

# *Truly Truthful*

December 2009

## **Curatorial Statement** **Leeza Ahmady**

Over the past several months, I have had the privilege of developing ART ASIA's new educational focus, which has culminated in the exhibition *Truly Truthful*.

*Truly Truthful* showcases 18 internationally renowned artists whose works challenge categorical presentations of truth and reality in the world. Hailing from 14 countries—Albania, Cambodia, China, Egypt, France, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, and the US—*Truly Truthful* reflects the diversity of the artists' backgrounds and practices, and dispels the notion that contemporary art from Asia is narrowly focused and comes from only a few regions.

Today's fast-paced world revolves around the acquisition of information. As a result, specificity has become an important tool for maneuvering through its dense layers. There are experts for every subject imaginable, and compartmentalization is now common in all fields. Yet, communication technologies—television, radio, and the Web—have dramatically increased public access to information. Wikipedia, Facebook, twitter, blogs, and phone apps: all prophets in disguise, spreading information as truth to the masses.

The quest for the latest, the best, and the most specific data drives private and public corporations as well as academic, cultural, and political institutions with an almost religious fervor. In our high-speed encounter with globalization, we are flooded with what contemporary Chilean philosopher Dario Salas calls “dead information”—dead because the average person cannot possibly process the quantity and velocity of stimuli he or she encounters every day.

Unlike the popular belief that knowledge equals power, information does not equal knowledge or wisdom. Knowledge refers to the process of comprehension—consciously connecting various elements together so that they become whole and comprehensible to the human brain. The individual mind today is colonized by the continuous overload of various scattered, fragmented, and categorized bits of information, camouflaged as truth.

With that in mind, *Truly Truthful* presents some of the most successful artists working both inside and outside of Asia today, whose work challenges presentations of truth as established, objective, and specific. Beyond aesthetics, existential inquiry is perhaps one of the dominant preoccupations for contemporary artists. They scrutinize and use everything as material to study paradoxes and complexity in the world. Time and again, artists give us profound insight into what matters by deconstructing parts of a whole.

Across a vast array of styles and diverse formats—including documentary footage, staged events, real and fictive characters, renewal of age-old crafts, and the construction of new myths—the exhibit asks viewers to ponder established notions about Asian contemporary art and other so-called truths related to everything from aesthetics to consumerism, to colonialism and human consciousness.

**Participating artists:**

Lara Baladi  
Huma Bhabha  
Jeff Cylkowski  
Anita Dube  
Cao Fei  
Chitra Ganesh  
Yeondoo Jung  
Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev  
Li Jikai  
Marya Kazoun  
Kimsooja  
Mami Kosemura  
Bari Kumar  
Sopheap Pich  
Qiu Zhijie  
Jean Shin  
Ushio Shinohara  
Jakkai Siributr  
Sislej Xhafa

Artists for the *Truly Truthful* exhibition were selected through nominations by experts in the field, including some members of the Asian Contemporary Art Consortium (ACAC) and Asian Contemporary Art Week (ACAW).

**Special thanks:**

Patrick Todd and Martin Bauer, for their tireless assistance in designing the show, and Jeff Lawson and the entire ART ASIA staff. We also thank the following individuals and institutions for their nominations and for lending works to the show:

Ombretta Agro' Andruff, independent curator (New York)  
Elisa Badii, Brancolini Grimaldi Arte Contemporaneo (Rome)  
Shumita Bose and Rebecca Davis, Sadia Rehman, Bose Pacia Gallery (New York)  
Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan (CCAA) (Kabul)  
Chen Yun (Alice), RCM Gallery (Nanjing)  
Ethan Cohen and Patrick Regan, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts (New York)  
Thomas Erben, Thomas Erben Gallery (New York)  
Esa Epstein, sepia EYE (New York)  
Lea Fried and Jessica Eisenthal, Lombard-Freid Projects (New York)

Alissa Friedman, Salon 94 (New York)  
Kimsooja Studio and Galleria Raffaella Cortese (Milan)  
Magazzino d'arte Moderna (Rome)  
Lori Ordoover, Africa Israel (USA)  
Barbara Kaz Paley and Pauline Nee, Art Assets (New York)  
Tyler Rollins, Tyler Rollins Fine Art (New York)  
Jung Lee Sanders, Art Projects International (New York)  
Yuka Sasahara, Yuka Sasahara Gallery (Tokyo)  
Sarah Schloemer, AhmadyArts (New York)  
Jamie Schwartz, Tina Kim Gallery (New York)  
Miwako Tezuka, Asia Society & Museum (New York)  
Taliesin Thomas, Larry Warsh, AW Asia (New York)  
Edward Winkleman and Murat Orozobeav, Winkleman Gallery (New York)

*Truly Truthful* opens for VIP viewing on Wednesday, December 2. It will be open to the public from Thursday, December 3 to Sunday, December 5. Please join us for the *Truly Truthful* Marya Kazoun performance and cocktail reception on Friday, December 4, from 4 PM to 6 PM. Sponsored by Saaga Vodka and Africa Israel, USA.

### **About Leeza Ahmady**

Born in Afghanistan and raised in New York, Ahmady is an independent art curator, educator, and noted specialist in art from Central Asia. As the director of Asian Contemporary Art Week (ACAW) at Asia Society, Ahmady brings together leading New York City galleries and museums to participate in special exhibitions, receptions, lectures, and performances citywide.

As part of her ongoing curatorial project, Ahmady has traveled widely in Central Asia, promoting the largely unknown artists of the region in various international art forums, including the Venice Biennale; Istanbul Biennale; and Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong. She curated *The Taste of Others* at Apexart (2005); *The Paradox of Polarity: Contemporary Art from Central Asia* at Bose Pacia (2007); *Parable of the Garden: New Media Art from Iran & Central Asia* at The College of New Jersey Art Gallery (2008); *I Dream of the Stans* at Winkleman Gallery, which traveled to MARTE Museo de Arte de El Salvador (2008); and *Tarjama/Translation* at the Queens Museum of Art (2009).

Ahmady is also a founding member of a number of nonprofit organizations in the United States and Central Asia. She serves on the advisory board for Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan (CCAA).