

SAODAT ISMAILOVA A SEED UNDER OUR TONGUE

«A seed is a journey from
the east to the north.
A seed is an encoded bone.
It is a solid that sustains.
It is the start of a tree, a forest,
a story, a narrative.
A seed is the beginning
of a continuation.
It holds memory, secrets,
and mysteries.
It is fundamental, fragile,
and eternal—the foundation
of the past and the future.
It revives and heals, gets lost,
and then manifests.»

Saodat Ismailova

SAODAT ISMAILOVA
A SEED UNDER OUR TONGUE

curated by
Roberta Tenconi

Pirelli HangarBicocca
12.09.2024 – 12.01.2025

Public Program

7 November: Conversation in the exhibition between Saodat Ismailova and curator Daniel Blanga Gubbay.

12 December: Conversation in the exhibition between Saodat Ismailova and curator Sheida Ghomashchi, in collaboration with Fondazione Elpis.

9 January: Concert in the exhibition with composer and musician Tomoko Sauvage.

Cultural Mediation

Cultural mediators are present in the exhibition spaces to answer questions from the public, give information and context elements that can deepen the fruition of the artworks.

Catalog

Published in fall 2024, the volume dedicated to the exhibition is available at the Pirelli HangarBicocca bookshop and online.

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Saodat Ismailova
Photo Rinat Karimov

The Artist

Saodat Ismailova (b. 1981, Tashkent, Uzbekistan; lives and works in Paris and Tashkent) is a filmmaker and artist whose practice addresses themes related to the impact of human activities on the environment and on the cultural heritage, to the relationship between the physical and spiritual world, and to knowledge and its transmission. She explores stories of colonialism and its repercussions on society, by reconstructing the collective memory and translating it through films, installations, and sculptures. Raised in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Ismailova uses her personal story and past events as a starting point to reflect on the void left by the collapse of the dominant political systems. She delves into what is lost, but also the generative potential of survival, resistance, and adaptation strategies that allow to cherish and nourish everything that endured the changes. To do so, she investigates the system of ancestral knowledge and practices shared by the regions of Central Asia, which have often been marginalized over the centuries: «I was getting more and more interested in disappearing rituals, cultural elements, and environmental wonders as they appeared to me as symbols of something lost, invisible, and unsaid.» Using evocative and

poetic images in which different timelines run parallel, Ismailova combines new video footage with archival material to convey a sense of the continuity of time. Still and moving images, light, time, and sound are edited and employed unconventionally as part of her installations, to which she often adds other materials that create complex visual layering, such as fabrics and embroideries.

Ismailova was born in the 1980s, a period marked by the radical social transformations initiated in the 1960s by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971). In the late 1990s, when she enrolled in the Tashkent State Art Institute to become a filmmaker, Uzbekistan had been independent for almost ten years. Despite reforms in education, television and film were still widely considered ideological tools, hence the approach was largely focused on the practicality of the subject rather than on its poetic potential. As a consequence, Ismailova was seeking to expand her cinematic understanding beyond the academic boundaries, and so began attending underground “ADO” club, which rented films by established directors, including Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–2007), Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007), and Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–1986), among others. In 2002, Ismailova won a scholarship for the Italian art residency at Fabbrica, in the province of Treviso, an experience that she recalls as fundamental for her formation: «That was where I discovered another way of making films, thinking about moving image, sound, narration, and form—and most importantly the notion that a film director can also write a script, operate the camera, and edit. But still, I thought I would be making conventional feature films and documentaries.»

