

# w i n d o w

bactria newsletter

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 5 / Special



## Central Asian Efforts

The first Central Asian Pavilion (2005), titled "Actual Archive", was curated by the Russian art historian and contemporary art theorist Victor Meziano, one of the first proponents of post-Soviet Central Asian art, which had previously been practically unknown. It was a large exhibition with multiple aspects; the initial goal of the Pavilion was to present the contemporary art process in Central Asia in all its diversity of themes and means of expression.

In 2007, the second Pavilion of Central Asian countries was named "Musikistan" since the main theme of the Pavilion was music (curator – Yulia Sorokina, Kazakhstan). The main part of the program featured Tajik

Ermek Jaenish is a representative of the youngest generation of Kyrgyz artists. It is worth noting that Ermek is not a professional artist - he is a physician. Perhaps this is why he has a fresher look at art and finds new combinations in regular reality. "Fake tissues of the world" is a series of collage works imitating cut outs which create a feeling of absurd composition of real paradoxes in life.

Works by Anzor Salidjanov, a photographer from Bukhara, drew my attention two years ago at the Tashkent Biennale of Contemporary Art. In his works Anzor seeks to reinterpret the history of arts. Taking old European paintings as a basis, this artist fills them with new content – parts of his own life and Central Asian culture. In one of his works, instead of the twelve Apostles he presents himself, his wife, friends and colleagues, having traditional pilaf and flat breads on the table in front of them. Ironic and even mocking tricks with Photoshop in fact suggest serious issues of interrelations between West and East and it is an illustration of well-established tendencies in Central Asian arts – constant urge towards coloring art works with local color, as if attempting "to get a western fellow to marry an eastern beauty".

This is what the Kazakh artist Oksana Shatalova "is trying to struggle against". She believes that "in arts, Orientalist (as Edward Said puts it) intentions are reproduced not only by the West but also by the Orient itself". If we look at the post-Soviet Asia, these numerous art projects all accentuate their Asian origin in various ways, whereas Oksana tries to distance herself from her Asian origins. It is even more conventional in her case as a Russian artist (by nationality) living in Kazakhstan, trying to see the situation objectively from the perspective of a universal context.

*Continuation on page 3*



"Sleeping Artist" Elena and Victor Vorobyev (Kazakhstan)

artist Aleksei Rumyantsev (video art "Karabolo"). Jamshed Kholikov's Falak was also displayed within the special program – Mediathek.

The third time that the Central Asian Pavilion was presented at Venice Biennale was at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Biennale. Its curator, Beral Madra, a Turkish art historian and curator, is one of the founders of Istanbul Biennale. In her conception of the Pavilion, Beral ignored the old stereotypes of the exotic nature of Central Asian art and accentuated its intellectual content and conceptual integrity. The Central Asian Pavilion was named 'MAKING PARTICLES OF THE WORLD'.

Where creativity meets people  
[www.bactria.net](http://www.bactria.net)

## Central Asian Efforts *continuation*

In her performance SPA-Mummification the artist plunges into a bath of milk creating an erotic and at the same time mystic image, with no identity, which provokes associations with both West and East – it could be a glamorous Western ‘natural’ beauty salon or a traditional milk bath of an oriental queen. This performance was displayed as a series of six photos and a video.

Elena and Victor Vorobyev are an art duo from Kazakhstan: “we are interested in inner interrelations in real life. By photographing pieces of the world around us we make these interrelations visible and present them to spectators as a condensed mass. Even in each single picture we care about completeness, integrity and the magic of documentation”. “Artist Asleep” is one of the installations displayed at the Pavilion. The authors conclude that when an artist is sleeping it is useless to wake

about everything – about time, people, his country and himself. Stops which he missed and stops where he had to wait too long for the right bus. In Jamshed’s “Stops” one can see many things – symbols of a by-gone era, modernist and constructivist projects, “ugly”, typical constructions, ideological manifestations, but, interestingly, it least of all represents the “point of waiting for public transport”. The functionality of public constructions and institutions were substituted by ideological pomp, were filled with hidden sense and became the space for the realization of artistic ideas. It seems that everything took its place – the old massive stops in cities have been replaced by exceptionally functional constructions from glass and metal; on the village roads and mountain serpentines there is no need of public transport; the former stops acquire a new functionality or just come to decay and ruin, but nobody pays attention to them... And we have a feeling that something very important and dear to us has disappeared from our lives with the last regular public bus.

