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Tales from the Caucasus

Agil Abdullayev, Farhad Farzali, Aiganym Mukhamejan (Echo Activism Collective), Ulviyya Iman, Ramina Saadatkhani

Preview: 22 January 2026, 6 – 8 PM (GMT)

Exhibition: 23 January – 14 March, 2026

Gazelli Art House presents *Tales from the Caucasus*, featuring four artists from Azerbaijan and the surrounding region working across painting and moving image. Reflecting on personal and societal transformation, they depict contemporary life through a figurative language rich in storytelling. The artists navigate everyday scenes, often infusing them with the fantastical elements of folk tales and myths. The emotional and psychological charge of specific moments and places forms the core of the exhibition — whether a domestic living room, a city park at night, or the shoreline of the Caspian Sea.

Tales from the Caucasus places regional traditions and histories within a contemporary, globalised context, creating connections between past and present. While many of the artists are based in Europe, their works draw on stylistic roots from the Caucasus, engaging contemporary perspectives shaped by migration, cultural exchange, and autobiography.

Agil Abdullayev's practice is an ongoing inquiry into how the queer body archives and performs identity across multiple spaces, both physical and psychological. In a new series of paintings and recent video work Abdullayev explores the entanglement of queerness and public space in post-Soviet contexts. Their work offers intimate portrayals of private realities, respecting anonymity and foregrounding resistance to preconceived notions of masculinity and social restrictions in often conservative environments. Their award-winning three-channel film *Radicals in Between Trees and Dicks* (2024) follows individuals navigating 'cruising' culture in Azerbaijan and surrounding countries — societies where homosexuality remains taboo. Abdullayev has visited over thirty cruising locations, such as public parks or discreetly designated private sex spaces, documenting their own observations and recording the experiences of others in interviews, conversations, and visual recordings.

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Ulviyya Iman focuses her attention to Azerbaijan's social structures and cultural norms, shifting between self-portraiture and observational viewpoints. Her canvases heighten emotional intensity within mundane, settings, as seen in *The End* (2025), which references the Farsi word *meykhana*, a millennia-old Sufi tradition of improvised poetic gatherings where improvised verses are performed to percussive rhythms, drawing parallels with rap battles of hip hop culture from today. In *Self Portrait, Red* (2025), Iman confronts the viewer with a direct gaze and vivid palette, conveying a scene charged with psychological tension.

Ramina Saadatkhani's painted collages offer a vision of inseparability between nature and human experience. Drawing on Nietzschean ideas of the "creature and creator" within, she depicts animals and foliage as expressions of inner states rather than external landscapes. *Experiment Number 3* (2025) is in dialogue with the Biblical scene of The Garden of Eden and interprets themes of temptation and betrayal. *Together with Pomegranate King* (2025), both engage mythic imagery and archetypes, staging dynamic tensions between the human and the animal, feminine and masculine, order and chaos, creation and destruction.

Primarily working with sound and moving image, **Farhad Farzali** combines traditional and marginal cultures with contemporary music and popular aesthetics. His practice is rooted in anthropological research into the neo-folklore of Azerbaijan and neighbouring regions. *Echoactivism* (2025), is a collaborative project with **Aiganyan Mukhamejan (Echo Activism Collective)** that comments on the paradox of hyper-connectivity and fragile human connection. The video documents a performance addressing the ecological crisis of the Caspian Sea, in which two performers that are positioned on opposite shores call to each other across the water; using iPhones and Bluetooth speakers as modern shamanic instruments.

Bringing together shared cultural memory, evolving values, and striking generational shifts, Abdullayev, Farzali, Iman, and Saadatkhani each develop distinct visual languages that speak to the complexities of life in and beyond the Caucasus. Through these intertwined perspectives, *Tales from the Caucasus* explores questions of place, identity, and belonging in a rapidly changing world.

VR headsets will be available for this exhibition for viewers to see our recent exhibition in Baku, *Parallel Worlds* and for visitors at the Baku gallery to see *Tales from the Caucasus*.

