

Global Design Forum İstanbul Concludes Inaugural Edition

*Four days of thought-provoking dialogue, citywide installations
and a framework for future editions*



Marina Tabassum & Melek Zeynep Bulut, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

- The inaugural edition of Global Design Forum İstanbul took place 13 - 16 May 2026.
- Presented in collaboration with strategic creative platform People Places Ideas (PPI), it spanned the Forum as well as citywide programming
- Melek Zeynep Bulut, founder of PPI, serves as the Artistic Director of Global Design Forum İstanbul
- The Forum offered two days of curated keynotes, panels and in-conversations, under the curatorial theme *Worlds in Contact* by Forum Content Advisor, Beatrice Galilee
- The four-day event convened over 30 leading international voices from the world of architecture and design

The inaugural edition of Global Design Forum İstanbul (GDFİ) has concluded, bringing four days of programming to a close and establishing the city as a significant meeting point for international design dialogue. Presented in collaboration with People Places Ideas (PPI) and

under the artistic direction of Melek Zeynep Bulut, the Forum expanded Co-Founder and Chairman Ben Evans' London Design Festival's flagship platform for global discourse to İstanbul for the first time, combining talks, performances, installations and digital storytelling across the city and within the Topkapı Palace complex.

Developed by Forum Content Advisor Beatrice Galilee around the theme *Worlds in Contact*, the two-day talks programme examined how design responds when material, political and bodily worlds collide. Across keynote talks, panel discussions and in-conversations, the programme brought together international and local voices to examine sustainability, technology, authorship, identity, craft, institutional power and the role of public space in a changing world. The core talks programme took place at Hagia Irene, within the Topkapı Palace complex, where *The Red Room* by NUN Architecture, Celâleddin Çelik and People Places Ideas transformed the historic atrium into a temporary forum setting. Formed from layers of translucent red tulle, the installation created a soft, immersive and light-filled environment that altered the atmosphere of the space, bringing together the monument's enduring stone fabric with a more intimate and sensory contemporary intervention.

Beyond the talks programme, Global Design Forum İstanbul activated the city through an ambitious series of temporary public installations developed under the placemaking framework *Praise of Transience* by Melek Zeynep Bulut. Installed across Hagia Irene within the Topkapı Palace complex, the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts on Sultanahmet Square and the Bosphorus-facing grounds of Kabataş High School, works by Waugh Thistleton Architects and National Timber Association; NUN Architecture, Celâleddin Çelik & People Places Ideas; Salon Architects by Alper Derinboğaz along with his students; YAKIN Kolektif and Marmara University students; Ali Derya Dostoğlu & Uğur Özer alongside İstanbul Kültür University students; Candaş Şişman; and Tanrı Misafiri explored architecture as something temporal, sensory and deeply connected to the body. Rather than treating permanence as architecture's ultimate ambition, the installations proposed transience, participation and transformation as equally meaningful spatial conditions

At the centre of the Forum's public and editorial identity was the idea that İstanbul is not simply hosting design discourse, but helping shape it. Melek Zeynep Bulut has described the Forum as a civic-scale platform designed to work through question, difference and site-specificity, while Ben Evans has framed the inaugural İstanbul edition as a new chapter in a long-term international dialogue about design and culture.

Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, Mr. Mehmet Nuri Ersoy expressed *"Global Design Forum İstanbul demonstrates how design can serve as a bridge between heritage and the future, local identity and international collaboration. As creative economies continue to shape the future of cities and cultural diplomacy worldwide, this forum reinforces İstanbul's growing role as a global centre for culture, architecture and contemporary creative thinking."*

“Global Design Forum İstanbul has been a very special project that we have worked on with great care over many months, thoughtfully shaping its contextual framework, global positioning, and overall strategy. I’m incredibly happy to see the Forum come to life in such a strong and positive way. İstanbul is a city with a powerful cultural heritage, one that knows very clearly what it wants, and what it does not want. Seeing the city embrace the Forum with such strong interest has been truly inspiring. The discussions, exhibitions, and the focal points we highlighted across the city were brought to life through a well-considered approach, and we are very happy to have created an inspiring context and platform for everyone involved.” – Melek Zeynep Bulut, Founder of PPI & Global Design Forum İstanbul Artistic Director

“The Global Design Forum is designed to stimulate debate, dialogue and exchange. In İstanbul for the first time it offered new opportunities for exploration not simply through the prism of east and west but local and international, contemporary and historic, and crucially problems and solutions. I believe that design is everything as is İstanbul, a city of wonders. It was a triumph being here.” - Ben Evans, London Design Festival & Global Design Forum Co-Founder and Chairman

