

SASHO STOITZOV

Born 1952

About the Artist:

Sasho Stoitzov was born in 1952, in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. In 1971 he graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in Sofia. Since 1998, he has been living alternately in New York city, where in 2000 he completed a degree in Digital Media Arts Technology in TCI, and in Sofia, Bulgaria.

At the end of the 1970s, he was among the first artists who started working in conceptual painting. By the end of the 1980s, he had become one of the most active representatives of “unconventional” art. During the 1990s, he created installations and objects. His works have always been simultaneously within and apart current trends in Bulgarian art.

Stoitzov’s contribution to the history of Bulgarian art is important not only because he was among the few artists who continued making contemporary art after 1989, but also because his work had been influenced by Western art trends from early on. An example can be found in his photorealist paintings, which date back to the late 70s. His portraits from this period are saturated with a freeze-frame tension, while their titles (“The Andrey Program,” 1979; “A Family,” 1979; “The Bratanov Program,” 1980) suggest that a conceptual framework was always present beneath the surface of what appeared to be conventional paintings.

“Sasho Stoitzov works addresses the past and its visual rhetoric through its symbols (pentacles, pickaxes, shovels) in paintings, wood carvings and aquarelles. In some of his installations from the 1990s and 2000s working tools are turned into icons and altars and adorned with gold-foil. The socialist symbols are now “tamed” and look beautiful. Sasho Stoitzov has created a local pop-art based on recent history. Following his sojourn in New York, in 1998, he started using a new technique – polystyrene boards, colored papers and adhesive tapes. The artist has created a parallel reality which very much resembles his portraits from the “Program” series in their drawing a borderline between visible and irrational.

In 1988, he was one of the curators and participants in the legendary art action and exhibition entitled 11.11.88 – one of the first conceptual art forums in the country, and in 1989 he organized the first national exhibition of “unconventional” art , under the same title, in the Blagoevgrad City Art Gallery. His were perhaps the only authentic soc-art presentations in Bulgaria. Starting his career as a painter, he was one of the first artists who acted on the changed conditions in the late 1980's. His works from that time have become classics of Bulgarian vanguard.”

Maria Vassileva,
Curatorial text for Sasho Stoitzov’s exhibition “Breakthrough”, National Gallery Sofia,
2016

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Sasho Stoitzov participated in some of the exhibitions of real importance in the development of Bulgarian art: Earth and Sky (1989), Kaymak-Art [Cream-Art] (1992), N-forms, Reconstructions and Interpretations (1994), VideoHeart (1995), First International Biennial Africus 95, Johannesburg, South Africa, Export-Import (2003), the August in Art Biennial (2004), Why Duchamp? (2012) and numerous others. He organized a number of individual shows and won the M-Tel Award for Contemporary Bulgarian Art (2008).“

Sasho Stoitzov had a major retrospective at the Bulgarian National Gallery, Sofia in 2016, curated by Maria Vassileva

SASHO STOITZOV

1. *Program Ljubima*, 1980

Oil on canvas, 127cm x 126cm

Ownership history: Collection Vladimir Iliev



SASHO STOITZOV, *Program Ljubima*, 1980

About the Work:

Since the 1970s, Sasho Stoitzov came to light as one of the most skillful and refined adepts of photorealism in Bulgarian painting. He created large-scale compositions, in which photorealistic images were outlined on a flat digital background based on Vazarely. Stoitzov created new and unconventional for its time concept about the portrait, in which the deep foreshortenings and the three-dimensional density of the figures pierce the abstract patterns in the background, creating a sense of a parallel, sterile and distant reality.

“There was a whiff of liberalization, a need for new things in art. The works shown at the National Collective Art Exhibitions were mostly subject-based and positivist. I needed to make paintings in the most mechanical manner – without any emotions, almost like a machine. No story, no emotions. I believed that humankind was part of a digitally programmed universe and that this universe could be reproduced by agents other than human beings. This is why I used geometrical shapes, photography and only four colors of paint. The experience of making these works was different from what I’d done before. I was also using a ruler, a camera, a slide projector, scotch tape and spray painting with the back end of a vacuum cleaner, which were all unfamiliar techniques in Bulgaria at the time.”

Sasho Stoitzov

Interview with Vessela Nozharova for the catalogue of the exhibition “The Choice. 43 Critics – 43 Works”, curated by Maria Vassileva, Sofia Citi Art Gallery, 2011

Echoing tendencies in the West, of both abstract and conceptual art and photo realism, Stoitzov’s particular insistence on the human figure within the geometric space however, reflected the importance of figurative art and the human experience, which remained consistent throughout Bulgarian art history.

“Bratanov Program” was rejected by the selection committee for his first one-man show in 1982 in “Rakovska Gallery” - one of the galleries of the Union of Bulgarian artists.

In order to achieve an even background, Stoitzov used a “Raketa” vacuum cleaner instead of aerograph, which was a technical tool not available to the artists in Bulgaria at the time. For the various views, he used stencils and tape, and to depict human figures, he took photographs, which he painted over the background. He magnified the image with an epidiascope and projected it onto the canvas.