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AZIZA SHADENOVA

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Aziza Shadenova is a multidisciplinary artist whose work spans photography, painting, sculpture, video, and installation. Drawing inspiration from Central Asian ecologies and traditions of abstraction, she delves into the complexities of displacement, migration, memory, and feminist modes of knowledge transmission in a rapidly changing world, particularly through the lens of post-Soviet cultural upheaval.

Shadenova proposes a nonlinear understanding of time, conjuring emotional, speculative, and mnemonic worlds shaped by her upbringing, diasporic experiences, and family history as colonial history. Borrowing elements from 20th-century European avant-gardes and contemporary countercultures, her Dada-esque visual poetry utilizes patterns and collage, often employing mirrored images, repetitions, and variations of motifs drawn from the evolving landscapes and nomadism around the Aral Sea under economic and ecological pressure, as well as methods of making drawn from ancestral practices, such as plaits, dowries and food rituals. Her work navigates dysfunctional mental states and dislocations of migration to question what it means to belong, to remember, and to evolve within and beyond cultural frameworks. Attuned to past and present forms of invisible female labor, her choice of materials and crafts ranges from textiles, hair, wool, soil, and stones to garments, tapestry, painting and animation. Through humour and strategies of the absurd, her poetic assemblages reveal—and attempt to heal—the psychic and material scars of political and economic violence.

Aziza Shadenova (b.1989) is a British artist of Kazakh and Uzbek descent, living and working in Hastings, UK. After completing a BA in Graphic Design at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design (2011), she took part in *Winter: Poetics & Politics*, Central Asian Pavilion, 55th Venice Biennale (Venice, 2013). Shadenova's solo exhibitions include *My Cocoon Tightens - Colours Tease*, Ainalaiynspace (London, 2022) and *Textures of Grieving*, HOP Projects (Folkestone, 2018). She has participated in institutional group exhibitions such as *Recipes for Broken Hearts - Bukhara Biennial*, cur. Diana Campbell (Bukhara, 2025); *The Pleasure of Misuse*, Royal Society of Sculptors (London, 2025); *Lining Revealed. A Journey Through Folk Wisdom and Contemporary Vision*, Mill6CHAT Centre for Heritage Arts & Textile (Hong Kong, 2025); *I Swear I Saw That*, cur. Sara Raza, Mathaf Museum of Modern Art (Doha, 2024); *How to Hold Your Breath - 9th Asian Art Biennial*, (Taichung, 2024); *Thinking Historically in the Present*, cur. Okwui Enwezor and Hoor Al Qasimi, Sharjah Biennial 15 (Sharjah, 2023) and *New Mythologies of Central Asia*, Sapor Contemporary (New York, 2020). Shadenova's works are held in private and public collections worldwide: LACMA, Los Angeles; Moving Image London, UK; ABR, Almaty, Kazakhstan; National Museum of Kazakhstan, Astana, Kazakhstan.

AZIZA SHADENOVA

1989, Uzbekistan.

Lives and works in Hastings, UK.

Education

2011 Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, (Bachelor of Arts) - Graphic Design, London, UK

Solo Exhibitions

2022 *My Cocoon Tightens - Colours Tease*, Ainalainyspace, London, UK

2018 *Textures of grieving*, HOP Projects, Folkestone, UK

Group Exhibitions

2025 *Looking Sideways: A Guide to Misinterpreting Myself*, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
Bukhara Biennial, Recipes for Broken Hearts, Bukhara, UZ
The Pleasure of Misuse, Dora House, Royal Society of Sculptors, London, UK
Lining Revealed, A Journey Through Folk Wisdom and Contemporary Vision
MILL6CHAT, Hong Kong, CN

Language Without Alphabet, Private Institute, Paris, FR
2024 *I Swear I Saw That*, Mathaf Museum of Modern Art, Doha, QA
How to Hold Your Breath, Asian Art Biennial, Taichung, TW

2023 *Thinking Historically in the Present*, Sharjah Biennial 15, Sharjah, UAE
Clouds & Power, MILL6CHAT, Hong Kong, CN

2020 *New Mythologies of Central Asia*, Sapar Contemporary, New York, US
Racing The Galaxy, Astana Art Show 19, Astana, KZ

