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The Musée d'Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden in Marrakech: A Case Study in Collecting and Place-Making

Stephanie Dieckvoss

s.dieckvoss@kingston.ac.uk

Kingston School of Art, Kingston University, Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2QJ, UK

This case study examines the Musée d'Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden (MACAAL), a private museum in Marrakech, Morocco, within the cultural, political and economic contexts of private philanthropy. It analyses the development of the collection of the owners of the museum within the specific context of support for the arts in the Muslim kingdom in North Africa and examines the function of the private museums which opened in 2018 both within and beyond the country. In order to answer the question of the motivations for the foundation of the museum, the article describes the transition from a more traditional model of philanthropy and patronage to a new entrepreneurial model of giving, in line with a generational shift in the management of the collection and opens up some possible explanations for this shift. The complex relationship between the State and the collecting family that touches not only on cultural but also political and economic domains is explored. Furthermore, a shift of alignment from the MENASA region to a Pan African context in line with state policy is discussed. This serves to situate the private museums within a broader context and to make a contribution to the study of private patronage and museums in emerging economies.

Keywords: collecting; cultural philanthropy; emerging art markets; Morocco; Pan Africa; private museums

The Musée d'Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakech is a recently opened private museum for contemporary African art in Morocco. Situated in the tourist hot spot of this former French colony, it opened its doors to an international, predominantly French audience in February 2018. This launch coincided with the inaugural edition of 1:54, the fair for African contemporary art – already established in London and New York – in the same city. In this article, I shall argue that MACAAL is an important entrepreneurial philanthropic development, reflected by its ambition to establish a place for contemporary art from the African continent in a heritage-driven traditional environment. The museum is run by an energetic young designer and architect, Othman Lazraq, the son of the founder of the family collection. The location and scale of this private institution raise interesting questions about its audiences and possible tensions between what Ardouin calls a “marketable world art” (2009, 49) for a seasonal wealthy international visitor base and the expectations of a local audience used predominantly to exposure to cultural heritage objects. Being promoted as the first museum of its kind in Morocco, it also forms a fruitful case study to investigate in greater depth the motivations of the founder’s philanthropic efforts and the relationship between private initiatives and the state.

The following discussion will question three predominant assumptions in the nascent research into the topic of private museums: First, the argument that private museums step in where the state fails and are best able to bring art and culture to local audiences, especially in non-Western ‘peripheral’ regions and emerging art markets. This argument has been lobbied for by interested parties in the first instance¹ and has since been adopted by the academic field, often without being critically analysed or evidenced (Bechtler and Imhof 2018; Zorloni 2013). Secondly, the motivations of private museum founders are regularly disparaged by labelling their projects as vanity initiatives. Epitomizing this stance, the British art market journalist

Georgina Adam coined the term “ego-seum” in her book about the excesses of the contemporary art market (2014). This notion risks belittling the influence of some private museum owners in the very complex field of philanthropy.² Thirdly, MACAAL provides an interesting example of a museum that is very aware of its geographical context, going against the trend of ‘cloned’ private museums that exhibit the same international superstar artists across the world (Dercon 2018, Gnyp 2015, 99). Instead, it focuses on the establishment of an African art history by displaying solely African art. This comes with its own problems as will be shown. Taking these established viewpoints for granted might obscure an in-depth, critical analysis of these new initiatives and the motivations behind them. As this case study hopes to demonstrate, the family of the collector and philanthrope behind MACAAL is extremely sophisticated in its undertakings, following deliberate strategic plans that enhance the family’s symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) pushing it into the realm of symbolic power (Swartz 2013, 39).³ This allows them to make at least indirect economic, social as well as political gains from their private institution. The collecting and exhibition strategies furthermore stake a claim for a specific regional place which opens up new areas for further research into the relevance and significance of regional and even local art ecologies.

This case study is based on a site visit that took place during the launch of the museum and observations of surrounding events. It is also based on two qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the museum’s president Othman Lazraq which took place in Marrakech and London in 2018.⁴ The readings of secondary materials focus (beyond the relevant studies on private museums and collecting) on the political, social and cultural context in Morocco and its position as a predominantly Islamic Kingdom in North Africa. As most research on African art ecologies focuses on the longstanding markets in South Africa as well as the new flourishing art centres in West Africa,⁵ this article will contribute to an under-researched field, both within its regional as well as global context.

