

ARTnews

NFT Community Fundraises for Ukraine: 'It's About Uniting to Save Lives'

Shanti Escalante-De Matte | March 7, 2022 12:41 PM



The View from the Art for Ukraine gallery | Art for Ukraine

As the Russian invasion of [Ukraine](#) continues, people have found unconventional means of support Ukrainians, such as [renting out](#) AirBnBs in the country to ensure direct donations to those fleeing their homes and [offering](#) Ukrainian scholars housing and teaching placements. Now, the NFT community is organizing to leverage their unique resources.

“All we could talk about was the war. We all felt a little helpless and had trouble focusing on our own work, so we thought, ‘Let’s take this restless, uneasy feeling that we all have put it towards something positive,’” said Amir Fallah, who helped organize an NFT fundraiser called Art for Ukraine along with fellow artists like Sara Ludy and Ana Maria Caballero.

Each artist involved with Art for Ukraine made a piece for the sale, which begins today, and minted 100 editions of the work, each priced at one Tezos. Unlike Ethereum, the cryptocurrency on which most [NFTs](#) are transacted, Tezos is an environmentally friendly currency. It’s also a lot less valuable, as of writing, one Tezos is equivalent to little more than \$3, whereas Ethereum is at around \$2,600. Because Tezos is so cheap, it is easier not only to buy work with the currency but also to make art funded by it, seeing as the minting costs are much lower.

“The reason we chose to use Tezos was to make the project very inclusive,” said Fallah. “We wanted to make sure that people found it accessible to donate as well as buy.”

That means that fundraising is perhaps less effective on Tezos, but it also means that those who want to contribute something can do so. Each time a work is bought, the proceeds are automatically sent to seven charities aiding Ukraine using a **specially built** smart contract. The smart contract also accepts direct donations of Tezos. This has all been made possible with volunteer labor, organized on social media in a matter of weeks. So far 6,000 Tezos, or over \$20,000, has been raised in just direct donations.

In parallel to the fundraiser is a curated show of Ukrainian NFT artists like Yura Miron and Philipp Kapustin. “At first we thought we should invite Ukrainian artists to submit work for the fundraiser,” said Fallah. But instead, the organizers thought they should support Ukrainian artists instead. “Even if they don’t live in Ukraine right now, they’re not on Twitter, promoting their projects. They’re probably not even making their work. They’re probably in a state of distress and trying to figure out what to do to help their families and loved ones,” Fallah continued. “So we thought, ‘We’ll promote them.’” A digital gallery show was built on muse.place, a user friendly 3D space creation tool to show off their works.

Art for Ukraine is just one of many initiatives of its kind. Pussy Riot’s Nadya Tolokonnikova organized Ukraine DAO, in which those with Ethereum were encouraged to pool together donations by bidding on an NFT of the Ukrainian flag in another show of technological innovation. “We purposefully avoided adding our own art to this release; in a way it’s our strong conceptual artistic statement. People can have different aesthetics, but it’s not about what color we prefer, it’s about uniting to save lives,” Tolokonnikova said in an emailed statement. “The Ukrainian flag unites us.”

At the end of the bidding, no one owned the NFT, but that was the point. The unique smart contract was built by CXIP Labs to gather pooled bids as donations.

“Last Thursday, CXIP received news that several of our development partners located in Ukraine had been displaced from their homes and raced to move their families to safety, while some of them remained in Ukraine, trapped and unable to leave,” said CXIP CEO Jeff Gluck in an emailed statement. “When CXIP was asked to create a custom contract for the UkraineDAO NFT initiative, we immediately refocused our efforts to support this critical campaign.”

The effort resulted in a donation of 2,174 ETH, which is valued at \$5,705,690.81. All donations went to Come Back Alive, a foundation which provides the Ukrainian military with training, ammunition and technology like reconnaissance drones, but does not provide arms.

NFT platforms are also trying to do their part. SuperRare built a new feature page, “For Ukraine: SuperRare Artists Support the Cause,” which displays work that artists will use to fundraise for charities, and the platform will match up to \$50,000 in sales. Individuals are also fundraising outside of group efforts.

As always, scams are rampant in the space, and those who wish to donate should remain vigilant. “I don’t know of any scams personally, but I’m sure that exists,” said Fallah. “Just as you would find in the regular charity world, there’s bad actors everywhere.”