



Photo for Memory #9

**YELENA VOROBYEVA &
VIKTOR VOROBYEV**
Provincial Sets

curated by *Marco Scotini*

Opening on October 3rd 2013, at 18.30
The exhibition will run until November 30th, 2013

the artists will be present

Opening times:
Tuesday - Saturday, 15.00 - 19.00
Morning by appointment

Four years after their first duo exhibition in Italy, Yelena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev return to Milan to inaugurate the new season at the Laura Bulian Gallery. For the occasion the well-known Kazakh couple present four major projects dating from between 2002 and 2012, therefore covering the last decade. The exhibition *Provincial Sets*, curated by Marco Scotini, brings together some of the most significant works by these two representatives of the Central Asian art scene.

Creators of photographic databases, archives of documentary images, for years Yelena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev have been compiling a precise record of the negligible details of daily life, local particulars, subjects that are not exactly photogenic. They do it in series, according to typologies, producing not single shots but coherent groupings of images. While seemingly insignificant (and exhibited unmistakably for what they are), these details (of objects, colours and customs) end up revealing many signs of a macro-history as well as new social metaphors and camouflaged symbols of power.

But the Vorobyevs research cannot be defined as an exhaustive or systematic investigation, nor are they intended as such. It is rather an occasional and discontinuous taxonomy to which the “conceptual” practice of photography (and its neutral conventions) turns out to be most suitable when transforming the traces of day-to-day experience into both document and pure sign. Indeed, these groupings of images (*Sunsets and Sunrises, Kazakhstan.Blue period, Bazar and The Fence*) present unique methods of collection and assemblage, where subjects acquire ready-made socio-cultural features on the one hand and (once they have been de-contextualised and repeated) become abstract figures within ornamental sequences on the other.

This double level, like the micro-macro shift in scale, never ceases to interpret the real conditions and fictitious projections (social aspirations, remote nostalgia, new lifestyles) of contemporary post-Soviet reality. Contrary to many other present-day artists, the Vorobyevs' work does not address the socialist past or its memory. It is focused instead (through clear-minded criticism) on the present regime's more or less direct succession to the previous totalitarian power within the ex-Soviet periphery: what the Vorobyevs call “decorative democracy”. Fragmentation, neo-nationalism, the destruction of all sense of community, nostalgia for patriarchal authenticity and

the new turquoise blue of the Kazakh flag, these are all recurring features of neo-totalitarian Central Asian society that the Vorobyevs' images never cease to highlight.

Each one of these projects requires a very long period for the actual gathering of traces and assembling of material. In *The Fence* (2004-2012), what was once the Iron Curtain, on a mental level, is transformed into a real multiplication of the new enclosures of private property which started to appear once again following the *perestrojka*. Sheets of metal bearing socialist emblems are recycled in improvised fences in the outskirts of Almaty and communist red is painted over with Islamic green. Here too, as in *Blue Period*, colour is capable of identifying both the members of a community and metaphysical symbols. Semiotic reconversion betrays an identical political hegemony despite the mutated context.

In the absence of any alternatives, the new social classes of the post-Soviet periphery cannot but face up to the ever tightening grip of the models of Western capitalism. In the cycle *Photo for Memory. If a Mountain Doesn't Go to Mahomet ...* (2002) the Vorobyevs underline the gap between reality and expectations, the people of the steppes are photographed against a background of posters of Western capitals. Features of disillusion and impossibility reach their apex in the multimedia work *Day and Night* (2007) where the horizon is definitively closed off. The classic bars on windows, which from 1991 onwards have become a common feature in Central Asian housing, substitute the rays of the sun (rising and setting) with their metal grid. For the Vorobyevs this system of domestic protection becomes a potent symbol of unconditional imprisonment under the sign of the Eastern sun.

Yelena Vorobyeva was born in 1959 in Nebit-Dag (Turkmenistan). Viktor Vorobyev was born in 1959 in Pavlodar (Kazakhstan). They live in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Selected exhibitions since 2005:

2013: *At the Crossroads: Contemporary Art from Central Asia and the Caucasus*, selling exhibition, Sotheby's London, 03.2013

2012: *Migrasophia*, curated by Sara Raza, Sharjah Museum, Maraya Art Center, UAE

Arsenale 2012, Kyiv International Biennial of Contemporary Art, curated by Nataliia Zabolotna and David Elliott, Kiev, Ukraina

2011: *Between Heaven and Earth. Contemporary Art from the Centre of Asia*, Calvert 22 Foundation, London, UK

2010: Participation at the *International Sculpture Biennale of Carrara*, Italy, curated by Fabio Cavallucci

Rites without Myths, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy

2009: *Making the Interstices*, Central Asia pavilion, 53. International art exhibition, Venice Biennial, Italy

Lonely at the Top # 2, curated by Viktor Misiano, Project of Bart De Baere, Muhka Museum, Antwerpen, Belgium, Kazakhstan. *Blue Period*, Solo show, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy

2008: *Tracing Roads Through Central Asia*, YBCA, San Francisco, USA

2007: *Progressive Nostalgia, Contemporary Art from the Former USSR*, curated by Viktor Misiano, Centro per l'arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato Italy

Time of the Storytellers. Narrative and Distant Gaze in Post-Soviet Art curated by Viktor Misiano, Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, Finland

2006: *Zones Of Contact*, curated by Charles Merewether, 15 biennale contemporary art of Sydney, Australia

Zone Of Risk. Transition, 3rd international exhibition of contemporary art, Bishkek, Kirgizstan

2005: *Art From Central Asia: a Contemporary Archive*, Central Asia pavilion, 51. International art exhibition Venice Biennial, Italy