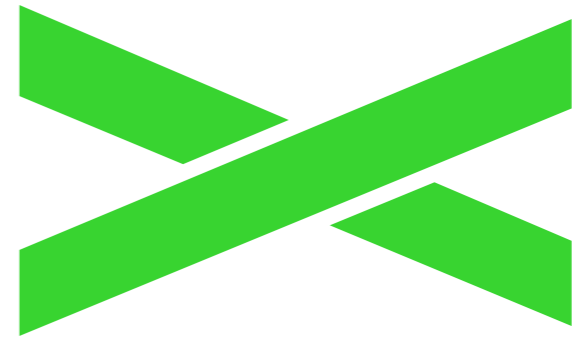




DESERT  ALULA 2020





Since I first discovered Desert X, the landscapes of AlUla always made sense to me as the most appropriate playground to host such an artistic event dedicated to the most powerful and significant expressions of our time. AlUla's history at the crossroads of civilizations and cultures resonates perfectly with the fundamental philosophy of Desert X, which is the promotion of art as a language in its own right. The only one capable of enabling the communication of hopes and dreams.

Shaping the great desert void into a space of infinite possibilities, Desert X AlUla thus appears as one of the purest form of an experience setting new mindsets regarding cultural expressions. By bringing together all these contemporary artistic expressions in AlUla, we are aspiring to perpetuate its millenary tradition of creation and to echo to the richness of its cultural heritage as an everlasting shelter for dialogue among civilizations.

*HRH Prince Sultan bin Fahad bin Nasser Al-Saud, Advisor to the Ministry of Culture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Patron of Desert X AlUla*

Desert X was founded in the California desert in the middle of the last decade. Our goal has been to provide a desert landscape in which artists can realize their dreams. After just two exhibitions—in 2017 and 2019—Desert X has achieved many of its founding principles by offering a platform for the creation of site-specific installations by recognized artists from around the world that speak to the issues of our times. With the exhibition in AIUla, we are realizing another of our founding goals: to create a desert-to-desert conversation across countries and cultures. We believe the arts speak an international language that brings people together. We can imagine no better way to learn about each other and share our hopes and dreams, than through the experience of art. Desert X AIUla provides that opportunity and will be transformative for the participating artists, for its audiences and for everyone touched by this historic event.

*Susan L. Davies, Desert X Founder and President*



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**NEVILLE WAKEFIELD**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF DESERT X

**NORA ALDABAL**

ARTS AND CULTURE PROGRAMMING DIRECTOR  
AT THE ROYAL COMMISSION FOR ALULA

FORWARD

To encounter the vast landscape of AlUla, a region of Northwest Saudi Arabia located 300 kilometres north of Medina, is to be confronted with an untouched expanse echoing the site's timeless mystery and complex history.

Layers of human and natural heritage are embedded within the burnt ochre striations of sandstone mountains that enclose the landscape; rich archaeological monuments created by the Dadanites, Lihyanites, Nabataeans and Islamic civilisations, all of whom built cities here; ancient burial structures forming unique patterns visible from the air; countless inscriptions offering an intriguing window into vanished societies; a vast green oasis nestled among majestic cliffs, a shaded paradise in the Arabian desert along with its ancient mudbrick town, dominates the central valley, under the cosmic swathes of sky that frame the sandscape.

Not only is there an otherworldly quality to AlUla, but its unique terrain also conceals a rich array of ancient beliefs. History and culture, humankind and nature, are all inscribed into this expanded landscape which has, until recently, remained largely unexplored.

The enduring traces of communities that have traversed AlUla are a reminder that for thousands of years, AlUla was a place that cradled reflection, creativity and ingenuity. It has been an historic stopping point on the ancient incense road and on pilgrimage routes towards the holy cities, a place of passage, of encounters, a crossroads for trade and ideas, a home to successive civilisations that carved, sculpted and inscribed their lives into the landscape.

The spirit of the place is strongly felt in the legacy of the Nabataeans, who not only developed an extraordinary knowledge of their environment, notably in their mastery of scarce water resources, but also sculpted the mountains to leave eternal marks and a surreal presence still felt today.

Today, by celebrating AlUla's extraordinary landscapes and remarkable heritage as a place for cultural transfer, Desert X AlUla marks a new chapter in the area's continuing history as an oasis for art and creativity. Once again, the materiality and unique colour palettes of AlUla's landscape will turn into a powerful source of inspiration for artists, responding to the legacy of past civilisations and delivering era-defining monumental works.

Between the eternal and the fragile, between respect for nature and visionary dreaming, Desert X AlUla is a true reflection of AlUla's ambition, combining resolutely modern ideas and unique projects that stir the imagination and speak to all humankind, anchored in a singular legacy, that honors the past as it shapes the future.

While AlUla's art mandate balances its ambition with a deep respect for its irreplaceable cultural and natural heritage, the transformative power of art is centre stage as Desert X AlUla amplifies AlUla as a cultural crossroads and heartland. The exhibition invites international, regional and local artists to gather together to realise ambitious artworks in a place of scale, beauty and stories, adding to a vibrant and productive arts community and related education program.



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# HISTORY AND CULTURE, HUMANKIND AND NATURE, ARE ALL INSCRIBED INTO THIS EXPANDED LANDSCAPE WHICH HAS, UNTIL RECENTLY, REMAINED LARGELY UNEXPLORED.

Local communities, guardians of AlUla since the dawn of time, will be central to, and benefactors of AlUla's emerging cultural program. Enrichment through art and culture has always permeated here in AlUla, and new programmes such as Desert X AlUla are nourishing local talents, laying the groundwork for future creative endeavours while sowing the seeds of inspiration for the future generation.

Desert X AlUla is a true international partnership built on shared values. Acclaimed artists come together to create a public exhibition of new works that respond meaningfully to the desert, sparking cross-cultural dialogue and exchange.

Desert X AlUla is the first major contemporary art event for this historic county, which is presented as an open museum in harmony with its landscape. Desert X AlUla, along with emergent ambitions, provide a platform for iconic and emerging artists to add new layers to AlUla's cultural legacy, which honour the unique character of the county as a place where heritage, nature and art are inextricably linked and seamlessly integrated into the timeless fabric of its breathtaking landscapes. ●



THE ENDURING TRACES OF  
COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE TRAVERSED  
ALULA ARE A REMINDER THAT FOR  
THOUSANDS OF YEARS, ALULA WAS A  
PLACE THAT CRADLED REFLECTION,  
CREATIVITY AND INGENUITY.





# THE POWER OF CULTURAL DIALOGUE

Anna Somers Cocks  
 Founder Editor, *The Art Newspaper*

## Saudi Arabia invites the world on a rare artistic journey into the heart of the Kingdom's ancient wonders

In 1877, after 28 days riding a camel, an exhausted, sun-burnt Englishman calling himself Khalil arrived at the oasis town of AlUla together with tens of thousands of pilgrims on the hajj caravan from Damascus to the Holy Cities.

Khalil, whose real name was Charles Doughty—a doctor, historian, and poet in love with the Arabic language—was making the journey because back in Damascus he had heard about the wonders of the rock-carved tombs of Hegra (also called Meda'in Saleh), and was determined to see them. It is not unreasonable to call him the first western tourist in Saudi Arabia.

When the caravan departed, he stayed on in the Qalaa—the hajj fort that still stands near AlUla—and studied the inscriptions on the tombs for weeks. At first, the arrival of this western Christian was greeted with wariness by some locals. But the older men, who welcomed him into their gatherings, spread the word that no harm needed to be feared from strangers and repeated to their fellows “Kul wahed ala dinuhu” (to everyone his own religion).

Times have changed and foreigners are no longer such a rarity here. Nowadays, the region is being revealed internationally as the jewel in the crown of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage, and AlUla is emerging as both the symbol and embodiment of the Kingdom's desire to embrace the world.

Today, AlUla's universal message reaches back into our past and ahead into our future. Its history is made of encounters between cultures, from the Nabataeans to the Orientalist travellers of the last century. From being a crossroad of civilizations with its tombs the expression of the syncretism of the Mediterranean world and the ancient bonds connecting Arabia and Graeco-Roman Europe, AlUla has become an oasis for international art and creativity.

This year, more than a century after Charles Doughty's journey, a new kind of pilgrim is coming to these lands to draw inspiration from them, to give birth to monumental works that will mark the soul of AlUla forever. Fourteen of the brightest artists of our time have settled in the vast desert of AlUla to make it the stage on which their works will fulfil their vocation to be receptacles of creativity and voices for the universal language of feeling.

Thanks to the cross-border collaboration between the seasoned Saudi curatorial team Raneem Farsi and Aya Alireza with Neville Wakefield, artistic director of Desert X, this event has got off the ground, bringing together gifted artists from Saudi Arabia, the region, the US and Europe.

Only art can create connections that bridge great distances at a single glance. Desert X 2020 is a remarkable example of the power of art to unite different cultures and communities. In this dramatic setting—a red sandstone canyon with walls sculpted by the wind into latticed humps and gnarled fingers pointing at the sky—these artists have found their inspiration and experienced a borderless space of vast possibilities.

Land Art, as interventions like Desert X are called, depends precisely on the inspiration that the landscape gives to the artists, and here it has resulted in a poetic conversation with the geology, the sky and sheer remoteness of the place that is also a conversation among the artists themselves and with the public.

Such an experience cannot be less than a life-changing journey for them, breaking preconceptions and opening up new ways of thinking about how we relate to one another.

One hundred and fifty years after Charles Doughty arrived at the oasis town of AlUla with the hajj, and 50 years after the last hajj caravan stopped off here (modern means of travel having taken over), it is a new kind of caravan that is reaching these lands: a caravan of artists and art-lovers from around the world on an esoteric and artistic pilgrimage into the heart of ancient Arabia and its wonders.



**FROM BEING A CROSSROAD OF CIVILIZATIONS WITH ITS TOMBS THE EXPRESSION OF THE SYNCRETISM OF THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD AND THE ANCIENT BONDS CONNECTING ARABIA AND GRAECO-ROMAN EUROPE, ALULA HAS BECOME AN OASIS FOR INTERNATIONAL ART AND CREATIVITY.**





**A JOURNEY TO ALULA REMAINS AN EXISTENTIAL EXPLORATION OF LANDSCAPE AND SOUL, BUT WITH UNEXPECTED RESULTS: HERE, THE SEARCH FOR HORIZON REVEALS THE CENTER; IN SEEKING DETACHMENT, ONE FINDS A CONNECTION TO AN ABUNDANCE OF HUMAN HERITAGE.**

# CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Aya Alireza, Raneem Farsi and Neville Wakefield

Originated in the Coachella Valley, Southern California, Desert X was conceived as a recurring site-specific exhibition that would reach across borders and continents using the distinctive experience of the desert environment. Despite stark differences, a vast expanse of unrelenting landscapes, at turns brutal and beautiful, provided a common space and shared culture to foster dialogue. The desert of AlUla in Saudi Arabia represents a remarkable space in which to explore the confluences of human interaction with desert environments through time and across cultures. Like the desert of the Coachella Valley, it is a place of scarcity, of stark contrast, crude survival, indescribable mystery, and transformation. Yet, it is neither a barren wilderness nor a wasteland. Seemingly, against all the odds, it is the cradle of ancient civilizations, including the Nabataeans, Lihyanians who have left their mark in the monumental structures that earned AlUla international recognition as Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. A historical crossroads for trade, AlUla connected Southern Arabia with Egypt along the Incense Route — links that have existed for millennia, drawing cultures together long before the current configuration of national boundaries. The site, therefore, becomes a testament to human achievement in one of the harshest environments known to humanity. A journey to AlUla remains an existential exploration of landscape and soul, but with unexpected results: here, the search for horizon reveals the center; in seeking detachment, one finds a connection to an abundance of human heritage. It is a desert where harmony can be found in contradiction.

