



UNIVERSITY  
OF CENTRAL ASIA

*pg03 Manifesto*

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# NOMAD FESTIVAL 2025



*Naryn, Kyrgyzstan*

The **Nomad 2025**  
**cover** maps Naryn's  
river and the  
urban structures  
of the town as  
constellations  
against a night  
sky, where  
geography becomes  
astronomy. Through  
this fusion of  
cartography,  
starlight, and  
typographic  
rhythm, the design  
embodies the  
festival's  
intersection of  
art, science, and  
culture.



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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 the 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.



about THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF CENTRAL  
ASIA



*University of Central Asia, Naryn Campus.*



# the TEAM



## CO-CHAIRS, NOMAD FESTIVAL

**Dr Soheil Ashrafi**, UCA's Communications and Media Programme Director, brings global experience in media, culture, and design education. As a researcher and essayist he explores the intersections between hermeneutic phenomenology, aesthetics, and design pragmatism.



**Dr Michael Garbutt** is a writer, artist, documentary maker, and experience designer with a background in architecture, literature, and discourse analysis. His current research explores aesthetic experience across museums, galleries, and natural and urban environments.



**Film  
Festival  
Director**

**Nursultan Stanaliev** – Film and Television instructor at the University of Central Asia. His short films and documentaries have been recognised at national and international film festivals, including the “Best Director” award at the “Navsoz” IFF.



**Film  
Festival  
Programme  
Curator**

**Anisa Sabiri** – A Tajik-British film director and screenwriter, CHEVENING scholar, graduate of the London Film School and Busan Film Academy. Her works have been presented at the Venice Biennale, Busan IFF, Berlinale, and other prestigious venues. Member of Directors UK and the European Documentary Association.



**Media,  
Design,  
and Event  
Manager**

**Sehar Naz Janani** is a design strategist and multimedia storyteller whose work explores how visual narratives and systems thinking can transform cultural experiences. She played a crucial role in the foundation of the Nomad Festival, building it into a recognised platform rooted in place and memory.

## THE NOMAD STORY



*Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky - Film Festival Awards Ceremony.*

4th Edition

The first edition of the Nomad Festival, entitled "The Nomadic Image," was held in 2022 at the University of Central Asia (UCA) in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. This event combined the seventh Transdisciplinary Conference on Imaging with a film festival, establishing the foundation for what has become an annual tradition.

The festival returned the following year as "Nomad 2023: The Living Land." UCA's campus now hosted not only film screenings but also celebrations of Kyrgyz fashion and design, writing and graphic design workshops, and digital arts exhibitions. The festival embraced the town of Naryn itself, with film competition finalists screening at the municipal theatre.

"Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky" marked a watershed moment for UCA. This third edition established the festival as an annual event that attracts a



*The Nomadic Image 2022 – Conference in Session.*

vibrant community of scholars and creative practitioners from around the world. Celebrating UCA's 25th anniversary, Nomad 2025 remains committed to advancing both intellectual discourse and creative expression—traditional and experimental alike—with a special focus on film. What began as an academic gathering has transformed into an annual celebration that honours Central Asia's cultural heritage while exploring new frontiers in contemporary culture.

**Dr Soheil Ashrafi & Dr Michael Garbutt**  
*Nomad 2025 Co-Chairs*

# 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL NOMAD FESTIVAL

Founded at the University of Central Asia in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, the Nomad Festival bridges ancient nomadic traditions with the ambitions of contemporary development. Since its inception, it has grown into a space where film, art, and intellectual discourse converge to foster dialogue across borders. The fourth edition in 2025

coincides with UCA's 25th anniversary, welcoming storytellers from across Central and South Asia and beyond. Through screenings and workshops, Nomad amplifies emerging voices who challenge conventional narratives and explore new cinematic languages shaped by mountains, pastures, towns, and urban rhythms.

20  
25





## PROGRAMME NOTE

The 2025 Nomad Film Festival represents our commitment to bringing international cinema to the distinctive mountain community of Naryn, establishing the only festival in Central Asia organised by and for highland communities. Our programme showcases over thirty carefully selected films that address the region's most pressing concerns: our relationship with the land, environmental challenges, human dignity, female leadership, and community bonds.

Beyond presenting international works, the festival provides a vital platform for Central Asian cinema rarely accessible to general public. This positioning amplifies Naryn's role as a centre for contemporary artistic dialogue and social discourse, fostering urgent conversations that resonate throughout the region.

