

FLOW: Central Asian Video Art Programme

Week Two Programme (2010s) 1-7 December 2025

Screening List:

- *In Dialogue with Fire*, Askhat Akhmedyarov, 2019, 11'23
- *Speechless / Soz Jok*, Äsel Kadyrkhanova, 2017, 04'39
- *The Disappearing City*, Aziza Shadenova, 2011, 04'32
- *Steppen Wolves*, Said Atabekov, 2017, 04'08
- *Global Society*, Gulnur Mukazhanova, 2016, 04'33
- Asel Kadyrkhanova, *Legend of Korkut*, sequence of drawings, loop, 2011 05'42
- *Zeitgeist Rabbit part 1*, Aziza Shadenova, 2011, 08'15

Additional Information/Artists Notes

ASKHAT AKHMEDYAROV (b. 1965, village of Aleksandrovo GAI, Ural region, lives in Almaty, Kazakhstan)

In Dialogue with Fire, 2019

The fire element and its ambivalent nature — terrifying and mesmerising at the same time — is a recurring motif in Akhmediyarov's work. The artist's fascination with the flame has its roots in his early memories, formed in the tense atmosphere of the Cold War and its imagery of the deadly nuclear blaze. However, instead of representing the destructive energy, in this work fire becomes a creative force, gradually revealing the monumental portraits of historical figures outlined in the burning straw. These figures include Nobel Peace Prize laureates and politicians who once helped to stop the further spreading of the flames of war. Thus, the motif of fire can also be interpreted as the inner fervour of activists fighting against the abuse of power. Providing a birds-eye view of historical figures and events, *In Dialogue with Fire* encourages critical reflection on the ambiguity of the human condition and the intrinsic creation-destruction dynamics of our existence.

His **photographic series** can also be seen as a poetic yet poignant reflection on the transition of Kazakhstani society from a nomadic to urban one. Combining a critical stance with irony, Akhmediyarov's oeuvre allows for multi-layered reading, placing local issues in the global context and referring to the human condition at large.

ASEL KADYRKHANOVA (b. Kazakhstan)

Speechless / Soz Jok, 2017

In this video-performance, I unstitch the phrase *Söz Joq*, written in Arabic letters. Its literal translation from Kazakh is "no word is there", but colloquially it is used similarly to the phrase "I am speechless", often in situations of shock or grief.

The work references the politics surrounding the alphabet change in Kazakhstan, performed by the Soviet government between 1929 and 1940 as part of the cultural assimilation policy. The Arabic alphabet, which had been used in the region for several centuries, was replaced in 1929 by the Latin script. This was soon followed by a switch to the Cyrillic. By addressing the loss of familiar letters, I reflect on the deprivation of language - the words to express pain. The phrase "Söz Joq" also alludes to Ludwig Wittgenstein's phrase "I know I am in

pain" on the paradoxical nature of pain felt strongly by the sufferer but incomprehensible to the observer. The destruction of this phrase, first stitched with red thread, raises the question of what remains, invisibly, after violence.

Legend of Korkut, 2011

This sequence of hand-drawn images is based on the Turkic myth about Korkut, a shaman and musician who travelled the world in search of a place where Death would not reach him. Having not found such a place, he returned to his homeland, spread the carpet in the midst of the Syrdariya river and began to play music on his kobyz (Kazakh traditional instrument). And while he played, he remained immortal.

In this sequence of drawings, I aimed to visualise the metamorphoses that happen in processes of thinking, dreaming, imagining and creating. Using the myth of Korkut as a starting point, I find parallels between the flow of water and the flow of thoughts: both are fluid and can take various forms. Each new drawing in the sequence was made only after the previous one was completed. The images emerged from interaction with one another, rather than solely from the narrative itself.

AZIZA SHADENOVA (b. 1989, Uzbekistan, of mixed Kazakh and Uzbek heritage, lives in the UK)

The Disappearing City, 2011

The Disappearing City is a short film that reflects on the society we live in today. It is also a film that envisions our future. Living in a fast paced world today, we often miss out on the things that we once cherish most, things that really matter in our lives. People seek and yearn for tangible materials, things that prove a certain social status. As a result, it is difficult for one to understand the values and ethics in life, and how we should uphold them.

In the future generations to come, they will have a harder time relating to their forefathers - forefathers who have brought them the comfortable lives they would be living in. In order for them to preserve history is by making history present. The short film illustrates a generational conflict based on a mother-daughter relationship. While the daughter tries to emancipate herself by trading her long traditional garments to short Western ones, the mother stages a traditional environment to "sell it" to tourists eagerly seeking for exoticism in the form of photographs. Women play a central role in this work critically relating to their society and traditional backgrounds.

Zeitgeist Rabbit part 1, 2011

Zeitgeist Rabbit is one of my earliest explorations in filmmaking, born from an instinctive need to understand the quiet tensions that shaped my own upbringing. In this short fantasy-documentary, I turned to the intimate space of a grandmother– granddaughter relationship to illuminate a broader generational and civilisational divide. Set in Ivanovka village—a house alive with chickens and sheep, where water runs only from an outdoor tap and the kettle warms atop a fire cooker—the film follows a young girl whose daily life feels borrowed from a time not her own.

As she drifts through cemeteries in a state of melancholy or dances alone in her bedroom in a disco bodysuit, the granddaughter embodies the subtle rebellion of a generation caught

between deep-rooted traditions and a growing desire for self-definition. The grandmother never appears as an antagonist; instead, the conflict unfolds internally, visible only through the girl's shifting moods and gestures. Her world is a portrait of quiet dissonance—of a young mind negotiating whether to remain within the life prescribed to her or to break away in search of something new.

In Central Asia, reverence for elders and adherence to tradition form the backbone of communal identity. Yet with *Zeitgeist Rabbit*, I wanted to capture the moment when that inherited stability begins to tremble—when the fight between continuity and change first awakens. This early film marks the beginning of my ongoing interest in the spaces where cultural expectation and personal longing collide, and in the tender, fragile negotiations that shape who we become.

SAID ATABEKOV (b. 1965 in Bes-Terek, Uzbekistan, lives and works in Shymkent, Kazakhstan)

Steppen Wolves, 2017

The video documents a game of Kokpar. It is a traditional sport (in Kazakhstan and other countries in the region). It consists of several horse riders (or teams) competing by keeping hold of the sheep/goat's carcass. (Some say it is a precursor of polo). In the artist's work the game becomes a metaphor for the fact that life is a fierce competition/battle. People are forced into the perpetual state of fighting for something. It is open to other interpretations as well.

GULNUR MUKAZHANOVA (b. 1984, Semey, Kazakhstan, lives Berlin, Germany)

Global Society, 2016

Global Society is an experimental short film by kazakh artist Gulnur Mukazhanova, directed by the german filmmaker Karim Oeltze von Lobenthal.

"Global Society Series" came after Mankurts in the Megapolis. The first time the idea struck me — What will happen if everyone starts to have the same face? — I was shocked. In my mind it felt like a horror film. So I decided to confront these feelings and begin working on them.

Now, eight years later, looking back, I can say that the sense of horror remains the same. I've realised once again how important it is not to lose touch with your roots. It is precisely my roots — the land where I grew up — that give me the energy to live.