

Selected Bios/Statements/Images

Author's note: With this essay, my intention is to publicize the artists of Central Asia. While I have written the contents of many of the following biographies, some text has been borrowed directly from various publications, press releases, websites, and other sources. In addition, some are texts that the artists have submitted to me within the past three years. Most bios do not list an exhibition history. Instead, they provide a general sense of the artists' thematic direction, preferred media, level of achievement, and public exposure.

Lida Abdul (Afghanistan)

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1973, Abdul lived in Germany and India as a refugee before going to the U.S. Her work fuses the formalist traditions she was learned in the U.S. with the numerous aesthetic traditions—Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, pagan, and nomadic—that collectively influenced Afghan art and culture. She has produced work in various media, including video, film, photography, installation, and performance. Her most recent work has been featured at the Venice Biennale 2005; Kunsthalle Vienna; Museum of Modern Art Arnhem, Netherlands and Miami Cantral; CAC Centre d'Art Contemporain de Brétigny; and Frac Lorraine Metz, France. She has also exhibited in festivals in Mexico, Spain, Germany, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan. She was a featured artist at the Central Asian Biennial 2004. Recently, she was in Kabul, Afghanistan, working on projects exploring the relationship between architecture and identity in post-war Afghanistan.



Lida Abdul, *Untitled*. Video, 2004.

Leeza Ahmady (Afghanistan/USA)

Leeza Ahmady was born and raised in Kabul, Afghanistan, and arrived in New York City in 1987 as a young teenager. As an independent art curator and arts administrator, Ahmady has been designing unique gallery spaces all over New York City, implementing innovative programs that welcome varied art forms. She has produced dozens of local and international art events and has presented her work at renowned venues such as The Whitney Museum of Art, Queens Museum of Art, Venice Biennale (2001), Istanbul Biennial (2005), and Apex Art. Ahmady is currently the Managing Director of Asian Contemporary Art Week, at the Asia Society, New York. In 2005, she recently completed her Masters degree in Arts and Cultural Management, at the Pratt Institute, New York. For her thesis, she researched the development and promotion of contemporary art in Central Asia and its neighboring regions. Since 2004, she has traveled to Central Asia to conduct on-site research and to launch her project "The Taste of Others," which was recently funded by the Asia Art Archive. Ahmady is a founding member of two non-profit organisations: NURTUREArt Non-Profit, Inc. (NYC) and School of Hope (USA/Afghanistan). She is an advisor to many arts organisations in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, including the newly established Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA).

Vyacheslav Akhunov (Uzbekistan)

Born in 1948 in Och, Kyrgyzstan, Akhunov lives and works in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. As an artist, writer and philosopher, his oeuvre comprises academic abstract paintings, installation, performance and video art, as well as numerous essays and novels. In his artistic credo, there is no contempt of classical or traditional art and nothing said against officially involved art. Oriental in attitude, flexible and without any specific intention, he faces every style or society. "I have always fled collectivism, that means a place where a collective is working on something. A creative person is always alone, just for himself. In my life, there have always been lots of alliances, right up until when I finally understood that all this was madness, all these artistic associations."



Vyacheslav Akhunov, *Leaders*. Installation detail, 2003.

Kerimbek Akmatov (Kyrgyzstan) is an innovative printmaker who has shown his multi-part, large-scale lithographs in Russia, Germany, Slovenia, France, Bangladesh, and Japan. He participated in CEC ArtsLink Vermont Studio exchange program in the fall of 2005

Assel Alpysbaeva (Kazakhstan) refers to her work as "experimental embroidery," employing traditional techniques in surprising and delightful ways. She also teaches painting at the Kazakh State Art Academy in Almaty. Alpysbaeva was chosen to participate in the CEC ArtsLink Vermont Studio exchange program in the fall of 2005.

Shaarbek Amankul (Kyrgyzstan) **Lizzy Mayrl** (Austria and Kyrgyzstan) Shaarbek Amankul creates evocative sculptural installations, photography, and video, which have been exhibited in England, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. In August 2005, co-organizing with artist Lizzy Mayrl, he launched "Transformation," the third artists' meeting to be held on the shores of mountain lake Issyk-Kul in five years. Amankul and Mayrl are founders of ArtConnection, a non-profit organisation based in Bishkek. Since the beginning of their partnership in ArtConnection, the two artists have launched many projects in Kyrgyzstan and in Austria. Former projects include "Signs of Eternity": Central Asia-Europe Artdialogue 2001 and "In Search": Central Asia-Europe Artdialogue 2002.



