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Considering a benefit auction to raise money for your art league? Hint: Don't sell art.

by Sherry Truhlar, President, Red Apple Auctions



You and your colleagues in the art collective want to raise a little money. Maybe you want to have some cash available to help each other with scholarships to attend art classes. Maybe you want to upgrade the A/C in your studios.

While you sit around debating how best to raise the money, someone mentions the idea of a benefit auction. Chances are, you and your friends have been asked to donate to those types of fundraisers before, so it's only natural that you'd be familiar with them.

"Everyone can donate a piece of their art," someone suggests, "We'll sell tickets to the night, and we'll auction the donations." In principle, it *sounds* like a good idea. After all, you're an art league and you like art.

But here's the hard fact: In many cases, you'll raise more money *if you don't sell art*.

Benefit auctions raise the most money when the items they offer have mass appeal. You don't want to sell just anything. You want to sell items that many people want to own.

Auctions are based on the concept of scarcity. It's that old principle of high demand and low supply. When a benefit auction offers limited, desirable merchandise to many interested buyers, they raise a lot of money.

But sadly, some auction planners begin to think that "more is better." They fill their auction tables with *anything*, thereby creating a garage sale mentality among guests. Stuff sells cheap.

As an artist, here's the challenge with making the benefit auction all about art: Your work (in most cases) doesn't offer mass appeal that guests are willing to *overpay* to get.

What sorts of things are in "high demand" in a benefit auction? What types of things offer mass appeal?

- A 5-course meal for six prepared in your home ... it could be used for an anniversary dinner, birthday celebration, or a promotion party.
- A long weekend in a private home on the lake ...it can be used for a family retreat, a romantic getaway, or a quiet sanctuary.
- Two seats to the always sold-out pro-football game ... it can be used as a thank-you gift to a star sales representative in my company, a birthday present for my husband, a surprise treat for my son-in-law
- Unusual, "once in a lifetime" activities (such as serving as Grand Marshal in a parade or taking a helicopter ride over your house) ... it can be used as a memorable anniversary gift, a story for my next blog, a check off the bucket list

These are the types of things that many people enjoy doing or would like to do. Each item is attractive to multiple people for multiple reasons.

In contrast, your mixed media piece "Shark Study I" doesn't offer that same broad appeal.

So what should the art collective do? How can you raise the funds for that new A/C unit?

Go ahead, plan a benefit auction. And do what others do — seek donations like those listed above for your live auction. To raise big money, stick with "known quantities."

And when it comes to including your art in the event, sell it in a different way. For instance, set up a bucket raffle whereby guests can buy multiple tickets and drop their ticket/s into the bucket of the art piece they like most. Should they be the lucky winner drawn from the bucket, they would be able to take home the art for the price of their raffle tickets.

Remember: Offering items with mass appeal will raise you more money for less work. Unless your artwork has mass appeal — and most art doesn't — it won't generate the returns you were hoping to achieve.

To learn more about benefit auctions and charity auctioneer Sherry Truhlar, visit www.RedAppleAuctions.com. The site includes her forward-thinking blog, free teleclasses, and a complementary download of her annual Auction Item Guide™— that reveals the top 100 items sold in gala auctions last year.

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