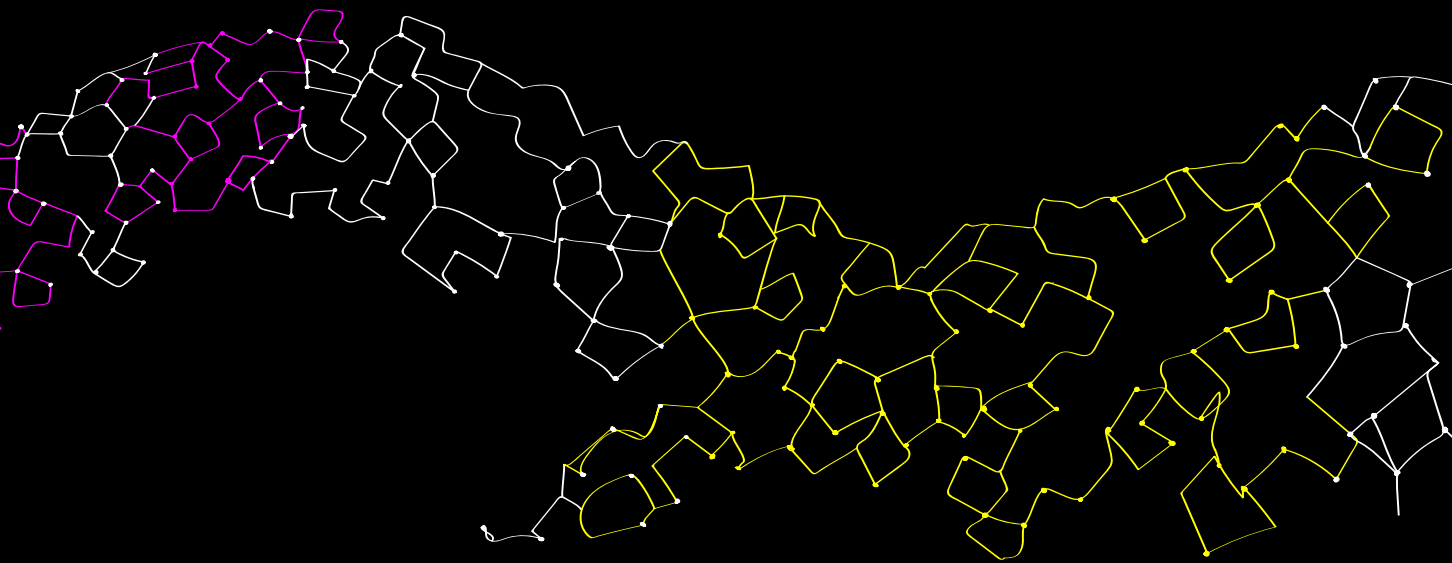




NOMAD
2024: THE
INFINITE SKY.





06 About the
University of Central Asia

08 A Nomad Story

10 Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky

14 3rd International Film Festival

100 "Aesthetics, Care and Action"
Symposium

124 Multimedia Exhibitions

132 Philosophical Encounters with
Richard Shusterman

134 Ruyò Journal: Watching Rivers

136 Falling Into Sky

138 Digital & Virtual Experiments

150 Sky Tour

152 Acknowledgements

The University of Central Asia (UCA) is a world-class centre for knowledge and learning, connecting isolated rural communities with the global community and building human capital needed for modern economies and stable governance.

The mission of UCA is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities, by offering an

internationally recognised standard of higher education and enabling the peoples of the region to preserve their rich cultural heritage as assets for the future.

UCA's undergraduate programmes are located in world-class residential campuses in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, and Khorog, Tajikistan, near the Tien Shan and Pamir mountains.



Naryn Campus

A NOMAD STORY



Nomadic Image 2022 Conference

In September 2020, an exciting opportunity arose when artist and media scholar Prof. Paul Thomas invited us to curate and host the seventh Transdisciplinary Conference on Imaging at the University of Central Asia (UCA) in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. The event brought together artists, filmmakers, and scholars from the University of New South Wales, Aga Khan Development Network, Ala-Too International

University, the University of California, the University of Plymouth, the Glasgow School of Art, the Aga Khan Museum, Ololohaus, Gapar Aitiev National Museum of Fine Arts, and the Osh Regional Museum of Fine Arts. A collection of papers presented at the Conference has recently been published by the University of Melbourne *The Nomadic Image: Selected essays at the intersections of arts, science, and culture.*



Nomad 2023 Awards Night

The connections made in 2022 inspired the return of the Nomadic Image the following year as "Nomad 2023: The Living Land." Once again, UCA's campus served as a spectacular setting, hosting a film festival, celebration of Kyrgyz fashion and design, writing and graphic design workshops, digital arts exhibitions, and a river landscape exploration. The festival also embraced the

town of Naryn, with the municipal theatre hosting the film festival finalists. With the launch of Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky, the Nomadic Image marks a watershed moment for UCA, establishing an annual event that attracts a vibrant community of scholars and creative practitioners committed to developing innovative responses to the challenges we all face.

Soheil Ashrafi and Michael Garbutt
Co-Chairs of the Nomad 2024

NOMAD 2024: THE INFINITE SKY


The sky begins
where the earth ends,
where vision escapes gravity, where
curiosity and awe link the everyday
and the infinite. The entire history
of the planet, and the life of every
one of its denizens, has been lived
in the presence of this celestial
witness, mantling the infinite time
of Being. 'Nomad 2024: The Infinite
Sky' is an international festival of
ideas, exhibitions and experiments
organised and hosted by the
University of Central Asia, at its
Naryn Campus, Kyrgyzstan.

NOMAD 2024: THE INFINITE SKY

In the age of

climate change, artificial
intelligence, enscreenment, and the
commodification of nature, what does
the sky mean for us now? Can the
Pale Blue Dot gather and hold the sky
in a fleeting consciousness of the
universe?

Join 'Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky' to
gaze at the sky, think
unforeseen thoughts, and share the
unfinished stories that roll above our
heads like never resting clouds.



