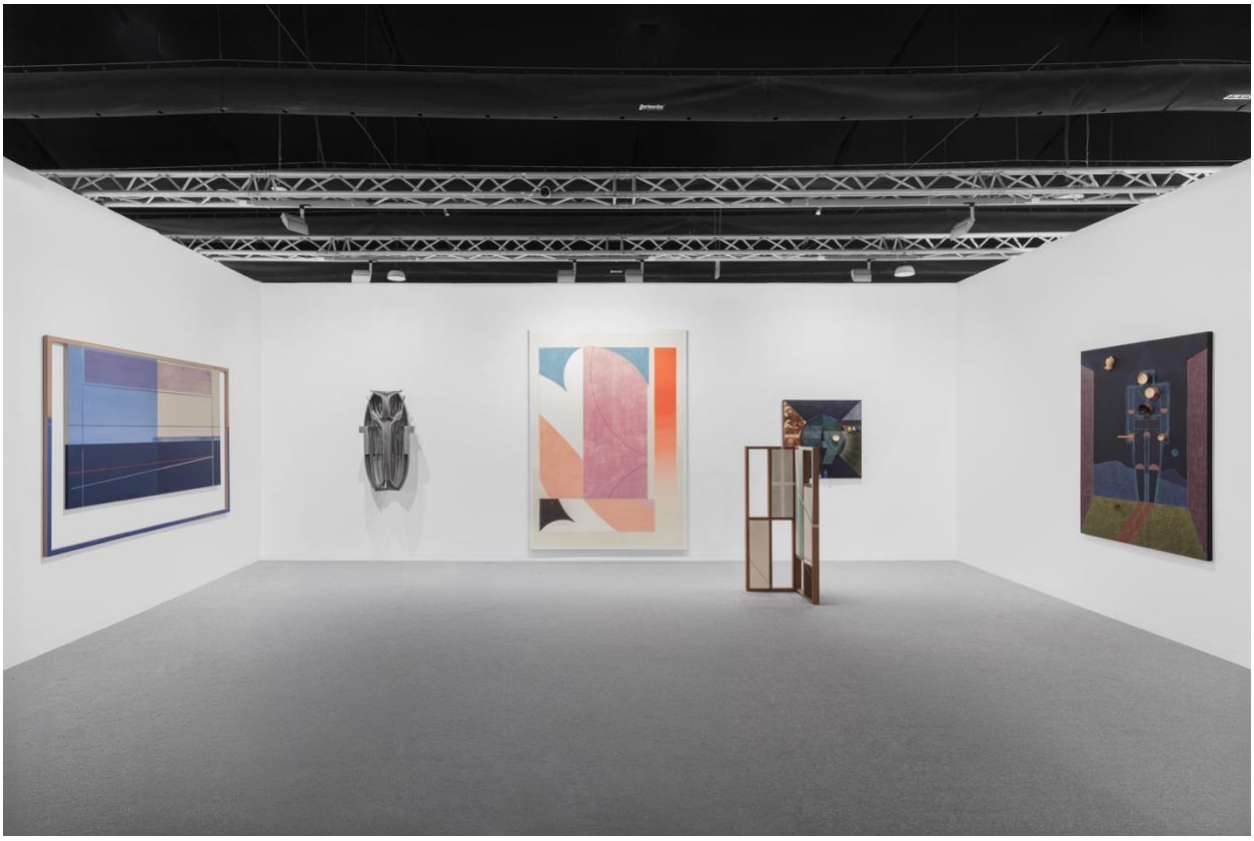
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In the Shadow of War, Frieze Abu Dhabi Continues With ‘Business as Usual’

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Frieze Abu Dhabi makes its debut this week amid geopolitical uncertainty in the region, as the US and Israel’s war in Iran continues to cause concerns about traveling to the Gulf. Even still, the United Arab Emirates is expecting smooth sailing. “It’s business as usual in Abu Dhabi,” Dyala Nusseibeh, Frieze Abu Dhabi’s director, told ARTnews. “The collectors are spending and people are buying.”
(…)

As part of Frieze Abu Dhabi’s takeover of the long-running Abu Dhabi Art fair, Nusseibeh is streamlining the show floor, cutting down exhibitors from 142 last year to 89 this year, giving galleries more space. The new, blue-chip-leaning list includes international powerhouses such as Gagosian, Pace Gallery, Thaddaeus Ropac, and Victoria Miro; of that bunch, only Pace participated in the 2025 fair. They will exhibit alongside UAE galleries like Carbon 12, Lawrie Shabibi, and The Third Line; Saudi Arabia’s ATHR Gallery and Hafez Gallery; and Tehran-based Dastan.

(…)

Kourosh Nouri, founding director of Dubai’s Carbon 12, put it more bluntly. “We are art professionals, not politicians. As long as the great galleries of Dubai and the region are present, the rest comes down to each gallery’s own strategy,” he said.
Mohammed Hafiz, cofounder of Jeddah-based ATHR Gallery, told ARTnews that regional developments are something people

consider when making any kind of travel or business decisions. “It would be unrealistic to pretend otherwise. We need to be careful about treating the Middle East as one place or assuming that events in one part of the region define the entire region.”

And at the fair, both galleries aim to highlight the strengths of their respective programs. Sfeir-Semler will be a group presentation of 12 artists, including works by Khalil Rabah, Bayan Kiwan, Samia Halaby, and Lawrence Abu Hamdan. Carbon 12’s booth will display new works by Sarah Almehairi, Bernhard Buhmann, Edgar Orlaineta and Amba Sayal-Bennett, while the gallery space in nearby Dubai will be a solo for British Iraqi painter Malik Thomas Jalil Kydd.

(…)

Beyond the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi’s opening, December will be active in the city, as celebrities and politicians, collectors and advisers descend for events ranging from the Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and the Abu Dhabi Finance Week conference to the Culture Summit Abu Dhabi and a Sotheby’s sale. ATHR Gallery’s Hafiz said he believes this confluence is the next step for the region in building a commercial market. “This is where the next chapter becomes particularly interesting. For many years, government and institutional investment have been major drivers of the regional art scene. The next stage is about developing a much broader private collecting base,” he said. Nouri, of Carbon 12, added that, at the moment, it’s private collectors who are “carrying galleries like ours.”