

Vyacheslav Akhunov

was born in 1948 in Och, Kyrgyzstan. He lives and works in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. — Selected shows since 2007 — **2016** *Quand fondra la niege où ira le blanc. Collezionismo Contemporaneo. Opere dalla collezione Enea Righi*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Italy — **2015** *The fourth prose*, curated by Marco Scotini, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy; *Balagan. Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places*, curated by David Elliot, Kuhlhaus Berlin, Berlin, Germany; *Project 35: The Last Act*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia; *Early Too Late. Middle East and Modernity*, curated by Marco Scotini, Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Bologna, Italy. **2014** *And the trees set forth to seek for a king*, curated by Raphie Etgar Museum On the Seam (MOTS), Jerusalem, Israel; *The Other & me*, curated by Jassim Alawadhi and Colin Reaney, Sharjha Art Museum, Sharjha, UAE; *The empty pedestal*, curated by Marco Scotini, Museo Archeologico, Bologna, Italy **2013** *The Red Line*, solo show curated by Marco Scotini, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy; *Lost to the Future*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore Biennale 2013, *If the World Changed*, Singapore; *More light*, 5th Moscow Biennale 2013, curated by Catherine de Zegher, Moscow, Russia; *Winter*, curated by Ayatgali Tuleubek and Tiago Bom, Central Asian Pavillion-55. Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy; *The Collection As A Character* MuHKA museum, Antwerp, Belgium; *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Central Asia and the Caucasus*, selling exhibition, Sotheby's London, 03.2013 **2012** *Documenta (13)*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Kassel, Germany; *Arsenale 2012*, Ukrainian Biennale of Contemporary Art, curated by David Elliott, Kiev; *Revolution vs Revolution*, Beirut Art Center, Beirut **2011** *I've Dreamt About*, MUDAM-Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; *Atlas. How to carry the world on one's back?*, Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany; *Between Heaven and Earth - Contemporary Art from the Centre of Asia*, Calvert22, London, UK; *Ostalga*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City, NY, USA; *Atlas. How to carry the world on one's back?*, ZKM - Zentrum für Kunst und Medien-technologie Karlsruhe, Germany **2010** *Watchmen, Liars, Dreamers (Erudition concrete 3)*, FRAC - Ile-de-France Le Plateau, Paris, France; *Ground Floor America*, Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark; *Lonely at the Top #5*, curated by Viktor Misiano, MuHKA, Antwerp, Belgium. **2009** *Changing Climate*, WUK Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria; *11th International Istanbul Biennial*, curated by WHW/What, How & for Whom collective, Istanbul, Turkey; *The view from elsewhere. Small Acts*, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane,

Australia; *For Keeps: Sampling Recent Acquisitions 2006 – 2009*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zeland; *Monument to Transformation 1989-2009*, City Gallery Prague, Czech Republic. **2008** *Busan Biennale 2008*, Busan, South Korea; *I dream of the stans: videos actuales de Asia central*, Museo de Arte de El Salvador, MARTE, San Salvador, Bahamas; *Traces du Sacré - Centre Pompidou - Musée National d’Art Moderne*, Paris, France; *Tracing Roads through Central Asia*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, USA. **2007** *Live Cinema/The Return of the Image: Video from Central Asia - Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia, USA; *Time of the Storytellers, curated by Viktor Misiano*, Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland; *52nd International Art Exhibition Venice Biennale*, Venice, Italy; *La Biennale de Montréal 2007*, Montreal, Canada.

