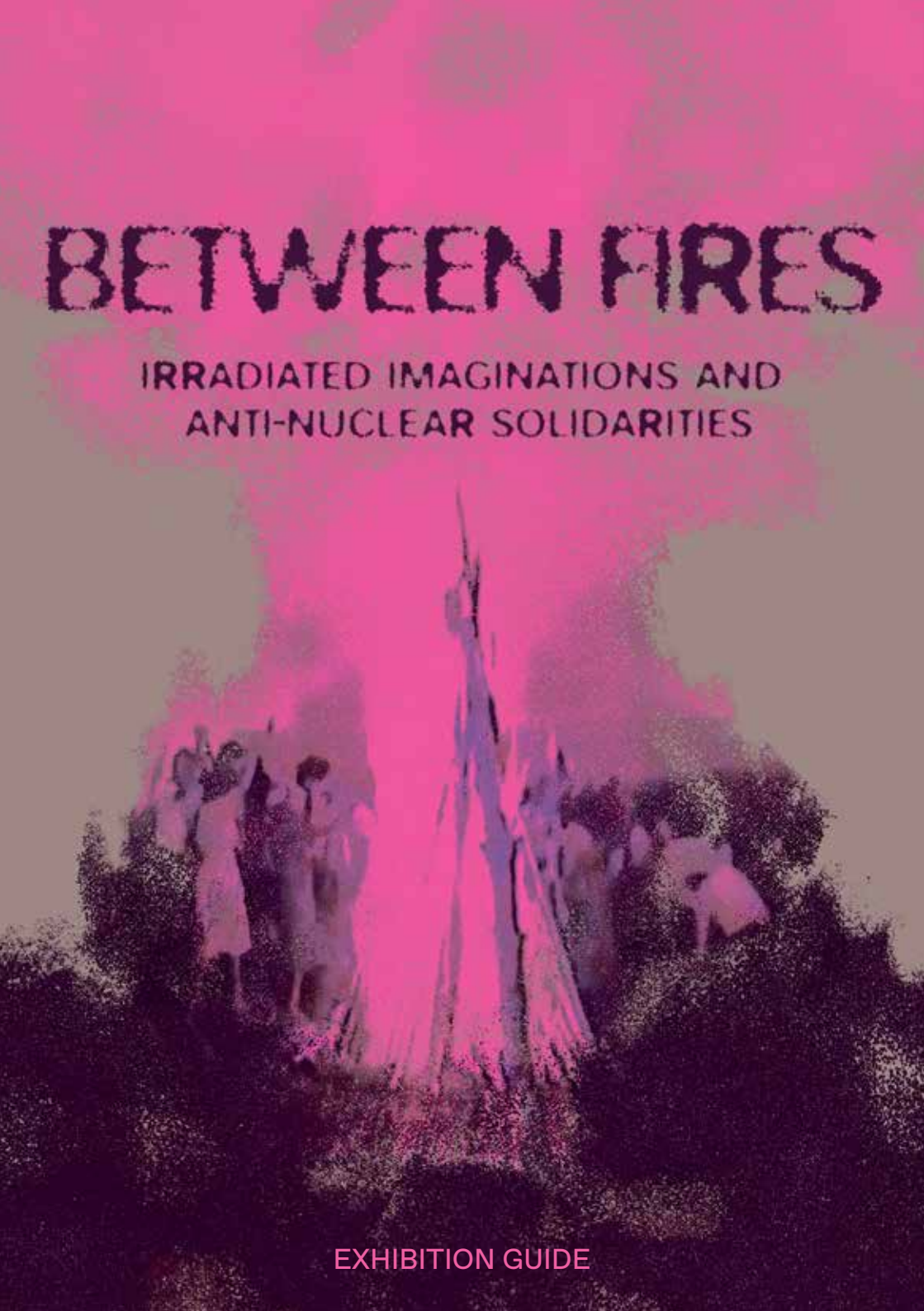
BETWEEN FIRES

IRRADIATED IMAGINATIONS AND ANTI-NUCLEAR SOLIDARITIES



EXHIBITION GUIDE

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EXHIBITION

13 FEB –
17 MAY ’26

CURATOR
Fabienne Rachmadiev

ARTISTS
buulbuul
Demian DinéYazhi'
Inas Halabi
Äsel Kadyrkhanova
Dilyara Kaipova
Almagul Menlibayeva
Kamila Narysheva & Vicky Clarke
Emilija Škarnulytė
Roger Peet

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS
Kamila Smagulova
International Institute of Social History (Mathijs Boom, Reina Borst and Rose Spijkerman)

SPATIAL DESIGN
Bureau LADA

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Ayym Zhaishylyk

Between Fires is presented in partnership with Sonic Acts

INTRODUCTION

JOSIEN PIETERSE AND ASHLEY MAUM

Artists have a unique ability to give form to the intangible, to represent experiences that cannot be fully articulated in language or comprehended through statistics. This capacity is often lent as a tool in social struggles, as we have seen in the many projects at Framer Famed that have reckoned with the colonial wound and histories of resistance. Issues which directly affect the environment and humans, yet whose consequences are sometimes only seen after years or decades. Although not widely discussed, nuclear weapons development and testing makes viscerally clear the horrific extent of (colonial) power to organise mass infrastructure impacting human and non-human life. This is the central concern in *Between Fires: Irradiated Imaginations and Anti-Nuclear Solidarities*, an exhibition curated by writer and researcher Fabienne Rachmadiev and presented by Framer Framed in collaboration with Sonic Acts and their 2026 biennial *Melted for Love*.

The infrastructure of nuclear programmes often remains out of public sight. Yet, through very much a colonialist mechanism, we are all subject to the knowledge that these weapons of unimaginable force exist and could be wielded at will. Through research-driven practices, the artists in *Between Fires* enter spaces where the public is not usually permitted access. Areas that many hardly dare to imagine much less to enter. These figure in sensorial landscapes (Halabi, Kadyrkhanova, Narysheva & Clarke), in sites of geopolitical operation such as the Kazakh Polygon test site (Melibayeva), and places where human presence feels perverse: the uranium mine (Peet) or deep within a mountain (Škarnulytė). Artists reach into these places or ones that don't exist in physicality and carry something back with them. This importantly reveals the connections across sites and communities – relations that become painfully tangible through networks of extraction.

The scarring relationality of nuclear colonialism is clearly exemplified in the entanglement of peoples and resources from both the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Denedeh (Dene country in Canada) in the development of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US. In particular, the Shinkolobwe mine in Kantanga, DRC, provided the bulk of the uranium for the bombs. Several projects presented at Framer Framed have already highlighted the history of mining and the current struggle for raw materials in the DRC: Sammy Baloji's *A Blueprint for Toad's and Snakes* in 2018 and *Charging Myths* by the collective On-Trade-Off in 2023.

As described by Léopold Lambert in his conversation with Congolese spatial practitioner Gloria Pavita for this exhibition guide, relationality (as per Édouard Glissant) 'means some people have been put in relation with others through an acute form of violence.' In *Between Fires* these relational ties are laid bare, the visitor moves within them. Movement through colonialist mechanisms was a core aspect of Samia Henni's exhibition *Performing Colonial Toxicity* presented at Framer Framed in 2023 in collaboration with If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part of Your Revolution. Henni's research dealt with the history of French nuclear colonialism in the Algerian Sahara, where seventeen nuclear bombs were detonated and where survivor remediation and cleanup remain unaddressed. The installation of *Performing Colonial Toxicity* spatialised her research, thus asking the body to rehearse this history through movement.

As with their effects, these histories do not remain cleanly contained in the primary site of violence. Henni highlighted during our collaboration how toxic colonial pollution returns concretely in the form of dust clouds from the Algerian Sahara sweeping over Europe – an afterlife of the infamous nuclear mushroom cloud.[1] Such a cloud drifts into the space of *Between Fires* through the scenography of Bureau LADA in the form of an imposing grey textile stretching over half the space. This spatial intervention reminds us that the nuclear does not sit elsewhere but hangs over us all, particularly as escalating geopolitical tensions among today's imperial powers heighten the risk of renewed nuclear weapons use.

At the same time, nuclear energy has also become a key component in many countries' strategies for a so-called 'green-energy transition'. With nuclear energy's 'clean' image being aided by the removal of its production from public oversight. The *Coalitieakkord* (Coalition Agreement) of the incoming Dutch government includes plans to develop four new nuclear power plants, alongside support for maritime nuclear innovation.[2] These are presented as steps towards 'green growth' and increased independence of the Dutch energy sector.

