



**BACTRIA**  
Cultural Centre

**window**  
Bactria Newsletter

Where creativity  
meets people

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# On Air

Dear Friends!

Here below we bring to your attention an interview with Alisher Primkulov who was in the head of Bactria since September 2011 to February 2011, a person whose warmth remained deep in the hearts of all Bactria's team.

***What were your best impressions while working with Bactria's team?  
What new discoveries did you make for yourself?***

Bactria Cultural Centre is really lucky to have such wonderful and diligent people working for it. They are true professionals regardless of their job responsibilities.

The one distinguishing feature of the team, I like the most is that they stick together during events and work as a cohesive team until the end. I remember the day of the educational fair "Closer to Europe." After the event was done, it did not matter what position and responsibilities any of us had, everybody was a loader and equal at that moment. Our director of educational programs, Antoine Buisson, was with us and took an active part in it even though his friends were waiting for him and had been for a long time. They would have never suspected he was loading the stands with his formal suit and tie still on. Such moments draw people closer to each other because they feel their colleagues' support and this unites them into a team. In my time in Bactria there has been an abundance of similar stories, besides this episode. These days at Bactria have been very positive moments of my life.

***Alisher Primkulov, Would you consider yourself a Leader or a Director of your staff and why?***

I cannot give you a definite answer to this question. It is hard to work as a leader; you must be ready to resolve the most unexpected and difficult questions. Your responsibility doubles when you work with a big team. I am very grateful to Bactria's team and their continuing support in resolving different issues. I think it is of primary importance to establish and maintain friendly relations with your colleagues, to listen to their opinions and to take independent decisions only when it is absolutely necessary. Although sometimes this balance is hard to achieve, it is the work style that I like best, and I believe Bactria's team deserves this kind of treatment. I have gained invaluable experience in managing people and resources and I hope I've managed to avoid the many mistakes which I had previously inflicted on my subordinates. Everything else might seem urgent at the time, in the long view these things are of little value. People are the most valuable resource.

***What are your creative plans for nearest future?***

I do not like this type of question... My creative plans are to shoot films. When I left, I got a number of job offers in international organizations. The offers were rather good and, frankly, many people still do not know the real reason behind my refusals. I only want to focus on my creative projects in my studio. I have been craving this creative freedom for a long time.

***Conducted by Anna Basanova***



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## Tajik traditional music confronted to the reality

Bactria\_Music

Does traditional music need support? What forms of it remain, and how is such an important cultural component perceived in Tajikistan? In 2009, the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for cultural preservation agreed to support the Bactria Cultural Centre project "Preservation of Traditional Music Culture through Community Participation and Public Programming". The support from this prestigious fund facilitated the successful implementation of this project, especially the project component that was jointly supported by the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation – Tajikistan in 2010.

Traditional music or "people music" as it used to be called, can have different meanings depending on the context. Some have a negative perception of it but this is mostly due to the low quality of the records sold, insufficient interregional cultural exchange and inadequate pupation to contemporary trends .

For the "Preservation of Traditional Music Culture through Community Participation and Public Programming" project, Bactria sent a team of sociologists and sound engineers throughout the country to record traditional music. Before entering the heart of the matter, we should mention that a significant part of these expeditions entailed meetings with local authorities, including the heads of local culture departments. The Ministry of Culture helped facilitate our efforts by explaining the goals and objectives of the projects to local authorities and requesting their assistance. The project received all types of support, for instance it was aided in the search for musicians and performers that best represent each locality, region or village we visited. We also received assistance identifying convenient spots and locations for shooting and sound recording.



*"Muboraky vakhony" museum in Yamg, GBAO*

The sound engineer Ikbol Zavkibekov, his assistant Pulod Pulodov, the cameraman Aleksey Rummyantsev and the ethnomusicologist Naim Khakimov accompanied the music projects coordinator Sergey Chutkov throughout the country, meeting musicians, makers of music instruments, and all manner of people involved in traditional music.