The Musée d'Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden and its siting

The cultural and commercial centre of Morocco is Casablanca, its capital Rabat. Marrakech, a city rich in imperial Berber as well as more recent French colonial history, usually attracts visitors in search of a holiday retreat. It hosts a large number of holiday homes owned especially by the French, hinting at the history of this formerly French colony. MACAAL is the first museum for modern and contemporary art in a city famed neither for its art production nor contemporary art market status, but for its heritage tourism. The launch of the 1:54 art fair in 2018 and of MACAAL has, however, resulted in a seasonal influx of international art aficionados to the city. The museum features a changing exhibition programme and an equally semi-permanent display of parts of the private collection of the Lazraq family, originally founded by Alami Lazraq, architect and property developer. It is now run by Othman Lazraq, his 30-year-old son. The museum is housed in a modestly sized building consisting of 900 sqm of exhibition space, surrounded by a 2000 sqm large garden, built by French architect Didier Lefort and repurposed by Jean-François Bodin (Fig. 1).

Othman Lazraq describes the ambition of combining a high standard of design and display with the feel of a family home. Aligned with current international standards of museum architecture, MACAAL features a café, a shop, spaces for temporary and permanent exhibitions across two floors and an outside area mainly used for social activities as well as an outdoor sculpture display. The design is slick and modern with subtle references to regional aesthetics. It features both an event and an education outreach programme directed at local youth. Problematic is the location of the space: the museum is positioned on the outskirts of the city, on the grounds of the large Al Maaden luxury residential and leisure complex, developed and owned by the Lazraq family company, which also comprises a golf course, a sculpture park and hotels as was reported in the French Art Media Agency Newsletter on 26

September 2013. The area is not easily accessible except by private means of transport. This enhances the exclusivity of the museum, as if visitors were preselected due to its location in a secluded and elite area of the city.

The museum's mission statement on its website describes clearly its awareness of its geographical and cultural context as African, stressing its innovative character:

The Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) Marrakech is an independent, not-for-profit contemporary art museum. One of the first of its kind on the continent, MACAAL is dedicated to the promotion of African art through its diverse exhibition and education programmes, cultivating the interest of a wide audience base. The museum nurtures an understanding of contemporary art from Africa through collecting and exhibiting established and emerging artists, highlighting the creative energy and cultural diversity found across the continent (<http://macaal.org/en/>).

Before highlighting the curatorial programme of the museum, it is necessary to untangle the complex ownership structure behind the museum. Othman Lazraq describes the museum as a family venture housing predominantly the collection of his father Mohamed Alami Nafakh Lazraq, a Moroccan architect and businessman, who has been collecting African Modernism since the 1980s.⁶ Lazraq was listed in the Forbes Rich list as amongst the 40 most wealthy families in Africa (Forbes 2012). The family business started out with luxury property in Morocco, with a focus on hotels, but has embarked on an ambitious expansion in terms of activities and geographical focus. The company bears the title ADI, Alliances Développement Immobilier S.A.. Founded in 1994, it has been listed publicly in Morocco since 2008. Since the 1990s, the company also holds a corporate art collection. The vehicle running the philanthropic ventures of the company is the Alliances Foundation, established as the

charitable arm of the company in 2009 with a focus on health, communities, art and culture. The foundation is the official owner of the corporate art collection and the museum's president is the son of the founder. While it is difficult to find exact information on charitable law in Morocco, according both to resources and interviews with Othman Lazraq, there are no tax breaks for foundations in the country and they occupy the status of private companies. The foundation's 3 million euro annual budget is, therefore, borne solely by the company (Azimi 2013). Compared to other countries, such as the USA, where tax breaks are a major incentive for private museum foundations, there is no direct financial incentive for the Lazraqs, and the institution's location and context do not make it a prime destination for a vanity project either. The foundation understands its relevance to be to "support the cultural development of the Kingdom of Morocco",⁷ suggesting a traditional and longstanding awareness of the responsibilities of wealthy individuals and companies to give back to the country and communities that allowed them to become successful in the first place.