These potent themes course through the works created for Desert X AlUla, which takes cues from the extraordinary landscape and its imposing historical and geological features. True to the charged spirit of exchange that inhabits the place, the exhibition is a dialogue between artists from previous iterations of Desert X California and artists from Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. The experience it offers is non-prescriptive, leaving the viewer to decide the sequence in which works are seen, to determine the narratives that connect them across time and space. The routes between range across the cosmic and the terrestrial — from Lita Albuquerque's exploration of the birthplace of astronomy to Rashed AlShashai's reflections on the passage of goods and trade from the ancient past to modern times. For AlShashai, the plastic palette — conceptually and physically the 'base' of the modern trade pyramid — becomes a universal form: a bridge between a vast open landscape and the economic systems that determine present-day borders.

Other works, such as Rayyane Tabet's Steel Rings, from the series: The Shortest Distance Between Two Points, explore the effects of technology on the environment. Tabet's sculpture directly references the Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company formed in 1946 to build and operate a 1,213km-long and 80cm-wide steel tube, engineered as a direct line that cuts across five different countries, thereby bisecting the Arabian Peninsula. The forty rings that form the sculpture are each inscribed with the distance from the pipe's source. Tabet's installation is a monument of superseded function, but with a narrative imprint that endures.

Natural resources both above and below ground also inform works by Zahrah AlGhamdi, eL Seed, and Manal AlDowayan. Located at the nexus of trade between the southern Arabian Peninsula, India, and East Africa in one direction and Iraq, Egypt, and the Levant in the other, AlUla's historical and cultural standing was born not just of geography, but geology. A rich aquifer yielded the abundance of water needed for date palm cultivation. Glimpses of the Past by AlGhamdi is an oasis that appears to flicker and tremble, made from thousands of containers used to preserve and transport this agricultural wealth. Like memories that have been captured and preserved, the date tins accumulate to form a constantly flowing river, with past and present reflected in sand and sky.

AlUla oasis stood as an image of fertility to those who first crossed the arid landscape in pursuit of trade; this hallowed status inspires eL Seed's Mirage. From a distance, the presence shimmers and evades, to be revealed only at the moment when a mirage would ordinarily disappear; as the viewer approaches the sculpture, the calligraphic structure, a stanza from a regional love poem, reappears against the bright desert sky. The evanescence of objects and images that occurs within this landscape also conditions Manal AlDowayan's Now You See Me, Now You Don't. Here, the humble puddle becomes the inspiration for an interactive moment. First, we are asked to dip our toes, then, to engage our whole body in this yielding form. Playful though the interaction may be, AlDowayan's artificial puddles imply the politics of visibility. It hints at the things we take for granted at our peril: culture now serving to irrigate our awareness of these precious natural resources and their current depletions.

The fragility of the desert ecosystem is also evident in works by Nadim Karam and Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim. Inspired by the diversity of flora and fauna found within the Arabian desert, Karam's On Parade is a caravan of fantasy forms that seem to have sprung from barren ground like desert blooms after a downpour. Similarly attuned to the rich potential held within apparently desolate terrain, Ibrahim's Falling Stones Garden consists of rock-like forms painted in highly saturated color. What can't be seen, in Ibrahim's case, is the rich but subtle palette of the desert itself – made manifest here through the exaggeration of the very things already present.

The formidable presence of the landscape itself is also registered on a temporal scale. To be here is to be acutely aware of both geological and biological time. Invoking the cosmic fiction of a female astronaut who arrives on earth to spread knowledge and understanding throughout the planet, Albuquerque's NAJMA (She Placed One Thousand Suns Over the Transparent Overlays of Space) is the constellation of "now" – January 31st 2020 – reaching backwards and forward into a distant past and an unforeseen future. Nasser AlSalem's Amma Qabl and Gisela Colon's parabolic monolith The Future Is Now embrace time as a continuum that connects all cultures and civilizations. To switch between the interior and exterior landscapes of AlSalem's sculpture is to toggle between two versions of time. The form and surface of Colon's monolith also shift between timeframes, as reminiscent of the mystery of ancient cultural artifacts such as Stonehenge, or the aerospace industries that brought it into being. As the title suggests, it speaks to a moment in history that shares the energy of Saudi's current state of transformation, marked as it is by the coming together of the distant past and an as yet unrealized future.

The role of cultural memory in shaping ideas of the present is also key to the works of Wael Shawky and Sherin Guirguis. Referencing the two-thousand-year-old city of AlUla, the physical structure of

Shawky's installation recalls the once thriving historic town as a place of architectural memory. Projected from this man-made structure onto the adjacent rock face are ghostly images of black camels, or majahims, being driven across undulating dunes. Originating in the Kingdom, but now best known for their role in the camel beauty pageants prevalent across the Arab world, their projected image suggests a metaphorical return. Real and fictional journeys also inspire Guirguis's Kholkhal Aliaa. Here, they take the form of a Bedouin anklet given to the artist by her mother. The original object represents cultural knowledge passed from mother to daughter, as well as the linking of bodies across space and time. Wedged high up within a rock crevice, the sculpture it inspires offers multiple views and interpretations, revealing itself from different positions as a thin minimalist black line, adorned crown, or poetic script. In this vast landscape, what began as a symbol of female power and agency becomes a metaphor for all journeys – actual and cultural.

The experience of Desert X AlUla is difficult to pin down. It resists definition, though many words come to mind – exploration, expedition, passage – anything in which an individual sets out as seeker, entering as one thing, before emerging as something different, something changed. Muhannad Shono's The Lost Path evokes such a journey. As a sculptural map, it reinforces the notion that treasure, truths or revelations are not offered on silver platters, but must be sought out with intention and determination. We learn that, ultimately, what is sought is found when least expected, always on the journey, rarely at the destination.

Patterns of physical, economic, and intellectual migration that continue to shape this part of the world are reflected not just in the exhibited works but in the origins of the artists themselves – hailing from the US, Denmark, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, Puerto Rico, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The exhibition, as much as the location, represents a cultural palimpsest of diverse ideas. Like the artists, the works themselves cross borders. Danish collective Superflex sound a call to collective action in One Two Three Swing! which demands a coordinated effort between three people to create a movement. Connecting people through shared endeavor, the work connects places and cultures across the world – a feature shown distinctly through the series of orange lines disappearing into the ground. Presented in places as diverse as Tate Modern in London and the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea, its message transcends traditional ideas of borders and ideologies. Like Desert X AlUla, it proposes that the beginnings of necessary and important discussions can be found within the dialogue and community of art.

In deserts, our more temperate approaches to culture and climate are encountered at extremes. In deserts, we unearth the lessons and secrets of near and distant pasts, with premonitions of what is yet to come. Such bellwether conditions have always drawn in the artists that seek dialogue over isolation. The underlying themes of Desert X AlUla – climate change, the environment, the effects of globalization, the politics of trade and borders, the coexistence of practices both ancient and modern, and the desire to create cultural community – originate in the specifics of this extraordinary landscape, and they are issues that belong to all. Nurtured in the cultures of the desert, they are conversations that reach out to embrace the world. ●





# ARTWORK

**LITA  
ALBUQUERQUE**

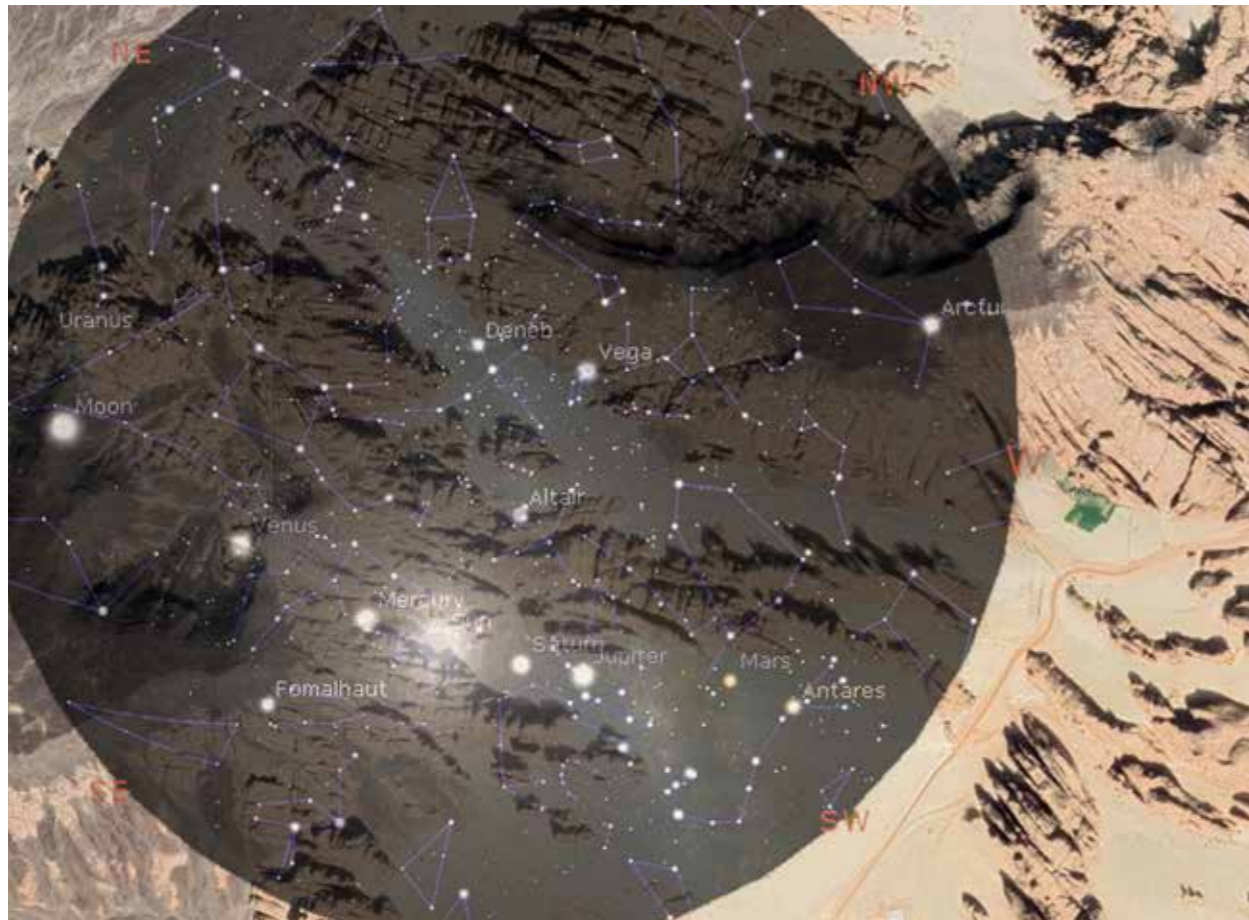
### Lita Albuquerque

*NAJMA (She Placed One Thousand Suns Over the Transparent Overlays of Space)*

Elyseria is a 25th century female astronaut – a fictive character, imagined by Lita Albuquerque – with a mission to teach about the stars and their related fields of astronomy and navigation. The story begins with her arrival on the planet in the year 6000BC, when she immediately loses sight of her objective. As she struggles to remember, she reconnects with a mysterious group called the Star Keepers, the guardians of the stars.

Albuquerque had the idea of Elyseria many years ago and has told the story in a series of vignettes – massive installations of the figure set in distinctive locales across the world. Each place becomes a stage set where the narrative of light, the stars, and collective knowledge is explored and evolved into a character myth. She creates Elyseria in striking ultramarine blue pigment that is reminiscent of the expanse of the cosmos, embodying the mythic figure as a way of welcoming her wisdom and her story.

*NAJMA (She Placed One Thousand Suns Over the Transparent Overlays of Space)* is a continuation of Albuquerque's projects in the great deserts of the world. For the artist, deserts are places to listen and connect to the rich history of celestial traditions. Here, the narrative of the mythical astronaut Elyseria's teaching brings her to the year 2020. We are invited to walk through a field of stars, their exact patterning and alignment particular to AIUla and the moment of the exhibition.



