



VYACHESLAV AKHUNOV
RED MANTRA

opening
 Thursday 12 April, 2018
 at 8 pm

12.04.2018
06.07.2018

curated by
 Marco Scotini

LAURA BULIAN GALLERY
 via Piranesi 10, 20137 Milano
www.laurabuliangallery.com

Monday – Friday, 15 – 19 pm
 Morning by appointment
 Free entrance

The **Laura Bulian Gallery** is pleased to announce *Red Mantra*, the second solo exhibition by **Vyacheslav Akhunov** (1948) to be held in this gallery. One of Central Asia's most charismatic and appreciated artists, Akhunov returns to Milan with a wide-ranging exhibition, devoted entirely to his cycle of calligraphic and repetitive mantras (dated from 1975 onwards). This exhibition stands as another fundamental chapter in his study of the relationship between discourse, truth and power.

Recognised today as "a classic artist of the Soviet underground", Akhunov came to international attention only in recent decades, when these areas of the world, considered at one time extremely remote, acquired a new geopolitical and cultural centrality, but more particularly when this specific artistic current emerged from its underground status behind the Iron Curtain and became a visible and rightful part of the global contemporary art scene. Nonetheless, even in this post-Soviet period Akhunov continues his criticisms of the new regime, thus becoming a target of national security services and censorship, to the point that his permission to leave Uzbekistan was revoked for years. Only now has this opportunity been afforded him.

The archaeological (and archival) drive that underlies Akhunov's entire work since the 1970s is not only perfectly in tune with contemporary Western conceptual art, it is also a direct heir of the archaeological expeditions carried out under the USSR by the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, an organisation to which the artist's father belonged. Indeed, the technique of accumulating photos and newspaper items, collecting Soviet propaganda imagery, the alphabets and endless series of notebooks are among Akhunov's preferred artistic tools. It is a practice that makes the word and writing its object and likewise the principles of ordering and classification that are a component of any discourse.

The relationship between image and word, the conversion of language from the phonetic to the symbolic dimension, the enormous Cyrillic letters that

emerge from the desert landscape or fill the emptiness of halls with disciplinary slogans, writing exhibited as an ornamental fabric, the monumental versions of acronyms such as USSR or KGB, are all examples of the same drive to unmask ideology by putting it against reality. In this gap stands the difference from Western conceptual art. His is not so much a speculation about language or significance, as a continuous struggle with the sense and the power with which meaning is imposed. This is why Akhunov's work comes across as ironic and dramatic at the same time.

A further artistic technique that the entire Milanese exhibition explores is that of the mantra. The ultimate objective of the Sufi tradition, which is akin to Akhunov's oriental culture, is to inscribe the divinity's name in one's thought. Hence, rewriting that name infinitely and its continuous verbal enunciation are a means of guaranteeing access to the sacred: essentially, to repeat is to remember. On this occasion Akhunov presents a sort of museum of the communist era, in which images of iconic works of socialist realism (paintings and sculptures) are covered with red signs endlessly repeating the same slogans.

Famous works such as "Lenin at the Tribune" by Alexandr Gerasimov (1930) or "Lenin Speaking to the workers of the Putilov factory" by Isaak Brodsky (1917), or the sculpture "Worker and Kolkhoz Woman" by Vera Mukhina (1937), are covered in a dense web of cursive writing stating: "All roads lead to communism" or "The victory of communism is inevitable". In reducing writing to a chromatic mass with neither beginning nor end, or likewise translating a political mission into a mystical ritual, it remains to be understood whether Akhunov intends to show a loss of meaning in those images or, on the contrary, to restore power and meaning to a possible ideal that was never achieved.

VYACHESLAV AKHUNOV was born in 1948 in Och, Kyrgyzstan. He lives and works in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

SELECTED EXHIBITION SINCE 2007

2018 Vyacheslav Akhunov, *Red Mantra*

Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy

2017 *Neon Paradise. Shamanism from Central*

Asia, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy

2016 *Quand fondera la neige où ira le blanc.*

Collezionismo Contemporaneo. Opere dalla collezione Enea Righi, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Italy

2015 *The fourth prose*, curated by Marco Scotini, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy; *Balagan.*

Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places, curated by David Elliot,

Kuhlhaus Berlin, Berlin, Germany; *Project 35: The Last Act*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art,

Moscow, Russia; *Early Too Late. Middle East*

and Modernity, curated by Marco Scotini, Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Bologna, Italy

2014 *And the trees set forth to seek for a king*, curated by Raphie Etgar Museum On the Seam

(MOTS), Jerusalem, Israel; *The Other & me*, curated

by Jassim Alawadhi and Colin Reaney, Sharjha Art Museum, Sharjha, UAE; *The empty pedestal*, curated

by Marco Scotini, Museo Archeologico, Bologna, Italy

2013 *The Red Line*, solo show curated by Marco Scotini, Laura Bulian Gallery, Milan, Italy; *Lost to*

the Future, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore Biennale 2013, *If the World Changed*, Singa-

pore; *More light*, 5th Moscow Biennale 2013, curated by Catherine de Zegher, Moscow, Russia; *Winter*,

curated by Ayatgali Tuleubek and Tiago Bom,

Central Asian Pavillion-55. Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy; *The Collection As A Character* MuHKA mu-

seum, Antwerp, Belgium; *At the Crossroads: Con-*

temporary Art from Central Asia and the Caucasus,

selling exhibition, Sotheby's London, 03.2013

2012 *Documenta (13)*, curated by Carolyn

Christov-Bakargiev, Kassel, Germany; *Arsenale*

2012, Ukrainian Biennale of Contemporary Art, curated by David Elliott, Kiev; *Revolution vs*

Revolution, Beirut Art Center, Beirut

2011 *I've Dreamt About*, MUDAM-Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg;

Atlas. How to carry the world on one's back?, Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany; *Between*

Heaven and Earth - Contemporary Art from the Centre of Asia, Calvert22, London, UK; *Ostalgia*, cu-

rated by Massimiliano Gioni, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City, NY, USA; *Atlas. How*

to carry the world on one's back?, ZKM - Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Germany

2010 *Watchmen, Liars, Dreamers (Erudition concrete 3)*, FRAC - Ile-de-France Le Plateau, Paris, France; *Ground Floor America*, Den Frie Centre

of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark; *Lonely at the Top #5*, curated by Viktor Misiano,

MuHKA, Antwerp, Belgium

2009 *Changing Climate*, WUK Kunsthalle

Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria; *11th International*

İstanbul Biennial, curated by WHW/What, How & for Whom collective, Istanbul, Turkey; *The view*

from elsewhere. Small Acts, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia; *For*

Keeps: Sampling Recent Acquisitions 2006 – 2009, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand;

Monument to Transformation 1989-2009, City Gallery Prague, Czech Republic.

2008 *Busan Biennale 2008*, Busan, South Korea;

I dream of the stans: videos actuales de Asia central, Museo de Arte de El Salvador, MARTE, San

Salvador, Bahamas; *Traces du Sacré - Centre*

Pompidou - Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, France; *Tracing Roads through Central Asia*, Yerba

Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, USA

2007 *Live Cinema/The Return of the Image:*

Video from Central Asia - Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA; *Time of the Storytellers*,

curated by Viktor Misiano, Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland; *52nd Interna-*

tional Art Exhibition Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; *La Biennale de Montréal 2007*, Montreal, Canada