As nuclear arsenals threaten life at a planetary scale, even nuclear energy development creates problems of a scale difficult to manage due to the toxicity of nuclear waste far exceeding human lifespans and conceivable time. The *Centrale Organisatie Voor Radioactief Afval* (COVRA – Central Organisation for Radioactive Waste) in Borssele, Zeeland, currently provides above-ground storage of Dutch nuclear waste. Quite deftly, COVRA tightly intertwines itself with an artistic imagination, boasting their understanding of 'the art of preservation'.[3]

1 Xu-Yang, Yangjunjie et al. 'Radioactive contamination transported to Western Europe with Saharan dust', *Science Advances*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 31 Jan 2025.

2 *Coalitieakkord 2026-2030*, 30 January 2026. <https://www.kabinetsformatie2025.nl/site/binaries/site-content/collections/documents/2026/01/30/aan-de-slag---coalitieakkoord-2026-2030/coalitieakkoord-d66-vvd-cda.pdf>.

3 'The Art of Preservation', *COVRAnv*, accessed 5 February 2026. <https://www.covra.nl/nl/radioactief-afval/de-kunst-van-het-bewaren/>.

The exterior of the building that holds waste with the highest-level of radioactivity is itself an artistic intervention, as it is repainted lighter every ten years to display the 'fading' potency of the waste. Further, the facility's low-radiation areas serve as depots for Zeeland museums and host art exhibitions. COVRA's facilities are intended as an interim waste storage solution for a still-conceivable 100 years, but radioactive waste remains hazardous for hundreds of thousands of years. The issue of long-term containment in the Netherlands, as in many nations, remains unsolved.

Resistance comes in the form of collective activism, which similar to artistic practice, seems to reach somewhere, into some unbelievable anger and love deep in the gut. Anti-nuclear resistance holds a powerful place in Dutch history, shown in *Between Fires* in collaboration with the International Institute for Social History. The *Ban de bom* (Ban the bomb) and *Stop de neutronenbom* (Stop the neutron bomb) movements initiated the largest demonstrations in Dutch history during the early 1980s. In October 1983, for example, 550.000 people marched against nuclear arms development in The Hague. The scale of resistance mobilised by this campaign has only recently been echoed in the Rode Lijn demonstration in October 2025 against the genocide in Palestine.

The profound strength of international solidarity was foregrounded in *Past Disquiet*, a long-term research project by curators Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti presented at Framer Framed in early 2025. The exhibition illustrated how the coming together of struggles binds and strengthens, while asserting the co-constitutive role of art and activism. This is clearly evidenced again in *Between Fires*, as it centres the importance of the Nevada-Semey movement, which united affected communities from the US and Kazakhstan to end Soviet nuclear testing at the Polygon test site.

While the exhibition title *Between Fires* references a ritual carried out in the context of this movement, it also names a sort of collective anxiety: that we stand on the brink of some impending fire. Whether we imagine this in the return of far-right fascist governments, the looming chaos of an ever-worsening climate crisis or growing geopolitical instability, survivor histories remind us that we should count ourselves lucky if these realities remain in the imagination. For many, often Indigenous communities, the horrible spectre of the post-nuclear future has already arrived. However, as histories of radical relational activism show – if we grasp these seemingly insurmountable forces, to reveal their forms and relations, we can begin to mould them.

CURATORIAL NOTE

FABIENNE RACHMADIEV

In the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan, in front of a Stalin-era socialist classicist building, with its pilasters and ornaments, stands another monument, easy to miss in contrast with the grandeur of the Writer's Union residence. It's a granite rectangle with an engraving depicting a Kazakh shaman and a Western Shoshone elder exchanging a peace pipe. This scene is the emblem of the Nevada-Semey anti-nuclear movement that gained extraordinary momentum in late 1980s' Kazakhstan, then still the Kazakh S.S.R. Led by poet Olzhas Suleimenov, the thousands of protestors formed the largest anti-nuclear movement in history. They built on the work of scientists who had started gathering data as early as the 1950s to establish the environmental and health dangers of radiation, often at great personal cost.[1] More than 40 years of testing by the Soviet regime had released 17.7 megatons of radioactive material onto the northern Kazakh steppe around Semey (named 'Semipalatinsk' before independence).[2]

While the anti-nuclear movement in Kazakhstan was tied up with a struggle for independence, it also sought to connect with other people and places rendered nuclear test sites by imperial forces, one of them being the Nevada Test Site, home to the Indigenous Western Shoshone people. Their activism included collective rituals, such as exchanging a peace pipe and throwing stones into fire to dispel evil.[3] One such purification ritual, walking through fire, saw hundreds of people march across the steppe between two bonfires. With this and other interventions, Nevada-Semey succeeded in ending Soviet nuclear testing and the closure of Semey's Polygon test site in 1991.

After the end of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine, as heirs to the Soviet nuclear arsenal, signed the Budapest Memorandum: giving up their arsenals in exchange for safety guarantees. Behind these geopolitical, financial and militarised structures of the atom, lie the lifeworlds of those directly affected by the cycle of mining uranium to detonating and testing nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan's nuclear history, while extensively studied within the context of the Soviet Union and the Cold War nuclear arms race, is not widely known outside of this narrative. As such, it is not often considered an example of nuclear colonialism.[4]

1 To this day, Moscow has not released any of this data.

2 Roughly equivalent to a thousand bombs like the ones dropped by the US on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

3 Rozsa, George Gregory. 'The Nevada Movement: A Model of Trans-Indigenous Antinuclear Solidarity.' *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2020, pp. 99-123.

4 Hennaoui, Leila and Nurzhan Marzhan. 'Dealing with a Nuclear Past: Revisiting the Cases of Algeria and

The secrecy surrounding nuclear infrastructure, which is classified as prohibited, often resorting to Cold War rhetoric and strategic 'safety' concerns, results in the obscuring of data and archives that are important for justice for survivors. Compounding radiation's famed invisibility, the deliberate concealment of nuclear infrastructures thus serves as a double erasure – complicating solidarity and cooperation between affected people and territories. The Nevada-Semey movement, but also current initiatives such as the Nuclear Truth Project, sought and seek to undo this obscuring by emphasising solidarity between survivors, more often than not from Indigenous lifeworlds. Scholar Lou Cornum calls them the 'irradiated international': 'Those whose lives are crossed by uranium and other radioactive weapons materials form a diffuse collective of families, communities, enemies, and strangers.'[5]

In her seminal work on Kazakhstan's nuclear history, nuclear policy scholar Togzhan Kassenova opens with the consequences for humans (an estimated 1.3 million were affected by various forms of radiation and radioactive waste) and non-humans – wild animals, such as the Saiga antelope and the Argali (wild sheep), as well as domesticated ones.[6] Kassenova notably centres the steppe itself, sacred to its inhabitants and the national imagination, but deemed 'uninhabited' by the Soviet military, which was searching for a suitable test site. The nuclear arms race with the United States had taken off; the first successful detonation of an atomic bomb at the Trinity Test site, affecting mostly Indigenous people and land, marked the beginning of a nuclear world.

Kassenova describes the steppe in detail: the river Irtysh flowing through it, and seasonal migration routes for the nomadic lifestyle adapted to its challenging ecology. She notes its beauty, its vastness, its many colours, the meaning this landscape holds for those who call it home. She also underscores the region's cultural importance with the city of Semey as the birthplace of many Kazakh artists, writers and other intellectuals. 'People from the Semipalatinsk region wish their land to be known for its history and culture, for the richness of its flora and fauna, and not only for the hardships they faced.'[7]

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Kazakhstan through a Decolonial Lens.' *The International Spectator*, Vol. ahead-of-print, No. ahead-of-print, 2023, pp. 1-19.

5 Cornum, Lou. 'The Irradiated International', lecture given at Future Perfect conference, 7-8 June 2018 at Data & Society Research Institute.

6 Dogs especially were rounded up by the Soviets to use for their experiments.

7 Kassenova, Togzhan. *Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan Gave up the Bomb* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2022), p. 4.

The exhibition *Between Fires: Irradiated Imaginations and Anti-Nuclear Solidarities* takes the irradiated steppe as the starting point for reflection on the intertwined histories of nuclear infrastructures, colonialism as well as resistance, and from there seeks to connect with other such visual, poetic, sonic and archival approaches. Two of the works commissioned especially for this exhibition deeply engage with the cultural importance of the Semey region, while considering what it means that the steppe has become irradiated. *Nükte*, by Asel Kadyrkhanova, means 'dot' or 'full stop' in Kazakh, implying an ending. It is a point of fixture in a vast landscape such as the steppe, an anchor point from which to consider radiation, or a before and an after radiation. Combining auto-ethnography, memory and pencil-drawing, Kadyrkhanova traces the incognisability of the steppe after the dot. The collective buulbuul presents a performance installation titled *The Burial of a Brown Goose*, in which a story of human and more-than-human solidarity takes centre stage. Musical and oral traditions, integral to Kazakh culture, convey care and friendship in a landscape that has seen colonial violence in the form of forced industrialisation, man-made famine and nuclear testing.

