

Press release

On the occasion of the 3rd edition of MATTER and SHAPE, Villa Hegra unveils in France for the first time a series of furniture pieces created through a collaboration between Saudi artist Badr Ali and Swiss design company USM

06 March 2026 – Villa Hegra, the first Saudi-French cultural institution based in AIUla and part of the network of French cultural villas (Villa Medici, Casa de Velázquez, Villa Kujoyama, Villa Albertine, Villa Swagatam), and institutional partner of MATTER and SHAPE in Paris, presents a 50-square-meter bookshop and Reading Room featuring furniture created through a collaboration between the iconic Swiss design company USM and Saudi artist Badr Ali.

Visitors can also discover a photographic series showcasing pieces designed by Paul Emilieu Marchesseau, the first designer in residency at Villa Hegra. Produced through local Saudi craftsmanship, these creations now furnish the artists' studios of the institution in AIUla.

Unique works by Badr Ali from AIUla

During his residency in AIUla in October 2025, Saudi painter and visual artist Badr Ali developed a capsule collection with USM, the internationally renowned Swiss design company that recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. Conceived specifically for the Villa Hegra site in AIUla, these modular and adaptable pieces were unveiled in January 2026 at the AIUla Design Awards.



Works by Badr Ali and USM

Inspired by the choreographic movements of traditional Saudi dances, Badr Ali's motifs applied to USM's modular furniture convey an abstract sense of movement. Each panel is a unique work, translating gesture and rhythm into spatial form.

In total, 20 silkscreen panels conceived by Badr Ali are assembled into a library structure. Within the salon, this Reading Room is envisioned as a space dedicated to learning and intellectual engagement through printed matter. Visitors are invited to explore a selection of more than 150 titles presented within the installation in connection with AIUla, including independent magazines, design books, and periodicals curated by MATTER and SHAPE.



Works by Badr Ali and USM

“We are pleased to highlight the collaboration between Badr Ali, one of our first residents in AIUla, and USM, on the occasion of this major design event in Paris. This Reading Room embodies the very spirit of Villa Hegra: a space dedicated to learning, knowledge-sharing, and dialogue between audiences, where books serve as a vital medium of transmission,” said Ferial Fodil, CEO of Villa Hegra.

A photographic series showcasing the work of designer and interior architect Paul Emilieu Marchesseau

The first designer in residency at Villa Hegra in AIUla and a recent participant in the exhibition *Nouveaux Ensembliers* at the Mobilier national in Paris, Paul Emilieu Marchesseau, also conceived the interiors of the institution during his stays in AIUla in 2024 and 2025.

For over two years, the designer immersed himself in the AlUla region, engaging in close dialogue with local artisans to create a furniture collection that is both modular and functional, conceived to endure and to evolve alongside the needs of resident artists.

To design and complete the structures, Paul Emilieu Marchesseau collaborated with partners in Saudi Arabia and France, bringing to each piece distinct technical expertise and symbolic depth, notably through the use of local palm wood. These collaborations resulted in embroidery conceived by Shaddah Design Studio (Riyadh) and a solar-powered speaker developed using technologies from Pikip Solar Speakers (Marseille).

The project is revealed to the public through a photographic series, transporting into the heart of the Paris salon the spirit of creative dialogue that animates Villa Hegra.



Talk on the Saudi cultural scene

A talk entitled “New Cultural Landscapes: Villa Hegra” will take place on Saturday, 7 March, from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm in the dedicated MATTER and SHAPE space, featuring:

- Gaël Charbau, Artistic Director of Villa Hegra
- Basmah Felemban, Co-curator of Villa Hegra
- Badr Ali, Artist in residence at Villa Hegra
- Abdulrahman and Turki Gazzaz, founders of the Jeddah-based design and architecture agency Bricklab

About Badr Ali

Badr Ali (b. 1992) lives and works between Berlin, London, and Jeddah. A graduate of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, he continued his artistic research in Paris in 2018 at Studio Escalier. His practice



explores the boundary between drawing and painting, with particular attention to gestural drawing, which he considers a direct and instinctive emotional language.

Since 2011, he has participated in numerous artist residencies, notably at the Cité internationale des arts in Paris (2018–2019), Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (2019–2020), and more recently at the Athr Foundation in Jeddah (2024). His solo exhibitions include *Expand and Collapse* in Paris in 2019 and *Tired Lion* at Athr Gallery in Jeddah in 2022.

His work has also been featured in group exhibitions such as *21,39: AMAKIN* in Jeddah and *The Mountains Quiver in Anticipation* at Hayy Jameel, as well as at international art fairs including Art Dubai and Abu Dhabi Art Fair.

About USM

A Swiss family-owned company, USM has pursued a commitment to quality and sustainability for more than 140 years. Its modular furniture system, USM Haller, is recognized as a design classic and is officially included in the permanent design collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA). Created in 1965 by a visionary architect and industrialist, its timeless lines, exceptional manufacturing quality, and outstanding modularity allow for tailored, scalable, and sustainable solutions across a wide range of colors and functions for residential, office, retail, public, and cultural spaces.

About Paul Emilieu Marchesseau

Paul Emilieu Marchesseau is a French interior architect and designer. A graduate of École Camondo in 2013, his practice advocates a sustainable approach to interior design. In 2020, he designed the interior of the new École Camondo in Toulon, creating an ecological, mobile, and adaptable furniture collection entitled *Mobilier Servant*. Winner of the Dezeen Awards 2022, Paul is the founder of Emilieu Studio, a Paris-based practice specializing in circular, impact-driven projects, including workspaces, learning environments, and cultural spaces.

During his residency at Villa Hegra, Paul designed a series of functional pieces for the institution's artists' studios: a modular wall, a studio lamp, a palm-wood trestle table, and a solar speaker.

Inspired by Saudi textile traditions and nomadic forms, these pieces were developed in collaboration with Saudi and French partners. The textile work, designed with Marianna Ladreyt, was embroidered by Shaddah Design Studio and artisans from Madrasat Addeera, while the solar speaker was co-created with Alphaplus and Pikip Solar Speakers.

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