

The Low down on high art **COAGULA**

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A MAJOR ART COUP FOR UCLA'S FOWLER MUSEUM:

THE MISSING PEACE – 88 ARTISTS CONSIDER THE DALAI LAMA

MAY WELL BE THE MOST PROVOCATIVE AND INSPIRING CONTEMPORARY ART SHOW OF THE SUMMER

Here is an invitation to wade into the deep pond of thought, the delicate domain of the heart, traverse territories of fierceness and strife and go beyond, towards what would be peace and its practice. While this exhibition is rooted in lofty ideals and projects the best intentions, it succeeds in captivating the viewer, over and over, thanks to the uncompromising quality of the works, their freshness and boldness, their diversity, complexity and power. This is actually what we expect of art – not the sensational, the competitive, the marketable, the smart and the smug, no: intelligence and inspiration and the transformation they would operate on us. Here it is: 88 from 25 countries, from Abramovic to Yamaguchi, a multi-media panorama of contemporary art practice at its best.

There are many ways to approach this multi-layered exhibition which is elaborately articulated in ten groupings of existential, philosophical and spiritual ideas, all revolving around the possibilities of peace, within and towards others. Each artwork is the artist's personal and specific interpretation or meditation on these themes.

Entering, we are greeted by the Dalai Lama himself, whose life-size video-taped face (recorded by Bill Viola) directly faces our own. This Tibetan monk and ruler in exile whose name signifies "Ocean of Wisdom" gently introduces us to the Buddhist ideal of compassion for all sentient beings and the qualities to cultivate leading to the achievement of respect and kindness towards all forms of life. He bows to us. **The first section offers interpretive portraits of His Holiness ("HH").** There is a striking black & white portrait by the late **Richard Avedon**, a Kyrilian photograph of his shoes by **Sylvie Fleury** (the luminous aura around the shoes attributable to the cobbler who resoled them said HH, not his own), an oversized color photograph by **Chuck Close**, a three-minute video of HH coming and goings by **Robin Garthwaite and Don Griffin** entitled "A Moment with the Dalai Lama."

The second section focuses on Tibet, its geography and inhabitants, its history and plight under Chinese rule. Here is a mural-size painting by Tibetan **Tenzin Rigdol**, a young artist first trained as a thangka painter by a 9th generation Tibetan master and who graduated in 2004 with an MFA from the University of Colorado. The painting, entitled "A Brief History of Tibet" is a sophisticated interweaving of fragments of Tibetan imagery, symbols and colors along principles of Western abstract composition. The anguished work questions the power of tradition and its symbols. At the center is an empty lotus: neither Buddha nor deity sits there, two foot prints walk away from it. The poignant question is: what happens after the Dalai Lama exits this plane of existence? There is Palden Lamo, the wrathful female deity protective of Tibet but

she is naked, without her attributes and her sacred sword. In the upper left corner is a grimacing mask of Mao who is spitting out sperm. There are chains of bondage. There is the golden vajra, symbol of the indestructibility of truth but “how far can you carry truth within you when you are not living it without?” asks Rigdol. “Freedom can only be experienced in space and time. You need the land to experience the freedom.”

In the next eight sections, explains curator Randy Rosenberg, the exhibition “spirals outward to include increasingly abstract and universal themes: the ideals of human rights, peace, compassion, the plight of people in exile, an exploration of belief systems, paths of transformation, universal responsibility, globalization and ideas of temporality and impermanence.”

Some samples. Third Section. Belief Systems. The room is in a penumbra. On the left wall runs a 3Ftx3Ft blue-black video animation by **Louis Fox and Free Range Graphics** overlaid with the buzzing of the “Om Mani Padme Hum” mantra. Six seated stone figures turn around a barely visible pond. Eventually, a square window appears in one of them, revealing a lotus: we all have wisdom and compassion within. The image fades into brilliance. Another work: stretched out in the middle of the room is a 27 foot long nylon inflated sculpture of a reclining Buddha whose surface bears the print of stone carving and whose face is that of the artist **Lewis de Soto**. Entitled “Parinirvana” and produced shortly after the death of de Soto’s father, the piece holds us at the moment preceding death, its qualities and our state of mind at that point, what shall it be, what is it now? Further hangs “Dharmakaya”, a powerful tapestry in dark greens and blues featuring a triumphant full moon, representing the radiance of the Buddha’s absolute nature, a work by duo **Era and Donald Farnsworth** from Oakland, California. Another wall holds a large painting featuring the repeated image in blue (as in blueprints) of the Afghan Buddhas of Bamiyan destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, by **Andra Samelson**. The artist states that the destruction could not and could never destroy the symbolism of the Buddhas: transcendence, peace and compassion and tolerance.

