



# Akram Khan and Manal AlDowayan premier Thikra: Night of Remembering commissioned by Wadi AlFann, AlUla

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- *Thikra: Night of Remembering*, a unique world-class site-specific performance by Akram Khan and Manal AlDowayan commissioned by Wadi AlFann, premiered during the AlUla Arts Festival 2025
- *Thikra* has been devised in collaboration with the local AlUla community across multiple disciplines including movement, music and design
- Set design and costumes created by Wadi AlFann artist Manal AlDowayan

ALULA, Saudi Arabia, Jan. 27, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- **THIKRA: NIGHT OF REMEMBERING** A new performance production by Akram Khan and Manal AlDowayan premiered under the stars in the ancient oasis of AlUla, Saudi Arabia, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January as part of the AlUla

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#### Performing programme

A site-specific performance piece has been created by internationally acclaimed, multi-award-winning choreographer **Akram Khan** and Wadi AlFann artist **Manal AlDowayan**, who represented Saudi Arabia at the 60th International Venice Biennale.

Khan joined forces with AlDowayan to create a cross-cultural performance piece. Fourteen dancers combine the traditional Indian classical dance, underpinning Khan's choreography with contemporary rhythms and gestures inspired by the desert landscapes and ancient myths of AlUla. *Thikra* features an original music score by celebrated composer Aditya Prakash, with contributions from pioneering musician Loulwa Al Sharif and local musicians from AlUla Music Hub.

AlDowayan has collaborated with Madrasat Addeera, AlUla's art and design centre, and the local artisans to create banners for the opening sequence. Furthermore, the artist has designed costumes, weaving traditional craft techniques with contemporary aesthetics, using natural dyes and pigments made to reflect the tonalities of AlUla's landscape. Visual aesthetics include set and costume design, banners, make-up and jewellery which take inspiration from the landscape, rich history and heritage including the Nabataeans and geometric motifs to signify the role and symbolism of each protagonist.

*Thikra* resonates with AlUla's commitment to engaging multi-generational local audiences and fostering cultural development across movement, music and design. The performance is inspired by local traditions and engages young Saudi professionals through workshops and training sessions led by Akram Khan Company and Manal AlDowayan. The musical composition includes recordings of local percussionists and members of the AlUla community, who play a key role in the opening sequence and procession. The programme stages an interface for artistic encounters in the arts sector, to ignite aspirations for the local creative ecosystem and to inspire the young generation. Community workshops have been led by performers Jumana Al Refai and Bilal Allaf.

Performing alongside some of the world's greatest dancers, a group of forty local people have formed a procession meeting guests at a circular stage, set against the monumental cliffs of Wadi AlFann's desert canyon. The audience sat under the stars, on traditional Sadu weaved carpets. They have experienced an imagined gathering where



The performance has taken place against the breathtaking backdrop of Wadi AlFann, which translates to 'Valley of the Arts'; a 65-square-kilometre global cultural destination for contemporary Land Art, where works by international artists are being permanently installed in the landscape of AlUla.

Commissioned by Wadi AlFann, *Thikra* takes inspiration from AlUla's heritage, dramatic topography, undulating vistas, remarkable geological structures, complex natural ecosystem and local communities. The world premiere of *Thikra* was part of Wadi AlFann's dynamic site-specific performance programme which has included Fenling Company's musical production *Nine Songs* and performances by artists Ahaad Alamoudi, Afra Atiq, Mohammad Al Faraj and Moza Almatrooshi. Following its premiere in AlUla, *Thikra* will embark on a world tour as Akram Khan Company's major new production for 2025, adapted as an indoor performance, bringing AlUla culture, heritage and artistry to audiences worldwide.

This performance is part of the AlUla Arts Festival, which runs from 16 January to 22 February 2025, and offers visitors an immersive journey through art, design, artist residencies and workshops set against the backdrop of the ancient city. Key highlights of this year's Festival are an exhibition of work by Wadi AlFann artist James Turrell, site-specific exhibits and installations, alongside public programs of classes, interactive activities and more.

#### Manal AlDowayan comments

*Thikra deepens my exploration of AlUla's voices, which began with my research for Oasis of Stories in 2018, my upcoming commission for Wadi AlFann. It marks a personal milestone as my first time working on both costume and set design as well as my first collaboration with my friend and great creative force Akram Khan. This unique opportunity has allowed me to incorporate performance into my artistic practice, blending performance, sound, costume and local artistry to honour the past and inspire the future. It has been a privilege to collaborate with the AlUla community, who hold a special place in my heart.*

#### Akram Khan comments

*I'm thrilled to have collaborated with the wonderful Manal AlDowayan on this special commission for AlUla Arts Festival. I've always believed that our vision of the future is shaped by the past, and throughout history, each culture has had its own unique perspective on what lies ahead. Standing amidst the vastness of the AlUla desert, in Wadi*



embedded throughout the work. I am super excited to be presenting Thikra with Manal, in AlUla, before sharing with audiences worldwide.

