

# w i n d o w

bactria newsletter

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## Unprofessional Opinion

I am not sure I can confess things like that, but just like most of modern urban residents, I was not quite competent in music. I used to have a prejudice against traditional music which seemed to me something moth-eaten, covered by dust, taken from the very bottom of granny's dowry chest. But now, I can confidently assume that a lot, if not the greatest part of what we call traditional music, is nothing but the badly-preserved and spoiled contents of this old chest, taken out with sterile rubber gloves and serious straight faces full of understanding of this noble mission of preservation of heritage of prominent ancestry, as a sole argument of consistency of our contemporaries. But I also know that there is a completely different traditional music that has a refracted light of the past but renders the present without the slightest corruption. Music that produces actual notions for us, evoking  
c o n f u s i o n   a n d  
misunderstanding.

We all agree that tastes differ, but it's worth going to the concert of SAMO in order at least to understand how folk music can be contemporary, interesting and moving not because it is played for hundreds if not thousands of years, which might not be true as well, but because you can touch upon a unique music experience created right there, at that very moment. It is not jazz, not even fusion or folk - SAMO does not go

not an inch beyond traditional genres – falak, mado, folklore of mountainous Tajiks, ritual and religious motifs but reveals deep potential of actual composing and performing creativity within this space. SAMO's music is not an artifact of an ethnographic museum but rather an outcome of experimental creative laboratory which was achieved not through synthesis, but through a spectral analysis disclosing things that seem hidden, that are unclear and insignificant. This music is not restoration, and not a free interpretation – it is a way of thinking, feeling, speaking, asking and sometimes even answering...

*Georgy Mamedov*



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## To be recognized

“To be recognized” – is the second part of the project STILLS and a dynamic development of conceptual impulse of the first project phase.

Exhibition titles “To be seen” and “To be recognized” mark, as a reference point, the person as an observer who “sees”, “recognizes” and “learns”. That is the figure of the “Other” (of course, this Other could be an “inner Other”). The relationships, in which we are with this figure, determine the phase of the project.

The first part stimulated primary, almost physiological impulse: attraction of attention. This is why the slide show “Attraction” was based on singular slides, a sort of perceptual trap. “Stories” that are presented in each of the photos were compressed and densely displayed as artificial concentration. Or to put it in other words – the first film visualized an artistic technique as it is, modeled and “tested” paths, figures, methods (metaphor, oxymoron, montage of attractions). It was not content that was dominating but the form as a synonym of expressivity. The film was not “speaking”, but “showing”.

“To know” is the next stage after “to see”. Here conceptual work is carried out. We move to rational construction. The object for construction is nothing, but identity. “To be recognized” is a formula of identification (the concept of “game” which is a common element of all the films is realized here as “role playing”). Thus the film “Locality: To be recognized” is more discursive and logo centric. It has a larger amount of narrative: along with single images there are photo series; stories are extensive, prolonged in time (they are not stuck together in one attractive image like in the first film). This is why there are twice as many photos in Locality than in the first film (235 vs. 113). Themes and stories are articulated more clearly and are separated. The film presents panoramic, not fragmental vision.

The film studies a wide choice of opportunities for being “recognized”. Artists offer various visual formulas for “localities” as well as identify. Photos are presented in the film sequentially, like they are in regular exhibition rooms with various thematic titles.

Here, it is important to note, that each film of STILLS is an artificial, experimental artifact that could hardly be identified as a film or video art. It is rather a model or a variation for an exhibition. It differs from a traditional exhibition by its temporal rather than spatial development.

In other words, the exhibition has two dimensions: temporal as a slide show and spatial as a video installation (1). The slide show is a compressed (compressed in space) presentation of several dozen artworks by various artists and one soundtrack by a group of musicians.

With all the clear features of a film, it is still not a film but an exhibition. First of all because a film is a collective work directed by a director, which is determined prior to the beginning of filmmaking, whereas in an exhibition (especially in a large one) ready-made artifacts, created by artists earlier, are lined up in a single syntagma by a curator.

Thus, key topics of the film “Locality” can be identified as follows:

### 1. Ethnical identity / continental (Asian) identity

This discourse can be designated as “discourse of identity and authenticity”.

It consists of two levels:

1. Between the great past and the great future. Monuments and theatrical performances.

The film starts with “heavenly” scenes from “Yanagi”, featuring symbolic sights of an Asian capital city. A work by the same artist – a bird’s eye view of the city – simulates the optics of greatness, optics of official-sublime.

The central image of this part of the film is “Erkindik” – the Statue of Liberty (works by a group of artists Graphia) in Bishkek. In comparison to other representations of majestic spirit this one is more delicate and democratic. The basements under the statue host international exhibitions of contemporary art and “Erkindik” is believed to be their patron saint.