During the festival days, we connect celebrated regional artists with emerging talent, creating "horizontal" discussions that inspire and support local creative voices. This year's collaboration with Naryn's Univer Cinema and other local institutions demonstrates our dedication to strengthening local initiatives whilst

building sustainable cultural infrastructure.

We take particular pride in presenting our programme with Kyrgyz subtitles and featuring twenty films directed by women, most of whom are from Central Asia, reflecting our commitment to accessibility and diverse perspectives. The festival experience extends beyond screenings through facilitated discussions with filmmakers and jury members, offering residents and visitors alike the opportunity to engage directly with contemporary cinema and its creators.

Our vision sees Nomad Film Festival evolving into a platform that celebrates community access to knowledge, arts, and education, developing a cultural sector that both serves and benefits from these mountain communities. Through this work, we aim to establish a lasting cultural landmark for Naryn whilst contributing to the broader artistic landscape of Central Asia.

We hope you'll join us in making this festival a meaningful celebration of cinema, community, and cultural exchange.

**Nursultan Stanaliev**, *Film Festival Director*  
**Anisa Sabiri**, *Film Festival Programme Curator*

## the JURY

Aktan Arym  
Kubat

JURY CHAIR

Zarrin  
Sanvar



Aktan Arym Kubat is one of Kyrgyzstan's most renowned filmmakers. His films, which include *The Adopted Son*, *The Light Thief*, *Centaur*, and most recently *Black Red Yellow*, have won international acclaim and brought Kyrgyz cinema to the global stage.

Zarrin Sanvar is a multi-disciplinary artist and filmmaker from Tajikistan. Her works, including the video installation *Free to Dream*, explore themes of childhood, memory, and self-discovery, and have been presented in international art and film platforms.

Arun  
Chadha



Arun Chadha is an acclaimed Indian filmmaker and documentary maker. He has directed over 75 films, winning national and multiple international honours, and has served on juries at prestigious festivals worldwide.

Robert  
Mentov



Robert Mentov is a Canadian filmmaker and cinematographer. Known for his striking visual style, he has worked on award-winning documentaries and narrative films around the world, bringing powerful stories to the screen with his distinctive lens.

Ehsan  
Zareie



Ehsan Zareie is an acclaimed Iranian filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist. Alongside filmmaking, his work spans poetry, writing, photography, and animation.



film festival  
PROGRAMME





Still from *Bell at Dusk*.



## BELL AT DUSK

Directed by Saadat Kazakbaeva

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 13:38

*Regional Short Fiction*

The old cobbler has  
lived alone for  
years, but his quiet  
life takes  
an unexpected turn  
when his radio  
breaks down.



# FURUGH

Directed by Odina Mahmad

Tajikistan | 2025 | 21:57

*Regional Short Fiction*

The story of a  
seven-year-old  
deaf-mute girl torn  
between rejection  
and hope, and a  
father's desperate  
search for her care  
and safety.



Still from *Furugh*.



Still from *Once Upon A Time In Korgazhino*.



## ONCE UPON A TIME IN KORGAZHINO

Directed by Aray Karimova

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 17:52

*Regional Short Fiction*

Eleven-year-old  
Aslan flees an  
autumn children's  
camp after hearing  
of Lake Shaitankol,  
said to grant wishes  
in exchange for  
sacrifice — and his  
only wish is to bring his mother  
back.





# ANSAR

Directed by Anuarbek Khamitov

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 5:00

*Regional Short Fiction*

Ansar, who helps his mother clean the apartment building where she works as a janitor, is torn between duty and his dream of playing soccer with friends.



Still from *Ansar*.



Still from *Etude*.



## ETUDE

Directed by Mumin Latifi

Tajikistan | 2025 | 16:00

*Regional Short Fiction*

Etude tells the story of 10-year-old Zafar, born into a family of hereditary musicians but drawn instead to street football. At its heart lies a generational conflict — fathers and sons divided over tradition — as Zafar struggles for the freedom to choose his own path.



# FIRST TIME

Directed by Meerim Dogdurbekova

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 11:21

*Regional Short Fiction*

A motherless  
girl undergoes a  
profound change  
that marks her  
passage into  
adulthood, while  
her father  
remains unaware  
of her physical  
and emotional  
struggles.



Still from *First Time*.





Still from *Lukhtak*.



