

2015 / CEE MONTHLY

viennacontemporary 2015 | Focus Bulgaria | Vesselina Sarieva

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Gallerist and organizer of viennacontemporary special project Focus Bulgaria Vesselina Sarieva about the contemporary art scene in Bulgaria.



(https://viennacontemporarymagazine.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/img_2723-corrected.jpeg)
Vesselina and Katrin Sariev

Kristina Kulakova: How has the Bulgarian art scene changed in the last 8 years since you founded the Open Arts Foundation?

Vesselina Sarieva: Open Arts Foundation (<http://openarts.info>) was founded in the beginning of 2007 – the year when Bulgaria entered the EU, which also meant entering into a new, shared space and structure of economic and intercultural relations. We actually appeared as the second wave of independent cultural organizations in Bulgaria since the fall of the Berlin wall and the communist regime. In this way Open Arts was born in an environment in which some of the pioneers of the Transition (among whom artistic and donor organizations) had just put an end to their activities because of one or the other reason. We started building our own, new and different – type of ‘space’ and communication with audience, partners, experts and other cultural organizations. We followed our intuition and respected our predecessors.

Furthermore, Open Arts wasn’t a group of artists united around some aesthetic principles similar to most of the organizations from the first wave during the Transition. A starting point for Katrin Sarieva and me was reflection on the actual contextual shortcomings. We were concerned and interested not only in contemporary art, but also in urban and social issues and education. Later these topics formed the separate programs of our foundation.

Of course, the impact of Open Arts’ activities should be measured as an effect on the environment. Talking about the impact of our work it is important to mention our threefold model. The three bodies working together, but in different dimensions, are Open Arts Foundation (<http://openarts.info>), Sariev Contemporary (<http://www.sariev-gallery.com>) and artnewscafe

(<http://artnewscafe.com>).



(https://viennacontemporarymagazine.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/10827939_10152517272182105_1928673902480740763_o.jpg)
artnews cafe

I would say that we influenced and managed to change the audience's attitude to culture and its meaning. We challenged people for active participation in the process of culture's making/happening.

With special exhibition project **Focus Bulgaria** at viennacontemporary and with publishing the bilingual book *Introduction to Bulgarian Contemporary Art* by Vessela Nozharova commissioned by Open Arts Foundation, we follow the line which started with our interest as a private gallery and developed it into a broader platform for presenting Bulgarian culture abroad.

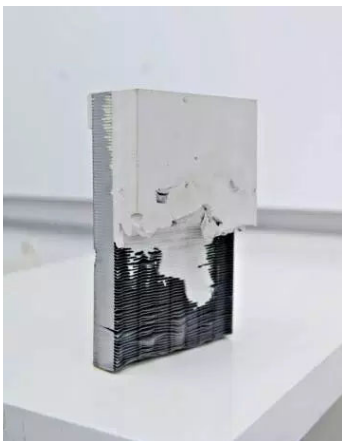
What are your criteria for the artists you work with?

From my position as a gallerist of Sariev Contemporary, I can say that we present some of the most prominent artists from both generations: already established Bulgarian artists and this of the younger emerging ones living in the country or abroad. The personal relation with them is really important for us because we respect them and literally love them and their work, and this enthusiasm we share with collectors, curators, art critics and art lovers.

Sariev Contemporary represents [Stefania Batoeva](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/Stefania_Batoeva/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/Stefania_Batoeva/), [Rada Boukova](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/rada_boukova/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/rada_boukova/), [Pravdoliub Ivanov](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/pravdoliub_ivanov/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/pravdoliub_ivanov/), [Vikenti Komitski](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/vikenti_komitski/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/vikenti_komitski/), [Lubri](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/lubri/) (<http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/lubri/>), [Stefan Nikolaev](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/stefan_nikolaev/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/stefan_nikolaev/), [Nedko Solakov](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/Nedko_Solakov/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/Nedko_Solakov/), [Valio Tchenkov](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/valio_tchenkov/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/valio_tchenkov/) and [Voin de Voin](http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/voin_de_voin/) (http://sariev-gallery.com/artists/voin_de_voin/). They are all exceptional artists whose work showcases the specific characteristic of Bulgarian art, presenting the irrational, the absurd and what we call uncanny. All this is manifested in a way that it creates a feeling of relief and new senses to see and accept the world around us. At least this is what I found common in their work and what I like the most.

On the other hand, we like working with international curators and through joint projects at the gallery so one can discover in detail the art practice of new artists.

At the same time we also develop platforms such as *Background: Young Artists* for discovering young authors and together with Open Arts Foundation we try to present an objective snapshot of the artistic life in the country, but also to present international artists. We do that through collaboration projects with curators in the framework of the contemporary art program of *Night/Plovdiv*.



