Khalil Saleeby (1870–1928)
a founder of modern art in Lebanon

خليل الضّليبي (١٨٧٠ –١٩٢٨)
أحد مؤسسي الفن الحديث في لبنان
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The Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Collection is a unique and extraordinary bequest to AUB by Dr. Samir Saleeby. It features more than 60 paintings by leading Lebanese artists including Khalil Saleeby, Omar Onsi, Saliba Douaihy, and Cesar Gemayel. Dr. Saleeby's vision is for all who have an interest in art and the cultural heritage of Lebanon to share his enjoyment of the paintings.

This first exhibition in Beirut celebrates the work of Khalil Saleeby, a relative of the donor. Khalil Saleeby is widely considered to be one of the most influential Lebanese painters of his time, inspiring the work of many of the artists who followed him in the 20th century.

The collection is being exhibited in a new temporary gallery at AUB. It will later form the centerpiece of the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum that will be permanently located in a magnificent heritage building on AUB's campus. This museum, the first of its kind in Lebanon, is currently being developed to the highest international standards and will host permanent and temporary exhibitions of fine art.

AUB will preserve and promote this premier collection, making it available to students, researchers, the people of Lebanon and the Arab world, as well as the wider international community. To this extent, four paintings from this collection are currently on loan to l'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.

Statement from the President of AUB

The Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Collection is a treasure that few have seen. With the opening of the AUB Art Gallery this unique trove of Lebanese art will be available for all to view and appreciate.

AUB is humbled and tremendously proud to receive these works. Our heartfelt gratitude is extended to Dr. Samir Saleeby for choosing the American University of Beirut as the institution to preserve and display this collection. We feel honored to be able to share these beautiful paintings with all of Lebanon and the world.

Peter Dorman
President
Curatorial Statement

Over the summer and fall of 1928, newspapers in Beirut relayed the details of a dramatic story: the painter Khalil Saleebey and his foreign wife Carrie Aude had been killed following a dispute over water rights. Related historical documents reveal fragments of the public and judiciary debates of the time, offering glimpses not only of a long-forgotten and tragic conflict, but also of the social perception of the new profession of picture-maker almost a century ago.

In the news reports about Khalil Saleebey and Carrie Aude’s murder, one finds not only the tragic conclusions of two personal stories but also the articulation of broader social and historical contradictions: the confrontation of late Ottoman and French colonial sensibilities, metropolitan and peripheral lifestyles, urban and peasant economies. Clashes of such epic proportions are often resolved through individual sacrifice.

From an art historical perspective, the life and work of Khalil Saleebey sketches in outline a crucial phase in the late 19th and early 20th century development of art in Lebanon. Saleebey belongs to that first generation of painters who most substantially contributed to the emergence of art as a new occupation in this country. Often called musawwirun (picture-makers and picturers) or simply rassamun (draftsmen who worked with cameras or brushes), members of this generation pioneered a modern profession at a time when the region was undergoing deep historical transformations in every field of social, political and economic life. The exhibition puts on display the traces of these radical transformations.

We place emphasis on three tendencies that prevail in the Saleebey collection. A close observer of this painter’s work, first of all, will not fail to notice the tender relationship between Saleebey and Aude that is revealed in a number of portraits and figures. Secondly, the exhibition follows the controversial theme of the nudes that Saleebey produced at a time when this material was subject to cultural restrictions. Finally, a series of portraits — the most represented genre in the collection — depicts ordinary and eminent contemporaries of the artist. We interpret the predominance of the art of portraiture over other genres as a distinct feature of the modern age, an indication that new social agents had turned their gazes towards individual citizens of all classes and denominations.

This exhibition has been made possible through the generous donation of Dr. Samir Saleebey to the American University of Beirut. After many years during which Dr. Saleebey cared for this collection, he has entrusted it to an institution that has responded with the pledge to conserve, preserve and display it to the public, as well as to incorporate it within its pedagogical efforts and activities. In putting on display the work of Khalil Saleebey, AUB announces its commitment to play an active role in promoting the fine and contemporary arts of this region.

