

MARAYA ART CENTRE

His Highness Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Bin Sultan Al Qasimi, Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, inaugurated today (March 14, 2010) the newly revived Maraya Art Centre during a welcome ceremony held at the Al Qasba grounds. Following the recent upgrades and expansions, the Art Centre is set to be one of the UAE's largest and most fashionable venues for contemporary visual arts.

Curators say that the three-story art center will be a stage for creative experimentation and a testament to the region's extraordinary artistic genius, hosting a panorama of the region's finest compositions. Visitors are welcome to explore a new world of contemporary and traditional art, attend lectures led by featured artists, enroll in topic-specific workshops, and enjoy daily tours of the Centre's three main levels.

Commenting on the launch of Maraya, Marwan Jassim Al Sarkal, CEO of Al Qasba

Development Authority, said that in an Emirate already known for its cultural diversity, liveliness and vibrancy, Al Qasba challenged itself to build something truly unique within the art community. "This collaboration involved people from a number of different social and academic backgrounds, and the result is a project that all of us take immense pride in sharing with the UAE society," commented Al Sarkal during the press conference that was held prior to the opening. "The ultimate goal is to nourish young talent and sustain a local platform for established artists to flourish within the region."

Each of the Centre's three levels has a unique theme tying the pieces together in custom-built exhibition spaces. The first level is known as "The Shelter", a multimedia retreat for artists seeking to make an impact on the local scene and collaborate with others in the business. Speaking at the press

conference, Ahmed Bin Shabib, one of the Founders of 'The Shelter', said that having a world-class venue like Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah will be a significant connecting point where traditional culture meets with contemporary innovation. "In the long run, this kind of interaction will add incredible value to Sharjah's cultural development and create a new wave of creative thinking in the country," added Shabib.

"Within a short period of time, The Shelter has changed the topography of the Dubai artistic community and encouraged the development of entrepreneurial thought," added Rashed Bin Shabib, also a Founder of 'The Shelter'. "Given Sharjah's robust academic institutions, The Shelter will act as an idea lab for talented individuals to propel their ideas forward."

With a strong commitment to showcasing works by artists from the Arab world, the second floor of Maraya features a permanent

exhibition titled The House of Arab Art. In order to bring in the best work from across the Middle East, Maraya has collaborated with The Barjeel Art Foundation, which was conceived by Sultan Bin Sooud Al-Qassemi with the vision of creating a space where Arab artwork can be displayed in an interactive and communal setting.

Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, whose Barjeel collection includes artwork from the Gulf region, Levant, Maghreb, Egypt, Iran and Iraq, is enthusiastic about the opening of Maraya. "My ambition is to create a space where the public can experience, enjoy and discuss Arab artwork as it gains greater prominence around the world," says Al-Qassemi. "Art of the Arab world is as nuanced as the nations that comprise the historically, politically, socially and geographically diverse region. It's very exciting to see it exhibited in one interactive and accessible space."

The top floor of Maraya Art Centre is a

Contemporary Art Gallery featuring dramatic and avant-garde pieces selected from some of the most promising names in the world of modern art with a global reach. For its inauguration, Maraya will showcase the extraordinary works of the first winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize from 2009.

Announced in 2008, the annual Abraaj Capital Art Prize is considered the only art prize specifically for the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia that rewards proposals rather than completed works-of-art. The aim of the prize is to empower potential and give often under-represented, contemporary artists from the vibrant MENASA region the resources to further develop their talent. The prize reflects Abraaj Capital's own investment philosophy, which is to take viable businesses with great potential, and create regional and global champions.

"Seeing these artworks displayed back in the UAE is truly rewarding. Strange Space by

Kutlug Ataman (Turkey); Walk on the Sky: Pisces by Zoulikha Boubadellah (Algeria) and Rhyme & Reason by Nazgol Ansarinia (Iran) were unveiled at Art Dubai last March and subsequently went on exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York" commented Savita Apte, Chair of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize. "We hope that aspiring artists will have the opportunity of visiting the exhibition and be inspired to apply for the annual prize."

In creating an authentic and meaningful art experience, Maraya has pursued a number of collaborative projects with partners in the local and international art community. These alliances include working with organizations like UAE Art Archive, Sharjah Art Foundation and Sharjah Cultural Department to ensure that projects brought to Maraya are of the very highest calibre.



"This collaboration involved people from a number of different social and academic backgrounds, and the result is a project that all of us take immense pride in sharing with the UAE society"

Marwan Al Serkal
CEO

