



**NOMAD**  
**2023**  
**A LIVING**  
**LAND.**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA  
School of Arts and Sciences

2023  
nomad  
a  
living  
land



Naryn Campus

The University of Central Asia (UCA) is a world-class centre for knowledge and learning, connecting isolated rural communities with the global community and building human capital needed for modern economies and stable governance.

The mission of UCA is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities, by offering an internationally recognised standard of higher education and enabling the peoples of the region to preserve their rich cultural heritage as assets for the future.

UCA's undergraduate programmes are located in world-class residential campuses in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, and Khorog, Tajikistan, near the Tien Shan and Pamir mountains.

# NOMAD 2023: A LIVING LAND

'Nomad 2023: A Living Land' is an invitation for the mountain communities and creatives of Central Asia and beyond to engage with the multi-dimensional concept of land during a three-day festival 22-24 September 2023. Organised and hosted by the School of Arts and Sciences and supported by the Graduate School of Development's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, the festival will explore how land not only shapes communities and individuals but is itself also moulded and changed by human activity. The notion of "A Living Land" incorporates all forms of life, animate and inanimate, everything beneath, within and above the earth. Notions of land and sustainability also

extend to the way the natural environment 'speaks' in return, and its role in ongoing human survival and spiritual identity.

"A Living Land" will engage communities of practice through international and regional films and creative writing/digital experiments. It aims to explore many-layered meanings and manifestations of creative expression. The endeavour is intimately bound up with the location: the place, where thought and practice are rendered resonant with 'coming forth', 'emergence', an unfolding of a thing out of itself, yet returning, gathering with the origin, the eco-coordinates of a birth.

Nomad 2023 is held at the Naryn Campus, University of Central Asia, situated in the town of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. Nestled amidst the scenic landscapes of a valley carved out by the Naryn River, the town offers an inviting setting for a thoughtful fusion of global perspective and local context. As the town opens its doors to the world, the Festival becomes a catalyst for cultural exchange and creative exploration, featuring the fluid horizons of "being at home with oneself in the whole".

As landscapes are formed by natural contingencies and human interventions, the orbits

of thought change course when exposed to dialogues and confrontations. The Festival calls attention to the generative interplay between flight of thought and gravity of place, freedom of imagination and enclosure of context. Naryn may remain on the periphery of global politics, yet it embodies a centre of life for the local and those embedded in its historical and cultural perimeters. It is hoped that the emerging ideas and perspectives continue to flourish beyond the space and time of the Festival, infusing ways of seeing and doing in our evolving land-consciousness.

Dr Soheil Ashrafi,  
Associate Dean, UCA's School of Arts and Sciences  
Chair of the Nomad 2023 Festival

Song-Kul, Kyrgyzstan. Photo Credits: Doolos Aibek Uulu.



# International Film Festival 2023

The Film Festival aims to provide a platform for emerging filmmakers contributing to the development of the film industry throughout Central Asia and beyond.

As an annual Film Festival showcasing exceptional works, Nomad 2023 has received overwhelming support with more than 150 films submitted from six continents, representing diverse cultures and creative expressions.

## Temir Birnazarov

Temir Birnazarov is a Kyrgyz film director, screenwriter, and producer. An Honored Worker of Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic, he is the director and writer of several feature films, including *Unknown Route* (2008); *Kumar* (2013); *Night Accident* (2017). He is the winner of the Grand Prix for Best Film PÖFF (Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival) and Nika Award for Best Film of CIS and Baltic States. Since 2010, Temir Birnazarov has been conducting filmmaking courses at the Tazar Film Company.

## Sophie Dia Pegrum

Sophie is a Fulbright National Geographic Society Fellow. As a filmmaker and abstract painter she has made films in Central Asia, the Antarctic, the North Pole and the Himalayas. Her work includes documentaries about ephemeral art/science collaborations, mountain and interspecies cultures and semi-nomadic life-ways. She has also made several documentaries focused on empowerment and the amplification of less heard voices and stories. During the pandemic, she made "The Last Lullaby" a biographical window into the life of a death midwife. Her most recent full-length film is "Wings of Kyrgyzstan" (Arte) - a documentary about rural life and horse culture in Kyrgyzstan.

