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trust at the Swiss Institute
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Feb. 9, 2026
Saodat Ismailova: Amanat

News

Saodat Ismailova forms a sacred trust at the Swiss Institute

The Swiss Institute is presenting the first solo exhibition by Ismailova in the United States. The show will travel to LUMA Arles and finishes at Kunsthalle Bern.



Saodat Ismailova, Amanat, 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

tl;dr



The Swiss Institute in New York is presenting *Amanat*, the first solo exhibition by Saodat Ismailova to be held in the United States. The central pillar of Ismailova's exhibition is her eponymous film *Amanat* (2026), a newly-commissioned piece whose title references the concept of a sacred trust, a testament which is bequeathed to the following generation. With *Amanat*, Ismailova concludes the final chapter in her long-term engagement with Arslanbob, a vast walnut forest in Kyrgyzstan revered for centuries as a sacred site.

The rolling landscapes of Central Asia, whose contours are deeply embedded in Ismailova's notion of the imaginary, are crisscrossed by fault lines steeped in ritual and myth, created by migrating nomadic peoples and great empires that have molded the psychosomatic terrains of the present. In *Amanat*, Ismailova contemplates how memory is processed during moments of profound cultural and political change, wondering what can be expressed out loud when pressure is brought to bear on the very conditions of belief.

For Ismailova, the forest acquires a geopolitical importance that transcends its local significance and assimilates with its mythical past. The film follows the course of history and memory in the region through the experiences of a young protagonist born into this most recent period of shifting reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its narrative follows him as he gathers walnuts in the forest, only to fall asleep under the trees and enter into an oneiric realm where themes of loss, betrayal and fractured truths bubble up to the surface.



Saodat Ismailova, *Two Horizons*, 2017. Courtesy of Saodat Ismailova and Le Fresnoy.

The show includes three sculptural objects that distill the film's temporal and metaphysical dimensions, lending them physicality: a date pit cast in gold, a walnut gathered from the forest floor, and an artefact which merges the two into a golden hybrid that portends the possibility of myth engendering new realities. The works are accompanied by an immersive sound installation composed by Mélia Roger located in an adjacent gallery, where audiences can be fully engulfed by the sounds of Arslanbob forest.

A complementary sound work on the second floor of the Swiss Institute that was recorded in the forest at night attunes listeners to a hallucinatory state in which reality is experienced somatically; the two-channel film installation *Swan Lake* juxtaposes different cultures from Central Asian cinema in an adjoining gallery. The confluence of film, sound and form foreground how we articulate and sense truth during moments of political upheaval and uncertainty.

The exhibition at the Swiss Institute has been organized in partnership with [LUMA Foundation](#) and [Kunsthalle Bern](#) and is open through April 12, 2026. A screening of Ismailova's films is scheduled for April 6 at Museum of Modern Art in New York. After the conclusion of the Swiss Institute show the exhibition will travel in expanded form to LUMA Arles and will finish at Kunsthalle Bern.