

كبريان

KAHLIL GIBRAN

The Prophet, The Artist, The Man



جبران

A free exhibition presented at the
State Library of New South Wales
4 December 2010 to 20 February 2011

Exhibition opening hours:
9 am to 8 pm Monday to Thursday,
9 am to 5 pm Friday, 10 am to 5pm weekends
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Conservation services in Lebanon: David Butcher,
Paris Art Consulting
International freight: Terry Fahey, Global Specialised Services
Printed in Australia by Pegasus Print Group
Paper: Focus Paper Evolve 275gsm (cover) and 120 gsm (text).
The paper is 100% recycled from post-consumer waste.
Print run: 10,000
P&D-3499-11/2010
ISBN 0 7313 7205 0

© State Library of New South Wales, November 2010

The State Library of New South Wales is a statutory authority
of, and principally funded by, the NSW State Government

The State Library acknowledges the generous support of the
Nelson Meers Foundation

Names of people and works in this exhibition have been
westernised where appropriate for English-language publication.
Unless otherwise stated, all works illustrated in this guide are
by Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931), and are on loan from the Gibran
Museum, Bsharri, Lebanon.

Cover: Fred Holland Day, **Kahlil Gibran with book, 1897**,
photographic print, © National Media Museum/Science & Society
Picture Library, UK

Above: Fred Holland Day, **Portrait of Kahlil Gibran, c. 1898**,
photographic print, © National Media Museum/Science & Society
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KAHLIL GIBRAN

The Prophet, The Artist, The Man



وزارة الثقافة
Ministère de la Culture



لجنة جبران الوطنية
GIBRAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE



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FOREWORD

Kahlil Gibran's visit to the State Library of New South Wales is both timely and fitting.

On 31 October 1910, Gibran was arriving back in the United States of America after his artistic sojourn in Paris. One hundred years later, examples of his life's creative output — including works created in Paris — are arriving in Sydney on a new sojourn, to be displayed in a building, the Mitchell Library, which is itself 100 years old. Gibran's artworks and manuscripts are visiting the State Library, which is renowned for its vast collection of items relating to previous and current generations of artists and writers — it's an excellent fit. The Library also holds publications by Gibran, in several languages including English and Arabic.

From a personal perspective, I was an avid reader as a young teen and I distinctly recall devouring Gibran's *The prophet* during that time. I am looking forward to reacquainting myself with Gibran — in particular *The prophet* — after all these years. This exhibition also introduces us to his original artworks, which very few of us in Australia may have previously seen. This is the first time that these works have travelled to Australia, on loan from the Gibran Museum in Bsharri, northern Lebanon.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the passionate and indefatigable Professor Fadia Ghossayn, President of the Australian Lebanese Foundation at the University of Sydney. Without her patience and skills as an intermediary between the Lebanese community of New South Wales and the many contacts within Lebanon, this exhibition and associated events would not have culminated in such a wonderful celebration of literature and art.

Regina Sutton

NSW State Librarian and Chief Executive



Kahlil Gibran had an enormous impact on many people around the globe.

Now beautifully presented here at the State Library of New South Wales, I first fell in love with these artworks in Lebanon in July 2009. I felt it would be wonderful if citizens in New South Wales could have the opportunity to share in the sheer beauty of Gibran's work.

Khalil Gibran is the world's third best-selling poet after Shakespeare and Lao-Tzu, making him one of the most widely read, culturally influential poets of all time.

His watercolours and portraits, his poems in manuscript, charcoal sketches from his days in Paris as a student, photographs of his home town Bsharri, notebooks from his years in London and Boston — all these works show us his essence. It has been said that his greatest work, *The prophet*, shaped the souls of many young Australians during the 1960s and 70s, as a counterculture bible for a generation. And this doesn't include its influence throughout Europe, the United States, India and the Arabic-speaking world.

This exhibition in our own temple to literature, the grand Mitchell Library, is a taste of the richness of Gibran's art and an insight into his soul.

I hope you will delight in this experience as much as I did.

The Hon Virginia Judge MP

NSW Minister for the Arts



Gibran Khalil Gibran — writer, poet, artist and painter — is now in Sydney, on display at the State Library of New South Wales. This exhibition shows this great philosopher as an artist, with each work revealing his insights.

