

Casino handed artistic legacy

New York-based dealer turns over operation of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, but partnership with Boston museum will remain in force

By *Kristen Peterson*
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Richard Brian

During a preview of the exhibition “American Modernism” Thursday at the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, a member of the media listens to audio while viewing “Deer’s Skull with Pedernal,” a painting by Georgia O’Keeffe. The show — featuring paintings by 17 artists — opens to the public today.

The New York art dealers who brought Monet, Warhol, Calder and Cezanne to Las Vegas are giving up the desert, but will leave a legacy that opened doors for the little gallery on the Strip.

PaceWildenstein turned the art world on its ear with a controversial partnership between the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

After six years, it handed the Bellagio gallery over to MGM Mirage in January, but the change won't affect the gallery's partnership with the Boston museum.

"For us it was more about the visibility of reaching a wider audience," says Katie Getchell, deputy director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, who was at the Bellagio this week for the installation of "American Modernism," a traveling exhibit of paintings by 17 artists that opens today.

The paintings arrived in Las Vegas just last week, and the MGM Mirage staff is still working out the quirks of running the gallery.

As for future exhibits, Getchell says, "we don't have any specific plans, but we have ideas in the works."

MGM Mirage curatorial adviser Michele Quinn and gallery manager Tarissa Tiberti also have a few ideas.

Quinn, a Las Vegas native who worked for Christie's and Brooke Alexander Editions in New York before returning to Las Vegas to run the now-defunct Godt-Cleary Projects, has her long list of contacts and is building relationships with other museums, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

"I have a big wish list," she says. "An abstract expressionist show could be phenomenal. We're just trying to cast a wide net out to museums. Trying to bridge relationships with appropriate people. We have an opportunity to reach such a cross-section of people."

That was part of the appeal for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

A lot of critics still are harrumphing over the lucrative and controversial partnership between the Boston museum and PaperBall, the PaceWildenstein subsidiary that ran the gallery. The deal brought 21 Monet paintings to the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Arts for a high but undisclosed price.

The art world screamed. Critics damned the museum for having the audacity to sully the "sacred" borrowing and lending relationships among nonprofit museums. They were contemptuous of the very idea that the museum would strike a deal with lowbrow Las Vegas.

In the end it was a slick little coup for the Bellagio gallery, which drew 450,000 visitors during the 16 months it exhibited "Claude Monet: Masterworks from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston."

That show was followed by another Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, exhibit: "The Impressionist Landscape from Corot to Van Gogh," a collection of 19th-century French painting.

Quinn says other museums are showing an interest in sending exhibits to the Bellagio. The gallery also plans to reach out to locals by increasing memberships and holding special events for the community, something PaceWildenstein's subsidiary wasn't able to do from New York.

So it's goodbye for now to Andrea and Mark Glimcher of PaceWildenstein, who burst onto the scene in 2002 with the Calder exhibit and more recently brought in an Ansel Adams show from the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona. Their final show, "In the Master's Hands: Picasso's Ceramics," brought Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, grandson of the artist, to town. His arrival had some so giddy that Mayor Oscar Goodman proclaimed July 27, 2007, "Bernard Ruiz-Picasso Day."

"It's something we knew would come to an end," Andrea Glimcher says. "We just didn't know when. We represent 50 artists and estates and we opened a third gallery in Chelsea. There's no way we could devote the time and attention that the gallery needs in Las Vegas."

(Editor's note: The caption in the photo in this story has been corrected. The original had the wrong name of the painting.)