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Martina Vacheva at SARIEV Gallery

August 8, 2021



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Artviewer, 8 August 2021
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Artist: Martina Vacheva

Exhibition title: Circle Pit

Venue: SARIEV Gallery, Plovidv, Bulgaria

Date: June 18 – August 18, 2021

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Sariev gallery, Plovdiv is pleased to present Martina Vacheva's solo exhibition Circle Pit, showing her latest series of works from 2020 and 2021 in an interconnected installation.

Ever since the artist's early work that granted her popularity, Martina Vacheva has been forging a highly recognizable visual language, a system of themes and personages. A language that acknowledges the importance of traditions, pop culture and the social context for what they are and for what they seek to be. These works artfully assume an artistic stance, brewing an alluring mixture of the humane and the grotesque. The colors are vivid and bright, the eyes of the personages are open, full of hope, moist with joy and wonder.

Martina's latest works from 2020-2021 display a visible change. The lights are extinguished, familiar faces from previous paintings sneak in, yet the pop culture stars and the mythic figures are missing. The personages are depersonalized, or more specifically they depersonalize themselves in one general trend, they are the trend itself, they undergo a process of transformation, moving out of the framework and submerging themselves into the subconscious. Specters of the image who seek realization between their own beginnings and endings that have been spliced into one and the same thing. They live through the chthonic world of their own euphoric fits, of music, of passion, as if engaged in a duel and challenging the boundaries of various rules. We may ask ourselves if they still have idols to worship. Or if the gods they wish to be are already in demise.

The exhibition's crucial work "Splash" presents the typical rock concert stunt known as "stage dive" or "slam" where the musician jumps off the stage into the crowd. The rock singer is left alone with his existential impulse to plunge into the unknown, standing on the brink between the trust in his audience and the distrust in himself and his former apologists. He plunges forth, yet here, in this moment of hesitation, for the first time in Martina Vacheva's work we witness the appearance of a splash. A spontaneous, blunt splash of paint over the canvas, serving as a limit to the notion and the image, the white blob, the rejection and the ecstasy. A liberating gesture that makes room for memory, or rather opens up a space for a totally novel reality. Whatever it may be as of now, it will never be portrayed as it was before.

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The splash, along with the exclusion of light, are brutal gestures of painting – they invade the other works from the series as well. The excessive flow of liquid is turbid, black, blue, yellow. It functions as a substitute to the social context which recently defined the personages ("Glammy Stirious", 2021); it is a lyrical aura, an unshared, yet universally gifted ecstasy ("Cannonballs Twist", 2021); it spills from the prolonged self-forgetful spraying on the face of the modern Gorgon ("Burn Out", 2021); it is the sound that will blow out the speaker ("Bottle of Lost", 2021); it spills over the two paintings from the diptych where the musician bids his audience farewell with the hope that something will bring them all together ("Irreversible", 2021); it is also the dried-up flow of erupting potential, of one's own intoxicating uncertainty that we use as a stepping-stone with the hope of carrying on ("Cannonballs Twist", 2021).

Here too, in this series of works, against the background of dim lights and splashes, things seemingly joyful come to pass, yet things that bring a premonition of war through the applied scraps of confetti, the canvas burns, the dismantling frameworks. One senses a distressing reluctance to leave the territory and a somewhat frantic impulse for prolonging the ritual as a means of providing a safe zone for self-expression. A self-expression that is clearly self-depleting, growing more and more close-quartered and unbearable, existing in a permanent ecstasy between limitation and certainty.

We ask ourselves, if these personages flee to the unknown as a promise of reaching the infinite, is that enough? What will endure in this death race*?

The extreme force of this carnal exhibition, harrowed by melancholy, powerful figures, dim lights, stark textures, sounds of some ominous decadent carnival, consists not only in the courage to be done for with yourself and with those who seemingly "are" in your midst, but also to believe there is something beyond that unites in a different, although imperceptible manner, something that sets in motion the circle pit* that miraculously appeared in the dense crowd as not just an image of our divine comedy.

text: Vesselina Sarieva

* Circle pit – a style of moshing at rock concerts where the participants push or slam into each other, forming a circle in a vortex-like fashion.

* Death race – a race/competition in any high adrenaline activity that may result in death or severe injury.

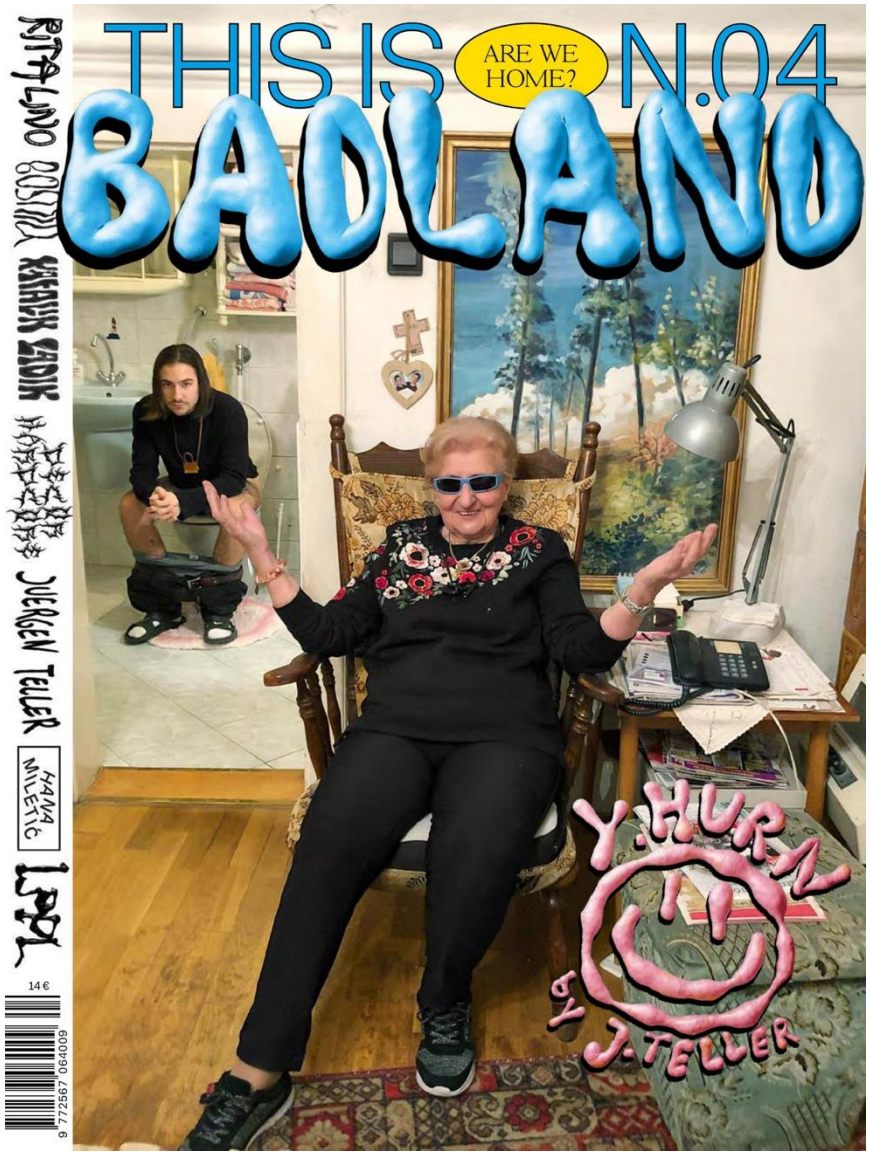
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Martina Vacheva (b. 1988 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria) lives and works in Plovdiv and Brittany, France. Graduated from the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, majoring in Illustration and Book and Print Graphics. In 2012 she specialized in the book illustrator's class of Georg Barber (ATAK) at the Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle, Germany. Solo exhibitions: "The Sex and the city", Institute of Contemporary Art, Sofia (2020) "Roots / Wurzeln" – Museum Folkwang, Essen (2019); "Mud" – Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv (2018); "Sereality" (2016, curator Vera Mlechevska) – Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv. Among her participations in group exhibitions are: "Diversity United. Contemporary European Art", Tempelhof, Berlin; New Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (upcoming); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (upcoming) (2021), "Crack up – Crack down" Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, curators Slavs and Tatars, co-curator Michał Grzegorzek (2020); Keeping the Balance, works from Art Collection Telekom, Museum Ludwig, Budapest, curated by Krisztina Szipőcs, Nathalie Hoyos and Rainald Schumacher (2020), Art Brussels (2019); 33rd Biennial of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana (2019, curated by Slavs and Tatars); "EVN Collection: Franz Kapfer/Lazar Lyutakov/Martina Vacheva", SKLAD, Plovdiv, (2019, curated by Thomas D. Trummer); "Baywatch", KVOST, Berlin (2018, curated by Nathalie Hoyos and Rainald Schumacher); "Dias de Romance", Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires (2018, curated by Carmen Ferreyra); "Schock und Schrecken", Goethe-Institut Bulgarien, Sofia (2018, curated by Stefka Tsaneva); "The Image is no Longer Available", Credo Bonum Gallery, Sofia (2017, curated by Vesela Nozharova); "Lifestyles and Still Life", Lubomirov/Angus-Hughes, London (2016, curated by Vera Mlechevska), etc. Martina Vacheva is the 2017 BAZA Award for Young Visual Artists winner. Her works are in the Art Collection Telekom, Berlin; EVN Collection, Vienna; Metropolitan Museum Library Collection, New York; and Gaudenz B. Ruf Collection, Zurich/Vienna. Martina Vacheva is represented by Sariev gallery since 2018.



