

The Art of Kahlil Gibran

- 1 Self Portrait
2. Portrait Painting by Gibran
3. Sketch drawing by Gibran
4. Behold, man and woman,
Flame to flame,
In white ecstasy.
5. Uplifted
6. Mother and child
- 7 Innermost
8. Mother is everything in life,
A fountainhead of compassion and love.
9. Love is my father,
And love is my mother
10. Rescue of the helpless
- 11 All life is twain,
The one a frozen stream,
The other a burning flame,
And the burning flame is love.
12. I saw naught but grief and sorrow
13. You are the bows from which
Your children as living arrows
Are sent forth.
14. Waterfalls
Continuity of the lifestream
Interdependence of man.
15. Nature's response
16. Fantasy
- 17 Peace
18. Comfort

Biographical sketch by Jean and Kahlil Gibran, co-authors of *Kahlil Gibran, His Life and World* (New York Graphic Society, 1974)

19. Monastery of Mar Sarkis, Gibran Museum
20. Gibran's mountain village viewed through a cleft in a rock in the Monastery
- 21 Gibran lived not far from the Monastery. As a child, he often wished that, when he grew up, he would own the Monastery and live in it. His tomb is inside a rock in the wall of the Monastery—now the Museum. The Monastery, embedded in the mountain, strategically located was a Christian stronghold through the ages.
22. Portrait of Gibran in Museum
- 23-25. Monastery entrance.
- 26-29. Long hallway at the entrance of the Museum; location of the exhibit.
- 30-32. Gibran's bedroom.
33. Gibran's living room.
- 34-38. Gibran's paintings as presently exhibited in the Museum.

This monastery-made museum is embedded in the rocky mountain of the Cedars. During his lifetime in the "new world" Gibran had dreamt of this abandoned monastery watching over his humble native village, Besharri and the Holy Valley of the Kadisha. Gibran was never to inhabit this monastery, but at his death he was put to rest in the small rocky chapel of Mar Sarkis.

This Gibran Museum was achieved in 1975 by the National Committee of Gibran chaired by Professor Emile Geagea.

Bronze plaque
Copley Square, 1977
by Kahlil G. Gibran



Exhibition of the Art of Kahlil Gibran

in celebration of the birth
of the great Lebanese
poet and artist

Great Hall
Boston Public Library
Copley Square

January 6—29, 1983

Sponsored by Lebanon National Tourist
and Information Office, the Arabic-speaking
Communities of Greater Boston and the
Boston Public Library

Kahlil Gibran (1883—1931)

Boston personalities and institutions figured prominently in Kahlil Gibran's life. Born on January 6, 1883, in Besharri, Lebanon, near the fabled Cedars, Gibran was twelve years old when he and his family journeyed to the Middle Eastern enclave in Boston's South End.

His mother Kamila supported her four children by peddling dry goods to Back Bay families. Kahlil enrolled in the Quincy School on Tyler Street and discovered the Denison House, an early Boston settlement center. Within a year his art teacher at the center showed his sketch book to Jessie Beale, coordinator of the popular "Home Libraries."

Miss Beale wrote to Fred Holland Day, a volunteer who had donated books for immigrant children. Her November 1896 letter to this photographer and publisher was eloquent testimony to Gibran's precocity and youthful predicament in the "City Wilderness".

I am wondering if you have an artist friend who would care to become interested in a little Assyrian [sic] by Kahlil G---. He strolled into a drawing class at the College Settlement on Tyler Street last winter. The family are horribly poor, living on Oliver Place.*

Then she mentioned a special sketch which tied Kahlil to turn-of-the-century Boston: "A drawing which he made in the cloisters, at the library, of the Bacchante, made quite a sensation." Evidently, the boy had discovered Frederick MacMonnies' nude statue

*Lebanon at this time was part of Syria.

just in time, for the controversial bronze soon was removed from the Boston Public Library. The drawing did indeed reflect the sculpture's joy and abandon.

Gibran's sudden immersion into a uniquely Brahmin world can be traced directly to Fred Holland Day. His interest in, and regard for, the Gibran family had not been fully appreciated until the discovery of several poignant photographs of the mother and her darkly handsome children in collections of the Royal Photographic Society and the Library of Congress where they had been for nearly seventy-five years. In 1972, Gibran's namesake and biographer identified these family portraits and recognized their importance in documenting the early years of the family as they appeared before Fred Holland Day's magic lenses.

Photographer and scholar Charles Peabody, art patron Sarah Choate Sears, poets Louise Imogen Guiney and Lilla Cabot Perry all knew Kahlil through his work at Day's Cornhill establishment, Copeland and Day, where he illustrated poems and book covers. His tenderest and most beautifully recorded friendship was with the poet Josephine Preston Peabody. Her unpublished journals detailed Kahlil's remarkable charisma as shown by this 1898 entry:

I saw that he [Day] believes what I believe—that the boy was made to be one of the prophets... There is no avoiding that young personality. You are filled with recognition and radiant delight.

The adolescent Gibran traveled to Beirut in 1898 and studied classical Arabic literature at the Maronite Catholic university,

Madrasat al-Mikmah. Renewing his cultural roots allowed him to become literate in his native language and influenced his commitment to the Arabic literature of the emigrant "mahjar."

