

ILONA—K ARTSPACE, A NEW CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY, SET TO OPEN THIS SEPTEMBER

In September 2020, the 2nd floor of Moscow’s Mercury Tower will be transformed into a brand new exhibition space, conveniently located in one of Moscow’s prime business centers just a short walk from the White House government office building. The ILONA-K artspace will occupy the 40th floor, and will offer a breathtaking view of the Russian capital. Ilona Kesaeva, the gallery’s founder, is a graduate of the London School of Economics and Sotheby’s Institute of Art. Ilona is the daughter of Stella Kesaeva, a collector and philanthropist, as well as the founder and president of the Stella Art Foundation. Ilona’s father, Igor Kesaev, is the owner of the Mercury Group and also serves as its president.

“Our mission is to stimulate and expand public perception of contemporary art in Russia and make it accessible to the local, as well as the international, community. We aim to support and promote a diverse array of the Russian artists worldwide and facilitate the cultural interaction between Russia and the rest of the global. The ILONA-K artspace values collaboration and dialogue and believes that it can make a powerful contribution to a contemporary art scene that is united by a common passion for art,” says Ilona Kesaeva, the founder of the new gallery.

Aslan Ktsoev, general manager of the Mercury City Tower, shares his thoughts about the location of the ILONA-K artspace. “Experience shows us that a skyscraper can only achieve some kind of harmony when it is filled with art. For example, the new Skyscraper Museum inside the New York’s Empire State building hosts numerous exhibitions and a great variety of educational programs. In addition, there’s the Mori Museum on the top floor of the Mori Tower in central Tokyo. I am delighted that the 500 sq.m. space on the 2nd floor of the Tower and the ILONA-K artspace on the 40th floor will now be home to compelling contemporary art, and I am sure that its visitors will appreciate one of the grandest panoramic views in the city.”

The gallery’s first major exhibit is a large-scale retrospective show entitled “Drowning by Numbers,” featuring the work of the celebrated artistic duo of Olga and Oleg Tatarintsev. The *perestroika* years in Russia were the catalyst for the Tatarintsevs’ career path and you can see the significance of social issues in their work, as well as a profound exploration of the relationship between art and power. The Tatarintsevs tend to lean towards conceptualism in their artistic practice, but they are also evidently fascinated by the plasticity of form. This duality enables the artists to transfer pressing social problems from the political sphere and project them onto one dominated by artistic form. It may be important to note that in the works of this duo you can sense a dialogue with the non-objective artists of the early Soviet avant-garde. Moreover, it is clear that the Tatarintsevs are also conversing with a number of different literary and historical traditions in the 19th and 20th centuries. Whatever the theme or medium they have chosen, the Tatarintsevs’ work has a singular style and exceptional aesthetic quality.

The “Drowning by Numbers” exhibits encompasses two separate spaces, a topography which gives the artists a unique opportunity to tie together the autonomous and yet interconnected parts of the exhibition. The gigantic exhibition space on the 2nd floor will showcase projects that the artists have created over the last 10 years, allowing visitors a view of the artists’ stylistic evolution as well as a definitive array of the themes that have been central to the Tatarintsevs’ oeuvre over time. At the very start of the exhibit, visitors will encounter “Beyond Borders” (2018), a complex but balanced combination of text, type and color. Further along, there are multicolored sculptural objects, including “The Persistence of Memory” (2014), “Burden” (2018) and “Camouflage” (2018). “The Nature of Silence” (2017) and “The Gene of Altruism” (2018-20) are largely perceived as more elaborate installations, dedicated to people who fearlessly fought for their ideas and beliefs under totalitarianism. Similarly, “Instead of Music” (2015) draws inspiration from the ideological manifestos of the Stalinist era and a point in time that marked the beginning of the revolt against formalism in the Soviet Union.

It may be important to point out that the exhibition will also feature works on canvas, included a series by Olga Tatarintseva entitled “Line of Sound” (2010). This series is devoted to Wassily Kandinsky, who served as inspiration for the artist. Notably in these pieces, Olga quotes the text of Richard Wagner’s libretto “Lohengrin,” and superimposes bits of it onto the rhythm of a visual melody. The artist uses the same approach for paintings in a second series called “I Am Not Just Saying This” (2020). In order to



avoid direct parallels between their previous work and their current creations, the Tatarintsevs intend to display only new pieces realized specifically for this exhibition.