# LUKHTAK

Directed by Samariddin Mukhitdinov

Tajikistan & China | 2025 | 15:16

*Regional Short Fiction*

Facing financial  
hardship, a Tajik  
family marries  
off their underage  
daughter for a  
bride price,  
trapping her  
and her younger  
sister in a  
generational cycle of suffering.



# DERT

Directed by Ali Zhetpis

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 12:07

*Regional Short Fiction*

In the Kazakh  
steppe, a family's  
quiet morning is  
disrupted when two  
strangers leave a  
slot machine behind.

As Merei becomes  
entranced by the  
game, tension rises and time itself  
seems to stand  
still.



Still from *Dert*.



Still from *The Late Wind*.



# THE LATE WIND

Directed by Shugyla Serzhan

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 22:34

*Regional Short Fiction*

A young pregnant woman grapples with an uncertain future as her boyfriend vanishes, leaving her searching for answers amid city turmoil.





# PAIN OF YORE

Directed by Alisho Qonunov

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 10:00

*Regional Short Fiction*

An otherwise  
enthusiastic  
professor of  
literature,  
teaching "War  
and Peace", is  
disheartened by  
an inattentive  
classroom, which  
prompts him to recall and share  
his own war story  
- a story of  
tragedy, despair,  
and pain.



Still from *Pain of Yore*.



Still from Rock Berkut.



# ROCK BERKUT

Directed by Tamerlan Almanov

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 11:33

*Regional Short Fiction*

Berkut, a hyperactive boy, discovers rock music and finds unexpected calm and focus – prompting his mother to enroll him in lessons.



# ILI ILI

Directed by Guzel Zakir

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 15:29

*Regional Documentary*

A collective  
memory of the first  
Uyghur migration  
from China to  
Kazakhstan (1950–  
1966), where the  
Ili River emerges  
as both a landmark  
and a symbol of  
migration's losses and hopes.



Still from *Ili Ili*.



Still from 8:59 AM Forever.



## 8:59 AM FOREVER

Directed by Ulyana Toporovskaya

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 19:45

*Regional Documentary*

Every six months, Jon and Joelle wait for the call that will decide whether they have more time together.





# BALQASH SONG

Directed by ArtCom Collective

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 19:40

*Regional Documentary*

The video essay  
draws on the  
heritage of  
qazaqiliq—the  
tradition of free,  
nomadic life that  
enabled Kazakh  
communities to  
develop resilient  
survival strategies even  
under conditions  
of colonization,  
forced  
sedentarization,  
and the famine  
known as  
Asharshylyq.



Still from *Balqash Song*.



Still from *Aralkum*.



# ARALKUM

Directed by Daniel Faezi & Mila Zhluktenko

Uzbekistan & Germany | 2025 | 13:43

*Regional Documentary*

Aralkum is  
a cinematic  
kaleidoscope where  
the Aral desert  
flickers back into  
its former sea —  
sand becomes water,  
and an old man once  
more a fisherman.



# COMRADE POLICEMAN

Directed by Assel Aushakimova

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 12:19

*Regional Documentary*

A journalist  
from Kazakhstan's  
state television  
is assigned to  
cover a police  
image campaign.



Still from *Comrade Policeman*.



Still from *We Are (At) Home*.



# WE ARE (AT) HOME

Directed by Shakhzoda Mirakova & Darya Gusmanova

Uzbekistan | 2025 | 13:51

*Regional Documentary*

The untold stories  
of the Luli,  
Central Asian  
Roma, highlighting  
their resilience  
and struggle for a  
rightful place in  
society.





# ALIKHAN'S VILLAGE

Directed by Dastan Borkosh

Kyrgystan | 2025 | 14:30

*Regional Documentary*

In his small  
village, Alikhan  
helps his father  
with chores before  
joining friends to  
play the traditional  
Kyrgyz game of  
alchiki, knowing  
everyone and their  
nicknames by heart.



Still from *Alikhan's Village*.



Still from *Provided*.



# PROVIDED

Directed by Soheil Rahimi

Iran | 2025 | 9:10

*International Short Fiction*

In exchange for  
her husband's  
release from  
prison, Zahra  
sets her own  
condition for the  
benefactors.



# LEFT-HANDED

Directed by Nasrin Mohammadpour

Iran | 2025 | 14:59

*International Short Fiction*

Maryam is a 38-year-old woman who heads a family of four. She decides to cut off her right hand while working in a poultry slaughterhouse because, in this way, she can get more money from insurance than losing her left hand to pay her debts.



