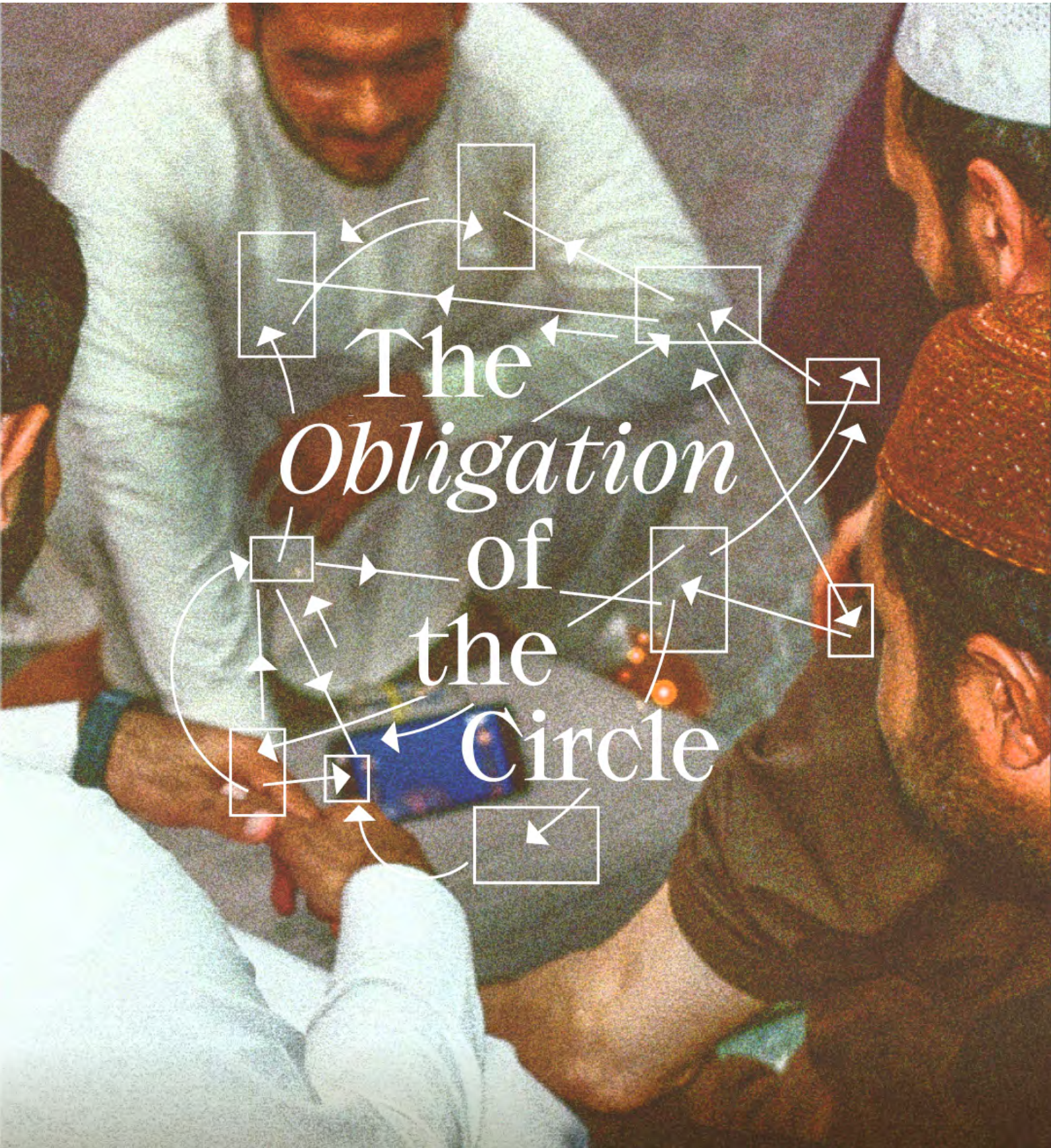


CHRISTOPHER JOSHUA BENTON

# The Obligation of the Circle

Opening 21.11.2025 | 6 - 11 PM

Jabal Qas'ah St - Al Rawdah - W58 - Abu Dhabi





Christopher and the storytellers of the carpet souk. © Ron John

**Baró O-Contemporary is pleased to announce The Obligation of the Circle, the debut and first solo exhibition of Christopher Joshua Benton, presented at the gallery's space in Abu Dhabi.**

Benton, an American artist who has lived and worked in the United Arab Emirates for the past decade, presents a new series of kilim tapestries developed in collaboration with a weaving circle of women in Kabul, Afghanistan: Fatima, Fawzia, Qadria, Tahira, Zahra, Zakia, and Ziagul. Together, these works deepen the artist's ongoing inquiry into civic imagination, communal infrastructure, and collective belonging.

