



**AZERBAIJAN PAVILION**  
*at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*

## **From Caspian To Pink Planet: I Am Here**

**Artists: Vusala Agharaziyeva, Rashad Alakbarov and Irina Eldarova**

curated by **Luca Beatrice** and **Amina Melikova**

**20 April - 24 November 2024**  
**Arsenale, Campo della Tana, Castello 2126/A - 30122 Venice**

Preview: from Wednesday, 17 April to Friday 19 April 2024

Official inauguration: Thursday, 18 April 2024

On the occasion of its participation in the **60<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**, this year **Azerbaijan Pavilion** presents *From Caspian To Pink Planet: I Am Here*, realized by **Heydar Aliyev Foundation** and open to the public **from 20 April to 24 November 2024**.

The exhibition, curated by **Luca Beatrice** and **Amina Melikova**, draws inspiration from the theme proposed by Adriano Pedrosa, curator of the 60<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, to explore the various meanings of the theme “Stranieri Ovunque/Foreigners anywhere”, as interpreted by **three artists Vusala Agharaziyeva, Rashad Alakbarov** and **Irina Eldarova**.

The exhibition *From Caspian to Pink Planet: I Am Here* presents a unique response to *Stranieri Ovunque/Foreigners Everywhere*. Its optimism lies in its thesis that a person can be present everywhere - physically and/or mentally. Even as a stranger, the power of imagination and empathy enables one to master (or settle in) an unfamiliar environment and take root there.

The artworks showcased here explore metaphorically the profound and resilient bonds between individuals and their environments. Each work, along with the variety of media employed to convey its artistic concepts, engages directly with the Biennale’s overarching theme, and each one is simultaneously a vivid illustration of Azerbaijan’s unique societal traits.

**Luca Beatrice**, co-curator of the Pavilion, explains: “*You just need to make a quick visit to Baku to understand the cultural and artistic effervescence of this ancient country, where contemporary architecture is in a dialogue with history, where technology and industry move forward with speed and art becomes the most faithful mirror of this attitude projected towards the future*”. The exhibition has an intriguing title: *From Caspian To Pink Planet: I Am Here* – a compendium of the titles of the works presented by the three artists. Here is the local sea sourcing oil, a philosophical view of the

planet, even Hollywood, as East meets West, but on reflection, and in response to Foreigners Everywhere, the definitive statement I Am Here.

**Amina Melikova**, co-curator of the Pavilion, explains: “*The three artists represented in the Azerbaijan Pavilion this year are from different generations and use different means of expression and technique. However, their works selected for display at the Biennale touch, in one way or another, upon situations intertwining reality and fantasy in which an individual must overcome alienation and achieve a sense of belonging within the observed/imagined space*”

In response to the approach outlined by the curators, the artists have conceived and submitted a **selection of works** designed to encourage viewers to immerse themselves in one of the most urgent cultural and social issues of our time.

**Vusala Agharaziyeva's** project, *Pink Planet*, , imagines a science fiction scenario, referencing illustrations that appeared in works of futuristic literature in the 1950s and 1960s. Interpreted through a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, and digital installations, the journeys that have shaped her background are a constant in the artist's narration, echoing the sensation of feeling like an outsider within one's existence, glimpsed here in the act of disembarking in surreal extraterrestrial landscapes steeped in vivid shades of pink.

**Rashad Alakbarov** exhibits one, large-scale work in the pavilion - the installation *I Am Here*. Within the faceless white walls of a modern labyrinthine city, the artist recreates the oppressive atmosphere of the cramped and predetermined trajectories of our movement in living space, movement set by the rhythm of the structures into which we are forced to fit. Nevertheless, there is a way out - the point is to find the angle from which the imperative is visible in the mirror (in the direct, figurative meaning of the word) - *I Am Here*.

**Irina Eldarova** asserts that women are initially foreigners. Getting married, moving from their parents' home, sometimes even from their country.

