

PRESS RELEASE — July 2026

## ***Life of Forms***

**Emerging design hub AIUla partners with Lafayette Anticipations to present *Life of Forms* exhibition at Paris Design Week – First event presented as part of AIUla's Cultural Season in Paris**

8 — 13 September 2026  
Lafayette Anticipations, 9 rue du Plâtre, Paris 4

Press preview: Monday 7 September 2026



Altin, *Wadi The Canyon, Palm Chronicles*, 2026, Collection, Courtesy of Arts Alula © Lorenzo Arrigoni

On the occasion of Paris Design Week 2026, Lafayette Anticipations, Arts AIUla, Design Space AIUla, the French Agency for AIUla Development (AFALULA) and Villa Hegra join forces to present *Life of Forms*, a major exhibition bringing together design pieces emerging from AIUla's residency programmes alongside a selection of works from the Collection Lafayette Anticipations (Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin).

Featuring contributions from **d'Aseel Alamoudi, Altin, Xavier Antin, Meriem Bennani, Camille Blatrix, Katinka Bock, Étienne Bossut, Ève Gabriel Chabanon, Gaëlle Choisne, bahraini—danish, Raphaël Emine, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Paul Ledron, Paul Emilieu Marchesseau, Mathieu Mercier, Ori Orisun Merhav, Lydia Ourahmane, Studio Raw Material, Markus Schinwald and Studio ThusThat**, *Life of Forms* unfolds as both a manifesto and a landscape: a fertile zone where contemporary art and design converge in a shared attentiveness to the forms, materials and narratives that shape our ways of inhabiting the world.

The exhibition is conceived in partnership with Villa Hegra, the first Saudi-French cultural institution based in AIUla, that hosted Paul Emilieu Marchesseau in its dedicated design residency programme in 2025.

The exhibition is curated by **Clément Delépine**, Director of Lafayette Anticipations, **Arnaud Morand**, Head of Art and Creative Industries at AFALULA, with **Ali Alghazzawi**, Art Initiatives and Curatorial Manager at the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU), and Emily Marant, Senior Design Advisor at AFALULA and Founder of Studio Marant, serving as associate curators.

*Life of Forms* takes its place within Lafayette Anticipations' programme as a moment of activation, where forms are not merely presented, but inhabited, interpreted and continually reconfigured.

**Hamad AlHomiedan**, Director of Arts and Creative Industries at the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) said:

*"For thousands of years, AIUla has stood as a crossroads of cultural exchange and creativity, and "The Life of Forms" is a powerful contemporary expression of that enduring legacy. Presented during Paris Design Week in partnership with Lafayette Anticipations, the exhibition reflects the growing reach and strength of AIUla as a design hub and the Arts AIUla ecosystem on the international stage, as well as the calibre of the artists and designers engaged in our programmes. Together, these works open a dialogue that speaks to the depth of Saudi-French collaboration and the transformative power of cross-cultural artistic expression."*

**Clément Delépine**, Director of Lafayette Anticipations and **Arnaud Morand**, Head of Arts and Creative Industries at the French Agency for AIUla Development (AFALULA), co-curators of the exhibition said:

*"What emerges from the exhibition is not a collection of objects but a landscape of situations: spaces to inhabit, materials to handle, environments to perceive, and systems of production to traverse. This landscape will dialogue both with the original identity of Lafayette Anticipations as a place where making, thinking, and exhibiting are inseparable, and with the very distinctive and inspirational geography of AIUla. It echoes a broader reflection on how design can emerge from, and remain embedded within, such specific contexts."*

## **AIUla Cultural Season in Paris**

This exhibition forms part of a wider **AIUla Cultural Season in Paris** placing AIUla at the forefront in Paris at a key moment for contemporary art, design and the creative industries. Conceived within the framework of Saudi-French cultural cooperation, **Life of Forms** marks the start of a season that will unfold across several major platforms in September and October: a presentation of AIUla's design initiatives as part of the Institut du monde arabe (IMA) Design Prize; an installation by Saudi artist Ayman Zedani, presented by the AIUla Contemporary Art Museum during Art Basel Paris week; and the participation of Villa Hegra to Asia Now. Together, these initiatives affirm AIUla's growing role as a cultural platform for dialogue, creation and international exchange.

## An exhibition at the crossroads of art and design

*Life of Forms* approaches contemporary art and design as kindred disciplines, brought together by a shared attention to forms, materials, uses, narratives and the social realities they both reflect and transform.

Taking Louis Sullivan's principle that "form follows function" as a point of departure, the exhibition moves beyond the opposition between function and autonomy to explore the feedback loop between imagination and lived reality. It examines how creation can invite life in — through living materials, ecological processes, craft transmission, social use and critical responses to industrial production.

Some works reconnect with living traditions, from palm weaving and mud-brick construction to perfumery, incense practices and stone-working. Others restore a central role to natural materials or divert industrial processes, opening them to alternative forms of use, imagination and shared experience.

## A dialogue between AIUla and Lafayette Anticipations

The exhibition brings into conversation two places devoted to creation and production. At Lafayette Anticipations, art and design have been treated on equal footing since the institution's inception, with production, research and exhibition embedded into the very structure of the building.

In parallel, AIUla offers an institutional ecosystem rather than a backdrop. Through its residency programmes, living craft school, *Madrasat Addeera*, its Arts District **Aljadidah**, its land art initiatives **Wadi AlFann** and **Desert X AIUla**, forthcoming **AIUla Contemporary Art Museum**, archaeological sites such as **Hegra & Dadan** and its cultural programming, the project is anchored in a living context of landscapes, vernacular knowledge, material ecologies, custodians, makers and contemporary practitioners.

