

Selected Works And Random Images, Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv, 2019, catalogue

40 Otets Paisiy str. / Plovdiv 4000, Bulgaria / +359888520375 / www.sariev-gallery.com

INTRODUC- TION TO BULGARIAN CONTEMPO- RARY ART 1982—2015

VESSELA NOZHAROVA



OPEN ARTS
FOUNDATION

Introduction to Bulgarian Contemporary Art (1982– 2015), catalogue, 2018

Vessela Nozharova

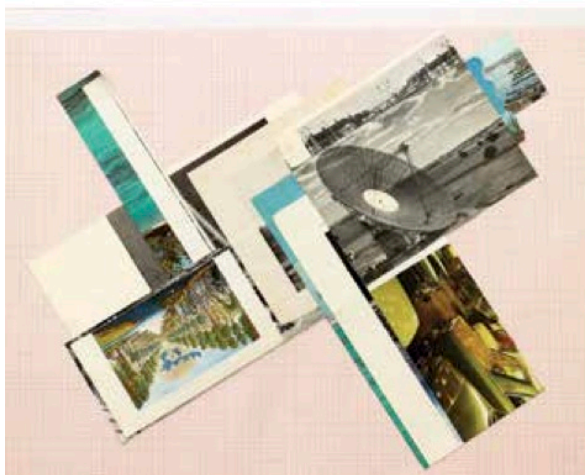
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sense of reality by cutting them out or flipping them upside down.¹⁵⁷ He has been shortlisted twice for the Gaudenz B. Ruf Award in 2009, and 2011. He won the BAZA award in 2011. He is one of the young Bulgarian artists to have left their home country in pursuit of a professional career. At first, he went to Vienna, where he worked with Krinzinger Gallery, and then to Berlin. He has worked with curators such as Gülşen Bal, Walter Seidl and René Block among others.

The choice of the 2009 BAZA Award's recipient, an artist who had managed to establish himself on the Bulgarian contemporary art scene over the previous 15 years, was logical and fully expected. **Samuil Stoyanov** made his debut in 2001 with the exhibition "The City," which consisted of unexpected and exciting paintings; it was shown in the gallery of the same art academy from which he had just graduated. His paintings, on the one hand, showed a city that was familiar, calm and ordinary. On the other hand, however, this ordinariness concealed a hidden picture of unexpected turns and existential dramas. It was precisely this sensitivity to the hidden images and the mysteries of an otherwise prosaic reality that remained an important driving force behind Stoyanov's subsequent works, which dealt with the urban environment's daily "bugs," the poetics of the image and the hidden meaning of ordinary objects and images. His works, frequently relying on a play of words and meanings, are charged with a sense of humor and irony. In

✧ Vikenti Komitski, "Collage (5)," 2014, from the Vacuum Collages series, 42 x 60 cm

✦ Vikenti Komitski, "Who Wants to Live Forever," 2010/2014, polyester tents from the exhibition "Balkon zum Balkan," Kunsthalle Baden Baden, Germany

