

Gwobr ac Arddangosfa Gelf
Weledol Ryngwladol Cymru
Wales International Visual
Art Exhibition and Prize

Yael Bartana
Fernando Bryce
Ergin Çavuşoğlu
Chen Chieh-jen
Olga Chernysheva
Gulnara Kasmalieva +
Muratbek Djumaliev
Adrian Paci

2010



artesmundi 4

Gulnara Kasmalieva
+ Muratbek Djumaliev

Changing the world,
one video at a time

by Lisa Dorin

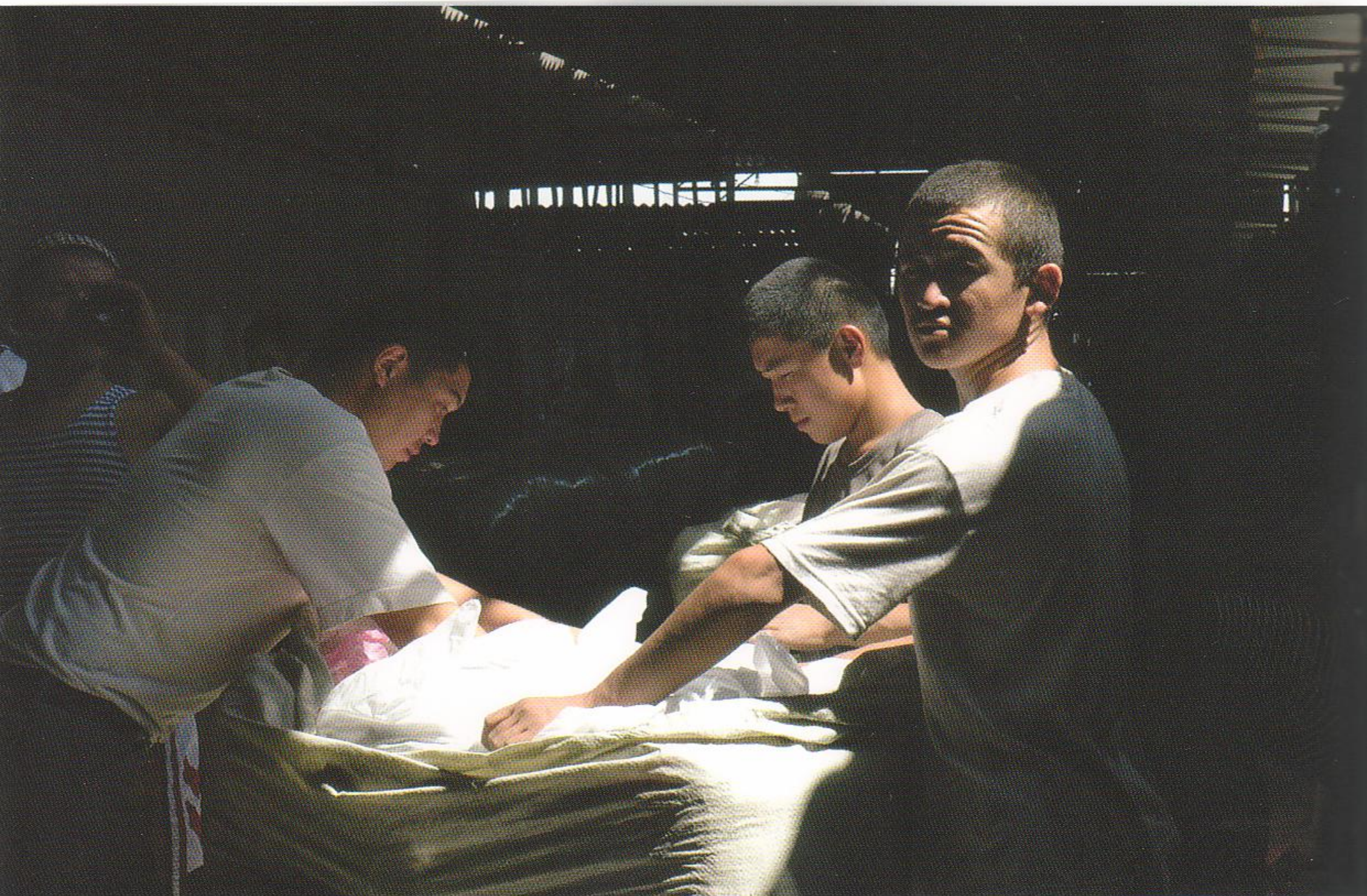
For over five years Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev have made it their mission to bring Kyrgyzstan to the world and the world to Kyrgyzstan, a young nation with an ancient history. Partners in life and work, they are well established in their homeland – as far as any contemporary artist can be in a country with virtually no institutional infrastructure for the support of the arts. Since their work was featured in the first Central Asian Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005 – an event that marked a defining moment for the region, identifying it as one of the last frontiers of the global art world – the collaborative duo have exhibited frequently and continue to receive widespread critical attention. Their videos, photographs, and performances allow an international audience to discover a multilayered Kyrgyz identity – including the country's traditional nomadic and shamanic roots, its Soviet past, and the new republic's tenuous position in the current global capitalist system – and bring to light themes of universal consequence within what might at first appear to be an isolated experience.

