

# \$1.3 million worth of art auctioned for Syrian refugee children

Oliver Holmes 26/10/2013

BEIRUT (Reuters) - An estimated \$1.3 million worth of art from more than 130 artists, mostly from Syria and Lebanon, is being auctioned at below-gallery prices in Beirut to raise money for Syrian refugee children.

Syrian refugee children attend class at a school for refugee children in Istanbul October 21, 2013. REUTERS/Osman Orsal

“This is first time that you have so many artists from the Middle East mobilize for a cause,” said Noura Jumblatt, president of the Lebanese Beiteddine festival and wife of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt.

“We had more offers but we had to limit ourselves,” she told Reuters in her office, which was filled with thousands of dollars worth of bubble-wrapped art ready for a live auction on November 8th in Beirut.

About half of Syria’s two million war refugees are children, according to the United Nations. At least 100,000 people have died in nearly three years of conflict.

Many have fled to Lebanon and live in appalling conditions - in tents or abandoned buildings, with limited food, medicine, clothing and education.

Artists donating work include the Lebanese Nabil Nahas, who regularly exhibits in New York, and Ayman Baalbaki, who has given a broad-brush painting of a man wearing a red and white headscarf.

Iraqi, Egyptian, Iranian and European artists have also joined the effort.

Much of the work is now being auctioned on Paddle8, a U.S.-based

auctioning site, with reserves that are below gallery prices, Jumblatt said.

Paddle 8 spokeswoman Sarah Goulet said the art work is estimated at \$1.3 million but their online benefit auctions on average exceed their estimates by 20-30 percent.

A total of \$250,000 was bid in the first two days of the two week auction, she said in an email.

“Bidding has been extremely brisk,” she said.

Paddle8 takes a 5-7 percent commission on benefit auctions.

The Baalbaki piece had a bid at \$9,000 on Saturday but he sold an acrylic painting at Sotheby’s this April for \$377,000.

Others are rising in price - Nahas’ piece, which depicts a Lebanese cedar tree, had a bid at \$60,000 on Saturday, rising by thousands throughout the week.

The auction also spotlights some of Syria’s emerging and most established artists, many of whom have been influenced by the revolt and ensuing war.

Youssef Abdelke, a renowned artist from the northeast city of Qamishli who was arrested by government forces in July this year and later left Syria, has donated.

Syria’s best-known political cartoonist Ali Ferzat, who had his fingers broke in 2011 by men he said were Assad’s henchmen, also donated original sketches.

Other participating artists have been less open about their political views on the Syria war, which has divided Syrians and caused sectarian hatred among the country’s many religions and ethnicities.

Jumblatt, whose husband has an anti-Assad stance regarding the conflict,

said she choose the plight of children refugees so the exhibition could be apolitical.

“We have not gotten into this,” she said.

All funds will go towards food, clothing, medical supplies and schooling through humanitarian organizations like UNICEF and Save the Children International.



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