

INSTITUTE
OF
CONTEMPORARY
ARTS
SINGAPORE

PRESENTS

LOST
TO
THE
FUTURE

CONTEMPORARY ART FROM CENTRAL ASIA

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Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore presents
Lost to the Future: Contemporary Art from Central Asia
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LOST TO THE FUTURE

: CONTEMPORARY ART FROM CENTRAL ASIA

DR. CHARLES MEREWETHER

Presented at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, *'Lost to the Future: Contemporary Art from Central Asia'* draws upon contemporary art in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. These three countries form a part of Central Asia and are in different states of re-formation following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. The exhibition is shaped in part as a response to the organizing concept of the fourth Singapore Biennale, *'If The World Changed'*. In a certain sense, *'Lost to the Future'* anticipates a 'changed world' as a proposition. This anticipation is based on a recognition of the need, if not imperative, for change but with the knowledge of an uncertain outcome.

Almost a quarter-century has passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. This passing has resulted in disentangling the past from today and exploring the possibility of new beginnings. Gone are the days and visions of the early Soviet era, symbolized by **Alexander Ugay's** video work of some six years ago titled *'Bastion'* (2007). The short video re-presents the Constructivist tower named 'Monument to the Third International' envisaged by the Russian artist and architect Vladimir Tatlin in 1920. One of the pioneering artists of the early Soviet Era, Tatlin designed the tower to rise about 400 meters high, housing a conference and administrative hub, a broadcast center, and workers' library. Its structures were designed to rotate according to year, month and day, and would be built using industrial materials such as iron, glass and steel. The tower was never realized as, within a few years from the time of its design, all had changed and the Soviet Union fell under the repressive and destructive dictatorship of Stalin. Ugay's rendering of this image in *'Bastion'* is a reminder of what never was. It appears dreamlike, as if floating across the view of a group of spectators.

'Lost to the Future' exhibits the work of twelve artists and artist groups covering installation, sculpture, film and video, photography and painting. The concept of the exhibition is conceived to suggest how different legacies have grown in this past quarter century, a legacy still informing if not shaping the present and immediate future. The artists represent a post-Soviet generation for whom national identity is of ongoing and troubling concern. We may ask: What is their distinct identity? Is it being defined by the individual, or by national interests whereby identity is determined by governments rather than people themselves?

In Uzbekistan, the issue of identity remains determined by a government whose dictatorial rule can be symbolized by monuments of heroes and 'fathers' of communism. For other countries, identity is a multi-layered shifting paradigm of different ethnicities and gender. In Kazakhstan, many artists address the haunting vestiges of the Soviet era alongside the increasing disparity between the traditional life of the steppes and the rapid growth of city centers, especially in Almaty and Astana. Artists in Kyrgyzstan have referred back to the revolutions that have taken place in 2005 and again in 2010. With the revolution came an optimism that the county would find its own path, its own development, and not be a state serving the Soviet Union or an even worse surrogate.

A series of work by **Evgeny Boikov**, titled *'Warriors of Manas'* (2012), recently addressed the presence of the US military base in Kyrgyzstan, of which existence has been justified by the former Soviet presence in the region. The name 'Manas' refers to a heroic epic of the Kyrgyz people and Boikov's series reflects a contemporary reading of the epic. While virtually obsolete, the US military base still remains a sign of its former self but, nonetheless, a lasting shadow. Additionally, Boikov's principal work *'Kinematics of Protest'* (2012) captures and transforms the moment of The Tulip Revolution of 2005 and uprising of 2010. In both the first and fourth series of the project, Boikov approaches the subject as one that captures the dynamism of a people, an investigation of the aesthetics of revolt and violence. The work is reminiscent of the Italian Futurists in the early twentieth century,

when the country was going through a period of upheaval and change. In utilizing industrial techniques in printing, Boikov tacitly acknowledges the surpassing of the individual or artisanal approach to celebrate the age of mass culture.

The idea of a people, of the humanity of ordinary people regardless of their class or status, profoundly affected the culture of Kyrgyzstan after their revolution of 2005. The notion of this possibility—of a potentiality of such a change—animated people again. This question led the group of artists within **Workshop of Critical Animation of STAB (School of Theory and Activism—Bishkek)** to create projects, such as *'Which side are you on'* (2013), which seek to engage with a broader local Kyrgyzstani audience.

We may refer too to the photographic practice of **Shailo Djekshenbaev** in two of his photo series *'Mental Health'* (2007) and *'The Bride from the South'* (1980), both of which powerfully convey the tragedy of individual lives, of lives gone wrong or the fates of those forgotten. Through the idea of a series, he creates a virtual document that tells the story of particular lives. In a third group of photographs, Djekshenbaev captures the world around him. The photographs are more abstract, and less clear or 'unremarkable' in their subject. Located within an obscure, indeterminate space, there is a sense of 'lack' or an ambiguity that suggests uncertainty if not imminent change.

Two aspects of a country in the moment of change are also captured in *'A New Silk Road'* (2006) and *'Brooklyn Bridge'* (2010) by **Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev**. These artists witnessed the transformation of their country from the rise of the export trade using ancient transportation routes and the migration of people beyond their country to live elsewhere. Together, these works represent two points of departure towards new beginnings. First, the advent of a burgeoning economy that is based on the modernization of the Silk Road as the new hub of transnational exchange between China, Russia and the West; and secondly, the movement of people Westwards beyond their country, in the hope of a better life elsewhere.

