

Tomb, Marie (2018) The portrait of a country: painters, the art world and the invention of Lebanon 1880-1943. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/30260>

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**The Portrait of a Country:
Painters, the Art World, and the Invention of Lebanon
1880-1943**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2017

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to Dr Nelida Fuccaro for her continuous support and her precious guidance throughout the writing of my dissertation.

I would also like to thank B erenice Tomb, Roland Tomb and Jamil Baz for their sustained and enthusiastic assistance and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the visual representation of Lebanon put forward by its painters and its art world during the period covering the last decades of the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon (1860-1918), the French Mandate (1920-1943), and the first years of the independent Lebanese Republic, after 1943. The period coincides with Lebanon's forging its identity as an autonomous political unit, but it also corresponds with the formation of a local art world. While the investigation of painting reveals an alternative fashioning of Lebanon created outside the political sphere, art was nevertheless informed by socioeconomic developments.

Part I examines the professionalisation of painting between the 1880s and the 1920s. Chapter 1 looks at the adoption of Western painting and other kinds of images, among them photography, in the Mutasarrifiyya and in Beirut. Chapter 2 retraces the careers of the first professional painters, Daoud Corm (1852-1930), Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928), and Habib Serour (1863-1938).

Part II studies the formation of an art world in the 1930s and 1940s. Chapter 3 investigates the formation of an elite artistic culture centred on the art show. Chapter 4 examines instances when the leading painters of the period, Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957), Omar Onsi (1901-1969), and César Gemayel (1898-1958), proposed conservative aesthetic theories and defined their conception of the artist's role in society. Chapter 5 analyses their works, which most frequently represented an idealised Mountain physical and social landscape, hinting at their patrons' possible conflicted relationship with modernity.

Part III looks at the visual presentation of the country to foreign audiences from the 1920s to the 1940s. Chapter 6 examines the presentation of Lebanon as an authentic Mountain holiday destination by the tourism industry, which would take up artists' aesthetics and themes. Chapter 7 turns to the role of art in the conceptualisation of Lebanon in large-scale international events. The Mandate authorities exploited art to assert their power at the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth and at the Exposition Coloniale de Vincennes in 1931. However, at the 1939 New York World's Fair, art helped affirm the autonomy of the Lebanese Republic.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the visual representations of Lebanon put forward by its painters and its art world during the period covering the last four decades of the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon (1860-1918), the French Mandate (1920-1943), and the first years of the independent Lebanese Republic, after 1943. The period coincides with Lebanon forging its identity as an autonomous political unit, and also corresponds with the formation of a local art world: the first professional painters, trained in Europe, started their careers in the 1880s, and, by the 1940s, a fully-fledged art world had taken shape, with a culture of public exhibitions.

This defining period for Lebanon is often studied in terms of political history, with a focus on the tensions within the Lebanese political and intellectual spheres around the country's ideological outlook, on the mandatory authorities' projects for the country, and on the nature of an independent Lebanon, defined by intersectarian cooperation, and a compromise between its Arab identity and its orientation towards the West. On the other hand, art history and the history of artistic expression, as part of a broader cultural, political, and social scene, can give an idea of how individuals outside the world of politics and political debates also elaborated certain conceptions of Lebanon during the same period. More specifically, the investigation of painting reveals an alternative fashioning of Lebanon, not only created outside the political sphere but also ostensibly apolitical. Inevitably, though, a close look at Lebanese art brings forth the ideological attitudes of its makers and patrons. Artists did not propose a unified conception of Lebanon, but elaborated several intersecting ones dependent on the

conditions of art commissioning, production, display, and reception. And while the study of painting reveals an alternative fashioning of Lebanon, art was nevertheless informed by and reflective of socioeconomic developments.

Painting only involved a small segment of Lebanese society, namely, Beirut's sociocultural elite, to which patrons, art writers and artists belonged; the public consisted of Lebanese and French merchants, professionals, politicians, and intellectuals. The story of painting, thus, reflects the formation of this elite's artistic culture and taste. When made and shown at home, the images of Lebanon produced by Lebanese painters moreover corresponded to the way their patrons wished to represent themselves and their country. Artists such as Daoud Corm (1852-1930), Habib Serour (1863-1938), and Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928) focused on painting the portraits of self-declared modern individuals from around 1880 to 1930, and, later, painters like César Gemayel (1898-1958), Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957), and Omar Onsi (1901-1969) depicted idealised Mountain landscapes that hint at their patrons' possible desire to vicariously project themselves into an allegedly unscathed natural scene. In terms of taste, this Westernised art world claimed to favour conventional European figuration.

The signification of Lebanon's visual representation fluctuated according to the context of commission and display. When Lebanese painters' production was shown to a foreign public in particular, its meaning was modified. The tourism industry, for instance, would take up artists' aesthetics and themes, but add to them elements attractive to European visitors. In international events that incorporated art,

painters and sculptors could work on commission to suit the message that the exhibitions' French or Lebanese organisers wanted to communicate.

Part I, *THE GENESIS OF AN ART WORLD*, examines the professionalisation of painting between the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the Mandate. Chapter 1, *Nineteenth-century Visual Culture and the Invention of the History of Painting in Lebanon*, looks at the adoption of Western painting by the Maronite Church in the Mountain, and the consumption of painting and other kinds of images, among them photography, in Beirut. In the late 1940s, painter Moustafa Farroukh and writer Victor Hakim (1907-1984) will describe this period as a “renaissance” akin to the Nahda, the contemporaneous intellectual revival of the Arab world. The prestige of this so-called artistic renaissance would be said to reflect on post-independence Lebanon.

Chapter 2, *Becoming a Painter in Late Ottoman Beirut*, retraces the careers of the first professional painters, Corm, Saleeby, and Serour. These painters trained in conservative European academies, practiced in studios, and owed their success to portrait commissions from Beirut's elite, who sought to showcase their Westernisation and modernity. Contemporary writers considered them Lebanese Great Masters that anchored their country in a prestigious European cultural heritage.

Part II, *SHOWING ART IN BEIRUT AND TALKING ABOUT IT*, examines the formation of an art world during the Mandate period. Chapter 3, *A Growing Art World: Public Exhibitions and Critical Stances in 1930s Beirut*, investigates the formation of an elite artistic culture centred on the art exhibition. The art world was inclusive, as the painters showing their works in collective shows could be

professional or amateurs, and they hailed from different milieus, from high society to underprivileged neighbourhoods. They were also not all Lebanese, as French artists, for instance, exhibited works in Beirut. The figure of the curator appeared, while some journalists and writers improvised themselves art critics. They set parameters of behaviour for the public and the artists, and encouraged the latter to emulate European academic aesthetics.

Chapter 4, *Lebanese Painters' Aesthetic Positions and Conception of their Roles, 1930s-40s*, examines instances when the leading painters of the period, Farroukh, Onsi, and Gemayel, proposed theories of aesthetics and defined their conception of the artist's role in society. They sought to uphold traditional European figuration up to the days of Impressionism, and their discussion of the social purpose of art was not nationalist but had universal aspirations, whereby art should communicate emotions and foster morality and social cohesion.

Chapter 5, *Painting Authentic Lebanon: The Landscape and its People, 1930s-1940s*, analyses artworks by Farroukh, Gemayel, Onsi, and other painters, who most frequently represented an idealised, so-called authentic, Mountain physical and social landscape, despite the changing socioeconomic circumstances of the Mount Lebanon. These works hint at their patrons' possible conflicted relationship with modern urban life, as they could constitute an escapist outlet. Commentators found in the physical mountain the essence of Lebanon, and in the Mountain's aesthetics a source of patriotic pride.

Part III, *LEBANON EXPORTS ITS IMAGE*, looks at the visual presentation of the country to foreign audiences, which fluctuated according to the context of

commission and display. Chapter 6, *Marketing the Mountain Idyll: Visual Promotion of Tourism in Lebanon, 1920s-1950s*, examines the presentation of Lebanon as an authentic Mountain holiday destination by the tourism industry, as part of a project promoted by both the French mandatory administration and the Lebanese government, alongside a variety of entrepreneurial actors, to bank on tourism to boost the Lebanese economy. The visual promotion of the country adopted aesthetics and themes that were similar to those put forward by some of the painters, but added to them elements attractive to European visitors. Painters could also be commissioned to design postage stamps or illustrate guidebooks in order to contribute to the promotion of tourism.

Chapter 7, *Lebanon at International Exhibitions in the 1920s And 1930s*, turns to the conceptualisation of Lebanon in large-scale international events. The Mandate authorities exploited art to assert their power at the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth, an event that aimed to legitimise the Mandate and promote French industry. At the Exposition Coloniale de Vincennes in 1931, paintings by Lebanese artists stressed Lebanon's Western orientation and historical links with France. However, at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Lebanese Republic participated autonomously, under the direction of writer and businessman Charles Corm (1894-1963). The art on show there was used to assert the prevalent ideology of Christian-Muslim partnership, Lebanon's turn towards the West, and its distinction from other Arab countries, concepts that would become officialised around the time of the 1943 independence.

INTRODUCTION

THE FORMATION OF A MODERN ART WORLD IN BEIRUT

This dissertation investigates visual representations of Lebanon, and the Lebanese, made by its painters and sculptors, and promoted by its art world, from the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon (1860-1918), to the French Mandate (1920-1943), and going into the first years of the independent republic of 1943. These years not only marked the formation of Lebanon's political and cultural identity as an independent state, culminating with the official outlook forged around 1943, of a country simultaneously part of the Arab world yet distinct from it, and turned towards the West, as well as marked by cooperation between Christians and Muslims: they also correspond to the formation of an organised art world in Beirut, which disseminated visual images of the country within Lebanon and abroad.

The first professional painters, who formally trained in Europe, started their careers at the very end of the nineteenth century, and, by the 1930s, the art world had expanded alongside a culture of public exhibitions and art criticism, involving Beirut's sociocultural elite. In Beirut, this group forged, discussed, and assessed images of Lebanon made for local consumption. Yet, the visual image of the country was modified according to the circumstances of art production, display, and reception. International events, such as world exhibitions, thus gave the opportunity to Lebanese artists to participate in shaping other images of their country, this time presented to foreigners, with varying levels of input from the authorities.

As part of the broader sociocultural Lebanese scene, the study of art can also shed light on the way painters and the actors surrounding them elaborated certain conceptions of Lebanon, sometimes converging, at others at odds with, the ones put forward in the political sphere. Each time, art was also reflective or reacting to Lebanon's socioeconomic circumstances, even if only indirectly. Moreover, the display of art could sometimes be informed by larger political developments concerning the French Mandate authorities' and the Lebanese government's policies after the establishment of the Republic of Lebanon in 1926. Therefore, this dissertation aims to reconnect artistic activity with the political, and especially the socioeconomic context in which it developed, thereby filling a gap within the historiography surrounding Lebanon, where authors have mainly focused on the political, economic, and social history of the country at the expense of the study of cultural expressions. Simultaneously, it seeks to complete histories of Lebanese art, which often only construe historical circumstances as a neutral background over which art developed unproblematically, and overlook the context of art making. Besides the examination of the circumstances of art making, this project is distinguished by a close involvement with a considerable number of images, and is also informed by art history and theory, the sociology of art, and the philosophy of aesthetics, areas of inquiry indispensable to the analysis of paintings, which studies of Lebanese art rarely bring into play.

After outlining the main themes of this dissertation through a discussion of the main subjects and debates among historians of the Lebanese art of the period, and presenting alternative approaches that can illuminate Lebanon's art history, this

introduction will turn to a wider contextualisation of the elaboration of certain private and public images of Lebanon, by highlighting the broader economic, political, and ideological developments in the country most relevant to understanding the process of art making and the kind of works that artists proposed to their public.

Approaches to Lebanese art history

The first publications of substance on Lebanese art history appeared in the 1970s, but, until recently, rare are the authors who have addressed the question of Lebanon's conceptualisation by artists and the art world that artworks allude to. Moreover, many art historians have only proposed cursory analyses of artworks, and have seldom provided insight into the mechanisms of artistic production in a certain art world within a larger socio-historical and political context. Indeed, despite their usefulness to gain information about artists' studies, career evolution, style, and general artistic practice, well-known studies of the 1880s-1940s period's art history usually hinge on descriptions of works and biographical outlines rather than on analysis. This is the case, for instance, of Richard Chahine's *A Hundred Years of Plastic Arts in Lebanon* (c. 1980), which features eighty painters and sculptors from the 1890s to the 1970s, and pairs a reproduction of an artwork with a short biography of the corresponding artist, mentioning his or her studies and main exhibitions and describing his or her style.¹ The format reappears in the seminal exhibition catalogue *Lebanon: the Artist's View, 200 Years of Lebanese Painting* (1989), which afforded a historical overview of Lebanese

¹ Richard Chahine, *A Hundred Years of Plastic Arts in Lebanon* (Beirut: Chahine Gallery), n.d.

art going back to the early nineteenth century, featuring around one hundred artists.² Michel Fani's *Dictionnaire de la peinture libanaise* (1998), which crucially lacks artwork reproductions, consists of a valuable repertory of around one hundred Lebanese and foreign painters active in Lebanon since the early nineteenth century, with an accent on twentieth-century abstraction and a laboured psychological analysis of painters.³ More recently, *Art from Lebanon: Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975 vol.1* (2012), of which I am the main author, presented fifty essays about the century's most prominent painters and sculptors, starting with Daoud Corm (1852-1930) and ending with painters who responded to the beginning of the 1975 Lebanese war.⁴ Although destined to the general public, it adopts the methods of academic research and delves into the background upon which artists' careers were built. Accompanying essays sought to construct a more overarching narrative of Lebanese art history within changing socio-political circumstances.⁵

Certain scholars, by contrast, have opted to focus on one painter or a group of them. There are, for instance, Samir Saleeby's *Khalil Saleeby, a Painter from Lebanon* (1986), and Nadine Mohasseb's monograph on Daoud Corm, or the exhibition catalogues published at the occasion of certain artists' retrospective exhibitions in Beirut, such as those of painters Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) (2004), César

² *Lebanon: The Artist's View: 200 Years of Lebanese Painting* (London: British Lebanese Association, 1989).

³ Michel Fani, *Dictionnaire de la peinture libanaise* [Dictionary of Lebanese Painting] (Paris: L'Escalier), 1998.

⁴ Marie Tomb et al., *Art from Lebanon, Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975 vol.1*, under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012).

⁵ Joseph Tarrab, "Introduction: the Wide Gap," in *Art from Lebanon*, 10-19.

Gemayel (1898-1958) (1982), and Omar Onsi (1901-1967) (1985).⁶ Although they afford an extensive panorama of artists' works, these publications tend to be on the descriptive side, and propose factual, chronological biographies and laudatory essays, although some reproduce primary source material.

Other authors, however, have adopted a more scholarly perspective. Maha Sultan for instance delved into the careers of painters Daoud Corm, Habib Serour (1863-1938) and Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928), in *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann at-tashkīli fi Lubnān* (Pioneers of the Plastic Arts in Lebanon) (2004).⁷ Her study provides a well-rounded entry point into the beginnings of the early Lebanese art world because of its reliance on extensive archival research, its iconographical analysis of dozens of paintings in dialogue with European painting of the period and that of the greater Ottoman world, and its framing the three painters in their historical context.

Recently, certain scholars have taken an even more focused approach, zooming in on selected exhibitions or group of paintings produced in the span of a few years. Kirsten Scheid, for example, studied, among others, the early careers of two painters, Moustafa Farroukh and Omar Onsi, in the 1930s, with an eye on the context of the Mandate-era politics and socioeconomic dynamics. She focused on their trajectory within the incipient Beirut exhibitionary complex, and tackled in particular

⁶ Omar Onsi, *The Gardener of Epiphanies*, exhibition catalogue (Beirut: Conseil des relations économiques extérieures, 1985); *Mustafa Farroukh 1901-1957*, exhibition catalogue (Beirut: Sursock Museum, 2004); *César Gemayel, le pinceau ardent - the ardent brush*, exhibition catalogue (Beirut: Conseil des relations économiques extérieures, 1982); Samir Saleeby, *Khalil Saleeby, a Painter from Lebanon* (Beirut: Lebanese University, 1986); Nadine Mohasseb, *Daoud Corm, 1852-1930* (Beirut: Galerie Bekhazi, 1998).

⁷ Maha Sultan, *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann at-tashkīli fi Lubnān: Qorm, Srūr, Ṣalībi 1870-1938* [Pioneers of the Renaissance of the Plastic Arts in Lebanon: Corm, Serour, Saleeby 1870-1938] (Beirut: Université Saint-Esprit - Kaslik, 2004).

the concept of what she deemed the “nationalist” nude and viewers’ reception of the two painters’ landscapes.⁸ Despite only engaging with handful of paintings, Scheid’s background in art anthropology makes her publications a complementary outlook to more art historical studies of the art of the period.

The abovementioned publications nevertheless rarely place art making in a larger geographical context. Woven throughout the story, this dissertation will therefore attempt to bring forth points of convergence and divergence between, on the one hand, Lebanese artists’ careers and style, and the Lebanese art world’s mode of operation, with, on the other, the experience of other artists in the Mashriq – Syrian ones, because of the territory’s inclusion within the French Mandate, as well as Egyptian ones and Iraqi ones – and that of Turkish painters, because of their geographical proximity and the Ottoman Empire context.

Furthermore, one common thread throughout studies of Lebanese art history is their generally scarce preoccupation with issues central to the study of painting, such as art theory, the philosophy of aesthetics, and iconographical analysis. This dissertation, by contrast, aims to unpack the philosophical and aesthetic reasoning of artists and critics, their repercussion on their works, and their ideological implications, coupled with a close look at paintings’ contents. As will be seen below, this is in great part made possible by analysing their works under the light of histories of European art, since this was the tradition within which Lebanese artists’ creation was inscribed.

⁸ Kirsten Scheid, “Divinely Imprinting Prints, or, how Pictures became Influential Persons in Mandate Lebanon,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, eds. Andrew Arsan and Cyrus Schayegh (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 349-369; “Painters, Picture-makers, and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Unsettled State” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005); “Necessary Nudes: Ḥadātha and Mu’āṣira in the Lives of Modern Lebanese,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 2 (May 2010): 203–230.

Another useful way to analyse the interaction of artists, patrons, and other actors around them is to consider them in terms of participants in a given art world – in this dissertation’s case, that which emerged in Beirut between the 1880s and the 1940s. Drawing on Bourdieu’s field of cultural production, sociologist Howard Becker for instance defines an art world as the network of participants cooperating around an artist, such as critics, curators, patrons, and the public. This world is characterised by specific configurations and conventions, going from the commercial, to the social, the religious, or the aesthetic, which inform interactions among actors in the art scene and the style and content of artworks.⁹ Professional artists, in order to find success, must abide by these and successfully respond to their patrons’ demands. While Becker tends to overstate the way an artist’s career and the content of artworks are predetermined by a given socio-cultural, political, and even geopolitical, context, and tends to discount the contents of the works themselves, the framework he proposes is worth keeping in mind to explore the process whereby certain individuals became professional artists in Lebanon starting the late nineteenth century, and also provides tools to analyse the culture of exhibitions that subsequently developed in 1930s Beirut. Examining the interplay between the various actors in this evolving art world, not only the ones belonging to the private sphere but also the Mandatory and Lebanese authorities, will help understand of the image(s) of Lebanon put forward at different moments in time and different locations, be it in Beirut or outside Lebanon.

⁹ See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Art in Lebanon before a modern art world

Studying the artistic representation of modern Lebanon demands starting before the 1880s, since the adoption of Western-inspired artistic practices in Mount Lebanon took place centuries earlier. Many studies of Middle Eastern art, such as Silvia Naef's, have at their core the subject of the historical prohibition of figural representation in Islamic societies, and the gradual acceptance thereof starting the second half of the nineteenth century with the adoption of Western art forms.¹⁰ The question, of course, concerns Levantine Muslim communities, but not the Christian ones in Mount Lebanon, where figuration was especially visible in religious contexts. Mat Immerzel's and Mahmoud Zibawi's studies of medieval churches in Lebanon, for instance, note that around the twelfth and thirteenth century, particularly in areas surrounding Crusader settlements, churches could be adorned with frescoes made by itinerant monks who made use of various iconographical Eastern and European sources.¹¹ The Maronite Church was incorporated into the Roman Catholic one in 1584, and throughout the following century, as Bernard Heyberger has shown, contacts intensified between Mount Lebanon and Italy, which allowed local monks to familiarise themselves with Western religious iconography brought over by missionaries from the Jesuit and other orders, who would train local clergymen to

10 Silvia Naef, *Y a-t-il une question de l'image en Islam?* [Is There a "Question of the Image" in Islam?] (Paris: Téraèdre, 2004); Bernard Heyberger and Silvia Naef, eds., *La Multiplication des images en pays d'Islam: de l'Estampe à la télévision (17e-21e Siècle)* [The multiplication of Images in Islamic Lands: from Etching to Television (17th-21st centuries)] Actes du Colloque Images: Fonctions et Langages (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003).

11 Mat Immerzeel, *Identity Puzzles: Medieval Christian Art in Syria and Lebanon* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009); Mahmoud Zibawi, *Images chrétiennes du Levant: les décors peints des églises syro-libanaises au Moyen-Âge* [Christian Images from the Levant: the Painted Decors of Syro-Lebanese Churches in the Middle Ages] (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2009).

copy reproductions of European images whose style would then be blended with local vernacular expressions.¹²

In the nineteenth century, the Lebanese art world remained limited to a direct relationship between painter and patron, whether the Church, or, increasingly, wealthy laypeople. Although the existing literature on the period describes artistic practices, it rarely analyses artworks in terms of the identity patrons sought to project, or asks if the works revealed conceptions of a larger community, a question this dissertation addresses in chapter 1. During this period, across the Levant, wealthy families not only flaunted their wealth through furniture and marquetry, but also through frescoed walls and ceilings sometimes painted with decorative programs inspired by Europe, then seen as modern, which Claire Paget has investigated.¹³ Meanwhile, monks and laypeople put their often-summary skills at work to paint religious art and portraits of high-ranking ecclesiastics and successful laymen from Mount Lebanon.

In the cultural sphere, the mid-nineteenth century also marked the beginning of the activity of the intellectuals of the Nahda, who promoted the cultural revival of the Arab world, in Cairo, Beirut, and other major Levantine cities. These writers and thinkers took European ideas as models and applied them to endeavours promoting progress, civilisation, and social order in the Arab world, notably seeking to renew the Arabic language, culture, and literature. Lebanon actively participated in this intellectual discourse, with Butros al-Bustani (1819-83) at the forefront of the

¹² Bernard Heyberger, "De l'Image religieuse à l'image profane? L'essor de l'image chez les Chrétiens de Syrie et du Liban (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)" [From the Religious to the Lay Image? The Rise of the Image with the Christians of Syria and Lebanon (17th-19th centuries)] in *La Multiplication des images*, 31-48.

¹³ Claire Paget, *Murs et plafonds peints: Liban, XIXe siècle* [Painted Walls and Ceilings: Lebanon: 19th century] (Beirut: Editions Terre du Liban, 1998).

debates.¹⁴ This intellectual context might be an avenue to explore the self-presentation of lay art patrons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who could fashion themselves as modern and progressive individuals, as chapter 1 will argue. Their portraits are only representative of the idea the Christian elite of the Mutasarrifiyya had of itself, but do shed light on the functioning of a nascent art world and on the way patrons wished to be perceived within their sociocultural context.

The development of a modern art world

The formation of a modern Lebanese art world, modelled on European ones, starts with the first painter to practice professionally in Beirut, the Maronite Daoud Corm (1852-1930), the departure point of chapter 2. Unlike previous painters, Corm had not been trained by local monks and missionaries, but was sent by the Jesuits to Rome's Accademia de San Luca to pursue formal art studies.¹⁵ His training can be approached through the lens of the extensive literature on these academies, which provide an entry point into Corm's aesthetics and their significance for the Lebanese art scene: Corm followed these schools' strict curriculum, established in the seventeenth century, which emphasised anatomical drawing, the prestige of History painting, scenes of classical mythology, and religious art, with a strong accent on the emulation of Renaissance art.¹⁶ Less than one generation after Corm, Habib Serour (1863-1938)

¹⁴ Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6; Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley University of California Press: 2010), 166; Fawwaz Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 63-64.

¹⁵ Tomb, "Daoud Corm," in *Art from Lebanon*, 31.

¹⁶ See for instance Carl Goldstein, *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Monique Segré, *L'Art comme institution: l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 19ème-20ème siècle* [Art as Institution: the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 19th-20th centuries] (Cachan: Editions de l'ENS-Cachan, 1993); Harrison White and Cynthia White, *Canvases and Careers; Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York: Wiley, 1965).

and Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928), both Christian as well, followed similar curricula, at Rome's Fine Arts Academy for the former, and in Great Britain for the latter.¹⁷ At the turn of the twentieth century, the three men became Lebanon's first "integrated professional painters," ones who successfully adhered to the aesthetics and content that their patrons – the Church and wealthy laymen – preferred, and possessed the technical abilities to do so.¹⁸

Corm, Serour, and Saleeby worked within the European artistic tradition, which makes it possible to analyse their works in the light of concepts derived from European art history. They practiced two main genres: religious art (for Corm and Serour) and portraiture. Studies of European religious art such as Thomas Buser's can give information about the former.¹⁹ Meanwhile, several art historians of European portraiture give avenues of analysis for the Lebanese one; there are, for example, Catherine Soussloff's (2006), Marcia Pointon's (2012) or Shearer West's (2004) studies of the genre.²⁰ These authors combine visual analysis and a study of the circumstances of portrait making, and evaluate this genre in terms of bourgeois patrons' desire to express their conception of themselves. Since all three authors delve into early twentieth-century portraiture in Europe, their conclusions could be applied to the portraits of Beirut's elite social circles of the same period, which may have, in a similar fashion to their European contemporaries, employed professional painters not only to

¹⁷ Sultan, *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann*, 258-261; Tomb, "Habib Serour," in *Art from Lebanon*, 46; Tomb, "Khalil Saleeby," in *Art from Lebanon*, 43.

¹⁸ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 25, 229.

¹⁹ Thomas Buser, *Religious Art in the Nineteenth Century in Europe and America* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

²⁰ See Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Catherine Soussloff, *Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

reproduce their likeness but also to announce their social success. In these Lebanese paintings, like in Europe, the study of dress as a way to announce one's status remains of the principal avenues of analysis of Society portraiture, so it might also be the case that affluent Lebanese sitters' sartorial codes reveal social hierarchies and shed light on the group's values and its ideological allegiance to concepts of modernity, as chapter 2 will suggest. As a whole, this body of portraits does not paint the picture of Lebanon in general, but is restricted to sketching out the identity of a small, elite, and in majority Christian, part of the population, which were so far the principal art patrons.

Corm's, Saleeby's, and Serour's careers ended around 1930. The star artists of the next two decades hailed from diverse backgrounds. The Beirut-born Sunnis Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) and Omar Onsi (1901-1969), and Chaldean Christian Marie Hadad (1889-1973), and the Maronite César Gemayel (1898-1958), from Ain el Touffaha in Mount Lebanon, will, like their predecessors, practice professionally in Beirut, but in an expanded art world, which chapter 3 will investigate. The three male artists received their training abroad, since there existed no art school in Lebanon, before settling back in Beirut around 1930. Onsi and Gemayel made their way to Paris in the late nineteen-twenties, where they attended the Académie Julian, a private art school. Farroukh was a student at the Academy of Decorative Arts in Rome around the same years, and also frequented the studios of prestigious conservative French artists. Hadad, the exception, received private art lessons.²¹

²¹Tomb, "César Gemayel," in *Art from Lebanon*, 97; Tomb, "Moustafa Farroukh," in *Art from Lebanon*, 107; Tomb, "Omar Onsi," in *Art from Lebanon*, 79; Tomb, "Marie Hadad," in *Art from Lebanon*, 91.

As a culture of public art exhibitions developed, art would no longer be confined to church walls and the homes of affluent patrons, and the categories of players in the Mandate-era and post-independence Beirut art world expanded to include curators, critics, and, seldom, the authorities. Art only involved a small segment of Lebanese society, namely, Beirut's sociocultural elite, to which patrons and most of the public belonged, with the financial-commercial notability joined by intellectuals, journalists, and successful professionals. They were part of what Samir Kassir described as the elite culture and lifestyle of the Mandate period, when the city's merchants, aristocrats, and politicians, regardless of their political persuasions, regularly mingled with French officials, businessmen and military men, and their wives, at Society parties, cafés and nightclubs, as well as high-end entertainment activities, including concerts, plays, and art shows, in a collective play to emulate the Parisian high bourgeoisie.²²

Art exhibitions first took place in the context of events dedicated to consumer culture, technology, or the arts and crafts, like the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth or the exhibitions at the School of Arts and Crafts around 1930, before an expanded exhibitionary complex took shape throughout the 1930s. While prominent artists staged individual shows, the main events were large-scale exhibitions such as the Salons des Amis des Arts of 1938-1941, whose curators aimed to showcase a comprehensive panorama of local art in a set-up modelled on Paris's Salons, gathering more than a hundred Lebanese paintings and sculptures by professionals and amateurs, as well as artworks made by foreigners in Beirut.

²² Kassir, *Beirut*, 311-15.

In parallel with the development of exhibition-going, a culture of art criticism emerged, which can be examined under the light of literature dealing with the history of European, and especially French, art criticism, through publications such as Kerr Houston's.²³ Starting the early 1930s, as soon as the concept of the public exhibition appeared in Beirut, Lebanese journalists indeed began reviewing them, and, by the end of the decade, critical writing had greatly grown in scope and frequency in the press, in parallel with the multiplication of individual and collective art shows and the constitution of an affluent urban audience. Moreover, in Beirut, like in Europe, the press played a crucial role in bolstering artists' profiles and elevating the cultural prestige of painting. Journalists also helped define the conventions of the art world, by favouring certain styles, discussing the type of artistic figure one should champion, and proposing standards of taste in exhibition curating and display.²⁴ All the while, they set aside the political leanings of the publications they wrote for, thereby appearing to define the art world as a politically neutral terrain.

One possible participant in the Beirut art world that appears to have been mostly absent from the Beirut art scene are the French and Lebanese authorities, which could seem paradoxical since it ought to be in the interest of a state or a mandatory power to foster a certain national culture. In addition, it does not seem that state actors had a say in the selection of the works, censored them in terms of content or style, or took an active role in organising art shows in Beirut. In general, officials seemed rather disengaged from the workings of the Beirut scene, and more

²³ See Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices* (Boston: Pearson, 2013).

²⁴ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 29.

involved in fashioning the image of Lebanon that would be presented in international events, as will be seen below.

In fact, the question of the exact French and Lebanese, official involvement in the Beirut art world has yet to be clarified. Jennifer Dueck's study of the politics surrounding cultural enterprises during the second decade of the Mandate tellingly singles out the field of education and language as the principal plane onto which French and Syro-Lebanese political and/or religious leaders used culture as a political tool, with a direct impact on the population.²⁵ Institutions such as the secular Mission Laïque Française, missionary-run schools, and the Alliance Israélite Universelle, who all promoted French culture, language, and educational system, constituted the core of the French cultural network and competed to instil in children the values and senses of identity that corresponded to their respective ideologies, in a field that also involved Muslim-run institutions and state schools.²⁶ No sense of using institutions to promote certain ideologies, or of a contest between them, seems to transpire in the art world; in fact, artists and critics alike criticised the lack of governmental involvement in it, as will be seen in chapter 3.

Despite a deepening of the study of sociocultural circumstances surrounding art making in the past few years, as mentioned above, the discussion of the elaboration of the art world's aesthetic preferences has been marginal, a gap this dissertation seeks to fill. It is not towards art critics but rather towards the artists themselves that one

²⁵ Jennifer M. Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End. Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10, 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33, 35, 40, 49.

needs to turn to, if one seeks to investigate prevalent conceptions of art in the 1930s and 1940s, which is what chapter 4 sets out to do. It is also useful to read artists' texts and speeches against histories of European modern art that evolved concurrently with the formation of the Beirut art world, in order to gain a better understanding of the stances of these painters who worked within the European artistic tradition.

Although Lebanese painters such as Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi were familiar with European modern art, they rejected it and instead favoured upholding the academic tradition, while claiming the influence of Impressionist techniques, in particular *plein air* painting.²⁷ But unlike the Impressionists, and more specifically unlike Monet, as art historian Richard Brettell explains, they did not seek to question the subjectivity of representational transcription, or to explore new pictorial techniques related to space and perception.²⁸ Moreover, if one adopts philosopher Jacques Rancière's definition of the European avant-gardes' central artistic tenet as the desire to be free from the constraint of rules, artistic hierarchies, and subject matters, it seems that Lebanese artists were positioned diametrically against modernism.²⁹ The question here seems to be why and how Lebanese painters instead preferred adhering to traditional rules of art making, an issue that this dissertation will explore in chapter 4 by looking at artists' writings and at speeches they delivered.

Oil and watercolour paintings of the Lebanese landscape, including scenes of village life, painted in an academic style tinged with Impressionism, prevailed during

²⁷ See for instance César Gemayel, "Paul Cézanne za'im al-madrasa al-ḥadītha fi-t-taṣwīr" [Paul Cézanne the leader of the modern School of Art], *Al-Makshūf* 90 (April 1937): 8; or Omar Onsi, "Al-Madrasa at-ta'thīriyya" [The Impressionists] (conference, Arab Cultural Club, Beirut, 1948).

²⁸ Richard Brettell, *Modern Art 1851-1939 Capitalism and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16, 18.

²⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 18-19.

the second decade of the Mandate and the 1940s. European landscape painting is made for an urban elite, and is often considered a representation of this elite's way of seeing the world: this type of assessment could apply to Lebanese painting, since the public for art was urban – the art world being based in Beirut – and belonged to the city's sociocultural elite.

To first approach Lebanese landscape painting, one can turn to art historian W.J.T. Mitchell's proposition that the genre is fundamentally a representation of human beings' organisation of space and time. In fact, even when unpopulated, the image of a landscape could represent interplays between the countryside and a city that seeks to make sense of rural areas and manage them, if only visually.³⁰ Likewise, art historian Denis Cosgrove maintains that landscape painting is never a neutral representation of the land, but an image filtered through the bourgeois society's culture and ideological beliefs: if one looks at Lebanese landscape painting in such a light, it could be possible to gain insight into Beirut's attitudes towards the Mountain, which chapter 5 will explore.³¹ Moreover, art historians Malcolm Andrews and Alan Wallach, who studied scenes of rural life in European painting from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, have argued that such scenes spoke to an urban public experiencing rapid modernisation, and who felt some uneasiness towards their modern socioeconomic condition, which could have driven them to seek a vicarious

³⁰ See W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

³¹ See Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 9, 14.

experience of authenticity through painting.³² In Lebanon too, painters represented a Mountain landscape characterised by rural peacefulness and communities' ancient practices within a rapidly modernising country, so this literature seems relevant to the Lebanese case, where landscape paintings could have also constituted a space on which to project fantasies of authenticity.

Lebanese landscape painting also seems to be tied to the aesthetics of the picturesque, a concept derived from Edmund Burke, describing a scene that is neither canonically beautiful nor awe-inspiring, and that shows a nature seemingly impervious to change. As a rural utopia constructed for an urban audience, it reveals complex and ambivalent relationships between city and countryside, which is what Lebanese painters possibly painted.³³ Another angle of study that can be applied to several Lebanese landscape paintings is what Wallach calls the panoptic sublime, whereby the urban viewer controls a scene from above and from a distance, as an expression of the bourgeoisie's intent to dominate and control the unfamiliar countryside.³⁴

Since, in the 1930s and 1940s, Lebanese painters usually painted their own country, the question of possible nationalist intents arise, as well as that of the ideological commitment of artists. Indeed, scholars of art and nationalism routinely draw links between art and the celebration of a certain conception of national identity, with the former said to reflect the latter, so debates surrounding the relationship

³² Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 151, 170; Alan Wallach, "Between Subject and Object," in *Landscape Theory*, eds. Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2008), 317.

³³ Andrew Ballantyne, "The Picturesque and its Development," in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 116.

³⁴ Wallach, "Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 81.

between artistic expression and the idea of a nation need to be considered. John Hutchinson, for instance, argues that the arts can often promote cultural nationalism, seeking to “morally regenerate” a nation or represent its myths.³⁵ Some art is indeed undeniably nationalist in content: many historical rulers have promoted nationalistic landscape painting to impose their ideology on supposedly virgin territories, for example, in Turkey and the Soviet Union during the interwar period.³⁶ In Lebanon, however, content and style were not dictated from above. In terms of topics addressed, whereas twentieth-century nationalist artworks often harnessed popular myths of the struggling, yet triumphant peoples, with at their centre the image of the peasant or worker, in Lebanon, the image of the latter is absent, and the former does not seem to be described as a paradigmatic example for people – one whose work is crucial to nation building – but rather as a model of moral rectitude, as chapter 5 will argue.

It nevertheless remains pertinent to investigate whether actors in the Lebanese art world – artists, art commentators, exhibition organisers, the public, or the authorities – interpreted, or called for employing, art to bind the nation, or to celebrate versions thereof coinciding with one available in the political spheres. These could have been, for instance, advocating Lebanese nationalism or Syrian Arab nationalism – which were the main ideological attitudes, out of several possible ones, throughout the Mandate period, as will be seen below.

³⁵ John Hutchinson, “Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration” in *Nationalism*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 124.

³⁶ Cosgrove, “Modernity, Community and the Landscape Idea,” *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 1–2 (July 2006): 56–58.

This topic of the interplay between art and nationalism can begin to be approached through the analysis of art reviews in the press as well as artists' writings and speeches, which chapters 4 and 5 will endeavour to do. The outlook of exhibition organisers on the subject can also be culled from the content of the artworks selected for exhibition. Artists' voices are the clearest on the topic: in the 1930s and 1940s, painters such as Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi sometimes contributed to the pages of cultural-literary periodicals such as *al-Adīb* (The Writer) and would give conferences at intellectual clubs like the Cénacle Libanais, expressing their views on the role art should play for social progress. The question of whom this progress was meant to impact arises, as artists did not adopt a specific focus on the Lebanese nation, or promote certain specific ideological articulations thereof. Art critical writings of the period might also uncover certain conceptions of the role of art within a certain Lebanese nation; their description of artworks and praise for specific styles or themes can too reveal their notions of what Lebanon was or ought to be. Overall, it could seem that artists and critics were, in general, responsive to the concept of a standalone Lebanese nation. This dissertation aims to uncover what kind of nation they believed it should be, and, more specifically, how it should be represented visually.

The image of Lebanon abroad: tourism, international exhibitions, and constructions of a national identity

The question of the use of art towards the articulation of a national identity comes into sharper focus when it comes to representations of Lebanon directed towards foreigners – especially towards the French audience, but also towards the American and other international ones. Apart from painting a certain image of Lebanon to be

enjoyed by their local public, Lebanese painters and sculptors indeed participated in constructing the official visual identity of the country that was disseminated abroad, for instance in international exhibitions, or throughout tourism visual material, starting the 1920s and going into the 1940s. During this period, the tourism industry would actually take up artists' aesthetics and subjects, but add to them elements attractive to European (both French- and English-speaking) visitors. Although the history of this sector and its contribution to the Lebanese economy have been the subject of several studies, the artistic input in the development of the field has so far not been investigated, which is what this dissertation sets out to do in chapter 6.

Since the early 1920s, the Lebanese tourism industry, which included French and Lebanese state and private actors, opted to promote summering in the Mountain (a possibility that distinguished Lebanon from successful tourist destinations such as Egypt), by opposition to visiting and staying in Beirut. During the Mandate period, dozens of villages welcomed affluent Beirutis and French citizens seeking to retreat from the capital city's heat in the summer months.³⁷ Seeing the popularity of such resorts, and that Lebanon lacked natural and industrial resources, some private entrepreneurs, as well as the French authorities, and, later, the Lebanese ones, looked at tourism as a possible way to boost the Lebanese economy and their own businesses: for instance, prominent Lebanese merchant families and French corporations had stakes in Mountain resorts, the port of Beirut, or luxury hotels.³⁸ Governmental organisations dedicated to tourism also appeared, with a national tourism office set up in Beirut in 1921, and a department within the mandatory

³⁷ Kassir, *Beirut*, 303-4.

³⁸ Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 93.

administration created to promote tourism in 1923, while the French administration also extended loans to tourism-related businesses. Soon, facilities multiplied to welcome tourists in Beirut and the Mountain.³⁹ At the beginning of the 1920s, thirty-five hotels operated in Beirut, and sixty-two in 1930, while the number of tourists to Lebanon grew from an estimated 30,000 in 1937 to 216,000 in 1952.⁴⁰ Although the contribution to the sector by artists has so far not been studied, artists did participate in disseminating the tourism industry's preferred image of Lebanon, that of a Mountain resort holiday destination, as part of governmental or private endeavours. Painters Moustafa Farroukh and Philippe Mourani, for example, won commissions to design postage stamps for the Lebanese Republic showcasing Mountain holidays, and Farroukh had illustrations of his village scenes reproduced in a guidebook to Lebanon, thereby repurposing his own art to address an international audience.⁴¹

In addition to participating in the promotion of Lebanese tourism, artists were crucial in forging the image of Lebanon that was presented at international exhibitions in the 1920s and the 1930s. Although there exists considerable scholarship on such events, the Lebanese participation in them is rarely, if ever mentioned. This dissertation's last chapter aims to simultaneously study the impact, if any, that Lebanon had at international fairs and exhibitions and to investigate what image of the country was presented, by whom, and to what ends, through the lens of the art on

³⁹ See Xavier Guillot, "From One Globalization to Another: In Search of the Seeds of Modern Tourism in the Levant, a Western Perspective," in *Tourism in the Middle East Continuity, Change and Transformation*, ed. Rami Farouk Daher (Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2007), 95-110.

⁴⁰ Guillot, "One Globalization to Another," 100; Kassir, *Beirut*, 267; Carolyn Gates, *The Historical Role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1989), 16.

⁴¹ Jamil Rouhi, ed., *Beyrouth et la République libanaise* (Beirut: Librairie universelle, 1948).

display.

One of the first instances of public display of Lebanese art took place at Beirut's 1921 Foire-Exposition, an event dedicated to increasing French industry's dominance over the mandated territories, under the conceit that the Fair was designed to benefit the economic development of the latter in the aftermath of World War I. As Simon Jackson points out, the Exposition reflected the French political economy policies of the time, and was also meant to assert French political and military dominance.⁴² Among vast displays of French goods, and smaller ones of local crafts, a Pavillon des Beaux-Arts stood on Beirut's central square, Al-Burj: this dissertation will attempt to understand how the Lebanese artworks presented there participated in defining Greater Lebanon from a French perspective, as a Christian protectorate rescued by France from Ottoman mercilessness.

Ten years later, Lebanon was present at the Exposition Coloniale de Vincennes, together with the Syrian mandatory states, in a Pavillon des États du Levant, where the fine arts built an image of Lebanon divergent from Syria's. One can turn to the work of scholars such as Ellen Furlough or Donna Jones to gain a larger perspective on the Exposition's ideological framework and the colonial-imperial project embedded in its elaboration, and also to compare the representation of Lebanon with that of France's colonies, which essentially consisted in racist displays allegedly representative of these territories.⁴³ By contrast, the archaeological artefacts

⁴² Simon Jackson, "Mandatory Development: The Political Economy of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon, 1915-1939" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2009), 325-340.

⁴³ Ellen Furlough, "Une Leçon des [sic] choses: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 3 (summer 2002): 441-42; Donna Jones, "The Prison

and the Lebanese and French paintings inside the Pavillon suggest a different French project to represent its mandated states, which, in the case of Lebanon, seems to have emphasised its ancient civilisation and historical and cultural ties with France.

Unlike at Vincennes, at the 1939 New York World's Fair, Lebanon enjoyed a standalone pavilion, where art once again played a crucial role in defining the image and the identity of Lebanon to the world. The United States invited the Lebanese government to join in as an independent nation, with the understanding that the 1936 treaty with France would soon equate with independence. The Fair has been studied extensively, for instance in the collective *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair, 1939/40* or by Marco Duranti, which explain the ideology behind the Fair, a drastic departure from previous international exhibitions that exalted Western imperialism: instead, the 1939 World's Fair celebrated the corporate world, with a message purportedly meant to promote world peace and prosperity.⁴⁴

Asher Kaufman has studied the Lebanese participation in the New York's World's Fair, with an accent on an examination of the persona of Maronite writer and businessman Charles Corm (1894-1963), the exhibition's curator, more so than on the art displays.⁴⁵ Despite parliamentary approval, Corm's appointment was rather controversial, since he was a partisan of the promotion of the Phoenician identity of

House of Modernism: Colonial Spaces and the Construction of the Primitive at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition," *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 1 (January 2007): 55-59.

⁴⁴ Marco Duranti, "Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939-40 New York World's Fair," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006): 663-683; *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair, 1939/40*, ed. Helen Harrison and Queens Museum (New York: Queens Museum, 1980).

⁴⁵ Asher Kaufman, "'Too Much French, but a Swell Exhibit': Representing Lebanon at the New York World's Fair 1939-1940," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. i (2008): 59-77. Kaufman moreover discounts to a large extent the American press's assessment of the Lebanese pavilion, which is an important entry point into the West's perception of Lebanon.

Lebanon, justified by invoking History and geography, a concept recurring throughout his writings.⁴⁶ Although Kaufman argues Corm imposed his “Pheonicianist” vision on the pavilion’s contents, this assessment is not fully supported by the abundant artworks and archaeological artefacts exhibited in the pavilion.⁴⁷ Displays related to the Phoenicians’ role as described in the Old Testament were also designed to be attractive to Americans, and, on the whole, art and archaeology might have in fact told a narrative of Lebanese history culminating with an affirmation of Lebanon’s focus on trade and tourism, and of the official identity Lebanon would adopt at independence, as a country between East and West, characterised by Christian-Muslim cooperation, as will be seen below.

FRAMING THE LEBANESE ART WORLD: SHIFTING HISTORICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS

The fluctuating identities of Lebanon

It is fundamental to contextualise the activity of artists and of other actors involved in exhibiting art within broader historical, socioeconomic and political developments, in order to evaluate if, and how, they reacted or responded to them. Painters portrayed images their own country that varied with time and place, with the nature of their audience, and with the identity of their patrons: their visual (and verbal) stances could be compared to certain conceptions of Lebanon available on the political and intellectual scenes, in order to determine whether there existed actors in the art world, in particular artists, who sought to promote similar ideas, and under what circumstances.

⁴⁶ See Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), in particular 141-158.

⁴⁷ Kaufman, “Too Much French,” 67.

Although very few historians of Lebanon have discussed culture, let alone the fine arts – which makes this dissertation a valuable complement to their works – they do provide indispensable insight into the political, intellectual and social debates surrounding the formation of Lebanon’s national identity, during the decades leading to the establishment of the independent Lebanese Republic in 1943. Many standard histories of Lebanon do so, as part of a larger narrative going back several centuries and ending with the 1975 Lebanese war. Kamal Salibi for instance focuses on the chronological unfolding of political developments; Fawwaz Traboulsi does likewise, albeit adopting an analysis frequently more centred on class and social issues.⁴⁸ Other publications focus more specifically on parsing the intellectual and political scenes’ stances regarding the issue of Lebanese nation building, and the many possibilities that were put forward between the Mutasarrifiyya and independence.

Several ideological conceptions of a Lebanese polity were in fact already available during the Mutasarrifiyya period, and fluctuated in response to regional – and international – political and socioeconomic trends and events, as Carol Hakim has shown. They, and newer ones, were competing at the time of the establishment of the State of Greater Lebanon. Thus, during the Mutasarrifiyya, the clerical and secular elites would develop fluid narratives of Lebanese national representation, based on

⁴⁸ Salibi’s *The Modern History of Lebanon* (Delmar (NY): Caravan Books, 1965) covers the period from the rise of the Shihabi family to 1958; Traboulsi’s *History of Modern Lebanon* goes back to the Ottoman conquest and ends with the 1975 war. Salibi’s publications suffer from glaring omissions: he does not, for example, mention the dramatic 1916 Ottoman-provoked famine in Mount Lebanon; some of his other works take an ideologically partisan dimension – *A House of Many Mansions: the History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (University of California Press, 1988) notably argues for the Arab identity of Lebanon. See also, for instance, Joseph Chami, *Du Mont-Liban à l’Indépendance: 1861-1943. Le Mémorial du Liban, vol. I.* (Beyrouth: Chemaly & Chemaly, 2002) and William Harris, *Lebanon : A History, 600-2011* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2012).

interpretations of History, some of them incorporating the Maronites only and others Mountain communities.⁴⁹ Before World War I, conceptions of the political/ideological identity of Lebanon, often born out of the context of reformist programs aimed at assuaging socio-economic problems in the Mountain, competed and overlapped, locally among Christian and Muslim elites, and concurrently among Maronite émigré circles in Egypt, France and the United States. Whereas some groups of Maronite activists started demanding more autonomy for Mount Lebanon, other groups, which included both Christians and Muslims, championed Ottomanism or Syrian nationalism, the latter aiming at the political and territorial unification of Greater Syria, or the association of a Lebanese nation within it.⁵⁰ During this period, Corm, Saleeby, and Serour notably painted portraits of Beirut's Christian elite, which seem to have focused on displaying the sitters' wealth and Europe-inspired modernity, without displaying their ideological beliefs regarding the conceptualisation of Lebanon; these works set a precedent for the apparent absence of politicisation in Lebanese painting.

After the upheaval of World War I and its disastrous social, economic and political consequences, and the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the period until 1920 was dominated by the French/British dispute over the control of the region.⁵¹ Part of the Lebanese elite – mostly Maronites – increasingly argued for the extension of the Mountain's territory to its “historical and geographical” boundaries. For them, incorporating Beirut, the Mediterranean coast, and the agricultural plains north, south,

⁴⁹ Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 262.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8, 263.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 263-4.

and east of Mount Lebanon, would insure access to agricultural lands and to foreign trade, in order to prevent the repeating of the catastrophic famine Ottoman-provoked famine during World War I, which had claimed as many as 200,000 lives.⁵² Concurrently, certain Christian Francophile intellectuals, lawyers and businessmen gathered around Charles Corm invoked the idea that Lebanon was fundamentally distinguished by its Phoenician past, to legitimise the separate existence of a Lebanese state for historical and cultural reasons and the mapping of its territory onto the alleged Phoenician one.⁵³

Lebanese visits to the Paris Peace conference, in 1919 and 1920, most prominently those led by Maronite Patriarch Elias Hoyek, thus lobbied for the extension of Mount Lebanon's borders to form a Lebanese state. Yet, they achieved little in practice, since the French remained unsure of their position up until the end of the peace talks.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the contribution of the Maronite clergymen and notables in Paris remained significant, since they engrained in the French their "Lebanist" narrative. In Lebanon, Sunnis, Druzes and Shias, in addition to some Christian notables, by contrast, preferred the establishment of a Greater Syrian entity.⁵⁵

The increased French determination to gain control over the Syro-Lebanese region was fulfilled once France was given control over it at the San Remo

⁵² Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 92; Hakim, *Lebanese National Idea*, 234. In addition to the famine, within Greater Syria, there were between 650,000 and 3.5 million civilian and military casualties during World War I (Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 120).

⁵³ Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 129, 89.

⁵⁴ Hakim, *Lebanese National Idea*, 253.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 246. As Hakim points out, "Lebanism" was not a "coherent and popular nationalist ideology of movement," but focused on ideas and myths put forward by the Lebanese clerical and secular elite. Moreover, most of the population before 1920s seemed to have adhered to no particular idea of Lebanon (*Lebanese National Idea*, 263-4).

conference, defeated Hashemite King Faysal of Syria, and took control of the Bekaa valley. France then unilaterally declared the establishment of Greater Lebanon, which was proclaimed in Beirut, in September 1920, by High Commissioner General Gouraud. The creation of the state happened alongside France's division of its mandated territories into five states according to religious sects, thereby creating, alongside majority-Christian Mount Lebanon, the majority-Sunni states of Damascus and of Aleppo, the state of the Alawites, and the Jabal Druze, a division, they hoped, would weaken the different communities' opposition to the Mandate and impede Syrian Nationalist activities. Yet, Greater Lebanon was not uncontroversial, even among Christian communities. Fearing Muslim domination, many Maronites remained proponents of a "smaller Lebanon," which would have maintained the borders of the Mutasarrifiyya, and some Orthodox Christians feared Maronite supremacy within Greater Lebanon. Many Sunnis and bi-confessional Syrian nationalist groups still argued for Lebanon to become part of a larger Syrian state for religious and/or cultural reasons.⁵⁶

The national identity debate during the two decades of the Mandate was dominated by tensions between, on the one hand, Syrian Arab Nationalists, and, on the other, partisans of Lebanon's separation from Syria, with, as background, the political transactions, shifting alliances, and rivalries among Christian and Muslim politicians, and between them and the Mandate authorities, with confrontations especially spurred by debates surrounding the question of the continuation of the Mandate and that of the definition the Lebanese territory, as outlined by historians

⁵⁶ Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 216, 218, 222.

such as Meir Zamir.⁵⁷

Lebanon became a republic in 1926, albeit one with limited room for political manoeuvre. It had a constitution, a democratic parliamentary system, with a Chamber of Representatives replacing the Administrative Council, and a president (Maronite Charles Debbas was the first one), but France still made decisions with regards to foreign relations, and the High Commissioner enjoyed considerable powers, such as vetoing legislature, dissolving parliament and ruling by decree.⁵⁸ Indeed, the 1920s and 30s were marked by frequent direct French interventions into the functioning of the Lebanese political system: successive High Commissioners initiated several revisions or suspensions of the constitution according to political needs, and would sometimes directly appoint the President or deputies.⁵⁹ France was also invested in building the official image of Lebanon in large-scale manifestations, such as the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth and the 1931 Pavillon des États du Levant at the Exposition de Vincennes. In both cases, the art display seems to have reflected France's intentions to emphasise its mandate's legitimacy.

The establishment of the Lebanese Republic, in 1926, simultaneously increased demands for independence and found vocal opponents within Muslim communities, who regularly demanded the unification of Lebanon and Syria. In 1936, a treaty was concluded between Lebanon and France, planning for Lebanon to become an independent sovereign state, and to be admitted to the League of Nations within three

⁵⁷ See Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest, the Road to Statehood 1926-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003). One important omission from his work is that of local archives, Zamir only studying British and French documents.

⁵⁸ Salibi, *Modern History of Lebanon*, 167.

⁵⁹ See Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest*; Salibi, *Modern History of Lebanon*, 170-187.

years, with France nevertheless retaining an important military presence among other advantages.⁶⁰ This treaty was nevertheless never ratified. Yet, other Western countries had a different perception of the treaty: for instance, in 1939, it is with the understanding that Lebanon was an autonomous nation, soon to be independent if not already so, that the United States invited it to take part in the New York World's Fair.

After several years of existence of the Lebanese Republic, and especially after the treaty with France, many Muslim public figures, notably Riad Al Solh (1894-1951), who had been a prominent advocate of Syrian Arab Nationalism, gradually accepted the idea of Lebanon remaining separate from Syria, providing it would be completely free from French influence, and that the country would display its Arab identity. At the same time, several Christian Lebanese nationalist politicians, foremost among them the Maronite Bechara El Khoury (1890-1964), came to believe that cooperation with Muslims was necessary to obtain independence from France.⁶¹ Other groups or political formations appeared in parallel during the decade, among them the Communist party and the Syrian Socialist party, who argued for a secular form of Syrian Nationalism.⁶²

But in the 1930s and up until independence, the political scene was effectively dominated by the competition between two main factions, or rather, two men – in fact, Lebanese politics were almost as much a matter of sectarian disagreement as they were a matter of cross- and inter-sectarian one, and of French-Lebanese shifting allegiances and personal rivalries. On one side, there was Maronite politician Emile

⁶⁰ Salibi, *Modern History of Lebanon*, 181.

⁶¹ Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest*, 243.

⁶² Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 215-229.

Eddé (1883-1949), President between 1936 and 1941, and his National Bloc, who were loyal to France and strong opponents of Syrian Arab nationalists; on the other, Maronite politician and several-times Prime Minister Bechara El Khoury and his Constitutional Bloc requested independence. El Khoury's group would join forces with Muslim politicians, notably Al Solh, to campaign to obtain it. The Free French, under the pressure of Great Britain and the United States, and popular outcry, would relent, and Lebanon obtained independence in November 1943, with El Khoury becoming President and Al Solh Prime Minister.⁶³

It is then that the official identity of independent Lebanon crystallised. Michele Hartman and Alessandro Olsaretti, as well as Kaufman, have discussed the formation of this ideology, as elaborated by Chaldean Christian thinker and banker Michel Chiha, the principal adviser, financier, and brother-in-law of El Khoury.⁶⁴ Although Chiha was close to Charles Corm and his "Phoenicianist" circles around 1919, he would depart from this outlook and advocate the integration of Lebanon in the Middle East, albeit still invoking the Phoenician myth, in particular to justify the country's borders and its inscription within the Mediterranean world.⁶⁵ Chiha was the main writer of Lebanon's 1926 constitution, which put in writing the principle of political power sharing between sects, an idea that he linked to Lebanon being a

⁶³ Salibi, *Modern History of Lebanon*, 186-191.

⁶⁴ Michele Hartman and Alessandro Olsaretti, "The First Boat and the First Oar': Inventions of Lebanon in the Writings of Michel Chiha," *Radical History Review* 86 (spring 2003): 37-65. See also Farid Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact. Papers on Lebanon* 12. (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991).

⁶⁵ Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 94, 160-61. Chiha still remained close to "Phoenicianists" socially, and his writings did incorporate some Phoenician terminology. Many members of the Christian elite likewise incorporated Phoenicia in their conceptions of the Lebanese identity.

supposed haven for minorities.⁶⁶ His ideas would influence the articulation of the verbal National Pact between El Khoury and Al Solh, which would define Lebanon's official identity in 1943.⁶⁷ This compromise pact marked the official Muslim acknowledgement of Lebanon's statehood and independence, in exchange for which Christians would relinquish demands for French protection. It also conceptualised Lebanon as part of the Arab world (with an "Arab face" and language), but with cultural ties with the West, and as a Muslim/Christian partnership.

During the 1930s and 1940s, a crucial period for the definition of the country's identity, the Beirut art world ostensibly remained apolitical. Exhibition reviews do not appear to have been an occasion for art critics to champion the political stances of the publications they wrote for, or to broach the question of the validity of the Lebanese Republic's territory or ideological outlook. Rather, journalists seem to have patriotically supported Lebanese art. In their interviews, writings, and speeches, artists likewise did not strike as holding ideological allegiances, although an implicit approval of the idea of a standalone Lebanese entity exists. By contrast, it looks as if conceptions of Lebanon similar to the National Pact's publicly reverberated in the 1939 Lebanese pavilion in New York, despite its curator Charles Corm's promotion of Phoenicianism.

Socioeconomic developments in Beirut and the Mountain

Since the days of the Mutasarrifiyya, Beirut dominated Lebanon as an economic and a cultural centre, in conjunction with its status as a political capital. It was also in Beirut

⁶⁶ Hartman and Olsaretti, "First Boat," 50.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

that the Lebanese art scene took shape, and where patrons, artists, and critics lived and worked: in this perspective, it is especially crucial to understand not only the political, but also the socioeconomic developments taking place in the city from the late Ottoman era to post-independence Lebanon. Strikingly, painters largely disregarded the major changes the city underwent during this period, be they economic, demographical, sociocultural, or related to the city's physical makeup. Examining such changes is nevertheless essential in order to find ways to understand why this rejection took place, and to get a more refined picture of the context of art production and reception.

Two works of note give insight into the development of the urban backdrop against which the Lebanese art world took shape. The first, Jans Hanssen's *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (2005), provides, besides its discussion of politics, information about infrastructural, technological and communications changes in Beirut. Likewise, Samir Kassir's *Beirut* (2010), a history of the city since Roman times – and one of the few general histories of Lebanon delving into the larger cultural field – helps complete the story of the city's transformation for the Mandate period.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Beirut was on the path to becoming the principal Levantine port of the Empire, benefitting from the influx of European capital and the activity of local merchants. New Ottoman-conceived rail and road networks linked the city to the greater Ottoman world and beyond, while steamboats insured one could reach Europe in a matter of days. Beirut was also an early adopter of modern communication technologies, as telegraph lines were installed there in the

1860s, and the telephone appeared before World War I.⁶⁸ In the 1920s, the French administration took on large-scale public works, notably building a network of asphalted roads throughout Lebanon and Syria. The automobile became the Lebanese bourgeoisie's preferred means of transportation, with around twenty thousand cars riding Lebanese roads in the early 1930s. The first passenger hydroplane lines were set up then, and Beirut's airport was inaugurated in 1939.⁶⁹ Painters, from Corm, Serour and Saleeby starting the turn of the twentieth century, to Farroukh, Onsi and Gemayel in the late 1930s and 1940s, effectively benefitted from the development of transportation, not only in order to go study in Europe, but also to exhibit in France, the Levant, and the United States.

During the Mandate period, Beirut moreover experienced profound physical transformation and rapid urban expansion. May Davie has detailed the transformation of the city at the beginning of the Mandate period, when, in 1920-21, the French mandatory authorities embarked on an extensive overhaul programme of Beirut's city centre, which could make its military activities and trade easier. In a way reminiscent of a Haussmanisation project, the majority of the old, and rather decrepit, Beirut souks were torn down and replaced with a grid of wide avenues lined up with tall buildings housing offices and businesses.⁷⁰ Kassir explains how the city's physiognomy further changed in the interwar period, two decades during which

⁶⁸ Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 8-9.

⁶⁹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 266-75, 301-4.

⁷⁰ May Davie, *Beyrouth 1825-1975: un siècle et demi d'urbanisme* [Beirut 1825-1975: One and a Half Centuries of Urban Planning] (Beirut: Publications de l'Ordre des Ingénieurs et Architectes de Beyrouth, 2001), 71, 87-88; Davie, "Deuxième conférence internationale d'histoire urbaine. Beyrouth: de la ville ottomane à la ville française" [Second International Conference on Urban History. Beirut: from the Ottoman to the French City] (Conference presented at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur l'Urbanisation du Monde Arabe, Strasbourg, 1994), accessed April 5, 2015, <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/900/902/MAY-Davie/Ville-ott-francaise.html>

Beirut's population exploded: it doubled only in the 1920s, reaching an approximate 160,000 in 1932, not only because of demographic growth, but also because of the rural exodus and the arrival of refugees in the thousands, first, the Armenians, and then Christian Syrians and Kurds, among other groups.⁷¹ Refugees settled in shantytowns, and the Mountain's former inhabitants gathered in poorer suburbs on Beirut's outskirts. While entire villages surrounding Beirut turned into underprivileged suburbs, neighbourhoods closer to the city centre also knew an unprecedented speed of construction, with tall, modern, mixed-use buildings.⁷² Painters ignored the physical transformation of Beirut, turning instead to the remaining bucolic parts of town, or shunned representing the modern city altogether: this dissertation will attempt to explain this attitude.

The Mandate period also saw the rise of Beirut's economic importance and the parallel decline of the Mountain's. These dynamics were in great part due to the French mandatory politics of economic development, which, as Jackson showed, were indeed a political matter, both at the governmental and at the personal, daily level for the population.⁷³ Carolyn Gates has studied Lebanon's tertiary sector, centred in Beirut, which developed aggressively during the Mandate period, encouraged by French policies. Foreign capital investment – most importantly, French one – was key to this development.⁷⁴ Beirut's economy grew steadily after the end of the Great Depression, and even more so after the end of the Mandate, and effectively drove a period of economic growth for the entire country. Lebanon became known as a

⁷¹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 267.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 292-96, 300.

⁷³ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 1-2.

⁷⁴ Gates, *Political Economy*, 15, 20.

“merchant republic” dominated by a quasi-oligarchy of businessmen and bankers with political connections.⁷⁵ Often with the input of French capital, they owned banks, insurance companies, import concessions for Western goods (for items going from food to medical products to electric equipment), and had shares in construction and public service companies.⁷⁶ After independence, the city cemented its status as an important regional commercial-financial hub, focused on trade, banking, transport-communications, and the service industry. Further policies of economic deregulation and liberalisation, even of economic *laissez-faire*, were intensified to sustain a system favourable to the development of Lebanon’s service economy.⁷⁷ It is in this context that the tourism industry developed as an alternative source of income for the country and that painters such as Farroukh would contribute images to the promotion of this industry.

Yet, the system fostering Beirut’s economic development did not go without popular contestation, as, during the Mandate period, French ambitions – which they often sought to attain with the help of local merchants – had to contend with the changing initiatives and positions of the Syro-Lebanese to adhere to or oppose the mandatory political economy.⁷⁸ Protests notably focused on the running of the sector of public utilities: France, in fact, had put in place a rather exploitative system of concessions for the tramways, electricity, and water companies, which it could control

⁷⁵ Ibid., 16-17.

⁷⁶ Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 116.

⁷⁷ Gates, *Political Economy*, 19.

⁷⁸ Jackson, “Mandatory Development,” 1.

and reap benefits from cheaply, with a minority participation of local entrepreneurs.⁷⁹ But, at several points, citizens-consumers demonstrated their desire to reform this system via boycotts and strikes against utilities' high prices and the companies' managers' corruption, for instance with the 1922 and 1931 tramway boycotts. These events, although not nationalist in character, were multi-sectarian and involved different social classes together in protest.⁸⁰

Just as the consequences of French (and, later, the Lebanese government's) political-economic policies could be felt in the daily life of Beirutis, they also affected the Mountain, whose economy was already suffering before the Mandate. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon had been an important regional centre of silk thread, and essentially transformed into a monocrop economy exporting its production in majority to France.⁸¹ Production peaked in 1910, but the industry greatly suffered from Chinese and Japanese competition, causing its steady decline in the 1920s, and, despite French efforts to revive it, it collapsed in the 1930s concurrently with the Great Depression and the increase in imports of artificial silk, as Joel Beinin has noted.⁸² During the Mandate period, agriculture became less efficient because of the intensive use of the land, and the French authorities did little to develop the sector and instead supported the import market for French consumer goods. Yet, they encouraged agriculture to diversify, and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 252, 318. Nevertheless, Jackson relies only on English- and French-speaking sources – an issue he acknowledges – which limits the voice given to the Syrian and Lebanese populations.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 4, 12, 25, 318-19.

⁸¹ Jens Hanssen, "'Your Beirut Is on My Desk': Ottomanizing Beirut under Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909)," in *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, eds. Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis (New York: Prestel, 1998), 41-68.

⁸² Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72.

to replace silk cultivation with that of varieties of fruit and vegetables, but this did not prevent the decline of the sector.⁸³ In 1948, although 50% of the population remained involved in agriculture, the sector only represented 18% of the GDP.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the transformation of the Mountain economy had important consequences on its demography. Rural exodus went unabated, while inhabitants of the region emigrated *en masse*: an estimated 100,000 mainly Christian men had already left Lebanon before 1914, followed by thousands more after the famine of World War I and the collapse of sericulture.⁸⁵ In the mid-twenties, French sources estimated that 600,000 to 800,000 Syro-Lebanese lived outside the Levant.⁸⁶ Lebanese landscape painting seems to have evoked none of these trends: village scenes instead suggest a timeless, light-hearted lifestyle. Actually, it was not people, but nature, and especially mountains, that appear to have been the focus of painters' interest. Studying the critical responses to such images could elucidate whether they were understood as concealing socioeconomic facts, perceived as representative of a nation, or whether they represented another conception of Lebanon upheld by the Beirut art world, perhaps one based on an urban/rural rather than a sectarian or ideological divide.

⁸³ Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest*, 86; Beinin, *Workers and Peasants*, 70-80.

⁸⁴ Gates, *Political Economy*, 20.

⁸⁵ Beinin, *Workers and Peasants*, 73; Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 92.

⁸⁶ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 394.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Studying the image of Lebanon cannot go without relying on visual material. Between 2009 and 2012, during the research the publisher and I conducted for *Art from Lebanon: Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975 vol.1*, we gained access to multiple private and institutional collections and photographed thousands of artworks, including paintings, sculptures, drawings and sketches.¹ For the period this dissertation covers (1880s-1940s), this database contains around 400 images by Corm, Saleeby, Serour, Farroukh, Gemayel, Onsi, and their contemporaries. In addition, during my research for this dissertation, artists' families, especially Corm's, Farroukh's, and Onsi's, as well as collectors, made the artworks they owned available for me to photograph, or provided me with digital images. Reproductions of artworks also came from collections pertaining to Lebanon's participation at international events such as the 1939 New York World's Fair.²

Visual materials not made by artists, such as photographs and posters, came from various sources. There were illustrated periodicals, such as the weekly *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen* (1928-2011) and *Al-Ma'raḍ* (The Exhibition) (1921-36), or France's *La Correspondance d'Orient*, and newspapers such as *Le Jour* (founded

¹ Marie Tomb et al., *Art from Lebanon: Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975 vol.1*, under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012). The artworks we photographed came from institutions such as Beirut's Sursock Museum, the collections of artists' families and of important private collectors.

² These belong to David and Hiram Corm, the sons of the exhibition's curator Charles Corm and the grandsons of painter Daoud. Their entire collection covers the 1880s-1960s, from the beginning of Daoud Corm's career to the death of his son Charles. Daoud Corm's sketches and painting are indexed and numbered.

1924). Certain guidebooks to Lebanon, like André Geiger's *Syrie et Liban* and Jamil Rouhi's *Beyrouth et la République libanaise*, are illustrated, as well as publications from the French Haut-Commissariat, for instance *La Syrie et le Liban en 1921. La Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth. Conférences. Liste des récompenses*.³

Primary textual materials come from two main sources. First, artists' families, collectors, specialists of Lebanese art, and the persons in charge of a few art institutions, in particular Beirut's Ibrahim Nicolas Sursock Museum, made themselves available for interviews and provided essential documents from their archives and collections, such as exhibition brochures, invitations, press clippings and manuscripts.⁴

The second main source of primary texts is the Lebanese press. Until the 1920s, it rarely covered the arts, and the culture pages were instead dominated by literature and theatre, especially in Arabic-language publications. During the Mandate period, although the Francophone press wrote about art more frequently, the Arabic-language one was catching up. The generalist newspapers *L'Orient* (founded 1934), which was friendly to the Mandate, and pro-independence *Le Jour* regularly covered the local art scene, especially collective exhibitions, and reported on international

³ Geiger, André Geiger, *Syrie et Liban* (Grenoble: B. Arthaud, 1932); Jamil Rouhi, ed., *Beyrouth et la République libanaise* (Green Guidebooks. Beirut: Librairie Universelle, 1948); Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, *La Syrie et le Liban en 1921. La Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth. Conférences. Liste des récompenses* (Paris: Emile Larose, 1922);

⁴ Moustafa Farroukh and Omar Onsi's families in particular made the collections of texts pertaining to the painters' careers available. Both are housed in Beirut, respectively at Farroukh's son Hani and Omar Onsi's niece May. These include personal papers, pamphlets, press clippings and artists' writings. They are however not catalogued, and cover the 1920s to the 1960s. The Sursock Museum housed a number of documents pertaining to the career of Marie Hadad.

exhibitions where Lebanon was represented.⁵ *La Syrie*, an unofficial organ of the Mandate, did likewise. In addition, *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, a generalist weekly, based in Paris but owned by and largely written by Lebanese citizens and rather close to the Mandate authorities, often profiled artists, covered Lebanon's presence at international exhibitions, and published articles tackling the topic of Lebanon's tourism industry in the 1930s. (It changed its name to *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient arabe* in 1939.) Meanwhile, the cultural-political monthly *Phénicia* (late 1930s), which, as its name suggests, was keen on presenting a Lebanon steeped in Phoenician origins, reported on the principal artistic events in Beirut.⁶

From the side of Arabic-language newspapers, the Jesuits' *al-Bashīr* (The Forerunner) (1870-1947) sporadically covered events involving visual culture starting the 1920s. But beginning the 1930s, a few Arabic-language periodicals became increasingly interested in the art world and published long form articles. The Jesuits' academic periodical *al-Mashriq* (The Levant) (founded in 1898) wrote about the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth and regularly covered collective exhibitions in the 1930s. The weekly independentist political-cultural *al-Ma'raḍ* also reported on the main individual and collective exhibitions in Lebanon, and examined Lebanon's representation at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Vincennes.⁷ Later, the cultural-literary *al-Adīb* (The Writer) (1942-1983) and *al-Makshūf* (The Exposed) (1935-49) gave space to critics and artists, such as Moustafa Farroukh and César Gemayel, to

⁵ The archives of both newspapers, today combined as *L'Orient-le Jour*, are at the newspaper's head office in Beirut. They start in 1924, when *Le Jour* started publication, and go up to the present day.

