

For Immediate Release



American University of Beirut secures donation of a major private Lebanese art collection

- *Unseen paintings of Khalil Saleeby to be exhibited for the first time*
- *Over 60 paintings to be displayed at AUB*

Beirut, Lebanon- 12/01/2012 - The American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon's leading liberal arts university, announced that it has secured a donation of over 60 paintings, the majority from the early twentieth century.

The collection, which has never been publicly exhibited -- having been housed in a private residence for over 80 years -- will include more than 30 paintings by the renowned Lebanese artist Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928); it is being donated by a distant relative of Saleeby.

AUB has already created a temporary gallery space in Hamra, Ras Beirut to showcase the collection, which is set to open by early summer. The opening will be a landmark occasion as this will be the first major Lebanese art collection to be made permanently available to the public.

"We are honoured to receive such a prestigious and important art collection and are very grateful for this extraordinarily generous gift," said AUB President Peter Dorman. "The university has long been a supporter of the arts through our teaching and research in the arts and humanities. We are also proud to have practicing artists amongst our students, faculty and alumni. This collection forms a vital part of Lebanon's and the Arab world's cultural heritage and we consider it a privilege to preserve and promote it for the benefit of future generations. Not only will the collection enable a public art exhibition but it will also serve as a unique resource for students, researchers and art specialists."

In addition to the paintings by Khalil Saleeby, the collection also includes works by other leading Lebanese painters of the early twentieth century: Saliba Douaihy (1915-1994), Cesar Gemayel (1898-1958), and Omar Onsi (1901-1969). The initial exhibition in Beirut will provide an opportunity for AUB to tell an important part of the history of Lebanese art. AUB considers it essential that the collection be seen as widely as possible in the Middle East and internationally. In March 2012, L'Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, will exhibit some of the works in the first public viewing of these paintings.

Commenting on his donation to AUB, Dr Samir Saleeby, a prominent ophthalmologist in Beirut and former AUB student said, "I wanted the collection to remain permanently in Lebanon and to be made available to the public. It was critical that the paintings be taken care of by a trusted and respected institution and there was no better choice than the American University of Beirut. In addition, Khalil Saleeby himself studied at the Syrian Protestant

College (which later became AUB), so it is entirely appropriate that the university should become the custodian of this valuable art collection.”

The quality and significance of the collection is evident by its size, the high quality of the paintings, the fact that they are all still in their original condition, and the breadth of the work by Saleeby. Conservation of the paintings is currently being undertaken by Lucia Scalisi, the former senior conservator of paintings at the Victoria and Albert Museum, while the entire collection has been appraised by Sotheby's. Scholarly research on the collection will also be undertaken by AUB to prepare a catalogue of the works.

AUB will create a permanent art museum on campus through the expansion of an existing landmark facility. It will be named “The Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum” after the donor's parents. With this important collection, anticipated additional donations, the planned new venue, and growing academic programs in the visual arts, AUB is positioning itself as a leader in the arts in Lebanon and the region.

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Photo captions: 1- Self-portrait; Saleeby's last painting (1928); 2- Detail from a painting of his wife, Carrie (1922)

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Notes 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.

About Khalil Saleeby

Saleeby is considered the founder of modern Lebanese art. He studied, worked and exhibited in Edinburgh, Paris, the USA and Lebanon. He knew and was influenced by John Singer Sargent, Pierre Cecile Puvis de Chavannes and Pierre Auguste Renoir. Tragically, the painter and his American wife (and muse) were murdered in Lebanon because of a dispute with neighbors over water access.

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