During the trips, all the participants of the project were troubled by sustainability and potential to develop traditional genres of the music culture. Some of them, like the art of labchang playing or performing the epic cycle of gurugly, seem particularly at risk. Nevertheless, there are many genres of the traditional music that seem more resilient. Although the mad-doh as well as many other forms of spiritual and philosophic heritage has been suppressed by authorities for the last seventy years, this musical style still thrives. The world has changed, and we are here to re-discover it together. Everyone has their part to play from members of the donor organizations to artists from the capital Dushanbe.



*Naim Khakimov with Gurugly performer in Khatlon*

Of all phenomena we noticed during the implementation of the project, we would like to note the interdependence between the sharing traditional music with the audiences in Tajikistan and the involvement of traditional Tajikistani musicians in the world music trend. Western audiences, in search of authenticity, turn towards ethnic music, and this wave of interest can benefit musicians from Tajikistan and increase their potential fan base, gaining new audience outside and inside the country.

By spreading the project's materials among its foreign partners involved in promotion of the Central Asian traditional music, Bactria Cultural Centre hopes to encourage the invitation of Tajik artists and musical groups to international festivals, concert and cooperation programs abroad.

Another goal of the project was to promote an interregional cultural exchange within Tajikistan by encouraging musicians from different parts of the country to perform together in joint cultural events. For instance, we were able to get Imrun Kadamenov, the daf player of Navoi Rushon group (from GBAO) to accompany Abdurauf Sultonov, the famed dutar player and performer of falak from Kulob.

The philosophy behind the project was to use music as a universal language to build bridges, strengthen professional and personal ties, intensify exchange and encourage joint crea-

tivity in a friendly atmosphere. By participating in joint master-classes, sharing the feeling of excitement before going on stage for the final concert, and the general conviviality of their entire stay in Dushanbe, the musicians, who express the traditions of the local communities, learned to better understand each other.

As part of the project's efforts to popularize traditional musical genres within Tajikistan, Bactria arranged several master classes with aspiring musical students. The tremendous educational effect of these classes cannot be underestimated. The musicians invited for master-classes, such as the falak performer Abdurauf Sulonov from Kulob and Navoi Rushon group from GBAO who perform the maddoh style, were questioned thoroughly by the students of the P.I. Tchaikovsky Music School #1. The artists explained the entire spiritual and philosophical meaning of the music pieces they played. We noticed that even talented pupils often lacked basic knowledge about genres and themes of the traditional culture. Some thought that the poetry of Falak or Maddoh was about popular sagas and legends, or about agricultural cycles. Often, traditional genres, including classical ones like the Shashmakom, are combined with the popular songs about everyday life, strengthening the concept that traditional music is first and foremost the people's music. The artists explained the structure of Maddoh cycle, the philosophical and spiritual meaning of the lyrics and poems used in the genre which is a very typical for the artistic genius of the Badakhshan region. The music pieces we mentioned were based on poetry of Shamsiddin Tabrizi.



*Navoi Rushon perform Maddoh at concert in Hyatt Regency Dushanbe*

This direct dialogue between the musicians and the management of the education institutions, helped foster a deeper understanding of the nature of traditional music and radically enlarged the music erudition school's students, who previously had no access to high quality live performances of the traditional music.

Live musical performances allowed the audience to feel a direct contact with the sounds of traditional instruments and the melodies thanks to the mastery of the musicians and singers. The audiences witnessed the empathy, emotions, sound nuances that cannot be transmitted through record and were given the opportunity to ask challenging questions to the mu-

sicians. Another important function of these meetings was to offer students explicit, fresh and original examples of traditional genres that they were studying.

During the concert and master class at the Music College, the masters of traditional music invited from the regions performed for a prepared and initiated audience, it strengthened their self-confidence and offered an occasion to have their creativity and performing skills appreciated.

