



ACAF

FIELD MEETING Take 7

Uzbekistan 2025

FIELD *Take 7:* **MEETING**

Thinking Pilgrimage
Uzbekistan

Khiva, Samarkand, Bukhara & Tashkent
August 30 – September 12, 2025



Asia Contemporary Art Forum (ACAF)

FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* Uzbekistan

Curatorial Reflection Leeza Ahmady

After a five-year hiatus, I returned to Asia Contemporary Art Forum's (ACAF) FIELD MEETING series with what felt like the realization of a long-held dream. Years of reflection and preparation culminated in an invitation to eighteen artists, curators, collectors, and spiritual practitioners to embark on FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage*—a contemplative, caravan-style journey across the sacred cities and landscapes of Uzbekistan: Khiva, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent, anchored by meditations, performative dialogues, site-specific activations, and healing rituals. (August 30 – September 12, 2025)

While I have returned to Central Asia over many decades through curatorial work and research, Samarkand holds a particular significance for me. It was from here that my grandfather was forced to flee during the Bolshevik advance in the early twentieth century and settle in Afghanistan, where I was born and raised until the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s compelled our family to leave for the United States.

As we traversed architectural marvels and elemental landscapes long revered by seekers across a region that for centuries has served as a crossroads of pilgrimage, trade, mysticism, and intellectual exchange, the landscape itself became our teacher. The FIELD gradually revealed itself not only as a geographical site but as a shared state of consciousness. Pilgrimage became a curatorial method—a liminal terrain through which knowledge could be encountered, embodied, and co-created.

At the heart of the project was *Sufi Fluxes*, my long-evolving curatorial methodology: a continuum of spiritual play, critical humor, and creative experimentation rooted in centuries-old Sufi traditions and ancestral knowledge. Expressed through poetry, music, ritual, and pilgrimage, Sufi practice cultivated modes of experience that both anticipated and paralleled concerns later explored by Fluxus artists of the 1970s—dissolving boundaries between art and life, challenging hierarchies, and privileging lived experience over objecthood. The beloved Sufi trickster Mullah Nasrudin emerged as the archetype of *Sufi Fluxes*, embodying a mode of transformation in which humor, paradox, revelation, absurdity, and wisdom flow as one.

FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Previous page and bottom right: Roya Ghiasy, *When the Sky Forgets Its Name*. A performance alongside the Amu Darya River on the road to Bukhara. Photos by Roya Ghiasy and Lin Liu. This page, top right: Tilakari Madrasa, Samarkand. Photo by Farah Salem.





Rather than illustrating *Sufi Fluxes*, Thinking Pilgrimage invited participants to inhabit it. Approaching contemporary art through living currents of spiritual wisdom—myth, oral tradition, faith, remembrance, and embodied knowledge—it drew upon Central Asia's legacy as a center of the Islamic Renaissance. Rather than treating this inheritance as singular, the journey brought it into conversation with Buddhist, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Taoist, Zen, shamanic, and Abrahamic mystical traditions, revealing pilgrimage as a shared language through which diverse spiritual lineages have long cultivated transformation, contemplation, and belonging.

Guided by these currents of resonance, FIELD MEETING brought together artists and practitioners whose lives and creative work are rooted in—or in dialogue with—Central Asia and its wider diasporic communities. They represented diverse cultural lineages spanning Central, South, West, and East Asia, together with their diasporas across Europe, Africa, and the United States, and included **Moshtari Hilal, Zolaykha Sherzad, Roya Ghiasy, Yusef Misdaq, Parwana Haydar, Shezad Dawood, Amina Ahmed, Farah Salem, Deniz Gül, Sam Salehi Samiee, Kang Chunhui, Roya Khadjavi, Megha Ralapati, Lila Nazemian, Lida Ahmady, Lin Liu, and Rena Glickman**. Together, they brought perspectives shaped by resilience, cultural continuity, and diasporic imagination.

Along the route, we gathered with local artists and arts leaders in studios, museums, and cultural spaces, including the inaugural Bukhara Biennial. These encounters wove the pilgrimage into the region's contemporary artistic life, while mountains, deserts, rivers, historic shrines, mausoleums, mosques, and necropolises invited us to move between stillness and action, solitude and community, offering new ways to reflect on how tradition and innovation might converge, how the boundaries of ego might soften, and how new forms of collective awareness could emerge.

Across thirteen days in Uzbekistan, a constellation of offerings emerged among the FIELD MEETING participants in response to the places, histories, and encounters of the journey. I use the word offerings intentionally, honoring the spiritual orientation of the pilgrimage and understanding each contribution as a gesture of attention, generosity, and reciprocity—something given before it is received. These offerings took the form of performances, conversations, readings, rituals, movement, sound, film, tea, healing practices, and collective acts of making, each rooted in the participant's own lived experience while remaining deeply responsive to the group and the places we inhabited together. Together, they traversed a remarkable range of subjects—from pilgrimage, hospitality, and remembrance to love, mortality, healing, ecology, material knowledge, and the ethical dimensions of artistic practice.



What I believe will remain with us is not any single offering or site visited, but the way each quietly opened the possibility for the next. *Thinking Pilgrimage* became an evolving conversation—one shaped as much by generosity, vulnerability, and curiosity as by artistic expertise. As with every pilgrimage, there was no final destination, only a path that continues to unfold.

Since the inception of FIELD MEETING in 2014, I have understood curating as the art of creating the conditions for revelation. *Thinking Pilgrimage* extended that understanding through my concept of *Sufi Fluxes*, proposing pilgrimage as a curatorial methodology that moves beyond the exhibition of objects toward the curation of the FIELD itself: a threshold of energy, consciousness, and relationship.

The pages that follow gather my written reflections on the offerings of each FIELD MEETING participant, woven with hundreds of photographs made across Uzbekistan's cities, sacred sites, and landscapes. They are offered in the spirit of the pilgrimage itself: one invitation among many.

Bringing this publication into being has been a tremendous archival undertaking. My deepest gratitude to ACAF's 2025 and 2026 Fellows and interns—Samantha Jenkins, Luca Ponticello, Jonas Bauer, Tanasia LeBrew, David Pae, and Zarlacht Mohammadzai—whose care and dedication made it possible. Thanks also to Parwana Haydar and the FIELD MEETING participants who generously shared the photographs featured throughout these pages, extending the spirit of this remarkable collective experience through their own witnessing. Every act of seeing is also an act of remembering.

Leeza Ahmady
August 4, 2026



Farah Salem, *Sound-Bound Amulets: Protecting Wisdom Seekers*. A ritual during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Video still by Yusef Misdag.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Tilakari Madrasa, Samarkand, Uzbekistan 2025. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.



АВТАР

КОСМОНА



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Previous page: Kosmonavtlar subway station in Tashkent. Photo by Farah Salem. This page, Courage Monument Square Park, Tashkent. Top photo by Parwana Haydar, bottom by Roya Ghiasy, right by Leeza Ahmady.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Chorsu Market, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo, top by Roya Ghiasy, bottom and right by Parwana Haydar.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Chorsu Market, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Tashkent Museum of Applied Arts, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. 2025.
Photos, top and right by Leeza Ahmady, bottom by Farah Salem.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Visit with Sufi master Sabit Madaliev and studio visit with artist Jamol Usmanov, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Parwana Haydar.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Studio visit with artist Vycheslav Akhonov, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Parwana Haydar.





AMINA AHMED (NEW YORK, LONDON, TEHRAN)

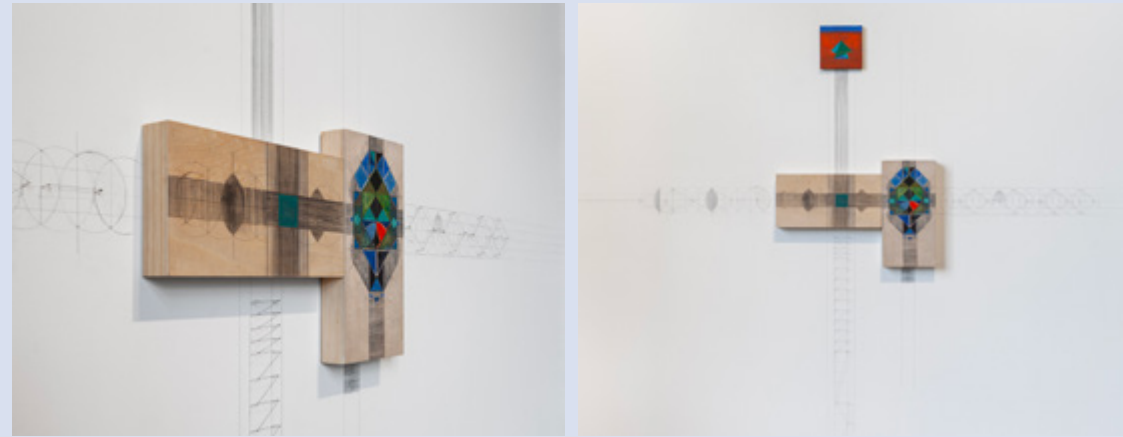
The Pilgrimage Within

A facilitated conversation on September 1, 2025 | Khiva

During a warm afternoon lunch in Khiva, multidisciplinary artist Amina Ahmed facilitated a conversation on the meaning of pilgrimage. Resonating with her ongoing exploration of remembrance, transformation, and the landscapes of the heart, she considered pilgrimage as a shared practice across spiritual traditions—an outward journey that often mirrors an inner passage of reflection, healing, devotion, and change. As the conversation unfolded, an unexpected atmosphere of openness and emotional resonance emerged, with participants reflecting one by one on personal challenges that had shaped their lives and informed their understanding of themselves and of life itself as an ongoing pilgrimage. Through a shared exchange of stories and intentions, the gathering became an opportunity to contemplate what might be released, reclaimed, or newly discovered along the journey through Uzbekistan.