However, despite all local connotations the statue is still a symbol of power. According to Boris Chukhovich, the author of thesis “Monuments of independence. Mythology of the sphere and discourses of power” (2), “...freedom on the sphere is inspired by Nika – the goddess of victory held by an emperor-demiurge in power. Great French revolution demolished the demiurge but did not terminate him”.

2. Seeking truth. Images produced by collective minds.

The area of artists’ research is in the locus and heterotopia that are empowered by collective mind to reproduce concentrated and even aesthetic identity and authenticity, such “invariance of mentality and spirit” like bazaars and cemeteries (Alina Tolstihina, Natalia Andrianova) and such traditional heterochronys as a holiday (Umida Ahmedova).

Other places of that sort are symbolic landscapes like steppes and mountains.

A work by Alexandr Fyodorov depicting a sleeping aksakal underneath an old tree is an embodiment of an Elysium from a myth in a very accurate way. And this magic picture is not staged, but borrowed from reality which is not less dreamy than dreams.

Re-deconstruction of images of orientalism is presented in works by Mumtoz Kamolzoda and Murod Sharipov, Ura Huseinov and Joshua Murzahmetova.

### 2. Civil post-soviet identity

First of all, it should be noted that post-soviet mental references are intermittently noticeable in the first part of the film (social identity – a dialectical complex which can be dissected only by an analytical scalpel).

Such artificial points – a mix of national and soviet – are typical of local and regional situations and get externalized in interesting artistic observations.

**Continuation on page 4**

## To be recognized *continuation...*

A photo by Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Jumaliev "A Family in a Yurt" (New Silk Road project) demonstrates soviet home design (wall hanging with a picture of swans and deer) turned into a national visual thesaurus. A yurt, a model of the universe, the thick felt rug depicting the sun, a fundamental symbol, and the picture of swans itself, is built into an ornamental cartouche which reveals a home motif of sacred connotations.

The photo series of Natalia Andrianova presents a range of "ecumenical ziggurats" marked by sacred symbols of various doctrines (soviet stars and Muslim crescent).

Post-soviet discourse can be stated as a "discourse of loss and hope". Here we can see several avatar-images, despite a post-Soviet mental complex, namely complex that combines both negative and positive components.

### 1) Identity of breakup

"After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Second World became the Third World – this thesis exists not only in the collective sub-mind of post-soviet people, but also in writings by a range of sociologists (3). The locus here is like ruins. Visual landmarks of this identity are images of destruction, disorderliness, and deprivations.

The range of images and stories is very wide.

Artists document both rusty traces of war (Jamshed Kholikov) and traces of revolutionary disorders and mess (Anatoliy Kolesnikov), remains of Soviet monuments (Alimjan Joropaev) and democratic entourage of bazaars, presented here as a space for employment of dogbodies (Dmitriy Petrovskiy and Chingiz Aidarov).

However the works presented in this part of the film cannot be considered as critical in nature.

In the photo series by Alexei Shindin, the disorderly living antibourgeois and deadbeats have a trait of freedom and non-commitment, intimacy and abnormality a'la Diane Arbus and Nan Goldin.

### 2) Identity of periphery

When we stopped being a part of the empire (centre) we became the periphery, which is also a "constant reverse" of post-Soviet myth.

фото-арт-проект  
7-12 декабря 2009 г.  
Культурный центр «Бактрия»  
Открытие: 7 декабря в 17.00

Битва знаний

ЛОКАЛЬНОСТЬ.

STILLS  
центрально-азиатский арт-объект

Участники: художники Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Таджикистана, Туркменистана, Узбекистана

Кураторы: Оксана Шаталова (Казахстан), Борис Чухович (Канада)

Саундтрек: [Afterband], Алматы

www.stills.kz

"Metal Theme", a theme of materiality of the Third World, presented in minimalistic compositions, by Aitegin Muratbek-uulu, has surprising lyrical links to the photo-performances of the group "...graphy" photographed by Inna Semenova, which is romantic and ironic at the same time.

This part of the film presents several bright and witty visual metaphors (Georgiy Kolotov, Artur Boljurov, Aleksei Rumjantsev and others).

3) Identity of heirs and successors of utopian spirit of Soviet Union.

It part has a progressive and optimistic flavor: internationalism, openness, thirst for justice, bravery, brotherhood, mutual help, "sound naivety", sincerity, enthusiasm.

The final part of the film is a bridge to the third phase of the project, titled "STILLS-Enthusiasm: To be or not to be", the idea of playing for oneself, rather than a show for others.

