

Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia – The Ancient Silk Road

A photo exhibition at Bien Contemporary Gallery
Copenhagen May 20th – June 17th



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About the exhibition

Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia – The Ancient Silk Road is a photo exhibition that sheds light on the challenges between modern development and traditional ways of life, as it visualizes the historical, cultural and ecological significance of rural communities living in High Mountain Asia.

Viewers are not only prompted to question how to overcome the challenges these communities face today, but are invited to explore possible futures that could affect humankind on a global scale. How might developed societies "rewild" their own ways of life? What would a developed society look like if it adopted indigenous customs and values that revolve around coexistence as opposed to resource-oriented, subject-object relationships with nature?

Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia – The Ancient Silk Road extends a prior traveling exhibition presented throughout Central Asia under the same name, curated by Dr. Zahra Hussain, Founder and Director of Laajverd (an interdisciplinary collective with a focus on the intersections of culture, art and architecture) and Altyn Kapalova, Research Fellow, Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, Graduate School of Development, University of Central Asia.

For this iteration, the exhibition is displayed in three conceptual sections:

The PAST section, where Silk Road history, ethnicity and traditions are presented through text and maps.

The PRESENT section, which captures the rich history and cultural heritage of High Mountain Asia through journalistic photography in the form of photo prints.

The FUTURE section, which shows imagined futures through conceptual art photography as projections.

In addition, the space will include immersive sound recordings of

the High Mountain Asia region, audible throughout the exhibition experience.

By raising the question of what future "rewilded" societies might look like in a modernized, urban context, the term "rewilded" becomes open to a wide range of interpretations, both utopian and dystopian—from humans voluntarily reconnecting to nature, to the forced destructuring of current societal systems due to natural and/or man-made disasters.

By engaging the viewers in this way, the exhibition aims to bridge the gap between the observer and the observed, placing the viewer into the position of an active thinker/creator in contrast to a passive bystander through the anthropological approach of "participant observation."

Through this ethnological approach, implemented by the curators, combined with the photographers' creative vision, the exhibition offers a unique perspective on the intersection of culture, ecology, and the possibilities of rewilding, inspired by indigenous communities living along the Ancient Silk Road.

The exhibition features six international photographers – Claudia Grünig (DE), Danil Usmanov (KGZ), Marylise Vigneau (FR), Guliza Urustambek kyzy (KGZ), Victor Jose Torrejon Marina (ES), and Wayne Bregulla (US).

This exhibition was made possible by initiative of Victor Jose Torrejon Marina (ES). Curated by Abel Alazo Rangel (CU), Cila Brosius (US/DE), and hosted by Bien Contemporary.

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"The Road of Hope and Heritage" is a 30-minute ethnographic documentary film, directed by Aibek Bayimbetov (researcher at University of Central Asia), which sets the tone for the exhibition, as it creates context through the voices of people living along the Ancient Silk Road.



[Watch the film here](#)

The Photographers

Danil Usmanov

Danil Usmanov

Danil Usmanov (b.1995) is a documentary photographer from Kyrgyzstan. He studied photojournalism and documentary photography at DocDocDoc School of Modern Photography in Saint Petersburg. Since graduation, Danil has participated in several international exhibitions and has been published in THE CALVERT JOURNAL, DER SPIEGEL, Vice France, The Guardian, among other channels. He has worked with NGOs such as SRC, UN Women, and UNDP Eurasia, to name but a few, and won several photography competitions, including the latest Bishkek First April Competition in 2022 with his photo series Rice Grains. Currently he is working on several documentary projects in Kyrgyzstan.

About the work

The title of Danil Usmanov's photographic series – Inshallah – expresses the belief that nothing happens unless God wills it, and that his will supersedes all human will. The project explores the topic of islamisation through several stories, which Danil captured while traveling to the South of Kyrgyzstan.

Despite or, perhaps, because of its Communist history, Kyrgyzstan is now a secular country, where 83% of the population is Muslim. After the fall of the Soviet Union, people turned to Islam in order to build a new identity, resulting in rapid growth of mosques across the country. Danil captures both beauty and tragedy within this society. Although many of his photographs depict his subjects in harmony with themselves and nature, he also explores the lives of people affected by religious radicalization – women and children left behind after hundreds of men died fighting for ISIS in the war

in Syria. Despite times of crisis, the community continues to take solace and find strength in uttering the phrase "Inshallah."

