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# ARTISTS OF THE PACIFIC RIM HIGHLIGHTED AT SEATTLE ART FAIR

EVA COHEN AUGUST 1, 2015 0 COMMENTS

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Polit-Sheer-Form Office – artist collective: HONG Hao, XIAO Yu, SONG Dong, LIU Jianhua, LENG Lin (Beijing) "Do the Same Good Deed," 2014, single-channel video, color, sound, 8'.

Seattle might be at the edge of the American frontier, but its location on the west coast situates the city within the realm of the vast Pacific Rim, replete with a rich and diverse art community.

Leeza Ahmady, the director of [Asia Contemporary Art Week \(ACAW\)](#), has partnered with the [Seattle Art Fair](#) to bring [Thinking Currents](#), a "signature exhibition of video, film and sound by artists based in the Pacific Rim," to the city this weekend.

The exhibition showcases 30 artists, including both those born in the region, and many who relocated there later in life. The artists' backgrounds are as diverse as their art, ranging from Charwei Tsai, who has lived in Ho Chi Minh City, Paris, and Taipei, to Alexander Ugay, whose ethnically Korean family was forcibly relocated by Stalin from South Korea to what is now present day Kazakhstan. Due to this fluidity in movement, those in the exhibition are listed by the cities they have lived in, rather than by the country they currently reside in, since they are not representative of nations or nationalism: they only represent their own art and experiences.

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Born in Afghanistan, Ahmady moved with her family to New York as a teenager. Since then, she has traveled widely throughout Central Asia, where she has forged countless firsthand relationships with local artists. Ahmady is excited for the Seattle public to take in the wealth of creativity displayed in Thinking Currents, and is ecstatic how well the opening went on Thursday evening, with lines to get in that stretched out the door and down the street.

“Seattle is a very special place, it’s becoming incredibly diverse; the public is broadening,” Ahmady said. “What I would like to see in Seattle is for the general public to be puzzled: for them to say, ‘I didn’t know about this, what does this mean?’”



Jun Nguyen-HATSUSHIBA (Ho Chi Minh City)

Memorial Project Nha Trang, “Vietnam: Towards the Complex—For the Courageous, the Curious, and the Cowards”, 2001, single-channel video, color, sound, 13’. (upper)

“I want them to be turned on and to say, ‘I want to know more, this is making me think and feel something,’” Ahmady continued. “Hopefully they will not be dismissive if it’s something they don’t immediately get; they can revisit the idea and learn more from it.”

Within the Pacific Rim, some countries have longer histories of their artists’ creations reaching the shores of the Pacific Northwest than others. Even within the Pacific Rim, some countries, such as Cambodia and Thailand, have not even infiltrated into the psyche of art curators based in Asia, Ahmady said, so she is especially pleased to introduce creations from these nations to the American public in Seattle.

The themes represented within Thinking Currents include issues of migration, environment, identity, technology, nation building, conflict, and stagnation. And what holds all of these Pacific Rim countries together? Water. The exhibition delves deeply into this unifying fact of nature, with artistic explorations in video and new media format of the various liquid and land territories in the region.

On Saturday, August 1, a Keynote discussion will be held from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., entitled “Liquid Territories and the Flux of Myths, Dreams, and Reality,” which specifically brings attention to the role the Ocean plays in connecting millions of people within three continents in the Pacific Rim.

The Keynote discussion will feature Ahmady in conversation with French-born artists and architects Laurent Gutierrez and Valérie Portefaix, of MAP Office in Hong Kong. The two also have a piece in the exhibition entitled “Island is Land,” which is a single channel color video on a 30 second loop. The video “explores islands as anomalies through semiotic ambiguity; as land that is both opposed-to and reliant-on water for its existence.”

Other videos in the exhibition are similar in length, such as Burçak Bingöl of Istanbul’s “Self Conscious”



**The Seattle Times**

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which runs at 1:31min, where the artist “interrogates notions of belonging, culture, history, and tradition, also read as homage to ceramics—a treasured Asian-continental artistic practice and symbol of wealth, widely spread through Western imperialism.” Alternatively, Ho Tzu-Nyun of Singapore has submitted the video “The Cloud of Unknowing,” with a run time of 28 minutes. The piece “explores the aesthetic history and role of cloud imagery in art through eight compartmentalized vignettes, titled after a fourteenth century mystical treatise on faith, in which the cloud represents a simultaneous internal struggle and reconciliation with ‘the unknown’ or the divine.”



Burçak BINGÖL (Istanbul) “Self-conscious,” 2015, single-channel video, color, sound, 43”.

Visiting Seattle for the first time, Gutierrez and Portefaix said they are struck by its similarity to Hong Kong.

“Our projects are all related essentially around territories ... to discover the potential of these territories, and to inform about the modes of living,” said Gutierrez. “Recently, we have mainly been concerned with the ecology of these territories.”

Seattle, like Hong Kong, is surrounded by interconnected pieces of land, and it is this type of geography that truly inspires the pair. As Ahmady points out, nine out of 10 of the world’s largest port cities are in the Pacific Rim, so cities such as Seattle play an integral role in human interconnectivity and globalism, as well as serving as the connector between mankind and the Ocean. Portefaix added that political tensions over islands, such as the growing amount of disputes over islands in the Pacific between China and other nations, also plays a role in their art.

Geopolitical topics run strong within Thinking Currents, which is coined as an exhibition which “seeks to contribute to a rethinking of global contemporaneity.” The complete list of participating artists with brief project descriptions is available at this link: <http://www.acaw.info/?p=16911>. Information for the exhibition can also be accessed at the Seattle Art Fair website: <http://seattleartfair.com/projects-events/thinking-currents-an-exhibition-and-curatorial-platform/#.Vb0gOzBVikr>. The show runs through Sunday evening, August 2.

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Eva Cohen is a Canadian-American journalist. Currently located in Los Angeles, she has spent a considerable amount of time working and traveling in Asia. She loves covering human interest and features from China and enjoys sharing with you the stories of the people and places she encounters. Eva received her Masters in

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