

Contemporary Art Alive and Well in Kabul

Seven years after the U.S. entered Afghanistan, an international contemporary art show arrives in Kabul. “Living Traditions” is organized by **Turquoise Mountain**, a non-governmental organization founded in 2006 by **Rory Stewart**—a Scottish writer and diplomat who once walked 6,000 miles across the Middle East—with the goal of preserving Afghan culture. The group’s current co-presidents are **Hamid Karzai** and **Prince Charles**. The exhibition is additionally supported by the **British Embassy** in Kabul and the **Finnis Scott Foundation**, a charitable organization based in London. Turquoise Mountain (named after an Afghan capital city destroyed in the Middle Ages) is working on a number of projects in Kabul, from job training and business development to building the Institute of Afghan Arts and Architecture, which will focus on jewelry, ceramics, calligraphy and woodwork. In June, the organization also sponsored the first **Afghan Contemporary Art Prize**, which was won by **Sahba Shams**, a 19-year-old mixed-medium artist.



Khosrow Hassanzadeh: Ya Ali Madad, 2008, silkscreen on canvas, 78¾ inches square.



Nusra Latif Qureshi: Red Silks—II, 2007, digital print on paper, 15¾ by 11¾ inches.

“Living Traditions” is on view Oct. 10–Nov. 8 at the Queen’s Palace in Bagh-e Babur, a park in Kabul. The show is organized by **Jemima Montagu**, who was a contemporary art curator at the Tate for six years before moving to Kabul. **Constance Wyndham** [an *A.i.A.* contributor] and **Abdul Wahab Mohmand**. It includes around 20 artists from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The works are inspired by artistic traditions shared by the three neighboring countries—miniature painting, carpet weaving, Islamic calligraphy, etc.—as seen through contemporary eyes. Some of the artists have not shown outside their home country, while others (including **Nusra Latif Qureshi**, **Khosrow Hassanzadeh** and **Lida Abdul**) have had exhibitions abroad and have been included in international art fairs and biennials. Sculpture, photography, film and video will join more traditional paintings and drawings.

“Living Traditions” will travel to the National Gallery of Art in Islamabad, and possibly to another venue in Pakistan. At press time, dates had not yet been confirmed.

—Leigh Anne Miller

congress convenes in 2009. If the measure gets stuck in committee again, the pledges will not be honored (congressional sessions are two years long and bills not voted on in that time are thrown out). The ADAA plans to announce the first round of selected artists in early 2009. To bring attention to the initiative, it is organizing a series of events around the country, which Blumberg says are like “political rallies,” with speakers and festivities intended to build a coalition and popular support for the

bill. The first was held on Sept. 8 at the MCA in Chicago, with others to follow at MOMA in New York, L.A. MOCA, San Francisco MOMA and the Dallas Museum of Art.

The national committee for the initiative is a roster of high-profile collectors and philanthropists, including Eli and Edythe Broad, Don and Doris Fisher, Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis, Leonard Lauder, Ray Leary and Melva Bucksbaum, Bob and Nancy Magoon, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, Howard and Cindy Rachofsky, Donna and Howard Stone, and Joel Wachs. The initiative also has the backing of the **American Association of Museums** and **Americans for the Arts**, whose president, **Robert Lynch**, a national committee member, noted that, as a result of artists not donating their works to public institutions, “a large part of our cultural heritage remains in private collections and out of the public domain.”

Originally introduced by **Senator Patrick Leahy** [D-Vt.] in 2005 and reintroduced in 2007, the bill has bipartisan support, with the backing of Democratic Senators, including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Edward Kennedy, John Kerry, Dianne Feinstein, Christopher Dodd and Chuck Schumer, and such Republicans and Independents as Robert Bennett, Joseph Lieberman and John Isakson. The bill has equally broad support in the House.

As Leahy pointed out in his floor speech, the current tax code is an unintended consequence of the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which was passed with the perception that some individuals were inflating the value of their own works to take advantage of the deduction. The new bill would require artists to adhere to the same rules imposed on collectors, such as providing a certified appraisal of the gift and, in some cases, submitting to a review by the IRS’s Art Advisory Panel. Addressing suspicions that passage of the act would result in rampant and dubious “donations” to public institutions, Leahy also noted that “donated works must be accepted by museums and librar-

ies, which often have strict criteria in place for works they intend to display. The institution must certify that it intends to put the work to a use that is related to the institution’s tax exempt status.” He said the bill would also correct another disparity in the tax code that treats the same work differently before and after an artist’s death. Though living artists are allowed to deduct only the cost of materials for a given work, upon their death their estates are taxed at the market rate for the same work, and receive a fair-market deduction if that work is donated.

