

CAP launches with ambitious, experimental plans



Steel sculpture by Hussein Madi, part of CAP's permanent art collection. (Photos by Alwatan Daily)



Some of the contemporary and modern international art found at the exhibition.

“Passionate people were stranded in this world of creativity and I thought CAP could help connect these artists, filmmakers, curators”

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Staff Writers

KUWAIT: It is another proof of onward artistic progress in Kuwait: Last week, a new collaboration, Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), officially launched their experimental and very ambitious non-profit project with an impressive two-day affair.

Liane Al-Ghusain, the director and driving force behind the launch, gleefully said, “I was constantly meeting passionate people without an outlet. They were stranded in this world of creativity and I thought CAP could help connect these artists, filmmakers, curators, etc., by offering them a neutral zone to express themselves.”

And if the launch of the event was anything to go by, CAP did provide an opportunity for artists, critics, hangers-on, insiders, curators, and befuddled outsiders to converge, mingle, and fawn over the public art exhibition, titled ‘Face to Face’, which presented a variety of more than a hundred paintings, photographs, and sculptures loaned by various art collectors, and work created by local artists following the themes of ‘Icon’, ‘Self’ and ‘Society’.

This collection was tactically placed along the walls with a number of sculptures peppered around the venue, transforming the top floor of the Life Center mall at the outskirts of Shuwaikh. Large glass doors opened to a sizeable space, with a modern industrial vibe that has slight echoes of London’s Modern Tate Art Museum. White movable walls, cement floors, and pipes could be seen protruding from the ceiling, giving the grunge look, with bright lights shining on every inch of the center. The venue also houses a comprehensive library regarding art on the side, desperately calling out to visitors and participants to explore.

“I love what CAP is attempting to do. This is a non-commercial space which hopes to promote art as an important cultural aspect of this country. I like to think of this project as my contribution to society,” remarked Amer Al-Hunaidi, the founder and owner of CAP.

As the evening progressed, a growing number of people arrived. The crowd was composed of an interesting mix of young and old, locals and expatriates, artists and collectors, experts and laymen, the elegantly dressed and the casual, all rubbing elbows and gleaming at the prospect of viewing collections belonging to private homes and artwork by local talent.

Like the crowd, the collection itself was vibrant. One could see an exceptional piece by Andy Warhol depicting Chairman Mao alongside intriguing paintings by local artists. A turnaround, and you would come face to face with a work by French graffiti artist Mr. Brainwash’s ‘Madonna Wall’, and at another corner, you find yourself taken in, by the haunting painting of Syrian artist Fateh Moudarres titled, ‘Qaseedat Hub Bi La Nihaya’ (The Story of Love without End).

“It’s excellent. I love it. About time, if you ask me,” stated prominent artist Shurooq Amin. “The setting is so organic and unfinished and it’s such a rare location to actually have a gallery. In such a setting, art truly stands out. In other glamorous galleries, the art tends to get subdued. Also, it is really quite clever to introduce a show with paintings from art collectors because it gives them (the collectors) a chance to stand in the limelight and allow them a sense of importance and value,” stressed Amin.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, an art collector who presented a rather magnificent and powerful portrait by French artist Philippe Pasqua, ‘Cape Horn Warrior Portrait’, echoed Amin’s excitement. “It’s a beautiful and original event. What interested me was that nothing here is for sale. It is great that the art scene in Kuwait is improving, and there is much potential here for



Amer Al-Hunaidi, founder of CAP (right) along with one of the art collectors that loaned a painting for the event.



The panel comprising Omar Donia, Isabella Hughes, Steve Sabella and Isabelle De Bruyere.



Seen in the far distance is ‘Cape Horn Warrior Portrait,’ by French artist Philippe Pasqua, from the collection of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah.

“It’s beautiful what they have done with a space like this but they should push the limits.”

young collectors. However, although the galleries here are nice, they are limited in terms of budget and content. CAP is a good beginning” he added, whilst energetically playing with a brown-hued Gulf Komboloi.

As for his passion for collecting, Al-Sabah said, “I have been collecting modern contemporary art for a long time. I was born in a house where my mother was a collector and for me collecting came as naturally as breathing. It’s funny how some collectors, who have presented their works here, are some of my close friends and acquaintances, but without this exhibition I would never have seen their private collection.”

After the reception, a panel of three speakers were brought together to have a light discussion on the nature of the art market in the region. Transparent chairs were set up in an

empty space reserved for future lectures and film screenings, with a make-shift screen that dropped down from the ceiling to serve as an aid for the speakers.

First up was Christie’s Middle East Director Isabelle De Bruyere, who spoke briefly on her experiences in the art auction houses, particularly on what economically defines and affects the trends, prices, and values of art.

She was followed by art expert and curator Isabella Ellaheh Hughes, who put together a summary of the artistic development in the region. Hughes attempted to paint a portrait of West Asian and North African art, detailing the Pre-Islamic age to the contemporary, and quickly pointing out the influences and cultural amalgamations that occurred over time.

“We need to seriously consider that art can be a great agent of cultural diplomacy and a

mechanism to embrace differences, particularly by encouraging art beyond the routine explorations of heritage and culture,” stressed Hughes.

Lastly, Palestinian artist Steven Sabella presented his talk which could be thematically considered a counter point to the discussion held by De Bruyere. Sabella, representing the artists’ narrative, urged the need to mull over the value placed on marketability of art rather than encouraging art of critical acclaim. He pointed out the need to support sustainability, particularly by the use of trust and education. He ended his talk by asking, “Can Kuwait be a hub? Kuwait can grow in synergy with its neighbors. Ground research [in terms of art development] is the key. It is theory that generates value. Kuwait must learn from the mistakes and transcend them, in order to be an art center. [Therefore] has Kuwait done enough research in its path to develop and support artists?”

For the audience, it seemed like Sabella’s speech resonated the strongest out of the three, particularly with artists in the crowd, who felt that he had hit the key factors that mattered to them. As interesting as the talks were, the experience was slightly jarred by chit-chat from bystanders in the background who did not come to here the panelists speak. Overall, the feedback by attendees, whether they be artists, col-

lectors, or average observers, had been unanimously positive, with many eagerly waiting to see what the future holds. “It’s beautiful what they managed to do with a space like this,” said Farida Sultan, owner of Sultan Gallery, “But they should push the limits and have a residency program. Creating another space to display work is fantastic but CAP shouldn’t fall into the trap of mere art exhibitions.”

Another attendee expressed a feeling that encompassed the overall vibe of the launch, “They managed to succeed in creating an environment that feels very different for Kuwait. It’s inspiring and brilliant.” The reception was classically catered by Edo, just outside the doors of CAP, where attendees could take a break from the intense art viewing, to enjoy a delicious variety of sushi, sashimi, and small grilled burgers. The second day of the launch was geared more towards artists, as Steve Sabella gave a follow-up discussion on the points he presented and spoke more personally on his life and work experience, which was followed by the screening of a documentary and other videos that touched on a variety of subjects from constructed identities to intriguing notions of reality. CAP is now officially open for the public to visit. Projected exhibitions range from calligraphy art to issues of gender and propaganda.



“Qa seedit Hub Bi La Nihaya,” by Syrian artist Fateh Moudarres.



The private library of the center with a large collection of topics on arts and art making.