Still from *Left-Handed*.



Still from *The Bag*.



## THE BAG

Directed by Habib Shahzad

Pakistan | 2025 | 8:31

*International Short Fiction*

Amid displacement,  
a boy's hold on  
holy relics becomes  
a fragile beacon  
of hope, where  
innocence speaks the  
secret language of  
the divine.





# XENA'S BODY

Directed by Occitane Lacurie

2025

*International Documentary*

A reflection on the  
iPhone as more  
than a mirror—an  
intimate device that  
tracks the body  
while entangling  
knowledge, power,  
and desire.

represents patience

Still from *Xena's Body*.





Still from *Feasting Junta*.



# FEASTING JUNTA

Directed by André Córdova Rudstedt

Chile | 2025 | 7:00

*International Documentary*

As Chile collapses  
under junta rule,  
its leaders  
indulge in lavish  
celebrations while  
the nation crumbles  
around them.



# A LONG LETTER TO LOVE

Directed by Nika Krikun

Ukraine | 2025 | 07:25

*International Documentary*

A two-part visual  
poem unfolds through  
dance, where each  
movement expresses  
the narrator's inner  
voice as she finds  
herself trapped in  
the abandoned house  
of her own mind.



Still from *A Long Letter to Love*.





Still from *In Zaynab's Heaven*.



# IN ZAYNAB'S HEAVEN

Directed by Ali Mehdi

Pakistan, Lebanon & United Arab Emirates | 2025 | 25:00

*International Documentary*

A Hazara filmmaker follows a gravestone maker, a water girl, and a man who buried his own limb, capturing their daily lives within a graveyard.





# THE SILENCE AFTER THE STORM

Directed by Alina Rizwan

Pakistan | 2025 | 10:47

*International Documentary*

In flood-stricken  
Sindh, a young boy  
rewrites his rain-  
soaked dreams as  
classrooms turn to  
rivers and lessons  
flow with resilience  
— a story of youth  
redefining life's horizon.



Still from *The Silence After the Storm*.



Still from Co-Exist.



# CO-EXIST

Directed by Komeil Soheili

Iran | 2025 | 12:00

*International Documentary*

On Iran's Hormuz  
Island, blind  
captain Dela  
sustains an old  
bread-making  
tradition with  
three unique island  
elements — fish he  
hears in the sea, natural  
salt, and edible  
soil — against a  
backdrop of rising  
geopolitical  
tension.



# MOTHER

Directed by Bayaman Asanaliev

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 12:02

*Regional Student*

Young documentary filmmaker  
Bayaman turns  
his lens on his  
mother, an  
obstetrician-  
gynaecologist,  
capturing the  
intensity and  
intimacy of a night  
shift in the maternity ward.  
Amid difficult  
births and quiet  
conversations, he  
discovers a world  
with its own rules  
and unseen heroes.



Still from *Mother*.





Still from *The Goldfish*.



# THE GOLDFISH

Directed by Aizhamal Mirbek

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 12:03

*Regional Student*

Sezim, a young girl, is left alone when her father - her only relative - mysteriously disappears.





# I PROMISE

Directed by Altynai Turgun & Nurkamal Zhetigenova

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 03:00

*Regional Student*

A college romance  
turns into a  
nightmare when  
a young woman,  
forced to sacrifice  
her future for  
marriage, confronts  
her husband's dark  
violence and must fight for her  
safety.



Still from *I Promise*.



Still from *A Dance Alone For Two*.



# A DANCE ALONE FOR TWO

Directed by Mehr Said

Tajikistan | 2025 | 12:00

*Regional Student*

In the past, a  
migrant worker,  
36-year-old  
Rano became  
an ambitious  
theatrical  
director in a  
theatre in a  
small Tajik town. Despite many  
difficulties, Rano  
has to make great  
efforts to breathe  
life back into  
the provincial  
theatre.



# STRINGS OF BELONGING

Directed by Umed Qurbonbekov

Tajikistan | 2025 | 20:00

*Regional Student*

A college romance  
turns into a  
nightmare when  
a young woman,  
forced to sacrifice  
her future for  
marriage, confronts  
her husband's dark  
violence and must fight for her  
safety.



Still from *Strings of Belonging*.





Still from *Roza Eje*.



