

GAZELLI ART HOUSE **VARX**

SEEING
OURSELVES
AND
EACH OTHER

HER ART
IN
ACTION



AZERBAIJAN 2024

The Feminine Gaze:

SEEING OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER

The topic for the 2024 edition of **Her Art in Action** focuses on how women depict their own experiences through art. For most of art history, the depiction of women has been controlled by the masculine gaze, which was created through gender constructions based on social, cultural, domestic and gender biases. Today, female artists are using their artistic platforms to take back the power of representation and delve into the complexities of women's roles and experiences. Through their work, they explore how art can serve women as a space for discourse and understanding, and ultimately provide liberation from rigid gender roles, expectations and identities.

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We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our sponsors for making the Her Art in Action festival possible. Special thanks to Gazelli Art House, Red Hearts, Pasha Travel, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Azerbaijan, and the German Embassy. Your support has allowed us to showcase the creative potential of female artists and reach a wider audience. Thank you for your invaluable contributions.

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OPENING CEREMONY

By inviting international artists to **'Her Art in Action'**, we aim to create a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences. Collaborating with different women artists from around the world, we enrich the cultural dialogue, expand artistic perspectives, and provide valuable networking opportunities for local talents. This perspective strengthens the festival's impact and promotes cross-cultural understanding.



“HER ART IN ACTION”

is an annual festival dedicated to supporting and empowering women artists in Azerbaijan. Held at the esteemed Gazelli Art House in Baku, our festival aims to inspire creativity, build community, and encourage collaboration among female artists. We believe in the transformative power of art and its ability to change and challenge perceptions. Supporting women artists is crucial because art has the potential to encourage important dialogues, promote empathy, and foster connections across diverse communities. By supporting women artists, we contribute to a more balanced representation within the art world, providing them with a platform to share their experiences. Our festival is dedicated to giving local women artists a platform to exhibit their work, gain visibility, and reach a broader audience. We achieve this through exhibitions, workshops, and collaborations, fostering a supportive and inclusive artistic community.





Lesley Gray

Lesley Gray is a Dubai and Los Angeles based curator and researcher specializing in contemporary art and museums in the Arabian Peninsula and Caspian Sea regions.

Professionally, Lesley provides curatorial consultancy services on a variety of museum and cultural projects, including large-scale contemporary art and heritage projects in the GCC.

She completed her PhD in Museum Studies and Art History at University College London focusing on contemporary art institutions and art practice in the GCC and Caspian Sea regions and has a research background in Anthropology, Contemporary Art, and Museum Studies.

In addition to her professional curatorial projects, she is a contributing writer to ArtAsiaPacific Magazine and the ArtAsiaPacific Almanacs (2016-2020).

She published her first book, Azerbaijan Contemporary Art, in 2022.

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FOREIGN ARTISTS

Altynai Osmoeva
Aida Adilbekova
Daro Sulakauri
Sabiha Chimen
Olga Vesselova



Altynai Osmoeva

Free Precious Women, 2023

In the heart of the Central Asian turmoil, where women endure the weight of societal shackles and political unrest, "Free Precious Women" emerges - an artwork by artist **Altynai Osmoeva** performed by Zere Asylbek, a singer and activist, blending ancient Kyrgyz craft of silverwork with modern spirit of activism.

In the nomadic landscapes of Kyrgyzstan, WHERE SILVER AND JEWELRY GLEAMS AS A SYMBOL OF TRADITION AND REVERENCE, A NEW NARRATIVE EMERGES - ONE WOVEN WITH THREADS OF COURAGE, DEFIANCE, AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION.

Traditional silver jewelry is reimagined as objects of oppression, limitation of freedom of women and simultaneously transcends adornment, becoming symbols of defiance, protest and liberation.

1. Silver tiara in a form of a tumar, a triangle symbol for protection, with an engraved Kyrgyz proverb: The wisdom comes from the head, the precious stone from the rocks.

2. Silver brows with engraved words: Truth, Liberty, Equality, which is covered by a removable piece with opposing words: Dishonesty, Captivity, Discrimination.

3. Silver glasses with fire-shaped irises and hanging quartz clear teardrops (restricting vision).

4. Silver ear cuffs with a traditional oimo pattern (restricting hearing).

5. Silver nose cuff with a traditional oimo pattern (restricting breathing).

6. Eye patch with a proverb: Truth pierces the eyes.

7. Mouthpiece in the shape of a hand (restricting freedom of speech).

8. Choker with a proverb: One can get beheaded, but cannot be restricted in

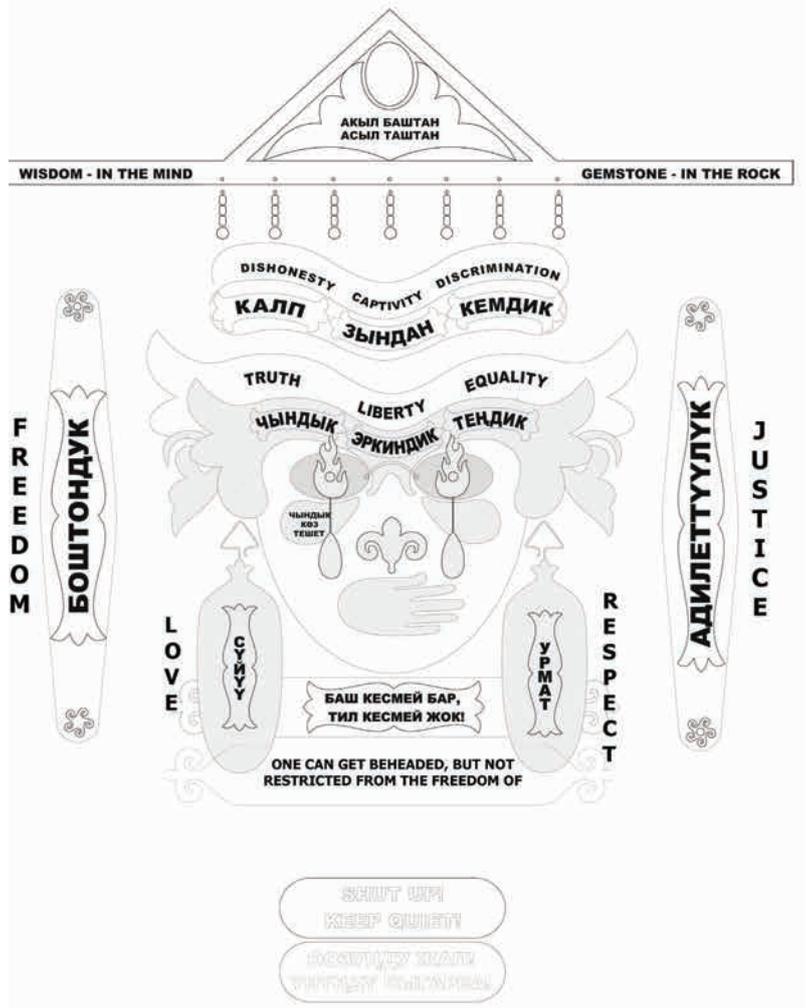
freedom of speech! It comes with a removable silver piece with opposing words: Shut up! Keep quiet! (restricting freedom of speech).

