# Development of Intercultural Dialogue between Russia and Europe in the Sphere of Modern Art (by Example of the Art on Site Project)

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The National Center for Contemporary Arts (NCCA) is a museum, exhibition and research organization dedicated to the development of contemporary Russian art in the context of the global art process, as well as to the creation and implementation of programs and projects in the sphere of contemporary art, architecture and design, both in Russia and abroad.

The National Center for Contemporary Arts was created in Moscow in 1992, when Russian contemporary art just started acquiring the basis for its normal existence and development. The Center became an important and crucial structure for consolidating the efforts of masters of contemporary art, as well as stimulating their activity. NCCA activities became an essential factor in the artistic life reorganization processes that were occurring in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s. It was important both for Moscow, where the Center was based at the time, and the many other regions of the country in which NCCA effort and initiative helped to launch the implementation of projects in the sphere of contemporary art, triggering its development there.

Today, when the previous years’ efforts are starting to bear their fruit and results, the National Center for Contemporary Arts is continuing on with active work aimed at developing and popularizing contemporary Russian art and integrating it in the global arts context.

NCCA has been a network organization since 1995. We have a network of branches that is growing all the time. Today, the Center has branches in Kaliningrad, Yekaterinburg, Saint Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod. It has already reached agreements to open two North Caucasus branches in Vladikavkaz and North Ossetia. And in the foreseeable future, the branch network will only continue to grow.

From the standpoint of our joint work with the European Union nations, we already have fairly broad experience there. The year 2009 provided another very positive example – the implementation of a major artistic project called Art on Site, which was demonstrated at the Moscow Biannual of International Contemporary Art. The project involved us inviting artists from different nations who had worked with both our regional branches and the Moscow NCCA. After living in these regions and acquiring some real-life experience there the artists then went on to create works basing on the impressions of what they had seen. After that, we gathered all these groups and displayed their works at our Moscow venue – the National Center for Contemporary Arts – where they appeared together with the works of Russian artists from the cities where these foreign guests had been working.

For the situation in Russia at the time, this project represented a fairly new format of communicating with European artists. The history of the project’s start is very important. Two years ago, realizing that the residence program was not developed enough in Russia, one of our NCCA councils decided to propose the residence of German artists as one of our competitive European Union program projects. This was aimed not only to be a format in which the artist works in residence and potentially communicates with the local situation, but also in which this residence develops into a fairly deep and interesting look into various local identities. We would like to underscore that the project was staged in four branches along with the Moscow Center. What came out was a map of certain Russian regions from the perspective of the German side’s interpretation of a local character, which was presented in an interesting manner in the final project. From the standpoint of Russian issues and European identity – how people work with these concepts and how these concepts are researched through contemporary art – this residence experience was unquestionably important.

Initially, the project’s concept was determined at a seminar held in one of the cities taking part in the project. Then, each of the branch’s selected curators took a research trip to German cities. Obviously, this trip was prepared in advance and our German partner institutions, the centres that for years have been working with residence artists were expecting us there. For us, this came as a very important exchange of experience about ways to organize residence programs. The artist first came to the city for a month to conduct some research. He then returned for a second time to work on implementing the project. And of course, for such a representative level of project submittal, it was important that this effort became a part of the Third Moscow Biannual of International Contemporary Art. The final exhibition in Moscow could just be the place to demonstrate to the broader audience a series of artistic interpretations of the histories of myths and places.

As for the problems and objectives that we face in our work with cultural representatives from the European Union nations, we would like to point out that we still need more information that we currently lack. Despite the new types of information that are being developed from day to day, it would be wonderful if the European Union nation representatives could provide us with support in the possibility of displaying the most famous authors of Europe in our halls.

In addition, Russia currently faces an acute problem in the sphere of contemporary art education. We are referring to audiovisual contemporary arts as a whole. At present we already have some critics, curators, researchers and artistic creative people who are well-known across the world. But we do not have education – a full-fledged and professional system of education specifically in the sphere of contemporary art. We would like to count on European Union’s help. In this respect, we could develop programs with leading educational organizations such as the Moscow State University, the Russian Academy of Arts and others and we would only be too happy to receive specialists in the spheres of education and contemporary audiovisual arts on our territory.