



GREATER MANCHESTER PREPARES TO WELCOME *THE HERDS*

- A monumental migration of life-sized puppet animals will journey through Greater Manchester to mark the opening of Manchester International Festival 2025.
- From the team behind *The Walk* with Little Amal in 2021, *THE HERDS* will visit Manchester City Centre, Heywood in Rochdale and Pennington Flash in Wigan as part of a 20,000km journey from the Congo Basin to the Arctic Circle in a public artwork on a scale never before attempted.
- Hundreds of local residents are invited to join puppeteers and puppet makers to bring the ever-growing herds to life in the city region.

Transforming Greater Manchester into a breathtaking untamed spectacle to vividly dramatise the climate crisis, the hugely ambitious new public artwork *THE HERDS* will see life-sized animal puppets travel through the city region from 3 – 5 July.

The animals visit Manchester as part of an epic journey that began on 9 April in Kinshasa. As the animals cross continents they will grow in numbers and species including elephants, giraffes, antelope and lions, with some local species joining *THE HERDS* along the route. Puppets will be operated by local participants in each city, highlighting the scale of the climate crisis and the collective effort needed to fight it.

Factory International and The Walk Productions are looking for amateur makers and DIY enthusiasts to join the puppet build and 100 local people to help operate the puppets in Manchester, Heywood and Wigan.

MAKING THE HERDS puppet build sessions will create new life-sized puppet animals, including red deer, wildebeest and wolves, that will join the herd in Greater Manchester. Sessions will be led by master puppet makers between 17 May and 19 June and are open to ages 16+.

MOVING THE HERDS is a once in a lifetime training and performance opportunity to puppeteer *THE HERDS* in Manchester, Heywood and at Pennington Flash, following three days of intensive puppet training with The Walk Productions' Artistic Director Amir Nizar Zuabi, world leading puppeteers Ukwanda Puppets & Design Art Collective and puppetry director and designer, Craig Leo. The opportunity will run from 30 June – 5 July and is open to Greater Manchester residents ages 18+ with an enthusiasm for performance.

Young People are invited to learn more about *THE HERDS* and create their own puppet animal at drop-in workshops during May Half Term and on Saturday 28 June. LET THE WILDNESS IN family workshops will be held at Aviva Studios and are suitable for ages 6+.

For the opening event of Manchester International Festival 2025, on Thursday 3 July the displaced herd arrives in Manchester City Centre, set on interrupting an orchestral performance by Manchester Camerata. Encounter *THE HERDS* as they scatter through the city, sweeping the music into their frenzy. Find yourself between Cathedral Gardens and

Market Street, and you might just stumble upon them. Is that the sound of music you hear, or something wild approaching?

After opening MIF25 with a dramatic arrival in Manchester City Centre, *THE HERDS* abandons the bustling city for the residential streets of Heywood, Rochdale. Encounter the animals in the industrial shadow of Mutual Mills before they move to Queen's Park in search of nature. Can they find a tranquil moment away from the city?

For the final stop on their Greater Manchester journey, *THE HERDS* find a fleeting refuge in the wild beauty of Pennington Flash Country Park. Visitors are invited to explore the park's winding trails, pause in bird hides, and quietly observe as 70 life-sized puppets appear amid the trees and wetlands. A lion stalking through the long grass. A giraffe blending with the canopy. A silent kudu, watching from the shadows. Will your patience – and your stillness – be rewarded?

Low Kee Hong, Creative Director of Factory International and Manchester International Festival said: *"With THE HERDS's visit to Greater Manchester we're really proud to once again bring iconic international public art to our streets for everyone to witness and be inspired by. More so, we're thrilled to celebrate the creativity of our area by inviting people from Greater Manchester to become a part of THE HERDS, whether contributing to the herd, or performing in the events."*

Amir Nizar Zuabi, Artistic Director of THE HERDS, said: *"THE HERDS is an urgent artistic response to the climate crisis, a living, breathing call to action that stampedes across continents. Through the beauty and ferocity of these life-size creatures, we aim to spark dialogue, provoke thought, encourage engagement and inspire real change. Meet us wherever you can."*

THE HERDS is brought to life by The Walk Productions, the international team behind Little Amal, and led by Artistic Director Amir Nizar Zuabi. It ~~and~~ brings together leading artists and arts and educational institutions across Africa and Europe. Following their visit to Greater Manchester *THE HERDS* continue their journey northwards to the Arctic Circle.

THE HERDS will engage with global climate organisations – including WWF International, Save the Elephants, Wild Africa, Global Rewilding Alliance and TED Countdown - as well as numerous arts organisations, scientists, artists, zoologists, politicians, climate activists, universities and civil society groups across Central, West and North Africa and Europe to present one united call for action.

THE HERDS will be included on Bloomberg Connects, the free arts and cultural app powered by Bloomberg Philanthropies. The Bloomberg Connects platform will give audiences a behind-the-scenes insight into the work of many of the internationally renowned artists co-creating the public art events for *THE HERDS*.

As well as joining events in-person across the route, audiences will be able to follow *THE HERDS* online and via social media.

There will be arts and education workshops and activities on the theme of climate change inspired by *THE HERDS*, supported by Art Fund. Art Fund is bringing together 44 museums and galleries across the UK to take part in *THE HERDS* with their local communities allowing thousands more people to get involved.