Shaarbek Amankul, *Untitled*. Performance "Transformation Symposium" Lake Issykul, 2005

Said Atabekov (Uzbekistan) was born in the village of Bes Terek in Uzbekistan in 1965. He graduated from Shymkent Art College in Kazakhstan and currently lives in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. He was a founding member of Kyzyl Traktor, the first avant-garde artistic group founded in southern Kazakhstan after Perestroika. His first solo exhibition in 1993 entitled "I is not We" was a clear affirmation of a new individual voice in contrast to the traditional Soviet aesthetic of "collectivism," and it proposed an important alternative to a post-Soviet environment. He continues to focus his attention on Central Asia: its customs, daily life, legends, and the history of the area. His work has been exhibited widely throughout the world: Moscow, Russia, Vilnius, Berlin, Geneva, Prague, Mexico City, and Italy.



Said Atabekov, "Noah's Ark" Video, 2000-2004

Smail Bayaliev (Uzbekistan) was born in the village of Iskander in Uzbekistan in 1952. He graduated from the Tashkent Art College in 1974, and he lives in Chymkent in Kazakhstan. He is a member of Kyzyl Traktor, the first avant-gard artistic group founded in southern Kazakhstan after Perestroika. He has created paintings, sculptures, performances, and installations, all of them focusing on interpreting national traditions. His works are often ironic versions of folkloric and religious rituals and are tinged with controversy through the perspective of official art, which regards folklore as the only possible aesthetic of modern Kazakhstan.

Ulan Dzhaparov (Kyrgyzstan)

Dzhaparov was born in 1960 and lives in Bishkek. He is an influential and dynamic figure among artists in Central Asia as an artist, curator, architect, and critic. Dzhaparov is a founding member of Studio Museum in Bishkek, a venue that has supported the development of many multidisciplinary art projects by dozens of artists since early 1990s. His work ranges from performance-based video to installation and photography. As a pioneer of contemporary art in Kyrgyzstan, he has organized numerous exhibitions and art events in collaboration with artist couples like Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djoumaliev, and Yelena and Victor Vorobyev. Dzaparov is also the publisher of a quarterly bulletin on contemporary art.



Mariam Ghani, *Friendly Fire*. Video, 2002.

Mariam Ghani (Afghanistan/Lebanon/USA)

Mariam Ghani is a Brooklyn-based artist whose work in video, installation, new media, photography, text, and public dialogue performance investigates how history and memory are constructed and reconstructed as narrative in the present, particularly in the border zones and political spaces of transition where past, present, and future emerge as stories told in translation, contest, and counterpoint. Her work has been exhibited internationally since 1999, including screenings at the Liverpool Biennial, the Danish Film Institute, transmediale in Berlin, Smart Project Space in Amsterdam, Futura in Prague, Curtacinema in Rio de Janeiro, EMAP in Seoul, d/Art in Sydney, the Dallas Video Festival, Cinema East, the Asia Society, and the New York Video Festival; installations at Eyebeam Atelier, Exit Art, the Bronx Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Queens Museum; and web and video projects commissioned by Turbulence.org, artwurl, the Longwood Digital Matrix, and the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn for its inaugural exhibition. Her critical writing on disappearance, warm data, the politics of new media, and networked archives has been featured in the Sarai Reader 05, Samar, Arts and Leisure, and the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, and she has moderated and participated on related panels for NYU's Kevorkian Center, the AANM, the Amnesty International Firefly Project, SUNY Stony Brook, and LMCC.

Roya Ghiasy (Afghanistan) is an international artist who was born in Kabul and works between New York and Amsterdam. Her work deals with researching phenomena that are related to cross-cultural intersections. She highlights her themes by using various mediums, from drawing to multimedia to sculpture. She is a founding member of Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan.



Roya Ghiasy, *Mrs. Homayun*. Video, 2002.

