



BACTRIA
Cultural Centre

window
Бюллетень Бактрии

Where creativity
meets people

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On air again!

Dear friends.

We are pleased to announce our first issue of Bulletin for 2011. We regret that there has been such a large gap between this and our previous online edition. From now on, our news is available online and can be downloaded from Bactria's website. We have a lot to tell you. Bactria, as ever, is boiling with cultural and educational activities.

Bactria is surely one of the main platforms for contemporary arts and cultural activities in Tajikistan. Our effort are helping to push our country onto the world Art scene, most notably with last year's summer school on contemporary arts which drew both Central Asian and international lectures and experts.

Bactria's creative laboratories have been particularly fruitful. Thanks, in part, to a state of the art audiovisual extravaganza hosted in Dushanbe there has been a marked improvement in the quality of the video and music produced in our laboratories.

Looking back to the recent past and facing the present and future we will intend to reveal to you all the events held either on the initiative of Bactria or with its direct participation or beyond it.

In the past few months there have been some exciting initiatives by Bactria.

For the first time in its history, Bactria opened its doors to the population of Soghd Province during the 2010

European Week with a series of cultural events. Already a tradition, this annual event introduces to a public various aspects of European culture. The Week of European Culture brought several events to Khujand – including a week of European films and theatre performance of “Confession” by Barzu Abdurazokhov.

With support from the HIVOS Institute and The Christensen Fund we managed to realize our long-anticipated goal of acquainting the soghdians with the exhibition “Buses” by Jamshed Kholikov, a participant of 2009 Venice Biennale. Besides this notable art exhibit, Bactria supported an artist-in-residency project with the poetical title of “Under the foot of Kuramin's mountain range” in Taboshar which paved the way for the creation of a multimedia exhibition inside the local House of Culture.

It is also worth mentioning, the completion of a large-scale project entitled “Preservation of indigenous music culture through community participation” which was supported by the US Ambassador's Fund for cultural preservation and Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation – Tajikistan. You will learn about the uniqueness of this project in one of our upcoming issues.

Very soon we will also unveil the public art sculptures that Bactria has commissioned. The sculptures will be curated by Kendal Henry, an American artist. For the time being our local well-known artists are actively working on these sculptures so as to display them to a wider public.



Public lecture by Oksana Shatalova (curator, artist)

Bactria team

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www.bactria.net

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To watch the music

The written word, allows us to the chance to relive and capture the rapture of the recent cultural events in Tajikistan. This is a great occasion to give these musically stimulating and enchanting occasions the attention they are due and put our impressions to paper. In 2010, Dushanbe became a Central Asian musical focal point where musicians from France and Tajikistan fused their styles together for a refined and audacious artistic experiment.

What was it all about? Who were those brave musicians and masters of cinematography and special effects that challenged the greyness of the everyday life with their jazzy music and inspired depictions? What was that French-Tajik collaboration that brought together electronic music, jazz, and the traditional Tajik melodies in those memorable summer and autumn days of 2010.

The music pieces by Yves Dormoy featuring Antoine Berjeaut, the French participants to this unique artistic laboratory, were live improvisations on tenor saxophone, clarinets and trombone based on samples of music and speech previously recorded and arranged that refer to the memories, impressions and the past historical events that marked everyone's imagination. They were combined with Tajik melodies and profound classical Farsi poems performed by the musicians from Tajik groups of Mizrob

(Ikbol Zavkibekov and Zarif Pulodov) and Samo (Shanbe Mamadgaminov, Fayzmamad Nazariiev and Shavkmamad Pulodov). The traditional Tajik instruments and songs sounded even richer and unusual, as special electronic devices and technologies of audio processing were used to enhance the artistic effect. After rehearsals and the concert, Fayzmamad Nazariiev from the group Samo shared his memories of singing in the grottos of the Pamir Mountains, where the singers' voices reverberate from the cave walls and get lost in its depth created by the natural echo. Yves Dormoy and Antoine Berjeaut, jazz and electronic music performers from France, were searching to recapture this enchanting effect for their audience.

The series of concerts supported by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Tajikistan and the Embassy of France in Dushanbe and organized by Bactria Cultural Centre were the highlights of the World Music Day in June 2010 and the European Week in October 2010. The musicians themselves, both French and Tajik, were impressed by the richness of the program they have built up together. The jazzmen from Paris were charmed by the magical phonetics of the Tajik language and the classical poems in the Farsi language.



