

## PRESS RELEASE

### ILYA & EMILIA KABAKOV *The Strange Museum*

**Opening Friday 7 October 2005, from 12.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.  
Galleria Lia Rumma, Milan**

To mark the launch of the "Start" initiative, currently being promoted by 24 Milan galleries, the Lia Rumma Gallery in Milan is pleased to present ***The Strange Museum***, a project by Ilya & Emilia Kabakov.

***The Strange Museum*** is a complex installation which completely transforms the space of the gallery by making its rooms resemble those of a late eighteenth century provincial museum. The interior is divided into three parts by six pilasters which emerge from the two lateral walls; a high band of listel fillets in dark wood covers the lower part; higher up, a floral frieze in gold stucco runs along the entire perimeter of the walls. Three large canvases are displayed next to each other towards one of the sides of the gallery, each of them mounted on pedestals and placed inside transparent Plexiglas cases. The room is wreathed in semi-darkness and conjures up the almost religious atmosphere of a traditional museum. The only source of light is that provided by the spotlights, pointed towards both the front and the back of the three canvases. On the back of the paintings, placed between the wooden strips of the canvas frame, there are extremely delicate shapes in the form of small white wings. The front of the canvases bears realistic subjects, painted using traditional techniques. One of them depicts an artist viewed from behind as he paints in front of an easel in his studio (*The Luck Idea*); another painting shows a hospital interior with a doctor standing beside the window (*In the Hospital*); the third depicts three small boys sitting round a table, absorbed in reading a book (*The Interesting Book*). In each of these three paintings, an anomalous detail emerges. In the canvases entitled *The Luck Idea* and *The Interesting Book*, the traditional style of painting is broken up by an abstract element: a white band – which in *The Luck Idea* is placed in the left-hand corner and in *The Interesting Book* is painted horizontally near the bottom – breaks up the depiction of the subject. In the canvas entitled *In the Hospital*, in contrast, there is a large oval chandelier which creates a particularly bright light instead of the geometric band. By carefully observing both sides of the three canvases, a clear correspondence emerges between the shapes of the wings placed on the backs and the anomalous details on the front parts. The shapes on the backs of the paintings are concentrated in the part corresponding to the anomalous details and increase the sense of intentional ambiguity which is destined to remain unresolved.

Ilya Kabakov (Ukraine, 1933) and his wife Emilia (Ukraine, 1945) have already exhibited their work at the Lia Rumma Gallery in Naples in 2000 with their installation entitled *The Sick Child*. In recent years their works are based on the total transformation of space, which takes the form of theatrical mise-en-scènes. Their works, apart from references to their own personal histories, linked to life in post-Stalinist Russia, represent a global analysis of the human condition, frequently representing dramatic aspects viewed through an ironic lens.

Ilya & Emilia Kabakov rank among some of the most interesting artists on the international scene. They have taken part in the main international events, such as the Venice Biennial, the Whitney Biennial and Documenta. Their works feature in the collections of the most important museums in the world: MOMA in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Kunsthalle in Berne, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. They currently live in New York where they moved in 1991.

The exhibition will also remain open on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 October from 12.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.