

ILYA & EMILIA KABAKOV

Opening: Saturday 23 May 2009, Via del Castello 11, 6pm–12 midnight

Until 29 August 2009, Tuesday–Saturday, 2–7pm

Galleria Continua is pleased to announce a new personal exhibition by Ilya & Emilia Kabakov.

The father of Russian Conceptualism and a doyen of contemporary art, Ilya Kabakov is internationally recognized as the most important living Russian artist and as having been one of the most influential figures on the 20th-century art scene.

Right from the outset, Ilya Kabakov's poetics centred on an analysis of the social condition in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period, exploring conditions of life and their institutional paradigms. Since 1988 he has worked together with his wife, Emilia. Over the years they have realized projects for some of the world's most prestigious exhibition spaces, including, to mention just a few: the Russian Pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993; a solo show at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg in 2004; two personal shows, *The House of Dreams* at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2005, and *Orbis Pictus* at the Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo in 2008. Group shows include: *Magicians de la Terre* at the Musée National d'art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (1989), Documenta IX, Kassel (1992), a large-scale historic exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (2005), plus the 47th, 50th and 52nd Venice Biennali. In 2008, besides the Biennale of Singapore, there was *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Retrospective, An Alternative History of Art and other projects*, the most extensive retrospective ever realized in Russia by the artists.

Kabakov defines himself as a "witness to a buried civilization", the atmosphere of which he has tried to revive through over 160 "Total Installations". In these installations, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov reproduce classic environments from beyond the Iron Curtain: an abandoned school, interiors of flats and hospitals, a communal kitchen. The bare, minimal spaces, dimly lit and made from simple materials, give concrete form to an autobiographical story in which art and life come together and where the historical focus provides an opportunity to reflect on the future of art and humankind.

The exhibition has been arranged by the artists in such a way that viewers come first to a series of sculptures and installations and then to *The Blue Carpet* in the former stalls area of the gallery.

The work reproduces a rather singular domestic environment – a room covered by an enormous blue carpet surrounded by a series of small pictures delimiting the perimeter. The welcoming atmosphere and soft lighting invite viewers to feel at ease in the space and encourage a state of calm meditation. The elements making up the installation (the dominant presence of colour, the volumes of the room and the line delineated by the pictures framing the floor, becoming a decorative motif) are arranged by the Kabakovs in such a way that the visitor can view them both as a whole and in terms of specific individual details. In turn, these details reveal unexpected worlds, as revealed in the text with which the artists accompany the work: "... More than anything I love to lie on the floor, but no one knows about it. ... I lie on my side, and I look at what is surrounding me. ... I love to examine the tiniest objects in front of me: balls of dust, used matches that all turn into a mysterious landscape, and I myself feel like a

giant in it. But most of all I love to lie on my back and look up; the walls disappear, my imagination takes me away. ... Once I saw that others also like to do the same thing as I do. I saw on a color postcard such a multitude of people in an Istanbul mosque... lying in the most varied poses, dreamily gazing upward, on an enormous carpet that looked like a dark blue swimmingpool. "

Ilya Kabakov was born in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine) in 1933. He started his artistic career in the 1950s as an illustrator of children's books. An activist and theorist of the Moscow Conceptual Artists movement, in 1972 he formed the Sretensky Boulevard group together with a circle of Moscovite intellectuals who gravitated towards his studio. In 1987 he left the Soviet Union, first for Graz in Austria, and then to the United States, where he now lives together with his wife Emilia.

Emilia Kabakov was born in Dnepropetrovsk in 1945. After studying at university and taking a diploma in music, she emigrated to Israel in 1973. In 1975 she moved to New York, where she worked as a curator and gallery owner until, towards the end of the 80s, she began working together with Ilya Kabakov.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's works are held in the collections of some of the world's most important museums: the MOMA in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Kunstmuseum of Berne and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

**For further information about the exhibition and for photographic material:
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