Moroccan Art History in a Pan-African context

Like many collectors from emerging markets (Knight Frank 2012), Amali Lazraq invested firstly in art from his own heritage; he began collecting Moroccan art 40 to 50 years ago. He was more drawn to Moroccan modernist rather than strictly Islamic art or heritage objects. Lazraq followed traditional collecting patterns, enjoying the social status the collection gave him as he became part of an early collecting elite in Morocco that emerged as part of the economic liberalisation of the country in the 1980s (Graiouid and Belghazi 2013). As one of the first generation of company founders in Morocco in the post-colonial era, he thrived economically. Despite the general political turmoil of the time, but similarly to his peers, he consolidated his success in the assembly of an art collection that celebrated Moroccan heritage (albeit with a modern, progressive focus), thereby constructing a specific identity both of

himself as well as of Morocco. Expanding the collection to become a corporate collection as part of the Alliances Foundation allowed him to not only to expand its size and scope from about 500 to 2000 objects, but also to hand ownership of the works to an ‘independent’, charitable organisation. Recognised Modernist artists in the collection include, for example, Jilali Gharbaoui, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Miloud Labied and Hassan El Glaoui (Fig. 2). The idea to display the collection in a museum originated in the early 2010s. Only then did Lazraq’s collecting activities expand beyond Morocco into other areas of Africa and into other regions including China, South America, Europe and, according to Othman Lazraq, the Middle East. It was only during this period that Othman appeared on the scene, a young architect and designer who had been educated abroad, but who returned to Morocco to join the family operations and take the helm of the foundation’s cultural activities. He has done so with passion, energy and a certain *savoir vivre* that seems typical for a younger generation of new African elites.⁸

It is important to stress the international education and socialisation of the second generation of the Lazraq family in order to understand the sophistication of the son’s patron-like behaviour. Since 2016, only Othman features in any publicity activities, having taken over his father’s role as fronting the foundation, the collection and MACAAL. He is also responsible for the general strategy of MACAAL and its programme, while the collecting activities are still decided between him, his father and company members, as he points out (Interview 13/6/2018). Although the private collection is now fully international, the foundation collection focuses on African Art, both on modernist and contemporary artists (Fig. 3) with a pan-African focus. Acquisitions are conducted mainly from Moroccan and other African galleries with occasional purchases in the secondary market, from private deals through to auction houses. While there is a strong interest in photography, the collection also incorporates sculptures, installations, and site-specific works of art. Artists include for example Leila Alaoui, Mohamed El Baz,

Abdoulaye Konaté, and Chéri Samba (Fig. 3). The significance of this collecting strategy is twofold. On one hand it alludes to an awareness that the family is in a unique position to make a public mark within their own socio-cultural context. On the other, international art trophy buying in an international context might be beyond the foundation's means and, more importantly, not align with its interests and intentions. The collection's most important feature has been visually to tell Moroccan audiences about the history and innovations of African contemporary art throughout the African continent, including sub-Saharan Africa, with an often political message and with works emphasising the pride of Africans and the quest for liberation from the colonial past. The collection has moved from tracing specific modernist elements of Moroccan art to enforce visually the strong affiliation of the museum to Africa both as a geographical continent and as an idea. This overrides potential references to any religious affiliations or specific Islamic art one might expect in Morocco, conveying instead a history of Moroccan art as part of an African art history, deliberately aligning the collection to the prospect of an African future for their culture (and country).

The use and display of modernist works of art as a way to signify national pride and then to focus in a seemingly progressive line to contemporary African art in the exhibition programme is very interesting. While Claire Bishop (2013) pointed out the drive for “presentism” in the contemporary art museum especially in Europe and the USA, this neglect of any past cannot be observed here or in other private museums in emerging art worlds. Here the dogma of the ‘contemporary’ is well understood but is combined with the need to establish the recent artistic past and to write the (art) history of one's culture. In contrast to European-American Museums which seem to have had “too much” of history, which they try to negate or disrupt by strategies focusing on the “contemporary”, many museums in emerging markets – especially if they have a complicated colonial past – feel the need to exhibit their history through creating an art historical narrative which often begins with facets of modernism and

ends in today's art production in order to formulate a both independent but still national cultural narrative. That the first contemporary art museum in Morocco tells the history of Modernism in Morocco from the perspective of a single owner collection raises, however, questions about the influence of private collectors in shaping artistic canons as has recently been explored by Brown (2019). Scholars have argued that the development of a canon in Western museums has been built on a multitude of curatorial and critical voices and that museum acquisitions are equally built the expert views of groups of curators while in private museums the taste of a single individual determines acquisitions. If this then forms the nucleus of the only contemporary art museum in a country, it raises at least questions about whose history is represented here.

