

# ARTS & CULTURE

## Ras Al Khaimah Art 2026 Festival unveils ‘Civilizations’ as its theme



Work of art at the festival, 2025.



Visitors engage with the market.

**RAS AL KHAIMAH:** The Ras Al Khaimah Art 2025 Festival concluded on a successful note, reaffirming its position as a premier cultural and artistic platform in the region. It enjoyed an impressive turnout of over 39,000 visitors, showcasing a collection of 190 artworks by 100+ artists from 31 nationalities. An immersive programme of 21 workshops, a diverse marketplace of 40+ vendors, and the participation of seven diplomatic missions, further enhanced the experience; RAK Art celebrated art as a universal language of connection.

The festival's Art Exploration Program saw deep engagement, with 2,662 students from 80 schools participating in 85 workshops over 20 days, nurturing young creative minds and striving to foster a deeper appreciation for artistic expression. Following the success of 2025, Ras Al Khaimah Art 2026 Festival (Jan. 16 – Feb. 15, 2026) has unveiled its theme, 'Civilizations'. It a tribute to the evolution of cultures and the creative legacies they leave behind. From the ancient trade routes that once connected Ras Al Khaimah to the globe, to the contemporary digital landscapes shaping artistic narratives, the

2026 Festival will explore the dynamic interplay of civilisations and their influence on art.

Through curated exhibitions, live performances, immersive installations and interactive experiences, it will present art as a living dialogue between the past, present and future, where histories merge, cultures interact, and creativity flourishes. Driven by its commitment to nurture and promote global artistic exchange, the festival has invited artists, filmmakers, and creatives from around the world to participate in its Open Call, from April 1 to May 31, 2025. The Call includes the prestigious Film Grant and Art Residency, which offers selected participants an opportunity to develop and showcase their work at the festival.

Building on the outcomes of 2025, the festival has also extended an invitation to diplomatic missions worldwide, to take part in the artistic

and cultural celebration. The previous edition witnessed active engagement from seven diplomatic missions, including the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, United States, China, Japan, and Brazil, each contributing to a diverse and enriching exchange of artistic outlooks and perspectives. The festival is offering a platform to highlight the cultural heritage of the countries they represent, enjoining collaboration with international artists, and fostering dialogue through exhibitions, performances, and film screenings. In line with the 2026 theme, diplomatic missions are encouraged to explore the artistic roots of their nations and showcase the ways in which their cultures have influenced global creativity. Ras Al Khaimah Art Festival, now an established event in the art calendar, continues to grow in impact and reach and it invites the global artistic community, cultural institutions and embassies, to be part of its transformative journey. "Together, let's celebrate the artistic legacies that shape civilisations - past, present, and future," it says. Ras Al Khaimah has a rich history, dating back some 7,000 years. There is a partly destroyed shell mound twenty-three kilometres south-west



Art installation at the festival.

of the modern city of the emirate, near the abandoned fishing town of Jazirat al-Hamra.

The site was first identified by German archaeologists in the late 1980s, when fragments of Mesopotamian pottery were found among a heap of fish bones and mollusc shells. The presence of pottery was evidence that the mound was of Neolithic origin and could be dated to the fifth or sixth millennia BCE, providing evidence that Ras Al Khaimah could trace its history back at least 7,000 years. The archaeological finds of foreign origin in Ras Al Khaimah indicates an early peak in trade in the 3rd millennium and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE. In the 13th and 14th centuries, a prosperous port named Julfar, became one of the most prominent trading posts in the Arabian Gulf, widely known for its exquisite pearls.

With the creation of the large Islamic empires, the trade in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods reached very large volumes and opened the markets even beyond the Indian Ocean, finally reaching China as well. The large scale trade elevated Julfar, which became even more prosperous through global trade, where products from all over the Arabian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and

Southeast Asia, could be found. Favoured by merchants, Ras Al Khaimah prospered for centuries as a crossroads of trade routes between Europe, India and China. Europeans used the coast as a major hub for trade in everything from pepper to pearls, while the mainland was used by the Bedouins and other tribes to transport goods overland. By the 13th and 14th centuries, Julfar (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) had emerged as one of the most prominent trading posts in the Gulf, and an important commercial centre for pearl fishing and pottery. Ras Al Khaimah's location at the entrance of the Arabian Gulf has always been strategic to the socio-economic and cultural growth of the emirate, and the festival theme is a continuation of its global, civilisational history.

Founded in 2013 under the patronage of Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, the Ras Al Khaimah Art Festival has evolved from a modest gathering of 30 emerging local artists, into the emirate's premier art and cultural showcase. Formerly known as the Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival, the re-branded Ras Al Khaimah Art Festival serves as a dynamic, creative hub dedicated to nurturing local and international talent. Through grants, masterclasses, workshops and year-round events, it nurtures artistic growth and cultural dialogue.

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