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Art by animals for sale to aid zoo research - Zookeepers helped their animals create works of art, which will be auctioned this weekend at an auction in Miami's Design District.

Miami Herald, The (FL) - Monday, January 30, 2012

Author: *Rebecca Burton* , rburton@MiamiHerald.com

Mabel, a featured artist at a new art exhibit coming to Miami, will soon have her painting auctioned off and hanging in someone's living room for all to see. She isn't worried about what critics might think as she makes care free strokes with the colors her assistant chooses.

Mabel is an African elephant and her assistant is a zookeeper at Zoo Miami. She is preparing with the other animals at the zoo for the first-ever Savage Art Exhibit. The exhibit will contain only artwork made by the animals, with help from their zookeepers, of course.

The event, organized by the South Florida chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers and Zoo Miami, will take place from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Feb. 4 at the Bakehouse Art Complex at 561 NW 32nd St.

Frank Rigdley, conservation and research manager at Zoo Miami, has done similar events at other zoos he has worked at and said he is excited Miami is catching on.

"We have a new conservation and research department and this art show is a good way to raise some money for it. We are trying to coordinate more events like these," Rigdley said.

Rigdley said with the money, his department would like to buy acoustic monitoring equipment to research bats that live at the zoo. He said there are only about a couple hundred left of the rare species. With the new equipment he, and scientists from Florida International University and University of Florida will be able to further their research.

Paintings will be sold in a silent-auction fashion and include artists such as rhinos, giraffes, meerkats, a camel and even a cheetah.

"Most people could never have the opportunity to have an original painting by some of the rarest animals on Earth," Rigdley said.

The paintings were constructed in three different fashions. Some, like Mabel, were enthusiastic enough to hold the brush and paint in a traditional sense. Others had their paws covered with non-toxic paint and would walk over the canvas. Rigdley also said that some animals would be assisted with the paintings to distract them from their medical examinations.

"The point of this is for the fun and the cause," Rigdley said. "We know they're not all

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masterpieces. But this is a fun event to bring the family to.”

The event will also include food trucks, a live band, a DJ and raffles. Other art galleries around the show will also be open to the public that night. Secured parking and admission are free.

Rigdley wanted to encourage the public not to laugh when viewing Nellie’s work, Mabel’s painting rival and an Asian elephant.

“You can tell she loves it because she squeaks when she’s painting. But she kind of just smashes the brush and twirls it around. She’s not the best artist,” Rigdley said. “But she is enthusiastic and spirited.”

Provided By: The McClatchy Company

Index Terms: American Association of Zookeepers and Zoo Miami; Florida International University; University of Florida

Location(s): Bakehouse Art Complex; 561 NW 32nd St.

Record Number:

201201300500KNRIDDERFLMIAMIH_2485ec61e89e5f5fbbc7f1950ae52b64

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