9. Earrings with words: Love and Respect (in Kyrgyz traditional culture, the earrings were gifted to a future bride by the family of her future husband and were symbols of commitment and promise).

10. Bracelets with words: Justice and Freedom. The bracelets become shackles/handcuffs with attached silver chain.

11. Pin in a shape of a heart with Umay oimo - a pattern that signifies goddess of fertility in Turkic mythology and Tengriism, Mother Earth, and as such related to women, mothers and children.

12. Felt collar bibs with word WOMAN and breasts to signify the heaviness of legacy, knowledge and fate that women are born with and wear throughout life.



Through design and bold statements inspired by traditional Kyrgyz proverbs and signs on protest posters, each jewelry piece resembles both a restrictive object and an armor. As each piece adorns the wearer, it becomes a beacon of protest and hope, a reminder of the resilience inherent in womanhood. With every stroke of the artisan's hand, a silent protest is etched into existence, echoing through the annals of time - a testament to the indomitable spirit of those who refuse to be silenced. As silver gleams, so does the resilience of those reclaiming their voices and autonomy. In this fusion of art and activism, Free Precious Women - a testament to the power of women to shape their own destiny and to the power of art as a catalyst for change. In a world plagued by injustice and inequality, it serves as a reminder that even the smallest of actions - crafted with intention and imbued with meaning - can spark a change.

Altynai Osmoeva
Venus Jengeler, 2023

Triptych of round wall pieces from felt, cupro nickel and Swarovski crystals.

Venus Jengeler is an artistic expression rooted in the rich heritage of Central Asia, where felt holds ancient significance among semi-nomadic communities. This concept intertwines tradition with innovation, weaving together the tactile warmth of felt with the enduring strength of metal. At its core, Venus Jengeler delves into the essence of

cultural identity and the transformative power of tradition.

The act of pouring silver or cupro nickel onto felt symbolizes more than a mere artistic technique—it mirrors the process of embedding cultural experiences and ancestral wisdom into our very being. Just as the silver liquid burns and seeps into the fibers of felt, marrying each other, shaping and molding them, so too do our cultural roots shape us, molding us into the individuals we become.

Central to this concept is the imagery of women as Venuses, celestial beings traversing the cosmos within each of us. Venus Jengeler encapsulates the essence of this celestial journey, symbolizing the interconnectedness of humanity and the cyclical nature of life. As celestial nomads journeying through the Circle of Life, Venus

Jengeler invites viewers to embark on a profound exploration of identity, tradition, and the universal human experience. Through the fusion of felt and metal, this concept transcends cultural boundaries, offering a glimpse into the timeless beauty and resilience of the spirit of women.







Aida Adilbekova

Köbelek
(defining “butterfly” in Kazakh)
2023

In this video monologue by artist **Aida Adilbekova**, the protagonist describes the transition of female social roles inside a family, when youth becomes the elder.

On the eve of my birth you saw a butterfly flying out of the light. That's how we met. You used to cover the table with flowers to me. I filled myself with colour, landing and feeding off of each of them. You wished me to grow and prayed so my wings would strengthen. I learnt that I've carried so much of you within me. An immense wisdom you've left one day will come to me, too.

All the honey and milk you've covered me in will shelter me from the cold. A morning will dawn and many suns will set. You prepared me to travel further away from your garden and set sail on your own journey. Before you left, a frozen Earth melted by the force of a

purple wind. Spring has come. I have a new friend by my side. I had no sleep when you were born. The world was loud, and we lived in a drought. I started a garden, so when your shoulder blades harden and turn into wings, we can go there too. All the fauna of that garden hushed for a thousand years, waiting for you along my side.

Time has lost its meaning. A house you've landed in started hosting the Sun. I will wait for it to shatter the darkness and cold, and for the soil to dry. Once you hold your head up, I will bury your gifts under the apple tree. I will find all the purple for you in the grey-ness of the world.





Daro Sulakauri

**Shifting Borders,
2008-2024**

Imagine waking up one morning to find out that your bedroom is now located in a different country. Literally. While your living room and kitchen are still in the country where you fell asleep...

overnight the border has been unofficially 'redrawn' by the occupying forces from a hostile northern neighbor. Such nightmarish vulnerability has been horribly real for thousands in the South Ossetia region, a part of my homeland in the country of Georgia.

Russian occupation and the occupiers' shifting of so-called administrative "borders" in South Ossetia continues daily to encroach on Georgian territory. No one really knows where the line is, it is so mutable, and in many places it remains completely unmarked. When out for a walk, villagers on the Georgian side of the "border" can find themselves in Russian-occupied territory without realizing, resulting in Russian border guards arresting them.

As Russia-backed forces nudge the border further into Georgian territory, thereby de facto annexing more land, Georgia continues fighting an uphill battle to maintain its territorial integrity. This phenomenon of 'creeping borders' can impact the lives of anyone living in proximity to Russian-occupied territories without warning – something being newly experienced in extreme ways across Ukraine's Donbas region – and tragically, it has impacted daily life for decades in Georgia, my homeland.

It's a battle that's been fought for centuries. Growing up in the 90's in Georgia, my generation has borne witness to drastic upheavals and many important changes – protests and mass demonstrations for social change, civil war, revolution, and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war – in what is still an ongoing conflict today, as boundaries of occupied territories are being continuously manipulated by occupying forces.

Dear Reader,

The reason for this letter is for you to understand what the Russian occupation means, how it separated families and the people we love the most. The Russian occupation separated me and my grandparents. My grandfather died fighting the Russian occupation. But fortunately, my grandma is alive, and I believe someday the barbed wire fence will be demolished. I have one grandma left, and she is very ill, so sometimes during the school holidays, I sneak into the Russian-occupied territory. When the Russian guards are not inside the hut nearby, I jump over the barbed-wire fence to care for my grandmother. I am scared to death, but with fear, I still go to see her. One day the doctors called me and told me that grandma was very sick, so I again had to put my fear aside and started my journey by foot from my home in a village nearby. The road is 8 km; it takes 3-4 hours to get close to the barbed-wire fence to Khurvaleti village. I have to hide from the Georgian border police as well because the road is dangerous, and if they see me, they will not allow me to continue my journey because it is too dangerous.

I have to walk very quietly, sometimes crawling and hiding under the corn bushes. I finally arrive at the occupied territory. There is one place where the fence is low, so I found a flat wooden log which I placed on the barbed wire. I stepped on it and then jumped into the Russian-controlled territory. I was very scared, but love kills the fear. I ran to grandma's house, which is located very close, and when I went inside the house, I saw my grandmother on the floor. She had fallen, for god knows how long, and could not get up or reach her bed. I grabbed her right away and pulled her up to the bed. She was frozen; it was winter. She could not understand who I was, but once she felt safer, she recognized me and felt joy. We hugged each other. She was very hungry because she had no strength to cook herself anything, so I boiled her tea and gave her bread with butter. She felt alive again and started to tell me her stories. Throughout the week, I gave her medicine, and after a few days, she felt better. This was one of my journeys sneaking into "Russia," but in reality, I sneaked into my own country, on my own land. I believe this occupation will end soon. I have hope that with the help of Europe, we will gain our lands back. I want to believe that one day we will be able to hug our loved ones without sneaking over the barbed-wire fences, fearing that the Russian-backed militants will catch us and arrest us.

