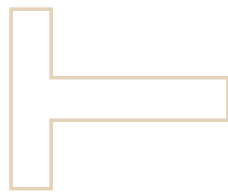


ALULA

DESERT > ALULA 2024



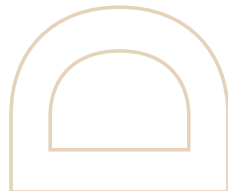
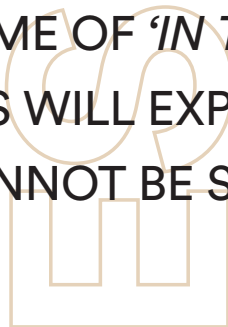


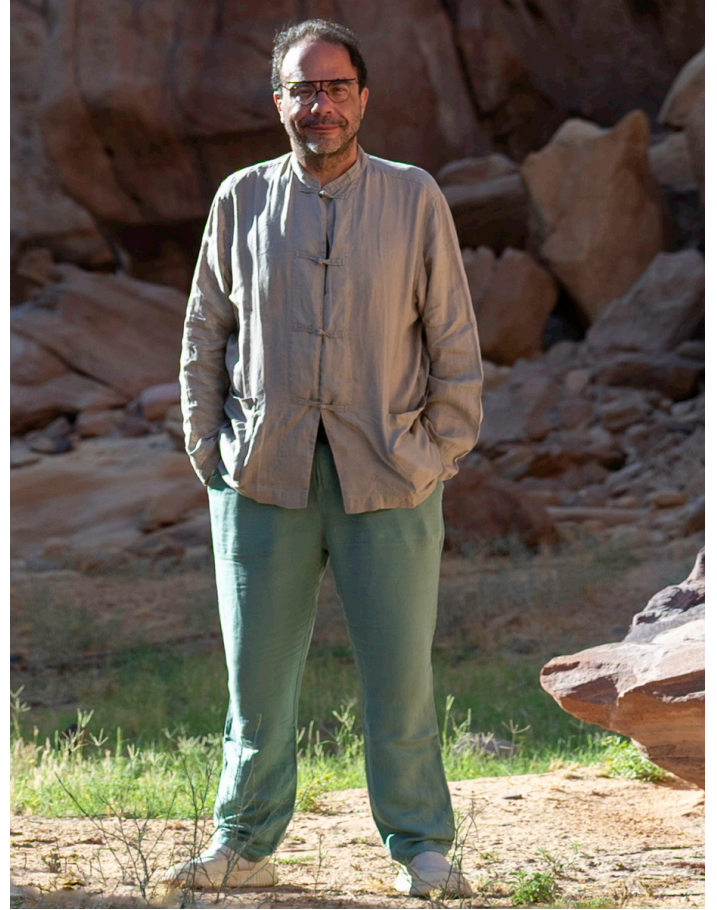
DESERT X ALULA

9 FEBRUARY – 23 MARCH 2024

THIRD EDITION OF INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION

UNDER THE THEME OF '*IN THE PRESENCE OF
ABSENCE*', ARTISTS WILL EXPLORE THAT WHICH
CANNOT BE SEEN





- Maya El Khalil, Desert X AIUla 2024 curator, Courtesy of the Royal Commission for AIUla
- Marcello Dantas, Desert X AIUla 2024 curator, Courtesy of the Royal Commission for AIUla

— Title page

— Top
Alicja Kwade, *In Blur*, installation view, Desert X AIUla 2022, courtesy the artist and Desert X AIUla, photo by Lance Gerber

— Bottom
Jim Denevan, *Angle of Repose*, installation view, Desert X AIUla 2022, courtesy the artist and Desert X AIUla, photo by Lance Gerber

OPEN TO ALL, DESERT X ALULA IS A RECURRING AND TEMPORARY, SITE-RESPONSIVE, INTERNATIONAL OPEN-AIR ART EXHIBITION TAKING PLACE IN ALULA, A GLOBALLY SIGNIFICANT ANCIENT DESERT REGION IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA. DESERT X ALULA TAKES PLACE AS A HIGHLIGHT OF THE ALULA ARTS FESTIVAL.

Raneem Farsi and Neville Wakefield will return as this year’s artistic directors and the exhibition will be curated by Maya El Khalil and Marcello Dantas. El Khalil is a renowned art advisor and curator with a focus on the MENA region. Dantas is an award-winning curator known for innovative interdisciplinary practices linking science, history, technology to create engaging and participatory exhibition experiences.