The independence of Uzbekistan from the Soviet Union did not bring radical change as was inaugurated in other neighboring countries, however fragile that independence may have been. Rather, in the years that followed the fall of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan witnessed the emergence of another repressive state-controlled country. Artistic practice was corralled into the service of a centralized nation-state and the possibility of a freedom of expression for artists remained unrealized. In short, not all change brought with it an opening up for the betterment of peoples. The work of Uzbeki artist **Vyacheslav Akhunov** reflects on the present in Uzbekistan as one that is still guided by the dead weight of its communist leaders. In particular, in *'USSR – Our Motherland'* (2013) and *'Monument to the Match'* (2011), Akhunov constructs a monumental installation composed of the letters USSR. The viewer may walk through a small door, reminiscent of a yurt, to see 'Lenin's plans for monumental propaganda' (1981). In the center, there is a high-rise monument made of matchboxes. It stands as a mock celebration of the grandiose vision of communism, with photographs of its leaders and a myriad of commemorative images. It is a matchbox monument that offers little solace except a momentary fire that burns out, leaving nothing but the ashes of dead wood.

In Kazakhstan, while the six selected artists represent different generations, they overlap in their engagement with the enduring presence of the steppes and legacy of the Soviet era. The black humour of Akhunov is complemented by the work of **Erbossyn Meldibekov** whose installation *'Communism Peak'* (2009) mocks the ideology and utopian visions of communist rule. The work was inspired by the renaming of the central peak in the Pamir mountains over six times, including being renamed 'Peak of Communism' after Stalin's death. The beautiful mountain ranges that lie across the whole region are represented by overturned aluminum tubs and basins that have been moulded, damaged and crushed. The photographic series *'Family Album'* (2007–09) show people standing in front of statues of heroic leaders and then again years later. In between years, the statues have disappeared, been torn down and replaced by other monuments. The photographs constitute an ironic reflection of Soviet or communist power, alongside portraits of people who have lived, died or survived and outlived this era.

The twenty-five years since the fall of the Soviet regime have been filled with chaotic yet vital change. The idea of change was an open question—all seemed possible. In this period of openness, the old and the new were thrown together like a collage, an assemblage of materials, different sense of times, customs, beliefs and ways of life. The work of **Georgy Tryakin-Bukharov** reflects this spirit. The work shows a creative

ingenuity to piece things together, to make something new out of the old as in 'Requiem' (1987), 'Sleeping Knight' (2000), 'Walk' (2001), 'Balance' (2013) and the monumental 'Mustang' (2003). The artist's work serves as a counterpoint to that of Akhunov. For Tryakin-Bukharov, the present becomes a kind of living junkyard, constituted by virtue of treating all things equal, playfully teasing and mocking the aspirations of the present.

The uncertainty of change and the future underscores the work of **Askhat Akhmediyarov**. His photographs and performative-based practice capture the fantasy of change, caught between the disappearing life of the steppes and dreams of the city. This has led to the migration of people, especially youths, who seek a way of life that appears to be offered by the city. This condition of being 'in-between' is shown in 'Nomad' (2012) and 'In love with the Track' (2013). In these works, Akhmediyarov ironically imagines the world of those who dream or aspire to live in the city centers, imagining a better life there—one that is less traditional and more modern. The installation 'Turn: Turk' (2008) by **Katya Nikonorova** presents traditional carpets that are bundled up together in a manner that recalls the architectural structure of a traditional dwelling in the region. Installed in the middle of a space, their isolation makes them appear bereft of use or cultural context, as if outside their place of origin; they become nothing more than a decorative sign.

Both **Saodat Ismailova** and **Almagul Menlibayeva** show us the other side of the urban dream. 'Steppes' not only refers to a region but, tacitly, to a way of life, a people and culture who were born into traditional nomadic life or small towns that are part of the hinterland of Kazakhstan. It is a world still invested in customs and beliefs, a world where mythology comes out of the strange admixture of ethnicities and a legacy of histories and beliefs of its people.

The video installation 'Zukhra' (2013) by Saodat Ismailova explores the role of women in contemporary Central Asia where tradition still plays a major role in defining one's position in society. Ismailova's work engages with a poetic discourse that has its origins in a personal memory of her grandmother. Ismailova writes:

"As a child, I was awakened by my grandmother every dawn in winter to see the last star in the sky: Zukhra–Venus. According to the legend there was a young girl that mysteriously disappeared and reappeared in the sky as a star. There is a belief that one can ask for a wish when seeing this star; this will be granted by Zukhra." (Artist's website)

In this manner, Ismailova draws upon a mythical heritage that persists throughout contemporary Central Asia. Through the installation, the viewer is encouraged to actively immerse herself in an experience—that of a woman in an idle state remembering her life, passively existing in a moment of suspension. Following this, Ismailova has just made a new film 'Gulchehra' (2013). It is a melancholic reflection depicting a seventeen-year-old girl looking at herself in a mirror and dreaming of love and, on an accompanying screen, the futile search for her following her unexplainable disappearance. Based on a true incident, Saodat notes:

"The film tells briefly the story of Gulchehra who disappeared in 1992 in the Southern city of Termez in Uzbekistan. She never came back from a walk she took to collect 'rivaj'—a spring plant that grows for a very short period in the high mountains. It is believed that if you eat rivaj hand-picked by yourself you'll be granted happiness with your beloved one. Before she disappeared, Gulchehra complained she was hearing some strange voices that were following her when she was alone. The family and local community spent several weeks searching for Gulchehra in the high mountains, forest, hills, caves, and waterfalls, of the region, but the search didn't bring any results, only a lock of Gulchehra's long hair was found in a cave called 'Parite-shik' known as 'The cave of female ghosts.'" (Artist's website)