As cultural administrators, mentors, and facilitators, Kasmalieva and Djumaliev led a group of artists in the creation of ArtEast, a non governmental organization that aims to advance contemporary art in Kyrgyzstan, promote partnerships with international arts organisations, and encourage the use of new technologies in art by providing studio space, workshops, video editing facilities, equipment, and training. Under the auspices of ArtEast they have also organized three of the four Bishkek International exhibitions, which introduced contemporary art from around the globe to the Kyrgyz people. Through the accompanying publications, they were also able to promote the work of the participating artists, many from Central Asian countries, to an international audience. Each of the invitational exhibitions had its own distinct theme relevant to its time: "In the Shadow of Heroes" (2005) explored the difficulty of carving out an artistic identity when culture itself is in crisis; "Zone of Risk – Transition" (2006) took place in the wake of Kyrgyzstan's

2005 "Tulip Revolution" and featured work that reflected on social and political transition; and most recently "Boom-Boom" (2008) (co-organized with Ulan Djaparov) looked critically at an over-zealous building "boom" taking place throughout the former USSR, focused solely on profit and lacking careful consideration of good design, sustainability, or the actual needs of the residents of the growing cities. In their richness and timeliness, these themes also serve as the basis for many of the artists' own projects.

While they were trained in traditional media – printmaking and sculpture respectively – Kasmalieva and Djumaliev's most powerful, mature statements have undoubtedly been in the medium of video. Early on in their collaborative career they shifted away from the plastic arts in favour of performances that often investigated Kyrgyzstan's shamanic roots. It was a fluid transition into video, which not only served to document performative actions, but also provided a contemporary vocabulary with which to practise the ancient art of storytelling. Video is highly portable, allowing the artists to work in extremely remote areas, and to distribute the finished product widely. Because of its multi-sensory nature, video has also afforded Kasmalieva and Djumaliev the opportunity to experiment with sound and image in increasingly remarkable ways. Music has come to play an essential role in their most important works. The decision to use Edvard Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King* as the soundtrack for *Revolution* (2005), for instance, cleverly turned what might otherwise have been a frightening image of violent protest during Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution," into a farcical, cartoonish mockery of political action. Thus a strict documentation of actual events became a subjective – and entertaining – critical commentary on the failure of the political process to effect change. *Trans-Siberian Amazons* (2004), *A New Silk Road: Algorithm of Survival and Hope* (2006) and *Brooklyn Bridge* (2010), all rely on the power of a lone human voice or solitary player with his instrument to communicate a wealth of ideas with an economy of means. Whether an antiquated Russian pop tune or a timeless folk song, each exudes feelings of sorrowful loss that can be understood without the need for recognition or translation.