## Gulbara Tolomushova

Gulbara Tolomushova is known for her expertise in the film industry, where she mainly acts as a film critic in different media and forums, ranging from online social media to international film juries. Tolomushova studied cinematography in Moscow, Russia, and graduated from Russian State Institute of Cinematography in 1989. Since then, Tolomushova has had a rich and varied career. She has directed films, in particular documentaries with a human rights focus, and authored numerous reviews, articles and columns. Currently, she is a member of International Federation of Film Critics and Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema, and the leading expert on international relations and film promotion at the Department of Cinematography at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Kyrgyzstan.

## Nazira Karimi

Nazira Karimi was born in Tajikistan and later relocated to Austria where she is currently studying Art and Digital Media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her work exists at the intersections of diverse media such as digital performance, installation, and video. All relate to the iconography and stereotypes of female identity as represented in modern popular culture and throughout art history. Karimi often uses her own body, mixing its parts with animation and sound to question alienation and the concept of identity. Karimi's work was featured in international venues including Aspan Gallery, ARTBAT FEST, and FemAgora, as well as a special video performance for Tselinny Center of Contemporary Culture in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

JOURNAL

Film still from *Dusner*



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## SHADES OF MELANCHOLY

Kyrgyzstan

Directed by Karash Zhanyshov

Baizak and Meerim grew up in the same village, and then both moved to the city. The city also attracts Meerim. One day she disappears. Baizak, in love with Meerim, embarks on a quest.

## DUSNER

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Indonesia

Directed by Yusuf Hayy

Petrus and Mores are two students who set out to meet a shaman in the forest of Papua. The shaman is the last speaker of the Dusner language, which the students hoping to record. Along the way, they are faced with inner conflicts and other obstacles.

Italy

Directed by Filippo Biagianti

Scientific research has shown that central Sardinia has some of the oldest human DNA in Europe, containing gene sequences that are directly inherited from Neolithic people.

In Ogliastra and in the inland areas of the island there is one of the highest concentrations of centenarians in the world. These "living ancestors" guard the legacy of distant times, a bridge between past and present memories that meet today in front of the monumental "Tumbas de sos mannos" (The tombs of the giants), ancient Nuragic burial sites, dating back to the third millennium BCE.

The elders of the nearby villages visit these sacred places to spend the night and see the wise ancestors in their dreams. The dream becomes a meeting place to ask for advice and get comfort before making decisions that are particularly important for their communities. Sa 'ilgiadora de su Tempus is the keeper of time.

The Sardinian word *bigliai* / *ilgiai* is used to indicate the vigil for the dead, but it also means paying attention to children. Aurelia Coni recounts her life stories and dream experiences.



Sa 'ilgiadora de su tempus





Film still from *Romeo*

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## ROMEO

Armenia

Directed by Marina Arzumano

Artist Romeo Meilqyan lives in Berd: a country town near the border. Being surrounded by serene nature he finds himself making art using the complete opposite: old and abandoned factories, rusty and misshaped metals are the current inspiration for his paintings and sculptures. Before the war, Romeo finished paintings quickly. Now, he is not afraid to spend a month on a single work. He only fears war, the only time he can't create art.

## SUITCASE

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Iran

Directed by Saman Hosseinpour & Ako Zandkarimi

Far from his own homeland, a Kurdish refugee lives in his suitcase. In it he carries memories of his family. When someone steals the suitcase in the tumult of the foreign city center, he loses his home a second time.

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## THE SOUND OF THE TREE

Armenia

Directed by Eren Aybars Arpacik

Carved saz (traditional string instrument) master Halil Kafes talks about his love of trees in this musical story of a Taurus Mountain woodcutter's transition from nomadism to settlement. "You have to love the tree very much...because you lie in the tree from the cradle, even when you die and go down, the tree is used."

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## BAUXITE

Brazil

Directed by Thamara Pereira

Brazil is one of the most dangerous countries for environmentalists. The rural community of Belisário holds the country's second largest bauxite reserve, right below one of the most bio-diverse areas in the world: the Atlantic Forest. The small community was shaken when the beloved Gilberto, a Franciscan Friar, received a death threat followed by the lines: "You've been talking against mining way too much".



Film still from *Pay To*



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## EARTH

Kyrgyzstan

Directed by Aliman Toktogulova, Umarjon Jumaev

Elchin travels to Uzbekistan at the request of his grandfather to bring him soil, real soil, because his grandfather was born in the city of Kokand, where the Kokand Khanate was located in ancient times. His grandfather needs the soil in order to pass into the other world with a peaceful soul.

