

Inside the Invisible

📅 May 17, 2018 👤 David Siegel

"Time appears longer when you cannot see."

A poignant and powerful phrase from the beginning of Kamen Stoyanov's documentary *IN-VISIBLE*. The narrator emerges from a railway tunnel into Slovenia much like one of Plato's chosen cave-dwellers. The perception of time is not the only thing that is about to change.



<http://www.inenart.eu/?p=23738>

Part-allegory and part-hero's journey, the film tacks along the course of darkness, discovery, light, and the role of the guide along the way. The classic narrative structure beautifully compliments the documentary's own exploration of the invisible/visible as clear parallels to darkness/light.

The grounding in Ljubljana is a reminder that these are not just concepts reserved for mythology. They are happening everywhere as a kind of everyday yin and yang. Where there is visible, there is invisible. And if there is any truth to the concept, the invisible world is equally counterbalancing the visible once – with equal importance. As the title suggests, there is a path *inside* the visible. Stoyanov takes us *in* invisible Ljubljana.



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We meet two guides in Marko Pogačnik and Taubi in a path of discovery of the hidden Ljubljana. Each a sage in their own way, Stoyanov assumes the role of seeker and transmitter of their wisdom, allowing the two men to speak of an invisible truth. Marko offers a path into a world of metaphysics – dreamlike and symbolic. Taubi, worldly and raw, blends politics and emotions from the deep fringes of urban Ljubljana.



The juxtaposition is evocative and enjoyably open-ended, leaving room for personal choice in a journey. There are always decisions to be made in how to regard newly visible places. Far from preachy or patronizing, the film echoes the words of a third guide and another invisible world:

"I don't help anyone. I give you only a place."

-Don Pierino

Despite their differences, Taubi, Pogačnik, Pierino, and Stoyanov echo a similar kind of compassion which creates space for what might be found in invisible worlds. Where there is invisible, there is often neglect and suffering that elicits a strong desire to help. But maybe it is as Don Pierino says – rather than trying to help, maybe we could do more with the act of providing a place.

Film Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/kamenstoyanov/in-visibletrailer>

For more information visit : www.kamenstoyanov.com

Reviews /



BY ANNE KATRIN FESSLER
20 FEB 2012

Kamen Stoyanov

JesuitenFoyer



Cultural Moussaka, 2010,
Video still

Several spoons of Bulgarian culture, and it tastes much better,' says Kamen Stoyanov in his video cookery show *Cultural Moussaka* (2010) as he drizzles a portion of Kultura yogurt over a dish. As the Bulgarian artist goes step by step through the recipe, he compares making a sauce to preparing a canvas. Still, his video has less to do with the transmission of know-how than with a cultural system that seems bent on making things impossible: Bulgarian cultural politics.

<https://frieze.com/article/kamen-stoyanov?language=en>

The work was in the modest yet convincing exhibition aptly titled 'Impossible Stories', which was part of the Otto Mauer Prize Stoyanov won in 2011. The Vienna- and Sofia-based artist's earlier works deploy humour as a stylistic device to address issues such as the political past of his native Bulgaria (*Hallo Lenin*, 2003) and art market conventions (*Which one should I buy*, 2008). 'Impossible Stories' also showed off his flair for the absurd and the ironic since the works describe not only the improbable but also the downright incredible. The absurdities of the internationalized art and culture industry led to Cultural Moussaka: To sponsor Stoyanov for the 2010 Aichi Triennale in Nagoya, the Bulgarian Embassy in Tokyo offered him not money, but a cook. Since Bulgaria likes to present itself as a culinary culture, the embassy's chef was hired to work at the opening. When the chef was laid off as a result of cutbacks, Stoyanov took this incident of 'cultural promotion' as a starting point for his work. The other elements were two things the Japanese tend to associate with Bulgaria: yogurt (Japan's best known brand is called 'Bulgaria') and Kotoo'shu Katsunori, a sumo wrestler of Bulgarian origin. Stoyanov made moussaka, which happens to be Kotoo'shu's favourite dish.