2018 *Post-Nomadic Mind - Focus Kazakhstan*, Wapping Hydraulic Power Station,
London, UK

2017 *The Return of Memory*, HOME Gallery, Manchester, UK.
In Search of the Present, EMMA Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Espoo, FI

2014 *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Istanbul to Kabul*, Sotheby's,
London, UK
IV Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, RuArts Gallery, Moscow, RU

2013 *Winter: Poetics & Politics, Central Asian Pavilion*, 55th Venice Biennale,
Venice, IT

Residencies

2025 *Costumes & Collapse*, University of Chicago, Ria Keburia Residency, Chicago, US

2015 *Protagonists, The Invisible Pavilion of Kazakhstan*, IADA, 56th Venice Biennale, IT

Collections

LACMA, Los Angeles, USA

Moving Image London, London, UK

ABR, Almaty, KZ

National Museum of Kazakhstan, Astana, KZ

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WORKS AND EXHIBITIONS



Lining Revealed - A Journey Through Folk Wisdom and Contemporary Vision at CHAT/ mill6chat, Hong Kong, 2025

Commissioned by Hong Kong's Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile (CHAT), Aziza Shadenova's *Dastarkhan (Her Skirt)* (2024) takes the form of a large skirt and colorful soft pads arranged in a square, replicating the traditional Central Asian table setting known as "dastarkhan." This "wearable tablecloth," created collaboratively with the artist's mother, honors Central Asian women and highlights the beauty often hidden beneath daily routines. Four colorful quilts are joined together in a square to replicate the traditional table setting dastarkhan, a communal space where food and conversations are shared. Drawing inspiration from traditional Kazakh ornaments, Shadenova designed unique patterns to embellish the borders of the quilts. She invites the visitors to visualize the environment, landscapes, flora, fauna, and everyday objects that would have accompanied the life of a woman growing up in Kazakhstan. The empty cups embroidered onto the skirt are used in prayers for food and provision, therefore further emphasizing this woman's strength and status. Evocative of haute couture displays, this installation is a tribute to female labor in Central Asian cultures.

Aziza Shadenova

Dastarkhan (Her Skirt), 2024

Quilted fabric mattresses & pillows, embroidered cotton and wallpaper design.

Variable dimensions

100 cm × 100 cm





Language Without Alphabet, cur. Hannah Kneale & Azad Asifovich, Private Institution, Paris, 2025



Aziza Shadenova
Pattern 2, Kese / Pivola, 2024
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm



Aziza Shadenova
Pattern 4, Sunset & Sunrise, 2024
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm

Aziza Shadenova
Pattern 3, Vine Glitch, 2024
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm





How to Hold your Breath, Asian Art Biennial, 2024





Textures of Grieving was inspired by the Aral Sea as a visual statement, manifesting the themes of national identity, ethnicity, immigration and displacement with roots in contemporary ecological crisis. The series *Textures of Grieving* was originally produced from canvas, silk and wool attached to tall polls and scattered around the Aral Desert, and installed both on wet and dry grounds. These fabrics made from Uzbek ikhat textiles represent tears. The polls standing from the dry grounds of the Aral desert have white fabric as tears, in reference to the drought affecting the land. The main narrative thread explores of how the slow erasure of Central Asian identity is tied to the climate disaster of the Aral Sea. Through these works, Shadenova attempts to visualize the slow erosion of her own ethnicity in the contemporary world by establishing an analogy with the disastrous shrinking of the Aral Sea. Shadenova questions in the absurdist manner whether the Soviet ideology was beneficial for Central Asia or is it responsible for the slow shrinking of the Central Asian ethnicity rooted by homogenising people into a single “national unit”.