This series tells of a non-realist, fictitious meeting and love between two heroes mythologized in the mass media. East and West, of the 1960s and 1970s – a typical male worker from the offshore oil fields in the Caspian Sea and the Hollywood idol Marilyn Monroe. The appearance of a foreigner in the scenography of an already romanticized, industrial everyday life creates a special semantic intrigue.

In this story, the most unlikely scenario of a pop symbol meeting an ordinary Baku oilman is possible. The ephemeral feminine and brutal hard labor. Two foreigners from two worlds far apart... Enchanting colors. So much humor. So many associations. A combination of two myths, daring in concept and implementation – the bright ideals of communism and the American dream – the air of unreality, as experienced by those who find themselves in an unknown environment. Here only kindness and attention give one the strength to become oneself in a new place that one day becomes home.

## PRESS CONTACTS

PCM Studio di Paola C. Manfredi  
Via Farini 70 | 20159 Milano, Italy | [www.paolamanfredi.com](http://www.paolamanfredi.com)  
Federica Farci | [federica@paolamanfredi.com](mailto:federica@paolamanfredi.com) | m. +39 342 0515 787  
Francesca Ceriani | [francesca@paolamanfredi.com](mailto:francesca@paolamanfredi.com) | m. + 39 340 9182004

## INFORMATION

<https://www.azerbaijanvenicebiennale.com/>

## THE ARTISTS

**Vusala Agharaziyeva** (Baku, b.1990) Vusala completed her master's degree in Decorative and Applied Arts at the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts in 2014. Since 2017 she has been the creative driving force behind multiple projects involving three-dimensional mural art in various locations of Baku such as in Icherisheher (the old city), the central streets of Baku, Azerbaijan's regions, and in Istanbul.

While earning recognition for her murals, sculptural works and conceptual videos, and stretching further into graphics and product design, painting remains central to Vusala's creative pursuits. She is also an active contributor to charitable endeavors, working as an educator with teenagers, including those with limited physical abilities or from underprivileged families and shelters. She is currently involved in advancing regional cultural development by establishing a space and platform for creatives in one of Azerbaijan's regions.

**Rashad Alakbarov** (Baku, b. 1979) Renowned contemporary artist Rashad Alakbarov has garnered international recognition for his captivating installations of light and shadow that are celebrated for their intricate design and imaginative approach. His works incorporate less conventional materials like found objects, plastic bottles, welded steel, and plexiglass lettering. Such materials are skillfully arranged to craft images or messages that appear when illumination casts the artwork onto surrounding walls. For Rashad, art is his platform to address topics such as consumerism, sensationalism, climate change and other global concerns. Since completing his education at the Faculty of Decorative Arts within the Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Art, Rashad has dabbled in different artistic forms: painting and sculpture as well as video art, but his installations embody the full impact of his work. His artistic training is truly reflected(!) in the creative manipulation of space, volume and proportion, always in playful manner.

**Irina Eldarova** (Moscow, b. 1955) Honored Artist of Azerbaijan, illustrator and designer, was born in Moscow and educated at the Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts and Moscow State Academic Art Institute. With their vivid imagery, her paintings are a distinct contribution to modern Azerbaijani art. Irina's dynamically figurative paintings captivate with their vibrant coloring, while often incorporating a subtle humor. She conveys her imaginative associations and narratives to the viewer in a variety of media. Her unique storytelling explores themes of good and evil, of dreams, as well as of life's complexities and intrigues. Brimful with the realism of experience, there is still room for intricately interwoven reflections on life. Beyond her paintings, she has also designed extensive marble reliefs for the *Halglar Dostlugu* metro station in Baku. Irina Eldarova has shown her work in more than twenty solo exhibitions, at home in Azerbaijan and abroad.

## THE CURATORS

### **Luca Beatrice** (Turin, b. 1961)

A graduate in History of Cinema at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Turin, he is a curator and contemporary art critic.

