



Tuesday 21 July 2020

Selkinchek (1993) by Aktan Abdykalykov

Selkinchek means swing in Kyrgyz, and this childlike symbol of joy is the centrepiece of Aktan Abdykalykov's deeply personal work. Filmed in Kok-moinok gorge, a village of extreme natural beauty in the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan, *Selkinchek* begins with bucolic shots and the arrival of strong winds. The winds in their force seem almost mythological and are certainly pathetic fallacy, symbolising the harsh storm that the lead character, the little boy Mirlan, is about to weather. After the initial pastoral beauty the film cuts to Mirlan pushing Ainura on the swing, accompanied by his friend. We see the giddy up and down from Ainura's perspective and the joy on the faces of the two young boys.

The film is Abdykalykov's second feature and the first in his autobiographical trilogy which comprises of *Selkinchek*, *Beshkempir* (1998) and *Maimyl* (2001). The second film, *Beshkempir* (1998) is considered to be one of the best 100 Asian films of all time and won a Silver Leopard at Locarno Film Festival. It details his father's alcoholism, his discovery of his adoption and his coming of age. *Maimyl* (2001) depicts Abdykalykov's teenage years in a provincial town and his work on the railroad, before his departure for military service. *Maimyl* was similarly successful, sweeping up awards on the festival circuit and screening in the *Un Certain Regard* category at Cannes festival. These films, highly personal and symbolic in nature end in adulthood and leaving home. They are concerned with the pain of adolescence, disillusionment and loss of innocence. *Selkinchek*, the beginning of this bittersweet trilogy, is about both first heartbreak and the first steps away from the innocent happiness of childhood. Mirlan, who has spent the first decade of his life playing with Ainura, the neighbour's daughter, and his friend Bakyula, one day runs into straight into the arms of a visiting sailor. The sailor picks him up and gazes past him, toward his 16 year old love. We see the recognition on Mirlan's face, beautifully played by Abdykalykov's own son, as a moment passes between the sailor and Ainura.

Interestingly unlike *Beshkempir* and *Maimyl*, Abdykalykov made *Selkinchek* in black and white. When asked about this decision in an interview conducted by the *Centre for Contemporary Art* in Tashkent he pointed first to his limited equipment. He merely had a tripod, cheap black and white film and natural lighting.

His mission was to turn all these setbacks into assets. Beyond these practical concerns, he pointed to the colourlessness of his early memories. 'If my memories are of the nature of action they are monochrome, containing but one colour... *Selkinchek* is a return to the origins of the soul and a tribute to the classics of black and white cinema, it is an opportunity to recreate lost feelings with light and shadow. My childhood is associated with the colour of white: the walls of the house, blooming apple trees, my grandmother's white scarf.'

One of the film's white symbols is the seashell the sailor brings to landlocked Kyrgyzstan. The shell is mesmerising to the inhabitants of the village, in particular Ainura. They take turns to hold it and listen to waves of the sea. It is a symbol of the wider world and the inevitable intrusion of the unknown into his home and childhood. Ainura is compelled by the mysteries and maturity the sailor brings to the village. Whereas Mirlan strongly feels he represents home and comfort and cannot bear the idea that she might want to leave this behind. Adult viewers can understand both perspectives. The pain of the first true changes that are wrought to our lives, is memorable to most of us. This despair eventually turns into our own appreciation for excitement and the unknown, as we witness with Ainura. At the film's end Mirlan throws the seashell away in the hills that surround the valley. It remains out of sight but certainly not out of mind.

After this act of defiance he comes to sit next to the mural he drew. The childlike but highly emotive drawing of Ainura on a swing is an expression of his sadness and a moment of the artist's becoming. The swing evokes the sensation of childhood and for adults is a symbol of a time to which we cannot return. At the beginning of the film he plays on the swing, at the end he sits alone by his depiction and remembers the past. Mirlan's mural is simultaneously a symbol of his pain and a commemoration of love and happiness. In this highly autobiographical work, it becomes meta. A remembrance of the first significant time the artist used art to process his feelings and leave an imprint of his memories within a work about art and memory. When Abdykalykov was growing up in the small village of Kuuntu, everyone told him he was destined to become an artist. He has stated that he would, "wish on falling stars" for this dream to come true.



