

For Immediate Release



## **AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery for contemporary art inaugurated** *Opening exhibition focuses on the labor that goes into art-making*

Beirut, Lebanon- 20/05/2012 - The American University of Beirut (AUB) inaugurated on May 20, 2013 the AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, with a special exhibition on the relation between art and labor over history.

Located in a prime location on campus, the new AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery will be dedicated to hosting temporary exhibitions and programs relating mostly to contemporary art.

Byblos Bank was among the first to support AUB's vision in promoting the arts, and had initiated talks about a collaboration with AUB in 2009.

Almost a year ago, the AUB Art Gallery was opened off-campus on Sidani Street to showcase an important collection of Lebanese paintings donated to AUB by former student and retired ophthalmologist, Dr. Samir Saleeby.

Together, the two galleries are expected to enrich the Lebanese art scene while offering students and scholars alike opportunities to study art, examine works of art and pursue intellectual inquiry in a country where such opportunities are extremely limited.

“Our goal with this gallery is to present to the widest possible audience the most recent developments in art, curated with academic rigor,” said Rico Franses, director of AUB art collections and galleries, and associate professor of fine arts and art history. “Through close interlinking of both AUB galleries with our academic programs, we aim to train students in all aspects of the visual arts, whether as practicing artists, art historians, or curators who will later staff the many new museums and galleries of this region. More broadly, we believe that art provides a way of conceptualizing the world that enriches all who come into contact with it.”

Semaan Bassil, vice-chairman and general manager of Byblos Bank Group said, “Byblos Bank has chosen to lead by example and establish the AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery. This experimental space plants seeds that encourage Lebanese artists and the application of art in

its different forms. Our belief is that human creativity and innovation is a much neglected economic resource.. It creates jobs; brings direct and indirect revenues; and preserves the uniqueness of our cultural expression for future generations.”

Octavian Esanu, curator of AUB art galleries, underscored the academic and intellectual value of having an art gallery on the campus of one of the leading higher education institutions of the region.

“Within the context of the university campus, the new art space must be regarded not only as a place where students and the public at large come to passively enjoy art but a place where we all can reflect upon what is it that makes ‘art,’ art,” noted Esanu. “What are the conditions of art’s possibility? This has been and remains a question that has preoccupied the minds of artists, art critics and art historians over the past fifty years; it is also a topic that professors and students constantly discuss in classrooms at AUB. The new gallery is thus conceived as a laboratory where we practically examine questions that are theoretically explored within the seminar room.”

The art gallery’s inaugural exhibit, “Art in Labor: Skill, De-skilling, Re-skilling,” will run until July 27, 2013, displaying the works of Georges Daoud Corm, Saliba Douaihy, John Carswell, Ghassan El Hajj, Khalid Hamza, Haitham Hassan, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Mahmoud Khaled, Mohammad El Rawas, Gregory Sholette, Hito Steyerl, Rachid Wehbi, Vera Yeramian.

More than 20 paintings, drawings, mixed media works, audio installations, and minimalist art objects by artists from the region, Europe and the United States will be showcased in this exhibition, which will reveal both the artisanal aspects of art and the more intellectual, thought-provoking political commentary that certain works evoke.

“One of the essential elements that makes ‘art,’ art is a particular kind of labor or skill that people who call themselves artists possess,” explained Esanu.” For this event we invite the audience to look at this particular labor or skill and to ask themselves: how has artistic labor or artistic skill evolved in the course of a century... In the exhibition we chose artists whose work either directly addresses the issue of artistic labor, and of artistic skill, or whose work serves as an illustration of the processes that have taken place in art but also in society over the past century.”

He added: “By launching the new art space under this theme we would like to signal the educational and research-oriented direction of our future activities,” said Esanu. “On a more symbolic level perhaps, we start the new art space by repeatedly asking ourselves, ‘What is art?’ and ‘Out of what is it born?’”

Art Galleries Director Rico Franses emphasized the new art gallery’s role in promoting contemporary art.

“With the opening of the new AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, AUB enters the fray of contemporary art,” added Art Galleries Director Rico Franses. “As the local and regional art scenes buzz with energy and innovation, we hope to provide an academic perspective on the most recent developments and to contribute to the many lively debates concerning contemporary art.”

Over the last several years, major developments have taken place at AUB to enhance the profile of the arts. In 2007, the Department of Fine Arts and Art History was re-launched, having been closed during the war, and has since expanded considerably. In 2012, the donation of the major Saleeby Collection, which includes works by prominent Lebanese artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prompted the University to open the AUB Art Gallery in Hamra. For the first time, students and the public would have the opportunity to examine for themselves original works of art from this period in history.

AUB President Peter Dorman said, “It is a tribute to Semaan Bassil and the directors of Byblos Bank that they recognize the value and importance of the arts for society and have encouraged us in this endeavour. We thank them for their generous support and partnership, which has made this new gallery possible. We are proud to have the name of Byblos Bank permanently associated with the American University of Beirut.”

With the opening of the AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, AUB will expand its artistic mission by hosting temporary exhibitions and programs relating mostly to contemporary art.

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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 700 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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### **About Byblos Bank**

Byblos Bank, one of Lebanon’s top three banks, maintains a proud tradition of support for arts and culture in Lebanon. This tradition is rooted in the Bank’s commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, and is part of a broader mission to revive, sustain, and enrich Lebanon’s much-celebrated cultural heritage. The AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery is yet another initiative aimed at investing in promising talents in order to help build the future generations of artists.

Byblos Bank is listed on both the Beirut Stock Exchange and the London Stock Exchange. It provides a full range of consumer banking, commercial banking, correspondent banking and capital markets services to an ever-growing clientele, both locally and internationally.

Byblos Bank maintains a substantial presence in Lebanon, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Armenia, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In all these countries, the Bank is committed to the highest international standards of corporate governance, customer satisfaction, and quality service, and to driving business growth while supporting social and economic development.

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