⁶ Both publications are available at Saint Joseph University's Bibliothèque Orientale in Beirut.

⁷ *Al-Bashīr*'s archives were accessed at the British Library *Al-Ma'raḍ*'s, *Al-Mahsriq*'s, and *Al-Makshūf*'s can be found at Saint Joseph University; *Al-Adīb* is available online at archive.sakhr.it.co

express themselves and expound on their aesthetic and social views on art. Other newspapers consulted include Lebanon's *al-Abwāl* (The Circumstances), al-Jumhūr (The People), *al-Ahrār* (The Freemen) and the *Eastern Times*, and France's *La Revue Moderne* and *Le Montparnasse*.⁸

With regards to the image of Lebanon as presented to foreigners, several guidebooks provide valuable information, notably those published by Baedeker in Germany in the late nineteenth century, and the ones written for the French Guide Bleu and Guide Vert series in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹ Likewise, American and French newspapers are also instrumental to analyse Lebanon's representation abroad. The American view of Lebanon, for instance, transpires in articles from *The New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune* and *The New York Post*, among other newspapers that discussed the 1939 Lebanese pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

Lastly, some French documents pertaining to French-sponsored artistic events were accessible, such as the High Commission's report on the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth or the articles published in the colonialist *La Correspondance d'Orient. Revue Économique, Politique et Littéraire* at the occasion of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Vincennes.¹⁰ This dissertation, unfortunately, has not benefitted from visiting the French Mandate's archives, which could deepen our understanding of the formation of the visual image of Lebanon during this period.

⁸ Articles from these publications were found in artists' families' collections.

⁹ There are, for instance, Jamil Rouhi's *Damascus, Palmyra, Baalbek: With a Tour Itinerary Round Syria and Lebanon* (Damascus: Librairie universelle, 1941) and Robert Boulanger's *Liban. Les Guides Bleus illustrés* (Paris: Hachette, 1955).

¹⁰ Both are available in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

PART I

THE GENESIS OF AN ART WORLD

CHAPTER 1

NINETEENTH-CENTURY VISUAL CULTURE AND THE INVENTION OF THE HISTORY OF PAINTING IN LEBANON

INTRODUCTION

During the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon (1860-1918), a diversity of visual expressions appeared, endured or transformed, in the Mountain and in Beirut, the de facto economic and cultural capital of the province.¹ The following will examine the multiplication of the figurative painted image, and, to a lesser extent, that of photography, during the second half of the nineteenth century, before the professionalisation of the local art world.² While the history of the image in the Levant, for this period, is often told as the implantation, or even imposition, of European techniques of image-making on places where figuration was prohibited, this broad model hardly fits Lebanon because of its Christian communities. After outlining the historical Muslim and Christian attitudes towards figurative images in Lebanon and the history of Christian sacred art, the text turns to the several ways private individuals could consume images in the nineteenth century, among them

¹ Although Beirut was not part of the Mutasarrifiyya, the links (whether cultural, artistic, economic or social) with it make it impossible not to include this city in a study of the visual arts. "Lebanon" for the purpose of this chapter thus designates the territory that covers Beirut, the coast, and Mount Lebanon.

² I borrow the term "multiplication des images" from Bernard Heyberger and Silvia Naef, as elaborated in *La Multiplication des images en pays d'Islam: de l'Estampe à la télévision (17e-21e Siècle)* [The multiplication of Images in Islamic Lands: from Etching to Television (17th-21st centuries)]. Actes du Colloque Images: Fonctions et Langages (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003).

photography, interior wall painting, and portraiture, the two latter mimicking aspects of European art. Ottoman officers also painted in Beirut during this period. The popularization of image ownership and commissioning happened in conjunction with the opening up of trade and the increased easiness of travel to Europe, which caused a change in modes of consumption. In the cultural field, the multiplication of the image coincides with the times of the Nahda, the intellectual renaissance of the Arab world. The consumption of certain types of images, moreover, corresponded to one's religious group and socioeconomic category.

In a second part, this chapter examines the writings of Sunni painter Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) and Maronite writer and art critic Victor Hakim (1907-1984), who, in the late 1940s, simultaneously started reflecting on the beginnings of painting in Lebanon, as the newly independent country was in the process of self-definition. They inaugurated the writing of Lebanese art history by the Lebanese, and their version lends itself to be assessed in relation with the art historical record. In 1947, Farroukh, then one of the leading artists in Beirut, gave the seminal conference “Ṭalī‘at al-fannānīn al-lubnāniyyīn” (The Forerunners of the Lebanese Artists) at the Beirut club of intellectuals Le Cénacle Libanais. He covered artists from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, with an accent on the late Ottoman period, which he characterised as a renaissance of the arts in Lebanon.³ One year later, Hakim retraced the history of painting in Lebanon in a series of articles for the Francophone

³ Contemporary historians of Lebanese art acknowledge the significance of Farroukh's investigation for the factual details he provided about pre-twentieth century art, and consider it a reference for research.

daily *L'Orient*, at the occasion of the opening of the UNESCO headquarters in Beirut.⁴ Some of his articles also dealt with pre-twentieth century Lebanese art, and converge with Farroukh's findings on many levels.

Although it is difficult to ascribe the two men national or nationalist intentions, the post-independence context in which they were writing invites the possibility of finding links between their conceptualisation of painting's history and identity and the concurrent definition of Lebanon as a country. The ultimate question, for both Farroukh and Hakim, was what constitutes Lebanese art. They hoped to find an answer, in the words of Farroukh, in a history "still very young, but already full of sacrifice, effort and divine memories."⁵

I. HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE IMAGE IN LEBANON

A. Lebanon and the Islamic prohibition of figural images

The question of the historical prohibition of figural representation in Islamic societies stands at the centre of many studies of the Levant's changing visual culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and does concern Lebanon's Muslim communities.⁶ The Islamic objection to figural images is linked to the idea that, by representing a human being, the painter would be usurping God's creative function; nonetheless, figuration enjoys a long history in the Islamic world, although it usually

⁴ Victor Hakim, "Tableau de la Peinture Libanaise" [A Panorama of Lebanese Painting] series of articles published in *L'Orient*, November-December 1948.

⁵ Moustafa Farroukh, "Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn al-lubnāniyyīn" [The Forerunners of the Lebanese Artists], in *Les Conférences du Cénacle 5* (Beirut: Michel Asmar, 1947), 256.

⁶ See Silvia Naef, *Y a-t-il une question de l'image en Islam?* [Is there a "question of the image" in Islam?] (Paris: Téraèdre, 2004).

remained in the private sphere.⁷ In the Ottoman Empire, until the Tanzimat period, figuration existed primarily in the circles of the Sultans and dignitaries. Then, attitudes changed for cultural and technical reasons: the elites and the government sought to develop European types of art, seen as progressive, and break with the Islamic artistic traditions.⁸ To this end, the Ottoman government started sending young artists to European academies of art in the second half of the nineteenth century. Beyond these elite spheres however, figuration was not widely accepted throughout the Muslim population of the Ottoman world, although some anecdotal reports suggest exceptions to the rule: for example, French writer Gérard de Nerval wrote about some instances of figurative images, including reproductions of Mecca and Medina's sanctuaries and of animals, in the houses and cafés of Cairo and Tunis in the eighteenth forties, but these excluded representations of human beings.⁹ On the other hand, there seems to have been cases where foreign artists painting outdoors were the targets of verbal and physical attacks.¹⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some Muslim religious scholars started allowing the representation of animated beings in secular contexts. In 1903, the reformist scholar Muhammad Abdu (1869-1905) argued that such images could be of use when their presence helped clarify difficult concepts, and believed that prohibiting the representation of animated beings in fear of a return to paganism was

⁷ Terry Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Manchester, Mich.: Solipsit Press, 1988), accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/fe2.htm>.

⁸ Naef, *Question de l'image*, 65, 78.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8; Naef, *À la Recherche d'une modernité arabe: l'évolution des arts plastiques en Égypte, au Liban et en Irak* [The Search for an Arab Modernity: The Evolution of the Plastic Arts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq] (Genève: Slatkine, 1996), 40.

¹⁰ There are reports of insults, of stones thrown at painters in Egypt, of artists wounded by pilgrims on their way to Mecca (Samir Moubarak, collector and specialist of nineteenth-century Lebanese art, in discussion with the author, March 2015).

no longer necessary. Rashid Rida (1865-1935), his follower, was stricter. In 1917, he allowed figuration in the contexts of dictionaries to illustrate plants and animals, for anatomy, topographical studies, and espionage. Such debates were likely a factor contributing to encourage the acceptance of figuration throughout the population, including Muslims in Lebanon, and, in general, “mechanical” image-making techniques like photography were less frowned upon than drawing and painting. Cairo’s Al-Azhar University’s magazine would also open its pages to the question of figuration in the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹

Farroukh actually evoked the situation in his autobiography, where he recounted a possibly apocryphal episode of his teenage years in 1910s Beirut. He had just taken up painting and lived in a conservative Islamic milieu in Beirut’s modest Basta neighbourhood, and, anxious about the Islamic prohibition of figurative images, turned to progressive sheikh Mustafa al-Ghalayini for advice. To his surprise and relief, the man of religion, he recalled, was greatly amused by the question, instructed him not to worry about consequences, and encouraged him to paint.¹²

B. Christian sacred art in Mount Lebanon

The complex web of Muslim attitudes towards figuration contrasts with those held in Christian Mount Lebanon, one of the few parts of the Ottoman Empire where the presence of figural images was historically commonplace in public contexts, in particular churches. Until the late nineteenth century, and especially in rural areas, private ownership of images (apart from small icons) was, however, uncommon. In

¹¹ Naef, *Question de l’image*, 97-99, 113-114.

¹² Farroukh, *Tariqi ila-l-fann [My Road to Art]* (Beirut: Dar Nawfal, 1986), 33.

Antiquity, some churches featured mosaics or abstract symbolism, and, in the Middle Ages, around Crusaders' settlements, some were decorated with frescoes. It is hard to conceive of such vernacular religious art in Lebanon as the self-conscious artistic expression of a local identity, especially that, historically, the artists/artisans were often Levantine itinerant monks from different Christian sects, who carried with them influences and portable images picked up during their travels, and then repurposed them according to local needs.¹³ They could reuse stock characters to embody local saints, and inscribe their works in the Syriac, Greek or Arabic languages.¹⁴ In practice, churches in the Lebanese Mountain were poor, catered to communities of a few dozen people, and often could not afford commissioning images, so they appropriated those made available to them. Besides, images were not necessarily conceived as permanent: village churches often consisted of one humid room, so wood would rot, and frescoes were regularly painted over when churches' walls were covered with lime for sanitary reasons.¹⁵

At the end of the seventeenth century, the visual universe of the Christians in the Levant changed dramatically, concurrently with their cultural and economic opening to Europe. The Maronite Church fell under the umbrella of the Catholic Church in 1584, and the subsequent foundation of a Maronite College in Rome

¹³ Father Germanos Germanos (Rector of Antonine University, Lebanon) in discussion with the author, October 2014; Mat Immerzeel, *Identity Puzzles: Medieval Christian Art in Syria and Lebanon* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 10.

¹⁴ Mahmoud Zibawi, *Images chrétiennes du Levant: les décors peints des églises syro-libanaises au Moyen Âge* [Christian Images from the Levant: the Painted Decors of Syro-Lebanese Churches in the Middle Ages] (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2009), 34; Nada Helou, "Le Patrimoine peint (12e-13e siècles)" [The Painted Heritage (12th – 13th centuries)] in *Fascination du Liban: Soixante siècles d'histoire de religions, d'art et d'archéologie* [Fascination for Lebanon: Sixty Centuries of Religious, Art and Archaeological History], ed. Marielle Martiniani-Reber (Geneva: Musées d'art et d'histoire de la ville de Genève, Skira, 2013), 179.

¹⁵ Immerzeel, *Identity Puzzles*, 10; Germanos, interview.

helped intensify contacts between members of the Maronite clergy and the Italian one, as well as their acquaintance with Italian religious art. In parallel, Jesuit, Carmelites and Franciscan monks introduced Western iconography in Lebanon by bringing in paintings (or reproductions thereof), prints, medals, or statues in line with the counter-reformation Baroque style.¹⁶ They would teach local clergymen to reproduce such items, and local monks would then train one another to fulfil local needs for religious images, as the superiors of local convents understood their importance to educate and persuade believers.¹⁷ These images would thus incorporate European imagery into vernacular traditions.¹⁸ The clergymen-painters were also not full-time artists: in their communities, they were channels of education, learned useful crafts such as masonry, carpentry, and basic medicine.

Until the nineteenth century, most of them remain anonymous, save for a few examples. Art historian César Nammour goes back to 1587, when a monk called Elias Hasrouni supposedly produced a painting for a church in Bikfaya in Mount Lebanon.¹⁹ Farroukh and Hakim proposed the name of a Melkite monk active in the first half of the eighteenth century, Abdallah Zakher, as one of the first identifiable

¹⁶ Bernard Heyberger, "De l'Image religieuse à l'image profane? L'essor de l'image chez les Chrétiens de Syrie et du Liban (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)" [From the Religious to the Lay Image? The Rise of the Image in the Christian Communities in Syria and Lebanon (17th-19th centuries)], in *La Multiplication des images*, 31-48.

The seventeenth century also saw a renewal of icon painting in regional religious centres connected to the Orthodox world, such as Aleppo, with the intensification of contacts with the greater Greek Orthodox world (Sylvia Agemian, "Aspects de la Peinture Melkite" [Aspects of Melkite Painting] in *Fascination du Liban*, 176-82).

¹⁷ Victor Hakim, "Tableau de la peinture libanaise. Les Primitifs" [A Panorama of Lebanese Painting. The Primitives], *L'Orient*, November 18, 1948.

¹⁸ Michel Fani, *Dictionnaire de la peinture au Liban* [Dictionary of Painting in Lebanon] (Paris: l'Escalier, 1998), 92.

¹⁹ César Nammour, "Art in Lebanon: a Historical Overview," in *Art from Lebanon, Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975 vol.1*, by Marie Tomb et al., under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), 21.

painters. Zakher had, in fact, travelled to Rome and is noted for having built one of the first Arabic printing presses of Mount Lebanon.²⁰ One better documented example, which they also cite, is Moussa Dib (d. 1826), a Maronite abbot based in the Kesrwan mountain near the Maronite centre of Ghazir, and who is known for a painting of a Virgin and Child in a church in Dlepta, north of Beirut, and a few portraits of high-ranking ecclesiastics. Record shows he had spent time in Rome, and that a Cyprus-born Maronite monk called Boutros Kobressi had also taught him painting.²¹

His nephew Kanaan Dib (1801-1882), also a Maronite monk, is too relatively known. He learned painting with his uncle, and with an Italian Jesuit called Giusti, leaving religious works where Western art was integrated into vernacular artistic expressions to form a hybrid imagery.²² An 1845 painting of the two third-century saints Sergius and Bacchus, the subjects of local veneration, illustrates this confluence (fig. 1). The painting approximates European perspective and proportions, and clouds and angels indicate some familiarity with classical Italian art. Significantly, Dib signed the lower-left-hand corner of the painting with “by the hand of Kanaan Dib,” which suggests a desire to present himself to the world as a bona fide artist like European ones. Yet, the image also resembles Eastern Christianity’s icons, in its colours and the way the expressionless characters seem to float in an undefined space; their moustaches, outfits, and sabres also inscribe them in the Orient. If paintings such as

²⁰ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 253, 58; Hakim, “Primitifs.”

²¹ Fani, *Peinture au Liban*, 92.

²² Hakim, Farroukh and later historians also cite other names, like the abbots Traboulsi, Boutros Kobersy, Kaitouilly, Dirani, Fares Cherfane, and Khorchid (Fani, *Peinture au Liban*, 93, 128; Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 258; Hakim, “Primitifs”).

this one indeed corresponded to local believers and church patrons' preferences, the message (if any) they wanted to communicate regarding their identity, religious or otherwise, is ambiguous. It might be that local communities saw themselves at the crossroads of East and West, but the paintings' public were mainly local villagers with little contact with abroad. More realistically, painters would practice what they learned, and the spread of paintings such as Kanaan Dib's suggests the public welcomed the incremental change in religious imagery.

And although several well-known European Orientalist painters were active in Lebanon in the nineteenth century, they seem to have had little influence on or even contacts with local painters, and played little role in the local adoption of Western aesthetics in painting. Actually, Orientalist painters intended their works mainly for European consumption, and showed Europe how it imagined or experienced the Orient. Notable Orientalist artists painted a fantasy of an ancient Lebanon, usually reinforcing prejudices and stereotypes of a backwards East, and revealing European fantasies and fears.²³ David Roberts (1796-1864), in lithographs for his *Holy Land* series, focused on the Biblical Cedar forests and the Antique ruins of Baalbek. Edward Lear (1812-1888) painted nostalgic panoramas of Beirut in the 1860s, while others proposed pseudo-documents of current events, like a painting of the nineteenth-century Maronite Emir Bashir Shihab II greeting Ibrahim Pasha by Georg Emanuel Opiz (1775-1841) in 1831, or an erotic scene of anti-Druze propaganda from 1866 by Emile Vernet-Lecomte (1821-1900) (fig. 2). Mount Lebanon's relationship with Orientalist art stands in contrast with the Ottoman capital, where Mehmet II already

²³ J.M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester U.P, 1995), 44, 52, 55.

invited Gentile Bellini to paint his portrait in 1479. From then on, many Ottoman sultans had European salaried court painters, and in the mid-nineteenth century, they sent artists such as Osman Hamdi (1842-1910) to train in Europe under prominent Orientalist painters, a type of patronage that did not take place in Lebanon.²⁴ Meanwhile in Egypt, Orientalist painters would prove an impetus to the development of the local art scene, and exhibitions of Orientalist art were organised since the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵

II. PRIVATE CONSUMPTION OF IMAGES IN THE MUTASARRIFIYYA AND BEIRUT: PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING AS EXPRESSIONS OF STATUS AND MODERNITY

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the visual culture in Lebanon expanded to include an array of artistic expressions, some mechanical and affordable, such as photography, others, like painting, made for a smaller public of churchgoers or for wealthy patrons. Overall, the popularisation of new types of images testifies to the formation of a gradual “modernistic division,” or hierarchizing, between fine arts, the decorative ones, and artisanship, due in great part to Western intervention.²⁶

All these images were informed, to different degrees, by European artistic styles or technologies: in fact, their widening production and circulation grew concurrently with the intensification of travel and trade between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Beirut, then, was becoming the main Levantine port of the Empire,

²⁴ Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 21, 23, 53.

²⁵ Silvia Naef, *À la Recherche*, 131.

²⁶ Octavian Esanu, *Al-Musawwirun, Artists before Art*, exhibition pamphlet (Beirut: American University of Beirut art galleries, 2015).

thanks to the influx of European capital and the participation of local merchants.²⁷ New transportation and communication technologies favoured the circulation of men, goods and ideas: there was the road linking Beirut and Damascus (1863), a burgeoning network of regional railroads, and steamboats that insured links with Europe, as well as reliable telegraph lines.²⁸

The consumption of images in nineteenth-century Lebanon is also closely tied to contemporaneous changes in the type of goods available for purchase there, and the value buyers ascribed them. New imported consumer goods and technologies, including photography and painting, constituted status symbol consumer items and expressions of their owners' desire to be modern, and to be perceived as such by their social, professional, or intellectual circles. Europe-inspired images especially fit within the framework of changing interior decoration: rich merchants adopted European furniture, a status-symbol sign of modernity, which incrementally reached Beirut's middle classes. Dressers, steel-framed beds, dining room tables, and chairs eventually replaced the divan and the built-in furniture made of raised platforms, continuous benches, and wall niches.²⁹ If, traditionally, families flaunted their sociocultural status

²⁷ May Davie, "Deuxième conférence internationale d'histoire urbaine. Beyrouth: de la ville ottomane à la ville française" [Second international conference on urban history. Beirut: from the Ottoman to the French City] (Conference presented at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur l'Urbanisation du Monde Arabe, Strasbourg, 1994), accessed April 5, 2015, <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/900/902/MAY-Davie/Ville-ott-francaise.html>

This contrasts with other cities in the North African and Ottoman Mediterranean, whose trade was dominated by foreigners. Moreover, Beirut "was estimated to handle 11 per cent of the total trade in the Ottoman Empire in 1907" (Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13).

²⁸ Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 8-9. Similar trends are observed in other Ottoman Mediterranean port cities, such as Izmir, Salonika, and Alexandria.

²⁹ Nancy Micklewright, "Late Ottoman Photography: Family, Home, and New Identities," in *Transitions in Domestic Consumption and Family Life in The Modern Middle East: Houses in Motion*, ed. Relli Shechter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 80; Friedrich Ragette,

with richly ornamented carpets, silks, and marquetry, they were now letting go of wall panelling, which liberated space to hang small images.³⁰ Changes in interior decoration thus influenced new trends in wall decoration, especially in Christian homes, whose walls could be adorned with reproductions of European landscape paintings, images of the Bible, photographs, and framed European mirrors.³¹ Small imported goods also quickly found mainstream popularity: at the end of the nineteenth century, Beirut's souks, as well as new European-style department stores like Orosdi-Back, proposed a vast array of portable commodities, such as umbrellas, clocks and watches, and European clothes and textiles.³²

A. The dissemination of photography

Photography, an imported technology, fit within these new consumer patterns and came to be one of the principal means by which the image of Lebanon and its inhabitants was disseminated locally and abroad. At first luxury items, photographs, made by locals or foreigners, had become, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a popular hobby and a common way to display status inside homes. Professional photography is documented in Lebanon since mid-century: French photographer Tancredè Dumas opened Beirut's first photographic studio in 1861,

Architecture in Lebanon: The Lebanese House during the 18th and 19th Centuries (Delmar, N.Y: Caravan Books, 1980), 115.

³⁰ The domestic spaces of villages took a longer time to adopt the relatively expensive European furniture: in the 1920s, houses still had hybrid interiors, with European dining rooms coexisting with foldable mattresses. This information was provided by Souraya Tomb who recalled her grandparents' house in the village of Qobayate (Discussion with the author, April 2014).

³¹ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 208, 210; Stephen Sheehi, "A Social History of Early Arab Photography or a Prolegomenon to an Archaeology of the Lebanese Imago," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39 (2007), 236.

³² Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, "Taste and Class in Late Ottoman Beirut," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. iii (2011), 483-84.

and, one year later, Lebanon-born photographer Georges Saboungi opened his.³³ The Palace had indeed paved the way for the embrace of the technology as soon as it arrived in Istanbul in 1839. Then, photographers of Armenian, Greek, and other European backgrounds set up studios in the Ottoman capital, and, from there, the technology spread throughout the Empire.³⁴

In Beirut and the Levant, two kinds of photographs coexisted, approximately, between 1860 and 1920. The first one was mainly the work of studios run by foreign photographers, whose clientele was principally made of European tourists. They catered to their patrons' taste for nostalgic souvenirs of a fantasy Orient by producing photographs that carried on the aesthetics, and, more important, the ideology embedded in Orientalist painting.³⁵ The Bonfils studio, founded in 1867 by Frenchman Félix Bonfils and active until the 1910s, exemplified the practice. Arguably the most successful studio of its time, it printed thousands of photographs sold in England, France, and the United States.³⁶ It became known for images of anonymous dwellers in seemingly authentic dress, and in particular of Oriental women, which contributed to popularise the cliché of the sensual Odalisque common in Orientalist painting.³⁷ Their other, and related, focus was images of a timeless Orient featuring

³³ Sheehi, "Early Arab Photography," 180. Among the noted European photographers who travelled to Lebanon are Girault de Prangey (1804-1892), Maxime Du Camp (1822-1894), and Gustave Le Gray (1820-1884).

³⁴ Micklewright, "Ottoman Photography," 65; Michelle Woodward, "Between Orientalist Clichés and Images of Modernization. Photographic Practice in the Late Ottoman Era," *History of Photography* 27, no. 4 (winter 2003), 365.

³⁵ Ali Behdad, "Photography's Orientalism," in Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications: 2013), 27.

³⁶ Fani, *Une Histoire de la photographie au Liban 1840-1944* [A History of Photography in Lebanon 1840-1944] (Paris: Escalier, 2005), 80.

³⁷ Behdad, "Photography's Orientalism," 18, 22-25.

dramatic landscapes and scenes of ruins from Antiquity (figs. 3-4).³⁸

Throughout the Levant, this kind of Orientalist photography coexisted with the work of native studios, which catered to a local market of Christians as well as Muslims.³⁹ Studio portraiture was especially popular, and the images – by contrast with Orientalist ones – often demonstrate the subjects’ desire to appear modern. The middle and upper classes used photography to announce their achievements in life – their intellectual work, their marriage, their professional success, or their children for instance (figs. 5-6).⁴⁰ They would pose in their finest attire, Levantine or Western: men often wore three-piece suits but kept the popular tarbush headpieces, and Christian women wore Western-style dresses, while Muslim ones remained veiled. In the photographs, the clients are staged in interiors exuding wealth: there are mock moulded ceilings, classical columns, and luxurious chairs in European styles, which coincides with the new conceptions of taste that appeared in parallel with the Westernisation of the consumer market. Furthermore, the sitters’ body language and the way they stare at the camera emanate confidence.

In 1888, the affordable Kodak and Brownie portable cameras began to be sold in the Ottoman Empire, and gave a wider section of society access to a new modern hobby and the means to take the visual expression of their identities into their own hands.⁴¹ In the last quarter of the century, photography was also frequently exhibited in houses, where it became a popular form of wall decoration, and contributed to modify the ways status was expressed. The number of pictures on show was

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁹ Sheehi, “Early Arab Photography,” 179.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

important, as well as the way they were arranged: articles in the press instructed on how to file them in albums, frame them, and place them on walls, adding to other imported elements to build the aura of wealth and modernity the family sought to project.⁴²

B. Status-symbol frescoes and the new domestic architecture

Starting the late nineteenth century, photography was thus the principal means by which images circulated in Lebanon, thanks to its affordability and ease of transport, which made a great number of people able to own representations of themselves, their circles, and the places they liked. Conversely, only the Church and the more affluent commissioned original paintings from local artists to express their sociocultural standing, showcase their interests, and indicate their ideological affiliations. When it came to decorating their houses' walls and ceilings, wealthy nineteenth-century patrons could commission more-or-less self-taught local and Levantine painters to create frescoes with imagery reminiscent of European art (fig. 7). The practice of adorning one's house with large-scale frescoes reflected patrons' desire to show their status, culture, and taste, and was related to urban and architectural developments in what is today Lebanon, especially in Beirut. The city's physiognomy indeed changed dramatically in the nineteenth century because of its population boom: from a small port of around 10,000 inhabitants in 1800, it was home to 100,000 a century later.⁴³ As Beirut grew outside its walls, the old city became the new Beirut's downtown, and new neighbourhoods appeared to house a growing

⁴² Kassir, *Beirut*, 191.

⁴³ Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 2.

middle- and upper-class population keen on flaunting its success.

A new type of house appeared: instead of replicating the terraced houses traditional to Beirut, the rising classes sought to demonstrate their prosperity by building individual ones, with arcades and balconies turned towards the outside. This new type, called the central-hall house, revolved around a large square main room, around which other rooms with now differentiated functions (bedrooms, kitchen, or bathrooms) were arranged. The new domestic architecture was made possible by the intensification of trade with Europe, since it depended on the importation of materials such as metallic beams, red tiles from Marseilles, marble from Carrara, and glass windows.⁴⁴ The expensive central-hall houses not only represented social success, but were also opportunities to better flaunt it, not only through furniture and marquetry, but also with walls and ceilings ornamented with marble and coloured glass. But soon, the more audacious, and wealthier, homeowners from Beirut, the coastal cities, and silk-producing regions – the Mutasarrifiyya's main industry – abandoned chiselled wood panels and, instead, had their central hall or dining room's walls and/or ceilings painted to boast their prosperity.⁴⁵ This practice, in fact, is not limited to Lebanon but is attested in Istanbul since the eighteenth century, and throughout the Levant since

⁴⁴ Kassir, *Beirut*, 207; Semaan Kfoury, *Maisons libanaises / recueils d'articles [Lebanese Houses / Compilation of Articles]* (Beirut: ALBA, 1999), 32. The central-hall house was not exclusive to Beirut. The type is also found in Anatolia and Istanbul, and spread to Levantine cities (see Stefan Weber, "Architecture of Damascus in the Ottoman Period (1516-1918)," in *Multicultural Urban Fabric and Types in the South and Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Maurice Cerasi, *Beiruter Texte Und Studien* (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2007), 189-224).

⁴⁵ Claire Paget, *Murs et plafonds peints: Liban, XIXe siècle [Painted Walls and Ceilings: Lebanon, XIXth Century]* (Beyrouth, Liban: Editions Terre du Liban, 1998), 41; Saleh Barakat, "The Place of the Image in the Levantine Interior: The Lebanese Case," in *La Multiplication des images*, 180.

the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁶

Patrons did not ask for their portraits to adorn their walls. Nevertheless, the paintings hint at the image of themselves they sought to communicate to their visitors, sometimes in a literal way, for example with occupational and religious symbols, or objects of their everyday lives. Homeowners also showcased their cosmopolitan identity when their walls featured imaginary landscapes of the Ottoman Empire's cities, thus linking their homes to the larger Ottoman world. But the principal aim of the paintings was decorative, and escapism was important: few images of the modern world – steamboats, factories or trains for instance – appear in Lebanese wall painting.⁴⁷ Instead, patrons favoured profuse geometric and floral ornamentation, with motifs distant relatives of the baroque and rococo, a style widespread throughout Levantine wall painting.⁴⁸ To an extent, though, patrons were carrying on the traditional Levantine predilection for geometric and natural patterns in interior decoration, and reframed it with European aesthetics evocative of wealth and glamour. Hence transformed, the houses announced the identity patrons chose for themselves: they were evidence not only of their social standing but also of their modern outlook turned towards Europe.

Painters of wall frescos were summarily trained; they could be local construction painters, or itinerant workers who happened to have learned some kind

⁴⁶ See Stefan Weber, "Images of Imagined Worlds," in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2002), 145-172.

⁴⁷ Paget, *Murs et Plafonds*, 171, 216.

⁴⁸ Pera Müzesi and Suna ve İnan Kiraç Vakfı, *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism*, Pera Museum Publication 46, Symposium Series 1 (Istanbul: Pera Müzesi ; 2011), 301-3.

of painting skill. Indeed, the paintings show they did not master perspective, so they painted in trompe-l'oeil using the stencil technique to give the illusion of depth.⁴⁹ And neither painters nor patrons seem to have made a clear distinction between art and craft. In fact, patrons would not commission artworks per se, but what they called frames (*baramīz* in Lebanese vernacular Arabic) as decorative inserts.⁵⁰ Moreover, few wall paintings are signed, which attests to the unimportance of the artist's persona. Even one example of a signed wall, in a Beirut house from the second half of the nineteenth century, corroborates the idea that the roles of artisan and artist intersected. The individual who painted it appended to his name a dual description, the designation *terrāsh rassām* (in Lebanese vernacular Arabic: construction painter and draughtsman).⁵¹ Although a signature is, historically, the mark of a self-conscious artist, here, the double designation underscores the painter's awareness that boundaries were blurred between his two intertwined occupations.

C. Nineteenth-century portraiture and the Nahda

Wealthy laymen could not only commission frescoes to adorn their houses, but also sometimes asked for their own likeness to be painted: for prosperous inhabitants of Beirut and the wealthier Christian towns in the Lebanese Mountain, especially those made rich by the silk industry, portrait painting was a way to demonstrate their wealth, modernity, and, for some, their adherence to values promoted by the Arab Nahda. Their painters could be clergymen or laymen, and could specialize in Christian

⁴⁹ Paget, *Murs et Plafonds*, 68-77; 88-103.

⁵⁰ Saleh Barakat (art dealer, researcher and specialist of Lebanese art) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

religious art, portraiture, or both. They could be self-taught, or have been trained, in both cases through reproductions of European works; as such, stylistically, their easel paintings rather clumsily imitate classical European painting, beginning with its rules of perspective and proportion. People who painted were rarely called, nor did they call themselves, artists, painters (*fannānūn*), or draughtsmen (*rassāmūn*), but were habitually designated by the term *muṣawwir* (image-maker), a term traditionally used for the practitioners of religious or folk arts.⁵² The term *muṣawwir*, moreover, was not limited to painting but could also refer to sculpture and decoration.⁵³ (*Muṣawwir* sometimes became a surname given to painters with no relation with one another.)⁵⁴ Most of the names of these painters have been forgotten, and the attribution and dating of the works can be speculative.

Painting the portrait of prosperous and intellectual-leaning modern men

Some Lebanese merchants, politicians and intellectuals thus started commissioning portraits through which they demonstrated not only their social standing but also their modernity, and sometimes revealed affinities with the Nahda's progressive project (and, for some, their direct participation in it). The Nahda, the intellectual renaissance of the Arab world, proclaimed in the mid-nineteenth century by intellectuals in Cairo, Beirut and other major Levantine cities, was promoted by writers and thinkers who

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Esanu, *Al-Musawwirun*.

⁵⁴ We know of at least five "muṣawwir" active in the nineteenth century – Abdo, Chukri, Boutros, Hanania and Gerges, as cited by Fani in *Peinture au Liban* and in the exhibition catalogue *Lebanon: The Artist's View: 200 Years of Lebanese Painting* (London: British Lebanese Association, 1989), n.p. There is also a Youssef Muṣawwir mentioned as having lived in the late eighteenth century (see *Chrétiens d'Orient – 2000 ans d'Histoire* [Christians of the Orient – 2000 Years of History], ed. Raphaëlle Ziadé (Paris: Gallimard, 2017)).

took Europe as a model to revive their own culture, and stressed progress, civilisation, and social order: their attitude reverberates during the period in that of a few Lebanese individuals who commissioned portraits, for whom endorsing a European technique and style of art seems to have corresponded to a progressive and modern outlook.

The same painter could practice religious art and also offer his portraiture services, in Mount Lebanon and in Beirut: among Kanaan Dib's works, for example, there is an 1858 portrait of the Orthodox Christian Khalil Khouri, an active member of the Nahda intellectual circles: he was the founder of *Hadīqat al-Akbbār* (The garden of News), the first Arabic-language newspaper in Beirut, and of the seminal printing press *al-Matba'a al-'Arabiyya* (The Arabic printing press) (fig. 8).⁵⁵ Khouri stands against a green background, wearing a rich Oriental attire and a tarbush, then a sign of modernity in the Ottoman world. He stares confidently at the viewers, and, proud of his intellectual achievements, directs them to what he believes should be the real centre of attraction: a copy of the newspaper he founded, the evidence of his role in the renewal of intellectual activity in the Arabic language. His traditional clothing is not a contradiction, but indicates that his endorsement of European ideas was to be used for the sake of local culture.

Several other painters who had been taught by Italian missionaries found a clientele in the Mountain and Beirut's notability. One of them, Ibrahim Khalil Georr (1873-1936), was based near the Jesuit centre of Ghazir, north of Beirut, and had

⁵⁵ Zachs Fruma, "Pioneers of Syrian Patriotism and Identity: A Re-evaluation of Khalil al-Khuri's Contribution," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern History, 2011), 91-108.

trained under an Italian painter in Lebanon.⁵⁶ Like Dib, he painted portraits that highlighted social and professional status, among them those of high-ranking clergymen and locally noted laymen, such as an 1893 portrait of Gerges Zouein, a writer from Georr's region, where the subject's book and pen emphasise his intellectual standing (fig. 9).

Patrons did not always seek out trained painters, but could also enlist local artists whose only schooling probably happened thanks to whatever visual data they gathered in the villages where they proposed their services, from where they approximated the style and techniques of European art. A certain Abdo Saad, active in the 1890s, was one of them. Although close to nothing is known about him, it is nevertheless possible to glean from one of his paintings information about the kind of personas his well-to-do patrons sought to project to the world. In Mayrouba, right outside Beirut, Saad painted the portrait of a father and son, who hailed from a family of businessmen and intellectuals, and who present themselves as adherents to the kind of progress the Nahda advocated (fig. 10).⁵⁷ The painting illustrates the confluence of East and West, of conservatism and progress, and the transition from Oriental traditions to the adoption of elements of European-style modernity over two generations. The two men's clothes and furniture attest to this process: the father wears the traditional vest and *shermal* pants, but the young man stands in a Western three-piece suit. The father's tarbush stood for modernity for men of the father's generation, but the headpiece had become commonplace in the 1890s, and his son no longer dons it. The family also owns Western furniture: a luxurious table and an

⁵⁶ Richard Chahine, *Ibrahim Khalil Georr 1873-1936* (Beirut: Galerie Chahine, n.d.), n.p.

⁵⁷ Moubarak, interview.

armchair have replaced the traditional divan. More important, they sit in a well-furnished library, and the literature on display demonstrates their allegiance to European thought. The father reads Alexis de Tocqueville, anchoring him in European enlightenment philosophy; the son, who corresponded with Emile Zola, placed on the table a copy of *L'Aurore* with Zola's "J'accuse."⁵⁸ Both stress their belief in the progressiveness of European political theory, and their engagement with the contemporary issues of equality and liberty mirrors concerns central to the intellectuals of the Nahda.

III. THE COUNTERPOINT: OTTOMAN OFFICERS PAINTING CELEBRATIONS OF THE EMPIRE IN BEIRUT

Some Lebanon-made paintings were not meant to illustrate locals' self-representation: almost at the opposite, the works painted by Ottoman officers dispatched around the provinces were designed to represent Lebanon through Ottoman eyes and to celebrate the Empire. These painters, some of them born in Lebanon, had trained in Istanbul's or provincial military schools, where principles of European drawing were taught since the late eighteenth century. This training was not designed to foster aesthetic expression, but rather to help the Ottoman government assert its power: with officers versed in topographic drawing, mapmaking and engraving, it could chart the dominated territories and have maps available for military use.⁵⁹ Paintings of cities, Beirut among them, also unified the Empire by directly linking them to representations of the rest of its territories. Officer-cum-painters were indeed active

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Oleg Grabar, Renda Günsel, and Erol Turan, *A History of Turkish Painting* (Genève; Istanbul: Tiglat art gallery, 1987), n.p.

all around the Ottoman world: in Iraq, young Ottoman officers are an important part of the introduction of European-type painting in the country at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶⁰

The presence of Ottoman officer-painters in Beirut was due to the city's importance as a strategic port and its central role for trade. Accordingly, they focused on the port and newsworthy or politically important events happening there. Ibrahim Sarbey (or Sarabiyyeh) (1850-?), probably the best known of these painters, studied art in a military school in Istanbul, and is documented in Beirut in the 1890s. He is remembered for a painting commemorating the reception of the German Emperor Wilhelm II in the port of Beirut in November 1898 (fig. 11).⁶¹ Painted with a detailed technique indicating his training in topographical drawing, the work gives insight into how the Ottoman government sought to present itself, and the city of Beirut, to locals as well as foreigners.

Wilhelm II's visit was a significant social and political event coinciding with the recent affirmation of German-Ottoman friendship, and an event through which the Sultan, although absent, aimed to flaunt to the emperor the achievements of his government. The day functioned as an Ottoman ritual of commemoration, with a focus on the Ottomanisation of Beirut's urban space. There was a sightseeing tour of the city's imperial landmarks, followed by a military parade on the hill occupied by the Grand Sérail, the headquarters of the Ottoman governors, which dominated the city, the port, and the mountains. The choice of the location to culminate the journey

⁶⁰ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 10.

⁶¹ Maha Sultan, *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann at-tashkīlī fi Lubnān: Qorm, Srūr, Ṣalībī 1870-1938* [Pioneers of the Renaissance of the Plastic Arts in Lebanon: Corm, Serour, Saleeby 1870-1938] (Beirut: Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik, 2004), 15-16.

allowed showcasing the Sérail's marriage of European construction and Oriental ornamentation, a prototype of the Ottoman architectural modernity homogenously employed across the Empire.⁶²

Sarbey's painting focused on the landing of the German imperial yacht, welcomed by an estimated 50,000 people – perhaps genuinely enthusiastic, curious, or even mocking.⁶³ At first glance, the painting looks like the celebration of the two empires' friendship and fêtes Germany. On the wharf's edge stands a row of poles adorned with red and white banners, as if the Ottoman Empire was lining up to welcome its German friend, symbolised by a crisp ship dominating the visual field. Nonetheless, what the painting really celebrates is the Ottoman Empire's power, modernity and diplomatic successes. The viewer, like the officials on the Sérail hill, enjoys a panoramic view of the mountain, sea, and city. (Sarbey likely based himself on a photograph.) In addition, there are signs of Ottoman-style progress and good governance: not only is the port well equipped, but the population also seems relatively cohesive despite its diversity. The crowd partially adopted European modern clothing – although people are reduced to little brushstrokes, one still makes out bare-headed as well as tarbush-clad men, alongside women wearing European-style dresses standing alongside veiled ones.

Allegories of Ottoman power, with the ship as a powerful symbol, recur through the works of Ottoman officers-cum-painters in Lebanon. As an example, Ali Jammal, a Beirut-born Ottoman Navy officer, painted a menacing black warship, a multi-flagged conqueror led by the Ottoman banner (fig. 12). Farroukh cited a half-

⁶² Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 240, 243, 260-63.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 261.

dozen other such artists with links to the Ottoman Navy, such as a certain Dimaschkye whom he noted for painting the 1893 sinking of a Royal Navy ship in the harbour of Tripoli. For others, Farroukh said, he could only give names, since many had few ties to Lebanon, and left the country quickly.⁶⁴ He also attested to the paintings' presence in some Lebanese collections (where several are still housed today), a sign that, despite their Ottoman propaganda, certain works held interest to some Lebanese eyes, or perhaps their first collectors endorsed Ottoman politics.

IV. MOUSTAFA FARROUKH, VICTOR HAKIM, AND WRITING THE HISTORY OF LEBANESE PAINTING AFTER INDEPENDENCE

A few years after Lebanon's 1943 independence, some intellectuals, among them the painter Moustafa Farroukh and the writer Victor Hakim, started to look back on the country's cultural history, in their case that of the visual arts. A Sunni native of Basta, a modest neighbourhood of Beirut, Farroukh studied painting in Parisian art schools, and was one of the leading painters of 1930s-50s Beirut.⁶⁵ He was deeply committed to classical European painting, well versed in both European and Arab art history and philosophy, and wrote several articles on the theory and the social role of art (which will be examined in chapter 4), as well as a half-dozen books, where he reflected on art and on his life. Farroukh also gave a few public lectures, notably his 1947 "Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn al-Lubnāniyyīn" (The Forerunners of the Lebanese artists) which was the

⁶⁴ Farroukh noted he could find out almost nothing about the works of Salim Haddad who left for Egypt, Nagib Bekhazi for Russia, or Said Merhi who emigrated to the United States ("Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn," 259).

⁶⁵ Farroukh's career and artistic practice are elaborated upon in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

first substantial attempt at retracing the history of painting in Lebanon.⁶⁶ His lecture remains a reference to this date.

Farroukh gave this conference at the Cénacle Libanais, an intellectual forum founded by the Maronite writer and intellectual Michel Asmar. Active between 1946 and the beginning of the 1975 Lebanese war, the Cénacle reflected its founder's belief in promoting patriotic engagement and encouraging public debate beyond ideological barriers. Every week, members of the Lebanese intelligentsia, coming from all fields and ideologies, would give conferences where they addressed, on a neutral terrain, the key subjects of Lebanon's and the Arab world's political-cultural life, from art and literature to economics, politics and philosophy.⁶⁷ From the outset, one of Asmar's principal aims was to foster the discussion of the Lebanese identity, an urgent topic of reflection after the 1943 independence: Farroukh's review of the history of painting was the right fit for this purpose, given it reflected on the identity of local art and the history of Lebanese culture. In parallel, Farroukh likely had the aim to raise the cultural profile of his country.

The second writer, Victor Hakim, was a Maronite lawyer, intellectual and minor poet. He doubled as a journalist for various Francophone newspapers and magazines, where he wrote about literature, culture, art, and politics. Before independence, he staunchly opposed the French Mandate. In November 1948, as

⁶⁶ Farroukh, "Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn."

⁶⁷ The Cénacle also welcomed speakers from Europe and the Arab world, among them Yasser Arafat. From Lebanon, personalities as varied as the Shia imam Moussa al Sadr and the Druze leader Kamal Joumlatt talked there. A detailed history and analysis of the Cénacle's trajectory can be found in Amin Elias, "Le Cénacle libanais (1946-1984): une tribune pour une libanologie inscrite dans son espace arabe et méditerranéen" [The Cénacle Libanais (1946-1984): a Tribune for a Libanology Insccribed in its Arab and Mediterranean Space], (Ph.D. thesis, Université du Maine (France), Université Saint-Esprit Kaslik (Lebanon)), 2013.

Beirut was celebrating the opening of its UNESCO headquarters, *L'Orient* hired him to write a series of a dozen articles, published throughout the month, which he titled “Tableau de la peinture libanaise” (a panorama of Lebanese painting), retracing the history of art in Lebanon from Antiquity to the 1940s. The inauguration of the UNESCO “palace,” as the building came to be called, was a momentous occasion for the press, officials, and the art world, not only to pontificate about world culture, but also, and more essential, to showcase the highlights of Lebanese culture to the world: tellingly, a large exhibition of twentieth-century Lebanese art was then set up in the building. It is in this context that Hakim opened up a discussion of Lebanese identity from the angle of the arts, within the wider framework of a discussion of what the country stood for. Neither Farroukh nor Hakim was addressing a mass public. *L'Orient* was the Francophone newspaper of record, so its audience, while in the tens of thousands, was limited to speakers of this language, and even though the activities of the Cénacle were meant to promote public debate, its public was composed of a few dozen intellectually minded and educated people.⁶⁸

Farroukh and Hakim came from different walks of life, which could have meant they would propose divergent interpretations of the history of painting in Lebanon. But Farroukh’s “Ṭalī‘at al-Fannānīn al-Lubnāniyyīn” and Hakim’s “Tableau de la peinture libanaise” series do coincide with one another. This agreement brings to mind the wider intellectual and dominant political discourse of the time, which had

⁶⁸ Ibid. Elizabeth Thompson notes that a high estimation of newspaper readership would place it at 250,000 in Lebanon and 500,000 in Syria during the Mandate. Around 1945, she adds, about forty newspapers were active in Syria and Lebanon (*Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 211-13).

been gaining ground since the 1930s and was made official at independence. The official ideology of independent Lebanon was derived from the thinking of the intellectual and banker Michel Chiha (1891-1954), the main writer of the Lebanese constitution in 1926: it articulated Lebanon as a space for Muslim-Christian cooperation, and a country simultaneously enjoying ties to the West, and part of the Arab world, yet distinct from it, an idea that also underpinned the 1943 National Pact between Sunni Prime Minister Riad Al Solh and Maronite President Bechara El Khoury.

Farroukh and Hakim both started their art historical investigations by emphasising historical Muslim-Christian artistic correspondences. Then, both described the history of easel painting as a progressive trajectory helped by contact with Europe, which culminated in the nineteenth century in a manner reminiscent of the literary Arab Nahda. Perhaps paradoxically, neither one of them spoke of Lebanon in ideologically loaded or overtly nationalist terms. Indeed, when designating his country, Farroukh generally just called it Lebanon, and sometimes referred to it interchangeably with the Arabic words *waṭan* (motherland), *'umma* (community), or *balad* (country), despite the different ideological connotations of the terms.⁶⁹ Hakim likewise limited himself to “Lebanon,” or the neutral *pays* (country), instead of nation or *patrie* (fatherland) for instance.⁷⁰ Moreover, the Lebanese Republic, a modern political entity, was taken as a given and taken to be ancient: all the historical artists they described are called Lebanese, even though their lifespans can predate the

⁶⁹ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 252. Farroukh’s use of the terms related to nation is also discussed in chapter 4 in more detail.

⁷⁰ Hakim, “Tableau de la peinture libanaise” [A Panorama of Lebanese Painting], *L’Orient*, November 17, 1948.

modern republic. The fact that, whatever their origin, they were active on the territory corresponding to modern Lebanon seemed to justify the epithet. The recuperation of historical artists as Lebanese could assert the validity of the republic's existence by giving it a cohesive and progressive history, and, simultaneously, finding this country a rich artistic history could raise its international profile.

A. The historical Muslim-Christian syncretism

Hakim and Farroukh's histories of the visual arts in Lebanon begin with the historical dialogue between Christian sacred art and Islamic art, although neither of them delved into the question of the prohibition of figural imagery in Islam. They did not use terms such as "interdiction," or "prohibition," and Hakim instead spoke of stylisation and abstraction, a term that appeared in the discussion of European and American art in the 1910s. In fact, Farroukh's and Hakim's texts pay less attention to the content and meaning of Christian religious art and Islamic art than to their aesthetics. In Hakim's eyes, both kinds of art historically sought to express spirituality by "simplifying forms:" he observed this in Christian icons as well as in Islamic art's arabesques. In addition, Hakim highlighted that, historically, both Christian and Muslim artists in Lebanon fused a variety of cultural influences, from the Hellenistic, to the Byzantine, and the Omayyad civilisations, which cumulatively would have enriched local artistic expressions.⁷¹ Thus, according to him, the similarities between Islamic and Christian art, and their capacity for absorbing external influences, helped set the bases of an idiosyncratic, and rich, early Lebanese artistic identity. As

⁷¹ Hakim, "Tableau de la peinture libanaise. Perspectives et conclusion" [A Panorama of Lebanese Painting. Perspectives and Conclusion], *L'Orient*, December 2, 1948; Hakim, "Tableau de la peinture libanaise."

extrapolated to the post-independence political context, Hakim's early history of art in Lebanon is again reminiscent of the concerns in the public sphere, where the cooperation between Muslims and Christians was a focus defining Lebanon's identity at the official level.

Unlike Hakim, Farroukh did not discuss the history of Medieval Christian and Islamic art in Lebanon *per se*, but dedicated part of his conference to a theoretical discussion of the Christian and Islamic civilisations' cultural interactions and artistic convergences, putting Lebanon into perspective to remind his audience of the considerable impact Islamic art had had on Western artists and intellectuals. Farroukh was passionate and knowledgeable about Islamic art and architecture history: around 1930, he took a break from studio painting to spend some time in Andalusia studying and drawing its architecture. His visit to Granada's Alhambra palace in particular left a mark on him, and, in his 1947 talk, he drew on it as a way to establish the trans-spatial and trans-historical interconnections between Islamic and Western cultures, epitomised, according to him, by the palace's mix of Abbasid and Byzantine styles. Farroukh supported his argument by giving the examples of noted Western intellectuals that had preceded him there: there was for instance the American writer Washington Irving (1783-1859), who wrote *Tales of the Alhambra*, and the English thinker John Ruskin (1819-1900), one of Farroukh's intellectual models. For Farroukh, these men's appreciation of the Alhambra was a sign that the palace's architecture could persuade all men of culture, in Lebanon and elsewhere, of the universality of art and its crucial role in fostering human understanding through the

“beauty of transcendent thought, this open-minded outlook that knows no borders.”⁷²

B. The myth of Fakhreddin II Ma'an and the first artistic renaissance in Lebanon

Skipping to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Farroukh and Hakim showcased Druze Emir Fakhreddin II Ma'an (1572-1635), who ruled over the Ottoman-dominated Emirate of the Shuf, and whose reign they equated with a cultural “renaissance” in Lebanon. The link is made possible by Fakhreddin's exile in Tuscany, from where the prince would have brought back Italian artistic principles. Because of conflicts with the Ottomans, the Emir indeed had to flee Lebanon from 1613 to 1618, first under the protection of the Medicis in Tuscany, and then in Sicily and in Naples. As Hakim wrote, on Fakhreddin's way back, he was said to have brought with him Italian architects, artists, and decorators; hence, as their patron, he would have founded the typical Lebanese architecture and encouraged a local revival of the arts and letters. Thus, for Hakim, thanks to Fakhreddin's “friends abroad,” Lebanon opened up on cultural progress, and a “new mentality” took hold.⁷³ Farroukh furthermore explained that Fakhreddin not only promoted culture, but that he also left “the legacy [of his] taste and love for art and architecture” in the vestiges of a network of castles and forts scattered across Greater Syria, whose artistry “enhanced his military glory.”⁷⁴ Farroukh and Hakim thus both asserted that Fakhreddin federated society culturally, and, right after Lebanon's independence, invoking the figure of Fakhreddin could give historical weight to the existence of Lebanon as a sovereign state and underscore the country's orientation towards the West.

⁷² Farroukh, “Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn,” 252.

⁷³ Hakim, “Tableau de la peinture libanaise.”

⁷⁴ Farroukh, “Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn,” 254.

In 1948, this characterisation was not new: historians, as well as popular culture, often held Fakhreddin as a hero of Lebanese independence because of his resistance to Ottoman control and his protection of a somewhat autonomous emirate, and also characterised him as the one that brought the Renaissance to Lebanon.⁷⁵ Maronite patriarch Estephan Douaihy already constructed this idealised figure in his history of the Middle East, *Tārīkh al-azmina*, written between 1670 and 1704. Closer to Farroukh and Hakim in time, in 1934, the poet and intellectual Charles Corm devoted a few pages to Fakhreddin in his collection of poems *La Montagne inspirée*. There, he described the emir's conflicts against the Ottomans in heroic terms and called him "our Louis the XIV who built himself a Versailles."⁷⁶ Later, some twentieth century Lebanese historians, from different religious communities, would stress particular aspects of historical events to claim Fakhreddin's legacy and to turn the emir into the founder of a united and autonomous political entity.⁷⁷ Still, the interpretation of his legacy remains contentious. The territory of the Emirate was not fixed, but fluctuated along with political alliances and frequent conflicts with the Ottoman Empire. (The emir's reign ended with his execution in Istanbul.)

Twentieth-century Lebanese art historians such as Edouard Lahoud also echo

⁷⁵ Youssef Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography: Historical Discourses and the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 2003), 241.

⁷⁶ Charles Corm, *La Montagne inspirée, Chansons de geste* [The Sacred Mountain] (Beirut: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne), 119-121.

⁷⁷ For the different ways mainstream Lebanese historians described Fakhreddin's reign see for instance Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: the History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1988), Michel Chebli, *Fakhreddine II Maan, Prince du Liban (1572–1635)* [Fakhreddine II Maan, Prince of Lebanon] (Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1946), or Philippe Hitti, *A Short History of Lebanon* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1965.

the claims about the prince's cultural legacy.⁷⁸ Recently however, historians of architecture have also disputed this version of Fakhreddin's role. The notion of his importation of Italian Renaissance culture deserves critical evaluation, especially that evidence supporting it is scarce: the main sources for Fakhreddin's supposed cultural impulse are a 1936 documentary study by an Italian clergyman, Paul Carali, the 1921 writings of the French Jesuit Henri Lammens, and those of Lebanese historian Issa Iskandar Malouf. Moreover, the remainders of Fakhreddin's constructions show little Italian influence. And if the historical record attests to the arrival in Lebanon of Italian experts, they were likely not there to contribute to the art of painting, but rather to assist in infrastructural projects in the context of a possible alliance with the Medicis.⁷⁹

C. The idea of a nineteenth-century artistic "renaissance," the sister of the Nahda

The history of Lebanese painting, Hakim affirmed, is "only the history of the adoption of Western graphic arts, oil painting and watercolour."⁸⁰ He, and Farroukh, made this history start with Fakhreddin, and then jumped forward one century, when European missionaries introduced oil paintings of religious scenes to the local clergy. Both recalled that, in the late seventeenth century, commercial relationships with Europe intensified, Catholic missionaries arrived in Lebanon and, at the same time, members of the Maronite clergy were traveling to Rome, so that these exchanges

⁷⁸ In Lahoud's *L'Art contemporain au Liban* [Contemporary Art in Lebanon] (New York; Beyrouth: Near East Books Co, 1974), one finds an Emir "determined to bring Lebanon into the mainstream of modern civilisation by governing according to Western-inspired methods [and who] showed a sharp interest and sensitivity for everything concerning art") Available at www.onefineart.com/en/articles_arts/contemporary_art_lebanon.shtml (Retrieved April 2, 2015).

⁷⁹ Elie Haddad, "Between Myth and Reality: The 'Tuscan Influence' on the Architecture of Mount Lebanon in the Emirate Period," *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 2 (summer 2007), 161.

⁸⁰ Hakim, "Tableau de la peinture libanaise."

enabled Lebanese clergymen to familiarize themselves with European painting. Yet, Farroukh argued, it seemed that artists of the Arab Orient still lived in a society that remained “deeply asleep, mired in illusions, and fooled by strongmen who fuelled ignorance,” and that utterly disregarded the role of science, culture, and taste in the life of communities.⁸¹ Then, he asserted, as European art was increasingly embraced, a momentous break from these dark ages was meant to happen and the history of Lebanese art thus took a triumphant turn in the nineteenth century: Farroukh assured his audience that painters then did succeed in their “struggle against ignorance,” and liberated Lebanon from backwardness.⁸²

Coincidentally, the mid-nineteenth century also marks the beginning of the activity of the intellectuals of the Nahda, who imported ideas from Europe, appropriated them, and applied them to endeavours promoting progress and modernity in the Arab world. Lebanon actively participated in this intellectual discourse, with Butros al-Bustani (1819-83) at the forefront of the debates: a grammarian, educator, and journalist, he distinguished himself with his Arabic-language encyclopaedia. Alongside him, thinkers and men of letters such as Nasif al-Yazigi (1800-1871) and Ahmad Faris Shidyaq (1804-1887) were likewise noted for their linguistic activities and their promotion of reform and education, and, later, Jurji Zaydan (1861-194), Ibrahim al-Yaziji (1847-1906) and the émigrés Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) and Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) carried on the project.⁸³

⁸¹ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 256.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 6; Kassir, *Beirut*, 166; Fawwaz Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 63-64.

The artistic “renaissance” that Farroukh and Hakim described would be the Nahda’s counterpart. According to Hakim, “it was only natural that a renaissance of intellectual studies facilitate the official birth of Western-style painting.”⁸⁴ Farroukh was certain that “the rise of Lebanon’s literary and artistic renaissance started conjointly” in the nineteenth century and that the “blessed intellectual movement” of the Nahda naturally reverberated in art.⁸⁵ On the surface, the link has some merit, since both the intellectuals and the painters drew on European concepts and repurposed them. Intellectuals applied them to linguistics, literature and philosophy, with the goals, among others, of modernising and renewing the Arabic language, and to use it in unprecedented literary forms, such as the novel and theatre. According to Farroukh and Hakim, artists did likewise, since they used imported concepts and the technology of oil painting. They both believed that the two contemporaneous “renaissances” shared a common aim of promoting social progress. Hakim furthermore added that the artists emulated the Nahda’s project to reflect on and redefine the Lebanese identity because they would have sought to delineate the country’s artistic identity.⁸⁶

Farroukh and Hakim needed to find Lebanese artists to match the standing of the Nahda protagonists. They did so by invoking the prototype of the genius artist, whose myth prevailed in Renaissance Italy: Vasari’s fifteenth-century *Lives of the Artists* marked the beginning of the veneration of the figure of the heroic man who becomes a painter under a mysterious impulse. Using this myth, and the Italian Renaissance,

⁸⁴ Hakim, “Primitifs.”

⁸⁵ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 255.

⁸⁶ Hakim, “Tableau de la peinture libanaise.”

allowed Hakim and Farroukh to give instant prestige to the history of Lebanese painting, and furthermore elevated local painters to the status of the Italian Great Masters. Hakim titled his section on eighteenth and nineteenth century painters “Les Primitifs” (the Primitives), a term then used for the artists of early fifteenth-century Italy; Farroukh described them as Lebanon’s “quattrocento, the impulse for the Renaissance,” and compared them to Cimabue, Giotto and Masaccio. Because geniuses are said to appear spontaneously, the existence of the type in Lebanon could indicate that the country possessed an innate talent.

Hakim thus imagined a genius from Lebanon, a “young peasant or an ambitious artisan,” who would spontaneously take up the brush after a painting hung in a church struck his imagination.⁸⁷ More concretely, both writers found their geniuses in the persons of clergymen who painted in the first half of the nineteenth century. They found in Kanaan Dib, for example, a heroic artist who overcame the odds to arrive at a purely personal expression. For Farroukh, Dib was a “naive genius” that could produce paintings “full of feeling and surprising mysticism” despite his little training.⁸⁸ Likewise, Hakim explained, Dib demonstrated “the temperament [...] of a real painter,” who, nonetheless, like other clergymen of his time, imitated paintings from Italy.⁸⁹ These clergymen indeed had some kind of training with foreign and local monks in convents, where they taught one another artisanal practices, including the necessary skills to decorate churches with sacred images. But this familiarization with new forms of representation was not seen as contradictory with the idea of a genius rooted specifically

⁸⁷ Hakim, “Primitifs.”

⁸⁸ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 258.

⁸⁹ Hakim, “Primitifs.”

in Lebanon. For Farroukh, it is the cross-fertilisation with Europe that enabled artists to create the intrinsic Lebanese artistic identity characterised by the marriage of European techniques and “Eastern sensibility.”⁹⁰ In this perspective, European art did not impose itself on a blank slate, but helped propel the birth of a specifically Lebanese form of forward-looking artistic expression – in some respects, the same role European thought played for the literary Nahda.

However, the Nahda was, importantly, a self-conscious ideological movement, with thinkers and writers interacting with one another and brainstorming their areas of interest. There is, by contrast, little indication so far that contemporaneous painters discussed their cultural role in the public sphere, or that they had in mind promoting progress. Still, one could argue that, in the cultural field, any kind of imitations of European concepts or techniques in the Levant can be construed, as Stephen Sheehi proposes, as an “ideological act by which non-Western subjects claimed ownership of modernity along with its intellectual and capital resources and privileges.”⁹¹ In this sense, painters did participate, self-consciously or not, in using European concepts towards progressive and modernising aims.

CONCLUSION

The nineteenth-century visual culture of Beirut and the Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon included an array of image-making practices. Some, like photography, found wide success, since they were easily portable, affordable and reproducible. The wealthier, however, could commission elaborate frescoes for their walls and ceilings,

⁹⁰ Farroukh, “Ṭalī‘at al-Fannānīn,” 258.

⁹¹ Sheehi, “Early Arab Photography,” 178.

or have their portraits painted to flaunt their modernity and their social and intellectual status. Sacred art was enjoyed by the faithful, while Ottoman officers sometimes painted Beirut for propaganda purposes. All featured elements culled from Western painting, introduced in Mount Lebanon starting the late seventeenth century through exchanges between Rome and the Maronite church. Until the turn of the twentieth century, the art world was not professionalised: painters were sometimes self-taught, or summarily trained by clergymen from reproductions of European works, which they imitated and to which they incorporated vernacular imagery to different degrees.

Soon after Lebanon's 1943 independence, at a time when the public sphere reflected upon the country's identity, Farroukh and Hakim focused on the history of painting in the country. They not only described the process by which oil painting was adopted and spread in Lebanon, but also asserted the primordially of painting in the cultural makeup of the country. Furthermore, they interpreted the history of Lebanese art, seeking to define the cultural identity of their country, and found it a long and rich history to raise the profile of the new state. They started by describing a certain ancient Christian-Muslim harmony in the artistic field that brings to mind independent Lebanon's official line, which stressed cooperation between religious communities. Then, they placed Lebanese art – thus, Lebanon – in a progressive trajectory made of successive “renaissances” on the model of the European one. The first, allegedly happening with the seventeenth-century Emir Fakhreddin, would have coincided with the Italian one, although, in reality, there are few traces of Italian influence on the buildings of Fakhreddin's time. But because this prince is often

hailed as a hero of Lebanese independence, he could be used to build a history of independent Lebanese painting. Later, Farroukh and Hakim speak of a more substantial nineteenth-century artistic “renaissance,” coinciding with the activities of the Arab Nahda in the intellectual world: they make a parallel between the painters’ adoption of European artistic principles and the Nahda’s interest in European ideas.⁹² However, it is up to speculation whether the period’s painters, whom we still know little about, shared the Nahda’s interest in social progress. Some of their sitters, however, did so, as seen for instance in Kanaan Dib’s portrait of Khalil Khoury, so it could be that painter and patron shared an ideology.

Farroukh and Hakim’s stories of renaissances and cultural progress as elements constitutive of modern Lebanon’s artistic identity thus fit within a larger story: they contribute to build the identity of Lebanon, where painting could be a mirror of the country itself. In this perspective, the country takes the best of what Europe can propose (such as Renaissance art), and feeds it into the vernacular practices of a historically harmonious people. In Farroukh’s opinion, Lebanese artists married European techniques and “Eastern sensibility,” which is also an echo of the National Pact’s definition of Lebanon as both part of the Arab world and turned to the West.⁹³ Perhaps Farroukh and Hakim sought to promise that the new state would carry on this cultural legacy, anchored in its long history, into a modern future.

⁹² Decades later, Farroukh’s and Hakim’s arguments in favour of a nineteenth century renaissance still reverberates in some scholars’ texts: the nineteenth-century painters, including the Ottoman officers, were described as “pioneers” and “precursors of the artistic renaissance in Lebanon” by Maha Sultan for instance (see *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann*, and “From Classicism to the Splendor of Nature,” in *Art from Lebanon*). Elsewhere, Kanaan Dib is “a milestone in the history of art in Lebanon who paved the way for personal pictorial languages” (Fani, *Peinture au Liban*, 191).

⁹³ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 258.

CHAPTER 2

BECOMING A PAINTER IN LATE OTTOMAN BEIRUT: DAOUD CORM AND THE MAKING OF THE FIRST INTEGRATED PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS, c. 1880 - c. 1930

INTRODUCTION

Daoud Corm (1852-1930) was born in Ghosta, north of Beirut, in the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon. Around 1870, the Jesuits sent him to Rome to formally study painting at the Accademia di San Luca, looking to acquire a painter who could reliably reproduce the aesthetics of European academic art; they then hoped to hire Corm to paint religious works that could help tie the Maronite community to Europe. Corm, however, branched out. He opened a studio in Beirut and his clientele expanded to the city's high bourgeoisie, who commissioned him portraits. Corm held a diploma, was urban, and cosmopolitan: as such, his career broke with Lebanon's past art-production framework, described in the previous chapter, when the majority of painters were often semi-trained or self-taught clergymen.¹

This chapter first examines biographies of Corm from the 1940s: given his trajectory, several authors described him as a Renaissance-like Great Master who founded a tradition of Lebanese art entrenched in the European one. In the late

¹Throughout this chapter, "Lebanon" designates, first, the territory covered by the Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon plus Beirut, and, after 1920, it refers to Greater Lebanon's and then to the Lebanese Republic's after 1926.

1940s, painter Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) and writer Victor Hakim (1907-1984), who, as discussed in the previous chapter, wrote about a nineteenth-century artistic “renaissance” in Lebanon, saw in Corm its culmination: this characterisation is especially important in the context of post-independence Lebanon, as both men sought to elevate the cultural profile of the new state. But Corm’s career is especially significant because he marks the appearance in Beirut of the figure of the integrated professional artist identified by his name and practice – a radical, almost unprecedented behaviour for his time and place. Soon after Corm, a few other painters, such as Habib Serour (1863-1938) and Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928), who had studied under Corm, would join this world and attain the same status as him, after following comparable trajectories, in the context of the Beirut of the late Ottoman era and the first decade of the French Mandate. Both of them, like Corm, were Christian, and their careers also ended around 1930.

The chapter then turns to an examination of the mode of operation of these three integrated professional artists, who successfully took advantage of the opportunities in their surrounding art world – the network of participants interacting to forge their careers, namely, the Catholic Church and the Beirut bourgeoisie.² Investigating the space they occupied locally and internationally and the nature of their commissions clarifies the process whereby their careers flourished. Corm’s academic training will be analysed first, and then his Church commissions, before looking at his, Serour’s, and Saleeby’s portraits of their upperclass Beirut patrons. The artworks can disclose the image that the Church and Westernised, modern, and wealthy lay patrons

² Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 25, 229.

wanted to project to the world during the period spanning 1880 to 1930.

I. CONTEMPORANEOUS AND POSTHUMOUS BIOGRAPHIES OF CORM FORGE AND QUALIFY HIS MYTH

A. Corm's Jesuit-sponsored artistic formation, from Ghazir to Rome

The Jesuits were the main catalyst of Corm's career, starting with providing him with art lessons in his teenage years, and then sending him to Rome's Accademia di San Luca to obtain a painting diploma. Corm's formation, in the second half of the nineteenth century, took place in the context of the intensification of the joint Catholic Church-Jesuit project to reinforce the Maronite sect's inclusion in Catholicism, and to encourage it to define its identity as tied to the West by invoking historical ties between Rome and Lebanon.³ Links between the Jesuits and the Maronites are ancient: when the Maronite church fell under the umbrella of Rome in 1584, a Jesuit monk was appointed to head the seminary there, and the Jesuits were present in Lebanon in 1831, with French monks hailing from Lyons, when their congregation was reinstated.⁴ And, as seen in the previous chapter, the missionary religious orders considered imagery a valuable aid to the propagation of faith, hence, within their overarching ideological project, the Jesuits sought to employ artworks to link the visual culture of Maronite believers to Rome.⁵ In particular, the paintings should be modelled on the Roman academic style, whose aesthetics, in the vein of the

³ Stephen Sheehi, "Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision," *Discourse* 28, no. 1 (2006): 77.

⁴ Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: the Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 27.

⁵ John W. O'Malley, "Saint Ignace et la Mission de la Compagnie de Jésus dans le domaine de la culture" [St Ignatius and the Jesuit Mission in the Field of Culture], in Gauvin A. Bailey et. al., *L'Art des Jésuites* (Paris: Menges, 2003), 29.

