

Singapore strengthens its position as an international arts hub with the opening of a fine antiques gallery and the unveiling of a world-class art storage facility, reports **CHEAH UI-HOON**

Art-catraz:
The Singapore FreePort is the largest freeport dedicated to the storage of fine art in the world



Art storage facility's 1st phase all booked

SINGAPORE is taking a concrete step towards becoming an international arts hub, with lots at the \$60 million state-of-the-art, high-security storage facility dedicated to offshore fine arts storage in Changi fully taken up.

Though The Singapore FreePort, modelled after freeport warehouses in Switzerland, will be completed only in the third quarter of next year, 100 per cent of the lots in the first phase – covering 22,500 sq m – have been booked by a few institutional clients already, says Alain Vandendorre, president and co-founder of The Singapore FreePort Pte Ltd. "It's the largest freeport dedicated to the storage of fine art in the world, and the first in Asia," he says at a preview last night.

The Singapore FreePort will have strong rooms, huge vaults, showrooms, workshops, photo studios and private offices and will store everything from diamonds to vintage cars. It will be Singapore's first offshore space, as valuables are shipped in and out, stored or traded outside of Singapore customs.

"The international market is looking forward to the completion of this facility with great anticipation. Options are being taken for Phase 2 already (an additional 24,000 sq m to be completed in 2011)," says Mr Vandendorre.

The Singapore FreePort, he notes, will be the perfect partner for international fine art collectors and dealers, auction houses, diamond dealers, banks, museums and sovereign state collections looking for a safe, stable and secure offshore location to store and trade their valuables collections.

It's the perfect time for such a facility in Singapore now, he says, because of the money and physical assets brought out of Switzerland since early 2005, thanks to a change of banking laws there. "We're in the same market except that we're not

dealing with money, but physical assets," he says.

The Singapore FreePort concept and design is being unveiled this weekend through the Singapore FreePort Skylounge at Fullerton Hotel – in a showcase designed by French designer Jean de Piepape who'll go on to create a series of unique concepts and lounges to showcase The Singapore FreePort in international art fairs.

"After the F1 event, The Singapore Freeport will host a string of events and concepts at the world's top art fairs, starting with Miami Art Basel in Miami Beach in early December this year, then moving on to TEFAF (The European Fine Art Fair) in March in Maastricht (Holland), the Moscow World Fine Art Fair, then on to Art Basel in Switzerland, the world's leading contemporary art fair, and then the Salzburg Fine Art fair and Paris," says Mr Vandendorre.

These lounges will also be a platform to showcase some of the major art and ecological initiatives from Singapore as well such as Gardens on the Bay and the National Art Gallery project, he notes. "Jean de Piepape is not only a designer, he also creates concepts. His creativity, coupled with his sensibility to ecology and environment, has produced stunning scenographies for art galleries," says Yves Bouvier, chairman of The Singapore FreePort.

The Singapore FreePort was conceptualised and designed by Swiss Atelier d'Architecture 3BM3, with the input of two internationally-reknowned contemporary designers Johanna Grawunder and Ron Arad. Its shareholders include the Singapore National Arts Council and the National Heritage Board.

Mr Vandendorre estimates that The Singapore FreePort could house art objects and fine collectibles worth billions once it's up and running next year.