**Aziz:** I would like to introduce our guest today, Elena Peshkova. She is the president of the Korovin Foundation. I would like to tell you a little bit about our project. Our conversation today is not an interview, but a conversation. To get a story from you about your life. The project is called Oral Histories and we are interested in human destinies against the background of great historical events. And your story will be a wonderful historical source for future generations so that they can make impressions about our contemporaries. I have learnt a little about your biography and I was very impressed by it. You have a managerial speciality, but you are closely connected with art, you studied at VGIK. Can you tell me how you became interested in it? From childhood? And a little bit about your family.

**Elena:** hello, thank you for the invitation, for taking part in this project. It is a great honour for me to be in history, what is happening and what will be for future generations. If my story will somehow help to form an idea of this time, I will be very happy. My background is in project management. I'm a very good organiser. I organise exhibitions, events. I had a painting studio in Moscow. I loved to draw, write poetry, like all children. And at some point society cuts off our wings and when you become a person, acquire a profession, you can come back and start to regain your wings. At such a creative moment I wanted to write, to reflect, I finished my piano class. As we were all told in Soviet times that you have to finish schools, there were teachers who said you have no ear. A lot depends on the teacher and not always the right people. And when I closed my eyes and saw my hands playing the instrument. When we sold the flat, I sold my piano. I went to school, got my degree. And still, about 10-15 years later, I came back to that instrument. I had an electronic instrument, and I bought exactly the same instrument. And it's such a thrill - it's a return to childhood. There is an inner child in each of us who needs to be loved, respected and brought back to childhood.

**Aziz:** Were your parents connected to creativity, to the arts?

**Elena:** no, my parents are from the construction field. They played a huge role in my life path. They gave me a good education, helped me in the field of fundamental education. I have a managerial skill and it helps me to communicate with creative people, to organise something. When you are in a creative flow and you come up with a detail for a project, my employees then argue at me and say: How so, yesterday there was nothing, and now you have come up with it, it's additional costs. And I realise that the project will not work without it. The organiser, producer, when he works, he understands the idea, he is on the same wavelength and thus the effect of the whole action is strengthened.

**Aziz:** Did you finish school and general music school? Where did you go afterwards?

**Elena:** State University of Management in Moscow. It is a good university. At that time, this project management as a direction was just beginning. It is now every second project manager. It was very interesting to me. After graduation, I worked in a large company, and in my fifth year I joined the American company HP, and it gave me a big leap in my life, because it's endless business processes, it's organisation, it's administration, it's working in a large corporation, it's the basis and it's a reference point. You have to build business processes to develop yourself. You can't just go and trade on the market. This basis gave me an understanding of scale. How to build a system.

**Aziz:** How long have you worked in this company?

**Elena:** 2.5 years. It was a great experience for a beginner. It was also where I met my future husband. And we have been together for so many years. And I moved here after him. At that time there was a new generation. It was event management. It wasn't there either. This is 2006. And I realised I wanted a new speciality. I lacked such a company for creativity.

**Aziz:** You studied, then you get into one of the world's top companies. You work there for 2.5 years. And suddenly, you feel dissatisfied.

**Elena:** exactly so, because I could have a good career there and people work there for 10-20 years until certain moments and from all points of view this company gave me a huge leap, but inside I lacked freedom, creativity, development, I wanted to improvise. I am such a person that I need something new all the time. And when I learnt that there is a new direction in event management I tried to start with the hotel business and I was lucky to find good people.

**Aziz:** Luck is for those who are looking. Looking back, do you have any regrets?

**Elena:** I'm just happy. That I left the company, that I found a new direction. All the baggage that I gained both in the company and at Formica, which is one of the leaders in exhibition activity. I went to work there after HP, it was a quiet horror. It was started by Maxim Zverkov, a very interesting entrepreneur. Now this company has grown into a huge structure. This company was in its infancy and I was invited with my experience to help facilitate global growth. That's what I've been doing in parallel with my creative tasks. When I flew to Tashkent, I found out that my colleagues were also in Tashkent because Inoprom was taking place there. This exhibition was done by Formica. The first industrial exhibition I organised was held in Ekaterinburg. I was the Director of the exhibition in 2010. Formica managed the exhibition projects and they made a branch to Central Asia and for 2 years now I have been meeting my colleagues, it's like parallel destinies touching each other.

