

The New York Times

Louvre Abu Dhabi Draws One Million People in Debut Year



The French Culture Minister Franck Riester, center, visits the Louvre Abu Dhabi on Nov. 9. The museum, designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel, is celebrating the first anniversary of its official opening to the public on Nov. 11. Credit: Karim Sahib/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By Doreen Carvajal

Nov. 11, 2018

A year since its opening, the Louvre Abu Dhabi drew more than a million visitors to its dome-shaped museum that features borrowed treasures by Leonardo da Vinci and Vincent van Gogh from the collections of French institutions.

Those visitors were dominated by foreign tourists, with more than 60 percent from other countries — topped by India, along with Germany, China, England, the United States and France, according to the new museum. The crowd figures are still small in

comparison to the flagship Louvre in Paris, which is lending its brand through a 30-year government accord between the United Arab Emirates and France. The oil rich monarchy is paying 400 million euros (more than \$453 million) for the name and almost a billion euros (\$1.1 billion) for French expertise and guidance from the Louvre and a consortium of museums.

Earlier this year, the Louvre — the world’s largest art museum — reported a sharp increase in attendance, up more than 14 percent, to 8.1 million visitors. But in its debut year, the Middle Eastern namesake has already eclipsed the Louvre’s satellite in a former coal mining district in northern France and institutions in its own region, such as Qatar’s flagship Museum of Islamic Art, which attracted more than 400,000 visitors last year.

The Abu Dhabi museum is teaming again with the Louvre in February to mount an exhibition, “Rembrandt and the Dutch Golden Age,” which starts Feb. 14. The show includes 17th century works on loan from Paris and from the private, New York-based Leiden collection, which owns more than 250 Dutch paintings and drawings and lent some earlier this year for special exhibitions in Russia at the Hermitage and the Pushkin State Museum.

On Thursday, the Louvre Abu Dhabi opened another show, “Roads of Arabia: Archeological Treasures from Saudi Arabia,” which will end Feb. 16. The exhibition was first conceived in 2010 by the Louvre and toured extensively through the United States. It was also the result of government deal making when former French president Jacques Chirac participated in the opening in Riyadh of an exhibition from the Louvre of Islamic art and urged Saudi Arabia’s late King Abdullah to send an archaeology exhibition to France.

With the end of the Louvre Abu Dhabi’s first year, it is returning some of its precious loans to France, including a self portrait of Vincent van Gogh and works by Cezanne and Matisse. But as part of the rotation, French museums are sending to Abu Dhabi a new group of 40 works, including Claude Monet’s “Madame Louis Joachim Gaudibert” (1868) and van Gogh’s “The Ballroom at Arles” (1888).

The museum had intended to display a da Vinci portrait of Christ, “Salvator Mundi” — which sold last year for a record-breaking price of \$450 million — in mid-September, but canceled the exhibition without explanation.