Aziza Shadenova

Textures of Grieving, 2019

Fabric installation: felt, wool & silk ikhat, galvanised buckets, stones and sand

Various dimensions



Racing The Galaxy, cur. Jérôme Sans & Dina Baitassova, Palace of Independence, Astana, Kazakhstan, 2020



Exhibition view, *Sharjah Biennial 15, Thinking Historically in the Present*, Sharjah, UAE, 2023



Aziza Shadenova's paintings, films and performances interrogate the world of emotions and memories and advance nonlinear understandings of time. *Treasured Shadows* (2022), a site-specific woodwork installation using glass chandelier crystals and fabric, is an immersive visual and embodied reflection of the artist's childhood recollections of her life in Uzbekistan. The work offers visitors theatrical and otherworldly insight into the artist's inner world. Vases and silhouettes populate the room's recesses while four camels guard its centre, the heart of the dreamscape. Crystal objects suspended from the ceiling emit sparkling light, while the white wooden cutouts transform into silhouettes and shadows. The installation was produced by Sharjah Art Foundation for *Thinking Historically in the Present*, Sharjah Biennial 15, 2023.

Aziza Shadenova

Treasured Shadows, 2022

Site-specific installation: wood, glass chandelier crystals and fabric
Various dimensions



Aziza Shadenova
Quilt/Korpe, 2021
 Oil on canvas boards
 200 cm x 120 cm, (Total: 60 Boards)
 20 x 20 cm (each)

Aziza Shadenova
The window, 2019
Oil on canvas
150 cm x 100 cm







Aziza Shadenova
Dawn (Triptych), 2019
Oil on canvas
150 x 100 cm (each)



Focus Kazakhstan: Post-nomadic Mind, cur. Indira Dyssebaeva-Ziyabek & Aliya de Tiesenhausen, Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, London UK, 2018

Shadenova's expansive practice explores the nuances of the self and being in our contemporary moment, while carefully referencing complex histories and personal memory. The installation *Mothers* is representative of her use of the plait as a recurring motif, a symbol of Central Asian identity and histories, particularly in relation to women. *Mothers* features dramatically long plaits draped over glass cylinders stuffed with sheep's wool, recognising the perseverance and labour of women from nomadic times to present day. The work draws on Shadenova's careful observation of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, noticing the way in which their long hair would be tied or plaited when faced with hard work. The installation also features sheep fleece, a central source of survival in Nomadic life. Together with women's plaited hair, their juxtaposition indexes both a particular cosmology and the place of women's labor within it as a life-sustaining system.

Mothers was commissioned for the exhibition *Focus Kazakhstan: Post-nomadic Mind* at Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, London, UK, 2018 and is currently part of the collection of the National Museum of Kazakhstan in Almaty.

Aziza Shadenova

Mothers, 2018

Mixed media installation: Glass cylinders, synthetic hair, and wool



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TEXTS & PRESS

In Doha, Central Asian Artists Dismantle Orientalism



From the stylized figures of Moroccan artist Baya – a trailblazer in the last century who was close to the surrealists – to contemporary artists like the Kazakh Erbossyn Meldibekov, the selection doesn't only span Eastern geographies, but also different generations.

The installation by Meldibekov, featuring a horse's lower legs frozen in motion and placed on a white podium, is particularly haunting. The work was conceived as a commentary on the rise and fall of historical figures celebrated by statues across Central Asia. The felling of these statues started following the collapse of the USSR as part of a state-sponsored nationalist agenda and was part of a plan to revive the region's epic past, a topic dear to Meldibekov.

While his installation is dedicated to 15th-century Italian Captain Erasmo Gattamelata, and his statue to Italian Renaissance painter Donatello, Meldibekov also references Gérôme's bronze statue of the 14th-century Uzbek emperor, Timur.

But the work which is probably more impactful in moving forward the discussion on Orientalism is a series of photographs titled "Girls of Kyrgyzstan," which have distinctive GenY/ GenZ aesthetics.

Created by Uzbekistan-born Kyrgyzstan-bred artist Aziza Shadenova, a multidisciplinary artist and musician of Kazakh ethnicity, it encapsulates the ethos of the generation born right after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, who grew up familiar with the internet from an early age.

The series speaks of the pervasiveness of images on the internet as a means to represent the self, freeing themselves from both Western and the Soviet narratives, as well as debunking previous social norms and myths around the representation of Central Asian women.