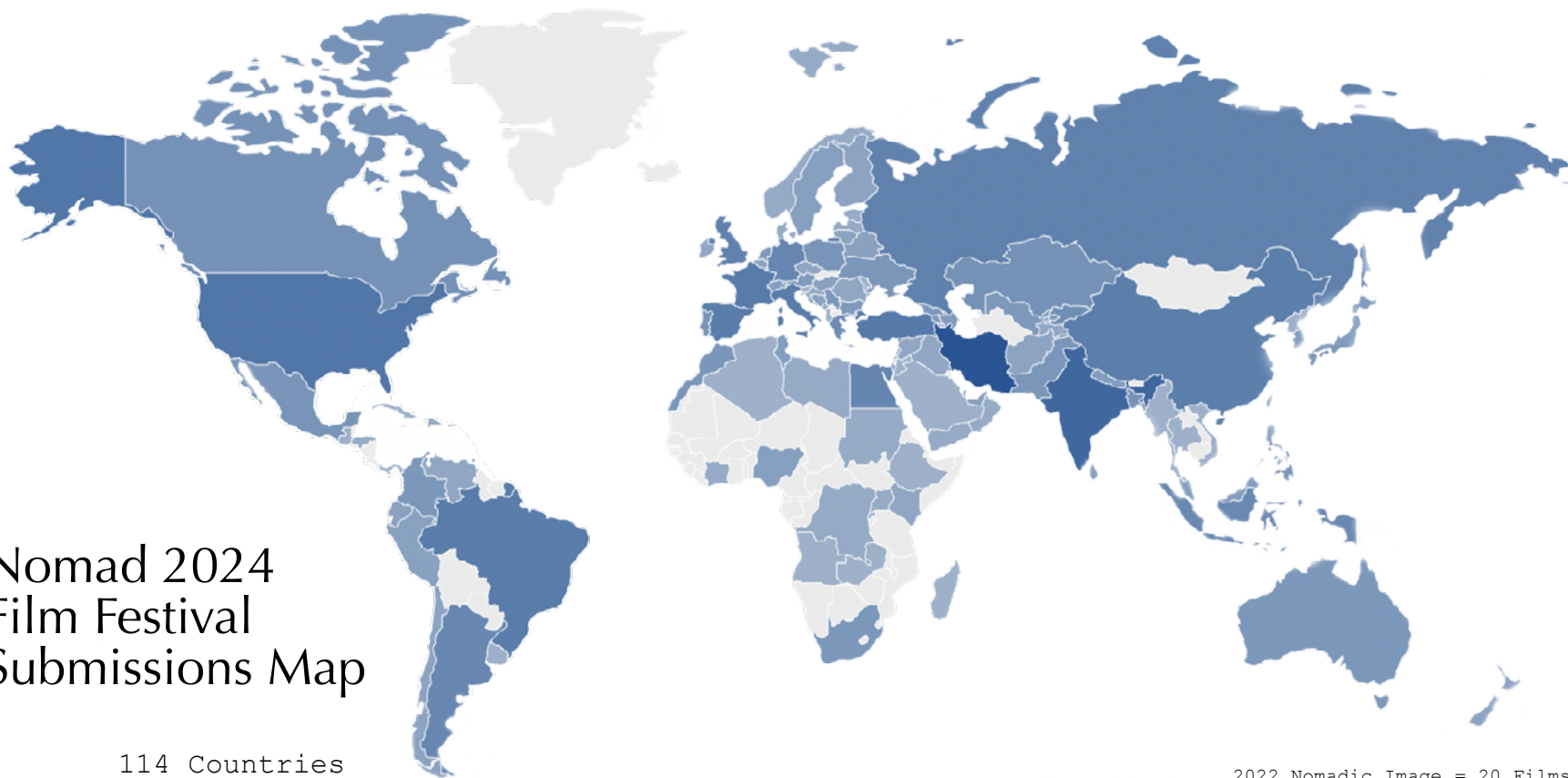
The Film Festival aims to provide a platform for emerging filmmakers, contributing to the development of the film industry throughout Central Asia and beyond.

As an annual film festival showcasing exceptional works, Nomad 2024 received 1,933 submissions from 114 countries.

3rd International Film Festival “Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky”

Nomad 2024 Film Festival Submissions Map

114 Countries



2022 Nomadic Image = 20 Films
Nomad 2023: A Living Land = 170 Films
Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky = 1,933 Films

Ernest Abdyjaparov

Chair of the Jury

Ernest Abdyjaparov, born in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is a film director, screenwriter, and producer. In 1983, he graduated from the Pedagogical Institute of Russian Language and Literature and initially worked as a school teacher.

Abdyjaparov's film career began in 1988 as the director of the film magazine *Korogoch*. He became the editor of *Kyrgyz Film* in 1992 and led the "Umai" youth creative foundation in 1993. In 1999, he founded his own film studio and served as co-secretary of the Union of Cinematographers of Kyrgyzstan until 2001, then as *Kyrgyz Film's* editor-in-chief until 2002.

Since 2008, Abdyjaparov has held annual master classes, mentoring many cinematic talents. He has directed 14 feature films and gained international acclaim.

Sophie Dia Pegrum

Jury Member

Sophie Dia Pegrum is a multi-disciplinary visual artist, focusing on film, documentary, and storytelling. She was recently awarded a Fulbright National Geographic Society Fellowship for a hybrid cine project about the Kyrgyz Space Program and a Smithsonian Fellowship to document the histories and experiences of families of beekeepers in the Western United States. As an accomplished cinematographer, she bridges artistic expression and scholarly depth, pioneering experimental storytelling. Committed to documentary education, she explores human and cultural connections to land, sky, and creatures.

Anisa Sabiri

Jury Member

Anisa Sabiri, a London-based Tajik writer-director, has created notable short films such as *The Crying of Tanbur* (2018) and *Rhythms of Lost Time* (2021). Her films have been screened at prestigious festivals including Busan and Berlinale. Her work is also featured in the Imago Mundi collection and the IDEAL Centre d'Arts Digitals de Barcelona. She co-wrote *Hafta*, which was selected for the 60th Venice Biennale.

Sabiri has been an advocate for Central Asian cinema and has served as a juror at various film festivals. She earned an MA in Screenwriting from the London Film School, where she won the Outstanding Screenwriting Award in 2021. She is a member of Directors UK and the Documentary Association of Europe, and has been a Senior Lecturer at the University of Central Asia since 2024.

Ehsan Zareie

Jury Member

Ehsan Zareie, born in Iran in 1978, holds a bachelor's degree in visual communication and a master's degree in illustration. As an art and design academic, his work encompasses a variety of mediums, including poetry, writing, photography, filmmaking, and animation.

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

Memories of the Yellow River

Directed by Ji Shang (China) | 2023 | 18:00

Control steadily slips away in a metropolis trapped by the relentless grip of pollution. As the city evolves, its citizens undergo a subtle metamorphosis, both physical and mental. A young woman mysteriously conceives new life. While the city may appear ordinary to the majority, this solitary wanderer meanders through the restrictions and smog-laden streets, in pursuit of the essence of human existence.



Still from Memories of the Yellow River

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Water Tomb

Directed by Kaihan Adwai (Iran) | 2024 | 11:00

The film tells the story of a funeral in a remote village in Horaman, where rising dam waters have severed the village's connection to the cemetery. The situation becomes uncertain, leading to many struggles and hardships as the villagers seek a resolution.



Still from *Water Tomb*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

The Cold of Cold

Directed by Farhan Behpour (Iran) | 2023 | 10:20

Amid the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, a Muslim man seeks an honorable burial for himself, driven by his deep friendship with an Armenian man.



Still from *The Cold of Cold*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM


I am Rain

Directed by Onur Bilmen (Germany) | 2023 | 11:08

Could life be worse than going to hell?

Enn is waiting nervously at a bus-stop until his loneliness is suddenly interrupted by a strange, young woman called *Baal*. During the course of the conversation, the woman turns out to be a demon, who wants to persuade Enn to go to hell voluntarily to cleanse his soul of sin.

Still from *I am Rain*



*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

The Pencil

Directed by Soheil Paryani (Iran) | 2023 | 06:57

Pazhar, a boy who habitually sharpens both ends of his pencils, dismisses a classmate's ominous warning that this could bring death to his family. Having already lost his parents, Pazhar fears for his aunt, his last remaining relative, and throws his pencils into the river. Despite his efforts, his aunt passes away after he discovers that one sharpened pencil was left hidden in his drawing book.



Still from *The Pencil*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Pisho

Directed by Aun Ul Haider (Pakistan) | 2023 | 15:46

A seven-year-old girl, Ruqayya, embarks on a search to find her lost kitten, suspecting her mother and neighbors may be responsible. During her quest, Ruqayya stumbles upon a protest against a recent terrorist attack. Inspired by the demonstrators' placards, she creates her own sign seeking help to find her missing kitten.



Still from *Pisho*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

The Salty Woman

Directed by Liana Farias (Brazil) | 2023 | 15:00

Dila struggles to recognize the habits she's formed to preserve memories, as her routine quietly shapes her transformation. Through Lia's eyes, we witness Dila's mysterious ritual, rich with meaning, as she brings her emotional journey to an end.



Still from *The Salty Woman*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

Pāramitā

Directed by Xu Xiaochen (China) | 2024 | 15:00

Li Shuyang, a middle-aged single woman from Xinjiang, has spent much of her life under her mother's shadow. Seeking liberation, she decides to build a ship and burn it in the desert, hoping to fulfill her ideal of "smooth weather and rising waters."



Still from *Paramita*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

Dear Humans

Directed by Joo Peter (Indonesia) | 2023 | 5:00

Dear Humans,
Singularity is knocking at the door.

In this satirical dystopian short film, AI in human form reveals itself with haunting words. The speaker seems completely lifelike human and yet, like the following 10 speakers, is completely artificial. Or is a real actor, the author underneath one of the characters?



