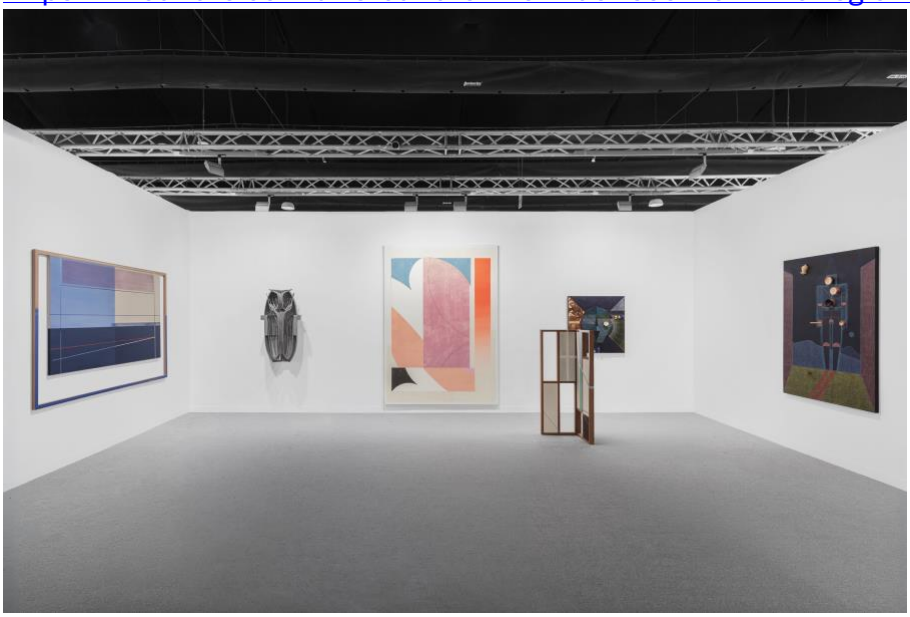
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Five Must See from the Region at Frieze Abu Dhabi
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As the art world turns its attention to the Gulf once again, the inaugural edition of Frieze Abu Dhabi launched this week, running from Thursday November 19 running through Sunday, November 22, 2026. Building on the seventeen-year legacy of Abu Dhabi Art, the fair marks a new chapter in the emirate's cultural trajectory, bringing together international galleries, artists, collectors, and institutions within an ecosystem that has been steadily expanding its global reach.

The fair's 89 galleries from 37 countries and regions brought artists from West Asia, North Africa and South Asia into conversation with artists from around the world. Beyond the commercial dimension, in fact, the fair offers an opportunity to consider the wider cultural conversations taking shape across the region, from overlooked historical figures from MENASA modernism, to emerging artistic voices and the great deal of talent in its growing artistic scene can boast today. Against a backdrop of regional uncertainty, Abu Dhabi's cultural landscape continues to assert the importance of dialogue, exchange, and sustained artistic engagement.

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Established in Dubai in 2008 by Kourosh Nouri and Nadine Knotzer, Carbon 12 has played a longstanding role in shaping the emirate's contemporary art landscape.

Presenting in the fair's main Galleries section, the gallery brings together works by Sarah Almehairi, Bernhard Buhmann, Edgar Orlaineta and Amba Sayal-Bennett in a dialogue across media, centred on a shared interest in the systems through which meaning, identity and cultural knowledge are produced, preserved and transformed.

Drawing on Modernism, popular culture and industrial production, Mexican artist Edgar Orlaineta reworks familiar forms into hybrid objects that explore the relationship between technological progress and cultural memory. Working at the intersection of art, design and traditional craft, he embraces woodworking and artisanal processes, reactivating stories embedded in materials and forms while foregrounding the physical and emotional encounter with objects, often through a playful, ironic lens.

Similarly tracing the movement of Modernist forms across geographical and colonial contexts, British-Indian artist Amba Sayal-Bennett examines the systems through which knowledge and meaning circulate. Working across language, architecture and abstraction, she interrogates the structures of power that shape our environments and relationships.

Resonating with this investigation of structure, form and meaning, Emirati artist Sarah Almehairi approaches space and abstraction as evolving systems. Starting from geometric frameworks and grids, she intuitively folds, cuts and reconfigures forms into compositions that move between image and language, order and ambiguity, making absence and negative space integral to the construction of meaning. Completing the booth, Austrian artist Bernhard Buhmann brings geometric abstraction and figuration together to explore the relationship between identity and social performance. His often fragmented or archetypal figures reflect how identity is shaped by images, roles and collective expectations.

Together, the four practices offer a compelling conversation around the ways in which material, geometric, social and linguistic structures shape our understanding of the world, while remaining open to reinterpretation and change.