

The Worth of Art

The Future of the Art Market in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The news of the record setting sale price "Message / Messenger" -an Art piece of by Saudi Contemporary Artist Abdunasser Gharem- at the 2010 auction by Christie's, Dubai by U.S. \$ 842,500, caused a huge sensation in economic ,cultural and even social circles in Saudi Arabia.

This sale raised many questions about the cause of this current interest in contemporary art in the region, today, with the rising economic power of Gulf States and with the rapidly increasing number of Muslims globally and the changing demographics in some Western countries as a result of migration, along with the belief of continued Western political and economic domination. We in a midst of transformation of the open Art market through the trade, trying to survive and maintain our Saudi identity while participating in a competitive Western dominated open market through the trade of Art. It has been hard for some Artists to survive as a unique identity while taking advantage of this developing art market or even the strong local economy.

This research discusses all that through the role played by today's auction houses, dealers, and galleries owners in the Arabian Gulf and the way some Artists try to avoid the drive to raise the prices of art work artificially with the aim of local instructions to eventually controlling the local art scene and the promotion of a specific style or model under the principle of (supply and demand) or (this is the art market).

Keywords; Art, Contemporary, Saudi Arabia, Art Market, Middle Eastern Art, Arabian Gulf.

Introduction

Benhamou-Huet, in her book *The Worth of Art* says "It is the money fetched by those Paintings and not the paintings themselves, that made Art news in a big way, Art is too elitist to excite the global village, but the money made by Art can" [1]. This is exactly what happened with Saudi artist Abdunasser Gharem.¹ Gharem is the recipient of several local awards and has had several international exhibitions [2]. However, it was the sale price of his work that brought him into the public spotlight. At a Christie's² auction in Dubai in 2011, his work *Message/Messenger* (Figure 1) sold for USD 842,500, this after an

initial appraisal of USD 70,000 to USD 100,000 [3].

This price is a record for the works of Arab artists in general and Saudi artists in particular and it triggered a huge stir in economic circles interested in arts and culture, as well as in social circles. However, this news was a distress call requiring us to move decisively and to initiate an acceleration of visual cultural growth [4] before we are steered by the international art trade and market, whose ideological direction may not fit or reflect our local culture. knowing that Gharem's work was within a collection presented by Christie's Auction House in Dubai in 2011, through which it achieved a record in the sales of contemporary Middle Eastern (Arabic, Iranian and Turkish) arts, with an aggregate value approximating USD 8 million, knowing that six of the works were from the Edge of Arabia's collection, by a group of Saudi artists and other Arab residents in Saudi

¹ Abdunasser Gharem is a young Saudi artist, born in the city of Abha in 1973, who obtained several national and international awards and participated in art events such as Sharjah Biennial 2006 and Venice Biennial 2009 and 2011.

² Christie's is one of the most famous international houses, with several branches around the world, such as in Dubai, whose branch opened in 2006.

established in 2003 [5] and whose members change from show to show.

Basis of the research

We are currently witnessing the rise of a prosperous Middle Eastern contemporary art trade. This art trade depends on artists, the producers of the artwork; owners, who purchase the work; brokers, who appraise the work and contribute toward the work's financial value (which usually takes priority over the work's artistic value); appraisers; marketers; art gallery owners; and so forth, each with a completely

different set of functions. This start of the art market in the Middle East has attracted others with the use of the title; Contemporary Islamic art, during a decade when certain marketers and researchers were intent on the ideological classification of commercial and political objectives. Jessica Winegar [6] interprets the increase in U.S. interest in contemporary art from the Middle East as a cultural impact of September 11, 2001, although the works of Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States, for example, may be directed by an ideology attributed to their environment.



Figure 1.

Abdulnasser Gharem, *Message/Messenger*, 2010
<http://abdulnassergharem.com>

A question that may be raised by those who would control the direction of the art market is why there is such demand for the works of artists from the Middle East—particularly Iran, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria—and even the works of countries of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) artists [7], especially since the experience of GCC artists is not comparable with that of artists in other Middle East

countries. Is this phenomenon a reflection of the economic growth the GCC enjoys, with the same market potential market as contemporary art in China, which has turned the balance of the art trade upside down during the last 10 years? Fraser [5] emphasizes the interest in the gulf in his interpretation of the continued existence of Christie's auction house in Dubai as being due to sales between 2006 and 2011, which may

have been the motive to attract other auction houses to a place that had not been previously exploited, with a promising future in the visual arts investment market.

There is no doubt that the prosperity of contemporary art is a cultural requirement to launch the art trade in the Middle East; however, the problem is that commercial entities are controlling its direction through the art market on which it is based, to the point where the price of a work, regardless of its artistic value, indicates an artist's success or failure. This trend clearly harms the visual arts [1], in that it contributes to the dissemination of artwork conforming to Western tastes, following the same false slogan as for the most important artistic centers, such as New York and London: "This is the market demand." This trend has also led certain artists to copy specific artistic subjects/methods just to market their work, especially in wake of the local sales slump faced by their art brokers (if professional brokers exist in Saudi as an example). This recessive period is due to the approach of public support for the fine arts over the past five decades, which—if once appropriate during the art trade's beginning days—are no longer suitable for the decade of artistic revolution in the Middle East.

Any fearful mindset in the arts is the result of the historical transformation of power in the fine arts scene, from the arts' academic impact to the role of the artists who contributed in shaping the schools of Art in the past. Today it is the collectors, marketers, and appraisers of artistic works who identify current art trends. Note, for example, the influence of Charles Saatchi on the Young British Artists, or YBAs; however, Saatchi considers that their role cancels such a complete mandate of the public sector in controlling the direction of art [8].

On the other hand, Spranzi, in his book *Economics of Arts* [9], argues that the economist must be interested in the arts for three reasons: First, this field is supposed to satisfy the economic need for one of the most valuable

consumables, so one must understand the nature of such a product to market it. The second reason is that for art to grow, a transformational work environment must be available, by the artist and by the owner, and such an environment must be managed so that it does not adversely affect visual culture. Accordingly, it is important for the economist to be familiar with this field and be fully aware of its foundations so that his role in this transformational process will be a positive one. The third reason is that the economist must be aware of the problems, or quality, of the artistic work, not just in terms of its cultural and intellectual concepts, but also its industrial and technical concepts.

If one assumes that the economy is the most important factor in cultural movement and growth and, further, that the arts form the visual aspect, as well as a documentary, of such cultures—whether architecture, visual arts, or advanced functionality arts, or otherwise—and given the economic crisis that has prevailed in the few past years in several countries, the art of the GCC countries—which have been experiencing an economic boom due to the increased price of oil—is expected to reflect these conditions, with increased numbers of acquirers of artwork from the GCC for investment or other reasons. One can have the same impact today on the state of the visual arts and at the same time prevent the arts from becoming a slave of marketing, so that it can remain a cultural product that represents local identity.