Still from Dear Humans

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

Son

Directed by Saman Hosseinpur (Iran) | 2024 | 17:45

In a Kurdish village, an elderly mother waits for her son to return from military service. After his long absence, she sets out to find him, only to uncover a secret that forces her to confront a dilemma about her son's identity.

Still from *Son*



*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

Islam: We Walk with You

Directed by Kazuya Isobe (Japan) | Filmed in Kyrgyzstan
| 2023 | 14:53

In a remote village of Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan, a family of four lives peacefully with their cherished son, Islam, who was born with cerebral palsy and cannot walk on his own. The village's isolation prevents access to proper rehabilitation. A mother pours milk tea while staring at the distant clinic, and a father and brother work on their car—all united by a single hope.

This film is dedicated to children with disabilities living in remote areas. All funds raised will be used to support their rehabilitation expenses.



Still from *Islam: We Walk with You*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Pail

Directed by Adel Alhaimi (Yemen) | 04:13

Pail is a poignant documentary that explores the deep connection between an elderly man, Hajj Abdullah, and the ancient city of Sana'a. For over six decades, Hajj Abdullah has devoted his life to restoring and preserving the city's historic architecture, becoming a vital thread in the fabric of its history.



Still from *Pail*

Nominated
International Professional

FILM

S

The Temple of the Eternal Sound

Directed by Jorge Caravotta (Argentina) | Filmed in Venezuela |
2024 | 11:00

The Temple of Eternal Sound is an introspective and spiritual short film that explores the transformative power of sound. In a serene and sacred setting, Tibetan bowls resonate, initiating a journey of deep healing. Through the ancestral vibration of these sacred instruments, the film narrates the awakening of the self to an altered state of consciousness where silence and sound converge. As the sound waves flow, the deepest corners of the human soul are revealed, confronting us with our shadows, our unhealed wounds, and our ungranted forgiveness. As the sound echoes, light and the rebirth of the self emerge, leading the viewer to a state of peace and deep understanding. *The Temple of Eternal Sound* is not only an exploration of healing through sound but also a reminder that everything in the universe communicates, and we are intrinsically connected by the vibration of existence.



Still from *The Temple of the Eternal Sound*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Like Aliens

Directed by Nico Muñoz (Argentina) | 2020 | 5:30

An artist creates miniature worlds from discarded materials, prompting us to rethink our role in the universe.

Joaquin Fargas designs natural ecosystems contained within sealed orbs, influenced only by external heat and light. These systems, like our planet, rely on light as an energy source to sustain the life cycles within.

These orbs serve as miniature representations of Earth, emphasizing its fragility and the responsibility of its inhabitants to care for it.



Still from *Like Aliens*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Forget-Me-Not

Directed by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan & Fabeha Monir (Bangladesh)
| 2024 | 6:48

On 25 July 1971, the Sohagpur massacre occurred in the village of Sohagpur in the Mymensingh district of East Pakistan (now Sherpur District, Bangladesh) during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Hafiza Bewa, a resident of Sohagpur, was married at the age of 14 to Ibrahim, the only child of a widowed mother. During the massacre, the Pakistani Army, guided by local collaborators, killed 187 villagers, including Hafiza's husband, uncle, and cousin, leaving her drenched in her husband's blood. Although she survived by hiding, Hafiza lost her entire family. After the war, she returned to find her home destroyed and now spends her remaining days haunted by the memories, endlessly searching the fields for the faces of her lost loved ones.



Still from *Forget-Me-Not*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Gando

Directed by Teymour Ghaderi (Iran) | 2022 | 7:57

In the Sistan and Baluchestan province of Iran, girls must travel long distances to fetch water from ponds, where they face the danger of attacks by gando, a type of Iranian crocodile. These attacks have led to many children losing limbs. Despite the danger, the people of the province hold a respectful belief that the presence of gando indicates the availability of water. This documentary tells the story of nine-year-old Hawa, who lost her hand to a gando.

Still from *Gando*



*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Labe God

Directed by Rayehe Mozafarian (Iran) |
2023 | 16:23

A film about a traditional Iranian sport that women are not
allowed to participate in.



Still from *Labe God*


Nominated
International Professional

FILMS

Lady of the Graves The Voice that Shatters the Silence

Directed by Mohamed Allali (Morocco) | 2023 | 17:43

Since childhood, he has been haunted by his grandmother's tales of the *Mule of the Graves*, a frightening legend from a remote village in the Atlas Mountains. After her passing, he decides to return to his ancestral land to uncover the truth behind her stories, reconnecting with his family who still resides in the region.



Still from *Lady of the Graves*
The Voice That Shatters the Silence

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILMS

A Hakka Song

Directed by Adrià Guxes (Spain) | Filmed in China
| 2024 | 11:00

A song is heard in the distance. It comes from the Hekeng village, famous for its ancient earthen buildings, also called tulou. It is where the last original Hakka families live amidst the exodus of those looking for a more modern environment. Among them there is Zhang Houyin, an old man concerned about the state of the village's temple; or his daughter-in-law, Pan Yi, who spends all day guiding tourists around these impressive structures. And there is also Zhang Weibo, her little son, who can find amusement even in the most rudimentary elements... Hekeng: a place frozen in time whose songs have endured for centuries.



Still from *A Hakka Song*

*Nominated
International Professional*

FILM

Journey to the End of Life

Directed by Yevangelina Kovalchuk (Poland) | 2024 | 10:17

Robert, a 55-year-old man, refuses to let a cancer diagnosis define him. The film depicts Robert's determination to live life to the fullest. He travels tens of thousands of kilometers on his bicycle with one goal: to savor the remaining time. During his journey, Robert encounters new people, experiences the kindness of strangers who offer him food and shelter, and faces various challenges that he overcomes with perseverance and a positive attitude. The documentary also presents Robert's reflections on life, death, and the meaning of life here and now, inspiring those he meets to appreciate the beauty of their own lives.



Still from *Journey to the End of Life*

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILM

SABYR

Directed by Marina Zibert & Damir Tanatov (Kazakhstan) | 2022
| 20:02

A dyslexic boy dreams of flying in his homemade plane with Madame de Laroche, a chicken pilot. This is a story of imagination and hope as he strives to take to the skies despite the challenges he faces.



Still from *SABYR*

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILMS

Space

Directed by Turar Takhyr (Kazakhstan) | 2024 | 4:23

In a remote, unknown place, children search daily for food. One day, they discover a long-desired television antenna. When they turn on the TV, they are astonished to see themselves featured on the news.



Still from *Space*

Nominated
Regional Professional

FILMS

Romeo

Directed by Tynistan Temyrzhan (Kyrgyzstan) | 15:10

A young boy makes the bold decision to confess his love to his classmate on the day of their performance at an abandoned, old club. In his eyes, she is his Juliet, and he's determined to become her Romeo.



Still from *Romeo*

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILM

One Client

Directed by Mirzo Begibaev (Uzbekistan) | 2023 | 7:04

In a heated debate over the existence and impact of fate, a father and son wager their futures. The bet involves an arranged marriage and the ownership of a bookstore, putting both their beliefs and lives on the line.



Still from One Client

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILM

In the Night

Directed by Danysh Akylbekov (Kyrgyzstan) | 2024 | 19:59

A burglar breaks into the house of a blind old man who recognises the burglar as his son and seeks redemption from him.



Still from In the Night


*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILMS

Pilgrim

Directed by Talgar Zamirbekovich Zamirbekov (Kyrgyzstan) | 2023
| 15:15

Everyone's life path is unique, and opportunities come only once. As the sole wanderer and pilgrim on this journey, you both create and dismantle everything through your own thoughts.



Still from Pilgrim

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILM

City of Dreams

Directed by Toktorova Edisa (Uzbekistan) | 2023 | 12:50

As children, we dream of many things—becoming astronauts, living richly, or achieving something extraordinary. Our young hero dreams of making money abroad, in a place with tall buildings and the right conditions. Though his talent for drawing is often overlooked, he sells apples at the market to support his family. His life and dreams take a turn when he meets an old museum employee.