*Dato Vanishvili, 14 years old.
Khurvaleti Village*

PRESS RELEASE

Gazelli Art House, an international art gallery with locations in Baku and London, along with VarYox, an art and media platform based in Baku, are organizing a month-long festival called Her Art in Action, which focuses on female artistic practices. The festival, running from March 8 to 31, aims to support the professional development of Azerbaijani female artists and introduce their work to new audiences. It will feature an exhibition at Gazelli Art House and a series of workshops, public talks, and events centered around the artists and their work. The theme, “The Feminine Gaze: Seeing Ourselves and Each Other,” will be explored through new commissions and works by established artists from Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, highlighting how women’s lives are depicted in art.

The exhibition will showcase 13 Azerbaijani artists selected via an open call, along with works by invited artists from Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It will include paintings, videos, performances, and installations spread across the gallery’s three floors. Curators Sitara Ibrahimbayli, Lesley Gray and Olga Seleznyova aims to foster a dialogue on women’s issues in the region through this curatorial framework.

Additionally, the festival will offer two photography workshops by international photographers for Azerbaijani artists to refine their practice. Participants will also have the opportunity to have their portfolios reviewed by an international curator and attend public talks by visiting artists.

Throughout the one-month duration of the festival, children from Integration Training Boarding School No. 11 will actively participate in all the scheduled activities, fully immersing themselves in the rich array of events designed to inspire and cultivate their talents. Following their engaging experience during the festival, these aspiring young designers and artists will showcase their creativity and original creations at Nine Senses Art Center. The showcase will feature an exhibition of their artworks as well as a fashion show on the runway.

VarYox, led by Sitara Ibrahimbayli and founded in 2018, is the first Azerbaijani and English language art and cultural platform initiated by local artists. It aims to showcase Azerbaijani artists’ work, emphasizing the role of culture in uniting people. The festival seeks to support women in the arts in Azerbaijan, aiming to change the stagnant trends of recent years and inspire both artists and audiences.

Gazelli Art House Baku, as the hosting and curatorial partner, will be the main venue for the events and will announce additional opportunities for the public to engage with the exhibition and meet the artists.

This project is supported by Red Hearts, Pasha Travel, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Azerbaijan, and the German Embassy.

By supporting women artists, we contribute to a more balanced representation within the art world, providing them with a platform to share their experiences.

LOCAL ARTISTS

**Dilara Tagiyeva
Kafiye Eyvazova
Fidan Abilova
Fidan Humbatli
Sitara Ibrahimbayli
Aliya Bayramova
Aytakin Mirishova
Lali Binyatova
Nazrin Mammadova
Nigar Zeynalli
Ulviyya İman
Regina Rzayeva
Rufana Mamedova**



Dilara Tagiyeva

Story of Vulva, 2024

Vulva. This story is over hundreds of thousands of years old. This story is about love. About a woman. About a mother. About a girl. About a sister. About a lover. It's about life.

This story is about power. About the struggle. About loneliness. About grief. About being rejected. About betrayal. About suffering.

This story is about life. About getting to know ourselves. About secrets. It's about silence. About shyness. It is about our continuation in others. It's about unity. About motherhood. About living children. About joy. About disappointment. About dead children. About grief. About regret. About guilt. About pain with thousands of stories inside.

This story is about friendship. About co-creation. About laughter. About being accepted. About unity. This story is about caressing. About softness. It's about subtlety. About joy. It's about pleasure. About excitement. This story is about shame. About the great fear. It's about abuse. It's about appearance. About conforming to beauty standards.

This story is about the awkwardness of the viewers. It's about curiosity, weirdness, fear, guilt. It is about lust in minds and bodies. It's about conforming to moral standards.

This story is about oppression. About control, violence, oppression, murder. It's about the expression of our voice. About hesitation. About mocking and being mocked. About ignorance. About endurance. About anger. It is about resistance and struggle. About the cries for help. About cries of love. About cries of hope. This story is about hope. About faith. About light. About healing. About the revival of ancient memory.

This story is about our differences. It's about us. About our power. About beauty. It's about our right to enjoy life. It's about ecstasy. On the origin of life. About care. About defense. About love. This story is about the incredible changes our body, mind,

and consciousness can make.
It is about the sanctity of our bodies.
It is about the holiness of the soul.
It is about the sanctity of women.
It is about the sanctity of men.
It is about the sanctity of a man.
It's about sexuality.
This story is about different forms
and formats of love.
It is about love for God.

It's about sensitivity.
About shame.
It's about guilt.
It's about sin.
It's about birth.
It's about death.
This is a story about humanity.
This story is me.
This story is you.
Look. What do you see?