Here, the problem of research is based on the importance of the activation of the art market, without affecting the shape and image of the product adversary, through displaying an overview of its history, the problem and suggesting solutions, to emphasize the identity of contemporary art in the GCC countries in general and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular. Accordingly, the hypothesis of this research is the following:

We can support local contemporary art without affecting the sincerity of its statement and develop it, transitioning from a traditional to a contemporary model, without directing it to serve Western political or ideological models.

This research is important because it addresses this possibility by attempting to develop strategic priorities, using the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as an example. The study emphasizes the role of the public sector, represented by the Ministry of Culture and Information, in ensuring the identity of Saudi contemporary art, finding marketing venues, and culturally sustaining it as a local economic product.

Accordingly, this research aims to do the following:

1. Identify contemporary art, the art market, and the art trade based on empirical data.
2. Summarize the state of art sales in the world today, using China as an example.
3. Examine the relation between the local Saudi market and the international art market and art trade in general.
4. Make recommendations to protect this trade and encourage the market.

Art, contemporary art, the art market, and the art trade

Without going into the linguistic and detailed definitions of art terminology used by artists and others in the field, one should remember that contemporary art is a reaction to the new arts of the postmodern period, when such intellectual trends were exaggerated by their separation from familiar customs and forms. Contemporary arts has now returned to tradition and culture; however, due to globalization, such works have become acceptable as a result of using new techniques and methods, by either mixing so-called Western art with local art or using local subjects and icons [10]. The term *art market* is considered a foreign concept in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia in particular. It involves the commercial exchange in which the demand and supply of artistic works are provided for and the currency by which the value of the artistic works is being economically evaluated [1]—in

other words, a “trade for non-priced items,” as ironically defined by Horowitz [11]. The *art market* is also one of the aspects of consumption in the postmodern communities, and one of the market fundamentals is the widespread cultural and economic growth of developed countries, where the acquisition of artwork has become a social phenomenon. Further, the acquisition of artwork is no longer motivated by admiration of the artistic work itself but, rather, is carried out for investment reasons or the acquirer’s desire to be part of a specific social and cultural circle. The problem is that such trend has a negative impact on the art market [1].

The history of acquiring artistic works dates back to the Renaissance, when nobles, the wealthy, and the church supported artists in return for their services. None of the artists of the time were famous, except those under such patronage. As Vasari [13] describes, artists at the time would compete for such opportunities. Perhaps this period marks the beginning of interest in art based on its financial value instead of its artistic value [12].

The concept of art as an investment may have been shaped in the United States after World War II, when the idea of investing in American arts was supported by government and businessmen. This initiated an investment movement of acquiring artwork for their investment or sale value, and not merely to collect them [7]. Benhamou-Huet [1] notes that the art market is the result of what can be called a small revolution dating back to the 1990s, when the investors and owners of U.K. and U.S. auction houses—the most famous of which are Sotheby’s and Christie’s—sought to expand the cycle of the art trade and attract new individuals and wealth to the market. Since then, a new relationship with art was formed and new rules for such a relationship were developed, with money as the ultimate aim, regardless of the effect of that on rules of art in identifying the aesthetics of this field [1], which was preceded in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States by a trend of investors and acquirers reviving interest in historical artworks by increasing their prices. This behavior increased the market’s growth

prior to the art world's support shifting in the 1990s to contemporary art.

The market is also supported by another aspect: the media. The media's function precedes an artwork's sale by publishing articles on subjects relating to such art. This role continues even after the auction sale of the art, as an echo of the process itself. Such echoes, however, do not involve the work so much as its sale price [1], which has made the art market and trade an adventure for some. There is no standard against which to measure the price of art or its growth, neither for the acquirer who may fear to invest nor for the professional artist who is concerned about the stability of his income.

Art sales in the world today: The example of China

The price of artwork has increased enormously in the last 50 years, sometimes on the order of 45 times [7], whether for classical or contemporary works. This boom has made the acquisition of artistic works an investment goal of collectors, especially given the latest economic crises [14]. A typical example involves Picasso's *The Dream* (1932), acquired by Steve Wynn in 1997 for USD 48.4 million and resold to Steve Cohen for USD 88.4 million after around 10 years. However, the latter lost a great portion of the work's value when, showing it to a group of friends, he accidentally elbowed it [1].

Following the market of such art, one can observe two variables: The first is what might be called its capital, or area of growth, which moved from one city to the next over several

decades, due to several factors, among which the economy may be the most important. Moreover, it could be said that art history in the Western world—from the Renaissance in Florence, Rome, and Venice to Paris, London, and New York in the 20th century—has evolved around the emergence of various individuals (artists) and their success and maybe their sales, as well as being connected to central locations of production and commerce [15]. The second variable is the source of the work's acquisition, which revolves around showrooms and the dealers, or promoters, of the artistic work, that is, the owners of the art gallery. However, this aspect has changed, starting several decades ago, with the growth of activities, events, and forums that combine the seller, purchaser, and artist under one roof within a specified period. Its focus has shifted from showrooms as market sources to artistic events such as festivals and biennials, which started to become popular in the middle of the 2000s [16].

The most important factor in reading the art market, the value of artistic works, or acquisition trends is the sale price of artwork. Despite the fact that most sales are carried out confidentially [17], publicized sales, especially those through auctions houses, provide sufficient indicators to study the market. For example, the top 10 sales in the history of Sotheby's (Table 1) totaled USD 723 million in 2010 [18], while Christie's (Table 2) top 10 sales totaled USD 639.8 million in in the same by the end of 2010 [19].

Table 1. Best 10 auction results at Sotheby's.

Top 10 : Best auction results at sotheby's				
Rank	Artist	Hammer Price	Artwork	Sale
1	<u>Pablo PICASSO</u>	\$93 000 000	Garçon à la pipe	05/05/2004 (Sotheby's NY)
2	<u>Alberto GIACOMETTI</u>	\$92 521 600	L'homme qui marche I	02/03/2010 (Sotheby's London)
3	<u>Pablo PICASSO</u>	\$85 000 000	Dora Maar au chat	05/03/2006 (Sotheby's NY)
4	<u>Francis BACON</u>	\$77 000 000	Triptych	05/14/2008 (Sotheby's NY)
5	<u>Auguste RENOIR</u>	\$71 000 000	Au Moulin de la Galette	05/17/1990 (Sotheby's NY)
6	<u>Peter Paul RUBENS</u>	\$69 714 000	The Massacre of the Innocents	07/10/2002 (Sotheby's London)
7	<u>Mark ROTHKO</u>	\$65 000 000	White Center	05/15/2007 (Sotheby's NY)
8	<u>Amedeo MODIGLIANI</u>	\$61 500 000	Nu assis sur un divan	11/02/2010 (Sotheby's NY)
9	<u>Paul CÉZANNE</u>	\$55 000 000	Rideau, cruchon et compotier	05/10/1999 sotheby's NY
10	<u>Kasimir Sevrinovitich MALEVICH</u>	\$53 500 000	Suprematisch Composition	11/03/2008 (Sotheby's NY)