Still from City of Dreams

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILMS

Aylin's Fairytales

Directed by Asel Asel Umaralieva (Kyrgyzstan) | 2024 | 12:02

In a magical world crafted by her loving parents, Aylin lives amidst nature's beauty and friendly animals. Her life feels like a fairytale, and her dreams take flight in harmony with this enchanting environment, transporting her to a realm of endless fantasies.



Still from Aylin's Fairytales

*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILMS

Coexisting With Wolves

Directed by Chingiz Samudin uulu (Kyrgyzstan) | 2023 | 20:00

Wolves have lived in the Celestial Mountains for many thousands of years, while the Kyrgyz people have called this region home for the past two millennia. With population growth and climate change threatening both, finding sustainable solutions for their future coexistence is crucial.

Still from Coexisting With Wolves



*Nominated
Regional Professional*

FILM

To Descendents on Demand

Directed by Aliman Toktogulova (Kyrgyzstan) | 16:40

This autobiographical film chronicles the life and creative journey of Bekesh Abdyldaev, one of the foremost documentary filmmakers in the history of Kyrgyz cinema.

Still from *To Descendents on Demand*



*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILM

The Choice

Directed by Gulnur Kalmukhambetova (Kazakhstan) | 15:00



Still from The Choice


*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILM

Sezim

Directed by Beknazar Seyitkazyevich Sadyrkulov (Kyrgyzstan) |
14:55

Bek, a 21-year-old passionate composer from Kyrgyzstan, lives for music, channeling his emotions and experiences into his craft. This film explores his life and how every aspect is intertwined with his art, while also delving into how his parents influenced his understanding of the world and music.



Still from *Sezim*

*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILM

Scared

Directed by the Children Laboratory ATOM (Kyrgyzstan) | 2024 |
13:36

A mini-almanac created by teenagers explores their fears and concerns in today's troubled world. What scares them? Is it darkness, heights, or something else entirely? This project delves into the sources of their anxieties and how they navigate them.

Still from *Scared*



*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILM

My Love Lives on the Field

Directed by Saadat Sataeva (Kyrgyzstan) | 2024 | 7:03

Former football player Kiyal recounts her first romance with the game itself. Through candid reflections on camera, she shares the highs and lows of her relationship with football—overcoming family criticism, embracing her passion, and celebrating the joys and challenges of their early connection.



Still from *My Love Lives on the Field*

*Nominated
Regional Student*

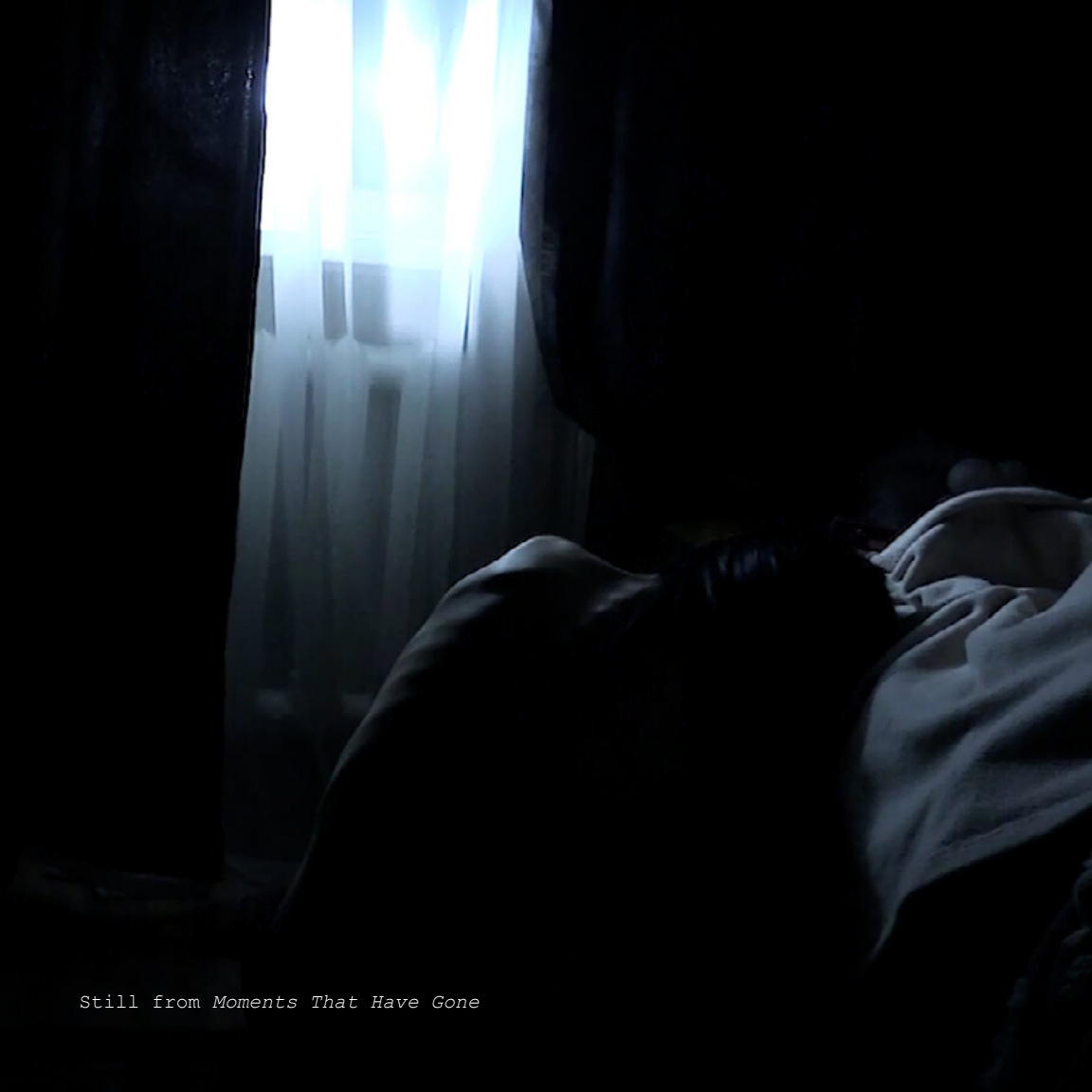
FILM

Moments that Have Gone

Directed by Saltanat Maratovna Ismanova (Kyrgyzstan)
| 2024 | 11:11

The film unfolds chronologically, starting with the author's childhood and evolving as she revisits her old writings. Through each diary page, filled with suffering and inner struggles, we also see glimpses of her happy childhood captured by her father. Reliving these hidden emotions, the story unfolds entirely within the confines of her room, symbolizing her inner world and isolation. The audience gains insight into her self-relationship, her journey through her own psyche, and her quest to understand her past.

Still from Moments That Have Gone



*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILMS

Inkar

Directed by Raiymbek Alzhanov (Kazakhstan) | 2022 | 17:22

In the 17th century, on the Great Kazakh Steppe, where myths often come true, a girl named Inkar flees after a failed magical ritual. Evil spirits seek to possess her body and her hereditary gift. Along her journey, she encounters two fugitive brothers, with whom she hopes to cross the Great Sea. Will they survive the perilous road ahead?



Still from *Inkar*

*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILMS

Blue Blue Card

Directed by Zhanna Semenova (Kyrgyzstan) | Filmed in
Lithuania, Netherlands, Russian Federation and Spain | 2024 |
11:11

Aleksei, a Russian immigrant, struggles to reconcile his
tender soul with harsh principles while navigating life amid
the invasion of Ukraine.