In distinction to the work of Ismailova, Menlibayeva refers to her work as a 'nomadic aesthetic'. This is expressed in recent video works such as 'Butterflies of Aisha Bibi' (2010) and 'Transoxiana Dreams' (2011). In the earlier of these two works, Menlibayeva recounts an ancient love story of the Sufi poet's daughter Aisha Bibi and Karakhan, and



[1]



[2]

[1] Saodat Ismailova, 'Gulchehra', still from video, 2013

[2] Almagul Menlibayeva, video still from 'Kurchatov 22', five-channel HD video projection, 5.1 surround sound, colour, 26 mins, 2012 © Almagul Menlibayeva, Courtesy of American-Eurasian Art Advisors LLC, USA

visually transformed it into a modern day drama of unfulfilled longing and unconditional love, with reference to both her own nomadic heritage and the Shamanistic traditions of the cultures of Central Asia. 'Transoxiana Dreams' (2011) tells the tale of a young fisherman's daughter who observes the dramatic changes to the landscape of the Aral region and its population. A former homeland of the nomadic tribes of Persia and Turan who moved the banks of the Oxus River, it remained an important trade region along the Northern Silk Road with flourishing civilizations and fertile plains for many centuries spreading across southwestern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In the 1960s, the Soviets began to drain the sea for irrigation, and both commercial and cultural interests were abandoned. Today, Transoxiana lies bare and stripped with discarded fishing fleets. In the film, which is part documentary and part fictional, the girl's father searches for the remaining sea and new fishing grounds, while encountering strange and seductive four-legged female creatures, feared for their savage and magical powers. These figures allude to images of the Greek mythological figure of the Centaur, and a time when the ancient Greeks first encountered the nomads of the Transoxianian steppes.

Menlibayeva recently staged and shot a multi-channel work of communities that are still living with the legacy of sixty years of Soviet occupation. Entitled 'Kurchatov 22' (2012), she commented:

"I use specific ways of expression in modern and contemporary art as a vehicle to investigate my personal archaic atavism as a certain mystical anthropomorphism. In other words, I explore the nature of a specific Egregore, a shared cultural psychic experience, which manifests itself as a specific thought-form among the people(s) of the ancient, arid and dusty steppes between the Caspian Sea, Baikonur and Altai in today's Kazakhstan. In the Russian language, Archaic Atavism is personalized as a being, which points to and creates a different meaning. We are not just speaking about an idea or archaic element in the collective subconscious of a people, but about the embodiment of our archaic atavism which becomes an active entity, just like a creature itself. Our archaic atavism is not just internalized, but also externalized. It is as if he has been awakened by the post-Soviet experience of the indigenous Kazakh people, who are becoming their own after 80 years of Soviet domination and cultural genocide." (Artist's website)

'*Lost to the Future*' will remain a lasting question, perhaps an unanswered one. Contemporary art in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan reveal the differences between these three former Soviet Republics, perhaps differences that will endure. The world did change in 1989 but, perhaps not enough or never enough. No one was to know what was to come for some. These new beginnings presented a risk worth taking, however much an experiment. Spurred by ideas for new beginnings, their worlds did change, but did those changes fulfill the dreams and needs of all its people? Did it bring a democracy to people lives? For some it brought greater rights, greater participation in the social process of their representation, better wages and a better standard of living. But for those living outside of the city centers, it did not change for the better. We are reminded of those who fell under new dictatorships, those who were left behind, disappeared or forgotten, and others who did not appear to fit the outline of these new beginnings. What of them? This project belongs to an ongoing portrait of this long interregnum, an interval beyond the legacy of the past and the advent of the future. Waiting.

Dr. Charles Merewether is an art historian, writer and curator. He was director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore from 2010 to 2013. Born in Edinburgh with a Russian mother from St. Petersburg, he was educated in Australia where he received his BA in Literature and doctorate in Art History at the University of Sydney. Between 2007-8 he was Deputy Director of the Cultural District, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi and Artistic Director and Curator of the Biennale of Sydney (2004-2006). Merewether has taught at the University of Sydney, Universidad Autonoma in Barcelona, and University of Southern California. His recent book publications include newly published monograph '*After Memory: The Art of Milenko Prvacki, 40 Years*' (2013), '*ISSUE: Land*' (2012), a co-edited volume of essays '*After the Event*' by Manchester University Press (2010), '*Under Construction: Ai Weiwei*' (2008), '*Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950-1970*' (2007) and '*The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*' by Whitechapel Gallery (2006).

WHERE WE ARE? YULIYA SOROKINA

On the far side of Almaty city (the former capital of Kazakhstan) near the railway station, you can find yourself in the strange studio of the artist **Georgy Tryakin-Bukharov**. In that space, one can get lost among different objects which look like garbage or goods from a flea-market: iron details, wires, wooden pads, details of unknown mechanisms, giant pinions, rusty letters of neon signs, antique furniture, enamelware, cobblestones, pieces of felt, decrepit garden tools, and more. The artist will welcome you to the yard, show you his workshops, his objects and explain that here is his work '*Mustang*' (2003), made from iron and wooden details of used domestic items and there is Nefertiti – a portrait of the Egyptian Queen made from rifle butt-stocks with protruding teats as ammunition. Overlooking this artistic 'landshaft', well-known masterpieces that were created by re-using found objects and the ready-made come to mind.