A real turning point came between 2004 and 2010, when she started the research and extensive travel involved in making the documentary series *The Music of Central Asia*, commissioned by the Aga Khan Music Program in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. For the first time, Ismailova had the opportunity to travel across the lands of Central Asia and meet with communities that would have been otherwise beyond her reach. In these regions, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, tributaries of the Aral Sea and a crucial resource, have suffered a drastic reduction in their flow due to a water diversion project commenced in the 1930s by Soviet government, which has led to the impoverishment of entire villages. Besides the dramatic envi-

ronmental aftermath, Ismailova became concerned with the impact on the culture of the affected localities, which witnessed the disappearance of common, sacred denominators that had shaped their understanding of the world for centuries. In this context, the artist decided to create an archive of dreams that keep alive the memories of the landscape and its inhabitants, who traditionally share them with the flowing waters of the rivers. This project—which culminated in the 2016 film *Stains of Oxus*—gathers the narratives of several generations and mirrors different relations to the river: older people with vivid reminiscences of water, adults who navigate between the recollection and absence of this fundamental element, and children who are growing up in an environment where water is a presence more mythical than real. Water, and in particular the Aral Sea is the subject of an earlier work, the documentary film *Aral. Fishing in an Invisible Sea* (2004), which Ismailova made with director Carlos Casas narrating the resilience and daily struggle of a father, grandfather, and child—inhabitants of a fishing town once-thriving on the Aral Sea ecosystem. The film won the Best Documentary award at the Turin Film Festival in 2004 and was selected for the IFFR – International Film Festival Rotterdam the following year.

Ismailova, however, was already familiar with the stories of ancestral knowledge passed down orally, as her own grandmother, Bibi Rokia, was a key figure in her education and discovery of heritage. Through her, she came across the theory according to which there are 18,000 worlds in the universe, and we live only one of them. This thought is common throughout Central Asia, and the artist used it as a starting point of her film *18,000 Worlds* (2023), which in fact begins with the words of one interpreter of the theory, the Persian philosopher Suhrawardi (1154–1191). In a tradition of spiritual practices preserved mainly within families, Ismailova acknowledges personal and social responsibility for actions and their transgenerational repercussions.

Ismailova's sources of inspiration also include works by twentieth-century philosophers, particularly Henry Corbin (1903–1978), a French historian of philosophy whose thought parallels the ancient knowledge the artist naturally acquired, and blends with Western cultural theories. An explicit reference to cosmology appears in the work *Zukhra* (2013)—whose title means “Venus” in Uzbek, the planet that appears just before dawn—Ismailova's first art



Zukhra, 2013
(video still)
Single-channel
HD video, color,
sound (stereo)
30'

installation presented in the Central Asian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Art Biennale in 2013. The artist superimposed archival audio tracks on the almost static image of the female protagonist of the video. These tracks are both personal, related to her family, and collective, like the sound of electric cables from Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979) and the neighing and breathing of a horse from the Soviet animated film *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975) by Yuri Norstein, among many others. Shortly after, her feature film *Chilla: 40 Days of Silence* (2014) was screened at more than 35 film festivals, establishing Ismailova among the most innovative voices of her generation of Central Asian artists.

In 2021, Ismailova founded the research collective DAVRA to preserve and cultivate Central Asian culture. This initiative

reflects her commitment to future generations and to those who have been forced to interrupt the transmission of traditions due to political climate. Her desire to perpetuate heritage also extends to handicrafts, such as weaving and embroidery, which she often employs as integral fabric elements to her video installations. She collaborates with communities of artisans in the region to create textiles, such as *falak*, an ancient embroidery work from Tashkent made by women that represents a cosmology and evokes protection, which she used also as part of the *Chillahona* (2022) installation. To Ismailova, the fabric, with its network of threads, translates and symbolically represents the film's plot, where ancient and modern stories emerge in different montages.

The Exhibition

“A Seed Under Our Tongue” is an anthological exhibition exploring Ismailova’s practice through films, sculptures, and installations, presenting both new and historical works in one encompassing space. The show centers on the concept of transmission—whether of knowledge, stories, memories, or landscapes—and its implications. It conjures up different narratives, eras, and social contexts, creating an environment which develops on multiple levels.

The title is inspired by a popular Central Asian story about a man, Arslanbob, who carried a date seed under his tongue (associated with speech and storytelling) and, after a long journey, gave it to another person, Akhmad Yasawi, who planted it, giving rise to the Arslanbob walnut forest in Kyrgyzstan. This transformation from a date seed to a walnut highlights the often contradictory nature of transmission. The artist uses the word “our” to extend the responsibility of dissemination to the community, aligning with the Central Asian belief that each individual is «responsible for the seven generations before us and seven generations to come after us.»