Martina Vacheva, *Circle Pit*, 2021, exhibition view, SARIEV Gallery, Plovidv

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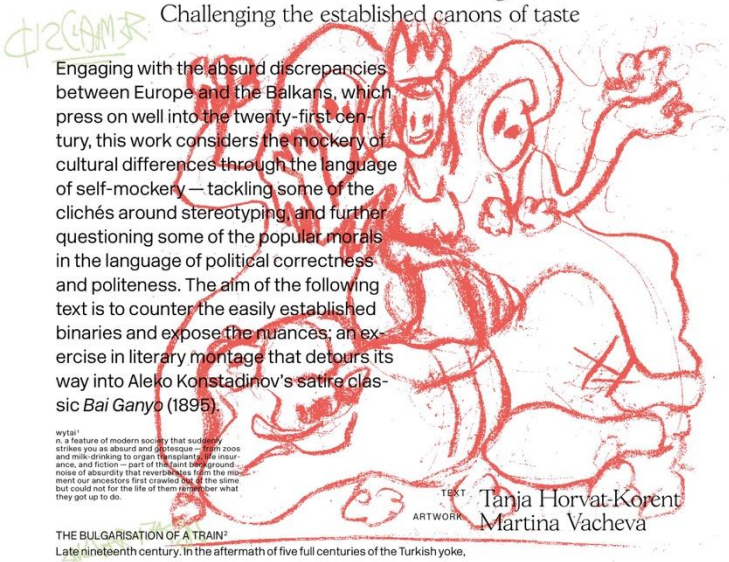
Tanja Horvat-Korent, text, Martina Vacheva, artworks Incredible tales of a Modern Bulgarian: Challenging the established canons of taste, This is Badland magazine, Are we home?, issue N. 4, 2020





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Incredible tales of a Modern Bulgarian: Challenging the established canons of taste



Engaging with the absurd discrepancies between Europe and the Balkans, which press on well into the twenty-first century, this work considers the mockery of cultural differences through the language of self-mockery — tackling some of the clichés around stereotyping, and further questioning some of the popular morals in the language of political correctness and politeness. The aim of the following text is to counter the easily established binaries and expose the nuances; an exercise in literary montage that detours its way into Aleko Konstadinov's satire classic *Bai Ganyo* (1895).

TEXT Tanja Horvat-Korent
ARTWORK Martina Vacheva

wytai[1]
n. a feature of modern society that suddenly strikes you as absurd and grotesque — from zoos and milk-drinking to organ transplants, life insurance, and fiction — part of the faint background noise of absurdity that reverberates from the moment our ancestors first crawled out of the slime but could not for the life of them remember what they got up to do.

THE BULGARISATION OF A TRAIN[2]

Late nineteenth century. In the aftermath of five full centuries of the Turkish yoke, the modern Bulgarian state has just arisen autonomously, leaving citizens of Bulgaria now in confines of disparate worlds.

Bai[3] Ganyo, the Bulgarian travelling merchant of attar of roses, launches into his misadventures. The train station is one on the Pest side of Budapest and Mr Bai is to be found in a hustle, trying to catch a train. All the while not realising he is running after the train in circles, while it was manoeuvring to come in on another track.

"Finally, at some point I see that the train has stopped and so, upsy-daisy, I jump on and go inside. I startled some guy and he shouted something at me in Hungarian — **heke meke** — and me, you know, I don't put up with any nonsense*... These Magyars!"[4]

* what actually is nonsense are the syllables intended to imitate the sound of a Hungarian.

Bai's appearance stands for the clash of the agrarian Turkish and the new modernised Europe. His attire consists of a Bulgarian brimless, peaked fur hat (*kalpak*), boots, a peasant's sash and a collarless shirt underneath an urban West European vest and frock coat. Curiously resembling a character depicted on a fortune-telling card, he is ready to conquer and swallow the world!

The **Fool** is a powerful, important and generally positive card in the **tarot** deck. It depicts a youth walking joyfully into the world. He is taking his first steps, and he is exuberant, excited. He carries nothing with him except a small sack, for the possible dangers that lie in his path. But this doesn't seem to concern him. We are unsure if he is naive or heedless by choice.[5]

I SEEM TO BE A VERB AND IGNORANCE IS BLISS

The American systems theorist, architect, engineer, author, designer, inventor, environmentalist and futurist Buckminster Fuller had a lot to say — and he was invariably inventive in the way he said it. "I live on Earth at present, and I don't know what I am. I know that I am not a category," he wrote. "I am not a thing — a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process — an integral function of the universe."

Bai Ganyo is like the rose oil[6] he sells, raw and essential — yet to be refined. Near cruel in its complexity, the traits of Bai change as they move between the dual arrangement of the book: the first catching up on our paladin's European trade routes, while in part two he returns home to Bulgaria. Preposterous and diverting while abroad, he turns into a basic corrupt bully and a sanctimonious niggard through and through upon his return. What remains solid is his failure to be a victim throughout.

This serious farce is made of stories told through the eyes of the eyewitnesses — all representatives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia — making it hard to distinguish the judging audience. Is it European, or rather Bulgarian?

As is, Mr Bai seems blissfully ignorant to any and all attempts of discrimination against his foreignness. All while immensely observant when it comes to holding prejudice for his hosts in return. Not attempting in the slightest to assimilate, he rather introduces his own social norms to the mortified or tickled European public. In his world, lice are a fact of life, *kelepir*[8] the highest achievement and suspicious of the trappings of the European 'civilisation' he worries, above all, about being 'fleeced'.

"What's to see in Vienna? A city is a city: people, houses, fancy stuff. And wherever you go, everybody goes gut morgin and everybody wants money. Why should I give my money to the Germans, we got people at home to take it from us," Mr Bai exclaims.[9]

noun: **niggard**; plural noun: **niggards**
1. a mean or ungenerous person; a miser/late Middle English: alteration of earlier *nigon*, probably of Scandinavian origin.

Unrefined unpurified unprocessed untreated unmilled unworked unpolished coarse unprepared raw natural plain. Impertinent insolent impudent impolite uncivil ill-bred churlish crass curt uncharitable ungallant derogatory disparaging malapert contumelious underbred. Loud harah flashy tacky over-the-top. But is he all baseborn low-born ordinary common?

A PUSH AND PULL BETWEEN WHAT SUSTAINS AND THREATENS

"A tavern in Southeastern Europe. Bai Ganyo ate. The way he ate, even his ears were flapping. Every organ in his body was in motion, but his teeth, tongue and nose were in first place. With what words, with what interjections, with what punctuation marks, or even musical notes is it possible to describe the chomping, the grunting, the snorting, smacking, tongue clucking, and sucking that came raining down like hail out of Bai Ganyo?!!"

Red as a lobster, he rolled himself a cigarette, fingers smeared with grease, and listened to the *Gypsies*' fiddle twang:

'Your body's like a slender tree,
A sharpened stake that pierces me.
Your sweet skirt's hem is my desire,
It has my inside all on fire!'

