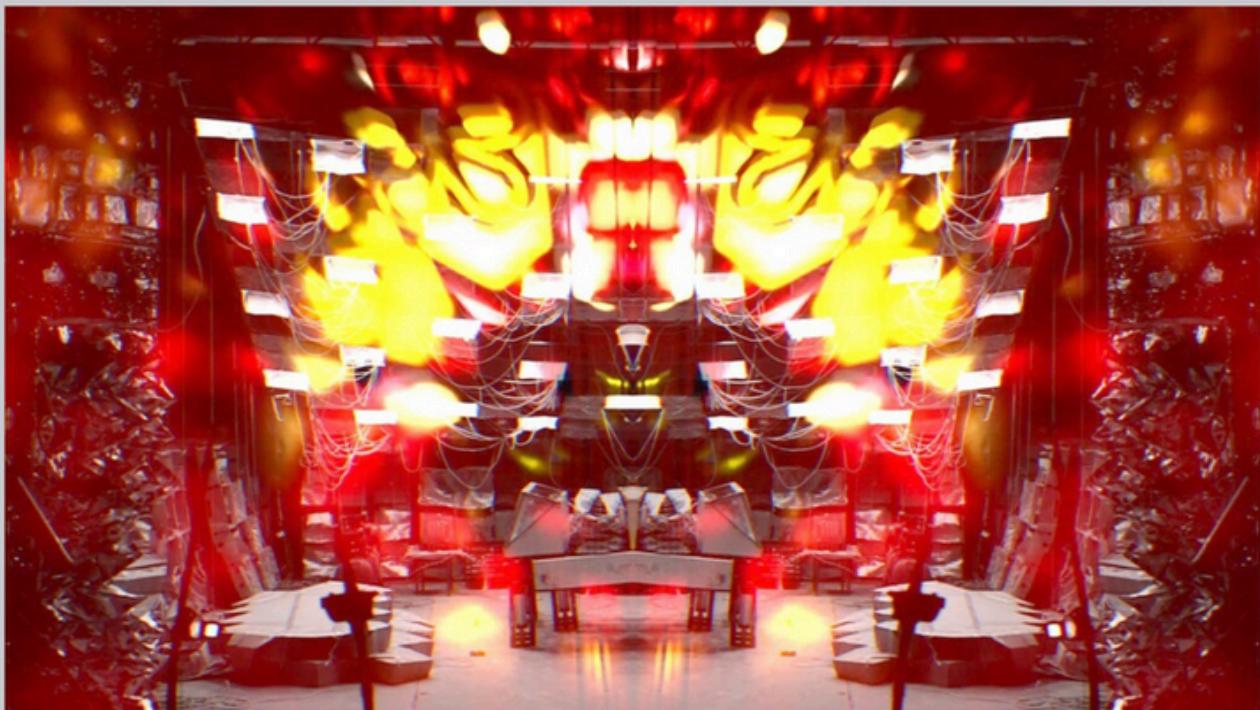


INSTITUTE OF THE COSMOS → COSMIC BULLETIN

Arseny Zhilyaev and Rustem Begenov

"HOW DO YOU TRANSFER AN ENTIRE COUNTRY TO THE FOURTH DIMENSION? THIS IS A TASK"

The following is a conversation between artists Arseny Zhilyaev and Rustem Begenov (ORTA Collective) about the first National Pavilion of Kazakhstan at the 59th Venice Biennale and its agenda of "the New Genius," a school of thought based on the life and art of the avant-garde artist Sergey Kalmykov (1891-1967), who lived in Almaty. The core topic of the conversation is ORTA Collective's elaboration of Kalmykov's "event," which breaks out of traditional rules, hierarchies, and values in life and art. Their pop-up installation created for the Centre for the New Genius in Venice was an improvisational response to the impossibility of receiving the intended installation on time due to the logistical collapse caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The idea behind the ORTA Collective's challenge is as follows: "not a product that we advertised, but only an advertisement of how people can interact creatively and create such projects. And this interaction is also just an advertisement for something that lies even deeper."



Film still from Darya Jumelya, *MASTERPIECE: The Video Manifesto of the 8 Laws of Sergey Kalmykov*, 2022. Photo: ORTA Collective © ORTA Collective / Courtesy of the Artist.

Arseny Zhilyaev: We first learned about Sergey Kalmykov several years ago. Alexander Brener's book of memoirs begins with a hymn to the artist. Brener describes how, at the age of seven, he encountered an enthusiastic crowd on the street of Almaty near the Theater of Young Spectators, watching Sergey Kalmykov's drawing process. Brener did not skimp on compliments, describing Kalmykov as a modernist genius rebelling against the banality of the world. It was impossible to remain indifferent after such a description. We began to search for additional information on the Internet. It turned out that there is quite a lot for a street artist who died in obscurity. There were even several solo exhibitions in the last 10 years and a community of collectors. But all this is somehow not very comparable to the figure himself... Despite his cult status, Kalmykov seems to remain a little-studied figure, marginal even for the space of post-Soviet art. You wrote that you had worked with the artist's archive for about 5 years before developing the exhibition in Venice. Tell us in more detail about who Sergey Kalmykov was and how you became interested in him.

