



## Contemporary Artists Respond to Saudi Arabian Desert as Desert X and the Royal Commission for AlUla Partner on Major Exhibition



Images left to right: Qasr al-Farid at UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hegra; AlUla landscape, images courtesy RCU.

**Paris, France and Palm Springs, CA October 7, 2019** – Desert X and the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) today revealed plans for a major site-specific art exhibition engaging some of the world’s most exciting international artists. **Desert X AlUla** will take place in the pristine desert of AlUla, northwest Saudi Arabia, which is home to the country’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hegra. The exhibition will open January 31–March 7, 2020, coinciding with AlUla’s annual festival Winter at Tantora and is part of the RCU’s vision and pledge to reinvigorate, protect and preserve AlUla as a vibrant, open museum and a unique global destination for heritage, nature and the arts.

Desert X AlUla is the first international collaboration for Desert X, which was founded to connect desert communities and cultures through contemporary art. Co-curated by Desert X Artistic Director Neville Wakefield and Saudi curators and contemporary art specialists, Raneem Farsi and Aya Alireza, the exhibition will bring together artists from Saudi Arabia, the neighboring regions, and the world. The exhibition will feature large-scale installations, including site-specific works and commissions.

Desert X AlUla will create an international dialogue about the desert and shared interests through art works that respond to different desert cultures and environmental conditions, and to the historical context of AlUla.

AlUla is an ancient oasis in a desert valley, a region that was once a historic crossroads between three continents, and a gateway from Arabia to the East and West. Built from successive civilisations and peoples including the ancient North Arabian Kingdoms of Dadan and Lihyan, and the Nabataeans, the landscape combines works of nature and humankind, expressing a long and symbiotic relationship between people and their environment.



“We are thrilled to be collaborating with Desert X, an organisation which shares our hope and vision for international exchange through art. This is the first temporary exhibition of site-specific works to take place in the magnificent region of AlUla, and the diverse voices of the participating artists will advance a vital and inclusive exchange about social, environmental, historic, geographic and philosophical ideas and issues,” said **Culture Minister and RCU Gov. Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammad bin Farhan Al-Saud**. “Desert X AlUla is part of our expanding cultural vision for AlUla and will invite local, regional and international visitors to experience engaging international art, and to preserve our global heritage for future generations.”

“We believe that the arts are an enlightening and unifying force that fosters new perspectives and creates opportunities for transformative conversations,” said **Susan Davis, Desert X founder and board president**. “The collaboration with Royal Commission for AlUla advances the mission of Desert X beyond the California desert, enlarging and amplifying a desert-to-desert dialogue. Desert X AlUla will shine a light on contemporary art being made in Saudi Arabia and the neighboring region and bring the work of international artists to new audiences.”

The full list of participating artists will be announced in the coming weeks.

Visit: [desertx.org/alula](https://desertx.org/alula)

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### **Notes to editors**

#### **About AlUla**

Located 1,100 km from Riyadh, in North-West Saudi Arabia, AlUla is a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage. The vast area, covering 22,561km<sup>2</sup>, includes a lush oasis valley, towering sandstone mountains and ancient cultural heritage sites dating back thousands of years to when the Lihyan and Nabataean kingdoms reigned.

The most well-known and recognised site in AlUla is Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. A 52-hectare ancient city, Hegra was the principal southern city of the Nabataean Kingdom and is comprised around 100 well preserved tombs with elaborate facades cut out of the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement.

In addition to Hegra, AlUla is home to many fascinating historical and archaeological sites such as: Ancient Dadan, the capital of the Dadan and Lihyan Kingdoms, which is considered one of the most developed 1st-millennium BCE cities of the Arabian Peninsula; thousands of ancient rock art sites and inscriptions; and Hijaz Railway stations.

### **About The Royal Commission for AlUla**

The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to protect and safeguard AlUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in North-West Saudi Arabia. RCU has embarked on a long-term plan to develop and deliver a sensitive, sustainable transformation of the region, reaffirming it as one of the country's most important archaeological and cultural destinations and preparing it to welcome visitors from around the world.

Since its inception RCU's development work in AlUla has encompassed a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, nature, tourism, culture, education and the arts.

In addition to the launch of a cultural manifesto, a major programme incorporating extensive archaeological fieldwork and survey of the biodiversity of AlUla is currently underway by RCU, with the support of expert teams from around the globe. The creation of nature reserves and animal conservation initiatives are amongst efforts to protect habitats and safeguard endangered species.

Local skills development for the AlUla community include the Hammayah programme, training male and female citizens in heritage awareness; the Scholarship Programme for AlUla students to study at world-leading institutions abroad and the training of local tour guides, the 'AIRowah' group in AlUla; as guardians of AlUla's history story.

### **About Desert X**

Desert X is produced by The Desert Biennial, a 501(C)3 charitable organization, conceived to produce recurring international contemporary art exhibitions that activate desert locations through site-specific installations by acclaimed international artists. Its guiding purposes and principles include presenting public exhibitions of art that respond meaningfully to the conditions of desert locations, the environment and indigenous communities; promoting cultural exchange and education programs that foster dialogue and understanding among cultures and communities about shared artistic, historical, and societal issues; and providing an accessible platform for artists from around the world to address ecological, cultural, spiritual, and other existential themes. [desertx.org](http://desertx.org)



### **About Winter at Tantora Festival**

Winter at Tantora is a festival in AlUla County in northwest Saudi Arabia, a place of extraordinary natural beauty and cultural heritage. Running from December 19, 2019 to March 7, 2020, Winter at Tantora will bring 12 weekends of wonder to the AlUla Oasis, inspired by its spectacular scenery. Home to archaeological treasures, natural beauty and magnificent monuments that span millennia, AlUla is set on the ancient incense route between Southern Arabia and Egypt. It became a hub of commercial and cultural exchange because a lush oasis valley ran through it, creating an ideal environment for civilisations to flourish.

[www.experiencealula.com](http://www.experiencealula.com)

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