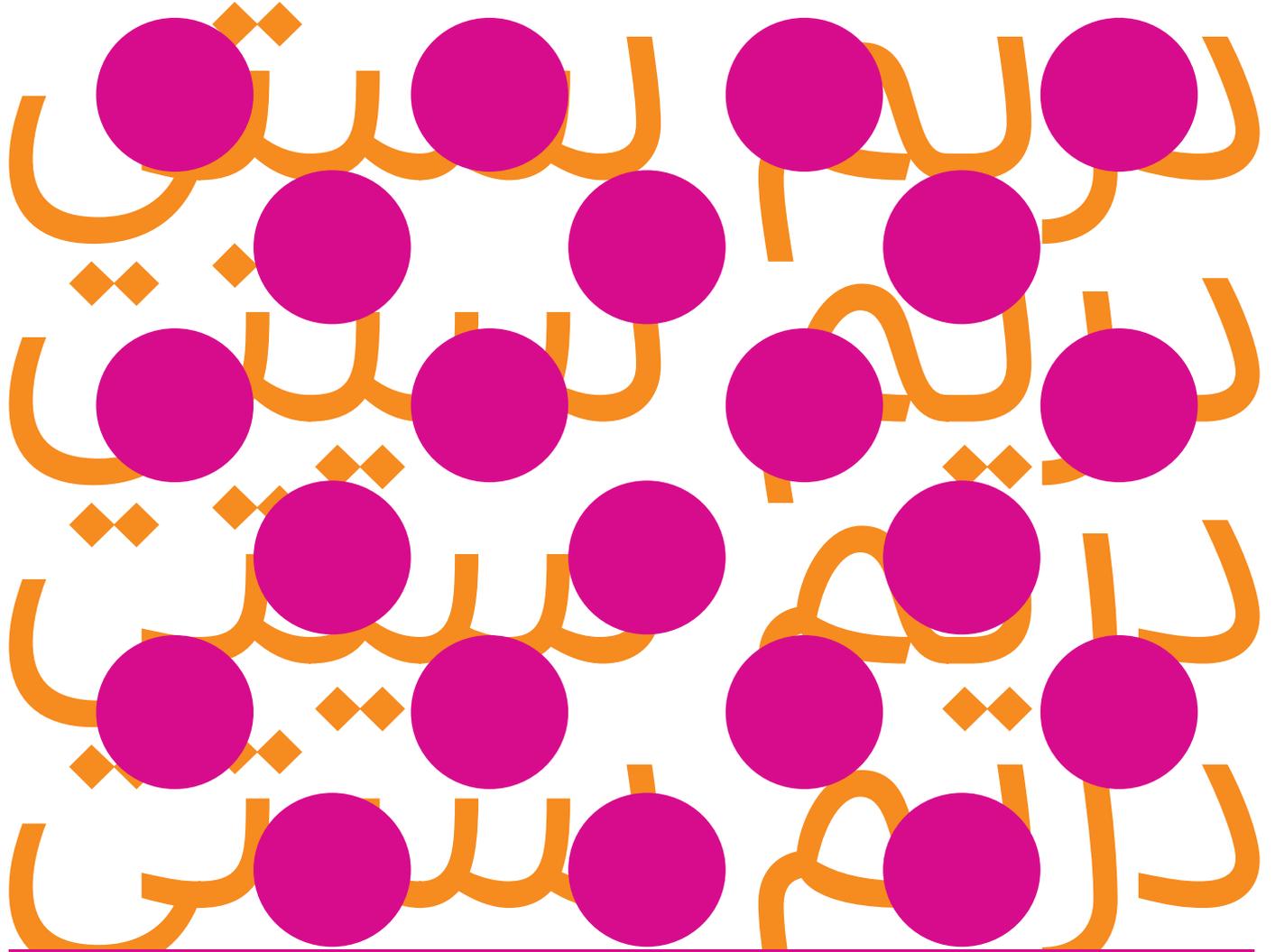


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Editorial – Dream City 2025 (Tunis, 3–19 October 2025)

Fragments of an Unfinished World: Thinking Amid the Slow Apocalypse

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Some cities do not merely occupy space; they condense history until they become seismographs. Gaza—both the territory and its besieged city—stands today as such an example: like Warsaw after 1944, Algiers in the 1950s, Beirut during the civil war, Soweto in 1976, Sarajevo in the 1990s. At once an inhabited place and a memory on fire. Not only a city under siege, but a territory emblematic of our time, crystallizing the most brutal political logics of the contemporary world.

