

EMILIA KABAKOV INTERVIEWED BY LISA LE FEUVRE

The Russian-born New York-based artists Ilya & Emilia Kabakov have worked together for nearly 30 years. Here Emilia discusses the failure of utopianism, the importance of memory, and installation as an expanded form of painting.



Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's exhibition 'Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future' is at Tate Modern, London to 28 January.

LISA LE FEUVRE is the inaugural executive director of the Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson Foundation.

Lisa Le Feuvre: You and Ilya have worked together since 1989 and, as well as the dialogue and collaboration between you both in your work, there is always a built-in invitation to share ideas. This dialogue is in both the human encounter and the relationship between the work and the space that holds it. Like any invitation, though, it can be accepted, refused, turned away from – it doesn't seem to matter which route is chosen, what matters is the encounter and the dialogue.

Emilia Kabakov: All who experience one of our installations become participants. I usually try not to talk about collaboration because it is very difficult to define. Ilya has been a professionally trained artist since he was a child. I am a professionally trained

musician. If I describe what I do, I am often pinpointed as some kind of business manager. If you understand the work, immediately you will know that Ilya will not choose a life with a businessperson – this would be impossible.

When you live with somebody you get used to the person, and even if you do not have something in common often you stay there for many reasons. For an artist to stay there are a lot of emotions involved. Our artistic collaboration is based on emotions, love, understanding, respect and, of course, trust in each other. Love comes first and an understanding of the work comes second. We also play the role of the viewer – the outsider – for each other. This gives us a possibility to look at the work through the eyes of not a partner or husband or wife, but from the position of the 'other'. From the very beginning, Ilya's work has involved different levels of understanding of knowledge, and of the emotions of others. It could be the life of his mother, or of an unnamed person who is suffering in life for many different reasons.

Telling Stories

Ilya Kabakov
The Fallen
Chandelier 1997