The slideshow ends with the photo series by Mirbek Kadraliev "Flexi-Communication" in a funny, non-aggressive form of questions, a frameworks of all communicational/ identification/ discourse models and universality of the notion of identity.

**Oksana Shatalova**

(1) The first exhibition visualized the concept "Attractiveness" through a drama effect of a "game" developed by a spatial plot. People entering the exhibition hall could not see the film immediately as it was projected on the sidewall. They could only see the same film accelerated and projected on spectators; two projectors projected the film on the floor and on the spectators, blurred and unfocused producing a special effect. In this way, the spectators became a part of the installation, their bodies were palimpsests (unreadable texts), were recognized as objects of the show, nothing more. Only going further into the gallery a spectator accesses the show and becomes a part of the show for other spectators. This exposition created an atmosphere of stage and a mirror game.

(2) <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/4/ch18.html>

(3) For example, <http://www.politstudies.ru/N2004fulltext/2000/4/5.htm>

## The Pamirs - Incredible World

Anticipation, interest, curiosity are the main motivating forces driving humans all the time. I have experienced this myself when I visited one of the most beautiful places of Tajikistan.

Every year thousands of tourists, crowds of curious and intrigued people come here from different parts of the world to satisfy their thirst of interest, anticipation, and curiosity.

Waiting seemed endless, testing strength. My inner world was protesting with mixed feelings – fatigue, anger, persistence and curiosity.

This flight, just like others, was destined to be delayed. It was short though, but still full of excitement and unforgettable. The plane looked like a big bird, a seagull, headed to the roof of the world daring at high altitude, flying by scary rocks.

Turbulence flung the aircraft left and right, up and down – reminding of the danger this flight entailed. And down there, I could see a fascinating embroidered picture – houses, ploughed fields, emerald rivers, making one forget about human nature, turning him into an observer from above, seeing the way life flows, as it has been doing for hundreds of years.

This is it – the Eastern part of the Pamirs with beauty you can't describe - a remote, isolated, pure and untouched nook...

You can't describe this beauty as it takes you aback; you can't breathe, see, and admire enough. And the mountains..., they radiate magic and intimidating power. They look so close, just a stone's throw away, but coming closer you realize how far they really are.

The first rule to remember in the Pamirs is "Do not plan anything" and it says everything, it will keep you aware of the unpredictability and remoteness of this place...

Everybody who has ever been to the Pamirs remembers this rule. This place seems to be trying to keep you here forever, offering all the naturalness and whole simplicity of its small world.

There, an inspiring meeting with local people from Khorog was in store for me. Its airport is a separate story to tell, it is another world, which despite all its plans and schedules, promises no confirmed chance of leaving to Dushanbe on the appointed day. The waiting area of this airport was full of curious people sticking their heads out through the gates looking for familiar faces, while I was trying to figure out what to do next and where to go. Finally I found the right way and walking through the gates I was pretty surprised that one does not have to go through customs and passport control.

Khorog people worship and respect everything around them – their sights, neighbors, visitors. They all treat each other as family members – sisters, brothers, and even stray dogs walking around, are taken for integral part of the population, sharing common rules of living with the rest, causing no inconveniences to the rest of the population.

I also saw that very traffic light – the only one in the city, the one that does not function, but is the main reference point for locals and visitors to meet.

I went to the new City Park with its well located office of one of the most successful Tajik crafts organizations "De Pamiri". This association involves more than 100 active women and this number grows each year. Each woman is trained and consulted individually to help improve the quality of her products. There is a whole database with various designs for djurabs. Their encoded messages show interrelations of peoples, cultures, histories. Stories are inspired by the spirit of the place, its nature, people's everyday life, beliefs and



their own worldviews. Woolen pieces, particularly djurabs, are of various shapes, sizes and show the variety of ancient ornaments. Craftswomen's skills are so good that it sometimes seems that they do not concentrate on knitting and the handwork while making ornaments that are so accurate. Craftswomen seem to feel colors and designs with the tips of their fingers.

Upon arrival into this shop you find yourself in a world of skilled artisans working with felt and wool, with a whole variety of felt hats and footwear. Each item is created in national style in combination with contemporary trends. The power of colors and originality is irresistible; everyone who manages to come here fails to leave this place without buying some of the hand made products.

**Continuation on page 6**

## The Pamirs - Incredible World *continuation...*

I've started the next day by driving up to an altitude of 11500 feet above the sea level. Yes, this is a legendary place, ever admired and written about by those who have been here at least once – a place so remote but still existing and constantly developing – Murgab.

A trip to Murgab seemed endless and I was so anxious, waiting to know it better. Its nature is very interesting – a hilly area, winds, hard crusted soil with green fields and a river.

