



Report on the visit of Ellen Pearlman, April 20 – May 3, 2009 to Ulan Bator, Mongolia under the auspices of the Open Academy, Prince Claus Trust

# Background

Mongolian artists have no exposure to the explosive growth of their Chinese neighbors to the south and Russian neighbors to the north. From conquerors of nations during the times of the great Khans in the 1300s to being conquered by successive dynasties of overloads, including most recently the Soviets, Mongolian artists are entrusted as stewards of their illustrious past while hurtling towards the future. What separates their art from other nations and gives them a unique voice and spirit?

Some factors to consider.

The issue of pure post modernism in the Mongolian art world is not feasible. Each artist is a conveyor of their nomadic and Khan inspired past. Their relationship to the earth, sky, sun and totemic animals such as the wolf and horse is irrevocable and part of their national character. It is easy to give lip service to the subject of trans nationalism, but for a country that is just now emerging from 70 years of Stalin's rule, had their language taken away, and was only allowed to explore real modern art since 1996, certain allowances must be made.

There is a surplus of vibrant fauvist colors in their painting, remnants from the Soviet influence., and most of their sculpture has not progressed beyond Cubism. The Soviet influence can not be under emphasized – it is a given as most beret wearing instructors in the art academies were trained either in Soviet Russia or one of their satellites like Bulgaria or the Czech Republic. Their art then is a strange amalgam of Cubism, Soviet Realism, and Kitsch. Art . It is not very conceptual, but “felt”. There is only one course in art criticism in the entire school However, things are changing. There are new influences.

This report is divided into three sections. The first is my activities at the Fine Arts Academy. The second is miscellaneous activities which occurred during my two week stay. The third is my work with the Blue Sun artists group including the creation of site specific performances based on the underlying principle of relational aesthetics.

In July, 2008 after the Parliamentary elections the losing party got drunk and set fire to sections of the Fine Arts Museum Gallery. It is under these conditions, with a paucity of government support that Mongolian artists continue to make art.



Part 1

## Lectures at the Fine Arts Academy

I gave three lectures at the Fine Arts Academy in Ulan Bator.

The first was on 20 years of contemporary Chinese history as seen through the eyes of Chinese women photographers. These were further broken down three distinct phases; the political, social dislocation and urban fragmentation, and finally the impact of advertising and eroticism. This lecture was presented showing the ability of female artists to enter the art world on a level equal with men.



Fine Arts Academy, Ulan Bator, Mongolia

Contemporary Chinese Women Photographers lecture



The next lecture at the Academy was on contemporary Tibetan Art. Tibetans face some of the same problems as Mongolians, but are grappling with different issues as well. Both cultures have been dominated by outside Communist states, and both cultures have had their language taken from them. I showed examples of the Gendun Choephal School in Lhasa, Tibet which formed in 2003 as well as works by Tibetan artists in exile.



For the third lecture in New Media first I showed the students my own video in progress, "Beijing Boogie Woogie" about the contemporary Chinese art world. Next I showed them examples of Cao Fei's "China Tracey" series in Second Life from the Chinese Pavillion at the Venice Biennale. After that I showed them examples of work I was contemplating showing at SIGGRAF Asia '09 in Japan, as I am one of the judges for the art gallery. Unfortunately, the Internet connection at the Academy was often slow.



Part 2  
Other Activities

Artist studio visits and critiques













## Visit To A Private Art School For Special Needs Children

I was also taken to a struggling private arts school set up 15 years ago to teach art to homeless nomad children, as well as deaf and dumb children. The school receives no support from the state and scrapes by on merger tuition fees. No homeless child is ever turned away.



The director of the school Yadamsuren Bulgan.. Her Mongolian grandfather U. Yadamsuren was the most famous artist in Mongolia before the invasion by the Russians.



## Honors Graduation Ceremony for Fine Arts Academy

I was lucky enough to attend the honors graduation ceremony for the Fine Arts Academy and meet with the new Director of the Fine Arts Museum



I also met with the Director of Xanadu Gallery, the first truly professional gallery for Mongolian Artists run by Jargalan Batbayar, a graduate of Columbia University in New York.





Part 3  
Blue Sun Group

The remainder of my time was spent working with the Blue Sun group. Our first activity was a computer based portfolio review and professional critiques.



However, I felt during my time in Ulan Bator that the artists needed support and encouragement to go beyond their normal art practices and to engage in activities they had never experienced. This came about through a brainstorming session on creating a fictitious political “Art Party”, as the real Presidential elections were only 3 weeks away. I had explained to the artists about the New York based performance artist “Reverend Billy” and his choir of the Church of Stop Shopping. I also explained Reverend Billy was not a real reverend, but nonetheless he was running as the Green Party Candidate for Mayor of New York City.



Mashbat, the most vocal member of Blue Sun sketched out some ideas for the Mongolian “Art Party” candidate.

This inspired the artists tremendously and they had their own meeting. Within two days, which is probably a record amount of time for them, they had organized everything. First there was a planning meeting at Blue Sun constructing “Art Party” hats from newspapers.



Mashbat sat the night before for a studio portrait and the artists created posters along with small flyers to hand out on the street.





The "Art Party" jumped into action with guerrilla style tactics of putting up posters and handing out flyers to often perplexed onlookers.





The next day Blue Sun held an art opening, and with my encouragement called the local TV Station, Channel 25 which did indeed cover the event and the candidacy of the “Art Party”. As it was a holiday weekend, the news was aired after my departure.





Dalkha speaking for Blue Sun







This led to a incredibly successful conclusion of my visit.