Counter-reformation Baroque, were then favoured by the Catholic Church.

The missionary project to get the Maronites acquainted with European religious imagery was not completely new, since European religious orders had been importing reproductions of European paintings to Lebanon since the eighteenth century. Local churches adopted them, and semi-trained painters based themselves on them to make religious art, as seen in the previous chapter. In the late nineteenth century, this skill level was not enough for the Jesuits, who believed that a proficient reproduction of European art would be best insured by sending young laymen to study in Europe. Corm therefore simultaneously inherited an established trend of adapting European themes and iconography to fit local purposes, and started out a new system, distinguished by a formal course of studies and a proficiency in the aesthetics required by his patrons.

Corm's introduction to art happened at an early age, in part thanks to family circumstances. His father, Semaan Hokayem, was a main assistant-cum-handyman to local feudal chiefs, and, at some point, had been the tutor of Khalil and Amine, the sons of the Emir Bashir II Shihab (r. 1788-1842).⁶ When Corm was around 10, his father sent him to the Collège Jésuite de Ghazir, near the family home, in the Kesrwan region north of Beirut. The institution, established in 1842, was the leading French missionary school in the greater Syrian region, a secondary school whose curriculum included, besides the standard schooling, languages (French and Italian),

⁶ "David Corm, aperçu biographique" [David Corm, biographical outline], Manuscript (Beirut, 1894), David and Hiram Corm collections, trans. from Arabic and annotated from al-Muqaṭṭam no. 1522, March 19, 1894.

philosophy and theology.⁷ It was one of the first schools the Jesuits had opened when they established themselves in Lebanon, and the choice for its location was not arbitrary, since Ghazir was a historical Maronite religious centre. The Collège was effectively part of the mid-nineteenth century project of Christian missionaries of all denominations to build an educational infrastructure in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, in order to educate and reinforce local Christian religious identity, as well as encourage them to turn towards Europe.⁸ Strong believers in the power of education to attain their religious aims and influence society, the Jesuits went on to found a network of dozens of schools, and Saint Joseph University in Beirut in 1880.

In Ghazir, Corm might have been the pupil of an Italian Jesuit called Constantino Giusti, who resided in Lebanon between 1830 and 1870, where he painted churches and stayed in Ghazir for a time, or, according to other sources, of a certain Father Medicis.⁹ In his teenage years, he learned the bases of European classical representation, likely not during individual lessons, since his exercises are stamped with “Collège des RRPP Jésuites de Ghazir” or “Madrasat Ghazir” (School of Ghazir), which suggests the context of a course. The lessons probably started with the study of perspective, and continued with reproducing religious paintings (figs. 1-2).

The curriculum of an academic painter

Around 1870, chaperoned by a Jesuit father called Roccas, Corm set out for Rome, where he benefited from the Jesuits’ financial support and enjoyed room and board in

⁷ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 195.

⁸ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto, 2007), 60.

⁹ “David Corm, aperçu biographique;” Michel Fani, *Dictionnaire de la peinture au Liban* [Dictionary of Painting in Lebanon] (Paris: L’escalier, 1998), 77.

a Lebanese monks' residence.¹⁰ Aside from the help of the religious order, Corm's travels, and his access to art studies, were facilitated by the development of an efficient transportation infrastructure. Indeed, people and merchandises sailed across and around the Mediterranean constantly and relatively quickly: the Messageries Maritimes Françaises lines served Beirut since the 1840s, and the 1876 Baedeker guidebook, for instance, noted that the Marseille-Palestine/Syria steamboat route, the main way to reach France and Italy from the Levant, then took 4 to 5 days, with stops in Naples, Alexandria, Port Said and Jaffa.¹¹ At the end of the century, when Beirut's port was expanded and renovated, several other Austrian, Russian, or English companies likewise promised arrival in Marseilles in a matter of days.¹²

The Jesuits chose to enrol Corm at the Accademia di San Luca, established in 1593 under papal patronage with explicit proselytising aims in mind. In the late nineteenth century, the Church remained a main patron of its professors and students, in the context of Pope Pius IX's ambitions to revive Rome's status as a cultural capital resisting the Risorgimento.¹³ And although San Luca became the Royal Academy after the 1872 unification of Italy, it still enjoyed Church patronage. There, Corm was a student of Roberto Bompiani, an Italian painter known for his neoclassical

¹⁰ "David Corm, aperçu biographique."

¹¹ Karl Baedeker, ed., *Palestine and Syria Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1876), ii.

¹² Karl Baedeker, ed., *Syria and Palestine* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1898), 11; Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut, the Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 86-92.

¹³ Thomas Buser, *Religious Art in the Nineteenth Century in Europe and America* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 200.

The exact year of Corm's travel is not clear. Farroukh and Hakim say it is 1865, when he would have been 13. Other texts cite 1870, or 1872. A reliable source is art historian Maha Sultan's recent *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann at-tashkīlī fi Lubnān: Qorm, Srūr, Ṣalībi 1870-1938* [Pioneers of the Renaissance of the plastic arts in Lebanon: Corm, Serour, Saleeby 1870-1938] (Beirut: Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik, 2004), where she dates Corm's trip to Rome to after 1870 after an analysis of the archives of his drawings.

historicizing frescoes, and who counted among his Europe-wide clientele the Church and aristocratic families.¹⁴

European academies of art's foremost role was to train artists in conformity with a strict doctrine, codified in seventeenth-century France, and that had changed little by Corm's arrival at San Luca. The subjects deemed suitable for painting and sculpture were the ones coinciding with bourgeois morality, like the exemplary actions of heroic figures, and scenes of History, literature, or the Bible. Stylistically, art academies stressed the emulation of Antique sculpture, seen as the foremost ideal of perfection, as well as that of the Renaissance Masters, who were considered the founders of the rules of art, and the epitomes of creativity. Providing a rendering of nature at once faithful and elevated was paramount, and such curriculum was the norm in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

Bar the involvement of the Catholic Church, the academic course of studies Corm followed resembles that of his Egyptian and Turkish contemporaries. In their cases however, the impulse to study in European (Parisian for them) academies came from the government, which sponsored artists' travels, and also founded local art schools. In Egypt, under Muhammad Ali (r. 1805-1848), students were sent to European arts and crafts schools, and, in 1908, an art school opened in Cairo, under

¹⁴ Charles Corm, *La Montagne inspirée, Chansons de geste* (Beirut: Editions de la Revue Phénicienne), 1934; "David Corm, Aperçu biographique;" Piero Santi, "Bompiani, Roberto," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* [Biographical Dictionary of Italians] Vol. 11 (1969) http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/roberto-bompiani_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ Accessed November 2013.

¹⁵ Carl Goldstein, *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 103, 119; Monique Segré, *L'Art comme institution: l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 19ème-20ème siècle* [Art as institution: the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 19th – 20th century] (Cachan: Editions de l'ENS-Cachan, 1993), 9, 139; Harrison White and Cynthia White, *Canvases and Careers; Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York: Wiley, 1965), 30, 33, 46.

the impulse of Prince Yusuf Kamal, who would finance it for twenty years, and which was directed by French sculptor Guillaume Laplagne, with a faculty composed of foreign academic painters.¹⁶ And after the Tanzimat era, in addition to producing painters in their military schools, the Ottoman governments sent artists such as Ahmet Ali, Suleyman Sayyit and Osman Hamdi to Paris to train with academic painters, and Hamdi founded a fine arts academy in Istanbul in 1883.¹⁷

Corm's drawings and sketches outline the academic process. First, he went through the drawing course, which consisted in copying reproductions of paintings and sculptures from Antiquity, and from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century. The study of anatomy followed: the aim was an exact reproduction of the skeleton, muscular structure, and male body parts.¹⁸ Corm studied the links between them, alongside facial expressions (figs. 3-4). The anatomy course culminated with drawing *écorchés* (flayed men), which illustrate the constancy of the tradition of academic art: the student mimicked the standard of the type codified by the French Royal academy in the late eighteenth century, with works such as Roger de Piles' (1635-1709) *Abrégé d'Anatomie* (1760), itself derived from Renaissance models (figs. 5-6). It is only after mastering these skills that the future painter was allowed to draw from the nude

¹⁶ This school was thus free and open to anyone, with no prerequisite. Among its first graduates were the painters Yusuf Kamil (1891-1971) and Muhamed Nagi (1888-1956), and the painter and sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar (1891-1934). (See Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910-2003* (Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 13-14; Silvia Naef, "L'expression iconographique de l'authenticité (asâla) dans la peinture arabe moderne" [The Iconographical Expression of Authenticity (asâla) in *L'Image dans le monde arabe* [The Image in the Arab World], ed. Gilbert Beaugé and Jean-François Clément (Paris: CNRS, 1995), 140).

¹⁷ Pera Müzesi, *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism* (Istanbul: Pera Museum Publications, 2011), 303-305; Wendy M. K Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 41.

¹⁸ Segré, *Art comme institution*, 103; Goldstein, *Teaching Art*, 119.

model, after what he was ready to stage his models in paintings, and transformed them into dressed idealised bodies (fig. 7).¹⁹

B. The establishment of Lebanese painting's European roots in Corm's biographies

Early elaborations of Corm's myth as a Renaissance genius

Two texts contemporaneous with Corm's lifetime give elements to reconstruct the place the painter would take in Lebanese art history, and start building his myth. The earliest one was published in 1894 the Cairo-based newspaper *al-Muqattam*, which was edited by Syro-Lebanese émigrés and widely read in the diaspora, and the second was written by Corm's son Charles in 1934.²⁰ The writer for *al-Muqattam* celebrated the achievements of the first forty-two years of Corm's life, and gave a chronology of events, including the dates of his travels, of his graduation from Rome's art academy, and of his wedding, and noted important commissions. Notwithstanding this straightforward itemisation of Corm's life, the writer was the first to invoke the myth of the genius, initiated in the Renaissance by Giorgio Vasari's biographies of painters in his 1598 *Vite*, thereby perpetuating a centuries-old tradition that shaped the modern myth of the "absolute artist," an autonomous individual capable of creating art independently of circumstances surrounding him. (This figure is in fact very close to the Kantian innate genius of superior intelligence and creativity.)²¹ The *al-Muqattam* article mentioned Corm's preternatural birth into art, describing him as supposedly

¹⁹ Goldstein, *Teaching Art*, 103, 106.

²⁰ "David Corm, aperçu biographique."

²¹ Greg Thomas, "Instituting Genius, the Formation of Biographical Art History," in *Art History and its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2002), 262; Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 32, 146.

predestined to become a great painter, because of his “brilliant natural dispositions:” that is, he had innate talent.²²

In 1934, Corm’s son Charles, a successful businessman, intellectual, and important Francophone poet, who was involved in the art world, fully fleshed out his father’s myth in a two-paragraph-long biography appended to his collection of poems *La Montagne inspirée* (The Sacred Mountain).²³ He capitalised on the classical “absolute artist” biography by using standardized revealing anecdotes about the artist’s purported actions at key “miraculous” moments, in this case, his birth into art.²⁴ Charles Corm drew on the historical motif of the early, direct, learning from nature thanks to magical power or divine inspiration, in a story likely derived from Vasari’s well-known life of Giotto.²⁵ There, the Italian artist, a young shepherd, was discovered painting on stones by Cimabue, who then took him under his wing. Charles Corm described similar circumstances:

When still very young, [Daoud Corm] demonstrated a gift for drawing and drew on rocks images of birds and animals [...] Jesuit fathers noticed them in one of their strolls, and, to their surprise, they learned that the drawings were the works of a ten-year-old.

Then, according to Charles, the Jesuits, taking on Cimabue’s role, asked Daoud to teach drawing in their school in Ghazir, and in return, the young man would have only asked for language lessons.²⁶ (Such constructions of absolute artists also appear in the stories of other painters from the region, for instance that of the important

²² “David Corm, aperçu biographique.”

²³ Corm, *Montagne inspirée*.

²⁴ Soussloff, *Absolute Artist*, 5, 139.

²⁵ Giorgio Vasari, “Giotto”, in *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects. Volume 1, Cimabue to Agnolo Gaddi.*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere (1598, 2008), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25326/25326-h/25326-h.htm> Accessed November 2013.

²⁶ Corm, *Montagne inspirée*.

Egyptian sculptor Mahmud Mukhtar (1883-1934), who is sometimes portrayed as a child prodigy that started modelling from the mud on the banks of the Nile.)²⁷ Moreover, by eulogizing his father in such a way, and publishing his biography alongside his poems, Charles Corm elevated Daoud's reputation, and, at the same time, gave himself a prestigious cultural lineage to affirm his own outstanding intellectual status.

Writing about Corm after the 1943 independence

As discussed in the previous chapter, shortly after Lebanon's 1943 independence, some artists, critics and journalists, notably Moustafa Farroukh and Victor Hakim, reflected on the history of Lebanese art coincidentally with the articulation of the country's identity. They described a nineteenth-century artistic "renaissance" taking place in parallel to the Arab Nahda, putting Lebanon on a progressive trajectory modelled on European modernity. According to the two men, this "renaissance" culminated with Daoud Corm, who brought it to completion and launched modern Lebanese painting, because he was the first painter to have formally learned the principles of classical European art directly in Europe. Concurrently, in the late 1940s, other writers independently joined in to characterise Corm in a similar way. There was, for instance, journalist Beshara Malouf, who wrote a biography of Corm in

²⁷ Silvia Naef, "Peindre pour être moderne? Remarques sur l'adoption de l'art occidental dans l'Orient arabe" [Painting to be Modern? Remarks on the Adoption of Western Art in the Arab Orient] in *La Multiplication des images en pays d'Islam: de l'estampe à la télévision (17e-21e Siècle)* [The Multiplication of Images in Islamic Lands: from Etching to Television (17th-21st centuries)] Actes du colloque Images: Fonctions et Langages, ed. Bernard Heyberger and Silvia Naef (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2003), 189–204.

Beirut's short-lived *Eastern Times* in 1944.²⁸ Meanwhile, Rushdi Ma'lūf, a writer on arts and culture for the Jesuit periodical *al-Mashriq* (The Levant), which published long form pieces on various subjects ranging from science to politics, was assessing the Lebanese artistic scene in 1947 at the occasion of an exhibition of Lebanese painting at the National Museum, and his text also celebrated Corm's achievements.²⁹ These four writers are critical to understand the place given to Corm in the Lebanese art and culture history soon after the country's independence, and Corm's significance in this context.

Malouf, in the *Eastern Times*, was the only one who took up Charles Corm's description of his father as a Renaissance genius, and further romanticised the story, adding hyperbolic interpretations. He made it clear that Daoud Corm's skill was innate – he was “born to the world of art” – and accomplished from the outset, since the images he drew on stones were “real paintings.” Furthermore, Malouf dubbed them “beautiful” and “almost perfectly accurate in detail and proportion,” which means they already conformed to classical art's principle of faithfulness to the natural model.³⁰ In the *Eastern Times*, Daoud Corm became twice worthy of his place in the Western canon: he was not only an absolute artist like the important Renaissance ones, but also mastered their aesthetics from an early age.

By contrast, Farroukh, Hakim, and Ma'lūf focused on this mastery but not on the myth, acknowledging that an artist cannot be an entirely autonomous subject at

²⁸ Bishara S. Malouf, “The Birth of Painting in the Lebanon,” *Eastern Times*, December 25, 1944; Corm, *Montagne inspirée*.

²⁹ Rushdi Ma'lūf, “Ma'rad funūn al-jamīla” [The Fine Arts exhibition], *Al-Mashriq* (March 1947), 116-136.

³⁰ Malouf, “Birth of Painting.”

the origin of a work. In effect, the figure of the absolute artist, a socio-historical construction, masks the artist's actual practice and their interactions with people, institutions and things that contribute to shaping their careers.³¹ Instead, the three writers put the accent on one of these career-defining factors, Corm's training in Italy, and used his resulting command of classical art to definitively entrench him in the history of European art. They also judged that Corm's successful assimilation of the principles of European art meant he equalled the illustrious Italian Renaissance artists; therefore, he would have crystallised the prestigious European sources of Lebanon's artistic identity.

Farroukh and Hakim thus started their account of Corm's life and work directly with his studies, disregarding his mythical early life. Hakim qualified Corm's discovery story, writing, "it is *said* that Corm was painting on rocks in his childhood:" he did not take the tale at face value (emphasis mine).³² Farroukh supposed that "a call from above" had befallen Corm, yet, that, in practice, his introduction to the "spirit and beauty" of the High Renaissance happened during his studies and throughout visits to museums and churches.³³ Then, Ma'lūf added that Corm was not only the first Lebanese artist to have formally studied art in a European academy, but that he had done so in Rome, "the centre of the art world," which placed him at the very heart of European art history. Furthermore, the critic believed that Corm did better than simply emulating great artists: he had succeeded in matching them. Indeed, according

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29.

³² Victor Hakim, "Tableau de la peinture libanaise. Les Premiers Maîtres" [A Panorama of Lebanese Painting. The First Masters], *L'Orient*, November 18, 1948.

³³ Moustafa Farroukh, "Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn al-lubnāniyyīn" [The Forerunners of the Lebanese Artists] in *Les Conférences du Cénacle 5* (Beirut: Michel Asmar, 1947), 262.

to him, the mastery of Renaissance artistic principles was “no clearer in the oeuvre of Leonardo Da Vinci, who discovered most of them, nor in that of Raphael and Michelangelo [...] than in the works of Daoud Corm.”³⁴

Corm’s absorption of classical European art thus made it possible to equate him to the cinquecento Masters, who set out bases for painting that carried on to the modern era. And so his 1940s biographers saw in him the inauguration of the prestigious history of Lebanon’s modern art. For the *Eastern Times* for instance, Corm embodied “the birth of painting in the Lebanon” and “effectively laid its foundations.”³⁵ For Hakim, “a Lebanese classical tradition was born.”³⁶ Farroukh, who spoke from a painter’s perspective, described an evolutionary link from Corm to himself, with Corm having “opened a new page in the life of Lebanese art,” and “paved the way for mature art,” namely, the one Farroukh practiced. According to him, this trajectory was progressive and modelled on Europe: he wrote that Corm “represented the mentality and the culture” of the Renaissance, and exemplified its “liberty of thought and desire for progress through his art and travels.”³⁷

Corm is thus said to have crystallised the artistic identity of Lebanon for posterity by anchoring it in European classical art’s conventions. In 1943, Lebanon too had seemingly come to maturity as an independent country. Given the post-independence context of a state in the process of defining himself, one could conjecture an implicit argument in Farroukh’s, Hakim’s and Ma’lūf’s writings about the definition of Lebanese art and cultural identity: Corm’s artistic achievements

³⁴ Ma’lūf, “Ma’rad al-funūn,” 116, 118.

³⁵ Malouf, “Birth of Painting.”

³⁶ Hakim, “Premiers Maîtres.”

³⁷ Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-Fannānīn,” 260.

contributed to the cultural prestige of the country, and participated in placing it in a progressive trajectory akin to Europe's.

II. CORM'S, SEROUR'S, AND SALEEBY'S SUCCESS AT HOME AND ABROAD

A. Three painters' cosmopolitan careers

Corm, and, after him, Habib Serour and Khalil Saleeby, trained in Europe and then based themselves in Beirut, from where they branched out internationally. Serour and Saleeby attended, respectively, Rome's Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the 1880s, and British art schools in the 1890s.³⁸ Corm had given painting lessons to both of them, and the three painters' careers overlap. Although they started out in Lebanon at different points – Corm was already active in Beirut in 1878, Serour settled in the city in the 1890s and Saleeby in 1900 – they ended simultaneously around 1930, since Saleeby passed away in 1928, Corm in 1930, and Serour was no longer active by that date.³⁹

The three painters' professional careers, and sometimes their personal lives, overflowed Lebanese borders, taking them to Egypt, Turkey, and Europe, and, in Saleeby's case, as far as the United States. This pattern is typical of artists from smaller art worlds, where opportunities for work, while often steady, pale in comparison to larger metropolitan centres, where the prospects of commissions are statistically more likely, and the rewards for success possibly bigger.⁴⁰ Such travels were facilitated by

³⁸ Marie Tomb, "Habib Serour," in Marie Tomb et al., *Art from Lebanon 1880-1975: Modern and Contemporary Artists vol.1*, under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), 37; Tomb, "Khalil Saleeby," in *Art from Lebanon*, 43.

³⁹ Khalil Saleeby and his wife were assassinated under murky circumstances that year.

⁴⁰ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 330.

Beirut's early adoption of modern means of transportation, which effectively linked it with other Levantine, Mediterranean and European cities. Regionally, at the end of the nineteenth century, Beirut was well integrated into the Ottoman-conceived infrastructure of roads and railroads, and internationally, it was efficiently connected to Europe and beyond by steamboat.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the city took on modern means of communication early on: it had the first telegraph station of the Levant in 1863, and the telephone appeared there before World War I. In the 1920s, its private use was just catching on.⁴² In addition to reliable transportation and communication, the three artists' cosmopolitan careers were favoured by their knowledge of foreign languages: Corm and Serour had learned French and Italian in religious schools in Lebanon, and Saleeby English at Beirut's Syrian Protestant College (now the American University of Beirut), and possibly before university.

Under these circumstances, Corm, and after him, Serour and Saleeby became integrated professional painters – artists who conform to the aesthetics and content that their patrons consider respectable, and who master the technical abilities and social connections necessary for success.⁴³ In fact, soon after he graduated from San Luca, in 1875, Corm had already found employment for a short time at the court of King Leopold II of Belgium.⁴⁴ Then, in 1878, he set up a studio in Beirut and acted as a professional painter embedded in a culturally thriving city; he did not, for example, opt to work from his native town of Ghosta. It is, however, his work in Egypt starting the 1880s, when he painted the portraits of Ottoman officials and other dignitaries,

⁴¹ Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 9.

⁴² Kassir, *Beirut*, 266, 302-3.

⁴³ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 25, 229.

⁴⁴ Hiram Corm (Daoud Corm's grandson), in discussion with the author, March 28, 2014.

that best attests to his status as a successful cosmopolitan artist. Under what circumstances he was called to Egypt is uncertain, but he must have been well connected to constitute a substantial pool of patrons: in 1894, *al-Muqattam* reported commissions from Hussein Faouse Paşa (Mushir of Damascus) in 1885, and from Toufic Paşa (Khedive of Egypt and Sudan between 1879 and 1892) and his family, in 1890. Corm also painted diplomats, such as Mukhtar Paşa el Ghazi, the Ottoman High Commissioner in Egypt, at the end of the eighteen-eighties, and the Marquis Reverseaux de Rouvray, a French consul in Egypt in the eighteen-nineties.⁴⁵

One notable commission, the 1894 portrait of Abbas Hilmi Paşa, the Khedive of Egypt, epitomises Corm's international success. In March of that year, he received an official hand-written note from the Khedive's French secretary transmitting his employer's thanks, congratulations, and great satisfaction in the portrait (fig. 8).⁴⁶ The note confirmed a payment of an appreciable £150 fee, an indication of Corm's renown. A photograph of the Khedive was appended to the note, as a reminder of the honour bestowed upon Corm that the commission represented, and an assertion of the power of the patron over the painter's success and reputation. In the photograph, the Khedive wears his official Ottoman attire of a Western-inspired costume and a tarbush on his head; he is cropped to the knee in an oval frame with his head in a three-quarters profile, a common set-up in portrait painting. The small photograph also confirms the prestige of a large-scale, colourful portrait made by a well-known painter over a reproducible, small, black-and-white print.

Corm and other Lebanese professional painters' geographical mobility made it

⁴⁵ "David Corm, aperçu biographique."

⁴⁶ Letter from Rouilly to Daoud Corm, 8 March 1894. Corm family papers.

possible for them to grab opportunities for work, and sometimes for leisure, wherever they appeared. Serour, who had studied in Rome, established himself in Italy for a time in the 1880s, and stayed there for health reasons, before returning to Beirut and gaining some recognition as a portrait painter in Egypt too.⁴⁷ Saleeby knew a more picturesque career in the Anglo-Saxon world. After studies in London, he moved to Edinburgh in 1890, until artist acquaintances, including American painter John Singer Sargent, encouraged him to try his chance in the United States, in Chicago and Philadelphia, where he met his wife. In 1896, he was in Paris at the Beaux-Arts and spent the last two years of the century working in London. His Beirut career would start in 1901, not without stints in Istanbul and Cairo, where he spent World War I.⁴⁸

Few artists of the time wrote at length about their travels at the beginning of the twentieth century, or at least, none did to the extent of the sculptor Youssef Hoyek (1883-1962): in *Dhikrayāti ma' Gebran 1909-1910* (My souvenirs with Gibran), he narrated, over two hundred pages, his Parisian adventures with the writer Gibran Kahlil Gibran as a frequent sidekick, when they were aspiring painters.⁴⁹ Hoyek had previously been sent to the Royal Academy in Rome, thanks to the connections of his uncle, the Maronite Patriarch Elias Hoyek, but sought to break out from the school's rigidity and moved to Paris. Throughout the story, he portrays himself as a rather dilettante student, enthusiastically immersed in the cosmopolitan bohemia of the French capital. He describes some of its actors, many of whom participated in the Parisian art world of the time, and recalls encounters and friendships with Italian

⁴⁷ Tomb, "Habib Serour," in *Art from Lebanon*, 46.

⁴⁸ Sultan, *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann*, 258-261.

⁴⁹ Youssef Hoyek, *Dhikrayāti Ma` Jubrān: Bārīs 1909-1910* [My souvenirs with Gibran: Paris 1909-1910], transc. Edwige Shaybub (Beirut: Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1957, 1979).

models, Polish art dealers, French artists, Swedish collectors, and the dancer Isadora Duncan, who, he claims, purchased two of his drawings.⁵⁰ Twenty years later, Hoyek boasted to a journalist he had travelled all over Western and Central Europe, and exhibited from Turkey to Afghanistan.⁵¹ This time, though, as Lebanon's foremost sculptor.

B. Taking pride in one's achievements and Corm's further ventures

Corm's self-portrait from around 1900 follows centuries of Western artists showcasing their identity for posterity (fig. 9). In it, he announces himself as a professional painter whose standing matches that of his urban and cultured patrons: dressed in an elegant evening suit, complete with white bowtie, he radiates confidence in his role, and his emphasised forehead projects him as a significant member of the intellectual elite. The medals pinned to his chest are a visual match for the ones his patrons sometimes exhibited, and expose his international recognition; they include the papal medal of Saint Gregory he received in 1892, and the Ottoman Mejideh one awarded to him in Egypt in 1885.⁵² In addition, the genre of the self-portrait allows the artist to advertise for his skills, and give a taste of his style: Corm painted himself with the same concern for an exact rendering of individual likeness that he applied to painting his patrons.⁵³ Self-promotion was indeed a requirement in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Beirut, where, unlike in Europe, there were no professional art

⁵⁰ Hoyek, *Dhikrayāti Ma` Jubrān*, 62.

⁵¹ Emile Maklouf, "Le Premier Sculpteur du Liban et de la Syrie: Une Heure dans l'Atelier de Hoyek" [The Foremost Sculptor of Lebanon and Syria: One hour in Hoyek's studio], *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, November 15, 1928.

⁵² "David Corm, aperçu biographique;" Sultan, *Ruwwad min nahḍat al-fann*, 33.

⁵³ Anthony Bond, "Performing the Self?," in *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*, by Anthony Bond et al. (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), 31.

dealers, so painters had to take care of their own marketing. Like Corm, Serour and Saleeby painted self-portraits that demonstrate their consciousness of their professional identity. Both staged themselves in their studios, and appear as respected suit-clad members of the professional classes; brush and palette in hand, they promised patrons they would be painted in the same characteristic style (figs. 10-11).

As an added source of income, Corm sought out professional opportunities outside his painting practice. In 1883, he placed notices in Beirut newspapers advertising that he sold “beautiful ancient paintings, and different kinds of paintings to decorate houses, at moderate prices,” which were most certainly not his original work but reproductions of Western art then fashionable within the middle classes (fig. 12). He was then relatively new to Beirut, so the venture could have arisen from necessity. Yet, Corm carried on proving his business-mindedness all throughout his career. In 1913, in downtown Beirut, he opened La Maison d’Art, a bookstore and stationery store that actually offered much more. When advertisements for La Maison d’Art appeared in the francophone monthly *La Revue Phénicienne* (1919) (whose owner was Corm’s son Charles), they promised everything from musical scores, to photography equipment, fashion magazines and painting supplies (fig. 13). Across the bottom of the sheet, text flaunts La Maison d’Art easy-to-remember address – “the old post office” – and insists on the competitive prices practiced (yet “prix fixe,” no bargaining), and the high quality of the products.

La Maison d’Art capitalised on a pool of cultured and educated customers avid of imported modern consumer goods, and met with some success for fifteen years. (It closed in 1928.) In the early 1920s, Corm was photographed at the store with his son

Jean, who ran it. Judging from the image, the two men manifestly took pride in their business (figs. 14-15). The pictures furthermore give evidence of the store's modernity, and the way the Corms strove to fulfil their clientele's professional needs as well as their taste for art and leisure. The windows prominently advertised the popular Royal typewriters, and the store kept up-to-date with the latest inventions in office supplies, such as the Waterman and Onono fountain pens. The store also catered to popular middle-class forms of image consumption: it offered portable cameras as well as reproductions of Western works, encased in gilded frames, which now often decorated homes.⁵⁴ Corm's store thus participated in the wider popularisation of visual material in interior decoration. His paintings, however, were not for sale there; this would have been beneath the level of a professional artist.

III. THE LEBANESE PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS' NEW MODES OF OPERATION: FROM SACRED ART TO PAINTING THE ELITE'S SOCIAL MORES

Professional painters' careers depend on their interactions with a network of participants cooperating within a certain art world, defined by its configuration and conventions, and the way they successfully respond to their patrons' demands. Several favourable factors – material, individual or institutional – had to converge to support their careers. Corm's everyday practice depended, for instance, on canvases, paint and brushes imported from Europe, which were available to him in Lebanon.⁵⁵ But his patrons were the most crucial element accounting for his success. Corm started with abiding with the aesthetic and thematic requirements set by the Church, applying what

⁵⁴ Kassir, *Beirut*, 209.

⁵⁵ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 13.

he had learned in Rome to religious art in Lebanon, but the Lebanese high bourgeoisie rapidly sought him out to paint their portraits. Since Serour and Saleeby shared Corm's pool of patrons and mode of operation, looking at some aspects of their artistic practice alongside Corm's can therefore give a larger view of the evolution of Beirut's art world. Their works did not seek to, nor were they, representative of the Lebanese society as a whole. Corm's religious paintings are tied to the definition of a certain Maronite identity, at once Lebanese and tied to the greater Catholic Church. His, Saleeby's, and Serour's portraits are evidence of the self-representation of a small section of the Lebanese population – mainly Beirut's Christian bourgeoisie and intellectuals – and demonstrate how these people sought to represent themselves as modern, westernised, individuals.

A. Corm's first patrons, the Jesuit order and the Maronite Church

Corm came back to Beirut from Rome in 1878. Now the Jesuits had the highly skilled painter they needed to produce religious artworks that, they hoped, would help define Maronite identity as tied to the West. Thanks to his training, he was able to replicate the European themes and aesthetics the Jesuits valued, by working along the lines of Italian academic painting. He painted not only the main figures and subjects of Catholicism, but also saints and devotions newly made popular by missionaries, and the ones historically venerated locally.

One of his first commissions from the Jesuits was Saint Joseph University's

Sacred Heart Church, in 1880.⁵⁶ There, Corm painted three works that show themes and religious figures favoured by the Jesuits: one of them, above the entrance door, represents the death of Saint Joseph, the Jesuits' patron saint, and two life-size paintings near the altar show a scene of the Holy Family at the temple, and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ (fig. 16). The latter devotion, considered a reminder to believers of Christ's death and resurrection, and of his love for mankind, was much prized by the Jesuits. Then, it was however not particularly well known in Lebanon, and had also only recently been introduced into Church dogma.⁵⁷

In Corm's painting, Christ emerges from sunbeams and clouds with putti drawn from Baroque art. He carries the Cross and points to a radiating heart encased in a crown of thorns, and surmounted by flames and a cross, to remind believers of his crucifixion; the symbols and instruments are again born by an angel. The two kneeling figures are new imports: they are two French saints associated with the devotion (Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), who initiated it, and the Jesuit Saint Claude de la Colombière (1641-1682)).⁵⁸ They were not traditionally venerated locally, so it is uncertain how churchgoers related to them. Nevertheless, the painting is adapted to a local audience: an inscription in Arabic describes the subject.

While the Jesuits were important patrons of Corm's, the Maronite church so abundantly commissioned him works that Hakim assessed that the painter had

⁵⁶ The church is commonly called "Saint Joseph church" because of its affiliation with the university (R.P. Michel Scheuer (Vice-rector of Saint Joseph University), in discussion with the author, April 7, 2014.

⁵⁷ Alexander Lucie-Smith, "The Sacred Heart is a Rich and Important Devotion. But its Iconography Lacks Theological Vim," *Catholic Herald*, June 15, 2012. Pope Pius IX officialised it in 1856, after it became a popular focus of Catholic piety in France.

⁵⁸ R.P. Michel Scheuer in discussion with the author.

“literally filled the churches of Lebanon with his compositions.”⁵⁹ Some commissions were more important than others. In 1910, the Maronite Patriarchate commissioned Corm a painting to commemorate the inauguration of the Marian shrine of Harissa, north of Beirut, completed two years earlier (fig. 17). The shrine is distinguished by a monumental spiral staircase, high twenty meters, leading to an eight-meter-high bronze statue of the Virgin Mary, painted white, the work of a French sculptor. The statue was dedicated to Our Lady of Lebanon: the Maronite Church had not only definitively made European artistic styles its own, but used them to make a statement about the Maronite identity’s distinctiveness within the Catholic Church. Corm’s painting reinforces the declaration. He showed the spiral structure, and the statue overlooking the sea, but inverted their proportions, so that the statue gained in prominence, to dominate the hill and the coast entirely. With her arms outstretched towards Beirut, enlivened with a blue veil and a flesh-coloured face, the figure of the Holy Virgin watches over local Christians. The inscriptions in Arabic on the lower right side underscore the Maronite Church’s self-determination: although the words commemorate the visit of a foreign religious order, the name standing out in the middle is the Maronite Patriarch Elias Hoyek’s.

B. The Lebanese elite’s appetite for portraiture

The Church remained one of Corm’s major patrons throughout his career and also hired younger painters such as Serour. But a shift happened between the late 1870s, when Corm opened his studio in Beirut, and the 1910s: Beirut’s wealthy bourgeoisie’s

⁵⁹ Hakim, “Premiers Maîtres;” David and Hiram Corm (Daoud Corm’s grandsons), in discussion with the author, March 28, 2014, and the database of paintings they provided us. Corm’s family has inventoried sixty of these churches since 2010.

portrait commissions effectively ended the Church's predominance on the local painting scene. In fact, the younger Saleeby seldom painted religious artworks, and yet became one of Beirut's foremost painters. The three painters dominated portrait commissions and enjoyed the patronage of important intellectuals, high-ranking ecclesiastics, officials, and especially the successful mercantile bourgeoisie. (Besides painting portraits, the three painters also delved into the occasional landscape, still life and genre scene.) Corm, for example, painted several members of the wealthy merchant families of Beirut, like the Orthodox Tabet and Surssock, as well as those of old landowner feudal families, like the Maronite Dahdah and Khazen of Kesrwan. In fact, Farroukh even called Corm's extensive body of work "a reference book on the history of Lebanese families:" more than one hundred portraits are indeed documented today.⁶⁰ Most often, but not always, the sitters were wealthy Christians, whom artists could make look cultured, modern, and rich. Indeed Corm's, Serour's and Saleeby's paintings not only constitute a network of images revealing their patron's self-fashioned identity, and that of their group, but they also constitute a mark of their social distinction: consuming art, especially from leading artists, constitutes a form of conspicuous consumption and amounts to an exhibition of one's wealth and status.⁶¹ The sitters' ideological outlook does not transpire through the works – whether they adhered to Syrian Nationalist, Ottomanist, Phoenicianist or other conceptions of what Lebanon should be, become, or be part of. However, they denote their turn towards Western ideas and modernity. The press also did not discuss

⁶⁰ Farroukh, "Ṭalī'at al-Fannānīn," 261; database made available by Hiram and David Corm.

⁶¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge), 1984, 55; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Macmillan: 1899; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

these portraits often, since they were generally not exhibited in public but destined to adorn the walls of private homes, which limits our understanding of their reception by their audience.

Fashioning the Lebanese upperclass's identity

An important way in which portrait painting constitutes a sign of status is its distinction from photography, which spread in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century and became increasingly accessible with time, as seen in chapter 1. In the Levant just like in Europe, the new technology thus considerably democratised portraiture. By comparison, time-intensive and skill-dependent portrait painting enjoyed an aura of prestige: as a mark of culture and rank, Beirut's high bourgeoisie, concurrently with the European one, enlisted professional painters, not only to represent their likeness, but also to broadcast their social position.⁶² Unlike in Europe however, where the advent of photography had generated a reconsideration of the relationship between portrait and resemblance, in 1880s-1920s Lebanon, portrait painting would uphold conventional portraiture's commitment to accurately reproduce the sitters' physical aspect.⁶³

The principal avenue of analysis of 1880s-1920s Society portraiture in Lebanon is the sitters' attire, especially because the paintings seldom feature background objects and accessories that could help build the meaning of the image, as

⁶² Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 81, 87; Catherine Soussloff, *Subject in Art : Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

⁶³ Soussloff, *Subject in Art*, 8, 38, 87; West, *Portraiture*, 1.

Lebanese patrons are generally set before a plain background.⁶⁴ Moreover, sartorial codes can affirm and reveal social hierarchies and solidarities, and thus help shed light on the subjects' conception of their individual and group identity, in terms of values and ideological outlook. Since the first portraits by Corm in the late 1880s, Lebanese patrons' clothing shows their keenness to adopt modern Western fashions, and their early adoption of it, since garments produced in Europe on an industrial scale arrived in the Ottoman world at the end of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the inception of a new system of rapid fabric production and consumption made possible by modern global capitalism.⁶⁵

The second half of the nineteenth century is also the time when Beirut became one of the main Levantine ports in no small part thanks to the booming silk monoculture in the Lebanese Mountain. The industry particularly strengthened commercial ties with France because silk thread was in majority exported to Lyons, and, in return, manufacturers and traders from this city implanted in Lebanon.⁶⁶ Locally, Beirut's merchants were the main participants and beneficiaries of this trade, and it is likely that their business played a role in their rapid embrace of European fashion. And in Beirut, businesses did not wait long to capitalise on the demand for European clothing: advertisements for imported fabrics appeared in mainstream

⁶⁴ Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 15.

⁶⁵ Peter Braham, "Fashion: Unpacking a Cultural Production," in *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, ed. Malcolm Barnard (London: Routledge, 2007), 351; Charlotte Jirousek, "The Transition to Mass Fashion System Dress in the Later Ottoman Empire," in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922 : an Introduction*, ed. Donald Quataert (Albany: State University of New York Press), 208.

⁶⁶ Mathew Burrows, "'Mission Civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914," *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (March 1986): 11; Jens Hanssen, "'Your Beirut is on My Desk': Ottomanizing Beirut under Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909)," in *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, eds. Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis (New York: Prestel, 1998), 46.

newspapers around 1880, and, by the end of this decade, there were reportedly twenty-eight dressmakers specialising in European-style garments in Beirut.⁶⁷ The first department store, Orosdi-Back, part of an Austrian chain present across the Empire, opened a branch in downtown Beirut in 1894, and popularised the idea of ready-to-wear clothes in the latest Parisian fashions.⁶⁸ Still, going into the first two decades of the twentieth century, wearing a mix of traditional and European costume remained common.⁶⁹

Women's role as representatives of their milieu's distinction

The portraits of upperclass Lebanese patrons suggest that they were not only early adopters of Western fashion, but that they also especially embraced its luxury version as a visible mark of social distinction and modernity. Corm's, Serour's, and Saleeby's female sitters embraced fashionable, and ornate, European dresses, which could be custom-made, purchased in stores, or, for the wealthier, bought directly in Europe.⁷⁰ The high price commanded by the luxurious dresses indicates the elite's ability to engage in conspicuous consumption: since women's dresses must be disposed of after a short while, and are colourful and elaborate in comparison with the uniformity of male's clothing, they constitute an efficient mark of distinction between genders and social classes.⁷¹ The evolution of female dress in the portraits, from the 1880s to the 1920s, also follows closely the rapid cycles of European fashion, which attests to the

⁶⁷ Kassir, *Beirut*, 214.

⁶⁸ Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *European Department Stores and Middle Eastern Consumers: The Orosdi-Back Saga* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Centre, 2007), 21, 31, 39.

⁶⁹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 214.

⁷⁰ Jirousek, "Transition to Mass Fashion," 229.

⁷¹ See Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

quick communication of fashion styles to the Levant and their just-as-quick adoption. Moreover, these dresses were not made for working women, and thus reinforce an image of female idleness, sponsored and perpetuated by men; thus, they embody the female qualities valued by traditional gender roles, including beauty, lack of personality, deference to the husband or the head of the house, and a role of representation.⁷²

This is true of the women Corm and Serour painted in the 1890s. Their dresses correspond to the fashions of the decade, when French and English fashion magazines promoted large sleeves and a profusion of ornamental lace on the décolletage.⁷³ Corm paid meticulous attention to the details and textures to highlight the sophistication of the fashionable outfits: in the portrait of his wife Virginie, he rendered the patterns of the lace cascading down her torso with precision, and showcased her trendy puffy sleeves and sleeveless jacket, a recent style modelled on menswear (fig. 18). Likewise, in the portrait of his sister-in-law, Corm highlighted the complexity of the folds of her white muslin dress and its layers of lace (fig.19). Serour similarly committed to exhibiting the elegance and richness of his sitters' clothes: for example, in a c. 1900 portrait of a woman, he focused on each hair of the lush fur wrap around his sitter's shoulders (fig. 20). The painters' exhibition of the quality and intricacy of the dresses brings to mind the price these garments would have commanded – their complexity points to hours of manual labour, rather than mass fashion – and thus the women's milieu's wealth. Corm's portraits of his wife and of

⁷² Pointon, *Search for Identity*, 20.

⁷³ James Laver, Amy De La Haye, and Andrew Tucker, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 208.

her sister also associate his family with the elite of the period, and assert the painter's professional success.

By contrast with Serour and Corm, Saleeby slightly deviated from academicism and embraced a looser brush, closer to early twentieth-century derivations of Impressionism, a style coinciding with the one then-favoured by the European and American elite. (When in Great Britain, Saleeby was acquainted with the American painter John Singer Sargent, and was especially impressed by his glamorous portraiture, then very much in vogue.)⁷⁴ Yet, despite the divergence in aesthetics between Saleeby and the two other painters, he still subscribed to the imperative of resemblance.

Between Corm's beginnings around 1890 and Saleeby's 1910s and 20s Society portraiture, the evolution of women's dresses reveals something of the conventions of sartorial modesty held by the Lebanese high bourgeoisie.⁷⁵ Despite women fashion's tendency towards more revealing styles, Saleeby's paintings show a certain continuity in the feminine roles advocated by Beirut's upperclass patrons. In the 1890s, Corm's wife and sister-in-law wore corseted dresses that hid their entire bodies, and the most visible indication of sexuality and sensuousness in the painting was the lace that highlighted their breasts. But two decades later, when Saleeby painted Eva Tabet, a member of an old patrician family of merchants, she wore a close-fitting burgundy dress, whose high waist, short sleeves, and lack of ornamentation exemplifies the fashion for column-like shapes that appeared in Europe during the same decade (fig.

⁷⁴ Tomb, "Khalil Saleeby," in *Art from Lebanon*, 43.

⁷⁵ West, *Portraiture*, 145.

21).⁷⁶ In her portrait, Tabet poses sensually; her dress highlights her waist and backside, and strategically placed flowers draw the viewer's eyes to her breast. She conformed to the luxury fashion of the time, but did not opt for the provocative short skirts and hair of the contemporaneous Parisian *garçonnes*, for example.

In 1922, Saleeby's American wife Carrie would pose in the drop-waist dress typical of this decade, and revealed her calves, which suggests that the rules of modesty for women's clothes in affluent Lebanese circles had relaxed (fig. 22). These rules, however, did not condone the jazz age's flapper dresses popular among Europe's glamorous circles. Thus within the Lebanese art patrons' milieu, while one could follow fashion trends that advocated the loosening of constraints placed on women's bodies, this did not involve going all the way. Neither did it mean that allowing a part of women's bodies to be exposed should correspond to a change in feminine roles. In their portraits spanning three decades, neither Virginie Corm, nor Eva Tabet or Carrie Saleeby, are seen engaged in any kind of labour, and their clothing remains both delicate and impractical.⁷⁷ They remain wives destined to represent their milieu's wealth and power, in strong contrast with the roles taken on by an increasing number of Lebanese women: since the turn of the twentieth century, middle-class Lebanese women had been steadily joining the labour force; for the poorer social groups, this meant being hired as an unskilled labourer in the silk industry. But by the 1920s, with more education opportunities, women were entering

⁷⁶ Laver, De La Haye, and Tucker, *Costume and Fashion*, 224-230.

⁷⁷ Michael Carter, "Thorstein Veblen's Leisure Class" in *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2003), 48.

the private sector as pharmacists, physicians, dentists and lawyers.⁷⁸

Lebanese notions of elite masculinity

While the portraits of Lebanese upperclass women bring forth their roles as emblems of their husbands' and their group's power, those of men signal their assuredness of their position in society, and their articulation of their ideological leanings. They also express their conceptions of themselves and their group in terms of costume, showing the gradual Westernisation of male dress in the financial and intellectual elites throughout the Ottoman world. Starting the 1880s, in fact, these groups gradually adopted the three-piece suit and tie – the middle- and upperclass Western male dress – a while before pants, shirts and jackets spread throughout Lebanese society.⁷⁹ Corm's, Serour's and Saleeby's portraits of their male patrons thus present a modern ideal of a Lebanese urban citizen, who enjoys a certain financial or intellectual standing, and is largely turned towards the West.

In the 1880s, at the beginning of Corm's career, it did not necessarily follow that traditional dress equated with traditional values, as his 1884 portrait of Butros Al-Bustani (1819-83), the foremost proponent of the Nahda, demonstrates (fig. 23). A convert to Protestantism from the Maronite faith, Al-Bustani is perhaps best known for launching important newspapers such as *al-Janna* (1870), his compiling of a groundbreaking comprehensive dictionary of the Arab language, the *Mubīt al-Mubīt* (1867-70), as well as his six-volume Arabic-language encyclopaedia (1870-82)

⁷⁸ Lamia Rustum Schehade, *Women and War in Lebanon* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1999), 40-43.

⁷⁹ John Norton, "Faith and Fashion in Turkey," in *Languages of Dress in the Middle East*, ed. Nancy Lindisfarne (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, in ass. with the Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, SOAS, 1997), 158.

(continued by his sons after his death), among myriad other educational, linguistic and translation ventures.⁸⁰

Corm's portrait of Al-Bustani is perhaps a posthumous homage, since it is dated one year after the sitter's death. It works both as a celebration of the man and an illustration of his intellectual identity and ideology. Corm indeed presented Al-Bustani as a stately scholar exuding character, wisdom and experience. In order to emphasise his sitter's intellectual standing, he drew on formulas from European portraiture denoting intellectual superiority: Al-Bustani has a wrinkled and large forehead, a sign of a lifetime of reflection; he stares intently to the side, discounting viewers, as if his deep cerebral activity detached him from the world.⁸¹ He sits comfortably in a red armchair that gives him an almost regal authority, presiding over the Nahda, both literally and figuratively.

Al-Bustani's sartorial choices correspond to the way he characterised himself and reveal aspects of his intellectual project. He passed away around the time European suits were entering Lebanese attire, and, throughout his life, he had worn the typical Levantine wide trousers and colourful sash belt. The mark of Oriental modernity of his generation was the tarbush, which Sultan Mehmet II (r. 1808-39) had imposed as a mark of progress to replace the turban for his military men and state officials, who also had to wear European suits. (Only religious dignitaries continued to wear robes and turbans.)⁸² For a figure such as Al-Bustani, the new Oriental headgear

⁸⁰ Kassir, *Beirut*, 170-180.

⁸¹ Richard Brilliant, *RB Essays in Art and Culture. Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 112.

⁸² Norton, "Faith and Fashion," 153; Suraiya Faruqi, "Ottoman Clothing Rules Changes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil (New York: Routledge, 2010), 416.

perhaps also pointed to his ideological interests, which typified the Nahda: the promotion of progress and modernity. Moreover, the tarbush was a marker of class that distinguished its wearer from rural folk, who, traditionally, wore other distinctive types of headdresses. Maronite peasants, for example, used to wear the *labbade* (a conical wool hat), and others – Bedouins for instance – a keffiyeh. Corm's portrait of his father Semaan, who was of Al-Bustani's generation, is a reminder of the difference in dress between city and Mountain: Semaan wore a flat cap called *taqiah* (fig. 24).

The combination of the tarbush and a Western suit is visible in several turn-of-the-century portraits: in 1888, when Corm painted Khalil Sursock, a member of one of Beirut's wealthiest families of landowners and merchants, Sursock matched his tarbush with a double-breasted coat and straight pants (fig. 25). There is no doubt about his wealth and his participation in the global modern consumer market, as evidenced, here, by the imported gilded chair he leans on. A transition happened towards the end of the century: looking at paintings available in collections today, in Corm's body of work, which starts around 1880, tarbush-wearing men outnumber bareheaded one 2-to-1, but in Saleeby's, which starts around 1900, the headpieces are few and far between.⁸³ By the 1910s, it appears that the majority of upperclass men from Beirut had either decided to forego the oriental headpiece, or to present themselves without it in their portraits. (The tarbush all but disappeared in Beirut after World War II, although some public figures such as post-independence Prime Minister Riad Al Solh (1894-51) still wore it.) As a whole, the portraits suggest that the tarbush gradually lost its initial connotations of distinctive Arab modernity.

⁸³The calculation is based on the database of paintings built during the making of *Art from Lebanon*, by researching the main painting collections in the country.

In fact, starting the very end of the nineteenth century, Corm's, Serour's, and Saleeby's mostly Christian patrons, including intellectuals, landowners and rich merchants, uniformly wore a dinner or smoking jacket with a white shirt and black tie to pose for their portraits, paired with the close-fitting European trousers that had definitively replaced the wide Levantine ones (figs.26-28).⁸⁴ Each of them shows confidence and pride, in the way he stands straight and stares at the viewer, but it is almost as if different faces were appended to the same suit-clad body, a testament to the uniformity of Western male fashion. The Lebanese men's choice to wear the global costume of the Western affluent not only participates in defining local conceptions of masculinity, but also denotes their citizenship to the modern global economy.⁸⁵ At a time when an increasing number of Lebanese men became able to afford everyday Western attire, the painters' sitters pose in chic black suits or dinner jackets. These were men who wanted to show they could, at least in theory, afford a life of leisure, as none of them seemed to see the need to broadcast their profession. Instead, they dressed themselves to show their success. The distinction is not necessarily a matter of wealth, but can be one of intellectual standing. Corm painted, for instance, the Orthodox writer Girgi Zeidan (1861-1914), who carried on the Nahda project in endeavours to modernize the Arabic language by adapting it to the modern Western writing forms of the novel and the newspaper; he also wrote for the newspaper *al-Muqtataf* (the Excerpt), and founded the influential periodical *al-Hilāl* (the Crescent) in 1892 (fig. 29). But there is no sign of such work in Zeidan's portrait. A member of Beirut's intellectual elite, he presents himself in a manner similar to

⁸⁴ Laver, De La Haye and Tucker, *Costume and Fashion*, 205.

⁸⁵ Carter, "Georg Simmel: Clothes and Fashion," in *Fashion Classics*, 73-74.

members of the mercantile one, wearing a dark suit, stressing his commitment to progress and modernity, and his distinction from those who have to do manual work for a living.

An exception to his portraiture of the urban Christian upper classes, Corm painted two Muslim exponents of the Nahda. The first one was Youssef Al-Assir (1815-1889), a graduate of Al-Azhar, a religious legal scholar and participant in the translation of the American Bible into Arabic, and one of the founders of the influential newspaper *Thamarat al-Funūn* in 1875 (fig. 30).⁸⁶ The second was Hussein Bayhum (1833-80 or 81), a collaborator of Al-Bustani and one of the individuals who instituted Sunni charity Makassed (fig. 31).⁸⁷ Both the former, portrayed as a wise elder, and the latter, as a meditative young man, wear a robe and turban, indicating they were men of religion – a traditional attire that was considered compatible with their social and intellectual interests. Bayhum's portrait is dated 1879, which suggests that he indeed sat for Corm, hinting that Sunni men evolving in Al-Assir's and Bayhum's circles had definitely settled the question of the representation of human beings.

CONCLUSION

In the late 1940s, critic Rushdi Ma'lūf, writer Victor Hakim, and painter Moustafa Farroukh independently proposed biographies of Daoud Corm. They designated him the first Lebanese Great Master – a local Michelangelo – because of his mastery of the

⁸⁶ Kassir, *Beirut*, 167.

⁸⁷ Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 336.

http://www.alba.edu.lb/Library/Files/Uploaded%20Files/Zokak%20el%20Blat_Brochure.pdf

principles of Renaissance art he had acquired during his formal course of artistic studies in Rome. Then, as the three writers tell it, once imbued with European art, Corm came back to Lebanon to found a local tradition of painting that conformed to classical European art. Corm would thus have enshrined the artistic identity of Lebanese art in a prestigious tradition, which standing could reverberate on the country's culture as a whole, and which underscores Lebanon's turn towards Europe.

Aside from glorifying the painter for the sake of Lebanon, Corm's biographers touched upon a key defining point in his career: he was the first artist from Lebanon to have attended a European art academy and gained professional recognition at home and abroad. Thus, the beginning of Corm's career, around 1880, marked a break in the history of Lebanese painting: unlike painters active on now-Lebanese territory before him, he not only trained formally, but was also implanted in Beirut, where he opened a studio in 1878. In this city, he introduced the figure of the integrated professional artist, one capable of successfully navigating the art world he works in, by satisfactorily fulfilling his patrons' demands and taking advantage of the opportunities given to him. A short while later, painters such as Habib Serour and Khalil Saleeby followed a path very similar to Corm's, and, like him, practiced in Beirut and abroad as professional painters, between the 1890s and 1930.

The Jesuits, who had sent Corm to Rome, sought to acquire a skilled painter to make religious works in the European vein that could encourage Maronite Christians' ties to the West, but Corm's sacred art would also contribute to defining what made the identity of Lebanese Maronite Christians according to the Maronites themselves. In parallel, between the 1880s and the 1920s, the art world became more secular

thanks to the Beirut – in majority Christian – elite’s portrait commissions. These works reveal the values this group of patrons promoted and the kind of identity they sought to project, as evidenced in particular by their European attire: the portraits showcase the sitters’ modernity and Westernisation, as well as their intellectual prominence or financial success, and their attachment to traditional gender roles.

Corm, Saleeby, and Serour were cosmopolitan artists, who took advantage of travel opportunities to study and respond to commissions, thanks to social connections and modern transportation advances. Corm, for instance, gained some recognition as a portraitist of Ottoman dignitaries in Egypt in the 1890s, and Saleeby travelled across the Anglo-Saxon world to pursue further studies and work opportunities. Conscious of their success, these painters did not shy from boasting it, and even embarked on other business ventures, like Corm did with *La Maison d’Art*. Their visibility enshrined the figure of the professional artist in Lebanese culture.

PART II

SHOWING ART IN BEIRUT AND TALKING ABOUT IT

CHAPTER 3

A GROWING ART WORLD: PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS AND CRITICAL STANCES IN 1930s BEIRUT

INTRODUCTION

As explained in the previous chapter, Daoud Corm (1852-1930), Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928) and Habib Serour (1863-1938) became the leading painters of late Ottoman Beirut and of the first decade of mandatory Lebanon by working on commission. When their careers came to an end around 1930, their paintings had seldom been seen outside private residences and churches, as, during their lifetimes, Lebanese artists' opportunities for local public exposure remained limited. In the 1920s, painting could be shown in the context of events dedicated to technology and the arts and crafts, such as the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth. On rare occasions, Corm and Saleeby had nevertheless exhibited in Europe: the former showed a Bedouin woman in 1889 and a scene of the ruins of Baalbek in 1901 in Paris, perhaps in the context of World Exhibitions, where the Ottoman Empire had pavilions.¹ Saleeby, for his part, is documented at the yearly Salons of the Beaux-Arts in Paris, including the 1922 one, and reportedly earned a prize in Edinburgh in 1899.²

Beirut's art world truly expanded in the 1930s, when the network of participants interacting to forge artists' careers started incorporating a larger public,

¹ *Al-Ma'raḡ* 1022 (July 1934), 22.

² Maha Sultan, *Ruwwād min nahḡat al-fann at-tashkīli fi Lubnān: Qorm, Srūr, Ṣalībi 1870-1938* [Pioneers of the Renaissance of the plastic arts in Lebanon: Corm, Serour, Saleeby 1870-1938] (Beirut: Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik, 2004), 261.

and the new roles of art critic and of curator emerged.³ The concept of the public exhibition took off, which gave artists the opportunity to create works from their own initiative before presenting them to potential patrons, thereby shifting the criterion of artistic accomplishment from prestigious private commissions to public success. Certain artists started staging their own exhibitions: Farroukh, for instance, started to attract critical attention with his 1929 show at the American University of Beirut, and he and Onsi would exhibit their works in individual exhibitions at the School of Arts and Crafts in the early 1930s.

Exhibitionary activity intensified in frequency and in scale in the late 1930s, thanks to the apparition of a new type of actor on the Beirut art scene – the curator – and of large collective exhibitions. One group in particular, called *Les Amis des Arts*, staged yearly exhibitions called *Salons*, on the model of Paris's eponymous shows, between 1938 and 1941. The group was made up of socially prominent women, such as the First Lady Mrs Eddé, whose husband Emile was President between 1936 and 1941. The organisers' background mirrored the art public's: they were part of a mixed French/Lebanese commercial, intellectual, and political elite, to whom the emulation of Parisian culture, including its art world, was essential.

The press started taking interest in personal and collective art exhibitions, with journalists and writers acting as art critics. They defined criteria of taste, delimited the boundaries of appropriateness of the public's behaviour, and assessed the work of the shows' organisers. Furthermore, they outlined the figure of the ideal Lebanese artist, and demonstrated patriotic support for their work, seen as a means towards the

³ Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 25.

elevation of Lebanon's cultural prestige, and this in spite of the ideological and linguistic differences in the press. Mainstream Francophone newspapers such as *L'Orient* and *Le Jour*, and general interest weekly magazines like *La Revue du Liban*, took interest in art, as well as Arabic-language cultural-political journals and magazines, among them *al-Makshūf* (The Exposed), *al-Mashriq* (The Levant) and *al-Ma'raḍ* (The Exhibition). But none of the publications' political leanings – for instance, their agreement with or opposition to the Mandate, or their conception of Lebanon as an independent entity or as part of a larger Syrian one – transpired in art writing.

The interactions between the exhibitions' organisers, the public and the critics created four art stars who would dominate the scene during the French Mandate: Marie Hadad (1889-1973), Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957), César Gemayel (1898-1958), and Omar Onsi (1901-1969). Their reputations were based more on merit than on discriminatory criteria of status, gender, or religion, as these painters came from widely different backgrounds: Hadad hailed from the Christian political-financial elite, and Farroukh from a modest Sunni neighbourhood of Beirut, for example. The three men upheld the conventions of academic art they had absorbed in Paris and Rome's art schools, which they blended with techniques derived from Impressionism. Their practice also marked a shift in the themes of Lebanese art, since painters started focusing on landscapes and scenes of the Lebanese Mountain, rather than on portraiture. Hadad, however, painted children, Bedouins and peasants, with less concern for the historical conventions of European painting. It is also notable that both Onsi and Farroukh were Sunni, which attests to the spread of the acceptance of figurative painting in Lebanese urban Muslim milieus. And beyond the Beirut art

world's inclusion of disparate professional artists, it also opened its doors to upperclass amateurs, and to an appreciable number of foreign artists, most of them French. In a sense, Beirut was a node in a network of related art worlds, where the public and the artists participated in a global dialogue linking Europe to the Middle East.

Beirut's Mandate-era collective art exhibitions, moreover, were not the exception among in the region, which also featured both local and European artists. In Syria, the first documented instance of a public art exhibition dates from 1926, while Egypt had seen its first public art shows in the early 1890s.⁴ Cairo's interwar exhibitions were more frequent and larger than Beirut's, but their configurations resembled one another. After the Egyptian Society of Fine arts (1919-21) began staging regular exhibitions, the Society of the Friends of the Arts would organise a yearly Salon starting 1923. At the end of the 1920s, the La Chimère group of artists, with the artist Mahmoud Moukhtar (1891-1934) at its core, also organised its own shows, which, like Beirut's, were also the focus of continuous reviews in the press, and whose public too belonged to high society. Later, other artists' groups would do likewise, such as the Art and Liberty group, active between 1939 and 1945.⁵ In Iraq, exhibitionary activity grew during World War II, with the 1941-46 exhibitions of the Society of the Friends of Art, which included painters such as Hafiz Al Droubi (1914-

⁴ Atassi Foundation, "Tawfik Tarek, Biography," <http://www.atassifoundation.com/artists/tawfik-tarek> Accessed February 1, 2018 ; Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 16.

⁵ Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910-2003* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 33-34; Silvia Naef, *À la Recherche d'une modernité arabe: l'évolution des arts plastiques en Égypte, au Liban et en Irak* [The Search for an Arab Modernity: The Evolution of the Plastic Arts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq] (Genève: Slatkine, 1996), 82.

1991), Faeq Hassan (1994-92) and Jawad Salim (1919-1961), who were key in instigating the formation of a wider art world in this country.⁶ On the whole, such events were unique venues for the display of art in Cairo and Damascus, where, like in Beirut, there were no galleries or permanent exhibition spaces.⁷

I. PAINTERS AT ARTS AND CRAFTS EXHIBITIONS, 1921-1930

Corm, Serour, and Saleeby, never had individual exhibitions in Beirut, and rarely took part in public collective art shows per se during their lifetimes. In a rare instance of public display of art, the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth (Beirut Fair), which took over the city's centre for the summer, included a Pavillon des Beaux-Arts. The fair, as will be discussed in chapter 7, was an event organised by the Mandate authorities in collaboration with local notables, and was conceived simultaneously as a tool of French propaganda, a means to boost the French economy, a promotion of Franco-Lebanese trade, and, to a lesser extent, a showcase for the mandated territories' industries. The Pavilion des Beaux-Arts included in great majority (and perhaps only) painters from Greater Lebanon, among them Saleeby and Corm, and the sculptor Youssef Hoyek (1883-1962). The exhibition was small, and the building stood among dozens of commercial exhibits; yet, it is significant for being host to one of the earliest documented instances of public display of art in Beirut, suggesting that a culture of public art exhibitions, whether incited by the French or not, may have been gaining ground, and that art held increased value in the eyes of the public.

⁶ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 309; Tiffany Floyd, "Hafidh al-Droubi," Mathaf Encyclopedia of Arab Art and Artists <http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org.qa/en/bios/Pages/Hafidh-al-Droubi.aspx> (Accessed February 1, 2018).

⁷ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 46, 54.

The dual, yet mostly separate exhibition of, arts and crafts at the same venue was repeated in the 1930-31 exhibitions at Beirut's School of Arts and Crafts, an institution that had opened in 1907 as a vocational school to teach practical skills to underprivileged students. The input of the Ottoman government was key to the project, by endowing the school's founders, a group of Beirut notables, with funds to build a school, a hospital, and the Sanayeh (arts and crafts) gardens, a complex that they saw as a charitable and sanitizing project.⁸ Later, the government of the Lebanese Republic under the French Mandate took up the venture in order to train technicians and craftsmen in skills such as carpentry, foundry, and mechanics, and thus insure a qualified workforce for the country's industrial development.⁹

In the late 1920s, sure of its success, the school started holding yearly exhibitions to showcase its students' production (figs. 1-2).¹⁰ These government-sponsored exhibitions were both official and popular events. The four-day-long July 1931 show, for instance, was inaugurated by President Charles Debbas (1885-1935) and visited by an estimated ten thousand people, who admired the wide array of goods produced in Lebanon, among them ironworks, woodworks, silks, clothing, and even soap and pastries.¹¹ But, less noticed in the press, a standalone painting and engraving exhibition had taken place at the school five months earlier. It was not, unlike the arts and crafts show, a way to promote Lebanese artisanal and mechanical

⁸ Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 247, 250.

⁹ E. Maklouf, "L'École des Arts et Métiers de Beyrouth" [Beirut's School of Arts and Crafts], *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, September 1932.

¹⁰ Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 249.

¹¹ *Al-Ma'raḍ*, "Al-Ma'raḍ aṣ-ṣinā'ī al-waṭani fi madrasat aṣ-ṣanāye' al-lubnāniyya" [The National Industrial Exhibition at the Lebanese School of Arts and Crafts], July 1931.

production. Farroukh, Serour, Hadad and Gemayel's works hung on the first floor, and the show also included works by French, Armenian and Italian artists, among other nationalities, as well as copies of European works.¹² The involvement of the government in this event had yet to be determined; it seems that art, overall, remained a secondary concern to the official organisers of public exhibitions, who centred their efforts on showcasing commodities. Moreover, later exhibitions staged at the School, such as Farroukh's and Onsi's, in 1932 and 1933 respectively, stemmed from private endeavours, as the School now rented out its halls for public events.

II. BEIRUT'S NEW EXHIBITIONARY COMPLEX AND THE LEBANESE-FRENCH ELITE CULTURE

During the French Mandate, high commissioners, as well as other prominent French officials, businessmen and military men, and, of course, their wives, readily integrated Beirut's high society circles, and regularly mingled with the city's upper-middle-class and high society at lavish receptions and parties. The Lebanese elite's relations with foreign interests, dating back to the Ottoman period, likely made for an easy incorporation of the French into their milieu. In the 1930s, these French-Lebanese circles were mixed in more ways than one: although its members were mostly Christian, this did not preclude friendship and partnership with the leading Sunni merchant families of Beirut. Moreover, the spectrum of the Lebanese political world and the politically involved were present at social gatherings, which were in part an occasion for political manoeuvring. On the whole, the French presence certainly gave further impetus to the elite's pre-existing desire to imitate Parisian high society's

¹²Youssef Ghossoub, "Yaqz al-fann fi Lubnān. Naẓra `an ma`raḍ al-fann wan-naqsh" [The Awakening of Art in Lebanon. A Look at the Exhibition of Art and Engraving], *Al-Mashriq*, February 1931, 86.

behaviour and tastes. This cultural emulation involved intensifying the high-end artistic and entertainment activities already present in Beirut before the war, and, in the 1920s, the city developed into an internationally recognized prime destination to watch plays, go to concerts, and of course to party.¹³ Art exhibitions would add to the mix, as another occasion for “ceremonies” in the social calendar confirming those in audience of their belonging to a certain elite, through the distinguishing act of cultural viewing and consumption.¹⁴

A. Public exhibition organisers, at some distance from authorities

The major collective art exhibitions organised in Beirut in the 1930s were private initiatives stemming from members of the city’s social elite. In 1934, the pro-French newspaper *La Syrie* – whose owner, Georges Vayssié, was a member of the *Comité des Amis des Musées Nationaux et des sites archéologiques* (the Friends of the National Museums and Archaeology committee) – chose the brand-new luxury Saint Georges Hotel to set up a group show, which associated the art world with the upper classes from the outset.¹⁵ Four years later, a group called Les Amis des Arts (the friends of the arts) started staging impactful yearly exhibitions. The Amis des Arts were headed by three women: the First Lady Mrs Eddé oversaw the activities, accompanied two French women, Delphine Firmin, the president of the group, who moonlighted as an artist,

¹³ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 311-15.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge), 1984, 7, 272.

¹⁵ Marie Tomb, “Habib Serour,” in Marie Tomb et al., *Art from Lebanon 1880-1975: Modern and Contemporary Artists vol.1*, under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), 41.

and J. Fersant, who was responsible for gathering artworks and for the exhibitions' setup.¹⁶

The group's shows, called the Salons des Amis des Arts, lasted from 1938 to 1941.¹⁷ They were to an extent modelled on the famed yearly Salon des Artistes Français, started in 1882 on this society's private initiative, and which strove to encompass an extensive array of France's contemporary art production.¹⁸ The Lebanese curators likely aimed to showcase a comprehensive panorama of local art, gathering around two hundred works in 1938, and, in 1939, one hundred of them.¹⁹ Both times, around three dozen artists were represented. (In comparison, Cairo's 1935 Salon counted 600 exhibitors, including 495 Egyptians.)²⁰ They could be Lebanese or foreigners, amateurs or professionals, but all painted similar genres such as landscapes (especially Lebanese ones), portraits of their families and friends, and still lifes. Most times, the paintings were made in a kind of academic style tinged with Impressionism; sculpture, however, was seen less often, as comprehensive illustrated exhibition reviews suggest.²¹

¹⁶ Georges Cyr, "La Peinture c'est très grave" [Painting is Very Serious], May 8, 1939.

¹⁷ I focus on the first two Salons, which are extensively documented in comparison the 1940 and 1941 ones, perhaps because more the war diverted the press's focus afterwards. Moreover, the 1941 Salon was an outlier: neither did it feature new works, nor amateurs, and its taking place appears to have been the initiative of Catroux, possibly as an assertion of French cultural preeminence in the context of both the global war and the regional contest with British and American forces (see Kirsten Scheid, "Painters, Picture-makers, and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Unsettled State" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005).

¹⁸ Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices* (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 40.

¹⁹ Joseph Oughourlian, "Le Salon" [The Salon], *Phénicia*, May 1938; Farid El Assi, "Le Salon" [The Salon], *Phénicia*, June 1939, 37.

²⁰ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 54.

²¹ See for instance *Le Jour*, "Le Ile Salon des Amis des Arts" [The 2nd Amis des Arts Salon], April 22, 1939 and El Assi, "Le Salon."

Neither the Mandatory nor the Lebanese authorities seem to have been closely involved in the organisation of the Salons des Amis des Arts and other exhibitions, including individual ones, in Beirut in the 1930s.²² This could seem paradoxical, since the sponsorship of the arts acts in the interest of the state to develop a national culture and elevate the nation's international reputation.²³ For this period in Beirut, there are, in any case, no signs of an ideological selection or censorship of works from above, of an imposition of themes or styles, or of officials actively taking part in setting up the shows. The French and Lebanese authorities could, however, be tangentially implicated. The 1938 Salon, for example, was held at the Cercle de l'Union Française, a meeting club for well-to-do French and Lebanese citizens, which could suggest approval from the Mandate authorities. The Lebanese authorities were a facilitator of the following year's exhibition, which took place in a hall inside the Parliament buildings, the government having agreed to lend it to Mrs Eddé.²⁴ Sometimes, political public figures, or individuals related to them, could be given the honorific title of patrons of art shows. Hence, Farroukh's 1933 exhibition at the School of Arts and Crafts happened under the patronage of Mrs Charles Debbas, the First Lady, and, the same year, Marie Hadad's took place under that of the High Commissioner Damien de Martel.²⁵

²² My argument is corroborated by others' such as Kirsten Scheid's, who furthermore notes that "both French diplomatic archives and contemporary Arabic" (and I would add French) "newspapers support this assertion." (Scheid, "Divinely Imprinting Prints, or, how Pictures became Influential Persons in Mandate Lebanon," in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, eds. Andrew Arsan and Cyrus Schayegh (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 368).