Another recent consideration of the enduring meaning and latent presence of radiation on the northeastern Kazakh steppe comes in the form of an immersive sound installation by Kamila Narysheva and Vicky Clarke. Narysheva undertook a challenging journey to the former test site, known as the Polygon, to experience for herself this space that has become so central to Kazakhstan's transition into independence and that looms large in the collective imagination. The recordings of the site evoke a layered testimony of nuclear temporalities embedded in the materiality of the place, which gains an aliveness as if it is finally allowed to witness, too.

Whereas the Polygon in foreign media is often portrayed as a dystopian wasteland – attaching yet another colonial gaze to the steppe – these artists testify to both the need for remembrance of the horrors, as well as the need for love, commitment and enduring care for the steppe. To pledge not only for the survival of this lifeworld, but to pay respect to the knowledge, the joy and the beauty of the 'eternal steppe'.

From this place, *Between Fires* reaches to other regional perspectives and landscapes that bear histories of the nuclear. Emilija Škarnulytė's film installation *Burial* (2022) invites the viewer to take in the past, present and speculative future of the Ignalina Power Plant – a Cold War era construction in Lithuania. The immense architecture is undergoing a process of decommissioning, a moment of possible openings that the artist has transformed into an immersive journey, where sound informs sight as much as the other way around.

Roger Peet's print *Dig Up The Sun* (2022) traces and connects the path, through time and place, of the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Peet's map covers a vast geography: from the uranium of the Shinkolobwe mine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through the Trinity

Test Site in New Mexico, to numerous enrichment facilities, plants and docks before their detonation in Japan. It takes an extraordinary amount of infrastructure, resources and people to create a nuclear weapon. While the vastness of it might dazzle, Peet's map is foldable; we have to grasp and carry these paths of violence and destruction in order to resist them.

The origin of the atomic bomb, of the nuclear weapon, lies in the United States, and so Demian DinéYazhi''s work *my ancestors will not let me forget this* (2019) powerfully states, 'Every American Flag is a Warning Sign'. An evident reality for those who have undergone the violence of the United States. DinéYazhi''s use of colour references both an 'Indigenous aesthetic' as well as the toxic glow from radioactive waste and the reddish hues of the waste from uranium mining.[8] Another, more covert, 'warning sign' is woven into Dilyara Kaipova's textile artworks, which combine traditional Central Asian weaving techniques, such as ikat, with imprints of nuclear toxicity hazard signs. Woven into chapans, they offer alarmingly beautiful reminders of what this tradition has seen and endured through the centuries. A chapan, meant to be worn, functions as a guard for radiation, or as an awareness of what radiation has already permeated.

Colour as a visible aftermath of invisible radiation, as well as suppressed practices around nuclear infrastructures, appear also in Inas Halabi's *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (2023). In these frames, the question of the possible burial of nuclear waste in the southern West Bank haunts the landscape.

Returning to the nuclear legacy of the steppe, Almagul Menlibayeva reckons with the past, present and possible futures of the Polygon in the five-channel video installation *Kurchatov 22* (2013). Speculative fiction is paired with survivor testimonies, an eerie soundtrack with scenes oscillating between myth and dream. Menlibayeva does not regard the nuclear history of the steppe as something of the past, instead she continues her engagement with the implications of radiation, most recently in the textile work ominously titled *Thermonuclear Skin* (2022).[9]

Alongside these artistic contributions, two archival sections on anti-nuclear activism of the past, assembled by researcher Kamila Smagulova and the International Institute for Social History, show the ways in which communities have come together in struggles for the protection of their environments.

The inhabitants of these and other sites of extraction, detonation and containment are the primary victims, but these irradiated landscapes should not be viewed merely as 'elsewhere', nor confined to the past or the unreality of a dystopian future. The nuclear is a planetary condition, especially in an increasingly militarised world,

8 Pothast, Emily. 'Demian DinéYazhi' Mines a Toxic History', *The Stranger*, 9 May 2018. <www.thestranger.com/visual-art/2018/05/09/26134705/demian-dineyazhi-mines-a-toxic-history>.

9 This text is partially based on the author's forthcoming dissertation at the University of Amsterdam.

where there is a renewed threat of regimes taking up nuclear weapons. As scholar Gabrielle Schwab writes in *Radioactive Ghosts*, 'the very invention and use of the first atomic bomb and the haunting knowledge of its power to annihilate planetary life have generated a rupture in "the order of things" [...] How can this knowledge not affect people in their entire existence?'[10] Schwab calls this the 'nuclear unconscious'. Even for those who live far away from test sites, in Imperial cores, the nuclear harbours potential for such vast damage, everyone is in some way entrapped within it.

What does it mean to live in such a nuclear world?

Fabienne Rachmadiev is a writer and art historian. In her practice she combines art, theory and literature to create communal events and programmes, often reflecting on lands, bodies and histories of extraction from Central and North Asia, as well as the expansive steppes between Eastern Europe and Asia. She regularly contributes art criticism to *De Groene Amsterdammer* and *Metropolis M*, among others.

Rachmadiev is a researcher at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam. Her dissertation is on temporalities of contemporary art in Central Asia, with a special focus on ecology and colonial histories. Her debut novel, on an unlikely community on the outskirts of Almaty in the 1990s, is forthcoming with Das Mag publishers.

10 Schwab, Gabriele. *Radioactive Ghosts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), p. 4.

Emilija Škarnulytė, still from *Burial* (2022). Courtesy of the artist

A Belarusian Toxic Nightmare

MARK CINKEVICH

A uranium tablet is so small in comparison to other sources of energy that it verges on being viewed as immaterial. Electricity generated by nuclear energy is perceived as coming out of nowhere. Yet, in the case of the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), a small tablet of uranium has become the basis of a unique colonial infrastructure, where the occupation operates not through resource extraction but through resource overproduction. The overproduction of electricity by the Russian-financed NPP creates a condition of Belarusian dependence on Russia, not only as a uranium supplier but also as a primary consumer of the overproduced electricity.

Belarus dreamt of a nuclear plant for about half a century, hoping that it would grant energy independence. In 1968, the USSR Ministry of Energy and Electrification outlined a general scheme for energy industry development. According to the scheme, the first nuclear power plant on the territory of Belarus was to be constructed by 1980 near Snudy Lake, 10 kilometres north of the city of Braslav. However, the project was cancelled in favour of the construction of the Ignalina NPP in neighbouring Lithuania. Belarusian officials initiated another enterprise via the USSR Ministry of Energy and Electrification in the 1980s. The new plan included construction of a plant set to begin in the early 1990s, but all Soviet nuclear projects were first suspended following the Chernobyl tragedy of 1986 and subsequently abolished with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. In 1998, a commission of scientists and public figures passed a 10-year moratorium on NPP construction projects in Belarus. After the moratorium expired – not devoid of controversy – Belarusian authorities quickly initiated the 'peaceful atom' programme.[1] The desire to provide an 'impulse' for agriculture, industrialisation and urbanisation in the region by means of a NPP resulted in the start of the construction in Astravyets in 2008.

The long cherished NPP, however, can hardly be called Belarusian. With the amount of financial and technological investment provided by Russia, the seeming fulfilment of the dream is deceptive. Belarus and Russia signed an intergovernmental agreement on the financing of the Astravyets NPP, under which Belarus covers only 10% while Russia covers the remaining 90%.[2]

1 Novikova, Tatyana. 'Komitet Po Soblyudeniyu Orkhusskoy Konventsii Rassmotrel Delo o Belorusskoy AES', *Bellona.ru*, 21 July 2015. <bellona.ru/2010/10/01/komitet-po-soblyudeniyu-orhusskoj-konv/>.

2 'Belarus i Rossiya Obsuzhdayut Prodleniye Sroka Kredita Na Stroitel'stvo BelAES Na 10 Let – Karankevich', *BelTA – News from Belarus*, 4 April 2019. <atom.belta.by/ru/belaes_ru/view/belarus-i-rossija-obsuzhdajut-prodlenie-sroka-kredita-na-stroitelstvo-belaes-na-10-let-karankevich-10251/>.