## ROZA EJE

Directed by Faridun Karabozov & Erik Stybaev

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 19:04

*Regional Student*

For 30 years, Roza Eje has driven a milk truck through Karakol, enduring grueling physical labor and navigating complex human relationships. Her perseverance not only sustains her livelihood but also shapes the community around her.



Step away from the everyday rush with a contemplative walk from UCA's campus to the Naryn River, exploring mindful practices that connect you with yourself, others, and the landscape. By the river, author Lucy Palmer invites participants to collaborate with its rhythms—flow, erosion, entanglements—creating site-specific narratives that honour the river as an active partner in the creative process.

**Lucy Palmer** is an award-winning radio documentary maker, journalist, author, and editor.

**Paulie Doyle** is an investigative reporter at the Irish political news website The Ditch.

WORKSHOP

## Creative Walk & River Landscapes





## WORKSHOP

### Strategy as a Way of Creative Becoming

- ▼ We mostly believe
- ▼ creativity is
- ▼ about inspiration, but in reality, it's about how to navigate rejection, uncertainty and change without



losing yourself in the process. In this talk, Brand Strategist and Creative Director **Jon Jacobsen** will share his story and experimental methods accross

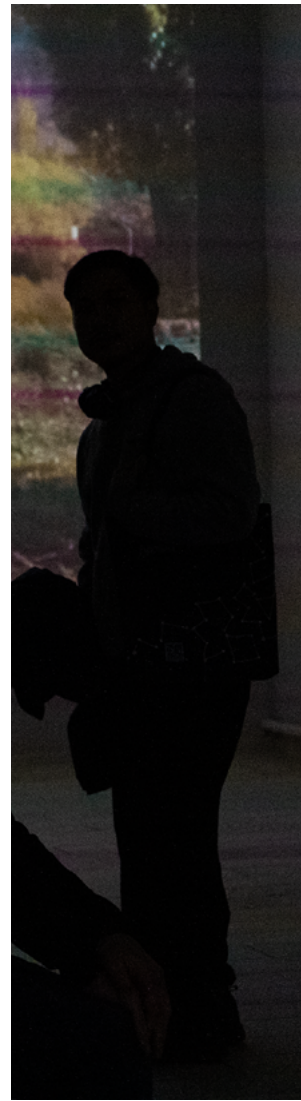
different creative industries, from the projects that flourished to the ones that fell apart, and how those moments of loss become turning points.

Strategy isn't a rigid business tool, but a way of becoming: it gives structure to chaos, direction to ideas and clarity to decisions. For filmmakers, designers,

communicators and creative entrepreneurs, this means building a practice that is both adaptable to commercial realities and rooted in personal meaning.



In this talk, you'll explore how strategy can help you protect your vision, sustain your career, and transform challenges - including grief - into creative energy.

