

The background features a complex arrangement of black and white geometric shapes, including triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, abstract composition. The shapes are layered and overlapping, with some forming a central white space where the text is located.

FOCUS  
KAZAKH  
STAN  
BERLIN

# **BREAD & ROSES**

Four Generations of  
Kazakh Women Artists

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Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists

Curated by  
David Elliott, Almagul Menlibayeva and Rachel Rits-Volloch

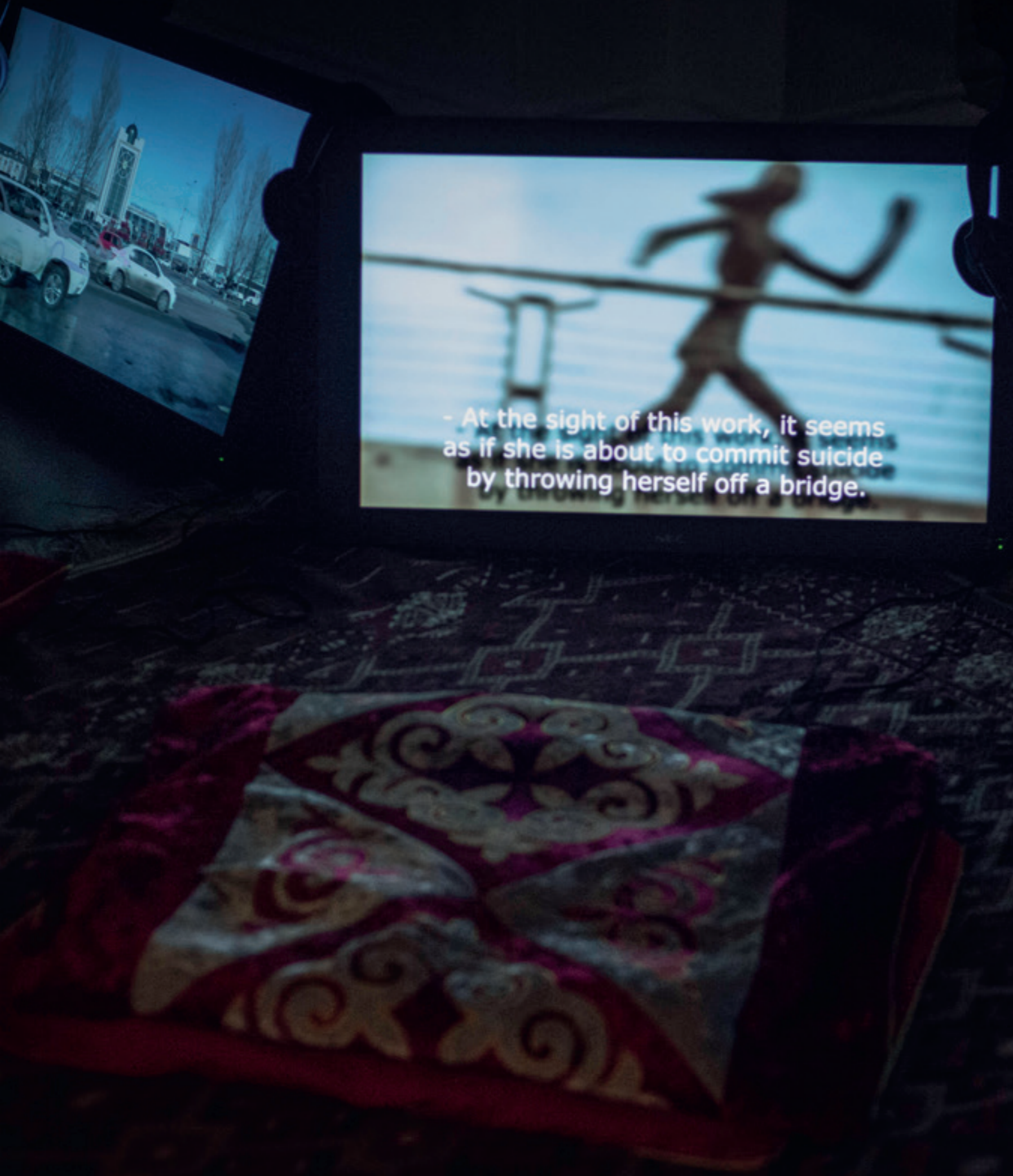
Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin  
25 September – 20 October 2018

*THE WORKER MUST HAVE BREAD,  
BUT SHE MUST HAVE ROSES TOO.*

Rose Schneiderman, 1911

Rose Schneiderman was a Polish-American labour union leader and women's rights activist who never visited Kazakhstan. Her words are invoked in connection with this exhibition because they make a poetic case for an international equality of genders, based not only on suffrage and access to the bare necessities of life, but also for humane common rights to culture, work and a full life. Within a few months, her words had inspired a poem of the same title which, set to music in at least three different arrangements, is still inspiringly performed today.



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 The National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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## I.

In his programmatic article 'A Look into the Future: Modernizing Public Opinion,' Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev defined new priorities of public policy. Special attention should be paid to promoting the culture and art of Kazakhstan abroad. In this respect, it is quite natural that, for the first time in Kazakhstan's history as an independent country, we should be witnesses to the large-scale project Focus Kazakhstan, an overview of the fine arts in our country from the 1930s to the present.

Curated by David Elliott, Almagul Menlibayeva, and Rachel Rits-Volloch, the exhibition *Bread & Roses* gives us fresh insight and international perspective into the art and culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Tatiana Glebova, Vera Ermolaeva, Aisha Galimbayeva, and Gulfairus Ismailova represent the generation of 'foremothers', the women who established the traditions of the fine arts in Kazakhstan. In their avant-garde experiments with form, design, and colour they avoided copying reality, since Kazakh folk art, especially ornamental design, incorporated abstract elements. These women merged past and present in their work, building a bridge between traditional Kazakh art, the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, and socialist realism.

The exhibition concludes with a new generation of artists, including Almagul Menlibayeva, Saule Suleimenova, Anar Aubakir, and Gulmaral Tatibayeva, who have sought to revive Kazakhstan's vanishing folk and other traditions in art through modern modes of self-expression.

The art residency program at MOMENTUM, led by the gallery's director, Rachel Rits-Volloch, is worthy of particular note. This intense and varied program, specially designed for our country's younger artists, has proven its effectiveness, as demonstrated by the excellent results shown at the *Focus Kazakhstan: Artist Residency Show*.

I should like to thank everyone involved in this project and hope for continued success in promoting the art and culture of Kazakhstan abroad.

Leonid Kochetov  
Acting Director  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan

## II.

At last, a public program has been launched whose stated mission is the promotion of art and culture from Kazakhstan abroad. This may wrongly imply that we have a strong front of cultural institutions at home, including many museums, public and private galleries, collectors, art schools and art colleges, art historians, experts, specialized magazines and contemporary art fairs. But in many ways we are just at the beginning of a long development, and this is a topic for another conversation.

Our museum applied to the government to implement this project, and we were asked to complete it. The next question we faced was how to bring it to life. There were those of us who argued we should exhibit only fine art (painting, sculpture, and graphic art) and established artists, while others said we should show only contemporary work by young artists (installations, video art, photography, etc.) that would make sense to western viewers. It was a classic dilemma: an irreconcilable antagonism between modernism and postmodernism, which has been typical of discourse throughout all the countries that comprised the former Soviet Union. But, at the end, everyone realized that progress is impossible without previous experience.

The history of the fine arts in Kazakhstan is not even a century long. Its origins lie in the 1930s and in the figurative art of this time—a state of affairs that continued until the mid-1980s. In the 1990s, we saw free artists approaching art in a new way, while in the noughties the painter as aesthete yielded to the painter as scholar, and modern techniques and technologies were gradually integrated into art. Everything was up for grabs, including our own take on the world. Contemporary artists emerged as socially responsible actors, while the concepts of exhibitions, as conceived by curators, relied not only on a knowledge of art and cultural history but also on philosophical research, sociology, and personal insight.

We should not forget that the practices taken onboard by the west in the sixties and seventies were not common in the post-Soviet countries until the early nineties. What was new to us was commonplace to them.

So, what has the west found interesting about us? Since 1991, as Kazakhstan has emerged as an independent country, the western public has discovered only a little about our culture and art. We, on the other hand, including our artists, while vigorously searching for our own cultural and national identity, have managed to intrigue some international connoisseurs. But what, exactly, has been interesting for them? The fact is that our artists have used western practices (performance, video art, installation, art actions, etc.) to reveal the global and the universal in the regional and the ethnic. Undoubtedly this interchange has added to the poignancy and honesty of what they have produced.

In all fairness, thanks to the support of art lovers and various sponsors at home in Kazakhstan, the country's artists have blazed their own trails in the West and have made names for themselves, including Rustam Khalfin, Sergei Maslov, Moldakul Narymbetov, Erbossyn Meldibekov, Almagul Menlibayeva, Galim Madanov and Zauresh Terekbay, Elena and Viktor Vorobyev, and Said Atabekov. I am pleased that, over the past two years, the National Museum has focused on showing the artists of the nineties and the noughties, finding a place for their work, and on supporting talented young artists and independent curators.

Based on such considerations, the museum decided that *Focus Kazakhstan* should be an overview of art from the 1930s to the present that unveiled historical connections between different generations and periods, and conducted research in international terms. The globalization of Kazakh society, its de-Sovietization, the impact of the feminist movement, local modernity, and post-nomadic art are the key themes of the four main exhibitions: *Post-Nomadic Mind* (London), *Bread & Roses; Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists* (Berlin), *Thinking Collections: Telling Tales. The Kyzyl Tractor Art Collective* (Jersey City), and *The Eurasian Utopia: Post Scriptum* (Suwon).

A distinctive feature of *Focus Kazakhstan* is its complex approach, consisting of a programme of professional education as well as exhibitions — with artist-in-residencies and related displays of work produced in Berlin.

The *Focus Kazakhstan* team includes fifteen Kazakh and international curators and consultants, including David Elliott, Leeza Ahmady, Rachel Rits-Volloch, Eun Young Shin, Almagul Menlibayeva, Yuliya Sorokina, Indira Dyusebaeva-Ziyabek and Aliya de Tiesenhausen, as well as the international public relations firm Pelham Communications (London).

*Focus Kazakhstan's* five exhibitions feature works by ninety-four artists, including Abylkhan Kasteev, Uke Azhiyev, Aubakir Ismailov, Aisha Galimbayeva, Gulfairus Ismailova, Salikhiddin Aitbayev, Zhanatay Shardenov, Oralbek Nurzhumayev, Yevgeny Sidorkin, Erkin Mergenov, Bakhtiyar Tabiev, Abdrashit Sydykhanov, Agymsaly Duzelkhanov, Dulat Aliyev, Mazhit Baytenov, Saken Narynov, Moldakul Narymbetov, Rustam Khalfin, Sergei Maslov, Almagul Menlibayeva, Saule Sulcimenova, Erbossyn Meldibekov, Kyzyl Tractor, Galim Madanov and Zauresh Terekbay, Elena and Viktor Vorobyev, Alexander Ugay, Bakhyt Bubikanova, Beibit Asemkul, Anar Aubakir, Dauren Kasteev, Nurbol Nurakhmet, Gulnur Mukazhanova, Asel Kadyrkhanova, Kamilla Gabdullina, Gaisha Madanova, and Anvar Musrepov. The exhibitions also feature works by artists from earlier generations whose lives and fates brought them to Kazakhstan and whose work impacted on Kazakh art, including Pavel Zaltsman (1912–1985) and Tatiana Glebova (1900–1985), both disciples of Pavel Filonov, a prominent Russian avant-garde painter and founder of a system he called analytical art or the 'universal flowering'; Vladimir Sterligov (1900–1973), a student of Kazimir Malevich; Sergey Kalmykov (1891–1967), an avant-garde artist and the only artist from Russia's Silver Age to survive into the 1960s; and the avant-garde artist, and associate of Kazimir Malevich, Vera Ermolaeva (1893–1937).

Each of the exhibitions has its own original concept and represents a dialogue among artists of the older, middle, and younger generations. Each is designed to show the search for new subjects and means of expression in an interaction between past and present, set between the museum's main collection and the works of contemporary artists. The exhibitions feature a wide range of genres and media—from sketches, drawings, and other forms of graphic art to paintings, sculpture, performance, installation, video, film and photography.

This project has been constructed strategically around recognized experts from both Kazakhstan and abroad. I should like to express my gratitude to the exhibition curators and the entire *Focus Kazakhstan* team, who have worked harmoniously and hard to collect, describe, and systematize a unique body of work in record time. I have no doubt that this will provoke keen interest in both those already interested in art and in the general public as they realise that contemporary Kazakh art is being made at the highest level.

It is our fondest hope that this project marks the start of the long, complex journey of promoting the contemporary art of Kazakhstan around the world.

Roza Abenova

*Head of the Contemporary Art Department  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan*

## FROM MOMENTUM

*Focus Kazakhstan Berlin* is an extraordinary project, a cooperation between MOMENTUM and the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan encompassing a year of research resulting in an artist residency program and two exhibitions with over seventy works by twenty-four artists. With a predominant focus on women artists, this project, nevertheless, was not born out of a feminist agenda. Rather, it is a reflection of the quality and creative drive of the current generation of young artists in Kazakhstan. That so many of them are talented women, working in a hierarchical culture still dominated by men, calls for the necessity to shine a spotlight on this generation of women, and the preceding generations of women artists who paved the way for them. We could not have done this without the in-depth knowledge and experience of our co-curator, Almagul Menlibayeva, whose work as an artist—as student, mentor, and colleague of so many of the key figures in this project—gave us unprecedented access to a creative context largely unknown outside of Kazakhstan; nor without the depth of research, historical knowledge and prior work in the region of co-curator David Elliott. Nor could this project have taken place without the tireless efforts of Rosa Abenova, Head of Contemporary Art at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, who spearheaded the *Focus Kazakhstan* initiative across four countries.



Installation photo of the  
Focus Kazakhstan Artist  
Residency Exhibition,  
MOMENTUM Gallery

The *Focus Kazakhstan* project is the latest in MOMENTUM's program of exhibitions, artist residencies, and symposia on art from the former USSR and Eastern Bloc, which was launched in 2015 with *BALAGAN!!! Contemporary art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places*—an exhibition of 150 artworks by 75 artists from 14 countries, curated by David Elliott, the co-curator of *Bread & Roses: Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists*. This was followed in 2016 by *HERO MOTHER: Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism*—an exhibition of 45 artworks by 30 women artists from 20 countries, curated by myself together with Bojana Pejić, contributing also to this catalogue. Having featured Kazakh artists in both *BALAGAN!!!* and

RACHEL RITS-VOLLOCH

*HERO MOTHER*, for *Focus Kazakhstan* we finally had the luxury of delving deeply into the artistic output of a single country; a young country with an ancient culture, which, through its fascinating history, encompasses within itself a melting-pot of ideas and influences between east and west that are expressed dynamically in its contemporary art.

*Focus Kazakhstan Berlin*—both exhibitions and the artist residency program—was held in Berlin's historic Kunstquartier Bethanien. Now an Art Center home to over fifty visual arts institutions and artist studios, this building was originally a hospital and school for nurses built in the 1840's. *Bread & Roses* was held in the former chapel of the hospital, remarkable, as is the building as a whole, for its neo-gothic architecture.

*Focus Kazakhstan Berlin* was launched over a period of four months prior to the exhibitions, with seven artists working in Berlin on intensive two-month residency programs at MOMENTUM. Alongside a structured series of museum and gallery visits, artist talks, and masterclasses, Beibit Assemkul, Anar Aubakir, Liliya Kim, Aigerim Ospanova, Ykylas Shaikhiyev, Saule Suleimenova and Gulmaral Tatibayeva produced new works shown in the *Focus Kazakhstan Artist Residency Exhibition*. For many of these artists, it was their first time to show work, or to travel, abroad. The works they produced for their Residency Exhibition are a reflection upon Berlin through Kazakh eyes; a cultural dialogue between their traditions and the condition of the contemporary nomad. Dealing with topics ranging from wartime histories to personal histories, from today's refugees and migrants to the nomadic migrations of the artists' grandparents, the works exemplify the talents of young artists, men and women, never before seen in Berlin. It has been a pleasure to mentor and guide them through their encounters with the rich complexities of the Berlin art scene. Held in parallel to *Bread & Roses: Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists*, three of the artists—Anar Aubakir, Saule Suleimenova and Gulmaral Tatibayeva—overlapped between both exhibitions.

The *Focus Kazakhstan Artist Residency Exhibition* was held in parallel to *Bread & Roses: Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists*, with three of the artists—Anar Aubakir, Saule Suleimenova and Gulmaral Tatibayeva—overlapping between both exhibitions.



Installation photo of the  
Focus Kazakhstan Artist  
Residency Exhibition,  
MOMENTUM Gallery

*Bread & Roses* and the twenty extraordinary women chosen to participate in this exhibition, are the focus of the following pages. On behalf of MOMENTUM, it will suffice to say that it was a sincere pleasure learning about and from each and every one of them: Anar Aubakir, Lidya Blinova, Bakhyt Bubicanova, Ganiya Chagateyeva, Natalya Dyu, Vera Ermolaeva, Zoya Falkova, Aisha Galimbayeva, Tatiana Glebova, Gulfairus Ismailova, Kreolex Zentr (Maria Vilkovisky & Ruthie Jenrbekova), Gaisha Madanova, Aigerim Mazhitkhan, Almagul Menlibayeva, Gulnar Mirzagalikova, Gulnur Mukazhanova, Katya Nikonorova, Saule Suleimenova, Gulmaral Tatibayeva, and Elena Vorobyeva.

RACHEL RITS-VOLLOCH



It has also been our great pleasure and privilege to work with the many vibrant voices contributing to this catalogue and to the symposium accompanying *Bread & Roses*: Aliya de Tiesenhausen and Indira Dyussebayeva, curators of the *Focus Kazakhstan London* exhibition *Post-nomadic Mind* (2018); Diana T. Kudaibergenova, sociologist and scholar at Cambridge University; Dina Nurpeissova, founder of Berlin's Central Asian cultural association Steppenboot; Nari Shelekpayev, Einstein Fellow at Berlin's Einstein Forum; Bojana Pejić, curator of *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2009/10), *Good Girls: Memory, Desire, Power* (2013), and co-curator of *HERO MOTHER* (2016); Aigul Omarova, curator at the Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum, who was instrumental in our research; and to Thomas H. Campbell for his expert translation from Russian of several texts for this catalogue, including Lidya Blinova's poetry which is here translated into English for the first time.

For the generous loan of works to our exhibition, we should like to warmly thank the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kastejev State Museum in Almaty, the Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum, and a number of private collectors who are credited in the list of works for the exhibition.

Special thanks are due to all the wonderful artists who contributed their works and talents to this project, to Rosa Abenova and her team, Anar Mukhanova and the rest of her colleagues at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan for daring to dream this ambitious international initiative and for seeing it through so effectively; to Alexandra Tsay for public relations on the project; and to the Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ruhanyi Zhangru initiative for bringing all the wonderful art and artists from Kazakhstan onto the global stage.

And of course, none of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of my amazing team at MOMENTUM: co-Director and Head of Design, Emilio Rapanà; Head of Production, Leslie Ranzoni; Artist Coordinator and translator, Evgeniya Kartashova; gallery assistants Kelsey Maas and Clara Maria Bueno Vieira; and to Marina Belikova for coming back to share her web design and video editing skills with our artists. Their outstanding work, above and beyond all expectations, resulted in an exceptional program for young artists and two exhibitions of which we will remain very proud. Very special thanks to the teachers of the workshops and masterclasses at the Kulturwerk and BBK print studios and media labs in the Kunstquartier Bethanien, which opened so many new skills and possibilities for our artists: Mathias Mrowka, Magda Korsinsky, Daniel Mecklenburg, and Barbara Wolters. Heartfelt thanks are due to Constanze Kleiner for exhibiting the work of our first residency group; to Erika Hoffmann for sharing her collection and breadth of experience with our artists; to Tainá and Tereza Guedes for inspiring them all; and to the many other curators and artists who mentored and advised our artists-in-residence; to the many participants of the *She-Shamans* felt-making workshop who came together to create an artwork for this exhibition; and to all who came and engaged in the public programming throughout the course of the *Focus Kazakhstan Berlin* project. Special thanks to the talented team at Eidotech, and to Lars Kulik and Julian Schmidt for putting the work up and making the exhibitions look so good; to Camille Blake for capturing it all so beautifully on camera; and to Kai von Carnap and Thibaud Bourgoing, and all the MOMENTUM team for their indefatigable work in getting it all down in the end.

And finally, thanks to all of you—readers, audiences, art lovers—we now invite you to travel with us through the past and present of Kazakh art made by its remarkable great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers and daughters: *Bread & Roses: Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists!*

Rachel Rits-Volloch  
*Founding Director of MOMENTUM*

OPPOSITE  
 Gulfairus Ismailova playing  
 a lead role in *Botagoz* / 1957 (cat.21)



-Damn your beauty!  
 -Mad old women!



# GENDER, EMPIRE AND DECOLONISATION

## FOUR GENERATIONS OF KAZAKH WOMEN ARTISTS

DAVID ELLIOTT

### I. Kazakhstan: a background

Since 1991, when the Republic of Kazakhstan rose out of the ashes of the USSR, the country has been transformed from a Soviet dead end, leading nowhere, to command a strategic position at the crossroads of Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> With flourishing oil and gas industries, as well as vast mineral resources, the country attracts foreign interest and investment that echoes its history as a vital trading link on the ancient Silk Roads. From the earliest times people, goods, ideas, religions and ideologies have flowed freely from east to west and back — of course, with occasional disruption. Now they begin to do so again. Kazakhstan is also a key participant in the new ‘Silk Road’ — the Chinese ‘Belt and Road’ initiative — that sets out to increase world trade and stimulate developing economies.

**But the transition from nomadic steppe to bustling modern economy has been far from straightforward or happy. Kazakhstan’s tortuous path from the pre-national fluidity of early nomadic settlement to being, before 1991, the outpost of several empires, is shown here condensed into its contemporary art.**

**Settled initially by groups of Iranian and Turkic nomads with different animistic beliefs in a larger area known as both Sogdiana and Transoxiana, ‘Kazakhstan’ was from the early part of the 8th-century conquered by first the Umayyad and then the Abbasid Caliphates and adopted their Islamic religion. This, with pre-existing shamanism, continued as the dominant indigenous belief until secularization by the Soviets in 1920.<sup>2</sup> During the 13th-century the region was, like China and Russia, subsumed in the expansion of the Mongolian empire.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> KAZAKHSTAN IS THE WORLD’S LARGEST LANDLOCKED COUNTRY, AND THE NINTH LARGEST IN THE WORLD. WITH A POPULATION OF 18 MILLION (2014), IT HAS ONE OF THE LOWEST POPULATION DENSITIES. IT SHARES BORDERS WITH RUSSIA, CHINA, KYRGYZSTAN, UZBEKISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN AND ADJOINS A LARGE PART OF THE CASPIAN SEA, AS WELL AS THE RAPIDLY DISAPPEARING ARAL SEA.

<sup>2</sup> AFTER INDEPENDENCE IN 1991, THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN REMAINED A SECULAR STATE. ISLAM IS BY FAR THE LARGEST RELIGION TODAY AT AN ESTIMATED 70.4% OF THE POPULATION, FOLLOWED BY ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AT 24.7%.

<sup>3</sup> AT THIS TIME, THE MONGOLIAN EMPIRE BECAME THE LARGEST CONTIGUOUS LAND EMPIRE IN HISTORY.

OPPOSITE  
Gulnar Mirzagalikova,  
*Peak of Abai* / 1996 (cat.37)

From the 15th century, when a number of Turkic and Mongolian tribes coalesced under the Kazakh Khanate, a distinct sense of Kazakh identity, with its own governance and culture, began to emerge. From the first half of the 18th century, this was increasingly disrupted by the expansion of the Russian Empire that, in waves of annexation, settlement and russification embedded the Orthodox Christian religion in the region. Accelerated by the building of railways, systematic Russian colonisation began in the 1860s and intensified before the revolutions of 1917.<sup>4</sup> From 1917, under the Alash Autonomy, Kazakhstan was briefly an independent, if unrecognised, state protected by the White anti-Bolshevik army. Upon defeat in 1920, it was absorbed into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), initially as part of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, it was then incrementally acknowledged as the Kazak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1925 and as the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936.

From the beginning of Russian colonisation, Kazakhstan's remoteness from the capital made it suitable for the sequestration of dissidents. This role expanded dramatically in the Soviet period with mass purges and the accompanying need for an 'archipelago' of gulags in which to house 'enemies of the people'. This, with the *Asharshylyk*, the disastrous famine and repression that accompanied Stalin's collectivisation of agriculture in 1932/33, are still commemorated as an inhumane, barbarous persecution that helped to keep alive the flame of independence (fig. 1). An impossibly high price was paid for this enforced injection of modernity: the famine rendered Kazakhs a minority in their own country;<sup>5</sup> Kazakh traditional arts and nomadic ways of life were imperilled and virtually made extinct.<sup>6</sup>



4 BETWEEN 1900 AND 1917 THE SLAVIC POPULATION OF KAZAKHSTAN GREW FROM 15% TO 42%.

5 KAZAKHS REMAINED A MINORITY IN KAZAKHSTAN FROM THIS TIME UNTIL SHORTLY AFTER INDEPENDENCE IN 1991. THE 2016 CENSUS REGISTERED A TURNAROUND IN THAT 66.48% OF THE POPULATION IS NOW KAZAKH, 20.61% RUSSIAN AND 12.91% 'OTHER'.

6 DURING THE FAMINE THE POPULATION WAS SEVERELY REDUCED; AN ESTIMATED 2 MILLION PEOPLE DIED, INCLUDING C. 38% OF ETHNIC KAZAKHS, MANY OTHERS MOVED INTO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

FIG 1 'Exodus' famine in Kazakh SSR in 1932 (This documentary photo provided the basis for Saule Suleimenova's work, cat.44)

7 PERESTROIKA: THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SOVIET POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE 1980S UNDER MIKHAIL GORBACHEV AND HIS PREDECESSORS. THE CULTURAL RESTRUCTURING THAT ACCOMPANIED THIS WAS KNOWN AS GLASNOST.

8 ALMA-ATA BECAME ALMATY, THE KAZAKH FORM OF ITS NAME, IN 1991; IT REMAINED THE CAPITAL OF KAZAKHSTAN UNTIL DECEMBER 1996 WHEN THE NEW CITY OF ASTANA ASSUMED THIS ROLE.

Although never openly stated, the sense of being a national underclass continued to fester. Discontent reached a head in December 1986, during perestroika,<sup>7</sup> when mass demonstrations of ethnic Kazakh students flared in Alma-Ata, the former capital,<sup>8</sup> quickly spreading throughout the country, prompted by the removal of the President of the Kazakh SSR by the Soviet government and his replacement by a non-Kazakh. The security forces arrested and killed a large but unconfirmed number of people. In the Kazakh language these riots are called the *Zheltoqsan* and are regarded as an iconic first step towards independence (fig. 2). Based on documentary photographs, contemporary artist Saule Suleimenova has, with studied irony, used plastic waste to reference the 'progressive' road of Kazakh history in sequences of images of both the great famine and the student demonstrations. (cats. 44–46).

At the same time, the enclosed geography of the country, with its vast, unpopulated steppe and arid deserts made it seem ideal for secret or dangerous scientific research; this, too, wrought untold damage on the land. A disastrous agricultural experiment in the 1960s, to divert the waters of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers to enable the development of water-hungry cotton production in Uzbekistan, led to the remorseless desertification of the Aral Sea. Further east in Semipalatinsk/Kurchatov, at the main Soviet nuclear testing site, bombs and other weapons had been detonated with little care for the

surrounding population or environment.<sup>9</sup> Since 2011, Almagul Menlibayeva, one of the curators of this exhibition, has made several art works relating to environmental despoliation. Her most recent, *The Altar of the East* (2016–18), includes a nine-channel video installation that reimagines Kurchatov today, contrasting the high-tech, high-rise image of its new Tokomak reactor, that produces power from controlled thermonuclear nuclear fusion, with the traumatically tarnished aura of this region's past in the testing of nuclear weapons. (cat. 41).<sup>10</sup>



9 FROM 1949 TO 1989, 456 NUCLEAR TESTS WERE CONDUCTED IN THE OVERLAPPING AREAS OF SEMIPALATINSK AND KURCHATOV.

10 MENLIBAYEVA'S SINGLE-CHANNEL VIDEO *TRANSOXIANA DREAMS* (2011) EXPLORED SYMBOLICALLY THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE DESERTIFICATION OF THE ARAL SEA. HER 5-CHANNEL, HD VIDEO INSTALLATION *KURCHATOV 22* (2012) WAS SET IN THE DESERTED NUCLEAR TEST ZONES OF KURCHATOV/SEMIPALATINSK, WHERE THE TOKOMAK REACTOR IS NOW SITUATED, AND CONTAINS INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS.

FIG 2 December 16 1986, Student Demonstrations in Alma-Ata

## II. Role Models: Amazons, Venuses, Shamans and Balbaltas

### a) Amazons

The permanent display of the new National Museum in Kazakhstan's recently constructed capital of Astana<sup>11</sup> contains a range of exhibits, models and dioramas that, using freshly discovered artefacts and research from excavations by Kazakh archaeologists, show the lives of the region's earliest inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> Like the work of the artists in this exhibition, this also tells a story about Kazakh identity, the product of millennia of migrations and colonisations. Amongst the opulence of golden caparisons and sword hilts, one large display case, labelled simply 'Reconstruction of a Sarmatian Woman's Clothing' strikes an unexpected note. It reflects life and dress in west 'Kazakhstan' during the 5th to 6th centuries BCE, yet it reveals not the pastoral, nomadic life of a yurt-dweller but a young woman as a warrior: her felted clothes decorated by geometric and floral motifs, she carries a sword, and holds a bow and quiver of arrows. During the Iron Age, she would not have been an unusual site<sup>13</sup> but the ancient Greeks could not believe she existed; for them, such creatures had to be figments of the imagination: *Amazons*, mythical women who mutilated themselves in order to fight harder, the conflicted daughters of Ares, god of war, and Harmonia, the immortal goddess of harmony and concord (fig. 3).

11 ASTANA TOOK OVER FROM ALMATY AS THE NATION'S CAPITAL IN 1997. WITH A MASTER DEVELOPMENT PLAN BY JAPANESE ARCHITECT KISHIO KUROKAWA, IT CONTAINS MANY BUILDINGS BY WORLD FAMOUS ARCHITECTS. THE UTOPIAN FANTASY AND FABRIC OF THE CITY HAS BECOME THE TOPIC OF MANY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' WORK AS SEEN HERE IN THAT OF AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN (CATS. 62-3) AND GULMARAL TATIBAYEVA (CAT. 53).

12 BEFORE KAZAKH INDEPENDENCE IN 1991, THE MOST IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS IN THE ENTIRE USSR (PREVIOUSLY RUSSIAN EMPIRE), WERE CENTRALISED AT THE PUSHKIN MUSEUM, MOSCOW OR AT THE HERMITAGE MUSEUM IN LENINGRAD/ST. PETERSBURG.

13 IN THE DON AND LOWER VOLGA REGIONS FURTHER WEST WHERE SARMATIAN CULTURE LATER EXTENDED, AS MANY AS 20% OF EXCAVATED BURIALS WERE OF WOMEN WARRIORS.



FIG 3 Amazon archer in trousers carrying a shield and quiver c.470 BCE / Ancient Greek, Attic White-ground terracotta alabastron British Museum, London

b) Venuses

Incredulity about matriarchal societies has not been limited to classical culture. The Sarmatians, of Iranian origin, were nomadic, pastoral hunter-gatherers, as well as warriors, and their communities depended upon co-operation for survival. Many archaeologists suspect, but find it difficult to prove, that early nomadic societies were matriarchal, unlike later settled, materialist cultures. This would appear to have been the case when, across the Eurasian landmass, a range of prehistoric portable 'Venus' figurines, characterised by the 'hyper-femininity' of wide hips, small heads, and legs tapering to a point, appeared as both 'art' and symbols of power and fertility.<sup>14</sup> No male equivalents have been found (fig. 4).

This fluid, nomadic, perhaps matriarchal, past appears in Kazakhstan today in museums, theatrical spectacles, themed national restaurants, souvenir shops (where a small model yurt may be purchased for a few tenge) and during the summer holidays when some particularly nostalgic Kazakh families gather together on the steppe to construct and re-enact together a few days' life in a yurt. Yet the confidence and quality evident in the recent work of Kazakh women artists shown here suggests that this positive, even heroic, spirit is far from extinct, even though it may have been buried by circumstance.

c) Shamans

Beyond hunger or nostalgia for the primitive, there is the question of how ideas about non-patriarchal autonomy have become integrated in present belief. Non-gendered power is central to shamanism, a deep-rooted animistic tradition in which, as healer and intermediary with ancestors and the spirit world, he/she derives power from being able to shift from one shape, or state of being, to another. Through Central Asia, from Siberia to Alaska, then east and south to native American

cultures, such beliefs are still active and, although some shamans are male, they often wear women's clothing or adopt a female persona during rituals. In the majority of cases shamanism is not gender specific and may be practised by an adept of any sex (fig. 5).



FIG 4 Hohle Fels Venus Mammoth ivory / 6 cm high c.33,000 BCE / Photo H. Jensen, University of Tübingen

Shamanism has absorbed influences from Tengrism<sup>15</sup> via the early migrations of the Xiongnu (Huns) and Mongols, and later from the esoteric practices of Islamic Sufism.<sup>16</sup> Although active shamans are seldom seen in Kazakhstan today, they appear widely in contemporary Central Asian art, referenced equally by men and women. In the work of such male artists as Said Atabekov and Erbossyn Meldibekov, the native 'shaman' is shown as a holy fool, at a loss in the modern urban world, yet in the videos of Almagul Menlibayeva and Katya Nikonorova, the female shaman is co-opted as a double-headed, multi-breasted symbol of healing or revenging power working across history and through nature (Menlibayeva, cat. 41) or, more satirically, as *Katipa apai*, a naïve, new age goddess or female Jesus in Islamic clothing (Nikonorova, cat. 51), a comment on the increasing popularity of the Muslim religion since independence.



FIG 5 Altay shaman with drum Kharkas ethnicity / c.1908

It is difficult also not to regard the appearance of the shaman in contemporary Central Asian art as a sardonic riposte to the spirituality of such western artists as Joseph Beuys or Marina Abramović, both of whom, like Gurdjieff before them, have claimed to have derived spiritual power from esoteric Asian practices.<sup>17</sup> And, by referring to their indigenous traditions, contemporary Kazakh artists have orientalised themselves, not in the picturesque 'western' sense adopted by earlier Asian artists such as Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910), in which his

<sup>15</sup> TENGRISM IS A CENTRAL ASIAN RELIGION CHARACTERISED BY SHAMANISM, ANIMISM, TOTEMISM, POLY AND MONOTHEISM AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP. IT WAS THE PREVAILING RELIGION OF THE TURKS, MONGOLS, HUNGARIANS AND XIONGNU.

<sup>16</sup> 'THE PRIESTESS OF UKOK,' A V-CENTURY BCE BURIAL IN KAZAKHSTAN, WORE A ONE-METRE-TALL FRAMED HEAD DRESS ADORNED WITH THE TREE OF LIFE WITH GILDED FELINE CREATURES AND BIRDS ON ITS BRANCHES. SIMILAR BURIALS HAVE BEEN FOUND ELSEWHERE IN KAZAKHSTAN AND UKRAINE.

<sup>17</sup> JOSEPH BEUYS (1921-86) FALSELY CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN SAVED FROM LIFE THREATENING BURNS FOLLOWING A WORLD WAR II PLANE CRASH BY NOMADIC TARTAR TRIBESMEN WHO WRAPPED HIM IN ANIMAL FAT AND FELT. IN HER WORK, MARINA ABRAMOVIC' (B. 1946) HAS DEVELOPED A SYNCRETIC PRACTICE OF MIND/BODY EXERCISES IN WHICH SHE BECOMES AN ANTENNA FOR THE RECEPTION AND TRANSMISSION OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE. GEORGE GURDJIEFF (1866/72 - 1949) WAS A PERIPATETIC MYSTIC, PHILOSOPHER AND SPIRITUAL HEALER.

modernising intent was masked by his pictorial conservatism, but by playing a double game in which they highlight the materialistic absurdity of the present by invoking its ‘absurd’ opposite-mythic spirituality related to historical belief.

#### d) Balbaltas

The enigmatic presence of *Balbaltas*—ancient carved stone standing stones in both male and female forms—has also been a recurring motif in both modern and contemporary art. Related to different waves of *kurgan* burial mounds built across Southern Eurasia, they were produced first by Indo-European migrants, then by Scythians, and lastly, in the middle ages, by Turkic tribes. Before the Russian Revolution, the simplified, ‘primitive’ form of such sculptures, inspired many members of the avant-garde in their search for an intrinsically ‘Russian’ rather than western abstraction.<sup>18</sup> Similar impulses also prompted Aisha Galimbayeva and Gulfairus Ishmailova in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s in their depictions of the Kazakh past for film and theatre. But, in the late 1960s, Lidya Blinova, one of the first independent artists to emerge in Kazakhstan after the war, directly revisited such figures whilst an informal student of the forgotten primitivist sculptor Isaak Itkind. Her carved wooden self-portrait (found sheltering in the verdant garden of a relative) provides telling proof. (cat. 23).<sup>19</sup>

### III. Colonisation, Decolonisation and Gender

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The central topic of *Bread & Roses* is culture and history: both how they have been affected by gender in their transmission from one generation to another, and how we regard them in the present through the agency of contemporary art – a field in which women now have an unprecedented visibility.

Since the 1990s, cultural theory has moved away from a contested discourse about what constitutes ‘post-colonial’ or ‘post-soviet’ art towards a realisation that these terms encapsulate what they claim to reject. This discussion, therefore, has broadened out into a debate about *decolonisation*—a process only in its infancy. In this, it is recognised that issues of gender (initially masculine [patriarchal, aggressive and acquisitive], followed by feminist and queer critiques) are fundamental for any analysis of what, in the first instance, constitutes *colonisation*. Accordingly, this exhibition, and the research behind it, is symptomatic of a much larger aesthetic and cultural debate that addresses the deep-rooted frameworks of power, interest and attitude that affect and mould the ways the world is perceived, experienced and recorded.

In 1993, Edward Said, one of the leading theorists of post-colonialism, revisited the impact of his book *Orientalism* (1979), a seminal analysis of the west’s patronising and self-serving representations of an ‘othered’ Orient. In the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, he underlined some of the profound changes that had been taking place in this still embryonic field. It was ‘...still dominated by an aggressively masculine and condescending ethos,’<sup>20</sup> that had been recently questioned by feminist academics who propagated ‘a very different sort of idea about Islam, the Arabs and the Middle East [that] challenged, and ... to a considerable degree undermined the old despotism.’<sup>21</sup> Such works, for Said, demonstrated ‘the diversity and complexity of experience that works beneath the totalizing

<sup>18</sup> SEE JOHN BOWLT, NICOLETTA MISLER, EVGENIA PETROVA, *THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE: SIBERIA AND THE EAST*, (EXH. CAT.), MILAN, SKIRA, 2013. THE FUTURIST HYLEA GROUP WAS IMPRESSED BY SUCH ANTIQUITIES.

<sup>19</sup> BORN IN BELARUS, ISAAK ITKIND (C.1871-1969) WAS BOTH A RABBI AND A WORLD-FAMOUS, SELF-TAUGHT SCULPTOR, STORYTELLER AND WRITER. IN 1937, AFTER HIS WORK *PUSHKIN IN CHAINS* HAD BEEN SHOWN IN PARIS, HE WAS ARRESTED FOR ‘JAPANESE ESPIONAGE’, TORTURED AND FOR MANY YEARS IT WAS THOUGHT THAT HE HAD BEEN MURDERED. IN FACT, HE WAS LIVING IN PROFOUND POVERTY IN A SMALL KAZAKH VILLAGE. IN 1956 HE FOUND WORK AS A PAINTER IN THE ALMA-ATA STATE THEATRE, AGAIN BEGAN TO MAKE SCULPTURE AND TO OPEN THE MINDS OF A YOUNGER GENERATION OF ARTISTS.

