



**The Russian Pavilion
at the 55th International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia**

**June 1 — November 24, 2013
Giardini, Venice**

VADIM ZAKHAROV: *DANAË*

Artist: Vadim Zakharov
Title of the Project: Danaë

Curator: Udo Kittelmann
Commissioner: Stella Kesaeva

Organizers: The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and Stella Art Foundation, Moscow

www.ruspavilion.ru

Venice, May 28, 2013. Vadim Zakharov's *Danaë* project represents Russia at the 55th International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia. Zakharov's installation has united the upper and lower storeys of the Pavilion in a single project for the first time in the building's long history (the Pavilion was built in 1914 by the Russian architect Alexei Shchusev who, ten years later, would also design Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow).

The theme of the installation turns around the ancient Greek myth of Danaë. The myth of Zeus and Danaë has inspired many famous works of art since ancient times, including the picture by Rembrandt, painted in 1636-1647 and kept in the State Hermitage Museum, where it was seriously damaged in 1985 by a man who threw sulphuric acid onto the canvas and slashed it in two places.

Vadim Zakharov: 'The installation has two points for viewing — from above and from below (in the central hall of the Pavilion a large square hole has been made in the ceiling of the lower exhibition space, and an altar rail with cushions for kneeling has been built on the upper floor, around the hole). Kneeling and looking down, we can grasp and feel that we are present at a unique process of materialization of the myth. Through the huge hole in the floor, we fall into another semantic and poetic space, into which golden coins fly from a pyramid ceiling. Below we see women with umbrellas, which protect them from being struck by the coins. The lower hall can only be visited by women. This is not about sexism but merely follows the logic of the anatomical construction of the myth. What is masculine can only fall inside from above, in the form of golden rain. The lower level of the Pavilion is a "cave womb," keeping tranquility, knowledge, and memory intact.'

For the first time in the history of the Russian Pavilion the exhibition is curated by a foreigner — Udo Kittelmann, Director of the Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Prior to the exhibition opening Kittelmann said: 'I am very pleased to accept the challenging task of curating the Russian Pavilion in order to show Vadim Zakharov at the Venice Biennale 2013. This will be the second time I have curated one of the national pavilions. The last occasion was in 2001 when I organized the German Pavilion with German artist, Gregor Schneider. However, there is one rather large difference between then and now. When I curated the German Pavilion, I personally selected the artist, whom I thought would be the most interesting to present in Venice. Now Vadim Zakharov, the artist himself, together with his commissioner Stella Kesaeva, have chosen me to be the curator — a curator who has considered Vadim Zakharov to be one of the most outstanding international artists since we first met in the late 1980s.'

As Kittelmann says: 'The mythological theme of Danaë, as a constantly recurring theme in art from antiquity to the modern age, is given an updated interpretation by Vadim Zakharov in the Russian Pavilion. The Greek myth of the impregnation of Danaë is subjected to numerous readings: a falling shower of gold makes reference to the seduction of Danaë as an allegory for human desire and greed, but also to the corrupting influence of money. Through his artistic staging, Zakharov allows this ancient myth to find a contemporary temporal dimension. Philosophical, sexual, psychological, and cultural fragments become concentrated into a theater-like overall composition throughout the Pavilion rooms. The project has sculptural and pictorial elements and invites active participation by visitors to guarantee the flow of material goods as an ongoing process. In this "Performance in Five Acts," Zakharov presents the significance of the embodiment of myths to a society that no longer lends them any credence.'

"... the time has come to confess our Rudeness, Lust, Narcissism, Demagoguery, Falsehood, Banality, and Greed, Cynicism, Robbery, Speculation, Wastefulness, Gluttony, Seduction, Envy, and Stupidity."

The Pavilion Commissioner Stella Kesaeva shared her impressions from working on the project: 'When I invited Vadim Zakharov to represent Russia at the Venice Biennale, I based my decision on the fact that he is one of the most significant artists working in our country today. But I could not imagine that the *Danaë* project would reveal Vadim Zakharov's talent to me in a new light. I understand how important it was for him to work with Udo Kittelmann, who is not only an excellent curator but also a close friend. A successful combined effort always produces a striking result. I am pleased that our project has won the support of the Russian Ministry of Culture and I look forward to its success in Venice.'