The artistic practice of Tryakin-Bukharov is not simply a replication of practices that employ the readymade, but is one that is a reflection of a local Kazakhstani artist's ideas of the values of art. Moreover, Tryakin-Bukharov is also searching for a way to continue his artistic practice in a manner that will be appropriate to his time and to his own existence as an unpaid and unemployed worker of the cognitive labor-market.

The idea of being a key player within the international artistic community began to gain momentum at the beginning of 1990s when Kazakhstan as well as all other Central Asian Post-Soviet Republics gained independence and started to develop their own states. Artists such as Rustam Khalphin and Sergei Maslov are examples of protagonists of such an international approach. Both artists formed the direction of further development of Kazakhstani contemporary art and could be seen as the 'fathers' of the local art scene. They locally championed the importance of a strategy in the approach of artists towards the contemporary art scene. Khalphin developed an innovative idea for a hybrid of Modernistic and Nomadic approaches to art-making. Maslov, on the other hand, encouraged postmodern values, seeking to inculcate ideas within a 'postcolonial' Kazakhstan that was based nevertheless on a Russian-speaking textual culture.

The main artists of the contemporary art community in Kazakhstan, and later in other countries of Central Asia, developed their artistic career in a strategic way, constructing their own modus operandi. One can see this in a video work by one of the most well-known and outstanding female artists – **Almagul Menlibayeva**. Her attractive artistic approach opens to international audiences an artificial world of a new mythology. This approach might be an example of the strategy, which is strongly connected with national identification and artistic positioning in a Neo-orientalist way. Obviously this manner of reflection and representation is the most recognizable and thereby useful in the global art-market. Menlibayeva says that she makes it her task to create a mythology of her own in a topical and critical way. She introduced the occult notion of the 'Egregore' ('collective thought form') to describe a specific cultural and psychic experience in Kazakh society. In her latest film and video works, Menlibayeva also uses fictional characters and draws upon the concept of 'archaic atavism' to deliver her narratives. In a number of videos, she raises the issue of a new national identity through suggestive images: of Aisha Bibi, a legendary female hero and local symbol of eternal love; and the modernized daughters of Shaitans, female demons, splendid female centaurs or fox-like werewolves. In her latest work, the five-channel video installation '*Kurchatov 22*' (2012), Menlibayeva seeks to give meaning to the tragic consequences of nuclear experiments on the nuclear test site near the city of Semipalatinsk on the territory of Soviet Kazakhstan, which was active from 1949 to 1989.

From a far distance the work by **Erbossyn Meldibekov**, '*Communism Peak*' (2009), looks like waxworks of snowy mountaintops. But they are actually made from white enameled basins, the bottom of which has been distorted by the artist to look like artificial rocks. The artist creates a kind of 'ideological landscape' of Central Asia, deforming a metal utensil of the Soviet epoch. With these distinct and strong images, Meldibekov made a specific investigation using sculpture and, in this way, raises the question of societal transformation and the artifice of its process. This method of critical investigation is also seen in many of Meldibekov's works. For instance, in the project '*Family Album*' (2007-09), the artist compared photographs of families taken in the same places in Tashkent, Almaty, and Taraz, over a period of time. The same people in the photographs have changed, grown up and are older; meanwhile, architectural objects, such as monuments, which although are constructed to be eternal, are changing over the course of a life. Meldibekov is definitely one of the most internationally recognizable Central Asian artists. Although politically oriented, his approach is instrumentally valuable amongst other artists of the region.

Another artist, **Vyacheslav Akhunov**, the father of contemporary Uzbek art, started creating his notebooks and pattern books in the late 1970s. This was a moment of deep crisis—dubbed ‘The Stagnation’—in the Soviet Union when official ideology in art as with elsewhere had exhausted itself. However, artists in the fifteen Soviet republics were still not allowed to work independently outside official institutions. This situation defined the nature of the art that Akhunov created while he sketched in his notebooks and created his conceptual proposals for unrealizable projects. He collected them in his kitchen and gave them recipe names. This was taken as a precautionary measure in case of unforeseen visits from the KGB. Due to the political situation in Uzbekistan, Akhunov’s fortunes have not changed much in his native country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, he remains a dissident whose work cannot be shown in Uzbekistan, a fact made visible when he recently exhibited his notebooks abroad in the project titled ‘1 Square Meter’. There he displayed individual pages from his sketchbooks by concealing them in numerous matchboxes placed in formation on a pedestal measuring one square meter. He went further in this game of concealment by creating different kinds of objects and using matchboxes attached with images as seen in ‘*Monument to the Match*’ (2011). At the moment, Akhunov still struggles for the right to get special Uzbek permission to travel outside of the country as he has been blacklisted, disallowed from travelling abroad due to political reasons. Hence, for Akhunov, his art still provokes real danger or, at least, trouble with the authorities.

In contrast to these positions, a group of art-activists known as the **Workshop of Critical Animation of STAB (School of Theory and Activism–Bishkek [ШТАБ])**, have been producing politically-oriented performances. This group, led by Georgy Mamedov and Oxana Shatalova, focused on educational programmes held within left-oriented literature studies, including various workshops with young artists and representatives of different minorities. The group is based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and it often involves people from the countries of Central Asia, as well as some artists and activists from abroad. Their workshops and educational programmes mostly critique art-events. Consistently, the group has composed their messages in the form of propagandistic cartoons, as seen in ‘*Which side are you on?*’ (2013). The group has never declared that their activities or works are artifacts, and have never denied art as a social institution. Their activity, from one point of view, looks like a progressive one but, from another perspective, also enters into an international mainstream, following different kinds of ‘occupation’ movements and left-oriented rhetoric. The second point of view might be viewed as conservative if we did not take into account the list of problems and hot issues specific to the region, which are different from the crisis of the Western neoliberal system.