Gibran's legacy is the powerful simplicity of his words, which continue to inspire those who long for peace, search for love and strive for justice. As he wrote in *The prophet*: 'Work is Love made visible.'

Gibran expressed his ideas through writing and the visual arts, using black and white and colour. His subjects reflect his philosophy — he visualised 'Man' in tragedy and sorrow, as well as in happiness and love. Gibran's spirituality played a strong role in his paintings, and he acknowledged the artistic culture he experienced in Paris as a young man, the great mystical poets of the East, and the Lebanese countryside as some of his inspirations.

Gibran believed that love is the key to all things: if a person has love, they are freed from greed, ambition, intellectual pride, blind obedience to custom and awe of persons of higher social rank. In his *Jesus, the son of man* series, Gibran created his 'Wanderer' as a hero who embodied his message, and also captured the mood and atmosphere of his homeland, Lebanon, and its abiding influence on his work.

After 100 years, Gibran's philosophy, art and poetry still inspire people, and show why his legacy continues to shine.

Salim Wardy

Minister of Culture, Lebanon



From Bsharri to Sydney

Lebanon is renowned worldwide for its rich cultural treasures and, more specifically, as being the birthplace and homeland of the genius of Khalil Gibran. Along with his literary and artistic talent, Gibran is considered to be one of the greatest ambassadors for Lebanese talent and culture internationally. His writing and paintings touched people everywhere, leaving a brilliant legacy for the world.

This exhibition is an opportunity to celebrate the beauty and love in Gibran's work, especially in his remarkable paintings, on loan from the Gibran Museum — located in his home village, Bsharri — and exhibited for the first time in Sydney.

The Gibran National Committee proudly works to fulfil our cultural mission in Lebanon and globally. We promote and protect our unique bequest and, most importantly, communicate Gibran's philosophy worldwide. Therefore we are honored to have our collection represented at the State Library of New South Wales, with the support of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture represented by his Excellency, the Minister Salim Wardy.

Gibran National Committee

Bsharri, Lebanon





KAHLIL GIBRAN

Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931) was born Gibran Khalil Gibran in Bsharri, Lebanon (part of Ottoman-ruled Syria at that time) to a poor but devout Maronite (Christian) family. When he was 12, his mother took Kahlil, his older stepbrother and two younger sisters to America to seek a better life, leaving their father behind. They arrived at Ellis Island on 17 June 1895 – a very small part of the wave of Lebanese emigration into America in the late 19th century.

The family settled in Boston's South End amongst the Syrian community, which included distant family connections, in an area renowned for overcrowding and slum conditions. Gibran was the first and only one of his siblings to attend school, starting at the age of 13 in September 1895. For the next three years he learnt English and 'the three Rs'. It was probably at this time that the spelling of his name was westernised.

Gibran's own stories about his childhood often stressed his precocious and artistic nature – he seemed to spend a lot of time alone sketching, and his mother appears to have indulged him. Gibran's artistic skills transformed the trajectory of his life, deflecting his destiny away from what could have been a life of hard physical work and relative obscurity.

An art teacher at a local community centre Gibran attended out of school hours noticed his early artistic talent and brought him to the attention of a friend of hers, Fred Holland Day, the first of two key figures in Gibran's life in the West.

Fred Holland Day (1864–1933) was an independently wealthy photographer and one of the leading lights of a Boston avant-garde movement

called 'the Visionists'. Meeting Gibran in December 1896, Day mentored the good-looking exotic boy and used him as a model. Day found in Gibran an acolyte, a blank book, someone to be instructed and moulded. Through Day, Gibran was introduced to a world of luxury and decadence, literature and art. He met established writers and artists. A whole new and exciting world opened up, setting his day-to-day life in stark relief.

