

News Column

Asia Society Museum in New York Presents Shiva Ahmadi: In Focus

June 9, 2014

NEW YORK, June 9 -- The Asia Society issued the following news release:

Asia Society Museum presents Shiva Ahmadi: In Focus, the Iranian American artist's first solo New York museum exhibition. Ahmadi's paintings and animations draw on the tradition of Persian miniature painting while offering a critique of contemporary political conflict. For this exhibition, Ahmadi has created Lotus, a new single-channel video installation inspired by two Buddha sculptures from the Asia Society Museum Collection. Shown here for the first time, the animation references Ahmadi's 2013 painting of the same title, and is on view with the Museum's two Buddha sculptures: an eighth- or ninth-century ivory depiction of the Buddha Shakyamuni from Kashmir or northern Pakistan, and a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Myanmar version of the Buddha Shakyamuni depicted with kneeling worshippers.

Born in Tehran in 1975 and currently based in Northville, Michigan, the artist first began to infuse political content into her work during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, when she was living in the United States as a graduate student. While her compositions most often focus on tensions within the Middle East and between East and West, Ahmadi is ultimately interested in examining the relationship between absolute power and corruption. Her recent foray into video animation allows her richly intricate narratives to come to life. Lotus opens with a bucolic scene that depicts the enlightened Buddha sitting atop a blooming lotus throne, and surrounded by his loyal monkey subjects, who bear offerings of delicate bubbles. As the narrative progresses, the monkeys' bubble offerings turn into bombs and grenades while their behavior grows violent. The Buddha begins to participate in the ensuing chaos and his appearance becomes increasingly warrior-like. The landscape changes into a dystopia filled with war and destruction as the once enlightened leader is transformed into a common tyrant.

The exhibition is part of Asia Society Museum's ongoing In Focus series in which the Museum invites contemporary artists to create new works of art inspired by or in dialogue with traditional art from the Asia Society Museum Collection. The exhibition is organized by Michelle Yun, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Asia Society. Artists who have participated in recent In Focus exhibitions at Asia Society include U-Ram Choe, Michael Joo, Yoshihiro Suda, and Yuken Teruya.

Artist Biography

Shiva Ahmadi was born in 1975 in Tehran, Iran, and currently lives and works in Northville, Michigan. She received a BA in painting from Azad University in 1998 and MFA degrees from Wayne State University in 2003 and the Cranbrook Academy of Arts in 2005. She also participated in a residency at the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in 2003. Since then, the artist has been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions. Shiva Ahmadi: In Focus is Ahmadi's first solo museum exhibition in New York.

Exhibition support

Support for this project has been provided by the Contemporary Art Council: Carol and David Appel, Christine and E. William Aylward, Max and Monique Burger, Gina Lin Chu, Stephany Maillery and Stephan D. Cretier, Trinh D. Doan, Misook Doolittle, Anne B. Ehrenkranz, Stephanie T. Foster, Susan Hayden, Janine W. Hill, Joleen and Mitch Julis, Yung Hee Kim, Deddy Kusuma, Marie Christine Lippman, Helen Little, Harold Newman, Cynthia Hazen Polsky, and Denise Saul. (Listing as of May 16, 2014).

Also on view

Nalini Malani: *Transgressions*, on view February 19 through August 3, 2014, features a video/shadow play from the Asia Society Museum Collection and a selection of Malani's artist books.

SxSE: *Selections from the Asia Society Museum Collection*, on view June 17 through August 3, 2014, brings together video artworks created since 2000 by South and Southeast Asian artists.