

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL
AKRAM KHAN COMPANY

Thikrā: Night of Remembering



By Akram Khan
& Manal AIDowayan

Age guidance 12+

MAD
STUDIO

وادي الفن
Wadi AlFann



BAGRI
FOUNDATION

PRESS QUOTES

"Khan's choreography bypasses thinking mode and goes straight for weighty but intangible worlds of colour and emotion, life and death, animal spirit, magic and witchery."

The Guardian

"Thikra is a handsome finale, showing off Khan's gift for spellbinding movement"

"Thikra makes a characteristic end note for this stage of Khan's career – and a promising indicator for what comes next"

The Independent

"Genuinely thrilling"

"It also leaves you fascinated to see what Khan will come up with next as he embarks on another stage of his mercurial, marvellous career"

The Telegraph

"Khan's choreography is so extraordinary to watch that you can just sit back and enjoy the ride"

"A gripping swansong for Khan's groundbreaking company"

The Stage

"A stirring finale for Khan's company"

The Standard

World Premiere site-specific performance: AIUla Arts Festival, 25 January 2025

World Premiere indoor adaptation: Montpellier Danse Festival, 22 June 2025

Judith Mackrell speaks to Akram Khan and Manal AIDowayan

March 2025

Thikra: Night of Remembering was originally commissioned as part of a series of works which invite artists to respond to the astonishing landscape of AIUla, an unspoilt desert region of epic canyons and monumental rocks. Once, this remote part of Saudi was an important oasis for international traders and travellers, and traces of those who inhabited it or passed through it, survive in engravings and in tombs built into the rocks. Akram Khan, in close collaboration with the Saudi visual artist Manal AIDowayan, their team of creatives, and fifteen female dancers, has made a work that imagines something of the history behind those ancient traces, exploring themes of ancestral knowledge, collective learning and healing. Together he and Manal AIDowayan have honoured the idea that 'without a past there is no future', and, after staging the work in the desert of AIUla, they've now recreated *Thikra* for an indoor space and for a much wider audience.

JM How were you and Manal first drawn into this commission?

AK I accepted the first invitation to visit AIUla because I was so curious about the location, and about the history of the place. It dates back to mythological times, and because I've always been interested in myth it spoke to me. I was asked if I wanted to work with a visual artist, and from the moment that Manal was introduced to me it was love at first sight. She was so graceful, so generous and I knew I would learn so much from her because her work is always so inseparable from the community where she's making it. We met together in the desert, and we started to dream.

JM What were the things you talked about during that first dreaming conversation?

MA I'd already seen Akram's work, I was very excited by it, and I wanted him to fall in love with AIUla. I had been there many times and the history of the place had become my obsession. Every human being had passed through it - it was on the silk route from China, the frankincense route from Yemen - yet the archaeologists still don't know much about it. Even though the people who lived there left very beautiful traces, there are still so many blanks.

I was never taught the history of AIUla in school, and for me, the original idea that triggered everything, was the possibility of recovering that history; of Akram and I interpreting our own stories to fill in the blanks; of connecting the history of AIUla to the larger history of memory. There was once a very famous poet, a prince from Yemen, who stood amongst the rocks of AIUla to speak his own poetry. Akram and I wanted to scratch a little bit of ourselves into the place.

JM How did you develop the story, what kind of material did you research?

AK Manal and I carried on meeting, and she presented me with lots of possible material - books, images, the works of Arab female poets - and together we chose several elements which we meshed and moulded and made into our own myth. It's about ten percent historical, ninety percent imagination and it's about a ritual of memory, like the Mexican Day of the Dead, in which a tribe of women come together every year to remember a woman, a princess who long ago taught the tribe to be free. I think there are always women like this in every time and culture who lead the way.

