

lissitzky utopia and reality kabakov

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General information exhibition

Lissitzky – Kabakov, Utopia and Reality

A meeting of two Russian giants

01.12.2012 – 28.04.2013

The Van Abbemuseum asked the artists Ilya (1933) and Emilia (1945) Kabakov to organise an exhibition of their work together with that of El Lissitzky (1890-1941), as guest curators. For the *Lissitzky – Kabakov* exhibition they made an extensive selection from their own work and that of Lissitzky. It is the first time that the oeuvres of these famous 20th-century Russian artists are being presented together. Bringing together Lissitzky and the Kabakovs completes the circle which started with the revolutions in the early years of the twentieth century and finished with the upheavals of 1989. The confrontation between early Soviet art and that of the later Soviet era presents opportunities for a better understanding of the art and culture of the intervening period. In addition to works from the collection of the Kabakovs and the Van Abbemuseum, there will be loans from the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Guggenheim Museum in New York and Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as from a number of private collections. Some of the Kabakovs' installations have also been recreated for this occasion. The exhibition is part of NLR2013, the Dutch – Russian year and travels to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Multimedia Art Museum (MAMM) in Moscow in 2013.

The opening takes place on Saturday 1 December, between 15.00 and 19.00. At 15.30 there will be opening speech by amongst others Dr. Marc Jansen (Russia expert, guest researcher, affiliated with the department of East-European History, European Studies, University of Amsterdam), and poems by Mayakovsky will be recited.

Traditionally the artist has been seen as someone who holds up a mirror to the society he lives in. But art is also assigned the role of showing us a new world. In this exhibition these two functions of art are played out against each other in many different ways. Lissitzky's enthusiasm for the revolution and his involvement in the new social order is present everywhere in the exhibition. In contrast, we constantly come across the Kabakovs' melancholic but also humoristic representation and interpretation of the conditions in the late Soviet era. The

mother country of both the artists had become a place where the rhetoric of progress had run aground on the everyday reality of life in that society. Nevertheless, it proved possible to re-emerge from this twilight zone.

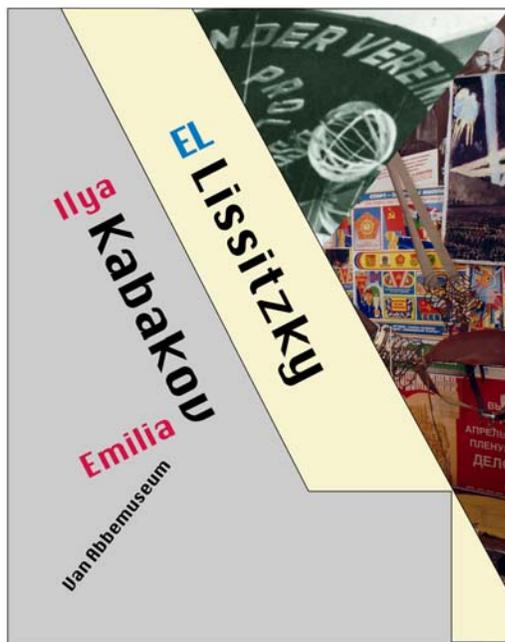
Two sides of the Soviet coin

The *Lissitzky – Kabakov* exhibition will take place on two floors in the new building of the Van Abbemuseum and is designed by the Kabakovs. The first floor and the seven halls on the second floor each have their own theme and

a different aspect of the works of Lissitzky and Kabakov is compared every time. Each room is divided in two; one part is decorated with geometric patterns in avant-garde colours (red, white and black), exhibiting the work of Lissitzky. The work of the Kabakovs can be seen in the other part of the room painted in colours which were used in public spaces in the Soviet Union in the 1980s: a brown line on the wall with a blue edge. Some of the important works in the Kabakovs' oeuvre that form part of this exhibition include *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (1985, collection Centre Pompidou, Paris), *In the Communal Kitchen* (1991, courtesy Regina Gallery Moscow) and a newer version of the wagon entitled *Let's go Girls* (2004, collection Ilya and Emilia Kabakov). The existing Lissitzky collection of the Van Abbemuseum is supplemented with key works from the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and new models based on designs by Lissitzky, such as the *Lenin Tribune* and the Red Star for the *Pressa Exhibition* of 1928. The lives of the artists themselves are represented in a large mural designed by Ilya Kabakov, and their personal history is interwoven in the larger (art) historical stories of which they form part.

