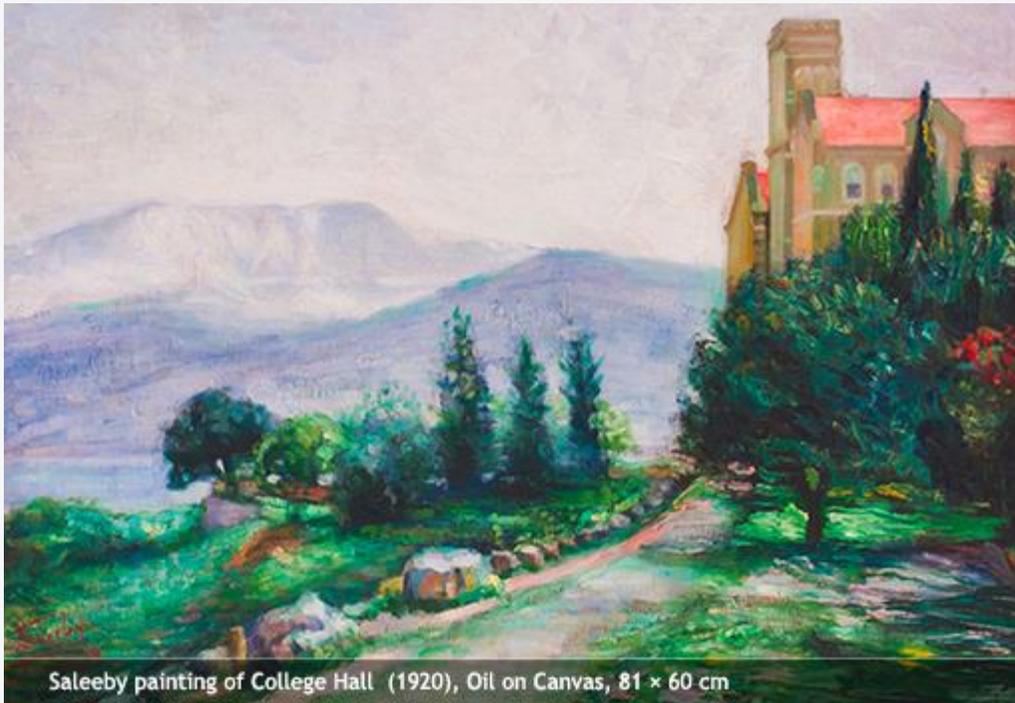




Dear friends and colleagues in the AUB community,

Academic arts abound at AUB

For a university and a city that have seen so much adversity and destruction, both AUB and Beirut are remarkable in that they are defined by a thriving and creative art scene. I do not only mean art in the sense of showcasing aesthetic beauty to draw large crowds, and big price tags—I am talking about the more difficult, often not-popular sense of art; art that has something to say, which asks questions, and which requires audiences to engage critically and think about the society around them. This can only be learned within a theoretical framework and our university is a major player, with [two first-class galleries](#), an outstanding [fine arts and art history \(FAAH\) department](#), and other activities and initiatives in art such as the Philippe Jabre Lecture Series on Fine Arts and Art History. We are building real momentum in this field, something of critical importance in this university's mission and its wider vision for this region in the global context. A particularly exciting prospect is the launch this fall of a **new master's program in art history and curating**, which will be the first of its kind in the Arab region. To date, graduate training has been limited to cultural management programs at franchise universities in the Gulf, which are not imbued intellectually with the philosophy of art, but rather focus on heritage preservation or claiming cultural heritage to build contexts for emerging museums. AUB therefore is breaking much-needed new ground that puts not just Beirut, but the whole region, on the map in terms of academic art history and related disciplines. The intertwining of art history and curation prepares our graduates to embrace ample opportunities in the region to work in the burgeoning art and cultural sector, as researchers, arts journalists, curators grounded in art historical research, or art historians making curatorially conscious choices of methodology.



Saleeby painting of College Hall (1920), Oil on Canvas, 81 × 60 cm

Very few pedagogical art institutions of AUB's size can boast the hands-on learning experiences that are the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum of Art currently located in temporary accommodation in Sidani Street, and the Byblos Bank Art Gallery in Ada Dodge Hall. The galleries originate in the magnificent gift received in 2012 by Dr. Samir Saleeby of a large private collection of early Lebanese art, in particular works by Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928) and Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994), which make up the mainstay of our permanent collection. [Mimesis, Expression, Construction](#) is the current show at the Saleeby Museum, using items from the permanent collection augmented with other works to furnish students and other visitors with the opportunity to analyze the imitative or expressive origins of most art, or the third category where things not recognizably related to the history of art reveal internal relationships like geometrical exercises. It is certainly art curated to make you think, building on the wake of the very successful and unique **Arab Nude: Artist as Awakener** exhibition curated by Dr. Kristen Scheid and Dr. Octavian Esanu last year. Really, if AUB did not stage such challenging intellectual activities in the heart of this city, it is hard to think of anyone else doing it. We are still in the early stages of art history as a discipline in Beirut, and it will take a lengthy gestation period no doubt, but with the strong faculty we have in place, under program head Dr. Angela Harutyunyan, and with gallery director Dr. Rico Frances and curator Dr. Octavian Esanu, this movement can only go from strength to strength.