Following two exhibitions since 2020, Desert X AIUla returns for its third edition from 9 February – 23 March 2024, placing visionary contemporary artworks by Saudi and international artists amidst the extraordinary desert landscape of AIUla, a majestic region in north-west Saudi Arabia of natural and creative heritage steeped in a legacy of cross-cultural exchange.

Under the theme of *In the Presence of Absence*, Desert X AIUla 2024 asks ‘what cannot be seen?’. Often dismissed as spaces of emptiness, deserts are rendered mute, static, but there is much more than meets the eye. Artists taking part in Desert X AIUla 2024 have been invited to explore ideas of the unseen and the inexpressible. Encouraged to engage with what is not immediately apparent, they stage new encounters with the landscape, imagining alternative perspectives that appreciate the imperceptible forces and atmospheres of time, wind, light, the flows of history and myths woven into the place.

Desert X AIUla is a collaboration between Desert X and the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) established to advance new cultural dialogue through art. The first site-responsive exhibition of its kind in Saudi Arabia, it fosters exchange between artists, curators and international and local communities, shaped by a curatorial vision that takes the desert as its inspiration. Building on the legacy of Desert X, which takes place in California's Coachella Valley, Desert X AIUla draws on principles of land art, offering a profound opportunity to experience art in dialogue with nature.

Desert X AIUla has played a pivotal role in paving the way for the development of another initiative due to open in AIUla in 2026, Wadi AlFann, a 65 square kilometre site set to become a global destination for monumental site-specific, permanent land art. Marking a major milestone in the Royal Commission for AIUla's Cultural Manifesto, the epic, monumental scale of Wadi AlFann's cross-generational commissions will open a new chapter in art history, expanding and continuing for years to come. Both Desert X AIUla and Wadi AlFann are examples of RCU's vision for art in the landscape.

As well as being a historic cultural site, AIUla is at the heart of Saudi Arabia's burgeoning arts scene. Arts AIUla is dedicated to creating a culturally enriched place to live and visit, to revive the rich legacy of arts in the region and to create opportunities for the community to experience art as a source of education and enrichment through job creation and skills development.

The upcoming edition of Desert X AIUla will be situated in locations within the Wadi AlFann desert, Harrat Uwayrid and AlManshiyah Railway Station, inviting visitors to wander through and experience spectacular and varied landscapes as they weave their journey between the works. Desert X AIUla aims to contribute to and continue the artistic heritage of the local community and region: Works from Desert X AIUla 2020 by Sherin Guirguis, Lita Albuquerque, Manal AlDowayan, Superflex, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim and Nadim Karam have been acquired by RCU, some of which are on view at Habitas, AIUla. Works from Desert X AIUla 2022 by Dana Awartani, Alicja Kwade, Monika Sosnowska, Sultan Bin Fahad, Khalil Rabah, Shezad Dawood and Serge Attukwei Clottey have been acquired by RCU, some of which are on display. Jim Denevan's work for Desert X AIUla 2022 also remains in its original location, where it will dissipate naturally. Desert X AIUla has been building local and international audiences over the years, with a 53% increase in average visitors per day from 2020 to 2022 editions.

Home to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hegra, built by the Nabataeans over 2,000 years ago, the AIUla region has been at the crossroads of cultural exchange for millennia, historically lying on the incense trade route and once capital to the ancient Kingdom of Dadan. Today, it is once again a crossroads of cultural inspiration, valuing arts and creativity as an essential layer of enrichment.

Desert X AIUla takes place as a highlight of the AIUla Arts Festival, which runs from 9 February – 2 March 2024. During the festival, More than meets the Eye, an exhibition of modern and contemporary works by Saudi artists will be presented by the contemporary art museum, AIUla. There will also be an exhibition of work by Wadi AlFann commissioned artist Manal AlDowayan in Aljadidah Arts District. The festival will immerse visitors in a vibrant celebration of contemporary visual and public art, design, curated cinema, art tours, and artist residencies. At AIUla's mixed-use creative hub, Madrasat Addeera, there will be hands-on workshops on crafts such as palm weaving, pottery, jewelry, geometry, 3D structures, textiles, and many more.

