Mophradat's Orbitals program took us on a research-trip to Uzbekistan. The lens that shaped the entirety of the trip was Saodat Ismailova's work, her connection to the work of other Uzbek artists and craftspeople, and the general local political context. We were profoundly struck by the generosity of the people we met in Uzbekistan, a warmth that opened the door for us to deeply delve into the multifaceted world Saodat Ismailova seeks to capture, a world that she, too, renders with such generosity across all its layers.

A moment that made a dent in all our beings, and will surely remain with us forever, was the day spent in Saodat's parents' living room. It was an essential moment for us, surrounded by four generations from Saodat's family and musicians who were old friends she had worked with on some of her films. The day was filled with discussions about the history of music and instrument-making in Uzbekistan, musical erasure and censorship during the Soviet Union, and conversations around a long lunch table that harbored our intimate conversations with one another. In that moment, the past, present, and future floated around us.
As we spent time learning with Saodat about her work and the local, political context, we engaged in profound reflections that continued throughout our trip around identity, decolonial creation, the relationship with nature, tradition, and craft, transmission and the responsibility of collective memory, and constantly searching for the thematic and methodological threads that intertwined with our own artistic practices. The trip led us to carefully draw out both similarities and differences not only between her work and ours, but also between our respective countries' struggles for liberation and the question around identity, colonial/governmental erasure, and memory.
We found particular inspiration in her approach of working in collaboration with craft and knowledge keepers not only in Uzbekistan but also in Central Asia as a shared geography, in addition to her work with the collective DAVRA, emphasizing circularity, mythology, transmission between generations and a creative unity that defies the artificial separations manufactured by nation-states and imposed borders, prompting us to continually question what is shared and what we do with it.
What was given to us was a glimpse into a social texture that, in many notions, resembled ours:

Cherishing the land and resisting erasure.

An identity that has been shaped by language, civilizational change, cultural blend, and political turning points.
How might these blends influence -or even shape- one's artistic practice?
This has inspired us to reflect on knowledge in our respective contexts, write poems, collect flowers, take photographs and make illustrations.
The following reflection is an initial collection of our writings, notes, stories, plants, and photos that we have collected throughout this trip. They have no particular order, and are meant to give a general, collective essence of what we tasted, smelled, dreamed, and walked...



Madina Kasimbaeva's studio (an Uzbek artist known for her exquisite suzani (from ‘suzan’, the Farsi word for needle) a type of silk-thread embroidery that draws on cosmological and Zoroastrian world views that are part of the heritage of Central Asia. August 2026

What was your dream? Tell the river

In Tashkent old city, he remembers:
(under his tongue)



"They used to play as kids: they fed bread to the river, swam to collect it, and ate it.
The water was so pure then"[1]

In Jericho, a spring is haunted by a female spirit, its waters turn red. Where many women have gathered, shared stories, and prayed to the spring for healing and fertility.

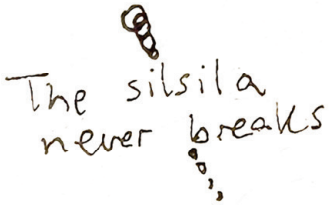
1 Conversation with Othmane, a 70 year old man born and raised in Tashkent, who we met in the old city walking along the canal.





Bukhara old city
August 2026





- Do you love your job?[2]
- My joy is teaching it to others



Amanat



To transmit: every person holds a seed that transforms in their hands.

A dialogue with the past, a creation, not a reproduction.

“Engaged in no less than remaking the world and making it home again through a complex process of spiritual resettlement and reclaiming.”