Catalogue

There is a detailed catalogue available in Dutch and English for the exhibition, with an in-depth article by the Kabakov expert Professor Boris Groys, an imaginary interview with Lissitzky by Professor John Milner, an expert in avant garde Russian art, and an interview with Ilya and Emilia Kabakov by the artist Anton Vidokle.



Cover catalogue, design Ilya Kabakov

All the works in the exhibition are shown in colour, arranged in accordance with the themes in the exhibition. Finally, the book contains an illustrated image biography of the artists.

Mediation

In cooperation with different partners there will be a broad range of educational activities for the *Lissitzky – Kabakov* exhibition. These activities offer an entrance to all visitors to both the exhibited art as well as the society from which it originates.

Amongst other things there will be a special mobile website about the Soviet era available for visitors at home on the computer, in the museum with their own smartphone or by means of the available iPads. They will be introduced to the Soviet era and can choose their own way in via different speakers. For example, Henk Kern (lecturer in Russian history at the University of Leiden) talks about the political and social history of Russia. For personal experiences, one can listen to seven citizens from former Soviet states who can take them along with them in their stories. The third, more intuitive way of getting to know the Soviet era is by listening to the soundscape made by music expert Frank de Munnik. The Van Abbemuseum organises a special programme of Soviet films in cooperation with the EYE Amsterdam film museum.

In a programme for children and families Lissitzky's *Figurines* are coming to life in a DIY tour. From January these figures will be present in person during the special theatre tour through the halls. There will also be courses, a concert and workshops provided by the artist group Connecting.

The three-monthly agenda of the museum, the *Radically Yours*, is almost entirely dedicated to *Lissitzky – Kabakov* and acts as an exhibition guide as well.

Curators

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Charles Esche.
Project leader: Willem Jan Renders.

Subsidisers

The exhibition is made possible with the support of Ammodo, BankGiro Loterij, Mondriaan Fund, SNS REAAL Fonds, Turing Foundation and VSB Fonds.

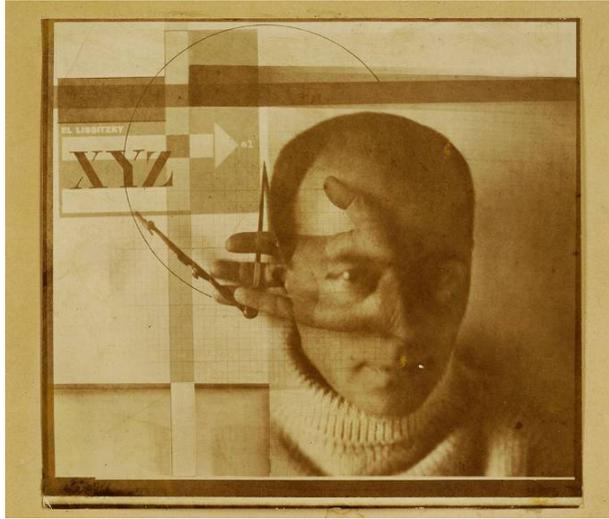


NLRF2013

The exhibition is part of NLRF2013, the Dutch – Russian year and travels to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Multimedia Art Museum (MAMM) in Moscow in 2013.



Short biography Lissitzky and Kabakov



El Lissitzky, *The Constructor (Self portrait)*, 1924. Collection Van Abbemuseum. Photo Peter Cox

El Lissitzky (Potsjinek 1890- Moscow 1941)

The Van Abbemuseum holds one of the largest and most important collections of work by the Russian artist El Lissitzky, one of the most dynamic artists of his time. Lissitzky is an interesting example for contemporary artists; in addition to his own artistic vision, he was very much involved with what was happening in the world. Lissitzky was a painter, a graphic artist and a designer of architecture, furniture, books and posters. He was a writer, a photographer and an indefatigable traveller. He was, moreover, a veritable mediator between the cultures of Soviet Russia and Western Europe. He collaborated closely with Kazimir Malevich, Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, László Moholy-Nagy, Theo van Doesburg and many other people, including architects, theatre directors and filmmakers from across Europe. Lissitzky's enthusiasm for the revolution and his involvement with the new social order is very much present in the exhibition.



Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, courtesy the artists

Ilya (Dnepropetrovsk, 1933) and Emilia (Dnepropetrovsk, 1945) Kabakov

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov are Russian-born, American-based (Long Island, New York) artists that collaborate on environments which fuse elements of the everyday with those of the conceptual. While their work is deeply rooted in the Soviet social and cultural context in which the Kabakovs came of age, their work still attains a universal significance. Unlike many other underground artists Kabakov became a member of the Association of Russian Artists in 1965. He worked thirty years in Moscow - from the fifties to the late eighties. In his career, he has produced a large and varied body of work, paintings, drawings, installations, books and theories. His work is sold in prestigious galleries in all major cities of the world and in the beginning of this century he was mentioned as one of the "ten greatest living artists" by ArtNews. The Kabakovs work has been shown in such venues as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) New York, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Documenta IX, at the Whitney Biennial in 1997 and the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg among others. In 1993 they represented Russia at the 45th Venice Biennale with their installation *The Red Pavilion*. The Kabakovs have also completed many important public commissions throughout Europe and have received a number of honours and awards, including the Innovation Prize, Moscow in 2011, the Oskar Kokoschka Preis, Vienna, in 2002 and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Paris, in 1995. The *Lissitzky – Kabakov* exhibition is the perfect opportunity to introduce the general public to his work, including several new artworks as well as the exhibition design he developed specifically for this exhibition.

Director Charles Esche about *Lissitzky – Kabakov*

"This unique exhibition and publication brings together these two significant artistic figures in a series of radical juxtapositions. Navigating the exhibition, viewers are constantly confronted with polarities where early radicalism and projection meets later introspection and reflection. Where one looks forward, the other looks back – both trying to understand how an artist needs to position him or herself in relation to the world around them. It is the extraordinary tale of the tragic adventure of the Soviet Union that this exhibition seeks to illuminate. It comes to us today as an exhortation from history, to understand but also to be liberated from its shadows and to examine it in all its aspects, under the full glare of the exhibition lights.

Lissitzky-Kabakov, Utopia and Reality fits perfectly into the recent policy and profile of the Van Abbemuseum as a cultural institution that seeks to generate new possibilities from out of the modern heritage that we have in our collections and archives. Ilya and Emilia visited the museum first during the World Cup of 2010 and we spent a memorable day both looking at the collection and watching football. Very rapidly, they were taken by the extent of the museum's collection of materials by El Lissitzky, of which the largest quantity outside Russia is held in Eindhoven. Their fascination with this material and knowledge of its origins led very quickly to a spontaneous proposal, embraced on both sides, to put the two artistic oeuvres in direct dialogue. The enthusiasm and commitment with which both Emilia and Ilya have approached the curatorial process has been extraordinary and I would like to thank them most sincerely for all their efforts in making this exhibition happen."

Van Abbemuseum

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is one of the first public museums for contemporary art to be established in Europe. The museum's collection of around 2700 works of art includes key works and archives by Lissitzky, Picasso, Kokoschka, Chagall, Beuys, McCarthy, Daniëls and Körmeling. The museum has an experimental approach towards art's role in society. Openness, hospitality and knowledge exchange are important. We challenge ourselves and our visitors to think about art and its place in the world, covering a range of subjects, including the role of the collection as a cultural 'memory' and the museum as a public site. International collaboration and exchange have made the Van Abbemuseum a place for creative cross-fertilisation and a source of surprise, inspiration and imagination for its visitors and participants.

Van Abbemuseum

Bilderrijkslaan 10
Eindhoven, The Netherlands
www.vanabbemuseum.nl

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday 11:00 – 17:00
Every first Thursday of the month the museum is open until 21:00

Entrance

Adults: € 10,00 / Groups of 10 persons or more, senior citizens: € 8,00
Students; holders of the Dutch young people's cultural pass (CJP): € 5
Every first Thursday of the month the museum is open until 21:00, entrance to the museum is free from 17:00

For the editors:

For more information and photographs, please visit:
www.vanabbemuseum.nl/en/press

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