²³ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 180.

²⁴ *Le Jour*, "Le Ile Salon des Amis des Arts."

²⁵ Louis Vauxcelles, Exposition Marie Hadad Décembre 1933 Sous Le Haut Patronage de S.E. Monsieur Le Comte de Martel, Ambassadeur de France, Haut Commissaire de La République

The Lebanese press only mentioned governmental (whether French or Lebanese) involvement to the extent that officials were named honorific patrons of shows, and that the authorities had lent venues, such as halls in the Parliament and the Cercle de l'Union Française. Actually, several journalists expressed their frustration at what they perceived as a dearth of governmental support for the art world. Thus, in a review of the 1938 Salon, *L'Orient* chastised the Lebanese government for its lack of support for the arts, and stressed that the public authorities, who otherwise claimed to supposed “generous intentions,” should be providing better support for the arts, in order for yearly shows to take off and become proper showcases for Lebanese art.²⁶ Another writer for the same newspaper echoed this sentiment, and denounced the public authorities’ negligence of the arts, contrasting it with the “so-called elite’s eagerness.”²⁷ Painter César Gemayel still complained to the press about the lack of governmental support for the arts in a wider sense.²⁸ One painting of his going to the presidential palace in 1937 remains a rare documented governmental purchase.²⁹

The exact French involvement in the Beirut artistic scene has yet to be elucidated.³⁰ If it happened, it was likely limited, given that the French Mandate’s

Française. Dans la grande salle des fêtes de l’hôtel St Georges Beyrouth. Du 16 Au 26, Marie Hadad exhibition December 1933. Under the High Patronage of H.E. The Count of Martel, French Ambassador, High Commissioner of the French Republic. In the Grand Ballroom of the St Georges Hotel Beirut. From the 16th to the 26th], brochure (Beirut: 1933).

²⁶ Philippe Safa, “Le Dernier salon franco-libanais de peinture et de sculpture” [The Latest French-Lebanese Salon of Painting and Sculpture], *L'Orient*, May 26, 1938.

²⁷ Jean Debbané, “Visite à la galerie libanaise. Omar Onsi” [A visit to the Lebanese Gallery. Omar Onsi], *L'Orient*, March 4, 1937.

²⁸ César Gemayel, “Tabayyin al-adhwāq fit-taswir [The Manifestation of Taste in Painting],” *Al-Ma`rad* 12 (1932), 9.

²⁹ M., “Les Peintres libanais: dans l’atelier de César Gemayel” [Lebanese Painters: in César Gemayel’s Studio], *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, January 11, 1937.

³⁰ Investigating the French Mandate’s archives in Nantes might help clarify the French involvement in the art world.

cultural policy in the Levant notably focused on the contested field of education. Besides supporting institutions of higher education, in particular the Francophone Jesuit-run Saint Joseph University, the French authorities helped develop the network of French religious orders-run schools, and opened the Mission Laïque Française school in Beirut in 1924.³¹ Together with organisations like the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the above institutions promoted French culture, language, and educational system, although France also sometimes subsidised Muslim-run institutions and state schools.³² Local religious and/or political leaders and the French authorities thus competed as to what kind of values and senses of identity, corresponding to their respective ideologies, should be instilled in children.³³

Yet, in the arts field, it might be that no such competition took place: the discourse around art was apolitical, and participants in the art world generally rather displayed an ideological inclination towards the West, by emulating the French art world model. The little governmental participation in the art world could thus suggest that it condoned its activities and their underlying Western bent. From the side of the French mandatory authorities, this laissez-faire attitude perhaps denotes that they believed that no further cultural policy should be implemented vis-à-vis the arts, given that artistic circles were largely Francophone and championed European, and especially French, forms of art making. No sense of large-scale subsidising the artistic field, whether French or Lebanese, seeking to bolster certain ideologies, or of contest between different institutions regarding forging the public's sense of identity, seems to

³¹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 269.

³² Jennifer M. Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End. Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33, 35, 40, 49.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10, 29, 49, 233.

transpire in the art world.

A comparison with neighbouring Turkey, another 1920s-created political entity, provides a counterpoint to the mandatory and Lebanese authorities' laissez-faire attitude towards the arts. In Turkey, the governmental involvement in the arts had historically been substantial, with Ottoman sultans regularly commissioning works, often from European artists, for self-aggrandizing or propaganda purposes, and giving the seal of approval to the first group exhibitions organised in 1873 and 1875 by painter Ahmet Ali (1841-1907), who was also a Master of Ceremonies in the palace.³⁴ Concurrently with the emergence of exhibitions in Mandate-era Lebanon, Atatürk explicitly harnessed the arts for a nationalist cultural development project and the integration of the people in a single culture. He notably championed the image of the Turkish peasant in painting, in the context of his populist policy that made of the peasant the benefactor of the people who insures the nation's prosperity.³⁵

B. Professional and high-society amateur Lebanese painters at collective exhibitions

According to the lists of works shown at the Salons des Amis des Arts, the Beirut art world included an equivalent number of non-Lebanese and native artists, but the Lebanese professional painters were considered the undeniable stars. A disparate handful of them rose to the forefront of Beirut's art scene around 1930, and would dominate it for two decades: they were three men, Omar Onsi, Moustafa Farroukh,

³⁴ Wendy M. K Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 52.

³⁵ Metin And, "Atatürk and the Arts, with Special Reference to Music and Theater" in *Nationality and Nationalism. Volume IV*, eds. Athena Leoussi and Steven Grosby (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 105-106; Z. Y. Yaman and F. Deroche, "The Theme of Peasants and Farmers in Turkish Painting" in *International Congress of Turkish Art Art Turc = Turkish Art* (Geneva: Fondation Max van Berchem, 1995), 752.

and César Gemayel, and one woman, Marie Hadad. The four of them were integral to the world of exhibitions, and not only featured in most collective art shows, but also frequently held personal exhibitions, which suggests they had found a dedicated audience of amateurs and patrons. The nature of the press coverage around them substantiates their success, with art writers consistently supporting them in glowing reviews and electing them as subjects of long profile pieces.

These four artists predominantly painted Lebanese subjects. The thematic convergence, however, comes at the end of dissimilar paths to becoming a painter, beginning with their individual milieu and training. Marie Chiha Hadad came from a prominent family of the commercial-political elite – her brother Michel Chiha (1891-1954), a Chaldean Catholic banker, lawyer and politician, was committed to Lebanese nationalism. He was one of the writers of the Lebanese constitution of 1926 and the ideological brain of Maronite politician future president Bechara El Khoury (1890-1964), who was married to Marie Chiha's sister. But neither religion nor social background was a determining factor in finding artistic success: Onsi and Farroukh, who were both Sunnis from Beirut, were respectively the son of an affluent physician, whose family destined him to this profession, and a native of the poorer neighbourhood of Basta with coppersmith brothers. Farroukh's family was rather conservative, and sent him to a Koranic school for the first few years of his education. Gemayel, meanwhile, hailed from Ain al-Touffaha, a Maronite village in the Lebanese Mountain; his background was rather modest, and he first trained in pharmacy.³⁶

³⁶ Tomb, "Moustafa Farroukh," in *Art from Lebanon*, 107; Tomb, "César Gemayel," in *Art from Lebanon*, 96; Tomb, "Omar Onsi," in *Art from Lebanon*, 79.

Apart from Hadad, whose training consisted of private art lessons in Beirut, the three other painters made their way to European art schools, where they enjoyed an academic education, like their predecessors such as Corm, Serour, and Saleeby. Onsi actually frequented Saleeby's studio in his early twenties, and also found a mentor in sculptor Youssef Hoyek. He spent the better part of the 1920s as an English tutor to the children of Jordan's royal family. In 1928, he made his way to Paris, where he enrolled at the Académie Julian, an influential private art school whose curriculum was more open to modernist trend than the conventional Beaux-Arts. He then settled in Beirut in 1931.³⁷ César Gemayel had likewise been a student of Saleeby, and studied at the same Académie between 1927 and 1930.³⁸ Farroukh, however, started out with art lessons with the daughter of a German photographer, and with Serour during World War I. Having saved money from painting the portraits of local notables, he was able to finance his studies and graduate from Rome's Royal Academy of Decorative Arts in 1927. After a few years in Beirut, he went to Paris for further training under prestigious conservative French artists, such as Paul Chabas, the president of the Société des Artistes Français. He definitely based himself in Beirut in 1932.³⁹

Throughout their careers, Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi upheld the conventional artistic principles they had learned in Parisian and Roman academies, in particular the faithfulness to the model, the application of the rules of perspective, and

³⁷ Omar Onsi, *The Gardener of Epiphanies* (Beirut: Conseil des relations économiques extérieures, 1985), 17.

³⁸ Silvia Naef notes that Gemayel was the recipient of a governmental grant but no other sources, either primary or secondary, confirm this assertion (Naef, *À la Recherche*, 148-9).

³⁹ Hani Farroukh (Moustafa Farroukh's son), in discussion with the author, November 2014.

the attention to the accurate rendering of colours. They used techniques derived from Impressionism, such as the study of the changes made by sunlight on a scene's appearance, and *open-air* painting, but were obstinate opponents of the avant-garde trends of their day, as will be further elaborated in the following chapter. Within these parameters, they principally painted the Lebanese Mountain, including expansive panoramic views and village scenes, and, less frequently, portraits, and the occasional still life (figs. 3-8). Gemayel, in particular, also became known for his nudes, a genre that had become common currency in the 1930s, and which Onsi and Hadad also delved in (fig. 9).⁴⁰ Hadad, by contrast with the three men, focused on portraits of children, Bedouins and peasants, with less concern for conventional European painting's rules (figs. 10-12).

The four painters were based in Beirut, but were anything but insular: as Farroukh stated, "for whatever art is, there is my home and my chosen land. And where beauty is, there is my country and my tribe."⁴¹ Artists such as himself, Onsi, Gemayel, and Hadad were part of a global artistic dialogue, with particularly tight links to Paris. The three male painters exhibited at group shows in the French capital in the 1930s, and Hadad held individual exhibitions at prestigious Parisian galleries, which will be examined below. Some of them gained some measure of public recognition there: in 1930, Farroukh earned a prize at the official Salon of the Society of Artists in

⁴⁰ A look at the available databases of around 250 paintings by Farroukh, Onsi and Gemayel collected for this study suggests that the nude might have constituted as much as a quarter of the latter's production, the remainder being mainly landscape painting, but remained marginal in Onsi's and Farroukh's output, in which the nude largely consisted of studies (as opposed to paintings).

⁴¹ Farroukh quoted in Sam Bardaouil, "The Transmodern Artist," in *Told, Untold, Retold: 23 Stories of Journeys through Time and Space*, exhibition catalogue, (Doha, Qatar: Arab Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 22.

Paris, for a portrait of his Italian professor Colarossi.⁴² In Paris, Farroukh, Onsi and Gemayel also exhibited works in international exhibitions such as the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris, as part of the Levantine States Pavilion; they, and Hadad, were also present at the Lebanese pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. (Chapter 7 will examine these events.)

The group of Lebanese artists present in Beirut's collective exhibitions encompassed not only professional painters, but also an almost-equivalent number of amateurs. Among several dozen artists showing at the 1938 Salon des Amis des Arts, the magazine *Phénicia* singled out for discussion thirteen professionals exhibiting and twenty amateurs, and ten and seven respectively in 1939.⁴³ Unlike the diversity of the star painters – Hadad, Gemayel, Onsi, and Farroukh – the amateurs mostly came from socioculturally privileged circles. The names and the titles that the press mentioned give an idea of their background, but are hard to precisely match to a known person, since only surnames are often given, and sometimes occupations. There were, as a matter of course, numerous Frenchmen and women – officers and wives of officers, professionals, and one or two aristocrats.⁴⁴ The Lebanese amateurs were represented by a mixture of professionals (one finds men listed as lawyers or physicians) and by members of the financial-commercial and political elite families. The press sometimes noted amateurs whose presence they found particularly noticeable because of the spot they occupied in Beirut's elite. Zelfa Tabet Chamoun,

⁴² René Catelot, "Mustapha Farrouk," *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, 1931; Mounir Mazhar, "Un Peintre libanais à l'honneur Mustapha Farroukh" [Honours Decerned to a Lebanese Painter], *Le Jour*, February 25, 1951.

⁴³ Oughourlian, "Le Salon;" El Assi, "Le Salon."

⁴⁴ Safa, "Le Dernier salon;" Oughourlian, "Le Salon;" *Le Jour*, "Le Ile Salon des Amis des Arts."

for example, who was the wife of Maronite politician Camille Chamoun (1900-1987), then a minister, and later president of Lebanon (1952-58), exhibited a painting at the 1938 Salon.⁴⁵ In 1939, Nadia Beydoun, a member of a prominent Sunni family of merchants, also showed a painting; she was praised for likely being the first female Muslim painter to exhibit in Beirut.⁴⁶ If the Beirut art world was inclusive, it was in the sense that social status trumped religion.

C. The art public: mixed citizenships, related social milieus

The public, like the exhibitions' organisers and amateur painters, mostly belonged to Beirut's mixed Lebanese and French sociocultural elite; this correlation between exhibition visitors and the upper classes was neither specific to Lebanon nor new, but attested for the high-art European exhibitions since the eighteenth century.⁴⁷ The Beirut shows were visited by Lebanese socialites, professionals, statesmen, and members of the banking and commercial elites, who arrived with, or separately from, their socially active wives; they blended with Frenchmen and women, including Mandate officials, military officers, and businessmen. Journalists, artists, and intellectuals were naturally also in attendance. It was largely, but not exclusively, a Christian public.

In a rare instance of the description of Beirut's art audience, *Le Jour* listed a few names of personalities present at the 1939 Salon des Amis des Arts' opening, as if reporting for the society pages. The newspaper found around forty people worth mentioning, and, for some, gave their occupation, or wrote a succinct description of

⁴⁵ Oughourlian, "Le Salon."

⁴⁶ El Assi, "Le Salon."

⁴⁷ Houston, *Art Criticism*, 27.

who they were. Many of them are nevertheless hard to identify, especially when only a surname is noted. Two Lebanese men were listed as lawyers for instance, two as doctors, and one, Antoine Tabet, was a prominent architect. Important newsmen were present too, such as Georges Vayssié, the owner of the newspaper *La Syrie*, who attended with his wife.

Le Jour remarked on the presence of several French officers and officials, or their wives – they noted for instance Gabriel Bounoure, the director of the Office of Public Instruction, and his wife, as well as one colonel and one general's wives. There were also one lawyer and the French director of the Beirut port, accompanied by his wife.⁴⁸ The higher echelons of French politics also sometimes attended exhibitions: in his memoirs, Farroukh recalls selling a watercolour to General Maxime Weygand at the 1940 Salon.⁴⁹ (Weygand, who had served as high commissioner in 1924-25, was back in Beirut in 1939, as commander-in-chief for the Orient Theatre of Operation.)

In its 1939 review, *Le Jour* added that the world of Lebanese politics was represented by the Maronite politician Alfred Naccache (1887-1978), then the prime minister (and president in 1941 and 1942), and his wife, and by Petro Trad (1976-1947), an Orthodox politician and lawyer from a patrician Beirut family.⁵⁰ Although *Le Jour* backed independence promoter Bechara El Khoury (1890-1964) (president after 1943), it still reported on and supported an event organised by the wife of El Khoury's rival, then-president Emile Eddé (1883-1949), and noted the presence of several French individuals, some of them involved in the Mandate administration, and

⁴⁸ *Le Jour*, "Le Ile Salon des Amis des Arts."

⁴⁹ Moustafa Farroukh, "Souvenirs of Moustafa Farroukh." Private papers, 1950-57.

⁵⁰ *Le Jour*, "Le Ile Salon des Amis des Arts."

of politicians close to the Mandate like Naccache. Indeed, if the participants in the exhibitions' world came from divergent political backgrounds, this comingling was not unusual at elite circle's social gatherings – the balls thrown by the wives of high commissioners, and socialites' weekly receptions, often brought together Lebanese and French citizens from all political persuasions, as they were occasions for political manoeuvring.⁵¹

Those in attendance at Farroukh's 1933 exhibition at the School of Arts and Crafts were likewise part of Beirut's bourgeoisie, spanning the “professionals [...] merchants, aristocrats, clergymen [...] Mandate officials and aspiring politicians.”⁵² Yet, Farroukh's audience featured exceptions to this general rule, which suggests that the audience for art could sometimes expand to a larger public. There were, unsurprisingly, artists, educators and students in attendance, but also lower-middle-class individuals, many of them friends of Farroukh from his modest neighbourhood of Basta.⁵³ While it makes sense the latter would attend Farroukh's show, it remains to be determined whether they also visited the Salons set up at the exclusive venues of the Cercle de l'Union Française and the Parliament.

Furthermore, records of sales at Onsi's individual 1932 exhibition suggests that the majority of paintings there were sold to foreigners (diplomats or members of the Mandate governments), and that, at his next exhibitions, his customers included Maronite intellectual and businessman Charles Corm, Maronite litterateur Jacques

⁵¹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 311.

⁵² Scheid, “Divinely Imprinting Prints,” 354.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Tabet, and Sunni Hussein al-Ahdab, which correlates with *Le Jour's* description of an elite public of mixed nationalities and, sometimes, different faiths.⁵⁴

D. Ad-hoc art critics from diverse horizons

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, critical writing grew in importance as a corollary of the multiplication of exhibitions and the broadening of the public interest in the arts, at least throughout an affluent urban audience – as had been the case, for instance, in nineteenth-century Paris with the Salons des Beaux-Arts.⁵⁵ As magazines and newspapers turned their attention to art, the press became instrumental in enhancing the profile of artists and the cultural prestige of painting. A glance at the pre-1930s Arabic-language and Francophone Lebanese press suggests that cultural coverage, then, centred on literature and theatre, but in the 1930s, a few publications widened their focus. Some came up with intermittent arts sections to punctuate their daily reports on music, theatre and cinema (this was the case of *L'Orient* and *Le Jour* for instance), and others, like *al-Makshūf*, mainly covered major artistic events in depth. The Francophone press's coverage of the arts was more extensive than the Arabic-language one, perhaps in line with the Lebanese Francophone circle's desire to copy the Parisian cultural model. When art pages featured in a publication, they not only included exhibition reviews, but were also a platform for thinkers and artists to pontificate on the principles of painting, as the next chapter will detail.

The press that covered the arts spanned the linguistic and political spectrum, but

⁵⁴ Exposition Omar Onsi, Peinture, Aquarelles, Exhibition catalogue (Beirut: École des Arts et Lettres, 21–28 February 1932), and “List 26, Exposition Onsi 1932,” (Joseph Matar archives), quoted in Scheid, ““Divinely Imprinting Prints,” 350.

⁵⁵ Houston, *Art Criticism*, 39.

rarely did political leanings transpire in art writing, as the case of *Le Jour*, mentioned above, already suggested. In their reviews, art writers did not bring up the relationship with France or allude to current political events; neither did they show bias against artists' religion, politics, or gender. Most of them, in fact, displayed patriotic support for Lebanese painters. The two mainstream Francophone daily newspapers, from the opposite ends of the spectrum, covered the arts in an apolitical fashion: on the one side, there was *L'Orient*, founded in 1932 by Georges Naqqache, which backed Emile Eddé's, and, on the other, *Le Jour*, established in 1924 by thinker and politician Michel Chiha, that supported Bechara El Khoury's independence project. There was also, to a lesser extent, *La Syrie*, which was basically an organ of the Mandate. The Francophone and very Francophile general-interest weekly *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen* (1928-2011), which was based in Paris and featured both Lebanese and French writers, also covered the arts regularly, and featured interviews with artists. (It changed its name to *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient arabe* in 1939, reflecting a change in its ideological outlook.) There were also monthlies, like the intellectual *Phénicia* (late 1930s), which supported the idea of Lebanon's Phoenician ancestry, and also wrote about art at times, without revealing its ideological perspective in such articles.⁵⁶ Arabic-language cultural-political journals dedicated space to art too: there were for instance the illustrated magazine *al-Makshūf* (1935-49), an important cultural weekly and promoter of modern Arabic-language literature, founded in 1935 by writer Fuad Hubaych, in addition to *al-Mashriq* (founded 1898), the Jesuits' scientific and cultural academic monthly, and the

⁵⁶ The publisher of *Phénicia*, Aurore Augour, nevertheless claimed her journal had no political agenda (see Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 129.)

political-cultural *al-Ma'raḍ* (1921-1936), published by pro-independence writer and politician Michel Zakkour.

Across these publications, a majority of the exhibition reviews were only signed with initials. The identifiable names are often not those of full-time journalists, and are as diverse as the press that published them. They include Frenchmen involved in the art world, like the painters Georges Cyr who wrote in *L'Orient*, and Jean Dobelle, who both regularly exhibited in Beirut. Litterateurs and intellectuals also participated: Maurice Sacre, a political thinker and writer, contributed to the Francophone press's arts coverage, Youssef Ghossoub, a poet, wrote in *al-Mashriq*, and Victor Hakim, also a writer, thinker and minor poet, penned articles for *L'Orient* and other publications. Brothers Emile and Ibrahim Maklouf, the owners of *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, wrote for their own magazine.

III. THE CRITICS' VIEWS ON THE NEW ART WORLD

A. On the exhibitions' artistic quality and the public's behaviour

In 1930s Lebanon, art critics, besides examining the works themselves, began dissecting all the art world's participants, including the artists, the public, and the exhibition's organisation and set-up. By doing so, they defined the conventions of the art world: aside from giving their opinion about aesthetics, they discussed the type of artistic figure one ought to champion, the boundaries of acceptability of public behaviour, and they set standards of taste in exhibition curating and display.⁵⁷ Lebanese art writers uniformly expressed their patriotism, when they gave preference

⁵⁷ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 29.

to native artists over foreigners, and simultaneously stressed the emulation of Europe, as if expressing their desire for Beirut's cultural activities to equate with Paris's prestige.

Overall assessments of the Amis des Arts' efforts to galvanise Beirut's art world with the 1938-41 Salons encapsulate the critics' outlook. Commentary was praiseful: in the opinion of a writer for the magazine *Phénicia*, the 1938 Salon was a "happy and brave initiative" that deserved encouragement.⁵⁸ Beyond this, several commentators praised the exhibitions' usefulness, because the events could potentially raise the awareness of local art by showing its abundance, foster emulation among artists, and promote young talent.⁵⁹ More important, according to *al-Makshūf*, Beirut "had made a great leap towards finding its proper place [on the international scene] and the foreigners here will hold the city in higher esteem:" the exhibitions seemed to have great potential to help raise the country's international cultural profile.⁶⁰

Yet, despite the accolades, the exhibitions' organisers could not escape criticism, especially with regards to the selection of works. At the 1938 Salon, *Phénicia* wrote, "not everything was worthy of being exhibited [...] the general impression that emerged was that the works' value was vastly unequal."⁶¹ Commentators also gauged curatorial success according to practical parameters and the quality of the display. Actually, they could judge shows even before visiting them: the location of an exhibition did matter, and critics preconised maximising visibility. In 1932 for example, when Farroukh had an individual exhibition in the West Hall of the

⁵⁸ Oughourlian, "Le Salon."

⁵⁹ Safa, "Le Dernier salon."

⁶⁰ Ḥalīm Kan`ān, "Ma`raḍ aṣḍiqā' al-fann" [The Amis des Arts Salon], *Al-Makshūf* 248 (1940): 4.

⁶¹ Oughourlian, "Le Salon."

American University, one writer harshly criticised the venue's distance from Beirut's centre. The same year, a journalist visiting Onsi's exhibition at the same place did likewise.⁶² Conversely, to *Phénicia's* relief, the 1939 Salon des Amis des Arts was strategically staged in a hall inside the Parliament building, in the heart of downtown Beirut – the magazine's critic thought a proper exhibition space was “long overdue.”⁶³ Then, the space's setup and the display's tastefulness were subjected to evaluation. *Phénicia* hence described the hall as a well-conceived “elegant and pleasant space” with a thoughtful lighting and champagne-coloured walls. In *L'Orient*, French painter and critic Georges Cyr added that it was “as if a magician's wand had turned a cellar [...] into a thing of beauty.”⁶⁴ By and large, commentators supported the modernist practices of picture display developed in Europe since the Impressionist exhibitions: in a photograph taken inside the 1939 Salon, works are framed by discreet rods, hang in a row at eye level on neutral walls, and are lit by artificial lighting (fig. 13).⁶⁵ Individual and collective exhibitions were, moreover, accompanied by invitations, in line with Western practices.

Nevertheless, according to most art writers, the public of these exhibitions was at best ignorant, and at worst neglectful of art. The press's general opinion was that, while the public ought to value art, they were but an elite group concerned only with social appearances – in some way, journalists were also defining the rules the public

⁶² M. D., “Nos Reportages. La Semaine de la peinture. Nos peintres. Mourani-Farouk-Onsi” [Our Reports. Painting Week. Our Painters. Mourani-Farouk-Onsi], *L'Orient*, 1932; *Al-Ma`raq*, “Ma`raq al-fannān `Umar al-'Unsi,” [The Exhibition of the Artist Omar Onsi], May 1932.

⁶³ El Assi, “Le Salon.”

⁶⁴ El Assi, “Le Salon;” Cyr, “La Peinture c'est très grave.”

⁶⁵ Richard Brettell, *Modern Art 1851-1939 Capitalism and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1999, 7.

should abide by in order to demonstrate their social distinction.⁶⁶ In 1931 already, when an art exhibition took place at the School of Arts and Crafts, journalist Youssef Ghossoub, writing in *al-Mashriq*, complained of poor attendance numbers, blaming it on society's lack of taste, and the potential patrons' habit to "fill their houses with oriental carpets, feathers, mirrors and chandeliers, [and] pictures of no value" as opposed to artworks.⁶⁷ Likewise, *La Syrie*, in 1932, deemed the art public nothing but mindless "socialites;" likewise, six year later, *al-Makshūf* deplored the fact that the art public seemed limited the "aristocracy."⁶⁸ The journalists' disdain of pretend art lovers recurs in reviews of the Salons des Amis des Arts. Indeed, it still seemed to *Phénicia* that their public preferred "vulgar palaces [and] luxury cars" to painting.⁶⁹ One of *al-Makshūf's* writers too deplored their lack of engagement with art, which they seemed otherwise eager to purchase just to show off.⁷⁰ Another commentator, in the same magazine, chastised the public for flaunting the rules of exhibition-going behaviour and treating the exhibition as a social occasion, when they ought to behave as attentive spectators driven by artistic culture.⁷¹ Some members of the audience, in fact, also bemoaned a certain public lack of interest for art, with one physician, for

⁶⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 2.

⁶⁷ Ghossoub, "Yaḡz al-fann," 86.

⁶⁸ Jean Dobelle, "En Suivant les Muses. Le peintre Farrouk" [Following the Muses. The Painter Farrouk], *La Syrie*, 1932; `Ali Sa`ad, "Al-Madiyya fi thaḡāfatina [Materialism in Our Culture]," *Al-Makshūf* 157 (1938), 7.

⁶⁹ El Assi, "Le Salon."

⁷⁰ Shafīq Ḥātem, "Khaṡar al-madāres al-shāḡa fi afsād ḡauquna al-fanni" [The Dangers of Abnormal Schools on the Perversion of our Artistic Taste], *Al-Makshūf* 145 (1938): 2.

⁷¹ Kan`ān, "Ma`raḡ aṡḡiqā' al-fann;".

instance, criticising a nation that “does not properly appreciate” the works Farroukh once exhibited.⁷²

B. Critical conceptions of the authentic artistic personality

In the 1930s, a few years after the end of Corm’s, Serour’s, and Saleeby’s careers, these artists were anointed the first members of the Lebanese artistic canon.⁷³ Critics then sought out living painters who had the potential to equal, or even surpass, their three predecessors. Out of the dozens of painters active in the Lebanese art world, they selected Farroukh, Onsi, Gemayel, and Hadad as candidates to the title of Great Lebanese Artists. (Hadad’s career and artistic practice diverged from the male painters’, and are discussed further down.) These painters’ preferential treatment in the press reflects their predominance on the scene: they were not only distinguished among their peers in reviews of collective exhibitions, but also enjoyed individual shows since around 1930, which suggests they had found their public early on. Indeed, Farroukh started in 1928, with a show in a private residence, sponsored by the Muslim Scouts, followed by regular exhibitions at the American University of Beirut starting 1929, and one the School of Arts and Crafts in 1933. After his own exhibitions at the School of Arts and Crafts in 1932 and 1935, Onsi had another show at the Galerie Libanaise in 1937, among other ones.⁷⁴ Closer to Francophone circles, Gemayel exhibited, for instance, in the locals of the newspaper *Le Jour* in 1937 and

⁷² Exposition du Peintre Farrouk, 15–24 December, 1933, Guest Registry (Hani Farroukh Archives, Beirut, Lebanon), quoted in Scheid, “Divinely Imprinting Prints,” 354.

⁷³ *Al-Mashriq*, “Mazāhir al-thaqāfa al-fanniyya,” [A look at the artistic culture: painting], July-September 1941, 312, 315. Corm’s, Saleeby’s and Serour’s characterisation in the Lebanese press is discussed in the previous chapter.

⁷⁴ Tomb, “Omar Onsi,” in *Art from Lebanon*, 89; Naef, *À la Recherche*, 149.

Marie Hadad would stage exhibitions at the Saint Georges hotel in 1933 and the Catholic Youth Club in 1937.⁷⁵

Individual exhibitions gave the press an occasion to publish more focused reviews and lengthier profiles of the painters than what reports on group shows allowed for. Interlaced with aesthetic assessments, the texts define what characterises a Lebanese artist worthy of his or her place in Beirut's art world, and, at the same time, instructed readers what to appreciate. They imply conceptions of what artists should look and be like, and how they should behave, in a variation on the historical notion of the absolute artist, which was discussed in the previous chapter. In this sense, writers active in Lebanon worked in the tradition of the standard artist biography established in France in the nineteenth century, which notably combines factual details with anecdotes about the artist's purported actions in order to establish greatness. Nonetheless, the Lebanese art writers of the 1930s and 40s longer resorted to myth much less often and instead interpreted facts and everyday situations. The critical vocabulary changed: once a mark of supernatural distinction, "genius" became a figure of speech, and commentators, especially in the Francophone press, rather spoke of painters' talent – "real", "mature," "evident," "conscientious," "multifaceted" or otherwise.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Louis Vauxcelles, Exposition Marie Hadad Décembre 1933 Sous Le Haut Patronage de S.E. Monsieur Le Comte de Martel, Ambassadeur de France, Haut Commissaire de La République Française. Dans la grande salle des fêtes de l'hôtel St Georges Beyrouth. Du 16 Au 26. [Marie Hadad exhibition December 1933. Under the High Patronage of H.E. The Count of Martel, French Ambassador, High Commissioner of the French Republic. In the Grand Ballroom of the St Georges Hotel Beirut. From the 16th to the 26th], brochure (Beirut: 1933); Joseph Honein, "Ma'raḡ Marie Haddād" [Marie Hadad's Exhibition], *Al-Bashīr*, April 1, 1937.

⁷⁶ Oughourlian, "Le Salon;" El Assi, "Le Salon," *Le Jour*, "Le Dernier Salon." For the "genius" hyperbole see Kamāl Al-Nāfi, "Ala ṭarīq aḡiya' al-fann" [On the way to art], *Al-Aḡwāl*, June 1, 1929; *Al-Ma'raḡ*, "Sā'a fī studio Farrūkh" [An hour in Farroukh's studio], May

Furthermore, the profiles and reviews boosted Lebanon's cultural standing, in particular in relation to European artistic culture. Commentators on the Lebanese art scene, however, did not emphasise the nationality of the painters they described, since readers were presumed to be aware of it. Beside their cultural role, contemporary artists' biographies also had practical market-directed aims: they participated in increasing artworks' values by raising the interest of the public in the artist, and enabling the association of a name with a work.⁷⁷

The features of a true artist, according to critics

First off, studies at a well-known European art school greatly increased one's chances to earn critical recognition in Lebanon. Lebanese artists' profiles indeed consistently mentioned the curriculum they followed. After establishing chronological facts, writers brought in anecdotal stories and descriptions to paint the figure of the Great Lebanese artist, a man or woman who detains memorable idiosyncrasies in body and character, as well as superior expressive capabilities, from which artistic originality and creativity derive. Part of the argument for artistic authenticity is indeed drawn from narrative anecdotes that enhance the singularity of artists' characters. In 1951 for instance, as Farroukh had just earned a mention in the *Bénézit*, the venerable French dictionary of artists, a journalist from *Le Jour* sought to interview him, "only to find him," he recalled, "running bareheaded under the rain, two carrots and a tomato in his

1932, 12; Ghossoub, "Al-Ma`raḡ al-kabīr lil-'istāḡ Muṣṭafa Farrūkh" [The Large Exhibition of Master Moustafa Farroukh], *Al-Aḡrār*, 1929.

⁷⁷ Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 144.

hands, his face dripping with water, running to give a drawing class.”⁷⁸ In the writer’s eyes, Farroukh’s obliviousness of his honours confirmed his eccentricity, and validated him as a true artist. Anecdotal – yet apocryphal – accounts of Onsi’s actions likewise seem to confirm his idiosyncrasy. In a review of his 1932 personal exhibition for example, the writer for *al-Ma’raḍ* used stereotypes of villagers’ backwardness and superstition to highlight the painters’ oddity. In the text, Onsi appears as an eerie presence, walking around the Lebanese village of Baysour, looking for a landscape to paint, and, at some point, as the article recounted, “the villagers who watched him with suspicion and fear [...] fled from him when they saw him walking between the bushes, in the valleys and on top of the hills.” Near a spring, young ladies ran away at Onsi’s approach.⁷⁹ Such stories about Farroukh and Onsi thus complete the picture of a real artist, an individual with an atypical character and behaviour.

The argument linking art to body and character is further underscored in descriptions of a painter’s physical appearance in relation to his or her personality. *L’Orient* was thus able to equate Onsi’s modesty to his passion for painting, and this passion to his “scintillating” stare.⁸⁰ And when a journalist for *al-Aḥrār* (The Liberals) visited Farroukh at his 1929 exhibition, he encountered a small and frail man whose “nerves extruded from each of his pores [...] colour and lines gathered in his eyes effusively” – his physique literally exuded art.⁸¹ In another profile of the painter, *La Revue du Liban* wrote about “a little frail, dark, always calm, man, with astonishingly deep

⁷⁸ Mazhar, “Un Peintre libanais à l’honneur.”

⁷⁹ Al-Ma’raḍ, “Ma’raḍ al-fannān `Umar al-’Unsi.”

⁸⁰ Debbané, “Visite à la galerie libanaise.”

⁸¹ Ghossoub, “Al-Ma’raḍ al-kabīr.”

and intelligent eyes,” which were proof of “a veritable artist.”⁸² In 1930, *Le Montparnasse* too observed that Farroukh was “everything but an athlete but small, thin, and agile,” and also found that the painter was inherently bound for art because of his physical features, namely his “remarkable deep and melancholic gaze, and his supple dexterous fingers.”⁸³ One’s physique and abnormal character were furthermore said to reverberate into one’s works, and in Farroukh’s case, it was his possible shyness and nervousness.⁸⁴ A photograph used in *al-Laṭā’ef al-Muṣammara* (The Illustrated Anecdotes) to illustrate an article about the latter’s 1929 exhibition looks as if it had been purposely chosen to prove the point: Farroukh sits at a desk like a studious young man, shyly avoiding the camera: the photograph could link the paintings surrounding him to his introversion (fig. 14). At the opposite of Farroukh’s characterisation in the press, *Phénicia’s* review of the 1938 Salon argued that Gemayel’s tall stature was a sign of his “powerful” personality, and, consequently, so were his works.⁸⁵

C. Criticism of Lebanese artists: the patriotic imperative to emulate Europe

Although the body-mind-work triangle might make a real artist, the 1930s Lebanese art writers thought that their favourites, such as Farroukh, Onsi, and Gemayel, could still improve artistically. The press had one benchmark for style, the classical academic principles that professional Lebanese painters had studied in Paris, and called attention to what they saw as inadequate technical skills and the unsatisfactory display

⁸² *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, “L’Art libanais Mustapha Farrouk,” July 1930.

⁸³ Ibrahim Makhoul, “Moustafa Farrouk premier peintre libanais” [Moustafa Farroukh the foremost Lebanese Painter], *Le Montparnasse*, 1930.

⁸⁴ M.D., “Nos Reportages. La Semaine de la peinture. Moustafa Farroukh” [Our Reports. Painting Week. Moustafa Farroukh], *La Revue moderne*, August 1931.

⁸⁵ Oughourlian, “Le Salon.”

of feeling and creativity, another principle inherited from standard European art criticism. A painting by Gemayel was thus criticised for exhibiting a “confused scene, as if painted by a student,” and, at another time, for being “too technical;” Farroukh was once blamed for “lacking precision.”⁸⁶ This kind of criticism also applied to the entire group of Lebanese artists exhibiting. According to *L’Orient*, in 1947 still, Lebanese artists, although talented, unfortunately seemed more “apt to ‘reproduce’ than to ‘create,’” and “lacked creative and suggestive powers.”⁸⁷

If mastering the principles of conventional European art was the goal, the emulation of historical European artists was the key to do so, an argument that recurs all throughout the 1930s and 1940s. For *al-Aḥwāl* (The Circumstances), who covered Farroukh’s 1929 exhibition, the end goal of Lebanon was clear: native artists should “persevere and improve,” in order to “reach the level” of Europe’s Old Masters.⁸⁸ In 1931, *al-Mashriq* too regretted that exhibitions in Beirut paled in comparison to European museums, and ten years later, *al-Makshūf* still concurred: despite Lebanese artists’ talents, “we are not in France [and] have yet to master art.”⁸⁹ Critical texts imply a certain patriotic encouragement of the arts, which was likely part of a wider encouragement of Lebanon to enhance its reputation on the international art scene, and to thereby affirm its legitimately deserved place among other countries – possibly a place that distinguished it as a nation independent from France. And ultimately,

⁸⁶ Ghossoub, “Yaḡz al-fann;” El Assi, “Le Salon;” Kan`ān, “Ma`raḡ Aṣḡiqā` Al-Fann.”

⁸⁷ Maurice Sacre, “Visite à l’exposition des artistes libanais” [A visit of the Exhibition of Lebanese Artists], *L’Orient*, May 3, 1947.

⁸⁸ Al-Nāfi, “`Ala ṡarik aḡiya` al-fann.”

⁸⁹ Ghossoub, “Yaḡz al-fann;” Kan`ān, “Ma`raḡ aṣḡiqā` al-fann.”

partially thanks to the arts, the Lebanese culture's prestige, and the country's more generally, could be recognized worldwide.

D. Assessments of foreign artists in Beirut's collective exhibitions

Around half of the exhibitors at the Salons were not Lebanese. Exhibition reviews, in fact, mention Frenchmen and women, and other Europeans too, from Italy, Russia, or Poland for instance. As evidenced by the available illustrated exhibition reviews, they and Lebanese artists painted approximately the same themes – mostly Lebanese scenes, portraits and still lives – and their styles were comparable.⁹⁰ Art writers devoted to foreigners column space commensurate to their representation on the scene. Although their works were regularly the subject of praise, certain writers patriotically judged non-Lebanese painters collectively inferior to native artists. The main criticism levelled against foreigners was their paucity of sentiment and creativity, and especially their failure to do justice to Lebanese themes: in *al-Mashriq's* opinion, this showed their ignorance of Lebanon's essence and consisted of a misrepresentation of the country.⁹¹ By contrast, according to *al-Makshūf*, Lebanese painters displayed “varied and strong personalities that distinguish their paintings” as well as “superior and deep feelings,” in particular towards their own country whose “warm colours” they successfully transcribed on canvas.⁹²

Still, art writers identified a few professional foreign painters who seemed to stand out, in the same way they had selected a few Lebanese professional artists to champion. In a 1948 overview of the main foreigners active in Beirut since the 1920s,

⁹⁰ See for instance *Le Jour*, “Le IIe Salon des Amis des Arts” or El Assi, “Le Salon.”

⁹¹ *Al-Mashriq*, “Maḏāhir al-thaqāfa al-fanniyya,” 314.

⁹² Kan`ān, “Ma`raḏ aṣḏiqā' al-fann.”

writer Victor Hakim highlighted fifteen names, five of whom were French, two Italian, and six from Eastern Europe.⁹³ He only listed the name of most of them, noting that they were secondary painters, but went into more detail about a few, such as the Polish Jean Kober (1890-?), the Russian Boris Novikoff (1888-1966), and the Italian Fernando Manetti (1899-1963) (fig. 15). All of them had been professional artists in their home countries and had arrived in Beirut for a variety of reasons at different points in time. (Novikoff landed in the city as an engineer during World War I; Manetti arrived after World War II.) In Beirut, they all taught painting to well-to-do young ladies.⁹⁴ But the leading foreign painter, by far, according to Hakim and the Beirut art world at large, was the Frenchman Georges Cyr (1880-1964). After relatively failing at a career in France, he had arrived in Beirut in 1934 to try his chance there, and easily integrated into the Lebanese and French socially prominent circles. Like many another foreigner present in Beirut, Cyr often painted Lebanese subjects, and he received positive reviews for his “dreamy” crucifixions, his “almost tragic” marines, and especially for his watercolours of the souks of Beirut and of the Lebanese countryside (figs. 16-17).⁹⁵ Cyr’s success can be partly explained by his being French, which could have facilitated his entry into the Francophone upperclass, but it was likely also due to his ability to position himself as an artistic eminence, and to his particularly intensive activity in the Beirut art world – he took part in most public

⁹³ Victor Hakim, “Tableau de la peinture libanaise. Peintres étrangers” [Panorama of Lebanese Painting. Foreign Painters], *L’Orient*, December 2, 1948.

⁹⁴ Tomb, “From Abroad, Yet So Lebanese: A Few Foreigners Who Left Their Mark on The Lebanese Art Scene,” in *Art from Lebanon*, 424.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Fu’ād Haddād, “Ma`raḡ asḡiqā’ al-Fann fil-barlamān,” [The Amis des Arts Exhibition at the Parliament], *Al-Makshūf* 201 (1939): 5; *Le Jour*, “Le Ile Salon des Amis des Arts;” Safa, “Le Dernier Salon franco-libanais.”

exhibitions, had a few individual ones, and was a frequent contributor to the art pages of the Francophone press. In addition to these activities, he taught painting from his studio and was an instigator of formal art education in Lebanon.⁹⁶ It is, in fact, because of these contributions, rather than his art, that in 1952, the painter and intellectual Georges Corm (1896-1971) (the son of the painter Daoud Corm) would retrospectively call Cyr's presence and activity in Lebanon nothing short of "miraculous."⁹⁷

IV. A DIFFERENT MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL PAINTER: THE GENDER BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL ADVANTAGES OF MARIE HADAD

The male-dominated European art world's historical bias against women artists rarely allowed them a place in its canon because art was a man's job, and women were to stick to their traditional gender roles, only being allowed to become amateur painters.⁹⁸ This lack of acceptance held partly true in 1930s Beirut. At the occasion of the 1938 Salon des Amis des Arts, *Phénicia* chose to report on (among many dozens of exhibitors) twenty male artists and eleven female ones, and in 1939 twelve and five respectively, a 2-to-1 ratio that suggests women artists enjoyed relative recognition, at least more so proportionally than they were represented in the European art historical canon. But only two members of this group, Marie Hadad and Blanche Ammoun (1912-2011), were known as professional painters (figs. 10-12, 18).⁹⁹ Neither of them had attended

⁹⁶ Tomb, "From Abroad," 423.

⁹⁷ Georges Corm, "Défense et illustration de la peinture libanaise" [In Defense of Lebanese Painting], *L'Orient*, December 20, 1952.

⁹⁸ Harrison White and Cynthia White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York: Wiley, 1965), 51; Linda Nochlin, "Why have There Been no Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* 69 (January 1971): 22-39.

⁹⁹ Oughourlian, "Le Salon;" El Assi, "Le Salon."

art school, as was the case historically with European female artists, but both had considerable social advantages, and links to dominant male artistic personalities or powerful family connections.¹⁰⁰ Ammoun, who came from a Maronite family of notables and politicians, was one of the first two women to graduate from law school in Lebanon, but never practiced as an attorney, and turned to painting instead. In the 1930s, she was known for her still lifes and landscapes in the mainstream vein of the time, and had an individual exhibition at the Saint Georges hotel in 1938.¹⁰¹

Hadad was by far more successful than Ammoun in Beirut, and known in Paris too. Her family was politically and socially prominent – as seen above, she was the sister of the important thinker and Pharaon-Chiha bank part owner Michel Chiha, and the sister-in-law of President Bechara El Khoury. She was, a priori, not designed for a full-time artistic career. In Lebanon, schools for socially advantaged young women afforded their students painting lessons, but this was as part of the making of well-rounded future wives, not of professional painters; Hadad's introduction to painting proper happened during private lessons with Polish painter Jean Kober.¹⁰² The path towards becoming a painter was unlikely for her, especially that, unlike her male counterparts, she had not trained at Parisian academies, the attendance of which was key to their public and critical recognition. This absence of formal studies might be due to limitations placed on her by her milieu, and the role a woman was expected to fulfil: at the same time Onsi and Farroukh stayed in Paris, she was getting married and

¹⁰⁰ Nochlin, "Why have There Been no Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* 69 (January 1971): 22-39.

¹⁰¹ Oughourlian, "Le Salon."

¹⁰² Victor Hakim, "Tableau de la peinture libanaise. La Peinture féminine" [A Panorama of Lebanese painting: Female Painters], *L'Orient*, December 1, 1948; Tomb, "Marie Hadad" in *Art from Lebanon*, 91.

having children.¹⁰³

Historically, pursuing an artistic career was considered incompatible with traditional feminine roles, perhaps even more so than other professions, given artists' aura of unconventionality.¹⁰⁴ But the high bourgeoisie Hadad belonged to was an environment where several women, like Ammoun, had started studying traditionally male-dominated fields such as medicine and law.¹⁰⁵ Hadad's taking up art was rare, but apparently not frowned upon by her milieu, and, in any case, she did not abandon her traditional roles. As a matter of fact, the press praised the way she simultaneously managed to earn the art world's respect and to fulfil the conventional "domestic obligations of the housewife," as *al-Bashīr* (The Forerunner) put it in 1937.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, her family's prominence likely played a non-negligible role in furthering her career, and her male relatives actively supported her – it was her husband who took care of securing her exhibition opportunities and supervised their logistics.¹⁰⁷ (Hadad stopped painting in 1945, after her daughter passed away.)

Hadad's path towards international success

In addition to participating in Beirut's collective exhibitions, Hadad had several individual ones at notable venues in Beirut and Paris. Perhaps thanks to her social connections, her first notable show, in 1933, took place at the luxury Saint Georges

¹⁰³ See Nochlin, "Great Women Artists."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Lamia Rustum Schehade, *Women and War in Lebanon* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1999), 40-43.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Honein, "Ma`rad Marie Hadad" [Marie Hadad's Exhibition], *Al-Bashīr*, April 1, 1937.

¹⁰⁷ Louis Vauxcelles, Marie Hadad œuvres récentes Invitation Galerie Borghese Paris 26 Dec - 12 Jan 1939, [Marie Hadad recent works. Invitation Borghese gallery. Paris 26 Dec-12 Jan 1939], brochure, (Paris: 1939).

Hotel on the Beirut waterfront. The event happened under the patronage of the High Commissioner Damien de Martel – it might be that, in the cultural field, a patron’s prestige mattered more than his political orientation, since part of Hadad’s family vocally opposed the Mandate.¹⁰⁸ The exhibitions were unequivocal critical successes in spite of Hadad’s little training, and of her thematic and stylistic differences with the other celebrated painters of the day such as Onsi, Farroukh and Gemayel. Unlike the landscape painting that dominated their production, she focused on portraits of peasants and Bedouins, which, unlike them, she did not paint in an Impressionist-influenced academic style, but with an outlook somewhat reminiscent of the Fauves’ flat areas of saturated colour and thick outlines (figs. 10-12). Moreover, Hadad’s lack of formal training left critics unphased. On the contrary, *al-Bashīr* believed that it made her all the more deserving of praise because her works were the mark of “innate” artistry, and critic Victor Hakim, in a 1948 biography of hers in *L’Orient*, highlighted her “imperviousness to outside influences.”¹⁰⁹ Although one could conjecture that her success was largely due to her family’s position top of the Lebanese financial and political elite, it remains that Hadad, as a woman artist, had the added burden to catch up with men: if she was recognized as a legitimate painter, it was also because she was able to surpass “the contrived manner that plagued women’s art,” and instead, painted “as a [male] painter does, not as a lady’s hobby.”¹¹⁰

Hadad moreover surpassed Farroukh, Onsi and Gemayel internationally, by becoming the best-known Lebanese painter in France, without even having set foot in

¹⁰⁸ Louis Vauxcelles, “Exposition Marie Hadad Décembre 1933.”

¹⁰⁹ Honein, “Ma`raḡ Marie Hadad; Hakim, “La Peinture féminine.”

¹¹⁰ Vauxcelles, “Marie Hadad Oeuvres Récentes.”

any of Paris's art schools. By then, on the French scene, attending them was no longer a requirement for success anyway. She was able to access the network of private art dealers directly thanks to Parisian acquaintances, and exhibited individually several times at the distinguished Bernheim and Borghese galleries (fig. 19).¹¹¹ In the meantime, she also befriended the influential French critic Louis Vauxcelles, a supporter of modernist art (yet not the Cubist or abstract kinds) who would write laudatory forewords to her exhibition pamphlets, in Beirut in 1933, and in Paris in 1937 and 1939.¹¹² Apart from the probable role Hadad's social connections played in furthering her Parisian career, her embrace by the higher spheres of that city's art world could be explained by the nature of her works themselves: it might be that France more readily appreciated her paintings of Bedouins than the landscapes of Lebanon her contemporaries painted. Indeed, during the Third Republic, the official French imperialist ideology still banked on stereotypical images of colonial subjects to build the image of a racially and morally superior mainland. Accordingly, French popular representations of Arabs and Berbers still focused on mystery and danger, an inheritance of Orientalist art.¹¹³ Hadad, a member of Beirut's political-financial elite, arguably painted Bedouins as her own "Others," an outlook that will be further analysed in chapter 5. Her characters are brooding, inscrutable, and sometimes engage in occult practices; as such, they could conform to the French public's expectations of

¹¹¹ Hakim, "La Peinture féminine."

¹¹² Vauxcelles, Marie Hadad œuvres récentes; Vauxcelles, Exposition Marie Hadad Décembre 1933.

¹¹³ Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 161.

what “backward” Middle Easterners were like, and possibly also corresponded to the way Beirut’s Westernised elite public itself construed Bedouins (fig. 20).

CONCLUSION

In the 1920s and 30s, Beirut’s art world transformed from an embryonic system based on private commissions to an expanded exhibitionary complex. This happened to a great extent thanks to private endeavours stemming from the upperclass circles of French Mandate Beirut. In the 1930s, group shows modelled on Paris’s Salons started taking place, notably the 1938-1941 Salon des Amis des Arts, which surveyed Lebanon’s art production, as well as exhibitions of individual painters, beginning with Farroukh’s American University show of 1929. The art world’s new participants – the high society women who moonlighted as curators, and the art public – came from a group mixing the Lebanese and French sociocultural and intellectual circles, and the political and commercial elite. The artists were diverse, as collective exhibitions embraced both native and foreign artists from different backgrounds, as well as a considerable number of upperclass amateurs. Critics, however, largely focused on and directed their praise towards Lebanese professional artists, especially Farroukh, Onsi, Gemayel, and Hadad.

Around 1930, when the Lebanese Francophone and Arabic-language press started featuring exhibition reviews and artists profiles more frequently, art writers defined the parameters of taste and appropriateness that the art world’s participants ought to follow: they demanded an attentive audience, favoured modern-looking shows, and juggled the aesthetic adequacy of the exhibited artworks. To them, the

prototypical outstanding Lebanese artist fit European biographies' emphasis on his or her abnormal character and physical aspect as sources of creativity.

Farroukh, Onsi and Gemayel had all studied at European art academies, and applied what they learned to painting Lebanese subjects, landscapes in particular, filtering them through an Impressionist lens, which will be the focus of chapters 4 and 5. Hadad, unlike the three male painters, had no formal training, but social advantages contributed to make up for it. She became the foremost Lebanese artist in Paris, notably with her paintings of Bedouins. She, too, was hailed as an outstanding Lebanese artist despite the discrepancy between her paintings and the mainstream Lebanese art of the time. She was also the one who most visibly raised Lebanon's international artistic profile.

World War II registered the end of the Salons des Amis des Arts, but features of the 1930s art world remained throughout the 1940s: the ambiguity of governmental involvement, the patriotic celebration of prominent artists, and the press's desire to assert Lebanon's place on the world's cultural stage. After the last Salon in 1941, Beirut would have to wait until 1947 to see another major collective exhibition, when the Lebanese government, as an exception, sponsored a Salon des Artistes Libanais at Beirut's National Museum. The National Museum show could constitute a sign of a new governmental commitment in supporting the arts, or of a project to educate the larger public, or even suggests that the authorities perhaps saw in art some political value. In fact, Bechara El Khoury, now president of Lebanon, was the official patron of the show. The Ministry of National Education and the Fine Arts (whose establishment could also connote a new governmental interest in the arts) oversaw the

exhibition and published its pamphlet.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, who selected the works, under which criteria, or provided the logistical structure is uncertain. The exhibition featured the famous Lebanese artists of the day – in painting, Gemayel and Onsi, and, in sculpture, Youssef Hoyek – as well as the then-rising star of Lebanese painting Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994). The show was on a large scale, as each of the painters had around two dozen works on display, for a total of 111.

Although this Salon was the first time such an event was held not only at a major landmark, but also at one with national significance, it remains that the museum, completed in 1937 and inaugurated in 1942, was dedicated to archaeology, and modelled on French conceptions of national art museums. The project was started in 1923, concurrently with the creation of a service of the antiquities and fine arts, which also dealt with archaeological excavations. The committee that initiated the project was politically diverse, inter-confessional and inter-professional, with merchants participating alongside intellectuals and officials; at its head was Jacques Tabet, a member of a family of Beirut merchants.¹¹⁵ But the museum was a product of the 1920s, contemporaneous with the excavation of Lebanon's Phoenician sites and the trend among several important intellectuals to place Lebanon's Phoenician heritage at the heart of the country's national identity, as will be seen in chapter 7, and its first

¹¹⁴ *Galleries du Musée National. Salon des artistes libanais. Sous le Haut Patronage de S.E. Cheikh Bechara El Khoury, Président de la République libanaise* [National Museum Galleries. Salon of the Lebanese Artists. Under the High Patronage of H.E. Sheikh Bechara El Khoury, President of the Lebanese Republic], brochure (Beirut: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et des Beaux-Arts, 1947).

¹¹⁵ Suzy Hakimian, "The Beirut National Museum and Collective Memory: Sanctuary, Repository, or Interactive Space?" *Near Eastern Archaeology* 73, no. 2/3 (2010), 182. The committee included Christian merchants such as Alfred Sursock and Henri Pharaon, journalists close to the Mandate like Georges Vassiyé, but also Druze notables such as Ali Joublatt, and Sunni former politician Omar Daouk, as well as painter-intellectual Georges Corm and Sunni and Christian physicians.

director, Maurice Chehab, participated in the popularisation of such a narrative.¹¹⁶ This preoccupation with archaeology side-lined whatever project existed for an art museum, which says much about the government's concern for the arts at that time.¹¹⁷

One year after the National Museum show, Lebanon hosted an international UNESCO summit concurrently with the inauguration of the institution's headquarters in Beirut (fig. 22). In November 1948, two art exhibitions were staged, one featuring foreign artists, and another Lebanese ones. The latter included eleven artists, and the bulk of the show was again made up of Farroukh, Onsi, Gemayel and Hoyek. Exactly who organised the show is also unclear, since the pamphlet only bears the UNESCO logo, which suggests that the event was organised under this institution's umbrella, not by a governmental entity.¹¹⁸ Its curators, whose names are so far unknown, likely hoped to advance Lebanon's cultural standing by taking advantage of an occasion when representatives from world cultures would be present. A few writers effectively participated in affirming Lebanon's cultural prestige at the occasion: *L'Orient*, for instance, published for six weeks a dozen of celebratory articles by Victor Hakim, titled "Tableau de la Peinture libanaise," which retraced the story of Lebanese art and acclaimed the main contemporary artists, Lebanese and foreign, active in Beirut.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 124.

¹¹⁷ Edouard Lahoud, *L'Art contemporain au Liban* [Contemporary Art in Lebanon] (Beirut: Librairie orientale, 1974) available at

www.onefineart.com/en/articles_arts/contemporary_art_lebanon.shtml

¹¹⁸ Exposition des artistes libanais à l'occasion du mois de l'UNESCO. Beyrouth, Liban [Lebanese artists' exhibition at the occasion of UNESCO month. Beirut, Lebanon], brochure (Beirut: UNESCO, 1948).

¹¹⁹ See Victor Hakim's series of articles published in *L'Orient* in November-December 1948 under the heading "Tableau de la Peinture Libanaise."

CHAPTER 4

LEBANESE PAINTERS' AESTHETIC POSITIONS AND CONCEPTION OF THEIR ROLES, 1930s-40s

INTRODUCTION

As seen in the previous chapter, Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957), César Gemayel (1898-1958), and Omar Onsi (1901-1969) were at the top of the Beirut art world of the 1930s and 1940s: they were omnipresent in Beirut's collective exhibitions, were among the few to stage individual ones, and enjoyed widespread critical and public recognition. They came from diverse milieus: while Gemayel was a Maronite from Ain el Touffaha, in the Mountain, Farroukh and Onsi were Sunnis from Beirut, the former from a modest neighbourhood, the latter the converse. But regardless of their divergent backgrounds, they came together in their allegiance to European culture, from which stemmed a common artistic project.

The extent to which the painters interacted with one another seems limited, at least when it comes to their intellectual exchanges. They certainly were acquainted, since the Beirut art world was small and they often showed their works in the same collective exhibitions. Yet, there is no sense that they ever formed a cohesive group self-conscious of a mission, unlike contemporaneous groups elsewhere in the region, such as Egypt's Art and Liberty group, active between 1939 and 1945, and its Contemporary Art Collective of the late 1940s, or Iraq's Friends of the Arts group of

1941-46, for instance.¹ It rather seems that, although three Lebanese painters' theories of art resemble one another, they were formulated independently. Yet, they converge with regards to stylistic prescriptions and all painters direct their recommendations not only towards Lebanese artists, but also to the worldwide community of art practitioners. Essentially, they preconised adhering to European naturalist figuration, which they considered superior to twentieth-century modernist trends.

The three painters, and Farroukh in particular, also expressed their conception of the social role of the art. They did not, however, advocate active political engagement or promote a specific agenda. Neither did they criticise the political class publicly, nor did they speak on behalf of the mandatory of Lebanese government. In their speeches and writings, Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi almost never broached contemporary events or the debates in the political and public sphere. They seldom even mentioned their country or questions surrounding the definition of its identity and nation building, and did not question the legitimacy of the Lebanese Republic, whose 1943 independence often predates their public expression of their opinions. Rather, Farroukh, and to a lesser extent Gemayel, outlined a theory of how painting could universally contribute to sociocultural progress by educating the public's taste and moral values. Despite such stances, instances of social commentary remain rare in Farroukh, Onsi, and Gemayel's paintings.

The three painters actually did not express their views in public regularly. The three of them wrote a few articles, and gave some conferences, on the topic of their

¹ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 309; Tiffany Floyd, "Hafidh al-Droubi," Mathaf Encyclopedia of Arab Art and Artists <http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org.qa/en/bios/Pages/Hafidh-al-Droubi.aspx> (Accessed February 1, 2018).

artistic project and the purpose of art, but their engagement in the public sphere was otherwise limited. They usually addressed an audience of intellectually minded, urban, and educated individuals who read literary periodicals and attended cultural clubs. In 1948, Onsi, for instance, gave a conference on Impressionism at the Arab Cultural Club in Beirut, a society established in 1944 by Arab nationalist intellectuals who regularly met to discuss the cultural and political issues of the Arab world. Their ideology, however, does not reverberate in Onsi's speech, although his presence in such a context might indicate sympathy towards their stance.² Farroukh also gave a conference on the history of Lebanese painting in 1947 at the Cénacle Libanais, a venue where intellectuals from all walks of life were welcome to participate, which has been further describes in chapter 1. He and Gemayel contributed a few articles to the press, such as long-form texts published between 1945 and 1950 in the monthly cultural publication *al-Adīb* (The Writer), which was founded in 1942 by poet Albir Adib, and focused on the promotion of Arabic-language literature and poetry, which could suggest that, although fluent in French, the two artists were friendly to the principle that the Arabic language ought to be Lebanon's principal means of expression. Otherwise, Onsi, Farroukh and Onsi expressed their views in interviews and in their private papers; Farroukh's unpublished "Kayfa nanẓuru ila al-lawḥa al-fanniyya" (How to Appreciate a Work of Art) (1951) is the best-developed discussion of taste and style among such texts.³

² Omar Onsi, "Al-Madrassa at-ta'thīriyya" [The Impressionists] (conference, Arab Cultural Club, Beirut, 1948).

³ Moustafa Farroukh, "Kayfa nanẓuru ila al-lawḥa al-fanniyya" [How to Appreciate a Work of Art], August 1951. Manuscript, Hani Farroukh collections, Beirut, Lebanon. The text was only

I. HOW TO PAINT

A. Three Lebanese painters' aesthetic statement of purpose

One formal rule: naturalist figuration

In the late 1930s and 40s, Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi posed as aestheticians. After getting acquainted with European painting in Beirut, and learning it formally in Paris, they had thoroughly embraced the history of European art: as Onsi affirmed, this tradition “is mine, it is yours, it became part of ours.”⁴ Not limiting themselves to Lebanon, they would formulate universal principles of painting, yet without fully fleshing them out. Broadly speaking, they advocated following the rules of conventional European figuration as taught in art academies.

The journalistic activity surrounding Beirut’s art world during this period says little about the elaboration of standards for Lebanese painting. The critical discourse certainly invited judgment, praise, and description and the reasons thereof, but prescription was rare, and the analysis remained more literary than substantial. In fact, the vocabulary used then rather brings to mind conventional mid-nineteenth century French criticism, exemplified in the writings of Théophile Gautier, who frequently employed generic qualifiers such as “beautiful” or “perfect.”⁵ Similarly, in Lebanon, texts on individual and collective exhibitions described works as “good” and “strong,” scenes as “beautiful” or “elegant,” and compositions as “delicate” and “soft,” a

translated and reproduced in 2003 at the occasion of his retrospective exhibition at Beirut’s Sursock museum.

⁴ Omar Onsi, undated manuscript. May Onsi collections, Beirut, Lebanon.

⁵ Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices* (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 36.

lexicon that varied little across Francophone and Arabic-language publications.⁶ Yet, in between the lines, some articles did hint at aesthetic preferences, explaining the importance of the elements of classical composition – the arrangement of lines and the harmony of colours, and the recognisability of the subject. For example, in 1932, the magazine *al-Ma`raḍ* (The Exhibition) judged that Onsi’s light brushstrokes and subtle watercolour tones were preferable to “clashing colours,” and, seventeen years later, French painter and critic Georges Cyr concurred, deeming Onsi’s watercolours’ washed-out tones preferable to “virulent reds or acidic yellows” (fig. 1).⁷

Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi are better informants on notions of stylistic prescriptions than contemporary critics. They preconised following conventional precepts of European art, derived from the Renaissance, and to perpetuate the teachings of conservative art academies into the twentieth century, by opposition to modernism. By and large, their recommendations focused on paying attention to an exact rendering of the scene, the respect of the rules of perspective, the harmony of colours and the balance of lines. Hence, in his private papers, Onsi stressed the “refinement of colours” and the need for a picture to “rest the eye,” as well as the importance of training in copying Renaissance artworks (fig. 2).⁸

In 1951, Farroukh elaborated analogous ideas in “How to Appreciate a Work of Art,” where he explained his rules for art-making and art appreciation to the novice

⁶ Fu`ād Haddād, “Ma`raḍ aṣḍiqā’ al-fann fil-barlamān,” [The Amis des Arts Exhibition at the Parliament], *Al-Makshūf* 201 (1939): 5; *Al-Ma`raḍ*, “Sā`a fī studio Farrūkh” [An hour in Farroukh’s studio], May 1935, 12; Georges Cyr, “Omar Onsi, Peintre” [Omar Onsi, Painter] *L’Orient*, October 29, 1949; Joseph Oughourlian, “Le Salon,” *Phénicia*, May 1938.

⁷ Cyr, *ibid*; *Al-Ma`raḍ*, “Ma`raḍ al-fannān `Umar al-’Unsi” [The Exhibition of the Artist Omar Onsi], May 1932.

⁸ Onsi, undated manuscript.

art lover. The text straightforwardly defends aspects of conventional academic European painting: first of all, he argued, the quality of a painting rests on the composition's highlighting its principal subject. Then, he advised making a clear distinction between the different planes of the scene, according to the rules of linear perspective, and to strike a balance between vertical ("dynamic") and horizontal ("calming") lines. Farroukh furthermore recommended utilising the standard contrast between, on the one hand, blue and green (the "quiet and soothing" cold colours), and, on the other, yellow and red (the "lively and vigorous" warm ones). He indeed heeded to his own advice, or rather, that of his Parisian teachers, since the beginning of his career: for instance, in the early 1930s, shortly after graduating from art school, he toured Andalusia and made paintings of the Alhambra palace that highlight the main element clearly, are visibly organised according to a grid of lines distinguishing between the planes, and display colour contrasts between greens, blues, and warmer tones (fig. 3). Finally, Farroukh emphasised that painters ought to demonstrate their knowledge of the human anatomy, and he, Onsi, and other Lebanese painters did indeed train in rendering the human figure and its proportions (figs. 4-5).⁹

Finding connections with the Impressionists

Alongside upholding rules of academic art, Onsi and Gemayel invoked nineteenth-century French avant-gardes to legitimise their artistic project. They reclaimed paradigmatic painters and movements, from Realism to the Post-Impressionism of Cézanne, and especially drew a link with Impressionism, which, in the 1930s, had long become part of the European artistic canon. In fact, more than half a century after

⁹ Farroukh, "Kayfa nanżuru."

their first exhibition of 1874, embracing the Impressionists as a model could seem rather anachronistic: by the mid-1880s, awareness of the group had already spread throughout the European artistic sphere, and, by 1900, it had significantly influenced visual representation internationally.¹⁰ During the interwar period, in Europe and the United States, Impressionism's numerous contradictory offshoots had too gained wide recognition, with formative figures such as Seurat, Cézanne, and Gauguin omnipresent in exhibitions.¹¹

Onsi and Gemayel emerged as Impressionist painters' leading admirers in Beirut. In addition to drawing inspiration from them, Gemayel wrote a few articles on the group and on Cézanne in *al-Adīb*, and Onsi gave a conference about them in 1948 at the Arab Cultural Club.¹² Gemayel's reverence for the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists sometimes led him to heavily draw on their works, as he produced, for instance, still lifes of fruits that certainly referred to Cézanne's *Apples and Oranges* paintings (c.1900), or scenes with women reminiscent of the voluptuous bodies that Renoir painted at the turn of the twentieth century (figs. 6-7).¹³ But the kinship Onsi and Gemayel established with the celebrated French painters was not inclusive of all their artistic practice's aspects. Rather, they paradoxically reinterpreted Impressionism to integrate it within their own commitment to conventional

¹⁰ Richard Brettell, *Modern Art 1851-1939 Capitalism and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹² César Gemayel, "Paul Cézanne za'im al-madrassa al-ḥadītha fi-t-taṣwīr" [Paul Cézanne the Leader of the Modern School of Art], *Al-Makshūf* 90 (April 1937): 8; Onsi, "Al-Madrassa at-ta'thīriyya."

¹³ Several contemporary Lebanese art historians call "impressionist" the Lebanese artists who rose to fame in the 1930s, in spite of the fact that Lebanese painters, who admired them, never claimed the label. See for instance Maha Azize Sultan, "From Classicism to the Splendor of Nature," in Marie Tomb et al., *Art from Lebanon: Modern and Contemporary Artists, 1880-1975, Vol. I*, under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), 26-29.

figuration. While it is nonetheless true that the Impressionists did not represent a sudden break with European aesthetics, and did not venture to entirely overturn their rules, they were not, unlike what Gemayel and Onsi contended, in complete conformity with what the two Lebanese painters called “the great laws of art” derived from the Renaissance.¹⁴ Hence, Gemayel reinvented Cézanne as the paragon of “rich beautiful colours” and “sincerity towards nature,” and this – not the innovative character of his works – was why he could call him the genius “leader of the modern school in painting.”¹⁵ Mainstream scholarship, by contrast, holds that Cézanne’s importance lies in great part in his reconsideration of space in painting.

Onsi and Gemayel were more interested in the visual effects of certain Impressionist techniques than in the spirit of experimentation and the theoretical questioning of art that underpinned the group’s practice. They selected one particular aspect of Impressionism to emulate, *plein air* landscape painting, which involves the study of the changing light and colours of a scene when painting outside. But regardless of Gemayel and Onsi’s contention that their own project coincided with a fundamental Impressionist concern with the landscape, the French painters were not even intrinsically defined by such a focus. They were, instead, a group of associated artists who often exhibited together, but shared a diversity of intersecting interests – Monet and Renoir notably painted Paris for instance, and Degas usually worked in his studio.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ernst H Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 2011), 413; Gemayel, “Al-Fannān,” *Al-Adīb*, February 1, 1943; Onsi, “Al-madrassa at-ta’thīriyya.”

¹⁵ Gemayel, “Paul Cézanne.”

¹⁶ Brettell, *Modern Art*, 20-30.

For Onsi, *plein air* painting, which he describe but did not mention it by name, was the ideal way to optimise a painting's accuracy, because it allowed to capture the exact colour of an object under one specific light of day: he actually obsessively painted his garden and his pet animals, for instance, at different points during the day and under different atmospheric conditions, and the watercolours he realised on the spot exemplify his application of the technique (figs. 8-9).¹⁷ Yet, on the theoretical level, Onsi's concern for verisimilitude contradicts the way a painter such as Monet's intended to use *plein air* painting: unlike Onsi, Monet sought to explore the subjective act of representational transcription itself, and to find new pictorial techniques to approach space and perception.¹⁸

Ultimately, the resemblance between Onsi's and Gemayel's works and the Impressionists' essentially resides in their use of short brushstrokes, which are frequently associated with many of the better-known Impressionist works (figs. 1, 10-11). And in the context of 1930s Beirut, this aesthetic choice, coupled with the adoption of landscape painting, and with the free choice of one's subjects, was a sign of artistic modernity, since it could demarcate Onsi and Gemayel from the preceding generation of Lebanese painters, such Daoud Corm (1852-1930) and Habib Serour (1863-1938), who adhered to a smooth academic finish, were principally studio painters, and usually responded to portrait commissions, as seen in chapter 2.