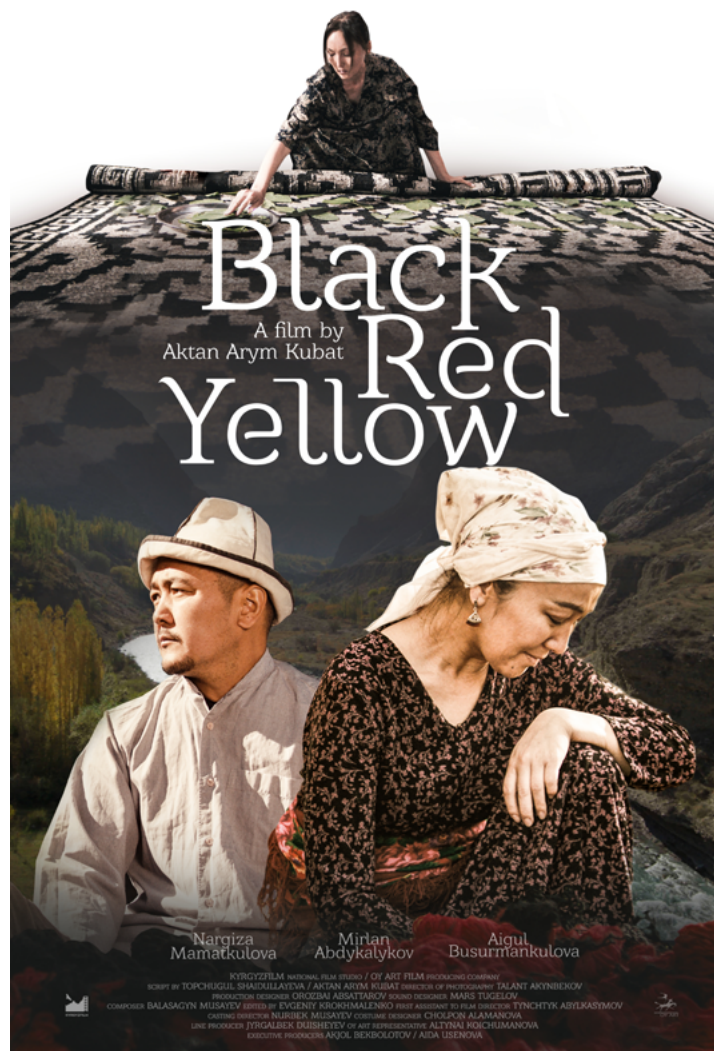


## SEMINAR

### THE ART OF KYRGYZ CINEMA

Acclaimed filmmaker **Aktan Arym Kubat** explores the traditions of Kyrgyz cinema and its role in shaping cultural identity. Drawing on his internationally awarded films, he reflects on the visual language of Kyrgyz storytelling, the challenges of filmmaking in Central Asia, and cinema's power as both a mirror of society and a bridge to the world.





## FESTIVAL OPENING FILM

*Black Red Yellow* is a feature film about three intertwined destinies, centered on a love between two ordinary villagers – a love that endures and uplifts. The story explores moral responsibility within the family and the need to cherish one another. At its heart is Turdugul, a weaver whose carpets reflect the lives of those they are made for: one black, one red, one yellow.

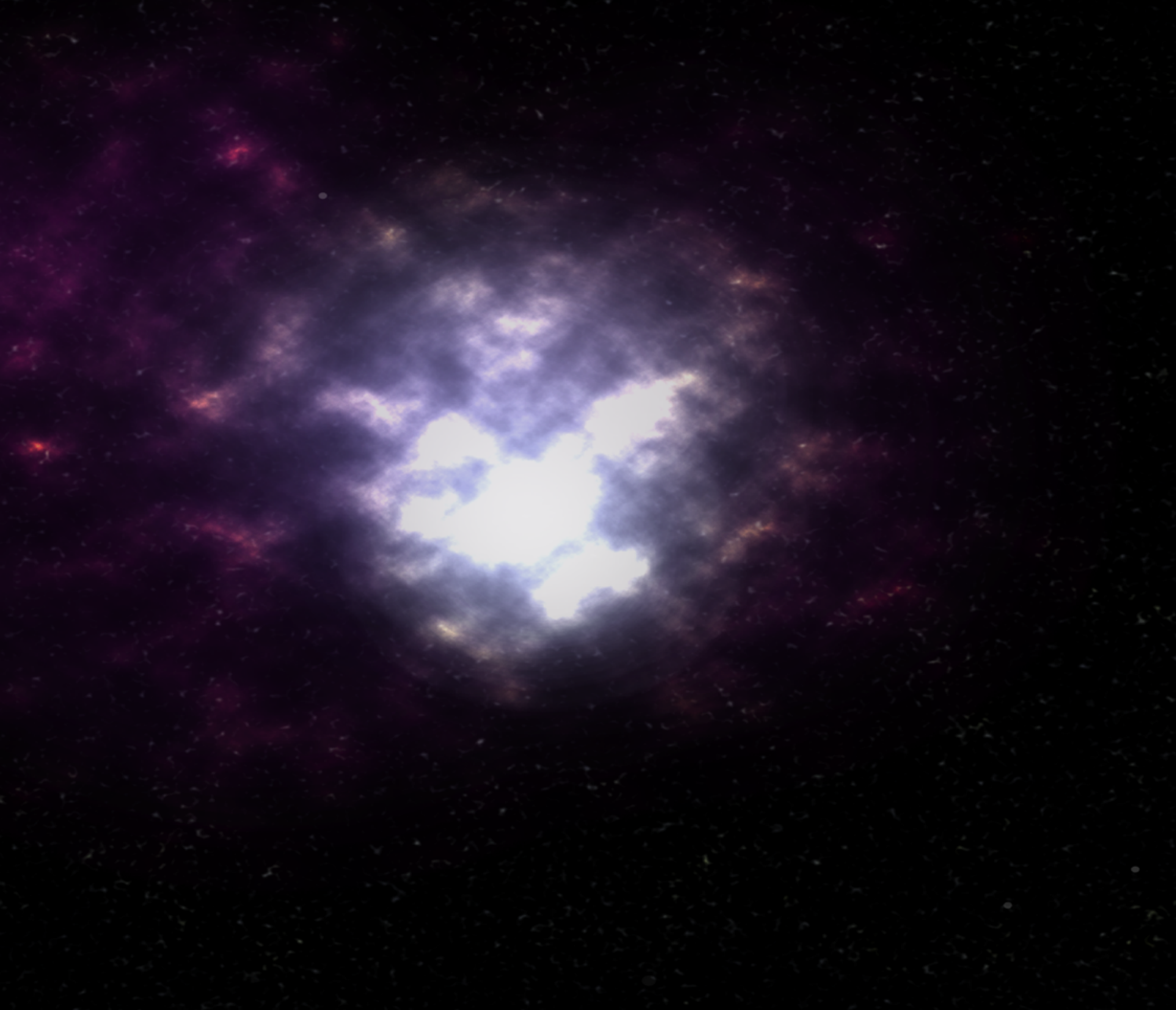
These colours embody human nature – black as calm and grounded, red as fiery and intense, yellow as nostalgic and melancholic. Though Turdugul is the village's only weaver, each carpet is unique, shaped by the soul it represents. Through her craft, the film reveals the emotional depth of tradition and how personality and destiny are woven into every thread.



