

The Louvre's Art: Priceless. The Louvre's Name: Expensive.



A computer image of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel. The building is expected to cost about \$108 million to build, and will include art from all eras and regions, including Islamic art.

By ALAN RIDING

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PARIS, March 6 — What's the price of a good name?

How about a cool \$520 million?

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Ateliers Jean Nouvel, via Associated Press
An image of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, scheduled to open in 2012.

That is the amount that Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, agreed Tuesday to pay to attach the [Louvre's](#) name to a museum that it hopes to open in 2012. And there is more: in exchange for art loans, special exhibitions and management advice, Abu Dhabi will pay France an additional \$747 million.

Controversy over the Louvre Abu Dhabi has been swirling in France for the last three months, with critics charging that the French government is "selling" its museums. But only now have the full details of the nearly \$1.3 billion

package been disclosed.

For Abu Dhabi, the deal is an important step in its plan to build a \$27 billion tourist and cultural development on Saadiyat Island, opposite the city. The project's cultural components include a Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, a maritime museum and a performing arts center as well as the Louvre Abu Dhabi.

For France the agreement signals a new willingness to exploit its culture for political and economic ends. In this case, it also represents something of a payback: the United Arab Emirates has ordered 40 Airbus 380 aircraft and has bought about \$10.4 billion worth of armaments from France during the last decade.

The agreement was signed on Tuesday in Abu Dhabi by the French culture minister, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, and the president of Abu Dhabi's tourism authority, Sheik

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Sultan bin Tahnoon al-Nahayan. Henri Loyrette, president of the Louvre, joined the many senior French museum officials in attendance.

The Louvre Abu Dhabi, designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel as a 260,000-square-foot complex covered by a flying-saucer-like roof, is expected to cost around \$108 million to build. Planned as a universal museum, it will include art from all eras and regions, including Islamic art.

The project will be overseen by a new International Agency for French Museums that is to include the Musée d'Orsay, the Georges Pompidou Center, the Musée Guimet, the Château de Versailles, the Musée Rodin, the Musée du Quai Branly and the Louvre among its members. This agency is also expected to seek new international partners in the coming years.

Still, it was inevitable that the focus of attention would be the renting of the Louvre's name. It was this that upset many French traditionalists, including 4,700 signers of an online petition objecting to the accord. But it was also the Louvre brand that Abu Dhabi most coveted to add prestige to its ambitious Saadiyat Island plan.

"It's a fair fee for the concession of the name," Mr. Loyrette told Agence-France Presse in Abu Dhabi. "This tutelary role deserves reward. It's normal."

Apart from paying \$520 million to the French agency for the use of the Louvre name for 30 years, with \$195 million to be paid within one month, Abu Dhabi has also agreed to make a direct donation of \$32.5 million to the Louvre to refurbish a wing of the Pavillon de Flore for the display of international art.

This gallery, to be ready by 2010, will carry the name of Sheik Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahayan, the founder and longtime ruler of the United Arab Emirates, who died in 2004.

Abu Dhabi will also finance a new Abu Dhabi art research center in France and pay for restoration of the Château de Fontainebleau's theater, which will be named after Sheik Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan, the current president.

For a government-owned cultural institution in France to carry the name of a corporate or foreign donor is also a first and may well raise eyebrows here. In the past, for instance, the Louvre has turned down offers of financial help from philanthropists who asked that galleries be named after them in return.

France is profiting handsomely from this deal: in exchange for \$247 million, it will rotate between 200 and 300 artworks through the Louvre Abu Dhabi during a 10-year period; it will be paid \$214.5 million over 20 years for the management expertise provided by its new museums agency; and it will provide four temporary exhibitions a year for 15 years in exchange for \$253.5 million.

In a telephone interview from Abu Dhabi, Mubarak Al-Muhairi, the deputy chairman of the emirate's tourism authority, dismissed rumors that the new museum would reject loans or exhibitions from France including Christian religious art or depicting, say, nudity. "In principle, there are no restrictions," he said, "but both sides will agree on what is shown."

He said that the authority's hope was that the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, which is being designed by [Frank Gehry](#), would open by or soon after 2012, with the other parts of the cultural center to follow.

He added that while Abu Dhabi is expected to spend around \$520 million during the next decade on assembling its own art holdings, "it is our intention to build the collection gradually so as not to disturb the market." In this, the French museums agency is also expected to play an advisory role.

In a statement, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan said the accord reinforced Abu Dhabi's

vision of becoming “a world-class destination bridging global cultures.”

In a message read at Tuesday’s ceremony, the French president, [Jacques Chirac](#), said the arrangement “sealed a partnership with the world’s most visited and well-known museum.”

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