Maya El Khalil, curator, Desert X AIUla 2024, says:

“The region of AIUla is monumental. Formed of inconceivable spans of time and space, the urge is to meet it with imitations of similar size and impact. But the reality is, human efforts struggle to match the grandeur sculpted here across

eons. We challenged the artists to adjust their perspective to encounter the unseen aspects of the place with reverence, attuning to the forces, rhythms and processes that shape the landscape in imperceptible ways. Their works diagram and engage ephemeral phenomena like the movement of light or the erosion of wind, becoming performed by these forces to reveal the monumental significance of what might at first seem absent.

Marcello Dantas, curator, Desert X AIUla 2024, says:

“ The desert, often perceived as a place of emptiness, gradually unveils its intricate layers of existence as one immerses in it. These layers manifest through the ever-shifting terrain, the intricate dance of time, the evidences of life, and the transformative power of climate. Desert X AIUla invites artists to create original works with a unique canvas on an unprecedented scale. We tasked these artists with the mission of uncovering traces that transcend the limits of our sight, blurring the line between what we see and what we truly perceive, in the presence of absence.

Nora Aldabal, Executive Director of Arts and Creative Industries at RCU says:

“ We are delighted to have Maya and Marcello as the curators for Desert X AIUla 2024. Both have spent time in AIUla and understand its rich heritage as a place of cultural exchange and connect with the complex and spectacular landscapes of AIUla. Under their curation, the selected artists will explore themes of the unseen, challenging human-centric perspectives in an awe-inspiring landscape, we look forward to seeing the works that will be on show.

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For more information please visit:

www.livingmuseum.com/arts

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Notes to editors:**About AIUla:**

Located 1,100 km from Riyadh, in North-West Saudi Arabia, AIUla is a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage. The vast area, covering 22,561km², 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 AIUla 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 of more than 100 well-preserved tombs with elaborate facades cut out of the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement. Current research also suggests Hegra was the most southern outpost of the Roman Empire after conquering the Nabataeans in 106 CE.

In addition to Hegra, AIUla is home to 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 at Jabal Ikmah; AIUla Old Town, a labyrinth of more than 900 mudbrick homes developed from at least the 12th century, and Hijaz Railway and Hegra Fort, key sites in the story and conquests of Lawrence of Arabia.

About The Royal Commission for AIUla:

The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to protect and safeguard AIUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in North-West Saudi Arabia. RCU is embarking 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. RCU's development work in AIUla encompasses a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, tourism, culture, education and the arts, reflecting the ambitious commitment to cultivate tourism and leisure in Saudi Arabia, outlined in Vision 2030.

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 principles include presenting public exhibitions of art that are free to the public and respond meaningfully to the conditions of desert locations, the environment, indigenous communities, and promote cultural exchange. Desert X is committed to education and public programming with a robust series of initiatives that expand the breadth and depth of the organization's engagement with the surrounding community. The exhibitions provide a platform for artists from around the world to address ecological, cultural, spiritual and other existential themes. From its inception in 2017, Desert X has presented four exhibitions in the Coachella Valley. In 2020, the organization began to engage with exhibitions outside the United States and helped establish Desert X AIUla in the desert of Saudi Arabia. The exhibitions to date have explored new configurations of site-responsive work by more than 80 artists from North

existential themes. From its inception in 2017, Desert X has presented four exhibitions in the Coachella Valley. In 2020, the organization began to engage with exhibitions outside the United States and helped establish Desert X ALUla in the desert of Saudi Arabia. The exhibitions to date have explored new configurations of site-responsive work by more than 80 artists from North America, South America, South Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa creating a new paradigm for the presentation and experience of art and welcoming an audience of over 1.7 million. Desert X is funded by its board of directors and an international group of individual donors, foundations, and sponsors.

Maya El Khalil

Maya is a renowned art curator that has over 14 years of experience in the arts industry with a focus on the MENA region. She was born in Beirut and is based out of Oxford, UK. She is the former founding director of Athr Gallery, a contemporary art space in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where she curated several exhibitions that showcased the works of emerging and established artists from around the world. One of her notable curatorial works was the annual 21,39 Jeddah Arts exhibition. Maya has also worked as an independent art advisor and curator.

Marcello Dantas

Marcello is an award-winning curator and artistic director with 35 years of experience, known for innovative interdisciplinary practices and the use of Science, history and technology, to create engaging exhibition experiences. Dantas has conceptualized several museums and cultural institutions across South America and Asia including the Museum of Portuguese Language and Japan House Sao Paulo, and, curated solo exhibitions featuring influential contemporary artists like Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor. He also curated Vancouver Biennale, BienalSur and Mercosul Biennale. In 2021, he became the curator of the SFER IK Museo in Tulum, Mexico.