



Leeza Ahmady
Independent Curator and Consultant
Director of Asian Contemporary Art Week
Asia Society, New York

Education

2003-05 MA in Art and Cultural Management, Thesis Focus: Contemporary Art in Central Asia, Pratt Institute, New York, NY

2000-02 Art History (Graduate Level Non-Degree), Hunter College, New York, NY

1990-94 BA in International Relations, Minor (Art History), St. John's University, New York, NY

Jan-Aug 1993 Central European Studies, Art History, Budapest University (College Europa Study Abroad)

Resume of Curatorial Work

Director of Asian Contemporary Art Week Asia Society (Sep 04 – present)

Directs the renowned annual citywide event, Asian Contemporary Art Week (ACAW), focusing on artists producing works both inside and outside of Asia in a week-long series of public programs such as exhibitions, lectures and artist conversations at leading museums and galleries in New York. Ahmady's visionary efforts have resulted in attracting an incredibly diverse and broad array of presenting venues as well as an expanded list of artists from almost every region of Asia including Central Asia and the Middle East.

www.acaw.net

“Truly Truthful”

Art Asia Miami (Dec 2-6, 2009)

Presented a selection of works by 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. The exhibition defied the notion that contemporary art from Asia is narrowly focused and comes from only a few regions. Artists: Lara Baladi, Huma Bhabha, Jeff Cytkowski, Anita Dube, Cao Fei, Chitra Ganesh, Yeondoo Jung, Gulnara Kasmaliev & Muratbek Djumaliev, Bari Kumar, Li Jikai, Marya Kazoun, Kimsooja, Mami Kosemura, Sopheap Pich,

Qiu Shijie, Jean Shin, Ushio Shinohara, Jakkai Siributr, Sislej Xhafa.
<http://69.24.73.123/SCOPE/asia.php/asia/miami10>

“Tarjama/Translation”

Queens Museum of Art (May 10-Sep 27, 2009)

Co-curated with Iftikhar Dadi, and Assistant Curator Reem Fadda. An unprecedented exhibition, which maps an influential subset of recent work from the Middle East, Central Asia, and its diasporas, as a complex and dynamic translational undertaking. The exhibition addresses the work of translation as multivalent; from the specificities of textual and visual maneuvers to the larger sense of revealing fissures of the self, community, site and temporality. Artists: Ayad Alkadhi, Nazgol Ansarinia, Hamdi Attia, Lara Baladi, Yto Barrada, Esra Ersen, Khaled Hafez, Emily Jacir, Pouran Jinchi, John Jurayj, Gülsün Karamustafa, Bouchra Khalili, Almagul Menlibayeva, Farhad Moshiri, Rabih Mroue, Rahraw Omarzad, Michael Rakowitz, Khalil Rabah, Khaled Ramadan, Solmaz Shahbazi, Wael Shawky, Mitra Tabrizian, Alexander Ugay, Sharif Waked, Dilek Winchester, Yelena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev, and Akram Zaatari. <http://www.arteeast.org/pages/visualarts/>

New Video Art, in conjunction with: “Afghanistan, Hidden Treasures from the National Museum Kabul”.

The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (July 2008)

A selection of recent video works by Afghan and Afghan-American artists, including Mariam Ghani, Roya Ghiasy, and Rahraw Omarzad. Several artists represented in this program are members of the Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan (CCAA), an association working to render visible the issues that are buried beneath the many media-manufactured topics currently characterizing Afghanistan. <http://www.nga.gov/press/exh/273/index.shtm>

“The Silk Code”

Astana, Kazakhstan (June 2008)

An exhibition commissioned by Asia Society in conjunction with the International Business Conference “Kazakhstan: Trade and Investment at the Crossroads of Eurasia.” This exhibition brought together some of the most prominent artists working in a variety of media. Artists: Vyacheslav Akhunov, Said Atabekov, Mariam Ghani, Gulnara Kasmalieva & Muratbek Djumalieva, Rustam Khalifin, Jamshed Kholikov, Galim Madanov, Almagul Menlibayeva, Moldagul Narymbetov, Saken Narynov, Rahraw Omarzad, Alexander Ugay, Yelena and Viktor Vorobyeva. <http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/silk/>

“I Dream of the Stans”

Winkleman Gallery (March April 2008)

Museo de Arte de El Salvador MARTE (June 2008)

Co-curated with Murat Orozobekov, and Edward Winkleman, the exhibition surveyed the range of powerful new works by leading contemporary artists in Central Asia and Afghanistan. It centered on the remarkably strong single and multi-channel video works produced in the region, a fact often attributed to the region’s centuries-old traditions of storytelling, street theater, and weaving. /

Dream of the Stars brought together works by seven of the area's most important artists and teams. After debuting in NY this exhibit traveled to El Salvador. Artists: Vyacheslav Akhunov, Rahraw Omarzad, Almagul Menlibayeva, Jamshed Kholikov, Gulnara Kasmalieva & Muratbek Djumaliev, Said Atabekov, and Julia Tikhonova & Rustam Khalfin.

