

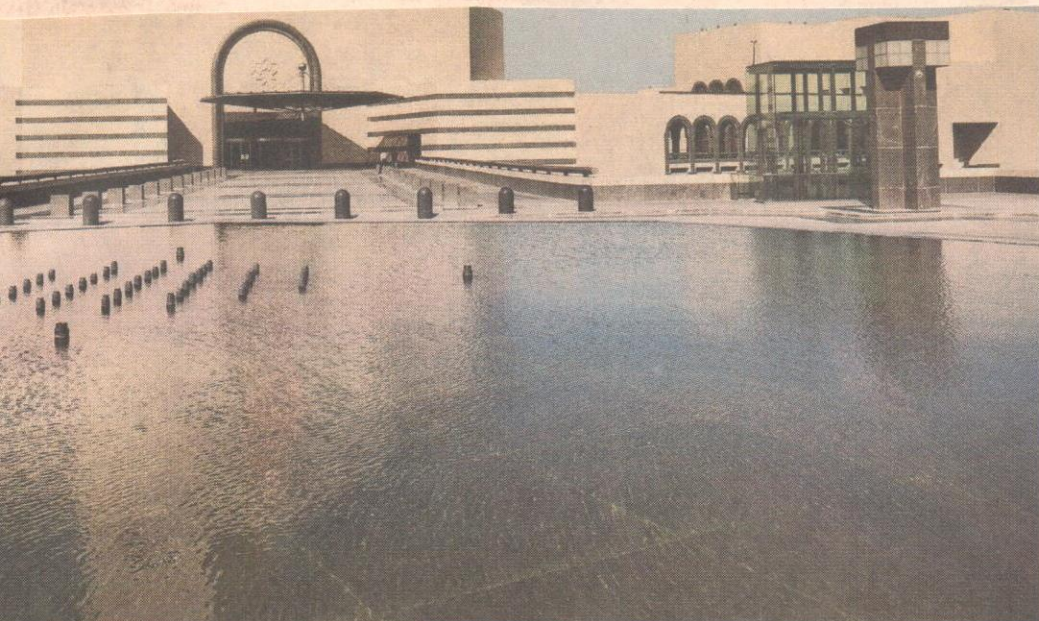
ART

Plus Break up, break even: couple

WEEK

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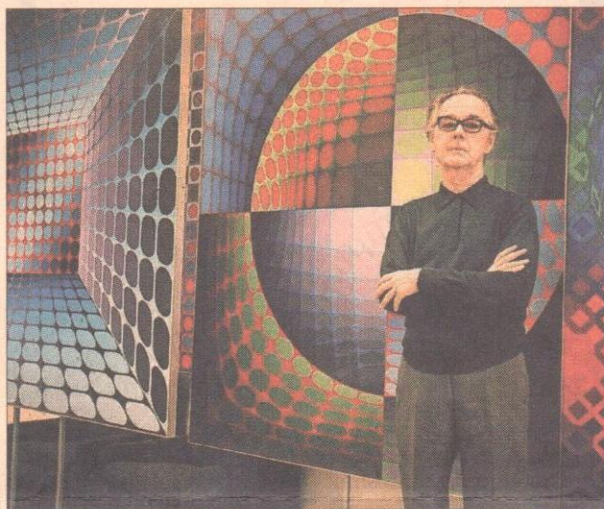


French auction house Artcurial, only to see them seized at the last minute and the sale cancelled.

Scion of the billionaire Nahmad family of art traders, the New York-based Helly Nahmad – who recently pleaded guilty to running an illegal gambling operation and was sentenced to a year and a day in jail – is facing another court case. This is, in fact, related to an older, civil case which has been revived, and this time targets Helly and his father David. It concerns Modigliani's "Seated Man with a Cane" (1918), which is claimed by a Frenchman, Philippe Maestracci, who says it belonged to his grandfather, Oscar Stettiner, and was stolen by the Nazis during the second world war.

The earlier case was closed in March 2012 after Maestracci withdrew his complaint against the Helly Nahmad Gallery, seeking the return of the painting. Key to that case, brought in a federal court, was the position of the International Art Center in Geneva, which had purchased the work from Christie's in 1996 for £2m. The Nahmad lawyer said at the time that "Helly Nahmad Gallery never owned the painting nor is the painting in its possession" – but that it rather belonged to the IAC.

For this new case, Maestracci has enlisted the help of the Canadian Mondex Corporation, which specialises in tracking down and recovering looted works of art. The



Clockwise from top: The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar; Modigliani's 'Seated Man with a Cane' (1918); op-artist Victor Vasarely; Mayssa Fattouh, director of the Katara Art Center, Doha

Getty; Bridgeman Art Library

initial action is in a New York state court, where Mondex and Maestracci aim to discover more information about the IAC. A Mondex spokesman told me: "We hope to uncover the true ownership and control of the International Art Center."

The painting was exhibited at the Helly Nahmad gallery in 2005, and was sent for sale in 2008 at Sotheby's with an estimate of \$18m-\$25m, but failed to find a buyer. Richard Golub, the Nahmads' lawyer, told Artnet that he had "failed to see any documentation that Stettiner owned the painting" and blamed the publicity over Helly's court conviction for "blowing the story out of proportion".

Christie's. For the moment, he is making no comment on the bids – and neither is Greenhill.

Bigger and bigger: the ambitions of the London-Zurich-New York powerhouse dealer Hauser & Wirth seem to know no bounds. In July it will open a sprawling art centre in a series of farm buildings in Somerset, UK (see interview on facing page). Now it has revealed the location of Hauser Wirth & Schimmel Los Angeles. Sited in downtown LA, the seven-building complex includes a former flour mill as well as a neoclassical bank building and covers 100,000 square feet, including a vast interior courtyard.

A pop-up show will inaugurate the site next January, but the operation will only be fully operational in early 2016. It offers "a new paradigm for the 21st-century art gallery", say the organisers, and will be used both for selling and non-selling exhibitions. Hauser & Wirth is no stranger to scale: its former Roxy disco and roller rink in New York extends to 24,700 square feet alone, and the Somerset site includes 100 acres of farmland. Add LA and Ivan Wirth's empire will be much bigger than Larry Gagosian's 153,000 square feet of permanent gallery spaces, as calculated by The Art Newspaper – and will still be bigger even when Gagosian's new Grosvenor Hill space opens ...

Georgina Adam is art market editor-at-large of The Art Newspaper