

## Desert X AlUla 2026 unveils stellar line-up of Saudi and international artists for landmark fourth edition

- Site-responsive works set to animate AlUla's valleys, canyons, and oases under the curatorial theme *Space Without Measure*
- New art commissions by leading figures, including Mohammed Alfaraj, Tarek Atoui, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Agnes Denes, Ibrahim El-Salahi, and never-before-seen works by the late Mohammed AlSaleem
- Curated by Wejdan Reda and Zoé Whitley, with Artistic Direction from Neville Wakefield and Raneem Farsi
- The exhibition runs 16 January – 28 February 2026 as part of the fifth AlUla Arts Festival



**AlUla, Saudi Arabia, 09 January 2026:** Arts AlUla and Desert X AlUla, the international, open-air biannual exhibition, is excited to announce the exceptional line-up of Saudi and international artists whose site-responsive earthworks, sculptures, and installations will create multisensory public engagement with the awe-inspiring landscapes and layered heritage of AlUla.

Held in collaboration with Desert X, this landmark edition brings together 11 artists whose diverse and monumental works reflect a wide spectrum of ideas, materials, and traditions. From monumental kinetic sculpture to sound-based explorations above and below ground, each commission is deeply rooted in relationships to AlUla's dynamic and distinctive environment. The participating artists are: Sara Abdu, Mohammad Alfaraj, Mohammed AlSaleem, Tarek Atoui, Bahraini-Danish, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Agnes Denes, Ibrahim El-Salahi, Basmah Felemban, Vibha Galhotra, and Héctor Zamora.

Desert X AlUla, the region's first public art biennale will return for its fourth edition from 16 January to 28 February 2026. This edition is co-curated by Wejdan Reda and Zoé Whitley, with Neville Wakefield and Raneem Farsi returning as 2026 Artistic Directors. Situated amidst the stunning vistas of Wadi AlFann, an emerging global cultural destination for monumental art in the landscape, Desert X AlUla is a pre-opening programme of Wadi AlFann and a highlight of the AlUla Arts Festival – an annual celebration that transforms the ancient city of AlUla into a showcase of contemporary art, design, and culture.

From a unique setting within the ancient Oasis to the compass-like canyons radiating North, South, East and West, artworks will be presented across AlUla's extraordinary landscapes. This edition embraces sustainable practices from traditional rammed earth techniques to wood and stone carving as well as drawing upon the expertise of the botany experts at the AlUla Native Plant Nursery. Working in harmony with the terrain's natural character of dunes, valleys and rock faces, Desert X AlUla 2026 will foster meaningful ways of viewing and listening to the land while limiting ecological impact. All of the commissioned art works were produced and fabricated in Saudi Arabia, using locally sourced materials and relying upon the craft and skill of regional artisans, including collaborations with Madrasat Addeera, AlUla's art and design centre, and the AlUla Music Hub.

The curators' theme is inspired by the words of visionary Lebanese-American writer Khalil Gibran, who once described dreams as *Space Without Measure*. Drawing on Gibran's meditations on possibility, perception, and the boundless nature of the human spirit, Desert X AlUla 2026 invites visitors to contemplate the infinite horizons and soaring imagination that flourish when art responds to place. Audiences will explore spaces shaped by light and shadow, ingenuity and memory.

Hamad Alhomiedan, Director of Arts & Creative Industries at the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), said: "At Desert X AlUla 2026, audiences will encounter an extraordinary diversity of artists whose works converse deeply with the land. From sound and sculpture to living installations and historic forms reimagined, this year's commissions create spaces that honour AlUla's heritage while inviting visitors into its present, where the ancient and contemporary meet. We welcome audiences to experience the unique landscapes of AlUla through works that reflect the richness of its stories, its resilience, and its distinct place in the global dialogue of contemporary art - as a precursor to Wadi AlFann, the permanent monumental open-air museum of art in dialogue with AlUla's landscapes, unveiling from 2028."

The participating artists for Desert X AlUla 2026 include:

**Sara Abdu** is a Saudi-born artist of Yemeni heritage whose practice reflects her position "between geographies." For this edition, her work *A Kingdom Where No One Dies: Contours*

of *Resonance* layers poetry and geological strata into sculptural walls of rammed earth, reviving ancient construction techniques common to cultures around the world.