Lebanese artists were actually not the only ones in the Levant to turn to the Impressionists for cues as to how to paint. In Syria for instance, painters such as Tawfiq Tarek (1875-1940) (who, like the Lebanese, also upheld academic principles),

¹⁷ Cyr, "Omar Onsi, Peintre."

¹⁸ Brettell, *Modern Art*, 16.

Saeed Tahsin (1904-1985), Michel Kirsheh (1900–73), or Nazem al Jaafari (1918-2015) all adopted Impressionist-like brushstrokes at some point in their careers, even beyond the 1950s for the latter, a tendency that also appears in Iraqi art before World War II in the works of painters such as Faiq Hassan (1914-1992).¹⁹

B. Reactions against modern art's aesthetics

Gemayel's, Farroukh's, and Onsi's insistence on upholding conventional figuration came at a time when artistic movements that turned their back on it had long gained currency in the West. Since they partially took up Impressionism, Lebanese painters arguably did not oppose the entirety of modern art, a term that, broadly speaking, covers the succession of avant-garde movements emerging from 1850, and going to roughly the 1930s.²⁰ What the three Lebanese painters opposed were the core artistic principle of, specifically, the *twentieth-century* European avant-gardes – the quest for freedom from constraining rules, artistic hierarchies and genres, and subject matters.²¹ In fact, they resented the fragmentation of shapes, and the further abandonment of traditional perspective and of colours faithful to nature, first noted in the works of Picasso and other Cubist painters around 1910. Although Onsi, Farroukh and Gemayel rarely mentioned names of painters or of groups, they spoke of new “trends” and “methods” to refer to the French avant-gardes that they would have

¹⁹ Silvia Naef, *À la Recherche d'une modernité arabe: l'évolution des arts plastiques en Égypte, au Liban et en Irak* [The Search for an Arab Modernity: The Evolution of the Plastic Arts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq] (Genève: Slatkine, 1996), 219, 309; Tiffany Floyd, “Hafidh al-Droubi,” Mathaf Encyclopedia of Arab Art and Artists <http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org.qa/en/bios/Pages/Hafidh-al-Droubi.aspx> (Accessed February 1, 2018); Atassi Foundation, “Tawfik Tarek, Biography,” <http://www.atassifoundation.com/artists/tawfik-tarek> Accessed February 1, 2018.

²⁰ Brettell, *Modern Art*, 16.

²¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 18-19; Brettell, *Modern Art*, 33.

been exposed to during their studies in Paris around 1930. Surrealists were there then, as well as expressionist painters like Chaim Soutine. Picasso, of course, was a fixture on the Parisian art scene, and Cubism not only enjoyed a global reach but was also recognized as one of the most important innovations in twentieth-century art.²²

Lebanese critics appreciated local artists' rejection of modernist art. In a review of a 1947 collective exhibition at Beirut's National Museum, a writer for *al-Mashriq* (The Levant) judged that "between the two wars [...] Europe broke with the classical, with realism, with proper principles, and with beauty," whereas, "despite the temptations, [Lebanon] did not deviate from them and did not lose the true aim of art."²³ Throughout his career, Onsi kept refusing to incorporate modernist ideas in his works: in a 1951 interview, he still exclaimed, "God forbid I follow Picasso!"²⁴

Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi also resisted engaging with the subject of urban life, a paradigmatic aspect of European modernist art: starting Manet, many European artists reflected on the modern city, and proposed new reactions to it, be they celebratory, critical, or aesthetic, which came as a response to the cities' radical transformation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with mass transport and communication, world trade, and World War I.²⁵ Instead of turning to the city, Lebanese painters would concentrate on landscapes of the Lebanese Mountain and scenes of Lebanese village life, which will be analysed in the next chapter (figs. 1, 10-12). Onsi, Farroukh, and Gemayel were of course aware of the new character of life

²² Brettell, *Modern Art*, 32; Houston, *Art Criticism*, 49.

²³ Rushdi Ma`lūf, "Ma`raq al-funūn al-jamīla" [The Fine Arts Exhibition], *Al-Mashriq*, March 1947.

²⁴ "Samaḥ Allāh itba' Picasso!" [God Forbid I follow Picasso!], *Kul Shī'*, 1951.

²⁵ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Malden (Mass.): Blackwell: 2003), 128.

under the political, socioeconomic cultural circumstances of modernity. They did experience modern Western urban life during their European travels, and were of course engrained in the life of modern Beirut, where they lived, painted, and exhibited. And, during the Mandate, the city came to resemble European ones. It was increasingly urbanised, and, to some extent, overhauled by the mandatory authorities' works carried on in its centre in 1920, as will be seen in chapters 5 to 7. Beirut's citizens also benefited from all the modern technologies of communication and transportation. Private use of the telephone spread in the 1920s; cars numbered in the tens of thousands in the 1930s; and airplane activity started in 1930, further reducing time and distance.²⁶ Yet, painters preferred turning to the Lebanese Mountain as an escapist outlet and a counterpoint to the city's conflicted modernity, a phenomenon at the core of the next chapter.

C. Moral judgement and social conservatism

The Lebanese painters' rejection of modernist aesthetics and subjects (including abstraction) is associated with a vocabulary of moral judgment equating the avant-gardes' abandonment of conventional aesthetics to a threat to European culture's traditions, and thus, by transitivity, to their own aesthetic and moral values, since they believed to be part of European civilisation and the heirs to its art history. In fact, if modern art is often construed as the expression of a revolt against bourgeois order, reflective of modernity's demands for cultural innovation, the three Lebanese painters

²⁶ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 273-76, 301-4.

preconised the reverse.²⁷ Hence, Onsi feared that “the rise of decadent painters” would annihilate “the great [Renaissance] tradition, the highest expression and most precious treasure of humanity.”²⁸ Farroukh too believed that avant-garde movements were not only “vacuous and ridiculous” fads making for “a confusing, bewildering, mixture of styles,” but also a “conspiracy against true art and a pernicious attempt to destroy beauty.”²⁹ Gemayel took the statement to a racially loaded extreme, and denounced modern art’s “bestiality,” by which he meant the incorporation of African influences into painting. Citing Picasso, Georges Rouault and Raoul Duffy, he argued that “negro” art made society “sick” and “regress to a primitive state.”³⁰ Gemayel made this statement in a 1932 interview, at the height of the Mandate, and it is reminiscent of French racist theories that stressed a supposed deep gap between France and the allegedly less advanced, violent, and diseased colonised peoples.³¹ His reprehensible words reveal the depth of his belief that European culture was his, and that he irrationally feared for his own way of life. Meanwhile, Farroukh dubbed Picasso, Duffy and Matisse “antichrists” that tainted morals and art’s purity with their savage style, and were guilty of diabolical fraud.³²

But despite the Lebanese painters’ fears for bourgeois morality evident in their words, it is often hard to read an outright intent to teach moral lessons in their works,

²⁷ Daniel Bell, “Modernism and Capitalism,” in *Art in Theory*, 1118; Ma`lūf, “Ma`raq al-funūn al-jamīla.”

²⁸ Onsi, undated manuscript.

²⁹ Farroukh, “Kayfa nanzuru;” Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-fannānīn al-lubnaniyyīn [The forerunners of Lebanese art]” in *Les Conférences Du Cénacle* vol. 5 (Beirut: Michel Asmar, 1947), 252.

³⁰ M. “Les Peintres libanais: dans l’atelier de César Gemayel” (Lebanese Painters: in César Gemayel’s studio), *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, 11 January 1937.

³¹ Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 161, 172.

³² Farroukh, *Tarīqi ila-l-fann [My Road to Art]*, 129, cited in Naef, *À la Recherche*, 151.

especially their scenes of Lebanon's Mountain, or their less frequent portraits, nudes, and still lifes; critics moreover did not interpret them as moral lessons, as the following chapter will show. And in the end, one wonders whether underneath their lofty posturing laid some measure of anxiety about the devaluation not of beauty or moral values, but of the monetary worth of their own artworks in the face of modernist art's rising popularity. Moreover, the systematic link they drew between avant-garde art and cultural decadence discounts the frequent concern for social betterment held by several European artists and groups, such as Russian Constructivism's interest in transforming society, Kandinsky's idealism, or Picasso's indictment of war in his *Guernica* (1937).

Lebanese artists' attitude was, in fact, commonplace in the Arab world, where most artists, in Iraq and Egypt for instance, seemed to refuse to embrace twentieth-century modern art.³³ Still, important exceptions to this rule took emerged starting the late 1930s. In Egypt, the group Art and Liberty's 1940s exhibitions were designed to counter the conservative *salons*, aiming to expose the local public to modernism, and in particular Surrealism. A few years later, in 1951, the Bagdad Group for Modern Art, with painter Jawad Salim (1919-1961) at its helm, explicitly rejected conservative forms of art in favour of the promotion of abstraction.³⁴

³³ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 310.

³⁴ Nada Shabout, "Collecting Modern Iraqi Art," in *Archives, Museums And Collecting Practices In The Modern Arab World*, eds. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz (New York Routledge: 2016), available at <https://Books.Google.Com.Lb/Books?Id=N3a3daaaqbaj> Accessed 14 February 2018.

II. THE ROLE OF ART

In the 1940s, Onsi, Farroukh, and Gemayel, concurrently, yet independently, started formulating a similar artistic philosophy, delineating the effects of art on viewers, and explaining the role art could play in social progress. A comparison with 1940s-50s neighbouring Egypt, which enjoyed decades of art in the European vein, could put the three Lebanese artists' position into perspective. In Egypt, it was critics who articulated the social role of art, whereas Beirut's art critics, by and large, commented on artworks without concerning themselves with social considerations. A few Egyptian journals that focused on art advocated a mission for artists to refine the public's taste, so that society would acquire specific knowledge, in the context of a larger preoccupation with education in Egypt. The final goal, then, was national development and civilisation, with a parallel assertion of the relevance and prestige of art.³⁵ By contrast, Lebanese painters did not draw a link between the arts and building a Lebanese national sentiment, and, instead, had ambitions to build universal theories. Their theses were abstract rather than practical: they did not elaborate, for example, on concrete programs to use art to educate the people.

A. Communicating emotions

The first tenet of Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi's philosophy was a variation on theories of art as expression, according to which artworks reveal an artist's unique personality and are a channel to communicate his or her emotions to the public. In this perspective, paintings are conceived as representations of the artists themselves

³⁵ Dina Ramadan, "The Aesthetics of the Modern: Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2013), 12-13, 125.

perhaps more so than a rendition of a model or things. The theory had emerged in nineteenth-century France as a Romantic reaction against classicism, and was in the spirit of the times when the three Lebanese painters' careers flourished – in fact, English philosopher and historian R.G. Collingwood's *Principles of Art*, which contributed to the notion's diffusion, was published in 1938.³⁶

Thus, according to Onsi, a painting directly expressed the artist's "feelings and knowledge of the exterior world," and represented "a conception akin to his heart [and] his self-expression," as if the canvas were a cathartic tool.³⁷ Farroukh likewise argued that lines and colours were "the means through which an artist's feelings take shape," and "the incarnation of his state of mind," "infused with [his] personality and spirit." Moreover, the ultimate goal of painting, for him, was to harmonise objective attention to natural detail and the "subjective truth of emotion."³⁸ The thesis actually finds an echo in contemporary reviews of the two artists' works. One journalist present at Farroukh's 1929 personal exhibition at the American University, for instance, observed that "all that goes through [Farroukh's] brain [...] and all the things that affect him" transform into art.³⁹ Meanwhile, another writer stated, one year later, that Farroukh's paintings were "direct translations of sentiments and sensations, and

³⁶ Richard Schiff, "Expression: Natural, Personal, Pictorial" in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 160, 164. The Lebanese artists' stances, however, do not precisely match Collingwood's. The general sense that art is the product of the artist's inner self, however, reverberates in their words.

³⁷ Onsi, undated manuscript.

³⁸ Farroukh, "Kayfa nanẓuru;" Farroukh, "Ḥadīth al-fann" [the discourse of art] [2], *Al-Adīb*, May 1, 1948.

³⁹ Youssef Ghossoub, "Al-Ma`raḡ al-kabīr lil-'istād Muṣṭafa Farrūkh" [The Large Exhibition of Master Moustafa Farroukh], *Al-Aḥrār*, 1929.

even of his soul.”⁴⁰ In 1950, Onsi’s champion, the French painter and art critic Georges Cyr, still echoed this kind of assessment: painting, he thought, was a means for Onsi to sublimate nature by exteriorising his sensibility and sensations.⁴¹

But this accent on emotion cannot be entirely philosophical, nor is it gratuitous. The individualist philosophy of art as expression underscores artistic autonomy, and this autonomy demarcates the generation of Farroukh and Onsi from the preceding one, when artists such as Corm and Saleeby typically worked on commission, as seen in chapter 2. Moreover, putting the accent on individual expression helps enhance the value of a painter’s practice, since it facilitates the authentication of a body of work and the attribution of a rising price to it.⁴²

B. The aim to promote social progress

Beyond expressing an emotional content, Farroukh and Gemayel saw a wider, perhaps universal, role, for art and for themselves. As Farroukh maintained, it was artists’ “cultural duty” to engage with society. But they did not envisage that the artist’s social consciousness would systematically translate into artworks critical of society or politics, nor did they mention any sort of duty to reach out to society via other conduits, for instance by addressing a larger public, publishing a manifesto, or taking direct action. Farroukh gave at least one public speech, and he and Gemayel wrote some articles, but neither stressed the responsibility of fellow painters to consistently engage with the public in practical ways; their pronouncements, in fact, remained

⁴⁰ Ibrahim Makhoul, “Moustafa Farrouk Premier Peintre libanais” [Moustafa Farroukh the foremost Lebanese painter], *Le Montparnasse*, 1930.

⁴¹ Georges Cyr, *Omar Onsi* (Beirut: Murex, Les Peintres du Liban, 1950).

⁴² Harrison and Wood, “The Idea of the Modern World,” in *Art in Theory*, 127.

rhetorical. By contrast, some artist groups in neighbouring countries were actively socially and politically engaged. The Egyptian Art and Liberty group turned to Surrealism around 1940 and associated with André Breton and Diego Rivera in opposition to fascism and Nazism's censorship of modern art, and published manifestos arguing for the international resistance against cultural oppression.⁴³ At the end of this decade, the Contemporary Art Collective, led by painter Husayn Yusuf Amin (1904-1984), was also vocally denouncing the political system and socioeconomic inequalities.⁴⁴ In another approach to artistic engagement with society, in Iraq, the Society of the Friends of Art, which included painters such as Hafiz Al Droubi (1914-1991), Faeq Hassan (1994-92) and Jawad Salim (1919-1961), sought to bring art appreciation to the public, and, in the early 1950s, the Bagdad Modern Art Group, led by Salim, aimed at the creation of a national discourse close to the government's.⁴⁵

Regarding a specific engagement with their own society or nation, Farroukh and Gemayel did not mention Lebanon by name, but the context is implicit, given that they spoke in Beirut and wrote in local magazines, which could also reach readers of the Arabic language internationally. Yet, despite the place from which they spoke, the two painters set out to propose a universal, not a national, theory of art's social goals. They employed general terms, and usually directed their arguments to any society (*mujtama*), sometimes to people in general (*an-nā's*), to mankind (*insāniyya*) or

⁴³ Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910-2003* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 33-34; Naef, *À la Recherche*, 82.

⁴⁴ Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*, 37.

⁴⁵ Shabout, "Collecting Modern Iraqi Art."

to a civilisation (*madaniyya*).⁴⁶ They also treated as synonyms the different words the Arabic language employs to refer to the concept of nation, in spite of their different connotations. Hence, Farroukh appeared to use interchangeably the terms *waṭan* (often meant as nation in the sense of homeland), *'umma* (typically employed to refer to a community, in particular that of Muslim believers) and the adjective *qawmi* (national).⁴⁷ Perhaps he and Gemayel saw a society and a nation as equivalent notions, designating one coherent group of people living together in one shared space.

Consequently, it might be understood that the Lebanese State, to them, was unequivocally one such entity, at a time – the 1940s – when the country was in the process of self-definition: Gemayel wrote “Al-Fannān” (The Artist) in February 1943, as Lebanon approached independence in November that year, and Farroukh’s texts on art under review span 1945-1951. But in these writings, both effectively set aside the several ideologies that competed in the interwar period and beyond to define the Lebanese national ideology and territory, and the contemporary debates around the state’s official identity.

Yet, diverse propositions, often corresponding to religious affiliations, still competed in the late 1930s and even into the 1940s. Syrian nationalism remained a prominent ideology in the Lebanese political sphere, and Arab nationalism steadily increased in popularity in the second half of this decade. The latter emphasised the shared history and language between Lebanon and its neighbouring countries and

⁴⁶ Gemayel, “Al-Fannān;” Farroukh, “Kayfa nanzurū.”

⁴⁷ Farroukh, “Min zawāya at-tarīkh al-fannī” [From the Corners of Art History], *Al-Adīb*, August 1, 1945.

found more Muslim adherents because of its Islamic component.⁴⁸ In Lebanon, during the second decade of the Mandate and up until independence, the political sphere was particularly divided along the questions of the relationship with France and that of independence. The National Bloc of Maronite politician Emile Eddé (1883-1949) (president between 1936 and 1941) was loyal to France, whereas their opponents, the Constitutional Bloc, headed by Maronite politician Bechara El Khoury (1890-1964) (president from 1943 to 1952), requested full autonomy. The latter ended up collaborating to this end with Syrian nationalist Muslim politicians such as Riad Al Solh (1894-51) (who would become prime minister in 1943), with whom they ruled after 1943. The official ideology of independent Lebanon, derived from the thinking of the writer and banker Michel Chiha (1891-1954), the main writer of the Lebanese constitution in 1926, conceptualised Lebanon as a Christian/Muslim partnership, part of the Arab world, yet distinct from its neighbours, and with ties to the West.⁴⁹

Neither Farroukh nor Gemayel integrated the period's political debates in their writings about the role of art, and neither touched upon the question of Lebanon's national identity, nor did not question the validity of the existence of an independence Lebanese state. Perhaps they did tacitly adhere to something akin to the official ideology of independent Lebanon, whereby the country was to be a political entity turned to the West, since they practiced a Western art form and saw themselves as part of the European civilisation, and distinct from, yet integrated in Arab world, since they expressed themselves in Arabic.

⁴⁸ Michele Hartman and Alessandro Olsaretti, "The First Boat and the First Oar': Inventions of Lebanon in the Writings of Michel Chiha," *Radical History Review* 86 (spring 2003): 40.

⁴⁹ Hartman and Olsaretti, "First Boat," 45.

C. From educating taste to civilisational development

As Farroukh saw it, rather than public and targeted political engagement, the artist's role began with training society's aesthetic discernment. Consequently, he and Gemayel theorised, art would drive ethical and moral improvement, thereby contributing to sociocultural progress. According to Farroukh, the way to do so was simple: one should visit exhibitions regularly, just "like listening to music trains one's ear."⁵⁰ Learning to appreciate art was, first, a matter of visually absorbing the criteria of what made a good painting, by which he meant something akin to what Europe had produced up to the twentieth century.⁵¹

Farroukh's emphasis on taste could look rather self-serving, since encouraging the public to appreciate art similar to his own would make them more likely to patronize him. He indeed felt, as many critics also did, that the audience of Beirut's exhibitions was aesthetically incompetent. (As seen in the previous chapter, it consisted of a blend of Beirut's sociocultural elite – its commercial, political, intellectual, and professional world – and the Frenchmen and women – many of them affiliated with the mandatory administration – who lived there.) Thus, Farroukh claimed he found himself forced to cater to their lack of sophistication in order to make a living: when a journalist found the works he showed at a 1932 exhibition aesthetically lacking, Farroukh explained that, to his regret, this was "what three quarters of the visitors like." He therefore pleaded artists should not be judged for

⁵⁰ Farroukh, "Ḥadīth al-fann" [1], *Al-Adīb*, April 1, 1948.

⁵¹ Farroukh, "Kayfa nanzuru."

“treating the Salons as mere commercial fairs” because they did not have a choice.⁵² The statement, nevertheless, seems disingenuous, since Farroukh was then rising to the top of the Beirut art world and enjoyed critical success. As seen in the previous chapter, after his studies in Paris, as soon as he exhibited in the Lebanese capital, in 1928, he had already found an audience: his personal exhibition held the next year at the American University of Beirut was one of the first individual shows in the city, and was widely reviewed, as seen in the previous chapter. A glance at records kept at Farroukh’s and Onsi’s early shows also suggests that the appetite for Lebanese painting, and especially that of the landscape, was on the rise, with the price of Onsi’s scenes of nature increasing more than twofold between 1932 and 1933.⁵³

After educating the public’s taste, Farroukh had a further role for the artist in mind. If the public was made to understand art better, it might be ethically elevated: art, he maintained, was “a school for morality” with better effects than plays and books. By mastering the proper way to look at art, the viewer would be capable of deciphering the meanings of the lines, in which Farroukh saw aspects of civilisation, and the colours, which he thought represented sentiments. Moreover, according to him, since images are a mirror of nature and mankind, they reveal fundamental truths about life and therefore nourish self-awareness and social understanding. The ultimate purpose of art, thus, would be to lead the public to the “ideal spheres of life” where

⁵² Jean Dobbelle, “En Suivant les Muses le peintre Farrouk” [Following the Muses, the Painter Farrouk], *La Syrie*, 1932. Farroukh was not the first one to criticise his public in such a way: in 1932, sculptor Youssef Hoyek complained that art in Lebanon “does not enjoy a high degree of respect, where everyone wants to look at it, and hasn’t reached the level that other nations have given it” (Michel Zakour, “Yūsif al-Huwayyik,” *Al-Ma`rad*, January 13, 1929).

⁵³ Kirsten Scheid, “Divinely Imprinting Prints, or, how Pictures became Influential Persons in Mandate Lebanon,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, eds. Andrew Arsan and Cyrus Schayegh (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 350.

“souls are cleansed” and “the intellect is refined.”⁵⁴ Even more, for Gemayel, artworks have the power to “liberate viewers” and “raise them to the level of the gods.”⁵⁵ Other painters shared this perspective even earlier: in 1932, Philippe Mourani (1875-1990), for instance, linked art to education and social betterment, stating that “besides the pleasure they bring to a nation, the plastic arts have had and will always had an educational, moral, and practical mission.”⁵⁶ But although painters earnestly professed that art could propel society into a more ethical sphere, it is, in practice, difficult to assess the behavioural consequences of artworks once viewers exit the exhibition space.⁵⁷ Besides, such declarations of the social importance of art also allow them to emphasise, justify, and gain recognition for the centrality of their own place in society.

Still, Farroukh and Gemayel maintained, this education of taste and of behaviour undoubtedly generated sociocultural development. They did not, however, mention nationalist intentions to specifically impact Lebanese society. In Farroukh’s opinion, art was more generally “the fundamental basis of great nations’ power,” and he saw proof of this in a few periods of European history. His standard was what he called the “true civilisation” of Western Europe, which, as he saw it, had historically given a significant place to art, and therefore allowed it to make critical contributions

⁵⁴ Farroukh, “Kayfa nanzuru.”

⁵⁵ Gemayel, “Al-Fannān.”

⁵⁶ Philippe Mourani, “Pour la Renaissance libanaise. Le rôle des arts plastiques (la sculpture et la peinture) dans la vie des peuples” [For a Lebanese Renaissance. The Role of the Plastic Arts (Sculpture and Painting) in the Lives of Peoples], *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, March 1932.

⁵⁷ Art philosopher Noël Carroll provides an in-depth examination of the question in *Art in Three Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 240-41.

to society.⁵⁸ Gemayel too described prestigious moments in History in which he described considerable artistic activity taking place in parallel to sociocultural progress; he saw himself as a continuation of a millennia-old progressive march of world civilisation, going back to Prehistory and carrying on through the heights of Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, the Renaissance and nineteenth-century Paris.⁵⁹

Farroukh, however, chose to focus on the Italian Renaissance, whose art history he retraced in two articles for *al-Adīb*. In them, aside from extolling the Great Masters' genius, he formulated a kind of social history of art delineating the socio-political circumstances surrounding artistic creation. The cities of Florence, Venice and Rome, as he recounted, were then "resting on their past glory and plagued by internal strife [...] society was in shambles." But, he pointed out, important historical events were taking place simultaneously, such as the fall of Constantinople and the travels to America, and had an impact on art. In this context, he argued, art helped clear up chaos and drove society forward.⁶⁰

Although universal, Farroukh's theory of the artist's role could be applied to specific regions and times, and he actually brought up the Arab world, of which Lebanon, he believed, was an integral but distinct part. His discussion of Arab countries applies his universal theory to demonstrate how a renewed interest in culture could benefit social progress, although he did not refer to political events – one thinks notably of World War II's impact on the region, and, shortly afterwards, Syria's 1946 independence, the war in Palestine, or the rise of Arab nationalism – or allude to the

⁵⁸ Farroukh, "Min zawāya at-tarīkh al-fannī."

⁵⁹ Gemayel, "Al-Fannān."

⁶⁰ Farroukh, "Ḥadīth al-fann [1];" *ibid.*, [2].

construction of a national identity.⁶¹ Farroukh seems to have believed that Arab societies had weakened concurrently with their contempt for the arts, and that this unwillingness to recognize art's centrality to society "impeded progress and prevented catching up with the working march of mankind" (implicitly, that of Western civilisation); hence, they should remedy the situation and support the arts in order to move forward.⁶² Here, his thesis is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Arab Nahda intellectual project of a cultural revival of the Arab world, modelled on European ideas of progress, with Renaissance Italy as the example.

Farroukh's Renaissance model could apply to 1940s Lebanon more specifically, and give it a distinguished example to emulate. Indeed, throughout the decade, as Farroukh was theorising, Lebanon witnessed a period of considerable political upheavals, most notably the events leading to the 1943 independence, with all the conflict in the public sphere and on the ground that preceded and followed it amidst the turmoil of World War II. Lebanon was trying to define its identity as a new state, and Farroukh's belief that "art is a tool for national understanding" could be applicable to questions of national cohesiveness and identity relevant to his own country.⁶³

To underscore the importance of the artist in promoting social harmony, Farroukh proposed a further analogy between his time and nineteenth-century England, as both periods seemed to him to give a disproportionate role to industry at the expense of art. He derived his argument from the theories of the English writer and philosopher John Ruskin, in whom he saw a fellow believer in the importance of

⁶¹ Hani Farroukh (Moustafa Farroukh's son) in discussion with the author (Beirut, April 2015).

⁶² Farroukh, "Min zawāya at-tarīkh al-fannī."

⁶³ *Ibid.*, "Kayfa nanḏuru."

art to build society's character. According to Farroukh, Ruskin was a kind of hero who rose against the social costs of mechanical production, and strove to use "beauty" (the arts) to combat Industrial England's materialism – its excessive desire to acquire and consume material goods.⁶⁴ Farroukh, nevertheless, did not share all of the views held by Ruskin, who famously supported painting with an explicit moralising content, and a revival of traditional handicrafts.⁶⁵ But the English thinker still provided him with an argument of authority to justify his own ideas about the part art could play in sociocultural development.

III. SAMPLES OF VISUAL COMMENTARY ON LEBANESE SOCIETY

A. Farroukh and Onsi's satire of the Beirut art public

For all of Farroukh's and Gemayel's insistence on the central role of the artist in social progress, instances of social commentary in Lebanese painters' works from the 1930s and 1940s are scarce. And when they appear, they seem more anecdotal than reflective of a deep sense of social duty. Since Farroukh's theories started with art's effect on the audience's taste, it seems logical that he first directed his visual social critique toward a public he found lacking. On two occasions, with him and Onsi, the verbal judgement of their supposedly aesthetically unsophisticated audience did indeed turn visual. Two works, *Women at the Exhibition* (1932), an oil painting by Onsi, and *Souvenir de l'exposition Farroukh 1933*, a postcard made by the painter in connection with one of his personal exhibitions, satirise the artists' educated urban public's behaviour towards

⁶⁴ Ibid., "Ṭalī'at al-fannānīn," 252-3.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art, 1750-2000* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113.

art, both involving the appearance of an unusual audience in the exhibition space (figs. 13-14). Taken at face value, the two images could look like caricatures of their protagonists.⁶⁶ However, they actually picture a paradoxical world where incongruous exhibition-goers counter-intuitively behave like the ideal audience, since they are curious about art for its own sake, regardless of the theme on show, in this case the nude – a genre whose very nature made controversial.

Onsi's *Women at the Exhibition* features a group of six veiled women, wearing the traditional *yachmak* covering their heads, although paired with short black dresses and stockings, a testimony to the gradual sartorial changes within the Sunni community in Beirut, who was increasingly embracing Western forms of women's dress, and sometimes supported women's choice to remove the veil.⁶⁷ Accompanied by a small boy, they hurry towards one of his paintings – quite an atypical behaviour in an art exhibition, where one usually walks slowly. It is plausible that their attire places the six women in Onsi's close social circles, although members of Onsi's educated family (his father was a prominent physician) might have been in some measure familiar with art viewing, and would thus have behaved according to exhibition-going conventions.⁶⁸ (Onsi's wife, who was French, was not veiled.) In any case, they are not representative of the painter's usual public, who was in large part Christian, as explained in chapter 3, and, when the work was exhibited, the appearance of "veiled young ladies" in the painting seemed surprising enough to be remarked

⁶⁶ This alternative interpretation of the postcard appears in Octavian Esanu and Kirsten Scheid, *The Arab Nude: The Artist as Awakener*, exhibition catalogue (American University of Beirut Art Galleries, 2016), 19.

⁶⁷ Kassir, *Beirut*, 315-16.

⁶⁸ The former analysis was proposed by Kirsten Scheid in "Painters, Picture-makers, and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Unsettled State" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005), 130.

upon by an *al-Ma`raḍ* journalist, who did not delve further into their background.⁶⁹ Onsi's usual public is there, too, on the right of the painting, represented by an elegant couple donning chic Western clothes: the man is wearing a Western suit, and the woman a white dress revealing her calves. Both seem more preoccupied by their conversation than by the art on display, a demeanour concurring with artists' and critics' denunciation of regular exhibition-goers' behaviour.

Farroukh's *Souvenir de l'exposition* shows an even more unusual public visiting his exhibition two villagers – a veiled older woman and a man wearing traditional *sberwal* pants and the then-anachronistic tarbush – intensely scrutinize one of his works. While it is clear that Farroukh entirely invented this scene, it remains to be determined whether Onsi worked from an actual situation, or made one up to comment on the practices of exhibition-going and viewing paintings, in particular the Nude. In the case of Onsi, viewers flock towards one of his paintings, which was perhaps exhibited at the School of Arts and Crafts in 1930, and, for Farroukh, the image seems to be based on his French mentor Paul Chabas's *Au Crépuscule* (1905), which Farroukh had previously reproduced (fig. 15).⁷⁰

Onsi's women and little boy, and Farroukh's villagers as well, thus stand in front of nudes, which were likely a novelty for them (at least for the latter), and which are traditionally considered a mark of taste and cultural distinction for the upperclass.⁷¹ The artistic nude is also a Western invention par excellence, and none of the viewers in the two paintings, at least going from their dress, fully adhered to a

⁶⁹ Al-Ma`raḍ, "Ma`raḍ al-fannān `Umar al-'Unsi."

⁷⁰ Esanu and Scheid, *The Arab Nude*, 18-19.

⁷¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge), 1984.

Westernised lifestyle, making the confrontation with the nude sharper. For the Westernised Lebanese art world of the 1930s, however, the nude was commonplace; Gemayel, for example, made it one of his specialties, and Saleeby was already noted for his in the 1920s. Farroukh and Onsi nevertheless did not often make oil paintings of nudes (Onsi did, however, produce many studies of them in charcoal or in ink), and their choice of having the six women and the boy look at a nude, instead of looking at examples of their more frequent landscapes, seems deliberately aiming at creating an unexpected situation that enables them to reflect on who appreciated their art and how – and whether – they did it.

Paradoxically, these newfound art lovers look at the nude with no prejudice. Although one cannot ascertain these viewers' opinion of the works, their interest is certain: although dumbfounded, as their body language shows, Farroukh's two peasants, despite their ignorance of the arts, make an effort to understand the image in front of them, and Onsi's women compete with one another for a view of the work. In both cases, the Nude is not an object of repulsion, but of attraction, albeit probably not of the sexual kind for the six women, a fact that somehow negates art historian T.J. Clark's standard definition of a Nude as, fundamentally, the construction of the image of a woman to satisfy the desires of male viewers.⁷² *Al-Ma`raḍ* described Onsi's women as "surprised," as if they neither a negative nor a positive impression of the artwork they observed.⁷³

Ultimately, Onsi's and Farroukh's unlikely exhibition visitors overturn the gender and class boundaries of the female nude, and act as the painters' ideal,

⁷²T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 131.

⁷³*Al-Ma`raḍ*, "Ma`raḍ al-fannān `Umar al-'Unsi."

culturally competent public, who holds the pure gaze of the true art connoisseur. But Farroukh's written criticism of art patrons centred as much on their lack of taste as it did on their apparent unwillingness to purchase paintings, and it is doubtful that the alternative audience of his and Onsi's Nudes could afford to acquire them, figuratively for the women, and literally for the villagers. Meanwhile, those that could purchase the paintings seem disinterested, as seen in Onsi's painting. Given that there would be no sale in either case, an audience that was at least attentive was the next best thing.

B. Two paintings of women by Farroukh as possible commentaries on the Lebanese women's condition

Two works by Farroukh depart from the usual representation of women in the Lebanese painting of the time, in which they were most often named sitters of portraits, anonymous peasants in rural scenes, or nude models: *Unveiled* (c. 1930) is a scene with an anonymous Sunni lady from Beirut, and the subject of *The Two Prisoners* (1929) resembles the invented odalisques of Orientalist art (figs. 16, 18). Although they could be construed as arguments supporting women's liberation, this analysis faces the risk of over-interpretation.⁷⁴

Unveiled highlights the subject's choice to remove her veil and take a stroll on her own, a controversial decision for a woman from Beirut's Sunni bourgeoisie around 1930, when many of them still dressed in head-to-toe black to step outside, with a *yashmak* covering the lower half of their faces. Middle- and upperclass Sunni women from Beirut rarely left the house unaccompanied, and parts of Sunni society preferred segregating men and women at social occasions and public venues like

⁷⁴ Scheid for instance makes this argument in "Necessary Nudes: Ḥadātha and Mu'āshira in the Lives of Modern Lebanese," *International Journal Of Middle Eastern Studies* 42 (2010): 203-230.

cinemas. Segments of Beirut's Sunni notability, however, increasingly accepted women's unveiling, and even encouraged it as a progressive gesture. This gradual rejection was actually not a Lebanese matter only, but happened in parallel with developments within Muslim communities in other countries: in 1922, for instance, Egyptian feminist Hoda Shaarawi famously removed her veil in public, while Atatürk instituted a ban upon it.⁷⁵ Farroukh's wife Soraya Tamim, whom he married around 1930, was not veiled.

Farroukh's unveiled young lady was not his only sitter from a Sunni background. Another image he made around 1930 shows another woman who, however, did keep her *yashmak* (fig. 17). The sitter likely posed in the painter's studio, where she could take more liberties with regards to her presentation; still, her commissioning a portrait denotes a certain readiness to show her face to the world. *Unveiled's* protagonist goes one step further, but does not radically remove her veil and only lifts it up to reveal a heavily made-up face. She has adopted the Western bright red lipstick, and accentuated the kohl around her eyes, a styling that had become accepted in the West in the previous decade, and was further popularised in the Arab world with Egyptian movie stars, who also abandoned the veil.⁷⁶ And if the young woman stands defiantly, she does not defy society, and protects herself from the crowd with a red umbrella. She is "unveiled" to a select audience only, and Farroukh never exhibited the painting, nor did he reveal her name, maybe out of fear of her circle's objections.⁷⁷ Considering this, the painting could hardly be part of a project to

⁷⁵ Kassir, *Beirut*, 316.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 315-16.

⁷⁷ Hani Farroukh, interview.

advocate women's rights – here, one centred on the question of removing the veil – throughout society at large. It does, however, document the margins of manoeuvre Sunni women then had as far as their public presentation went.

Meanwhile, in Farroukh's *The Two Prisoners*, a skimpily dressed woman reclines on a sofa in an oriental interior, with a caged bird as companion, inviting a comparison between their confinement and the social constraints placed on Lebanese women; moreover, her staring outside a window could signify a desire to escape. However, if the motif of the caged bird as a metaphor for secluded women recurs in European art history, it usually equates them as two beautiful things to possess. On the whole, what Farroukh's painting really corresponds to is to Orientalist painting's cliché of the odalisque – the sexually available harem courtesan – that had also been widely disseminated by native and foreign photographers in the Levant.⁷⁸

Indeed, Farroukh's lounging woman fully embodies the stereotype of the lascivious oriental seductress. The scene exudes exoticism in its decor, and the women's outfit, turban and jewellery, participate to the effect. Her translucent outfit reveals her curves, her legs are bare, and one of her breasts is exposed. The curves of the water pipe she smokes, too, are an echo of her body's. She is clearly the object of sexual desire of the ruler of the house, and of male viewers. Whether she wishes to escape is beside the point: viewers would not have seen in her a woman to be rescued, but one available for their pleasure.

Given that the painting is an outlier in Farroukh's body of work, it might have been a commission, and, as such, responded to the demands of one of his patrons for

⁷⁸ Ali Behdad and Luke Garland, *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013), 28.

this kind of image. Exactly why it was conceived and what use it had at the time is open to speculation; the patron, if there indeed was one, could have been looking for an erotic scene to enjoy privately, or for an imitation of Orientalist art, without necessarily endorsing the attendant ideology. Furthermore, images of Oriental women, real or imagined, made by Europeans, also describe the European perception of their own repressive social codes and values by providing a fantasy escape where possessing an eroticised “Other” is possible.⁷⁹ In a like manner, *The Two Prisoners*, made by a Westernised Lebanese painter, could point to the relationship that his likewise Westernised patrons entertained with their own social constraints. Nevertheless, although the painting hardly advocates women’s rights, it does not necessarily follow that it was made or understood by Farroukh with the principal goal of promoting traditional gender roles, which he, in any case, criticised privately.⁸⁰ Neither does *The Two Prisoners* deny Farroukh’s commitment to social progress. But it still reveals a paradoxical disjunction between the theories he put into words and the content of one of his works.

CONCLUSION

The three leading painters of 1930s and 40s Beirut, Moustafa Farroukh, César Gemayel, and Omar Onsi, posed as aestheticians, in a few conferences and articles. They admired, and believed they belonged to, European culture, and championed the aesthetic principles of conventional art academies. In fact, they vehemently rejected the modernist art of the French avant-gardes active in their lifetime. Twentieth-

⁷⁹ J.M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 64.

⁸⁰ Hani Farroukh, interview.

century European art, for the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, is intimately tied to modernity's "revolt against narrative, morality, and utility," but Lebanese artists sometimes equated avant-garde art with societal decadence.⁸¹ This denotes a certain social conservatism, and a fear that the artistic traditions they adhered to, as well as conventional bourgeois values, would dwindle under the weight of modernist art's competition.

To the three artists, the extent of acceptable innovation stopped at adopting aspects of Impressionism such as *plein air* landscape painting. Invoking this prestigious moment in art history not only allowed them to validate their artistic project, but the painters' reinterpretation of Impressionist landscape also served to differentiate them from the previous generation of Lebanese artists: Corm, Saleeby, and Serour typically worked from their studios and usually responded to portrait commissions, whereas Farroukh, Onsi, and Gemayel could freely choose their subjects, most often opting to paint Lebanese landscapes.

In parallel with proposing aesthetic principles, Farroukh and Gemayel theorised on the purpose of art in society. They outlined a theory of art as the expression of the artist's own emotions, which emphasises the autonomy of the artistic personality and reinforces the value of individual creativity. Moreover, Farroukh believed artists ought to educate the public's taste, by convincing them to appreciate European naturalist figuration. And if "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier," educating the public to art would give them a mark of social distinction,

⁸¹ Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (winter 1981): 5.

one, more specifically, defined by the appreciation of European art.⁸² And extrapolating his speech to the Lebanese context, Farroukh does seem to encourage the country as a whole to adopt aspects of European civilisation.

According to Farroukh, by elevating the public's taste, the artist would somewhat help improve society's moral behaviour, and, as a consequence, would play a critical part in sociocultural progress. His discourse remained on the conceptual, rather than the practical level, as neither he nor his colleagues detailed the ways artists should be engaged socially or politically, or broached the socio-political debates and events of the period. Farroukh invoked the Renaissance to support his claims that the role of the artist transcends time and space, and his, Gemayel's, and Onsi's, concept of civilisation development was patterned on the European notion of the term, inscribing Lebanese art in this tradition. Their speech was also ostensibly universal and designed to be applicable to any society, including Lebanon. Farroukh appears to have construed the latter as a coherent whole, and implicitly seems to have agreed with the official outlook his country took at independence, one of a country at once turned to the West and part of the Arab world, and marked by interfaith cooperation; yet he did not delve into nation building or the practical role of art within it. Ultimately, perhaps, such speeches were designed to convince the public of the significance of Lebanese artists' role, and could legitimise their place in Lebanese society and on the international cultural stage.

Despite inventing themselves an elevated role of social leaders, Lebanese painters rarely made works arguing for social change, propose social critique or

⁸² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 7.

address contemporary issues: it is hard to detect an outright moral or social message in their paintings of Lebanese scenes. Nonetheless, in a few cases, Farroukh and Onsi satirised the upperclass public of Beirut exhibitions by pitting them against incongruous, yet visibly attentive, visitors. In terms of commentaries on women's condition, Farroukh's *The Two Prisoners* centres less on the protagonist's supposed desire to escape her condition than on the construction of an erotic fantasy of the harem courtesan, perhaps revealing Farroukh's patrons' uneasiness with their own social constraints.

Nevertheless, for all the efforts Farroukh, Onsi or Gemayel made to assert their position in the cultural field, one still wonders whether their expounding on art theory and the social role of art really mattered for recognition. As seen in the previous chapter, Marie Hadad (1889-1973), another leading painter of 1930s-40s Beirut, enjoyed a successful career and critical success in Beirut and abroad without formal training, adhering to a precise rendering of the subject, or sticking to the rules of perspective (fig. 19). In addition, she did not put herself forward as an art theorist. Considering her case, it might be that the public and critics did not ascribe as considerable an importance to Farroukh's, Gemayel's and Onsi's positions as the painters would have wished, and that the conformity to the conventional figuration they promoted was not the only gauge of artistic appreciation.

CHAPTER 5

PAINTING AUTHENTIC LEBANON: THE LANDSCAPE AND ITS PEOPLE, 1930s-1940s

INTRODUCTION

During the second decade of the French Mandate and the post-independence years, Lebanese artists painted their own country. More specifically, they painted the long mountain range stretching across Lebanon, the mark of its topography and History. The prominent painters of this period, Omar Onsi (1901-1969), Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957), and César Gemayel (1898-1958), all converged towards the Mountain, and its landscapes and villages represent an overwhelming majority of their production, perhaps as much as 90% of their works combined.¹ The three painters were fundamentally urban – as discussed in chapter 3, they were graduates of European art academies, and lived and worked in Beirut – but they gravitated towards the Lebanese countryside where they spent considerable time. Onsi, the son of a successful Sunni physician from Beirut, owned a house in the village of Meyrouba, in the Christian region of Kesrwan, where he summered, and is also known for his images of Druze villages. Farroukh, also a Sunni from Beirut, but hailing from a more

¹ These statistical observations come from the examination of the paintings in the 250+ image database of paintings for this period built during the research for *Art from Lebanon: Modern and contemporary artists vol.1 1880-1975* (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), as well as of the available exhibition catalogues.

The three painters' careers continued in the 1950s, and the 1960s for Onsi. However, by then, their works were no longer entirely representative of the artistic scene, and modernist painters like Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994) and Shafic Abboud (1926-2004) came to the fore.

modest background, spent time in the Christian Metn region among other places, while Gemayel branched out of his native Maronite village of Ain el Touffaha in the Metn to paint other towns.

Their paintings of the Mountain and its inhabitants, who were in large majority Maronite and Druze, picture a fantasy of Lebanese authenticity. To do so, they drew from the panoply of European art's genres and pictorial strategies they had been introduced to during their studies; in particular, they adapted the framework of European landscape painting. Their paintings of a so-called genuine Lebanon thereby carry with them the ideological structure underlying the genre: a painting of a landscape does not show nature for its own sake, but represents an imaginary space where the urban audience could temporarily escape the city. Moreover, the Lebanese scenes of village life correspond to European genre painting, and the landscapes bring to mind the picturesque, both modes implicating the infusion of scenes with an ideal of timelessness that add to the effect of a rural utopia antithetical to the city.

The dynamics of European landscape painting concerned a bourgeois urban audience, and, likewise, Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi addressed an affluent public in Beirut, as seen in chapter 3. The artists' success is certainly due in great part to their satisfying the demands of patrons who belonged to the city's privileged milieu; thus, the artworks are likely to correspond to this audience's perception of the Mountain and to how they wished to see it depicted. And since this public represented only a very small part of the Lebanese population, it is doubtful that the paintings coincide with a nationalist project to represent certain conceptions of the Lebanese nation, whether using art to support the integration of Lebanon within a Syrian Arab

nationalist framework, or a “Lebanist” call for the independence of the nation as defined by its 1920 borders, or even maintaining the Mandate. Besides, the painters did not express such intent, as the analyses of their writings in the previous chapter showed. Art writers, however, could serve as an indicator of the way such artworks were received in the public sphere, and what kind, if any, ideological interpretation of the paintings they proposed. It seems that they eschewed contemporaneous political ideology debates: they rather saw in the Mountain villagers of the paintings aspirational examples of a virtuous Lebanese character, and praised their preservation of traditional activities, and, when looking at paintings of the unpeopled landscapes, they treated the scenes as an object of contemplation.

If Farroukh’s, Gemayel’s, and Onsi’s works represent an idealised version of Lebanon, it is especially because they disregard the socioeconomic facts of the Mountain. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s, the region was one of the driving forces of the country’s economy thanks to sericulture, but the industry steeply declined before and during the Mandate. Moreover, painters also discounted the physical encroachments of the city into the Mountain, and the economic ties between the two. The denial of modernity persisted in images of Beirut, where it was made to resemble a Mountain village, and its physical and social realities were denied.

I. PAINTING LEBANON: A PROJECT MADE IN BEIRUT, FOR BEIRUT

Considering that, in the 1930s and 1940s, Lebanese painters very frequently depicted landscapes of their own country, it is tempting to see in their works expressions of cultural nationalism, which proposes that artworks contending to embody the essence

of a land are geared towards celebrating nation building. Historically, many rulers indeed encouraged landscape painting with a nationalist content in order to impose their own ideologies on a supposed virgin territory, including notions of an authentic nation and of progress.² The imagery employed to consolidate the nation often included popular myths and epics of the struggling, yet triumphant, peoples, with the figure of the peasant or worker as a hero; this was the case for instance of Atatürk Turkey and of Soviet Union propaganda during the period coinciding with the French Mandate in Lebanon.³ Yet, systematically interpreting landscape painting as promoting the cult of the nation lacks nuance – it hardly applies to Impressionist landscapes, for instance.⁴

In Lebanon, artists such as Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi made no overt call for binding the nation together or consecrate it, and, when they painted the Mountain, they did not resort to myths or grand narratives. Moreover, their landscapes contend to timelessness, not to national progress. In fact, Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi did not express a commitment to using art to bring their audience together in a national project, neither through their works, nor in the context of their public discourse on art, as analysed in the previous chapter. They reflected no politically driven conceptions of Lebanon's identity, although, during the years they were active – the 1930s, 40s, and 50s – several competing ideologies found adherents in Lebanon.

² Denis Cosgrove, "Modernity, Community and the Landscape Idea," *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 1–2 (July 2006): 56–58. This is explicit, for instance, in nineteenth-century American landscapes of the West, capturing the territory's conquest.

³ John Hutchinson, "Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration," in *Nationalism*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 122–130.

⁴ Anthony Smith, for instance, draws such a link in relation to nineteenth-century French painting in its entirety, including artists as different as Courbet and Van Gogh ("'The Land and Its People': Reflections on Artistic Identification in an Age of Nations and Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2013): 87–106).

During the Mandate, “Lebanism” and Syrian Arab Nationalism faced off, while the Mandate authorities clung to their imperialist policies, and, especially starting the second half of the 1930s, an increasing number of politicians, most prominently Maronite Bechara El Khoury (1890-1964) and Sunni Riad Al Solh (1894-1951), worked towards independence, after which the identity of Lebanon remained controversial, despite the official ideology promoting Muslim/Christian cooperation. Painters, however, seem to have taken as a given the legitimacy of the 1926 Lebanese Republic and, after the country’s independence in 1943, they did not use, or claim to project to use, their art to reinforce concepts of Christian-Muslim partnership and of Lebanese particularism in the Arab World. Some of them, like Farroukh, might have nevertheless adhered to it, as chapters 1 and 4 suggested, but this did not reflect in his artistic production.

Indeed, the three painters’ works do not seek to rally viewers around one conception of a nation. First, although the paintings present the Mountain as the source of Lebanese authenticity, there is no sign that this constitutes a call to adopt a kind of Mountain nationalism, akin to some Maronite 1920s-30s propositions whereby Lebanon would shrink back to the borders of the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon, which was only unified with the coast and the Bekaa plain at the founding of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920, nor does it suggest that the Mountain had political significance. Second, after subjecting the works to critical analysis, one finds that the paintings’ outward smoothing out of the tensions between Beirut and the Mountain do not support the two regions’ coalescing under a shared nationalist ideology either. In reality, instead of promoting nation building, the

paintings propose the Mountain as a visual and lifestyle counterpoint to Beirut, instead of trying to reconcile urban and rural areas, or to unite disparate socioeconomic categories. The urban/rural dichotomy furthermore confirms the divorce between the paintings' content and the debates in the political sphere, where the main oppositions were drawn between Muslims and Christians, and between the Arab world and the West.

The circumstances of the display and reception of the artworks further invalidates the thesis that Lebanese painting constituted a promotion of some version of national identity. In fact, the way participants in the art world interacted within this world was irrelevant to their political opinions or their stance on the Lebanese nation, as seen in chapter 3. In order to have an effect on society at large, Lebanese painting should furthermore have been accessible to a wider spectrum of society, of different social categories, faiths, and regions. However, Farroukh's, Gemayel's, and Onsi's works only went on show at a few select venues in Beirut, and targeted a restricted patronage circle. Moreover, the authorities were little involved in the art world at large, while the opposite would likely have been the case had the mandatory authorities or the Lebanese government decided to use painting to advocate their preferred version of the Lebanese nation.

Furthermore, the commentators that covered the exhibitions set aside their political affiliations when talking about art, as seen in chapter 3: the question of national unity and progress were not part of their discourse around painting. Nevertheless, they supported a form of patriotism in their continuous support of Lebanese painters and their work. They extolled the beauty of the Lebanese natural

landscape, admired villagers as the painters represented them, and appreciated traditional scenes and unscathed nature. Yet, they did not seem to look for a representation of national progress. Moreover, they did not contend that the paintings represented an objective truth of Lebanon that the nation ought to celebrate, but underlined that the images were artistic constructions, as will be argued below.

II. THE MOUNTAIN'S SOCIAL LANDSCAPE: THE AUTHENTIC LEBANESE VILLAGE

Paintings of the Mountain's inhabitants and of their daily activities invite the affluent urban art public to behold a fabricated image of the supposedly uncorrupted rural life of Maronite and Druze villagers. In order to create such scenes, Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi, who had trained in the European artistic tradition, adapted strategies of genre painting, the European approach to the representation of the daily life of ordinary people. Ideologically speaking, genre painting implies representing the city's dominant point of view on the countryside, an interpretation pertinent to 1930s-40s Lebanon. Genre painting is not only a picture of the village, but also reveals much about the city, because the images often reflect the modern urban middle classes' aspirations to an unchanging lifestyle lived in an imagined arcadia, possibly in reaction to a certain discomfort with the frantic rhythm of modernity.⁵ In Lebanon, painters represented a seemingly ahistorical and idealised Mountain for an audience who lived in modern Beirut; moreover, they bypassed the contemporary transformations in the socioeconomic makeup of the Mountain.

The Mountain indeed changed drastically in the first half of the twentieth

⁵ Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 2; John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Paintings, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P, 1980), 16.

century, in its landscape, economy and demography. Since the inception of the autonomous Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire in 1860, sericulture had been the central economic activity of the region. The Mountain transformed into a monocrop export economy, with France as its principal commercial partner. Before World War I, mulberry trees covered almost half of the cultivated land, and silk thread amounted to half of the value of Beirut's exports, but starting the beginning of the twentieth century, competition from China and Japan decreased the profitability of the (tiny in comparison) Lebanese silk thread industry, which steadily declined in the 1920s. Although the French attempted to revive it, it collapsed in the 1930s in the aftermath of the Great Depression, and had all but disappeared in the 1940s.⁶

In parallel, agriculture also declined during the Mandate period and the decade following it. France did not focus on major investments in the sector, despite the fact that more than half of the population worked in agriculture, and preferred developing the market for French imported goods.⁷ The intensive use of the land made agriculture less efficient, and, as the two principal cultivated crops, wheat and barley, were no longer sustainable economically, since Lebanon could not respond to the demands of the local market, their price increased tenfold between 1938 and 1953, which meant they had to be imported.⁸ Concurrently, the rupture of the common market with Syria, when the French Mandate came to an end in both countries, also

⁶ Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72-73; Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (New York: Pluto Press, 2012), 93.

⁷ Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest, The Search for a National Identity, 1926-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 86.

⁸ Norman Lewis, "Lebanon. The Mountain and Its Terraces," *Geographical Review* 43, no. 1 (1953): 2,6.

had adverse consequences for Lebanese agriculture and the Lebanese economy in general. In particular, the abandonment of a common currency with Syria, and the latter raising tariffs, meant that Lebanon had to turn to other sources for grain, such as the United States.⁹ Around 1950, Lebanese agriculture had considerably diversified, in part because France had encouraged peasants to do so during the Mandate: the cultivation of fruit, olives, and grapes (a large proportion of it destined to make wine), amounted to two thirds of the production; the rest encompassed an array of crops, among them apples, pears, plums and cherries in the Mountain, as well as bananas and citrus in the plain.¹⁰ The production of the latter, backed by financiers who saw in it a profitable, exportable, good, had in fact surpassed silk's in the 1920s; however, Lebanese citrus was eclipsed by the production of Mandate Palestine in the following decade.¹¹

As a consequence of the radical transformation of the Mountain economy, a considerable part of the region's income, since the 1910s, came from sources other than farming, notably émigrés' remittances and the earnings of villagers who left to work in Beirut. Before World War I, an estimated 100,000 mainly Christian men had already left Lebanon in search for better opportunities abroad, especially in the United States, as sericulture started declining. Then, the catastrophic famines of World War I and the further collapse of the silk thread industry spurred thousands more to leave for North and South America, and to a lesser extent to Europe.¹² In fact, estimations

⁹ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 355.

¹⁰ Lewis, "The Mountain," 6-10; Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest*, 86.

¹¹ Simon Jackson, "Mandatory Development: The Political Economy of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon, 1915-1939" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2009), 374.

¹² Beinun, *Workers and Peasants*, 73; Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 92.

suggest that more than half a million people of Syro-Lebanese origin lived outside the Levant in the mid-1920s.¹³ Emigration not only partially emptied out the Mountain, but modified its gender balance: working in silk factories for low wages was often conceived of as women's work, which meant that men emigrated in greater proportions.¹⁴ By 1950, the trend towards emigration had not abated. Not all villagers seeking to relocate left the country: the rural exodus made Beirut's population double in the 1920s, reaching an approximate 160,000 in 1932.¹⁵ There, villagers settled in poorer suburbs sprouting on the outskirts of the city, often clustering together with people from their village in one neighbourhood, as will be described below.¹⁶

A. The aspirational model of the Lebanese villager

As villagers sought out better opportunities abroad and in Beirut, painters, by contrast, proposed the Mountain as an authentic refuge from city life. In the 1930s and 1940s, artistic representations of the Mountain's inhabitants and customs were effectively divorced from the actual circumstances of the region: painters like Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi showed villages almost stuck in time. These images do not denote cultural inferiority, nor do they convey disdain for rural dwellers; on the contrary, commentators rather admired the depicted villagers. They held them as genuine and aspirational figures conveying character strength and virtue, and praised

¹³ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 394.

¹⁴ Beinín, *Workers and Peasants*, 67.

¹⁵ Kassir, *Beirut*, 267; William Harris, *Lebanon : A History, 600-2011* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2012), 187. The numbers are not fully reliable, since the 1921 census only counted those who wished to be so.

¹⁶ Kassir, *Beirut*, 300.

their perpetuation of traditional activities; for these reasons, they encouraged viewers to identify with them.

Commentators perceived portraits of male villagers as the embodiments of positive Lebanese values; they especially admired their ability to manage their relationship with nature, an effort unknown to city dwellers (figs. 1-5). According to the French painter and art critic Georges Cyr, for instance, the men Onsi depicted must have been clever, because they could “handle [...] the skies’ capriciousness” and were able to “read in the shape of a cloud over the moon the rain and blight of the next morning.” They seemed shrewd too, as they had “no qualms about scheming to foil nature’s plans.”¹⁷ Furthermore, several commentators specifically presented the villagers as aspirational Lebanese figures, which their readers might be encouraged to take as models. A reviewer of Farroukh’s 1929 personal exhibition at the American University of Beirut, for example, judged that the painter’s pictures of peasants revealed “the struggles [of those] that toil the earth [and] have to deal with the harshness of nature.” They were models of hard work, and their “dependence on the vicissitudes of nature,” the writer explained, built character and magnified the Lebanese personality.¹⁸ In the end, *al-Makshūf* (The Exposed) concluded in 1938 that villagers, as Farroukh painted them, were “glorious symbols” of the Lebanese character, because of their resilience and profound intelligence, and were examples for all of those who cherished their land, namely, Lebanon.¹⁹

¹⁷ Georges Cyr, “Onsi, Omar. Peintre” [Onsi, Omar. Painter.] *L’Orient*, October 29, 1949.

¹⁸ Youssef Ghossoub, “Al-Ma`raḡ al-kabīr lil-‘istād Muṣṭafa Farrūkh” [The Large Exhibition of Master Moustafa Farroukh], *Al-Aḡrār*, 1929.

¹⁹ Shafīq Ḥātem, “Khaṭar al-madāres al-shāḡa fi afsād ḡauquna al-fanni” [The Dangers of Abnormal Schools on the Perversion of our Artistic Taste], *Al-Makshūf* 145 (1938).

The unchanging nature of the Lebanese villager in Farroukh's, Gemayel's, or Onsi's paintings can also be approached through the lens of costume, since traditional dress denotes attachment to unchanging norms.²⁰ By contrast with villagers, the majority of the participants in Beirut's art world wore European clothes. As seen in chapters 2 and 4, in the 1930s, men seldom still donned the tarbush headpiece, Christian women wore European dresses and Sunni women were starting to remove their veils and swap their characteristic black dresses for imported ones. But part of Beirut's population, usually the more modest categories, still donned traditional forms of dress, such as the wide *shermal* male pants, which Farroukh showed a Beirut street seller of fruit wearing (fig. 6). Traditional attire was, however, more visible in the Mountain, and throughout the three painters' village scenes, costume not only confirms the perpetuation of tradition, but also helps distinguish between the communities living there, chiefly the Maronites and the Druzes. Hence, for example, Maronite male peasants are shown wearing the *shermal*, and on their head their traditional headpiece called a *labbade*, a conic hat made of wool (figs. 5, 11). Farroukh painted a focused Maronite woman making bread bare-armed, with a shawl loosely tied around her neck; this styling reappears in a portrait by Gemayel (figs. 7-8). In both cases, the subjects wear Western-style shirts and skirts, but the loose scarf however denotes traditional attire, as the Beirut bourgeoisie no longer wore it. The elongated silhouettes of the Druze women that Onsi painted more effectively bring to mind the perpetuation of traditional dress, since they all sport their characteristic long white veil (figs. 9, 11, 15-16).

²⁰Jennifer M. Scarce, *Women's Costume of the Near and Middle East* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 124.

B. Villages as sites of community and traditional production

Farroukh's, Gemayel's, and Onsi's images of daily activities of Mountain women further emphasise the persistence of ancient practices. These are not the glorious mythical traditions of overtly nationalist paintings found in other countries, but prosaic agricultural and craft activities, whose production could be seen in all Beirut homes. But if the focus is placed on such activities, neither the images nor the writing around them advocate abandoning the modern economy in favour of a return to manual labour. Lebanese village scenes generally describe a light-hearted lifestyle anchored in reassuring ancient practices, and a sense of communal cooperation. In European painting, such scenes of rural daily life, as art historians hold, were particularly appealing to an urban public who lived in the midst of rapid modernisation, and may have wished to temporarily escape the uniform and frenetic city life.²¹ In Lebanon too, such images could have spoken to urban viewers looking for an imagined rural peacefulness, where a sense of community still prevailed, perhaps unlike in the modern city. Moreover, when taken as a whole, Farroukh's and Onsi's scenes of daily Mountain life depict Maronites and Druzes as sharing a common lifestyle and a sort of cultural unity in spite of religious difference, a counterpoint to the Beirut political sphere's sectarian tensions.

The three painters illustrated the production of two staples of the Lebanese diet, with scenes of activities dating back millennia: the olive harvest, and baking the *markouk* flatbread on the ancestral wood-fired metallic dome oven (figs. 7, 10, 11). During this period, in Beirut, olive oil came from the Mountain already bottled in jars,

²¹ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170; Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*, 3; Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 2.

and Beirut's bourgeois women seldom baked their bread themselves. The paintings thus remind viewers that the Mountain is historically at the origin of the city's sustenance, but suggest so in an idealistic, unproblematic way. Moreover, images of olive picking demonstrate a certain spirit of cooperation, one that might be dwindling in the individualistic and capitalist city: Onsi's olive pickers gossip, sheltered by tree branches, and Farroukh shows coordinated action in the different steps of the task, from shaking the olives off the tree to the filling a jute bag with them (figs. 12-13).

The motif of women going to the well also recurs – in the 1930s and 1940s, many Lebanese villages did not have running water, in contrast with Beirut.²² As the newspaper *al-Jumhūr* (The People) indicated in 1931, Farroukh's depictions of such scenes reflected an activity “that we encounter in every one of our villages, where the women come to the spring every morning to fill their jars, singing local songs” (figs. 14-16).²³ In this sense, the importance of the scenes do not lie in the women's activity per se, but in its presentation to urban readers as an aspirational ideal of communal joyfulness and of historical continuity. In 1948, *L'Orient* offered a comparable assessment of Onsi's scenes of village women at the well, and spoke of “mourners” – a reference to the black dress of Druze women – “transformed into an graceful swarm [...] dancing a light dance [...] with a certain *joie de vivre*” (figs. 15-16).²⁴

A comparison with paintings of peasants from the same period and region could clarify the role that Lebanese critics ascribed native villagers. In 1920s Atatürk Turkey,

²² Souraya Tomb, the author's aunt, in discussion with the author (July 2015, Beirut).

²³ *Al-Jumhūr*, “Farrūkh fannān yaghmas rīchatihī fī qalbihī” [Farroukh is an artist who dips his brush in his heart], undated (c. 1930s).

²⁴ Victor Hakim, “Tableau de la Peinture libanaise. Omar Ounsi” [A Panorama of Lebanese Painting. Omar Ounsi], *L'Orient*, 24 November 1948.

the figure of peasant/farmer was built into an authentic popular hero because of his productivity, and was frequently endowed with a central nation-building role in painting as well as in countless propaganda images. Atatürk's version of cultural nationalism hoped that showing paintings of peasants to the public would encourage society to be inspired by their work ethic, to adopt ancestral rural traditions, and to find in them guidance to inspire the nation's modernisation.²⁵ In Lebanon however, neither Onsi nor Farroukh or Gemayel invoked collective myths fostering national cohesion, nor did they present villagers as leaders of national progress. Art writers, in turn, saw in Lebanese villagers timeless symbols of moral character and praised them for perpetuating traditions, not for their productivity. Moreover, the figure of the Lebanese villager of the paintings did not reach a general audience, but an elite circle of viewers, and it was not a subject of state propaganda as in Turkey for instance. The Lebanese villagers might rather be construed as objects onto which Beirut's art public could possibly project a rural fantasy, away from the city's activity.

C. The Bedouins and Lebanese Orientalist-like painting

If paintings of Lebanese villagers were interpreted as example of righteous character, the Bedouins were proposed as a counterfigure. In paintings, they constituted an alter ego to both city and Mountain dwellers, as they were represented as different from both groups in dress, occupation and lifestyle. Bedouins were semi-nomadic, and lived at a physical distance from the Lebanese, for many of them in the highlands and the

²⁵Z. Y. Yaman and F. Deroche, "The Theme of Peasants and Farmers in Turkish Painting," in *Art Turc/Turkish Art* (Geneva: Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Turkish Art, 1995), 751–56; Metin And, "Atatürk and the Arts, with Special Reference to Music and Theater," in *Nationality and Nationalism*. Volume IV., eds. Athena S. Leoussi and Stephen Grosby (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 105.

Bekaa valley, where men worked as shepherds and herdsmen. The women, however, could sometimes be seen in Beirut, where some of them would go door-to-door to sell culinary and medicinal herbs.²⁶ Marie Hadad made them pose for her, and their portraits were key to her success in Beirut and Paris in the 1930s and 1940s, as discussed in chapter 3. She was not alone in taking interest in Bedouins: in the 1920s already, Habib Serour (1863-1938) was known for painting them, and in the 1930s and 1940s, critics noted images of highlanders by Onsi and Farroukh (figs. 17-24).

In many respects, the Lebanese paintings of Bedouins conform to the mechanism of French and British Orientalist painting, premised on the representation of a non-Western “Other” for a Western urban audience.²⁷ In Lebanon however, the ideology of Orientalist art was displaced: unlike the latter, the local paintings did not participate in reinforcing Western imperialism’s global hegemony, but illustrated dynamics internal to Lebanon by implying an antinomy between the Westernised, affluent urban art public, and “Others” dwelling on the same territory.

Lebanese paintings of Bedouins and Orientalist ones converge to hypothesize the supposed backwardness of their subjects, a negative perception of the “Other” that goes together with a fascination with their difference. In Lebanon, painters emphasised the contrast between the Lebanese’s and the Bedouins’ external appearance, beginning with their skin tone, and, most visibly, their costumes, a conspicuous means of ethnic differentiation (which European painters who visited the

²⁶ Joseph Tarrab (historian of Lebanese art) in discussion with the author, December 20, 2013.

²⁷ J.M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xiii.

Levant also used).²⁸ Female Bedouin dress in particular underscored the sartorial difference with Beirut: whereas Beirut's Christian bourgeois women had adopted Western fashions since the 1890s, and an increasing proportion of affluent Sunnis were doing likewise and sometimes removed their veils in the interwar period, Bedouin women wore long-sleeved, often ornamented, dresses and cloaks, and a headscarf around their heads, sometimes wrapped in a turban. Their hair was often braided, and their body adornments added to their exoticism, as painters called attention to their oversized gold jewellery, the thick kohl around their eyes, and their henna tattoos (figs. 17, 21-24).²⁹ Hadad's sensual female Bedouins especially embody the stereotype of the mysterious and dangerous, yet attractive, "Other" of Orientalist painting, both in the way the painter represented them and in the eyes of Beirut art critics.³⁰ Their facial expressions denote a certain sexualized character; they stare at the viewer intently with hints of fear or taunting in their inviting stares. (One of them is even called *Jarwa*, in other terms "prostitute" (fig.22).) As such, Hadad's portraits of female Bedouins are the diametrical opposite of the rather stiff ones of Lebanese upperclass women of the period, and oppose bourgeois conceptions of acceptable female behaviour, which were examined in chapter 2.

Moreover, images perceived as displays of uncontained sexuality and of unsettling difference, according to European racist theories, were a sign of a people's unhealthiness and dangerous bestiality. Indeed, several Lebanese commentators

²⁸ Scarce, *Women's Costume*, 118.

²⁹ Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (Paris: ACR Édition Internationale, 1985), 83.

³⁰ Rana Kabbani, "Regarding Orientalist Painting Today," in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Nicholas Tromans (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 42.

perceived Bedouin society – women as well as men – as backwards, even dangerous. *Al-Aḥrār* (The Freeman) for example deemed the Bedouins Farroukh featured in his 1929 exhibition “unhealthy but not sick, and lazy but not sloths.”³¹ To another reviewer of the show, they seemed distressingly inscrutable.³² Likewise, *L’Orient* felt that their stares, a mirror of their souls, were “deep, untamed, and hallucinating.”³³ Hadad herself called “savage” the eyes of a young Bedouin she had painted; the pamphlet published for her 1937 show straightforwardly characterised her female sitters as “authentic primitive creatures” with a bestial attitude and cruel eyes.³⁴

The fear of the “Other” went together with his or her sexual lure, which commentators also perceived in the Bedouins’ eyes. Hence, in a *Phénicia* magazine review of the 1939 Salon des Amis des Arts, a collective art exhibition, Hadad’s Bedouins’ “passionate and sad [...] ardent eyes” were said to reflect their “fervour” and to “invite the viewer,” one assumes, to sensual experiences.³⁵ Yet, if Hadad’s female Bedouins elicited in the press (and perhaps in the public too) the expression of a desire for the sexually attractive yet possibly dangerous “Other,” the art writers’ attitude also likely denoted a degree of envy of those who lived outside the strict norms of bourgeois behaviour.³⁶ In practice, female Bedouins had more liberty of movement on the city streets than women of the Christian and Muslim bourgeoisie,

³¹ Ghossoub, “Al-Ma`raḡ al-kabīr.”

³² Kamāl An-Nāfi, “‘Ala ṭarīq aḡiya’ al-fann” [On the road to Art], *Al-Aḡwāl*, June 1, 1929.

³³ M.D., “Nos Reportages. La Semaine de La Peinture. Nos Peintres. Mourani-Farouk-Onsi” [Our reports. Painting week. Our Painters. Mourani-Farouk-Onsi], *L’Orient*, 1932.

³⁴ “La Peinture libanaise (VI): Marie Haddad,” *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient arabe*, January 25, 1943; Louis Vauxcelles, “Marie Hadad Œuvres Récentes 1937 Galerie Rotge Paris” [Marie Hadad recent works 1937. Rotge gallery Paris], Brochure (Paris: 1937).