'Shut up now, you Chingenge! I don't want any love songs!' he shouts!"[10]

Chingene: 'Gypsy' (derogatory)
Chifut (plural *Chifuti*): 'Jew' (derogatory)



Enter Slavoj Žižek.
A Slovenian philosopher.
Popular,
populist.

Just like Aleko Konstantinov, Slavoj throws a shade of emotive irony to the musty arena of socio-political analysis. If political correctness is just fascism with morals, and incorrectnesses, in return, can build bridges, is laughing at the crude and with the crude, purifying and binding in effect? When it comes to dealing with cultural differences, there seems to be something appropriate about the need of establishing such an atmosphere where you can speak in stereotypical terms, with even the notion of discrimination being rendered redundant.

1. The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, created by John Koenig, and defining neologisms for emotions for which descriptive terms do not exist **2.** Bulgarisation, balkanisation. Tomato, tomato. Bravado? By the start of the nineteenth century, Europe has added to its repertoire of *Schimpfwoerter* (or disparagements), a new, most persistent one: balkanisation. It is now a synonym for the reversal to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian (for more, see Maria Todorova, *The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention*) **3.** *Bai* is an old-fashioned title of intimate respect used for an older man. The effect in Bulgarian can be compared to the use of titles with their names

4. Konstantinov, Aleko. *Bai Ganyo: Incredible Tales of a Modern Bulgarian*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010 **5.** *Labyrinthos*. Accessed 2020, https://labyrinthos.co/ **6.** Rose oil is an essential ingredient for many of the world's perfumes, and with eighty percent of the world's supply coming from Bulgaria — making it a source of national pride **7.** Aleko and the narrators were all really prominent figures of the Bulgarian cultural and political scene, and together they formed a group called Iolly Bulgaria **8.** The Word *Kelepir* entered Bulgarian from Turkish, and has the sense of an English cheap bargain, undeserved riches, windfall, free lunch, pork barrel, boondoggle **9 and 10.** Konstantinov, Aleko. *Bai Ganyo: Incredible Tales of a Modern Bulgarian*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010

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WAKE UP AND SMELL THE ROSES
But first, let's accompany the boy to the baths, with our hearts in our throats, as we see the writings on the wall: "All hands on deck!" He does a belly flop and starts flapping his hands, swimming "sailor style". The Germans stood stock-still.

"Water rushes up
and gushes,
cooling summer´s sizzle.
In a sudden whoosh
it rushes,
what a hefty drizzle.
Over all the curbs
it swishes,
cooling city fishes.*"[11]

* the fishes being the Germans, ofc.

Continuing on the leitmotif of laughter, our favourite proxemic hero is laughed at constantly in perplexity, but the laughter is being conveyed through the perceptive space of the narrators, and is, within the same, reduced to a critical sounding board. Laughter can function as a reflective mirror that distorts and obfuscates the orthodox binary views on cultural stereotypes. In holding a mirror to Bulgaria, the narrators scrutinise their own cultural legacy while flaunting its faults and flaws, represented by Bai Ganyo's actions and attitudes.

They laugh at him, he laughs at them, we laugh at him, they laugh at themselves. We, as readers, are equally complicit in indulging discomfitingly laughable narratives, just as we are responsible for dismantling them to create more equity, with all the power stereotypifications continue to wield. And we turn to exposing our own cultural shortcomings and logical deficiencies for the sake of making fun at ourselves. Laughter is a much better testimony to cultural heterogeneity than any (philosophical and/or political) discourse and serves an echo of the assertive optimism for universal validity.

SYNECDOCHE, BAI
Aleko, the Aristophanes of Bulgaria, makes Mr Bai be an insignia of an antihero that cuts across times and regimes, oscillating between parochial and universal—born, bred and based on socio-political realities. Unlike his bearded misfit, Aleko Konstantinov, the father of THE MISTER that KILLED HIM[12], and his fellow narrators of the book completely embraced the values and attitudes they then identified as 'European'.

baiganyovets a person who acts like Bai Ganyo
baiganyovski like in the manner of Bai Ganyo
baiganyovstina a quality or art typical of Bai Ganyo

"Then" was a time when Europe still included the Russian Empire—a world that employed Victorian era etiquette, charm-schooled social graces and regalities, far more advanced than the cultural environment of the excluded Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Albanian and Serbian cultures.[13] Bai is being pushed in the midst of European cultural diversity. Ridiculed and humiliated, he needs to get cultured and refined, so he goes to the Opera.

Puppenfee production.

"So, picture this, gentlemen! Amidst playful pleasantries being exchanged at the foyer, an indignant shriek deafens the entire establishment:[14]

'Oh how I adore your charming petals,
your fragrance galore!'
Grinning with delight,
he had given her a pinch.
He asked not for her hand, but rather grabbed her cheeks.
She wanted to call the batons.
'Scandalous!'
— she screeched."

Now is the time when Europe includes most of the non-regal Southeastern states, and with the main gist of the novel's critique remaining poignant, still. With assimilation and resistance being simultaneous hankerings, the wry humour is letting us linger, loiter, laze. "Peinlich, peinlich." Everything is still "wirklich, wirklich" nur "sehr peinlich" to the Germans.

Our 'older brother' Bai Ganyo is a microcosm of the Balkans that was, and *is*, "the Europe that is Europe, but still not quite."