Kafiye Eyvazova

Hierarchy, 2024

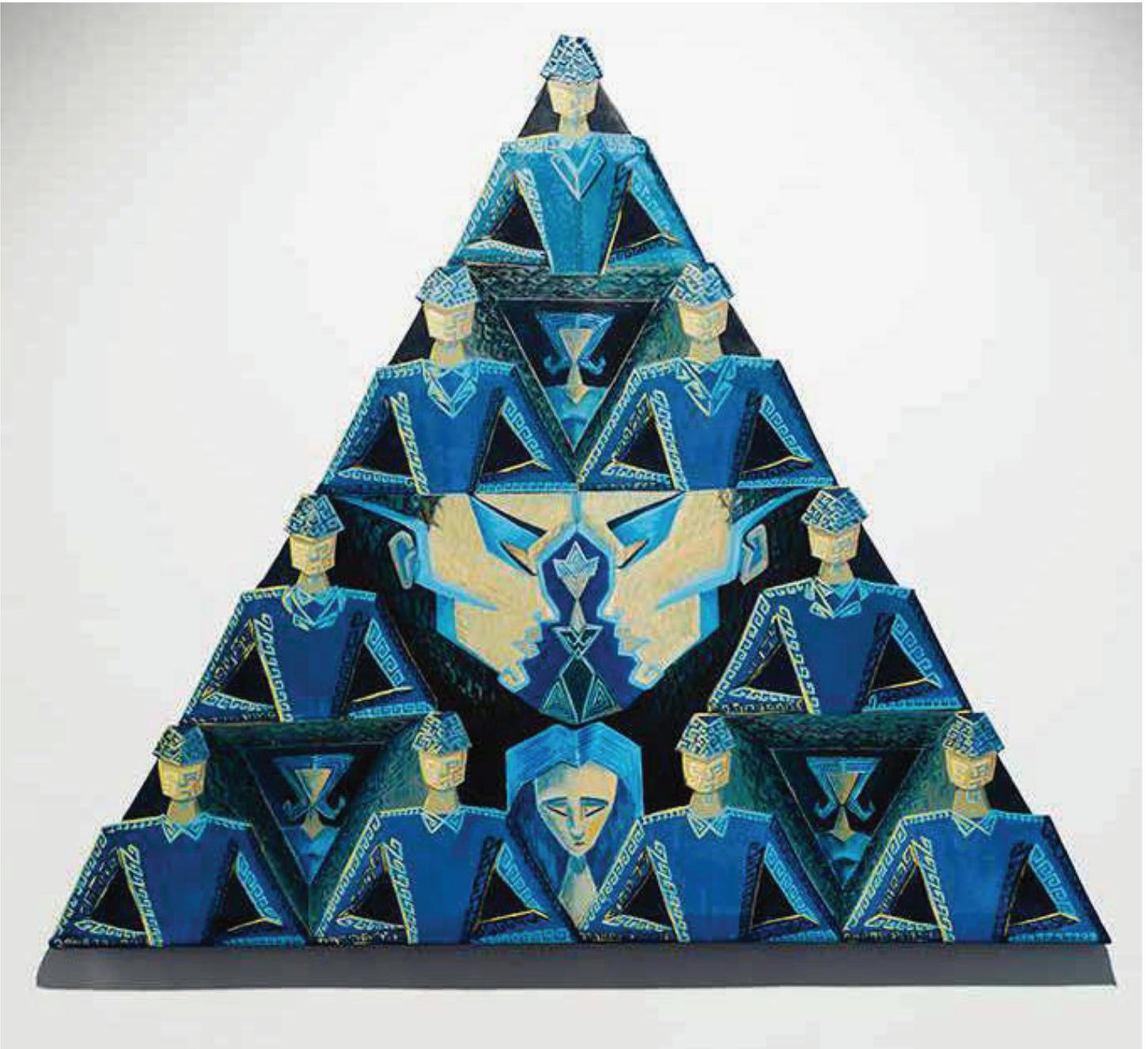
“The most important hierarchy in almost all human societies known so far is the gender hierarchy”- Yuval Noah Harari.

This work embodies the hierarchies that society has built against women. A large part of the pyramid-shaped work is made up of a patriarchal hierarchical system. Located at the 3 corners of the pyramid and forming a small pyramid with 3 male motifs, these anthropomorphic patterns reflect patriarchy. In the very center of the patriarchal pyramid, there is a female motif behind a small triangular window, and 3 male motifs with hands behind their backs in its circle seem at first glance to be protecting that woman. However, this posture, holding the hands behind the waist, is actually an indication of superiority in body language. The “S”-shaped patterns that create the facial features of these motifs are the “dragon” ornament widely used in **Karabakh carpets**, and the meaning of this pattern is strength and protection. If you pay attention to the facial features of the male subjects, you can easily think that these patterns create a sense of satisfaction on their faces. Society imposes a lot of expectations on them in this regard, and men in this patriarchal system live an unhappy life because they try to live according to those stereotypes. While there is a wide triangular space between these three male motifs, the female motif is located inside the triangular window

frame surrounded by a “wall” extending back from the male motifs. Rhombus patterns on these walls are used as eye symbols.

This also shows that the main views of society’s condemnation and mentality are on women. We see that the field of women is completely violated, and the yellow light that falls on male motifs does not fall on the middle part where female motifs are located, which means that women are seen far behind men or as submissive people surrounded by obstacles. When we pay attention to the facial features of the female motifs, we see that there are no features that are different from the male motifs. In a patriarchal society, women are seen as lower compared to men. In regions where this system is more severe, women are not allowed to make any decisions about their lives and a woman’s expression of her feelings is not welcomed. Among the three pyramids, which are symbols of patriarchy, in the very center of the general framework there is “idealism of beauty”, which becomes a hierarchy. The idealism of beauty is constructed in an inverted triangle with only female motifs. In the upper part, there are two identical female figures, and between them there is a small female motif with a crowned head. This crowned woman motif is a beauty icon and is designed with a geometric pattern in a shape that fits beauty stereotypes. Beauty idealism is an illusion that often changes depending on geography and

history, but convinces many people of the “perfection” of their stereotypes. To express this illusion, the crown and body have a spiral pattern that curls inwards. Unfortunately, the majority of women around the world “torture” themselves under the influence of this illusion - very small noses, large lips, sharp chin, wide cheekbones, and painful operations to change their body shape. As a result, women who look like “twins” and have lost their true natural beauty try to feel valuable and self-confident by turning themselves into victims of illusion - the motifs of the two “twin” women described in the upper part embody this idea. Their faces are bent towards the icon, which shows that they obey the idealism of the eye, and the rhombus eye symbols on their faces show that their appearance is determined or created by society or beliefs. There is also an absent girl motif; people who believe in the idealism of beauty, or the reality of those stereotypes themselves, create a hierarchy of beauty and become a part of this hierarchy themselves. In general, people who do not compare themselves to the opposite sex, regardless of their gender, do not belong in this patriarchy, and women who do not try to gain their self-worth and self-esteem through physical beauty and conformity to stereotypes do not belong in the hierarchy of beauty. When a person does not compare himself or herself with another person, they are freed from hierarchy. Hierarchy or frameworks consist of simple ideas. For this reason, none of the motifs in the pyramid-shaped work are depicted with their eyes open.





Fidan Abilova

Burden of generations, generational inheritance

When a person is born, she grows up according to her environment and adopts this way of thinking. It works so hard on our ego that we often don't feel the need to ask ourselves if the ideas we've been taught and accustomed to since birth are really true.

Even if we think about it and come to the opposite conclusion, it is not so easy to get rid of the influence of these old ideas on our consciousness. In this way, until you fearlessly believe in your own ideas and say no to the wrong patterns of the past, duality occurs in a person's life, everything that she forces on herself becomes a burden to her.

Unfortunately, these cases are more common in society. From childhood, we are brought up with certain patterns and burdens, and often, even if we don't want to, we get caught up in the flow planned for us from the beginning. It has been this way for generations. We carry the burdens of our predecessors and pass them on to the future.







Fidan Humbatli

**Blinding,
2024**

In the presented concept, exploration focuses on communication and connection issues among humans, seeking solutions. The visual language employed aims to illustrate the significance of synergy for the prosperity of humanity. Across the world, archaeologists have found clay figurines from the Paleolithic era depicting female bodies.



They have named these sculptures Paleolithic Venuses. Science is still investigating the possible reasons for why humans of that era created these Venuses. Art forms during these ancient periods are strikingly synchronous around the world. They show the interconnectedness of the imaginative thinking of humans living in the same time period in different geographies. Humans seem as though they were more connected then, than we are now, despite the availability of countless

new technologies today. Like their originals, these ceramic Paleolithic Venuses emphasize that all people in the world are equal and that there is and has always been an amazing connection between us. The Venuses invite us to remember this connection, which we often forget. This cultural, social, mental and emotional connection is expressed with an image of a woman who has, does and will always play an enormous role in the history of humankind.



