

Pravdoliub Ivanov

Transformation Always Takes Time and Energy



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The works of Pravdoliub Ivanov revolve around phenomena of spatiality in which norms are disrupted and trompe l'œil effects are inserted into an everyday visual vocabulary. By intermingling public and private moments, the artist transfers private matters into the realm of the gallery or art space, tying in specific architectural tropes as he does so. Ivanov plays with irritating elements: he uses ironic gestures taken from mundane and incidental everyday situations to evoke a heightened awareness for routine encounters that might otherwise often go unnoticed. The juxtaposition of unusual objects and materials forms the basis for Ivanov's installations, which generally tend to produce uncanny moments for their viewers. In keeping with the Freudian concept of the uncanny, these are phenomena that seem familiar and foreign at the same time. Whoever experiences such situations feels uncomfortable and has to ask him or herself just where these strange feelings are coming from. Freud viewed such impulses as repressed feelings deriving from the id and forced upon us by the superego as a manifestation of the symbolic fear of castration or punishment as a consequence of neglecting traditional social norms. The paradoxical nature of being both attracted to and alienated from Ivanov's art objects and installations gives rise to a state of cognitive dissonance; this makes it difficult to perceive his works of art as rational manifestations within space. His uncanny constructions of reality arouse the viewer's desire for a detailed perception of our various everyday environments, which are usually given short shrift as we pass by all too quickly. Ivanov presses the "Pause" button on various everyday phenomena and creates ironic links of belonging, for instance patching up cheese holes with band aids (*Pessimism No More*, 2004) or cutting a carpet in a shape such as results from a stone hitting a window pane (*Ornaments of Endurance*, 2011). Such prank-like interventions in both public and private spaces characterize Ivanov's artistic working method, which he has been applying in many different contexts for nearly two decades.

Path, 2006

Wooden boards and logs, nails

1.60 x 0.80 x 100 m

3rd International Forest Art Symposium, Darmstadt, Germany



Territories, 1995-2003

Soil, fabric, wooden sticks, metal holders

Installation view at Fridericianum Museum, Kassel, Germany

Courtesy Block Collection, Berlin

Territories, 1995-2003

Detail





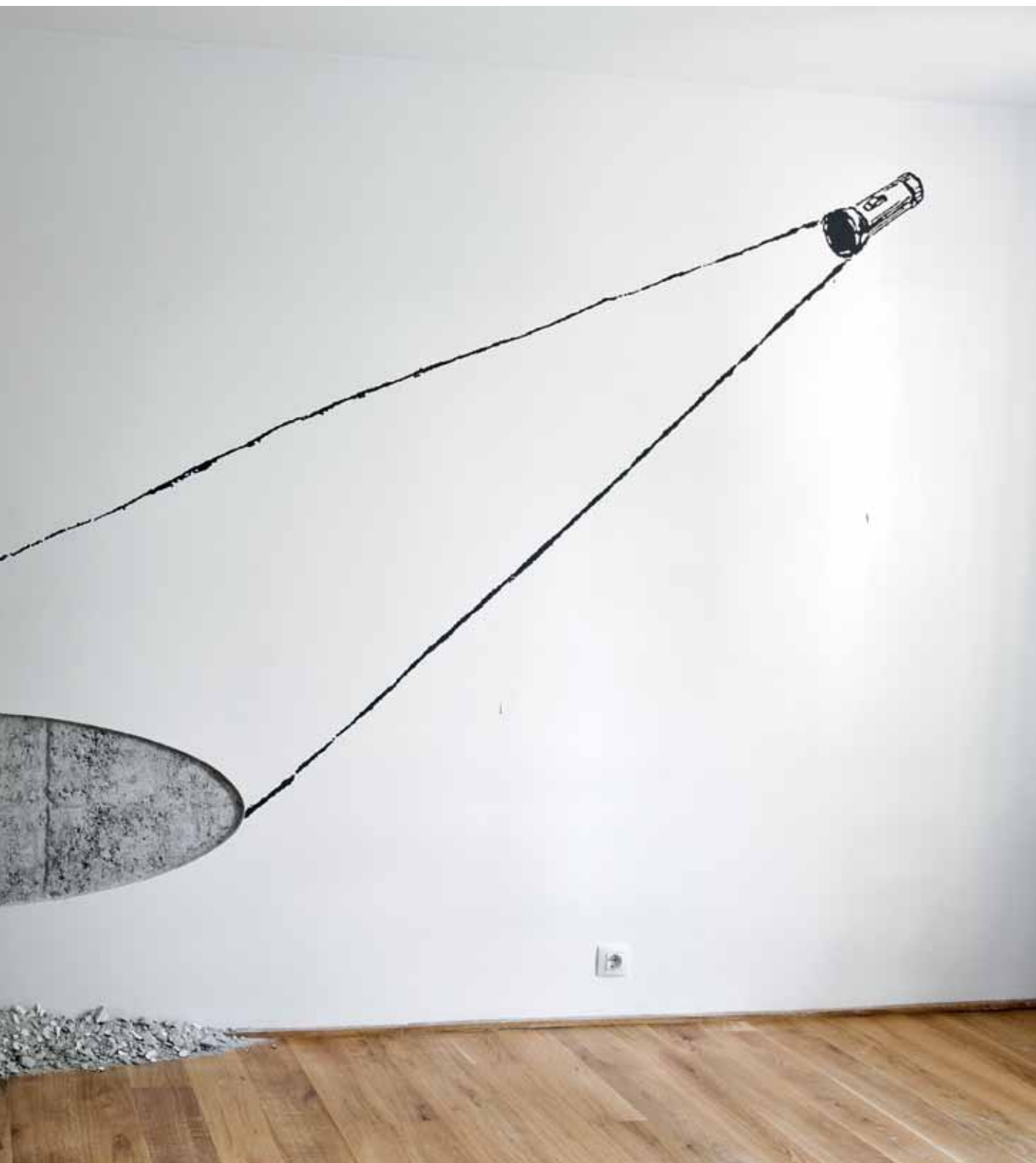
Enlightenment, 2008

Wall intervention, acrylic paint

Dimensions variable

Installation view ARC Project, Sofia





Half Truth, 1999

Two-part installation: indoors and outdoors,
various materials, dimensions and languages

In photos:

Outdoor part — spray-painted letters on asphalt

Indoor part — foil letters on wall

Installation view Musée des Beaux Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds,
Switzerland





Hand Print, 2001

Two colour photos

50 x 70 cm each



Form From Form, 2012

Rotation mechanism, double-sided light box, metal post

Total height 460 cm

Realized during Sculpture Quadrennial, Riga





Loaded, 2010

Cut suitcases

Installation views: Dana Charkasi Gallery, Vienna;

La Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, France

Courtesy Tiroche DeLeon Collection & Art Vantage

PCC Limited



Border by Memory, 2006

Neon

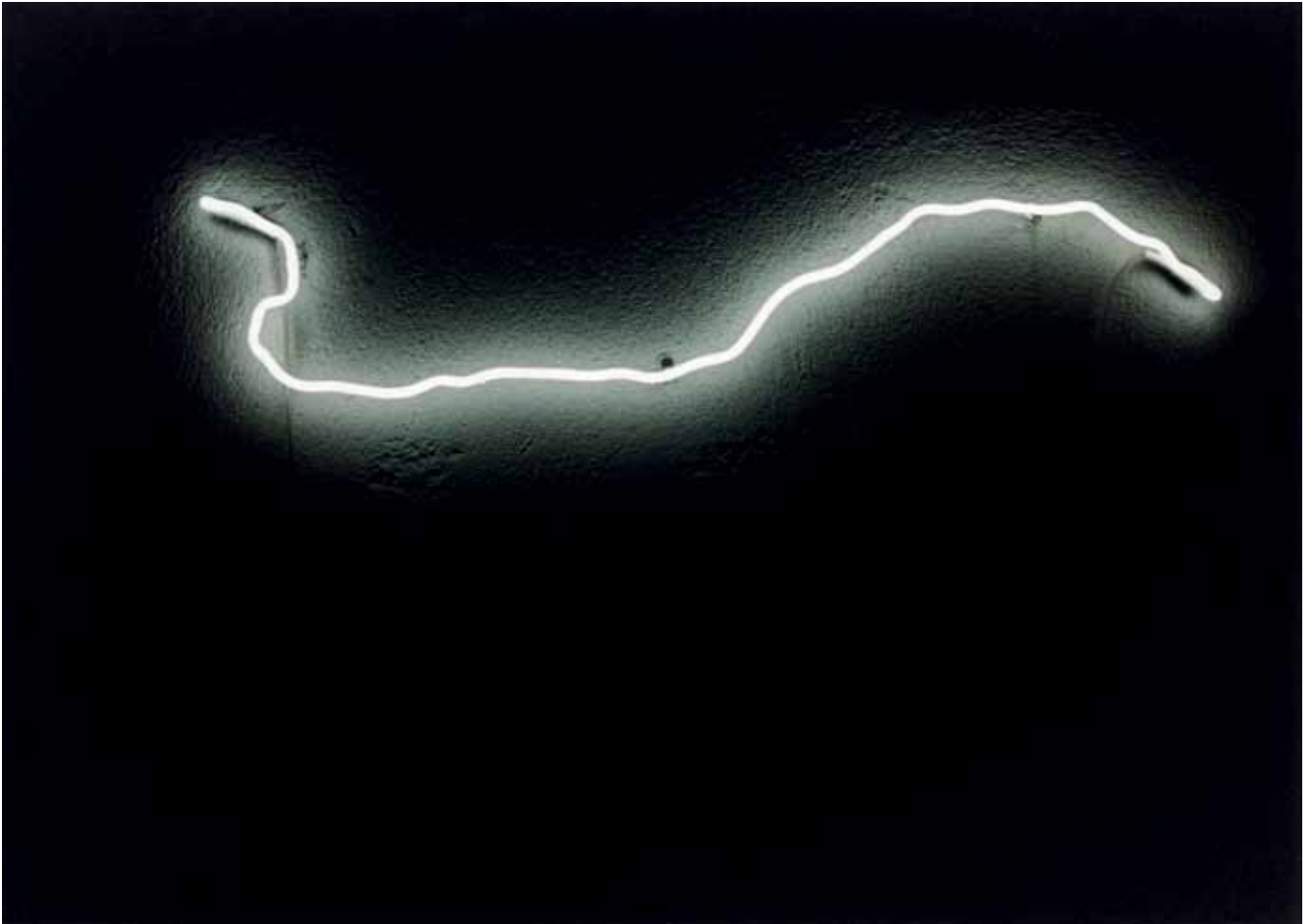
25 x 115 cm

Courtesy: Collection of the European Investment Bank,
Luxembourg; Sofia City Art Gallery, Sofia

Border by Memory is an image of my attempt to draw the border between Bulgaria and Romania by memory. The drawing and respectively the neon are very approximate and are not a correct picture of that border. Every mistake of my hand “reduced” or “enlarged” this or that territory of both countries. The title itself is like a clue for understanding the work and its references to the memory and history of that border in its dramatic transformation during the last century, which affected many lives.