Still from Blue Blue Card

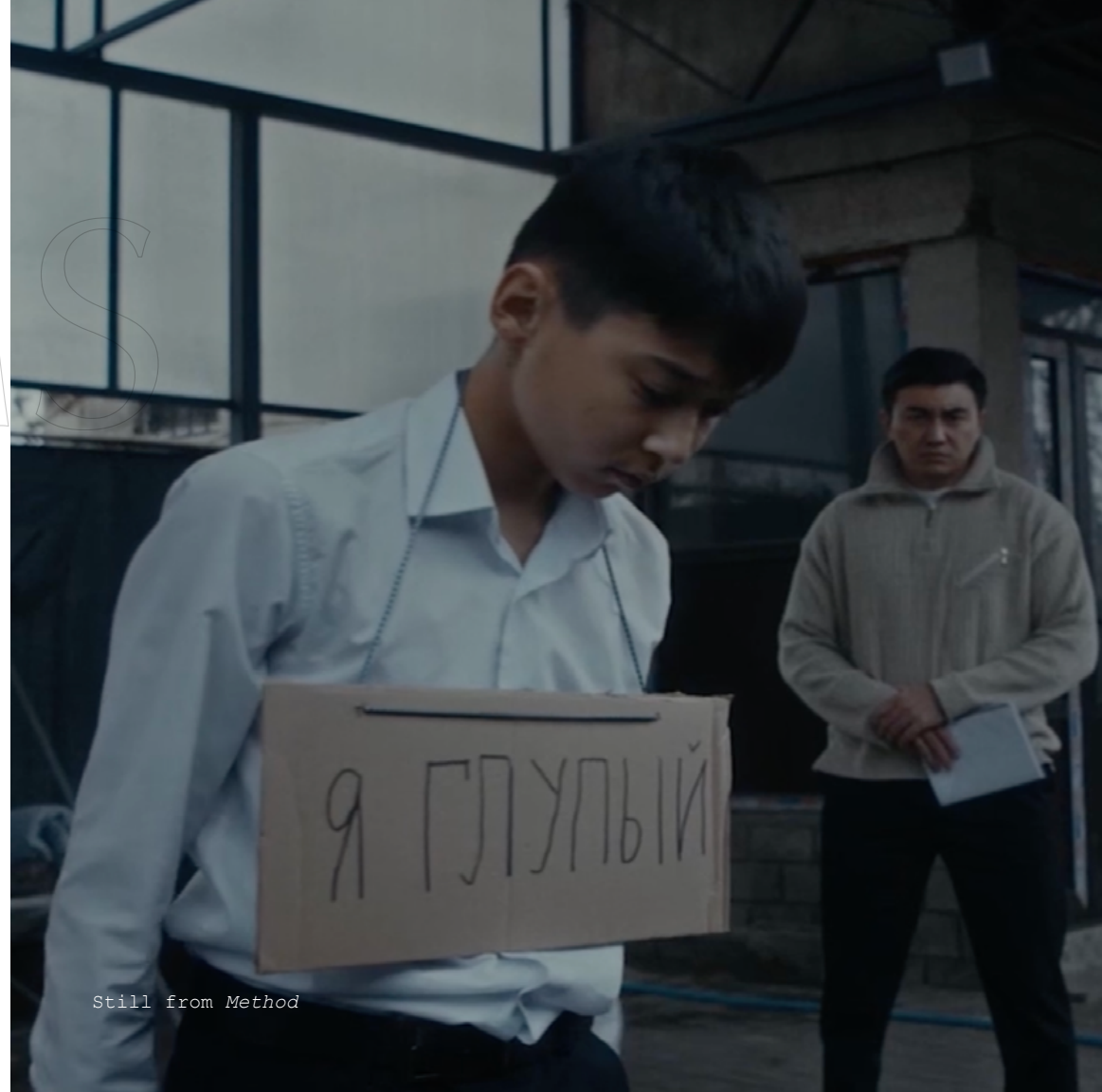
*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILMS

Method

Directed by Nurbek Sadvakasov (Kazakhstan) | 2023 | 13:51

A boy with hearing and speech impairments attends a regular school, where his father, who has endured harsh military training, insists on subjecting him to the same discipline. While the father aims to prepare his son for a cruel world, the boy misses out on the joys of childhood. A series of events prompts the father to reevaluate his approach to parenting.



Still from *Method*

*Nominated
Regional Student*

FILMS

The Forgotten Religion

Directed by Abdul Ali Shavkatovich Lalbekov (Kyrgyzstan) |
Filmed in Tajikistan | 2024 | 18:00

Still from *The Forgotten Religion*



“Aesthetics, Care, and Action” Symposium

At a time of unprecedented social, environmental, and economic challenges, including catastrophic climate change, and the Faustian compact we seem to be making with AI, the symposium, held as part of Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky Festival, offers a space to reflect on the character, value, and relevance of aesthetics in the contemporary world. Aesthetics has undergone various theoretical guises in past centuries. As transcendental judgement in Baumgarten and Kant, an instrument of social change and revolution in Marxism, unconcealment in Heidegger,

experience in Dewey, force in Menke, political arkhe in Rancière, everyday affairs in Saito et al, aesthetics proves an elusive concept enmeshed in a dynamic heterogeneity of outlooks and discourses. As Derrida (1981) maintains, there is as much concealed as there is revealed in every theory, and this can only be shown through deconstruction.

The history of aesthetics thus entails histories of deconstruction, dismantlement, unfoldment, and yet the conclusive delineation remains distant, delayed, if not impossible.





Symposium Contributors

(in alphabetical order)

- Soheil Ashrafi, *University of Central Asia*
 Tracie Costantino, *California Institute of the Arts*
 Frank Feltens, *Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art*
 Michael Garbutt, *UNSW Sydney*
 Prudence Gibson, *UNSW Sydney*
 Madina Junussova, *University of Central Asia*
 Altyn Kapalova, *University of Central Asia*
 Elena Kolesova, *University of Central Asia*
 Freya Mathews, *Latrobe University*
 Nico Roenpagel, *Wevolve, Berlin*
 Anisa Sabiri, *University of Central Asia*
 Richard Shusterman, *Florida Atlantic University*
 Gina Wall, *Glasgow School of Art*

What has aesthetics ever done for anybody?

Soheil Ashrafi, University of Central Asia
Michael Garbutt, UNSW Sydney

In a world grappling with climate change, poverty, war, rampant materialism, commercialism, hyperconnectivity, a collective attention deficit disorder, and emergence of AI, we want to question the role and value of aesthetics in addressing these challenges. Our interest in this topic comes from a decade of work, first in art museums, later in the role of aesthetics “beyond the art museum” the most recent framing of which involves fieldwork in Kyrgyz mountain communities. Our participatory research design involves collaborations with the people of the Tian Shan (The Mountains of Heaven) region of Kyrgyzstan, whose everyday experiences represent a rich site of aesthetic enquiry. Through contemplative, somatic, and embodied practices, we explore the relationship between the self and Other. As we will argue, this relationship is grounded in the cultivation of a sense of inner truth, unconcealed when the sensing agent experiences itself through being sensed. In different ways, the contributors to this symposium extend this line of enquiry, exploring how aesthetic practices can cultivate empathy, inspire action, and reimagine our relationship with the human and more-than-human world. By bringing together diverse perspectives, we hope to foster a dynamic conversation about how aesthetics can contribute to meaningful change and nurture a more caring, life-enhancing, and sustainable futures.



Japanese Aesthetics: Now and Then

Frank Feltens,
Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art

Over centuries, artists and historians have built a vast framework of aesthetic terms and concepts. Yet today that macrocosm of aesthetic inquiry is often reduced to cliched notions of “wabi-sabi” and “Zen” as synonyms of Japanese culture and historic taste. The story of Japanese aesthetics and their applicability to life today is much more layered than that. When delving into the history of Japanese aesthetics and keeping in mind that any art object produced in Japan historically was meant to be lived with, raises interesting potentials for considering Japan as a touchstone for the turbulent world we live in. In this short presentation, I focus on a few select concepts of Japanese aesthetic expression and contemplate how they might resonate with contemporary concerns.