Said Atabekov

was born in 1965 in Terek, Uzbekistan. He lives in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. — Selected shows since 2005 — **2016** *Look at me! Da Nadar a Gursky: i ritratti della collezione d'Arte Unicredit*, curated by Walter Guadagnini, UniCredit Pavilion, Milan, Italy. **2015** *Life is a legend*, curated by Dimitri Konstantinidis, Daria Evdokimova, Estelle Pietrzyk, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasburg, France; *Early Too Late. Middle East and Modernity*, curated by Marco Scotini, Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Bologna, Italy. **2014** *The Other & me*, curated by Jassim Alawadhi and Colin Reaney, Sharjha Art Museum, Sharjha, UAE; *The empty pedestal*, curated by Marco Scotini, Museo Archeologico, Bologna, Italy. **2013** *More light*, 5th Moscow Biennale 2013, curated by Catherine de Zegher, Moscow, Russia; *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Central Asia and the Caucasus*, selling exhibition, Sotheby's London, 03.2013 **2012** *Migrasophia*, curated by Sara Raza, Sharjah Museum, Maraya Art Center, UAE. **2011** *The Dream of Gengis Khan*, curated by Marco Scotini, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy; 54th Venice Biennale, Central Asia Pavilion, Venice, Italy; *Ostalga*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, New Museum, New York, U.S.A.; *4. Fotofestival The Eye is a Lonely hunter: images of humankind*, Mannheim – Ludwigshafen- Heidelberg, Germany; Winner of the Prince Claus Fund, Amsterdam, Netherland. **2010** *Rites without myths*, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy. **2009** *Lonely at the Top*, curated by Viktor Misiano, Muhka Museum, Antwerp, Belgium; *Son of the East*, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy – solo show; Photoquai 2009, Biennale des Images du monde, Paris, France; *Changing Climate*, Kunsthalle Wien, Austria; *Scènes Centrales*, Lille-3000, Lille, France. **2008** *Old/New Routes-A* Selection of video Art from Central Asia, BizArt, Shanghai, China.

2007 52st Venice Biennale, Central Asia Pavilion, Venice, Italy; *Time of Storytellers*, curated by Viktor Misiano, Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, Finland; Live Cinema, *The return of the Image*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA; La Biennale de Montreal 2007, Montreal, Canada; *Way to Rome*, SCCA, Almaty, Kazakhstan. **2006** 10th Media Art Biennale Free waves, Los Angeles, USA; Contemporary Art from Central Asia, Ujasdovskii Castle, Warsaw, Poland. **2005** 51st Venice Biennale, Central Asian Pavilion, Venice, Italy; 9th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey; *In the shadows of heroes*, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; X Prague Quadrennial, Prague, Czech Republic.

Saodat Ismailova

was born in 1981 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Selected shows since 2005 — **2017** *The Haunted*, Tromsø Kunstforening, Norway - solo show **2015 - 2017** Artist at Le Fresnoy, National Centre of Contemporary Art, France **2016** Artist in Residence, OCA, Office of Contemporary Art, Oslo, Norway **2014** *Celestial Circles* – solo show, Kunstsammlungen und Museen Augsburg, Germany; *Berlinale*, International Film Festival, Nomination for the best debut film, Berlin Germany **2013** *Winter*, curated by Ayatgali Tuleubek and Tiago Bom, Central Asian Pavillion-55. Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy **2008** Berlinale Talent Campus, Berlin Germany **2005** DAAD, Film program, residency. Berlin, Germany; *Fabrica goes East*, Fabrica works, Tashkent, Almaty, Kazakistan-Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Gulnara Kasmalieva & Muratbek Djumaliev G.Kasmalieva born in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 1960. M. Djumaliev born in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 1965. They live in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Selected shows since 2005 **2016** *Fotografia Europa 2016. The Via Emilia. Roads, journeys, borders*, curated by Diane Dufour, Elio Grazioli, Walter Guadagnini, Palazzo da Mosto, Reggio Emilia, Italy **2015** *Pas de deux - kg.ch.*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Yverdon-Les-Bains, Switzerland; *8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Gallery of Modern Art | Queensland, Australia; *Worlds in contradiction – Areas of globalization*, curated by Julia Brennacher, Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria **2014** *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, curated by Slavs and Tatars, Organized by Marker Foundation in occasion of Art Dubai 2014, Dubai, UAE; *Art Stage Singapore 2014*, curated by Charles Merewether, Central Asia Platform, Singapore; *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Istanbul to Kabul*, selling exhibition, Sotheby's London **2013** *In spite of it all*, Curated by Hoer Al-Qasimi, Sharjah Art Foundation, Collections Building, Sharjah, UAE, *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Central Asia and the Caucasus*, selling exhibition, Sotheby's London, 03.2013