## PAY TO

Iran

Directed by Mohammad Ghazazani

A young man receives a cheque to repay a debt but every time he goes to the bank, the debtor's account is blocked. The young man calls his debtor, but for various reasons, the debtor trivializes the issue of debt and drags the discussion to other situations, including personal and family issues of the young man. Angry with the debtor, the young man goes to the debtor's house ...

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## THE NAKED LAND

Brazil

Directed by Wlisses Alves

An elderly couple live alone and spend their days watering a cornfield. The water serves for irrigation and operation of the machines. When it dries up, misfortune befalls them ...

## PULSE

Russian Federation

Directed by Darya Kuznetsova

This is the story of Chukotka, Russian Arctic whale hunters who go out in the harsh northern sea, wading through thick ice to feed themselves and their families. The story of killing for living.



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## AETERNA

France

Directed by Camille Combes

Suffering from a terminal illness, Akhara decides to leave everything to go on the road of death.

## KARA-KAMYSH

Kyrgyzstan

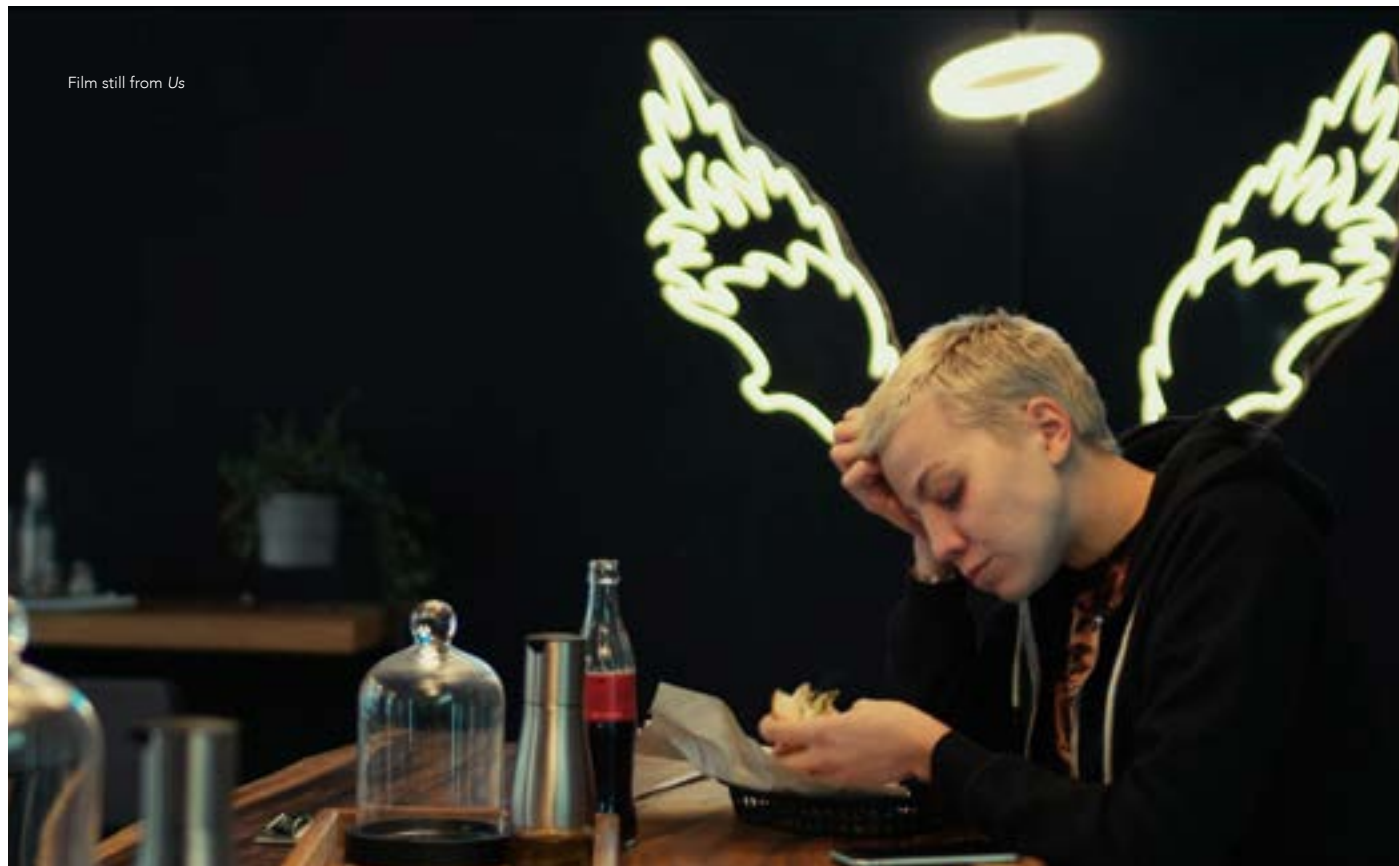
Directed by Asel Umaralieva

The village of Kara Suu has clean water and beautiful nature. Unfortunately, some people don't see the beauty and earn money by felling trees and shooting animals. Realising the damage they are doing and the kind of land they will leave for future generations, they decide to stop logging and save nature.

Film still from Kara-Kamysh



Film still from *Us*



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## A NORMAL DAY

### US

Germany

Directed by Elias Redlitz

Iran

Directed by Mohammad Ghazazani

A retiree meets a disillusioned young woman and successfully encourages her to join forces in political action to save the future. But when the media draws attention to how insignificant the action ultimately is, the younger woman falls back into old patterns.

A day in the life of single, independent women and girls, and their encounters with daily problems.

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## THE JOURNEY: THE FUTURE OF KAZAKH NOMADS

Japan

Directed by Kazuya Isobe

Bayan-Ulgii. At the foot of the Mongolian Altai Mountains lies a region where Kazakh nomads live. While some families still continue their traditional nomadic lifestyle, others have migrated to the cities due to desertification. How do the parents and children feel and live in the traditional way of life that is being lost? I lived with them and explored their current situation.

## THE DOOR

Kyrgyzstan

