

Leeza Ahmady, *Paradox in the Polarity*
Bose Pacia New York

By Natane Tadeka

Featuring the work of fourteen Central Asian artists, this group show, *The Paradox of Polarity*, both covertly and overtly offers information about the artists' own history as well as contemporary life in Central Asia. Curated by Leeza Ahmady, the exhibition is part of an ongoing curatorial project called *The Taste of Others*, which aims to promote emerging artists from Central Asia; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. During the Cold War these nation states were isolated from the rest of the world. In this exhibition, however, the artists' come out of their shell, and we glimpse a once hidden history as well. The artworks, which range from sculptures and video installations to photography, the show serves to remind us that great art often originates from catastrophe.

There is a juxtaposition of everyday-objects in works by Elena and Viktor Vorobaeva from Kazakhstan. In *Winter Sublimating Subject*, 2004, a series of fifteen photographs documents a frozen-ice-teapot on a bonfire. A huge sculpture, *Knife*, 2003, made by the specific stone in the country, is situated in the front of the photographs. The grayish marble-like stone is rough in some parts. In both, the subject matter and materials are raw and the items themselves are common. Like Arte Povera's artists, by using something relevant to all of us, the couple focuses on the alchemical process. In *Winter Sublimating Subject*, needless to say, the ice is melting in the last photograph, which might suggest a universal law; every-



Rustam Kholfin and Yulia Tikhonova *Groom and Bride*, 2003. Video. From the exhibition *Paradox in the Polarity*. Curated by Leeza Ahmady. Courtesy: the artist and Bose Pacia Gallery, New York

thing is in transition. At the same time, the work seems to reference the end of a painful history and the hope of a new beginning.

At first glance, the photo collage, *Paradise*, by Alexander Ugay, (Kazakhstan of Korean descendant), looks like a painting. The work speaks in loud colors. The mountainous and nomadic landscape of Kazakhstan appears in a long horizontal shape, which suggests a narrative thread. Local figures, mostly males and also a bird and some objects, dustbins, are randomly inlaid. The work appears to be a picnic scene on a peaceful day. However, upon closer inspection, the viewer notices that everything is out of context. For instance, dustman like figures with their faint smile stand next to the dustbins in the vast green field. Why are they here? There is something of the absurd here. The vivid colors exaggerate

the sense of detachment from nature, and even the modern world. Fantasy versus reality, or nature versus modernity, the work is a perplexing paradox.

There are eight video works in the show. More or less, they are all informed by regional and cultural references. In *Apa*, 2003, by Almagul Manilibaela, six naked women are embedded in the snowy landscape; each woman is situated in a mole's hole-like snow mountain, which looks like a white skirt. The naked women are waving their hands, dancing and shouting "apa." *Train Art*, 2005, by Ulban Japagrov from Kyrgyzstan, utilizes photography and performance-based video to show everyday-life in the region. The video captures a narrow aisle on a local train car. In one scene, we see some young men sitting

cross-legged, meditating in the small space. Without being distracted by the train's bumpy ride, they seem to be totally in a world of their own. With the local music and the rhythm of train's movements, the video hypnotizes. These two video pieces compliment each other, symbolizing a the difference between the disposition of men and women in the region.

The *Paradox of Polarity* is a cohesive and didactic show, encompassing regional issues from a historical perspective. Each artist resurrects the old customs and transfers them onto a contemporary template. Despite the regional nature of the work, the subject matter is relevant to social structures around the world. Life is, after all, a paradox. **M**



Atabekov *Noah's Ark*, 2004. From the exhibition *Paradox in the Polarity*. Courtesy: the artist and Bose Pacia Gallery, New York



Ugay *Example for Wall Paper Paradise*, (undated). From the exhibition *Paradox in the Polarity*. Curated by Leeza Ahmady. Courtesy: the artist and Bose Pacia Gallery, New York