As with the 2006 tax law that severely limits fractional gifts to museums and cultural institutions, which has had a similarly chilling effect on donations and which is also the target of corrective efforts, museums and cultural institutions are hoping that the next congress, along with our next president, recognizes the impact these laws have had on our cultural legacy. —Stephanie Cash

Home Sweet Home

The longtime home of Bay Area artist **David Ireland** was purchased in August by local collector **Carlie Wilmans**. As reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the 78-year-old conceptual artist had to move out of the house several years ago due to health problems that made navigating the staircase difficult, leaving the fate of the 1886 Victorian structure at **500 Capp Street** uncertain. Over the 30 years that Ireland lived there, the house itself became a constantly evolving artwork and a uniquely installed repository of his work in various mediums. Beginning some eight years ago, the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art** considered acquiring the house, but complications arose, from funding and administration to necessary physical upgrades.

Wilmans is director of the **Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation**, named for her late grandmother, who was a

Giving Artists a Fair Shake

To garner legislative and popular support for the **Artist Museum Partnership Act**, which has been kicking around congress for four years, the **Art Dealers Association of America** has launched the “50 Artists for 50 States” initiative. **Linda Blumberg**, executive director of the ADAA, told *A.i.A.* that the hope is to galvanize support and to ensure that art and culture have an important place in the next administration. If passed, the bill would amend the IRS regulations for artists who donate works to museums; under the current

law, they are allowed to deduct only the cost of materials used to make the work, while a collector who might purchase and donate the work would get to write off the full market value. Blumberg said that the incentive is needed since museum acquisition funds are becoming increasingly limited, and more works by American artists are being exported due to stronger foreign currencies.

With the help of a 15- to 20-member artist selection committee, which so far consists of such figures as curators **Gary Garrels**, **James Rondeau** and **Kynaston McShine**, the ADAA is securing pledges from 50 prominent artists to donate works to museums on the occasion of the bill’s passage when the 111th



View of David Ireland’s living room, showing wall treatment and artworks.

major collector and local philanthropist. An SFMOMA board member, Wilmans told *A.i.A.* that she learned that the house would be put up for sale at an acquisitions committee meeting in late 2007, when the museum was in the process of purchasing a seminal Ireland sculpture. Recognizable to anyone who has visited the house, the piece is an agglomeration of old brooms that Ireland found when he moved in. Wilmans toured the house in February and subsequently purchased it for \$895,000, before it was put on the market, and has set up a foundation that will maintain the site. Ownership of the house and its contents, including Ireland's archives, will be turned over to the foundation once legalities are worked out. Wilmans said that 500 Capp Street may become accessible to the public and to scholars and students interested in Ireland's work. She also hopes to initiate the return, through donation or loan, of former Capp Street artworks that have been sold in recent years.

Ireland's house is sparsely installed with furniture of his own design, found

objects and family pieces, some altered, some not, and a variety of Ireland's often process-oriented works, such as a number of his *Dumb Balls*, concrete spheres that he tossed back and forth in his hands for hours until the material set. Visitors to his home also are likely to remember the propane-torch chandelier that spins when lit and the copper-covered broken window, at which he recorded a rapid audio description of what could be seen from the window before the view was sacrificed. (Wilmans plans to digitally preserve the cassette recording.) Ireland considered his labors on the house to be a form of performance art. Always charming and hospitable, he would often lead guests on tours, pointing out humorous touches. *Where the Safe Got Away*, for example, consists of the titular text on wall plaques next to dings in the stairwell wall where a safe he was moving escaped his grasp. Throughout the interior he "restored" the walls, peeling off wallpaper and layers of paint—but leaving cracks and imperfections that revealed the passage of time

and traces of use—before applying varnish to the resulting warm yellow surfaces, a treatment he also applied to rooms at the Headlands Center for the Arts, an artist residency program in Sausalito.

Neither a preserved artist's studio nor a single-artist museum, 500 Capp Street is more akin to a living artwork now frozen in time. While future plans may allow for tours of the residence, no one will be able to shed light on its history and personality more than the former docent who once called it home. —Stephanie Cash

Outsider's Private World on Screen

In recent years the work of **James Castle** (1899-1977), a deaf and mute self-taught artist living in nearly total isolation in rural Idaho, has been embraced by the art-world mainstream. Locally recognized as an artist by only a few at the time of his death, Castle created work that today is shown regularly in prestigious galleries across the country. And this month, "James Castle: A Retrospective," his first museum survey, featuring some 275 intimate drawings and constructions, opens at the Philadelphia Museum of Art [Oct. 14, 2008-Jan. 4, 2009].

