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Abu Dhabi Art Exceeds 100 Galleries for the First Time

The fair's growth—up from 92 galleries last year—and the region's burgeoning investment in art helped fuel rumours of a potential buyout by Art Basel.

By Shreya Ajmani

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The 16th edition of Abu Dhabi Art 2024, held at the Manarat Al Saadiyat this week, was abuzz with conversations around the fair's transformation in recent years and Art Basel's potential involvement from 2025. [The Art Newspaper](#) described a takeover as 'all-but-certain', although they were unable to confirm it, or the rumoured price tag of \$20 million.

A buyout would not be surprising given the U.A.E.'s rising importance in the art world, evidenced by the development of the Saadiyat Cultural District, home to the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the soon-to-be Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, and Abu Dhabi investment fund ADQ's recent investment of [\\$1 billion in Sotheby's](#).

On the ground, the city's commitment to the arts was evident, with Abu Dhabi and [Dubai](#) streets adorned with signage for the inaugural Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennial. Located in the city's downtown area, the Biennial featured installations by 70 artists, including [Daniel Buren](#), [Oscar Murillo](#), and [Farah Al Qasimi](#).

'I think this is a fascinating time for the U.A.E. in terms of its dynamic, thriving art ecosystem,' said Fair Director, Dyala Nusseibeh. Several galleries are turning their attention to the region, drawn by its exciting opportunities and growing significance in the art world. Art historian and gallerist Sundaram Tagore noted the upcoming institutions in Abu Dhabi as a major draw for their participation in the fair this year for the first time.

Abu Dhabi Art has expanded significantly under the helm of Nusseibeh since 2016, when there were only 37 participating galleries. This year saw leading galleries including Leila Heller Gallery, [Lawrie Shabibi](#), and [Perrotin](#) take part.

'Unlike other fairs which are run as a commercial enterprise, Abu Dhabi Art is organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi and has a wider mandate,' said Nusseibeh. 'It has to serve the art community it is part of and contribute to that community—whether through education initiatives, outreach programmes, exhibitions, artist commissions, knowledge production in the form of books or research and more.,' she said.

The fair featured a variety of striking displays across its different sections—Special Projects, Modern and Contemporary, Emerge, Bidaya, and Focus.

Visitors were greeted by a large work by [Anish Kapoor](#) among works by [Ai Weiwei](#), [JR](#), and [Loris Cecchini](#) at Galleria Continua's booth.

Leila Heller Gallery and its neighbour, [CARBON 12](#) drew large crowds. Leila Heller Gallery mounted works across three sections by [Shirin Neshat](#), [Mouna Rebeiz](#), and Wassef Boutros-Ghali. CARBON 12 presented works by [Bernhard Buhmann](#) and rising artist [Sarah Almehairi](#), whose work is also on display at Louvre Abu Dhabi as part of the 2024 Richard Mille Art Here Art Prize.