

Best of Melbourne Art Fair 2024

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What to see at this year's Melbourne Art Fair, which features contributions from over 60 galleries.

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Visual Arts

Olsen Gallery Booth A4 at Melbourne Art Fair 2024 with works by Jacqui Stockdale. Photo: Supplied.

Best artist comeback: Tolarno Galleries (D4)



Tolarno Galleries Booth D4 with works by Wanapati Yunupingu. Photo: ArtsHub.

Wanapati Yunupingu is an artist that has been on this writer's radar since the 2022 Melbourne Art Fair, and his works just seem to get better every time. The Yolŋu artist is instantly recognisable with meticulous etching designs from his Gumatj clan on found metal surfaces, such as road signs.

Yunupingu inherited ceremonial practices from his late father, Miniyawany Yunupingu, who is also an artist and spiritual leader.

This time, Tolarno Galleries presents a solo booth of Yunupingu's works of varying scale, including a ceremonial pole that Yunupingu has carved into, which seems to animate the piece with movement and vibration.

Yunupingu has been collected by major institutions in recent years, including the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), where one work is currently being exhibited as part of the Triennial.

Best in photography: COMA (K2)



COMA Gallery Booth K2 with works by Shan Turner-Carroll. Photo: Supplied.

There are surprisingly few photography works on view at this year's Melbourne Art Fair for a city that's only a few sleeps away from its biennial International Festival of Photography, PHOTO 2024. Sydney's COMA Gallery is a standout, presenting a solo of new works by Shan Turner-Carroll, collectively titled *SÚDA VÚDA AGGA BA* and taken in the Icelandic town, Seyðisfjörður.

In a place filled with a population of foreigners, including Turner-Carroll himself, the artist has portrayed each of his subjects in sometimes uncanny and surreal scenarios. While their faces are devoid of expression, hints of character are evident through Turner-Carroll's use of props and costuming, from dramatic wood-carved heels to extra long jeans.

Inside COMA's booth, portraits are paired with some of Turner-Carroll's landscape photographs, which capture rare sights of the natural environment, where clouds take on a mythical quality and form part of the storytelling.

A selection of Turner-Carroll's works from an earlier series, *Edge Of The Garden*, was recently acquired into AGNSW's collection.

Best booth install: Arthouse Gallery (K4) and Olsen Gallery (A4)



Arthouse Gallery Booth K4 with works by John Prince Siddon. Photo: ArtsHub.

In an art fair environment where works are competing for attention, the set-up of a gallery booth can add bonus points to complement the artworks on display, as well as create a unique environment for visitors.

Two booths were particular highlights this year: Arthouse Gallery, presenting a solo exhibition of Walmajarri man John Prince Siddon, and Olsen Gallery with the works of Melbourne-based artist, Jacqui Stockdale (hero image).

Siddon's rich and motif-laden paintings are bolstered by the sunny yellow booth walls, complete with works on 44-gallon drums, kangaroo pelts and sheep skulls (some organic, others 3D printed).

Hailing from the remote town of Fitzroy Crossing in the West Kimberley, WA, Siddon's oeuvre covers everyday occurrences, pop culture, politics, war, First Nations sovereignty and more. On one drum, a seemingly mundane comic strip showing Ernie and Bert takes a dark turn. Another work, titled *Russian Why Bomb Hospital Small Farms*, is a response to the shocking atrocities of war driven by political agenda.

Meanwhile, Stockdale's presentation, *Angel at My Table* embodies the spirit of Día De Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) and our deep-rooted fascination with motifs surrounding death. The artist has worked with a designer to create custom stickers resembling paper cutouts to surround her paintings, rather than the traditional frame. The result is almost homely – if being surrounded by festively dressed skeletons (Calavera Catrinas) and a four-armed pregnant woman is your thing.

Yet, there are multiple layers of narratives in Stockdale's work, most prominently the fact that the exhibition was sparked by the recent death of a close friend's son. There is the apparent element of the ghostly and the supernatural, but also tenderness, grief and longing. *no son rise* features a portrait made

from unrisen bread encased behind museum glass, signalling vitality and protection. *ArtsHub* was told that the bread has been treated to last ... forever.

Best emerging talent: Nasha Gallery (L3) and Despard Gallery (H1)



Nasha Gallery Booth L3 with works by Mark Maurangi Carrol. Photo: ArtsHub.

Nasha Gallery's presentation of Sydney-based artist Mark Maurangi Carrol and Despard Gallery's showcase of Sam Field from Marion Bay signalled some interesting early-career talent in painting.