Table 2. Best 10 auction results at Christie's

Top 10: Best auction results at Christie's

Rank	Artist	Hammer Price	Artwork	Sale
1	<u>Pablo PICASSO</u>	\$95000000	Nude, Green Leaves and Bust	05/04/2010 (Christie's NEW YORK NY)
2	<u>Gustav KLIMT</u>	\$78500000	Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II	11/08/2006 (Christie's NEW YORK)
3	<u>Vincent GOGH van</u>	\$75000000	Portrait du Docteur Gachet	05/15/1990 (Christie's NEW YORK)
4	<u>Claude MONET</u>	\$71846600	Le bassin aux nymphéas	06/24/2008 (Christie's LONDON)
5	<u>Vincent GOGH van</u>	\$65000000	Portrait de l'artiste sans barbe (1889)	11/19/1998 (Christie's NEW YORK)
6	<u>Andy WARHOL</u>	\$64000000	Green Car Crash (Green Burning Car I)	05/16/2007 (Christie's NEW YORK)
7	<u>Pablo PICASSO</u>	\$50000000	Femme aux bras croisés	11/08/2000 (Christie's , New York)
8	<u>Alberto GIACOMETTI</u>	\$47500000	Grande tête mince (1954)	05/04/2010 (Christie's NEW YORK)
9	<u>Amedeo MODIGLIANI</u>	\$46650450	Tête (c.1910-1912)	06/14/2010 (Christie's PARIS)
10	<u>Francis BACON</u>	\$46297350	"Untitled" (1974/77)	02/06/2008 (Christie's LONDON)

It is natural that Sotheby's and Christie's, pioneers of the sales of artistic works, be located in Europe, which, until 1950, ruled the art market, whether through its artists or house or gallery sales. Between 1950 and 1990, the trade or market of art was between Europe and the United States, but by 2010 contemporary art consisted of 38% sales in the United States, 30% in Europe, and 29% in Asia [20]. However, if we calculate revenues from 2007 to 2010, other statistics indicate that China jumped to first place [21]. In the opinion of Thierry Ehrmann, founder and chief executive officer of Artprice³, we are witnessing a transformation point in the history of the global art market: China now ranks first in revenues for auctions of contemporary arts, having taken only three years to jump from third place in 2007 to first in 2010, ahead of the United States and the United Kingdom, which had dominated the market since 1950 [21].

Chinese investor support may have played a role, since Asian auction houses supply in conformity with demand, with the percentage of artwork sales currently at 82%, while the percentage of sales in other countries does not exceed 60%. This situation raises the average

³ Artprice.com is a multi-language website that offers information on the global Art Market

price of Asian contemporary artistic work to around USD 44,000, while the average price in the rest of the world is USD 22,000 [20]. As a result, by the end of 2010 China ranked first in global sales of contemporary arts, with 33% of the market, compared to 30% for the United States, 19% for the United Kingdom, and 5% for France. Moreover, in 2010 four Chinese artists were among the top 10 artists by total auction revenues, compared to only one artist in 2009. The sales of the lowest-ranked of the four artists that year reached USD 176 million in sales centers that today include Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai among the foremost cities in the art market [21].

In the context of other Asian countries, Japan's sales of contemporary art increased from 2006 and 2010 by 325% (even if in most cases it was dependent on the sales of only three Japanese artists). Sales in Taiwan have also multiplied as a result of new collectors, with one-third of buyers at Sotheby's and Christie's in Hong Kong estimated to be Taiwanese [20].

While the jump in sales in the last 10 years of Asian works in general and Chinese works in particular have been astonishing, interest in contemporary Chinese art did not emerge suddenly during the second millennium. It began with the beginning of the 1990s with the contribution of Chinese artists at a Venice

biennial and a number of artistic events in Europe, even with limited numbers of Westerns interested in Asian work at the time [22]. However, and to this day, most Asian art collectors acquire the works of their fellow citizens [20]. This can be interpreted as a sign of the stability of the form and framework of Chinese art, as well as the active role the economy plays in any culture, since it is the most prominent factor in its dissemination. Economic events in China today have strongly impacted the dissemination of the Chinese culture and even contributed in bringing it to the attention of others, as with China's visual arts.

However Saatchi [8] considers that the growth in demand for Chinese art has nothing to do with its form but, instead, is due to its connection with China's developed market, whose Art forms and styles haven't changed much before or through the increase of supply and demand in the art market. Even with fear at the beginning of prosperity of the Chinese artistic work, due to the fact that a portion of Chinese artists do not use brokers dealers or art galleries to sell their works, where it is difficult in the concept of the art market in the West to regulate such sales or to trust the frame of price and its stability. However, the success of the Chinese experience has been proven: China has increased the supply and demand in the art market and today is the country with the strongest art trade, without conforming to the Western experience in terms of the mechanisms and system of sale [22].

The art trade and the local market in GCC countries

Prior to discussing the art trade and market in the Middle East, as well as in the GCC countries specifically, it is important to first classify the reasons for the increased U.S. and European interest in the contemporary arts of the Middle East, or so-called Islamic contemporary art, in recent years. Such interest has naturally attracted auction houses and appraisers of artistic works, based on either the cultural maturity of the works in question, economic

factors, or other reasons. Farhat [23] interprets this phenomenon by connecting it with academic study and research in universities and research centers in the West, in addition to the availability of academic scholarships, which came about after the Arabic world's resistance during previous periods of Western cultural dominance, in addition to early description by orientalist or old resources which describe the area and its arts, when they use the term (Islamic art) as if the development ends by the end of the 18th century with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and then the area falls into colonization over decades, while we witness a cultural and technological leap in the West following the Renaissance through getting back to classical concepts in Greek culture, which were developed after the French Revolution. Contemporary studies [24], [25], [26], in the field of Islamic arts address the importance of including the continuity of such arts during the 19th and 20th centuries in the timeline of Western contemporary and modern arts. Moreover, a number of Islamic art professors have made changes in the methodology of this discipline to include these periods. Certain writers, researchers, and appraisers of artistic fairs have already redefined the term *history of Islamic art* and connected it with current times, through the term *contemporary Islamic art* or *modern Islamic art*, as noted by Wegdan Ali [24], in her book *Modern Islamic Art 1997*. Nada Shabout discusses different opinions of the term as a replacement for *contemporary Arabic art* [25]. Saeb Eigner's book *Places of Contemporary Arabic Art* discusses Islamic values and subjects [26].

The term *Islamic art*, in general, is modern, given that Ali was the first to use it in print in 1997 [24]. The term today is probably repeated in the West to describe the art of religious subjects in the Islamic world or, most comprehensively, the art of such countries, the difference being that the term is an extension of recognized Islamic art or a new definition in light of September 11 and increased interest in Islam as a whole. Today, with the economic

force formed by the GCC countries and the demographic force formed by Muslims throughout the world, interest in Islamic art has begun to increase in certain Western countries, mostly due to immigration. Islamic culture has become a shadow that is connected to the works of several artists, whether residing in their countries or immigrants connected with the remains of their Islamic culture and identity. Moreover, Islamic concepts and related subjects were intentionally or unintentionally repeated. In many shows and fairs certain conceptual or contemporary works made by Middle Eastern Artists were reinterpreted according to Islamic perspectives or stereotypes. This had a significant effect in attracting visitors or ideologist media, which reminds us of what happened with (YBAs) in the 1990s, and the impact of the media that perhaps triggered a renaissance in the history of British visual arts [15].