**Aziz:** how long have you lived in Ekaterinburg?

**Elena:** it was travelling by plane. Two or three times a week. Angela's favourite hotel. I didn't even see the city. I saw only pavilions, held meetings, and I left quickly. I was designing Ekaterinburg EXPO, a large exhibition centre, I went to Stuttgart and Dusseldorf to exchange experience, studied their large exhibition centres. They were monsters of the exhibition business. Germany has always been a place where you could see ideas, understand how business processes work. I am very grateful to this experience. And we designed a very cool project Ekaterinburg EXPO on the basis of this experience.

**Aziz:** our German listeners will be very pleased to hear this.

**Elena:** In terms of exhibitions, I really liked Hannover. It is the world's exhibition capital. In 2014, Russia was a partner country.

**Aziz:** it is called Messestadt, i.e. exhibition city.

**Elena**: I love Hannover very much. And they did a project there where Merkel and Putin were together and it was all very beautiful. Wonderful times.

**Aziz**: You move so easily and quickly in space and from one activity to another. In your exhibition activities, did you have the opportunity to engage in creative projects? Or were they all commercial?

**Elena:** it's already creative.

**Aziz:** were the exhibitions of an economic nature? Or were there artistic ones too?

**Elena:** at that time there were too. At the Inoprom exhibition in 2010 there was an industrial biannuale as one of the parts. Alisa Prutnikova is a monster of the art business, a person whom I love and respect very much, she is such a cosmic person. And so she did this biennale. We had an exhibition of retro cars there, it was 40,000 square metres. We had to fill the space in three months. So half of the pavilion was given to retro cars, some other art project, we had to fill the space. In 3 months we had to get the companies together and stand on the square.

**Aziz:** I visualise it all as a dynamic work. You are a very dynamic woman and it's immediately visible and projects of such a scale, which you organised and suddenly such a transition. How did you come to this?

**Elena:** I had a deep personal crisis. I had an issue with childbearing. I was married and I really wanted children. And that made me slow down and stop. In the end I came to the point that still work gives me a boost and after I was realised in motherhood and there was then a difficult path that helped me to go to another level, to go into myself, to reflect on my life and find a new approach. And thanks to one artist, Irina Kuzmina, she offered to organise her painting master classes, and I combined my experience and her talent to teach painting, when in 3 hours everyone left her with masterpieces. It was such a trendy format where you leave with a finished painting. But it was an outlet that allowed me to stay afloat, to communicate with people. And it all came to a global project, and at the moment it is one of the mainprojects of my life, a charitable one, the restoration of Konstantin Korovin's dacha.

**Aziz:** I wanted to ask you how you came to this? And why Korovin? He is a wonderful artist, but there are a huge number of artists in Russia, and why Korovin? You are the president of the Korovin Foundation.

**Elena**: it's a mystical story. My husband decided to farm. We needed land for it. I fed him the word Yes for a long time, like an Uzbek woman. And at some point, my husband said he was buying land. And we came to Okhotino, Yaroslavl region. We looked for land there for a year. And here we see a plot surrounded by forest, 10 hectares, silence, beauty. And the most interesting thing, next to the abandoned village where the House of Konstantin Korovin. Broken windows. I was surprised, this is the first Russian impressionist, his exhibition was in the Tretyakovka in 1912, and his house is in such disrepair.

I started to spin this story. Researching, reading his memoirs. It's a very interesting source from that time. It's about Russia, it's about Paris, it's about those events. It's a treasure trove of information. There's Chalapain, Gorky, Rachmaninoff, Mamontov, Serov, Vrubel.

**Aziz:** a whole layer

**Elena:** yes, it's a big two-volume book. It's a great personality, of course. An artist at the end of his journey, became a writer. Everyone recognises that he is as outstanding a writer as an artist. Chekhov was his friend.

**Aziz:** Amazing. I didn't know any of this.

**Elena:** Korovin was also a discovery for me, the fact that he was also a screenwriter. At the end of his life he wrote the screenplay Moscow Nights. The film based on his script came out in 1936. The film was made by the British, although he was living in Paris at the time, and they did not list him as the screenwriter or author of the film. I was in the literary archive in Moscow and I found a letter where Korovin writes that he saw his film and that he was not even listed as the author. And it became a mission for me, the Russian House Abroad helped us to find this film, and we made a programme about Korovin and showed an excerpt of the film and indicated its authorship. Every work must have an author. We managed to restore justice.

**Aziz:** our specialists also made a small contribution to this.

**Elena:** nobody knows, by the way, that Korovin was in Central Asia. I learnt about it when I was here. It was a shock for me. And I'm in Tashkent and he was in Tashkent. How we opened this Korovin house. How all the circumstances unfolded. All events unfolded in the most favourable way. What went wrong, but something even better came along. When you're in a process like that, it's exciting. Let's go back to Okhotino or Central Asia?

