



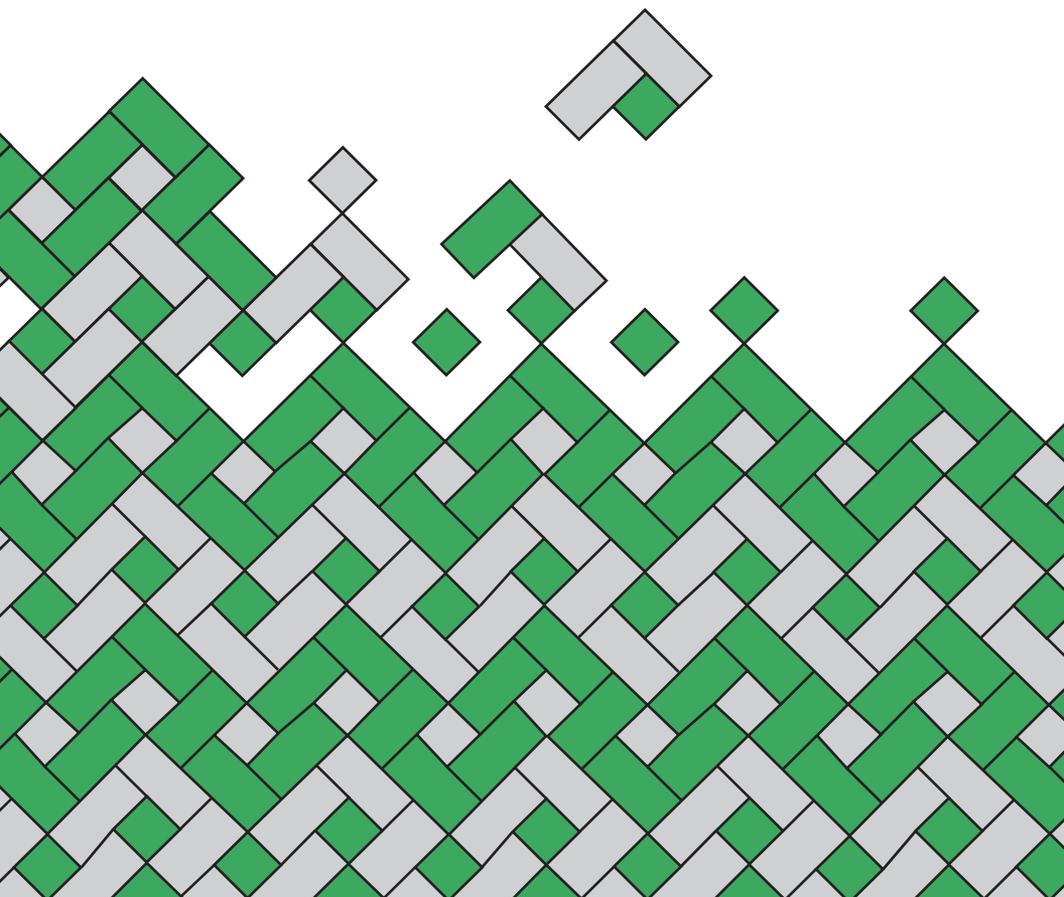
# PARABLE OF THE GARDEN

new media art from Iran & Central Asia

---

curated by Leeza Ahmady, Sarah Cunningham & Deborah Hutton

The College Art Gallery, The College of New Jersey  
February 20 - March 30, 2008





## FEATURED ARTISTS

Vyacheslav Akhunov

Muratbek Djoumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva

Shahram Entekhabi

Simin Keramati

Khosro Khosravi

Erbossyn Meldibekov

Almagul Menlibayeva

Rahraw Omarzad  
Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan

Karan Reshad  
Kolah Studio

Alexander Ugay

## Parable of the Garden: New Media Art from Iran & Central Asia

### Curatorial Statement

Geographically focusing on former Persia and its cultural legacy, the *Parable of the Garden* exhibit presents recent media works by artists from Iran and Central Asia. The exhibit thematically explores not only the traditional garden and a contemporary sense of place, but also notions of paradise lost and found, lessons learned and forgotten, and traditions cherished and rejected. The show features works by ten artists or collaborative teams hailing from Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Two of the artists now live in Europe, but the rest remain in Central Asia, and all engage in the cultural dialogue of place and identity. The media in which they work include digital photography, video, installation, and graphic design.

The entire region represented in the exhibit can be classified as “Central Asia,” however the geographical label is more commonly applied to the former Soviet states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. After fifty years of isolation and two decades of independence since the fall of the Soviet Union, the region is finally re-connecting with the world. Indeed, major international art forums including the Venice Biennale have recently exhibited a dynamic range of works by Central Asian artists to great critical acclaim. Through movements such as the free market economy and the development of democratic governments, Central Asian countries are now engaging with other nations around the globe. They are also re-negotiating relationships with one another as well as with neighboring countries, such as Afghanistan and Iran, with whom they share a great many cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic ties.

Most Central Asian artists practicing contemporary art today were trained in architecture, monumental painting, and sculpture at some of the best Soviet art institutions. They studied these disciplines along side traditional local forms of art making. The 1990s, which witnessed the fall of the Soviet system, represented incredible years of experimentation when artists were able to break through and express their individual and collective aesthetics with conceptual vigor. This spirit of experimentation and growth continues today.

Just as in the former Soviet states, Iran and Afghanistan’s contemporary art scenes are experiencing profound fluctuation and development. Of the countries represented in the exhibit, Iran has had the longest and most well established engagement with the international modern and contemporary art world. Throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s, Iranian artists were producing works that

sought to combine the concerns of international modernism with local traditions. In 1977, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, featuring important collections of works by both Western and Iranian modern artists, opened, but then, just two years later, the Islamic revolution occurred. The political and social chaos preceding and following this seismic event coupled with the long Iran-Iraq war, which stretched throughout most of the 1980s, significantly curtailed artistic production outside of what was created for the government's propagandistic purposes. During this period, many artists left Iran to find support abroad, contributing to a large Iranian expatriate artistic community that is still active today.

While the Iranian Ministry of Culture still monitors artistic output for any dissenting or "un-Islamic" content, the censors have considerably loosened the enforcement of government restrictions since the reformist presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). Correspondingly, the last decade or so has seen a re-blossoming of the artistic scene in urban centers such as Tehran. Iranian artists now show widely at home as well as abroad, although they receive more attention and acclaim in Europe than in the U.S. due to the ongoing embargo and frosty relations between the U.S. and Iran. Contemporary art from Iran is diverse, encompassing a range of media and approaches, but one reoccurring concern seems to be a preoccupation with expressing individuality and personal voice despite the constraints of society.

In comparison to their peers in neighboring states, Afghan artists work under the most dire circumstances. Afghanistan has been in an almost constant state of war since 1978 and the coup overthrowing then-leader General Daud. The Soviet intervention, which was met by fierce resistance, began in 1979, and that was followed by a civil war, which eventually led to the harsh rule of the Taliban and finally the U.S.-led invasion to overthrow the Taliban and install the interim government led by Hamid Karzai. Three decades of war and brutal rule have been disastrous to Afghanistan's artistic heritage, both past and present. Ancient and medieval artworks have been, in some cases, deliberately destroyed and, in others, unintentional casualties of war. Many contemporary Afghan artists have been forced to live and work abroad. The work they create speaks powerfully to the experience of exile and loss. Those artists who remain in the country have extremely limited resources. The new Afghan government and most of its citizens are preoccupied with curbing violence and re-establishing basic infrastructures. Working with minimal materials, equipment and funding in a challenging environment, Afghan artists like Rahraw Omarzad and his students, still manage to create poignant responses to war, loss, and recovery that speak equally of trauma and hope, paradise lost and found.

