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11 Contemporary Emirati Artists To Know By Rawaa Talass

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It's been quite a year for art in the Gulf area. In early February, the debut of Art Basel Qatar brought international art world attention to the region. A few weeks later, the U.S. attacks on Iran created turmoil across the Gulf and led airlines to cease operations to Qatar, the U.A.E., and nearby locales. The conflict has impacted plans for Art Dubai, which had to scale back its event to a smaller, more focused fair in mid-May.

Artists and galleries in the Gulf had to momentarily close their spaces and postpone exhibition openings. They are slowly resuming operations, with several participating in overseas events, including Frieze New York. Some might be wondering how the U.A.E., which has been described as a new center of the art world, will emerge from the crisis. Yet its achievements over the past couple of decades remain unchanged: Thanks in part to government support, creative activity has boomed across Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi, with each emirate embracing its own cultural offering.

This boom is actually the result of decades of hard work. Since the 1980s, shortly after the country's unification in 1971, the domestic art scene slowly developed thanks to the establishment of pioneering institutions such as Emirates Fine Arts Society in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, which were established in 1980 and 1981, respectively. Such associations were crucial platforms for new ideas, arts education, and showcases for domestic talents.

This was also an era when forward-thinking artists who were educated abroad, such as Hassan Sharif, Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim, Abdullah Al Saadi, Hussain Sharif, and Mohammed Kazem—collectively known as “The Group of Five”—broke free from traditional art and the canvas. They embraced more experimental modes of self-expression, including performance art, land art, and Conceptual art.

Such figures paved the way for today's young, driven, and internationally visible Emirati artists. They observe their country's rapid social changes as well as world events and universal concepts, which shape both their lives and art.

From up-and-coming talents to established names, here are 11 Emirati artists to keep an eye on.

[...]

An arts graduate of New York University Abu Dhabi, the emerging artist Sarah Almehairi has worked in fiber art, sculpture, drawing, collage, and other media. Her mother's craft shop in Abu Dhabi exposed her to creativity as a child. Almehairi is now inspired by Cubism and Abstract Expressionism; her clean-cut, geometric works combine painting and sculpture as they examine themes of materiality, systems, and correlations. Almehairi has hosted art workshops at Expo 2025 Osaka and displayed a public installation at Louvre Abu Dhabi as part of the Richard Mille Art Prize. In February 2026, she showcased her work in a solo presentation with Dubai-based gallery Carbon 12 at Art Basel Qatar.