

THE HERD / LESS



WELCOME

Welcome to Dance Umbrella 2026 – London's international festival of dance, bringing artists and audiences together across our global city.

This year we invite you to experience dance as a meeting place between cultures, histories, generations and communities. Across London and online, our programme brings together artists from around the world whose work challenges, celebrates and expands the ways we think about movement, identity, place and connection.

From live performances and immersive dance-floor experiences to films, conversations, workshops, DJs and opportunities to gather, this year's Festival creates space not only to watch dance, but to encounter it, question it and move within it.

Across the programme artists explore what we inherit and what we transform; how bodies carry histories; how communities come together; and how dance can create connection across difference.

So, bring your curiosity, your questions and your dancing shoes.

Best vibes,

Freddie

Freddie Opoku-Addaie
Artistic Director & Co-Chief Executive
Dance Umbrella



Mamela Nyamza
THE HERD/LESS
8 – 10 Oct
Sadler's Wells East



Poliana Lima & Yinka Esi Graves
A Place to Dance
9 – 10 Oct
The Place



Jack Anderson & Charlotte Mclean
in collaboration with
Malin Lewis
not for glory
13 – 14 Oct
Cecil Sharp House



Cie Omar Rajeh & Maqamat
Dance is Not for Us
16 – 17 Oct
The Pit, Barbican



Dance Umbrella
Film Series
Sunday Shorts
18 Oct
Barbican Cinema 3



Arno Schuitemaker
After After
21 Oct
The Place



Theatre-Rites & Miguel Altunaga
Eshu at the Crossroads
24 Oct The Albany
25 Oct Brixton House
27 Oct The Place



Anthea Lewis / Blulili Projects
Touch The Floor
24 Oct
Rich Mix

About THE HERD/LESS

THE HERD/LESS is a powerful new ensemble work by South African artist Mamela Nyamza, exploring the tensions between unity and control.

Following the acclaimed HATCHED ENSEMBLE, which opened the 2024 Dance Umbrella Festival and received the 2026 Venice Biennale Silver Lion, Nyamza continues to challenge conventions through fearless choreography.

THE HERD/LESS explores the dual meaning of the 'herd': a collective moving in harmony, and a group shaped and controlled by cultural and physical forces. Cloth and traditional southern African sticks become symbols of power and authority. The ensemble's movements create a live percussive score, revealing the beauty and brutality beneath the surface of collective life.

Cast & Creative

Creator, Choreographer & Director
Mamela Nyamza

Rehearsal Manager
Kirsty Ndawo

Dance Artists
Thamsanqa Tshabalala, Hatoentle Tema, Nonofu Olekeng, Mbali Brandt, Thandiwe Mqokeli, Sinazo Bokolo, Thabang Mojapelo, Zandile Constable, Dineo Mapoma

Costume
Mamela Nyamza, Xolani Mawande & Shiba Sopotela

Set Design
Mamela Nyamza (Concept & Design) & **Karabo Legoabe** (Set Maker)

Lighting Designer
Thabo Pule

Technician
Simon King



Photo: Andrea Avezzu

Credits

Presented by Dance Umbrella and Sadler's Wells

Co-producers: Dance Umbrella UK, Venice Biennale 2026 and Lalanbik La Reunion





About Mamela Nyamza



Photo: Esa Alexander

Born in Gugulethu, Cape Town, Mamela Nyamza is a South African dancer, choreographer, director and activist whose work has redefined the boundaries of dance theatre.

She trained in ballet from the age of eight, going on to graduate from Tshwane University of Technology with a national diploma in ballet, before winning a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey International School in New York.

From early in her career, Nyamza was drawn to the politics of the body – challenging who gets to be a classical dancer and on whose terms. Her landmark work *Hatched* (2007) launched a practice built on unapologetically deconstructing the norms of classical dance, and her subsequent *HATCHED ENSEMBLE* was described by *The Times* as “a strikingly original piece... with communal liberation its chief underlying theme.”

Nyamza's accolades include the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance (2011) and the Silver Lion at the 2026 Venice Biennale, which recognises artists who have brought new urgency to the language of dance. Through her non-profit company Mamela's Artistic Movement, she continues to build a creative home for dance artists marginalised by body politics, using performance as a vehicle for social commentary.



A captivating performance shaped by rhythm, dialogue and a desire to celebrate our shared experiences. Taking place in-the-round, the work dissolves the boundaries between audience and performer.

A Place to Dance

UK Premiere

Poliana Lima & Yinka Esi Graves

9 – 10 Oct

The Place

Photo: Miguel Ángel Rosales



An intimate solo blending personal memoir with political reflection. Urgent and deeply human, the work asks what it means to keep dancing amid rupture.