(<https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria->

[vesselina-sarieva/m-ute-muller-and-christoph-meier-curator-bettina-steinbrugge-12-september-30-october-2014/#main](https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-))



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[vesselina-sarieva/m-ute-muller-and-christoph-meier-curator-bettina-steinbrugge-12-september-30-october-2014-1-2/#main](https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/m-ute-muller-and-christoph-meier-curator-bettina-steinbrugge-12-september-30-october-2014-1-2/#main))



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What is most of interest in the Bulgarian contemporary art practice at the moment?

I would say that after the very intensive years after 1989 and 2000 we are in a standstill at the moment, there are no strong new young artistic positions. But at the same time the interest towards Bulgarian artists from the active generation of the 90s and the young stars from the new millennium is getting stronger. These artists strongly questioned their identity and their art practice was characterized by a strong visual language, lightness and self-irony.

I think right now it is the time of re-discovering these artists in a broader context and acknowledging them. But this process, within the country, develops very slowly. One of the reasons for this "delay" is the lack of media environment. Meaning that establishing yourself into the contemporary art scene is possible only through personal efforts and contacts.

The lack of new artistic positions is maybe also connected to the fact that more and more exhibition spaces are closing and they do not manage to unite a circle of artists around them.

In identifying young Bulgarian artists, I think, we are facing the global problem of national identification and belonging. In this sense, the Bulgarian art scene is in search of its specific identity, I think it will firstly develop towards taming the Bulgarian diaspora and secondly in the direction of underlining the "place of happening" and not the "place of origin". In this sense I see Plovdiv as "the place" and its future is in becoming a new and attractive center for contemporary art similar to Istanbul or Berlin.



(<https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria->

[vesselina-sarieva/jiri-kovanda-nothing-in-the-middle-solo-show-curator-edith-jerabkova-9-april-17-may-2015-at-sariev-gallery-2/#main](https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/jiri-kovanda-nothing-in-the-middle-solo-show-curator-edith-jerabkova-9-april-17-may-2015-at-sariev-gallery-2/#main))



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Is collecting in Bulgaria different from the Western Europe tradition of collecting?

Geographically and historically Bulgaria is placed in a very interesting territory which keeps the traces of prehistoric times, through Antiquity, Ottoman times, the time of cultural emancipation in the beginning of last century, the years of communism, and, of course, of modern (European) Bulgaria. All of this is visibly present in our everyday life and forms a different type of art collections. There are inherited family collections (as is the case for me) and these collections have undergone the transformations of the economic system of private interest.

Other collections are younger, recently established and they are organized around a concrete topic or the specifics personal interests from the collector. But in every case collections follow the relief of the social and economic development.

Of course the collections visible to the public are those owned by public figures who are used to publicity. There is a plenty of interesting smaller collections of young and emerging collectors, but they are visible only to people like me, who work in this field.

I would mention the interesting case of artists-collectors: Svetlin Roussev, Nedko Solakov, Doctor Gatev; the “foreign” collectors of Bulgarian art such as Gaudenz B. Ruf and Hugo Vouten; collectors interested in classical art but discovering contemporary art such as Elena Dineva, Georgi Voynov; those who live abroad and collect contemporary international artists, but has recently rediscovered the Bulgarian ones, the most prominent being Spas Roussev.

What are the challenges in promoting Bulgarian art in the international scale?

This year Sariev Contemporary was the only Bulgarian gallery at Art Brussels. Somebody made a joke asking me if BG comes from Great Britain.



(<https://viennacontemporarymagazine.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/fairy-tale-device-crashed-2013-installation-cut-carpet-hidden-aluminium-construction-275-x-420-x-88-5-cm-collection-vehbi-koc3a7-foundation.jpg>)

Pravdoliub Ivanov, Fairy Tale Device Crashed, 2013 Installation, cut carpet, hidden aluminium construction, Vehbi Koç Foundation

In what museums can one find contemporary Bulgarian art? In which collections, galleries?

For art travelers heading to Bulgaria I would recommend [Sofia City Gallery \(http://www.sghg.bg/en/\)](http://www.sghg.bg/en/), [Vaska Emanuilova Gallery \(Sofia\)\(http://veg.sghg.bg/en/\)](http://veg.sghg.bg/en/), [Institute of Contemporary Art-Sofia \(http://ica-sofia.org/en/\)](http://ica-sofia.org/en/), [Center for Contemporary Art, The Ancient Bath \(http://www.arttoday.org/site/\)](http://www.arttoday.org/site/)(Plovdiv), [Contemporary Space \(Varna\) \(http://www.contemporaryspace.bg\)](http://www.contemporaryspace.bg) and of course [Sariev Contemporary \(http://www.sariev-gallery.com\)](http://www.sariev-gallery.com).

