**Aziz**: I am pleased to welcome a new participant in our Oral history project, Mrs Elmira Akhmedova. She is a major art historian, Doctor of Philosophy and I would like to say a little bit about the purpose of our project. Our project is called Oral history. This is a very promising direction in the world historical science. The project aims to collect oral, very subjective testimonies of people about the time in which they live, about their life in this time and about their attitude to this time. The main thing here is the subjectivity of the view. The accounts of these people are an invaluable source on the history of our time. In the future, any person who will be interested in our time, thanks to the stories of people like you, will get an idea of our time or will try to reconstruct this time. Our interest in you is not accidental. You have been involved in the history of contemporary art in Uzbekistan professionally and what we will talk about in detail is that you are the daughter of a very famous People's Artist of the Soviet Union, Rakhim Akhmedov. Due to these and your professional reasons, you have access to very interesting information, and you are a carrier of this information and it should be recorded for our descendants. Here I will finish our preface and pass the floor to you. First of all, tell us about your family. About your father, about your mother, it will be very interesting.

**Elmira:** thank you very much for the invitation. We talked earlier and you explained to me how you see the project, and I am happy to participate. Family, parents are very important for every person, and I will start by telling you about my parents. Rakhim Akhmedov - People's Artist of Uzbekistan, People's Artist of the USSR, Academician of the Russian Academy, Academician of the Academy of Arts of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Professor, winner of the Hamza State Prize and so on. Behind all these regalia and honours there is a difficult life of my dad, a complicated life, a long life. Dad lived 88 years. And these 88 years include difficult years, when he was orphaned at the age of 8, went to an orphanage, studied at the Benkov school, then the years of war, where he fought as a sergeant. Then he studied at the Leningrad Academy of Arts, Ilya Repin Institute of Painting and Architecture**.** Then he returned to Tashkent and actively entered the artistic life of the country. All these are the main milestones of his life. Behind each stage of his life there is a lot of things. And I will represent him in two hypostases: on the one hand, I am Rakhim Akhmedov's daughter, and on the other hand, I am an art historian. In our conversation I will try to be objective, but my subjective opinion is also important. Dad was brought up in an orphanage, and it gave him fortitude, diligence and attitude to life. In the orphanage, one of the teachers who ran the drawing circle, Hikmat Rakhmanov, noticed Dad's talent and that this young man could and wanted to be an artist.

**Aziz:** Do you even remember this man's name? Did your father tell you that?

**Elmira:** I'll tell you why I remember. This man was the dearest guest in our family. And when he came to our house, Dad always introduced him with pleasure, with great respect and I always remember this man with great gratitude. He took my dad by the hand and took him to the art school and straight to the outstanding artist, Alexander Volkov. He looked at the drawings of a 14-year-old boy and said: You need to learn. Come on, get ready.

Dad said that he was lucky in people who determined the vector of his development, his path. His attitude to life and art. His teachers were Adeksander Volkov, Bakhrom Hamdami, and then he studied in Samarkand with Benkov. This is the kind of foundation my father got in Uzbekistan.

Then came the war. Dad's fortitude and selflessness accompanied his whole life, and he knew that he had to study. It was impossible to get higher education in Uzbekistan, and Dad realised that he had to study in Moscow or Leningrad. I would like to tell you that my father went to the military enlistment centre twice and wanted to serve, to fight. He changed his documents a little, cheated with his health and from the second time he went to the military enlistment centre he was sent to the North Caucasian front. And there, at the front, the political officer noticed that Daddy was good at drawing and he said to him: We should take care of you, you will be useful to us in peacetime and he was left at the headquarters. Dad drew posters, wall newspapers, drew in the albums of his fellow soldiers, and the soldiers sent the drawings home to their parents. It speaks of a moral attitude to life. When the war ended and Dad returned to Tashkent, nobody met Dad at the railway station. Everyone was greeted by relatives, joy was all around, and Dad didn't even know where to go. His home was an orphanage. Dad returned to the orphanage. He worked there as a tutor, teacher and was preparing to enter an art university. In 1947 a governmental decree of the USSR on supporting the art of the republics was issued. In this decree 7 republics were specified. Specialised recruitment to the leading universities of the country was announced. And daddy goes together with 5 candidates to Leningrad. They are Manon Saidov, Tajat Aganesov, Viktor Zelikov and Nigmat Kuzybaev. This is 1947. The country had just recovered from the hardest war. And Leningrad had suffered a blockade. And these young people saw Leningrad still destroyed. Once again, I would like to draw attention to the fact that this is 1947, when you think about how to establish post-war life, and the state thinks about the future of the country. It thinks about the republics. And we should not forget about it. Young people come to the still destroyed Leningrad, take part in subbotniks. His classmates were still dressed in overcoats, in gymnasers. Front-line soldiers. With bandaged arms and legs, on crutches, but there was a thirst to learn. There's an expression: "Make it to the top." What did it mean? It was to get an education, to be worthy of the country, to prove yourself. These 5 people brilliantly finished their studies at the institute, of course there were difficulties, many of them did not know Russian. For the first months they were taught Russian language, general education subjects such as history of art, history of the country. And there were evening courses in drawing and composition. Such a rich life in Leningrad determined Rakhim Akhmedov's attitude to art and culture.

