

Press release

On the occasion of the fifth edition of the AlUla Arts Festival, Villa Hegra celebrates performing arts, photography, film and design

AlUla, 15 December 2025

From 15 January to 14 February 2026, Villa Hegra, the first Saudi-French cultural institution, takes part in the AlUla Arts Festival, a flagship cultural event that each year transforms the oasis city of northwestern Saudi Arabia into a vast open-air stage dedicated to international contemporary creation.

This fifth edition will bring together an exceptional array of exhibitions, installations, performances and immersive experiences. A highlight of the festival, *Desert X AlUla* returns with new monumental works embedded in the dunes of Wadi AlFann (the Valley of the Arts), reaffirming the festival's unique position in the field of land art. Visitors will also discover an exhibition organized in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou and the Contemporary Art Museum of AlUla, as well as an ambitious program devoted to design.

For its second participation in the festival, Villa Hegra presents a program focused on performing arts, photography, film and design, fostering dialogue between Saudi, French and international artists, set within the exceptional natural and cultural heritage of AlUla.

Three months after the inauguration of its site in AlUla, the institution affirms its role as a cultural bridge between Saudi Arabia and France, encouraging artistic collaboration and mutual enrichment for local and international audiences alike.

An exclusive performing arts program, in partnership with Chaillot – Théâtre national de la Danse

Rachid Ouramdane, Chairman and Director of Chaillot – Théâtre national de la Danse, presents an original adaptation of *Vertigo*, co-created with highliner Nathan Paulin and composer and musician Christophe Chassol, first premiered at the reopening of the Grand Palais in Paris in June 2025. Transposed to the spectacular setting of AlUla's canyons and developed from the research conducted by Rachid Ouramdane during his residency at Villa Hegra in January 2025, the piece becomes *Vertigo*.

Unveiled on 16 January at the *Desert X* site, this large-scale aerial and immersive experience, performed by acrobats and highliners from the Compagnie de Chaillot, including Nathan Paulin, will be accompanied by live music by Christophe Chassol. The performance will feature Saudi musicians and singers, as well as children from AlUla who were introduced to movement through workshops led by Chaillot – Théâtre national de la Danse at Villa Hegra.

Echoing *Vertigo*, Villa Hegra will host a day dedicated to dance and performance on January 17, in partnership with Rachid Ouramdane and Chaillot – Théâtre national de la Danse. Audiences will experience a highline crossing by Nathan Paulin alongside acrobats from the Compagnie de Chaillot, drawn from Rachid Ouramdane's work *Les Traceurs*, as well as a musical journey through the works of Christophe Chassol, followed by a concert by Saudi musicians.

French choreographer Saïdo Lehlouh will present *Break On*, a unique encounter between hip hop dance and an unexpected musical universe bringing together French and Saudi talents, including Jeddah dancer Akram. Practice workshops and a screening of *Möbius Morphosis*, a work by Rachid Ouramdane and Collectif XY, created for the Cultural Olympiad of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, will complete the program.

These initiatives are supported by Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels, a program dedicated to promoting contemporary dance, as well as by the International Fund of the French Ministry of Culture.

Photography, film, design and contemporary creation: a cross-disciplinary journey featuring Villa Hegra's residents throughout the festival

From 15 January to 14 February, Villa Hegra will present in the heart of AlJadidah Arts District, the photographic exhibition *Not Deserted: AlUla's Archives in Movement*, composed of early 20th-century images by French traveller Tony André, in dialogue with a contemporary film work by Saudi filmmaker and Villa Hegra resident Saad Tahaitah. Together, these images of desert landscapes create a hybrid cartography of AlUla, a multifaceted and rapidly evolving territory. The initiative is developed in collaboration with the ICCD (Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione) in Rome, which owns the photographic archive.

On the occasion of the AlUla Design Awards 2026, from 23 January to 14 February, Villa Hegra will also highlight within its building the artists and designers in residence who have contributed to shaping its spaces.

Saudi artist and resident Badr Ali will unveil a capsule collection commissioned by Villa Hegra and produced in partnership with USM Haller, a reference in functional and sustainable design.

Interior architect Paul Emilieu Marchesseau, the institution's first designer in residence, will present bespoke furniture created for Villa Hegra's artist studios in collaboration with Saudi artisans.

Works by French artist Théo Mercier, produced during his research residency in preparation for his installation at the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale 2026, will also be exhibited. Developed through a process combining field research and the use of local materials, these pieces reflect a practice situated at the intersection of anthropology and landscape.

Several design pieces will be on display, including chairs and a table from the OSAKA 25 collection, designed by French designer Jean-Baptiste Fastrez for the 2025 World Expo and produced by Tectona. Created especially for Villa Hegra, this ensemble is part of its partnership with the Mobilier National, which brings together artistic residencies, contemporary design creation and exchanges between Saudi and French savoir-faire.

For more information on the AlUla Arts Festival, visit: experiencealula.com

About Villa Hegra

Born of the friendship between Saudi Arabia and France, Villa Hegra is a bilateral institution promoting cultural cooperation. It supports contemporary artistic practices, particularly in the fields of visual arts, design, cinema and performing arts, offering an open space for creativity, education, and exchange.

Since 2023, Villa Hegra has developed its off-site artistic programme, becoming part of AIUla's cultural landscape through residencies, workshops, performances, academic exchanges and research programs in collaboration with Saudi, French and international partners, and has also presented initiatives in France.

In October 2025, Villa Hegra opened its doors in central AIUla, establishing a new destination for artist residencies and for cultural initiatives open to all. This cross-disciplinary hub also includes a cinema as well as AIUla's first performing arts studio.

Villa Hegra belongs to the international network *Viva Villa!*, including Villa Medici in Rome, Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto, Casa de Velázquez in Madrid, Villa Albertine in the United States, and Villa Swagatam in India. It extends the tradition of these artist residencies that, since the 17th century, have provided an ideal setting for creation and encouraged dialogue with the community.

Villa Hegra's programme is built around innovation, transmission and collaboration, inviting local and international audiences to actively take part in the creative process.

About Chaillot - Théâtre national de la Danse

Since 2008, Chaillot has been the first national theater predominantly dedicated to dance productions, placing it in the vanguard of the dance scene both nationally and internationally.

Headed by choreographer Rachid Ouramdane since April 2021, Chaillot presents every year over 60 artists from around the world, nearly 40 shows and 220 performances, and offers multiple outreach actions for educators, facilitating the connection between artists and audiences.

The mission of Chaillot is to engage with diverse forms, aesthetics and audiences in order to make dance central to society. Fostering hospitality "from within and out" by utilizing the Art Deco building in different ways, bringing in a plethora of artists in residence all year round, curating events to facilitate interaction, experimentation and reflection, these are the tenets of the Chaillot spirit and experience. A hospitable venue that champions diversity, Chaillot is a place for experimentation and togetherness.

About Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels

Profoundly attached to the world of dance since its origins, the High Jewelry Maison's commitment to the choreographic arts was reaffirmed in 2020 with the creation of Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels.

Since its launch, the program has accompanied numerous companies in their creations as well as multiple institutions in the presentation of their works on the international stage. This presence is reinforced each year by a major event: the Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels Festival.

In addition to supporting the creation and promotion of choreographic works, Dance Reflections places increasing importance on issues of transmission and education. The program organizes with its partners residencies for professional dancers as well as actions to raise awareness of choreographic culture open to all.

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