The yearslong siege—relentless bombardment, deliberate cuts to water, electricity, and food—belongs to a longer history. Gaza is the product of layered violence, broken treaties, borders drawn far from the people they bind, international promises never kept. It is heir to the 1948 Nakba, to decades of military occupation, and to a colonial repertoire that secured total control over resources and bodies.

To understand Gaza, it must be placed within the continuum of cities made uninhabitable by deliberate policy: Warsaw, where inhabitants were starved before the uprising; Leningrad, encircled to be broken by hunger and cold; Grozny, systematically reduced to rubble; Mogadishu, dismantled by war and foreign interference; Homs and Yarmouk in Syria, leveled by repeated bombardment; Sana'a in Yemen, besieged by an interminable war; Khartoum, consumed by conflict and aborted transitions; and Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, scarred by cycles of armed violence, forced displacement, and extractive exploitation. In each case, material destruction was never an end in itself; it sought moral destruction—the annihilation of a people's capacity to think itself.

To those who watch Gaza at a distance, it must be said: this city is a mirror—and a test of our institutions, laws, principles. Gaza exposes the porosity of the “rules-based order” so readily invoked: an order suspended, adapted, or bypassed whenever strategic interests demand it. The mechanisms are familiar: euphemized language (“targeted strikes” for massacres); deferred temporality (promises to “work toward peace” after military victory); the hierarchy of lives (sympathy extended to some, relativized for others).

To name what is happening in Gaza as genocide is not polemic but precision. It is to recognize that collective punishment, planned erasure, and the destruction of collective memory constitute deliberate policy. It is to refuse the sanitizing of history—after the fact, as so often before. Today Gaza is not only the seismograph of the Middle East; it is the seismograph of the world. It registers the convulsions of our collective moral collapse—and will inscribe them in the archives to come. The question is not only what will happen to Gaza, but what our response—or our silence—will say about us.

Tunis registers these tremors: each local vibration resonates with distant waves. In its streets, light catches both the dust of the past and the sharp fragments of the present. At once crossroads and culdesac, the city witnesses the collision of ruined dominant narratives, the suspended dreams of youth, the climate crisis, scarcity, and patient resistances that escape attention.

Dream City 2025 emerges from this tension. Conceived by Jan Goossens in dialogue with the festival's founders Selma and Sofiane Ouissi, it unfolds as an artistic and civic project at a moment when democratic compacts fracture, critical speech grows scarce, and civic space contracts. Speaking becomes a risk. Writing, a provocation. Creating, an act of insistence. From Cairo to Riyadh, Washington, D.C. to Budapest, Algiers to Berlin, doubt, contradiction, and free thought are watched or stifled. Yet in this narrowed space, art still holds open the possibility of posing questions, inventing forms, saying what elsewhere can no longer be said.

Palestine is not a "theme" of this edition; it is its moral center of gravity. Preopening on 2 October with *Tarab*, dedicated to dancers from Gaza killed in 2024, where grief is converted into collective trance. Collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation gathers works that produce counterhistories and countercartographies: Emily Jacir reconstructs the erased modernity of a vanished airport; Jumana Manna and Sille Storihle dismantle the ideology of the "peacemaker"; Sharif Waked reroutes narratives of programmed death through the voice of Scheherazade; Raeda Saadeh turns minimal resistance into persistence; Basma alSharif interrogates the collapse of trust in facts. These works do not commemorate; they treat memory as active matter, refusing both simplification and oblivion.

If Gaza is the epicenter of catastrophe, Tunis feels the tremors along the same moral fault line. Bombs do not fall here, yet the spaces for speaking, contesting, and dreaming shrink by the day. The city retains the brilliance of a democratic turning point followed by a slow disillusion. It knows what it

means to see the street made suspect, free speech dangerous, common places emptied of political function and reduced to façades.

