

Art in America

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Asia Comes to New York

by Richard Vine



Starting today, New York plays host to not one but two Asian art festivals. Asia Week, Mar. 18-26, combines the efforts of 34 international dealers, five auction houses, and 18 cultural centers and museums. All present works made from ancient times through the present day. Meanwhile, Asian Contemporary Art Week, Mar. 21-31, finds 25 museums and galleries displaying material from some 90 postwar artists, who hail from powerhouse nations like China, India, Japan and Korea as well as emerging art scenes in Iran, Kazakhstan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and other locales.

Asia Week's gallery shows are remarkable in their geographic and historical range. At the older end of the spectrum are exhibitions like "Ancient Chinese Bronzes" at J.J. Lally & Co., "Early Indo-Buddhist Art" at Dalton Somaré / Pace Gallery and "Transition to Empire: Art from the Warring States to Han China" at Joe-Hynn Yang, Courage and Joy, Inc. Sometimes-neglected regions are tapped in "Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Art" at Carlton Rochell Asian Art (namesake gallery of AW's chairman) and "The John Menke Collection of Vietnamese Ceramics" at Zetterquist Galleries. Tradition meets the new in shows like "200 Years of Korean Art: From Classical to Contemporary" at Kang Collection Korean Art and "New Shoots Off the Old Trunk: Contemporary Chinese Art with Classical Roots" at China 2000 Fine Art.

The participating auction houses are Christie's, Sotheby's, Bonhams, Doyle and the online iGavel, which will also have pieces physically on view at its Manhattan showroom. While a full range of works and prices are on offer, some estimates bring home the specialized nature of the Asian art market: a blue-and-white Ming dynasty bowl at \$800,000-1.2 million (Sotheby's), an untitled 1985 painting by Indian-born, French-based Syed Haider Raza at \$800,000-1 million and an 8th-century bronze figure of the Hindu goddess Durga at \$2-2.5 million (both at Christie's).

Asia Week institutional events are similarly eclectic. The Japan

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Asian Contemporary Art Week, now in its seventh edition, reflects the what's-happening-now approach of its Afghanistan-born director, Leeza Ahmady, a curator, educator and dancer who came to the U.S. as a teenager in 1987. Gallery shows include unconventional still-lives and nudes by the Indian-born photographer Pat (at Thomas Erben) as well as Almagul Menlibayeva's new fantasy-laced video exploring post-Soviet life in the windswept expanses of her Central Asian homeland (at Priska C. Juschka Fine Art).

Among participating institutions, the Queens Museum hosts "Erasing Borders: Contemporary Indian Art of the Diaspora" and the Rubin Museum presents an installation and performance (Mar. 26) in which Korea's Atta Kim encourages viewers to take away water from a slowly melting 5½-foot-tall ice sculpture of a seated Buddha, in the hope that they will use it to nourish seedlings.

Dialogue is the keynote of this year's ACAW, which features such match-ups as new-media artist Mariam Ghani and curator Barbara London at MoMA, Chinese painter Liu Xiaodong and curator Alexandra Munroe at the Guggenheim Museum, and a symposium titled "Women, Arts, and Activism: Making Changes through Art" at the China Institute.

ACAW also pays heed to the historical transitions—from traditionalism to modernism and beyond—that gave birth to today's Asian art. Zürcher Studio, for example, is exhibiting sculptures by Wang Keping (b. 1949), a member of Beijing's pioneering avant-garde Stars group. The Asia Society has scheduled a Mar. 23 colloquy between museum director Melissa Chiu and celebrated Indian modernist M.F. Husain (b. 1915) and his Iranian-born female peer Monir Farmanfarmaian (b. 1924).

Full information on Asia Week is available in a booklet distributed at participating venues and on the organization's website www.asiaweekny.com. A detailed Asian Contemporary Art Week schedule can be found in a foldout flier and at www.acaw.net.

Above: Liu Xiaodang, *H's Family*, 2009.

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