<sup>20</sup> EDWARD SAID, *CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM*, LONDON, VINTAGE, P. XXVII. SEE ALSO SAID’S *ORIENTALISM*, LONDON, VINTAGE, 1979.

<sup>21</sup> SAID REFERS HERE TO THE FOLLOWING BOOKS: LILA ABU LUGHOD *VEILED SENTIMENTS* (1986), LEILA AHMED *WOMEN AND GENDER IN ISLAM* (1992) AND FEDWA MALTY-DOUGLAS *WOMAN’S BODY, WOMAN’S WORLD* (1992).

discourses of Orientalism and [the] Middle East[’s] (overwhelmingly male) nationalism’; they were ‘intellectually and politically sophisticated, ..., engaged but not demagogic...; finally, they are works that are in dialogue with, and contribute to the political situation of women...’<sup>22</sup>

At that time, it was too soon for Said, or anyone else, to have assimilated the impact of the vast and dramatic changes that had taken place in the former Soviet empire (and during its process of disintegration) and, while he limited his comments in this book to ‘the expansion of the great Western empires,’<sup>23</sup> he moved the discussion about the culture of imperialism decisively away from ‘masculine’ motivations towards a more subtle and incisive framework that took into account new perspectives about gender and power alongside the culture and politics of the present.

During the Soviet era, equality of all kinds—of citizenship, ethnicity and of gender—had been repeatedly proclaimed through propaganda yet, in effect, it had little.<sup>24</sup> This was a totalising and flattening ‘equality’ in which national particularisms were suspect and, during the 1930s and ‘40s, were often used as pretexts for state murder. In a paranoid atmosphere in which ‘enemies’ could be discovered anywhere, national minorities were moved across the country at Stalin’s will and, in addition to war-time refugees from Moscow and Leningrad, Kazakhstan accommodated large transient populations from Poland, Germans from the Volga region, Jews, Tartars, Balkars, Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, Koreans and, latterly, Japanese prisoners-of-war—some of whom were detained after the war to help rebuild the cities. In art or politics, ethnicity could be expressed only in strictly defined and carefully coded ways. And, in the matter of national identity, despite one’s origins, being Soviet trumped everything else.

Only over the past decade has a more open discussion about colonisation, gender and orientalism begun to enter the discourse of a vital generation of young women artists in Kazakhstan. This is also closely enmeshed with questions about what national identity means today.<sup>25</sup>

### IV. The Anatomy of Identity

This exhibition examines how themes and motifs from traditional Kazakh art were able to confront, and combine with, those of modernity to surface in the present. To emphasise the constant flow of definition and redefinition of power and identity that has taken place between the beginning of the 1930s and the present, it has been divided into four sections, each focussing on different ways in which women (and other) artists have contributed to the cultural mix of the present within the context of their own time.

Its first section examines the legacy of the classical avant-garde repressed by Stalin, as well as folk art, its Kazakh doppelgänger. The first work in the exhibition is a contemporary remake of a traditional Kazakh wall-hanging adorned by an abstract formal language that fascinated Russian avant-garde artists in the early twentieth century because its sophistication and purity echoed the expressive non-objectivity for which they themselves were searching. (cat.1).

It is followed, during the 1950s and ‘60s, by the emergence of the first generation of Kazakh women artists to work within the system of socialist realism, acting and designing for film and theatre as well as making paintings.

<sup>22</sup> SAID, *CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM*, OP. CIT. P. XXVIII.

<sup>23</sup> *IBID*, P. 9.

<sup>24</sup> SEE ALIYA ABYKAYEVA-TIESENHAUSEN, *CENTRAL ASIA IN ART. FROM SOVIET ORIENTALISM TO THE NEW REPUBLICS*, LONDON, I.B. TAURIS, LONDON, 2016, CHAP. 1 ‘THE POLITICS OF MULTINATIONALISM: MESSAGES FROM THE CENTRE’.

<sup>25</sup> IN APRIL 2008, THE COURTAULD INSTITUTE OF ART IN LONDON ORGANISED THE CONFERENCE ‘FRAMING THE OTHER: 30 YEARS AFTER ORIENTALISM’ WHICH EXAMINED SAID’S IDEAS OUTSIDE THE IMMEDIATE MIDDLE EASTERN CONTEXT IN WHICH HE HAD ADDRESSED THEM; IN JUNE 2008 AT THE SOROS FOUNDATION IN ALMATY THE CONFERENCE ‘DESTINATION ASIA: EASTERN ORIENTALISM’ EXAMINED THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN CENTRAL ASIA AGAINST THAT OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN. SEE ALSO ABYKAYEVA-TIESENHAUSEN, OP. CIT., P. 258 AND ANAR AUBAKIR’S INSTALLATION *HOME* (2018) (CAT. 54).

25

The present is intimidated by the reawakening of autonomous, non-official art in the 1960s, '70s and '80s by people who struggled to establish a new sense of identity out of the ruins of the past. The last section, from 2005 to the present, concentrates on the birth of a wave of independently-minded contemporary artists, more concerned with the present than the past, working across many different media in the cities of Almaty, Karaganda and Astana, the new capital.

## i.

The story begins in November 1937 when Vera Ermolaeva, an artist and close associate of Kazimir Malevich,<sup>26</sup> was shot in the Dolinka camp in Karaganda, where she had been sent from Leningrad as punishment for 'anti-Soviet activities' (cats. 2, 3).<sup>27</sup> Her knowledge of Kazakhstan was tragically circumstantial, yet her role here is iconic. Her associate Vladimir Sterligov, imprisoned in the same camp on the same charge, survived (with others) to provide a critical, living testimony of independent ways of thinking about and making art; from 1942 to 1945 he was a teacher at the Alma-Ata Art Institute and after he returned to Leningrad, he retained links with the city.<sup>28</sup>

A parallel storyline emerges in the work of Tatiana Glebova, a leading member of painter Pavel Filonov's circle in Leningrad.<sup>29</sup> In 1942, at the height of the siege, she was evacuated to Alma-Ata where she met and married Sterligov. In this directly personal way, experience and knowledge of the ideas and work of Malevich and Filonov, two of the most charismatic and influential Russian avant-garde artists—as well as of others, such as the anarchically absurdist younger generation of writers and performance artists in the *Oberiuty*—were kept alive, transmitted and disseminated.<sup>30</sup> (fig. 6) In the spirit of Filonov, Glebova's spare drawings and watercolours cast a severely laconic eye on daily life in Alma-Ata, both in the actuality and aftermath of war. (cats. 4–11)



FIG 6 Tatiana Glebova (right) with Daniil Kharms Leningrad c.1930

From the mid-1930s, painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking within the USSR were closely controlled by the Artists' Union in Moscow where socialist realism, the only approved artistic method, imposed strict limits on subject matter, style and ideology.<sup>31</sup> In Kazakhstan, the whole notion of fine art was regarded as 'western' and notions of identity were confined to tradition and folk art, either stripped of context, or made kitsch to fit Soviet taste.<sup>32</sup> But simple forms were no stranger to abstraction: everyday or ritual objects, felt clothing, carpets or wall hangings for yurts, as well as large petroglyphs scattered through the landscape, were adorned by a complex, symbolic language of cosmological,

<sup>26</sup> FROM BEFORE THE REVOLUTION, KAZIMIR MALEVICH (1879-1935) HAD BEEN THE INSPIRING LEADER OF THE SUPREMATIST GROUP IN MOSCOW, VITEBSK AND PETROGRAD / LENINGRAD.

<sup>27</sup> SEE AIGUL OMAROVA'S ESSAY *THE TRAGIC LIVES OF THE ARTISTS IN KARLAG*, PP. 34 – 43.

<sup>28</sup> VLADIMIR STERLIGOV (1904-73) HAD, THROUGH VERA ERMOLAEVA, BECOME A STUDENT IN THE MALEVICH CIRCLE IN LENINGRAD DURING THE LATE 1920S AND EARLY '30S. HE REMAINED IN KARAGANDA AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM KARLAG IN 1938, MOVING NORTH TO NOVGOROD IN 1941. HE FOUGHT ON THE KARELIAN FRONT IN WORLD WAR II, WAS WOUNDED AND EVACUATED TO ALMA-ATA IN 1942 WHERE HE MET AND MARRIED TATIANA GLEBOVA. IN 1945, HE MOVED WITH GLEBOVA TO PETERHOF OUTSIDE LENINGRAD WHERE, FROM THE LATE 1950S, THEY SET UP A NON-OFFICIAL ART ACADEMY IN WHICH INSTRUCTION WAS BASED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALEVICH'S FORMAL AND PEDAGOGIC PROGRAMME.

<sup>29</sup> PAVEL FILONOV (1883-1941) WAS AN INFLUENTIAL AVANT-GARDE PAINTER IN PETROGRAD / LENINGRAD WHO FORMED 'THE MASTERS OF ANALYTICAL REALISM,' THE LARGEST NON-OFFICIAL ART SCHOOL THERE, TO TEACH HIS METHOD OF PERCEPTION THROUGH PAINTING. IT WAS CLOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN 1932. HE DIED OF STARVATION DURING THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD.

<sup>30</sup> IN LENINGRAD, BOTH GLEBOVA AND ERMOLAEVA HAD ASSOCIATED CLOSELY WITH THE TALENTED AND MERCURIAL OBERIUTY (MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR REAL ART) - THE YOUNGEST GENERATION OF THE LENINGRAD AVANT-GARDE - PERFORMANCE ARTISTS AND WRITERS WHO MADE ABSURDITY REFLECT THE RANDOM CRUELITIES OF THEIR TIME. THE AUTHORITIES REFUSED TO EXHIBIT THEIR WORK. THEY INCLUDED DANIIL KHARMS (1905-42), ALEKSANDR VVEDENSKY (1904-41) AND NIKOLAY ZABOLOTSKY (1903-58). IN 1938, ZABOLOTSKY WAS CONFINED TO THE GULAG IN SIBERIA AND SPENT THE LAST PART OF HIS EXILE (1944-46) IN KARAGANDA IN KAZAKHSTAN. BOTH KHARMS AND VVEDENSKY MADE ENDS MEET BY WRITING STORIES FOR CHILDREN; ERMOLAEVA AND GLEBOVA BOTH ILLUSTRATED THEIR WORK FOR DETGIZ, THE STATE PUBLISHING HOUSE FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE.

<sup>31</sup> THE SAME WAS TRUE FOR ALL OTHER ART FORMS WHICH HAD THEIR OWN SEPARATE UNIONS.

<sup>32</sup> THE ADULTERATION OF FOLK ART WAS DIRECTED TOWARDS AVOIDING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNREST BY WEAKENING AND FETTERING THE IDENTITY AND CULTURE OF NATIONAL MINORITIES. DURING THE 1930S, SOVIET ADULTERATION WAS ALSO DAMAGING IN THE ANNOTATION, REARRANGEMENT AND APPROPRIATION OF KAZAKH FOLK MUSIC.

zoomorphic, floral and geometric designs.<sup>33</sup> Such images not only provided a basis for traditional Kazakh folk art but also have been invoked repeatedly by contemporary artists in ways that, as we have seen with shamanism, mix irony with admiration. In this exhibition, the folk tradition reappears decisively in the project *She Shamans* (2018, cat. 1) made by the Kazakh artists-in-residence in Berlin, as well as by members of the Berlin public. This work is based on the design of a fine antique felted *tekemet* in the Kasteyev Museum of Art in Almaty.

## ii.

After the death of Stalin in 1953, the cultural climate began tentatively and slowly to relax. Very few women then practised as artists and none of them were Kazakh. At this point, two Kazakh women artists, Aisha Galimbayeva (cat. 12–16) and Gulfairus Ismailova (cats. 17–22), began the hard task of reconciling what they knew, saw and were told with national feeling and traditions in their work. As in 1920s Leningrad, where many women avant-garde artists could find employment only in making book designs for children, so, after the war in Kazakhstan, creative women initially found more freedom by working in theatre and film rather than in the highly controlled Artists' Union. Through this channel, both artists shared another key link with the pre-Stalinist Leningrad avant-garde in the figure of Pavel Zaltsman, a self-taught artist, pupil of Filonov and friend of the *Oberiuty*, who worked as a designer in the Lenfilm Studios in the 1930s and, because of his German-Jewish ancestry at a time of war with Germany, suddenly found himself in a gulag in Kazakhstan. On his release in 1954, he moved to Alma-Ata, worked sporadically as a designer on different films, and began to lecture privately on art and art history while still working as an artist. In 1960 he was appointed Chief Designer of the Kazakh Film Studios.<sup>34</sup>



FIG 7 Gulfairus Ismailova Film poster for *Botagoz* in which she played the leading role

Galimbayeva studied decorative art and theatre design at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow which, along with the Mosfilm Studios, had been evacuated to Alma-Ata in 1941 where it remained until the end of 1943.<sup>35</sup> From the 1950s, she worked on costume and set designs, as well as paintings, to capture, and recuperate, for a Soviet audience, traditional dress, decorations and ways of living that had disappeared. But she, as well as all other members of the Artists' Union, had to work within a propagandistic story line that made it clear that such outdated accoutrements were both picturesque and feudal.<sup>36</sup> At this time, she worked with Pavel Zaltsman as

<sup>33</sup> THESE WERE CHARACTERISED IN SUCH CATEGORIES AS 'SUN', 'CRESCENT', 'MOON', 'THE MILKY WAY', 'RAMS' HORNS', 'GOOSE NECKS', 'CAMELS' LIPS', AND 'ANTELOPES' HORNS'. SEE SHARA MAZHITAYEVA, AIGERIM SHUGAEVNA KAPASOVA, AIDANA ERGAZYKYZY KAPANOVA, ZHANBAI TURAROVICH KADYROV, AMANAI BAITURMOVICH MYRZABAYEV & ZHANAR ESKAZINOVA, 'THE SEMIOLOGY OF KAZAKH ORNAMENTS', *REVIEW OF EUROPEAN STUDIES*, VOL. 7, NO. 6, 2016, [HTTP://IS.NKZU.KZ/PUBLISHINGS/%7BA8D97433-F124-4AE6-818E-78C05CCADDCC%7D.PDF](http://is.nkzu.kz/publishings/%7BA8D97433-F124-4AE6-818E-78C05CCADDCC%7D.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> BORN IN KISHINEV, PAVEL ZALTZMAN (1912-1985) WAS EVACUATED FROM LENINGRAD TO ALMA-ATA IN 1942 AS AN EMPLOYEE OF THE LENFILM STUDIOS. ON ARRIVAL, OWING TO HIS GERMAN DESCENT, HE WAS INTERNED IN KARLAG UNTIL 1954. ON RELEASE, HE FOUND WORK WITH THE CENTRAL UNITED FILM STUDIO BUT BECAUSE OF THE 'ANTI-COSMOPOLITAN' (ANTI-SEMITIC) CAMPAIGN WAS PERIODICALLY SACKED AND MADE HIS LIVING BY GIVING LECTURES ON ART AND ART HISTORY, OCCASIONALLY WORKING IN CINEMA AS A DESIGNER. HE CONTINUED PAINTING IN KAZAKHSTAN AND WAS ALSO AN INFLUENTIAL INFORMAL TEACHER OF MANY ARTISTS INCLUDING AISHA GALIMBAYEVA, GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA AND LIDYA BLINOVA.

<sup>35</sup> THE FIRST PART OF SERGEI EISENSTEIN'S EPIC FILM *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* (1944) WAS PRODUCED IN ALMA-ATA AND THE RESIDENCE OF ITS ENTIRE CAST AND PRODUCTION TEAM MUST HAVE MADE A CONSIDERABLE IMPACT THERE. EISENSTEIN REMAINED IN ALMA-ATA UNTIL 1944 AS THE SIGNATURES ON SOME OF HIS DRAWINGS TESTIFY.

<sup>36</sup> ABILKHAN KASTEYEV (1904–73) IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE 'FATHER' OF MODERN KAZAKH ART. MUCH DECORATED BY THE STATE, FROM THE LATE 1920S HE WORKED IN A NAIVE STYLE THAT BECAUSE OF ITS SUBJECT MATTER CONFORMED WITH THE TENETS OF SOCIALIST REALISM WHILE REFLECTING AN IDEALISED VIEW OF RURAL KAZAKH LIFE.

designer on three films—*Daughter of the Steppes* (1954), *A Poem About Love* (1954) and *Lady Dzhigit* (1955) and, although there is no record of their conversations, it is clear this contact also made itself felt in her paintings. Despite their socialist realist genre, they have a strong frontality and lack of cliché that expresses both a freshness of approach and a Kazakh rather than Soviet identity. (cat. 15).

Following in the steps of Gamibayeva, Gulfairus Ismailova as painter, theatre designer and actor was able to side-step many of the stereotypes of socialist realism to present the outdated life of the steppe in a concrete but romantic way by remodelling historic epics and myths. She, too, worked closely with Zaltsman and in *Botagoz* (1957), which he designed, she played a leading role in a story of a young Kazakh woman's abuse and revolutionary awakening during the last years of the Tsars (fig. 7). For the stage, her sets and costumes for new versions of ancient Kazakh folk tales evoke the opulence of Leon Bakst's pre-revolutionary orientalist designs for the *Ballets Russes*; but her gaze is self-affirming rather than exoticised as the 'orient' looks at itself (cats. 18–21).

### iii.

The first Kazakh independent, 'non-official' contemporary art began to emerge in Almaty from the late 1960s under the influence of Lidya Blinova and of her partner, Rustam Khalfin, an artist of Tartar origin, both of whom had previously studied architecture. They shared a strong interest in the autonomy of pre-Stalinist art: Blinova through her occasional work at the film studios for director Sergei Bodrov that led to a personal link with Zaltsman, and also through her mentorship by the 'reborn' sculptor-guru Isaak Itkind; Khalfin from his regular contact from the early 1970s with Vladimir Sterligov and Tatiana Glebova and their 'Malevich school' in Leningrad.<sup>37</sup> This inspired him with the idea of forming a similar school in Alma-Ata; it never came to fruition but less formal groups coalesced around them and they began to exhibit their works in the first 'apartment' shows in the city.<sup>38</sup>

Blinova was fascinated by many different intellectual constructions: magic, shamanism, game theory, art theory, linguistics, poetics and how the body related to all these different Ideas. The formal trope of the *pulota* originated with her, to be elaborated by Khalfin in drawings and paintings in which he tried to break away from the potential tyranny of former avant-garde practice.<sup>39</sup> Created by the simple gesture of folding a fist and looking through the hole in its middle, it was a corporeal 'keyhole' opening out into a fragmented world of space, time, and image that also, inevitably, had a sexual connotation. It was what Blinova described as the 'ultimate plastic object,' replete, at the same time, with fullness and emptiness. She later elaborated this idea in her photo installation *Finger Ornaments* (1995), (cat. 24), that showed her own hands arranged in a series of complex mudras that suggest both a cosmic-tantric-erotic signficance and the mirrored the forms of traditional Kazakh ornaments. The range of her work is further attested by *Poetry for Cats* (1995), an elegy for a deceased feline friend and a text-based object translated into English for the first time. It is not only an impressive piece of writing but, exhibited at cat's eye height in a long line across the space of the gallery, is also a milestone in the history of conceptual art in Kazakhstan. (cat. 25, see pp. 66–68).

At different times, Blinova was an architect, sculptor, conceptual artist, poet, jewelry-maker, book designer and actor, but she was hesitant to be typecast. Her wide range of activities, and her natural diffidence and reluctance to work formally in any profession, or be involved with any official cultural manifestation, combined, with her early death in 1996, to obfuscate her considerable influence on the origin of new art in Alma-Ata/Almaty. A number of her works have been lost, but many artists still keep alive her memory; this is clear from *Lidya Blinova: Pulota* (2018), her friend Saule Suleimenova's documentary film that records direct testimony about her personality, work and influence from the people who knew her.<sup>40</sup> (cat. 26).

By the late 1980s, at the height of perestroika, a younger generation began to emerge in Alma-Ata who adopted the name of *Green Triangle* (*Zelenie Treugol*), a loose grouping of around 20 artists, writers, poets and musicians, that included Almagul Menlibayeva and Saule Suleimenova. Just before, in the southern town of Shymkent, *Red Tractor* (*Kizil Traktor*) had been formed by Moldakul Narymbetov, Said Atabekov, Vitaly Simakov and others in a conscious attempt to combine the ideas of the classical Russian avant-garde with new shamanism. Gulnar Mirzagalikova was the single female member, distinguished by her serial imaginings of surrounding mountains with evocative paintings of the steppe and women shamans (cats. 37–39).<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, Sergei Maslov, an independent, self-taught artist, became an important critical influence in Alma-Ata where, independently of other artistic groups, he constructed different mythological personae—sometimes presenting himself as an alien, a vampire, or a magician—to express the absurdities of disintegrating soviet life. After independence, particularly in his paintings, he ironically highlighted the continuation of the soviet patriarchy into the new system.<sup>42</sup> Both his work, and that of Lidya Blinova, strongly influenced that of younger non-aligned artists such as Elena Vorobyeva who, in 1990, had just graduated from the faculty of monumental painting at the Alma-Ata Art Institute. In relation to the six paintings shown here, Vorobyeva remembers how she had 'associated the word "artist" with all things artificial' and rejected easy identification with either the historical avant-garde or the new post-modern dogma of 'anything goes'.<sup>43</sup> At this time she was more impressed by Greek archaic sculpture and naïve painting and this led her to regard simple still-lifes as objects in themselves, innocent of 'art,' pathos or intention. Blinova encouragingly saw 'a sensual rather than intellectual component' in them and, at this stage, Vorobyeva could not yet imagine any other way in which to work.<sup>44</sup> Devoid more or less of painting, the installations she subsequently made with Viktor Vorobyev have left the intimacy of what Sergei Maslov had once implied was her 'kitchen,' to map an ironical and multi-perspectival anatomy for contemporary Kazakhstan—yet she maintains that painting still remains her sensory solace. (cat. 31–36).

From the late 1980s, a chaotic flood of western influence washed across the whole of the USSR—the music of Pink Floyd, the readymades of Marcel Duchamp, the *Transavanguardia* of young Italian painters, the social sculpture of Joseph Beuys, feminist theory, the ideas of Michel Foucault....—and Kazakhstan, having been previously closed to all foreign influence, strongly felt this impact. It was accompanied by an unprecedented opening of secret state archives and of previously banned Russian and foreign literature and art. By the beginning of the 1990s, video was added to the list of new media available and it was quickly exploited by artists.

Despite these new, apparent freedoms, the old patriarchy still prevailed and a number of the same personalities and institutions remained in power. In the field of culture, it was not until 1996 that the *Women's League for Creative Initiative* was founded in Almaty to provide a common platform for women artists, applied artists, designers and writers from all over Central Asia and Russia to show their work.<sup>45</sup>

### iv.

*Bread & Roses* concludes with the work of artists born in the 1970s and '80s who have had little experience of life in the Soviet Union. In the footsteps of their elder sisters, gender is expressed frankly in their works, but as only one part of an existential puzzle often communicated via social media or the internet. Neither is history, or its legacy, a primary concern: they share a common focus on the complex layering of the present and on how it is expressed. Any concerns they may have about identity are markedly individual rather than collective; misgivings are expressed that shared values and standards are being eroded.

<sup>41</sup> RED TRACTOR WAS INITIALLY CALLED TRANSAVANTGARDE IN RESPONSE TO ITALIAN ARTISTS AND CRITICS WHO HAD RECENTLY VISITED SHYMKENT. AS PART OF FOCUS KAZAKHSTAN, THE EXHIBITION THINKING EXHIBITIONS: TELLING TALES. KYZYL TRACTOR ART COLLECTIVE, CURATED BY LEEZA AHMADY WITH VLADISLAV SLUDSKIY, HAS BEEN HOSTED AT MANA CONTEMPORARY, JERSEY CITY, USA.

<sup>42</sup> SERGEI MASLOV (1952-2002) WAS BORN IN SAMARA AND EDUCATED IN PEDAGOGICAL STUDIES IN ALMA-ATA. HE BEGAN WORKING AS AN ARTIST DURING THE LATE 1980S AND HEADED THE NIGHT TRAM GROUP. HE CAPTURED SMALL ELEMENTS OF POST-SOVIET REALITY IN HIS WORK AND ELEVATED THEM INTO IRONICAL EXPRESSIONS OF UNIVERSAL TRUTHS. HIS PAINTINGS EXPLORED THEMES OF SEXUALITY AND THE BODY WHICH WERE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN HIS CRITIQUE OF THE OFFICIAL PATRIARCHAL DISCOURSE OF THE NEW NATION BUILDING.

<sup>43</sup> ELENA VOROBYEVA, VTORAYA POPYTKA MATERIALIZATSII, (THE SECOND ATTEMPT AT MATERIALISATION),VOZVRASHCHENIE SLEDUYET' (THE RETURN WILL FOLLOW') (EXH. CAT.), 2008. AMATY, TENGRI UMAE, P. 8. REPRINTED IN ENGLISH P. 176–185.

<sup>44</sup> IBID.

<sup>45</sup> FORMED IN ALMATY IN 1996, THE WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CREATIVE INITIATIVE ( LIGI ZHENSHCHIN TVORCHECKOI INITSIATIVY) ORGANIZED IN THE SAME YEAR THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF CENTRAL ASIAN WOMEN ARTISTS 'WOMEN: EAST AND WEST' (MEZHDUNARODNAYA VYSTAVKA ZHENSHCHIN-KHUODOZHNI TSENTRALNOI AZII ' ZHENSHCHINY: VOSTOK-ZAPAD'). THIS INCLUDED MANY WOMEN ARTISTS WHO WERE NOT MEMBERS. THE LEADING ARTISTS IN THE LEAGUE WERE ASSIYA KHAYRULINA, AIZHAN BEKKULOVA, RITA ZHUGUNUSOVA AND RITA MADANOVA.

<sup>37</sup> SEE NOTES 19 AND 28-30.

<sup>38</sup> NON-OFFICIAL ARTISTS (I.E. THOSE WHO WERE NOT ADMITTED AS MEMBERS OF THE ARTISTS' UNION) WERE EXCLUDED FROM SHOWING THEIR WORK IN PUBLIC EXHIBITION SPACES AND, FROM THE 1960S, BEGAN TO SHOW THEIR WORK BOTH OUTSIDE IN PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE RETREATS AS WELL AS IN EACH OTHER'S APARTMENTS. BOTH BLINOVA AND KHALFIN REFUSED TO CONFORM WITH THE LEGAL REQUIREMENT OF WORKING IN AN OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED CATEGORY.

<sup>39</sup> PULOTA IS A NEOLOGISM COMPOSED OUT OF TWO RUSSIAN WORDS PUSTOTA –VOID AND KULAK –FIST. FOR KHALFIN IT WAS AN ALTERNATIVE TO BOTH THE VISUAL AND THE CONCEPTUAL IN ART AS HE MAINTAINED THAT 'ART HAD TO ACTUALIZE TACTILE PERCEPTION.' SEE RUSTAM KHALFIN (EXH. CAT.), 2007, LONDON, WHITE SPACE GALLERY.

<sup>40</sup> SEE NOTE 44 AND CAT 26. AT THE SYMPOSIUM ON BREAD & ROSES HELD AT MOMENTUM ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2018 THE AUTHOR MODERATED A SESSION BETWEEN ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA AND SAULE SULEIMENOVA ON THEIR MEMORIES OF BLINOVA AS MENTOR AND COLLEAGUE AND THEIR ASSESSMENT OF HER WORK.



Their work is prefaced in spirit here by *House*, a semi-humorous video with related photographs, choreographed by Ganiya Chagatayeva (b. 1956) in 2005. Here the artist, in the absurd role of a female bird/butterfly-catcher in a constant process of transformation, appears to be in pursuit of both her animal self and a male bird/caterpillar (played by the Uzbek artist, Vyacheslav Akunov). On one level, these works have the light-hearted spirit of a joint artists' project set on the shores of Lake Issyk Kul where they were made, but they may also be regarded, along with other works made around the same time by Almagul Menlibayeva and Saule Suleimonova, as both the coming-of-age of a more clear-cut attitude towards individualism and gender, and the refutation of established patriarchal values. (cats. 27–30).

A more activist approach to the same concern is adopted by the Kreolex Zentr (Maria Vilkovisky and Ruthie Jenrbekova) who apply the anthropological and linguistic notion of post-colonial creolization to current gender politics in Kazakhstan (fig. 8).<sup>46</sup> Their work takes the form of a fluid, non-binary series of presentations that accommodate feminist, queer and LGBT ideas with other aspects of gender. In a spirit of post-futurist *épatage*, they regard their 'imaginary institution' as educational as well as artistic, and their 'promotional video' parodies established cultural conventions and clichés to highlight their absurd rigidity. Their pseudo-scientific demonstration of 'Dildo-techtonics,' for instance, lampoons 'the cracks and slippages inflicted by the dildo on the hegemonic sex-gender system,'<sup>47</sup> while the more prosaic episode of salad-making in the kitchen is treated as a gendered philosophical exercise. (cat. 47).



<sup>46</sup> CREOLIZATION IS THE ASSIMILATION OF ASPECTS OF ANOTHER CULTURE OR CULTURES OR THE HYBRIDIZATION OF CULTURES. KREOLEX ZENTR USE THIS TERM FIGURATIVELY IN RELATION TO BOTH GENDER AND CULTURE.

<sup>47</sup> TEXT FROM KREOLEX ZENTR PROMOTIONAL VIDEO (CAT. 47).

FIG 8 Kreolex Zentr  
Still from *Promo* / 2016 (cat.47)

In her videos, Natalya Dyu, an artist of Korean heritage based in the provincial city of Karaganda, employs the absurd language of social media as a personal statement about abjection and the ways in which the aspirational conformism of consumer society fails to provide opium, or anything much else, for the masses. In *So Naïve, So Fluffy* (2009), she plays the part of a young girl dreaming in her bedroom, writing out names and words onto labels that she then sticks onto the backs of a flock of small chickens that chaotically and noisily run over her bed. The labels fall off, creating unreadable messages on the bed sheets punctuated by the shit that the birds have left behind. In *I Love Naomi [Campbell] and Naomi Loves Fruits* (2001), she is filmed in pink pyjamas sitting on the toilet, a place to dream, where she obsessively soliloquizes a fantasy about her life and its relation with that of the supermodel. Her comparative dream both highlights and temporarily obliterates an unbridgeable void. (cats. 48–49).

Astana-based artist, Bakhyt Bubikanova presents, in performances, photo-panels and videos, a heroically surreal vision of women in revolt. In her short video *Sebastian* (2013), she ironizes the role of the naked gay martyr in stillness on a bleak hillside, then rapidly moves from semi-nakedness to nude in a denouement that seems as if she is hanging out washing. In *Boztorgay* (2018), against the buffeting of the wind, kneeling in one of the capital city's many wastelands, she keens and howls plaintively and continuously, consumed by unassuageable grief, to the hidden music of traditional *zhoktau*

(song lamentations). *New Year's Postcards* (2014), five photomontages, propose a lighter, more Rabelaisian approach to the female condition that revolves around the many drunken festivities associated with this season as well as their, at times, grizzly aftermath. In two of these, an evocative scene, with the artist's headless body, is almost comically obliterated by the ruched nylon hangings of Soviet-style curtains. (cats. 59–61).

Both Zoya Falkova and Gulnur Mukazhanova also build on the need for female heroes in their work. Falkova's object *EVERMUST* (2017) appropriates a boxer's punching bag and, by embellishing it with substantial breasts, rounded buttocks and prominent red nipples, transforms it into an assertion of femininity rather than an object for male aggression (cat. 52). Mukazhanova's *Iron Woman* (2010) is a woven G-string of nails, screws, wire and chain that is also a semblance of pubic hair; in a related photograph, this *vagina metalica* is shown on a live model. Such shape-shifting, power objects have shamanistic echoes, reinforced by Mukazhanova in *Mankurt 1 & 2* (2011–12), two photo-panels, in which she, a resident of Berlin, with long black hair and dressed in a rough wedding gown of felt, gazes from a roof top at the Radio Tower 'totem' in Alexanderplatz. In a related work, she is revealed massive, masked and naked within a felt enclosure, lodged between the two baroque wings of the Palais de Versailles—a shamanic Id embedded within and overpowering a regal Superego. (cats. 55–58, fig. 9).



FIG 9 Gulnur Mukazhanova  
*Mankurt 2* / 2011–12 (cat.58)

Gaisha Maidanova is concerned with the relationship between natural and artificial existence. A founding member of *Artpologist*, an international art collective that combines art with anthropology, she reveals a poetic concern for the definitive roles of cultural context (cats. 64–65). *Aluan* (2015), an ongoing project, is an exhibition space in the shape of a magazine, the first issue of which focussed trilingually (in Kazakh, Russian and English) on the relationship between culture and contemporary art in the city of Almaty. Her large installation *Beam Me to the Presence* (2017) extends from the local to the cosmic realm. In the spirit of Lidya Blinova's conceptual poem (cat. 25), she 'transmits', in an almost illegible form throughout the exhibition space, one of many messages anonymously composed in 2014 to be transmitted to Mars as proof of benevolent life on earth. She regards its extension here, along the gallery balustrade, as both a discovery and act of faith in the future as well as an intimation of the fragility of idealism.

Anar Aubakir, Aigerim Mazhitkhan and Gulmaral Tatibayeva are based in Astana, attracted there by its northern location and studios spaces for artists, yet their work takes very different forms. Tatibaeva makes small installations using tree bark or, as here, large structural hybrids between traditional yurts and a western modernist version of them designed by British architect Norman Foster for an Entertainment Centre in the city. She both revitalises and subverts the history and associations of these two motifs by making an entirely new, eight-metres-high structure, cladding

its skin with a colourful patchwork of different kinds of traditional Kazakh female clothing while its interior is covered by the clothes of women refugees she has met in Berlin. (cat. 53). As well as making a thoughtful and physically significant intervention into the architectural design of the former chapel where the exhibition is held, its structure provides a darkened space for rest and reflection where the work of other artists may be seen.

In her videos, shown inside Tatibayeva's construction, Mazhitkhan also comments on the architectural transformation of the new capital. In *Metaphors of the City* (2017), she asks visitors of different ages and backgrounds what nicknames they give to the new buildings. As in other cities, the iconic forms of such structures provoke popular, sometimes humorous, comparisons that deflate their architectural pretensions. Having established what names are attributed to the chief 'culprits', the artist then paints a portrait of their popular reception by asking whether the interviewee thinks this kind of naming is good or disrespectful, with unpredictable results. In *Images of the Capital* (2015), a related work, she conducts similar interviews about the efflorescence of new public sculpture around the city and receives remarkably frank opinions about what is perceived as the kitsch nature of official taste. (cat. 62–63).

In her eleven-part installation *Home* (2018), Aubakir, fascinated by the traditional philosophy, architecture and music of Kazakhstan, has moved away from the capital to create a multi-layered narrative of migration, displacement and loss. It starts in 1944 with the story of Marina, who had been forcibly transported from her remote Balkarian homeland in the Caucasus to Kazakhstan. After the war, she settled and remarried but, after the death of her husband, she lived for a time in her car and then stayed with the artist's family. She wanted to return home with Timur, her son, plans were set, but he was involved in a serious traffic accident and unable to leave because of a lengthy legal action against him. She worked to earn enough money to pay off the fines, finally bought the train tickets, and together they travelled to the station. At this point she suffered a heart attack and died in the ambulance to the hospital.



FIG 10 Anar Aubakir  
*Marina* / 2010 (cat.54/2)

Maria's dream of being reunited with her home was never realised; Timur buried his mother in Kazakhstan and stayed there. The meta-narrative of this work, that includes paintings, drawings and cyanotypes, landscapes and portraits that reflect places and disparate moments in the lives of these people, expresses what the artist describes as 'the spiritual and moral world of nomadic cultures.' It also raises the unanswerable question of 'whether the Kazakh people will succeed in transferring to future generations the high standards of sincere humanity they have shown towards others in the past.' (cat. 54, fig. 10).<sup>48</sup>

## V. Epilogue

The idea for *Bread & Roses* was prompted by the unparalleled number of good women artists making work in Kazakhstan today. This is a by no means unique phenomenon elsewhere and it is a symptom of deep-rooted social, cultural, economic and political changes world-wide that art, if it is any good, cannot help but reflect and, perhaps, also anticipate. To help make sense of the current artistic situation in Kazakhstan, we thought it necessary to reveal its roots in both the abstract meanings of traditional art and in the autonomous researches of the early 20-century Russian avant-garde. The spirit of both, in modified forms, has survived repression and neglect to surface in the work of new generations.

The geographical position of Kazakhstan has traditionally made it a melting pot for ideas, as well as a staging post for journeys, a reality as true today as it was in ancient times. The sense of openness, energy and flux that this engenders has been consistently expressed in its art, which, as we have seen, has even managed to confront and digest its often tragic history.

To more accurately reflect the realities of the past within the framework of present and future, *Bread & Roses* has been an exercise in storytelling, as well as being an exhibition of contemporary art. It is therefore a story about decolonisation, rooted in the historical mists of patriarchy, that should have no clear end other than the sustained amelioration of art and life for everyone, regardless of their gender or ethnicity.

An analysis of this broad discourse, and what it represents, suggests that crude patriarchal structures, inherited from the 18th century European Enlightenment and before, are no longer effective. This inevitably leads to a reconsideration of what power expresses today as well how, and for whose benefit, it is disposed. Happiness should not be built on the misery of others, yet history and much present experience prove otherwise. It is a modest desire that, since the days of the Roman Empire, we should have progressed from the manipulative diet of 'bread and circuses' to enjoy today: freedom from slavery, bread, art—and the blooming of roses too.



FIG 11 Katya Nikonorova  
*A Bouquet for March 8th: Tulips*  
2013 (cat.50)

<sup>48</sup> ANAR AUBAKIR, ARTIST'S STATEMENT ABOUT THIS WORK. SEE P. 74.

# THE TRAGIC LIVES OF THE ARTISTS IN KARLAG<sup>1</sup>

AIGUL OMAROVA

In 1989, a seminal illustrated art book and anthology of articles *The Avant-Garde, Stopped on the Run* was published in Leningrad. The book's dust cover bore the caption, 'A book about how the artist Vera Ermolaeva went missing on the shores of the Aral Sea, and then the sea disappeared, too.'<sup>2</sup> Kazakhstan has not yet fully solved the problem of restoring the Aral Sea, along with its salty waves, a truth that, for many years, had been hushed up before slowly re-emerging. This kind of truth should be openly accessible in all countries that have gone through dictatorships and are seeking to go forward democratically, but it should also include the real story about what happened to Ermolaeva. The truth may not be quite as intriguing or mysterious as the caption on this book's dust cover, but it is equally tragic.<sup>3</sup>

In the same year, 1989, researchers at the Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum established that Ermolaeva, a former colleague and comrade of Marc Chagall and Kazimir Malevich, co-founder of UNOVIS (Champions of the New Art), and a faculty member of Ginkhuk<sup>4</sup>, had been shot on September 26, 1937, in a labour camp in the village of Dolinka, the headquarters of Karlag (the Karaganda Corrective Labour Camp). But the story of how she met her end in Kazakhstan and why she was shot there is emblematic of the story of many other women artists who met a similar fate.