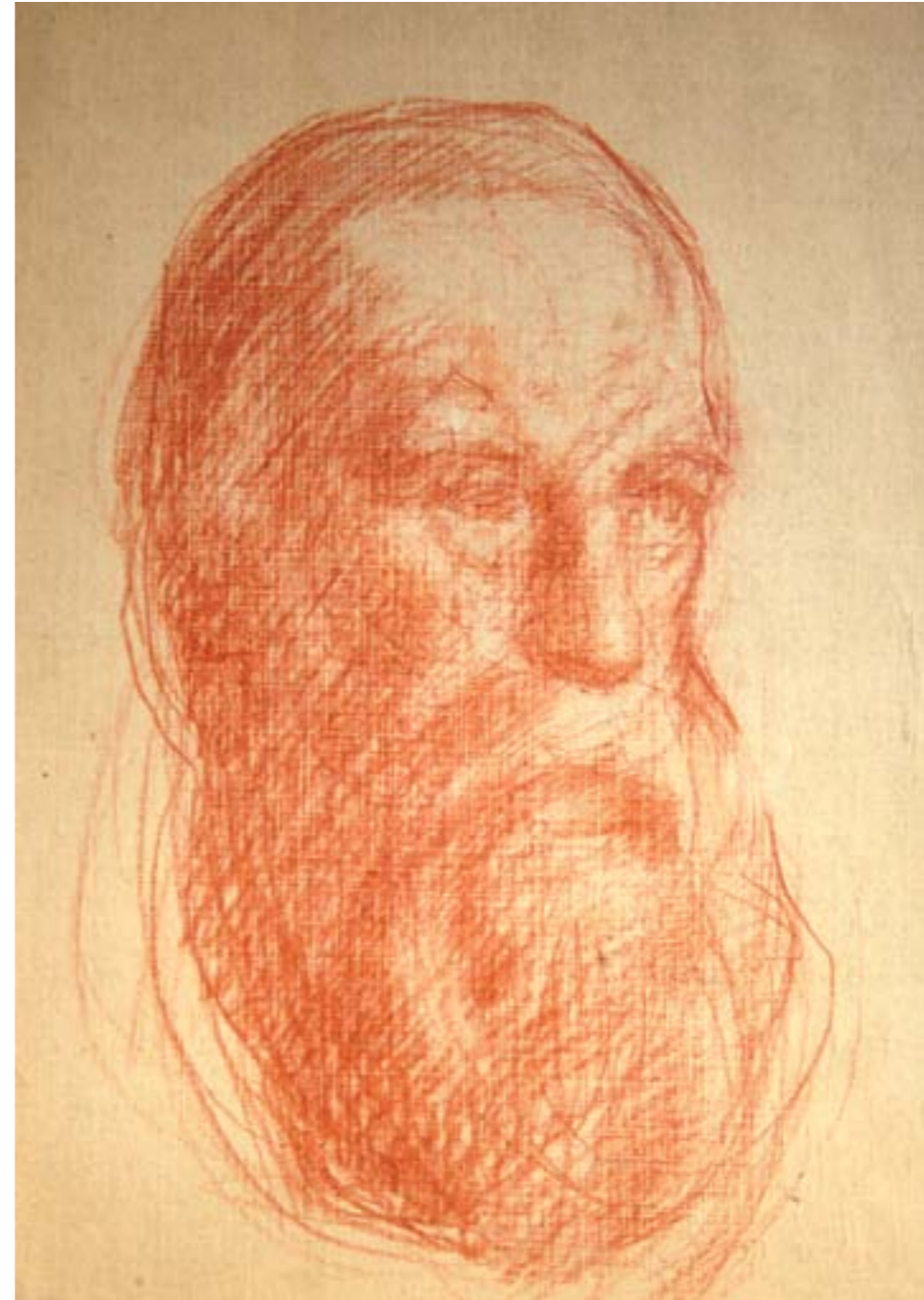
Day encouraged the young Gibran to read widely and introduced him to various artistic and literary movements. What were then modern ideas would be fundamental to Gibran's later output: a fondness for nature, celebrating the power of love, a belief in the unity of all religions, a preference for a personal religion over organised religion, and an interest in reincarnation and the higher self.

