



UNIVERSITY
OF CENTRAL ASIA

NOMAD FESTIVAL 2025



Naryn, Kyrgyzstan

The **Nomad 2025**
cover maps Naryn's
river and the
urban structures
of the town as
constellations
against a night
sky, where
geography becomes
astronomy. Through
this fusion of
cartography,
starlight, and
typographic
rhythm, the design
embodies the
festival's
intersection of
art, science, and
culture.



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The University of Central Asia(UCA) is a world-class centre for knowledge and learning, connecting isolated rural communities with the global community and building the human capital needed for modern economies and stable governance.



The mission of UCA is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities, by offering an internationally recognised standard of higher education and enabling the peoples of the region to preserve their rich cultural heritage as assets for the future.



about THE
UNIVERSITY
OF CENTRAL
ASIA



University of Central Asia, Naryn Campus.

the TEAM



CO-CHAIRS, NOMAD FESTIVAL

Dr Soheil Ashrafi, UCA's Communications and Media Programme Director, brings global experience in media, culture, and design education. As a researcher and essayist he explores the intersections between hermeneutic phenomenology, aesthetics, and design pragmatism.



Dr Michael Garbutt is a writer, artist, documentary maker, and experience designer with a background in architecture, literature, and discourse analysis. His current research explores aesthetic experience across museums, galleries, and natural and urban environments.



**Film
Festival
Director**

Nursultan Stanaliev – Film and Television instructor at the University of Central Asia. His short films and documentaries have been recognised at national and international film festivals, including the “Best Director” award at the “Navsoz” IFF.



**Film
Festival
Programme
Curator**

Anisa Sabiri – A Tajik-British film director and screenwriter, CHEVENING scholar, graduate of the London Film School and Busan Film Academy. Her works have been presented at the Venice Biennale, Busan IFF, Berlinale, and other prestigious venues. Member of Directors UK and the European Documentary Association.



**Media,
Design,
and Event
Manager**

Sehar Naz Janani is a design strategist and multimedia storyteller whose work explores how visual narratives and systems thinking can transform cultural experiences. She played a crucial role in the foundation of the Nomad Festival, building it into a recognised platform rooted in place and memory.

THE NOMAD STORY



Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky - Film Festival Awards Ceremony.

4th Edition

The first edition of the Nomad Festival, entitled “The Nomadic Image,” was held in 2022 at the University of Central Asia (UCA) in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. This event combined the seventh Transdisciplinary Conference on Imaging with a film festival, establishing the foundation for what has become an annual tradition.

The festival returned the following year as “Nomad 2023: The Living Land.” UCA’s campus now hosted not only film screenings but also celebrations of Kyrgyz fashion and design, writing and graphic design workshops, and digital arts exhibitions. The festival embraced the town of Naryn itself, with film competition finalists screening at the municipal theatre.

“Nomad 2024: The Infinite Sky” marked a watershed moment for UCA. This third edition established the festival as an annual event that attracts a



The Nomadic Image 2022 – Conference in Session.

vibrant community of scholars and creative practitioners from around the world. Celebrating UCA’s 25th anniversary, Nomad 2025 remains committed to advancing both intellectual discourse and creative expression—traditional and experimental alike—with a special focus on film. What began as an academic gathering has transformed into an annual celebration that honours Central Asia’s cultural heritage while exploring new frontiers in contemporary culture.

Dr Soheil Ashrafi & Dr Michael Garbutt
Nomad 2025 Co-Chairs

4th INTERNATIONAL NOMAD FESTIVAL

Founded at the University of Central Asia in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, the Nomad Festival bridges ancient nomadic traditions with the ambitions of contemporary development. Since its inception, it has grown into a space where film, art, and intellectual discourse converge to foster dialogue across borders. The fourth edition in 2025

coincides with UCA's 25th anniversary, welcoming storytellers from across Central and South Asia and beyond. Through screenings and workshops, Nomad amplifies emerging voices who challenge conventional narratives and explore new cinematic languages shaped by mountains, pastures, towns, and urban rhythms.



