



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Desert X unveils *The Living Pyramid* by Agnes Denes

Monumental, environmental intervention and first in a series of new commissions for Desert X 2025 promises to bloom for the fifth edition of the international art exhibition to open on March 8 – May 11, 2025

Exhibition in the Coachella Valley will expand upon issues of indigenous futurism, design activism, deep time evolutions, colonial power asymmetries, and the role of emerging technologies in our contemporary society

Save The Date: Desert X 2025 Media Preview

Friday, March 7, 2025 from 9:30AM – 12:00PM

**Breakfast and Exhibition Presentation at The Ace Hotel and Swim Club, Palm Springs,
Followed by a First Look at Desert X 2025 from 12:00PM – 5:00PM**



Desert X 2025 installation view of Agnes Denes *The Living Pyramid* at Sunnylands Center & Gardens,
photo by Lance Gerber, courtesy Desert X

PALM SPRINGS, Calif., – Desert X, the recurring site-specific, international art exhibition has unveiled a monumental sculpture and environmental intervention by pioneering artist and philosopher **Agnes Denes**. Titled *The Living Pyramid*, Denes's latest work, which is now on view at Sunnylands Center & Gardens, is the first in a series of new, outdoor commissions that will be presented as part of the fifth edition of Desert X opening at sites across the Coachella Valley, California from March 8 – May 11, 2025. The exhibition will be free and open to all.

"The Living Pyramid is the most iconic and recurring expression of the pioneer of environmental art Agnes Denes's commitment to the creation of works that speak in equal parts to the ancient structures of architecture and knowledge that shape our world view and the endless cycles of life and death that are the transformative powers of nature," says Desert X Artistic Director **Neville Wakefield**.

Denes is a leading figure among the concept-based artists who emerged to international attention in the 1960s and 1970s. Born in Budapest in 1931, and having lived in New York since the 1950s, for Denes "art exists in a dynamic, evolutionary world where objects are processes and forms are dynamic patterns, where measure and concepts are relative and reality itself is forever changing."

The Living Pyramid, the first desert iteration of Denes's pyramid structures bears witness to this. "While the pyramids are based on mathematics and thus achieve a kind of perfection, they contain all the imperfections they are dealing with or are representing and visualizing," Denes says.

"The form is hierarchical, echoing perhaps the idea of Sunnylands as the Camp David of the West, a place where politicians and thought leaders from across the globe have convened 'to promote world peace and facilitate international agreement,'" adds Wakefield. At the same time, the work is constantly changing. Planted with vegetation that is native to the region, its structure and appearance transform according to the slow growth cycles of the desert environment. Over the course of six months the plants it carries will sprout and bloom, some will go to seed, some will die.

For Denes, this process is evidence of the organic development of nature as it interacts with the pyramid, one of the most iconic forms of human civilization, of which she says, "The Pyramids appear in my work in a variety of forms from the Snail Pyramid, Egg and Fish Pyramid to pyramids of thought processes, mathematics, forests humanity, survival. These pyramids have little to do with their ancestor pyramids of Egypt, rather they represent social structures, in the form of visual philosophy conveying ecological, social and cultural issues with a purpose to answer humanity's problems, issues of concern and seek benign solutions."

The tiers of *The Living Pyramid* extend beyond its visible structure becoming, in effect, a social construct that cultivates a micro-society of people responsible for its construction, planting, and ongoing care, while addressing water conservation and philosophical questions relating to biological and geological time.



Desert X 2025 installation view of Agnes Denes *The Living Pyramid* at Sunnylands Center & Gardens, photo by Lance Gerber, courtesy Desert X

“This new work of *The Living Pyramid* is planted material, yet a new meaning,” explains Denes. “Transformed into blossoms, the Pyramid renews itself as evolution does to our species. The rigid angle becomes an arc to reach above, to reach what it wishes to reach. It is not just planting, but planting the paradox, a structured edifice of soil and grain, not on a farm or field but in the heart of a busy mega-city or various parts of our world. It is planting the seed into soil and human minds.”

The Living Pyramid was originally commissioned in 2015 by Socrates Sculpture Park in New York City. The work has subsequently been displayed at documenta 14, Kassel (2017); the Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (2022); the Hayward Gallery, London (2023) and will also be exhibited at MUDAM Luxembourg in 2025. Denes intends the work to be displayed at locations throughout the world and to feature indigenous plants in each location.



Desert X 2025 installation view of Agnes Denes *The Living Pyramid* at Sunnylands Center & Gardens, photo by Lance Gerber, courtesy Desert X

Sunnylands Center & Gardens is a cultural partner of Desert X. In addition to hosting Denes's *The Living Pyramid* for Desert X 2025, it has, over four editions from 2017 to date, provided sites for Desert X works and performances by women artists from around the world including **Lita Albuquerque**, **Iman Issa**, **Ghada Amer**, and **Paloma Contreras Lomas**.

