

ARTnews

"Sales for Inaugural Untitled Art Houston Point to a Committed Local Collector Base, with Strong Mid-Market Sales"

By Francesca Aton

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Entrance at Untitled Art, Houston, 2025. Photo Francesca Aton/ARTnews

The inaugural edition of Untitled Art, Houston, though half the size of its Miami Beach counterpart with 88 participating galleries, was a buzz, with robust sales, strong attendance, and a commitment from local collectors that seems to be following a shifting market all the way to Texas.

By the end of opening day on Thursday, September 18, Los Angeles-based gallery Megan Mulrooney, who showed artists Mason Owens and TJ Rinoski, completely sold out, while others like Rajiv Menon from Los Angeles and Swivel Gallery from New York reported steady sales.

Leading the sales was Houston-based gallery Sicardi | Ayers | Bacino, which sold a work by Carlos Cruz-Diez for \$415,000. Additionally notable acquisitions include San Francisco's Jessica Silverman who sold a bronze piece by Clare Rojas to the tune of \$150,000 and Houston's McClain Gallery, which fetched between \$70,000 and \$125,000 for two John Alexander paintings.

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Most galleries reported consistency with strong mid-market sales in the \$25,000–\$50,000 range. A mix of local and (somewhat) regional collectors from Houston, Dallas, Austin, the Bay Area, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and San Francisco were in attendance and acquiring. Houston's Laura (The Gallery) said it had sold five works by Shuling Guo to prominent local collectors, a trend echoed by other dealers.

"I started to see more advisors and collectors reaching out from Houston," Erin Goldberger at Half Gallery of New York and Los Angeles told *ARTnews*. "In the past few years we've switched up the fairs we've been doing in general."

When asked why Half Gallery decided to skip the New York Armory Show earlier this fall, Goldberger explained, "Mostly the cost. The booth is extremely expensive. We're not a blue-chip gallery, but we're too old to get these emerging gallery prices."

She added that "the exposure wasn't really enough. I didn't feel like I gathered a bunch of new clients. And you're basically breaking even, even when you're in New York. This is a good way to expand into new territories without fully breaking the bank."

Though it's hard to beat the critical mass in large city centers like New York and Miami, gallerist Michael Kohn said that there are still many collectors outside those areas and diversifying among cities like Aspen, Houston, Dallas, and Seattle is important as the fair model and market changes.

At the fair's VIP preview opening Wednesday, September 17, around 1 pm, Goldberger also noted that "the energy was extremely high." The excitement stood in stark contrast to the sluggishness at fairs since the market downturn began at the end of 2023. For a few days at least, market concerns seemed like a far-off fever dream—evidenced by the daring selection of large-scale works in multiple mediums on view at the fair.

For its part, Texas has a rich history in the art world, with Donald Judd's compound in Marfa and strong museums and institutions spread across Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas. Houston, in particular, is home to a number of institutions like the Menil Collection, which oversees the Rothko Chapel and the Cy Twombly Gallery, and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, among others.

Other participating dealers like Charlie James, for example, who is based in Los Angeles, told *ARTnews* that he traveled to the fair to further solidify relationships with those institutions, which have acquired work by some of the artists on view in his booth for their respective collections.

Hard to miss at the fair was Houston's own Moody Gallery, which celebrated its 50th anniversary concurrently with the fair's opening. The gallery's assistant director Lee Steffy said a few art fairs have come to Houston in the recent past, which Moody was keen to support through their own participation, but noted that Untitled was not only "wonderful to work with, [but] so professional" and added that they were "tickled" and "excited to support" this fair.

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