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Las Vegas Resorts Woo Jet Set With \$60 Million in Public Art

By Katya Kazakina - Mar 12, 2008

March 12 (Bloomberg) -- Two hotel and casino operators plan to put Las Vegas on the cultural map by displaying contemporary sculptures and installations, including [Maya Lin](#)'s 120-foot silver cast of the Colorado River, in their new resorts.

The goal is to lure art lovers, not the sneakers- and T-shirt-set who stay in cheap hotels and gamble at the 25-cent slot machines.

"This is an international visitor who is well-traveled, well-read and who is coming not for the gambling experience," Michele Quinn, MGM Mirage's curatorial adviser, said in an interview after MGM announced Monday it will display \$40 million worth of art in public spaces throughout its \$8 billion, 76-acre resort complex set to open on the Strip in 2009.

Fontainebleau Las Vegas will outfit its new 63-story casino-hotel on the Strip's north end with up to \$20 million in contemporary art by the end of next year, [Glenn Schaeffer](#), Fontainebleau Resorts chief executive officer, said in an interview on Monday.

New York-based art adviser Mark Fletcher doesn't think a few sculptures will be enough to draw the jet set to MGM's project.

"This project seems conceived to appeal to the existing and largely local tourist base, not an international art contingency," he said.

Lobby Art

MGM, the world's second-largest casino company, is acquiring or commissioning works by 15 artists, including [Frank Stella](#), [Henry Moore](#), Nancy Rubins, [Jenny Holzer](#) and Isa Genzken.

Lin, best known for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, will create her piece for the reception area of MGM's gaming resort.

Outside the same building, conceptual artist Holzer will create a 250- to 300-foot-long light-emitting diode (L.E.D.) sign streaming her signature truisms.

The MGM project, called CityCenter, will contain hotels, luxury residences and entertainment venues designed by architects such as [Norman Foster](#), [Rafael Vinoly](#) and [Daniel Libeskind](#).

Visitors in the lobby of the Fontainebleu will see work by James Turrell, who is known for his light installations. [Ai Weiwei](#), a leading contemporary Chinese artist, is creating a chandelier for the casino. Another eight artists will create works exploring light and space.

Better Offer

"You've got to have that 'wow' element," said Schaeffer, who is also renovating the Fontainebleau Miami Beach resort in Florida. "These are theatrical buildings. To get people from everywhere to come here, we better offer them something they can't get at home."

Las Vegas, though, hasn't forged a strong track record as a cultural destination.

Guggenheim Las Vegas, designed by [Rem Koolhaas](#) at the Venetian hotel to show large-scale contemporary sculpture and installations, closed in January 2003 after only one exhibition. The museum's second space at the Venetian remains open in collaboration with St. Petersburg's Hermitage museum.

Marc and Andrea Glimcher of New York's blue-chip [PaceWildenstein](#) gallery ran the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art for six years in the Bellagio hotel, which is owned by MGM. The gallery said it ended the association in January when the lease came up for renewal. Quinn now manages the space.

Las Vegas has steadily transformed itself into a high-end destination for dining, shopping and entertaining. Name-brand chefs including Todd English and Charlie Palmer have established outposts. Shops within hotels include the likes of Gucci and Prada. Broadway is represented with "Phantom of the Opera" and other abbreviated shows.

The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce sees art as a new revenue stream.

Travelers will say "I want to see the Oldenburg that's in Las Vegas," chamber spokeswoman Cara Roberts said, referring to Claes Oldenburg's collaboration with Coosje van Bruggen: a 5-ton stainless steel and fiberglass typewriter eraser outside the Mandarin Oriental hotel in MGM's CityCenter complex.

(Katya Kazakina is a reporter for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are her own.)