This installation continues to document generations of human consciousness and wisdom through the science of astronomy. A gift that gives an understanding of the cosmos, it first flowered in this part of the world and provides constant guidance in both ordinal and celestial dimensions.

The narrative is particularly potent here in AIUla, with the region's long connection to astronomy. The sculpture sits atop a bolder in the hidden valley, amid a special arrangement that reflects the alignment of stars overhead on January 31, 2020, at the exact moment of the opening ceremony, at 26.5503 degrees N, 37.9679 degrees E. ●



# MANAL ALDOWAYAN

**Manal AlDowayan***Now You See Me, Now You Don't*

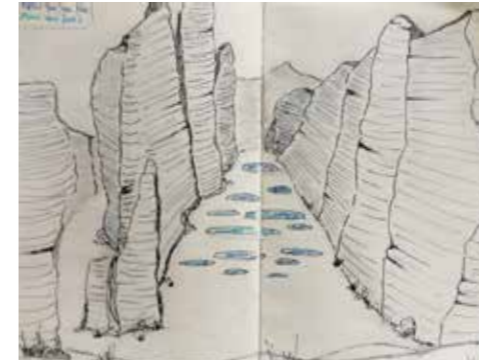
*Now You See Me, Now You Don't*, are the words that a humble puddle in the desert of Saudi Arabia would say to any of her curious visitors. The puddle is only ever here for a brief moment, formed as if by accident. This will never be its permanent home. The encounter with the unexpected puddle can suggest and carry a tremendous amount of information. It also instigates a range of ideas, thoughts that can disappear at any given moment.

Despite its capricious presence, there is no randomness to the formation of a puddle. Puddles are concentrations of water that are caught in nonporous environments. Reading a puddle and the circumstances of its appearance is a skill of sensitive environmental intuition, yet it is constantly overlooked. The typical puddle forms when water travels downwards, allowing gravity to guide its path to the lowest point in the land, until something stops it. In nature it could be a rock or a patch of saturated wetland. Puddles in forests or valleys tend to survive and grow, but in drier environments, like the deserts of AlUla, they simply fade away.

In urban spaces, puddles have a particular reputation; the puddle is not an innocent natural phenomenon. In cities, puddles are usually seen as the sign of an imperfection of design, or a failure in engineering. They are to be eradicated and avoided in most spaces inhabited by humans.

Here, AlDowayan presents a set of puddle-like installations designed to last for a few months; they do not belong to this landscape, and yet they appear, paused, contained, existing in the crevices of the AlUla rocks. The puddles are not real, but are made of massive trampolines that can be touched, laid upon, jumped on, and observed. In the evening, they become moon circles, activated through a series of lighting techniques as people interact with them. As encounters with the work becomes bodily, a physical exchange of cause and effect, awareness of the environment, its sensitivities, receptiveness, and actions are heightened.

Climate change and irresponsible man-made irrigation practices have made water scarcity one of the most critical issues we face today. Examining their disappearance, AlDowayan establishes these puddles as a symbol and indicator of the impending water crisis. ●





**ZAHRAH  
ALGHAMDI**

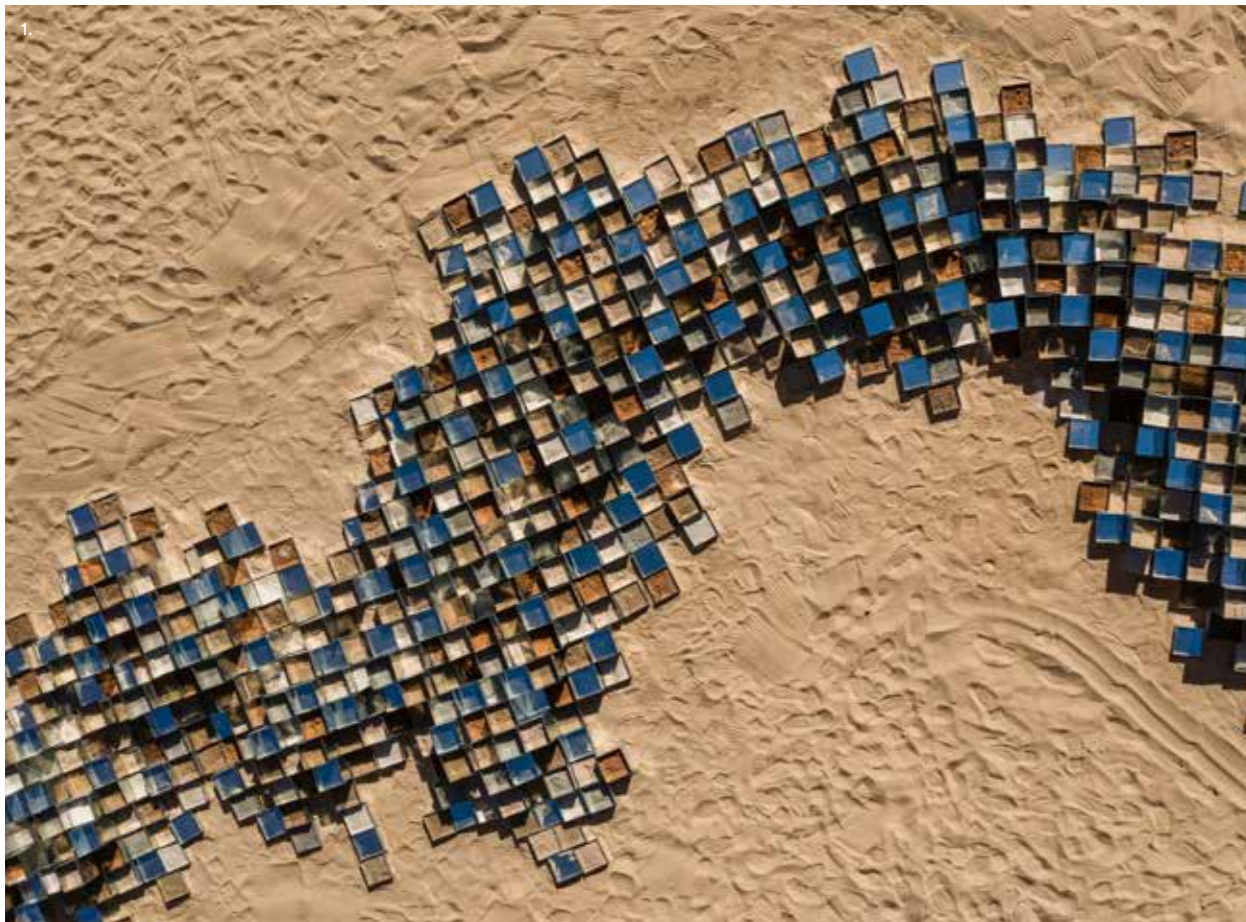


Zahrah AlGhamdi  
*Glimpses of the Past*

AlGhamdi's installation consists of approximately 6000 tin date containers of different sizes, laid out across 80 meters against the terrain of AlUla. The artwork is an ode to AlUla's agricultural wealth; its plentiful palm tree groves that have fueled the area's trade for generations and the springs of water that have sustained them.

The artist has repurposed the containers, traditionally used for the storage and transport of dates, to create what resembles a sparkling, flowing river with multiple tributaries. Filled with five different shades of sand and mirrors, the work becomes a metaphorical representation of AlUla's significance in being a crossroads of civilizations in history and a cultural hub today attracting visitors from around the world.

The experience of the artwork transforms it to the point that it ceases to be about date farming at all and appears as an organic part of the landscape. It awakens a deep sense of nostalgia as the mountains and sky reflect off the shiny surfaces of the containers and mirrors within. ●





**NASSER  
ALSALEM**

**Nasser AlSalem**  
*Amma Qabl*

Amid extraordinary megalithic structures, towering rock-carved facades that have stood statuesque-still for more than 5000 years, AlSalem's structure is an elegantly simple gesture that spans past and present: a passage-way, its circumference shaped by calligraphic letter forms that read *Amma Qabl* (loosely meaning 'what precedes'). The words, elongated to 9m, are architecturally transformed into a tunnel as they link one non-descript point in the desert to another, equally anonymous point. The short phrase structuring the passage has no entirely satisfactory equivalent in the English language – like the formal idiom it derives its meaning from: *amma baad*, ('henceforth' or 'there-after'), it synthesizes time frames and pivots thought from one moment, one place, to the next.

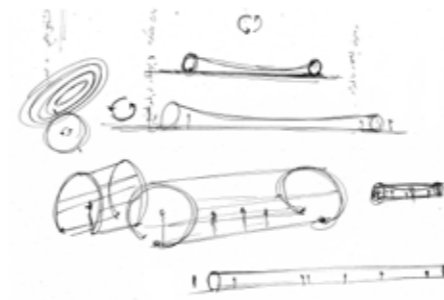
The work appears as part of AlSalem's "*Amma Baad*" series, named for an expression found solely in formal correspondence. Following initial salutations, while preceding – and perhaps anticipating – the main subject or story to follow, *amma baad* is a moment dense with expectations. The phrase implies deferral, a liminal time and space of pause between greeting and content.

The series articulates varied reflections on the exponential changes that are reshaping Saudi society, each piece a still point that unfurls a gesture through time and space – to what has been and towards what lies ahead. In the simple, as-yet-unrealized space announced by *Amma Qabl*, AlSalem telescopes the monumentality of historical time into the rapid convulsions of the present. After a long duration

of stasis, the Kingdom now experiences a moment of tumultuous transformation; Vision 2030, a long-range strategic plan set to diversify the economy and reconfigure daily life. Saudis today exist in this space in-between, after what has come before, but still waiting with bated breath, for the impact of this vision.

Unlike the fixed specificity of '*amma baad*', in Arabic, '*amma qabl*' has no official register. Though it is not conventional phrasing, invoked here it suggests what has been – yet, that sense is entirely contingent on its sister phrase.

With *Amma Qabl*, AlSalem traverses from present to past, attention is directed towards the Nabataeans, finding there, in that ancient kingdom, the origins of the Arabic script. As such, the tunnel enacts a rite of passage, progressing from here to there expresses a state of transition between past and future identities. In the context of Saudi Arabia, this hypothetical space of pause is the collective anticipation of what might materialize from this restless, relentless change. The past and the future become entwined in a liminal moment, pregnant with potential. Tense interdependency enfolds '*amma qabl*' within '*amma baad*' – there could be no real linguistic sense for the former without the latter – and there could be no '*amma baad*' – no present or the future it ushers us towards – without '*amma qabl*' – all that has come before, including the linguistic foundations built by the Nabataeans. ●





**RASHED  
ALSHASHAI**

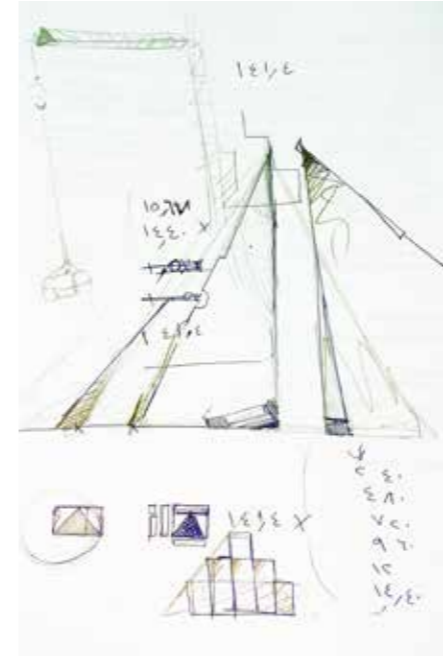
**Rashed AlShashai**  
*A Concise Passage*

In times gone by, travelers in trading caravans found refuge in AIUla, its natural rock formations providing shelter from the elements, a place for respite, as well as protection from the raiders and highwaymen of the desert. The horses and camels that made up these caravans quenched their thirst in its freshwater springs. This offer of shelter and safety in the harshest of environments helped turn AIUla into a cradle of successive civilizations. In this way, the confluence of geographic and social factors shaped the history of the place; in turn, the place had an abiding influence over the trade routes of the region.