Directed by Zhanyl Umuralieva

Every day a person opens dozens of doors. With some doors, he opens his soul too; others he is too scared to even open. But most interesting thing is, he never knows what is going to happen when he opens a new door.

Film still from *The Journey: The Future of Kazakh Nomads*



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## SANAI

Nepal

Directed by Akanchha Karki

Two teenage girls separated by the caste system fight against society and keep their friendship alive by playing their favorite instrument - the *sanai* - which women are forbidden to play.

## BLESSING

Kyrgyzstan

Directed by Daniyar Abirov

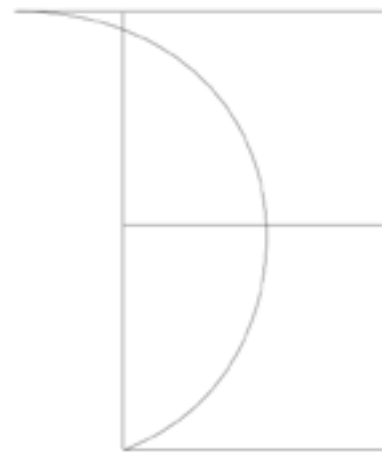
In Kyrgyz *Ak zhalga* is a good wish, a great word to humanity. Many years ago, in a vision Japarkul ata met a man who instructed him to speak words of kindness to people, good wishes to all the people, to stop all the bad, evil. This meeting was a vision, because he also saw a snow leopard. People may not believe him, but since then Japarkul ata wants the world to believe his kind words, so that we may be cleansed and enlightened.



Film still from *Blessing*







Digital Experiments features writers and artists producing experimental creative prose or poetry for digital audiences.



## Lucy Palmer

Lucy Palmer is a Senior Lecturer of Communications and Media based at the UCA Naryn campus. She is an award-winning journalist, memoir writer, editor and author of the acclaimed memoir, "A Bird on My Shoulder," published by Allen and Unwin. Palmer holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing from the University of Wollongong, Australia, and a BA in Film, Media, and Communications from the Polytechnic of Central London, UK. Palmer's work has been published around the world including The Observer (UK), the Sydney Morning Herald, the BBC World Service, and Australian Radio National. She was awarded a Gold Medal at the New York Arts Festival for her radio documentary,


"Birdsville to Alice". She has been mentoring students and teaching journalism since 1994 and has taught at the University of Papua New Guinea (PNG), the University of Wollongong, and the Divine Word University in PNG. She was invited to present her PNG students' creative work at the Oxford Conference in 2006 as part of their focus on teaching English and English Literature. A former foreign correspondent, Palmer has also ghostwritten and edited non-fiction since 2010. An experienced researcher and interviewer, she was the ghostwriter of "Playing the Game: Life and Politics in Papua New Guinea" by Sir Julius Chan, published by the University of Queensland in 2016.

