

## Centre for Contemporary Arts Tashkent launches its first-year programme, positioning Uzbekistan as a new centre for global contemporary culture

- **A landmark for Central Asia:** *The first permanent institution for contemporary art and research in the region, spearheaded by the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation.*
- **Historic architecture, reimagined:** *Housed in a 1912 industrial building, the Centre is being transformed by acclaimed French architects Studio KO.*
- **A globally engaged programme:** *The inaugural year introduces residencies, youth initiatives, professional development, and interdisciplinary public programming.*
- **Looking ahead to 2026:** *The inaugural exhibition Hikmah will bring together major international and Uzbek artists, with the building opening fully to the public in March 2026.*



Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent (CCA). View on the Diesel station façade.  
Render © Studio KO. Courtesy of the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF).

**3 September 2025** – The Centre for Contemporary Arts Tashkent (CCA), led by the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF) and its chairperson

Gayane Umerova, opens a bold new chapter for contemporary art in Central Asia with the launch of its first-year programme and announcement of its inaugural exhibition, *Hikmah*. The CCA will be the first institution of its kind in Central Asia as a permanent centre for contemporary art, research, and community engagement in the heart of historic Tashkent, helmed by Artistic Director and Chief Curator, Dr Sara Raza.

Opening to the public in March 2026, the CCA's inaugural exhibition *Hikmah*, Uzbek for "wisdom", will bring together major contemporary art voices including Ali Cherri, Kimsooja, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Nari Ward, Muhannad Shono, and Tarik Kiswanson, alongside Uzbek and Karakalpak artists Shokhrukh Rakhimov, Vladimir Pan, Daribay Saipov, and Bakhtiyar Saipov.

Featuring recent works and new commissions, the show will explore wisdom across cultures and materials. Highlights include Nadia Kaabi-Linke's *Flying Carpets*, a major loan from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, a new commission by Muhannad Shono, Kimsooja's participatory piece *Archive of Mind*, a new installation by seventh-generation Uzbek ceramicist Shokhrukh Rakhimov, and a site-specific work by Nari Ward drawing on local craft traditions. A complementary music programme will span Sufi chants to electronic genres, exploring ancient and contemporary manifestations of *hikmah* in sound.

In 2026, the CCA will launch two major new annual initiatives: the multidisciplinary Navruz Gala and the citywide Tashkent Public Art Festival, as well as two landmark exhibitions that anchor the CCA's calendar and reinforce its long-term commitment to artist-driven, collaborative, and globally relevant cultural production.

**Gayane Umerova, Chairperson of the ACDF**, says: "The CCA is the realisation of a long-term vision to firmly position Uzbekistan at the heart of global cultural dialogue. Since 2019, my team and I have been laying the foundations for a regional centre of excellence: a place for artistic research, experimentation, and exchange that honours our heritage while embracing new ideas. Last year, we launched the CCA Artist Residencies, marking a milestone in ACDF's mission to preserve, promote and nourish Uzbekistan's cultural landscape. Now, with the launch of the Centre, that vision comes to life through a pioneering programme that connects contemporary creativity with cultural legacy on an international stage."

Through a vibrant mix of exhibitions, residencies, and interdisciplinary public programming, the CCA fosters new connections between Uzbekistan and the wider world. Its year-round calendar positions the Centre as a new force in global cultural discourse: spanning visual art, architecture, design, performance, music, and film;

sparking dialogue, supporting artists, and opening access to cultural production for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. These initiatives complement the Centre's ongoing Artist Residencies, launched in October 2024, workshops and labs, offering artists and creatives the opportunity to research, develop and present new work in Tashkent for the first time.



Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent (CCA). View of the Diesel station exhibition space.  
Render © Studio KO. Courtesy of the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF).

### **Upcoming public programming 2025/26**

From **4 September 2025**, audiences will encounter new initiatives and residents shaping the Centre's early months.

**CCA Artist Residencies:** Since October 2024, the residency programme has welcomed both Uzbek and international artists, designers, and researchers including Dutch-Moroccan designer Mohamed Benchellal and Saudi artist Muhannad Shono.

