

THE STRAITS TIMES

Record-breaking prices for S'pore women artists at 'tremendous' Art SG and Sotheby's sales



Miya Ando's Moon Enso is 29 panels of printed silk chiffon arranged in the round, depicting all phases of the moon.
PHOTO: ART SG



Clement Yong

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SINGAPORE – Top-notch sales for South-east Asian women artists, including Singapore artists Melissa Tan at mega art fair Art SG and Kim Lim at Sotheby's auction, ended the first weekend of a vibrant Singapore Art Week (SAW) on a feel-good note.

In its third year, Art SG at Marina Bay Sands was hailed by many galleries as a “tremendous success” and a maturing of an art fair that had met with some scepticism in past editions.

Despite visitorship falling from 45,300 in 2024 to 41,000 in 2025, robust sales more than allayed concerns. White Cube Gallery led the charge with key sales totalling more than \$2.5 million.

Its Asian managing director, Ms Wendy Xu, said there was a “clear shift” among Singapore collectors from the “observational phase” two years ago to active acquisition, as well as a “noticeable evolution in taste” towards greater sophistication in the regional market.

Mr Richard Koh, founder of Singapore-based Richard Koh Fine Art, said there was also tangible excitement surrounding emerging Singapore artists. Five of the six young Singapore artists he showed were snapped up, including Ruben Pang and Samuel Xun.

But the topline sale of a living Singapore artist was Tan's eye-catching monumental metallic triptych *The Fates: Klotho, Lachesis & Atropos* (2024), acquired by a regional private museum for an artist record high of between \$50,000 and \$60,000.



Melissa Tan's *The Fates: Klotho, Lachesis & Atropos*. PHOTO: HARIDAS CONTEMPORARY

Founder of Haridas Contemporary Christiaan Haridas, whose 1½-year-old gallery presented the work, pointed out that more Singapore-based expatriates are showing interest in supporting young Singapore artists, especially those who paint local scenes.

A host of other galleries reported that sales went swimmingly. Notably, Lehmann Maupin placed New York artist Teresita Fernandez's work of handmade paper overlaid with handwoven fibres *Stella Maris (Net) 4 (2024)* in a Singapore-based private collection for US\$120,000 to US\$125,000 (S\$164,000 to S\$171,000).

Singapore gallery Ames Yavuz sold all 22 coffee-stained paper drawings by Filipino artist Elmer Borlongan and six major paintings by Thai artist Pinaree Sanpitak, each worth US\$60,000 to US\$85,000, by the first preview day.

Local gallery STPI's sales ranged from US\$5,000 to US\$40,000, reflecting the increasing relevance of contemporary pieces in print and paper.

Some galleries expressed concerns that prices were generally lower in 2025. Thaddeus Ropac Asia director Dawn Zhu noted that Asian collectors are still less trigger-happy: "Collectors are still looking for quality works at good prices and are taking their time to make considered decisions."

This means still more galleries could expect good news in the coming days. Ms Priya Mudgal, vice-president of art advisory at Indian gallery DAG gallery, said it is the week after the fair that is most important: "They are still contemplating and will reach out later."

Sotheby's Singapore's auction on Jan 18, the first time the auction house has held its event in conjunction with SAW, also successfully sold 90 per cent of South-east Asian works.

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Sales totalled \$12.3 million, with Lim's *Ronin (1963)* – a roguish assemblage in bronze made to resemble wood – setting a new artist record of \$168,000, above low estimates of \$140,000.

The Singapore-British sculptor, who has an ongoing solo at National Gallery Singapore, was among a trio of pioneering South-east Asian women artists to surpass their previous sale numbers.

Indonesian abstractionist Christine Ay Tjoe's *Lights For The Layer* (2011) was pushed to \$2.94 million after 10 minutes of fierce bidding, above its low starting estimate of \$950,000.

The whimsical I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih's tempera on textile *Musik Mengusir Buta Kala* (1997) almost doubled her high estimate of \$50,000 to change hands for \$90,000.

Unlike 2024's auction, the three other Singapore works in the auction by Nanyang painters Cheong Soo Pieng and Chen Wen Hsi all found buyers. Chen's graphic, geometric *Boats*, in particular, attracted a quick-fire bidding war to peak at \$156,000, beyond high estimates of \$90,000.



Raden Saleh's Javanese Landscape: View Of Merbabu And Merapi has not been seen publicly in the last century.
PHOTO: SOTHEBY'S SINGAPORE

The two Raden Saleh landscapes that had not been seen for 100 years, *Javanese Landscape: View Of Merbabu And Merapi* (1862) and *Javanese Landscape: View Of*

Talagabodas easily sold around their high estimates at \$2 million and \$648,000 respectively.

Investment in Singapore's art market appears to be paying dividends, with a UBS survey in 2024 finding that the Singapore art market was expanding rapidly relative to 13 other mature markets. Between 2019 and 2023, Singapore had expanded its share by value of artworks from 1 to 5 per cent of the global trade.

Singapore also had the highest proportion of new collectors (42 per cent) and spent the most on new and emerging artists' works in 2023 and the first half of 2024. Sotheby's says there has been a 60 per cent increase in Singapore-based bidders in its auctions since 2022.

Singapore institutions are also getting into the buying game. For the first time, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) had benefactor-led funds to buy works from both Art SG and the South-east Asia-focused fair S.E.A Focus, the latter still ongoing at Tanjong Pagar Distripark.

SAM used the \$150,000 donated by arts patrons Carmen Yixuan Li and Pure Yichun Chen, as well as other anonymous donors, to acquire North Korea-born artist Kim Yun Shin's stacked Chinese mahogany sculpture Add Two Add One Divide Two Divide One (2023) from Lehmann Maupin; Canadian artist Kapwani Kiwanga's tile, paint and rope creation Magma (2024) from Goodman Gallery; and Vietnamese artist Lena Bui's ink and watercolour painting on silk and archival paper Breathing No. 2 (2024) from Galerie Urs Meile.

At S.E.A. Focus, its budget of US\$25,000 added 11 works to its collection, including those by Myanmar artist Maung Day, Singapore artist Lai Yu Tong, Malaysian artist Ivan Lam and Filipino artist Lui Medina.



The Border Line (2024) by Indonesian artist Agan Harahap. PHOTO: MIZUMA GALLERY

It also bought one of the stars of the show, *The Border Line* (2024) by Indonesian artist Agan Harahap. This is a book-based, partially artificial intelligence-generated work revolving around life in a fictional village that serves as a gate to enter a mystical dimension filled with tigers.

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