

# THE ART NEWSPAPER

## Artists launch American road trip linking US and Middle East

Culturunners project to open at humanist Rothko Chapel



Houston, we have lift off: road trip kicks off in the Texan city in September

A cultural road trip through America connecting US and Middle Eastern artists is due to start at the Rothko Chapel in Houston on 21 September—the United Nations' International Day of Peace. For the launch event, artists and scholars will take part in a panel discussion on the power artists have to change society, followed by film screenings of works by the Saudi artist Ahmed Mater. The chapel has been chosen for its political status as a centre for human rights.

The road trip, called Culturrunners, is part of a three-year US tour organised by Edge of Arabia, an artist-led organisation that promotes dialogue between the Middle East and the Western world. The artist Stephen Stapleton, a co-founder of Edge of Arabia, is co-organising Culturrunners with Azra Aksamija and Peter Schmidt, two US-based artists from MIT's art, culture and technology programme.

Stapleton says linking US and Middle Eastern artists is about "bringing two dominant centres of energy together". Stapleton's own collaboration with the Middle East began in 2003 when he formed Edge of Arabia with the Saudi artists Ahmed Mater and Abdunasser Gharem in the mountains of south western Saudi Arabia. "Coming to America is a way of continuing that journey," Stapleton says, adding that he hopes groups of US artists and curators will also travel to Saudi Arabia as part of the project.

Stapleton describes the Culturrunners tour as a "grassroots journey" that may encompass "camping in Montana, being part of a rodeo or hanging out in cities". Following the launch in Houston, Culturrunners will travel to Massachusetts. Other stops include the Louisiana State University and communities in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

Funding has come from Art Jameel, the cultural arm of the Abdul Latif Jameel Group, a car manufacturing company based in Saudi Arabia. Stapleton says he will also be launching a kickstarter campaign to raise money from the public.