

FIELD Take 7: MEETING Thinking Pilgrimage



Film still from *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), directed by Peter Brook, based on Philosopher, mystic, and writer, G.I. Gurdjieff's book, chronicling his pilgrimage and encounters with Sufi teachers and other sages in Afghanistan, Iran, and parts of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

FIELD MEETING Take 7: Thinking Pilgrimage Uzbekistan (August 30 – September 12, 2025)

Curated by Leeza Ahmady

ACAF Director and Curator-at- Large at Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts

After a five-year hiatus, the **Asia Contemporary Art Forum's (ACAF)** FIELD MEETING series returns with its latest and most transformative chapter: *FIELD MEETING Take 7: Thinking Pilgrimage*. This edition convenes 20 artists, curators, and spiritual practitioners for a contemplative caravan-style journey across **Uzbekistan**'s sacred cities and landscapes—**Khiva, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent**—anchored by meditations, performative dialogues, site-specific responses, and healing rituals.

As they traverse architectural marvels and elemental landscapes long revered by seekers, the journey invites deep reflection and communal exchange, enacting the “field” not only as a

geographical site but as a shared state of consciousness—a space to cultivate new ways of knowing, where pilgrimage itself becomes a curatorial method: a liminal terrain in which knowledge is both shared and embodied through co-creation. In this context, art-making and curating are journeys of ideas—transformative acts that integrate tradition and innovation, dissolve ego, and awaken the spirit.

At the heart of this project is **ACAF Director, curator Leeza Ahmady's** concept of ***Sufi Fluxus***, a continuum of spiritual play, critical humor, and creative experimentation rooted in centuries-old Sufi traditions and ancestral knowledge. These practices—poetry, music, ritual, and pilgrimage—anticipated many concerns later explored by Fluxus artists of the 1970s: dissolving boundaries between art and life, challenging hierarchies, and prioritizing experience over objects. The Sufi figure **Mullah Nasrudin**, both trickster and sage, embodies this spirit. His stories model transformation that moves fluidly between the rational and the irrational, the personal and the collective, where humor, mischief, paradox, revelation, absurdity, and insight flow as one.

Thinking Pilgrimage approaches contemporary art through living currents of spiritual wisdom—myth and oral tradition, faith and remembrance—rooted in the region's legacy as a center of the Islamic Renaissance, yet continually opening outward into dialogue with other mystical and esoteric streams: Buddhist and Hindu, Zoroastrian and Abrahamic, Taoist and Zen, shamanic and beyond.

Guided by these currents of resonance, the presence of **invited Afghan** and Afghan-descended artists—**Moshtari Hilal, Zolayzha Sherzad, Roya Ghiasi, Yusef Misdaq, Parwana Haydar, and Khadim Ali**—adds vital contemporary voices, embodying resilience, vision, and deep cultural rootedness. For them, this program is both a creative act and a gesture of visibility within a cultural landscape shaped by layered histories and shifting geopolitical dynamics. They walk alongside voices from South, West, and East Asia—artists **Shezad Dawood, Amina Ahmed, Farah Salem, Deniz Güл, Sam Samiee, and Chunhui Kang**, together with collector **Roya Khadjavi** and curators **Megha Ralapati** and **Lila Nazemian**—whose practices open portals onto spiritual, historical, and ecological inquiries deeply attuned to the pilgrimage's ethos.

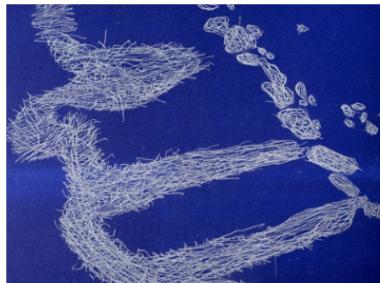
The group will pause its journey to view contemporary art at artist studios and other sites, including visiting the inaugural Bukhara Biennial. These encounters are framed not as acts of spectatorship but as a continuation of the pilgrimage, attuning to how the works—particularly those by artists from the region—resonate with the sacred rhythms of local spiritual traditions. In this context, the Biennial and other contemporary art platforms become a site for reflecting on landscape, community, and the evolution of ancestral knowledge as vital to creative manifestation. Encounters with sacred mountains, desert expanses, and bodies of water further embody the flux between stillness and movement, solitude and gathering.

Since its inception in 2014, formerly as the signature program of Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW), FIELD MEETING has redefined curation as a performative site for generative thought. Under Leeza Ahmady's leadership since 2005, ACAF has evolved toward embodying the intimate relationship between contemporary art, curatorial practice, and spiritual life. ***Thinking Pilgrimage*** deepens that mission, grounding creative inquiry in the playful yet profound currents of ***Sufi Fluxus***—cultivating awareness, connection, and collective care for the world we share.

Participating Artists and Practitioners:



Amina Ahmed
London & New York



Deniz Gü'l
Istanbul & Berlin



Farah Salem
Jeddah & Chicago



Kang Chunhui
Beijing, Urumchi, Xinjiang



Leeza Ahmady
New York



Lida Ahmady
New York



Lila Nazemian
Tehran & New York



Liu Lin
Beijing & Shanghai



Megha Ralapati
Chicago



Moshtari Hilal
Hamburg & Berlin



Parwana Haydar
London & Stockholm



Rena Glickman
New York



Roya Khadjadi
New York



Roya Ghiasy
New York & Leiden



Sam Samiee
Tehran, Amsterdam, Berlin



Shezad Dawood
London & Karachi



Yusuf Misdaq
Los Angeles, London, Kabul



Zolaykha Sherzad
Kabul, Paris, New York

Asia Contemporary Art Forum (ACAF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, grew out of Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW), founded in 2001 by a consortium of museum directors, curators, and collectors to educate and engage the public—particularly in the United States—on the diversity and vitality of contemporary art and culture from Asia. Since 2021, ACAF has focused on internal-facing programs fostering mentorship and collaboration among Asia-based and diaspora artists, including supporting resettled Afghan artists through bilingual sessions with leading artists, curators, and academics.

ACAW's past editions, including signature exhibitions, programs, institutions, galleries, and artists, are archived at acaw.info, while past **FIELD MEETING** editions, featuring performances and lecture-performances at institutions like The Met, Asia Society, the Guggenheim Museum, and Alserkal Avenue, can be explored at acaforum.art.

Founding ACAW Consortium Members / Participants: Asia Society & Museum, +91 Foundation, Asia Art Archive in America, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Queens Museum, MoMA | The Museum of Modern Art, Chambers Fine Art, SepiaEYE, Japan Society, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, China Institute, Rubin Museum of Art, ArteEast, Art Projects International, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, Roya Khadjavi Projects, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, Collectors Jack and Susy Wadsworth, M+ Museum (Hong Kong), Ink Studio (Beijing), Richard Koh Fine Art (Kuala Lumpur), Twelve Gates Arts (Philadelphia), Alserkal Avenue (Dubai), and ArtAsiaPacific (Hong Kong).