

ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH
A TRIBUTE TO ILYA KABAKOV

Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice
14 April – 14 July 2024

During all these years we have worked with ideas based around the imaginary and utopia.

We sincerely believe that art, which occupies an important place in our culture, can change the way we think, dream, act and reflect. It can change the way we live.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov

The **Fondazione Querini Stampalia** of Venice and the **Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Art Foundation** are paying **tribute to Ilya Kabakov**, one year after his passing, on occasion of the 60th Venice Art Biennale.

The **Ilya and Emilia Kabakov 'Between Heaven and Earth'. A tribute to Ilya Kabakov** exhibition at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice from 14 April to 14 July 2024, **curated by Chiara Bertola**, is commemorating the master of conceptual art, the genius who experimented with poetry and the expressive potential of materials in the exhibition space, a man who was celebrated as the most important twentieth-century artist born in the USSR who became a naturalised US citizen.

The exhibition was made possible thanks to the contribution of the Thaddaeus Ropac, Lia Rumma, Sprovieri, and Continua galleries and thanks to the support of ONDA.

For the first time **some historic installations by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov dialogue with the antique rooms and art collections of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia Museum**, becoming *site-specific* works created for the space that houses them. This is the nature of the Querini Stampalia's contemporary art programme 'Conserving the Future', which envisages a dialogue with a past to safeguard and a future to plan, and which involves the institution, the public and the artists. The latter act as ferrymen and women, who reveal fractures and invent connections. They show something that otherwise risked being lost or never seen again.

Each of the installations is a carefully choreographed *mise-en-scène* of objects, texts, lights, and sounds which immerse the viewer in the work of art in accordance with the concept of the *total installation* that has been so important to Ilya and Emilia Kabakov since the early 1980s.

It is also an opportunity to commemorate the father of *Where is Our Place?* First installed at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in 2003, the incredible installation – whose subject is still so relevant today – garnered great critical and public acclaim and positioned the institution as one of the key places for contemporary art in Venice.

“Together with Emilia Kabakov, it was decided that we could place some of their historic installations in the rooms of the Querini family house museum: in the museum space they represent accidents, obstacles, capable of making the viewers watch out, of getting them to activate their vision and think about memory and the past, and thus the present, with greater awareness” writes **Chiara Bertola** in the catalogue.

She goes on to state, *“In Ilya Kabakov’s work the theme of the room is a recurring one: it represents a place in which to be protected from the other, from the neighbour, it represents fleeing a difficult existence, creating and constructing distance from reality. The installations form a route that reveals unexpected worlds to the visitor; they undermine the relationship between our gaze and everyday reality, pushing us into an alternative space in which the world we know is granted a second life”*.

The project has **two major themes**: the theme of the *accident* that happens in the museum and which reveals truths that would otherwise be ignored, and the theme of fleeing reality through art and the imagination. The viewer is catapulted into an unreal and paradoxical world in which the everyday is redeemed and overcome. The work thus becomes a paradigm of a reality to rise above through the practice of an alternative thinking that questions every fact, event and situation.

The Kabakovs’ work leads us on an expressive spiral in which sense and non-sense, past and present, truth and lies, real and surreal, earth and sky, are inextricably interwoven. It is the fulfilment of an interior need, and what emerges is that everyone can create an additional, dreamlike, spiritual, creative life. **Ilya Kabakov** wrote in 1992: *“This is what I truly believe: it is impossible to live in this world. It is impossible to change life, it is an attempt doomed to failure. Nevertheless, we must do everything in our power to distance ourselves from this life by living before we die. For example, flying above the earth and only landing every now and then”*.

These are **the historic installations** chosen to pay tribute to Ilya Kabakov:

The Eminent Direction of Thoughts, 2017

The viewer enters a dark narrow room where the beam of a single ceiling lightbulb illuminates a chair which has brightly coloured threads emanating from it that head upwards towards obscurity. The meaning of this installation is somehow ‘mystical’ and can only be understood if you manage to separate the space in which it is exhibited from the rest of the museum. This is what we define a *total installation*.

Concert for a Fly (Chamber Music), 1986

At the centre of the installation a paper fly hangs from the ceiling. Twelve empty chairs and lecterns are placed in a circle around it. On each lectern there is a white sheet of paper with drawings, texts and musical scores. Everything acts as a focal point, directing our gaze upwards. The viewer waits in a state of anticipation, as if at the beginning of a concert.

