

NEDKO SOLAKOV

Born 1957

About the Artist:

Nedko Solakov is Bulgaria's most well-known contemporary artist. Known as a great story teller and master of irony, Solakov combines poetic narratives, aphorisms and word plays, with a sharp analysis of the contradictions inherent to society and the double binds of our collective "truths" and norms.

Trained as a classical artist in mural painting at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia (he realized several murals in Bulgaria as a young artist) his interest in narratives and in the absurdities of society quickly materialized in his paintings set him apart. Dark, muted colors (they were preferred by the teachers of mural painting in the Art Academy), small figures lost in vast spaces, metaphorical language, these typical for Solakov elements were all present in his earliest works. They were quite unusual among his generation of artists in the 1980s who were either experimenting with dense compositions or with eclectic forms of abstraction, with a strong preference for expressionism.

Together with another four of the most interesting young painters of his generation – Andrey Daniel, Vihrony Popnedelev, Bozhidar Boyadjiev and Gredy Assa, Solakov was part of the The City Group, created by curator Phip Zidarov in 1986. Until the end of the decade, the group had several exhibitions and actions, highly politicized and experimenting with the possibilities of painting and installation.

However, it was his residency at the HISK in Gent in 1985/6 that really transformed Solakov's way of thinking and working, conceptual art being the strongest influence he encountered there. All these experiences formed Solakov's unique attitude which combines both classical drawing and painting techniques, with conceptual thinking and attitudes.

The selection of key works of the artist proposed here, traces Nedko Solakov's development from a painter to conceptual artist, with some of his earliest paintings as well as installations that are deeply inscribed in the political context of his country and his times.

NEDKO SOLAKOV

Since the early 1990s, Nedko Solakov has exhibited extensively in Europe and the US. His work was featured in Aperto'93 (Venice Biennial); the 48th, 49th, 50th and 52nd Venice Biennial; the 3rd, 4th and 9th Istanbul Biennial; São Paulo'94; Manifesta 1, Rotterdam; the 2nd and 4th Gwangju Biennial; the 5th Lyon Biennial, Sonsbeek 9, Arnhem, the 4th and 5th Cetinje Biennial, the 1st Lodz Biennial; the 7th Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates; the 3rd Tirana Biennial; the 2nd Seville Biennial; the 2nd Moscow Biennial; documenta 12; 16th Sydney Biennial; Prospect 1, New Orleans Biennial, Singapore Biennial 2011, dOCUMENTA (13), Kathmandu Triennale and 1st Riga International Biennial for Contemporary Art. He had solo shows at Museu do Chiado, Lisbon; Stichting De Appel, Amsterdam; CCA Kitakyushu, Japan; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Centre d'Art Santa Monica, Barcelona; Kunsthaus Zurich; Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli; Sofia City Art Gallery; Galleria Borghese, Rome; Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg; BOZAR, Brussels; ICA Sofia and La Panacee, Montpellier. In 2003-2005 an extensive mid-career "A 12 1/3 (and even more) Year Survey" was presented at Casino Luxembourg, Rooseum Malmoe and O.K Centrum Linz, and in 2008-2009 the "Emotions" solo project was exhibited at Kunstmuseum Bonn, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, and Institut Mathildenhoehe, Darmstadt. In 2011-2012 his retrospective "All in Order, with Exceptions" was presented at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Fondazione Galleria Civica Trento (F"All in (My) Order, with Exceptions"), S.M.A.K., Ghent and Fundação de Serralves, Porto. His works belong to more than fifty international museums and public collections, among them MoMA New York, Tate Modern, London and Center Pompidou, Paris.

NEDKO SOLAKOV

1. *They*, 1987

Oil on Canvas

130 x 162cm

Edition: Unique

Ownership history: The Artist



NEDKO SOLAKOV, *They*, 1987

About the work:

In the summer of 1987, together with the sculptors Ivan Russev and Ljubomira Yaneva, Nedko Solakov took part of an exhibition at Villa Merkel in Esslingen, Germany. The museum was the only one in Western Germany at the time to show art coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain. Solakov took the opportunity to visit Documenta 8 in Kassel, which was happening at the same time. He admits to have been deeply impressed with the works of Anselm Kiefer, Peter Fischli and David Weiss.

Back in Sofia, he started preparing his next exhibition at Shipka 6 – the main exhibition space of The Union of Bulgarian Artists. At that time, Solakov was already working with The City Group whose activity was a turning point in the evolution of ‘unconventional art’ in Bulgaria. Solakov created around 15 new large scale works, bearing the influence of Anselm Kiefer. *They* is part of this series.

The painting depicts shadowy humanoid creatures on something that looks like a cloud. They observe the Earth smoldering in red, as if on fire, or more like being Hell itself. “I see *They* as aliens, says the artist, who will come to rescue us, or higher-beings, people raised above what’s down there. I still hope one day they will come to save us.”

Just as in Nedko Solakov’s other paintings of *almost* everyday life, we are pursued by a desolate, overhanging, thick, gray and silver inconsolable sky - the nothing-ever-happens-ness and melancholy of the late 1970s and early 80s, during which the artist’s own life as a young painter was taking place.

Sensing the impending changes in the air, there is still no clear idea from where those changes might come. *They* today reminds of a society, which was alienated from its own fate, and looked for guidance always somewhere else, outside, or as in this case – above.

NEDKO SOLAKOV

2. A Cornered Solo Show, 2023

Site-specific installation conceived for the Centre Pompidou

Edition: Unique

Ownership history: The Artist



Example: A Cornered Solo Show #2 at the MAXXI Museum

NEDKO SOLAKOV, *A Cornered Solo Show, 2023*

About the work:

A series of solo shows in prominent museums with unusual architecture. Each should be titled “A Cornered Solo Show #1, 2, 3, etc.”

What I need is an “insignificant” corner in the museum's building, in an area which is not usually used for exhibitions, i.e. out of the proper gallery halls. An insignificant corner in the margins with a Solakov story. Such a show requires almost no budget, and there is also no need for the usual timely preparation process for a serious solo exhibition in a museum institution.

The process should start with the selection of an “appropriate” corner in the museum, which should be out of the usual exhibition areas and at the same time be accessible to the visitors. In general, all artists dream of having a huge show in the best museum halls. I am asking for a non-usable corner, even outside the margins, something which any other artist would most likely not appreciate. An important detail is that this proposal comes from an artist who is relatively famous internationally. If the proposal came from an emerging artist, it would not be the same. She/he deserves the big official halls for exhibiting significant art.

The particular narrative will come after selecting the corner. I can do it from a distance as well - if travel is not possible because of the pandemic - with the help of local assistants collaborating online. In any case it will be a story about our times, when we, even if we are cornered by the crisis situation worldwide, still have to survive, and we will. Also, an artist's cornered point of view might help us better swallow the bitterness of daily life, because one thing is for sure: my stories for the cornered solo shows will not be pessimistic (or only a little bit for the sake of realism).

Nedko Solakov
March 2021