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OFFICIAL COUNTRY NAME
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN
POPULATION
31,889,923
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT PER CAPITA
US \$800
LANGUAGES
PASHTU, DARI



TOTAL VALUE OF ART EXPORTED	N/A
ARTS FUNDING	US \$5,800,000
ART PROGRAMS (UNIVERSITY-LEVEL)	2
STUDENTS ENROLLED	N/A
MUSEUMS EXHIBITING CONTEMPORARY ART (PUBLIC + PRIVATE)	3
CONTEMPORARY ART SPACES (NON-PROFIT)	1
COMMERCIAL CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERIES	N/A
FOUNDATIONS (NGO + PRIVATE)	2

The statistical figures are 2007 estimates. The figures are taken from the most recent censuses and information.*

Source and Acknowledgements: Arts Funding - Fiscal Year 2002-2003, Afghanistan Ministry of Finance Report; Lida Abdul, Mariam Ghani, Ismail Said Noori, Rahraw Omarzad, Elijah Waterman.

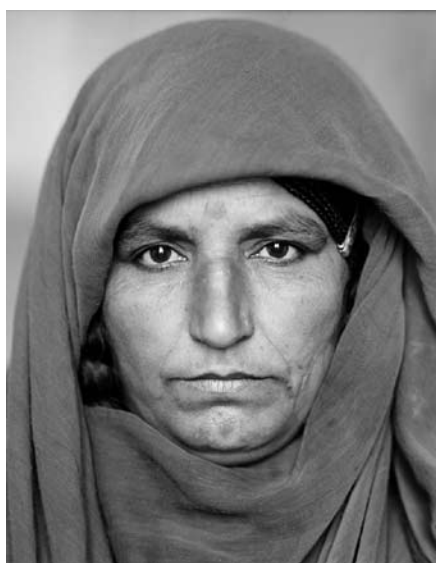


LUKAS EINSELE — *Abdul Azeez, Afghanistan (2002)* Copyright Lukas Einsele - One Step Beyond

In 2007, a growing Taliban insurgency, a spate of foreigner

kidnappings and sluggish economic and infrastructural development dampened the enthusiasm and optimism that accompanied Afghanistan's postwar reconstruction boom. Despite worsening conditions, the country's artistic community continues to rebuild, supported by a broad government mandate recognizing the role of media, art and culture in establishing democracy.

With no commercial gallery scene or collectors to speak of, artists, especially those working in painting and sculpture, have limited exhibition opportunities though they occasionally sell work from their studios. But photography and video have emerged as important media, encouraged by numerous NGOs attempting to reestablish a free press.



LUKAS EINSELE — *Rohida, Afghanistan (2002)* Copyright Lukas Einsele - One Step Beyond

Kabul's **Centre for Contemporary Art Afghanistan** (CCAA), directed by video artist and Kabul University art professor **Rahraw Omarzad**, provides access to new media and technology through workshops, seminars and exhibitions, with designated programs for young women artists. Other activities include a mobile cinema and the semiannual *Gahnama-e Hunar*, an art journal in Dari with English synopses that Omarzad edits and publishes. In 2007, CCAA collaborated with Frankfurt-based Leonhardi Kulturprojekte on "Discovering Democracy - Young Kabul Art 2007" (3/5-12), a Konrad Adenauer Stiftung-funded workshop and exhibition for emerging artists focused on representations of the struggling Afghan democracy.

In May, CCAA hosted a workshop with Canada-based painter Yar Mohammad Taraky and US-based photographer Gazelle Samizay, organized by New York non-profit Afghan Communicator with support from the Christensen Fund. Workshops continued at the Kabul and Herat Universities, the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, the Center for Visual Art and Herat's Behzad School.

Another important venue, **Goethe-Institut Kabul**, presented German Lukas Einsele's "One Step Beyond - The Mine Revisited/Returning Voyage Afghanistan" (7/2-26), a multimedia exhibition on landmines and their victims at the Timor Shah Mausoleum. Goethe-Institut also collaborated with Kabul University's Faculty of Fine Arts and Delhi's SARAI initiative of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies for the latest in a series of successful photography workshops (4/1-5/3), led by alumni Massoud Hossaini

and Farzana Wahidy. The workshop included an intensive module on representing the city led by Indian photographer Gauri Gill and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, a member of India's Raqs Media Collective (4/21-23). "Life and Nothing Else," an exhibition resulting from a previous workshop that included Hossaini and Wahidy along with novices Najibullah Zirak and Ahmad Tamim Asghar Zada, toured to sister institutions in Delhi, Karachi, Chennai and Calcutta and to Balkh University in Mazar-e-Sharif through early 2007.