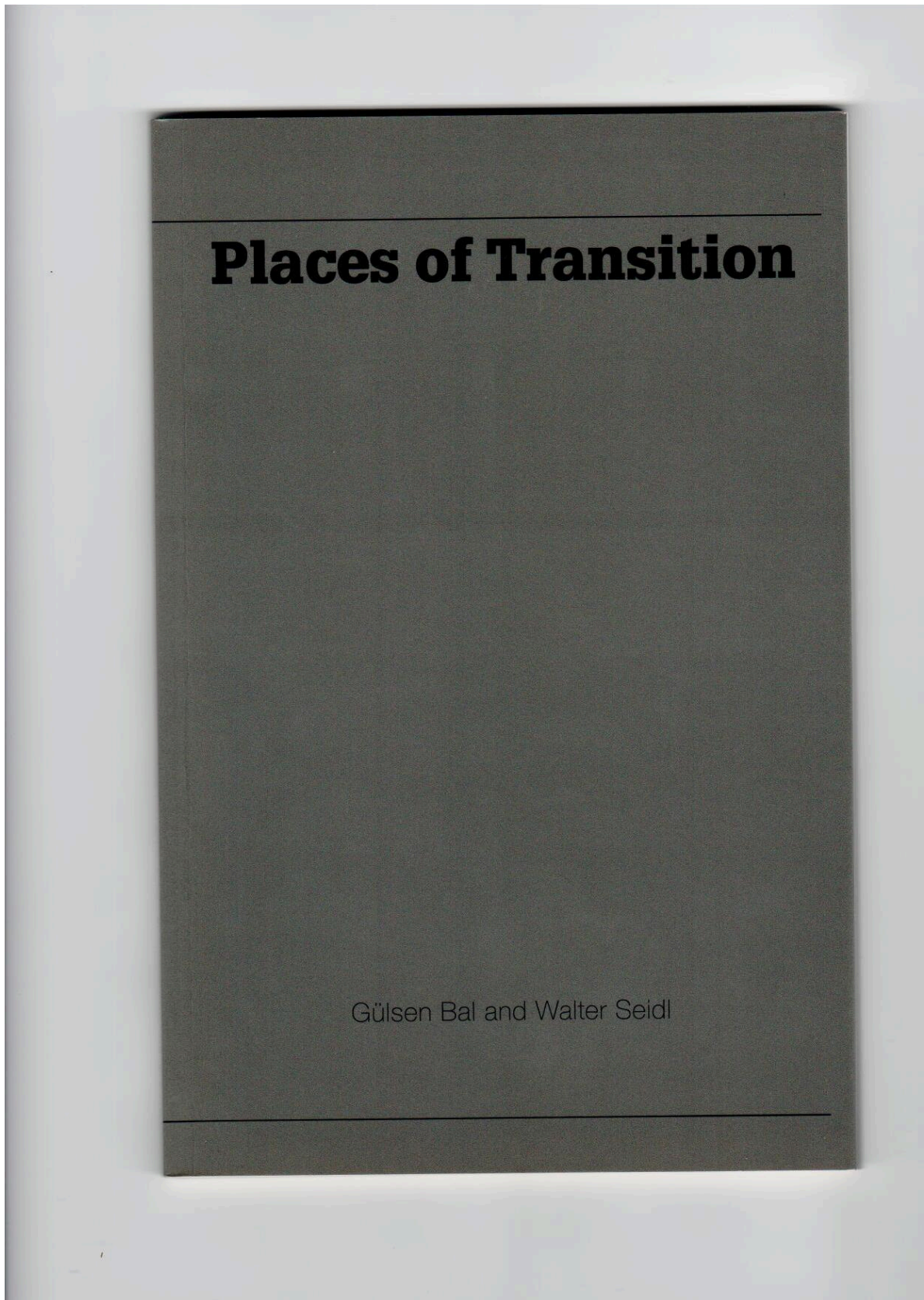


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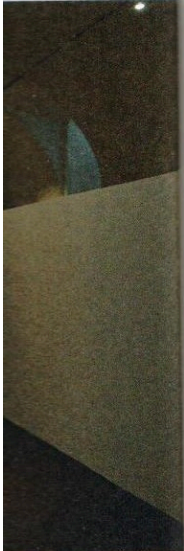
Places of Transition, Freiraum MuseumsQuartier, Vienna, 2014, catalogue



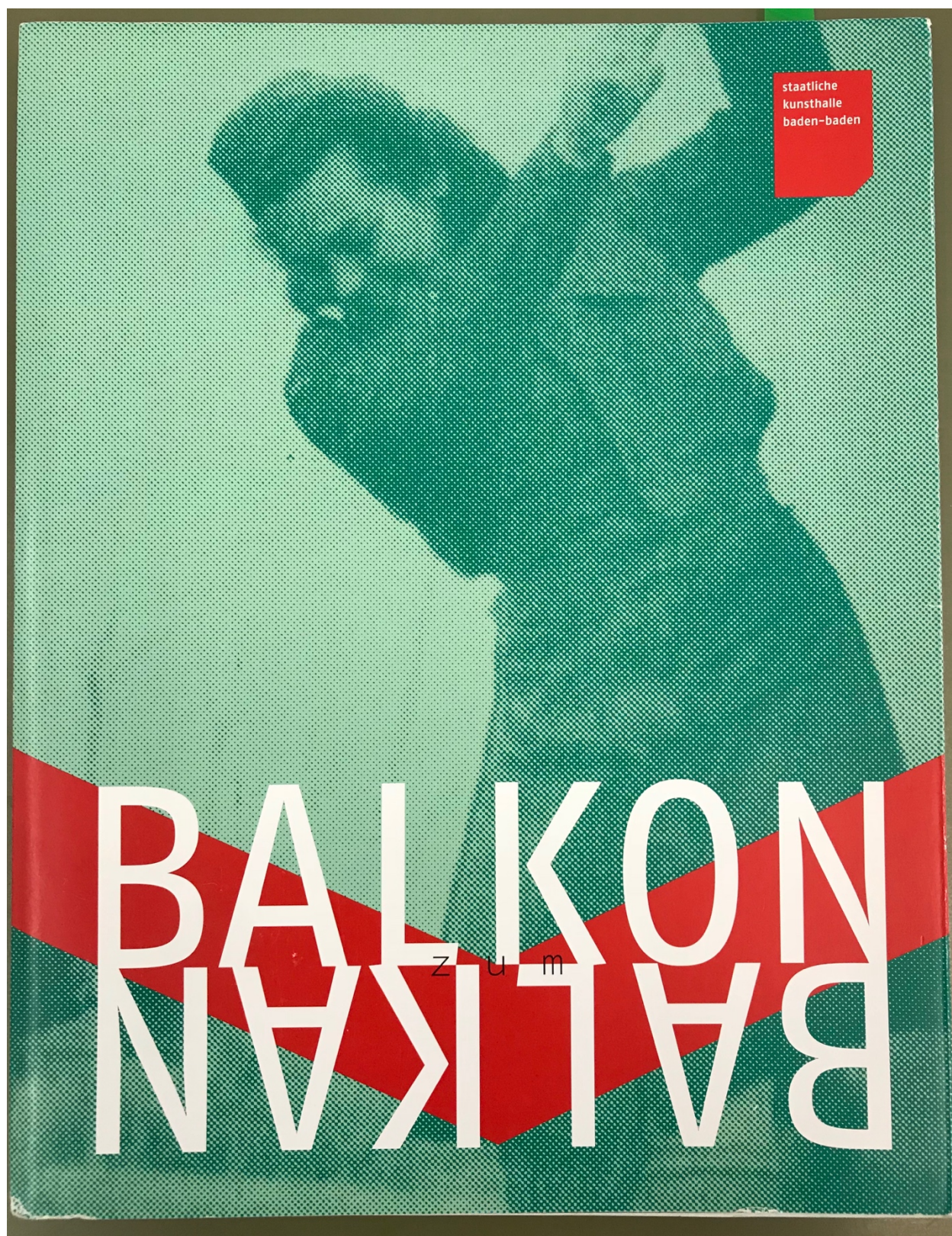
Pop-up Wall

Vikenti Komitski

2004, Video, 8'54"