Vegetal Aesthetics

Prudence Gibson,
UNSW Sydney

Over the last 15 years, evidenced discoveries in plant science, such as plants' capacities to memorise, learn and communicate, have influenced contemporary philosophy, particularly aesthetics. There are challenges to art praxes that incorporate plants, in light of this new knowledge. Artists are now asked to avoid subject/object dyads by avoiding flattening, framing or instrumentalizing the vegetal world. These aesthetic difficulties hound art and they hold creative people accountable for ensuring the independent agency of plants. This presentation grapples with the aesthetic complexities of new plant-human relations and follows the impact of new plant knowledge on vegetal aesthetics. It proposes new aesthetic categories and focuses on the recent urban forest created by the Dirt Witches in Barlow Street Sydney as a case study in plant aesthetics.



Incorporating Wisdom into a Framework of Care in Aesthetic Education

Tracie Costantino,
California Institute of the Arts

Addressing the symposium's question, "Does an ethics of care and compassionate action require an aesthetic framework?", I will explore the possibility of a framework that marries Dewey's conception of the transformative potential of aesthetic experience as action and the contributions of wonder, with feminist and indigenous theories of practical wisdom that ask us to consider how we ought to act in relation to the care for our world and each other. This exploration will be grounded within the context of aesthetic education.



Can aesthetics play a key role in our approach to the present era of Earth Systems Collapse?

Freya Mathews, Latrobe University

Is aesthetics as a distinct mode of attentiveness-to-things a function of agrarian and post-agrarian forms of society organized around an ethos of production - of 'artefacture' (the creation of artifacts), building and architecture, manufacture and industrialism? More particularly, does it stem from an ethos of design that inevitably accompanies the imperative to produce what we need for ourselves rather than relying, in pre-agrarian style, on ecologically attuned forms of direct collaboration with local environments to provide for our needs? As producers - artisans, builders, farmers, industrialists - we need design principles to guide our production. Is aesthetics, with its reference to various culturally relative criteria for appraisal, a distillation of these criteria, pertaining particularly to what makes artefacts (including those created in the name of art) pleasing to their intended users? I shall argue that a pre-agrarian orientation to the world reveals the contingency of both design, as an ethos, and aesthetics, as a form of sensibility. This opens up the possibility of an alternative approach to economic and cultural praxis.



Aesthetics as Entangled Worldmaking

Gina Wall,
Glasgow School of Art

Yuriko Saito argues that aesthetics plays a significant role in the communal, social effort of human worldmaking. I propose that the embodied turn offers an opportunity to rethink the aesthetic in order to open an understanding of its potential for supporting ethical more-than-human relations. In contradistinction to human-world relations as observer-observed, the aesthetic experience could be reconsidered in terms of material and psychological affect, generative of the world's continual becoming.

In response to the symposium provocation that the embodied turn holds to a notion of pleasure that is ethically problematic, I speculate that given the deep physiological embodiment of psychological affect, perhaps the question should be: how might affect, emergent through intra-action, support a care-full worlding of the world in more-than-human communities? What might be gained from diffracting the aesthetic experience through the lens of Karen Barad's ethico-onto-epistemology, an affective ethics of entanglement?

The Aesthetics of Tantric Hedonism

Nico Roenpagel,
21st-century mystic and embodiment researcher

In a materialist world that sells beauty, pleasure and individual freedom as the sole pathways to happiness, the philosophy of tantra can help generate a new lens: towards a reinvention of ethical hedonism. Tantra is based on the assumption that pleasurable and painful experiences as well as conventionally beautiful and ugly phenomena can equally contribute to cultivating insight, wisdom, and happiness.

Applying such a radical integration of polarities, taboos, shadow and discomfort to the pleasure-driven principles of hedonism generates a framework for an ethics of acceptance and compassion beyond the merely beautiful. Further, a tantric approach to hedonism acknowledges that individual and collective healing is profoundly intertwined. Drawing on a case study of an organisation, Hedoné, that promotes ethical hedonism through festivals, events and education, this presentation proposes psycho-emotional and spiritual healing as one dimension among political, economic, ecological and other forms of necessary planetary change making.

Somaesthetics, Self-Care, and Care for Others

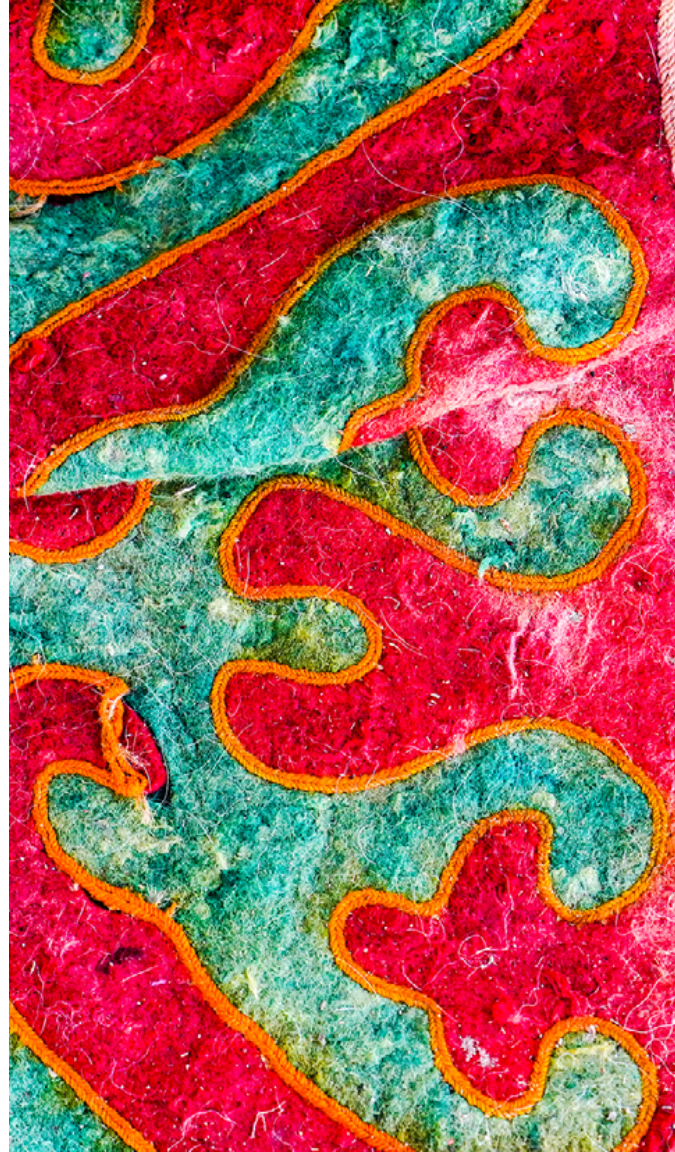
Richard Shusterman,
Florida Atlantic University

Somaesthetic attention to one's bodily feelings and form is often taken as essentially superficial and selfish. My talk will show, however, how such attention is not only crucial to self-care but also to caring for others. Key to the argument is the concept of soma - the living sentient, purposive body that is essentially implicated and shaped by an environment that is both material and social. The soma's self-awareness includes an awareness of that environment and thus opens to the others in that environment. The soma is not only the locus of perception but also the medium of all our action in the world. This includes the action of caring; and genuine care implies real action rather than merely good intentions.

Crafting Resilience: Women-entrepreneurs, aesthetics, and traditional creative practices in Kyrgyzstan

Elena Kolesova,
University of Auckland;
University of Central Asia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to severe economic crises in every former Soviet state, including the Kyrgyz Republic. When men lost their jobs and subsequently their status in the society, women used traditional craft skills to produce felt rugs (shyrdak) and other traditional and new products that could generate income, ultimately paving the



way for economic independence and personal satisfaction for many rural and urban women during the difficult years that accompanied the construction of the independent state. In this presentation, I discuss how life, art and mass culture then and now interconnect through the everyday aesthetic experience of women who work in the craft and arts sector in Kyrgyzstan.

