Convivial Futures
Public Programme

An exhibition at Qatar Preparatory School (QPS)
and the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ)

Mediating Countryside

الوساطة في الريف

Material landscapes mediated by multiple, layered & often contradictory meanings

المشاهد المادية التي تتوسطها معانٍ متعددة، ومتراكبة وفي بعض الأحيان وغالبًا ما تكون متناقضة

Mythologies & Materialisms

الأسطوريات والماديات

Doha, Qatar
November 2025

DESERT AS HERITAGE Countryside: A Place to Live, Not to Leave

متحف قطر الوطني
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF QATAR

أمة التطور
Evolution Nation

Qatari Countryside

Paradox 1 ——— Nature, Without Nature
Nature, Without Nature. Landscapes that forged pastoral imaginations — rural England, rolling hills of Northern Europe — are now among Earth's most nature-depleted regions. The modern countryside emerged through enclosure, displacement, and agricultural consolidation. The idyllic field conceals histories of extraction.

Paradox 2 ——— Escape, Rather Than Relation
Industrial modernity reframed nature as scenery — to visit and aestheticise rather than live within. Yet those who work the land — for whom irrigation, road repair, walls and fences are technologies and traditions across generations — are increasingly marginalised by environmentalist and technological "solutions." The countryside is loved and left, not loved and lived with.

Paradox 3 ——— Imperial Hinterland
Urbanisation at planetary scale now encloses land across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, transforming whole regions into resource frontiers. Forests, soil, labour, and water are outsourced; wealth accumulates centrally. Colonial geographies endure in contemporary supply chains.

"The rural is never only soil and sand; it is also narrative and media."

Narrative Myths

Myth of Purity
the countryside as untouched, obscuring irrigation, imported feed, cooling infrastructures, and labour regimes.

Myth of Abundance
aerial views of endless dunes, concealing the energy-intensive activities that continuously consume resources.

Myth of Scarcity
the desert as empty void, masking complex ecologies and long histories of adaptation.

Myth of Survivalism
heritage images celebrate endurance while erasing politics of dispossession and forced transformation.

"Purity. Scarcity. Abundance. Survivalism.
Every myth hides a material reality."



What emerges from the Countryside Exhibition and the Autumn 2025 Convivial Futures programme is a more intertwined view of what sustains life: reproduction as earthcare, labour as metabolism, and care as the infrastructure beneath every food system and conservation claim. Across dates and dairies, soil memory and microbial work, enclosure histories and wage dependency, the same question returned: what does the countryside reproduce — life, or extraction? The work of being alive is never only human, and never only economic.It is the shared labour of bodies, species, waters, and worlds, shaped by governance, property, metabolic processes and the technologies that modulate them. Convivial futures begin where this work is made visible and supported: where commons replace isolation, where technology deepens relation rather than domination,and where nourishment becomes a practice of remembering interdependence.

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Paradoxical Myths

Part of a series of reflections from the opening public programme for Countryside: A Place to Live Not Leave. "Convivial Futures" approached the countryside through Convivial Conservation — "to live with" — examining the politics of connection over disconnection.

"Images do not reflect landscapes;
They shape what landscapes are allowed to become."

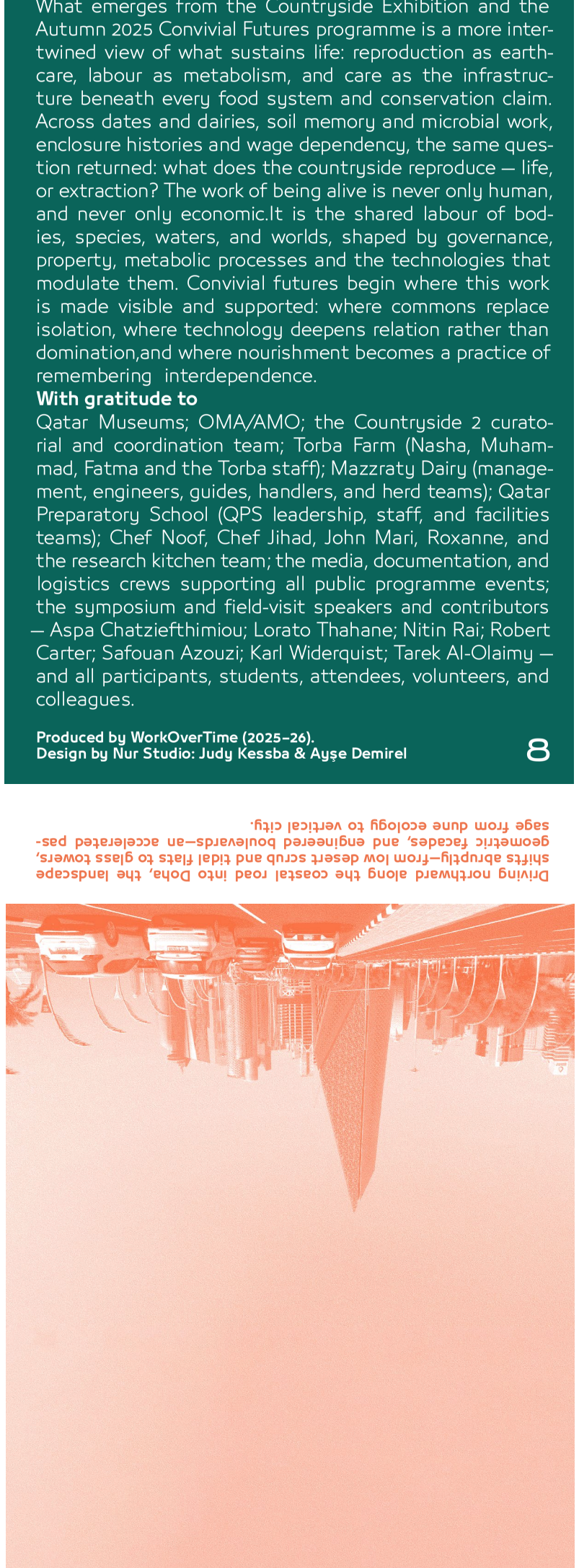
Countrysides are created and recreated through images, diagrams, narratives, branding, data visualisations, and tourism aesthetics. Rural space is mythologised, materialised, and mediated, participating in fantasies of purity, emptiness, abundance, and cultural memory.
To circulate representations of the countryside is to participate in world-building. What kinds of mediation are required to build the myths — and the material realities — of connection?

