

DESERT X

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS ANNOUNCED FOR DESERT X 2023

THE EXHIBITION EXAMINES SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES WITH A FOCUS ON THE CHANGES THAT GIVE FORM TO A WORLD INCREASINGLY SHAPED BY CLIMATE CRISIS, GLOBALISM, AND THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MIGRATIONS THAT FOLLOW IN THEIR WAKE.



(Palm Springs, CA, January 30, 2023) – Desert X announced today the participating artists in its fourth edition of the site-specific, international art exhibition opening March 4–May 7, 2023 at sites across the Coachella Valley. Eleven artists from Europe, North America and South Asia will present poetic and immersive works that span sculpture, painting, writing, architecture, design, film, music, performance and choreography, education, and environmental activism in the exhibition curated by Artistic Director **Neville Wakefield** and Co-Curator **Diana Campbell**.

Participating artists:

Rana Begum, b. 1977, Bangladesh, based in London
Lauren Bon, b. 1962, USA, based in Los Angeles
Gerald Clarke, b. 1967, USA, based in Anza, California
Paloma Contreras Lomas, b. 1991, Mexico, based in Mexico City
Torkwase Dyson, b. 1973, USA, based in Beacon, New York
Mario García Torres, b.1975, Mexico, based in Mexico City
Hylozoic/Desires (Himali Singh Soin, b. 1987, India, based in London and Delhi and **David Soin**
Tappeser, b.1985, Germany, based in London and Delhi)
Matt Johnson, b. 1978, USA, based in Los Angeles
Tschabalala Self, b. 1990, USA, based in New York
Marina Tabassum, b. 1968, Bangladesh, based in Dhaka
Héctor Zamora, b. 1974, Mexico, based in Mexico City

“There’s a saying attributed to the Kwakwaka’wakw nation that a place is a story happening many times,” says Wakefield. “This idea of place as the multiplicity of stories flowing through it is central to Desert X. Artists are an essential part of this understanding and the ideas they bring to it irrigate our perception of place, nourishing the narratives already there and propagating those that have yet to be told.”

In the exhibition, which builds on social and environmental themes explored in earlier editions, newly-commissioned works make visible, as instruments of self-awareness and devices of wonder, the forces that we exert on the world: how we design our environments, how we live, and the messages we send that reinforce systems that might or might not be beneficial for us. From the local to the global, from schools and roads to global trade routes that define the ebb and flow of goods and many things in-between, infrastructure has subsumed creative ways of being that are inconvenient to forces of power.

“Desert X 2023 can be seen as a collection of artistic interventions that make visible how our energy has a transference far beyond what we see just in front of us in our own localities,” says Campbell. “From deserts to floodplains, finding, building and developing tools and tactics to shelter our minds and bodies from the harshness of the world outside are essential to survival. In a time of global crisis, many of the artists have created spaces of freedom and possibility, suggesting new ways to build healing cultures of care that embrace and protect (bio)diversity, opening up opportunities for joy and hope anchored in justice. Immersing ourselves in the stories of place also awakens us to its mythologies, whether they be religious texts and oral traditions across multitudes of belief systems that see us creating vessels to escape the flood as well as being cast into the arid wilderness to test the limits of existential and spiritual survival.”

“Since its founding, Desert X has provided a non-judgemental platform where artists and audiences generate cross-cultural dialogue and new understanding about our world. They are challenged by the desert, its beauty, harshness, and ever-changing environment,” says Desert X Founder and President **Susan Davis**. “For 2023, visitors will encounter immersive works that respond to the global impact of climate change, economic challenges and the profound social transformations we are confronting.”

Artists’ works:

Approached from a distance, **Rana Begum’s No.1225 Chainlink 2022-23** appears as a shimmering pyramidal haze of color floating above the desert floor. Taking the form of a series of concentric rings that respond to the ubiquity of the chain link fence spread across the Coachella Valley, the maze-like structure of containment, allows light and air, sand and water, as well as people, to filter through, revealing a paradox whereby the place of greatest confinement is that of greatest freedom.

