



Maktoum in Kevans's watercolour — and how he really looks

Sorry, this isn't the portrait the sheikh expected

■ Richard Brooks and Sam Parkhouse

PORTRAITS by the British artist Annie Kevans of the royals who run the United Arab Emirates were intended as gifts from loyal subjects to two of the Gulf's most powerful rulers.

But the pictures have been deemed so embarrassing they cannot be presented.

Rather than depicting two regal and wealthy potentates, the watercolours of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, president of the UAE, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the vice-president, show them as fey teenagers.

"I wanted them to look vulnerable," said Kevans, whose new solo show, *Swans*, opens on June 1 at the London gallery 319 Portobello Road.

The portraits were commissioned by Shehab Gargash, a UAE property magnate and his wife Lamees Hamdan, who was voted top businesswoman in the emirates in 2005. She is interested in art and is behind a major exhibition of Arab artists that opened in Dubai last month.

The sheikhs were due to be handed the portraits soon as a mark of respect by the business couple.

Maktoum, also the ruler of Dubai, has close ties to Britain, where he has a home and owns a leading racing stable and, a few months ago, almost became the owner of Liverpool football club.

Khalifa is also the ruler of Abu Dhabi which, like Dubai, is one of the seven emirates that make up the UAE.

Kevans, several of whose paintings were snapped up from her degree show in 2004 by Charles Saatchi, had been

given photographs of the two men, taken recently, to work from.

The resulting portraits were expected to show them as they are now — in middle age, looking regal, powerful and rich.

Gargash and Hamdan, however, appear to have been disappointed by the outcome.

"I've now been told my pictures would offend them [the sheikhs] so they are not going to get them any more," said Kevans, 34. "Lamees has said I would have insulted them because I did them without beards and without their headgear."

Kevans is one of the rising stars of the British art scene, with work bought by Saatchi, Marc Quinn — himself a leading artist — and David Roberts, a Scottish property developer who is now one of the biggest spenders on art in Britain.

She pointed out that it was her style to paint portraits of her subjects in their youth — she has used this technique with the American presidents George W Bush, John F Kennedy and Franklin Roosevelt.

"That's what I tend to do. I've also done Hitler and Pol Pot as youngsters," said Kevans.

Flora Fairbairn, Kevans's art dealer, said Hamdan had not fully appreciated the artist's way of working before commissioning her.

"She saw a magazine article with Annie's work," said Fairbairn. "But maybe it did not occur to her that Annie would not paint them as they are today."

The sponsors of the paintings, despite their embarrassment, are to pay Kevans's fee all the same. But the artist has decided not to accept commissions in the future.

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