## Khurshedsho Qonunov

Khurshedsho Qonunov is a poet, writer, linguist and educator from the Pamir mountains in Tajikistan; he is currently an Assistant Professor at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek. One area of his expertise is in the use and translation of English – both creative and academic – as well as being fluent in Russian, Shughni, Tajik, and Persian. His interests span many art forms including poetry and filmmaking; he is a passionate exponent of the importance of education, languages, world literature, history and Central Asian cultures.

## Altynai Kudaibergenova

Art manager, head of visitors department at the Gapar Aitiev Kyrgyz National Museum of Fine Arts, tour guide and tour author at the Bishkek Walks initiative, co-founder and creative director at Artkoldo. BA in English Literature and Translation/Interpretation from LCC International University (Klaipeda, Lithuania). Currently working on enhancing visitors' experience at the museum through storytelling, developing narratives for Bishkek city walks and trips around Kyrgyzstan, building an online Kyrgyz Museum Marketplace for promoting national art and crafts through museum souvenirs.



DARIKA URGAZIEVA

## **Currents of Memory: Tracing the Naryn River's Past**

The Naryn River, like a timeless tapestry, weaves together the rich history of the Kyrgyz people. Its flowing waters hold the stories of generations past, tales of struggle, resilience, and a spirit of interconnectedness that has shaped the Kyrgyz identity. In the annals of Kyrgyz history, a chapter stands out prominently—a time when the land whispered of uncertainty and change.

Illustration by Darika Urgazieva

JESSICA ARGO

## **Folding Space / Folding Time**

"Folding Space / Folding Time is a piece commissioned for GIOFest XV that encourages the orchestra and our guests to explore memory, community and stories through time and space. The work features archival recordings, graphic scores, video samples, and conduction gestures learned from the theremin, telematic music making, and cross-cultural exchange."

KYZZHIBEK ZHANIBEKOVA

## **The Long Way**

"The poem is about the stories of people who passed through the Tian Shan and Pamir mountains running from Russian power in 1916 "Urkun" and depicts the sacrifices made by the previous generation. However, it is relatable not only to the past or Central Asian people but to all the societies that face challenges on the way to a better life. As the last lines of the poem state, "We are taught to protect our lands but also we are taught that the fortune is in our hands." The way we see our lands today is not only about protecting the places we live in but the entire planet. Just as our ancestors nurtured the land to pass on to the next generation, our generation should also consider the sustainability of the land we were gifted.



EDUARDO SANCHEZ LOPEZ

## **Soundscape: The Journey of a Molecule of Water**

“Within this work, Sánchez immerses us in a scenario in motion, which follows the simulated point of audition of a molecule of water. Setting the mood from the *Musique Concrète* introductory piece, the acoustic scene, delivered from an anthropocentric approach and at times from within water’s perspective, leads to an auditory experience that does not leave the listener indifferent.”

EDUARDO SANCHEZ LOPEZ

## **Short film: Ubuntu**

“I am because we are.  
A film in response to the COP26 summit agreement.”

*Still from Ubuntu*

Still from *Deora*

ALEXANDRA BELL

## Deora

"This short art film experiments with poetry, film, visual art, soundscapes and music, inspired by 'A Living Land'. It explores the impact of land on relationships, forced separation and forced proximity (*Deora* means tears in Irish Gaelic). The work acts as a memory, capturing emotions from the pandemic as well as reflections on how the land and land boundaries affect our need for physical social interaction

as well as physical space. The sound and poetry was inspired by the Scottish landscape, starting with women 'wind singing' during a storm on the Isle of Skye and ending with a newly composed score sung by a choir singing in the sea. Participants are modern nomads from Ireland, Scotland, Brazil, Australia and Hungary."



MICHIEL TURNER

## Seaweed

"Seaweed is an animation exploring consumption and the relationships between materials and organisms in nautical environments. The stop-motion plays with form and poetics; layers of visualisation are collaged together on screen to create an ephemeral landscape and the narrator, 'Nodosum', leads the audience through fragments of inner monologue. 'Nodosum' is named after the seaweed *Ascophyllum Nodosum* and is searching for the "big" or "great" fish; an enigmatic vertebrate who has begun to swallow the seabed in a destructive pursuit. Nodosum is trying to restore balance to the ocean by

eating the materials from Great Fish's belly and crying seaweed tears which ultimately replant the seabed. The soundscape is saturated with original music and seaside noise. The washing of the ocean is heard, drifting in and out. A call of oystercatchers murmurs. Percussion is used to signal the growth and occurrence of new visual elements such as lungs or wooden birds. The instruments heard were recorded live and resampled to continue a theme of recycling materials to produce new arrangements."



