

How to Support Artists and Galleries Impacted by the Beirut Explosion

An Instagram account selling works donated by artists including Ali Cherri and Charwei Tsai is among the initiatives raising funds.



Artist Mounira Al Solh visits Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut, after the explosion. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg.

Relief funds have been established to help artists, galleries, and others impacted by the 4 August blast that killed over 200 people and left more than 300,000 homeless in Beirut, Lebanon.

[Letitia Gallery](#) director Gaia Foudolian was [reportedly](#) killed in the blasts, while [Marfa Gallery](#), [Galerie Tanit](#), [Opera Gallery](#), and [Sfeir-Semler Gallery](#) were severely damaged. The blast also hit major institutions including the [Sursock Museum](#), [Ashkal Alwan](#), the [Arab Image Foundation](#), and the [Beirut Art Centre](#).

On [their Instagram](#), Sfeir-Semler Gallery shared images of the devastation, including an interior wall impaled by a thick spike of glass.

'We have just finished cleaning up the rubble and are initiating the next steps to restore the gallery,' Andree Sfeir-Semler, owner and founder of Sfeir-Semler Gallery, told *Ocula Magazine*.

'We are going to support the cultural sector as best we can,' she said. 'At the moment this means supporting fundraising initiatives in favor of the art scene. This is the most urgent part as many artists have lost their homes, their studios, their friends, they have been injured, scarred and shocked and are unable to work—a last blow after the severe economic crisis, and the COVID shut downs.'

One such fundraising initiative was launched by Brussels-based non-profit [Mophradat](#), whose board president, artist Walid Raad, is represented by Sfeir-Semler Gallery.

'People are still missing; the dead are being buried; the wounded tended to; psyches are scarred; debris is piling up; shortages abound; and [on] top of our mourning, tears, and fears, we feel anger, defiance, resignation, horror and disgust wrapped into a single continuous consuming emotion,' said Raad and Mophradat director Mai Abu Eidahab in a [statement](#), where bank transfer details are provided. Funds will prioritise the already disadvantaged, and those who can benefit the broader community in lasting ways.

'As we live this (up close and from afar), we will do what we can so that

our arts communities return to studios and workspaces, gathering spots and centres, art schools and residencies, museums and theatres,' they said.

Another initiative, the [Lebanon Solidarity Fund](#), was launched by the [Arab Fund for Arts and Culture](#) and [Culture Resource](#) (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafi). It has set a fundraising target of US \$500,000 to support arts and culture organisations and spaces in urgent need, as well as artists who lost homes, studios or art-making materials in the blast.

The Instagram account [Art Relief For Beirut](#), launched by Beirut-born artist [Mohamad Kanaan](#), who now lives in the Netherlands, is an attempt by international artists to support the most vulnerable victims of the blast. Artworks donated by Ali Cherri, [Charwei Tsai](#), the 2019 Turner Prize winners ([Oscar Murillo](#), [Lawrence Abu Hamdan](#), Tai Shani, and [Helen Cammock](#)), and others are up for sale, with proceeds going to charities including [Impact Lebanon](#), [Lebanese Red Cross](#) and [Baytna Baytak](#).

Impact Lebanon and Lebanese Red Cross are also among eight relief agencies and charities Marfa' posted links to on [their website](#), writing 'Marfa (Port in Arabic) is home. Our prayers go to those with no homes, those who lost their loved ones. No words can describe our devastation.'

The explosion was caused by 2,750 metric tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored unsafely inside a warehouse. Protests against the Lebanon Government, criticised as incompetent and corrupt, led to the cabinet resigning on Monday 10 August.

Rebuilding in Beirut will be hampered by an ongoing economic crisis that the World Bank predicted would see 45% of the population fall below the poverty line in 2020, even before the blast and the pandemic. The day before this piece was published, [309 new Covid-19 cases](#) were counted, a new record for Lebanon.

'If we don't do our bit, the [art] sector will sink completely,' Sfeir-Semler said. —[O]