Gibran's mother and stepbrother sent him back to Lebanon in August 1898, perhaps to remove him from Day's influence; they may also have wanted to reinforce his Arabic heritage. Gibran began a three-year course of study at the Maronite Catholic college Madrasat-al-Hikmah in Beirut, where he was introduced to Arabic and French literature, as well as an Arabic translation of the Bible. Gibran and fellow student Youssef Howayek (1883–1962) produced a student magazine – Gibran was editor, designer, artist and chief contributor, while Howayek dealt with the business side. In his final year, Gibran was very proud of the fact that he was made the college poet – this gave him great confidence to pursue a living as a creative artist. During his time in Lebanon, Gibran also met with his father, who was not particularly supportive of his son's artistic endeavours.

Comforting angel, c. 1904
Pencil



Portrait of Charlotte Teller, c. 1911
Oil on canvas



Portrait of the American painter Albert Ryder, 1915
Red chalk



Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.

Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky. We fell them down and turn them into paper that we may record our emptiness.

All our words are but crumbs that fall down from the feast of the mind.

The triangle, 1918
Wash drawing

Quotes above are from Kahlil Gibran's *Sand and foam*, 1926



On completing his studies, Gibran travelled back to America by way of Athens, London, Munich and Paris, possibly funded by Fred Holland Day. While in Paris in April 1902, he learnt of the death of his youngest sister, Sultana, at the age of 14. She had contracted tuberculosis, not uncommon in the crowded slum conditions in Boston where the family was living. Gibran returned to find that his stepbrother and his mother were also very ill. Both eventually died in 1903 – his brother of tuberculosis in March, his beloved mother of cancer in June – leaving Gibran and his sister Marianna. One can only imagine the psychological effect this would have had on the sensitive 20-year-old Gibran.

In 1904, Fred Holland Day, still a constant friend and guiding light, offered to let Gibran use his Harcourt Building studio for Gibran's first public exhibition. The display opened on 30 April 1904 to favourable critical attention. It was at the opening of his exhibition that Gibran met the next key figure in his life, Mary Elizabeth Haskell (1873–1964).

At 30, Mary Haskell was ten years older than Gibran, and an independently wealthy headmistress of her family's private school in Boston. Recognising Gibran's talents, Mary's interest in him grew and she gradually took him under her wing and made him one of her protégés. Mary encouraged and funded Gibran's visit to Paris from July 1908 to October 1910, where he went to study art, and further develop his techniques and philosophy.

Gibran enrolled at the Académie Julian (a large private academy with a number of ateliers all over Paris) in July 1908, when he joined the atelier of Jean-Paul Laurens. Here he learnt how to paint and use colour, and improved his powers of observation.

By early 1909 he was working in the studio of Pierre Marcel-Béronneau (of the Symbolist school). Shortly after this, Gibran seems to have given up on 'formal education'. He met up with his former fellow student Youssef Howayek, who was also in Paris to study art and sculpture. They hired models and spent hours studying the work of other artists they admired in the galleries and museums, immersing themselves in their styles and techniques.

It is possible that in December 1908, in the company of some professors and other students, Gibran visited Auguste Rodin in his studio. Rodin expounded his philosophy of art and life and one question led him to talk about William Blake.

Of all the impressions absorbed by Gibran during his Parisian sojourn none had a greater and more lasting influence on him than his [re-]discovery of William Blake. In Blake's visionary work Gibran found the support and confirmation for his own early ideas, and he owed more to the Englishman than to any other poet, artist, or philosopher.

Bushrui and Jenkins, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and poet*, p. 101

Gibran profited from Paris and, with the help of his teachers and friends and sheer hard work, he transformed himself from a skilful draughtsman to someone who was not afraid to use colour and had some familiarity with oils, watercolours and pastels.

While in Paris, he occasionally socialised with Syrian compatriots, meeting an older Lebanese writer and political activist, Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), who introduced Gibran to other Syrian dissidents living in Paris and to the world of Arabic politics, then in a dynamic stage of unification between Arab states.

Man in search of existence, c. 1920
Wash drawing



Gibran returned from Paris feeling he had outgrown Boston. Once again, encouraged and sponsored by Mary Haskell (who remained in Boston), he moved to Greenwich Village, New York, in April 1911. He eventually rented an artist's studio in which he worked and lived, which he called 'The Hermitage'. At this stage, he was still focused on finding fame and fortune as an artist. A major artistic project that Gibran conceived and initiated in Paris was his 'Temple of art' series of pencil portraits (always Gibran's best medium) of famous male and female artists of the day. He continued to add to this series once he returned to America — in a 1914 exhibition in New York there were 19 portraits on display. However, by 1917 Gibran was finding more success with his writing than his art, and this is where he started to concentrate his efforts.