Such disproportionate investment in the strategic infrastructure project enables a covert financial-political form of nuclear colonialism. Russia not only finances the project, but the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom also functions as the general contractor. The NPP will have two WWER-1200 (water-water power reactors), each with 1200-megawatt output. The reactor vessels are developed by Hydropress Design Bureau, a Russian state construction office specialising in the design and development of WWER-range nuclear power plant reactors. Produced and transported to Belarus by Atommash, an engineering company located in Volgodonsk, Rostov Oblast, Russia – the vessels for the Astravyets NPP are the first produced by Atommash in 30 years.

Central to every nuclear power plant is uranium. As Belarus lacks natural uranium resources, it will be imported from Russia's uranium deposits in the South Urals, Western Siberia, and Siberia east of Lake Baikal. The uranium for the Astravyets NPP will also undergo the enrichment process at the Novosibirsk Chemical Concentrates Plant in Russia.[3]

Belarus consumes around 36 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year.[4] The largest share of Belarus' energy production relies on Russian gas. Half of the energy is generated by Lukoml and Berezov natural peat-fired thermal power stations known as GRES (State Regional Power Station), and the rest is produced by thermal power plants across the country. The two power reactors of the Astravyets NPP add roughly 18 billion kWh per year, creating massive energy overproduction. This surplus comes from the fact that, at the time of planning, the energy consumption was expected to increase by 2020. However, economic stagnation, financial crisis and devaluation negatively impacted the trend, resulting in no growth. The overproduction became irreversible; nuclear power plants, by their design, can only operate at 100% capacity. Belarus now has to find ways to manage overproduction with three options: consume more energy, produce less energy or export excess energy.

The initial idea of the NPP as a boost for the region dissipated upon the impossibility of consuming the energy produced given the absence of growth over the last 12 years. The attempt to direct surplus energy to enterprises – such as AMKODOR engineering company, Bielorussian Steel Works OJSC, Tractor Works, Belcard JSC, and the industrial park 'Great Stone' – is but a late superficial solution that requires additional investments. Instead of the NPP fuelling a rising infrastructure, the infrastructure must be built around the NPP to sustain its operation. However, all of these projects combined will increase energy

3 Russia has a long history of working with uranium enrichment dating back to Soviet times. See: Hecht, Gabrielle. *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

4 Molochko, Andrey, et al. *Razrabotka energeticheskogo balansa energosistemy Belarusi s uchetom razvitiya vozobnovlyayemoy energetiki, v tom chisle vetroenergetiki: nauno-tekhnicheskiy otchet* (Minsk: OOO Alfa-kniga, 2019).

consumption by 3.38 billion kWh per year and cost 7.7 billion Belarusian rubles, which constitutes 27% of the entire NPP budget. And still an estimated 14 billion kWh of overproduced energy every year remains.

The second strategy is to reduce the amount of energy produced. At this point, the implementation of Russian control becomes visible. NPPs, by default, only function at 100% output. Combined with the insufficiency of measures to increase energy consumption, this means that Belarus will have to reduce its energy production by partially conserving and closing the existing infrastructure. In particular, the two largest producing stations, Lukoml GRES and Berezov GRES will be conserved. The Lukoml GRES, Berezov GRES, Thermal Power Stations (TPS) Minsk-5 and Novopolotsk will also undergo long-term conservation. The stations can be reactivated in case of emergency but would operate at a significantly lower load than before, about 20% of their full capacity. So not only does the NPP require new infrastructure to be built around it, but the existing infrastructure also has to be put out of operation.

The conservation of existing plants reveals forms of political rationality underlining the Astravyets NPP project, exposing the mechanism of establishing colonial control. The NPP becomes a project of failure instead of promise. While it promises energy independence and cheaper production costs, it results in the destruction of existing energy infrastructure and the formation of large-scale technical systems of colonial dependence.[5] Russia gains control over an infrastructural network that comes to organise the everyday life of the entire country.

The third way to deal with overproduction is to sell energy abroad. Electricity for national usage is normally stored for no more than one day, so the energy can potentially only be transmitted to a limited number of neighbouring countries, including Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine and Russia. The western direction is rendered unavailable to Belarus due to Lithuania recognising the nuclear power plant as a threat to national security. Lithuania even disassembled Europe's highest-capacity power transmission line connecting Belarus and Lithuania to prevent Astravyets energy from entering its territory.[6] In solidarity with Lithuania, Poland and Latvia also rejected Astravyets energy.

Already by 2018, Russia's annexation of Crimea and Ukraine's ambiguous status in the Commonwealth of Independent States had rendered cooperation with the country impossible. Moreover, Ukraine was set to integrate into the European Union

5 Hughes, Thomas. *The evolution of large technological systems*. See Bijker et al., 1987, pp. 51-82;Hughes, Thomas. *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

6 'Lithuania to dismantle power lines with Russia, Belarus in 2025, says TSO', *LRT English*, 25 October 2024, <www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2397035/lithuania-to-dismantle-power-lines-with-russia-belarus-in-2025-says-tso>.

energy infrastructure by the year 2023, so it was not interested in investing in shared infrastructure with Belarus.[7]

The remaining direction for selling exporting surplus energy from the Astravyets NPP is Russia. What began as a project to diversify energy sources to guarantee energy independence ends with dependence on Russia not only as a supplier but also as a consumer. Russia, as an essential energy consumer, will become an integral part and prerequisite for the functioning of the Belarusian energy sector. Relations where one country can only function based on another country's infrastructure are colonial relations. The NPP unsettles the territorial authority of the Belarusian state and separates it from its own infrastructure, shifting from direct territorial control to the control over essential infrastructures. Ultimately revealing how even zero-emission, clean energy can be employed as a colonising tool.

The NPP nightmare continues as the Belarusian authorities and the power plant's general contractor initially assured that radioactive waste would be sent to Russia for processing and storage: 'If we are talking about spent radioactive fuel of Russian production, then it will not remain in Belarus for permanent storage.'[8] Despite these promises, Russia has exercised its political power by revoking the agreement to dispose of Astravyets NPP radioactive waste.[9]

Currently, there are several possible strategies for disposing of the Astravyets NPP's radioactive waste, all of which include subsequent return for burial in Belarus. For Belarus, a country that has suffered the most severe damage from the Chernobyl disaster, creating a toxic waste burial site which was not initially planned could result in a severe ecological crisis. While the powerplant has been operating – and thus generating toxic waste – since 2019, the construction of nuclear waste storage facilities in Belarus is still in the initial stages as of 2026.

The Astravyets NPP has redrawn the borders of infrastructural control. On the one hand, the border with the EU has become more rigid, functioning as a barrier. Shared infrastructure projects have been dismantled, and cross-border energy connections physically disconnected. At the same time, the border with Russia has become more transparent. The NPP megaproject has made Belarus and Russia

7 'Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine – Industrial Visa-Free Regime, Common Aviation Space, Single Digital Market – Oleksiy Honcharuk Spoke about Ukraine and EU Priorities for 2020', Government Portal Ukraine, 11 February 2020. <www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/promislovij-bezviz-spilnij-aviacijnij-prostir-yedinij-cifrovij-rinok-oleksij-goncharuk-rozpoviv-pro-prioriteti-ukrayini-ta-yes-na-2020-rik>.

8 Novikova, Tatyana. 'Kuda Belarus' Pristroit Otrabotavsheye Yadernoye Toplivo So Svoyey AES?', *BelaPAN*, 3 February 2010. <naviny.by/rubrics/society/2010/02/03/ic_articles_116_166484>.

9 At the same time, according to Greenpeace Russia, Russia is providing the disposal of radioactive waste from German nuclear power plants on its territory for profit. See: 'V Rossiyu Snova Nachali Vvozit' Otkhody Obogashcheniya Urana Iz Germanii', *Greenpeace Russia*, 23 October 2019. <greenpeace.ru/news/2019/10/23/v-rossiju-snova-nachali-vvozit-othody-obogashhenija-urana-iz-germanii/>.

inseparable in terms of energy infrastructure, with Belarus dependent on Russian uranium and energy consumption to run the plant. As such, Belarus becomes a space beyond Russian territory yet infrastructurally integrated within it, whose sovereignty is no longer sustained by its borders.

The Astravyets NPP – envisioned as a promise of energy independence – has been realised as an enterprise of overproduction controlled by a foreign state. The alienation of the Belarusian state from its own infrastructure presupposes a loss of full territorial authority. The power plant distorts the future into an arrangement where Russia seizes control of the infrastructure. The longer the NPP functions, the deeper it entangles the Belarusian state within the Russian infrastructural web.

