

Call for Papers

LAWHA Workshop



Spaces and Places: Art Exhibitions in Lebanon (1940s-1990s) (Re)assessing the Role of Cultural Clubs and Foreign Cultural Centres

Organizer: LAWHA/Orient-Institut Beirut

Venue: Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB), Zokak el-Blat, Beirut

Date: 13-14 September 2023

Art exhibitions in Lebanon can be traced back to the late 1920s and early 1930s. This is when the press started to develop an increasing interest in this kind of event. The *École des Arts et Métiers* in Beirut was a space that regularly hosted exhibitions at the time. As of the 1950s, the number of exhibitions and spaces steadily increased including hotels, cafés, furniture galleries, university departments as well as cultural clubs and foreign cultural centres. Art galleries started to emerge in the late 1950s reaching a peak in the early 1970s. In the decades leading up to the outbreak of the war in 1975, the various spaces were major outlets for art display, a role which some of them continued to play throughout the 1980s.

While research into art galleries has brought to light some of their exhibition history, other spaces have not yet been closely studied. This workshop aims at examining the hitherto largely neglected **role of cultural clubs and centres in promoting visual arts**. Driven by non-commercial interests (in contrast to most art galleries), the motivation and mission of these organisations is generally civilizational, cultural, humanistic, patriotic and/or political. While the cultural clubs' objectives are primarily connected to a shared view on Lebanon among their membership, foreign cultural centres are an integral part of cultural diplomacy and as such representatives of the respective country's foreign policy. Most cultural clubs and centres are situated in Beirut, but many have representations and an outreach across Lebanon, which makes these spaces and places particularly worthwhile to study.

Among the first cultural clubs in Lebanon was the Arab Cultural Club in Beirut (est. in 1944), which artist Saloua Raouda Choucair was actively involved in. Between 1947 and 1948, she organized an art lecture series with accompanying exhibitions. The Cultural Association in Tripoli (est. in 1943), the Cultural Movement Antelias (est. in 1978) and the Cultural Council of South Lebanon (est. in 1964) are other examples of clubs that spread out in the coastal regions from the North to the South. Our understanding of clubs includes the organizational form of "club" (نادي), thereby hinting at a more or less closed entity with certain entry rules, "council" (مجلس), "movement" (حركة) or "association" (رابطة). Each of these have their own specificities and varying degree of openness. Among the foreign cultural centres of interest are the Goethe-Institut, the John F. Kennedy Center, the French Cultural Club, the British Council, as well as the Italian, Spanish, Iraqi and Russian/Soviet Cultural Centres, and the Hamazkaïne Center/École Palandjian, most of which have a long history in Lebanon and their share in shaping the cultural scene.

We seek contributions that address any of the following objectives:

- a. To flesh out and reconstruct some of the exhibition history and to reevaluate the role of these organisations – or of individuals working there – in the promotion of visual arts. Were art exhibitions a priority of certain clubs or centres rather than others? Did they focus on certain art forms, styles or media such as abstract or conceptual art, landscape painting, or new media? Who were the artists exhibiting there? Were they mainly local, and to what extent were other Arab and international artists included?
- b. To address the conceptual frameworks associated with these cultural centres and clubs. Can they be categorised as alternative spaces and why? How can we describe and evaluate the role of these organisations (e.g. as platforms, hubs, initiators, facilitators) and in how far does their organizational form (club, centre, association, movement, council, etc.) impact the way they organise their outreach?
- c. To explore the localities or places of these spaces, many of which were outside Beirut (including the different branches of many cultural centres). Who were their audiences? What role did/do these spaces play within the local art and cultural scene and what was/is their relation to the centre Beirut? Do these places figure as centres in their own local contexts (e.g. Tripoli with regard to North Lebanon)?

The workshop focuses on the period between the 1940s and 1990s, with a particular interest in the activities and the role of these organisations during the war years (1975-1990).

The workshop addresses **students**, **PhD candidates**, and **scholars** from various disciplines including art history, history, anthropology, and cultural studies as well as **practitioners** working in the field. Please send an abstract of 300 words and a short biographical statement (in English or Arabic) before **31 March 2023** to: lawha@orient-institut.org

About LAWHA: “Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad: Trajectories of artists and artworks in/from Lebanon since 1943” (LAWHA) is a research and database project funded by the [ERC](#). LAWHA is about the forces that have shaped the emergence of a professional field of art in Lebanon within its local, regional and global context. LAWHA is hosted by the [Orient-Institut Beirut](#) (OIB) of the [Max Weber Foundation](#). [Cà Foscari University of Venice](#) is an additional beneficiary of LAWHA. Find out more: <https://lawha.hypotheses.org>