Pravdoliub Ivanov

Text from the catalogue, 2006



Fairy Tale Device Crashed, 2013

Cut carpet, invisible aluminum
construction

275 x 420 x 88.5 cm

Installation view TANAS, Berlin
Courtesy Vehbi Koç Foundation,
Istanbul, Turkey





Memory Is a Muscle, 2007

Resin, two-component silicone, heat-forming polycarbonate

100 x 300 x 100 cm

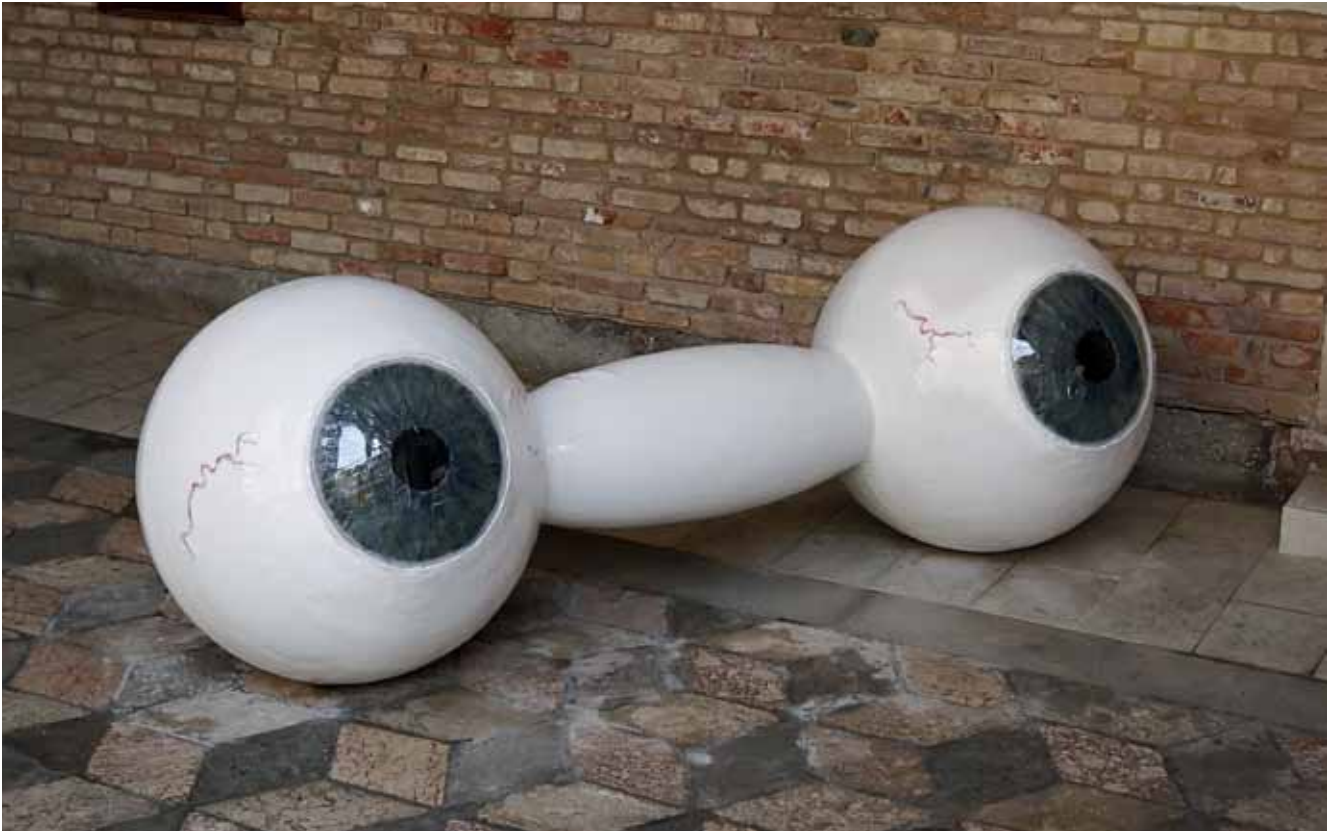
Installation view Palazzo Zorzi,

52 Venice Biennial, Bulgarian Pavilion

Photo: Kalin Serapionov

Memory Is a Muscle, 2007

Detail with public



Monument to the Unknown Washerwoman, 2005

Metal base and post, plastic washbasins and buckets

1100 x 100 x 100 cm

Casino Luxembourg, City of Luxembourg



Mystic Truths, 2013

Wall intervention, manipulated pencil

Dimensions variable

Installation view Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Courtesy Block Collection, Berlin

Mystic truths ✓

Mystic truths

Non Works, 2007 –
Photographs
Dimensions variable





Ornaments of Demand, 2013

Cut carpet mounted on wall

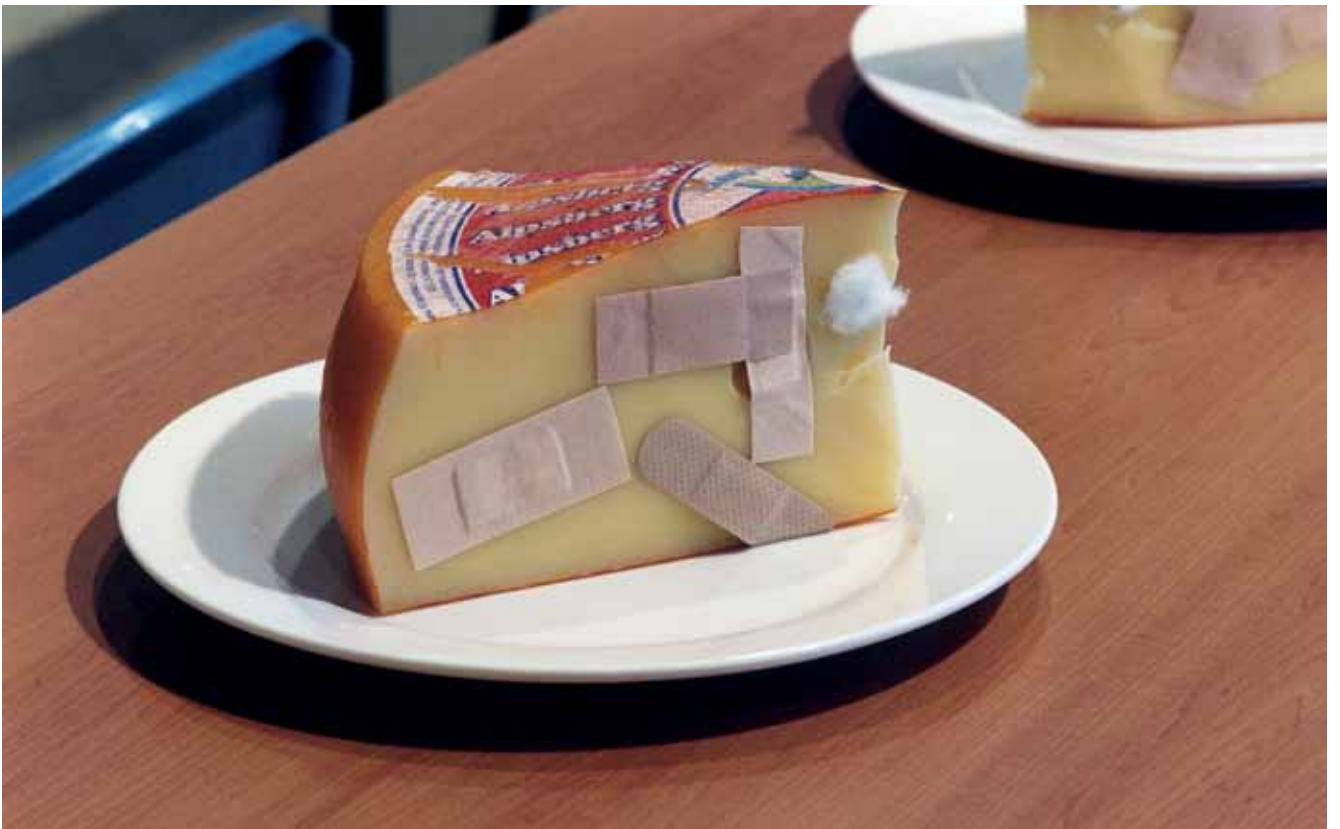
248 x 176 cm



Pessimism No More, 2004

Cheese, plasters, plates, school desks and chairs

Detail and installation view at Museum of Contemporary Art,
Sydney, Australia



Radio Luxembourg, 2005

Bulgarian loudspeaker from the 70s, transmitting a recording of an original broadcast of the Bulgarian National Radio from 1969

Courtesy Casino Luxembourg, City of Luxembourg

Radio Luxembourg

The name of the city of Luxembourg has always evoked in my mind a story I have heard numerous times from my parents. It used to crop up in the stories of many people of the same or similar age, which probably makes it a “personal” memory of the whole generation. This is a simple story telling how during the 1960s, 1970s and up until the early 1980s, when communism was strong and the Iron Curtain was far from silk, information was very scarce and my parents were young, the most popular radio station was Radio Luxembourg – a 24-hour station with the hottest pop and rock hits. A whole generation listened to that radio, partied to its “forbidden” music, recorded it, talking about it as about some mythical entity. I don’t know whether this radio was really broadcast from Luxembourg or whether it only had this name, whether it was a state or private station, whether it still exists or not, nor do I care. My idea is to somehow close the circle of time, history and personal memory by bringing to Luxembourg the sounds and music that my parents’ generation was “allowed” to listen to, but didn’t want to. The project involves installing a loudspeaker in one street in the city, just like the ones that were installed in the streets of Bulgaria during communist times and broadcasting an authentic Bulgarian National Radio program from 1969.