The **Afghan Foundation for Culture and Civil Society** (FCCS), a cultural organization whose programs include film screenings, literary, theater and music events, celebrated its fourth anniversary in 2007 with a program that included an exhibition of Afghan photography and graphic arts (6/27). FCCS also organized the fourth installment of its annual Gul-e Surkh International Music Festival in Mazar-e-Sharif (3/20-22) to commemorate *Nauroz* (New Year).

A notable new addition is the **Turquoise Mountain Foundation**, brainchild of diplomat and adventure writer **Rory Stewart**, sponsoring diverse activities focused on promoting traditional Afghan art and architecture. Supported by the UK's **Prince Charles** and Afghan President **Hamid Karzai**, the foundation operates a Centre of Traditional Afghan Arts and Architecture in Kabul, where the traditional art forms are taught and which hosts an international exchange program for foreign artists, architects and craftsmen. In March, the foundation presented its first exhibition, "Ink from Ashes: Contemporary Calligraphy from Afghanistan," at Beit al-Qur'an, Bahrain; the largest exhibition of Afghan calligraphy ever shown in the region, it included work by Grand Master Wakili Azizuddin Populzai



Rahraw Omarzad, courtesy Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan, Kabul

and Centre instructors Muhammed Mahfouz Seyyed Khili and Abdul Sabour Omari.

Without significant funding, Afghanistan's museums are only just recovering from the war years and 2007 saw important benchmarks. In March, more than 1,423 ethnographic and archaeological artifacts, held for safekeeping at the **Afghanistan Museum-in-Exile**, Bubendorf, Switzerland, since 1999, returned to the National Museum. And the **National Gallery in Kabul** presented "Jaisalmer Yellow" (9/15-29), a traveling exhibition of paintings produced during an Indian Council of Cultural Relations-sponsored art camp in Jaisalmer, India, that brought together 25 artists from the eight member countries of SAARC (1/14-24); the works also exhibited at Lalit Kala Akademi,

New Delhi (6/2-4). Veteran painters **Abdul Shakoor Khasarwe** and **Yousuf Asefi**, respected for saving important 20th-century oil paintings during the Taliban regime by overpainting them with thick watercolor coats, represented Afghanistan, which formally joined SAARC in April.

Internationally, New York-based **Mariam Ghani** is an important emerging artist. Ghani presented *Fugitive Refrains* (2007), a surround-sound video installation produced in collaboration with choreographer Erin Kelly, at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Germany (5/24-7/7), and her three-channel video installation *Kabul 2, 3, 4*, reflecting on Kabul's changing cityscape from 2002-04, featured in "Encounters Part II" at Stads Galerij Heerlen, the Netherlands (8/24-11/11).

Lida Abdul (SEE FIVE FOR 2007 & AAP 43) remains the most visible Afghan artist. Her videos, shot entirely on location in Afghanistan, were included in the 2nd Moscow Biennale (2/22-3/22), 3rd Auckland Triennial (3/9-6/4) and the 8th Sharjah Biennial (4/4-6/4), where she was awarded a UNESCO Prize for the Promotion of the Arts. Among other activities, Abdul followed a solo at Musee National Marc Chagall (3/3-6/4) with her belated New York debut at Location One (10/4-11/17).

Looking ahead, Abdul is shortlisted for the 3rd Artes Mundi Prize with the winner announced in late April 2008. Ghani will initiate a residency in the Hague with a reinstallation of *Kabul: Constitutions* (2003-05), an interactive three-channel video installation documenting the place and process of the Afghan constitutional assembly. Turquoise Mountain Foundation is planning a UK and US tour of "Ink to Ashes" and an exhibition of contemporary art from Central Asia, which will debut in Kabul and then tour Pakistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan. **MV**



MARYAM RASOOLI — *Untitled (2007)* Oil and collage, 90 x 130 cm, courtesy Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan, Kabul

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