UF | College of the Arts
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

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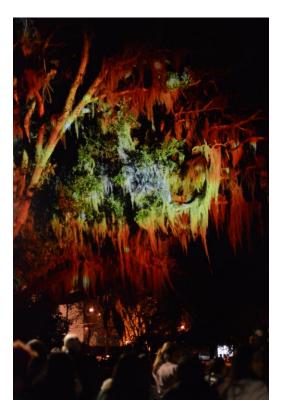**Contributing Writer**: Grace Landefeld

Internationally acclaimed artist illuminates Innovation Square with digital projection artwork

Gainesville, Fla.—The oak tree in Innovation Square is a canvas for Paris-based artist and architect Naziha Mestaoui.

Using digital projection mapping, Mestaoui's *Live Oak Tree of Life* artwork will illuminate the square's tree with images of the Tree of Life, which represents the immense network of relationships that links all living things.

Created by a team of UF researchers led by professors Doug and Pam Soltis from the Florida Museum of Natural History, the Tree of Life maps the shared evolutionary history of and relationships between all of Earth's 2.3 million named species.

The project emerged from the University of Florida Strategic Development Plan led by UF Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Charlie Lane, which included an initiative to reinforce the relationship between UF and the city of Gainesville.

The university sponsored a grant to the UF College of the Arts to identify impactful ways to share the arts with the city.

"One thing I love about this project is the fact that is captures the intangible," Lane said. "So many discussions around our Strategic Development Plan revolve around physical development, but the underpinning spirit behind this project is not something you can touch or feel. It's something almost indescribable."

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Upon receiving the grant, College of the Arts Dean Lucinda Lavelli immediately began working on finding a symbol that would capture the creative energy of the city and university. She chose Innovation Square as the location for the artwork because it is almost exactly equidistant between downtown Gainesville and the University of Florida, binding the two epicenters of the city.

"Naziha Mestaoui's artwork captures a sense of connection among disciplines and cultures," Lavelli said.

Mestaoui worked with a composer to transform the genome that is common to all life on Earth into music. The amino acids from this common DNA sequence were translated into notes to make what Mestaoui called the Symphony for Life, which she used to accompany the projection.

The *Live Oak Tree of Life* was only one piece of the larger "One Tree, One Planet" event series hosted by the Florida Museum of Natural History in November 2017. The weekend of events included a second projection by Mestaoui on the back of the Harn Museum of Art and the premiere of a short, animated film by James Oliviero and his team at the UF Digital Worlds Institute called TreeTender, which can be viewed at www.treetender.org.

Mestaoui premiered a temporary installation of the Innovation Square projection in November but is installing a more permanent structure on March 29. Community members can experience the artwork and music after sunset.

"It's our diversity as a city that makes us who we are," Gainesville Mayor Lauren Poe said at the projection's premiere in November. "It's not only important, but our lives depend on celebrating that diversity and making sure that every single element of our community is served equally in our quest for the pursuit of happiness."

About the College of the Arts
The College of the Arts, previously known as the College of Fine Arts, is one the 16 colleges and more than 150 research centers and institutes at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. The College of the Arts offers baccalaureate, master's and Ph.D. degree programs in its three fully-accredited schools — the School of Art and Art History, School of Music and School of Theatre and Dance. The college is home to the Center for Arts in Medicine, Center for World Arts, Digital Worlds Institute, University Galleries and the New World School of the Arts in Miami. More than 100 faculty members and more than 1,220 students work together daily to engage, inspire and create. The college hosts more than 300 performances, exhibitions and events each year. Faculty and students also exhibit and perform at other local, national and international venues. To learn more, visit www.arts.ufl.edu.

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