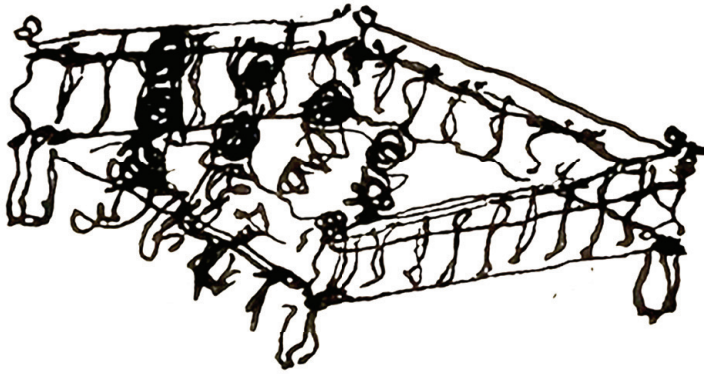


2 Exchange with Baxshullo Jumayev, a Gold embroidery craftsman in his Bukhara shop.



Madina Kasimbaeva's studio
August 2026

The living room opened a door for us
into Uzbekistan
The food
The hospitality
The musicians
The relationships
Four generations of women
We had a therapy session with music
A tiny intimate domestic space
A moment that reflected what it means to be here.
In Uzbekistan.



- Do you heal with music?
- Music heals. The string of the dutar resonates so deeply within you;
it makes the strings of your heart shake.[3] [4]

She sat with each of us, looking deep into our eyes, asking each of each: «Are you beautiful?» «No no, don't stop playing.» I know who you are from the way you play, by the way your thumb touches the string and by the way you strum the dutar, I can tell if you are shy, confident, happy, or sad. I can know you just from the way your fingers sound.



3 Exchange with Guzal Muminova, a traditional folk musician, academic and dutar player.
4 The dutar is a traditional long-necked two-stringed lute found in Central Asia and Iran.

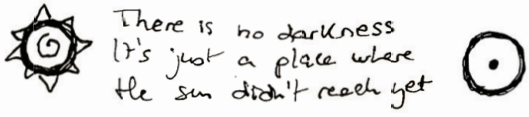


Guzal Muminova, a traditional folk musician, teacher and close collaborator of Saodat Ismailova
August 2026