**Mohammad Alfaraj**, a multidisciplinary Saudi artist, weaves a labyrinth of living fables inspired by the landscapes of his childhood in Al Ahsa. Centred on a palm tree made of many grafted trunks, his work *What was the Question Again?* reflects harmony, renewal, and the intimate relationships between people and environment.

**Mohammed AlSaleem** (1939–1997), the renowned Saudi Modernist and founder of Riyadh's first art house, is represented, on loan courtesy of the Riyadh Art collection, The Royal Commission for Riyadh City, through five rare sculptural works never before seen. *The Thorn*, *AlShuruf Unit*, *The Triangles*, *Flower Bud*, and *Al Ahilla* were created in the 1980s, their geometric forms ascending skywards, each imbued with symbolic meaning inspired by desert landscapes and celestial motifs.

**Tarek Atoui** is a Lebanese-born artist and electro-acoustic composer celebrated for immersive sound-based installations and collaborative performances. His new project *The Water Song* is a continuation of *Bayt Al Hams (The Whispering House)* presented at the AlUla Arts Festival 2025. Atoui will treat the landscape as an archaeological site, where half-excavated instruments emerge from the earth.

**Bahraini-Danish** is the collective practice of Batool Alshaikh, Maitham Almubarak, and Christian Vennerstrøm Jensen, who work across art, architecture, design, and publishing. Their kinetic sculpture *Bloom* responds to the desert's interplay of shadow and sunlight, its spinning forms merging with terrain to create a shifting, participatory dialogue between visitor and place.

**Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons** is a Cuban-born, US-based multidisciplinary artist whose work channels land, light, and spiritual heritage. *Imole Red* is inspired by AlUla's intense sunsets and West African Yoruba traditions, synthesising colour and energy into a blossoming, alchemical garden that honours the valley's past and its connection to water.

**Agnes Denes**, the Hungarian-born, US-based pioneer of ecological and land art, presents *The Living Pyramid*, the latest iteration of a worldwide project. The monumental, plant-filled structure sited in AlUla's oasis is an exploration of the cycles of life from soil to seed to blossom and speaks to the universal language of optimism, resilience, and beauty.

**Ibrahim El-Salahi**, a leading Sudanese Modernist, presents an installation inspired by resilient acacias that grow across AlUla's canyons. *Haraza Tree* is his forest of sculptural meditation trees that envisions unity emerging from multiplicity, linking heaven and earth in a harmony of form and meaning.

**Basmah Felemban** is a Saudi artist known for her installations rooted in Islamic geometry. Magnifying the smallest geological elements into monumental limestone sculptures, her

work *Murmur of Pebbles* reflects on the ancient rivers that shaped AlUla's desert, carrying resonance and memory within each pebble form. The piece was originally commissioned for Desert X AlUla 2024, curated by Maya El Khalil and Marcello Dantas, and has been revisited for the 2026 edition through the curatorial lens of *Space Without Measure*.

**Vibha Galhotra** is a New Delhi-based artist whose practice addresses climate change and environmental degradation. In *Future Fables*, she encloses fragments of AlUla's demolished buildings within a steel framework, transforming rubble into a shelter for shared narratives, collective reflection, and imagining new futures.

**Héctor Zamora**, the Mexican-born artist known for blurring boundaries between art, architecture, and public participation. Inspired by both traditional Saudi drums and hyperbolic paraboloid forms, his work *Tar HyPar* transforms the valley into a musical instrument, inviting visitors to create energy through collective sound.

Alongside the unique commissions, Desert X AlUla 2026 will present an expanded programme designed to deepen visitor engagement with AlUla's landscapes and the exhibition's ideas and theme. Artist-led workshops, including sessions by participating artists themselves, will invite audiences to create and explore concepts and materials in direct response to the desert environment. Guided art hikes, curated tours, and stargazing tours will offer immersive journeys through the landscape and artworks, while specially commissioned artist performances, participatory events, wellness sessions, and family-focused programming will animate the site with sound, movement, storytelling and play. A specially curated live music programme at the Visitor Pavilion, developed in collaboration with AlUla Music Hub, will further connect visitors to AlUla, creating moments where art, nature, and community converge.

Desert X AlUla 2026 offers visitors the rare opportunity to explore site-responsive works in some of the region's most remarkable locations, including the desert canyons that will one day house AlUla's permanent Wadi AlFann, Valley of the Arts.