Tunis is not alone in this condition. Beirut, with its unfinished reconstructions and districts frozen in rubble, lives in suspended time, hostage to geopolitical calculation. Jenin—again destroyed and sealed off in recent months—now appears as the laboratory for the announced "Gazafication" of the West Bank. Across these cities, a pattern repeats: contraction of civic space, the precarization of collective life, encirclement—military, economic, bureaucratic.

This invisible constellation of fractures is more than a list of wounded cities. It is a political atlas through which the same logics of control and dispossession circulate. Visible borders—walls, fences, barbed wire—are doubled by invisible ones: administrative restrictions, censorship, migration policies, limits on movement, speech, assembly. To Western powers and many Arab regimes, these fractures often appear as isolated local tragedies, lamented from a distance while trade, negotiation, and normalization continue. Seen from Tunis, however, they compose a system: a global architecture of asphyxiation in which indifference, strategic calculation, and complicity transcend geopolitical blocs. Gaza is its most implacable incarnation; Tunis also feels its effects—contracted freedoms, generalized suspicion, confiscated speech, fragile independent public spaces. This architecture has no single center; it spreads through networks of alliances, interests, and silences, reproducing the same logic of dispossession.

It is within this context that *Dream City* takes shape—not as a cultural event suspended above reality, but as an observatory linked to other hotspots. In streets and squares, in sites reclaimed by the festival, it is not only a matter of showing works: it is about making felt, drawing correspondences between fractures and solidarities, revealing that what unfolds here is inseparable from what unfolds elsewhere. Tunis and Gaza are not connected by geography alone; they share a struggle to keep alive the spaces where thinking together remains

possible. The question is not only how to save places, but how to safeguard the very conditions that allow a city to exist—politically and humanly.

In a world where falsification, media saturation, and the erasure of facts have become strategic weapons, proof no longer belongs to law alone; it is also aesthetic, political, curatorial. The material destruction of bodies and places is almost always doubled by the destruction of archives and memory. Libraries burned, servers wiped, museums looted, videos falsified: a parallel war is waged against traces.

To respond, art must equip itself with tools that document reality with rigor and precision while inventing forms that endure in memory. Isolated, memory dissolves; shared as form, it becomes force. As practices from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to Forensic Architecture's visual investigations have shown, proof is never a simple statement: it is disputed, instrumentalized, produced. What is at stake is not the accumulation of facts but the struggle over who holds the right to speak the truth.

This position constitutes a method we claim: an art founded on evidence. Artists investigate, collect, verify, and compose with traces. Their works are not only forms; they become documents that contest official narratives, archives designed to outlast the machinery of forgetting. To destroy a library is to kill twice: first memory, then knowledge. Here, even memory is under attack.

The 2025 edition carries this demand as one of its structural pillars: a constellation of works demonstrating that art can generate verifiable knowledge, circulate where law is suspended, and resist the rewriting of history.

In *Zifzafa*, Lawrence Abu Hamdan mobilizes sound as a forensic tool. Recording the wind on the Golan, he reveals how the deafening roar of wind turbines—marketed as "green" infrastructure and deployed to expel residents and prevent their return—manufactures uninhabitability. Sonic evidence here exposes an invisible dispossession and shows how "ecology" can be weaponized as a

mask for colonization and ethnic cleansing.

Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, in *La vertigineuse histoire d'Orthosia*, pursue an archaeological and cinematic inquiry into a vanished Roman city and a Palestinian camp razed to the ground. They uncover layered erasures—ancient site, camp, the inhabitants' memories—effaced by recurring logics of power across centuries. What a time preserves or forgets speaks the naked truth of that time.

Chokri Ben Chikha, with *Dignité*, reconstructs colonial "human zoos" only to overturn them into a tribunal of the present. Summoning contemporary bodies to the stage, he makes these archives resonate with today's mechanisms of racialization and control. The performance asserts that colonial history is not finished; it persists in imaginations, institutions, and gazes.