In ***The Smallest Sea with the Largest Heart***, **Lauren Bon** and **Metabolic Studios** create a poetic object that submerges visitors in the deep past and the distant future, taking inspiration from plants, which metabolize sunlight into energy, and the Blue Whale, the largest animal known to have lived on Earth. Fuelling the potential for future life and visually transforming itself in the process, the work, which merges swimming pools in a landscape associated with tremendous water shortage, and water and fish-bone skeleton “sand” from the Salton Sea, reminds us not only of the imperative for artists to create at the same level as society’s capacity to destroy, but also of our own connection to water and that the desert was once a sea.

Immersion by rancher, artist and educator **Gerald Clarke** takes the form of a traditional Cahuilla coiled basket or ‘chi-pat-mal’ scaled to become a giant game board. The goal of reaching the center can only be achieved by correctly answering questions relating to the traditions and histories of the Cahuilla Indians and other sovereign cultures. By gamifying history Clarke sublimates prejudice. At the same time he reminds us how unattainable these same goals have become for those for whom such knowledge has been forcibly withdrawn.

In ***Amar a Dios en Tierra de Indios, Es Oficio Maternal*** by **Paloma Contreras Lomas**, visitors encounter a dated car that has screeched to a halt. An absurd array of tangled limbs of two mysterious characters wearing long hats sprawl out of the car. Plush hands armed with soft-stuffed guns hang from

the windows, barely camouflaged by the artificial overgrowth invading the sculpture. These strange characters accompany the visitor on a caricature of a Western-meets-sci-fi, audio-visual tour of the landscape, where Contreras Lomas pushes back at the violent male gaze of the landscape by confronting its historical association with the male libido, the occupation and instrumentalization of territory, and economies of extraction.

Liquid a Place by **Torkwase Dyson** is part of an ongoing series in which the sculptural installation becomes a mediation between the memory of water in the body and the memory of water in the desert. Our bodies are themselves arcs, vessels of existential as well as spiritual survival, reservoirs of stories and reservoirs of water. How these vessels relate to the architectures we design to house and contain them is essential to how we consider the future. Understanding that the social sphere is formed at the intersection of hard and soft architectures, Dyson's work engages us as liquid beings seeking new forms amidst the landscape around us.

For **Mario García Torres** the idea of the West comes home as entertainment. **Searching for the Sky (While Maintaining Equilibrium)** consists of a herd of mechanical bulls. The 'animals,' now rodeo facsimiles, combine to create adagio choreography in which the synchronized oscillations of their reflective surfaces seek a harmony and balance that can never be achieved. Designed to make you fall, the mechanical bulls become a macho celebration of failure, where the wild ride of uncontrollable nature has been supplanted by the wild ride of a culture out of control.

Sleeping Figure by **Matt Johnson** might be a cubist rendition of a classical odalisque except here the cubes are shipping containers and the harem to which they belong is that of the globalized movement of goods and trade. Conceived at the time when a Japanese-owned, Taiwanese-operated, German-managed, Panamanian-flagged and Indian-manned container behemoth found itself for six days under Egyptian jurisdiction while blocking the Suez Canal, Johnson's figure speaks to the crumples and breaks of a supply chain economy in distress. Situated along the main artery connecting the Port of Los Angeles to the inland U.S., the sculpture gains local relevance from the recently approved siting of distribution centers in the north of Palm Springs and Desert Hot Springs. Casual and laconic, **Sleeping Figure** overlooks the landscape reminding us that the invisible hand of globalism now connected to its container body has come to rest in the Coachella Valley.