Concert "Music vibrations"

To watch the music *continued...*

This music experiment inspired Jamshed Kholikov and Aleksey Rumyantsev, the Tajik contemporary artists, to get involved in a challenging visual experiment based on the music of Yves Dormoy and the contributions from Antoine Berjeaut and their Tajik peers. Long before the rehearsals started, the visual artists began searching for artistic ideas that could capture the musical themes, developing methods that would help in creating improvisational live video on stage during the concert, to contribute a visual expression for the "Vibration of Music" that was the base for the joint creation of the French and Tajik musicians.

To capture the music of Yves Dormoy and Antoine Berjeaut the artists assembled a towering model of a skyscraper made of cardboard egg packages which they burned down for the needs of their art. After many hours of preparation, filming and montage – on June 17th the few lucky few who could fit in the reduced space of Bactria's cinema room witnessed the first visual experiment of its kind in Central Asia. The concert of the French guests playing jazz and electronic music was unexpectedly brought to another dimension, the visual one. The originality of this event is beyond doubt: it was first time in Central Asia that a direct live video-art

was created on stage, based on the accompanying music pieces .

The enthusiasm of the audience, musicians and visual artists for this video and audio experiment led to another presentation, conducted in a more refined and developed form and for a larger audience on October 23rd, 2010. It was held in the Mayakovski theatre in Dushanbe. On that day, the music program based on electronic themes in jazz combined with the oriental melodies and rhythms that are part of the cultural richness of Tajikistan were accompanied with the improvisational video created directly on stage. This delighted the public of Dushanbe.

The live video performance was a unique artistic event. Such an original artistic expression was one of the result of artistic laboratory. When the Bactria Cultural Centre encourages the cooperation between guest artists and their Tajik counterparts, the whole cultural landscape of the country is enriched and it leaves a more lasting and sustainable impact than the memories of the audience.

Kirill Kuzmin
Music projects coordinator



Concert "Music vibrations"

Artistic education in Central Asia. Draft solution for the problem.

Art education as a problem?

As part of the first stage of the two years' project Artist and/in Community, a regional summer school on contemporary art practice for young artists and intellectuals, Terrain orientation, was held in Dushanbe. There were more than twenty youth from four of the Central Asian countries, as well as more than ten personalities active in the regional art scene giving lectures and holding seminars. Based on the event of this summer school, I would like to use this editorial to highlight the dire problems facing artistic education in Central Asia. During my work in Bactria Cultural Centre, it became clear to me that the artistic education is a major barrier against the dynamic and complete evolution of the artistic process in the region. The purpose behind the Bactria program was to encourage the development and promotion of innovative artistic practice among young and emerging artists. The first difficulty we began to notice was reaching the aforementioned young and emerging ones. What was even more surprising is the discovery that in one academic year, 200 (sic) people enrolled as an "artist" in the country's secondary specialized schools and higher education institutions. Therefore, we came to the point where we had to choose whether to plan the policy of the cultural centre in terms of the current exhibitions of the semi-souvenir artistic production or attempted to nurture an alternative artistic process. The choice was between organizing artistic events or concentrating more on training and capacity building. We chose the latter, and within the two years implemented a series of various projects in the field of art training, including seminars for art critics and journalists by Oksana Shatalova, a laboratory for young artists Original Copy by Dana Safarova, a cycle of lectures on history of European literature and art by Larissa Dodkhudoeva and professor Aleksanda L. Spektor, as well as the workshops by American artists

Martha Jackson-Jarvis and Kendall Henry. At a certain stage, we seriously considered the institutionalization of all our educational initiatives, and the idea was to create a regular educational project in the shape of a school of contemporary culture. However this initiative did not bear fruit. Nevertheless, Bactria is presently implementing two projects where an important educational component is included. This is exemplified by the project Artist and/in the Community, and new media-studio headed by Jamshed Kholikov. These projects help us recapture some of the previous educational initiatives and constitute a base to create forthcoming initiatives.

Background

The artists that could be referred to the prime generation or the first wave of the contemporary Central Asian art, started their practice in the 1990s or in the very beginning of the 21st century. As a rule, they benefited from the traditional art education system. They followed curricula designed for painters, sculptors, set-designers, etc., in the leading higher education institutions of their countries or in Moscow. For this generation of artists contemporary art symbolized a complete re-imagining or coping with their academic artistic background. The contemporary artistic practices were for those artists similar in a way to the Freudian patricide. The most topical idea was the struggle against medium. Their aim was to get find new ways of expression and to reconsider the ones they had learnt in the schools. The pieces by the artists of the aforementioned generation contain some self-reflection. For instance, the Kazakh artist Yerbossyn Meldibekov studied as a sculptor. The young man from a village chose the profession quite pragmatically and enrolled in the section where they teach how to sculpt leaders of the world's proletariat (most notably Lenin, the most solicited artistic image in the country). The family sacrificed a whole cow to ensure their son was accepted into the prestigious department, as everyone understood



"Mutations" by Yerbossyn Meldibekov

Artistic education in Central Asia.

