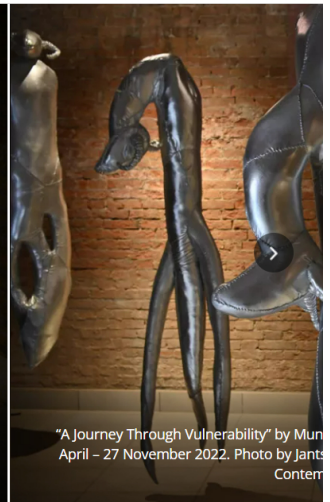


“I’m Bringing Humanity Closer To Healing”: Mongolian Artist Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav’s Visceral Art At The Venice Biennale



“A Journey Through Vulnerability” by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April – 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.



“A Journey Through Vulnerability” by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April – 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.

TOP

657

37

0

SHARE

AUTHOR

22
JUL

COBO SOCIAL

DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

READ NOW

f
TW



Naima Morelli

81

469540

3471

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for...

VIEW PROFILE

Titled “A Journey Through Vulnerability”, the Mongolian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale is a solo presentation of Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, an artist whose visceral work plunges us into a world that is at once intimate and fragile, yet powerful. Contributing writer Naima Morelli speaks with the artist about the process of making work, the developments of local contemporary art and the need to rediscover Mongolia’s forgotten history.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association



“A Journey Through Vulnerability” by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April – 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.

This may sound surprising, but Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, also known as Mugi, wasn't really happy to represent Mongolia at the 2022 Venice Biennale. “My first reaction was all but bliss,” the artist tells me with a soft voice and a direct attitude. “I have felt a lot of anxiety towards the way people may receive my work. It’s a big responsibility!

But here we are.”

One of the most recognised contemporary Mongolian artists, Mugi has presented a show titled “A Journey Through Vulnerability” exploring the concept of samsara, compassion, and healing. With a strong multimedia practice, incorporating sculpture, painting, video, and performance, Mugi’s work explores pain, fear, healing, and rebirth. In her practice, the artist explores the complexities of female bodies, mind and soul, and dives deep into the connection of oneself with and nature. Her inspiration is found both in her personal experiences and through Mongolian traditions, something the artist believes is at risk of being lost.

In Venice, Italy, she presents a series of soft silver sculptures and paper-cuttings, portraying subjects like half-animal half-human creatures, silver birds representing the pulse of life, pregnancy, healing and protection, and female bodies as symbols of the constant search for inner strength. These are realised with her trademark technique of tearing, cutting, collating, and stitching. According to the artist, the practice itself symbolises pain, hope, and patience.

The show marks the fourth appearance of Mongolia at the Venice Biennale. Each year the country has presented a different aspect of its multifaceted scene; the earliest editions addressed belonging and identity, and the urge and need to recapture Mongolia’s vital past suffocated by years of socialist rule, while in more recent iterations artists grappled with art theory, asking themselves what meaningful contemporary art is.

The participation of Mongolia at the Venice Biennale owes largely to curator Gantuya Badamgarav, who initiated and organised Mongolia’s first-ever participation in 2015, and the two subsequent editions in 2017 and 2019. Taking me through the dark rooms of the Pavilion, Badamgarav translates for me as the artist takes me through her work.

You grew up during a period of transition in Mongolia, the emancipation from the Soviet Union. How was it for Mongolian artists to mature artistically at this very particular time in history?

I studied in Mongolia during socialist times in the late 1980s and furthered my art studies in Belarus when it was still part of the USSR. Right before finishing, I dropped out. You have to consider that in socialist times all policies were state-imposed, and I didn’t very much like the strictly controlled Russian academic education. After 1990, most of the Mongolian artists couldn’t really focus on their craft, because everyone was busy just trying to survive this tough transition period. We were in the middle of a severe economic crisis, and we were all trying to figure out how to free ourselves from Russian control. After 2000, the scene became more active, and in the last 22 years, but it was really from 2009, that the art scene has really developed.

So I would say contemporary Mongolian art has a short story, but it developed incredibly fast after the end of Soviet rule. I find it also very rich because of our history, the connection with other Asian countries as well as with Europe, not to speak of the connection with our roots, the nomadic culture, and lifestyle, shamanism, and rituals. Mongolian art has so many elements: the Buddhist influences, European culture coming from Russia, and the figure of Genghis Khan, who conquered the world. All of these influence contemporary Mongolian art.

During socialist time, Russians prohibited us from talking about Genghis Khan, and they even changed our very beautiful script into Cyrillic. They didn’t want us to feel strong or to feel proud. They considered us very dangerous people; the Chinese and Russian always feared our power, so they held strict control over our knowledge of our own history. So, rediscovering our roots resulted in a great explosion of creativity.

