



## Press release

Paris, 18 October 2022

### AIUla announces its new Artist Residency programme

- The latest artist residency programme in AIUla is now underway
- Six selected artists have 12 weeks in situ through December 2022
- Artists' works will contribute to the reimagination of the destination

**AIUla Saudi Arabia, 18 October 2022:** The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) is launching its latest Artist Residency programme in partnership with the French Agency for AIUla Development (Afalula).

The Artist Residency, which began on 3rd October 2022, will nurture creativity, engage communities and shine a new light on the beauty and regeneration of AIUla's unique heritage and mesmerizing landscapes. It aims to foster dialogue, exchange and collaboration between the artists in residence and the scientific community on the ground in AIUla, as well as local practitioners and members of the local community.

Shortlisted from a group of 16, and original list of 35, the programme's six artists will encounter a unique, creative environment as a group, and will research and absorb local heritage and culture, ultimately playing a role in the transformation of AIUla and the rebirth of its Oasis. Their time of exchange and on-site work with archaeologists, botanists, water specialists, craftsmen, oasian agro-systems specialists, perfume scientists will provide them insights into the workings of the land. This in-depth collaboration with the experts will give them the opportunity to be part of the research that is currently undertaken in AIUla – a living museum. A mix of three women and three men, there are artists from Saudi Arabia, France, Morocco, Philippines, UAE and USA.

The selection criteria were based on a mix of the artists' experiences and technical abilities; their initial research projects, alignment with wider RCU and AIUla objectives, and their ability to work in an unusual environment was evaluated by a judging panel encompassing **Nora Aldabal**, Executive Director of Arts and Creative Industries, RCU, **Ali Al Ghazzawi**, Creative Opportunities Lead, RCU, **Sumanro Ghose**, Artistic programming director, RCU, **Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi** founder of Barjeel Art Foundation, **Iwona Blazwick**, Chair of the Public Art Expert Panel, RCU, and **Arnaud Morand**, Head of Innovation & Creation, Afalula.

The artists will undertake a diversity of practices to celebrate this new AIUla Artist Residency, including visual arts, mixed media, installations, poetry, performance and documentary photography. The artists will regularly animate workshops and take part in public talks throughout the programme. They will also showcase their ongoing research through an Open Studio in December, proposing a fresh look on how to give a new lease of life to the land and to make sure it is connected to its fabled history. In Mabit AIUla, a palm-grove and a guesthouse in the heart of AIUla's oasis, the artists will bring back forms, gestures, age-old skills, traditions, and legends from past civilisations such as the Dadanites and the Nabataeans in an effort to also question the place of the artist in such fast transforming, future-oriented projects.



## Quotes:

### **Nora Aldabal, Executive Director of Arts and Creative Industries, RCU stated:**

The latest Artist Residency will build on the foundations of our pilot programme, and is our next step in shaping the ever-evolving legacy of AIUla. The local community of AIUla and the artists will both play fundamental roles in combining the essence of place, local histories and artistic skill. Additionally, whatever their angle of approach or their preferred technique, this research residency will offer these six artists an exceptional and inimitable field of investigation.

**Iwona Blazwick, Chair of the Public Art Expert Panel, RCU commented:** The artist residency programme will give these six artists the most precious commodity of all, which is time. It's an opportunity to leave everything they are familiar with behind, and in turn negotiate a place and community that is completely new. The ambition is twofold - to create dialogue that transcends geo-politics and cultural differences, and also to see what happens when you invite someone from outside into this rich environment.

**Ali Al Ghazzawi, Creative Opportunities Lead, RCU, said:** AIUla's new Artist Residency programme will further the transformation of AIUla into a globally-renowned centre for art and culture and a hub for creativity. The programme will continue to contribute to AIUla's cultural diversity and build understanding between countries and cultures; bringing together the best in artists, creatives and researchers.

### **Arnaud Morand, Head of Creation and Innovation, French Agency for AIUla Development commented:**

We are thrilled to unveil the participating artists to this new residency program. With this opus our intention is to enable creatives to research, to explore the unlimited possibilities of AIUla rather than focusing on production per se. The originality of our initial residency program relied in co-operation between artists with the impressive array of scientific experts working in the Oasis. This new adventure will build on this collective knowledge and explore further the exchanges with AIUla local communities. We want to nurture mutual inspiration between local narratives, skills, endemic knowledge, and artistic practices through a variety of mediums and approaches, from visual art to poetry.

## About the artists:

### **Mohammad Alfaraj**

Saudi, b. Al Hassa, KSA  
Lives and works in Al Hassa, KSA

Mohammad Alfaraj is a multidisciplinary artist who works across filmmaking, installation, sculpture, writing and photography. Alfaraj's work is anchored to place, people, stories of the past and mysteries of the future. Alfaraj draws inspiration from the non-negotiable dependence of people upon nature, frequently deploying natural and non natural materials, such as palm fronds found in the local landscape, in his artworks. The artist combines these materials with practices drawn from those who inhabit the same landscape, such as stories from local workers and children's invented games, to reflect on the ways in which people and the natural environment affect each other, in both detrimental and positive ways. Though serious in theme, Alfaraj's practice is balanced with a poetic vision and an undercurrent of hope.

### **Dr. Afra Atiq**

Emirati, b. Dubai, UAE  
Lives and works in Dubai, UAE

Dr. Afra Atiq is a poet, scholar, and teaching artist. She holds a strong record of academic and professional excellence, having spent the last 10 years at the intersection of education and culture in various capacities.

