

Text for press release

Kesang Lamdark
"Headless Disco on Top of the World"

Grieder Contemporary announces the solo exhibition of Tibetan artist, Kesang Lamdark. With humor and cynicism, Lamdark's conceptual disco mocks the Chinese cultural invasion of Tibet, while graphically commenting on the tragic self-immolation of Tibetan monks in response to their oppression.

Lamdark's disco is no trendy Buddha Bar for partygoers to drink and escape reality, but rather a forum to confront the brutal situation on the Tibetan plateau. His artwork consists of kitschy light box installations, readymade pop sculptures, and plastic thangkas that show the erosion of Tibetan tradition caused by the influx of Han migrants and increasing consumer capitalism. At the entrance to the exhibition visitors encounter Lamdark's *Burning Buddha*, a large Buddha within a pink plastic cage illuminated by a massive psychedelic 80's disco light. As the mega-watt bulbs overheat, the plastic melts, frying Buddha, not in his golden cage of legend, but in a burnt pink wasteland.

Illuminated televisions and large flat screen video monitors give us incendiary protests and news blackouts. Instead of the latest music videos that flash in most clubs, we see Lamdark's signature beer cans affixed perpendicularly to the screens. "You can look through the drinking holes in the cans like peep shows," he says. "And instead of sex shows, you see news coming from Tibet. You see the truth, because we don't get news."

Lamdark's round beer can bottoms become variations on the traditional mandala shape used for centuries in Tibetan religious thangka art, highlighting how alcohol is replacing spirituality. The underlying political meaning of the beer can mandalas is unmistakable. You see glowing dotted images of monks igniting themselves, nuns protesting and other censored Tibetan scenes. These beer can news channels give us so much more than protest. Some also offer viewers comic relief. There are random pop and Disney images and sports stars, like shirtless footballer Bolatelli, flexing his muscles during one of his Hulk celebrations.

In a plastic thangka diptych, Lamdark juxtaposes traditional Tibetan and rock 'n' roll tongue-waggers. One depicts Dorje Drakden, the ancient Tibetan sate oracle with tongue stretched out, and the second shows KISS rock band member Gene Simmons, a.k.a. "The Demon", snaking his infamously long tongue. "In Tibetan folklore, if you stick your tongue out and it's red, you are telling the truth," explains Lamdark, "If it's black, you're lying. Kiss is about sex. Their songs are about sex." We see Simmons has a truthful red tongue.

The brutally ironic *Naked Ignorance* is a mirrored light box in the round that illustrates how the citizens of the West and China are ignoring Tibet's oppression. In his pointillist style, using a hammer and nail to render the image, we see a sensuous, naked woman submerged in a bubble bath. "Ignorance can be as appealing as a naked woman," Lamdark says. "It's the opposite of burning. You can rest ignorantly in bubbly water while others are burning. Sexy as well. Bodies can be used as a means of escape."

Lamdark's sculpture *Headless Disco* is a headless body sporting a pink jean jacket, the back (in Hell's-Angels-style) patched with a skull emblem superimposed with the last four paramount leaders of China. The body is buffed-up like a steroid pumped body builder, mirroring the artificial growth China injects into Tibet.

Lamdark's works mix ancient religion with pop culture and the neon realities of nightclubs to create a modern day voice that draws upon and reinterprets his ancient heritage, reflecting a Tibet that is both secular and religious. While monks and nuns light themselves on fire in Tibet, while prisoners of consciousness meditate in rat infested cells, Shangri-La is scarred with fast tracks carrying disco trains. The world watches Tibet bathed in bubbles of censorship. Lamdark's illuminating exhibit is sure to make you dance your head off.

(Text by Andrew Cohen)