In reference to the theme, "Parable of the Garden," the profound social, political and economic changes taking place throughout Central Asia—the former Soviet states as well as Iran and Afghanistan—can be seen as a kind of re-growth of a forgotten garden. The garden is abundant not only with impressive amounts of energy reserves like minerals and petroleum, but also with glorious histories of

arts and sciences. Modern day cities such as Samarqand (Uzbekistan), Isfahan (Iran) and Balkh (Afghanistan) once served as artistic centers for the entire Islamic world. While today the artistic communities in these regions are only just being globally recognized, the artistic seeds they sow are strong and grow in rich, fertile soil. The artists featured in this exhibit represent the artistic resurgence happening across Central Asia, and through their works featured here, they share with us their garden, with all of its wonders and limitations.

Much like artists of other regions around the world, Central Asian artists work in whichever media are able to clearly express their ideas while also being readily available and inexpensive. This includes video, installation, and photography. The artworks in this exhibition challenge the viewer in two ways: through employing new media that emphasizes conceptual approaches and by introducing unfamiliar perspectives of a region largely misunderstood or unknown to American audiences. While the former Soviet Central Asian states are rarely mentioned in the U.S. media and remain largely anonymous to the average American, Iran and Afghanistan are often featured in news reports—Iran because of ongoing political hostilities with the U.S. administration and Afghanistan because of the current U.S.-led war there. This exhibit offers an opportunity for an American audience to see these countries not filtered through the negative lens of the evening news, but rather from the viewpoints of artists who live or were raised there.

Their works, however, are not documentary in nature. Instead they address local as well as global issues through the exploration of concepts of paradise, constructions of identity, and senses of place. Many of the works embody paradoxes that challenge the viewer to reconsider easily found truths. In fact, the artists seem to question the very idea of truth. There is no attachment to the authenticity of the suggested narratives. Instead, the narratives serve as a tool for constructing new relationships that may last or may be immediately destroyed to create something else entirely.

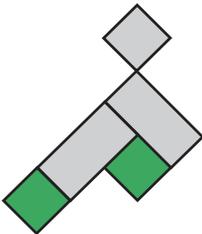
At the same time, reality is never completely forsaken by the artists in this exhibit. Indeed, reality is emphasized through re-constructions of local, continental and global traditions, both old and new. The many religious practices of the region, including Islam and Shamanism, are also reflected in the works. Ritual in all its forms is therefore appropriated as a method for investigating reality. Many works incorporate gorgeous landscapes, as well as natural and man-made imagery, mixed with contemporary artistic practice that is performance based and action oriented. These works gesture towards the hopes, disappointments, contradictions, and general disrepair present in all facets of life in Central Asia, but also in the world at large.

The focus of the Religion, Culture, and Identity learning community, a yearlong scholarly exploration conceived by the Religious Studies committee at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) provided the inspiration for this exhibit. TCNJ gallery director, Sarah Cunningham, and art history professor, Deborah Hutton, conceived of a dynamic contemporary art exhibit featuring artists from Central Asia that

would provide a meaningful learning opportunity for four audiences: the general public, the TCNJ campus, the learning community, and the students enrolled in Dr. Hutton's fall 2007 Arts of Iran course. To best achieve this goal, we reached out to independent curator Leeza Ahmady, a recognized expert on contemporary art from Central Asia, to collaborate on this project. As co-curators, the three of us chose the theme, artists and specific artworks. We wanted to present a modern view of the region while referencing its rich heritage. To do so, we focused on new media while exploring an age-old theme found in artworks from the area since the pre-Islamic period—the garden as paradise. After the artists and artworks were selected, Dr. Hutton gave her students the semester-long project of researching and writing about the individual artists, the thematic focus of the exhibition and the region's complex history. Students completed research through email interviews with the artists, in-class discussion with each other and the exhibit curators, class lectures, and individually collected data. Excerpts from the students' final research papers comprise the following essays. We hope that their insights, culled from all that they learned over the semester, provide a useful context in which to situate the works on display in the gallery.

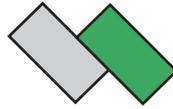
Leeza Ahmady, Sarah Cunningham and Deborah Hutton  
*Curators*

February 2008



# CENTRAL ASIA





## Reflections on Paradise

The College of New Jersey's exhibition, *Parable of the Garden*, explores the contemporary art and culture of Iran and the Central Asian states through the theme of the Persian garden. The exhibition illustrates how contemporary artists appropriate and employ traditional cultural concepts and artistic methods to critique the society in which they live and work. Somewhat paradoxically, it is undeniable that these works differ strikingly from traditional art and culture. When examining the many artists' work it is interesting to observe the interplay and links between classical Persian culture and ideas and contemporary artistic expression.

The concept of the garden is not a new one in Iranian society. The garden has existed in some form since the early third century BCE. Over time the various civilizations that have settled within that region have incorporated the theme of the garden into their respective cultures. Modernity brought tremendous changes to traditional culture and society – globalization, the influx of commercialization and Westernization have all influenced the art of this region. Yet the basic notion of the garden has survived numerous religious and socio-political transitions. Within Iran, the garden still holds much of the same social and religious significance as it did in the past. Thus, Islamic notions associating the garden with the re-creation of paradise on earth continue.

Typically, the Persian garden was an area encircled by a series of tall walls. The walls' purpose was to effectively remove any traces of the outside world from affecting the inner sanctuary of the garden. The grounds were designed in a symmetrical fashion on a rectangular template, and the focal point was often a central structure such as a water fountain or pavilion. Rows of trees were planted interspaced by flowering and fragrant shrubs and flowers.<sup>1</sup>

The garden is a common theme in traditional Persian art, and it is depicted in many different styles and mediums. For instance, it is seen in miniature paintings, manuscripts, and textiles. The garden was also a popular theme in the literature of the historical past. Renowned scholars, poets and historians described the garden and its beauty with great enthusiasm.

In this exhibition, we see that modern artists employ the theme of the garden to explore and challenge religious dogma, gender inequality, and political disenfranchisement. In contemporary art, the garden seems more abstract and open to various interpretations than in traditional art. To some artists the garden still

<sup>1</sup> Donald Newton Wilber, *Persian Gardens and Garden Pavilions* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979), 9.

symbolizes the ideal of utopia. They see it as a symbol of hope, triumph, and beauty. To others the garden represents the flaws of society: isolation, desolation and despair. To these latter artists, the walls of the garden seem to parallel the restrictive nature of their respective societies.

Although there are many different interpretations of the garden, the theme has been an enduring one. Could this be attributable to the adaptable nature of the garden itself? As long as artists continue to be inspired by and explore the themes represented by the garden, the garden will continue to evolve and thrive.

-RK

The concept of paradise is one that seems fairly simple and universal. While similar trends and themes can be seen within various religions and cultures, individuals, especially artists, have their own unique ways of portraying and defining paradise. Within the religion of Islam, some basic concepts rooted in the Koran set the framework for many pieces of art over thousands of years. According to the Koran, paradise is comparable to a walled garden containing four rivers: one of purified honey, one of milk which never goes sour, one of water, and one of wine that provides joy, but not drunkenness.<sup>2</sup> The most literal artistic expression is seen in the historical practice of building walled gardens. These gardens often included pavilions, exotic animals, and fruit plants from foreign lands, as well as water channels.

