



Vincent Van Gogh produced more than 2000 works during his life time. He only sold one painting during his life.

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PAGE
13

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Visitors are dwarfed by Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul



Curvy edifice begs \$450 m question

■ Seoul's Dongdaemun Design Plaza is set to remain a source of debate for years to come

A curvy futuristic \$450 million building meant to remake Seoul into a global design capital opened to the South Korean public Friday after years of debate about its impact on a historic city precinct. And not everyone is happy with the outcome. Designed by award-winning architect Zaha Hadid, the Dongdaemun Design Plaza is a stark contrast to its neighbourhood, which is better known in Seoul for its links to a royal dynasty that ruled for half a millennium and as home to one of the city's oldest markets.

Located in central Seoul, the Dongdaemun area bustles with shoppers and vendors day and night, selling trendy clothes at budget prices, textiles and a bewildering array of knick-knacks. It lacks the glitz and glamour of Seoul's trendy Gangnam district,



garish neon signs in the neighbourhood. The building is a legacy of the mayoralty of Oh Se-hoon, who opposed welfare

called it an ugly spaceship that made an emergency landing while others praised its architectural

ences, concerts, exhibitions and design-related businesses. Some in Seoul question

Korea's professional baseball and football leagues. "DDP is a beautiful work of architecture," said Kim Eun-sik, a 40-year-old writer who used to attend baseball games in Dongdaemun and explored the neighbourhood's alleys as a teenager. "But I feel sad and empty as it replaces something that was endearing and joyful to me," said Kim. "It does not seem like the sacrifice has produced something valuable."

About 900 merchants who had to relocate their shops and carts to another area to make space for the Plaza hoped the launch would boost visitors as the city had promised, said Park No-keum, head of the merchants association. He said they moved out during economic good times when their businesses were at a peak.

Some of the anger about

Many Koreans think "if we have a certain GDP, nice shiny buildings then we can show foreigners that we became a developed country," he said.

While an impressive architectural accomplishment, Dongdaemun Design Plaza is also an embarrassing reminder how South Korea favoured something fancy and new over its cultural heritage, said Pai Hyungmin, an architecture professor at University of Seoul. He regrets that Seoul, under the former mayor, moved historic ruins discovered during construction. The Joseon Dynasty that ruled the Korean peninsula from 1392 to 1897 trained its elite troops at Dongdaemun, which in Korean means the east gate of Seoul fortress.

"If we want to restore the place's history there are still a lot of things we can

Norway museum returns Matisse stolen by Nazis



Woman in Blue in Front of a Fireplace circa 1937 by Henry Matisse

A Norwegian art museum on Friday returned a precious Matisse painting looted by the Nazis in the Second World War to the American heirs of the French art dealer Paul Rosenberg.

The 1937 painting by Henri Matisse — *Woman in Blue in Front of a Fireplace* — worth an estimated \$20 million (14.5 million euros), was claimed by the Rosenberg family after it appeared in a temporary exhibition at the Paris Pompidou Centre in 2012.

The piece — which has been returned by the Henie Onstad art centre near Oslo — was seized in France by

wife, the Olympic figure skating champion Sonja Henie.

Although Norway is a signatory to the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art it also has a law that grants definitive ownership once a collector has possessed an item for more than a decade.

"Henie Onstad art centre's extensive investigation of the case has led to the decision that the return is justified, and HOK's board has decided to return the painting without further conditions," board chairman Halvor Stenstadvold declared

to one of the city's oldest markets.

Located in central Seoul, the Dongdaemun area bustles with shoppers and vendors day and night, selling trendy clothes at budget prices, textiles and a bewildering array of knick-knacks. It lacks the glitz and glamour of Seoul's trendy Gangnam district, made world famous by the rapper Psy's Gangnam Style hit. But locals and tourists alike find charm in Dongdaemun's lively stores and nearby vintage markets, scenes recalling an older Seoul that is rapidly disappearing.

Hadid's signature flowing curves impart a sense of calm to the imposing steel structure that along with a plaza occupies 63,000 square metres (15.6 acres). At night, the edifice is illuminated with soft LED lights in contrast to the

garish neon signs in the neighbourhood.

The building is a legacy of the mayorality of Oh Se-hoon, who opposed welfare and pushed landmark construction projects to redesign Seoul and boost its economy. It cost about 24 per cent of the city's annual budget, putting it among the most expensive architectural endeavours ever commissioned by Seoul.

Oh resigned as mayor in 2011, but the Plaza is set to remain a source of debate for years to come. Debate will not be limited to the structure's futuristic look that has drawn scorn and admiration. Some

called it an ugly space ship that made an emergency landing while others praised its architectural accomplishment, using few columns and 45,000 tiles to cover its surface.