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Danil Usmanov



Danil Usmanov

Marylise Vigneau

Marylise Vigneau

Marylise Vigneau is a documentary photographer who splits her time between Austria and Pakistan. She grew up in a Parisian family, in which many secrets were kept, which sparked her curiosity and sense of justice. She is drawn to the stories of people who live under the effects of borders, both visible and invisible, and who find ways to express themselves and resist oppression. She prefers to work on long-term projects that allow her to explore the connections between memory and place, documenting moments of tenderness in harsh environments. Her work is represented by the Anzenberger Agency in Vienna.

She recently won the 2023 Sony World Photography Award (Professional competition winner).

About the work: “Moving Mountains”

The photographic series in this exhibition – Moving Mountains – is part of a tentative portrait of Kyrgyzstan, 30 years after its independence.

Diverse and interwoven stories constitute a fragmented and subjective portrait of this little-known country landlocked in Central Asia.

Under a dense sky, in a landscape of mountains, birds and wind, but also of industrial ruins and polluted wastes, a conflicted nation tries to shape its future.

The images from Pakistan are the story of an escape to the mountains after months of working in the megalopolis of Lahore. From troubled Baluchistan to the mythical Karakorum

Highway, a Pathan improvises a dance in a coal depot, a boy seems to question the sky under a bridge, and springtime blossoms in Hunza while an explosion carves through the mountain in a bid to enhance a roadway.

The mountainous areas of Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan share similar landscapes, skies, and remoteness but also hardships and the challenge of confronting a changing world.

