

Stefan Nikolaev

HOME

solo exhibition

29 September – 12 November 2023

Opening: 29 September, Friday, 6 – 8 pm, in the presence of the artist

Sarieva @ DOT Sofia, 46, Bratya Miladinovi str., Women's Market, Sofia, Bulgaria

Visiting hours: 30 September – 12 November 2023, 2 – 7 pm – Wednesday – Sunday

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*Sarieva/Gallery is pleased to present the solo exhibition HOME by the gallery-represented artist Stefan Nikolaev, which will take place between September 29 and November 12, 2023 in the newly opened DOT Sofia.*

“When we hear the word home, an image pops into our heads: a combination of shapes, smells, and sounds. It carries an atmosphere. A feeling. It speaks, often confusedly, of shared history, of half-forgotten rituals, of lost faces. Created especially for the collaboration of Sarieva/Gallery with the new building *DOT Sofia* and curated by the gallery, Stefan Nikolaev's exhibition *Home* explores fragments of that image through series of recent works bind together by a particular contradiction of symbols and materials.

The title comes as a word game in Bulgarian linking *dot* to *dom* ('home') as *DOT Sofia* beyond gallery space offers housing. But it also connects that first idea to a game-changing phenomenon of modern times: art works become an integral part of homes. Themes, lines, colours, materials, everything changes to accommodate the new way of seeing art. Nikolaev reflects on that phenomenon by examining stylistically and symbolically some key subjects and by continuing his exploration of meeting points between sculpture and painting.

In our post-pandemic era, as in those before, sense of life, of destiny, of home comes under even more intense scrutiny, questioning, doubts. In the artist's habit of creating dialectical spaces, the exhibition seduces with earthly delights (*Nu aux arabesques*, 2023, *Composition avec Omar*, 2023) before sending us into spiritual introspection (*I 1*, 2023, *What you see is what you got*, 2022). But there's more to that primal opposition. Nikolaev uses it not without mischief to make us rethink our perception of what hangs or used to hang on our walls.

More than nostalgic symbols floating between periods, the works examine their own subjects. Still-life paintings became a must-have in Western homes since the 17th century even if they were considered the lowest of genres. They also used to adorn the walls of Egyptian tombs (to be enjoyed in the afterlife) and Roman villa floors. Depicting everyday objects links us to home, to life, to its fragility and let us compose our own imagery of pleasures. In parallel, the artist takes on the most vivid representation of our anxieties in art – the vanitas, and reduces it to their three essentials – Time, Death, Life. If vanitas became too blatant and gloomy to be a crowd-pleaser in time of eternal progress and youth promised by capitalism, they found rehabilitation in our post-modern disquiet.

Stefan Nikolaev goes further into what makes these subjects so familiar to us by examining their material essence. Most of the still-lives ever created used to be seen in the trembling light of a candlestick, corner by corner, detail by detail. It's the invention of electricity that completely transformed our way of seeing colours, shapes, matters. Nikolaev uses one of its further inventions and what might be one of the lasting symbols of the twentieth century – the neon light to question how and what we see. What for instance makes us imagine a timeless Madonna with child in *I 1*, 2023? Not unlike neon signs, the contours in Nikolaev works outline the most essential part of an image, of a symbol. As if the artist has been repeating a gesture that many repeated before him in search of its truest form.

Since that first barber's shop sign light up in 1913 in Paris, neon signs witnessed all the transformations our world went into in the last hundred and so years. It is also a sign of transformation in Nikolaev's art. From his earlier uses of neon to write idiosyncratic

phrases emerge a desire to see how far light could go as a creator of forms, of symbols. Or even how that quite modern and affordable light could cohabit with some of the oldest and most noble materials and techniques used to create artworks.

In *Cold bird*, 2023, it's the dusty grey veining of a soft white Arabescato marble that seems to flow differently in the blue neon light encapsulated in Murano glass. Nikolaev favours even further the ancient technique of hammered copper to give a new sense of materiality to his neon works. Copper's lustrous beauty has for centuries been associated with the goddess Venus. And aren't her seductive forms emanating from *Nu aux arabesques*, 2023?

With these new works Stefan Nikolaev pursue his interest in what makes images part of our collective imagination and thus of a shared place. Home. An image that has the characteristics of a neon sign: flashy, moody, dubious, and desirable."

- Desislava Mileva

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Stefan Nikolaev was born 1970 in Sofia, Bulgaria. He lives and works in Paris and Sofia. He began his studies at the Fine Arts High School in his native city (1983-1988), followed by a course at the Paris School of Fine Arts (1989-1994) and Winchester School of Art in England (1992). There have been many solo shows of his work, including „Still Life Series and Marbles“ Michel Rein, Paris (2023); „Here You Come Again“, Emergent, Veurne (2022); „Still Life“, Michel Rein, Paris (2022); „I Dream I work I dream I work“, Michel Rein, Brussels (2020); „Be yourself no matter what they say“, Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv (2019); "Rien ne va plus", Michel Rein, Paris (2018); "I Walk a Labyrinth Which is a Straight Line", Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv (2017); "Bronze, sweat and tears", Michel Rein, Brussels (2016); "Business, Model, Sculpture", Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv (2015); "If Things Are Not As You Wish, Wish Them As They Are", Michel Rein, Paris (2013); "Half-Life", Sariev Contemporary, Plovdiv (2013); "Holy Spirit Rain Down", Les Eglises contemporary art center, Chelles, France (2010). His work has also been shown internationally in a large number of group shows such as "L'ami-e modèle", Mucem, Marseille, Opening K11 MUSEA, Hong Kong, "Joy", Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, "Playlist", Palais de Tokyo, Paris, "Double Vie", Galerie Clark, Montreal, A Shot in The Head, Lisson Gallery, London, "High Fidelity", White Box, New York, etc. He has taken part in the Lyon Biennial (2007) and presented Bulgaria in the Venice Biennial (2007, together with Ivan Moudov and Pravdoliub Ivanov), as well as the biennials at Gwangju, Korea and Cetinje, Montenegro (2004). His work has also been shown at various art fairs: Paris + Art Basel, ArtBasel, ArtBrussels, FIAC, The Armory Show, ARCO. For his work for the 4th Cetinje Biennial, Stefan Nikolaev was awarded the UNESCO art prize.

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