Mark Cinkevich is a Belarus-born interdisciplinary researcher and artist. In his practice, he is interested in critical, speculative and experimental aspects of art that operate at the intersection of fact and fiction. His work focuses on the post-Soviet infrastructural and social landscape, through which he explores in particular the concepts of nuclear colonialism, infrastructural colonialism, extractivism and monstrosity.

Reclaiming Relationalities: From Shinkolobwe to Hiroshima

LÉOPOLD LAMBERT IN CONVERSATION WITH GLORIA PAVITA

Léopold Lambert: When I was asked by Framer Framed who would be the right interlocutor for a conversation in parallel to their exhibition *Between Fires: Irradiated Imaginations & Anti-Nuclear Solidarities*, I immediately thought about our conversation last October in Cape Town. You and I first met in Johannesburg quite a few years ago at the Graduate School of Architecture, which is still a place I hold very dear in my heart. Today we'll speak about another geography, but first I'd love to have you introduce yourself and your practice.

Gloria Pavita: Thank you so much for having me, Léopold. I'm so excited to be in conversation with you. Especially thinking back to our meeting at the Graduate School of Architecture, which has formed my practice in such a significant way.

I am a reader, a writer, a storyteller and spatial practitioner of an often unseen everyday. I write, make, embody, envision, evoke and film meaning and matter of the intangibles, the seemingly irrevocable conditions that make up home and the everyday for those of us in the margins. For those of us who are many borders away from the countries of our birth. I work between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the country of my birth, and South Africa, the country of my being.

LL: You've already pointed towards the geography that we will talk about today, very much in relation to so many others. Namely the DRC and, even more specifically, the region of Katanga. The reason for holding this conversation in connection to the exhibition at Framer Framed is precisely because *The Funambulist* did an issue of the magazine called 'The Colonized & the Atomic Bomb' (July-August 2025) that was a way to mark the 80th anniversary of the mass killing that happened through the double bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by US forces in August 1945.

Roger Peet, *Dig Up The Sun* (2022). Courtesy of the artist

But rather than reading this event in the way we are usually told to – through the Japanese nation-state, in a sort of political vacuum – I was interested in this issue to take my cue from the Dene from Denedeh (Dene country) in the northwest of the Canadian settler colony. The issue follows the stories told by Glen Sean Coulthard, which place in relation the Dene people, whose land was stolen for its uranium and used to fabricate the bombs that went on to assassinate thousands and thousands of people in Hiroshima. About 25-30% of the uranium in the Hiroshima bomb came from Denedeh. The rest came from Katanga. I was interested in this issue to draw those relations that colonised people – including Koreans in Japan – had forced onto them by imperial and colonial forces but are relations that can perhaps be reappropriated.

So, the first thing I wanted to ask you specifically about that event is to reflect on this relationality with people 12.000 kilometres away from Katanga, and to ask what this evokes to you?

GP: Thank you so much for this issue of *The Funambulist*. It came at a time when there's a sense of deafening silence regarding the Congo, at least in my experience of it. A lot of people don't really know how to relate, in the sense of how to speak to and with the Congo. I found the issue really helpful in shedding light, especially with regards to the Shinkolobwe mine that the uranium was extracted from, very few people know about it. And very few people make those kinds of connections.

In reflecting on this particular relationality, beyond the violence of it: for every person or people that was affected by it, both directly and indirectly, there's a sense of opacity. It feels as though we remain quite opaque to one another as more often than not the lines are not clear between the mining of uranium in Shinkolobwe to the eventuality of the extermination in Hiroshima. When I speak about opacity, I mean to say that perhaps the possibility exists to facilitate visibility of ourselves to each other. Even in this conversation, where we're speaking about, or at least alluding to, a global nuclear instrument, we don't yet have the words of the people. Who were the people mining the uranium? What were their lives? What were the conditions under which they operated, and how could they relate to those who eventually lost their lives? What are the commonalities between us, or what potential commonalities could there be?

To be honest, I don't think it's even a matter of commonality, but a matter of visibility. To see that there are people living everyday, ordinary lives behind these atrocities. In the context of my home

place, I feel there's an internal need to step a little bit further back, also in line with visibility. When I speak of Shinkolobwe to my family members, it's also quite opaque. It's not something that's distinctly memorialised in the context of Congo.

I'm taken back to the 2024 Lubumbashi Biennale at Picha Art Center, where there was an exhibition on Shinkolobwe. Entering from the back of the space towards the exhibition, there was a text that read *Arishi kani bantu ba na semeya pa Shinkolobwe*, translating to 'What stories do people tell about Shinkolobwe?' I appreciated that you encountered these words before seeing Roger Peet's illustration (*Dig Up The Sun*, 2022) of the extractivist byways that connect all these geographies. That you are called to take a pause and ask yourself what stories we will tell, and what stories do you know about Shinkolobwe before encountering the sheer enormity of what has unfolded and what continues to unfold. It's a uranium mine, after all, and it still has after-effects that are not yet being seen or, at least, being given the visibility that they deserve even in the context of Katanga.

LL: It's true that we began with that uranium that creates relationality. I think it's very important here to follow the way Édouard Glissant approaches relationality. Relationality doesn't mean this nice thing where we all hold hands and are happy together. It means some people have been put in relation with others through an acute form of violence. But precisely the goal of this conversation is to also understand how we can reclaim those relationalities. Uranium was one way to go about it, but rubber could have been just as much one, in the context of Belgian colonialism... I'm always aware that I'm wearing a very unfortunate first name myself in these kinds of conversations.

If we try to keep showing this infrastructure of relationality that links us: the DRC is a gigantic country, but even when we talk about Katanga, we are obliged to think about the role Katanga played (in association with colonial powers such as Belgium, the US and France) in the downfall and eventual assassination of Patrice Lumumba, which had political repercussions far beyond the Congo. To some extent, the same could be said about the student movement of 1990 and the Mobutu-ordered bloody repression in Lubumbashi (the largest city of Katanga). How do you read this network of repercussions with your family home region at its centre?

GP: I appreciate that you picked on those two events because there's quite a bit of mirroring with the precedents that they both set, and I think they still have quite significant and deep ripple effects with how we negotiate with our home place. I don't know if it's fair to say we, let me just say I. Both events speak to moments where ideas of liberation, ideas of independence, self-determination were quite heightened, especially following the overwhelming history of extraction that surrounds the Congo. A history that still defines conversations on how we relate to the Congo.

These two events are quite pivotal. They not only perpetuated inherited violence, but I think they also caused significant suppression of the greater population. In the sense that the greater populace spoke up about what they wanted or how they wanted to proceed with what the country could be, and they were met with quite extreme violence. This signalled to the greater population of Congo that this is what happens when you want to self-determine. This is what happens when you have a voice, when you call out something for what it is.

LL: When we talk about the DRC and how we can reclaim relationality that was established in violence, something that I want to complexify is how so many of us – in particular in the [Global] North but far from exclusively – quite literally carry pieces of Congolese land in our pockets. In the form of our phones, or our computers. If we really take this seriously and imagine we would be carrying a little bit of soil, rather than it being formatted into a phone. I'm wondering what kind of ontology this creates, to have a piece of a land that has been stolen over and over again. Not just by European colonial powers, but by many more.

This is a very hard question, I know, but do you have any imagination about how we can reclaim such a relationality today?

GP: I don't have a specific answer to that, to be honest, as there's a degree of detachment that this device, this piece of Congo that we have in our pockets, facilitates. The other side of it is that this same device offers the opportunity to bear witness, to read deeper, to see more. And I think those are incredibly valuable ways to approach a seemingly distant land, where several forms of extraction and violence are occurring.

I'd be remiss not to echo the calls of Congolese activists asking us to reconsider how we engage with new technology. Whether we require upgrading, and when we do, considering who we purchase from and which alternatives exist in the form of refurbished technology.

How can we begin to extricate ourselves from the cycle of consumption and extraction? The supply chain continues whether or not a few of us choose to buy refurbished items, but I do think it is a worthwhile pursuit to try and put a small dent in how these consumer networks unfold.

Relationality emerges in the tension between distinct realities: on one hand, women and children sorting extracted mineral ore into 25-kilogram sacks; on the other, our hands that scroll and tap devices containing grams of cobalt. I have yet to come to a place of how to reclaim this relationality beyond witnessing through these same devices. In witnessing, we counteract the detachment that our devices permit. There is more than just the minerals of Congo carried in these devices, there are people.