The force

The fool

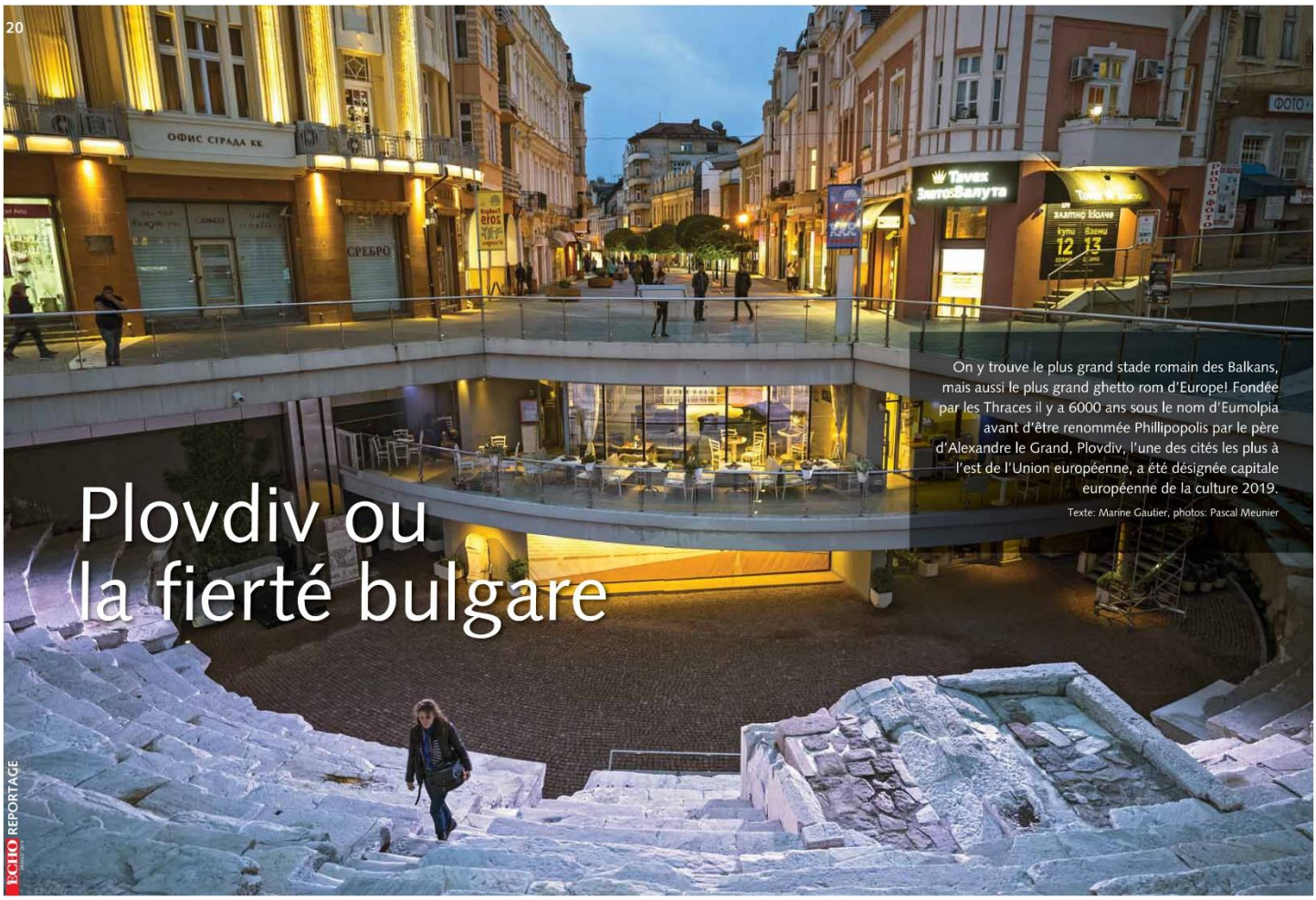
A firestarter

11. Ridlon, Marci. 'Open Hydrant'. *Tomie DePaola's Book of Poems*. New York: Putnam, 1988 12. After his own standing for elections in his native Svishtov — and ones that are depicted in Part II of the satire — he was killed by an assassin's bullet that was perhaps not even meant for him, but a politician by his shoulder 13. Mr. Bai Ganyo's surname, Balkanski, is the adjective form of Balkan, a word and concept that in the days of the late-nineteenth century, Bulgaria had already acquired many negative nuances in opposition to the positively valued (Western) Europe 14. Konstantinov, Aleko. *Bai Ganyo: Incredible Tales of a Modern Bulgarian*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010 ("You can't figure who's mad and who's mistress here, they're all so shiny, dressed in clean clothes...simpering at you as sweet as pie," the Mr explains)



Poiithracians series, 2017, Martina Vacheva

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Plovdiv ou la fierté bulgare / Plovdiv or Bulgarian pride, article
Écho reportage, 29.08.2019



Kapana ou «Le Piège» est le cœur vivant et coloré de Plovdiv. Ce quartier unique en Bulgarie n'était il y a peu qu'un terrain vague!

Pages précédentes Datant du 2e siècle après Jésus-Christ et découvert en 1923 sous l'avenue principale de la ville, le plus grand stade romain des Balkans n'a été exhumé qu'en 1973.

«Il vous plaît, mon pays?» Siméon, un jeune étudiant en droit, accoste régulièrement les quelques touristes qu'il croise. La nomination de Plovdiv comme capitale européenne de la culture est pour lui une fête. «C'est une fierté pas volée pour notre pays qui a traversé les siècles dans l'oppression», affirme t-il.
A cette occasion, la ville présente près de 300 projets et 500 évènements: expositions, spectacles vivants, projections de films… C'est la reconnaissance tardive mais tant attendue d'un patrimoine trop souvent boudé par les livres d'histoire et les touristes.

LA PLUS VIEILLE CIVILISATION

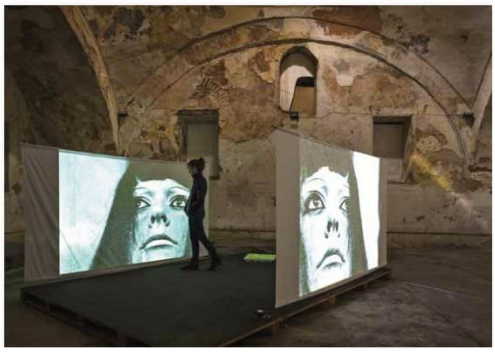
La devise de cette édition? *Together*, «Ensemble»! «Bulgarie, étymologiquement, viendrait du mot turc 'Bulga', qui signifie 'mélange'. Et ce mélange, il commence là-haut!» Siméon pointe du doigt une colline à un couple de touristes londoniens. C'est Nebet Tepe, une des six collines autour desquelles la ville est bâtie. «Ici les Thraces fondèrent la forteresse de Plovdiv en 4000 avant Jésus-Christ. Nous sommes au début de tout, dans le berceau de la plus vieille civilisation d'Europe», raconte Daniel, un guide local.
Aujourd'hui, c'est un site archéologique libre et vivant. Pas de ticket, pas de barrière. Un lieu dont on s'empare, qui appartient aux habitants, dont on profite en jouissant d'un coucher de soleil, en se faisant photographier en robe de bal ou en appréciant une bière entre amis assis sur des pierres millénaires. «Nous avons toujours été dans l'ombre des Grecs et des Romains, pourtant notre histoire est plus ancienne encore.» Daniel a hâte de partager un passé trop peu connu.

EUMOLPIA POUR LES THRACES

Le passé de la ville se déplie au fil des nombreux sobriquets dont elle s'est vue affublée. *Eumolpia* par les Thraces. *Phillipopolis* par Philippe II de Macédoine, père d'Alexandre le Grand, en 342 avant Jésus-Christ. *Trimontium* sous la protection de l'Empire romain d'Orient. *Poulpoudéva*, ou encore *Ploudin*, par les Byzantins avant que la ville ne soit conquise par l'Empire ottoman en 1345 et rebaptisée *Filibe*. Aux 18e et 19e siècles se produit la Renaissance nationale, une première émancipation des Bulgares face aux Ottomans qui les mènera à l'indépendance en 1878. La ville est alors au centre des échanges commerciaux entre l'Orient et l'Occident. Les marchands s'enrichissent et font construire sur la colline d'immenses bâtisses de bois aux façades colorées. La vieille ville est née!
Avant l'apparition de ce quartier trônait déjà sur la colline un imposant amphithéâtre construit par les Romains. Cœur battant de la ville, il accueille régulièrement concerts et spectacles. Une série d'excavations entamée dans les années septante a exhumé d'autres incarnations du passé romain de Plovdiv dont une portion d'un gigantesque stade. 30'000 spectateurs prenaient place dans la plus grande structure publique romaine des Balkans. «Lorsque j'étais enfant, j'ai vu l'avenue principale être éventrée pour révéler le stade: c'était inouï!», confie une maman. Les fouilles ont aussi mis à jour un immense forum de plus de 11 hectares ainsi qu'un odéon qui était alors recouvert par… un cinéma en plein air. «Tous les étés, je venais voir un film ici. Je me souviens d'*Il était une fois dans l'Ouest* comme si c'était hier. C'est incroyable de se dire qu'il y a 1500 ans, des spectateurs assistaient ici même à un spectacle de chant et de musique!», se réjouit Petar, un passionné d'histoire.
Cet enthousiasme pour les arts ne s'est pas éteint durant l'ère socialiste. Eloignée de la capitale, Plovdiv était alors un îlot de résistance artistique. Pourquoi la ville semble-t-elle être depuis toujours une terre amie des arts, et cela même au cœur des périodes où la liberté d'expression est muselée? «Orphée!», répond Petar. Plovdiv serait la patrie du personnage mythologique. Génie de la musique et de la poésie, il aurait béni les lieux. Mais la musique adoucit-elle les problèmes identitaires? Avec la devise «Ensemble», la ville envoie un message fort à une Europe marquée par



La colline de Nebet, lieu d'histoire, mais aussi de vie et de rencontres.



Bain turc du 16e siècle, Chifte Banya accueille désormais un centre d'art contemporain.

Plovdiv ou la fierté bulgare / Plovdiv or Bulgarian pride, article
Écho reportage, 29.08.2019






Ci-dessus
Dans la vieille ville, les demeures baroques des riches marchands de la Renaissance bulgare sont plus extravagantes les unes que les autres.

La gaïta, cette cornemuse en peau de chevreau, est l'instrument le plus caractéristique du folklore bulgare.

Elevée au milieu du 19e siècle, l'église orthodoxe Sainte Marine abrite une somptueuse iconostase en bois sculpté.

L'art s'invite désormais partout. Il sort des galeries pour s'afficher sur les murs et dans les cafés.

l'érection de murs et la montée du populisme. En Bulgarie, il a pris les couleurs d'un nationalisme volontiers agressif vis-à-vis des minorités, musulmans et Roms. C'est dans la banlieue de Plovdiv qu'est établi le plus grand ghetto rom d'Europe, Stolipinovo, qui abrite plus de 50'000 personnes.

«Sans prétendre résoudre les problèmes, la désignation de la ville permet de pointer du doigt des enjeux, et c'est déjà beaucoup. Nous apprenons à débattre, nous apprenons la démocratie, qui est encore jeune chez nous!», déclare Victor Yankov, un des organisateurs d'une représentation du mythe de Médée. Fin juin, cette représentation a eu lieu dans l'amphithéâtre antique. «C'est la première fois dans l'histoire du pays que des enfants roms, turcs, juifs, arméniens et bulgares jouaient ensemble sur l'une des plus prestigieuses scènes du pays!», se félicite l'organisateur.