For the students and professors of the Tajik National Conservatory, the meeting with the guest artists was an opportunity to share ideas and points of view among peers and conduct discussions with specialists, like the musicologist Naim Khakimov. He presented the findings of the expeditions. The professors, students and musicologists from the Tajik National Conservatory had active discussions and asked a myriad of questions to the musicians.

As a conclusion, it would be appropriate to specify some of the unique aspects of the material published in the scope of this project. Firstly a booklet outlining the various styles and genres encountered on the expedition was created. This book, especially its Tajik language version, is one of the few publications of its kind. It was also published in Russian and in English.

The music CD included in the publication package allows a global audience and the specialists to receive a clearer picture of performers' mastery and the variety of genres within traditional Tajik music culture. The disc is almost an encyclopaedic compilation of the music recorded during the field trips and allows a full tour of musical cultures of Tajikistan.

The video documentary included in the pack is a dynamic visual illustration of the variety of music genres we witnessed during expeditions all around Tajikistan.

The project has now finished, but the ideas that came up during the process of its implementation will likely be the base for some promising initiatives. Among those which Bactria finds most encouraging is the creation of an independent label that would release traditional music record, as well as any quality live music composed in Tajikistan. Producers, managers, concert organizers are also sorely needed. Many of those who aim to express themselves through music are able to take decisive steps. We do hope that our article inspires them.

*Kirill Kuzmin*  
*Music projects coordinator*

## Ideal Environment or Public Art in Dushanbe

Bactria\_Art Vision

Public art or, as it commonly called in Russian language the Art for public places, is a new phenomenon for Tajikistan. The emergence of contemporary art as a practice in general takes its roots from 2005, while the birth of Tajik public art dates back to 2009.

It was Kendal Henry, a widely known curator and public art artist, who brought in this practice with his three-week visit to Dushanbe by holding an art residence in the frame of GlobalArtLab project that have been repeatedly implemented by American organization CECartlinks for several years. It was none other than him, who acquainted our artists and students with this novelty, a different form of art.

His workshops revealed that the public art as well as the street art are new forms of contemporary art that people might unexpectedly encounter in public places and shiver in a shock. The art that is at times displayed at places so unfit and contradicting for presentation of art (at least for traditional art in its conservative understanding). To such places might belong public bus stops, subways, various establishments, sidewalks, walls of buildings etc. The choice of places depends on the artist's imagination and the scope of creativity. Such thought-provoking encounter raises many questions in the minds of regular spectators: "Is this really art?" "If not, what is it then – hooliganism, vandalism or a mere foolish act? To answer the first question it makes sense to find answers to others: "What is art to you?" – Things that hang on the walls of museums? Things exhibited in galleries? Or the things an old art teacher so eagerly tries to drill into your head?"

These are the very questions that haunted the artists of the late 20th century. Traditional forms of artistic expression were disputed (painting, sculpture), academic perception of art imposed by museums and galleries was openly ignored. The art would suddenly spring from round the corner in the form of performance or action. Sculptures and figures bloated with the oxygen streams coming through subway grating or ventilated buildings that grew out of the ground in front of surprised passersby, ten-meter-high images of homeless or some comic-strip characters suddenly appeared on walls. Public art unexpectedly disappeared just as emerged. Objects made of cigarette ashes, tiny garbage and snow melted and were blown away by wind or swept away by street cleaners soon after their creation, which might not be noticed by anyone. Over the time public art projects were getting more complicated.

Today they are created not only for observation but also for active interaction with a public at large. There is an artist (whose name I cannot tell you as well as other names because it is quite impossible to "catch them red-handed" on the scene of their creative "crime") who did creative projections on the

walls of buildings, converting desolate warehouses into palaces with facades in barokko style. That very artist offered to passersby to send via SMS short texts which he after projected on walls. Everybody could openly observe how texts on the walls provoked animated discussions on various topics, some saying "there are real g...ats, those Republicans", others ending with "Kim Kardashyan looks pretty good in his home video". Among the other unknown artists was the one who glued to advertising posters and banners the so called "dialogue bubbles" through which comics characters converse. The dialogue bubbles were blank thereby inviting people to fill them in with whatever comes to their mind. There was hardly anyone who could indifferently pass by those extremely amusing "expressions" without being double-bent with laughter. Imagine that early in the morning when you walk along the street to your office and suddenly see a Hollywood star on a wall poster advertising a shampoo that speaks to you through those dialogue bubbles: "I want to make a pee" (this is what someone wrote inside of that glued bubble).