The outlook towards Africa was made explicit in the opening exhibition of the museum entitled 'Africa is no Island'. 'Afrique in Visu', a "participative platform" for photographers created in Mali in 2006, was invited to co-curate the official opening exhibition for the museum together with Madelaine de Colnet (Fig. 4). Displaying a survey of more than 40 photographers from the African continent, it aimed to demonstrate the scope and quality of African photography today (de Colnet 2018). During the period before the official launch, the museum already demonstrated its ambitious programming, first with an exhibition of artists working on the topic of environmental concerns coinciding with the 2016 UN climate summit in Morocco, followed by an exhibition of the collection itself in 2017. The programming so far shows an in-depth thematic engagement with current social, environmental and political issues. The museum collaborates with external curators in addition to a 13 or so in-house team of curators, educators and logistical staff. All exhibitions include works from the collection as well as works for temporary display. When visiting 'Africa is no Island', the inclusion of works from the collection contradicted at times the curatorial integrity of the exhibitions, as some objects felt out of place for the author. "Africa is no Island" stands out due to its programmatic title,

used for the international launch of the museum as well as through its focus on photography as a medium, which Othman Lazraq considers to be the most “democratic” medium in the arts. The motivations behind these endeavours shall be analysed below.

Studies on museums in Africa and the Middle East have analysed in depth the role collections play in national identity building in post-colonial societies (Pieprzak 2010). As alluded to above, this remit can also be ascribed to private collectors who contribute significantly to the visualisation and display of a specific view of African art history and hence of Africa. In the present case, the generational shift from father to son, combined with political, economic and cultural factors, demonstrates a shift in the collection and display strategies of the museum towards a new Pan-African direction, replacing an earlier period’s focus on Moroccan art.

This is significant due to the specific geopolitical location of Morocco and subsequently its categorisation in current (art) history. Academic studies (Kräussl 2014), but also institutions from the International Monetary Fund to cultural institutions such as TATE (Tate Middle Eastern and North African Acquisition Committee), count Morocco as part of the MENA region, that is the Middle East and North Africa. This grouping goes back to a time where regional belonging was defined by religion. When Morocco became independent from France in 1956, its newfound identity was deeply linked to an Islamist Arab state similar to its geographical neighbours to the East. While this Arab dominance continued politically for decades to come, artists and intellectuals debated their identity on the crossroads between ancient Berber and Arab cultures, the Maghreb region and facing both Europe and Africa through their coastal position.

The Souffles, a group of artists and writers active in the 1960s and 1970s described themselves as “both Arabist and keen to promote Berber culture; both Moroccan and Maghrebi [...]; both pan-Africanist and pan-Arabist” (Stafford 2009, 218). In 1968 Souffles became the

first Arabic and French bilingual art magazine of the postcolonial era; until it was censored and abolished in 1972 when its founder Abdellatif Laabi was imprisoned. According to Cohen and Jaidi's study on Morocco and globalisation (2006, 103), this multicultural country is "currently at the forefront of the clash between Western-style development and the politicized Islam that now pervades the Arab world." To observe the exhibition programming at MACAAL with a decisively African outlook speaks, therefore, to a desire to inscribe identity into an artistic and cultural African context, but also to the fact that Morocco itself might orientate itself closer to its African neighbours. This generates a different ideological alignment combined with the potential for economic growth. MACAAL and its founders are fully aware of the sensitivities and implications of Morocco's geographical and cultural position, its connectedness both to Europe (and especially to France) and Africa, while being firmly embedded in Muslim cultural and religious traditions. In the stated interview, Othman Lazraq talks passionately about how Morocco is moving towards Africa, both culturally, economically and also politically, fully aligned with the intentions of King Mohammed VI. There are a number of potential explanations for this strategy.