The Karaganda Corrective Labour Camp was established in the Kazakh steppes, the largest in the NKVD's Gulag. It was based on a Giant State Farm, and its mission was both rural and industrial development. Large-scaled arrests in the Soviet Union and forced deportation of whole peoples to Kazakhstan were underway. To this end, the indigenous Kazakh population was driven from their native lands, which caused a famine in 1932–1933 that killed fifty percent of the Kazakh people. Only camp staff, their families, and inmates—an unpaid labour force—lived in the camp. The first inmates were peasant families, accused of being *kulaks* in Russia<sup>5</sup>, and clergymen. They built the first barracks and railways and were followed by political prisoners, people convicted of 'counter-revolutionary' crimes. Stripped of their right to move elsewhere, people were left to live there in perpetuity, which was

AIGUL OMAROVA

<sup>1</sup> KARLAG (KARAGANDA CORRECTIVE LABOUR CAMP) WAS FOUNDED IN 1931 IN KARAGANDA OBLAST, KAZAKH SSR AND QUICKLY BECAME ONE OF THE LARGEST SOVIET GULAGS. OVER A MILLION INMATES SERVED THERE AND A LARGE NUMBER OF THEM WERE POLITICAL PRISONERS — 'ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE.'

<sup>2</sup> S.M. TURUTINA, A.B. LOSHENKOV, AND S.P. DYACHENKO (EDS.), AVANGARD, OSTANOVLENNYI NA BEGU (THE AVANT-GARDE, STOPPED ON THE RUN), LENINGRAD, AURORA, 1989. YEVGENY KOVTUN, A CURATOR AT THE RUSSIAN MUSEUM IN LENINGRAD, WAS ONE OF THE LEADING FIGURES IN PUTTING THIS TOGETHER.

<sup>3</sup> THE STORY THAT ERMOLAEVA PERISHED IN THE ARAL SEA COMES FROM A MEMOIR PUBLISHED BY VLADIMIR STERLIGOV, A FELLOW ARTIST AND PRISONER. THE DOCUMENTARY RECORD, HOWEVER, DOES NOT SUPPORT HIS VERSION OF EVENTS.

<sup>4</sup> THE GINKHUK (STATE INSTITUTE OF ARTISTIC CULTURE) WAS AN AVANT-GARDE RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN LENINGRAD THAT FOCUSED ON ART THEORY. ERMOLAEVA DIRECTED THE COLOUR LABORATORY AT GINKHUK.

<sup>5</sup> KULAK WAS THE DEROGATORY NAME GIVEN TO RICH PEASANTS WHO RESISTED STALIN'S COLLECTIVISATION OF AGRICULTURE.

tantamount to exile, and it was they who built the first labour settlements in Karlag. The flow of political prisoners and exiles was so overwhelming that so-called Troikas—groups of three officials who decided in lieu of the courts whether prisoners would live or die—were set up nationwide.

The murder of the popular Communist Party leader Sergei Kirov, in Leningrad during 1934, sparked a huge wave of arrests. Artists were caught up in this wave, including Ermolaeva, who hosted exhibitions and gatherings of artists in her flat, something noted by the NKVD. Everything about Ermolaeva worked against her: her aristocratic pedigree, her education and free thinking, her trips to Paris and Berlin, and her links to Malevich, who had been arrested twice, jailed for a year on charges of 'espionage,' and was dying of cancer. Also, the illustrations she had recently completed for Goethe's classic story *Reynard the Fox* could be construed as a satire on new Soviet norms of justice.



One of Vera Ermolaeva's illustrations for *Reynard the Fox* (1933) that the NKVD claimed satirised the Soviet state

By order of the Leningrad NKVD, on December 25, 1934, Ermolaeva was denounced as a purveyor of anti-Soviet propaganda and member of a counter-revolutionary group that had tried to establish illegal communications channels with foreigners. She was charged under Articles 58–10 ('anti-Soviet agitation') and 58–11 ('organizing anti-Soviet activity') of the Soviet Criminal Code. Article 58 had a total of fourteen clauses, and the first of these dealt with crimes punishable by death. On March 29, 1935, Ermolaeva was convicted by an NKVD Special Council as a 'socially dangerous element'. Although her exact crime was not specified, she was sentenced to three years in a labour camp and dispatched to Karlag. Her sentence went into effect on March 27, 1935, rather than retroactively on the day she was arrested. She was arrested, convicted, and transported to Dolinka along with Vladimir Sterligov, who later founded a painting school derived from Suprematism, with several other of Malevich's disciples.

During interrogation, the NKVD staged one-on-one confrontations between Ermolaeva and Sterligov. When they were sent to Kazakhstan, they were assigned to the same train car. Disabled since childhood and paralyzed in both legs, Ermolaeva walked on crutches. She found the trip to Kazakhstan quite agonizing, especially when the guards ordered the convicts to lie down and get up during stops and when exiting the train in the steppes. Emaciated after his spell in prison, Sterligov would help Ermolaeva get up from ground, when he was scarcely able to lift the tall, stout, heavy woman.<sup>6</sup>

After arriving in Dolinka in April, Ermolaeva was immediately assigned to work as an artist in the Karlag agitprop and cultural education unit. She worked hard, designed posters, and showed her work at exhibitions in the camp, some were even exhibited in Moscow. In Dolinka, she lived among the exiles on 56, First Street and was noted for her politeness, discipline, and ability to get things done. She

AIGUL OMAROVA

<sup>6</sup> S.M. TURUTINA, A.B. LOSHENKOV, AND S.P. DYACHENKO (EDS.), OP. CIT., P. 20. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THE PAGES IN THIS OTHERWISE ESSENTIAL, GROUNDBREAKING BOOK ARE NOT NUMBERED — TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

attended political education classes, seemed enthusiastic and interested in everything, and became involved in clubs, amateur art activities, and theatrical productions, staged along with Sterligov and fellow avant-gardist Pyotr Sokolov, in which other convicts performed. She worked overtime, earning the title of 'Shock Worker,' which meant that more workdays were added to her record and, this, consequently, was supposed to lead to her early release.<sup>7</sup>



7 THE FORCED SETTLERS AND FARM WORKERS WERE CREDITED WITH WORKDAYS INSTEAD OF BEING PAID WAGES.

Portrait of Vera Ermolaeva 1915-16

The reasons why Ermolaeva was shot and the circumstance of her final days in the camp have now been ascertained. On September 14, 1937, she was issued a release warrant but, on the evening of the same day, was indicted under Criminal Code Articles 58–10 and 58–11 and was searched, interrogated and accused of associating with four counter-revolutionaries, members of anti-Soviet political parties who were convicts in the camp. Allegedly, she had allowed them to use her apartment for secret meetings and had sent illegal letters to other sections of the Karlag. Ermolaeva made a huge mistake by pleading partly guilty to the charges, claiming she was merely acquainted with the convicts in question and had conversed with them only about literature, art, and their families. Although her partial conviction was sufficient, eyewitness testimony was also included in the case against her. Thus, on September 17, 1937, Ermolaeva was indicted along with eight other people.



Decision to send Ermolaeva for three years' hard labour to Karlag on grounds of her being a 'socially dangerous element'

On September 18, due to a bureaucratic mix-up, Ermolaeva was told she would be released and was sent under armed escort to Karabas, where her case file (No. 3744/37) was being processed. On September 20, Ermolaeva successfully applied for release from Dolinka and left for Karabas.

The very same day, she was retried *in absentia* by a NKVD troika and sentenced to death. Meanwhile, her case file did not turn up in Karabas, and neither was her name on the lists of convicts scheduled for release. She was held in remand prison in Karabas until September 25, when she was sent back to Dolinka. Upon arrival, she submitted a written explanation of where she had been.<sup>8</sup> The next day, September 26, 1937, she was shot on the edge of the steppe just outside the camp—many miles away from the salty waves of the Aral Sea.

8 KARAGANDA REGIONAL FINE ARTS MUSEUM, AUXILIARY RESEARCH ARCHIVES, ACQUISITIONS LEDGER, ITEM NO. 82.



Site of Ermolaeva's execution on the steppe, just outside the Dolinka Camp, Karlag

Eventually, on November 21, 1989, Ermolaeva was exonerated posthumously by the Karaganda Regional Prosecutor, due to there being a lack of evidence for her conviction. Her life had come to a tragic end during the height of the Great Terror of 1937–1938, a time when Stalin's totalitarian regime destroyed the pride of the Soviet people, including many members of the intelligentsia—scholars, educators, artists, and cultural workers—sparing neither women nor children.

Zhanna Zimmerman was convicted of spying for England, as she had a good command of English and was also sent to the Karlag. She was arrested in 1938 and sentenced to eight years of hard labor in 1941. After serving her time in Karlag, she remained in Karaganda as an exile. In April 1950, she was rearrested and then exiled in September to Karkaralinsk, where she worked as an artist and typist. She painted rugs, jars, and boxes and was employed as a typist in a logging enterprise, where she edited the speeches of the company's directors. In 1956, she was exonerated and moved to Leningrad, where she died in 1993.

A special legal status was concocted for women whose husbands or fathers had been accused and arrested: family members of traitors. They were extrajudicially sent to labour camps for periods of five to ten years and deprived of civil rights after their release. Their children were dispatched to orphanages or special, strictly-monitored institutions, where they were given new names and separated from their mothers.

Many women—wives of prominent politicians, scientists, and writers—were sent to the Soviet Gulag, and Kazakh women were among them. Three women's camps for so-called enemies of the people were set up in the Soviet Union. One of them, the notorious ALZHIR, the Akmolinsk Camp for Wives of Traitors, was a branch of Karlag where women were subjected to humiliation, coercion, hours of interrogation, long trips from one prison to another, emotional abuse, beatings, torture, and violence at the hands of guards, investigators—and criminals. The NKVD used a tried-and-tested method: if you do not let someone sleep for weeks on end, they will sign anything you put in front of them, half delirious and unaware of what they are doing.

The women were transported by train to the new camp. ALZHIR was overcrowded in six months. The women were later reassigned to other camps, where they lived in special compounds. If they committed infractions or refused to sleep with the wardens, they could be 'thrown under a train', as the saying went, i.e., gang-raped by syphilis patients and forced to perform unbearable manual labour. If the women were educated as artists, however, they were more likely to survive, since they were assigned not only easier work, and better food rations, but also had the chance to put their education and skills to use in a narrowly creative way and thus maintain their human dignity.



Alla Vasileva  
*Portrait of Anna Artobatskaya*  
1941 / ink wash on paper  
11,5x10cm  
Made in Karlag

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Artists were often consigned to making agitprop, which in the camp was under strict ideological control. They produced posters, slogans, portraits and busts of Communist leaders, decorated buildings and clubs, and were involved in amateur art, constructing scenery and making costumes for theatrical productions, and giving drawing lessons to their fellow inmates. They painted portraits of camp officers and their families, produced paintings based on popular pictures of the period (for example, those found on postcards), and designed carpets on paper. The artists were thus able to obtain extra food rations and take baths in private. Naturally, since they were isolated and cut off from the world of art, they ceased to evolve as artists.



*Portrait of Natalia Iznar*  
c.1930

AIGUL OMAROVA

Since it was founded in 1988, the Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum has vigorously researched the work of artists who suffered under the Terror, holding 1,200 works by some thirty artists who were persecuted. Many of them were still alive and recorded their personal testimony. These include seven women: Anna Artobatskaya, Irina Borchman, Alla Vasilyeva, Vera Ermolaeva, Natalia Iznar, Maria Myslina, and Zhanna Zimmerman. The museum has also identified other female artists who were in the Karlag, but whose works are no longer extant: Lydia Pokrovskaya, Eva Levina-Rosenholz, Anna Shitikova, Dora Rogalskaya, Zora-Irina Kalina, and Yevgenia Ovoshchnikova.

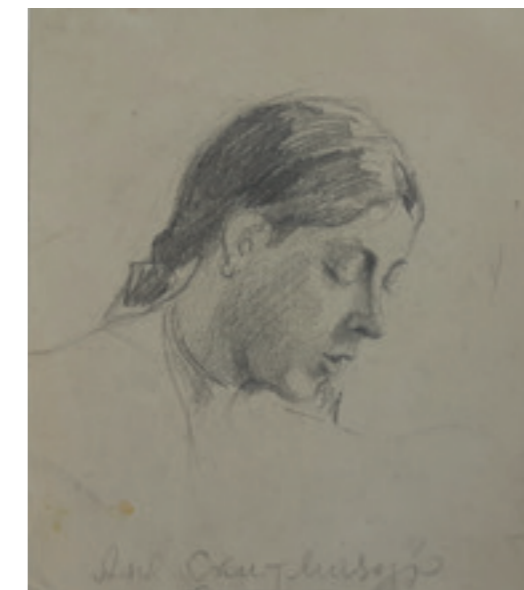


Maria Myslina  
*Portrait of Natalia Iznar / 1960*  
Gouache on cardboard / 29x19cm

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Dagmara Yevsteshina, a resident of Karaganda, allowed the museum to make photocopies of two portraits of her as a seven-year-old girl, drawn by Artobatskaya.<sup>9</sup> Artobatskaya ran the fine arts club in Dolinka, where the young Yevsteshina, the daughter of local exiles, took classes. Artobatskaya was escorted to classes by armed guards and made pencil sketches of the girl in preparation for a large painting, later giving several of these to her sitter and pupil, whose thinness reminded her of her own daughter, her only daughter, who had died when she was six. She had been arrested at her daughter's grave during her funeral and was taken to Butyrka Remand Prison in Moscow. During her interrogation, the NKDV investigator tore up the last photographs of her child in front of her. Artobatskaya's only crime was that she was married to a so-called enemy of the people.

<sup>9</sup> KARAGANDA REGIONAL FINE ARTS MUSEUM, PERSECUTED ARTISTS COLLECTION, ACQUISITIONS LEDGER, ITEM NO. 5920 AND ITEM NO. 5921.



Alla Vasileva  
*Portrait of Anya Skimazur / 1941*  
Pencil on paper / 9x11,5cm  
Made in Dolinka, Karlag

AIGUL OMAROVA

After she was released from Karlag on April 19, 1946, Artobatskaya lived in the Central Club in Dolinka, where she also worked as an artist, earning a wage of 500 roubles a month. She stayed in the settlement until August 1946.<sup>10</sup> Every day, she made drawings her daughter but unfortunately none of these has survived. Subsequently, she lived in Karaganda, where she continued working as a stage designer, before moving to Uzbekistan. In 1956, she moved to Moscow, where she died in 1974.

Directors of the arts clubs in Karlag came and went as they finished their sentences and were released. Among them were women artists whose lives became entwined in the camp. Relationships grew into strong friendships that lasted even after they were released because, since they had been emotionally and intellectually isolated, they could no longer be friends with anyone else. Both in the camp and after their release, they supported one another, taught drawing and painting, made stage designs for amateur theatricals and serious productions, sharing their know-how, and made portraits of their friends as well as genre scenes that depicted the everyday lives of female inmates. Bound together by similar lives and professions, the artworks they produced in the camp were *cris de coeur*, a means of voicing their longing for their families and their children, and an essential spiritual protest against totalitarianism.



<sup>10</sup> KARAGANDA REGIONAL FINE ARTS MUSEUM, AUXILIARY RESEARCH ARCHIVES, ACQUISITIONS LEDGER, ITEM NO. 90.

Alla Vasileva  
*Portrait of Natalia Iznar* / 1960  
Oil on canvas / 37×32cm

Natalia Iznar was the wife of the well-known Russian graphic artist Nikolai Kupreyanov. After the revolution, she became a member of the Union of Art Workers (RABIS) and was involved in educating children and young people. She worked in the Office of Political Outreach to Children's Homes and was involved in setting up the first children's theatre in Moscow. She was head stage designer at a drama theatre in Moscow and worked with the artist Martiros Saryan in Konstantin Stanislavsky's Opera Studio. She also designed productions at Yuri Zavatsky's theatre with the artist Andrei Goncharov. In the 1930s, Iznar was hired by the editors of the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia* to work as a consulting artist while also making book illustrations and exhibiting her work at a number of art shows in Moscow.

Iznar's second husband, Gavriil Abezgaus, a senior official at Narkomfin (State Commissariat of Finance) and a department head at the USSR State Bank, was arrested and shot.<sup>11</sup> As a family member of a 'traitor', Iznar was sentenced on December 22, 1937, to eight years in a labour camp with subsequent deprivation of civil rights. She was sent to the ALZHIR, and thence to a camp in the village of Dolinka in 1938. It was there Iznar employed her gifts as an artist, working in the camp's culture and education section. She made stage designs for productions mounted by Karlag inmates at the Central Club of the Interior Ministry's Political Department in Dolinka. On May 29, 1945, she

<sup>11</sup> M.G. NIKOLAEV, "DOM GOSBANKA: LIUDI I SUD'BY" [THE STATE BANK HOUSE: PEOPLE AND LIVES], DEN'GI I KREDIT 3 (2014): 71-76, [HTTPS://WWW.CBR.RU/CONTENT/DOCUMENT/FILE/19853/71\\_76.PDF](https://www.cbr.ru/content/document/file/19853/71_76.pdf).

was released six months early and ordered to settle in Dolinka. Later, she moved to Vladimir, where she was appointed stage designer of the regional drama theatre in 1947. In 1955, Iznar was appointed head artist of the Novgorod Regional Drama Theatre, then headed by the renowned Soviet theatre director Georgy Tovstonogov. After she was exonerated in 1956, she moved to Moscow, where she died of cancer in 1967. The Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum has one work by Iznar and a number of her photographs.

Maria Myslina, Iznar's best friend in the Karlag, was also a family member of a 'traitor': her husband, Vladimir Kaabak, was shot in 1937. Prior to this, she had been a member of the Association of Artists of the Revolution (AKhRR), and she had studied professionally with the renowned artists Konstantin Korovin and Ilya Mashkov. She specialized in book illustrations and posters. After a stint in the ALZHIR, Myslina worked at the club in Dolinka with Lydia Pokrovskaya, making stage design for theatre productions.

In Dolinka, Pokrovskaya worked in a dye factory, supervised an embroidery workshop, did paintings on glass, made pencil portraits of inmates, and produced a series of portraits for the camp's board of honour, entitled *Shock Workers of the ALZHIR* and *Women of the ALZHIR*, some of which are housed in the Gulag History Museum in Moscow.

After serving out her sentence in 1946, Myslina worked in Cheboksary, Chuvashia.<sup>12</sup> Iznar helped her move to Vladimir, where she worked in the theatre with her friend. In 1955, Myslina moved to Moscow, where she died in 1974. After moving to Moscow, Myslina was able to thrive as an artist by illustrating children's book with watercolours, painting postcards on subjects that appealed to children and women and trying her hand at animal painting. The last series of watercolours painted by Myslina was entitled *Shells*, one of which is held by Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum along with a drawing, her *Portrait of Natalia Iznar*.

<sup>12</sup> KARAGANDA REGIONAL FINE ARTS MUSEUM, AUXILIARY RESEARCH ARCHIVES, ACQUISITIONS LEDGER, ITEM NO. 88.



Irina Borchman  
*A Pig* / 1942  
Pigs' blood on paper / 13×19,5cm

The life of Alla Vasilyeva, Myslina's and Nazar's friend, was similar: her husband too had been arrested and shot, and she was convicted as a family member of a 'traitor' and sent to the camp. She left behind her son Gai Protopovov, who would later come to join her in Dolinka.<sup>13</sup> Protopov would also be arrested as a so-called enemy of the people, but later, in 1951. When Vasilyeva was released in 1942, she was ordered to settle in Dolinka, where she spent another four years, working in the Karlag's culture and education section.<sup>14</sup> She produced the scenery for theatre productions, including the ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. In 1953, she returned to Moscow, where she passed away in 1991. The Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum holds twenty-six of her works, including two portraits of Anna Artobatskaya, a *Portrait of Natalia Aznar*, and her *Self-Portrait*. Her pencil drawings and watercolour portraits in the museum's collection

<sup>13</sup> "PROTOPOV, GAI KLAVDIYEVICH," VIRTUAL MUSEUM OF THE GULAG, [HTTP://GULAGMUSEUM.ORG/SHOWOBJECT.DO?OBJECT=375720&LANGUAGE=L](http://GULAGMUSEUM.ORG/SHOWOBJECT.DO?OBJECT=375720&LANGUAGE=L)

<sup>14</sup> KARAGANDA REGIONAL FINE ARTS MUSEUM, AUXILIARY RESEARCH ARCHIVES, ACQUISITIONS LEDGER, ITEM NO. 86.

include several from her time in the camp: *Exile*, *Sick Woman*, *Portrait of Anna Skitmazur*, *Celia*, *Portrait of Galya Rappoport*, *Portrait of Vera Baskakova*<sup>15</sup>, *Portrait of Erzszy Magyar*<sup>16</sup>, *Portrait of Zvenigorodsky*, and *Portrait of Anna Artobatskaya*.

Not all women artists were employed as artists in the camp. Women with university educations, as well as women who had studied with the world's best artists and had exhibited their work abroad, often had to work in the fields of the state farms and take care of livestock. They had no paints, but the desire to make art forced them to use what came to hand. Moscow artist Irina Borchman studied at the School of Applied Arts in Munich, the Institute of Fine Arts in Starnberg, and at Vkhutemas in Moscow.<sup>17</sup> She served her time in Dolinka, the village of Prostornoye, and Special Camp No. 8 (Peschanlag).<sup>18</sup>



<sup>15</sup> SEE THE LIST OF VASILYEVA'S WORKS AT [HTTP://OLD.MEMO.RU/MUSEUM/RUS/GRAPHICS/VASILEVA\\_L.HTM](http://old.memo.ru/museum/rus/graphics/vasileva_l.htm).

<sup>16</sup> A MEMBER OF THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNIST PARTY.

<sup>17</sup> VKHUTEMAS, FOUNDED IN 1920, STOOD, IN RUSSIAN, FOR THE HIGHER ART AND TECHNICAL STUDIOS. IT WAS LOCATED IN MOSCOW AND MOST OF THE LEADING AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS AND ARCHITECTS TAUGHT THERE.

<sup>18</sup> MEANT FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS AND POWS, THE SPECIAL CAMPS WERE SUPPOSED TO REPLACE HARD LABOUR.

Irina Borchman  
Spring / 1953  
Watercolour

Borchman worked in the garment factory, on the sheep farm, as a cook, as a furnace stoker, and in the fire department. Her artistic medium in Karlag was blood squeezed from bedbugs crushed on the walls of the barracks and pig's blood on paper. At the outset of her time in the camp, she was given a bucket of pig's blood and assigned to paint numbers on the animal pens. The Karaganda Regional Fine Arts Museum now owns *Borka*, one of her works in this medium which depicts a piglet.

Borchman suffered with pellagra in the camp and nearly went blind. She took up drawing again in 1948 and painted frescoes on the walls of the camp wardens' offices. After her release, she lived in exile in the village of Zhuravlyovka. The museum holds her landscape paintings of the camp exile settlements, including *The Girin House*, *Spring*, *Prostornoye*, and *Steppe Village*, a view of Zhuravlyovka that was shown at the exhibition of the Regional Council of Trade Unions in Akmolinsk (now Astana) in 1952.

Borchman had been sentenced to ten years in the camp with perpetual exile because of her ethnic German background and she was caught up in the new wave of terror that coincided with the outbreak of war in 1941. Entire ethnic groups, not considered trustworthy by

Soviet authorities, were deported to Kazakhstan, including Germans, Koreans, Chechens, Ingush, Latvians, Poles, Meskhetian Turks, and Karachai. They were stripped of the right to move freely, to live in the major cities, and to go to university.

Those who had served their time did not have the right to go home. They also signed nondisclosure agreements, thus forever depriving themselves of the right to talk about what had happened to them. They were required to report regularly to the local commandant's office, and they were under the NKVD's watchful eye. Their personal lives had been tragically ruined and many of their relatives refused to have anything to do with them. Even when they were reunited with loved ones and children, many women found it difficult to integrate with people who had changed while they had been away.

The women artists could work only in the places where they were exiled, but work they did. The sculptor Yevgenia Ovoshchnikova, for example, produced many sculptures for the buildings in Karaganda as the city was being built. Her work can still be seen today gracing long friezes throughout the railway station. She was arrested in Moscow, where she studied sculpture with Anna Golubkina, who had been a pupil of Auguste Rodin. As the wife of a 'traitor', she had been sentenced to eight years and stripped of her civil rights.

Work made by political prisoners was produced all over the former Soviet Union. They built cities and factories, worked in mines, processing plants, and collective farms, painted murals and made sculptural friezes for the new workers' palaces. When Stalin died and the Gulag began to collapse, the soviet economy fell apart as well, since it was fuelled by the unpaid labour of convicts. It knew no other form of management, gradually leading to its complete decline and to the Soviet Union's collapse.

If the women artists had lived in a country free of systematic persecution and could have developed their art, art throughout the world might be completely different today. Their names nearly disappeared in the past, but there were many more of them than are recorded here. Like the salt waters of the Aral Sea, these will never return.

# THE PERSONAL IS STILL POLITICAL

## SPACES OF SELF-DEFINITION

BOJANA PEJIĆ

*Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.*

Michel de Certeau<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition *Bread & Roses* employs gender and geography as two types of framing device.

**44** All the participating artists are women from a specific geographical community that we expect to be able to 're-imagine' and recognise as part of a collectively-held history—a 'politics of location' that reveals to us aspects of the geographic and political place in which they live and work today. In other words, we somehow assume that Kazakhstan's artists are concerned with contextual art practices. This exhibition makes it evident that they are indeed dealing with 'their' context, but once their works travel and are shown in a foreign context, what may we expect then?

Since December 1991, when the Republic of Kazakhstan gained its sovereignty, the construction of 'Kazakhness', imagined as a collective and cohesive force, has become, as Narek Mkrtchyan asserts, a unique post-communist project 'in terms of harmonious interethnic coexistence of a multi ethnic society...In the multinational society of Kazakhstan, the titular nation can legitimize its existence by referring to past archetypes. In order to overcome demographic disproportion, Kazakhs as a titular nation have to prove that they are an indigenous population deeply-rooted in early local history and prehistory.'<sup>2</sup> The women artists whose paintings, drawings, photographs, installations, videos and performances have been selected for this exhibition approach the issue of Kazakh identity differently, some of them with enthusiasm and some with critical distance, but, irrespective of their attitude, none of them denies the fact of belonging to Kazakhstan's plural cultural space.

As we are all, at some level aware, our age of globalization is paralleled with resistance from the local: on the local agenda there is the insistence on religious 'roots,' on ethnic 'origins,' on cultural 'uniqueness' and a unitary national identity. Today, these searches for identity have resulted—as often as not—in locally-performed, aggressively ethnic nationalisms that sometimes take the form of state-sponsored xenophobia. Screening the global art world of today, Frederick N. Bohrer, has made the point: 'Important as it is to belong, group identity must be seen in counterpoint to individual identity. Surely this is especially important to an artist, or anyone who wants their work to be seen as her or his own, and not merely as the product of a collective force. Belonging, like anything else, is something from which the artist can make art. The linguistic, social and cultural practices of one's 'heritage' are not just

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<sup>1</sup> MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE*, 1988, BERKELEY ET AL., UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, P. 115. FRENCH ORIGINAL: *ARTS DE FAIRE* (1984).

<sup>2</sup> SEE NAREK MKRTCHYAN, 'THE NOTION OF "KAZAKHNESS" BEHIND THE SYMBOLIC NATION-BUILDING OF KAZAKHSTAN,' *CEU POLITICAL SCIENCE JOURNAL*, VOL. 9, NO. 1–2, 2014, PP. 16 AND 24.

given; they are more like raw material, one of the many things that enter into one's art. Furthermore, as we come to see identity in the interplay of various dynamic forces, it follows that identity itself is not fixed, but fluid, not given, but performed.'<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, it is necessary to decipher how the artists included in the *Bread & Roses* project perform their belonging to their collectively shared geographical space, while at the same preserving their individual artistic—and women's—identities.

At the core of their work lies the question of space. Whereas it is true that most (although not all) the works in the exhibition refer to their Kazakh heritage, as well to the country's contemporary moment, the artists are not so concerned by the ways in which their experience of space influences the formation of collective/national identity. Rather, they pursue an opposite strategy, elaborating instead on the connections between space and subjectivity. In her inspiring analysis of video produced by younger women artists at the beginning of the 2000s, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth argued: 'It was not, to be sure, a fascination with nylon stockings, but rather a persistent emphasis on femininity as something other than *identity*, be it in the essentialist or performative sense of the word, something less familiar, more difficult to grasp, something that cannot be so easily assumed, let alone becoming one's "own".'<sup>4</sup> She continued: 'The renewed interest in space is, I think, precisely a symptom of many women artists' more or less programmatic withdrawal from the aesthetics of identity and their interest in pursuing different, as yet unscripted, scenarios of self-definition.'<sup>4</sup> The constitution of identity *via* space in the video works included in *Bread & Roses* is similarly produced but, considering that space, as Lajer-Burcharth put it, is 'inherent in any act of self-definition,' I should like also to explore the operation of spatialization in works realized in other media such as painting, performance and installation.

<sup>3</sup> FREDERICK N. BOHRER, 'BORDERS (AND BOARDERS) OF ART: NOTES FROM A FOREIGN LAND,' IN (ED. KAMAL BOULLATA) *BELONGING AND GLOBALISATION – CRITICAL ESSAYS IN CONTEMPORARY ART & CULTURE*, 2008, SAQI, 2008, PP. 28–29.

<sup>4</sup> EWA LAJER-BURCHARTH, 'DUCHESS OF NOTHING: VIDEO SPACE AND "THE WOMAN ARTIST"', IN (EDS. CAROL ARMSTRONG AND CATHERINE DE ZEGHER) *WOMEN ARTISTS AT THE MILLENNIUM*, 2006, CAMBRIDGE MA, MIT PRESS, PP. 145–146.

## The Spatial

The curators of the *Bread & Roses* show are well aware that in producing an exhibition they have to work within a given gallery space, guiding—even seducing—the visitors to follow the narrative they have staged. Visiting an exhibition, wandering around it, stopping and looking at the exhibited works is always a spatial experience. But besides this, the *Bread & Roses* show itself is 'about' spaces: spaces produced in two-dimensional representations, such as painting or photography, in real locations and/or staged places, captured in moving images, such as film and video, or in real spaces in which the artists situate their performative acts or their installations. It is thus evident that women artists are actively engaged in producing or, rather, *making space*.

From some superficial knowledge of the ancient history of Kazakhstan, and its local customs relating to space, we may understand that this culture has been basically conditioned by a nomadic way of being in the world with ceaseless mobility, perpetual change of location, and momentarily occupied settlements. In the 1930s, however, the collectivization of agriculture imposed by soviet power finally brought this way of life to an end. But nomadism is as much an attitude as a reality and the recent history of Kazakhstan tells us that even the country's capital may 'travel' and change its location: from 1929 until 1996 Alma-Ata/Almaty, served as the old capital, and is still the largest city in the country (approx. 1.8 million inhabitants). But it had to be abandoned because it embodied the past. Astana, the new capital, has a much smaller population (approx. 1 million inhabitants) and is meant to symbolise the 'new' Kazakhstan and the future.

But, first of all, what is space? How is space produced and by whom? In his influential volume, *The Production of Space*, French philosopher Henry Lefebvre writes: 'Everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a "room" in an apartment, the "corner" of a street, a "marketplace", a shopping or cultural "centre", a public "place" and so on. These terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish, but not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general they describe social space in that they correspond to the specific use of that space, and hence to the spatial practice that they

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both express and constitute.<sup>5</sup> The basic idea, thus, is that space is the product of a community: it structures social relations, including relations between genders; it also organizes collective living and gives it meaning. Social spaces are not simply shaped by architects and urbanists who design our habitats from *above*, but they are produced also from *below*, by various spatial practices performed by the inhabitants and users of collectively-shared spaces. This kind of space as Michel de Certeau, another prominent French theorist in this field, maintains is dependent on ‘the relationship of coexistence.’<sup>6</sup> Since the late 1980s, the profusion of spatial considerations and spatial metaphors has repeatedly resurfaced in disciplines as disparate as philosophy, sociology and in natural sciences, such as biology; it has also appeared in the theorization of cultural practices like literature, cinema and visual arts, particularly in (feminist) art histories. These spatial discourses stemmed basically from the French poststructuralist theories from the 1970s which, translated into English some twenty years later, became basic reference for a wider theorization of space.

Throughout the 1990s, one used to talk about ‘mapping’ spaces, ‘geographical imaginations,’ the ‘politics’ of space, the ‘scanning’ of public venues, about megalopolises ‘framed’ by so-called postmodern (neo-Marxist) geographers. However, when the writings of influential scholars, such as Edward W. Soja or David Harvey, were revisited by feminist professors of geography, Doreen Massey for instance, their shortcomings became apparent in that their ‘flexible sexism,’ in the urban space constructed not only class and racial positions but also gender relations. Because of this, ‘spatiality cannot be analysed through the medium of the male body and heterosexual male experience.’<sup>7</sup> Massey's critique makes it clear that ‘new’ postmodernist views have indeed been based on ‘old’ modernist conceptualizations of space which posited public space as a ‘*menspace*’. According to the old bourgeois order, democratic society is constituted through the division between the public and the private spheres. For Walter Benjamin, the central figure of the early modernity is the *flâneur*, a man who freely roams and meanders around the nineteenth Paris, where the street becomes his ‘dwelling’, and where he is able ‘to turn the boulevard into an *intérieur*.’<sup>8</sup> At that time, the only woman both literati and any man could encounter in such spaces was a ‘public woman,’ namely, a prostitute. Such a woman, for whom the street was her ‘working place,’ is the other—highly eroticised—figure of modernity. And even if European women were frequent travellers, visiting many ‘exotic’ faraway places, once back home nobody expected them to become ‘*flâneuses*,’ that is female city wanderers.

Inquiring into the same era, feminist art historian Griselda Pollock explains how the partition of private and public space was enacted by French Impressionist women painters who produced ‘spaces of femininity’ in their works that represented the home, women's private spaces and domestic environments, such as the dining room, the bathroom, the balcony/veranda and the private garden. These late nineteenth century spaces had been ‘naturally’ used by women who were represented as a rule as mothers attending children.<sup>9</sup> Male painters were also attentive to home interiors in that they also portrayed their families or painted family scenes, but it seems that, for the most part, they were fascinated by bathrooms and women's bathing in general. The intimate scenes housed by these spaces enabled them to focus their ‘masculine gaze’ on the female body represented as eroticised nudes caught in the moment of cleaning their bodies. In this kind of ‘hygienic imagination’ the female nude stood for woman's moral cleanliness. In addition, the traditions of western art, both religious and secular, reveal artists real ‘excuse’ for their obsession with the female nude. Linda Need explains it this way: ‘More than any other subject, the female nude connotes “Art”.’<sup>10</sup>

In approaching the works shown in *Bread & Roses*, I'd like to start with Elizabeth Grosz's definition of space ‘...as the ongoing possibility of a different inhabitation.’<sup>11</sup> By allying these works with four provisional sections—*lived space*, *memory space*, *ritual space* and *transgressive space*—I assume that each of these is inhabited in either an actual or virtual sense. The spaces unfolding here show, or refer to, the collective spaces produced by the users of these spaces, whether it be the bazaar, the city, the landscape, the home or the art gallery. Each of them is constituted by its ‘relationship of coexistence,’ co-presence and sociability.

5 HENRI LEFEBVRE, *THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE*, 1991, OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE MA, BLACKWELL PUBLISHING, P. 16. FRENCH ORIGINAL: *PRODUCTION DE L'ESPACE* (1974).

6 MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *OP. CIT.*, P. 117.

7 DOREEN MASSEY, *SPACE, PLACE AND GENDER*, 1994, CAMBRIDGE, POLITY PRESS, P. 182. SEE ALSO LINDA MCDOWELL, *GENDER, IDENTITY & PLACE – UNDERSTANDING FEMINIST GEOGRAPHIES*, 1999, NEW YORK, POLITY PRESS.

8 WALTER BENJAMIN, CHARLES BAUDELAIRE: A LYRIC POET IN THE ERA OF HIGH CAPITALISM, 1997, NEW YORK, VERSO, P. 37.

9 GRISELDA POLLOCK, ‘MODERNITY AND THE SPACE OF FEMININITY’, IN *VISION & DIFFERENCE – FEMININITY, FEMINISM, AND THE HISTORIES OF ART*, 1988/94, LONDON AND NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, PP. 50–90.

10 SEE LINDA NEED, *FEMALE NUDE – ART, OBSCENITY AND SEXUALITY*, 1993, LONDON AND NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE.

11 ELIZABETH GROSZ, ‘EMBODYING SPACE: AN INTERVIEW’ IN *HER ARCHITECTURE FROM THE OUTSIDE – ESSAYS ON VIRTUAL AND REAL SPACES*, 2001, CAMBRIDGE MA. AND LONDON, MIT PRESS, P. 9.

## Lived Space

Lived space is a space that is produced in everyday life, as Michel de Certeau maintains by stating that ‘space is a practiced place.’<sup>12</sup> Lived space is a real public space, where people collectively work, gather or live. Communal activity may be motivated by trade, like in the bazaars that Tatiana Glebova represents in her exquisite watercolours in her *Kazakhstan Series (1942–1945)*, cats. 4–11). The bazaar, like any other market place, is not simply a location for economic exchange, it is also a space for the exchange of information (and gossip) about social life. In her multi-screen installation *Tokamak (2016)*, Almagul Menlibayeva inquires into one particular working place, the Kurchatov National Nuclear Centre in south Kazakhstan, where the scientists conduct experiments with nuclear power, building on the soviet state's previous plans for the development of nuclear weapons (cat. 41). Saule Suleimenova's collage-based triptych, *Skyline (2017)* focuses on a less dangerous location which is equally political and actual: her representations of crowded public offices are based on actual events. In January 2017, the Kazakh government passed a new law that obliged all citizens who no longer lived in their original place of registration, to declare their current place of habitation. It seems that dealing with the bureaucratic apparatus in Kazakhstan, as in any other corner of the world, is a time-consuming venture for the registration offices quickly became chaotically overcrowded, ‘inhabited’ for many hours by long queues of thousands of citizens who were all trying to make their new registration (cat. 43).



Saule Suleimenova  
*Skyline (detail) / 2017*  
(cat. 43)

One of the most common of lived spaces is the home, which Anur Aubakir observes in her pictorial installation, *Home (2009–2018)* that consists of paintings representing family members, close friends, and painful histories of migration (cat. 54). The yurt, a mobile and portable form of house that serves many artists to reference a Kazakh nomadic past, appears in art as a principle of living which links the community with nature, and its form is an easily recognizable ‘ethnic trope’ that runs through many works. Aisha Galimbayeva's painting *National Talents (1957)* pictures an intra-feminine space, in which women who represent three generations are shown in a yurt, where they used to perform typically feminine labour of making textiles by weaving, spinning, embroidering and felting (cat. 12). The wall hanging admired in this scene by the women artisans transmits meanings of traditional family hospitality, values which—once upon a time—had been vital for communal survival. The yurt as a once lived in dwelling space is rethought and reconstituted by Gulmaral Tatibayeva in her installation, *Untitled (2014)*, in which she employs ‘feminine’ textiles, that is, women's clothing, to cover the convex surfaces of the shelter which, supersized at 8 metres height, references also the rebuilding of Astana by western architects who have appropriated the form of the yurt as an emblem of Kazakh identity. It seems this piece, conveys a certain nostalgia that calls for a restoration of traditional values as well as an awareness that this is impossible (cat. 53).

