

**Central Asian Project** is a unique collaboration between Central Asia and the UK, dedicated to forging new links between the art communities in both these regions through artists residencies, cultural exchanges and exhibitions. Jointly organised by AsiaArt+ (Almaty, Kazakhstan), Cornerhouse (Manchester) and SPACE (London) Central Asian Project will show simultaneously at Cornerhouse and SPACE in February 2007 before touring Central Asia.

The project provides a unique insight into Central Asia, as well as giving a new perspective on British cultural identity, exploring how personal and national identities are created through landscape, culture, history and politics, whilst challenging the prejudices and preconceptions that we hold about each other's countries. Showcasing work from UK artists and some of the most influential Central Asian artists practicing today, the project draws attention to the similarities and differences between culture and contemporary art in both these regions of the world.

In the context of this project Central Asia refers to the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. These relatively new countries, born out of the dismantling of the Soviet territory, are still establishing their cultural identities. Whereas British artists have been active participants of the global contemporary art scene for a while, their Central Asian counterparts have been under-represented and the regions of Central Asia are often perceived to be on the periphery of contemporary culture. The lack of an established tradition of 'modern' art in these countries means that artists have approached contemporary art with their own original frameworks and perspective drawing upon the rich tradition of storytelling, shamanism and the legacy of Soviet rule as well as the influence of global art, culture and media.

A distinctive aspect of the Central Asian contemporary artistic community is its almost family-like structure. The burgeoning scene is still relatively small in scale and its artists support and help each other regularly. Central Asian Project emulates this rare quality and expands it across international boundaries. All artists involved in the project are undertaking residencies in each other's countries to share skills, learn from each other and discover new cultures.



**Alexander Ugay**  
(l) *Dog Show*  
Video, Monitor  
2006 (10mins)  
(r) *Untitled*  
Photo-series  
2006

Kazakhstan-based photographer and video artist Alexander Ugay will première a new series of photos and video produced during his residency at SPACE in the Summer of 2006. Ugay's practice involves 'cinema-objects' in the form of short, experimental films, parables and performances recorded on 16mm Soviet-era video cameras. In his work *Untitled* for **Central Asian Project**, Ugay merges almost imperceptibly images of London with those of his home town (Kyzilorda, Kazakhstan), blurring the visual and cultural boundaries between the two.

UK artists, Dinu Li, Ruth Maclennan and Shona Illingworth visited Kazakhstan in the Autumn of 2006. Key influences running through each artist's work are landscape, identity and the imprint of the past on the present.



**Dinu Li**

***Chronicle of a Dream Foretold***

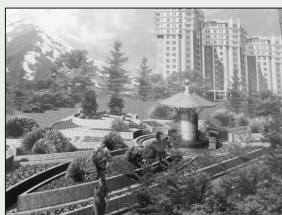
Director: Dinu Li, Video, Projected, 2006–7 (20mins 30 secs)

Editor: Peter Wobser, Producer: Yuliya Sorokina

Casting Director: Eva Bekher, Location Manager: Mariya Glebova.

Band: Motor Roller

Lens based media artist Dinu Li's practice addresses the construction of identity – individual and collective, shaped by the forces of cultural, social and economic trends. Li's video ***Chronicle of a Dream Foretold***, utilizes the manipulation of time and the multi transferring of photographic stills, film and DV material to blur the boundary between documentary and fantasy. Inspired by Jean-Luc Godard's 1960's film of The Rolling Stones rehearsing their song ***Sympathy for the Devil***, Li worked with a local Kazkhstani rock band Motor Roller in a studio recording their latest song ***Dreams***. These scenes are supplemented by abstract vignettes as diverse as equestrians, mountain landscapes and train journeys.



**Ruth Maclennan**

(l) ***Valley of Castles***

(*Hunting Eagles*) Video,

2006–7 (20mins) Thanks

to Alexander Ugay, Valery

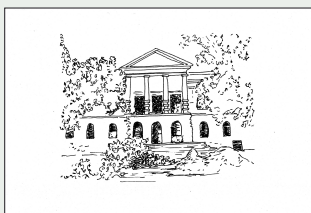
Kortun and Alexei Shindin

(r) ***Estate*** Video, Monitor,

2007 (3mins)

Artist and writer Ruth Maclennan produced new video and photography works during her residency in Kazakhstan. Her piece ***Valley of Castles (Hunting Eagles)*** follows the artist's journey in South-Eastern Kazakhstan to film traditional Kazakh eagle hunters. The film captures the hunter's relationship of trust with his bird. At the same time, the idea of an authentic experience, and authentic view of Kazakh culture, is challenged by the conflicts that unfold, and the Hollywoodesque performance by the hunters. This work explores the invention and performance of cultural identity, and the projection of expectations on to people, on to the symbol of the golden eagle, and on to the cinematic image itself.