Sitara Ibrahimbayli

Ana,
2024

During the Soviet period, there was a notable influence of the Russian language and culture on various aspects of life in Azerbaijan, including daily language. It became common for people, especially in urban areas and among the younger generation, to use Russian terms of endearment and address family members.

In this context, **the term “mama” (mama) had replaced the Azerbaijani word “ana” - for “mother”.**



In Ana, the artist shows four generations of her family (her grandmother, her mother, herself, and her daughter), each saying the name for ‘mother’ that they grew up with. The work explores the emotion attached to the word, despite it changing through the generations due to outside influences.

Ultimately, the work is a testament to strength, continuity, and enduring love.



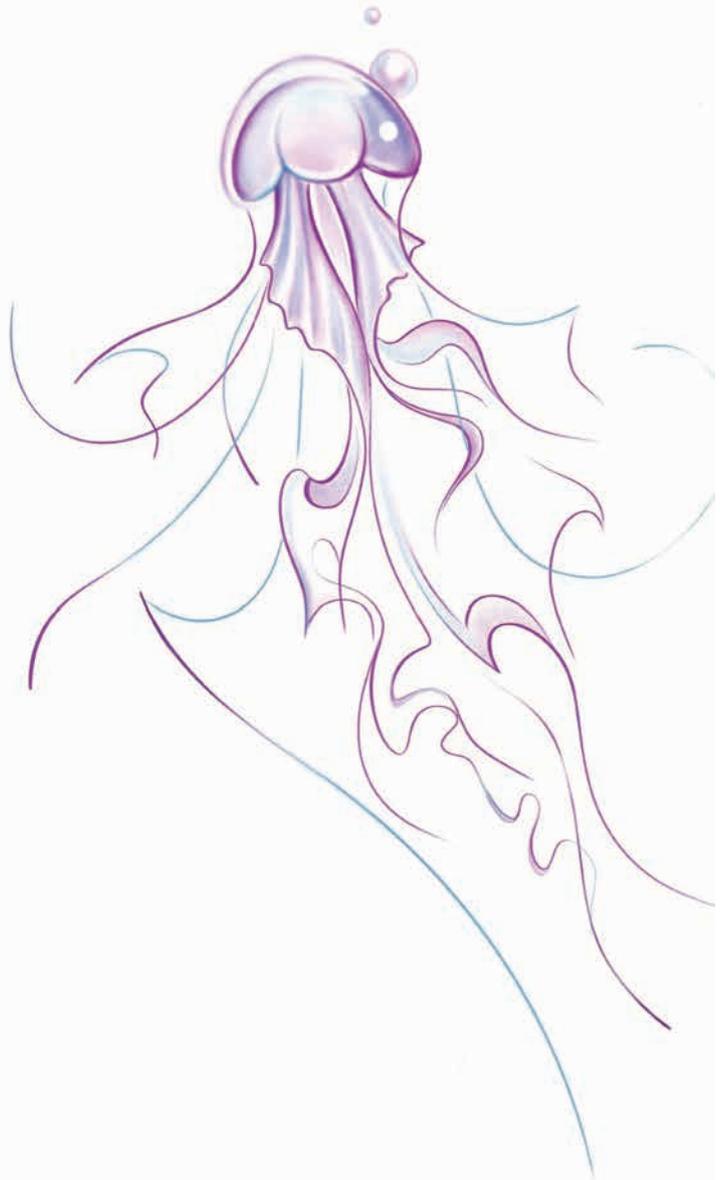
Aytakin Mirishova

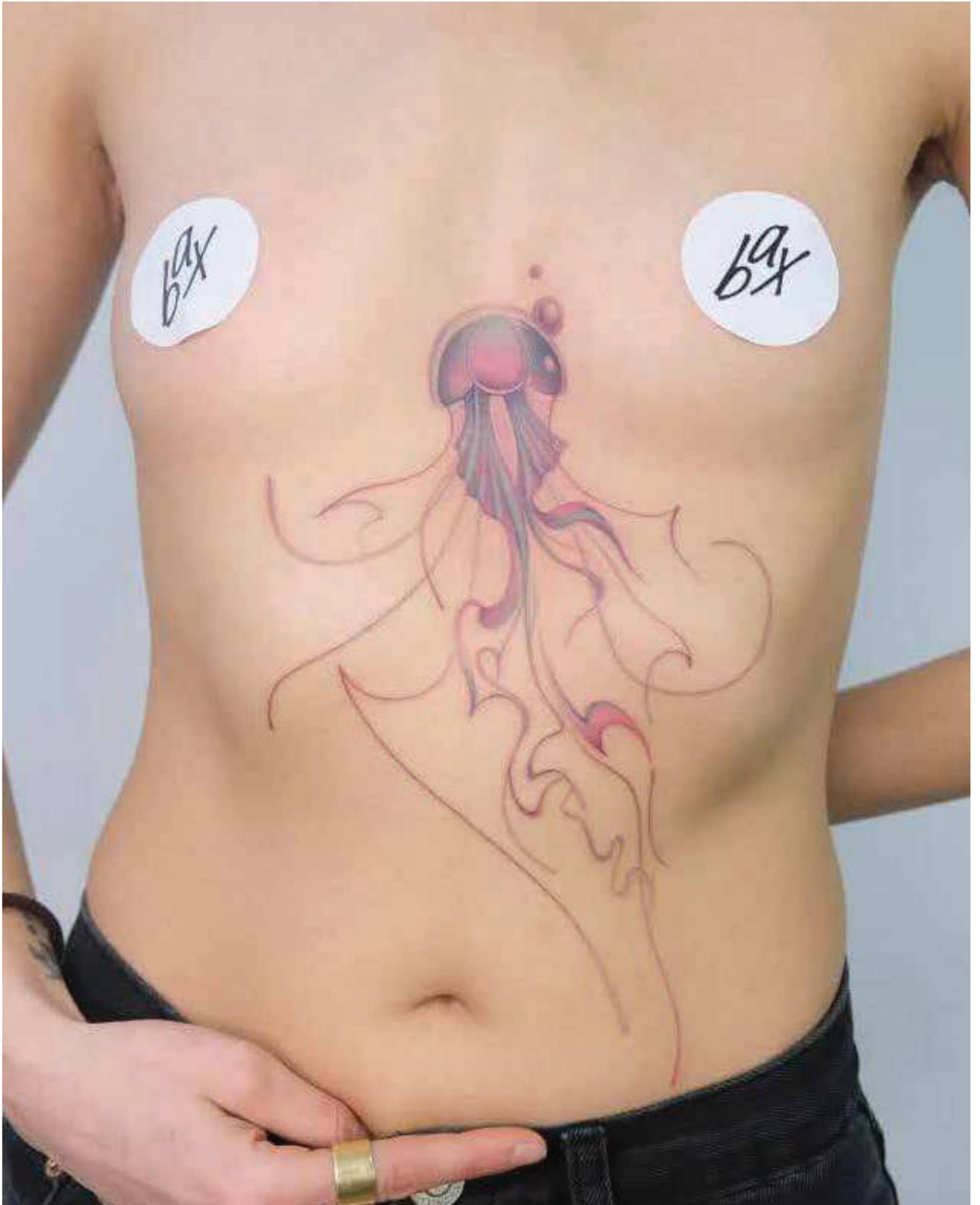
**Reimagined,
2024**

In her Reimagined performance, the artist incorporates **the female body as a canvas challenging traditional ways of representation**. Displayed on the ribcage of a woman, the tattoo serves as a symbol of empowerment, resilience and the transformative journey of human spirit. .