Vikenti Komitski's work involves the use of readymade principles applied to objects and ideas. Sometimes, the content of his work aims to convey a critical view over the production of an artwork itself, while other times it does not. In Komitski's installation *Pop-Up Wall*, which he developed during his residency at the MQ, the artist addresses how borders are still drawn up to protect "Fortress Europe." At the beginning of 2014, working restrictions were loosened for citizens in Bulgaria and Romania to allow them to freely obtain permission to work in all countries of the European Union. Concurrently with this liberalization for the EU's easternmost countries along the Black Sea, Bulgaria attempted to reinforce its border with Turkey—a project that came to extend over a 30-kilometer-long stretch near the Bulgarian towns of Lesovo and Kraynovo by February 2014—in order to prevent Syrian refugees from entering the country. Komitski, reacting to this phenomenon, built a model metal wall component for the exhibition as an example of what the Bulgarian-Turkish wall looks like. By putting it on wheels, he demonstrates how walls fluctuate, constantly being put up and taken down.



Balkon zum Balkan, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden Baden, 2014 catalogue



Balkon zum Balkan, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden Baden, 2014 catalogue

VIKENTI KOMITSKI

A pyramid of blue tents towers in direct proximity to Baden-Baden's Stiftskirche and the Florentinerberg. While from a distance it looks like just another old monument next to the others, when seen from up close the visitor realizes that the work is playing with the symbolic level. This tent pyramid installation is also not intended to be dwelled in, for the entrance to the tents can be found inside the installation, facing the other tents.

Vikenti Komitski (born in Bulgaria in 1983) studied sculpture at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia. He has been invited to several internationally renowned residencies, including one at Museumsquartier in Vienna (2013) and one at New York's ISCP. Komitski's approach to serious, often politically explicit subject matter is frequently flanked by the humorous refunctioning or de-familiarization of the materials used, true to the logic of the readymade.

The archaic-pyramidal form of the installation is countered by the material used and thus in an image is found for the transitory state of life. It is impossible to avoid thinking of the tent conglomerates of refugee camps found around the world and the recent development of protest camps in public space. These tent camps bring attention to urgent issues of public interest, like the problem of European asylum policy and the people affected by it. The rhetorical question that provides the title here can be read as an ironic reference to the short-life span of the tent installation, but at the same time it is a cynical commentary on the status quo of contemporary life.

VIKENTI KOMITSKI

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In unmittelbarer Nachbarschaft zur Baden-Badener Stiftskirche und dem Florentinerberg erhebt sich eine Pyramide aus blauen Zelten. Wenn man von Ferne noch glauben könnte, ein archaisches Monument neben anderen zu erblicken, erschließt sich dem nähertretenden Besucher, dass hier ein Spiel mit dem Symbolträchtigen betrieben wird. Dabei ist die pyramidale Zeltinstallation auch nicht für die Behausung gedacht, denn der Eingang der Zelte liegt im Inneren der Installation, den anderen Zelten zugewandt.

Vikenti Komitski (*1983 in Bulgarien) studierte an der National Academy of Arts in Sofia im Bereich Bildhauerei. Er wurde bereits zu mehreren international renommierten Residenzprogrammen eingeladen wie etwa zum Museumsquartier Wien (2013) und dem ISCP in New York (2012). Komitskis Zugriff auf ernste, zuweilen explizit politische Themen ist häufig flankiert von einer humorvollen Umnutzung oder Verfremdung der verwendeten Materialien, getreu der Logik des Readymades.

So wird die archaisch-pyramidale Formgebung der Installation konterkariert durch das verwendete Baumaterial und damit in dieser Arbeit auch ein Bild für den transitorischen Zustand des Lebens gefunden. Man kommt auch nicht umhin, an die Zeltkonglomerate weltweit existierender Flüchtlingslager und an die noch junge Entwicklung bürgerschaftlicher Protestcamps im öffentlichen Raum zu denken. Diese Zeltcamps rücken drängende Fragen öffentlichen Interesses wie die Problematik europäischer Asylpolitik und die Menschen, die davon betroffen sind, ins Blickfeld der Öffentlichkeit. Die titelgebende rhetorische Frage kann daher einerseits als ironischer Verweis auf die kurzzeitige Lebensdauer der Zeltinstallation gelesen werden, zugleich birgt sie aber auch einen zynischen Kommentar zum Status quo zeitgenössischer Lebensumstände.