Draft solution for the problem. *continued...*

that a single state order for bust of Lenin would easily pay for the animal. But dreams about state orders were never meant to be, the country disaggregated and the skills to sculpt Lenin's figure became useless. This traumatic experience linked to the education is somehow expressed through Mutations, a project by Yerbossyn where Lenin's busts are transformed by hammer into "mutant" representations of Genghis Khan or Patrice Lumumba. The image that symbolises for the author the education he acquired is subject to the direct physical impact that could almost be considered as a murder. Certainly, the main topic of Yerbossyn's project is not his education, even though the motivations that described above are explicated by him in relation to this work. Nevertheless, this example vividly illustrates the role of the artistic education for the older generation.

For the youngest generation of artists, the ones who are now in their 20s, the education has a totally different meaning. The artistic education that was inherited from the Soviet Union and was seen as quite prestigious had been totally discredited. All Art schools and institutes in Central Asia, to varying degrees, suffer from problems including teachers' issues, logistical problems

and an "outdated" Soviet style methodology. This is not confined to Central Asia, main art schools in Moscow, with some notable exceptions, are also untrustworthy. One of my American acquaintances, an artist and curator who is quite closely involved in the artistic sphere in Russia and Central Asia, stated the following "If in Russia the artistic schools still keep up with the tradition of drawing and composition, the Central Asian ones cannot even follow up on that."

However the only young artists who are making any sort of impression on the artistic scene, either have no professional artistic education, or are in the process of getting a formal one, or got one solely for the purpose of having a diploma. We understand that such an education has no significance for their artistic practice.. Having no "school" background that would inspire respect for the tradition, the canons, and the way of expression per say, the young artists have a more spontaneous attitude to the media, I would even say a lighter one. This is for instance expressed through their interdisciplinary practice, which includes visual media such as photo, video, and theatre and literature. As an example of such a multidisciplinary approach, one can cite



"Fisherman" by Marat Rayimkulov

the Bishkek artist Marat Rayimkulov. Marat is physicist by education, and still has some ambitions for his scientific career having just followed until his postgraduate studies. Marat's practices are the intersection of paper and digital graphics and the theatre and literary experiments. He is inspired by the theatre of absurd and the existential literary works of Gogol, Kafka and Durrenmatt. This inspiration informs his illustrations, drawings, animation movies or theatre projects. The project of Marat entitled "l'innommable" will be presented in the Central Asian pavilion of the Venice Biennale this year.

It is clear that contemporary art is a complex and heterogeneous discipline that requires some practical foundations in different mediums, as well as the knowledge, or even the immersion in what we call discourse, which can be equally important, if not even more crucial. The discourse is being created around the art sphere by the artists, curators, theoreticians and philosophers to define the motivations and strategies of the artistic practices. We are aware that the traditional artistic education cannot propose anything in that field. What would be then the alternative to the traditional education in the region?

The proper shape of artistic education is not problem exclusive to our desert region. The issue is common in the Western context as well, but in Europe, the USA and some other countries the discussion takes on a theoretical dimension. Practically anyone willing to get involved in arts has access to the wide choice of schools providing valid conventional and contemporary education. An education prestigious enough to allow to become a gallery artist, or alternative and innovative enough that would lead the artist into the domain of cultural centres and non-commercial foundations. Such education can aim to develop some limited number of practical skills or be theory and research oriented. In any case, artistic education as well as the artistic milieu is very heterogeneous sphere, which makes the choice of schools one of the most important for a young person to make, however the variety also offers some flexibility – if you made a wrong choice, you can go study somewhere else.

In the situation current for Central Asia any attempt to create a sustainable educational institution would mean orienting all human and financial resources towards one unique model and unique format of artistic education. As the artistic community is small, it would be difficult to find alternatives to it. This is equally true for potential students and for potential teachers, taking into account the limited funding options.

That is why, as an alternative to the traditional academic education in Central Asia, I would propose self-

education, a very simple option that probably will seem disappointing for many. The role of institutions should be in the first place to understand the situation in the field of artistic education as situation marked by emerging self-education and by the attempts to react to the current situation, generating projects aiming to promote the self-education and access to various resources. To be more clear, the existing artistic structures must not aim for a centralized educational unit, but rather should promote mobility and decentralization. Open lectures, series of seminars, workshops and residencies are for me part of a more productive strategy in the field of education. Certainly, the people who are searching to acquire knowledge and skills, the self-education is a very difficult and challenging process that needs willpower and self-discipline.

