

BOSE PACIA

January 2007 New York - Bose Pacia presents *The Paradox of Polarity: Contemporary Art from Central Asia*, an exhibition conceptualized by Leeza Ahmady as part of her ongoing curatorial project entitled *The Taste of Others*, intended at promoting and unifying the largely unknown and scattered artists of Central Asia. The gallery is located at 508 West 26th Street on the 11th Floor, in the Chelsea district of New York City. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 12 to 6 pm and by appointment. There will be an opening reception with the curator in attendance on Friday, January 12th from 6 to 8 pm. The public is invited.

Central Asia, a region comprising of five nations, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan is an area that for many years has been isolated and ignored by the international art world due to the Cold War and the later disintegration of the Soviet Union. Today this region has begun to attract global attention, namely because of its strategic location as a neighbor of the Middle East and also because of its abundance of natural resources; oil and gas. Central Asia's true exodus from obscurity began with the participation of many of its premiere artists in internationally renowned art venues such as the Istanbul Biennale, the Sydney Biennale and the Singapore Biennial. However, the event which truly launched Central Asia onto the international art scene was the 51st Venice Biennale (2005) that not only acknowledged Central Asian artists individually, but the entire region as a collective, where it was, for the first time in its history given its own pavilion. *The Paradox of Polarity* attempts to offer a small survey of the numerous and richly varied forms of art flourishing in Central Asia today. Some artists represented in this group exhibition have been disclosed to the public through the aforementioned art forums and some have not. The one common denominator linking these artists together, is that they are being exhibited for the very first time in New York; in a venue that divulges their independence as creative beings yet which simultaneously confirms their identity as belonging to the larger tradition of an area fraught with memories of an ancient and glorified past, a contradictory present and an uncertain future.

From the fifteen participating artists, Rustam Khalfin born in Uzbekistan and resident of Kazakhstan may be considered the founding father of contemporary art in Central Asia. A follower of the last survivor of the Russian historical avant-garde and as both teacher and theorist of trends in contemporary art and culture, he has played an integral role in training the younger generations. Khalfin's contemporaries include the husband and wife artist team, Elena and Viktor Vorobeyva from Kazakhstan who document both the mundane and extraordinary in life through works such as *Winter Sublimating Subject* and *Knife*. These works make use of concepts and materials specific to the region and explore universal themes of love, happiness, consciousness, and human inertia resulting in multilayered commentaries on either the simplicity or complexity of life in Central Asia. Gulnara Kasamalieva and Murtabek Djournaliev from Kyrgyzstan, also associates in life and art, are constantly searching for harmony between civilization and nature. The starting point of their work is in observing daily events. Inspired by romanticism and Oriental conditions, the outcome of their exploration is both poetic and daunting such as in their photo series, *Shadows*.

Yerbossyn Meldibekov, Almagul Menlibayeva and Said Atabakov from Kazakhstan have truly achieved celebrity status as they have been widely exhibited internationally. Working primarily in video installation and sculpture, Yerbossyn's art addresses the processes for change and reform in Central Asia and the region's relationship with the world, Asian mentality and European civilization. Almagul is known as an experimental artist working simultaneously in varied media such as painting, graphic art, performances, installations and videos. She is primarily concerned with the subject of women and their role in pre-Soviet, pre-Islamic, and even shamanistic and dervish origins as exemplified in her video project *Apa*.

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The quieter, local artists include, Ulan Japarov of Kyrgyzstan whose work ranges from performance-based video to installation and photography. In humorous and highly staged works such as *See No Evil*, *Hear No Evil* and *Train Art*, Ulan reveals how local moral belief systems have preserved their connection to the larger Asian or continental philosophical practices. Saken Narynov of Kazakhstan was originally trained as an architect and his work reflects this training. A mixture of sculpture and architectural projects, his art refrains from the iconography of memory and reasserts the abstract-constructivist frameworks of Pevsner and Gabo; with a girdle made of resin, fur and nails, entitled *20 Kg. of Good and Evil*. Representing the younger generation of artists in the region, Alexander Ugay born in Kazakhstan and of a Korean descendant, uses photography and video as his primary medium. In works such as *Tea Ceremony* and *Paradise* his sardonic approach deconstructs ideological icons; through a rendering of imagery that is telling of Central Asia's diverse peoples and places and which employs both the real and the fantastical, the normative is brought into question.

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan and raised as a young teenager in the United States, Leeza Ahmady has established herself as an independent art curator. Ahmady has been designing unique gallery spaces all over New York, implementing innovative programs that welcome varied art forms. Ahmady is currently the Managing Director of Asian Contemporary Art Week, at the Asia Society. She has traveled widely in Central Asia to research the development and promotion of contemporary art in the region since 2004. She has presented her work at renowned venues such as The Whitney Museum of Art, The Queens Museum of Art, Venice Biennale (2001), Istanbul Biennial (2005) and Apexart. She is also an advisor to many organizations in Central Asia, including the newly established Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan. Ahmady currently works and lives in New York. As Central Asia attempts to carve a niche for itself onto the international art world, examples by artists such as these make this difficult task appear not at all challenging but rather the next step in the natural artistic progression and history of the region.

Vyaxheslav Akhunov
Said Atabekov
Rustam Khalfin
Shailo Djekshenbayev
Murat Djournaliev
Ulan Japarov
Gulnara Kasamalieva
Erbossyn Meldubekov
Almagul Menlibayeva
Roman Maskalev
Saken Narynov
Talant Ogobaev
Elena and Victor Vorobaeva
Julia Tikhonova