



Contemporary Collector

Sultan Al Qassemi

Story by Adrian Murphy

Collecting art has been a full-time hobby for Sultan Al Qassemi for the past decade and he sees the accumulation of 200 pieces of Middle Eastern artists' work as another way of telling the story of the region.

Now he is preparing to display some of his work in Dubai and Sharjah and hopes people will see a different side to Arab artists.

"Too many times it is the religious and political nature of the region that gets highlighted over and over. Arabs have a rich contemporary culture that needs to be highlighted," he says.

The 31-year-old from Sharjah is also the managing director of a family firm established by his late father in 1980. Which invests in publicly listed companies around the world.

"My art collection includes artists from across the Middle East, especially the Arab world," he adds.

"I have young artists and established artists in my collection. I have semi-nudes and paintings reflecting religion and piety.

Al Qassemi has just bought the oldest piece in his collection by Chafic Abboud from 1950 and says there are always works that he thinks will enhance his collection.

"I have yet to collect dozens of pieces that would tell a broader story of the Arab world."



Al Qassemi loaned pieces to the Emirati Expressions exhibition in Emirates Palace earlier this year and has also shared pictures with publications and catalogues and is keen to let the public see his collection on a more permanent basis.

"My art collection is in a storage facility in the house I live in," he says.

"I go to see it every other day to make sure that the air-conditioning to avoid humidity and make sure there are no water leakages.

"The art will be moving to a long-term site being created in Al Qasba in Sharjah and I am also working on having my Emirati art collection in a location in Dubai."

As part of his passion Al Qassemi travels all over the world to view and buy art including France, Italy, United Kingdom and the Middle East.

"I travelled to Tehran for the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art a few years ago to see the collection amassed by the former Empress that was on show for the first time in a quarter of a century."

Al Qassemi also visited the Venice Biennale this summer, where he bought art from Egyptian and Palestinian artists.

The first piece of art Al Qassemi bought was by Emirati artist Abdul Qadir Al Rayyes. He was surrounded by a family who appreciated art and some of whom were also artists in their own right.

"Many of my cousins are artists themselves," he adds. "The Ruler of Sharjah who is a relative is a great art collector who has shared his collection with the public for many years and continues to do so.

"I mostly have Middle Eastern art and have concentrated on Arab art in the past few years. I see it as a way of telling the region's story."

The present developments in the art world in the Middle East and in the UAE specifically are positive according to Al Qassemi who says he is trying to portray this in his collection.

"I decided early on that I want to have a representative collection," he says.

"I have even bought some pieces that I

did not like too much because they conveyed political or social statements.

"My favourite artists are Louay Kayyali from Syria, Dia Azzawi from Iraq and Abdullah Al Muharraqi from Bahrain.

Since the financial crisis began Al Qassemi says he has stepped up buying because the pieces that are available have not been on the market for sometime and are undervalued.

But he does have his limits. "I will spend up to five digits in dollars."

"The art world is beginning to mature, even temporary exhibitions in the country are of better quality. The media, especially The National's art section had a big role to play."

"Sheikh Hassan Bin Mohammed Al Thani is a pioneering art collector. I was very impressed by his superb collection of Arab art.

"Emirati artists have come of age this year. I think the Emirati Expressions exhibition in Abu Dhabi gave them a platform and allowed them to showcase what they are capable of."



Using energy more efficiently, for example by using renewable energy, and relying less on fossil fuels is crucial.

