

# the garden of the Hesperides



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Direction and Choreography: Alicia Soto

Award: **Special Jury Mention** — 6th Baghdad International Theatre Festival



## Review by Arslan Darwish

*Baghdad International Theatre Festival – October 2025*

*Published in Kurdistan24 – <https://www.kurdistan24.net/ar/opinion/869063>*

Through the language of movement, shadow, and confession, nothing here is expressed in a conventional way; every word is whispered through a speaking body, and every movement becomes an act of knowledge that restores to memory the meaning of female existence throughout history. The performance directed, dramaturgically written, and performed by the Spanish artist Alicia Soto stands as an aesthetic manifesto against oblivion, against the reduction of the body to a faded echo, against oppression inherited as an eternal destiny that has pursued the idea of freedom since the birth of the very first narrative. Through a complex dramaturgical text, where myth intertwines with poetry and the spoken word dialogues with the visual, theatre transforms into a space of rebirth: language is born from the body, and the body becomes a poem written with the ink of cry, desire, and rebellion.

This garden is not cultivated with flowers, but with voices silenced by power and with a memory that blossoms in defiance of restraints, as if proclaiming: there is no freedom without the body, and no body without self-awareness as a complete universe that cannot be reduced to an idea, a desire, or a mirror.

Within this scenic space that breathes between myth and reality—where the threads of body and soul intertwine and bodies sing their own poems—The Garden of the Hesperides emerges to reconfigure aesthetic and existential concepts within a singular artistic form, embodying a profound visual and physical poetics that combines choreography—as the design of bodies in evocative motion—with dramaturgy, which carves questions out of silence and weaves narratives from presence.

The dramaturgy constructed by Soto together with Julio Martín da Fonseca and Carmen Samudio Costina does not adhere to a classical structure, but rather to an emotional architecture that draws upon myth to reconstruct feminist discourse as a journey from within outward, from dream to action. The myth of the Hesperides—those guardians of the garden of immortality—is reclaimed here not as a symbol of seduction, but as an image of resistance, as a body that remembers what has been taken from it throughout history.

In this performance, the female body is not an object but an active subject that rewrites its own narrative through movement. Spanish and Moroccan actresses and dancers move like planets within a shared orbit; their breaths intersect like rhythms of clay and light, while their steps transform into fragments of performative poetry that express an eternal conflict between oppression and liberation, memory and oblivion, isolation and emancipation.

A standout performance comes from Moroccan actress Sanaa Assef, who embodies her role with powerful bodily and vocal authority. In her first monologue, as she performs the act of removing hair from her thigh, we are not witnessing an everyday gesture, but a wound opening onto history: a blade inscribing on the skin the biography of oppression, and a movement that challenges the objectification that turns the body into a site of ownership rather than freedom.

In the bathing scene, water washes away oppression—not the body—and mirrors fragment under the light, giving way to inner illumination, to a freedom that breathes for the first time through dance. Here lies the importance of the choreographic design: it does not appear as ornament, but as the heart of the performance—the alternative language that allows the body to speak what words cannot reach.

At its core, the performance is a confrontation between the body as identity and the world as restriction; and it is within this tension that beauty is born. The music of Abdellah Hassak pulses at the deepest level of the piece, while the scenography by Elisa Sanz and the lighting design by Miguel Ángel Camacho construct a mutable, symbolic, and profoundly expressive space.

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The work reveals an intellectual, aesthetic, and dramatic unity that turns it into a philosophical and poetic experience. Situated within postdramatic theatre, it combines poetry, performance, and abstract dance, revealing a deep understanding of cultural hybridity. This Spanish–Moroccan production is not a circumstantial collaboration, but an experience that demonstrates how identity can multiply without fragmenting.

Selected for the sixth edition of the Baghdad International Theatre Festival, the work marked a milestone in its programming. The Garden of the Hesperides in Baghdad was not merely a performance, but a universal mirror in which humanity contemplates its shared wound and its eternal desire for emancipation.

It is not just a play, but a meditation on existence, memory, and the body that refuses to be erased and insists on becoming the first book of freedom. In an era in which the essence of being is reduced to image, this performance restores philosophical depth to beauty and proclaims that theatre, when it dances, writes the very poetry of life.





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## Review by Mohamed Sami

*Article published on the occasion of the opening of “Tunis: Theatres of the World”*

*Published on March 21, 2025 – Backstage Newspaper / Al Arab*

### **“Tunis: Theatres of the World” opens with a focus on the feminist struggle against restrictions**

An occasion that opens the door to the discussion of contemporary human issues at a time when theatre has become a space of resistance, expression, and freedom.