<http://www.winkleman.com/exhibition/view/1205>

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

The College of New Jersey Art Gallery (March 2008)

Co-curated with Sarah Cunningham and Deborah Hutton, this exhibition focuses on former Persia and its cultural legacy. It examines not only the traditional garden and the contemporary sense of place, but also notions of paradise lost and found, lessons learned and forgotten, and traditions cherished and rejected. Artists: Vyacheslav Akhunov, Muratbek Djumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva, Shahram Entekhabi, Simin Keramati, Khosro Khosravi, Almagul Menlibayeva, Rahraw Omarzad, Karan Reshad, and Alexander Ugay.

<http://www.tcnj.edu/%7Eepa/news/2008/parableofthegarden.htm>

“The Paradox of Polarity: Contemporary Art from Central Asia”

Bose Pacia New York (Feb 2007)

An exhibition conceptualized as part of Ahmady's ongoing curatorial project entitled *The Taste of Others*, intended at promoting artists of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan & Afghanistan). As New York City's first major exhibition from the region, *The Paradox of Polarity* offered a small survey of the numerous and richly varied forms of art flourishing in Central Asia today. Artists: Vyacheslav Akhunov, Said Atabekov, Rustam Khalfin, Shailo Djekshenbayev, Muratbek Djumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva, Ulan Djaparov, Yerbossyn Meldibekov, Almagul Menlibayeva, Roman Maskalev, Saken Narynov Talant Ogobaev, Yelena and Viktor Vorobayeva, Julia Tikhonova.

http://www.bosepacia.com/exhibitions/2007-01-12_the-paradox-of-polarity/

Venice Biennale (2005)

Afghanistan and Central Asia Pavilions

Promoted and advised the commissioning of the first Afghanistan and Central Asia Pavilions at the Venice Biennale as a result of which all featured artists succeeded in becoming highly visible on to the international scene.

“The Taste of Others: Contemporary Art in Central Asia”

Apexart, New York (Mar 2005)

Ahmady launched *The Taste of Others* at apexart New York in March 2005 as an on-going educational and curatorial program to connect contemporary artists of Central Asia to artists, art professionals, and institutions in other parts of the world. The program includes a series of traveling exhibitions, lectures, screenings, artist-talks, and publications presented at various private and public galleries, museums and academic university settings throughout the United States and abroad. Recently, Ahmady expended the initiative to also include placement of artworks in private and public collections.

The exhibition at apexart was the inaugural event of Ahmady's educational program. The show incorporated live performances and installations by Leeza Ahmady centered around a Sandalee, heating system common in Afghanistan, and Keecheerrii Kooroot, a famous cold-weather dish. The show also premiered Lida Abdul's first exhibition in New York with an untitled live performance by the artist smearing a large block of ice cube on to the surface of an Afghan rug. Artists: Roya Ghiasy, Mariam Ghani, (Afghanistan), Nikhil Chopra (India), Yerbossyn Meldibekov (Kazakhstan), Alexander Nikolaev (Uzbekistan), Jacob Fuglsang Mikklesen (Denmark), Sislej Xhafa (Kosovo) Muratbek Djumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva (Kyrgyz Republic).

<http://www.apexart.org/exhibitions/maurizio/tasteofothers.htm>

Asia Art Archive Hong Kong (June 2005)

Unveiling Contemporary Art in Central Asia:

Comprehensive Essay and Presentation

In June 2005, as a recipient of Asia Art Archive's Martell Contemporary Asian Art Research Grant, Ahmady returned to Central Asia to research the development of contemporary art in the region. She interviewed & documented the works of 85 artists, curators, and art managers. Asia Art Archive, a Hong Kong based organization published her findings in a comprehensive essay. During this trip, Ahmady also conducted workshops and lectures about international artists working in the United States, Europe, and other parts of Asia.

http://www.aaa.org.hk/research_grantees.aspx#la

"Contemporaneity" (April 2004)

