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Art Dubai rides its buzz to strong sales of contemporary and digital works

► A bulk of the purchases from this year's event came from private foundations and collectors



Colour synergy and strong sales made for a sunny Art Dubai Digital. Getty Images

Feedback



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Sales moved fast at this year's [Art Dubai](#), with works traded during the VIP preview on Tuesday and others gone by the second day of the fair.

Private foundation and [collectors](#) – many from Dubai – made the bulk of the purchases, with some major international collectors coming into the UAE despite an exceptionally busy art calendar over the past month.

A large sale within hours of the preview opening was the El Anatsui wall-based *The Bend in the River* (2022), which [Dubai's Efie Gallery](#) sold for \$600,000 to a collector also in the emirate.

El Anatsui, a Ghanaian artist who lives in Nigeria, currently has the Turbine Hall commission at Tate Modern, for which he has suspended his signature bottle-cap curtains from the ceiling of the museum, cloaking the institutions in emblems of trade. Regionally, he also has a monumental maze-work in the Diriyah Biennale in Riyadh.



El Anatsui's *The Bend in the River* sold on the opening day for \$600,000. Photo: Art Dubai

Efie itself is a relative newcomer to the Dubai scene, with a focus on works from Africa (the founders are from Ghana). Among other sales was an editioned print from the Ethiopian artist Aida Muluneh for \$7,500 to a collector in Ghana.

Many Dubai gallerists were also all smiles by the second day of the fair.

Green Art Gallery, in Alserkal Avenue, sold both their works by Afra Al Dhaheri, in the range of \$9,000. The wall-mounted sculptures are part of the

artist's series focusing on the structure of a painting's canvas, which the Abu Dhabi artist has been experimenting with over the past year.



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Green Art quickly sold out of its works by Abu Dhabi artist Afra Al Dhaheri at the fair this year, such as Visible invisible No 2. Photo: Green Art

Al Dhaheri is head of sculpture at Zayed University and part of a young generation of UAE artists taking up leadership positions in the art world. The gallery also sold their works by the elder French-Lebanese artist Chaouki Choukini, who will be in the curated show of the Venice Biennale this year.

Green Art's neighbour, The Third Line, sold out their works by Sara Naim, in the range of \$8,000 to \$10,000. Like Al Dhaheri, Naim is well-known to the art world in the emirates, recently transforming excerpts of photographs into odd and welcoming curvaceous sculptures.



Sara Naim's presentation at this year's Third Line booth. Photo: The Third Line

And Tabari Artspace, an established DIFC gallery that formerly concentrated on Arab masters, has seen their new embrace of younger artists pay off. They dedicated their booth to seven young female artists from the Middle East, selling three large-scale paintings by Lebanese artist Tagreed Darghouth at \$35,000 each, as well as mosaic works by Chafa Ghaddar (a new medium for the artist, who is best known for her

modernised al fresco techniques) and a neon work by Palestinian artist Aya Haider.

Lawrie Shabibi sold their work by Shaikha Al Mazrou, a pillow-like fibreglass sculpture, within the VIP preview. The works by the NYUAD professor are highly sought after (one is also in the Dubai Collection exhibition at the fair) and the angular blue sculpture went in the range of \$30,000 to \$50,000 to a prominent UAE collection, as did a work by Peruvian artist Ishmael Randall Weeks. The Dubai gallery also sold a work by Mandy El-Sayegh, a new recruit to the gallery, for \$60,000. She recently has her first Dubai solo show in their Alserkal Avenue space.



Lawrie Shabibi quickly sold one of Shaikha Al Mazrou's popular voluminous sculptures from this year.
Photo: Lawrie Shabibi

Visiting gallerists also did well. The Moroccan gallery Comptoir des Mines made several sales, with Fatiha Zemmouri's *Tay Al Ard* (2022) selling to a Lebanese collector for \$60,000 – a good price for the elder artist, who works with earthen material. A suite of her works was one of the great surprises of last year's Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah. Comptoir des Mines had a strong showing all around; they also sold works by Moroccan artists

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Sara Ouhaddou, Mustapha Akram, and Khadija Jayi at the preview, with prices ranging from \$18,000 to \$44,000.

Almine Rech, the well-known London gallery, sold a work by Umar Rashid for a range of \$20,000 to \$30,000 and one by French artist Thu-Van Tran for between \$30,000 to \$45,000.



Meem offered Mahmoud Sabri's vibrant drawing from the 1960s for \$140,000 at Art Dubai this year. Photo: Meem Gallery

The curated modern section this year explored [relationships between Soviet socialist republics](#) and artists from the Global South – an interesting research subject that did not translate fully into the more scattered format of an art fair.

Here the best booth was that of Meem Gallery, which played to its traditional strengths of Iraq modern art with a twin booth of paintings – by Dia Al Azzawi, Marwan, and others – and an archival and drawing section, notably including a suite of Baghdadiyat drawings by Jewad Selim, priced each at \$6,000. Meem reported sales across both booths, from Azzawi, young Iraqi artist Adel Abidin, Kurdish artist Walid Siti and half-Danish, half-Syrian artist [Zhivago Duncan](#), as well as institutional interest in the major paintings.



A visitor explores a VR work at Art Dubai Digital. Photo: Art Dubai

In Art Dubai Digital, the mood was light – literally. The fair changed the layout to open up the room towards the sea-facing windows, and the booths felt both buzzy and more established, with more physical objects on show and a youthful atmosphere as people were encouraged to interact with works.

Phygital or not, things moved. Within minutes of the opening, the Morrow collective, a Dubai organisation that just celebrated its 10th anniversary, sold out their Brian Brinkman edition for a total of 5ETH (Ethereum), which is about \$17,000.

Unit London, a star of last year's Digital section, sold Krista Kim's *1005 v1* at the preview for 12.5ETH (about \$42,600) – a figure that puts the Digital works up there with the higher end of the contemporary galleries' offerings, and proves again that the section has been a good bet for the fair.

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