The exhibition layout in the Shed emphasizes the idea of circularity and cyclicity, inherent in the concept of transmission. The works are arranged to symbolically follow the courses of the two main rivers of Central Asia: the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya (*Oxus* and *Jaxartes* in Greek), whose waters once nourished the now arid Aral Sea. Two impressive three-channel installations, *Stains of Oxus* (2016) and *Arslanbob* (2023–ongoing), filmed on the banks of the Amu Darya and in the region beyond the Syr Darya in the Arslanbob Forest and the Sulaiman-Too Mountain, open and close the exhibition at the opposite ends of the narrative.

The shape of the Sulaiman-Too mount is echoed in the design of the five seats inside the exhibition space, representing its five highest peaks. These forms, taken from a orographic survey, evoke a geological time and symbolize the concept of stratification and transmission through the centuries.



Stains of Oxus, 2016 (video still)
Three-channel HD video,
color, 4.1 sound
24'

1. *Stains of Oxus*, 2016

The exhibition opens with *Stains of Oxus*, a three-channel video that testifies to the artist’s interest in oral storytelling. The work recounts the dreams of villagers along the course of the Amu Darya (*Oxus* in Greek), where water diversion during Soviet times caused the land to dry up, severely impacting the local economy. As Ismailova recounts, «the major role of dreams in Central Asia is the connection to ancestors, to receive their messages.» The film follows the course of the river from its source in the snow-capped Pamir Mountains to the dry shores of Aral Kum (Aral desert) that once was Aral Sea. This topographical journey poetically explores the theme of water mismanagement in the region and its impacts through the memories of older people, adults, and children who have personally experienced the river’s course reducing and felt its weakening. The work alternates dreams where the image of water and its ecosystem persists, like the Caspian or Turan tiger, an animal once found along Central Asian rivers and now extinct due to hunting and habitat loss. *Stains of Oxus* highlights the consequences of the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, devising



The Haunted, 2017 (video still)
HD video, color and black-and-white, sound
23'30"

a choral narrative through the personal accounts of those who have experienced irreversible changes, leaving an indelible mark on the collective unconscious.

Stains of Oxus is 24 minutes long.

2. *The Haunted*, 2017

The Haunted tells the story of the extinction of the Turan tiger, an animal considered a sacred archetype and symbol of protection. Narrated through the artist's voice, the film serves as a metaphor for the impact of colonial rule on the region's ecosystem. It begins with a white flag fluttering in the wind on the top of the Zoroastrian necropolis Mizdakh Khan—believed to be the sepulcher of Adam the first man—, an image that represents both surrender and resilience. The film then features scenes of the sinuous move-

ments of a Siberian tiger, the closest species to the Turan tiger still present today, and of an employee of the State museum of history and culture of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, dusting a stuffed Turan tiger—one of the last preserved examples of its kind in Uzbekistan. These images symbolize the attempt to repair what is lost. As part of the narration, clips of the Amu Darya river, the area where the tiger formerly lived and where it still appears in the dreams of its inhabitants as a guide and protector, are interspersed with archival footage from the early twentieth century, by the first local filmmaker Khudaibergan Devanov (1879–1940), during the Tsarist Empire in Uzbekistan. Together, they critique the dominant power structures that, along with changes to the landscape and its inhabitants, often lead to the loss of knowledge, languages, and cultural traditions.

The Haunted is 23 minutes long and is alternated on the same screen with the 26-minute film *18,000 Worlds*.



18,000 Worlds, 2023 (video still)
HD video, color and black-and-white,
suond (stereo)
26'

3. *18,000 Worlds*, 2023

Commissioned and produced on the occasion of the 2022 Eye Art & Film Prize in Amsterdam, *18,000 Worlds* highlights the theory according to which the world we live in is only one of the 18,000 worlds that make up the universe. This belief can be found in various Central Asian writings, including those of the twelfth-century Persian philosopher and mystic Suhrawardi whose words open the film, as well as in ancestral traditions transmitted orally and learnt by Ismailova through her grandmother.

