

Sarieva/ Gallery presents:

Stefan Nikolaev

The Price of Love

Solo Exhibition

October 15 – November 15, 2026

Opening: October 15, Thursday, 6:00 – 8:00 pm, in the presence of the artist

Finissage: November 15, Sunday, 1:00 – 5:00 pm, in the presence of the artist

Sarieva/Gallery @ DOT Sofia

ul. Bratya Miladinovi 46, Women's Market, 1303 Sofia, Bulgaria

Opening hours during the exhibition: Wednesday – Saturday: 1:00 – 7:00 pm; Sunday: 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Sarieva/Gallery is pleased to present the solo exhibition *The Price of Love* by Stefan Nikolaev, on view from October 15 to November 15 2026 at the gallery's space at DOT Sofia.

The exhibition will also host the first presentation of the newly published, comprehensive trilingual monograph *Stefan Nikolaev: Monographie de référence | Reference Monograph*, dedicated to the artist's practice and published in French, English and Bulgarian. It features essays and interviews by Christine Macel, Rose Vidal and Hans-Ulrich Obrist – curators and writers with prominent roles in the international contemporary art scene – alongside contributions by Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva, an established Bulgarian curator and art critic. Their critical perspectives situate Nikolaev's work within a broad cultural and institutional context.*

The Price of Love continues the collaboration between Stefan Nikolaev and the gallery, which began thirteen years ago. It brings together new works not previously shown to Bulgarian audiences alongside works created especially for the exhibition, continuing his longstanding exploration of images, symbols and the transformation of familiar forms. The exhibition encompasses painting, sculptural objects and compositions made using hammered copper, bronze, gold leaf, marble, neon, Murano glass and watercolour – materials through which the artist articulates tensions between permanence and fragility, monumentality and intimacy.

The exhibition's title refers to New Order's *World (The Price of Love)* (1993) and its iconic music video, directed by Baillie Walsh and filmed at the Carlton Hotel in Cannes. The notion of the "price" of love unfolds as a reflection on the value of what we desire, what we believe in and what we give to another person, as well as our readiness to accept what we receive.

Drawing on art history, religious iconography, popular culture and everyday objects, Nikolaev transforms recognisable images into forms with multiple meanings that both draw viewers in and invite questioning. His desire to depict life in its simplicity and tranquillity also leaves room for emotional depth and personal narratives.

The exhibition's theme finds its most direct expression in the newly created object *The Price of Love* (2026): a red cotton rope with bronze coins. Evoking a talisman and prayer beads, it lends monumental scale to an object associated with personal hope and trust. Love emerges as an act of giving that does not necessarily imply reciprocity, while its "price" remains an open question.

In recent years, established genres such as still life and the nude have occupied an important place in Nikolaev's practice. Through them, the artist turns towards the simplicity of everyday life and the world as it is. In the neon compositions *Welcome Home* (2024) and *La buveuse absente* (2024), as well as the new work combining watercolour and Murano glass, *Still Life With Fried Eggs* (2026), vessels, fruit and simple food are reduced to a few lines and shapes. The pursuit of clarity and simplicity of form is also evident in the nude in *Odalisque rouge* (2026) and in the contours of the water lily in the neon composition *Nymphéa Tondo* (2026). Familiar artistic genres and motifs, often inspired by seminal figures such as Monet, Cézanne and Picasso, offer an opportunity to look afresh at the familiar and the ordinary, investing them with new meaning. In the neon works, images extend beyond the picture plane, acquiring a three-dimensional presence and emitting light of their own. The simplicity of the forms

and the use of colour convey beauty and tranquillity, yet the titles leave room for other feelings: home and closeness, but also absence; hope, but also dashed expectations and emptiness.

The exhibition moves between the tranquillity of everyday scenes and the hope invested in the talisman, between the vivid, explosive colours of *Priceless Copper* (2026) — an abstract painting in a heavy hammered copper frame — and the declaration *No way* (2026), inscribed in gold on a fragment of marble. Through these contrasts, *The Price of Love* opens a space for reflection on the value of relationships: what is worth welcoming into our lives, what we should let go of and what we might have — but perhaps not at any price.

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*Published by Éditions Dilecta, Paris, *Stefan Nikolaev: Monographie de référence | Reference Monograph* comprises 368 pages with colour illustrations, together with a separate catalogue section documenting the works through colour thumbnails and individual artwork details. Conceived as a reference publication, the book offers an in-depth critical examination of Nikolaev's practice through analytical essays, conversations and an extensive visual archive tracing the development of his work across different periods and contexts. Graphic design: Svetlana Mircheva. The hardcover publication is available with blue or red covers, measures 23 × 27 cm and has a print run of 1,500 copies. Price: €39.

Partners / Sponsors: AM EYE Art Dotation, MFG Foundation, Michel Rein, Sarieva/Gallery.

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Stefan Nikolaev (b. 1970, Sofia) lives and works in Paris and Sofia. He studied at the Fine Arts High School in Sofia, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and Winchester School of Art. He represented Bulgaria at the 52nd Venice Biennale and co-founded the Paris-based artist-run space Glassbox (1997). He received the UNESCO Art Prize at the 4th Cetinje Biennial. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Venice, Lyon, Cetinje and Gwangju Biennales, Palais de Tokyo, Kunsthaus Zürich, and National Gallery Sofia. His works are held in public and private collections in Europe and internationally. Nikolaev has been represented by Sarieva/Gallery since 2013.

For more information:

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