



FINE ART APPRAISAL
RESOURCE

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***Art and the Arabian Peninsula:
Qatar***

Question: What common thread connects the recent FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) scandal with the sale of the most expensive painting ever sold at auction?

Answer: The small Arabian peninsula nation of Qatar.



Pablo Picasso
(Spanish, 1881-1973)
Les Femmes d'Alger (Version "O")
1955
Oil on canvas, 45 x 57.6 inches
Sold in May 2015 for \$179.4

Slightly smaller than Connecticut with a population of just over 2 million (July 2014), the country, with its capital in Doha, is probably best known as the headquarters of its news agency Al-Jazeera. This Dauid-sized country, that abounds in superlatives, has managed to make Goliath-size headlines these last few years and in particular the last couple of weeks, in both sports and the arts.





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The Background:

Since the mid-1800's Qatar has been run by the al-Thani family and is currently ruled (since June 2013), by Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who has been responsible for improving the domestic welfare of the Qataris: universal healthcare, free education and expanding the country's infrastructure, (Doha and the surrounding area was a major work in progress during the author's recent visit). Headlines were made when the country became the winning nation to host the 2022 World Cup in soccer, notwithstanding major concerns regarding the heat (it can reach 120 degrees fahrenheit), and a poor record of labor practices related to the building of the stadium.¹



A rendition of a planned World Cup stadium in Qatar.
(AP Photo/Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy)

Qatar's history and change unfolds much as it has for the United Arab Emirates; from British protectorate to independence (September 1971) and, most importantly, with the discovery of oil and gas in 1939 and subsequent commercialization in 1949, which allowed it to become a major player on the global stage. (Qatar is now the world's dominant liquid natural gas producer²). Up until this time Qatar's main sources of revenue was derived from fishing and its pearl production.

Like its Arabian neighbors, Qatar has strived to define its image and "build a new narrative" in the region and globally. American universities have built campuses: Georgetown, Texas A&M and Northwestern. The country has become a key "global deal maker in both business and politics."³ A fundamental part of forming their image has also been their staggering investment in art, both public and private.

¹(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2015/05/27/a-body-count-in-qatar-illustrates-the-consequences-of-fifa-corruption/>)

²*Qatar Pushes for a Larger Role on the Global Stage*, Stanley Reed, January 6, 2013, New York Times

³Qatar's aid was "instrumental in toppling the Libyan dictator, Col. Mummer del-Qaddafi; calling for the departure of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria early on"; and investing in global companies, such as Volkswagen and Shell, to name but two.



The players and the art:



Sheika al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, seen on the left, is the current head of the state-run Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) which was established in 2005; its goal, according to the Sheika, "... is to assert Qatar's identity on the world stage...and hopefully change the mindset and understanding of the Middle East."⁴ And like Abu Dhabi and Dubai, "make it a new destination on the art-world gran tour." This ambitious goal has been carried out by building museums and commissioning art

installations by contemporary artists.

To understand the investment, it is striking to compare the annual budgets for 2012 for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which was \$39 million and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which was \$32 million. The Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning of Qatar put "cultural spending" at \$1.3 billion annually. This does not count what the al-Thani family has purchased privately!

War Mask, 15th century,
Eastern Turkey or Western Iran



I.M. Pei's 2008 Museum of Islamic Art in Doha
Photo by Ammar abd Rabbo via Flic



In 2008 the Museum of Islamic Art was opened in the stunning, fortress-like I.M. Pei structure ("his last major cultural

building", according to the architect), touted as "the most encyclopedic collection of Islamic art in the world".⁵

Following this was the opening of The Orientalist Museum in 2009, a collection of fine and applied arts "tracing Orientalism back to the early 16th century." With over 700

⁴*What is Qatar Hiding Behind Its Expensive Love of Art*, Emily Shire, February 6, 2015, The Daily Beast; *Building Museums, and a Fresh Arab Identity*, Nicolai Ouroussoff, New York Times, November 26, 2010.

⁵ *In Qatar, an Art Museum of Imposing Simplicity*, Nicolai Ouroussoff, November 23, 2008, New York Times



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Eugène Delacroix (French, 1798-1863)
An Arab Horseman at the Gallop, 1849
Oil on canvas

works in the collection, it is fascinating to note that the 19th century paintings play an important role as visual documentation of Middle Eastern life during this period which was otherwise undocumented. According to a member of the royal family, Sheik Hassan, while viewing these paintings he recognizes “the life [portrayed], the sheik sitting in his tent, [he] knows these costumes are 100 percent right — even the tint of the button.”