Along with film excerpts about and from Central Asia digitalized at the Eye Filmmuseum collection, the montage features footage that the artist filmed over twenty years, some of which have been used in previous works. These include the documentary stating the definition of the borders of Central Asia to the Soviet Union in 1924, the footage Ismailova shot in

the space station in the Kazakh city of Baikonur, The Parkent Sun Heliocomplex, in Bishkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan), and in the ancient city of Bukhara, as well as scenes of an older woman lying on a *kurpacha*, a characteristic Uzbek cotton mattress. Ismailova likens the recovery of these sources to the process of archaeological restoration, where fragments are found, cleaned, and assembled to reveal a complete view of the whole only at a later stage. The film also addresses the danger of losing forms of knowledge and similarly to memory its montage doesn't follow a linear narrative, but rather evokes recollections through sensations and images.

18,000 Worlds is 26 minutes long and is alternated on the same screen with the approximately 23-minute film *The Haunted*.



Two Horizons, 2017
(video still)
Two-channel HD
video, color,
4.1 sound
24'

4. *Two Horizons*, 2017

Two Horizons is set in Baikonur Cosmodrome space station, on the Kazakh steppe on the northern banks of Syr Darya river, and weaves together two stories that explore the human dream of immortality. The polarized narrative incorporates the myth of Qorqut, Central Asia first shaman, who, according to tradition, is said to levitate. This moment is depicted in the film through the presence of a 7-year-old boy, an age that symbolizes the initiation to life. The other story from the area—considered sacred by locals and known as “the navel of the Earth”—is linked with Soviet history, featuring footage of the Baikonur Cosmodrome, the world’s first space base, which remains

active today. Built in the mid-twentieth century during the Cold War, it launched Yuri Gagarin’s (1934–1968) spacecraft on April 12, 1961, making Gagarin the first human to travel into space. By connecting two individuals from different times and backgrounds, each exploring the search of humanity for immortality, Ismailova highlights how this location preserves and intertwines the memories of both the ancient and the modern, merging past and present.

Two Horizons is 24 minutes long and alternates on the same screens with the 37-minute film *Chillahona*.

5. *Chillahona*, 2022

Chillahona explores the sense of emptiness and disorder that characterized the Central Asian countries following perestroika, the period of political and economic reforms implemented by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022) shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The installation, consisting of a film and embroidery, was first presented at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022.

Set in one of the oldest cemeteries in Tashkent, the video takes place inside a cell known as a *chillahona*, a term derived from Persian, referring to an ancient underground room used in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states for 40-day periods of self-isolation. The cell is built as the lower underground floor of a three-level construction, whose architecture culminates with an octagonal dome. The stages of the structure are mirrored by the three channels of the video and are visible in their entirety in the 3D view of the building. The film opens with archival footage from *Shock* (1989) by Uzbek director Elyor Ishmukhamedov, restaging collective hypnotic sessions led by psychotherapist Anatoly Kashpirovsky, which in the late 1980s were widely broadcast on Soviet television and popular during a time of crisis. These images are followed by footage taken inside the cell of a woman who spends time inside the chamber exorcising her memories related to the perestroika period, and trying to find a hold on any possible pole. Presence of archetypal animals accompany the character through the narration, such as the two-headed snake, the she-wolf, and a predatory bird, all of which, along with the tiger, are considered in the region to be symbols of regeneration and protectors, as well as messengers of the ancestors.

Near the screen, the embroidered fabric realized by artisan Madina Kasimbaeva offers a modern reinterpretation of traditional Tashkent embroidery made by women known as *falak*, which depicts the celestial sphere. Ismailova incorporates key elements from the film onto the piece, including forms like the moon cycle, snake, bird, and womb. The fabric is animated with moving colored lights, inspired by Sufi mysticism, which theorizes that color emissions from the human body reflect one's spiritual evolution.