Dance is Not for Us

London Premiere

Cie Omar Rajeh & Maqamat

16 – 17 Oct

The Pit, Barbican

Photo: Miguel Giuseppe Follacchio

TALKS AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Curating in Context

7 Oct | Somerset House & online with a Digital Pass

When dance travels across borders, it is shaped not only by artists but also by the frameworks through which it is presented, contextualised and understood. This panel discussion explores how dance is programmed across different geographies, and whose perspectives inform those choices.

Facilitated by Isabel Moura Mendes, Senior Relationship Manager for Theatre and Dance at the British Council, who is joined by Senegalese cultural administrator Ndèye Mané Touré, Dutch-Ghanaian artist and curator Richard Kofi, Mozambican curator, artistic director and cultural producer Quito Abrão Tembe, and Dance Umbrella Festival 2026 Guest Curator Anthea Lewis.



Akram Khan Company

Artist Encounters: Anatomy of a Story

12 Oct | The Bhavan & online with a Digital Pass

One of the most influential dance artists of his generation brings his distinctive voice to this year's Artist Encounters.

Facilitated by The Royal Ballet Director Kevin O'Hare and with demonstrations from English National Ballet dancers Erina Takahashi and James Streeter, this landmark event offers a rare window into the inner workings of Khan's artistic process.

Presented in the intimate setting of The Bhavan, a space long connected to South Asian arts and one that holds a personal significance for Akram.

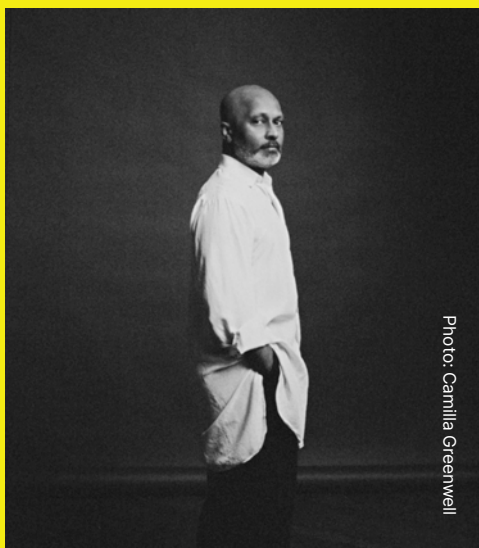


Photo: Camilla Greenwell

DIGITAL PROGRAMME

Experience dance through a different lens.

Digital Pass available from 7 Oct – 30 Nov.

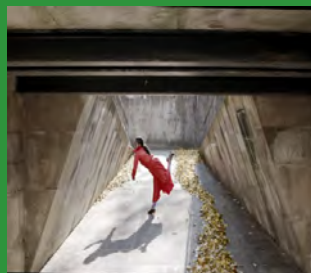
Watch online at danceumbrella.co.uk with a Digital Pass



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MAQAMAT – THE ODOR OF
ELEPHANTS AFTER THE
RAIN**



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A huge thank you to all the 2026 Festival Volunteers

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Jake Ulrich (Chair), Peter Barker (Treasurer), Eva de Blocq van Kuffeler, Nikhil Bolton-Patel, Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway, Alex Mecklenburg, Jacqueline Rose, Manohari Saravanamuttu, Naomi Simpson

Dance Umbrella's work would not be possible without the enthusiasm, commitment and financial backing of a number of individuals and organisations, both listed here and those anonymous.

Artistic Director's Circle

Sandi & Jake Ulrich, Michael Lamont, Ashleigh Ruxton, Eva & John de Blocq van Kuffeler

Freddie's Special Thanks

Germaine Acogny & Helmut Vogt, Delia Barker, Olivier Beroud, Erica Bolton, David Bryan, Helen Cave, Kevin Charles, Mary Kate Connolly, Ravi Deepres, Janine Fletcher, Gerry Fox, Koen Guiking, Jo Hedley, Nigel Hinds, Anja Krans, Dawn Langley, Wayne McGregor, Rhonda Moore, Isabel Moura Mendes, Joyce Nzovu, Morgane Quemener, Maimouna Thiaw, Neil Webb.

Dance Umbrella team and family and friends who put up with us coming back to them at unfashionable hours during the festival period.

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Help shape the future of dance



At Dance Umbrella, we invest in the future of dance. Each year, we bring extraordinary artists from the UK and across the world to London, giving them a platform to share bold, ambitious new work and connect with new audiences. This year's festival includes two new works commissioned by Dance Umbrella.

It is no secret that arts organisations are facing a critical challenge when it comes to funding. Your support is vital in helping us commission new work, champion artists and bring exceptional dance to audiences across London.

Please consider making a donation to Dance Umbrella – every gift makes a real difference.

Support new work. Champion new voices. Shape the future of dance.

Donate now



PRINCIPAL FUNDERS



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WHAT NEXT?