Dia Azzawi (Iraqi, b. 1939)
Red Sky with Birds, 1981

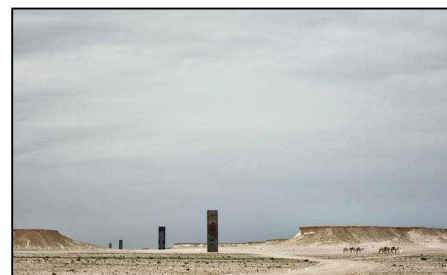
In 2010 the Arab Museum of Modern Art (Mathaf) was opened, housed in a former school building in the Education zone.⁶ The permanent collection presents an overview of Arab art from the 1840's to the present.



And finally, the National Museum of Qatar, designed by Jean Nouvel (architect's rendering on left), due to open in 2016. It is rumored that the frenzied buying of modern and contemporary Western art in the last few years, may fill the walls of this museum.

Commissioned works are abundant in Qatar. The most recent commission is a work by Richard Serra (American, b. 1939). Already a regular on the Qatar art scene, Mr. Serra has set 4 steel monoliths in the Brouq Nature Reserve, 40 miles west of Doha.⁷

Richard Serra, *East-West/West-East* (2014)
credit Rik van Lent / Qatar



⁶ Today the museum is connected by a free bus that runs from the Museum of Islamic Art to Mathaf

⁷For a full description of the installation, see <http://www.davidzwirner.com>. Serra also placed a work on the grounds of the Museum of Islamic Art.



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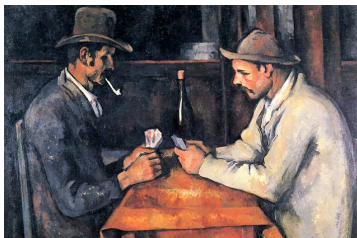
Let's look at the numbers:

Nafea Faa Ipoipo (When Will You Marry?), 1892
Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches.

- **\$250-\$300 million** - amount reportedly paid, depending on what article is sourced, for Paul Gauguin's *Nafea Faa Ipoipo (When Will You Marry?)*, 1892. Private sale in Switzerland in February 2015.



- **\$179.4 million**, the most expensive work ever to sell at auction, May 2015, Pablo Picasso's *Les Femme d' Algiers (Version "O")*, 1955, Christie's.
- **\$1billion** the amount spent, according to Artnet, on both commissions and purchases of fine art in 2013.
- **\$20 million** commission for Damien Hirst's 2013 installation of, *The Miraculous Journey*, 14 monumental bronze sculptures for the Sidra Medical Research Center in Doha, tracing human development from conception to birth.



- **\$250 million** purchase in 2011 for the last of Paul Cézanne's (French, 1848-1903), *The Card Players* circa 1895, held in private hands.⁸

The Card Players, circa 1895
Oil on canvas, 38 x 51 inches

- **\$70 million** for Rothko's *White Center* - 2007
- **\$20 million** for Damien Hirst's, *Pill Cabinet* - 2007
- Based on per capita income, Qatar has consistently been named "the richest country in the world" and in 2012 the Art Newspaper "crowned the nation the biggest single contemporary-art buyer in the world."

⁸ The artist painted five "Card Player" paintings. Four of the works are in the following museums: Met; Musée D'Orsay, Courtauld, and the Barnes Foundation. This work was sold privately and was in the collection of the Greek shipping magnate, George Embricos. The sale was not reported until February 2012.



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There is no question that Qatar has become, along with Abu Dhabi, a formidable collector with deep pockets, but how long will this buying trend continue? Will the political situation, especially with nearby Yemen and Saudi Arabia, affect Qatar's plans as an international destination? Is it possible that the opening of these cultural doors may lead to a more enlightened ruling family and by extension a model to follow for other Middle Eastern leaders? Or will the country's cultural budget be diverted to solve more pressing political issues in the future?

We shall see...

Join me for our final stop on this journey when we look at Dubai...

If you have missed any of the previous newsletters on the Arabian Peninsula, please visit the website, www.LNFappraisals.com and click the "About" tab for "Newsletters".

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