Studio arts ascendant



In the last three years, the space on the fourth floor of Nicely Hall has undergone a little-noticed transformation from an unloved backwater to a buzzing student centered hub for studio arts (SART). On a very tight budget, program head and world-acclaimed artist Walid Sadek and his team of Neville Assad-Salha (sculpture), Daniele Genadrye (painting), and Heather O'Brien (photography/videography) have reclaimed most of Nicely's original 1950s art studio, complete with hand-cranked ceiling louvers for perfect natural light, to create drawing and painting studios and a digital photographic studio, and students' common room with a small library, with an analog photographic studio with darkroom on the way. Sculpture and ceramics are still hosted on the ground floor although one will need to make way for an oils studio, which cannot be accommodated upstairs because of the dangerous fumes. As with all great art schools, if in miniature, the SART faculty has tenaciously and effectively ensured that the students feel it is their space, keeping their own hours for studio work, cleaning up and mopping the floors themselves, and taking the initiative. As Mr. Sadek, a leading contemporary artist of global repute with a great portfolio of international installations and interventions, modestly puts it, "We teachers of art are just gate keepers of the past; our students will invent what art is in the future."



As I have indicated, the public interface of this kind of academic art will never match the charms of the French impressionists or Dutch masters, but its theory and practice are part and parcel of a healthy intellectual society, making students socially engaged actors of the future—whether activists or entrepreneurs—who do not just accept the status quo, but critically intervene in everyday life and in broader social structures and institutions. In this spirit, EVP Mohamed Sayegh is very keen on art in the Medical Center, and has commissioned six contemporary Lebanese artists to stage “interventions” (in contemporary art parlance) in various unexpected corners of the new Advanced Clinical Center. These are meant to engage patients, visitors, doctors, nurses, and other staff on multiple levels, not the easy answer of trying to make people healthier or happier, although that would be a welcome side effect, but to make them reflect on the experience of being in a hospital. I applaud this initiative—most hospitals around the world just buy in art that has little to say about the context—and other AUBMC commissions are in the pipeline. There are so many talented young contemporary artists on the local cultural scene and it is part of our job to stimulate that sector by such initiatives. It also functions as a powerful public experience, commissioned by the very discriminating minds of our FAAH department.

The magic of music



Dr. Kim conducting the AUB Choir and Choral Society in a spring concert at Assembly Hall

I cannot leave the subject of the Arts without focusing on the work of the music program, headed by FAAH department chair Dr. Thomas Kim, who manages to combine his passion and expertise in choral-orchestral music, his distinction as a conductor, including a four-year stint at Harvard University, with the fully engaged leadership of this rapidly developing and key department at AUB. Although there is no BA in music yet, it remains a vital undertaking at AUB and would add real quality to what is already an advanced program, but which lacks the practical element. We are determined that this will be made possible by the ambitious BOLDLY AUB campaign. There is no limit to the positive effect of developing this field, impacting on theater and performing arts, becoming a department in their own right possibly. AUB could become a hub for music theory and practice, with the potential for new initiatives between Arts and Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, Business and more, in sound engineering, acoustics, set design and construction, performance management, and so on. Indeed, performing arts could be a nexus for so many ideas that happen between faculties and there seems no doubt that AUB should develop this side of its personality. As well as staging a series of outstanding choral concerts with the AUB Choir and world-class visiting musicians, Dr. Kim and his team continue to bridge the artificially wide gap between eastern and western music. An incredible collaboration is coming up with Swiss composer Fortunat



Frölich, who has been experimenting with choral music based on Arabic *muwashshah* combined with contemporary western choral polyphony. The resulting marriage of sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonizing themes will be performed in Lebanon and Switzerland in what will be a very exciting musical happening—more so for the European audiences perhaps than those here in the Levant, with its tradition of cosmopolitan interaction and contemporary practice of

coexistence in diverse communities.

We should not forget the enormous contribution the music, art history and studio arts make as some of the most popular electives on campus, no longer mistaken for an easy credit or a relaxing counterpoint to “harder” academic courses. Dr. Harutyunyan describes the general education program art history course as “as hard as mathematics” and says students emerging from recent courses are as qualified for the graduate program as art history undergraduates. Music appreciation is preparing to expand to a mega-sized enrollment of 100 or more, opening the path for a lifetime of learning in this incredibly varied, rewarding and universal human activity. Starting next semester, Studio Art minors and electives will be required to adopt the approach and work ethic of an art student, taking the first Drawing and Painting course as if they were one. What a fantastic opportunity, one of many in this outstanding department of which this university and its community can be justly proud!

Best regards,

Fadlo R. Khuri, MD
President