LL: I'm reminded of the piece you had at the Venice Biennale in 2023 that was soil, quite simply. I want to push you a bit further in wondering together whether the land has a chance to express itself while being in our pocket. In transit or travel, so to speak. Can the land speak through this, or have we forever shut it up once we extracted it?

GP: I don't think we can ever quite shut it. That’s the beauty of the land. It just finds a way to make itself known, to make itself present in some way or another. I really appreciate that line of thinking because it opens up possibilities around how we can read the ways in which the land is trying to speak to us. Beyond a certain extraction point, beyond it being converted into a device or something that's unrecognisable from where it came from.

Léopold Lambert is the editor-in-chief of *The Funambulist*, a print and online magazine dedicated to the politics of space and bodies. He is a trained architect, as well as the author of four books that examine the violence of architecture, including *States of Emergency: A Spatial History of the French Colonial Continuum* (Premiers Matins de Novembre, 2021; Columbia Books on the City and Architecture, 2026).

Gloria Pavita is a reader, writer, storyteller and spatial practitioner of an often unseen everyday, one inhabited by people who aren't warranted the privilege to write or speak of themselves. Pavita is a Candidate Architect working in the domain of social impact architecture. She works between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Africa.

ARTISTS / ARTWORKS

BUULBUUL

The Burial of a Brown Goose **(2026)**
Performance installation
Concrete, steel, wood and
agar-based bioplastic
Variable dimensions

The Burial of a Brown Goose ties together several lifelines, all stemming from the regions of Kazakhstan deeply affected by nuclear testing and radiation, focusing on human and more-than-human interaction during times of genocide and colonialism. *The Burial of a Brown Goose* is based on a song made by musician and writer Junisbay (1891-1973) about two geese. The work channels the grief, rage and generational care that gets passed on amid the denigration of nuclear-affected soil, water and living beings. Through recreating a bird burial, buulbuul invites listeners into a state of hypnotic lament using human mimicry of bird noises and the distorted soundscape of nuclear-affected spaces.

The Burial of a Brown Goose has been commissioned by Framer Framed and Sonic Acts for the exhibition *Between Fires*. The work is produced in collaboration with Anemoia Tacenda (bodywear), Gizem Üstüner (headwear), Jee Chan (choreography) and Ache C. Wang (steelwork) and contains excerpts from Junisbay Stambayev's 'Brown Goose' (20th century).

buulbuul is a duo comprised of artists Haider Timur and yourfriendkas, working in the realms of sound-making, poetry and image. They use Central Asian traditional instruments, modular synths and voices to mimic the sound and movement of geese, swans and humans.

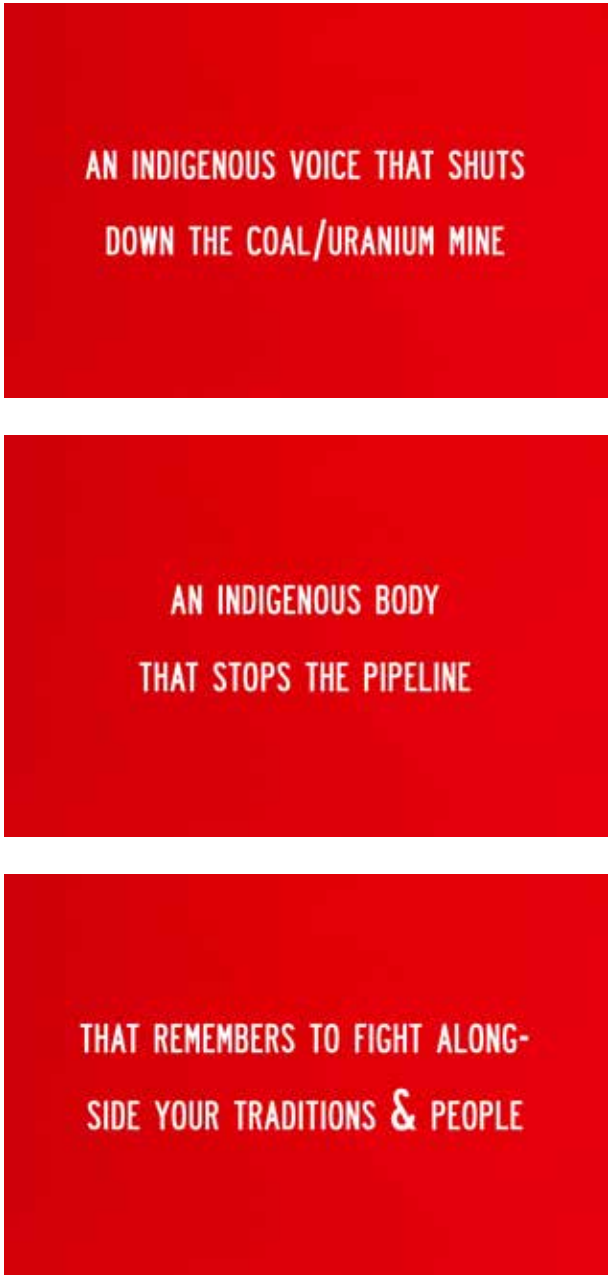
Haider Timur is a graphic designer and hybrid media artist based in Amsterdam. With a background in literature and philosophy, he brings a ‘melancholic dreamscape’ to his work, often drawing on historic Central Asian and Persianate poetry. Timur strives to express sensual and spiritual transformations, the concept of beauty and its destruction through his art.

yourfriendkas is a friend and artist based between Amsterdam and Almaty. They work with (access to) communal space; shared and decentralised knowledge; translocal solidarity; and the connection of direct action/ resistance to art and cultural work. Their output usually consists of audiovisual experiences, writing, performance, publications, community building and collaborations.

DEMIAN DINÉYAZHI´

Hey Jolene **(2018)**
51 carousel slides
Glass-mounted 35mm

Hey Jolene is a visual poem mounted on an analogue slide projector. The text appears against a saturated crimson background, created by the artist’s finger pressed over a lens facing the sun. The poem addresses a friend who died on her reservation, resonating with shared experiences of loss, survival and structural harm across Indigenous communities in the Gallup region (New Mexico, US).



Demian DinéYazhi´, slides from *Hey Jolene* (2018). Courtesy of the artist

Demian DinéYazhi´, *my ancestors will not let me forget this* (2020). Courtesy of the artist

my ancestors will not let me forget this
(2019-ongoing)
Wheatpaste poster installation
Variable dimensions

my ancestors will not let me forget this addresses the entangled relationship between the land, Indigenous peoples and the United States. The work insists the US flag is a symbol of genocide and ongoing refusal to honour Indigenous peoples. Rather than an innocent emblem of patriotism, the flag is a signal of devastation to be read as a warning from those who may be waving or wearing it.

This iteration of DinéYazhi´'s artwork derives from an earlier neon sculpture with the same phrase in a glowing yellow, which confronted the toxic legacy of uranium mining by the US government on Diné (Navajo).

Demian DinéYazhi´ is a Portland, Oregon-based Diné transdisciplinary artist, writer and curator born to the clans Naasht'ézhí Tábaahá (Zuni Clan Water's Edge) and Tódích'íí'nii (Bitter Water). Their practice highlights the intersections of Radical Indigenous Queer Feminist ideology, while challenging the white noise of contemporary art by refusing colonial and professional etiquette. Their multimedia approach honours ancestral traditions of survivance, migration and revolutionary histories tied to the resilience of Indigenous, Trans, Two-Spirit and Queer communities.

They are the founder of Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment (R.I.S.E.), an activist initiative dedicated to amplifying Indigenous culture. They are the author of *Ancestral Memory*, *An Infected Sunset* and *We Left Them Nothing*.

Inas Halabi, Hebron, from the series *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (2023). Courtesy of the artist

Inas Halabi, Yatta, from the series *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (2023). Courtesy of the artist

INAS HALABI

We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction (2023)
40 carousel slides
Plastic-mounted 35mm

We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction explores the material effects of radiation, both physically and metaphorically. Following research conducted by local nuclear physicist Khalil Thabayneh, the work probes the possible burial of nuclear waste and the presence of man-made radiation in the Hebron District in Palestine.

By placing red plastic filter sheets in front of the camera lens in various locations, different shades of red are generated to make visible the levels of radioactivity. The isotope Cesium 137, invisible but deadly, can be seen as a synecdoche for a more ungraspable invisibility – the systemic networks of power and control in the region – and the work becomes a meditation on how to account for the un-filmable but inexorable.