**Aziz:** Both. Just a small clarification. Has Central Asia been reflected in his work in any way?

**Elena:** yes, of course. An exhibition in Paris in 1900. The North and Central Asia is represented there. He received a gold medal for this pavilion. After that he became very famous, on a world scale. These colours, the sky, the sun and it changes the artists' worldview and the creative process, it certainly influenced Korovin and helped him achieve the highest recognition.

**Aziz:** Do they know about it here? I, for example, have heard about it for the first time.

**Elena:** no one in Russia knows about it and unfortunately no one here either. This year we opened a project with the Uzbek Museum of Art. We have such a tradition to hold plein airs on the day of Korovin's memory. And this year we plan to do it in the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan. We will definitely show a film and hold an exhibition of works. We have just made a film about Okhotino, about Korovin, about that time. The Russian House Abroad also provided us with a film. We will introduce it into culture. The Museum of Art here keeps many of Korovin's masterpieces. Unfortunately, they are not in very good condition, they need to be restored, and we would like to open them up to the masses.

**Aziz:** it is very interesting and very important what you have told us about. I for us in Uzbekistan, and I want to thank you for that. And the partners you are working with. And I would like to finish the topic with the house. Was it difficult? Isn't it federal property? Were there bureaucratic obstacles?

**Elena:** You're absolutely right. At that time it was a house in disrepair. There was grass all around, broken windows, you could say the house was falling apart, and thanks to the district administration and municipal services, namely Petrina Tatiana supported us and we opened the museum in a month. In August we had the first Saturday clean-up day, where we cleaned and tidied everything, and in September we opened the museum. The governor came. And of course the business community helped us. This is my main idea, that the business community and museums should help each other. In Uzbekistan, this connection has been lost. In Russia, it works through some structures. For example, you buy a ticket and it says on it that a bank is a sponsor. Here there is no such thing at all. In Okhotino village we had to work through people, through personal contacts and I am very grateful to those people who supported this project with their resources. The main business support is Vladimir Yermoshin. Low bow to him for everything he has done. Someone who came to the subbotnik turned out to have a glass manufacturing plant there. And they put all the glass in our windows. They found the information through Facebook and they were so energised by the atmosphere and helped out just like that. It's really unique.

**Aziz:** I see your role here. Maybe you don't want to talk about it because of your modesty. But businessmen are all busy people and it was probably you who brought this project to them. Is this your energy, your initiative?

**Elena:** I think it was just the way the space worked out. It had to happen.

**Aziz:** but with your active participation. And what is there now?

**Elena:** now it's a museum. It's a house, there's an exposition inside and there's a curator. This is Vladimir Seliverstov. Who had a grandmother who lived in this village. And this grandmother knew Korovin when he came there. And he looks a lot like Korovin himself. It's just the same face. He put his whole soul into this place and this is the kind of people that Russia, Uzbekistan and our culture is based on. People make culture. Uzbekistan struck me precisely with its people.

**Aziz:** You have said a very deep thought. Culture is nourished by traditions, people's devotion, but if there is no competent management in modern conditions, it is very difficult to preserve and develop it.

**Elena:** Yes, business, power and management must come together.

**Aziz:** You are a bright carrier of bright competences.

**Elena:** thank you

**Aziz:** who do you work with in Uzbekistan?

**Elena:** with Jahongir Temirkhodjaev. He is a big brother. A man of huge soul, sincere heart. He is the first person I met in Uzbekistan. And he brought me into this world of art. He loves culture, traditions, the country and it is very much felt. He is a man of enormous proportions. I am very grateful to him. For the fact that he brought me into this art sphere in Uzbekistan.

**Aziz:** I know him well and he will be very pleased to hear your words. It is wonderful when people from different countries, different cultures find each other and something works out.

**Elena:** The most important thing is that we hear each other. Not just to listen, but to hear. This person will never pass by, he will always help and thanks to him our project was accomplished in 3 days.

**Aziz:** the project with our Uzbek artist Opukhtin. Tell us a little about it.

**Elena**: in autumn fate brought me together with a very interesting person, this is Victor Opukhtin. He became my children's teacher and every time in his workshop I was immersed in a completely different environment, his stories about artists, his erudition and the scope of his knowledge were simply amazing. In Moscow I had experience in organising groups and one group grew into something bigger and became Art Bureau Vysota. Already the structure.4 girls from Russia, our husbands work together, and we ended up in Victor Opukhtin's workshop and an interesting creative symbiosis was formed, where he is a maestro, a director, a teacher. Under him we did two projects. We decorated one of the private residential complexes with our works. We wanted to bring a museum-like element to the residential complex. At the moment there are identical designs and a lot of copying of Emirates and we wanted to return the identity of Uzbekistan with its patterns on a modern motif and Victor masterfully did it.Then with these paintings we were in the museum and young and old people were absorbed by it all. The project is called Living Water. We wanted the project to raise the ecological theme that water is becoming less. In European countries they understand and appreciate water, that it is an expensive resource, but in our post-Soviet space we do not understand it yet.

