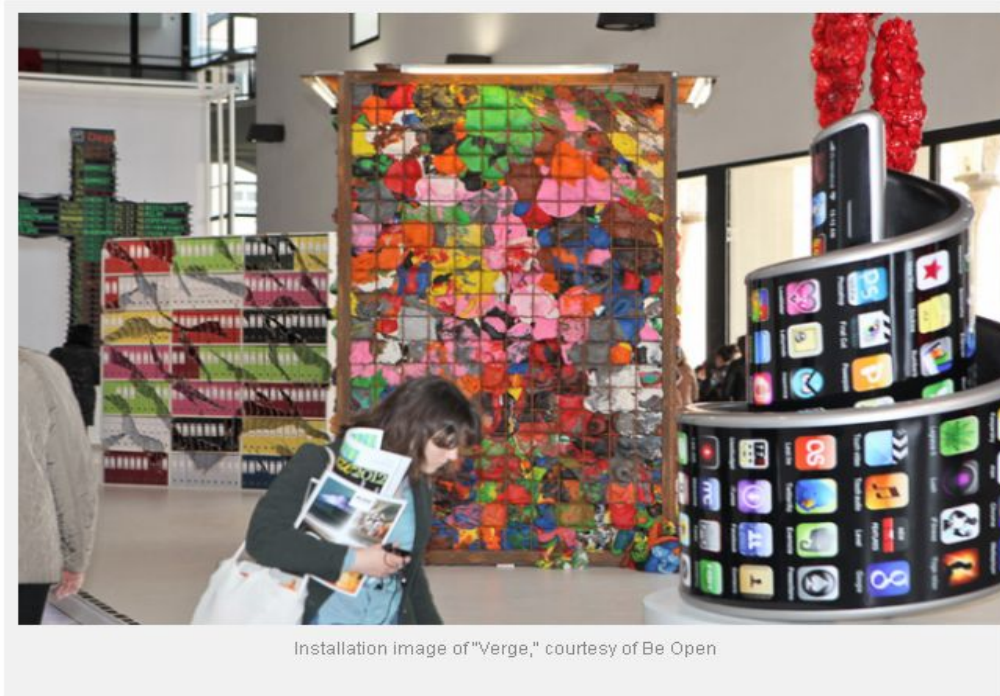


On the “Verge”: Russia’s wealthiest woman announces a new era of “Open” art patronage

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This past week, international news outlets have been aflutter with the news that [Dasha Zhukova and Rem Koolhaas’ new Garage Gorky Park](#) will “define Russia’s new identity.”

In the wake of this, there appeared in the *Financial Times*, [Georgina Adams’ curious interview](#) with a slightly-less photogenic but equally formidable new patroness: Elena Baturina. While to the art community, she may be yet unknown, those who’ve so much as glanced at a Russian paper in the last, oh, ten years recognize her as the controversial wife of the even more controversial former mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, who was ousted for exactly the type of corruption that was rumored to land his wife as the only woman on Russia’s roll call of billionaires. Baturina’s real estate and construction companies have been accused of directly profiting from Luzhkov’s decisions (such as the much-protested [demolition of Khimki forest](#), a recurring discontent that surfaced long before these elections but whose [countless victims](#), alas, don’t make quite as compelling the Artchronika cover as Pussy Riot.) Now in exile with her husband in Europe, [Baturina is rumored to be seeking new investment opportunities](#). As Adams’ article reveals, among these opportunities, she is also developing the humanitarian-minded creative think tank, [Be Open](#).

According to Baturina’s blurb on the Be Open website, the charity conglomerate aims to “build solutions for the future.”

Working in the construction industry, I collaborate with architects and designers all the time. I enjoy their alternative vision, sensitivity to human needs and restlessness – a desire to keep improving on what we have, to fashion us a better world. I want to garner this energy and responsiveness to direct it at really big issues. I am also aware of an emerging generation of creatives who deserve more attention; and I want to help them get it.

Part of helping those creatives is sponsoring projects that [map the impact of social networks on “truth”](#) and [commissioning Julian Schnabel to lecture about happiness](#) (...)

[When the announcements went out that Aidan Gallery, Guelman Gallery and XL – three of Moscow’s leading galleries – would “restructure,”](#) most people assumed that XL’s Elena Selina’s official statement about taking on sponsorship for her projects meant a few more press walls and vodka stands around the Winzavod. On April 16, however, crowds in Milan got another taste of what such sponsorship could look like, when Selina curated the [Verge](#) exhibition for Be Open.

Timed to coincide with International Design Week, “Verge” brings together five artists “on the edge of art and design,” and all, incidentally, from XL’s stable: Irina Korina, Mikhail Kosolopov, and Alexey Buldakov (all featured in [Baibakov Art Projects’ first project, invasion : evasion](#)) as well as Sergei Shekhovtsov and Electroboutique. Critic Valentin Diaconov penned the catalogue essay (a decision he wryly acknowledged on his social network pages.)



Installation view of “Verge,” courtesy of Be Open



Aleksei Savrasov, The Rooks Have Come Back, 1871

[As Baturina tells Adams](#), the exhibition is only the first in a planned program of sponsorship for contemporary arts (though Baturina confesses that she’s more a fan of the classics, citing Aleksei Savrasov.) [As Adams reports:](#)

Her idea is to stimulate innovation and “good design”, and so contribute to a better world: “I am convinced that human ideas and thoughts are often influenced by the visual. If people are shown horrible things then they become aggressive and horrible themselves. But beauty, on the other hand, brings a peaceful society.”

While one can see how this kind of hopeful optimism can come across in Savrasov’s rooks, Buldakov’s bookshelves – chainsawed through in a process captured in Dmitri Venkov’s film [The World of the Other](#) – may pose a little more challenge. It will be interesting to follow how the development of Be Open, particularly in its partnership with Selina and the Moscow scene.



Alexey Buldakov, A Slight Correction in Design (detail), 2008, courtesy of Baibakov Art Projects