

The Art Collective Behind the Improvised Kazakhstan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale Has a Simple Message: 'Everyone Is an Artist'

The pavilion, inspired by outsider artist Sergey Kalmykov, has a hopeful and inspiring hopeful message.

Sarah Cascone • April 24, 2022



Entrance to Orta's LAI-PI-CHU-PLÉE-LAPA Centre for the New Genius at the Kazakhstan pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Photo by Sarah Cascone.

Orta, the art collective representing Kazakhstan at the country's first Venice Biennale pavilion, spent four years making the large sculptural installation that was to be the centerpiece of the exhibition. Then, when shipping delays struck, they had just 10 days to cobble together a temporary display to have something to present on the art world's biggest stage.

"We were crushed," Rustem Begenov, who cofounded Orta with his wife, Alexandra Morozova, in 2015, told Artnet News.

But rather than give up, Orta came up with an alternative plan to utterly transform the exhibition venue, a coworking space called Spazio Arco, by covering every surface with what they were able to scrounge up locally: wooden dowels, brown paper, and aluminum foil.

“We said, ‘what would Kalmykov do?’” Begenov added.



Orta, *LAI-PI-CHU-PLÉE-LAPA Center for the New Genius* at the Kazakhstan pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Photo by Nathan Monroe-Yavneh.

Kalmykov is Sergey Kalmykov, the Russian artist who inspired the pavilion and the collective. Kalmykov lived in the Kazakh city of Alma-Ata, and is today considered today one of the nation’s most important art-historical figures—he made 1,500 artworks and thousands of pages of manuscripts that were posthumously discovered after he died in penury.

Begenov and Morozova came to know Kalmykov’s work in 2016, when they stumbled upon some of his prolific writings in state archives.

Those writings are the basis for *LAI-PI-CHU-PLEE-LAPA Center for the New Genius*, the title of the pavilion and a longterm project for Orta, which hopes to open centers around the world to help viewers tap into their latent genius, as Kalmykov would have wanted.



Orta, *LAI-PI-CHU-PLEE-LAPA Center for the New Genius* at the Kazakhstan pavilion at the Venice Biennale.
Photo by Sarah Cascone.

“What captivated us, what touched us, is Kalmykov didn’t care what anyone else thought. He said, ‘I am a genius,’” Begenov added. “He died as a bum. Now, 55 years later, he is at the Venice Biennale.”

Instead of presenting its planned presentation, the collective is staging daily performances at noon and 5 p.m. that it calls “spectacular experiments.”

The plan next is to reopen in May with the full Center for the New Genius experience, a massive cardboard and LED sculpture designed, the group said, to open a portal to the fourth dimension, where greatness lies.

But even after you leave Venice, Orta wants you to live by the center’s principles every day.