For **Namak Nazar, Himali Singh Soin** and **David Soin Tappeser** of **Hylozoic/Desires** invite visitors to think through ecological loss and the loss of home, seeking shelter somewhere in the radicality of love in their immersive audio-visual environments. For Desert X, this metaphor is found in salt. Inspired by the proliferation of conspiracies, from Ufologists, Scientologists, Cybernetic Spiritualists, Area 51, Flatearthers, Lizard people and Chemtrails, a salt encrusted utility pole proposes an era of flood from which terra firma has only recently been reclaimed. Carried as if by the wind, the sounds and voices of ancient and modern mythologies, folklore, salt songs and other speculations into the known and unknown suggest the shifting sands of human presence, from sacred geometry to settler colonialism.

Pioneer by **Tschabalala Self** is a monument built in homage to the collective foremothers of contemporary America. Placed in the California desert, **Pioneer** exists as a figure that is simultaneously born out the historical event of America's creation and one that has an ephemeral quality, untethered by any moment in time. The desert, through its Abrahamic and general symbolic wealth in the collective West often references both the beginning and the end. **Pioneer**, similarly represents the lost, expelled and forgotten Indigenous, Native, and African women whose bodies and labor allowed for American expansion and growth, while also standing as a beacon of resilience for their descendants; a visual representation of their birthright and place within the American landscape.

Marina Tabassum's Khudi Bari (Bengali for 'Tiny House') is an example of a modular mobile home that, in Bangladesh, is low cost, durable, and can be assembled and disassembled within a short time with minimum labor, taking advantage of a rigid space-frame structure to save goods and lives in the wake of flash floods on tiny "desert islands" of sand known as 'chars' that are dotted precariously across the Bengal delta. Land is fluid on the floodplains of Bangladesh, and these islands often break off and erode into the water, making it necessary for people to physically move their home when the land it is placed on

may no longer exist. Desert X has commissioned a film about the project in which Tabassum addresses dry and wet cultures and the role of design in enabling life in some of the world's most extreme climate conditions, drawing connections across deserts and floodplains and shared challenges and possibilities when it comes to imagining adaptable futures.

Héctor Zamora's *Chimera* is a performative action that transcends, reinvents, and redefines the conventional exhibition space, generating friction between the common roles of public and private, exterior and interior, organic and geometric, savage and methodical, real and imaginary. Zamora implicates visitors' participation and requires them to question the everyday uses of materials and the functions of space, in this case transforming street vendors, who are ubiquitous in the Coachella Valley but are often invisible in the landscape, into walking sculptures made of balloons, which dissipate as visitors buy the balloons, take them home, and interact with the vendors in a space of dignity.

Education and Public Programs:

The exhibition, which is free and open to all, will be accompanied by a series of in-person and online education and public programs that will engage the local community and expand on the ideas and conversations raised by the artists in their works. Organized with cultural, city and education partners Sunnylands Center & Gardens, Palm Springs Art Museum, Modernism Week, the City of Desert Hot Springs, College of the Desert, Palm Springs Family Center, Temalpakh Farm, Palm Springs Unified School District, Desert Sands Unified School District, and Coachella Valley School District, the free programs include a first curatorial fellowship; artist conversations on imagined landscapes, structures of survival, monuments and memory; workshops with leaders in the fields of architecture, community-led design, design thinking and climate solutions; newly-established Desert X Art Clubs at select schools across the Coachella Valley; student internships; school tours of the exhibition, and community days for audiences of all ages.

Desert X is funded by its board of directors and an international group of individual donors, foundations, and sponsors.

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Media Partners: artnet, *frieze* Magazine, Cultured Magazine, Here Media, Palm Springs Life Magazine, Take on Art, Terremoto, and Visit Greater Palm Springs.

Image credit: View of Coachella Valley, California, photo by Lance Gerber, courtesy Desert X.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

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 respond meaningfully to the conditions of desert locations, the environment and the 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. Founded on the principles of the Land Art movement of the late '60s and early '70s, when artists sought to create work outside of the confines of institutional walls, Desert X has, since its inception in 2017, explored new configurations of site-responsive work by artists from around the world creating a new paradigm for the presentation and experience of art that is both unrivaled and accessible to all.

