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MIT program
in art, culture and
technology

School of Architecture + Planning

artJameel
Abdul Latif Jameel | Community Initiatives

EDGE
OF
ARABIA

**CULTURUNNERS WORKSHOPS,
MAJLIS SYMPOSIUM AND PUBLIC LECTURE
OCTOBER 1 – 6, 2014
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**





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ART JAMEEL, EDGE OF ARABIA and THE MIT PROGRAM IN ART, CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY (ACT) PRESENT



MIT Media Lab Exterior, copyright Andy Ryan

**CULTURUNNERS WORKSHOPS, MAJLIS SYMPOSIUM AND PUBLIC LECTURE
OCTOBER 1 – 6, 2014
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ARTISTS AND SCIENTISTS COME TOGETHER TO CREATE AND SHARE
TECHNOLOGIES AND APPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL COLLABORATION
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Cambridge, MA (August 26, 2014) – CULTURUNNERS week of workshops and public events at MIT (October 1st to 6th, 2014) is a multidisciplinary gathering of artists, designers, filmmakers, scientists, curators, and scholars whose practices inspire novel approaches towards cross-cultural exchanges specific to the United States and the Middle East. Together, they will collaboratively share, develop, and test creative communication technologies and narrative techniques.

CULTURUNNERS is a core component of the Edge of Arabia's US tour – in partnership with Art Jameel - and ACT's Culture Fabric research on cultural empathy. Over the course of three years, an evolving group of artists, scientists, and thinkers will cross the country in the hope of investigating and experiencing commonalities interconnecting the narratives, economies,

politics, cultures and landscapes between the United States and the Middle East. *CULTURUNNERS* will use custom-built artistic technologies to map, archive, and broadcast the experiences of the travelers over the course of their tour.

The ***CULTURUNNERS* week of workshops and public events at MIT include three days of hands-on workshops, a daylong Majlis Symposium, and a presentation as part of the ACT's Monday Night Lecture Series.** This programming represents the beginning of an ongoing collaboration between Azra Akšamija, Class of 1922 Career Development Professor and Assistant Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and curators & artists of Edge of Arabia. Through a series of curated **expeditions** and **exchanges**, *CULTURUNNERS* allows for grassroots encounters, linking individuals and communities across physical and psychological borders.

Technologies developed during the **Workshops** at MIT from October 1st to 3rd will assist the *CULTURUNNERS* travelers in recording and broadcasting their experiences during the Edge of Arabia tour. These technologies include a roaming broadcast vehicle or 'mobile studio', wearable technologies, and an online storytelling and archiving platform, which will be used for real-time reporting and dynamic archival of multi-media content. These collected narratives—which will take the form of video and audio reports, media coverage, images, diaries, and contextual material—will be digitally and physically archived, and subsequently made available as a free resource for international audiences through a series of presentations and a dedicated website and online TV channel: www.culturunners.com

The daylong **Public Symposium** on Sunday, October 5 features a series of talks, screenings, performances, and readings inspired by the 'Majlis'—an Arabic term denoting a welcoming environment that embraces diverse types of social gatherings. During this multidisciplinary symposium, participants from diverse backgrounds will share storytelling methods with the intention of developing a more sophisticated understanding of the relationships between cross-cultural interactions and burgeoning forms of technology. On Monday, October 6, *CULTURUNNERS* will present its findings as part of ACT's prestigious **Monday Night Lecture Series**. Both these events will be free and open to the public.

Following the week of events at MIT, the *CULTURUNNERS* project will travel New York and Washington DC in 2015, before heading across the United States to the West Coast in 2016.

***CULTURUNNERS* Week at MIT includes:**

October 1 – 3, 10am – 6pm | APPLIED WORKSHOPS

October 5, 12pm – 6pm | PUBLIC SYMPOSIUM

October 6, 7 – 9 pm | *CULTURUNNERS* @ MIT MONDAY NIGHT LECTURE SERIES

A full schedule of speakers and events is available [here](#).

To join as an audience member in the **free Public Symposium**, please **RSVP** [here](#).

Applied Workshop participation is by invitation only.

Connect with Edge of Arabia on [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) for all the latest news, updates, photos and more. Join the conversation by mentioning @EdgeOfArabia and using the **#EOAUSA** **#CULTURUNNERS** hashtags.