Octavian Eşanu  
AUB Art Gallery Curator

كلمة القيم

خلال صيف العام 1928 وخرفه، تداولت صحف بيروت تفاصيل حزن فاجع لقتلى حبل الصليب وهو كاري أود، من جراء نزاع حول حقوق مياه. تتضمن الوثائق التاريخية الملحقة بالقضيحة عتبرات من النقاش العام والشخصي في ذلك الوقت، وقورئات فائتة. لاحظت صور مأساوية للنمر وحب تقليد ذلك عواطف المجتمعات التي كانت جدبدة منذ قرون تقربًا، محققة صانع اللوحات.

في التقارير الإخبارية عن مقتل خليل الصليب وكاري أود، لا يغفل المرء فقط من النهاية المأساوية للضحايا، بل يذكر أن هذا الجدل هب جدلًا في فنون القرن التاسع عشر وأوائل القرن العشرين. ينتهي الصليب إلى ذلك الرجل الأول من الفنانين الذين ساهموا على نحو فعال في توجيه الفن كاحتراز جديد في هذا البلد. أدرك هذا الجدل غالبًا ما تعنين بالمصورين أو الرسامين، مهندس أسلوب جديد للفن، فيما كانت المنطقة تشهد تحولات تاريخية عميقة في كل ميدان من ميدانات الحياة الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية.

وطير العروض أثر هذه التحولات الجيدة.

تركز على ثلاثة أنواع أساسيًا في مجموعة الصليب. من وجة نظر عن كل عم حوار الصليب لا يفتقده، ما يراه أن يلاحظ ستة حاشية تحول بالصليب إلى جملة، والتي تلقى في عدد من البورتريهات والتشكيلات. ثانياً، يتبع المعرض موضوع العربي الشهير للجامل الذي مارسه الصليب في زمن كان يُصور على هذه المادة بقوة إلهام جدًا. بعد سلسلة من البورتريهات — النوع المتمثل أكثر من كل ما أدى إلى مجموعة حمراء — تُصور صورة الفنانين الحاضرين والبروفين. نظرًا للفوهة على الأواع الأخرى كإشارة مهمة إلى العمران الحديث، أشار المعارض إلى أن عناصر الحياة الاجتماعية جديدة قد حلت أنظارها نحو المواطنين الأحرار من جميع الطبقات والعمل.

يُنظر هذا المعرض بفضل الصلابة من الدكتور سعدي الصليب إلى الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت. بعد سنوات عديدة خلفه الدكتور الصليب بجهد مجموعة عدها إلى المؤسسة التي استثمرت لذلك الانتشار وتفحصها وعرضها على الجمهور، فضلاً عن إدراجها ضمن موجها ونشاطها التربوي. تُعلن الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت، عبر عرض عمل خليل الصليب، عن الالتزام بقدرهم.

نُظمت هذه المعرض في الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت.

أوكتافيا إيسناو

 testimوح في جامعة النجاح والمعاصرة لهذه المنطقة.
Collecting Histories: The Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Collection

The opening of the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Collection at the American University of Beirut represents a landmark occasion. The collection is named after the parents of the donor, Dr. Samir Saleeby, a prominent Beirut ophthalmologist and former AUB student. The Saleeby Collection will form the nucleus of a future modern and contemporary art museum housed at AUB under the name of the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum.

In a region where the majority of art works are dispersed throughout private homes and collections, the opportunity to view together works by Lebanon’s modern and contemporary artists offers a rare glimpse into a vibrant history of art.

The sale of contemporary artists in Lebanon is a recent phenomenon. Dr. Samir Saleeby has been one of the leading collectors and advocates of modern and contemporary art in the Middle East. His collection includes a wide range of works by prominent Lebanese artists, as well as selected works from other regions.

The Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Collection will be a valuable resource for the study and appreciation of modern and contemporary art in Lebanon and beyond. It will serve as a platform for artists to showcase their work and contribute to the cultural landscape of the region.

In summary, the opening of the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Collection marks a significant milestone in the history of modern and contemporary art in Lebanon. It highlights the importance of private collections in promoting the development of the arts and underscores the role of collectors in shaping the cultural narrative of a region.

نحو روز والشاهيين
الصلبيي
تعريف وتاريخ

تمّ افتتاح مجموعة روز والشاهيين الصليبيي في الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت مناسبة تاريخية. وتحمل المجموعة اسم الذي يُعتبر الدكتور سمير الصليبيي طبيب العيون البارز في بيروت والطالب السابق في الجامعة ذاتها. وسوف تشكل مجموعة روز والشاهيين الصليبيي نواة لمتحفٍ للفن الحديث والمعاصر في حضن الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت.

إنّ عرض أعمال الفنانين اللبنانيين الحديثين والمعاصرين مجتمعة في منطقة تنظف غالبية الأعمال الفنية فيها بين المنازل والمجموعات الخاصة. يُقدّم لحمة نادرةٍ من تاريخ فنيٍّ ناضجٍ بالحياة. وأكثر من نصف القطع في المجموعة هو للرسام خليل الصليبيي (1878-1948). مما يوفر للمختصين والعامّة على حدّ سواء إطالة تناولًا وشاملاً على واحدٍ من أكثر الفنانين الحديثين تأثيرًا في لبنان.
that were in the possession of the artist at the time of his death. Since then, the paintings have hung—untouched—in the Saleebys’ home.

Over the years, Dr. Samir Saleebay expanded his father’s original collection to include oil and watercolors by Khalil Saleebay’s disciples, acclaimed Lebanese artists Cesar Gemayel (1898–1958), and Omar Onsi (1901–1969). A substantial number of pieces by modernist Saliba Douaihy (1912–1994) document the artist’s transition from academic landscapes to hard edge abstraction. Dr. Saleebay developed a close friendship with Douaihy in the early ‘sixties, when the two were living in New York City. The collection also includes pieces by contemporary painters Haidar Hamaoui (b. 1937), Chucrallah Fattouh (b. 1956), and Robert Khoury (b. 1923).

During the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), the Saleebys shipped the art to London for safekeeping. The collection returned to Beirut during the nineties. Now, thanks to the generous donation of Dr. Samir Saleebay, the works have secured a new home at the American University of Beirut, where they will provide a platform for the study of Lebanon’s art history.

The Saleebay Collection in Focus: Khalil Saleebay - The Journey of an Artist

The story of Khalil Saleebay is one that takes us from the village of Batalloun to Ottoman Beirut, on to the European capitals of Edinburgh, London, Paris, and the American city of Philadelphia before winding back to Beirut. Similar to that of many of art history’s pioneers, Saleebay’s journey originates in a childhood distinguished by artistic inclination. Despite discouraging comments from elders, destiny and

more than half of the pieces in the collection are by painter Khalil Saleebay (1870–1928), thus offering specialists and the general public alike a rare, comprehensive understanding of one of Lebanon’s most acclaimed modern artists. Born in the village of Batalloun, Saleebay studied at the Syrian Protestant College (now the American University of Beirut). In 1890, he traveled abroad to pursue his artistic training. Saleebay spent the next decade working and exhibiting in Edinburgh, Philadelphia, Paris, and London. Upon his return to Beirut, Saleebay opened an atelier on Bliss Street and established a reputation as a portraitist. His body of work, also inclusive of a number of landscapes, nudes, and genre scenes, is suggestive of a broader historical transition from nineteenth century academic artistic conventions to twentieth-century modernism’s emphasis on the materiality of the medium.