20
25

PROGRAMME NOTE

The 2025 Nomad Film Festival represents our commitment to bringing international cinema to the distinctive mountain community of Naryn, establishing the only festival in Central Asia organised by and for highland communities. Our programme showcases over thirty carefully selected films that address the region's most pressing concerns: our relationship with the land, environmental challenges, human dignity, female leadership, and community bonds. Beyond presenting international works, the festival provides a vital platform for Central Asian cinema rarely accessible to general public. This positioning amplifies Naryn's role as a centre for contemporary artistic dialogue and social discourse, fostering urgent conversations that resonate throughout the region.

During the festival days, we connect celebrated regional artists with emerging talent, creating "horizontal" discussions that inspire and support local creative voices. This year's collaboration with Naryn's Univer Cinema and other local institutions demonstrates our dedication to strengthening local initiatives whilst

building sustainable cultural infrastructure.

We take particular pride in presenting our programme with Kyrgyz subtitles and featuring twenty films directed by women, most of whom are from Central Asia, reflecting our commitment to accessibility and diverse perspectives. The festival experience extends beyond screenings through facilitated discussions with filmmakers and jury members, offering residents and visitors alike the opportunity to engage directly with contemporary cinema and its creators.

Our vision sees Nomad Film Festival evolving into a platform that celebrates community access to knowledge, arts, and education, developing a cultural sector that both serves and benefits from these mountain communities. Through this work, we aim to establish a lasting cultural landmark for Naryn whilst contributing to the broader artistic landscape of Central Asia.

We hope you'll join us in making this festival a meaningful celebration of cinema, community, and cultural exchange.

Nursultan Stanaliev, *Film Festival Director*
Anisa Sabiri, *Film Festival Programme Curator*

the JURY

Aktan Arym
Kubat

JURY CHAIR



Aktan Arym Kubat is one of Kyrgyzstan's most renowned filmmakers. His films, which include *The Adopted Son*, *The Light Thief*, *Centaur*, and most recently *Black Red Yellow*, have won international acclaim and brought Kyrgyz cinema to the global stage.

Zarrin
Sanvar



Zarrin Sanvar is a multi-disciplinary artist and filmmaker from Tajikistan. Her works, including the video installation *Free to Dream*, explore themes of childhood, memory, and self-discovery, and have been presented in international art and film platforms.

Arun
Chadha



Arun Chadha is an acclaimed Indian filmmaker and documentary maker. He has directed over 75 films, winning national and multiple international honours, and has served on juries at prestigious festivals worldwide.

Robert
Mentov



Robert Mentov is a Canadian filmmaker and cinematographer. Known for his striking visual style, he has worked on award-winning documentaries and narrative films around the world, bringing powerful stories to the screen with his distinctive lens.

Ehsan
Zareie



Ehsan Zareie is an acclaimed Iranian filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist. Alongside filmmaking, his work spans poetry, writing, photography, and animation.

film festival
PROGRAMME



Still from *Bell at Dusk*.



BELL AT DUSK

Directed by Saadat Kazakbaeva

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 13:38

Regional Short Fiction

The old cobbler has
lived alone for
years, but his quiet
life takes
an unexpected turn
when his radio
breaks down.



FURUGH

Directed by Odina Mahmad

Tajikistan | 2025 | 21:57

Regional Short Fiction

The story of a
seven-year-old
deaf-mute girl torn
between rejection
and hope, and a
father's desperate
search for her care
and safety.



Still from *Furugh*.



Still from *Once Upon A Time In Korgazhino*.



ONCE UPON A TIME IN KORGAZHINO

Directed by Aray Karimova

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 17:52

Regional Short Fiction

Eleven-year-old
Aslan flees an
autumn children's
camp after hearing
of Lake Shaitankol,
said to grant wishes
in exchange for
sacrifice — and his
only wish is to bring his mother
back.



ANSAR

Directed by Anuarbek Khamitov

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 5:00

Regional Short Fiction

Ansar, who helps his mother clean the apartment building where she works as a janitor, is torn between duty and his dream of playing soccer with friends.



Still from Ansar.



Still from *Etude*.



ETUDE

Directed by Mumin Latifi

Tajikistan | 2025 | 16:00

Regional Short Fiction

Etude tells the story of 10-year-old Zafar, born into a family of hereditary musicians but drawn instead to street football. At its heart lies a generational conflict — fathers and sons divided over tradition — as Zafar struggles for the freedom to choose his own path.



FIRST TIME

Directed by Meerim Dogdurbekova

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 11:21

Regional Short Fiction

A motherless
girl undergoes a
profound change
that marks her
passage into
adulthood, while
her father
remains unaware
of her physical
and emotional
struggles.