**From 5<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> September, Bactria Cultural Centre will open Jamshed Kholikov’s exhibition “Bus Stops” and will present printed and video materials of international projects, national pavilions and other related events of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale.**

*Georgy Mamedov  
Venice-Dushanbe*



Photo project of Jamshed Kholikov: “Bus Stops”

him or her up, shake him or her awake and call upon something. You can only wait till he or she wakes up to deliver another masterpiece. An artist asleep is the one with an Artists’ Union ID in his or her pocket, the one having a personal exhibition while we, intelligent and sensitive people are scared by our own ideas and feelings.

A bus stop as a piece of art, as a symbol of an epoch, as an embodiment of bureaucratic ignorance and waste, as something important and dear in our life... This is the way of viewing ‘Bus Stops’ presented by Jamshed Kholikov – an artist from Tajikistan. This photo-project consists of 200 photos taken in different places of Central Asia – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan. This project is

## Venice Biennale: faster, higher, stronger...

Venice is undoubtedly one of those must-see places and a city which one could give many a long lecture on. I traveled to Venice to make it to the opening of the greatest event of contemporary art in the world – the Venice Biennale, The full title of the International Art Exhibition is *La Biennale di Venezia*, which is often compared in its significance in the art world to the Olympics. The Venice Biennale dates back more than a hundred years and up to this day remains one of the most significant and important events in the art world. Like the Olympics, it attracts a large number of people, both art professionals and casual amateurs. However the main similarity between the biennial and the Olympics is the idea of national participation. Arts from every country in the world are represented in national pavilions – special exhibition halls or galleries belonging to or rented by countries. For example, the Russian pavilion was built in 1911, a project of Shchusev, while the German pavilion was constructed during the fascist regime and its architecture bears clear signs of it; a fact that constantly becomes the object of critical artistic practices from German artists themselves who exhibit in the pavilion.

While the international exhibition makes up the basic program, the concept, repertoire and decisions behind the exhibition are decided by the curator/director of the biennial, who is invited by the organizers. This year's exhibition in no way matched the principle of national representation and the participation of artists depended exclusively on whether their works corresponded to the announced concept and the taste of the curator.

The director of the 53rd Venice Biennale is Daniel Birnbaum, a curator and gallery owner. In the art world his name is well known – he is the author of several books on theory and art history, he has curated major international events including the two Moscow Biennials. He recommended the concept of this year's biennial "Making Worlds", which was translated into all languages of the participating countries, among them was also a translation into the Tajik language - "Таъсиси оламҳо".

During the biennial, along with the national pavilions and main exhibition, are also the so-called additional events – exhibitions of separate collections and museums as well as the presentation of special projects. In the framework of the biennial all projects must be the initiative of non-profit organizations. No art is sold or bought at the event.

To attempt to talk about all the events of the Biennale, yet alone to visit every single one, seems practically impossible. I have therefore permitted myself in this article to discuss those artistic projects which left the biggest impressions on me. In order to maintain some objectivity, I would like to mention one more similarity between the Venice Biennale and the Olympics, that is its competitive character. The award ceremony, attended by the President of Italy, takes place during the official opening in which the 'Golden Lion' is awarded to the best pavilion and artist. Besides, the jury can also select the best young artist and the best curatorial work of any of the projects. At the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale, the American pavilion was acknowledged as the best national pavilion, where a retrospective exhibition, titled "Topological Gardens" took place, a work by Bruce Nauman, the classical American conceptualist of the 60's. The object of Nauman's artistic research is arts and the artist as a manufacturer. In his artistic practice special



Bruce Nauman: "Topological Garden"

attention is given to the body, more precisely its parts – such as hands for instance; these are the hands of an artist on which the weights of "manufacturing" arts are placed. He also likes to pay attention to the head. Generally, he creates images of water flowing from the head; a metaphoric interpretation of the artist making art, as if pouring out his soul.

*Continuation on page 4-5*

## Venice Biennale: faster, higher, stronger... *continuation*

This "Golden Lion" for the best pavilion provoked many arguments if not even some agitation, bearing in mind that the biennial should determine future tendencies and not state the achievements of the past. For

and its artificial reproduction and tries to be more natural, to integrate into life itself rather than be opposed to it.

The work of Roman Ondak "Loop", exhibited in the Czech and Slovak pavilion, achieved the most clarity and simplicity in this particular aspiration. Inside the pavilion the artist planted the same types of bushes as the ones that grow around the building, thus removing the borders between external and internal, between natural and artificial.