Rustem Begenov: By and large, the fact that Kalmykov received and continues to receive publicity—including via our New Genius project—is a mistake which can only be explained by the Theory of the Fourth Dimension. All these exhibitions of his paintings and drawings are, of course, a misunderstanding—they are "not very comparable to the figure himself," as you say. It's as if one were to say, "Antonin Artaud was an outstanding theater director!" and everywhere were to show a film recording of one of the one and a half performances he staged. Yes, Kalmykov and Artaud have a lot in common. In terms of "art," they are a "weak artist" and a "weak director," respectfully. As "helpless" as Artaud's performances were, so are Kalmykov's paintings. But everyone understands that the point is not the performances that Artaud staged or not. So, the point is not the paintings that Kalmykov painted. We call him "Pustoe Mesto," which is how in Russian one calls a "never-was" and which literally translates as "Empty Space." Like a black hole with an absolute *Nothingness* or *Absence* at its core. It is impossible to grasp him or put him into any category—not an artist, not a writer, not a theorist, not a thinker, certainly not a public figure. How to grasp an empty space?

On March 19, 1967, Kalmykov's neighbors thought that he had died, and either with the help of policemen or by themselves, they opened his apartment. He was still alive but on the verge of death. They called an ambulance, which took Kalmykov to a psychiatric hospital: everyone was sure that he was "crazy." In the medical report after his admission, it is recorded that as of hospitalization he was diagnosed with "senile psychosis," "paranoid delirium," and suspicion of schizophrenia. Later a clinical diagnosis was made: "end-state paranoid schizophrenia." It is also written there that one month later, on April 27, he died

with such concomitant diseases as "general atherosclerosis, cerebral sclerosis, bilateral pneumonia" and with such complications as "myocardial dystrophy" and "senile insanity." They say that before his death he was very happy with hot soup; for many recent years he ate only bread and milk, according to his diary entries and conversations. A governmental commission made an audit of his apartment and found more than a thousand paintings, almost ten thousand pages of his manuscripts, many albums with drawings and texts, and pieces of wallpaper, cardboard, and linoleum on which he also drew and wrote a lot. The apartment—a small one-room apartment on the fourth floor in a Khrushchyovka building on the very outskirts of Almaty, which Kalmykov was given somewhere close to his retirement in 1962—was terribly dirty. The official name for this condition is "unsanitary conditions": it had not had electricity and gas for a long time, and, instead of furniture, he had stacks of newspapers. Kalmykov was poor: his pension was 52 rubles. In his diary we found an entry that said, "Bastards!—Instead of the promised 82 rubles a month! As Viktor Zakharovich Kharitonov promised,—only 52 rubles!"

The commission cleared everything: paintings and drawings were placed in the State Museum of Arts of the Kazakh Soviet Social Republic, and manuscripts and albums were sent to the central state archive. All this was done more out of sympathy, or in an attempt to have "their own Van Gogh," or for some other personal reasons of the then-director of the museum Lyubov Plakhotnaya, than out of an institutional recognition of the artistic caliber of the works. For instance, when Plakhotnaya tried to donate five of Kalmykov's works to the Pushkin Museum, she received a reply from Irina Antonova, the legendary director of Pushkin Museum, that the general opinion of the museum's expert council "was that the quality of these drawings did not correspond to the artistic level of our collections; ceteris paribus, the Museum would not have acquired these drawings. However, we imagined that for some reason, such as the relationship with the artist or his family, such a transfer could be important to you, and then other considerations should come into force. Write, please, quite frankly, if it is so. If so, then we will accept the drawings, and we will send you signed agreements; if not, we will return your drawings and agreements." Since then, no one from the professional artistic community has recognized Kalmykov as a somewhat "good" artist. We know only two art historians who have studied his work: Valentina Buchinskaya from Almaty and Igor Smekalov from Orenburg, where Kalmykov lived for some time. Kalmykov is still not accepted in the artistic environment of Kazakhstan—even now he really remains marginal. Usually they speak of him with condescension, as a holy fool or a "city madman," sometimes adding "original" or "eccentric." If somebody says he was an outstanding artist, they immediately reply that he was so outstanding just because "he was the only one like that then."

He really was the only one like that then, but even now there are no such people in Almaty: he sewed himself crazy-wide pants, attached all kinds of tin cans to them, dyed his hair with black paint, made himself an ultra-stylish triangular bag, and wore a big red beret, about which he said, "My red beret against Mayakovsky's yellow jacket!" The idea behind such an outfit was for him to be a "bright spot" against the background of the "generally gray creeping mass" in order to be seen from space by millions of eyes looking at Earth. Townspeople remember him, usually saying, "I (my dad, mom, grandmother, grandfather) remember him: he bought newspapers at the Soyuzpechat kiosk!" Among professionally creative people, not many openly talk about love for him or about his influence on themselves—except perhaps Sergey Maslov, who, according to some, in some sense embodied the legacy of Kalmykov's images, and Alexander Brener, who, in our opinion, is very close to Kalmykov in his freedom to be difficult, uncomfortable, not beautiful, lonely, or obscene. (We did not read a single obscene word from Kalmykov, but he wrote very freely about everything he thought, including his opinion about "enemies of the people," for which, judging by his diaries, Chekists [Soviet secret police] came almost every day in 1937-38). Luckily, we were able to use the texts on Kalmykov by both these artists in our book, which is technically a catalog for the Pavilion, and is the first ever book on the New Genius, though Maslov's text was written before his tragic death in 2002, and Brener kindly wrote his text upon our request. Everyone in ORTA, as well as many townspeople except me, somehow knew about Kalmykov because the State Museum has a corner with his paintings, and his paintings are completely different from everything that hangs around them. But in 2016, I learned that Kalmykov also wrote texts; at that time, as many as two books of his texts had already been published in Orenburg by two enthusiasts: Igor Khramov who runs an independent cultural foundation, and Igor Smekalov, an art researcher who has been studying Kalmykov for many years. Valentina Buchinskaya told us that all of Kalmykov's manuscripts are kept in the state archive. Alexandra Morozova and I went to the archive, and we were given his manuscripts. We were struck. "Contaminated with genius" was how we later explained it to ourselves. As if we were exposed to radiation that emanated from the endless pages with diary notes, artistic and scientific manifestos, novels, and political programs for the development of the arts. Morozova proclaimed that "We must do everything—performances, books, projects!"