The September 2025 cohort includes:

- **Sami El-Enany** – British–Egyptian sound artist working across modern classical, electronica, and found sound.
- **Paria Farzaneh** – British–Iranian fashion designer shortlisted for the prestigious LVMH Prize.
- **Dr Vivek Gupta** – London-based art historian researching Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian Subcontinent. His residency will inform a future CCA exhibition.

- **Jamila Sadat** – Afghan miniature painter and *tazhib* specialist celebrated for intricate interpretations of Afghan heritage.
- **Dishon Yuldash** – Bangkok-based Uzbek mixed media artist known for her sculptural works.

**Clubistan:** Launching on **10 September 2025**, Clubistan is the CCA’s new youth-led programme for 16–21-year-olds, opening with a talk by fashion designer Paria Farzaneh and a music set by Timur Azim, the CCA’s music curator. The bi-monthly series offers workshops and peer-led projects - from upcycling and zine making to film and podcasts - designed to inspire creativity and build pathways into the cultural sector.

**CCA Radio:** Launching on **17 September 2025**, CCA Radio is a bi-weekly sonic experience curated by Timur Azim, which includes DJ sets, instrumental performances, and hybrid formats capturing the sounds of *mahallahs* and bazaars. The programme will also showcase soundtracks related to future exhibitions and guest sets by both local and international artists from the Global Majority World.

**Professional development programme:** Launching this winter, Dr. Sara Raza will lead an intensive professional development programme for emerging and mid-career arts professionals. Featuring workshops, site visits, and talks by industry experts, the programme will cover curating, collecting, art law, publishing, cultural diplomacy, and more - linking global practices with local and digital contexts while offering participants insider access to institutions and public sites.

**Dr Sara Raza, Artistic Director and Chief Curator of the CCA**, says: “The CCA’s inaugural programme reflects a commitment to curating across geographies, generations and disciplines, bringing together pioneering voices from Uzbekistan, Central Asia and beyond. From concept-driven exhibitions and artist-led gatherings to monographs, experimental public art, film and performance, the programme is rooted in critical inquiry, cultural resonance, and collective imagination. At its heart, the Centre is a space for dialogue: between artists and audiences, local histories and global ideas, where the past becomes a catalyst for future possibilities.”

Dr Sara Raza brings a transnational curatorial approach shaped by two decades of scholarship and cultural practice across Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and their diasporas. Her methodology is grounded in Tashkent’s legacy as a 20th-century crossroads for Global Majority thinkers - from W.E.B. Du Bois to Audre Lorde - and in the spirit of the Tashkent Festival for Asian, African, and Latin American Cinema (1968–1988), which inspires its globally engaged, future-facing programme. She will



work closely with a team of local experts and staff, ensuring that the Centre is deeply rooted in the knowledge and participation of the community.



Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent (CCA).

From left to right: Service building brick façade under renovation. Closeup of the renovated brick façade.

Photos © BCDF Studio. Courtesy of the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF).

Originally built in 1912 as a diesel station and depot for Tashkent's first tram line, the structure that now houses the Centre, is undergoing a careful transformation, led by Gayane Umerova, in collaboration with acclaimed French architecture firm Studio KO. Designed by Wilhelm Heinzelmann - the architect behind iconic Tashkent landmarks such as the Palace of Grand Duke Romanov and the Treasury Chamber - the building remains a powerful testament to the city's architectural heritage. After serving for decades as part of Tashkent's electricity network, it was entrusted to the Foundation in 2019 as part of its long-term cultural development strategy.

**Studio KO architects Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty explain:** "In designing the Centre for Contemporary Arts, we sought to honour the memory of a powerful industrial building while giving it a new poetic life. Our work with traditional Uzbek materials and light-filtering motifs allowed us to create a space that is both contemplative and open; one that can evolve alongside the diverse programmes and ideas it will host. The architecture is intended as a vessel for the spirit of contemporary art in Central Asia."

