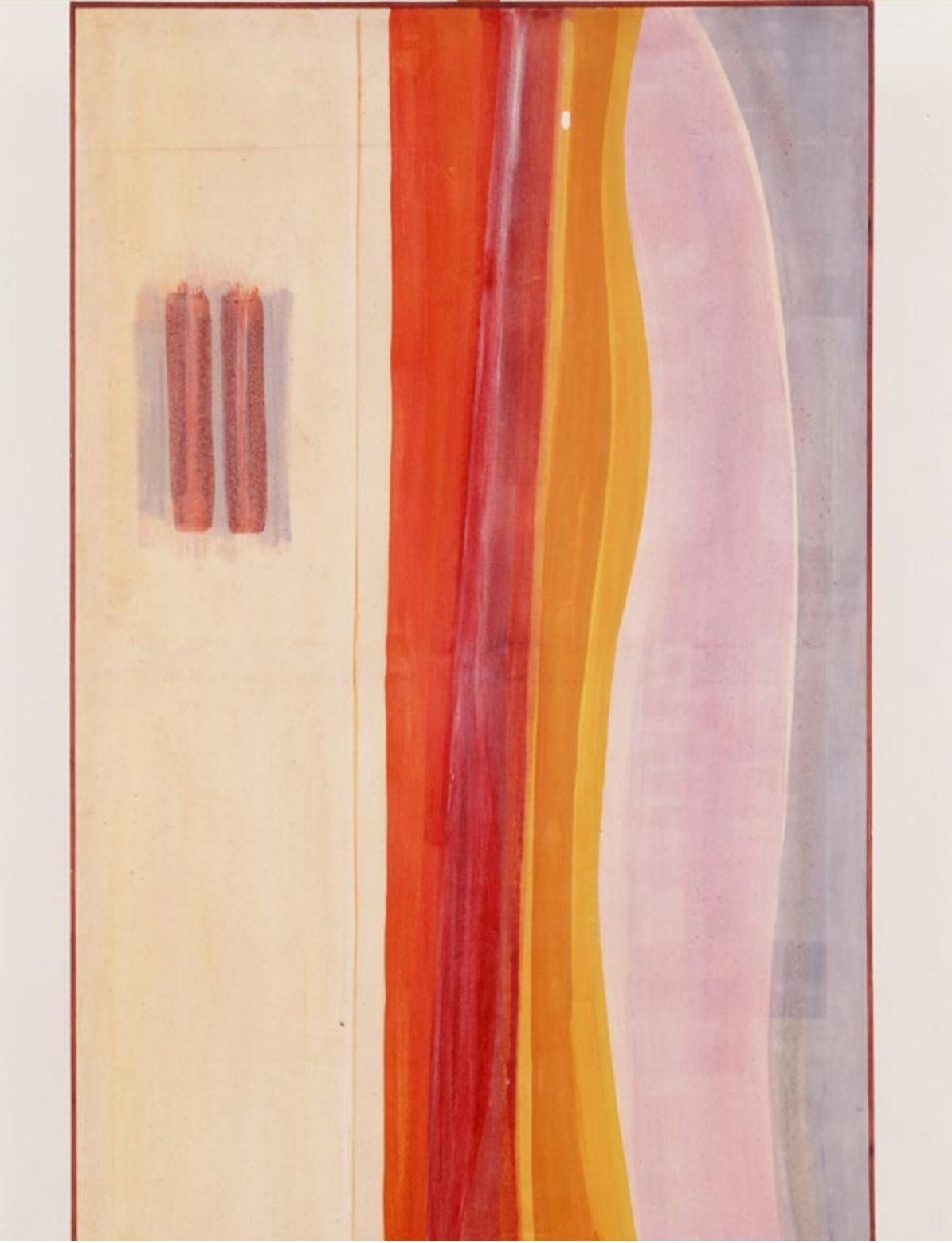


# PRESS RELEASE



*Front cover:*

**Aref el Rayess**

*Hommage au tapis volant* [Flying Carpet Tribute], 1965

Acrylic on canvas. 152 x 102 cm

Exhibited at the 5th Salon d'Automne, 1965

Sursock Museum Grand Prize

Purchased by the Museum, 1965

Sursock Museum collection

The Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Museum is a modern and contemporary art museum in the center of Beirut first opened in 1961, with a mission to collect, preserve, and exhibit local and international art. The mansion in which the Museum is housed was the former residence of Nicolas Sursock, a Lebanese collector and philanthropist. Recognizing the need for institutional support of artists in Lebanon, Sursock left his mansion to the city of Beirut as an art museum upon his death in 1952.