³⁵ Joseph Oughourlian, “Le Salon,” *Phénicia*, May 1938.

³⁶ Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory*, 164.

and, thus, many believed, enjoyed more sexual liberties.³⁷

III. THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE AS THE ESSENCE OF LEBANON

When Lebanese artists depicted expansive Mountain landscapes viewed from afar, they tended to erase human presence, and turned the land into a virgin territory ripe to serve as a receptacle for Beirut's rural fantasy (figs. 25-35). By doing so, Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi, three urban painters trained in Europe, reproduced the dynamics of Western landscape painting as practiced since the eighteenth century: the painting of a landscape is not a neutral representation of the land, but shows a land mediated by the culture and the ideological beliefs of the bourgeois society that produces the painting, thereby revealing this group's conception of themselves and of the world around them.³⁸ Moreover, according to art historians of landscape painting, given that the European urban bourgeoisie could not experience rural life on a daily basis, but desired to dominate what they thought of as an entirely natural space, art could enable them to fill the landscape with their wishes for a life antithetical to their own.³⁹

Since Lebanese painters worked in the European artistic tradition, and their Westernised Beirut audience was used to and appreciated their style, the ideological implications of European landscape painting can provide a starting point for the analysis of the Lebanese one. In this perspective, paintings of the Mountain do not simply represent rural scenes, but also imply the relationships between the capital city and the Mountain. Moreover, they could address prosperous Beirutis' nostalgia for a

³⁷ Tarrab, interview.

³⁸ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 9, 14.

³⁹ Alan Wallach, "Between Subject and Object," in *Landscape Theory*, eds. Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2008), 317.

disappearing way of life, and project a utopian alternative to modern city life, where the complicated connections between Beirut and the Mountain, economic and otherwise, would not exist.

A. The hidden Mountain life and its ties to Beirut

Many Lebanese landscape paintings fall more specifically under the umbrella of picturesque aesthetics. The category of the picturesque, as elaborated by eighteenth-century British writers such as Uvedale Price around 1800, describes what falls between Burke's sublime and his beautiful; in art, it designates scenes neither canonically beautiful, nor awe-inspiring. Picturesque landscape painting generally depicts a nature that is believed to be resistant to change, and constructs a rural utopia for the urban middle classes by involving an iconography that favours rough, wild, and irregular nature, and stresses variety instead of man-made organisation.⁴⁰

The expansive landscapes Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi painted indeed delineate the natural and topographical variety of the allegedly unscathed scenes: the man-made elements are downplayed in comparison to the assemblage of valleys, peaks and vegetation. Simultaneously, they claim to show virgin lands by attempting to mask the reality of human interference on the land, since they minimise settlements and labour. Moreover, they try to conceal the physical traces of Beirut's intrusion in the countryside, notwithstanding the considerable changes in the Mountain's economy and social landscape. The paintings' masking of Beirut/Mountain interconnections in favour of an unspoiled countryside could also be a reflection of the urban

⁴⁰ Andrew Ballantyne, "The Picturesque and its Development," in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 116.

community's ambivalence towards their own modern socioeconomic circumstances, which could thus further explain their wish to experience something supposedly more authentic.⁴¹

A painting of a landscape fundamentally represents the way humans want to organise space and time, and even when emptied out of people, the nature depicted reveals interactions between the countryside and the urban sociocultural and political elites.⁴² So although the distant perspective sometimes employed to paint landscapes of the Mountain do not allow for detailed human figures and thus naturally focus on the depiction of large-scale natural elements, the paintings still reveal traces of human presence, which painters minimise, and which point to the Mountain's inscription in a wider modern economic system. The stone houses are the most obvious signs of human presence in the images, but painters sometimes have them blend with the rocks, or melt within the hills – often, they treat them as blocks that merge into the natural landscape and share its colour scheme (figs. 25-30, 34-35). Their red-tile roofs, despite their inscription in a nature presented as immune to time and human intervention, are actually neither ancient nor local, but a nineteenth-century import from Marseilles. Paintings hint at further signs of economic activity linking the Mountain to the city and beyond: the cultivated terraced slopes in Farroukh's and Onsi's works were used for agricultural production intended for both local and urban consumption, but this activity is not detailed.

⁴¹ Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, 151.

⁴² W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.

In Lebanese landscape painting, the city's domination can be symbolised by the urban viewer's visual control of a Mountain scene from above, and from a distance, taking on the position to experience what has been called the panoptic sublime, or the sense that the dominating gaze turns into sudden possession of an unknown land.⁴³ The arrangement recurs in Farroukh's and Onsi's works painted from the top of a hill from which one looks over the valleys below (figs. 25-27). It is as if painters allowed their urban audience to survey nature, villages, and the cultivated terraces, and symbolically appropriate them all. At other times, the painting lets the viewer physically penetrate the scene by climbing from Beirut to the Mountain. In two landscapes by Farroukh, a road starts at the lower edge of the canvas and enters the landscape, soon diving deep into it, thus leading the audience to immerse themselves completely in the Mountain, before presumably reaching their village destination (figs. 28-29). Gemayel also used this kind of setup, in a painting where the pine trees almost cover the road (fig. 30).

The bucolic paths to the Mountain that Farroukh painted might well symbolise the road urban dwellers took to get from Beirut to the village, and between villages. Indeed, during the Mandate period, Beirut and the Mountain became more physically connected than ever, since the mandatory authorities progressively covered Lebanon and Syria with a network of asphalted roads facilitating car riding. Yet, painters downplay the modernity of the journey undertaken by urban dwellers to visit the Mountain, concealing not only the roads, but also the cars. Although certain scholars

⁴³Wallach, "Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 81.

have described the Mandate-era new roads in terms of devices that the “colonial” state employed to demonstrate its power and to represent itself, the roads in the paintings, in effect, highlight the connections and differences between city and village rather than reinforcing the inequalities between the “mobile” colonisers and the “immobile” colonised.⁴⁴ The middle and upper classes from Beirut who used the mountain roads were not the passive recipients of new roads, but took advantage of them for their own recreation, as the habit of summering in the Mountain took hold.⁴⁵

Relatedly, when the paintings allude to walking up the Mountain, they belie the modernity of the actual means by which one got there – by automobile, which made the trip quicker than ever. In 1930s Beirut, cars were increasingly becoming an essential means of private and public transportation, and around 20,000 automobiles rode on the Lebanese roads in the early 1930s.⁴⁶ They doubled as recreational tool for the affluent classes, to reach vacation destinations or simply to show off.⁴⁷ Thus, by cancelling cars out, painters conceal both the tool that enabled the physical penetration of the Mountain and affluent urbanites’ conspicuous consumption. In the paintings, arriving to villages looked almost magical, and the landscape remained pure for the city to enjoy, literally free from modern pollution.

⁴⁴ See Kristin V. Monroe, “Automobility and Citizenship in Interwar Lebanon,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* vol. 34 (2014): 518, 522.

⁴⁵ Kassir, *Beirut*, 274.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁴⁷ Monroe, “Automobility and Citizenship,” 520.

B. The aesthetic focus on Lebanon's natural beauty

Critical praise for the picturesque

Contemporary commentators glossed over the connections between Beirut and the Mountain implied in landscape painting, and over the socioeconomic changes of the Mountain the images masked. Instead, they concentrated on the landscape's beauty, which they perceived as the distinctive mark of Lebanese authenticity and a source of patriotic pride. Thus, the essence of Lebanon was defined as aesthetic, rather than based on an ideological interpretation of paintings' content, and critics essentially found it in the paintings' picturesque and supposed timeless qualities.

Commentators praised the way painters provided an inventory of the mineral and vegetal elements characteristic of Lebanon and used them to build images of an allegedly virgin land. Hence, in 1937, *L'Orient* observed that Onsi's paintings frequently featured many species of indigenous trees, such as the pine and the mulberry tree ("the traditional guardian of our houses" – as opposed to the historical source of income for villagers), alongside waterfalls and rocks; taken together, these constituted "a magnificent ensemble that characterises Lebanese landscapes."⁴⁸ When critic Victor Hakim wrote a profile of Onsi for the same newspaper in 1948, he also marvelled at the painter's inclusion in his works of the myriad plant species found in the country, from fruit (apples), to flowers (tulips, anemones, poppies), to pine and sycamore trees, among many others.⁴⁹ Onsi's close-up scenes of nature demonstrate his picturesque outlook, in the way he enhanced the tonal contrasts between the

⁴⁸ Jean Debbané, "Visite à la galerie libanaise. Omar Onsi" [A visit to the Lebanese Gallery. Omar Onsi], *L'Orient*, March 4, 1937.

⁴⁹ Hakim, "Omar Ounsi."

rough stony mountains and the untamed variegated flora and minimized human presence to a seemingly abandoned traditional three-arcaded house, a “ruin” also in line with the picturesque (figs. 31-32). This outlook actually pervades the majority of landscape paintings by Onsi and his colleagues, all of which juxtapose and highlight the rougher, arid, mountain peaks, the greener hills, and various species of pine trees and assorted vegetation. Critics were appreciative: overall, writer Rushdi Ma`lūf asserted in 1947 after visiting a collective exhibition of Lebanese art, all painters succeeded in doing justice to “the variety in our land’s nature, in its colours, shapes and views.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, art writers often appreciated the way painters hid traces of human occupation and attempted instead to picture an ahistorical landscape where nature seemed to override man-made elements. A reviewer of the 1939 Salon des Amis des Arts (a collective exhibition surveying local contemporary painting), for instance, marvelled at a painting by Farroukh where a village was hidden by pine trees and overtaken by the blue and green expanses of the sky and forest, the setting sun and the clouds.⁵¹ Similarly, in 1938, *al-Adīb* (The Writer) had praised Gemayel for concealing “crowns of red tiles among a large expanse of trees and a piece of a shadowy mountain.”⁵² The painter indeed pictured villages literally engulfed by nature (fig. 30).

Yet, the crux of Lebanon’s exalted beauty, several art writers agreed, was the Mountain summits themselves. The top of the mountain range, rising above 3000

⁵⁰ Rushdi Ma`lūf, “Ma`raḡ al-funūn al-jamīla” [The Fine Arts Exhibition], *Al-Mashriq*, March 1947.

⁵¹ Farid El Assi, “Le Salon,” *Phénicia*, June 1939.

⁵² Ḥātem, “Khaṡar al-madāres.”

metres, indeed dominates numerous landscape paintings. With Farroukh, summits can stretch across the horizon (figs. 28, 29, 34); with Onsi, they might appear as an imposing arid mass rising above a receding line of trees (fig. 26); with Gemayel, they can push the viewer into a dizzy, colourful, whirlwind (fig. 33). Painters often represented Mount Sannin, a peak visible from Beirut and covered in snow winter-long. Gemayel, for instance, depicted it as a powerful presence in shades of pink, clashing with the green valleys and towering above hillside villages. Mount Sannin also occupies the background of many of Farroukh's landscapes (fig. 28, 34). When he exhibited one such picture in 1932, *L'Orient* described the summit as emerging from a "purple sunset, over the dark pine treetops [...] with a moving simplicity that expresses the majesty of one of the most beautiful Lebanese landscapes," and *Al-Jumhūr* (The People) too saw in Farroukh's works a homage to the "eternal" mountains that define Lebanon, encouraging all of Lebanon to take pride in the country's beauty.⁵³

Perhaps more so than the natural landscape's topography and vegetation, it is actually the Lebanese sunshine that critics seem to have taken as the ultimate defining element of the landscape's beauty, and the decisive source of patriotism as far as art was concerned. In fact, Farroukh, Onsi, and Gemayel distinctly relied on sunlight, which coincided with their interest in the Impressionist study of the changing light on a scene (which was described in the previous chapter), and commentators found in their works the validation of the significance of light. As *al-Mashriq* (The Levant) affirmed in 1941 in an overview of the local artistic landscape, it was the "horizons

⁵³ M.D., "Nos Reportages. La semaine de la peinture," *Al-Jumhūr*, "Farrūkh fannān yaghmas rīshatīhi."

and radiant light” that encapsulated the “truth of the atmosphere of the country.”⁵⁴ A contributor to *Phénicia* echoed the opinion: the Lebanese sun, he wrote, has “multiple souls that constantly renew life [and] animates the landscape to the point it can become its essential object.” To this writer, the Lebanese sun looked all the more worthy of patriotic glorification that it was an international mark of distinction, because Europe only “knows foggy skies [...] and cannot envision the radiant Lebanese sun.”⁵⁵ The Lebanese sun furthermore differentiated Lebanon from neighbouring states, and Onsi’s paintings appeared to prove the point. The painter had travelled to and painted Syria and Jordan, where, according to Maurice Sacre, who wrote in *L’Orient*, he had learned to “seize the multiplicity of Oriental light, which is intense in the desert, and more diluted as one approaches the Mediterranean.” However, to this writer, Onsi’s paintings of Lebanese landscapes underscored the supremacy of the Lebanese light.⁵⁶

The landscape as aesthetic object

Art writers’ praise for the picturesque aspect of Lebanese landscape paintings suggests that it was the aesthetic effects of the Mountain’s distinctive elements that constituted a source of patriotic pride. Writers, in fact, were aware that what they deemed the source of Lebanese authenticity was not the physical Mountain, but the Mountain as aesthetic object, once painters had transformed sights into a contained artistic image. Thus, *al-Jumbūr* explained, Farroukh’s paintings of “this living paradise we call

⁵⁴ *Al-Mashriq*, “Mazāhir al-thaqāfa al-fanniyya: at-taṣwīr” [A look at the artistic culture: painting], July-September 1941.

⁵⁵ El Assi, “Le Salon.”

⁵⁶ Maurice Sacre, “Visite à l’exposition des artistes libanais” [A Visit to the Exhibition of Lebanese Artists], *L’Orient*, May 3, 1947.

Lebanon” were artistic interpretations, not objective representations, of the country’s “greatest views and farthest landscapes.”⁵⁷ Likewise, *al-Aḥrār* marvelled at the way his brush “transformed [scenes] into a picture of wonderful beauty in front of which the viewer remains delighted and bewildered” (emphasis mine).⁵⁸ Farroukh too, in fact, acknowledged that an artwork was an image inevitably filtered through the artist’s intentions and expectations.⁵⁹

The discourse around Onsi’s paintings perhaps best illustrates critics’ awareness that the Lebanese landscape as seen in paintings was in fact an artistic fabrication. In 1931, *al-Mashriq* remarked that his works were not exact renditions of the landscape but “transcend[ed] the everyday.”⁶⁰ *L’Orient* likewise maintained, in a 1948 profile of the painter, that his brush made mountains lose their material quality, and that his rendering of light “shifted shapes and rocks.”⁶¹ Onsi’s works even seemed to invoke sensorial experiences: one writer thought that he “infused landscapes with a spirit of a dream, of a deep ecstasy,” where “mountains dance like mirages,” and another that the trees he painted resembled “tents sheltering lovers.”⁶²

The French painter and art critic Georges Cyr’s 1949 text on Onsi was even clearer on the fact that Onsi’s paintings were born from his choice to transform the scene he chose to represent. According to Cyr, the painter only pretended to “show

⁵⁷ Al-Jumhūr, “Farrūkh fannān yaghmas rīshatihi.”

⁵⁸ Youssef Ghossoub, “Al-Ma’raḡ al-kabīr lil-’istād Muṣṭafa Farrūkh” [The Large Exhibition of Master Moustafa Farroukh], *Al-Aḥrār*, 1929.

⁵⁹ Moustafa Farroukh, “Ṭalī’at al-fannānīn al-lubnaniyyīn” [The Forerunners of Lebanese Art] in *Les Conférences Du Cénacle*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Michel Asmar, 1947), 275.

⁶⁰ Al-Mashriq, “Maḡāhir al-thaqāfa.”

⁶¹ Hakim, “Omar Ounsi.”

⁶² Fu’ād Haddād, “Ma’raḡ Aṣḡiqā’ al-fann” [The Amis des Arts Exhibition], *Al-Makshūf* 201 (1939); Halīm Kan`ān, “Ma’raḡ aṣḡiqā’ al-fann” [The Amis des Arts Exhibition], *Al-Makshūf* 248 (1940).

the world as it is,” but in reality manipulated sights’ appearance, “making viewers forget the land, the sky, the trees, the house.” Onsi’s paintings, he added, were but

a pretext for a melody that draws one to dream gardens [...] drags us to an unreal world of blue, pink, green and purple thoughts [where the] spirit is liberated from worldly contingencies, and annihilated in a contemplative nirvana.⁶³

Cyr’s allusions to a sensorial, transformational, effect produced by immersing oneself in Onsi’s paintings do in effect constitute a figure of speech. And the fact that the same metaphor recurred in other art reviews suggests that many writers considered the paintings a space for viewers to project themselves into an imaginary space completely unlike their everyday life. Hence, a writer for *al-Makshūf* thought that, in Farroukh’s paintings, one could imagine “the branches of pine trees ascending with the lightness of young girls [...] catching kisses of nature from the faint breeze.”⁶⁴ The same publication felt that Gemayel’s works made it seem that one “heard [in them] the sound of leaves carrying rest and quiet through the pine trees.”⁶⁵ If viewers could not physically escape to a real authentic rural idyll, landscape painting might then be a substitute avenue to experience a fictitious Lebanese authenticity.

IV. BEIRUT BECOMES THE MOUNTAIN

Paintings of Beirut by Lebanese artists from the 1930s and 1940s are as rare as landscapes are common. Judging from the available catalogues of collective exhibitions of the period, and the paintings present in collections today, scenes of the city only make up around 4% of their works, compared to 50% for scenes of the

⁶³ Cyr, “Onsi, Omar. Peintre.”

⁶⁴ Kan`ān, “Ma`raḍ aṣḍiqā’ al-fann.”

⁶⁵ Ḥātem, “Khaṭar al-madāres.”

Mountain (including landscapes and images of Mountain life).⁶⁶ The rare paintings of Beirut smooth over the disparities between city and countryside, as if trying to bring the fantasy home to urban viewers (figs. 36-48). In fact, in the images, Beirut is transformed and invariably deprived of life: it can be an amorphous blur subject to panoramic observation, or, seen from up close, a relative of a mountain village. This representation of Beirut masks the considerable economic development of the city, and the substantial transformation of its urban and social fabric, notwithstanding the political events that took place there during the Mandate and the post-independence years.

As an economic and a cultural centre, in conjunction with its status as a political capital, Beirut dominated Lebanon. Still, painters shunned the major physical changes the city underwent during the period. They disregarded its centre, where the Mandate-area infrastructural and economic developments were the most salient: in the early 1920s, the French administration overhauled the plan of downtown Beirut, tearing down the majority of its rather decrepit labyrinth of small streets housing myriad artisanal activities, and turning them into a grid of large avenues and tall buildings dedicated to modern business, as will be seen in chapter 7. Furthermore, painters ignored the poorer neighbourhoods that cropped up on the city's outskirts, at the antipodes of downtown Beirut's modern project. During the interwar period, the demographic pressure placed on the city by the rural exodus was intensified by the arrival of refugees in the tens of thousands: first, the Armenians, in the aftermath of the Genocide of 1916, then, Christian Syrians, and Kurds, among other groups. These

⁶⁶ This number was calculated by looking at the 250 or so images I gathered of works by Farroukh, Onsi, Gemayel and Hadad. The number of works makes it a reasonably representative sample.

newcomers settled in makeshift camps before moving to shantytowns in Beirut's periphery, such as the neighbourhood of Burj Hammud for the Armenians.

In order to house Beirut's growing population, the pace of construction, both residential and commercial, was unprecedented. To the verticality and the density of the business district responded the new suburbs – former villages transformed into entire neighbourhoods made up of hastily built concrete structures to house the poorest. Meanwhile, other parts of the city remained quite green, such as the residential neighbourhoods, some more prosperous than others, that developed at a short distance from the city's centre. The middle-class residential hill of Ashrafiyyeh, to the east of downtown Beirut, was covered with triple-arcaded houses or apartment buildings, and so were the Gahlghul and Wadi Abu Jmil neighbourhoods, immediately adjacent to downtown. Luxury villas sprung up in the fashionable Qantari and Zuqaq al-Blat districts. Closer to downtown, mixed commercial-residential sectors such as Saifi and Gemmayze grew in density; building activity also surrounded educational institutions such as Saint Joseph University and the American University.⁶⁷ But welcoming thousands of people who settled according to their place of origin and confession could not go without social consequences for Beirut. At the very least, it enhanced the sense of communitarian identity that already marked a city where religious, political, and ideological tensions between Muslims and Christians were tangible. But little of these changes and tensions in the demographical and physical makeup of the city transpire in painting.

Neither were painters interested in documenting instances of social

⁶⁷ Kassir, *Beirut*, 294-96.

mobilization. There were, for example, the 1922 and 1931 tramway boycotts in Beirut, spurred from popular resentment against foreign infrastructure concessions, which were cross-confessional and involved diverse social categories, all contesting the repercussions of the entangled French authorities' and Lebanese elites' interests in the Lebanese infrastructure. Lasting several weeks, both succeeded in their aims of lowering tramway fares.⁶⁸ Strikes against low wages also took place in 1930, caused by increased taxation and the effect of the Great Depression on various industries, and against the tobacco monopoly in 1935, while a boycott of the Franco-Belgian electricity company took place in 1931.⁶⁹

A. The panoramic view controlling the city

Farroukh approached Beirut from the hills overlooking it, which afforded a wide view of the city, and, by adopting the format of the panorama (the circular, or 180 degrees view of a scene), he also adopted its ideological underpinnings (figs. 36-37). Art historians see in panoramic painting a derivation of Bentham's panopticon, and of the popular nineteenth-century panorama shows, which gave an urban public a circular representation of their own city under a dome: the particular point of view the panorama generates is closely linked to the growing importance of the city in the modern economy, and could represent a metaphor for the bourgeoisie's desire to control, or at least make sense of, the world, starting with their own city.⁷⁰

Farroukh's engagement with this kind of manipulated view of Beirut could suggest that he, and his viewers, felt on some level uneasy in the modern city and

⁶⁸ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 4, 207, 257, 288.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 287, Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest*, 85, 169; Kassir, *Beirut*, 303.

⁷⁰ Wallach, "Between Subject and Object," 318.

sought to manage it somehow. Indeed, since he was painting Beirut from above, he could modify its appearance; in two paintings, he turned it into a white shadow nested between the Mediterranean and the Mountain. The city's modernity is denied: the sea and the green hills fill the top and bottom thirds of the canvas, as if trying to reverse the city's sprawl – perhaps this blank space could eventually be filled with an authentic Mountain landscape. At the same time, the uniformly white city of Beirut conspicuously protrudes out of the scene, thus emphasising the discrepancy between the capital city and the countryside.

When Farroukh painted a view overlooking the balcony of his mountain house, Beirut reappeared as a white undefined shape (fig. 38). The breakfast table has been set, and the person who set it has left, as if the villager catering to the city (in the guise of the urban painter) had to remain invisible, just like Farroukh minimised agricultural labour in his views of the Mountain. In the painting, the artist and his viewers are free to immerse themselves in a scene that seemingly transcends human interference. Simultaneously, the view makes it possible to visually manage and dominate Beirut, keeping its true appearance and socioeconomic circumstances at a distance. It is as if the viewers' daily urban life were an illusion, and the fabricated authentic landscape the real thing.

B. Beirut, the timeless village?

In the 1930s and 1940s, painters also ventured inside Beirut. But whether they opted to paint seaside avenues or dense residential neighbourhoods, they refuted the existence of city life and made Beirut stand still. They disregarded its underprivileged areas just like they ignored the new avenues, the modern businesses and popular cafes

of the city centre, which they frequented for social and professional reasons: Farroukh and Gemayel for instance had their studio on Al-Maarad street, one of the central district's principal avenues, and a product of the 1920-21 reconfiguration of the city. Artistic events often happened downtown; the Salons des Amis des Arts, a yearly collective exhibition of Lebanon-made painting, would for example take place in halls inside the parliament building on Nejmeh Square between 1938 and 1941, as seen in chapter 3. Farroukh, however, discounted the bustling modern downtown and instead nostalgically painted what was left of the old carpenter and ironsmith souks, with their shabbily paved streets and arcaded pathways (figs. 39-40). The images indeed bring to mind the passing of an era, as storeowners and passersby have turned into ghostly silhouettes. Farroukh's images intimate that modernity has, perhaps unfortunately, taken over the city, and the painter would not show it. He maintained his stance when he ventured to the south of downtown Beirut, along the Avenue des Français (later called the "Corniche"), a popular promenade with wide sidewalks lined with palm trees, restaurants, and luxury hotels, frequented by middle- and upperclass Beirut. But with Farroukh, the crowd, cars, and businesses have disappeared, save for an elegant couple lost in space and time (figs. 41-42).

The negation of Beirut's modernity continues in views of residential hills by Farroukh, Hadad and Georges Daoud Corm (1896-1971), a writer and painter, and the son of painter Daoud Corm (1852-1930) (figs. 43-45). In their works, Beirut looks like a quiet village, with houses, vegetation and sea in harmony. Its inhabitants are nowhere to be seen, and neither are traces of their activity; the city seems to participate in the artists' project to paint Lebanon as a rural idyll for an urban

audience. Their choices of neighbourhoods to paint are also revealing: they eschewed the shantytowns and suburbs where villagers were settling, and focused on the districts where they themselves lived instead. Hadad painted Beirut from the top of the exclusive Zuqaq al Blatt hill, where she resided, showing Beirut as an agglomeration of villas, and Corm zoomed in on the sector of Ashrafiyye, a large hill west of downtown, which included a diversity of neighbourhoods, from the lower- to the upper-middle class, and where he lived. Instead of erasing the urban growth, both painters seemed to attempt to contain it, but the images still allude at the expansion of Beirut's urban fabric and of its population – Hadad's tightly clustered villas look like the might spill over the sea, and Corm's apartment buildings threaten to suffocate the trees.

Meanwhile, Onsi lived further south, on the Tallet el Khayat hill, a neighbourhood where affluent inhabitants of Beirut still found enough surface area to build mansions surrounded by large gardens. From there, he could look over the sandy hills of Ramlet el Baida, one of the last areas of Beirut still untouched by the urban fabric (fig. 46-47). Although he sometimes depicted the hills, he turned inwards to his garden more often. In both cases, the images – and maybe the painter himself – dismiss the reality of the city to imagine a fabled authentic Lebanon (fig. 48).

CONCLUSION

Farroukh's, Gemayel's, and Onsi's paintings could well correspond to the way a British agricultural study defined Lebanon in 1953:

Lebanon proper consists of "The Mountain," and only "The Mountain." Neither the coast nor the interior has ever been fully Lebanese in

character, or, historically, has their possession ever been quite assured to the Lebanese people.⁷¹

The statement of course refers to the Mountain as a historical cultural-political unit, and the source of Lebanon's sustenance – neither of which the painters were interested in. But taken out of its original framework and to the art world, however, it strongly brings to mind the way critics interpreted the painting of the time: the Mountain's nature is the essence of Lebanon, and it is a supposedly authentic rural idyll that Beirut could never quite possess.

Indeed, during the French Mandate and the post-independence years, Lebanese painters turned towards their own country. The three prominent artists of the period, Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi, in fact, gained critical recognition and public success almost entirely thanks their scenes of Lebanese Mountain landscapes and village life. However, their focus on their birthplace was not nationalist. As seen in chapter 4, in the texts they wrote about art and its role, they conceived of painting as a tool of social, not national progress. In their paintings and critics' assessments, there is a patriotic sense of Lebanon as territory and as nature but also a clear constructing of a rural idyll devoid of nation-building mythology. The Lebanese landscape paintings actually amount to representations of rural areas tailor-made for the city, like many European ones did historically. They bring forth the divide between city and rural areas, and could reveal a certain fantasy of escape from modernity into an imagined kind of paradise.

In Lebanon, Landscape paintings, conceived for Beirut, picture the Mountain

⁷¹Lewis, "The Mountain," 2.

as a repository for city dwellers' fantasies of an imagined authentic life. Their representation of villagers and their activities also use strategies of European genre painting to claim these were evidence of an unchanging lifestyle: individuals perform age-old activities that bring to mind of a sense of community perhaps dwindling in the individualistic modern city. Art writers admired the preservation of traditions, and considered that villagers represented an ideal of moral character that their urban readers ought to aspire to.

This idealised representation of village life contradicts the drastic changes in the Mountain's demography and economy of the period, with the disappearance of the silk industry and agriculture stagnating causing tens of thousands to settle in Beirut's new poor suburbs or to emigrate. This denial of the facts of the Mountain's economy and society finds an echo in paintings of the natural Mountain landscape. There, painters diminish traces of human occupation – villages seem to merge with mountains or are hidden by trees – as well as signs of rural labour. Not only do the painters attempt to conceal agriculture, an essential aspect of the Mountain linking its economy to Beirut, but they also downplay the physical links with the city, especially the asphalted roads. Still, the footpaths of the paintings reveal the city's penetration into the Mountain since painters make it possible for viewers to adopt a dominating panoramic view over the landscape or to climb to the village.

Critics did not comment on the contemporary social and economic dynamics implicit in scenes of so-called traditional village life and in the supposedly unscathed natural Mountain landscape. On the contrary, they concentrated on the landscape's aesthetics. They particularly appreciated the picturesque aspect of paintings, a mode

that emphasises natural variety and timelessness, and, correspondingly, praised the paintings' reproduction of the supposedly eternal and variegated Lebanese vegetal, aqueous and mineral elements. But the ultimate manifestation of the Lebanese nature's essence, to them, was the mountains themselves, and the sunlight was the landscape's most characteristic manifestation of Lebanon's beauty. Nevertheless, commentators acknowledged that the painters' idyll did not correspond to the real world: the so-called paradise was only accessible as an aesthetic object, the product of a painter's endeavour.

By contrast with the abundance of their landscape paintings, Farroukh, Gemayel and Onsi seldom represented the city of Beirut, and when they did, they denied its contemporary circumstances. Instead, they sometimes proposed panoramas painted from the surrounding hills, thanks to which the viewer could control the city and almost erase it by turning it into a white amorphous space, perhaps one onto which to project a fantasy of the Mountain. At other times, they concentrated on some of Beirut's middle- and upperclass neighbourhoods and painted them as if they were villages. Whatever part of Lebanon painters turned to, their paintings seemed to fulfil a similar role: to satisfy their urban public's desire to vicariously experience, via art, a version of Lebanese authenticity, as a counterpoint to their lives' circumstances and perhaps a mirror of their uneasiness with them.

PART III

LEBANON EXPORTS ITS IMAGE

MARKETING THE MOUNTAIN IDYLL: VISUAL PROMOTION OF TOURISM IN LEBANON, 1920s-1950s

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the French Mandate, Lebanon was already embedded in an organised Levantine tourism network. Thanks to the increased efficiency and reliability of transportation, traveling to the Middle East was no longer complicated or prohibitively expensive, and tourists could rely on established travel agencies, such as Thomas Cook and Sons, to embark on tours of the entire Levant or to visit individual territories, Lebanon among them. Parts of the larger region, like Egypt, were particularly successful in attracting travellers on a large scale.¹ At the time, the Lebanese economy suffered from the decline of the silk thread industry – the main production of the former Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon – under the pressure of Chinese and Japanese competition, and was deeply affected by the disruptive impact of World War I. Industrial production, for its part, was embryonic. On the other hand, Beirut was well connected to the world, as communication and transportation technologies appeared in quick succession, shrinking time and distance. The telegraph (since the 1860s), telephone (in the 1920s), and radio (broadcasting from Beirut in the 1930s) strengthened the role of the city as a regional communication centre, while the car

¹Xavier Guillot, "From One Globalization to Another: In Search of the Seeds of Modern Tourism in the Levant, a Western Perspective," in *Tourism in the Middle East Continuity, Change and Transformation*, ed. Rami Farouk Daher (Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2007), 96, 103.

(1920s) and the airplane (1930s) insured swift transportation of people and goods.² Given these circumstances, individuals in both the official and the business spheres theorised that Lebanon would benefit from investing more aggressively in the tourism industry, as an alternative avenue for economic growth.

The substantial development of tourism during the Mandate and beyond happened in the context of Beirut's economic rise after the end of the Great Depression and into the 1950s. The infrastructural framework was well in place for Beirut to drive a period of economic growth in Lebanon by becoming a prominent regional commercial-financial hub.³ And as agriculture declined, the city came to absorb the bulk of the Lebanese economic activity, and shifted its focus on commerce, banking and the service industry. Lebanon's economy was externalised and its tertiary sector developed aggressively, a process intensified with the French mandatory policies, which favoured French investments, liberalised the market, and encouraged the Lebanese merchants and political class to foster a service economy. Such policies of economic deregulation and liberalisation were intensified after the Mandate to sustain the development of Lebanon's tertiary sector.⁴ Then, Lebanon came to be known as a "merchant republic," when a quasi-oligarchy of businessmen and bankers, with tight political connections, dominated the Lebanese economic activity, through their shares in construction and public-service companies, their owning several banks and insurance companies, as well as franchises to import Western manufactured goods.⁵

² Kassir, *Beirut*, 266, 302-3.

³ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 273-76, 301-4.

⁴ Carolyn Gates, *The Historical Role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1989), 16-17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

The French mandatory authorities as well as the Lebanese government and members of this so-called “consortium” of merchants believed tourism should play an important role in economic growth. And since the 1920s, all promoters of the Lebanese tourism industry – private individuals, and governmental actors, French and Lebanese alike – would agree on the focus to adopt: publicising the concept of holidays in the Mountain, where one could enjoy an attractive scenery and an agreeable climate. Putting in place an infrastructure favourable to welcoming visitors was essential. The mandatory authorities, together with the Lebanese Republic’s government, took initiatives to develop the transportation network and to facilitate travel. The hospitality industry, controlled by Lebanese and French capital, built a multiplicity of restaurants and hotels of all categories in Beirut and the countryside.

Notwithstanding practical actions to bolster tourism, Lebanon also needed to market itself, especially visually. In the 1930s and 1940s, visual material, stemming from both the official and the private spheres, came in to publicise the country, and sometimes involved important Lebanese painters of the period. In congruence with the Mountain holiday project, these images and documents showcased nature and recreation, and put the accent on the countryside’s accessibility and the quality of Beirut’s hospitality industry. Among the participants to the dissemination of the country’s visual identity, there was the Lebanese Republic government, who, starting the 1930s, would issue stamps that marketed Mountain vacations; the painters Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) and Philippe Mourani (1875-1970) produced two such designs in 1936.

Private initiatives presented Lebanon in a similar way. Guidebooks to the

country, such as one publication from the Guide Vert series from 1948, by Jamil Rouhi, a Lebanese author, and a 1955 Guide Bleu, by Robert Boulanger, a French one, combined images and text to stress that modern Beirut, despite its comfort, was only the starting point of excursions to the more attractive and authentic Mountain locales. The Guide Bleu had photographs of Beirut highlighting its modern landmarks, and the Guide Vert reproduced scenes of villages by Farroukh. Meanwhile, foreign firms with stakes in tourism, like the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée railway company, published posters that showcased Lebanon's mountains.

Especially since painters sometimes participated in the promotion of Lebanese tourism, it is possible to compare, on the one hand, the image of Lebanon constructed by both native and foreign actors in the tourism industry to attract foreigners, with, on the other, the artistic conception of their own country that painters such as Farroukh, César Gemayel (1898-1958), and Omar Onsi (1901-1969), proposed to their Beirut public. (The latter was the subject of the previous chapter.) This comparison is all the more pertinent in cases where artists were expressly commissioned to publicise Lebanon, with stamps for instance, and when a painter's works were repurposed for the two different audiences, which is the case of Farroukh's illustrations in the Guide Vert. This comparison will analyse the points of congruence and divergence between the two sets of images, notably concerning the perception of the Mountain and of Beirut they encouraged, and to whom.

I. DEVELOPING THE MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY

A. The case for tourism and the concept of the Mountain holiday

Throughout the Mandate period and even shortly before its start, certain Lebanese press outlets emphasised the importance of developing the tourism sector for the good of the Lebanese economy. Already in 1919, in the aftermath of the disastrous consequences of World War I on the economy, the Francophile and “Phoenicianist” publication *La Revue Phénicienne* assessed that, since Lebanon (designating the Greater Lebanon they wished to see established) could not rely on its natural resources (such as water), and that banking and commerce might not be sufficient to drive the economy, tourism, consequently, could be a profitable alternative.⁶ The particular case of the magazine *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, which was close to France and published several articles on the topic of tourism in the late 1920s and 1930s, not only provides insight into the reasoning behind the promotion of the tourism industry, but the timing of the articles’ publication also parallels the institution of official policies and private initiatives in the sector. *La Revue du Liban* also demonstrates the convergence of French and Lebanese interests in Lebanese tourism, since writers of both nationalities contributed to its pages. Moreover, their arguments reflect the general outlook taken on by the Lebanese tourism industry, from both the entrepreneurial and the official side: tourism is said to be potentially lucrative, and ought to happen in the Mountain.

Lebanese and French contributors to *La Revue du Liban* repeatedly asserted the economic potential of tourism. In 1928 for example, a Lebanese analyst called Pierre

⁶ See for instance Fouad El-Khoury, “L’industrie hôtelière au Liban” [The Hotel Industry in Lebanon] and Albert Naccache, “L’industrie de la villégiature au Liban” [The Mountain Holiday Industry in Lebanon], *La Revue phénicienne*, 1919.

Aouad published figures that, he argued, demonstrated considerable possible gains: he estimated that at least 10,000 foreigners visited Lebanon each summer, each of them staying in the country for two months on average and spending an estimated 80 French Francs per day. He calculated that this figure amounted to earnings of 50 million Francs per year. Increasing this revenue, Aouad affirmed, would more than compensate for Lebanon's dearth of natural and mineral resources.⁷ In the same magazine, a couple of years later, two French contributors likewise emphasised the gains Lebanon could derive from tourism.⁸

The *La Revue du Liban* articles, along with other publications' throughout the Mandate, suggested focusing on one kind of holiday, spending time in the Mountain, an opinion that echoed governmental and private initiatives. The concept was already circulating in 1921: for instance, at the occasion of the Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth – a showcase for the French, Lebanese and Syrian industrial production, which was organised by France – a Frenchman called M. Prost, associated with the mandatory authorities, gave a conference on tourism. (This fair will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.) Prost described a prototypical trip to Lebanon, indicating that tourists ought to leave Beirut, a charming city but otherwise poor in monuments and archaeological remains, and go discover the Lebanese Mountain, where “a variety of excursions as interesting from a historical perspective as they are from a picturesque

⁷ Pierre Aouad, “Le Tourisme libanais” [Lebanese Tourism], *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, October 1928.

⁸ Francis Louis Loviot, “Étude sur la publicité touristique en Syrie” [A Study on Tourism Advertising in Syria], *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, October-November 1930; Max Fauconnet, “Il faut organiser des missions artistiques pour la Syrie et le Liban” [Artistic Missions Have to be Organised for Syria and Lebanon], *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, March 1932.

perspective” were possible.⁹ Curiously, Prost did not address the role tourism could play in the Lebanese economy, neither did he outline what France stood to gain from its development. However, the inclusion of a conference on tourism among a series of public talks mostly delivered by Frenchmen on topics going from agriculture, to history, and geopolitics, suggests that France took an early interest in the matter.¹⁰

Writers for *La Revue du Liban* also singled out the Mountain as a prime touristic spot. Furthermore, they emphasised that the mountain range distinguished Lebanon from the rest of the Levant: according to them, Egypt, for example, enjoyed world-renowned archaeological sites but, because of its climate, could not offer estivating possibilities or winter recreation. Not only did Lebanon enjoy a mild climate and natural scenery, *La Revue du Liban* noted, but it also offered tourists the promise of authentic village life, where they could relax and partake in diverse physical activities as well, among them outdoors sports, hunting, fishing, and skiing starting the mid-1930s.¹¹

But the idea of a relaxing Mountain escapade was not exactly novel, since many wealthy Beirutis had, since the end of the nineteenth century, taken the habit of summering in the countryside in order to get away from coastal heat and humidity. Towns such as Aley and Sawfar, both conveniently located along the highway to Damascus, were already reputed resorts at the turn of the twentieth century, and, during the Mandate period, dozens of other resorts mushroomed to welcome growing

⁹ M. Prost, “Le Tourisme en Syrie et au Liban” [Tourism in Syria and Lebanon] in Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, *La Syrie et le Liban en 1921. La Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth. Conférences. Liste des récompenses*, (Paris: Emile Larose, 1922), 191-2.

¹⁰ A research in the Mandate’s archives in Nantes would likely provide more information about the French argument for helping develop the Lebanese tourism industry.

¹¹ Loviot, “Étude sur la Publicité;” *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient arabe*, “Le Tourisme libanais et la propagande en France” [Lebanese Tourism and Propaganda in France], June 1939.

numbers of middle- and upper-class Beirutis and French citizens.¹² In addition, *La Revue du Liban* noted, Lebanese villages already offered “thousands” of Egyptian, Iraqi and Palestinian holidaymakers an escape to a milder climate during the summer months.¹³ The concept of the Mountain stay had been time-tested, and Lebanon now had to find a way to attract European, and especially French, tourists, to experience it.¹⁴ French journalists naturally focused on attracting their compatriots, but Lebanese writers also did so since, presumably, from a practical perspective, French holidaymakers would have been the easiest targets given the links between the two countries.

B. French and Lebanese, governmental and private, initiatives for tourism’s development

Concurrently with the press’s advocacy of tourism, the mandatory and Lebanese authorities took practical initiatives to bolster the industry. Evidently with French interests in mind, the High Commission produced a periodical, the *Correspondance syrienne et libanaise d’information et de tourisme*, to boast of its infrastructural initiatives.¹⁵ The French administration invested in public works and road building, which had the side-effect of facilitating travel, and gave financial incentives to businesses, such as loans from the state-backed Société Libanaise du Crédit Agricole et Industriel du Liban, to enable building hotels and hospitality structures in Mountain municipalities.¹⁶ In parallel, the

¹² Kassir, *Beirut*, 303-4. Kassir notes that the French High Commissioners Gouraud, Weygand and Sarrail used to rent the Bustros residence in the summers in Aley.

¹³ Aouad, “Tourisme libanais;” *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient arabe*, “Tourisme libanais et propagande en France.”

¹⁴ Loviot, “Étude sur la Publicité.”

¹⁵ Anne-Lucie Chaigne-Oudin, “L’Action culturelle de la France au Levant pendant l’entre-deux-guerres” [France’s cultural action in the Levant during the interwar period], *Les Clés du Moyen-Orient*, December 27, 2010 <http://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/L-action-culturelle-de-la-France.html> (accessed 3 August 2016)

¹⁶ Gates, *Political Economy*, 17.

French created a favourable infrastructure to ease travel, by reducing taxes on visas and customs, among other actions.¹⁷ Organisations dedicated to catering to visitors were also put together at the beginning of the Mandate, with the creation of a national tourism office in Beirut in 1921, and, in 1923, of a department within the mandatory administration dedicated to the promotion of tourism.¹⁸ Private organisations working towards the same ends also appeared, such as the Société d'Encouragement du Tourisme Franco-libanais, a binational NGO.¹⁹

International and local transportation speed and efficiency also improved thanks to both official and private endeavours. The trip to and from Europe grew in reliability and speed: since the mid-nineteenth century, steamboat companies like the French Messageries Maritimes had regular lines circling the Mediterranean, with the journey to Marseilles lasting four to five days in 1932.²⁰ But less than one decade later, one could fly to Beirut. The first cargo flights from Air Union-Orient landed in Beirut from Marseilles in 1928, and passenger hydroplane lines were set up shortly afterwards. Beirut's airport, in Bir Hassan, was inaugurated in 1939; it was first served by Air France, soon followed by the Egyptian company Misr Air.²¹ In parallel, the international railway network improved, notably with the French Société Damas-Hama et Prolongement that served the Levant and the Middle East. The car, however, mattered most for short journeys. The local automobile market expanded quickly: five thousand

¹⁷ Ibrahim Maklouf, "Tourisme et villégiature source de richesses pour le Liban" [Tourism and Mountain Holidays, Source of Wealth for Lebanon], *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, 1936.

¹⁸ Kassir, *Beirut*, 306.

¹⁹ Maklouf, "Tourisme et villégiature."

²⁰ André Geiger, *Syrie et Liban* (Grenoble: B. Arthaud, 1932), 11.

²¹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 277; Guillot, "One Globalization to Another," 96.

cars rode throughout Lebanon in 1929, and eighteen thousands of them were imported to Beirut in 1931. During the Mandate, the authorities developed a network of asphalted roads throughout most regions of Lebanon and Syria, to the advantage of local car owners, and of holidaymakers too, who could now reach the countryside destination without difficulty.²² Meanwhile, the Association of Automobile importers lobbied for legislation to ameliorate the road network for visitors, in the obvious aim of furthering their business.²³

C. Tourism takes off

Around 1930, in large part as a result of this favourable context, the hospitality industry already contributed to the Lebanese economy on a non-negligible scale. Estimates suggest that between 1923 and 1929, in Beirut, the number of businesses directly connected to hospitality and tourism increased substantially, with travel agencies growing from six to ten, restaurants from twenty-one to thirty-two, and cafés from twenty-two to twenty-six. The growth was even more visible in the proliferation of hotels. The first hotel in Beirut, the Grand Hotel d'Orient, had opened in the 1870s, and long remained one of the few upscale facilities available to welcome tourists, along with the Bellevue. Seventeen hotels operated in Beirut at the turn of the twentieth century, but at the beginning of the 1920s, there were thirty-five of them, and sixty-two by 1930.²⁴ In the mid-1930s, hundreds of establishments of all standings appeared, from luxury ones, such as the Saint-Georges and the Normandy hotels on the Beirut

²² Kassir, *Beirut*, 266-75, 304.

²³ Kristin Monroe, "Automobility and Citizenship in Interwar Lebanon," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34 (2014): 523.

²⁴ Kassir, *Beirut*, 215, 267.

waterfront, to comfortable hotels in the Mountain, to modest hostels.²⁵ In 1939, *La Revue du Liban* concluded that the industry had “remarkably taken flight,” but conceded that more could still be done.²⁶ Indeed, the sector kept growing, as French, British and Lebanese studies from the 1930s and 1950s approximate the number of visitors to Lebanon to 30,000 in 1937 and 216,000 in 1952.²⁷

The development of the tourism industry certainly benefited many – travel agencies for instance, as well as hotel and restaurant employees, tour guides, down to craftsmen who made souvenirs, chauffeurs, and porters.²⁸ Yet, those who stood to gain the most were French and Lebanese entrepreneurs, many of whom were associated with the Lebanese and mandatory authorities.²⁹ In fact, members of the financial and political elite were among the first to put forward the tourism project. *La Revue Phénicienne*, which advocated for the sector as early as 1919, had been founded by the successful businessman and writer Charles Corm (1894-1963) (the son of painter Daoud Corm (1852-1930)). It counted on its board important Francophile Christian intellectuals, financiers, lawyers, intellectuals and merchants, such as the banker and politician Michel Chiha (1891-1954), who expounded on the economic, social, and political issues of the day in the greater Syrian region.

Over the following decades, the financial-political elite remained in control of a considerable part of the tourism sector. Several families of merchants had stakes in

²⁵ Guillot, “One Globalization to Another,” 100.

²⁶ “Tourisme libanais et propagande.”

²⁷ Gates, *Political Economy*, 16.

²⁸ Guillot, “One Globalization to Another,” 104.

²⁹ Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 93. Traboulsi however argues that the development of the tourism industry in Lebanon only resulted from a desire to advance the wealthy Christians’ political and economic position, and that of their French associates, and he thus discounts the industry’s practical effects on a larger section of the population.

Mountain resorts such as Bhamdūn and Sawfar, and in ski stations like the one in the Cedars forest. These private Lebanese interests often intersected with French ones: in association with Lebanese businessmen and merchants, state and private French actors invested, for instance, in the port of Beirut and the country's large construction companies.³⁰ Frenchmen also had stakes in the luxury hotels, such the Saint-Georges, which was part of the Société des Grands Hôtels du Levant, a subsidiary of the Banque de Syrie et du Grand-Liban, itself in great part controlled by French interests.³¹

II. OFFICIAL VISUAL MARKETING OF TOURISM: THE CASE OF POSTAGE STAMPS

Postage stamps might be small in size, but they enjoy an international reach, and, as such, can act as effective marketing tools for a state by allowing it to assert its existence globally while propagating its chosen visual identity at home and abroad.³² The evolution of Lebanon's official imagery and symbols happened in parallel with historical and political developments. When the State of Greater Lebanon became the Lebanese Republic in 1926, symbols of France, such as the Marianne, disappeared from its stamps, but these remained bilingual, signifying simultaneously the French connection to Lebanon and the desire to make the stamps easily legible for Westerners.³³ Important symbols were, however, retained, even after Lebanon's independence in 1943, but changed their meaning over time: this was the case of the Cedar tree, which had been the emblem of Greater Lebanon since 1921 (fig. 1). The Cedar was originally associated

³⁰ Ibid., 117.

³¹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 306.

³² Donald M. Reid, "The Symbolism of Postage Stamps: A Source for the Historian," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 2 (April 1984), 226; Stanley D. Brunn, "Stamps as Iconography: Celebrating the Independence of New European and Central Asian States," *GeoJournal* 52, no. 4, Iconographies (2000), 315.

³³ Reid, "Symbolism of Postage Stamps," 237.

with Christians, since it grows in historically Christian regions in the Mountain, and was adopted as a symbol by Christian nationalists in the 1920s. It also featured on the flag of the State of Greater Lebanon, between the red and blue bands of the French flag. Still, in 1943, at independence, it was retained as the country's emblem.³⁴ By then, many Muslim and Christian politicians alike embraced it, and in 1943, the Lebanese Parliament agreed to adopt Sunni politician Saeb Salam's new flag design, a green cedar on a white background in between two red bands. By this point, using the Cedar was a means to differentiate Lebanon's flag from its Arab neighbours' and thus assert that the country was a distinctive unit within the Arab world.

Alongside the Cedar, three kinds of images prevailed during the Mandate and carried on after independence with modified connotations. The first kind, introduced by France, emphasised links with Antiquity, Christianity and Western civilisation through images of the Phoenician cities of Byblos and Tyre, the Roman temple of Baalbek, or the Crusader citadel in Tripoli. Although initially intended to define Lebanon through its ties with the West, they eventually became consensual symbols of Lebanese history. The second category of images comprised sights of Beirut, in particular cultural and official landmarks, like the Grand Sérail (the government's headquarters), as symbols of the State; the third one centred on nature, in particular distinctive Lebanese sites such as the Cedars forest.³⁵

³⁴ In "Symbolism of Postage Stamps," however, Reid argues that the continued use of the Cedar indicates Christians' desire for supremacy.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 238, 244-45. National historical figures were not featured before independence (Reid argues they appeared in the 1950s; however the nineteenth-century prince Bashir II, seen as representative of the fight against the Ottomans, appears on a stamp issued in 1941, when the Free French first declared Lebanon independent). Contemporary politicians appeared on stamps in the 1950s.

In the 1930s, the Lebanese government would, on a few occasions, use stamps for the specific purpose of advertising the country as a holiday destination. In congruence with the overall strategy for Lebanese tourism, and with its infrastructural support of it, it issued stamps that featured Mountain landscapes and recreational activities and that emphasised the reliability of Lebanon's modern transportation network. A jury thus gathered in 1936 to select two new designs among several proposals. Headed by M. Fayad, the Christian director of the Posts and Telegraphs, this group was binational and multiconfessional, and brought together public and private powers. Among its other members, there were Beirut notables (Soubhi Bey Haidar, a Sunni merchant, and Donna Maria Sursock, the wife of Alfred Sursock, the scion of one of the largest Orthodox Christian real estate and business fortunes in Beirut), and two French citizens (one member of the mandatory administration called De Lasse, and one Mrs Firmin).³⁶

The well-established Lebanese painters Moustafa Farroukh and Philippe Mourani won the competition. The two stamps represent an uncommon example of painters' skills put at the service of a governmental enterprise, or political and economic project, since the Lebanese and mandatory governments were largely uninvolved in the art world of the period, as chapter 3 explained (figs. 2-3). The winning designs were featured on the cover of *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient Méditerranéen* in July 1936 (fig. 4). The headline, "La peinture au service du tourisme libanais" (Painting at the service of Lebanese tourism) proudly announced that well-known artists had agreed to contribute their skills to the country's publicity. To attract visitors, both painters showcased

³⁶ *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, "Timbres libanais" [Lebanese Stamps], July 1936.

modern recreation within an agreeable natural setting with efficient transport links to the outside world. Mourani showed a group of people skiing and sledding, and Farroukh a view overlooking the bay of Jounie, a coastal city to the immediate north of Beirut, with a boat sailing on the distant sea and a car ascending the mountains. His panoramic and bucolic landscape invites potential visitors to survey the Mountain and the coast, and symbolically appropriate the scenery before arrival. This stamp design, viewed alongside Farroukh's paintings of the Mountain, make evident the difference between, on the one hand, official representations of Lebanon destined to foreigners, and, on the other, artistic representations of Lebanon made for a local audience as idylls where to escape the city, as seen in the previous chapter.

The two stamps encapsulate the tourism industry's emphasis on Mountain recreation made possible by modern transportation. Both put the accent on the various types of recreation available all year long, from the relaxing outing at sea during the summer with Farroukh, to the new mountain sports, popularised in Europe in the 1930s, with Mourani. Skiing, which announces Lebanon's recreational modernity, actually reappears in stamps of the 1930s designed by other artists (fig. 5). In addition, Farroukh and Mourani show how modern amenities facilitate and enhance the stay in Lebanon: the car present in Farroukh's design suggests that Lebanon's good transportation infrastructure makes touring the country easy, and the planes in the four corners of the two stamps underscores the country's modern connectedness to the world. The airplane is of course the international symbol of airmail, but it also appears in the main image of several 1930s Lebanese stamps to reiterate the point about the country's accessibility. One series designed by a Frenchman, for instance, showed a

plane flying above Beirut and other well-known Mountain sites and villages, and Mourani also created a design commemorating the ten-year anniversary of the Marseilles-Beirut line (figs. 6-7). In the latter image, the plane takes centre stage to reassert that Lebanon was not only within easy reach, but had been for ten years already.

Since Farroukh's and Mourani's 1936 stamps were designed to attract foreign visitors, they highlighted Mountain nature, recreation, and the transportation infrastructure. As the previous chapter showed, during the same period, Lebanese landscape painting also put the accent on the Mountain, and Farroukh even painted scenes that adopted a panoramic perspective on the coast not unlike that of his *Bay of Jounie* stamp design (figs. 8-9). However, unlike postage stamps, landscape painting addressed Beirut's affluent art public, and did not allude to modern means of transportation or recreational opportunities, but instead concealed the links between the Mountain, Beirut, and the world beyond. Moreover, contemporary art critics acknowledged that the landscapes as seen in paintings were not a physical destination but an artistic utopia. By contrast, the postage stamps purported that the images truthfully reflected the experience of visiting Lebanon, premised on the coupling of nature and modern conveniences.

III. GUIDEBOOKS TO LEBANON: THE JOURNEY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE

Guidebooks to Lebanon published between the 1930s and the 1950s brought the concept of the holiday journey throughout the Lebanese countryside to the forefront: their Lebanese and French authors alike invited readers to visit charming Mountain sites

where they could enjoy multiple leisurely activities thanks to the country's modern infrastructure. Four of these guidebooks, punctuating the three decades, are noteworthy for their inclusion of images – photographs, maps, or illustrations. These images, read in conjunction with the text, can be examined under the light of Lebanese painting of the period, in order to help differentiate the image of Lebanon that painters and their affluent public sought for themselves and their local public from the ones guidebooks presented to future European visitors.

In 1921, the French Mandate authorities had issued a propagandist *Un Voyage en Syrie*, and, in 1927, a *Guide Français de la Villégiature au Liban* where it boasted its economic and infrastructural achievements since the beginning of the Mandate.³⁷ Soon, guidebooks stemming from private initiatives appeared. In 1932, André Geiger's *Guide du Liban et de la Syrie* provided a lyrical account of his journeys throughout both territories, a dual focus unsurprising for the time: the first guidebooks to the Levant at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the Baedeker series, covered the entire Levant, including Egypt, and later focused on Greater Syria and/or Palestine.³⁸ As tour operators narrowed their focus and their clientele diversified, guidebooks did the same.

Geiger and later guidebooks all targeted a European public, but the categories of information they included were tailored for different audiences. Geiger seemed to have had in mind an affluent and cultivated public, and is more focused on his recollections than on providing practical travel information. In 1941, Lebanese author Jamil Rouhi

³⁷ Chaigne-Oudin, "L'Action culturelle de la France;" Geiger, *Syrie et Liban*.

³⁸ Guillot, "One Globalization to Another," 102; Karl Baedeker, ed., *Palestine and Syria Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1876); Karl Baedeker, ed., *Syria and Palestine* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1898).

wrote an *Itinerary Round Syria and Lebanon*, for the Green Guides series.³⁹ (It was originally written in French and translated into English soon after.) Later in the decade, after Lebanon's 1943 independence, and as the tourism industry effectively took flight, a variety of standalone guides to Lebanon appeared, among them Rouhi's 1948 *Beyrouth et la République libanaise* (also for the Green Guides series), and, in 1955, French author Robert Boulanger's *Liban*, published by the Guides Bleus Illustrés.⁴⁰ These three guidebooks from the 1940s and 1950s, by contrast with Geiger, provide essential facts about transportation, accommodation, currency, the weather, and so on, and some of them discuss diverse subjects in more detail, such as ethnography, economy, and history. Rouhi's 1941 *Itinerary*, for example, included anthropological and sociological essays as well as ethnographic data, and his 1948 *Beyrouth et la République libanaise* was a collaborative effort involving a dozen of specialists, who contributed texts on different aspects of the country, including society, contemporary economy, and history. Among the four books, it is the only one that gives a lengthy account of Lebanese history. The introduction, by noted Lebanese historian Philippe Hitti, gave a short "Evolution de la nation libanaise," whose title immediately emphasises the legitimacy of the independent Lebanese state to visitors.⁴¹ Then came a longer "Simple esquisse de l'Histoire du Liban," by Abdallah Alayli, an al-Azhar-educated Beirut Sunni scholar and linguist.

³⁹ Jamil Rouhi, ed., *Damascus, Palmyra, Baalbek: With a Tour Itinerary Round Syria and Lebanon*. Guides Verts (Damascus: Librairie universelle, 1941).

This chapter focuses on representations of Lebanon directed towards European tourists. But there existed Arabic-language guidebooks: Kassir mentions the *Dalil Suriyya* from 1927, for instance. Investigating them would be a useful way to get insight into the image of Lebanon projected to tourists from the region, as opposed to Western ones.

⁴⁰ Jamil Rouhi, ed., *Beyrouth et la République libanaise* (Beirut: Librairie universelle, 1948); Robert Boulanger, *Liban*. Les Guides Bleus illustrés (Paris: Hachette, 1955).

⁴¹ P.K. Hitti, "Evolution de la nation libanaise" [The Evolution of the Lebanese Nation] in Rouhi, ed., *Beyrouth et la République libanaise*, 3-6.

Alayli was a promoter of Lebanon's Arab identity, but nonetheless started his story of the alleged historical longing for Lebanese independence with the Phoenicians, which he construed as an Arab tribe, thereby appropriating the so-called "Phoenicianist" narrative to make it fit the Arab orientation of Lebanon.⁴² Besides, the guidebook's texts' insistence on Phoenicia and Lebanon's pre-Islamic past could also possibly attract foreigners who would be led to understand that Lebanon was part of their own Western civilisation. Boulanger's 1955 *Guide Bleu*, for its part, gave matter-of-fact background data on the economy, and a short, largely factual, historical chronology; it was one of several successive editions of the book, the first one having been published in 1932.

The bulk of Geiger's, Rouhi's, and Boulanger's texts, however, centred on descriptions of journeys across the country and of sites of interests, to which they sometimes juxtaposed images to support their characterisation of Lebanon. Geiger's *Syrie et Liban*, for instance, is rich in photographs reflective of his nostalgia for an ancient Orient (figs. 10-11). Rouhi's 1941 *Itinerary Around Syria and Lebanon* is not illustrated, but his 1948 *Guide Vert* includes a few black-and-white photographs of Beirut and the countryside, and half a dozen illustrations of village life by Moustafa Farroukh. Boulanger's 1955 *Guide Bleu* notably features maps of Beirut and of the main archaeological sites in the provinces. Examined along the texts, the images shed further light on how the authors wanted potential visitors to perceive Lebanon. Overall, they emphasise the dichotomy between Beirut and the Mountain: Beirut is presented as a conveniently modern city, but seems to lack interest compared to the provinces'

⁴² Abdallah Alayli, "Simple esquisse de l'histoire du Liban." [A Simple Sketch of Lebanon's History] in Rouhi, ed., *Beyrouth et la République libanaise*, 7-20; Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 131.

historical sites, and to Mountain locales' nature and recreational possibilities.

This opposition between the village's authenticity and the city's lack thereof also underlies contemporary Lebanese painting. As explained in the previous chapter, painters such as Farroukh, Onsi, and Gemayel, and art critics, concurred to praise the Lebanese villager's strength of character and resilience. Likewise, the guidebooks and the attendant illustrations consider villagers examples of authenticity. But if painters tended to erase Beirut's modernity, photographs and maps featured in guidebooks enhanced it and presented it as an asset.

A. Beirut's exciting, yet indistinctive, Western-like modernity

The four guidebooks converged on the premises of the optimal trip to Lebanon and its general unfolding. The journey, as a matter of course, started in Beirut, a comfortably modern, fun, but not terribly interesting city from a natural and historical perspective – mainly, a convenient springboard to excursions to so-called more authentic regions. In 1932, Geiger already noted that the city was becoming more Western, and he longed for a time when Lebanon and Syria were “faraway, unknown lands,” “impenetrably mysterious [and] full of charm and sortilege.” To him, early 1930s Beirut was unfortunately becoming but “a more colourful copy of Nice,” where one had to look hard to find exoticism.⁴³ Visually, the centre of the city indeed looked increasingly modern and European. In the early 1920s, the French mandatory authorities had overhauled downtown Beirut, tearing down the labyrinthine old souks and replacing them with a grid of large avenues lined with tall buildings, in a French-Baroque-Oriental style, dedicated to modern business, as will be detailed in the next chapter. Beirut also

⁴³ Geiger, *Syrie et Liban*, 10, 11, 22.

experienced a boom in construction in the 1930s, evident in and around downtown in the increasingly tall residential, commercial or mixed-use buildings, which combined the traditional arcaded house and the prototype of the European apartment building.⁴⁴ (The previous chapter detailed these developments.)

But when the 1941 Guide Vert called Beirut “similar in all to European towns,” it meant it, unlike Geiger, as the city’s main selling point.⁴⁵ Rouhi’s two guidebooks and Boulanger’s 1955 Guide Bleu agreed that travellers would find Beirut reassuringly familiar because of its embassies, banks, administrations, and commercial firms. More important, Beirut afforded modern comfort: the 1941 Guide Vert assured its readers that dozens of hotels of all standings were available throughout the city, and that all provided the “most up-to-date modern conveniences.” This guidebook, though, had wealthier travellers in mind, and mainly recommended higher-end establishments.⁴⁶ Boulanger’s Guide Bleu, however, targeted readers with an array of budgets, and advised making strategic choices. Still, it instructed visitors to only consider more modest establishments for short stays, and promised affluent families that they would easily find hotels ready to accommodate them and their domestic workers.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding comfort, Beirut provided something even more attractive: entertainment. In 1932, Geiger already noted, nighttime was “dedicated to amusement in dance halls and cafés,” and to the modern entertainment par excellence, the cinema.⁴⁸ During the following decade, luxury hotels such as the Saint-Georges and the

⁴⁴ Kassir, *Beirut*, 292-293.

⁴⁵ Rouhi, ed., *Damascus, Palmyra, Baalbek*, 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 250-51.

⁴⁷ Boulanger, *Liban*, 28.

⁴⁸ Geiger, *Syrie et Liban*, 34.

Normandy opened, as well as upscale, Paris-like, sidewalk cafés and nightclubs. Seaside neighbourhoods, in particular the Zaytuneh area near downtown Beirut, became the heart of the city's nightlife, with gastronomic restaurants and upscale nightclubs.⁴⁹ Less costly options were of course available, and Boulanger suggested trying Oriental coffee shops, where one could have coffee, tea, local beer or *arak* (grape alcohol), and smoke a water pipe – these places looked especially attractive since they did not exist in Europe, and provided an Oriental escape from the blandness of Westernised Beirut.⁵⁰

If Rouhi and Boulanger found Beirut comfortably modern and fun, they did not think it was remarkable in any other way, and especially deplored its paucity of historical sites. Across the board, they recommended visiting the archaeological museum and a few ancient mosques and churches, but these seemed far less compelling than the provinces' large archaeological sites, such as the Roman temples of Baalbek and the Antique and Phoenician ruins of Byblos, Tyre and Saida. Given Beirut's lack of historical remains, the guidebooks advised going to see a few relatively new constructions. Some of their recommendations, such as the Saint Joseph and the American Universities, founded in the late nineteenth century, were related to cultural and intellectual life; others were deemed of architectural interest, like downtown Beirut, with its 1920s French-Italian-Oriental style buildings, including the Parliament at its centre.

Correspondingly, the two maps of Beirut published in the 1955 Guide Bleu, one in colour and foldable, the other in black and white, directed visitors towards more or less recently built cultural sites of interest – the two universities, and the UNESCO

⁴⁹ Kassir, *Beirut*, 307-8, 397.

⁵⁰ Boulanger, *Liban*, 44.

headquarters (inaugurated in 1948) (figs. 12-13). The author indicated the location of the archaeological museum, but did not find it worth including the location of historical monuments. Instead, in keeping with the stress on Beirut's convenience, the maps multiply indications to places French and English-speaking travellers might need. These of course included the French and British embassies, the Tourism Office, and the post office, and evidently transportation hubs (the train station and the port). The Guide Bleu moreover had health and safety in mind, and noted the locations of the police station and the Hôtel-Dieu de France hospital. By pointing out the Grand Sérail (the headquarters of the Prime Minister), the maps also assert the existence of the Lebanese State, possibly reassuring holidaymakers of law and order, all the while describing the building as a site of architectural interest.

Showcasing Beirut's modern landmarks

The photographs of Beirut published in Rouhi's 1948 Guide Vert confirm the twin convenience and recreational nature of the city outlined in his and Boulanger's guidebooks. Rouhi opted to exhibit Western-type modernism, and, to do so, commissioned photographs where Beirut is emptied out of its inhabitants to better bring out the city's newest landmarks (figs. 14-16). The images dramatize modern architecture, with the imposing Saint-Georges and Normandy hotels, and with the 1939 airport, built in the International Style then prevalent in Europe and the United States. Featuring these three buildings also underscores the ease of access to Beirut and the quality of the city's hospitality industry.

Photographs of places for entertainment are likewise devoid of human presence. An image of Martyrs' Square, the historical centre of Beirut and a recreational space for

decades, perhaps epitomises the city's dedication to Western-type nightlife. Sidewalk cafes and restaurants scintillate, as the eye moves along with the speed of cars and tramways circling the square, which adds to the dynamic feel of the city. Neon lights complete the picture and advertise for restaurants, cinemas and even a pharmaceutical company. In one full-page spread, the crowd has likewise vanished from the "Corniche," the popular seaside promenade south of downtown Beirut, bordered with upscale hotels and restaurants. However, an alluring convertible car speeds up north, towards downtown Beirut, taking the reader to the sailing port and the district's promises of entertainment.⁵¹

In the 1930s, Farroukh also painted two views of the Corniche with the Mediterranean at the left and downtown Beirut on the line of horizon. Yet, unlike the guidebook photographs, he erased traces of modernity and recreation (fig. 17). Whereas in Rouhi's publications, one drove along the Corniche, in Farroukh's painting, one lone couple of pedestrians strolls down the avenue. Farroukh was not the exception among Lebanese painters to depict a city outside time: although he and his fellow Lebanese artists were based in Beirut, when they painted it – which happened rarely – they disregarded the city's recreational nodes they frequented, the cars, and the busy commercial districts, as the previous chapter showed. Instead, painters like Onsi turned to middle- and upperclass residential areas, which they depicted as villages resistant to modernity (fig. 18). Ultimately, the absence of human activity common to Rouhi's guidebook and Lebanese paintings has opposite aims and results: for the guidebook, voiding Beirut of its population was meant to better highlight the city's forward-looking

⁵¹The top picture in the spread is mistakenly labelled the Corniche; it is actually the road to the airport.

attitude and make it look attractive to tourists, whereas when painters showed Beirut as if impervious to change, they addressed a local affluent urban audience. Their paintings, as seen previously, might constitute a metaphorical transformation of Beirut into a kind of unchanging rural idyll one might escape to through art.

Yet, neither erasing the city's modernity like the painters did, nor putting it centre stage, like in the *Guide Vert*, acknowledges the poor socioeconomic condition of a wide segment of the population and the coinciding growth of Beirut's urban fabric, spurred in great part by rural exodus and the arrival of refugees, a trend discussed in the previous chapter. Underprivileged districts are nowhere to be seen in guidebook photographs, in which it was crucial to paint an attractive image of the Lebanese capital city. However, their absence in the Lebanese painters' works suggests that their public stemming from the sociocultural elite preferred to see paintings that did not feature palpable social tensions close to them.

B. Discovering authentic Lebanon: the journey

In the guidebooks, Beirut looked shiny and new, but was not quite the point of a visit to Lebanon. Actually, Rouhi's and Boulanger's guidebooks unanimously encouraged potential visitors to leave the capital city for the coastal ones, such as Tyre, Saida, Byblos, and Tripoli, to visit their historical and archaeological sites, and urged readers to discover the Mountain during day, week, or even month-long excursions. It is during these trips, they assured, that one could discover authentic Lebanon. Guidebooks also put the accent on the car as a way to arrive to the countryside and travel within it, in stark contrast with the Lebanese painters' concealment of it in images destined for their public.