Gulnara Kasmalieva + Muratbek Djumaliev
Changing the world, one video at a time



Above and right:
A New Silk Road
Road: Algorithm of
Survival and Hope, 2007
photographs,
Courtesy of the
Artists, Winkleman
Gallery and Impronte
Contemporary
Art Gallery, Milan



A New Silk Road, a major five-channel video installation, which debuted in 2007 at the Art Institute of Chicago, is on view in the Artes Mundi exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff, Wales. Among the artists' most ambitious projects to date in terms of scope and scale, the work documents the process of sorting and packing scrap metal for trade between Kyrgyzstan and western China. All screens open with humming trucks criss-crossing through mountains, followed closely by the collecting, sorting, and loading of tons of used metal. Over the course of a several-day-long journey, during which the artists trailed an eastbound truck caravan, their cameras captured the sculptural beauty of the antiquated Soviet-era vehicles precariously stacked to their brims with scrap. These images are juxtaposed with those of the pristine and powerful Chinese big-rigs that travel west through Kyrgyzstan with new readymade goods to sell in the wealthier nations of Kazakhstan and Russia.



Through meticulous video and sound editing, Kasmalieva and Djumaliev hone in on the patterns and cadences formed amidst the chaotic activity. We experience the rhythmic packing and taping of giant parcels in the bustling marketplace followed by the cling-clanging of metal sorting. Scenes of the rural communities that have long populated the plateaus are interwoven with those of the provisional villages now springing up near the road as undeniable evidence of the scrap economy's viability. In rustic mountainscapes, truckers and villagers come together in festive celebration – here a young Kyrgyz man plays accordion and sings a traditional ballad, an ode to the unique landscape of his homeland. Closing the cycle, we return to the trucks, the basis of a new economy. Revealing the humanity in an account that is essentially about global economics, *A New Silk Road: Algorithm for Survival and Hope* proposes an abstract set of instructions for resilience in the face of hardship.



In the final scene a young boy on horseback gleefully races a heavily laden truck as it labours uphill. Finally overtaking the summit, the vehicle speeds into the distance leaving



Above and left:
Spring, 2009
 Production still,
 Courtesy of the
 Artists and Impronte
 Contemporary Art
 Gallery, Milan

the child and animal in a cloud of dust. What may at first appear to be a condemnation of the effects of progress on this community is, rather, a picture of hope. The life that the boy and generations before him have known is, indeed, quickly changing yet here he is ready and eager, despite the obvious hurdles, to ride right "into the future." Devoid of nostalgia for the ancient Silk Road, with its romantic visions of Marco Polo and caravans of camels brimming with exotic luxury goods, Kasmalieva and Djumaliev's project foregrounds instead the contradictory currents in the existence faced by the living, breathing populations along these well-worn trade routes. The artists' clear focus is the entrepreneurial ingenuity and perseverance of the Kyrgyz people and an intimation of the possibilities that may lie ahead.

In *A New Silk Road* each scrap, no matter how rusted, worn, or decayed, is reinvented. "Reuse and recycle" functions here not as a fashionable slogan, but as a way of life. This industrious spirit is taken to an extreme in Kasmalieva and Djumaliev's *Spring* (2009) which looks at the recent phenomenon of inner-Kyrgyz migrants who, in an effort to escape the dire economic situation in the remote regions, have come to populate the vast municipal garbage dump on the outskirts of the capital city of Bishkek. The single-channel projection opens with close-up shots of classical musicians tuning their instruments. As they begin to play the

opening notes of *Spring* from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the air is thick with what appears to be an early morning mist through which can be seen glimpses of construction vehicles and builders at work. As the camera pans back, it becomes clear that the fog is actually "plumes of smoke" from smoldering piles of garbage in uncomfortably close proximity to the crude housing developments, unofficially known as "The Ring of Poverty."

