

Tuesday, April 13, 2010

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CARTOON DISPATCH



From Central Asia
-Ted Rall

CIVIL SOCIETY

CENTRAL ASIA: REGIONAL ART TRENDS ARE ON DISPLAY IN NEW YORK

Deirdre Tynan 4/11/08

Works from Central Asia are making an impression in the New York art world. "I Dream of the Stans: New Central Asian Video" is an illuminating exhibition of seven media projects full of humor, historical analysis and eroticism.

Currently on display at the Winkelman Gallery in New York, these videos have their roots simultaneously planted in the steppes and minarets of Asia and the world of contemporary art and technology.

The Winkelman Gallery is a tiny white space in Chelsea, Manhattan, but curators Leeza Ahmady, Murat Orozobekov, and Edward Winkelman have compiled a mini retrospective of 21st century work from some of Central Asia's leading artists. The common themes that emerge from the exhibition are spirituality and nomadism, identity and borders.

Leeza Ahmady, an independent curator who specializes in Central Asian art, says her aim was to assemble a representative collection that highlighted the adventurous spirit of regional artists. "We're trying to use the best of what's going on. Even though there is a lot of visibility [Central Asian artists] are not quite in the market yet. We want to be visual as well as conceptually strong," she said.

The largest projection, Said Atabekov's grainy, black and white "Neon Paradise," features the artist complete with backpack kneeling and bowing before automatic sliding doors. As he bends the doors mechanically open and close. He cuts a scruffy, Sufi like figure before the stainless steel and glass. The mysterious Kazakh artist appears to be praying, perhaps mockingly, at some faceless shrine of modern design and enterprise.

The smaller projection, an ochre and sepia hued epic of sensuality, is the joint work of Rustam Khalfin, an Uzbek now living in Kazakhstan, and Kazakh artist Julia Tikhonova. The title "Northern Barbarians Part II: Love Races" is inspired by the Chinese collective name for nomads who roamed beyond the Great Wall, and two water colors from the book "Chinese Eros." The piece shows a young couple making love while on horseback riding through woodland. It panders neither to western notions of Oriental exoticism or prudishness, and is a painterly interpretation of an archetypal, dreamlike sequence.



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