

An aerial photograph of a desert canyon. The landscape is dominated by large, rounded, tan-colored rock formations. A winding road, composed of dark gravel or stones, snakes through the sandy desert floor. The lighting is bright, casting long shadows from the rock formations. The overall scene is arid and rugged.

DESERT

ALULA 2020

CASE STUDY

LYN WINTER INC CREATIVE STRATEGY AND COMMUNICATIONS
CONTEMPORARY ART DESIGN FASHION ARCHITECTURE LUXURY

OVERVIEW

Desert X AlUla took place from January 31–March 7, 2020 in the desert of AlUla, an ancient oasis in the north west of Saudi Arabia and home to the UNESCO World Heritage site, Hegra. The exhibition was co-curated by Saudi curators Raneem Farsi and Aya Alireza with Desert X Artistic Director Neville Wakefield.

Desert X AlUla was the first site-responsive exhibition of its kind in Saudi Arabia. The exhibition enabled new, cross-cultural dialogue between artists from Saudi Arabia and the surrounding region with artists from previous iterations of Desert X in California. An exploration of desert culture, the exhibition took its cues from the extraordinary landscape and historical significance of AlUla and created exchange among artists, curators and the international and local communities.

Free and open to all, Desert X AlUla activated the unique desert landscape of AlUla through installations by artists Lita Albuquerque, Manal AlDowayan, Zahrah AlGhamdi, Nasser AlSalem, Rashed AlShashai, Gisela Colon, Sherin Guirguis, Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim, Nadim Karam, eL Seed, Wael Shawky, Muhannad Shono, Superflex and Rayyane Tabet.





To provide an international platform for artists from Saudi Arabia, the neighboring region and around the world to present work together in response to the unique conditions of the historic, desert landscape of AlUla.

To enable cross-cultural dialogue among artists and local and global art and cultural communities.

To connect desert communities.

To provide free access for all to art by today's most important artists.

Desert X AlUla drew more than 9,000 visitors in 5 weeks, among them, local visitors from AlUla, the region and those traveling internationally.

The exhibition coincided with the annual “Winter at Tantora Festival ”as well as with the annual 21,39 art exhibition in Jeddah.

Delegates visiting AlUla for a convening of Nobel Laureates and other visiting delegations were able to enjoy and experience this first site-specific exhibition of its kind in the historic desert of AlUla.

Media guests attended from around the world, including from Saudi Arabia and the region, the UK, Europe, China, and the United States.



GLOBAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Desert X AlUla garnered extensive, positive media coverage in print, online and broadcast in a wide range of local, national and international media outlets and on social media.



MORE THAN 1.52B COMBINED GLOBAL MEDIA
IMPRESSIONS FROM OCTOBER 2019 TO DATE

500 MEDIA STORIES:

ONLINE STORIES: 381

TOTAL ONLINE IMPRESSIONS COUNTED: 1.5B

OFFLINE

BROADCAST STORIES: 51

TOTAL BROADCAST IMPRESSIONS: 2.28M

NEWSLETTER AND PRINT STORIES: 68

TOTAL PRINT IMPRESSIONS: 13.01M

Sources: Cision, Google, and CoverageBook

INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE IN 28 COUNTRIES:

Austria, Bahrain, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Turkey.



The New York Times

“Art Rises in the Saudi Desert.”

“Across the gold-and-russet sandstone canyon, the brawny rock formations sprouted contemporary art: an iridescent sculpture like a spaceship, a glinting metal tunnel, a scattering of brightly painted spheres.”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

“Curators at the California-based biennial Desert X worked with Saudi and international artists to create an exhibit of temporary art installations in the Saudi desert called Desert X AlUla.”



“In praise of the transformative power of the arts.”

“The Californian contemporary art biennial has arrived in western Asia with 14 monumental installations.”

THE TIMES

“AlUla, in northwest Saudi Arabia, is the extraordinary desert site of the Desert X Al Ula temporary exhibition.”

US AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

AFAR

"Saudi Arabia's Ancient Desert Transforms Into a Striking Art Exhibition"

Desert Sun.

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

"Desert X exhibition in Al Ula received 9,000 visitors"

London Evening Standard

"From California to Saudi Arabia: Desert X lands in Al Ula"

"The desert kingdom is the host of a truly Instagrammable show. Stephanie d'Arc Taylor on a nation's new image"

Forbes

"Desert X AlUla: The Art Event Enticing Travelers To The Desert of Saudi Arabia"



"Saudi Arabia opened up its tourism industry and cooperated with the American high-end art festival Desert X to host an art festival in its heavily-funded AlUla tourist resort."

Los Angeles Times

"Desert X art exhibition is heading to Saudi Arabia"



"The nonprofit was approached by the Royal Commission of AlUla, to bring the artistic dialogue about the desert to AlUla."

ARTFORUM

“Desert X site in Saudi Arabia to become permanent arts hub”

artnet®

“Time seemed to stop momentarily in AlUla as the formidable presence of the landscape united with contemporary artworks in a most magical manner.”

ARTnews

“The inaugural edition of Desert X AlUla, the outdoor sculpture exhibition in Saudi Arabia, has named its artists list.”

designboom®

“Desert X AlUla sets art across the heart of historic saudi arabian trade route”

dezeen

“Desert X installs 14 site-specific works in Saudi Arabian desert”

HYPEBEAST

“Desert X AlUla: Striking Art Installations Across The Historic Saudi Arabian Valley”

REGIONAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



"This ethereal sculpture show is connecting cultures through contemporary art in AlUla"



"First Desert x Al Ula festival announces participating artists"



"An Extraordinary Exhibition Launches In Saudi Arabia's AlUla Region"

ARAB NEWS

"Saudi Arabia's AlUla lands interactive art exhibition"



"Coachella art biennial Desert X heads to Saudi Arabia"

Saudi Gazette

"Saudi Arabia to welcome renowned Coachella Valley-based Desert X Art Biennial in 2020"



"Desert dreaming"

"Desert X AlUla not only put an ancient locale on the global art state, is also ramped up the discourse on the nature of site-specificity."



"Desert X AlUla is an invitation to the world to come and visit Saudi Arabia."



"Oasis of creativity"

"You don't need to travel to the ends of the earth to expand your horizons"

MEDIA TRIP WELCOMED REPORTERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



In collaboration with the RCU and its agencies, Lyn Winter, Inc. coordinated trips for media representatives from around the world to visit the exhibition for the opening preview and events and to meet artists, curators and stakeholders.

Media representatives from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Arab News*, *The Independent*, *FT Chinese*, *KCRW*, *USA Today/Desert Sun* and *Artforum*, among others visited as part of a series of press trips.

