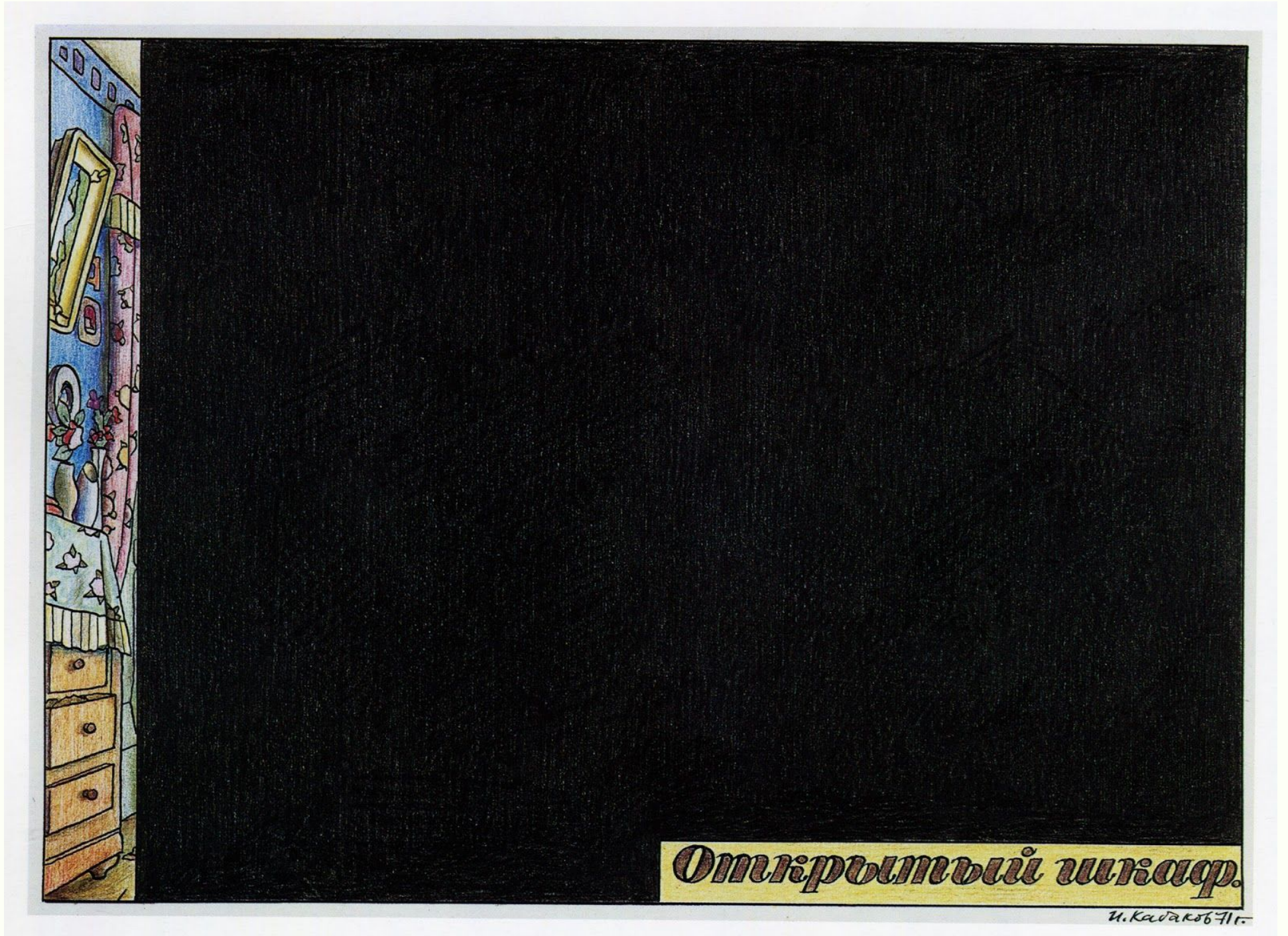




# Art History Colloquium

Friday, April 16th | 4:00–6:00 pm | Via Zoom



Ilya Kabakov, a page from *Sitting-in-the-Closet Primakov* (from the album series *Ten Characters*), 1971. Source: [ilya-emilia-kabakov.com](http://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com).

## JULIA VAINGURT

# The Show of Weakness: Antiheroic Performances in Heroic Times

In the 1970s, Ilya Kabakov, a children's book illustrator and soon-to-be internationally acclaimed virtuoso of "total installation," produced a cycle of albums under the title *Ten Characters*. These albums consisted of drawings and short narratives, each devoted to a character personifying one of the artist's phobias or fears. The albums were meant to be shown and read in a small circle of like-minded artists and friends. The question arises: in channeling his personal phobias into playful performances, does the artist disavow them, or reclaim them? – master, or give in to them? Does fear turn into its opposite, a fortitude of sorts, when it is acted out and shared? And, what potential for communion and communication, solidarity and transformative change, might be contained within antiheroic performances of fragility, failure, and finitude? The talk will explore these questions and examine Kabakov's performances of his own "complexes, neuroses, even hysterics" (as he calls them) in the context of larger tendencies in late-Soviet unofficial culture, in which weakness became an aesthetic strategy and ethical code.

**Julia Vaingurt** is an associate professor of Russian studies at the University of Illinois in Chicago. She is the author of *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s* (Northwestern University Press, 2013) and a coeditor of *The Human Reimagined: Posthumanism in Russia* (Academic Studies Press, 2018) and *NestandArt: Zabytye eksperimenty v sovetskoj kul'ture, 1934-1964 gody* (*Nonstandard: Forgotten Experiments in Soviet Culture, 1934-1964*, forthcoming from NLO, 2021). She is currently working on a book that explores the poetics of weakness in late-Soviet culture.