As part of the official launch, Dongdaemun Design Plaza is hosting the six-day Seoul Fashion Week and eight art exhibitions. Yet the city is still figuring out how to fill the multi-level building, which has a larger floor area than the Louvre's exhibition space. Its first test is to cover estimated annual operating costs of 32 billion won (\$30 million). Seoul mayor Park Won-soon said the Plaza will host confer-

ences, concerts, exhibitions and design-related businesses.

Some in Seoul question whether compromises they felt forced to make were worth it. Sports officials and baseball fans had opposed demolishing an 80-year-old sports stadium to give way to the sleek building that Oh, the former mayor, said would make Seoul the world's design capital.

The stadium, which can now only be seen in a few vestiges, was Korea's first and sole modern sports stadium until the 1980s, hosting highly popular high-school baseball matches and the first games of

united teams of the area to make space for the Plaza hoped the launch would boost visitors as the city had promised, said Park No-keum, head of the merchants association. He said they moved out during economic good times when their businesses were at a peak.

Some of the anger about the Plaza was heaped on Hadid, a superstar architect who is behind the design of the main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the first female winner of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize. It was also derided as a product of South Korean insecurity.

Commissioning Hadid is "like having a handbag from Hermes," said Daniel Tudor, author of *Korea: The Impossible Country*, referencing the popularity of luxury bags as a status symbol in South Korea.

Unearthed ruins discovered during construction. The Joseon Dynasty that ruled the Korean peninsula from 1392 to 1897 trained its elite troops at Dongdaemun, which in Korean means the east gate of Seoul fortress.

"If we want to restore the place's history there are still a lot of things we can do," said Pal. — AP

DDP is a beautiful work of architecture. But I feel sad and empty as it replaces something that was endearing and joyful to me. It does not seem like the sacrifice has produced something valuable.

— KIM EUN-SIK writer

Heinle Onstad centre near Oslo — was seized in France by the Nazis in 1941, and was briefly part of the personal collection of Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering.

It later found its way into the hands of a German art dealer Gustav Rochlitz who owned a gallery in Paris.

In 1950, a wealthy Norwegian shipowner Niels Onstad bought the painting from the Parisian dealer Henri Benoit without knowing how he had acquired it.

The Matisse went on to form one of the centrepieces of the Heinle Onstad art centre, established in the 1960s by Onstad and his

item for more than a decade. "Heinle Onstad centre's extensive investigation of the case has led to the decision that the return is justified, and HOK's board has decided to return the painting without further conditions," board chairman Halvor Stenstadstov declared Friday, announcing the unconditional return of the piece.

Now the Woman in Blue in Front of a Fireplace will cross the Atlantic following an agreement between the French and American sides of the Rosenberg family.

"There is no (contentious) issue," Christopher Marinello, the Rosenbergs' lawyer who travelled to Norway to collect the painting, told AFP.

The family was continuing to actively search for "hundreds of works" looted by the Nazis during the war, he added. — AFP

Man's claim to Yale's Van Gogh painting is tossed

A federal judge in Connecticut has dismissed the claims of a man who says he was the rightful owner of a Van Gogh painting that's been on display at Yale University for about 50 years.

Judge Alvin Thompson on Thursday granted Yale's request to deny the claims to the painting by Pierre Konowaloff, who says *The Night Cafe* was stolen from his family during the Russian revolution.

Yale sued in 2009 to assert its ownership rights and to block Konowaloff from claiming it. Konowaloff sought the return of the painting, or damages, and valued the painting at \$120 million to \$150 million.

The judge agreed with Yale's argument citing the act of state doctrine in which US courts don't examine the validity of foreign governments' expropriation orders. He called the piece one of the world's most renowned paintings.

"We're pleased that the court has dismissed Konowaloff's claims," said Jonathan Freiman, Yale's attorney. *The Night Cafe* is a 1928 masterpiece that the public can see free of charge, and in this suit Yale has worked to make sure it stays that way."

Konowaloff says his grandfather, industrialist and aristocrat Ivan Morozov, bought *The Night Cafe* in 1908. Russia nationalised Morozov's property during the Communist revolution, and the Soviet government later sold the painting.



The Night Cafe by Vincent Van Gogh

The 1888 artwork, which shows the inside of a nearly empty cafe with a few customers seated at tables along the walls, has been hanging in the Yale University Art Gallery.

Yale argued that the ownership of tens of billions of dollars' worth of art and other goods could be thrown into doubt if Konowaloff were allowed to take the painting. Any federal court invalidation of Russian nationalisation decrees from the early 20th century also would create tensions between the United States and Russia, Yale has said.