Amina Ahmed, *The Pilgrimage Within*. A conversation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem. Previous pages, Khiva landscapes by Farah Salem.



Amina Ahmed, *Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish*, 2023. Site-specific drawing, gum tempera and graphite on wood; egg tempera on gesso on wood; pins, cotton thread, and graphite. Dimensions variable.

Amina Ahmed is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, printmaking, and textiles. Of Kutchi-Indian, Turkic, and Nubian heritage, she grew up in England and now lives in the USA. Her practice is rooted in geometry and the alchemy of material preparation—working with pigments, inks, threads, and paper as acts of remembrance. She engages color as a living language, drawing from patterns in nature and folk traditions where making is a form of embodied knowledge. Her work moves through the landscapes of the heart, the tree, and the mind—between rhythm and pattern—as a way of remembering, becoming whole, and tracing our place within a primordial migratory language. For Amina, the outward process of making is also an inward journey. Her work maps intertextuality, transposing elements into a field of remembering where displacement, transition, and transformation converge. She moves through these relations as a forest walker. She studied at Winchester School of Art and Chelsea School of Art before earning an MA in Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts from the Royal College of Art. Her work has been exhibited at Jhaveri Contemporary (Mumbai), Nottingham Contemporary (UK), the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (Riga), The Showroom (London), Queens Museum (NY), Twelve Gates Gallery, and Pearlstein Gallery (PA).



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Amina Ahmed, *The Pilgrimage Within*. A conversation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan. 2025.
Photos, top left and bottom by Parwana Haydar. Image on the right: visit to a sacred site, photo by Leeza Ahmady.





FARAH SALEM (CHICAGO)

Sound-Bound Amulets: Protecting Wisdom Seekers

A ritual performed on September 2, 2025 | Khiva

Sound-Bound Amulets marked another ceremonial opening for the FIELD MEETING: *Thinking Pilgrimage* program. Conceived and led by Farah Salem on the rooftop of an ancient fort overlooking the walled city of Khiva, the gathering functioned as a somatic and sonic rite of preparation for the journey ahead. Drawing from her interdisciplinary practice and ancestral traditions of the Arabian Peninsula, participants were invited into an expressive and therapeutic ritual of creating their own intentional amulets to carry throughout the journey, beginning with an extended meditation accompanied by a pre-recorded soundscape composed with sculptural talismanic instruments of Salemi's own making. Layered within the composition were archival recordings of women-led healing ceremonies, alongside poetry, chant, and vocal invocations. Within each amulet, three selected names from the 99 Names of Allah were embedded, opening space for reflection on intention-setting and on seeking protection, wisdom, and truth within one's spiritual journey. The triangular form of the amulet echoed a reconstructed sculptural instrument embedded within the soundscape, creating a dialogue between sound, form, and ritual gesture. The ceremony concluded with a purification rite using aromatic incense traditionally associated with cleansing and consecration. Each person carried their amulet across landscapes and encounters throughout the journey, holding their personal questions, qualities, and protective aspirations forward with faith into the unknown.

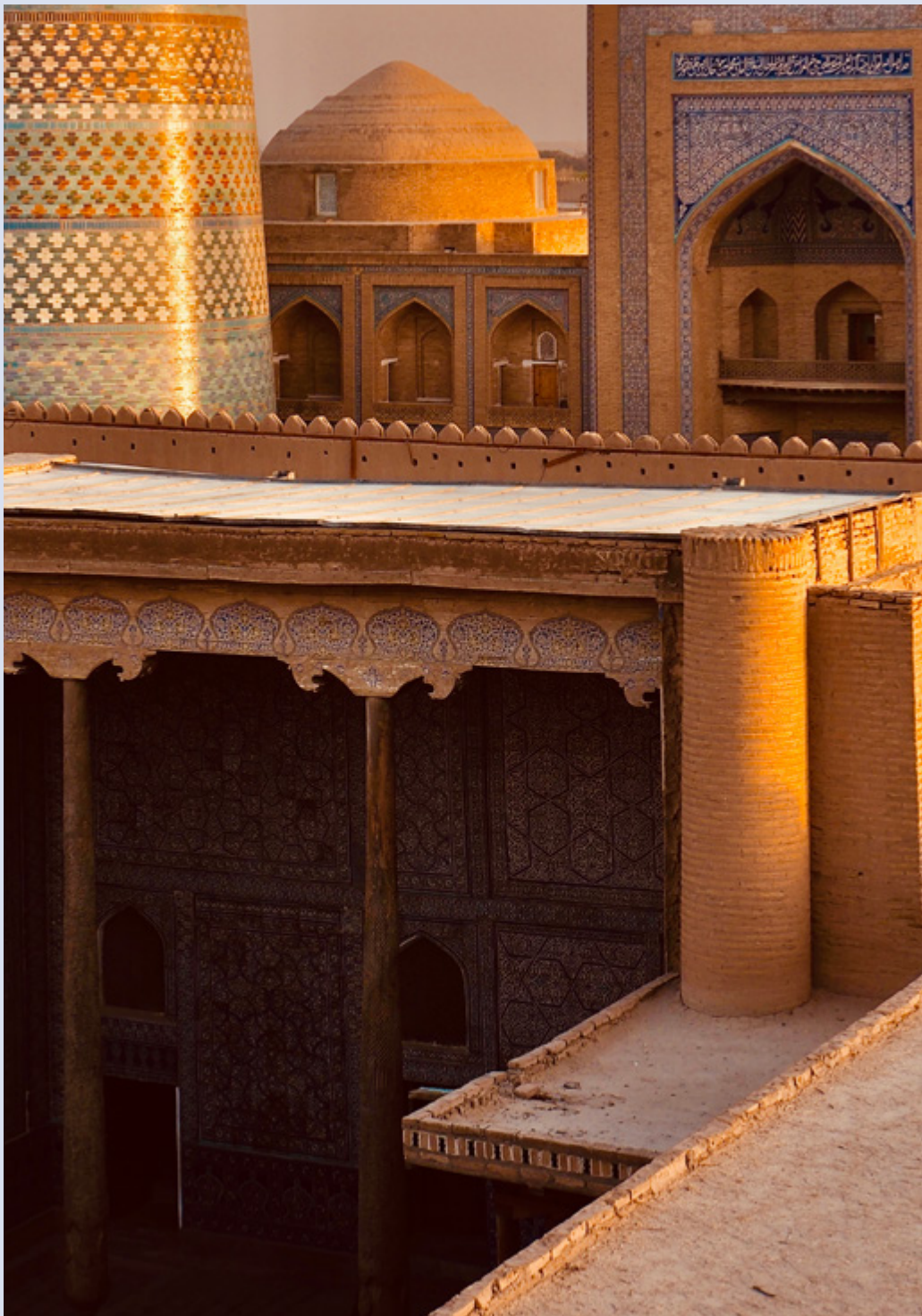
Farah Salem is a Chicago-based interdisciplinary artist and somatic art therapist whose practice spans photography, video, performance, sculpture, and installation. Informed by trauma-centered and somatic therapeutic frameworks, her work explores embodiment, ancestral healing, and the relationship between land and body as shared sites of memory and resilience. Drawing on personal and communal narratives, she investigates how trauma is held and transformed through the body, guided by natural and ancestral wisdom. Her current research focuses on migratory healing practices rooted in the Arabian Peninsula, reorienting toward belonging and embodied agency. Salem holds an MA in Art Therapy and Counseling from School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her artwork has been featured nationally and internationally at Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago), EXPO CHICAGO, American University Museum (Washington DC), Hyde Park Art Center (Chicago), United Photo Industries/Photoville Gallery (New York), Patel Brown (Toronto), Engage Gallery (Chicago), Bolivia Biennial, Paris Contemporary Art Fair(France), Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE), and Contemporary Art Platform (Kuwait). Farah completed the Radicle Studio Residency at Hyde Park Art Center, Hatch Residency at Chicago Artist Coalition, ACRE Artist Residency, Per|Form at Contemporary Art Platform (Kuwait) and Journey to Turkey Residency with Crossway Foundation (UK).



An amulet created as part of *Sound Bound Amulets: Protecting Wisdom Seekers*. A ritual by Farah Salem during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage*, Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.



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Farah Salem, *Sound-Bound Amulets: Protecting Wisdom Seekers*. A ritual during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Lin Liu.





SHEZAD DAWOOD (LONDON)

The Fourth Way

A movement meditation on September 2, 2025 | Khiva

On a cool, sunny early morning in Khiva, within the historic city walls that have stood for centuries, Shezad Dawood led a special movement session for the FIELD MEETING group. Set against the weathered architecture of the old fortifications, the exercise unfolded in direct relation to the surrounding site, where layered histories of passage, defense, and settlement formed an active spatial backdrop for collective practice. Drawing on early 20th-century philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff's *Fourth Way* principles alongside Daoist practices of sticking and moving, the session took shape as a non-verbal, somatic exploration of attention, rhythm, and relational awareness. Participants were guided through structured yet fluid sequences of movement that interrupted habitual patterns of posture and perception, encouraging heightened sensitivity to balance, timing, and proximity. Emphasis was placed on presence and collective coherence, as individuals continuously adjusted to one another in motion. The exercises functioned as a grounding entry point to the day's program, a transitional space balancing quiet mind, group exchange, and engagement with the pilgrimage sites on the agenda. The practice also echoed recurring concerns in Dawood's artistic work, where interconnectedness, altered states of perception, and embodied knowledge recur across film, installation, and collaborative formats.

Shezad Dawood, *The Fourth Way*. A movement meditation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Lin Liu. Previous page group photo by Farah Salem.

