Art Exhibition Supports Mosul’s Early Recovery

Challenge

The violent extremist group known as ‘the Islamic State’ left a devastating legacy that included the near-total destruction of Mosul’s rich cultural history. From shrines to art to ancient artefacts, the group sought to degrade the social fabric of Iraq’s most diverse city by erasing its past. Mosul Museum, one of the country’s pre-eminent cultural institutions, was a primary target; its destruction was vividly captured on social media.

Solution

IN2, in conjunction with Google Arts and Culture, the Economist and local media organisations, facilitated the first art exhibition in the city two years after the Islamic State’s defeat in Mosul. Held in Mosul Museum, ‘Return To Mosul’ used virtual technology to recreate ancient artefacts, such as the Lion of Mosul statues from 860 BCE. The 3D technology was a four-year endeavour by the archaeological organisation, Rekrei, to digitally preserve relics that the Islamic State destroyed or looted from the museum.

Critically, IN2 ensured the exhibition was a community event. In addition to the 3D exhibit, the works of nearly 40 Maslawi and Iraqi artists were put on display. Artists suppressed under the Islamic State exhibited their work to much acclaim, which boosted civic pride and engagement. Ahead of the exhibition, more than 30 artists from 4 countries also came to the city to exhibit their work. The experience was empowering and emotional for the community, which continues to rebuild and recover from the devastating legacy of the extremist group.

Results

The six-day ‘Return to Mosul’ exhibition drew over 6,000 visitors from a broad range of backgrounds, offering a rare opportunity for the community to gather at the legendary cultural site. The exhibition has subsequently been on display in Beirut and London, where thousands more visited the displays raising the international profiles of artists from Mosul whose works were on display.

The event was covered by over 20 international and local media outlets, winning praise for its innovative concept that revived ancient artefacts and priceless art. The exhibition’s celebration of history, inclusivity and cultural tolerance was also well-received, particularly in local media.