**Aziz:** it's incredibly interesting what you're sharing.

**Elmira**: this is the story of one person, the story of a country. That generation of people, with similar biographies, different episodes, but they were people who believed in the country, its ideology, and in no way doubted.

**Aziz**: absolutely. I knew people like that.

**Elmira:** and when people today throw stones at that time, it is simply out of ignorance. Ignorance of the history of the country, the history of people. Your project will open up all this in many ways and some "white spots" will be restored. Through eyewitnesses, through descendants and it will give a general picture, and you will put it together like a puzzle into a single picture.

**Aziz:** You have outlined the concept of our project absolutely precisely. It was a whole pleiad of people not only in the artistic sphere, but also in science. This is a whole generation of people.

**Elmira**: of course. they wanted to be useful to the country. It's very important. To be useful to the state, to people. There were ideals. There were moral principles that determined the course of the country's development as a whole. Coming back to my dad's biography, in 1953 he returned to Tashkent, and I can't tell you about my mum. My mum, Alimbayeva Karima, was the first professional musicologist who graduated from the conservatory. Mum was involved in folklore, traditional nard music and she was lucky with people too. There was a scientist who came to Tashkent in the 20s as a member of the "Culture Train" of cultural figures. He was an outstanding mathematician, Romanovsky. The Institute of Mathematics bears his name. His wife was a folklorist, ethnographer. I'll let you read about her, Elena Romanovskaya. My mother communicated with her, they travelled on expeditions to the far districts of Uzbekistan and collected tape recordings of traditional musicians. But at that time the songs were passed from mouth to mouth and Romanovskaya's role was to translate the recordings into the European way, that is, into sheet music. And my mum was lucky enough to be on that expedition and a lot was done. Why I am talking about it. Today we talk a lot about the revival of national culture, its preservation. The origins are there. Going back to my dad, my mum studied at the Conservatoire in the museum studies department, she was taught by Uspensky and Glier.

**Aziz:** You list such amazing names of teachers and mentors.

**Elmira:** this is something to know and be grateful for. Mum worked part-time at the museum of national instruments at the conservatory. Mum worked there as a referent. I will name one more person who is important for our family. Chingiz Akhmarov. An outstanding artist, a coryphaeus of art and the author of murals in the Alisher Navoi Academic Theatre. And at the time when my mother worked there, he was collecting material for his murals. It was important for him to know how national instruments look like. And he used to come to this museum, and he and my mother used to communicate. And in his memories there are kind words about mum. That he met not only a beautiful girl, but also a competent one, who told about each instrument with great love. At the same time he was acquainted with Dad. During his studies in Leningrad, Dad came to Tashkent for summer holidays and met Akhmarov. Chingiz Akhmarov sends Dad money, 8 roubles for paints and brushes. But when Dad came to Tashkent, he brought him paints and brushes. Chingiz Akhmarov is a very important figure in the life of the family. His first mentor, Hikmat Rakhmanov, the one who noticed and recognised Dad's talent, then Chingiz Akhmarov, he was very important to Dad.

**Aziz:** he's already made the cut with his influence.

**Elmira:** yes. I can say about the teachers at the Academy of Arts. Leningrad at that time, it's museums, theatres. The city itself. Its architecture. It all educates, moulds.

**Aziz**: especially for someone who can absorb it all**.**

**Elmira:** I really want to say that many teachers were evacuated to Samarkand during the war with the Repin Institute, just like the Surikov Institute in Moscow. They treated the children from Uzbekistan with great gratitude. They remembered the warmth and kindness of the Uzbek people. I also studied in Leningrad. And even I felt the echoes of this gratitude. I could not understand why they treated me like that, inviting me home, inquiring about my health, then my mother explained to me: It is not for you, it is for the country, for Uzbeks in general. Chingiz Akhmarov knew both my dad and my mum and decided to bring these two young people together.

