

## **Truly Truthful**

### Post Exhibition Article

Independent curator Leeza Ahmady's *Truly Truthful* exhibition in Miami, Florida, (Dec 2-6, 2009) was part of a new educational focus by the art fair of ART ASIA Miami, currently the only Asian-focused art fair in the U.S. Over the course of the five-day event more than 35,000 visitors from around the globe viewed this showcase of 19 internationally renowned artists from 15 countries.

Art enthusiasts as well as institutions, museums, advisory groups, collectors, and press were delighted by this 'works not for sale exhibition'. The show, which was given a prominent 2,400 square-foot space, was a testament to ART ASIA Miami's commitment beyond commercial interests to create public programming about Asia's dynamic and growing art scene.

Thrilled to design the layout of the exhibition according to her exact vision, Ahmady built three large rooms, each leading harmoniously to the other to unveil a masterful body of works by some of today's most acclaimed artists working both inside and outside of Asia. The title, *Truly Truthful*, simultaneously fun and mischievous, embodies Ahmady's curatorial concept as well as a common denominator found in all the artists' works: "the tendency to challenge categorical presentations of truth and reality in the world."

Upon entering the exhibition space, visitors were transfixed by images of a shimmering bicycle burning in **Sislej Xhafa's** black and white video *Beh-rang* (2004). Filmed in Afghanistan as a comment on the pitfalls of colonialism, this work made for a dramatic welcome. Rounding the corner, unassuming visitors were stopped in their tracks by barking Chinese office workers dressed as dogs in one of Beijing-based artist **Cao Fei's** earliest and most colorful video works; a critique on corporate culture, *Rabid Dogs* (2002).

Just to the left, Japanese artist **Ushio Shinohara's** latest imposing motorcycle sculpture, *Motorcycle, Orange* (2009), awaited the appreciation of its massive 7x14x4-foot size. Constructed entirely from acrylic paint & cardboard patches with a spiky wheel and adorned with a dinosaur skull that both intimidated and delighted the crowds, this work is indicative of Shinohara's "repugnant beauty aesthetic". Behind the motorcycle, viewers found themselves in the midst of **Jakkai Siributr's** *Hopes and Dreams II (diptych)* (2008) juxtaposed with **Jeff Cytkowski's** *Reasonable Doubt* and *Game Related* (2008). The former utilized traditional Thai craft while the latter has roots in urban American street art. However, both draw on a fun, pop aesthetic to criticize society's spiritual evolution.

Next, viewers were lured into an offset dark room to behold the installation of China's most recognized conceptual artist **Qiu Zhijie's** *Heart, Heart* (2001). Illuminated under black light to reveal in bright neon an otherwise invisible Chinese calligraphy painted on seven hanging scrolls. Burning and glowing enticingly on the opposite side of the larger exhibition space was **Anita Dube's** serene, beautiful sculpture made of wax candle, which spelled the word woman in large capital letters. Loaded with intellectual meaning yet imbued by a simple and lovely aura all its own, many proclaimed Dube's *Woman* (2007) their favorite of the exhibit.

To the right, hanging at a staggering 21x26 feet was **Lara Baladi's** *Sandouk el Dounia* (2008), a woven collage tapestry of hundreds of photographs taken where the artist lives and works between Beirut and Cairo. The clever artist, though, entices the viewer to closer

scrutiny in order to realize that the photographs were not individually applied. Rather each are woven of, and equally dependent on, the tapestry's threads.

A surprising "host" awaited visitors around the next corner, where they encountered New York-based Pakistani artist **Huma Bhabha's** *Ghost* (2007); this haunting figure made from raw chunks of Styrofoam and found bits of wood thematically expresses monumentality and death. Adjacent, three works by Chitra Ganesh (2009) seemed to pop off of the wall as the artist adorned the female figures on her canvases with intense colors and 3D objects to inspire desire and sexuality in power.

Two of China-based **Li Jikai's** paintings (both 2008) hung at either end of the rear corridor, drawing viewers into the artist's childlike inner landscape. Between Jikai's works hung two impressive paintings *Commit* and *Demofuckracy* (2008) by Los Angeles and New Delhi based artist **Bari Kumar**, both works were created with soft tones and strong imagery, embodying a haunting balance between classical and contemporary traditions in painting and design.

In close proximity were two sculptures by **Sopheap Pich**, *Buddha 2* (2009) and *Suture* (2009). Made of bamboo and rattan, materials that are prevalent in the artist's homeland of Cambodia, the abstract forms seemed to swell and flow in their spotlights as viewers moved by, also inspiring one to consider the physical & psychological hardships that that society continues to endure. *The Orientalist* (2007), a **Huma Bhabha** sculpture of bronze molded over chicken wire, sat in the corner – a monument to decay, begging the question "Ancient archeological find? or product of nuclear fallout?"

Across from *The Orientalist* exhibition attendees could spy a video from **Kimsooja's** *Video Album series, An Album: Christopher House* (2004); an individual psychological journey that captures a continuum of emotions through nearly imperceptible facial changes. The theme of change and entropy carried over to **Mami Kosemura's** video *Decaying* (2001), which astounded viewers as they watched miniscule changes accumulate into the distinct erosion of a vase of flowers over time.

Meanwhile, the unmistakably sweet tones of Vivaldi's "Spring" drew visitors into another offset room where the Kyrgyz artistic duo **Gulnara Kasmieleva** and **Muratbek Djumaliev's** latest video *Spring* (2009) screened a formal string quartet performing the melodious masterpiece atop a smoldering garbage heap on the outskirts of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, which the artists have witnessed slowly emerge as a suburb of the city. The next treat for attendees was comprised of two sets of trophies from Korean artist **Jean Shin's** *Altered Trophies Series* (2009). These works were subject to countless double-takes as viewers realized that what appeared to be ordinary sports trophies had been transformed into mini-monuments to everyday workers such as a garbage collector, mailman, and office cleaner.

**Yeondoo Jung**, also from Korea, closed off the show with a bang as viewers marveled at the visual trickery in two photographs from his *Locations* (2007) series as well as his insightful, entertaining, and visually striking *Handmade Memories* (2008)– a 45-minute video from which viewers often had to tear themselves away.

*Truly Truthful* brought together an impressive roster of world-renowned artists with works that provoked a broad spectrum of human emotion not often found in a single show. Through incorporating diverse styles, backgrounds, practices and voices it implored visitors

to question preconceived notions of perception and reality not only in Asian contemporary art, but also in the world around them.

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For a copy of the catalogue, or a PDF version of the curatorial statement and in-depth descriptions of artists works in the *Truly Truthful* exhibition please contact: [info@ahmadyarts.com](mailto:info@ahmadyarts.com)