

Hend Mana Al Otaiba, cultural department representative for TDIC, explains how the developer is leading the intellectual community in the capital



TDIC has an extensive cultural programme – what are some successful events you’ve coordinated in the past?

We have recently held the Louvre Abu Dhabi: Talking Art Series on Art, Architecture and Rituals in Pharaonic Egypt and Buddhist Art in India and the most recent talk on Court Arts and Art de Vivre in Islam on 23rd November. These talks will continue to be organised at Manarat Al Saadiyat until 27th June 2012. Manarat Al Saadiyat will continue to be used for exhibitions and talks.

Also, Emirati Expressions is back – the exhibition started on 19th October of this year and will continue to welcome visitors until late January. A dynamic new photo-booth from legendary French photographer JR was installed during the Abu Dhabi Art programme, in which visitors can create their own portraits.

Now that Abu Dhabi Art is finished, what’s next? What else is on the calendar for the year?

We’re already preparing for the next edition – Abu Dhabi Art 2012 – but the calendar is also filled with more talks until the summer that will keep all those interested in the reach of our

programme busy.

TDIC seeks to boost tourism in the capital. How does the cultural programme help further that goal?

Abu Dhabi is transforming into an international leisure, residential and cultural destination, and the cultural institutions of Abu Dhabi are engaged with some of the world's best museums, artists and collectors from across the globe, as well as regional and local institutions, artists and collector communities. The population of Abu Dhabi is multicultural, and we believe that the diversity of our residents' cultures is reflected in Abu Dhabi Art's programme and our local visitors.

To what extent do TDIC's cultural events attract an international audience? Do you expect to see an increase in international visitors to TDIC's events?

Abu Dhabi Art is now a fixture within the international and regional cultural calendar. Last year we attracted over 17,000 people locally, regionally and internationally, and we expect a similar number to join us

on Saadiyat Island this year. The 270-hectare cultural district, which occupies about ten percent of Saadiyat Island, is expected to attract 1.5 million visitors a year once finished.

What impact do you foresee TDIC's cultural department having on the broader economy of Abu Dhabi and the UAE?

With the long-term plans for the Saadiyat Cultural District, it is sometimes easy to overlook the extent of what is already happening here. Saadiyat Cultural District doesn't only host Abu Dhabi Art – it is also home to two of the region's most luxurious resorts, St Regis and Monte Carlo Beach Club. As Saadiyat Island grows, the tourism in this area of Abu Dhabi grows too, which in return has a positive effect on the economy here. Saadiyat Island has become regionally and internationally recognised with all that's going on from arts and tourism, and we are keen to ensure that this continues to play an important role within the broader Abu Dhabi and UAE economy over the long term.

Tell us more about the UAE Pavilion. Who designed it? What else will it be used for?

This year, Abu Dhabi Art was presented from the UAE Pavilion on Saadiyat Island. The Pavilion was designed by Lord Norman Foster for the Shanghai Expo last year, and was relocated in no fewer than 24,000 pieces for this year's Abu Dhabi Art programme. We believe that this beautiful structure is an exceptional addition to the Saadiyat Cultural District, as well as a stunning and unique venue for the international art world. In Shanghai, the Pavilion showcased exhibitions on the history of the UAE, attracting almost two million visitors. Inspired by the desert dunes of the UAE, this award-winning building has been relocated to Saadiyat Island, where it housed the Abu Dhabi Art 2011 programme. The UAE Pavilion is currently the only National pavilion from the Shanghai Expo to be relocated and reconstructed for future use. Further use of the Pavilion is currently in development.

What impact did the move to the Pavilion have on this year's Abu Dhabi Art event?

Relocating Abu Dhabi Art to Saadiyat Island was definitely a highlight of the event. We believe that the beauty and grace of the UAE Pavilion, set against the landscape by which it was inspired, gave the international world a window on the aims, ambitions and energy Abu Dhabi

has for our long-term plans for the Saadiyat Cultural District, and its development into a world-class destination for arts and culture. □

Laura Fulton