

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

Contemporary art from the Centre of Asia

14 September – 13 November 2011

Curated by David Elliott

“Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged.”

Rumi (13th Century poet and mystic, born in present day Tajikistan/Afghanistan, died in Turkey)

Between Heaven and Earth is a ground-breaking and timely exhibition which will bring to UK audiences a strong sense of the overlooked, yet exceptionally vibrant contemporary art that is being made in the former Soviet Republics of **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan**, as well as in **Afghanistan and Mongolia**.

The persistent mythology of the Silk Road, as well as the ‘Great Game’ played out between the British and Russian Empires in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has dominated the Western view of these mysterious lands. More recently, however, these rich cultural and physical landscapes have been dismissed in the West as the ‘Stans’ and downgraded to theatres of environmental degradation, religious conflict and war. The result of such a reductive approach, is a perception radically different from the truth: one that is devoid of nuance and processed into inhuman clichés of a “Borat” style, post-Soviet wasteland.

Between Heaven and Earth depicts a radically different ‘landscape’. Featuring over twenty artists and artist groups, many of whom have not been seen in the UK before, the exhibition examines the recent emergence of a vital, critical, self confident contemporary art throughout Central Asia, challenging ingrown prejudices and stereotypes.

For over 5,000 years different cultures from both East and West migrated, mixed and eventually prospered in the deserts, mountains, cities and steppes between the Caspian Sea and the Mongolian plateau. Such hybridity, reinforced by continuing ebb and flow, was fertilized by many different routes of trade between the great capitals of China, Constantinople and the West.

The art developing now throughout the centre of Asia, directly reflects this highly complex history and examines the multifaceted nature of both power and culture, often in shocking or humorous ways. The nomadic figure of the shaman – a character appropriated for Western art by Joseph Beuys in the 1960s – appears sarcastically and surrealistically in the work of many of these artists as does a sense of the layering of spiritual experience in a region that still accommodates active belief in Animism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, overlaid by the deadweight of materialism.

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Different aesthetic traditions also raise their heads in a number of ways: through ancient myths and stories, through the bright, clashing colours of ikat textiles and the architecture of 12th Century mosques, through the now fading memories of the vast populations of Koreans, Western Europeans and other ethnic groups who were deported to the region in the 1930s and '40s, through folk customs that are still kept alive in the face of aggressively rampaging modernity, and through reconstructed memories of the nomadic, 'barbaric' past. They are, after all, the heirs of Genghiz Khan, Tamburlaine and many other groups of people who moved towards, and conquered, the West. This is a fundamental part of their reality and myth.

Yet throughout the work in this exhibition, the strongest impression is how people struggle to establish or retain an individual sense of creative integrity and power at a time when traditional society and its memories are being demolished around them by economic and political forces which are far beyond their control.

Natalya Dyu, a young artist of Korean extraction from Karaganda in Central Kazakhstan, captures perfectly such ironies in a short video *Happystan*, 2007 that counterpoints images of the alienated bleakness of the new pseudo-consumer society with a popular sentimental love ballad sung by Aliya Belyaeva.

Gulnara Kasmalieva and **Muratbek Djumaliev** from Kyrgyzstan have reflected on recent turbulent political events in their country in their documentary film montage *Revolution*, 2005, to which they have added the incongruous soundtrack of Edvard Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*.

Kazakh artists such as **Almagul Menlibayeva** and **Erbossyn Meldubekov**, reflect on the vast natural resources of the steppe, on the rapid development of urbanisation, on the nation's political heritage as well as on the myths of shamanism and explore how these have joined with other beliefs to create a view of the world that is both idealistically compassionate and cruelly truthful. Presented for the first time in Europe, **Menlibayeva** will be showing *Transoxiana Dreams*, 2011, a fantastically surreal mythological documentary- focused on the centaur-like fox spirits that populate the newly formed desert around the rapidly shrinking Aral Sea.

Almaty-based painter **Rashid Nurekeyev** satirises national stereotypes and figures of speech as well as the legacies of autocracy on post-Soviet Kazakh society. **Timur Mirzakhmedov**, from Tashkent in Uzbekistan, presents a video work which focuses on the pervasive, controlling surrealism of television. In exquisitely delineated paintings, Mongolian artists from Ulan Bator such as **Baasanjav Chojiljav** and **Uriintuya**, both trained in the hieratic, traditional Buddhist-influenced *Zurag* style originally used to paint *tankas*, confront with an acerbic energy worthy of George Grosz the inequalities and conflicts within their newly forged society.

Between Heaven and Earth is curated by Berlin-based curator and writer **David Elliott**, former Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, Moderna Museet (the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Stockholm), the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, Istanbul Modern, and the Biennale of Sydney. He has worked and published extensively on Russian, East European and Asian art as well as on many other aspects of modern and contemporary art.

A catalogue will be published to coincide with the exhibition and there will also be a programme of accompanying events. Please visit www.calvert22.org for full details.

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Exhibiting Artists/Groups (including country of residence):

Vyacheslav Akhunov (b. 1948), Uzbekistan
Shaarbek Amankul (b.1959), Kyrgyzstan
Said Atabekov (b.1965), Uzbekistan
Baasanjav Choiijlavin (b.1977), Mongolia
Ulan Djaparov (b.1960), Kyrgyzstan
Natalya Dyu (b.1976), Kazakhstan
Mariam Ghani (b.1978), Afghanistan, resides in USA
Gulnara Kasmalieva (b. 1960) and **Muratbek Djumaliev** (b.1965), Kyrgyzstan
Rustam Khalfin (1949 – 2008), Kazakhstan
Galim Madanov (b.1958) and **Zauresh Terekbay** (b.1964), Kazakhstan
Erbossyn Meldibekov (b.1964), Kazakhstan
Almagul Menlibayeva (b.1969), Kazakhstan
Timur Mirzakhmedov (b.1986), Uzbekistan
Saken Narynov (b.1946), Kazakhstan
Alexander Nikolaev (b.1968), Uzbekistan
Ekaterina Nikonorova (b.1981), Kazakhstan
Rashid Nurekeyev (b. 1964), Kazakhstan
Aleksei Rummyantsev, (b. 1975), Tajikistan
Oksana Shatalova (b. 1972), Kazakhstan
Aleksei Shindin (b.1978), Kazakhstan
Alexander Ugay (b.1978), Kazakhstan
Uriintuya (b.1979), Mongolia
Viktor Vorobyev (b.1959) and **Elena Vorobyeva** (b.1959), Kazakhstan

Exhibition Partner



The Intergovernmental Foundation for Educational, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation

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Notes to Editors

Curator and Artist biographies, further information and images are available on request

Visitor Information

Address: 22 Calvert Avenue, London E2 7JP

Opening Hours: Wednesday – Sunday: 12pm – 6pm

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Shoreditch High St / Old St / Liverpool St

About Calvert 22:

CALVERT 22 is the UK's only not-for-profit foundation dedicated to the presentation of contemporary art and culture from Russia, CIS countries and Eastern Europe and presents a dynamic programme of exhibitions, talks and cross-disciplinary events from both emergent and established artists. Founded in May 2009 by Nonna Materkova, a Russian-born, London based economist, Calvert 22's mission is to create a unique platform, through imaginative and active presentations, for the very best in current art and culture from the former 'Eastern Bloc', whilst being a catalyst for new possibilities of cross-cultural understanding and exchange.

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