Inas Halabi (1988, Palestine) is an artist/filmmaker living and working between Palestine and the Netherlands. Her practice is concerned with how social and political forms of power are manifested and the impact that overlooked or suppressed histories have on contemporary life.

ÄSEL KADYRKHANOVA

Nükte (2026)
Charcoal drawing on paper
88 x 900 cm
Hand-drawn video animation
8'

'Nükte' is the Kazakh word for a full stop – the punctuation mark at the end of a sentence – deriving from the Arabic word 'noqta'. Starting from the etymology of the word, the animated film explores the incognisable presence of radiation in a landscape. An explosion is not a singular event but signifies the emergence of post-nuclear spacetime, the birth of a new landscape where full stop is no longer possible. Through metamorphoses of figurative shapes into simplified or encrypted forms, the film searches for a visual language to represent the impact of radiation, for which no signifiers are sufficient.

Nükte reflects on the embodied memory of the artist's mother, who experienced nuclear testing near Semipalatinsk as a child. Her mother recalls the sensation of the ground shaking during explosions, which she associated with being rocked in a cradle. Through this contrast, the artist asks what a lived experience of nuclear testing could be and how it is carried in memory.

Nükte has been commissioned by Framer Framed and Sonic Acts for the exhibition *Between Fires*.

Äsel Kadyrkhanova, fragment from *Nükte* (2026), charcoal on paper. Courtesy of the artist

Äsel Kadyrkhanova is a visual artist and researcher; currently, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam. Kadyrkhanova's artistic research looks at art as a medium of memory with a specific focus on cultural memory in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. She addresses traumatic inheritance – the burden of silenced, undocumented pasts and unmourned personal losses. Working across drawing, painting, textile, installation art and moving image, Kadyrkhanova is inspired by the concepts of embodiment, haptic visuality, landscape and language, with many of her works offering evocative metaphors to address totalitarian and colonial legacies.

DILYARA KAIPOVA

Radiation Signs (2022)
Cotton ikat
110 x 180 cm

Scream Mask (2022)
Silk ikat
130 x 180 cm

Radiation Signs (2024)
Silk and cotton ikat
110 x 180 cm

Ikats are often called a cloud fabric. They feature abstract patterns and colours that blur into each other. Uzbek ikat is a complex structure of symbols, created as a form of storytelling about the environment, the interaction between people and nature. Birds and insects, totem animals, plants and clouds, the sun and jewellery, as well as household items are all present in traditional patterns.

Kaipova's handcrafted chapans integrate 'foreign', modern symbols, forming entirely new meanings. Surprisingly, desacralisation does not disrupt the traditional pattern of the ikat, on the contrary, it seems organic, with modern patterns fitting into the fixed traditional ones.

Radiation Signs and *Scream Mask* have been produced in collaboration with artisans from Margilan City, Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan.

Dilyara Kaipova (1967, Uzbekistan) graduated in 1990 from the Department of Decorative Arts of the Pavel Benkov Republican College of Art. Kaipova worked as stage designer at the Mukimi Uzbek State Music Theatre from 1998-2012. She later worked as Art Director and Puppet Master at the educational theatre of Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts & Culture and collaborated with various puppet theatres until 2017. Kaipova is active in the field of graphic art, and in recent years, her creative work has extended to textile projects combining traditional Uzbek patterns with contemporary motifs.

ALMAGUL MENLIBAYEVA

Kurchatov 22 (2013)
Five-channel video installation
Variable dimensions

Kurchatov 22 was shot in the former heartland of the Soviet 'Iron Curtain', a secret territory in northwest Kazakhstan known by multiple code names, including Kurchatov 22 and Semipalatinsk-21. Established in 1948 under Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria, the site covered 18.500 square kilometers and functioned for four decades as a military-scientific testing ground. During this period, 456 nuclear tests – above and below ground – were conducted, alongside hundreds of thermonuclear, hydrodynamic and hydronuclear experiments. These tests profoundly affected the environment, plants and animals, and the lives of Indigenous Kazakhs and Soviet workers living in the area.

Combining historical facts, staged footage and contemporary eyewitness interviews, the work explores land as a carrier of a collective memory of the

Almagul Menlibayeva, still from *Kurchatov 22* (2013). Courtesy of the artist

'colonial experiment' and totalitarian experience. *Kurchatov 22* critically addresses Soviet modernity, opening a forum on human-environmental issues and shifting identities in Central Asia.

Thermonuclear Skin (2022)
Postdigital print on fabric with hand-sewing
220 x 160 cm

Thermonuclear Skin developed following Menlibayeva's visit to the Kazakhstan Tokamak for Material Testing (KTM) capsule in Kurchatov, North Kazakhstan. A tokamak is a device for studying controlled thermonuclear fusion. Inspired by the special alloy used to construct the capsule, the textile symbolises protection from the intense radiation of the capsule's 'Artificial Sun', which generates temperatures exceeding those found on the Sun.

Almagul Menlibayeva's practice combines video, photography and Cyber Textile with AI. She reinterprets contemporary processes in Central Asia through mythologies and collective memory, centring women's autonomy via the epistemic heritage of nomadic feminism and critically reflecting on the consequences of environmental degradation and modernisation.

Kamila Narysheva & Vicky Clarke, recording process of *T1/2 (Half-Life)* (2025). Courtesy of the artists

KAMILA NARYSHEVA & VICKY CLARKE

T1/2 (Half-Life) **(2025)**
Sound installation
37’

T1/2 (Half-Life) is a research and sound art project exploring the acoustic memory of the Semipalatinsk Test Site. The project centres on how sound can capture and convey the intangible echoes of historical trauma. The first component of *T1/2* was an expedition to the Semipalatinsk Test Site in December 2024, where Kamila Narysheva captured field recordings using specialised equipment. The piece is based on field recordings of soil, water, air and architectural remnants made using hydrophones, geophones and contact microphones. The second part is a sound piece and an installation that are presented as an immersive sound environment, where audiences experience history not just as knowledge but as a sensory, emotional encounter.

Kamila Narysheva (Kazakhstan) is a sound and media artist based in Almaty. Working with spatial sound, field recording and rule-based systems, she creates installations and performances that examine nuclear legacy, digital infrastructure and cultural memory in Central Asia.

Vicky Clarke is a sound and electronic media artist whose work explores materiality, electrical phenomena and ritual. Working with sound sculpture, DIY electronics and human-machine systems, she explores relationships to technology considering themes of human agency in autonomous systems, post-industrialisation and the techno-emotional states experienced through these interactions. Clarke produces music as SONAMB; her debut album, *SLEEPSTATES* was released in 2022.

Emilija Škarnulytė, still from *Burial* (2022). Courtesy of the artist

EMILIJA ŠKARNULYTĖ

Burial **(2022)**
Film installation
60’

Burial invites the viewer for an immersive sensorial trip into the unique and vast Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (INPP) in Lithuania, now undergoing a decommissioning process. Cold War energy structures continue to impact geopolitical processes and leave planetary threats over long periods of time. The project takes a geological approach – it reads the composition of this flat landscape as a stack of stratigraphic layers. *Burial* is an intertwined section through the current entanglement of identities, spatial practices, infrastructures and geological resources.

Writer & Director: Emilija Škarnulytė
Producers: Dagnė Vildžiūnaitė, Elisa Fernanda Pirir
Directors of Photography: Eitvydas Doškus, Audrius Budrys, Adam Khalil, Emilija Škarnulytė
Editors: Mykolas Žukauskas, Darius Šilėnas
Colourist: Fredrik Harreschou
Sound Design: Vytis Puronas
Composer: Gaute Barlindhaug
Additional Music: Jokūbas Čižikas, Vytis Puronas, Emilija Škarnulytė

Emilija Škarnulytė (Lithuania) is an artist working across film, sculpture, drawing and immersive installation. She explores deep time and the hidden structures that shape planetary, ecological and political systems. Moving between documentary and the imagined, her work traces sites where ancient myth intersects with the future.

Her films often take the perspective of a future archaeologist, entering decommissioned nuclear power plants, deep-sea data storage facilities, underwater cities and remote geological formations.

ROGER PEET

Dig Up The Sun (2022)
Hand-printed linoleum blockprint
96 x 96 cm

Dig Up The Sun traces the passage of uranium from the Shinkolobwe mine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the infrastructure of the Manhattan Project. The purity and concentration of Shinkolobwe ore were critical to the rapid success of the project. Due to the state secrecy surrounding the atomic bomb, the Congolese workers who made the weapon possible have been excised from history. Contamination from Shinkolobwe uranium affects sites across the US.