Pravdoliub Ivanov

Text from the catalogue, 2005



Black Balloons, 2013

HD video, colour, sound, 1'10"

Video stills

The work is based on short footage filmed during one of the daily peaceful, antigovernment demonstrations in the summer of 2013 in Sofia. On that particular day, one of the protestors brought hundreds of black balloons and distributed them among the people. They blew them up and later, marching by the building of the Parliament, which was heavily fenced off and blocked by the police forces, they began throwing their balloons into the guarded area. The speed of the movie is slowed down and this mainly affects the recorded sound, since the policemen were motionless. No additional effects were added to the sound, which appears almost as eerie as the display of state power.

Sandra Naumann

Text from the catalogue, 2014



Tools, 2013

Black and white photo mounted on aluminum, newspaper,
glued ink-jet printed papers, triptych frame
85 x 116 cm frame size



Bulgaria's 'Generation F' vents corruption ire



Protesters will march in 10 cities across Bulgaria, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and his government. The protesters, known as 'Generation F' (F for 'fear'), are demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and his government. The protesters are demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and his government.

North Carolina tax cut plan is just best hope for conservatives



UK retail sales fall short of forecasts

Silver & Gold, 2013

Oil on paper on stretcher

90 x 110 cm

Part of the project *What You See Is Not What You Get*



Rise To Score, 2011

Metal construction, basketball hoop and backboard,
artificial palm tree, plastic pot

Height 480 cm

Installation view Gallery Krinzinger, Vienna

Courtesy Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey



A Thought Within a Thought Within a Thought, 2008

Laser-cut steel plate, powder-coated in black

134 x 164 cm

Courtesy: Collection of the European Investment Bank, Luxembourg;

Nedko Solakov and Slava Nakovska Collection;

Bernhard and Elisabeth Hainz Collection;

Spas and Dilliana Roussev Collection



So Many Reasons..., 2004

Cut door and kitchen table, painted room

Installation view Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany

Photo: Hans-Christian Schink





Stairs of Innocents, 2010

Book *United Nations Security Council and General Assembly,
Resolutions on Cyprus 1960 - 2006*, plastic sticks

Scale of the work depends on the size of the given wall

Installation views La Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, France

and The Nicosia Municipal Art Centre, associated with Pierides Foundation



Light More Light, 2011

Site-specific project, intervention in public and private spaces.

Zeughaus – Toskanische Säulenhalle and private home, Augsburg, Germany

Light More Light, 2011

Installation view of the Polat family's house, Augsburg, Germany

The idea for the project *Light More Light* came from my long-term interest in the correlations and tensions between the public and the private, the institution and the private individual.

In the context of the exhibition *Tolerabilis**, my work consists of the simple action of exchanging a chandelier hanging in the historical building where the exhibition takes place with one from the living room of an immigrant family. Neither of the lighting fixtures will be suitable for their new temporary locations, but the aim of the project is to explore the ability of the participants from both sides to endure discomfort. I assume that this will prove more difficult for the family and I wish to apologize for this and thank them in advance. The references to Goethe and the Enlightenment in the title are obvious. The project is an attempt to express my belief that the process of getting to know one another is the way towards encouraging tolerance from both sides, to indicate in an ironical and absurd way the difficulties involved in this process and to allude to the hidden and non-productive formality of the efforts made by both sides.

* The exhibition *Tolerabilis* is organized within the framework of the Augsburg High Peace Festival, celebrating religion freedom and tolerance since 1630.

Pravdoliub Ivanov

Text from the catalogue, 2011



The Truth About the Truth, 2012

Pencil and ink on paper

110 x 145 cm



There Are No Forbidden Thoughts, 2007

Metal construction, electric motor and timer

151 x 110 x 25 cm

Installation view Steinle Contemporary, Munich, Germany



Confusion, 2002

Carpet, plastic wall skirts

Dimensions variable

Installation view ATA Center / Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia

Courtesy EPO Art Collection, Munich, Germany



There Are No Perfect Games, 2008

Modified found objects

Dimensions variable

Installation view MOCAK, Krakow, Poland



Never Enough, 2011

Paper stencil, black spray paint

70 x 240 x 3 cm

Installation view Gallery Le Guern,
Warsaw

ever ENOUGH



At the Level of the Eyes, 1998

Foil letters on wall

Installation view TED Gallery, Varna, Bulgaria



Easy Banners, 1997

Sewed nylon, wooden sticks, metal holders

Installation view Künstlerwerkstatt Lothringer Straße,
Munich, Germany

Courtesy Boyana Popova

A FLIGHT OVER THE RELIEF MAP OF MEANINGS

Pravdoliub Ivanov is among the most active Bulgarian artists today. His works include objects, drawings, sculptures, photographs, installations, texts, and recently video as well. Quite possibly the easiest and moderately irresponsible way to define him is to say that he is a post-conceptual artist. Although any elaboration on the notion “conceptual” would distance this text from Pravdoliub himself, still in his work there is almost always the hint of a question about what art is today and where its place is now. That obviously connects his work to the continuous, abundant, and fluid tradition of conceptualism.

The artist rarely asks his questions in words. Taking a quick look at his works, the viewer might even consider them straightforward answers. However, a closer inspection of his nearly twenty-year-long artistic practice will result in the understanding that it is precisely this questioning of the seemingly self-evident, the urgent challenge to formulate questions that is the artist Pravdoliub Ivanov’s strongest suit. I would even define him as a highly qualified “interviewer” of art in its relationship with society. Every time, it turns out that his works are debating not only the “what” and the “where”, but also, naturally, the “how”, the “why” and the “for whom”. This seductively endless, but highly motivating process carries the artist away.

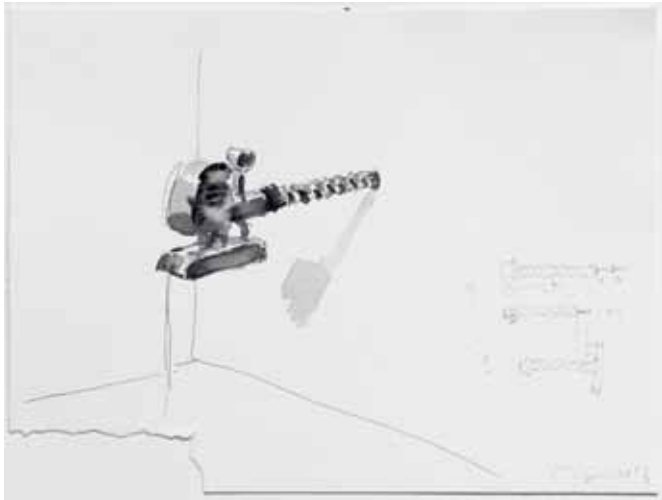
“Take from that sentence as much as you can carry”

I have borrowed the title for this text as well as its subtitles from a textual installation by Pravdoliub Ivanov, entitled *At the Level of the Eyes*. This work was shown in 1998 in a small private gallery in the city of Varna, Bulgaria. In the space of the gallery, right on the walls, the artist had arranged single sentences that he had composed himself – something like an assemblage of phrases that look like newspaper headlines, advertising messages, political slogans, poetic fragments, intimate notes... After the show, these sentences ended up in an artist’s book printed in a very limited edition – an archive of ideas, whims, and motivations. Here I take the liberty to use them in the same way as the artist, in his own words, has been using them ever since – as titles for works.

Pravdoliub Ivanov was trained in the traditional discipline of painting at the National Art Academy in Sofia, graduating in the early 1990s. However, he rejected the painter’s traditional means quite rapidly, as if agreeing with Damien Hirst that if painting in any case deals with the adaptation of already existing objects, then the artist is better off dealing directly with them. Thus, the “characters” in Pravdoliub Ivanov’s installations, objects, drawings, and photographs are most often the very ordinary objects that are with us every day or the typical situations in which everyone can recognize him or herself. The artist’s interest in easy-to-find materials, those atypical for art, and/or found objects, at the expense of paint and brush, is probably



Rise To Score, 2011
 Preparatory drawing for an installation
 22 x 30 cm



Childhood, 2013
 Preparatory drawing for an object
 23 x 30 cm

a reaction to his conservative education, as well as a result of his attentive curiosity for the surrounding world, where the man-made may possess more than just use value. Comte de Lautréamont's famous statement – “As beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table” – seems to apply to the works of Pravdoliub Ivanov as well. This is mainly because of the fact that the “encounters” engineered by the artist in his works are always fun to follow. He underscores his attention to the “hidden life of things”, his sensibility in utilizing the potential of these things by bringing it out into the open through rearrangement of details and reassembling of their composite elements in different ways. The artist manages to de-contextualize their usual existence while constructing a different set of circumstances that reinforce the links to the viewer.

This practice is far from the all-conquering art design of today. It is not by chance that Pravdoliub Ivanov's newest solo show at the Sariev Contemporary (Plovdiv, Bulgaria) is entitled *What You See*.¹ The title contains a reference to the classical (minimalist) dictum, or “joke” of the insider artist, claiming that “what you see is what you get” insofar as it deals with the delusions and confusions related to the perception of 20th century art from abstractionism to hyperrealism. This artist does not complete the familiar phrase; he quite consciously allows the viewer to wonder what he/she is actually seeing and what he/she understands within what has already been seen. The objects that are the center of attention for Pravdoliub are personified, have a psychology of their own, build a context within the space of art, and thus while remaining “objects”, they are fighting to regain their right to an “aura” (in spite of Walter Benjamin's dictum about the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction).

Rise To Score (2011) is an absurd hybrid between a basketball hoop and a potted palm tree that is growing through the net upside down, from the ceiling to the floor. All possible expressions of confusion, reversals of meaning and causal connections would find a beautiful reflection in this installation. The objects are caught in a “trap” between their substance and their meaning, to borrow Michel Foucault's saying about the works of Magritte.² They are themselves, yet clearly they mean something else. They turn into an illustration, but not of a concrete text, rather of the multiplicity of fragments from the text of mass culture.