Viewers are invited to contemplate the societal norms and identity constructs that shape our perceptions of beauty and self-worth through deeply personal statements.

Celebrating women reclaiming their bodies, it encourages individuals to fully accept their authentic selves, transcending societal expectations.







Lali Binyatova

Whispers of the past: Secrets of Azerbaijani families, 2023

In Azerbaijan, these stories are often told in a low voice. **Family secrets are usually hidden in the shadows.**

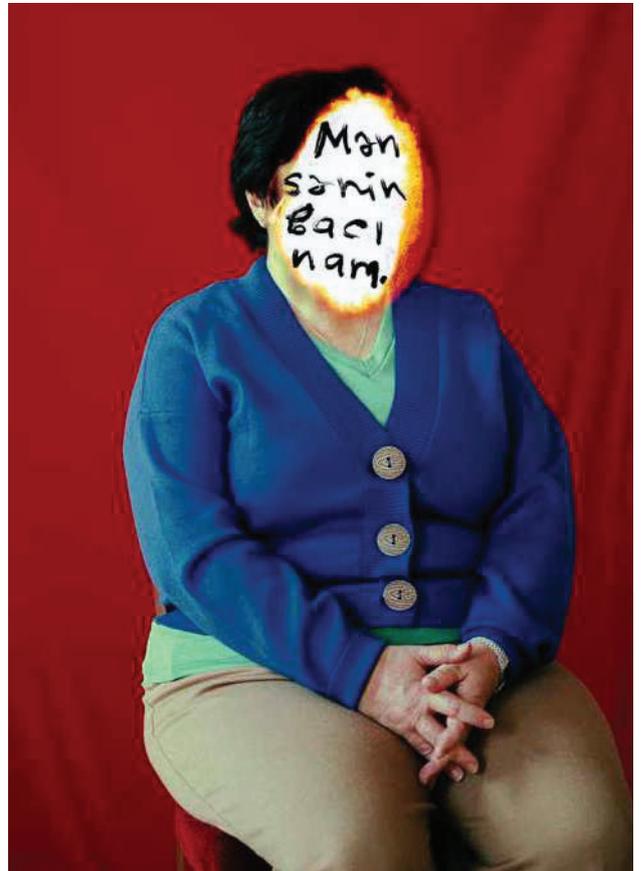
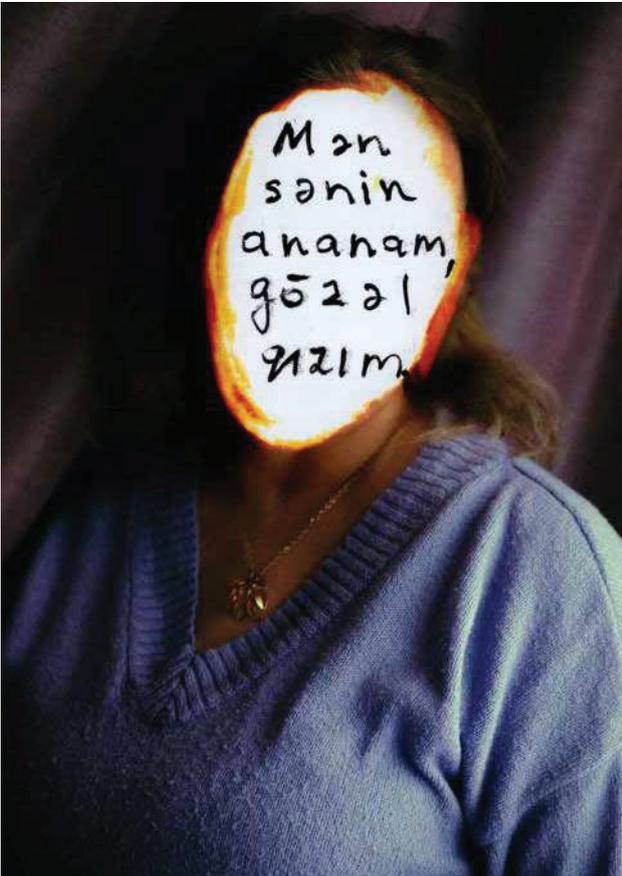
I remember well an incident from my childhood. One of my mother's friends shared her experience: her child was forcibly taken from her and given to her husband's relative.

The reason was that the family was childless for years. This was the starting point of my photo project, which touched on issues related to the formation of Azerbaijani families. While working on the project, as I discussed it with those around me, I learnt that such cases are not rare and happen in many families. There is silence about this very important but hidden aspect of Azerbaijani society; it is not talked about. Through interviews, patterns began

to emerge that gave an impression of the reasons behind this practice. It turns out that the biological parents never actually wanted to give away their children, but they had to submit to pressure from society and family. Traditions and decisions made by adults in the family played an important role in creating these heartbreaking events. As I was developing my project, I was struck by another interesting nuance. Blood kinship is so important in Azerbaijani society that childless families hesitate to adopt children from orphanages - they do not welcome it.

In this photo project, I bring to light the secrets of Azerbaijani families that have been hidden for years, and try to discuss complex topics and untold stories about family life in society. This photo story was prepared with support from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) South Caucasus Regional Office and Chai Khana Media.







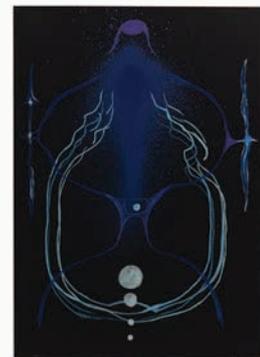
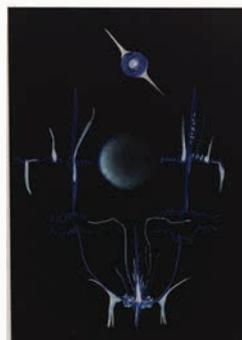
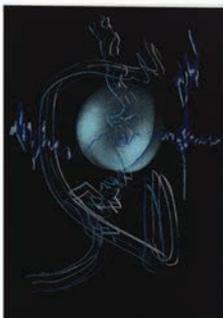
Nazrin Mammadova

**Embodiment practice,
2011, 2015, 2024**

Embodiment Practice delves into the depths of human experience, seeking to unravel the intricate connections between body, mind, and spirit.

Through extensive research and introspection, the artist embarked on a journey to understand the essence of embodiment - the profound interplay between physicality and consciousness.

The work challenges the conventional notions of the body as a static and idealized object of contemplation. Instead, it is an inner experience of embodiment, where the body transcends its traditional portrayal as a beautiful object and emerges as a dynamic subject of perception. The body becomes a vessel of lived experience, a canvas upon which the various possibilities of human existence are painted.