Website

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Marylise Vigneau



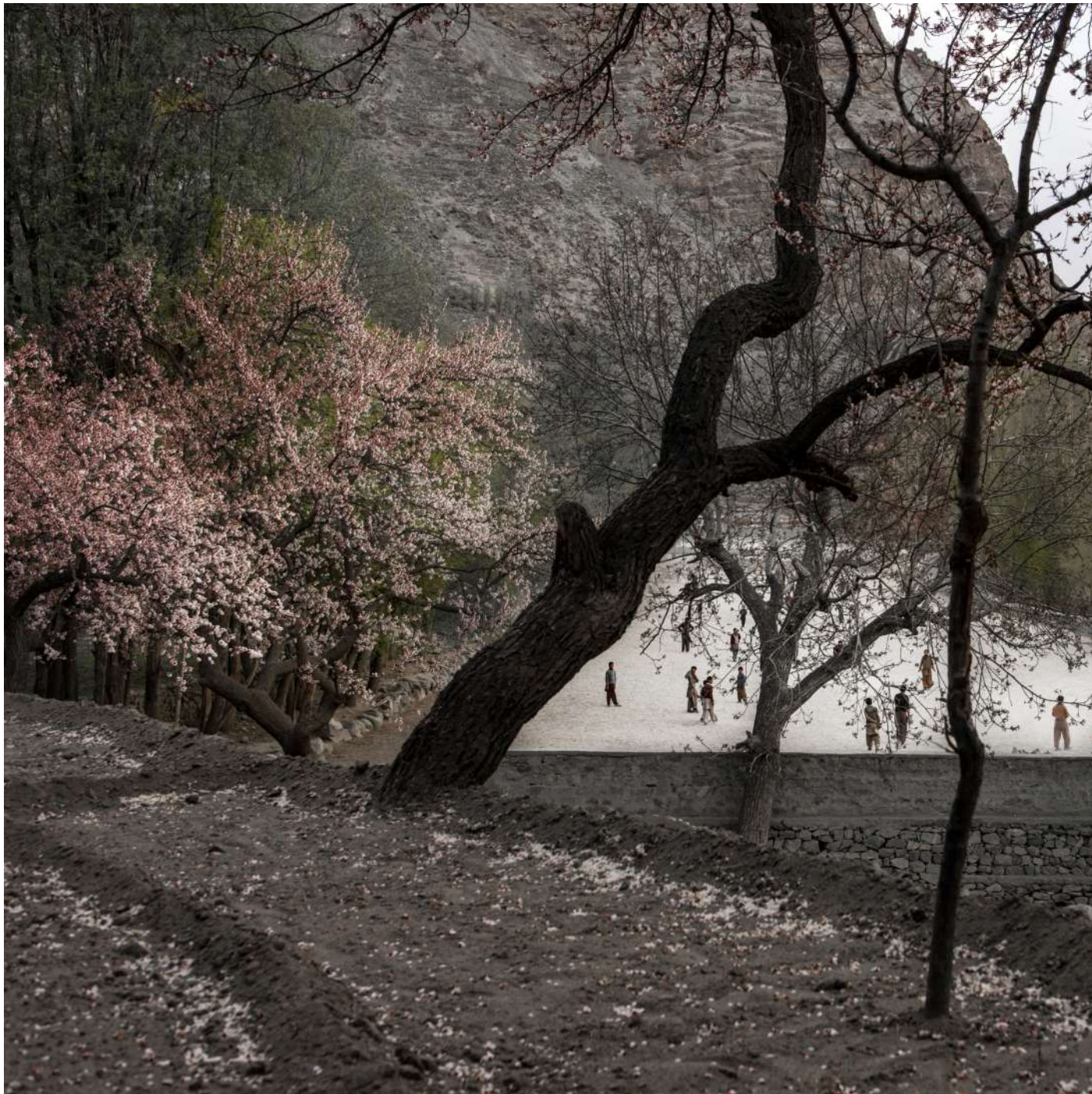
Marylise Vigneau



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Guliza Urustambek kyzy

Guliza Urustambek kyzy

Guliza Urustambek kyzy (b. 1998) is a photographer from Kyrgyzstan, with a background in Journalism Studies. Since 2020, she has worked as a photojournalist, mainly covering significant political and cultural events in Kyrgyzstan, such as the coronavirus pandemic, the parliamentary elections, environmental challenges, and cultural heritage.

She is also active as a photo artist and street photographer, taking part in a number of social projects, including the documentation of Doctors without Borders in Kyrgyzstan. As a photo artist, she captures moments in every-day life, in which the people of her home country can be seen pondering the meaning of life, hoping for a safe future, and, at times, feeling nostalgic for the USSR. She uses her camera as a tool to raise awareness and promote social change.

About the work

The photographs shown in this exhibition were taken as part of the photo project *Anxieties and Hopes of the People of Kyrgyzstan*. In one of the images displayed in the gallery, Guliza Urustambek kyzy captures a rural paramedic who goes to work every day on foot for 10 km.

The woman is seen walking on a dusty road in a seemingly desolate area with nothing but a truck passing by in the background.

Guliza also captures the hardships of gold mining by following an individual who continues to mine on the banks of the Naryn River in Kyrgyzstan – despite his worsening health – in hopes that Kyrgyzstan might one day become the next Switzerland.

Instagram
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Other sources
<https://www.archyde.com/internews-in-the-kyrgyz-republic-27/>



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Victor Torrejon Marina

Victor Torrejon Marina

Victor Torrejon Marina (b. 1988) is a Spanish photographer, currently based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Victor's eclectic background as a civil engineer and photographer have led him to travel remote corners of the world, such as Nepal, Greenland, and Northern Pakistan, to name but a few. As a photographer, he is particularly captivated by the mountainous regions of Asia and its people. He focuses on traditional ways of life and the profound transformations indigenous people face in a globally connected and fast changing world.

About the work

Bara Brook, part of the Ganche district of Gilgit-Baltistan, towers high above the world in the

mountains of Northern Pakistan. Here, livestock is one of the primary resources for people living in the village, with sheep, cows, yaks and goats being the primary species. The size of herds, and type of livestock, depend on the size of the grazing areas, the number of households and the local climate conditions. Every year in June, these animals are led to the high pastures as the snowy blanket of the long winter gives way to the summer vegetation for just a few short months.