What is the fly doing suspended at the centre of the circle? Is it getting ready to conduct the musicians once they have taken their places? Or has the concert already started, and it is suspended in the air, immobile, enraptured by the lovely music and completely oblivious, thinking that the concert is being held for it, maybe even in its honour?

I Will Return on April 12..., 1990

At the centre of the room there is a large sheet of packing paper with a dark blue sky covered in white clouds painted on it in oils. The 'sky' spread on the floor is in front of the viewer. Alongside it is an old chair with a jacket, trousers, a shirt, an undershirt, underpants and socks neatly folded on the back of it and, under the chair, a pair of old boots; in a word, the simple outfit of a person who has undressed and...? How often would we like to take flight from the earth with no planes, balloons or even ordinary wings!

Flight, from the earth to the sky, does not just represent the movement from the confines between reality and the imagination, but is also a reminder of Soviet communist society. A society which keeps its people trapped in the confines between the lived community and the dreamed individuality, in which the imagination is often the only means to withstand a depressing reality.

The Fallen Chandelier, 1997

The work consists of two elements that are connected both spatially and in terms of meaning: a chandelier lies on the floor with various pieces of shattered glass around it and a 'snapped' metal cable and electric wire dangle from the ceiling. The fallen chandelier, with its sad murmuring, makes the words of Blaise Pascal resound in us: "*We remain human as long as we preserve our memory*".

This project speaks about humanity and romanticism, and about their gradual disappearance from our daily life. It also speaks of a time in which human beings, when constructing their homes and workplaces, always included beauty and sensitivity in everything they did, so that the two elements constantly surrounded them.

How to Meet an Angel, 2003

The video installation screened outside Palazzo Querini Stampalia, on the wall of the neighbouring church, animates a drawing by the Kabakovs in which a figure climbs a wooden ladder towards the sky where he meets an angel who appears from among the clouds.

The meeting between the man and the angel happens through the light screened onto the building wall, whose architecture dialogues with the drawn landscape. The work anticipates and denounces the loss of spirituality and the supremacy of materialism, but at the same time exhorts the individual to moral improvement, absolute awareness and spiritual realisation.

Fondazione Querini Stampalia

The Fondazione Querini Stampalia is a unique cultural entity in Venice. A splendid palace in the heart of the city, it contains important historical collections and works by great contemporary architects.

Ancient and modern, past and present are placed in constant juxtaposition to one another: in the eighteenth-century museum home, in the vast library and in the spaces redesigned by

Carlo Scarpa, Mario Botta, Valeriano Pastor and Michele De Lucchi. Numerous echoes of its history are reinterpreted in a contemporary light. This is the Querini Stampalia's mission: conserving the future!

Conserving the Future is the Fondazione's decades-long contemporary art programme, created and curated by Chiara Bertola. For over twenty-five years the project has asked contemporary artists to relate to and dialogue with the spaces of the Fondazione, drawing inspiration from them to create new expressions through vital experimentation.

With the conviction that the most interesting and sensitive artists can help us not only understand the times we are living in but also to see our past in a different light, they are asked to relate to this condition of relativity, creating site-specific projects.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Art Foundation

The Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Art Foundation was established by the two artists to promote the creation and exhibition of art, public appreciation and interest in art, and the maintenance of a permanent collection of works. It fulfills its mission by supporting artistic scholarship, education events and exhibits, and grants for organizations similarly dedicated to cultural understanding and exchange.

Technical details

Title

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov
Between Heaven and Earth
A tribute to Ilya Kabakov

Curated by

Chiara Bertola

Supported by

Fondazione Querini Stampalia and the Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Art Foundation

With the contribution of the following galleries

Thaddaeus Ropac, Lia Rumma, Sprovieri, Continua

With the support of

ONDA

Where

Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice

When

14 April – 14 July 2024

Opening times

Tuesday – Sunday, 10am – 6pm. Closed Mondays

Tickets

The exhibition visit is included in the entry ticket to the Fondazione Querini Stampalia:

Full price €15; reductions €12

On Sundays, Venice City Council residents enjoy free entry

Fondazione Querini Stampalia onlus

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