At first glance it appears that there are very few similarities between the most literal depictions of paradise as a garden and the contemporary art pieces from Iran and Central Asia that are displayed in the *Parable of the Garden* exhibit. However, as you enjoy the show take the time to look closer and make the effort to apply what you now know about the culture, religion, and people. You will discover that many of the same basic religious themes are found in the contemporary art of the region. For example, the complex video instillation piece by Djoumaliev & Kasmaliev, *Paradise*, mimics many themes of traditional Islamic art and faith such as impossible growth, exclusivity and sustainability.

-SM

<sup>2</sup> Walter B. Denny, "Reflections of Paradise in Islamic Art," in *Images of Paradise in Islamic Art*, Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, eds. (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1991), 41.

## New Media Art

### Video

Bold. Unique. Revolutionary. Video art fervently retaliated against the highly commercialized and deeply entrenched institution of television during the 1960s. Its birth resulted from the advent of affordable and widely available cinematographic technology to aspiring artists residing in Europe and the United States. Specifically, video confers the ability to manipulate time and space to ultimately create works that challenge preconceptions, interrogate perceptions, and dismiss social, economic, and political misconceptions. In effect, the historical development of video art reflects a non-linear pattern shaped by not only technological advancements, but also the global community of artists. Unlike commercial cinema, video art does not necessarily require actors, a discernable plot, or dialogue. While traditional films and television programs oftentimes aim to entertain audiences, video-based works achieve multifaceted functions. For example, some works explore the technological characteristics of video, while others also interrogate misconceptions of video as a form of cinema. Ultimately, artists utilize this technology in the service of an idea or concept. Specifically capitalizing on the fundamental characteristics of time, physical space, and metaphorical meaning, both Eastern and Western artists reinvent the video medium to express their individual perspectives.

*The Parable of the Garden: New Media from Iran and Central Asia* exhibit presents an array of video works by artists from Iran and Central Asia. Each piece demonstrates a unique concept within a specific social, economic, or political context. Using video, emerging artists in the region effectively translate their realities into works that bear the potential of transcending linguistic barriers to effectively connect with a global audience. Today, emerging artists of Iran and Central Asia use video in conjunction with alternate forms of technology such as DVDs to create powerful multidimensional works of art. In addition to manipulating the medium, individuals challenge the traditional viewing experience by strategically placing multiple screens and utilizing reconfigured projection systems. This exhibit reflects the movement from single-channel works towards installation pieces. Overall, video represents a dynamic medium that continues to revolutionize artistic expression in the 21st century.

## Photography

In a recent exhibition at the Newark Museum entitled, *India: Public Places / Private Spaces*, the curator, Paul Sternberger, breaks down the evolution of Indian photography into three distinct phases. In the first phase, photojournalism in the tradition of photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson dominates. In the second, the placement of the photographer within his own work as a way of adding personal identification and meaning becomes common, and in the third phase, photographers introduce introspective and psychological qualities to their works.<sup>3</sup> While Indian art differs from Iranian and Central Asian art, the development of photography in Iran and Central Asia can also usefully be broken down into these three categories.

Photojournalism has strong roots in Iran. From its start in the second half of the nineteenth century, photography primarily was used to document the culture of the country, particularly for Westerners who had become so interested in the “Near East” after the Napoleonic campaigns and the spread of imperialism. As the twentieth century progressed, photojournalism began to record political turmoil. For example, Abbas (b. 1944), a leading Iranian photographer, continued this tradition with his photographs of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. His photographs preserve the Revolution’s horrific events for future generations.<sup>4</sup> While photojournalism continues today, its most distinct phase within Iranian history was in the first hundred years of the introduction of photography.

The second phase began in the 1980s when photographers started placing themselves within their works. In the 1993-95 series, *Women of Allah*, the Iranian-American artist, Shirin Neshat (b. 1957), created photographs of herself in the traditional black *chador* with calligraphic writing superimposed over the images. This series acts as a personal commentary on the changes since the Iranian Revolution and Neshat’s last stay in Iran.<sup>5</sup> This second dominant phase still continues today, just as photojournalism does.

The final and most dominant stage today in both Iran and its neighboring Central Asian states is one that focuses on instilling the photographic works with introspective and psychological qualities. In Iran, with the censoring restrictions instituted by the government after the Revolution still operating, many artists must work within this third phase to subtly communicate their personal, political, or social commentaries through their pieces. At the same time, advances in digital technology provide artists with new and diverse ways of expressing their ideas. The recent works of Central Asian artists exploring issues of national identity, modernity, and tradition also can be seen as fitting into this third phase. In *Paradise*

<sup>3</sup> Paul Sternberger, “Clouding the Mirror: Trends in Recent Indian Photography and Video,” in *India: Public Places / Private Spaces*, Brian Drolet ed. (Newark: The Newark Museum, 2007), 32-47.

<sup>4</sup> Shiva Balaghi, “Writing with Light: Abbas’s Photographs of the Iranian Revolution of 1979,” in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, eds. (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 104-125.

<sup>5</sup> Farzaneh Milani, “The Visual Poetry of Shirin Neshat,” in *Shirin Neshat*, Sara Tedesco, ed. (Milan: Charta Publications, 2001), 7.

Landscape, Kazakh artist Alexander Ugay uses digital technology to create a composite landscape that questions the false promise of modernity as paradise. Erbossyn Meldibekov, another Kazakh artist, prints farcical digital images of a Muslim man in a turban fashioned from an American flag printed on traditional ikat fabrics to make a multifaceted statement about the identity crisis that Kazakhs feel in their post-Soviet world.

-AR (with JB and QH)



### Graphic Design

Iranian graphic arts as we know them today began to take root in Persian culture during the second half of the Qajar dynasty (1781-1925). During this period, professional painters or draftsmen practiced graphic arts on the side, and traditional Persian designs often served as motifs. Slightly later, a distinctive European influence became visible in the works of graphic artists such as Frederick Talberg and the Sarvari brothers.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, the graphic arts in Iran began to change, thanks in large part to the Faculty of Fine Arts, established in 1940 at Tehran University. The traditional techniques and motifs were slowly, though not entirely, phased out by a Western-influenced administration and curriculum. In the late 1950s, Faculty students began to take a more professional interest in the graphic arts. This led to a veritable explosion of interest in the field, and not just at Tehran University. Several other universities also set up academic programs in graphic design.

The intense political atmosphere of the 1979 Revolution fueled the graphic arts in Iran to new heights. At the time, most of the Iranian population was illiterate, which led political activists to try and communicate with the masses through visual media.<sup>7</sup> It also led to a revitalization of traditional motifs, which were used to augment political messages in murals, graffiti, postage stamps, banknotes, textbooks, and posters. In addition to traditional Persian methods, the graphic arts were also influenced by European Beaux-Arts and, in particular, Soviet-based Socialist Realism.<sup>8</sup>

After Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980, graphic artists moved from undermining political opponents to rallying the masses against the Iraqi invaders. Never before had the graphic arts in Iran taken on such an important role. An army of artists set up workshops in towns across the nation, pumping out messages of

<sup>6</sup> Peter Chelkowski and Morteza Momayez, "Graphic Arts", <http://www.iranica.com/articles/v11f2/v11f2082.html> accessed Nov 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Chelkowski, "The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, eds. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Chelkowski, 133.

hope and determination in the form of posters and murals.<sup>9</sup> Almost no wall was left uncovered by posters, murals, or graffiti.