The exhibition coincides with the one-year anniversary of *Where Lies My Carpet is Thy Home* and briefly reflects on this collaborative installation created with carpet merchants from Abu Dhabi's souk. Developed through intimate majlis storytelling sessions, the work weaves together memories of the merchants' homelands in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India with their present lives in the Emirates. Its cascading valleys portray personal histories, including Wali's longing for his Afghan apple orchard and Abdul's recollections of trading sheep in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, blending the visual language of Afghan war carpets with a kilim-like, pixelated 8-bit

Larger than a football field, recognized as the second-largest carpet ever produced and potentially the largest majlis ever conceived, the installation mirrors the full lifecycle of a carpet and proposes a decolonial, body-first experience of art. Today, it remains a permanent public plaza co-designed with the community, continuing to support the Afghan and Pakistani residents of the souk.

At the heart of *The Obligation of the Circle* are new tapestries that map intertwined narratives of migration, gendered labor, and the yearning for homecoming. If Benton's earlier *Carpet Souk* project focused on the lives of men inhabiting the upper levels of the souk, this new body of work turns toward the labor of women in Kabul, constructing a "cartography of return" that connects intimate acts of weaving to broader histories of displacement, care, and community. Through convening diverse audiences around shared acts of making and storytelling, Benton invites reflection on how urban narratives are shaped, how communities coexist, and how artists can build spaces of empathy and exchange within their environments.

The show also features a selection from Benton's personal collection of Afghan war carpets, as well as a community wall, a large-scale photographic insta-

llation accompanied by printed images documenting interventions that have taken place in the souk. Together, these elements generate a dialogue between memory, territory, and collective practice, transforming the gallery into a site of encounter and reflection.

Additionally, the project welcomes discursive and process-based contributions from other voices that orbit Benton's practice, including Marisa Morán Jahn, Faustin Linyekula, and others, whose dialogues with the artist expand the understanding of community. This ecology of collaboration is reflected in the fact that proceeds from the production of

the works support Zuleya, a social enterprise dedicated to preserving Afghanistan's ancient weaving traditions through education, free healthcare, and sustainable employment.

The Obligation of the Circle will open on November 21, 2025, from 6:00 PM to 11:00 PM, coinciding with Gallery Night at Abu Dhabi Art 2025, and will remain on view until March 13, 2026.



"Where Lies My Carpet is Thy Home" Where Lies My Carpet Is Thy Home. 2024. Astroturf. 66 x 42 meters. Commissioned by the Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi for the Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennial 2024.



Christopher Joshua Benton © Ron John

## ARTIST BIO

Christopher Joshua Benton is an American artist based in Abu Dhabi whose practice centers on socially engaged art and installation. He collaborates with academics, architects, scientists, and everyday people to imagine new ways of living and create new sites of knowledge production. Inspired by twelve years of living in the Emirates, Benton researches how the notion of homeland endures within immigrant populations.

His current long-term artistic research projects include leading an archive of Black dance with scientists from MIT's Immersion Lab, funded by Meta and the Brooklyn Museum; designing a public park for the Government of Abu Dhabi; and heading a team of architects and urbanists to reimagine overcrowded low-income housing in the United Arab Emirates.

His exhibitions have been presented at museums, biennials and art fairs around the world, including the Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennial, the Fikra Graphic Design Biennial (Sharjah, UAE), and Abu Dhabi Art: Beyond Emerging (59th Venice Biennale). Additional projects have been exhibited at Jameel Arts Centre (Dubai, UAE); Dubai Design Week; and Tokyo Arts and Space (Tokyo, Japan), among others. His art and research have been featured on the BBC and CNN, and in print with GQ, Harper's Bazaar, and Architectural Digest.

While in Cambridge, Benton earned a master's degree in Art, Culture, and Technology from MIT and studied at Harvard, where he received the Obermayer Prize and the Harold & Arlene Shnitzer Prize. He has participated in programs and fellowships with the University of Georgia as a HOPE Scholar, the University of Oxford as a Gilman Scholar, and the Rhode Island School of Design as a Sallama Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation fellow. Benton is also the former Global Creative Director for Huawei.

## **BARÓ GALERIA**

Baró Galeria is a contemporary art gallery founded by Maria Baró in São Paulo in 1999. From the beginning, the gallery positioned itself as a space for experimentation and critical dialogue, rooted in international collaboration and institutional partnerships. Representing artists of multiple generations and geographies, Baró promotes both established and emerging voices. Its curatorial vision aims to connect the Global South with the broader contemporary art landscape, fostering cross-cultural exchange through a dynamic and forward-looking program.

## **O CONTEMPORARY**

A premier art gallery and advisory firm specializing in contemporary art from the MENA region. Our founder mission is to support and promote regional and international artists while celebrating the universal identity of Abu Dhabi through various art initiatives. Our mission includes various services focusing on public art projects, corporate art , and private collector art advisory.

### **For more information and press requests:**

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