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The ILONA-K artspace, located on the 40th floor of the Mercury City Tower, will exhibit projects by Olga and Oleg Tatarintsev that were created specifically for this opening. The centerpiece of this part of the show is the eponymous “Drowning by Numbers,” a meditation on the threats, both imaginary and real, that modern civilization must cope with. In such a world, lethal weapons, often considered the final argument in the resolution of political disputes and internal wars, have been rendered powerless in face of an invisible foe – a dangerous virus, which ruthlessly and silently kills hundreds of thousands of people around the globe. The Tatarintsevs aptly chose an epigraph to their installation from Svetlana Aleksievich’s 1997 book, *Chernobyl Prayer*. In the book, Aleksievich writes, “in the Zone and around the Zone... the countless amount of military equipment astounded me. Soldiers were marching with brand new machine guns and carrying all their own gear. For some reason, I tend to remember not the helicopters or armored personnel carriers, but these submachine guns ... Weapons ... A man with a gun in this zone ... Who could he shoot at and from whom could he possibly protect someone? From physics ... From invisible particles ... Shoot at the contaminated land or a tree?...” On the wall of the exhibition space, sheets of paper printed with disappearing numbers underscore the human toll of the virus, and stand as one of the highlights of the exhibition. They are numbers taken from death counts of the current pandemic, statistics that Olga and Oleg Tatarintsev have collected since the day it began.

Another project in “Drowning by Numbers” points at the evolution of Olga and Oleg’s artistic experiments at the intersection of painting, text and sound. This time, they turn their attention to excerpts from the diary of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and to the musical creations of his friend, the composer Josef Labor. Olga has worked with Adobe Audition software to create a visual representation of these diary excerpts.

The “Drowning by Numbers” exhibit will be included in the official VIP program of the Cosmoscow 2020 international art fair.

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OLGA TATARINTSEVA (b.1967, Staraya Ushitsa, Ukraine) and **OLEG TATARINTSEV** (b. 1966, Baku, Azerbaijan) graduated from the Lviv National Academy of Arts in 1992 and have been living and working in Moscow since 1993. The artists participated in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2009-2017); International Biennale of Contemporary Ceramics (Vallauris, France, 2014); the special project of the 3rd Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art (Yekaterinburg, 2015); the parallel program of the European Biennial of Contemporary Art Manifesta 11 (Zurich, 2016); the 6th Aluminium International Biennial of Contemporary Art (Baku, Azerbaijan, 2019).

Both Olga and Oleg Tatarintsev had solo shows at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (2011), Rappaz Museum (Basel, Switzerland, 2013), pop/off/art gallery (Moscow, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2018), Nadja Brykina Gallery (Zurich, 2016), and at the Galerie nomade Alexandra De Viveiros (Paris, 2019). They have also taken part in group shows in Russia, Ukraine, France, Switzerland, Spain, Poland, Germany, Chile and the US. The artists’ works may be seen in the collections of the Ludwig Museum in the Russian Museum (St. Petersburg), Rappaz Museum (Basel), Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Moscow), Magnelli Museum (Vallauris), National Centre for Contemporary Art (Moscow), Novy Museum (Saint Petersburg), Yekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts, All-Russian Decorative Art Museum (Moscow), National Museum of Ukrainian Pottery (Opishnya), Yelagin Island Palace-Museum of Russian Decorative and Applied Art and Interiors from the 18th-20-th centuries (Saint Petersburg), Museum of Decorative and Applied Art of the Saint Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design, Maximilian Voloshin Museum (Koktebel), Lviv National Academy of Arts. Olga and Oleg’s artworks are also held in numerous prestigious public and private collections worldwide.

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OLGA AND OLEG TATARINTSEV ‘DROWNING BY NUMBERS’ (6+)
ILONA-KARTSPACE 07.09. – 30.11.2020

Mercury City Tower, 1st Krasnogvardeysky drive, 15, Moscow, Russia. Monday-Friday, 11 am–9pm.
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