How did you develop your own style?

I developed my practice by looking at our history and our traditional culture. My background is in painting, but I also studied under different traditional Mongolian artists. As I mentioned, contemporary art in Mongolia was fuelled by the intention of reappropriating our forgotten roots; we wanted to recover our nation’s memory, and that was a deep discovery for us. We become passionate about learning about our past.

But it’s not just that. For me, the biggest journey was to reconnect with my own feelings and have my inner world connected to the outer world. It has been quite a journey!





"A Journey Through Vulnerability" by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April - 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.

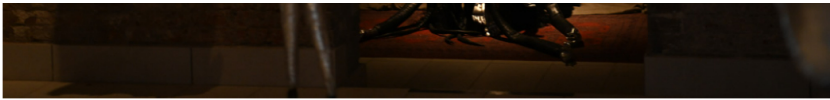


"A Journey Through Vulnerability" by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April - 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.

This first room of the Pavilion is full of these silver figures hanging from the ceiling. It reminds me of an eerie meat factory and has somewhat a taste of Louise Bourgeois. Can you tell me about this work?

This room is called *Pulse of Life* and is composed of soft sculptures which I like to refer to as "cosmic bodies". I created the works for this exhibition over the past 15 years, starting from paper works—also showcased here—which then evolved into soft sculptures. I tried to represent every element in this world that formed the current universe, including spirits and mythological figures, and tell sensible stories of women, unborn children, and the sorrowful fates of animals. My idea was to embody the Buddhist concept of samsara, where everything becomes one. My work is very much related to the Buddhist belief that everything is connected and everything leans towards final healing.





"A Journey Through Vulnerability" by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April – 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.

The last room is titled *Miscarriage*, can you tell me a bit about it?

The room *Miscarriage* contains a hut-like installation called *Keeper of Protector Bird* (2022) and it references traditional protective spells and rituals performed to safeguard women from miscarriage. This work tried to put the feelings of many women like myself into a physical form. Every woman has this fear deep inside but also has in her spirit some sort of protection. The work is put on a carpet, and that's the curator Badamgarav's idea, to have a touch of warmth. We tried to create a sense of home, a pleasurable ambiance.



"A Journey Through Vulnerability" by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April – 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.



"A Journey Through Vulnerability" by Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav, installation view at Calle S. Biasio, Venice, 23 April – 27 November 2022. Photo by Jantsankhorol Erdenebay. Image courtesy of the artist and Mongolian Contemporary Art Support Association.

Can you tell me about the work in the room called *The Dream of the Gazelle*?

Badamgarav and I tried to make this small space look like a barn, and present a multimedia installation. The works in the room were initially conceived as two separate works, but they are also connected. You see a soft sculpture of a gazelle cut in half, laying on a metal-framed bed, and there is a projection of a baby gazelle.

In Mongolia we have this vast, free land, and in the last few years people have started to put a lot of fences that weren't there before. It used to be a land free of any barriers, so animals, especially gazelles, don't see these fences and get injured running into them. A lot of them die because of that. There was a specific incident of a gazelle that was found in the countryside by local people and they brought it home and filmed it with a mobile phone. The video really haunted me for many months, so I decided to create this work and titled it *The Dream of the Gazelle*.

The work also refers to Mongolian ancestral rites and is inspired by Mongolian traditional healing methods and spiritual therapy, where the process of her artistic creation is deeply intuitive and ritual-like. In making this work I'm meditating on the nature of my anxieties and how to heal them.

I see that most of the works are related to dreams of animals and human beings, and hybridisation between the two, so it seems to me that the Mongolia Pavilion is very much tied to the theme of the Biennale. Very much visceral, with all these elements that tie to the body and a strong oneiric aspect. How did you relate to the Biennale's theme *The Milk of Dreams*?

I would say they are related, but they are also different at their core. Here, I'm concentrated on the modalities of healing; the process itself is a form of healing. Usually, I don't work with a team, I make all the works myself. I start with preparatory sketches, then I sew the sculptures—it's all handmade. Through the sewing and the stitching, I'm meditating and dealing with my own fears, and also connecting with my animal spirit.

What I feel is that art-making is not only about myself, but it brings all of humanity closer to healing. When you find your balance, then you are healed, whatever happens in your life. This concept, I'd say, belongs more to Asian countries than Europe, and also makes the premise of my work different from the surrealist aspect of the Biennale, which I find is more tied to European culture.

A Journey Through Vulnerability

23 April - 27 November 2022

Calle S. Biasio, Venice, Italy

You might also enjoy reading...