Another approach is represented by a number of artists from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, who started their career during the last 20 years. These artists attentively reflect the issues and questions arising in their own countries as well as globally. One can say that they organically appropriated the approaches of the ‘glocal’. As noted by Italian contemporary art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, the ‘glocal’ consists of the basic ground of artistic existence, which has also some specificities such as conceptuality and humor. Among such artists are Yelena and Viktor Vorobyevs (Almaty, Kazakhstan), and Ulan Djaparov (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). One example of an artist who combines ‘glocal’ approaches with conceptualism and investigates the category of time is **Alexander Ugay**. This is exemplified by his video work ‘*Bastion*’ (2007). As seen in this exhibition ‘*Lost to the Future*’, the work interweaves the concept of Soviet utopias with issues of community memory. This is also seen in his photographs and mixed-media projects.

Contrary to the artists who have made manifest their positions and statements, there is also a broader list of well-developed artists in the region, who do not have any clear strategic credo. They are focused on specific situations or particular aspects of their personal life, such as **Askhat Akhmediyarov** (Astana, Kazakhstan) or, show their personal perception of particular incidents, as **Evgeny Boikov** (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan); or still have strong connections with their professional backgrounds such as the former architect **Katya Nikonorova** (Almaty, Kazakhstan) or filmmaker **Saodat Ismailova** (Tashkent, Uzbekistan). Among this group there are also renowned artists such as **Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev** or **Shailo Djekshenbaev** (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), who have developed their work using qualitative technologies of high-resolution video and high quality photographs.

Of course, the rather conventional definitions mentioned above might be transmitted differently by other curators. Furthermore, one can say that we can find, in each region

of the world, these kinds of artistic categories and that this definition is not sufficient in distinguishing the Central Asian contemporary art scene as a unique phenomena. I would rather say that it is far more conducive to be part of the international contemporary art scene rather than pigeonholed as ‘Central Asian art’. Overcoming this dichotomous border, artists can fully implement their work. One of the main challenges to these artists is the endorsement of nomadism, the ‘line of flight’ or movement across territories that was celebrated by Gilles Deleuze. This means actively opposing settled truths and undermining fixed categories that are encumbered by such binaries, and avoiding the sterility of boundaries in contemporary art.

Yuliya Sorokina (1965) is a freelance curator based in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She received her BA from the Drawing Department of the Abai Kazakh Pedagogical Institute, and her MA in Art History at T.Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, where she is now a PhD student and lecturer for art management and curatorial studies. She has worked since 1999 as Art Manager and Chairperson of the Board of «Asia Art+» Public Foundation, and has published her texts in various magazines such as Springerin, Basler Magasine, Afterall, and more. She has curated numerous exhibitions and projects and is currently working on «ASTRAL NOMADS» - Digital Resource for Innovative Artistic Practices in Central Asia: <http://astralnomads.net>

Born in 1965 in Uralsk, West Kazakhstan, Askhat Akhmediyarov graduated from the Shymkent Art School in Kazakhstan. Akhmediyarov was a student of Vitaly Simakov and Moldakul Narymbetov. His major exhibitions included 'Transdialog with Van Hooft' in Shymkent, Kazakhstan (1999), 'Nomad's Land' in Berlin, Germany (2002), 'Art Dala' in Astana, Kazakhstan (2012), and 'Toray-Proton', a performance that took place in front of the building of the Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Uralsk, Kazakhstan (2013).

[1] Askhat Akhmediyarov, still from *'Dictator'*, performance, 2013

[2] Askhat Akhmediyarov, still from *'In Love with the Track'*, video, 8 mins, 2013



[1]

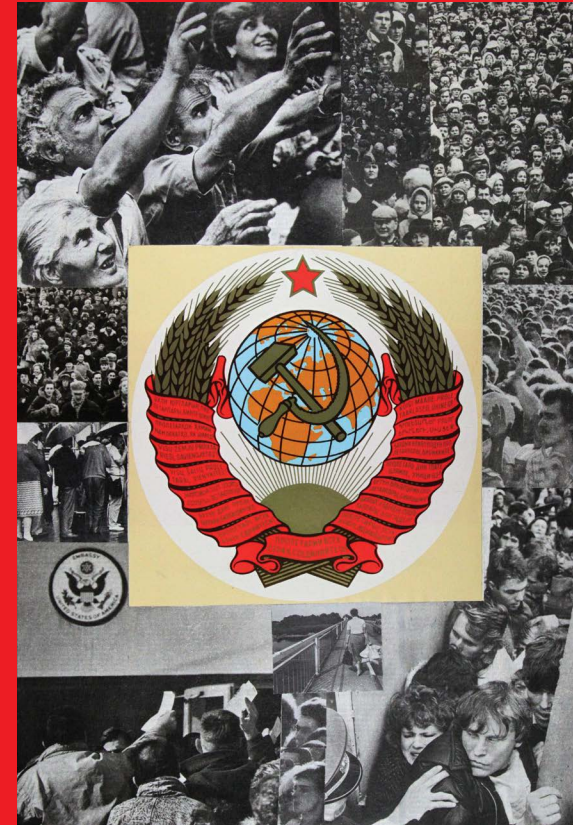


[2]

Born in 1948 in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, Vyacheslav Akhunov now lives and works in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. As an artist, writer and philosopher, his oeuvre comprises collage, painting, installation, performance and moving image, as well as numerous essays and novels. From a peripheral position in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, he has been reworking the experiences of 1970s Moscow conceptualism and, in the 1980s, organised pioneering happenings and actions. Since 2000, Akhunov has been investigating the possibilities of new media, particularly video. His work has examined change and inequality in his own region, commenting obliquely on the rise of collective religiosity in what was previously a largely secular society. Akhunov's works are often focused on the integrity and responsibility of the individual within the structures of power he or she may be situated.

