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## **Perception and Revision of (Soviet-)Russian Art. Ilya Kabakov – an Exceptional Phenomenon**

My PhD research focuses the emergence and the establishing process of Ilya Kabakov's exceptional status within the international art world. To my mind, perceptions of his artistic work are kept in tension by diametrically opposed forces: Kabakov is considered by the Western art world as a kind of stereotype, an epitome of Russian contemporary art. In Russia, on the contrary, dominant is the formulation of his image as a 'rarity', an individual case in the recent history of Russian émigré artists in the West. Indeed, the professional career of the former 'unofficial' Moscow conceptualist begun in the West after his emigration in the late 1980s. Since then, Kabakov has been included in significant curatorial projects as well as in famous museum collections, followed by a growing scope of publications and theoretical reflection on his artistic work. Today, he is one of the most known post-war Russian artists who succeeded to become integral part of the Western narrative of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. His 'typically Russian' installations, paradoxically, had to be historicized and legitimized abroad, and subsequently in post-Soviet Russia.

My paper reveals central mechanisms which have impact on perceptions and (re)valuations of Kabakov's work as well as on the formulation of his exceptional position: 1) art institutional framework and curatorial concepts, 2) intellectual reflections in the context of academic parameters, as well as 3) Kabakov's artistic strategies of steering the discourse are worthy of mention. The interim results (Forum 2014, 2015) are progressing, and further analysis of research questions made more detailed conclusions possible which shed light on contradictory methodological approaches to reassess Kabakov's work. Presenting Kabakov's highly ambivalent appropriation of Soviet art of both the Avant-Garde and Socialist Realism, I suggest to discuss conflicting notions of "Soviet modernism"/ "Socialist modernism", the clarification of which is essential to comprehend Russian (post-Soviet) postmodern art and its inherited cultural legacy. Taken theoretical positions of (mostly Russian) scholars who are familiar with Soviet communist aesthetics as a valid enrichment, Kabakov's artistic work

reveals its potential as medium of the art historical discourse and, in a broader context, as an attempt to reconstruct the fragmented history of Russian art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.