According to the census of 2015, the rural population in Kazakhstan is 48,8% of the total and in this work Tatibayeva asserts the yurt's obsolete significance as a movable dwelling: as an art work it may be shown indoors, in a museum or gallery, or in a public space. Once installed in the city as a

temporary public installation, however, the yurt has an air of being entirely intentionally displaced. Tatibayeva demonstrates here the clash of old and new, of pastoral tradition and contemporaneity in terms of a conflictual space. As a remnant of the past, the yurt is 'plonked' into a hyper-postmodern environment dominated by skyscrapers, whose phallogocentric dominance, to invoke Lefebvre, always manifests an 'arrogant verticality,' and 'violent expression of power.'<sup>13</sup>

Astana is the leading spatial agent in two video works by Aigerim Mazhitkhan; it is a city, only twenty years old, that she experiences every day as her lived space. Made in a documentary format, they are consciously filmed with an amateurish touch; unlike many other artists in this exhibition, she is not concerned here with the past but with the hyper-urbanity of the metropolis that became Kazakhstan's capital in 1997 (cats. 62–63). This new city is in the process of becoming a 'living symbol' of Kazakhness. Even so, the forms of the new architecture, memorials and sculptures in this futuristic environment are intended to evoke the past in terms of local traditions, structures (the yurt, for instance), heroes or mythologies. This newly constructed urban space does not simply reflect the state's rhetoric but actively produces it by visual means: 'In this context, the ethno-symbolic approach encourages the processes of ethno-genesis, in which myth, memories, symbolism, and especially language, as mechanisms for socio-cultural survival play fundamental roles.'<sup>14</sup> Both videos investigate the relationship between subjectivity and vision, and here Mazhitkhan re-spatializes the city through a process of walking and wondering. 'The story begins on ground level, with footsteps,' in Michel de Certeau's description, with the activities of passers-by and pedestrians constituting one of the 'real systems whose existence make up the city.'<sup>15</sup> This image of the artist moving around Astana may trigger the memory of Benjamin's *flâneur*, and it is thus tempting to identify Mazhitkhan as a contemporary *flâneuse* who moves around the city in any way she likes, but these associations turn out to be misplaced because the male wanderer's pleasure tends to be voyeuristic, with an interest only in viewing: he takes possession of the city through his controlling gaze but never interacts with it.



Aigerim Mazhitkhan  
Still from *Images of the Capital*  
2015 / Video / 8'24" (cat.62)

Mazhitkhan, in contrast, not only observes, but also interacts and intervenes. In *Images of the Capital* (2015), she works, any feminist scholar would notice, as a viewing woman who is an agent of visual knowledge. She activates the female teenagers she meets by asking them to comment on, and propose a re-design of, public sculptures spread around Astana, most of which represent the (nude) female body. These girls reveal a solid visual knowledge, explaining why they found the public sculptures ugly or even ridiculous. Whereas the artist's re-spatialization of Astana in this video concerns an improvement of the metropole's visuality, in her later work *Metaphors of the City* (2017) it focuses on verbal communication. Here she asks passer-by/residents about the meaning of the humorous, popular nicknames which they commonly use to address the city's newly constructed buildings and institutions. This manner of appropriating lived space via the vernacular is a way of deconstructing official (state) rhetoric by disregarding the buildings' official names. But it may also be seen as a form of 'street-level aesthetics' that personalize lived space, making it more intimate and homely.

## Memory Space

Memory space is that which re-produces collective memory. In her two most recent works, belonging to her current project 'Residual Memory,' Saule Suleimenova re-enacts the memory of the traumatic years of the *Asharshylyk* ('famine' in the Kazakh language), inflicted by Stalin's administration during 1932–33, that were repressed in collective amnesia throughout the existence of colonial soviet Kazakhstan. These works, however, address imminent loss, which as ever 'drives the impulse to record and remember.'<sup>16</sup> In *Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932. The Exodus of the Kazakh People during the Famine, 2018* and *Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932. The Surviving Children, 2018*, the artists questions the official (formerly soviet) representation of history (cats. 44, 45). This act calls us (once again) to remember Walter Benjamin who, in his pivotal study *Trauerspiel* (Mournful Play), elaborates on melancholia by arguing that, because this kind of baroque theatre merged 'history with its setting,' it did not transcend the concept of the tragic (as in Greek drama), but conveyed instead rooted feelings of sorrow and mournfulness. In her powerful collages, Suleimenova appears to support his conviction that 'chronological movement is grasped and analysed in a spatial image.'<sup>17</sup> But I believe that these works may be better understood with the help of Judith Butler who, in her remarkable essay 'After Loss - What Then?' (inspired by Benjamin) writes: 'And so this past is not actually past in the sense of "over", since it continues as an animated absence in the presence. [...] Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community. And if we say this second truth about the place where belonging is possible, then pathos is not negated, but it turns out to be oddly fecund, paradoxically productive.'<sup>18</sup>

Starting from a photographic document, Suleimenova 'spatializes' the image along with collective memory about national loss—through 'productive pathos.' The original documentary photographs had been stored—or rather hidden for years—in a state archive. As far as the question of space is concerned, archives are based on an ambiguous concept: 'The space of the archive is *inside* its walls while the space a photograph shows always remains *outside* the image.'<sup>19</sup> A photographic image presents a captured and frozen movement/moment of *history*, but what must remain outside it are the long-lasting effects of the *Asharshylyk*: the years of displacement and deportation, with their destroyed families and homelessness, that are preserved only by people's memories. Suleimenova translates images she has found in the archives into collages, composite images constructed out of plastic. By calling them 'waste collages,' she highlights the vast, worldwide environmental problems that plastic bags and other plastic waste materials are today causing. On the other hand, her description may also refer to those immaterial remnants of memory spatialized in or by her images that have been recycled as collective properties so that they may endure as living memories.

## Ritual Space

Ritual space is a social space that requires, firstly, the presence of a body engaged in ritual activity, and secondly, the attendance of a community with a mutual understanding of acts, gestures and symbolic objects used in such rituals. The aim of ritual is to foster social cohesion and, regardless of the cultures which have produced them, they are habitually carried out in specially designated locations believed to be sacred spaces. But they also structure a community's life in temporal terms: they are not performed every day but at specific moment in the year's calendar which, in ancient times, followed the seasonal rhythms of nature; the time they respect, therefore, is cyclical rather than linear. The purpose of the ritual is thus to break into the routine of communal living and to

<sup>13</sup> HENRI LEFEBVRE, *OP. CIT.*, P. 98.

<sup>14</sup> NAREK MKRITCHYAN, *OP. CIT.*, P. 24. THE POLITICAL AND/OR NATIONAL-ISTIC MEANINGS OF ASTANA HE FURTHER DISCUSSES ON PP. 25–30

<sup>15</sup> MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *OP. CIT.*, P. 97

<sup>16</sup> LISA SALTZMAN, *MAKING MEMORY MATTER – STRATEGIES OF REMEMBRANCE IN CONTEMPORARY ART, 2006*, CHICAGO AND LONDON, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, P. 2.

<sup>17</sup> WALTER BENJAMIN, *THE ORIGIN OF GERMAN TRAGIC DRAMA, 2009*, LONDON AND NEW YORK, VERSO, P. 92. GERMAN ORIGINAL: *URSPRUNG DES DEUTSCHEN TRAUERSPIEL* (1963). THESE THEATRE AND FOLK PLAYS HAD BEEN STAGED DURING THE THIRTY YEARS WAR (1618–1648), EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS THAT RESULTED IN AN ESTIMATED 8 MILLION FATALITIES.

<sup>18</sup> JUDITH BUTLER, 'AFTERWORD – AFTER LOSS, WHAT THEN?' IN (EDS. DAVID L. ENG AND DAVID KAZANJIAN), *LOSS – THE POLITICS OF MOURNING, 2003*, BERKELEY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, P. 468.

<sup>19</sup> JAN VERWOERT, 'RESEARCH AND DISPLAY: TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE IN RECENT ART,' IN (EDS. MARIA LIND AND HITO STEYERL), *THE GREEN ROOM – RECONSIDERING THE DOCUMENTARY AND CONTEMPORARY ART # 1*, BERLIN, STERNBERG PRESS, 2008, PP. 202–203.

institute, however temporarily, a fictional order of events, whereby the borderline between reality and fiction becomes blurred. As Clifford Geertz once remarked: 'In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined [...] turn out to be the same world.'<sup>20</sup>

The ritual of wedding is central to more than many cultures, and two artists herein the *Bread & Roses* show, Saule Suleimenova and Gulnur Mukazhanova, refer to this familial event by focussing on the bride, a girl caught in the *liminal* phase of her life. In his valuable study, *The Rites of Passage* (1908), Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, examined what he called 'life crises' and the ceremonies that supplemented them, he observed that such rites move through three stages: separation from society, transition, and new incorporation into community. More recently, Stuart Morgan has elaborated this: 'In the transitional phase, when the individual is neither in nor out of society, he or she exists in what van Gennep called a 'liminal' state, *limen* being Latin for "threshold".'<sup>21</sup> Waiting for the wedding ceremony, the bride is a *passeuse*: she is about to leave her previous status of girlhood and daughterhood but still not having acquired the new identity of spouse, which customarily presumes her future motherhood. The wedding dress is a garment that marks her position at the threshold of her new life. Saule Suleimenova's mixed-media collage, *Three Brides* (2015), based on an archival photograph taken in 1869, shows three girls in their early teens wearing traditional Kazakh wedding garments. The artist views the role of the *kelin* (bride) in traditional Kazakh culture critically, since she states: 'The social status of "*kelin*" in Kazakh society is the most unprotected. A girl taken into a new family loses all the privileges of being a beloved daughter and finds herself at the bottom of the social ladder until she gives a birth to a son.'<sup>22</sup>



<sup>20</sup> CLIFFORD GEERTZ, *THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES*, 1972, NEW YORK, BASIC BOOKS, P. 30.

<sup>21</sup> STUART MORGAN, 'INTRODUCTION' IN *rites of passage – art for the end of the millennium*, (EXH. CAT.), 1995, LONDON, TATE GALLERY PUBLICATIONS, P. 12. SEE ALSO STEPHEN GREENBLATT, 'LIMINAL STATES AND TRANSFORMATIONS' IN THE SAME PUBLICATION, PP. 28–30.

<sup>22</sup> THE FEATURE FILM *KELIN* (OR DAUGHTER-IN-LAW) DIRECTED IN 2009 BY THE KAZAKH FILM DIRECTOR ERMEK TURSUNOV, WAS NOMINATED FOR AN OSCAR IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CATEGORY THAT YEAR BUT DID NOT WIN IT.

Saule Suleimenova  
*Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932.*  
*The Exodus of the Kazakh People during the Famine (detail) / 2018*  
(cat.44)

The perception of the bride in Kazakhstan today has certainly changed, but the question of how to dress for the 'best day' in their lives still preoccupies many young Kazakh women. Beside their personal desires, partly formed by the fashion industry, it should be remarked that, since the early 1990s, Kazakh society, like others previously under state socialism, has started to institutionalize a form of 'post-communist' patriarchy that fits perfectly with the neoliberal world view. In this, motherhood is still the main role attributed to women the mother is still imagined as the central figure for promoting 'old, family values.' In two works that border performance and (public) sculpture Mukazhanova reshapes and enlarges the form of the wedding dress, while improvising on its traditionally accepted meaning. In *Mankurt 1* and *Mankurt 2* (2011–2011, cats. 57, 58), the artist appears naked in a numinous built environment, but 'cloaked' by the desired object made out of the traditional textiles of felt, silk and wool. For her, the wedding dress stands for the deficit of

traditional values in Kazakh contemporary society and therefore she employs the term '*mankurt*' to describe it, a complex word which in popular parlance refers to the absence of national roots and/or the memory of ancient heritage.

Over the past two centuries ritual practices, such as shamanism, have been eroded by urbanisation, industrialisation, and advances in science and technology as well as by the 'rationalism' of Soviet power—all but the last being processes central to the western (truly modernist) concepts of progress. Rituals have been taken over and performed in secularized or profane settings like in the theatre or sports stadium, but during the 1970s a considerable number of artists started to stage performances in which they re-invented rituals belonging to non-western cultures. In body-based performances, just as in real rituals, fictional and real worlds merge but, instead of impacting on a traditional community, we, the 'art community,' become its supporting matrix. Reviewing the beginning of performance art in the USA, Henry M. Sayre recognized the ubiquity of ritual-oriented performance works in women's art. Indeed, this inclination indicated that a great deal of feminist art in the 1970s—as later—shared an interest in the *communal* nature of ritual activity: 'The assumption is that in ritual activity we escape the fragmentation and contingency of the modern condition and enter into a kind of quasi-religious, timeless wholeness.'<sup>23</sup> This stimulus, it seems to me, motivates the video works by Ganiya Chagatayeva (*House 2005*) and Almagul Menlibayeva (*Steppen Baroque 2003*) which both constitute ritual spaces via the presence of the female body or bodies that emerge(s) as a potential instrument of change (cat. 27, 40). In line with recent feminist and ecofeminist theories about the relationship between nature, spirituality, and women, both artists situate the female body in landscape. In her video, Chagatayeva performs a ritual of transformation shifting between two female identities: the first is performed in a profane space in which a ludic, contemporary-looking woman wanders through a nature, initiating playful and comical events, even catching a man in her butterfly net. But even in this video, a rare appearance of the male in this exhibition, masculine identity is not forever fixed, as in one scene in which he is transformed into a woman. The other identity is based on 'ritual' acts that allow the artist to create a pagan space: here, a mythical bird-woman wearing ceremonial garb tries to animate and bring life into the ruined and deserted house, the disappeared home.

<sup>23</sup> HENRY M. SAYRE, *THE OBJECT OF PERFORMANCE – THE AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE SINCE 1970*, 1989, CHICAGO AND LONDON, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, P. 184.



Saule Suleimenova  
*The Three Brides (detail) / 2015*  
Plastic bags on plastic  
tablecloth on wooden board  
(cat.42)

In *Steppen Baroque*, Menlibayeva takes a different approach by producing a sacred space. This consists of a series of digitally transformed *tableaux-vivants* in each of which she choreographs the nude bodies of her female performers in re-enactments of ancient female shamanistic rituals. Aware that in Kazakh tradition the 'seven ancestors' are male branches of the family, Menlibayeva dedicates opens this video 'to my Seven Ancestors,' a radical, almost feminist revision that suggests a matrilineal heritage. This also implies that tradition is simply 'raw material,' therefore forever

subject to transformation, or, as Catherine Bell has pointed out, that: ‘ritual can be a strategic way to “traditionalize,” that is, to construct a type of tradition, but in doing so it can also challenge and renegotiate the very basis of tradition to the point of upending much of what had been seen as fixed previously or by other groups.’<sup>24</sup>

This iconic figure of the shaman woman also surfaced in the Gulnur Mirzagalikova's painting by Gulnur Mukazhanova, *Woman and the Steppe* (cat. 38), in which the female nude occupies almost the entire pictorial space, obstructing the landscape behind it. This visual representation, along with Menlibayeva's *Steppen Baroque*, assert the importance of location for the agency of shamanism: ‘Shamanistic subjectivity is predicated on a sense of community with nature; any boundary created between the individual and community is feared and abhorred.’<sup>25</sup> Throughout the course of the 1970s, such convictions were embraced by artists who re-enacted shamanist rituals, even though not all of them performed in the natural environment. Those who made performances in art museums and galleries habitually worked with materials they had ‘borrowed’ from nature.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, by re-producing shamanist rituals they introduced unknown traditions into the western art context expressing their discontent with what they regarded as dysfunctional western society.



Ganiya Chagatayeva  
Still from *House* / 2005  
Video / 4'40" (cat.27)

Katya Nikonorova seems convinced that the contemporary (Kazakh) society is definitely dysfunctional and practices shamanism. As a form of spiritual methodology in live performances and lectures, in different contexts: rural and urban, local and international. The astonishing adventures of *Katipa apai*, her fictional heroine, may could be followed online as a video serial, and have been occasionally broadcast also on TV but neither her ‘Wonder Woman’ persona, nor her actual and symbolic actions are intended to create any notion of localised identity for the simple reason that shamanism does not respect national borders but spreads over a vast Eurasian, Asian and American landmass. Her shamanist practice ‘arise[s] from a “sense of ritual” played out under particular conditions—not in a fixed ritual structure, a closed grammar, or an embalmed historical model.’<sup>27</sup> Nikonorova performs *art as life* and this is her truly utopian option: her intention is to transform ritual space into a collectively *lived space*—sooner rather than later.

<sup>24</sup> CATHERINE BELL, *RITUAL THEORY, RITUAL PRACTICE*, 2009, OXFORD AND NEW YORK, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, P. 124.

<sup>25</sup> JULIE HOLLEDGE AND JOANNE TOMKINS, *WOMEN'S INTERCULTURAL PERFORMANCE*, 2000, LONDON AND NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, P. 61.

<sup>26</sup> SEE NICK KAYE, ‘RITUALISM AND RENEWAL—RECONSIDERING THE IMAGE OF THE SHAMAN’, IN *PERFORMANCE*, LONDON, WINTER 1989/90, NO. 59, PP. 32–45. HERE KAYE DISCUSSES WORKS BY JOSEPH BEUYS AND COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCES BY MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ AND ULAY.

<sup>27</sup> CATHERINE BELL, *OP. CIT.*, P. 124.

## Transgressive Space

Transgressive space is an everyday space produced by excess, misbehaviour, by subtly (or violently undisciplined) actions that either betray or critique normalised social behaviour. All of the works shown here engage with the social construction of ‘femininity’ as a process of unravelling. One excellent example is *Iron Woman* (2010) a body-sculpture by Gulnur Mukazhanova, a G-string remake of a chastity belt fashioned out of small pieces of iron, that implies that the ideal of virginity today is still that conditioned by rigid traditional—heterosexual—social imperatives (not only in her homeland but worldwide). Looking at this work, I cannot but recall VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969), one of the icons of early feminist art. It is poster that features the artist wielding two weapons: her pants cut out at the crotch to expose her vagina, and a machine gun that she clasps closely to her body. A slogan of that era was: *the personal is political*.

Women artists today generally refuse to be categorised: why should they have to be classified as those who make ‘typically feminine art’ or even as ‘feminist artists’? It seems to me, however, that the artists in the *Bread & Roses* have, in their different works, created spaces of transgression that have opted for a feminist position. In feminist theory, the idea of a ‘politics of location’ is a critical in that, according to Caren Kaplan, it subverts standard periodization and demystifies abstract metaphors: ‘... when it is used to deconstruct any dominant hierarchy or hegemonic use of the term gender. [It] is not useful when it is construed to be the reflection of authentic, primordial identities that are to be re-established and re-affirmed.’<sup>28</sup> The notion of location is therefore a destabilization of unexamined or stereotypical images that signify the patriarchal discourse is of power. Michel Foucault, a thinker who on many occasions examined the disciplinary—and spatial—workings of power, used to argue that any given power is ‘productive’ in the sense that it produces resistances.<sup>29</sup> The fact that many works in this exhibition include naked the self-representations of the female body may, perhaps, signal a resistance to current processes occurring in Kazakh society either based on established patriarchy or on the development, in many regions, where the Muslim population had begun to observe strict Islamic customs that prescribe a woman's position in the family, society and dressing code in public.<sup>30</sup>



<sup>28</sup> CAREN KAPLAN, ‘THE POLITICS OF LOCATION AS TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST CRITICAL PRACTICE’, IN (EDS. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan), *SCATTERED HEGEMONIES - POSTMODERNITY AND TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST CRITICAL PRACTICE*, 1994, MINNEAPOLIS AND LONDON, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS, P. 139.

<sup>29</sup> SEE MICHEL FOUCAULT, *HISTORY OF SEXUALITY - VOLUME I*, 1981, LONDON, PENGUIN, PP. 92–98. FRENCH ORIGINAL: *LE VOLONTÉ DE SAVOIR* (1976).

<sup>30</sup> FEMALE AND MALE NUDITY AS AN ARTISTIC STRATEGY HAS ALSO BEEN ADOPTED BY WOMEN ARTISTS IN POLAND (DOROTA NIEZNAJSKA) AND LITHUANIA (EGLE RAKAUSKAITĖ) AS A WAY OF CRITICISING THE STANDARDS OF MORALITY IMPOSED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. SEE PIOTR PIOTROWSKI, ‘GENDER AFTER THE FALL OF THE WALL’, IN *HIS ART AND DEMOCRACY IN POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE*, 2012, LONDON, REAKTION BOOKS, PP. 243–261.

Almagul Menlibayeva  
Still from *Steppen Baroque* / 2003  
Video / 11' (cat.40)

Almost all the works shown here that produce transgressive space also deal with the private sphere—the home—which has been historically conceptualized as the ‘women's place. This is where we are first introduced to sociability and communal living yet, as we have learned from Foucault, it is also the first ‘disciplinary institution’ in our lives. And there are more of them: the kindergarten, the primary school, the high school, the college, the art university, the army, the workplace or the state bureaucracy. Power and gender are constituted in the arena of the everyday, domestic sphere—grounded on the model of the heterosexual unit or nuclear family—that is usually imagined as the most important space to protect and reproduce traditional (Kazakh) family values. But who is

the family member in charge for these values? In patriarchal fantasy, it is the woman. In contrast with former socialist societies, where women were expected to fulfil their roles as 'working mothers,' the social and economic neoliberal order of today prefers homebound mothers who must rely on men as breadwinners. But I always wonder if a woman who is a single mother can afford to remain at home.

When the women artists in this exhibition turn to the issue of home they opt for a 'politics of domesticity' which implies a critical, if not exactly feminist, effort. Natalya Dyu's videos are *home movies* in the best sense of the term, except that the family is nowhere to be seen! She films her 'undisciplined' body in two domestic locations: *So Naïve, So Fluffy...* brings us to the artist's bedroom where she, wearing pyjamas, accomplishes intellectual activity while sitting in bed, transforming thus her bedroom into a study—a 'room of one's own'. She performs as a cultured and educated woman by sticking names and/or theoretical terms onto chickens that represent 'wild nature.' In the video *I Love Naomi, Naomi Loves Fruit* she sits on the toilet—the most private space of all—with Naomi Campbell as her imaginary interlocutor. In such spaces, Dyu interfaces the local with the global, her own identity with that of Naomi Campbell, a world famous *femme du monde* who personifies ideal 'femininity.' She produces transgressive spaces employing minimal, funny and gentle gestures, but she still misbehaves, any mother will tell you that, arguing that a girl is not to make a 'spectacle of herself' either in public or in video art.



Natalya Dyu  
Still from *So Naïve, So Fluffy...*  
2009 / Video / 4'54" (cat.49)

Bakhiut Bubikanova's series of works, *New Year Post Cards* (cat. 60), consists of five photographic collages, two of which take place in a home interior. In these surrealistically organized spaces she only situates women. Her 'rooms' are pictured without openings, without doors or windows to provide access to the outside; these claustrophobic spaces are inhabited by headless women—women without identity—the head of one replaced by a Christmas tree, the head of another, shown as an erotic nude, hidden behind a 'Soviet baroque ruched' nylon curtain.

In her hanging sculpture, *EVERMUST* (cat. 52), Zoya Falkova transgresses the notion of 'sweet home' in a truly radical manner by representing a woman's torso shaped as a punching bag in a literal collision of masculine and feminine. It is an object that also directly refers to domestic violence, which, as the artist states, is sometimes viewed 'as an expression of love.' As architectural theorist Mark Wigley, following in the steps of Foucault, wrote in 1993: 'There is no space without violence and there is no violence that is not spatial.'<sup>31</sup> Regarding the romantic perception of home as a space which guarantees warmth and safety, we often fail to notice the assertive, even violent, way that patriarchal power relations functions *within* the family. This social problem, of course, is not limited to Kazakhstan, even though the statistical data gathered there

is depressing.<sup>32</sup> Women are victims of violence and sexual harassment in all the countries of the world, regardless of their economic development. Therefore, to claim that violence against women (either in public or at home) is connected with the damaging impacts of capitalist, or neo-liberal, modes of production (such as unemployment) seems erroneous. Doreen Massey argues that on the global scale these crimes against women are executed 'not by "capital" but by men.'<sup>33</sup>



<sup>32</sup> FOR EXAMPLE, IN AUGUST 2017 THE UN REPORTED: 'ACCORDING TO THE GENERAL PROSECUTOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, IN 2016 ALONE, EVERY THIRD MURDER TOOK PLACE IN THE FAMILY, AND AS A RESULT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, 36 WOMEN DIED AND 742 WOMEN COMMITTED SUICIDE. SOME 2481 CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS WERE REGISTERED LAST YEAR—JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG, AS MANY SURVIVORS CONTINUE TO SUFFER IN SILENCE' AT: KAZAKHSTAN'S NEW PLAN TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... - UN WOMEN WWW.UNWOMEN.ORG/EN/NEWS/STORIES/2017/8/FEATURE-KAZAKHSTANS-PLAN-TO-END-DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE-DEMONSTRATES-MULTI-DISCIPLINARY-ACTION [LAST ACCESSED ON 15.09.2018].

<sup>33</sup> DOREEN MASSEY, OP. CIT., P. 148.

Kreolex Zentr  
Still from *Promo* / 2016  
Video / 10'53" (cat.47)

In the completely different, but equally risky, realm of institutional critique, Kreolex Zentr (Creolex Centre) is a collective consisting of two women (Maria Vilkovisky & Ruthie Jenrbekova) who rethink the space of art both as a physical location and as a state of mind. Their video *Promo* (cat. 47), produced by their Department of Public Relations (sic!), announces that the Centre is 'a phantom cultural institution; a queer collective comprised of indeterminate identities...a xenoagency under cover'. Advising that what they do is 'something completely different [from what is expected],' they perform a series of parodies, in art and other spaces, of (educational) lectures, cabaret sketches, events, workshops and memorials, or just exercise the politics of domesticity by preparing food on stage. In some of these they purposefully create transgressive space by touching on contentious social issues: the war in Ukraine, for instance, or by debating the notion of 'post-family', a term that bypasses today's post-socialist—generally homophobic—views that support 'traditional values' by rejecting any form of family that refers to other configurations such as homosexual or lesbian couples. For me, Kreolex Zentr's conceptual project is essential in its feminism because it 'self-consciously challenge[s] the method, objects, goals, or principle of the mainstream patriarchal canon.'<sup>34</sup>

The Personal is—still—political.

<sup>34</sup> ELIZABETH GROSZ, SPACE, TIME, AND PERVERSION - ESSAYS ON THE POLITICS OF THE BODIES, 1995, LONDON AND NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, P. 11.

<sup>31</sup> CITED IN ROSALYN DEUTSCHE, EVICTIONS - ART AND SPATIAL POLITICS, 1998, CAMBRIDGE, MA, AND LONDON, THE MIT PRESS, P. 374, NOTE 121.



# FIERCE WOMEN, TRAUMA AND BODY

## WHY DOES CONTEMPORARY ART IN KAZAKHSTAN MATTER?

DIANA T. KUDAIBERGENOVA

In Central Asian societies, contemporary art is one of the few remaining forms of popular cultural protest. Art or performance does not require as grand a scheme of funding as the film industry and it is more popular than oppositional texts spread online or in newspapers. Contemporary art is also largely free of state censorship owing to its marginalization from such official institutes as Artists' Unions. The field of contemporary art in Central Asia operates on its own logic and authority. It speaks about things that have long been buried as historical traumas—unspoken or silenced perspectives of the past and hidden subtexts behind notions of respect, tradition and culture.

This is why the *Bread & Roses* exhibition contributes to a much wider discussion about power and representation seen through the perspective of four generations of women artists. Some of these were forgotten or repressed by the state and some were hidden away because they re-appropriated the dominant discourse of *uyat*—shaming—as a form of empowerment for their works by utilising their thoughts and their bodies. *Uyat*, or shame in the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages, is the revived discourse of shaming and ordering predominantly female bodies and their behaviour in line with unexplained, mythical traditions of what is appropriate that are thus taken for granted. Tradition becomes the overpowering paradigm for ruling over the subject's life, behaviour and, ultimately, her representation through social, economic, political and cultural texts. Contemporary *uyat* discourse hides behind the paradigm of tradition and dictates that women are not allowed to expose their bodies, date or marry outside their cultures or live their lives as they please.

At the heart of this power struggle over women's bodies and lives is the constant fear of losing an 'authentic,' cultural, truly Kazakh, idea of being. Unable to explain what they mean by tradition, the *uyat-men*, those who impose shaming discourses to restrict and order women in Kazakhstan (and in other parts of Central Asia), inevitably disclose deep-seated traumas from the period of Soviet colonisation in their difficulties in coming to terms with the current post-colonial and neo-liberal globalised order. To such men, women represent both the body of the motherland and the passive producer of the nation,<sup>1</sup> they are weak, yet authoritative, figures who should pass the knowledge

<sup>1</sup> NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS, *GENDER AND NATION*, 1997, LONDON, SAGE.

about real 'Kazakhness' to future generations. Whatever they may claim, this attempt to overpower and rule over women is not based in history because this has never happened before; artists (like Almagul Menlibayeva in her videos) (cats. 40–41) constantly remind us of this fact by portraying strong nomadic women and female shamans.<sup>2</sup>

Central Asian history, and the place of women in the region's cultural and historical transformation, was never experienced as a homogenous, or linear, temporal development. Diverse geographical and religious differences, as well as lifestyles influenced by either nomadic or sedentary urban practices and traditions, have shaped the ways in which women have been represented and this has influenced their position in pre-colonial, pre-Soviet Central Asian societies and communities. The region itself represents a constant series of ruptures and disintegrations in different spatial, political and historical domains: historical Eastern Turkestan is now separated from post-Soviet Central Asia, and any sense of contemporary Kazakh or Kyrgyz nomadic heritage is imprisoned by the new post-Soviet nationalist realities. Female voices are rarely represented in such contemporary discussions despite the fact that women's discourses and narratives of development are probably the best witnesses of the tremendous historical transformations the region had to go through in the past 300 hundred years. Contemporary art, therefore, has become the space for diverse discussions, visual and cultural dialogues that link the historical traumas of colonization (such as the Great Famine [*Asharshylyk*] of 1932–1933 that claimed almost 40% of Kazakhstan's population) that places female artists at the fore to balance out contemporary gendered discriminations. Women and their histories, female depictions and their rapid adaptation to new realities, are also central for an overall understanding of the ways in which contemporary Central Asian societies have developed; female narratives reflect the region's path to modernity as well as the ability of states and communities to participate in globalised economic, social and cultural networks.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> KUDAIBERGENOVA, D. T. 2016. 'THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY IN THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDEAS AND NATIONAL SYMBOLS IN CENTRAL ASIA: ART AS RESISTANCE' IN *NATIONALITIES PAPERS*, 44, 2, 'GENDER AND ACTIVISM IN CENTRAL ASIA' SPECIAL ISSUE, PP. 225–246.

<sup>3</sup> SEE EDGAR, A. 2007. 'MARRIAGE, MODERNITY, AND THE "FRIENDSHIP OF NATIONS": INTERETHNIC INTIMACY IN POST-WAR CENTRAL ASIA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE', *CENTRAL ASIAN SURVEY*, 26(4), PP. 581–599; BLUM, D., *THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF GLOBALIZATION: RETURN MIGRATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN KAZAKHSTAN*, 2015, CAMBRIDGE, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS; DERGOUSSOFF, D. 2014. *AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND POST-SOVIET RURAL ECONOMIES IN KYRGYZSTAN*, PHD DISSERTATION, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA.

Still from *Botagoz*  
1957 / 92" (cat.21)  
Directed by E. Aron  
The actress is  
Gulfairus Ismailova

The aim of the *Bread & Roses* exhibition, and of many of the works by female artists in the exhibition, is directed towards an exploration of the historical developments of women's roles and positions in Central Asian societies as well as towards the development of culture as a whole and its impact on Central Asian womanhood. Everyday encounters with the Self—in the form of the female body—are equally as important in these discussions as unravelling the past in writing out a new alternative to the Soviet or post-Soviet official view on the history of the whole country that ascribes a particular role to womanhood as a cultural and social institution. This focus on the female body is neither surprising nor unexpected as it challenges both nationalist Russian colonists and Soviet

modernizers who both equally appropriated and orientalist 'Woman of the East,' as exotic beauties who had to be freed from the chains of a 'feudal' and 'backward' society.<sup>4</sup> But did this gorgeous creature require liberation or was she free already? This is the running narrative in most of the works presented in *Bread & Roses* and significantly so in those of Almagul Menlibayeva, one of the strongest decolonising voices in contemporary Kazakh art. Also, her re-thinking and re-positioning of Gulfairus Ismailova, one of the first grand Kazakh Soviet female artists who also played the leading role in the 1957 film *Botagoz*, in her short film on this artist, is striking in this sense. (cats. 21–22).

Efim Aron's film *Botagoz* was based on an eponymous Stalin Award book by Sabit Mukanov, who was the head of the Kazakh SSR Writers' Union at the height of the Purges and Terror in the 1930s. The main focus of the book is the victorious suppression of nomadic Kazakhstan by Soviet ideology and the October Revolution. Botagoz, a young girl who grew up in the impoverished conditions of a pre-revolutionary *aul* (Kazakh village) and became the wife of the protagonist, is basically an ideological illustration of class war. Her body and beauty are fought for by the dying bourgeoisie and liberated and saved by young Kazakh revolutionaries represented in the figure of Askar, her husband, to whom the whole novel and narrative is devoted.



Saule Suleimenova  
*Zheltoqsan/Youth Riot,*  
*December 1986 (detail) / 2018*  
(cat.46)

In spite of it being introduced by a reprint of the Soviet poster that accompanied the film, Menlibayeva's video, *Gulfairus* (2018) is a re-direction and re-positioning of the character of Botagoz as well as a re-conceptualisation of the past. Here Botagoz plays the leading role and this simultaneously liberates the great achievements and artistic and cultural legacy of Gulfairus Ismailova from the marred Soviet and colonial perspectives of her as a female figurehead of socialist realism and Soviet ideology. For those who have been familiar with Ismailova's works being represented in a strictly sovietised manner, as both a Soviet artist and a liberated woman of the East, seeing her paintings and other work standing alone in the transformed context created by the curators of the exhibition and Menlibayeva's video is striking (cat. 21). Here, she is free from the chains of the old taxonomies where she was simply a passive, exotic, colonial body. Instead of being tied by the past, she is now represented in the present in a decolonial turn so powerful that it shakes the whole paradigm and linear perspective of Soviet and post-Soviet time. Time in the contemporary post-Soviet perspective is seen as the gradual development and constant erasure of the histories, themes and even people that are not favourable to those currently in power.

To the same end, the work of Saule Suleimenova also provides a telling example of how such erasures may be exposed and discussed. In her powerful rethinking of the tragic events of the 1986 Alma-Ata riots and student demonstrations she follows a thorny yet rewarding path. (cat. 46). On 16 December 1986, in the first open public and political protest in the Soviet Union, many young people gathered in protest at the main Lenin square in the country's then capital Alma-Ata in opposition to the central government's decision to remove Dinmukhamed Kunayev, the country's long-term leader, and replace him with the unknown figure of Gennady Kolbin. Resentment grew out of many complexities marred not just by 'nationalist' sentiments, although the nature of these

events is still an open discussion in Kazakhstan. Kunayev was a charismatic and well-supported local leader while Kolbin never visited the country; the Politburo discussion before this important decision took only 17 minutes and was seen as a disrespectful colonial move by Moscow. The mainly-peaceful demonstrations were brutally suppressed by the special forces and followed by quiet repressions, dismissals and a paranoid atmosphere of distrust and alertness. 1986 for Kazakhstan was like 1968 for France, except it did not result in any significant body of literature, art, thought or critical theory yet, it became one of the deepest and most silent places of amnesia.

Saule Suleimenova is among the few artists who have opened up the bloodied curtain of these events in an attempt to question the cause and lasting legacy of these events on the social, cultural and political development of independent Kazakhstan. In 1991 the Day of Independence coincided with December 16, the day of the first manifestations in 1986 and subsequent protests in Zhanaozen in 2011, the bloodiest that have ever taken place in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.



Saule Suleimenova  
Exhibition '*Somewhere in*  
*the Great Steppe. Skyline*'  
at the National Museum of  
Kazakhstan. Astana, Kazakhstan  
(16.6–16.8.2018)

In her works Suleimenova often goes back to notions of everyday life, routines of presence. Her subjects find themselves in long queues in official institutions such as tax or migration offices, mundane state statistic agencies and are almost all covered by the description: Centre for the Service of the People (CON in Russian). Their faces are blank, tired, upset or angry, their time is wasted but, if you look more closely, something more complex shines through that reminds post-Soviet people of the mundane days of the *sovok*—the colloquial word for all the negative connotations of Soviet communal life at a time of constant deficit in consumer goods. Suleimenova works in what she calls her 'cellophane paintings' where all of her most recent works are made with used plastic bags—the signs of the new and acutely post-Soviet neoliberal 'heaven.' Faces, figures, parts of clothing, background are put together in a plastic mosaic. Some parts of them reveal brands, addresses and phones of shopping malls, bakeries and coffee shops. These fragments of contemporary neoliberal lifestyle reflect the recent shopping mall colonisation of Kazakhstan's major cities where retail greatly outnumbers the cultural institutions and places such as museums of contemporary art become sources of everyday entertainment and consumerist culture. Yet Suleimenova is able to position art into a public discussion both through the medium and content of her work. (cat. 43).

The dialogue of time with itself is another central theme explored in this exhibition. Time is presented as history (Soviet and post-Soviet) and such historical traumas as the Great Famine, the nuclear testing grounds and colonialism are reframed by current discussions about re-traditionalization



and identity. Such concerns are clearly seen in the works of Almagul Menlibayeva and Gulnur Mukhazhanova. Menlibayeva has employed the female body in dialogue with post-Soviet ideology, yet the nakedness of her earlier work gains even more empowerment in her 9-channel video installation *Tokamak* (2016) in which the female body is juxtaposed with the mainly 'male' monuments of post-independence Kazakhstan's urban realities (cat. 41). In this context, her body seems even more powerful than the everyday sights of bronze male warriors on their horses as it represents an opposing sense of 'motherland' in a space in which gender is not characterised by the 'powerful' or the 'disempowered.' Menlibayeva's work has long signalled the return of women to the main frame as active members of political and cultural discussions about where Kazakhstan is heading during murky post-Soviet times.

Gulnur Mukhazhanova's work also focusses on women, nationhood and identity. *Iron Woman* (2010), her centrepiece of women's underwear made of nails and metal wire starts an uneasy discussion about *uyat* and the disempowerment of women during the post-Soviet era that has coincided with economic hardship, unemployment and neoliberal vulnerabilities. (cats. 55–56). Shame becomes a shield for fragile masculinity that grasps its moment of uncertainty by clinging onto changing traditions and to fading institutionalization of masculine power. It overshadows the presumption of male domination in the past, present and future development of Kazakhstan's society, polity and culture. Women here represent not just docile bodies of the nation. This Mukhazhanova reminds us, in the same way that Zoya Falkova sardonically points out that women are not punching bags. (cat. 52). The point of representation is the fulcrum of this work. Where many artists depict real female bodies, Falkova shifts attention to the objectification of the body by gendering a punching bag and, by doing so, clearly foregrounds domestic violence as a significant social problem.



Almagul Menlibayeva  
*Tokamak* / 2016  
Video installation  
(11-channel version)  
Exhibition "Transformation"  
at the Grand Palais, Paris  
(2.12.2016–2.1.2017)

Mukhazhanova's approach to the female body represents an interplay between discourses of empowering and disempowerment. Her figures hide their faces under thick layers of hair. Unlike Ismailova's colourful indigenous and powerful women, they are not exposed. Where Ismailova, Menlibayeva and Suleimenova are in dialogue in their female representations of what it means to be Kazakh, Mukhazhanova questions the nature of this identity when it comes into dialogue with

globalisation. When this happens, is authentic identity lost and people transformed into faceless *mankurts*—mythical figures with no national memory? Or is this a necessary rule of the game for the new Kazakhstan? Her works pose an important question about the notion of identity that still haunts the country. Instead of searching for final answers in her powerful series of works *Mankurts in the City*, she opens the floor for reconsideration. (cats. 57–58).



Zoya Falkova  
*EVERMUST* / 2017  
(cat.52)

Returning to the initial question of 'why does contemporary art in Kazakhstan matter?' the answer now seems quite evident—art has become a redolent space for decolonization and empowerment. This is because it is able to address buried, haunted traumas and suggest alternatives to official ideologies; it is also capable of representing the everyday experience and inequalities of the new neoliberal age. And, most of all, because it is a space that women may occupy at the cutting edge, its unique perspectives may contribute to discussions about the political, social and cultural development of contemporary Kazakhstan, the wider post-Soviet region, and the world.





Готовый обрушиться каменный мост,  
Весь город, как Морок великий.