"From protected areas to promoted areas — landscapes inhabited with people, sustainably." — Bram Büscher

Mediating the Countryside

The countryside is not simply a "place" defined by non-urban character. It is mediated and imagined space — constructed through representation as much as through soil, water, and labour.
In Qatar, the countryside appears in contradictory forms: a desert of leisure; a heritage landscape shaped by Bedouin identity; a tourism experience; a laboratory for agricultural experimentation; a working terrain of pipelines, desalination plants, and logistics networks.
Each is filtered through specific visual regimes: satellite imagery mapping vegetation density; NDVI grids translating plant life into colour; agricultural logos promising purity; roadside views framed through car windows; touristic scripts narrating falconry and camel culture; museum dioramas staging the desert as timeless. The countryside is encountered not only as land, but as image — rehearsed, branded, diagrammed, aestheticised.

"A desert framed as empty invites extraction.
A desert framed as heritage invites preservation."



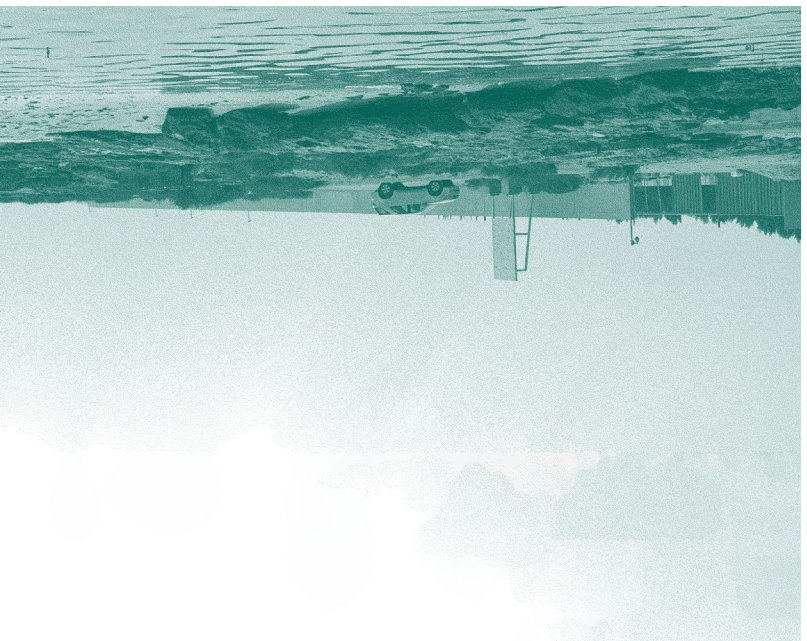
Driving northward along the coastal road into Doha, the landscape shifts abruptly—from low desert scrub and tidal flats to glass towers, geometric facades, and engineered boulevards—an accelerated passage from dune ecology to vertical city.

Desert as Heritage, Leisure, Spectacle, Laboratory

Reflecting on the long drive between Bahrain and Doha, Tarig Al-Olaimy describes how the Gulf countryside holds layered, sometimes contradictory meanings. Over four and a half hours of desert road, borders, oil infrastructure, and open horizon, one encounters a shifting field of memory, identity, leisure, and experimentation.

"Not a singular landscape, but a shifting field of memory, identity, leisure, and experimentation."

In the national imagination, the countryside is tied to Bedouin heritage: tents, wells, falcons, grazing routes, poetry, mobility, kinship. This desert becomes origin story — a cultural anchor narrating who "we were" and there-fore who "we are."
It is also a space of leisure. Weekends fill with camping caravans, dune-bashing vehicles, fires under night skies, extended family gatherings. Around this recreational desert circulates a curated economy: camel rides, falconry displays, date tastings — safe, consumable slices of complexity. Simultaneously, the countryside operates as laboratory. It hosts desalination plants, industrial farms, pipelines, military installations, cooling systems, and experimental agricultural zones. Slow ecologies — mangroves breathing with tidal rhythms, seeds dormant for years awaiting rain — exist alongside pivot irrigation circles that register from satellite imagery. Geological time meets production tempo.



Mangrove nursery and restoration site near Khasoomo on Qatar's northern coast, led by Aspa D. Chatziefthimiou — where tidal ecologies, saltwater soils, and patient cultivation meet the infrastructural edge of the desert.