Catalogue

An illustrated catalogue has been compiled for the exhibition edited by Udo Kittelmann (published by Hatje Cantz Verlag). It includes texts by Vadim Zakharov and the Curator of the Metropolitan Museum, Nicholas Cullinan, as well as a foreword by Stella Kesaeva, two conversations between artist and curator, recorded in 2005 and 2013, and 'a manual' created by Udo Kittelmann, which serves as a 'guidebook' to the exhibition.

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The Artist

Vadim Zakharov

Born in Dushanbe in 1959 and now lives and works in Berlin and Moscow.

He is an artist, editor, collector, and archivist of Moscow conceptual art. He participated in exhibitions of unofficial art during the Soviet period (since 1978) and took part in the underground Apt-Art Gallery project in 1982–83. Vadim Zakharov has worked in collaboration with many other artists, including Victor Skersis, Sergei Anufriev, Andrei Monastyrski, Yuri Leiderman and Niklas Nitschke. In 1992 he began publication of the *Pastor* artistic-periodical project and created Pastor Zond Editions. In 2006 he published the book *Moscow Conceptualism*, and in 2008 created the website *Moscow Conceptualism Presented by Vadim Zakharov* (www.conceptualism-moscow.org).

In 2003 Vadim Zakharov created the monument in Frankfurt-am-Main to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of the philosopher Theodor Adorno.

The Curator

Udo Kittelmann

Born in 1958 in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Since fall 2008, Udo Kittelmann has been the Director of the Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. In this position he is responsible for the Alte Nationalgalerie, Neue Nationalgalerie and the Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart — Berlin, as well as the Berggruen Museum, the Sammlung Scharf - Gerstenberg and the Friedrichswerdersche Kirche. Udo Kittelmann worked as a freelance curator from 1987 to 1993. From 1994 to 2001 he was the director of the Kölnischer Kunstverein (Cologne). In 2001, he was the Commissioner of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, where the *Totes Haus u r* project by Gregor Schneider won the Golden Lion award for best national pavilion. Between 2002 and 2008, Udo Kittelmann was the director of the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt.

Udo Kittelmann is the author and editor of various publications and essays on art.

The Commissioner

Stella Kesaeva

Stella Kesaeva is the President of Stella Art Foundation and Commissioner of the Russian Pavilion at the International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2011, 2013 and 2015.

Since the creation of Stella Art Foundation in 2003 Stella Kesaeva has organized about 100 exhibitions in Moscow, Europe, Asia and America. These include *Ruin Russia* at the Scuola dell'arte dei Tiraoro e Battioro (2007) and *That Obscure Object of Art* at the Ca' Rezzoniko (2009) both as part of the Collateral Events programme at the Venice Biennale. She has also realized a number of partner projects with major museums, including the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (2009), where she presented *That Obscure Object of Art* (2009), the *In Situ* exhibition by Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich, and Boris Orlov's *Circle of Heroes* (2010).

Stella Kesaeva's museum projects in Russia include Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's '*Incident in the Museum*' and *Other Installations* at the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2004). She has also organized *Mapplethorpe's Rooms* at the Stella Art Foundation space in Moscow and *Vadim Zakharov. 25 Years on One Page* at the State Tretyakov Gallery.

Stella Kesaeva works closely with the musical director and conductor Valery Gergiev. In 2008 she helped to organise the Russian premiere of Bill Viola's production of Richard Wagner's opera, *Tristan and Isolde* at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg.

Stella Art Foundation

Stella Art Foundation is a non-profit organization set up in Moscow in November 2003 on the initiative of Stella Kesaeva in order to support contemporary art. The Foundation has carried out about 100 projects by Russian and foreign artists both in Russia and abroad. The priority of the Foundation is support and research in the field of conceptual art. The Foundation has a collection of more than 1000 works of art from the 20th and start of the 21st centuries.

www.safmuseum.org

VADIM ZAKHAROV: DANAË

INVENTORY

RUSSIAN PAVILION

3 PARABOLIC ANTENNAS

1 LADDER

1 SADDLE

50 KILOS PEANUTS

1 ALTAR RAIL

200,000 COINS

2,000 UMBRELLAS

1 CAVE

1 FOUNTAIN

1 BUCKET

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