

Artist Ilya Kabakov Dies at Age 89

May 29, 2023



ya Kabakov at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2017. **Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

On Saturday the artist Ilya Kabakov passed away, “surrounded by his loved ones, just shy of his 90th year,” his wife and collaborator Emilia announced online.

Kabakov is considered one of the most important artists of the former Soviet Union. Born in what was called Dnipropetrovsk (then Ukrainian SSR, now Dnipro, Ukraine), he was evacuated with his family to Samarkand during WWII, fortuitously where the Leningrad Academy of Art had also moved. He studied there until he and his family returned to Moscow after the war. He graduated from the Surikov State Art Institute with a specialty in graphic design and book illustration. He joined the Union of Artists in 1959 and was accepted as a full member in 1962. For the next 20 years Kabakov worked officially as a book illustrator.

Unofficially he and a group of artists living on Sretensky Bulvar in Moscow and mostly working as illustrators and graphic artists joined together to discuss art and, eventually, show their “unofficial” art. Kabakov began to work on series that combined texts, illustrations or realistic depictions, and abstract forms, textures and colors. Kabakov created albums — illustrated “stories” about fictional people, often with banal lives and depicted in impossible

situations, sometimes floating or flying in the air, with texts — absurd in these contexts — painted in perfect Soviet-era school-child cursive. Eventually some of the Sretensky group and Kabakov became known as the Moscow conceptualists.

Kabakov's albums — more than 50 in total — led to installations: enormous creations of rooms, houses, labyrinths, workshops, businesses. In the late 1980s Kabakov began traveling and working abroad, eventually settling on Long Island, New York. His show in New York at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in 1988 included "The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment" — a shabby Soviet apartment room with an enormous hole in the ceiling. The installation and exhibition rocketed Kabakov to international success and changed contemporary art. Since then Kabakov and Emilia, his wife and collaborator, have made more than 150 installations. Most recently, their installations were shown in London, St. Petersburg and at Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery in 2018–2019 in a [show called](#) "Not Everyone Will Be Taken into the Future."

Over the decades Kabakov has received dozens of awards including Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Ministère de la Culture et de la Francophonie, France in 1995 and Commandeur De L'Ordre Des Arts Et Des Lettres, Ministry de la Culture, France in 2014; Medals for Life Achievements in Art from the Moscow Art Academy (2013); and the Gold Medal For Achievements in Art from the National Art Club, New York.

He is considered to be the [highest paid](#) Russian artist. One of his paintings sold at auction for \$5.8mln in 1982, and Roman Abramovich and his partner Dasha Zhukova acquired many of Kabakovs' works for a reported \$60mln.

Emilia Kabakov announced that the family will hold a private funeral service followed by a public memorial service in several weeks and requested that in lieu of flower, charitable donations be made to the [Ship of Tolerance / Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Foundation](#) or the local [public library](#).

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