

Art & ANTIQUES

FOR COLLECTORS OF THE FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS

Spanning the Gulf

THE HAUGHTONS' NEW DUBAI FAIR PRESENTED WESTERN DEALERS WITH A LEARNING CURVE.

DUBAI—"It's lovely to see the sea of flowing robes," said Gerard Widdershoven of New York's Maison Gerard, as he stood at his booth and nodded politely to a posse of sandaled Saudis walking by on opening night of Art & Antiques Dubai, which ran February 21 to 24. As waiters passed canapes and guests sipped fruit-juice cocktails (no alcohol served in keeping with local tradition), there was an air of expectancy at the Madinat Jumeirah resort. Dealers wondered: What does the Middle Eastern market want?

When veteran fair organizers Brian and Anna Haughton decided to launch a fair in Dubai, they knew it would involve some trial and error. "The first year anywhere is a learning curve," says Anna, "but I knew we had a lot to learn in an emerging market." Post-fair, dealers and organizers alike are reflecting on what works here and how to bridge the culture gap to encourage more sales. According to the Haughtons, a Ladies' Day will be introduced next year, to accommodate Muslim strictures separating the sexes.

While some Emirati and Saudi royals did their own shopping, others sent ladies-in-waiting to scout for the palace.

The commerce-driven emirate has been welcoming to contemporary art, starting with the success of the 2007 Gulf Fair, founded by London gallerist John Martin. This year it returned, doubled in size and

renamed Art Dubai. Last fall, Turret Middle East organized antiques fairs that ran in Dubai and neighboring Abu Dhabi, the oil-rich emirate that is developing a cultural district with outposts of the Guggenheim and the Louvre. Turret spokesman Duncan Phillips says the Abu Dhabi fair will continue but the Dubai fair has been suspended.

So, following the Haughtons' virgin venture, is there a market for fine art and antiques in Dubai? "We've already signed on for next year," says An Jo Fermon, of London's Whitford Fine Art. She sold a large Homer Simpson sculpture by Clive Barker, in polished brass, from 2004.

Categories that sold included silver pieces in the six-figure range at Koopman Rare Art of London and Alistair Crawford of New York; Orientalist pictures including Frans Wilhelm Odelmark's "Mosque of Sultan Hassan, Cairo" at London's Mathaf Gallery, which has been active in the region for 30 years; maps of Arabia at Bernard J. Shapero of London; and French Art Deco furniture at New York's Maison Gerard.

"We're in talks with three clients from Dubai," says Jeremy Garfield-Davies of the London furniture dealer Ronald Phillips. "Many of them have houses and businesses here. They are just beginning to understand the fair process and the way European dealers do business." —SALLIE BRADY



Frans Wilhelm Odelmark, "Mosque of Sultan Hassan, Cairo," 1894.