Shortly after the end of the “Imposed War” with Iraq in 1988, the Ayatollah Khomeini died. Iran was exhausted, and political art assumed a diminished role. However, over the past 15 years or so, the graphic arts have regained ground and have become more and more of an established art medium. The Internet has proven to be the primary way for reformists to circumvent censorship. Websites that are pornographic or anti-Islamic are prohibited, but otherwise the Internet is largely unregulated by the government. It therefore provides an outlet for artists like Karan Reshad, who produces *Brainstorm*, a Tehran-based underground e-magazine that is distributed in PDF format. The magazine strives to introduce Iranian cultural artistic expressions to the world, while also exposing Iran and the Middle East to what the world has to offer in return. Reshad is also an avid graffiti artist. Today, artists all across Iran are utilizing graffiti, graphic art, and the Internet to raise their voices in a country that tells them to be silent and stand in line.

-TF

<sup>9</sup> Chelkowski, 135.

# Vyacheslav Akhunov

b. 1948, Kyrgyzstan, lives in Uzbekistan



*Ascent*, video, 11:52 minutes, 2004

“Seek not water, seek thirst,” Rumi

Followers of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) believe that the best way of reflecting on oneself is to develop a personal spiritual relationship with the creator. This spiritual relationship is what the protagonist seemingly seeks to develop through the peril of strenuous activity in Vyacheslav Akhunov’s *Ascent*. Dressed in traditional Uzbek clothing, the man begins to climb an ancient minaret’s spiral staircase. As the video progresses, instead of feeling anxious for the man to finish climbing, you become immersed in his struggle to ascend. As you view the video, slowly his ascent becomes your ascent until he (and you) reach a stage of satisfaction at the top of the tower. Although the man reaches the top, he continues his pursuit by examining his journey as depicted on a laptop computer screen, hence *Ascent* is a continual loop of the man’s journey. Through the video’s continuity the artist emphasizes the Sufic belief that no one ever reaches a state of blissful completion because being is a state of eternal struggle. The importance is not in reaching the top of the minaret, but rather, the importance lies in the journey itself.

The man climbing the stairs is also analogous to a man ascending to heaven. In Islam, gardens and architecture help exemplify the beauty of God's own creations by using the constructed elements to emulate the aweing wonder of nature. These human-made homages underscore that such magnificent creations could not have been possible without the mercy and glory of Allah. Therefore, a man climbing a minaret's spiral staircase is also a metaphor for worship.

To appropriately understand *Ascent*, it is important to understand the significance of religion with respect to Uzbekistan. In 1991, Uzbekistan emerged as a sovereign country after more than a century of Russian rule, first as part of the Russian empire and then as a component of the Soviet Union. During the time of Soviet direct and indirect rule, religion was suppressed in favor of communist ideology. Under the new Uzbek government, Islam no longer was hidden; instead, very quickly, it rose to a prominent position and became a political tool used by the government to control people.<sup>10</sup> However, through personal religious practices, like the ones followed by Sufis, many Uzbeks continue to form individual spiritual identities. Akhunov's *Ascent* can be read as stressing that religion should be spiritual rather than used for a political agenda. Given Uzbekistan's current cultural complexity and political uncertainty, religion is a way of constructing an identity that bridges the past and the present.

-SR

<sup>10</sup> "The World Factbook: Uzbekistan," Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html), accessed 7 Oct 2007.

# Muratbek Djoumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva

b. 1965, Kyrgyzstan; b. 1960, Kyrgyzstan



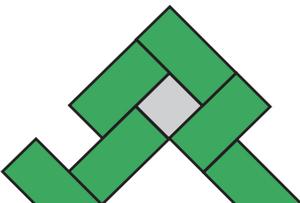
Paradise, three-channel video installation, variable dimensions, 2000

In 1991, Kyrgyzstan became independent from the Soviet Union. After years of Soviet control, almost every facet of Kyrgyz life had been cultivated to serve Russia's needs. No longer did the Kyrgyz speak the languages of their nomadic tribes; they spoke Russian instead. The Kyrgyz were educated in the Russian school system so that they would learn skills necessary to be productive to the Soviet society. Kyrgyzstan had become so entrenched in Soviet society that when it became independent it had no economy of its own to speak of. The country had to start over from scratch.

Artists Muratbek Djoumaliev and Gulnara Kasmalieva reveal the truths about their country through their telling art. An especially relevant piece reflecting the sentiments of post-Soviet Kyrgyz people is *Paradise*, a three-channel installation piece with TV monitors surrounding a circular patch of live grass. The first screen depicts a muddy barren landscape. Scenes of tire marks and dead snakes entrenched in the mud mark the footage. The second screen depicts a man

reaching upwards towards a clear blue sky. The third TV shows lush green grass that fills the frame. The first screen is a representation of the economic, social and political devastation of Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union from which nothing lucrative could grow. While the prospect of independence seemed bright, Kyrgyzstan was woefully unprepared. The post Soviet years in Kyrgyzstan have been marked by corruption and an inability to change. The middle screen showing a man reaching towards the sky represents the voracious desire for a better life. The Kyrgyz people keep striving for a way out of their predicament. The man reaching toward the sky symbolizes every Kyrgyz who tries for change. The last video is an entire screen filled with lush green grass. It is this last screen that represents paradise. The grass represents hope and success growing in plenty from fertile soil. The actual grass growing in front of the three screens represents paradise coming to life. It shows a tangible hope cultivated from the hands of the Kyrgyz people.

-FN



# Shahram Entekhabi

b. 1963, Iran, lives in Germany



Happy Meal, video, 13:00 minutes, 2004

Shahram Entekhabi's purpose in creating *Happy Meal* transcends a mere acknowledgement of the globalization phenomenon. He is particularly interested in the question of identity. In fact, much of his work seeks to explore how Muslims living in the West strike a balance between Islamic tradition and Western influence in this rapidly globalizing world, in which they have equal exposure to both. With this in mind, Entekhabi hones his analysis of migrant identities to consider the notion of visibility versus invisibility, and whether the culture that these immigrants bring with them from home is truly "seen" by others in their newly assimilated environments. *Happy Meal* seems to be an anomaly within the context of Shahram Entekhabi's usual work. Here, not only does he deviate from his usual schema of using characters who are either migrant workers or fundamentalists, but his message also seems to be far more optimistic and playful.<sup>11</sup> This video depicts the intersection of two seeming antipodes of today's society: Islam and Western corporate capitalism. *Happy Meal* chronicles a little Muslim girl (who happens to be Entekhabi's daughter, Lara) as she excitedly eats a McChicken

<sup>11</sup> For more about Entekhabi's work, see <http://www.entekhabi.org>.

Happy Meal in a German McDonald's. At times, it seems very apparent that the *chador* which she is wearing gets in her way as she tries to finish her sandwich and then remove the Happy Meal toy from its plastic covering. This continual interference is a metaphor of the often contentious relationship between Islam and the Western world. The background music throughout the piece is a cycle of two catchy children's songs praising Allah that also serves to highlight the juxtaposition of Islam against the West. Watching the progression of the work unfold, one witnesses a moment in which these two antipodes converge, and all differences are evinced. It is a moment when all the external factors – the politics, the prejudices, the stereotypes – that accompany life as a Muslim living abroad cease to be. After much grimacing and machination, the girl is finally able to overcome the “burden” of her *chador* and remove the plastic covering of her Happy Meal toy. At this moment the girl seems truly and completely happy. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan describes this point in time as when “the possibility and excitement of new cultures being created.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the creation of a hybrid “third culture” is the main message that Entekhabi is seeking to convey through *Happy Meal*. The third culture is one that embraces ideas from both the East and the West, and that threads them together instead of forcing them apart.