Second International Biennale of Arts, Kyrgyzstan

Curated a video exhibition for the 2nd International Biennale of Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and Academy of Fine Arts Tashkent, Uzbekistan. As an exhibit, Contemporaneity welcomed art that falls under the boundary of formal and conceptual contemporary art: what it is, who decides what it is, and the scope of its language, materials, ideas, and histories. Artists: Lida Abdullah (Afghanistan, USA) Michele Beck and Jorge Calvo (USA) Nikhil Chopra (India, USA) Cecilie Dahl (Scandinavia, USA) Ali M. Demirel (Turkey) Jacob Fuglsang Mikkelsen (Sweden/Denmark) Mariam Ghani (Afghan/Lebanese, USA) Roya Ghiasy (Afghanistan, USA/Europe) Muratbek Djumaliev and Gulnara Kasmalieva (Kyrgyzstan) Masood Kamandy (Afghanistan, USA) Sislej Xhafa (Kosova, USA/Italy)

<http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2004/contemporaneity>

Whitney Museum of Art (2002)

Initial Public Offerings (I.P.O) New Artists, New Curators

Screening of slides and video alongside discussion with conceptual artist Roya Ghiasy, who was born in Afghanistan and lives and works in New York City, about her examination of immigration, integration, ethics, religion, globalization, mass-media and social-political platforms.

International YMCA (Jan 02 -Aug 03)

Conceived and developed a cultural diversity awareness program for youth (ages 6-15) enrolled in the YMCA after-school programs at over 95 NYC public school sites. With an art education framework in collaboration with visual and performance artists, Ahmady created over 40 workshops that incorporated traditional and contemporary art forms from around the world. Secured private and public grants to finance the initiative.

Analogue Blossoming III

Queens Museum of Art (2001)

Curated a program of video works, live sound compositions, and performance art by twenty-five international artists along side screening of short films.

Robert Pardo Gallery (2000-2001)

Co-directed the gallery dedicated to the exhibition of contemporary sculpture. Works exhibited and placed in private and public collections included sculptures by Alstair Noble, Pavel Kraus, Casper Henselmann, Richard Bottwin, Roslyn Mazzilli, Zoran Mojsilov, Ann Gillen, Gabriel Roos, and Kevin Barret.

The Venice Biennial (2001)

"We Welcome the Minister of Culture of Afghanistan"

In 2001 Ahmady co-organized an unofficial parallel project to the biennale presenting the first Afghan artist in the history of the Venice Biennale. Roya Ghiasy's poster installation: *We Welcome the Minister of Culture of Afghanistan*, was pasted by the artist all over the official signage sites of the biennale as an intervention act. The project explored perceptions of authority and power in the spheres of art, culture, and politics.

"Banzai Art" Young Art Japan (2000)

Curated an exhibition, which transported 15 contemporary Japanese artists to experience their first show in New York City. As opposed to the Japanese World War II slogan: "Banzai Nippon" meaning, "Go for Japan." *Banzai Art* addressed Japanese American competition issues.

"School of Hope", SOH (2000-2005)

One of the founding members of School of Hope, a 501 c(3) non-profit organization established to respond to twenty-three years of war and destruction by taking on an active role in the restoration of Afghanistan's educational system. School of Hope programs were active during the Taliban occupation, when the need for education was great and the political situation difficult. SoH has successfully provided educational assistance to thousands of Afghan youth

through its work with local communities and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“LL Gallery” (1998-2000)

Designed a unique art gallery housed inside the famous Chelsea nightclub: The Limelight. Implemented and directed an ambitious program of contemporary art exhibitions which allowed numerous emerging and established international contemporary artists as well as curators and galleries to present site specific works. Notable artists exhibited at LL Gallery included Brigid Berlin, Dan Flavin, Ray Johnson, Gerald Laing, Dennis Oppenheim, Malcolm Morley, Tiger Morse, Frosty Myers, Billy Name, Anton Perich, Robert Rauschenberg, Ira Schneider, and Andy Warhol.

"Vision 21" (1997)

Curated an exhibition of works by seventy-five emerging New York based artists who were invited to predict the course of contemporary art in the 21st Century. The exhibition was installed in a large refurbished warehouse in Brooklyn NY and juried by art dealers and critics such as Paula Cooper, Jeannette Ingberman, Papo Colo, and Abraham Lubelski.