ART ANCESTRAL ET CULTURE POPULAIRE

Un travail de médiation colossal est aussi effectué pour faire converger les différentes communautés vers les lieux culturels. Dans la galerie principale de la ville, beaucoup ont pu admirer le travail de Martina Vacheva. Cette artiste est l'auteure d'une série de sculptures intitulée «Post-Thraces». C'est que la Bulgarie moderne se passionne pour ses origines.

«Je me considère comme une Thrace» affirme la jeune femme. Ses œuvres font dialoguer l'art ancestral et la culture populaire en jouant avec les stéréotypes d'aujourd'hui. Comme de nombreux artistes exilés dans les années nonante, sa sœur, artiste peintre, est revenue à Plovdiv. Pour encourager cet élan, la municipalité a offert le loyer des galeries durant les deux premières années de préparation des festivités.

Si les projets présentés en 2014, date à laquelle Plovdiv a été sélectionnée, étaient nombreux, beaucoup ne verront pas le jour cette année. «Des concerts devaient se dérouler dans le cinéma Cosmos, chef-d'œuvre de l'architecture de l'époque socialiste, or il est à l'abandon. Sur l'avenue principale, les travaux sont à l'arrêt depuis des mois», déplore Pollina. Comme elle, beaucoup d'habitants sont en colère contre la municipalité, soupçonnée de corruption.

Si le succès est à nuancer, de nombreux objectifs sont atteints. La plus belle réussite étant la rénovation du quartier de Kapana ou «Le Piège». Pendant l'occupation ottomane, c'était un immense bazar où plus de 900 marchands délestaient les badauds de leur temps et de leur argent. Le quartier honore toujours bien son nom: on y entre par une petite ruelle et l'on est happé par le street art, la bière locale et les restaurants de burgers maison. Ce quartier est absolument unique en Bulgarie. La ville a rénové ce qui n'était alors qu'un terrain vague autour d'un grand parking.

A l'instar des anciens entrepôts de tabac ou encore des bains turcs transformés en centres d'art contemporain, il fait partie du programme qui réinvestit les espaces oubliés en leur donnant une orientation culturelle.

UN CALME SURNATUREL

Les rues deviennent piétonnes, les galeries fleurissent, l'artisanat local est mis en lumière. La police a cessé de pourchasser les graffeurs qui se sont vus proposer des contrats par la municipalité. Stern et Nassimo, street artistes et enfants de Plovdiv, sont ainsi passés de gamins pourchassés à peintres officiels de la ville. Ils ont redonné au quartier ses couleurs. L'ancien parking est désormais une jolie place où la jeunesse se rencontre, pratique le skate, prend le temps.

Il règne à Plovdiv un calme surnaturel. Une certaine paix, à l'image des nombreux chats errants, jamais apeurés, toujours apaisés. Ici c'est l'Est, mais c'est aussi le Sud et son indolence. ■

Marine Gautier



Ci-contre
Le théâtre du 2e siècle n'a pas le temps de prendre la poussière. Il accueille régulièrement des spectacles et des concerts.

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L'ECHO REPORTAGE

Plovdiv ou la fierté bulgare / Plovdiv or Bulgarian pride, article
Écho reportage, 29.08.2019

FLASH ART

•REPORT 15 July 2019, 3:54 pm CET

CRACK UP – CRACK DOWN *33rd Ljubljana Biennial* by Carlos Kong



1 2 3 4

Martina Vacheva, Uncle Greedy, 2018. Glaze ceramic, coins 35x35x40 cm. Photo by Jaka Babnik. Courtesy of the artist and Sariev Contemporary, Bulgaria and Archive MGLC.

What is the place of comedy in a groundless world? Amid the volatility of contemporary society, where claims of truth, ethics, and politics are challenged at the speed of a proverbial coin toss, comedy's role is deeply ambivalent. A joke about someone can reinforce another's authority. Yet when mobilized from marginalized positions, humor can divest such authority of its power.

CRACK UP — CRACK DOWN 33rd Ljubljana Biennial, a report by Carlos Kong
Flashart, 15 July 2019
https://flash---art.com/2019/07/crack-up-crack-down-33rd-ljubljana-biennial/

FLASH ART

•REPORT 15 July 2019, 3:54 pm CET

CRACK UP – CRACK DOWN *33rd Ljubljana Biennial* by Carlos Kong



1 2 3

Martina Vacheva, Bulgarian Rose Queen, 2019. Acrylic painting on canvas, plastic roses, 188 x 181 cm. Photo by Jaka Babnik. Courtesy of the artist, Sariev Contemporary, Bulgaria and Arhiv MGLC.

What is the place of comedy in a groundless world? Amid the volatility of contemporary society, where claims of truth, ethics, and politics are challenged at the speed of a proverbial coin toss, comedy's role is deeply ambivalent. A joke about someone can reinforce another's authority. Yet when mobilized from marginalized positions, humor can divest such authority of its power.

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"Crack Up – Crack Down," the 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, takes up this dualnature of comedy—the subversive "crack up" and the despotic "crack down"—and satire specifically, as its central theme. The multi-site biennial is curated by the artist collective Slavs and Tatars, whose polymorphous practice examines the syncretic histories and geopolitics of Eurasia. The collective's attunement to humorous and ironic moments of cross-cultural contact throughout their work is echoed in their curatorial debut in Ljubljana. The focus on satire moreover aligns with the critical heritage of the Graphic Arts Biennial while extending its scope in new directions.

Founded in 1955, the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts originated as a meeting point across Cold War divisions. The mobility of print media allowed for graphic arts to be mailed to former Yugoslavia for exhibition from the countries of NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the Non-Aligned Movement. This internationalist history is reflected in Slavs and Tartars' curatorial emphasis on the geopolitical conditions of humor, while satire itself evokes the history of graphic arts, as printed matter was (and remains, even in our digital age) the fundamental means of satire's circulation. Yet most novel in the biennial's curation is the consideration of the graphic as "an agency" rather than a medium. In doing so, Slavs and Tatars highlight an array of historical and contemporary practices that draw out humor's affective import, its enduring conviction, and the relevance of its potential subversion.

Hamja Ahsan's *The Aspergistan Referendum*(2019), installed across the Biennial's venues, invites viewers to vote on whether Ljubljana should join the "Aspergistan Federation," an imagined nation of the "shy, introverted, and autistic." Winner of the Biennial's Grand Prize, Ashan's intervention queries alternate states of possible solidarity, like introversion, while satirizing the fictions that sustain national identity. By naming the work a "Referendum," which takes the form of ballot boxes, a constitution, a national anthem, and hashtags, Ashan coyly critiques the exits of nations from ideals of cooperation and proclaims reticence as a mode of resistant camaraderie.

At the International Centre of Graphic Arts, various works riff on the geopolitics of satire by presenting parodies of national tropes, particularly through recourse to irony, affect, and eroticism. The grotesque figures of sexualized excess in Martina Vacheva's painting *Bulgarian Rose Queen*(2019) deflate national stereotypes of folkloristic femininity. *Uncle Greedy*(2018), her malformed ceramic statue of the Bulgarian symbol Bay Ganyo, further caricatures the figure's stereotypical imposition of crude backwardness onto the Balkans. Ferdinand Kriwet's neologisms on his *Text-Sign*(1968), like "HOMODELIGHT," "SODOMESTICK," "DREAMERICAN," conflate the vocabulary of sexuality and nationalism to disrupt the grammars of the domestic and normative. Meanwhile, in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's humorous video *The All-Hearing*(2014), two Sheiks denounce "bad-sounding call to prayer" and uphold "the position of Islam on noise pollution" in Cairo's urban space.

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ArtSeen

Crack Up - Crack Down

The 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts

By Osman Can Yerebakan



Zhanna Kadyrova: Market, DobraVaga. Photo: Jaka Babnik. Arhiv: MGLC.

