

For Immediate Release



AUB showcases art collecting in a special exhibit at AUB Art Gallery

Beirut, Lebanon- 05/02/2012 - The American University of Beirut inaugurated on April 4 a new exhibition entitled “Profiles: Collecting Art in Lebanon” at the AUB Art Gallery, in which the profiles of 10 leading art collectors in Lebanon are showcased.

The exhibition will run until August 24.

Examining practices of art collecting and art patronage in contemporary Lebanon, the exhibition displays 10 video interviews conducted with private art collectors and inheritors of collections including **Saleh Barakat, Anachar Basbous, Georges Corm, Raymond Audi, Abraham Karabajian, Ramzi Saidi and Afaf Osseiran Saidi and Tony Salamé.** The art critic and publisher **Cesar Nammour** offers a historical perspective on the practice of art collecting, while **Zeina Arida** of the Arab Image Foundation speaks about collecting as an artistic strategy. **Dima Raad**, of the Ministry of Culture of Lebanon, also offers her perspective. On the lower floor of the gallery, the house of a Lebanese art collector—inspired by the home of the collector, **Dr. Samir Saleeby**—has been reconstructed.

“From the beginning, certain roles in the art world have been firmly established,” explained Octavian Esanu, curator of AUB art galleries. “The artist produced, and the art collector bought or accumulated out of enjoyment, compulsion, concern for cultural heritage, or with the noble intention of showing the artwork to the public.”

Before the emergence of curatorship as a profession, it was often the art collector who exhibited the artist, acting as a lens through which the product of artistic labor was projected onto the public realm, added Esanu. “For this event at AUB Art Gallery, we decided to turn this lens around to shine a spotlight directly on the figure of the collector and on the practice of art collecting.”

A life-long collector and a major art donor to AUB, Dr. Saleeby served as inspiration for the exhibition. Last year, Dr. Saleeby donated his collection, which includes works by renowned relative Khalil Saleeby, to AUB, which prompted the University to set up the AUB Art Gallery to house the collection and hold other exhibitions. It was this body of artworks by Khalil Saleeby that served as the core of his collection, later complemented with works by other distinguished Lebanese artists whom Dr. Saleeby befriended at certain periods of his life.

Unlike other countries, Lebanon’s art scene has been dominated by the private sector, which has always taken the initiative to preserve the nation’s cultural heritage, noted Esanu.

“In this exhibition, rather than providing a comprehensive account of existing collecting practices in Lebanon, we reveal certain established types: the private collector; the bank as collector; non-profit collectors; collectors who started from scratch and collectors who inherited their collections,” he added.

Bios of the interviewed art collectors:

Saleh Barakat launched Agial Art Gallery in 1991. Over more than two decades he has established a comprehensive collection of modern and contemporary Arab art. His major curatorial projects include the 9th Francophonie Summit Art Exhibition in Beirut (2002); the World Bank Summit in Dubai (2003); and *The Road to Peace: Painting in Times of War 1975-1991* (2009). He also co-curated the first national pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale and more recently the exhibition *Art from Lebanon: Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975* at the Beirut Exhibition Center. Saleh Barakat was a Yale World Fellow in 2006.

In this interview, Saleh Barakat speaks about his collecting experience, also offering a broader look at different types of art collecting in Lebanon.

Tony Salamé is the chairman and CEO of the Tony Salamé Group. He started collecting art in 1989, beginning with the classical paintings at the time popular in fashion boutique design, and soon began collecting contemporary art as well. In 2005 Tony Salamé established the Aïshti Foundation, a private organization dedicated to contemporary culture. Today his collection consists primarily of international contemporary art. More recently he expressed interest in collecting Lebanese contemporary art and has been working with the idea of opening a museum of contemporary art in Beirut.

In this interview Tony Salamé talks about his interest in collecting art.

Abraham Karabajakian is founder and managing partner of Loyalty Inv&Ins. Two years ago Abraham Karabajakian and business partner Roger Akoury initiated a private art collection called K&A, on display in Beirut. The collection includes works by major Lebanese modernist artists as well as artists of Armenian and of other national origins. Although access to the collection is currently restricted, Karabajakian and Akoury plan to make it available to a larger public in the near future.

