

## The French-Saudi cultural institution Villa Hegra launches its first artist initiatives, featuring major artists

Villa Hegra's inaugural artist initiatives – occurring as a segment of Villa Hegra's 2023-2024 preopening season - will feature the participation of four distinguished artists hailing from France and Saudi Arabia. These initiatives mark a significant step in fostering creative dialogue between the two countries and are instrumental in shaping Villa Hegra's future artist residencies.

Conceived by Villa Hegra's 2023-2024 preopening season curators, Wejdan Reda and Arnaud Morand, the inaugural artist initiatives enable creatives to discover AIUla and exchange with the local community, through two different formats. It is a way to allow artists to pursue their artistic endeavors through experimentations in the unique and infinitely rich setting of AIUla.

### Saudi French duos selected for Villa Hegra's artistic initiatives in AIUla to cultivate a creative dialogue

Duos of artists have been selected by the curators to take part in the artistic initiatives.

- **The first initiative consists of an ambitious artwork commission, following a one-year research.** It features Saudi American visual and performance artist Sarah Brahim and French artist Ugo Schiavi. They are working together for the first time, benefiting from an exclusive access extensive array of scientists, multiple trips and support to create a site responsive installation. The artworks created during these retreats, following a year-long research period, will be an integral part of Villa Hegra's artistic ecosystem. Both artists are known for their unique approaches to integrating heritage, spirituality, and contemporary narratives in their works.
- **The second initiative, entitled "Art Retreat", is a short-stay format** envisioned as a discovery trip, inviting another duo of artists, including one of Saudi Arabia's most acclaimed artists, Abdulrahman Alsoliman, and Théo Mercier – a renowned French visual artist and stage director, to seek inspiration in AIUla.

### The artistic initiatives at the heart of Villa Hegra's purpose

These artistic initiatives will play a key role in the definition of Villa Hegra itself as described by the Saudi-French duo of curators: *"It represents an occasion to invite creatives onsite to engage with us in the reflection of what Villa Hegra will / should be. This axis is a good way to initiate the future network of Villa Hegra, and to prefigure its coming residency programmes."* They added that *"these programmes provide a privileged frame of reference that enables its actors to step back and re-examine the roles and modalities of creative practice in the current state of the world and site-specific context of AIUla."*

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**About Villa Hegra:** Villa Hegra is a Saudi French institution dedicated to arts and culture, born out of a bilateral cooperation agreement. Conceived as a space for artistic, cultural, and creative dialogue between France and Saudi Arabia, it is also the foundation for dialogue between local communities and international

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artists. Villa Hegra will open its doors in 2026 in AlUla, Saudi Arabia, and will house artist residencies and a cultural center. A rich preopening program is planned ahead of the official opening, including cultural workshops for teenagers, ciné-concerts, music and dance performances, conferences, and artist retreats.