In other works, Stoyanov translates Bulgarian cultural policy into symbols that are clear and often perfidious but never trite. Exploring the prosaic and the overlooked, his videos lend visibility to cultural outsiders, like the street philosopher Seiji Inamine in *Impossible Message* (2010). The negligible meets the momentous in *Bringing Kultura* (2010), which documents another intervention. As the national cultural budget was being cut in 2010, a monument was erected in Sofia to honour the microbiologist Stamen Grigorov, who discovered lactobacillus bulgaricus yogurt in 1905; Stoyanov responded with his own cultural export and travelled to an exhibition in Maribor with a suitcase full of Kultura yoghurt, which he distributed to the locals. Fittingly, the show featured an empty Kultura pot (*Untitled*, 2011) to collect donations for the Ministry of Culture and the next Venice Biennale. This found object was Stoyanov's answer to the scandalous financing of the last Bulgarian pavilion, which was financed by a private individual instead of the state. As culture gets privatized, does it taste better?

Translated by Jonathan Blower

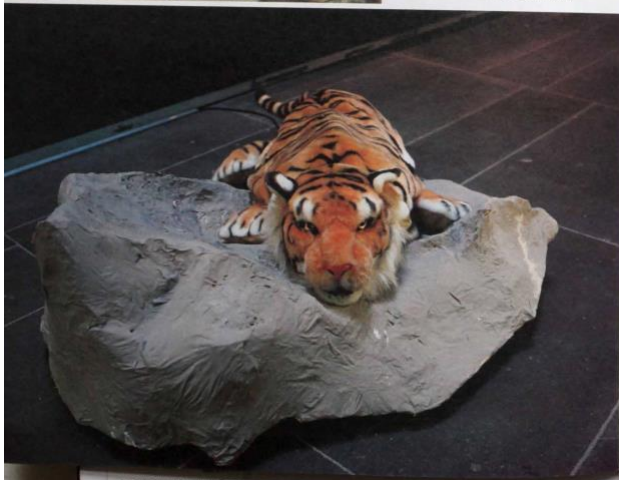
Kamen Stoyanov, article.

Frieze, 20 February 2012

<https://frieze.com/article/kamen-stoyanov?language=en>

AT ARM'S LENGTH

Milena Dimitrova



Contemporary art that engages with Eastern Europe tends to be viewed from a purely Western perspective. Bulgarian artist Kamen Stoyanov, an artist as an observer, makes no attempt to evade this question. Vienna's MUMOK in Vienna played host last year to the exhibition "at arms length" by Stoyanov. In connection with the awards ceremony of the Vienna fair, this exhibit took as its theme the relations between the post-socialist East and Western Europe regarding cultural translations, questions of identity and cultural phenomena.

The phenomena associated with post-socialism, the art market, the all-encompassing economization of so many areas of life, cultural identity, and the position of the artist—all of these themes are expressed through a variety of media. This tendency could be seen in *At Arms Length*, the series of drawings *Brakeshoes*, the video *Move Your Hands*, the installation *Tigersteps* and the video-work *Persona*. *Persona* was the most important work in this exhibition, serving as a thematic summary of all of the works presented under the banner of cultural translation.

In this case, gaps and breaks in cultural and artistic identities are of particular interest. There are moments in which these identity clashes occur, as, for instance, in the *Brakeshoes* cycle, which

treats the possible intercombinations of the A3 paper format and the Bulgarian first-person pronoun, rendered in Cyrillic lettering as A3. One particularly thorny thematic question of these sketches is posed by the Cyrillic alphabet, itself regarded as a barrier ("Hermenschub") from intercultural communication in the widely popular 1984 work on world languages by the Swiss philologist Frederick Bodmer.* Of particular note is one passage from the book on the inability of Russia to reach out to the much-desired cultural treasures from abroad:

"[...] The Serbs and Bulgarians also drag this cultural burden along with themselves, but not the Poles and Czechoslovaks. When their forefathers were adopted by the Roman Catholic faith, the Latin alphabet came as a gift from Rome."