The series of abstract paintings & drawings serves as a visual manifestation of this exploration, capturing the nuances of embodied existence through color, form, and texture. These artworks capture this internal perspective, offering glimpses into the inner workings of the body and the intricacies of embodied consciousness. Each piece is a reflection of the inner journey, a testament to the profound and multifaceted nature of human embodiment. Accompanying these paintings is a spoken word component, weaving together embodiment affirmations that resonate on the soul level. These affirmations serve as a guide, encouraging viewers to embrace their bodies as sacred vessels of experience and expression. Viewers are invited to immerse themselves in the exploration of their own embodied existence and find a deeper understanding of the human condition, and ultimately, to embark on their own journey of self-discovery and transformation. May these artworks serve as catalysts for reflection, empowerment, and healing, inspiring a deeper connection with the essence of being.

MUSIC:

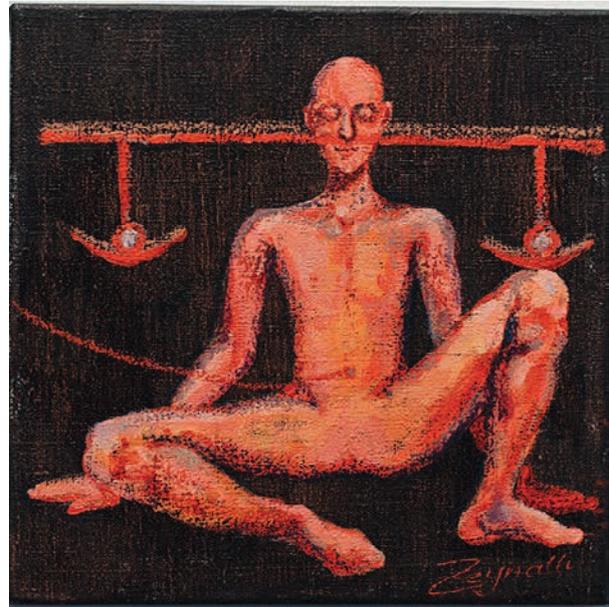




Nigar Zeynalli

The genderless,
2024

This work addresses the issue of gender inequality that exists in our society. Unfortunately, this is neither today's problem nor yesterday's. Even in ancient times, societies used to bury newborn girls alive; this is just one example of violence against women. In many cultures, for centuries, women have always had a lower role than men. Also, throughout the lives of women in Azerbaijan, we have encountered cases of unemployment, career discrimination, domestic violence, and gender-based discrimination. Sometimes, we are forced to take on the "double burden" of work and household concerns.



Referring to all this, in this work a human figure of indeterminate gender is depicted. Regardless of gender, everyone is a human being first of all, and everyone has equal rights, reflected by the balanced scales. With this work, the artist invites everyone to appreciate each other, not because of their gender, but because they are human beings.



Ulviyya Iman

**May you be blessed
with a boy, inshallah,
2024**



Due to Azerbaijan's patriarchal family structures, sons are considered to be more socially and economically valuable than daughters. In 2022, Azerbaijan had the highest level of sex-selective abortions in the world. There have been many cases in which the mother-in-law or other family members forced the mother to terminate the pregnancy.

After giving birth to girls, most mothers hear variations of the phrase "Hopefully the next one is a boy". This phrase is often said by other women.

In this work, "**May you be blessed with a boy, inshallah**", the artist explores and criticizes the misogynistic values that are etched into our daily life and culture. She seeks to understand how it is considered normal to dismiss a daughter and wish for a boy, while also being a woman. The work shows a family's reaction to the birth of a girl, capturing the disappointment of the mother-in-law, the father's realization and the mother's tiredness. The work condemns societal norms and brings awareness to gender inequality in our country.



Regina Rzayeva

**Confused,
2024**

Confused reflects the internal state of women through the folds of the fabric and composition. In the past, women in paintings were anthropomorphic. Instead, in these works, the artist focuses on the importance of secondary objects and how they can reveal the inner states of the people they belong to. In this case, a pile of clothes describes confused emotions. **The works are also inspired by the artist's diary, which she has kept since childhood.** Most often associated with women, diaries hold intimate thoughts and emotions.

For the artist, it is a record of the confusion that marks this period of life.





Rufana Mamedova

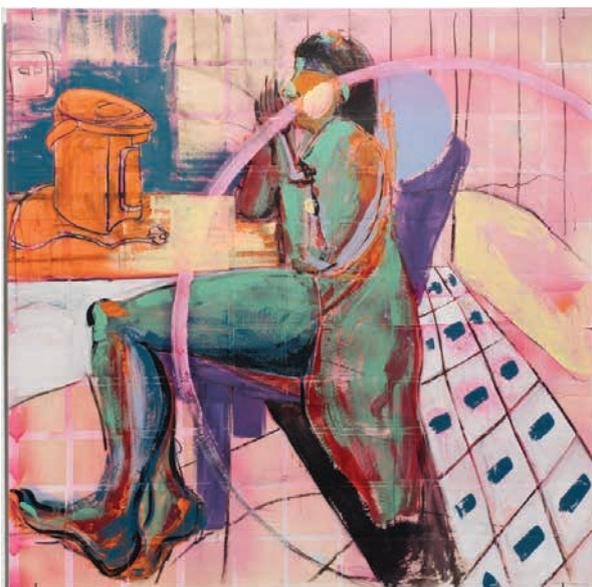
**Mama 1/2,
2024**

Throughout the artist's practice, she has sketched her mother within domestic settings

- at home, on the couch, in the kitchen, doing dishes, and household chores. Even as her practice has evolved, her mother remains a key protagonist in her work.

Lately, the artist has been troubled by questions of life and death and how it affects us all. She realized that she is aging and everyone around her is aging too, including her mother whom she saw every day. This inspired her to depict her mother in her paintings at every age, a few years apart, to remember her as she is.

She believes that this is not just about life and death, but about the existence of such a feeling as love, and this feeling stems from the feminine energy within each of us. Our perception of beauty and admiration for it is the ultimate expression of feminine energy.



Talk

8
MARCH

ALTYNAI OSMOEVA

Altynai Osmoeva's talk was met with great interest, with 80-100 people in attendance. She began by discussing her career and then spoke about the gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan and how it influences her work. As a multimedia artist and activist rooted in Central Asian nomadic heritage, her work focuses on social awareness and women's empowerment. She aims to bridge traditional and contemporary societies, challenge societal norms, and foster positive change. Actively involved in local and international solidarity movements, Osmoeva advocates for social justice causes.



Workshop and talk

11-12
MARCH

SABIHA CHIMEN

Sabiha Çimen, born in Istanbul, is a self-taught photographer with a degree in International Trade and Finance and a Master's in Cultural Studies from Istanbul Bilgi University. Her most well-known project, 'Hafız', focuses on the daily lives of young girls in Quran schools in Turkey. A Magnum Photos associate photographer, she splits her time between Istanbul and New York. Her talk, attended by 80-100 people, where she presented her 'Hafız' book, along with her two-day workshop for 14 people, were well-received, effectively conveying her knowledge.



