Letter From Ilya Kabakov

Dearest Grisha

I wanted very much to write you a letter, immediately after my visit to your studio where I have seen your latest, finished work for the exhibition. Right away I have to tell you that it made a powerful impression on me. And now, after a few days have passed, when my impressions have somewhat settled, I can tell you much accurately and unequivocally, what I liked, define the essence of what was there.

In my opinion a successful work of art, its "substance" lies not in the unique selection of elements and their correct balance-it is important, but ultimately it is a technical matter with which any professional marvelously copes. A truly successful, powerful work of art can only be one which encounters with highly vital, deep-seated points inside the consciousness of every person called "Archetypes!" They exist in each of us, hiding "below" on a subconscious level, although there possibly is a structural basis for our psychological life.

There are not many of these formations, these points, yet an accidental contact with them forces us to experience deep unceasing emotions. To open them, to touch a formation is a grand and rare chance (that is why we can consider it "success").

One of the archetypes you succeeded in reaching and it "emitted sound"-is "THE WALL." It is sufficient to mention this word and entire world of associations, emotions and impressions appear. Different in each person, but similar in one aspect, image. Halt, obstruction, blockade and impassability. Simultaneously a desire to overcome, slip by, get to other side. THE WALL, like one side of a box, in which we all found ourselves (not depending on its size) and an insane, unsurmountable desire to overturn this wood, stone-it doesn't matter which side of the box. This WALL could become an obstacle on our way to a place where we want and long to be. We search in it for a door, we wait for it to open, we imagine that world to which we direct our longing.

It seems magical to us, its azure radiance penetrates the WALL and in our imagination it becomes semitransparent, begins to shine with a multitude of lights and colors, as in your project. As I understand, it is a universal impression when a person stands before a wall. Although there can not be a similar profound impression when a person views a painting depicting the wall, regardless of how magically and beautifully it was depicted. You see, the viewer would rather stand in front of a painting, but not in front of the wall.

Your true success consists of the fact that for your idea you chose an installation genre. It is a fairly young and independent fine arts genre; that is the only way such an idea could be realized and in a very convincing manner, too (which for the time being still arouses doubt).

Such in my view is the meaning of your new work and a principal impression that I brought from your studio. The installation is already "working," and I'm convinced that when it will be assembled in the gallery, its influence will be equal to its intent. Successful intent inevitably will achieve success. I am certain of that.

Yours, Ilya