**Aziz:** was that his intention?

**Elmira**: it was so delicately and tactfully done. Chingiz Akhmarov was a top-notch intellectual, educated, erudite. This is an interesting story. There was a tour at the Navoi Theatre, and there was the premiere of Rubinstein's opera Demon. Georg Ots was in the title role.

**Aziz:** on Lermontov?

**Elmira**: yes. The decorations were by Vrubel. Can you imagine the whole scale of culture. And Chingiz Akhmarov bought them tickets for the seats next to each other and invited my mum and dad to this premiere and that's how my parents met.

**Aziz:** Did they tell you all this later?

**Elmira:** of course. the second most honoured person in our family was Chingiz Akhmarov. I actually thought he was our grandfather. That's the story of our family's formation.

**Aziz:** it's a very beautiful story. Just amazing. In fact, it was a creative union of an artist and a musician.

**Elmira:** my dad already had a thesis topic in mind. When he met Mum, he was collecting material for his thesis. The theme of the thesis was "In the field cotton mill". Mum was surprised by such a topic. She told him: "Take something poetic. So Dad took "The Folk Singer". There's a lot of credit to Mum. She gave him the topic, gave him materials, introduced him to folk musicians.

**Aziz:** Great. They went through life hand in hand?

**Elmira:** yes of course. It's a family of two creative people, an artist and a musicologist, and the great merit of course was my mum. The fact that dad is selfless, hard-working, but there is also a big role of mum, who managed to create a family, which dad was deprived of. And to surround daddy with kindness, family cosiness.

**Aziz:** You have mentioned outstanding regalia of your father. He is a laureate of the State Prize and People's Artist of Uzbekistan, People's Artist of the USSR. Were these very important works of his? Which of his works could you mention?

**Elmira:** like I said, it's titles and regalia. It is not just given. There is a lot of hard work behind it. In one interview I said: He was different, like the colours of his palette. In the book published on his 100th anniversary, the memoirs "Rahim Akhmedov in the memory of contemporaries" were published. In this book his contemporaries recall his different facets. And of his life and activity. He was the chairman of the Union of Artists for many years. 27 years. He was a professor and had a workshop at the Behzad Institute of Art and Dizvayn. But there is a prehistory of this institute. When 5 returned to Tashkent in 1953, there was no higher art institute here. There was only a school named after Benkov. And these 5 people became teachers of the school. But at that time there was already a theatre institute. There was a small department of theatre and decorative art, where Tetovasyan taught.

**Aziz:** what kind of people you are naming!

**Elmira:** he taught future directors and actors there, and since my dad studied with him and knew him, he said to my dad: Maybe your strong point is painting? And these two people created a department, which later grew into an art department, where Dad invited his classmates from the school and Leningrad, and it was called Ostrovsky Theatre and Art Institute.

**Aziz:** it's clear how it all took shape.

**Elmira:** Next year will be the 70th anniversary of this institute. But at the origins were those artists who later became national artists, academicians and educated a large number of artists who still today make up the colour and light of Uzbek fine arts.

**Aziz:** do you have your own preferences in your father's work? What is close and interesting to you.

**Elmira:** I don't remember my father in an idle lifestyle. He was always working. He taught, he had a workshop, he was also a deputy, and he was chairman of the Union of Artists. He was always working. Mum always said: The main thing is creativity. She pushed him that he should paint every day. Like they say about writers: Not a day without a line. It's the same with Dad. Not a day without a drawing, without a sketch. I saw my dad always at work.

**Aziz:** That's the key to his success.

**Elmira:** when people talk about my dad, they always bring up a few of his works. It offends me a bit. It happens that an actor has two roles for which he is known. It happens to a writer or a poet too. And my dad also became a hostage of 2 works, by which he is always recognised. When people say Rahim Akhmedov, they always remember his portrait "Mother's Reflection" and "Morning of Motherhood". These paintings are part of the golden fund of fine arts of Uzbekistan. These paintings are always present in the exposition of the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan. But for 88 years of his life and 70 years of creative life, he has created a huge number of works of art. And I am trying to break this cliche around Rakhim Akhmedov. In 2021, we celebrated his 100th anniversary. There was a decree of the government of Uzbekistan on anniversary celebrations dedicated to Rakhim Akhmedov. Perhaps these are not coincidental. I should note that in the recent history of Uzbekistan, this is the first such decree concerning artists, and it is the first time on such a national scale.