Considering these compositional elements of trade histories, AlShashai playfully employs two distinctive symbols of 'civilization' and 'commerce' – one ancient and one modern. The pyramid has been a subject of fascination and study across various different fields for centuries, such as architecture, engineering, science, and spirituality. The artist uses the pyramid for its symbolic significance, identifying advanced civilizations due to the genius of its design. It is a monument to ancient knowledge and wisdom. The plastic pallet is typically used for shipping goods all over the world and has become the foundation of the modern trade system. Here, it stands in for AIUla's history as a major stop along the Incense Trade Route, a center where goods from various corners of the earth once exchanged hands.

In AIUla, AlShashai brings these two ideas together, constructing a pyramid from plastic pallets. The pyramid's shape itself points to AIUla's importance, not just as a cradle of civilization of old, but more importantly, to its reawakening; AIUla has embraced a new role as a center for the exchange of ideas rather than goods, and a generator of meaning and understanding rather than commerce. It has a renewed pride of place as a cultural hub for the region. The blue pallets and colored passage stand out in contrast to the calm tones of the landscape. It becomes a cheerful and emphatic contemporary monument; a beacon of knowledge, it is a metaphor for AIUla itself.

Split down the middle, the viewer is invited to enter the pyramid. Within, they are confronted with both nature and the man-made. This experience encourages thoughts around man's legacy, the importance of what we leave behind and our place in the universe. ●







**GISELA  
COLON**

Gisel Colon  
*The Future is Now*

*The Future is Now* draws a subtle comparison between human time and geological time. Exploring through juxtaposition, the work encourages a humble sense of perspective and appreciation of the expanse of history from a non-anthropocentric perspective. It creates opportunities for dialogue beyond geographical boundaries, focusing on universal planetary concerns as it looks to the future. Within the arresting desert environment of AIUla, *The Future is Now*, the latest of her *Parabolic Monolith* series, stands as a beacon of transformation, renewal, and hope, adding even greater dimensions to the already culturally rich history of this spectacular geological location.

Colon's practice of "organic minimalism" explores intangible connections between the Earth and the cosmos, hinting at the energy that pervades all things visible and invisible. Colon's *Parabolic Monoliths* are physical manifestations of vital energy sourced from the Earth and beyond, purposefully channeled into sleek objects that become conduits of transmutation and transformation, emanating radiant energy. While their outward appearance is high-tech, space-age, and futuristic, they are also visceral, primitive, and reminiscent of ancient cultural artifacts.

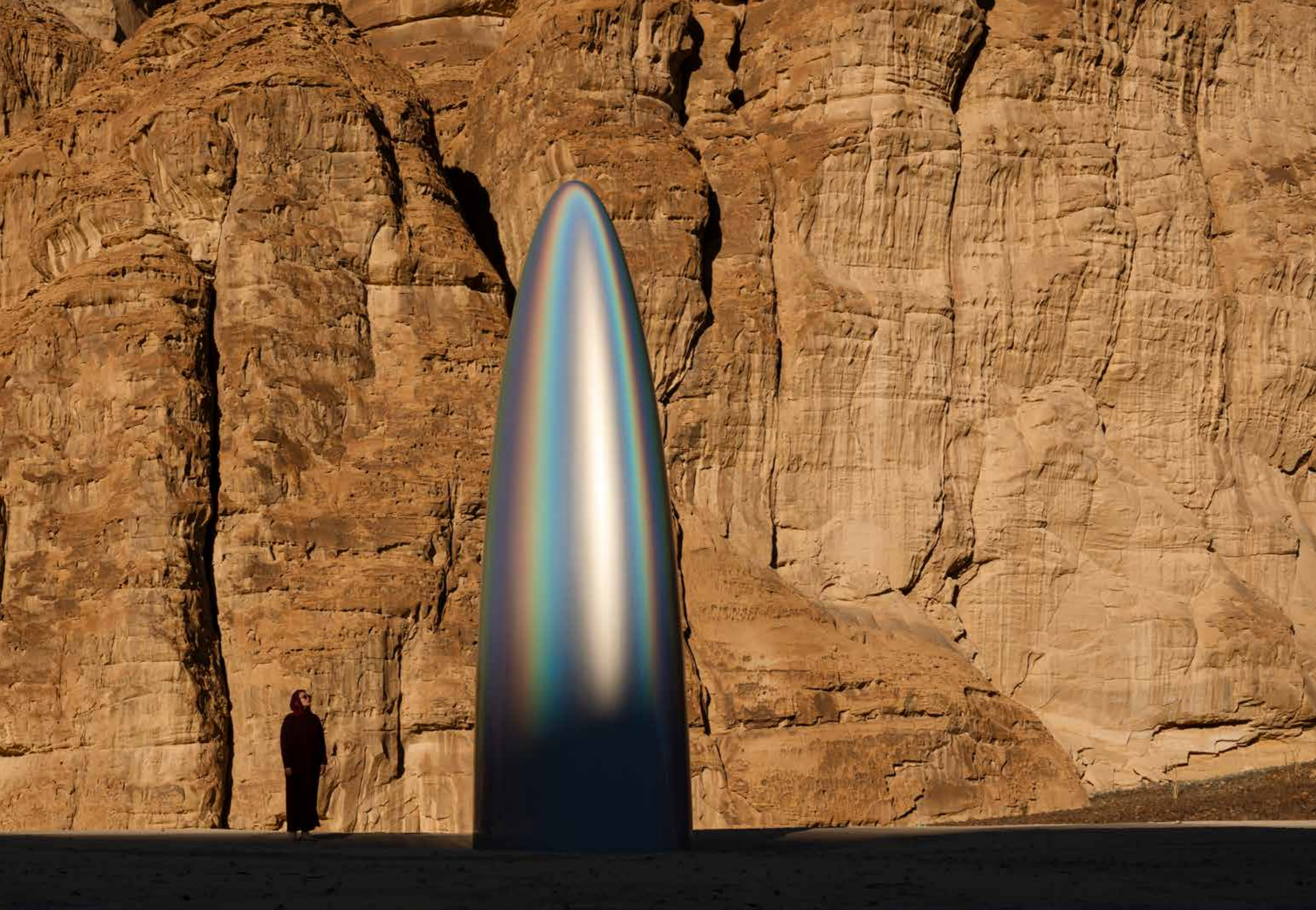
In the quest to access these inspiring universal ideas, Colon taps into a confluence of primeval power sources emanating from natural locations found around the world, which she terms "hotspots." Colon actively draws from the primordial energy of Puerto Rico (her native country), the ever-present sense of renewal, re-invention, and re-birth found in Los Angeles, the essence of metaphysical transformation existing in the open



spaces of the Wild West, and the energy permeating the low-slung skies of the rustic haven of minimalism, Marfa, Texas.

Desert landscapes and rugged terrains such as AIUla have a particular power; these ancient lands evidence the magnitude of geological time. As they establish an awareness of the precariousness of human life, they introduce a sense of awe, and an appreciation of the fragility and wonder of life.

Against the backdrop of AIUla's vast geological and cultural histories, Colon presents her work in order to consider the future. Surrounded by massive geological "earth monuments" harking back billions of years to the Precambrian Era, *The Future is Now* paradoxically exudes a sense of anti-monumentality. What it summons is an awareness of the precariousness of human existence in the Anthropocene. ●

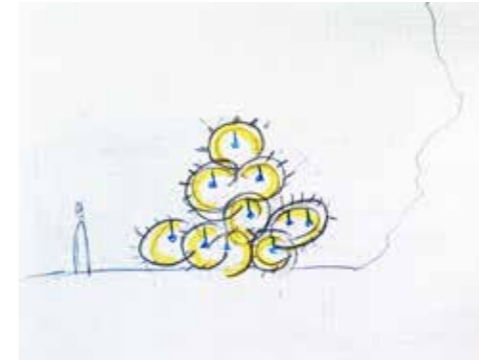


**SHERIN  
GUIRGUIS**

**Sherin Guirguis**  
*Kholkhal Aliaa*

*Kholkhal Aliaa* is inspired by a Bedouin anklet given to Guirguis by her mother. Its specific history is unknown, but the fiction around its journeys from mother to daughter over generations has been a continual source of inspiration to the artist. The striking form of the kholkhal, ornamented with enormous spikes and delicate detailing, conveys power, elegance, and female agency. As a piece of jewelry, it is something intimately related to the body but meant as a public symbol of union and promise. It is a tracker of footsteps in the desert, of bodies moving in the sand, in public space. A sign of union and connection, the depth of meaning in its ornamentation, often dismissed as merely decorative, is undeniable. Guirguis abstracts and concentrates the form of this powerful object, and scales it in relation to a vast landscape. In this transformation and shift of perspective, the landscape becomes a kind of collective body, adorned with the artifact that is so connected to its cultural history. *Kholkhal Aliaa* sets the circular form levitating between the two walls of an enclosed crevice, acting as a shelter and a bridge. The location – an extraordinary embodiment of contrasts – is a sheltering space made of hard rock, where the earth becomes the body adorned.

Upon first encountering the work, *Kholkhal Aliaa* will appear as a single line in the landscape, a stripe of matte black that interrupts the rocky ravine. It is only upon approaching the crevice that the work's elliptical shape and ornamentation is revealed. As you move underneath and around it, the work frames the landscape in different ways, positioning the viewer in three distinct postures – inward (toward the mountain); upward (to the sky); and outward (toward the valley). This sequence of movements and attentions are a guided ritual, connecting the body and the earth. Light will filter through openings in the sculpture to pattern the ground. Shifting motifs with the movement of the sun and shadow across the course of the day, it creates a light drawing on the ground, while framing the sky. The bottom surface of *Kholkhal Aliaa*, high above viewers' heads, will glow with gold leaf, inscribed on the interior with the words of a local Bedouin poet, Aliaa bint Dawi AlAyyah AlDalbahi AlOtaibi, making a crown and a connection between the land and the air. It is a portal at the juncture of body and land, earth and sky, between generations and across time. ●





**MOHAMED  
AHMED  
IBRAHIM**

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim  
*Falling Stones Garden*

*Falling Stones Garden* is a site-specific installation composed of 320 sculptures that vary in size and hue, inspired by the natural rockfall at the base of the sandstone cliffs surrounding the exhibition valley in AlUla. Ibrahim discerns an abundance of color in the rocks around the installation, even though this isn't necessarily perceptible at first sight. Initially, it is easy to anticipate the landscape as monotone; the vibrant palette of the installation challenges this, guiding the viewer to pick up on the multiple different hues of the rocks. The work reframes a relationship to the landscape as it instigates new appreciation and sensitivity. By demonstrating the flaw to be in our ability to look attentively, we are prompted to look again at all the landscape offers. Within these visual cues, the multitude of history and time can be gleaned.

*Falling Stones Garden* is a reflection of Ibrahim's conceptual art practice and his distinctive land art works, inspired by a lifelong relationship with the environment of Khorfakkan (United Arab Emirates), his place of birth. Ibrahim's fascination with the desolate, rocky terrain on the eastern shore of the United Arab Emirates recalls the earthy toils of a generation of land artists, with whom Ibrahim shares a spiritual lineage. His deep connection to this environment repeats itself throughout his studio practice, whether through his installations, drawings or objects, making his works both autobiographical and collective, tracing social and cultural histories, through connections to the land. ●







**NADIM  
KARAM**

**Nadim Karam**  
*On Parade*

The rocks of AlUla and the shifting flux of its sands are the theater for thousands of life forms hidden within its crevices, recesses and pinnacles. They belong to the vast ancient time of the landscape and the time of accumulated moments; they are visible only to those who know the secrets of the desert.