These three approaches—sonic, archaeological, performative—dialogue with other practices of proof. In *Resilience Overflow*, Lara Tabet diverts biomedical language to imagine a bacterium proliferating through Tunis's water network, interrogating "resilience" as a political injunction that normalizes precarity. In *Search for Justice Among the Rubble* by Public Works documents the ruins left by Israel's war in Lebanon (2023–2024), where deliberate destruction and erasure compound economic collapse. The exhibition unfolds through three gestures—*To Gather*, *To Return*, *To Repair*—assembling testimonies, mapping razed villages, conceiving repair as social and environmental act. Here the archive does not merely testify; it becomes an instrument of urban justice, a resistance to scorched earth policy. Both projects form part of a collaboration with the Center for Human Rights & the Arts (Bard College), in dialogue with artist Tania El Houry, where art is conceived as investigation and as archive. They remind us that contemporary violence targets not only bodies but the very evidence of their existence: to erase archives and falsify traces is to render memory illegible—and with it, the possibility of justice.

Here the logic of proof intersects another curatorial architecture at the heart of this edition: the modal polyphony of Suni'a Bisihrika – Créé avec ta magie, imagined by Tarek Abou El Fetouh. Inspired by the history of the maqams—Arabic musical modes transmitted over centuries, carriers of migrations, exiles, trade routes, conflicts, and celebrations—this exhibition process unfolds in five movements, beginning in 2025 and concluding in 2027, in Tunis. The maqams are not fixed scores but open structures shaped by variation, modulation, and improvisation. Some bear the name of a people (Kurd, Bayati), others of a territory (Hijaz) or an affect (Saba, “the weeping of men”). Each maqam is a moving archive: a legacy of circulation, translation, and conflict in which identity is conceived not as essence but as relation.

By adopting the maqams as curatorial matrix, Suni'a Bisihrika affirms a politics of the plural that refuses forced synthesis. The polyphony it composes does not erase dissonance; it welcomes it as constitutive of the collective work. It is an aesthetics of the unfinished: each voice retains its grain while venturing toward accord. A radical gesture at a time when nationalist retrenchment and exclusive identities seek to simplify reality by splitting it apart.

The invited artists reflect this ambition: Mona Hatoum, Walid Raad, Ala Younes, Jumana Manna, Noor Abuarafteh, Etel Adnan, Ali Eyal, Ayman Zedani, among others. Their practices shift archives, recompose narratives, and interrogate temporalities. Each brings a singular note to a composition that is neither unison nor cacophony but an unstable accord—a moving space where disagreement becomes democratic competence. It is not harmony that saves, but the capacity to hold together what does not agree.

Within this polyphonic composition, another axis traverses the edition: political ecologies. The history of empires is also the history of nature's capture. From colonial plantations to mining cartographies, from imposed dams to roads carved for export, the appropriation of resources has always been bound to political domination. Landscapes are not neutral;

they bear the marks of centuries of exploitation, resistance, and reappropriation. “Ecology” belongs to this *longue durée*: power relations, displacement, erased knowledges. The environment is at once archive and battlefield; what unfolds in a desert or along a river engages memory as much as survival.

In *Magec/The Desert*, Radouan Mriziga confronts two visions of the desert: for the colonial gaze, a void to be conquered, a *terra nullius* to be exploited; for the communities who inhabit it, a dense weave of knowledge, orientation, shared resources, and narratives anchored in geology and the stars. By reactivating these knowledges, Mriziga places his practice within struggles for the recognition of indigenous epistemologies against erasures imposed by extractivist modernity. Emptiness is never empty; it is saturated with memory.

With *The Grounding Point*, Sonia Kallel weaves another relation to land: that of the *Mrazig* of Douz, where textile becomes territory. Each thread traces a route, each motif condenses a memory. This nomadic weaving bears the marks of forced displacement, redrawn borders, contested resources—a living map in which itinerancy is not a lack of anchoring but a way of inhabiting the world. Here identity rests not on stability but on circulation.

With *Laaroussa Fragment* and *Laaroussa Quartet*, Selma & Sofiane Ouissi extend this thinking of gesture as archive. Observing, recording, and transmitting the gestures of the women potters of Sejnane, they transform artisanal knowledge into contemporary choreography. Clay shaped by bare hands becomes a quiet resistance to industrialization and the standardization of form. Each repeated gesture, handed down across generations, inscribes inherited memory into matter, binding cultural persistence to the world's physical transformation.

