

Truly Truthful

A special exhibition presented by ART ASIA, curated by Leeza Ahmady

Curatorial Statement

Over the past several months, I have had the privilege of developing ART ASIA's new educational focus, which has culminated in the exhibition *Truly Truthful*.

Truly Truthful showcases 19 internationally renowned artists whose works challenge categorical presentations of truth and reality in the world. Hailing from 15 countries—Albania, Cambodia, China, Egypt, France, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, and the US—*Truly Truthful* reflects the diversity of the artists' backgrounds and practices, and dispels the notion that contemporary art from Asia is narrowly focused and comes from only a few regions.

Today's fast-paced world revolves around the acquisition of information. As a result, specificity has become an important tool for maneuvering through its dense layers. There are experts for every subject imaginable, and compartmentalization is now common in all fields. Yet, communication technologies—television, radio, and the Web—have dramatically increased public access to information. Wikipedia, Facebook, twitter, blogs, and phone apps: all prophets in disguise, spreading information as truth to the masses.

The quest for the latest, the best, and the most specific data drives private and public corporations as well as academic, cultural, and political institutions with an almost religious fervor. In our high-speed encounter with globalization, we are flooded with what contemporary Chilean philosopher Dario Salas calls "dead information"—dead because the average person cannot possibly process the quantity and velocity of stimuli he or she encounters every day.

Unlike the popular belief that knowledge equals power, information does not equal knowledge or wisdom. Knowledge refers to the process of comprehension

consciously connecting various elements together so that they become whole and comprehensible to the human brain. The individual mind today is colonized by the continuous overload of various scattered, fragmented, and categorized bits of information, camouflaged as truth.

With that in mind, *Truly Truthful* presents 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. Beyond aesthetics, existential inquiry is perhaps one of the dominant preoccupations for contemporary artists. They scrutinize and use everything as material to study paradoxes and complexity in the world. Time and again, artists give us profound insight into what matters by deconstructing parts of a whole.

Across a vast array of styles and diverse formats — including documentary footage, staged events, real and fictive characters, renewal of age-old crafts, and the construction of new myths—the exhibit asks viewers to ponder established notions about Asian contemporary art and other so called truths related to everything from aesthetics to consumerism, to colonialism and human consciousness.

Participating artists:

Lara Baladi	Li Jikai
Huma Bhabha	Marya Kazoun
Jeff Cylkowski	Kimsooja
Anita Dube	Mami Kosemura
Cao Fei	Sopheap Pich
Chitra Ganesh	Qiu Zhijie
Yeondoo Jung	Jean Shin
Gulnara Kasmalieva	Ushio Shinohara
and Muratbek Djumaliev	Jakkai Siributr
Bari Kumar	Sislej Xhafa

Artists for the *Truly Truthful* exhibition were selected through nominations by experts in the field, including some members of the Asian Contemporary Art Consortium (ACAC) and Asian Contemporary Art Week (ACAW).

Sopheap Pich: 1969 (Battambang, Cambodia; lives and works in Phnom Pehn)

Hovering between abstraction and representation, Sopheap Pich's sculptures speak of the complex social and economic changes he witnessed growing up under the Khmer Rouge, and then moving back to Cambodia after years in the US. His works flow, spiral, swell, and contract, creating poetic yet tightly realized forms that connect to both traditional craft and avant-garde sculpture. Buddha 2 is linked to Pich's ongoing exploration of his country's tragic history and evolving contemporary culture. Motivated by a childhood experience that found him entering a ravaged Buddhist temple with blood-spattered walls and smashed Buddha statues, this work is the artist's reflection on the shattered state of Cambodian Buddhism, and by extension, on the nation's psyche.



Sopheap Pich
Buddha, Version 2



Sopheap Pich

Buddha, Version 2

From the Installation "1979", 2009

Rattan, wire

106.2 x 29 x 9.8 in

Courtesy of artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York

Jakkai Siributr: 1969 (Bangkok, Thailand; lives and works in Bangkok)

Hopes and Dreams II is Jakkai Siributr's response to the colorfully over-the-top pop aesthetic of Thailand. In Thai homes, one wall is traditionally adorned with a dedicated image of His Majesty, The King, placed respectfully above all other images, including portraits of revered monks. But nowadays, Siributr has noted that these walls of homage have been transformed into montages of pop culture, including anything from scantily clad calendar girls and pop stars to lists of winning lottery numbers. Hopes and Dreams II comments on the aspirations of the common person in contemporary Thai society, as traditional Buddhist piety comes into conflict with the rampant materialism of today's consumer culture.



Jakkai Siributr
Hopes and Dreams II (Diptych), 2008



Jakkai Siributr

Hopes and Dreams II (Diptych), 2008 Detail
Assorted fabrics, stitching, cross-stitch, threads,
embroidery, safety-pins on quilted canvas
77 x 60 in

Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art