During his Parisian sojourn Gibran and Mary had corresponded regularly, and by the time he returned from Paris they had formed a partnership of sorts, which essentially lasted for the remainder of Gibran's life. He benefited from this devotion to his talent — Mary felt strongly enough about Gibran to be his 'muse', English-language editor and 'confidante' to the end of his life. She also financially supported Gibran. Along with paying for his visit to Paris, she also paid the rent for his studios in Boston and New York and provided other funds until Gibran was financially independent, a couple of years after the publication of *The prophet* in 1923.

New York was an exciting new prospect. Despite his humble origins, by the time he reached his thirties Kahlil Gibran had become a charismatic man — small of stature but good looking, intense, polite and softly spoken. He had a ready and interesting

opinion on most matters, but was also a good listener. He felt an abiding love for his homeland, yet could not bring himself to leave America, his land of opportunity. He was fascinated with all aspects of the world around him yet often led an ascetic and lonely existence.

Gibran continued his involvement with Ameen Rihani and other Arabic activists, and became one of the founding members of the Pen Club (al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya), writing for Arabic newspapers and associating with the Syrian literati and other writers living in New York. He gave popular poetry readings in English to test new ideas for his publications, and became a darling of the matriarchal elite of New York society, at a time when alternative forms of religious expression were beginning to attract interest.

Gibran was published in Arabic first, and later in English. One of his first Arabic publications was *The broken wings* in 1912; and his first publication in English was *The madman* in 1918. His English publications veered from pessimistic to optimistic over time, with *The prophet* in 1923 considered the most confident and optimistic of all his writing.

The prophet was Gibran's third English-language book, and the twelfth of his 17 Arabic and English books published in his lifetime.

In conception, it was the first of a trilogy: *The prophet* was intended to cover man's relationship to man, addressing the realities of human existence: birth, children, marriage, love, eating, work, pain and death. The second book, *The garden of the prophet*, was to address man's relationship to nature; and the third, *The death of the prophet*, would focus on man's relationship to the divine. Gibran was working on *The garden of the prophet* at the time of his death.

The triad-being descending towards the mother-sea, 1923
Watercolour



*Art is a step from nature towards
the infinite.*

*I long for eternity because there
I shall meet my unwritten poems
and my unpainted pictures.*

Forgetfulness is a form of freedom.

Evocation of Sultana Tabet (?), 1908
Charcoal

Quotes above are from Kahlil Gibran's *Sand and foam*, 1926



The prophet consists of 26 ‘counsels’. Gibran took many years over the book and considered it the most important of his works. References to the book occur many times in Mary Haskell’s journals from as early as 1912. Letters between Gibran and Haskell originally refer to ‘counsels’ or ‘The Commonwealth’ when mentioning what was later to become *The prophet*.

The structure of the book was in place by 1912 and by 1919 it had evolved into its present form, with its present title. The manuscript was mostly finalised by late 1921, with Gibran and Mary perfecting it during 1922 – working on the spacing of the sentences and taking the ‘Book of Job’ as their model. Mary was, as usual, the perfect editor, sympathetic and encouraging. It is interesting to speculate how much of the book’s value can be attributed to her tireless efforts. The book was finally published in September 1923, either by design or fate – September being the month of ‘Ielool’, in which the book is set.

Many scholars believe that *The prophet* reveals the kernels of Gibran’s own belief system. It poetically enshrined Gibran’s firm belief that the most important thing in life is Life itself. As with many of his other Arabic and English writings, the rhythms and cadences in *The prophet* were based on the Bible, and the author himself did the illustrations. Gibran was unique in his capacity to blend two artistic sensibilities – art and writing. *The prophet* made his reputation and, more than anything else he accomplished, still resonates with readers today.

From around the mid-1920s Gibran suffered from illness, creative fatigue and self-doubt. He continued to write – his second most-popular and longest book,

Jesus, the son of man, was written from November 1926 to December 1927 – but he was starting to flag. His later works were mostly one-act plays and the reworking of writing done years before.