Still from *First Time*.



Still from *Lukhtak*.



LUKHTAK

Directed by Samariddin Mukhitdinov

Tajikistan & China | 2025 | 15:16

Regional Short Fiction

Facing financial
hardship, a Tajik
family marries
off their underage
daughter for a
bride price,
trapping her
and her younger
sister in a
generational cycle of suffering.



DERT

Directed by Ali Zhetpis

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 12:07

Regional Short Fiction

In the Kazakh
steppe, a family's
quiet morning is
disrupted when two
strangers leave a
slot machine behind.

As Merei becomes
entranced by the
game, tension rises and time itself
seems to stand
still.



Still from *Dert*.



Still from *The Late Wind*.



THE LATE WIND

Directed by Shugyla Serzhan

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 22:34

Regional Short Fiction

A young pregnant woman grapples with an uncertain future as her boyfriend vanishes, leaving her searching for answers amid city turmoil.



PAIN OF YORE

Directed by Alisho Qonunov

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 10:00

Regional Short Fiction

An otherwise
enthusiastic
professor of
literature,
teaching "War
and Peace", is
disheartened by
an inattentive
classroom, which
prompts him to recall and share
his own war story
- a story of
tragedy, despair,
and pain.



Still from *Pain of Yore*.



Still from Rock Berkut.



ROCK BERKUT

Directed by Tamerlan Almanov

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 11:33

Regional Short Fiction

Berkut, a hyperactive boy, discovers rock music and finds unexpected calm and focus – prompting his mother to enroll him in lessons.



ILI ILI

Directed by Guzel Zakir
Kazakhstan | 2025 | 15:29
Regional Documentary

A collective
memory of the first
Uyghur migration
from China to
Kazakhstan (1950–
1966), where the
Ili River emerges
as both a landmark
and a symbol of
migration's losses and hopes.



Still from *Ili Ili*.



Still from 8:59 AM Forever.



8:59 AM FOREVER

Directed by Ulyana Toporovskaya

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 19:45

Regional Documentary

Every six months, Jon and Joelle wait for the call that will decide whether they have more time together.



BALQASH SONG

Directed by ArtCom Collective

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 19:40

Regional Documentary

The video essay
draws on the
heritage of
qazaqiliq—the
tradition of free,
nomadic life that
enabled Kazakh
communities to
develop resilient
survival strategies even
under conditions
of colonization,
forced
sedentarization,
and the famine
known as
Asharshylyq.



Still from *Balqash Song*.



Still from *Aralkum*.



ARALKUM

Directed by Daniel Faezi & Mila Zhluktenko

Uzbekistan & Germany | 2025 | 13:43

Regional Documentary

Aralkum is
a cinematic
kaleidoscope where
the Aral desert
flickers back into
its former sea —
sand becomes water,
and an old man once
more a fisherman.



COMRADE POLICEMAN

Directed by Assel Aushakimova

Kazakhstan | 2025 | 12:19

Regional Documentary

A journalist
from Kazakhstan's
state television
is assigned to
cover a police
image campaign.



Still from *Comrade Policeman*.



Still from *We Are (At) Home*.



WE ARE (AT) HOME

Directed by Shakhzoda Mirakova & Darya Gusmanova

Uzbekistan | 2025 | 13:51

Regional Documentary

The untold stories
of the Luli,
Central Asian
Roma, highlighting
their resilience
and struggle for a
rightful place in
society.



ALIKHAN'S VILLAGE

Directed by Dastan Borkosh

Kyrgystan | 2025 | 14:30

Regional Documentary

In his small
village, Alikhan
helps his father
with chores before
joining friends to
play the traditional
Kyrgyz game of
alchiki, knowing
everyone and their
nicknames by heart.



Still from *Alikhan's Village*.



Still from *Provided*.



PROVIDED

Directed by Soheil Rahimi

Iran | 2025 | 9:10

International Short Fiction

In exchange for
her husband's
release from
prison, Zahra
sets her own
condition for the
benefactors.



LEFT-HANDED

Directed by Nasrin Mohammadpour

Iran | 2025 | 14:59

International Short Fiction

Maryam is a 38-year-old woman who heads a family of four. She decides to cut off her right hand while working in a poultry slaughterhouse because, in this way, she can get more money from insurance than losing her left hand to pay her debts.