**Nora Aldabal, Director of Arts and Creative Industries, Royal Commission for AlUla**

*In the lead up to the opening of Wadi AlFann, and as part of the AlUla Arts Festival 2025, we are delighted to present Thikra as part of our ongoing performance programme, offering visitors a taste of the new awe-inspiring global destination for contemporary art that is Wadi AlFann. This performance not only brings worldwide attention to AlUla's unique landscape steeped in thousands of years of natural, historical and cultural heritage but also highlights the invaluable contributions of local talent and craftsmanship. We are pleased to welcome back Manal AlDowayan to AlUla, where her deep connection with the local community continues to inspire cultural dialogue. Through projects like Thikra, we strengthen our cultural identity and inspire the next generation of creatives in Saudi Arabia.*

For more information visit:

[www.livingmuseum.com](http://www.livingmuseum.com)

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Please find the press kit [here](#).

**Royal Commission for AlUla**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**About Thikra world tour:**

*A commitment to present Thikra has been secured from some of the most prestigious international festivals and venues. These will be announced individually by the respective festivals and venues over the coming year.*

Aditya Prakash, Composer

Gareth Fry, Sound Design

Zeynep Kepekli, Lighting Design

Jumana Al Refai, Community Movement Practitioner

Bilal Allaf, Community Movement Consultant & Practitioner

Mavin Khoo, Creative Associate / Coach

Blue Pieta, Dramaturge

Angela Towler, Rehearsal Director

Farooq Chaudhry, Producing Director

Pallavi Anand, Dancer

Ching-Ying Chien, Dancer

Kavya Ganesh, Dancer

Nikita Goile, Dancer

Samantha Hines, Dancer

Jyotsna Jagannathan, Dancer

Mythili Prakash, Dancer

Azusa Seyama Proville, Dancer

Divya Ravi, Dancer

Mei Fei Soo, Dancer

Harshini Sukumaran, Dancer

Shreema Upadhyaya, Dancer

Kimberly Yap, Dancer

Hsin-Hsuan Yu, Dancer

*Musicians and Vocalists (in recorded composition): Loulwa Al Sharif and over 35 other international musicians and vocalists including contributions from local talent from AlUla.*

## Manal AlDowayan Biography

Manal AlDowayan is one of Saudi Arabia's most significant contemporary artists working internationally. Her work, which spans various mediums including photography, sound, sculpture, and participatory practice, interrogates traditions, collective memories, and the status and representation of women.

AlDowayan's work has been exhibited regionally and internationally in institutions such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, USA (2023); the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada (2023); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, USA (2023); Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE (2023); Misk Art Institute, Saudi Arabia (2023, 2022); Setouchi Triennale, Japan (2022); Diriyah Biennale, Saudi Arabia (2022); Taehwa River Eco Festival, Korea (2021); Victoria & Albert Museum, UK (2021); British Museum, UK (2021); Desert X AlUla, Saudi Arabia (2020); the Aga Khan Museum,





(2014); Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar (2014); among others. In 2024, AlDowayan represented Saudi Arabia at the 60th La Biennale di Venezia.

Her works can be found in the collections of the British Museum, UK; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark; the Centre Pompidou, France; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, USA. She participated in the Robert Rauschenberg Residency, USA (2015), and the artist-in-residence program at the Delfina Foundation, UK (2009). She holds an MA in Contemporary Art Practice in Public Spheres from the Royal College of Art, London. Born in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in 1973, AlDowayan currently lives and works between London and Dhahran.

### Akram Khan Biography

Akram Khan is one of the most celebrated and respected dance artists of today. In just over 23 years he has created a body of work that has contributed significantly to the arts in the UK and abroad. His reputation has been built on the success of imaginative, highly accessible and relevant productions such as *Jungle Book reimagined*, *Outwitting the Devil*, *XENOS*, *Until the Lions*, *Kaash*, *iTMOi*, *DESH*, *Vertical Road*, *Gnosis* and *zero degrees*.

As an instinctive and natural collaborator, Khan has been a magnet to world-class artists from other cultures and disciplines. His previous collaborators include the National Ballet of China, actress Juliette Binoche, ballerina Sylvie Guillem, choreographers/dancers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Israel Galván, singer Kylie Minogue, indie rock band Florence and the Machine, visual artists Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley and Tim Yip, writer Hanif Kureishi and composers Steve Reich, Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook and Ben Frost.

A highlight of his career was the creation of a section of the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony that was received with unanimous acclaim.

Khan has been the recipient of numerous awards throughout his career including the Laurence Olivier Award, the Bessie Award (New York Dance and Performance Award), the prestigious ISPA Distinguished Artist Award, the Fred and Adele Astaire Award, the Herald Archangel Award at the Edinburgh International Festival, the South Bank Sky Arts Award and ten Critics' Circle National Dance Awards for his Company, AKC. Khan was awarded an MBE for services to dance in 2005. In



Montfort Universities, and an Honorary Fellow of Trinity Laban. Khan is an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells and Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, London as well as Curve.