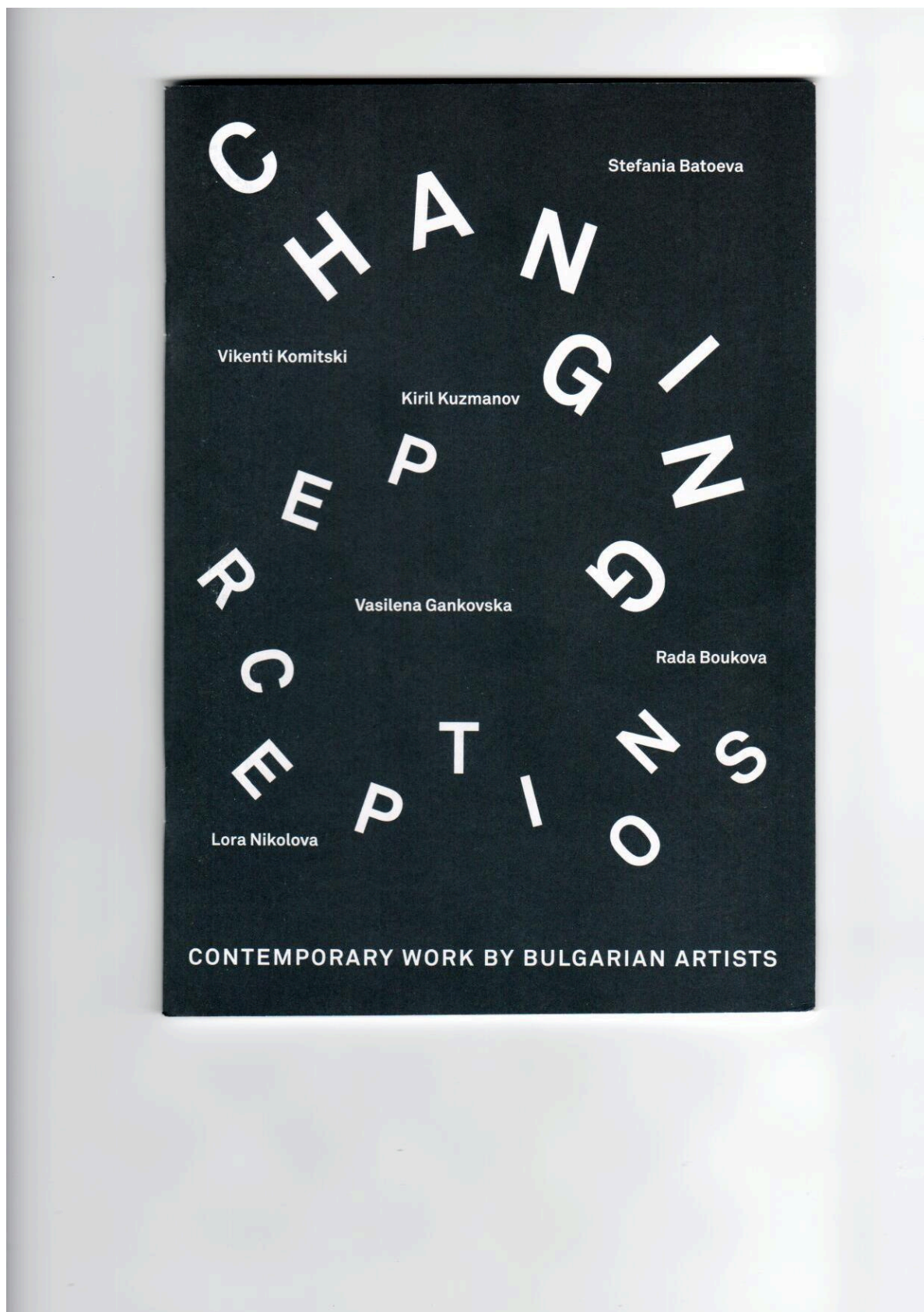
← VIKENTI KOMITSKI, *Who Wants To Live Forever*, 2010
Polyesterzelte, diverse Materialien

**BALKON ZUM BALKAN**

Festival der Nachwuchskunst aus den Balkanländern
im öffentlichen Raum rund um den Marktplatz
und im 45cbm — Studiораum der Staatlichen Kunsthalle Baden-Baden

BALCONY TO THE BALKANS

Festival of young artists from the Balkan region
in public space around the market square
and at 45cbm — studio space of the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden



CHANGING PERCEPTIONS. Contemporary work by Bulgarian Artists, 2012, catalogue

Conversation with the artists

26 September – 14 October 2012

From: Kathrin Singer

To: Vikenti Komitski; Kiril Kuzmanov; Stefania Batoeva

Vikenti and Kiril, you both graduated from the National Academy of Fine Arts, Sculpture Department, in Sofia, Rada finished the Ecole Nationale des Superieure des Beaux Arts in Paris, Stefania graduated from the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London. It is quite interesting for me to see that your work is not limited by the media you studied or by one topic. How would you describe your way of working?

From: Vikenti Komitski

I guess the most important part of my work is to extract relevant topics to talk about from my environment, conversations I have, books I read. It has a lot to do with intuition, but not only. When I find something that makes me want to make a piece about it, the next step is to decide in what way, depending in what context I want to situate the work. At this point it comes to what media do I use. The hard part is to clear out the topic I am interested in, than the rest is just playing with trying to situate the work on the right context.

From: Stefania Batoeva

I don't have a defined way of working, there might be a pattern, but that would change too. However, I do start work with sparks of ideas; I make some decisions that seem right at the time. I keep objects and images. At some point they may come into the work. Mostly, I try to cut the unnecessary stuff out of the picture.