Still from *Left-Handed*.



Still from *The Bag*.



THE BAG

Directed by Habib Shahzad

Pakistan | 2025 | 8:31

International Short Fiction

Amid displacement,
a boy's hold on
holy relics becomes
a fragile beacon
of hope, where
innocence speaks the
secret language of
the divine.



XENA'S BODY

Directed by Occitane Lacurie

2025

International Documentary

A reflection on the
iPhone as more
than a mirror—an
intimate device that
tracks the body
while entangling
knowledge, power,
and desire.

represents patience

Still from *Xena's Body*.





Still from *Feasting Junta*.



FEASTING JUNTA

Directed by André Córdova Rudstedt

Chile | 2025 | 7:00

International Documentary

As Chile collapses
under junta rule,
its leaders
indulge in lavish
celebrations while
the nation crumbles
around them.



A LONG LETTER TO LOVE

Directed by Nika Krikun

Ukraine | 2025 | 07:25

International Documentary

A two-part visual
poem unfolds through
dance, where each
movement expresses
the narrator's inner
voice as she finds
herself trapped in
the abandoned house
of her own mind.



Still from *A Long Letter to Love*.



Still from *In Zaynab's Heaven*.



IN ZAYNAB'S HEAVEN

Directed by Ali Mehdi

Pakistan, Lebanon & United Arab Emirates | 2025 | 25:00

International Documentary

A Hazara filmmaker follows a gravestone maker, a water girl, and a man who buried his own limb, capturing their daily lives within a graveyard.



THE SILENCE AFTER THE STORM

Directed by Alina Rizwan

Pakistan | 2025 | 10:47

International Documentary

In flood-stricken
Sindh, a young boy
rewrites his rain-
soaked dreams as
classrooms turn to
rivers and lessons
flow with resilience
— a story of youth
redefining life's horizon.



Still from *The Silence After the Storm*.



Still from Co-Exist.



CO-EXIST

Directed by Komeil Soheili

Iran | 2025 | 12:00

International Documentary

On Iran's Hormuz
Island, blind
captain Dela
sustains an old
bread-making
tradition with
three unique island
elements — fish he
hears in the sea, natural
salt, and edible
soil — against a
backdrop of rising
geopolitical
tension.



MOTHER

Directed by Bayaman Asanaliev

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 12:02

Regional Student

Young documentary filmmaker
Bayaman turns
his lens on his
mother, an
obstetrician-
gynaecologist,
capturing the
intensity and
intimacy of a night
shift in the maternity ward.
Amid difficult
births and quiet
conversations, he
discovers a world
with its own rules
and unseen heroes.



Still from *Mother*.



Still from *The Goldfish*.



THE GOLDFISH

Directed by Aizhamal Mirbek

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 12:03

Regional Student

Sezim, a young girl, is left alone when her father - her only relative - mysteriously disappears.



I PROMISE

Directed by Altynai Turgun & Nurkamal Zhetigenova

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 03:00

Regional Student

A college romance
turns into a
nightmare when
a young woman,
forced to sacrifice
her future for
marriage, confronts
her husband's dark
violence and must fight for her
safety.



Still from *I Promise*.



Still from *A Dance Alone For Two*.



A DANCE ALONE FOR TWO

Directed by Mehr Said

Tajikistan | 2025 | 12:00

Regional Student

In the past, a
migrant worker,
36-year-old
Rano became
an ambitious
theatrical
director in a
theatre in a
small Tajik town. Despite many
difficulties, Rano
has to make great
efforts to breathe
life back into
the provincial
theatre.



STRINGS OF BELONGING

Directed by Umed Qurbonbekov

Tajikistan | 2025 | 20:00

Regional Student

In Tajikistan's
Pamir Mountains,
the ancient rubab
weaves a tapestry
of memory, faith,
and identity, as
musicians and
craftsmen strive to
preserve their heritage while
navigating the
tides of change.



Still from *Strings of Belonging*.



Still from *Roza Eje*.



ROZA EJE

Directed by Faridun Karabozov & Erik Stybaev

Kyrgyzstan | 2025 | 19:04

Regional Student

For 30 years, Roza Eje has driven a milk truck through Karakol, enduring grueling physical labor and navigating complex human relationships. Her perseverance not only sustains her livelihood but also shapes the community around her.