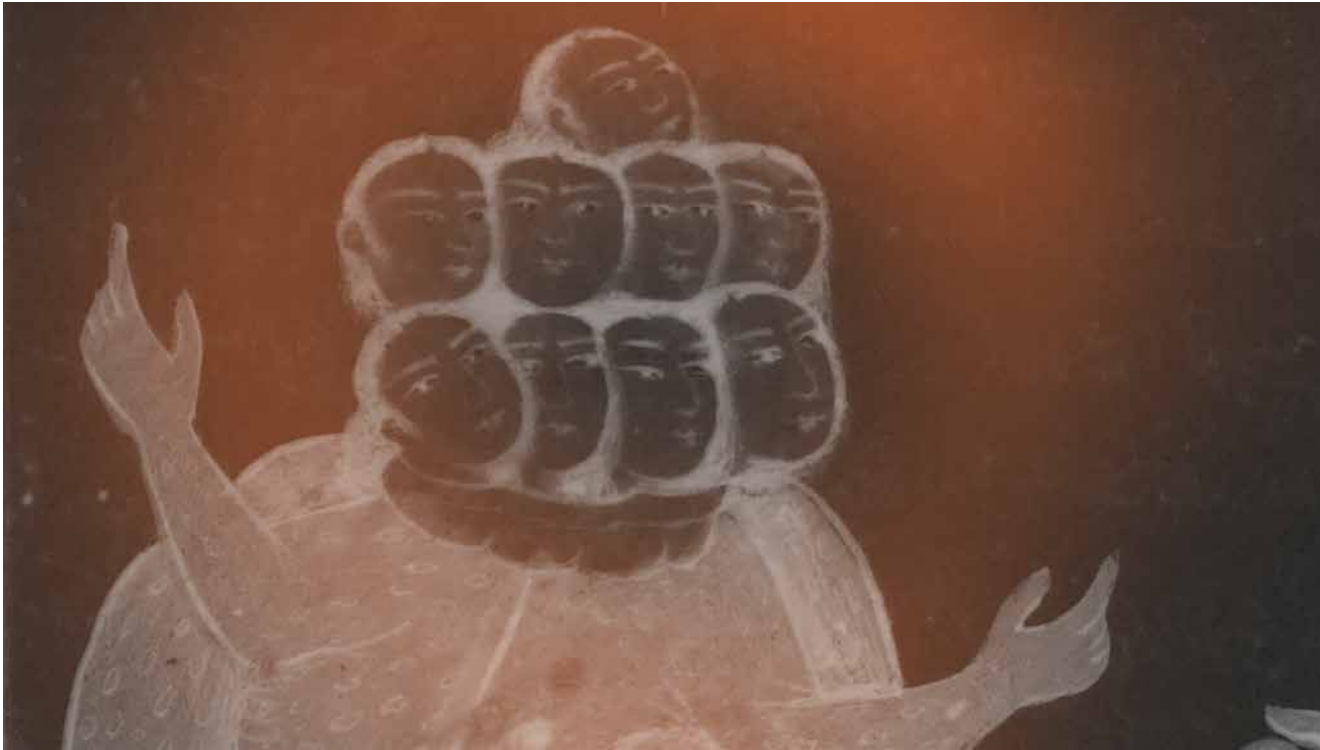
The 37-minute film is part of the installation *Chillahona* and is alternated on the same screens with the 24-minute film *Two Horizons*.

6. *The Seed Under Our Tongue*, 2024

The golden date seed sculpture, positioned near the film *Arslanbob* (2023–ongoing) with which it shares a link to the legend of the seed, represents individual responsibility for one's cultural and spiritual heritage in the face of the challenges posed by time and social context. This concept ties into a broader discourse on resilience of knowledge, collective memory, and the deep connection between past and present, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage despite political changes and social turmoil. Symbolically, the seed embodies the potential of a single tiny individual action that has the ability to sprout and transform to something larger than one's life.

The work is central to the oral legend that inspired the exhibition's title, recounting the story of Arslanbob and Akhmad Yasawi, mystics of Central Asia. In the most widespread version, Arslanbob lived for several centuries before finding a worthy successor in Akhmad Yasawi (7 year old at the time) to whom he passes a date seed that he had kept under his tongue. The myth also tells how Yasawi plants the seed near Sulaiman-Too Mountain, resulting in the walnut forest known today as Arslanbob.