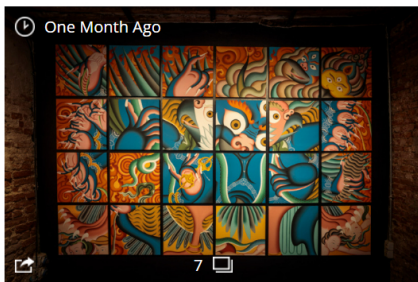
- [59th Venice Biennale: What Would the World Look Like Without Us?](#)
- [Tsherin Sherpa On Representing Nepal For The Country's Venice Biennale Debut](#)

#59th Venice Biennale #Gantuya Badamgarav #Mongolia #Mongolian Pavilion #Mugi #Munkhtsetseg Jalkhaajav #Naima Morelli #The Milk of Dreams #Venice Biennale #Venice Biennale 2022

LEAVE A COMMENT


You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.

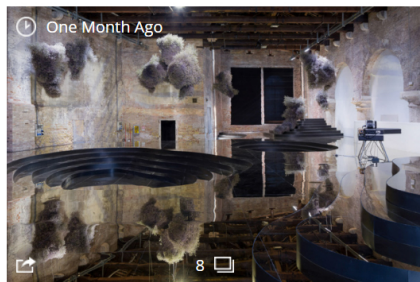
Related Recommends Latest



#59th Venice Biennale #interview #Nepal Pavillion


Tsherin Sherpa On Representing Nepal For The Country's Venice Biennale Debut

 Nicholas Stephens



#59th Venice Biennale #Ali Cherri #British Pavillion

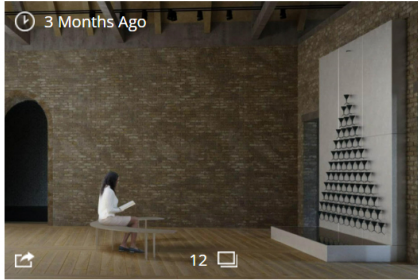
59th Venice Biennale: What Would the World Look Like Without Us?

 Nicholas Stephens



#CloneX #M+ #Metaverse #News Roundup #NFT

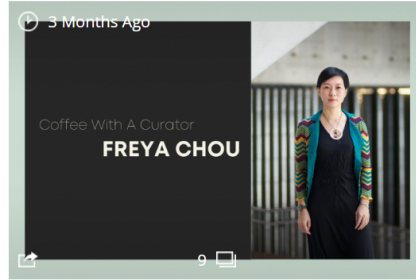
Wrapping Up The Art World: Sydney Modern Project Unveils In December, Yuga Labs' Latest NFT Drop Sparks Minting Frenzy, And More



#59th Venice Biennale #Biennales #Collateral Events

National Pavilions And Collateral Events: What To See At The 59th Venice Biennale

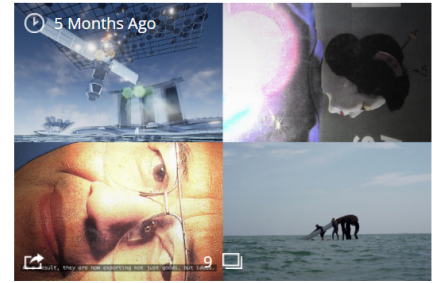
Herbert Wright



#Angela Su #Carnegie International #Caroline Ha Thuc

Coffee With A Curator: Interview with Freya Chou

Caroline Ha Thuc



#Asia Forum

Looking Beyond Global Asias: Four Artists Shed New Light on World Issues and Historical Legacies at Asia Forum's Digital Gathering

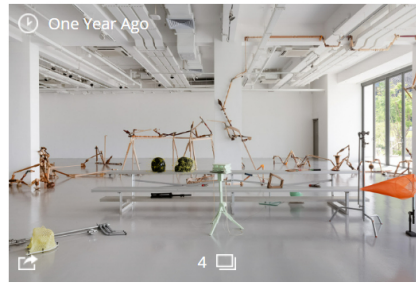
C.A. Xuan Mai Ardia



#Art News #Bi-weekly News #Centre Pompidou

Wrapping Up The Art World: Venice Architecture Biennale to Host "Silent Openings", NFT Price Plummetts, And More

CoBo News



#contemporary art #COVID-19 #M+

Remote Installation: Temporary Phenomenon or Persistent Theme?

Nicholas Stephens



#Asia Society Triennial #Bangkok Art Biennale

What will it take for the Biennial to stay relevant?

Reena Devi



#Bread #Carina Fischer #Centre Pompidou

Destruction, Decay and a House Made of Bread: The Wacky and Wonderful Works of Urs Fischer

Carina Fischer

MORE