Step away from the everyday rush with a contemplative walk from UCA's campus to the Naryn River, exploring mindful practices that connect you with yourself, others, and the landscape. By the river, author Lucy Palmer invites participants to collaborate with its rhythms—flow, erosion, entanglements—creating site-specific narratives that honour the river as an active partner in the creative process.

Lucy Palmer is an award-winning radio documentary maker, journalist, author, and editor.

Paulie Doyle is an investigative reporter at the Irish political news website The Ditch.

WORKSHOP

Creative Walk & River Landscapes



WORKSHOP

Strategy as a Way of Creative Becoming

- ▼ We mostly believe
- ▼ creativity is
- ▼ about inspiration, but in reality, it's about how to navigate rejection, uncertainty and change without



losing yourself in the process. In this talk, Brand Strategist and Creative Director **Jon Jacobsen** will share his story and experimental methods accross

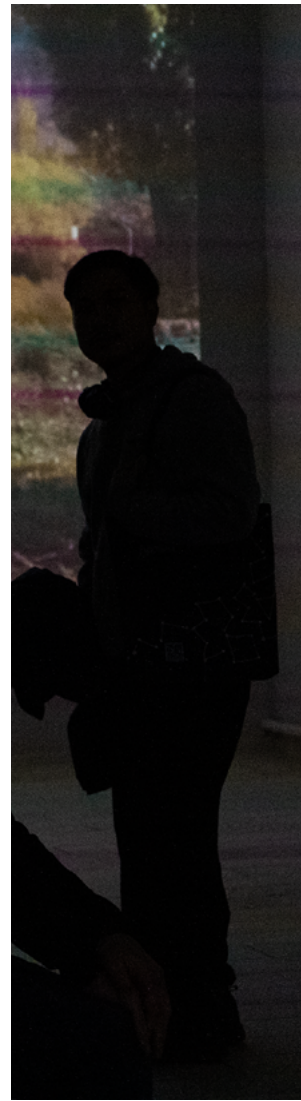
different creative industries, from the projects that flourished to the ones that fell apart, and how those moments of loss become turning points.

Strategy isn't a rigid business tool, but a way of becoming: it gives structure to chaos, direction to ideas and clarity to decisions. For filmmakers, designers,

communicators and creative entrepreneurs, this means building a practice that is both adaptable to commercial realities and rooted in personal meaning.



In this talk, you'll explore how strategy can help you protect your vision, sustain your career, and transform challenges - including grief - into creative energy.



SEMINAR

THE ART OF KYRGYZ CINEMA

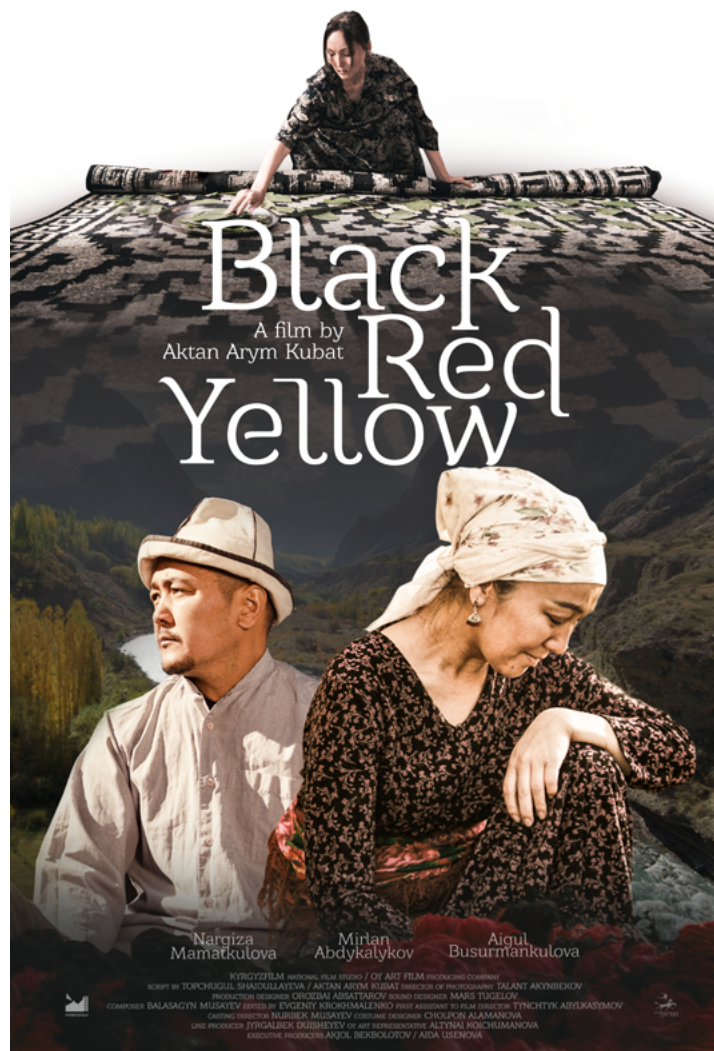
Acclaimed filmmaker
Aktan Arym Kubat
 explores the
 traditions of Kyrgyz
 cinema and its role
 in shaping cultural
 identity. Drawing on
 his internationally
 awarded films, he
 reflects on the
 visual language of
 Kyrgyz storytelling,
 the challenges of
 filmmaking in Central
 Asia, and cinema's
 power as both a
 mirror of society
 and a bridge to the
 world.

