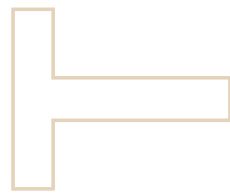




DESERT > ALULA 2020



DESERT X ALULA

NEWS





— Above: Nasser AlSalem, Amma Qabel, installation view at Desert X AlUla, photo Lance Gerber, courtesy of the artist and Athr Gallery and Desert X AlUla

— Cover page: Superflex, One Two Three Swing! Installation view at Desert X AlUla, photo Lance Gerber, courtesy the artist and Desert X AlUla

DESERT X ALULA WELCOMED OVER 9,000 VISITORS ACROSS ITS FIVE-WEEK RUN

NEWLY RELEASED DESERT X ALULA PODCAST SERIES GIVES VOICE TO PARTICIPATING ARTISTS FROM SAUDI ARABIA, THE NEIGHBOURING REGION, EUROPE AND THE U.S.

RCU ANNOUNCES CANYON WHERE EXHIBITION TOOK PLACE WILL BECOME A PERMANENT ARTS HUB FOR ALULA

DESERT X IS INVITING ARTISTS FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS SURROUNDING REGION TO PARTICIPATE IN ITS NEXT COACHELLA VALLEY EDITION SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN 2021

Desert X welcomed over 9,000 visitors across its five-week run

Organised collaboratively by Desert X and the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), Desert X AlUla – the first site-responsive exhibition of its kind in Saudi Arabia – closed to the public on 7 March 2020 having welcomed over 9,000 visitors over its five-week run. The exhibition fostered cross-cultural dialogue, creating exchange among artists, curators and the international and local community.

Free and open to the public, Desert X AlUla was co-curated by Saudi curators Raneem Farsi and Aya Alireza with Desert X artistic director Neville Wakefield and activated the unique desert landscape of AlUla through installations by 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.

As custodians of AlUla, its people are central to, and beneficiaries of AlUla's emerging cultural programme. Engagement with local communities at Desert X AlUla included the participation of a group of women weavers, Lines and Colours, in Sherin Guirguis' installation. In collaboration with Guirguis, the group created a "tracing" of the inner ring of the artist's Kholkhal Aliaa sculpture in Sadou, the traditional tent weaving technique. Similarly, Wael Shawky's mud house was inverted with a Bedouin-style tent on top of its roof rather than the ground, made in collaboration with local artisans. Artist-run workshops organised by Sherin Guirguis, Manal AlDowayan and Zahrah AlGhamdi brought local women artists to the exhibition site to preview the work and discuss how to find your voice as an artist, build a commission proposal and develop an idea for a work.

The exhibition's school and university programmes brought together 200 students from the AlUla county to participate in on-site educational workshops led by Saudi artists Dalia Bakhurji and Abdelrahmen AlShahed, focused around sculpture making using wire and contemporary calligraphy.

Newly released Desert X AlUla podcast series gives voice to participating artists from Saudi Arabia, the neighbouring region, Europe and the U.S.

The Desert X AlUla podcast series provides a global platform for the voices of featured artists and carries forth the discussion and exchange fostered throughout the exhibition. The podcast series features co-curators Wakefield, Farsi and Alireza in conversation with participating artists about their experience of responding to the landscape and why they welcomed this collaboration.

Lita Albuquerque, among the artists featured in the podcast series comments:

"I think what we're doing here is about art and it's not about retreating, but it's about making a statement to actually open up conversation, open up the doors. That goes beyond politics."

Also featured is artist Muhannad Shono, who comments:

"The change happening in Saudi Arabia is incredible. We have all these young people... who have been developing their skills and ideas. For them to be coming out of the shadows and being respected and given opportunities across the country and internationally, is extremely humbling."

The large-scale site-specific works by 14 participating artists have inspired new dialogue about the desert and themes that range from the passage of goods and ideas along the ancient incense route, the cultural memory that passage has left, and the natural resources that have shaped the region, both past and present.

The series of eight podcast episodes is free to download at www.desertx.org/podcast/alula and on iTunes and other podcast apps:

Episode 1. Desert X AIUla co-curators introduce the exhibition

Episode 2. Conversations with artists Nadim Karam, Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim and Gisela Colon

Episode 3. Artist Lita Albuquerque brings “NAJMA” to the Arabian desert

Episode 4. Artists Muhannad Shono and Zahra AlGhamdi draw lines in the sand

Episode 5. Artists Superflex and El Seed send love and engagement to Saudi Arabia

Episode 6. Artist Sherin Guirguis makes a crown from an anklet

Episode 7. Artist Manal AlDowayan sends a serious message, playfully

Episode 8. Curators and artists reflect on the impact of Desert X AIUla

Royal Commission for AIUla announces canyon where exhibition took place will become a permanent arts hub for AIUla

Desert X AIUla is part of a wider, long-term plan to reinvigorate, protect and preserve AIUla, rooted in a Cultural Manifesto developed to deliver a sensitive, sustainable transformation of the region. One of the RCU’s key ambitions within this framework is to develop AIUla as a new international centre for the artistic community. That means creating new museums, gallery spaces, arts and culture experiences in the landscape, and opportunities for creativity and cultural production to flourish in its open-air environment. RCU is pleased to announce the canyon in Ashar where Desert X AIUla took place will become a permanent arts hub in the future.

Desert X is inviting artists from Saudi Arabia and its surrounding region to participate in its next Coachella valley edition scheduled to open in 2021

The next edition of Desert X is scheduled to open in the Coachella Valley, California from 6 February – 11 April 2021. Reinforcing one of the organisation’s founding principles to connect diverse, international artists, deserts and communities around the world, and to find commonalities within shared environmental and cultural experiences, Neville Wakefield, Desert X Artistic Director comments:

“Desert X will be inviting Saudi and regional artists to participate in future editions of the California exhibition.”

Notes to editors

About AIUla

Located 1,100km 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. In addition to Hegra, AIUla is home to a series of 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. AIUla will reopen its key heritage sites including the UNESCO World Heritage site, Hegra, Dadan, AIUla Old Town and Jabal 'Ikma in October 2020. These sites are presently closed to allow ongoing archaeological work and enhance the sites in readiness to welcome visitors. Many other sites such as Elephant Rock and other scenic areas remained accessible to visitors during Desert X AIUla, which coincided with Winter at Tantora festival and ran for 12 weekends from 19 December 2019 to 7 March 2020.

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. <https://www.rcu.gov.sa>

About Desert X

Desert X is produced by the Desert Biennial, a 501(c)3 charitable organisation 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 the indigenous communities through promoting cultural exchange and education programmes 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.

Visit:

experiencealula.com

desertx.org/alula

desertx.org/podcast/alula

Follow Desert X AlUla on Instagram: @experiencealula @_desertx

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— Artists at Desert X AlUla, courtesy RCU and Desert X



— Sherin Guirguis (centre) shows visitors weavings made collaboratively with the group Lines and Colours, photo by Hassan Albaqshi, courtesy the artist and Desert X AlUla



— Manal AlDowayan jumps on her installation Now You See Me, Now You Don't, at Desert X AlUla, photo by Noon Art, courtesy RCU and Desert X