Guarding the city of Ljubljana, Slovenia, are four dragons perched on each corner of the Dragon Bridge, built in the beginning of the 20th century during the Austro-Hungarian Empire rule. The quartet of beasts, with their grotesque postures and spine-chilling jaws, now symbolize the city of 300,000 inhabitants. Indicators of the city's burgeoning tourism following the bloody separation from former Yugoslavia in 1991, numerous souvenir shops sell adorable stuffed dolls of the terrifying dragons, whose menacing roars are replaced by comical grins and harmless teeth. Ridiculous, water-downed, and trivial, the plush replicas of the despotic figures accidentally manifest the workings of satirical humor, which bends the hoisted arm of the authoritarian discourse, stripping off its imperious clothes to ridicule its hyperbolic command with slipperiness of the mundane.

Befittingly, the 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts assumes satire as its central theme under the curation of Berlin-based art collective Slavs and Tatars, who have long subverted despotic decrees of power with open-ended wit and an array of transcultural references. En par with the collective's practical focus on "an area east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China" in visual art, printed matter, and lecture-performances, the roster they bring together foremost spans a similar geography, benefiting from the key location of Slovenia—the first previously communist republic to enter the eurozone—for a Eurasia-centric statement on the zeitgeist.

Crack Up — Crack Down, The 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, Osman Can Yerebakan
Brooklynrail, July 2019
https://brooklynrail.org/2019/07/artseen/33rd-Ljubljana-Biennial-of-Graphic-Arts-Crack-Up-Crack-Down#

Entitled *Crack Up - Crack Down*, the exhibition occupies a total of nine institutions and galleries around the city, starting with the International Center of Graphic Arts (MGLC), where Slavs and Tatars intertwines an eclectic narrative on subtleties of farce. Bulgarian painter Martina Vacheva's lush paintings mash pop-culture rituals of beauty pageants and car washes with depictions of overtly sexual women surrounding her native country's everyman comic figure Bay Ganjo, which has thus been adopted for propaganda by the left and the right alike. Lawrence Abu Hamdan's series *Disputed Utterances* (2018) breaks down seven real-life legal cases in which the defendant's potential innocence results from unclear verdicts on how certain words were pronounced. Abu Hamdan pairs wall texts of such slippery utterances with a three-dimensional, laser-cut plexiglass sculpture of a zoomed-in mouth with its tongue covered in charcoal and olive oil, referencing a speech-therapy method of studying the mouth's functions in making certain sounds. Arguably the closest visual and thematic lexicon to Slavs and Tatars's own practice in the show belongs to German multimedia artist KRIWET (born Ferdinand Kriwet), whose circular text pieces twist, bend, and transform phonetic and ideological potentials of words and sounds. The late artist's experiments with English tend to shake words from their cores, making them slowly morph into "nonlogical" sounds, remotely familiar yet distinctly foreign. Words such as "Marylinkman," "Incestimate," or "Heteroclyde" sound and seem almost legitimate at first sight but dissolve into obscurity. Spanning an entire room at the Švicarija Creative Centre, located steps away from the International Centre of Creative Arts, is *No More Fuchs Left to Give* (2019), a collaboration between Arthur Fournier and Raphael Koenig, saluting the biennial's history on graphic arts and gnarly parts of dissemination of printed matter. 20thcentury Marxist historian and publisher Eduard Fuch's influence on Walter Benjamin, particularly for his seminal 1935 text *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, is showcased with a densely researched display of ephemera, limited editions, and, comically, Walmart.com prints of Fuch's illustrations taken out of their context and placed into generic "European-looking" decorative images to grace suburban homes. *Dobra Vaga*, an exhibition space located by the Ljubljana River amidst the city's street market, brings the biennial into the street. Ukrainian artist Zhanna Kadyrova's sells ceramic replicas of fruits, vegetables, and fish for one Euro per gram, saluting everyday commerce and disrupting the fluctuating values of the art market. Touchable and accessible with ease, the sculptures parody rituals of exchange for high art and everyday consumables.

Crack Up — Crack Down, The 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, Osman Can Yerebakan
Brooklynrail, July 2019
https://brooklynrail.org/2019/07/artseen/33rd-Ljubljana-Biennial-of-Graphic-Arts-Crack-Up-Crack-Down#



Martina Vacheva: The appetite comes with the voting (left), Uncle Greedy (in the centre), Bulgarian Rose Queen (right), MGLC.Photo: Jaka Babnik. Arhiv: MGLC.

Crack Up — Crack Down, The 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, Osman Can Yerebakan
Brooklynrail, July 2019
https://brooklynrail.org/2019/07/artseen/33rd-Ljubljana-Biennial-of-Graphic-Arts-Crack-Up-Crack-Down#



Prickly guests

Maija Rudovska

The 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts

08/07/2019

One compelling young artist is Martina Vacheva. She won the biennial's Research Residency Award and has gained recognition both at home in Bulgaria as well as abroad. In her art, Vacheva examines Balkan stereotypes, appropriating characters from pop culture and folklore as well as other social clichés that relate to dominant political and ideological narratives. Her artwork contains a mash of vernacular culture that relies on the traditions of grotesque and naïve aesthetics to comment on sexual exploitation, myths of nationalism, masculinity and other themes. With her commentary on society and its "rituals", she belongs to those artists, who not only speak ironically about the world around us but also confirm, repeat (as memes often do) and even strengthen already existing stereotypes and clichés – as if viewing them objectively but at the same time turning them into objects that the culture wishes to consume. As Slavs and Tatars comment: "We are not against stereotypes: rather, we do our best to allow them to implode. The aim is to create models which are not recognisably left, right, conservative or progressive but nonetheless further one's (hopefully internationalist) aims."[iv] Of course, such a democratised approach allows visitors to experience the 33rdLjubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts in very different ways, and, if one is able to spend a longer time in Ljubljana, to also view this event from within the collective historical and social context, which is very abundantly represented in the city itself.

Prickly guests, Maija Rudovska
Artterritory, 08.07.2019
https://arterritory.com/en/visual_arts/reviews/24204-prickly_guests/



Crack Up - Crack Down, 33rd Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, curator Slavs and Tatars, 2019. Exhibition view.
Photo: Jaka Babnik. MGLC Archive.

Prickly guests, Maija Rudovska
Artterritory, 08.07.2019
https://arterritory.com/en/visual_arts/reviews/24204-prickly_guests/



Martina Vacheva, The soup, aus dem Buch Parents cannibals, 2013, Courtesy Sariev Contemporary and the artist

Museum Folkwang

Martina Vacheva – Wurzeln

Keramik und Collagen zwischen Tradition und Moderne

In der Reihe 6 ½ Wochen zeigt das Museum Folkwang **bis 25. August** die erste institutionelle Einzelausstellung der bulgarischen Künstlerin **Martina Vacheva** (*1988 in Plovdiv). Mit dem Ausstellungstitel **Wurzeln** verweist Vacheva auf die Bezüge ihrer künstlerischen Arbeit zur bulgarischen Volkskultur, deren Themen und Darstellungen sie in ihren Plastiken und Papierarbeiten auf humorvolle Weise aufgreift. **Der Eintritt ist frei.**



Porträt Martina Vacheva, 2019, Foto: Jens Nober

Martina Vacheva untersucht in ihrer künstlerischen Arbeit die Schnittstellen zwischen Tradition und Moderne und die Einflüsse von westlichen Kulturimporten nach Bulgarien. Seit ihrem Studium der Illustration und Druckgrafik an der Kunstakademie in Sofia gilt ihr Interesse insbesondere den Mythen und Märchen Bulgariens, deren archetypische Geschichten die Künstlerin zu zwei Künstlerbüchern angeregt haben:
Parents Cannibals (2013) und **Stupid woman** (Pop-Up Book, 2015). Die Bücher und ihre collagierten Vorlagen werden in der 6 ½ Wochen-Präsentation gezeigt.

Neben der plastischen Arbeit **Plague** (2018), die eine keramische Maske mit Textilien und Naturmaterialien zu einem archaischen Bild von Tod und Schrecken zusammenführt, entsteht mit The Stone Wedding (2019) vor Ort eine neue großformatige skulpturale Arbeit. Diese erzählt die Legende einer versteinerten Hochzeitsgesellschaft und wurde durch Geschichten aus dem südbulgarischen Rhodopen-Gebirge inspiriert. Vacheva nimmt verstärkt die psychologischen Aspekte der Märchen und Volkssagen in den Blick und leuchtet deren Beziehung zum Unbewussten und zu Kreisläufen der Natur aus.