*Mark Jankinson sculpture in Seoul*

A well-known New York artist under the pseudonym Pixilator erects wire screens made of dimmed small glass squares and sticks them on advertising screens at the entrance to subways. As the result of it the erected images look as if they were made of big pixels and mesmerize passersby who stand staring up for hours glued to those screens. The same artist with his public "warehouse" art associates created and gave an extensive publicity campaign to their upcoming exhibition on kinetic installations somewhere in a desolate subway which neither

police nor interested people can find it so far.

Though amusing and at first glance flippant and sometimes absurd images but still able to draw the attention of the audience to the questions of vital importance. Dominance of Mass Media over the public opinion shaping, expansion of consumerism, social problems of separate groups, illogical and unfair rules and many other things become the objects and targets of many artists working with public space. Their works – designed for unprepared and unaware audience, – are abundant with simple and easily recognized images that are also reflecting particular phenomena of the present day reality. Practically every public art artist represents his/her position, which is manifested and stressed in original and often unique style. The art for such artist is not confined within the walls of their studio only; their activity is wider in scope, all the world is a canvas for them.

### Ideal environment

Looking forward at the future of contemporary art in Tajikistan you will involuntarily face a sad picture. Official infrastructure is limited in development and contemporary art within the inactive existing system is viewed from a negative side, and as the result, deprived of due attention. The doors of exhibition halls and museums are closed for contemporary artists whose works and ideas contradict to what is “hanging and standing” in official halls. There are very few opportunities to learn something about contemporary arts except by tiny doses through some cultural institutions which is a rarity as well. Thus in my view Tajikistan has an ideal environment for public art development.

Devoid of opportunity to find its niche in a cultural infrastructure, the art must realize itself in an alternative space – public place. First attempts to display contemporary art on the streets were made in 2009. Among the first truly successful public art projects were Abdullo Ubaidulloev's work “Water drop” and the work created by Inna Klado and her students “Fish”.

Abdullo's project harmonized well with the city's scenery and environment even to the extent that public could hardly notice it. The image of blue water drop with a question mark drawn near the dried-out fountain, desolate and no more used Gas-water containers, rainwater pipes, somewhere in subway passages or near flowing water taps called on people to think

about the value of water and its rational consumption. The project embraced the overall city and would certainly have brought to Abdullo a great fame if our people had at least the slightest notion of this kind of art. Hopefully, he will proceed with his project as it should live on constantly reminding us of itself the way the artists with assumed names do – Banksi and Space Invader in their provocative projects.

The “Fish” created at the fountain just in front of Opera and Ballet Theatre and nearby a summer café turned into a local place of interest. The drawing of the Golden Fish impressed on



*“Drop” action by Abdullo Ubaidulloev, Dushanbe*

the ground near the fountain as if swimming in and then out of it in the form of a skeleton – a sight that attracted both the youth and the tourists so eager to take pictures on its background. Unfortunately neither fried fish sellers, so gladly offering their products to the café visitors nor the city dwellers, all the time throwing their cigarette ends, empty bottles and other trash into the fountain understood the meaning that “fish” conveyed.

It is worth mentioning Aleksey Rumiyantsev's action through which he who bestowed his neighbors, constantly suffering from water shortages, with a water-fall that ran down their apartments' windows. He offered his neighbors to follow their example by imitating a group of the young artist that were bathing, washing their dress and even brushing their teeth under the imagined water-fall. Some of the neighbors to whom this action appealed screamed out of their wide-open windows: “Aleksey, can we have that water-fall as well”!



