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Ester Sheynfeld

b. 2000, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

"You can inherit someone else's experience, but you cannot fully possess it. The same image can be perceived in completely different ways by different generations. This is our cultural layer, but in a way, it is not ours either."

Ester Sheynfeld is a multidisciplinary artist working across graphic art, painting, collage, installation, photography, and video art. Her research-based practice examines the intersections of shared memory, historical narratives, and contemporary identity, with particular attention to how inherited visual languages and ideological codes inform perception. Drawing on Uzbekistan's layered history and social context, Sheynfeld investigates how migration and different local traditions influence the ways individuals understand their identity and sense of belonging. Her work frequently engages with the visual remnants of Soviet modernism, archival imagery, folkloric references, and everyday social archetypes, approaching them as active elements within an evolving cultural landscape.

Sheynfeld's engagement with art began in early childhood, developing through an environment in which artistic and intellectual interests were actively encouraged. Her initial education encompassed traditional drawing and painting before leading her to pursue formal training in monumental painting at the P. P. Benkov State Art College in Tashkent, followed by studies in graphic illustration at the National Institute of Fine Arts and Design named after K. Bekhzod. This multidisciplinary foundation established her familiarity with a broad range of techniques and materials, from fresco and mosaic to graphic composition and book illustration. The subsequent postgraduate studies in the Contemporary Art program at the Joseph Bakshtein Institute of Contemporary Art further developed her conceptual and theoretical approach.

A formative influence on Sheynfeld's artistic development has been her long-standing collaboration with the artist Vyacheslav Akhunov, whose studio she joined in 2016, initially as a student and later as studio manager.

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The early mentorship centered on the study of contemporary art, philosophy, and critical theory, providing an alternative framework for creative thinking that was not readily accessible within the local academic environment. Through sustained discussions, independent reading, and practical experimentation, Sheynfeld developed an understanding of conceptual art as a process in which an idea, its underlying structure, and the choice of artistic medium are intrinsically connected. Akhunov's approach encouraged her to move beyond the boundaries of conventional disciplines, while their collaborative work also created a space for independent thought, reflective dialogue, and the gradual formation of her own perspective.

An important dimension of Sheynfeld's practice is her investigation of cultural memory as a process of continuous interpretation. Working with archival photographs, documentary materials, inherited objects, and personal encounters, she examines how images acquire meaning across generations and how their reading changes according to individual experience and historical distance. Her series ‘Pinned’, comprising twenty-nine collages constructed from photographic postcards by Max Penson, offers a particularly clear articulation of this inquiry. Penson's carefully staged photographs of everyday life in the Uzbek SSR construct an idealized image of Soviet society, presenting a visual narrative in which collective life appears harmoniously organized. By cutting, fragmenting, and recomposing these images into forms reminiscent of ancient Turkic inscriptions, Sheynfeld transforms the photographic archive into a new visual vocabulary.

Her engagement with collective memory also extends to the social structures and recognizable characters of the post-Soviet environment. In the ongoing series ‘Social Phantoms’, Sheynfeld examines familiar figures that persist over time despite the profound transformations of the societies in which they exist. The neighborhood observer, the permanently dissatisfied neighbor, and other recurring social characters become cultural remnants that continue to inhabit contemporary life. Drawing on the visual language of Soviet modernism, mosaic composition, and postmodern irony, she places these figures within fragmented, abstract pictorial spaces. Their persistence reveals the durability of the peculiar nostalgia attached to behavioral patterns that have outlived their original historical context.

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For Sheynfeld, these figures also point to a broader regional experience, in which recognizable references circulate across Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and other parts of the former Soviet region.

Questions of inheritance and the transmission of knowledge constitute another central strand of her research. Growing up in Uzbekistan, where intergenerational relationships and respect for elders occupy an important place in everyday life, Sheynfeld became increasingly attentive to the relationship between accumulated experience and the limits of its transmission. Her exploration of identity is further informed by her own multicultural background and an interest in personal belonging. Several series of work by the artist reflect on mortality, remembrance, and the human impulse to preserve the traces of existence. Across her works, Sheynfeld connects subjective narratives with broader questions of displacement, memory, and identity.

Her interest in historical continuity also informs ‘The Radiance of the Axis of Time’, developed for the Uzbekistan Pavilion at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. Centered on the Institute of the Sun, a site associated with Soviet-era scientific research and space exploration, the project examines the relationship between scientific ambition, architectural modernism, and the ideological imagination. Through the metaphor of light traveling across time, Sheynfeld considers how intellectual aspirations and historical ideas remain present long after the circumstances of their emergence have disappeared.

A defining characteristic of Sheynfeld's artistic method is the absence of a fixed hierarchy between media. Her choice of material emerges from the nature of each inquiry, with the initial impulse often arising from an observation, encounter, or distinct experience before developing into a more extensive process. While certain projects require sustained engagement with archival sources and contexts, others begin with an immediate response to an object, image, or conversation. This approach allows her to move freely between traditional artistic techniques and contemporary formats, treating painting, graphic composition, photography, and installation as equally valid means of articulating an idea. Her background in different artistic disciplines also informs an openness to collaboration, enabling her to engage with unfamiliar materials and processes when the conceptual direction of a project calls for it.

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Ultimately, Sheynfeld's practice is concerned with the ways in which individuals and societies construct their understanding of the past and negotiate inherited perspectives. Her work traces the persistence of cultural images and social codes, revealing how seemingly distant narratives continue to inform the conditions of contemporary life.

EDUCATION

2023–2025	Joseph Bakshtein Institute of Contemporary Art, Postgraduate Program in Contemporary Art
2019–2023	Tashkent National Institute of Fine Arts and Design named after K. Bekhzod, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2016–2019	Tashkent State Art College named after P. P. Benkov, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

EXHIBITIONS

2025	19th Venice Architecture Biennale, Venice, Italy
2024	“We Are Here” / Elpis Fondazione, Milan, Italy
2024	10th Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2024	“Archival Landscapes” / Petershof Art Space, Cologne, Germany
2024	“Archival Landscapes” / NIA.S.A, Bremen, Germany
2024	“Nomsiz Festival”, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2023	“Mahalla Art Weekend”, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2022	“Tashkent Futures” / Center for Contemporary Art (CCA), Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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2022	Group Exhibition held with the support of the United Nations Mission in Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2019	“To Each Their Own Space” / Zero Line Gallery, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2019	“Where Sleep Ends and Reality Begins” / Zero Line Gallery, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

PUBLICATIONS

2025–2026	Perspective. Generation of Search. Faces of the Generation
2025	BOSMA, Volume 01
2024	i-D Magazine, “Don't Sleep on Uzbekistan's Thriving Fashion Scene”
2024	Tez Tosh Magazine, “MAPPINGTHECITY”

Museums and Collections

Housed within private collections worldwide.

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