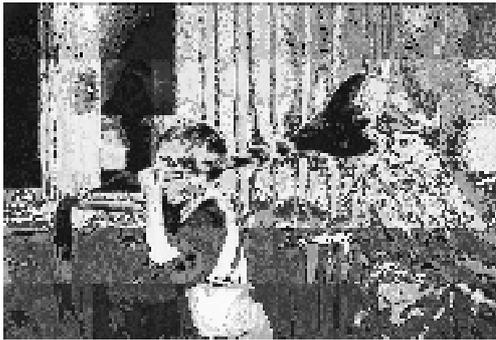
Valeria Ibraeva (Kazakhstan)

Born in 1955 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, the philologist, art historian, and curator Valeria Ibraeva works in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where she has been the head of the Soros Center for Contemporary Art since 1998. She has been noted as the foremost

expert and one of the most adventurous sponsors of artistic research in Central Asia. Following her study of philology in Tashkent and art at the Repin Institute in St. Petersburg, she worked as an editor and was awarded the silver medal for the "Industrial Exhibition of the USSR" in 1990. For over two decades, Ibraeva has written about modern film and contemporary art in Kazakhstan and for international newspapers, journals, and catalogues. Through her curatorial projects, she has helped launch a number of Central Asian artists onto the international scene.

Aigerim Issabekova (Kazakhstan)

In photographs and video, Issabekova illuminates parallel, individual worlds of imagination and memory. Her photographic series *The Family* captures transcendent moments in everyday life, and a short video, *Shadows Are Afraid of Darkness*, follows a little boy who is on a mission to save shadows. She participated in the CEC ArtsLink Vermont Studio exchange program in the fall of 2005.



Aigerim Issabekova, *Untitled*. Photo, 2004.

Shailoo Jeckshenbaev (Kyrgyzstan)

Like many Kyrgyz artists, Jeckshenbaev was trained as an architect. He began experimenting with film and photography in the 1980s and has since become a recognized artist among the Kyrgyz arts community. His photographs incorporate a feeling of abundance, much like cinema. He has produced many series, most of which venture into investigating the existential (spiritual) and spatial (physical) relationships between nature, industry, and people. Jeckshenbaev's photographs have been published and exhibited in Central Asia, Russia, and Eastern Europe.

Alimjan Jorobaev (Kyrgyzstan) has recently celebrated the twentieth anniversary of his activity as a photographer with the exhibition "Sadly but so fine" (2002). Although it had a slightly naive title, it was able to witness the substance of his

creativity. "Pain is not always sorrow or tears," he wrote in his poetic declaration. "A person's attitude to another always passes through a gaze in beauty or pain." Jorobaev was born in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and his family members were all artists. His first photo dates from when he attended secondary school. Since 1980, he has worked at the National Studio, established for the development and restoration of old films, where he quickly became laboratory assistant in the Department of Photography. He has been a professional photographer since 1992 and has won many awards for his works.

Masood Kamandy (Afghanistan/USA) was born in 1981 in Colorado and grew up in New York. He received his BFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York, and is currently working on his MFA at Bard College. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the focus of his work has been on reconnecting with his heritage in Afghanistan. In collaboration with SVA photography undergraduate chair Stephen Frailey, he established a photography department at Kabul University. In 2005, he spent five months in Kabul building a darkroom and classroom and teaching the first introductory photography courses to be offered at Kabul University since the fall of the Taliban. His photographs have appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *American Photo: On Campus*, and on the cover of *Print Magazine*, among other places. In 2005, he was chosen to be one of *Photo District News'* "30 Emerging Photographers to Watch," and in 2006 he was a recipient of the Art Director's Club's "Young Guns" biennial award.



Masood Kamany, Election. Photo, 2005.

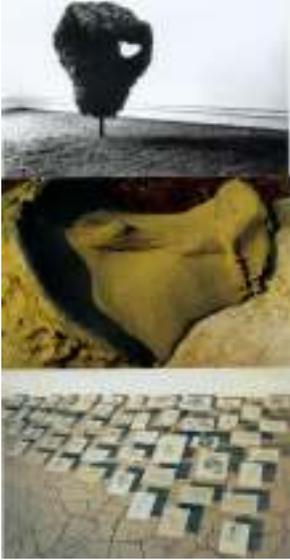
Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djoumaliev (Kyrgyzstan) are friends and associates in life and art. They are constantly looking for harmony between men and women. The starting point of their work is in observing daily life; in particular they focus on the relationships between man and religion, man and business, man and nature, man and national conflict, and man and tradition. Inspired by romanticism and Oriental conditions, the outcome is poetic. Kasmalieva was born in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 1960 and graduated from Surikov Art Institution in Moscow. Djoumaliev was