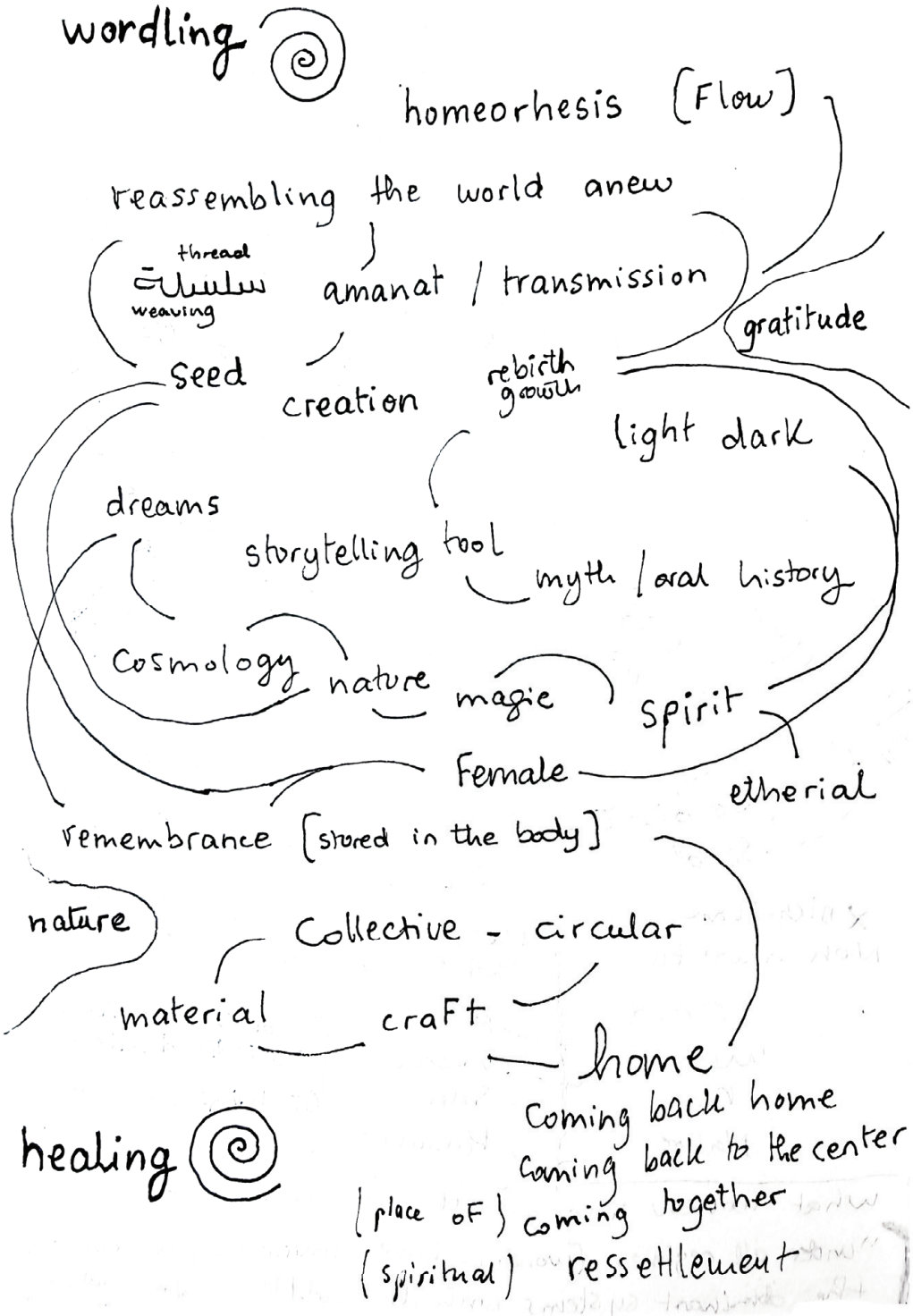


The moon and the sun take turns to eclipse
40 hottest summer days
40 coldest winter nights
Are you tired, my friend?
Are you lost and looking for something you do not yet know?
Even the moon and the sun take turns to eclipse
In this little cave, rest for a while
In silence, in darkness, in observing the sun path;
From darkness to light, from light back to darkness
Once you reach the place of no place
You might find the entire world waiting,
A whole community breathing



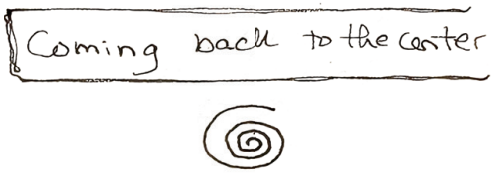


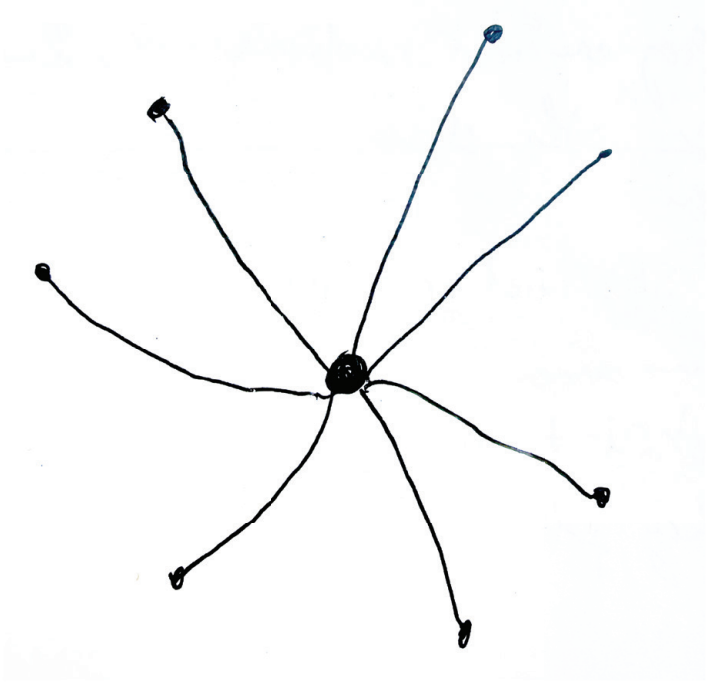
The Chillahona at the Kukcha cemetery (an ancient underground meditation cell dating back to the 12th century)
August 2026