Here, in fantastical procession, nature's creatures are on parade, coming together to show off the forms and shapes of their diversity. Inspired by the flora and fauna of the Arabian desert, their linearity echoes time and the movement of the caravan people. They have come to a standstill for us, making themselves momentarily visible as they enter the fields of our perception. ●





**EL SEED**

eL Seed  
*Mirage*

eL Seed's artwork has often been described as a bridge. His French-Tunisian heritage straddles the gap between East and West and his use of Arabic script is a tool to communicate his messages of unity to the various communities that witness them. This project is inspired by the ancient trade routes that once wound their way through this walled city. The *Mirage* takes reference from the walled city of AlUla, which was an oasis in the desert valley and full of fertile soil.

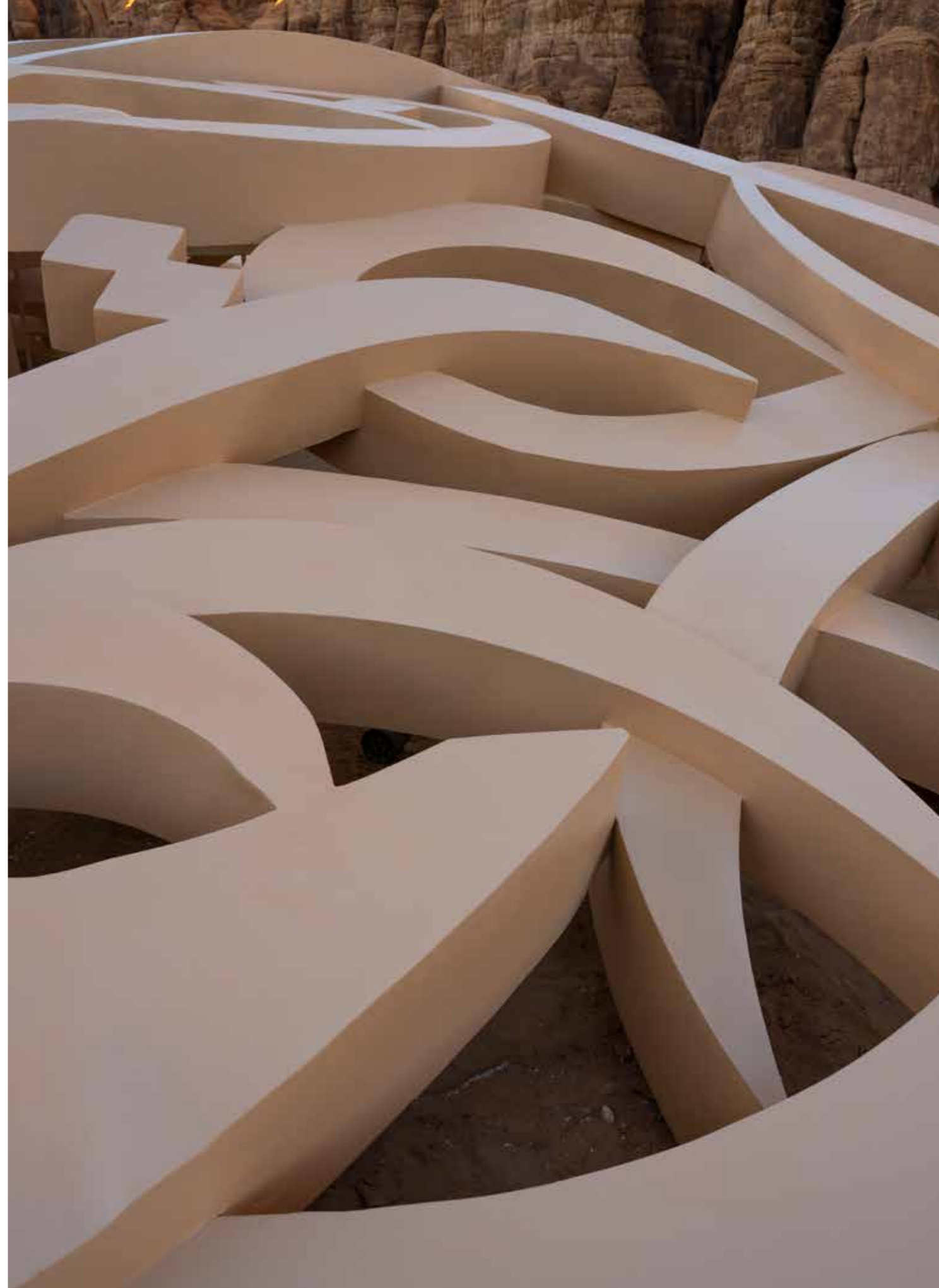
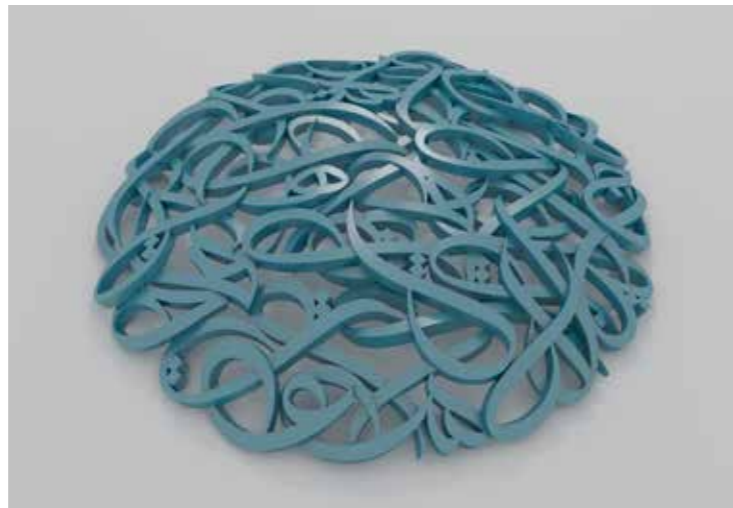
The poetry chosen for this particular sculpture was penned by Jameel Bin Abdullah Bin Moammer, a poet from Wadi Al Qura, who wrote to his sweetheart Buthayna.

"If only the prime of the youth were new and old times come back, Buthayna, should my poetry spend a night in Wadi AlQura, then I'm happy."

These words summarize the love the poet has for this region and were chosen by the artist to shed new emphasis on it to residents as well as visitors. Every phrase chosen for eL Seed's project is the result of hours of research, and in this case, the poetry offers a lens through which to witness the entire landscape. The words come from within the heart of the region and are, in many ways, an ode not only to one woman, but to nature itself. The *Mirage* acts as a metaphor for the love Jameel had for Buthayna; a love so infinite, ever longing to be reached and grasped.

As audiences approach this installation, which is geographically aligned with the trade routes that once were the life-blood of the region, they will be appreciating the rich history that the desert sands have witnessed, as well as considering their own place within civilization, and the majesty and power of the natural world. Embedded within its surrounding, the work surrenders to the immensity of the landscape embodying the sense of humility concurrently felt by the individual.

This environment and presentation of the *Mirage* is vital both for conceptual and physical access. A democratic approach that maximizes audience participation is key to all of eL Seed's work. Although the text he uses is often illegible, its meaning is imbued with approachability; it is important for his work to be placed in the public sphere rather than to be confined to a gallery or a non-public space. ●





**WAEEL  
SHAWKY**

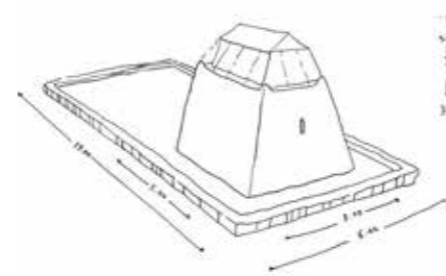


Wael Shawky

*Dictums: Manqia II*

The mountainous landscape in AlUla forms a backdrop for Shawky's video work that is derived from *Dictums: Manqia I* – the film is inverted, rendered in negative and re-oriented in portrait mode. In the film, a herd of prize black camels or majahims glides across desert sand dunes towards an unknown destination. These prized majahims originate from Saudi Arabia and their procession across the mountain range (and towards the sky) creates a surreal landscape. With the film in negative, the majahims transform into bodies of light and appear ghost-like; their spirits returning to their original home.

The artist produced the film in negative to further highlight themes of memory, history, and nomadism. The idea of inversion is instrumental in much of Shawky's work and is employed to strengthen his visual language. The notion of nomadism and the history of the Bedouin are also important to Shawky and he has previously worked with Bedouin tribespeople for his *Telematch* and *Dictums* series. Shawky's mud house is also inverted with a Bedouin-style tent on top of its roof rather than the ground. Together, the house, tent, and film projection create a distinctive and surreal landscape. ●