#### **About Arts AIUla:**

The creation of Arts AIUla within The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) is a commitment to crafting the next chapters in a millennia of artistic creation – celebrating cultural inheritance, presenting the art of our time, and shaping a future propelled by creativity. AIUla has long been a consistent and ever-evolving hub of cultural transfer. It has been a place of passage, a crossroads for trade, and home to successive civilizations who carved, sculpted and inscribed their lives into the landscape. The work of Arts AIUla seeks to preserve this legacy: fuse the old with the new; the local with the international, keeping the arts central to the spirit of AIUla as a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage.

Arts AIUla will bring to fruition a series of new initiatives, projects and exhibitions. The artwork curation will speak to RCU's vision for the continued development of AIUla's contemporary art scenes: positioning the arts as a key contributor to AIUla's character, the quality of life for its local community and the region's economic future.

Arts AIUla focuses on transferring the talents of the Saudi nation and the local AIUla community into meaningful long-standing social and economic opportunities. This is a key part of the Journey through Time masterplan bringing together the 15 different landmark destinations for culture, heritage and creativity across AIUla.

#### **About Wadi AlFann:**

Wadi AlFann, meaning 'Valley of the Arts', will be a global cultural destination for contemporary art, where era-defining works by artists from around the world will be permanently sited in the monumental landscape of AIUla, the extraordinary desert region of north-west Saudi Arabia.

New, large-scale, site-specific commissions by Manal AlDowayan (b. 1973, Saudi Arabia), Agnes Denes (b. 1931, Hungary), Michael Heizer (b. 1944, USA), Ahmed Mater (b. 1979, Saudi Arabia) and James Turrell (b. 1943, USA) will be the first five works to be conceived for Wadi AlFann, a spectacular valley spanning approximately 65 square kilometres. These initial five works will mark the start of a continued programme of commissions, with more artists and activities to be announced.



dramatic topography, undulating vistas, remarkable geological structures and complex natural ecosystem. The works will be created with respect for the landscape, set against the stunning sandstone cliffs and canyons of the vast terrain.

Wadi AlFann will provide unparalleled opportunities for local communities to experience art as a source of education and enrichment. Through job creation, skills development and engagement with local creatives, Wadi AlFann will strengthen AIUla's cultural economy, inspiring a new generation of arts professionals and enhancing quality of life for its residents.

This epic new destination will also welcome art lovers, adventurers, and globetrotters from across the world on a transformative cultural journey to a unique place of creative and geographical wonder, continuing the region's history as a place of cross-cultural exchange

#### **About AIUla:**

Located 1,100 km from Riyadh, in North-West Saudi Arabia, AIUla is a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage. The vast area, covering 22,561km<sup>2</sup>, includes a lush oasis valley, towering sandstone mountains and ancient cultural heritage sites dating back thousands of years to when the Lihyan and Nabataean kingdoms reigned.

The most well-known and recognised site in AIUla is Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. A 52-hectare ancient city, Hegra was the principal southern city of the Nabataean Kingdom and is comprised of 111 well-preserved tombs, many with elaborate facades cut out of the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement. Current research also suggests Hegra was the most southern outpost of the Roman Empire after the Roman's conquered the Nabataeans in 106 CE.

In addition to Hegra, AIUla is also home to ancient Dadan, the capital of the Dadan and Lihyan Kingdoms and considered to be one of the most developed 1st millennium BCE cities of the Arabian Peninsula, and Jabal Ikmah, an open air library of hundreds of inscriptions and writings in many different languages, which has been recently listed on the UNESCO's memory of the World Register. Also AIUla Old Town Village, a labyrinth of more than 900 mudbrick homes developed from at least the 12th century, has been selected as one of the World's Best Tourism Villages in 2022 by the UNWTO. Additionally, Hijaz Railway and Hegra Fort, which are key sites in the story and conquests of Lawrence of Arabia.

For more information, please visit: [www.experiencealula.com](http://www.experiencealula.com)





celebrate and unlock AIUla's stories, uncover its secrets, and celebrate local and international cultures. With 7,000 years of civilisations and home to some of the most sophisticated ancient kingdoms of antiquity, AIUla is no stranger to social gatherings and cultural celebrations.

AIUla Moments calendar introduces five festivals: Winter at Tantora, which returned to celebrate heritage, culture, and music; the Ancient Kingdoms Festival that celebrates the ancient civilisations that lived in AIUla and its neighboring oases in Khaybar and Tayma; in addition to the AIUla Skies Festival, AIUla Arts Festival, and AIUla Wellness Festival.

The festivals offer a selection of experiences in art, culture, music, nature, wellness, equestrian activities, dining, and astronomy. All of these experiences were in celebration of the culture, history, legacy and history of AIUla.

AIUla Moments additionally introduces a number of marquee events, including AZIMUTH, Richard Mille AIUla Desert Polo, The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Endurance Cup, AIUla Camel Cup, and a variety of fashion, adventure and sporting events.

For more information, please visit [experiencealula.com/en/alula-moments](https://experiencealula.com/en/alula-moments)

A photo accompanying this announcement is available at <https://www.globenewswire.com/NewsRoom/AttachmentNg/458bc91c-a126-4a84-9383-2face0baa28d>

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