The university says former owners have challenged titles to other property seized from them in Russia, but their claims were rejected by the US Supreme Court and state, federal and foreign courts. Konowaloff's attorney, Allan Gerson has said nei-

ther Russia nor the United States expressed any concerns about the case and that any ruling would not affect Russian paintings.

Gerson has said in court papers that Yale's argument amounted to compelling US courts to "rubber-stamp good title on any dictator's plunder."

A message left with Gerson on Friday was not immediately returned. Yale received the painting through a bequest from Yale alumnus Stephen Carlton Clark. The school says Clark bought the painting from a gallery in New York City in 1933 or 1934.

Konowaloff has called Yale's acquisition "art laundering." He argued that Russian authorities unlawfully confiscated the painting and that the United States deemed the theft a violation of international law. — AP

A creative endeavour fuelled by grief



Alka Raghuvanshi
artscope

The trajectory of grief is inexplicable. It takes on hues that logic defies. It has the power to allow one to soar free for one has touched rock bottom and deep within, one knows that if one can survive anything, it can be the steel in your backbone or it can be the millstone around your neck. The choice is yours. And it is this choice that ultimately defines who you are. It is said that free will has the power to change everything — even destiny.

I have many reasons to be grateful to God. If He brought me trials and tribulations, He also surrounded me with friends whose lives were shining examples of bending free will to the point where it became such an inseparable part of their persona and destiny that it was impossible to dissect and pry them apart. Just seeing them survive and piece together their lives after great tragedies has itself been a learning experience. After all one has to learn from other's experiences since we don't live long enough experience everything ourselves.

One such prime example is artist Kavita Nayyar. She lost her daughter Sakshi a few years ago, and Sakshi's ongoing show *Seeds*, is in real terms an ode to her only child. She grapples with issues of the

umbilical cord and the womb to the flowering of her child and everything else in between that must have gone into making the liquid form grow into a stunningly beautiful and wonderful adult. The years of staying awake at night, teaching the child to walk and talk, taking her across the teens, et al. In many ways it is a feminine journey that takes such a toll on women and more often men are the involved bystanders.

"My recent work is based on a belief that life is harmoniously symbiotic. A seed is buried in a womb and nourished by the mother through the umbilical cord. This cord is firmly bound to the foetus like the verdant stem holding the lotus up to bloom. The womb is the primordial place from where all thought and expression arise. In turn, the seed anchors the mother, helping her stretch and fly. make magical leaps of creativity and boundless journeys of strength. The umbilical cord is the bond between the foetus and the womb that forms the links in the embryonic chain of birth and rebirth. It embodies the ancient truths of Mother Nature — of life, dependence and freedom," she says.

"I often think the process of creating each one of my works has been like giving birth. Beginning with an



impression, nurturing it in the folds of my mind and finally the almost miraculous moment when it starts to emerge into the world. A combination of essential thoughts and emotions in me comes out in a format that is visible to the eye. I look at this work in front of me with a realisation, that I am part of this marvellous chain and think in surprise, "That is me but not mine," adds Kavita.

And yet when I see Kavita's husband Pawan's devotion to her and to Sakshi's memory, I remember my own father's affectionate involvement in our upbringing. My mother used to say that the day a daughter is born to a couple, the wife gets relegated to the second position, but Pawan has been steadfast and together I have seen them come to terms with this very difficult wound. All the bewilderment and horror and pain that must

have ravaged their insides — I shudder. I can empathise with them and it has taken me quarter of a century to get over my child's death and I wonder if I still have.

I remember Sakshi very fondly and she would often invite me as an expert to be part of many television shows that she anchored. In fact, a couple of days before she died she came to cover my home for a lifestyle programme on television and it was perhaps her last professional assignment. Sakshi was everything anyone would wish for in an offspring and more — she was well-mannered, well-spoken, well-read, a wonderful mix of Indian tamesh and western education. Pawan and Kavita have launched Kala Sakshi dedicated to her memory to help identify and support promising young artists. Kavita's poignant lines



Paintings from the exhibition *Seeds*

mirror her pain:
*Life is sacred! Death nourishes it!
Through love made dense like a web of umbilical cords!*

*Union with life in primordial purity, lotus like!
You floated above the mud of relationships and blossomed into life!*

*The umbilical cords of suffering, labyrinthine!
You grew out of me! You outgrew me!
Pure! Lotus-like...*

*I don't want anyone to pluck my lotuses! I am painting them all in my canvases!
The universe is safe in my paintings
Love made dense like a web of cords.*

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