**MUHANNAD  
SHONO**

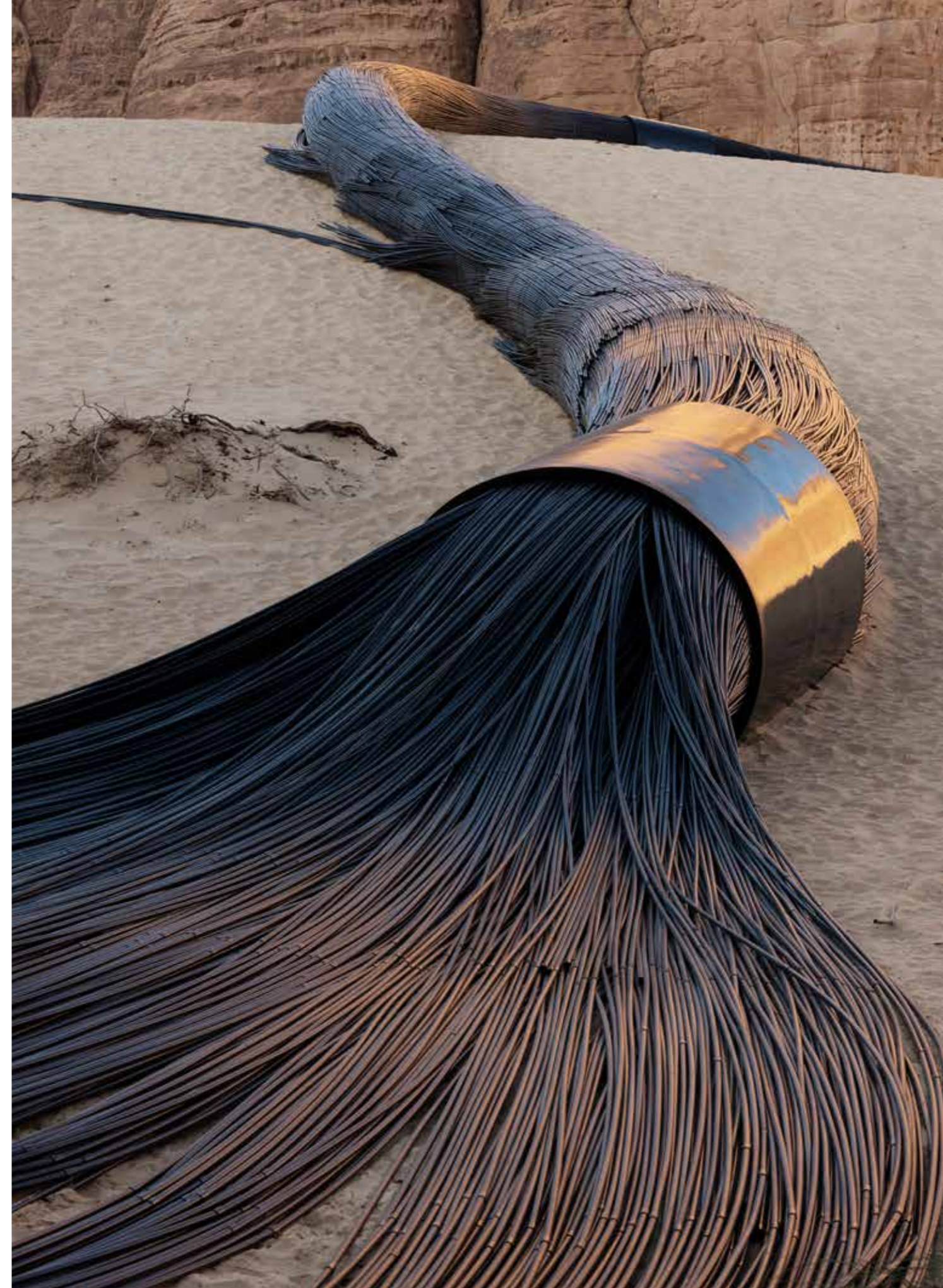
**Muhannad Shono**  
*The Lost Path*

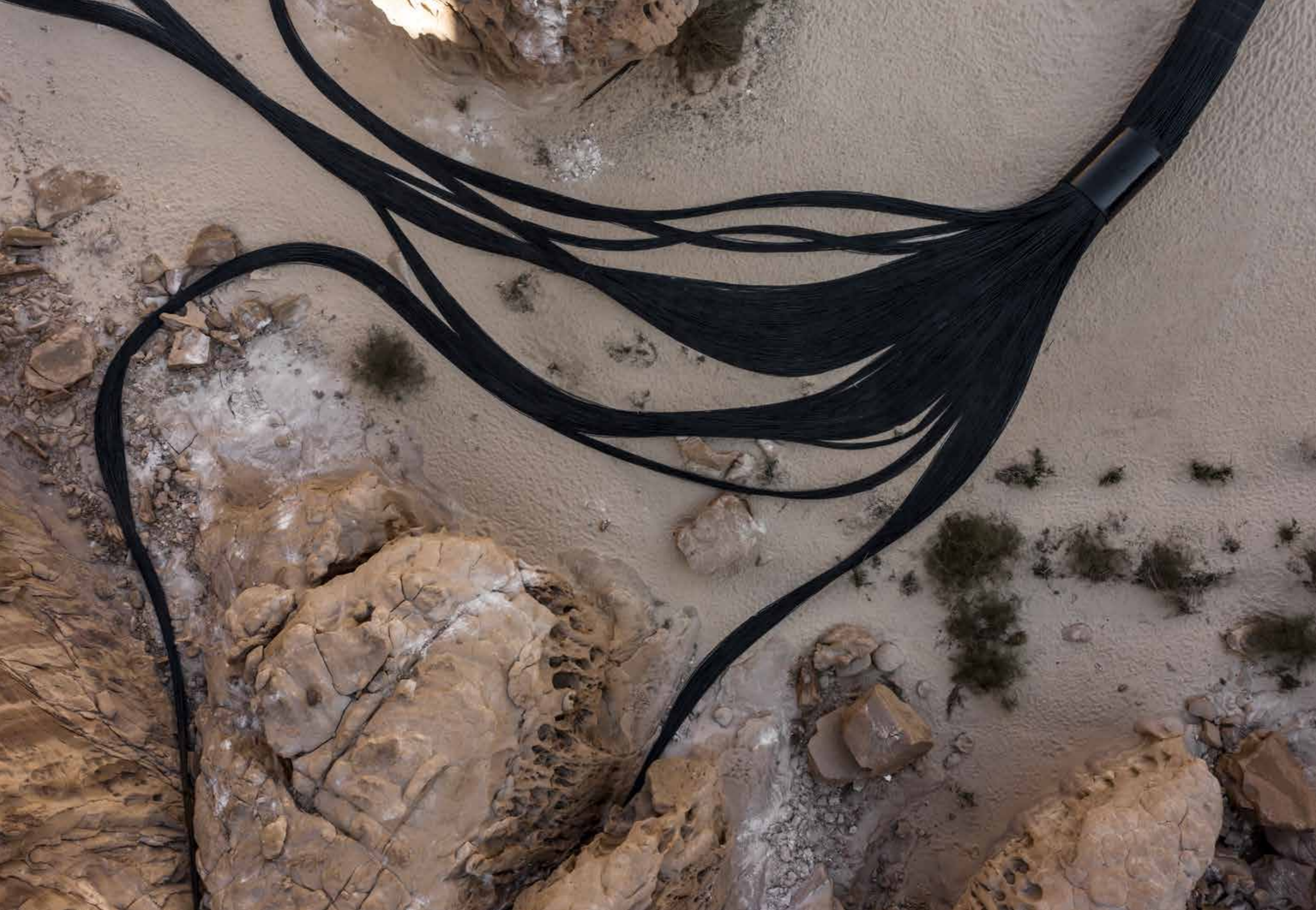
We are all in search of meaning in our lives, whether it be through maps we follow or journeys we undertake. In *The Lost Path*, Shono reminds us that the journey is always greater than the destination, and points us towards our own personal buried histories.

The path is drawn from a single line, seemingly unobtrusive but conspicuous enough to draw attention and arouse enough curiosity to want to follow it. At first, there is a sense of being led towards something, but soon, the path itself grows and expands so as to become the treasure itself, a sculptural relic waiting for visitors to explore it.

Using plastic pipes, a byproduct of the petroleum industry and a material the artist has been exploring in recent works, Shono repurposes this easily discarded material to draw the single line that forms the basis of this work; a line that creates versus a line that destroys, a line that draws you in rather than keeps you at a distance. He uses the pipes in the desert as one would ink on paper, effectively drawing on site – a sculptural sketch in the desert.

To those who choose to journey with the installation, the artist hopes to gift the childlike sense of wonder they once had. *The Lost Path* is a call for discovery, a treasure map leading towards the finding of our personal path. ●





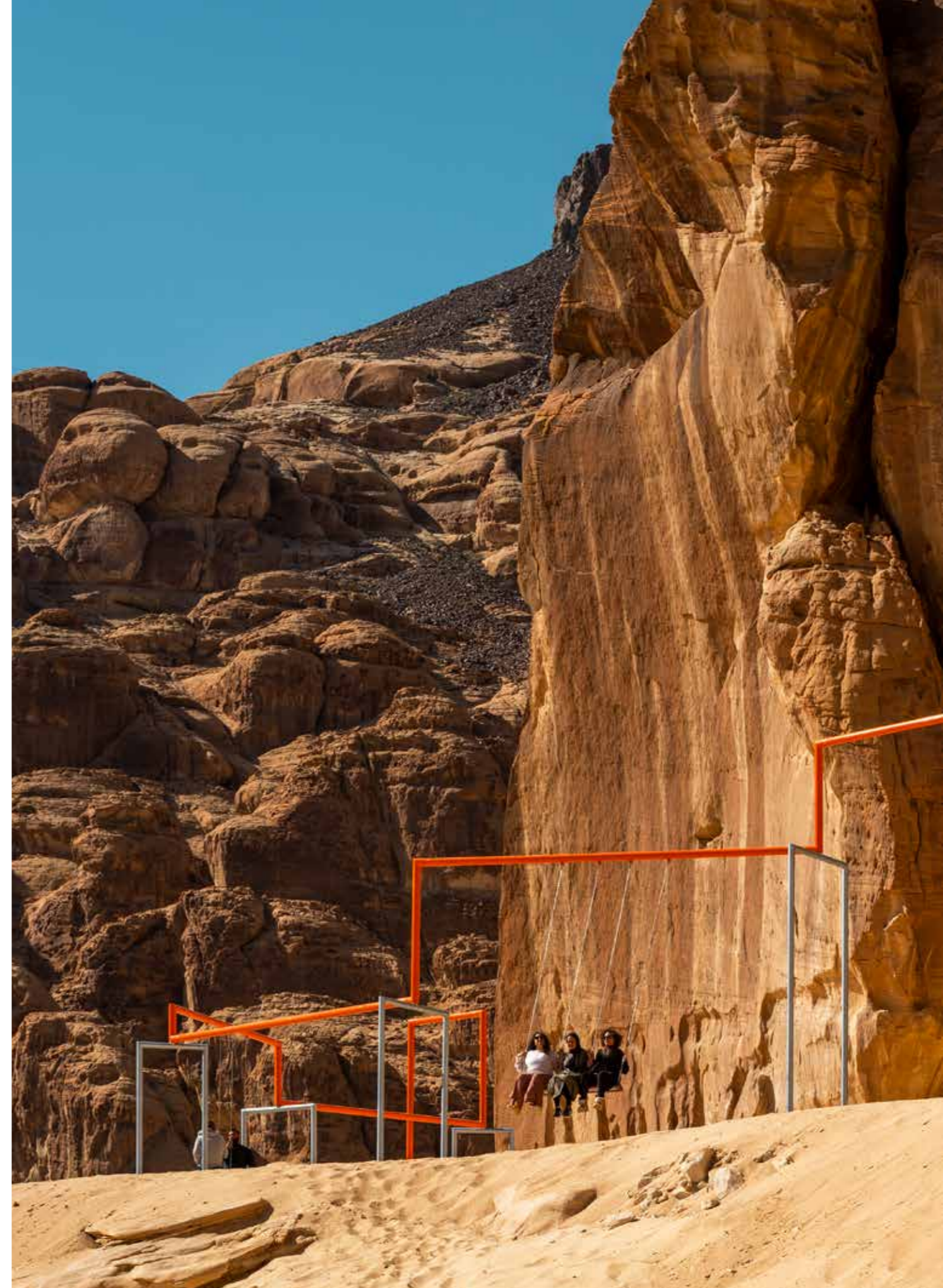
**SUPERFLEX**

**Superflex**  
*One Two Three Swing!*

To exist in a global economy is to be in constant swing; periods of intense flux are interrupted by moments of sudden paralysis. These movements are causal, and capital connects us all, for better or worse. But perhaps we can harness this movement ourselves. Comprised of several sets of three-seated swings conjoined by a zig-zagging orange support, *One Two Three Swing!* invites its users to activate the socially transformative potential of collective movement, challenging society's apathy towards the political, environmental and economic crises of our age. The multi-user swing acts as a human-powered pendulum, converting energy into movement that is almost flight: rocking, moving, propelling backward and forward with increasing momentum in a process of ever shifting equilibrium and play.

The swing's users must utilize the forces of gravity through coordinated pushings and pullings, until everyone moves into full swing together. In this playful moment, the potential energy of group movement is released. Perhaps it is possible, then, to shift the impact of our collective action to achieve a different kind of global momentum and utilize the act of swinging together as a means of social and political transformation.