It is equally clear that the music was not chosen simply for background ambience, but that Vivaldi's three-part concerto – made up of a slow, contemplative movement between two faster-paced ones – is itself the formal structure for the video. In the second scene the camera takes its cues from the melancholic soundtrack and shifts to a close-up of raindrops on a window followed by a rushing stream and a cloudy sky over a verdant mountainous landscape. A lone horseman takes shelter from the storm under a large tree that has been heavily adorned with strips of fabric, identifying it as a sacred pagan site of the sort that is rapidly being lost to the urban sprawl witnessed in the video's first and third scenes.ⁱⁱ When the music picks up again the camera follows a rain-drenched dirt road lined with telephone poles, and cuts to the almost surreal vision of the musicians, dressed in formal attire, playing in the midst of a trash heap. Finally, the view hones in on the protagonists, an entire community of people scavenging for plastic and metal amidst the waste, animal carcasses, and carrion birds. Some labourers wear makeshift masks in a meagre attempt at protection from the toxic fumes, others remain entirely exposed while carrying heavy loads of refuse on their backs, or by hand, in small groups. Government regulations on building in proximity to this contaminated environment are seemingly non-existent, or at least not enforced, and the artists have witnessed the situation spiral out of control in recent years. *Spring* is a time of renewal and rebirth and despite its inherent perils, the garbage dump nonetheless appears to represent a new way of life for a people that society has clearly left behind. The artists do not pass judgment, nor do they provide any sense of what the future holds, rather, as in many of their works, they expose a complex set of circumstances with no easy solution. Even in

Gulnara Kasmalieva + Muratbek Djumaliev
Changing the world, one video at a time



Gulnara Kasmalieva + Muratbek Djumaliev
Changing the world, one video at a time



Brooklyn Bridge, 2010
Video still,
Courtesy of the Artists

this most wretched, abject situation, Kasmalieva and Djumaliev bring to bear their singularly poetic, compassionate, and discerning approach, revealing a lyricism and beauty buried within the harsh realities of the human condition.

Inspired by their travels to points far and wide, Kasmalieva and Djumaliev continue to broaden their subject matter in ways that reflect increasingly universal themes. *Brooklyn Bridge* (2010) for instance, is a work in progress comprised of a three-channel video installation and a series of photographs, all shot during a recent stay in New York City, where the artists discovered an unexpectedly large Central Asian population that has settled in the predominantly Russian Brighton Beach area of Brooklyn since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Many of these immigrants have not yet attained legal status and struggle to find the means to provide for their families. Flanking a large projection of close-up footage of the *Brooklyn Bridge* from a moving vehicle are two smaller screens, the first depicting an Uzbek woman, a former doctor, who recounts her experiences as a room service maid in one chain hotel after another since coming to the United States. On the second screen a Kyrgyz folk musician, who currently makes his living as a day worker on construction sites, plays several favorite tunes on his flute and says a few words about his efforts to keep his music career alive. The videos and large-scale photographs of Russian storefronts throughout Brighton Beach tell an immigrant story that we do not hear much about on the daily news but is, at its core, not unlike so many others. Having given up the lives they knew in the hopes of a better, yet uncertain,

future for themselves and their families, they occupy a liminal space that is neither fully here nor there, neither present nor past, and lies somewhere between hope and despair. In the artists' words, they are forever on the "bridge" between these points, looking forward and back, with no end in sight.

Through their collaborative artistic practice and cultural leadership Kasmalieva and Djumaliev exemplify the theme of the Artes Mundi Prize. Laying bare preconceived notions about cultural identity, the stories of individual personal struggle they recount in their work invariably have wide-reaching appeal beyond physical, social and, political borders. The artists excel at unearthing the unexpected, not simply for the sake of being different, but because their natural curiosity, sensitivity, and openness compel them to dig deeper, to look closer to home and farther afield in equal measure. It is precisely this delicate balance that lies at the crux of their project. In an art world that often looks remarkably uniform, Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev are a vital artistic force with the vision and the passion to push themselves, and us, to see anew.

Lisa Dorin is Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, USA

ⁱ *Into the Future* is the title of a 2005 video by Kasmalieva and Djumaliev depicting the comings and goings on a Siberian ferry boat.