Symbolic Capital: Economic and Political Motivations Through Culture

The Kingdom of Morocco is ruled by King Mohammed VI. It is an Islamic, 'democratic' and social constitutional hereditary monarchy, with the current King in power since 1999 (Cavatorta 2016). It is based on three principles: Islam, the Monarchy, and territorial unity (Szmolka 2010). The King is well known for his love of art and owns an extensive art collection (Slimani 2010). His Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the first large scale museum built since independence, opened in 2014 in the capital Rabat, exhibiting works by over 200 Moroccan artists. The development of the cultural landscape in Morocco has always been driven by private individuals or foundations. The few state museums have focused

on heritage and tourism and it was left to pioneering private or corporate collections, such as the Wafa Bank in the 1980s, to establish platforms for the visual arts. This has not changed much, with a lot of the King's interest in art being followed up by purchases for his own collection, rather than state investment. According to the Lazraqs, the King fully supports MACAAL and other private cultural initiatives across the country. An example of the close ongoing personal and business ties between the King and the family was the presence of the Monarch during the presentation of a new social housing project ADI that was planned for Casablanca in 2013. This symbolic support for the project demonstrates the close business relationships between the property developer and the state. However, the well-established links between the King and Lazraq go beyond business interest and reach into the cultural arena.

Neoliberal cultural policy has been firmly embedded in the Moroccan state, and private companies are actively encouraged to support the government in the financing of cultural activities (Pieprzak 2010, 40). This arms-length approach to culture has a long tradition in the country as does the importance and influence of private patrons in the arts. As far back as in 1988, the then Cultural Minister Mohammed Benaissa stated at the opening of an exhibition space run by the private Attijariwafa Bank of the formation of "the noble tradition of patronage that throughout our history has permitted the enrichment and preservation of our patrimony" (Pieprzak 2010, 44–45). Private cultural institutions were initiated over a number of decades and the connection between the state and private museums is hence not new. While in the initial phase of nation building in Morocco museums were founded to support the establishment of a national identity and to foster heritage and the awareness of tradition, corporate and private museums founded in a second stage started to use their own specific notion of memory in the creation of meaning (Pieprzak 2010, 18).

What has changed now, however, is the international reach MACAAL can demonstrate and its ability not only to operate for local audiences, but to attract the attention of a wider

international art world, including that of its African neighbours, to its initiatives.⁹ In a creative industry study about the government's influence on music and film festivals, Said Graioud and Taieb Belghazi point out an analogy: "The work of these foundations, which enjoy strong support from financial and political circles, as well as from Moroccan media, is geared more towards the production of mega events to promote the image of a modern, tolerant, and culturally rich country rather than the development of local cultural production" (2013, 269). They analyse how these events not only perpetuate the undemocratic political system of the country (and the ownership of culture by an elite) but also maintain an inequality of access by diverse audiences.

While in contrast MACAAL aims to provide access to the museum for local audiences as mentioned above, the family's primary objectives lie not only in the educational remit of the museum, but also secure the owner's economic and social ambitions through the placement of the museum within the cultural policy of its country as well as its engagement with the continent of Africa. In this regard the museum also supports the King's political strategies. An awareness of these complex relationships and networks was clearly evidenced when Alami Nazraq stated in 2013: "It is a duty to participate in the cultural development of my country" (Azimi 2013). Graioud and Belghazi (2013) propose that this cultural development is based on cultural production that co-operates with the dominant vision of a progressive country, rooted however in tradition: "Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the royal patronage and its cronies (private companies and individual wealthy tycoons sponsoring music festivals for example) provide the financial backing on condition that artistic production meets their vision of society; that is to say, they clearly co-opt these forms of production" (263). While this interpretation focuses on a different artistic field, its findings support the current reading of the close systemic relationship between state and patronage in Morocco. It also allows the King to remain less visible in the promotion of forms of contemporary art which might not be

tolerated by more traditionally oriented Muslim parties. Analysing the history of cultural patronage in the country and using Graioud and Belghazi's broader analysis of the current field of the creative industries, one has to at least raise the question in how far MACAAL perpetuates the traditional forms of securing influence through cultural patronage.