OUTLINE OF THE CULTURUNNERS PROGRAM

CULTURUNNERS *workshops and* symposium are chaired by Azra Akšamija, Class of 1922 Career Development Professor and Assistant Professor in the Program in Art, Culture, and Technology at MIT, and Stephen Stapleton, artist and Edge of Arabia co-founder.

OCTOBER 1 – 3: APPLIED WORKSHOPS

Timing: Daily 10am – 6pm

Location: Program in Art, Culture and Technology, Media Lab Complex, MIT.

During three days of intensive workshops and discussions, invited artists, designers, and scientists will gather in MIT's Program for Art, Culture and Technology to be immersed in the development and practical application of ideas for individual or group projects in two categories which are in close communication with one another and with interconnected results:

MOBILE & WEARABLE TECHNOLOGIES

Workshop Leader: Azra Akšamija, artist and architectural historian, Assistant Professor at MIT.

A second-hand RV will be reimaged as a mobile studio. Participants will collectively implement or specially-make devices and gadgets to transform the vehicle into a highly-designed portable workspace. This modified vehicle will have multiple functions to facilitate cultural exchange, and to help the travelers comfortably immerse themselves during their trip across the U.S. The devices will serve such diverse purposes as observation, investigation, communication, production, recording, broadcasting, mapping, archiving, and emotional comfort. The group will also develop wearable technologies to be worn by the travelers to enable them to maximize their encounters with grassroots communities.

Participants include: Daanish Masoud, co-founder of *The Machine to Be Another*, Peter Schmitt, German artist and MIT MediaLab alumni roboticist; Rashad Salim, London based Iraqi artist; Wafaa Bilal, New York based Iraqi-American artist and scholar; Ava Ansari, New York based Iranian artist, and EOA US Tour Manager and Associate curator; and Regina Maria Möller, German artist and Professor at the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art in Norway.

ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS and ARCHIVAL PLATFORMS

Workshop Leader: Stephen Stapleton and Ahmed Mater, artists and Edge of Arabia co-founders

As part of the Edge of Arabia tour, a free website (located at www.CULTURUNNERS.com) will be created and launched to act as a digital platform for the broadcasting and archiving of materials generated over the course of the tour. The materials selected for this website will be drawn from the creative and critical practices of the artists and thinkers involved in the tour, and so will appear in multiple medias and contexts (including video and audio reports, media coverage, images, personal narratives, and real-time encounters), drawn from diverse times and locations to exist together interconnectedly on the *CULTURUNNER* digital platform. This online platform will locate the U.S. Tour within the ongoing trips undertaken by the Edge of Arabia's community, dating from its emergence in 2002.

Using this website as a jumping-off point, the Online Communications and Archival Platforms workshop will serve as a forum in which participants can discuss and analyze different methods of digital curation, archiving, and publicizing. Materials such as the travelers' real-time reporting, legendary artists' diaries, and artistic responses to encountered communities will be used as a lens through which to examine the opportunities (and difficulties) intrinsic to these online platforms.

Participants include: Carol Huh, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Husam Al Sayed, Palestinian filmmaker and member of Saudi based Telfaz 11 collective; Ziad Al-Sayed, Jeddah based art director and producer; Henry Hemming, author of *Misadventures in the Middle East* and *Edge of Arabia*

SUNDAY OCTOBER 5TH: MAJLIS SYMPOSIUM

Timing: 12pm – 6pm

Location: Program in Art, Culture and Technology, Media Lab Complex, MIT.
Wiesner Bldg, Lower Level, 20 Ames Street, Cambridge, MA

MIT will host a daylong multi-disciplinary 'Majlis' in the lower level space, curated by Azra Akšamija and Ava Ansari. During this program, research, artworks, case studies, and technologies related to the theme of acculturation will be communicated through objects and stories presented by the participants and related to their practice. These interactive presentations will serve as springboards for a series of conversations regarding experiences of mutual understanding between individuals or communities from the United States and the Middle East. They will be documented as cultural markers or artifacts of intercultural connectivity, and will become part of the first phase of *CULTURUNNERS'* online archive. The Public Majlis will take place on Sunday, October 5th, and will continue from the afternoon through the evening.

Audience members will have the opportunity to move between different curated environments to interact with the presenters, during which they can examine and test the wearable, mobile, and online technologies developed during the workshops. The modified mobile studio will also be present, acting as an anchor for a series of roving programs.

Confirmed presenters include: Ahmed Mater, Daanish Masoud, Regina Maria Möller, Rashad Salim, Stephen Stapleton: Marriam Mossali & Husam Al Sayed from Telfaz 11.

