

# NEWS

Keeping you up-to-date with developments in the visual arts environment including: funding, government and European policy; changes in law and taxation; artist-led organisation and workplace developments; new awards, residencies, commissions; prize winners and bursary recipients and more. Regular contributions by Frances Lord and Emily Speed.

## Still living

Alinah Azadeh and Rosa Nguyen are the latest artists to exhibit new work as part of The shape of things initiative, which has awarded bursaries to nine artists to create new work for display at public museums and galleries.

Working with artists who have established careers, The shape of things explores the contribution artists make to influence or reflect national identity, the intercultural nature of British society and its connection with global cultures.

One of the aims of the initiative is to further enhance and build the artists' reputations through new bodies of work specifically conceived in relationship with the space that they have been linked to. This offers the opportunity to explore new ideas and to work closely with curators. The intention is that the process of reputation building through these shows will engage the interest of collectors and purchasers and potentially increase the representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic artists working with crafts in both public and private collections. The initiative also encourages museum curators to work with artists from the beginning of the making process through to presentation and interpretation to their audiences.

The installations by Alinah Azadeh and Rosa Nguyen at Bristol's City Museum & Art Gallery are followed by installations at Bilston Craft

Gallery, Wolverhampton with Halima Cassell and Seiko Kinoshita; at Touchstones Rochdale with Tanvi Kant and Taslim Martin; at City Art Gallery, Leicester with Chien-Wei Chang and Margaret Scott, and a group show in autumn 2010 at Flow Gallery, London.

Rosa and Alinah have worked independently with curators and others on their installations for Bristol. However, connections in the two artists' ideas and approach are evident. For both artists their intercultural backgrounds are important: British-Iranian (Alinah) and French-Vietnamese (Rosa).

Two inter-related works, *The Gifts (1-99)* and *The Gifts (100-999)*, form the centrepiece to Alinah's installation. Alinah initiated this project by giving objects from her own collection, including items belonging to her mother who died in the Asian tsunami of 2004. The overall aim was to gather a total of 999 objects, alluding to the significance of the 'complete' number 9 in numerology and in many ancient cultures including Islam. She then invited donations of personal objects which had meaning for the givers but 'had outlived their emotional shelf-life'. As part of the process, Alinah asked the givers to record the personal meaning or association the objects had for them. This personal link to stories and emotions that we attach to objects, and how these can change when objects are given away, is compared by

Alinah to the way museums acquire objects and build collections. Alinah was interested in the idea of inviting people to make personal donations of things that might not normally be collected in a museum.

All 999 objects were wrapped in richly coloured fabrics and Sari yarn using a colour palette inspired by Burmese, Turkish and Persian textiles, and hung in two separate installations in the gallery. *The Gifts (1-99)* contains objects belonging to her mother and herself displayed in a spiral illustrating the cycle of life; the remainder of the objects, shown in *The Gifts (100-999)*, are donated by others and displayed in a wave like form evoking a magic carpet in mid-flight.

*Mother Tongue*, shown alongside *The Gift* installations, comprises three bound rice-cookers belonging to Alinah's mother.

For *Still Living* Rosa Nguyen investigated the Museum's collection of Chinese glass, English ceramics, watercolours and natural history specimens. Rosa explored the choices curators make about displaying objects and telling their stories. Her installations combine objects displayed in the form of tableaux selected from the Museum's collections with new commissioned blown glass objects combined with ceramic forms made by the artist.

*Lunar Tank* brings together the Bristol Quaker Thomas Pole's 1806 watercolour of his garden at 14 St James's Square, with Chinese glass and Rosa's blown glass vessels, to evoke a landscape displayed in a tank-like exhibition case. In *Still Living*, artichoke branches with poppies and alliums from Bristol's botanical gardens dipped in paint, blue ink and lacquer referencing glazed surfaces and the cobalt blue pigment used in ceramic and glass are combined with new glass forms. *Lunar Tank* and *Still Living*, together with the *Altar* and *Fleet* installations made specially for the exhibition, are informed by Rosa's Buddhist faith and the concept of 'Chi' energy, and Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, in which flower arrangements suggest certain implied meanings, such as sun, moon, earth, sky or love.

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition contains helpful contextual essays on both artists and full descriptions of individual works.

Frances Lord

[www.theshapeofthings.org.uk](http://www.theshapeofthings.org.uk)

*Still Living* and *The Gifts* are on display at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until 18 April 2010.

[www.alinahazadeh.com](http://www.alinahazadeh.com)

[www.a-n.co.uk/artists\\_talking/projects/single/518804](http://www.a-n.co.uk/artists_talking/projects/single/518804)

[www.nguyen-ceramics.co.uk](http://www.nguyen-ceramics.co.uk)



1 Rosa Nguyen, *Altar*, 2010. Photo: David Emenev, Bristol's Museums, Galleries & Archives