Gibran returned to Boston in 1902. Here he endured anguish and despondency over the sickness and deaths of his sister Sultana, his half-brother Peter, and his mother within a fourteen-month period. Surviving these tragedies and sustained by his loving sister Marianna, he began to exhibit his symbolist drawings, first at Wellesley College, and later, at Boston's Harcourt Studios on Irvington Street. Then, on November 11, 1904, his entire body of art work was destroyed when the Harcourt Studios burned to the ground.

His reaction to what Josephine Peabody called the "destruction of that whole record of an inspired childhood" was to plunge into the world of Arab emigré writers. While contributing articles and essays to the New York newspapers, from 1905 to 1908, he also published three books for the house of Al Mohajer. Gibran's allegorical tales, the rebellious and romantic themes describing oppression and injustice witnessed in his native land, profoundly influenced the colloquial style emerging from the Middle East.

At this time Gibran organized the Golden Links, a Boston group of Arab-Americans who regularly met for discussion and lectures. This society foreshadowed his formation twelve years later, of "Arrabitah," the Pen Bond uniting eight major contributors to Arabic emigrant literature. His close friendship with two members,

Ameen Rihani and later Mikhail Naimy, was crucial to the developing New York "mahjar" movement.

In 1908, Gibran made his life-long alliance with Mary Haskell, Headmistress of Marlborough Street's Haskell School for Girls. Her influence and generous spirit enabled him to study art at the famed Academy Julian in Paris for the next two years. He also worked in the atelier of Symbolist painter Pierre Marcel-Beroneau and began his portrait series of great artists. Rejuvenated by his exposure to the Parisian art world and having exhibited in the National Society of Beaux Arts, he came back to Boston in 1910 and moved his studio to West Cedar Street on Beacon Hill. The devotion between Mary Haskell and Gibran didn't result in the marriage they sometimes contemplated but their correspondence and collaboration remained paramount for the remaining twenty-one years of his life. Through her sponsorship he relocated in New York's Greenwich Village. Her thoughtful tutoring encouraged him to pursue an English writing career.

The New York years were productive for the maturing Gibran. By 1914 he published two more Arabic books, *Broken Wings* and *Tears and Laughter*, exhibited drawings at the Montross Gallery, and was receiving considerable attention in the New York press. More significantly, his English parables and poems were well received by several artists and writers. Claude Bragdon, Witter Bynner, Rose O'Neill, José Clemente Orozco, Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, Alfred Pinkham Ryder, and Eleanor Speyer were among

his colleagues.

Gibran experienced a crisis of conscience throughout the first World War. The war represented an opportunity to free Lebanon from Turkish control, and he exhorted Arab-Americans to support the struggle for liberation. This nationalism was in contrast to the pacifism expressed by many American thinkers like James Oppenheim in whose magazine *The Seven Arts* Gibran was publishing.

The Madman, a selection of parables based on Lebanese folklore, was Gibran's first English book published in 1918 under Alfred A. Knopf's imprint. *Twenty Drawings* appeared the next year, and *The Forerunner* in 1920. Simultaneously, he continued to produce Arabic poems and anthologies. The Haskell diaries revealed Gibran's concern over this duality of purpose: "He lives in two worlds—Syria and America—and is at home in none."

The appearance of *The Prophet* solidified Gibran's decision to only publish in English. Immediately after the volume's appearance, it was sold out. Mary Haskell made this prediction about *The Prophet* destined to become one of America's most popular and beloved books:

Generations will not exhaust it, but instead, generation after generation will find in the book what they would feign be—and it will be better loved as men grow riper and riper.

Gibran's reputation soared both in America and abroad. His books *Sand and Foam*, *Jesus, Son of Man*, *The Earth Gods*, and *The Wanderers* reflected a diminished concern with nationalism, re-

placed by a growing sense of universality and a consciousness of all peoples. Moving among an international coterie, he became known as a "cosmopolite," a world citizen.

Gibran visited Boston often. His sister's apartment at 75 Tyler Street, next to the Maronite Church, was the scene of constant entertainment and storytelling. His final summer was spent in nearby Squantum where he completed the manuscript *The Earth Gods* and tried to ignore the disease exhausting him.

Kahlil Gibran died in New York at St. Vincent's Hospital on April 10, 1931. His body was returned to Boston, and funeral services were held at Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church. For three months he lay at Mount Benedict Cemetery. Then his sister Marianna left with the coffin for Lebanon. The homecoming and burial at the monastery Mar Sarkis were said to have been "more like a triumphant entry than a funeral."

Beyond all the public eulogies and tributes, Gibran's words remained his finest memorial. During personal transitions: birth, marriage, death, and through public crises, his message has been translated and repeated all over the world.

A few months after Gibran's death, Jessie Beale commented to Fred Holland Day about their protegee:

That dear little Syrian boy did a lot of thinking. His interest in his fellow man was great.

In 1983 it is right that Bostonians celebrate Gibran's centennial and trust that his vision of peace and love will become a universal reality.