

The Future is Unwritten

Healing Arts Auction

Christie's, WHO Foundation and UN75 announce Global Art Initiative to support COVID-19 Response



Magnetism (Installation) by **Ahmed Mater** will be the first artwork to be auctioned in November 2020. Exhibition View: *Mitochondria: Powerhouses*, Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, 2017. Image courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA. Photo by: Ela Bialkowska, OKNO Studio.

New York, NY, October 6, 2020—COVID-19 has revealed that a virus can affect not only our physical health but also our ability to cope with the psychological impact in its wake. The cultural community is often among the first to support in solidarity and compassion, standing together against common existential threats. In that spirit, *The Future is Unwritten's Healing Arts Auction* series is today unveiled by Christie's, the WHO Foundation and UN75, a cultural call-to-action to support a global COVID-19 response through the arts.

As part of *The Future is Unwritten's* initiative to engage the international art world in UN priority areas, and **World Health Organization (WHO)** Solidarity Series of Events, the auction series aims to increase awareness around a global path to recovery and raise critical funds to mobilize artists and health

professionals in support of communities most vulnerable, at-risk and with the weakest health systems to act effectively in response to the pandemic.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General, comments: “This initiative represents a unique opportunity for the art world to step up to this global challenge and support communities on the front line of the pandemic, ensuring everyone, everywhere has the tools they need to overcome it.”

All proceeds from this initiative will benefit the **WHO Foundation**, supporting the urgently needed mental health response to the pandemic through the applied use of arts in health-giving and recovery; and **The Future is Unwritten’s Artist Response Fund**, supporting artist-led projects that directly facilitate community healing and healthcare messaging in the aftermath of the pandemic. In addition to the auction series there is a program of educational events covering urgent thematic areas from emergency response, to mental health, to the health effects of the environmental crisis, to the achievement of Universal Health Coverage, each through the lens of the supportive power of the arts.

Christopher Bailey, WHO Arts & Health Lead, adds: “Art has a unique ability to help us comfort, confront, contextualize and create community. And when embracing science and evidence as a bedrock, art and culture can help us imagine a better way forward to a positive future.”

Artist-led projects being supported include an urgent public-health campaign in **Yemen**; *The Painted Desert* project by artist-physician **Dr. Chip Thomas** addressing the nutrition crisis among the **Navajo Nation** in Arizona (Navajo deaths from COVID-19 were among the highest per capita in the US); a cultural preservation project with Yazidi communities on the **Iraqi-Syrian** border following the ISIS genocide in 2014; a public health data campaign by **Mona Chalabi** in New York City; and community rebuilding projects in **Beirut, Khartoum** and failing small town main streets across the **United States**.

Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for the Commemoration of the United Nations 75th Anniversary commented: “Arts are socially influential and help us better understand the world and one another. It is imperative for the United Nations to engage with the arts and include cultural voices in its global policy discussions at this time.”

The Healing Arts Auctions in collaboration with Christie’s will run over the course of a year, with works to be offered in a number of sales across a wide range of genres. The first work to come under the hammer will be *Magnetism* (2012, estimate: £80,000 - £120,000) by Ahmed Mater, appearing in the November Middle East Contemporary Art Sale in London. One of his most important pieces to date, Mater fuses art, science and the concept of identity and religion, creating one of the 21st Century’s most iconic cultural images from the Islamic world. The central focus of the piece is a cuboid magnet that resembles the black draped Ka’bah, the central element of the Meccan rites, considered by Muslims everywhere to be the most sacred place on Earth. Around the cube are spiral patterns made of tens of thousands of particles of iron evoking the Hajj, an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, that include a series of rituals like walking counter-clockwise seven times around the House of God. Mater’s counterpoint of square and circle, whirl and cube, of black and white, light and dark, places the primal elements of form and tone in dynamic

equipoise. The overall aim of the artist is simple, but enchantingly alluring. Given, during COVID-19, Mecca was seen mostly empty for the first time in its history, this work is well positioned to launch the Healing Arts Auction series. Details of lots from other categories will be announced in the coming months.

Dirk Boll, President of Christie's Europe, Middle East and Africa, remarks: "Christie's is honoured to be working with the WHO Foundation and UN75, offering a platform for artists and works in the coming year, to assist individuals and communities. We're also very pleased to present the work of Ahmed Mater as the debut lot in our year-long auction collaboration, today one of the most celebrated artists from Saudi Arabia, as well as a doctor and an individual who is very active in promoting the different artistic strengths of his region, dedicated to making culture accessible to as many as possible."

[ABOUT The Future is Unwritten](#)

The Future is Unwritten is an initiative by **CULTURUNNERS** and the **World Council of Peoples for the United Nations (WCPUN) Arts & Culture Advisory Council**, launched in 2020 in partnership with **UN75**. TFIU facilitates urgent cooperation between the international Arts and Culture sector and the United Nations in order to accelerate implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. TFIU's 2020 programming partner is the **Open Mind Project**. www.thefutureisunwritten.org

[ABOUT the World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

The World Health Organisation works with 194 Member States, across six regions, and from more than 150 offices, to achieve better health for everyone, everywhere. WHO's Arts & Health Program looks at the research agenda around the health benefits of the arts, in everyday life as well as an instrument in the field. www.who.int

[ABOUT the WHO Foundation](#)

The WHO Foundation is an independent grant-making foundation focused on addressing the most pressing global health challenges of today and tomorrow. By funding high-impact initiatives and advancing strategies of innovation, effectiveness and rapid response, it supports the global health ecosystem. Headquartered in Geneva and legally independent from WHO, the Foundation works responsibly with individual donors, the general public and corporate partners to build a healthier world for future generations. Specifically, the WHO Foundation supports global public health needs, from prevention, mental health, and non-communicable diseases to emergency preparedness, outbreak response and health system strengthening. www.whofoundationproject.org

[About Christie's](#)

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had auction sales in 2019 that totalled £4.5 billion / \$5.8 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and international expertise. Christie's offers around 350 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Alongside regular sales online, Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. www.christies.com

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