

Mellon Fund supports the arts and humanities at AUB

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Five faculty members from the American University of Beirut (AUB) have been given funding for a range of fascinating projects that bring into sharp focus the importance of the humanities at AUB.

Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation with grants distributed through the Presidential Discretionary

Award, the projects are designed to encourage student participation and creative thinking. Speaking about the grants Provost Ahmad Dallal said: "The Mellon Grants are among several initiatives that reinforce AUB's commitment to supporting the arts and humanities. By helping our students develop knowledge and skills in a broad range of fields, we are preparing them to think in original and creative ways. This, no doubt, will provide our students with better opportunities for professional success, but above all, it will prepare them to live richer and more rewarding lives."

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation



In a series of workshops co-sponsored by the Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) and the Departments of Architecture and Graphic Design, and Fine Arts and Art History (FAAH), Henry Chalfant, graffiti art expert, will explain his pioneering work on street art as a serious cultural phenomenon. An author and filmmaker, Chalfant's work includes the modern classic *Subway Art* and the documentary film *Visit Palestine: Ten Days on the West Bank* about graffiti in Palestine. In addition to the workshops with AUB students, local artists and faculty members, Chalfant will give a lecture on street art and screenings of his films. The renowned actress Kathleen Chalfant will accompany her husband and has agreed to give a theater workshop as well as a talk sponsored by CASAR. Speaking for CASAR, center director Associate Professor Robert Myers said, "I am happy that the Mellon Foundation is helping AUB to resume its former position as one of the most vibrant centers for the arts in the Middle East."

Ghassan Abou-Zeineddine, Department of English instructor and faculty advisor on the nascent student literary journal, *The Banyan Tree*, is delighted that the Mellon award will help establish the new journal on the AUB cultural map. Dedicated to writing across five genres: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, playwriting, and graphic story writing, *The Banyan Tree* gives students a rare opportunity to express their creative ideas in print. It also provides valuable work experience for its all-student editorial board and its design and layout team from the Graphic Design program. "The award shows a commitment from the administration towards promoting the arts," says Abou-Zeineddine, "and it will allow *The Banyan tree* to expand and grow."

William Shakespeare will be another beneficiary of the Mellon award. In the past five years, studies of the Bard have taken dramatic shift east towards the Levant. As Professor Francois-Xavier Gleyzon of the Department of English explains, "Publications in this new emergent field

recently proved how Shakespeare could be instrumental not only to understand the Middle East (through *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and other plays) but also how Shakespeare could be comprehended and reinvented as a cultural and social bridge uniting the East and West." This shift in perception will be the subject of a conference entitled "Shakespeare and the Orient," organized by department of English faculty and students with the participation of international Shakespeare scholars. It will include a special session for student papers under the supervision of these scholars.

David Kurani, FAAH senior lecturer has a more recent drama in his sights. He will be working with students and members of the AUB Drama Club to translate "*Sijn el Nissa*" (*Memoires of a Women's Prison*) by Nawal El Saadawi, into a play directed by Professor Lina Abyad, from the Lebanese American University Theater Department. Kurani will be in charge of costume and set design on this daring work that explores resistance to violence and injustice and the formation of a women's community behind bars.

In a challenging collaboration between music and physics, Jihad Touma from the Department of Physics, and Moslem Rahal, master *neyzen* and *ney* maker from the Higher Institute of Music in Damascus will work together with AUB students on a year-long project to explore the ney in an interdisciplinary framework which marries mathematical modeling of the underlying physics with the construction of actual neys and with music making.

Although AUB has received previous funding from the Mellon Foundation, this is the first time money has been made available for the arts and humanities. The generous \$100,000 award will subsidize these five projects and additional initiatives over the next three years.