wordling
homeorhesis (Flow)
reassembling the world anew
thread
weaving
amanat / transmission
gratitude
seed
creation
rebirth
growth
light dark
dreams
storytelling tool
myth / oral history
cosmology
nature
magic
spirit
Female
etherial
remembrance [stored in the body]
nature
Collective - circular
material
craft
home
Coming back home
Coming back to the center
(place of) coming together
(spiritual) ressetlement
healing



Tapshan (a type of outdoor furniture unique to Central Asia) in Samarkand
August 2026

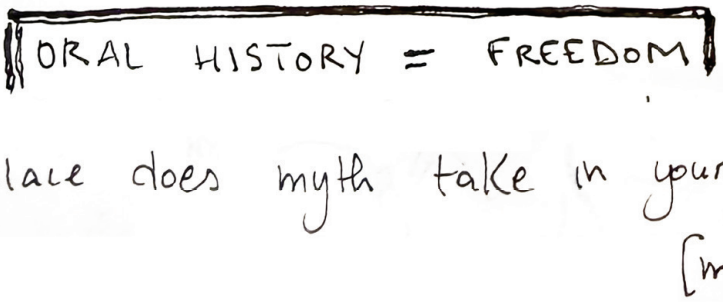




Two fingers twirl and twirl
They twirl around
The center of the dutar
They twirl around a silk thread
They twirl around two strands of hair
Braiding
Twirling the world into being
Opening a portal



A portal near the pistachio tree at the Khoja Doniyor mausoleum in Samarkand
August 2026



Everywhere we went, I was overwhelmed by the amount of flickering images.

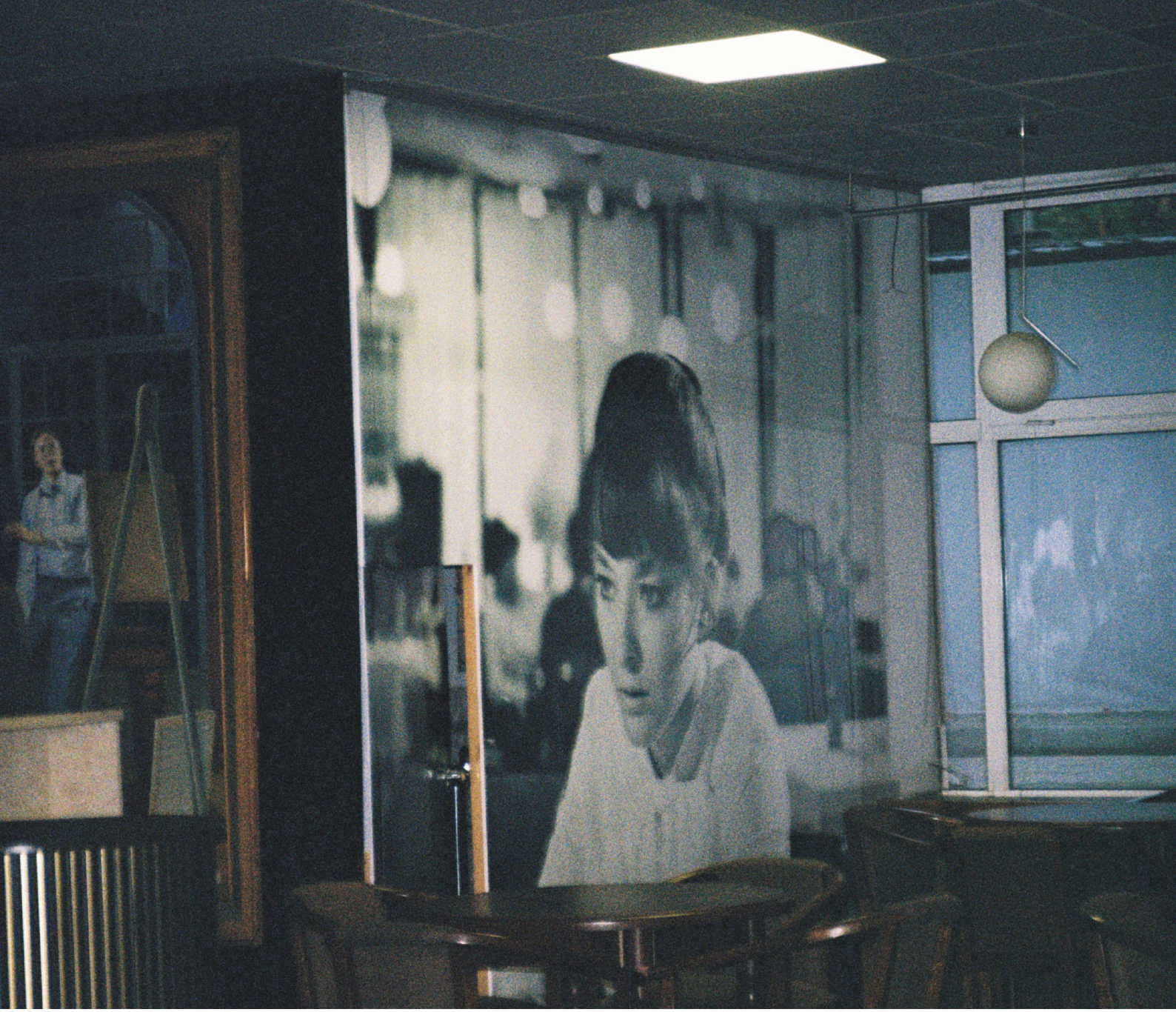
At the new museum[5], what was shocking to me was the excessive amount of AI-generated images. The obsession with creating an image of a nation that has only 35 years of independence, turning everything into an image.

