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CITY ROOM

Artist Lets Public Wear Concern for Storm Victims on Their Sleeves, and Chests



Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

Sebastian Errazuriz, a designer and sculptor in Brooklyn, is raising relief money with Hurricane Sandy T-shirts.

By LIZ ROBBINS Published: November 5, 2012

Some people are donating the shirts off their back. Others are creating them.

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And hundreds still are scooping them up like auctioned art in a social-media-fueled frenzy that captures New York City's volunteer spirit in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

Sebastian Errazuriz, a designer and sculptor in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, whose work was halted by the storm last week, has taken a simple, familiar design and, quite inadvertently, turned it into a philanthropic sensation.

Mr. Errazuriz said he was so depressed by the images of the devastation that he wanted to raise money with some kind of art project. He decided on Friday night to make T-shirts by taking the celebrated white "I Love NY" design and dipping them into blue ink to replicate the flood line he saw in an art gallery. He also took a subway map shirt and dipped it diagonally in the same blue ink to symbolize the Manhattan power-dividing line.

At first, Mr. Errazuriz, 28, thought a few of his friends and customers of his high-end art would buy a couple dozen. He enlisted Grey Area, an online art gallery with a SoHo

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store, to help sell shirts. On Sunday afternoon, Grey Area e-mailed a newsletter to its 32,000 subscribers and posted it on Facebook. The shirt would sell for \$40, with all profits going to storm victims – most likely artists from Red Hook and New Jersey who were the most affected.

By Monday afternoon, Grey Area had 500 orders. The only problem? As of Monday afternoon, Mr. Errazuriz had not yet printed any T-shirts. He had a staff of two, and, because

he works in large wood and furniture sculpturing, he had no silk-screening equipment. He planned to dip the shirts in buckets of ink.

“I didn’t think it would get to this level of craziness,” he said, laughing on the phone as he drove back to his studio to get working. “When there’s an idea that connects with people, it spreads incredibly fast.”

While other Hurricane Sandy T-shirts are already on the market, what makes Mr. Errazuriz’s unique is the art component. His expensive work – including a \$75,000 shelf made from a real tree branch – has been shown in design museums throughout the world.

Mr. Errazuriz initially took his bicycle around Greenpoint to buy “I Love NY” shirts. On Monday morning, he got a car to Manhattan for a larger supply. After dropping off samples for the talk-show host Katie Couric and her guest Steve Buscemi, he went to 42nd Street and Third Avenue, buying all the shirts in size medium he could find.

His design for what he calls his “I Still Love New York” shirt was deliberate. He hung the shirt on the wall and measured five feet from the floor, tie-dying the bottom. His subway map, “Manhattan Blackout,” followed the initial power failures.

For now, the shirt costs \$22 to produce, leaving \$18 for storm victims. But with such a demand, Mr. Errazuriz said he hoped to order in bulk and secure a bona fide T-shirt maker to reduce production costs.

Manish Vora, a founder of Grey Area, said, “We haven’t directed the funds yet to which groups because our team and Sebastian want to have the money go to as many people rebuilding as possible.”

Mr. Errazuriz said he had been shocked and inspired by the immediate reaction. Born in Chile and raised in London, he has been living in New York for seven years.

“When you come as a foreigner from abroad, you are immediately shocked by how cold and how indifferent people are,” he said. “But at the same time, now you see these instances where there’s a real strength and pride in helping each other and getting through the problems. And that’s impressive.”

He had to rush to his studio, but at least could take bit of a breath. “We’re telling people we’ll need two weeks to deliver them,” he said.

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