**The stone bridge, ready to fail,  
And the sinister hugger-mugger of the town.**

Пред нею ступеней крутой водопад,  
Затем коридор и покои.  
Уюту старинному кто же не рад,  
В пути переживший такой!

**She climbed a steep cascade,  
Then walked down the hall to her rooms.  
If you such a voyage had made  
You'd be glad of an old cozy home.**

Конец.

**The End**



ЧЕРНОКНИЖНИК

## THE WARLOCK

За сотню монет плюс на водку трояк  
Купил он и остров, и старый маяк,  
И кирпича хорошего  
Купил довольно дешево.  
Наняв баркас, возил навоз  
Для огурцов и tuberos.  
И за год все устроил так,  
Что раем стал простой маяк.

**For a hundred coins and a bottle of hooch  
He bought an old lighthouse and an island to boot.  
And the sturdy bricks he found  
He purchased for a pound.  
He hired a longboat and hauled manure  
To fertilize the tuberose and cucumber.  
And he turned in the space of a year  
The lighthouse into heaven on earth.**

По ходу лестницы спиральной  
Двенадцать комнат, кроме спальни,  
Овальный зал с камином в нише  
Внизу устроил, а на крыше—  
(Зачем — он объяснить не мог)  
Уютный маленький чертог!  
И распилал в нем три стены  
Эфемеридами Луны

**There were twelve rooms, besides the boudoir,  
As you ascended the spiral stairs.  
To the ground floor he bequeathed  
An oval room with an inglenook hearth.  
He could not explain why, but on the roof  
He built a cozy little loft.  
On three of its walls he depicted  
The moon's ephemeris.**

И что же? Старая тоска  
И здесь нашла, чтоб мучить,  
Опять он пригоршни песка  
В раздумье сеет с кручи.  
Опять, укравшись наверху,  
Мычит от боли,  
Опять вверяется стиху,  
А гряд не полет!..

**What of it? The old ennu  
Found him there, too, tormenting him.  
He again sprinkled, lost in reverie,  
Fistfuls of sand from the cliff.  
Hiding upstairs,  
He again groaned in agony.  
He again confided in verse  
While neglecting his weeding.**

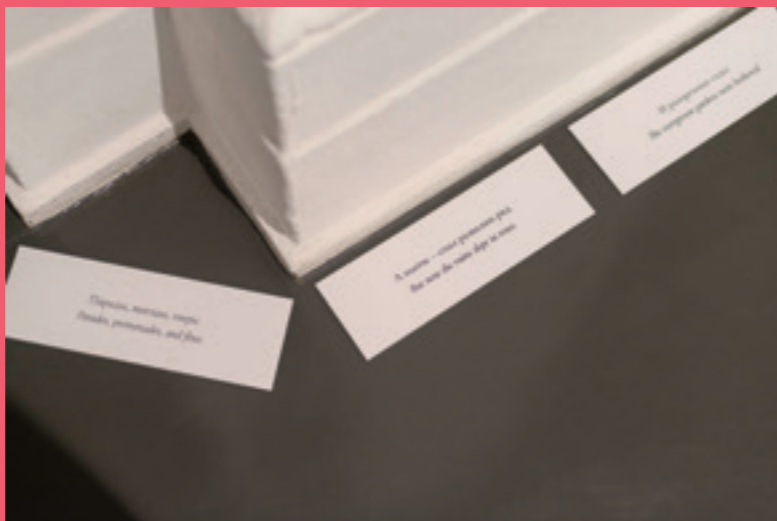
И все в оракуле старинном  
В сплетенных звезд  
Ему мелькает: взор невинный,  
Очки и хвост!

**And in the oracle of ancient days,  
In the stars and their trails,  
He kept on glimpsing the innocent gaze,  
The eyeglasses, and the tail.**

Алма-Ата начало 90-х

Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, early 1990s

*Translated, from the Russian,  
by Thomas H. Campbell*



Lidya Blinova

*Poetry for Cats*

1995 / Installation: text on paper

size variable

Exhibition "Bread & Roses. Four Generations  
of Kazakh Women Artists" (cat.25)

## Elena Vorobyeva

### *A Memoir about a Pussycat*

It was the early nineties, probably 1992 – either autumn or spring – the sun glimpsed through the leaves on the trees. Lidya and I were sitting in the kitchen, bowls of tea on the table and a tiny metal sugar bowl with a spoon in it. The spoon had a short handle. Lidya was smoking, as always.

We had never discussed this topic, but suddenly Lidya spoke, gazing at the glints of sunlight outside.

“Now I’m just living out my final time.”

I said nothing.

My visits to her house were an outlet of sorts for me. Khalfin [her husband] was out of town. He was making art in Moscow.

We talked a lot. I said a lot of dumb things, and she did, too, as it were. But there was a good deal of sense and observations from life in the dumb things she said.

I never heard her say anything bad about anyone. She pitied them. She responded to them as if they were strange creatures.

She would tell me about her pussycat Lyuska, who had lived with her for a short time. She told me how Lyuska would jump through the window onto a tree, and would sit on Lidya’s shoulder when she went across the street to buy Georgian wine.

Subsequently, Lyuska was passed on to acquaintances. Out of habit, the pussycat jumped out the window, but the flat was on the ninth floor, and there was no tree in sight...

Lidya treated her own work ironically. She seemed not to be serious about it but she produced a lot of stuff: tons of drawings and notes, ideas that were never implemented. Where did it all vanish?

It was during this time that Lidya showed me “The Learned Pussycat.” It was all about her, of course. I had the audacity to ask for a copy of the poem in order to make some illustrations for it. It suggested this just for the heck of it, without any goal in mind. There was no question of publishing it. The drawings were so-so, and, probably, Lidya didn’t like them when I showed them to her. But they have survived as a keepsake of those sunny days.

In 1995, at a show at Koserek Gallery, Lidya and Rustam made a ribbon on which the poem was printed as a single long line. They taped it to the wall, very close to the floor, round the entire room. The installation was ‘non-spectacular,’ as we would say nowadays. It was completely impossible for viewers to read, but ‘any pussycat who visited the show could read the poem from beginning to end’. In this way Kazakhstan got its first taste of conceptual art.

*Translated, from the Russian,  
by Thomas H. Campbell*

## A COLLECTIVE WORK

### She Shamans

2018, felt carpet

Made by:

Anar Aubakir  
 Jan-lukas Bohnhoff  
 Kai von Carnap  
 Mukudzei Chinaka  
 Silks Eve  
 Tainá Guedes  
 Tereza Guedes  
 Md Reza Islam  
 Turbo Jambon  
 Arseny Knaifel  
 Almagul Menlibayeva  
 Kelsey Maas  
 Aigerim Ospanova  
 Silvia Parini  
 Laura Perez Plans  
 Leslie Ranzoni  
 Rachel Rits-Volloch  
 Aima Samatova  
 Anna Schneider  
 Nari Shelekpayev  
 Saltanat Shoshanova  
 Aizhan Suleimenova  
 Saule Suleimenova  
 Clara Tang  
 Gulmaral Tatibayeva  
 Barbara Wolters  
 Ida Isak Westerberg

OPPOSITE  
*She Shamans*  
 2018  
 Felt Carpet  
 200x400cm



## ANAR AUBAKIR

Born 1984 in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan.  
Lives and works in Astana, Kazakhstan

Anar Aubakir's paintings, often shown in complex installations, emanate a disquieting poetic symbolism that, while referring to stories and relationships she has encountered in Kazakhstan, suggest a much broader reference. She completed an MA at the Kazakh National Academy of Arts in Almaty; in 2010 she won the best realist painting award in the Russian Art Week competition in St. Petersburg as well as the 1st painting prize in the Week of Kazakhstan Art competition in Almaty. Her work was awarded the Cholpan-Ata City Award in Kyrgyzstan in 2016. She is also the organizer of the first traveling exhibitions to have taken place since Kazakhstan became independent.

From 2013 to 2017, she organized more than a dozen exhibitions, in which over 20 artists participated, which have travelled to Pavlodar, Semey, Aktobe, Atyrau, Kostanay, Karaganda, Temirtau, Kokshetau, Petropavlovsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Aktau and Astana. In each of the cities she conducted master classes in painting and interdisciplinary art. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held in Almaty (2010) and Astana (2015.) Her works are in museum collections in Kazakhstan and Tatarstan.

OPPOSITE

Home

2009–2018

Installation: oil on canvas, charcoal, print on paper, wood

200x280cm

ANAR AUBAKIR



ANAR AUBAKIR

## Home

2009 – 2018

installation: oil on canvas, charcoal, inkjet print on paper, wood

In 1976 my parents bought a house in Pavlodar in the north of Kazakhstan. Following family tradition, my mother and father, both being the oldest children, were responsible to their parents for their younger brothers and sisters. Our house became a common home for close relatives, as well as for distant relations who came to the city from nearby collective and state farms — and even for close family friends.

In 2009 Marina and her son Timur appeared in our family. I often asked her and her son to pose for me as I could see that their interesting faces harboured uneasy stories. Marina frequently spoke about her happy previous life in Kabardino-Balkaria [in the north Caucasus] and planned to go back there as soon as possible.

Marina first came to Kazakhstan in the spring of 1944, when the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR decided to deport Balkars, of which she is one, from their homeland. An earlier famine had killed a large number of indigenous Kazakhs, and it was decided to recolonize these territories by people from other nationalities.

74 Marina and her family found themselves in the Sherbaktinsky district of the Pavlodar region. Many who had been deported returned to their homeland after Stalin's death, but the story of Marina and Timur was different. In 2010 Marina decided to take her son 'home', hoping that according to the traditions of her people, older relatives would help her son arrange his life. She sold all her belongings in the village and came to Pavlodar, where her son was working. Beside a friend of her mother, she knew no one and she settled in the house next to us. Timur had been born and raised in Kazakhstan and it was difficult for him to imagine living in another place, but Marina could not stay in a strange house for a long time — at one point she even lived in her son's car. Then my parents invited her to our house. Marina's plan collapsed when her son had a serious traffic accident and a criminal case was brought against him. This trial lasted over a year. During this time Marina lived in our house with her son. But her desire to leave became almost overwhelming. Step by step, Marina managed to remove all charges against her son. Finally she bought train tickets and they went to the station, but on the platform she had a heart attack. In the ambulance she died. Timur buried his mother in Pavlodar and stayed in Kazakhstan. Marina's mother refused to participate in her funeral; her daughter's plan for a joyful reunion with her family and new life in her home of Kabardino-Balkaria remained only a dream.

*Home* includes paintings and other works that express the preservation of nomadic spiritual and moral values in the face of the ruinous heritage left by the Soviet Union. Even when exhausted by the systematic ethnocide in the 20th century, my native Kazakh people have managed to maintain their sense of humanity by opening their arms to many others who have been deprived of means of subsistence during their time of forced deportation.

In *Home* I have composed a composite portrait of a traditional Kazakh family — one which always had a place for people in need. By doing this, I raise the question of whether the Kazakh people will succeed in transferring such high standards to future generations.

— Anar Aubakir

ANAR AUBAKIR

- OPPOSITE
1. *Kabardino Balkaria*  
2018 / Oil on canvas  
65x80cm
  2. *Marina*  
2010 / Oil on canvas  
51.5x63.5cm
  3. *The Door*  
2018 / Oil on canvas  
80x50cm
  4. *Timur - Marina's Son*  
2009 / Charcoal on paper  
30x21cm
  5. *The Poem*  
2018 / Oil on canvas  
80x60cm
  6. *Home*  
2018 / Oil on canvas  
90x60cm
  7. *Abdra*  
2018 / Oil on canvas  
60x50cm
  8. *The Roofs of Houses*  
2006 / Oil on canvas  
60.9x91.9cm
  9. *The Way*  
2018 / Inkjet print on paper  
55x45cm
  10. *Return*  
2018 / Oil on fiberboard  
60x80cm
  11. *Emptiness*  
2018 / Empty wooden frame  
100x80cm



3



1



2



4



10



7



6



11



2



8



5

ANAR AUBAKIR

## LIDYA BLINOVA

1948–1996

Born in Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR.

Lived and worked in Almaty

Lidya Blinova's parents both worked as architects, her grandfather was a priest and mystic. She graduated from the Architecture and Construction Institute in Almaty and her subsequent work encompassed architecture, art, poetry, sculpture, jewelry, book design, acting, and cinema. By inclination she was a radical. She jointly developed ideas with Rustam Khalfin, her partner, (who described her as his 'Alter Ego') whom she had first met in 1962, at the age of fourteen, in the graphic studio of Alma-Ata's Palace of Pioneers. Khalfin's idea of the *pulota*—a keyhole into a fragmented world of space, time, and image—originated with Blinova. Formed by the simple gesture of folding a fist and looking through the hole in its middle, it created what she described as the 'ultimate plastic object,' replete, at the same time, with fullness and emptiness.

At the end of the 1960s, Blinova's earliest work was wooden sculpture made in the studio of Isaak Itkind, a primitivist and friend of Mark Chagall who had been imprisoned in Kazakhstan. She also encountered Pavel Zaltsman, a close associate of avant-garde painter Pavel Filonov in Leningrad, who had been interned in Karlag and, after his release in the mid-1950s, worked as an artist, art teacher and designer in the film industry. From the 1970s, she both organized and was a participant in non-official art exhibitions held in private apartments in Almaty that showed autonomous works by pupils of Vladimir Sterligov. (See also bio of Tatiana Glebova.)

Both Blinova and Khalfin refused to work in any official capacity in order to concentrate on their own different forms of creative activity; Blinova often supported herself by producing and selling small sculptural forms as jewelry. In 1986, she worked as Production Designer on director Sergei Bodrov's first film *The Non-Professionals* and, the following year, as costume designer for Sergei Solovyov's film *The Stray, White and The Speckled* (1985). She also made puppet shows for children. Bringing together many different strands of interest that included shamanism, linguistics, structuralism, psychology and tantrism, she encouraged a conceptual approach in both her own work and that of her friends while also being aware of the emotional and sensual imperative of art.

In 1995 she designed a series of catalogues on contemporary Kazakh artists for the Soros Foundation in Almaty, made *Finger Ornaments*, her conceptual photo-series of different mudras, and presented her installation *Poem for a Cat* at the Kokserrek Gallery which also published the text of the work (see pp. 66–68). In 2011 her work was posthumously represented in the exhibition *Between the Past and the Future: Minus 20. The Archeology of Relevance* at the Kasteyev Art Museum in Almaty.

OPPOSITE

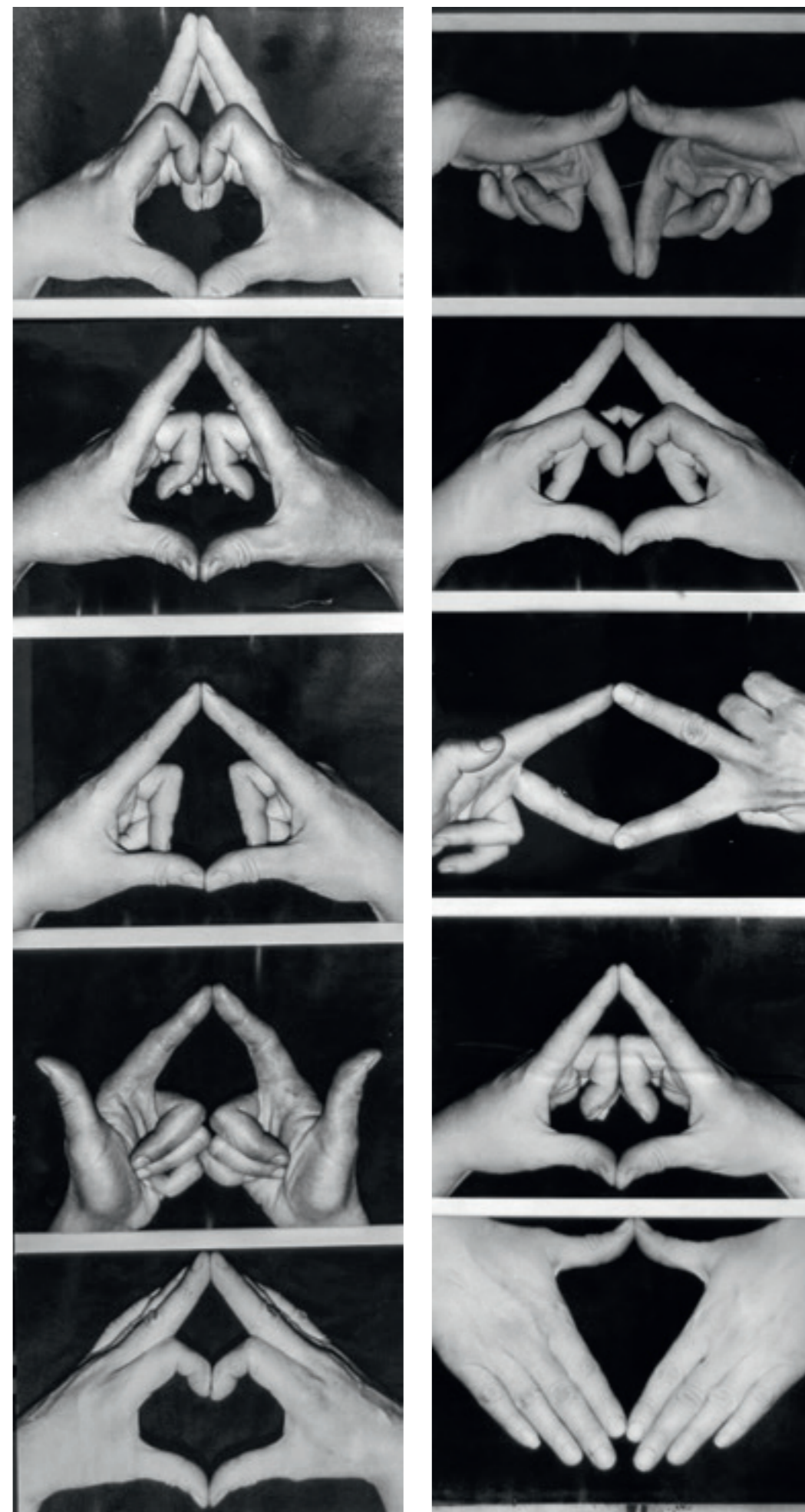
*Finger Ornaments*

1995

Series of 10 photographs, B/W, PVC backing

29x201cm

LIDYA BLINOVA



LIDYA BLINOVA





*Untitled Sculpture [Self Portrait]*  
1966-69  
Wood  
85x70x70cm  
Said Dzhiembayev Collection

LIDYA BLINOVA



Stills from  
*Lidya Blinova: Pulota*  
2018  
Video  
HD single-channel + sound  
17' / 16:9  
Directed by  
Saule Suleimenova (b. 1970).

LIDYA BLINOVA

## BAKHYT BUBIKANOVA

Born 1985 in Aktobe, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Bakhyt Bubikanova graduated from the painting and sculpture department of the Kazakh National Academy of Arts in Almaty in 2008. With a mixed-media practice encompassing video, performance, photography, drawing, painting, collage, and installation, she has been actively exhibiting her work since 2005. Since 2010, she has been teaching in the Kasteyev School of Fine Arts and Design. In 2014, she was given the First President's Award for merits in the field of Kazakh contemporary art. Her selected solo exhibitions include: *Homo*, Almaty (2010); *The Kazaxenianckui Superethnos*, Atmosphere Art Space, Almaty (2014). Recent group exhibitions include: *The Nomads*, Artwin Gallery, Moscow, Russia (2015); Shymkent Art Days, Shymkent, Kazakhstan (2016); *Elsewhere*, Floodlight Foundation, London (2017); *Suns and Neons above Kazakhstan*, Yarat Contemporary Art Center, Baku, Azerbaijan (2017); *Painting Resistance*, Aspan Gallery, Almaty (2017); *Postcolonial Art of Asia*, GEDOK Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe Germany (2018); Art Dubai, UAE (2018). International Biennales include: *A Time for Dreams*, the Fourth International Moscow Biennale for Young Art, Moscow (2014).

### Sebastian

2013, video, 2'5"

This is the story about the life of Saint Sebastian, who was bound and pierced with arrows for his faith—but remained alive.

In the current situation, any public political statement, one that often includes the artist's body, is akin to the history of Sebastian.

It is doubtful whether anyone will shoot you with arrows nowadays, but artists still have to punish themselves to prove and declare what they believe.

And so this work is more like a biography of an ordinary person who harnesses themselves and waits.

OPPOSITE

**Sebastian**

2013

Single-channel video + sound

2'5" / 4:3





*New Year's Post Cards*  
 2014  
 Series of 5 photomontaged photo prints on aludibond  
 60x80 / 60x60 / 70x50 / 60x60 / 60x80cm

## New Year's Post Cards

2014, series of 5 photomontages

I started my search in contemporary art from working on postcards using collage. These 2015 New Year's cards (in the Chinese calendar this was the Year of the 'Goat') was made as a proposal for distribution via the internet.

The format of collage is very suitable for our country, as it reflects how we collect fragmentary information: classical Roman columns with curtains; girls and boys who base their style of dress and behaviour on what they see on the internet and TV; a traditional Kazakh feast on a Soviet New Year's Eve, (with the Red Star of the USSR instead of the star of Bethlehem); rituals of blessing (*Bata*) and the cult of sacrifice with bowls of meat and *qazi* [sausage-like food]; an eclecticism of styles and symbols that, at the same time represents, one unique picture of identity: Eurasian collaboration.

84

## Boztorgay

2018, video, 6'10"

In the video I sit on a decorative hill, against the backdrop of pyramids. I am listening to music, crying out in time with the melody of the hit song 'Boztorgay', written by Kenen Azirbayev and performed by Meirambek Bespaev, that became popular in the '90s.

In my childhood, I heard it many times on a cassette tape recorder at home. It was my father's favorite song and tells the sad story of an orphan.

For me this song is a symbol of the Kazakh country. The modern culture of Kazakhstan is riven through with tragedies: wars, famine, repressions. We can observe this in the colour of our paintings, in our music, theatre and cinema, even in our tradition of *zhoktau* [song lamentations].

Although all Kazakhs have experienced tragedies, they have still not lost hope and retain an element of humour.

— Bakhyt Bubikanova



Stills from *Boztorgay*  
2018  
Single-channel video + sound  
6'10" / 16:9

85

## GANIYA CHAGATAYEVA

Born 1956 in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Ganiya Chagatayeva graduated from the department of Graphic Design in the Moscow Art and Industry Academy (former Stroganov Academy) and taught at the Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts. She participated in the seminars of Vyacheslav Koleichuk, a post-constructivist sound and kinetic artist and Aleksandr Lavrentiev, a designer and grandson of Aleksander Rodchenko, which were held with the assistance of VNIUE Moscow (Moscow Technological University). She is a member of the Union of Artists and the Union of Designers. Chagatayeva works at the junction of painting and graphics, also making objects and installations, and teaching.

“Eastern wisdom says: Our world is a stream of metaphors and symbols in a pattern. Behind the boundaries of the visible world lies a clear divine order. In nature, everything is structured and subordinated to one’s own laws of harmony and rhythm. The laws of rhythm are the breath of the universe, resonating through art. The rhythmic formation of the inner environment of human perception is the desire to look beyond the visible. I search for my own understanding in the world and for a universal beginning that may be found in pre-figurative states. This is a conceptual experiment in the style of abstract expressionism. Overcoming the plane of the horizon, by opening inner perspective, and reflecting on the laws of harmony and rhythm, the highest order may be found hidden in the crystallization of symbolic thinking behind the visible chaos of nature. This makes it possible to create new spatial rhythms and images by finding new forms.”

OPPOSITE

*Transforming Object, Bird I*

2005

Photograph on aludibond

90x60cm

GANIYA CHAGATAYEVA



GANIYA CHAGATAYEVA

## House

2005, video, 4' 40", 4:3

The southern shore resembled an almost uninhabited island, above which stood the dilapidated remains of a military facility. The building—a monster, like a vampire, dug into the body of Lake Issyk-Kul [in Kyrgyzstan]. The squares of the concrete beams divided the room into blocks and pools. Like blood vessels, huge rusty pipes intertwined the space. On the walls hung 'stalactites' from bird dung and on the floor - fallen off plaster similar to an egg shell. In the huge openings of the windows the watery surface of Issyk-Kul pulsed like blue satin splinters.

In an uninhabited, abandoned room - a tied dog... Such a sight looked as absurd as the empty pools on the shore of the lake. Subsequently, I included this dog in the credits of the film under the name 'Stalker.' Throughout the whole area there was amazingly

sparse vegetation and only the poisonous ephedra bush splendidly dissolved in its bright red berries. Near the building grew a curved, dried-out tree, I gave it a new name—'Ephedrevo' and decorated it with green leaves from the ephedra.

A dried tree, a black dog, cellars, catacombs, labyrinths...

All the coast was neatly furnished with large porous rocks. They had smooth curved forms, and like sculptures they rose against a background of bright, small stones.

On the second floor, there was a ledge inside a room, possibly the remains of a balcony. At this point I started to make my first huge 'Nest' object. It symbolized the 'heart' of the building, it animated the space, and returned life to it.

The idea behind the video-performance was — to paraphrase a common metaphor — turning a pupa into a butterfly. In the film, the action had to move in the reverse order — the butterfly's transition to the pupa-cocoon, and then from the cocoon-net to the likeness of a worm.

The trapper hunts for the Bird — his double, which lives in the heart of the destroyed building. Bird tracks are lost in the sky, returning as a cloud. The sculptural basis of the action is the square (the bird) and the circle that limits it (the net). A catcher with a net can follow the bird to the shore, looking for it inside the building. In an act of transformation, the bird disappears among the coastal rocks.

The net symbolizes a cocoon, stasis, a cage, our ego. Having been caught in the cocoon-net, the Bird tears it up, as the image of a pathetic, helpless creature, creeping out like a worm.

The idea of the duality of consciousness is expressed in the images of the Hunter and the Bird in one person. The [Uzbek] artist Vyacheslav Akhunov, afterwards, beautifully depicted his moment of birth from the cocoon-net.

'Nest', 'Ephedrevo', 'The Fallen Cloud,' 'Footprints,' photographs — my independent art objects entered the video performance and merged into the drama of the film.

The sunny days seemed to have been ordered for our symposium and ended with this 'graduation work'.

The house saw us off with empty blue eye sockets, then the berries of the 'Ephedrevo' dropped. Inside the house, in a large nest, the dog 'Stalker' slept.

— Ganiya Chagatayeva



LEFT  
*Transforming Object, Bird III*  
2005  
Photograph on aludibond  
90x60cm



RIGHT  
*Transforming Object, Bird II*  
2005  
Photograph on aludibond  
90x60cm

## NATALYA DYU

Born 1976 in Karaganda, Kazakhstan.  
Lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Natalya Dyu studied Fine Arts at the Buketov Karaganda State University, in the faculty of mechanical drawing. Selected exhibitions include: *BALAGAN!!! Contemporary art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places*, MOMENTUM, Berlin (2015); *Between Heaven and Earth. Contemporary Art from the Centre of Asia*, Calvert 22, London (2011); *East of Nowhere. Contemporary Art from Post-Soviet Central Asia*, Fondazione 107, Turin, Italy (2009). International Biennales include: the 2nd International Antakya Biennial, Antakya, Turkey (2010); *Qui Vive?*, 2nd Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia (2010); *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, 11th International Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2009); *So Close Yet So Far Away*, 2nd International Incheon Women Artists' Biennale, Incheon Art Platform, Korean-Chinese Cultural Center Gallery, Korea (2009); *MARTIAN FIELDS: Collaboration*, curated by Irina Yashkova, 3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, M'ARS Centre for Contemporary Arts, Moscow, Russia (2009); *Muzikstan*, Central Asian Pavilion, 52nd Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2008).



### I Love Naomi and Naomi Loves Fruits

2001, video, 4'27"

In *I Love Naomi and Naomi Loves Fruits* (2001) the artist is filmed in pink pyjamas sitting on the toilet, a place to dream, where she obsessively soliloquizes a fantasy about her life and that of the supermodel, Naomi Campbell. Her comparative daydream both highlights and temporarily obliterates what is an unbridgeable void between the aspirations of neo-liberal consumerism and reality.

OPPOSITE TOP  
[I Love Naomi and Naomi Loves Fruits](#)  
2001  
[Single-channel video + sound](#)  
4'27" / 4:3

OPPOSITE BOTTOM  
[So Naive, So Fluffy...](#)  
2009  
[Single-channel video + sound](#)  
4'54" / 4:3

### So Naive, So Fluffy...

2009, video, 4'54"

In *So Naive, So Fluffy* (2009), the artist plays the part of a young girl dreaming on her bed, writing out names and words onto labels that she then sticks onto the backs of a flock of small chickens that chaotically and noisily run through her bedroom. The labels fall off, creating unreadable messages on her bedsheet, punctuated by the shit of the birds.



## VERA ERMOLAEVA

1893–1937

Born in Petrovsk, Russian Empire.

Murdered in Dolinka Camp, KARLAG, Karaganda, Kazakh SSR.

Artist, designer, and illustrator Vera Ermolaeva came from a wealthy, noble family and, at the age of 10, was crippled by a fall from a horse; from this time she could walk only with crutches. She went to different schools in Paris, Lausanne and St Petersburg, graduating from the Princess A.A. Oblenskaya Academy in 1910. From 1911 to 1914, she studied at the private art school of painter Mikhail Bernstein, travelled to Paris and began to move in advanced Cubo-Futurist circles in Petrograd. In 1916, she became a member of *Bezkrvnoe ubiitsvo* ('Bloodless Murder'), a group of futurist artists, and designed the sets and costumes for Ilya Zdanevich's play *Yanko 1*. She also became interested in icons, folk art, broadsheets (*lubki*) and painted shop signs, amassing a large collection of the latter that she donated to the Petrograd City Museum where, for a time, she worked. In 1917 she joined the artists' collectives *Svoboda iskusstvu* ('Freedom for Art') and *Iskusstvo i Revoliutsia* ('Art and Revolution') and met the writers Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Mayakovsky. In 1918 she became a founder member of the *Segodnya* ('Today') publication house and began to illustrate books, including three works by Natan Vengrov and 'Pioneers', a Russian translation of a poem by Walt Whitman.

In 1919 she was sent to Vitebsk to work as a teacher in the People's Art School, which Mark Chagall had founded and invited Kazimir Malevich to teach there. His flat, abstract style of Suprematism strongly influenced Ermolaeva's work and took over the school, creating a rift between his approach and that of Chagall. In 1920 she made set designs for the opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* ('Victory over the Sun' 1913), by Mikhail Matyushin and Aleksei Kruchenykh for which Malevich had made the original designs — particularly the 'Black Square' backdrop — that later he claimed to be the origin of Suprematism.

Together with Malevich and his students, she formed UNOVIS (The Creators of the New Art) — a research laboratory for studying the development of art, colour, spirituality and artistic form in the revolutionary climate of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s.

Following her return to Petrograd/Leningrad in 1923, she directed the Colour Laboratory in GINKhUK (the State Institute of Artistic Culture) of which Malevich was both the General Director and Head of the Department of Painting Culture. GINKhUK was closed by the State in 1926, after it had been criticised in the Press for being 'a State-supported monastery' and Malevich had been arrested and interrogated for three months.

During the late 1920s Ermolaeva also closely associated with the Oberiuty (The Association for Real Art), a group of advanced writers and performance artists, including Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedensky, both later suppressed, with whom she collaborated by illustrating their books. From 1925, working with the DetGiz (the Children's Division of the State Publishing House), where she met Tatiana Glebova [see pp. 106–113], she explored new ideas and formats for children's books. In 1929, with former members of UNOVIS, she formed a new group that elaborated Malevich's synthesis of abstraction and realism in the light of the dramatic changes that were then taking place throughout the country during the First Five Year Plan. Desolation in the countryside was a recurrent theme and, in her illustrations for Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Goethe's *Reynard the Fox*, she shifted her focus towards books for adults.

In 1934, in the first wave of mass arrests that followed the assassination of Sergei Kirov, head of the Communist Party in Leningrad, she was, with a number of her artistic associates (including Vladimir Sterligov [see pp. 34–37]) interrogated and sentenced to three years' hard labour for 'anti-Soviet activities ...anti-Soviet ideas and an attempt to organize around themselves an anti-Soviet intelligentsia.' She was incriminated by her illustrations for Goethe, which the NKVD interpreted as a satire on Soviet power and justice, and was sent, with others of her group, to a Gulag in Kazakhstan. In 1937, unlike her associates who were released, she was re-arrested and shot on September 26 in the Dolinka camp near Karaganda. Her legacy as both an artist and personality was suppressed and forgotten although her reputation in both Kazakhstan and Leningrad was kept alive by both Tatiana Glebova and Vladimir Sterligov. She was not posthumously rehabilitated until September 20, 1989. Many examples of her books are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Examples of her art works may be found in the collection of the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.





## ABOVE AND OPPOSITE

**The Fables of Ivan Krylov, *The Liar***

A children's book illustrated by Vera Ermolaeva  
 Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts

## FOLLOWING SPREAD

Stills from **VERA: The Life and Death of Vera Ermolaeva**  
 2018

HD single-channel video + sound

11' / 16:9

Directed by Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969)

VERA ERMOLAEVA



VERA ERMOLAEVA



The man in the quilted jacket. 1933.  
Paper, gouache. 24x17 cm.  
The State Russian Museum.



Vera Ermolaeva -  
artist, graphic artist, illustrator.

## ZOYA FALKOVA

Born 1982 in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.  
Lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Zoya Falkova graduated with a Masters degree in Architecture from the School of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Almaty, in 2004. She has participated in many contemporary art exhibitions and festivals in the former Soviet Union and Europe, including the unofficial pavilion of Kazakhstan at the 57th Biennale of Venice (2017). Also in 2017, she was nominated for the Singapore Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Art Prize.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *PLAYINGTHEWOMAN*, Esentai Gallery, Almaty, Kazakhstan (2017); *Disappearing Peninsula/Southern Siberia*, Kyiv, Ukraine (2018). Falkova's area of interest is the study and deconstruction of colonial and post-colonial practices, both gendered, political, and ecological. She works in installation, sculpture, media art, photography, painting, and drawing, and also creates poetic texts.

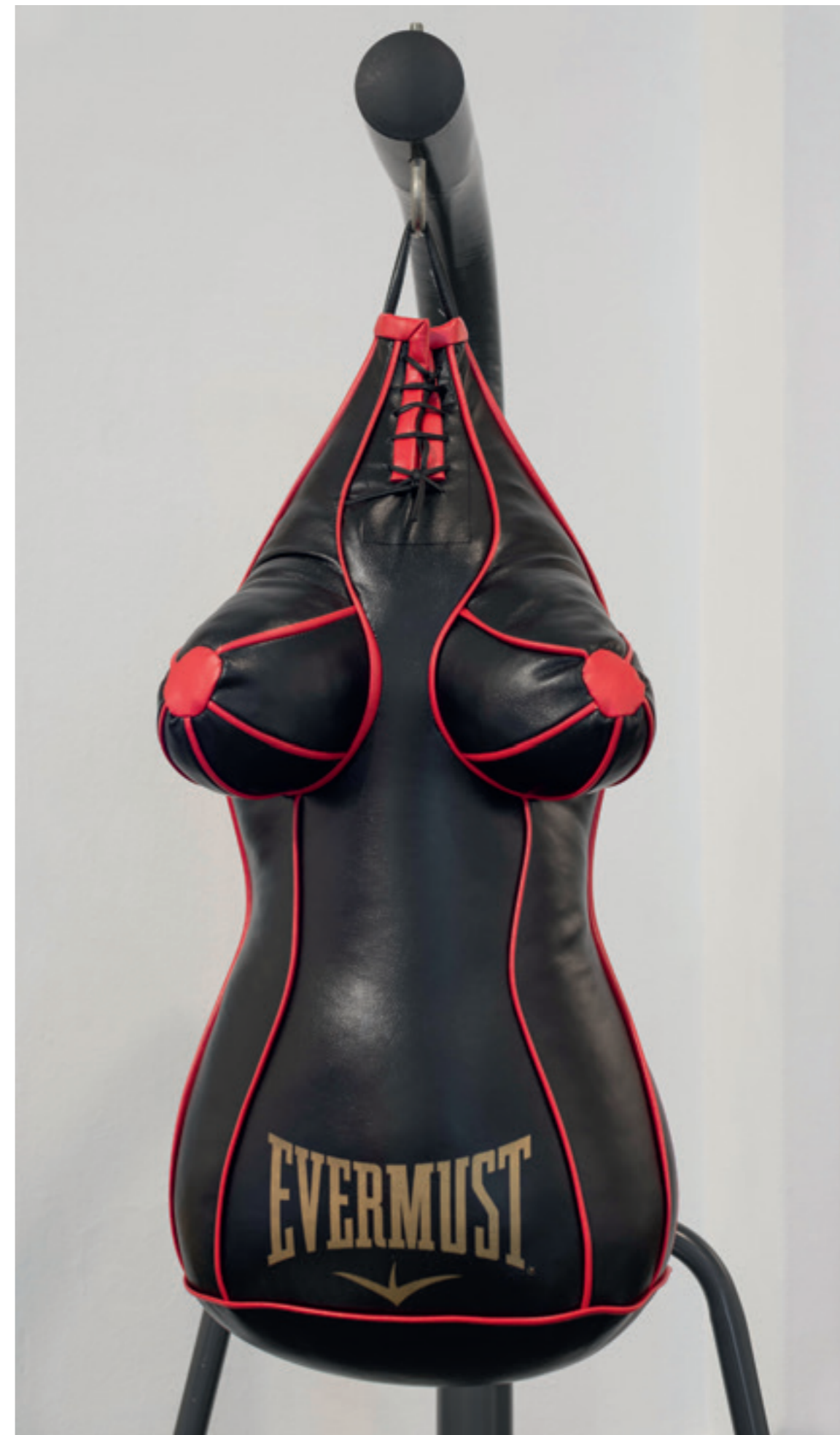
### EVERMUST

2017, object: artificial leather, filler, chain

'The punching bag in the form of a woman's torso is both a female portrait and the expression of a social climate in which violence is not only considered the norm but may even be a sign of love.'

— Zoya Falkova

OPPOSITE  
**EVERMUST**  
2017  
Object: artificial leather, filler, chain  
75x45x40cm



## AISHA GALIMBAEVA

1917 – 2008

Born in the Kazakh SSR.

Lived and worked in Kazakhstan.

Aisha Galimbaeva is one of the most important pioneers of women's art in Kazakhstan. She was a Laureate of the State Prize of the Kazakh SSR (1972) and was also awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour and the Order of the Badge of Honour. A painter, production designer for film and theatre, and educator, she is noted for her colourful and realistic depictions of the changing social and psychological position of women in Kazakhstan during the mid-20th century.

By the age of 17, she had received a diploma from the N.V. Gogol Art College in Almaty; she graduated from the Alma-Ata Art College in 1943 and worked at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow and the MosFilm Studios that, from 1941 to 1943, was evacuated to Alma-Ata as a result of the war, where film director Sergei Eisenstein directed the first part of his epic *Ivan The Terrible*.

After the war, she became a professor at the Alma-Ata Art Institute and the Graphics and Art department of the Kazakh Abai State Pedagogical Institute. In the 1950s she was a designer on *The Daughter of the Steppes* (1954), *A Poem About Love* (1954) and other films, working closely with Pavel Zaltsman, an avant-garde artist who in the 1930s had been an associate of Pavel Filonov, one of the charismatic leaders of the Leningrad art scene.

In her paintings, costume and set designs, she recuperated and made popular again traditional dress, decorations and modes of life that had virtually disappeared. Although she worked in the official genre of Socialist Realism, when she painted factories, the landscape or collective farms in the countryside, it was through a Kazakh rather than Soviet prism. Two of her portraits of farm brigade leaders from the 1980s shown here combine the almost disappearing official style with an unbridled modernist romanticism. From 1951 she was a member of the Artists' Union of Kazakhstan, USSR.