In *Psalm Palm (living with mice)*, Carrol's pieces emerge from "the other side", both figuratively and literally. Working with industrial oil enamels from the reverse side of the rustic linen canvas, Carrol's paintings are in a sense, imprints. These images of experiences straddle a halfway state, like memories that are just starting to emerge or have already begun to fade away.



Despard Gallery Booth H1 with works by Sam Field. Photo: ArtsHub.

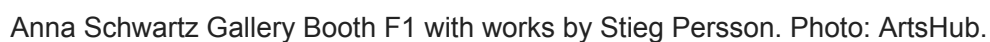
Carrol's technique pays tribute to his printmaking training, but the stories embedded in these works also point to his childhood growing up in the Cook Islands and Australia. The works depict family events that are grounded in the everyday, yet they sometimes appear ghostly and alien.

Process and presentation is also important in the work of Field, who taps into folklore, conspiracy and religion. His paintings are a departure from the everyday or, perhaps, they highlight the looming unease and chaos that has always been present.

The Back Of My Own Head is filled with the absurd, where tiny figures seem to go about their business against expansive but barren landscapes. Text sometimes features abruptly, sticking out of a corner or slanted across the bottom – amusing in an almost self-deprecating manner.

For some works, Field has adopted the use of the Oxford frame, a simplistic wooden structure that creates a cross at every corner of the canvas. Some of these pieces were sold at the time of the media preview, as have several of Carrol's larger paintings.

Best blue-chip presentation: Anna Schwartz Gallery (F1)



Phrases like “BIRTH COPULATION DEATH END OF STORY” and “SLEEPING ST JOSEPH DECAF” demand viewers stop for a second take. It’s undeniably museum quality, with layers of interpretation that feed off Persson’s oeuvre and social commentary.

Best pairing (that doesn't include painting): THIS IS NO FANTASY (C4)



THIS IS NO FANTASY Booth C4 with works by Ali Tahayori and Alexandra Standen. Photo: ArtsHub.

Yes, centuries later canvas is still winning but THIS IS NO FANTASY has put together a well-curated and thoughtful showcase of works by Ali Tahayori and Alexandra Standen that is not bound to painting's popularity.

On one wall is a large archival photograph of what appears to be a family gathering. It is the source image of *Untitled 17 (Archive of Longing)* showing in the adjacent cluster of photographs manipulated by Tahayori. Images are closely cropped and sometimes taken out of context, printed on glass that is then hand-cut to create different geometries.

Another text-based sculptural piece by Tahayori, *Objects In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear*, is displayed in synergy with Standen's alluring ceramics, covered in gold lustre. Both Tahayori and Standen draw on ancient Islamic traditions, and their works ripple and reflect off each other at the Melbourne Art Fair. A synergetic pairing.

And more...



Jan Murphy Gallery at Booth B2 with works by Guida Maestri. Photo: ArtsHub.

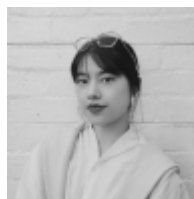
While on the topic of paintings, there are some great examples to mention this year, including Jan Murphy Gallery's (B2) presentation of Guida Maestri, accompanied by an array of red wax-cast elements as wall fixtures and floor installations; Nicholas Thompson Gallery's (K1) solo of Newcastle-based James Drinkwater; and Amber Boardman's *Retro Enchantment* showing at Sophie Gannon Gallery (C5).



Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert Booth L4 with works by Tammy Kanat. Photo: ArtsHub.

Textile and fibre-based works also have a strong presence, from Sullivan+Strumpf's presentation of new works by 2023 Archibald Prize-winner Julia Gutman (also part of the gallery's presentation at Sydney Contemporary 2023) to the winner of this year's Melbourne Art Fair Richard Parker award, Tammy Kanat, at Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert (L4). Others include Tia Ansell at Lon Gallery (H7) and Edwina McLennan at The Renshaws' (E4).

Melbourne Art Fair 2024 runs from 22-25 February at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.



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Celina Lei is an arts writer and editor at ArtsHub. She acquired her M.A in Art, Law and Business in New York with a B.A. in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Melbourne. She has previously worked across global art hubs in Beijing, Hong Kong and New York in both the commercial art sector and art criticism. Most recently she took part in drafting NAVA's revised Code of Practice - Art Fairs. Celina is based in Naarm/Melbourne.