Talks, Panels and Discussions

“Target Free Thursday Arts Roundtable: Navigating Cross-Cultural Collaborations”

Museum of Chinese in America (April 2010)

Participated in this roundtable discussion on developing and maintaining effective and mutually beneficial partnerships in the arts. Using cross-cultural collaborations as an entry point, panelists shared their experiences on cross-cultural artistic collaborations and audience development and offered insights on how artists and arts organizations with their respective vision, culture and capacity can respond to the risks and capitalize on the opportunities of collaborations. Panelists: Leeza Ahmady, Vivian Chiu, Jacqueline Terry, Bradley McCollum; Moderator: Vanessa Hu

www.mocanyc.org/visit/events/navigating_cross-cultural_collaborations

The College of new Jersey (March 2010)

Duke University (September 2009)

Arte East’s Across Histories Series, Cabinet Space (March 16, 2009)

Cornell University (November 2008)

Ahmady discussed her curatorial interests focusing on the process and development of her research and advocacy of art from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and other countries of Central Asia. The talk spotlighted the historic events that have forced many contemporary artists to live and work abroad and the ways in which their work powerfully addresses the experience of stagnation, loss and change. Artists inside the region are experiencing a cultural regeneration in their small but vibrant artistic communities and discovering critical acclaim on the international art stage.

Across Histories is a monthly series of talks with artists and curators from the Middle East, North Africa and their diaspora. Previous speakers have included Shirin Neshat, Michael Rakowitz, Wafaa Bilal and Adila Laidi-Hanieh

“Conversation with Art Connoisseurs and Experts: Asian Contemporary Art: Practice and Collections”

Art Singapore (October 2008)

Initiated, organized, and moderated this panel discussion, bringing together some of New York’s highly influential art connoisseurs to examine current issues, emerging trends, and new directions in Asia’s contemporary art scene. The panelists of prominent international gallerists, collectors, writers, and curators shared their insights about the processes of private and institutional collecting in the United States and in Asia with a special focus on India’s contemporary artists and their increasing global visibility. Participants: Hammad Nasar, Thomas Erben, Payal Chaudhri, Robert C. Morgan.

<http://www.artsingapore.net/index.php?page=2008-events-programmes>

“Re-Orientations: Art from Central Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East”

Asian Contemporary Art Fair (November 2008)

Participated in this panel discussion with David Elliott, Curator, Writer, Artistic Director of the Sydney Biennial 2010 and Alexandra Munroe, senior curator of Asian art at Guggenheim Museum. Moderated by Dr. Charles Merewether, curator. Artists work presented at this discussion were: Vyacheslav Akhunov, Said Atabekov, Rustam Khalfin, Shailo Djekshenbaev, Muratbek Djumaliev, Ulan Djarparov, Gulnara Kasmalieva, Yerbossyn Meldibekov, Almagul Menlibayeva, Roman Maskalev, Saken Narynov, Talant Ogobaev, Yelena and Viktor Vorobayeva. <http://www.acafny.com/en/index.php>

The 10th International İstanbul Biennial (Sep 2007)

Panel: *International Discourse vs. Local Vibrancy: Challenges and Opportunities in the Practice of Art in Central Asia*

Moderated a discussion on the ever expanding contemporary art world: In the past few decades, many localities have launched artists who are formulating new aesthetics and who are bringing issues forward that in the past were simply repressed. Much like many other regions of the world, the art communities in Central Asian countries are very small. What happens to the local art scene when its best artists also act as curators, critics, and administrators become engaged and occupied in projects abroad? Can it maintain local activity and local vibrancy? If so, how? The symposium gathered a number of artists, critics, and educators from the region and attempts to explore the above-mentioned issues, and other specific challenges and opportunities in the practice of art inside the countries of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. **Speakers:** Gulnara Kasmalieva (Artist, Kyrgyzstan), Shaarbek Amankul (Artist, Kyrgyzstan), Yulia Sorokina (Independent curator and critic, Kazakhstan), Saken Narynov (Architect, Kazakhstan), Surayo Tuichiera (Artist, Activist), Jamshed Kholikov (Designer, Activist, Tajikistan), **Participants:** Artur Boljurov (Artist, Kyrgyzstan), Ilyos Mamadzhonov (Artist, Tajikistan)

http://www.iksv.org/bienal10/english/detail.asp?cid=27&ac=panel_program

The 9th International İstanbul Biennial (Sep 2005)

Art in Afghanistan

Presented the works of internationally recognized artists including Lida Abdul, Rahraw Omarzad, Roya Ghiasy, and Mariam Ghani as part of a panel entitled *Art in Afghanistan* organized by the biennale to explore contemporary art practices by Diaspora artists and artists living in Afghanistan.

<http://www.iksv.org/bienal/bienal9/english/?Page=Positionings&Sub=9bt&Content=1>