



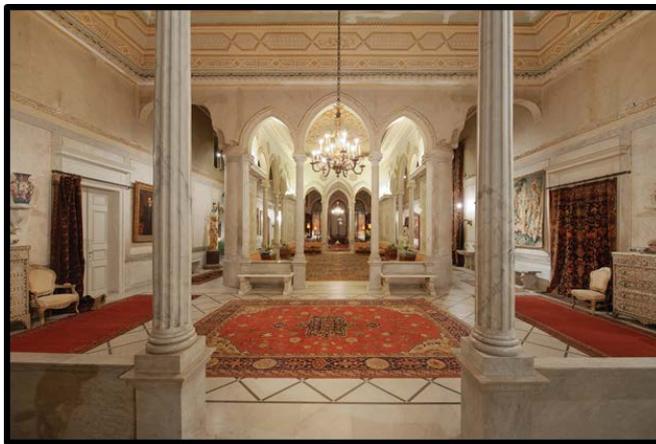
RestART Beirut

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Press Release - For Immediate Release

New philanthropic fund for the safeguard of arts and collections in Beirut

RestArt Beirut – International Fund strikes out its First Ambitious Project: Saving the Sursock Palace



© Ferrante Ferranti (left) - © Sursock Palace/RestART Beirut (right)

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Abstract:

The RestART Beirut Fund, an ambitious international initiative launched by a group of young friends from five different countries under the aegis of the King Baudouin Foundation, is launching its first project – saving the badly damaged Sursock Palace in Beirut and helping open it to the public as a museum and cultural centre. The Fund is commencing its first fundraising campaign in time for Christmas in order to raise funds for the most urgent work – an emergency inventory and safeguard of the Palace’s heavily damaged artwork. The Palace, home of the famous Sursock-Cochrane family since 1850, is a relic of Beirut’s Golden Age which mixes European and Eastern styles in a unique way and houses priceless paintings by Gentileschi, 17th century European tapestries, Oriental furniture and ceramics. The Fund will help restore and open the Palace to the public while boosting the local economy by using local craftsmen, reviving traditional techniques where possible and involving Lebanese artists in the process. This place of beauty, refinement and rich history shall be shared with the art lovers around the world Lebanese people and the rest of the world and allow them to learn about and take pride in the Golden Age, which they have the power to revive.

Statement – Shocked by the tragic explosion which devastated Beirut, that killed and hurt so many of its inhabitants on 04 August, a group of young friends and art passionates decided to act and help in the best way they could: by trying to save the often overlooked Beirut artistic heritage for future generations. Following a visit to Beirut and discussions with the Sursock-Cochrane family, they decided to launch a charitable Fund in order to raise much-needed funds to save the Palace from further destruction and prevent its collections being lost or dispersed forever. Dr Marie Eve Didier, one of the six co-founding members explains: *“We were all of course shocked by the terrible loss of lives and sufferings we witnessed after the explosion. But while the humanitarian emergency was naturally what everyone was focusing on, we realised there was another, less visible and overlooked emergency”*. Beirut’s artistic heritage was at risk of being lost forever: unique buildings were at risk of collapse and priceless art collections lay among piles of rubble. *“So we decided to help as best as we could – by trying to save at least one of these beautiful buildings and its artwork and open it as a museum. The Sursock Palace, with its amazing history and harmonious mix of European and Oriental artwork seemed the natural choice for this.”* added Joseph El Hayek, cofounder based in Beirut.

Today, RestART Beirut is introducing its first fundraising campaign - help fund the most urgent work needed in this future museum: an emergency inventory and safeguarding the most fragile pieces. Once the Palace is restored and the art collections renovated, the Fund hopes to financially support resident artists, hold exhibitions and concerts at the Palace and eventually extend its work to other endangered buildings.

The Sursock Palace

The renovation of the Sursock Palace’s collections and the transformation of this iconic place - one of the last surviving vestiges of the Golden Age of 19th century Beirut - into a public centre for culture, education in the field of conservation, restoration practices and artistic dissemination is the flagship project of RestART Beirut.

In the aftermath of the explosion, the Sursock Palace and its ravaged art collection became the symbol of the scale of destruction and its baffling nature. The painful images of its fragile and broken artefacts lying among piles of rubble shocked the inhabitants of Beirut and the art world at large. To honour Lady Cochrane’s legacy of philanthropy, RestART Beirut, in close collaboration with the Sursock-Cochrane family, will restore the palace and its collections and turn it into a museum open to the public.

In a 2010 book dedicated to the Sursock Palace by Dominique Fernandez and illustrated with photographs by Ferrante Ferranti, Lady Yvonne Sursock Cochrane left this sad quote:

“God only knows what will become of this property, surrounded more and more by vile towers (...) It is still the only green space in the district (...) But it will remain in the memory of those who knew it, the image of a time when civilisation and the art of living were part of everyday life.”

RestART Beirut's ambition is to ensure Lady Sursock’s fear does not become reality, so that this palace should not only have a glorious past but also become a part of Lebanon’s future.

The Sursock Palace Museum will act as a cultural centre, housing resident artists, restoration workshops, concerts, conferences and exhibitions. The project aims to reinforce the role which heritage can play within the social-economic fabric of the city by generating jobs, fostering cultural activity and contributing to enhancing Beirut’s international reputation.

RestART Beirut aims to provide the necessary technical expertise required for the entire project and the fundraising for the implementation.

To achieve this ambitious goal, RestART Beirut divided this inspirational project into multiple smaller activities, for which it will organise fundraising campaigns, establish collaborations with academic institutions and build partnerships with local and international companies.

Further information on the RestART Beirut organisation can be found on the Fund's website: www.restartbeirut.art

All the activities of RestART Beirut depend entirely on donations and sponsorships.

Mary Ann Prior (independent art advisor for Bank of America Europe, Government Art Collection, London) says she is *"delighted to support the work of RestART Beirut in striving to raise awareness and funding for restoring Beirut's cultural heritage. As a newly-appointed Ambassador for RestART, I am looking forward to doing whatever I can to help accelerate the program of restoration."*

Mary and Roderick Surssock-Cochrane, owners of the Palace, add that *"it is with great pleasure that [Roderick and I] have the opportunity to work with RestART Beirut, a young, dedicated, dynamic, international group, who have come together to help restore the works of art in the Surssock Palace collection. We will be working together to bring back Surssock Palace to its former glory. Our common goal is to transform the Palace into a museum and cultural center to promote arts in Lebanon, the Middle East and beyond."*

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