also born in Bishkek in 1965 but graduated from The Academy of Fine Arts in Muchina, St. Petersburg. They both live in Bishkek. Their work has been shown in the following exhibitions: "Young artists of Central Asia," 1988 (Central Exhibition Hall, Tashkent, Uzbekistan); "Parallel City," 1997 (Fine Arts Museum, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan); "Labyrinth," 1988 (Fine Arts Museum, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan); "Biennale of Graphic Art," 1999 (Gallery of Modern Art, Novosibirsk, Russia); "Communications," 2000 (Soros Center for Contemporary Art-Almaty, Kazakhstan); "The Internal Asia," 2001 (Fine Arts Museum, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan); "No Mad's Land," 2002 (House of the World Cultures, Berlin, Germany); "People and Shadows," 2004 (CANAIJA Gallery, Mexico City); Caravan Cafè, 2004 (Rocca di Umbertide-Centre for Contemporary Art, Umbertide, Italy); "The Sacred Places of Central Asia," 2005 (Soros Center for Contemporary Art-Almaty, Kazakhstan).



Muratbek Djoumaliev & Gulnara Kasmalieva, *Paradise*. Installation, 2003.

Rustam Khalfin (Uzbekistan) was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 1947. He graduated from the Architectural Institute in Moscow in 1972. He lives in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He was a follower of Vladimir Sterligov, the last survivor of the Russian historical avant-garde. He is considered to be the father of contemporary Kazakhstan art. Both a teacher and a theorist of the new trends of contemporary art and culture, he played an important role in preparing young artists and several Kazakhstan intellectuals. During the Soviet regime, he was the only person to organize a non-official art exhibition in his apartment in Almaty; he also took part in many non-institutional exhibitions in Moscow and Leningrad. His work has been exhibited throughout the ex-Soviet countries and recently in many cities of Europe, including the Venice Biennale 2005.



Rustam Khalfin, Various installations, 1997-2003.

Jamshed Kholikov (Tajikistan)

Jamshed Kholikov is a designer and devout art promoter living in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Over the past decade, he has initiated a number of online projects such as the Tajik Development Gateway and a virtual art gallery, Arzhang, which documents the works of artists. As a contemporary art lover, he seeks opportunities for developing the practice by serving as a connecting point between Tajik artists and artists of other nations in Central Asia. In recent years, he has helped guide various international art personalities and organizations in their research and project initiations in Tajikistan.

Natasha Kim (Kazakhstan) is from the remote city of Karaganda. Kim's works are humorous reflections of pop culture and its effect on personal space and human intimacy. In a cryptic soliloquy in her work *I Love Naomi, Naomi loves fruits*, she allows us to participate in her ideals and longings while she does her "business" as she talks about supermodel Naomi Campbell. It's her way of de-idolizing the idol. For Kim, the toilet is just another place that provides insatiable and rewarding thematic complexes, worldwide.

Ernes Kurtveliev (Uzbekistan)

A documentary photographer, Kurtveliev has investigated a range of subjects, including the conditions of life at the Aral Sea, illegal cock fighting, open heart surgery and *ulak*, an ancient equestrian game in which the winner is the rider who succeeds in

taking a goat's carcass from his competitors. His work has been exhibited in Brussels and Moscow as well as in Uzbekistan, and he has had photos published in the British newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*.

Ilyos Mamadzhanov (Tajikistan) is a painter with a sensitive use of pattern and vivid palette. He teaches at Tajik State Art College in Dushanbe and is a member of the Union of Artists of Tajikistan. He has participated in an artist residency program in Vienna, Austria, and in the CEC ArtsLink Vermont Studio exchange program in the fall of 2005.



Sergei Maslov, Baikonur-2. Slide film, 2001.