Later, when we went to the cinema with her, she said: [6]

"we didn't have an image of us"

and that only after the collapse of the Soviet Union did they get access to their archive, in an attempt to get closer to their image.

5 Islamic Civilization Center, Tashkent, conceived in 2017 under the vision of Uzbekistan's president Shavkat Mirziyoyev.
6 Exchange with Saodat Ismailova in the Alisher Navoi Cinema Palace (known as the Panoramic Cinema), completed in 1964, Tashkent.



Alisher Navoi Cinema Palace (known as the Panoramic Cinema) in Tashkent
August 2026

I could not comprehend the extensive use of the color blue in Bukhara and Samarkand's historical mausoleums until it became clear when we met the ceramicist[7]; working to perfect the alchemy of the color blue; to bring back the blue that once was centrally made in Bukhara and Samarkand from turquoise, cobalt, and an unknown wild plant…

7 Abdulvahid Bukhoriy Karimov is a prominent Uzbek master artisan and ceramicist based in Bukhara



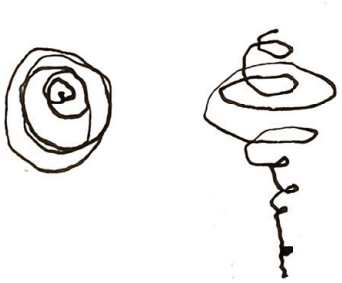
Kosmonavtlar, Tashkent metro station developed in 1981–1982 by Sergo Sutyagin and Sergey Sokolov
August 2026

Beyond representational and/or reactionary art: ways of reassembling the worlds anew.

We are inspired by her work. It reflects a complexity we were often asked to simplify.

Craft takes a layer amongst many. It is not about being ornamental. Myths take a layer amongst many. It is not about escaping reality. History takes a layer amongst many. It is not about sticking to victimhood.

An artistic gesture that thrives to build agency beyond the action/reaction realm. Poking the enemy by honoring our ancestors, listening to their stories, and being grateful for our lands. An endless imagination that is very hard to seize.