Join us at AlUla Arts Festival 2026 for a month-long journey of art, heritage, and creativity in one of the world's most extraordinary landscapes. For more information and tickets, please visit: [experiencealula.com](http://experiencealula.com)

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**Multimedia gallery:**

High-resolution photos can be found [here](#)

### **About Arts AlUla**

The creation of Arts AlUla within The Royal Commission for AlUla (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. AlUla 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 AlUla seeks to preserve this legacy: fuse the old with the new; the local with the international, keeping the arts central to the spirit of AlUla as a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage.

Arts AlUla 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 AlUla's contemporary art scenes: positioning the arts as a key contributor to AlUla's character, the quality of life for its local community and the region's economic future.

Arts AlUla focuses on transferring the talents of the Saudi nation and the local AlUla 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 AlUla.

### **About Wadi AlFann**

Wadi AlFann, meaning 'Valley of the Arts', will be a global cultural destination for land art, unveiling from 2028 onwards, where era-defining works by artists from around the world will be permanently sited in the monumental landscape of AlUla, 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. Further artists are engaged and commissioned through temporary commissioned exhibitions including Desert X AlUla, and the 'Wadi AlFann Presents' performance commissioning and exhibitions programmes, and the Public Art programme.

Wadi AlFann offers a profound opportunity to experience art in dialogue with nature. Learning from the desert, the artists are responding to the landscape of AlUla, taking inspiration from its dramatic topography, undulating vistas, remarkable geological structures complex natural ecosystems and local communities. 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 AlUla'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.

A full press release about Wadi AlFann can be found [here](#).



### About AlUla Moments

AlUla Moments is AlUla's new home for events. AlUla Moments calendar was launched at the end of 2021 and introduced new festivals and events to celebrate and unlock AlUla's stories, uncover its secrets, and celebrate local and international cultures. With 7,000 years of continuous human civilisations and home to some of the most sophisticated ancient kingdoms of antiquity, AlUla is no stranger to social gatherings and cultural celebrations.

AlUla Moments calendar comprises of five festivals offering diverse experiences in art, culture, music, nature, wellness, equestrian activities, dining, and astronomy. The AlUla Wellness Festival featuring the latest practices to engage the mind, body and soul; Winter at Tantora, the original AlUla celebration of heritage, culture, fashion and music; the Ancient Kingdoms Festival offers immersive events acknowledging the ancient civilisations that lived in AlUla and its neighboring oases in Khaybar and Tayma; AlUla Skies Festival with the popular hot air balloons and stargazing experiences; and AlUla Arts Festival bringing together contemporary and ancient art events and experiences.

In addition to the festivals AlUla Moments calendar offers a number of marquee events, including AZIMUTH and Richard Mille AlUla Desert Polo, along with the heritage sports events such as The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Endurance Cup, AlUla Camel Cup, AlUla Falcon Cup, the Tent Pegging World Championship and Horseback Archery World Cup, a world-class fashion, adventure and sporting events.

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

### About AlUla

Located 1,100 km from Riyadh, in North-West Saudi Arabia, AlUla 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 AlUla 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 Romans conquered the Nabataeans in 106 CE.

In addition to Hegra, AlUla 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 AlUla Old Town Village, a labyrinth of more than 900 mudbrick homes developed from at least the 12th century, which has been selected as one of the World's Best Tourism Villages in 2022 by the UNWTO.

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### **About 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-responsive installations by acclaimed international artists. Its guiding principles include presenting public exhibitions of art that are open and free to the public and respond meaningfully to the conditions of desert locations, the environment, Indigenous communities, and promote cultural exchange. Desert X is committed to education and public programming with a robust series of initiatives that expand the breadth and depth of the organization's engagement with the surrounding community. The exhibitions provide a platform for artists from around the world to address ecological, cultural, spiritual, and other existential themes.

From its inception in 2017, Desert X has presented five exhibitions in the Coachella Valley. In 2020, the organisation began to engage with exhibitions outside the United States and helped establish Desert X AlUla in the desert of Saudi Arabia. The exhibitions to date have explored new configurations of site-responsive work by more than 100 artists from North America, South America, South Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, creating a new paradigm for the presentation and experience of art and welcoming an audience of over 2 million.

Desert X is free and open to all and is funded by its board of directors and an international group of individual donors, foundations, and sponsors.

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