He has written in the art magazines *Tema Celeste*, *Arte* and *Flash Art*. He has been appointed curator of the Biennial Exhibition in Prague (2003 - 2005) and commissioner for the Preview section of the 14<sup>th</sup> Quadriennale in Rome (2004). In 2009 he was chosen as curator of the Italy Pavilion at the 53<sup>rd</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. From 2010 to 2018 he was president of the Circolo dei Lettori in Turin. He is a member of the Board of Evaluation for the School of Cultural Heritage and Activities. On 7 February 2024 he was named President of the Quadriennale in Rome.

Among the most recent events organized by him: the anthological exhibitions on Andy Warhol in the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa (2016) and on Edward Hopper in Palazzo Fava, Bologna and Vittoriano, Rome (2015-2016), the group exhibitions *Jackson Pollock and the School of New York*, Palazzo Reale, Milano e Vittoriano, Rome 2018, *Easy Rider. The Myth of the Motorcycle as Art*, Reggia di Venaria 2018, *Warhol and Friends*, Palazzo Albergati, Bologna 2018, *Diabolik alla Mole*, Museum of Cinema, Turin 2021, *Carlo Levi*, GAM Turin 2022, *Giacomo Soffiantino*, Fondazione Ferrero, Alba 2022, *Alberto Moravia and Art Criticism*, GAM, Turin March 2023, and *Marco Tamburro*, MAXXI, Rome 2023.

For Gallerie d' Italia. Intesa Sanpaolo he curated the exhibitions devoted to New York, London, Berlin and Los Angeles at Palazzo Zevallos in Naples and the review *Futuro* at Palazzo Leoni Montanari in Vicenza (2020).

He has published numerous essays of art and music criticism: *Da che arte stai? Pop, Sex e Nati sotto il Biscione* for Rizzoli; the biographies of Renato Zero and Lucio Dalla for Baldini & Castoldi, *Canzoni d'amore* for Mondadori, and *Arte e libertà?* for Giubilei Regnani. In February 2021 the essay *Da che arte stai? Dieci lezioni sul contemporaneo* was published by Rizzoli and in September 2023 *Le vite. Racconto provinciale dell'arte italiana* was published by Marsilio.

### **Amina Melikova** (Baku, b. 1977)

Amina Melikova is director of the Department of Exhibitions and Events of the Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku. She gained her postgraduate degree at the University of Baku and has over twenty years' experience in the museum sector. She was head of the Department of Development and International Relations of the Museum Centre of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan from 1999 to 2009; she was director of international relations of the National Museum of Art of Baku from 2009 to 2018; she directed the Icherisheher History Museum of Baku from 2018 to 2023.

Her awards received include the title of Honoured Culture Worker of Azerbaijan (2017) and she has been a member of the Azerbaijan Artists' Union since 2011.

The publications edited by her include *Gurama, Art of Patchwork* in 2022, *Kelagayi Art* in 2018, *Shirvanshahs' Heritage in the World Museums* in 2018, *Oil and Art* in 2013, *Azerbaijan Oil* in 2010 and *Nobels and Baku Oil* in 2009.

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**60th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia 2024**

*From Caspian to Pink Planet: I Am Here*

**20 April – 24 November 2024**

**Arsenale, Campo della Tana, Castello 2126/A - 30122 Venezia**

### **Commissioner**

Ambassador Rashad Aslanov

### **Executor**

Heydar Aliyev Foundation in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Italy and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan

### **Participants**

Vusala Agharaziyeva

Rashad Alakbarov

Irina Eldarova

### **Curators**

Luca Beatrice

Amina Melikova

### **Curators' assistants**

Giorgia Achillarre

Nazrin Ismayilova

### **Consultant**

Lana Sokolova

### **Coordinators**

Carlotta Scarpa

Paolo De Grandis

PDG Arte Communications

### **Exhibition design**

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### **Press office**

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