

## **Press release**

### **Villa Hegra celebrates the closing of its first cultural preopening season in AIUla**

**Villa Hegra concludes its first year of activations in AIUla with two landmark events on December 12 to 14, 2024. This cultural season featured a diverse range of initiatives aimed at promoting cultural exchange and artistic innovation. Highlights include the unveiling of “NEUMA – The Forgotten Ceremony”, a site-specific installation and performance by Sarah Brahim and Ugo Schiavi, and the debut of the Opéra National de Paris’ Junior Ballet.**

Ahead of the inauguration of its building, Villa Hegra has launched a series of annual preopening programs in AIUla in 2023. Jointly conceived by Saudi curator Wejdan Reda and French curator Arnaud Morand, Villa Hegra's 2023-2024 cultural programming included a wide range of initiatives, such as artist retreats, creative workshops, cine-concerts, performances, masterclasses, as well as academic and research programs. Reda and Morand's curatorial approach for this program is derived from Villa Hegra's DNA and aligns with the ethos of its architects, Lacaton & Vassal: moving away from monumentality, working with nature rather than against it, crafting a humble yet powerful vision rooted in bridging the understanding of the local context, and building connections with other artistic scenes.

### **Unveiling “NEUMA – The Forgotten Ceremony”, a site-specific installation and performance in AIUla**

“NEUMA: The Forgotten Ceremony” is a collaborative contemporary artwork by Saudi-American artist Sarah Brahim and French artist Ugo Schiavi, unfolding across two locations in AIUla. At Wadi AlNaam, a striking fifteen-panel glass installation emerges from the desert sands, while at Dar Tantora, hand-crafted glass sculptures reflect the region's distinctive geology. The project debuted with a live performance on December 12, 2024, where local participants were invited to engage with the installation through breath and sound, generating resonant tones that echoed through the surrounding landscape. Brahim and Schiavi's work weaves together heritage, spirituality, and contemporary expression, exploring AIUla-specific themes such as the relation between the body and the landscape.

### **Crossings, the debut piece of the Opéra de Paris’ Junior Ballet**

On December 13 and 14, 2024, the Junior Ballet of the Opéra National de Paris, featuring 18 young dancers aged 18 to 22, presented its first public performance in the canyons of AIUla. The 45-minute piece *Crossings*, created by Noé Soulier, was specifically designed to blend seamlessly with the natural surroundings, with the dancers performing directly on the sand of Our Habitas desert resort.

The two events served as a milestone in Villa Hegra's first year of cultural programming, paving the way for the Villa's 2025 preopening season, which will feature the opening of a temporary space in central AIUla. Feriel Fodil, CEO of Villa Hegra, stated: "*These initiatives marked an important year for Villa Hegra, highlighting our dedication to inspiring future generations of creatives, fostering connections and promoting knowledge sharing. As we look to the next season, we remain committed to strengthening ties between Saudi Arabia and France, building on AIUla's legacy as a place where cultures converge.*" Villa Hegra's activations will ramp up in 2025 with the opening of a temporary location in central AIUla.

**About Villa Hegra:** Villa Hegra is a cultural institution born of the friendship between Saudi Arabia and France. Dedicated to promoting cross-cultural exchange, it offers residency programs for artists and researchers and serves as an open hub for creativity and education, cultivating connections between AIUla's community and international audiences. As part of its cultural preopening program, Villa Hegra

VILLA HEGRA

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offers a wide range of initiatives fostering contemporary creation in the fields of visual arts, cinema, performing arts, music and literature.

Villa Hegra will open a temporary location in central AIUla in 2025, that will host artist and research residencies along with its preopening cultural activities.

[LINK TO VIDEOS AND PICTURES OF THE EVENT](#)

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