In the principal iconographic interpretations, the seed is the origin and the growth potential, but in this story, it takes on an even greater significance due to both the contradictory nature of all forms of transmission, which allows a date seed to become a walnut, and its time frame, as date palms only bear fruit after 30 years and can live over three centuries.



Arslanbob,
2023–ongoing
(video still)
Three-channel HD
video, color, sound
19'32"

7. *Arslanbob*, 2023–ongoing

Filmed in the Arslanbob forest in southern Kyrgyzstan next to the Sulaiman-Too Mountain, one of the oldest sacred sites in Central Asia, *Arslanbob* is a new ongoing editing of a project that the artist commenced in 2022. The work explores the fragility of these places and the need to protect them from human activities that threaten both the environment and ancestral memories and deeply rooted beliefs. Arslanbob forest, named after the mystic Arslanbob, is known for the presence of many healing plants and for the hallucinatory effects attributed to its dense growth of walnut trees and their release of more carbon dioxide than oxygen. This habitat is a

unique example of a relict walnut forest and the behavior of the plants still remains mysterious; local people say that even the animals do not sleep under them.

In the montage, the artist combines live images of the forest and the tomb of Arslanbob within it, along with miniatures from the ancient book *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence*, a seminal thirteenth-century work in cosmography by Persian geographer and philosopher Zakariya al-Qazwini, tracing a line amongst different times and realms.

Arslanbob is approximately 20 minutes long.



What Was My Name?, 2020
Neon, horsehair
140 x 150 cm

8. *The Mountain Our Bodies Emptied*, 2024

This new sculpture condenses themes central to Ismailova's practice, such as the stratification of memory.

The work evokes geological time through its shape and structure, which is a cast from the Tamchi Tomar cave, the most visited and still highly venerated in the pilgrimage site of the Sulaiman-Too Mountain. The natural caves in the mountain are believed to have healing properties and revive an ancestral dialogue with the Earth, thus Pilgrims enter the rock's openings with their body or parts of it, such as their arms, legs, or head to be cured. In particular, the Tamchi Tomar cave, which translates to "dripping water," is visited by pilgrims who enter it completely for fertility purposes or apply drops of the cave water to their eyes to heal them.

The artist used Lidar scanning, an advanced structural surveying technology, to capture the shape of the empty space within these

cavities, and then modeled the smaller-scale sculpture entitled *The Mountain Our Bodies Emptied*. It is made of resin, frequently used for architectural projects and chosen for translucidity and stone-like characteristics such as hardness and resistance to wear over time.

In the exhibition, *The Mountain Our Bodies Emptied* dialogues with the installation *As We Fade* film (2024), where the rock and the natural landscape is also viewed in the projected film through the Lidar scans, and both witness and evoke historical events, including the impacts of environmental changes. Through this work, Ismailova advocates for a renewed relationship between humans and the geological environment, emphasizing its potential to heal both personal and collective wounds.

9. *Talosh*, 2024

Horsehair holds symbolic significance in Central Asian culture. For example, it is the principal material of the *chachvon*, a traditional veil used in the early twentieth century by Uzbek women to cover their faces in public, but it is also hung to flutter unwoven near the tombs of saints. Ismailova has previously used this material as emblematic of political and ideological shifts in works like *Chilltan #1* (2020), an installation that included 40 *chachvons* paired with red neon lettering, and *What Was My Name?* (2020), where a white neon sign with the title phrase in old Uzbek written in Arabic is surrounded by horsehair tails.

In *Talosh* the suspended curved line of the installation recalls the shape of a loop in the Syr Darya river, creating a geographical dialogue with the other works on display. Along this curved line, a text is projected, featuring the words of Jontemir Jondor, a young Uzbek independent poet, who within the continuity of the traditional literary school is a highly relevant voice in the contemporary discourse. Jondor also collaborated on Ismailova's recent film *Melted into the Sun* (2024).