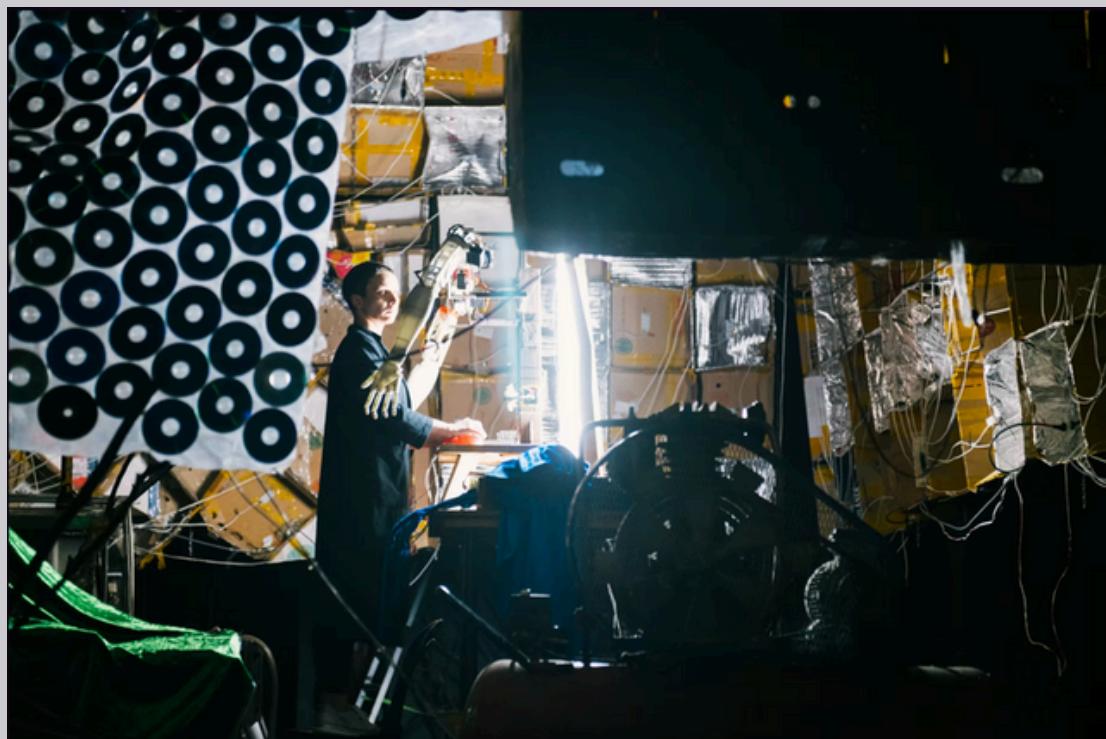
We started doing something that we didn't know anything about yet. At first, Alexandr Bakanov and I came up with the idea of completely lining his Khrushchyovka building with golden tin, from which the domes of mosques and churches are made, and turning it into a "Golden Khrushchyovka"; we thought of turning one of the functioning city trolleybuses into Kalmykov's trolleybus, carrying it on our hands and burying it under the house. Of course, we decided to publish all of his texts. This became the *Novel in Thousand Volumes* project.

With all this, we turned to various funds, gave interviews on TV, radio and in newspapers, and even spoke at the public council of the city advocating to at least name a street by his last name. Some methods worked, and some didn't, but in general everyone sympathized. In 2017, Kalmykov Street appeared in Almaty, albeit in a random remote neighborhood not connected with him in any way. I don't know if our efforts had anything to do with this, but everything seemed to coincide. We started to do projects ourselves and made a media project, "A month of Sergey Kalmykov," with the leading independent Kazakh Internet-based media platform Vlast.kz. In 2018, we created and took to Moscow a large-scale techno-mystery "Svetoprestavleniye Sergey Kalmykov" [Doomsday Sergey Kalmykov], which was a headliner for the New Drama Festival at the Meyerhold Center; we published the first book of Kalmykov's texts in Kazakhstan as *Pervyj tom romana v tysyachi tomah* [*The First Volume of the Novel in Thousand Volumes*]; conducted a series of open experiments of the Institute of the New Genius; I dedicated to Kalmykov several issues of my radio show "Novyie Genii Pervogo Ranga" [New Geniuses of the First Rank]—the name, of course, is also an expression borrowed from Kalmykov's language—that broadcast from 2017 to 2020 on the Kazakh radio station "Classic,"; under our commission, the playwright Ekaterina Bondarenko wrote *Shedevr* [*Masterpiece*] based on Kalmykov's texts. In 2021, at the Stanislavsky Electrotheater in Moscow, we held the First International Congress on the New Genius. At the same time, we held a series of sessions of Zen-extravaganza "Pervyi Atomicheskiy Bombootrazhatel" [The First Atomic Bomb Reflector], and hosted an exhibition of Kazakh Achievements of the New Genius at the Meyerhold Center as a part of the NONAME festival. Documentary filmmaker Taisiya Krugovykh from the Gogol's Wives duo shot a film about all this called *Teoriya Novoy Genial'nosti* [*Theory of the New Genius*]. The film premiered in the competition of the "Message to Man" International Film Festival. Alexandra Morozova developed the project *Sacred Expositions* in which she transferred Kalmykov's language to fabric using the traditional Kazakh embroidery technique "biz keste" and thus created about 50 tablet flags. These are some but not all of the events that we did as part of the work on the New Genius. With the help of all these developments, we managed to build the first operating Centre for the New Genius in Venice at the Venice Biennale. It is, of course, the first Centre among many world Centers.