Curated by Wakefield and Co-curator **Kaitlin Garcia-Maestas**, the forthcoming edition of Desert X reflects on the desert's deep time evolutions, challenging us to glean wisdom from its vast knowledge. "The Coachella Valley is far from an empty expanse. Here, the landscape acts as a canvas of real and imagined histories, narrating tales of displacement, sovereignty and adaptation superimposed over visible testaments of time," says Garcia-Maestas. Desert X 2025 will delve deeper into nonlinear narratives of time, forming a space where ancestral wisdom intertwines and collides with contemporary visions for our collective future. Through the presentation of newly-commissioned works by artists from around the world, the exhibition will expand upon issues related to indigenous futurism, design activism, colonial power asymmetries, and the role of emerging technologies in our contemporary society.

For further information and to plan your visit, go to desertx.org

Desert X 2025 is funded by its board of directors and an extraordinary group of individuals, foundations, and sponsors.

The Living Pyramid by Agnes Denes is generously supported by The National Endowment for the Arts and Sunnylands Center & Gardens.

Media Partners: artnet, ArtReview, Canvas, Cultured Magazine, *frieze* Magazine, Here Media, Palm Springs Life Magazine, Terremoto, and Visit Greater Palm Springs.

Acknowledgement of Native Land

We acknowledge the Cahuilla People as the original stewards of the land on which Desert X takes place. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work with the indigenous people in this place. We pay our respect to the Cahuilla People, past, present and emerging, who have been here since time immemorial.

Desert X

Desert X is produced by The Desert Biennial, a 501(c)3 charitable organization, conceived to produce recurring international contemporary art exhibitions that activate desert locations through site-specific installations by acclaimed international artists. Its guiding principles include presenting public exhibitions of art that respond meaningfully to the conditions of desert locations, the environment and the indigenous communities; promoting cultural exchange and education programs that foster dialogue and understanding among cultures and communities about shared artistic, historical, and societal issues; and providing an accessible platform for artists from around the world to address ecological, cultural, spiritual and other existential themes. Founded on the principles of the Land Art movement of the late '60s and early '70s, when artists sought to create work outside of the confines of institutional walls, Desert X has, since its inception in 2017, explored new configurations of site-responsive work by artists from around the world creating a new paradigm for the presentation and experience of art that is both unrivaled and accessible to all.

Desert X Artistic Director Neville Wakefield

Neville Wakefield is a writer and curator interested in exploring the ways in which art behaves outside of institutional contexts. It is his belief that where art is most successful – its most epiphanic and challenging – is not within the white spaces and clean-cut definitions that have traditionally encased it. Rather it is to be found in new territories; hybrid spaces that break free of containment to suggest new paradigms. While a senior curatorial advisor for PS1 MoMA and curator of Frieze Projects he gained a reputation for challenging the conditions that shape art in both commercial and non-commercial contexts. He has worked extensively with institutions in the U.S. and abroad including the Schaulager Switzerland where he curated the ground-breaking Matthew Barney retrospective 'Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail' and more recently 'Divided Landscape' which placed historical works from the Crystal Bridges's collection in dialogue with contemporary visions shaped by non-settler indigenous and African American experiences. He co-founded Elevation1049, a site-specific biennial in Gstaad, Switzerland, currently in its fifth edition while maintaining his role as artistic director of Desert X in the Coachella Valley region of Southern California. Wakefield also led Desert X's iterations in

the desert of AlUla, an ancient oasis in Saudi Arabia. His interests in international cultural exchange while focusing attention on the environmental, natural, social and historical ecologies of the desert informed his recent appointment as lead curator of the Noor Riyadh Light Festival and his multiple roles on advisory boards in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Desert X 2025 Co-curator Kaitlin Garcia-Maestas

Kaitlin Garcia-Maestas is the Curator and Director of Exhibitions at Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, NY, where she oversees the exhibition program, curatorial initiatives, and the Socrates Annual Artist Fellowship, a longstanding program for early career artists to realize ambitious public artworks along the New York City waterfront.

Born and raised in New Mexico, her curatorial practice challenges the role of colonial narratives in shaping our understanding of land, place, and identity. For over a decade, she has dedicated herself to advocating for and realizing large-scale, site-specific installations by historically underrepresented and early career artists. Formerly, Garcia-Maestas was Acting Curator of Visual Arts at the Momentary, the contemporary satellite space of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, where she developed a robust exhibition program focused on site-specific, architectural interventions, including new commissions by Martine Gutierrez, Matthew Barney, Xaviera Simmons, Nicholas Galanin, Andrea Carlson, and Tavares Strachan. Recent exhibitions include *Suchitra Mattai: We are nomads, we are dreamers* (2024, Socrates Sculpture Park), *Mary Mattingly: Ebb of a Spring Tide* (2023, Socrates Sculpture Park), *Yvette Mayorga: What a Time to Be* (2022, the Momentary), and *A Divided Landscape*, co-curated with Neville Wakefield (2022, the Momentary). Garcia-Maestas previously held curatorial positions at the Denver Art Museum, MCA Denver, and the Biennial of the Americas.

Exhibition Dates: March 8–May 11, 2025

Opening hours and locations: visit desertx.org for details

Free Admission

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