Sergey Maslov (Tajikistan) is known as "the mythmaker of contemporary art in Kazakhstan." He began his work in the late 1980s as an artist and leader of the art group "Night Tram," developing variations of oriental mysticism and stylistic eclectics. One of his most legendary myths was his affair with Whitney Houston, which he created with a series of love letter correspondences. Other odd stories that he translated into his works featured him as an alien, a vampire, and a magician. He died unexpectedly in 2003, leaving behind numerous paintings, films, manuscripts, and various projects.

Yerbossyn Meldibekov (Kazakhstan) was born in the south of Kazakhstan in 1964. In 1992, he graduated from the State Academy of Art in Kazakhstan and currently lives in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He was one of the artists of the Central Asian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2005, and he defines himself as a political

artist. His works are commentaries on processes for change and reform in Central Asia and the region's relationship with the world, Asian mentality, and European civilization. His works in video, installation, and sculpture have been exhibited in Germany, Italy, Mexico, Switzerland, Moldova, Czech Republic, Croatia, Indonesia, Russia, and in the U.S. Meldibekov is an active member of the Soros Center for Contemporary Art in Almaty.



Yerbossyn Meldibekov, *Pastan 6*. Room and wall installation with about 50 plates, 2004.

Almagul Menlibaeva (Kazakhstan) was born in Almaty in Kazakhstan in 1967. She graduated from the State Academy of Art in Kazakhstan in 1992 and lives in Almaty, Amsterdam, and Berlin. She is a successful artist with the ability to deal with experimental and traditional areas of art. In 1998, she was awarded the "Daryn" prize by the President of Kazakhstan. She was also awarded the "Tarlan" prize by the Kazakhstan Macanese Club in 2002. She was also a member of the underground youth group "The Green Triangle," which was active during the last few years of the Soviet regime. She is very talented in working simultaneously in different areas of art: painting, graphic art, performance, installation, and video. The main theme in her art is the condition of women and their plea for freedom and emancipation. Her work has been exhibited in various exhibitions in Central Asia and abroad, including the Venice Biennale 2005.



Almagul Menlibaeva, *Steppen Barocq*. Photograph of performance series, 2004.

Saken Narynov (Kazakhstan) was born in the village of Issyk in Kazakhstan in 1946. He graduated from the Kazakh State Polytechnical Institute in Architecture. He lives in Almaty, Kazakhstan. His art is a mixture of sculpture and architectural projects; each piece resembles a small house for snails, air, a peasant, a penis, and humanity. His scientifically pursued objective is in the pleasure of everyday people, every sculpture, and every architectural project where beauty, symmetry, and order are expressed. Narynov has also received the honorary rank of innovator from the USSR.

Alexander Nikolaev (Uzbekistan)

Alexander is a multimedia artist living in Tashkent. Works such as "I Want to Go to Hollywood" touch audiences with the irony and conceptual integrity of his paintings, installations, and videos. He often sees his creative work imbued with mystery, as a part of a global continuum despite the isolation from information that he feels exists in his country. His work was included in Istanbul Biennial 2003 and the Venice Biennale 2005.



Alexander Nikolaev, *Photo Salon*, Oil on canvas, view of installation, 2004.

Talant Ogobaev (Kyrgyzstan)

Ogobaev creates layered, atmospheric collages using a range of materials including fabric, cardboard, plaster, watercolor, India ink, foil, photographs, and insects. He also works in installation and video. He has attended workshops, seminars, and festivals in Lithuania, Russia, Poland, Germany, and Austria. His main interest is the history of American art and postmodernism.

Alisher Primkulov (Tajikistan) was born in 1981 and brings a youthful humor and unique view of the world to his video works. He is a freelance film and advertising educator and is active at the Bactria Cultural Center in Duhsanbe. He was selected to

participate in CEC ArtsLink Vermont Studio exchange program in the fall of 2005.

Gennady Ratushenko (Tajikistan) was born in Siberia in 1941 and graduated at Omsk State Agricultural Institute. He lives in Dushanbè, Tajikistan. He is a photographer, reporter, and journalist and has won many awards. The photos he took during the civil war in Tajikistan (1990-1997) brought to light its grotesquely tragic dimensions. It must be remembered that Tajikistan shares a border for many hundreds of kilometers with Afghanistan. He has taken part in many photographic exhibitions both in the Soviet Union and Europe.

