



## Unlike Other Springs

### The Story behind Birzeit University Art Collection

Curated by Vera Tamari

The exhibition “Unlike Other Springs” is an attempt to examine the process of how a public art collection such as the one at Birzeit University (BZU) has been realized and developed. The BZU art collection is unique because it serves large audiences from all walks of life, whether students, academicians, or members of the community.

Vera Tamari, curator of “Unlike Other Springs,” who has witnessed the inception of the BZU art collection and has worked for more than 20 years on its development, believes that this exhibition is a celebratory event, above all things. It is to celebrate the individual stories behind the various art works and the particular circumstances of how they arrived at Birzeit University. The exhibition is to honor scores of renowned Palestinian, Arab, and international artists who, in a gesture of appreciation for the university’s national educational role, have generously contributed their works as gifts. Most importantly, “Unlike Other Springs” is a way to showcase the versatility and uniqueness of the collection, documenting how it developed through the years to become a wealthy source of knowledge on modern and contemporary art practices.

The year 1994 marks a significant date in the evolution of the Birzeit University art collection. At that time, the renowned Swiss artist, the late René Feurer, in recognition of the Oslo Accord peace prospects for Palestinians, donated

six of his monumental paintings to the university. BZU is proud of the fact that subsequently and gradually, it has received more than 250 noteworthy artworks as gifts through personal initiatives by artists and university friends. Although not many people are aware of the university’s art collection or know how it was developed, it forms an impressive corpus of outstanding works. The collection claims amongst its contributors highly renowned artists such as Samia Halaby, Kamal Boullata, Marwan

Qassab Bashi, Vladimir Tamari, Sliaman Mansur, Mona Hatoum, Leila Shawwa, Emily Jacir, Khalil Rabah, Sharif Waked, and many more. While the BZU collection is versatile with regards to its sources and motivations, it has a strong coherence due to the intrinsic personalized relationship between the artists, the donors, and the university. Further importance lies in the individualized stories of how and why those works arrived at BZU, as this documents the many connections and liaisons the university has formed in its history; and last but not least, the collection’s value stems from the high aesthetic quality of the works themselves.

This exhibition fulfills one of the museum’s main missions since it serves as a source of knowledge and inspiration and engages the university community and the larger audiences with the art collection and all that it represents and embraces. “Unlike Other Springs” makes a significant contribution to the museum’s thematic exhibition program and associated learning activities by introducing,

through works contributed by more than 25 artists, original samples of modern and contemporary art practices. Furthermore, and emerging from the very local context, it is embedded in and guided by strong educational and social responsibility. The Birzeit University Museum plans its annual programs and exhibitions around the value that art adds to our lives by being a tool for learning and thinking. Its various programs are specially designed to fuel creative and conceptual channels of knowledge and to prepare the cultural environment suitable for the near-future establishment of an arts faculty at Birzeit University.

*The exhibition opens on March 19 and runs until June 30, 2016 at BZU Museum. In parallel, there will be a panel discussion at the museum on March 26 on art collecting in Palestine, and a BZU architecture student intervention inspired by Lois Nakhleh’s exhibition of Palestinian watercolor flowers on April 2 at the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center.*

