

OCULA

DESERT X 2021 to Feature Judy Chicago and Felipe Baeza

By Sherry Paik
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Now in its third instalment, DESERT X 2021 is among the first major art events to return to the region since California went into lockdown last year.



Installation view: Sherin Guirguis, *One I Call* (2017). Courtesy the artist and Desert X.

Southern California outdoor art festival DESERT X has announced the artists participating in this year's event, which takes place from 12 March to 16 May.

In a work specially commissioned by the festival and the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation, Judy Chicago will continue her 'Atmosphere' series that

began in the 1960s. On 9 April she will present *Living Smoke, A Tribute to the Living Desert*. In this 'performance-sculpture', the artist uses coloured smoke and fireworks to temporarily 'feminise' the historically male-dominated Land Art movement.

Marginalised voices will also be amplified in Mexican artist Felipe Baeza's mural *Finding Home in My Own Flesh*, which addresses the silence over queer communities of colour 'from multiple histories and places integral to the Valley', while the billboards in Xaviera Simmons' *Because You Know Ultimately We Will Band a Militia* will verbalise white stereotypes.

Zahrah Alghamdi's *What Lies Behind the Walls*, by comparison, revolves around the endurance of time and land: the monumental sculptural wall, containing 'the different stratas of time', draws links between the arid landscapes of the Coachella and other parts of the world.

Co-curated by Artistic Director Neville Wakefield, who also co-curated *DESERT X AIUIa* in Saudi Arabia, and Curator César García-Alvarez, the organisers of *DESERT X 2021* say it approaches the desert as a meeting place for ideas, narratives, histories, and communities.



Installation view: Doug Aitken, *MIRAGE*. (2017). Photo: Lance Gerber. Courtesy the artist and Desert X.

'The curators have brought together an extraordinary group of international artists who have made compelling works that celebrate the Coachella Valley and its histories while provoking us to explore our commonalities and celebrate our differences,' said DESERT X Founder and President Susan Davis.

'We refute the dichotomy of local versus global, and instead champion the nuances that connect both,' said García-Alvarez.

Going global has created problems for DESERT X, with some of the event's sponsors criticising the organisers for producing DESERT X AIUIa 2020 in Saudi Arabia, whose human rights violations have been enumerated by Amnesty International and others.

Last November, Palm Desert City Council narrowly voted to pay \$20,000 to The Desert Biennial, the nonprofit behind DESERT X, over 2020 and 2021, while the Palm Springs City Council has chosen not to back the festival.

In a statement published in Desert Sun early February, the DESERT X team said, 'We believe deeply that art has the potential to challenge the divides that segregate our world and that engagement, no matter how difficult or controversial, will always be a better strategy than an isolationist approach rooted in selective moral grounds.'

The other artists participating in Desert X 2021 are: Ghada Amer (Egypt); J Serge Attukwei Clottey (Ghana); Nicholas Galanin (US); Alicja Kwade(Poland); Oscar Murillo (Colombia); Christopher Myers (US); Eduardo Sarabia (US); Kim Stringfellow (US); and Vivian Suter (Argentina).