

Contemporary primitives: Domitilla Dardi reflects on the search by upcoming designers for a modus operandi that goes beyond industry

Since 1928

Search Domus...

Log in

# domus

Italiano  
Sign up / Log in

[Architecture](#) / [Design](#) / [Art](#) / [Products](#) / [Domus Archive](#) / [Shop](#)

Contents [News](#) / [Interviews](#) / [Op-ed](#) / [Photo-essays](#) / [Specials](#) / [Reviews](#) / [Video](#) / [From the archive](#) / [Competitions](#)

Magazine [Current issue](#) / [Local editions](#)

Network [Your profile](#) / [RSS](#) / [facebook](#) / [twitter](#) / [instagram](#) / [pinterest](#) / [LOVES](#)



## The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

At the immense Mystetskyi Arsenal, Ukraine's first International Biennale of Contemporary Art advocates a revitalisation of country's deep artistic and cultural traditions.

[Art](#) / Maryana Greenberg

Author

[Maryana Greenberg](#)

Published

20 July 2012

Location

[Kiev](#)

Sections

[Art](#)

Keywords

[AES+F](#), [Ai Weiwei](#), [Boris Mikhailov](#), [David Elliot](#), [Emilia Kabakov](#), [Jake and Dinos Chapman](#), [Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art](#), [Louise Bourgeois](#), [Mystetskyi Arsenal](#), [Natalia Zabolotna](#), [Oleg Kulik](#)

Network

[Like on Facebook](#)

[Share on Twitter](#)

[Pin to Pinterest](#)

Built to dominate Kiev, the Mystetskyi Arsenal is now visible from the whole world, as the host of the first [Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art](#). The 50,000 square metre space is hosting 99 artists such as [Ai Weiwei](#), [Louise Bourgeois](#), [AES+F](#) and [Jake & Dinos Chapman](#), alongside Ukrainian contemporary art luminaries [Ilya & Emilia Kabakov](#), [Oleg Kulik](#) and [Boris](#)

**Mikhailov.** They were all persuaded to participate by the Biennale's artistic director David Elliot, whose heroic efforts have made *The Best Of Times, The Worst Of Times: Rebirth And Apocalypse In Contemporary Art* an exhibition to enjoy and remember.

*The Kiev Biennale also finds a powerful ambassador in Mystetskyi Arsenal's director Natalia Zabolotna, has engineered a major coup for the powerful emerging art from the former Soviet Union. Zabolotna worked and campaigned for the resurrection of this massive ex-Cossack fortress, which is now Europe's largest art museum. A spectacular showcase of brick-vaulted space and white stone columns, it is a fitting venue for her Biennale vision. "Art has the power to inspire and build bridges," she remarks, with remarkable commitment. "And our goal is to bring Ukraine's artistic and cultural heritage to the world stage."*



Top: Song Dong, *Wisdom of the Poor*, 2005–2012. Courtesy of the artist and PACE gallery, Beijing. Above: Ai Weiwei, *Circle of Animals*, 2012. Yuz Collection Jakarta. Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chornyy

*"Most exhibitions made today are Eurocentric in their assumptions and relations to the art market," explains David Elliot, who is also a renowned art historian, gallerist and writer. "While not rejecting this, The Best of Times, The Worst of Times tries to present another picture, one that also takes into account the political and aesthetic developments that have shaped so much art of the present. In doing this the still reverberating impact of the*



*cultural policies of Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong are no more neglected than the much longer established but still vitally evolving aesthetic traditions of Asia, the Islamic world, Africa, and of course Europe and North America. Such influences as these and many more feed into the level platform we call contemporary art."*



Ukrainian artist Boris Mikhailov

*Ukraine is not the easiest of environments, neither for artists nor for organisers, and the legacies of the past century are visible parts of daily and public life. Artists and art thrive and develop through confrontation and controversy but blockades can stifle or distort. Some Ukrainian groups use art as a proxy battlefield for political issues of identity and hegemony. Obstruction just polarises the debate and encourages extremism while closing the avenues through which Ukrainian art and artists can find its place in the world.*

*The 50,000 square metre space is hosting 99 artists such as Ai Weiwei and Louise Bourgeois, alongside Ukrainian contemporary art luminaries*



*Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, Monument To A Lost Civilization, 1998–1999. Courtesy of the artists, The Pace Gallery, New York. Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chorny*

*In the first International Biennale of Contemporary Art, Natalia Zabolotna and David Elliot have called forth memories of Ukraine's deeper history, bringing together East and West at this former Silk Road crossroads, and advocating the revitalisation of its long artistic and cultural traditions. Trade routes are not just rivers of goods and wealth, but also conduits of art and culture. Kiev sat for a thousand years astride one of the most important trade routes in the world and is stepping forward into this role again. Where will it go from here? Maryana Greenberg*





*Anila Rubiku, Bunker Mentality/Landscape Legacy, 2012. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chornyy*

*Through 31 July 2012*  
**The Best Of Times, The Worst Of Times: Rebirth And  
Apocalypse In Contemporary Art**  
**Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art**  
*Mystetskyi Arsenal, Kiev*



*Louise Bourgeois, CELL (BLACK DAYS), 2006. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth and Cheim & Read, New York. © Christopher Burke. Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chorny*





*Yin Xiuzhen, Weapons, 2003–2007. Courtesy Annie Wong Art Foundation and Beijing Commune*



*Folkert de Jong, The Shooting... At Watou; 1st of July 2006, 2006. Courtesy of the artist and the James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai. Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chorny*





*Phyllida Barlow, UNTITLED: hoardings, 2012. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth, London. Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chornyy*



Yayoi Kusama, *Footprints to the Future*, 2012 site-specific installation for the Kiev Biennale. Courtesy of the artist's studio and Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo.  
Photo by Maksim Belousov, Mykhaylo Chornyy

Author  
[Maryana Greenberg](#)

Sections  
[Art](#)

Keywords  
[AES+F](#), [Ai Weiwei](#), [Boris Mikhailov](#), [David Elliot](#),  
[Emilia Kabakov](#), [Jake and Dinos Chapman](#), [Kiev](#)  
[International Biennale of Contemporary Art](#),  
[Louise Bourgeois](#), [Mystetskyi Arsena](#), [Natalia](#)  
[Zabolotna](#), [Oleg Kulik](#)

Location  
[Kiev](#)

Network

[Like on Facebook](#)

[Share on Twitter](#)

[Pin to Pinterest](#)



Your comments



Aggiungi un commento...

☒ Pubblica anche su Facebook

Stai pubblicando come **Artist AnilaRubiku** ▾

Commenta

Plug-in sociale di Facebook

Tweets

Follow



**Domus**  
@DomusWeb

1h

#Rzero designed the #offices for three different clients following the concept of “create without constructing”  
[domusweb.it/en/news/2015/0...](http://domusweb.it/en/news/2015/0...)

Expand



**Domus**  
@DomusWeb

2h

RT @m\_navarra: La città a fumetti. Intervista a Francis Rambert  
[domusweb.it/content/domus...](http://domusweb.it/content/domus...)

Expand



**Domus**  
@DomusWeb

4h

#1952 \_ Favola americana \_ #GioPonti racconta ai lettori di Domus le avventure architettoniche

Tweet to @DomusWeb