Victor's body of work was created during several visits to Northern Pakistan, where he witnessed the traditions and way of life of villagers in this remote region. The set of photos included in the exhibition depict a typical daily scene where

lactating cows, yaks and crossbreeds are allowed to free roam, and herdsmen watch over goats and other smaller ruminants. At night, the animals are secured to protect them from predators, such as lynx and snow leopards looking for their next meal. Their milk is turned into several traditional dairy products such as lassi, butter and yogurt. The younger villagers carry these down into the towns of Bara, whilst the veteran shepherds spend the whole summer tending to their flocks up in the mountains. At the end of September, as the cold weather rolls back in, the shepherds return to their villages with their flock, storing them in their houses until next year.

Independent, isolated, and illiterate, the pastoralists of Gilgit-Baltistan face an uncertain future.

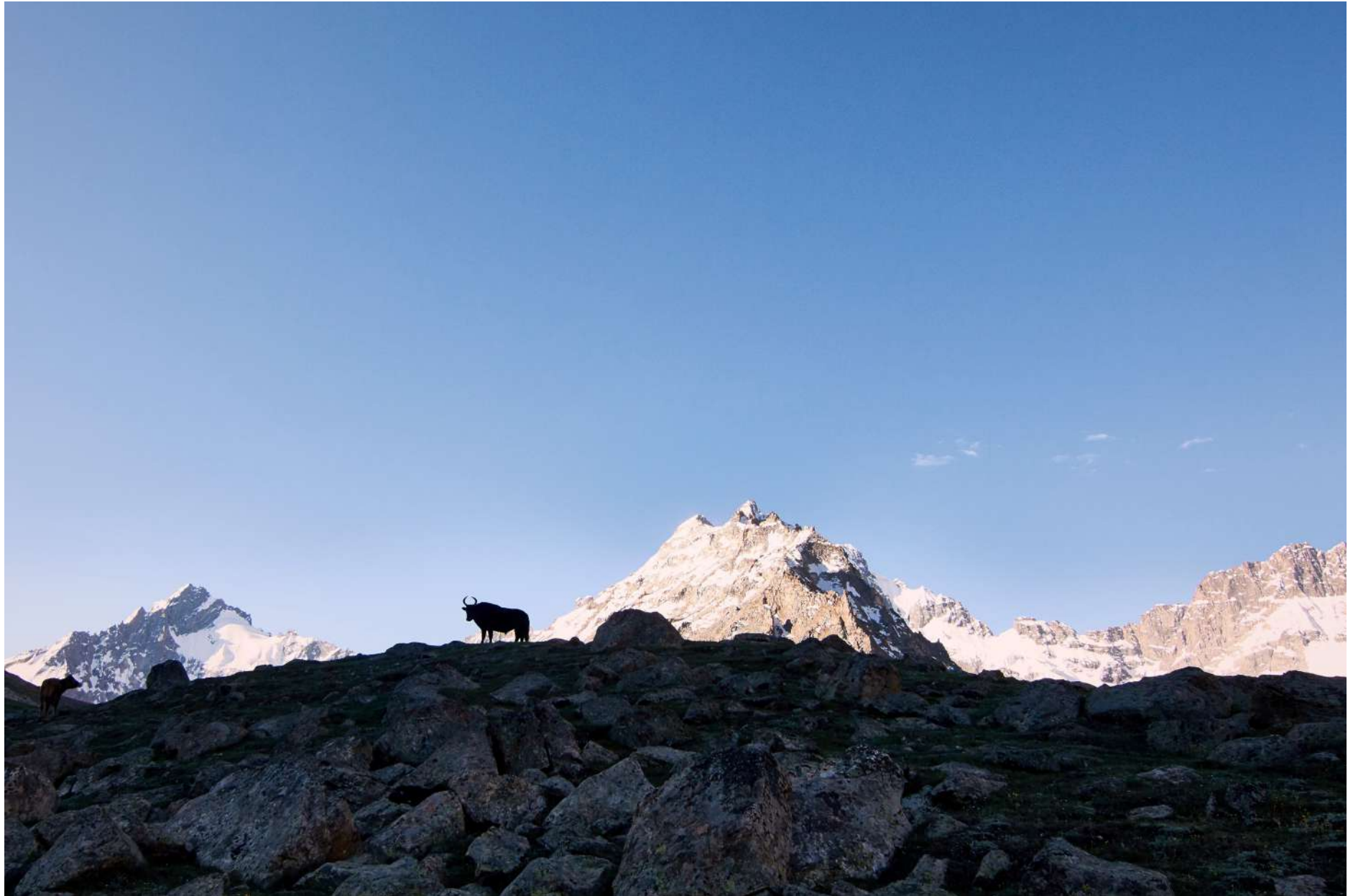
Historically, Balti people have proven themselves adaptable to new situations; As long as the environment is spacious and rural, they do well. However, climate change and socioeconomic development brings new challenges and tougher conditions to work under. Can these adaptable people adjust to the new social and environmental landscape that now confronts them?

