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The Art Market: Abu Dhabi's New Fair

ARTS: Collecting

By Georgina Adam

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Christie's owner François Pinault, artist Jeff Koons and Louvre museum director Henri Loyrette were just a few of the art world movers and shakers who flew into Abu Dhabi this week for the launch of [Abu Dhabi Art](#). The event, a "cultural platform" including an art fair, was put together at breakneck speed this summer by the Emirati authorities and continues until tomorrow. The fair counts just 50 dealers but includes heavyweights such as Gagosian, White Cube, Hauser & Wirth, L&M Arts, PaceWildenstein and Thaddaeus Ropac; for many, the prospect of selling art into museums on the multibillion-dollar Saadiyat Island project acted as a powerful magnet.



Alexander Calder's 'Ordinary' (1969) in Abu Dhabi

Compared with the previous, French-organised event, the new fair represents a quantum leap, with a stellar patrons' committee including Pinault, Koons and architect Norman Foster; the quality – and value – of the art on offer have also leapt upwards. A grouped stand features some of the blue-chip works offered last month at the Paris Fiac fair, and includes a Cézanne, a Picasso and a green-hued Warhol "Car Crash". Pace has a stunning group of 11 Calder's in its booth, including the c.1939 "Black Disc with Flags" priced at \$12m. Moving gently in the breeze outside the marble-and-gold Emirates Palace hotel, where the fair is held, is another equally large Calder, the 1969 "Ordinary", priced at a hefty \$45m.

Koons's work features on a number of stands, with his giant "Diamond (Red)" (2006) ring dominating Gagosian's stand. The gallery would not reveal the price, but it is thought to be tagged at about \$12m.



Ron Arad's 'Oh, the farmer and the cowman should be friends' (2009) in

Hong Kong

White Cube has also gone for bling, with a gold-ground Hirst butterfly painting studded with artificial diamonds (£550,000), a solid-gold sculpture by Marc Quinn moulded from his original blood head (\$3m) and a gold-ground spot painting, again by Hirst.

For most of the exhibitors, being in Abu Dhabi this week is more about the future than the present. The acquisition committee for the Guggenheim museum is still being put together, although the museum is showing a “teaser” group of paintings – Mondrian, Jasper Johns, Kandinsky and Malevich – from its collection in the hotel. But even if the galleries at the fair don’t make many sales this week, “those who are exhibiting now will be in the front row when the museums do start buying,” said the Paris dealer Patrice Trigano.

Still on the subject of gargantuan projects, next month MGM Mirage inaugurates its CityCenter in Las Vegas, which is coming in at an eye-popping \$8bn. Partly bankrolled by Dubai World (the investment arm of the Dubai government), the development includes six towers, three hotels and a Daniel Libeskind-designed shopping mall. CityCenter has bought a lot of art, spending some \$40m on a public programme including works by Jenny Holzer, Claes Oldenburg, Frank Stella, Henry Moore and Richard Long. The project will also have a commercial art gallery created by Michele Quinn, the ex-Christie’s specialist, and opening on December 4. Richard Long, for instance, has been commissioned to make two 80ft x 50ft wall mud drawings, entitled “Circle of Life and Earth”, and the gallery will be selling “Untitled” Long prints at \$4,500.

This week, a benefit evening co-chaired by collector Eli Broad, dealer Larry Gagosian and collector Dasha Zhukova attracted film stars, art world luminaries and fashionistas to the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art for its 30th anniversary celebrations. It raised \$4m for the museum, which was rescued from financial meltdown earlier this year by Broad. One highlight was a performance by Lady Gaga, of “The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again”, in which she played a Hirst-designed pink Steinway decorated with turquoise butterflies, while the Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli embroidered by her side.



Afterwards, Gagosian kept up his support of Damien Hirst by buying the piano at auction, paying \$450,000 for it, and all in a good cause.

Lady Gaga performs on a Damien Hirst-decorated piano in Los Angeles

London dealer Ben Brown inaugurates two new galleries in Hong Kong on Wednesday. One features the designer Ron Arad in a “pop-up” space in the International Finance Centre; in the other, just minutes away in an old colonial building, Brown will show works by international artists – Warhol, Hirst, Basquiat, Gursky and so on. “Hong Kong has a lot of galleries showcasing contemporary Chinese art but there is a dearth of places to see international artists; I want to fill that gap,” he adds.

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