ⁱⁱ The pastoral scene in the video's second chapter also evokes the sonnet that accompanies the second movement of Vivaldi's concerto, "On the flower-strewn meadow, with leafy branches rustling overhead, the goat-herd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him."

Bywgraffiadau cryno'r artistiaid

Artists' brief biographies



**Gulnara
Kasmalieva**

Mae Gulnara Kasmalieva a Muratbek Djumaliev yn cyd-fyw ac yn cydweithio yn Bishkek, prifddinas Kyrgyzstan. Mae eu gwaith yn cynnig golwg fanwl ar Asia Ganol a'i chysylltiadau â Rwsia fodern. Trwy osodweithiau fideo a ffotograffig maen nhw'n archwilio'r modd y mae cwmp comiwnyddiaeth wedi effeithio ar fywydau miloedd o bobl Kyrgyzstan. Edrychant ar y modd y mae aflonyddwch economaidd a gwleidyddol wedi newid bywydau, economïau lleol a chyflogaeth. Maen nhw wedi cael arddangosfeydd unigol yn Sefydliad Celf Chicago yn yr Unol Daleithiau, Oriel Winkleman, Efrog Newydd, a sgriniad ffilm yn MoMA, Efrog Newydd. Mae'r pâr wedi arddangos eu gwaith mewn sawl biennale rhyngwladol ac wedi cael eu cynnwys mewn sioeau grŵp ac yn Amgueddfa Gelf Fodern Shanghai Zendai yn Tsieina ac Amgueddfa Gelf Gytoes Taipei, Taiwan. Nhw hetyd yw sefydlwyr ArtEast, corff dielw sy'n darparu addysg gelf yn Bishkek er mwyn i artistiaid iau brofi a gallu cyfnewid gydag eraill yn y byd celfyddydau gweledol cyfoes y tu allan i Kyrgyzstan.

Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev live and work together in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Their work offers a complex insight into Central Asia and its links to modern Russia. Through video and photographic installations they explore how the fall of communism has affected the lives of thousands of Kyrgyz people. They examine how economic and political unrest have changed lives, local economies and employment. They have had solo exhibitions at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA, the Winkleman Gallery, New York, and a film screening at MoMA New York, USA. The couple have shown their work in many biennales internationally and been included in group shows and the Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, Taiwan. They have also established ArtEast, a not-for-profit organisation for art education in Bishkek in order that younger artists might experience and be able to exchange with others in the contemporary visual arts beyond Kyrgyzstan.



**Muratbek
Djumaliev**

Artes Mundi'n dathlu

Mae Artes Mundi'n dathlu artistiaid o bedwar ban byd sy'n dechrau dod i'r amlwg am eu hymdriniaeth â'r cyflwr dynol ac am ychwanegu at ein dealltwriaeth o ddynoliaeth. Ffrwyth dwy flynedd o weithgarwch ym meysydd celf, addysg a'r gymuned yw'r Arddangosfa ryngwladol yma.

Artes Mundi celebrates

Artes Mundi celebrates emerging artists from around the world who discuss the human condition and add to our understanding of humanity. This international Exhibition is the culmination of a two year cycle of art, education and community activity.

Cyhoeddwyd y llawlyfr hwn i gyd-fynd ag Artes Mund 4, a drefnwyd gan Artes Mundi ar y cyd ag Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd.

© Gwobr Artes Mundi Cyfyngedig a'r artistiaid, 2010

Mae Gwobr Artes Mundi Cyfyngedig yn Elusen Gofrestredig yng Nghymru (rhif 1097377).

This Guide is published on the occasion of Artes Mundi 4, organised by Artes Mundi in association with National Museum Cardiff.

