

## The first art residency program located at the heart of the oasis of AIUla unveiled today

- The first art residency pilot program in AIUla has been revealed today. Over a period of 11 weeks, until January 14, 2022, an exciting lineup of six artists will work on the ground, around the theme “rebirth of the oasis.”
- With interdisciplinarity and collaboration at its core, the AIUla art residency aims to foster dialogue and exchange not only between emerging and established artists and a community of experts working on the ground, but also with local practitioners, and members of the local community.
- AIUla is already an emerging hotspot for artists. The pilot program will further nurture creativity and cultural production in the flourishing cultural ecosystem of AIUla, marking the beginning of a destination inspired and built by artists

AIUla, Saudi Arabia, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021: The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU), the French Agency for AIUla Development (Afalula) revealed today the launch of the first art residency program in AIUla (Saudi Arabia) operated by Manifesto. AIUla is a unique cultural landscape of north-west Arabia which has, for centuries, been a consistent and ever evolving culture and trade hub.

Shortlisted amongst more than fifty profiles, six artists are currently part of the pilot residency which started last November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, and will last until January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

- **Rashed AlShashai** (b. 1977, Saudi Arabia, based in Riyadh) is a conceptual artist and arts educator. His work explores the purpose of human existence and the functions of society with everyday objects and imagery;
- **Sara Favriau** (b. 1983, France, based in Paris) is a multidisciplinary artist. Her sculptures, installations and performances investigate the very permanence of self, nature, and works of art;
- **Talin Hazbar** (b. 1988, Syria, based in Sharjah) is an architect and a visual artist. Her work and processes aim to showcase the overlapping boundaries in nature, history, and ecology;
- **Laura Sellies** (b. 1989, France, based in Paris) is a multimedia artist. In her work, she finds new ways to understand the relationship between sculptures, bodies, images, and sounds;
- **Sofiane Si Merabet** (b. 1981, France, based in Dubai) is a multimedia artist. His work interrogates memories, identities, and migration;
- **Muhannad Shono** (b. 1977, Saudi Arabia, based in Riyadh,) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work interrogates what lies beneath the surface of the human experience.

The 11-week pilot residency program fosters dialogue, exchange and collaboration between the artists in residence and the community of experts working on the ground in AIUla, as well as local practitioners and other members of the local community. Through these collaborations, embedded within varied technical teams from geology, to archaeology to botany, to architecture, AIUla will truly become ‘a destination built by artists’.

The rebirth of the oasis is the theme of this inaugural edition, during which artists’ research and work focuses on the oasis, one of AIUla’s most prominent landscapes where a regeneration program is underway, in an effort to give it a new breath of life.



The pilot program encourages invited residents to reflect on the place of the artist in such vast development programs and the way they can integrate their insights and perspectives in the research undertaken by the community of experts. Through their creative outlooks, artists will question the development of the oasis over time while (re)defining, in the specific context of a regeneration program, what the oasis, as an object of knowledge, of creation and of preservation can teach us.

In addition to providing support to develop the artists' research and production projects to be implemented in AIUla, a dynamic public program is organized in collaboration with the artists, the experts, and the local community on a weekly basis. It includes open studios, workshops, and meetings between the public and the artists about their work in progress at different stages of the residency.

The pilot edition is based in Mabiti AIUla, a palm-grove and a guest-house in the heart of AIUla's oasis. It will subsequently be established in Madrasat AdDeera, an arts and design center. Artists in residence already started building collaborations with local artisans through the programs held at Madrasat AdDeera while delving deeper and focusing their research on the local materials of AIUla, its craft and cultural practices. Madrasat AdDeera would be a key anchor asset of the future Arts District of AIUla, a dynamic cluster of programs, education and production that will form an active and vibrant arts destination for communities, students, artists and visitors.

This pilot edition is an experimental project and the very first step towards building a larger program that regularly welcomes artists in residence in AIUla. In the long run, a thriving ecosystem for artists from all around the world will be embedded in AIUla and will give artists access to curatorial and artistic support in addition to production facilities.

RCU partnered with Afalula to create the first art residency program in AIUla. Based on its solid expertise in transforming territories by associating arts and cultural actors with development projects, Manifesto was selected to work hand in hand with RCU and Afalula as the operator of the residency as well as to support them on the artistic direction they are leading and on artists' management.

### Quotes

Nora AlDabal, RCU Arts & Creative Planning Director, said:

*"This pilot artist residency is a new milestone in AIUla's cultural development. Our goal is not only to provide unique cultural experiences for visitors but also to contribute to creating a flourishing cultural ecosystem with a vibrant Arts District and space for artists and creatives in AIUla. The art residency pilot program unveiled today will lay solid grounds for such ambition. We envision a campus for arts, engagement, inspiration and creation which will draw artists and creative minds from around the world to live, work and take part in shaping the next chapter in our ever-evolving legacy".*

Jean-François Charnier, Afalula Scientific Director & Arnaud Morand, Head of Creation and Innovation stated:

*"The originality of this very first art residency program developed in partnership between the Royal Commission for AIUla and the French Agency for AIUla Development relies on the cooperation between international artists with the impressive array of scientific experts currently working in the oasis, from archaeologists, anthropologists, agriculture experts and botanists, and many more. It is an unprecedented experiment to associate at this level artistic vision and scientific approaches in the writing of the narratives and the reimagination of a destination. This will undoubtedly contribute to further mark the originality of AIUla as a cultural destination of a new kind."*

Laure Confavreux-Colliex, Manifesto Executive Director commented:

*"We are very proud that Manifesto has been chosen to launch this very first artists hub in the heart of AIUla's oasis. We are working on site to make this the very start of a destination truly built by artists."*

**ENDS**



الهيئة الملكية لمحافظة العتلا  
Royal Commission for AIUla



### **Note to editors:**

*It is always AIUla / not Al-Ula*

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### **About the Royal Commission for AIUla**

The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to preserve and develop AIUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in north-west Saudi Arabia. RCU's long-term plan outlines a responsible, sustainable, and sensitive approach to urban and economic development, that preserves the area's natural and historic heritage, while establishing AIUla as a desirable location to live, work, and visit. This encompasses a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, tourism, culture, education, and the arts, reflecting a commitment to meeting the economic diversification, local community empowerment, and heritage preservation priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program.

### **About the French Agency for AIUla development (Afalula)**

Afalula was founded in Paris in July 2018 following an intergovernmental agreement signed by France and Saudi Arabia in April of that year. Afalula aims to support its Saudi partner, the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU), in the co-construction of the economic, touristic, and cultural development of AIUla, a region located in the North-West of Saudi Arabia which benefits from outstanding natural and cultural heritage. The agency's mission is to mobilise French knowledge and expertise and to gather the finest operators and companies in the fields of archaeology, museography, architecture, environment, tourism, hospitality, infrastructure, education, security, agriculture, botany, and the sustainable management of natural resources.

### **About Manifesto**

Manifesto is a leading Paris-based art and culture agency involved in major urban and heritage development projects. Manifesto works closely with artists to design, manage and produce cultural projects with a strong creative and social impact. It operates POUISH, a unique artists incubator in Europe. Manifesto Expo, a subsidiary of the agency, serves museums and art foundations around the world to organize and tour high-profile exhibitions. Manifesto is involved in the ambitious vision of AIUla and in various public art projects in Riyadh.