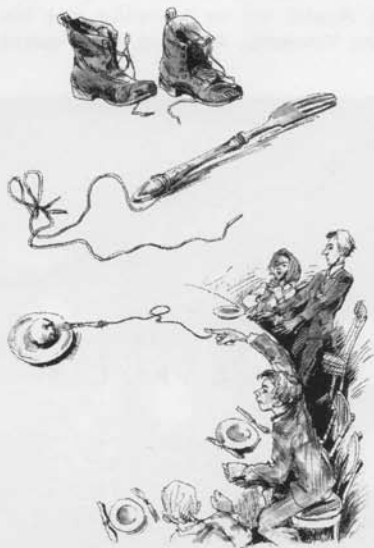


COLUMBUS, OHIO

Upon entering ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV's installation "20 Ways to Get an Apple Listening to the Music of Mozart" (*Columbus Museum of Art, February 1—June 10*), the viewer is immediately struck by a sensation of lightness. A room within a room, the outer limits of the installation are a series of white walls comprised of flowing fabric. The space is enveloping. At first there do not appear to be any sharp angles. There is a precursory unboundedness contradicted once the viewer advances into its midst. Accentuating the pull between airiness and enclosure is, in the artists' words, "the music of Mozart, one of his piano pieces, light and transparent...."

The work's core is an excessive table (on which the fabric of the walls becomes a crisp tablecloth) with a lustrous red apple at its center. The stage for a fairy tale or allegory is set. The one component that initially offsets the ethereal quality of "20 Ways" is the attendant (a.k.a. museum guard) positioned at the entrance, ostensibly present to ensure that only so many viewers enter at once. The viewer's passage through the installation is highly scripted, a counter-clockwise, sequential progression from one of 20 place settings around the table to the next. "20 Ways" is broken down into assimilable, discrete fragments; the unnoteworthy plate and silverware of each setting are given dimension by a page of unique text handwritten in the original Russian with typewritten English translation, and by an illustration. The artists base the viewer's interaction with "20 Ways" on the model of reading a book, moving from one page to the next.



How does a hypothetical dinner party-er successfully claim the apple? Though the apple to begin with is rife with associations ("the fall of man/original sin/Adam and Eve" being an obvious one), the viewer quickly abandons any general preconceptions of the object's worth in favor of its specific meaning for each of the 20 places. The Kabakovs state, "together the ways represent a large 'fan' of diverse possibilities: philosophical, linguistic, magical, technological, psychological, political, etc....a small encyclopedia of all possible ways of 'appropriation'...."

Discourses of appropriation are as varied as the pretend guests. The 8th Way to attain the apple involves a man tying his shoelaces together: "...I grab the fork from under the table, aim and toss it at the apple. If I have correctly calculated the length of the two laces and my outstretched arm, accurately selected the trajectory and the force of the throw, then the fork will stick into the middle of the apple...." Another Way is to forego the literal apple at the table's center altogether in favor of the metaphorical apples of a particular guest nearby.

Perhaps the balance of the identity of the installation's first character (the guard), simultaneously greeting guests/viewers at the door and forbidding certain newcomers (those representing a traffic overflow) from the gathering and/or protecting museum property ("20 Ways" being the latest contemporary art addition to the permanent collection), is a neat analogy to the characters of the installation proper. In them rests the tension of outwardly being part of a collective whole, while inwardly conjuring up myopic relations to the apple. It's interesting to consider how the viewer—with the weight of the cultural edifice (the museum) and the bearing of the guard—comes to feel a sympathy with the implied guests. Couldn't it be that viewers harbor their own fantasies about somehow ingesting the art work (perhaps even a desire to yank the tablecloth or to touch the voluptuous fruit)—desires that are held at bay primarily by an adherence to the codes of proper behavior? Radically exploratory imaginary space is transgressive. The third rail that electrifies "20 Ways" is how it scandalizes even as it receives sanction from the art establishment.

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