In terms of the Middle East as an art market, it is probable that investors and art buyers have directed as they did in the Far East, through promotion of contemporary Islamic art from Iran and Iraq as a first step [8, p. 123]. Sales of art from the Middle East in general and Iran in particular began at the end of 1990s, first in modest numbers but multiplying by 10 times in under 10 years [7]. The famous art dealer Saatchi alleges that he had a role in this, just as he did with the emergence of the YBAs.

On the other hand, some see that the aftermath of 9/11 in the United States marked the beginning of American interest in discovering the contemporary Middle East [6], particularly as a culture, and the visual arts facilitate such comprehension without the need for translation. Others view the interest in the culture of the Middle East and the GCC as merely due to economic reasons, in addition to the sudden growth that led the West to invest culturally in the region. However, serious interest in contemporary arts did not emerge in the Middle East until the last four or five years, when artistic events held throughout the region concentrated on political and terrorism-related

themes [27]. Moreover, some believe that the expansion of auction houses and international art shows to include the GCC and Middle Eastern countries is a clear example of globalization, which raises the following question: Is it a means of imposing Western political and economic dominance, as certain people believe, especially in view of the popularity of the cultural art and production of the area as virgin land, since the participation of Arab artists has been ignored since the middle of the 20th century? This is also what Farhat [23] states in his article on depoliticizing contemporary Arab or Islamic art and the push of Christie's house auctions to discover such art, following certain art exhibits and shows held in the West that have correctly displayed Art from the Middle east in its historical, social, political, and artistic context. However, others borne an intellectual trend of contents and questions such as: *We (Europeans) cannot understand how you (the Arabs) can go directly from the tent to the skyscraper and from camels to six-cylinder vehicles*. This is a racist statement that conveys a sense of Western superiority and the inferior vision of the East. Moreover, some exhibitors tend to focus on presenting Arabs by promoting stereotypical images just to justify the area's exploitation for the political and economic benefit of Western governments [23].

Accordingly, we can say that the opening of Christie's auction house in Dubai has elucidated current efforts to calm the revolutionary aspects of Arabic art in certain countries, while oil wealth in the Arabian Gulf has benefited the promotion of local artists, with an attempt to politicize this art according to a trend in conformity with the Western perspective and serves its interests [23]. We can also say that at a time in which the emirate of Sharjah is seeking to preserve local identification through its most famous museums and regional biennial, we can also find investment openings in the emirate of Dubai that have attracted several sellers, marketers, and appraisers of artistic works to become a branch of sources whose previous headquarters were in Europe!

When we compare the situation in other Arabic countries according to Winegar's [28] vision in her research related to art in Egypt, where the private sector of the art market emerged during the colonization period, the difference in trends between the private and public sectors is reversed. It is as if Egypt had suffered from the consequences of colonization until the rule of Abdullnaser, who turned the balance of culture upside down, to reveal manifestations of communism in the works of artists under the trend of the public sector after it was a Western trend driven by the residing foreigner investor in the era of King Farouq. The interference of the state in directing arts is not an Middle Eastern product there are several examples, some of which are positive in certain stages, especially supporting art sales, accordingly, providing income opportunities for practicing artists and the same might transfer to a negative impact in other stage. In the first half of the 20th century, the American Federal Project played a large role in initiating the sales of arts and providing sales opportunities to artists; however, its negative role was revealed only after its termination in the 1940s [29], when American art, thanks to this and other several factors, was finally open to free expression, leading to the emergence of the abstract expressionist school, for example.

By referring to the Egyptian experience, the fading impact of communism, and its transformation into a capitalist economy, the follower of fine arts since 2000 can sense a return of the effect of the foreigner investment, but this time by a reverse manner on works of Egyptian artists who wanted to be contemporary in the global concept, by copying Western styles that interest Western investors. Is this a new type of colonization? This is the question raised by certain Egyptian youth today [28]. Hence, opening up to global investment if not directed by the public sector or without the penetration of this sector might be forced to be a copy of a Western trend, that is not truly an expression of the local culture or change its direction to reflect a specific ideology or an economic policy that does not consider the importance of authenticity or identity in cultural work as much as the financial revenue from the dissemination of such culture.

In light of this global trend to revive investment in the visual arts in the Arabian Gulf as the (wealthy) part of the Middle East, do we have the right to say that we are ready for a global art market? GCC countries especially became a global destination in the arts by sponsoring cultural institutions: As in the United Arab Emirates, Sharjah, for example, interest was cultivated through art museums and the Sharjah Biennial. Dubai applied the concept of tourism, including cultural tourism, and witnessed the opening of Christie's house in May 2006, a new era of contemporary and modern Arabic art [23], and the start of the art trade and market in the region. This start was very encouraging, with sales reaching USD 8.4 million, in addition to its role in granting "legitimacy" to regional artists. Dubai also opened the domain to several showrooms, as well as an annual art festival (Art Dubai) that began in 2007 [28]. Abu Dhabi on another hand wants to classify itself among today's cultural capitals with a huge project to be open in 2020, Al Saadiat island will introduce 5 museums, among them are branches -in cooperation with the museums-of the Louvre and Guggenheim. Work on the project began in 2007 and is expected to be finalized in 2012, with aggregate costs of the project exceeding USD 100 billion, adding to the country's efforts and interest in cultural activities [27].

As for Qatar, it has already started in the field of modern museums of unique architectural design. In 2008, it opened the famous Museum of Islamic Arts (MIA), with its unique Islamic contemporary design [30], followed by the Modern and Contemporary Arts Museum (Mathaf), the first museum to specialize in modern and contemporary art of the GCC countries. This museum combines the works of elite Arab artists with famous 20th century works, such as Cezanne's *The Card Player*, acquired by Qatar for the record-breaking price of USD 250 million [31]. However, prior to such transformations in the visual arts in those countries, there a preparation period, establishing academics or art schools that graduate artist to be ready for such a market. Whether in Qatar or in the United Arab Emirates, not only did they follow the Western model of teaching in those schools, but also opened branches of Western universities in its cities, such as Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha. Further, investment increased in the GCC countries and new names prevailed among acquirers of artworks. The journal *Canvas* [32]

and other suitable publications emerged to fulfill market requirements and highlighted the role of acquirers and investors in several issues on and interviews of “young collectors”.

The situation in Saudi Arabia

Whereas a successful art trade depends on the existence of the artist, the artistic work, and the acquirer under a structure that regulates the process of transferring the artistic work within a specific culture, combined with the community as a whole (Figure 2), there is no doubt that the

economy is the driving factor in many social and cultural matters, as sometime supporter and guide. Art is not far from an economic transformation, but what happened in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and during the first economic boom is that a religious caution was made against the arts, which delayed visual cultural growth, on the other hand cities witnessed huge scales of architectural growth, although a development is inseparable in a (normal) society.