In this interview, Abraham Karabajakian talks about his experience with the K&A Collection.

Anachar Basbous opened his sculpture studio in Rachana (Batroun, North Lebanon) after graduating from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d'Art in Paris. In Rachana he established the Michel Basbous Foundation--a free open-air sculpture

gallery and garden that permanently exhibits the work of Michel Basbous. Anachar Basbous has been taking care of the Basbous collection, which consists for the most part of granite, bronze, metal and wood sculptures as well as of drawings. In addition to preserving the collection and continuing his own artistic practice, also on display in the garden, Anachar Basbous regularly organizes a sculpture symposium in Rachana.

In this interview, Anachar Basbous speaks about caring for the Michel Basbous Collection.

Zeina Arida is the director of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), launched in Beirut in 1997 by Akram Zaatari, Fouad Elkoury and Samer Mohdad. This non-profit foundation was established by artists with the main aim of collecting, archiving and presenting photographic practices in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Members of the foundation have also developed a large range of artistic projects that use the collection for research and for enriching contemporary artistic experience. The activities of the foundation are documented at www.fai.org.lb.

In this interview, Zeina Arida speaks about the Arab Image Foundation.

Cesar Nammour is an art historian and publisher of art books who has closely followed Lebanese art since 1958. He is a frequent lecturer at Lebanese universities, teaching the history of sculpture and painting as well as art appreciation. In 1997 he cofounded the Contemporary Art Society and in 1998 the Lebanese Association of Art Critics. With his associate Gabriela Schaub, Nammour has organized the yearly Beirut Art Book Fair; currently they are working on launching the first Museum of Contemporary Art in Lebanon.

In this interview, Cesar Nammour speaks about the history and significance of art collecting in Lebanon.

Raymond Audi began collecting classical art in the 1980s, following the successes of Bank Audi in Switzerland. Audi later extended his collecting activities to Lebanon and to modern and contemporary art. The Bank Audi collection of art is regarded as the largest in Lebanon. It consists of two parts: the Geneva headquarters of Bank Audi hosts a large collection of Old European Masters, while the Beirut branch (located in Beirut Central District) stores in its vaults and offices predominantly modern and contemporary European and Lebanese art.

In this interview, Raymond Audi speaks about what it is to be a collector of art.

Dima Raad has been employed at the Ministry of Culture of Lebanon since its formation after the Civil War in 1993. She is the head of the department of exhibitions and oversees the Lebanese state's collection of art. Dima Raad is also an artist and professor at the Lebanese

University and as a curator she organized multiple exhibitions for the Ministry of Culture of Lebanon and other cultural institutions. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in art history at Université Lille 3.

In this interview, Dima Raad speaks about art collecting from the position of representative of the Ministry of Culture of Lebanon.

Georges Corm has written extensively on the history of the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. He served as former Minister of Finance (1999-2000) and is professor of political science at Saint Joseph University. Georges Corm's art collection consists of paintings and drawings produced by his grandfather Daoud Corm and by his father Georges D. Corm, which latter occupy the largest part of the collection. The most significant displays of his collection took place at the Exhibition Hall of the Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (1981); at UNESCO headquarters in Paris (1994), and at the Sursock Museum in Beirut (2007).

In this interview, Georges Corm speaks about the Corm Collection.

Ramzi Saidi and Afaf Osseiran Saidi began assembling their art collection in the early 1980s. The urge to collect art was triggered in part by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, as well as by their concern for preserving the artistic heritage. One of the main intentions in assembling the collection was to represent the main themes, aspects, and media in 20th century Lebanese art. Ramzi Saidi and Afaf Osseiran Saidi generously lend artworks from their collection to various cultural events, actively participating in the organization of art exhibitions in cooperation with Lebanese and foreign institutions. One significant activity in the career of Ramzi Saidi has been the creation in 1983 of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), one of the first environmental NGOs in Lebanon.

In this interview, Ramzi Saidi speaks about his collecting practice.

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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 420-bed hospital.

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