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## Bonhams breaks records at Middle Eastern and Lebonese art event

Mark Banham – May 4, 2016

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Art auctioneers Bonhams has broken ten records at its Middle Eastern and Lebonese contemporary art event. The sales broke 10 records for seven artists from the Art of the Lebanon sale and three from the Middle Eastern Modern and Contemporary Art sale.

The top-selling lot, Nubian House by Hussein Bicar, sold for £319,300, achieving the record price for a modern Arab painting sold in London.

Kahlil Gibran's painting Portrait of Mrs Alexander Morten sold for almost ten times its estimate, at £182,500. Portrait of Mrs Alexander Morten by Kahlil Gibran, estimated at between £20,000 and £30,000 and sold for £182,500.

Portrait of Mrs Alexander appeared in Gibran's first exhibition in New York in 1914, but then remained unseen for 100 years. It is the first painting by the poet and artist ever to be auctioned. It was bought by a Lebanese institution, and after more than a century in the West, will return to the country where Gibran was born.

Farid Aouad's Opera Garnier, estimated at £40,000 to 60,000, sold for £74,500. It is one of the most prominent works by a Lebanese artist and has been shown in museums across Lebanon and Europe.

Another work in the sale was The Beirut City Centre Egg by Ayman Baalbaki that sold for £86,500. The Egg, as it has been named by the people of Beirut, is a partially destroyed cinema complex built in the Brutalist style. The bombed-out building has become a monument of the civil war and a historic landmark in its own right.

Nima Sagarchi, head of modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art at Bonhams, said: "It's been a ground-breaking sale. Despite the fact that many of the artists are well-established, both in Lebanon and elsewhere, this is the first time that many of them have come to the market.

"A number of pieces have been purchased by Lebanese buyers and in many ways it's a great homecoming for the country's modern and contemporary masterpieces. But it also marks a turning point in the importance of Middle Eastern art on an international stage."

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