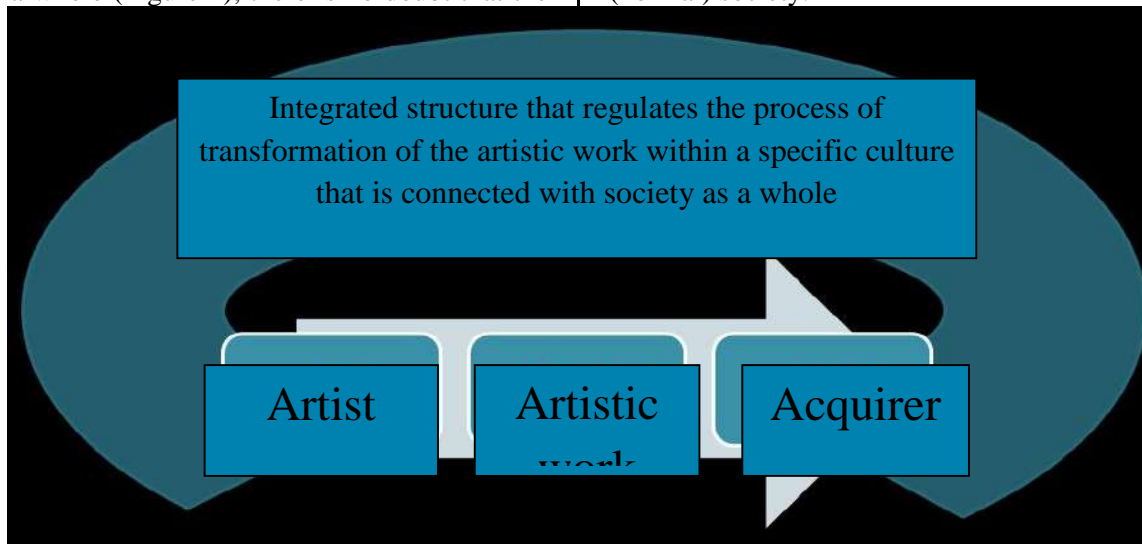


Figure 2 The process of transformation of the art work.

However such problems of not absorbing the concept of arts have obstructed its natural growth, moreover, having only art education departments in local universities to graduate art teachers, with the absence of art academies or departments of fine arts or history of art for a long period, (till today for males) has had its impact on today's art scene. Such absence of formal art teaching is clear today in the type and quality of visual arts products, in addition to the negative role in the past either by the media or youth clubs and centers, not to forget the poor art curriculum in the educational system, with the absence of specialized learning opportunities of training and communicating in this field. We must not forget the inferior vision of a society who could not find a place in the visual arts for certain social classes, especially when we compare them with linguistic arts inherited and appraised by Arabs for hundreds of years [33].

Artists in Saudi have suffered by what is *Halal* and what is *Haram* in their practice, even if some of what was prohibited is now practiced

freely due to the re-interpretations by Islamic clerks, or due to the changes in art itself, for its current trend toward conceptualization and abstract. However, by referring to the concept of Islamic art and rewriting it, as well as attempting to raise awareness of the term *contemporary Islamic art*, we can see that Islamic religion—as well as its role as inspirer, subject, and technique in contemporary work—is no longer an obstacle. This is not to forget that today's artist has come to ignore such strict religious values for the purpose of innovation, while others have been able to combine both into a form of contemporary Islamic art.

However, cultural changes in Saudi visual arts in terms of practice, themes, form, and even content, has been affected by the commercial jump and growth in the market for the works of Middle Eastern artists and the increasing numbers of artwork collectors from the Arabic Gulf who want to support their artists, on one hand, and invest in a growing market, on the other. Also the participation of a number of

Saudi artists in the artistic events of neighboring countries, Sharjah Biennial among the most important venues, which presents regional artists, such as Abdunnasser Gharem, to Westerners. Gharem participated for the first time at the Eighth Biennial in 2007 [2], with his colleague Ahmad Mater, the two by the assistant of the British Stephen Stabelton, began a new art group called *Edge of Arabia* [34], currently the most representative presence outside the government's patronage of Saudi contemporary art outside Saudi Arabia.

Edge of Arabia's collection provides an example of Saudi contemporary art of local and Islamic origins, in a global form that can fit in the Western taste in Art. Edge of Arabia was an

idea generated by the British Stephen Stabelton and the two Saudis Abdunnasser Gharem and Ahmad Mater in the southern region of *Aseer*, in Al Meftaha village specifically in 2003; its actual beginnings took place after five years of working through an exhibit in London University's School of Oriental and African Studies in October 2008. This period was followed by the first participation of Saudi artists at the 53rd Venice Biennial in 2009, a several exhibits around of world capitals—such as Berlin, Istanbul, and Dubai, the Sharjah Biennial—and then the 54th Venice Biennial in 2011 [35] and a continuous presence in many international events up until this writing (Figure 3).

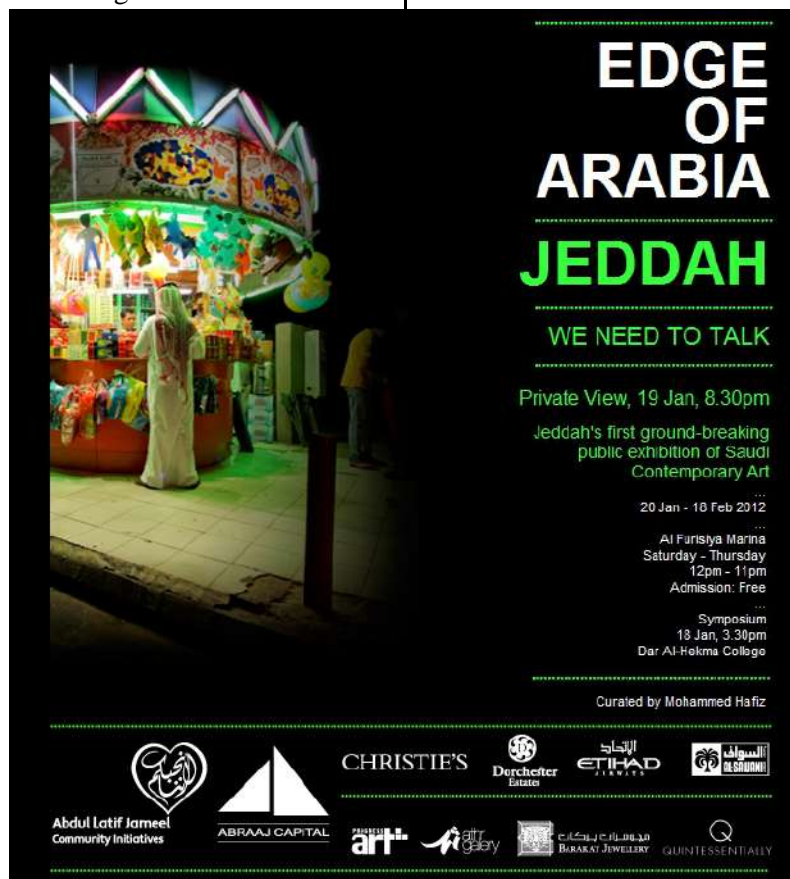


Figure 3. Announcement for the first show of the Desert Edge collection in Saudi Arabia/Jeddah.