We don't tell the story literally, we both like to exist in ambiguities, but Manal developed images and backstories for our four main protagonists, the Ancestor, the tribal leader or mother who puts on her ceremonial outfit once a year to summon the Ancestor's memory and the two twin daughters who help her. As I worked on my own material, Manal was like a dramaturge - always asking 'what does that mean', 'what is happening', 'have you thought of this?' She was taking me to her own roots in Saudi.

MA Very early on I introduced Akram to a woman I'd met through a community project I'd worked on. She loves music and dancing, she is part of a tradition that still survives in rural Saudi and whenever you visit there is always dancing. Somehow she'd managed to find a projector to show Akram some YouTube videos of traditional dances, she got her twelve year old granddaughter to perform some of them, and because she was dissatisfied she got up and danced herself. That was amazing, because in rural Saudi women never dance in front of men. It never happens. But she was so appreciative of Akram coming she was willing to do it.

AK Really, she inspired the whole opening of the piece. But I was also working with an incredible ensemble of dancers. It's always been my dream to work with dancers from the Pina Bausch company and Azusa Seyama Prioville has joined us to play the tribal mother. Ching-Ying Chien, who danced the lead in *Until the Lions* is the princess. But three quarters of the ensemble are all Bharatanatyam trained and that was so important for me because Bharatanatyam is a form that embodies spirituality. It's like Kathak, wherever you dance, whether it's in a studio or the street is already sacred, it's already a temple. Together these dancers create an incredible feeling of power, not a masculine power but a power without gender.

MA I think it's the first time that the AIUla region has seen dance like this, Saudi traditions combined with Indian and contemporary dance. We knew from the beginning that we didn't want Thikra to look 'realistically Saudi'. When I was creating the costumes, I incorporated some Saudi symbols - the motif for the Ancestors' costume is a triangle, because in Saudi culture windows are often triangular; they are symbols for passing from one world to another. But I didn't try to be authentic. I didn't want people saying 'oh that's not correct, that's not how a Saudi woman would dress'.

JM I could hear the same eclectic freedom in Aditya Prakash's score, which at one point features Dido's lament from the Purcell opera?

AK Aditya worked a lot with local musicians, and some of the music he recorded is very traditional, you can hear a one-stringed instrument that is very typical of Bedouin culture. But he also recorded a contemporary, more jazzy singer, and there's the London Bulgarian Choir in the opening section, which was important to me because the sound is so spiritual. It's a collage of sounds, very international. But the core of it, especially the rhythm of it, still feels true to Saudi.

MA I also gave Aditya a recording I made from a part of Saudi I visit where the sand makes a humming movement when it moves. You can even hear that hum in the score.

JM The original inspiration for Thikra, and the original setting was the AIUla desert. What sort of challenge did you face in adapting it for an indoor space?

AK It wasn't a challenge, really, because we could never try to recreate the scale and the experience of that outdoor performance - the wind, the echoes, the freezing cold of the desert night, the fact that you had to walk through the desert to get to the stage. Instead, we had to re-imagine.

I transformed a lot of the dance material, extending the solos. Manal and I worked out how to amplify certain passages to make them more alive. And of course, we had much more control of the lighting when we were indoors, we could bring in different colours and moods.

At the beginning we felt very strongly the weight of this commission and the importance of the place - we were the first two artists to collaborate on a contemporary dance at AIUla. But a place means nothing without the spirit of the people and in the end it was the human connection between Manal and I that was most important. I already know I'm determined to work with her again.

When I'm on my death bed it will be my collaborations with other people I will remember - and the influence we leave on each other's hearts.



In Akram Khan Company's final touring production, *Thikra: Night of Remembering*, the past and present converge in a journey through tradition to honour our ancestors, deeply rooted in the power of rituals. Imagined as an annual gathering, a tribe of women come together for one night only to awaken the spirit of those who came before them. Through ceremony and shared remembrance, they transcend time, uniting the past and present in a profound act of renewal.

Khan draws profound inspiration from diverse cultures that engage in these sacred practices across the globe. With scenography and costume design by award-winning Saudi artist Manal AlDowayan, the piece explores the echoes of a colonised past.

