

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Phillips auctions contemporary art for clean water cause

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Ai Weiwei's "Wave Plate." Image courtesy of Phillips

By SARAH JONES

Auction house Phillips is leveraging art for a cause with a charity auction for nonprofit One Drop.

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In New York on Sept. 21, Phillips will auction off works from 50 contemporary artists to benefit One Drop's water access and sanitation projects. Due to the big-ticket nature of art, auction houses frequently use their capabilities for social causes to make a significant impact.

"Art for One Drop was a truly unique project for Phillips, in part because of the importance of the charity's work, but also because of the generosity we have seen from some of the most significant artists, all working charitably in collaboration with their galleries and with the support of their studios," said Sam Mansour, associate specialist and head of the Art for One Drop sale at Phillips, New York.

"The sale introduced a new and exciting dynamic for our relationships with these groups, resulting in Phillips' ability to bring to the market some of the finest works by the most acclaimed practitioners working today," he said.

Drop donations

Established by Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberte in 2007, One Drop aims to provide clean water to at-need areas. The charity has 13 projects in locations such as Africa, India and Latin America, which it estimates will provide safe drinking water to about 1.3 million people once they are completed.

The proceeds from the auction at Phillips will go towards One Drop's work in Latin America, which will help more than 200,000 people in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia and Paraguay. Throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region, 36 million people lack access to clean drinking water.



One Drop uses art to further its mission. Image courtesy of One Drop

With Mr. Laliberte's creative backdrop, the organization aims to create "Social Art for Behavior Change." This approach creates art in communities based on local culture to drive action.

Supporting the nonprofit's mission, Phillips tapped curator and critic Philipp Kaiser to put together an auction of contemporary art, titled "Art for One Drop."

Among the participating artists are Ai Weiwei, Damien Hirst, Gabriel Orozco and Kara Walker.

Tracey Emin created a neon sign that reads, "I listen to the ocean and all I hear is you."



Tracey Emin's piece for Phillips' Art for One Drop. Image courtesy of Phillips

Meanwhile, Jenny Holzer's "Survival" is a blue sodalite bench with the phrase, "People look like they are dancing before they love."

Tackling a modern experience, Barbara Kruger's "Untitled (Connect)" shows a black-and-white hand holding a

brightly colored smartphone. As opposed to real applications, the icons featured on the screen of the device are labeled with words such as "knowledge," "greed" and "clarity."

The auction aims to raise \$10 million, with estimates starting \$20,000 and reaching as high as \$1 million.

"Due to the high quality of the artworks that are being offered, we are engaging some of the most important collectors around the globe and, in doing so, are able to introduce those who are unfamiliar with One Drop to the charitable work that they have been carrying out for over 10 years," Mr. Mansour said.

"Some of the works that have been donated incorporate the theme more directly," he said. "For example, both Catherine Opie and Tracey Emin's pieces are unique works that were specifically created for the sale and immediately address the water theme in their content.

"Collectors who participate in Art for One Drop will have the rare opportunity of enhancing their collections with some incredible works of art, all while knowing that they are benefitting One Drop and their mission to bring clean water to over 200,000 people in Latin America."

Cause-based sales

Phillips is not alone in using its platform for a purpose.

Auction house Bonhams similarly supported the victims of London's Grenfell Tower fire through art.

Bonhams acted as the auctioneer for the Art4Grenfell charity sale that saw works donated by talents such as Boy George and Alison Hunter to the cause. Art is often used as a fundraising appeal, with works from eminent artists fetching significant sums for causes ([see story](#)).

Phillips, in association with Bacs & Russo, previously put a rare Rolex timepiece up for sale for a cause.

A vintage white gold Rolex Cosmograph Daytona, reference 6265, headlined Phillips' "Daytona Ultimatum" sale on May 12. The watch is the only known timepiece of its kind, making this sale the first time most had seen it in person ([see story](#)).

"Artists have long focused their attention on elements of society that are important to them through their own creative endeavors in some truly impactful ways," Mr. Mansour said. "As such a public-facing company, Phillips has voice and a reputation that gives us an advantage in amplifying One Drop's message, shining a spotlight on their mission and past successes.

"We can broaden the reach of some wonderful charitable organizations, all the while providing our clientele with works that would be an exciting addition to any collection," he said.