-KK

*Happy Meal*, the story of a black *chador*-clad Iranian girl enjoying her food in a Berlin McDonald's, uses dress to convey meaning and shift viewer perception. Her dress highlights her cultural identity. To many in the West, this identity coincides with the idea of Islamic fundamentalism; however, as she enjoys her Happy Meal, the viewer begins to see her as a child first and Muslim second. The viewer identifies with her enjoyment of a meal that is emblematic of Western culture. The *chador* then becomes a symbol of cultural hybridity. The girl serves as a bridge between two separate cultures. The artist understands what the *chador* represents to many Western viewers, and he uses this representation to challenge expectations.

-KC

<sup>12</sup> Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, “Texts and Interviews: Happy Meal,” <http://www.entekhabi.org>, accessed 17 Oct 2007.

# Simin Keramati

b. 1970, Iran



*Earth*, video, 14:23 minutes, 2006

*Water*, video, 6:35 minutes, 2007

Simin Keramati intertwines the theme of destruction with the elements of nature: earth, water, wind, and fire. Through the four videos in her project, “The Four Elements,” she illustrates deep human feelings of despair from both personal and social perspectives. This exhibition features two of the pieces, *Earth* and *Water*.

The video, *Earth*, opens with the image of a woman, played by Keramati, sitting and leaning on the wall of an enclosed space. Sand slowly falls on the woman, eventually burying her entire body. Strangely, she makes no attempt to extract herself from the sand. Her facial expressions are devoid of any emotion, and there is a great sense of futility and hopelessness in the image. In this video, Keramati portrays her own paralysis through what she described as a dark period of her life.<sup>13</sup> She gives great importance to the woman’s self-imposed failure to react to her surroundings and its contribution to the general theme of desolation and despair. Keramati’s anguished thoughts also serve to remind us of the human feeling of hopelessness that prevails in the lives of many of today’s Iranian women. A large

<sup>13</sup> Simin Keramati, e-mail exchange with Jilu Jacob, Oct – Nov 2007.

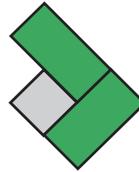


portion of this hopelessness arises from the social and political changes that have affected Iranian citizens since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Another piece in the “Four Elements” project is *Water*. The video begins as a hand puts a handwritten note with Persian words into a glass of water. Slowly the words disappear as the blue ink begins to dissolve, and the silently vanishing words juxtapose with the dissonant sounds of falling rain and crashing thunder. As the video progresses, the voice of a man reading a text becomes audible, but it is apparent that the voice will never be clear over the thunderous crashes. The combination of blurred images and muffled sounds reveals a powerful theme of misunderstanding. Keramati emphasizes that the importance of the piece lies not in the text that the man reads, nor the words written on the note, but in the feeling of misunderstanding that humans must cope with.

In her two pieces, Keramati powerfully captures universal themes of humanity including despair and misunderstanding. Through vivid imagery and analogies rooted in nature’s elements, Simin Keramati effectively portrays the dualities that represent her identity as well as the identity of Iranian women.

-JJ



# Khosro Khosravi

b. 1965, Iran



Fifth Grade, video, 5:00 minutes, 2006

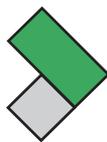
Khosro Khosravi's piece begins with a sequence of blurry, indecipherable images that transform into posterior views of fifth grade girls. A soundtrack of Persian-speaking children accompanies the visual progression. Khosravi seems to deliberately have created an obscure piece. Can these blurry images relay a clear message? One possible reading of *Fifth Grade* is as political commentary.

Reflective of Iran's historical trajectory, Khosravi's early paintings progressively explored themes of revolution and, then, national identity. His current work has expanded to include video art that integrates characteristics of his painting. The painterly quality of *Fifth Grade's* blurry images establishes them as art and consequently informs the viewer that the montage has meaning. In the first half of the video, girls' voices accompany the painterly blurred images. While giggling intermittently, the girls speak of life, nature and the world. Paralleling the world of a ten-year-old girl, the aura of the first half is happy and carefree. This beautiful world comes crashing down as the blurred images transform into girls covered by the *hejab* (Islamic covering) and the voices read a literature textbook speaking of politics, patriotism and martyrdom. The viewer expects to see the faces of the

schoolgirls as they naturally interact with each other. Khosravi breaks this convention by showing only a posterior angle and one girl per frame. Khosravi intended this synthetic and limited view to emphasize the social contradictions in Iran.<sup>14</sup> He uses the pretext of social contradictions to indirectly criticize the government. Khosravi purposely shows the girls' braids coming out from under the *maghne'a* (head scarf) only to be whisked away under its cover. The pattern reflects Iranian political trends. Every time Iran moves towards positive change, extremist politicians rise to power and undermine progress without delivering their promises of economic growth. The most recent example of this trend is the presidential election of 2005, which the hard-line conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won. By 2005, the economy was the major source of frustration among Iranians, and the country was ready for relief; however, Ahmadinejad has failed to deliver the promises of economic change that were the reason behind his election.<sup>15</sup> Instead he has undermined the progressive reforms of his predecessor, with devastating social consequences.

The blurry images of *Fifth Grade* are not meaningless; they convey a clear political message. The piece functions as a parable of sorts by covertly conveying its broader message. By criticizing the dominant society that the Islamic Republic defines, Khosravi draws a parallel between the 1979 Revolution and the 2005 presidential election; in both cases, false promises of economic growth brought politicians with radical policies to power.

-MM



<sup>14</sup> Khosro Khosravi, e-mail exchange with Malorie Meshkati, 26 Sept 2007.

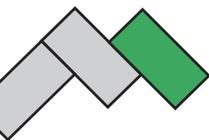
<sup>15</sup> Ali Moazammi, "The Mirage," *New Internationalist*, March 2007, <http://www.newint.org/features/2007/03/01/poverty>, accessed Nov 2007

# Erbossyn Meldibekov

b. 1964, Kazakhstan



from the Pastan Series, prints on fabric, 20"x20" each, 2004



The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 was regarded as a monumental victory in the eyes of the democratic world; however, it was a frightening moment of sudden responsibility for the new Republic of Kazakhstan. The citizens of Kazakhstan were left disoriented and confused over who they were and what defined their identity. Erbossyn Meldibekov addresses these issues of identity while simultaneously confronting the stereotypes that some in the West have constructed of Kazakhstan. The *Pastan Series* provides a multifaceted statement about the identity crisis that Kazakhs feel in their post-Soviet world and also shows how their views are influenced by their traditional roots.

