

# Tarinankertojien aika

*Kertova ja etäinen katse entisten neuvostotasavaltojen taiteessa*

## Time of the Storytellers

*Narrative and Distant Gaze in Post-Soviet Art*



KIASMA





Kazakstan. Sininen kausi.  
Kazakhstan. Blue Period.  
2002–2005

## Elena Vorobyeva

★ 1959, Nebitdag, Turkmenistan ▶ Almaty, Kazakhstan

## Viktor Vorobyev

★ 1959, Pavlodar, Kazakhstan ▶ Almaty, Kazakhstan

### PAINT IT BLUE

When Kazakhstan gained its independence in the early 1990s, the new country adopted as its national symbol a flag whose main colour is turquoise blue. This represents the country's great open spaces and the infinite blue sky spreading high over its steppes and

mountains. This blue vastness also acts symbolically as a factor linking the country's Turkic peoples, such as the Tatars, Mongols and Uigurs, and in the religious sense it symbolizes the God of the Skies, Gök-Tanry. In the middle of the flag, under a golden sun, an



eagle spreads its wings as a reminder of the ancient empire of Genghis Khan.

The national sky-blue colour officially adopted by the state has been embraced by a spontaneous and peaceful 'colour revolution' among the people. As they travelled all over Kazakhstan, artist couple Elena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev noticed that the red of revolution visible everywhere during the Soviet era had been replaced by this turquoise blue, which is called *kok* in Kazakh. "The Kazakhs love this blue, and if something needs painting, choosing a colour poses no problems – it'll be *kok*," they say. Today it is certainly the country's favourite shade: houses, doors, fences, benches, rubbish bins and even graveyard crosses are all painted in it. This monochrome colour world has arisen freely and spontaneously among the people. Kazakhstan's blue period can also be linked symbolically with the present period of 'peace, progress and stability' under President Nursultan Nazarbayev, which has lasted since 1990.

In "Kazakhstan. Blue Period.", series of photographs document this nationwide colour spree graphically and with warm humour. Elena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev make documentary comments on reality, adding nothing and not changing by artistic means what exists and can be seen. However, what the artists choose to include and exclude brings out their personal way of seeing the world and of allowing images to tell stories. They trust in the power of the visual and strengthen its natural features by presenting their material broadly, as if in an

archive. The cavalcade of images forms a homogeneous whole despite the innumerable interesting details, with turquoise blue naturally acting as the common denominator.

*Time of the Storytellers* also features a new work called "City". In the video forming part of the installation, urban views in a black-and-white grey can be glimpsed at the end of a wedge-shaped structure, right down by the floor. Here, the artists' chosen view is focused and limited. The video image acts as the closure point in a false perspective created by the space structure, thereby forming the work's *punctum*, the detail that draws one's attention. The "blue period" has now ended, colours have vanished, and modern urban life that is so stressful everywhere has also reached Central Asia.

Right now Kazakhstan, which is often seen only as a land of great empty steppes without any urban city life, is a hot spot for huge construction projects. Several monuments with modern glass and steel design are rising in the new capital, Astana. These tell the world through carefully chosen symbolism about the country's wealth and internationalization, as well as the peaceful coexistence of many religions, which is important for internal stability. One of the most symbolic of these buildings is probably the pyramid-shaped 'Palace of Peace and Reconciliation' designed by British architect Norman Foster, which combines Soviet-style ideological magniloquence with ultra-syncretistic idealism and an archetypal form.

*Jari-Pekka Vanhala*





Kaupunki  
City  
2007





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