Aziza Shadenova, "Girls of Kyrgyzstan"; image: TCA, Naima Morelli

Going out of the comfort zone: An Interview With Artist Aziza Shadenova



Still of the video "Going out of the comfort zone"

Aziza Shadenova - is one of the brightest artists of the new generation in the Central Asian contemporary art scene. She is a Kazakh artist born in Uzbekistan and raised in Kyrgyzstan. Aziza graduated from Saint Martins College and since then she is based in London. Across geographical and cultural borders her works reflect on her native background of the Post Soviet Asian region. Her multidisciplinary practice includes paintings, installations, photographs and films. She has participated in the Central Asian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale, 4th Moscow International Biennale for young art, Mythologies of Central Asia group show at Sapar Gallery in NYC and many others. Especially for IADA the artist Aziza Shadenova shared her experience about working during quarantine and spoke regarding her new video work «Out of the Comfort Zone».

How are you doing during quarantine?

I am doing ok, thank you. It's been somewhat productive for me. I have done the "Harvest" drawings that's been quite fun to do. As well as some experimental small works on paper and since I ran out of canvases I did oil paintings on PVC Sheets. I guess its good to keep myself busy during these times, otherwise I'd go mad. But sometimes I just space out on the bed and watch films that i've missed out on. The main thing is maintaining the balance between being fruitful and lethargic. Oh, and I miss socialising.



THE HARVEST

Original Drawings, Gouache on Card
2020

How did you found the idea of Out of the Comfort Zone? It was your first time in Almaty?

It has been my second time in Almaty. Out of the Comfort Zone came out through pure exploration of my inner artistic practice. At this point in my life I felt that I had an urge for development, but the development wasn't coming through naturally. It felt that I was being dishonest with myself and was trying to create something that was quite pretentious and unnatural. Every creative had an idea of 'going out of the comfort zone' in some way or another. So I was trying to do the same, by trying different mediums, ideas, brainstorming about what I haven't done before. As a manifest to this idea, I've made this short performance, ridiculing the idea of "getting out of the comfort zone" so to speak. And trying to find out what it feels like and what it looks like in an absurd manner. I have never ice skated in my life, so to bring a little bit of motion and comedy to the performance I've tried to paint my self-portrait while ice skating. Self portrait has been a sort of mental metaphor for the inner search. I guess the inner search still continues and this performance has proved that it's ok to be safe and at ease sometimes. And continue digging deeper into yourself rather than try to be someone else and do something that's out of your character as an artist and as a person.

Let's talk about your practice of making films, it seems that it is a big part of your life but most of your films are not included in the portfolio on your website. Is cinema for you is a continuation of artistic practice or is it a simultaneous occupation? In an interview with Dazed, you said you want to return to your homeland and make a film. Are these plans still valid?

I have always dreamed of being a filmmaker. After all I've started my artistic practice from making films. Everything I do is interconnected. May it be an installation or a painting, I always envisioned it to be a moving image. A backdrop to a scene, or a character from the painting in the narrative story. I choose whether to flatten the subject matter down to a painting or let it move in the video format. It's that idea of being static that intrigues me. The form sometimes really does matter. For example the work I did, titled The Unfinished Aral Sea project "Textures of Grieving" was initially meant to be a video work, as a moving image portrait of an installation scattered throughout the Aral Sea/Desert. The whole film was suppose to be about the measures of taking these big "Ikat Eye" installations to the location and placing them physically into the wet and dry grounds of Aral. But obviously due to time, location, and some financial difficulties the work turned out to be in purely static installation format and much smaller in scale. Which is still ok, but it turned out to be only a small fraction of the bigger idea. I guess my film practice had been put on hold for sometime. But I will definitely come back to that medium as I have been thinking about many things I'd like to shoot and perform in front of the camera. And yes, I still intend to make a film in my homeland, one day it will happen. Its all about time and resources at the moment. But I will work hard to annihilate these restriction one by one, and finally make something I've planned for a long time.

Your work for Astana Art show Textures and grieving related to Aral sea how did you feel about all of the environmental problems? Are you sensitive to ecological problems?

The main narrative of the work is exploration of how Central Asian national identity equals to the climate disaster of the Aral Sea. Through these works, I visualise the meaning of slow erosion of my ethnicity in the modern world and compare it to the disastrous shrinking of the Aral Sea. I think being conscious of your surroundings and care for the earth is always a must. However I am not as militant and over sensitive about these matters as some environmentalists are. The Aral Sea is an ecological disaster that's been created through water supply diversions which led to its shrinking. This was part of the Soviet plan for the "White gold" – cotton to be a major export. The Greed has been killing this earth for centuries and it will happen over and over again.