TASHKENT FILM ENCOUNTERS

CLASSIC CINEMA FROM CENTRAL ASIA

Aktan Abdykalykov

Aktan Abdykalykov is a Kyrgyz director, screenwriter and actor born in 1957 in Soviet Kyrgyzstan. He was adopted, as it was customary for parents of a large family to offer a baby boy to an infertile couple. Raised in the village of Kuntu where he still resides, he grew up fascinated by the Russian and Indian movies shown in the little theatre in the village. He studied painting and technical drawing at Kyrgyz Fine Arts College, a skill which no doubt has informed the cinematic beauty of his films. In 1981 he began his work in film as a set decorator at Kyrgyzfilm, leading to his career directing. He is best known for his deeply personal, symbolic films which both reflect his own life and provide a voice for Kyrgyzstan's specific social issues. He is best known for his work *Beshkempir* (1998) which won the Silver Leopard and is regarded as one of the greatest pieces of Asian cinema. His recent work, *Centaur* (2017) stunned the festival circuit received to great applause. As well as directing and co-writing, Abdykalykov starred in this film.

About Klassiki

Klassiki is an opportunity to experience online a weekly curated selection of the best of Soviet, Russian, Caucasian and East European cinema. Championing director led work, each week's offering chooses a relevant film of a great director to introduce audiences to the director's work and give biographical, social and political context to each film in the form of specially commissioned and downloadable informative program notes. This is the birth of Klassiki, our planned free streaming platform, which will allow you to stream great cinema from the region, literally on the hop. If you would like to support our endeavours to showcase the best of Russian and Soviet and Central Asian cinema please share our work on your social media channels using the tags we have added to this program page or consider supporting us with a donation. Thank you.

About Centre of Contemporary Arts Tashkent

CCA Tashkent is a new space for the development and support of contemporary culture in Central Asia. This year CCA Tashkent is operating in test mode: among its first projects is the CCA LAB, a research laboratory whose aim is to nourish and develop contemporary art and cultural practices in Uzbekistan, as well as to formulate new readings and understandings of the region's artistic heritage.

About Tashkent Film Encounters

Kino Klassika Foundation, in association with the Centre of Contemporary Arts Tashkent presents TASHKENT FILM ENCOUNTERS, a film programme spotlighting classic film from Central Asia. This season continues Kino Klassika's long standing undertaking to showcase classic films of the Soviet, Russian and Caucasian film traditions, as well as expand the offering to include contemporary classics of Central Asian cinema. We will spotlight a selection of modern classic filmmakers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan will be spotlighted. Films will be available online for a week, free to view and will take place each Tuesday from the 21 of July to 18 of August 2020.

TFE Curator: Saodat Isamilova

Saodat Ismailova is one of the representatives of a new generation of artists from Central Asia who came of age in the post-Soviet era and have established cosmopolitan artistic lives while remaining deeply engaged with their native region as a source of creative inspiration. After graduating State Art Institute of Tashkent, she was granted a residency in Fabrica, Research and communication center of Benetton, Italy. In 2005 she was awarded DAAD - Artist in Residency program in Berlin developing the script of her debut award winning feature film "40 Days of Silence", which was nominated for the best debut film in Berlin International Film Festival, 2014. She participated in Venice Biennale, 2013 as part of the Central Asian Pavilion with her video installation "Zukhra". In 2018 she graduated from Le Fresnoy, France's National Studio of Contemporary Arts, where she developed "Stains of Oxus" and "Two Horizons". In 2020 she is running Laboratory from the Center for Contemporary Arts in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She is currently working on her second feature film "Barazgh".

Support Us

Kino Klassika is a UK registered charity (1150791). We rely on the generosity of our supporters. If you want to encourage education and engagement with classic Russian language, Eastern and East European film, please support us by making a donation.

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About Kino Klassika Foundation

Kino Klassika creates programmes of film restorations, publications, art commissions and events to educate audiences about classic Russian language and Eastern cinema. This includes a 2-year programme to spotlight the pioneering work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, our first restoration projects including *Hakob Havnatanyan*, *Arabesques on the Ploshmani Theme* and *Jirdan* (1969). We have recently completed *Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus*, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Francais, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham. The program celebrated the diversity and complexity of Soviet, Russian and Caucasian musicals.

The Kino Klassika Team

This screening could not happen without the unstinting support of the Kino Klassika team: Joseph Andreyev, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Olja Mljjevic, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

Klassiki programming is supported by funds from the BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) which is made possible by the National Lottery. Klassiki screenings are also part of Film FeelsConnected, a UK-wide cinema season, supported by the National Lottery and BFI Film Audience Network. You can explore all films and events at filmfeels.co.uk



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