Her video ***Estate*** reflects the desire for a perfect life, in a perfect home, in a perfect world. All the worlds depicted are offered up for sale, advertised in magazines, free brochures and on websites in Kazakhstan. The luxury home in Kazakhstan in the 21st Century spans a variety of contradictory utopias from Alpine chalet living, to suburban mansion, to Modernist high-rise, and hybrid combinations. Window-shopping for homes is also a favourite British weekend pursuit. The viewer is invited to drift trance-like through a succession of always sunny, rich, glamorous and improbable lives, each vista more seductive than the last.



**Shona Illingworth**

***Tomb*** Video, Projected, 2007 (approx 3mins)

Shona Illingworth works with photography, film, video and sound, to create installations in which image and voice combine to test the formation of identity, imagination and perception. During her visit to Kazakhstan Illingworth visited the infamous Kazakh Gulags to examine the impact they have on their surrounding landscapes and people.

She filmed the vast Steppe, with its open cast mines, pylons and former labour camps, and people who still live in the former Gulag village of Dolinka. Here in Dolinka the NKVD\* Villa

and Central Administration building of the Karlag Gulag is being sealed. Its doors and windows bricked up, its subterranean spaces and ruined stately rooms hidden in darkness. In *Tomb* sounds of an orchestra playing Arensky's ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* mix with voices and sounds of barking dogs in the evening air. \*The NKVD (People's Commissariat For Internal Affairs) was responsible for all detention facilities including the Gulag.

Three Central Asian artists, Vyacheslav Akhunov, Natalya Dyu and Almagul Menlibayeva will show their works alongside their Kazakhstan and UK colleagues, whilst developing new works to be shown in a final joint exhibition in Central Asia.



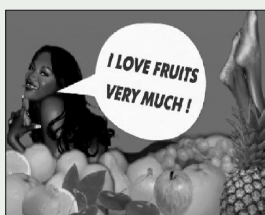
**Vyacheslav Ahunov**  
 (l) *Grain for Canary* Video, Projected, 2006 (15mins)  
 (r) *Corner* Video, Projected, 2004 (9mins)

Vyacheslav Akhunov works with various media, painting, installation, performance, actions and video art. For *Central Asian Project* he will exhibit some of his previous works including the video work *Corner*. In this piece protagonist Sergey Tychina, wearing Muslim headdress, recites a namas (prayer) in various places. For this he does not turn towards Mecca, as required by the rules of Islam, but places himself in corners very close to the walls, and so entirely focussing on himself. The basis of the piece is to reflect a human-being recognising their individuality, mental space and authenticity in a time when the public image is favoured over such singularity.



**Almagul Menlibayeva**  
*Apa (Ancestors)* Video, Projected, 2004 (5mins)

Almagul Menlibayeva is a pioneer in the tradition of punk romantic shamanism, whereby ancient traditions and mystical laws of Kazakh art combine with avant-garde ideas from personal experiences. Menlibayeva employs this movement to express her vision and understanding of the surrounding world and creates harmony between traditional Islamic culture and contemporary art. The notion of female identity is fundamental to her work which comprises of graphics, painting, performance and video art.



**Natalya Dyu**  
*I love Naomi, Naomi Loves Fruits*  
 Video, Monitor

Video and Media artist Natalya Dyu utilises video and animation to produce insightful, ironic and multicultural pieces. In her practice Dyu often incorporates cultural icons, for example in the video work *I Love Naomi, Naomi Loves Fruits* Dyu is seated in on a toilet musing out loud about the supermodel Naomi Campbell, imagining the ideal life of Campbell, her habits and temperament. The video transforms into animation in which the model is represented among her favorite things. In this soliloquy Dyu allows viewers to participate in her own ideals and longings.