The Museum opened its doors in 1961 with the Salon d'Automne, an open call exhibition showcasing new art of the time. The Salon was held on an annual basis, showcasing the work of such artists as Shafic Abboud, Etel Adnan, Michel Basbous, Saloua Raouda Choucair, Paul Guiragossian, Aref el Rayess, and Adel Saghir. Alongside the Salon d'Automne, the Museum organized diverse exhibitions showcasing art from all over the world. As such, the Museum played a key role in the development of the cultural scene in Beirut, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 2008, the Museum closed for major renovation and expansion works that saw a fivefold increase in its total surface area, from 1,500 square meters to 8,500 square meters. This structural overhaul

aimed at equipping the Museum with the facilities that would transform it into a cutting-edge 21st-century cultural institution. The project was initiated in 2000 by the President of the Museum's Committee at the time, Ghassan Tueni, who, along with the Committee, commissioned the architects Jean-Michel Wilmotte and Jacques Aboukhaled to undertake the expansion project. The works were completed in 2014 under the mandate of the current *moutawalli*, the President of Beirut's Municipality Dr. Bilal Hamad, and Dr. Tarek Mitri, the Chair of the Museum's General Committee.

The Museum reopened on October 8, 2015 with a new team and with plans to host seven exhibitions a year, as well as a dynamic public program for all ages. Through its collection, archives, exhibitions, and public programs, the Museum aims to produce knowledge on art practices in the region, support local art production, provide a platform for encounter and experimentation with art and ideas, and inform and challenge diverse audiences in new and unexpected ways.

The following pages give an overview of the Museum's new premises, the four opening exhibitions, and the opening program.



The auditorium ©Nabû Productions



The new racking system installed in the Museum's storage spaces ©Nabû Productions

# BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS

The Museum's expansion project added four floors beneath the garden. The new premises include several firsts for the Sursock Museum, notably:

The **Special Exhibitions Hall**, an 800-square meter hall with double ceilings that can accommodate works and installations that are over two meters high. The Special Exhibitions Hall will host three exhibitions a year, from thematic group shows to guest-curated exhibitions.

The **Twin Galleries**, two identical spaces that function as a single exhibition space. The Twin Galleries will host four exhibitions a year, featuring both local and international artists.

A specialized **research library** dedicated to collecting, preserving, and studying local and regional art historical resources.

An **auditorium** of 168 seats, equipped with the latest audiovisual and presentation tools, in addition to simultaneous translation equipment.

**Two storage spaces** with different climate control conditions for the Museum's permanent collection: one for paintings and objects, and another for paper-based works, including photographs and manuscripts.

A state-of-the-art **restoration workshop**, equipped with all the necessary tools and chemicals to clean, dust, and treat works from different media.

A **store** and **restaurant** housed in a glass-and-steel extension in the Museum's esplanade. The store will offer a comprehensive selection of contemporary art books and gifts. The restaurant, headed by Joanna Debbas, will offer an eclectic range of Mediterranean dishes, as well as coffees and desserts.



**Hussein Madi**  
*Untitled, 1999*  
Acrylic on canvas. 100 x 100 cm  
Leila and Touma Arida collection



**Randa Mirzab**  
*The Selective Residence, 2013*  
Pigment ink on Canson baryta. 80 x 110 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Tanit

# EXHIBITIONS AND DISPLAYS

The Sursock Museum reopens with four exhibitions and displays.

## Regards sur Beyrouth 160 ans d'images 1800-1960

Curated by Sylvia Agémian

8 October 2015–11 January 2016

Special Exhibitions Hall, Level -2

Bringing together over 200 rarely seen works from private collections—including paintings, photographs, and etchings—*Regards sur Beyrouth: 160 ans d'images* traces the city's historical evolution from a provincial Ottoman town to the capital of a nation state, from 1800 to 1960. With a trajectory spanning 160 years, Beirut's urban and social transformations are examined through six aspects of its geography: the panorama, the port, the city, the coast, the provinces, and the surrounding hillsides.

Orientalist imagery together with romanticized landscapes, historical maps, and photographic surveys produce both a reading of the city and an overview of major political and social shifts taking place during the period. Distant images of landscapes and traditional houses later give way to colorful depictions of urban life, including modern architecture in Saadi Sinévi's 1952 painting of the long gone Souk Ayass, tense street protests in E. Harrison's 1958 painting of a women's march in Furn el Chubak, and major political events in Khalil Zgaib's 1958 *Le début des évènements*.