Murgab is a territory of free-floating thoughts, remarks, and impressions. My whole stay there was one big amazement and delight – I was amazed by the way people lived there and at the same time I admired their progress and their aspiration

to develop and stay in their home region. In a short, three hour talk to local people of this upland, artisans disclosed to me the whole horizon of their attitude to life, an attitude of a simple, unspoiled and good life. I met craftswomen of Yak House association, who were patiently waiting for me the whole week and then waited on for these three hours despite the late night and that they will have to walk back home. They met me with their eyes wide open full of interest and hope. They were listening to the presentation attentively, paying attention to details sometimes noting very small things. I saw them being

exited, sharing their feedbacks full of new ideas. I got to know those craftswomen who make embroideries without using a stencil – by memory, who make wonders with wool, make threads, color them and weave carpets and rugs in traditional ways and techniques. Each item bears a craftswoman's soul. Each woman seeks to preserve traditional methods and pass them on to younger generations.

The women's faces looked alike to each other but they told me a lot each on their own way, disclosing woman's fate, the hardships of this place, with tight economical, social and environmental limitations. Each of them had such an open look, which inspired me so much with hope for a better future for these women.

After the meeting we decided to have dinner in a café nearby. Murgab is a small town and you can easily walk around. It has its beginning and its end along the main road. There are some interesting buildings there, newer in style, well-adopted to life – many of the houses are used as hotels for visitors with a plate in English on each of them announcing Home Stay. I stayed overnight in

one of them. Another interesting peculiarity of the place is an unusual use of tanks, coaches and yurts. It is amazing how a metal tank used for railway transportation of black oil and fuel can become a café for local people and visitors.

This café can offer you a separate compartment by means of a curtain, which means "Occupied" when shut. The café's menu offers a variety of dishes, starting with fried meat ending with pelmeni and stuffed peppers.

The next day with its delicately falling and melting snowflakes of the first snow of the year, gave me a pleasant and easy farewell. The way back from Murgab



to Khorog surprised me with long and torturous delays. The driver, I and another passenger were accompanied by two sheep. To my great surprise they behaved quite humanly – quiet. Their unbearable smell was the only thing that kept us aware of their presence. There were a couple of urgent stops on the way, but at the end of the day we managed to get to our destination.

There was another long and perilous overnight road – Khorog-Dushanbe. For this trip, I was filled with positive impressions of this successful mission, of the experience gained, and of how warmly I was welcomed by the Pamirs.

This trip was another adventure full of excitement, encouraging a return to this beautiful and immense place...

**Shabnam Shermatova**  
**Crafts Development Program Manager**

## A few words about Bergman

In the framework of its CinemArt project, BACTRIA was bound to present the challenging but outstanding work of a key film director, Ingmar Bergman. "Challenging" because most of Bergman's movies are cerebral and often deal with psychological and metaphysical issues, although the director strived to make audiences feel and sense his movies. "Outstanding" because Bergman has built the basis of our cinematic collective unconscious and made cinema a medium of personal and introspective value.

Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007, Sweden) will indeed be remembered as a "master of cinema" for his cinematic exploration of the human condition through major themes such as childhood, illness, insanity, love, betrayal, belief and death. Krzysztof Kieślowski once said: "This man is one of the few film directors—perhaps the only one in the world—to have said as much about human nature as Dostoevsky or Camus."

Love – twisted, thwarted, unexpressed, repulsed – was the leitmotif of many of Bergman's movies, such as *A Summer with Monica* (1953) and *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), and permeated from his own private life. Unlike *A Summer with Monica*, which is deeply influenced by neorealist Italian cinema, *Scenes from a Marriage* is marked by Bergman's personal style and presents an analysis of couples' behavior. Through the tragic and painful disintegration of a couple, Bergman addresses the difficulties of the individual to deal with its feelings and wills as well as with expectations and pressures from society.

*Scenes from a Marriage* dates from the period of

maturity of Bergman's cinema and was shot one year after *Cries and Whispers* (1972), which is considered as Bergman's master piece. The film is the shortened version (168 minutes) of a TV mini-series of 6 episodes spanning 295 minutes, which met with huge popular success and sparked sociological surveys on the institution of marriage and the worries of contemporary couples.

Existential questions of mortality, loneliness and religious faith are notably addressed in *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *Through a Glass Darkly* (1971). Bergman won his



international reputation with the former, which was qualified as "the most beautiful film ever" by Eric Rohmer (French director).

**Antoine Buisson.**  
**Director of Educational Programs of Bactria**

**BACTRIA will screen *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) on November 5. The other movies mentioned above are available at BACTRIA's Resource Center.**