– ENDS –

### Artists and artworks featured in *Hikmah* include:

- **Nadia Kaabi-Linke's** (b. 1978, Tunis, Tunisia; lives and works in Berlin, Germany) *Flying Carpets*, a major loan from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Her works explore migration and the invisible histories underlying place and identity.
- **Muhannad Shono** (b. 1977, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; lives and works in Riyadh), whose practice engages with themes of inner transformation and light, will debut new commissions developed through the CCA's residency programme.
- South Korean artist **Kimsooja's** ((b. 1957, Daegu, South Korea. Lives and works in Seoul, South Korea) *Archive of Mind* will invite audiences into a contemplative space. The participatory work, in which visitors hand-roll spheres of local clay, gradually forms a collective, tactile archive of presence.
- Tashkent-based ceramist **Shokhrukh Rahkimov** (b. 2002, Tashkent, Uzbekistan; lives and works in Tashkent), a seventh-generation potter, will present a new installation inspired by the 13th-century Khiva-born Sufi philosopher Najm al-Din Kubra and his illuminationist theories, exploring the metaphysics of light and the wisdom of the soul.
- A site-specific installation produced by New York-based, Jamaica-born artist **Nari Ward** (b. 1963 St. Andrew, Jamaica; lives and works in New York, USA) and created in dialogue with local craft traditions, draws on his longstanding interest in found materials and copper patina that resonates with the Centre's industrial past as the building that once powered Tashkent.
- **Ali Cherri** (b. 1976, Beirut, Lebanon; lives and works in Beirut and Paris, France) transforms archaeological fragments and found artifacts into hybrid sculptures - melding elements like clay, bronze, masks, and bones to challenge historical narratives.
- **Tarik Kiswanson's** (b. 1986, Halmstad, Sweden; lives and works in Paris, France) deeply interdisciplinary work - spanning sculpture, writing, video, performance, sound, and drawing - dwells in themes of rootlessness, metamorphosis, memory, and renewal, shaped by his family's diaspora and his own condition of living between cultures.
- Karalpak artists **Vladimir Pan** (b.1956), **Daribay Saipov** (b.1961) and **Bakhtiyar Saipov** (b.1956) will also show works in the exhibition.

Press kit, including imagery, is available [HERE](#).

The Centre for Contemporary Arts website: <https://www.ccat.uz>

The Centre for Contemporary Arts Instagram: [@cca\\_tashkent](https://www.instagram.com/cca_tashkent)

The Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation website:

<https://www.acdf.uz/>

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **About the Centre for Contemporary Arts**

The Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent (CCA) is a new initiative by the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF), launched as part of the country's wider investment in arts and culture. Launching in September 2025, the CCA is dedicated to contemporary art, dialogue, and public engagement, with a year-round programme of exhibitions, residencies, and interdisciplinary events. Located in the heart of Old Tashkent in a 1912 building that once housed a tram depot and diesel station and has since been thoughtfully transformed by world-renowned French architecture firm Studio KO, the Centre draws on the city's legacy as a historic crossroads for cultural exchange, connecting local perspectives with global ideas. Through its work, the CCA aims to support creative practice, foster collaboration, and expand access to contemporary culture in Uzbekistan and beyond.

### **About the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation**

The Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF) preserves, promotes and nurtures Uzbekistan's heritage, arts and culture. Positioned at the forefront of Uzbekistan's cultural development, ACDF is committed to fostering the cultural ecosystem of the country, driving the creative economy, and providing opportunities for practitioners on a local, regional and global stage. ACDF believes that culture and heritage are vital in shaping society, uniting communities, bridging generations, and facilitating cross-cultural conversations.

ACDF has successfully led the fourth edition of the World Conference on Creative Economy (WCCE) (2-4 October 2024) in Tashkent and the inaugural Aral Culture Summit (4-6 April 2025) in Nukus, Karakalpakstan. The Foundation currently spearheads Uzbekistan's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan (April – October 2025), the revitalisation of the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent, the construction of the new National Museum of Uzbekistan designed by Tadao Ando, and the restoration and partial reconstruction of the Palace of the Grand Duke of Romanov.

ACDF has also launched “Tashkent Modernism XX/XXI”, an ongoing research project documenting and protecting the city's modernist architecture, highlighted by two significant publications in collaboration with Rizzoli New York (published in November 2024) and Lars Müller Publishers (published in May 2025). In Bukhara, ACDF is launching the first Bukhara Biennial in September 2025. In Samarkand, ACDF will host the forthcoming 43rd session of the UNESCO General Conference (30 October - 13 November 2025).