AZ: ORTA group looks very trans-disciplinary in composition, uniting people of theater, poetry, music, visual art, and engineering. At the same time, your work is still connected with archival work, with building your own mythology on the basis of Kalmykov's theories. And as far as we understand, this implies maximum openness to all those who want to realize themselves as a genius and, at the same time, openness to everything that interferes with your plans... Everyone was excited even by your pop-up installation created for the Centre for the New Genius in Venice as an improvisational response to the impossibility of getting

works on time due to the logistical collapse caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Can we learn more about the way your group works?

RB: What we do is not art. There are such types of human activity as art, science, philosophy, and religion. But the division into these types occurs at a certain level. And deeper than this level there is no division. The New Genius, or the art of the New Genius, lies at this depth—it is a school of thought, philosophy, art, science and, in fact, a totally new kind of human activity. This is the goal we are moving towards. It is like the top of a mountain. It is somewhere there, and we always foresee it and go toward it. The mountain is so big, and the summit is so far away, that we will never reach it in our lifetime. But it is that summit that gives us energy every day not only to get out of bed, but also to break out of everyday life and not be an automatic reactor to life's circumstances. Kalmykov wrote that he "would remain for centuries with Picasso and da Vinci." That's what he believed in. During his lifetime no one needed him—no one even buried him properly; his grave is nowhere to be found. But now 55 years have passed since his life, and the historical first Pavilion of Kazakhstan is dedicated to him at the most prestigious world art exhibition. No one will destroy our faith that in 50, 100, 1000 years we will be remembered as those who strived to create a new kind of human activity—the New Genius.



Alexandra Morozova during *SVETOPRESTAVLENIYE SERGEY KALMYKOV* Moscow, Russia. Photo: ORTA Collective © ORTA Collective / Courtesy of the Artist, 2018.

On the way, we have different adventures happening to us; on the way to the main summit there are always smaller peaks, rivers, forests, swamps, volcanic eruptions, fires, floods, or hurricanes. This is the technique: in order to reach the top, you need to cope with individual adventures as adequately and as extremely carefully as possible, but you don't need to get involved in them either; it is just another stage on the way to the goal. Without the main summit, there is no energy to solve tactical problems, and without solving such problems there is no movement towards the summit. The very solution to these problems is, generally speaking, creativity and life. This all happened to us in creating the first Pavilion of Kazakhstan at the Venice Biennale. We had had a dialogue with the Pavilion Commissioner Meruyert Kaliyeva for two years; she knew that we were working on a global project of the New Genius. When she offered us the pavilion commission, it was a natural and logical step for us: the Biennale is a good platform for presenting the New Genius to the world. Kalmykov said, "Raise your intimate secrets to the heights of World Advertising." Is the Venice Biennale not the height of World Advertising? In general, everything we do is *Advertising*—this is one of the main principles of our work. We planned that during the opening week of the Biennale and then for another month we would conduct experiments with the participation of visitors at the Centre for the New Genius, and it was meant to become the Advertisement of the New Genius—the great system of approach to life and art that is available to everyone and can truly change the world. We declared in our information campaign: "We are the New Geniuses! Come see how we designed and set the Centre for the New Genius—a symbol of the great Art of the New Genius!" When it became clear that the two trucks with our installation would not arrive on time for the Centre to be set up for the opening week, we had no choice but to organize an *Advertisement* for the future Centre, i.e. to make an *Advertisement* of the *Advertisement* of the New Genius. In two weeks, we invented and set up a *Temporary Temple* and spent the opening week conducting the *Spectacular Experiments* that became the unexpected foundation for the future Centre. It was scary to present something developed off the cuff in just a couple of weeks, and not what was prepared over five years. Moreover, the planned exhibition was meant to show the greatness of the New Genius. Not to mention, this was our country's inaugural pavilion, and the previous attempt to organize the pavilion failed with a loud international scandal. So, let's face it: there was a lot of pressure on us, as if we were athletes representing the country at the Olympics. But we decided to follow Kalmykov and "bet on advertising!," because "advertising is the key to success!" People came to the pavilion on April 20, and we told them, "Unfortunately, you will be able to see the Centre only in a month, but now we welcome you to the *Temporary Temple* for the New Genius! Together, we will conduct experiments on the future experiments of the Centre and you will see how outstanding it will be!" In an amazing way, we received an incredibly huge amount of energy of inspiration,

faith, complicity, play, kindness, and solidarity from everyone who came to our pavilion. And this temporary pavilion became a super-*Advertisement* for the future pavilion. But even when people later came and saw the already embodied Centre, they again saw not a product that we advertised, but only an advertisement of how people can interact creatively and create such projects.

