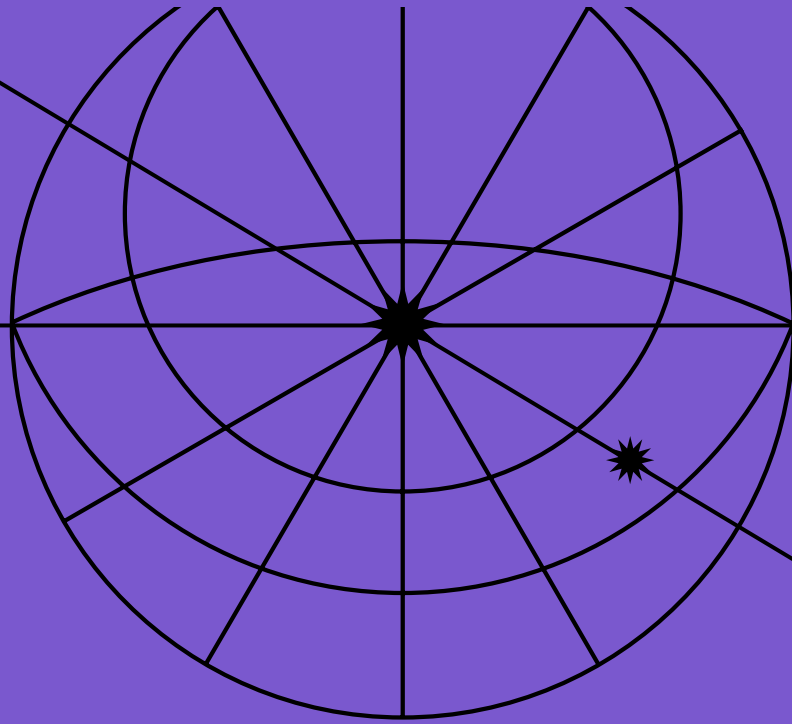

On the occasion
of Art Basel Paris



ARTS فنون
ALULA الحلال

ORBIS TERTIUS



First exhibition in France of
ALULA artists in residency programme

October 15th
to 20th, 2024

5 rue Saint-Merri,
75004 Paris

With the participation of*

MAITHA ABDALLA
MOHAMMAD ALFARAJ
MONIRA AL QADIRI
DANIAH ALSALEH
MARLON DE AZAMBUJA
GRÉGORY CHATONSKY
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SARA FAVRIAU
TALIN HAZBAR
M'HAMMED KILITO
SABINE MIRLESSE
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ANHAR SALEM
HUGO SERVANIN
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ITTAH YODA
AYMAN ZEDANI


*Artists biographies in the press pack

A journey between fictions and myths

Orbis Tertius is an exhibition bringing together 20 contemporary artists who have participated in the artistic residency programmes in the oasis city of AIUla, Saudi Arabia. Curated by Arnaud Morand, Head of Arts at AFALULA, it borrows its title from the writings of Jorge Luis Borges and unfolds on the foundations of the total idealist philosophy dear to the author. It revolves around themes such as how the world can be embedded into storytelling, and the inconsistent boundaries between fiction and reality.

Continuing their research in this region with its thousand-year history, marked by the archaeological remains of several pre-Islamic civilisations, as well as by innovative urban planning resolutely turned towards the future, the artists of this exhibition undertake to unfold reality throughout their works. They explore various fields of possibility, where ancestral stories and those of the future respond to each other, where alternative versions of the past adjoin possible futures, where myths and legends hybridise with scientific knowledge.

Orbis Tertius key figures

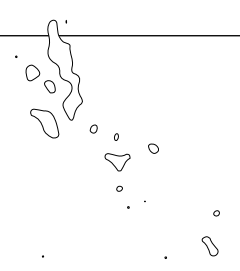


1200 M²
OF EXHIBITION
SPACE AND 4 LEVELS

20
CONTEMPORARY
ARTISTS

43 WORKS:
PAINTINGS, SCULPTURES,
INSTALLATIONS, PHOTOS,
VIDEOS

13
ORIGINAL
PRODUCTIONS



A fertile international residency programme

The AIUla artists in residency programme serves as a platform for regional and international artists to explore and experiment with their artistic pursuits against the backdrop of AIUla's awe-inspiring landscape, with its 200,000 years of human history. It fosters a dynamic dialogue and collaboration among artists, as well as with the scientific and local communities of AIUla.

Located in the palm grove of Mabiti AIUla and the newly opened artists' lodging in the arts district of AIUla, AlJadidah, the residency programme offers a privileged setting for artists to reflect on and re-evaluate the role and methods of creative practice in the contemporary world.

By delving into questions such as our connection with the past, our responsibility towards the environment, and the integration of local culture into our daily lives, artists contribute to a fresh perspective on our surroundings. Through their art, they weave narratives using various languages of expression, be it through words or visual forms. They draw inspiration from cultural artifacts and natural elements, intertwining them with their imagination.

