

TheNational



ArtParis returning to capital with a focus on education and culture

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Last Updated: September 16, 2008 12:38AM UAE / September 15, 2008 8:38PM GMT

ABU DHABI // Dozens of galleries from 22 countries will check into the Emirates Palace hotel in November for the second ArtParis-AbuDhabi exhibition, which will offer for sale works by such artists as Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst.

The Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (Adach) brought the French art show to the city last year to stimulate interest in art and promote local artists. The show attracted nearly 10,000 visitors and sold about US\$16 million (Dh58.8m) worth of paintings and other art. This year, Adach expects more than 15,000 visitors.

The exhibition, which will run Nov 17-21, will include more artists, more art and a wider variety of lectures and educational programmes, all of which the organisers hope will reaffirm Abu Dhabi's role as the emergent cultural hub of the Arab world.

In addition to displays by 57 galleries, the fair will host eight "young galleries", each showcasing the works of a young artist. "Movement and communications ... Travel through the desert and sea" will be an exhibition presenting emerging Arab artists. Educational programmes have also been added to the five-day exhibition, with roundtable discussions, lectures and a symposium of architects, curators, artists, poets, designers and art critics.

Also at the exhibition, Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid will lecture on the culture of form within Islam, relating the signature curves in her buildings to those in traditional Arab calligraphy.

Yesterday, Mohammed Khalaf al Mazrouei, the director general of Adach, said the organisation hoped to "enlighten members of society" and encourage creativity and an arts culture in the emirate.

"ArtParis-AbuDhabi is one of the most important projects of Adach," Mr Mazrouei said, adding that he hoped it would enhance the "role of Abu Dhabi as a focal point for contemporary art" in the region.

But with most participants lined up for the art fair from outside the UAE, local artists said if the goal was to develop Abu Dhabi's art scene, it could be better achieved through government support for their work and their galleries than by importing foreign exhibitions.

Jalal Luqman, a digital artist whose work is being shown at Ghaf Gallery, on Khaleej Al Arabi Street, said the number of visitors and the money spent at last year's exhibition did not reflect the reality of the embryonic art market in Abu Dhabi.

Local artists, he said, did not sell their work easily, partly because appreciation for art and art education had not yet fully developed. What the country stood to gain from hosting international events such as ArtParis, he said, was the chance to catalyse admiration for art among local people, but the benefit ended there.

"We should be exposed to art from other places. It is excellent to have more local people exposed to art," he said. "But events like this do not directly benefit local artists. And they shouldn't be advertised under the umbrella of developing a local art scene."

Abdulla al Amri, director of arts and culture at Adach, said that over the past two years, most galleries in Abu Dhabi had built relationships with buyers in the private sector. For local art galleries and artists, the best is yet to come, he said.

"There is a good market coming up in Abu Dhabi," he said. "The structure of the art market in Abu Dhabi has been expanding."

This year at ArtParis-AbuDhabi, however, only three of the artists on show will be Emiratis. Mr Mazrouei described that as a "big step in promoting Emirati artists to the world".

ArtParis was launched in the French capital in 1999 and is held there every March. Caroline Lacoste, the fair's director, said organisers had been keen to export the project and "create a dialogue between all cultures through economic and cultural exchanges". ArtParis-AbuDhabi was the result.



ArtParis-AbuDhabi will feature works by young artists, such as this chromometric print by Lalla Essaydi, from her 'Les Femmes du Maroc.' Courtesy Adach

“We wanted to make a committed engagement in Abu Dhabi’s cultural marketing strategy and to play a fundamental role right from the beginning in establishing the emirate as a pioneering cultural hub within the Middle East and the Arab world,” Ms Lacoste said in a written statement.

Mr Luqman, however, said the partnership was “more political than for the sake of art” and that it would be at least 20 years before the cultural benefits of such an exhibition would be apparent.

ArtParis-AbuDhabi and the cultural project on Saadiyat Island were both investments in youth, he said. By developing an admiration and appreciation for art, it would be today’s young people who would create the change needed to turn Abu Dhabi into a cultural hub.

“Everything is good about educating people about art; every little bit helps,” he said.

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