Martina Vacheva, Plague, 2018, Courtesy Sariev Contemporary and the artist, Foto: Maria Djelebova

Als Satellit der Ausstellung findet zudem die **Keramik-Serie Postthracians** (2017) ihren Platz an der Seite archäologischer Objekte. Postthracians stellt die Frage, wie präsent Traditionen und Überlieferungen in der gegenwärtigen visuellen Kultur Bulgariens sind. Feinziselierte thrakische Goldschätze des 4. Jahrhunderts vor Christus werden von Martina Vacheva in glasiertem Ton nachgebildet und das antike Formengut mit Themen der Gegenwart zwischen Konsum und Pop motivisch verbunden.

6 ½ Wochen basiert auf kurzfristiger Planung: Spontan und aktuell stellt es junge künstlerische Positionen vor. 6 ½ Wochen wird von der Stiftung Kunst, Kultur und Soziales der Sparda-Bank West gefördert.

Martina Vacheva – Wurzeln, Keramik und Collagen zwischen Tradition und Moderne, Museum Folkwang, Essen intern newspaper, July 2019

KubaParis
Zeitschrift für junge Kunst

Martina Vacheva in conversation with Marie Himmerich

Martina Vacheva (*1988, *Plovdiv, Bulgaria*) *is an artist based in Plovdiv. She graduated from the National Academy of Art in Sofia, majoring in "Book and Print Graphics", and attended the illustrator's class of Georg Barber* (*Atak*) *at the University of Design and Fine Arts, Burg Giebichenstein in Halle, Germany. Martina's work has been included in international group and solo shows, among others at KVOST, Berlin, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, or Swimming Pool, Sofia. Martina Vacheva is represented by SARIEV Contemporary, where she had her exhibition „Mud"* (9 November 2018 – 30 December 2018). *At the moment she is preparing a project for Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts* 2019 *curated by Slavs and Tatars. Marie Himmerich and Martina met for the first time in Plovdiv in* 2018. *The conversation finally took place via Email and skype talks.*

MH: Your approach is strongly influenced by narrative, inspired for example by Bulgarian fairy tales or folk legends. How did this interest come about?

MV: My interest in fairy tales began around 2012 when I was studying at the National Academy of Art in Sofia. As my focus was especially on books I began to collect old editions, firstly because of their graphic language, their layout and illustrations. Later my attention turned in particular towards Bulgarian editions of fairy tales, songs and proverbs dating from the 1920's and 1930's. In these, the tales are narrated or recounted very pristinely, I sometimes even came across different dialects, and I was very attracted

Martina Vacheva in conversation with Marie Himmerich, interview.
KubaParis, February 2019

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Kukeri hunting Karakondzoli, 2014, graphic transfer, acrylic, collage on paper, 21,2 x 29,6 cm, Private Collection



The Legend of Katerina's Den, 2015, graphic transfer, acrylic, watercolor, pencil on paper, 22 x 53 cm

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mini-plots to the original narrative of the sister and her deer brother, among others the story of a scary woman who made a soup from one of her boobs as she felt forced to offer her husband meat for dinner. Such stories captivated me so much that I continued to search for further folk tales and legends. Sometimes I even go to mountain villages where the old people are keeping stories orally, stories which have been transformed or become a legend just by being retold from one person to another during time. The world now is globalizing so fast that I like to keep these forgotten narratives from the past and give them a new live.



The Soup, 2013, part of the book project "Parents cannibals", 2013, collage, acrylic on paper, 22 x 53 cm

MH: Another project of yours has been a fanzine edition and meanwhile you are working in all kinds of media, including recent experiments with sculpture. How do you choose your medium?

MV: For me, each material and medium gives a different sense, dynamics and weight of the idea. This functions as a whole – an idea in sync with the choice of media and material, and the way of treating them, as well as deciding about colour and aesthetics. When I studied at the academy, I never thought that I will develop just in that or that direction. For one of my first works, "Serial Portraits" (2015), I chose the concept of the fanzine edition as a form to represent portraits from the actors of cult American TV

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Serial Portraits, 2015 – 2016, fanzine editions, 13 x 19,7 cm each, colour digital print on recycled offset paper, 26 pages, 100 copies

MH: Your painting practice seems to be very aware of style, reminiscent for example of the traditions of bad or naive painting. Some, as is the case with "Baywatch" (2015), seem to cite the organizational structure of hidden object images, as they are known from children's books. At the same time, in most of the painting works there is a strong impression of decorative flatness. Are there any stylistic role models or references that matter to you? What role does humour play in this context?

MV: Aesthetics is not just a primary spur for me, but related to an inadequacy that I am seeking for. It is a conscious and purposeful part of my work. The naivety and deskilling oscillating between the form language of children's drawings and comic are a mirror of the easily digestible pop culture of TV series which produces models of social behaviour and desires that tend to be easily accepted. In my work, humour expressed through irony and grotesque sometimes serves as a parody, sometimes I use it as a critical tool, sometimes it expresses just pure naivety in its clear beautiful form. The Bulgarians are

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Baywatch, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 70 cm

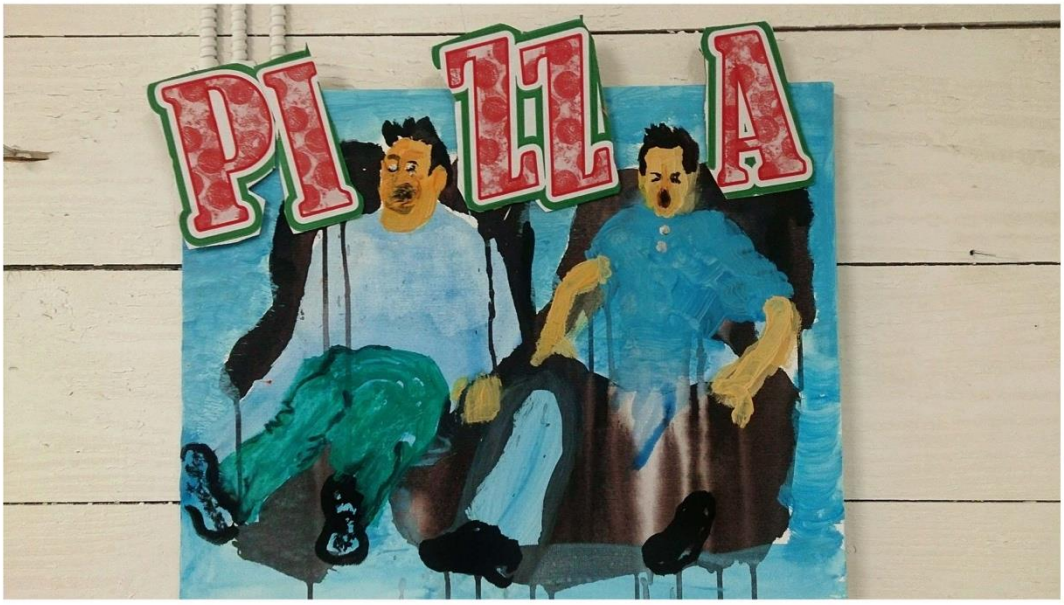
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Escrava Isaura, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 60 cm



Pizza & TV, 2018, from Serial Portraits ("Friends"), acrylic, collage on canvas, 44 x 50 cm

MH: Your "Postthracians" ceramic series (2017) amongst others refers to the famous Thracian

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with the Thracians, for example their love for gold, as a reference to the imposed culture of kitsch in our country and sought in the objects themselves. Ceramic is a popular material in ancient art which is the main link to its choice for the project. The way of treatment as for example the use of golden crystal glaze, but also general stylistics, motives and symbols are inspired by the ancient Thracian vision. So the series represents the Bulgarian heritage and what will remain of us. However, in my recent gallery exhibition at Sariev Contemporary, "Mud", I also use ceramic but rather as a reference to its earliest origin as a mud-derived material combined with other materials from nature and to mark the beginning of its evolution as an artistic means.