Rouhi and Boulanger outlined an array of possible outings across the country, with stops at points of various levels of interest, and optional stays in the new hotels of the bigger towns. In 1948, Rouhi recommended a half-dozen or so itineraries, and Boulanger's *Guide Bleu*, in 1955, outlined eleven journeys out of Beirut, while two started in Tripoli, the second largest Lebanese city. Boulanger, in fact, devoted only twenty pages to the visit of Beirut, but spent 120 detailing provincial towns' geography, history, accommodation possibilities, and giving sightseeing advice. He naturally discussed at more length the larger coastal cities' sites, as well as the country's best-known historical and archaeological sites, such as the Roman temple of Baalbek and the nineteenth-century palace of Emir Bashir II in the town of Deir el Qamar. He also highlighted natural landmarks, for example the Cedars forest and the natural grotto of Jeita. Still, Boulanger found smaller locales more than deserving of a visit too, and he found built or natural items worth a look in every one of them. But it actually seems that the journey from a town to another mattered just as much as the sites themselves in terms of touristic enjoyment. And to get the most of the experience, Boulanger preconised travelling by car instead of train: since cars are more flexible, travellers could stop as they pleased to see "many interesting locales and Antique sights that are difficult to visit otherwise."⁵² Tourists only had to choose among the guidebooks' itineraries and follow their directions. To this end, the *Guide Bleu* adopted a very methodical format, with kilometre-by-kilometre instructions interspersed with short descriptions of the

⁵² Boulanger, *Liban*, 45. In fact, "by 1927 the Bulletin de la Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban stated that, in that year alone, 14,000 automobiles had helped carry 15,000 visitors to historical sites, and 10,000 summer visitors up to the cool of the Lebanese Mountains" (Jackson, "Mandatory Development," citing CADN, Nantes, PER 155, Bulletin de la Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban (Beirut, 1927)).

journey's high points. Indications to go from Tripoli to the Cedars forest, for instance, began as such:

Roads: From Tripoli, two roads lead to the famous Cedars of Lebanon. The first (57.5 km) via Kousba and Hasroun... the second (56 km) via Zghorta and Ehden. It is obviously recommended to use the first to get there and the second to come back, and vice versa.⁵³

The itinerary thus came micromanaged to optimise the trip's efficiency and allowed for a more comprehensive visit of the allegedly genuine side of Lebanon.

The emphasis on the usefulness of the car to discover Lebanon, in Boulanger's and Rouhi's guidebooks, contradicts Lebanese painters' representation of the Mountain. Farroukh and Gemayel, for instance, painted landscapes in the 1930s and 1940s that suggest one rather arrived to the Mountain on foot: the paintings can take the viewer there on a bucolic path rising from the coast (fig. 19). Lebanese painters showed a landscape that remained pure of the city's intervention, when, in reality, their middle- and upperclass public consistently took advantage of asphalted roads for their own recreation. The painters' attempt to mask modern infrastructure's role in the enjoyment of the Mountain suggests that painting could have represented to their viewers an avenue to symbolically escape to an unspoiled rural life, perhaps in response to their uneasiness with modern life in Beirut, as seen in the previous chapter. Boulanger, conversely, focused on the interconnections between Beirut and the provinces, and among provincial towns, because he needed to reassure visitors of the easiness of the journey he promised, from modern Beirut to and within the attractive countryside.

⁵³ Boulanger, *Liban*, 134.

C. Discovering authentic Lebanon: the people

It remained to tell, and show, holidaymakers what they ought to expect from Lebanese villagers, and Rouhi's 1948 Guide Vert gave a flavour of that. One of the essays in the guidebook, "La vie au Liban, vie sociale" (Life in Lebanon, social life), by a writer called M. Souleimane, included a depiction of the so-called genuine Lebanese village life and people, and J. Abdelnour, in "Beyrouth et ses habitants" (Beirut and its inhabitants), provided a counterpoint with a description of the Westernised and modern Beirut society.⁵⁴ In the same guidebook, in a rare instance of an artist's collaboration with Lebanese travel literature of the period, Farroukh contributed images to illustrate Souleimane's text on village life, and, in fact, corroborate it.

Farroukh might have been commissioned works especially for the book, but it is more likely that the publishers reused some of his older works – the image of a shed, for example, is a black-and-white version of one of his watercolours (figs. 20-21). Farroukh's illustrations for the Guide Vert thus repurpose his artistic project in a format addressing an international audience: this change of context invites a comparison between, on the one hand, his images' relationship with Souleimane's text, and, on the other, the reception of Farroukh's paintings of rural life by Lebanese art critics. The latter's descriptions of their village compatriots come close to Souleimane's, since they praise the virtues of the supposed authentic Lebanese villager and the bliss of perpetuating traditions. But Souleimane diverges in the connection he sought to create between his audience and the Lebanese village, because guidebooks present a foreign

⁵⁴ M. Souleimane, "La Vie au Liban. Vie sociale" [Life in Lebanon. Social life], in *Beyrouth et la République libanaise*; Abdelnour, "Beyrouth et ses habitants" [Beirut and its Inhabitants], in *Beyrouth et la République libanaise*.

destination and its inhabitants as objects of curiosity and bring out their differences with their readers. By contrast, Lebanese art writers encouraged the Beirut art public to project themselves in artistic representations of rural life – to some extent, to bridge a metaphorical, not physical, gap between themselves and the nearby countryside, as explained in the previous chapter.

In Rouhi's 1948 *Guide Vert*, villagers explicitly constitute the antithesis of Beirut's inhabitants. The Beirut society Abdelnour described was Westernised, and felt familiar to the European tourist. The Beirut woman, he wrote, was "very evolved, on the Western model," and the society was cosmopolitan, intellectual, polyglot, and "au courant of all the new ideas."⁵⁵ In Beirut, he added, there were bookstores, numerous literary and scientific events, and radio stations that broadcasted cultural programs.⁵⁶ The village, by contrast, as Souleimane assessed, seemed devoid of all of these features and it could thus only be there that one might "get to know the veritable Lebanese, who exemplifies the qualities and the virtues of the country." This "veritable Lebanese" was a model peasant, characterised by hard work (he "struggled against but vanquished nature"), vivacious intelligence, and humaneness. Moreover, village life, as Souleimane described it, was simple and innocent: "peace reigns, health lives, and faith resides there."⁵⁷

Farroukh's illustrations published in the *Guide Vert* can be seen to confirm Souleimane's opinion of Lebanese village life. In one of them, a Maronite peasant, wearing the traditional conic hat, called a *labbade*, and baggy *shermal* pants, stands in a

⁵⁵ Souleimane, "La Vie au Liban," 89; Abdelnour, "Beyrouth et ses habitants," 168.

⁵⁶ Abdelnour, "Beyrouth et ses habitants," 168.

⁵⁷ Souleimane, "La Vie au Liban", 94, 98.

field, plow in hand (fig. 22). His traditional costume and the austere scene denote an unchanging and simple lifestyle; the peasant's stance demonstrates hard work; his facial expression shows determination, in accordance with Souleimane's text. During the same period, Farroukh and Gemayel also regularly depicted Lebanese male villagers in traditional outfits engaging in ancient activities, such as picking olives, and contemporary art critics also saw in these men genuine Lebanese examples of hard work and intelligence (figs. 23-24). Yet, while Souleimane's text simply praises the Lebanese villager, some art writers saw in them patriotic models, as the previous chapter explained.

The Guide Vert also reproduced an image by Farroukh of a smiling young woman going to the well, as well as one of villagers cheerfully dancing the traditional *dabke*: both support Souleimane's emphasis on the bliss supposedly inherent to Lebanese rural life (figs. 25-26).⁵⁸ Lebanese painters also treated both subjects – among many examples, there are for instance Onsi's watercolours of Druze women at the fountain, and Gemayel's painting of the *dabke* (figs. 27-28). As seen earlier, Lebanese art critics interpreted this kind of scenes as proofs of the happiness of perpetuating tradition, and of the sense of community rural activities fostered; they contended that this kind of paintings confirmed the endurance of Lebanese customs. Yet, unlike Souleimane, these commentators were not addressing potential tourists, but Beirut readers, who knew something of the Mountain close by, and for whom paintings of village scenes could be aspirational ideals of rural joyfulness reflective of their longing for a lifestyle unlike their own.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

Conversely, when Farroukh's images are juxtaposed to Souleimane's text, they participate in the guidebook's promise of the physical accessibility of Lebanon's authentic village, as opposed to the metaphorical one. Souleimane underlines that this experience might not be always possible, as he lamented the disappearance of Lebanese customs – the “characteristic colour and flavour of the country” – under the effects of modernity. In particular, he acknowledged the contemporary rural exodus, which emptied out Mountain towns of their younger generations.⁵⁹ Indeed, since the 1910s, the collapse of the silk thread industry and the decline in agriculture's economic importance had been driving thousands of villagers to emigrate to Beirut and abroad, as the previous chapter outlined. Lebanese art critics eschewed such considerations, but for Souleimane, putting the accent on the vanishing of so-called authentic Lebanese life communicated to his readers a sense of urgency to discover it before it was, allegedly, too late.

IV. THE VIEW FROM ABROAD: THE PARIS-LYON-MÉDITERRANÉE RAILWAY COMPANY POSTERS

In the early 1920s, the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée (PLM) railway company, a major network covering France and the Mediterranean coast, sought to advertise its various destinations. It opted to use posters, a reproducible and portable, thus efficient, marketing tool, in addition to their illustrated brochures and advertisements in the press: this strategy was typical of international transportation companies of the time, such as the French shipping company Messageries Maritimes, for instance. The PLM thus commissioned French artists Julien Lacaze and Léon Dabo to design an extensive

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 95, 97.

series of posters promoting the regions the company served, among them Lebanon. Three posters featuring the country were designed at different points in the 1920s, and reprinted with different headings during this decade and the following one (figs. 29-30). Some were titled “Le Tourisme en Syrie” (lumping the Syrian state(s) and Lebanon under one destination), others “Syrie et Liban,” and yet others “Liban:” these designations seem to have been used interchangeably and independently from political developments. The trio of headings might rather reflect the PLM’s desire to narrow their marketing focus or expand it according to their needs.

Lacaze’s and Dabo’s posters of Lebanon reveal the way the PLM wished to present the country to their European and international clientele: they designate Lebanon “Pays de Tourisme et de Villégiature” (land of tourism and village holidays), a statement coinciding with the outlook of the Lebanese tourism industry, the guidebooks to the country, and the French and Lebanese authorities. By contrast, the sites the PLM chose to feature to publicise Syria were not bucolic scenes but the ancient ruins of Palmyra and the historical village of Maaloula, and travel posters of the period advertising Egypt put the spotlight on the pyramids of Gizeh (figs. 32-33).

Lacaze, despite focusing on Beirut, still emphasised the Mountain as a destination. He gave the city a flavour of ancientness, which is not too surprising since he designed the poster around 1920, when Beirut had not yet been reconfigured by the French administration. Yet, he already pointed to the direction the Lebanese tourism industry would take: the snowy mountain peaks cannot be missed, and indicate a mild climate, an important feature in the marketing of the country. Dabo, however, elected to feature the Lebanese Mountain more prominently: one poster, “Le Mont Sannin au-

dessus de Beyrouth” (Mount Sannin above Beirut) (c. 1925) is a view down valleys and towards this summit, and “Route d’Aley au pont du Cadi” (the road to Aley at the Cadi bridge) (1927) takes the viewer to the town of Aley, east of Beirut, to contemplate the landscape. The three posters bring to mind landscape paintings of the period by artists such as Onsi, Farroukh and Gemayel, because of their aesthetics focused on nature, and their compositions. But while these Lebanese painters concealed the modern means by which their local viewers reached the Mountain, Dabo’s two posters give indications of them.

“Route d’Aley” and “Le Mont Sannin” promise to bring viewers into authentic Lebanon. Both invite them to look down on a valley and immerse themselves in the landscape, in a way reminiscent of certain scenes of nature by Onsi for example, including one where the diagonal perspective is almost the exact reverse mirror of Dabo’s (fig. 34). Moreover, the PLM posters and the Lebanese works share picturesque aesthetics: both sets of images seem to portray a supposedly untouched nature and emphasise the variegated vegetation growing in a topographically diverse landscape. Even more, Dabo and the Lebanese painters alike highlight the sunlight and the physical presence of the mountain, which dominates the background as the ultimate destination of the viewer, and becomes the defining feature of authentic Lebanon. In one of Farroukh’s landscapes, for instance, the same Sannin takes over the scene’s background, painted in a set of colours curiously similar to Dabo’s (fig. 35).

When Farroukh’s and his contemporaries’ paintings were exhibited in Beirut, Lebanese art critics proposed the Mountain, coupled with the sun, as the essence of the Lebanese landscape, as the previous chapter proposed. Unlike Dabo, they did not

present it as a touristic attraction, or even a physical destination, but as an artistic image that could not be physically experienced and thanks to which the affluent Lebanese public could metaphorically escape Beirut for a rural fantasy. Conversely, although Dabo's poster also gives the illusion of a genuine landscape with the Mountain at its core, the artist used the strategy to draw viewers to the actual site, and attempted to convince potential tourists that the physical landscape would match its flattering image.

In addition to the diverging possible interpretations of these two sets of Lebanese landscapes whose aesthetics resemble one another, there is another significant difference between Dabo's "Route d'Aley" and Lebanese landscape painting of the Mandate era: in the poster, a car is parked strategically, at the optimal spot to observe the view. Lebanese painters, by contrast, concealed modern means of transportation used to get to the Mountain to their Lebanese audience, who responded positively to artistic representations of a pure countryside. The PLM poster of Aley, however, announces to the tourist that Lebanon provides modern amenities that will ensure a smooth journey throughout Lebanon, and, in effect, also promises a pleasant travelling experience aboard the PLM trains.

But were it not for the title of the posters, Dabo's images of the Lebanese Mountain could have almost corresponded to those the PLM published to advertise its European coastal destinations. Posters of the period that feature the French resort of Evian-les-Bains and the French Riviera, for instance, partake in the same aesthetics as the Lebanese ones (figs. 36-37). This congruence is not coincidental, if only because the nature and climate of the South of France resemble that of Lebanon, and the region is also known as a summer destination. In the posters of France, like in those of Lebanon,

the viewer overlooks a scene that includes the same combination of pine trees, mountains and greenery, the whole presented as intact. Transportation and leisure also appear in Evian under the guise of sailboats awaiting holidaymakers. Moreover, the erasure of differences between the PLM's Mediterranean destinations appears in the loss of their distinguishing features: there are no identifiable villages or landmarks, which however appeared in the posters advertising Syria and Egypt. Thus, viewed alongside posters such as Evian's and the Riviera's, the Lebanon Dabo depicted loses a part of its identity, and the country's particularities make way for the Mediterranean-picturesque aesthetics the PLM favoured. The strategy certainly rendered the Lebanese landscape familiar and reassuring to European tourists, since it placed Lebanon within the Mediterranean-Western heritage rather than the Oriental one: Lebanon was thus a place where Europeans could escape city life while still enjoying the benefits of modernity, and escape Europe without truly leaving it.

CONCLUSION

The argument for the promotion of Lebanon as a destination for Mountain holidays emerged in the 1920s, at the beginning of the Mandate, as the Lebanese economy was affected by the decline of sericulture, and industry was undeveloped. Considering this situation, and Lebanon's location within a dynamic regional tourism network, many believed that attracting foreign holidaymakers could benefit the country's economy – the mandatory authorities, the Lebanese government, as well as private actors agreed on this point. Aside from practical governmental initiatives to facilitate travel, and private ones to develop the hospitality industry, it was necessary to market the country by

disseminating visuals.

This promotional material, whether made by French or Lebanese actors, by the government or the private sector, argues that a holiday in Lebanon ought to happen in the Mountain. They coalesce to highlight the allure of the countryside's nature and recreational opportunities, emphasise their accessibility, and bring forth the country's modern infrastructure and hospitality industry. From the official side, the Lebanese state used postage stamps to publicise Mountain recreation. Two of them, designed in 1936 by Farroukh and Mourani, represented, respectively, a journey by car throughout the mountains with a panoramic view over the coast, and winter sports. From the foreign side, the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée railway company commissioned French artist Léon Dabo two posters that presented Lebanon in a similar fashion: in one of them, like in Farroukh's stamp design, there is a car taking the tourists to enjoy a scenic and picturesque Mountain landscape. In fact, for all the participants in the tourism industry, it was important to show that Lebanon's transportation infrastructure guaranteed easy access to beautiful scenery and relaxation for the tourist: guidebooks to Lebanon, such as Jamil Rouhi's 1948 *Beyrouth et la République libanaise* and Robert Boulanger's 1955 *Guide Bleu*, concurred and put the accent on excursions outside Beirut, providing detailed itineraries. During the same period, Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi were frequently painting landscapes adopting a perspective on the Mountain scene similar to Farroukh's stamp design and Dabo's posters, where the viewer dominates the landscape. They, however, erased the automobiles used to access the Mountain, where many members of their Lebanese audience summered, and showed them a utopian escape from Beirut.

Then, as Rouhi's 1948 guidebook explained, once in the Mountain, the holidaymaker would encounter authentic Lebanese villagers. In order to prove the point, he reproduced artworks by Farroukh showing them in their daily activities. In this instance, one painter's works were successively presented to two different audiences – first, to Beirut's art public, and then, to the guidebook's international readers. This entails a change in the images' possible messages, and in their potential reception. The *Guide Vert* praised villagers, but presented them as objects of curiosity for potential tourists. However, when art critics assessed similar village scenes by Farroukh and other painters, they presented them as patriotic examples for Beirut's art public to emulate and identify with.

In the guidebooks, if the village represented authentic Lebanon, Beirut was its opposite. The city, the authors affirmed, enjoyed a quality hospitality industry, all the necessary amenities, and featured plenty of entertainment to choose from. In all, as the photographs Rouhi and Boulanger published suggest, it was Westernised and reassuringly familiar for the European tourist, but lacked historical interest. By contrast, when artists like Farroukh and Onsi painted Beirut, they concealed the city's activity, showing neither cars nor leisure or entertainment. Ultimately, the Lebanese painting of the period might have provided its public a temporary escape from Beirut's modernity, to metaphorically experience a supposedly authentic idyll. By contrast, the tourism industry needed to insure future visitors that their visit Lebanon's countryside was not only going to be enjoyable, but also easy, and it was important to them to guarantee that Lebanon enjoyed modern transportation, hospitality and recreational infrastructure, and reassure tourists of the feeling of familiarity of Westernised Beirut.

LEBANON AT INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

INTRODUCTION

While the promotion of tourism in Lebanon continuously stressed the identity of the country as a destination for a pleasant Mountain stay, when Lebanon was represented in international events, its image evolved with time. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lebanon participated in international fairs and exhibitions under the aegis of France, in the context of large-scale celebrations of its colonial power. At the 1939 New York World's Fair however, France would be relegated to the background.

The idea of including Lebanon in international exhibitions started right at the beginning of the Mandate. In fact, the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon was only a few months old when High Commissioner General Gouraud decided a Foire-Exposition would take place in downtown Beirut. The event was conceived as a commercial fair with two objectives: first, ensuring French economic domination over the region by showcasing the production of French firms, and, second, developing trade between France and the Levant. But the underlying political goals the French had in mind for the fair were more critical, since the mandatory power sought to prove the legitimacy of its control over the region, and its partition in several states on a sectarian basis: in 1920, after the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire, France divided its mandated territories into majority-Christian Greater Lebanon, the Jabal Druze, the State

of the Alawites, and the predominantly Sunni States of Damascus and of Aleppo. By giving their own lands to the different religious sects, France fragmented the region and hoped to prevent the intensification of pan-Syrian nationalism and weaken the opposition to the Mandate. The new state of Greater Lebanon nevertheless only had the support of part of the Maronite population.

At the exhibition, the mandated territories' exhibits were strategically set up on Al-Burj, Beirut's central square. In contrast with the pavilions dedicated to the Syrian territories, which emphasised artisanal practices, Lebanon was also represented via sculpture and painting in a fine arts pavilion, which marked the first public art exhibition in the country. There, Lebanon was characterised as a Christian protectorate through the works of the foremost artists of the time, such as the painter Daoud Corm (1852-1930) and the sculptor Youssef Hoyek (1883-1962).

Ten years later, France included its mandated territories at the Exposition Coloniale in Vincennes, near Paris, grouping them in a Pavillon des États du Levant. The political context at home had changed, since the mandated territories had been reconfigured into four states, which were still organised along sectarian lines: the Lebanese Republic, the Syrian one, the Jabal Druze and the Government of Latakia. Then, Syria and Lebanon had somewhat increased in political autonomy, which nevertheless did not equate with independence. Overall, the Levantine states' exhibition celebrated the French actions in the region, in keeping with the Exposition Coloniale's exalting of the Empire. Yet, the content of the Pavillon des États du Levant further distinguished between Syria and Lebanon in order to emphasise Lebanon's historical relationship, and its cultural and religious affinities, with France. Painting and sculpture,

alongside archaeological artefacts, maps, and photographs, participated in reinforcing the French message, with artists such as the painter César Gemayel (1898-1958) enlisted to produce works to that end.

But at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the pavilion of the Lebanese Republic stood on its own. The United States had invited Lebanon to take part in the fair separately from France, with the understanding that it deserved to be present as an autonomous state, after the 1936 signature of a treaty with the mandatory power as a prelude to the country's independence. This treaty, however, was never ratified, as High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux still declined to do so in 1939. The organisation of the exhibition was entirely in Lebanese hands, and Maronite writer and businessman Charles Corm (1894-1963), who was imbued with French culture and recurrently stressed the Phoenician ancestry of Lebanon, was appointed by the Lebanese parliament to undertake the project.

The exhibition greatly involved contemporary Lebanese art, and in large part reflected the Lebanese nationalist ideology that would prevail at independence, in the 1943 National Pact between Maronite President Bechara El Khoury and Prime Minister Riad El Solh: Lebanon was defined as simultaneously turned towards the West and part of the Arab world, yet with an identity distinct from its neighbours, and was characterised by the cooperation between its Muslim and Christian communities. Corm also gave a prestigious ancestry to the country by integrating Phoenician artefacts and history in the displays. Since the late 1910s, several Christian nationalist writers and thinkers, such as Corm himself or the financier-politician Michel Chiha (1891-1954), indeed found in this civilisation one of the bases of the Lebanese identity, anchoring

Lebanon in a non-Muslim civilisation. They leveraged the Phoenicians politically in order to justify contemporary Lebanon's borders – which would map onto the alleged Phoenician ones – and to prove the validity of the country's autonomy from Greater Syria.

But ultimately, in New York, Corm sought to attract American tourists, who were already acquainted with Ancient Lebanon's biblical ties, and were particularly fond of the Old Testament's Cedars, which are said to have been used to build King Solomon's temple. Lebanese artists, including the painters Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) and César Gemayel, and the sculptor Youssef Hoyek, played a critical role in elaborating Lebanon's historical and civilisational narrative, adding to the archaeological artefacts, maps, photographs, and handicrafts on display.

I. THE 1921 FOIRE-EXPOSITION DE BEYROUTH

The 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth lasted two months, took over the entire city centre, and attracted a reported 6,500 people on opening day, April 30; its total attendance might have been as high as 100,000 people.¹ It was essentially a commercial fair displaying a large proportion of goods imported from France and a minority thereof made in its mandated territories. This economic focus concealed political aims: with the Fair, France sought, simultaneously, to further its economic interests in the Levant and

¹ The first number comes from *Al-Bashīr*, "Ma'raḡ Bayrūt" [The Beirut Exhibition], May 3, 1921; the second from the Office Commercial Français pour la Syrie et le Liban as cited in Simon Jackson, "Mandatory Development: The Political Economy of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon, 1915-1939" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2009), 339.

to legitimise its presence there.² To this end, the mandatory authorities took advantage of the renovated downtown Beirut to assert French power physically and visually, and separated the goods made in France, which were displayed on the streets of central Beirut, from those of the mandated territories, which were shown on the Al-Burj plaza, then called Cannons' Square (fig.1).

The French political establishment was closely involved in the organisation and management of the Fair, in Paris as well as in Beirut. The French government dispatched senator Fernand David (who had been Minister of Agriculture in the 1910s) as an official delegate; an official decree from the French government governed the Fair's planning and proceedings; several French ministries and agencies, from finance to the fine arts, were also involved. In Beirut, the event took place under the high patronage of Gouraud, with Commandant Fumey acting as its general commissioner. An honorary committee was formed around them, on which French politicians and Mandate higher-ups, among them the governor of Greater Lebanon Captain Albert Trabaud, the Secretary General of the High Commission Robert de Caix (Gouraud's main assistant and one of the key devisers of the French Mandate policies in its first years), and General Garnier-Duplessis, the adjunct to the Commanding General of the Levantine Army, were given symbolic positions.³

² This observation is corroborated by Jackson's investigation of the mandatory archives discussing the elaboration of the Fair ("Mandatory Development," 326, quoting MAE, Série E-Levant-1918-1929, Sous-Série - Syrie-Liban-Cilicie, Carton 80, HC Beirut to MAE, 25 March 1920.)

³ Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, *La Syrie et le Liban en 1921. La Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth. Conférences. Liste des récompenses* (Paris: Emile Larose, 1922), xv, xvi, xxv-xvi. At the occasion of the Fair, the High Commission published *La Syrie et le Liban en 1921. La Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth. Conférences. Liste des récompenses*, a report detailing the participants to all the committees in charge of the event, publishing the conferences given at this occasion, and providing a list of all the exhibiting firms and individuals, highlighting those that had been given prizes.

The High Commission's report notes no fewer than six dozen other individuals sitting on several additional committees. The general commissariat, arguably the most important of them, was composed of an honorary committee and an organising one. The former had five French members, the rest of them being part of the Lebanese and Syrian financial-commercial and feudal elites. The participating individuals, who hailed from different religious sects, were likely close to, or at least willing to collaborate with, the mandatory authorities, and their political and financial interests probably intersected with those of France. From Lebanon, there were for instance Beirut merchants, like the Sunni Beydoun and the Orthodox Philippe Pharaon and Alfred Sursock, and members of feudal families like the Druze Amir Arslan or the Maronite Youssef Khazen. Several of them had political roles in the early mandate's administration and beyond, such as Pharaon and Sursock who had seats on Beirut's municipal council, Sunni merchant Abdallah Beyhum who would become Prime Minister in the 1930s, and, paradoxically, Omar Daouk, the mayor of Beirut during the late Ottoman era, who had proclaimed the Arab government in 1918. The local committee in charge of organising the event included half a dozen French businessmen and engineers and a dozen Syrians and Lebanese, including two journalists.⁴

A. The Fair's layout reveals its objectives

The Foire-Exposition's opening day marked the inauguration of Beirut's new city centre, France's first large-scale city-planning project in the Levant: the extensive overhaul was devised to make the city match its important role as the seat of France's general headquarters in the region. The project was conceived to facilitate France's

⁴ Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, xxvi-vii.

military activities and trade, make crowd management more efficient, and foster commercial partnerships. With the participation of the Lebanese bourgeoisie who welcomed building and infrastructure contracts, and felt that a more modern downtown would favour businesses, the old city's labyrinthine souks and the port neighbourhood were demolished and reconfigured in a way reminiscent of a Haussmanisation project, revealing that the Mandate sought for Beirut to become an example of Western-style development: they became a grid of large symmetrical axes, lined with red sandstone buildings with façades evocative of Italian and French architecture, to which were added baroque and Levantine touches. Linked by arcaded pathways, the new buildings housed modern businesses and offices.⁵

On opening day, Gouraud proceeded to parade French power throughout this newly built environment that freed up space for visual and physical control. He was accompanied by high-ranking Mandate officials and a French parliamentary delegation, which included David, De Caix, and deputy Robert Solé. France included their local collaborators in this procession: representatives of local governments, such as the governor of the State of Damascus Hakkı Bey Azam, the state secretary in Lebanon Auguste Adib (formerly part of the Egyptian state administration, and who would

⁵ May Davie, *Beyrouth 1825-1975: un siècle et demi d'urbanisme* [Beirut 1825-1975: One and a Half Centuries of Urban Planning] (Beirut: Publications de l'Ordre des Ingénieurs et Architectes de Beyrouth, 2001), 71, 87-88; Davie, "Deuxième conférence internationale d'histoire urbaine. Beyrouth: de la ville ottomane à la ville française" [Second international conference on urban history. Beirut: from the Ottoman to the French city] (Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur l'Urbanisation du Monde Arabe, Strasbourg, 1994). In Beirut, the French built on the Ottoman modernising and westernising works undertaken since the end of the nineteenth century in many of their main cities. The remodelling of Beirut contrasts with their North African cities, where medinas were safeguarded. It also contrasts with Damascus's and Aleppo's preservation projects of historical buildings. In Beirut, some historical mosques and churches were left intact, while the old souks were in majority torn down.

become Prime Minister in 1926), and the head of the administrative commission of Greater Lebanon, Daoud Ammoun, marched behind the French officials.⁶

The men walked throughout the fairgrounds set on the new, wide, Allenby Street and its extension, which eventually came to be called Ma'raḳ (fair) Street (fig. 2).⁷

It is on these avenues and the grid around them that France flaunted its economic might, and announced its desire to dominate the region's commerce. Purposely-built exhibition structures showcased the products of as many as 1300 French firms,⁸ belonging to the manufacturing, artisanal and service industries, spanning foods, cars, medicine, agriculture, textiles, and engineering, among two dozen fields. As many as 600 of them received official prizes and diplomas.⁹ This wide display of French goods had been made possible by the Quai d'Orsay's lifting export bans on certain products and foodstuffs. And after a devastating World War I notably marked by famine, the Foire's profusion of goods of all sorts surely impressed the local population, or could have been met with envy.¹⁰ Moreover, this artificial marketplace mirrored the French urban sanitizing project: as described by the High Commission's report, the fairgrounds, like the new city centre, were designed to be "bright, open, airy, and wide," by contrast with the former "obscure and mysterious markets" with their "shady" dwellers.¹¹

Levantine products were not displayed alongside the French ones on Allenby Street, but nearby, on Al-Burj, the city's central and largest square (fig. 3). During the

⁶ *Al-Bashīr*, "Ma'raḳ Bayrūt."

⁷ *Al-Ma'raḳ*, "Ma'raḳ Bayrūt" [The Beirut Exhibition], July 1921.

⁸ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 339, citing the Office Commercial Français pour la Syrie et le Liban, (OCFSL).

⁹ "Liste des récompenses" in Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, 348-83.

¹⁰ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 334.

¹¹ Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, 2.

exhibition, Al-Burj served as the central showcase of French power as the location was charged with political symbolism. Al-Burj had been known as Place des Canons (Cannons' Square) since the mid-1850s because artillery had been used there by the Russians in the late eighteenth century, and, more pertinent to the Fair's context, by the French in 1860. It changed its name to Place Hamidiyye in honour of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II in the late nineteenth century, and was renamed Liberty Square after the 1908 Young Turks Revolution.¹² The mandatory authorities reverted to calling it Place des Canons.¹³ Al-Burj was also a strategic location: it was the heart of the city, visited daily by people who worked downtown, and flanked, on its north side, by the Petit Sérail (the seat of the Lebanese administration), its other sides lined with cabarets and cafés, and, nearby, to the east, thrived the red-light district.

Although the five pavilions built on the square corresponded not to states but to cities, they still asserted the Levant's sectarian division. The buildings of Beirut (a Christian-majority city), Saida, and Tyre (both Sunni-majority cities) stood for Greater Lebanon, and the pavilions of Damascus and of Aleppo, two Sunni-majority cities, represented the states bearing their names. In each of the five buildings, artisanal and agricultural goods from each region were on display. Other structures on Al-Burj highlighted different economic sectors of production, in particular agriculture-related ones, given that local industrial production was rather undeveloped.¹⁴ This contrasted with the prevalence of the manufacturing and service industries on the French side of the exhibition, with its hundreds of French firms. Indeed, there were only around 150

¹² Al-Burj means "the tower," a reference to one of Beirut's towers that used to stand there.

¹³ This is the name that appears in Haut-Commissariat, *La Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*.

¹⁴ Luis Cheikho, "Ma'raḍ Bayrūt. Naẓar Ijmāli Tarīkhi iqtisādi ijtimā'i" [The Beirut Exhibition. Historical, Economic and Social Remarks], *Al-Mashriq*, July 1, 1921, 528.

Lebanese and Syrian firms who received prizes or diplomas, in comparison with 600 French ones, and the local producers specialised in handicrafts and artisanal goods, like pastry, furniture, interior decoration, or glassworks.¹⁵ While this discrepancy mirrors the difference in scale between French and Levantine production, the overwhelming quantity of French goods on show points to France's likely wish to use, among other strategies, flooding the local market in order to gain economic domination over a region with little industrial production, and whose agricultural sector had been ravaged by the Great War, as seen in chapters 5 and 6. Lastly, the near-absence of other countries at the Fair reveals that the French had made sure it was to remain entirely in their hands, with the participation of Syrians and Lebanese, which is why they sought to curb the presence of the United States and the former Central Powers as much as possible: only twenty foreign firms exhibited at the Fair.¹⁶

B. The French rhetoric surrounding the Fair

The opening-day speeches confirmed the related economic and political goals of the Fair, and, more precisely, interpreted recent events in a way that would justify and assert the French political-economic agenda for the years to come. That day, the officials' journeys culminated on Al-Burj, where French officials delivered speeches glorifying their country, and some local officials also spoke.¹⁷ Commandant Fumey, the exhibition's general commissioner, more or less straightforwardly declared that the Foire-Exposition was fundamentally designed to market French consumer goods, and,

¹⁵ "Liste des récompenses" in Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, 348-83.

¹⁶ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 332, 334.

¹⁷ Al-Bashīr, "Ma'raḡ Bayrūt."

as a corollary, to showcase the Syrian industries and help boost their growth.¹⁸ On the matter of helping local economies, Fumey claimed to have in mind developing local mineral resources and agriculture, most notably the cultivation of silk and tobacco in Lebanon, and of grain in the Syrian plains.¹⁹ In spite of Fumey's statement of intent, in reality, by the end of the 1920s, the mandatory authorities had done little to develop both agricultural and industrial sectors, as mentioned in chapter 5. Instead, they boosted the import market, primarily for what concerned consumer goods produced in France.²⁰

Fumey, Gouraud, and other officials also argued in favour of the legitimacy of French rule by citing French achievements in numerous fields. This was particularly necessary since the Fair was taking place at a time when France had to defend not only its presence in the Levant but also its controversial sectarian-based division thereof, which the five cities' pavilions reflected. France had declared the establishment of Greater Lebanon in September 1920, but the idea of a Christian-dominated Greater Lebanon, had already been gaining prominence in the aftermath of World War I, when a sizeable proportion of Maronite notables, the Patriarch Elias Hoyek foremost among them, lobbied France to create a state separated from Muslim-dominated Greater Syria. Greater Lebanon, they argued, should expand the borders of the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon to absorb Beirut and the coast to gain access to international trade, and incorporate the predominantly Muslim agricultural plains surrounding the Mountain, in order to insure subsistence after the 1916 famine that had

¹⁸ Commanding officer Fumey's opening day speech, quoted in Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, xii.

¹⁹ Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, xxviii.

²⁰ Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest, The Search for a National Identity, 1926-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 86.

claimed as many as 200,000 lives – as much as half of the Mutasarrifiyya’s population.²¹ The Allies’ sea blockade that prevented Egyptian goods from coming in, a locust plague that ravaged harvests in 1915, the requisitions of goods by the Ottoman authorities starting 1915 to feed their own army, and Jamal Pasha’s land blockade all contributed to the disaster.

After taking their time to weigh their options, and taking into account the geopolitical context, their imperial project, and their competition with Great Britain, the French proclaimed Greater Lebanon in September 1920 within the borders advocated by Maronite “Lebanists.”²² Nonetheless, certain Maronites sought to maintain the borders of the Mutasarrifiyya, while some Orthodox Christians resented possible Maronite domination, and many Muslims, as well as Christians, advocated Lebanon’s incorporation into a larger Syrian state for cultural and/or religious reasons.²³

Thus, Gouraud’s speech tried to alleviate the concerns surrounding French rule throughout the mandated territories, invoking all “the results [France] had attained in less than one year,” foremost among them the actions of its army that had brought “peace, unity, and prosperity to a severely wounded and troubled” region.²⁴ In parallel with official speeches, a series of twelve conferences, all but two given by Frenchmen took place during the Fair and coincided with the French discourse surrounding it. They all extolled French endeavours: one presented the recent role of the French military in the Levant, two outlined France’s (real or purported) projects for agriculture and the

²¹ William Harris, *Lebanon : A History, 600-2011* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2012), 172.

²² Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 253.

²³ Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 216, 218, 222.

²⁴ General Gouraud’s opening day speech, reproduced in Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, xiv-xx.

local economy, and two others delved into the French *mission civilisatrice*, particularly in the fields of education, charity work, and medicine.²⁵ In terms of economy and agriculture, the speeches were in line with the then-prevalent colonial rhetoric of “economic morality” purporting that Syria’s great “wealth during Antiquity and the country’s potential for the future [had been jeopardized by] degradation and corruption under Ottoman-Sunni rule.”²⁶ Moreover, the accent placed on economic development, among other subjects, is to be placed in the context of the French concern for the reconstruction of the Métropole’s post-war economy. Meanwhile, in Paris, the pro-colonial press echoed the rhetoric put forward at the Fair: *La Revue des Deux Mondes* argued that “commercial propaganda” there could simultaneously make France the first commercial partner of the Levant and “substitute the locals’ political concerns with preoccupations about their economic development” during politically troubled times.²⁷

These speeches and conferences, of course, only reached those in attendance. In order to placate the general population as well as attract it to purchase French goods, the Foire-Exposition’s organisers had to draw a wider net, and thus banked on entertainment: on opening night, there were fireworks on the seashore, music, and street performers, and then a multiplicity of daily activities, including car races, flower shows, balls, champagne cocktails, and film screenings. A French restaurant opened on the seashore, and a theatre-cum-circus behind the Petit Sérail.²⁸

²⁵ “Les Conférences” in Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, 1-305.

²⁶ Jackson, “Mandatory Development,” 122, 197.

²⁷ *La Revue des deux mondes*, “L’Œuvre de la France en Syrie” [The Works of France in Syria], March 1921.

²⁸ *Al-Bashīr*, “Ma’raḍ Bayrūt [The Beirut Fair]”, May 3, 1921; Cheikho, “Ma’raḍ Bayrūt,” 529, 530. French sources cited by Jackson corroborate this account (see Jackson, “Mandatory Development,” 325.)

C. The Fine Arts pavilion's depiction of a Lebanese Christian protectorate

The five cities' pavilions afforded a partial view of the way France, and the local elites, wanted to portray the territorial entities the structures represented – as landscapes of production characterised by the specific goods they produced. In Beirut's pavilion, artisanal objects constituted the bulk of the display: in a photograph of one of its rooms, a man stands among an array of local marquetry, carved wood furniture, and Oriental objects, including a mirror, a glass lamp, drapery, and a *'ūd* (Arabic lute) (fig. 4). Yet, although the room looks overall Levantine, a few Western-style art objects link Greater Lebanon to European civilisation. There were, in addition to some pieces of Europe-inspired furniture, three European-style paintings on the back wall, and a sculpted bust on top of a cabinet. (It is unclear who made them, but the Beirut pavilion was meant to display locally made items.)

In fact, the fine arts on display at the Foire-Exposition provide a fruitful avenue to better understand Greater Lebanon's identity as presented in this context. A fine arts pavilion, in fact, stood on the square, rather incongruously, near the Army and the Navy's pavilions, which were both designed to celebrate the French military and showcase its equipment.²⁹ The structure housed exclusively Lebanese artworks, although there were oil painters practicing in Syria at the time.³⁰ On the whole, the works on show suggested that Greater Lebanon was a Christian territory grateful of French rule.

²⁹ Jackson, "Mandatory Development," 330.

³⁰ The Lebanese press, as well as the High Commission's report, only mention Lebanese artworks, and al-Mashriq noted that the Syrian fine arts exhibition consisted of antique mosaics (Cheikho, "Ma'raḡ Bayrūt," 530).

The High Commission's report lists six artists' names, and *al-Masbriq* (The Levant) provides two additional ones, encompassing professionals and amateurs. The pavilion featured the prominent Lebanese painters of the period, the Maronites Daoud Corm (1852-1930), Habib Serour (1863-1938), and Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928). As seen in chapter 2, these three artists were the first professional painters in Beirut, where they had opened studios at the turn of the century. They enjoyed regional renown and, by the early 1920s, were at the height of their careers. It is not known so far who exactly chose to exhibit these particular artists, but their selection is not surprising, since few other painters at the time enjoyed their renown. It is remarkable, however, that the three painters were showing their works in a public context, since they typically responded to direct commissions from the Church and wealthy local patrons, so their works went straight from their studios to their intended destinations, whether homes or churches. (The question also remains whether the works were commissioned especially for the exhibition or culled from the painters' pre-existing production.) In this respect, the Fine Arts pavilion heralded the development of Beirut's exhibitionary complex during the 1920s and 1930s, which has been examined in chapter 3.

In a fair that stressed Lebanon's Christian identity, curators chose to principally exhibit three Christian painters. It might be that this was a deliberate gesture to put the emphasis on the country's Christian identity, but, in practice, no Muslim had yet gained notoriety as a painter. The young Sunni Omar Onsi (1901-1969), who would become one of Lebanon's leading painters in the 1930s, and one of the first Sunni ones, was the only Muslim painter exhibiting at the Fine Arts pavilion. Alongside Onsi and the three older painters, lesser-known ones called Homsy and Matta were there, as well as

amateur painter Alfred Sursock, who might have succeeded in showing works thanks to his belonging to a prominent merchant family and his membership on the Fair's organising committee.³¹

Rather than the names of the artists, it is the titles and descriptions of the artworks on show, as found in the contemporary press, that suggest that the selection of paintings was probably meant to emphasise the Christian identity of Greater Lebanon that both the French and the Maronite nationalists stressed.³² As seen in chapter 2, Corm, Serour, and Saleeby painted in the European tradition they had absorbed during their studies in Paris or Rome, and became known for their Society portraits and religious works in the case of Corm and Serour. At the time, wealthy patrons were increasingly commissioning portraits, as a type of status symbol and declaration of their Western-style modernity, while the local Church frequently hired artists and sometimes directly sponsored their training. *Al-Mashriq* reported that both genres were on display at the exhibition, noting a painting of Saint John the Baptist by Corm (fig. 5).³³ The magazine also mentioned genre scenes, portraits of Bedouins, and still lifes. Exhibiting religious paintings out of their intended context of display may have been meant to affirm Greater Lebanon's Christian identity, and it is also possible that the portraits of Westernised Lebanese art patrons may have been construed as proofs of Lebanon's European outlook and progressiveness in comparison with Syria. It also needs to be

³¹ Cheikho, "Ma'raḡ Bayrūt," 530; Haut-Commissariat, *Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth*, 327-28. It could be that Homsy and Matta were Syrian, but *al-Bashīr* does not indicate painters' origin. Their Lebanese readers presumably knew where painters such as Corm came from.

³² So far, I have not been able to find photographs from inside the exhibition.

³³ Cheikho, "Ma'raḡ Bayrūt," 530.

noted that these two genres constituted the main modes of Lebanese painters then, which limited curatorial options.

Sculpture in the pavilion was, however, explicitly loaded with pro-French connotations and emphasised Lebanon's Christianity. Right at the entrance stood a pair of sculptures by Youssef Hoyek, the leading sculptor of his generation. They consisted of two marble female nudes, one of them sleeping, the other awake: for the Mandate-friendly Jesuit periodical *al-Mashriq*, the pair stood for "The Sleep and Awakening of Lebanon." To this publication, the awakened woman represented the rebirth of the Lebanese Mountain after Ottoman oppression, by implication thanks to France's involvement, making the sculpture representative of the official line pursued by the mandatory authorities.³⁴ Hoyek's works, however, could be interpreted differently. For example, when the pro-independence magazine *al-Ma'raḍ* (The Exhibition) reproduced some of his sculptures of female nudes in 1934, they were interpreted as allegories of Lebanon striving to set free from French oppression (figs. 6-9). Hoyek's biography and interviews suggest that he had no clear political stance, that he was inspired by Symbolist art and that he considered himself Lebanese, without elaborating on an ideology.³⁵ Nonetheless, at the Foire-Exposition, visitors were encouraged to look at "The Sleep and Awakening of Lebanon" with the story of the Mandate's beginnings in mind. Moreover, *al-Mashriq* noted, a series of small sculptures displayed nearby, the works of a certain Jean Debs, explicitly represented the Levant's suffering during the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Youssef Hoyek, *Dhikrayāti Ma' Jubrān: Paris 1909-1910* [My Souvenirs with Gibran: Paris 1909-1910], trans. Edwige Shaybub (Beirut: Nawfal, 1957, 1979), 160; Emile Maklouf, "Le Premier sculpteur du Liban et de la Syrie: une heure dans l'atelier de Hoyek" [The Foremost Sculptor of Lebanon and Syria: One Hour in Hoyek's Studio], *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, November 15, 1928.

Great War, and its rescue by France.³⁶

II. THE PAVILLON DES ÉTATS DU LEVANT AT THE 1931 EXPOSITION COLONIALE DE VINCENNES

The May-November 1931 Exposition coloniale de Vincennes was the most ambitious celebration of France's global empire to date, and marked the first notable presence of the Syrian and Lebanese mandated territories in this kind of international event. With thirty million visitors, the Exposition was the culmination of a series of colonial exhibitions, a type appearing in the 1880s and derived from the international exhibitions inaugurated with London's 1851 Crystal Palace Great Exhibition. All were meant to exalt Western global supremacy via displays of mass culture, technology, and science, coexisting with pseudo-educational displays and exhibits allegedly representative of dominated territories. To foster loyalty to its Empire, France endeavoured to demonstrate the supposed mutual advantages of colonialism, whereby mainland France would reap economic benefits from it, while the colonies would develop and be saved from their so-called backwardness thanks to France's civilising mission.³⁷

Although the racist undertones pervading the Exposition were played down it in, the Pavillon des États du Levant extolled the historical and contemporary role of France in the entire region, in accordance with the Exposition's message, and made use not only of modern techniques such as maps and photography, but also, as was the case with the 1921 Beirut Fair, of Lebanese painting and sculpture. The Pavillon was to

³⁶ Cheikho, "Ma'raḡ Bayrūt," 530.

³⁷ Ellen Furlough, "Une Leçon des [sic] choses: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 3 (summer 2002): 441-42; Donna Jones, "The Prison House of Modernism: Colonial Spaces and the Construction of the Primitive at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition," *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 1 (January 2007): 55-59.

reassert the legitimacy of France's sectarian-based strategy to divide its territories after the formation of the Lebanese Republic of 1926: it housed one common exhibit, and four separate ones, for the Lebanese Republic, the Syrian one, the Jabal Druze and the Government of Latakia. In the pavilion, the four territories were thus distinct, and France particularly distinguished between Lebanon's Christian-Western identity and the other states' Muslim-Oriental one, as the displays underscored. And despite Syria and Lebanon having become republics, the four territories were not depicted as independent – neither from one another nor from France.

After the formation of the Lebanese Republic in 1926, while pro-independence formations posed an increasing challenge to the Mandate, a large part of the population still questioned the legitimacy of the state, with many Muslim public figures still demanding unification with Syria. Furthermore, the Lebanese Republic effectively did not have complete freedom in the political choices it could make. Although it now had a house of representatives, a president, and a constitution that affirmed it would be in charge of its own affairs, foreign relations were still conducted through France, and the High Commissioners enjoyed veto rights, could rule by decree, dissolve legislature and suspend the constitution – which they were not shy of doing.³⁸

A. The conception of the pavilion and its building

The Pavillon's organisation closely involved the Mandate administration: it took place under the aegis of High Commissioner Henri Ponsot, and was coordinated by Mr Pierre-Alype, who was at the time the director of the Office des États du Levant sous

³⁸ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 258, 280; Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (Delmar (NY): Caravan Books, 1990), 167-187; Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest*, 228-239.

Mandat Français, an organ of the French government, based in Paris, that served as a connection between the office of the High Commissioner in Beirut and the French press, and the political and business establishments. Assisting Pierre-Alype was his adjunct Pierre Bertholot. The Lebanese and Syrian members of this organisational committee were close to the Mandate government; they were the Syrian Amir Abdul Aziz and Alphonse Ayoub, the Lebanese Attaché to the Office des États du Levant, and a certain Mourade who worked in the Mandate's economic services.³⁹

In line with the High Commission's instructions, the group set up a pavilion that showcased the entire Levant as the beneficiary of French rule, while distinguishing Muslim Syria from Christian Lebanon. The very participation of Lebanon in the Exposition, in fact, proved controversial. In the Lebanese press and in Parliament, the question was whether mandated states ought to be displayed alongside colonised ones, a question whose answer cut across political lines. The pro-French newspaper *L'Orient*, for example, opposed assimilating Lebanon to the colonies.⁴⁰ The Mandate-backing Jesuit newspaper *al-Bashīr* (The Forerunner) supported the pavilion: Lebanon's racial superiority and association with French culture, they argued, immediately differentiated it from the colonies.⁴¹ Independence proponent *al-Ma'raḍ* (The Exhibition) was more pragmatic and argued that Lebanon's presence at the exhibition could be useful if it helped the country reap from it economic benefits – commercial, touristic, or otherwise – which would outweigh the possible disadvantages of Lebanon's participation in a

³⁹ Paul Fidès, "Les États du Levant à l'Exposition Internationale" [The Levantine States at the International Exhibition], *La Correspondance d'Orient. Revue Économique, Politique et Littéraire*, April 1931, 151.

⁴⁰ Asher Kaufman, "'Too Much French, but a Swell Exhibit': Representing Lebanon at the New York World's Fair 1939-1940," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. i (2008): 64.

⁴¹ *Al-Bashīr*, "Al-Ma'raḍ al-Isti'māri al-duwālī" [The International Colonial Exhibition], May 9, 1931.

colonial exhibition.⁴²

Pierre-Alype and his committee directed the pavilion's elaboration, and entrusted Lebanese and Syrian professionals to execute it for the greater part.⁴³ France thus gave its Levantine territories under Mandate some measure of autonomy over their representation. While at the Fair, the colonies were grouped by region and set up along a "grande avenue des colonies françaises," the Pavillon des États du Levant stood on its own, on the periphery of the exhibition grounds, near Belgium's building and those of Palestine and Suez, then both under British control.⁴⁴

This distinction with the colonies further manifested itself in the pavilions' architecture. Those representing the colonies were designed by Frenchmen, and were idealised and enlarged copies of local architectural types, such as African villages, and in some cases of historical monuments like the Khmer temple complex of Angkor Wat; North African pavilions were designed to evoke a mysterious Arab Muslim world through elaborate Moorish palaces with exaggerated minarets.⁴⁵ Unlike the colonies' structures, the Levantine pavilion was designed by a Syrian architect, the Christian Ulysse Moussalli (1899-1987), and the Lebanese Maronite painter Philippe Mourani (1875-1970) participated in its interior decoration.⁴⁶ Based in Paris, Mourani was a sympathiser of the Mandate, and no stranger to fulfilling their commissions, having

⁴² *Al-Ma'raḡ*, "Al-Ma'raḡ al-Isti'māri wa mā waraḡ al-bihar" [The Colonial and Overseas Exhibition], July 1931.

⁴³ M., "À l'Exposition internationale de Vincennes. Comment se présente le pavillon de la Syrie et du Liban" [At the Vincennes International Exhibition. What the Syria and Lebanon Pavilion Looks Like], *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient méditerranéen*, May 1931, 12. A research in the Mandate's archives in Nantes may help find out details about the Franco-Lebanese and Franco-Syrian dealings in the pavilion's organisation.

⁴⁴ Great Britain did not take part in the fair.

⁴⁵ Furlough, "Leçon des [sic] choses," 440-50; Dana Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 170.

⁴⁶ M., "À l'Exposition internationale," 12.

painted, for example, a scene of Gouraud's proclamation of the state of Greater Lebanon.⁴⁷ Moussalli's two-storey building was not a parody of local architecture, but brought together references to historical Levantine architectural styles, with its horizontally striped façade, pointed-arch entrance door, carved latticework wood blinds, and a dome reminiscent of a mosque's (fig. 10). The building married the different Levantine faiths' architectural heritage, a fact *La Revue du Liban* picked up on. The magazine saw it as a synthesis of Muslim and Christian princely palaces, citing the eighteenth-century Damascus palace of Sunni Ottoman governor As'ad Pasha al-'Azm, and the nineteenth-century palace of Sunni-turned-Maronite prince Bashir II Shihab (1767-1850) in Beiteddine, Lebanon.⁴⁸

B. Representing the Levant: archaeology, maps, and painting

Inside the pavilion, the exhibition took place in galleries behind colonnades surrounding a garden with a fountain, a nod to Arab architecture's open central court. Throughout the exhibition space, in addition to artefacts, maps, and photographs, Lebanese and French paintings made allusions to the French perception of the Levant and corroborated the message France wished to communicate to the world about its Mandate. One section common to the four territories explained the region's historical trajectory, in such a way to legitimise French control by citing ancient ties between France and the Levant and highlighting the French interventions of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Elsewhere in the pavilion, other rooms, devoted to each individual territory, refined the identity France defined for them, with the Lebanese

⁴⁷ The painting belongs to a private collection in Meyrouba, near Beirut.

⁴⁸ M., "À l'Exposition Internationale," 12.

halls emphasising its historical, cultural, and religious ties with France, picturing a “friend” who was at once a base to dominate the Levant.

Painting played a major role in the pavilion. Publicly displaying their art was not new to Lebanese artists: the timing of the Vincennes Exposition coincided with the beginning of regular art exhibitions in Beirut and the growth of painting’s cultural importance at home, as chapter 3 outlined. Lebanese artists had also become accustomed to participate in art shows in Europe since Daoud Corm, who showed paintings at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, and Saleeby who participated at the 1922 exhibition of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, for example.⁴⁹ Moreover, around 1930, key modern painters such as Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) studied and exhibited in Paris, as seen in chapter 4. In the pavilion, the majority of the paintings on show were by the Maronites Mourani and César Gemayel (1898-1958). They are likely to have been commissioned especially for the event: their paintings shown in the pavilion mainly depicted historical sites, painted in a way that departed from their usual Impressionist-like style, and from their subjects, as both typically painted landscapes and portraits (figs. 11-12). Gemayel had attended art school in Paris; unlike Mourani, he is not known for having otherwise contributed to the visual celebration of the Mandate, although he did nonetheless express his affinities with French racist attitudes, and saw himself as part of an allegedly superior French culture, as chapter 4 suggested.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Marie Tomb, “Daoud Corm,” in Marie Tomb et al., *Art from Lebanon: Modern and contemporary artists vol.1 1880-1975*, under the direction of Nour Abillama (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), 31; Maha Sultan, *Ruwwād min nahḍat al-fann at-tashkīlī fi Lubnān: Qorm, Srūr, Ṣalībi 1870-1938* [Pioneers of the Renaissance of the plastic arts in Lebanon: Corm, Serour, Saleeby 1870-1938] (Beirut: Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik, 2004), 261.

⁵⁰ M. “Les Peintres libanais: une heure dans l’atelier de César Gemayel” [Lebanese Painters: One Hour in César Gemayel’s Studio], *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, 11 January 1937.

The common halls: French-Levantine ties and French initiatives

The common halls began with ancient civilisations. By insisting on Antiquity in the Levant, the displays showed that the region was steeped in Mesopotamian and Levantine ancient cultures that were also claimed by Europe and the West as the beginning of their civilisation, making France's recent activity in the region look legitimate. Upon stepping inside the pavilion, one encountered the sarcophagus of Phoenician king Ahiiram of Byblos (c. 1000 BC), a relief of the Assyrian king Eshmunazar, and a Hittite sculpture of a lion.⁵¹ Ahiiram rooted Lebanon in the ancient civilisation of Phoenicia. So-called "Phoenicianism" was a concept and political idea put forward right after World War I by Charles Corm, Michel Chiha and other Christian intellectuals: invoking the supposed borders of the Phoenician territory served to legitimise the separation of mainly Christian Greater Lebanon from Syria, and simultaneously anchor Lebanon in a non-Arab past.⁵² For the French, emphasising Phoenician culture likewise meant stressing that Lebanon did not have Arab origins, and was close to the West, thereby giving the Mandate a certain legitimacy. But these artefacts' presence in Paris should also be placed in the context of the French-led archaeological excavations of the twenties, for instance French archaeologist Maurice Dunand's extensive exploration of Byblos and other cities with a mixed French-Lebanese team. Two paintings by Mourani added the Roman era to this common heritage; they showed the first-to-third-century Roman temples of Baalbek, in Lebanon,

⁵¹M., "À l'Exposition Internationale," 13.

⁵²See Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

and the Nabataean city of Palmyra in Syria (figs. 13).⁵³

Mentions of early Christianity placed the entire Levant – not Lebanon only – in the Judeo-Christian civilisation, and thereby demonstrated its ties with Europe and France. A bas-relief from the Louvre of fifth-century saint Simeon Stylite, said to have lived near Aleppo, was on display, near an image of Bab Kisan, one of the gates of old Damascus, associated with Saint Paul's escape from the city. Nearby, Mourani hung a picture of Antakya, another city with biblical links (fig. 14). Skipping a few centuries, France was portrayed as arriving on the Levantine coast, via a model of the Crusader castle of Sahyoun and photographs of other vestiges of the era, in order to show that the French and Maronites ties dated to the times of the Crusades, when the latter would have assisted the Crusaders in their fight against Muslims, between 1099 and 1291.⁵⁴

Yet, Levantine history really culminated with the French involvement there since the nineteenth century. French intellectuals' activity in the Levant was thus highlighted, through documents and portraits of French travellers and writers such as Alphonse de Lamartine and Maurice Barrès. There was also a panel listing one century of French-led initiatives in economy and education. The Paris-based *La Correspondance d'Orient*, a political, economic and cultural publication founded by the Syrian Georges Samné and the Lebanese Chukri Ghanem (two former Syrian nationalists now close to mandatory circles and who believed in the convergence of French and Syrian interests in the context of Greater Lebanon) remarked that the narration of centuries of French

⁵³ Some of the paintings mentioned here were reproduced in the press: *La Correspondance d'Orient* reproduced Mourani's painting of Baalbek, Marchand's Damascus, and Gemayel's Krak des Chevaliers. Additionally, *La Revue du Liban* reproduced scenes of Antakya by Mourani and Hama by Marchand. Otherwise, photographs of other artworks and of the entire display are so far not accounted for.

⁵⁴ Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 27.

benevolent presence in the Levant surely justified its contemporary involvement there.⁵⁵

After the history lesson, the visitor was exposed to the purported benefits of the Mandate. One display, called “Contemporary History and French Works,” centred on two maps of the mandated territories, sponsored by the France-owned Banque de la Syrie et du Liban.⁵⁶ These demonstrated the different ways France had implemented and furthered its rule in the Levant since 1920, all the while contending to show to the Exposition’s French and international visitors the benefits France had brought to local populations. One of the two maps, in relief and measuring three by six metres, underlined French territorial control and its sectarian division of the Levant by describing the territories’ borders. The map also delineated agricultural zones to boast their breadth, and featured coloured electric wires that flickered to show the spread of the road network during the first decade of the Mandate, and pinpointed air and navigation lines, and urban growth. This was an occasion for an interactive lesson in the French achievements, where the visitor, as *La Correspondance d’Orient* put it, was invited “to contemplate [...] and almost touch with one’s fingers [...] the economic progress accomplished under the impulse of France.”⁵⁷ Rather surprisingly, the pro-independence *al-Ma’raḍ* described this display in neutral terms and did not delve into the map’s assertion of French control.⁵⁸

Multimedia displays reappeared in a room called “Geography, Ethnography, and Tourism,” where paintings accompanied maps, graphics, and photographs to give a preview of the contemporary Levant’s sights and populations. The presentation

⁵⁵ Jackson, “Mandatory Development,” 179; Fidès, “Les États du Levant,” 148-49.

⁵⁶ *Al-Ma’raḍ*, “*Al-Ma’raḍ al-Isti’māri*.”

⁵⁷ Fidès, “Les États du Levant,” 147.

⁵⁸ *Al-Ma’raḍ*, “*Al-Ma’raḍ al-Isti’māri*.”

proposed that the territories were simultaneously inscribed in the Christian-European heritage and the Muslim-Oriental one. In the eyes of *La Correspondance d'Orient*, and in quite loaded language, the visitor was at once transported to “the mountains celebrated in the Bible and the Phoenician coast” and to the “solitary and luminous desert, and the untidy Oriental cities, full of the Middle Ages’ poetry,” the whole nonetheless “coexisting with modernity.”⁵⁹ In its visual presentation, Lebanon, however, tended more towards Europe than towards the Muslim world, compared to its neighbours. Four paintings on display, by Jean Marchand, a Beirut-based French painter, made the thesis explicit. To represent Syria, he showed views of Aleppo, Hama, and Damascus, the latter directly pointing to the Muslim Orient (fig. 15).⁶⁰ In it, a curtain with “Damascus” written in Arabic flies between the arcades of a balcony built in an Arab architectural style, and an imposing minaret rises above the city’s rooftops. The panorama of Beirut Marchand painted, by contrast, was described as showcasing Beirut’s port leaning against the Mountain: the port stresses links with Europe, and the historically Christian Mountain underscores Lebanon’s religious particularity.⁶¹

Nevertheless, there were exceptions to the rule whereby painting necessarily had to corroborate the message of French celebration, as some paintings on display had little to do with colonialist propaganda, and more to do with what was generally on offer on the Beirut art market, as described in chapters 3 and 5. Gemayel, for example, showed pictures of Bedouins, a theme he tackled in Beirut. The Sunni Omar Onsi was represented in the exhibition with landscape paintings, the principal genre that brought

⁵⁹ Fidès, “Les États du Levant,” 148.

⁶⁰ *Al-Ma’raḍ*, “Al-Ma’raḍ al-Isti’ māri.”

⁶¹ Fidès, “Les États du Levant,” 148.

him success at home. Onsi's works, *al-Ma'raḍ* noted, had been exhibited in Beirut the previous year, which means they had not been commissioned specifically for the Exposition nor were they conceived to corroborate the Pavillon's message.⁶²

Lebanon's section: a historical dialogue with France and Western civilisation

The Lebanese Republic's section conceptualised the state as a France-friendly Christian enclave in the Levant, also making use of painting, sculpture, and other media. First, it stressed the country's ancient participation in Western civilisation. The first room featured a sculpture of a Phoenician worker engraving the alphabet, made for the occasion, as a way to highlight Lebanon's early contributions to Western culture.⁶³ As with Ahiiram's sarcophagus, the use of Phoenicia as an anchor of Lebanese history was political and echoed the opinions of Christian "Phoenicianist" intellectuals.

The Lebanese section then put the spotlight on nineteenth-century Sunni-turned-Maronite Emir Bashir II Shihab, who appeared in a three-dimensional wax scene, adapted from sketches by Gemayel, which recreated an apocryphal 1832 reception given in honour of the French poet-diplomat Alphonse de Lamartine, who visited Lebanon (fig. 16).⁶⁴ Giving this scene a prominent place again symbolised the historical links between France and Christian Lebanon, and particularly put the accent on their cultural connections. Moreover, as described in *al-Ma'raḍ*, a library stood in a corner of the scene, pointing to the emir and the poet's common intellectual interests and suggesting that France could claim to share deeper cultural affinities with Christian

⁶² *Al-Ma'raḍ*, "Al-Ma'raḍ al-Isti'māri."

⁶³ *Al-Ma'raḍ*, "Al-Ma'raḍ al-Isti'māri." In M., "À l'Exposition internationale," the author says that the sculpture of the Phoenician alphabet had had to be made in France because Hoyek was not able to complete an artwork on time.

⁶⁴ *Al-Ma'raḍ*, "Al-Ma'raḍ al-Isti'māri."

Lebanon than with its Muslim neighbours. Yet, if the scene might have been presented as a proof of historical French-Christian Lebanese friendship, it also suggested that it was France that had brought Lebanon the arts and letters, and not the opposite. Near the wax scene, to confirm the depiction of Lebanon as a Christian territory, Mourani added paintings of the Cedars forest, the emblem of Lebanon first proposed by Christian nationalists.

The other mandated territories

By contrast with the Lebanese section, those of the other mandated territories were ensconced in a somewhat stereotypical and unchanging Orient, whose principal distinguishing feature was their artisanal production. Lebanon also had traditional crafts on display, such as silver and copper objects, but the press scarcely mentioned them; *La Revue du Liban* judged their presence trivial compared to the Lebanese arts and archaeology.⁶⁵ The Jabal Druze room, by contrast, recreated a traditional reception hall, with a *dimān*, embroidered cushions, and chiselled metal trays, and a wax figure wearing the traditional *shermāl* wide pants and a *keffiyeh* also featured there. The Syrian Republic's space had a mosaic fountain and latticed wood windows, and, on the walls, photographs illustrated traditional costumes as well as carpet weaving. The government of Latakia's section too featured a *dimān*, a marble bench and a blown-glass lamp. In that room, a painting by Gemayel of the crusader fortress the Krak des Chevaliers, near Tartus, reaffirmed the ancientness of French influence in the Levant (fig. 17). Unlike in the Lebanese section, the Syrian states' halls included photographs of public works

⁶⁵ M., "À l'Exposition Internationale," 14.

undertaken by France as further evidence of its *mission civilisatrice*.⁶⁶ On the whole, these exhibits portrayed a more backwards Muslim Syria, juxtaposed to Greater Lebanon, which the Pavilion pictured to a large extent as part of the Christian world, and in dialogue with French civilisation.

C. Lebanon and Syria at other 1930s international exhibitions

In the 1930s, Lebanon and Syria were present, under the aegis of France, in a few other international exhibitions. In 1935, the Levantine States were on display at the Universal Exhibition in Brussels as part of the “France d’Outre-Mer” section: unlike in 1931, they were lumped with other French non-metropolitan regions, a course of action which was criticised as a step backwards by many Lebanese politicians and intellectuals.⁶⁷ Since the exhibition was smaller than Paris’s 1931 one, France had then lumped all its mandated territories together in one display. As *La Revue du Liban* reported, the halls were akin to Oriental reception rooms, and included an exhibition of artisanal items and agricultural products; to this magazine, the display was assuredly not an adequate reflection of Lebanon.⁶⁸

The question of the differentiation between the identities given to Lebanon and Syria was still current two years later, when Paris hosted an Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques dans la Vie Moderne. On this occasion, the pavilion of the Levantine states, built, like in 1931, by Ulysse Moussalli, had two semi-detached wings, one for Syria, the other for Lebanon, denoting not only the differentiation between

⁶⁶ Fidès, “Les États du Levant,” 145, 147.

⁶⁷ Kaufman, “Too Much French,” 65.

⁶⁸ *La Revue du Liban et de l’Orient méditerranéen*, “La Syrie et le Liban à l’Exposition de Bruxelles” [Syria and Lebanon at the Brussels Exhibition], July 1935.

their (respectively Christian and Muslim) identities but also the states' autonomy from one another (fig 18). It was built on an island, so each section faced a different bank of the Seine, and it brought together a variety of Oriental elements, but these were meant not to unify but to distinguish the two sides of the pavilion from one another: Lebanon's façade evoked Bashir II's palace, while Syria's included a minaret.

Lebanon celebrated its participation to the Fair with a series of postage stamps reproducing a photograph of the Lebanese wing, with Syria's minaret standing behind it (fig. 19). The stamp was titled "Pavillon libanais," in a semi-circle around the building, which suggests that the Lebanese Republic saw itself as an entity definitely separate from Syria and autonomous from France. At the time, Lebanon was actually considered close to achieve full independence after the signature of the 1936 treaty with the mandatory power devised to plan steps towards independence and admission to the League of Nations within three years, although, in practice, despite being a republic with an assembly and a constitution, it remained in large part governed by France.⁶⁹ Visually, at the 1937 Exposition, it looked separate from Syria, although it remained linked to it under the umbrella of one Mandate.

III. THE 1939 NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR

A. The road to New York

In 1935, a group of New York City businessmen, led by Joseph F. Shagden, an engineer, and Edward F. Roosevelt, speculated that the revenues from an international fair would boost the city's stagnant economy after the Great Depression, and that

⁶⁹ Salibi, *Modern History*, 181.

exhibiting American companies' latest innovations would convince the public of industry's centrality to society.⁷⁰ Unlike previous events of this kind, the New York World's Fair was not conceived as an outlet to celebrate the host country's empire: instead, it ostensibly sought to promote science and technology as tools for world peace and prosperity.⁷¹ Its theme, "The World of Tomorrow," was a message of hope to overcome the memories of World War I and the Great Depression, setting aside worries about the rising totalitarian ideologies in Europe, and an attempt to restore faith in progress.⁷²

It also, importantly, marked a shift to the celebration of the corporate world. By contrast with earlier international fairs, which were typically organised around the concept of the national pavilion, the New York World's Fair was zoned according to areas of economic activity, from consumer goods, to transportation, to medicine, on over four square kilometres of the new Flushing Meadows Park (fig. 20).⁷³ The biggest attractions were corporations' large-scale science-fictional displays, such as General Motors' Futurama city.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, sixty foreign states were separated from the corporate exhibitions by a "Lagoon of Nations," and exhibited on the outskirts of the fairgrounds. Their presence was meant to enhance the Fair's optimistic message: the

⁷⁰ Marco Duranti, "Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939-40 New York World's Fair," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006): 663-68. In the late nineteenth century, the United States had renamed the concept World's Fair and used it to legitimize American expansion in an age of industrialisation.

⁷¹ Robert W. Rydell, "Preface," in *Meet me at the Fair. A World's Fair Reader*, eds. Laura Hollengreen et al. (Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2014), xviii, xx.

⁷² Duranti, "Utopia, Nostalgia," 668.

⁷³ Stanley Appelbaum, "Introduction," in *The New York World's Fair, 1939/1940 in 155 Photographs*, eds. Stanley Appelbaum and Richard Wurts (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), ix-xiii.

⁷⁴ Joseph P. Cusker, "The World of Tomorrow: Science, Culture and Community at the New York World's Fair," in *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair, 1939/40*, ed. Helen Harrison and Queens Museum (New York: Queens Museum, 1980), 3.

official literature presented their congregation around a plaza, called “Court of Peace,” as a kind of United Nations conference presided by the United States’ imposing building at their centre.⁷⁵ Two facing sides of the court were occupied by ready-made pavilions that the United States provided for free to less wealthy countries. The Lebanese pavilion stood there, between Greece’s and Albania’s (figs. 21-22).

In New York, Lebanon exhibited itself independently from France and its other Levantine mandated territories for the first time. The mandatory authorities, in fact, had virtually no involvement in the pavilion’s organisation. Although, in 1936, France and Lebanon had signed a treaty devised to plan Lebanon’s independence, in 1939, High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux still declared that France would not ratify it. Nevertheless, when the American consulate in Beirut extended an invitation to the Lebanese government to participate in the Fair – albeit through the office of the French High Commission⁷⁶ – the gesture implied that the United States considered Lebanon a nation deserving of its own independent exhibit.

At the end of the 1930s, the legitimacy of the Lebanese Republic was by and large no longer contentious within political circles, but the issue of balancing Lebanon’s Muslim and Christian identities still was, so the pavilion’s ideological outlook, as well as the identity of its potential curator, were subject to debate. In early 1939, a thirty-member interfaith committee, which included businessmen, intellectuals, and artists like Farroukh, Hoyek, and Gemayel, met under the supervision of Minister of National Education Khalil Kseib to examine the feasibility and pertinence of participating in the

⁷⁵ Duranti, “Utopia, Nostalgia,” 668, 673-74. Germany was conspicuously absent.

⁷⁶ Kaufman, “Too Much French,” 67.

World's Fair.⁷⁷ The committee selected the proposal put forward by one of its members, Charles Corm, a Maronite, Francophone and Francophile poet and writer, and a successful businessman, who had sold his companies at the beginning of the 1930s to dedicate himself to literature and supporting the arts. Corm's social and political connections could also facilitate his work, as he was notably close to the president at the time, Emile Eddé (1883-1949), who was friendly to the Mandate. Still, Corm got along with politicians, and social and cultural figures from different parties, and was, in fact, a supporter of independence.