This interaction is also just an advertisement for something that lies even deeper. Advertisement of advertisement of advertisement of advertisement, and so on, ad infinitum. It is an ongoing process; it is a *Practice*. Everything in the world is *Advertisement*, and the product is an Empty Place that you can't catch by the tail, because it is also just an indication of something even deeper.



Alexandra Morozova embroidering Venice's Golden Lion during the Spectacular Experiment in the Temporary Temple for the New Genius at the inaugural pavilion of Kazakhstan at 59th La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: ORTA Collective © ORTA Collective / Courtesy of the Artist, 2022.

The main principle of our interaction with each other within ORTA and with the people we meet on the way is "My Inner Genius turns to your Inner Genius." You always know if your genius is speaking in you now. Only you and no one but you. Kalmykov called himself a genius—and he *was* one. "*Was*" as an active action, and not as a third-party assessment of his condition. Any person can do the same: call yourself a genius and be one. Claim. Decide. Practice. And do not compare yourself with anyone: genius is not an assessment of abilities. Genius is an absolute category from the Fourth Dimension: in this dimension there is no relativity, no dimensionality.

Something is big or small not in relation to something, but simply big or small, or rich or poor. I'm a genius not in relation to anyone. I am Genius. It is high time for humans to become an absolute, each one, and not at the expense of anyone else. However, overcoming the limitations of personhood—expanding without infringing on a space already existing and not belonging to you—without colonization is impossible in our world. But in the Fourth Dimension it is very possible! And this is a separate theory of the Fourth Dimension, a scientific area inextricably linked with the New Genius. Turning to the genius of another is the most difficult, complex task, but it bears the most unexpected, amazing, and unbelievably beautiful results in our projects. Besides this communication among Inner Geniuses, one can and must nourish their own genius. The technique of such nourishing is another focus of the New Genius. For instance, the Venice Centre for the New Genius is a machine for activating one's Inner Genius. One more principle of our work is that each one involved in the project applies the New Genius to their field. More detailed descriptions of the practical principles of the New Genius are to be discovered in the years to come by all new geniuses of the Earth, the cosmos, and their surroundings.

AZ: In Venice, "LAI-PI-CHU-PLEE-LAPA Center for the New Genius" is an installation that combines very diverse elements. It is turned simultaneously to the past—to the history of art, to the archive, and to the future—and it builds speculative scenarios using new technologies. There is place for the traditional architecture of Kazakhstan—yurts, the dwellings of nomads. Or, for example, the traditional "biz keste" embroidery techniques used to create flags that fill the yurt with quotes and slogans from Kalmykov. But it feels like here ORTA works with the Soviet legacy, with attention to the red flag, to words that promise a better future, justice, etc. Plus, there is a generator of genius nearby—a complex installation using programmable lighting systems and evoking associations with Kubrick's *A Space Odyssey* but produced in Thomas Hirschhorn's "folk" aesthetics. Another closer associative example from the Soviet past is Georgiy Daneliya's film *Kin-dza-dza*, where the "spacecraft" created by the kineticist-artist Viacheslav Koleichuk traversed the expanses of the Karakum desert. If you try to combine all these unusual combinations—traditional and contemporary art, current and archaic technologies, etc.—then the term "ethno-futurism" comes to mind. Similar categories, though based on their own material, include Afro-futurism, Sino-futurism, Gulf-futurism, and, to some extent, Russian cosmism. Any attempt to grasp these in a general sense is conditional. In this process, something is bound to be lost. But on the other hand, perhaps some aspects, on the contrary, could be articulated better with the help of a broader context. Is this associative series close to you? Is it possible to use the phrase "Kazakh futurism" or cosmism in relation to the ORTA Collective?

RB: We came out of the Soviet Union; our entire objective and mental environment bears traces of that culture, whether we like it or not. We want to use beautiful materials, whether living or once alive, and many of these materials are from the history of our land—some from the ancient times, some from Soviet times. But do we want to “tell something about the Soviet Union?” No. Nor do we want to tell something about the time and space we live in today. Or to *tell* anything at all. We are not “tellers.” It seems that Hirschhorn also likes such “alive” materials, and I really like some of Hirshhorn’s works, but, in my humble opinion, they remain in the field of art: they have images, there is *objecthood*, as if he wants to say or show something through his projects. Even his procedural works, like a cardboard philosophical fair, are a kind of image, a *performance*, albeit an interactive one. Or, at least, he did not avoid this objectification, even if he wanted to. When we say “objecthood,” we mean that this object or event of art can be told about to others. But about the “real event”—you cannot tell this to others; it’s sort of meaningless, indescribable, and inappropriate to talk about it. When we say “we don’t do art,” what we mean is that we truly develop the Theory of Genions¹ and the theory of the Fourth Dimension; we explore the higher levels of human creative interactions, and we construct the New Genius as a school of thought.