The AIUla artists in residency programme is an integral part of AIUla's vision for the 21st century, positioning contemporary creation as a fundamental pillar. It acts as a catalyst for the development of artistic practice, leveraging artists' perceptions and critical perspectives while providing them with the time and unparalleled context to nurture their craft.

The residencies serve as an anchor for AIUla's burgeoning arts scene and contribute to the strategic growth of the creative industries, deeply rooted in the land and its heritage. Together, they contribute to the creation of an imagined future for AIUla.

"Now I held in my hands a vast methodical fragment of an unknown planet's entire history, with its architecture and its playing cards, with the dread of its mythologies and the murmur of its languages, with its emperors and its seas, with its minerals and its birds and its fish, with its algebra and its fire, with its theological and metaphysical controversy. And all of it articulated, coherent, with no visible doctrinal intent or tone of parody."

Jorge Luis Borges, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, in *Fictions*, 1940.

Fables, parables, utopias, legends and myths are all narrative forms harnessed by artists to reveal the tangible world, to reinvent it – and even to abstract from it. In doing so, the artist imbues fiction with an almost ontological quality: a creative simulacrum that requires research as attentive and rigorous as that traditionally demanded in ascertaining truth and verisimilitude. This exercise in alternative thinking, with its detailed nature and complexity, seeks to expand the limits of what is possible. It does so without ever yielding to the limitations of the real, once the fragile boundary between fiction and reality – between mimesis and poiesis – is shattered.

The term *Orbis Tertius*, borrowed from the first short story in *Ficciones*, a collection published in 1940 by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, refers to a titanic undertaking aimed at documenting, with extraordinary meticulousness, the fictional world of *Tlön*. This composition of an imaginary universe also reflects Borges' profound admiration for Arabic literature in all its diversity, from the most scholarly of works to the more informal, including oral traditions exemplified in *The Arabian Nights*, which he deeply revered. From this universe, Borges borrows the layered construction of a narrative – stories within stories that stack and intertwine. Guided by a taste for mystery, science and literary mischief, the inventors of *Orbis Tertius* construct a portrait of this mythical civilisation and third world that is so rigorously coherent, it soon becomes astoundingly real. In this dizzying *mise en abyme*, the orders of the real and the imaginary collide and clash. It is within these fantastical worlds, which exist in symbiotic relation with the world of reality, that our artists are situated, poised to act.

The artists featured in this exhibition share the experience of having lived and conducted their research in the city of AIUla, in Saudi Arabia, as part of residency programmes developed since 2021 by the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) and the French Agency for the Development of AIUla (AFALULA). The laboratory is itself remarkable, for it invites artists to narrate this destination into existence. Within the exceptional setting of this oasis-city, with its history stretching back thousands of years, lie the archaeological remains of several pre-Islamic civilisations, coexisting with the tangible and symbolic influences of the Arab world. All this unfolds against a backdrop of innovative urbanism looking to the future, in a city partially veiled by the greenery of its palm groves as well as embraced by a desert landscape and cliff faces, whose fascinating geology has been sculpted by volcanic activity, seas and winds.

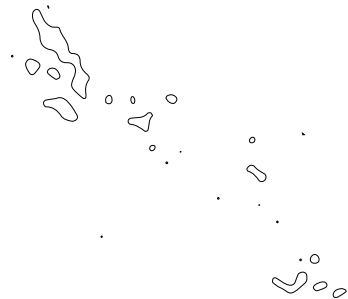
In this region, rich with a tapestry of histories, the contributing artists set out in search of the more subtle narratives which, in their own way, define the society and its distinct identities. Each artist, following his or her own path, arrived at a premise shared by the collective: the anecdote, the poem, the allegory, the rock carving, the tale, the rumour or even the joke wield an equal power over the mind. They serve as foundations for establishing alternative geographies of this unique environment and, more broadly, of the world that unfolds before us. Each in their own way, they explore the realms of possibility, where ancestral stories converse with those that are yet to come, where alternate versions of the past sit alongside potential futures, and where myths and legends cross-pollinate with scientific knowledge.

This approach, reminiscent of Borges' beloved fictions, deftly blends authentic literary references with chimerical inventions, where historical figures and apocryphal characters rub shoulders and influence each other on an equal footing. A tacit plea in favour of the power of the idea, an ode to wonder and the pursuit of knowledge. A universe where what is told holds the weight of truth, where the word assumes performative power, and speech becomes an act.

These twenty artists have gathered facts and anecdotes, documented their observations across diverse fields – such as botany, geology, astronomy, crafts, architecture, agriculture, occultism, sociology – unravelled the tangible world and reimagined it through a speculative lens, challenging normative and restrictive notions of knowledge in the process. Their works delve into the interplay of veracity and fantasy that guides the rewriting of a history with missing passages, conceiving a place so unique it seems to exist beyond time and outside this world. Marked by the survival of traditions and practices passed down from ancestors, some of these works trace connections to invisible phenomena, while others focus on the tangible materials of the natural world, their inherent poetic qualities, and the forms of life to which they bear witness. They also speak to the insatiable – and distinctly human – desire to know and dominate the world while courting the perils inherent in this quest.