MONDAY OCTOBER 6TH: CULTURUNNERS @ MIT EVENING LECTURE

Timing: 7pm – 9 pm

Location: Bartos Theatre, MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology, Wiesner Building, Lower Level, 20 Ames Street, Cambridge, MA

During *CULTURUNNERS@MIT* evening lecture, panels made up of selected artists, scientists and curators will present and discuss their findings from the previous week's workshops dedicated to developing technologies for travelling artists. Findings will be presented in two categories, MOBILE & WEARABLE TECHNOLOGIES and ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS and ARCHIVAL PLATFORMS, and act as a coda for the weeklong collaboration between *CULTURUNNERS*, *Edge of Arabia* and MIT's Program in Art, Culture and Technology. The lecture will be followed by a Q&A moderated by Ava Ansari and Azra Akšamija.

Further information, including bios of workshop leaders and speakers, is available [here](#).

ABOUT THE PARTNERS

Art Jameel

Art Jameel – Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives (ALJCI) arts and culture initiative – aims to foster and promote a thriving arts scene within the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MENAT) region and to support the development of creative enterprises. In partnership with art organizations worldwide, Art Jameel develops cultural exchange programs to encourage networking and knowledge sharing.

Art Jameel is the founding partner of Edge of Arabia, The Crossway Foundation, Arabian Wings, Jeddah Art Week and The Archive. In partnership with the Victoria & Albert Museum in London it provides the biannual Jameel Prize for contemporary art inspired by Islamic traditions. Additional projects include: Jeddah Sculptures Museum, a public park established in collaboration with Jeddah Municipality; the Art Jameel Photography Award; and the Art Jameel Art Olympics in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia.

ALJCI was established in 2003 to promote positive social change through the establishment of long-term partnerships with international institutions, and the creation of initiatives in the fields of Job Creation, Global Poverty Alleviation, Arts and Culture, Education and Training, Health and Social. More information on ALJCI's considerable set of initiatives can be found online at www.aljci.org.

Edge of Arabia

Edge of Arabia is an independent non-profit arts and education enterprise dedicated to connecting Middle Eastern and international artists and audiences. The initiative is the brainchild of two artists, Ahmed Mater (Saudi Arabia) and Stephen Stapleton (UK/Norway) who met in the mountains of South-West Saudi Arabia in 2003 and shared a common desire "to create a real artistic movement that connected people across borders." With its exhibitions, educational programs, and publications, it seeks to foster new audiences and inspire young artists to develop independent and authentic practices and to collaborate across borders.

Based between London and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, *Edge of Arabia* maintains creative independence and has, to date, welcomed over 250,000 visitors to its exhibitions and distributed over 50,000 publications worldwide. International exhibitions include: *Rhizoma*, 55 Venice Biennale (2013); *#COMETOGETHER*, East London (2012); *We Need to Talk*, Jeddah (2012); *The Future of a Promise*, 54th Venice Biennale (2011); *Terminal*, Dubai (2011); *Transition*, Istanbul: European Capital of Culture (2010); *Grey Borders/Grey Frontiers*, Berlin (2010); *Edge of Arabia*, Riyadh (2010); *Edge of Arabia*, 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); and *Edge of Arabia*, University of London (2008)

ABOUT THE HOST

MIT Program in Art, Culture, Technology

The Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT) is an academic department and research center which facilitates artist-thinkers' exploration of art's broad, complex, global history and conjunction with culture, science, technology, and design via rigorous critical artistic practice and practice driven theory.

This exploration occurs in the program's academic offerings and the research of faculty, fellows, and guests in individual and collaborative forms and media including cinema, video, sound,

performance, photography, experimental media and new genres, conceptual, sculptural, and spatial experiments, writings and publications. Critical thinking, knowledge mining, and creative engagement, along with explorations of changing public and private spheres, are of particular relevance. Extracurricular activities include a cross-disciplinary lecture series, field trips, workshops, studio visits, and public presentations.

ACT is one of the five discipline groups in the Department of Architecture within the School of Architecture + Planning at MIT. ACT offers a highly selective two-year graduate degree — Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology (SMACT) — and graduate courses for students in other disciplines. On the undergraduate level, ACT offers a Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) concentration and minor. Throughout the academic year, ACT hosts numerous public programs, including the well-regarded Monday Night Lecture Series.

For more information about the event, please contact:

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