

VIP visits, visitor footfall, buoyant sales mark success of Art Dubai

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- 07 Apr 2021



A guest has a close look at Ramesh Shukla's '50 Years United' at Art Dubai 2021.

Muhammad Yusuf, *Features Writer*

For many, Art Dubai (Mar. 29 – Apr. 3), held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai and hosted by Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), signalled the cultural resurgence of the Emirate, embracing the resilient spirit that Dubai embodies. It received international acclaim for reaffirming that art is best enjoyed in person, supporting the arts community and for bringing people safely together.

Among visitors were Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, UAE Member of the Cabinet and the Minister of Tolerance, who opened the fair, Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairperson of Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, Crown Prince of Ajman, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, Sheikha Nawar Al Qassimi, Vice President & Director of

External Affairs Sharjah Art Foundation, Noura bint Mohammed Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth, Saif Ghobash, Director General Abu Dhabi Executive Office and Zaki Nusseibeh, Cultural Adviser to the President of the UAE.

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Art Dubai introduced a number of innovations to safely welcome over 18,000 visitors over the course of the event. It included a new booking system to help ensure social distancing, a remote participation programme for galleries unable to travel to Dubai to attend the fair and a new payment model to help galleries participate. According to sources, galleries saw robust sales, with artworks being placed in major private collections and international institutions, and many more in the process of negotiation.



A visitor at the Agial & Saleh Barakat Gallery.

Custot Gallery Dubai sold two works by Ian Davenport in the price range of \$120-150,000 each; Lawrie Shabibi Dubai sold five works by Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, a leading figure in Emirati art, between \$15,000 and \$20,000 each; Gallery 1957 from Ghana sold four works by Ivory Coast-based artist Joana Choumali in the price range of \$10-16,000 each.

First time exhibitors Comptoir des Mines Galerie from Morocco sold a work by Moroccan-born artist Fatiha Zemmouri for \$32,000 and Albrarrán Bourdais from Spain sold a Bertrand Lavier for \$80,000. Galleria Continua from Italy sold a series of Shilpa Gupta works to an institution for \$50,000 and Perrotin from France sold a JR work for \$65,000 and a Daniel Arsham for \$45,000. Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery from UK sold a number of works by Iraqi-born artist Afifa Aleiby for \$50,000 each.

To mark 50 years since the founding of the UAE, '50 Years United,' an exhibition of photography by Ramesh Shukla dating back to 1971, was shown at the DIFC Gate Avenue. It detailed portraits of the Founding Fathers, historical landmarks as well as traditional customs and heritage. A curated Sculpture Park surrounding the DIFC Gate Building featured eleven large-scale installations by ten artists, including Iraqi painter and sculptor Dia Al-Azzawi, Saudi Arabian artist Rashed Al Shashai, Indian architect Tarik Currimbhoy, pioneering conceptual Emirati artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, Algerian sculptor, print-maker and ceramicist Rachid Koraïchi, contemporary Mozambican artist Gonçalo Mabunda, Argentine-French multidisciplinary artist Pablo Reinoso, Emirati artist Hussain Sharif, Greek conceptual sculptor Costas Varotsos and French conceptual artist Bernar Venet.

William Lawrie of Dubai-based Lawrie Shabibi gallery said that "Art Dubai pulled off something amazing, at a time that much of the rest of the art world is at a standstill.

"I was stunned by the number of collectors who had come from all corners of the world, despite travel restrictions and red tape. There was a concentrated energy throughout the run of the fair, lots of excitement and some great sales." Victoria Cooke, Director of Gallery 1957 in Ghana said: "Beyond Art Dubai showing a much-needed stride of confidence, we sold to important collectors and made new introductions in a region that continues to be very important to our gallery; a reminder that in-person connections are integral to the art market."

Maimiti Cazalis, Senior Director of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, said: "We've been extremely delighted to be back at the Art Dubai fair, after a gap of five years. On many levels, this fair has been a success. We sold artworks from all the artists presented in our booth and have been very impressed by the quality of the visitors attending the fair. We are thrilled to develop sales and projects with the artists in the region." Art Dubai, which is now in its 15th year, is one of the highlights of the region's cultural calendar and saw many international travellers visit the city to attend it and also tour creative districts such as Alserkal Avenue and Jameel Arts Centre. They included groups and representatives from the Garage Museum Moscow, Tate Patrons, patrons from Aga Khan Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland USA. Antonia Carver, Director of Art Jameel, said that "the return of the UAE as an international destination for curators, artists, gallerists and patrons was felt more keenly than ever (during the) week, given the past year of global isolation, closing borders and the catastrophes suffered by this region — notably in Lebanon. We've seen a rise in local visitors to Jameel Arts Centre through 2020 — and to share our exhibitions now with the international crowd was a joy, too."

Art Dubai 2021 was sponsored by Julius Baer. Dubai Culture & Arts Authority (Dubai Culture) was the fair's strategic partner.



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