

Charity begins at home for these artists

Visual artists, with few exceptions, are among the poorest members of our society. Yet they are forever being asked to donate or sell their work at cut-rate prices in a seemingly endless round of charity auctions.

Each year, there are auctions for hospitals, the latest Third World causes and parallel galleries, those funky, artist-run spaces that take the first risks showing the work of the young, innovative newcomer.

And despite artists' generally feeble bank accounts, most are surprisingly forthcoming when called upon to contribute their work to charity.

ART

Ann Duncan

But one group of Montreal artists has taken that generosity one step further.

A collective of four men — Francis Caprani, Scott MacLeod, Gerald Pedros and Daniel Glassman — has put together an exhibition of their work.

Proceeds from sales will be split between Amnesty International, the

Nobel Prize-winning human rights group, and the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

The show is being held at, of all places, a hairdressing salon — Antidote at 5850 Sherbrooke St. W.

"It's a nice freedom to take the art out of the pristine gallery setting," MacLeod said.

The artists aren't taking one cent from the sales, which have already amounted to some \$5,000.

"Our dealer, Samuel Lallouz, thinks we're crazy," MacLeod said. But he quickly pointed out that Lallouz, who will be staging a show of the group some time in the spring,

and Antidote donated all the artists' supplies and materials for this show.

Why did these four artists, who have to pool their money to get by, decide to organize a charity exhibition?

"It's a way of giving back as artists," Caprani said. "When you take, you've got to give back, and we've been really lucky here to have been able to make a living off art."

Why did the group pick Amnesty International and the Japanese-Canadian group as beneficiaries?

"Because I wouldn't fancy the idea of rotting in jail because of my ideas," Caprani said.

In keeping with the spirit of the show, much of the art is about imprisonment, repression and other overtly political themes.

Mixed-media mural

The four, who often collaborate on the same work, together made one huge, mixed-media mural that is filled with protests against jails and racism.

The mural looks much like a graffiti-splattered wall, and harks back to the now-jaded style, substance and imagery of the anti-war-art of the '60s.

How do four artists work on the same work of art? One will start an image and somebody else might take over, MacLeod and Caprani said.

There may be considerable discussion and even argument in the process, but most are good-natured exchanges and the four chalk consider them learning experiences.

"Four heads are better than one," MacLeod said.

But the results don't necessarily always live up to that conclusion. The paintings that were done separately are often the strongest works in this show. The colors in these pieces tend to be brighter and more pure, and the same goes for the imagery.

Cocky youths

Particularly strong are Caprani's paintings about tensions in his native Ireland. One of these, called *Catholic Boys*, shows a group of three cocky youths. It has become the trademark for this exhibition, and is being used on the show's T-shirts and posters.

Ironically, this exhibition comes at a time when all four artists are moving away from their overtly political imagery into something that Caprani calls "interior landscapes — kind of like building a church inside yourself, a sanctuary."

"There's only so much you can do with your anger and your moral outrage," he said. "We're now getting rid of all the dross."

And in the process, they're raising money for — and awareness of — two major human rights groups in Canada.

The show continues until March 12.



Detail from Francis Caprani's *Catholic Boys*, the trademark of collective exhibition.