I would like to return to the summer school of the project Artist and/in Community. When planning this event, we were aware of the background described above. The title of the Summer school was Terrain Orientation, a metaphoric expression of those background aspects. We aimed to provide to our audience some kind of road map that would help them later on to orient themselves independently within the contemporary artistic process. The school had a very important peculiarity – it was above all a theoretical school, oriented at reading. It was important for us to lead our audience through main texts and authors' works that impacted the most the artistic process of the 20th and the 21st centuries. That is why we offered courses on the problematics of representation, on philosophical conceptualization on technical means of expression, approaches to criticism, interpretations of art and the problem of local vs. global.

This approach was shared by some, and criticized by some others from the regional art sphere, which reveals the diverging views on artistic education. I think that the variety and contrariety of the approach is a sign of a vibrant living space. I see this as yet another confirmation that centralized solutions for the issue of artistic education will not work and might even be counter-productive. Sporadic and heterogeneous projects, certainly, cannot encourage education of a systematic and homogeneous kind, a scholastic one, in the positive meaning of the word. However they would result in collage and mixing of apprehension patterns, approaches and strategies, which probably best incapsulates contemporary life ...

Georgy Mamedov
curator

Ball of all times...

Fashion, music, dances were constantly changing with times. Only people were not subjected to that change. The film *Le Bal* opens in pre-war France, a time when the inhabitants of the nearby neighborhood would gather together for a drink, relaxation and dancing. It was a time of new acquaintances, broken hopes and new families – the life as it should be. Suddenly a war breaks out. Some joined the resistance forces, others were marginalized in the ghetto. Fiends who would spend their evenings in an amiable conversation over a couple of strong drinks turned into betrayers... Time is flying by, the rhythms and costumes of dancers change again. The war is over! Those who had spread fear and evil not so long ago were rejected and despised by society. The world changes again along the music and songs. Everybody is whirling around in never-ending dancing of life. Somebody leaves the stage. Somebody appears on the stage. New generations and celebrities emerge. As the time slips by clothes, hairstyles, rhythms, and dances all change. The booming sixties, seventies, eighties follow. Rock-and-roll, Latin American rhythms, tango and waltz, "Beatles", disco.... In the never-ending dancing these musical styles change one after the other, dancers change their partners and instead of donning their old sweaters they put on new vivid shirts studded with spangles. The dances never stop – people live to the music, where there is happiness and misfortunes, love and loneliness. We can see people with different fates each having a separate part in this never-ending dance of life.... When the music suddenly dies away, the dancers leave the stage and lights go down. But they will return the next day to continue dancing, the dancing which never ends and never stops. Only the rhythms, styles and clothes will change with coming times. No matter what happens

the dancing will always be performed as long as people come to this ballroom to dance, dance, dance... Our life is music.

It is a testament to the artistic flair of the film-director that the movie captured the entire history of a country in one musical saga. This film, where actors do not utter a single word for half an hour, rightfully belongs in the upper echelons of highly artistic world cinematography. But it is not fully a silent film; some actors are engaged in dialogue although their voices are never heard. The film presents rather recognizable human characters whose parts are performed by the same group of actors through the time. But it is not about the play of actors. The main emphasis is laid on the dramaturgy of the whole 20th century with its series of tumultuous events tinged with the colour and music rhythms peculiar to each period of time. The film is more than just the history of France. The film depicts the history of music, the forms that dominated an epoch and through which we recognize these periods: from waltz and tango to rock-and-roll of 50s-60s and disco of 80s. It is beyond doubt that national coloring of French melodies lends a special appeal to the actors' performance. This special performance appeals both to musical memory of the audience and situations so familiar to them from classic cinema. There are surely many directors who would like to portray the past through the medium of dance, but few could successfully undertake it. It takes a special artistic flair, unconventional worldview, and a different way of thinking. When you watch the performance you realize that there is no need for words at all. They would have turned the dramaturgy of the film into disputes between people, small-scale conflicts which would have clashed with each music performance. The ball never ends. The invitees are representatives of various generations having fun in their own way. Some come to boast of their beauty and dancing skills, others to compete with partners – the rest come to enjoy a grand party, the place where even during the most difficult times in life one can spin around in jolly dancing. There is no feeling better when for a moment you escape from political and everyday problems and dance.

All our life is a never-ending ball!

Sukhrob Mirzoaliev,
resource centre manager



Scene from film "Le Bal"