This quotation serves as the point of departure for these sketches, introducing a thematic framework for the conflicts of culture and identity in modernity within their differing contexts and external forms, and allowing them to be represented visually. Hence, this work takes up more broadly the customary idea of the artist as a skilled draughtsman, as well as the preference among gallery owners for the medium of drawing, one that can be sold more easily than other, less traditional media.

The charm of these drawings lies in their logic of similarities and transformations, in which thematic or formal qualities are transferred from picture to picture. For instance, a "perfect circle" drawn by one artist appears on one sheet, while on the next, a bite has been taken out of it. Even the way in which the drawings are stacked, in a careless heap, could be seen as simulating a pile of money.

Along with the theme of identity, this formal principle is carried further in the video installation *Persona*. This work displays a woman performing a simultaneous interpretation of Ingmar Bergman's film of the same name during a screening at the Odeon cinema in Sofia. It is hardly an accident that Bergman's *Persona* is the film selected: a work in which the central theme is that of identity and the problems that grow out of it between two women. In the film, one of the women is speaking in the name of the other, and the interpreter in Stoyanov's video assumes a similar role, even through her own external similarity to the actress re-inscribing the process. Much as in the drawings, what transpires in the video is a highly ambiguous, multi-layered process of identity-shifting. In *Persona*, Kamen Stoyanov took inspiration directly from Walter Benjamin's text "The Task of the Translator," in which the central idea, put simply, is that translation is always an extension and transformation of the original, making the original more comprehensible, and that breaks, imprecisions and features in the process of translation, which paradoxically arise

through literal faithfulness to the original, lead straight to the actual, hidden meaning of the text itself.

A literal translation proves to be an error on the part of the translator, and a quality that unexpectedly lends transparency to the original—an idea that applies not merely to linguistic translation, but even to that of cultural, economic and social phenomena. One example of the idea of an all-too-literal translation appears in another of Stoyanov's works, the *Tigersteps* installation.

A stuffed tiger, almost life-size, relates the life-story of the Siberian tiger Shakti, who spent four months as an attraction in the hip (yet short-lived) Tiger Steps cafe in the Sofia's massive Zvezd shopping center, surrounded with all possible comforts from flat-screen TV to air-conditioning. Photographs and tiger-shaped accessories from the place where it all transpired serve as evidence of the verity of this story.

Following the stated logic of translation, the expression and appearances of capitalist economics reveal themselves in essence once translated into the formerly socialist East. Their implantation, often absolutely literal and presented in pure form, allows this economic system to emerge in its most radical, most pure manifestation. This work does not criticize a deliberately imprecise translation or incorrect interpretation of the market economy, but instead finds concealed in its "mutation" and "misunderstanding" the potential for enlightenment as well as disturbance.

With a stuffed animal that repeats (through a cassette tape, in overly affirmative tones) the views of its owner and advertising slogans for the cafe, *Tigersteps* is, though, simultaneously the most "talkative" work in the exhibition. With notable ambiguity, the installation is located between the floors, in the museum's transition space, in "transit" to that point where the East is to be localized: a place that creates the necessarily troubling ground for any "self-colonization." If the exhibition makes a statement that should be interpreted, it is only to create from the critical potential of translation.

*The Lion of Language, Frederick Bodmer, London, 1944. Available to foreign languages for the home student.

On opposite page: Installation, Tiger steps, 2007. Below: Kamen Stoyanov, Break Shows, 2007. Series of 13 drawings, felt pen on paper, 30 x 42 cm. Kamen Stoyanov, Persona, 2008. Video, 80 min.



This is a sketch of the drawing of the A3 in 1984. The work is in a series of 13 drawings, felt pen on paper, 30 x 42 cm. It shows the artist's work on the initial drawing. The picture is the first one.