During the course of the show, organized by museum curator **Ann Percy**, screenings of a recent documentary, *James Castle: Portrait of an Artist*, by **Jeffrey Wolf**, will run continuously. In this briskly paced film, barely an hour long, Wolf, a first-time documentary director, approaches his complex subject with clarity, solid research and a refreshing lack of the sentimentality that too often mars documentaries on self-taught artists. In the process, perhaps ironically, the film goes a long way to blur the distinction between outsider and insider artist.

Tracing Castle's life, the film examines his upbringing as the sixth of seven children in a family struggling to make ends meet in a rustic farm community near Garden Valley, Idaho. The documentary juxtaposes beautifully shot recent footage of the area with archival pictures of the countryside at the time of Castle's youth, plus his later renderings of the environs. Adding to these evocative images, new-age folk-inflected music written for the film by **Jeff Beal** helps convey the environment that proved to be infinitely fertile territory for Castle's imagination.

Reminiscences and insightful commentary are provided by several of the artist's nieces and nephews. The film covers Castle's rejection of formal education, as he dropped out of a school for the hearing impaired and never learned to read or write. Instead, he retreated into a world of



James Castle, ca. 1968, at home in Boise, Idaho.

his own, over the years obsessively producing thousands of small drawings, collages and paper constructions, most often images that reflect the people, places and things of his immediate environment. In addition, he invented his own written language and an elaborate, codified visual vocabulary, the use and meaning of which only he knew. His technique was as eccentric as his vision. He shunned conventional art materials, favoring, instead, a paste he made of ash and saliva that he etched into the surfaces of found paper using pointed sticks. Helping to conjure the artist at work, Guy Wade, a nephew, recalls the great speed at which Castle drew; a niece, Gerry Garrow, mentions that he always smelled of soot.

While the family's comments are absorbing, the strength of Wolf's documentary lies in his judicious selection of art-world professionals to provide a strong case for Castle's unique achievement. Art historians and curators Percy, Jerry Wilding and Sandy Harthorn are on hand, as well as dealers Frank Del Deo of New York's Knoedler Gallery, John Ollman and Jacqueline Crist. Artists Terry Winters and Stephen Westfall discuss Castle's work in general, and writer John Yau remarks on its internal logic. Robert Storr, of late ubiquitous in artist documentaries, discusses how Castle's work resulted from a deep physiological impulse and attained a consistent balance of orderliness and play. Throughout the film, Castle's luminous works appear to gently corroborate and elaborate upon the comments of the art-world talking heads. —David Ebony

[James Castle: Portrait of an Artist, directed by Jeffrey Wolf, 2008, 53 minutes, director of photography Anthony Jannelli, produced by the Foundation for Self-Taught American Artists, distributed by Breakaway Films.]

Paik's Place

The new \$26.6-million **Nam June Paik Art Center** opens to the public Oct. 9 with a festival titled "Now Jump" [through Feb. 5, 2009], encompassing a multiartist show, workshops, seminars and online activities. Designed by German architect **Kirsten Schemel**, the 60,000-square-foot structure, comprising three stories above ground and two below, includes exhibition spaces, offices and a media research archive. The center is located in Yongin—a city of nearly 800,000, lying about 25 miles south of Seoul—and financed by Gyeonggi Province, which surrounds the separately administered national capital.

Schemel's design was chosen in 2003 from among 430 proposals submitted to a competition monitored by the International Union of Architects. The piano-shaped building is intended to nestle like a lake in the rolling terrain of Sangkal Park. It features an 820-foot-long glass facade that provides anticipatory views of works in the largely wall- and column-free interior. The facility opened for staff use in April.

Under development since 2001, the NJP Art Center seeks to preserve the legacy of the avant-garde new-media and performance artist (1932-2006) who made his career abroad, outside the relatively conservative Korean art world of his day, but who has since been avidly embraced by the country's cultural establishment. With a current collection of 67 fully realized pieces and some 2,000 sketches, proposals and documentary videos, the institution is under the direction of **Young Chul Lee**, former head of the Gwangju Biennale (1997), Busan Biennale (2000) and Anyang Public Art Project (2005). The chief curator is **Tobias Berger**, previously director of the Para/Site Art Space in Hong Kong and the 8th Baltic Triennial (2002) in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Exhibitions are slated to have a decidedly international bent, mixing works by Paik with examples by his friends and colleagues (Joseph Beuys, John

Cage, Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, Charlotte Moorman and others) as well as younger artists (such as Ryoji Ikeda, Zilvinas Kempinas, Peter Weibel, Johan Grimmonprez and Jan Fabre) influenced by the Fluxus movement or Paik himself. Beginning later this season, a prize will be awarded periodically to a young individual artist or group whose works combine new-media arts and performance.

—Richard Vine

An exhibition space in the new Nam June Paik Art Center near Seoul.