With *p\Arc_*, Éric Minh Cuong Castaing explores another ecology: that of vulnerable bodies and shared care. In *Parc du Belvédère*, children with motor disorders and dancers coinvent a space where every movement becomes relation, every contact a form of attention. The audience

circulates freely: more than a performance, a human ecosystem that redefines the city as a site of copresence and inclusion. Situated at the heart of this politics of the living, *p\Arc_* affirms that bodies and care—as much as water, desert, or soil—are texts of power and survival. Here ecology is not metaphor; it is the daily practice of care and vulnerability.

These works remind us that the appropriation of resources—water, land, raw materials—is a political weapon. In Gaza, this strategy takes the form of water cuts, maritime blockades, the destruction of agricultural infrastructure. Elsewhere it manifests as land grabs, water privatization, deforestation in the name of “development.” Faced with such environmental violence, art becomes an instrument of countermapping: making visible the links between sites, gestures, and materials, and insisting that every resource is also a battlefield. What is contested is not only land itself, but the very idea of what can be inhabited.

In *Dream City*, this ecological thought unfolds at the heart of the city. Works are not confined behind closed doors; they inhabit repurposed buildings, squares, alleyways, places saturated with local histories. They inscribe narratives connecting Tunis to the deserts of North Africa, the farmlands of Palestine, the workshops where memory is kneaded into clay. Moving through them, audiences grasp that nature is not backdrop but actor, and that protecting its gestures, cycles, and materials is to protect the conditions of our collective freedom. Here ecology is not an added ornament; it is the very condition of democracy.

It is precisely here that ecology meets persistence. To persist—within what Sherene Seikaly calls “the apocalypse our ancestors had anticipated”—is a major political act. This apocalypse is not a sudden blast; it advances slowly, like a diffuse, cumulative shadow. A process that erodes freedoms, wears down solidarities, methodically removes the means of action. Achille Mbembe speaks of “politics of asphyxiation” to describe systems that do not always kill outright but organize a progressive suffocation of bodies and imaginaries.

Against this slow violence, persistence is more than survival: it is the choice to create, gather, and celebrate—even amid hostility. It refuses imposed urgency and counters it with other temporalities—slowness, repetition, shared joy. Persistence is not a state; it is a strategy of time.

In *Tarab*, Éric Minh Cuong Castaing responds to tragedy through rhythm. Dedicated to Gaza's dancers Ahmed Medhat and Mumen Khalifa, killed in 2024, the work fuses the pulses of the Levant with Tunisia's popular energies. Not a fixed commemoration, but a collective trance: a body—even wounded—that insists on dancing, transforming grief into shared energy.

With *Sham3dan*, the duo *nasa4nasa* invokes slowness as political tactic. In a world where market and war enforce acceleration, they decelerate—stretching gesture until it becomes a space of resistance. This slowing is not retreat but refusal of the imposed tempo: an autonomous rhythm.

In *ASSWAT*, Cyrinne Douss turns voice into a tool of collective selfassertion. Revisiting women's rites of passage, she makes intimacy a political space where song and memory become gentle weapons against erasure.

With *The Dressing Room*, Bissane Al Sharif explores the chamber as political stage. Through the stories and bodies of women marked by war and mourning, she treats intimacy as a site of memory and resistance. Humor and selfirony mingle with gravity: the everyday becomes theatre, and fragility, a political strength.

With *Every Brilliant Thing*, Ahmed Al Attar & Nanda Mohammed turn a play about mental health and reasons to live into an act of lucid joy. Performed in Arabic by Nanda Mohammed, alone on stage, it draws the audience into an unending inventory of things worth living for. Here intimate resilience becomes collective resistance: a politics of the living that opposes joy to disappearance.

In this theatre of bodies, Serge Aimé Coulibaly inscribes dance as a language of endurance and vigilance. His practice—where the body is never mere figure but force—shows how the stage can

become civic space: a site where fatigue and joy are powers of action, where community is forged in real time.