OPENING EVENTS

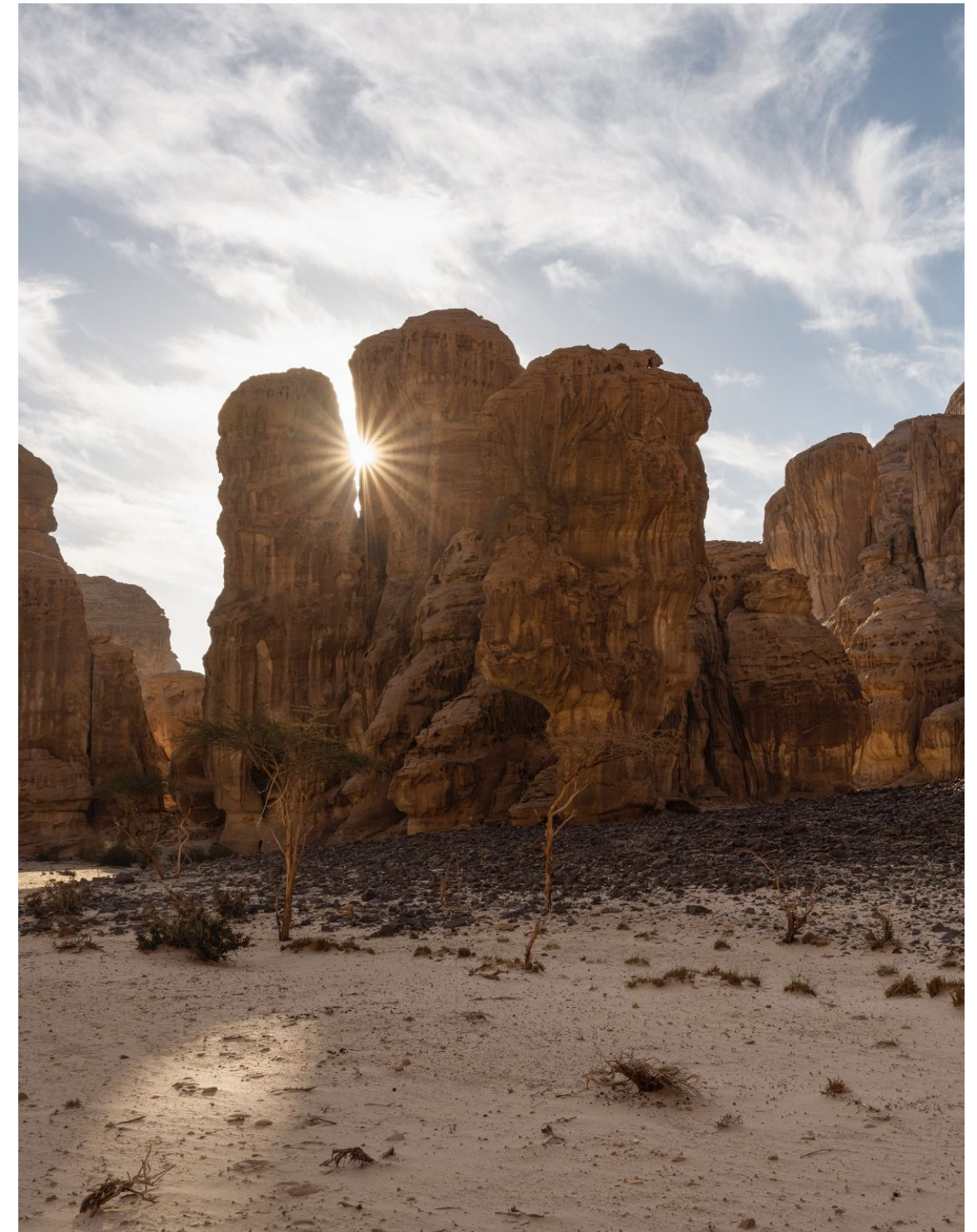
Desert X AlUla opening events for media, VIP guests, artists, curators and stakeholders took place from January 28-30, 2020, including:

Opening press conference and remarks by Desert X AlUla representatives and exhibition curators

Guided tours with curators and artists of Desert X AlUla art installations.

Desert X AlUla official opening preview and reception

Visits to UNESCO World Heritage site Hegra and to the ruins of the ancient city of Dadan.





WEBSITE

A dedicated DX Alula 2020 web presence at <https://www.desertx.org/alula> was established as the digital hub for the exhibition.

SOCIAL MEDIA

A social media campaign through exhibition-related accounts @_desertx and @experiencealula was activated resulting in:

- More than 89.2k likes across 32 total promotional posts on official channels in the lead up and during the run of the exhibition.
- 70.5k combined posts using hashtags #desertx, #desertxalula, and #experiencealula to date.