Vyacheslav Akhunov has participated in Venice Biennale (2005, 2007, 2013), Moscow Biennale (2013), Istanbul Biennale of Contemporary Art (2009), Pusan Biennale (2008), and dOCUMENTA (13) (2012). He has also been involved in various exhibitions including 'At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Caucasus & Central Asia' at Sotheby's, London (2013), 'Revolution vs Revolution' at the Beirut Art Center, Lebanon (2012), 'Project 35, Atlas' at ZKM | Museum fur Neue Kunst, Germany, and 'Traces du Sacre' at the Centre of Contemporary Art of Pompidou, Paris (2008).

- [1] Vyacheslav Akhunov, 'Behind iron curtain. Battle of national emblems - battle of ideologies and economies. USSR-USA'; second collage (in series of 30 collages), 56 x 38 cm, 1980 - 1990
- [2] Vyacheslav Akhunov, 'Monument to the Match', matchboxes, dimensions variable, 2011



[1]



[2]

Evgeny Boikov lives and works in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. He graduated from Azerbaijan Institute of Physical Culture in 1980, and the studio of painting and drawing in 1985. Boikov works across various media including drawing, photography, installation, and video. As a witness of the two revolutions that took place in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010, much of his work is saturated with political awareness. Boikov's artistic practice has also concerned itself with the emotional and social aspects of protests, which has received international recognition.

Boikov has had various solo exhibitions which include 'Ketsin' in Shoreditch Town Hall, London (2013), 'Kinematics of protest' in Rosenheim, Germany (2012), and 'Behind Glass' in The Kyrgyz National Museum of Fine Arts, Bishkek (2006). He has also participated in 'At the Crossroads' in Sotheby's, London (2013), 'Aluminum' at the 5th International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Baku (2009 and 2012), and was also a finalist in the Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong (2012).

[1] Evgeny Boikov, '*Kinematics of protest I #8*', oil on canvas, 130 x 130 cm, 2012

[2] Evgeny Boikov, '*Warriors of Manas, #3*', oil on canvas, 94 x 94 cm, 2012-2013



[1]



[2]

Shailo Djekshenbaev was born in 1947, and currently lives and works in Kyrgyzstan. He studied architecture at Frunze Polytechnic Institute, Kyrgyzstan, and directed several animation films in Moscow. His achievements in architecture and animation were acknowledged by the State Awards and led to several prizes at international animation film festivals. Since 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he has focused primarily on photography, his long-time passion since his youth. One of the main themes of his work is the series of changes that have occurred in the Kyrgyz society after the country's independence in 1991. This includes architectural and environmental changes as well as the development of contemporary art in Kyrgyzstan.

Shailo participates in many international art exhibitions both inside and outside Kyrgyzstan. This includes 'WOSTOK', ausstellungsraum gerhart scholz, in Vienna (2008), 'The Paradox of Polarity: Contemporary Art from Central Asia', Bose Pacia, New York (2007), and 'Seeing the world through the Eyes of Hope', Museum of Fine Arts, Bishkek (2006).

[1] Shailo Djekshenbaev, 'Mental Health', photograph, 60 x 90 cm, 2007

[2] Shailo Djekshenbaev, 'The Bride From The South', photograph, 90 x 90 cm, 1980



[1]



[2]

Saodat Ismailova was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 1981. As a filmmaker, Ismailova's works aim to safeguard the beliefs and traditions she have inherited from her ancestors and her culture, and translate them into modern visual arts. She attempts to capture the essence of contemporary Central Asia and to understand the state of its soul through all of its transitions, with a special interest on surviving pre-Islamic beliefs and animism that surrounds women. She is interested in the collision of fiction and documentary observation with a special focus on sound research and cinematic experimentation.

After her graduation from the Tashkent State Art Institute, Cinema Department, she was invited to Fabrica, Benetton's communication research centre in Italy, where she directed several projects including 'Aral, Fishing in an Invisible Sea'. Since 2004, Ismailova has been in charge of documentary films on the music of Central Asia for Smithsonian Folkways, the non-profit record label of the Smithsonian Institute. In 2005, she was a part of the Artists-in-Berlin program of the DAAD. This year, Ismailova was also part of the Central Asian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale.

[1] Saodat Ismailova, 'Zukhra', still from video, 43 mins, 2013

[2] Saodat Ismailova, 'Gulchehra', still from video, 2013



[1]



[2]

GULNARA KASMALIEVA & MURATBEK DJUMALIEV

Based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev are cultural catalysts in the Central Asian region, which is in many respects a Zone of Silence. Both trained in both film and visual art, they produce video installations that encapsulate everyday life in Central Asia. Their practice embodies the transition from a deeply rooted tradition of art making towards the use of contemporary languages. Graduates of Kyrgyz State College of Fine Art, they accessed international ideas when studying in Russia during the period of perestroika. Returning to Bishek they experimented with new technologies and developed documentary-style videos and photography that provide unprecedented representations of Kyrgyzstan's passage to independence and the impact of Soviet-era legacies on life and identity.

