



# GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

Via del Castello 11, San Gimignano (SI), Italia  
tel. +390577943134 | info@galleriacontinua.com | www.galleriacontinua.com

## ILYA & EMILIA KABAKOV

Opening: Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup> 2016, Via del Castello 11, 6pm-midnight  
Until 04.09.2016, Monday-Sunday, 10am-1pm, 2-7pm

Galleria Continua is pleased to welcome *Ilya & Emilia Kabakov* back to its San Gimignano venue for a new solo show.

Regarded as the father of Russian Conceptualism, Ilya Kabakov has worked together with his wife Emilia since 1988. From the very outset the couple's work was distinguished by its reflection on social, cultural and political issues in the Soviet Union, on the tragic ramifications of crumbling ideologies, but also, in a more universal sense, on the human condition and the loss of moral bearings in the contemporary age. Their work is charged with a powerful utopian ideal, seeing refuge in art and the imagination as a possible salvation from the everyday. *"All this time we have worked with ideas revolving around the imagination and utopia. And we really believe that art, which occupies an important place in our culture, can change our way of thinking, dreaming, acting, reflecting. It can transform the way we live,"* affirms Emilia Kabakov.

In the 1980s the couple developed an expressive form described as "total installation". Possessing a marked narrative structure, total installation comprises elements drawn from architecture, painting, film and theatre, and concerns the potential of the artwork to entirely transform the exhibition space, considering the very

notion of space as a plastic, flexible and yielding component. The installations, the sculptures and the series of paintings presented by the artistic duo in this solo show form a path that reveals unexpected worlds to viewers. Works that question the relationship between everyday reality and our gaze, pushing it into a magical space where the world we know is granted a second life nurtured by our dreams and experience.

*I Want to Go Back! (Reverse)* is an imposing female figure with a wide skirt that opens like stage curtains, inviting us to enter. Inside we are greeted by the unexpected: a quiet, muffled environment and an illustrated children's book with which to embark on a journey back into the world without sadness of childhood. The theme of childhood is also addressed in *I'll Return on April 12...*, a sky crossed by white clouds, a chair, and the clothes and shoes of the man who has just soared into the sky; *"diving into that blue, shiny world I experienced once again the fullness of existence, just like in my marvellous past,"* recounts the man, when, as a child, he used to watch the sea and the sky blending together indistinctly.

The figure of the angel recurs frequently in the Kabakovs' work, whether as a guardian angel or as a fallen angel predicting the loss of spirituality and the domination of materialism. More than a religious figure, in

the couple's art the angel is the allegory of happiness and wisdom. On display, engaged in the everyday practice of self-improvement, is *How to Make Yourself Better*. "How can you make yourself better, kinder, more decent? You need to make two wings from white waxed canvas... you need to wear the wings, shut yourself away in your room and remain in absolute silence for 5–10 minutes, then get on with your usual occupations... After 2–3 weeks, the effect of the white wings will begin to manifest itself with greater and greater force," the artists explain.

The colour white has particular significance for the Kabakovs: on the one hand it symbolizes a great, infinite void, nothingness, as conceived by Suprematism; on the other, it indicates something transcendent, perhaps even mystical and religious. The abstract, empty surface, framed by human events, refers to the role of collective oblivion, but also to the painting of icons, where the edge precisely frames the sacred image, to which it is inextricably linked. White contains all the colours and reflects light more than any other one, which is why it is the brightest. White frames and marks out the series of oil on canvas paintings presented in this show.

Rounding off the exhibition is *The Arch of Life*. The work comprises five sculptures representing the different phases of human existence: a head hatching from an egg; a four-legged person wearing a threatening lion mask; a person carrying on their shoulders a box that emits light; a person who is blocked, unable to get over a wall; and finally, someone worn out by an unbearable weight.

**Ilya Kabakov** (Ukraine 1933) and his wife **Emilia** (Ukraine 1945) live and work in Long Island (New York, United States). Works by the artists are held in the permanent collections of various prestigious museums, including the MoMA in New York, the London Tate and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and have been shown, among other places, at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Sprengel Museum in Hanover. In 1992 they participated in Documenta IX at Kassel (Germany), in 1993 they represented Russia at the 45th Venice Biennale, and in 1997 at the Whitney Biennial in New York. The Kabakovs have also done numerous important public commissions all over Europe, and have received many awards and prizes, including the Praemium Imperiale Award in Tokyo in 2008, the Oskar Kokoschka Preis in Vienna in 2002 and the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres in Paris in 1995. In 2004 they became the first living Russian artists to have their work shown at the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg. In 2012 the Sprengel Museum in Hanover mounted a major retrospective of their work, in 2014 they showed at the Grand Palais for Monumenta, and in 2015 they took part in the Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale in Niigata (Japan), where *The Arch of Life* became a permanent work. A solo show by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov opens at the Tate Modern in London in October 2016.