**Aziz:** good precedent.

**Elmira:** good. Then it began to be practised. Many deserving honoured outstanding artists began to be celebrated at the state level. It is not by chance that it is still in demand in recent times. This is very important. So that the new time, the new generation will appreciate the same.

**Aziz**: it is very important in the artistic environment.

**Elmira**: it is important everywhere. If the continuity is broken, there is a decline and a dead end.

**Aziz:** You grew up in an amazing creative atmosphere. And did it predetermine your life choice? Tell us a little bit about that. Was this choice due to the influence of your parents?

**Elmira:** No, not my parents. First of all, the atmosphere in the family. Wednesday. We had outstanding people as guests. Such as Tamara Khanum, Halima Nasyrova, Kamil Yashin, Konstantin Simonov, etc.

**Aziz:** were they all friends?

**Elmira:** yes, they were all at our house. They were feasts, noisy conversations about life, about creativity, about art. And we were witnesses. Of course the environment predetermined my choice. But also the fact that after the 7th grade my parents and I were in Leningrad and I just fell in love with this city. Its architecture, museums, theatres, exhibition halls. And the Academy of Arts building itself. My dad's alma mater. His classmates always came to Tashkent, his teacher Viktor Oreshnikov came to visit us. I just dreamed of studying in Leningrad.

**Aziz:** did your dream come true?

**Elmira:** of course.

**Aziz:** tell us a little bit about that. About studying in Leningrad.

**Elmira:** I wanted to study only there, but it didn't work out the first time for some reasons. So I enrolled here at the Theatre Art Institute, at the Department of Art History. I won't lie if I say that of course it would have been much easier for me here and I would have received my diploma on a silver platter. Now I can talk about it. But, having finished the 1st year, I did not want to study.

**Aziz:** and did your dad support you?

**Elmira:** I had wonderful teachers here. Larisa Shostko, Valentina Lakovskaia, Rafaed Taktash, and so on. But I set a goal to study in Leningrad.

**Aziz:** did your parents support you in this endeavour?

**Elmira:** we went there. They were afraid to send me alone to Leningrad.

**Aziz:** of course, a young girl alone.

**Elmira:** we went there. The rector of the institute at that time was Viktor Oreshnikov. Dad's teacher. We went in to greet him, and Dad said, pointing at me: Here's a future art historian. He asked: Where does she study? Dad says: In Tashkent.

He said: Why there and not here?

He called the teachers and asked: Can we have a transfer? She'll pass the missing exams and transfer to study here. And everything was solved like that.

**Aziz:** What school did you get there?

**Elmira:** Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture named after Ilya Repin.

**Aziz:** it sounds like a song.

**Elmira:** yes, I am proud.

**Aziz:** we have few graduates of this institute in our republic.

**Elmira:** very few. There are artists, but very few art critics. Many people graduated there by correspondence, but not many full-time. Then I dragged my younger sister there. She also graduated from this university. And today she is Doctor of Sciences, Academician, Nigora Akhmedova.

**Aziz:** and your scientific work, your scientific degree?

**Elmira:** after graduating from the institute, I came back and was assigned to the Theatre and Art Institute, to the Department of History and Theory of Fine Arts. I taught. But I had to retell what I had read from books, without seeing the world, without having a concept. And when I came to Leningrad, I saw the teachers of professors, on whose books I studied at the 1st course in Tashkent. They are Dobroklonsky, Nesselstrauss, Likhacheva.....

**Aziz:** Leningrad intellectuals.

**Elmira:** their monographs were the basis for my 1st year of study. When I came back, I lacked theory. Art history then consisted of: who, what and how. That is, who the author is, for example, Repin. When he was born, what he created, his works. In what atmosphere, what was the setting, the time, who was around, what were the ideals, the criteria. Art history doesn't answer that. Only who and what. And art history didn't answer the questions of how and why.

Here I taught Western European art, 17th to 20th century. The golden age of European art. But I didn't find answers to some of the questions I had about art history. I entered the postgraduate programme at Moscow State University, at the Faculty of Philosophy, at the Department of Ethics, Aesthetics and Cultural Studies. I studied under an outstanding philosopher, Mikhail Ovsyannikov. The founder of Soviet aesthetics. There's a four-volume translation of Hegel. It's his work. He was my supervisor, head of the department.

