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Guggenheim Abu Dhabi to do 1960s onwards, the Louvre up to that date

First Guggenheim purchases go on show

ACQUISITIONS

Abu Dhabi. Who will be covering what in the future museums of Abu Dhabi is gradually becoming clearer. The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will begin its collections in the 1960s, according to the notes on its current exhibition there, which gives the first glimpse of its purchases.

Marie-Claude Beaud, the Louvre Abu Dhabi's commissioner for Modern acquisitions, is responsible for acquiring international works from after Impressionism to the 1960s. She is a former director of the Fondation Cartier, where she worked with Jean Nouvel, now the architect of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, and today she is director of the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.

The purchases in the Guggenheim show on Saadiyat Island, where the museums are going up, all make use of

"The image I remember most vividly from my childhood is the play of light and shadow through palm leaves," said the 40-ish Emirati collector and industrialist, Saif Al Hajeri, at a panel discussion at Abu Dhabi Art fair last month.

For another collector, the United Arab Emirates' minister of health, Abdul Rahman al Owais, 47, the earliest memory was of the blues of the sky and the sea: "Apart from those, we lived in a world without colours, let alone art," he says.

Remarkable speed

The speed, therefore, with which an art scene, with a genuine, if small, local following, has established itself in the UAE is remarkable. At last month's Abu Dhabi Art, there were 50 galleries, all in the Manarat building, while the sand-dune-shaped former World Fair pavilion next door, which last year let in the rain,

remained closed, looking rather dusty.

Everyone agreed that the fair had benefited from being in one space and there was general enthusiasm among the dealers at the number and curiosity of the crowds and the level of the sales. The top-flight New York gallery Acquavella was back after a few years' absence, the only dealer to bring classics including a Degas, a Pissarro of the Louvre, a Picasso and a very good Ernst of 1927. David Zwirner, of New York, was also back with a selection of rigorously minimalist US art, aimed more at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi than local collectors. London's Lisson was present with an elegant marble Anish Kapoor. Some galleries, such as Salzburg-based Thaddaeus Ropac, brought a combination of artists from the region and from the West, but



Adel Quraishi's portrait of Abdullah Adam from his series "The Guardians (Alef group of 8)", 2014. These are the last of a line of Abyssinian eunuchs who, since Ottoman times, have been the keepers of the keys to the Prophet's burial chamber. London's Park Gallery showed the series at Abu Dhabi Art

like Art Dubai, this is becoming a fair for art from the Middle East and North Africa, with a niche for the ingenious virtuosity of Korean art. Here the high six-figure or seven-figure sales are almost all to the future museums or members of the ruling family, usually buying on their behalf, while the ordinary public tends to stick at below \$100,000. One of the most interesting, if unflashy, stands was Agial Gallery from Beirut, which showed the obsessively geometric studies of the reclusive Lebanese artist and writer, Gebran Tarazi, who trained as a master of inlaid woodwork and in a thoughtful essay on the role of art in the modern Arab world said, "There is no salvation

outside an indigenous culture, resolutely committed to the quest for the universal" a consideration against which the whole fair could be measured. A group of these panels was bought by a member of the ruling family.

A new public space

The Abu Dhabi art scene also got another exhibition space last month as part of New York University, with its own full-time curator, May Allison, formerly of the Rhode Island School of Design. The name of the first show, "On Site" a coherent and elegantly displayed group of works by two Emiratis, Eptisam Abdulaziz and Mohamed Ahmed

"Seeing through Light": artists bought by the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi

Ghada Amer, Angela Bulloch, Song Dong, Monir Shahroudi Farmanfarmaian, Samia Halaby, Shirazeh Houshiary, Hassan Khan, Y.Z. Kami, Bharti Kher, Rachid Koraichi, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Keith Sonnier, Douglas Wheeler. On loan from the Guggenheim in New York: Dan Flavin and Larry Bell

Ibrahim, one Palestinian, Tarek al Ghoussein, an Egyptian, Basim Magdy, a Pakistani, Rashid Rana and an American, Mary Temple, is a celebration of the university's presence on the formerly desert island, almost fully operational after only seven years since the agreement was signed. But the works are also about location, from the weight and colour of a handsome pile of copper-bearing rocks wrapped in copper wire by Mohamed Ibrahim, who was working with the raw materials of his remote part of the UAE long before he ever heard of Richard Long or Joseph Beuys, to the artful room by Rashid Rana, with an exterior like a cube grid by Sol LeWitt and an interior papered as a replica of a room in Tate Modern, the walls, doors, security camera all shown by a pixellated photograph.

Budget could increase

Fleur Pellerin, the French culture minister, was in town with the Louvre's deputy director Hervé Barbaret, tipped to lead the Louvre Abu Dhabi after it opens. It has spent €50m a year for purchases, but the authorities have let it be known that more may be available for exceptional works in the run-up to the inauguration in December 2015. The 5,000 workers on site are being increased to 7,000 to make sure it is finished on time, and its 180m-wide, perforated dome, which Nouvel calls the "Rain of Light" will shortly be lowered into place over internal cladding with two more layers of holes beneath so that patches of light will shine through and move around with the motion of the sun, as though under the palm trees of an oasis.

Anna Somers Cocks

light: Activated, Celestial, Perceptual, Reflected, Transcendent, as the sections of "Seeing through Light" (until 19 January) are called. It is a good choice with which to begin introducing the Guggenheim to its public because light captures the eye and the show's single, sensuous theme makes it easy to compare each artist's use of the medium. It is also transcultural and does not demand prior knowledge of the history of 20th-century art; for example, Doug Wheeler's mystically glowing panel in an all white space completely captured the Indian guard, who was encouraging people in to see it, while the infinite reflections of coloured balls of light by Yayoi Kusama was a winner with visitors of all ages. In that world of intense sun and knife-edge shadows, light is also more emphatic.