

World class

The Art Market: Dubai fair; canopy for sale; Gagosian lawsuit. By Georgina Adam

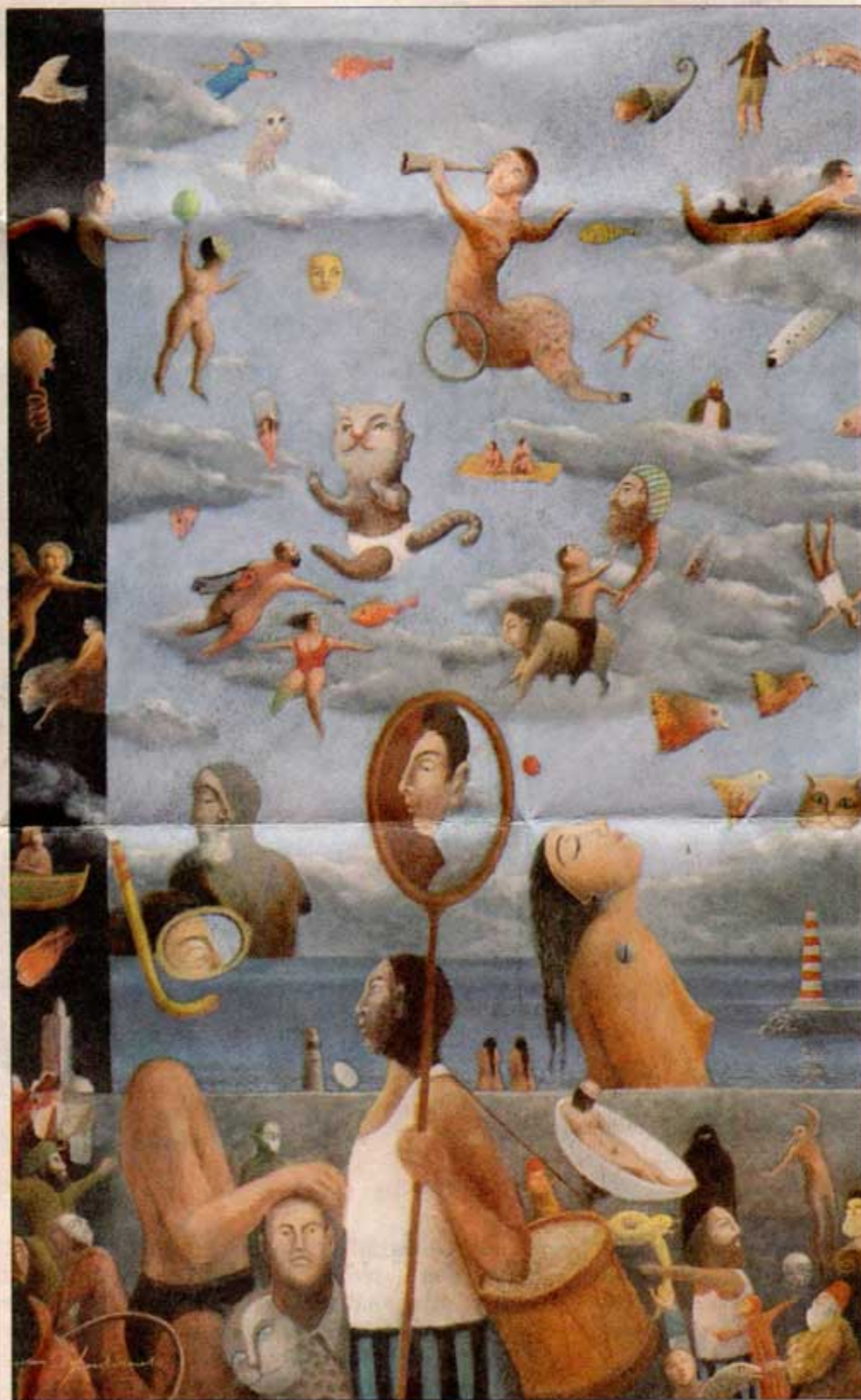
Year sees a joint anniversary – the fifth edition of the Sharjah Biennial and the fifth edition of Art Dubai, which opens tonight. Interest in the art of the Middle East seems to be growing rapidly, as shown by the crowds that attended this year's fair. Among them were many first-time visitors at the fair, including heavyweight New York collectors Susan and Michael H. E. Sotheby's international chairman Robin Woodhead. The New York and Beijing collector Richard Chang came with a group from MoMA – one of 60 museum visitor groups. "This was my first visit, and I'm adoring it. I really didn't know the art of the region," he said, shortly after scooping up two works by Tala Madani at the booth of London-based Pilar Corrias, herself appearing for the first time at the fair. What is now dubbed "Art Dubai 2011", art galleries in the city staged a pre-opening before the fair actually got underway, and were virtually mobbed – within 12 hours almost sold out its show of Swiss artist Hans-Peter Büchel's faux-naïf, expressionist paintings while the newly opened Lawrie Giblin gallery sold eight major pieces. The show of the Lebanese artist Nabil Anwar (prices from \$35,000-\$185,000).

