

Morocco's Booming Art Market

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The art market in Morocco is profitable. The industry has been thriving for the past few years, and annual sales range currently between DH 400 and 500 million. Although this amount seems significant at first, it remains marginal for a country like Morocco, which should regard art as a job-creating sector vital for economic development like tourism and real estate.

At least this is what 33-year old Hicham Daoudi thinks. The young entrepreneur is the founder of Art Holding Morocco and a major auction company in Morocco--CMOOA (Compagnie Marocaine des œuvres et objets d'art), which auctions art pieces valued at DH 100 million every year with annual revenues totaling DH 30 million.

Mr. Daoudi is very optimistic about the sector's future; he hopes that public awareness will increase so art can be seen as a solid pillar for economic development and museums as wealth-creation institutions. The young CEO--who was guest speaker at the "Club de l'Economie" last Friday--is hopeful that Morocco will become a major art exchange in Africa and the Muslim world, where art work by African, Maghreb, European and American artists could be sold and bought. "Morocco can be a strong art market", he says. He adds that African and Arab artists are very prolific and produce quality work that deserves international recognition. Furthermore, more Arab countries show interest in the sector by establishing museums. The young businessman promised to "develop relationships with museums in Doha, Paris and London to weigh on their future art acquisitions".

Mr. Daoudi cautions that political authorities should be aware of art importance and support new legislation favoring import businesses. "The VAT rate on imported art works is 5.5% in Europe but 20% in Morocco. Photography, furniture, design and sculpture have a 35% tax rate, and the levy can skyrocket to 55% if there are no free-trade agreements," he says.

The situation is even worse for art export. He adds, "Qatar Museum bought two items for DH 20 million at my last auction sale. The items couldn't be shipped and were stored here for 4 months, until the Minister of Culture kindly listened to us and intervened in the matter."

In fact, art export is regulated by the Ministry of culture, because the government believes that Moroccan artistry is part of national heritage, and thus should not leave the country. The young entrepreneur regrets that position because he thinks that "art is also a communication channel that helps promote a country's artistic genius overseas", and adds that "unfortunately, Moroccan art is little known globally."

Nonetheless, he remains optimistic and continues to invest in the sector; but he cautions that "if legislation doesn't change, the art market will soon decline in Morocco." He thinks that many laws need to be urgently enacted: regulate the industry by passing appropriate laws, establish a historical heritage charter, identify national treasures and unique manuscripts and promote ceramics, jewelry, textile and prehistoric art.

It should be highlighted that Mr. Daoudi has invested significantly in this sector despite the risks involved. After setting up CMOOA a decade ago, the young businessman then opened an art gallery in Rabat, something he feels proud of. He also founded an art magazine--called Diptyk--which has been managed by Editor-in-chief Meryem Sebti. Diptyk is a high-quality magazine dealing with various art topics.

The dynamic Daoudi heads today a 40-worker company. Alia Sebti, chief of operations and auction sale logistics at CMOOA, opines that the job is exciting but also very stressful.
BUYER BEWARE

An industry riddled with counterfeiting

Hicham Daoudi thinks that "every other art deal in Morocco has counterfeit items, essentially in the cash market." Therefore fraudulent art is rampant in the industry, which is catastrophic. The public should be more cautious. In auction

sales, there's no concern because items are certified by experts. Laws exist to counteract this parallel fraudulent market. Unfortunately, budget constraints do not allow proper enforcement. Mr. Daoudi thinks that work by Moroccan artist Saladi is the most counterfeited. There are times where his very heirs are sponsors of counterfeited items. Therefore, vigilance is needed!

Morocco Newsline