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A Feral Commons: An Open Letter to Culture Leaders

Alserkal Advisory's Global Co-Commission convened cultural leaders to reimagine public art through a “feral commons” lens, emphasizing untamed, community-entered methodologies. The project, spanning three continents, calls to challenge institutional norms and reconnect art with ecological and social contexts.

By embracing “epistemic disobedience” and “radical collaboration”, the initiative hopes to introduce innovative tools for understanding art’s impact, advocating for practices that integrate human and non-human experiences while challenging dominant cultural paradigms. In this spirit of collaboration, they invite connection by sharing public art commissions from all regions exploring opportunities for broader partnerships. Read along:

On November 17, 2024, Alserkal Advisory gathered cultural leaders, artists, and thinkers for A Feral Commons: Expanding the Circle at Alserkal Avenue, Dubai. This event marked the culmination of the Global Co-Commission, a three-year transcontinental collaboration between three cultural districts: Alserkal Avenue in Dubai, Victoria Yards in Johannesburg, and Kingston Creative in Jamaica.

Spearheaded by Alserkal Advisory with support from the Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) and Urban Art Projects (UAP), this initiative was a collective effort to reimagine public art—not as a static object, but as a living, evolving part of our shared environment, deeply connected to community and

ecology. Anchored on a South-South axis, the project challenged global capital and colonial legacies, asking: What happens when we embrace the “feral”?

Drawing inspiration from *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene* (Stanford University Press, 2021)—the groundbreaking research of anthropologist Anna Tsing alongside Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena, and architect Feifei Zhou—“feral” in this context signifies untamed, uncontained approaches that break away from institutionalised systems governing public art. Participants explored the concept of “feral commons,” spaces where absolute control is relinquished, and the non-human is integrated—growing, evolving, and coexisting with its environment. By embracing “feral methodologies,” they aimed to create spaces of safety, healing, solidarity, and radical collaboration, all fiercely grounded in the socio-political and ecological realities of the communities they serve.

Curated by Tairone Bastien, the three site-specific works from the Global Co-Commission served as focal points of the gathering. At Alserkal Avenue, Muhannad Shono’s *A Forgotten Place* used the humble drip of air-conditioning condensate to nurture feral plants—a quiet act of care for overlooked ecologies. In Kingston, Camille Chedda’s *Chain of Love* reconnected a fractured community with its colonial history, transforming abandoned spaces into sites of memory and regeneration. Finally, in Johannesburg, Io Makandal’s *Ophidian’s Promise* shaped clay bricks and Soweto grasses into a sanctuary for urban wildlife, reminding us that even in the densest cities, the earth’s pulse continues.

Discussions raised critical questions: How does art impact the environment? How does it shape communities? How do we measure its role in daily life? Tools developed by UAP—*Artwork Ingredients List* and *Public Art 360*—provided valuable insights on carbon and community impact, revealing data on the ripple effects of public art on both human and more-than-human worlds.

The gathering became a platform to both practice and advocate for what Walter D. Mignolo described as “epistemic disobedience,” reimagining how knowledge is created and shared while actively challenging dominant paradigms. It also posed a critical question: Can collaboration be more radical? By welcoming criticality, responsibility, and slow, long-term processes of co-creation and co-thinking, the Global Co-Commission and *A Feral Commons: Expanding the Circle* introduced a new framework and a new tool—the field meeting—for public art commissioning. Together, they urge a shift towards practices that engage both communities and

ecologies.

In this spirit of collaboration, we invite you to connect with us by sharing public art commissions from your region and explore opportunities for broader, nourishing partnerships.

Reach out to us at advisory [at] alserkal.online.

Participants included: Amanda Abi Khalil, Independent Curator and Founder of Temporary Art Platform (Beirut/Paris/Rio de Janeiro); Sabih Ahmed, Director of Ishara Art Foundation (Dubai); Fiza Akram, Director of Alserkal Advisory (Dubai); Tairone Bastien, Independent Curator (Toronto), Camille Chedda, Artist (Kingston); Andrea Dempster-Chung, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Kingston Creative (Kingston); Dearne Dettrick, Architect and PhD Candidate (Brisbane); Stephanie Fortunato, Director of Special Projects, Global Cultural Districts Network (Rhode Island); Gilbert Guaring, Global Head of Marketing, Sustainability + Engagement, Urban Art Projects (New York); Stephen Hobbs, Artist and Public Art Curator (Johannesburg), Vilma Jurkute, Executive Director of Alserkal Initiatives (Dubai); Roxani Kamperou, Project Manager (Athens); Io Makandal, Artist (Johannesburg); Samuel Mayze, Director of Urban Art Projects Middle East (Brisbane); Elena Sorokina, Curator, Writer, and Art Historian (Paris); Romy Stander, Director and Co-Founder of Water For the Future (Johannesburg), Fatoş Üstek, Independent Curator and Writer (London); and Feifei Zhou, Artist, Architect, and Researcher (Nanjing/New York).

[Alserkal Advisory](#) - Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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