¹ *What You See*, Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv. 01 November 2013 – 17 January 2014. The title of the exhibition is a fragment from the installation *What You See Is Not What You Get* (neon, ink, oil on paper 2013) shown there.

² Michel Foucault. This is not a pipe, 1973. Quot. From http://monoskop.org/images/9/99/Foucault_Michel_This_Is_Not_a_Pipe.pdf

³ Ibid.

The installation in public space entitled *Form From Form* (2012) is a literal embodiment of the transformation of form into content. This is not a simple process – the light boxes rising high overhead are in constant motion, while the viewer is suddenly confronted with the realization of what is actually happening. Words take the place of the form; the statement is “positioned within the space of the figure and makes the text say what it represents”.³ Pravdoliub Ivanov is playing with the main rule of conceptualism that requires the minimum possible materiality of the work in order to emphasize the idea.



Half Truth (Polprawda), 1999

Outdoor working process, together with the curator Kamil Julian, Warsaw, 2011

“Metaphor is a transport company”

Transformation Always Takes Time and Energy (1998) is the title of one of Pravdoliub Ivanov's best-known works. The installation consists of a multitude of large metal pots full of water – quite ordinary ones, colourful, well used by their owners. These are positioned on top of small electrical hot plates that are arranged elegantly right on the floor amidst their cords, which are plugged into power outlets through extension cords. The contradiction between the large pots and the small, weak hot plates makes boiling water a difficult, long, and painful process, though the water is slowly evaporating in steam. The typical sound of a rolling boil is never quite there. However, it is exactly the invisibility of what is actually happening, familiar to all of us both as an elementary household procedure and as a persistent reminder of the laws of physics, that is transformed into a metaphor for those endless processes of political and social transformation that our generation has gone through.

In the middle of the 1990s, Pravdoliub Ivanov's installations were very often a direct reaction to actual political events – the wars in the Balkans, for instance, with all the territorial claims, ethnic conflicts, and border disputes. However, he never wanted to create documents or historical narratives. His interests are related to the analysis of “otherness”, to the search for differences in meaning, the investigation of symbols, the exploration of the relations between the object and its representation.

The installation *Territories* (1995–2003, shown for the first time at the Fourth Istanbul Biennial in 1995) is a row of large banners that have been “cast” in mud and earth. The impulse for this work came from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences' experimental agricultural field on the outskirts of Sofia, which the artist saw daily from his window and where all kinds of “national” soil(s) are collected. The banners of mud, the flag as the most authentic symbol of each nation state, its basis and substance, replace the pieces of fabric, which often feature incomprehensible and forgotten symbols, becoming a monumental installation, which is a powerful reflection on the very concept of territory. The message of the massive single flag of mud laid in a specially made wooden box is similar (*Territory*, also 1995). Here though, the contrast between the natural earthen material of the flag and its luxurious velvet “bed,” which makes it look like expensive jewelry, are a reflection on the dramatic conflict between reality and interpretation, especially in the sphere of politics. The third time the artist turned his attention to the same symbolic form is even more ironic. *Easy Banners* (1996) is a set of identical flags arranged as a row on the wall, but the flags are made of transparent nylon “fabric” hung on typical wooden poles. The message is that everyone can assign to the flags the national, political, or symbolic meaning that is most important to him or her, can fill up the “form” as he/she wishes...



Radio Luxembourg, 2005

Pencil and water colours on paper

Drawings for the project

21 x 29.7 cm each

‘Everybody is writing, nobody is reading’ is a quotation of unclear origin though according to Professor Alexander Kiossev, the cultural studies expert, it has come to us from the ancient Sumerian civilization. Now as well as then, it signifies the decline of civilization. *Stairs of Innocence* (2010–2012) is an endless column of pages magically positioned in horizontal rows one above the other. The pages are taken out of a political document – the United Nations’ Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions on Cypress 1960–2006. It is hard to imagine how exactly Pravdoliub Ivanov acquired precisely this collection of texts. However, he has made it impossible to read the documents, which is a reflection on the unwillingness to read, on the damage caused by unenforced political resolutions, on political ignorance and indifference. The minimalist composition a la Donald Judd transforms something that is “useful” (in theory) into something else, which is removed from the initial meaning.

A Thought Within a Thought Within a Thought (2008) represents a human brain in a diagrammatic yet recognizable way. Such transparent visual presentations of the brain are now quite popular (although not as popular as presentations of the heart in the form that is mandatory for St. Valentine’s Day). For this sculptural object, the artist has used the *Matrioshka* or nesting-doll effect of visual repetition. The formal mechanism turns into a monotonous but elegantly told story about the thinking process.

Pravdoliub Ivanov draws a lot – on paper, on a monitor, with the help of a tablet. In the earlier days of modernism, there was the expression – “drawing while writing”. This reflects the feeling of delight from the lightness and speed of execution with which artists create images that are no less complex or meaningful than images created with words. *Mystic Truths* (2013) joins in the favorite conceptual game where the object of the representation coincides with the representation itself. The two words on the wall are written, yet at the same time, they are being drawn by that mystical pencil that is “sticking out” of the wall, as if frozen at a right angle in the last stroke of the text/drawing. The miracle of the hand-made work is conveyed in a seemingly miraculous way – the viewer’s perception moves along the Möbius strip. The process is complicated further by the hidden quotation from a neon work by Bruce Nauman from 1967, the year before the student revolutions: *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*. Unlike his predecessor, though, today Pravdoliub Ivanov does not provide an answer to the question about the role of the artist; however, he is still hinting at the nature of the artist’s efforts.

“Civilization is a habit”

The works of Pravdoliub Ivanov always count on the special relation with the space they occupy and to which they belong. The play with this space may often turn into the main element of the work itself, as happened in *Minus 1 m3, Plus 1 m3* (1994) in collaboration with Kamen Tzvetkov. In the middle



Fountained Fountain, 2005

Site-specific installation
Regensburg, Germany



Water Monuments, 1999 / 2004

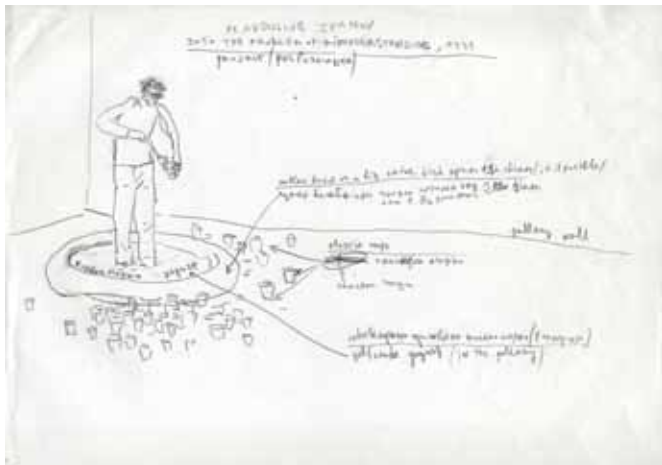
Dug in plastic wash basins and buckets
Detail
Royal Botanic Garden,
14th Sydney Biennial, Australia

of the pretty, romantic yard of a house (in the Old City of Plovdiv with its architectural heritage from the National Revival period), there is a one cubic meter hole dug perfectly into the ground, while next to it there is its “positive” in exactly the same form of one cubic meter of earth, which seems to have been extracted from the ground without any loss or displacement. This minimalist sculpture served the function of an exclamation mark placed over the opposition between the “enduring historical characteristics” of a given space and the “contemporary perception” of the same space. Thus, even unpretentious ready-made plastic wash basins embedded outdoors into a flat grassy lawn are able to transform the lawn from a typical landscape surface into a colourful bright palette full of joyful spots of colour – *Water Monuments* (1999-2004). The installation was first realized in Holland at the Sculpture Park in Drechtoevers, where the artist experienced an intense urge to diversify the monotony of the perfectly maintained natural surroundings through the introduction of cheap objects for daily use there.

For Pravdoliub Ivanov, art in public space is a clear challenge to overcome the distance between the “high” and the “low” in the name of unmediated communication with the local audience. The artist is collaborating with space, using not only its volume or specific geometry, but also employing its history, its political and cultural memory. Thus, his installations are not only site specific, but also context specific, activating around themselves the various energies of the very location. In *Monument to the Unknown Washerwoman* (2005) in Luxembourg, the artist marked the very place next to the river where generations of local women had been washing laundry with a high column made out of multicoloured washing basins placed vertically one on top of the other. Here the artist is carefully “quoting” Arman’s ideas about the accumulation of quantities of identical objects as a critical gesture about consumer society in order to delicately underscore the social aspect of his work.

The *Fountained Fountain* (2005) is once again a context specific installation in public space, which asks questions about the existing status quo. When Pravdoliub Ivanov arrived in Regensburg, Germany, he found in the center of town a three-year-old ditch meant for the “Fountain of Europe”. It had stayed unfinished due to lack of funds. The ditch was fitted with a wooden cover, which the artist lifted slightly in order to place powerful light projectors underneath it – at night the illusion of active construction work going on under the wooden cover is totally convincing. This ironic confusion transforms passersby into viewers, while pushing them towards a conscious reaction to the situation in the city.

In the installation *Path* (2006) in the woods of Darmstadt, Germany, the artist once again uses the scenario of confusion, of breaking up monotony, of interference in the ordinary. By installing a 100 m long wooden pathway with handrails in the thick of the woods, the artist is defining a vector for



Into the Problem of Misunderstanding, 1999

Pencil on paper

Preparatory drawing for a performance

21 x 29.7 cm



Fairy Tale Device Crashed, 2013

Side view

movement. It forces everyone stepping onto the pathway not only to separate from the ground below, but also to enter into a dialogue about detailed attention and sense of humor.

“To whom it may concern – don’t be so naïve”

For Pravdoliub Ivanov, each new work and show is a process of building a dialogue in which the artist utters the first sentence in a friendly, mischievous, and inviting manner while hoping for feedback. He does not like to force interactions and leaves everyone enough time to join in. However, his works possess aesthetic, psychological, political, and even physical arguments that motivate the viewer to rethink his/her ideas about normalcy.

