

## ***The Only Way Out Is Through: The Twentieth Line***

Curated by Shumon Basar

18<sup>th</sup> September – 7<sup>th</sup> November 2025

The Third Line is pleased to present *The Only Way Out Is Through: The Twentieth Line*, a project curated by Shumon Basar, marking the gallery's 20th anniversary. Taking inspiration from the phrase often invoked in times of hardship—both as a mantra of endurance and a fatalistic admission of reality—*The Only Way Out Is Through* looks back on two decades of The Third Line's story in relation to global cultural, political, and economic shifts through a retrospective exhibition, program of conversations, and “Flash Sales Specials”—a series of 48-hour pop-up sales of thematically grouped, long-unseen works from the gallery's archive.



Graphic Design by UBIK.

The **exhibition component** features every artist currently represented by The Third Line, with early and recent works drawn from the gallery's extensive two-decade archive—much of which has not been shown to the public. Many of the early works reveal how some artists' practices have evolved over the years, while others show artists whose visual language and concerns emerged fully formed and have remained strikingly consistent.

Selected pieces are arranged into four chronological sections—2005 to 2009/ 2010 to 2015/ 2016 to 2020/ 2021 to 2025—each contextualized by a timeline running across the gallery’s floors that delineates key political, economic, and cultural moments, ranging from the global financial crisis, through uprisings across the Arab world and the COVID-19 pandemic, to the present moment shaped by intersecting global crises. The exhibition opens and closes with statistical analytics that frame the narrative arc of the past two decades.

The 20-year portrait of The Third Line is completed by **a series of conversations** with key protagonists from the gallery’s history.

In celebrating the gallery’s 20-year journey, a tradition from its earlier years is resurrected as **Flash Sales Specials**. Basar selects long-unseen works from the gallery’s archive, groups them by “Search Word” themes, and displays them in the gallery’s Viewing Room for 48 hours only at a time, like vanishing Instagram Stories. The Flash Sales Specials will be announced via The Third Line’s social media platforms over the course of the exhibition.

The Third Line was founded when contemporary art from the Middle East was yet to gain recognition internationally the way it has today. Similarly, Dubai was just beginning to assert itself as a centre for culture and commerce. In 2005, the city’s ambitions were often met with international skepticism. Twenty years on, however, Dubai has now become a focus for shaping postwestern cultural discourse. *The Only Way Out Is Through: The Twentieth Line* invites visitors to time travel—through the many trajectories of contemporary art from the region over the past two decades, but also through the crises that have shadowed it—and reflect on the complexities and contradictions that make up the early 21st century.

### Artists Included

Abbas Akhavan  
Ala Ebtekar  
Amir H. Fallah  
Anuar Khalifi  
Arwa Abouon  
Bady Dalloul  
Farah Al Qasimi  
Farhad Moshiri  
Fouad Elkoury  
Hassan Hajjaj  
Hayv Kahraman  
Huda Lutfi  
Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige  
Jordan Nassar  
Kamran Samimi  
Laleh Khorramian

Lamya Gargash  
Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian  
Nima Nabavi  
Pouran Jinchi  
Rana Begum  
Sahand Hesamiyan  
Sara Naim  
Sarah Awad  
Shirin Aliabadi  
Slavs and Tatars  
Sophia Al-Maria  
Tarek Al-Ghoussein  
Vian Sora  
yasiin bey  
Youssef Nabil

### Credits

Research by Tara Timberman  
Graphic Design by UBIK

### About Shumon Basar

**Shumon Basar** is a writer, thinker, and curator with two decades' experience working in the Gulf. After landing in Dubai for the first time in 2005, Basar became a Contributing Editor at *Bidoun* magazine, with whom the book, *With/Without: Spatial Products, Practices and Politics in the Middle East* — co-edited with Antonia Carver and Markus Miessen — was published in 2007. In the same year, Basar's other book, *Cities from Zero*, also came out, analysing new urban languages in Dubai and China. Basar has been Commissioner at Art Dubai's renowned Global Art Forum since 2011, overseeing hundreds of speakers, across Doha, Kuwait, Singapore and London. He was Curator-at-Large at Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, where his 2021 exhibition with Douglas Coupland and Hans Ulrich Obrist *Age of You* was critically acclaimed.

Other roles have included founding member of Fondazione Prada's Thought Council; Special projects at Prada and Miu Miu; Curator of Public Program at Art Week Riyadh 2025; Expert Advisory Group for the Royal Commission of AlUla; Chief Narrative Officer and co-founder at web3 startup Zien; Public Programs Director at the Architectural Association. He is currently working on establishing Ibraaz, a London-located space for art, culture and ideas from the global majority, initiated by Lina Lazaar and the Kamel Lazaar Foundation.

Basar is co-author of the modern-classics, *The Extreme Self* (Franz and Walter Koenig) and *The Age of Earthquakes* (Penguin), both with Douglas Coupland and Hans Ulrich Obrist. Lastly, Basar has held editorial positions at the magazines *TANK*, *o32c*, *Flash Art*, and as Curator-in-Residence at *Zora Zine*, produced a trilogy of pieces around his viral neologism, 'Lorecore.'

### About The Third Line

Founded in 2005, The Third Line is a Dubai-based gallery that represents contemporary artists locally, regionally, and internationally. With 20 years of dedicated commitment to the arts, it has become a pioneering platform for established talent and emerging voices from the region and its diaspora. Through a dynamic program encompassing exhibitions, artist talks, and art book publishing, The Third Line fosters rich discourse around contemporary art practices from the region.

Represented artists include: Abbas Akhavan, Ala Ebtekar, Amir H. Fallah, Anuar Khalifi, Bady Dalloul, Farah Al Qasimi, Farhad Moshiri, Fouad Elkoury, Hassan Hajjaj, Hayv Kahraman, Huda Lutfi, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Jordan Nassar, Kamran Samimi, Laleh Khorramian, Lamya Gargash, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Nima Nabavi, Pouran Jinchi, Rana Begum, Sahand Hesamiyan, Sara Naim, Sarah Awad, Shirin Aliabadi, Slavs and Tatars, Sophia Al-Maria, Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Vian Sora, yasiin bey, and Youssef Nabil.

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