

## Exhibitions

# Beirut Plans an Art Museum With Help From Christie's

Can Lebanon overcome political turmoil to open an art museum?

**Sarah Cascone**, February 3, 2015



Shafic Abboud, *Untitled* (1926). Beirut plans an art museum to showcase the work of Lebanese artists. Photo: courtesy the Shafic Abboud Family.

Beirut has kicked off a campaign to build itself a modern and contemporary art museum in Lebanon. As reported by [Al Monitor](#),

the museum is planned to be called Beirut Contemporary. A national campaign called “Museum in the Making,” run by the Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon (APEAL), aims to create a haven for Lebanese art in the capital city.

The country’s government is unlikely to provide funding for such a project, so APEAL instead launched the fundraising initiative last week with an art auction and gala at the Hilton Beirut Habtoor Grand. Held with the support of Christie’s, the sale featured 20 donated works by Lebanese artists including Diyaa Azawi, Chawki Chamoun, Abdel Rahman Katnani, Nadim Karam, Akram Zaatari, Marwan Sahmarani, Elie Kanaan, Paul Guiragossian, Alfred and Michel Basbous, Jamil Malaeb, Nabil Nahas Ayman, and Osama Baalbaki.

Michael Jeha, the regional manager of Christie’s in the Middle East, told Al-Hayat that he estimated that the evening’s proceeds, which also included tickets for the benefit dinner, totaled over \$500,000.

### **Establishing Beirut Contemporary**

That money will be put toward establishing Beirut Contemporary, with a targeted opening date of 2020. The planned institution hopes to foster local artists, fueling the country’s art scene. It also hopes to appeal to tourists, turning Beirut into an international arts destination alá Abu Dhabi with its planned Louvre and Guggenheim outposts (see What’s in the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi’s Collection? and Da Vinci, Monet, and Manet for Louvre Abu Dhabi). The country’s present political turmoil, however, could present an obstacle.

“It is no big secret that Lebanon’s security situation is unstable,” admitted Jeha in discussing the project, “but art mainly aims at uniting people rather than dividing them. Art lovers and supporters consider this their starting point to move forward, armed with the hope of completing the construction and gathering the necessary funds.”

Christie’s first established its Middle Eastern headquarters 10 years ago in Dubai, and its presence there has certainly contributed to the region’s now-booming contemporary art scene. When asked if a Beirut expansion was in the cards, Jeha said “Why not?” but warned “it won’t be in the near future.”