In one of his very rare performances, entitled *Into the Problem of Misunderstanding* (1999), at the exhibition “Bacterium Bulgaricus” (named after the small bacteria famous for “producing” yogurt), the artist stands with his shoes on right in the middle of an inflatable children’s pool while scooping up yogurt from the pool and offering it to the audience. The name of the artist’s homeland is part of the Latin name for this bacteria, which allows for ironic reflection on national identity. Trampling on the yogurt “symbol” while imitating a classical expression of hospitality is a further confusion of cause-and-effect; a possible reading of the work within the traditional links between symbol and substance is disrupted.

In the cases of *Confusion* (2002) or *So Many Reasons...* (2004, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig), the possibility of fully identifying with the situation is most strongly orchestrated. The first installation consists of a piece of home carpeting, which is positioned in the white cube of the gallery in such a way so as to give the impression that one of the walls of the space has been constructed on top of it. The second work is site specific – an old kitchen table seems to be standing in front of a door to the room, apparently blocking it. With precision and delicacy, pieces of the table and the door have been cut out, thus allowing the door to seemingly “pass” through the table as if in virtual reality, making the movement possible.

In the last few years, the Persian carpet has often been the “medium” for Pravdoliub’s works. It is possible that the everyday traditions of his native country of Bulgaria, which is geographically and historically located at the border between the East and the West, are important here... It is possible that the memories from his childhood under socialism, when such carpets were the most accessible symbol of prestige at home, are important here as well...

Regardless – smashed to smithereens (*Fairy Tale Device Crashed*, 2013) or shattered by stones (*Ornaments of Endurance*, 2011 and *Ornaments of Demand*, 2013), Persian carpets are for the artist a symbol of smashed reality rather than of the exotic Orient; perhaps even a symbol of the fairy tales



The Kingdom of Wish and Waste, 2004

Silicone, resin

60 x 400 x 60 cm

Installation view State Museum of Contemporary Art

Thessaloniki, Greece

Courtesy Sofia City Art Gallery

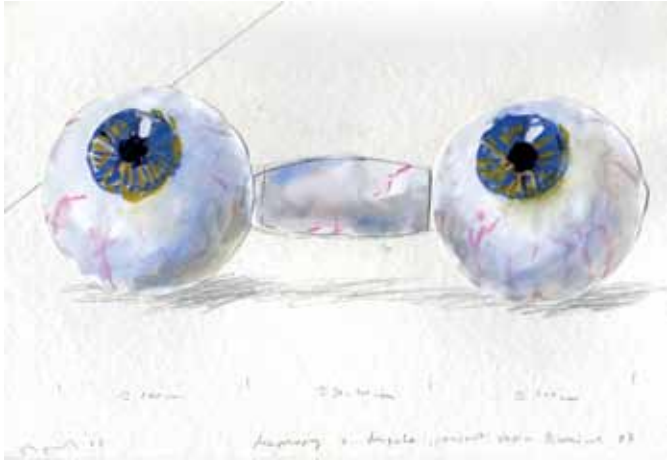
inside each one of us. Looking immaculate and beautiful, the carpets in these installations are destroyed in a way that is highly atypical for them; they are smashed to pieces, just as usually happens metaphorically with notions and ideals.

Another work paradoxically offers the solution to an obvious problem. *Pessimism No More* (2002-2004) was first conceived as a billboard image and later transformed into an installation. It consists of impressive pieces of prime cheeses pierced by huge holes. These are positioned on top of old school desks that have been arranged in the space according to tradition – in monotonous geometric order. This creates the feeling of a respectful pause, as if before or after an important event. The space of the installation does not have special characteristics but all of a sudden, you notice that the pieces of cheese are actually undergoing medical treatment – the holes are carefully bandaged with band-aids... The “poor” cheese has been given “first aid”, but – how, why, by whom? Everything is at once reduced and expanded to a childish game of inventing paradoxes and manipulating the concepts of the “possible impossible” and so on.

The objects and means of presentation, with all their programmatic communicative lightness, do often cause a mild shock at first, which removes them from the domain of entertainment and places them in the context of philosophical statements. The half-letters of the slogan *Half-Truth* (1999-2007) are somehow too obvious and literal – in Bulgarian; there is even some tautology here. However, the missing half of the whole slogan, which ends up being in open public space one way or another (as a “half” textual inscription on the street, as a sticker, or a postcard), demonstrates serious manipulation of meaning – could it be that the missing invisible part is a “half-lie”?

The four-meter-long silicon spermatozoid, a sculptural object entitled *The Kingdom of Wish and Waste* (2004), is effective first of all for its size (!). Taken together with the title, which the artist carefully sought, the work is a straightforward statement about the daily catastrophe related to sex, ambition, claims, hopes, and even love. The work could have been a clearly male statement if only its vision and materialization were not so childishly absurd!

The barrier, which is ever more “popular” in the globalized world of gated communities, has been transplanted into the exhibition space of an art show in *There Are No Forbidden Thoughts* (2007). Here the artist is appealing once again to our ability to appreciate a paradox and to follow the paths of association branching out from the work without prejudice. The barrier should look like an unpleasant hint at restrictions, censure and control; or at least it should be a sign of critique of these notions. In this white and red barrier, however, the normally moving part is static, while the stand of the



Memory Is a Muscle, 2007

Tempera, pencil, collage on paper

Preparatory drawing

22 x 30 cm

Courtesy Dr. Horst Köhn, Vienna



Minus 1 m3, Plus 1 m3, 1994

In collaboration with Kamen Tzvetkov

Site-specific intervention

Courtyard, Old City of Plovdiv, Bulgaria

device goes up and down, moving beyond the context of rationality. Though the work does not reject the above-mentioned reading, it is an absurdity and a chance to laugh at our apprehensions, fears, and conventions.

“If information is a line, then it is wider than it is long”

The *Border by Memory* (2006) fits within the logic of the above statement – its thin white line made of a neon tube signifies the northern border of Bulgaria passing along the Danube River. The conditional precision of human memory and the conditional stability of state borders hint at the possibility that the notions of geography (along with the local culture associated with that) are a function of time rather than space.

In one of the very rare cases of Bulgaria’s national participation in the Venice Biennial, in 2007⁴, Pravdoliub Ivanov showed a sculpture – two eyes connected to a gigantic dumbbell – *Memory Is a Muscle* (2007). There is something strange, scary, and childish at the same time in its form. With such eyes taken out of dolls, the boys at school would try to scare the girls... The hyper-realistic execution down to the veins on the surface of the eyeballs is at the same time funny and frightening. The eyes seem to follow you everywhere just as in a masterpiece of Renaissance portraiture. Is it possible that this is the materialized gaze of art itself staring straight into the viewer? The gym gadget used to “train” the visual memory is very fitting for the city of Venice. The overabundance of images there, especially at the time of an art biennial, overwhelms any other reading and creates new images in the viewer.

In the 1990s when Pravdoliub Ivanov started his career, one of the most often-used words for contemporary artists was the word “nomad”, contemporary itinerants who more often than not found application of their ideas and products in places where they were not born. Travel, which in the totalitarian states was an elite privilege up until the end of the 1980s, all of a sudden became a characteristic of the artist’s profession. The accumulation of suitcases with cut-out bottoms and lids is entitled *Loaded* (2010) by the author. The empty, see-through, disembodied objects are in substance loaded with everything which has no material equivalent. However, that is precisely what the artist’s work consists of.

Pravdoliub Ivanov has been taking photographs for a long time now. He takes snapshots for his friends during openings and parties. However, he also shows his photographs in exhibition halls. With very few exceptions, they are not staged photographs but documentary ones, often confirming that favorite saying in the press that the eye of the artist is not like anybody else’s; it is capable of seeing what others fail to see. This artist’s photographs demonstrate his attraction to urban and rural landscapes, sometimes with people. He is, however, always photographing his subjects because of those products of human labor that might end up within the space of

⁴ *A Place You Have Never Been Before*, 52nd Venice Biennial, Bulgarian Pavilion, participants Pravdoliub Ivanov, Ivan Moudov, Stefan Nikolaev, curator Vesela Nozharova.



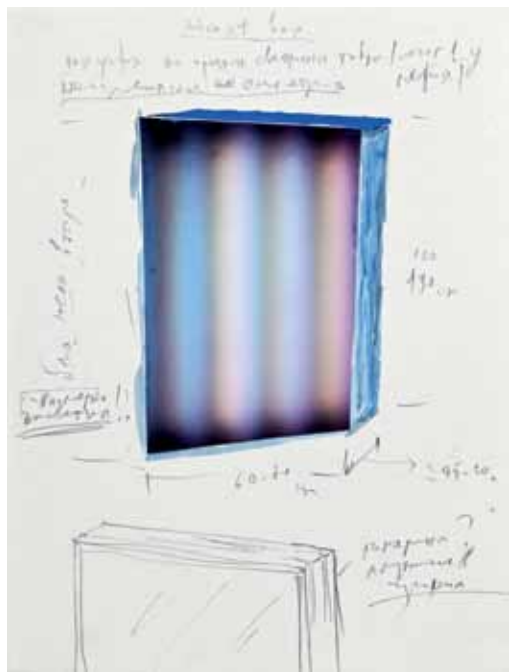
Picture, 2013

Water colour on paper on stretcher

23 x 33 cm

Part of the project *What You See Is Not What You Get*

Courtesy Boiana Sokolova



Light Box, 2013

Tempera, pencil and collage on paper

Preparatory drawing

35 x 27 cm

artistic efforts. His series of such photographs, started in 2007, is entitled *Non Works*. It is a catalogue of the unexpected, untimely, irrationalness of miracles created by accident by anonymous creators.