Highlights include David Hockney's *Place des Canons* (1966), produced during a visit to Beirut and depicting the modernist façade of the famous Rivoli Cinema in downtown Beirut; Amine el Bacha's 1950s watercolor paintings of the Place des Canons and its raw, urban energy; as well as the 1936 painting by J. M. celebrating the nascent modern Lebanese state through its architectural emblems.

The exhibition also features important works from The Fouad Debbas Collection not previously on public view. These include the fragile 1860s *Manuscript of the Countess of Perthuis*, presented to the public for the first time, as well as

an important survey of photographs from the Bonfils studio, including an 1870 albumen print showing the façade of the Khan Antoun Bey.

## The City in The City

08 October 2015–11 January 2016

Twin Galleries, GF

This group exhibition brings together recent work by artists, designers, and researchers concerned with mapping and exploring contemporary Beirut. Here, the city is at once a product of desire and fantasy, and a lived and embodied space.

In reference to *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino's 1972 treatise on the layered and elusory nature of the city, the exhibition evokes the myriad overlapping cities that are Beirut, cities we simultaneously negotiate everyday. From action films to urban dérives, from the real to the fantastical, through the works on display we encounter visions of a past, present, and future Beirut, moving from what we imagine to be the real to what we hope could be the possible.

With works by: 98weeks, Vartan Avakian, Roy Dib, Mona Fawaz, Ahmad Gharbieh, Randa Mirza, and Public Works (Nadine Bekdache and Abir Saksouk-Sasso).

*This exhibition is accompanied by an extensive public program and film program.*



**Etel Adnan**  
*Mount Tamalpais*, 1985  
Oil on canvas. 148 x 125 cm  
Gifted by the artist, 2007  
Sursock Museum collection



**Georges Saboungi**  
*Untitled*, 1890s  
Albumen print mounted on board, 16.3 x 10.8 cm  
The Fouad Debbas Collection / Sursock Museum



## Picturing Identity

### A Selection of Photographs from The Fouad Debbas Collection

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08 October 2015–11 January 2016

The Fouad Debbas Collection Gallery, Level 1

At the end of the 19th century, photographic portraiture in the Middle East borrowed tropes from classical European painted portraits. Whether showing a close-up or full body photograph, studio portraiture was used to signal the social rank of its sitter.

From cartes-de-visite to postcards and staged photographs, these images circulated through local and international networks, much like images in social media do today.

This exhibition shows a selection of cartes-de-visite and studio photographs from The Fouad Debbas Collection, tracing the construction of local class typologies through the studio practice of the Bonfils family, the Saboungis, and the Abdullah Brothers.

### About The Fouad Debbas Collection

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The Sursock Museum is home to The Fouad Debbas Collection, a photographic collection comprising over 30,000 images from the Middle East—namely Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey—from 1830 till the 1960s.

It was built over the course of two decades by a passionate man, Fouad César Debbas (1930-2001), who believed in the importance of collecting and preserving images as a means of safeguarding cultural heritage. Debbas' brothers, Robert and Antoine, entrusted the Collection to the Sursock Museum in order to make it accessible to the public.

It consists of postcards and stereoscopic views, in addition to loose albumin prints, etchings, and books, all of which relate to the region. Among these works are 3,000 images produced by Maison Bonfils, one of the first commercial studios in the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th-century.

The collection's orientalist character and commercial clichés form an important part of the Sursock Museum's collection, highlighting photography's key role in the development of modern art in Lebanon.

## Collection display

### A Selection of Works from the Sursock Museum Collection

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Collection galleries, Levels 1 and 2

Distributed along the Museum's upper two floors, the collection display traces Lebanese modern art from the late 1800s to the early 2000s. Acquired by or gifted to the Sursock Museum following exhibitions, the works in the collection also chronicle the history of the Museum's exhibition program since its opening in 1961—including the annual Salon d'Automne—as well as the evolution of artistic practices in Lebanon.

From Daoud Corm's painted portraits to Assadour's geometric abstraction, the display's scope and depth give insights into Lebanese modern art.

Works on display include Khalil Saleeby's *Portrait de Boutros Dagher* (1907), Aref El Rayess's *Colloque* (1966), Shafic Abboud's *Les Amours et les jeux* (1979), and Etel Adnan's *Mount Tamalpais* (1985).

### About the Sursock Museum collection

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The Sursock Museum's collection is comprised of works by predominantly Lebanese artists from the late 1800s to the early 2000s.

Primarily works on canvas and paper, the collection also comprises sculptures and mixed media works. Of particular note is the Museum's collection of Lebanese art from the first half of the twentieth century, whereby key modern Lebanese artists such as Shafic Abboud and Amine el Bacha are represented.