The works of Kasmalieva and Djumaliev have been exhibited at The Art Institute of Chicago (2007), Venice Biennale, Singapore Biennale, and Winkleman Gallery, New York. They also run the cultural centre ArtEast in Bishkek, and are active as curators and leaders with a mission to stimulate the next generation. They were awarded the 2010 Prince Claus Award for their significant contribution to contemporary culture in Central Asia and for establishing a space of freedom and opportunity for young artists.

[1] Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev, 'A New Silk Road', five-channel video, installation view, 9 mins 43 secs, 2006

[2] Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev, video still from 'Brooklyn Bridge', video installation, 10 mins, 2010



[1]



[2]

WORKSHOP OF CRITICAL ANIMATION OF STAB [SCHOOL OF THEORY AND ACTIVISM - BISHKEK]

The School of Theory and Activism – Bishkek (STAB) is the Central Asian artistic and research initiative, which considers art as a means of social critique, territory of solidarity, and practice of radical imagination. The Workshop of Critical Animation is a project as part of the strategy of media activism of School of Theory and Activism – Bishkek (STAB). The Workshop of Critical Animation is committed to the position of the critical left wing and relies on the avant-garde experience of artists and animators of the 1920's young revolutionary Soviet republic.

They produce cartoons and conduct workshops on chaise animation, the most accessible art form for activist purposes. Rejecting aestheticism and entertainment in animation which is an easy way for the viewer to escape from reality, their animation works do not aim to adhere to any strict technique. Their priority in production of animation is collective work, where each member of the group, regardless of their skill is a full participant of the production. They identify themselves as part of the working class, rejecting individualistic and authoritarian approaches, which serve the needs of the capitalist world.

[1][2] Workshop of Critical Animation of STAB (School of Theory and Activism – Bishkek), video stills from 'Which side are you on?', animation, 2 mins 40 secs, 2013



[1]



[2]

Born in 1964 in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, Erbossyn Meldibekov graduated from the Almaty Theater and Art Institute and lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan. His work is informed by the 'collapse of culture' in post-Soviet Central Asia and the political and social disarray of his native country Kazakhstan. He also examines the collapse of civility within a post 9/11 environment, referencing on-going conflicts and drawing on Central Asia's epic past. His ideas are deployed through media such as video, performance, architecture and installation, offering his viewers absurd, heroic and humorous visual interpretations of human interplay.

Erbossyn Meldibekov has had several solo exhibitions from 1997 showing in numerous countries such as Kazakhstan, Russia, Italy, Germany, China, London, and Hong Kong. He has also shown in group exhibitions at Benteng Vredenburg Museum in Yogyakarta (1998), the City Gallery of Modern Art in Italy (2001), the ACC Gallery in Weimar, Germany (2003), the CANAIA Gallery in Mexico (2004), and has also taken part in the Venice Biennale (2005, 2011).

- [1] Erbossyn Meldibekov, 'Communism Peak', installation view, 5 x (50 x 115 x 40 cm) and 5 x (35 cm), 2009, image: M HKA
- [2][3] Erbossyn Meldibekov, 'Family Album', framed photographs with photo album (detail), photographs: 20 x 30 cm, album size: 35 x 30 cm, 2007 – 2009



[1]



[2]

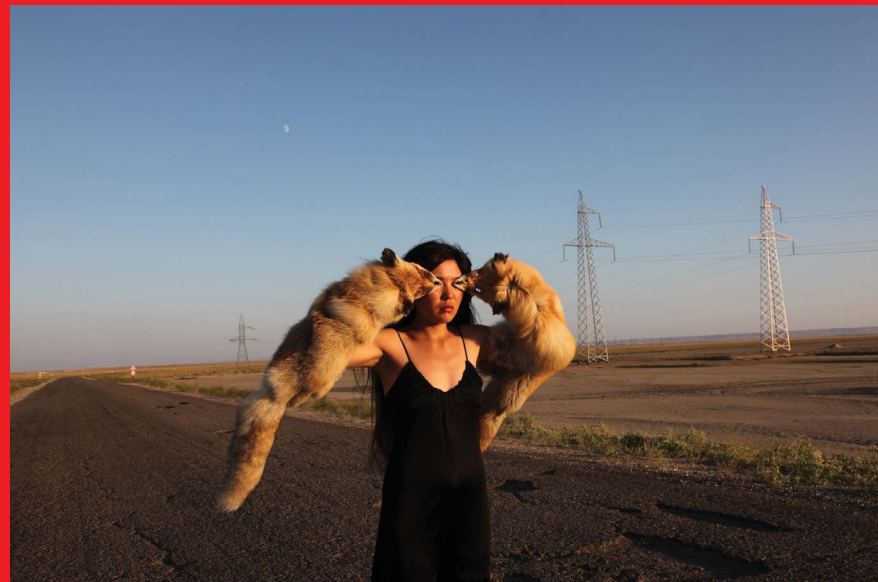


[3]

Almagul Menlibayeva was born in 1969 in Almaty, Kazakhstan and currently lives and works between Berlin and Kazakhstan. She graduated from the Art and Theatre University in Almaty in 1992. Menlibayeva is an experimental artist renowned for her talent in working simultaneously in different areas of art: painting, graphic art, performance, installation, and video. Her works translate the various dimensions of what she wishes to express about beauty, décor, ritual and spiritual practices. Menlibayeva's works across media, placing special focus on women and their roles in pre-Soviet, pre-Islamic and even Shamanistic and dervish origins.