Shezad Dawood is a multidisciplinary British artist and Research Fellow in Experimental Media at the University of Westminster. Working across painting, textiles, sculpture, film, and digital media, Dawood explores narrative, history, and speculative futures through what he calls "world-building." His philosophically driven practice is rooted in collaboration and research, often engaging with communities to reflect on ecology, architecture, embodiment, and cross-cultural histories. Dawood's critically acclaimed exhibitions include *Leviathan* at Salisbury Cathedral, *Night in the Garden of Love* at WIELS Brussels and Aga Khan Museum Toronto, and *Integrations* at Barakat Contemporary, Seoul. He has participated in major biennials such as Venice, Sharjah (winning a Jury Prize in 2019), Gwangju, and Toronto, and his work is held in collections including the Guggenheim, Tate, LACMA, and The British Museum. Dawood's films have screened at MoMA, ICA, and CPH:DOX, among others. He lives and works in London.



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Exhibition view of works from Shezad Dawood's 2019–2020 series at the University of NonDualism, 2021.



LEEZA AHMADY (NEW YORK)

Encountering The Miraculous After G. I. Gurdjieff
An activation on September 2, 2025 | Khiva

On September 2, within the courtyard of a former 19th-century madrasa in Khiva, Leeza Ahmady enacted a participatory activation inspired by a film still from *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), directed by Peter Brook and based on the autobiographical writings of philosopher, mystic, and teacher G. I. Gurdjieff. The image, encountered during Ahmady's research for this iteration of FIELD MEETING, became the point of departure for the activation. In a spontaneous gesture, Ahmady invited FIELD MEETING participants to collectively inhabit a series of poses and movements drawn from the figures depicted in the still. Performed on a raised platform within the former madrasa's courtyard, the collective gestures transformed a cinematic image into a shared embodied experience, collapsing distinctions between image and action, and between past and present. The activation paid homage to Gurdjieff's esoteric teachings, which combined physical and mental exercises intended to cultivate attention and self-observation, interrupt habitual patterns of perception and behavior, and challenge the ego's reliance on automated thinking and action. Gurdjieff's late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travels across Afghanistan, Iran, the Caucasus, and Central Asia in search of spiritual knowledge also informed the framing of the piece. These concerns resonate with Ahmady's concept of Sufi Fluxus, which understands pilgrimage, embodied practice, spiritual play, and collective experience as pathways toward expanded forms of knowing. In this way, the historical image became a living tableau and a temporary field of shared consciousness, linking Gurdjieff's search for wisdom to FIELD MEETING's broader exploration of pilgrimage as a practice of encounter, awakening, and transformation.



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.



Leeza Ahmady, *Encountering The Miraculous After G. I. Gurdjieff*. An activation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Muhammad Amin-Khan Madrasah, Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.

Leeza Ahmady (New York) is a curator known for orchestrating large-scale programs that frame contemporary art as communal ritual and a portal for spiritual reflection. Her groundbreaking research on post-Soviet Central Asia's return to pre-Communist nomadic and Islamic identities—earned her an MA from Pratt Institute (2005) and led to presentations at major venues including the Venice Biennale, Istanbul Biennale, Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong, and dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel and Kabul (2005–2012). As Founding Director of Programs and Curator-at-Large at the Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts (FSA), Ahmady develops residencies, retreats, performances, and scholarly initiatives that explore the intersection of art and sacred transcendence. From 2005 to 2019, she led Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW) in New York, transforming it into a pioneering platform that amplified Asia-centric perspectives, particularly from underrepresented regions such as Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Her work has fostered collaborations among hundreds of artists and institutions across Asia, the U.S., and beyond, challenging conventional curatorial and geographic frameworks. She has contributed to major exhibitions and public programs at the Guggenheim, MoMA, Asia Society, The Met, The Drawing Center, Art Basel, Queens Museum, and many more. Since 2020, Ahmady has reshaped ACAW into the Asia Contemporary Art Forum, a mentorship-focused initiative supporting artists and curators, including over 75 recently displaced Afghan artists. Her writings appear in numerous publications, catalogues, and monographs.



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FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.





FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photos: previous page by Roya Khadjavi, this page, top by Parwana Haydar, bottom by Leeza Ahmady.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.





Sam Samiee, *Behold the Maps of Dreams*. Translations & recitals during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Khiva, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos: previous page by Farah Salem, this page by Parwana Haydar.





SAM SAMIEE (TEHRAN & AMSTERDAM)

Behold the Maps of Dreams

A series of site-responsive talks across Uzbekistan.

Throughout the FIELD MEETING: *Thinking Pilgrimage* journey across pilgrimage sites, museums, and road-based settings, Sam Samiee offered a series of performative activations—recitations of poetry, storytelling, songs, and literary mappings in response to the geographies, images, and texts encountered along the way. He consistently treated Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and broader Central Asia not as separate national histories, but as a shared Persianate–Turko–Islamic intellectual geography shaped by movement—trade routes, manuscript culture, Sufi lineages, and translation systems. Working through Persianate-Turkic speculative narratives, psychoanalysis, and ethical-aesthetic inquiry, his engagement offered a lens for reading across art historical frameworks and Islamic intellectual traditions, while revisiting and re-signifying epistemic lineages. Within this field, Manichaeism emerges as a premodern connective system across Eurasia, and Adab as a mode of conduct in which ethics and aesthetics are inseparable, grounding perception, behavior, and form within a unified sensorial and intellectual orientation. Sam’s contributions carried a palpable energy, attuning the group to the region’s deep aesthetic and intellectual legacies and their resonances across world civilizations. For many within the group, including members of the wider Central Asian diaspora, his passionate musings on religion, history, myth, philosophy, psychoanalysis, music, and literature channeled a way of reading living systems of thought that emphasized felt knowledge as a vital dimension of experience—one that is sensed, embodied, and lived as much as it is understood.

Sam Salehi Samiee is an Iranian painter and researcher working between the Netherlands and Iran. His expansive practice combines large-scale installation grounded in deep investigations into the history of painting, psychoanalysis, and Persian Adab (literature and ethics). Samiee’s work challenges formal and conceptual boundaries, blending intellectual inquiry with bold visual experimentation. He has received significant recognition, including the Royal Award for Modern Painting in 2016, and served as a jury member for the prize since 2020. In 2018, he was awarded the Wolvecamp Prize for Painting, which led to the publication of his monograph *Footnotes to Life*, later named a Best Dutch Book Design in 2021. His studio has received sustained support from the Mondriaan Fonds across multiple categories, including Young and Established Talent grants. Samiee’s ongoing project, *Nastaliq Might Be An Indian Boy*, continues his exploration of cross-cultural aesthetics and linguistic poetics.



Sam Samiee, *Behold the Maps of Dreams*. Translations & recitals during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Alongside the Amu Darya River on the road to Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos: previous page by Parwana Haydar, this page, left by Farah Salem, right by Roya Ghiasy.



Click to Watch Video 1



Click to Watch Video 2





In 2001, **Roya Ghiasy** entered the 49th Venice Biennale through a side door. Not as a visitor, but as a country. Without an official invitation, she created the first Afghan Pavilion titled *Welcome the Minister of Culture of Afghanistan*. The gesture itself became part of the work: a question aimed directly at the structures of visibility, legitimacy, and cultural power. Who decides what gets seen, and whose absence goes unnoticed? That instinct to look beneath what is presented and towards the mechanism shaping how we see continues through her practice. Ghiasy is a multidisciplinary visual artist based between New York and Delft, with a foundation in cultural anthropology. Moving across mediums, histories, and social environments, she approaches material, memory, and lived experiences with close attention to what everyday life quietly asks people to accept, repeat, and carry forward. Her work weaves personal memory with collective history, not to resolve the tension between them, but to remain inside it. She is drawn to the unnoticed ways power settles into behavior, ritual, memory, and perception before it is named, and to what subtly shapes the way we see the world before we recognize it.

ROYA GHIASY (NEW YORK & DELFT)

When the Sky Forgets its Name

A performance on the road from Khiva to Bukhara on September 3, 2025.

A performance inspired by Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, which took place in the desert landscape along the Oxus River during FIELD MEETING's pilgrimage journey by bus on the road between Khiva and Bukhara, also known as the Silk Road in Uzbekistan. Ghiasy presented participants with names and qualities of particular birds to contemplate as part of a set of open instructions for presence. Rather than functioning as identities, each "bird" operated as a prompt, an entry point into intuitive reflection. The work asked not for interpretation, but for direct presence and responsiveness. From this starting point, the performance unfolded as a gradual process of release. Participants moved through the landscape in shifting forms: walking, running, dancing, exercising, and stillness. Slowly, a quieter, open space emerged within body and mind, between individual and collective, where certainty softened and distinctions between seeker and sought began to blur. In this intimate space between the personal and the symbolic, the activity became internal rather than representational, unfolding as a passage rather than a story. In dialogue with Sufi cosmologies of transformation and unknowing, the work opened toward an understanding of selfhood and perception as fluid and continuously in flux, and toward the possibility of shedding what is usually held onto: names, roles, identities, fears, desires, and attachments.



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Roya Ghiasy, *When the Sky Forgets its Name*. A performance during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Alongside the Amu Darya River on the road to Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. All photos by Roya Ghiasy.





Deniz Gül is a Turkish conceptual artist and writer whose interdisciplinary practice explores language as form, text, sculpture, and space. Known for her novelistic exhibitions, Gül creates immersive environments that consider structure, consequence, and materiality. Working closely with artisans, she navigates the poetic and the concrete, often framing her works as processual acts unfolding over time. Her major projects include *5 Person Buffet* (2011), *B.I.M.A.B.K.R.* (2013), *Loyelow* (2016), and *Meydan* (2020), a culmination of a decade-long inquiry into text, action, and space. Gül has exhibited internationally at venues such as the Istanbul Biennial (2015), Sharjah Biennial (2017), Arter (Istanbul), Badischer Kunstverein (Karlsruhe), and Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle (Warsaw), among others. Her work has been featured in Frieze, Art in America, Financial Times, and Artnet News. Gül's latest novel was published by Norgunk, and she continues her research with an upcoming project titled *Scratch and Surface*.