The collection is closely linked to the history and evolution of the Salon d'Automne, as artworks were often acquired by the Museum following the Salon. As such, the collection's scope and breadth give insights into Lebanese modern art. Major Lebanese artists featured in the collection include Etel Adnan, Assadour, Daoud Corm, Paul Guiragossian, Jean Khalife, Hussein Madi, Jamil Molaeb, Omar Onsi, and Aref el Rayess.

The collection is equally shaped by the various artworks that were gifted to the Museum following exhibitions. As a result, the collection also includes an Islamic art collection, Japanese etchings, and ancient Arabic manuscripts.



**Beirut. The Public Garden**, Circa 1900-1920  
American Colony (Jerusalem). Photo Dept.  
Library of Congress / Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection



©Nabū Productions

## **PUBLIC PROGRAM**

The Sursock Museum's public program offers myriad ways to engage with art, artists, and ideas. The program explores themes related to the Museum's collection and temporary exhibitions, but also considers visual arts and culture in a wider context. A range of events are offered for all ages, aimed in equal measure at art specialists, and those encountering the museum for the first time.

The opening program explores both the historic and contemporary city of Beirut. Highlights include artist-led walks, workshops on greening the city for all ages, and panel discussions exploring Beirut through the lenses of cosmopolitanism and gender.

In addition, the Museum offers a range of activities designed for families, where children and parents can learn about art in a fun, creative, and informative atmosphere. Activities are open to accompanied children over 4 years of age.

Program highlights include a drop-in workshop for families with Collectif Kahraba; a performance-walk by Dictaphone Group; a writing workshop with Lina Mounzer; a talk on the history of Beirut by Fawwaz Traboulsi; and a film program curated by Roy Dib.

The majority of programs and activities offered by the Sursock Museum are free. For workshops that require a registration fee, the Museum charges a symbolic price. For the full program, please refer to the public program guide.



The Sursock Museum by night ©Joe Kesrouani

# ABOUT THE SURSOCK MUSEUM

## MISSION

The Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Museum is a modern and contemporary art museum in the center of Beirut open since 1961, with a mission to collect, preserve, and exhibit local and international art.

Through our collection, archives, exhibitions, and public programs, we aim to produce knowledge on art practices in the region and explore work that reflects on our contemporary moment. Our goal is to support local art production, to provide a platform for encounter and experimentation with art and ideas, and to inform and challenge diverse audiences in new and unexpected ways.

## ADMISSION HOURS OF OPERATION

### Museum and exhibitions

**Open daily from 10.00-18.00**  
**Late opening on Thursdays from 12.00-21.00**  
**Closed on Tuesdays**

Admission to the Sursock Museum is free of charge, but you are welcome to pay what you wish for your visit. Your support helps the Museum to fulfill its mission by preserving the collection, developing exhibitions, and designing educational programs for all ages.

### Library

Open daily from 10.00-17.00  
Late opening on Thursdays from 12.00-20.00  
Closed on Tuesdays and Sundays

Please note that the library will not be fully functional at the reopening. From 08 October through 16 November, the Sursock Museum library is

hosting a temporary display showcasing some of the rare material in our archives, including documents and photographs of previous exhibitions at the Museum. Artist and gallery archives from the 1960s and 1970s and original documents from The Fouad Debbas Collection are also on view.

### Store

Open daily from 11.00-19.00  
Late opening on Thursdays from 13.00-22.00  
Closed on Tuesdays

### Restaurant

Open daily from 10.00-01.00  
Closed on Tuesdays

## GOVERNANCE

### Moutawalli

Dr. Bilal Hamad, President of the Municipality of Beirut

### Executive Committee

Dr. Tarek Mitri, President  
Abdel Menhem Ariss, Vice-president  
Nabil Kiwan, General secretary  
Maher Daouk, Treasurer  
Rachid Achkar, Member  
Maria Melki Fatte, Member  
Habib Ghaziri, Member  
Noha Karanouh Kabbani, Member  
Chadia Tueni, Member

## MUSEUM STAFF

Zeina Arida, Director  
Elsa Hokayem, Assistant Director  
Yasmine Chemali, Head of Collections  
Nora Razian, Head of Programs and Exhibitions  
Lucas Morin, Programs and Exhibitions Assistant  
Muriel N. Kahwagi, Head of Communications  
Albert Ghaya, Office Manager  
Adel Khoury, IT Manager  
Tania Khalaf, Administrative Assistant  
Zaher Alama, Art handler  
Claire Henry, Communication intern





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