From: Kiril Kuzmanov

I try to express my ideas through the visual and the material. This world of ideas inevitably meets social realities, concepts and institutions in Bulgaria, including academic institutions, which today are heavily Eurocentric.

To me, despite being a graduate from an art school and academy, what remains essential is the world of ideas and how a given artistic language expresses them. To me art is not an opportunity to showcase the "artist". It rather renders visible the self-positioning of the

individual in relation to the situation. I think I actually contribute to making them easy victims.

From: Kathrin Singer
To: Stefania Batoeva

The last decade has been a constant reference to retro dresses to Conceptual art, technicality might be a scenario in one of the project *His Master's Voice* you are most interested in.

From: Stefania Batoeva

I find the concept of a singular gesture a problem with the project *His Master's Voice*.

His Master's Voice spot on a dream voice belong?

individual in relation to the world and his or her particular dimension/situation. I think that too rigid a division of art in genres and practices actually contributes to driving the text and context apart, thus making them easy victims of marketing and politics.

From: Kathrin Singer

To: Stefania Batoeva

The last decade has been defined largely in terms of the past: via constant references to yesterday, specific styles and periods, from retro dresses to countless revivals, from recycling 1960s and 1970s Conceptual art. By contrast, it seems that the coupling of nature with technicity might be a sign of a new era in art. You are creating fantastic scenarios in order to ask important questions about our world like in the project *His Masters Voice*. How would you describe the questions you are most interested in? What moves you?

From: Stefania Batoeva

I find the coexistence of chaos and order fascinating. I definitely don't understand how it works; I try to grasp this with singular gestures coming from different directions. I don't think I have a problem with being part of the chaos or being in the dark.

His Master's Voice cancels a whole load of "knowns", to shine the spot on a dreamlike reality, with an open question: To whom does the voice belong?