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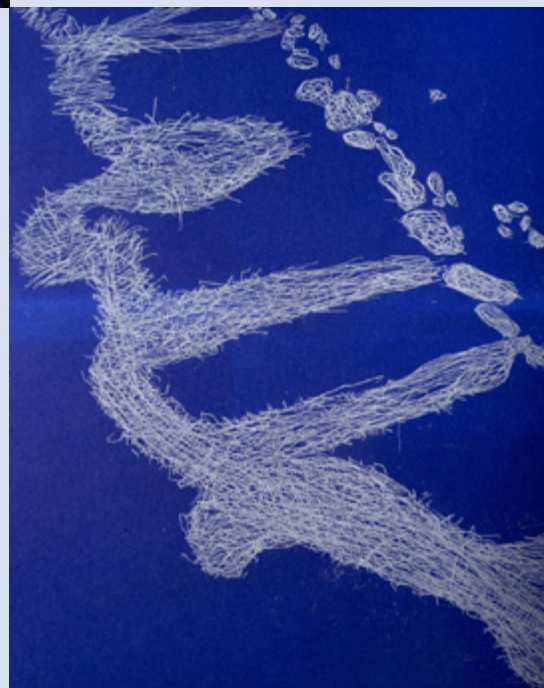
DENİZ GÜL (ISTANBUL & IZMIR)

there is life between us (+transparency)

A reading on the road from Khiva to Bukhara, on September 3, 2025

Inside a moving bus en route from Khiva to Bukhara, alongside eighteen FIELD MEETING participants, Istanbul-based artist and writer Deniz Gül recited passages from her book *there is life between us (+ transparency)* and shared traditional songs from Turkey. Taking place in transit between two historic Silk Road cities, the offering transformed the journey into a moving site of reflection, where song, text, and landscape intertwined. Gül's book unfolds through a series of fragmentary texts that examine transparency as a way of reconsidering perception, meaning, and human relations. Throughout her practice, words become a form of architecture, shaping how experience is understood and communicated. Within the context of Uzbekistan, a region shaped by centuries of cultural, religious, and linguistic transformation, marked by successive empires, migrations, and upheavals—Gül's words and songs evoked the ever-unfolding entangled histories between Central Asia and Turkey. Shared while traversing the desert road between Khiva and Bukhara, the offering resonated with FIELD MEETING's broader exploration of pilgrimage as a passage through both external and internal landscapes. Expression emerged as a spiritual vessel, revealing the unseen currents that continue to bind people, places, and histories across time.

Deniz Gül, *there is life between us (+transparency)*. A reading during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Road to Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.



Deniz Gül, *Line Exhausted by Line*, 2025. Etching and monotype on Hahnemühle 350 gsm paper.



Deniz Gül, *Highness*, 2019-2025. Refrigerator unit coated in brass, clear ice, display glass. Exhibition view.



Deniz Gül, *there is life bwtween us (+transparency)*. A reading during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Road to Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Farah Salem.







FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Previous pages, Ismail Samani Mausoleum, Bukhara. Photos by Parwana Haydar and Farah Salem. This page, bottom left and right: The Ark of Bukhara. Top left and right, various sites, photos by Farah Salem.









MEGHA RALAPATI (CHICAGO)

The Resonance of Hum: Voice as Portal

A meditation on chakras on September 5, 2025 | Bukhara

Gathered in the courtyard of a guest house reflecting the rich architectural traditions of Bukhara, FIELD MEETING participants joined Megha Ralapati for a guided meditation exploring breath, sound, and the chakra system. Beginning with breathwork and an embodied alignment of the chakras, the meditation focused on the relationship between the heart chakra (Anahata), associated with love and compassion, and the throat chakra (Vishuddha), the center of communication and self-expression. Reflecting on how emotions and experiences can become lodged in the throat when left unspoken, Ralapati invited participants to explore voice as a pathway through which inner experience, creativity, and intention move into the world. Connecting the throat chakra to the sacral chakra—the seat of desire and generative energy—she traced the subtle channel through which ideas, aspirations, and creative impulses take form and find expression. The meditation culminated in a collective vocal practice centered on the seed sound Hum, associated with the throat chakra and the element of ether. Working in pairs, participants exchanged sustained vocal tones while maintaining physical and visual connection, creating what Ralapati described as a “sound weave.” Through humming, breath, touch, and attentive listening, individual voices merged into waves of resonance that gradually expanded outward to encompass the entire group. Situated within a region shaped by successive spiritual traditions, from Buddhist and Hindu influences to the enduring legacy of Islamic mysticism and Sufi devotional practices—the collective hum became both a contemplative exercise and a living echo of long histories of sacred chanting, opening a space for deeper connection to one another and to the unseen dimensions of self-expression awakened through the pilgrimage.



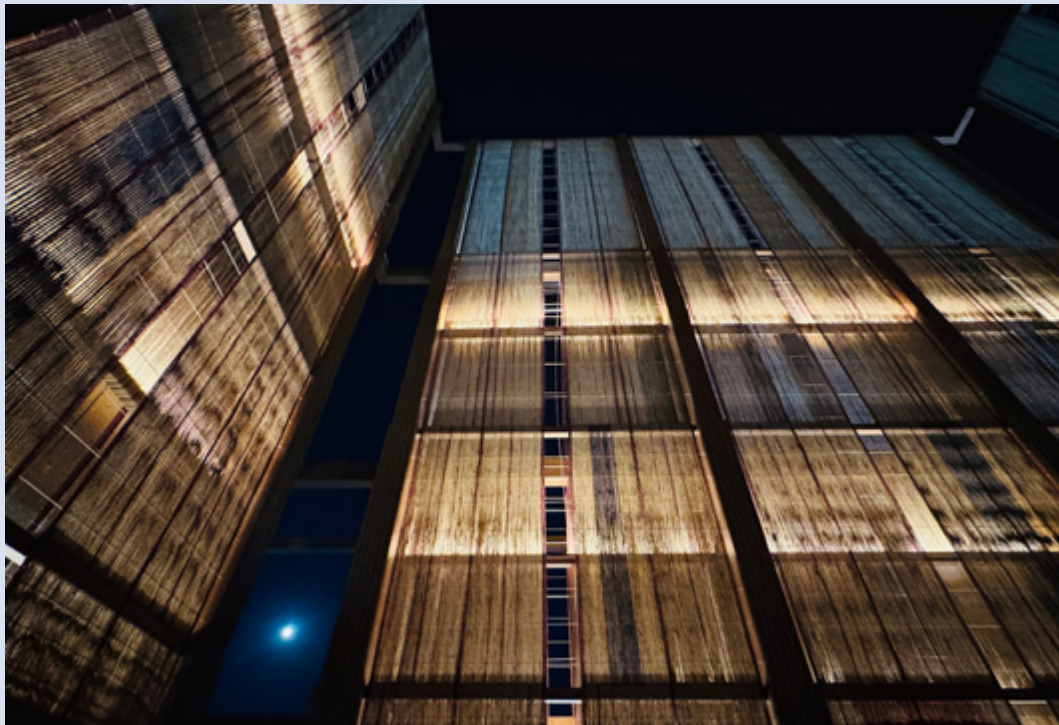
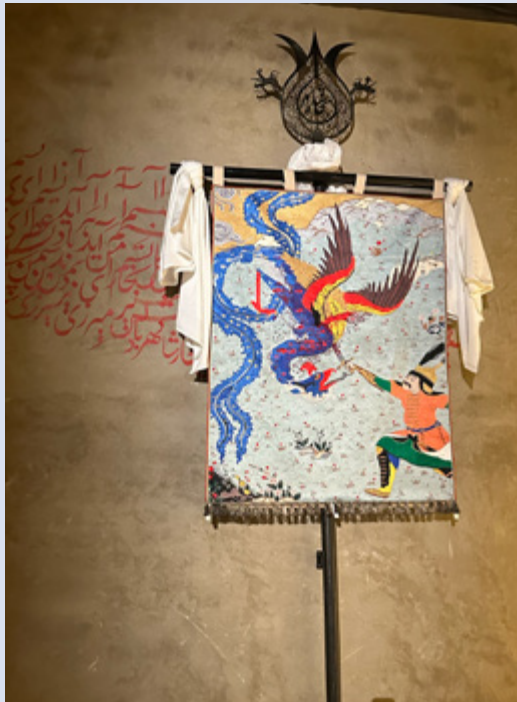
Megha Ralapati is an arts leader, curator, and writer specializing in artist mobility and cross-cultural exchange, dynamic program development, and collaborative projects. Megha developed and led the Jackman Goldwasser Residency at Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago for a decade, establishing partnerships with institutions such as the MacArthur Foundation, Asian Cultural Council, and Northwestern University to foster intentional international artistic exchanges. In this role, she initiated collaborations with community-driven organizations worldwide, including Project Row Houses (Houston), ARTPORT Tel Aviv, and the Center for Contemporary Art Lagos. Her career centers on creating dynamic arts programming that cultivates meaningful relationships between artists, ideas, and diverse audiences. Prior to Hyde Park, Megha was Director of Bose Pacia in New York, a gallery focusing on contemporary South Asian art. She holds an MA in Visual Culture from Goldsmiths and a BA in Art History and Anthropology from Columbia University. Megha serves on the boards of Artist Communities Alliance and Enrich Chicago.

Megha Ralapati, *The Resonance of Hum: Voice as Portal*. A meditation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos, left by Farah Salem, right by Leeza Ahmady. Previous pages, photos by Parwana Haydar and Lin Liu.



Megha Ralapati, *The Resonance of Hum: Voice as Portal*. A meditation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Deniz Gül.





Installations visited at the inaugural Bukhara Biennale during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Previous page and top right: Khadim Ali, *Simurgh*. A monumental two-part tapestry, created in close collaboration with Sanjar Nazarov and a group of anonymous Afghan embroiderers. Photos by Leeza Ahmady. This page, top left installation by Taus Makhacheva, photo by Leeza Ahmady. Bottom left, *AlMusalla* by EAST Architecture Studio, photo by Lin Liu.