“Worlds in Contact” revealed just how many divergent, yet deeply interconnected, ways there are to see and work with the world today. Speakers travelled to be with us in İstanbul from contexts that ranged from the museums and art being forged in the desert of Doha to Thailand’s elephant sanctuaries, from Uzbekistan’s aral sea to major new institutions in Shenzhen. We saw a vision for a city of 8 billion people, as well as hearing from leaders on placemaking in İstanbul, London, Lisbon and Jeddah today. We watched the thoughtful, intertwined, community, art, ecological and pedagogical practices taking place in Athens, Dhaka, Mexico and Accra. It was an extraordinary few days of exchange and generosity, and I’m deeply grateful to everyone involved who made it possible.” - Beatrice Galilee, Global Design Forum İstanbul Forum Content Advisor

“The Global Design Forum İstanbul has emerged as a landmark international convergence, crowning the city’s multi-layered cultural tapestry with a profound design consciousness. İstanbul is inherently suited to play host to the dialogues and encounters that shape the trajectory of creative industries. Within this expansive vision, we must continuously bridge our manufacturing prowess and technical ingenuity with design, while seamlessly projecting these endeavors onto our international stakeholders.” – Celâleddin Çelik, Global Design Forum İstanbul Architectural Advisor

DAY 1 HIGHLIGHTS

The first session, *Worlds in Contact*, brought together Fernando Laposse, Mireia Luzárraga, James Bridle, Boonserm Premthada and Defne Koz in a fast-moving series of exchanges

that established the Forum's central proposition: design as a practice that shares authorship with ecosystems, communities and living systems. The session brought together perspectives from architecture, design, writing and landscape practice across Türkiye, Thailand, Mexico and beyond, with each speaker contributing a distinct lens on how design can move beyond objects, brands and buildings toward something more porous and relational.

"We should diversify who we are designing for; not all humans are urban humans. I think design innovation should propose radically new production systems that are fair, collaborative and non-extractive." – Fernando Laposse, Designer



Worlds in Contact: Fernando Laposse, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

One of the defining conversations of the Forum followed in *Design of Our Time – Material Worlds*, moderated by Celâleddin Çelik, where Tom Dixon CBE and Lina Ghotmeh reflected on architecture and design through radically different yet complementary perspectives. Dixon traced four decades of designing through industrial and cultural transformation, while Ghotmeh articulated a deeply material and place-sensitive approach to architecture grounded in memory, sustainability and craft. Together, the conversation captured one of the Forum's recurring concerns: how contemporary practice can remain human, tactile and historically conscious amid accelerating global change in the age of artificial intelligence.



In Conversation: Design of Our Time – Material Worlds: Tom Dixon & Lina Ghotmeh, Moderated by Celâleddin Çelik, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Mark Cocksedge

The programme repeatedly moved beyond conventional conference formats into performative and immersive territory. Architect and filmmaker Liam Young presented *Planet City* – a speculative cinematic work imagining every human being living within a single hyper-dense metropolis while the rest of the Earth is rewilded – accompanied by a live performance from Forest Swords. Compressing questions of migration, climate and resource distribution into a collective sensory experience, the work exemplified the Forum's commitment to experimentation across disciplines and media.



Planet City: Liam Young. Performed by Forest Swords, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

Questions of institutional power, cultural authorship and public responsibility shaped several major discussions throughout the programme. In *Designing Design Worlds*, figures including Dominique Petit-Frère, Beatrice Leanza, Justine Simons OBE and Sheikha Reem Al-Thani examined how design is framed, circulated and legitimised across museums, biennales and cultural institutions, interrogating the structures that determine what enters the global cultural canon and what remains excluded.

“Worlds in Contact perfectly captures the critical role of design in shaping the spaces, rituals and narratives of collective life, and the growing need for moments like the Global Design Forum to make the encounter of resonant ideas and experiences possible.” – Beatrice Leanza, Curator

These questions continued in *The Museum Has Left the Building*, where Alper Derinboğaz, Beral Madra, Ömer Selçuk Baz, Guta Moura Guedes and Anastasia Sinitsyna challenged traditional institutional models and argued for museums rooted in ecology, participation

and public space rather than monumentality or hierarchy. Across the discussion, the museum emerged not as a static container for culture, but as a social and environmental actor embedded within everyday life.