Featuring an original score by Aditya Prakash, sound design by Gareth Fry, lighting design by Zeynep Kepekli, dramaturgy by Blue Pieta, with an all-female international cast of Contemporary and Bharatanatyam voices, *Thikra* weaves a narrative that is at once universal and deeply personal.

Together, these creative voices invite us to reflect on our own heritage and the rituals that have shaped our shared humanity.

THE CHOREOGRAPHY

Thikra incorporates Bharatanatyam and Western Contemporary dancers; bridging a confluence of hybrid cultures, traditions and perspectives. The work is not an exploration of different styles nor is it a commentary on east meets west connections.

The choreography aims to employ the inherent traditions and rituals embodied within the Bharatanatyam dancers through a creative lens of dance making in collaboration with the Contemporary dancers.

The collective voices of the empowered female ensemble will be reflective of a coming together that transcends the specificity of the two styles inherent in the work, bringing an emphasis on the Experiential.





The set takes inspiration from the site-specific scenography by Manal AlDowayan

ARTISTIC TEAM & CREDITS

Director / Choreographer Akram Khan
Visual Director / Costume and Scenography Manal AlDowayan
Narrative Concept Manal AlDowayan & Akram Khan
Creative Associate / Coach Mavin Khoo
Music Composer and Soundscape Designer Aditya Prakash
Sound Designer Gareth Fry
Lighting Designer Zeynep Kepekli
Associate Lighting Designer Imogen Clarke
Dramaturge Blue Pieta

Rehearsal Director Angela Towler or Chris Tudor

Performed by 9-11 dancers

Tanisha Addicott, Pallavi Anand, Laura Bufano, Ching-Ying Chien, Amrita Doshi, Ekta Doshi, Kavya Ganesh, Shreya Kannan, Madoka Kariya, Azusa Seyama Prioville, Aishwarya Raut, Nikita Rao, Divya Ravi, Joy Alpuerto Ritter, Rohini Shetty, Elpida Skourou, Mei Fei Soo, Seren Williams

Producing Director Farooq Chaudhry
Executive Director Isabel Tamen
Technical Manager Michael Cunningham
Production of Visual Direction Carla Giachello

Company Stage Manager Emma Cameron
Touring Production Manager Anthony Forrester
Technical Stage Manager Harry Abbott
Sound Supervisor Enrico Aurigemma or Matt Armstrong
Lighting Supervisor Stephane Dejourn
Wardrobe Supervisor Anne-Marie Bigby
Costume Maker Peggy Housset
Set Builder Tin Shed

Featured music in score

“The Elephant’s Funeral” by Sushma Soma with Aditya Prakash

“Gyura Beli Belo Platno” by London Bulgarian Choir
Directed by Dessislava Stefanova

Musicians (in recorded composition)

Aditya Prakash, Ananya Ashok, Loulwa Al Sharif, Melanie Pappenheim, Sohini Alam, Zafer Tawil, Sumesh Narayanan, Layth Sidiq, Megan Shung, Jay Julio, Naseem Alatrash, Guhan Venkataraman, Doyeon Kim, Dimitris Menexopoulos, Isaac Alderson, Sushma Soma, Praveen Sparsh, V. Prakash Ilayaraja, N Deepan, N Vijay, M Rajendran, Chris Votek

Commissioned by Wadi AlFann, Valley of the Arts, AIUla

Indoor adaptation co-produced by Berliner Festspiele, Brown Arts Institute at Brown University, Montpellier Danse Festival, Pina Bausch Zentrum, Sadler’s Wells, Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Théâtre de la Ville Paris

Primary Co-Producing Partner Bagri Foundation

Supported by Arts Council England

Special thanks to Light Contrast, Mrs Khan, Yuko, Sayuri, Kenzo and Ayana Khan

Akram Khan

Director / Choreographer

Akram Khan is one of the most celebrated and respected dance artists of today. In over 25 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 Thikra: Night of Remembering, GIGENIS: the generation of the Earth, 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.