She has gained international recognition by participating in the 15th Sydney Biennale; 51st, 52nd and 53rd Venice Biennale; the Sharjah Biennial 10; the 4th and 5th Moscow Biennale; and in 2012, the 1st Kiev Biennial, Ukraine; the 18th Sydney Biennale and The Mediterranean Biennale of Contemporary Art, Sachnin, Israel. Her work has also been exhibited in venues including Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium; Queens Museum, NY, USA; Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Ithaca, NY, USA; Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway; University of California, San Diego, CA, USA; Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico; Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten, Graz, Austria; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia; the Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL, USA Videonale 13 in Bonn, Germany; BWA Contemporary Art Gallery, Katowice, Poland (as part of Videnale 13); Moscow Museum of Modern Art; Moscow, Russia.

- [1] Almagul Menlibayeva, *'The Observer'*, Duratrans print, 91 x 122 cm, 2010, © Almagul Menlibayeva, Courtesy of American-Eurasian Art Advisors LLC, USA
- [2] Almagul Menlibayeva, video still from *'Transoxiana Dreams'*, HD video, sound, single channel, 23 minutes, 2011, © Almagul Menlibayeva, Courtesy of American-Eurasian Art Advisors LLC, USA



[1]



[2]

Katya Nikonorova was born in 1981 in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. She graduated from the Kazakh National Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Almaty, Kazakhstan, and is a qualified architect and city-planner. Through photography, installation, drawing, collage, film and music, her works often addresses the topic of architecture, land, and urban planning.

Her interest in contemporary art led to her participation in several notable group exhibitions including 'Between Heaven and Earth: Contemporary Art from the Centre of Asia', Calvert 22 Gallery, London (2011), 'Larvae of the Future', MMOMA, Zurab Gallery, 3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2009), 'East of Nowhere: Contemporary Art from Post-Soviet Central Asia', Fondazione 107, Turin, Italy (2009), and the 4th Bishkek Biennale of Contemporary Art in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (2008). In 2012, she organized and curated her own Biennale titled "Biennale of Katya Nikonorova" in Almaty.

[1] Katya Nikonorova, 'Turn: Turk', carpets and synthetic grass, installation view, dimensions variable, 2008

[2] Katya Nikonorova, 'Self-soviet Architecture', series of photographs, dimensions variable, 2008



[1]



[2]

Georgy Tryakin-Bukharov moved to Almaty from the Irkutsk District of Russia in 1961. From 1967 to 1968, he studied in the drawing studio of the Union of Architects of Kazakhstan before establishing his own artistic training studio the following year. He also studied at the Higher Artistic-Industrial School in 1982, and in the Monumental Sculpture department of the Almaty State Institute of Theatre and the Arts from 1983 to 1987. His works, which consists largely of assemblages of old and found objects, have been exhibited in Almaty and across Europe.

Tryakin-Bukharov has exhibited in various group exhibitions including the Artbat Festival, Almaty Kazakhstan (2010, 2011, 2013), 'East of Nowhere: Contemporary Art from Post-Soviet Central Asia', Turin, Italy (2009), 'House of Tolerance', Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan (2008), 'Tamerlan Syndrome', Orvieto, Italy (2005), and more.

[1] Georgy Tryakin-Bukharov, 'Mustang', mixed media (wood and metal), 250 x 250 x 80 cm, 2003



[1]

Alexander Ugay was born in 1978 in Kyzylorda city, and currently lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He attended St. Petersburg Marine College from 1995-97 and the Bishkek State University in Kyrgyzstan from 1998-2002. His photographs, videos, and digital collages deal with memory and nostalgia, particularly in relation to the legacy left in his native Kazakhstan by the former Soviet Union. He often uses anachronistic black and white photographic processes to depict aspects of everyday life in the rural areas surrounding his hometown, the southern Kazakh city of Kyzylorda.

Alexander Ugay has participated and exhibited widely in several exhibitions locally and internationally. This includes Tarjama/ Translation, curated by Leeza Ahmady at the Queens Museum of Art, New York (2007), ' Muzykstan: Media-generation of Contemporary Artists from Central Asia', Central Asia Pavillion, 52nd Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2007), 'The Generational: Younger Than Jesus', New Museum, New York (2009), 'Promises of the Past', Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2010), 'The Bearable Lightness of Being – The Metaphor of the Space', 11th Venice Biennale of Architecture (2010), Sharjah Biennial 10, Sharjah, UAE (2011), Asian Art Biennale, Taiwan Museum of Contemporary Art, Taiwan (2011), 'Between Past and Present: Archeology of topicality', Museum of Fine Art, Almaty Kazakhstan (2011), 'Project 35, Volume 2', Independent Curators International, New York, USA (2012), and 'At the Crossroads', Sotheby's London, UK (2013).

[1][2] Alexander Ugay, 'Bastion', stills from video, 5 mins 9 secs, 2007



[1]



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Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore

The Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICAS) is the curatorial division of LASALLE College of the Arts. It runs seven galleries, comprising some 1,500 square meters of gallery spaces dedicated to exploring new and experimental art across the Fine Arts, Design, Media Practices, and Performing Arts. Its programme focuses on showcasing international, Asian, Southeast Asian, and local contemporary arts.

Its public programme includes regular publications, seminars and symposiums, visiting artists talks and events of contemporary performance, installation, design, and music/sound practices. The ICAS is committed to providing a cultural and educational tool for students and the Singaporean audience to advance their knowledge and appreciation of the contemporary local, regional and international arts, that is not otherwise available in Singapore today.

Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore

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