

Saodat Ismailova

8 November 2025 – 7 June 2026



Saodat Ismailova, *Melted into the Sun*, film still, 2025. Image courtesy the artist © Saodat Ismailova.

Opening 8 November 2025, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in a UK institution by artist and filmmaker Saodat Ismailova, a leading voice in Central Asian art. The exhibition presents the world premiere of *Swan Lake 2025*, alongside works from her two decade-long career.

Working between Paris and Tashkent, Ismailova came of age in the post-Soviet era Uzbekistan. Her work interweaves rituals, myths and dreams within the tapestry of everyday life. Her films investigate the historically complex and layered culture of Central Asia. Frequently based around oral stories in which women are the lead protagonists, and exploring systems of knowledge suppressed by globalised modernity, these consciousness expanding works hover between visible and invisible worlds.

Spanning film, sound, installation and sculpture, Ismailova often uses archival footage alongside striking iconography and hypnotic narratives that trace the loss marked by successive regime change to the spiritual memory of the region, and the impact of human activity on the environment.

The exhibition at Baltic includes the premiere of *Swan Lake 2025* alongside three key works, *Zukhra 2013*, *As We Fade 2024* and *Melted into the Sun 2024*. Together, they consider thresholds, transitions and power, memory and personal and collective consciousness. They think about the void, the suspended state during political and psychic change, where dreaming becomes possible, but which can also be subject to manipulation and control.

The exhibition is structured around the central work *Swan Lake*, a double-channel film composed from existing feature films from post-Soviet Central Asia. It seeks to capture the spirit of a period of immense transition in the region's recent history — *Perestroika* — a time that remains a neglected part of collective experience. It was an era of upheaval, struggle, and survival: the collapse of an idea alongside an extreme pitch of hope, a time of losing ground, of liberation, grief, rage, and joy.

These years were marked by strange and iconic figures — the hypnotist Kashpirovsky, the legendary rock group *Kino*, and the ballet *Swan Lake*, which the vast Soviet Union broadcast on a continuous loop for almost 24 hours, while its citizens, unaware of what was unfolding, witnessed the disappearance of their country. Those hours became a ghostly overture to the collapse of the Soviet Union, signed away beyond the eyes of its people. The film is dedicated to the children of *Perestroika*, and to the forgotten films that captured the spirit of those turbulent times.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Artist Biography

Saodat Ismailova, (b.1981 Tashkent) lives and works between Paris and Tashkent. Recent institutional exhibitions include JOAN, Los Angeles (2024); Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2024); Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains in collaboration with Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023); Center for Contemporary Arts, Tashkent (2019); Ilkhom Theatre, Tashkent (2018); Tromsø Kunstforening, Tromsø, Norway (2017).

Saodat Ismailova, (b.1981 Tashkent) lives and works between Paris and Tashkent. Ismailova has held solo exhibitions at major institutions including Hangar Bicocca, Milan (2024); Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam (2023); Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains in collaboration with Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023); Center for Contemporary Arts, Tashkent (2019); and Tromsø Kunstforening, Tromsø, Norway (2017). Her films and video installations have also been presented in international group exhibitions such as Shanghai Biennale of Arts (2024), Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (2024), Fondazione in Between Art and Film, Venice (2024), Sharjah Biennial (2023); Venice Biennale of Arts (2024, 2022, 2013); documenta 15, Kassel (2022); Meet Factory, Prague (2021); Para Site, Hong Kong; Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2019); and Yinchuan Biennale (2018).

In 2018 her live musical performance Qyrq Qyz premiered at Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York. Her work is also widely recognised in the film industry and has been featured in festivals such as the Berlinale International Film Festival (2014) and Rotterdam International Film Festival (2005), among others.

She has received numerous awards, including the Pernod Ricard Prize (2025); and the Art Basel Medal (2025), the Eye Art & Film Prize, Amsterdam (2022); Documenta Madrid (2018); Golden Alhambra Award, Granada Cines del Sur Film Festival (2014); Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art (2014); Turin International Film Festival for Best Documentary (2004)

In 2021, she founded the research group Davra, dedicated to the study, documentation and dissemination of Central Asian culture and knowledge.

About Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art is a major international centre for art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England. It has welcomed over 10 million visitors since opening in July 2002. Baltic presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions and events and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art. Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, Baltic houses 2,600 square metres of art space, making it one of Europe's largest dedicated contemporary art institutions.

Baltic has presented the work of over 877 artists of 78 nationalities in 266 exhibitions to date including Joy Labinjo, Hew Locke, Heather Phillipson, Antony Gormley, Cornelia Parker, Daniel Buren, Lubaina Himid, Steve McQueen, Jenny Holzer, Judy Chicago, Lorna Simpson, Imran Perretta, Huma Bhabha and John Akomfrah.

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Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art
South Shore Road, Gateshead NE8 3BA
Open Wednesday – Sunday, 10am–6pm. Free entry.

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