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artnet

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Art Fairs

What Caught Collector Komal Shah's Eye at Fog Design and Art Fair

We toured the 11th edition of the San Francisco fair with the keen-eyed collector.

It was about 5:45 p.m., and Komal Shah had been at the opening for San Francisco's <u>Fog Design and Art</u> for about a half an hour—but the collector, known for her near-exclusive focus on women artists, had only made it to three of the fair's 58 booths.

After a few minutes shadowing her, it was clear why: "San Francisco loves to socialize," Shah told me.

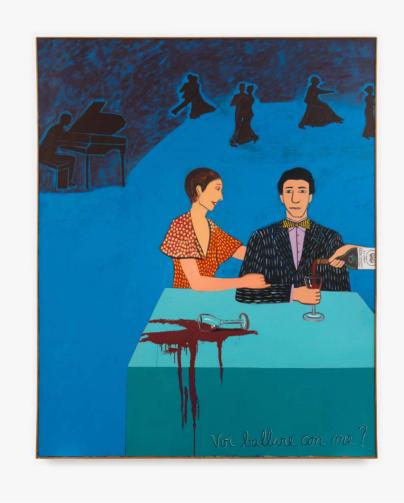
When I first linked up with Shah, she was asking SFMOMA chief curator Janet Bishop about the fair's must-see works. Bishop flagged two late Bay Area artists—both women, naturally—with recent or forthcoming shows she had curated at the museum.

Bishop's other pick was a large-scale 1976 canvas by figurative painter Joan Brown (1938–1990) titled <u>Let's Dance</u>. The work, which appeared in <u>SFMOMA's fabulous show</u> of the artist in 2022 and '23, was on offer from Claudia Altman-Siegel at her namesake San Francisco gallery <u>Altman</u> <u>Siegel</u> for \$350,000 courtesy of a "very prestigious local collection," according to the dealer.

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Inspired by a torrid affair Brown had with the owner of an Italian restaurant, it shows a couple at dinner, one red wine glass spilled over the table as the waiter pours another.



Joan Brown, Let's Dance (1976). Photo courtesy of Altman-Siegel, San Francisco.

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Shah wasn't just relying on recommendations from trusted friends and colleagues. At one point, she pulled from her pocket a handwritten list, neatly folded in half, of the different dealers she wanted to visit, and their booth numbers. But what Shah was really looking for was the unexpected.

"What I love about going to a fair is for it to be organic. So much is about falling in love," she said. And when that moment happened, it was immediately apparent.

After showing off the show-stopping Brown, Altman-Siegel took Shah to the booth's side wall, where she had a trio of abstract paintings by <u>Hiba</u> <u>Kalache</u> (b. 1972). The Lebanese artist moved to San Francisco after the explosion in Beirut in 2020, and her works are inspired by Middle Eastern fables.

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Komal Shah put this Hiba Kalache painting on hold with Altman Siegel at Fog Design + Art. Photo by Sarah Cascone.

Shah leaned in close to examine one of the works, then then turned to face Altman-Siegel, her face breaking out into a massive smile: "There is something about it that draws in me," she said, promptly putting in a reserve on the \$12,000 painting. "This is the best."