VIDEO CONTENT

A series of short videos focussing on the participating artists, and their works, the exhibition co-curators and the landscape and history of AlUla was produced collaboratively to extend the exhibition across social and digital channels

DESERT X ALULA PODCAST

The Desert X AlUla podcast series provided a global platform for the voices of featured artists and amplified the discussion and exchange fostered throughout the exhibition. The eight-part series featured co-curators Raneen Farsi, Aya Alireza and Neville Wakefield in conversation with artists about their experience of responding to the landscape, and why they welcomed this collaboration. Available at Apple Podcasts and wherever you get your podcasts.

RESULTS

A successful collaboration between RCU and its communications team resulted in positive, global media coverage and conversation across multiple channels:

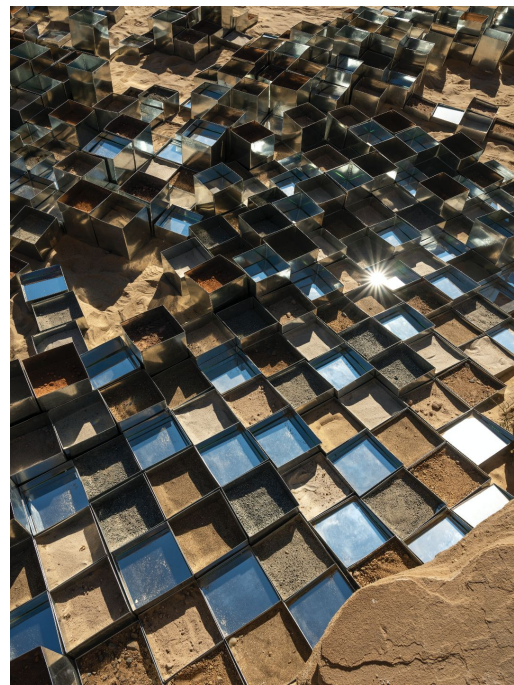
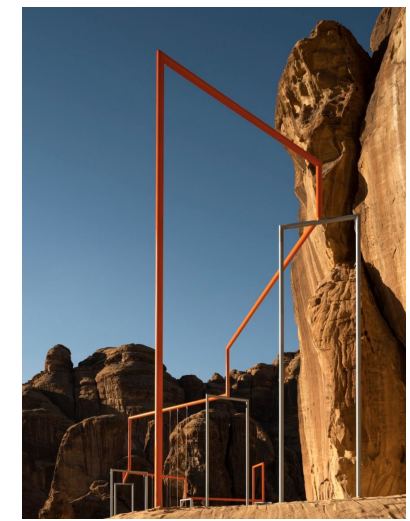
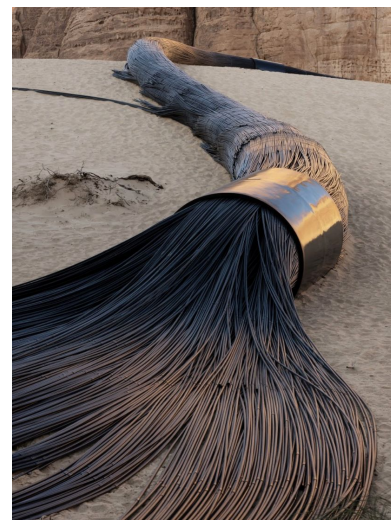
Introduced representatives of the international media to some of today's most important Saudi, regional, and international artists.

Amplified an active and engaging cross-cultural dialogue surrounding the exhibition and between artists and local and global desert communities.

Through the production of the dedicated Desert X AlUla podcast series, provided a global platform for the voices of participating artists from Saudi Arabia, the region, Europe and the US.

As a result of the exhibition, the canyon in AlUla, where Desert X AlUla took place has been designated as a permanent arts hub, continuing AlUla's history and legacy of craftsmanship and art-making, and establishing it as a new oasis for international art and creativity.





Desert X AlUla took place from January 31 to March 7, 2020 in the historic desert of AlUla in northwestern Saudi Arabia.

A catalog documenting the exhibition is available on request.