**Aziz:** what was the topic of your thesis?

**Elmira:** the interaction of artistic cultures as an aesthetic problem. I did not want to deal with other topics, such as philosophical and aesthetic views of Beruni, Behzod or Navoi. I wanted to go beyond that. I am always interested in the interaction of cultures.

**Aziz:** this is very relevant.

**Elmira**: it is all synthesis, interaction. There are no pure cultures. All cultures interact. I was very interested in this topic, I defended myself and got a PhD in philosophy.

**Aziz:** hence my next question. You were the head of the Department of Cultural Studies. At the University of World Economy and Diplomacy. Did this chair exist or did you open it?

**Elmira:** after I came back from Leningrad and went to work at the Tetartal Art Institute, I introduced the subject of World Cultural Studies. It was a new subject. It was in Russian universities.

**Aziz:** we didn't have it.

**Elmira:** I got a bit caught up in social activities, I couldn't give it up. I was accepted as a party member and sent to the Central Committee of the Komsomol. And it distracted me from my scientific work.

**Aziz:** Did you work in the Central Committee of Komsomol for a long time?

**Elmira**: I had an interview with Rano Abdullayeva. And they created a department of culture. And I was in charge of the Creative Youth Department there. I worked with creative youth, they were artists, composers, writers, musicians, directors.

**Aziz:** that's interesting too.

**Elmira:** I worked there for 2.5 years. I was sent to the Party School to the Department of Cultural Studies.

**Aziz:** You were at the origins.

**Elmira:** Leninist Philosophy and Cultural Studies Department. The chair was headed by a wonderful person, Khatima Shaikhova. She and I worked together for many years. It wasn't really mine. It was a jump to the side.

**Aziz:** You trained people, shaped tastes.

**Elmira:** Of course. They were the first secretaries of regional committees, district committees and they were all wonderful people. I became friends with many of them. They showed interest in museums, exhibitions, theatres. I remember those years with joy. I had to create a lot of things there, creative meetings with many cultural figures of Uzbekistan. For example, with Alexander Fanberg, Bernanra Karieva, Ruzy Chariev, Chingiz Akhmarov.

**Aziz:** and the Department of Cultural Studies at UMED?

**Elmira:** closed the party school. The University of Management is being created. And culture is needed again. And I became the head there. And then an order was issued to create a new University of World Economy and Diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Everyone was fired. I love people and appreciate personalities. Saidkasymov showed such delicacy diplomatically, humanly, professionally. It's easy to fire people. And people have worked for decades. Competent, literate, educated. And he talked to everyone, being the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He made time. It was late hours. Talked about how they would be useful to the new University, what they could give, etc.

And I had a meeting with him. A few months later I was called and they said: We invite you to work. And we started to create the University. It was a whole working group. Of course, I "pushed my interests" in that time too.

**Aziz:** these are common interests. Cultural studies.

**Elmira:** I was told: What's it for? There's protocol, diplomatic history, poltitology, etc. I said: Diplomats should be interesting people, not just protocols. There's the signing of protocols, then there's the banquet where interesting conversations should be had.

**Aziz:** that's where everything is decided.

**Elmira**: they should be at exhibitions, know where Elgrego is, where Picasso is. Listen to concerts, don't yawn. Recently it was Saidkasymov's anniversary and I reminded him about it. It's another page in my life. And they are happy pages. The UMED of that time met the specifics, the tasks. It was the first University of Central Asia of such format and level. Today, many graduates hold high positions.

**Aziz:** one last question. You have had a very rich experience. You were the head of a number of practical institutions, exhibition centres. Tell us about your activities. You initiated many major exhibitions.

**Elmira:** I was appointed Director General of the Central Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Arts. I worked there for 4 years. This is a very interesting time in my biography. These are exhibitions, big projects, communication with artists, visits to museums, travelling around the country, international projects and exhibitions.

**Aziz:** What do you do now? You are an incredibly busy person.

**Elmira:** I am a free artist now. But at the same time I am the chairman of the section of art historians of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan. Still, I am in art. People of art regardless of age, we are like fine wine, we get better with time. Firstly, I have accumulated a lot of experience, I have seen almost all world museums. I've been to many exhibitions. I've been personally involved in projects. I know many cultural and art figures in foreign countries. And that's something that needs to be shared. I have a big project now.

**Aziz:** Thank you very much for your wonderful story.