First installed at the Tate Modern Turbine Hall in 2017, various site-specific installations of the swing-set continue to be created in a great diversity of contexts, such as AIUla in Saudi Arabia, the DMZ area in South Korea and Vordingborg in Denmark. The color-scheme of the swings themselves represents the specific colors of the national currency of the country in which the swings are installed. Over time, the work will evolve as the orange support continues to grow and new swings are added into the wider world. ●







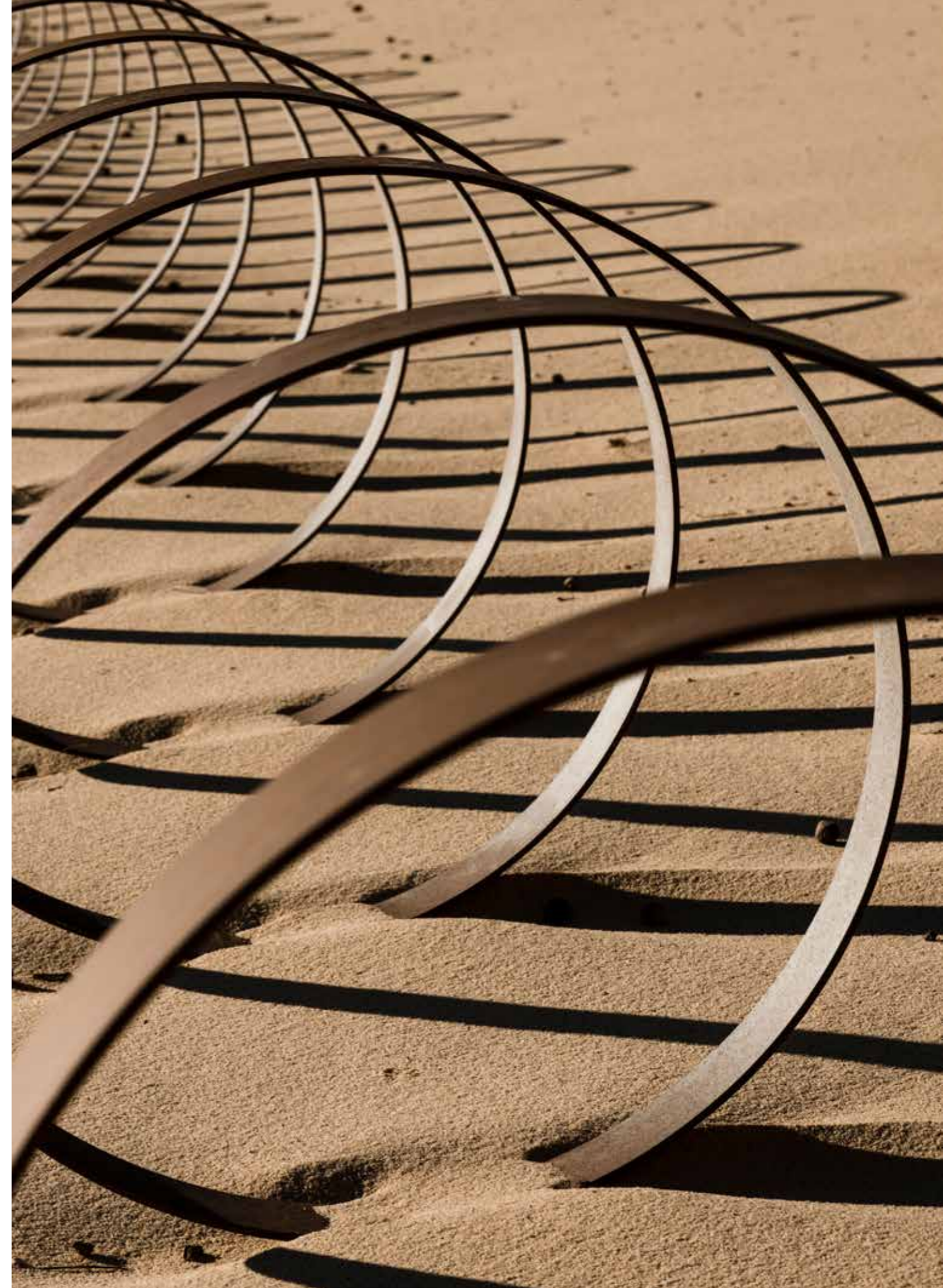
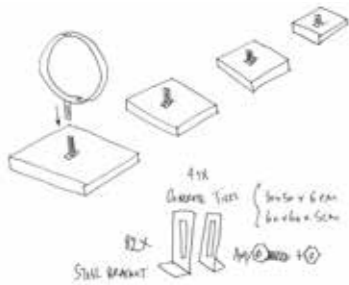
# RAYYANE TABET

Rayyane Tabet  
*Steel Rings, from the series The Shortest Distance Between Two Points*

The Trans-Arabian Pipeline is, as of today, the only physical object that crosses the borders of five countries. That it does so in a time that regions are very conscious of its demarcated lines, with a chequered history of change, makes this curious status even more significant. *Steel Rings* is a sculpture that replicates this object in ten-centimeter sections manufactured to the same diameter and thickness of the original pipeline, each engraved with the distance from the pipe's source and its corresponding geographic coordinates.

The forty rings exhibited in AlUla represent the last 40 km of pipeline that run through Saudi Arabia. They are a ruin and a relic, charged with the history of the pipeline project. They constitute an aesthetic and conceptual investigation of how relics come to possess meaning, a process shaped by the forces of history and culture. Despite the fact they no longer operate with the function of their intent, they are imbued with the significance of their history. This mute status, filled with meaning yet without purpose, connects them to the ruins of the Nabatean civilization. Both relics hold great power whose composition happens through geography (where they exist inform meaning) and cultural association (how past civilizations and societies considered the objects informs their present status). Displaced into this new context, the artefact is stripped of its purpose yet the vast social histories that radiate from the original – the borders drawn and redrawn and the sense of discovery and trade are implicitly present. What remains is the imprint, indicating something that was once the most important industry in the region to be transformed into a main symbol of cultural appreciation.

This deconstructed skeletal form, set within the timeless landscape of AlUla, is a reminder of the complexities of human-made history. The pipeline, like the impressive structures of this landscape, is a feat of human endeavor spurred on by conquest and commerce. It traces powershifts that hint obliquely at the conditions that have reconfigured the Arabian Peninsula. Through a single object, a story that is entangled with the narratives of the place is told. In disuse, the infrastructure becomes invested with a power manifested not through purpose and what it can achieve, but the latent significance of what it stood for. It is a monument to the past, the power lines that radiate into and structure the present, a present that's shifting its focus towards a diversified creative economy and the soft power of cultural exchange. Relocation to AlUla introduces timescales more massive than the brief story of man and oil, shifting perspectives to offer a new vantage on history. ●





# BIOGRAPHIES

**Lita Albuquerque** (b.1946, Tunisia/United States of America)

Lita Albuquerque is an internationally renowned installation and environmental artist, painter, sculptor, and writer. She has developed a visual language that brings the realities of time and space to a human scale and is acclaimed for her ephemeral and permanent artworks executed in landscape and public sites.

She was born in Santa Monica, California, and raised in Tunisia, North Africa, and Paris, France. In the 1970s, Albuquerque emerged on the California art scene as part of the Light and Space movement and won acclaim for her epic and poetic ephemeral pigment pieces created for desert sites. She gained national attention in the late 1970s with her ephemeral pigment installations pertaining to mapping, identity, and the cosmos, executed in the natural landscape.

She represented the United States at the Sixth International Cairo Biennale (Egypt), where she was awarded the Biennale's top prize. Albuquerque has also been the recipient of the National Science Foundation Artist Grant Program for the artwork, *Stellar Axis: Antarctica*, which culminated in the first and largest ephemeral artwork created on that continent, three NEA Art in Public Places awards, an NEA Individual Fellowship grant, a fellowship from the Civitella Ranieri Foundation and MOCA's Distinguished Women in the Arts award. Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Getty Trust, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among others. She is on the core faculty of the Graduate Art Program at Art Center College of Design and is represented in Los Angeles by Kohn Gallery.

**Manal AlDowayan** (b. 1973, Saudi Arabia)

Embracing diverse media, Manal AlDowayan's work encompasses black and white photography, sculpture, video, sound, neon, and large-scale participatory installations. Her artistic practice revolves around themes of active forgetting, archives, and collective memory, with a significant focus on the state of Saudi women and their representation.

In the past 13 years of her career she has been awarded several commissions that produced engaging work that both questions the status of society and at the same time, tells its stories. Notably, her participatory projects have invited hundreds of women to be part of her artistic process and journey; which includes her works *Tree of Guardians* (2014), *Esmi-My Name* (2012), and *Suspended Together* (2011).

AlDowayan holds an MSc in Systems Analysis and Design from London Metropolitan University and an MA in Contemporary Art Practice in Public Spheres from the Royal College of Art. In 2014, she was a recipient of a research Fellowship from New York University Abu Dhabi and was invited in early 2015 to the Robert Rauschenberg Residency in Captiva, Florida. AlDowayan has shown her work in *Prospect 3* New Orleans – The American Biennale (2014/15), in collateral shows at the Venice Biennale (2009/11), and at museums around the world like the Gwangju Museum in South Korea, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, The Victoria and Albert Museum in the UK. Her works are in significant public collections, including the British Museum (UK), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (USA), and the Louisiana Museum (Denmark).

**Zahrah AlGhamdi** (b.1977, Saudi Arabia)

Dr. Zahrah AlGhamdi's work explores memory and history through traditional architecture in both medium and assemblage. Her site-specific work sees the laborious and meticulous process in which she assembles particles of earth, clay, rocks, leather, and water. Both the medium and her method of making draw on the notion of 'embodied memory' to translate and delineate themes of cultural identity, memory, and loss. Growing up in the southwestern region of Saudi Arabia, surrounded by traditional Aseeri architecture, has played an integral role in her practice; with much of her work exploring the tensions between tradition and globalization. She then moved to Jeddah where she completed her undergraduate's degree in Islamic Arts from King Abdulaziz University. She holds a master's degree specializing in contemporary craft from Coventry University in England, where she also obtained her PhD in Design and Visual Art. She is now the Head of the Art and Design Department at Jeddah University.

AlGhamdi represented Saudi Arabia at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019). Other recent participations include the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai (2019); the King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture in Dammam (2019); the Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival in Sharjah (2018); *The Mosaic Rooms* in London (2019); and *Alserkal Avenue* in Dubai (2016).

**Nasser AlSalem** (b. 1984, Saudi Arabia)

Nasser AlSalem is first and foremost a calligrapher; his work is the Arabic written word. His practice pushes the boundaries of this age-old Islamic art using unconventional mixed-media forms to expand its conceptual potential.

Although AlSalem's training has been traditional – as he has obtained his Ijaza, the ultimate certification for an Islamic calligrapher – he pays attention to the concept of the word by means other than mere inscription. His architectural background has allowed him to develop a unique tripartite approach to calligraphy: the word, the medium, and the aesthetic. This dynamic style provides the viewer with a multi-layered path with which to approach the artwork; each layer further reinforces the ultimate concept of the work.

In the tradition of Islamic calligraphy, AlSalem's work is devotional but his artworks shed light on verses and concepts that lie outside the mainstream and that have particular resonance with him: "The things I find astonishing people usually don't notice or pay attention to. Although you could say my work is inspired by my religion, I by no means have a specific audience, and hope that my messages have a spiritual or historical significance for everyone".

His work is in the collections of The British Museum (UK); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (USA); and the Centre Pompidou (France). His recent participations include solo shows *Amma Baad*, at the Delfina Foundation in London (2019); and at *Casa Arabe* in Madrid (2019); and group exhibitions *Al Burda* in Abu Dhabi (2019), *Ekphrasis, Writing in Art*, Villa Empain in Brussels (2019); *Nomadic Traces: The Journey of Arabian Scripts*, Warehouse 421 in Abu Dhabi (2019). He was shortlisted for the Jameel Prize (2013).

**Rashed Shashai** (b. 1977, Saudi Arabia)

Rashed AlShashai works with found objects and appropriated imagery as a conceptual means of identifying the signs of the every day, creating what he describes as a 'semantic field' through which philosophical questions, primarily the purpose of human existence and the functions of society, can be explored.

With playful forms, he seeks to engage viewers with the signifiers of the mundane in order to facilitate a consideration of what might otherwise create tension. This includes the omnipresence of media, a global descent into superficiality, and the growing epidemic of apathy that has come to define modern life.

Born in Al Baha, Saudi Arabia, AlShashai holds an MA in visual arts and is considered one of the pioneers of the Saudi contemporary art scene. As a conceptual artist and arts educator, he has been considered influential to the new generation of Saudi talents. He has contributed to the development of local artistic practices as a member of the Saudi Fine Arts Society and Art Education Society. In 2009, he established the Tasami Centre for Visual Arts, an independent space that supports cutting-edge art in the Kingdom; he was the organization's director until 2014.