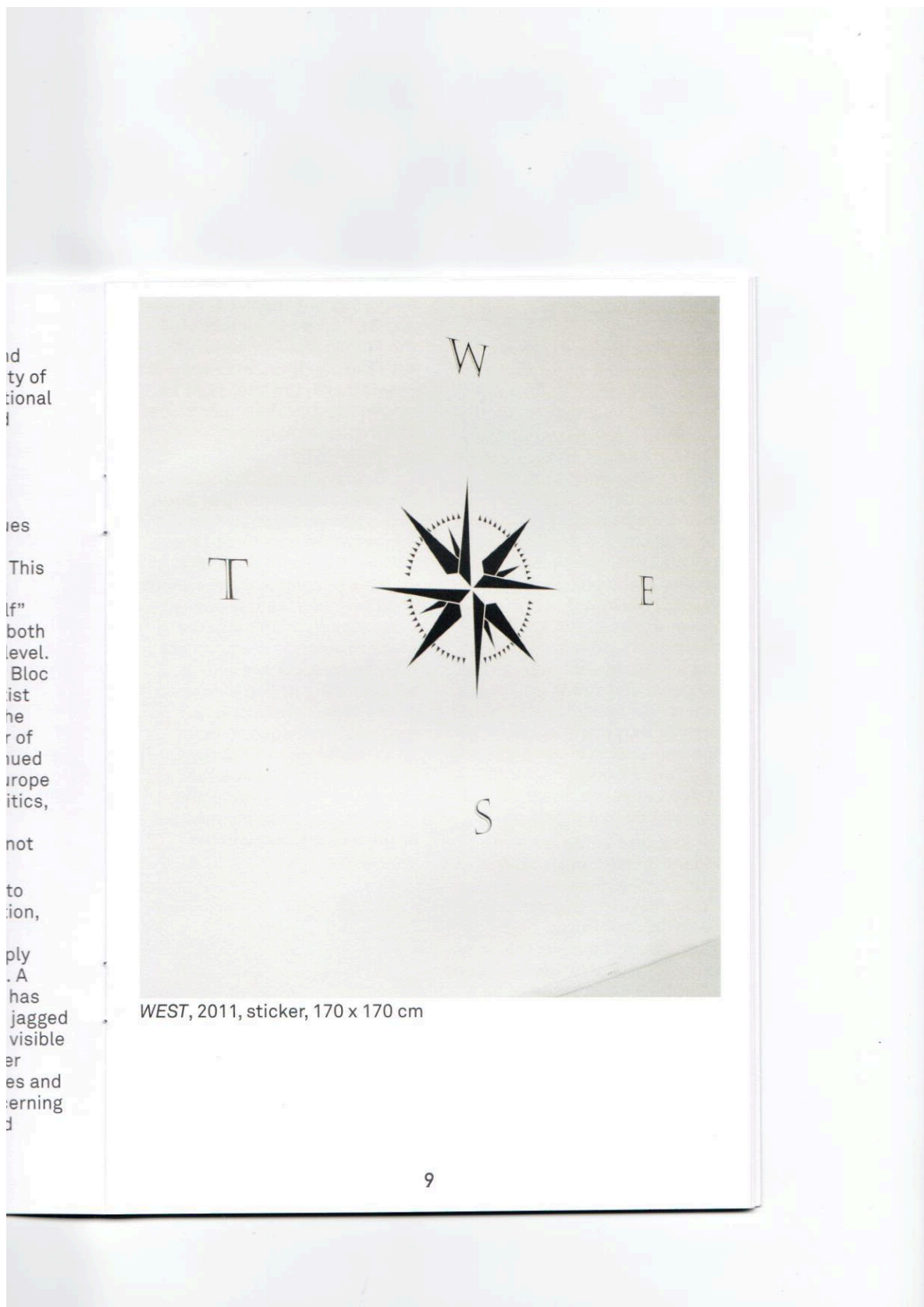
Vikenti Komitski

Together Again (2009), a manipulated geo-political map, redraws the globe into a flat circle with every continent and island rubbing against its neighbour. Visually describing the dubious effect of globalisation and the "flattening" of the world with recent technologies like the Internet, this simple act of collage makes visible the new political reality. More often than not, immediate neighbours have the bitterest rivalries. Komitski's redrawing of the world map to create fictional neighbours out of those countries which had heretofore been separated by large expanses of ocean, points obliquely to the fresh possibilities for disagreement and conflict within a world united with unprecedented proximity in the "global village". The title of the work, *Together Again*, and its appearance allude unmistakably to the prehistoric super continent Pangaea which formed 300 million years ago. Like an innocence that can never be regained, our global map will always be forever governed by territorial concerns, strife, demand for natural resources and conflict.

WEST (2011) simply and directly exposes the reality of the West's global gravitational pull – both politically and economically. Despite the ongoing momentum of globalisation, and the emergence of new global players, the West continues to define itself, and to be perceived, as the centre. This questionable version of a "here" and "there", a "self" and "other", plays out at both a continental and global level. Growing up in an Eastern Bloc country (Bulgaria) the artist is only too familiar with the promised utopian wonder of capitalism and the continued dominance of Western Europe and the USA in global politics, and the consequent of marginalisation of those not included.

Komitski's final work to be included in the exhibition, *Broken Book* (2009), is a highly theatrical and deeply iconoclastic intervention. A short political dictionary has been rent asunder with a jagged rupture. The work makes visible the artist's wish to shatter current political structures and received knowledge concerning the systems of power and government.

WEST, 201



WEST, 2011, sticker, 170 x 170 cm

Conversation with the artists

26 September – 14 October 2012

From: Kathrin Singer
To: Vasilena Gankovska

You live in Bulgaria and in different countries in Europe. I wonder if there are national or ideological borders for your art. When you received exhibitions in Paris, Shanghai or Vienna, what were the reactions to your work?

From: Vasilena Gankovska

I have been living abroad for quite a long time, so after all these years I finally reached the point where the topic of the nationality would not play such a big role in my work as an artist. At the beginning especially here in Austria and because of the context I started to exhibit in, I was labelled as an Eastern European artist and in this sense the audience also regarded my work as something Eastern European. Of course this had to deal at a certain point with the themes of my paintings, with the very specific context of the project I was participating in. In my recent solo exhibition for example this was not a question at all. More interesting was the reaction of the Bulgarian audience, when I made some projects in my home country. Although I was dealing with the situation there, I was in a way 'an alien', because of the visual language I used. For me it is a question of how much the audience gets or takes from the artwork. Of course this depends on the ability to understand certain cultural codes, which might be different in every country.

From: Kathrin Singer
To: Lora Nikolova

Lora, your artistic practice aims to engages the viewer to create their own connections and interpretations by using elements of mark making, transience and space. Could you explain in which ways you are trying to achieve this?

From: Lora Nikolova

As it stands, it is currently defined by issues relating to space within the picture plane, and alluding to extension beyond it, specifically in the way of generating outward flow, depth and three

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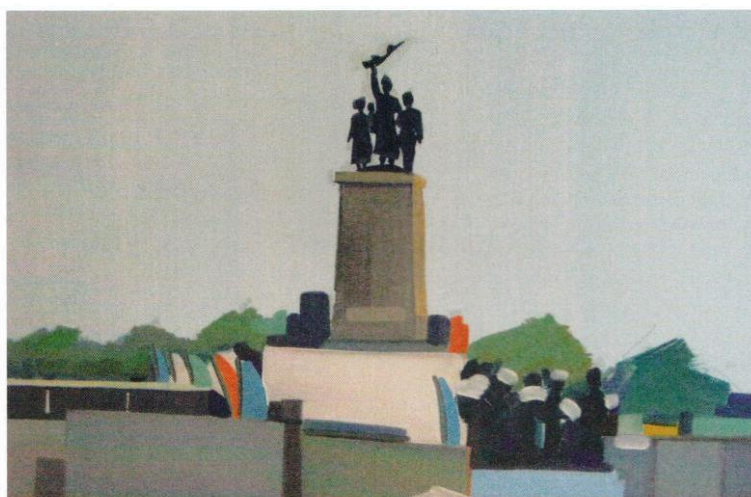
From: Kathrin
To: Rada Bouk