Jazgul Madazimova installation: *A Thousand Prayers* encountered at the inaugural Bukhara Biennale during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Roya Ghiasy.



Baxtiyor Akhmedov and Delcy Morelos, *La Sombra Terrestre (The Earth's Shadow)* installation encountered at the inaugural Bukhara Biennale during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos, top and bottom left by Lin Liu, bottom right by Roya Ghiasy.



Antony Gormley in collaboration with Temur Jumaev, *Close*. An installation encountered at the inaugural Bukhara Biennale during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Lin Liu.



Rena Glickman, *Havdalah as threshold in Bukhara*. A ritual during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photo by Farah Salem.



RENA GLICKMAN (NEW YORK)

Havdalah as Threshold in Bukhara

A ritual performed on September 6, 2025 | Bukhara

Midway through the FIELD MEETING pilgrimage, on a Saturday evening in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, participants paused amid the bustling energy of the Bukhara Biennale opening festivities to gather and take part in the Jewish ritual of Havdalah, meaning "separation" or "distinction." Traditionally marking the transition from Shabbat into the workweek—a passage between sacred and ordinary time—the ritual offers a framework for reflecting on thresholds, transition, and change. Held in a city long shaped by Bukharan Jewish communities who have carried these traditions across centuries, the gathering resonated with Bukhara's layered cultural and spiritual histories. Participants lit a braided blue-and-white Havdalah candle (*Ner Havdalah*), two or more intertwined wicks forming a single flame that symbolizes the transition from sacred to ordinary time and the blessing over fire (*Borei Me'orei Ha'Esh*); listened to songs of prayer together, and passed fragrant spices among one another. Situated at a midpoint in the FIELD MEETING pilgrimage, the gathering became a practice of integration rather than closure. While Havdalah marks separation, it also offered the group a way to carry forward the insights, relationships, and heightened attentiveness formed together through the journey, allowing the boundary between the pilgrimage and everyday life to remain fluid.

Rena Glickman is a New York–based, Emmy award-winning freelance producer with a background in television, documentary, and media production. She brings decades of experience across major media companies, including roles at Lumina Films, Pre-Sliced Productions, Food Network, Atlas Media Corp. (for A&E), and True Entertainment (for Discovery). From 2005 to 2011, Glickman co-led Agró/Glickman STEP (1) Art Inc. as an independent art consultant and curatorial advisor, deepening her engagement with contemporary arts programming and interdisciplinary storytelling. With a B.A. in History from Bowdoin College, her work reflects a narrative-driven, research-informed approach. Glickman plays a key role in shaping and delivering complex visual stories to diverse audiences, with expertise spanning development, production, and post—focused on creating compelling, culturally resonant content.



[Click to Watch Video](#)



Rena Glickman, *Havdalah as Threshold in Bukhara*. A ritual during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Farah Salem.



Rena Glickman, *Havdalah as threshold in Bukhara*. A ritual during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.



Roya Ghiasy, *Untitled OY*, 2025. Site specific installation made with rice, carrots, raisins on a stone floor, during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025.





FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Farah Salem. Top right by Roya Ghiasy.





FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Previous page: pilgrimage sites in Bukhara. This page: a manuscript page from the Qur'an in Bukhara. Photos by Lin Liu.

KANG CHUNHUI (XINJIANG & BEIJING)

Landscape to Pigment

An artist talk on September 7, 2025 | Bukhara

Set within a working studio of a renowned local master artist in Bukhara, Kang Chunhui spoke in dialogue with a living tradition of hand-ground pigments, fine brushwork, and transmitted manuscript knowledge. The setting, where color is still prepared through slow, embodied craft, offered a resonant ground for her reflections on painting as material manifestation and process. Kang's practice can be described as the transformation of landscape into pigment and pigment into image. Working directly with geological materials gathered in Xinjiang, particularly the red sandstone of the Kizil Caves, she compounds her own pigments by hand. In this process, earth is broken down into minerals, then reconstituted as color, making each painting a record of place rather than its representation. Through the engaged questions of participants and a shared sense of awe and wonder, she described how the distinctive reds in her paintings emerge from the grinding of Kizil sandstone, often combined with cinnabar, cochineal, and other mineral and organic substances. These materials extend her chromatic language into a broader historical field, linking her practice to mural and manuscript traditions that once circulated across Central Asia along the Silk Road. In conversation with the Bukharan miniature painting context, Kang reflected on a shared commitment to labor-intensive pigment preparation, where color carries accumulated knowledge rather than surface effect. Both traditions, she suggested, treat painting as a slow transmission of material and memory, where earth, gesture, and image remain inseparable. Kang's talk ultimately framed painting as a "living archive," where each pigment retains the trace of its origin, and each work becomes a site in which landscape, history, and spiritual geography converge through material transformation.



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Kang Chunhui (b. 1982, Urumchi, Xinjiang) is a painter and multimedia artist whose work reinterprets early Central Asian Buddhist mural traditions in the contemporary sociocultural context of Xinjiang. She earned her MFA from Seoul National University in 2010, focusing on video art. A pivotal moment in her practice was her 2006 research trip to the Kizil Caves near Urumchi, where she studied syncretic Buddhist murals that reveal artistic influences from Gandhara, Persia, India, and Byzantine Europe. Her work bridges ancient aesthetic languages and present-day identity politics. Kang has exhibited at the Xinjiang Art Museum, Wuhan Art Museum, Jiangsu Museum of Modern Art, Peking University, and internationally at venues including the Royal Society of British Artists (London), Today Art Museum (Beijing), and University of Sydney Art Gallery. Her work is held in the collections of Wuhan Art Museum, Guardian Art Center, Taikang Group, and the Center for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney.



Kang Chunhui, 须弥 No.21 (对屏画) [Sumeru No.21 (diptych)], 2023, Ink and mineral pigment on paper.

Kang Chunhui, *Landscape to Pigment*. An artist talk during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.



Kang Chunhui, *Landscape to Pigment*. An artist talk during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Top video still by Parwana Haydar. Bottom photo by Lida Ahmady.



Thinking Pilgrimage | Studio visit with artist Toshev Davlat Buronovich, Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.