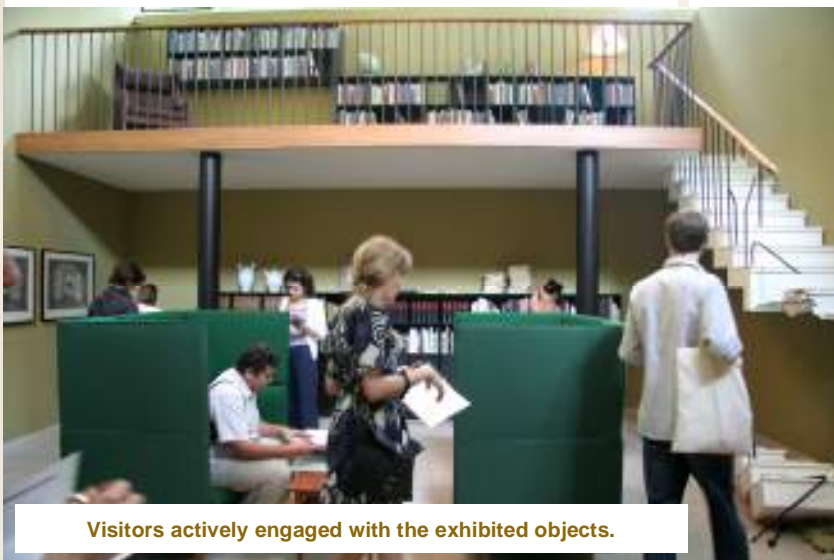
It is often regarded that contemporary arts should be timely, meaning that it should be reflective of pointed social and political problems of today's world. However, very often such art seems to be momentary, "in response to the latest events", even to some extent penetrating into the territory of journalism. I personally react to such art with indifference, but one of the projects, from this "series" left quite a strong impression on me. Estonian artist, Kristina Norman addressed

the problem of national identity, through the prism of an event that happened two years ago. It is connected to the transfer of a memorial to the liberators of Tallin – the so-called "bronze soldier" - from the center of the city to a military cemetery. The event in May 2007 divided the Estonian society into two camps. As an artistic project but more likely as a civil act, Kristina creates a "golden" plaster copy of the "Bronze soldier" in its real size and places it where the original one used to stand. The monument is surrounded by Russian speaking people, mainly the Russian population of Estonia, but it cannot stand there for long.

these purposes there is a special prize, given for investment in the development of arts. This year the recipients of this prize were Yoko Ono and John Baldessari. Yoko Ono, known to us first of all as the wife of the legendary John Lennon, is one of the first initiators of "performance" as a genre of contemporary art. John Baldessari is also a representative of American conceptualism, one of the most influential and meaningful contemporary artists, who managed, according to the jury's opinion, to develop his own visual language and, in the process, make an influence on several generations of artists.

To my embarrassment, I did not see, or rather simply did not notice (even though I had walked past it many times) the project by Tobias Rehberger from Germany, which was awarded the "Golden Lion" for best artist. The project presented itself as the interior design of the café of the Biennale. The award was given for its non-standard approach to the presentation of the object of its project, and for the understanding of its predestination leaving the frames of the usual exhibition space for a functional one.

Indeed, this work is in many ways a good representation of the main tendencies in contemporary visual arts – the aspiration towards maximum confluence with life and daily routine. Many forms of art that we might think of as figurative have long detached themselves from the meaning of this definition. Contemporary art strives to reject representational images of life



Visitors actively engaged with the exhibited objects.



Roman Ondak: "Loop"

## Venice Biennale: faster, higher, stronger... *continuation*

In her project "After-War" she also captures the objective history of events starting with moving pictures of planting flowers and congratulations to veterans on May 9, and finishing with shameful and disgusting pictures of wild youth demanding to install the monument back while wrecking boutiques and food stores. This work does not entail any conclusions and deductions but, as a friend of mine put it, "wins spectators over due to its completeness of expression".

A timely theme for us - labor migration, was expressed by Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko in the project "Guests". The dark interior of the pavilion is filled with voices, distinguished only by the silhouettes of migrant laborers on the walls – women and men who have arrived to Poland from various countries and speak different languages. They are all telling their own stories– someone has lost his passport, someone was not paid by his employer. Having first heard about this project from some friends of mine I expected to find a visual solution, highlighting the sharpness of the arising problem, but was slightly disappointed by, in my opinion, the excessive theatrical installation.