The Uzbek word *talosh* refers poetically to the idea of struggle and effort, for example in the moments of transition—when the sun sets, the day comes to the stage of struggle between daylight and night. It derives from the title of a poem specifically written by Jontemir Jondor in relation to the concept and structure of the exhibition in Pirelli HangarBicocca.

10. *As We Fade*, 2024

The work consists of 24 suspended thin white silk panels on which moving images can be discerned. Arranged in a row, the shape and proportions of these elements evoke a sequence of screens and film projection, which usually takes place at a speed of 24 frames per second. The images that penetrate the weave of the fabric—a reference to the plot and threads of a narrative—include 1929 archival chronicle material by an unknown source depicting inhabitants and pilgrims of the Sulaiman-Too Mountain, located at the center of the city of Osh, as well as new footage shot by the artist there. The fabrics used come from Margilan, a town in the Fergana region of Uzbekistan, famous for its silk production and handloom weaving. The characteristic transparency of the fabric allows the shapes of the images to filter from one panel to the next. As they gradually dissolve, they symbolically represent the fading of memory, what is lost or remains hidden beneath a visible surface.

The mount's name Sulaiman-Too is commonly translated as Throne of Solomon, a subject that appears in all the monotheistic religions. Just as the seed of the date transforms into walnut forest through oral transmission, the figures of Suleiman Farsi—another name for the mystic Arslanbob—and the Biblical Solomon have merged into one character over the perpetuation of the story. The image of the mountain, the most venerated place in Central Asia, appears in this work as in other works in the exhibition.

The film part of the installation *As We Fade* is 19 minutes long.

11. *A Guide, an Ancestor, a Tiger, a Healer*, 2024

The newly produced glass sculpture *A Guide, an Ancestor, a Tiger, a Healer* is a hybrid form composed of human and tiger phalanges, representing the coexistence and non-hierarchical relationship of different living entities and their common inheritance.

The tiger, a spiritual recurring presence in Central Asian mythology and animist belief, manifests as a sacred archetype and a guide in Ismailova's films *Stains of Oxus* (2016) and *The Haunted* (2017). Drawing inspiration from one of the dreams

recorded by the artist for *Stains of Oxus*, along the course of the Amu Darya river, the sculpture similarly highlights the shared destiny of all living beings—both human and animal—affected by turbulent events that could transform their habits, landscapes, but also languages, and ultimately lead to extinction. Installed between and literally embraced by these two films, *A Guide, an Ancestor, a Tiger, a Healer* materializes and condenses aspects of their narratives, underlining, also through its title, how social and political environments are temporary while deep-rooted knowledge and beliefs provide stability and solid guidance.

The work is also linked to the new film *Arslanbob* (2023–ongoing), whose title in English translates as “gate of the tiger,” in which the viewer enters the hallucinatory world of the subconscious.

12. *The Haunted*, 2024

In the same way that Ismailova uses the sculptures *The Seed Under Our Tongue*, *A Guide, an Ancestor, a Tiger, a Healer* and *The Mountain Our Bodies Emptied* (all 2024) to visually expand on the stories and themes in her films, her new work *The Haunted* interprets the 2017 eponymous movie in the form of a traditional hand-woven textile named *bakhmal velour*. For this new piece Ismailova extrapolated hundreds of frames and details from the film—such as the tiger's eye, the stripes of its coat, the color orange, or the audio track. According to the traditional *bakhmal velour* technique, these elements become patterns that overlap and intersect. Also known as *abr band* (“cloud weaving” in Persian), the fabric is made of dyed silk threads woven to form a soft, shaded design with a repeating mirrored motif. The revival of *bakhmal velour* is emblematic of Ismailova's desire to preserve the know-how associated with this type of handicraft. The work thus embodies a story of resistance and is a medium for disseminating a narrative, just as a film might: “The work unfolds the idea of translating and conceiving film as a weaving, seeing cinematic practice as intertwining a series of stories to weave a narrative, much like that of a film.”

