

Saodat Ismailova

Amanat – As We Sleep

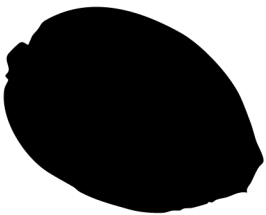
11 Sep–22 Nov 2026

Kunsthalle Bern is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in Switzerland of Uzbek artist and filmmaker Saodat Ismailova. Her films and installations unfold along the fault lines of Central Asian landscapes shaped by ritual and myth, shifting borders and the often-invisible forces of empire that continue to shape the present. Spanning both floors of Kunsthalle Bern, the exhibition brings together seven large-scale video installations, with the newly commissioned film *Amanat* (2026) at its heart. Derived from the Arabic *amānah*, meaning “trust,” the title refers to something placed in one’s care; not as a possession, but as an inheritance to be protected and passed on.

Following presentations at Swiss Institute in New York and LUMA Arles, the exhibition marks the third and final chapter of a collaborative project between the institutions, a series rooted in Ismailova’s sustained engagement with Arslanbob, an ancient walnut forest spanning more than 60,000 hectares in southern Kyrgyzstan. Since 2022, Ismailova has made several journeys to the remote region of Arslanbob, where local communities have long depended on the walnut forest and its harvest. The forest’s mysticism and reported hallucinatory properties became a point of departure for the artist’s exploration of the complex political histories embedded in the landscapes of the Central Asian Republics.

Situated within a region marked by ethnic tensions and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Arslanbob emerges in Ismailova’s work as both a physical landscape and a psychic terrain—one in which individual visions converge with the histories of collective experiences. The Soviet past unfolds as a landscape of collective dreams and nightmares, evoking the loss of pre-Soviet myths while reflecting on how history persists through fragments of its stories. Through film, sound, sculpture and textile, Ismailova allows for different temporalities to coexist without being resolved into a single narrative, giving shape to how regimes of truth enter collective imagination.

Sleep becomes an important motif throughout the exhibition: a vulnerable threshold at which reality can dissolve into fantasy and myth or other forms of knowledge and the subconscious surface. Traditional *kurpacha* mattresses from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan



invite visitors to lie down, shifting the exhibition into an intimate mode of encounter. Rather than proposing fixed connections between the works, Ismailova creates a space in which associations can emerge gradually, much like fragments recalled from a dream. Perhaps this, too, is *amanat*: what is passed down to us is never entirely ours, but something entrusted to us for a time, to be carried forward and passed on.

PROGRAM

Thu, 10 September 2026, 13:00

Lunch & Press Preview

RSVP to: celine@kunsthallebern.ch

Thu, 10 September 2026, 18:00

Opening: Saodat Ismailova

11 September – 22 November 2026

Kunsthalle Bern X BOGA, 8/10/12/14/16:00

In collaboration with the Botanical Garden of the University of Bern (BOGA), recordings from Arslanbob can be heard in the Steppenhaus.

Sat, 10 October 2026, 17:30

Dialogue & Guided meditation

With Ursina Leutenegger and Nadine Guldemann (in German)

Thu, 29 October 2026, 17:30

Walk & Talk

With Claudia Heim (Assistant Curator)

Sun, 1 November 2026, 17:30

Dialogue & Guided meditation

With Ursina Leutenegger and Nadine Guldemann (in English)

Sat, 21. November 2026

Closing Weekend

The exhibition is co-commissioned by Swiss Institute (New York) and LUMA Foundation (Arles). We thank director of Swiss Institute New York Stefanie Hessler for her contribution to the dialogue between artist and institution.

The annual program is made possible with the generous support of the Burgergemeinde Bern and the SüdKulturFonds.