From section to section, the exhibition continues to expand its scope and the works multiply their questions and challenges. Here is **Laurie Anderson**’s video projection onto two tiny clay figures sitting on white armchairs “From the Air”. Another wall-mounted video by **Rosemary Rawcliffe** entitled “Reclamation” features a luminous horizon shaped by a pulsating arc. It is the form of pregnant woman’s belly. Above it, images of the world swirl incessantly, helicopters fly, lights flash... The promise within and the future without. The first teacher of compassion is the mother. (Rawcliffe has recently made a documentary on the Dalai Lama and his mother). **Marina Abramovic** produced the largest video, occupying an entire wall, entitled “At the Waterfall”. It features a seamless simultaneous projection of 120 1Ft square images each with a monk or nun chanting. **Bill Viola** created a deceptively simple and highly poetic black & white silent video diptych of a male and female torso gradually dissolving into light and emptiness.

Suffering and memory (“Meditation on Universal Compassion”) is the theme of Vietnamese artist **Binh Danh**’s delicate chlorophyll prints on tree leaves of photographs of Cambodians ‘disappeared’ by the Khmer Rouge. For Spanish painter **Salustiano**, ultimate compassion is to be reborn as a child of your enemy: in “Reincarnation” a 3Ftx6Ft-long painting, he imagines the Dalai Lama reborn as a young Chinese girl with passion-red hair, painted on a background of hyper-red pigment. For Greek artist **Nefeli Massia**, serenity can only be won after a hard battle with the brain, against the brain, beyond the brain. In “Dreamstorming”, she lays out a bed of clouds (cotton wool) on the floor mounted with a succession of scarred Plexiglas panels twinned with light boxes symbolizing an inner dialogue where at last the transcendent is given to manifest. For Cuban-Chinese artist **Katarina Wong**, interdependence and our co-creation of reality is emphasized in a trompe-l’oeil sculptural montage of wax fingerprints (taken from family and friends) shadowing the wall, seeming to take flight in patterns mimicking the migratory patterns of birds, insects and animals.

English-American photographer **Adam Fuss** produced a most delicate and fascinating six-foot black & white photograph of a cocoon whose transparent perfect geometry celebrates the mystery of transformation. In the “Unity” section hangs a gorgeous diptych of 3Ftx3Ft white translucent wax by Japanese artist **Kisho Mukaiyama** which draws one at once into an introspective silence. The right quadrant features small colored rondels forming a circle (the races of humankind and the cycle of reincarnation) on a white

background and in the middle of the left quadrant floats a creamy white circle, representing the result of their being blended, a psychological and social necessity for the creation of peace. Emphasizing the experiential nature of these processes, he has given them invented mantric names of nupotanje (spirit of the body) and yupotanju (spirit of the universe.)

THE MISSING PEACE was conceived by The Dalai Lama Foundation (*see: www.dalailamafoundation.org*) and The Committee of 100 for Tibet with the intention of promoting the Dalai Lama's message of peace and compassion and helping people take on "the responsibility of becoming co-creators of a better world." The project director is Darlene Markovich and the curator is Randy Jane Rosenberg. Deeply convinced of the power of art to transform the mind and the heart, the organizers further believe that "peace will always be elusive or missing in our world but there is everything to gain to develop it within and without oneself." All artworks were donated by the artists and will be auctioned after the last exhibition. The website proposes a "peace curriculum" for students as well as a study guide based on the Dalai Lama's book "Ethics for a New Millennium." The exhibition is at the Fowler Museum until September 10 (*see www.fowler.ucla.edu*), and then will travel to the Loyola University Museum of (Chicago) and the Rubin Museum (New York) as well as other international venues.

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