

Art Dubai 2021: With a sold-out first public day, the fair sees steady sales of up to \$3 million

[thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/art-dubai-2021-with-a-sold-out-first-public-day-the-fair-sees-steady-sales-of-up-to-3-million-1.1195549](https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/art-dubai-2021-with-a-sold-out-first-public-day-the-fair-sees-steady-sales-of-up-to-3-million-1.1195549)

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Regional institutions such as Art Jameel have also made several acquisitions at the fair



Art Dubai 2021 opened on Monday, March 29, with the first three days restricted to VIPs and invite-only guests. All photos by Antonie Robertson / The National

As Art Dubai enters its fourth day, galleries report slow but steady sales, bringing in an estimated total of \$3 million so far.

The fair's artistic director Pablo del Val observes that while deals are happening daily, collectors have also been more considered about their purchases. "One of the fears of an art fair is that at the night of the opening everything is on hold, then on the second day, no one returns. Here, it's been the opposite – a lot of conversations are still going on, people are returning. It's a different speed, a different pace. People are taking time to make decisions. They're being reflective," he says, adding, "We expect the numbers to increase over Friday and Saturday as well".



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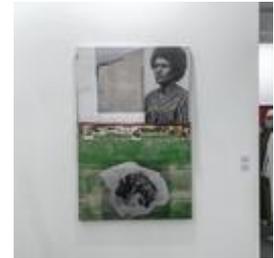
Pablo del Val, artistic director of Art Dubai

As of Thursday, Art Dubai has welcomed 18,000 visitors, compared to last year's 28,000. The fair opened on Monday, March 29, with the first three days restricted to VIPs and invite-only guests, the while the public days began on April 1 and will continue until April 3. Tickets for the first day have been sold out, according to organisers.

Galerie Perrotin, which has returned to the fair after nine years, sold photographs from artist JR's *JR at the Louvre and the Secret of the Great Pyramid* project for \$65,000 to a collector living in the UAE. Works by Jean-Philippe Delhomme and Thilo Heinzmann have also sold to UAE collectors, while larger, flashier pieces by Anish Kapoor and Takashi Murakami have not at the time of writing.

Dubai gallery The Third Line confirmed the sales of new works by its artists Nima Nabavi, Hayv Kahraman and Laleh Khorramian. Nabavi, who typically works with ink on paper, created his first painted piece during Dubai's stay-at-home period last summer. Completed over two and a half months, the intricate and multi-coloured work was bought by a collector from New York.

Other Dubai galleries, such as Custot Gallery and Meem Gallery have also made deals within the first three days. The former sold a work by Greek artist Sophia Varia for \$100,000, while the latter sold two works by Dia Al Azzawi.





The Third Line gallery booth at Art Dubai. Antonie Robertson / The National

A newcomer to the fair, Stems Gallery from Brussels have been able to sell three artworks so far, including one by the young French artist Clement Poplineau, whose portrait of a man in dark glasses and an orange jacket sold for \$7,000 to a collector from the UAE. Marion Marguerite Denne, a curator at the gallery, reveals that the painting was meant to be included in the gallery's own collection, but the buyer was insistent and returned to the fair several times for the work.

Additionally, an installation piece by Julien Boudet titled *Broken Dreams*, which features rims collected from scrapyards in Sharjah, sold for \$8,000 and a painting by American artist Allison Zuckerman pre-sold before the opening for \$30,000.

“People have been so receptive,” says Denne of the visitors. The team from the gallery came to Dubai early last year to gauge the market in the emirate. “We felt that something is happening in Dubai. We see a future here,” adds Denne.

With the uncertainty of art fairs taking place in other parts of the world, she says, the gallery was also eager for a chance to participate in one this year.

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Marion Marguerite Denne, Stems Gallery curator

Overall, it seems that galleries have been averaging sales of around two to three works within the first three days. Galleria Continua has sold several of Italian artist Loris Cecchini's velvety landscapes that mimic landforms and sand patterns, while the works of Ivan Argote and Cristina Lucas sold in the \$20,000 to \$35,000 range at the booth of Galeria Albarran Bourdais from Madrid.

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery from Berlin has fared well with half of its booth sold out. The gallery has a solo presentation of Iraqi artist Afifa Aleiby. Her painting *Sunset* from 2017 sold at the fair on the first day for \$50,000, as well as another work for the same price.

Regional institutions such as Art Jameel, an independent organisation based in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have also made purchases at the fair, including works from Egypt, India and Saudi Arabia. Among their acquisitions are a painting by Filipino artist Kristoffer Ardena from Tropical Futures Institute and a piece by Brook Andrew from Galerie Nathalie Obaida.

“Brook Andrew and Kristoffer Ardena are examples of artists we've been following for years. Their work speaks strongly to the themes of our collection and are in dialogue with existing works in the collection by artists from the Gulf, wider Middle East, South Asia and beyond,” says Antonia Carver, director of Art Jameel.



Visitors to Art Dubai 2021 at DIFC. Antonie Robertson / The National

Carver, who ran Art Dubai as director from 2010 to 2016 before heading to Art Jameel, spoke about being able to attend a physical fair this year. “It’s a relief after a year of other fairs having to try to present online. In building a museum collection, we always need to see works ‘in the flesh’ and to consider choices very carefully and through thorough research and collective decision-making,” she adds.

One of the welcome changes in this year’s edition is the arrival of new collectors who have been staying to Dubai to escape stricter restrictions abroad. “We have a few collectors who have moved to Dubai during the pandemic. This is new and unexpected, but also very exciting. These collectors are already sophisticated and familiar with art,” he says.

At the same, Del Val states that the pandemic has also compelled UAE collectors to look within the local art scene. “Being reclusive in the UAE and not being able to travel have given people a relationship with the city that’s different... There’s also a new crowd there too,” he says. “That support is amazing. The expat community and local community are really supporting the fair. People understand that for these events to continue, they need to be there.”

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[Art Dubai 2021: These are some of the most eye-catching works at this year's fair](#)



Located in DIFC instead of the usual Madinat Jumeirah, this year’s event has been adapted to fulfill Covid-19 guidelines, including purpose-built booths and a booking system for visitors that limits their time at the fair.

In addition, Art Dubai has reformatted its fee structure, taking 50 per cent of gallery sales instead of charging the usual booth fees.

Despite having to sacrifice size (the fair’s participation list was halved this year), space (booths have been scaled down) and programming to adhere to restrictions, Del Val says he is pleased with the performance of the 2021 edition so far. “Doing a very straightforward fair, where the relationship between the visitor and the work of art is raw, is amazing... It’s been a different exercise for collectors. There’s less distractions around,” he says.

He adds that he believes Dubai can seize the moment to keep attracting art collectors from around the world as other countries face political shifts and are recovering from the pandemic. He cites the example of Hong Kong, once a hub for the Asian art market through events like Art Basel Hong Kong, which has been grappling with pro-democracy protests over the last year. “The map is shifting. Communities are looking for new hubs and I think Dubai has an amazing opportunity here,” he says.

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