Edge of Arabia identifies itself as a Saudi group, although it is a part of a non-profit organization registered in England, with only an English website! Additionally, it has gained support from several entities in the private and public sectors of Saudi Arabia due to their eagerness to disseminate contemporary Saudi art into the global culture. Recently, the group required young artists —wishing to be part of the

group— to be fluent in English in order to enroll and be excepted [36]. It seems that it was aware early on of the importance of grasping the language of the audience mostly important for the group.

Edge of Arabia is a good example of a Saudi contemporary art group or organization that has served the demand for Saudi art work, and helped increase production by finding talents

and exposing them to training and exhibiting opportunities, especially in past 2 or 3 years. One may attend Art Dubai as an example, and if you bump into a dealer or gallery owner and he knows you are Saudi, he will ask whether you are an artist. If your answer is no, he will then ask whether you know any Saudi artists [37], which raises a dilemma, which is that this boom in the field of arts will resemble our economic boom during the 1970s, as previously mentioned. However, we have trends in arts: a contemporary trend that is suitable for export, in light of our community's reluctance to accept contemporary arts, and a local trend, in conformity with current society's culture. Further, we are now confronted by another challenge: When artwork is produced in Saudi Arabia and sold in Dubai through a British broker, even if the revenue is generally good

both economically and culturally, it still affects the form of culture, since it controls art trends according to the marketer's taste. Different criticisms have been directed against a number of Saudi artists who presented in Arab and international cities, because their works were interpreted by some as ideological or subject to the marketing stream previously explained. Examples include the works of Ahmad Mater (Figure 4) and Hafiz Qaswarah and Raneem Farisi (Figures 5 and 6), while the most criticized works have been those of Abdulaziz Al Qahtani—a Saudi Arabian artist based in London—in his first exhibition, "An Intimate Geography" which shocked Saudi society with pictures showing the contradiction between traditional thinking and total openness, in a way that is not usual among Saudis (Figure 7).

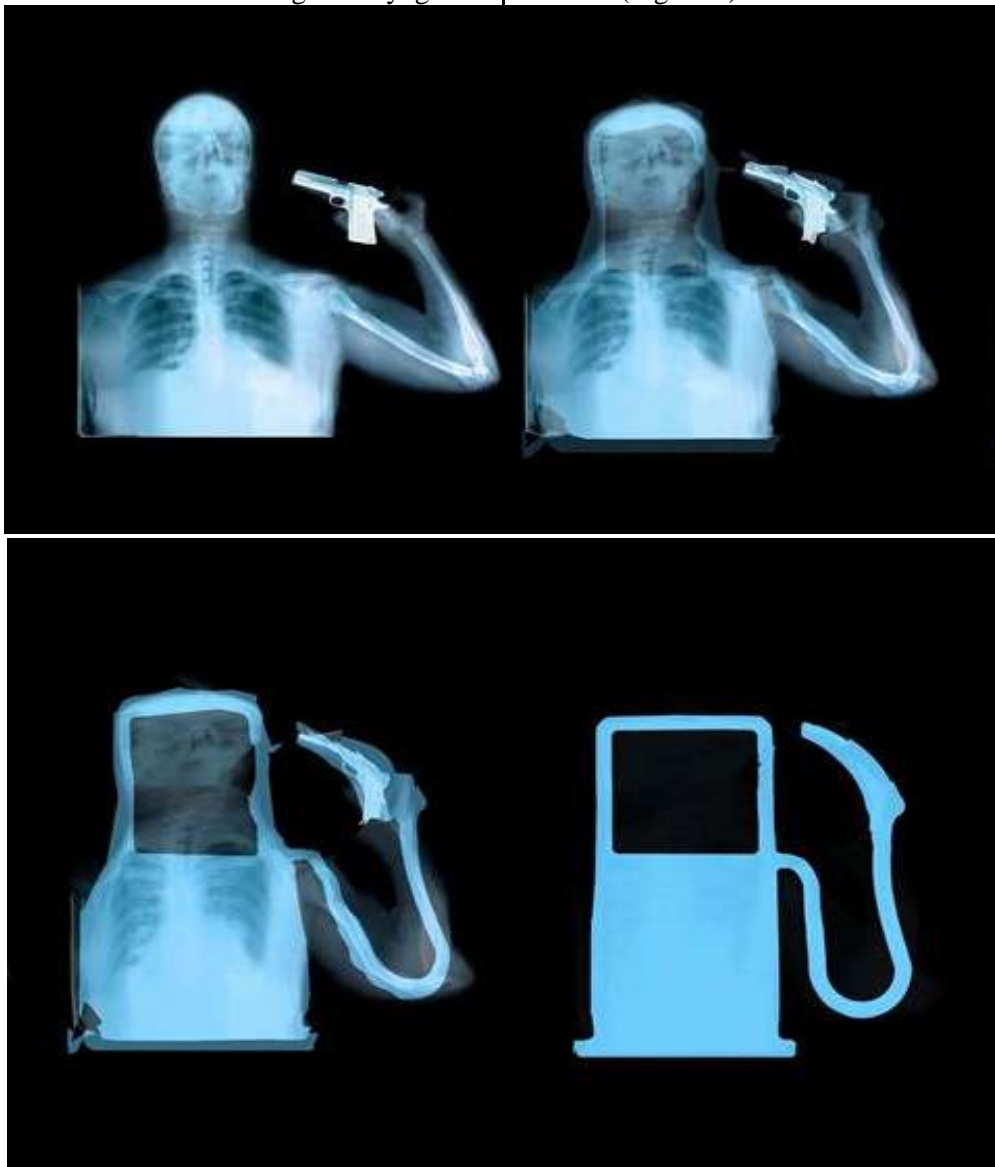


Figure 4. Ahmad Mater, 2010.



Figure 5. Hafiz Qaswarah and Raneem Farisi, *Blink* 2011-<http://www.reuters.com>



Figure 6. Hafiz Qaswarah and Raneem Farisi, *Blink* 2011-<http://www.reuters.com>



Figure 7. A group of art work by Abdullah al Shehri in London, 2011, <http://www.yabdo.com>

Therefore, continuing sales of Saudi art happening in other countries by foreign brokers, dealers or galleries, is a loss, that the Saudi market might have had a piece of this cake in, and to have a role to open such ports locally, however, it is not possible to do so without constructing the infrastructure of this market upon which a number of entities are dependent.

The idea of state patronage of the visual arts is not new, as previously mentioned, and the American Federal Art project was a model of such. Its role was a positive one until the private sector took over this duty and. For some, the liberation of the arts can help innovative production in the arts, while for others it might help politicization and ideological to the benefit of another sector [29]. Hence, it is important for any project to become a sponsor of the arts to protect the artist and the investor, without destroying culture or identity. A number of matters should therefore be considered, the most important being an emphasis on authenticity and identity in the artistic works sponsored, along with a consideration of the society's cultural and ethnic diversity among artists from different areas of the country, and the management of activities to accommodate such diversity and change, which can result in authentic works [38].