Saleebay’s life came to a tragic end in 1928 when the artist and his wife were murdered over a long-standing dispute concerning water rights in Batalloun. Dr. Shaheen Saleebay (1893–1989), a relative of the painter, and father of the donor of the collection to AUB, obtained over thirty works on canvas

obtained over thirty works on canvas of the donor of the collection to AUB, a relative of the painter, and father Dr. Shaheen Saleeby (1893–1989), murdered over a long-standing dispute in 1928 when the artist and his wife were afﬁnity with the painter’s home. Afﬁnity for the artist’s artistry, wide-ranging and deep-reaching, imbued the collection with a unique aura. Over the years, Dr. Samir Saleebay expanded his father’s original collection to include oil and watercolors by Khalil Saleebay’s disciples, acclaimed Lebanese artists Cesar Gemayel (1898–1958), and Omar Onsi (1901–1969). A substantial number of pieces by modernist Saliba Douaihy (1912–1994) document the artist’s transition from academic landscapes to hard edge abstraction. Dr. Saleebay developed a close friendship with Douaihy in the early ‘sixties, when the two were living in New York City. The collection also includes pieces by contemporary painters Haidar Hamaoui (b. 1937), Chucrallah Fattouh (b. 1956), and Robert Khoury (b. 1923).

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desire drove Saleeby's development from a provincial boy drawing with matchsticks to one of Lebanon's most important modern painters.

It was thus from humble beginnings that Saleeby launched an international reputation. Born in 1870, Saleeby was the only child of Makhoul and Saada Saleeby. After completing his elementary studies in the village school, Saleeby traveled to Beirut in 1881 to continue his schooling with American and British missionaries. Later, in 1886, he enrolled in the Syrian Protestant College, a notable accomplishment at the time. Saleeby remained in Beirut until 1890, the point at which his biography diverges from those of his artistic predecessors and successors throughout the Ottoman Empire.

Unlike the majority of the region's artists who pursued their artistic aspirations in Rome or Paris, Saleeby chose Edinburgh, where a cousin of his lived. There, Saleeby met renowned American painter John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), who had a profound impact on the young artist: a camaraderie that is most evident in the artists' roles as social portraitists. With Sargent's encouragement, Saleeby traveled to Philadelphia, where he met his future wife and muse, the American Carrie Aude. After their marriage, the couple lived in Edinburgh, Paris, and London before returning to Beirut in 1900.

Although few of Saleeby's known works date to the period prior to 1890, paintings in the collection nonetheless suggest that the artist's decade abroad was formative in the development of his formal language. A 1923 portrait, for instance, of Saleeby's most favored subject, his wife Carrie, reveals the aesthetic ties between Sargent and Saleeby. From the lavish painterly attention bestowed on the layered fabrics to the collar's neckline that accentuates Carrie's sensuous skin, Saleeby translates visual pleasure into a desire to touch. These accents highlight the social status of the sitter as well as underscore the artist's technique. In one such detail, the rug cushioning Carrie's feet invites the viewer to longingly caress the fur. Yet, upon closer inspection, the rug's painted materiality dissolves into a dense network of brushstrokes. This dissolution of identifiable form—exposing paint as paint—reveals a shared pedigree, hinted at in the composition, between Saleeby and Sargent. Both artists trained in Paris among a group of artists known as the Impressionists, who applied paint directly onto the canvas in short, thick, visible brushstrokes. Perhaps without coincidence, Saleeby worked with Auguste Renoir (1841–1919),

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After a decisive decade abroad, then, Saleeby returned to Beirut and opened an atelier on Bliss Street, across from the Main Gate of the Syrian Protestant College. The following years were prolific ones for Saleeby as his work of this period includes landscapes, architectural interiors, self-portraits, and figural works. His most substantial work, however, is in the genre of portraiture. Building a reputation as social portraitist, Saleeby further developed a local market forged just two decades earlier by his predecessor, the painter Daoud Corm (1852–1930).