The Greek myth of the Hesperides from a Moroccan–Spanish perspective. The third edition of “Tunis: Theatres of the World”, organized by the Tunisian National Theatre to celebrate World Theatre Day, continues until March 27. The event—now established as a platform for artistic dialogue and theatrical creativity—opened on Thursday evening with the Moroccan–Spanish co-production *The Garden of the Hesperides*, directed by Spanish director Alicia Soto. This work is part of a Moroccan–Spanish cultural collaboration and had previously been presented in Spain, Portugal, and Morocco before arriving in Tunis as part of the “Tunis: Theatres of the World” program.

**This collaboration highlights that women’s issues transcend geographical borders, affirming that the feminist struggle against social constraints is a shared human experience, not limited to a specific culture or country, but one with global resonance that reflects the reality of women worldwide.** The title of the performance is inspired by the Greek myth of the Hesperides, which tells of nymphs who guarded an orchard of golden apple trees, symbols of protection, femininity, and immortality.

The Hesperides—also known as the “Daughters of the Evening” or the “Guardians of the Apples” in Greek mythology—were nymphs appointed by the goddess Hera to protect the famous Garden of the Golden Apples, located at the western edge of the world and gifted to her by the Earth goddess Gaia on the occasion of her marriage to Zeus. In the performance, this mythical dimension becomes a metaphor reflecting the inner world of women, as the characters move between private and public spaces in search of protection and liberation.

The theatrical work **offered a sensory and contemplative experience that captivated the audience, taking them on a journey through the labyrinths of the feminine self**, where emotions intertwine between pain and joy, restriction and liberation, oppression and resistance. With an innovative artistic vision, director Alicia Soto rewrites this story, turning the “garden” into an inner space for each woman, where dreams and disappointments are preserved while she seeks her own path toward light.

On stage, bodies became a visual language that narrated women’s suffering, while choreographic scenes blended stillness and agitation, embodying the conflict between the desire for liberation and the constraints imposed upon them. The performance presented a comprehensive visual and musical vision, in which scenographic elements—including lighting, musical effects, and costumes—played a fundamental role in highlighting the psychological states of the characters.

The work is framed within a Moroccan–Spanish cultural cooperation, having been presented in Spain, Portugal, and Morocco before arriving in Tunis as part of “Tunis: Theatres of the World”.

Dim lighting expressed restriction and isolation, while brighter lighting symbolized freedom and emancipation. The scenography also made use of colored fabrics and moving lights to enhance the visual dimension of the piece. The music combined Moroccan traditions with modern Western rhythms, giving the performance a global character that brought different cultures together.



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At the thematic level, the presentation highlighted fundamental issues related to women’s experiences across different societies, addressing the concept of individual freedom and the conflict surrounding female identity within society. The work also explores women’s existential journeys across the centuries in search of meaning and existence, free from the constraints that bind them, thus reflecting the idea of the physical and spiritual journey women undertake in their attempt to discover their true identity.

The third edition of “Tunis: Theatres of the World” continues with a rich program that celebrates humanity. On Friday, March 21, the theatrical production *My Dear Grant*, directed by Fadel Jaziri, will be presented, followed on Saturday, March 22, by *Kima Today*, a co-production of the Tunisian National Theatre and the company Art Resistance, written, directed, and scenographically designed by artist Leila Toubal.

At an international level, several performances will be presented, among which *Sugar – Ice Cream for a Nice Crime* stands out on Sunday, March 23, a piece that blends theatre and dance, choreographed by Ivorian choreographer Abdoulaye Trésor Konaté. On Monday, March 24, the Tunisian film *Under Pressure*, directed by Ryan Al-Qayrawani, will be screened, followed on Tuesday, March 25, by *Confession*, directed by Mohamed Ali Ben Saïd.

On Wednesday, March 26, audiences will be able to attend a performance of the Italian production *Prometheus – The Blue Kangaroo*, directed by Simone Mannino and based on a text by political writer Lorenzo Marsili. This production brings together artists from Tunisia and Italy as part of a collaboration between the Bremen Theatre in Palermo and the Hammamet International Festival. The festival will conclude on Thursday, March 27, coinciding with World Theatre Day, with a performance of *The Follower*, directed by Tawfiq al-Jabali and produced by Theatre Theatre.

Founded in 2023, “Tunis: Theatres of the World” has become a significant platform for theatrical creativity in the Arab and Mediterranean worlds, bringing together diverse schools of theatre from Europe and Africa within a shared space of dialogue and innovation. It also represents an opportunity for theatre lovers to discover distinctive performances that engage both mind and conscience, opening the door to discussion of contemporary human issues at a time when theatre has become a space of resistance, expression, and freedom.