Selected Exhibitions

Saodat Ismailova has exhibited at numerous major institutions including JOAN, Los Angeles (2024); Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains in collaboration with Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023); Center for Contemporary Arts, Tashkent (2019); Ilkhom Theatre, Tashkent (2018); Tromsø Kunstforening, Tromsø, Norway (2017). Her films and video installations have also been presented in international group exhibitions such as Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale, Fondazione in Between Art and Film, Venice (2024), Shanghai Biennale of Art, Sharjah Biennial (2023); Venice Biennale, documenta 15, Kassel (2022); Meet Factory, Prague (2021); Para Site, Hong Kong, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2019); Lunds konsthall (2018); Yinchuan Biennale (2018). In 2013 Ismailova was one of the artists representing Central Asia at the Venice Biennale, while in 2018 her live musical performance *Qyrq Qyz* premiered at Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York.

Her work is also widely recognized in the film industry and has been featured in festivals such as the Berlinale International Film Festival (2014) and Rotterdam International Film Festival (2005), among others. She has received numerous awards, including Eye Art & Film Prize, Amsterdam (2022); Documenta Madrid (2018), Golden Alhambra Award, Granada Cines del Sur Film Festival (2014), Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art (2014), and Turin International Film Festival for Best Documentary (2004). In 2021, she founded the research group DAVRA, dedicated to the study, documentation and dissemination of Central Asian culture and knowledge.

This publication accompanies the exhibition “A Seed Under Our Tongue” by Saodat Ismailova

Lenders
Saodat Ismailova and Aspan Gallery

Acknowledgments
Erika Balsom, Massimo Berardini, Amina Berdin, Riccardo Bernardini, Arianna Bertolo, Ksenia Bisti, Marente Bloemheuvel, Arianna Campanelli, Giacomo Cantoni, Carlos Casas, Nicole Colombo, Andrea Crapanzano, Andrea De Liberato, Roberto Di Pasquale, Irene Fontana, Anselm Franke, Ekaterina Golovatyuk, Jaap Guldemond, Hong Sang Hee, Meruert Kaliyeva, Alexandra Kim, Marcella Lista, Leonardo Mariotti, Aziza Pulatova, Dilda Ramazan, Muhitdin Risqiyev, Riccardo Salomoni, Marco Secondin, Giacomo Segantin, Clara Scola, Rolando Vasquez, Pietro Vitali, Stefano Zeni

Special thanks to
Saodat Ismailova and Aspan Gallery

Layout Design
GRACE

Texts by
Chiara Lupi

Graphic Design
Leonardo Sonnoli
Irene Bacchi
with Laura Scopazzo
- Studio Sonnoli -

Editing and translation
Malerba Editorial & Partners, Milan

For all images,
if not otherwise stated:
Courtesy the artist
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Printed:
September 2024

Reprint:
November 2024

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**Our mission is to make art
open and accessible to everyone.**

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation dedicated to producing and promoting contemporary art. It was conceived and is supported by Pirelli. Established in 2004, Pirelli HangarBicocca has become a benchmark institution for the international art community, local public and region. It is a museum that is free of charge, accessible and open, and a place for experimentation, research and dissemination, where art is a point of reflection on the most topical themes of contemporary culture and society. It caters to a broad and diverse public with a program of major solo exhibitions by both Italian and international artists, a multi-disciplinary program of accompanying events and in-depth discussions, theoretical and informational publications, and educational courses. A team of museum facilitators is on hand at all times to help the public connect with the art. Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's artistic director since 2012.

Situated in a former industrial building, once a locomotive manufacturing facility, Pirelli HangarBicocca occupies 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest single-level exhibition spaces in Europe. This vast area comprises the Shed and Navate spaces, which are used for temporary exhibitions, and the permanent display of Anselm Kiefer's *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004–2015*. This monumental installation with seven reinforced concrete towers has become one of the most iconic works in Milan. The building also houses a number of services for the public: a spacious entrance with reception area, facilities for educational activities, space for conferences and meetings, bookshop and bistro with a charming outdoor area.

Technical Sponsors



Molteni & C

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Free admission

#ArtToThePeople

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