WORKSHOP

PERSONAL STORY AS CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

This workshop by **Zarrin Sanvar** explores how personal memory and everyday rituals can be transformed into cinematic storytelling. Drawing on examples from world and Central Asian cinema, the session highlights how intimate experiences and local urban/rural narratives can become universal film language. Participants will also engage in a short reflective exercise, experiencing how a simple memory can serve as the seed of a story.





FESTIVAL OPENING FILM

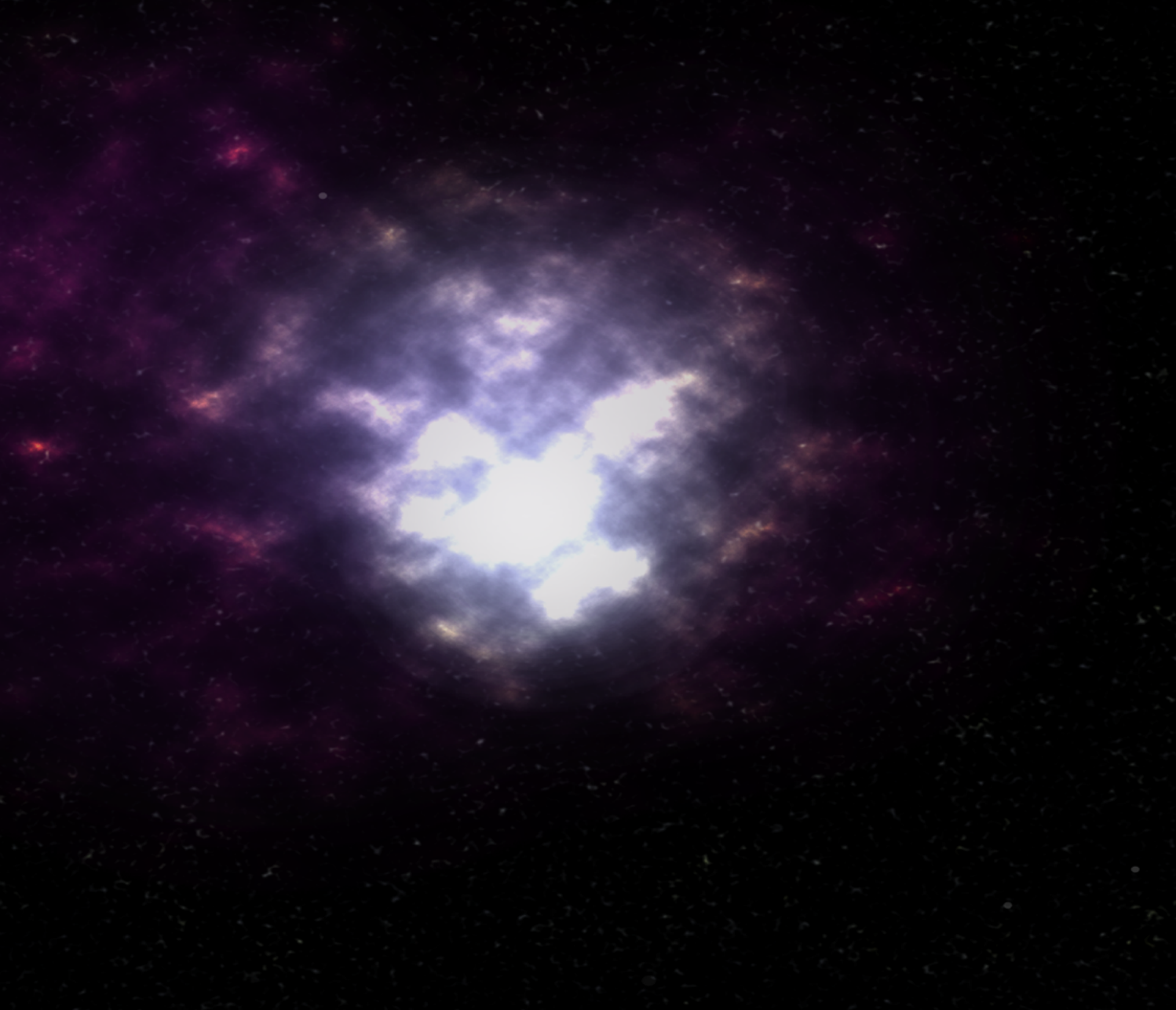
Black Red Yellow is a feature film about three intertwined destinies, centered on a love between two ordinary villagers – a love that endures and uplifts. The story explores moral responsibility within the family and the need to cherish one another. At its heart is Turdugul, a weaver whose carpets reflect the lives of those they are made for: one black, one red, one yellow.