## Dance Review — Published by Le Quotidien

*Opening of “Tunis Théâtres du Monde” with The Garden of the Hesperides: a journey through the meanders of the feminine universe - Published March 21, 2025*

The third edition of the event “Tunis Théâtres du Monde” was inaugurated yesterday, Thursday, March 20, at the Le 4ème Art venue in Tunis.

Organized by the Tunisian National Theatre (TNT), the event will run until March 27 in celebration of World Theatre Day. During the opening evening, audiences attended a theatrical performance born from a Moroccan–Spanish co-production entitled *The Garden of the Hesperides*, directed by Spanish director Alicia Soto. Blending theatre, dance, visual narration, and music, the work offered an immersive experience that explores the intimate world of women through an approach that brings together mythology, poetry, and the play of movement.

The title of the performance is inspired by the Greek myth of the Hesperides, nymphs tasked with guarding a garden of golden apple trees—symbols of protection, femininity, and immortality. This mythological reference is treated in the piece as a metaphor for women’s inner worlds, where characters oscillate between private and public spheres in search of protection and emancipation.

The garden of the Hesperides revealed itself as a sensory and introspective odyssey, guiding spectators through the meanders of the feminine soul. Emotions intertwine, shifting between pain and joy, oppression and liberation, submission and resistance, thus offering a renewed reading of the female experience in today’s world.

In Alicia Soto’s interpretation, the garden becomes an intimate sanctuary—a space where each woman holds her hopes, her disappointments, and her quest for light. On stage, bodies express themselves as a visual language, revealing the tensions between the desire for emancipation and the constraints imposed by society. Between shadow and flashes of light, movement and stillness, dance powerfully translates the inner struggles and deep aspirations of the feminine soul.

The choreographies alternate between stillness and agitation, unveiling the profound tensions inhabiting the protagonists. In some scenes, women reclining on colored fabrics appear in perfect harmony with their surroundings, evoking femininity, fertility, and ancestral heritage. By contrast, other tableaux take on a more ritualistic and expressive dimension: arms rise, cross, and intertwine in a collective movement of revolt, embodying a shared struggle against oppression.

### Universal feminist themes

From an artistic standpoint, the performance stands out for its subtle fusion of visual elements and musicality. Lighting—used as a true narrative tool—shapes emotions: dim lights evoke isolation and restriction, while bursts of brightness symbolize the search for freedom and the emergence of hope.

The scenography, conceived with meticulous precision, integrates harmoniously into the universe of the piece. At the end of the performance, the colored fabrics spread across the stage transform into a vibrant metaphor for inner richness and the plurality of female experiences.

From a sonic perspective, the music delicately blends traditional Moroccan melodies with contemporary Western rhythms, building a bridge between cultures and giving the work a universal scope that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries.



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## Dance Review — Published by Le Quotidien

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Beyond its carefully crafted aesthetics, The Garden of the Hesperides addresses crucial issues related to the condition of women across different societies. The piece highlights the tension between individual freedom and oppressive social norms, the identity struggle of women within a world governed by patriarchal structures, as well as the profound symbolic bond that connects women to nature.

The performance also raises essential questions about women’s existential quest throughout history, exploring their initiatory journey toward emancipation and the reclaiming of their identity. The Garden of the Hesperides does not merely bear witness to women’s struggles; it celebrates their resilience, their ability to reinvent themselves, and their capacity to overcome the challenges imposed by society.

### **An artistic project at the crossroads of cultures**

This performance is part of a dynamic of cultural cooperation between Spain and Morocco. Before arriving in Tunis, it was presented in Spain, Portugal, and Morocco, within the framework of international theatre and dance festivals.

This collaboration underscores the universality of women’s issues, emphasizing that the struggle for women’s rights transcends borders and concerns all societies, regardless of cultural, social, or geographical origin.

Through a subtle fusion of myth and modernity, movement and narration, oppression and hope, The Garden of the Hesperides asserts itself as a deeply committed work, carrying a message of emancipation and female solidarity. By capturing the complexity of the female experience in all its richness, the performance reveals a reality in which memory, resistance, and dream intertwine to outline the contours of a freer and more just future.

The event “Tunis Théâtres du Monde” will continue until March 27, marking the celebration of World Theatre Day. It should be noted that all performances take place at 9:30 p.m. at the Le 4ème Art venue, Avenue de Paris, Tunis.





