

Asian Art Fair Kicks Off

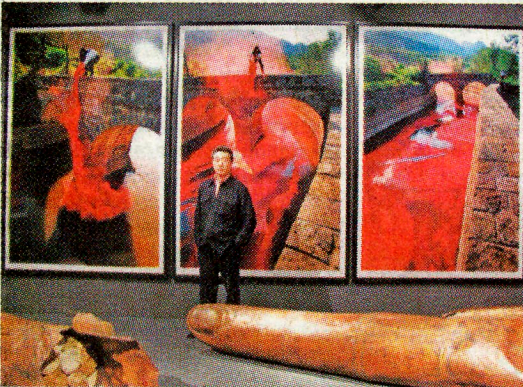


AMANDA L. GORDON

Dina and Hicham Aboutaam of Phoenix Ancient Art.



Donald Tober let another buyer take this \$15,500 basket by Fujitsuka Shosei at the TAI Gallery of Santa Fe, but he still got a picture with it.



Beijing artist Wang Jin stands in front of his triptych 'Fighting the Flood' at the booth of Friedman Benda. An hour into the fair, one of the three editions of the work had sold.



Dorothy Kauffman, Irene Aitken, and the owners of the fair, Brian and Anna Houghton.

In just the first hour of the International Asian Art Fair — which opened last night and runs through Wednesday — one could see that the market for ancient and contemporary art of Asia is blooming. "It's going fantastic," the owner of the fair, Brian Houghton, said as collectors brushed past him.

At Phoenix Ancient Art, one piece sold just as the fair opened, with six pieces under serious negotiation within an hour.

"People are interested in beautiful things. When they hear how old the work is, and they hear the prices, compared to modern art, they understand that they're undervalued. They become collectors," Phoenix Ancient Art's owner, Hicham Aboutaam, said.

Just as he finished speaking, a woman approached, brimming

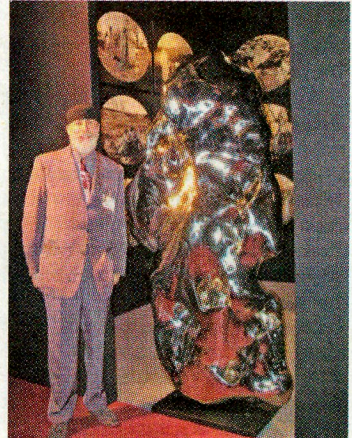
with enthusiasm. "I bought my daughter a tribal idol," she said.

The director of the Asia Society's museum, Melissa Chiu, had her eye on Zhan Wang's "Ornamental Stone," which is made of steel. "I like it because it's a traditional form in an unconventional material," Ms. Chiu said.

The event drew the who's who of the Asian art world in New York, including the Guggenheim's Asian art curator, Alexandra Munroe, and dealer Liza Hyde.

Many of the more than 1,000 visitors who were at the opening had traveled much farther. "This is the same as other events like it in China," performance artist and photographer Wang Jin said. Mr. Jin was born and lives in Beijing, and was on his first trip to America.

Amanda Gordon



Dealer Barry Friedman with 'Ornamental Stone' (2006) by Zhan Wang, priced at \$180,000. The artist is preparing for a show at the National Gallery in 2009. His work is at the Met and the MFA in Boston.