He has been widely exhibited in the Gulf and abroad, including at 21,39 Jeddah Arts (2018, 2017, 2016); Palais de Tokyo for Saudi Cultural Week in Paris (2019); The Kennedy Centre in Washington D.C. (2018); Winter at Tantora, AlUla (2018); the Islamic Arts Festival in Sharjah (2017); and The Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (2017).

**Gisela Colon** (b.1966, Puerto Rico/United States of America)

Gisela Colon is an American contemporary artist who has developed an idiosyncratic sculptural language of "organic minimalism," breathing life-like qualities into reductive forms. Operating at the intersection of art and science, Colon is recognized for her pristine light-activated sculptures, created with innovative materials of the 21st century, such as optical mediums and aerospace carbon fiber.

Colon's sculptural practice of organic forms and humanized geometries stems from phenomenological concerns, her connection to the Earth, and the vital energy that pervades all living organisms. Her objects embody qualities of energy, movement, growth, transformation, gravity, and time, addressing physical laws of the universe, and the infinite forces that rule the cosmological realm. Her energetic sculptures oscillate between masculine and feminine, primitive and futuristic, liquid and solid, inert and biological, possessing a confluence of polarities that take the minimal object to a new frontier.

Her work is in the permanent collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Perez Art Museum Miami, Palm Springs Art Museum, Grand Rapids Museum of Art, Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, amongst others.

**Sherin Guiruis** (b.1974, Egypt/United States of America)

Sherin Guiruis was born in Luxor, Egypt in 1974. She received her BA from the College of Creative Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and her MFA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Raised in Cairo, she lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

Through her practice she audits the symphony of difference and the complexity present in the politics of place. Her research-based practice is a means to heighten the understanding of marginalized and contested histories, in particular those of women. She engages both formal and social concerns by juxtaposing the reductive Western language of minimalist aesthetics with that of Eastern ornamentation. The work problematizes the history of decoration and ornamentation and its relationship with social structures, cultural identity and Women's agency.

Guiruis has had solo museum exhibitions at the Minnesota Museum of American Art (2019), the Craft Contemporary Museum, Los Angeles (2018), and the American University's Tahrir Cultural Center, Cairo (2019). Her work has been shown internationally in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Germany, and Italy. Guiruis' artworks are in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Orange County Museum of Art; the Houston Museum of Fine Art; and the Las Vegas Museum of Contemporary Art. Her art has also been acquired by the Public Art Commission of the Metropolitan Authority of Los Angeles and by the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Reviews and features have examined her work in ArtForum, Canvas, New York Times, The Guardian, Brownbook, Canvas, Flash Art, Los Angeles Times, among others. She is Associate Professor of the Practice of Art and Design and the Vice Dean of Faculty at the University of Southern California.

**Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim** (b.1962, United Arab Emirates)

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim came of age as an artist in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in an era in which the visual arts were not yet valued culturally or taught in university degree programs. In 1986 when he met the late artist Hassan Sharif and became a founding member of the Emirates Fine Art Society, Ibrahim was pulled out of a secluded practice, carving out unshakable friendships and collaborations that have formed the foundation of the creative community that defines the UAE today.

Ibrahim's practice has been inspired by a lifelong relationship with the environment of Khorfakkan, his birthplace, with the Gulf of Oman on one side, and the Hajar Mountains on the other. Since childhood, the artist has lived in this barren and rocky landscape and it is this experience that informs his practice, making his work somewhat autobiographical.

His deep connection to his local environment repeats itself throughout his practice. His handmade objects are shaped like primitive tools, bones, or parts of trees and appear to have been unearthed from some ancient den, rather than handcrafted. His works on paper reveal his own form of language – inscription lines and abstract forms that are reminiscent of ancient cave drawings – marking time and memory through meditative repetition.

His works are in significant international collections, including Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE); Sharjah Art Museum (UAE); Art Jameel (UAE); Barjeel Art Foundation (UAE); Arab Museum of Modern Art (Qatar); Kunstcentrum Sittard (Netherlands); the British Museum (UK); and The Centre George Pompidou (France).

In March 2018, Elements, a survey of his works spanning three decades of his practice, was presented at the Sharjah Art Foundation, curated by Hoor Al Qasimi.

**Nadim Karam** (b. 1957, Lebanon)

Nadim Karam is a multidisciplinary artist working from Beirut, whose practice spans public art, sculpture, architecture, installation, painting, and drawing. He initially trained in architecture at the American University of Beirut, before traveling to Japan in 1982 to attend the University of Tokyo, where he earned a doctorate in architecture.

With Atelier Hapsitus (the pluri-disciplinary group he founded in 1996, and continues to lead), he has realized temporary and permanent urban interventions in cities internationally such as Prague, Brussels, Beirut, Melbourne, Tokyo, Nara, London, Kuwait, and Yerevan, exploring the use of public art as an instrument for urban activation and regeneration. Karam's research focuses on the conviction that cities need to dream; he re-examines contextual issues with global significance. His work enhances perceptions of pluralism as a source of enrichment rather than conflict. Karam considers the artist's role is to provoke this dream by injecting art into still structures and urban contexts.

Karam has participated in multiple international biennales including in Liverpool (2006), Venice (1996), and Gwangju (1995). He has received many awards; in 2002 for The Archaic Procession project in Beirut, which was one of five selected worldwide by the Van Alen Institute in New York to highlight the role they played in the rejuvenation of city life and morale after a disaster. He also received awards for his 2006 work commissioned by Victoria State and the city of Melbourne, *The Travelers*, which recounts the story of the Aboriginal People and the migrants in Melbourne.

He has published several books amongst which *Urban Toys* (2006), *Voyage* (2007), *The Cloud, the Desert and the Arabian Breeze* (2007) and *Stretching Thoughts* (2014).

**eL Seed** (b.1981, Tunisia/France)

eL Seed uses Arabic calligraphy and a distinctive style to spread messages of peace and unity, underlining the commonalities of human existence. His artwork can be found all over the world and consistently aims to unify communities and redress stereotypes.

He found that Arabic calligraphy was a way of building a link between his equally important French and Tunisian backgrounds. As he matured, eL Seed began to use that same calligraphy as a tool to build bridges all over the world. Whenever he works within a community, he spends a long time researching an appropriate quote to summarize their collective voice, and to underline his key principles of love, respect, and tolerance.

His work has been shown in exhibitions and in public places across the world, including most notably on the facade of l'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris (France); in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); on the DMZ between North and South Korea; in the informal settlements of Cape Town (South Africa); and in the heart of Zaraqeb (Egypt). In 2017, he won the UNESCO Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture, and was named a Global Thinker in 2016 by Foreign Policy for his project *Perception* in Cairo. In 2015, the international organization TED recognized him as one of the year's TED Fellows, for advocating peaceful expression and social progress through his work. He has also collaborated with Louis Vuitton on their famous "Foulard d'Artistes" (Artists' Scarves).

**Wael Shawky** (b.1971, Egypt)

Based on extensive periods of research and inquiry, Wael Shawky's work tackles notions of national, religious, and artistic identity through film, performance, and storytelling. Whether instructing Bedouin children to act out the construction of an airport runway in the desert or organizing a heavy metal concert in a remote Egyptian village, Shawky frames contemporary culture through the lens of historical tradition and vice versa. Mixing truth and fiction, childlike wonder and spiritual doctrine, Shawky has staged epic recreations of the medieval clashes between Muslims and Christians in his trilogy of puppets and marionettes – titled *Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show Files* (2010), *The Path to Cairo* (2012) and *The Secrets of Karbala* (2015). His three-part film, *Al Araba Al Madfuna* (2012), uses child actors to recount poetic myths, paying homage, rather than mere lip-service, to the important narratives of yesteryear.

Shawky was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1971 and spent his youth in Mecca, Saudi Arabia before returning to Egypt when he was 13. He holds an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA, and a BFA from Alexandria University, Egypt.

Recent solo exhibitions have been held at ARoS, Aarhus Kunstmuseum in Aarhus (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Yinchuan, China (2017); Castello di Rivoli in Turin (2016); Fondazione Merz in Turin (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz in Austria (2016). Recent awards include the inaugural Mario Merz Prize (2015); the Award for Filmic Oeuvre created by Louis Vuitton and Kino der Kunst (2013); the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2012); the Schering Foundation Art Award (2011), as well as The International Commissioning Grant and an award from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, in 2005.

**Muhannad Shono** (b.1977, Saudi Arabia)

A love of storytelling led Muhannad Shono to create comics from high school to well into his 30s. While attending King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Saudi Arabia, Shono completed his degree in architecture, and his unconventional, largely self-directed art education has resulted in an outlook and a body of work that is hard to fit into a neat mold. The start of it being him co-publishing comics in Saudi Arabia, where at the time, there was a sense of creative hunger. Although scarce, every bit of information or visual material was obsessively studied, observed, and contemplated.

As a naturalized Saudi citizen to parents of Chechen and Karachay-Cherkessian descent, Shono's new body of work focuses on themes of displacement, migration, and identity. Shono is expanding the mediums he uses beyond his traditional ink on paper and is incorporating sculpture, animation, and sound into his work. It is an experimental state of being where the tools and materials he uses are those that best serve the story. His works are visual narratives, suggesting ways we might better approach the faulty ones driving and structuring our current state of mind.

Recent solo exhibitions include *The Silence Is Still Talking*, Athr Gallery in Jeddah (2019); *Ala: Ritual Machine*, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (2018), and the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dammam (2018). Group exhibitions include *Artificial intelligence and dialogue of cultures*, King Fahad Cultural Center in Riyadh (2019); *Bridges to Seoul* in Seoul (2019); *Schloss Wolfsburg* in Berlin (2018); and the *Islamic Art Festival* in Sharjah (2018). His work is in the collections of the British Museum (UK) and Art Jameel (UAE).

**Superflex** (*founded 1993, Denmark*)

Superflex is an artist group founded in 1993 by Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, Jakob Fenger, and Rasmus Nielsen, based in Copenhagen. With a diverse practice spanning a wide range of media and interests, they challenge the role of the artist in contemporary society and explore the nature of systems of power. Superflex describes their work in terms of Tools, thereby suggesting multiple areas of application that can be further modified and redefined. When put to use, they carry the potential to influence social, political or economic structures. Superflex's "multivalent tools" function as a framework for participation. As the name suggests, their practice is not bound to any form or context.

Superflex has gained international recognition for their projects. They have had solo exhibitions, among others, at the Kunsthalle Basel in Switzerland (Supershow — more than a show), GFZK in Leipzig, Germany (Social Pudding in collaboration with Rirkrit Tiravanija), Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main (Open market), the REDCAT Gallery in Los Angeles (Guarana Power), Mori Museum in Tokyo, Gallery 1301PE in Los Angeles and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Superflex has participated in international art biennials such as the Gwangju Biennial in Korea, Istanbul Biennial, São Paulo Biennial, Shanghai Biennial, and in the Utopia Station exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Southern California.

**Rayyane Tabet** (*b.1983, Lebanon*)

Rayyane Tabet is an artist who lives and works in Beirut. Drawing from experience and self-directed research, Tabet explores stories that offer an alternative understanding of major socio-political events through individual narratives. Informed by his training in architecture and sculpture, his work investigates paradoxes in the built environment and its history by way of installations that reconstitute the perception of physical and temporal distance.

His most recent shows include the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2019); Parasol Unit in London (2019); , The Louvre in Paris, Carré d'Art in Nîmes (2019); Kunstverein in Hamburg (2017), and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (2017). His work has featured in Manifesta 12, the 21st Biennale of Sydney, the 15th Istanbul Biennial, the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, the 6th Marrakech Biennale, the 10th & 12th Sharjah Biennial, and the 2nd New Museum Triennial.





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*The Lost Path*  
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Rayyane Tabet  
*Steel Rings, from the series: The Shortest Distance Between Two Points*  
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