The fair itself has a new director – Lisa Carver, who has extensive experience in the art scene, both locally and regionally. She has bolstered the fair by bringing in more foreign galleries, many of whom brought regional artists, keeping the identity of the event. Many works were priced well under \$100,000 although an El Anatsui tapestry was tagged at \$1.4m with October Gallery. The Indian collectors were a little thin on the ground, the Mumbai gallery Mould Prescott Road scored well with works by Pakistani artist Rashid Rana (prices from \$70,000-\$110,000). The fair attracted extraordinarily diverse buyers – an Indian-born entrepreneur, who divides his time between Biarritz in France and London, bought a tapestry work by the Indian artist Sara Rahbar from Dubai's Mould Prescott Road for \$40,000.

The UAE has so far been untouched by the upheavals in the region, but some of the art made reference to the events. Egyptian Khaled Hafez had produced a large-scale painting of the riots, "Revolution 11.02.2011", tagged at \$55,000 by Artspace Dubai, but it did not immediately sell. "The taste is still quite conservative and decorative here," said a dealer.

Gagosian Gallery in New York is the subject of an unusual lawsuit brought by a British collector based in Monaco, Richard Wylde, about a work he bought from the gallery in 2009. Wylde is seeking more than \$6m in damages after buying a painting by Mark Tansey, "The Innocent Test" (1981), and then discovering that the Metropolitan Museum of Art was part of it.

Wylde was a good client of Gagosian, as he spent more than \$5.1m on 10 works between 2004 and 2009, according to the complaint. He bought the Tansey, which shows a live cow staring at a painting of cattle while art specialists bid for it, for \$2.5m in 2009. The vendor was a retired art dealer Charles Cowles, the intermediary was Gagosian's former John Good. The painting had been on display in the Met but, according to Wylde, had been returned to Cowles in a "spat" with the Met's director



Visionary 'Sleepwalkers' by Halim Karabibene at Tunisia's Galérie El Marsa at Art Dubai (above); Bruce Denny's 'The Conversion of St Paul'



Gary Tinterow. A spokeswoman for the museum said this was not correct.

Less than a year later, however, Gagosian contacted Wylde to say that the Met actually owned 31 per cent of the work. It had been partially promised to the museum by Cowles' mother in a series of documents dating from 1988 and later. The New York Times reported that Cowles "considered the whole dispute his mistake"; for the moment, Wylde is keeping the painting.

Things might not have come to this point if anyone had looked at the Met's website, which still lists the painting as "Partial and Promised Gift of Jan Cowles and Charles Cowles".

In the same complaint, which casts some light on the inner workings of art galleries, Wylde accuses Gagosian of "gazumping" on the sale of a Richard Prince painting. He claims he was offered and agreed to buy "Millionaire Nurse" (2002) in late 2009 for \$2.2m – a knock-down price, considering that it had fetched \$4.7m at auction in 2008, before the financial crisis. But the gallery then cancelled the sale, first claiming that the vendor had changed his mind, then allegedly admitting that it had received a better offer. "Millionaire Nurse" was resold in June 2010 for \$3.3m at Sotheby's New York. In a statement, a Gagosian spokeswoman said that the gallery would "vigorously defend itself" against the suit.

The extravagance of Indian maharajas has long been the stuff of legend, and a testament to this is the set of jewelled, pearl-encrusted pieces commissioned by the Maharaja of Baroda in the late 19th century, possibly destined to adorn the tomb of the Prophet. The five-piece ensemble was broken up in 1905 and parts were taken out of India by the maharaja's wife, Sita Devi, after independence. These occasionally appear on the market: Sotheby's sold a rectangular "carpet" from the set in 2009 for \$5m, a price well below pre-sale expectations (some might say puffery). Now a circular canopy from the same set comes up for sale at Sotheby's in New York this Thursday. It was exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition *Maharaja: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts* last year, and is estimated at \$3m-\$5m; Qatar might be tempted to go for it as well.

The London City of Sculpture festival is a pre-Olympics art event in which Westminster gives artists and galleries the chance to exhibit in its open spaces. One of the artists who will be showing as part of the festival is Bruce Denny, who swapped his career as an IT specialist in the City for making bronzes, quickly finding the Albemarle Gallery to represent him. One of his sculptures, "The Conversion of Saint Paul", showing the blinded saint toppling from a rearing horse, was commissioned by the Dean of St Paul's and displayed outside the cathedral. Now this and three other works are going on display in Soho Square from tomorrow. As well as "The Conversion", he is showing "The Ascension", a child and grown man linked by a rope, as well as a group of seated figures. All are for sale, with prices ranging from the monumental "Conversion" priced at £240,000 to smaller pieces at £25,000.

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