Khan's work is recognised as being profoundly moving, in which his intelligently crafted storytelling is effortlessly intimate and epic. Described by the Financial Times as an artist "who speaks tremendously of tremendous things", 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. As a choreographer, Khan has developed a close collaboration with English National Ballet. He created the short piece Dust, part of the Lest We Forget programme, which led to an invitation to create his own critically acclaimed version of the iconic romantic ballet Giselle. Creature is Khan's latest work for English National Ballet.

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 2022, he was announced as the new Chancellor of De Montfort University, and he is also an Honorary Graduate of Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, University of London as well as Roehampton and De Montfort Universities, and an Honorary Fellow of Trinity Laban and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Khan is an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells and Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, London as well as Curve.

Manal AlDowayan

Visual Director / Costume and Scenography

Embracing diverse media, Manal AlDowayan's work encompasses black and white photography, sculpture, video, sound, neon and large-scale participatory installations. Her artistic practice revolves around themes of invisibility, active forgetting, archives, and collective memory, with a large focus on the status of women and their representation. In the past 20 years of her career she has been awarded several commissions that produced engaging work that both question the status of society and at the same time it tells its stories.

Manal holds a Master's Degree in Contemporary Art Practice in Public Spheres from the Royal College of Art, London and her works can be found in the collections of the British Museum, London; Centre Pompidou collection in Paris, Guggenheim Collection in New York and Abu Dhabi, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. In 2024, AlDowayan represented Saudi Arabia at the 60th Venice Biennale.

Mavin Khoo

Associate Artistic Director / Coach

Mavin Khoo is internationally recognised as a dance artist, teacher, choreographer and artist scholar. Khoo is considered one of the few Bharatanatyam male soloists to have carved a niche for himself as an international touring solo artist, whilst still regularly dancing at all major venues in India. As a contemporary dance artist he has worked with Wayne McGregor, Akram Khan, Shobana Jeyasingh, Ivan Perez Aviles and others. In his role as Associate Artistic Director at Akram Khan Company, he acts as lead rehearsal director and stager for Akram Khan's repertory. He also acts as repetiteur to Akram Khan's work with ballet companies, coaching and staging productions such as Dust, Giselle and Creature.

Aditya Prakash

Music Composer and Soundscape Designer

Aditya Prakash, an award-winning singer and composer known for his powerful and expressive voice, is one of the foremost young practitioners of Carnatic music. At 16, Aditya became one of the youngest musicians ever to tour and perform with sitar maestro Ravi Shankar. He has collaborated with a diverse range of artists, including sitarist Anoushka Shankar, Jazz pianist Tigran Hamasyan, electronic experimental artist Karsh Kale, and acclaimed dancer and choreographer Akram Khan. He is mentored by two prolific Karnatik artists: T.M. Krishna and R.K. Shriramkumar. Aditya's current focus in composition is pushing boundaries within the classical tradition. In his latest solo album, ISOLASHUN, he explores the weight of privilege and the boundaries of tradition in an entirely new creative form. He is currently composing the music for three evening-length dance productions by Akram Khan as well as touring his own solo gig-theatre production ROOM-i-Nation, which explores themes of identity, migration and tradition.

Gareth Fry

Sound Designer

Gareth Fry is a multi-award-winning sound designer, best known for his cutting-edge work in theatre. His dance credits include The Language of Kindness (Wayward), Stones of Venice, Invisible Cities (MIF, 59 Productions & Rambert), Othello (Frantic Assembly), John (DV8). Other production credits include Harry Potter and the Cursed Child; Complicité's The Encounter; Bedknobs & Broomsticks, and the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games. He is the author of Sound Design for the Stage. His awards for best sound design include three Olivier Awards, two Tony Awards, two Drama Desk Awards, two Helpmann Awards and an Evening Standard award.