Hence, to build an infrastructure for the art trade and market, the number of concerned entities must be regulated such that each one plays a role. The Ministry of Higher Education is one of the most important of these entities and bears the responsibility of developing this infrastructure. Studying the arts in Saudi universities depended for a long time on only departments of art education, while opening colleges for Art & Design only began 2010, for girls only. The absence of sufficient colleges, departments, and institutes in the fine and visual arts, with secondary and supportive majors such as Art Management, History, Criticism and theory, as well as Exhibit Design, Museum Management and so forth, is still an obstacle, that the Ministry hasn't tried to overcome by offering such opportunities in scholarship abroad in such majors, as part of the countries scholarships program that sends thousands of

students every year [39]. The infrastructure will suffer the absence of specialized education, which will ultimately affect the quality of product.

Hence, the Ministry shall bear the responsibility of opening schools to prepare qualified graduates to work within this market, whether as an artist or working in the management of activities or the marketing artistic works. The role of the Ministry of Higher Education includes revising the curriculum to add support for the dissemination of the culture of visual arts, as in art history curricula in general or the history of the Islamic art in particular. This may help to instill awareness in upcoming generations of the value and importance of the arts.

A number of entities—such as the Ministry of Commerce, Saudi General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority, city municipalities, and other entities responsible for planning—shall be responsible for all matters related to establishing different cultural (Art) centers—such as art museums, whether ancient, Islamic, modern, or contemporary—in addition to regulating the market, issuing the necessary licenses, and encouraging the acquisition of local artistic works to decorate offices, as well as promoting interest in art in public locations, for example. Additionally, we cannot forget other entities and their role, such the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its competitions, which benefit by obtaining artwork to decorate its embassies abroad. However, it seems that its embassy selections tend to display the traditional style of Saudi Art and give visitors the impression of a traditional local culture. Finally, the private sector and non-profit cultural institutions play a strong role with exhibits, sponsorship of artists, and marketing artwork, but it will not have a significant impact unless the local market is ready for them.

Opening up to an art market will help economic development by providing several work opportunities, especially with the increased unemployment among Saudis [40], whether in museums of modern and contemporary art or the cultural centers, media or tourism, as Artists, in galleries, or agencies. The infrastructure of this market requires specialists—such as appraisers, specialized writers, gallery supervisors, curators, administrators, and specialized lawyers—who are not currently available in Saudi Arabia, and those who are

acting in the position have only limited amateur skills. Therefore we must attract more investments that benefit the artist first and the citizen next by providing job opportunities related to the arts, as well as the local economy in general. Additionally, we can create such a civilization that is suited to our economic and academic strengths.

As such, the importance of studying the situation in the Arabic Gulf becomes clear within the global art market. However, in light of an infrastructure for the art market and trade in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to protect artistic works and artists from the global market—which can have a negative impact on artistic work, encouraging a specific ideology—the following section, presents a number of suggestions to protect this trade and to sponsor an art market that will first benefit the artist.

The Role of the Ministry of Culture and Information in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Example

Followers of visual art activity in Saudi Arabia during the last five years may have noticed that the visual arts are growing rapidly among some artists, while other growing so slowly among others, they appear to be frozen in some cases, with resistance to even trying to change. Hence, followers of Saudi Art will face reversal trends in the Art work; it is also possible to distinguish between events organized by the public sector and by the private sector, which allows one to describe Saudi art as

Traditional art that still follows the arts of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe and the United States, along with maintaining the characteristics of certain Western art schools through local themes, in addition to certain artists' shy attempts at coming up with individual techniques[36].

This description shall apply to art exhibits and competitions in the public sector, in which a number of traditional artists participate, while the following description shall apply to works

presented at international events by foreigners or local brokers mostly from the private sector:

Contemporary artwork, following global trends used today, simulate the techniques of Western contemporary artists, while some artists produce art work that fits the serotype of the Western view of Middle Easterners, others re-present local themes by showing their local culture in their own technique that is in conformity with the global contemporary form of art [36].

The first type of artwork is proper for local consumption, while the second is allocated for export. This differentiation shall indicate that our culture in the field of visual arts is too late due to our economic development and other cultural aspects; hence we are still catching up in field of art, while trying to experience global growth when the audience or the recipient changes, as if we were offering a work of art in Arabic but doing other work in a foreign language to be understood by others to suit their artistic sense or visual art culture [36].

While the Ministry of Culture and Information has been very important in supporting the cultural movement, it is late in supporting the new concepts of contemporary art due to its maintenance of the traditional image of Saudi fine art, which has played a big role in the cultural gap between the contemporary and the traditional in our visual arts. Further, it was not solely responsible, since a number of factors contributed to this social and organizational outcome, as previously mentioned. However, the Ministry has recently begun to keep pace with this field, as reformulation of its invitations to its fairs and the first form was an invitation to the First Saudi Fine Arts Fair for the contemporary Arts, involving instillation, digital arts, videography, photography, conceptual art and forms of visual arts that emerged recently. The Ministry awarded Artists for the work in an exhibit that was held during the second half of May 2011 [41], then this was followed by other

themes, such as “Contemporary Islamic Art” 2011, where a competition was open in the field of traditional fine arts, as well as digital arts, videography, photography, instillation and conceptual art [42]. The Ministry was aware of its traditional way in participation abroad through the cultural weeks in several countries, however, it has sported exhibits and

participations for Edge of in London, and in Venice Biennial 2009 [34], as well as sponsoring the Saudi pavilion a Venice biennial 2011 showing the work of Shadiah and Raja’a Al Alem; *The Black Arch* (Figure 8) as the first governmental sponsorship in this international event and by selecting two Saudi females residing temporarily in Paris [43].



Figure 8. Shadiah and Raja’a Alem, *The Black Arch*, 2011. <http://www.aawsat.com>

Recommendations; what should be considered to protect this trade and encourage the market to benefit the Art Market, Collectors and The Artists?

Saudi Authorities, institutions and even Saudi collectors, dealers and agents should have a big role to secure the future Art Market from threatening outside influence on the Art, while allowing its growth in a globalized environment, what we recommend can be applied by both governmental and non-governmental institutions;

1. **Protecting the artist’s intellectual rights**

While the Ministry of Culture and Information developed a system that protects the intellectual rights of authors in general [44], its application and materials do not present accurately or in detail the mechanism for protecting artistic works or the artist. This is especially the case

given the difficulty of linking this system with the documentation and registration system of artistic works of the King Fahd National Library and given the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has joined the World Trade Organization and must now be in compliance with the organization’s rules and regulations. Therefore, a detailed system is a must today in order to protect copy rights and help establish a ground for a future Art Market.

2. **Controlling and regulating the sales market**

With no regulation for sales of artistic works in Saudi Arabia, collectors avoid purchasing Art locally; therefore, ministries involved must work on a system that involves procedures such as

- Documentation and official registration of artistic works
- Issuance of licenses to art galleries to sell

and purchase artistic works

- Issuance of license to entities appraising artistic works
- Issuance of official forms for sale, documentation, and so forth
- Finding a mechanism with concerned entities to issue licenses for lawyers and proxies that protect the artist and the acquirer
- Cooperate with competent entities in regulating the market and trade of artistic works
- Issuance of special periodic and documented statistics to sell artistic works

The purpose is to protect the investor and the artist and to lend credibility to local sale processes, instead of requiring sales in other countries. In addition, it is important to follow the sales of Saudi artists internally and abroad and through auctions.

