

The Future is Now



A monolithic sculpture questions the future of creativity in a country on the brink of change

Sculptor Gisela Colón wanted her gleaming, 9-meter-tall totem to spotlight the differences in the way humankind and geology have evolved. The American artist originally from Puerto Rico has spent a decade travelling the globe and memorializing deserts, or “hotspots,” as she calls them. *The Future is Now* is a sophisticated tribute to the evolutionary power of desert civilizations. This glittering, prismatic teardrop of a sculpture, seemingly dropped onto the dunes of Saudi Arabia’s Al-Ula desert, platforms the inimitable power of the landscape as an art medium in its own right. This work is part of Colón’s *Parabolic Monolith* series, in which she replicates gleaming metallic sculptures in historic locations across the world, including the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and Regent’s Park in London.

Al-Ula is an hour’s drive from the coast of Al Wajh on the Red Sea. Saturated with light, this is a landscape rich in both human and natural history, home to abandoned sculpted sandstone monuments and the occasional azure desert lake. On the edge of the Al-Ula desert, Ikmah rocks still show the stories carved by the ancient Arabian travelers making the journey across the desert to Mecca. Colón’s sculpture attempts to fuse these histories into a monument that will last decades into Saudi Arabia’s future.

Saudi Arabia is at a moment of significant change, and the motives behind some of these changes can be difficult to discern. In 2018, Saudi Arabian women were finally granted the right to drive and a wealth of restrictions on their lives were lifted. However, many women continue to feel societal pressure to conform to outdated gender roles. In 2019 the country opened its borders to international travelers and, in the same year,

Colón travelled to Saudi Arabia to create a work that would capture this historical moment. Colón describes her work as “organic minimalism,” and her practice of channeling the natural elements is a tribute to a new era of Saudi creativity, one that, for the first time in history, women can take part in.

The Al-Ula desert is a poignant place to take in this change. Only 20 km (12.4 miles) from Colón’s sculpture are the remains of Hegra, a lost ancient tomb and a former hub of Saudi commerce, with huge columns and grand buildings sculpted into the mountains. This is a place where traders taking the silk road would have passed. *The Future is Now* respects this history, but its stark modern contrast to the Al-Ula desert makes Colón’s sculpture a fitting vehicle for questioning the future of creativity in a society grappling with change. As an agent of change, Colón’s work envisions a future of hope, transformation, and humanistic solidarity.