“Don’t read – contemplate”

The year 2013 in Bulgaria will obviously go down in history and living memory as the Year of the Protests... protests against the corrupt government, against the immorality of power, against the oligarchs’ greed. Tens of thousands of people went out into the streets daily to demonstrate their opposition to the status quo. As in many other parts of the world, many of the protesters belong to the so-called “creative class” in society – they are able to formulate and represent their thoughts in many different ways and forms. But even against the backdrop of this vastly populated field in the context of world protests, the powerful visual/textual polemic that Pravdoliub Ivanov maintained for weeks and months remains not only unique but highly effective and memorable. Because of his hand-made and hand-held slogans with clever-to-poignant messages, the artist was “nominated” by the media as one of the faces of the protests. This was one new answer to the question constantly present in the 20th century – “Where do you stand, masters of art?”⁵ Each day, Pravdoliub Ivanov would go out on the streets to protest along with the huge masses of people equipped with his one-meter-long slogans, which were always different in wording and invented by him; these messages were questioning, ridiculing the powers-that-be, appealing to the people, commenting on the situation, and ultimately capturing and reflecting the mood of the street. The artistic substance of this practice was reinforced and reflected by the *Financial Times* on July 15, 2013, when his slogans used the global meta-communicative language of emoticons, daggers, swords, grenades and other graphic signs of anger, which forcefully expressed the political emotions of the moment.

This last graphic slogan by the artist is the basis of his work *Tools* (2013), which combines a photograph of the artist at a street protest carrying this slogan, the artist himself and also the page from the *Financial Times* with a story dedicated to the Bulgarian anticorruption protests. Here the media becomes the message, indeed.

Black Balloons (2013) is one of the very first video works by the artist and it is once again a direct reaction to the reality of the street protests in Sofia. The video has captured a multitude of police officers guarding the Bulgarian Parliament. On the street, everywhere around the officers and beyond, there are black balloons rolling around. The balloons were “presented” to the authorities in the country on one of the days of protest, just as black balls were used in antiquity for voting – this custom, in fact, gives us the word “ballot”. Here the message is also complicated; the aesthetic montage juxtaposes the free movement of the balloons blown by the wind with the expressionless staticness of the living people – the police. This juxtaposition

⁵ The title of an article from 1932 by Maxim Gorky published in *Pravda* newspaper where the political and ethical position of cultural workers was discussed.



Never Enough, 2011

Detail

is further heightened by the strangely deformed sound; a modified actual recording of the protests has been transformed into the Sound of the Protests.

“The Tree of My Desire Is Bonsai”

Never Enough (2011) is a cry from the soul that has been aggressively sprayed on the surface of the paper work, but which also invades the surrounding wall. The same paper is “carrying” the *Less is More* sign, which defines Andrea del Sarto’s perfection in the poem by Robert Browning, while at the same time appears to be not enough for perfection itself...

How was it in the work of Eminem?

“...it may seem like I’m goin too fast cuz my mind is racing
And I could give a fuck what category you place me
Long as when I’m pushing up daisies and gone
As long as you place me amongst one of them greats
When I hit the heavenly gates...”⁶

Iara Boubnova

⁶ Eminem. “Never Enough”
from the album *Encore*,
2004

**PRAVDOLIUB
IVANOV**

Born in 1964 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Lives and works in Sofia. Graduated in painting at the National Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia in 1993. Member of the Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia since its founding in 1995.

**SELECTED
INDIVIDUAL
SHOWS:**

2013: *What You See*, Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv, Bulgaria; 2011: *Polprawda (Half-Truth)*, Gallery Le Guern, Warsaw; 2010: *Works, Non-Works and Illusions*, Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv; 2008: *Thoughts Within Thoughts*, dual show with Alec Finlay, ARC Projects Gallery, Sofia; 2007: *Double Trouble*, dual show with Valio Tchenkov, Steinle-Contemporary, Munich, Germany; 2003: *Existing Objects*, Ata Center / Institute of Contemporary Art - Sofia; 2002: *Pessimism, No More*, Musee des Beaux Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland; 1998: *Vehicles Dream*, Longwood Arts Project, New York, USA.

**SELECTED
GROUP
SHOWS:**

2013: *The Unanswered Question. Iskele 2*, TANAS and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.), Berlin; *Fantasia*, The Cello Factory, London, England; *On the Edge of Story*, 6th Brno Art Open, Czech Republic; 2012: *In Crisis – Terra Mediterranea*, The Nicosia Municipal Art Centre, Nicosia, Cyprus; *Sport in Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow, Poland; *Utopraxia*, TAF/The Art Foundation, Athens; *Beautiful game*, City Art Gallery, Ljubljana; 2011: *Within / Beyond Borders – The Collection of the European Investment Bank at the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens*; *Zwischenlager / Entrepot*, Krinzinger Gallery, Vienna; *Vidéo et après Suspended Spaces #1*, Screening at Cinema 1, Centre Pompidou, Paris; *No New Thing Under the Sun*, Royal Academy of Arts, London; 2010: *Suspended spaces – depuis Famagusta*, Amiens, France; *Breaking Walls – Building Networks*, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece; 2009: *Who Killed the Painting?*, works from Block Collection, Neues Museum Nürnberg, Germany; *Black Little Curly Hair*, Kappatos Gallery, Athens; 2008: *Ready-Made Today*, Steinle Contemporary, Munich, Germany; *Трансфер/Transfert*, La BF15, Lyon, France; *No Place – Like Home: Perspectives on Migration in Europe*, Argos Center, Brussels; 2007: *L'Europe en devenir*, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; *A Place You Have Never Been Before*, 52nd Venice Biennial, Bulgarian Pavilion; *Plus Zwei*, Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg, Germany; 2006: *Check-in Europe*, European Patent Office, Munich, Germany; *Of Mice and Men*, 4th Berlin Biennial; 2005: *Sous les ponts, le long de la rivière-2*, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg; 2004: *On Reason and Emotion*, 14th Sydney Biennial; 2003: *In the Gorges of the Balkans*, Fridericianum Museum, Kassel, Germany; *Blut & Honig, Zukunft ist am Balkan*, Essl Collection, Vienna; 2000: *Borderline Syndrome*, Manifesta 3, Ljubljana; 1998: *Bulgariaavantgarde. Kraeftemessen II*, Künstlerwerkstatt Lothringer Straße, Munich, Germany; 1997: *Menschenbilder. Foto-und Videokunst aus Bulgarien*, IFA Gallery, Berlin; 1995: *Orient/ation*, 4th International Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey.

**WORKS IN
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COLLECTIONS:**

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Tiroche DeLeon Collection & Art Vantage PCC Limited
Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey

Texts by
Iara Boubnova, Walter Seidl

Photography
Pravdoliub Ivanov

Edited by
Iara Boubnova, Maria Vassileva, Luchezar Boyadjiev

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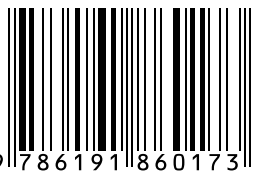
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ПОЛЕТ НАД РЕЛЕФА НА ЗНАЧЕНИЯТА / A FLIGHT OVER RELIEF OF MEANINGS

Правдолюб Иванов е един от най-активните днес български художници. Сред работите му има обекти, рисунки, скулптури, фотографии, инсталации, текстове, а напоследък и видео. Вероятно, най-лесно и достатъчно безотговорно той може да бъде определен като пост-концептуален художник. И макар изясняването на понятието „концептуален“ да може доста да отдалечи този текст от самия Правдолюб, в работите му почти винаги се усещат въпроси - какво и къде е мястото на изкуството в наши дни? Това очевидно го свързва с продължителната, широка и флуидна традиция на концептуализма.

Художникът рядко задава въпросите си с думи – при повърхностен поглед към работите му може дори да ни се стори, че сме пред един вид постулирани отговори. Но при вглеждане в направеното за почти три десетилетия професионална дейност, се усеща, че именно поставянето на очевидности под съмнение, подтикването към формулиране на въпроси, е най-силната страна на Правдолюб Иванов. Бих го определила като висококвалифициран „интервюер“ на изкуството във взаимоотношенията му с обществото. Всеки път се оказва, че работите разнищват не само „какво“ и „къде“, но, като естествено следствие, и „как“, „защо“, „за кого“. Художникът е увлечен от този примабливо безкраен и едновременно мотивиращ процес.

Вземи от това изречение колкото можеш да носиш/Take from this sentence as much as you can carry

Заглавието на този текст, както и подзаглавията на отделните му части, заех от една инсталация на Правдолюб Иванов – *На нивото на очите/ At the Level of the Eyes*, представена в малка частна галерия във Варна през 1998 година. Там, направо върху стените, авторът подреди отделни изречения собствено производство – нещо като асамбляж от фрази, напомнящи вестникарски заглавия, рекламни слогани, политически лозунги, поетични фрагменти, интимни забележки... След изложбата изреченията се оформиха в авторска книга, отпечатана в съвсем ограничен тираж – архив на идеи, хрумвания, мотивации. Тук си позволявам употребата им по същия начин, по който, според самия художник, ги ползва оттогава и той – като заглавия.

Правдолюб Иванов получава традиционно образование в Художествената академия в София в началото на 90-те, но доста бързо се разделя с привичните за живописец художествени средства, съгласявайки се като че ли с Дамиен Хърст, че щом живописиста все едно се занимава с адаптиране на вече съществуващи обекти, по-добре е художникът директно да се обърне към тях.

„Герои“ на Правдолюб Иванов са най-често съвсем обикновени предмети, с които сме всекидневно заедно, или типични ситуации, в които всеки е способен да се разпознае. Интересът на художника, за сметка на боите и четките, към лесно достъпни и нетипични за традиционното изкуство материали или намерени обекти, се дължи вероятно както на реакция спрямо консервативното обучение, така и на внимателното му любопитство спрямо обкръжаващия ни свят, в който произведеното от човека може да притежава не само потребителски функции. Прочутото изречение на граф де Лотреамон „Красиво като случайната среща между шевна машина и чадър върху хирургическа маса“ (Comte de Lautreamont "Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table") изглежда се отнася и за работите на Правдолюб Иванов, особено поради това, че „срещите“, които художникът организира в работите си, винаги протичат забавно.

Той определя вниманието си към „скрития живот на вещите“, усета си да оползотвори потенциала на подобни обекти, да го извади на светло чрез пренареждане на детайли и различно сглобяване на съставлящи елементи. Художникът съумява да де-контекстуализира привычното им съществуване и да изгради други обстоятелства, които подпомагат връзката му със зрителя.