The Faces of Ottoman Beirut

In turn-of-the-century Beirut, Saleeby would have found a city undergoing a period of rapid expansion and radical socio-political shifts. Just two years before Saleeby left for Edinburgh, in 1888, Beirut was granted status as the capital of an Ottoman province. This political transformation was the result of a series of petitions initiated and signed by an emerging upwardly mobile urban class united by shared economic and political interests to protect Beirut against ensuing provincial rivalries between cities. Over the next decade, the port city’s newly acquired position launched a series of expansions in Beirut’s urban development. Indeed, historians have examined this period as a foundational moment in Beirut’s history, as an emergent mobile middle class of merchants, intellectuals, and politicians—known historically as al-nahda al-‘arabiyah (Arab Renaissance)—formulated a vision for their city and, henceforth, for the future country of Lebanon. Building a reputation as social portraitist, Saleeby further developed a local market forged just two decades earlier by his predecessor, the painter Daoud Corm (1852–1930).
Lebanon. The newly accessible genre of oil portraiture, previously reserved for prominent religious figures, was one means through which this class secured a public identity.

It is thus not a coincidence that portraiture emerged as a popular genre of representation precisely during the period when leading al-nahta personalities, such as scholar Butros Bustani, were theorizing the emergence of the individual, modern citizen. Saleeby’s portraits of famed Romantic writer Amin Rihani and of Emile Dumit, professor at the Syrian Protestant College, capture his own self-image as the artist.

In addition to his portraits of well-known Lebanese personalities, anonymous portraits comprise a significant number of works in the Saleeby Collection. Completed on artist’s board and small in scale, several of these paintings are perhaps no more than studies. Others, however, are larger in scale and done on canvas, suggesting a market for such anonymous portraits. Faithful to the premise of portraiture as a genre, each of Saleeby’s unidentified portraits convey a sense of the individual sitter—from a furrowed brow to a serene expression. Moreover, in many of these portraits, Saleeby’s compositional focus is his subject’s face rather than the accoutrements of his or her surroundings.

Viewed together, Saleeby’s portraits provide a glimpse into the variety of figures characterizing Ottoman Beirut. In turn, the paintings contributed to a growing visual culture that distinguished urban and rural life, a divide that was often called upon in defining the modern subject in late nineteenth-century Beirut.

In 1911, Saleeby exhibited at the Beirut Exhibition of Fine Arts, a foray into a new artistic world. In 1912, he mounted his first solo exhibition at the American School of Art and Architecture in Beirut, where he was honored with a gold medal. Saleeby’s work was also featured in the 1914 International Exhibition of Modern Art in Paris, where he was awarded a bronze medal. In 1915, he exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York City, becoming the first Arab artist to be exhibited there. Saleeby’s work was also featured in the 1916 International Exhibition of Modern Art in London, where he was awarded a gold medal. Saleeby’s work was also featured in the 1917 International Exhibition of Modern Art in Paris, where he was awarded a silver medal. Saleeby’s work was also featured in the 1918 International Exhibition of Modern Art in London, where he was awarded a gold medal.
Aesthetic Bodies: Saleeby’s Nudes

Saleeby’s practice, located between academic conventions and modernism, is perhaps most evident in a series of nudes completed in first decades of the twentieth century. The bedrock of academic training, studies of the nude provided the basis for all art-making in European art academies. For viewers today, Saleeby’s nudes are critical revelations of the network of influences informing the development of Saleeby’s formal language.

In one such piece from 1922, the female body leans against a deep fawn-colored wall. Turned away from the viewer’s gaze, the body reveals in rather than hides the artist’s skillful hand: the sensuous curve of the waist, the shadows that convey bodily flesh; the ever-slight protrusion of the shoulder blade. Indeed, Saleeby’s depiction the very posture of the model’s body suggests the labor of painting. With head resting downward, her left hand tightly grasps her right wrist, as if holding the fatigued limb in place. The sharp contrast between the pale flesh of the body and the redness of the hand directs the viewer’s attention to the bodily endurance required to remain motionless for the artist.

