

ARTS COUNCIL OF MONGOLIA



Art from the Heart



Jessica Lumb

Artist J. Munkhtsetseg

During March, the Arts Council of Mongolia is proud to present an exhibition of work by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav with the support of Tseren Tours LLC. From the Heart is the first of a series of 15 new projects with 15 new donors being implemented by the Arts Council of Mongolia in 2012, to celebrate 10 years of creative partnership. These events aim to promote artistic excellence; preserve Mongolian cultural heritage; build creative youth and children; and bring arts to the public. Over the last decade, ACM has invested \$3,000,000 USD into arts and culture; implemented 183 projects; served 57,000 people including children; supported 5,500 artists and arts organizations and partnered with



E. Tserendolgor, director, Tseren Tours LLC

165 local and international organizations.

When we talk about the heart, we often mean it in a metaphorical sense not a literal one. We aren't referencing the muscle that sits close to the centre of our body, but mean it as a place that is connected to our emotions and is representative of the root of the true beliefs of a person. We can take heart, show heart, and have a heart of gold. If we never give up we are lion-hearted and when trying to understand something we seek to get to the heart of the matter. It can be a private place and home to our deepest feelings. Sometimes it is hard to open up our heart, especially if we've been heartbroken in the past. When we finally find the courage to express ourselves it is said that we speak directly from the heart and it is this honesty that is often the basis for the creation of art.

One of Mongolia's most recognized artists; Munkhtsetseg speaks from the heart with every painting, and every sculpture she creates, turning the personal into something universal. Titled From the Heart, the show brings together 5 works on paper, 16 paintings and 9 bronze sculptures in celebration of her achievements.

Born in 1967 in Ulaanbaatar,

Munkhtsetseg is one of the first Mongolian artists to be known internationally. She graduated from the Fine Arts College Ulaanbaatar in 1987 and from the Academy of Fine Art Minsk, in 1993. Her successes include 6 solo and 15 group exhibitions held in Germany, the United States, Korea, Mongolia, Thailand, Switzerland and Japan; and the participation in biennales in China and Taiwan. In 2009, she was featured on the cover of 'Asian Art News' (Volume 19, No. 3, May/June), accompanied by an in-depth article covering all facets of her career. Purchased by foreign buyers, her work is also held in many private collections around the world. This will be her first exhibition since 2011 and her first in Mongolia since 2004.

"Munkhtsetseg is a pure pearl of Mongolian Art," says major sponsor Tserendolgor of Tseren Tours LLC. "Her philosophy, self expression and unrepeatable colours are unique. We are talking here about very talented artist. Art lovers who already Munkhtsetseg knew will appreciate her newest artworks and those who do not know her name or art will have a great opportunity to get to know her. We are very proud and fortunate that Tseren Tours LLC is the main supporter of her exhibition."

Through her work Munkhtsetseg lets us into a world that only few are privileged to be a part of. In person, her modest demeanor suggests there is much we don't know but her paintings tell a different story. She uses women as her primary subject, and through them, she expresses the power of the female figure and the spirit and the strength of Mongolia. She examines deeply felt ideas of birth and death, motherhood, sexuality and spirituality, using symbols from the rich cultural heritage of her people.

"I am very interested in legends, folk tales and other bits of wisdom about the body – even children's ideas and questions about the body," she says. "When my son was very young, he asked me 'Why can people walk?' 'Why can they move their hands?' 'Who is the first one of my grandmothers in the world?' 'Do we see good and evil with our eyes?'"

"One of the most important elements in my work is the use of the traditional Mongolian hairstyle. It is like the wings of a flying bird. The hair of a Mongolian woman, for me, is a symbol of national power and of our culture. In my mind, long, beautiful hair signifies independence for women. Hair is important to us as living



Waterfall, 74x80x28, bronze, 2009

beings – for me, it is hard to imagine living without it – it has the same importance to me as the heart. When I'm working in my inner world of art, I love to draw connections to hair."

Large, gutsy, paintings dominate the show but are contrasted with finer water colour and pencil works on paper. Bronze sculptures mirror the work on the walls, creating another dimension to Munkhtsetseg's ideas. What stands out within the exhibition is the texture she manages to create across all three art forms, drawing reference to the Mongolian landscape.

"I developed the texture of the hair I have been painting based on the lines on sea shells. These unique lines remind me of a sand dune moving quietly across the

Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum, Ulaanbaatar, open 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. A talk will be held by Munkhtsetseg on March 21st, allowing the public a rare opportunity to hear from the artist herself.

"Whisper to yourself this word from your heart," says Tserendolgor. "For me it means love, peace, tenderness and contains every positive attitude. Everything could be the opposite if there is no heart or if it is not from the heart, right?"

Munkhtsetseg finds a way to express what's inside when words just aren't enough. Please take the opportunity to experience the beautiful examples of work brought together for this special exhibition.

For more information please contact Jessica at consultant@artscouncil.mn



Hair Performance I am Protected, oil on canvas, 2009, 160 x 150cm

Gobi desert. My reflections on seashells have inspired me to create strong and large portraits of Mongolian women's hair."

While there is femininity to her work, her women are bold and tough. They are powerful and hold a physical presence in their space, despite the pain or the heartbreak some of them express. Paintings reveal their inner selves, but instead of becoming vulnerable they demonstrate stoicism and survival. They represent the struggles and the healing undergone, both on a personal level and by her country; but also reach out to womankind as a whole.

"I want to create beauty – a beauty that transforms itself into power," Munkhtsetseg says. "I enter my art both physically and spiritually. I've set out to create a body of work using a variety of mediums – combining the physical and spiritual worlds – about women, Mongolian culture, beauty and power."

Animals also feature heavily in her works because she believes; they "support the human spirit and physical body. Animals have the power to cure people. Through Shamanism and Buddhism, humans can repair damage to their spiritual and physical body through animals, plants and minerals. These beliefs have been a source of inspiration for my work."

"I have recently been working on a series of paintings that are inspired by the female anatomy with references to Mongolian concepts of such anatomy and reflecting on traditional medicine. Traditional medicine was prohibited during the Soviet times in Mongolia and is now experiencing resurgence in Mongolia during the last 20 years of independence. When I was young, I was a very sick and weak child. I was taken to traditional medicine practitioners and learned a lot from my experience – which has worked its way into my paintings and sculpture."

The exhibition will run between March 14th and 28th at the Red Ger and Green Horse Galleries, located within the



Unexpected Paradise, 200x150, oil on canvas, 2009



Womb Bardo and Transitional Space, 180x150, oil on canvas, 2009

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