*Inna Klado public art project “Fish”, Dushanbe*

This year Tajik artists will present to the inhabitants of Dushanbe a series of their public art works that might be placed along the central alley of the city. Then our city dwellers will switch their attention to an iron TV that shows an endless line of passing cars, a chair that grew



*“TV” public art project by Jamshed Kholikov and Aleksey Rumayntcev*

deep into the pavement, or a zero point that shows us how far we are from outer world, or some other sculptures of unreal characters.

The beauty of public art is that everybody can create something. Everybody has a particular talent. Public art artists cut out different images from papers and glue them to walls, draw with chalk and spray paint through stencils or without them, they weave and knit, they carve images on the surface of hard objects be it the wall of a building or just a pile of dirt, or just draw existing pictures on some walls. You can create a public art work with whatever comes to your hands. The main thing is to express yourself and your ideas. More importantly, you should use the poetics or incompleteness of the existing object or site. Look closely at the object and think of any possible ways to complete that half-made “picture”.

As a friend of mine public art artist says: – “Go ahead everybody, walls never wait!!!”

*Farukh Kuziev,  
art management student, Buffalo University*

## Warm-handed, warm-hearted...

Bactria\_Heritage

Handcrafts are highly appreciated all over the world. We are all very familiar with saris from India, felt boots (valenki) from Russia, carpets from Turkey, and handicrafts of African ethnic groups. These are objects of everyday life, traditionally handmade, that have accompanied cultures throughout the ages.

The house... there are different words for it in almost every language, but what do we imagine when we hear the word? For people all over the world, this word reminds of childhood, hearth and home. We feel nostalgic when seeing the object that epitomizes the idea of home. Whether it is an object of interior design or a bibelot that has been familiar since childhood, an object made some years ago by someone’s skilful hands.

In the modern life, we are surrounded by all types of inventions and innovations – super-modern carpeting, plastic dishes specially designed for certain food and un-shrinkable clothing made from synthetic fabric. We totally forget how pleasant it is to walk barefoot on homespun carpets and drink perfumed green tea on the veranda using a wonderful handmade ceramic bowl. How great it is to wear a fancy colourful traditional dress embroidered with fantastic flowers and birds. Or how great it is, on coming back home on a cold winter evening, to roll oneself up with a warm blanket woven from natural sheep wool on an old grandma’s machine, and wear comfortable woollen juraby socks.

We make concessions to the general rush for innovation; we commission modern repairs in our homes and buy ultramodern furniture and high-tech kitchens. Nevertheless, sooner or later,

we all come to the conclusion that it feels cold to live in these high tech houses. We notice that it is boring to choose a rug in a shop that has hundreds of standard, monotype products which are strictly identical and without any defect or peculiarities that would differentiate it from the hundreds thousands of other carpets made by heartless machines.

Then, walking through the city, we start noticing the display cases of antique shops. We are drawn to that old copper jar that has turned green over time, that old colourful carpet that remains vivid, and to that ceramic bowl which for some unknown reason has escaped life hardships and that retains its shiny glaze. An invisible force drags us to the dusty twilight of such treasure troves, and our ultramodern soul revives and we remember how a cosy house should really be. In these shops, among motes turning in the rays of the evening sun, ceramics and copper dishes, woven covers and antique silver jewellery, similar to what our grandmothers used to wear, we lose the sense of time....

Then there are the suzani. Suzani are like songs, fairy tales or a story of one’s life embroidered into silk. The turning of an ancient distaff’s spindle merges with the imagination of the artisan to produce intricate picture in woven silk. Often this is an image of a blooming garden, with thin-stemmed rose bushes bent from carrying heavy luxurious buds and a sun- the symbol of life, placed in the focus of the composition as departure point for the most refined designs. Every stitch, every branch or flower, every twirl of the design has its own unique meaning. There

are also many stories accompanying suzani, the charming piece of art that a mother would embroider for her daughter, leaving a flower or a part of décor unfinished, so the young seamstress could learn the art through finishing the piece. You probably noticed that in almost all the suzanis, among ten similar elements, there are one or two different ones, by colour, or by shape, or else by the orientation of designs. Is this an error of the artisan? It's not, everything is planned, even the smallest details. As the old masters say, «... only Allah can create perfection, the humans do error...»