Zeynep Kepekli

Lighting Designer

Zeynep Kepekli is a London-based lighting designer whose work spans dance, theatre, opera, ballet, and site-specific projects and installations worldwide. With a background in art and design, her creations are deeply influenced by nature, architecture, and the interplay of bodies in space, often exploring themes of geography, belonging, and the relationship between natural light and landscapes. Recent credits include The Little Mermaid (Miranda Cromwell), Gigenis: The generation of the Earth (Akram Khan), Festival of New Choreography (The Royal Ballet), California Connections (Yorke Dance Project), The Meaning of Zong (Tom Morris), and Common Grounds (Pina Bausch Foundation).

Blue Pieta

Dramaturge

Blue Pieta is a dramaturge and dance-theatre director, writer, choreographer and dancer and performer. Their practice is informed by their research on ritual sacrifice, ancient mythology and embodied poetics. They studied Fine Art at Central Saint Martins and the History of Art at Cambridge University and underwent performance training at: Sadler's Wells, Impulstanz Vienna, Siobhan Davies and the National Youth Theatre. Their first play VOID debuted at the Royal Court Theatre, followed by a regional tour. They are the artistic director of the dance-theatre company Wringing Metamorphosis. Blue regularly collaborates with T. S Elliot Prize Winning poet Bhanu Kapil and was dramaturge for the music-theatre piece Nine Songs, directed by Farooq Chaudhry, in artistic collaboration with Jocelyn Pook and Rui Fu.

Angela Towler

Rehearsal Director

Angela has had a long professional career dancing with Richard Alston Dance Company and Rambert. She has worked with internationally celebrated choreographers including: Christopher Bruce, Wayne McGregor, Mats Ek, Jiří Kylián to name a few. She was nominated for a TMA award for Achievement in Dance and the Critics' Circle National Dance Award for Outstanding Female Performance. She has choreographed many works for Rambert and for BBC, ITV and live events. She is working with The Royal Ballet School, English National Ballet School teaching contemporary technique and also continues to work with leading companies.

Chris Tudor

Rehearsal Director

In his early career Chris danced with the legendary London Contemporary Dance Theatre, and was a founder member of Richard Alston Dance Company. He has worked with many distinguished choreographers, among them Richard Alston, Kim Brandstrup and Mark Morris. He has choreographic and teaching credits at some of the UK's leading professional dance organisations, including Rambert Company and School, Royal Ballet School, English National Ballet Company and School, London Contemporary Dance School and National Dance Company Wales. He has restaged a number of works for Alston. Chris has directed and choreographed several operas, which include *Imago* (Glyndebourne Opera), *Fairy Queen* (Brighton Music Festival), *Tolomeo* (St John's Smith Square), and has choreographed and presented programmes for the BBC. Chris was a Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader for the dance programmes at Middlesex University, he holds a Master's Degree with Distinction in Contemporary Dance from the University of Kent.



MARKETING & PRESS

For assets such as images, trailers and excerpts of the score, please visit our Google Drive folder which is updated on a regular basis and is accessible to a number of venues and collaborators.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dxxTjIhmk6F-Bd74yqE6iT1HVCYZ3pIM?usp=sharing>

This is a Wadi AlFann, Valley of the Arts, AIUla commission. Where possible, AKC are contractually obliged to incorporate the Wadi AlFann logo on all printed marketing collateral for the production, including a dedicated page in the programme for Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU).

Please credit our photographer Camilla Greenwell where appropriate.

Please liaise with the Company on the dancers performing at your venue and credit accordingly within the programme.

All marketing and publicity materials must be submitted for approval with a minimum of five days' notice to:

Chelsea Robinson on marketing@akramkhancompany.net.