About The Artists

Agil Abdullayev (b. 1992) is an interdisciplinary artist working across film, photography, and painting. Their practice investigates shifting notions of identity, trauma, vulnerability, and escapism as they move through public and private memory. Often semi-biographical, Abdullayev's films draw on childhood experiences and personal queer archives, expanding into work shaped by diaries, essays, and close collaboration with local communities. Through alter-egos, intimacy, self-reflection, and emotional extremities, they construct spaces of hyperpossibility where representations can be disrupted, re-articulated, and reinvented. Prizes include: second prize, Fluxus Museum Prize for Experimental Video (2025), the Golden Cube Award at Kassel Dokfest (2024), Seed Award from the Prince Claus Foundation (2022), Artlink Prize, SudKultur Fond 2022. Exhibitions

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and presentations include: MoMA Tbilisi; Istanbul Contemporary Istanbul; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco; Peabody Essex Museum, Salem; Tate, London; Liverpool Biennial; South London Gallery; and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong. Residencies: Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Meet Factory, Cittadellarte, Goethe Institute, and Artlinks CEC.

Farhad Farzali (b. 1989) is based in Berlin. Farzali is a sound artist whose practice merges traditional and marginal cultures with contemporary music and popular aesthetic forms. His work is rooted in anthropological research into the cultural contexts of Azerbaijan and neighbouring regions, documenting emergent forms of neo-folklore. Recent presentations include: *Freeing the Voices* at Kunsthaus Graz, Austria, curated by Zdenka Badovinac (2025); the Istanbul Digital Art Festival at the Atatürk Cultural Center, Istanbul (2024); the Islamic Arts Biennale, Jeddah (2023), the first alternative Azerbaijani pop-up pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2019), 16th Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival (2014). Solo exhibitions in Baku, Venice, Moscow, and Paris. Collections: Museum of Modern Art, Baku; the National Museum of Fine Arts of Azerbaijan; YARAT Contemporary Art Space.

Ulviyya Iman (b. 2007) is a multidisciplinary artist from Azerbaijan currently based in Prague, Czech Republic. Exploring themes of local daily scenes, she often highlights gender roles in society. Iman garners inspiration from her trips to the regions of Azerbaijan, working both from memory and imagination. In her paintings of bright characters and food, Ulviyya explores the everyday iconography of contemporary society. As an emerging artist, Iman exhibits the potential to make a lasting impact on both the Azerbaijani and global art landscapes. Her work has featured in Art Dubai (2025) a group exhibition *Once a Sea*, YARAT, Baku (2025) and *Her Art In Action*, Gazelli Art House, Baku (2024).

Ramina Saadatkhani (b. 1977) is a Baku-based artist who graduated from the Fine Arts Faculty in both the Azimzade Art School and the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts. Her practice spans painting, collage, and pop art, infused with abstract expressionist and pop art sensibilities. Engaging mythology, biblical narratives, and philosophical themes, she resists gendered or socio-cultural constraints, instead using bold, colourful imagery to explore archetypal energies, layered meanings, and encrypted visual forms. Drawing from Azerbaijani artistic heritage, Saadatkhani subtly references traditional carpet weaving and medieval miniature painting through her use of symbolism and structure. Her practice evolves through distinct phases, continually transforming while maintaining a recognisable and coherent visual signature style. Her work has featured in Art Dubai (2025) with Gazelli Art House and a group exhibition *Spring Flow* (2025), Gazelli Art House, Baku.

Aiganyam Mukhamejan (b. 1999) is based in Amsterdam and is a multimedia artist who employs ironic self-portraiture to reflect on Kazakhstan's evolving cultural and political identity. Her work often engages with themes of tradition and modernity, feminist perspectives, and the socio-cultural transformations occurring in contemporary Kazakh society.

Echo Activism Collective is an art collective formed by Farhad Farzali and Aiganyam Mukhamejan.

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About the Gallery

Founded in 2010 by Mila Askarova, Gazelli Art House represents an international roster of artists, from leading figures in Post-War movements such as Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism to ultra-contemporary voices redefining art in the digital age. The gallery champions artists who challenge convention through the creative exploration of a variety of media. Along with its sister site in Baku, the gallery also specialises in art from Azerbaijan and its neighbours, fostering cross-cultural dialogue. In 2015 we launched GAZELL.iO, an online platform specifically supporting innovation in art and technologies.

For further information, please contact: press@gazelliarthouse.com.