Тази практика е далеч от всезавладяващия днес арт дизайн. Не случайно последната самостоятелна изложба на Правдолюб Иванов в галерия Сариев в Пловдив е озаглавена *What you see*¹. В това заглавие присъства препратка към класическата инсайдърска за съвременния художник шега “what you see is what you get”, която има отношение към заблудите и объркванията, свързани с възприятието на изкуството на 20 век от абстракционизма до хиперреализма. Иванов не довършва познатото изречение и съзнателно оставя зрителя да се чуди, какво той/тя вижда и какво той/тя разбира от видяното. Предметите, обекти на внимание за Правдолюб, се персонализират, психологизират, контекстуализирани в пространството на изкуството. Така, оставяйки „предмети“, те се преборват за възвръщане правото си на „аура“ въпреки превърналата се в постулат характеристика на Валтер Бенямин за нашата епоха като епоха на техническо възпроизвеждане.

Rise to Score, 2011, представлява абсурден хибрид от баскетболен кош и растяща през него, но от тавана – обърната с короната си надолу, палма в саксия. Всеки израз на объркване, обръщане на смисли и причинни връзки би намерил прекрасна илюстрация в тази инсталация. Предметите са «в капан» между същността и смисъла си, използвайки израза на Мишел Фуко по отношение на работите на Магрит². Те са самите себе си, но очевидно означават друго. Превръщат се в илюстрация, но не на конкретен текст, а на множественост фрагменти от текста на мас-културата.

Инсталацията в публично пространство *Form From Form*, 2012, възплъщава в буквалния смисъл на думата превръщането на формата в съдържание. Това не е елементарен процес – уличните лайт-боксове се извисяват над главите ни, постоянно се въртят и в определен момент зрителят осъзнава какво се случва. Думите заместват Формата – изказването е «поместено в пространството на фигурата и кара текста да каже това, което тя представя»³. Правдолюб Иванов се закача с основно правило на концептуализма, изискващ минимализъм в материалността на творбата, за да се подчертае идеята.

Метафора е транспортна фирма/Metaphor is a transport company

Трансформацията винаги отнема време и енергия (1998) е името на една от най-популярните работи на Правдолюб Иванов. Инсталацията е съставена от множество пълни с вода големи тенджери – съвсем обикновени, шарени и разнокалибрени, нееднократно използвани от собствениците им, стъпили върху малки електрически котлончета, елегантно композирани направо на пода сред включените си в разклонители

¹ What You See, Sariev Gallery, Plovdiv, 01 November 2013 - 17 January 2014. Названието на изложбата е фрагмент от инсталацията *What You See Is Not What You Get*, неон, туш, 2013, показана в нея.

² Michel Foucault. This is not a pipe, 1973. Quot. from http://monoskop.org/images/9/99/Foucault_Michel_This_Is_Not_a_Pipe.pdf

³ Ibid.

кабели. Несъответствието между големите тенджери и слабите малки котлони прави кипването на водата трудно, мъчително, макар тя все едно да намалява, преминавайки в пара. Характерното бурно бълбукане никога не се постига, но именно незабележимостта на случващото се, познато и като елементарна домакинска процедура, и като упорито свидетелство за действието на физическите закони, е превърната в метафора на онези безкрайни процеси на политическа и социална промяна, с които нашето поколение съжителства.

В средата на 90-те инсталациите на Правдолюб Иванов са много често реакция на актуални политически събития – войните на Балканите, например, териториалните претенции, етническите конфликти, граничните разногласия. Но той не се опитва да създаде документи или исторически наративи – интересите му са свързани с анализа на «другостта», с търсене на различия на смисли, с изследване на символи, с изучаване на взаимоотношенията между предмет и репрезентация. *Територии* (1995-2003, показана за първи път на 4-то Истанбулско биенале) е редица големи знамена, «изляти» от пръст и кал. Подтик за тяхното създаване се оказва експерименталното селскостопанско поле на Българска академия на науките, което художникът вижда от прозореца си и където са събрани различни видове «национална» почва. Знамената от пръст – от най-автентичния елемент на всяка държава, нейна основа и същност, заместват парчетата плат с често непонятни и забравени символи, и се превръщат в монументална инсталация, преосмисляща самото понятие «територия». Подобно послание носи и масивното знаме в специална дървена кутия (*Територия*, също от 1995), където опозицията между земния природен материал на знамето и луксозното му кадифено «легло», подходящо за скъп инструмент, отразява драматичните противоречия между реалност и интерпретация особено в сферата на политическото. За трети път, още по-иронично, художникът се обръща към тази символична форма в «Лесни знамена» (1996) – прозрачни найлонови «платнища» върху характерни дървени дръжки. Всеки може да предложи важното за себе си национално, политическо или знаково съдържание и да напълни «формата» с него...

«Всички пишат, никой не чете», е цитат със спорен произход, по думите на културолога проф. Александър Кьосев появил се още в Шумер, означавайки упадъка на цивилизацията и тогава, и днес. *Stairs of Innocence*, 2010-2012, е безкрайна колона от страници на сериозен политически документ – United Nations Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions on Cyprus 1960 – 2006, магично закрепени една над друга върху стена. Трудно е да се предположи, откъде Правдолюб Иванов се сдобива именно с тази подборка текстове, но зададената от него невъзможност за прочитане рефлектира нежеланието да се чете, щетата от политически резолюции, политическата неграмотност и индиферентност. Минималистичната композиция ала Доналд Джъд превръща нещо на теория „полезно“ в нещо отдалечено от първоначалния му смисъл.

Thought Within a Thought Within a Thought, 2008, представя схематично, но разпознаваемо мозъка на човек. Подобно дантелено онагледяване на мозъка е вече доста популярно (макар и не толкова, колкото изобразяване на сърцето във формата, приета за задължителна за Valentine's Day.) В случая с този релеф е използван прийома на матрьошката – визуална палилогия. Формалният минимализъм се превръща в монотонна, но елегантно разказана история за процеса на мисленето.

Правдолюб Иванов много рисува – на хартия, на монитор, с помощта на таблет. Някога, в ранните времена на модернизма, е съществувал израз „рисува както пише“, отразяващ възхищение от лекотата и бързината, с която авторите създават образи не по

малко сложни и значителни от образите, създадени с думи. *Mystic Thruths*, 2013, встъпва в любимата игра на концептуализма, когато обектът на изображението съвпада със самото изображение. Двете думи на стената са изписани, но едновременно и нарисувани с този мистичен молив, който е застинал под съответния ъгъл спрямо последната чертичка в текста/рисуноката. Чудото на ръкотворността е пресъздадено чрез привидно неръкотворен прием – възприятието на зрителя се движи като по лента на Мьобиус, усложнено още и от това, че в работата има скрит цитат от неона на Брус Науман от 1967 г. – годината преди студентските революции: „Истинският художник помага на света чрез разкриване на мистични истини“ (*The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*). За разлика от предшественика си, Правдолюб Иванов днес не дава отговор за мястото на художника, но намежда за същността на усилията му.

“Цивилизацията е навик/Civilization is a habit”

Работите на Правдолюб Иванов почти винаги залагат на специални отношения с пространството, което заемат и към което принадлежат. Играта с него може да се превърне в главен елемент на самото произведение, както се случи в *Минус 1 м3, плюс 1 м3* от 1994 година. В средата на китен двор в историческия архитектурен резерват Старият Пловдив, идеално изкопаната в земята кубична дупка намира своя «позитив» от същата по форма пръст, извадена сякаш без разместване. Тази минималистична скулптура изпълни функцията на възкликателен знак над опозицията «постоянство на историческите характеристики» на дадено пространство и «съвременно възприятие» на същото.

Така и непретенциозните ready-made – пластмасови легени, вкопани в плоскостта на ливада, я превръщат от типична пейзажна повърхност в изумрудна палитра с жизнерадостни цветни петна – *Водни монументи*, 1999-2004. Тази инсталация е изградена за първи път в Холандия, в Скулптурен парк Дрехтоверс, където авторът изпитва острата нужда да разнообрази монотонността на идеално поддържаната природа чрез намеса с евтини предмети на потребление.

За Правдолюб Иванов изкуството в публично пространство е очевидно предизвикателство по преодоляване на дистанцията между “високото” и “ниското” в името на непредубедена комуникация с неизбежния местен зрител. Художникът сътрудничи с пространството, използвайки не само неговите обем и специфична “геометрия”, но и като залага на историческата му социална или културна памет. Така инсталациите се оказват не само site specific, но и context specific, концентрирайки около себе си многообразните енергии на самото място. В Люксембург *Паметник на неизвестната перачка*, 2005, бележи с висока колона от поставени един в друг разноцветни легени мястото край реката, където са прапи поколения местни жени. Авторът внимателно “цитира” идеите на Арман за акумулиране на количества еднакви предмети като критичен жест спрямо обществото на потребление, за да подчертае ненатрапчиво социалната страна на проекта си.

Фонтаниращият фонтан, 2005, е отново context specific инсталация в публично пространство, която задава въпроси пред наличното status quo. Когато Правдолюб Иванов пристига в Регенсбург, Германия, заварва в центъра на града тригодишен изкоп за “Фонтан на Европа”, незавършен поради липса на средства. Изкопът е затворен с дървен капак, който художникът приповдига, за да разположи отдолу мощни прожектори. През нощта усещането за интензивна строителна дейност под земята е напълно убедително.

Ироничното объркване превръща минувачите в зрители и ги тласка към съзнателна реакция спрямо случващото се.

В инсталацията си *Пътека*, 2006, в Дармщадтската гора, Германия, художникът отново използва сценарий на объркване, прекъсване на монотонността, намеса в привичното. Разполагайки 100-метрова дървена пътека с перила в гъсталака, той като че ли задава вектор на движението и кара всеки, който стъпи там, не само да се отдели в прекия смисъл на думата от земята, но и да се включи в диалог върху вниманието към детайла и чувството за хумор.

За който се отнася – не бъди толкова наивен/To whom it may concern - don't be so naïve

За Правдолюб Иванов всяка работа, всяка изложба е изграждане на диалог, в който художникът дружелюбно, закачливо, подканващо произнася първото изречение и се надява на отсрещна реакция. Той не обича да насилва отношения и оставя на всеки необходимото за да се включи време. Самите му работи, обаче, притежават естетически, психологически, политически, дори физически аргументи, мотивиращи зрителя да преосмисли представата си за нормалност.