Guldana Sapfarova (Kazakhstan)

Sapfarova was born in 1965 in Almaty and lives in Karaganda. She is an art historian, art manager, and curator. She received her graduate degree in art history in Moscow. Since 1990, she has worked in Karaganda's Museum of Art as the deputy director. She is an organizer and participant of exhibitions, which include: Kazakhstani-American exhibition "Bridge" (Karaganda, 1997); Exhibition of Karaganda's Museum of Art "Colour of time" (Almaty, 1997); two exhibitions of Deihch artists in Deihch House (Almaty, 1997); "Line of Beauty," an exhibition in a swimming pool (Almaty, Moscow "ART MANEGE 99", 1999).

Adis Seitaliev (Kyrgyzstan)

Seitaliev works in video, painting, and graphics. *Black Easel*, a 2004 video, reflects typical problems for post-Soviet artists—loneliness, miscommunication, and the difficulty of choosing a creative path in new conditions—in a manner that is at times humorous, surreal, and poignant. He has been exhibited widely in Kyrgyzstan and in Russia, France, Italy, Austria, and Germany. He hopes to extend his artistic vision by sharing values and beliefs with colleagues and by seeing the approaches and methods used by other artists.

Oksana Shatalova (Kazakhstan)

Working in video, photo, and installation, Shatalova explores the hopes and fears of ordinary working people and the role of women in patriarchal society. Her 2005 video *Wedding Dances* examines the Russian wedding ritual, which retains many archaic elements. Shatalova's work was included in the 2005 Venice Biennale and in several international video and digital art festivals. She is also co-producer of a literature and art magazine, *Pygmalion*.

Yulia Sorokina (Kazakhstan)

Sorokina was born in 1965 in Shushinsk, Kazakhstan. In 1987, she

graduated from the Graphic Art faculty of Kazakh Abay Pedagogical Institute. She has studied art in Moscow and London and has curated numerous exhibitions in Kazakhstan and Europe. She is currently the curator for Asia Art Gallery-Almaty and acts as one of the main connecting agents between artists and scholars of Central Asia.



Yulia Sorokina, *Exhibition Documentation* 2001

George Tyrakin-Bukharov (Kazakhstan) was born in Nizhneudinsk in Siberia in 1943. He lives in Almaty, Kazakhstan. His family was a victim of Stalinist repression and the majority of his work deals with the memories of that time, characterized by totalitarianism and imprisonment. His work assembles found objects—old chairs, parts of motorcycles, and children's toys—with which he creates astonishing sculptures. His skill is such that he has, as they say in Russian, "golden hands." His work brings together the dimension of movement. Instead of assembling new objects, he renews old ones, giving them new life and an unexpected meaning.



George Tyrakin-Bukharov, *Horse*. Assemblage sculpture, 2005.

Aleksander Ugai and Roman Maskalev (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) Aleksander Ugai and Roman Maskalev are members of the Kazako-Kyrgyso-German group "Armour Train." Their approach is very ironic. As the young members of the group grew up during the Soviet regime, they do not remember the conditions of that time and therefore try to understand what was represented and what is still represented in the contemporary world. Alexander Ugai was

born in Kyzyl Orda in Kazakhstan in 1978. He graduated from Kyrgyz State University in 2002. He lives in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Roman Maskaliev was born in Bishkek in 1979. He graduated from Kyrgyz State Art College in 2000. He lives in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Their work was exhibited at the Venice and the Istanbul Biennales in 2005.



Alexsander Ugai, *In the Sport Hall*. Photo, 2003

Yelena and Victor Vorobyev (Kazakhstan)

Yelena Vorobyeva born in 1959 in Nebit-Dag, Turkmenistan, and Victor Vorobyev was born in 1959 in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan. They live and work in Almaty, Kazakhstan as artists, writers, and curators. As a married couple, the Vorobyevs began working together on conceptual art projects during the early 1990s. They earnestly play with the world, using painting, photography, humor, stone, video, vegetables from their garden, people's reactions, and more. The results are multilayered works that comment either on the simplicity or complexity of life in Central Asia. They have exhibited widely in Central Asia, Russia, and Eastern Europe. Their photo project *The Blue Period* was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2005, and their latest work was shown at the 2006 Sydney Biennale.



Yelena and Victor Vorobyev, *Sculpture*, (Title & year not available.)