Portfolio Review and Small Talk

16-17
MARCH

OLGA VESSELOVA

Olga Veselova, a philosopher and curator specializing in contemporary art from Central Asia, has led projects like ArtBat Fest, ARTPOINT, and Urban Art Astana. She founded the Artistic Gesture School for young Central Asian artists and curates exhibitions globally. Over the past decade, she has organized art events across Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Her talk on modern Kazakhstani culture drew 50-60 attendees, alongside a successful two-day portfolio review with local artists.



Workshop and talk

29
MARCH

DARO SULAKAURI

Daro Sulakauri is a photographer from Georgia. During her talk, attended by 80-100 people, she explained the "Shifting Borders" project and organized a 2-day portfolio review. Sixteen people participated, and prizes were awarded on the first day. On the second day, Daro evaluated and provided feedback on the perspectives that the participants brought to the project.



Panel discussion

ART FOR GENDER EQUALITY

With the participation of 50-60 attendees, this panel discussion on "Art for Gender Equality" addressed the critical role of art in advancing gender equality. The panel highlighted gender inequalities and the resilience of women in the art world through artistic expressions. Topics such as gender-based violence, selective abortions, professional segregation, and the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes were discussed. Additionally, the discussion focused on how women artists can overcome challenges and achieve professional growth.



AFSANA TAHIROVA

Afsana Tahirova is an independent researcher educated in Azerbaijan, the United Kingdom and Australia. She researches collective, ancestral and individual trauma. Afsana sees patriarchal norms from a collective trauma perspective and regularly takes part in activism projects against gender-based violence against women and girls. In addition, Afsana explores art and culture in a trauma context as powerful means of human self-expression.



KHALISA SHARVERDIYEVA

Ms. Khalisa Shahverdiyeva is a gender expert and senior policy analyst with over 11 years of experience in women's human rights and socio-economic empowerment. She is a member of the Regional Civil Society Advisory Group for UN Women in Europe and Central Asia. Khalisa holds an LLM in Public International Law and Human Rights from Riga Graduate School of Law and studied Public Policy at Syracuse University as a Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow.



SHAMSIYYA MUSTAFAYEVA

Experienced professional with 20+ years in international development and education. Led strategic planning and program development, specializing in gender analysis and women's empowerment. Held leadership roles at two Azerbaijani universities and taught courses on leadership and organizational development. Holds advanced degrees from Maxwell School of Syracuse University and certifications from Adler International and Swiss Approval International.



OLGA VESSELOVA

She is a philosopher and curator specializing in contemporary Central Asian art. She has organized numerous art events globally, including ArtBat Fest, ARTPOINT, and Urban Art Astana. Her work spans Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Since 2016, she has contributed to the Central Asian Journal of Arts Research and Art Asian Pacific. In 2022, she became the leader of Fond Art & Creative Solutions.



SITARA IBRAHIMBAYLI

Multimedia artist, based in Baku. Had exhibited around the world, including the exhibition 'Our Land/Alien Territory' at the 6th Moscow Biennale, the 2015 exhibition 'BALAGAN!!!: Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places' with MOMENTUM in Berlin, the 55th Venice Biennale, and again in 'The Great Game' exhibition of the Iran Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale.

Training

AFSANA TAHIROVA

Emotional resilience amidst patriarchal norms

How do we maintain our emotional resilience as women in a patriarchal society (and world)? How do we protect our boundaries and emotional health if our reality and truth are constantly rejected by being told that we 'exaggerate', that we are 'to blame', that we are 'the problem', that we must 'put up with life' and if we are forced into a traumatic role called 'the good girl'? What do we do if we sometimes feel exhausted that 'nothing is changing', if we are tired of facing endless barriers? How do we sustain our creativity, continue our activities, and enjoy our lives? In this training, we explored the weight of patriarchal norms on our lives. We connected to our bodies to discover our resilience and to fuel our emotions into our activities instead of suppressing

moments from events 2024



All talks, workshops, portfolio reviews was met with great interest, with 80-150 people in attendance.



ABOUT

Galib Gassanoff,

was born on October 26, 1994, in Garajalar, Georgia, and grew up in an Azerbaijani family. He studied at the Georgian State Theatre and Film University and the Medea Chakhava Art Academy. In 2013, he won the “Tbilisi Fashion Week-Newcomers” and “Be Next Contest,” which led him to Milan. In 2016, he co-founded “Act n°1” with Luca Lin. Currently, he is the founder and creative director of INSTITUTION, a project reflecting his cultural heritage with an ethical and social-artistic foundation.



18
APRIL

Talk

GALIB GASSANOFF

Gave a talk on **"Is Fashion Art?"**

which received great interest with approximately 150 attendees.

During the discussion, he elaborated on his activities in the fashion industry, discussed his education in Europe, and explained how he developed his brand.



10
APRIL

FASHION SHOW / EXHIBITION

9 SENSES

Nine Senses is an art center for creativity and self-development.

An atmospheric place on the shore of the Caspian Sea, where you can spend from an hour to a whole weekend with the whole family. Our slogan “Unlock your inner artist” reflects the place where your feelings are revealed. Here you can release your inner child who always wanted to sculpt, draw, dance, manifest. Body practices, educational and entertainment programs, meditation lessons, exhibitions and film evenings, animation school for all ages in 3 languages. The center is located 30 minutes drive from the center of Baku on the coast of the Caspian Sea. The space is equipped with comfortable classrooms, an exposition area, and performance areas. In our cozy vegetarian restaurant Vida you can make appointments for breakfasts and dinners by the sea, enjoying all the tastes of freshly prepared products. Our mission is to create a safe and harmonious public space for art lovers of all ages and professions. We believe in unleashing the creative and fun spirit within everyone. Exchange of ideas and experiences. Collaborating with different women artists from around the world, we enrich the cultural dialogue, expand artistic perspectives, and provide valuable networking opportunities for local talents. This perspective strengthens the festival's impact and promotes cross-cultural understanding.



9 senses

With the support of Haydar Aliyev Foundation Vice-President Leyla Aliyeva, students from Boarding School with Integrated Training №11 showcased their work at the Nine Senses Creativity and Personal Development Center as part of the "Her Art in Action" festival dedicated to women's creative experience. The pieces were created by special students, including those with Down syndrome and autism, and aimed to inspire and support their future projects. During the event, five of the children's works were sold, providing them with financial support and motivation for future projects.



Team:

- Project manager and Curator: **Sitara Ibrahimbayli**
- Curator: **Lesley Gray, Olga Seleznyova**
- Project Coordinator: **Tanzila Baghirova**
- Editor: **Mehinbanu Safikhanli**
- Coordinator for boarding school: **Nargiz Mammadli**
- Designer: **Sally Al-Khuri**
- Fixer: **Tati Sattar**
- Filmmaker: **Azad Alizade**
- Video Editor: **Dadash Musayev**
- Filmmaker: **Kamran Balaoğlanli**



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HER ART IN ACTION