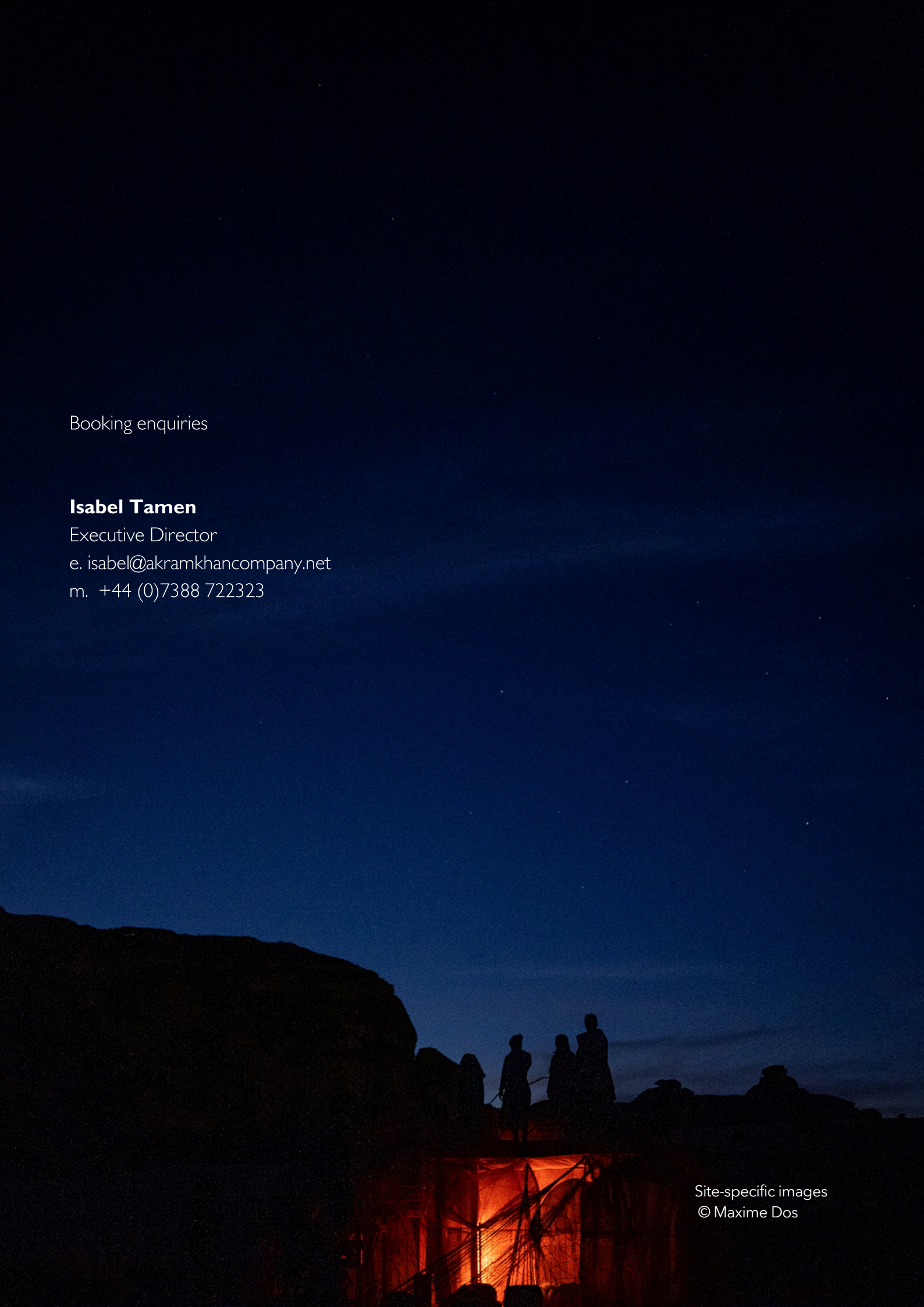
Booking enquiries

Isabel Tamen

Executive Director

e. isabel@akramkhancompany.net

m. +44 (0)7388 722323



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