В един от малкото си пърформанси – *Into the Problem of Misunderstanding*, 1999, в изложба, назована на името на малкия, произвеждащ кисело мляко бацил, авторът е стъпил направо с обувките си в надуваем детски басейн и черпи оттам кисело мляко, което предлага на публиката. Името на родината на художника участва в латинското наименование на бактерията и само по себе си е повод за иронични размисли върху националните пренадлежност и идентичност. А тъпченето на този “символ”, дублирано от класически жест на гостоприемство, заплита още повече причинно-следствените връзки, разчитането на отношението между символи и същности.

В случаите с *Объркване* (2002) или с *Толкова много причини* (2004, Галерия за съвременно изкуство, Лайпциг) възможността напълно да се асоциираш със ситуацията е може би най-силно застъпена. Първата инсталация представлява шарено домашно килимче, разположено в белия куб на изложбената зала така, сякаш една от стените е иззидана отгоре му. От своя страна втората работа е site specific – стара кухненска маса, застанала пред врата в помещение и пречеца, както изглежда, тя да се отвори. Прецизно и едновременно много деликатно и масата, и вратата са изрязани, което позволява вратата сякаш да мине “през” масата и така пътят да се освободи.

През последните години персийският килим често става “медия” на Правдолюб. Вероятно влияние оказва и битовата традиция на родина му, географски и исторически намираща се на границата между Изтока и Запада, обаждат се и спомените от социалистическото детство, когато килимът е един от най-достъпните символи на престиж в дома. Но раздробеният на парченца (*Fairy Tale Device Crashed*, 2013) или натрошеният като с голям камък (*Ornament on Demands*, 2013) персийски килими при художника са не само знак за смачканата от реалността представа за екзотичния Ориент, но и за приказката вътре в нас. Изглеждащи неръкотворни и прекрасни, килимите в тези инсталации са разрушени по абсолютно нехарактерен за тях начин, те са счупени на парчета, както метафорично това се случва с представите и идеалите.

За решение на очевиден проблем, макар и парадоксално, претендира *Никога повече песимизъм* (2002 - 2004) – работа, първоначално замислена като плакат, а по-късно превърната в инсталация. Внушителни парчета марково, с големи дупки сирене, са

разположени върху стари чинове, подредени по традиция геометрично и еднообразно. Ситуацията е на почтителна пауза – сякаш след или преди определено събитие. Пространството на инсталацията не носи особени характеристики, но изведнъж... сиренето го лекуват – дупките му са старателно залепени с лейкопласт. «Горкото» сирене, на което му е «оказана първа помощ» – как, защо, от кого? Всичко едновременно се свежда и израства до детско измисляне на парадокси и боравене с понятията на «невъзможното възможно».

Обектите и начините на презентация, при цялата си програмирана комуникативна лекота, често инициират слаб шок при сблъсък, който ги изважда от пространството на забавлението и ги измества по посока на философските обобщения. Половин-буквите, изграждащи надписа *Полу-истина* (1999 - 2007) са някак прекалено очевидни, буквални – на български тук има дори тавтология, но липсващата им половина, която по един или друг начин се оказва в отвореното публично пространство (като «половин» надпис на улица, стикер, пощенска картичка) разкрива доста сериозни манипулации със смисъла – да не би невидимото да е «половин-лъжа»?

Четириметровият силиконов сперматозоид – скулптурен обект с название *“Кралство на желание и хабене”*, 2004, естествено въздейства с размера си (!). Заедно със названието, старателно търсено от автора, работата без заобикалки дава представа за всекидневната катастрофа, свързана със секса, амбициите, претенциите, надеждите, дори и с любовта. Тя би била едно очевидно мъжкарско заявление, ако образното ѝ възплъщение не бе толкова по детски абсурдно!

Ставащата все по популярна в глобалния свят на затворените общности ограничителна бариера функционира в «художественото пространство» на изложба – *Няма забранени мисли* (2007). Авторът отново се обръща към нашата способност да приемаме парадокси и без предубеждение да проследяваме асоциативните пътеки, които тръгват от тях. Червено-бялата бариера в една зала би трябвало да изглежда като неприятен намек за разделяне, изолиране и контрол, или поне като критичен спрямо тях знак. При тази бариера, обаче, традиционното движещата се част е статична, докато стойката ѝ се вдига и спуска, извадена от контекста на рационалното. И макар да не отрича споменатите асоциации, работата е един абсурд, повод да се надсмеем над опасенията, страховете и конвенционалността си.

Ако информацията е линия, тя е по широка, отколкото дълга/ *If Information is a line then it is wider than it is long.*

В логиката на това «неправилно» изказване се намира *Border by Memory*, 2006, тънката бяла неонова тръбичка, означаваща северната, минаваща по Дунава, граница на България. Относителната точност на човешката памет и относителната стабилност на държавната граница намекват за това, че представата за география (а заедно с нея и за локалната култура) са по скоро функция на времето, отколкото на пространството.

В едно от малкото български национални участия на Венецианското биенале – това през 2007 г.⁴, Правдолуб Иванов представя скулптура – две очи, превърнати в огромна гиря – *Паметта е мускул*, 2007. Има нещо странно, страшно, но и детско във формата ѝ. С такива очички, извадени от главите на куклите, момчетата в прогимназията плашат

⁴ *A Place You Have Never Been Before*, 52 Venice Biennial, Bulgarian Pavilion, participants Pravdoliub Ivanov, Ivan Moudov, Stefan Nikolaev, curator Vesela Nozharova.

момичета. Хиперреалистичното изпълнение с венички по очните ябълки и плаши, и разсвива. Очите като че ли те следят като в някой ренесансов портретен шедьовър, колкото и да се местиш пред тях. Да не би това да е овещественият поглед на арта, втрещен в зрителите? Уредът, трениращ визуалната памет е много подходящ за Венеция. Свръхизобилието на образи там, особено по време на биеналето, побеждава обясненията и поражда нови образи.

През 1990-те години, когато започна кариерата на Правдолуб Иванов, една от най-често ползваните по отношение на художниците думи бе «номади», т.е. намиращи приложение на идеите и продукцията си не там, където са родени. Това, което в тоталитарните страни дотогава бе почти уникална привилегия, се превърна в една от характеристиките на професията. Струпването на пътнически куфари с изрязани дъна и капаци е наречено от автора *Loaded*, 2010. Кухите, прозрачни, безтелесни предмети изглеждат натоварени със всичко онова, което няма материален еквивалент, но от което всъщност се състои работата на художника.

Правдолуб отдавна фотографира, любезно прави snapshots за приятелите си по откривания и купони, но и представя фотографии в изложбени зали. С малко изключение, те също не са постановъчни, а документални, често потвърждаващи любимата теза в журналистиката, че окоето на художника не е като на всички останали, а способно да види това, което другите не забелязват. Фотографиите му демонстрират привързаност към градските и селски пейзажи, понякога с участието на хора, но винаги заснети заради онзи резултат на човешкия труд, който би могъл да попадне в пространството на художническите усилия. Серията от такива работи, започната през 2007 г. е названа *Non Works* – каталог на неочакваното, неуместното, нелогичното, на чудесата, случайно създадени от анонимни автори.

Не чети, а съзерцавай/ Don't read – contemplate.

2013 година в България очевидно ще бъде названа «годината на протеста» – срещу корумпираното правителство, срещу неморалността на властта, срещу алчността на олигарсите. Десетки хиляди излязоха по улиците, за да демонстрират несъгласието си със status quo. Повечето от тях, както и на много други места по света напоследък, принадлежат към «креативната класа», притежаваща уменията да формулира и репрезентира мислите си. Но дори и на този фон визуално-текстовата полемика с властимащите на художника Правдолуб Иванов прояви уникалните си качества, позволили авторът да се окаже номиниран от медиите за «лице на протеста». Отново се потърси отговор на постоянно присъстващия през 20 век въпрос – «С кого сте, майстори на изкуството?»⁵. Всеки ден месеци наред Правдолуб се появяваше сред потока манифестанти с еднометрови, винаги различни авторски лозунги с подигравателни, призивни, коментарни текстове, отразяващи настроенията на «улицата». Художествена квинтесенция, отразена от *Financial Times*, те придобиват на 15 юли 2013 г., когато лозунгът проговаря на глобален метакомуникативен език – чрез емотикони, кинжали, мечове, бомби и други гневни знаци, изразители на актуалните политически емоции.

Този лозунг се оказа в основата на колажната работа *Tools*, 2013, обединяваща снимката на Правдолуб Иванов по време на протеста с този лозунг, него самия и

⁵ Названието на статията от 1932 г. на М. Горки във вестник *Правда*, в която се обсъжда политическата и етическата позиция на културните дейци.

страницата от Financial Times със статията, посветена на българските антикорупционни протести. Медията стана посланието.

Black Balloons, 2013, е една от първите видео работи на художника и отново е непосредствена реакция на уличните протести. Заснето е множеството полицаи, пазещи сградата на българския парламент и черните балони, «поднесени» на властта в един от протестните дни подобно на черните камъчета при гласуване в Античността, благодарение на които се е появила думата ballot. Но и тук посланието е усложнено – естетският монтаж съчетава свободната подвижност на балоните, местени от вятъра, с безизразната статика на полицаите. Противопоставянето е подчертано от странния звук, модифициран реален запис, превърнат в Звук на протестите....

The Tree of my Desire is Bonsai

Never Enough, 2011, е вик на душата, решително спреиван върху хартия, прекриваща я по стената. Художествената повърхност, “понесла” знака “Less is More», определящ съвършенството на Андреа дел Сарто в поемата на Робърт Браунинг, едновременно се оказва недостатъчна. Как беше там при Еминем?

“... it may seem like I'm goin too fast cuz my mind is racing
And I could give a fuck what category you place me
Long as when I'm pushing up daisies and gone
As long as you place me amongst one of them greats
When I hit the heavenly gates...”⁶

(Изглеждам прекалено бърз, щото съзнанието ми препуска
И не ебавам, къде ме слагате,
Докато не гушна букета и си замина
И ще се окажа сред великите,
Когато ще застана пред райските порти)

Яра Бубнова

⁶ Eminem. *Never Enough* from the *Encore Album*, 2004