About Neville Wakefield

Neville Wakefield is a writer and curator interested in exploring the ways in which art behaves outside of institutional contexts. It is his belief that where art is most successful – its most epiphanic and challenging – is not within the white spaces and clean-cut definitions that have traditionally encased it. Rather it is to be found in new territories; hybrid spaces that break free of containment to suggest new paradigms. While a senior curatorial advisor for PS1 MoMA and curator of Frieze Projects he gained a reputation for challenging the conditions that shape art in both commercial and non-commercial contexts. He has worked extensively with institutions in the U.S. and abroad including the Schaulager Switzerland where he curated the ground-breaking Matthew Barney retrospective 'Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail' and more recently 'Divided Landscape' which placed historical works from the Crystal Bridges's collection in dialogue with contemporary visions shaped by non-settler indigenous and African American experiences. He co-founded Elevation1049, a site-specific biennial in Gstaad, Switzerland, currently in its fifth edition while maintaining his role as artistic director of Desert X in the Coachella Valley region of Southern California. Wakefield also led Desert X's iterations in the desert of AlUla, an ancient oasis in Saudi Arabia. His interests in international cultural exchange while focusing attention on the environmental, natural, social and historical ecologies of the desert informed his recent appointment as lead curator of the Noor Riyadh Light Festival and his multiple roles on advisory boards in the Middle East and elsewhere.

About Diana Campbell

Diana Campbell is a Princeton-educated American curator and writer who has been working in South and Southeast Asia since 2010, primarily in India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. She is committed to fostering a transnational art world, and her plural and long-range vision addresses the concerns of underrepresented regions and artists alongside the more established in manifold forums. Born in Los Angeles, her maternal family is indigenous CHamoru from the island of Guam and her heritage inspires her curatorial practice which seeks to amplify the reach of indigenous voices. Since 2013, she has served as the Founding Artistic Director of Dhaka-based Samdani Art Foundation, Bangladesh and Chief Curator of the Dhaka Art Summit, celebrated both critically for its artistic and scholarly content and for its popularity as the highest daily-visited contemporary art show globally. Campbell also leads the Samdani Art Foundation collection and programming and drives its international collaborations ahead of the opening of the foundation's permanent home and community-based residency program at Srihatta, the Samdani Art Centre and Sculpture Park in Sylhet. Concurrent to her work in Bangladesh from 2016 – 2018, Campbell was the Founding Artistic Director of Bellas Artes Projects in the Philippines, a non-profit international residency and exhibition program with sites in Manila and Bataan, and curated Frieze Projects in London for the 2018 and 2019 editions of the fair. Campbell also serves on the acquisitions committee of KANAL, Centre Pompidou in Brussels set to open in 2025. She is passionate about the role that artistic thinking can play in transformational social change, and is part of the Facilitation Group of Afield, an international network of cultural change-makers. Her writing has been published by *Mousse*, *Frieze*, *Art in America*, and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), among others.

Exhibition Dates: March 4–May 7, 2023

Opening hours and locations: Exhibition opening hours are generally from sunrise to sunset, however, hours and access to installations may vary. Visitors are encouraged to check details for each artist's work at desertx.org.

Free Admission

The **Desert X 2023 map** of artist installations will be available for visitors to download online from March 4 at desertx.org and via the **Desert X app**.

Desert X Hub at the Ace Hotel & Swim Club

701 E Palm Canyon Dr, Palm Springs
Stop by to pick up your Desert X 2023 guide, the map of artist installations, and visitor information. Visit desertx.org for opening hours.

MEDIA PREVIEW AND ACCREDITATION

Desert X 2023 Opening Preview

Members of the media are invited to attend the in-person Opening Preview on March 3, 2023 beginning at 9AM Pacific Time at the Ace Hotel & Swim Club, Palm Springs, CA. Visits to the artists' installations at sites across the Coachella Valley will follow from 12-5pm. Registration is required to desertx@lynwinter.com. The opening preview presentation by curators will also be livestreamed. Details will be sent to registrants with email confirmation.

For media accreditation and further inquiries, please contact:

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Note: Updated Feb 3, 2023.