The Danish- Norwegian duo of artist and curator Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset has received a special mention of the jury for their curatorial work in realizing the large scale project "The Collector", where they transformed the pavilion of Denmark and Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden and Finland) into a neighborhood of homes. The interiors of these homes contained works by 24 international artists and designers, including the works of the duo itself. Further interpretations of the exhibition space again strove to the maximize the merging of arts and life, which gave the visitors a feeling of intrusion into the private and domestic zone, a glimpse at the sort of linen one cannot wash in public. The curators deliberately accentuated the interactive component of the exhibition in almost every object – viewers could use pieces of interior – sit at the table, lie down on a sofa, take a book from the shelf (I even found one I have in my own library).

To conclude my short review of the national pavilions of the Biennale I would like to mention the other CIS countries (excluding Russia) that took part- Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine had their national pavilions.

The Russian and Ukrainian pavilions were of special interest. This interest, however, seemed more festive than artistic. The opening of the Russian pavilion was celebrated by one of the most glamorous parties, hosted in Venice's most expensive hotel. This party was visited by the upper crust of Russian so-



Installation element of the Danish– Norwegian project "Collector"

ciety, who came here as tourists (some might suggest that they came for the party rather than the exhibition itself) among whom were major Russian businessmen, members of the private club "Snob" and official partners of the Russian Pavilion. The main contemporary art "fan" Roman Abramovich arrived in Venice on his yacht with his girlfriend Dasha Zhukova – a founder of Moscow contemporary art centre 'Garage'. She even celebrated her birthday on this very yacht. This is one of the ways that art participates in social functions...

**Georgy Mamedov**  
**Venice-Dushanbe**



Ukrainian pavilion

## Venice Films in September

As the Venice Film Festival opened we would like show you some of this festival's previous participants. In our CinemArt program brilliant "alternative" films will be shown like "The Wrestler", of Darren Aronofsky, winner of last year's Golden Lion, "Lust, Caution" by Ang Lee, 2007 Golden Lion, "Paper Soldier" participant of the 2008 Film Festival and winner of the best camerawork, as well as films like "Wild Field" and "Kosh ba Kosh".

**The Wrestler** is an exclusively welded film, a very rare thing. It is a film featuring an old fighter who ruined his life to nothing, in honor of men's principles having no shame to display and expose his own degradation, living like a 15 year old boy, following the rules.

Randy "The Ram" Robinson is a pure diamond – broken and shabby, miserable and lonely, almost a hobo. It is OK if you feel sympathy towards this man. If you do we encourage you to cry a river.

There is an opinion that this film is made rather for understanding and interpretation than for emotional experience. An evidence for this is the whole set of scenes with not a space for compassion towards Mickey



"The Wrestler"

Rourke's character – at least because he does not seem to be a man who realized what kind of dirt the Universe made on him. Of course this film is very dramatic, but since it sounds like "And what end did you want? He got what he deserved!" it does not force tears of you.

But there is a lot of food for thought – a real horn of plenty. And the way your brains are 'massaged' when watching the film is impressive. It is not a direct appeal but a convenient and unique proposal to try to feel through the plot of the film an idea that you might find useful or wait until it sticks into your hand. It might hurt, or might not – everything can happen.

"The Wrestler" seems to ask us the question: if all what Randy does is just smoke and mirrors, why than the scars are real? He makes a direct and ultimate statement that there is not even a notion of a second chance. There is only one chance and after you made it you don't have much left but be yourself. And whatever you may think, the film ends a happy-end for the main character.

Once in a blue moon Mr. Aronofsky made a perfectly clear film for everyone to interpret it his or her way. His previous legends, including "The Fountain", "Requiem for a Dream" are very hard to forget, even if you try. And this makes me feel good. All the deep low bows and many thanks to Mickey Rourke.

## "Lust, Caution"

Let the whole world become Shanghai and Hong-Kong and a village girl sing a song about a thread and a needle, let a woman bear an enemy inside of her like a slave.

It is hard to say what prompted main characters-lovers to make those fatal deeds - passion, or hatred. Or maybe it was true love?

I believe that Ang Lee wanted to say that the core of the film is in its title - Lust, Caution, because Lust is the only word, which renders desires, consumes desires of the other person, making it an egotistic desire. This is what the whole film is based on. Watching two strong, gorgeous and stout people depending on each other, gives an exclusive joy.



Scene from "Lust, Caution"