Just as the creators of Tlön intended, these works make their intrusions through the fissures of our world, finding within them the substance needed to shape another universe and weave its narrative. A world where reality does not precede knowledge but is a function of it. An ontology of the possible, in response to the inherent omissions within the fabric of reality.

Arnaud Morand, exhibition Curator
Assisted by Marilou Thiebault and Ali AlGhazzawi



Information

Orbis Tertius exhibition
October 15th to 20th, 2024 11:00 am to 8:00 pm
5, rue Saint-Merri
75004 Paris

Press preview on Monday October 14th,
9.00 am to 11.30 am

Opening on October 14th,
5:00 pm to 10:00 pm

Talks on October 15th and 17th
in the exhibition at 9:00 am and on October 18th at Asia
Now at 01:30 pm

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l'art en plus

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About the AIUla artists in residency programme

The AIUla artists in residency programme is a key element of AIUla's ambitious 21st-century vision, positioning contemporary creation as a cornerstone of the project. It uniquely combines artistic intelligence with scientific expertise to shape the development of this remarkable destination, built by and for artists. This programme contributes to imagining and cultivating AIUla's possible futures.

The programme offers a platform for regional and international artists to explore and experiment in the stunning landscape of AIUla, enriched by 200,000 years of human history. It fosters dynamic dialogues between artists, creatives, experts, and AIUla's local communities.

The AIUla artists in residency programme was established in 2021 by Arts AIUla and the French Agency for AIUla Development (AFALULA).

About Arts AIUla



The creation of Arts AIUla within The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) is a commitment to the next chapters in a millennia of artistic creation – celebrating cultural inheritance, presenting the art of our time, and shaping a future propelled by creativity. AIUla has long been a consistent and ever-evolving hub of cultural transfer. It has been a place of passage, a crossroads for trade, and home to successive civilizations who carved, sculpted and inscribed their lives into the landscape. The work of Arts AIUla seeks to preserve this legacy: fuse the old with the new; the local with the international, keeping the arts central to the spirit of AIUla as a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage. Arts AIUla will bring to fruition a series of new initiatives, projects and exhibitions. The artwork curation will speak to RCU's vision for the continued development of AIUla's contemporary art scenes: positioning the arts as a key contributor to AIUla's character, the quality of life for its local community and the region's economic future. Arts AIUla focuses on transferring the talents of the Saudi nation and the local AIUla community into meaningful long-standing social and economic opportunities. This is a key part of the Journey through Time masterplan bringing together the 15 different landmark destinations for culture, heritage and creativity across AIUla.

About the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU)

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)

Born as a result of an intergovernmental agreement signed by France and Saudi Arabia in April 2018, the French Agency for AIUla Development (AFALULA) was founded in Paris in July 2018. In the spirit of collaborative development, AFALULA's objective is to support its Saudi partner, the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU), in the sustainable economic, tourism, and cultural development of AIUla, a region with an exceptional natural and cultural heritage located in the north-west of Saudi Arabia. The Agency's mission is to mobilize all of France's expertise and know-how and to bring together the best operators and companies in the fields of archaeology, museography, architecture, urban planning, tourism, hotel management, infrastructure, education, security, agriculture, botany, and sustainable natural resource management.



About AlUla

About AlUla:

Located 1,100 km from Riyadh, in North-West Saudi Arabia, AlUla is a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage. The vast area, covering 22,561km², includes a lush oasis valley, towering sandstone mountains and ancient cultural heritage sites dating back thousands of years to when the Lihyan and Nabataean kingdoms reigned. The most well-known and recognised site in AlUla is Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. A 52-hectare ancient city, Hegra was the principal southern city of the Nabataean Kingdom and is comprised of 111 well-preserved tombs, many with elaborate facades cut out of the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement.

Current research also suggests Hegra was the most southern outpost of the Roman Empire after the Roman's conquered the Nabataeans in 106 CE. In addition to Hegra, AlUla is also home to ancient Dadan, the capital of the Dadan and Lihyan Kingdoms and considered to be one of the most developed 1st millennium BCE cities of the Arabian Peninsula, and Jabal Ikmah, an open air library of hundreds of inscriptions and writings in many different languages, which has been recently listed on the UNESCO's memory of the World Register. Also AlUla Old Town Village, a labyrinth of more than 900 mudbrick homes developed from at least the 12th century, which has been selected as one of the World's Best Tourism Villages in 2022 by the UNWTO. Additionally, Hegra Railway and Hegra Fort, which are key sites in the story and conquests of Lawrence of Arabia.

For more information, please visit: experiencealula.com