*National Talents*

1957

Oil on canvas

100×130cm

Kasteyev State Art Museum, Almaty



*Portrait of Work Brigade Leader, M. Abenova*  
 1984  
 Oil on canvas  
 70×86cm  
 Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts

AISHA GALIMBAEVA



*Portrait of the Leader of the Shepherds' Brigade in the  
 Ulguli State Collective Farm (Sovkhoz), Zhanalyksky district, Kazina*  
 1985  
 Oil on canvas  
 160×170cm  
 Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts

AISHA GALIMBAEVA



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ABOVE  
 Film poster for 'The Daughter of the Steppes'  
 1954

OPPOSITE  
 Extracts from *AISHA: The Works of Aisha Galimbaeva*  
 2018

HD single-channel video + sound  
 22' / 16:9

Directed by Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969)

TOP - *The Daughter of the Steppes* / 1954 / Directed by Sh. Aymanov, K. Gakkel

CENTER - *Poem about Love* / 1954 / Directed by Sh. Aymanov, K. Gakkel

BOTTOM - *Lady Dzhigit* / 1955 / Directed by P. Bogolyubov

AISHA GALIMBAEVA



105



AISHA GALIMBAEVA

# TATIANA GLEBOVA

1900–1985

Born in St. Petersburg, Russian Empire.

Lived and worked in St. Petersburg and Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.

Tatiana Glebova was born into a radical intellectual family in St. Petersburg where her grandfather, Count Fyodor Tolstoy, was vice-president of the Art Academy. She attended this school from 1924 to 1927, initially in the studio of Alexander Savinov, but, from 1925, studied with the established avant-garde painter Pavel Filonov, who ran a workshop within the academy. The Leningrad avant-garde at this time was dominated by two artistic factwions, led on one side by Malevich, who had developed radical theories about a fourth dimension in art represented by non-objective planes, and on the other by Filonov, who with his 'Masters of Analytical Art' group (MAI) developed the doctrine of 'universal flowering,' an organic process of registering simultaneous sense impressions that combined realism with symbols, neo-primitivism and the fantastic grotesque of the northern Renaissance.

In 1926, she also began to work in DetGlz (the Children's Division of the State Publishing House), an organization that gave work to many avant-garde artists of different tendencies. She met Vera Ermolaeva there and, like her, made illustrations for children's books, particularly those by the Oberiuty—Nikolai Zabolotsky, Daniil Kharms, and Aleksandr Vvedensky—the emerging generation of poets, writers and artists who could find no other work.

In 1927 Glebova became a member of MAI, with whom she exhibited, and also began to work in scenography, making designs for Wagner's 'The Master Singers of Nuremburg' for the Maly Theater in 1932. In 1929 a large retrospective exhibition of Filonov's work planned for the Russian Museum remained unopened to the public for three years until it was finally forbidden by the authorities and State patronage dried up. He struggled severely to survive. Although MAI split up in 1932, Glebova remained closely affiliated with Filonov until December 1941 when he died of starvation during the siege of Leningrad. Throughout that harsh winter, she continued making drawings and wrote a diary. Evacuated to Kazakhstan in 1942, she met Vladimir Sterligov, a painter and member of the Malevich circle in Leningrad, who had been arrested and exiled to Kazakhstan with Vera Ermolaeva. They married there and after the war moved back to Leningrad. The drawings by Glebova shown here sardonically record the everyday scenes she experienced in Almaty during the aftermath of war. With Sterligov, she transposed the independent, autonomous way of working she had learnt in the 1920s and '30s into a post-war 'invisible institute' that recreated, remodeled and extended the analytical methods they had both learnt. Many important non-official artists studied and showed their work there, and from 1971 to 1973 fifty-two unofficial exhibitions were held in Sterligov's workshop. Lidya Blinova and Rustam Khalfin set up a related circle in Alma-Ata that operated throughout the 1970s and '80s. After Sterligov's death in 1973, Glebova continued working and exhibiting until her death. Her works are in the collections of the Pushkin Museum and State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, the Yaroslavl Art Museum, the Kostroma Picture Gallery, the Arkhangelsk Museum, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, and the Kasteyev State Art Museum, Almaty.

TATIANA GLEBOVA



TATIANA GLEBOVA

OPPOSITE

*Butcher's Shop in the Bazaar, Alma-Ata*  
1942-45

Watercolour on paper

65x55cm

All the illustrated works are  
from the collection of the  
Kasteyev State Art Museum, Almaty



108

*Kazakh Woman on a Donkey*  
1942-45  
Watercolour on paper  
38x26.7cm

TATIANA GLEBOVA



109

*Kazakh Woman Selling Kumis [fermented mare's milk] on the Steppe*  
1942-45 / Pencil and coloured crayon on paper / 35.3x21cm

TATIANA GLEBOVA





110

*Bazaar*  
1942-45  
Watercolour on paper  
39.9x29.8cm

TATIANA GLEBOVA



111

*Chechen Woman Selling Wool at the Bazaar, Alma-Ata*  
1942-45 / Watercolour on paper / 65x55cm

TATIANA GLEBOVA



112

*Bazaar*  
1942-45  
Watercolour on paper  
36x30.4cm

TATIANA GLEBOVA



113

TOP  
*Shooting Range*  
1942-45  
Watercolour on paper  
65x55cm

BOTTOM  
*Bazaar*  
1942-45  
Watercolour on paper  
26.7x26.4cm



TATIANA GLEBOVA

## GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA

1929 – 2013

Born in the Kazakh SSR.

Lived, and worked in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Considered one of Kazakhstan's 'mothers of contemporary art', painter, actor, film and theatre director, and production designer for film, theatre, and opera, Gulfairus Ismailova first studied at the Almaty Art College in 1944, and then at the Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (1950–1956). She is one of the first Kazakh artists to adapt the rules of Soviet Socialist Realism to take into account the history, national traditions and reality of Kazakhstan.

Initially acclaimed as a star in Yefim Aron's film *Botagoz* (1957), her influence also extended across painting, theatre design, and education and she became simultaneously a member of the Soviet unions for cinematographers, theatre workers and artists. She worked with Pavel Zaltsman, an avant-garde artist and designer from Leningrad who had worked closely with Filonov, an association that had a strong impact on her work as an artist.

In the early 1970s, Ismailova became the chief designer of the Kazakh State Opera and Ballet Theatre, where she worked for 16 years. During her lifetime, she participated in major exhibitions in Kazakhstan, Russia, GDR, UK, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, Japan, and France. Her works are held in museum collections throughout Kazakhstan. She was awarded the Tarlan Award for Contribution to Art (2002); the honour of the People's Artist of Kazakhstan (1987); Honoured Artist of Kazakhstan (1985); the Order of Friendship of Peoples; the Order of the Badge of Honour (1959) and the Order of Parasat.



*Portrait of Dina Nurpeisova*

1965

Oil on canvas

85×65cm

National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana



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Costume designs for 'Kozy Korpesh and  
Bayan-Sulu', a folk ballet by E. Brusilovsky  
1971  
Gouache on paper  
60×150cm  
V. Sidorkin Collection



*Costume design for Kyz Zhibek,  
a folk ballet by E. Brusilovsky*  
1967 / Gouache on paper / 50x40cm  
V. Sidorkin Collection

GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA



*Costume design for 'Er-Targyn', an opera-ballet  
by E. Brusilovsky based on an ancient Kazakh heroic epic*  
1967 / Gouache on paper / 50x40cm  
V. Sidorkin Collection

GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA



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ABOVE

*Film poster for 'Botagoz'*

1957

OPPOSITE

Extracts from *GULFAIRUS: Gulfairus Ishmailova and Soviet National Cinematography*

2018

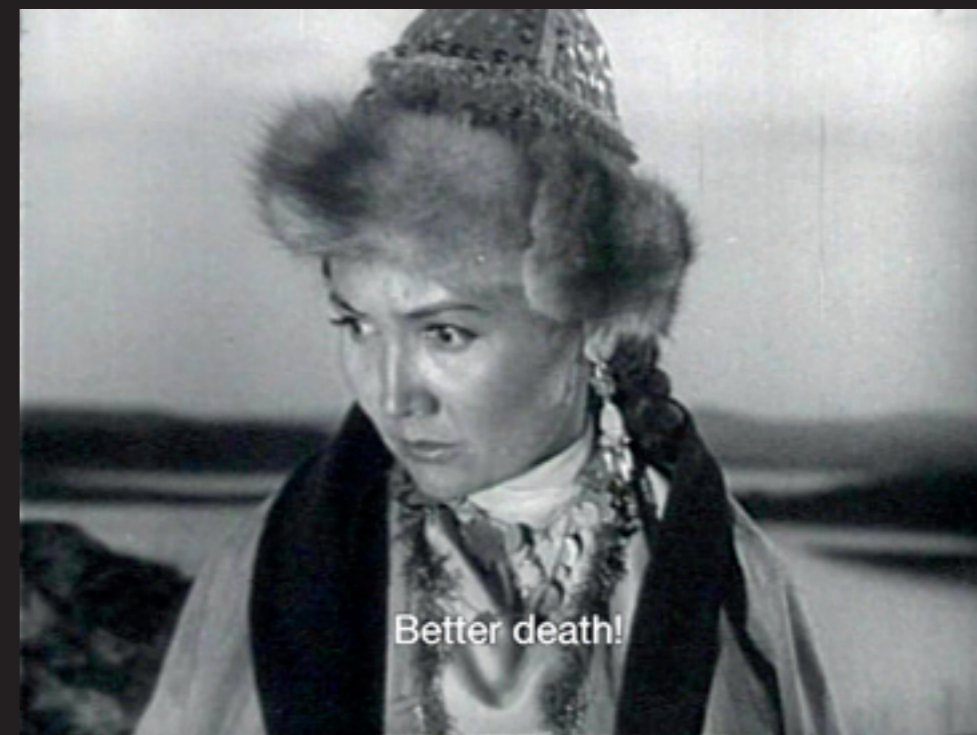
HD single-channel video + sound

22' / 16:9

Directed by Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969)

TOP - *Botagoz* / 1957 / Directed by E. AronCENTRE - *Alitet goes to the mountains* / 1949 / Directed by Mark DonskoyBOTTOM - *Kyz Zhibek (The Silk Lady)* / 1969 / Directed by S.A.Khodzhikov

GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA



GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA

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## KREOLEX ZENTR

Maria Vilkovisky, born 1971 & Ruthie Jenrbekova, born 1973,  
in Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR.

Live and work in Almaty, Kazakhstan and Vienna, Austria.

Maria Vilkovisky is a poet, musician, performer, curator, and an employee of Kreolex Zentr, working together with her partner artist Ruth Jenrbekova. With a practice focusing on poetry, experimental sound & vocal, performance, music, writing, queer and feminist theory, Vilkovisky studied at the Kazakh National Kurmangazy Conservatory, Almaty (1991–1996), the Musagethes Literary School for Writers (2008), and the Moscow Curatorial Summer School (2013).

Ruthie Jenrbekova has since 1997 has been involved in various artistic and curatorial activities as a performance artist, educator, film-maker, graphic designer, writer, and employee of Kreolex Zentr, working together with her partner artist Maria Vilkovisky. Currently working on her PhD in Practice at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, Austria, Jenrbekova also completed the Moscow Curatorial Summer School (2013), the Musagethes Literary School for Writers (2008), Almaty, and an MA in Urban Ecology at the Biological faculty of Kazakh State University (1995). Her practice focuses on Arts-based research methodologies, performance art, experimental audio and video, comparative anthropology, new materialisms, and feminist ontologies.

Selected exhibitions include: *Escapism Training Program*, group exhibition, Fabrika CCI, Moscow (2018); *Human Rights: 20 Years After*, group exhibition, Artmeken gallery, Almaty (2017); *In Edenia, a City of the Future*, exhibition, Yermilov Center, Kharkiv, Ukraine (2017); *Suns and Neons above Kazakhstan*, group exhibition, YARAT Contemporary Art Space, Baku, Azerbaijan (2017). *Symbiosis*, international artistic and research exhibition, Almaty Botanical Garden (2016); *A - Art, F - Feminism, An Actual Dictionary*, group exhibition and conference, DAR Institute, Moscow (2015).

Selected joint artistic and curatorial projects include: *Inhuman Rights Watch & Listen*, sound installation, Artmeken gallery, Almaty (2017); *Superformance. Typology of Actions*, interactive staged performance, shown at SIGs Space, Almaty (2017); *Intermedia 5*, interactive theatricalized presentation, Bishkek (2016), *Intermedia 3*, interactive theatricalized presentation of *Central Asian Mental Map*, Rosa's House of Culture, Saint Petersburg, in the framework of The Chto Delat School for Engaged Art (2016).

Key conferences include: *Queering Paradigms VIII. Fucking Solidarity: queering concepts on/from a Post-Soviet perspective*, international conference, Department for English and American Studies, University of Vienna (2017); *Body discourses/Body politix* conference, Humboldt University Berlin, [presentation *Self-Exoticism in Contemporary Art & Media in Kazakhstan*] (2015); *The Concepts of the Soviet in Central Asia* symposium, SHTAB, Bishkek [presentation *Creolization in Central Asia: Outlines for Social Compositionism*] (2015).

## Promo

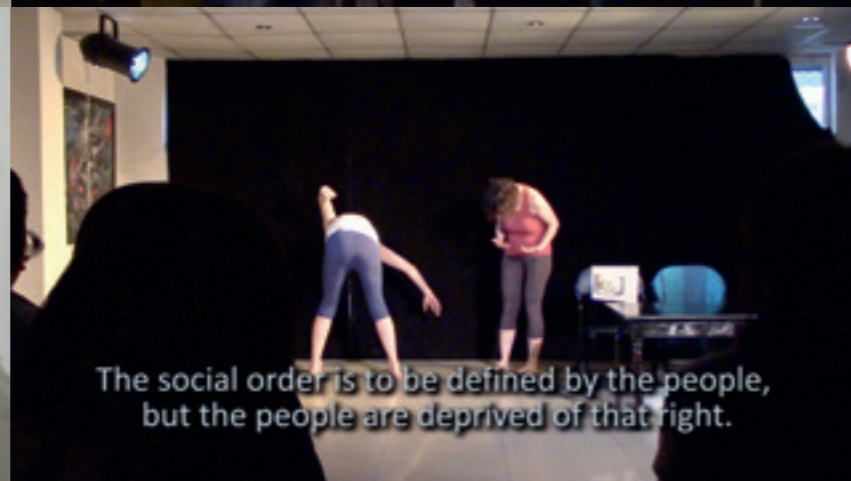
2016, video, 10' 53"

A message from Kreolex Zentr's Department of Public Relations:

This video as an example of how our organization functions. Being a conceptual project in the genre of imaginary institutions, Kreolex Zentr tries to retain many identities, which we realise may produce some difficulties in understanding our work.

What sense does it make to call ourselves a phantom cultural institution? While not seeking to clarify this question univocally, we, nevertheless, wish to provide lucid explanations of what we do. Our productions seem often simple and amateur; they stretch across a wide range of different formats and means of expression in order to gain a certain educational momentum. This short video was commissioned by the Kreolex HQ for promotional purposes and is meant to make our performances accessible to even wider audiences.

— Kreolex Zentr





## GAISHA MADANOVA

Born 1987 in Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSSR.

Lives and works in Munich, Germany, and Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Gaisha Madanova graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the Almaty College of Construction and Management in 2009. In 2018 she graduated from the Munich Academy of Fine Arts (in the Sculpture class of Prof. Hermann Pitz). In her artistic practice she uses different media and techniques—such as silkscreen print, nitro-frottage, video, photo, installations—basing her work on the investigation of questions that reveal the relationship between artificial and natural existence. Topics like ‘watching and being watched’, ‘the body as an expression of the inner self’ or ‘the strategies of transformations and displacement’ can be seen as links through different series of her works.

Madanova is also engaged in curatorial practice, including projects such as: *DIYALOG: New Energies*, OMV section at the VIENNAFAIR; the contemporary art educational program *VIDEO[ARTiFACT]*, Klaus vom Bruch; special project *mikro[smART]raiony*, Refunc group, ARTBATFEST, Almaty; video-art program *Internal Storage - Not Enough Space?*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow. Since 2012 Madanova has also been involved in different projects organized by Goethe-Institut in Kazakhstan. Since 2007 Madanova has been a founding member of the international art collective Artpologist (Art+Antropology), since 2014 she has been a member of the Munich-based art collective Roundabout, and since 2016 co-founder of Kazakhstan-based art communication platform ARTCOM. She is also the founder and editor-in-chief of the first conceptual art magazine in Kazakhstan: *ALUAN - Exhibition On Paper*.

*Aluan Magazine, Issue 1 / 2015 / 'Art Upside Down'*



GAISHA MADANOVA

## Aluan Magazine, Issue 1

2015, *Art Upside Down*

Published by the Goethe Institute, Kazakhstan

ALUAN is an exhibition space in the shape of a magazine. Each issue of this ‘exhibition on paper’ will be produced by a guest curator who explores a different art scene, defines a topic, and selects artists and artworks for display. It is a sequence of images, accompanied by a text that can be read as a guided tour. The first issue is curated by Berlin-based art critic and curator Thibaut de Ruyter.

Focusing on the art scene of Almaty (the former capital of Kazakhstan), it proposes a historical position in an archive about the city and its artworks that deal with identity and mapping. Central Asia has only a few art institutions and publications that provide accessible information and critical content about contemporary art. ALUAN is a response to this shortage with an approach valid both inside and outside Kazakhstan.

Founded by artist and curator Gaisha Madanova in 2014, the magazine is published in three languages (Kazakh, English, Russian) and proposes an alternative way of making exhibitions.



GAISHA MADANOVA

## Beam Me to the Presence

2017, Installation

In 1877, when the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli drew the first detailed map of the planet Mars, he imagined it as an earthly paradise. He named different regions Eden, Elysium, Arcadia and Utopia, the last in honour of Thomas More. In 1976 the spacecraft Viking 2 landed exactly on Utopia and began exploring Mars. In 2014 a company founded by scientists and former NASA personnel encouraged 'the inhabitants of Earth to send personal messages and pictures to Mars by radio transmission'. 237 messages were selected and sent — at the speed of light — as a global shout-out from Earth. The authors of these texts revealed their hopes and faith in the possibilities of passing frontiers into a new world; there was a new possibility of making everything right. These messages had the potential of being the first significant words to start a new communication, but they also faced the risk of being lost on the way and never heard. This artwork is based on one of the thousands of messages that were originally submitted. By exhibiting it in the temple of knowledge that each library or gallery represents, this text, with its honest hopes, gets another chance to exist by finding potential readers.

This work was first made for *UTOPIUM*, a group exhibition produced by the Julian Rosefeldt project class for the library of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich in 2017.

— Gaisha Madanova



### Installation Text:

You inspire us to dream of a second chance to do things right – to create a place where everyone is equal, where everyone is valued, where everyone is welcomed, You give us the chance to forget our differences and focus on our humanity. I imagine on Mars we would all just be humans. That in itself makes reaching you worthwhile. The goal of reaching you will encourage the best in us. We will need innovation, determination, and commitment. We will need our young people to bring their imagination and sense of adventure. We will need to value our teachers and refocus on our educational system to prepare our youth for this challenge. We will need to hold our leaders accountable to something bigger than themselves and now. By committing to this endeavor, we may rediscover our sense of national pride; however, instead of starting another space race, we should work with other nations to reach a common goal. Hopefully when we reach you, it will be because we want – not need – to be there.  
(Patti, John, Zack, Rachel, & Brett Hester)

OPPOSITE

*Beam Me to the Presence (details)*

2017

Text, vinyl lettering, dimensions variable

## AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN

Born 1986 in Semey, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Aigerim Mazhitkhan graduated from the Kazakh National Academy of Art in 2009, specializing in Art Criticism and Art History. Turning her critical eye back onto the architecture and public art of her city, Mazhitkhan addresses the rapid development of Astana, Kazakhstan's new capital, built-up almost from nothing over the past twenty years.

Selected recent exhibitions and festivals include: the Platonov Festival, Voronezh, Russia (2018); ArtBat Festival and the School of Artistic Gesture, Almaty (2017); *Act of Creation*, Eurasian Cultural Alliance, Almaty (2017); Artprospekt Festival, Almaty, 1st Place Golden Diploma award for *Images of the Capital* (2015); Magmart 9 International Video Festival, Naples, Italy (2015); *Alash - Page of Our History*, solo exhibition, Palace of Independence, Astana (2014).

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OPPOSITE  
 Stills from *Metaphors of the City*  
 2017  
 HD single channel video + sound  
 4'50" / 16:9

AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN



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AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN

## Metaphors of the City

2017, video, 4'50"

Astana, the capital, is built and expanded according to an approved general plan. Its buildings differ in their external form and concept. Because some of them become associated with specific objects by way of their appearance, the residents of the capital give different names to official buildings. For example, the National Archive is called the 'Egg'; the buildings of 'Samruk-Kazyn' are 'Buckets'; the Astanaalik Business Center has become 'The Syringe'; the Baiterek is popularly named after the lollipop brand 'Chupa-Chups'; and so on.

As an artist, I wanted to investigate the causes of this phenomenon. I interviewed the residents of the city, but I found their opinions contradictory. While some of them were saying that it is very convenient, the rest were sure that it was not ethical to give such nicknames to the main sights of the city. This is a not too serious examination of the citizens of Astana's perception of and attitude to their city.

## Images of the Capital

2015, video, 8'24"

Sculpture has always been a vital part of architecture that completes the architects' ideas. Together they create a single ensemble. Today, passing along the left bank of Astana, we can see a certain disunity and lack of proper combination between sculpture and the high-rise urban architecture that surrounds it. A lot of money has been spent, but the sculptures that have been commissioned look like space fillers and have been poorly made. Looking at this discrepancy, I ask the opinion of both professional figures within the art world and ordinary residents of the capital about these sculptures.

— Aigerim Mazhitkhan

OPPOSITE  
Stills from *Images of the Capital*  
2015  
HD single channel video + sound  
8'24" / 16:9

AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN



AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN

## ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA

Born 1969 in Almaty, Kazakh SSR.

Lives and works in Almaty and Berlin.

Video artist and photographer Almagul Menlibayeva holds an MFA from the Art and Theatre University of Almaty. She works primarily in multi-channel video, photography and mixed media installation and her work addresses such critical issues of post-Soviet modernity as social, economic, and political transformations in Central Asia, de-colonial re-imaginings of gender, environmental degradation, and Eurasian nomadic and indigenous cosmologies and mythologies.

In conjunction with her solo exhibition 'Transformation' at the Grand Palais in Paris (France, 2016–2017), she was awarded the prestigious Chevalier Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture in 2017. Other awards include the 'Daryn' State Prize of Kazakhstan (1996), and the 'Tarlan' National Award of the Club of Maecenas of Kazakhstan (2003). She was also the Winner of the Grand Prix Asia Art at the II Biennial of Central Asia, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (1995) and the Winner of the Main Prize of the International Film Festival Kino Der Kunst (2013) in Munich, Germany.

Menlibayeva has gained international recognition by participating in: the Venice Biennale, Italy (2005, 2007, 2009, 2015); Sydney Biennale, Australia (2006, 2012); the Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2010); the Mediterranean Biennale, Israel (2010); the Moscow Biennale, Russia (2011, 2015); the Kiev Biennial, Ukraine (2013); the Daegu Photo Biennale (2016); and the Gangwon International Biennale, South Korea (2018).

Selected solo exhibitions include: *Videoart at Midnight #98: Almagul Menlibayeva*, Berlin (2018); *Transformation*, Grand Palais, Paris, France (2016–2017); *Union of Fire and Water*, 56th Venice Biennial, Italy (2015); *Transoxiana Dreams*, Videozone, Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Germany (2014); *An Ode for the Wastelands and Gulags*, Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria (2013); *Daughters of Turan*, Casal Solleric, Palma De Mallorca, Spain (2012); *LATT: Europe at large #6*, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst (M HKA), Antwerp, Belgium (2010); *Kissing Totems*, Priska C. Juschka Fine Art, New York, USA (2008). Recent selected group exhibitions include: Haifa Museum, Israel (2018); Neues Museum in Nuremberg, Germany (2018, 2016); Astana State Museum, Kazakhstan (2018, 2016); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium (2017–2020, 2010); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST), Greece (2017).

## Steppen Baroque

2003, video, 11'

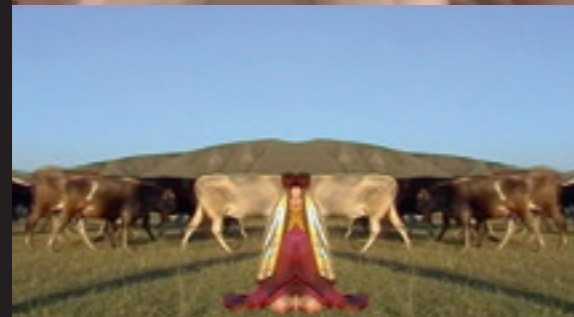
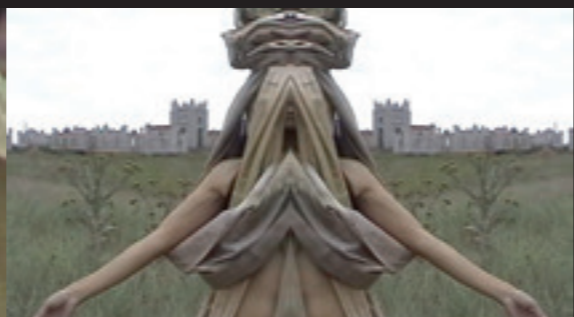
Sound by OMFO (G. Popov)

The stage for Almagul Menlibayeva's video performance *Steppen Baroque* is the bare, open steppe—the archetypal 'national landscape' of Central Asian nomadic culture. In this landscape, a group of seven women appear like mythical spirits, clothed in flowing colourful fabrics or completely naked, holding skulls of totem animals in their hands as offerings to gods. Menlibayeva has dedicated this work to her seven ancestors, thus referring to the nomadic tradition of knowing by heart seven generations of one's ancestors: memory creates history and continuity.

Menlibayeva says that she wants to give a face to central Asian women, because they are unknown and obscure in the contemporary world. In the turmoil of history, female identity in central Asia has been an instrument of politics: the communists transformed the central Asian woman into a symbol of their civilizing mission, promoting her as the ideal woman and a strong and self-disciplined worker. Today this strength and discipline are indeed needed in the new circumstances, when the transition to a market economy has brought sweeping changes to everyday life and social roles.

In Menlibayeva's art, woman appears as a strong matriarch of the nomadic period, independent and free from patriarchal control and oppression. *Steppen Baroque* also proclaims a new potential for individual freedom in its open celebration of traditional shamanism and female nudity, both forbidden during the Soviet era, when the communist regime tried to 'tame' the cultural and religious heritage of Central Asia and assimilate it into Soviet ideology.

(Extracted from Jari-Pekka Vanhala, *Steppen Baroque* as a *Spiritual Renaissance*, October 2007, <http://www.universe-in-universe.org>)



Stills from *Steppen Baroque*  
2003  
Single channel video / 11'

## The Altar of the East

2018

1. *Tokamak*, 2016, 9-channel video installation
2. *Tokamak*, 2016, photograph on aludibond
3. *The Constructor*, 2016, photograph on aludibond
4. *Altar of the East*, 2018, photograph on aludibond

*Tokamak* is a complex installation based on different images of KTM Tokamak, the experimental, materials-testing thermonuclear fusion reactor that started operation at the National Nuclear Centre in Kurchatov, Kazakhstan in June 2017. As well as being a celebration of the triumph of new technology, this work also evokes memories of the nuclear arms race during the Cold War, in particular Kurchatov's central role in the Soviet-era nuclear weapons tests. It is seen here alongside post-independence Kazakhstan's ambitious plans for the development of nuclear power.

The image *Altar of the East*, that gives the title to the whole Tokamak installation, depicts the Soviet-era control panel in Kurchatov for detonating nuclear weapons. The iconic 'Button' of Cold War dread is pictured in this triptych of images as a relic of a past era giving way to a future of science and technology where women play the central roles.

### OPPOSITE

*Tokamak*

2016

9-Channel video installation / 20'

### FOLLOWING SPREAD

*Altar of the East*

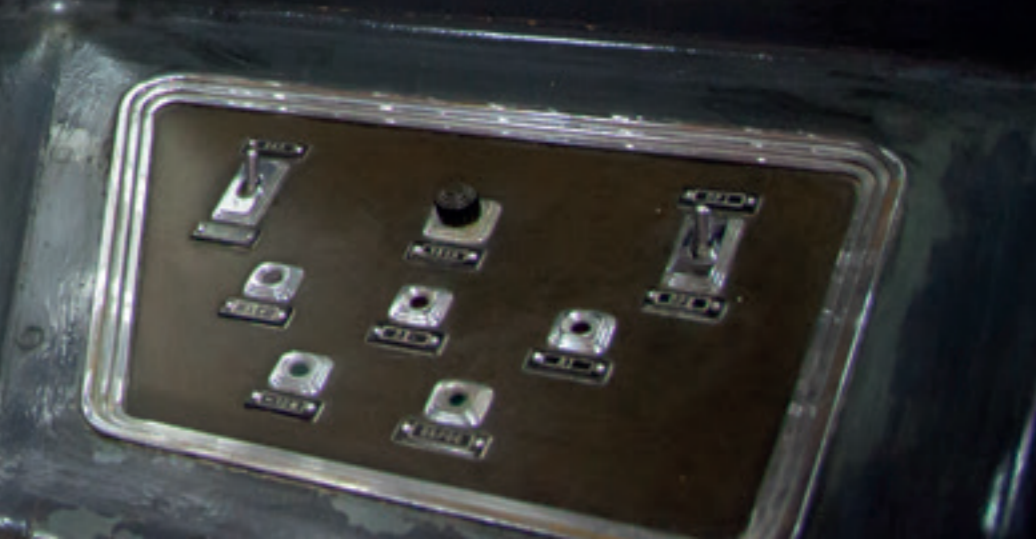
2018

Photograph on aludibond

100x150cm

MOMENTUM Collection, Berlin









*Tokamak*  
2016  
Photograph on aludibond  
150x100cm  
MOMENTUM Collection, Berlin

ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA



*The Constructor*  
2016  
Photograph on aludibond  
150x100cm  
MOMENTUM Collection, Berlin

ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA

## GULNAR MIRZAGALIKOVA

Born 1961 in Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Shymkent.

Mirzagalikova graduated from the Shymkent Art School in 1984 and from the Graphic Art Department of the Shymkent Pedagogical Institute in 1990. In 1986, she began attending classes at the Studio of 'Spatial Structural Composition,' which were supervised by V.A. Simakov. Here, she studied the laws of visual perception, ideas of artistic form, and the harmonious organization of space and structure. Consecutive exercises were carried out as part of this and an intuitive organization of structural construction was developed. In addition to factual knowledge, significant importance was attached to the preservation of the individuality of artistic thinking and to the values of regional culture. During 1989, she actively participated in group exhibitions of the students of the studio. Since 1995, she has participated in the exhibitions of the Red Tractor ('Kyzyl Tractor') group, Kazakhstan's celebrated art collective, noted for their feverish experimentations in the 1990s and early 2000s. Known for reorienting nomadic, Sufi, and shamanistic philosophies as a new artistic language over the past three decades, their work continues to chronicle the seismic socioeconomic and political shifts in Central Asia.

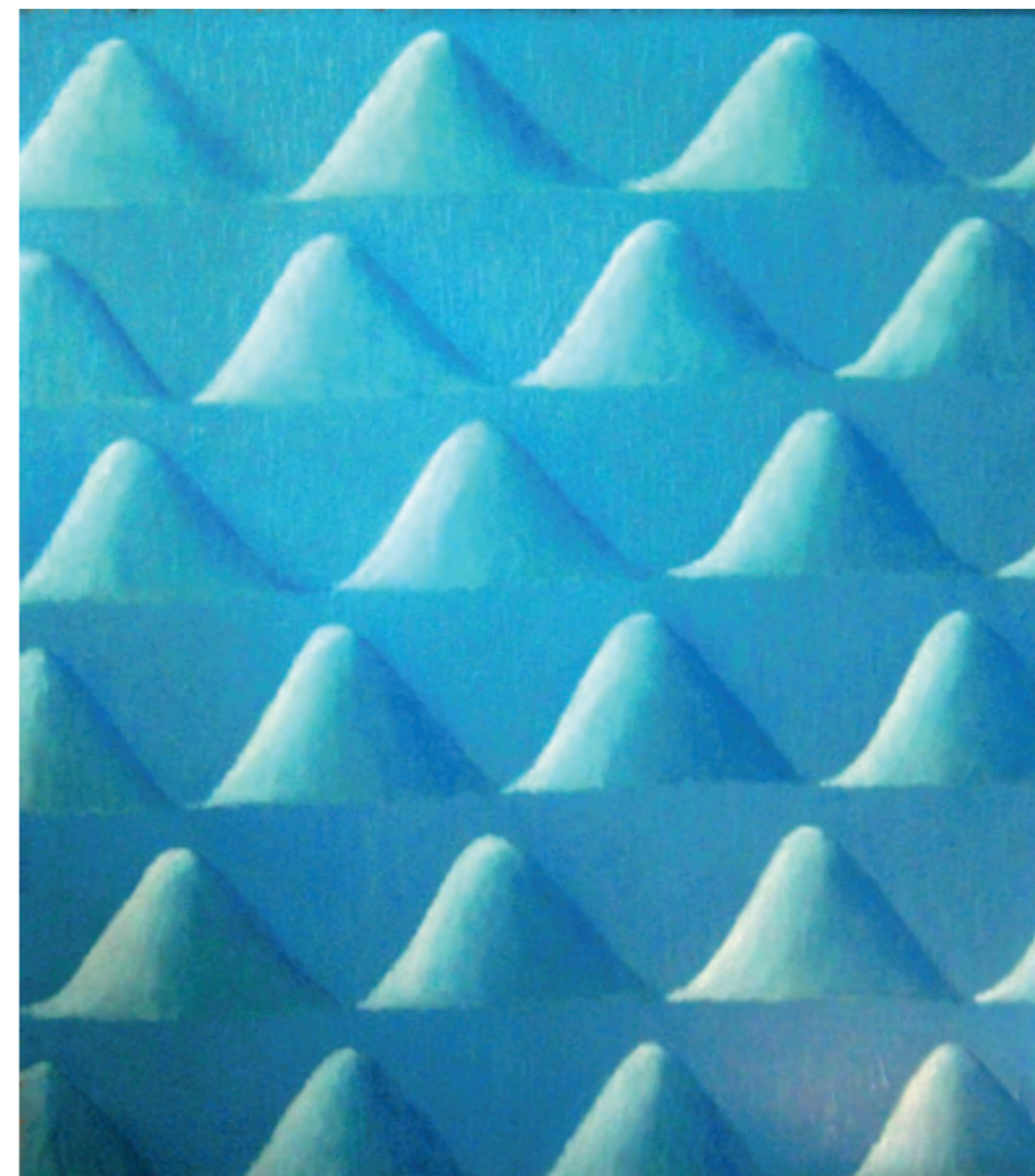
The works shown here are from three different stages of my practice: *Woman and Steppe* (1997), from the first stage, reflects the search for means of artistic expression for impressions from the surrounding world. Plasticity of form should fascinate as well as being in tune with the surrounding environment, the climate, and the fragrance of nature. Restrained within a narrow range of warm colors, this work allows an appreciation of the plasticity of line.

The second work, *Peak of Abai* (1996), is sustained in a cold, monotonous colour scheme with identical, strictly placed objects that direct us to the specific meaning and purpose of the picture. The basis for this work is the importance of Abai Kunanbayev for Kazakh people. [Abai Kunanbayev (1845 – 1904) was a Kazakh poet, composer, philosopher and cultural reformer. His words are also cited by Anar Aubakir in her work.]

Song of the *Shaman Woman* (2008), the third picture, is a mystical agony. The exit of sensual female energy. There are orgies that emerge from the onslaught of magic word forms that manage to gain stability in this world.

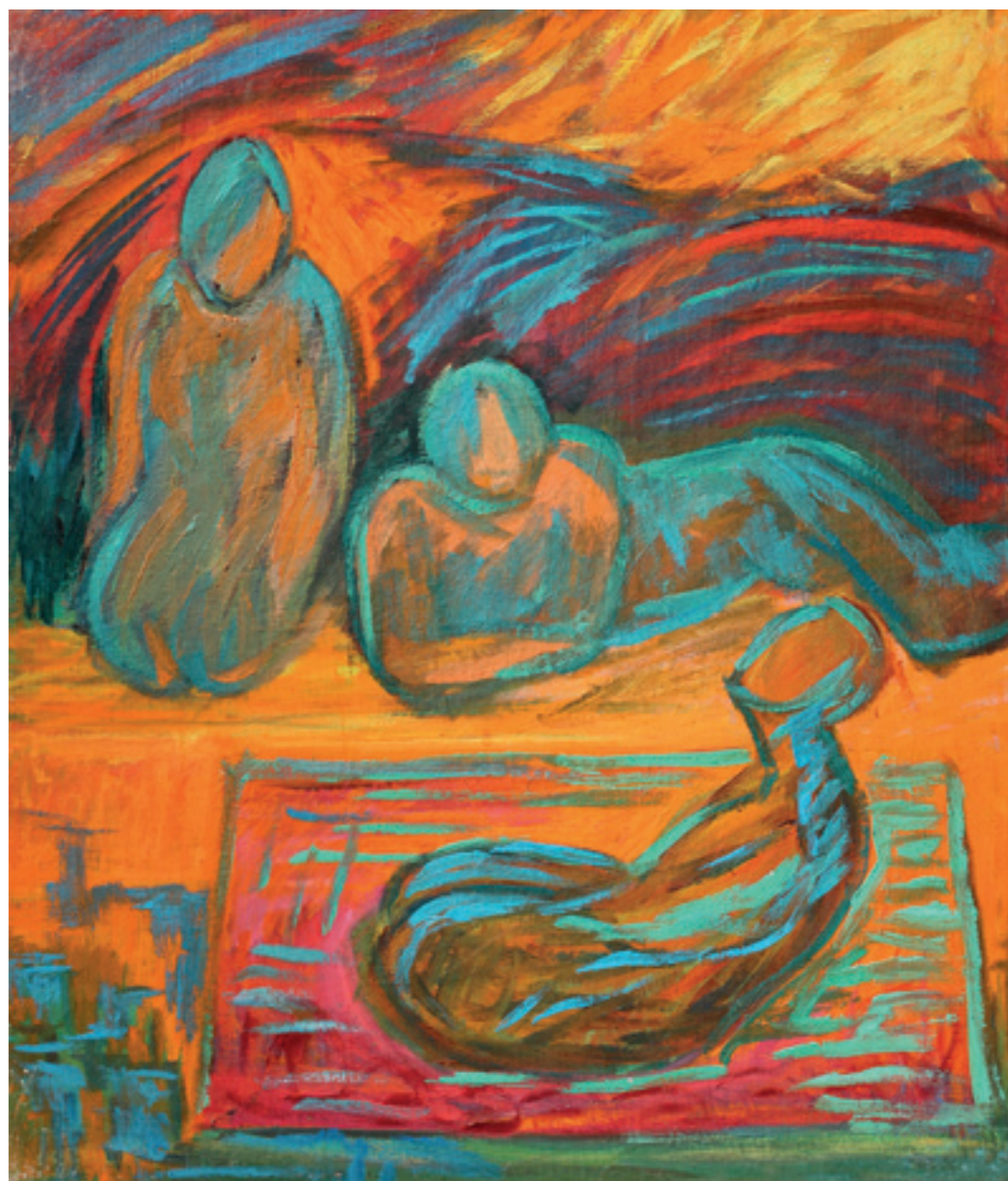
— Gulnar Mirzagalikova

GULNAR MIRZAGALIKOVA



*Peak of Abai*  
1996  
Oil on canvas  
91x81cm

GULNAR MIRZAGALIKOVA



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*Song of the Shaman Woman*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
52.5x44.5cm

*Woman and the Steppe*  
1997  
Oil on canvas  
30x38.5cm

## GULNUR MUKAZHANOVA

Born 1984 in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Gulnur Mukazhanova graduated from the Kazakh National Academy of Arts in Almaty (2006), and the Weissensee Art Academy in Berlin, Germany (2013). Her interdisciplinary practice encompasses textile art, photography, video, installation, and sculpture. Mukazhanova's art is a confrontation of two different cultures but also a dialogue between them. From her Central Asian roots she keeps a strong physical relation to traditional materials that are not only used for their aesthetics but have a symbolic and historic meaning. While living in Germany she has come to confront questions of feminism, globalization, and ethnology.