In Greater Manchester; The Co-operative Heritage Trust is working a primary school in Rochdale to create a Rochdale HERD that will take over Rochdale Pioneers Museum on Saturday 7 June; Wigan Museum's Young Curators Collective will work with local artist and puppet maker Eleanor Ferguson to co-create puppets from recycled materials; Manchester Museum will host a series of workshops with Olympias Music Foundation inspired by animals in Manchester Museum's collection and Science and Industry Museum will encourage visitors to explore the surprising species that exist in post-industrial urban spaces and develop simple surveying techniques to explore wildlife in their local area.

www.theherds.org

Instagram: @the__Herds

X: @The__Herds

Tiktok: @theherds2025

Ends

Notes to editors:

THE HERDS is produced by David Lan and Tracey Seaward for The Walk Productions and created by Amir Nizar Zuabi with Executive Producer Sarah Loader.

THE HERDS Greater Manchester is produced by The Walk Productions in partnership with Factory International. Greater Manchester events delivered in association with Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale Development Agency, and Wigan Council. MIF25 Opening Event created in partnership with Manchester Camerata.

Greater Manchester listings:

Manchester City Centre

Thursday 3 July, 6pm

Around Cathedral Gardens, Exchange Square and Market Street

Heywood, Rochdale

Friday 4 July, 7pm

Mutual Mills, Aspinall Street, Heywood, OL10 4HP

Pennington Flash Country Park, Leigh, Wigan

Saturday 5 July from 1pm

Pennington Flash Country Park

DOWNLOAD HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES HERE

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About Manchester International Festival & Factory International

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios.

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year.

MIF is one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, the festival invites world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds to create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester. Previous artists include, Björk, Jeremy Deller, Akram Khan, Yayoi Kusama, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Yoko Ono, Maxine Peake, Skepta, and The xx.

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

Aviva Studios was designed by the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), with Ellen van Loon as lead architect – their first major public building in the UK. Its development was led by Manchester City Council, with backing from HM Government and National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

factoryinternational.org

About *THE HERDS*

THE HERDS is produced by David Lan and Tracey Seaward for The Walk Productions and created by Amir Nizar Zuabi with Executive Producer Sarah Loader.

THE HERDS is produced by The Walk Productions in association with: Tshoper Kabambi (Kinshasa); A Whitespace Creative Foundation (Lagos); Sarah Desbois (Dakar); Othman

Nejmeddine (Morocco); Monica Hamill (Spain); Au Contraire Productions (France); X Equals Productions (UK); Factory International as part of Manchester International Festival (Manchester, UK); Givisme Foreningen (Denmark); Ulrika Josephsson with Parkteatern and Riksteatern (Sweden) and Olavsfest International (Trondheim, Norway).

The puppets are designed by Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective in South Africa (Luyanda Nogodlwana, Siphokazi Mpofu, Sipho Ngxola), Craig Leo, Simon Dunckley, Hansie Visagie, Tundra Dunckley, Kim Bednall and Artistic Director Amir Nizar Zuabi.

It is brought to life with support from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, The Backstage Trust, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Art Fund, ArtYard, Frederick Mulder Foundation, JKW Foundation and Maria Björnson Memorial Fund. With generous support from James Armstrong, the Hacking Family, Cheryl Henson, Danielle Lambert, Alexander Leff, Valerie Dillon & Daniel Lewis, Melony & Adam Lewis, Patrick McKenna and Paul Zuckerman.

Wimbledon College of Arts: University of the Arts London (UAL) and TED Countdown are Foundation Partners of *THE HERDS*.

THE HERDS sustainability practices are designed in partnership with Hope Solutions and Renew Culture: Theatre Green Book.

theherds.org

About The Emerging Company

THE HERDS has introduced a pioneering training programme for aspiring puppeteers - The Emerging Company (E-Co). This initiative provides performers with a rare opportunity to receive professional puppetry training while travelling with *THE HERDS* for ten weeks across multiple countries.

The journey takes the Emerging Company from Southern Europe to Scandinavia, immersing them in world-class performances and hands-on learning alongside our expert team. This transformative experience not only develops their skills but also empowers the next generation of storytellers to bring urgent global issues to life through the art of puppetry.

About The Walk Productions

The Walk Productions presents large scale participatory public art that brings people together in events of artistic excellence, challenging assumptions, rethinking narratives and provoking change. Led by producers David Lan and Tracey Seaward, Artistic Director Amir Nizar Zuabi and Executive Producer Sarah Loader, The Walk Productions was founded in 2019 to create *THE WALK*: the journey of Little Amal, the 12 foot high puppet of a refugee child who has journeyed through 18 countries. Her multi award-winning journeys have been experienced by more than 2 million people live, and tens of millions more online. They have been lauded by organisations such as Comic Relief, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO and IRC. She has met world leaders including His Holiness Pope Francis, President of the European Commission Ursula von Leyen, and Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Amina Mohammed as well as the mayors of many world capital cities.

About Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective

The puppets for *THE HERDS* are designed by Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective (Luyanda Nogodlwana, Siphokazi Mpofu, Sipho Ngxola), Craig Leo, Simon Duncckley, Hansie Visagie Tundra Duncckley and Kim Bednall. They came together in 2023 in Cape Town, South Africa, with a background in designing, building and bringing to life some of the world's most famous puppet creations including Little Amal and the War Horse puppets, both under the leadership of Handspring Puppet Company. In 2024 Ukwanda was awarded Best Puppetry Design at Fleur du Cap for *Maxeke: This Work is not for yourselves*. Ukwanda are resident artists at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape.