Weight of the Ore (2024)
Blockprinted fabric panel
110 x 240 cm

This panel of fabric has been printed by foot in two colours from two pattern-matched blocks. It depicts the mine, its product and the weapon that was made from them.

Roger Peet is an artist, printmaker, muralist and writer living in Portland, Oregon. His visual work tends to focus on civilised bad ideas, predator-prey relationships, as well as the contemporary crises of biodiversity and capitalism and what can and can't be done about them. His writing addresses the politics and history of social relationships with the natural world.

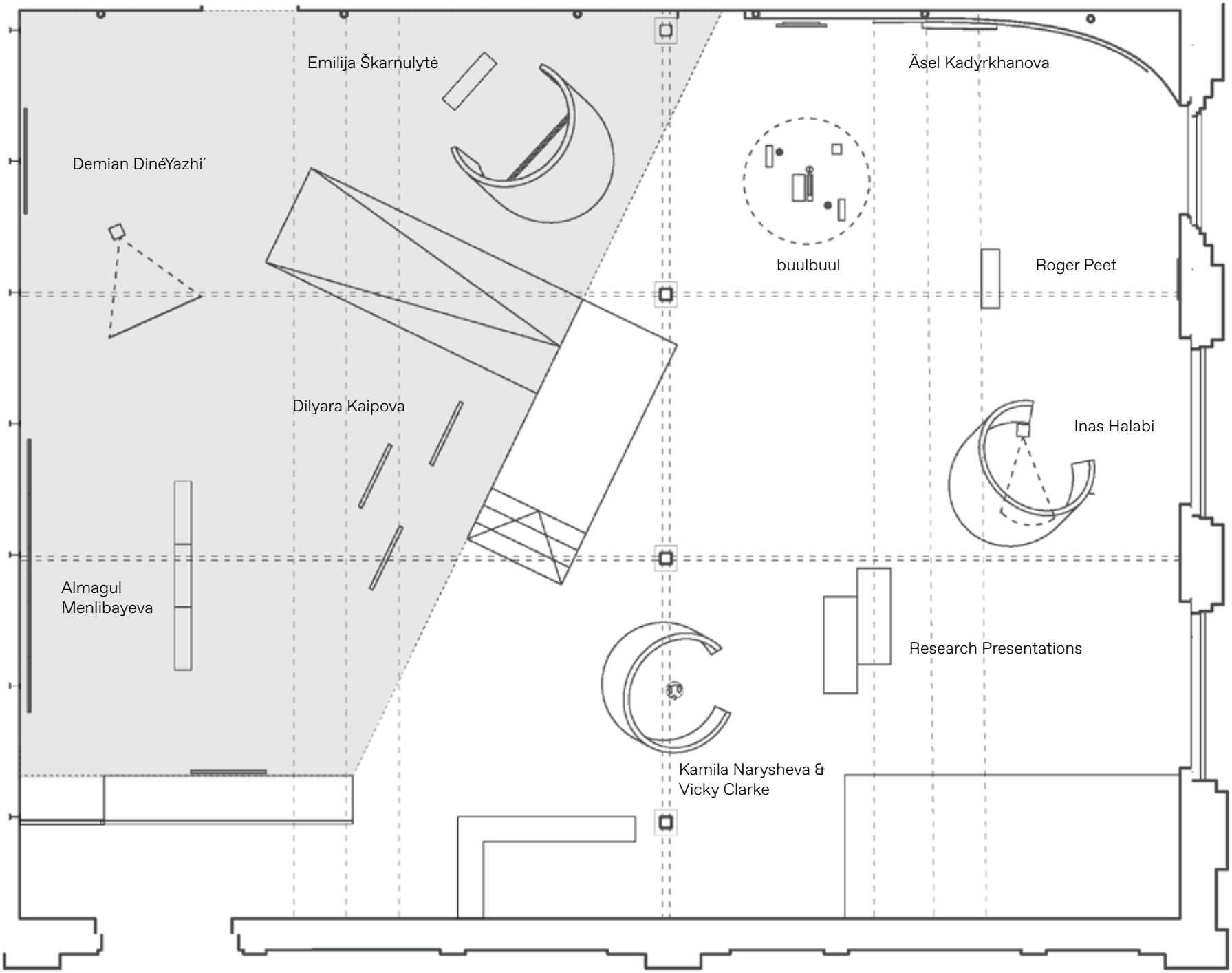
Peet is a founding member of the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative and helps to run the cooperative Flight 64 print studio in Portland. He collaborates with artists, activists and scientists globally and locally in service of a more generous and wilder world.

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Alongside artistic contributions, *Between Fires* includes research presentations by Kamila Smagulova and the International Institute for Social History (IISG) by Mathijs Boom, Reina Borst and Rose Spijkerman.

Kamila Smagulova is a researcher from Oskemen, East Kazakhstan, and a current PhD candidate at the Institute for History, Leiden University. Smagulova's contribution provides insight into the short history of the Nevada-Semey anti-nuclear movement. The display includes historical documents, photographs and personal diaries of the activists and survivors, speaking to their decades-long sorrow but also their courage to resist. Her research is part of the project *International Coalitions for Peace in the Era of Decolonisation* and supported by the European Research Council.

IISG is an archive and a research institute. Their collections focus on social and economic inequality, with an emphasis on labour and international social movements. IISG's contribution to *Between Fires* offers insight into Dutch energy politics and solidarity movements in the 1970s and 1980s. The presentation highlights the strength of transnational cooperation through case studies of opposition to enrichment infrastructure in Amelo, the Netherlands, and uranium mining in Namibia.


Emilija Škarnulytė
Äsel Kadyrkhanova
Demian DinéYazhi´
buulbuul
Roger Peet
Dilyara Kaipova
Inas Halabi
Almagul
Menlibayeva
Research Presentations
Kamila Narysheva &
Vicky Clarke

SPATIAL DESIGN

BUREAU LADA

‘The past does not disappear; it circulates through bodies, landscapes, and gestures.’
– Saodat Ismailova

The atomic cloud has disappeared, but the landscapes and people cursed by its shadows ‘stay with’ radioactive times that stretch far beyond human duration. How can the pressures of the cloud’s shadow be embodied? How can the invisible, slow and persistent violence inflicted upon steppe and desert landscapes – and their peoples – be sensed? Rendered empty, yet never truly empty, these landscapes were made silent.

The scenography gives form to the voice of irradiated landscapes through a low-lying shadow cloud that presses upon slanted fragments of ‘atomic infrastructure’, embedded within the ‘soil’ of the gallery floor. These grey, cylindrical elements converge around an absent centre – an invisible fire – structuring and articulating space for individual artworks, distributed along the perimeter walls and suspended within the volume of the space.

The cloud materialises through greenhouse shading fabric: rough, translucent, banal and faintly unsettling. The industrial mesh constructs an interconnected exhibition topography. Visitors move beneath and around the cloudscape, encountering sonic, visual, tactile and performative works in close proximity. At the centre, a raised platform supports the discursive programme, accessed via a ramp and stairs. This elevated zone enables a panoramic reading of the exhibition horizon – extended by the dark, reflective textile surface.

The scenographic approach draws on the work of Saodat Ismailova, particularly her engagement with the steppe as a site of memory and embodied knowledge, alongside texts by Samia Henni, notably *Deserts Are Not Empty* (2022). As Henni exposes the desert as a constructed fiction of emptiness, Ismailova reveals its capacity to remember. The scenography seeks to spatialise and synchronise these two epistemologies.

Lada Hršak is an architect, researcher and founder of Bureau LADA (Landscape, Architecture, Design, Action), a cross-disciplinary studio working between Amsterdam, Zagreb, Cairo and Tangier. Framing itself as a feminine spatial practice, the studio engages with spatial justice, social ecology and inclusive design through projects in architecture, research and education. Hršak’s work explores shallow-water territories, Mediterranean spatial practices and urban glossaries, published in the award-winning *Shallow Waters* and *Tangier Glossary*. She co-founded the Spatial Justice for Palestine Network NL, advises on cultural and spatial initiatives and teaches at the Design Academy Eindhoven, the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague (KABK) and the Academy of Architecture Amsterdam.

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Between Fires: Irradiated Imaginations and Anti-Nuclear Solidarities is curated by Fabienne Rachmadiev. The exhibition is commissioned and produced by Framer Framed and presented in partnership with Sonic Acts as part of Sonic Acts Biennial 2026.

Graphic design for the exhibition is inspired by the purification ritual in Karaul, Kazakhstan, 6 August, 1989, depicted in *Nevada i Semipalatinsk* (1989), dir. Sergey Shafir, Kazakhfilm.

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