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## Review by Cristina de Lucas

*Performing arts scholar and critic for the London-based magazine Bachtrack.*

*Published in AAEE Magazine, March 2021, pp. 58–60.*

The latest work by choreographer and dancer Alicia Soto, *The Garden of the Hesperides* (2020), premiered last autumn at the Teatro Calderón in Valladolid to a warm reception from the audience. The performance is rich in dance imagery and emotionally intense, with a scenic austerity that highlights the spoken word and the movement of the five women who make up the cast. Initially conceived as a Spanish–Moroccan research project on the situation of women in both societies, it ultimately emerges as a universal reflection on female identity and the heavy burden of hardships and impositions that still shape it today. The subtle narrative thread sustaining the piece (with dramaturgy by Soto herself, Carmen Samudio, and Julio Martín da Fonseca) constructs a story of liberation that alternates rage and serenity, defiance and discouragement, sensuality and anguish. Despite its powerful dramatic charge, the overall tone is not emphatic, plaintive, or violent, but introspective and, at times, even hopeful.

The opening soliloquy of the performance (interpreted by actress Sanae Assif) presents the key ideas of the work: from a past rooted in pain, I rise; [...] on a new, astonishingly clear day, I rise; defiant yet calm, she repeats: “I rise.”

The choreography created by Soto as a vehicle for such profound and evocative reflection includes powerful images and symbols. Raised fists sometimes suggest a desire for revenge, at other times impotence, and at others inner turmoil. Bodies that roll and laboriously slide across the floor evoke feelings of humiliation and physical suffering, but also that unbreakable will to rise again that structures the work.

A recurring motif is water. It frequently resonates in the music, evoking a healing river or spring, and presides over the scene depicting the women’s fraternal bath in a hammam. This is the most luminous moment of the piece, a space in which each woman encounters herself, celebrates her sensuality, and finds comfort and support among her companions. The preceding scene is also highly remarkable. In it, the dramatic expressiveness of the choreography emerges largely from the visual impact produced by the bodies of the five dancers (in addition to Soto and Assif: the elegant Lorenza di Calogero, the forceful Paloma Calderón, and the restrained Ester Lozano). The linked group—joined by hands or by multifaceted embraces—possesses the expressive power of a living, malleable sculpture.

As it advances laboriously across the stage, it evokes the harshness of a difficult journey—one that can be overcome through shared effort. This becomes the prelude to the transformation of its protagonists into new, strong, and free women.

Soto’s sophisticated choreography is extraordinarily supported by the contributions of all her artistic collaborators, many of whom are frequent partners in Hojarasca’s productions. The original music by Abdellah M. Hassak combines moving a cappella singing with techno, ethnic music, and even passages with epic undertones. Miguel Ángel Camacho’s lighting shapes the space as an intimate, deep, and complex environment, rich in nuance. The costumes, designed by Elisa Sanz, blend ethnic and more traditional garments with contemporary urban clothing. The women who rise at the end of the performance do so in a new skin.

*The garden of the Hesperides* celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of Hojarasca, a company founded and rooted in the peripheral region of Castile. Soto returned to her homeland after training first in Barcelona and later in Essen (Germany), at the university school directed by Pina Bausch. Since then, she has maintained her Castilian roots, moving the company’s base from Burgos to Valladolid in 2001. The result of this commitment to working at a distance from national artistic centers and trends is a repertoire of more than thirty productions and numerous collaborations, including many international ones, such as with French writer Michel Houellebecq, the Italian artists Masbedo, and the creators of Post Theater (New York, Berlin, Tokyo).



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Within this trajectory, The Hesperides bring to a close a creative period focused on scenic frugality and thematic emotional intensity. The cycle began with Study 1: Nocturne (2014) and has left in the company's repertoire works such as the duet Regards (Miradas) (2018), as well as the street performances Study 3: Miradas (2016) and Study 2: Silence (2014), the latter awarded at that year's TAC Festival. Hojarasca's artistic cycles tend to conclude and renew themselves every five years. The Hesperides therefore stand at a turning point that coincides with a moment of transition for the company itself.

On the occasion of its silver anniversary, the company can look back with pride on the path already traveled while envisioning the road ahead. Let us also celebrate in these pages the twenty-five years of Hojarasca and raise a toast to twenty-five more years of vibrant creativity.





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## Review by Margarita Muñoz Zielinski

*Dance Critic · La Verdad de Murcia Newspaper, February 3, 2021*

*Pure, unfiltered synesthesia*

The artistic correlation of sounds, colors, scents, flavors, and emotions constitutes the phenomenon known as synesthesia. For Jean D'Udine, any sentimental or intellectual emotion generates a movement of the soul in each person, and the creative artist is the one capable of assembling sounds, lines, colors, or words into a work of art that may—or may not—move the viewer. This reference from Art and Gesture serves to define the sensations that Alicia Soto's choreographic work *The Garden of the Hesperides* is able to evoke in the spectator.

