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THE ART OF COLLECTING

Feeding a desire to make gigantic works

LE MUY, FRANCE

Southern France benefits from international trend toward monumental art

BY NAZANIN LANKARANI

The south of France, long a vacation destination for art lovers, is growing new attractions: foundations to display monumental works and the contents of hitherto unseen private collections.

In July the Fondation Vence, owned by the sculptor Bernard Venet, and the Domaine du Muy, owned by the Parisian gallery owner Jean-Gabriel Miserrand and his family, opened in the picturesque countryside north and west of the Côte d'Azur.

Set to open next summer on the island of Porquerolles south of St.-Tropez, the Fondation Carmignac, funded by the financier Edouard Carmignac, will house contemporary artworks from the Carmignac corporate collection.

"There is a lot of energy in the south of France now, culturally speaking," said Mr. Miserrand, a nephew of the former French president François Mitterrand.

A number of vineyards in the region now double as contemporary sculpture parks. Among them are the Château La Coste near Aix-en-Provence, a biodynamic vineyard and sculpture park owned by the Irish property developer Paddy McMillan, and the Peyrassat vineyard in Flasse-sur-Seine.

The region already boasts respected institutions like the Matisse museum in Nice, the Jean Cocteau museum in Menton and the Fondation Maeght in Saint-Paul de Vence, all within a short driving distance of each other.

The new initiatives respond to a trend in the international art market toward oversize works that has led a desire by collectors to buy and display, monumental art.

The need for space prompted the Georgian gallery, two years ago, to open a two-story, 17,760-square-foot exhibition



Supersized creativity

Above, a work by Niki de Saint Phalle at the Domaine du Muy in southern France. Clockwise from bottom, the Domaine du Muy's owners Edward Mitterrand, left, with his father, Jean-Gabriel; a large work installed by Bernard Venet at the Fondation Vence in Le Muy; a chapel by Frank Stella at the grounds of the Fondation Vence; and Mr. Venet.



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hall in a former hangar on the grounds of Le Bourget, a private airport outside Paris. At about the same time, the Austrian gallery owner Thaddäus Ropac opened a 50,000-square-foot display space on a former industrial site in Paimon, near Paris.

"Sculptors today gravitate toward gigantism," said Mr. Miserrand, who this year also expanded his gallery in the Marais district of central Paris. "Galleries must adapt, if they want to preserve their relationship with the artists."

The supply-demand dynamic goes both ways, according to Edward Miserrand, Jean-Gabriel's son, who is an art adviser in Geneva and a partner in Do-



maine du Muy.

"If collectors are building bigger exhibition spaces, we as galleries have no choice but to enter larger pieces," he said.

The inaugural exhibition at the Domaine du Muy was curated by Simon Lamunère, a former curator of Art Unlimited, the monumental works section of Art Basel. The show on the 18-acre property included works by the sculptors Pipilotti Rist, Ugo Rondinone, John Armleder, Sylvie Fleury, Niki de Saint Phalle, and François-Xavier and Claude Lullazne.

Just north of the Domaine du Muy, the Fondation Vence includes a converted 19th-century mill and a former railroad equipment factory transformed into an indoor exhibition space and workshop.

Mr. Venet, who was born in France but is based in New York, acquired the 18-acre property in 1989. It was used until now as his summer residence and fiscal studio. He transformed it into a

sculpture park and private gallery where he can show monumental pieces that would not fit in a commercial gallery.

"For me, exhibiting in a small gallery is torture," Mr. Venet said during a recent interview at the Fondation. "I have to reduce my work to small sizes, which conveys the wrong message about the work. Here, people will see what I really do."

The site houses the artist's most sizable work to date, "Élémentaires d'Arcs" (Collapse of Arcs), consisting of some 200 steel arcs weighing 200 tons, all placed in a seemingly random composition that takes up nearly half the space of the former factory.

Visitors can also admire an outdoor chapel designed by Frank Stella and Mr. Venet's private collection of art by major minimalist and conceptual artists including Donald Judd, Tom Flavin, and Robert Rauschenberg.

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