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"Postthracians" series, 2017, Art Collection Telekom, photo: Art Collection Telekom

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Tomb (from the "Postthracians" series), 2017, crystalline glaze ceramic, 30 x 43 x 2 cm, Art Telekom Collectiom, photo: Mitch Brezounek

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Come on Uncle to the Gypsy Market (from the "Postthracians" series), 2017, crystalline glaze ceramic, 23 x 30 cm, Art Collection Telekom, photo: Mitch Brezounek

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Baa (from the "Postthracians" series), 2017, crystalline glaze ceramic, 19 x 24,5 x 24 cm, Art Collection Telekom, photo: Art Collection Telekom

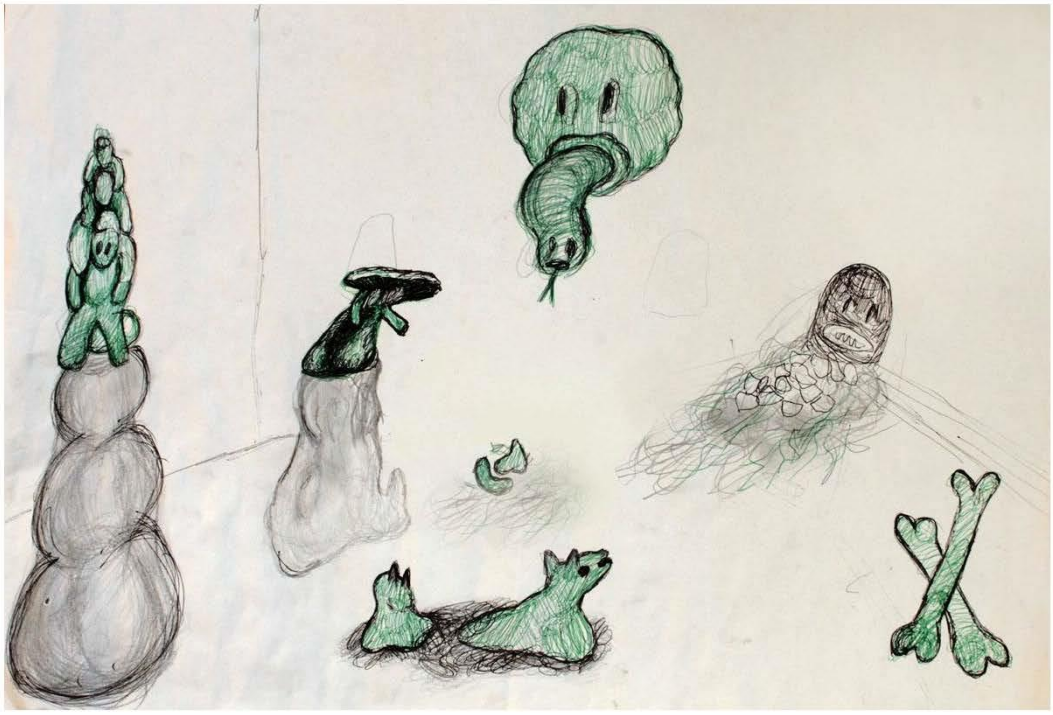
MH: "Mud" has had a strong scenic quality, some works appeared like requisites for a plot, others contained segments of landscape. Could you tell us more about it and how the single pieces relate to each other?

MV: This project is inspired from Bulgarian legends and motifs of lost fairytales which are – as "Mud" itself – a reflection of human nature, its evolution and decline. The works are a combination of ceramics with other natural materials which bear information on their own, such as dry grass, stones, branches, fertilizer, ash, lichens, mosses, clumps of mud. All of them are materials that decompose or convert into sand and ashes or that blot themselves out or take another form. So they mark a natural cycle as is expressed by the transformation of matter into dust, the decay of nature and its rebirth into another existence. The work "Stupid hatch stupid" (2018) for example

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which means Snowflake and that I also used as inspiration. Hence also the choice of a glaze close to earthly, natural colours such as green brownish nuances.



Sketch for the installation of "Mud" (9 Nov – 30 Dec 2018), at Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv

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Cave Snejanka, Bulgaria, photo: the artist



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Chevalier, 2018, glaze ceramic, clay, horse manure, dry grass, 138 x 80 x 40 cm, photo: Maria Djelebova

Martina Vacheva in conversation with Marie Himmerich, interview.
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The Mask of Darkling mystic, 2018, glaze ceramic, clay, dried branches, 92 x 47 x 91 cm,

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Snake Pit, 2018, dried branches, acrylic, pencil, charcoal on paper, 170 x 121 x 40 cm, photo: Maria Djelebova

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Installation view "Mud", Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv, photo: Maria Djelebova

MH: As concerns your more recent ceramics, such effects of the surface come especially into focus. I guess that it is quite complex to create them. How did you acquire the necessary skills to handle the material this way?

At the end of 2016 I moved to live for a while in France, in a village near Lorient along with my boyfriend's family. His mother, Florence Vivien, recently founded a family ceramic atelier called "Poterie de Kerouzine". Thanks to her, I managed to learn more about the material and techniques of ceramic. With regard to the works in "Mud", I actually spent a lot of time on their texture in modelling, applying different natural materials like feathers, stones or twigs on clay to make it not look artificial. Besides, Brittany is a really beautiful region with medieval architecture in front of high mystic forests and near the Atlantic Ocean where a lot of sea and Celtic legends were born. However, while I did the ceramics after my sketches in Brittany, I created the pedestals for the sculptures in the garden of my Bulgarian atelier in Brestnik.

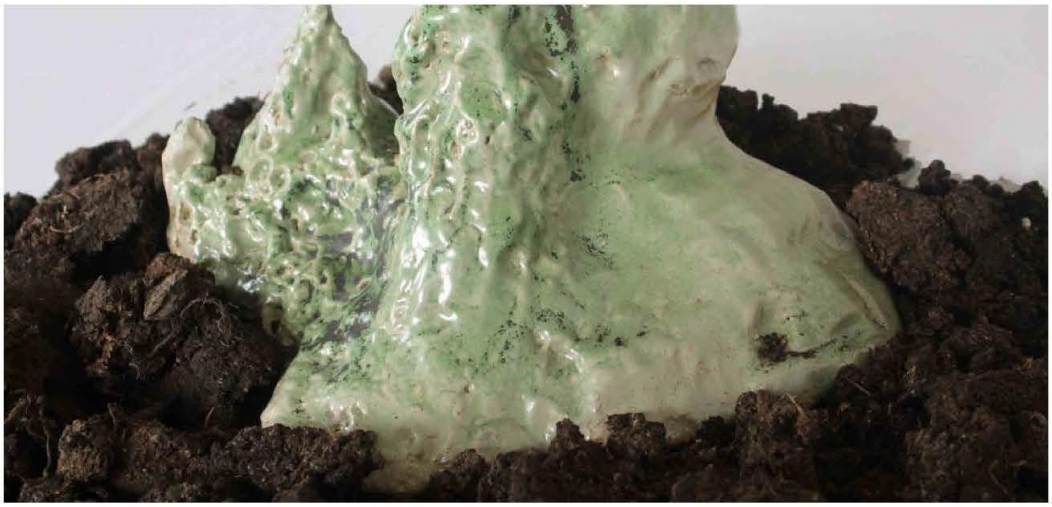
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Chevalier (detail), 2018

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Making of „Become a Stoned Mushroom" (detail), photo: the artist

MH: You are based in Plovdiv, a city which is about two hours away from Sofia. You've been abroad several times however you decided to come back to live and work in Bulgaria. Could you tell us a bit about the artistic scene on site and what you appreciate about it?

MV: Plovdiv is a very valuable city for me apart from the fact that I am originally from there. It is one of the oldest cities in the world with a highly layered history, and has not accidentally been chosen as the Capital of European Culture this year. It is also a city that has always paid attention to art and also inspired the making of it. There are many people devoted to Plovdiv and who are willing to stay here and change the city in a good way. The gallery that I am working with – Sariev Contemporary – is also based in Plovdiv and one of the most important engines that propels contemporary art in the city and culture on a large scale. Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria, but not so huge in size. It is close to the capital Sofia, but not far from the mountains and nature too, where, in the village of Brestnik, my parents created a house with an atelier. There is

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– Swimming Pool, Structura Gallery, Æther …– and many high-quality exhibitions and projects are taking place. Accordingly, this creates an environment that drives and creates conditions for the many artists who chose to live outside of Bulgaria because of the bad conditions for professional progress in the 1990's, and who now return back to the country to live and work here as well. So these are factors that motivate me to stay and be part of this change. Anyway, we live in open times – I travel a lot, I am here and everywhere, but Plovdiv is very special to me and has a big potential. There is still much to be desired, but we are in good direction.

MH: Thank you a lot!



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Become a Stoned Mushroom on earth pedestal in the artist's garden, Brestnik 2018, photo: the artist



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Earth pedestals for "Mud" in the artist's garden, Brestnik, 2018, photo: the artist

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