3. Disseminating the culture of art and encouraging the visual arts and the sale of artwork

One of the most difficult things to carry out is the dissemination of visual arts culture to society. Some suggestions involve disseminating this culture in cooperation with or through other governmental entities, such as in encouraging opening museums and cultural centers in every city, establishing museums of modern and contemporary art and encouraging student to visit to them. Media is an important tool in this procedure, by producing educational and informative programs in the visual art field, also by focusing on different age groups, not to forget using social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook in awareness campaigns instead of depending only on official websites.

Spreading the culture of obtaining an original art work for everyone, by negating the idea that acquiring artwork is restricted to the wealthy, with the example of Dorothy and Herbert Vogel of New York, a librarian and a post man, who lived in a small apartment but were able to build a fantastic art collection over 35 years, presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in

New York in 1997 [45].

The initiative; “Art in every house,” first adopted by Al Mansouriah cultural foundation, then Jeddah Atelier [46] as an attempt to encourage Saudis to buy Saudi Artwork. The Ministry of Culture later on sponsored an annual fair calling for the support of Saudi artworks in a similar activity. But that is not enough, it is also important for the Ministry to plan to hold annual conferences (academic and professional) to reach a stage in which we hold something as big as Riyadh Book Fairs but only for the sake of Visual Arts, providing exhibits, venues for sellers and artists, supplies, and so forth. The event shall include symposia and lectures, as well as workshops and artwork evaluations, shows for subsidiary branches of the arts (e.g., art marketers, art galleries, art websites, sellers of raw materials, and a fair for specialized art books).

4. Conducting studies and surveys of jobs that might be available within an Art Market

There is no doubt that practicing the visual arts in a productive manner and opening up the market for the arts trade—whether through sales, presentations, or training—will provide many job opportunities for full-time artists and employees of art museum or galleries, institutes, training and teaching centers, and everything surrounding cultural institutions of supportive works, whether through tourism or entertainment. For example, certain world capitals—such as New York, London, and Paris—are great examples of how arts, in museums and galleries, contributed in the sale of reproductions, and tourism at these locations, including all hotels, coffee shops, restaurants, souvenir shops, and so forth. There are also other jobs connected to the arts, including jobs to regulate and protect art, such as specialized lawyers, as well as jobs related to art history, art criticism, whether in audio, video, or printed media, and the dissemination of specialized books. Above all, however, it is important to recruit specialists in the governmental and non-governmental institutions, and to send youths to study abroad, also to benefit from King Abdullah's program to send youth to specialize

in related fields with the goal of creating a specialized cadre serving the field of visual arts.

5. **Encouraging cultural exchange**

Cultural contact and exchange have proven successful in the history of art over the centuries. In an era of accelerated communications, it is important to regulate cultural exchange at an official level with competent entities in other countries so we can display our culture to others and teach our citizens. Hence, exchange processes that take time—such as cooperative training programs, activities, protocols, and workshops and all other technical activities—in addition to sending artists to specialized arts programs will undoubtedly contribute to the form and content of Saudi artwork and will provide opportunities to gain expertise.

6. **Supporting and protecting publications in the visual arts and art criticism**

It is suggested to encourage specialists to write on themes of interest to the field, as well as offer awards or incentives for academic books and articles and translations of specialized books. Artist need also to be able to reach all kind of recourses, without banning books or access to sites on the Internet due to regulations on certain research sources in pictures. Also to provide access to educational and cultural sites and resolve this intellectual ban.

7. **Financial support**

A number of authorities, support the field of visual arts through competitions, offering more than one competition a year, with different classifications and prizes. However, there is currently a question as to the feasibility of such competitions and their purpose, as well as the possibility of having or suggesting alternatives that might be of more benefit, not only to the artist but also to the fine arts as a whole. If the purpose of holding competitions is to acquire artistic works for the Ministry, as well as encourage the youth and support them financially, however, such methods of support are no longer sufficient to encourage the practitioner and the fine arts in general. Accordingly, it is important to include other methods of support, such as scholarships provided to artists for the purpose of completing their artistic projects, with scholarships required for both male and female artists. This would allow artists of both genders to extend their visual portfolios and carry out their artistic projects in an academic manner, to include their vision, mission, and purpose. Such submitted

plans (but not the artistic works) shall be judged and the artists shall obtain scholarships to undertake their projects. The scholarship can be a financial amount to cover the costs of the project or an amount along with the provision of a suitable workplace or just the workplace and then a show for the project, a global system that is applied in many countries, some of which are neighbors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, acquisition is certainly one of the most important reasons for catalyzing the arts; however, it also needs an infrastructure to regulate the sale process and, before that, contribute to the quality of the innovative product for sale. Therefore we cannot neglect the importance of art in the economy and the importance of taking care of this aspect to develop it. However, the problem is in the rapid growth of Western types of art, as seen in cultural institutions and museums in Doha, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Dubai, and Masqat, in that it attracts art that depends of the marketing axis, as opposed to arts emerging in other Arabic environments, which do not get the same financial support. At the same time, we find that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to the contrary, has not opened the door to investment yet and is still cautious about intellectual changes under several names, such as Westernization, among others. Further, the public sector did not explicitly embrace foreign experts⁴ or as we also see in neighboring countries; hence, we may have to attract auction houses, on the one hand, and foreigner art marketers, on the other, and remain wary of their effects on the trend and form of art, especially that formed by supply and demand in this market and by individuals and groups within a single culture.

Additionally, in sponsoring such a market under a government's umbrella is characterized by protection of the art market in terms of prices for acquirers and artists, so that they do not fall victim to marketers by focusing on specific trends and identified names of artists serving such a trend to increase the price of their work, while the rest are graded according to a hierarchical classification that might ultimately enable control over the local artistic scene and promote a specified technique or mode due to

⁴ We exclude King Abdulaziz's cultural center in the eastern region, which ARAMCO announced to be working on, but without clear details on the form and content of the final artistic product.

the principle of supply and demand, or art market. Hence, the solution lies in the penetration of local cultural institutions in both the private and public sectors, on one hand, and a stronger presence for the local acquirer in his intellectual choices according to its culture, instead of conforming to the choices of Western marketers without an awareness of the work's artistic and intellectual value, and working on linking the specialized learning locally in this market for the acquirer to be able to trust opinions that do not serve an external interest and finally encourage art to be commensurate with the global market, but within internal control, and not to leave space for the politicization of contemporary art.

If the first decade of this millennium is interested in East Asian contemporary art, we expect the second decade to be that of Middle Eastern contemporary art and maybe even the art of the Arabic Gulf. Are we ready for this golden era and are we ready to reap economical fruits for the country? For the fruits of culture are continuous and endless.

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