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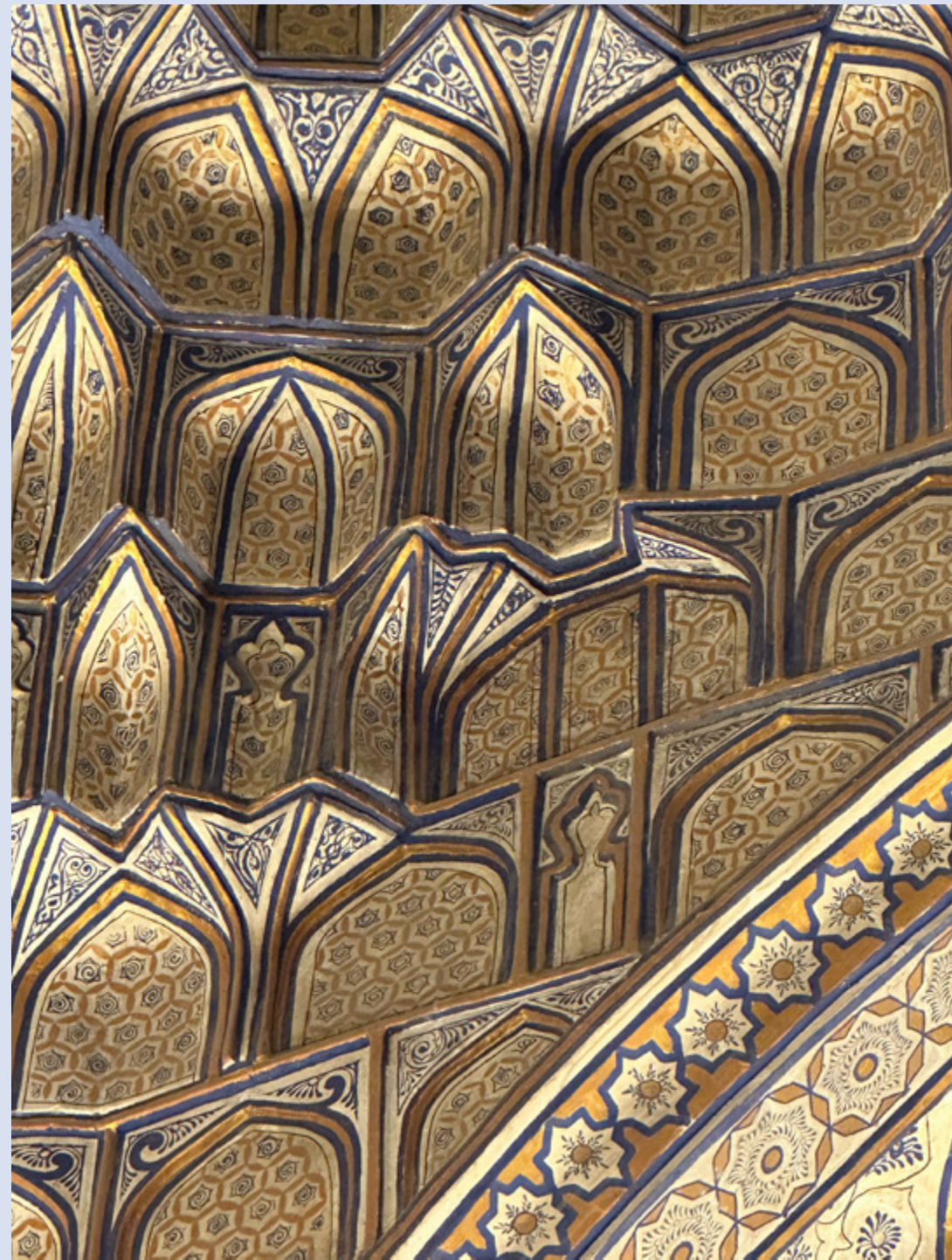
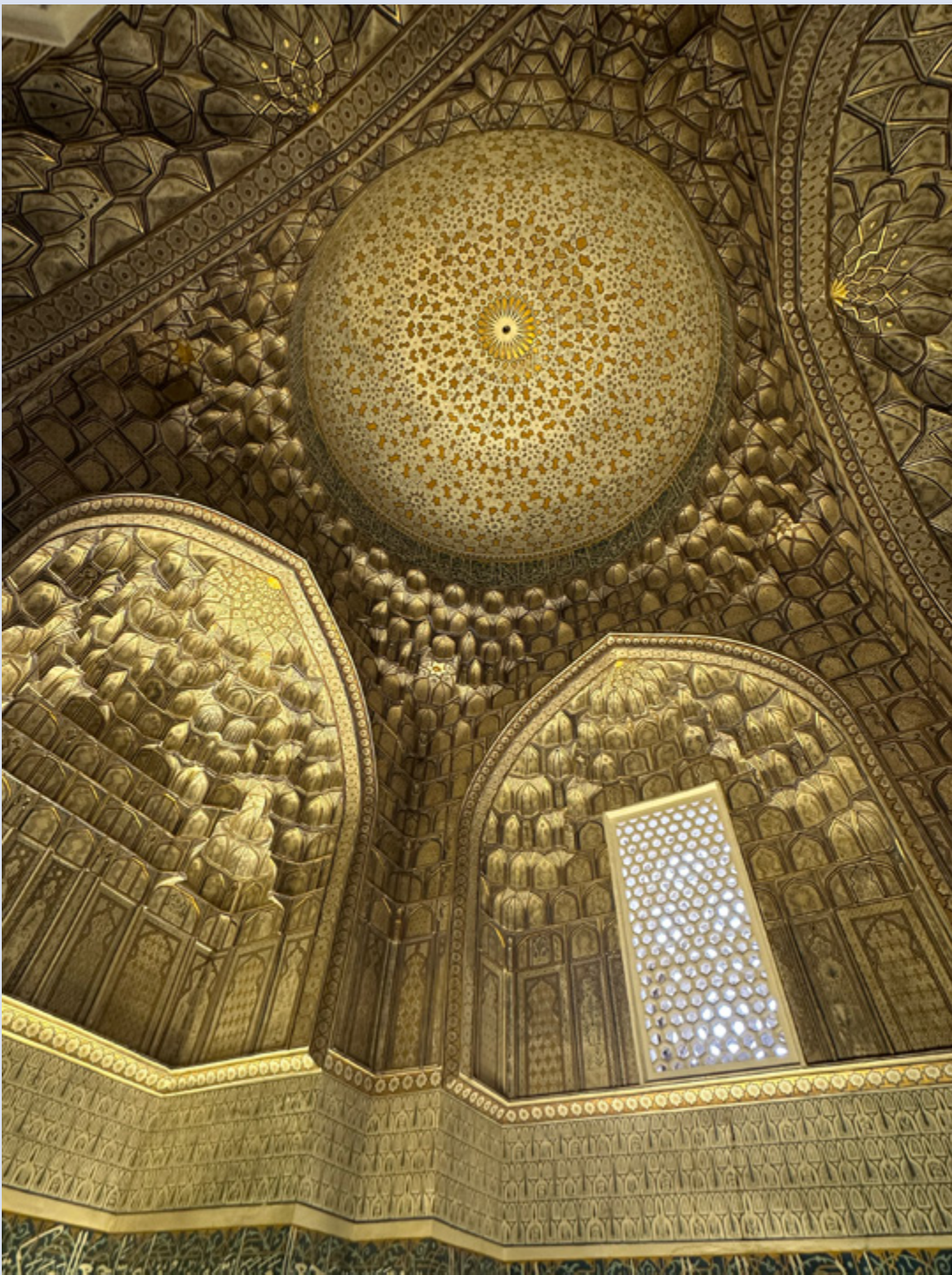
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FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photos, top and bottom left by Parwana Haydar, top and bottom right by Roya Ghiasy.

FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Parwana Haydar.
Previous pages: Kagan Train Station, Bukhara. Photo by Parwana Haydar. Registan Square, Samarkand. Photo by Farah Salem.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Leeza Ahmady.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos by Leeza Ahmady.



Moshtari Hilal is a visual artist, writer, and curator based in Hamburg and Berlin. With a background in Islamic Studies and Political Science, her practice is informed by gender and decolonial theory. She works across analog drawing, collage, writing, and research to explore personal narrative, memory, and power. Recurring motifs in her work include the prominent nose, black hair, and the maternal figure, approached through a visual language shaped by figurative line, visual noise, and low-resolution aesthetics. Hilal is co-founder of the AVAH (Afghan Visual Arts and History) collective and co-author of *Hierarchies of Solidarity* (2024) and *English in Berlin* (2022). Her debut book *Hässlichkeit* (Hanser, 2023) was awarded the Hamburg Literature Prize and named one of Germany's most beautiful books by Stiftung Buchkunst. She was a 2023 Villa Serpentara fellow and co-curated the CCC research symposium with nGbK Berlin.



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MOSHTARI HILAL (HAMBURG & BERLIN)

Notes on Corpses, Death, and Ugliness

A site-responsive talk on September 8, 2025 | Samarkand

Set within the vaulted mausoleum chambers of Shah-i-Zinda in Samarkand, one of Central Asia's most revered architectural ensembles of the Timurid era, Moshtari Hilal offered a talk reflecting on vulnerability, mortality, and the pressures of contemporary productivity. Known as "The King is Alive," Shah-i-Zinda is a pilgrimage site whose luminous mausoleums and intricate tilework form a living archive of Persianate artistic and spiritual traditions. More than a funerary complex, it holds an enduring presence as a place where architectural imagination and sacred time converge. Speaking from her own experience of illness, caregiving, and survival, Hilal examined how the figure of the corpse disrupts the modern insistence on usefulness and beauty, confronting us with the inevitability of bodily decline. Moving past conventional definitions of aesthetic beauty, and in dialogue with the experience of pilgrimage itself, she suggested that the ultimate form of love and connection is one that is unafraid of ugliness. She articulated a form of love grounded in radical acceptance, one that remains present even as the body fails, decays, or can no longer perform. In this encounter between site and speech, Shah-i-Zinda became not only a historical monument but a resonant site for thinking with fragility, impermanence, and care.



Moshtari Hilal, *Ugliness*, 2025. Photograph. Cover image for English translation of original text, *Hässlichkeit*.





Famous 7th-century *Afraasiab Murals*, also known as the *Paintings of the Ambassadors from Chaganian to king Varkhuman of Samarkand*. 648-651 CE, at Afrasiyab Museum in Samarkand. Visited during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. This page, photo by Lin Liu. Previous page, grounds of the Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.



Historical objects at the Afrasiab Museum, site visit in Samarkand during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photos by Leeza Ahmady.

LIDA AHMADY (NEW YORK)

The Subtlety of Self-Care

A therapeutic practice on September 9, 2025 | Samarkand

Throughout FIELD MEETING: *Thinking Pilgrimage*, Lida Ahmady supported the group through therapeutic practices addressing fatigue, recalibrating energy, and supporting the embodied unfolding of the journey across Uzbekistan. Her contributions included morning movement sessions and guided treatments along the route, including auricular acupressure (ear seed therapy), Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), qigong-based exercises, and acupuncture. These created moments of pause within the itinerary, allowing participants to restore physical balance while tending to the emotional and energetic dimensions of the pilgrimage. Working through traditional Chinese medicine and integrative somatic approaches, Ahmady's practice attended not only to physical strain but also to the subtle accumulations of tension, intention, and release that emerged over the course of the journey. Her interventions supported states of grounding, openness, and renewal. In this way, her presence functioned as a continuous field of care throughout the pilgrimage, holding space for restoration, attunement, and integration of experience.



Lida Ahmady is a veteran practitioner of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture, dedicated to helping people recognize the deeper patterns that foster balance between mind and body. Her holistic approach is informed by years of self-work and healing, allowing her to guide patients with warmth, empathy, and grounded wisdom. As a practitioner, coach, and healer, Lida integrates modern and ancient methodologies to address physical health concerns and the underlying emotional and energetic imbalances that contribute to them. She empowers her patients to make conscious lifestyle and mindset shifts, cultivating vitality, joy, and inner peace. Her deep commitment to Light and conscious living fuels her passion for helping others break free from negative cycles. She believes we are the architects of our own reality—how we feel about ourselves and our circumstances in every moment shapes our well-being. Born in Afghanistan, Lida immigrated to the United States at a young age, carrying with her the resilience and wisdom shaped by profound life experiences. These perspectives enrich her work, allowing her to connect with patients from all walks of life. In her practice, Lida goes beyond symptom relief, guiding patients toward a broader vision of wellness—one that nurtures long-term balance, fulfillment, and transformation.



Liu Lin is a cultural practitioner whose work centers on contemporary Chinese ink painting and art asset management, combining academic research, curatorial practice, and financial innovation. He serves as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the China Ink Painting Yearbook at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, and is a researcher at the China Modern and Contemporary Art Documentation Research Center. He has curated and co-curated exhibitions at major institutions including the National Museum of China, Wuhan Art Museum, University of Hong Kong Art Museum, Royal Academy of Arts (UK), University of Sydney Art Museum, and Guardian Art Center. In the field of art finance, Liu co-launched Yixiang Shijia (2020), China's first art consumption option trust, and initiated Wenrun Er Ze (2022), the nation's first art asset inheritance trust—advancing new models for cultural preservation and market engagement.



[Click to Watch Video](#)

Chinese Ink Painting 2020-2022 Yearbook publication series directed by Liu Lin.