She completed her PhD in Media and Creative Industries at UAE University. Her research focuses on mapping the Arab literary ecosystem and, in particular, the use of the parallel convergent research method. Additionally, she has been published in notable academic journals. She also earned a Master's Degree in diplomacy. Over the years, she has mentored, and coached, students and writers. She has also led numerous workshops and speaking engagements. Her artistic work explores a broad range of



topics which include heritage, culture, identity, and legacy. Dr. Afra has been awarded for her poetry and has been featured on stages across the world. Most notably, She has been featured as Author of the Day at London Book Fair, Expo 2020 Dubai, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature, Dubai Opera, and Abu Dhabi Art. She writes and performs in a blend of different languages. Community and education are at the core of everything Dr. Afra does and she dedicates much of her time to community collaborations. She's a founding member of Untitled Chapters – a community for Emirati women writers.

### **Daniah Alsaleh**

Saudi, b. Riyadh, KSA

Lives and works in Saudi Arabia and the UK

Daniah Alsaleh is a visual artist, she works with computation and paint, her work reflects on cultural conditioning; how messages and beliefs are absorbed and delivered via media and other insidious networks. She questions behavioral patterns and paradigms in the everyday, destabilizing the mainstream assumptions that form the basis of this conditioning, by deconstructing accepted meanings, to suggest alternative positions. Through different materials and computation, Alsaleh uses analogies to establish ways of reading and unearth unexpected perspectives. The work is duplicitous: behind its aesthetics lies a commentary on human fragility, insecurity, and vulnerability. She was the recipient of the Ithra Art prize in 2019, and has exhibited in the Middle East, the Hermitage in Russia, and BIENALSUR in South America.

### **M'hammed Kilito**

Moroccan/Canadian, b. Lviv, Ukraine

Lives and works in Casablanca, Morocco

M'hammed Kilito is a freelance documentary photographer. His work focuses on capturing narratives that help understand the relationship between groups or individuals and their environments, by covering issues related to cultural identity, the sociology of work and climate change. Kilito graduated with a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Montreal and an M.A. in Political Science from Ottawa University. Currently, Kilito is completing the two-year VII Mentor Program. His latest project *Before It's Gone* is shortlisted for Leica Oskar Barnack Award, is the recipient of the Contemporary Artist Prize by François Schneider Foundation, Emergentes - International Photography Award Encontros da Imagem, the Visura Grant for Freelance Visual Journalists and the Grand Prize at Kranj Photo Festival. World Press Photo Foundation designated Kilito as north African regional coordinator for the 2022 World Press Photo Contest, his work has been shown at festivals and venues including Sharjah Art Foundation (Sharjah), 1:54 Art Fair (Paris), Tate Modern (London), National Museum of Photography (Rabat), amidst others.

### **Sabine Mirlesse**

French/American, b. Connecticut, United States

Lives and works in Paris, France

Sabine Mirlesse is a Franco-American transdisciplinary artist, works with images, words and landscape. Her research is centered around the visibility of thresholds and the interiority of landscape, with a particular interest in how geological sites are divined, interpreted, and recounted. Weaving her way through mineral narratives and cosmologies, Mirlesse's multidisciplinary approach connects photography and geology as guardians of time. She is equally interested in the ways volume and image fuse together, explored through the invention of her own process of making cameraless images through stone. Her creative practice is rooted in her background in literature and mysticism and manifests across an accumulation of layers and strata, completed by sculpture, installation, video and writing. With research in philosophy and science, her subjects often take the form of geomantic investigations. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Parsons the New School in New York and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from McGill University in Montreal. She teaches at the École Normale Supérieure des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. She's been invited to present her work at the Pompidou Centre and the Sorbonne's conference programme, and has participated in a number of residencies internationally. Her second book, *Pietra di Luce* (ed. Quants), was nominated for the Bob Calle Artist Book Award. It contains critical texts by Jean-Pierre Criqui and Federica Soletta. Mirlesse is a laureate of the Mondes Nouveaux mission of the Ministry of Culture for her immersive winter installation of changing crystalline passageways at the summit of the Puy-de-Dôme volcano opening in December 2022, and has been a resident at Poush in Paris since 2020.



### **Augustine Paredes**

Filipino, b. Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines  
Lives and works in Dubai, UAE

Augustine Paredes is a multi-disciplinary artist questioning what it means to desire in the light of love, loss, and longing. His lyrical, contemporary, and sensuous visual narratives are derived from his many-storied travels, Southeast Asian consciousness, and curious gaze. Primarily working within the realms of image-making via photography, painting, poetry, and installation, he has been commissioned by Alserkal Arts Foundation, Art Dubai, Warehouse 421, and Goethe Institut. He is an alumna of Salama Bint Hamdan Emerging Artist Fellowship, Campus Art Dubai, and International Summer School of Photography, and has been nominated for 13 Artists Awards, World Press Photo Joop Swart Masterclass. He has exhibited in the Philippines, Malaysia, Latvia, Australia, United States of America and the United Arab Emirates. As an independent publisher, he has authored art books entitled Conversations at the end of the universe (2020), Long Night Stands With Lonely, Lonely Boys (2021), Happy to be here to be happy (2022).

He is a co-founder of Sa Tahanan Collective along with artist and curator Anna Bernice, they aim to create a platform for Filipino art and creatives through exhibitions, art sales, and collaborations.

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#### **About AFALULA (French Agency for AIUla development)**

The French Agency for AIUla Development (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 mobilize 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, horse, agriculture, botany and the sustainable management of natural resources.

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#### **About RCU (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.

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