2012 *Mapping mobilities exhibition*, curated by Christine Takengny, *Open Systems*, Wien, Austria; *Migrasophia*, curated by Sara Raza, Sharjah Museum, Maraya Art Center, UAE; *Gwanju Biennial: Round Table*, curated by Sunjung Kim, Mami Kataoka, Carol Yinghua Lu, Nancy Adajania, Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Alia Swastika, Gwanju, Korea **2011** *Between heaven and earth. Contemporary Art from the Center of Asia*, curated by David Elliott, Calvert 22 Foundation, London, UK; *4. Photofestival Mannheim*, Ludwigshafen – Heidelberg – Mannheim **2010** *A New Silk Road : Algorithm of Survival and Hope*, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy; Winners of 2010 *Prince Claus Award*, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Nominees *Artes Mundi Prize 2010*, Cardiff, UK **2009** On shortlist for *UK's art prize Artes Mundi*; *An Evening with Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev*, film screenings and events, MoMA, New York, USA; *Praxis. Art in Time of Uncertainty. 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art*, State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece **2008** *Eurasia. Geographic cross-overs in art*. MART. Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Italy; *Tracing Roads through Central Asia: On Traders' Dilemmas and Travelers' Perspectives*. YBCA. San Francisco, USA **2007** *Soft Power. Asian Attitude*. Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art. Shanghai, China; *Time of Story Tellers*, Kiasma Museum for Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland; *Progressive Nostalgia*, Museum for Contemporary Art, Prato, Italy *Montreal biennial*, Canada; *Sharjah biennial: Still Life*, United Arab Emirates; *Focus: Kasmalieva and Djumaliev. A New Silk Road: Algorithm of Survival and Hope*, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA (solo show) **2006** *Naked Life*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, Taiwan; *Singapore Biennial: Believe*; 3rd Bishkek International Exhibition of Contemporary Art, *Zone of risk – Transition*, curated by Edward Winkleman, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan **2005** *51st Venice Biennial*, Central Asian Pavilion: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Kyzyl Traktor

in Shimkent (Kazakhstan) **1991** the artists Said Atabekov, Smail Bayaliev, Moldakul Narymbetov, Arystanbek Shalbayev and Vitaliy Simakov founded the group *Kyzyl Traktor*; **1992** *CaA*, Vitaliy Simakov, Smail Bayaliev, Moldakul Narymbetov, Said Atabekov, Central House of Artists, Moscow, Russia **1993** *CaA, Central House of Artists*, Museum of History, Shymkent and Almaty, Kazakhstan **1995** *Artists from Shymkent: Kyzyl Traktor Group*, Kasteev State Museum of Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Action: Journey to the Oriental Country*, Mount Kazgurt, Kyryk Shilter, Kazakhstan; *Action: Teslim-Tash*, Khodzha Akhmed Yasavi Mausoleum, Turkestan, Kazakhstan **1996** *Blue Pepper*, Tengri Umai Gallery, Almaty, Kazakhstan **1997** *Kyzyl Traktor*, Asia Art