## WORKSHOP

### STARGAZING

A magical night-time adventure under the stars. Led by **Michael Garbutt**, co-author of *Mindful Eye, Playful Eye: 101 Amazing Museum Activities for Discovery, Connection, and Insight* (Smithsonian Books), 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.



## PERFORMANCES

### TAMYR

▶▶▶ *Tamyr* (The Root) is a performance about a woman as the embodiment of Nature – her memory and her future. Three female figures – Root, River, and Fire – symbolize the past, present, and future of the Earth. Their movements reveal an inner conflict: forgotten origins, the fluidity of life, and the drive toward either destruction or renewal. Through the collision and reconciliation of these three bodies, the performance asks whether we are still capable of hearing the Earth's voice and returning to harmony with the source.

### KYZ

Staged from the ancient Kyrgyz folktale *Akylkarachach* and proverbs dedicated to women, *Kyz* blends the art of Kyrgyz puppetry with the aesthetics of Japanese Kabuki to create a striking new theatrical form.

The performance honours the high status, strength, and wisdom of women in Kyrgyz culture while raising urgent issues faced by women and adolescents today. At its heart is *Karachach*, who, after losing her mother, grows up guided by her father's love and the secrets of nature. Her peaceful world is shattered by the cruel *Karakan*, who seeks to claim her, but with courage and inherited wisdom, *Karachach* must fight for her destiny.



*KYZ Performance.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to the University of Central Asia (UCA) for its support of the Nomad Festival. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha (Chairman of UCA's Board of Trustees), Professor Christopher Gerry (Rector, UCA), and Dr Diana Pauna (Dean of the UCA's School of Arts and Sciences) for their very generous support in the Festival's fourth year, which also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the founding of UCA.

To present a festival of this scale in this anniversary year, involving significant contributions from UCA's three founding states (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan), is the work of many months and many individuals. We also wish to recognise our wonderful festival directors, Anisa Sabiri and Nursultan Stanaliev, as well as the many creatives and technical and administrative support staff who have made this fourth edition of Nomad Festival possible.

Elmira Kuchumkulova  
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 Elena Kolesova  
 Ehsan Zareie  
 Aktan Arym Kubat  
 Zarrin Sanvar  
 Arun Chadha  
 Robert Mentov  
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 Paulie Doyle  
 Jon Jacobsen  
 Rustam Pallaev  
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 Regina Asadbekova  
 Nurkokul Mirlan kyzy  
 and all artists, filmmakers, and student volunteers.

Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, Graduate School of Development, UCA  
 Naryn Oblast Academic Musical Drama Theater named after M. Ryskulov  
 Univer Cinema  
 Aga Khan Development Network, Kyrgyzstan  
 Artcom Collective  
 Naryn film collective

*Soheil Ashrafi & Michael Garbutt: Festival Co-Chairs*  
*Sehar Naz Janani: Media, Design, and Event Manager*

September 2025



Scan the Programme

Design by Sehar Naz Janani

<https://ucentralasia.org/nomad2025>





international  
festival

2025

ПОРТО