Textures of grieving
Fabric installations (silk, wool, cotton)
Wooden poles, galvanized buckets, mud.
Dimensions Variable
Racing the Galaxy
Palace of Independence, Astana, Kazakhstan, 2019
Photo by Saparlas

Your work for the exhibition Post Nomadic Mind reminds me of the tradition of long hair in many countries of Central Asia. Until this time it seems like social capital for a woman from this region. How did you inspire? From this tradition or maybe you have a personal related story?

Precisely! Through personal relations I have observed the Central Asian woman's hardworking nature. May she be a daughter or a mother, she ties her hair in this way to work, to do or to be ready for something. When the hair is down, it's quite uncomfortable and it stops you from being productive. It also helped me in a way to depict certain things that I wanted to portray in my artwork such as the strength and responsibility of a woman as well as the beauty and the connection with nature. I've also used a sheep fleece in my installation. From the ancient times, the sheep was the main source of survival in Nomad families. The woman used each element of the sheep, from wool to the bone, providing food, clothes and many other things that she used for her home. From my point of view, the sheep was giving the woman her work and her life at the same time. In this installation, I am yet again depicting the circle of life in an abstracted presentation of time itself. The sheep prolonged the woman's life therefore women's hair became longer and longer. The writer for Art Asia Pacific Ned Carter Miles saw the "suggestion of the styles of living within the modern context, but also the containment of women and their labor within traditions". It's quite unique how many meanings can ones work hold together through the eyes of different viewers.



The Homemaker,
Mixed media installation. (Polyester plaits, sheep fur, glass cylinders) dimensions variable.

At "Focus Kazakhstan: Post-Nomadic Mind," Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, London, 2018

Photo by Thierry Bal

One of the central themes as the highlight of many of your works is definitely an identity theme. The description of your biography often begins with the fact that you are a Kazakh woman who was born in Uzbekistan, lived in Kyrgyzstan and moved to London. How has your migration history affected you? What do you feel mentally each time returning to your works about Central Asia?

Coming back to Central Asia feels like a breath of fresh air. Growing up in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan affected my work immensely. Especially the remains of the Soviet regime, the crossroads between traditions and westernisation. My childhood memories had a huge impact on my work especially observing the mix of traditions and clashes of languages and mentalities of post soviet nationalities. The communications between one and other and the outside world. It seemed all quite surreal. I am fascinated by the absurdity of life and people. Central Asian people are so friendly, kind and welcoming on the inside, but can be so hard and harsh on the outside. I blame the strict and unsparing history of Communism/Totalitarianism. Only here "abroad" I've realised how different the mentality of people is. The democratic past shaped people into complete opposite to my nation. Yet still my love for the countries I grew up in is tremendous. I've always said I don't think I would've felt so much love for my motherland if I stayed there. My identity have been shaped here abroad as greatly, as it was shaped during my childhood in my homeland. I've only got inspired when I was no longer living there. It gave me different sets of sensors to use by observing it from the distance. Perhaps it made me an observer through the heart, not though the eyes.

NEW EAST DIGITAL ARCHIVE

Aza Shadenova: the Kazakh artist whose canvases capture Central Asia's cultural crossroads

Via Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, this Kazakh artist has embraced no-wave punk and sweeping canvases

The creative path of Kazakh artist Aza Shadenova has not been straightforward: born in Uzbekistan and raised in Kyrgyzstan, she moved to the UK in 2007 and is now based between London and Hastings. Her career breakthrough happened in 2013, with her participation in the 55th Venice Biennale as part of the Central Asian Pavilion. Back then Shadenova's main media were video and photography, and her main subject the emerging identity of young girls on the crossroads of cultures in Central Asia.



Since then Shadenova has also spent a portion of her time as the front woman of no wave/ experimental punk band Manflu, before fully committing to painting. Her large-scale canvases twist together intricate patterns, bold colours, gold and curvy writing — channeling the conflicting cultural experiences of East and West, immigration and belonging.



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