Biennale, Central Exhibition Hall, Tashkent, Uzbekistan **1998** *Art from the province*,Kargauldy, Almaty;Museum of History, Shimkent, Kazakhstan; *IV International*, Kasteev State Museum of Arts and the Central State Museum, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Zone of art*, Kasteev State Museum of Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan; Action: *Threshold*, by Moldakul Narymbetov **1999** *Self-Identification- Futurological Prognosis, First Annual Exhibition by Soros Center of Contemporary Art*, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Artists from Shymkent*, Kasteev State Museum of Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan; Video-performance: *Those who have rights*, Kazakhstan **2000** *Communication-Experience of Interaction*, Second Annual Exhibition of Soros Center for Contemporary Art, Atakent Exhibition Hall, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Transzendenz*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria Performances: *Memories of Matisse*, Kazakhstan; *Mythology of the South*, series of performances, Kazakhstan **2001** *Kyzyl Traktor is Ten Years Old*, SCCA- Almaty, International Business Academy, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Spirit Fest*, SCCA, Almaty, Kazakhstan; Performance: *Warning Land Mines*, Kazakhstan **2002** *Inventory*, German Theatre, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *No Mad's Land*, curated by Sabina Vogel and Valeria Ibraeva, House of World Culture Berlin, Germany; *Trans Forma*, curated by Daniela Gruneberg and Valeria Ibraeva, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Genève, Switzerland; Performances: *“Semurg” Bird* **2003** *The Heart of PQ* (Especial project of the Prague Quadriennial), Central Hall of Industrial Palace, Prague, Chzcz Republic; Performance: *Neon Paradise*, by Said Atabekov **2004** *Videoidentity: The Sacred Places of Central Asia, Soros Center for Contemporary Art – Almaty Videartfestival*, curated by Valeria Ibraeva, German Theatre, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Kyzyl Traktor, Bildsprache des 21. Jahrhunderts*, NRW-Forum Kultur und Wirtshaft, Dusseldorf, Germany; *Zone of Risk – Transition*, 3rd *Bishkek Exhibition of Contemporary Art*. Curated by Muratbek Djumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva, Underground Spaces in Ala Too Central Square, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; *Festival Polyzentral: Kyzyl Traktor Group* and Almagul Menlibaeva, curated by Florent Le Duc, Central Asian cultural events and shamanic performances organized by *Central Asian Initiatives Association*(CAI), Kampnagel, Hamburg, Germany. **2007** *Said Atabekov: Road to Rome*, curated by D.Kozhakhmetov, Soros Center for Contemporary Art- Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Alexander Ugay

was born in 1978 in Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan. He lives in in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Selected shows since 2005 **2016** *Cartography of the real*, Almaty, Kazakhstan; *Dispossessed? A question of spirit and money*, Zurich, Switzerland; *1th Riga Photo biennale*, Riga, Latvia; *Project 35 last act*, Independent curators international, Garage, Moscow, Russia. **2015** *61th Oberhausen Film Festival*, Oberhausen, Germany; *Dissemination*, Stadt Galerie, Brixen, South Tirol, Italy; *Balagan*,

Momentum Worldwide, KühlhausBerlin, Berlin, Germany; *Alanica. The Experimental Method*, 6th Moscow Biennale – special project, Moscow, Russia; *Asia Contemporary Art Week*, New York, USA; *TV/Nam June Paik*, Parallel program of IV Odessa Biennale, Ukraine. **2014** *2th Xinjiang Biennale*, Xinjiang, China; *Alanika 2014*, North Caucasus Branch of National Centre for Contemporary Art, Vladikavkaz, Russia; *Busan Biennale 2014*, Busan, South Korea; *E-City*; Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasbourg, France; *Project 35-Volume 2*-The DeVos Art Museum at Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI **2013** *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Central Asia and the Caucasus*, selling exhibition, Sotheby's London, 03.2013; *Lost to the Future*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore; *Project 35 Volume 2 - Künstlerhaus Stuttgart*, Germany; *Project 35: Volume 2 - Art Gallery of Windsor*, Windsor, Ontario; *Time Diver, Thinking Now*, Gwangju Art Forum, South Korea. **2012** *The face of bride*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Perm, Russia; *Project 35: volume2*, Independent curators international, New York, USA **2011** Sharjah Biennial 10, Sharjah, UAE; *Between Heaven and Earth*, Calvert 22, London, UK; *Asian Art Biennial 2011*, Taiwan Museum of Contemporary Art, Taiwan;*Between Past and Present, archeology of topicality*, Museum of fine art, Almaty, Kazakhstan. **2010** Promises of the Past, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; *Ground floor America*, Den Frie Udstillingsbygning / Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark; *The Bearable Lightness of Being - The Metaphor of the Space 2*, Architecture Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; *Archive 10*, Chandong open studio, Seoul, South Korea; *Yeosu International Art Festival*, Yeosu, South Korea; Around the world in 80 hours, Suwonartcenter, Seoul, South Korea. **2009** *Tajama / Translation*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, USA; *M'ARTIAN FIELDS – COLLABORATION*, MARS Centre for Contemporary Arts, Moscow, Russia; *Younger Than Jesus*, New Museum, New York, USA; *Changing Climate*, Video Art from Central Asia, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria. **2008** Tracing roads though Central Asia, Yerba Buena Center for the arts, San Francisco, USA. **2007** *Central Asian Project*, Joint Project of Central Asian and Great Britain Contemporary Artists, exhibitions at: Cornerhouse, Manchester and SPACE/London, UK; *Muzykstan*, Media-generation of Contemporary Artists from Central Asia, Central Asia Pavillion, 52 Venice Biennale, Italy. **2006** *Plug In. The exhibition of new museum's collection*, VanabbeMuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands; *52th Oberhausen Film Festival*, Oberhausen, Germany; *E-flux*, video-collection project, New-York, USA. **2005** La sindrome di Tamerlano: Arte e conflitti in Asia centrale/The Tamerlane Syndrome: Art and Conflicts in Central Asia, Palazzo dei Sette, Orvieto, Italy; *9 International Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, Turkey.