In this dialogue, artists and designers rethink their working habits, their ways of inhabiting the world, and the forms through which life may become perceptible.

## Objects as almost-living entities

Drawing on Tim Ingold's reflections on the maker's engagement with materials and Jane Bennett's notion of "vibrant matter", *The Life of Forms* invites us to consider objects not as fixed appearances, but as entities shaped by processes, relations and conditions — historical, social, economic and environmental.

Borrowing also from Marcel Duchamp's idea of the "infra-thin", the exhibition opens onto the subtle possibilities contained within materials, gestures and objects. It suggests that forms may carry memories, compose tensions and harmonies, activate silences and allow different forms of life to emerge within the works themselves.

## Designers in residences in AIUla

The exhibition gathers pieces developed within AIUla's and Villa Hegra's residency programmes, anchored in the AlJadidah Arts District and Madrasat Addeera, by:

- **Altin** — design as the continuity of vernacular intelligence (palm ecosystems, *sa'af* weaving, collective authorship)
- **Aseel Alamoudi** — design as civic and social infrastructure
- **bahraini—danish** — design as spatial narrative and cultural translation
- **Paul Ledron** — design as atmosphere and interior ritual (Hejazi perfumery traditions, *bakhoor* and *'ūd*)
- **Paul-Émilieu Marchesseau** — design as cultural mediation and applied infrastructure, with a selection of pieces coming from his residency at Villa Hegra.
- **Ori Orisun Merhav** — post-human and multispecies design
- **Raw Material** — design as material inquiry and ecological system
- **Studio ThusThat** — critical material practice

## **A dialogue with the Collection of the Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin**

These propositions resonate with a selection of works from the Collection of the Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin, with pieces by **Xavier Antin, Meriem Bennani, Camille Blatrix, Katinka Bock, Étienne Bossut, Ève Gabriel Chabanon, Gaëlle Choisne, Raphaël Emine, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Mathieu Mercier, Lydia Ourahmane, Markus Schinwald**. From multispecies ecosystems to public infrastructures of play, from industrial residues to intimate sensory rituals, the exhibition articulates a plurality of relations to the world in which form remains contingent, evolving and relational.

### **Practical information**

*Life of Forms*

8 — 13 September 2026

Lafayette Anticipations, 9 rue du Plâtre, Paris 4th

Free admission

### **About Lafayette Anticipations — Fondation Galeries Lafayette**

Founded by the Galeries Lafayette Group and inaugurated in 2018, Lafayette Anticipations is a public-interest institution dedicated to contemporary artistic creation.

Free and open to all, its programme includes cutting-edge exhibitions exploring different ways of seeing and inhabiting the world; the Échelle Humaine performance festival; the Closer Music festival, celebrating emerging musicians; as well as talks, screenings, activities for younger audiences and innovative tour formats that take place throughout the year and shape the life of the place.

Located in the heart of Paris, the Fondation occupies a singular building. Designed by architect Rem Koolhaas its movable floors create an ever-changing space which embodies Lafayette Anticipations' daring, forward-looking and inclusive understanding of contemporary art.

Lafayette Anticipations is a space of meeting and exchange in the heart of the Marais. Through exhibitions, festivals, tours and workshops, it creates opportunities for shared reflection on our time and its challenges. Free and open to all, the Fondation encourages dialogue rooted in a spirit of intellectual and artistic hospitality.

Beyond its public programme, the Fondation also supports artists at pivotal moments in their practice through two residency programmes. Steered by a committee of experts, the Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin oversees a growing collection of over 400 works, acquired primarily from emerging artists.

### **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 Design Space AIUla**

Design Space AIUla combines a gallery, archive and workshop in a dynamic new centre for design in the region. Located in the heart of the AlJadidah Arts District, Design Space AIUla interrogates design practices from around the world through the prism of AIUla's cultural and natural landscapes. It aims to fuel creative thought and expression through a dynamic programme of collaboration and exchange, situating the creative practices of

Northwest Arabia in the international design ecosystem. A living compendium of AIUla's design journey, from master planning to graphic design, and product design to architecture, this is a space for designers and design enthusiasts to learn, dream, investigate, collaborate, experiment, make and share.

### **About AFALULA — French Agency for AIUla Development**

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 Villa Hegra**

Villa Hegra is the first institution dedicated to cross-cultural dialogue and creative exchange between Saudi Arabia and France, based in AIUla, Saudi Arabia. Established by an intergovernmental agreement signed in 2021, Villa Hegra develops residency programs and public initiatives in the fields of visual arts, cinema, research, performing arts and creative industries at large, encouraging long-term collaboration between Saudi and French cultural ecosystems. Villa Hegra fosters encounters between local practices, emerging generations and international perspectives, contributing to AIUla's development as a leading cultural destination. Its programme is structured around innovation, transmission and collaboration, inviting audiences to engage actively with the creative process. In 2025, Villa Hegra opened its doors in central AIUla. Spanning more than 2,300 square meters, its venue hosts AIUla's first indoor cinema and first performing arts studio, alongside artist residencies and ateliers, workshops and exhibition spaces. Villa Hegra is a member of the international residency network Viva Villa alongside Villa Medici (Rome), Villa Kujoyama (Kyoto), Casa de Velázquez (Madrid), Villa Albertine (United States) and Villa Swagatam (India).

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### **In partnership with:**