Mukazhanova has participated in international Biennales such as: *A Time for Dreams*, IV Moscow International Biennale of Young Art, Moscow, (2014); and the Krasnoyarsk Biennale, Russia (2015). Her solo exhibitions include: Artwin Gallery, Moscow, Russia (2016); *Iron Women*, Almaty, Tengri-Umai Gallery (2010); *Wertlosigkeit der Tradition*, Kazakhstan-German Society, Berlin (2010). Her work is held in international private collections: Fondazione 107, Turin, Italy; Krasnoyarsk Museum, Russia; La Metive, Moutier-d'Àhun, France.

Selected recent group exhibitions include: *All the World's Collage*, Aspan Gallery, Almaty, Kazakhstan (2018); *Astana Art Show*, TSE Art Destination Gallery, Astana, Kazakhstan (2018); *Focus Kazakhstan: Post-nomadic Mind*, Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, London (2018); *Cosmoscow*, international contemporary art fair, Moscow, Russia (2018); *Interlocal*, in association with *Blue Container on the New Silk Road*, Duisburg, Germany (2018); *Time & Astana: After Future*, National Museum, Astana, Kazakhstan (2017); *The Story Retells*, Daegu Art Factory Daegu, South Korea (2017); *Expo 2017: Future Energy*, Astana, Kazakhstan (2017); *Metamorphoses*, Pöornbach Contemporary, Pöornbach, Germany (2016); *Did you know... ?*, Wild Project Gallery, Luxembourg (2016); *Cosmoscow*, Moscow, Russia (2015); *Dissemination*, Stadtgalerie Brixen, Brixen (Bressanone), South Tyrol (2014); *Nomads*, Artwin Gallery, Moscow (2014); *Synekdoche*, Freies Museum, Berlin, Germany (2013).

### Iron Woman

2010, metal object and photograph on aludibond

In these works, the artist undertakes a personal research of identity using two different media—photography and objects made of metal.

She explores a woman's body in the conflict zones of sensuality and ideology—at the intersections of personal and social environment, of ethnic vs. global culture, of modernity vs. tradition. Significations of sexuality translated by the photos move between the accessible and the prohibited, between the carnal and the sacred.

## Mankurts in the Megapolis

2011–12, Mankurt 1 and Mankurt 2, two photographs on aludibond

The subject of this project is a white wedding dress, as well as the general disappearance of traditional wedding dresses in Kazakhstan—a topic connected directly with the problems of identity and loss of cultural values.

The title *Mankurts in the Megapolis* reflects this loss, as well as the fact that we have forgotten our origins. In Central Asia, the concept of *mankurtism* describes the loss of national roots, traditional values and culture. Previously it referred to slaves, called *mankurts*, who completely lost the memory of their past life under duress. Today, this term is used to describe people who have, consciously or unconsciously, adopted other cultural values. This loss of memory concerns the displacement of manners, morals and even language; a not uncommon phenomenon in the time of globalization.

The symbolic form of the wedding gown is understood worldwide. In earlier times, when each culture had its own original form of bridal gown, it displayed an immense wealth of material, ritual and cultural diversity. Since the beginning of the 20th century the white bridal fashion has been established almost all over the world, and many people now regard it as their own deeply rooted tradition.

The new set of values that characterize contemporary life in Kazakhstan have become so embedded, that it seems almost impossible to connect them with ancient nomadic traditions. Perhaps, because we are no longer nomadic, this no longer makes sense. I should like to know, what we, as a new generation, should keep and discard.

If we want to keep certain traditions, we must be able to believe in them, and not just imitate their form. This is often seen in the new designs for *saukele* [traditional Kazakh wedding head dresses], where originally meaningful symbols have become little more than primitive forms of ornamentation. The least we can do is to appreciate the meaning and the wisdom of the traditions which have been passed down to us from our ancestors.

Reflecting upon this, I wonder whether it makes any sense at all to worry, or if it would be better to live simply in the flow of events without thinking about them? However, I think that if we wish to meet this process of change with dignity, without being just one of the herd, we have to be prepared to examine both our thoughts and our emotions. Only in this way will we get to know who we are.

— Gulnur Mukazhanova



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*Iron Woman*  
 2010  
 Metal object: nails, screws, wire, chain  
 44x22x10cm

GULNUR MUKAZHANOVA



151

*Iron Woman*  
 2010  
 Photograph on aludibond  
 54.5x79cm

GULNUR MUKAZHANOVA



***Mankurt 1***  
 2011-12  
 Photo print  
 50.4x76cm



***Mankurt 2***  
 2011-12  
 Photo print  
 51.6x76cm

## KATYA NIKONOROVA

Born 1981 in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Katya Nikonorova received a degree in Architecture and Urban Planning at the Kazakh Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering in Almaty. Since 2000, she has focused on contemporary fine arts practice, participating in exhibitions, seminars and workshops internationally that have included exhibitions in Almaty, Bishkek, Moscow, London, Paris, Turin, Singapore, Strasbourg, San Francisco and Manchester.

Her work frequently addresses the topic of urbanism and global questions of identity; her most recent works focus on the tradition of female shamanism as a way of exploring the position of women in contemporary society. To this end, she has created KATIPAAPISM, a pseudo-religious art movement, centered around the ‘media-medium’ of Katipa apai — the first Central Asian Goddess in her invented personal religion.

Since 2012, she has organized her eponymous ‘Biennale of Katya Nikonorova’ (Almaty, Kazakhstan) followed by the 2nd True Biennale of Katya Nikonorova’ (San Francisco, USA), and the ‘III Beingnalle’ (Almaty-Bishkek). She also runs an ongoing online broadcast of the art-doc-serial *The Adventures of Katipa apai*, the first two series of which are shown here.

### A Bouquet for March 8th: Tulips

2013, objects, gloves, vase

March 8th in Kazakhstan — International Women’s Day — is an important commemoration of women’s struggle for equal rights. But long ago it became a cheerful holiday celebrating only women’s beauty and sexuality. And, like every holiday, it ends with a sumptuous banquet. But that is how it ends for men. On the women’s side, it just looks like another day with a double dose of household chores: cleaning, cooking, cleaning.



*A Bouquet for March 8th: Tulips*  
2013  
Objects, gloves, vase  
70x50x50cm

## The Adventures of Katipa apai

2014–16, video, 59'17"

### Who is this Katipa?

The Great White central Asian G...ss Katipa apai is back on Earth to restore the ancient religion of Tengrism by renaming it *Katipaapism*. Katipa apai, an emanation of the ancient Turkic goddess Umay (the Mother Earth), is the G...ss of one-way love, contemporary art, same-sex marriage and queer-communists.

At the basis of her liturgy is the radical art practice of the materialization (manifestation) of emptiness that, in common parlance, is described as 'contemporary art'. The G...ss also sends messages to believers in the form of documentaries and video-art. Occasionally an epiphany occurs when Katipa manifests Herself to parishioners in order to pass on to them sacred knowledge.

As a style within contemporary art, *katipaapism* includes the creation of hierotopias (environments, land art, objects for mystery plays, and liturgies), icon paintings (according to the canons of abstract painting and collage), and the transmission of the Message through art documentaries.

All these activities are aimed at neutralizing the deleterious effects of the Anthropocene era in an artistic and abstract manner through media-therapy, googlemaps-geo-therapy, quartz sterilization of environments, and Kazakh Feng Shui.

### The Adventures of Katipa apai

The video serial *Adventures of Katipa apai* currently has 2 seasons, with a total of 18 episodes: *Season 1: IX Epistles of Katipa apai*; and *Season 2: Measure of Faith*. Containing messages for future generations about Katipa's birth, life, and how to solve the global problems of humanity through her methods. Every episode is the documentation of Katipa apai's interactions: either through flashmobs, art interventions, improvisations or exhibitions. Shot in Kazakhstan, India, USA and Kyrgyzstan. This serial of videos transmits positive messages not only via audio/video, but also at high-vibration levels of perception. The other way of using this video content is as mental detergent in public spaces (in cinema theatres, and so on).

### Season 1: IX Epistles of Katipa apai

#### 1. **APAI ON IVAN KUPALA DAY** (56")

Performance documentation.

Anima held animus tool. The Mountain is a symbol of Nation. Katipa is changing the Nation.

#### 2. **DIVINITION TO KATIPA** (1'48")

Interaction with space.

#### 3. **GO FIND YOURSELF** (2')

Documentation of intervention.

As the ancient Diogenes, Katipa apai is walking through public spaces places with a flashlight and looking for a Man. Out of despair at the impossibility of expressing her sexuality, that she has to hide with a hijab, she commits an action, sacrilege, something perverse for the eyes of the audience, that the viewer can only guess about in the end. She strikes the recognizable pose of a woman who found herself (the Statue of Liberty).

#### 4. **BIRTH OF KATIPA APAI** (4'15")

Documentation of improvisation.

According to the ancient Greek Myth, the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite, was born from the ocean foam. Central Asian Goddess Katipa apai is also born from the Kapchagai's foam with the help of 3 Goddesses; the psychological archetypes of the modern understanding of femininity: hostess, girl, lover.

#### 5. **FAMILY LIFE OF KATIPA APAI** (5'45")

Documentation of improvisation.

#### 6. **KATIPA LEADS AMERICAN YOUTH TO THE TRUTH** (4')

Documentation of intervention.

At a meeting at the Civil Center in San Francisco, young Americans hide their faces with black masks; opposition of Black and White. Pure Soul leads youth to the Truth (subscribe to the wall).





*Stills from The Adventures of Katipa apai*  
 2014-16  
 Compilation, single-channel video + sound  
 59'17" / 16:9

**7. KATIPA REMAINS ON ALKATRAZ (4'05")**

Documentation of intervention.

Katipa apai explores the legendary tourist attraction, the Alcatraz prison. Relationships, family life, society, country, body, dress, and place in this short film are metaphors for imprisonment in the material world. In the 1970s Alcatraz was occupied by hippies, but this short period of freedom on this island was forcibly discontinued by the authorities. And then the State made Alcatraz a paid attraction. We are visiting a prison being prisoners and never guessing it.

So where is our Freedom?

**8. ASKING FOR POWER (1'45")**

Documentation of a ritual.

Katipa is making a ritual of Sufi whirling. Archangels on the Columns of the Palace of Arts look on, and after she calls upon their Forces, they take her into their highest circle. Now Katipa is hovering over the waters (and has the Power to change humanity to a better life).

**9. KATIPA STOPS THE WAR (4'04")**

Documentation of intervention.

In New York's well-known Brooklyn district, Katipa visits the Hasidic neighbourhood, showing her kind face and positive image in a hijab in order to stop the war between normal people. She begins at a school for girls.

**Season 2: Measure of Faith****10. 10TH EPISTLE OF KATIPA APAI (54")**

This abstract-mystic-energetic-cosmo-Epistle was shot on her 33rd Birthday, on the occasion of the exhibition IX Epistles of Katipa.

**11. PURE WATER (4'15")**

Conscious De-urination Method of Katipa apai. A weapon against War?

In every person's life there is a moment when the inner world of man becomes one with the outer. But every time we miss this sacred moment because of our ignorance. At the time of urination Humanity literally unites with all the life on the planet. The flow is like the umbilical cord, that connects us with the Earth, with Water, with all life on the Planet. And this connection is sustainable (one of the main codes of ecological thinking for the new Millennium). Imagine what we miss every time? You need to be truly focused on the process. Breath. On the exhale, relax and act. You can say to yourself: 'Only Love, only Peace pouring out of me'... And the pleasure that you get, give to the outer world. Depending on your personal 'advancement', you can send flows from the heart chakra (and your enjoyment will flow from the heart, changing the structure of water in you and outside of you on an energetic level), third eye (and you will feel a genuine unity with all that is happening around you). You can observe the first results within a week. The practice of concentrated de-urination in the future facilitates a return to awareness. The process of urination is similar to meditation. Moreover, the benefits of regular meditation are hard to overestimate.

**12. CASTING FOR THE LEADER (3'00")**

Documentation of intervention.

At a Muslim Festival in the Islamic city of Jodhpur, India, only Men are engaged in the festival's procession, while women sit and passively look on. Katipa apai climbs on an old tractor to show everyone women's attitude to take an active role in social life.

**13. IBID, AFTER 20 YEARS (2'47")**

Documentation of intervention.

Free society, a lot of water, equality of rights, etc... What happens after Katipa's leadership.

**14. OPENING CEREMONY (5'45")**

Katipa opens doors to heaven and calls us to come with her to the Bright Future.

**15. APPEARANCE OF THE RAINBOW FAIRY (3'45")**

Documentation of intervention.

**16. 8TH RIVER (6'20")**

Documentation of exhibition in Ile-Alatau National park.

**17. PHANTOM (4'18")**

Interaction with installation 'Imitating nature.'

**18. BIG ALMATY FLASHMOB (4'50")**

Documentation of flashmob.

Katipa wants to make a new Holy Day: the Day of Water on 8/08 each year.

Can we come together and make a big circle of unity with Nature and with ourselves? The idea of a flashmob is for the community to demonstrate to itself that 'I am.' The idea of collective gratitude will be implemented as follows: Those who wish to participate will come to Lake Sayran and encircle it (there should be enough participants so that we can form a closed circle around the lake), after which everyone will inwardly thank Nature and the Great Spirit of Almaty. After this, the flashmob will be concluded. This event will provide city residents with a powerful collective experience, something that forms the foundation of community. And if a community is aware of its own existence, purpose, and power of intention, it can transform itself in accordance with the laws of sustainable development, of co-operation between Nature and Human.

— Katya Nikonorova

## SAULE SULEIMENOVA

Born 1970 in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Almaty.

Saule Suleimenova graduated from the Kazakh State Academy of Architecture and Construction in 1996, and was awarded an MFA from the Kazakh National University of Arts in 2013. She has been a member of the Union of Artists of Kazakhstan since 1998. She works with mixed media, creating images and sculptures from plastic bags in a process she describes as 'waste collage'. *Residual Memory*, her current project, revisits the traumatic history of Kazakhstan by recycling reproductions of little-known photo documents into collages made of waste. Still painful themes such as the *Zheltoksan* (the Kazakh youth riots in 1986), and the *Asharshylyk* (the colonial genocide resulting from Stalin's Collectivization policies during 1932–1933), give her practice an edge of activism. Awards include: Fellowship of the President of Kazakhstan (1998); Laureate of the Shabyt, Zhiger and Tengri Umai awards; Laureate 'For creative achievements' in the №1 Choice of the Year, Kazakhstan, 2017; Shortlisted for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize 2017; Nominated for the Singapore Art Prize 2017; Nominated to Prince Claus Foundation Art Prize 2016.

Her selected exhibitions include: *Somewhere in the Great Steppe: Contemporary Art from Kazakhstan*, Erarta Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia (2017–2018); *Somewhere in the Great Steppe: Skyline*, National Museum of Kazakhstan, Astana (2017). Culture Summit 2017, Abu Dhabi, UAE; *Dis/Possessed. A Question of Spirit and Money*, Manifesta 10, Folium, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); *One Belt One Road, Federation of Women*, Sotheby's, Hong Kong; 56th Venice Biennale in the *Why Self* project (2015); 5th Moscow Contemporary Art Biennale in the *Migrants* project of RSGU (2013); ARTBATFEST Almaty contemporary art festival (2013, 2014, 2015); *East of Nowhere*, Foundation 107, Turin, Italy (2009); *Kazakh: Paintings by Saule Suleimenova*, Townsend Center, Berkeley University, USA, 2005.

### RESIDUAL MEMORY

In my series of works called *Residual Memory*, I investigate certain periods of history that are designated as historical traumas and are recorded in rare, residual photos and on film. While I depict these scenes in collages of residual materials (plastic bags), I try to consider and understand how they happened, as a form of therapy for purification and acceptance. For a long time, information about these historical times was hidden not only at an official level, but also people themselves preferred not to remember the traumas of the past. My work re-presents and re-establishes emotional contact with these times in order to understand ourselves better through this act.

OPPOSITE TOP

*Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932.*

*The Exodus of the Kazakh People during the Famine*

2018

Plastic bags on polyethylene film

127x140cm

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

*Asharshylyk/Famine:*

*The Surviving Children, 1932*

2018

Plastic bags on polyethylene film

25x140cm



## Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932.

### The Exodus of the Kazakh People during the Famine

2018, plastic bags on polyethylene film

*Asharshylyk* in Kazakh means hunger or famine. The Kazakh famine of 1930 – 1933 is also known in Kazakhstan as the ‘genocide by hunger’. During this time more than 1.5 million people died and hundreds of thousands of Kazakh families moved to other countries to try to survive. I show a fragment of this captured in a photograph where you can see how starving people left their native lands in search of a better life. The work is made out of plastic bags and fragments of wrappings for chocolates, bread and coffee which are mass-produced in Kazakhstan.

## Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932.

### The Surviving Children

2018, plastic bags on polyethylene film

Some historians and scholars consider this famine as a genocide directed against the Kazakh people. After it was over, the NKVD [secret police] searched the steppe for boys who had survived (mostly 7–11 years old) and sent them to orphanages in the Russian part of the Soviet Union. Kazakh families tried to save the boys by sacrificing the rest of the family. Getting to the orphanage, the children grew up as rootless ‘Soviet’ children and could not remember their original language. By the beginning of World War II in 1941, they were at the age of conscription and were enlisted and sent to the war first where many died as ‘cannon fodder’. There is no exactly known number of victims of the *Asharshylyk*, but the fate of these children could be also be added to their number. (Ref. demographer Dr. M. Tatimov, PhD Political Science).

## Youth Riot/Zheltoksan, December 1986

2018, plastic bags on polyethylene film

In 1986, in Alma-Ata, then the capital of Kazakhstan, there was an impulsive uprising of Kazakh youth for the first time in many years. Thousands of young people, mostly students, came out to protest against Gennady Kolbin, the new Russian head of the Kazakh SSR, and were brutally suppressed by the authorities. After these events, spontaneous waves of protest against Soviet national policies also began to emerge in many other republics of the U.S.S.R. The photo, which provides the basis for my work, is very well known in Kazakhstan.

At that time, I also went to the New Square where the demonstrations started. I came alone and quickly joined others. We marched together, with linked arms, shouting ‘Long Live Kazakhstan!’

— Saule Suleimenova

SAULE SULEIMENOVA



*Zhel'toksan/Youth Riot, December 1986*

2018

Plastic bags on polyethylene film

127x140cm

SAULE SULEIMENOVA

## Skyline

2017, plastic bags on polycarbonate sheet

In January 2017 the Kazakhstan government adopted a new law that obliged all citizens who do not live in the place of their original registration to re-register. This created a vast uproar in the service centres responsible for the registration where thousands of people waited in long lines. For me these lines became a part of my project *Somewhere in the Great Steppe*, where the line of people becomes a skyline, which marks the horizontal border of the steppe with the heavens.

### Skyline

2017

Plastic bags on polycarbonate sheet

200×600×2cm

3 pieces of polycarbonate sheet, each 200×200cm

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SAULE SULEIMENOVA

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SAULE SULEIMENOVA

## The Three Brides

2015, plastic bags on plastic tablecloth on wooden board

The social status of *kelin* [brides] in Kazakh society is the most unprotected. Traditionally, a girl taken into a new family would lose all the privileges of a beloved daughter, only to find herself at the bottom of the social ladder until she gives a birth to a son. The image of the brides itself is based on an archival photograph (1869, from the collection of Prof. Alkey Margulan) depicting three teenagers wearing Kazakh traditional wedding dresses.

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*The Three Brides*

2015

Plastic bags on plastic tablecloth on wooden board

100x140cm

## GULMARAL TATIBAYEVA

Born 1982, Scherbakty, Kazakhstan.

Lives and works in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Gulmaral Tatibayeva received a Bachelors degree in design from the Kazakh National Academy of Arts in 2002. She is a member of the Union of Artists of Kazakhstan; the Eurasian Designers Union; the Eurasian Creative Guild; and the art group 'KADMII QYZYL'. She has participated in many national and international exhibitions and competitions; she won the Grand Prix in the Astana city competition for the best billboard design to promote family values (2014) and has exhibited in the First Astana Art Salon; *Plein Air Aktobe*, an international symposium of Art (2015); the new media lab in EXPO-2017 at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow; AstanaArtFest, Astana Contemporary Art Centre (2015); International Festival of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture, (2017); the Eurasia Sculpture Biennale - International Biennial of Sculpture Art, Astana (2017); *Days of Culture of Kazakhstan in Turkey*, Istanbul (2017). Her works may be found in museums in Kazakhstan, and in private and public collections in Kazakhstan, Jordan, Turkey, Holland, Russia, and Great Britain.

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**Untitled**

2018

Installation: wooden scaffolding, textiles, women's clothing

800x640cm

## Untitled

2018, installation: wooden scaffolding, women's clothes

This work reflects on the role of women as a stable point in the family. Its framework echoes the physical and moral strength traditionally displayed by women in a nomadic way of life where the woman always remained in the background. During times of migration and resettlement, preservation of the way of life rested on the shoulders of women. The yurt was not just a nomadic dwelling, but a cultural centre, a place that sheltered family values.

The great famine in the U.S.S.R. from 1932–1933 united many women from around the world in mutual assistance in order to survive. Today you can hear many stories of women from other countries who had been banished to camps on Kazakh land. They were met by Kazakh women who fed them in secret, giving these exiles hope and strength to endure. It speaks of their strong spirit, endurance, humanity and compassion.

A modern woman works in other conditions. She has the opportunity to select housing, appliances, transportation, medical care, and other amenities. Times have changed, and with them the people. The life of a modern nomad requires resistance against stress. Now it is important to survive a marriage morally, to endure the selfishness of society which may affect the family, and to build a welcoming and stable hearth.

This installation mirrors both the shape of a traditional Kazakh yurt and Norman Foster's architectural landmark, the Khan Shatyr building in Astana. It is assembled out of women's garments: old dresses, scarves and items of Kazakh national dress clothe the outside of the structure; while the inside is clad in items donated by women in Berlin, all inhabitants of the city who originate from elsewhere. The Khan Shatyr is a shopping and entertainment centre built as a symbol of the modern nomad. Yet its position remains fixed, and women now voyage from all corners of Kazakhstan to shop at its boutiques, eat at its restaurants, and entertain their children at its attractions. Women have passed their role of guardian of the nomadic home into the hands of trade and modern commerce.

I have noticed that Berlin boasts its own version of the Khan Shatyr, ironically also built as an entertainment centre. A symbol of the modern reconstruction of post-unification Berlin, The Sony Centre repeats the silhouette of the yurt, yet it was intended to symbolise Mount Fuji, a Japanese national symbol, as sacred as the protective image of the traditional Kazakh yurt.

— Gulmaral Tatibayeva

GULMARAL TATIBAYEVA



*Untitled*

2018

Installation: wooden scaffolding, textiles, women's clothing

800x640cm

GULMARAL TATIBAYEVA



## ELENA VOROBYEVA

Born 1959 in Balkanabat (former Nebit Dag), Turkmenistan.  
Lives and works in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Elena Vorobyeva was educated at the Kazakh State Institute of Theatre and Art in Almaty (1985–1990). Selected solo exhibitions include: *The Artist Is Asleep*, Kasteyev Museum of Arts, Almaty (2015); *Yelena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev: Provincial Sets*, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan (2013); LES, Almaty (2013); *In Search of Reason...*, Tengri-Umai Gallery, Almaty (2010); *Kazakhstan: Blue Period*, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan (2009); *VIP (Very Impotent Persons)*, Tengri-Umai Gallery, Almaty (2009); *Vtoraia popytka materializatsii [Second Materialisation Attempt]*, Tengri-Umai Gallery, Almaty (2008); *Hitchcock's Teapot*, Art Navat Gallery, Almaty (2003); Milchstrassengalerie, Munich (2000); Offen Haus Oberwart, Oberwart (1999); Soros Foundation for Contemporary Art, Almaty (1996); Ular Gallery, Almaty (1995).

Recent selected group exhibitions include: *Eurasian Utopia: Post Scriptum*, Suwon I'Park Museum of Art, Suwon (2018); *Phantom Stories: Leitmotifs of Post-Soviet Asia*, Lunds Konsthall, Sweden (2018); *Human Condition*, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre, MMOMA, Moscow (2018); *At the Corner: City, Place, People*, Tselinny Center for Contemporary Culture, Almaty (2018); *Alternativnye Tezisy: Group Show of Contemporary Central Asian Art*, Esentai Gallery, Almaty (2018); *Water Stream*, Artbat Fest'9, Almaty (2018); 1st April Competition, Bishkek (2018); *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, 57th Venice Biennale, Venice (2017); *Suns and Neons*, Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku (2017); *Esli gora ne idet k Magometu... [If the Mountain Will not Come to Muhammad...]*, 1st April Competition, Bishkek (2017); *Not Not Not*, Asanbay Center, Bishkek (2017); *Human Rights: 20 Years Later*, ARTMEKEN, Almaty (2017); *Painting Resistance*, Aspan Gallery, Almaty (2017); *Symbiosis*, Botanical Gardens, Almaty (2016); 2nd Astana Art Fest, Astana (2016); *Limited Liability Pavilion 2.0*, Closer Art Centre, Kyiv (2016); *Post/Nachalo [Post/Beginning]*, Kazakh-British Technical University, Almaty (2016); *Vzgliad v buduscheie: aktual'noie nasledie [Towards Future: Contemporary Heritage]*, National Museum, Astana (2016); East Kazakhstan Regional Nevzorovs' Museum of Fine Arts, Semey, Kazakhstan (2016); 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Gallery of Modern Art | Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (2015); *BALAGAN!!! Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places*, MOMENTUM, Berlin (2015); *Topografica*, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek (2015); *The Practices of Contact*, 11th Krasnoyarsk Biennale, Krasnoyarsk (2015); *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona (2015); Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2015).



*Still Life with Fork*  
1989  
Oil on canvas  
73x100cm

*The return will follow...<sup>1</sup>*

The name of one of my earliest works was the triptych *The return will follow*; this title now seems especially symbolic to me, and I'll try to explain why.

**Not an artist**

For a long time, I associated the word 'artist' with something artificial. 'Artists' (mostly men) thought themselves very special. Beards, mustaches, long hair, velvet trousers or jackets — meaningful looks filled with 'philosophical' content — were the distinctive signs I used to distinguish them from 'ordinary' people. They were called 'bohemians', with a mysterious (dissolute) way of life, which was also a sign of their profession. My compassionate aunt warned me in advance: 'Lena, do not marry an artist — they are all alcoholics...'

These were not just artists, they had additional layers of specialization: easel painting, graphics, sculpture, monumental art, applied arts, and so on. The handicraft and workshop aspects of their activity was decisive here. Attending a 'central' university was particularly prestigious in the 1970s and '80s — the 'Mukhinka' (Mukhina Institute of Industrial Arts in Leningrad), the 'Stroganovka' (Moscow State Stroganov Academy of Industrial and Applied Arts) or the 'Surikovsky' (Surikov Art Institute, the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture), for example. Their graduates were immediately admitted to the Union of Artists as 'valuable young cadres'. The word 'Member' had particular significance in relation to them — all 'Members' had certificates and looked down at 'non-members'. They thought that they alone had the right to be called 'fully-fledged' artists. This caste always worked in the 'Oner studios, they had their own arts council, their own exhibitions, their own periodic congresses and their own chairman. Since then relatively little has changed (except for the ideology of course). They even still have the same chairman.

At the other extreme were the underground artists. They opposed themselves to official Soviet culture, led a semi-submerged life, arranged exhibitions in apartments and considered themselves 'real'. The main reason for this was their position of confrontation — a kind of dissidence — and also the belief that they were much better acquainted with the history of the forbidden Russian avant-garde and with the modern trends of western art than anyone else. This gave them a sense of exclusivity, an entry into a special realm. In this world, it was considered good to be a follower of any teaching and to continue in art someone else's formal line. Some were following Filonov, others Sterligov, there also were

<sup>1</sup> THIS ESSAY, 'VOZVRASHCHENIE SLEDUYET' (THE RETURN WILL FOLLOW) IS EXTRACTED FROM A LONGER TEXT BY ELENA VOROBYEVA THAT APPEARED IN VTORAYA POPYTKA MATERIALIZATSII, (THE SECOND ATTEMPT AT MATERIALISATION) (EXH. CAT.), 2008, ALMATY, TENGRI UMAE, P. 8. TRANSLATION BY EVGENIYA KARTASHOVA AND GEORGY ISTIGECHEV.



*Under the Moon*  
1989  
Oil on canvas  
63x71cm

some who took American pop art for a model.<sup>2</sup> As one artist-curator from Samara explained to me, being a disciple of Sterligov, which he considered himself to be, was very profitable—from the fathers of the founders of the Russian avant-garde to now, a clear line was formed, a holy shadow was laid down. As a result, your works acquired legitimacy in the history of art, and hence a very positive assessment, including a financial benefit.

Everyone knew everything, and they cleared up any difficulty with cleverness, saying 'everything had been invented long ago, take it, use it, just change the context!'—we were, after all, standing in the backyard of the era of postmodernism.

Separating myself from those and the others, I repeated to myself: 'I'm not an artist,' particularly if someone called me that.

## Primitivists

In 1990, after graduating from the faculty of monumental painting at the Alma-Ata Art Institute, I was in complete uncertainty about my profession and future prospects. The USSR was about to collapse, there was chaos everywhere, and monumental artists were no longer needed. I'd never seen anything like this before...

The only thing I wanted was to figure out what 'art' was (certainly not a craft). By trying to do this I understood, through some cunning, almost magical, way of self-disclosure, the phenomenon of distinct entities in an open form.

Only in painting did I see the presence or absence of 'art'. Other forms were shut off for me due to lack of information. That is, I, of course, knew that there was Duchamp in France, and Warhol in America and pop art, as phenomena, but this was abstract knowledge and not applicable to my own experience.

Strangely enough, 'art', for me, was more present in the pictures of naive artists, who were not burdened by their training, academic approach or theory, than in the works of professionals. Excessive education seemed to interfere with the manifestation of what was important. A little later the secret of the art of primitivists began to unfold for me—a process of cognition of the world that took place immediately at the time the picture was painted. And these artists always wanted to learn something (unlike those who had already been taught to paint and draw 'correctly'). They had no concept of style and were therefore free; in thinking about form they submitted only to their inner instinct. Being attentive primarily to themselves, naive artists have a heightened awareness of the world of real things. The only thing they lack is the ability to abstract, but this is not a prerogative of the child's mind. They feel all the time to be 'not real artists, but they just want to become one of them. The energy of this desire enters the fabric of their work and fills it with life. That is why I like Greek 'archaic' art so much. It is filled with hidden potential energy, only later did it reveal itself in classical art, and then it dried up, splashed out in the riot of Hellenistic forms.

<sup>2</sup> SEE PAGE 26, NOTES 28 AND 29.



*Prologue*  
1990  
Oil on canvas  
82x73cm

## Oil on canvas

I had a desire to master this kind of energy and, literally, to put it to work.

Gradually, I determined for myself what paintings were, as I understood them. First of all, they are *objects* (in the sense of art terminology). In this case, the 'content' of a picture cannot be described using classical definitions of genre—landscape, still life, portrait, etc., regardless of what is formally represented. If the picture is an *object*, then the relations within it are formed according to a special scenario. Here, all the technical parameters—the size and format of the canvas, its elasticity, the plastic properties of the paint, the tools and methods of applying the paint to the canvas—are of the utmost importance.

It can encapsulate my misgivings about this moment in my painting by a single word: *no*.

I do no work, this leads me in the right direction.

No drawing, since I draw nothing and do not invent in advance; no painting, since I do not use brushes, but would rather produce an image, by moulding it with oil paint.

No imitating nature, since I do not work from nature, but also no formal abstraction, since empty conventions simplify and 'flatten' painting.

From the point of view of 'content', I have no need for 'literature', that is, the images in my pictures should not carry any unnecessary semantic load or be an illustration of anything. This prevents direct perception. I wanted to do things that could not be retold, that is, their content could not be verbalized.

No pathos or tension, but an unintended irony arises along the way: the senses.

As for those things that inhabit my canvases and have some relation to still-life, I only require them to be 'metaphorical' material. I install them, as it were, into an inner space, either increasing the tension or weakening of the energy of this space. Nothing happens on the surface of the canvas, everything is inside, and this inner space itself becomes the main content.

## Attraction

Sergei Maslov once described me in one of his ironic texts: 'Elena Vorobyeva paints, as it were, on behalf of a dull housewife. The models for her work are ordinary teapots, forks, husband (?), But she draws them with improvised means—fingers, used tights, knives. In doing so, everything turns out to be masterful, just as if a great *kung fu* master worked before us.'

It is clear that the key to this is two times repeated. Our mutual attraction-repulsion was based on a different understanding of art. Sergei was still the continuer of the avant-garde line, it was not without reason that he called himself 'the last of the avant-garde', but he heavily relied on literary, narrative positions in his work (like many Russian artists). I also wanted (perhaps, naively) not so much as to break the thread of tradition



*The Poetry of Scandal*

1992

Oil on canvas

110x100cm

but to be out of tradition. But I will not dissemble and say that I reject the influence of such masters of the 1920s–30s as David Shterenberg. Or of Mitrokhin, of whose work I am also very fond.<sup>3</sup> Someone will find it strange and ridiculous, in our time, when postmodernism is no longer relevant, to seriously recall and refer to the art of the 1920s, but for me the important thing here is not even a formal plastic line, but the attitude of these artists to art, to the process of exploring the world. And this is not a world of global ideas and abstract concepts, but an intimate, close-to-a-person, everyday space. Roughly speaking, the artist-researcher once again 'privatizes' it, 'digests' it and gives it out in the form of an artefact, endowing it with the properties of an ideal world, that is, the profane turns into the divine. All that for all this.

Among our contemporaries, there are not many masters capable of truly exalting the most basic aspects of life. Perhaps, after all, Boris Mikhailov (in his Soviet period especially) could make art from 'emptiness', from what was available, adding or subtracting nothing, placing only accents. Ilya Kabakov, a master of the 'domestic genre, also ploughed this virgin soil, but he did not 'kick and fix' like Mikhailov, but prepared everyday situations, writing, incidentally, his own stories, illustrating his household surroundings. He is a conceptualist, however...<sup>4</sup>

## The return will follow

Most of my paintings were painted between 1990 and 1994. At this time I also had an intense association with Lidya Blinova (the wife of Rustam Khalfin).<sup>5</sup> Insanely talented, full of ideas, she attracted many people. Probably, she lacked unconditional faith in herself and was unable to realize all the ideas that were in her sketches and texts. Still, 'poetry must be silly,' and Lidya was clever... She detected a sensual rather than an intellectual component in my paintings.

One day, after a trip to Moscow, she brought along two thick magazines and handed them to me for study. These were the first numbers of the journal edited by Viktor Misiano.<sup>6</sup> I never encountered more indigestible reading. It seemed funny and I wanted more. We had heard rumours of the tumultuous artistic life in Moscow, and we decided to go there to find Viktor. On the proceeds from the sale of paintings (from my first solo exhibition) I bought tickets for the morning plane and by that afternoon I was walking through Yakimanka.

Moscow in the 1990s wasn't for the faint-hearted. It seemed that all the open spaces were filled by bonfires, bums and beggars, while the city centre was constantly bustling with incessant political demonstrations. People in camouflage, garbage, beggars, flea markets, and malfeasance, bordering on the verge of a complete breakdown. It was a feast in a time of plague...

Only Lenin in his Mausoleum appeared to be calm, warm and cozy.

Meanwhile, the art scene, not unlike other aspects of life at the time, was bubbling. In the CCA (Center for Contemporary Art)—the Hamburg project Misiano, Guelman—Kulik with *Compromise*, in the

<sup>3</sup> DAVID SHTERENBERG (1881–1948) STUDIED ART IN ODESSA, THEN IN PARIS (1906–12), NOT SETTling BACK IN RUSSIA UNTIL AFTER 1917. HE WAS INVOLVED WITH JEWISH ARTISTS' GROUPS, AND IN 1918–20 HE BECAME HEAD OF THE FINE ART DEPARTMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT OF ENLIGHTENMENT, WHICH HE SET UP IN THE MOSCOW INKHUK (INSTITUTE OF ARTISTIC CULTURE). FROM 1920–30 HE TAUGHT AT THE HIGHER INSTITUTE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHOTOTECHNIQUES (1919–23) AND AT THE VKHUTEMAS/VKHUTEIN (1924–31) ART SCHOOL IN MOSCOW. HE WAS PRIMARILY A PAINTER WHO USED VERY SIMPLIFIED FORMS IN HIS WORK. FROM 1930 HE FELL OUT OF OFFICIAL FAVOUR. DMITRY MITROKHIN (1883–1973) STUDIED BOOK ILLUSTRATION AT THE MOSCOW STATE STROGANOV ACADEMY OF INDUSTRIAL AND APPLIED ARTS. HE WAS A BOOK ILLUSTRATOR AND CURATOR OF PRINTS AT THE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, LENINGRAD. HE TAUGHT AT THE HIGHER INSTITUTE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHOTOTECHNIQUE, MOSCOW (1919–23) AND AT THE VKHUTEMAS/VKHUTEIN (1924–31).

<sup>4</sup> BORIS MIKHAILOV (BORN 1938 IN KHARKIV) A SELF-TOUGHT PHOTOGRAPHER AND ARTIST WHO NOT ONLY RECORDED THE LIFE AND SPIRIT OF THE DECAYING SOVIET EMPIRE BUT ALSO DISPASSIONATELY SHOWED THE BIRTH OF ITS NEW NEO-LIBERAL SUCCESSOR. ILYA KABAKOV (BORN 1933 IN DNEIROPETROVSK) STARTING AS A CHILDREN'S BOOK ILLUSTRATOR AND NON-OFFICIAL ARTIST IN THE 1950S, HE BECAME, DURING THE 1960S, A LEADING MEMBER OF THE SRETENSKY BOULEVARD GROUP WHICH, DURING THE 1970S, BECAME KNOWN AS THE MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISTS. HE CAST A LACONIC EYE ON LATE SOVIET LIFE BY FOCUSING ON INDIVIDUAL FANTASY AND DESIRE AND COMPARING THIS WITH REALITY. IN 1988 HE EMIGRATED FROM THE USSR AND SETTLED EVENTUALLY IN THE USA.

<sup>5</sup> SEE PP. 76–79.

<sup>6</sup> VIKTOR MISIANO (BORN 1957 IN MOSCOW) CURATOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE PUSHKIN MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS 1980–90, DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART MOSCOW 1992–97. FROM 1993 HE WAS THE FOUNDER AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE MOSCOW ART MAGAZINE. CURRENTLY HE IS A FREELANCE CURATOR AND WRITER.



*The Moment of Sublimation (A Cup of Coffee)*

1993

Oil on canvas

75x85cm

apartment-gallery XL—Brenner, sweaty and naked with a tape recorder on his neck, like a martyr, standing motionless above the crowd, eager for revelations. Rustam Khalfin also had an exhibition in Gallery 20—several paintings with ‘hollow-holes’ [puloty].<sup>7</sup> I remember Brenner’s remark: ‘Rustam, this is just a good painting...’

A week before our departure, we already had a firm understanding, that we must return. That, in order to say something, you have to live your life, and that this, in this situation, is already being lived and spoken about by others.

## Wordplay incubator

Our first installations appeared as ironic materializations of the characters depicted in our art. Kettles, lamps, forks poured out from the canvas into the light of God to adopt their real appearance. In a magical way, they became objects of art, vessels for new meanings. I wanted to place the serious viewer in a blind alley—what makes this stupid teapot significant in the territory of art? What possible import could it have? So, these were the installations ‘Light at the end’, ‘Wordplay Incubator’, ‘Evolution - Revolution’, ‘Artist asleep’.