Drawing from mythology, the nymphs—daughters of Atlas—guard the golden apples symbolizing immortality in a privileged place. Here, that garden becomes the inner landscape of the bodies of free women: brave, strong, independent women capable of enduring all kinds of situations. The theme of women's liberation is not new in choreographic works and therefore represents a risky undertaking for Hojarasca Company, one that carefully avoids falling into *déjà vu*.

To achieve this, the creator has surrounded herself with a magnificent team: Lorenza di Calogero, Paloma Calderón, Sanae Assif, Ester Lozano, and Alicia Soto herself as performers, in a work where the music by Abdellah M. Hassak, lighting by Miguel Ángel Camacho, theatrical direction by Julio Martín da Fonseca, dramaturgy by Alicia Soto, Julio Martín da Fonseca, and Carmen Samudio Kostina, and costumes by Elisa Sanz all come together in perfect harmony, resulting in a truly compelling piece.

Different stories unfold across different scenes. Dance-theatre. Physical expression. Contemporary dance. A style composed of so many details that it is difficult to categorize, due to its precise distinction from other works seen so often in other companies. One might say it resembles a collection of short stories that do not necessarily follow a fixed order.

The staging transports us into a personal experience of multiple situations, alternating choral groupings, individual passages, and sculptural formations, all justified in a way that avoids random improvisation while still allowing each dancer interpretative freedom.

Elements of water sound, purification of body and soul, the female body in all its beauty and sensual eruption, choosing the freedom to decide. Moments of suffering and moments of almost hysterical joy—laughter, bursts of laughter, screams, sobs. Women carrying other women like bundles, as seen at the beginning. The softness of parachute-silk fabrics contrasts with the heavy labor of washing. The sea, water as a liberating element.

As a choreographer, Alicia Soto draws extraordinary resources from every part of the female body—even hair, tied up, loose, or shaken and swaying like arms. Costume changes usher in each new scene.

The result is open, allowing each viewer to interpret it as they wish. It is a type of choreography in which, although there is a shared theme, each scene possesses its own independent meaning. The order does not alter the outcome. And if the overall work may at times leave a trace of sadness or suffocation, the ending is an explosion of jubilation, with clouds of colored powder covering the bodies of this splendid blend of Moroccan and Spanish women.



# “The garden of the Hesperides”

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## Review by Carlos Toquero Sandoval

*Review of The garden of the Hesperides – Teatro Calderón de Valladolid*

Here, at the Teatro Calderón in Valladolid, we attend the performance of The Garden of the Hesperides, the premiere of Hojarasca Danza, which brilliantly opens the 2020/21 theatre season. It is a creation and choreography by Alicia Soto. This artist from Burgos studied dance decades ago at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona, later refined her training in Germany with Pina Bausch, before returning to Spain and pleasantly surprising audiences in Valladolid at the International Theatre Showcase.

This latest work is, for me, another welcome surprise and a clear step forward in her career. It is the result of three workshops that this choreographer carried out in Lisbon, her current place of residence, as well as in Morocco and Valladolid. A work created with women, as it is a reflection on women of any condition and ethnicity, from any part of the world.

It speaks of woman and her desire to feel life; of the woman who, after the daily struggle, enters the garden of the Hesperides carrying a bundle on her back—with all those tasks, fears, burdens, and daily desires—to unload them and share them with other women, to relax, dream, and laugh (the scene with the buckets of water is particularly effective). But this daily act, this island of the Hesperides—where the three daughters of Atlas and Hesperus once dwelled, where the tree of the golden apples existed—that island is, in fact, inside every woman, and she can and must evoke it in order to feel, to fully enjoy life.

The actress-dancers Lorenza Di Calogero, Paloma Calderón, Sanae Assif, Ester Lozano, and Alicia Soto are excellent. The music by Abdellah Hassak is compelling, the lighting by Miguel Ángel Camacho is original, and the theatrical direction by Julio Martín da Fonseca is strong.







**A garden brought to life thanks to the outstanding work of a top-level artistic team**, including Alicia Soto herself—creator, choreographer, dramaturg, and performer; Julio Martín da Fonseca, responsible for the theatrical direction; the renowned Elisa Sanz, set and costume designer, recipient of eight Max Awards—and winner of an additional one in 2020—who designed all the costumes for the production; and the distinguished designer Miguel Ángel Camacho, also the recipient of several Max Awards.

*Paloma Calderón, dancer nominated for Best Female Performer at the 2020 Max Awards; Lorenza di Calogero, winner of the Best Dancer Award in 2019 at the Performing Arts Awards of the Valencian Regional Government.*