As in his portraits, Saleeby refused the glossy finished surface of a...
Sarah Rogers, PhD

Viewed together, Saleeby’s paintings represent the various local and international forces that contributed to the development of modern art. It is our task today to use these visual treasures as a resource in understanding that history.

Sarah Rogers, PhD
Visual Arts at AUB

The Saleebey collection at AUB offers a unique opportunity to affirm the university’s dedication to the arts. It enables the university to maintain and develop its role as custodian of cultural heritage through continuous commitment to artistic research and preservation. The university made its first major commitment to this goal when in 2006 it re-opened the Department of Fine Arts and Art History, which had been closed since the beginning of the civil war. Today this is a thriving department that offers majors in Art History and Studio Arts, as well as minors in Music and Theater.

The housing of an art collection on campus brings enormous responsibilities but also offers many possibilities and rewards. First and foremost, it entails a duty towards the various communities of students and academics and to broader society. Rather than merely being a repository of highly valued art works, the Saleebey collection, integrated within the structure of the university, will have much broader implications for scholarly research and critical inquiry. While art students and art historians will have the opportunity to closely examine art works, the presence of the collection also opens a whole new area for the study and practice of contemporary curatorial and exhibition production. In the meantime, students and professors from other departments such as Anthropology, Sociology, History, and Architecture and Graphic Design, to name but a few, will find that the collection has direct relevance to their own fields of learning: to issues concerning class, gender, ethnic and religious identity, and the trajectory of modernity and tradition.

Ultimately, the greatest advantage of hosting an art collection at AUB is the possibility of reevaluating and critically interpreting our place in the world. This collection of art will help us gain a better understanding of our past and present, and of how to relate to our immediate social, cultural and historical context.

Department of Fine Arts and Art History

 وإن الجامِعة الأمريكية في بيروت، باحتضانها مجموعة روز وشايم المعلمي، تؤكد دورها كحاسِس أمين على التراث الثقافي من خلال النزاهَة المستمر بالبحث الفني والحفاظ على الفن.

وقد خطَّت الجامعة خطواتها الأولى لتحقيق هذا الهدف حين أعطت نائِزة الفنون الجميلة ودارها في العام 2006. وكانت هذه الدائرة قد أغلقت في بداية الحرب الأهلية. وها هي اليوم دائرَة مُزهرة تقدم تخصصات في تاريخ الفن وفنون المحتفَر، ودراسات في الموسيقى والسرح لغير الأكاديميين.

إن احتضان مجموعة لوحات فنية في الحرم الجامعي ينطوي على مسؤوليات كبيرة. لكنه يخدم أيضاً الكثير من الإمكانات والفرص التي وجدتها هذه الدائرة في التفاعل مع الجامِعة الأمريكية ودرَسة التراث الثقافي.

تُشغَّل المجموعة تُنتج لطابع الفن ومؤذنَة فرصة تثْقَّف الأعمال الفنية عن كثب، ليفتح ذلك مجالاً جديداً للدراسة والمشاركة في المجال المعاصر الفني المعارض وفن رواض. وفي الوقت نفسه، سيُزداد فُرص التفاعل مع أساتذة وأقسام أخرى كالإثنولوجي وعلوم الاجتماع والتاريخ، والممارسة والتصميم، على سبيل المثال لا الحصر، أن المجموعة صلة مباشرة مباعَرة بمواهبتهم العلمية.

في الخلاصة، فإن أهمُ فائدة لاحتضان مجموعة فنية في الجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت هي

تمكِّننا من إعادة تقييم مكاننا في العالم وتفصيل تقنيّ.

هذِه المجموعة من الأعمال الفنية تساعدنا على الاكتساب فهم أفضل لمجتمعنا وحاضرنا، وكيفية التواصل مع سياقنا الاجتماعي والثقافي والتاريخي المباشر.

 دائرة الفنون الجميلة ودارها
Khalil Saleeb (1870–1928) a founder of modern art in Lebanon

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