

Paris, Sept 20 (AP) - Paris' Picasso museum is reopening for two days this weekend after being closed for five years of renovation and expansion that have been fraught with setbacks and dismissals. But there won't be many art works to see.

"I will first of all calm your ardor and your enthusiasm ... but you're going to see nothing. It's a great disappointment. It's an empty museum," Laurent Le Bon, the museum's president, said during Friday's preview reception.

She has had her job for just three months. Her predecessor was sacked.

The 37 rooms of Musee Picasso, located inside the Marais district's grand 17th-century Hotel de Sale, are being temporarily opened in honor of France's annual heritage weekend.

The museum, which is under the stewardship of the French government, won't officially open until Oct. 25.

It will house a 52-million-euro (about \$72 million) renovation, which organizers hope will end the museum's seemingly endless problems.

The previous president, Anne Baldassari, was sacked in May over the lagging renovation, amid accusations of mismanagement and clashes between the government and the artist's family. This weekend, visitors are being encouraged to use their imagination about how the museum will look.

"In lots of rooms there is nothing to see. It's a little like a blank page, where we can use our imagination. It's a moment when we can still dream," insisted Le Bon.

When it officially opens, 400 works from the prolific founder of Cubism will be on display. Until then, this weekend's visitors will mostly be viewing bare white walls, white ceilings, decorative white stucco reliefs, white staircases, and empty display cabinets.

For some, the reception at the preview was tepid.

"It's great to see the restoration. It's beautiful. But where's all the art?" asked Pierre Vercueil, 23. Organizers said it is important symbolically for the museum to open on national heritage day, even if the space is not yet ready, adding that the official opening in October will feature actual Picassos on the walls.

For Picasso-lovers interested in more than sparkling interiors this weekend, there will be six large-format works made by the Spanish-born artist peppered around the 3,700 square meter space - including the impressive canvass "Three Women at the Fountain" from 1921.

These tableaux were selected carefully from the vast collection of some 5,000 works and nearly 300 paintings.

The renovation is aimed at helping to double the possible number of visitors - but the bad press may not have helped.

France's Culture Ministry said Baldassari, who had led the renovations and was head of the museum for a decade, was dismissed because of the need to "reopen under the best conditions, protect the employees and restore confidence between the museum and its partners."

Claude Picasso, the painter's son, has denounced the delays in reopening the museum, one of the city's premier art attractions.

Speaking to Le Figaro in May, Claude Picasso said former Culture Minister Aurelie Filippetti had told him that troubles getting security guards in place, as required under French regulations, were behind the delay. Picasso said he couldn't understand that, and that he had the impression that France "doesn't care" about him or his father.