Said Atabekov, Prayer Rug, 1998

NEON PARADISE. Shamanism from Central Asia

opening

Thursday 9 February 2017

at 18.30

09.02.2017 – 17.03.2017

critical essay by
Valentina Parisi

The Laura Bulian Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Neon Paradise. Shamanism from Central Asia* a group exhibition devoted to post-Soviet shamanic practices in contemporary central Asian art. The exhibition consists of installations and photographs by **Vyacheslav Akhunov** (Uzbekistan, 1948), **Said Atabekov** (Kazakistan, 1965), **Saodat Ismalieva** (Uzbekistan, 1981), **G.Kasmalieva & M.Djumaliev** (Kirghizistan, 1960 and 1965) and **Alexander Ugay** (Kazakistan, 1978).

Furthermore, documentary records will be exhibited giving a pre-view of performances by the Kazakh group **Kyzyl Traktor**, founded in Shymkent in 1991 by the artists Said Atabekov, Smail Bayaliev, Moldakul Narymbetov, Arystanbek Shalbayev and Vitaliy Simakov.

The Shaman Reenacted by Valentina Parisi

In his study *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* Mircea Eliade dwells on a condition he calls “nostalgia for paradise”, defining it as the desire “to find oneself always and without effort at the centre of the world, at the heart of reality” transcending the limitations of human nature; being born again at a new level of awareness. That “nostalgia for paradise” is also a powerful metaphor for artists from Central Asia, who have recreated or mimicked shamanic rituals in the post-Soviet era, reinterpreting them under a broad range of conceptual solutions. Following the historical fracture generated by 70 years under the USSR, it is almost inevitable that the image of the shaman tends to be both fluid and unstable. The shaman is now no longer the “grand master of ecstasy”, the lord of fire or the exclusive medium between man and the spirits; his elusive shadow seems more an incarnation of that tribal substrate with which Russian culture, throughout its history, has always had to converse.

On the one hand, a rereading of shamanism implies confrontation with the avant-garde legacy, in other words its conceptualization of the primitive cannot be ignored nor can its utopian perspective of man in the natural state. On the other hand, the contemporary artist, living within the dynamics of the art world, can no longer partake innocently of this idealized momentum.

The “shaman reenacted” after the fall of the USSR becomes, therefore, the object of a tension that is destined to disappoint, the symbol of a primitive spirituality that may charm or arouse feelings of regret – yet it remains unattainable. It is no surprise that focus on shamanism tends to crystallize around the concept of otherness: alongside the ghost-like figure of the shaman the theme of the city also emerges, the urban dimension (as opposed to the village) where the contemporary artist usually interacts and creates. Hence, the issue of appropriating a shamanic otherness – which coincides with an ancestral identity for artists from Central Asia – remains open. To what extent can contemporary artists transform the needs of shamanic practice and re-elaborate them within their own artistic strategy?