Not surprisingly, this alignment in interests also impacts on the economic realm and here the business relationships between the King and Nazraq are particularly revealing. In the context of the Panama Paper revelations, it became known that before Lazraq's company ADI became a publicly traded company, one of the Monarch's offshore companies in the Virgin Islands invested in the stock market launch of the company and that this vehicle was still listed as a company shareholder even after its liquidation (Tchouta 2016). More recently, ADI has expanded its property development arm beyond its original focus on luxury developments such as hotels or golf parks into social housing projects, both in Morocco but also beyond, as mentioned above. The company's goal is to build social housing estates all across Africa – with contracts having to be secured in most cases from national governments. Against this background, a demonstration of Pan-Africanism support, together with highly visible acts of patronage, supports the economic goals of the company. The French *Nouvel Economiste* brought this to a point: "If his [Lazraq's] purchases of African art preceded his establishment on the black continent, from art to business there is only one step, and the tycoon intends to surf the needs of social housing in Africa" (Azimi 2013).

While these links between culture, economy and politics are not new, they have so far not been made visible in the context of private museums. It also shows again how important it is for the private museum to collect strategically within the context of contemporary African art rather than developing a museum of more generic international contemporary art. Vogl (2016), in her ground-breaking study on Moroccan art journals, points out how Morocco is explicitly attempting to place itself in the position of cultural forerunner in the region and to

cement its cultural leadership as a demonstration of general influence and soft power. But already in the 1990s, the British Museum's curator for Africa, Claude Ardouin, pointed out how throughout the latter half of the twentieth century the terms 'culture' and 'development' were almost talismanic in the way in which African states in general used them to signify "ambiguous notions of modernization and progress" (Pieprzak 2010, 41). This in itself creates a link to the collecting and programming strategies of MACAAL, from Moroccan modernism to current photographic statements paving the way for discussion around the future of Africa both as a continent but very much connected with its partners around the world. At this point the exhibition title 'Africa is no Island' becomes a programmatic statement of multiple complex connections. Othman Lazraq claims passionately:

I believe that Morocco is intrinsically African and His Majesty the King has been instrumental in initiatives that highlight that – he turned Morocco to Africa. His Majesty the King played an important role in structuring and creating links within African countries, therefore leading an initiative to establish a sense of unity throughout the continent. Moroccan banks and leading companies are creating strong inroads into other countries on the continent. Many businessmen strive to create bridges with other countries in the region. ... We have traditionally looked towards the "West" as the land of opportunities whereas now the "South" is much more attractive.¹⁰

A closer look at MACAAL within the context of established patterns of cultural patronage in close connection with observations of the political and economic links between the Monarch and the Lazraq family has demonstrated the function of the museum vastly beyond the cultural realm.

Conclusion

The exploration of the MACAAL and the contexts in which it operates has demonstrated that a generational shift is occurring. While the creation of private museums by an older generation was rooted in the aim to establish a legacy and support the production of national identities, a younger generation of patrons is very much invested in the relevance of their efforts for the future: their own, that of their country, and their business interests. The idea of the future is also the overarching theme of the collection. It serves as a promise to its founders as well as enhancing their economic, cultural and political standing. The awareness of what a private museum should and can achieve has also challenged the conception of a private museum predominantly as a vanity project; this labelling falls short in explaining the motivations and interests of the patrons.

As has been shown, the collection becomes part of a national narrative that has moved away from an allegiance to the MENA region towards looking south to Africa. As such MACAAL functions as “a site of claim-making about status in local and global society by creating and engaging narratives of what it means to be modern” (Pieprzak 2010, 19). The cultural, political, economic and social realms cannot be separated and are all integral to the function of MACAAL. It positions itself and thereby its founders as progressive, future oriented, participating in an international art context, while also laying claim to leadership in an African economic community. The general assumption that a certain group of global top end collectors collect the same has also been disproven. As discussed above, the works exhibited and purchased for the museum focus on contemporary African art sourced from African sources such as galleries and artists. As the Dutch sociologist Olaf Velthuis has argued, regional markets do not lose their relevance in a globalised art market (Komarova and Velthuis 2018).

