

For Immediate Release



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## **AUB University for Seniors amateur artists** **participate in Qatar International Art Festival**

Stuck in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the University for Seniors (UfS) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) learned how to draw and paint through an online course offered by renowned artist Majd Ramadan. Many of them had never held a brush to canvas. This October, 16 of those amateur artists were invited to participate in the third edition of the Qatar International Art Festival (QIAF) to exhibit their work on the world stage.

QIAF is the major annual contemporary art festival in Qatar and it came back this year after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. This festival, held in partnership with the Florence Biennale, the Qatar government, and UNESCO (<https://qiaf.net/partners/>), features more than 250 artists from more than 65 countries, and this year that included 16 UfS members who were selected to participate and represented Lebanon, AUB, and UfS.

The group named itself “Seniors and Art of Joy” and is led by the internationally recognized artist, Majd Ramadan. Their journey started with the first COVID-19 lockdown in Lebanon back in March 2020 when Majd Ramadan succeeded in virtually training around 30 amateurs to draw and paint. Together, they created a virtual exhibition called “Creativity in isolation.” Most of the participants had never painted before. As Ramadan explains, “I teach the art of pleasure, and all my classes are full of optimism and fun-filled moments. It is about lessons in happy painting that instill within oneself the passion of learning and ambition to grow further.”

The group consists of women aged between 52 and 81 years of age. Through their art, they were able to break the walls of isolation during the confinement and to face the multiple crises befalling Lebanon. They painted the Beirut port blast, the current struggles under the financial and economic collapse, and the unrest in the country; but they also painted of beauty, dreams, and love and have used their art to express their voices and their experience. As one participant

explains, “the UfS gave me the chance to do something for myself for the first time, something that makes me proud besides being a mother and a wife.”

Sixteen of these artists were proud to participate in QIAF, demonstrating the University for Seniors principle where older adults are breaking stereotypes by remaining active members of their communities, eager learners, and engaged citizens. Their participation in QIAF is one-of-a-kind and unique to exhibitions worldwide whereby a group of amateur, older adult artists coming from a life-long learning program are invited to participate in an International art festival. Recognizing the value of the artwork of the UfS participants, QIAF decided to acquire five of the UfS members’ paintings for its own collection.

“We are a unique phenomenon that resolved to leave a footprint behind by making use of the arts to change the future world through a creative output,” says Majd Ramadan. “A phenomenon that represents the changes in how we can feel happiness in life, owing to our age that is the motivation of our story; a story by which we certainly proved that hidden talents have no age limit to come out and shine.”

ENDS

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## Note to Editors

### About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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