With *Badke (remix)*, Ata Khattab & Amir Sabra posit joy as an offensive strategy. Reworking the Palestinian dabke, they claim an irreducible presence: “we are here,” even under occupation and siege. Here joy is not a luxury; it is a declaration of existence.

Finally, with *Blue Nile to the Galaxy Around Olodumare*, Jeremy Nedd & Impilo Mapantsula make of pantsula—born as resistance in apartheid townships—a living archive of struggle. In dialogue with the spiritual jazz of Alice Coltrane and Bheki Mseleku, their work unfolds as jubilant improvisation that breaks linear time and condenses memory and futurity—a physical poetics in which the memory of struggles becomes the energy of what is to come.

Despite their diverse forms, these works share a common refusal: to let the slow apocalypse dictate its terms. They remind us that persistence is not passive posture but active gesture—sometimes discreet, always intentional. Resistance occurs not only in spectacular moments but in invisible continuities: maintaining knowledge, repeating a gesture, sustaining a rhythm. From Soweto to Cairo’s squares, from Tunis’s streets to the uprisings of Santiago, bodies have long invented countertempos to imposed violence. Endurance, joy, slowness—each says no to erasure and yes to the possibility of a future.

In Tunis today, endurance takes on a particular meaning. The festival unfolds in a city where civic space is shrinking and independent gathering places are fragile. Yet it chooses to occupy streets, squares, and repurposed buildings, creating spaces where slowness, joy, and care are embraced as forms of resistance. Persistence becomes an art in itself—an art of duration. To keep dreaming with precision, even when everything seems designed to prevent it.

This articulation—between Gaza and Tunis, between proof and polyphony, between ecology and persistence—leads to the heart of this edition’s

manifesto. *Dream City 2025* takes place as the world acclimates to moral collapse. Gaza has been bombarded for months, its inhabitants starved, its infrastructure dismantled, its archives destroyed. In Tunis, civic space contracts, critical speech grows scarce, gathering places are weakened. These realities are not parallel; they belong to a single political geography, a global atlas of fractures and asphyxiations.

Faced with this, we refuse neutrality. We name: genocide, collective punishment, planned erasure, international complicity. These are not slogans but precise descriptions of deliberate policy. To avoid these words is to accept the euphemism that bleaches violence—to consent to forgetting before it is written.

Dream City is not a sanctuary sealed off from the world. It is an artistic and civic festival, a shifting territory where art acts as seismograph and archive. In its streets, squares, and reclaimed buildings, the works do not merely represent reality; they document it, indict it, reimagine it. They produce evidence, preserve gestures, unfold polyphonies, inhabit materials and places with the attention of those who know that everything can vanish.

To create today is risky. Silence is riskier. To say nothing is to let others write history in our stead—and in that history, Gaza would be erased, Tunis reduced to a backdrop, our voices relegated to background noise. In such moments, silence is not neutrality; it is complicity.

We choose another form of writing: to weave the archives of Gaza and Tunis; to link deserts to workshops, artisans’ gestures to dances of resistance, the slowness of ritual to the urgency of revolt. To make the city a seismograph, and art an evidencemaking device. A writing that refuses unison and embraces plurality, that treats disagreement as a democratic tool.

Dream with precision—this is the act we claim. Precision of words, to name violence. Precision of gestures, to preserve what can still be preserved. Precision of dreams, so they become maps for the future. For amid ruins, one possibility endures:

to see, to speak, to create—not to look away from reality, but to illuminate it until it changes. Not merely to survive, but to insist on dignity. Not to repeat the world, but to invent it anew. Every city that persists writes an archive of the future.

Dream City was founded in Tunis in 2007 by Selma and Sofiane Ouissi as an experimental space where art and the city interrogate one another. Since 2015, the artistic direction has been entrusted to Jan Goossens, who—in constant dialogue with the founders—has shaped the program and overall architecture. The 2025 edition bears the imprint of a collective endeavor: a curatorial conception led by Goossens, rooted in the Ouissis’ original intuition, and expanded through the independent trajectory of Suni’a Bisihrika – Créé avec ta magie, conceived and carried by Tarek Abou El Fetouh.