Enabling Community Participation in Redefining Urban Aesthetics for Resilience

Madina Junussova,
University of Central Asia

The presentation asserts the necessity of redefining the beauty of the urban environment through a participatory community engagement approach. Rather than imposing external expert perspectives on the quality of the urban environment, it emphasizes understanding and cultivating an internally driven aesthetic that resonates with the community's unique cultural and environmental context. We will explore how such an approach enhances the sense of satisfaction and emotional belonging among residents and fosters a more profound understanding of ownership and responsibility towards re-thinking and re-using their living environments. By prioritizing local voices in defining what is aesthetically pleasing and meaningful, we advocate for a model of urban resilience rooted in the community's vision of resilience and sustainability.

Woman, Life, Freedom: The Role of Art in the Struggle for Human Rights in Central Asia

Altyn Kapalova,
University of Central Asia

The Museum of Feminist and Queer Art (MoFA+) is dedicated to advocating for the rights of women and queer individuals. Through the transformative power of art, MoFA+ sees itself as a vehicle to amplify civic voices, fostering greater expressiveness and persuasiveness. The initiative aims to cultivate a safe and inclusive environment for women artists, challenging the historical dominance of male artists in public art spaces to elevate the visibility of women artists. In Central Asia, women artists often encounter barriers to resources and recognition compared to their male counterparts across various artistic disciplines. Nevertheless, there has been a significant rise in talented women artists in recent years, despite societal patriarchal structures. Their creativity not only inspires but also instigates change. This presentation delves into the symbiotic relationship between art, life, and the pursuit of social change, highlighting the contributions of women and queer artists within the MoFA+ framework.

An Axe for the Frozen Sea Within Us

Anisa Sabiri,
University of Central Asia

Cinema, emerging as a technical miracle but quickly co-opted as a tool of power and capital, institutions, and canons of dramaturgy, remains a potent servant of the 'aesthetic regime of politics' (Plato). Tajik filmmaker Anisa Sabiri, examining Central Asia as a juxtaposition of empires, colonial legacy, and challenged voices, invites us to imagine a cinema of emancipation - one that grants a voice to both the individual and the collective, reconstructing the universe by deconstructing the established order. Sabiri questions how such a performance can achieve

liberation through a rebirth into a more uninhibited form of speech. By exploring the cinema industry's history in Central Asia from the Soviet era to the present, the artist reimagines the future of Central Asian cinema, freed from dominant power structures and hierarchies. Just as the destruction of visual hierarchies can have its political analogue, cinema has the potential to reshape the relationship between artists, their land, and their communities, ultimately achieving visibility and empowerment.





Multimedia Exhibitions

celebrating everyday aesthetics in a
world of villages.

My Mountain of Heaven - Kyrgyzstan
Seed Forms - Tajikistan
Night Journey - Iran

The traditional village
may seem like a relic
of the past, but in some
sense, we all live in
villages—whether they
are rural, urban,
suburban, or even
digital. Whatever form
they take, the small
communities we inhabit
and identify with are
vital to our lives.



My Mountain of Heaven

Michael Garbutt, Soheil Ashrafi and
Sehar Naz Janani | Kyrgyzstan

When the future seems to belong exclusively to the city, how do the residents of Dobolu, a remote Kyrgyz mountain village, experience daily life and maintain their deep connections to nature? This exhibition at Naryn AS Art Gallery offers a window into Dobolu's everyday life, its places, its people, and the connections between them. In one room, a multimedia installation immerses visitors in the landscape and presents portraits of the residents we met. In another room, located in front of the yurt that is part of the gallery's permanent collection, a living room table is set with the foods and beverages typically offered to guests in village homes. Visitors are invited to join Dobolu residents at the table and view a photographic slideshow that highlights the haunting everyday aesthetics of domestic life. From October 2024, the geo-tagged photographs can also be viewed on Google Maps.



Seed Forms transports viewers to the mountainous landscape of Pamir, at the source of the Panj River, which divides Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

There, artist Sabina Khorramdel and Zeny Ogrisseg—a yogini, chant leader, and mystic of sound—performed a collaborative ritual to heal cultural suppression in the

region and honor its ancient spiritual traditions.

This installation captures Ogrisseg chanting primordial universal syllables that flow along the river to the Wakhan Corridor. The soundscapes feature mantras from the Tibetan Bön tradition, believed to have originated in a land called Tagzig (a name thought to be an early form of

“Tajik”). Khorramdel meditates on these sounds and translates them into another dimension through abstract painting. Her easel draws inspiration from traditional Central Asian timber door portals adorned with intricate vegetative motifs and solar imagery from the Badakhshan region. The muslin canvas, serving as a

symbolic threshold, invites contemplation of transcendence and a journey into an inner, intuitive, and metaphysical realm. This multi-sensory experience immerses viewers in the land of Pamir, inviting them to connect with the sacred vibrations of the region’s spiritual heritage.

Seed Forms

Sabina Khorramdal | Tajikistan





Still from *Night Journey*

Night Journey

Ehsan Zareie | Iran

In *Night Journey*, the medium of film transcends the boundaries of cinematic conventions and the script. This work invites the audience to engage with the film on an imaginative level, where minimal dialogue dissolves into a night sound and imagery is only to enrich an auditory experience akin to the recitation of a poem.

As the car travels through the landscape, night itself becomes the subject, where the interplay of sound and light—two fundamental elements of cinema—carries the weight of the narrative. Here, the filmmaker's connection with the audience is distilled to its purest form, relying on the delicate balance of what is seen and heard, inviting viewers to lose themselves in the mystery of night and the human condition.

Philosophical Encounters with Richard Shusterman

An evening with Prof. Richard Shusterman,
Dorothy F. Schmidt Eminent Scholar in the
Humanities at Florida Atlantic University.

Philosophical Encounters with Richard Shusterman is a documentary film, directed by Pawel Kuczyński about the life and work of philosopher Richard Shusterman. It has three related but independent modules, each almost 30 minutes long. The first is *The Role of a Philosopher*, while the other two encounters go more closely into Shusterman's career and are respectively titled *Making a difference* and *Inspirations and Influences*. These two encounters explain Shusterman's transcultural work and international impact in philosophy and aesthetics,

including his pioneering project of somaesthetics and his experiments in performance art. Following that work through its presence in France, Germany, Poland, China, and Japan as well as the United States, the film connects his personal life experiences with his philosophical theories. Avoiding the long interview format, the film works largely through visual images and short dialogical responses where Shusterman explains his philosophical ideas and their emergence from his nomadic life.



Ruyò Journal: Watching Rivers

Founder Sabina Khorramdel & 02 Edition Curator Anisa Sabiri

The talk explores the intricate process of establishing and maintaining an artist-run platform dedicated to developing critical discourse in Central Asian arts, film, and theory.

The platform's primary mission is to cultivate a vibrant space for intellectual exchange, artistic exploration and talent support. Offering a behind-the-scenes look at the platform's journey, the speakers draw on its unique position within the Central Asian arts landscape and the challenging but exciting navigation of the region's cultural, political, and social dynamics to carve out its distinctive niche.

Sehar Naz Janani, 2024, digital image created in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator

Falling Into Sky

Lucy Palmer, Chris Long and Lé Lé

This immersive audio visual and interactive creative session will take participants on a journey through new dimensions of the sky and its place in our everyday lives.

We will be focussing on the work of two artists. Chris Long is a US painter who describes himself as a nomadic sky watcher who's spent decades capturing the essence of its impact on his life as an artist and a human being.

The other artist is Lé Lé, a young rap poet, performance artist and singer based in East London, whose unique work is grounded in the human experience of the infinite and universal. During this two-hour session, participants will be collaborating on a "super poem" in response to this unique experience in the Creative Studio.



Naples Sunset IX by Chris Long, Oil on cradled wood panel

Digital & Virtual Experiments

An exhibition of contemporary digital media art that offers a space for creative conversations about "hypermediation" – how it influences our sense of self and shapes cultures in the increasingly digital world we inhabit.