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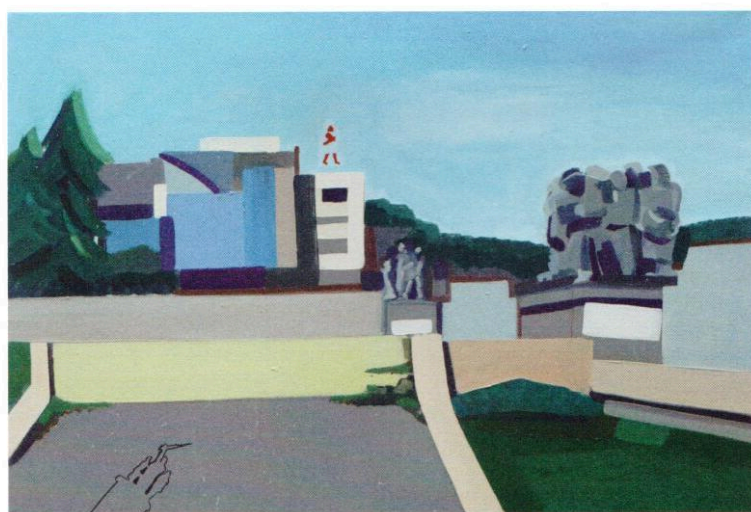
From: Rada B

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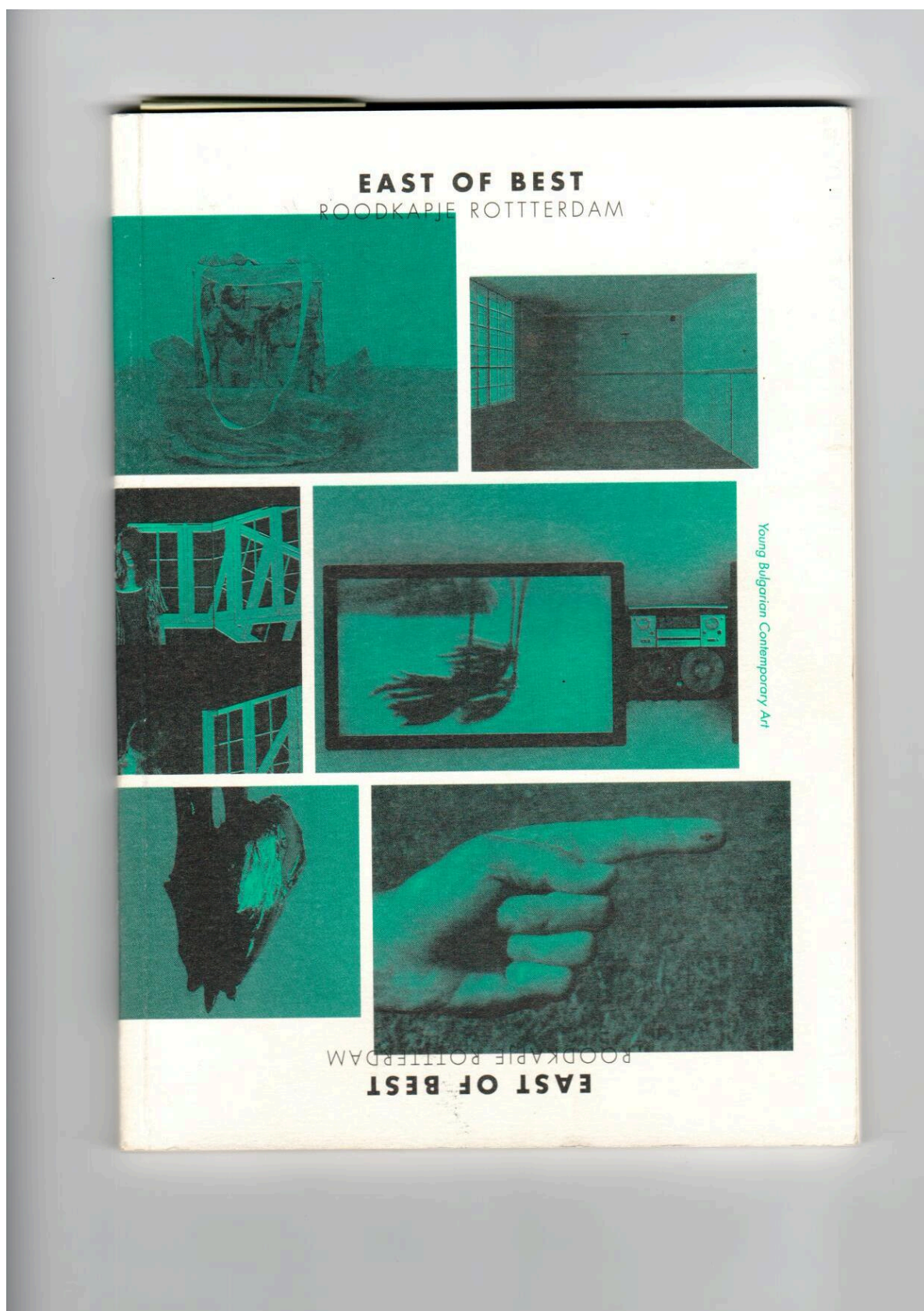
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The Army of the Soviet, 2008, oil on canvas, 42 x 60 cm



Johnny Walker Meets the Soviet Army, 2009, oil on canvas, 40 x 60 cm



East of Best, Roodkapje Rotterdam, 2012, catalogue

Vikenti Komitski is well known on the Bulgarian art scene for his small acts and casual statements, both ironic and political. In the work *Compass* (2011), instead of assigning the four cardinal directions, the artist replaces them with the readable "W E S T". By overturning the physical order of the world, he ironically alludes to the superpower of the "Western" countries that constitute

the most important historical, cultural and political reference in the discourse on Bulgarian identity.