Going back to the Venice Centre for the New Genius, it is necessary to say that around 50 people in total worked on creating it as a functioning machine for activating the genius of everyone who visits it. Through experiments, we were looking for the most effective materials, schemes, and processes for this goal. As a result, the Centre consists of the following:

The tin foil entrance room with the Pyramidal Photoiconostasis—a special eight-tier dynamic irradiator consisting of 108 LCD-displays in the shape of a three-sided inverted pyramid. It attunes one’s genius by showing an eight-channel photo and video stream with scenes from the life and art of the New Geniuses of the First Rank.

The next zone is the New Genius Yurt—an alternative design of the traditional nomadic yurt dwelling. Traditionally, a yurt is round in shape, has only one entryway, and only one shanyrak—the crossed circle at the top of the yurt. The New Genius Yurt has an elliptical shape with two entryways and two shanyraks. This allows for the enhanced distribution of the Genions Activation Field, mixing it with the emanation of the historical beauty of Venice.

Inside the Yurt, there are Sacred Expositions—a series of tablet flags with slogans from life-affirming texts by Sergey Kalmykov embroidered by the New Genius Alexandra Morozova on old Soviet fabrics using the traditional but unfortunately vanishing Kazakh folk craft called “biz keste.” Surprisingly, the ancient technique of “biz keste” allowed Alexandra to transfer Kalmykov’s text in such a way as to preserve the powerful emanations that come from his manuscripts. One’s inner genius continues to be activated strongly while reading the Sacred Expositions.



New Genius Yurt at “LAI-PI-CHU-PLEE-LAPA Centre for the New Genius” at the inaugural Pavilion of Kazakhstan at 59th La Biennale di Venezia.
Alexandra Morozova, *Man with the fried nerves and Big wings*, hand-embroidery on fabric from the series *Sacred Expositions of the Great and Immortal Lai-Pi-Chu-Plee-Lapa*. Photo: ORTA Collective © ORTA Collective / Courtesy of the Artist, 2022.

The next zone is the Generator of Genius—a room with a tunnel machine for the excitation of genions and for the creation of the conditions for a controlled sustainable opening of the Portal to the Fourth Dimension. This machine consists of 900 cardboard light cells, with the dimensions of 45 cm by 45 cm and 20 cm deep. Inside each cell, there are from three to nine LED lamps. The tunnel is three meters in diameter and ten meters in length, so approximately two kilometers of cables connect everything.

Different dynamic light patterns are used in the Generator for different purposes: one for activating genions, one for the opening of the Portal to the Fourth Dimension. By default, the light pattern that activates genions is working. You also hear the voice of the New Genius Alexandra Morozova. She reads a special visionary text, "V techenie dnya" [In the course of a day] by Sergey Kalmykov. This combination used to activate genions is called Ceremonial Emanations. The activation of your Inner Genius reaches the highest levels during the Ceremonial Emanations—especially if you spend more than five minutes here.



First Circular Cardboard Light Generator of Genius at "LAI-PI-CHU-PLEE-LAPA Centre for the New Genius" at the inaugural Pavilion of Kazakhstan at 59th La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: ORTA Collective © ORTA Collective / Courtesy of the Artist, 2022.

There is another zone in the courtyard. It is a stand for training hydraulic-powered walking robots: a body of a Daewoo Damas, a refrigerator, and a washing machine. Our application of the New Genius to technology led to this fundamental question: Can already-existing technologies and devices assist in working with the Fourth Dimension? And also to some more practical assumptions, like what if robotics can develop not only in top-notch expensive laboratories like Boston Dynamics but also in any garage in some remote village where there is welding and scrap metal. "Robots for everyone" could be a government program that would help agriculture, for instance.

We probably have more in common with cosmism than with ethno-futurism. We are looking for the possibility of overcoming the natural limitations of the human in the sense of being conditioned by the surrounding world. And as we said above, the Fourth Dimension—of course, it is possible to call it something else; we just have not yet come up with it—is a dimension where it is possible to overcome the limitations of humanity. But if in traditional cosmism this is supposed to be done in the cosmos, then in our theory this is done in the Fourth Dimension itself. In our world, any expansion ahead of the natural expansion of the Universe inevitably means the seizure of new territories and colonization, even if it is done with the "integration" or dissolution of humanity in newly acquired territories. In the Fourth Dimension, this inevitability does not exist. With this in mind, one could probably refer to ORTA Collective as cosmist, or neo-cosmist, but we expect that the term "New Genius" is more likely to go down in history associated with us.

AZ: ORTA's Venetian project is built not only on the polyphony of formal and conceptual contrasts, but it is fundamentally polyphonic in terms of language. There is a lot of English, some Italian, and a lot of Kazakh, but, as it seemed, no less or more than Russian. It is clear that English is the language of international communication in the field of art, and Italian is important from the point of view of the local public, and Kazakh and Russian are the first and second languages used in Kazakhstan. However, inside the installation, an interesting simultaneous mixture of the Dadaist persuasion arises. At the same time, after the invasion of Ukraine, the use of the Russian language in the post-Soviet context has been criticized for its imperialism. And Kazakhs, as far as one can judge from the outside, are very sensitive to this issue as well. After the protests in Kazakhstan at the beginning of this year, the CSTO troops entered the country; most of these were Russian army units, and this was a very disturbing moment. Now the troops have been withdrawn, the protests have ended, and it seems, though very slowly, changes are taking place towards the dismantling of autocracy and, in general, towards a more democratic structure of power. In foreign policy at the moment, Kazakhstan emphasizes its sovereignty and its course to reduce dependence on

Russia in regards to energy exports and trade. Considering all these transformations, we would like to know: how do you feel about the issue of language(s) in your art? And in general, do you consider ORTA's activities from the point of view of decolonial practices?