To launch the exhibition, guest of honor, Paul Thomas, will give a talk entitled *The Art of Digital Human Interface Culture*.

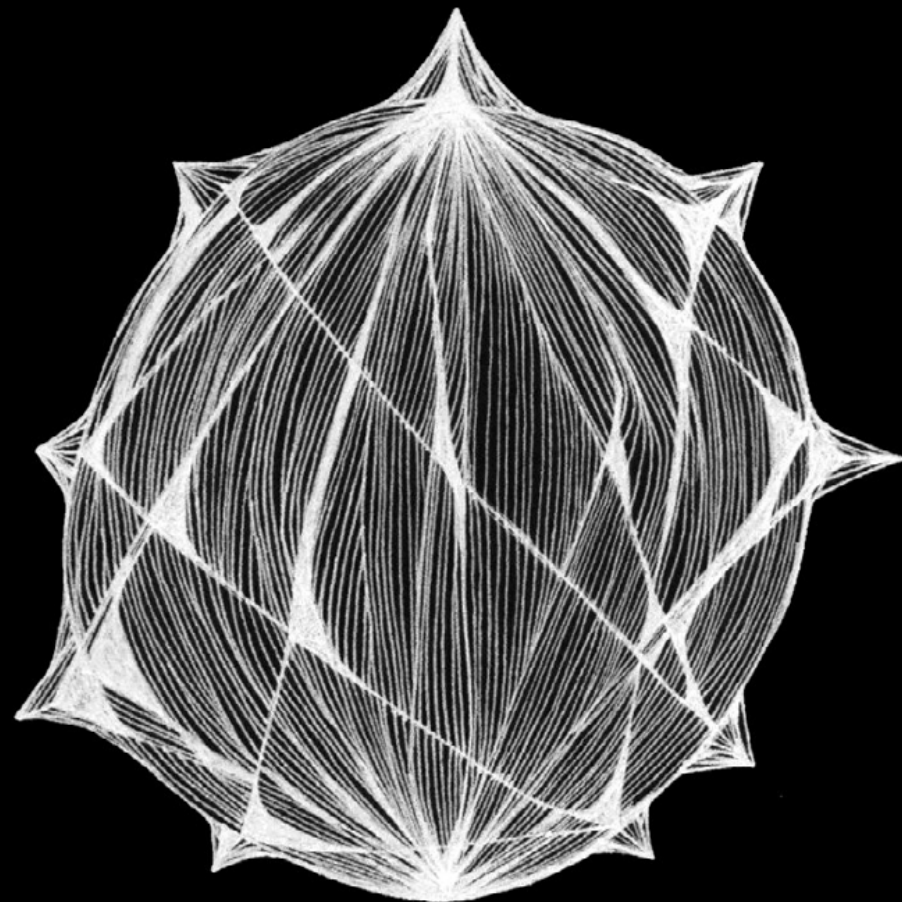
Paul Thomas is the founder and series chair of the International Transdisciplinary Imaging Conference series from 2010 to 2022. Thomas's current creative practice, the 'Quantum Chaos' artwork, is based on experiments conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Quantum Computation and Communication Technology at UNSW, where he is an honorary professor. His publications include *Quantum Art and Uncertainty* (Intellect Books, 2018).

EXPER IMENTS

Movement

Directed by Hossein Moradizadeh (Armenia) | 2024 | 03:00

Moving inwards, continuous and eternal.



Still from *Movement*

EXPERIMENTS

Dig In

Directed by Wheeler Winston Dixon (United States) | 2024 | 3:24

"I think the truly natural things are dreams, which nature can't touch with decay."

Bob Dylan

Jack Kerouac, Jacques Derrida and some Mexican food, plus dancing.

Still from *Dig In*

EXPERIMENTS

El Mago Georges

Directed by Katalin Egely (Argentina) | Filmed in Argentina and Hungary | 2020 | 4:17

We are not only endowed with free will but also with the responsibility to heed our gut feelings and follow our intuition—the wise part of ourselves. Traditionally, a magician was considered a wise person. Thus, if we have the courage to trust our inner wisdom, we can all embrace our inner magician.



Still from *El Mago Georges*

A still from the animated short 'Yesterday I found ...' showing a close-up of a textured, greenish surface with dark, branching lines. The texture is composed of small, repeating patterns, possibly representing a woven fabric or a biological structure. The dark lines are irregular and branch out across the frame, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall color palette is muted, with shades of green, grey, and brown.

EXPERIMENTS

Yesterday I found ...

Directed by Kinga Klajbor (Poland) | 2024 | 1:22

Surreal animated short about things from near daily life. Transition through collections of objects. Focusing on them and grounding them for a moment. To find something completely new in them. Inspired by the first sentence from the book *Pustostany* by Dorota Kotas.

Still from *Yesterday I found ...*

EXPERIMENTS

Interstellar Maze

Directed by Jiahao Zhang (China) | 2024 | 15:00

In the near future, humanity has perfected curvature engine technology and receives a mysterious signal from 1,300 light-years away. To uncover its origin, an astronaut embarks on a solo journey to a distant, unknown galaxy. There, she discovers a truth about human civilization that surpasses all her wildest imagination.



Still from *Interstellar Maze*



Sky Tour

A magical night-time adventure under the infinite sky.

Led by Michael Garbutt, co-author of *Mindful Eye*, *Playful Eye: 101 Amazing Activities for Discovery, Connection, and Insight*, we will lie on the grass, engage in playful, mindful activities, hear poems about the clouds, the moon and the stars ... and let our imagination soar through the infinite sky.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the University of Central Asia and in particular Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha (Chairman of UCA's Board of Trustees), Prof Christopher Gerry (Rector), and Prof Maxim Khomyakov (Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences) for their generous support.

We would also like to acknowledge our partner UNSW Sydney's Art and Design and our guest of honour, Hon. Prof. Paul Thomas, founder of the transdisciplinary conference on imaging at the intersection of art, science, and culture for his encouragement and enlightening advice. Of course, the Infinite Sky Festival is the result of the collective efforts of many. It would have not been possible without the contributions of the following institutions and individuals.

Ernest Abdyjaparov
 Jibek Abdylkasymova and UCA Operations Team
 Eliza Aidarova
 Sabina Khorramdel
 Emil Akhmatbekov
 Gulmira Akkulakova
 Zhamal Akmatova
 Meerim Baialieva
 Ant Banister
 Akylbek Chymyrbaev
 Melissa Cooperman
 Tracie Costantino
 Bernadette Hunter
 Adylbek Ismailov
 Altyn Kapalova
 Elena Kolesova
 Elmira Kuchumkulova

Pawel Kuczynski
 Zhanara Erkinbek kyzy
 Lé Lé
 Chris Long
 Elzada Mangeldieva and UCA Materials Management Team
 Almagul Menlibayeva
 Elvira Muratbekova
 Lucy Palmer
 Sophie Dia Pegrum
 Darian Popowicz
 Sascha Priewe
 Anisa Sabiri
 Urbaeva Siyagul Urkasymovna
 Erbol Sovetaly uulu
 Aidai Talantbekova
 Azamat Tankeev
 Nurlan Turganaliev and UCA IT Team
 Meerim Tursunalieva
 Meerim Toktosunova
 Ehsan Zareie
 and all artists, filmmakers, and student volunteers.

AS Art Gallery, Naryn
 Naryn Oblast Academic Musical Drama Theater named after M. Ryskulov
 Glasgow School of Art
 California Institute of the Arts
 The Aga Khan Museum, Toronto
 Aga Khan Development Network, Kyrgyzstan
 Historical Ethnographic Museum Named After Kayip Kalnazarov of Dobolu Village

Soheil Ashrafi & Michael Garbutt: Festival Co-Chairs
Sehar Naz Janani: Media, Design, and Event Manager
Nursultan Stanaliev: Film Festival Director

September 2024

Design, artworks and photography: Sehar Naz Janani



Scan the Programme



Published by the University of Central Asia.
© 2024 All rights reserved