Still from Seaweed

INTIZOR OTANIYOZOVA

## Nature

A short video showing how plastics are destroying the planet.







The Creative Writing workshops will offer an opportunity to learn deeper skills of self-expression with world-renowned Australian poet Dr Mark Tredinnick. We will explore our natural world through fresh eyes. The workshops will elevate our understanding of “A Living Land” and offer guidance and insights into techniques of creative writing, and the joys of translation.

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### **Workshop “Writing in Response to A Living Land”**



Villagers from Kek-Debe helped to build the monument to commemorate the lives of people who experienced Urkun. The monument is designed by Altyn Kapalova and Kina Yusupova. September 2021.

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## Exhibition “MOUNTAINS OF SORROW”

Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU), Graduate School of Development, UCA  
Curators: Altyn Kapalova, CHHU, UCA;  
Nurperi Orunbaeva, Artists and Research Fellow, Osh State Museum of Fine Arts

The exhibition “Mountains of Sorrow” demonstrates what land means for nomads, what it means to leave your home behind to walk thousands of kilometers stepping on damp, cold and icy land earth across huge glaciers. And then, what does it mean to return to one’s native land and to start again? This exhibition is about death, life, path, and home earth.

**“Though it was a conspired amnesia, yet memories of Urkun continued to live in the oral history of every affected family. Even after decades, the stories shared by their descendants remain full of tragedy and empathy for the victims.”**

- Altyn Kapalova

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## Exhibition "ORIGINS"

Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, Graduate School of Development, UCA  
Organiser: Aibek Baiymbetov, CHHU, UCA

The Festival features a combined exhibition 'Boz' by Yntymak Abdyl daev and 'Eelyy' by Mirrahim Toktogulov exploring the essence of nomadic culture through fashion design, folk art, and art installations, with a focus on the philosophy of the color gray and the sacred connection of people to places. This contemporary exhibition features an array of artistic expressions, including fashion shows, art, photography, and live music.



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## Musical Ensemble “Kyrgyz Kairyk”

Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, Graduate School of Development, UCA  
Organiser: Aibek Baiymbetov, CHHU, UCA

“Kyrgyz Kairyk” offers a modern twist on traditional music. Their unique repertoire explores nomadic life along the Silk Road and the mountain spirit with eight talented musicians and a fusion of traditional and classical instruments.



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## AGRO Musical Fashion Performance

This exhibition, presents the collection "AGRO" of a renowned fashion designer, Gulmira Akmatova, inspired by Chingiz Aitmatov's novel "White Ship," exploring the delicate relationship between humanity and nature. Crafted with care, the collection showcases Kyrgyz Merino wool, hand-spun and hand-woven by local women, adorned with animal and

insect-themed headpieces. The event features live music by Nurlanbek Nyshanov and Gulbara Baygashkaeva, who perform Kyrgyz folklore, immersing the audience in the rich cultural sounds of Kyrgyzstan. This exhibition beautifully weaves together fashion, culture, and music, highlighting our deep connection to the natural world.

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## Guided Walk/Mindfulness Practice “Living River, Living Mind”

In the company of Siyagul Urbaeva, director of the Dobolu Museum, participants will hear about the history of the Naryn and its river as they walk to the Naryn River. Then, guided by Michael Garbutt, UCA visiting faculty, and co-author of *Mindful Eye, Playful Eye*, they will be invited to connect with the river, sky, earth, and each other through experimental, playful practices that engage mind, body, vision, and imagination.

Gathering the grandeur of culture, film, fashion, art, and technology at Nomad 2023 adds a transformative touch to life in the community. Nestled amidst the scenic landscapes, Naryn offers an intimate setting for the Festival cultivating a beautiful fusion of global art and regional charm.

As the town opens its doors to the world, the Festival becomes a catalyst for cultural exchange and creative exploration, enriching both locals and visitors alike.

*Photo by Lucy Palmer*

Designer: Sehar Naz Janani





University of Central Asia, Naryn, Kyrgyzstan  
Sep 2023