Meldibekov believes that there is a fundamental difference in the arts of the West and the arts of the East. He suggests that this distinction is due to the physical mobility of the artwork.<sup>16</sup> Western art is often admired on a wall, in the form of a painting, while Eastern art appears in a multitude of forms from textiles to even accessories in tents. This reflects the difference in the manner in which people of the two different cultures traditionally lived: the West was sedentary and the East was nomadic. Meldibekov's work can be considered an attempt to emulate the

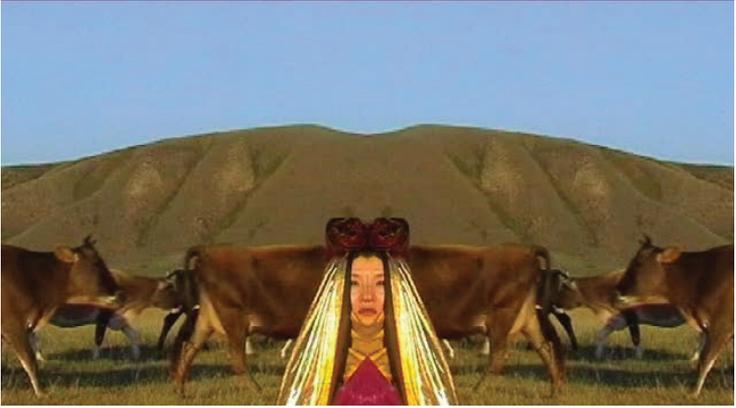
<sup>16</sup> Alexander Evangeli, "Hypermuslim (Paston)," Marat Guelman Gallery, <http://www.guelman.ru/eng/gallery/moscow/erbol/>, accessed 11 Oct 2007.

nomadic art that was created by his ancestors. Although he does not produce works that could be considered traditionally nomadic, the objects he creates, whether video or textile, are easily portable. His works in our exhibit are digital images printed on fabric resembling traditional silk *ikat*, a type of woven textile distinctive to Central Asia. The image of the camel with the rocket launcher printed on some of the textiles comments on the stereotypical Western view of Muslims as violent people. It also lampoons the West's ignorance about Kazakhstan by depicting a camel (or an elephant), an animal that is not native to the area, in the piece. The depiction of the old and dirty Muslim man in a turban fashioned from an American flag in another piece is again a stab at the West's stereotypical perception of Muslims. At the same time, the work can be interpreted as representing a socio-political criticism directed at the Kazakh people. Meldibekov is urging his people to not be married to the West and their culture, but rather to embrace their own Kazakh identity. What defines Meldibekov as an artist is his ability to simultaneously address two audiences. Not only does he address the misconceived perception that some in the West have of Kazakhstan, but at the same time, through his works, he urges his own Kazakh people to retain their identity and stand up for themselves.

-QH

# Almagul Menlibayeva

b. 1969, Kazakhstan, lives in the Netherlands



Steppen Baroque, video, 11:06 minutes, 2004

*Steppen Baroque* illustrates traditional Kazakh culture by using references from the nomadic steppe and Shamanism while simultaneously demonstrating the impact of the Western society on Kazakhstan by using European art concepts such as Baroque. This synthesis has created a unique artwork that gently combines aspects of two distinct cultures. Almagul Menlibayeva has lead the way in a style she calls “Romantic Punk Shamanism.”<sup>17</sup> This term in itself is a perfect example of the meaning behind *Steppen Baroque* as it references both European and Kazakh traditions.

The traditional heritage of Kazakhstan is centered on nomadic tribal culture. The livestock depicted in the video show the importance of pastoral nomadism in the country, and the steppe background provides the setting while also displaying that this land is crucial to the Kazakh culture. The artist also has connected with her nomadic heritage by using Shamanistic themes. In her artist’s statement, Menlibayeva discusses the perfection of nature and spirits that exist in the setting

<sup>17</sup> Galerie Davide Gallo, “Almagul Menlibayeva,” <http://www.galeriedavidegallo.com/index.php?id=menlibayeva>, accessed 4 Oct 2007.

of the video.<sup>18</sup> This perfection is represented through the use of a mirrored image, which creates symmetry in the work as everything that is seen on one side of the screen is seen as a mirror image on the other. The Seven Ancestors to which the video is dedicated illustrate Menlibayeva's belief in the spirits of Shamanism and the importance of ancestors.

Baroque, a 17th-century Italian term, describes the drama created by the shapes that the fabric makes as well as the dramatic and deep feel of the piece as a whole (the idea of theatrics was popular in the Baroque period). The women in the video are telling us a tale of their heritage and ancestry, but in a way that reflects Western artistic ideals. Punk is a term originating from the 1970's in England that describes a movement of music and culture that rebelled against social norms. Portraying these women as nude in a culture that is predominantly Muslim is a rebellion against a norm and thus can be called punk. Romanticism is a concept originating from 18th-century England that celebrates nature, imagination, self-analysis and freedom of the soul, aspects also visible in the video.

*Steppen Baroque* can be described as a synthesis. It is distinctive in that it describes the traditional Kazakh culture by using Western artistic traditions. It discusses an idea of modernity in Kazakhstan while incorporating the past of the country. A beautiful work has formed from this duality.

-AK

In *Steppen Baroque*, by employing nudity and elaborate draping of colored silks over the women's bodies, Menlibayeva presents the idea of Kazakhstan's return to tradition after being freed from Soviet rule. In this instance, the artist challenges the idea of the suppressed sexuality of Central Asian woman by flooding the viewer with images of nudity as a traditional connection between the woman and the earth. The women's dress represents their search for identity after the Western influence has been removed—they start off completely naked and eventually take on elements of dress that recall images of the ancient Silk Road. The specific image of veiling, central to Western ideas of the Muslim world, is not evoked; rather by making very specific choices in clothing (and in the strategic absence of clothing), the artist acknowledges the tendency of nations to return to an exaggerated form of tradition after a period of colonization in order to find their own unique identity.

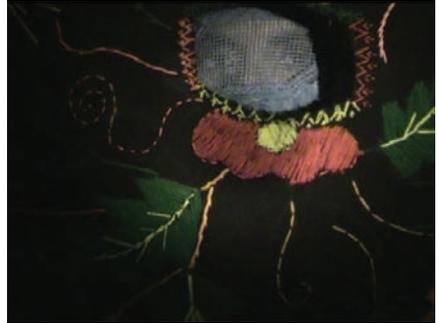
-KC



# Rahraw Omarzad

*Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan*

b. 1964, Afghanistan



*Closed Door*, video, 8:28 minutes, undated

*Opening*, video, 11:31 minutes, undated (alternatively titled *Foramen*)

*Sympathy*, video, 1:05 minutes, undated

Ravaged by countless decades of war, locked in a cycle of desperation generation after generation, Afghanistan is in search of hope. Amidst the decaying military paraphernalia, gardens of poison (opium) are nurtured. Afghanistan is a land that gives birth to those who have nothing to lose.

Rahraw Omarzad faces the struggles of living in a war torn nation while working as an artist, curator and lecturer. As an artist, his inspiration is embedded in the streets of Kabul. These streets are filled with the glory and tears of the past, obstacles of the present, and desires for the future. In 2005, Omarzad founded the

Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan, an institution that addresses the pivotal role than an artist plays in society: the beholder of a nation's identity.<sup>19</sup> The CCAA is the result of his desire to shift the very nature of artistic education and provide a means for artists to voice their concerns stemming from the urgent socio-political context. At TCNJ, we are showcasing three video pieces, *Opening*, *Closed Door*, and *Sympathy*, developed by Omarzad and his students.

