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سفر الظلال في بحر النهار

(Shadows travelling on the sea of the day), 2022

CONTEXT STATEMENT by Olafur Eliasson:

Over the course of my working life as an artist, I have always been a strong believer in collaboration and dialogue. I have approached diverging points of view – or even potential conflicts – in two ways: through the conversations, some public, some private, that I have with commissioners, curators, and collaborators; and directly through my artworks and the conceptual thinking surrounding them. I think art offers a rare opportunity for people from a wide range of backgrounds to share a space – whether in a museum or in public space – while acknowledging both shared interests and differences of opinion and of values.

*Shadows travelling on the sea of the day* provides areas of shade where visitors – locals, residents of Qatar, art lovers, archaeologists, and tourists – can gather and meet up in the hot desert surroundings. Looking up at the mirrored undersides of the artwork and around at the artwork in the desert surroundings, they see themselves, the other visitors, and the environment in which they are standing entangled in the reflections above.

For me, working in Qatar has meant entering into a context where I am confronted with values that are different from my own – sometimes radically so. I adamantly believe in the right of everyone to express themselves freely, in particular with regard to their gender and sexual orientation, and I am a strong believer in upholding human rights, as outlined by the UN. Entering into a work collaboration in Qatar, I am careful, as an outsider and as a European, to evaluate how I can best support these values. Throughout the installation of *Shadows travelling on the sea of the day* my team was dedicated to ensuring that all human rights standards were upheld on the building site. This must ultimately become the standard throughout the country.

I first worked in Qatar in 2017, on a presentation of my Little Sun lamps there. Little Sun, which brings solar energy to people living without reliable access to electricity, hosted workshops about sustainability and solar power at a space for contemporary art in Doha, called Fire Station.

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Commissioned almost a decade ago *Shadows travelling on the sea of the day* has taken four years to produce. Why did I accept a commission in Qatar to begin with? I was fascinated by the vast and vulnerable desert landscape and interested in the possibility of working in a different culture from my own. The desert environment is unfamiliar to me but in some sense it shares certain qualities with the Icelandic landscape that I know so well. I focused on making a permanent artwork, with a life expectancy that extends far beyond a single month of football. There is no artistic connection between my sculpture and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Why do I continue to believe in that engagement? I think there is great potential for intensified climate action in this part of the world, and Qatar can play a critical role here. The country is predicted to be hit hard by the consequences of climate change, including rising sea levels and increased temperatures. The country is a signatory of the Paris Agreement and, in 2021, signed the Global Methane Pledge to reduce methane emissions by 30% in 2030. Yet the wealth of the country is primarily bound up with oil and, not least, liquefied natural gas, some of which Europe, for instance, is keen to import at increased levels. This is a highly complex geopolitical situation in which we are all entangled.

For several years now, I have been considering the carbon footprint of art – artworks are produced, shipped to locations worldwide, installed and de-installed again, and all these activities have a carbon footprint. Since 2020, my studio's sustainability team has tracked all stages of art-making to improve waste management, reduce travel, and track carbon footprints; and to define ways of investing in sustainable practices. For *Shadows travelling on the sea of the day*, we are working with an external company to cross-check our calculation of its carbon footprint. Based on this calculation we will allocate funds from the project budget to support local environmental groups that work to preserve Qatar's natural landscapes.

I hope that the creative collaborations that I am currently nurturing on site in Qatar – and the embodied experiences and space for self-reflection that I strive to offer in my artwork – will provide means for people to meet each other across communities and cultures. The climate crisis requires collective action and an unprecedented level of international cooperation. It is my belief that art can help cultivate the transcultural understanding necessary to tackle this enormous task. I aspire for *Shadows travelling on the sea of the day* to be a prompt for further public discussion on sustainable practices and climate action – which I am actively working on with the teams at Qatar Museums.