Few events are more damaging, more crippling to human happiness, development and basic survival than war. In addition to precious loss of life, schools close, funds are scarce, and voices are all too often silenced in the crossfire. Those who can leave, do, and those who cannot, find their livelihoods disappearing as the powers that be rage on around them.

A special auction by Christie’s is raising funds for artists and academics living in areas of conflict, including Syria and Iraq. Anna Wallace-Thompson speaks to one of the artists whose work is included in the sale, and who has benefited from the actions of The Scholar Rescue Fund.

Beautiful Minds

Joumana Jaber
Chaos
Multi-medium (Acrylic on canvas, wood)
48” x 43” (121 x 109 cm)
$600

Words: Anna Wallace-Thompson
The Institute of International Education (IIE) was founded in 1919, and since then, has been one of the single most important non-profit initiatives in the rescue and long-term support of academics and creatives around the world. The IIE has been there for academics caught in the Bolshevik Revolution, Fascist Italy, and Germany in World War Two. Its actions have helped scholars across China, Hungary, apartheid South Africa, Burma and the Balkans. In 2002, the IIE officially launched its newest branch, the Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF), solidifying its work in the field of “preserving the lives, voices and ideas of scholars around the globe.”

The IIE-SRF works by partnering up with higher education institutions around the world and offering scholars visiting academic positions. This allows them to continue to pursue their important research and share their knowledge with the academic community without fear of repercussions. To date, the Scholar Rescue Fund has given fellowships to over 80 Syrian scholar and over 175 Iraqi scholars and senior academics. In 2013, the Middle East Studies Association awarded the IIE-SRF the prestigious Academic Freedom Award for its work.

We spoke to Iraqi artist-scholar Saadam Jumaily about his experiences leaving Iraq to Jordan, working with the IIE-SRF and how conflict has affected his academic and artistic work.

**What was the experience of leaving Iraq like?**

It was like facing the unknown. We used to dream of a homeland in which we could live and achieve our dreams – yet this was near impossible. I taught at the university in Iraq, at the Faculty of Arts, but felt disillusioned when I realized that there was so much destruction and corruption and secret groups and militias belonging to various sects. After receiving threats, I had to leave for Jordan with my wife. Leaving behind our family, friends and community was very hard for us. It was sad and painful, but better than being killed by a terrorist or taking part in the destruction of my own country.

**How did you get in touch with the Scholar Rescue Fund?**

I learned about them through an Iraqi artist living in London. I am so grateful to her for advising me to apply for this opportunity and for believing in my abilities as an artist, researcher and art teacher. Employment in Jordan was almost impossible, and the IIE-SRF fellowship allowed me to continue to work and create my art. It not only saved my life, but allowed me to practice my art freely.

**How so?**

Art requires a healthy environment in order to grow – art is a conscious behaviour practiced under normal conditions. In Jordan there are galleries, museums and cultural institutions that all help with art production – there is a lot of cultural activity. On top of being relieved of daily suffering, such as electricity loss, among other things, the difference is huge.
هل تأمل في العودة إلى العراق يوماً ما؟ أم أنك تستقر في البلد الذي أحلمه؟

أحد أبناء العراق الذي أحبته، ولا العراق، كاهن معروف بتعتبره من أشجع الأكافير في العالم، ووضع حلول مفتوحة على العالم. قد أزعجنا عندما قررنا في الوطن الذي نعيش فيه، وأعيش فيه، وأعيش فيه.

في الوقت نفسه، كان نحن ناسخين في العمليات، وأناحدينا، ونواصل العمل، ونعمل. ونعمل.

وقد ساعدت أمانينا الأكاديمية في مناطق الجغرافيا في الصين، وبعدها، في البلدان العربية، وأغليها، حيث التمدد العرفي على الطلاب.

في سنة 2005، أطلقنا هيئة التعليم الدولي في العراق، بمساعدة من خلال صندوق إنقاذ العلماء، وهو جمعية تبث الأدب في العراق، وتمددPalette الأكاديمية في بلدنا.

وقد كرسنا أنفسنا إلى الحفاظ على الحياة، وللحفاظ على هويتنا، فهل تأمل في العودة إلى العراق يوماً ما؟ أم أنك تستقر في البلد الذي أحلمه؟
Do you hope to return to Iraq one day? Or will you live permanently elsewhere?
I hope to return to the Iraq that I hope for – not the Iraq I know today. I hope my country becomes free of arbitrary fascist authority and open to the world. My situation right now is better than if I returned to Iraq, yet I don’t feel completely settled. In a way, my art is my “home,” it is what I protect and what gives me my identity. This is why it’s so important to me to be able to pursue my artistic practice – to display my work, to continue creating it. Losing the ability to live life as an artist would, in a sense, cause me to lose the last home I have left to me.

Christie’s UNTITLED auction runs online from 28 July – 11 August 2016, in partnership with The Scholar Rescue Fund. For more information, visit christies.com/untitled and scholar-rescuefund.org

Art for Scholars
Christie’s online sale, UNTITLED, will raise funds to allow these initiatives to continue helping those in need. A gala reception at Christie’s New York will bring together “over 200 collectors, gallerists, curators, press and leading art publications,” along with keynote speeches from the IIE’s CEO and President, as well as rescued scholars, to celebrate the importance of open dialogue and learning. Over 60 works are on offer, including pieces by scholar-artists Jumana Jabar from Syria, and Iraqi Saddam Jumaily.