A traditional dancer in Bukhara old city
August 2026



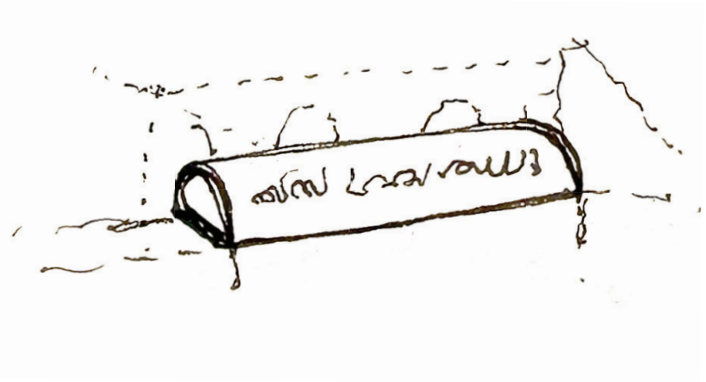
"There is an old woman, La Loba, who lives in a hidden place
that everyone knows in their souls but few have ever seen.
She creeps and crawls and sifts through the mountains and dry riverbeds, looking for wolf bones,
and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, she sits by the fire and thinks about what songs she will sing. And when she is sure, she stands over the creature, and sings out.
La Loba sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being.
And La Loba sings more and the wolf creature begins to breathe.
And still La Loba sings so deeply that the floor of the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon."
Somewhere in its running, by splashing its way into a river, or by way of sunlight or moonlight hitting it right in the side, the wolf suddenly transforms into a laughing woman who runs free toward the horizon.[8]

8 The legend of La Loba, also known as the Bone Woman, is an ancient myth from the American Southwest and Mexican folklore, popularized by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés in *Women who Run With the Wolves*, 1992.



The Khoja Doniyor mausoleum is located in Samarkand and features an unusual 18-meters-long tomb associated with prophet Daniel. Local legend says that the saint's body continues to grow every year, alongside a 500-year-old sacred pistachio tree that miraculously came back to life after being blessed in 1996
August 2026

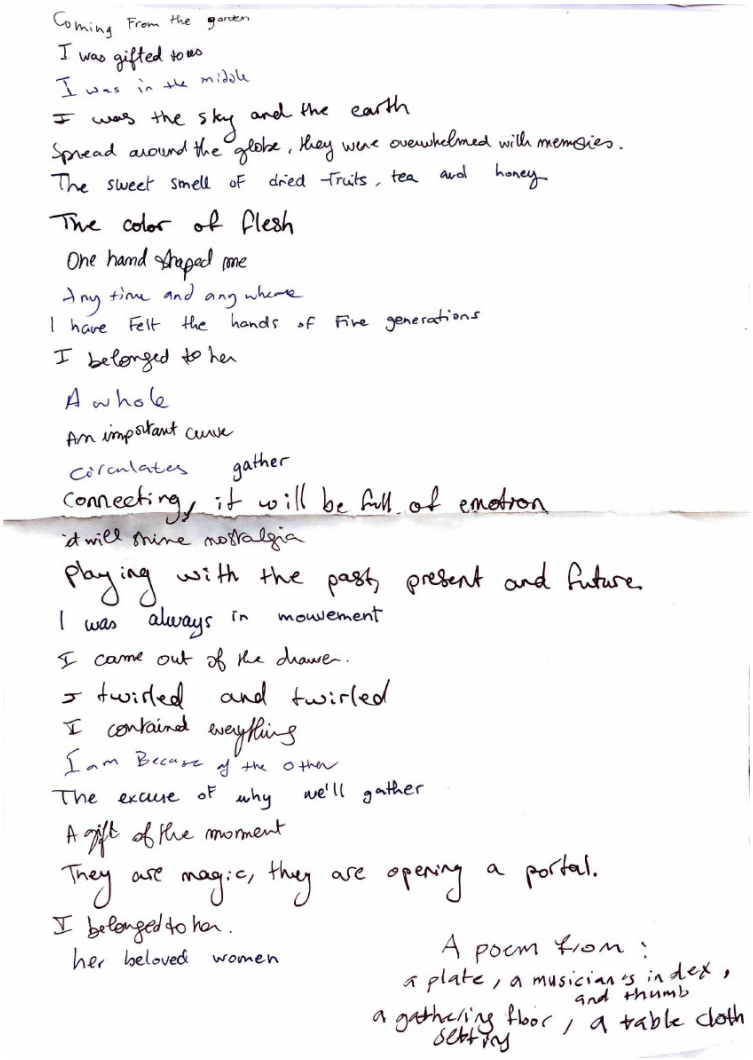
In the shade of the Tomb of St. Daniel[9]
and a clay cliff
beneath the pistachio tree
we, I, you, she, he, they,
tie threads of our clothes,
Omniyat “to mourn our cut off roots”
“claim our spirituality through soil”