At the same time, I started writing small texts to clarify (and, possibly, to confuse the situation). The literary space had become a field of reflection for me. I described the story of the creation of one of the installations in a text written in 1999.

Now, the installation has become one of mine and Viktor’s [my husband] forms of expression. But the components of our work are no longer real objects, but photographs and video. What do they represent? You may ask. But yes, everything is about the same—the space close to a person, the sphere of habitation of everyone.

As for painting, I also love it, and periodically return to it—it is closer to my body. But now for me, the picture is not the only container of ‘art’.

For that I am very glad.

— Elena Vorobyeva

<sup>7</sup> MARAT GUELMAN (BORN 1960 IN KISHINEV) RUSSIAN GALLERIST, COLLECTOR AND OP-ED COLUMNIST; OLEG KULIK (BORN 1961 IN KIEV) PERFORMANCE ARTIST, SCULPTOR, PHOTOGRAPHER AND CURATOR; ALEXANDER BRENER (B. 1957 IN ALMA-ATA), PERFORMANCE ARTIST AND SELF-DESCRIBED ACTIVIST, WITH KULIK A MAIN FIGURE OF MOSCOW ACTIONISM IN THE 1990S.



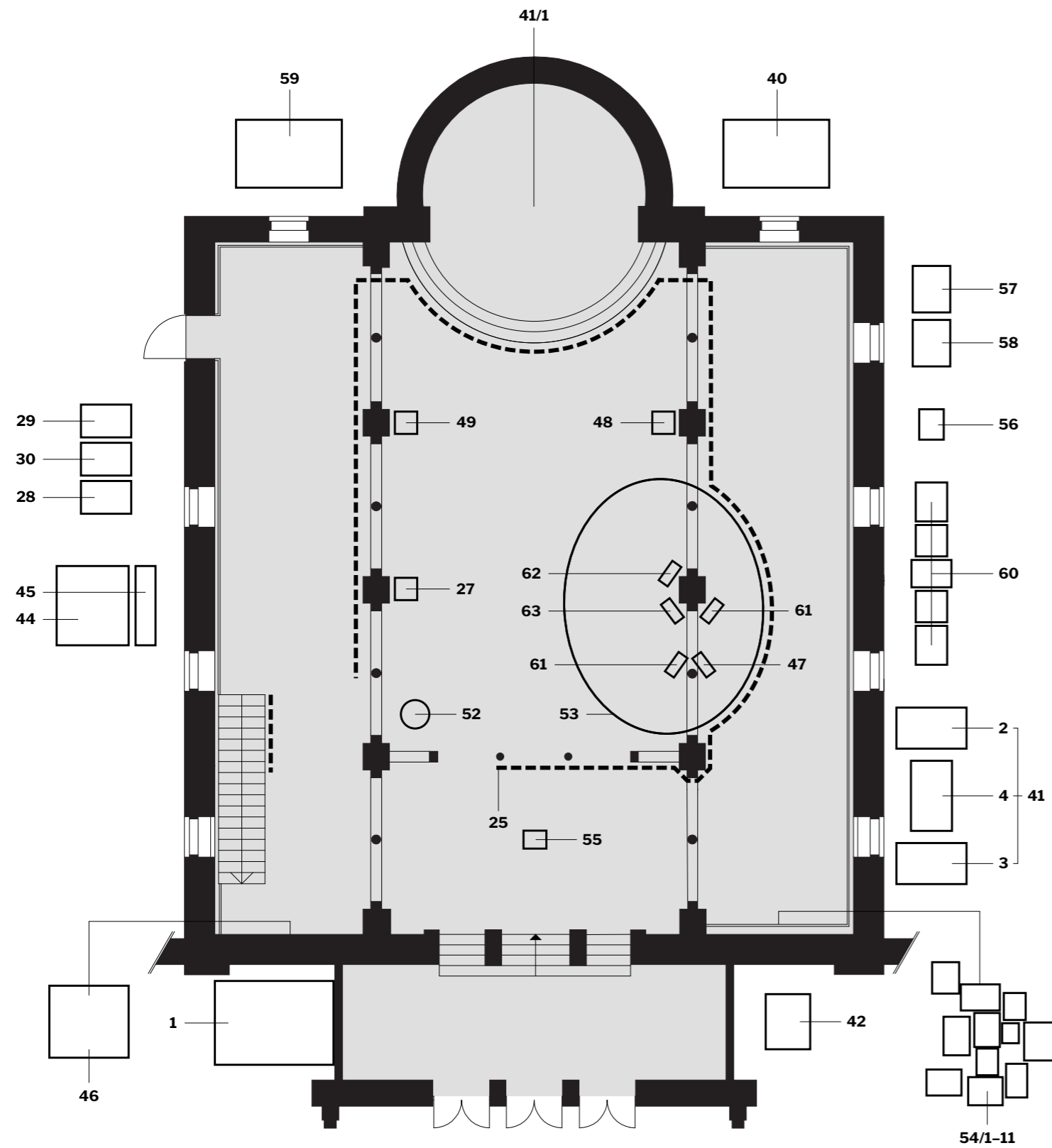
*A Simple Finale*  
1998  
Oil on canvas  
70x80cm





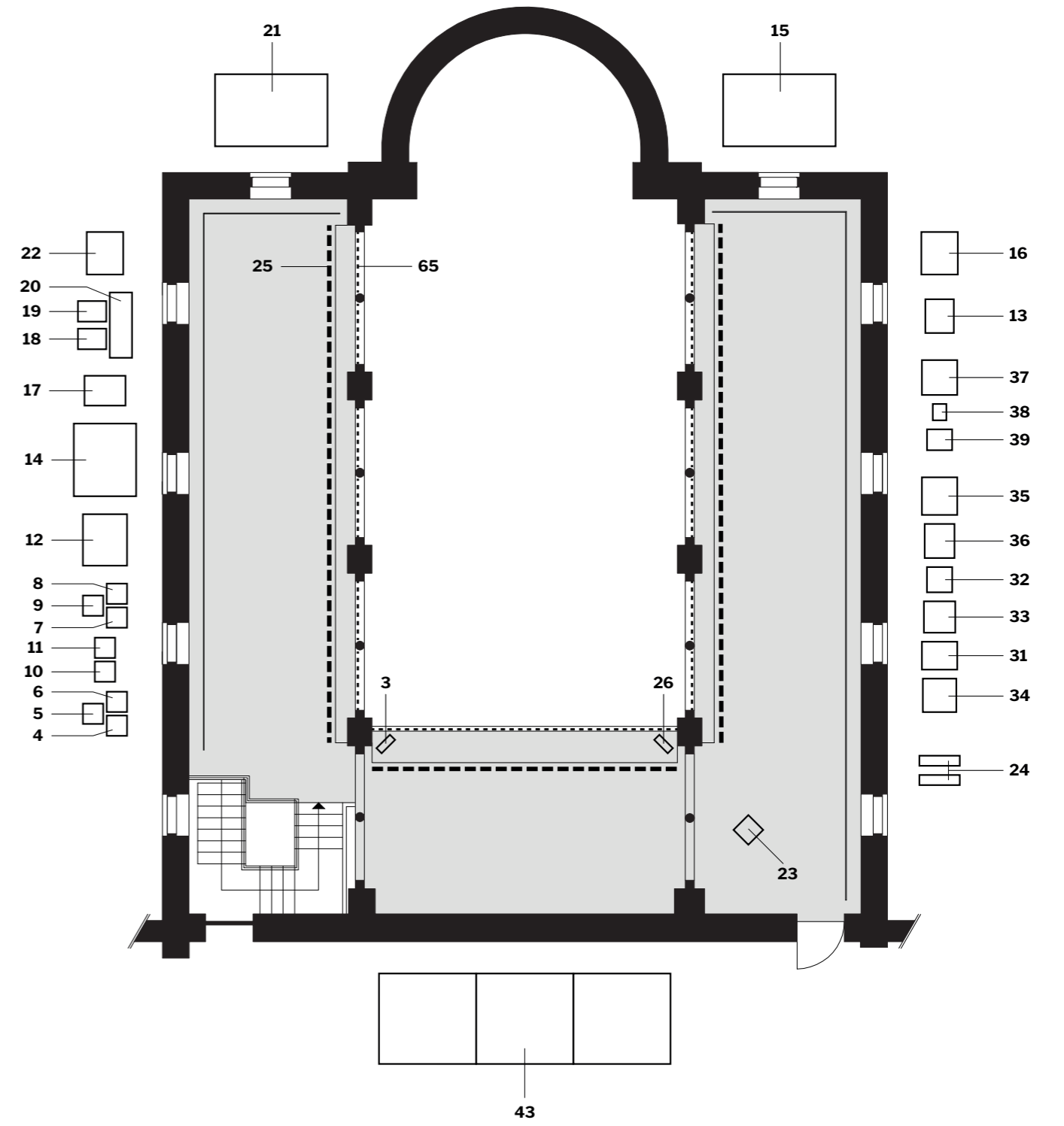


MAIN FLOOR



EXHIBITION LAYOUT

MEZZANINE



EXHIBITION LAYOUT

## WORKS

## LIST OF WORKS

## (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER BY DATE OF BIRTH)

## 1920s

## 1930s

## 1940s

## 1950s

## 1960s

## A COLLECTIVE WORK

- She Shamans*** (2018) felt carpet, 200 × 400 cm Made by Almagul Menlibayeva, Anar Aubakir, Saule Sulcimenova, Gulmaral Tatibaeva, Aigerim Ospanova and Rachel Rits-Volloch with the participation of the Berlin public. The design of this work is based on an antique felt tekmet in the collection of the Kastejev State Art Museum, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

## 1970s

## VERA ERMOLAEVA (1893–1937)

- The Fables of Ivan Krylov, The Liar***, a children's book illustrated by Vera Ermolaeva, 2nd edition. Moscow-Leningrad, OGIZ-Young Guard, 1931. 12 pp. Edition: 50,000. *Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts, Karaganda, Kazakhstan*
- VERA: The Life and Death of Vera Ermolaeva*** (2018) single-channel video, HD, sound, 11', 16:9. Directed by Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969). *National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, and Ruhani Zhanqyru*

## 1980s

## TATIANA GLEBOVA (1900–1985)

- These works from Glebova's Kazakhstan series were made between 1942 and 1945
- Chechen Woman Selling Wool at the Bazaar, Alma-Ata*** watercolour on paper, 39.5 × 35.3 cm

- Shooting Range*** watercolour on paper, 32.3 × 32.3 cm
- Butcher's Shop in the Bazaar, Alma-Ata*** watercolour on paper, 35.2 × 26 cm
- Bazaar*** watercolour on paper, 36.3 × 30.4 cm

- Bazaar*** watercolour on paper, 40 × 29.5 cm
- Bazaar*** watercolour on paper, 26.7 × 26.4 cm

- Kazakh Woman Selling Kumis [fermented mare's milk] on the Steppe*** Pencil and coloured crayon on paper, 35.4 × 21 cm

- Kazakh Woman on a Donkey*** watercolour on paper, 37.8 × 26.6 cm *All Glebova works are from the Collection pf the Kastejev State Art Museum, Almaty, Kazakhstan*

## AISHA GALIMBAEVA (1917–2008)

- National Talents*** (1957) oil on canvas, 100 × 130 cm *Kastejev State Art Museum, Almaty, Kazakhstan*
- Portrait of Work Brigade Leader, M. Abenova*** (1984) oil on canvas, 70 × 86 cm *Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts, Karaganda, Kazakhstan*

- Portrait of the Leader of the Shepherds' Brigade in the Ulguli State Collective Farm (Sovkhoz), Zhanalyksky district, Kazina*** (1985) oil on canvas, 160 × 170 cm *Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts, Karaganda, Kazakhstan*

- AISHA: The Works of Aisha Galimbaeva*** (2018) single-channel video, HD, sound, 22', 16:9 Directed by Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969) This video contains extracts edited from the following films on which Galimbaeva worked as a designer with Pavel Zaltsman: *A Poem about Love* (1954), directed by Sh. Aymanov, K. Gakkel, Alma-Ata Film Studio, 6' 40" (from original length 86'). The film is based on 'Kozy Korpesh - Bayan Sulu' —a Kazakh lyric-epic poem of the XIII-XIV century, *Lady Dzhigit* (1955), directed by P. Bogolyubov, Alma-Ata Film Studio, 6' 40" (from original length 92'). This thwarted love story, set on a Collective Farm, illustrates in a comic way traditional Kazakh horse-based courting customs. The lovers are eventually brought together with great happiness and rejoicing. *The Daughter of the Steppes* (1954), directed by Sh. Aymanov, K. Gakkel, Alma-Ata Film Studio, 6' (from original length 92'). This partisan melodrama set between the first years of Soviet power and World War II tells the story of an orphan girl who studies herbal medicine and uses this to cure soldiers on the front. She becomes a successful university lecturer. *Courtesy of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, Ruhani Zhanqyru, and Kazakhfilm*

- Film poster for ‘The Daughter of the Steppes’*** (1954), designer unknown reprinted in Berlin, 2018 by Almagul Menlibayeva and Leslie Ranzoni

## GULFAIRUS ISMAILOVA (1929–2013)

- Portrait of Dina Nurpeisova*** (1965) oil on canvas, 85 × 65 cm National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana Dina Nurpeisova (1861–1955) was a freedom fighter in the national liberation movement of 1916 and also a renowned composer and performer on the dombra (a long-necked lute) in the tradition of Kazakh folk music known as *kyuy*.

- Costume design for 'Er-Targyn', an opera-ballet by E. Brusilovsky based on an ancient Kazakh heroic epic*** (1967) gouache on paper, 50 × 40 cm *Courtesy of the V. Sidorkin Collection*

## 1960s

- Costume design for Kyz Zhibek, a folk ballet by E. Brusilovsky*** (1967) gouache on paper, 50 × 40 cm *Courtesy of the V. Sidorkin Collection* This story was also made into a two-part film in 1969 which Ishmailova designed and in which she acted. See cat. 21 below

- Costume designs for 'Kozy Korpesh and Bayan-Sulu', a folk ballet by E. Brusilovsky*** (1971) gouache on paper, 60 × 150 cm *Courtesy of the V. Sidorkin Collection* The film *A Poem about Love* (1954), designed by Pavel Zaltsman with Aisha Galimbayeva, was based on the same story. See cat. 15 above.

- GULFAIRUS: Gulfairus Ishmailova and Soviet National Cinematography*** (2018) single-channel video, HD, sound, 22', 16:9. Directed by Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969) This video contains extracts edited from the following films on which Galimbaeva worked as both designer and actress: *Botagoz* (1957), directed by E. Aron, 5' (from original length 92'). Here she plays a leading role in a story adapted from a novel by Sabit Mukanov about the travails and revolutionary awakening of a young Kazakh woman who had been sexually harassed by a Tsarist regional governor. *Alitet Leaves for the Hills* (1949), directed by Mark Donskoy for the Gorky Film Studio, Moscow, 5' (from original length 98'). In this historical war drama, she plays an indigenous Chukchi woman, living by Lake Baikal, who, along with other members of her community, is liberated by the Kamchatka Revolutionary Committee. The American colonist-businessmen and exploitative Russian fur traders are defeated so they may become self-sufficient and 'build a new life in a free land'. *Kyz Zhibek [Silk Lady]* (1969, first publicly shown 1972), directed by S. A. Khodzhevik at the Alma-Ata Film Studio, 10' (from original length 137'). The film was based on a Kazakh folk lyric-epic of the same name; Ishmailova worked here as both production designer and actress, playing the role of the protagonist's mother. This tragic, yet heroic, love story, set against the background of inter-tribal wars in the 16th and 17th-centuries, is an extended, nomadic reprise of *Romeo and Juliet*. In true Shakespearean tradition, few people survive. *Courtesy of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, Ruhani Zhanqyru, and Kazakhfilm*

- Film poster for 'Botagoz'*** (1957) designer unknown reprinted in Berlin in 2018 by Almagul Menlibayeva and Leslie Ranzoni

## 1970s

## LIDYA BLINOVA (1948–1996)

- Untitled Sculpture [Self Portrait]*** (1966–69) wood, 85 × 70 × 70 cm *Courtesy of the Said Dzhiembayev Collection*

- Finger Ornaments*** (1995) series of 10 photographs, B/W, PVC backing, 29 × 201 cm *Courtesy of the artist's estate*

- Poetry for Cats*** (1995) site-specific installation: text on paper, size variable *Courtesy of the artist's estate*

- Lidya Blinova: Pulota*** (2018) video, single-channel, HD, sound, 17', 16:9. Directed by Saule Sulcimenova (b. 1970) *National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, and Ruhani Zhanqyru*

## 1980s

- House*** (2005) single-channel video, sound, 4' 40", 4:3 Commissioned by the Art Connecction, Kyrgyzstan *Courtesy of the artist*

- Transforming Object, Bird I*** (2005) photograph on aludibond, 90 × 60 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- Transforming Object, Bird II*** (2005) photograph on aludibond, 90 × 60 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- Transforming Object, Bird III*** (2005) photograph on aludibond, 90 × 60 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

## 1990s

## ELENA VOROBYEVA (B. 1959)

- Still Life with Fork*** (1989) oil on canvas, 73 × 100 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- Under the Moon*** (1989) oil on canvas, 63 × 71 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- Prologue*** (1990) oil on canvas, 82 × 73 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- The Poetry of Scandal*** (1992) oil on canvas, 110 × 100 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- The Moment of Sublimation (A Cup of Coffee)*** (1993) oil on canvas, 75 × 85 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- A Simple Finale*** (1998) oil on canvas, 70 × 80 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

## 2000s

## GULNAR MIRZAGALIKOVA (B. 1961)

- Peak of Abai*** (1996) oil on canvas, 91 × 81 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- Woman and the Steppe*** (1997) oil on canvas, 30 × 38.5 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

- Song of the Shaman Woman*** (2008) oil on canvas, 52.5 × 44.5 cm *Courtesy of the artist*

## 2010s

## LIST OF WORKS

## 2010s

## 2020s

## 2030s

## 2040s

## 2050s

## 2060s

## 2070s

## 2080s

## 2090s

## 2100s

## 2110s

## 2120s

## 2130s

## 2140s

## 2150s

## 2160s

## 2170s

## 2180s

## 2190s

## 2200s

## 2210s

## 2220s

## 2230s

## 2240s

## 2250s

## 2260s

## 2270s

## 2280s

## 2290s

## 2300s

## 2310s

## 2320s

## 2330s

## 2340s

## 2350s

### ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA (B. 1969)

**40**    ***Steppen Baroque*** (2003)

Single channel digital video, 11', Sound by OMFO (G. Popov)

Courtesy American-Eurasian Art Advisors LLC

**41**    ***The Altar of the East*** (2018)

**1**    ***Tokamak*** (2016)

9-channel video installation, 20'

Surround Sound by OMFO (G. Popov)

Courtesy American-Eurasian Art Advisors LLC

Tokamak is a controlled Thermonuclear reaction device, invented by Soviet physicists in the 1950s, that is still being developed internationally as a source of nuclear power. The one shown here is in Kurchatov, Kazakhstan

**2**    ***Tokamak*** (2016)

photograph on aludibond, 150 x 100 cm

MOMENTUM Collection, Berlin

**3**    ***The Constructor*** (2016)

photograph on aludibond, 150 x 100 cm

MOMENTUM Collection, Berlin

**4**    ***Altar of the East*** (2018)

photograph on aludibond, 100 x 150 cm

MOMENTUM Collection, Berlin

This image depicts the Soviet-era control panel for detonating nuclear weapons.

The Altar of the East, 2018

### SAULE SULEIMENOVA (B. 1970)

**42**    ***The Three Brides*** (2015)

plastic bags on plastic tablecloth on wooden board, 100 x 140 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**43**    ***Skyline*** (2017)

plastic bags on polycarbonate sheet, 200 x 600 x 2 cm

(3 pieces of polycarbonate sheet, each 200 x 200 cm)

Courtesy of the artist

**44**    ***Famine/Asharshylyk, 1932. The Exodus***

***of the Kazakh People during the Famine*** (2018)

plastic bags on polyethylene film, 127 x 140 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**45**    ***Asharshylyk/Famine: The Surviving Children, 1932*** (2018)

plastic bags on polyethylene film, 25 x 140 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**46**    ***Zheltoqsan/Youth Riot, December 1986*** (2018)

plastic bags on polyethylene film, 127 x 140 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## KREOLEX ZENTR

(MARIA VILKOVISKY, B. 1971

& RUTHIE JENRBEKOVA, B. 1973)

**47**    ***Promo*** (2016)

single-channel video, HD, sound, 10' 53", 16:9

Courtesy of the artists

### NATALYA DYU (B. 1976)

**48**    ***I Love Naomi and Naomi Loves Fruits*** (2001)

single-channel video, sound, 4' 27", 4:3

Courtesy of the artist

**49**    ***So Naive, So Fluffy...*** (2009)

single-channel video, sound, 4' 54", 4:3

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## KATYA NIKONOROVA (B. 1981)

**50**    ***A Bouquet for March 8th: Tulips*** (2013)

objects, gloves, vase, 70 x 50 x 50 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

**51**    ***The Adventures of Katipa apai*** (2014–16)

Compilation, single-channel video, sound, 59' 17", 16:9

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## ZOYA FALKOVA (B. 1982)

**52**    ***EVERMUST*** (2017)

Object: artificial leather, filler, chain, 75 x 45 x 40 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## GULMARAL TATIBAYEVA (B. 1982)

**53**    ***Untitled*** (2018)

Installation: wooden scaffolding, textiles, women's clothing, 800x640cm

Courtesy of the artist, the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, and Ruhani Zhangyru

Supported by Syrlybek Bekbotaev, Askhat Akhmedyarov, Aida Issakhankyzy,

Gulmira Zholayeva, Dinara Nuger, Natalya Ligay, Aliya Kanibekova, Darina and Damelya Kalabaeva

The Altar of the East, 2018

## ANAR AUBAKIR (B. 1984)

**54**    ***Home*** (2009–2018)

installation: oil on canvas, charcoal, print on paper, wood, 200 x 280 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**1**    ***Kabardino Balkaria*** (2018), oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cm

**2**    ***Marina*** (2010), oil on canvas, 51.5 x 63.5 cm

**3**    ***The Door*** (2018), oil on canvas, 80 x 50 cm

**4**    ***Timur-Marina's Son*** (2009), charcoal on paper, 30 x 21 cm

**5**    ***The Poem*** (2018), oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm

**6**    ***Home*** (2018), oil on canvas, 90 x 60 cm

**7**    ***Abdra*** (2018), oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm

**8**    ***The Roofs of Houses*** (2006), oil on canvas, 60.9 x 91.9 cm

**9**    ***The Way*** (2018), inkjet print on paper, 55 x 45 cm

**10**    ***Return*** (2018), oil on fiberboard, 60 x 80 cm

**11**    ***Emptiness*** (2018), empty wooden frame, 100 x 80 cm

The Altar of the East, 2018

### GULNUR MUKAZHANOVA (B. 1984)

**55**    ***Iron Woman*** (2010)

metal object: nails, screws, wire, chain, 44 x 22 x 10 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**56**    ***Iron Woman*** (2010)

photograph on aludibond, 54.5 x 79 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

(From the series: Mankurts in the Metropolis)

**57**    ***Mankurt 1*** (2011–12)

photo print, 50.4 x 76 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**58**    ***Mankurt 2*** (2011–12)

photo print, 51.6 x 76 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## BAKHYT BUBIKANOVA (B. 1985)

**59**    ***Sebastian*** (2013)

single-channel video, sound, 2' 5", 4:3

Courtesy of the artist

**60**    ***New Year's Post Cards*** (2014)

(series of 5 photomontaged photo prints on aludibond)

60 x 80, 60 x 60, 70 x 50, 60 x 60, 60 x 80 cm

Courtesy of the artist

**61**    ***Boztorgay*** (2018)

single-channel video, sound, 6' 10", 16:9

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## AIGERIM MAZHITKHAN (B. 1986)

**62**    ***Images of the Capital*** (2015)

single channel video, HD, sound, 8' 24", 16:9

and takeaway postcard images on a metal stand

Courtesy of the artist

**63**    ***Metaphors of the City*** (2017)

single channel video, HD, sound, 4' 50", 16:9

Courtesy of the artist

The Altar of the East, 2018

## GAISHA MADANOVA (B. 1987)

**64**    ***Aluan Magazine, Issue 1*** (2015)

'Art Upside Down'

Courtesy of the artist

**65**    ***Beam Me to the Presence*** (2017)

text, vinyl lettering, dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

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## CONTRIBUTORS

### DAVID ELLIOTT

David Elliott is an English born curator and writer. He was Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, England (1976–1996); Director of Moderna Museet [The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art] in Stockholm, Sweden (1996–2001); Founding Director of the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (2001–2006); the first Director of the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art [Istanbul Modern] (2007); Artistic Director of The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival for a Precarious Age, the 17th Biennale of Sydney (2008–2010); in 2012 he was Artistic Director of The Best of Times, The Worst of Times, Rebirth and Apocalypse in Contemporary Art, the 1st International Kyiv Biennale of Contemporary Art (2011–12); he was Artistic Director of A Time for Dreams, the IV International Moscow Biennale of Young Art (2014). David Elliott was the Rudolf Arnheim Guest Professor in Art History at the Humboldt University, Berlin (2008) and Visiting Professor in Museum Studies at the Chinese University in Hong Kong (2008/11/13). From 1998 until 2004 he was President of CIMAM (the International Committee of ICOM for Museums of Modern Art). He is Hon President of the Board of Triangle Art Network/Gasworks in London. A specialist in Soviet and Russian avant-garde, as well as in modern and contemporary Asian art, he has published widely in these fields as well as on many other aspects of contemporary art. In 1996 he was co-curator of Kunst und Macht im Europa der Diktatoren 1930 bis 1945 at the Hayward Gallery, London and the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin and in 2000–2001 was Artistic Director of the exhibition After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Ludwig Museum, Budapest and Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. In 2011 he curated Between Heaven and Earth. Contemporary Art from the Centre of Asia at Calvert 22, London. He is the Chief Curator of BALAGAN: Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places, organized by MOMENTUM.

### ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA

Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969 in Almaty, Kazakh SSR) is a video artist and photographer, and is the co-curator of Focus Kazakhstan Berlin (2018). Almagul Menlibayeva holds an MFA from the Art and Theatre University of Almaty. She works primarily in multi-channel video, photography and mixed media installation and her work addresses such critical issues of post-Soviet modernity as social, economic, and political transformations in Central Asia, de-colonial re-imaginings of gender, environmental degradation, and Eurasian nomadic and indigenous cosmologies and mythologies. In conjunction with her solo exhibition ‘Transformation’ at the Grand Palais in Paris (France, 2016–2017), she was awarded the prestigious Chevalier Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture in 2017. Other awards include the ‘Daryn’ State Prize of Kazakhstan (1996), and the ‘Tarlan’ National Award of the Club of Maecenas of Kazakhstan (2003). She was also the Winner of the Grand Prix Asia Art at the II Biennial of Central Asia, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (1995) and the Winner of the Main Prize of the International Film Festival Kino Der Kunst (2013) in Munich, Germany.

### RACHEL RITS-VOLLOCH

Dr. Rachel Rits-Volloch is a graduate of Harvard University with a BA degree in Literature and holds an M.Phil and PhD from the University of Cambridge in Film Studies. She wrote her dissertation on visceral spectatorship in contemporary cinema, focusing on the biological basis of embodiment. In 2016-17, Rachel Rits-Volloch was Visiting Professor at the Bauhaus University, Weimar, lecturing in the MFA program “Public Art and New Artistic Strategies” and the PhD program in Artistic Research. Rachel Rits-Volloch founded MOMENTUM in 2010 in Sydney, Australia, as a parallel event to the 17th Biennale of Sydney. MOMENTUM moved to Berlin in January 2011, and since that time has evolved into a non-profit global platform for time-based art, with headquarters at the Kunstquartier Bethanien Art Center. Since MOMENTUM’s inception, Rachel Rits-Volloch has curated or produced over 70 international exhibitions showing works by over 500 artists, in addition to ancillary education programming, artist residencies, and related projects. In addition to being the co-curator of *Focus Kazakhstan Berlin: Bread & Roses* and the *Artist Residency Show*, as curator, major exhibitions include *MOMENTUM Sydney* (2010, Sydney Australia); the *Works On Paper Performance Series* (2013, 2014, 2015, MOMENTUM, Berlin); *Thresholds* (2013, Collegium Hungaricum, Berlin; 2014, TRAFÖ Center for Contemporary Art, Szczecin, Poland); *The Best of Times, the Worst of Times Revisited* (2014, Chronus Art Center, Shanghai, China); *PANDAMONIUM: Media Art from Shanghai* (2014, MOMENTUM, Berlin); *Fragments of Empires* (2014-15, MOMENTUM, Berlin); *Ganz Grosses Kino* (2016, Kino Internationale, Berlin); *HERO MOTHER: Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism* (2016, MOMENTUM, Berlin); *The 1st Daojiao New New Media Festival, Facade Project* (2016, Guangzhou, China); *Landscapes of Loss* (2017, Ministry of Environment, Berlin); *Future Life Handbook* (2017-18, Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art, Guangzhou, China). Born in Riga, USSR, Rachel Rits-Volloch is currently based in Berlin.

### DIANA T. KUDAIBERGENOVA

Diana T. Kudaibergenova is a cultural and political sociologist. She is currently a Research Fellow in the Centre of Development Studies at the University of Cambridge and a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Sociology of Law at Lund University, Sweden. Her main research interest concerns the social theory of power. Kudaibergenova studies different intersections of power relations through realms of political sociology, with a particular focus on nationalising regimes and nationalism in the new states of post-soviet space, cultural sociology, gender studies, and socio-legal studies. She published her first book in January 2017, Re-writing the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives, exploring the ways national ideas and narratives were produced, contested and rewritten in the very new genre of Soviet literature in modern Kazakhstan. Her second book, currently in production, addresses the comparative political sociology of nation-building, power struggles and new political elites in post-Soviet states. Kudaibergenova’s work on socio-legal studies of citizenship, minorities, and nation—as well as state—building is connected to this aspect of her research. She also works on gender and contemporary art fields to test similar questions of power relations, agency, and power contestations in societies that go through tremendous socio-cultural transformations.

### AIGUL OMAROVA

Aigul Sauletovna Omarova (b. 1968 in Karaganda, Kazakhstan) graduated from the Faculty of History of the Buketov University, Karaganda. She is a researcher at the Karaganda Regional Museum of Fine Arts, specializing in the history of artists who were repressed in Karlag. Omarova also works as a consultant for numerous television programs and films, including: My Karaganda - ‘The Artist Heinrich Vogeler’, and ‘The Artist Vladimir Eifert,’ as well as the documentary film *KarLAG. Position: artist*. A number of her articles have been published in collections of scientific conferences and in international periodicals, including: I am always coming to you..., for the 120th anniversary of AL Chizhevsky (<http://mysl.kazgazeta.kz/?p=9755>); Revolutionary. Poet. Teacher. Scientist, about the first scientist-psychologist of Kazakhstan; Kazakhstan-Germany yesterday and today, in the newspaper Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (DAZ); People of Creativity and the GULAG, for the GULAG Museum in Moscow; The artist who builds bridges, in Biz-Bote Magazine, Moscow; and many others. She is also the author of the book/catalogue Heinrich Vogeler, and co-author of the book Vladimir Eifert: The Artist of Old Karaganda. She also organises exhibitions at various museum and teaches.

### BOJANA PEJIĆ

Bojana Pejić (b. 1948 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia) is an art historian, writer, curator, and educator. From 1977 to 1991 she was curator at the Student Cultural Center of Belgrade University. Since 1991, she has been based in Berlin. She was guest professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin (2003), at the Institute for Cultural Studies at the University in Oldenburg, Germany (2006/2007), and at the Central European University, Faculty of Gender Studies, in Budapest (Winter 2013). She was chief curator of the exhibition After the Wall - Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe (1999), organized by the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, which was also presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art-Foundation Ludwig, Budapest (2000) and at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2000–2001). In 2008 she curated the international exhibition Artist-Citizen, the 49th October Salon in Belgrade (Serbia). She was chief curator of the exhibition Gender Check at MUMOK, Vienna (2009–2010) and Warsaw (2011). She is the editor of Gender Check: Art and Theory in Eastern Europe -A Reader (2010). She curated the international exhibition Good Girls: Memory, Desire, Power at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC) in Bucharest (2013) and co-curated the international exhibition HERO MOTHER-Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism, at MOMENTUM, Berlin (2016). Currently, she is a guest lecturer at the Bauhaus University in Weimar in the MFA program ‘Public Art and New Artistic Strategies’ (2014–present).

### ABOUT MOMENTUM

[WWW.MOMENTUMWORLDWIDE.ORG](http://WWW.MOMENTUMWORLDWIDE.ORG)

MOMENTUM is a non-profit platform for time-based art, active worldwide since 2010, with headquarters in Berlin at the Kunstquartier Bethanien Art Center. MOMENTUM’s program is composed of local and international Exhibitions, Artist and Curator Residencies, Video Art in Public Space Initiatives, complete Archives of the Performance Program and Education Program, and a growing Collection.

Positioned as both a local and global platform, MOMENTUM serves as a bridge joining professional art communities, irrespective of institutional and national borders. Working on a model of international partnerships and cooperations, MOMENTUM supports artists and artistic innovation, bringing to Berlin work by international artists that would not otherwise have been seen here, and ensuring an international audience for exceptional local artists. The key ideas driving MOMENTUM are: Cooperation, Exchange, Education, Innovation, and Inspiration. MOMENTUM continuously seeks innovative answers to the question ‘What is time-based art?’.

By enabling Exhibition, Discussion, Research, Creation, Collection, and Exchange, MOMENTUM is a platform which challenges the notion of time-based art in the context of both historical and technological development. Visual languages continue to evolve in concert with the technologies which drive them, and it is the role of visual artists to push the limits of these languages. As the world speeds up, and time itself seems to flow faster, MOMENTUM provides a program focused on the growing diversity and relevance of time-based practices, exploring how time-based art reflects the digitization of our societies and the resulting cultural change.

Having been founded by Rachel Rits-Volloch in Australia as a parallel event to the 17 Biennale of Sydney in May 2010, MOMENTUM moved to Berlin to a permanent space in the thriving Kunstquartier Bethanien Art Center in January 2011. Since its inception, MOMENTUM has presented over 70 Exhibitions showing the work of over 500 artists, as well as over 50 Education Events filmed and archived on the website, in addition to an ongoing program of Artistic Research Residencies which has so far hosted 45 international artists, alongside a diversity of parallel programming. MOMENTUM is also proud to feature the works of 92 international artists in the MOMENTUM Performance Archive and Collection.

MOMENTUM’s major exhibitions include MOMENTUM Sydney (2010, Sydney Australia); A Wake: Still Lives and Moving Images (2011, MOMENTUM Berlin); the Works On Paper Performance Series (2013, 2014, 2015, MOMENTUM, Berlin); Thresholds (2013, Collegium Hungaricum, Berlin; 2014, TRAFÖ Center for Contemporary Art, Szczecin, Poland); The Best of Times, the Worst of Times Revisited (2014, Chronus Art Center, Shanghai, China); PANDAMONIUM: Media Art from Shanghai (2014, produced with CAC Chronus Art Center at MOMENTUM, Berlin); Fragments of Empires (2014-2015, MOMENTUM, Berlin); BALAGAN!!! Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places (2015, MOMENTUM / Külhaus, / Stiftung Brandenburger Tor at Max Liebermann Haus, Berlin); Ganz Grosses Kino (2016, Kino Internationale, Berlin); HERO MOTHER: Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism (2016, MOMENTUM, Berlin), Landscapes of Loss (2017, Ministry of Environment, Berlin); Focus Kazakhstan: Bread & Roses (2018, MOMENTUM, Berlin), amongst many others.

## BREAD & ROSES SYMPOSIUM

### PARTICIPANTS

David Elliott, Almagul Menlibayeva, Rachel Rits-Volloch

Curators of *Focus Kazakhstan Berlin - Bread & Roses: Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists* and the *Focus Kazakhstan Artist Residency Exhibition* (2018)

Aliya de Tiesenhausen and Indira Dyussebayeva

Curators of the *Focus Kazakhstan London* exhibition *Post-nomadic Mind* (2018)

Diana T. Kudaibergenova

Sociologist and scholar at Cambridge University

Dina Nurpeissova

Founder of Berlin's Central Asian cultural association *Steppenboot*

Nari Shelekpayev

Einstein Fellow at Berlin's Einstein Forum and Visiting Professor at the University of Rome

Bojana Pejić

Curator of *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2009/10), *Good Girls: Memory, Desire, Power* (2013), and co-curator of *HERO MOTHER: Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism* (2016)

Anar Aubakir, Gaisha Madanova, Aigerim Ospanova, Saule Sulemeinova, Gulmaral Tatibayeva

Artists in *Bread & Roses: Four Generations of Kazakh Women Artists* and the *Focus Kazakhstan Artist Residency Exhibition*

### PROGRAM

David Elliott

*Bread & Roses: Colonization and Identity in Kazakh Art*

Aliya de Tiesenhausen & Indira Dyussebayeva

*On Post-Nomadic Mind (London) and the Current Discourse on Contemporary Art and Identity in Kazakhstan*

Bojana Pejić

*Spaces of Self-Definition: On Theories of Identity*

Discussion: Knowing Lidya Blinova

Almagul Menlibayeva, Saule Sulemeinova, David Elliott (moderator)

Nari Shelekpayev

*Shame, Power, and the Female Body: on Political Practices of Uyat in Contemporary Kazakhstan*

Panel Discussion: Naming Shame: Uyat in Kazakh Culture

Nari Shelekpayev, Bojana Pejić, Aliya de Tiesenhausen, Almagul Menlibayeva, Diana T. Kudaibergenova, Indira Dyussebayeva, Dina Nour (moderator)

Artist Talks

Aluan: Exhibition on Paper

Gaisha Madanova in discussion with David Elliott on Aluan and how it fits into her practice as artist and curator.

From the Perspective of Now: Two Generations of Kazakh Women Artists

Almagul Menlibayeva, Gaisha Madanova, Anar Aubakir, Aigerim Ospanova, Saule Sulemeinova, Gulmaral Tatibayeva, Rachel Rits-Volloch & David Elliott (moderators)



## COLOPHON

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

**FOCUS KAZAKHSTAN**

**BREAD & ROSES – FOUR GENERATIONS OF KAZAKH WOMEN ARTISTS**

**STUDIO 1 AT KUNSTQUARTIER BETHANIEN**

**25 SEPTEMBER TO 20 OCTOBER 2018**

FOCUS KAZAKHSTAN BERLIN is a 6-month cooperation between the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan and MOMENTUM Berlin, involving Artist Residencies for 7 young artists held from 1 June to 1 October 2018, and two parallel exhibitions be held on 25 September – 20 October 2018. Focus Kazakhstan Berlin: *BREAD & ROSES* and the *Artist Residency Show*, organised by MOMENTUM at the Kunstquartier Bethanien Art Centre, are part of the Focus Kazakhstan initiative implemented by the National Museum of Kazakhstan in association with the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Kazakhstan within the framework of the programme *Ruhani Zhangyru*. Focus Kazakhstan, a cultural initiative to bring contemporary art from Kazakhstan to an international audience, is comprised of four different exhibitions, each with varying artists and curators, taking place between June 2018 to March 2019 in Berlin, London, Jersey City (USA), and Suwon (Korea).



Project Organiser in Berlin **MOMENTUM**

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**RACHEL RITS-VOLLOCH**

Production **LESLIE RANZONI**

Graphics/Production **EMILIO RAPANÀ**

The project organizers in Kazakhstan

**THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN**



**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN**



The project has been prepared by

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN**

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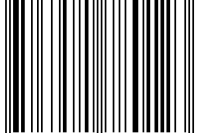
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