These colours embody human nature – black as calm and grounded, red as fiery and intense, yellow as nostalgic and melancholic. Though Turdugul is the village's only weaver, each carpet is unique, shaped by the soul it represents. Through her craft, the film reveals the emotional depth of tradition and how personality and destiny are woven into every thread.

WORKSHOP

STARGAZING

A magical night-time adventure under the stars. Led by **Michael Garbutt**, co-author of *Mindful Eye, Playful Eye: 101 Amazing Museum Activities for Discovery, Connection, and Insight* (Smithsonian Books), we will lie on the grass, engage in playful, mindful activities, hear poems about the clouds, the moon and the stars ... and let our imagination soar through the infinite sky.



PERFORMANCES

TAMYR

▶▶▶ *Tamyr* (The Root) is a performance about a woman as the embodiment of Nature – her memory and her future. Three female figures – Root, River, and Fire – symbolize the past, present, and future of the Earth. Their movements reveal an inner conflict: forgotten origins, the fluidity of life, and the drive toward either destruction or renewal. Through the collision and reconciliation of these three bodies, the performance asks whether we are still capable of hearing the Earth's voice and returning to harmony with the source.

KYZ

Staged from the ancient Kyrgyz folktale *Akylkarachach* and proverbs dedicated to women, *Kyz* blends the art of Kyrgyz puppetry with the aesthetics of Japanese Kabuki to create a striking new theatrical form.

The performance honours the high status, strength, and wisdom of women in Kyrgyz culture while raising urgent issues faced by women and adolescents today. At its heart is *Karachach*, who, after losing her mother, grows up guided by her father's love and the secrets of nature. Her peaceful world is shattered by the cruel *Karakan*, who seeks to claim her, but with courage and inherited wisdom, *Karachach* must fight for her destiny.



KYZ Performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to the University of Central Asia (UCA) for its support of the Nomad Festival. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha (Chairman of UCA's Board of Trustees), Professor Christopher Gerry (Rector, UCA), and Dr Diana Pauna (Dean of the UCA's School of Arts and Sciences) for their very generous support in the Festival's fourth year, which also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the founding of UCA.

To present a festival of this scale in this anniversary year, involving significant contributions from UCA's three founding states (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan), is the work of many months and many individuals. We also wish to recognise our wonderful festival directors, Anisa Sabiri and Nursultan Stanaliev, as well as the many creatives and technical and administrative support staff who have made this fourth edition of Nomad Festival possible.

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 Univer Cinema
 Aga Khan Development Network, Kyrgyzstan
 Artcom Collective
 Naryn film collective

Soheil Ashrafi & Michael Garbutt: Festival Co-Chairs
Sehar Naz Janani: Media, Design, and Event Manager

September 2025



Scan the Programme

Design by Sehar Naz Janani

<https://ucentralasia.org/nomad2025>

international
festival

2025

ПОРТА

