

**THE
VERDICT**

ART DUBAI

This year the fair proved strong despite fears to the contrary, *Nyree Barrett* takes a look at how some of the millions changed hands

PHOTOGRAPHY: RAJESH RAGHAV, ITP

With visitor numbers up from 14,000 to 18,000, Art Dubai didn't slow down this year like many people expected it to (although the number of party invites and the AC power both seemed to). Before the fair, some were expecting sales to be sluggish, but there were plenty of red dots adorning the walls. People such as the Rubell family (prestigious NYC collectors), the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Hans Ulrich-Obrist from the Serpentine Gallery were all working the room – a sign the fair's thriving.

Also, as John Martin, director and co-founder of the fair, pointed out, the event's not just about the week's sales. 'It's not like a supermarket; it's about building clients and relationships. A gallery wouldn't come here if they just sold and then never saw the people again. It's also great for the galleries across the city – it's a real boost to the art economy.'

The public days of the exhibition saw all walks of life appreciating art. Seven-year-old Dubai resident Maryam Omar Mohammed had a keen eye — she told us her favourite work

was 'Pop Culture', an installation piece by one-to-watch James Clar at Traffic.

Works were censored on March 17, and thus became hotter news than if they had been left to hang, but overall the fair led to an opening of dialogue. Rachael Brown from thejamjar pointed this out as a key element. 'It's important in a place like Dubai where we don't have big institutions. Yes we have the smaller galleries, which are fantastic, but it's great to have a focal point for the year. It's about educating the audience so art here can develop.'



IMAGE COURTESY FREY NORRIS GALLERY

◀ **'BUG WAR OVER TWO BLUE MOUNTAIN', 230CM X 460CM, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, BY KATE ERIC**
Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco
Sold for Dhs128,500

This was one of our most anticipated works – and it lived up to expectation. Like an underwater battle scene, the piece is magical, yet at times richly grotesque. It sold to a prominent local family and we're surprised the sizeable piece wasn't pricier. All of the husband and wife team's smaller pieces also sold. We're picking Kate Eric as artists with key investment potential.



◀ **'AFTER YOU WE BETRAYED EACH OTHER, FLAG #38', 180CM X 120CM, TEXTILES/ MIXED MEDIA, BY SARA RAHBAR**
Carbon 12, Dubai
Sold for Dhs103,000

This was censored at the start of the fair, and then became the talk of the town, proving that censorship creates hype. The Iranian artist's work was snapped up by a prominent regional collector.

▼ **'PALESTINAUTS', PLASTIC SCULPTURE, BY LARISSA SANSOUR**
La B.A.N.K, Paris
25 editions sold for Dhs1,500 each



The most affordable works in the fair, these mini sculptures, 'the first Palestinians on the moon', were a good start for the first time collector, and they sold like hot cakes.

What the regional collectors were buying...

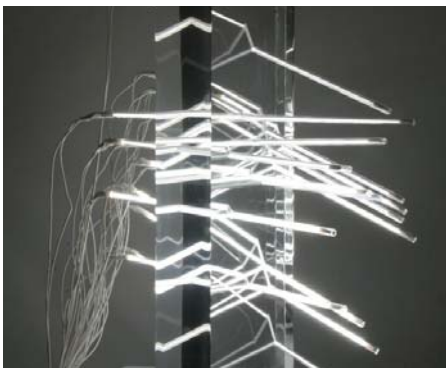
▶ **'THE GRAIN – BLUE', 160CM X 160CM, MIXED MEDIA ON WOOD, BY DUCK-YONG KIM**
Lee Hawk Gallery, Seoul
Sold for Dhs128,500

This work sold quickly, and for a heftier price than the artist's prior pieces went at Christie's last year. Showing a girl in traditional Korean dress, the work is painted onto wood, with mother of pearl making up her dress. Turning a corner at the art fair, we overheard a man in harem pants lamenting that the work was not 'challenging' enough, but sometimes we crave work that is just beautiful.



◀ **'A MOMENT DEFINED BY A POINT AND A LINE', 30CM X 42CM X 20CM, MIXED MEDIA, BY JAMES CLAR**
Traffic Gallery, Dubai

Dhs22,400 per piece. All three were bought by one regional collector. Young, locally-based artist James Clar was one of the most talked about at the fair, a great boost for the UAE scene. Here he's represented three assassinations by demonstrating the exact angle of the trajectory of each of the bullets that killed Malcom X, King Faisal and Amadou Diallo with light intersecting clear acrylic.



What Dhs5.5 million can buy you...

El Anatsui's aluminium and copper wire piece dominated a whole wall of the show as well as its talk. The sculptor found bags of bottle tops that had been thrown out by a bar in his native Nigeria. Trash, he discovered, could be turned to treasure when on large scale. The end result

evokes everything from Klimt to medieval armour. On the third day of the fair it was said to have been sold for Dhs4.4 million, but October Gallery assured us they weren't budging below Dhs5.5 million. An institution is rumoured to be buying the work for the desired price.