Kahlil Gibran died aged 48 on Friday 10 April 1931. The cause of death was cirrhosis of the liver, although he also showed signs of tuberculosis. During his lifetime he had published 10 works in Arabic, seven works in English, written 38 newspaper articles and shown his art in nine exhibitions. His Arab and American followers and friends mourned his passing at such a tragically early age.

Gibran’s will directed that everything in his studio was to go to Mary Haskell, with the instruction that she should send to Bsharri anything she didn’t want to keep. Gibran left his money, securities and shares to his sister Marianna. He bequeathed the royalties of his copyrights to his home town – the Gibran National Committee in Bsharri was formed to cope with the influx of royalties.

Mary remained true to Gibran’s wishes after his death. They had talked as far back as 1913 about his being buried in Lebanon, and in 1931 she pushed for the fulfilment of his dream. The chosen site for Gibran’s tomb was the ancient monastery of Mar Sarkis, which Gibran had set his heart on acquiring a few years before his death and which his sister Marianna (urged by Mary) purchased at the beginning of 1932.

Today the monastery, now the Gibran Museum, houses the best collection of Gibran’s artworks in the world, as well as the personal belongings found in Gibran’s New York studio at the time of his death.

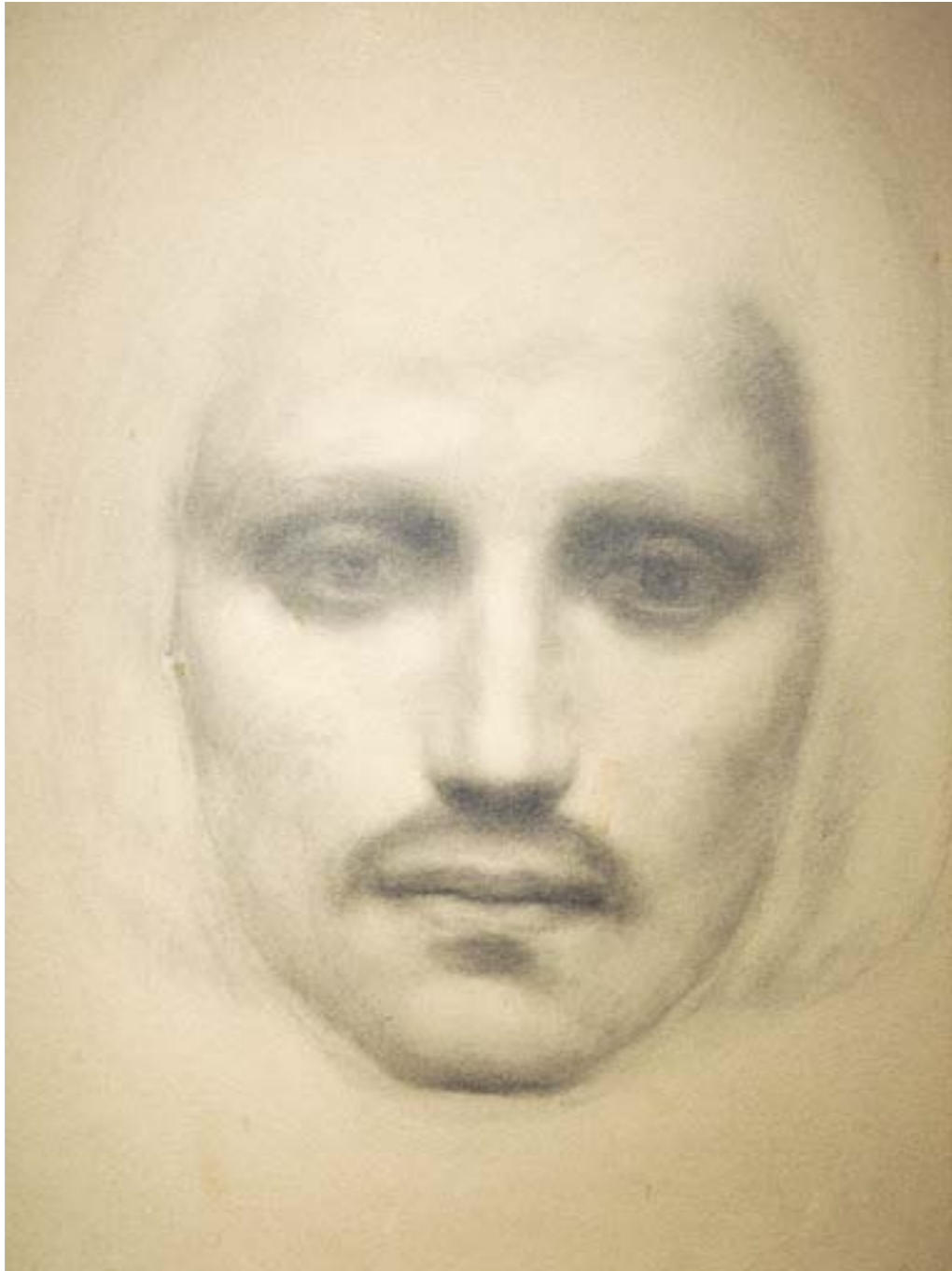
Avryl Whitnall

Curator

Kahlil Gibran: The Prophet, The Artist, The Man

The divine world, 1923
Watercolour

Deep inside me ... there is another dynamic intelligence which has nothing to do with words, lines or colors.



Face of Almustafa, 1923
(Frontispiece for *The prophet*)
Charcoal



Human figures spread out below a dark landscape, 1930
Wash

ITEM LIST