LIN LIU (BEIJING)

For the Love of Tea

A tea offering on September 9, 2025 | Samarkand

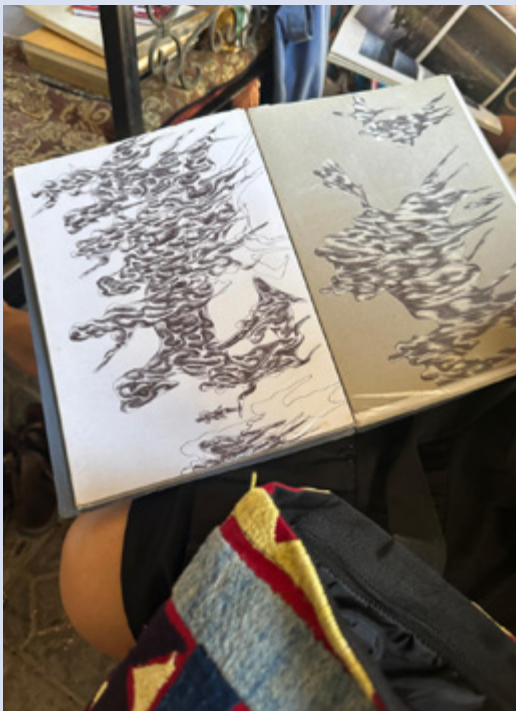
On a crisp morning in Samarkand, Lin Liu led an informal tea sharing session with FIELD MEETING participants. Framed by the city's long history as a place of encounter along the Silk Road, where tea and other practices traveled through Central Asia as part of everyday hospitality and pilgrimage routes. Lin Liu shared his expertise in Chinese tea culture by preparing and serving tea while explaining key practices, including brewing methods, water temperature, and the role of repeated infusions in shaping flavor, texture, and perception over time. He emphasized tea as a cultural practice grounded in technique, attention, and refinement through repetition. Participants were invited to observe and taste multiple infusions, noticing how subtle variations in preparation alter the character of the tea with each pour. Lin Liu also discussed how tea has historically functioned in China as both an everyday practice and a structured social ritual. Held outdoors in the early morning light of Samarkand, the gathering unfolded slowly, with each infusion marking a small shift in perception of the moment and of one another. In the quiet rhythm of pouring and tasting, tea became a shared pause, but also a continuation of the journey.



Lin Liu, *For the Love of Tea*. A tea offering during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Parwana Haydar.



Lin Liu, *For the Love of Tea*. A tea offering during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photos by Parwana Haydar.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Studio visit with artist and curator, Normurod Negmatov, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos, top by Leeza Ahmady, bottom by Parwana Haydar.

FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Studio visit with artist and curator, Normurod Negmatov, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photos, top and bottom left by Parwana Haydar, bottom right by Leeza Ahmady.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | The garden grounds of Art Station at Silk Road University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025, Photo by Parwana Haydar.



ROYA KHADJAVI (NEW YORK)

Patronage as Love

A reflection on September 9, 2025 | Samarkand

During FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage*, collector and art dealer Roya Khadjavi participated as an engaged listener and interlocutor, contributing generously to discussions throughout the journey. Invited in recognition of the vital role that patronage and philanthropy play in sustaining cultural life, she reflected on her own path from finance to motherhood, collecting, and exhibition-making during a gathering in the garden of a newly established art center in Samarkand. Her perspective echoed curator Leeza Ahmady's broader premise that the sacred sites, artistic traditions, and architectural wonders encountered across Central Asia were made possible through generations of patronage, spiritual leadership, craftsmanship, trade, and collective care. Speaking of collecting as an act of stewardship, generosity, and responsibility, Khadjavi emphasized that supporting artists means not only valuing their work but creating the conditions for their practices to thrive.

Roya Khadjavi, *Patronage as Love*. A reflection at the garden grounds of Art Station in Samarkand, during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Video still by Parwana Haydar.

Roya Khadjavi is a New York-based collector, art dealer, and independent curator known for her committed advocacy of emerging Iranian artists, both within Iran and throughout the diaspora. Since 2008, she has been instrumental in advancing Middle Eastern art initiatives, including serving on exhibition committees for major institutions such as the Guggenheim Museum and the Asia Society. Her deep engagement as a collector adds a layer of depth to her philanthropic endeavors, lending them both depth and continuity. Khadjavi is the co-founder of the Institute of International Education's Iran Opportunities Fund and currently serves as board president of Art in General, a leading New York nonprofit supporting experimental and socially engaged art practices. Her contributions to international arts and education have earned her the Women's Global Leadership Award from IIE and the Order of Academic Palms from the French Ministry of Education. She holds a B.A. from Wellesley College.



Mohsen Ahmadvand, *Ghajar* series, 2010. Ink on paper. At Rogue Space Chelsea in New York, 2014, co-curated by Roya Khadjavi.



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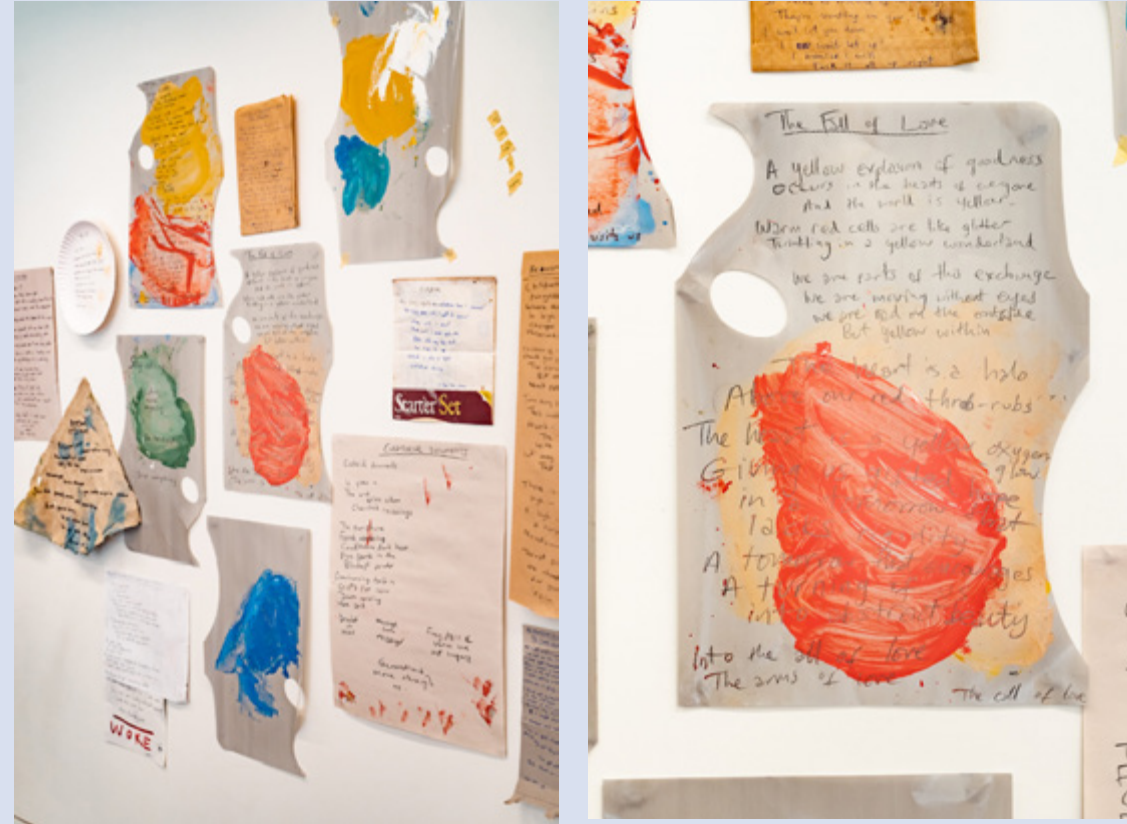
FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | The garden grounds of Art Station at Silk Road University, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photo by Parwana Haydar.

YUSUF MISDAQ (NEW YORK)

Palace Prayers

Poetry Recitations on September 9, 2025 | Samarkand

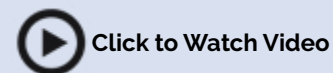
Throughout FIELD MEETING: *Thinking Pilgrimage*, Yusuf Misdaq shared impromptu recitations of poetry, personal writings, and *zikr* (Sufi remembrance). Often unfolding at shrines and places of spiritual significance, these informal offerings became a recurring thread woven through the journey. As an artist, poet, and musician, Misdaq was invited to participate in this edition of FIELD MEETING in part because of his longstanding engagement with Sufism and his living connection to spiritual lineages rooted in Central Asia. Throughout the pilgrimage, participants visited sites associated with Sufi masters whose teachings informed generations of seekers, including figures within Misdaq's own spiritual lineage. His relationship to these places, therefore, extended beyond historical or cultural interest; they formed part of a living tradition of spiritual transmission that continues to inform his life and work today. Grounded in decades of practice informed by his Afghan heritage, Misdaq's recitations and moments of *zikr* emphasized qualities that have drawn seekers to these sacred sites for centuries: devotion, humility, service, surrender of the ego, and the lifelong work of refining the heart. Central to his approach is a commitment to primal emotion and direct experience, privileging lived wisdom over overly intellectualized approaches to art, culture, and spirituality.



Yusuf Misdaq, *Ashtiname: Open Studio*, 2023. Poetry installation: paper, napkin, paper plate, cloth, paint, pen. As part of FSA's Artist-in-Residence Open Studio in Charleston.