It often comes as a surprise to realize that many people in the countryside continue to use handmade items in their daily life. Items that were constructed using ancient technologies. As city dwellers, we often see this as an exotic phenomenon. But it is simply that many families keep up ancestral traditions and techniques. They follow many rites, sow kurpacha (traditional mattresses) and costumes for weddings. They do not consider their efforts "ancient" rather they increasingly refer more to the contemporary market trends for inspiration. They often forsake use for the traditional cloth for textiles produced en masse in the foreign countries. The variety of colourful synthetic fabric saturated our markets, offering a wide choice for every taste. It is difficult to call the pieces that use these fabrics original and traditional, but they are desired none the less. Although the use of non-natural fabrics, sometimes of a doubtful quality, and synthetic thread coloured in a vivid and unnatural shades might cheapen the quality of some of the pieces, this is often the most economical choice, and it helps keep alive the traditional ways. Every traditionally crafted piece reflects the generations of work that have gone into perfecting and evolving the craft, every piece is reflective of the soul of the community. When used in clothing, the traditional elements add to one's style certain simplicity and soulfulness.

Traditionally, the secrets of mastership are transmitted in artisans' families from generation to generation. As of today, the traditional handicrafts of our country find customers throughout the world market. Handicraft fairs have become



*Felt toys.*

*Cooperative 'Layokat', Khorog*

very popular and draw Tajiks en masse as well as foreign visitors.

An artisan in today's Tajikistan faces various difficulties ranging from the lack of quality raw materials to the power shortages that decrease productivity. The awful

state of the mountain roads makes it impossible to transport the finished products from remote regions to retail centres in the cities. There are many programs today to support handicrafts. One of them is the program of development of handicraft implemented by Bactria Cultural Centre. Within this program, Bactria organizes bi-annual Handicraft fairs, gathering traditional artisans from all over the country. The masters who

take part in these fairs can sell their products, get to better know their clients, tell people about their profession and share experience with their colleagues. The artisans are not the only ones who wait for the handicraft fairs. These yearly events are a wonderful opportunity for the citizens of Tajikistan and numerous tourists to get to know the history of the country through handicraft and to purchase original gifts.

Regular handicraft fairs are not the only means to promote disappearing traditions. More fundamental measures are to be taken to extend the market for handicrafts and increase the quality of the products. The artisans also need training in new techniques and in the logistics needed to deliver raw materials. Improving the working conditions for artisans is yet another important task. There are many solutions to it, and a myriad of organizations are contributing their efforts towards this cause, helping artisans to better sell their products or to learn something new.

As time passes, the projects finish, the hum of the trade fairs dies down and the life of the artisans

returns to normal. Spring and summer are dedicated to the work in the fields, the autumn to harvesting, and the winter is a struggle against natural disasters and the energy crisis. Over the long months the artisan will anxiously look forward to the next small project, which will not only break the monotony of everyday life but will provide him or her with some material support.

Currently there are several large-scaled projects under development amongst organizations engaged in handicraft development. The projects will organize handicrafts fairs on both the local and international levels and develop an extensive educational program that will enable the artisans from all around the republic to improve the quality of their craft. Another important step for the preservation of our culture is to conduct substantial research studies on centuries-old techniques that are known to modern day present day artisans only by hearsay. It will take a lot of effort to revive these long-forgotten traditions and techniques.

There are many wonderful traditions and types of age-old handicrafts that we have already lost forever. It would be inexcusable for us to let the few remaining ones disappear forever.



*Aromalamp, ceramic.  
Master: Sukhrob Saidov,  
Dushanbe*

**Galina Yunusova, Coordinator  
of the Program of development of handicraft**