Unless otherwise indicated, all works are by Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931), and are on loan from the Gibran Museum, Bsharri, Lebanon. Titles of works appear in italics; where the title has been ascribed, it is not italicised.

THE MAN



Fred Holland Day (1864–1933)
Kahlil Gibran with book, 1897
Photographic print
© National Media Museum/Science & Society Picture Library, UK



Fred Holland Day (1864–1933)
Portrait of Kahlil Gibran, c. 1898
Photographic print
© National Media Museum/Science & Society Picture Library, UK



Self-portrait, 1908
Charcoal



Youssef Howayek (1883–1962)
Portrait of Kahlil Gibran, 1909-1910
Oil on canvas



Evocative image of Mary Haskell, 1904
Pencil



Portrait of Sultana Gibran, 1910
Oil on canvas



Portrait of Charlotte Teller, c. 1911
Oil on canvas



Ameen Rihani, 1911
Charcoal



Portrait of May Ziadeh, 1920-1921
(Sketched from a photograph)
Charcoal



May (Marie) Ziadeh (1886–1941)
Postcard to Kahlil Gibran, no date
Image: Temple of Jupiter in Baalbeck, Lebanon



May (Marie) Ziadeh (1886–1941)
Postcard to Kahlil Gibran, no date
Image: Valley of the Dog River in Lebanon (Nahr Al Kalb)



Notebook, no date
Original manuscript in both English and Arabic



Notebook, no date
Original manuscript in both English and Arabic



Notebook, no date
Original manuscript in both English and Arabic

THE ARTIST



Love asleep in a field of poppies, c. 1900
Pencil



Comforting angel, c. 1904
Pencil



Portrait of a young woman with head inclined, 1908-1910
Oil on canvas



Evocation of Sultana Tabet (?), 1908
Charcoal



L'automne, 1909
Oil on canvas



'TEMPLE OF ART' SERIES
Portrait of Claude Debussy, 1910
Charcoal



Carl Gustav Jung, 1913
Charcoal



Dance movement (Ruth St. Denis), 1914
Pencil



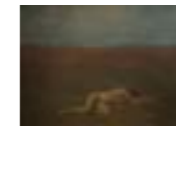
Portrait of the American painter Albert Ryder, 1915
Red chalk



