

## Asians, Europeans seek bargains at Tokyo art fairs

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By Sophie Hardach

TOKYO (Reuters Life!) - Asian and European art buyers raided Tokyo's art fairs this week, snapping up affordable works by emerging artists as well as more mature pieces, and taking advantage of relatively low prices in Japan.

101Tokyo, launched as a satellite fair to the larger Art Fair Tokyo, officially opened on Thursday, but visitors hoping for a bargain found that many of the works had already been sold at a preview the day before.

Japan's tepid domestic art market and weak yen mean that prices are lower than in Europe -- and rock-bottom compared with hot markets such as China, which makes it particularly attractive for Asian art fans.

"Taiwanese, Chinese, Koreans, definitely, there were a lot of them last night," Julia Barnes, one of the producers of 101Tokyo, told Reuters. "They are really interested in Japanese art because they know the price."

By Thursday, buyers had grabbed almost all of Yoshitaka Amano's sleek and sparkly acrylic-on-aluminum cartoons, described as "outstanding" by Fumio Nanjo, the director of Tokyo's influential Mori Art Museum.

Amano, a Japanese artist, started out producing "manga" comic books. His smaller 50cmx50cm panels depicting cartoon characters sold for 1 million yen (\$9,780), less than what they fetch in Europe.

"Festival", an abstract oil-on-canvas painting by Kazuyuki Takezaki, and "Life" by a 21-year-old Japanese artist known only as Masako, each sold for roughly a quarter of that price, putting their pieces in the range of first-time buyers.

Housed in a former school, 101Tokyo had a more experimental feel to it than the established Art Fair Tokyo, which opens to the public on Friday. Visitors' comments on the new fair ranged from "young and fresh" to "sophomoric", but the optimistic organizers aim to build up a serious contemporary art fair modeled along mega-events such as Art Basel.



Paintings titled "Kamon", created by Nahoko Kimura, are displayed as a gallery employee stand next to it at Art Fair Tokyo 2008 in Tokyo April 3, 2008.



An exhibit titled "Giants", created by Martin Honert of Germany, is displayed as gallery employees stand next to it at Art Fair Tokyo 2008 in Tokyo April 3, 2008.



An exhibit titled "Natsuyasumi", or "summer holiday", created by Hiroshi Ohashi, is displayed at Art Fair Tokyo 2008 in Tokyo April 3, 2008.

"Initially we were named as the satellite of Art Fair Tokyo, however, we don't see ourselves as a satellite... the vision is to be the art fair," Barnes said.

## BACON PRIZE

The larger Art Fair Tokyo centers on Japanese artists and displays contemporary art as well as scrolls and antiques. At a preview late on Thursday, visitors thronged around a giant winged, heart-like sculpture by Tomoko Konoike, who has been shown by several big museums including the Mori Art Museum.

"One fair is young, international, open, and this one is more established, mainly focused on Japanese galleries -- they complement each other," museum director Nanjo told Reuters at the Art Fair Tokyo preview.

101Tokyo is also awarding the Bacon Prize, Tokyo's first international contemporary art prize, named after the dog of curator and fair advisor Johnnie Walker. Visitors will be able to vote for their favorite artist at the fair using their mobile phones, which will affect the selection of the prize.

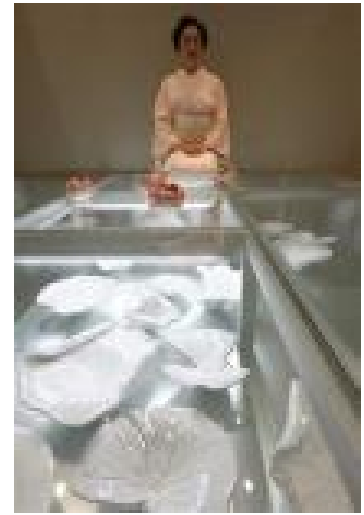
Japanese artists were not the only ones who attracted attention at the Tokyo fairs. At 101Tokyo, larger works by Indian artists Baiju Parthan and T.V. Santhosh, costing \$70,000 to \$100,000, sold almost immediately, reflecting feverish demand for art from the sub-continent.

"Historically speaking, it's a coming-of-age of Indian art," said Baiju Parthan. "The exposure is much greater than before, and it's an incentive to produce really good shows."

(Reporting by Sophie Hardach; Editing by Valerie Lee)



Kimono-clad artist Hanako Miwa demonstrates her work titled "Yume" at the Art Fair Tokyo 2008 in Tokyo April 3, 2008.



Kimono-clad artist Hanako Miwa poses next to her work titled "Yume" at Art Fair Tokyo 2008 in Tokyo April 3, 2008.

**Photos by REUTERS/Issei Kato**