Where did the night take you? Tell the trees

9 Saint Daniel's Tomb at the Khoja Doniyor mausoleum in Samarkand



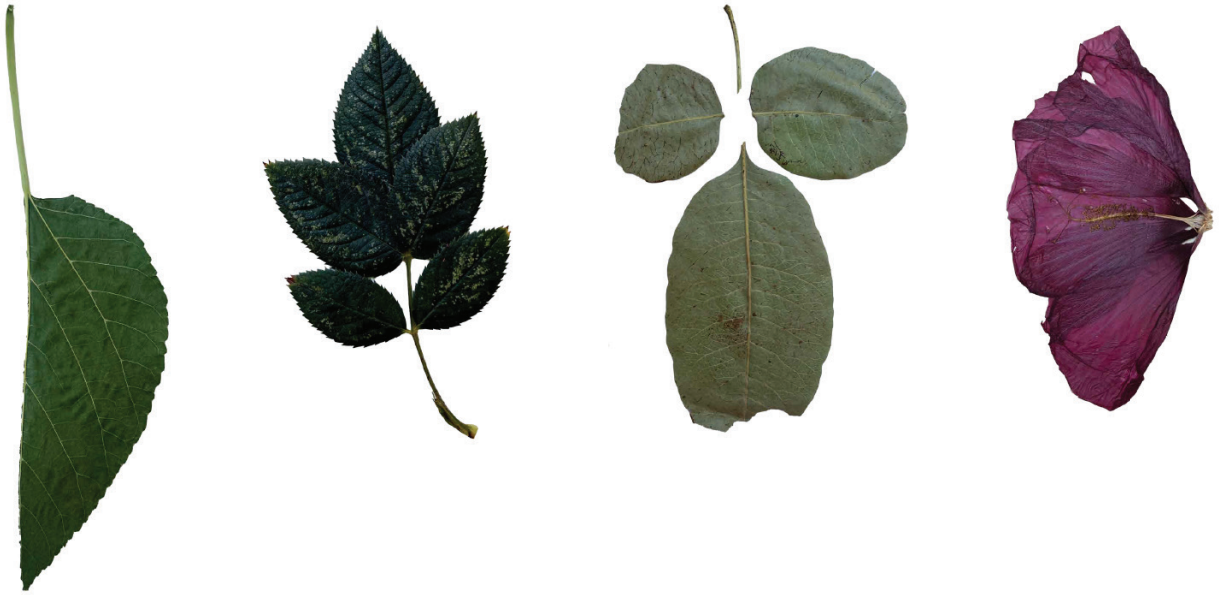
10 A free writing exercise and a poem from: a plate, a musician's index and thumb, a gathering floor, a table cloth setting to the living room of Saodat Ismailova's family home.



From left to right: Yaqeen Yamani, Noor Abed, Mona Ayoub, Mai Abu ElDahab, Sophia Alami captured by Asma Laajimi on lunch break before we head to the Sun Helio Complex.



From left to right: Asma Laajimi, Sophia Alami, Mona Ayoub, Yaqeen Yamani, Noor Abed, captured by a stranger on our last day in Tashkent.



With love,

Yaqeen Yamani
Mona Ayoub
Asma Laajimi
Sophia Alami