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Love for sale to save lives

KUALA LUMPUR — The Malaysian AIDS Foundation's "Artaid" exhibition series is back, featuring artworks by 46 Malaysian contemporary artists in aid of women living with HIV.

"The overwhelming success of last year's event, which raised RM230,000 to support women living with HIV, not only inspired us to continue this endeavour but also encouraged us to double the scale of the exhibition," said foundation chairman Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman.

Themed "Love for Sale", it sought to critically explore the subject matter of "love" while highlighting the gender inequities that continue to negatively affect women living with HIV.

"The event is a reminder that three decades into the AIDS epidemic, in spite of the remarkable progress in HIV science, people who deserve life-saving HIV treatment, care, support — and above all, our love and compassion — continue to be unjustly pushed to the fringes of society."

To date, more than 12,000 cases

of female HIV infections have been recorded in Malaysia.

As sexual transmission of HIV — which accounted for 78 per cent of new infections in 2015 — continues to rise, women now are faced with a two-fold increase in HIV risk with respect to men compared to 10 years ago.

"More worryingly, for many women, their only risk factor is being married," Dr Adeeba said.

Artist and foundation trustee Ahmad Zakii Anwar, who conceived the project last year, is back at the helm as advisor.

"The 'Love for Sale' collection evokes our collective hopes and ideals of an AIDS-free generation, where barriers are broken down, our differences are celebrated, communities thrive and no one is left behind.

"As efforts to end AIDS mount, it has become increasingly clear that without love, the battle against AIDS cannot be won," he said.

Curator Noor Mahnun Mohamed said she is particularly pleased to see the

participation of 11 female artists in the exhibition.

"Women in arts have a responsibility to paint the realities of other women in our community, especially those suffering in silence due to HIV stigma.

"We hope our creations will go on to inspire confidence, courage and determination in these women," said Mahnun.

A total of 63 artworks worth over RM500,000 makes up the collection, with part of the proceeds going to the foundation's treatment for HIV women, and care and support programmes.

Over the years, these programmes have helped women from underserved and impoverished backgrounds across Malaysia access life-saving HIV medicine and other related medical services, resulting in improved health outcomes and wellbeing.

The exhibition is at White Box, Publika, Solaris Dutamas, from 11am to 9pm daily until Wednesday.

For more information, visit artaid16.yam.org.my.

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Mahnun and her two contributions 'Speak Softly' (top) and 'Steadfast'.



Ahmad Zakii's contributions to the exhibition (clockwise from top right): 'Dua Pisang', 'Terung & Lada Hijau', 'Eggplant & Squash', and 'Tomato, Lobak & Lemon'.

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The exhibition's participating artists with representatives from the foundation.