An initial reading of *Opening* highlights the plight of an Afghan woman, relative to the plethora of Western stereotypes relating to the oppression of Muslim women. While it is true that the main subject of this video is a *burqa*-clad woman, her actions speak more of her determination and individuality than her restricted sexuality. *Stitching a garden*, the woman embodies a universal Afghan desire to create beauty in a dismal life. *Closed Door* chronicles the path traveled by a young Afghan man while returning from a building with a closed door, but an open window. The young man deliberately goes out of his way to find subtle new ways to enliven the same old path he takes everyday. The work contends that when the entrance to opportunity is locked, Afghans will find an alternative through which they can ultimately reach their goal. *Sympathy* portrays men digging holes only to be faced with double the amount of dirt shoveled back in. The endless and frustrating nature of the act embodies the Afghani emotions regarding their lost identity. The constant struggle can be read in several ways: it represents the inability to locate the past in the present landscape, the inability to cultivate the earth, or a laborious search for rebirth.

-AA

<sup>19</sup> Rahraw Omarzad, "Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA)," [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/islamic\\_world/articles/2004/ccaa\\_afghanistan](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/islamic_world/articles/2004/ccaa_afghanistan), accessed 23 Nov 2007.



Titled *Bomb in the Cultural Sidewalk*, volume 6 of *bRainstorm* represents the first Iranian street art event in Tehran and marks the 28th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Although Reshad is a skilled artist in various mediums, he promotes graffiti as the hallmark of the magazine. Karan's "tag" is "aloneman" which relates to his artwork's theme – "the loneliness."<sup>20</sup> When looking at the work of other contemporary artists throughout the world, a similar theme of loneliness emerges. Perhaps it serves as a catalyst for their inspiration, a form of therapy, coping mechanism, or empowerment. This idea of loneliness connects volume 6 of *bRainstorm* to the exhibit's theme of the garden.

The word "garden" does not necessarily have to reflect nature. When we visualize urban settings, it is doubtful a garden will come to mind. In this case we have to look at the meaning of a garden poetically. A garden can represent a diversion from tensions of urban life. In every city throughout the world, people need a sanctuary to retreat to that can erase their feelings of loneliness, alienation and despair. We can look at *bRainstorm* magazine, with its representations of graffiti, posters, street/urban and other forms of contemporary art, as a garden of prolific political choices teeming to make a beautiful statement. A garden can incorporate both natural and manufactured elements. Here we have a garden of manufactured elements: the stickers. Reshad's sticker event can be seen as a way of trying to connect people and make the urban environment, which can be a pretty lonely place, into something friendlier - changed from a jungle to a garden.

-JM

<sup>20</sup> Karan Reshad, e-mail exchange with Jim Mitchell, 8 Oct 2007.

# Alexander Ugay

b. 1978, Kazakhstan



Paradise Landscape, digital print on canvas, 36" x 192", 2004

A Kazakh of Korean descent, Alexander Ugay's art is conscious of his Central Asian identity and of Kazakhstan's rapid development and modernization. *Paradise Landscape* references the evolution of Kazakhstan during the artist's lifetime. The grassy plain sparsely populated by exotic animals and a variety of modern men holds a potent subtext. This piece recognizes Kazakhstan as a paradigm of developing nations and offers a critical view of the West's false promise of modernity as Paradise and what it means to be Kazakh in the twenty-first century.

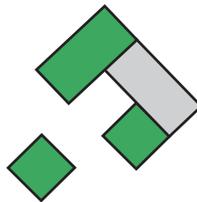
*Paradise Landscape* provokes thought through depiction of a variety of paradoxes, such as reality versus fantasy, industry versus nature, and global versus local. These comparisons and critiques neatly join and ultimately coalesce into one central question: What is Paradise? Ugay's Paradise can be considered a symbolic garden. Although the land is the steppe, it is set off from the rest of the world by mountains and endless sky, existing in and of itself, apart from the "outside." Everything in the space has clearly been arranged and placed with purpose. When understood as a metaphor for modernity, the image seems to convey that it is the personal efforts of the figures populating the paradisiacal setting that have developed Kazakhstan, earning them a place here.

Extensive use of digital processes has created a composite landscape with animals collected from around the globe and people engaging in a diverse set of activities sharing the same space, which would be unlikely in reality. Rhinoceroses do not graze the steppe, and Kazakh trash collectors would be more appropriate in the urban landscape of Almaty. This deliberate misplacement confronts the entire concept of a modern world as the ultimate reward for lifetimes of effort. Ugay's com-

mentary arises from contemporary perceptions of what it means to be modern, which are indivisible from Orientalism. This Eurocentric theory defines the West against the non-West. In this polar dichotomy, the West is modern both because it is the West and is not the Orient.<sup>21</sup> There is no room for Kazakhstan to develop its own identity because, in this system, it must duplicate Western models and meet Western needs. Kazakhstan is struggling to assert itself as a “modern” state because it is coming of age when modernity has already been narrowly defined globally as “Western.”

*Paradise Landscape* rewards repeated viewing and thoughtful consideration. Although the piece is obvious about its beauty, its substance is subtle. Discovering the layers of meaning laced throughout this work is well worth the effort, and it is important to keep them in mind as one contemplates the smiling painter, quiet elephants, and other understated details.

-JB



<sup>21</sup> “Mahmut Mutman, “Under the Sign of Orientalism: the West vs. Islam,” *Cultural Critique* 23 (1992): 165-197.





## Notes on Iran and Afghanistan

### **Censorship in Iran**

Censorship is nothing new to Iranians. From one oppressive regime to another, the government's restriction of freedom to impose power recurs incessantly. Although the use of censorship under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's monarchy differed from the Islamic Republic's, both governments aimed to confine the artists' and filmmakers' freedom of expression with regards to any issue that contradicted the ideology of the state. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was successfully reinstated as shah after a CIA-backed coup d'état in 1953, established the Ministry of Culture and Arts to ensure that all completed works were free of any form of socio-political criticism or political dissent.<sup>22</sup> Then came the Iranian Revolution of 1979, a tumultuous period of defiance, change, and optimism. Many Iranian people, the intellectuals and working class alike, hoped the revolution would generate positive social change and more political freedom in the country. However, with the instatement of the Islamic Republic, many revolutionaries felt betrayed. Instead of attaining the freedoms that were repressed by the shah, the revolutionaries found themselves subject to strict Islamic law under Ayatollah Khomeini. The Islamic clerics attempted to reconcile their abhorrence for what they saw as representations of immoral issues with the culture's passion for love and poetry by 'Islamifying' film and art.<sup>23</sup> The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) enforced the government's Islamic values on film and other forms of media. For example, on film, the *hejab* (head dress for women) was mandatory, and any outward expression of romantic feelings between a man and a woman was forbidden.<sup>24</sup> When Mohammad Khatami, former minister of MCIG, unexpectedly won the presidential election in 1992, a new phase, the "Third Republic" began. Under the Third Republic, many formally taboo ideas and themes became acceptable to convey in film and art, but some censorship still remained.

In order to make meaningful works that would pass the censors, many artists and filmmakers started working in minimalist, realist, and abstract styles. Many also

<sup>22</sup> Hamid Naficy, "Cinema as a Political Instrument," In *Continuity and Change in Modern Iran*, Michael E. Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 280.

<sup>23</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Iranian Cinema: Art, Society, and State," *Middle East Report* 219 (Summer 2001): 27.

<sup>24</sup> Azadeh Farahmand, "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema," in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation, and Identity*, Richard Tapper, ed. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2002), 99.

adopted a Shiite philosophy of searching for hidden truths and urged viewers to actively participate in the work's interpretation. This approach is as much a strategic tactic as it is artistic. They resorted to more creative means in order to evade the censorship that would inevitably befall a politically charged or socially conscious work.