Yusuf Misdaq (also known as Yoshi) is a British-Afghan multidisciplinary artist, writer, and musician currently based in Los Angeles. Known for his introspective and spiritual perspective, Misdaq works across poetry, music, film, sculpture, and performance—often under pseudonyms or anonymously. His practice is deeply rooted in his 12-year study of Sufism, the Islamic mystical tradition of his Afghan heritage, which informs his focus on unity, ego-sublimation, and spiritual refinement. In Los Angeles, Misdaq runs an independent art, meditation, and events center that serves as a hub for community gatherings and spiritual inquiry, where he leads *zikr* (Sufi remembrance) meditation workshops and interdisciplinary programs. He has released 10 books, 4 solo LPs, and numerous video and multimedia projects, earning acclaim from outlets including The WIRE, NPR, and the BBC. He holds an MA in Documentary Filmmaking from the University of London and has reported internationally, including from Libya with Democracy Now!. His teaching experience includes the University of Brighton, NYU's Islamic Center, and George Washington University.



Yusuf Misdaq, *Palace Prayers*. A poem recitation at the garden grounds of Art Station in Samarkand, during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Uzbekistan, 2025. Video still by Parwana Haydar.

LILA NAZEMIAN (NEW YORK & TEHRAN)

Love as Practice

A reflective conversation on September 10, 2025 | Samarkand

As one of the concluding offerings of FIELD MEETING Take 7, held in the garden of the Ulugh Beg Observatory Museum in Samarkand, curator Lila Nazemian offered a personal reflection on the pursuit of love as both an inward path and a way of being in relation to others. Drawing from her experiences as a curator where exhibition-making often unfolds through sustained acts of listening, care, and exchange—as well as her own psychological and emotional experiences, she reflected on the many forms love takes across family, friendship, sibling bonds, artistic collaboration, and romantic partnership. Her sincerity and openness created a space in which participants were moved to share their own reflections on love. Framed as an ongoing inquiry into the science, beauty, and practice of love, the conversation lingered in the paradoxes of intimacy, where devotion and desire, vulnerability and self-protection, often reveal the intricate architecture of the ego. Amid a site devoted to mapping the heavens and the movements of celestial bodies, the gathering turned toward the equally complex constellations of the human heart.



Levon Kafafian, Fatemeh Kazemi, Levani; Exhibition view of *The Bride Has Gone to Pick Flowers*, 2025. Curated by Lila Nazemian for CUE Art Foundation. Photo by Leo Ng.



Lila Nazemian is a New York-based independent curator and Programs Director at ArteEast, whose practice focuses on reimagining histories from the Middle East, Southwest Asia, North Africa (SWANA), and Central Asia to challenge narrative revisionism and collective amnesia. Recent projects include *The Bride Has Gone to Pick Flowers* at CUE Art Foundation (2025), *Conjuring Flames* at Arsenal Contemporary (2023), and *Now That We Have Established A Common Ground* as part of Protocinema's Emerging Curator Series (2022). She also co-directs Brooklyn's Transmitter gallery and teaches part-time at NYU Steinhardt's Department of Art & Art Professions. Nazemian holds a BA in History from Scripps College and an MA in Near Eastern Studies from NYU, and she has participated in programs such as the QAYYEM Curatorial Fellowship (2019), the Interdisciplinary Art and Theory Program (2018–2019), and the Independent Curators International Curatorial Intensive in Bangkok (2018).

Lila Nazemian, *Love as Practice*. A reflective conversation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Parwana Haydar.

PARWANA HAYDAR (LONDON)

House of History

A screening & discussion September 11, 2025 | Samarkand,

Toward the end of the FIELD MEETING: *Thinking Pilgrimage* journey in Samarkand, participants gathered for a shared breakfast and screening of *House of History*, a film by Parwana Haydar, one of the youngest artists participating in the pilgrimage. Given the nature of the program as a traveling caravan, participants were invited to view the film individually on their phones and computers before coming together over a traditional Uzbek breakfast to discuss the work as a group. The film's explorations of memory, inheritance, displacement, and belonging resonated with many of the themes that had surfaced throughout the pilgrimage. Its inquiries into history and identity found echoes in the objects, architecture, artworks, and historical sites encountered across Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent, creating unexpected connections between the work, the region, and the collective experience of the journey. The screening was followed by a discussion in which Haydar received thoughtful feedback from fellow artists and curators on the film's aesthetic, process, and emotional registers. Within the context of a journey grounded in spiritual inquiry and artistic practice, the exchange highlighted the importance of mentorship, intergenerational dialogue, and peer-to-peer learning, offering a reminder that knowledge is carried not only through places and histories, but also through the generosity of shared experience.



Parwana Haydar, *House of History*. A screening and discussion during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Farah Salem.



Parwana Haydar, *House of history* 2025. Film still.

Parwana Haydar is a London-based artist, and co-curator for AVAH (Afghan Visual Arts and History) Collective, an independent research collective and multimedia platform for artists from Afghanistan and its diaspora. Working primarily in film and moving image, Haydar explores themes such as memory, family, archives and displacement. Through her collaboration with AVAH, she has curated talks and workshops with institutions such as Void Gallery in Derry, Independent Cinema Office at the British Film Institute and HKW in Berlin. She is currently working with AVAH toward the publication of their seminal text: *On Collecting*—an innovative, unconventional archive documentation comprising family photos, textiles, household objects, and more—narrating personal, intimate, inclusive and peripheral stories of collective Afghan histories. Currently an artist-in-residence at Somerset House, her works have been shown at London Film Festival, Haus Coburg City Gallery, Eigenheim Gallery, Interfilm Festival and Fotofestival.



[Click to Watch Video](#)



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Hazrat-Prophet Daoud Cave pilgrimage site, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photo by Parwana Haydar.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Hazrat-Prophet Daoud Cave pilgrimage site, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photos, above by Lin Liu, right by Parwana Haydar.





ZOLAYKHA SHERZAD (NEW YORK & KABUL)

The Tapestry of the Inner Path

A collective drawing exercise on September 10, 2025 | Samarkand

During the *Thinking Pilgrimage* in Uzbekistan, artist Zolaykha Sherzad offered a quietly profound activation, inviting participants to translate their inner journeys into form. Each of us was asked to draw a symbol, word, or image that embodied what pilgrimage meant personally—an act of reflection moving beyond language and into intuition. The activation unfolded in resonance with the surrounding sacred landscape. The Hazrat Daud Cave, one of Uzbekistan's most evocative pilgrimage sites located in the hills south of Samarkand, is associated with the prophet David (Daud in Islamic tradition). The cave draws visitors seeking blessing, reflection, and a physical encounter with devotion—an atmosphere that subtly informed the contemplative nature of the exercise. These individual expressions were then gathered into a collective tapestry—a living archive of shared yet deeply personal narratives. The drawings will be brought to life through embroidery by her team at Zarif Design in Kabul, where traditional Afghan craftsmanship meets contemporary storytelling. In this gesture, the ephemeral becomes enduring: a convergence of voices, stitched across distance and culture, carrying the *ruh* (the spirit) of the pilgrimage forward.

Zolaykha Sherzad, *The Tapestry of the Inner Path*. A drawing activation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Hazrat-Prophet Daoud Cave pilgrimage site, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.

Zolaykha Sherzad is an Afghan-born designer and architect working at the intersection of cultural preservation and contemporary fashion. She is the director of the renowned Zarif Design, a socially engaged fashion label that revives Afghan textile traditions through modern design, working with a group of 50 artisans in Kabul. Forced to flee Kabul at age 10, she became a political refugee in Switzerland and later earned a degree in architecture from the University of Lausanne in 1994. Sherzad has worked as an architect in Switzerland, Japan, and New York, and taught at Pratt Institute's School of Architecture (1998 to 2004). In 2014, she was named Afghanistan's Official Haute Couture Representative by the World Fashion Week Board. Sherzad's sculptural installations like *Hawa-ye Azad* (Open Air), has been showcased at major international venues such as the 2009 Venice Biennale, *DOCUMENTA 13* in Kassel, and exhibitions in Paris and Marseille. Recent highlights include the Atelier Jolie Residency in New York (March–April 2025) focused on sustainable fashion, *Afghanistan, Tisser l'horizon à l'infini* in Arles (2023–2024), and *Art of the Thread* in Venice (September 2024), all underscoring her commitment to contemporary design while reimagining Afghan heritage on a global stage.



Zolaykha Sherzad, *Peace Coat*, 2022. Embroidery in progress at the Zarif Atelier, Kabul, Afghanistan.



Zolaykha Sherzad, *The Tapestry of the Inner Path*. A drawing exercise during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Hazrat-Prophet Daoud Cave pilgrimage site, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo top by Lin Liu. Bottom left: embroidery work in progress by Members of the Zarif Atelier in Kabul, Afghanistan based on drawings created by FIELD MEETING participants during The Tapestry of the Inner Path activation.



Zolaykha Sherzad, *The Tapestry of the Inner Path*. A drawing activation during FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Hazrat-Prophet Daoud Cave pilgrimage site, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.



FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Hazrat-Prophet Daoud Cave pilgrimage site, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 2025.
Photos by Roya Ghiasy.





FIELD MEETING Take 7: *Thinking Pilgrimage* | Farewell dinner in Tashkent. Photo by Leeza Ahmady.
 Following 2 pages: Farewell scenes in Samarkand. Photos by various FIELD MEETING participants.
 Following 3 pages: Pilgrimage sites in Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand. Photos by Lin Liu.











Asia Contemporary Art Forum (ACAF), formerly **Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW)** supports artists and cultural practitioners from Asia and its diasporas through initiatives and gatherings that nurture peer-to-peer mentorship, creative exchange, and cross-institutional partnerships. Rooted in lived experience and engaging histories and knowledge traditions from around the world, ACAF cultivates deeper, more nuanced understandings of Asia's cultural, spiritual, and geographic multiplicity.

ACAF evolved from **Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW)**, founded in New York in 2001 to increase the visibility of contemporary art from Asia. Through annual collaborations among leading museums, galleries, and cultural institutions in New York and across Asia, ACWW became a major U.S. platform for established and emerging artists, exhibitions, and critical dialogue from across the continent, with particular attention to historically underrepresented regions, including Central, South, and Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Since 2019, ACAF has been expanding this legacy through an evolving program of year-round initiatives.

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