“Istanbul hosted a very significant forum which found an active and conscious audience in Istanbul. Important figures from five continents presented their thoughts, knowledge, experiences, and criticisms in the Topkapi Palace Complex, a venue that holds the deepest historical and cultural significance in Istanbul. The legacy of this event now presents an important opportunity for younger generations.” – Beral Madra, Art & Culture Advisor, Global Design Forum Istanbul; Curator & Art Critic, BM Contemporary Art Centre Archive



Designing Design Worlds: Dominique Petit-Frère, Beatrice Leanza, Justine Simons OBE, Sheikha Reem Al-Thani, Moderator Ben Evans CBE, Global Design Forum Istanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

The first day concluded with a keynote town hall by Hussein Chalayan MBE, one of the most influential figures working across fashion, art and technology. In conversation with journalist Caroline Roux, Chalayan reflected on a practice built around migration, identity, displacement and transformation, discussing how clothing and the body can operate simultaneously as political, emotional and architectural forms. His keynote reinforced the Forum’s broader ambition to dissolve disciplinary boundaries and foreground design as a mode of critical inquiry.

“Istanbul is my favourite city in the world and Turkish is for me the language of emotions.” – Hussein Chalayan, Designer & Artist



Keynote: Hussein Chalayan, moderated by Caroline Roux, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

DAY 2 HIGHLIGHTS

Opening the second day, Prem Krishnamurthy's meditative performance *Zero to One* introduced a quieter and more introspective atmosphere before the Forum turned towards systems of intelligence, computation and automation in *Worlds in Code*. Bringing together Melike Altınışık, Roland Lamb, Ahmad Angawi, Suhair Khan and Mehmet Mehmetlioğlu, the session explored how machine learning, computational infrastructures and invisible digital systems are reshaping contemporary life. Rather than asking whether AI will transform design, the discussion questioned who will ultimately shape the political, ethical and economic conditions embedded within these technologies.

"It was thrilling to share my meditation Zero to One at this new event, which showcased global design changemakers who are pushing at the boundaries of their respective fields. Hopefully this conference will become a standard stop for designers looking for inspiration on how to transform our world." – Prem Krishnamurthy, Founder & Director, Department of Transformation



Nothing New Under The Sun, Olaf Grawert, Ma Yansong, Andrew Waugh, Han Tmertekin, Moderator Prof. Dr. Lale zgenel, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Mark Cocksedge

Themes of sustainability and material responsibility emerged forcefully in *Nothing New Under the Sun*, where Olaf Grawert, Ma Yansong, Andrew Waugh and Han Tmertekin argued that the most radical design act today may not be creating something new, but learning how to work intelligently with what already exists. Through discussions of adaptive reuse, anti-demolition architecture and industrial ethics, the session challenged the culture of endless production that continues to dominate both architecture and design industries globally.



In Conversation: Identity & Design, with Professor Lesley Lokko OBE and Beatrice Galilee, introduced by Melek Zeynep Bulut, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Mark Cocksedge

A major highlight of the Forum was the conversation between Professor Lesley Lokko OBE and Beatrice Galilee. One of the most important voices in architecture today, Lokko addressed the colonial structures embedded within architectural education and practice, arguing for a more inclusive and critically self-aware discipline capable of confronting the histories and inequalities it has long ignored. The conversation resonated strongly throughout the wider programme, particularly in its insistence that architecture and design cannot be separated from questions of race, power, geography and representation.

"Always inspiring to be in İstanbul but this visit was exceptional. In a period of increasing gloom and anxiety, to be in the midst of a future-facing, forward-thinking collective will sustain me for months to come." – Professor Lesley Lokko, OBE, CEO & Founder of the African Futures Institute



Worlds in Hands with Samer Yamani, Serap Ekizler Sönmez and Selva Gürdoğan, Moderator Guta Moura Guedes, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

Material intelligence and craft traditions became central in *Worlds in Hands*, featuring Samer Yamani, Serap Ekizler Sönmez and Selva Gürdoğan. Moving deliberately against the speed and abstraction of digital culture, the session foregrounded making as a form of thinking and cultural resistance. Through discussions spanning Palestinian glassmaking, archaeological preservation and collaborative authorship, speakers argued for the continuing political and emotional importance of tactile knowledge in an increasingly immaterial world.