**Aziz:** expressive means to attract attention?

**Elena.** Yes. It is to do it through beauty, through the connection of times. The interior paintings fit perfectly into the museum space. Thank you very much to the museum for supporting us. We had a video installation, we had living water, paintings. Adras material like water from the 3rd floor came down, it was like living water. For me, it's a connection of the times. On the 3rd floor Korovin, downstairs our project. Teacher-student on a global scale. The reviews I've read are very nice. Especially when the chill starts now, people found themselves in a cool space many thought a young man from the financial sector came and I saw in his eyes the interest and the importance of reaching every heart. Everything came together in that regard. If the stars are lit, then someone needs it.

**Aziz:** it's amazing what you are telling. I am very impressed.

**Elena:** we are already being called to Russia with this project. My friends from the environmental chamber. They really like this topic. They are now doing a project on the formation of an ecological culture and maybe we will speak at the end of July. We already have ideas. Victor is giving out new scopes. It is the interconnection of cultures and fraternal peoples. Everything is interconnected. Patterns, mouldings. There was a silk road at one time.

**Aziz:** we can talk about it endlessly. You know how to ignite. At the end of our conversation, I would like to ask you how you managed to integrate so quickly. Not adapt, but integrate. We have a common past, a common history, but 30 years have passed. We have different political regimes, different ways of development, and in 2 years you create such projects that resonate in your home country. And that is why it is not adaptation, but you managed to integrate and get a response. How did you do it?

**Elena:** I can tell you straight away, my spouse integrated separately. It was more difficult for me. I still came with two small children. At the beginning I was in the absolute role of a mum. It helped a lot that we have a common language. Common cultural codes. And the Uzbek people themselves are very hospitable. And responsive. There are different people, of course. But for the most part I have encountered very friendly people. Different communities are very developed in Tashkent. I went here to study at the Focus film studio. I went to learn public speaking, acting and psychology. I met some very interesting girls there. Such people in groups are united by interests, and different groups were formed. Strong Kazakh community group. If there are any questions about everyday life or anything else, they help. In Uzbekistan, it is still very developed that you can easily start socialising on the street, in cafes. Once I went to a coffee shop with my children and met a girl that way, and we are already friends.

**Aziz:** so you feel comfortable?

**Elena:** I have made a lot of acquaintances, business community.

**Aziz:** not everyone is as good as you are.

**Elena:** everything is very easy. For example, I forgot my keys at home and the children wanted to drink water and I ask my neighbour if the children can drink water and it turns out that he is from Russia and we are from the same sphere and he helps us to do the installation for nothing. You're just in a group, you're a neighbour and you're just a good person and it works so well in Uzbekistan. But in Moscow, I'm in Moscow City asking for directions, and everyone walks past me, and I realise that they are all wearing headphones and no one can hear anyone. I get a high from Tashkent because here you can ask your neighbour for water, get to know someone in a cafe.

**Aziz:** You have a very interesting observation. You can see many things from the outside. To be a communicator in Tashkent is a great thing. And the way is open to all communicators here.

**Aziz:** I must thank you for your story. You are not just an enthusiast, but a very competent person. You have a lot of experience and you are a creative person. You have a biography of a creative person. When you talked about your crises, I suddenly remember Gauguin. He was also a banker and he had a crisis that led him to a different life. You started out as a classic manager in a large company and suddenly you turned to creativity. I wish you success and I am happy that we have people like you who integrate so easily and share your professional experience so generously.

**Elena:** the most important thing is to find the bottom in this crisis and to push off from it, not to hang there.

**Aziz:** I did not go into this topic and I realised from your reaction that it was a serious topic for you.

**Elena:** I am grateful to the people here who gave me wings

**Aziz:** that's why I had this analogy with Gauguin.

**Elena:** thank you. It was very pleasant to talk to you. I wish your project to find interesting personalities so that it becomes a letter to the future. We are in posterity, as Basta's song says.

**Aziz:** I have learnt a lot from you today. Thank you very much. It was a wonderful story.