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Victor Torrejon Marina



Victor Torrejon Marina



Victor Torrejon Marina



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Victor Torrejon Marina



Victor Torrejon Marina

Wayne Bregulla

Wayne Bregulla

Wayne Maria Bregulla (b. 1974) is a US–American writer, painter and photographer who studied painting and illustration at the School of Visual Arts in New York. His recent work explores the themes of old trade routes and the ‘Human Condition’, using black and white as the predominant medium to convey his emotions and perceptions of the world.

He has also experimented with cross process photography as a creative use of color. He has a keen interest in diverse cultures, peoples and religions of the world, which have shaped his artistic vision and expression. His work reflects the influence of various places he has visited, especially India, Iran, Africa's East Coast and Japan.

About the work

Bukhara, once a center of the Islamic world and the centerpoint itself of the Silk Route due to its strategic location in the very middle of Asia, is one of the great cities of the East with thousands of years of history and magnificent gems of architecture. Known as “The Flower of Persia” it was looked at in years long long past as an intellectual powerhouse of Islam, a center of trade, culture and religion, and finally as a pillar of Central Asian architecture.

Bukhara has retained its rank consistently over the millennia amongst the preeminent cities of Persia. It stands within a select group of Silk Route cities such as Yazd, Isfahan, Samarkand, Merv, Baghdad, Herat and Kashgar – as places which not only surface time and time again in the lines of old travelers' tales and history books, but which survive as living legends albeit in the shadows of the the massive metropolises

and commercial centers of today which dominate the world's economies.

If someone were to ask Wayne Maria Bregulla what images come to mind when thinking back to his moments, days and weeks in Uzbekistan, he would say endless cups of tea, the giant metal pots of Pilav cooking with raisins, carrots, and lamb, the old Russian Ladas everywhere in every color, the distinct design of Hotel Uzbekistan in Tashkent, and, of course... the mosques.

Instagram
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Wayne Bregulla

Wayne Bregulla



Claudia Grünig

Claudia Grünig

Claudia Grünig (b. 1965) is a German artist with a background in theater and stage photography, curating and costume design. She studied painting at the University of Applied Sciences for Art and Design, Cologne, graduating in 1991, before switching to photography. Since the beginning of her artistic career, Claudia has been concerned with themes of identity and authenticity, constantly questioning the relationship between illusion and reality.

The subjects in her photographic works are often depicted in surreal settings, often alluding to fairy tales and legends, which carry collective memories and truth.

About the work

"In the exhibition catalog of the first iteration of Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia, Claudia Grünig writes: "In the mountainous countries there are very wealthy regions that live off tourism. In the immediate vicinity, however, there are also entire villages that have become extinct. Rich and poor coexist in the same space."

Claudia's surreal black and white images reflect this dichotomy between rich and poor, reality and fiction, existence and non-existence, durability and fragility.

With the backdrop of the untamed landscape of Kyrgyzstan, these works are part of Claudia's Unbreakable series from early 2017. They are presented in the form of large projections to emphasize the dreamy, intangible quality of the imagined futures they invoke. Claudia's imagery addresses the wish to preserve, even the desire to become invulnerable, while also

emphasizing the fragility and transience of things, whether it be in the form of an object, such as a porcelain vase, or in the form of cultural heritage.

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