“One of the most striking aspects of the forum was the sense of design consciousness that could be felt in even the smallest details of the organisation. The experience that emerged almost felt like a unique intellectual space established beyond the ordinary rhythm of daily life.” – Serap Ekizler Sönmez, Researcher & Academic, FSM Wakf University

The Forum’s ecological concerns culminated in *Water Buffalo and Other Design Stories*, where Cooking Sections and Jan Boelen examined food systems as one of the most consequential design infrastructures shaping contemporary life. Expanding the conversation beyond aesthetics into agriculture, extraction, climate and labour, the session proposed food as a deeply political and environmental condition rather than a lifestyle category. A tasting session of water buffalo yoghurt further blurred the boundaries between discussion, research and embodied experience.

“Global Design Forum İstanbul was a new place where east and west met. A dynamic platform where great minds and bold ideas met but moreover new friendships were made beyond borders and disciplines.” – Jan Boelen, Curator & Artistic Director | Atelier LUMA



Marina Tabassum & Melek Zeynep Bulut, Global Design Forum İstanbul 2026 | Courtesy of People Places Ideas & Global Design Forum | Photo Ahmet Akif Emre

The inaugural edition concluded with a keynote by Bangladeshi architect Marina Tabassum, whose work in the climate-vulnerable Bengal delta has become internationally recognised for its social intelligence and environmental sensitivity. Reflecting on architecture’s responsibility to place, climate and survival, Tabassum posed the question that ultimately framed the entire Forum: “What are we actually designing for?”

A significant legacy initiative announced during the Forum was *İstanbular: Creative Archive*, a dynamic digital platform developed under the *storytelling* principle of Melek Zeynep Bulut’s artistic vision. Bringing together visual, editorial and audio contributions, key creative figures, artworks and locations across the city, the archive extends the Forum beyond the event itself and positions İstanbul as an evolving repository of design knowledge, cultural memory and contemporary creative production.

Extending beyond the Forum itself, *İstanbular* will serve as a living creative archive dedicated to the people, places, and practices shaping İstanbul’s cultural identity. Conceived as a digital network, *İstanbular* connects global audiences with the city’s layered heritage through curated stories spanning art, architecture, craftsmanship, and contemporary urban life. From the enduring bookbinding traditions preserved at Barın Han

– the former studio of master calligrapher Emin Barın – to the striking contemporary structure sheltering the ancient mosaics of the Zeytinburnu Mosaic Museum, *İstanbul* reveals the city as a continuous dialogue between past and present. The project also highlights landmarks such as the recently restored Zeyrek Çinili Hamam, where a 16th-century Mimar Sinan bathhouse now hosts a museum and contemporary art programme within a Byzantine cistern, alongside initiatives like *Şehrin Panoları*, an online archive documenting İstanbul's distinctive vernacular signboards. Together, these stories form an evolving portrait of İstanbul's creative legacy and its enduring capacity for reinvention.

Yedikule Fortress Garden Competition

In the coming weeks, People People Ideas and Global Design Forum İstanbul will announce details of an international design competition for a contemporary garden and lighting intervention: the *Yedikule Fortress Garden Competition*. The initiative, developed under the programme's *rethinking* principle, is a longer-term commitment to future-facing urban and cultural transformation in the city.

For more information, interview and feature opportunities, please contact :

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Notes to Editors

- Dates: 13-16 May 2026
- [Press Kit](#)
- [Global Design Forum Istanbul sessions](#)
- Global Design Forum, London Design Festival's flagship platform for global design discourse, is presented in collaboration with People Places Ideas (PPI) with Artistic Direction from Melek Zeynep Bulut.
- <https://londondesignfestival.com/gdf-istanbul> | [@l_d_f_official](#)
- Artistic Direction: Melek Zeynep Bulut
- Forum Content Advisor: Beatrice Galilee
- Beral Madra: Art & Culture Advisor
- Celâleddin Çelik: Architectural Advisor
- About Global Design Forum
Global Design Forum is a curated thought leadership programme, celebrating design and the minds shaping its future. Global Design Forum İstanbul is launching

a new programme of talks, installations and citywide experiences taking place 13–16 May 2026 in İstanbul, Türkiye. Organised in collaboration with People Places Ideas (PPI), this is a new design platform where global perspectives and İstanbul's living cultural landscape meet. The Forum brings global voices into conversation with local contexts, traditions and futures - creating an innovative space for design, culture and ideas in one of the world's most layered cities.

- **About People Places Ideas**

People Places Ideas is a creative industries platform based in İstanbul, London and Doha. PPI designs resonance and impact. It generates Creative Strategy, Curation, Research and Art & Design & Culture Policies. In this context, it positions itself as an interdisciplinary new ecosystem of creativity, bringing together all stakeholders and creating new intellectual encounters.

- Lead Partner Türk Telekom
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- With the Support of Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, İstanbul Governorship, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA)
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