© Artes Mundi Prize Limited & the artists, 2010

Artes Mundi Prize Limited is a Charity Registered in Wales (No.1097377)

www.artesmundi.org
www.museumwales.ac.uk
www.amgueddfacymru.ac.uk



Wales International Visual Art
Exhibition and Prize

Gwobr ac Arddangosfa Gelf
Weledol Ryngwladol Cymru

Un Byd, Dynoliaeth Gyfan

Gwobr ac Arddangosfa Gelf
Weledol Ryngwladol Cymru

Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd

Canllaw i'r Arddangosfa
2010

Yael Bartana
Fernando Bryce
Ergin Çavuşoğlu
Chen Chieh-jen
Olga Chernysheva
Gulnara Kasmalieva +
Muratbek Djumaliev
Adrian Paci

artes ⁴
mundi

One World, All Humanity

Wales International Visual
Art Exhibition and Prize

National Museum Cardiff

Exhibition Guide
2010

4

Gulnara Kasmalieva + Muratbek Djumaliev

Oriel | Gallery | 16

Mae Gulnara Kasmalieva a Muratbek Djumaliev yn byw ac yn gweithio gyda'i gilydd yn Bishek, prifddinas Kyrgyzstan. Mae eu gwaith yn cynnig cipolwg ar fywyd yng Nghanolbarth Asia a'r cysylltiadau â Rwsia fodern. Trwy osodiadau fideo a ffotograffiaeth, maen nhw'n trafod sut mae cwmp comiwnyddiaeth wedi effeithio ar fywydau miloedd o bobl Kyrgyzstan. Portreadir sut mae'r ansefydlogrwydd economaidd a gwleidyddol wedi newid bywydau, economïau lleol a bywoliaeth pobl.

Ganed Kasmalieva ym 1960 a chafodd hyfforddiant celf academaidd arferol yn Moscow, tra cafodd Djumaliev ei eni ym 1965 a'i hyfforddi yn Leningrad, cyn i'r Undeb Sofietaidd chwalu'n wledydd annibynnol ym 1991. Enillodd eu mamwlad ei hannibyniaeth fel un o Weriniaethau Canolbarth Asia. Saif Kyrgyzstan i'r gorllewin o Tsieina, i'r gogledd o Afghanistan gyda Tajikistan yn y canol, ac mae rhan o'r hyn a elwir yn Ffordd y Sidan yn mynd drwyddi.

Roedd y llwybr hynafol hwn yn cysylltu Tsieina â rhannau eraill o Asia yn ogystal ag Ewrop a Gogledd Affrica. Nid ffordd sengl mohoni, fel mae'r enw'n ei awgrymu, ond rhwydwaith helaeth o lwybrau masnachu. Cafodd ei henwi ar ôl y fasnach sidan lwyddiannus a sefydlwyd gan y Tsieiniaid Han, gan arwain at ganrifoedd o gysylltiadau diwylliannol a masnachol. Mae Kasmalieva a Djumaliev yn canolbwyntio ar yr hyn sy'n cael ei gyfnewid heddiw.

Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev live and work together in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Their work offers an insight into Central Asia and its links to modern Russia. Through video and photographic installations they explore how the fall of communism has affected the lives of thousands of Kyrgyz people. They examine how economic and political unrest have changed lives, local economies and the ways of making a living.

Kasmalieva and Djumaliev, born in 1960 and 1965, received the customary academic art training in Moscow and Leningrad respectively, before the USSR split into separate countries in 1991. Their own birthplace became one of the Central Asian Republics and started life as an independent country. Kyrgyzstan lies to the west of China, north of Afghanistan with Tajikistan in between, and is located in part by what it contains, the Silk Road.

This ancient way connected China to other parts of Asia as well as Europe and North Africa, was not as its names suggests one single road, but an extensive network of trading routes. Named after the successful trade in silk pioneered by the Han Chinese, it led over the centuries to cultural and commercial exchange. Kasmalieva and Djumaliev focus their interest on today's exchanges.

*Ffordd y Sidan Newydd:
Algorithm Gobaith
a Goroesi, Rasio,
2007*

Ffotograff
Trwy garedigrwydd
Oriol Winkleman,
Efrog Newydd ac Oriol
Gelf Gyfoes Impronte,
Milan

*A New Silk Road:
Algorithm of Survival
and Hope, Rasing,
2007*

Photograph
Courtesy of
Winkleman Gallery,
NYC and Impronte
Contemporary Art,
Milan