To date, ACDF has reached over 3.5 million visitors through landmark exhibitions across 17 countries: from the Louvre and Arab World Institute in Paris to the Uffizi in Florence, the British Museum in London, and the Palace Museum in Beijing. With projects presented across Europe, Asia, and the Gulf, and collaborations with over 40 international museums and cultural institutions, the Foundation is amplifying Uzbek voices and stories in the world's most influential cultural arenas.

### **About Gayane Umerova**

Gayane Umerova is dedicated to developing the culture sector in Uzbekistan.

Head of the Department of Creative Economy and Tourism of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Chairperson of the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF), Gayane Umerova is at the helm of building Uzbekistan's cultural infrastructure. Her efforts are bringing the nation's art, artists, and cultural heritage into the global spotlight. Currently, she is overseeing the restoration and development of the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent, poised to become a new cultural hub for the region, and is the commissioner of the Bukhara Biennial (5 September - 20 November 2025). She has spearheaded the inaugural Aral Culture Summit (April 4-6, 2025); is driving the construction of the new Uzbekistan National Museum designed by Tadao Ando and is leading the forthcoming 43rd session of the UNESCO General Conference that will take place in Samarkand on 30 October - 13 November 2025. She is the commissioner for the Uzbekistan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale Arte and Architettura since 2021 as well as for Uzbekistan's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, among other significant projects.

Committed to boosting Uzbekistan's prominence on the international culture scene, Umerova serves as the Chairperson of the National Commission of Uzbekistan on UNESCO Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers and in April 2025 has been awarded France's Order of Arts and Literature. Her public service commitment is evident in her



dedication to creating opportunities for young people in Uzbekistan's cultural sector and fostering a cultural economy that unites communities and generations.

### **About Dr Sara Raza**

Dr Sara Raza is an award-winning curator and writer specializing in global art and visual cultures from postcolonial and post-Soviet perspectives. She is the author of *Punk Orientalism: The Art of Rebellion* (Black Dog Press, London, 2022). She has curated exhibitions and projects for international museums, biennials, and festivals, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), Galleria d'Arte Moderna (Milan), Rubin Museum of Art (New York), Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Doha, Qatar), the International Center of Photography (New York), Maraya Art Center (Sharjah), the 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (Saudi Pavilion "Rhizoma"), and the 3rd Baku Public Art Festival (Azerbaijan), among others.

Dr Raza previously held curatorial positions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Tate Modern in London, among others. She has a BA (Hons) in English Literature and History of Art and an MA in 20th-Century Art History and Theory, both from Goldsmiths, University of London. She pursued MPhil-PhD studies at the Royal College of Art, London, and completed her PhD at Middlesex University, London. Sara is a Core Critic at the Yale School of Art and has taught graduate and undergraduate courses at New York University where she is a Red Burns Fellow. She is the founder of Punk Orientalism Studio, a global curatorial studio based in New York, with activities internationally.

### **About Studio KO**

Since the beginning of Studio KO's creation twenty-five years ago, architects Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty have marked their influence through projects across Europe, the Americas and Africa. The creative duo embodies an eclectic spirit, approaching each project with a fresh perspective. The team has developed an array of styles out of a penchant for storytelling – a narrative framework in which light, space and texture become the protagonists. Whether private residences, public spaces, or contemporary homes in natural settings, each project is a ground for play, an opportunity to bring imagination to life. Rather than imagining a blank slate, Studio KO's method seeks to enliven a space by considering its context. The architects draw their cues from the natural or preexisting infrastructure of a site and then follow those threads. Context, therefore, becomes the starting point for any design whether a Parisian bistro or monolithic architecture in a desert landscape. The inevitable constraints of setting, topography and archaeology are essential considerations for the architectural alchemy that Studio KO strives to create. Each custom project generates poetry out of a delicate balance between necessary structural guidelines and the joy of creating a story, giving spirit to interior spaces, and sharing input with a visionary client.