The parliament approved Corm's project and entrusted him with a hundred thousand Lebanese liras to complete the task.⁷⁸ Yet, journalists from rival publications such as independence-backer *Le Jour* and Jesuit-ran *al-Bashīr* (The Forerunner) found the sum inadequate, and *al-Makshūf* (The Exposed) noted that private contributions surpassed the government's.⁷⁹ In any case, Corm's parliamentary approval suggests that he had the endorsement of rival political factions. Indeed, the heads of the two main political formations, the Constitutional Bloc's Bechara El Khoury (1890-1964), who demanded full autonomy, and the National Bloc's President Eddé, who was loyal to France, as well as Sunni prime minister Abdallah Al Yafi (1901-1986), supported Corm's appointment.⁸⁰ In the press, publications as varied as the Arab-oriented newspaper *Annabar* (The Day), the Jesuits' *al-Bashīr*, the Eddé-affiliated *L'Orient*, its rival

⁷⁷ Yūsuf Abi Sālih [1], "Lubnān fi Ma'raḍ New York" [Lebanon at the New York Exhibition], *Al-Bashīr*, November 7, 1938; Kaufman, "Too Much French," 68.

⁷⁸ Abi Sālih [1], "Ma'raḍ New York."

⁷⁹ Abi Sālih [1], "Ma'raḍ New York;" Kesrouan Labaki, "Exposition de New York," *Le Jour*, March 20, 1939; Shafiq Hātem, "Lubnān fi Ma'raḍ New York" [Lebanon at the New York Exhibition], *Al-Makshūf*, 1939.

⁸⁰ Kaufman, "Too Much French," 68-69.

Le Jour, and the cultural periodical *al-Makshūf* agreed. Corm nonetheless had to contend with detractors, especially coming from the ranks of Muslim representatives, who worried he would present Lebanon exclusively as a non-Arab, Western country.⁸¹

Indeed the question was which Lebanon would be on display. Corm opted to show the world an image of Lebanon whose identity was close to the official one the country would adopt in 1943, at independence, and which was becoming prevalent in the late 1930s: Lebanon was to be a Christian-Muslim partnership, with affinities with the West but part of the Arab world, yet distinct from its neighbours. This version of the national narrative, a compromise to foster national unity, was notably elaborated by Michel Chiha, who was the main writer of the 1926 constitution, and close to Corm.⁸²

Although it has been written that Corm “made all possible efforts to portray Lebanon in New York as the New Phoenicia, culturally and ethically unrelated to its Arab neighbours,” the story told by the pavilion was more nuanced.⁸³ Corm was indeed the most visible exponent of “Phoenicianism,” and his noted collection of poems *La Montagne Inspirée* extolled the virtues of the Phoenicians with a sense of nostalgia for a faraway past, and a certain desire to revive it. Yet, it also deplored the identity crisis of many modern Lebanese Maronites who, according to him, were losing their heritage – to begin with their linguistic one, since his main language was French – and perhaps sought out an imagined ancestry and invented roots for himself and Lebanon.⁸⁴ *La*

⁸¹ Kaufman argues the controversy was intense. Although it is clear there indeed was one, he does not elaborate at length about its scale, only listing the names of the seven opposing members of parliament. (Kaufman, “Too Much French,” 68- 69).

⁸² Hartman and Olsaretti, “First Boat,” 45.

⁸³ The former is Kaufman’s opinion; see *Reviving Phoenicia*, 155.

⁸⁴ See *La Montagne Inspirée, Chansons de geste* [The Sacred Mountain] (Beirut: Éditions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1934); David and Hiram Corm (Charles Corm’s sons) in discussion with the author,

Montagne inspirée, moreover, also celebrated historical figures considered heroes of independence such as sixteenth-century Druze emir Fakhreddin, as seen in chapter 1. Michel Chiha, for his part, did not conceive of Phoenicia as the unshakeable backbone of Lebanese identity, but thought that this civilisation's alleged territory and commercial outlook help legitimise the borders of the Lebanese Republic and its economy's orientation. In addition, the Phoenician people, who were conveniently neither Christian nor Muslim, gave Lebanon origins distinct from the adjacent states'.⁸⁵ Ultimately, the Lebanese pavilion would, in effect, present a country with a prestigious and distinctive start in Phoenicia, but had it followed by one of Christian-Muslim partnership for independence – with a definite emphasis on the concept throughout. The fact that Muslim as well as Christian members of parliament who had read the project approved of it also suggests that a Phoenicia-heavy display found supporters across the board.

Ultimately, Corm and the Lebanese government's more practical objective, as expressed by the Minister of Finances Hamid Frangie, was to take advantage of the exposure the World's Fair would give Lebanon to simultaneously raise its international profile and boost its economy.⁸⁶ As Corm explained in a November 1938 interview given to *al-Bashīr*, the Lebanese pavilion could have a variety of consumer goods and handicrafts for sale, and, more important, it could help attract Western tourists to Lebanon by introducing them to its History and its contemporary attractions. The World's Fair was also, in Corm's eyes, an opportunity to boost the Lebanese economy

April 2016). Kaufman, however, argues that Corm's poems are to be read perhaps more literally. For instance, Corm would have actually sought to revive the Phoenician language.

⁸⁵ Hartman and Olsaretti, "First Boat," 43, 45.

⁸⁶ Kaufman, "'Too Much French'," 68.

by capitalising on the Lebanese diaspora in the United States: it was, according to him, “wrong to believe émigrés do not care about their first nation,” and he claimed that they had sent “hundred of telegrams to help set up this exhibition.”⁸⁷ First, Corm would propose to them high-end, hand-made articles, such as textiles, copper- and ironworks – supposedly “as souvenirs to carry memories of their country with them.”⁸⁸ Second, the exhibition would, Corm believed, encourage in émigrés a sense of patriotic yearning to return to their country and, hopefully, invest there, thereby participating in economic growth in Lebanon. (It is to be noted that the Lebanese economy was then heavily dependent on remittances from abroad.)⁸⁹ In practice, while émigrés did indeed support industrial, commercial and agricultural projects, and also sometimes armed insurgencies, and could voice a civil critique of Mandate policies, their involvement in the 1939 pavilion has yet to be elucidated.⁹⁰ Corm might have been right to try to capitalise on them: perhaps 90,000 people with origins in Mount Lebanon had already emigrated to the United States between 1899 and 1910, and, in the mid-1920s, the city of Chicago alone might have been home to 100,000 to 150,000 people of Syro-Lebanese origin.⁹¹ In any case, Corm’s commercial approach for the Lebanese pavilion fitted in well within the Fair’s commercial-corporate outlook: the standard agreement

⁸⁷ Abi Sālih [2], “Lubnān fi Ma’raḍ New York.”

⁸⁸ Abi Sālih [2], “Lubnān fi Ma’raḍ New York [Lebanon at the New York exhibition],” *Al-Bashīr*, November 8, 1938.

⁸⁹ In 1948 still, remittances accounted for almost 10 percent of the GDP (Carolyn Gates, *The Historical Role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1989), 37.

⁹⁰ Jackson, “Mandatory Development,” 28.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 414, citing Kohei Hashimoto, Kohei Hashimoto, “Lebanese Population Movement, 1920-1939: Towards a Study,” in Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A World Study* (Centre for Lebanese Studies and I B Tauris: Oxford and London, 1992), 92; Akram Khater, “Why Did They Leave? Reasons For Early Lebanese Migration,” 15 November 2017, https://Lebanesestudies.News.Chass.Ncsu.Edu/2017/11/15/Why-Did-They-Leave-Reasons-For-Early-Lebanese-Migration/#_Ednref2 (Retrieved 20 January 2018)

signed by all participating countries was, in essence, a license to import and sell goods, since each state had to submit to the Fair's corporation a price list of the items for sale, on which it had to pay taxes ranging from 5% to 25%.⁹²

B. France and the United States' diverging views on Lebanon

On dedication day, 13 July 1939, Corm inaugurated the Lebanese pavilion with speeches in French, English, and Arabic, thereby covering all his possible audiences. The general commissioner of the French participation, Marcel Olivier, also spoke. Organisers of the fair, its assistant commissioner Charles Spofford, and Julius Holmes, the assistant to the corporation's president, as well as New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia likewise addressed the audience.⁹³ The Americans' speeches divulged a perception of Lebanon at odds with that of France, especially with respect to Lebanon's independence. Indeed, although Lebanon had organised its own pavilion, France sought to assert it had a say in the pavilion's conception: for instance, behind the scenes, the French ambassador to the United States, René de Saint Quentin, submitted a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris that followed the exhibition's elaboration.⁹⁴ On opening day, Olivier spoke for the French government as the general governor of the colonies, who had supervised the French pavilion and the displays of France's colonies and other territories. In order to legitimise the continued French presence in Lebanon, Olivier invoked a historical friendship "that can never be extinguished" as well as "their exchange of men, of ideas, of services, and of culture," in an echo of the mandatory

⁹² New York World's Fair Incorporated, Exhibition Concession Agreement with the Republic of Lebanon, September 18, 1939.

⁹³ *Phénicia*, "À l'Exposition de New York," July-August 1939, 45.

⁹⁴ Kaufman, "Too Much French," 71.

rhetoric at international exhibitions since the beginning of the 1920s. According to him, the introduction of the French language and culture to Lebanon was what had turned the Lebanese into “poets, artists and scholars [who thus] honoured French culture.” He also called Corm an “eminent friend” of France, because of his love of French culture, in spite of his opposition to the continuation of the Mandate. Then, regarding the political field, Olivier made it understood that Lebanon’s independence could only result from French benevolence. He declared that France had constantly “supported the legitimate aspirations of the Lebanese people” against the Ottomans, suggesting that the Lebanese would be able to pursue “the proud and free life of their Fatherland” thanks to France’s dissemination of its republican ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.⁹⁵ Ultimately, Olivier rather deplored Lebanon’s gains in autonomy. At the World’s Fair, he stated, France “would have been happy and proud to welcome” Lebanon within the French-supervised exhibitions that glorified French imperialism, which denotes France’s wish for a sustained control over its mandated states.⁹⁶

By contrast with Olivier, the Americans who spoke on opening day treated Lebanon as an independent republic, a new nation that was said to have emerged after the 1936 treaty with France, through a process that Spofford, the assistant commissioner to the Fair, found akin to “what Abraham Lincoln called a new birth of freedom.”⁹⁷ In addition, Spofford stressed that Lebanon and the United States shared a

⁹⁵ [Marcel Olivier], “Speech Delivered by the Commissioner General of the French Republic at the New York World’s Fair on the Occasion of the Official Dedication of the Lebanon Pavilion, 13 July 1939,” reproduced in *Republic of Lebanon. At the New York World’s Fair 1939* (New York: New York World’s Fair 1939 Inc, 1939), 9.

⁹⁶ [Olivier], “Speech;” Today at the Fair, “France Holds Colonial Exhibit,” July 5, 1939.

⁹⁷ [Charles Spofford], “Address of Charles M. Spofford, Assistant U.S. Commissioner,” in *Republic of Lebanon*, 8.

commitment to freedom and democracy, calling Lebanon a “sister republic.”⁹⁸ American newspapers echoed this point of view, suggesting that this conception of Lebanon was well established in public discourse. New York’s *Herald Tribune*, for example, subtitled its account of the pavilion’s opening, “U.S., France and Small Republic Reaffirm Faith in Democratic Principles.”⁹⁹ The *New York Post*, for its part, seemed to think that the Mandate was a benign arrangement that “would anyway be disposed of” soon, adding that, as they understood it, it was currently “being replaced by a treaty under which the country’s freedom will be further established.”¹⁰⁰

C. Inside the pavilion: from Phoenicia to the Mountain holidays

The Lebanese pavilion was built around a central court, dominated by a relief map of Lebanon, and most of the exhibition took place in arcaded galleries on a mezzanine, where Lebanon’s history unfolded (fig. 23). The version of the official identity of Lebanon that Corm presented to Americans amplified the Phoenician contributions to Western civilisation; this not only drew an implicit parallel between this people’s alleged accomplishments and modern Lebanon’s, but also, importantly, coincided with American preconceptions of Lebanon as a biblical land. Throughout the building, contemporary Lebanese artists participated in crafting the narrative told by archaeological finds and other artefacts, and elaborated on it.

Corm had extensive knowledge of and connections to the Beirut’s art world: his father was the painter Daoud Corm, and he was close to artists such as the renowned

⁹⁸ [Spofford], “Address.”

⁹⁹ *New York Herald Tribune*, “Lebanon Opens Pavilion at Fair Amid Praise.” July 4, 1939.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Post*, “If You Happen to Think of Alphabet and Navigation just Remember that Both Got their Start in Lebanon,” August 3, 1939.

sculptor Youssef Hoyek, whom he patronised. His acquaintance with the art scene allowed him to enlist Beirut's most distinguished artists, such as the painters Farroukh, Gemayel, Onsi, and Marie Hadad (1889-1973), the rising star Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994), as well as lesser-known artists like Blanche Ammoun (1912-2011). The official guide to the Fair noted the names of twenty-seven artists, including a half-dozen French, Polish and Belgian artists living in Beirut.¹⁰¹

Lebanese journalists took pride in the selection, perceiving it as a sign of the prestige Lebanese art was beginning to enjoy not only at home (as discussed in chapter 3, this was the time of the first large public exhibitions in Beirut, such as the Salons des Amis des Arts), but also abroad.¹⁰² Already in March 1939, three months before the pavilion's inauguration, *Le Jour* published a full-page spread previewing some of the artworks that would be sent to New York (fig. 24b). By giving art an increased space at the World's Fair, Lebanon was in tune with the spirit of the times, since the 1930s international exhibitions laid the groundwork for large loan exhibitions of contemporary art, and, in New York, France's and Britain's pavilions, as well as the United States and even the IBM company's, staged modern art shows.¹⁰³

The Lebanese painters who exhibited in New York might not all have adhered to Corm's narrative, but still agreed to respond to commissions or to send existing works – they were certainly keen to gain international exposure. Two examples, from among the best-known names, suggest a diversity of attitudes or possible motivations to

¹⁰¹ William Bernbach and Herman Jaffe, eds., "Lebanon," in *The Book of Nations* (New York: Winkler & Kelmans, 1939), reproduced in *Republic of Lebanon*, 4.

¹⁰² Labaki, "Exposition de New York."

¹⁰³ Neil Harris, "Old Wine in New Bottles, Masterpieces Come to the Fairs," in *Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s*, eds. Robert Rydell et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 41, 42, 50.

participate. For the pavilion, Gemayel worked on commission, producing paintings related to Phoenician history at odds with his usual landscapes and portraits. As a Maronite, he likely embraced the focus on this culture. His political allegiances, however, are unclear, and it seems that he would accept all kinds of prestigious commissions: at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris, his Ancient Lebanon-themed works were meant to correspond to the French official line, as mentioned above. By contrast, Farroukh, who was Sunni, wrote and gave speeches that reveal a Lebanese patriot who believed in Muslim-Christian understanding, outside considerations of a partisan nature, as explained in chapters 1 and 4: his point of view rather aligned with the way the pavilion presented Lebanon, where he also produced historical paintings on commission.¹⁰⁴

Ancient Lebanon's contributions to Western civilisation

The pavilion, like the ideology of independent Lebanon would do, asserted the country's ties to the West. It first gave Lebanon's Ancient history, and especially the Phoenician people, the place of honour. Archaeological artefacts, painting, and sculpture, glorified their entrepreneurship, their independent nature, and notably their contributions to Western civilisation: these characteristics were implicitly said to reverberate on contemporary Lebanon and gave it a prestigious ancestry. *Le Jour*, for one, straightforwardly claimed the paintings were a patriotic success in showing "men of all generations what world culture owed" to Lebanon, the place where "all sciences

¹⁰⁴ See for instance Moustafa Farroukh, "Ṭalī'at Al-Fannānīn Al-Lubnāniyyīn" [The Forerunners of the Lebanese Artists], in *Les Conférences Du Cénacle* 5, (Beirut: Michel Asmar, 1947), 252–75.

and almost all the arts were born.”¹⁰⁵ Corm’s stress on Phoenicia and biblical history was of course related to his own ideological beliefs, but it was also a way to leverage Americans’ preconceptions of Lebanon, since they were familiar with its mentions in the Old Testament, and to instil in them the importance of his country. Corm was, in fact, well acquainted with the United States, having often travelled there for business when he was the agent of Ford Motors in Beirut.¹⁰⁶

It was Maurice Dunand, a French archaeologist who had notably excavated Byblos in the 1920s, who organised the archaeological displays at the New York pavilion.¹⁰⁷ The principal attraction was a model of the sarcophagus of Byblos king Ahiiram, with a plaque explaining that the inscriptions on its side represented, in the words of the official pamphlet, “the first Phoenician alphabet dated thirteen centuries before Christ [from which] originated all the ancient and modern alphabets of the world” (fig. 25). To its right, a wall text helped retrace the development of the modern alphabet from the Phoenician one, showing that the Phoenicians were not only of historical importance, but also of continued relevance. Adding to the display, on top of the sarcophagus, a mural by Gemayel showed a group of nude Phoenician men using the alphabet to engrave tablets. Nearby, small Phoenician sculptures were on show, some coming from the Beirut National Museum, others replicas of pieces from the British Museum made by Hoyek and sculptor Halim al-Hajj.¹⁰⁸

Paintings hanging on the exhibition walls further elaborated on the Phoenicians’

¹⁰⁵ Labaki, “Exposition de New York.”

¹⁰⁶ David and Hiram Corm (Charles Corm’s sons) in discussion with the author, April 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Kaufman, “Too Much French,” 65.

¹⁰⁸ Bernbach and Jaffe, “Lebanon;” Ḥātem, “Lubnān fi Ma’raḍ New York.” Corm was a patron of both, and welcomed them at his home where they set up studios.

achievements to tacitly hint at the modern-day Lebanese's character, several of them putting the accent on the Phoenicians' interactions with other peoples in order to demonstrate their inventiveness and entrepreneurial spirit. Most artists produced works specifically for the occasion, which departed from their usual themes such as the Lebanese landscape. Gemayel, for example, exhibited a painting of nude Phoenician women inventing purple dye, a product for which the Phoenicians were renowned and traded with success, and another painting representing glass making.¹⁰⁹ A set of paintings, the work of Ammoun, added that the Phoenicians traded with the most illustrious people around them: she painted a scene of officials from Carthage and from Rome entering into a commercial agreement, and one of the king of Tyre signing a treaty with the envoys of King Solomon (fig. 24a, 24b, top right).¹¹⁰ Architecture, furthermore, was described as central to the Phoenicians' Mediterranean endeavours. Sunni painter Abdel Wahab Addada, for instance, underlined the connection to Solomon by highlighting the temple that the Phoenicians built him out of cedar wood, as the Old Testament recounts, and he also painted temples in Gibraltar and in Sicily that Phoenicians would have built, as well as the city of Carthage they founded: the fact that a Sunni artist painted such scenes might suggest that by 1939, at least part of Lebanon's Muslim population agreed with the purported Phoenician origins of Lebanon, albeit often by construing them as a people with Arab origins.¹¹¹ The connection these paintings drew between the Phoenicians and the larger Mediterranean world also resonates with Corm and Chiha's belief that the orientation towards the sea

¹⁰⁹ New York Post, "If You Happen To Think;" Labaki, "Exposition de New York."

¹¹⁰ Labaki, "Exposition de New York;" Hātem, "Lubnān fi Ma'raḡ New York."

¹¹¹ Meyer-Berger, "At the World's Fair," *The New York Times*, August 18, 1939. See Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, for a discussion of this line of thinking.

was an important facet of the national and cultural identity of Lebanon.¹¹²

If painters depicted Phoenicians as central to Western civilisation, they also emphasised their independent spirit, tacitly connecting it to the Lebanese Republic's then-struggle for independence. Gemayel showed their ships thanks to which, some believe, they circled Africa and reached the Baltic Sea (fig. 24, bottom right).¹¹³ Douaihy, meanwhile, underscored their patriotism, in paintings showing two sieges of Tyre: the city's 586-573 BC Babylonian one, and its nine-month-long resistance to Alexander the Great in 332 BC.¹¹⁴ Another artist illustrated patriotic Phoenician women sacrificing their hair and their jewels for the defence of Carthage.¹¹⁵

Artists then carried Lebanon into Greco-Roman times. Invoking, by turns, myth and fact, their works put the accent on the substantial role that people who lived on Lebanese soil would have had in the story of Western civilisation. Painter Georges-Paul Coury thus anchored the Lebanese coast in legends familiar to Westerners, exhibiting an oil-and-gold triptych of the myth of Venus and her lover Adonis, which Greco-Roman mythology set on Lebanese shores: the side panels showed the birth of Venus and the death of Adonis, and the middle one a festival honouring the goddess (fig. 26). Coming into the first centuries, two artists, Ghantous and Kordous, made a series of mosaic portraits of six Roman emperors and six popes supposedly born on Lebanese territory, therefore integrating Lebanon into Judaeo-Christian civilisation (fig. 27). Besides these mythical and semi-mythical artistic propositions, there were also paintings referring to

¹¹² Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 153.

¹¹³ Labaki, "Exposition de New York."

¹¹⁴ Bernbach and Jaffe, "Lebanon;" Labaki, "Exposition de New York;" Hātem, "Lubnān fi Ma'raḍ New York."

¹¹⁵ *New York Post*, "If You Happen To Think."

factual history. For instance, Coury painted the Roman-era law school of Beirut twice, once as its supposed historical likeness, the other as the twentieth-century vestiges thereof; the institution was in effect a well-known member of the Empire's network of law schools. By painting it, Coury furthermore tied Lebanon to the outset of modern thought and the rule of law.¹¹⁶

Lebanese newspapers rightly wondered whether the pavilion could compete with the thousands of attractions of the Fair, but it ended up receiving mentions in around a dozen local and national American newspapers.¹¹⁷ The *New York Times* wrote about a “tiny republic [that] charm[ed] visitors at Fair,” and reported a daily attendance of 4,000 to 5,000 people.¹¹⁸ While it is difficult to assess the significance and the accuracy of the figure, the article suggested that Lebanon attracted more attention than its size and relative anonymity would have predicted. Americans were also most sensitive to the role Phoenicia played in the Old Testament: according to the *Times*, before entering the pavilion, visitors only knew Lebanon was a place “famous in Scripture,” and were accordingly drawn to the cedar trees, the emblem of Lebanon.¹¹⁹ Corm had actually brought with him a 2000-year-old specimen from Lebanon, and cedar wood was used in tables and wall elements.¹²⁰ Lebanon also gave a thousand cedar seeds to Robert Moses, the Commissioner of Parks, which were planted in Flushing Meadows as a symbol of American-Lebanese friendship.¹²¹

Corm's Phoenician-centred strategy succeeded with the American audience: the

¹¹⁶ Bernbach and Jaffe, “Lebanon.”

¹¹⁷ Hātem, “Ma'rad New York.”

¹¹⁸ *The New York Times*, “Lebanon Presents Story In Pavilion,” July 20, 1939.

¹¹⁹ Meyer-Berger, “At the World's Fair.”

¹²⁰ *The New York Times*, “Lebanon Presents Story.”

¹²¹ *New York Post*, “If You Happen To Think;” *New York Herald Tribune*, “Lebanon Opens Pavilion.”

official guide to the Fair called Ahiram's sarcophagus a "precious stone" that evidenced "one of the most thrilling discoveries of the entire World's Fair," quite paradoxically so, given the futuristic theme of the World of Tomorrow.¹²² (Of course, the guide's authors must have written hyperbolically about all participating countries.) The *New York Post* also titled its report, "If You Happen to Think Of Alphabet and Navigation just Remember that both Got their Start in Lebanon."¹²³ Ultimately, the Americans' confrontation with Phoenicia generated a certain reflection on their own place in history: the *New York Times* marvelled that Byblos was 4,900 years old and the alphabet thirteen centuries old, and LaGuardia expressed his awe of Lebanon's "5,000 years of culture before the discovery of North America."¹²⁴

After Antiquity: religious cooperation and independence

Exhibiting Ancient Lebanon made the country appear like a key player in the history of Western civilisation, and already independent in spirit. The depiction of its later history switched gears to present an account of historical independence, as exemplified by both Muslim and Christian figures, in accordance with the notion of religious cooperation central to the soon-to-be official Lebanese national ideology. Visitors could thus see a sprawling 200 x 293 cm painting by Farroukh imagining the seventh-century Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah gathering his armada in Tripoli, Lebanon, presumably before he would embark on expeditions to the western Mediterranean: the size of the painting made it impossible to miss, and hard to ignore that Lebanon was part of the Arab world

¹²² Bernbach and Jaffe, "Lebanon."

¹²³ *New York Post*, "If You Happen To Think."

¹²⁴ *The New York Times*, "Lebanon Presents Story;" *New York Herald Tribune*, "Lebanon Opens Pavilion." Today, archaeology accepts the Proto-Canaanite alphabet as having originated circa 1000 BC, and Byblos to have first been occupied around 6000 BC.

(fig. 28). The scene draws an early connection between Lebanon and Islamic civilisation, not only because of Muawiyah's presence in Tripoli, but also because, as legend holds, artisans from this city had built the caliph's ships.¹²⁵ Yet, Farroukh emphasised Lebanon's distinctive character within the Arab world. Visually, it is a matter of attitude: Farroukh opposed armoured Arab soldiers to a crowd of peaceful Lebanese men and women. The difference also transpires in skin tone, as the local audience is paler than the caliph and his attendants.

Unlike at the 1931 Pavilion, Corm opted out of stressing the Crusades – which the French and the Maronites defined as an important moment of French involvement in Lebanon and characterized as a moment of Maronite-French mutual assistance – thereby erasing the role of France in Lebanon's national narrative. To recount the post-seventh-century history of Lebanon, the sculptor Hoyek represented much later historical figures, also aiming to demonstrate Lebanon's independent outlook and the cooperation between the different faiths towards this aim: for the entrance of the pavilion, he made sculptures of the sixteenth-century Druze Emir Fakhreddin II Ma'an, and of the nineteenth-century Sunni-turned-Maronite Bashir II Shihab, who both ruled over parts of the Lebanese Mountain and the territories around them, aspired to autonomy and thus frequently clashed with the Ottomans. Near them, Hoyek added a statue of Yusuf Bey Karam, a Maronite notable who rebelled against the Empire in the 1860s.¹²⁶ Christian and Muslim Lebanese people frequently characterise these men as heroes of Lebanese historical autonomy, and as precursors to Lebanon's 1943 formal independence, as seen in chapter 1. In *al-Makshūf's* report on the exhibition, the writer

¹²⁵ Bernbach and Jaffe, "Lebanon;" Labaki, "Exposition de New York."

¹²⁶ Labaki, "Exposition de New York."

indeed explicitly called them “heroes of the Nahda (Renaissance) and independence.”¹²⁷ While the statues of Bashir II and of Yusuf Karam could be seen as symbols of Lebanon’s Christian identity,¹²⁸ Bashir was in fact initially Sunni, and Fakhreddin a Druze: their congregation could as well be interpreted as a sign that all Lebanese sects had historically participated in the elaboration of an independent Lebanese state. Moreover, both Maronite César Gemayel and Sunni Moustafa Farroukh had previously portrayed two of these “heroes” – and it was Gemayel who painted Fakhreddin, and Farroukh Karam (figs. 29-30).

Elsewhere in the pavilion, Hoyek reasserted Lebanon’s independence, albeit in an allegorical way, with twin sculptures that the guidebook to the Fair called “The Dreaming and Awakening of Lebanon.”¹²⁹ A pair of sculptures of the same name had been exhibited at the Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth in 1921, and was then interpreted as an illustration of the rebirth of the Christian Mountain after France had liberated it from Ottoman oppression. In New York however, “Dreaming and Awakening” – whether it was the same sculpture or another one of the same name – ought to have pointed to the future independence of Lebanon after the Mandate would end.

Putting Lebanon on the touristic map

Once the pavilion had grabbed American visitors’ attention with Phoenicia, and given them an idea of the Lebanese identity throughout history, it projected them into twentieth-century Lebanon, or, rather, into an advertisement to go spend holidays there.

The rationale Corm put forward to give tourism an important place in the pavilion

¹²⁷ Hātem, “Lubnān fi Ma’raḡ New York.”

¹²⁸ Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 155.

¹²⁹ Bernbach and Jaffe, “Lebanon.”

coincided with the prevailing view adopted by Lebanon's tourism industry, as described in chapter 6: the sector was seen as a profitable alternative source of revenue to compensate for the country's limitations in terms of industry and agriculture. Corm also looked up to Lebanon's neighbours, like Egypt and Palestine, whom, he observed, reaped considerable benefits from the "thousands of Europeans and Americans [who toured] the Mediterranean, from Athens to Istanbul, to Palestine and Egypt." In his opinion, sadly, too few of them came to Lebanon.¹³⁰ Notwithstanding Corm's argument, by the late 1930s, the tourism industry had already considerably developed in terms of hospitality facilities, and Lebanon's infrastructure greatly improved, with the country welcoming approximately 30,000 visitors in 1937, as the previous chapter outlined.

The tourism hall mirrored the strategy of the contemporary tourism industry. It put forward the two features of Lebanon that the sector had banked on since the 1920s: on the one hand, the purportedly authentic Mountain and the leisurely stays there, and, on the other, the comfortable modernity of Beirut. At the Fair, the former was represented by paintings and handcrafted items, and the latter by architectural models, the whole complemented by photographs and literature. But, before anything, tourists ought to be able to locate Lebanon, and so the central hall of the pavilion did, literally, put Lebanon on the map. An 8.88-meter wide, 14.40-meter long, and three-meter high, cedar wood relief map of the country imposed itself in the centre of the room, and, on a wall, a world map placed the country in relation to the rest of the planet (fig. 31). Lebanon had also appeared on a map at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Vincennes:

¹³⁰ Abi Sāliḥ [3], "Lubnān fi Ma'raḍ New York," *Al-Bashīr*, November 9, 1938.

then, however, it was on a map of all the French Mandate's territories, designed to celebrate one decade of French activity in the Levant. By contrast, in New York, the standalone map of Lebanon was a tool of national affirmation, which communicated the message that Lebanon was an autonomous, if not independent, state, and that it had taken its representation into its own hands. On the map, towns and villages were indicated, and land areas were represented in cedar wood, tying the country not only to its official symbolism but also to the Ancient world that Americans were drawn to.¹³¹ The map effectively helped the American public visualise Lebanon, and made them discover that it was unlike their preconceptions of the Near and Middle East. The *New York Times* journalist, for example, stated that the public had not expected to encounter such "spectacular" mountains, adding that Lebanon had "previously [...] been only a biblical name" to them, but had now materialised into a real, locatable, territory, as one learned its "geographical relationship to Syria, Palestine and Turkey, the location of its capital, Beirut, and even the site of the celebrated Cedars."¹³²

The official pamphlet of the Lebanese pavilion best condensed Lebanon's touristic strategy as it was put forward in New York as well as at home. In it, a full page boasts, on top, Beirut's "first class hotels, modern comfort, international food" that ensure foreign visitors a comfortable visit. As was the case with the Lebanese tourism industry, the capital city was described as the starting point of a trip to the real centre of interest of their holiday – the multifaceted, scenic, and picturesque mountains represented in the spread's photographs (fig. 32). Furthermore, on the walls of the "Contemporary Lebanon" section of the pavilion, paintings depicted an idyllic

¹³¹ *The New York Times*, "Lebanon Presents Story."

¹³² *Ibid.*

Mountain life: Hadad, for instance, exhibited scenes of women making bread, and Jeanne Araman and Jacqueline Tabet (two well-to-do Christian Beirutis and amateur painters) showed the traditional activities of villagers (fig. 33, fig. 24 top left and second-to-bottom right).¹³³ Such scenes of village life were actually a subject of predilection across the Lebanese art world of the period, not only for Hadad but also for well-known painters such as Farroukh and Onsi. (This kind of paintings was examined in chapter 5.) In parallel, the pavilion exhibited the work of Lebanese craftsmen, as concrete proofs of Lebanon's alleged rural authenticity. There were for instance tapestries and silks woven in the context of First Lady Mrs Eddé's charity projects, and the iron balustrades surrounding the central court were made at the School of Arts and Crafts in Beirut. Traditional costumes had also been imported to round off the picture.

The 1930s Lebanese tourism industry also emphasised the quality of Beirut's recreation and hospitality sectors, and bet on the fact that tourists would be attracted to its Western-like modernity, as a springboard to a bucolic Mountain stay. The pavilion thus presented plans for the über-modern Beirut of the future, based on 1936 plans by French urban planner Romain de la Halle (figs. 34-35). (The designs were never built.) Although these plans were devised with the Mandate's approval, Corm saw no problem repurposing them in New York to boast the modernity of his said-to-be independent country's capital city. Three-dimensional renderings of the project were on display, revealing a neoclassical-inspired monumental port, with enlarged perspectives and wide avenues. This aerated centre, on one level, was the conceptual descendant of the French reconfiguration of downtown Beirut of 1920-21, which drew large streets along a grid

¹³³ Labaki, "Exposition de New York;" Ḥātem, "Lubnān fi Ma'raḍ New York."

and overhauled the harbour. On another level, the renderings fortuitously resembled the World's Fair's iconic structures, the Tylon and the Perisphere, and its geometrical organisation – they, and the models of Beirut, were, after all, utopian visions of modernity. De la Halle's designs for Beirut were however not limited to the city's centre: the portfolio detailing his plans fronts on its cover a sprawling "Cité des Sports" on the seaside, dwarfing the dense urban fabric surrounding it. Then, near these displays, a tourism information room sold souvenirs and postcards, which recapitulated the mythical antiquity, the traditional countryside, and modern Lebanon. Amoun illustrated a few of them, some of which connected Lebanon with Western modernity, democracy and progress, like one image of women voting, and one of a university graduation. Others tied the country to the Orient, although Aladdin's appearance seems rather tongue-in-cheek (fig. 36).

CONCLUSION

France used both the 1921 Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth and the 1931 Exposition Coloniale de Vincennes to simultaneously affirm its rule over its Levantine territories, prove the legitimacy of its presence, and congratulate itself for its achievements there in the military, economic, and sociocultural fields. While the 1921 Fair's underlying objective was to assert France's political dominance – which it crucially needed to do in the Mandate's early days – it was ostensibly a marketplace for French manufactured goods as a means to further France's local economic domination, with the stated side-goal of helping local economic development.

Ten years later, the Exposition Coloniale de Vincennes gathered all the lands

France controlled to celebrate its global empire at home. With the change of location and political context, the significance of the Levantine exhibition was modified. Instead of several structures, the Pavillon des États du Levant brought together all the mandated territories. Like in 1921, the Lebanese and Syrian participation in the event's organisation involved people close to mandatory circles. In 1921, the local political and mercantile elites, who probably saw business opportunities in working with the French, appear to have endorsed the Beirut Fair. At the Exposition Coloniale, the Lebanese participants in the elaboration of the Pavillon des États du Levant, but not necessarily the exhibiting artists, were likewise tied to the Mandate administration.

In the Lebanese pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair however, Corm by and large opted to show the version of Lebanon's identity that would prevail at independence, despite a focus on Phoenicia. France was sidelined, even physically so, to a side wing of the exhibition, and its presence was counterbalanced by a display paying homage to important figures in American history. The French-centred display featured a series of paintings of historical instances of so-called Franco-Lebanese friendship – this is the only place where one could see a depiction of the Crusades – and closed with an image commemorating the 1936 treaty planning independence: this could have communicated the message that the Lebanese, in effect, considered French control ought to end.¹³⁴

Lebanese artists participated in all these events, and their work provide additional information to refine the image of the Levant, and especially that of

¹³⁴ Kaufman however believes this picture shows that France granting Lebanon independence was the culmination of a long history of "friendship"; however, Corm's Francophilia does not preclude the fact that the overall display did not have such connotations ("Too Much French", 73-74).

Lebanon, which was proposed each time. The fine arts pavilion at the 1921 Foire-Exposition included works by the foremost artists of the day: the painters Corm, Saleeby, and Serour, and the sculptor Hoyek. The paintings on display tied Lebanon to Christianity and European culture, while sculpture's pro-France message was clear, as seen in Hoyek's "Dreaming and Awakening of Lebanon," which was interpreted as embodying the rebirth of the predominantly Christian Mountain thanks to France after World War I.

In 1931, the role and space given by the French and Lebanese organisers to art in the Pavillon des États du Levant grew considerably. Lebanese artists not only contributed to building the image of their country that France preferred, but they were also instrumental in the visual representation of the entire Levant, adding to archaeological artefacts, photographs, and interactive maps to tell the region's history through the French lens. Gemayel and Mourani responded to commissions asking to make works corroborating France's message that described ancient ties to the Levant.

A set of rooms common to all mandated states retraced their history through both archaeology and painting, focusing on Ancient history and France's presence in the Levant, notably during the Crusades. Then, a map fashioned a multimedia celebration of contemporary French infrastructural works, asserting France's contemporary domination of the Levant. But the Pavillon made a greater distinction between Lebanon and the Syrian states than the 1921 Fair's setup. It indeed emphasised France's historical and cultural links with Lebanon, for instance in the presence of French intellectuals there in the nineteenth century, as seen in a wax sculpture scene of Emir Bashir II and Lamartine. By contrast, the halls dedicated to the Syrian states

emphasised an unchanging Orient recipient of French benevolence, but not in dialogue with French culture.

In New York in 1939, like in Vincennes, the Lebanese pavilion included archaeological artefacts and a large-scale map, but the greatest part of the display consisted of artworks made on commission or lent by amateur or professional Lebanese artists, such as Gemayel and Farroukh. The story they told started with celebrating the Phoenicians' achievements, tying their importance to modern Lebanon, especially through an emphasis on the invention of the alphabet, described as the Lebanese people's great contribution to Western civilisation. Muslim-Christian cooperation and the idea that Lebanon was part of the Arab world appeared in artworks such as Farroukh's painting of the Omayyad Caliph Muawiyah. Moreover, a substantial undertone of the pavilion was Lebanon's historical desire for independence shared by the two faiths. Hoyek's sculptures of the Emirs Fakhreddin and Bashir II, perceived as heroes of resistance to the Ottomans, were there to prove the persistence of the Lebanese yearning for autonomy. And unlike the French, American officials spoke of Lebanon as a soon-to-be fully independent republic with which the United States shared ideals of liberty and democracy, and whose storied independence was on the way to being restored: despite the Mandate, Lebanon had earned a certain degree of international recognition as an autonomous state.

Corm's second objective was to bolster Lebanese tourism. In particular, he successfully leveraged the association Americans drew between Lebanon and the Bible to eventually draw them to displays depicting bucolic Mountain holidays. While it is difficult to tell whether his strategy effectively increased the number of American

visitors, it did attract the American press's attention. Nevertheless, the exhibition ended rather disappointingly for Corm. This was also true for the World's Fair as a whole: by the end of 1939, its optimistic message of peace, hope, and progress seemed increasingly inadequate given the foreboding international context. The Fair continued throughout 1940, changing its slogan to "for peace and freedom," but many European countries closed their pavilions.¹³⁵ By then, it was too risky to ship the objects back to Lebanon.¹³⁶ Most of the contents of the pavilion were dispersed: some archaeological artefacts went to the Semitic Museum at Harvard, a number of carpets and other handicrafts were sold in the United States, and many items were lost. At the end of her career, Hadad donated her works to her spiritual guru Dahesh, whose collection is today in New York City. A few items, however, made their way back: Farroukh's painting of Caliph Muawiyah now belongs to a Lebanese collection.

¹³⁵ Katie Uva, "'Plump, Moist, and a Bit of a Chump: Facing the Future with Elmer at the 1939 World's Fair," in *Meet me at the Fair*, 149-151.

¹³⁶ Charles Corm, Untitled manuscript, 1939, in "Republic of Lebanon," supplement, Portal 9, no.1 (Autumn 2012), 28.

CONCLUSION

The decades spanning the Ottoman Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon (1860-1918) and the French Mandate (1920-1943) witnessed a considerable expansion, professionalisation and Westernisation of the Lebanese art world. From an embryonic system dominated by Church commissions in the Mountain, in which painters were not professionals, this world came to function almost exclusively in Beirut, and became based on interactions between professional artists and their lay patrons, who took Europe as an aesthetic and lifestyle model. With a nascent culture of exhibitions in the 1930s, new participants joined in the Beirut art world, which was now modelled on Paris's; these included an expanded urban, educated public largely part of the city's sociocultural elite, as well as curators and art critics.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the visual culture of Beirut and the Mutasarrifiyya spanned a variety of painting practices, which enjoyed two main groups of patrons: the local Church and religious missionaries, such as the Jesuits, commissioned religious art, while wealthy laymen could have their houses adorned with elaborate frescoes or their portraits painted to boast their social and intellectual status, and sometimes their appreciation of European notions of modernity, in a way reminiscent of the Arab Nahda's intellectuals' attitudes. Those who made these paintings could be clergymen or laymen, self-taught or trained by local monks or foreign missionaries through reproductions of European images, which had been introduced in Mount Lebanon since the seventeenth century thanks to exchanges between Rome and the Maronite church. Their works included elements from

European art, which they incorporated with vernacular imagery to different degrees, and, eventually, came close to European aesthetics per se.

Around 1880, the art world's configuration changed with the painter Daoud Corm (1852-1930), who marked a break in the history of Lebanese painting. Unlike his predecessors in Lebanon, he enjoyed formal studies in Rome, and, when he settled in Beirut in 1878, he was also among the very first to open a studio in this city and to practice professionally as an easel painter. Corm went on to set the stage for a Lebanese tradition of painting that conformed closely to classical European art. With him and the following generation of professional artists, the art world became more secular, as lay patrons' commissions eventually surpassed the Church's. Younger painters such as Habib Serour (1863-1938) and Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928) followed a path similar to Corm's, training respectively in Italian and British art schools. They both based themselves in Beirut, and, like Corm, were cosmopolitan artists, who took advantage of travel opportunities to study and respond to commissions abroad, notably in Egypt in the case of Corm.

These three artists had few exhibition opportunities in Beirut during their careers, which all ended around 1930. After that date, the art world expanded as an exhibitionary complex formed, and the figures of the curator and the art critic appeared. The first major collective exhibitions in Lebanon took place between 1929 and 1931 at Beirut's School of Arts and Crafts; these included both artworks and industrial and artisan-made items. Exhibitionary activity intensified in the late 1930s, as public exhibitions dedicated solely to art, and modelled on Paris's Salons, started taking place,

often on the initiative of socially prominent women, who, in their capacity of curators, strove to showcase a comprehensive panorama of local art.

The pool of artists diversified, as collective exhibitions embraced not only Lebanese professional artists, but also foreign ones active in Beirut and a sizeable number of upperclass amateurs. A handful of Lebanese professional painters, however, surpassed all in terms of public and critical success and came to dominate the Lebanese art world of the 1930s and 1940s. This group included three men, Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957), César Gemayel (1898-1958), and Omar Onsi (1901-1969), and one woman, Marie Hadad (1889-1973). Besides regularly taking part in collective exhibitions, they also staged individual ones.

These new stars of the Beirut scene came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, but shared a training in European art. Hadad hailed from a prominent Christian family of the commercial-political elite; Onsi was a Beiruti Sunni, the son of a physician, while Farroukh, also a Sunni, came from the more modest neighbourhood of Basta. Gemayel was a Maronite, native from Ain el Touffaha in the Lebanese Mountain. Unlike Hadad, who had trained privately with a Polish painter in Beirut, the three male painters, like Corm, Serour, and Saleeby before them, graduated from European art schools, with Onsi and Gemayel going to Paris's Académie Julian and Farroukh to Rome's Academy of Decorative Arts.

The new culture of exhibitions in Beirut was not a society-wide phenomenon, but took place in the context of the upperclass culture of the French Mandate era, where the French and Lebanese commercial, intellectual, and political dominant circles regularly mingled at cultural events, replicating the lifestyle of the Parisian well-to-do.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Lebanese members of this sociocultural elite also used to commission portraits from local professional painters such as Corm, Serour, and Saleeby, to announce their self-fashioned Westernised identity. In these images, they showcased their modernity and social status, as well as their intellectual prominence or financial success, notably through their expensive European attire.

But, starting the 1930s, with the appearance of public exhibitions, artists could now show works they independently created in their studios, especially paintings of the Lebanese landscape. With the multiplication of exhibitions, journalists and writers started acting as art critics, as the Lebanese Francophone and Arabic-language press began featuring exhibition reviews and artist profiles more regularly. The benchmark of artistic excellence thus shifted to critical success, which meant conformity to the conventions of academic European art. These publications' diverse political and ideological leanings did not transpire in art writing. Instead, journalists focused on defining the parameters of appropriate behaviour for artists and the public, and the preferable aesthetics artists should adopt, emphasising the importance of emulating, and even surpassing, Europe artistically, by upholding traditional conventions of painting. Critics moreover demonstrated a certain patriotic encouragement of local painters, since they consistently gave preference to Lebanese artists over the foreign ones who exhibited in Beirut, which could imply a desire to enhance Lebanon's international artistic reputation and, moreover, affirm the independent cultural standing of a country still under mandate.

Aesthetically, artists such as Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi concurred with critics – and were even more vocal than the press – about the superiority of conventional

European figuration, and also believed to some extent in emulating Impressionism; they staunchly opposed modernist trends that they often equated with social decadence. In addition to sometimes taking to the press to express their aesthetic preferences, in the second half of the 1940s, Farroukh and Gemayel independently explained the progressive role they saw art and the artist should play in society, proposing universal rather than national rules. (Besides, convincing the public of the significance of their status could moreover legitimise their own place on the local and international cultural stage.) The two painters believed that their role was to train society's taste, and, as a consequence, they theorised, a society with better capacities for aesthetic discernment would improve morally, and be on the path to sociocultural progress. But Farroukh and Gemayel were patriotic rather than nationalist: their discourse remained on the theoretical level, and made scarce references to a Lebanese nation. Since neither broached the subject of Lebanon's political identity nor touched upon contemporary debates around it, it might be that they implicitly believed that the existence of the Lebanese nation, or at least that of the Lebanese Republic, was unequivocal.

A few years after Lebanon's independence in 1943, individuals such as the painter Farroukh and the writer Victor Hakim (1907-1984) similarly discussed the progressive role of Lebanese art, although from a historical angle, and, by and large, their writings too demonstrate patriotic rather than nationalist attitudes. They proposed reflections on Lebanon's artistic identity, finding in its art history since the seventeenth century elements to assert their country's place in the international cultural field, by reading in it a series of "renaissances" catalysed by contacts with Europe. One such "renaissance" would have notably taken place in the nineteenth century, a time that

coincided with the activities of the intellectual Arab Nahda: this alleged convergence thus linked local painters' adoption of European styles and imagery with the Nahda's appropriation of European ideas for culturally progressive purposes. For Farroukh, Hakim, and other contemporary writers, this "renaissance" culminated with Corm, who would have crystallised the prestigious European sources of Lebanon's artistic identity because he had mastered the Renaissance artistic principles thanks to his studies in Rome. Given that the late 1940s were a time when Lebanon was undergoing a process of self-definition, it could be that this version of Lebanese art history defined the new state's cultural identity by placing it in a progressive trajectory akin to Europe's, and underscored Lebanon's turn towards the Continent. Still, Farroukh and Hakim emphasised what they called a historical Muslim and Christian artistic syncretism, which could also ideologically correspond to the prevalent notion of Lebanese identity at independence, that of a country simultaneously turned to the West and the Arab world, and marked by interfaith cooperation.

The question of patriotism arises again when one examines the content and the contemporary interpretations of 1930s and 1940s depictions of the Lebanese Mountain by painters such as Farroukh, Gemayel, and Onsi. These images of a so-called authentic countryside reveal the prosperous Beirut urban audience's possible nostalgia for a disappearing way of life, with the supposedly untouched landscape as a utopian alternative to modern city life. Indeed, when painters showed their Beirut public a seemingly timeless Mountain, they bypassed the contemporary transformation of its socioeconomic makeup to create an impression of authenticity: images of rural

peacefulness belied the rural exodus and the stagnation of the Mountain's economy with the decline of sericulture.

This happened, first, through the representation of a fabricated image of villagers' uncorrupted life. In the paintings, peasants are shown engaging in millennia-old activities such as bread making or olive picking, denoting a sense of communal cooperation perhaps disappearing in the modern city. Contemporary critics, then, proposed the villagers as patriotic aspirational ideals of virtue. And, in paintings of the natural landscape, painters showed the Mountain as unspoiled, reduced traces of human occupation and rural labour, and minimised the reality of human interference with the land. Often, they afforded viewers a dominating view over the landscape, from which they could metaphorically control a seemingly virgin land. Such paintings could also reflect the city's ambivalence towards its own modern socioeconomic circumstances and become repositories for city dwellers' fantasies of an imagined authentic life.

When assessing artworks, critics in fact did not broach the topic of the deep changes in the Mountain's socioeconomic and physical makeup and glossed over the interconnections between Beirut and the countryside. For them, it was the Mountain's natural beauty that marked Lebanese authenticity, was the essence of Lebanon, and a source of patriotic pride. Nevertheless, their writings are devoid of nation-building concepts, as the essence of Lebanon was defined as aesthetic, rather than ideological. Commentators furthermore acknowledged that what they described as an authentic Lebanese paradise was an aesthetic object made by a painter, and thus physically inaccessible to the urban viewer.

By contrast with the abundance of their paintings of the Mountain, Lebanese painters seldom represented Beirut, and when they did, denied the substantial transformation of its urban and social fabric and erased its modernity to transform the city as a blank space or a Mountain village. These paintings, like Mountain landscapes, might have satisfied the elite art public's wish to vicariously experience Lebanese authenticity.

The opposition between Beirut and the Mountain found in painters' works reappears in images made to promote Lebanon as a touristic destination. In the 1920s, as the Lebanese economy suffered from the decline of sericulture and industry remained embryonic, French and Lebanese state and private actors, the latter mostly members of Beirut's merchant oligarchy, argued for the promotion of tourism as an avenue for economic growth. All participants in this burgeoning industry coalesced to promote the concept of the holidays in the Mountain, where one could enjoy attractive scenery and an agreeable climate while taking part in relaxing or physical recreational activities. Thus, in the 1930s and 1940s, images stemming from the French and Lebanese private and official spheres came together, sometimes with the input of important Lebanese artists, to showcase the Lebanese countryside and emphasise its accessibility, while boasting Beirut's quality hospitality amenities. But while the aesthetics employed to represent the Lebanese countryside by painters and the tourism industry were comparable, landscape paintings, by contrast with touristic images, pictured the Beirut art public's fantasies of escape to an imagined Lebanese paradise, not as an actual destination accessible to viewers.

Among other initiatives, in the 1930s, the Lebanese State used postage stamps on a few occasions to advertise the country as a holiday destination. For instance, in 1936, in a rare case of collaboration with the government, Farroukh showed a car journeying across the Mountain and Philippe Mourani (1875-1970) an image of people skiing. The representation of Lebanon as a site for Mountain holidays reappears in guidebooks to the country from the late 1940s and 1950s. These publications focused on itineraries throughout the Mountain to visit so-called authentic villages and treated Beirut as a modern, Westernised, comfortable, yet mostly uninteresting, springboard to the Mountain, in stark contrast with painters' transformation of the capital city into a kind of rural idyll. But for the guidebooks, like for painters, the authentic village was the counterpoint to Beirut. The reproductions of Farroukh's illustrations of villagers in their daily activities in a 1948 guidebook presented them to international readers as praiseworthy objects of curiosity to discover, whereas Lebanese critics saw in them patriotic types worth emulating.

The representation of Lebanon to foreigners in international exhibitions is more explicitly ideologically loaded than in touristic literature. It varied according to who – France or Lebanon – organised Lebanon's participation in the events, and, each time, art was instrumental in defining Lebanon's cultural and political identity. In 1921, for instance, the Foire-Exposition de Beyrouth brought together France and its mandated states in an exhibition in downtown Beirut. The event was an occasion for France to assert its rule over its Levantine territories, to legitimise the sectarian division thereof, and to celebrate its military and economic achievements there. But the Fair was, first

and foremost, a display of French economic domination elaborated in coordination with part of the local political and mercantile establishment. There, art by the leading painters of the day, Corm, Saleeby, and Serour, and sculptor Youssef Hoyek (1883-1962), was on display in a Fine Arts pavilion that exclusively housed Lebanese artworks, which, overall, painted Lebanon as a Christian territory grateful of French rule.

Ten years later, the Exposition Coloniale de Vincennes brought together France, its colonies, and its mandatory territories, alongside dozens of foreign nations, in a celebration of France's global empire. The Lebanese Republic, the Syrian one, the Jabal Druze and the Government of Latakia shared a Pavillon des États du Levant, where painting and sculpture played a major role, coming together with multimedia displays, photography, and archaeological artefacts, to describe the region's history from a French-friendly perspective and generally to legitimise and extol French rule, sociocultural and infrastructural initiatives in the Levant.

Lebanese artists, Mourani and Gemayel in particular, featured prominently, alongside a handful of French ones. They were instrumental in representing not only the image of their country that French sought to promote, but also that of the entire Levant. Rooms common to all mandated states told their history through archaeological artefacts and paintings that emphasised France and the Levant's common civilisational origins in Antiquity and stressed the ancientness of France's presence in the region, while an interactive map put an accent on more recent French recent initiatives in the Levant.

Artworks present in the pavilion also suggested that France distinguished between Lebanon and the Syrian states to a greater extent than in 1921. The Syrian

states' sections inscribed them in a stereotypical Orient distinguished by artisanal production, and emphasised France's *mission civilisatrice* there. Lebanon's halls, by contrast, stressed its historical, cultural, and religious ties with France, suggesting an ancient "friendship" between Lebanon, a Christian enclave in the Levant, and the mandatory power.

By contrast, at the 1939 New York World's Fair, Lebanese citizens were the only ones in charge of their country's representation. The pavilion's curator, Charles Corm (1894-1963), put forward an argument close to the official ideology that would prevail in Lebanon at independence, as elaborated by thinkers such as Michel Chiha: the state was a place for Muslim-Christian cooperation and partnership, enjoyed ties with the West, and was part of the Arab world, yet distinct from its neighbours. Although the exhibition put the spotlight on certain Phoenician archaeological artefacts, such as a replica of Phoenician king Ahiiram's sarcophagus (c. 1000 BC), the greater part of the display was made of paintings, among them well-known painters such as Farroukh, Gemayel, and Hadad.

These artists outlined the history of Lebanon from Antiquity to the twentieth century. They started with a celebration of the Phoenicians' contributions to Western civilisation, such as the invention of the alphabet, which emphasised the country's ties to the West, followed by paintings of the Greco-Roman era that reiterated the argument. Yet, as the soon-to-be official ideology of independent Lebanon proposed, the country was distinguished by Christian-Muslim partnership, and part of the Arab world yet distinct from it. Accordingly, Farroukh exhibited a painting of Omayyad caliph Muawiyah's armada in Lebanon. This thesis regarding the country's intersectorian

harmony will actually find an echo in Farroukh and Hakim's abovementioned histories of Lebanese art from 1947 and 1948, where they emphasised ancient Muslim-Christian artistic correspondences, and where they both took as a given the ancient validity and cohesiveness of the independent Lebanese state.

Another recurrent theme throughout the pavilion was the historical Lebanese striving for independence, shared by the two faiths, exemplified, for instance, by paintings of Phoenician patriotism, and by Hoyek's sculptures of historical figures perceived as heroes of independence, such as nineteenth-century Emir Bashir II Shihab (1767-1850). And in 1939, unlike the French, American officials and the American press, who were sensitive to the biblical ties of Lebanon, spoke of the country as soon-to-be fully independent, which suggests that despite the Mandate, Lebanon had earned a degree of international recognition as an autonomous state.

If at the 1921 and 1931 fairs, France had actively used art to fashion the image of a Lebanon acquiescent to its rule, in 1939, there appears to have been little official involvement of the mandatory authorities in the practical elaboration of the Lebanese pavilion. Neither were the Lebanese government much involved: parliament approved Corm's project and provided him with a budget, but this appears to have been the extent of official implication in the Lebanese pavilion's organisation. In Lebanon itself, during the Mandate period, it seems that the French and Lebanese authorities adopted a rather hands-off approach with regards to the internal functioning of the Beirut art world. Judging by the press coverage of the arts and the opinions given by artists, the extent of governmental involvement appears to have been minimal, with officials

sometimes being designated nominal patrons of art events for instance: no deeper support of the fine arts is mentioned, a situation that artists and critics alike deplored. Nevertheless, this absence of governmental directives as to how to represent the country gave the actors in the Beirut art world latitude to fashion their own, ostensibly apolitical, image of Lebanon, one based on an urban/rural rather than a sectarian divide, as the period's paintings suggest.

The climate changed slightly after independence: the 1947 exhibition of Lebanese artists at the National Museum, because of its prominent venue, took on a more official character, and the 1948 opening of the UNESCO headquarters in Beirut was an important occasion for Lebanon to showcase its artistic scene to global representatives gathered there for a summit. This show moreover took place under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, indicating, at least, official endorsement. But while these instances denote an increase in the governmental interest for the arts, the exact identity of their curators and organisers remains uncertain.

In fact, the overall near-disengagement of the Lebanese government from the artistic scene held true throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and the founding of major institutions dedicated to encouraging the fine arts would notably stem from the private sphere. Hence, the project for the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts, which opened its doors in 1943, was not the initiative of the state, but that of Alexis Boustros, an engineer and lover of the arts. Besides an art school, fashioned on the Beaux-Arts model, of which César Gemayel became the first director, the Académie included music

and architecture departments.¹ In 1954, the American University set up its own fine arts program, headed by American painter and photographer Mariette Charlton, and George Buehr, both hailing from the Art Institute of Chicago, while American painter Arthur Frick became the department's chair until 1976.² Several of its early graduates would become renowned artists, such as painter Huguette Caland (1931-) and sculptor Muazzaz Rawda (c. 1906-1986).³ By contrast with private art programs' active fostering of local talent since the 1940s, it was not until 1963 that the Lebanese government inaugurated an Institut des Beaux-Arts as part of the Lebanese University. Nonetheless, starting the early 1950s, the Lebanese government intensified its support of individual artists by handing out grants to an increasing number of them to further their studies in Paris. A new generation of painters, including Shafic Abboud (1926-2004) and Jean Khalifé (1923-1978), both graduates of the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts, would be able to attend Paris's Beaux-Arts and Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where they became acquainted with, and embraced, the abstraction of the École de Paris (figs 1a-1b).⁴

Styles indeed inexorably changed, and, as abstract art was gaining currency, the critical community remained divided. In 1955, a writer for *Ad-Diyar* thus bemoaned,

The standards behind the Venus of Milo and the Renaissance seem to no longer influence the current directions. All there is, is cheap futility that's the inevitable consequence of the mechanical and material currents that invaded the twentieth

¹ "Alexis Boutros, fondateur de l'ALBA" <http://alba.edu.lb/french/Alexis-Boutros-fondateur-Alba> Accessed June 1, 2017.

² Silvia Naef, *À la Recherche d'un modernité arabe: l'évolution des arts plastiques en Égypte, au Liban et en Irak* [The Search for an Arab Modernity: The Evolution of the Plastic Arts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq] (Genève: Slatkine, 1996), 174; Marie Tomb, "From Abroad, Yet so Lebanese: a Few Foreigners Who Left their Mark on the Lebanese Art Scene" in *Art from Lebanon Modern and Contemporary Artists 1880-1975 vol. 1* (Beirut: Wonderful Editions, 2012), 426.

³ Tomb, "Muazzaz Rawda," *ibid.*, 305; Tomb, "Huguette Caland," *ibid.*, 317.

⁴ Tomb, "Shafic Abboud," *ibid.*, 217; Tomb, "Jean Khalifé," *ibid.*, 205.

century and are about to take over humanity.⁵ Modern European art trends that the generation of Farroukh so abhorred had actually been infiltrating Lebanese painting since the end of the previous decade: at the 1947 Salon des Artistes Libanais at the National Museum, Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994) had been featured prominently alongside Hoyek, Onsi, Farroukh and Gemayel, despite his Lebanese landscape paintings' departure from his Impressionist-inspired co-exhibitors' styles, as he had started to deconstruct architectural and natural elements in a way reminiscent of Cubism (fig. 2).⁶ In the early 1950s, his travels to New York made him discover, among other trends, Abstract Expressionism and Hard-Edge abstraction, which he adopted all the while referencing his North Lebanon native landscape.⁷ Starting the end of this decade, the rising success of noted alumni of the first graduating classes of the Académie, such as Abboud, Khalifé or Elie Kanaan (1926-2009), all three acclaimed for their France-influenced lyrical abstraction, confirmed the Beirut art world's infatuation with this style (figs. 1a, 1b, 3).

Amidst these developments in art education and a stylistic near-revolution, Beirut still missed an art museum, as the National Museum, which had opened in 1942, was dedicated to archaeology. A project for a museum of fine and decorative arts emerged unexpectedly in 1952, on the private initiative of Nicolas Ibrahim Surssock (c. 1875-1953). A philanthropist and a member of a prominent family of landowners and industrialists, Surssock collected ancient books and Asian, Middle Eastern and French

⁵ Proux, Marcelle. "Omar Al Onsi the Poet of Lines and Colors," *Ad-Diyar*, March 23, 1955.

⁶ There, Douaihy had 30 paintings on show, out of 111. See Galeries du Musée National. Salon des artistes libanais. Sous le Haut Patronage de S.E. Cheikh Bechara El Khoury, Président de la République libanaise [National Museum Galleries. Salon of the Lebanese Artists. Under the High Patronage of H.E. Sheikh Bechara El Khoury, President of the Lebanese Republic], brochure (Beirut: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et des Beaux-Arts, 1947).

⁷ Tomb, "Saliba Douaihy," in *Art from Lebanon*, 125.

decorative arts, as well as mostly European paintings, including a portrait of his by Dutch-French Fauvist painter Kees Von Dongen.⁸ He bequeathed his Oriental-cum-Italian style villa and its eclectic contents to the Beirut municipality, on the condition that it turned the house into a museum bearing his name. Sursock conceived the bequeathal as a patriotic gesture aimed at fostering art appreciation among his countrymen in a space open to all, and ambitioned to raise Lebanon's cultural profile.⁹ Farroukh saluted the initiative in a letter to the newspaper *Annahar* (The Day), where he praised the long-awaited and long-deserved establishment of such an institution in his country's capital city, when "every small town in Europe had a museum," and described the museum-to-come as a civilising project that would "open up [the] horizons" of visitors.¹⁰ But despite the enthusiastic reaction of the art community, the museum Sursock had dreamed of only opened in 1961, after serving as a guesthouse for official foreign visitors between 1953 and 1957.¹¹

If Sursock's belongings constituted the core of the museum's collection, they were rarely the subject of major exhibitions. In fact, the museum's curatorial direction would remain faithful to its founder's wishes for the villa to become, as stated in his will, a "museum for the ancient and modern art from the Lebanese Republic territory, other Arab countries or elsewhere, as well as a dedicated space to exhibit Lebanese artists."¹² Temporary exhibitions of the 1960s and 70s indeed made one travel through

⁸ Loutfalla Melki, "Nicolas Sursock: L'Homme et son musée" [Nicolas Sursock: the Man and his Museum], in Musée Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock and Saad Kiwan, *Musée Nicolas Sursock: le livre* (Beirut: Chemaly & Chemaly, 2000), 19.

⁹ Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock's testament quoted in Melki, "L'Homme et son musée," 20 -21.

¹⁰ Moustafa Farroukh, "Nqūla Sursuq" [Nicolas Sursock], *Annahar*, January 8, 1953.

¹¹ Melki, "L'Homme et son musée," 29.

¹² Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock's testament quoted in Melki, "L'Homme et son musée," 20 -21.

time and around the globe: among myriad themes, they featured Melkite icons, Islamic and pre-Columbian art, reproductions of Western painting including the Impressionists, Picasso, Van Gogh and Cézanne, as well as German expressionist painters, historical Lebanese art, and contemporary Arab and Syrian art.¹³

The impactful yearly Salons du Musée Surssock, which started in 1961, usually included at least one hundred artists, some of them long-established painters, others Modernist emerging artists, most of them Lebanese, selected by a jury of critics and art world professionals from individual submissions. In 1964 for instance, one could see the now venerable painter Omar Onsi's landscapes hanging near Abboud's abstract compositions. The nine Salons that took place before the 1975 Lebanese war consistently featured younger artists that would later enter the canon of Lebanese art history, and launched the careers of many others. In 1964, the museum started awarding prizes for painting and for sculpture: the choice of winners reveals the passing of an era, as abstraction was without a doubt then dethroning figurative art. That year, Abboud won the museum's first prize for painting; the following year, winners included Kanaan, who had submitted a *Paysage*, and Aref El Rayess (1928-2005), with an abstract *Flying Carpet* (figs. 3-4).¹⁴ Saloua Raouda Choucair (1916-2017), who shared the sculpture prize with El Rayess, was making a name for herself with her modular wooden or metal constructions, characterised by interlocking geometrical elements (fig. 5).¹⁵

In parallel with public exhibitions, other private initiatives to promote – and make a profitable business of – contemporary Lebanese art multiplied, with the opening

¹³ See Camille Aboussouan, "Naissance et gloire d'un musée," in Musée Nicolas Ibrahim Surssock and Saad Kiwan, *Musée Nicolas Surssock: le livre* (Beirut: Chemaly & Chemaly, 2000), 45-70.

¹⁴ Tomb, "Elie Kanaan," in *Art from Lebanon*, 173; Tomb, "Aref El Rayess," *ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵ Tomb, "Saloua Raouda Choucair," *ibid.*, 137.

of commercial galleries. Such enterprises could furthermore make Lebanon catch up with Europe and the United States, whose culture of private art dealing dated back the late nineteenth century. The first important one, Galerie Fakhreddine, a joint Lebanese-Greek venture, opened in 1950. French painter and critic Georges Cyr (1880-1964) took to the pages of *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient arabe* to express his exhilaration, in a piece revealingly titled “Et la Lumière fut” (“And then there was Light.”) To him, “a miracle [had] been accomplished: Beirut suddenly saw emerging from its millennial depths an enchanted palace of painting [...] a real gallery.”¹⁶ Colette Alendy Gallery soon followed suit; it exhibited Choucair’s sculptures in 1951.¹⁷ There were also the Alecco Saab Gallery, which opened in 1958, the renowned Galerie One, founded in 1963 by poet Yusuf and painter Helen el Khal, and, in 1971, artist Waddah Faris’s counter-cultural Galerie Contact, among the most high-profile establishments.¹⁸

The artistic, cultural and political worlds regularly came together starting 1967, when Janine Rubeiz founded the influential cultural space Dar El-Fan, where, in addition to exhibitions and conferences, plays, concerts, film screenings and poetry readings were staged. Besides such activities, Dar El-Fan was host to cultural and socio-political debates, sometimes involving prominent local political personalities such as Shia religious leader Moussa Sadr or Progressive Socialist Party chief Kamal Joumblatt, as well as international cultural figures like the novelist Michel Tournier or the sculptor Henry Moore. Located on what would become the infamous “Green Line” separating

¹⁶ Georges Cyr, “Et la Lumière fut” [And then there was Light], *La Revue du Liban et de l'Orient arabe*, December 17, 1950.

¹⁷ Fayçal Sultan, “Abstract Art and Modern Tendencies, 1950 – 1975”, in *Art from Lebanon*, 119.

¹⁸ Examples can be multiplied. In addition to the above, Naef cites for instance the Galerie de l'Orient, L'Amateur, Studio 27, Delta, Modulard, and Camille Mounsef (*À la Recherche*, 142).

East and West Beirut during the 1975 Lebanese War, Dar el-Fan was forced to close in 1975.¹⁹

The 1960s and early 1970s were, in effect, years of cultural effervescence for Lebanon, a time when Beirut was a prominent Middle Eastern economic node, as well as, arguably, the cultural capital of the Arab world, in no small part thanks to its artistic scene. Lebanese galleries were furthermore among the few spaces where artists from neighbouring countries could show their works with no fear of censorship.²⁰ Meanwhile, not only galleries and the Sursock Museum, but also foreign cultural institutes, luxury restaurants, and hotels would organise art exhibitions. A UNESCO report from 1970, in fact, suggests that one hundred of them were staged every year during that era. Yet, exhibition going, as was the case four decades earlier, seems to have remained limited to the sociocultural elite.²¹

The years leading up to the Lebanese war marked a certain politicization of art, after close to a century of artists more often than not shying away from making engaged works. As a reaction to the tense situation in the Near East, and in particular after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, some painters started to incorporate references to a Lebanese, Arab, or Oriental heritage in their works, while, whether obliquely or overtly, pointing to contemporary events and expressing their disillusion with the modern world. Hence, for instance, Rafic Charaf (1932-2003) a politically engaged painter and an advocate for the Palestinian people, who believed his art should reflect his cultural heritage, would

¹⁹ See Janine Rubeiz et Dar el Fan, *Regard vers un patrimoine culturel* [Janine Rubeiz and Dar el Fan, A Look Towards A Cultural Heritage] (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003).

²⁰ Naef, *À la Recherche*, 325.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 143, 194.

often pay homage to the legendary hero Antar, construed as the “new Arab Man” (fig. 6).²²

But it is the 1975 Lebanese war breaking out that brutally announced a paradigm shift within the Lebanese art world. While numerous galleries were forced to close, many painters reacted vehemently against the conflict, but perhaps few of them did so as forcefully as Aref El Rayess (1928-2005). El Rayess had earned fame in the 1960s with his abstract paintings and sculptures, but, disappointed with the local and regional political situation post-1967, discarded the approach, deeming it unsuited to commenting on his times. Instead, he put current events, social issues and political injustice at the centre of his work, first turning to a social criticism of Beirut society, from everyday acts of greed to scenes of prostitution (fig. 7). As soon as the war started, he began working on a series of fifteen drawings, *The Road to Peace* (1976), an allegory of inhuman cruelty, with at its core the metaphors of Man as beast, and as mechanical killing machine. Using a symbolism by turns reminiscent of ancient Middle Eastern religious imagery, at others of socially engaged Mexican Muralism, he represented gruesome scenes of torture, crowds blindly following bloodthirsty leaders, mass graves, and despondent survivors, suggesting the war spurred the horrifying dehumanisation of society (fig. 8).²³ One century after Corm set up his studio in Beirut, figurative painting was back at the forefront of the artistic scene. Yet, its aims and means, and its very reasons to be, were now almost reversed.

²² Joseph Tarrab, “Introduction: the Wide Gap,” in *Art from Lebanon*, 11.

²³ Tomb, *War/Identities, When Words Aren't Enough: Human Rights Seen Through Art in Lebanon* (Beirut: Human Rights Watch, 2016), 18-41.

NOTE ON transliteration

I use the transliterations the artists themselves used for the signatures, received French spelling for public figures, and, for primary sources, the French spelling of Lebanese authors when they provide it. I use the common English spellings of places, for instance, Beirut. Otherwise, the English transliteration of Arabic follows the rules of the IJMES.

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