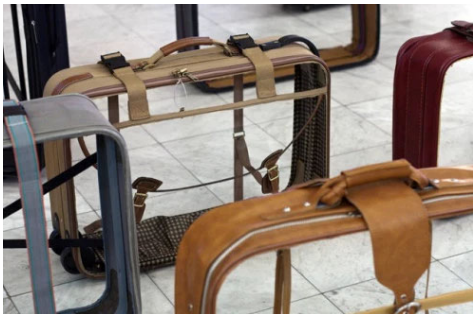
Works by Bulgarian artists can be seen in the program of private galleries such as [Galerie Krinzinger \(http://www.galerie-krinzinger.at\)](http://www.galerie-krinzinger.at)(Vienna), [Massimo Minini \(http://www.galleriaminini.it\)](http://www.galleriaminini.it) (Brescia), [Galleria Continua \(http://www.galleriacontinua.com\)](http://www.galleriacontinua.com) (San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins), [Michel Rein \(http://michelrein.com\)](http://michelrein.com)(Paris).

Artists [Nedko Solakov \(http://nedkosolakov.net/content/index_eng.html\)](http://nedkosolakov.net/content/index_eng.html) and [Pravdoliub Ivanov \(http://www.pravdo.com\)](http://www.pravdo.com) are most present in international (mostly European) public collections.



(<https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/loaded-2010-installation-suitcases-intervention-dimensions-variable-dana-charkasi-gallery-vienna-collection-the-tiroche-deleon-collection-art-vantage/#main>)

[focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/loaded-2010-installation-suitcases-intervention-dimensions-variable-dana-charkasi-gallery-vienna-collection-the-tiroche-deleon-collection-art-vantage/#main](https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/loaded-2010-installation-suitcases-intervention-dimensions-variable-dana-charkasi-gallery-vienna-collection-the-tiroche-deleon-collection-art-vantage/#main))



(<https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/loaded-2010-detail-collection-the-tiroche-deleon-collection-art-vantag/#main>)

[bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/loaded-2010-detail-collection-the-tiroche-deleon-collection-art-vantag/#main](https://viennacontemporarymag.com/2015/09/06/viennacontemporary-2015-focus-bulgaria-vesselina-sarieva/loaded-2010-detail-collection-the-tiroche-deleon-collection-art-vantag/#main))

Vesselina Sarieva is born in Plovdiv. Since 2004 has been working on creating and developing cultural politics, based on three platforms – [Sariev Gallery \(http://www.sariev-gallery.com/\)](http://www.sariev-gallery.com/) (after 2010 – [Sariev Contemporary](http://www.sariev-gallery.com/)), [Open Arts foundation \(http://openarts.info/\)](http://openarts.info/) and a place for information and meetings called [artnewscafe \(http://artnewscafe.com/\)](http://artnewscafe.com/), Plovdiv. Some recognizable projects and initiatives by this organizations are : “[Night of museums and galleries \(http://night.bg\)](http://night.bg/) – Plovdiv”, educational course “Introduction in contemporary art”, “City and public spaces” platform, “Collectors` Forum”, “Otets Paisiy” festival, a montly artnewscafe bulletin, as well as “Project 0”, “A city arbour”, “Alternative map of Plovdiv”.

To find out more about contemporary art from Bulgaria follow the keywords, or hashtags: #sarievcontemporary, #plovdiv, #cultureatlarge, #alternativemap, #cityandpublicspace, #thenight/plovdiv, #capitalofculture, #collectorsforum, #introductiontobulgariancontemporaryart

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(<http://www.viennacontemporary.at/en/>).

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FOUNDATION (<http://openarts.info>)

Tags: [alternativemap](#), [artnewscafe](#), [capitalofculture](#), [Center for Contemporary Art](#), [cityandpublicspace](#), [collectorsforum](#), [contemporary art](#), [Contemporary Space](#), [cultureatlarge](#), [Doctor Gatev](#), [Elena Dineva](#), [Focus Bulgaria](#), [Galerie Krinzinger](#), [Galleria Continua](#), [Gaudenz B. Ruf](#), [Georgi Voynov](#), [Hugo Vouten](#), [Institute of Contemporary Art-Sofia](#), [Introduction to Bulgarian Contemporary Art](#), [introductiontobulgariancontemporaryart](#), [Lubri](#), [Massimo Minini](#), [Nedko Solakov](#), [Open Arts](#)

[Foundation, Plovdiv, Pravdoliub Ivanov, Rada Boukova, SARIEV Contemporary, Sofia City Gallery, Stefan Nikolaev, Stefania Batoeva, Svetlin Roussev, The Ancient Bath, thenight/plovdiv, Valio Tchenkov, Vaska Emanuilova Galley, Vessela Nozharova, Vikenti Komitski](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

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