RB: We claim: in today's world where everything gets immediately politicized—i.e. used by all kinds of political forces even against your will and regardless of whether you are "political" or "apolitical"—art, and, even more so, the New Genius, is the only truly politics-free domain that resists being used by such political forces. It is *useless*. And at the same time, despite the common misconception, *uselessness* is the greatest force for making real changes in the world. Politics is unable to catch up with art, let alone with the New Genius. The state of Kazakhstan, in some sense, is also trying to implement the concept of *Advertisement* through claiming all kinds of "images of the bright future." However, at the government level, the concept is not realized as a conscious strategy and becomes false, exclusive, destructive. But how do you transfer an entire country to the Fourth Dimension? This is a task. We had two projects for the state of Kazakhstan.

- 1) During the pandemic, the "Employment Roadmap"—a program launched before the pandemic that provides work for a wide range of unemployed people—has greatly intensified. Under this program, a lot of people got jobs that did not require any qualifications: basically, people dug and re-dug ditches, picked things, pretended to clean the streets, etc. It was obvious that this was just work for the sake of work, and was often quite destructive. Apparently, psychologically, neither the state nor the people themselves are ready for a universal basic income, and everyone needs some kind of formal "job." So we came up with the idea that all these people, and even many other people, could be instructed to carry small stones—not hard labor at all, as the stones are the size of one's fist—and put them in one place. In two, three, five years, say, a hundred thousand people could build a pyramid larger than those in Egypt. Now imagine what a million or two million people would do! Such a pyramid would attract so many tourists from all over the world that one could even take a loan from an international development bank for this project. Maybe that's how the Egyptian pyramids were built—as a business project to overcome a crisis and that still, thousands of years later, brings in income!
- 2) Kazakhstan has a lot of land, mostly steppe. Anyone who wishes can purchase a shipping container and make a museum in it by gathering items that they want preserved after their life—just like ancient pharaohs who dedicated half of their lives to gathering collections that would be placed with them in their pyramids. These containers will be organized in pyramids, with access to every container.

Fields would be filled with these types of pyramids, contributed by people from around the world. We then just need for a special spiritual habit to appear—the habit to once a week go visit someone's museum. Any kind of randomizer can tell you which museum to visit next. This will solve two main limitations that prevent people from having their own museum: how to maintain such a big museum, and how to see its entire collection. The containers can be looked after by shepherds for a minimal payment from each museum holder, and you do not need to see all the museums at once, just one museum at a time. It doesn't matter which one, as they are all equally valuable—as valuable as each person.

If Kazakhstan were to implement such programs, it could probably transition to the state of the Fourth Dimension. These programs are examples of a practical solution to the “political responsibility” that is demanded from artists today.

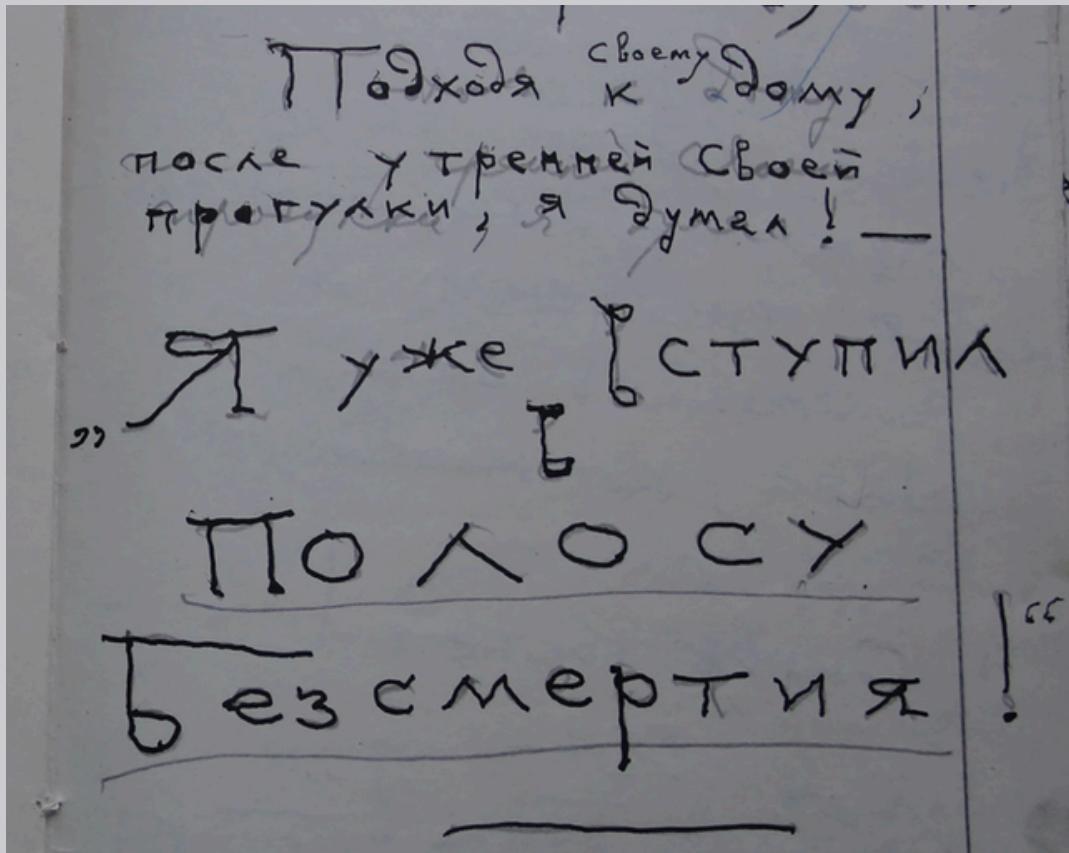


New Genius Yurt at “LAI-PI-CHU-PLEE-LAPA Centre for the New Genius” at the inaugural Pavilion of Kazakhstan at 59th La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: ORTA Collective © ORTA Collective / Courtesy of the Artist, 2022.