Most relevant however are the conclusions we can draw from an analysis of the function of the MACAAL in relation to the ambitions of its owners. Gnyp states, “A private museum helps the collector to gain significance and is a place where the social, cultural and economic power of the collector can be celebrated (Gnyp 2015, 217).” While Gnyp concentrates her analysis on the power of the collector and private museum owner within the art world, this article has argued that the symbolic power of the museum funders reaches beyond the realm of culture and social status into political and economic spheres of power. The symbolic capital of the founders, consisting of social, economic and political capital gives them “the social authority to impose symbolic meanings and classifications as legitimate” (Bourdieu 1989, 23). Over the brief period of its existence the museum has catapulted the formerly less well-known collecting family and their company onto the horizon of a national, regional and global art world. It has increased the visibility of the owners and thereby promoted their social status. Beyond that it is a key tool to advance the influence of the family company and their business endeavours into the African continent by developing a narrative that firmly embeds Moroccan identity into an African identity.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

¹ In a piece for Wallpaper, the critic and broadcaster Phillip Dodd, promoted this angle, while being the initiator of a network of private museums owners across the globe formed under the name Private Museums Summit (O’Kelly 2015).

² Recently, the influence of givers and patrons within the cultural sphere and potential conflicts of interest has finally drawn more attention, both within the art world and academia (Brown 2019). The artist Andrea Fraser has talked and written extensively about the abuse of influence by very wealthy patrons of the arts (Fraser 2017).

³ David Schwartz in his study of the political sociology of Pierre Bourdieu argues convincingly that for Bourdieu symbolic capital is being transformed into symbolic power. While private museums support the accumulation of symbolic capital in most cases, I argue here that the strategic pursuit goes beyond a mere focus on social status.

⁴ The press preview for MACAAL took place on 22/2/2018. The London interview with the author took place on 13/6/2018. All interview quotes and references are taken from this interview.

⁵ New private museums have sprung up across the African continent in recent years. The largest impact made the 2017 opening of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Capetown, developed by collector Jochen Zeitz in partnership with the developer V&A Waterfront. Even more recently, the Norval Foundation, financed by property developer Louis Norval, opened in the same city. In West Africa, the Shyllon Museum at Pan Atlantic University in Lagos, is currently in development, as is the Chimedie Museum equally in Nigeria.

⁶ The term African Modernism has been disputed and rightly so. Third Text founder Rasheen Araeen has long opposed this inscription of works from non-Western cultures into a Western understanding of modernity and modernism (1989) and while the conceptual issues are not the subject of this paper, they are important. The equation of modernism with also economic progression is relevant for the arguments brought forward here. For a recent discussion of Modernism in the context of North African cultures see Rey 2019.

⁷ The outreach programmes include workshops for youths, school visits, free shuttle buses and a fortnightly community couscous lunch. For more information on the other cultural activities of the Foundation, which include a Sculpture Park also on the Al Madeen site, a photography award and educational programme for young people, see <http://www.fondationalliances.org> and <http://macaal.org/en/about/foundation/>.

⁸ Generational shifts in collecting have not been widely researched. Bourgoïn (2013) however undertook a study of new elites focusing on the example of South Africa, but wider research is needed.

⁹ The international launch of the museum was supported by a heavy PR campaign both within African but also internationally and the museum has since continued to work with an international PR representation. The launch campaign was extremely successful and resulted in a large number of enthusiastic reviews of the museum, which while acknowledging the corporate roots of the museums, focusing little on the political and economic context of the organisation. The museum's website lists both PR representatives as well as give an overview of the press reviews. See <http://macaal.org/en/press/contact/>.

¹⁰ Interview with the author 13/6/2018. In this regard it is also interesting to note how many (not only) African Private museum owners have links to property development: The Zeitz Museum's partner V&A Waterfront, the Norval Foundation and of course in other regions

collectors such as Ramin Salsali of the Dubai Salsali Private Museum or Liu Yiquian, owner of the Long Museums in China.

Notes on the contributor

Stephanie Dieckvoss is an art historian with a special interest in art markets and works as an academic and journalist. She is a senior lecturer at the Kingston School of Art and course director of the MA Art Market & Appraisal; she also teaches at Sotheby's Institute of Art and Central Saint Martins. Her research interests centre around contemporary art markets, cultural globalisation and emerging markets and the art school as institution. She currently focuses her research on art fairs and power and on private museums in emerging markets. She received a TECHNE PhD scholarship in 2018.