Portrait of George Russell, 1928
Charcoal



Portrait of an artist, 1912
Charcoal



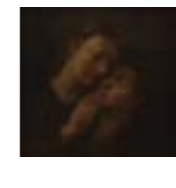
Isolation, c. 1912
Oil on card



The dawn, c. 1912
Oil on canvas



Self-absorbed, pre-1914
Oil on canvas



The murmur of silence, pre-1914
Oil on canvas



Anguish, 1914
Oil on canvas



The masks of life, 1914
Pencil and charcoal



Head of a man, 1914-1917
Pencil

ITEM LIST



Eyes closed, 1914–1917
Charcoal



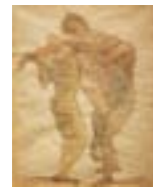
The mountain, c. 1916
Wash drawing



Nude woman holding child, no date
Red ink drawing



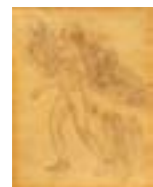
Man in search of existence, c. 1920
Wash drawing



The triangle, 1918
Wash drawing



Two faces, 1923
Charcoal



When the sun kissed his own naked face for the first time, 1918
Pencil



Human figures spread out below a dark landscape, 1930
Wash



Balance of the absolute, c. 1918
Pencil



Gibran's watercolour set
(Box with drawing appliances, brushes, colours and watercolour sets)

THE PROPHET



Three nudes their hands raised and joined, 1919
Wash drawing



Face of Almustafa, 1923
(Frontispiece for *The prophet*)
Charcoal



TWENTY DRAWINGS SERIES
The waterfall, 1919
Wash drawing



Study for the triad-being descending towards the mother-sea, c. 1920
Pencil



The rock, 1916
Wash drawing



The triad-being descending towards the mother-sea, 1923
Watercolour



Love, 1923
Watercolour



Friendship, 1923
Watercolour



The marriage, 1923
Wash-drawing



The divine world, 1923
Charcoal



The archer, 1923
Watercolour

Alfred A Knopf, Inc., New York
Galley proof of *The prophet*, c. 1923
(Handwritten corrections by Gibran)
Galley proof



The gift, 1923
Watercolour

Alfred A Knopf, Inc., New York
Plate proof of *The prophet*, c. 1923
Plate proof



The three stages of being, 1923
Watercolour

Kahlil Gibran
***The prophet*, 1923**
Alfred A Knopf, Inc., New York,
September 1923
(First edition)
State Library of New South Wales



Pain, 1923
Watercolour



JESUS, THE SON OF MAN SERIES
Sketch of the face of Jesus, 1928 (?)
Charcoal



The prayer, 1923
Watercolour

Manuscript for *Jesus, the son of man*, c. 1927
(Part 1 of 2)
Manuscript in notebook



Towards the light above, 1923
Watercolour

Kahlil Gibran
Manuscript for *Jesus, the son of man*, c. 1927
(Part 2 of 2)
Manuscript in notebook

THE AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE FOUNDATION

The University of Sydney established the Australian Lebanese Foundation in 2002 to build educational links between the university and Lebanese academic centres, to support educational opportunities for young Australians of Lebanese heritage and to strengthen cultural ties between Lebanon and Australia.

The Foundation has raised funds from the community to support its many activities. Over 40 first-year university students have received scholarships, and practical links have been established with the Lebanese University and other institutions in Lebanon. The Foundation has arranged visits to Australia of leading scientists, politicians, journalists and financiers to support the goals of enhancing the Australian community's understanding of the rich cultural heritage of Lebanon and of informing the people of Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora about Australia. These include the visits of a Lebanese environmental scientist to explain the diversity and beauty of the Lebanese ecology; senior political figures to discuss the status and management of Middle Eastern tensions; and Lebanon's leading television journalist and his team to make two programs on the Lebanese in Australia for international broadcast.

This exhibition of works from the Gibran Museum brings to Australia a heightened understanding of the fine traditions of Lebanese philosophy and culture, encapsulated in the modern era in the poetry and prose of Khalil Gibran. While Gibran is widely read and admired, relatively few Australians are aware of his heritage. The Australian Lebanese Foundation is delighted to be associated with this exhibition and its important contribution to advancing community understanding.



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Two faces, 1923
Charcoal

... In my work I am as solid as a rock, but my real work is neither in painting nor in writing. Deep inside me ... there is another dynamic intelligence which has nothing to do with words, lines or colors. The work I have been born to do has nothing to do with brush or pen ...

Kahlil Gibran to May Ziadeh, letter, 3 November 1920