It is just dirt from one's boots. We say this about our “art-works”: you go on an expedition, on a journey. You are returning from such a journey, and suddenly a lump of mud falls off your shoes and in it—a diamond. Are you glad? Of course. Is the diamond valuable? Of course. But it is not the diamond that you went for. The same is true for “works of art” or “scientific discoveries.” It's just dirt from the boots in which you went on a Campaign to the *Unknown*, to the *Mystery*.

Sometimes, it happens, of course, instead of a diamond or a ruby, cow dung falls off, and this also does not matter much for an expedition to the mountain. Some people do go only for diamonds—but we are not those people. Sometimes we have something similar to Dadaism, sometimes something similar to Afro-futurism. We have heard several times the phrases “Dadaist strategies,” “absurdism,” and “avant-garde” to talk about us, but these are all random formal similarities. Probably, in terms of the production of works, we are closer to surrealism. But unlike surrealism, we embody the Fourth Dimension, not the subconscious. Techniques for working with this dimension are one of the focuses of our theory. Imagine that our world is a projection of the Fourth Dimension onto the third dimension; that is, all processes actually take place in the Fourth Dimension, and in ours they are imprinted as the Russia's war against Ukraine, as the Kazakh gerontocracy, as the imperialist seizure of one country by another, as the dedication of the Pavilion of Kazakhstan to Kalmykov at the Venice Biennale, as all sorts of events and phenomena. Work in the Fourth Dimension means working with such phenomena, among other things. But not with projections; rather, with the sources of these projections. Humanity will have to study the Fourth Dimension: its properties, the principles of work within it, techniques of interaction with it. The possibility to draw up its maps, diagrams, and panoramas does exist. This is not easy, and we are at the very beginning of the journey, but perhaps this is the only way to work with the *real*—that is, with the sources of the visible world. In addition, according to our observation, the New Genius leads to a real, not formal, liberation from empire in any of its manifestations—including agendas, languages, and the approval of communities and institutions—as well as the practical liberation of employees from dependence on their employer and tenants of apartment buildings from their silent dependence on the municipality. This is a real increase in the political agency of people (and not only people—animals, objects, processes, etc.). All this is just a concomitant, albeit inevitable, feature of the New Genius. As far as we can judge, from the point of view of the discourse of decoloniality—that is, the language with an inherent or tragically acquired imperialism—our practice is not decolonial. We don't use the word “decolonial.” And if you do not use this language, then it doesn't apply to you. This leads to another important focus of our searches—the very language of the New Genius. Any language is inevitably the enslaver of those who communicate in it; each speaker must obey the language in order to communicate in it. But the existence of a non-enslaving language is possible! This is a language that cannot be used to speak out or to call for anything “useful,” a language in which one cannot exchange information, a language that cannot be “used.” The language of the New Genius is an example of such a language. It is impossible to use it; it seems to resist the establishment of rules, definitions, or semantic structures; it is pretentious, uneven, uncomfortable, and awkward. This is its inevitable liberating power—it

resists imperialism, regardless of whether you apply it in Russian, Kazakh, English, Italian, or something Otherplanetary. The New Genius is the liberating language of the Fourth Dimension, which belongs to every ethnic group, every community, every individual!



Sergey Kalmykov, fragment from author/artist's personal journal. [Translation: Approaching my house after my morning walk, I thought:— "I have already entered the STRIP OF IMMORTALITY!"] Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty.

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Arseny Zhilyaev is an artist, co-founder of Institute for the Mastering of Time, and a research fellow at the Institute of the Cosmos. Born in Voronezh, he lives and works in Venice.

Rustem Begenov is a New Genius projector, theater director, composer, and a co-founder of ORTA Collective. He was born and is currently based in Almaty.

¹ Genions are the fundamental particles in the New Genius that are the manifestation of the Fourth Dimension in a person. Each person exists in the Fourth Dimension through their genions, and the Fourth Dimension exists in a person in the form of genions. The mechanism of the Manifestation of the Fourth Dimension in other known dimensions is not yet fully understood. But it is known that in some existing systems this mechanism manifests itself as "nonlocality," "singularity," or "magic." That is, genions are the particles that make up a genius. Genions can be similar to electrons, whose behavior in electric current conductors depends on such variables as temperature, strength, character, and the direction of an electromagnetic field, and so on. According to the Theory of Genions, it is possible to create a special field—a Genius Field—which also affects the activity of genions. The degree of genion activity varies greatly from person to person. High activity means high genius; low activity means low genius. Some people may naturally have high activity, while others may never activate their genions to a perceptible level throughout their life. But everyone can (and should!) activate them! —Rustem Begenov. ↑