

FOCUS KAZAKHSTAN

Thinking Collections: Telling Tales: A Survey Exhibition of Kyzyl Tractor Art Collective

Signature Program of Asia Contemporary Art Week 2018

Mana Contemporary, Jersey City

October 14– 30 November 30, 2018

Curated by Leeza Ahmady and Vladislav Sludskiy

Opening Events: Sunday, October 14

Press walkthrough with the curators, 1:30-2:30PM

Performance by Kyzyl Tractor, 3PM

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Kyzyl Tractor Art Collective, *Red Bridge of Kyzyl Tractor* 2002, archival photo. As part of a documentary film shooting by B. Kairbekov. Courtesy of the artists & Asia Contemporary Art Week 2018

Thinking Collections: Telling Tales: A Survey Exhibition of Kyzyl Tractor Art Collective, a signature program of Asia Contemporary Art Week 2018 at Mana Contemporary, is part of *Focus Kazakhstan*, a landmark initiative celebrating the art of Kazakhstan through four thematic presentations in London, Berlin, Suwon and Jersey City.

This unprecedented survey reunites Kyzyl Tractor collective, known for their feverish experimentations in the mid 1990's and early 2000's, after almost two decades of working both separately and occasionally together. The exhibition highlights each artist's individual practice and contextualizes their

work from all periods interacting with one another. The group is acclaimed for reorienting nomadic, Sufi, and Shamanistic philosophies as a new artistic language in juxtaposition with the region's seismic socio-economic and political shifts.

The show comprises two monumental sculptural works - one newly conceived and a reproduction of an older destroyed work - alongside numerous archival photos of the collective's earlier performances, sculptures, paintings, drawings, found objects and other paraphernalia. On October 14, the opening day of the exhibition, the collective will reenact one of their legendary performance rituals entitled *Purification*.

Constant nomadic movement, a common narrative of the 1990s, is present in most of the Kyzyl Tractor's performances. Sacred materials such as wood and wool, felt, and other textiles found in the steppes of Kazakhstan are frequently featured, along with instruments like the Shan-Kobyz, dombra and drums. The principles of the spatial-structural composition school and dervish, nomadic and Tengri heritage are visible in the first ten years of their performative practice.

Established in the early 1990's by Vitaliy Simakov, a college professor and member of the spatial-structural composition school, Kyzyl Tractor's, name and members have fluctuated throughout the collective's existence. The first known title of the collective was Shymkent Trans Avant-Garde and then SAA, a verbal expression short for 'saalem', meaning hello or peace be upon you.

Central to the exhibition is an installation of over 45 paintings made by **Moldakul Narymbetov** - the artist, *baksy* (shaman), poet, philosopher and former lead member of Kyzyl Tractor - from the 1980's until his recent passing in 2014, which are on loan from the Eurasian Cultural Alliance. Hundreds of other works in the exhibition are by current key members **Smail Bayaliyev**, **Said Atabekov**, **Vitaliy Simakov**, and **Arystanbek Shalbayev** and were gathered directly from the artists' studios, archives, as well as private and museum collections in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

The title for the exhibition *Thinking Collections: Telling Tales* references by exhibition curator Leeza Ahmady's thesis of "seeing the artist as the first collector" beyond an art market lens which is also the guiding conceptual framework for Asia Contemporary Art Week 2018.

This exhibition is curated by Leeza Ahmady and assistant curator Vladislav Sludskiy.

Credit line: *Thinking Collections: Telling Tales: A Survey Exhibition of Kyzyl Tractor Art Collective*, 14 October – 30 November, 2018, the signature exhibition of Asia Contemporary Art Week hosted at Mana Contemporary, www.focuskazakhstan.com

Notes to Editors

[Focus Kazakhstan](http://www.focuskazakhstan.com) is implemented by the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan in association with the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of the program, Ruhani Zhangyru. The curator of *Focus Kazakhstan* is Roza Abenova, Head of Centre of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

[Asia Contemporary Art Week](#) is a dynamic educational and curatorial platform that brings together leading New York and Asia-based art institutions, museums and galleries to present the largest showcase of cutting-edge exhibitions, innovative projects, provocative dialogues on current topics, and networking opportunities. Please see acaw.info for more information.

Born and raised in Afghanistan, **Leeza Ahmady** is an independent curator noted for her foundational research concerning the largely unknown artists of Central Asia. Since 2005, she has led Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAWE), connecting leading New York and Asia-based institutions in the presentation of over 2,000 artists in 9 editions. In addition, she has staged the works of 200 diverse creative minds in ACAWE's acclaimed annual forum FIELD MEETING, hosted at prominent venues such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Asia Society, Performa, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and SVA Theatre. She was a member of the Agents/Curatorial Team for documenta (13), Kassel, Germany and Kabul, Afghanistan (2010-2013) and has presented numerous exhibitions, workshops, public programs and lectures across local and international venues, including The Museum of Modern Art, Independent Curators International, Queens Museum, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Venice Biennial and Istanbul Biennial, The New Museum, Smithsonian Freer Gallery, Art Basel Hong Kong, Sharjah Art Foundation, among many others.

Born in Almaty, Kazakhstan, **Vladislav Sludskiy** is the manager and curator of Ethan Cohen Gallery in New York and the co-founder and organizer of ARTBAT FEST, an annual Almaty, Kazakhstan-based, international contemporary art festival serving the Central Asian region. He is also the co-founder and curator of the Eurasian Cultural Alliance (ECA), dedicated to supporting cultural infrastructure in Kazakhstan and representing local artists in cities such as Venice, Kiev, Strasbourg, Moscow, Zurich and others. ECA has supported exhibitions at notable venues such as the PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art in Russia, the Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MAMCS) in France, the National Museum of Kazakhstan in Astana; and Damien Hirst's solo exhibition at the Kasteyev Museum of Fine Arts in Almaty. Recently, Sludskiy curated a special public art program of permanent large-scale sculptures as part of the highly anticipated Astana EXPO 2017.

Exhibition title: *Thinking Collections: Telling Tales: A Survey Exhibition of Kyzyl Tractor Art Collective*

Dates: October 14– November 30, 2018

Location: Mana Contemporary, 888 Newark Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey, United States

Curator tour and Collective performance: October 14, 2018

Time: 1:30 – 3:30PM

Exhibition preview: October 14, 2018

Time: 12:00 – 6:00PM

Location: Mana Contemporary, 888 Newark Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey, United States

Press Contacts

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