And what about *Permanent* (2011), a video on how the artist tattoos an arrow on his finger? The artwork re-

fers to a citation of Marcel Duchamp, who talks about the artist not being the hand that creates but as the finger that shows. This work is part in the series of references to iconic masterpieces of Western art; however, as the curator Vladiya Mihaylova commented for the online art magazine *Blister*, the works of Vikenti Komitski are more a "parody" of possible references than another try in conceptualism.

The present work is an ironical taking on Duchamp's words, at the same time it is a provocation reflecting its meaning. What does the finger point at – the West? Or at the post-modern geography of nowhere, where no clear answers exist? What is left over, after cool conceptualism has been taken literally? Finally, is it a "permanent" subjection to the legacies of Western art theory, where

VIKENTI KOMITSKI

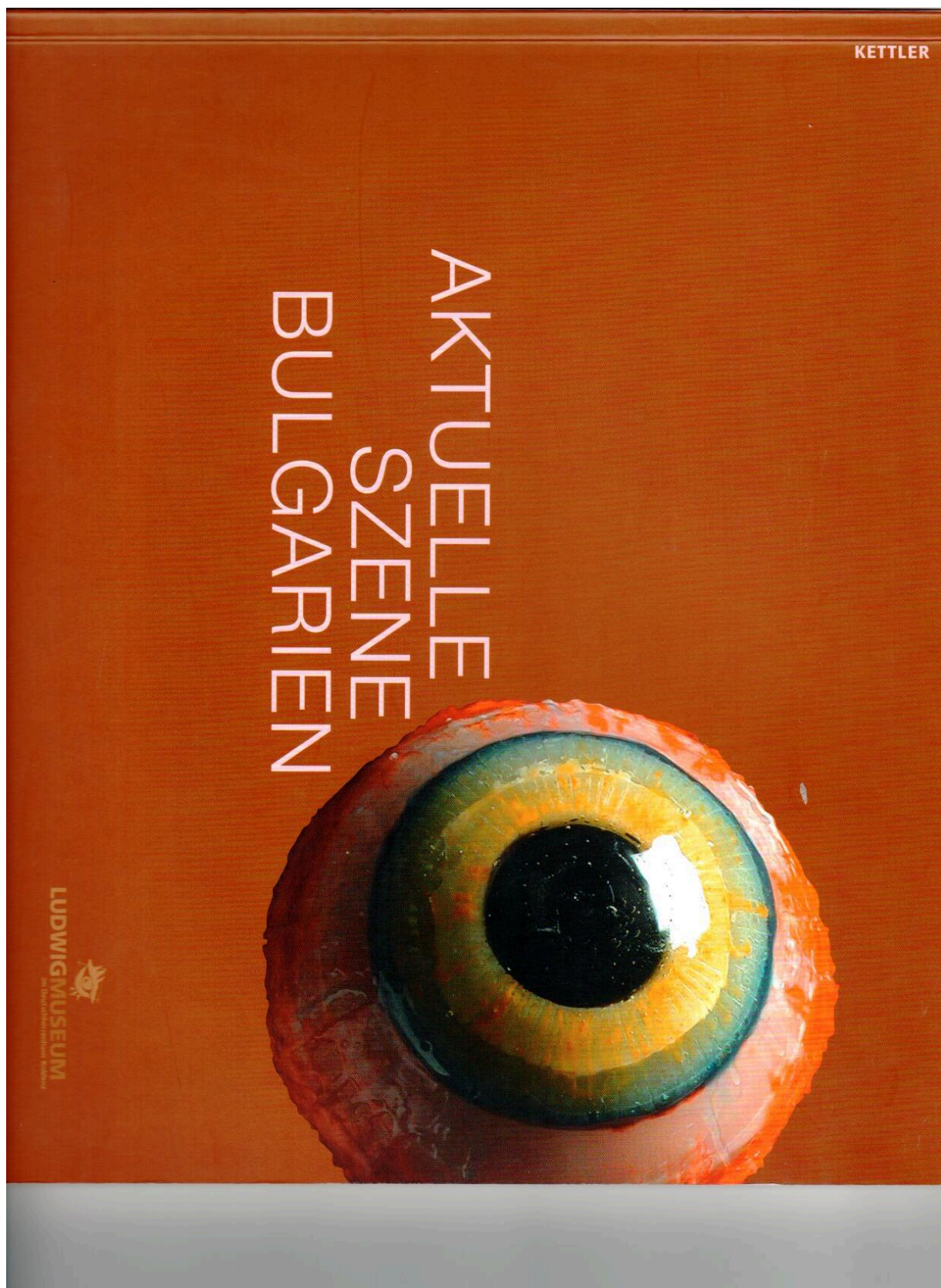


Permanent, 2011. Video



Subversive parodies through small acts

Duchamp plays a key role, or an aesthetic subversion to those rules? Vikenti Komitski also created exclusively for this exhibition the showcase-graffiti *BANKNOTES DONT JINGLE* as well as a textual work that lies in the continuity of his *Textsculpture* (2011) and an earlier graffiti *There is always somebody somewhere cutting something with the flex* (2007-2009) at the show case of *Vaska Emanuilova Gallery*, one of the most famous exhibition places in Sofia for Bulgarian emerging artists.



Aktuelle Szene Bulgarien, Ludwig Museum Koblenz, 2008, catalogue