



## The first edition of AIUla Art Residency closes with artists premiering contemporary works inspired by the historic oasis of AIUla

- After eleven-weeks of exploration and experimentation, the first AIUla Art Residency programme, under the theme of ‘The Oasis Reborn’, has successfully concluded this weekend.
- During three days of open studios, artists’ works – ranging from experimental sculptures to large-scale site specific or multimedia installations – were displayed in Mabiti AIUla and its surrounding palmgrove, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the historical and cultural oasis of AIUla.
- The artworks of the artists will also be displayed at the AIUla Arts festival taking place in AIUla from February 13 to February 26, 2022.

---

### AIUla, Saudi Arabia, January 14, 2022:

Following eleven-weeks of exploration and experimentation, six artists in residence have revealed their works in response to the cultural oasis in three days of open studios at the artists base in Mabiti AIUla.

Centred on the theme ‘The Oasis Reborn’, the artworks have been inspired by collaborations with technical and scientific experts and the local community, including artisans and cultural practitioners – giving artists dynamic insights into one of AIUla’s most prominent and storied landscapes. These perspectives have been regularly shared with the public throughout the residency, including 14 workshops & talks, 7 artists public programmes, 12+ site visits and 20+ expert interactions in 11-weeks.

During the three days celebrating the closing of the AIUla Art Residency, a dynamic public programming featured the six prominent artists’ work, through their creation and research, to the AIUla residents and community of experts, giving a fresh look on how to give a new lease of life to the oasis and to make sure it is connected to its fabled history and future legacy.

The final artworks of the engaged artists will be exhibited to the public during the AIUla Arts festival from February 13 to February 26, 2022.

They are:

Recalling a past that now seems far away, **Rashed AlShashai’s** *Thuraya* reflects on links between our present – one that is supposedly witnessing unprecedented scientific progress – and the ancient worlds. Through a conceptual approach, the large-scale site specific installation combines the history and the nomenclature of things and the environmental materials of the oasis that dwellers have used to make furniture pieces for daily life.

*The Oasis is a Wadi Raised to the Sky* developed by **Sara Favriau** in AIUla takes three forms, three distinct steps corresponding to three related moments: small sculptures “*Les Petits Riens*” (“Trifles and Trinkets”), a filmed performance “*Un jour sans fin*” (“A Never-Ending Day”) and an installation “*Ruban de Möbius*” (“Möbius Strip”). These three forms question the notion



of garden of the desert, and particularly of the oasis - our planet is a vast garden, after all, and the realms of the human and the animal are one.

Through a process of locating, sharing and collecting narrative, **Talin Hazbar's** *Earth Readings* explores various relationships between the past and the present, the imperceptible and the material and focuses on map-making and mark-making narratives to embody the materiality and meaning of the land.

Exploring individual, collective and scientific memories, **Laura Sellies' Peuplé de feuilles qui bougent** ("Populated by Moving Leaves") is an installation combining sculptures, sounds and texts. Invoking a palace of memories, these metal structures invite visitors to listen to the voices of the oasis: real or fictional, performed or recorded, voices of women and men, birds, camels, winds, water, rocks, and sand.

As a ritualistic catafalque, **Muhannad Shono's On this Sacred Day** represents the cycle of death and renewal unfolding among the living oasis. From the smoke that rises are stories of comings and goings, loss, and remembrance.

Analysing the oasis as a motherly environment nurturing human presence through time, **Sofiane Si Merabet's It's Not Early Anymore** establishes a parallel on the recent development of the oasis of AIUla and the excitement around wedding celebrations. Both being rhythmized by seasons and affected by human actions, the idea of celebrations and the lifecycle of the palm tree as observed in the oasis are explored in this multimedia installation.

## Quotes

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

*"We believe culture is indispensable to our quality of life, and we are successfully spearheading an environment which supports creativity, unleashing new and inspiring forms of expression that will interact with AIUla's residents. Embracing the landscape and surroundings, the AIUla Art Residency programmes are a key aspect in the long-term endeavour of nurturing a flourishing creative industry and cultural economy in AIUla, marking the beginning of a destination inspired and built by and for artists and arts professionals. It is a continuum of AIUla's legacy as a living oasis for art."*

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

*"We are delighted to unveil the research and work of the first artists in residency in AIUla. Through a variety of mediums and approaches, hand in hand with experts and the local community, they are offering a fresh outlook on the revival initiatives currently being deployed in the oasis. With this programme, we are calling upon contemporary creation to pay tribute to the beauty and significance of AIUla while also contributing to the development of the destination through art specific intelligence."*

Laure Confavreux-Colliex, Manifesto Executive Director noted:

*"The first edition of the AIUla Art Residency is the beginning of a story, creating a long-term link between artists and AIUla's local community. It already transcribes in their work restitution as the six artists got time to be thoroughly involved and to collaborate with local artisans and experts of AIUla. We hope it will impact on their own practice, drive their future works while having a significant effect on AIUla's urban overall transformation."*

**ENDS**



**Note to editors:**

*It is always AIUla / not AI-Ula*

**For media enquiries:**

For the Royal Commission for AIUla  
Public Relations Team  
[publicrelations@rcu.gov.sa](mailto:publicrelations@rcu.gov.sa)

For Afalula  
Mathias Curnier, Director Communications, Marketing, Innovation & Public Relations  
+33 (0)6 77 04 56 18 – [mathias.curnier@afalula.com](mailto:mathias.curnier@afalula.com)

For Manifesto  
Agence Dezarts - Noalig Tanguy  
+33 (0)6 70 56 63 24 – [agence@dezarts.fr](mailto:agence@dezarts.fr)

**About the AIUla Art Residency**

The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) and the French Agency for AIUla Development (Afalula) launched the AIUla Art Residency in November 2021. This first edition, operated by Manifesto, is an 11-week residency is an eleven-week production and research-based residency (1 November 2021 - 14 January 2022). Six artists from different backgrounds and nationalities participated. Their research and work have focused on the oasis, one of AIUla's most prominent landscapes, and the first stop in "A Journey Through Time." The residency programme is based on collaborations between resident artists, and technical and scientific experts.

**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 programme.

**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 organise and tour high-profile exhibitions. Manifesto is involved in the ambitious vision of AIUla and in various public art projects in Riyadh.