For **Said Atabekov** the encounter with the myth of the shaman takes on the features of personal experience with alienating consequences. In his performances – whether alone or with other members of the group **Kyzyl Traktor** (Red Tractor) – the artist, born in Bes Terek (today’s Uzbekistan) in 1965, takes on the appearance of a shaman by dressing in a shamanic costume – or rather a philologically inaccurate variation of one. Atabekov’s *reenacted* shaman is first and foremost a *čudak*, an “eccentric” uprooted from his village community context, where he performs bizarre rites that have been inevitably contaminated by the penetrating force of Western culture. Thus, he wanders the Steppe with a double-bass hoisted on his shoulders to the sound of Albinoni’s *Adagio* (as in the video-performance *Walkman*, 2005); or meditates on his knees before the sliding doors of a department store (*Neon Paradise*, 2003), interacting, alas, no longer with the spirits, but rather with a humble photocell.

This ironic deconstructive stance is rooted in the performances Atabekov created with the Kyzyl Traktor collective (Said Atabekov, Smail Bayaliev, Moldakul Narymbetov, Arystanbek Shalbayev and Vitaliy Simakov.) towards the second half of the 90s. In the past interpreted as an almost ethnographic attempt to rediscover their roots, the work of Kyzyl Traktor instead seems to poke fun at the orientalist stereotypes through which westerners often view Central Asia. By flaunting this image of shaman-impostors, Atabekov and his companions take their distance from new age fads and the post-Soviet commercialization of the shamanic heritage (very often exploited by healers who are equally false). A similar, playful tendency to disregard the spectators’ expectations can be seen in *Tea Ceremony* (2001), a super 8 film by **Alexander Ugay**, where the traditional Japanese tea ceremony (the artist’s family comes from the Far East) is transformed into an ecstatic ritual of uncertain outcome, estranged even further by the obsolete technology employed to record it.

In the cases of Kyzyl Traktor and Ugay, the interpretative framework proposed by Viktor Misiano seems to hold, whereby recuperating ethno-national archetypes such as the nomadic lifestyle, the Steppe, Sufism or Shamanism, the artists of Central Asia create mythopoetic works – in other words, narratives that are not necessarily aimed at authenticity. A different inspiration, however, can be seen in the video *Sham* (2004), filmed by **Gulnara Kasmalieva** and **Muratbek Djumaliev** on Kochkor Ata in Kirghizistan, an extinct volcano, a sacred site and place of pilgrimage since ancient times. *Sham* is an intensely lyrical documentary testimony of the ritual fires that are lit there every Thursday and illuminate the slopes of the mountain for the whole night. As long as anyone can remember the black and red volcanic rocks of Kochkor Ata have been believed to possess a special energy. It is here that Kyrgyz shamans, called *baqshī*, used to bring their patients in search of healing. The main character of *Sham* is a sick pilgrim who climbs laboriously towards the summit, in the hope that her life may change.

The theme of an initiatory ascent (whether literal or metaphorical) is found again in the videos *Ascent* and *Corner* by **Vyacheslav Akhunov** in collaboration with Sergey Tichina (2004). Here the artist, known for his “archeological” approach to Soviet symbology, rereads the motif of ecstasy within the conceptual framework of Sufism, the mystical trend in Islam that is rooted in Central Asian shamanism. The creation of a space for meditation where direct contact can be made with the divine is pitted against the urban dimensions of Tashkent and the use of new technologies. In both works the manner in which the action proceeds, either by a backward tracking shots or oscillating loops, prevails over the attainment of the goal, which, according to the Sufi mystics, is always partial and temporary.

However, shamanism is also about communion with nature and Panic identification with the spirit world that surrounds us. In the installation entitled *Stains of Oxus* (2016), **Saodat Ismailova** develops a heart wrenching image of the river Amu Darya or Oxus, through scenes of daily life along its banks, and especially thanks to the dreams that haunt the inhabitants. Dreams that act as a go-between with ancestral spirits and a defence, however ephemeral, against the ecological catastrophe that is playing out in lake Aral: in just a few decades the basin into which the Oxus flowed has almost completely dried up. It is as if the “nostalgia for paradise” were ever more topical.