Understanding the history of politics and censorship in the last five decades of Iran enables viewers to further explore the nuances of Iranian film and art. With this clarity, viewers can better appreciate the work of contemporary artists, such as Simin Keramati and Khosro Khosravi, who have used artistic strategies first developed in film in the 1950s and 60s to express their reflections on identity and social issues today. Instead of subduing their presence, the censorship laws have inadvertently motivated filmmakers and artists to channel their creativity in new directions. In an oppressive political environment, the poetic culture in Iran has heightened the quality of film and video art.

-MS



### **20th-century Afghanistan**

Every Afghan writer, filmmaker, or artist is keenly aware of the stereotype of constant warfare surrounding the country. However, war was far from the dominant discourse in early 20th-century Afghanistan. Before the start of the Soviet occupation in 1979, the Afghan educational system, like those in much of the world, was based upon the French model, the Lycée Français. Afghan artists began to produce works now largely dismissed, in the words of Grove Art, as “incorporating no recognizable Afghan characteristics,” and, “clearly derivative.”<sup>25</sup> Oil painting and sculpture, paragons of fine art in the West and largely unknown in Central Asia, were embraced at the expense of traditional Persianate miniature painting and calligraphy. Whether this was a deplorable act of cultural imperialism or simply Afghan appropriation of new art forms is a hotly contested issue in today's world of staunch nationalism. However, it is worth considering that perhaps oil painting and sculpture, once practiced by Afghans, became legitimate parts of Afghan culture.

The Saur Revolution of 1978, in which a core of Marxist intellectual elites overthrew the Afghan monarchy, marked the start of the attempted Sovietization of Afghanistan. The policy of Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, which lasted until 1989, was much like that in the other Central Asian states: Sovietization of politics, culture, and art. The Lycée was banned, and Afghan education now focused on historical materialism and the history of class struggle.<sup>26</sup> Socialist

<sup>25</sup> “Afghanistan,” Grove Art, Oxford University Press, <http://www.groveart.com>, accessed 16 Nov 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Olivier Roy, “The Sovietization of Afghanistan,” in *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: Collision and Transformation*, Milan Hauner and Robert L. Canfield, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 48.

Realism, the strikingly effective patriotic style common in all Soviet states, became the national art form. Unlike the other Soviet states, Afghanistan, armed with weaponry supplied by the American CIA and the Pakistani ISI, bitterly resisted the Soviet occupation. Thus, the cultural hybridization experienced by Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kazakhs never fully materialized.

After the ten-year war with the Soviets, Afghanistan turned upon itself, and most of the country has presently been in a state of war for over a quarter of a century. Very little art could be produced during the tumultuous years of the early 1990s, and even less was made under the puritanical vice of the Taliban. Since the official removal of the Taliban in 2001, Afghan artists have struggled to express themselves. Some try to express the trauma of war on canvas, while others shy from such expressions of violence, fearing that Afghans have already been subjected to much simplification in Western perspectives.

-PM

---

## SUGGESTED READING LIST

Leeza Ahmady. *The Taste of Others: Contemporary Art in Central Asia*. Asia Art Archive: [www.aaa.org.hk/downloads/Leezafinalreport.pdf](http://www.aaa.org.hk/downloads/Leezafinalreport.pdf).

Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, eds. *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, eds. *Images of Paradise in Islamic Art*. Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1991.

Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair. *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002.

Brian Drolet, ed. *India: Public Places / Private Spaces*. Newark: The Newark Museum, 2007.

Penelope Hobhouse. *Gardens of Persia*. Hong Kong: Kale Press, 2004.

Rose Issa, Ruyin Pakbuz and Daryush Shayegan. *Iranian Contemporary Art*. London: Barbican Art and Booth-Clibborn, 2001.

Johannes Kalter and Margareta Pavaloi, eds. *Uzbekistan*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997.

Martin McCauley. *Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Modern History*. Harlow: Longman 2002

Michael Rush. *Video Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.



## STUDENT AUTHORS

from Dr. Deborah Hutton's Arts of Iran course, Fall 2007

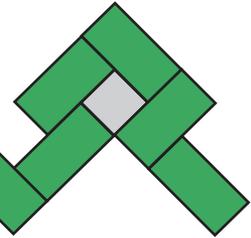
Front Row, L to R: Jim Mitchell (JM), Malorie Meshkati (MM), Jonathan Barracato (JB), Ashley Ragg (AR), Mona Sadegh (MS)

Back Row, L to R: Flora Novick (FN), Asha Shah (AS), Ava Kiss (AK), Paul Mumm (PM), Timothy J. Falcone (TF), Riksum Kazi (RK), Arooj Akhtar (AA), Qasim Husain (QH), Jilu Jacob (JJ), Karin Christiaens (KC), Sana Rahman (SR), Samantha Marquis (SM), Karan Kapoor (KK)

## SPECIAL THANKS

An exhibition like this relies upon the good ideas, hard work and willing support of so many. Special thanks are due to the artists for agreeing to participate and creating such thought-provoking work; Jane Lombard of Lombard Freid Projects for the generous loan of Erbossyn Meldibekov's prints; all of the students from the fall 2007 Arts of Iran course for their insightful writings, botanical skills, and upcoming gallery presentations; my co-curators for their tireless efforts, extraordinary vision and true teamwork; Alex Zukovich from the Interactive Multimedia Program for rolling up his sleeves and solving our projection puzzles, the Carpentry Shop for always helping out when help is needed, Media and Technology Support Services for advice, equipment and flexibility, the Art Department staff for picking up the slack, our extraordinary team of gallery assistants and interns for their extra time and personal commitment, Kevin Maulbeck for designing a beautiful postcard and catalog, Allegra Print and Imaging for meeting our impossible deadlines, the Religious Studies Committee for inspiring this project, and, last but not least, President Gitenstein, Provost Paul and Dean Pavlovsky, for their deep commitment to and ongoing support of the arts on campus.

Sarah Cunningham  
Director, The College Art Gallery



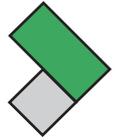
---

The College of New Jersey  
The College Art Gallery  
2000 Pennington Rd.  
Ewing, NJ 08628

Gallery Info:  
111 Holman Hall  
609.771.2198  
[www.tcnj.edu/~tcag](http://www.tcnj.edu/~tcag)

Gallery Hours:  
Tu, We, Th 12 p.m. - 7 p.m.; Su 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.  
Closed for Spring Break:  
March 9 - 16

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



*President*

Dr. R. Barbara Gitenstein

*Interim Provost*

Dr. Elizabeth Paul

*Interim Dean, School of the Arts & Communication*

Taras Pavlovsky

*Chair, TCNJ Art Department*

Elizabeth Mackie

*Director, The College Art Gallery*

Sarah Cunningham

*Design & Layout*

Kevin Maulbeck

## SPONSORS

Sponsored by the Department of Art, the School of the Arts and Communication, and the Committee for Cultural and Intellectual Community (CCIC) and made possible in part by the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission through funding from the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

## RELIGION, CULTURE & IDENTITY PROGRAM

This exhibit is a part of TCNJ's 2007-2008 program, "Religion, Culture and Identity." In addition to an interdisciplinary sequence of courses, this exhibit and the other events in the program highlight the evolution of personal and social identity as shaped by different global religions and their cultures, the varied expressions of religious experience in writings, art, film, and music, and its relation to other cultural, social, and political developments of the past and present. The events are co-sponsored by CCIC, the Religious Studies Committee, the School of the Arts and Communication, and the School of Culture and Society.



The College of New Jersey

