

THU, 17 APR 2025

## Emirati artist explores space, structure, and systems at Art Dubai 2025



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From Abu Dhabi's quiet landscapes to global conversations in abstraction, how Sarah Almehairi continues to expand her visual language

City Times Thursday | April 17, 2025

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There's a quiet intensity in the way Sarah Almehairi speaks about her work. A stillness, not of hesitation, but of precision — the same kind of thoughtful intentionality that defines her practice. An Emirati artist working across painting, sculpture, and installation, Almehairi has spent the past few years building a vocabulary grounded in abstraction, geometry, and materiality. This year, she brings a new chapter of that language to Art Dubai, where she is presenting with leading contemporary gallery Carbon 12.

At the heart of her evolving practice lies a deep fascination with systems — not the rigid, technocratic kind, but systems as poetic, iterative, and often self-referential frameworks. "What initially drew me to abstraction is how approachable it was and how connected I always felt to it," she says in a chat with *City Times*. "It allows for so much to be seen through it and also to be made from it."

Her works are often built from geometric structures that repeat and mutate across a series. Shapes recur. Lines resurface. Grids return. "In my practice, systems naturally build through the way I create — whether through creating series or even the process in which I organise visual elements within a single piece," she explains. "The work itself becomes a self-referential system, lending itself to the next work to follow."

This organic yet analytical approach is particularly visible in her newest body of work, *Off-Centric* — a sculptural continuation of her earlier *Off Centered* series. While the previous works flirted with dimensionality, these new pieces dive in headfirst. "This time I'm exploring space more intently," she says. "The work is slowly shifting more sculpturally." It's an evolution that speaks to her enduring interest in what lies between — between mediums, between flatness and form, between architecture and memory.

Though trained in design, Almehairi is largely self-directed in her artistic exploration. Her multidisciplinary approach allows her to move fluidly between surfaces and materials, choosing the form that best fits the concept she's working through. "Being a multidisciplinary artist and working with so many materials in the past helps guide my next decision," she says. "The medium I choose not only complements the work but also elevates it."

Wood is a material that has held a lasting presence in her practice — both for its physical qualities and its metaphorical weight. "I'm always experimenting with ways to take wood to the next step in terms of integration in my *Off Centered* series,"

she explains. "I'm constantly trying to challenge the idea of a sculptural painting and different ways in which that could take shape."

Almehairi's process may appear methodical, even architectural, but it is also full of emotion — expressed through nuance rather than drama. She embraces unpredictability and disruption within the boundaries she sets for herself. "It's about having the right amount of tension between structure and spontaneity," she says. "Over time, I've set constraints for myself when making a work, and having my work always returning to 'the grid' creates the ultimate structure. I offset these elements with moments of interruption, which come through as spontaneity visually."

This concept of balance — between thought and feeling, order and improvisation — sits at the core of her art-making. It's also reflective of a larger conversation about how artists in the Gulf are engaging with space, identity, and global art histories through increasingly personal, formally rigorous practices.

While Almehairi's work is not overtly autobiographical, her environment inevitably seeps in. Growing up in Abu Dhabi, she was surrounded by a constantly shifting architectural and social landscape — one that now informs the way she approaches space and systems. "Abu Dhabi offers such unique landscapes," she says. "But my tie to space, systems, and language was something more innate." More recently, she has been thinking about public spaces and their ability to inform larger environments — an interest that's begun to nudge her practice in new directions.

"My practice does engage with space quite frequently," she reflects. "And I definitely see it working with different architectures, as it's quite transformative. Not only do these environments help shape the work, but also shape the environments the work is engaged in."

This reciprocal relationship between artwork and setting feels particularly relevant at Art Dubai, where regional and international conversations about contemporary art converge.

But her ambitions extend beyond the exhibition itself. "I hope my work contributes to the evolving dialogue within the UAE's contemporary art scene," she says. "Working abstractly in form, colour, and geometry, I hope to engage audiences in a way that feels relevant and strong in connectivity on a global scale as well."

There's something deeply resonant in that desire — a push for global connectivity, not through spectacle, but through rhythm, structures, and systems.



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City Times  
Thursday

Vol 21—#114, April 17-2025  
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