

INTERVIEWS

KARINE FAUCHARD AND LAZAR LYUTAKOV

August 05, 2015 • Karine Fauchard and Lazar Lyutakov speak about Baba Vasa's Cellar



Lazar Lyutakov and Baba Vasa in Baba Vasa's Cellar, August 2011. Photo: Jan Machacek.

Located in Shabla, a small town near the Black Sea in northern Bulgaria, Baba Vasa's Cellar is a small exhibition space that opened in 2002. Since then, the now eighty-seven-year-old Vasa Maneva has been running the space in her basement, with the help of an international group of artists. Every summer they plan an exhibition, which commences with a garden party. This year's show is organized by the Vienna-based Dienstag Abend collective and will gather works by twenty-one artists, with many making their pieces on site. Here, artists Karine Fauchard and Lazar Lyutakov (Vasa's grandson) speak about the venue. The show opens on August 8, and Baba Vasa will receive guests to the exhibition until the end of August.

BULGARIA IS not known for contemporary art. When you go to its forgotten parts you double that. Baba Vasa's Cellar began as Lazar's artwork, but it has evolved into a collaborative project. A collective is always in the shadow of this space, but only one person represents it and it belongs to one person: Baba Vasa.

Baba Vasa has very little personal costs, so she can afford to be generous with her guests. This project is important for her; running this space brings her energy and strength. People love the idea of her being in the center of this project since she is wise, friendly, and respected. It's a bit romantic.

We asked Baba Vasa about contemporary art in Bulgaria, and she said (in Bulgarian): "I think about the success of Bulgarian contemporary art—I am sure it is going to happen soon. The most rewarding thing about having this exhibition space is to have you all around me and to enjoy the time with you."

The openings have the character of a happening. A grandmother welcomes absolutely every guest personally. People come to celebrate something. Food and accommodation in Shabla are the cheapest on the Bulgarian seaside. So it is not a huge effort for our guests to make a personal investment, which is what creates dialogue. The right people are the ones who come just because they want to come. The neighbors are a part of it too. In the past, they have brought tomatoes or whatever they could to the openings. Artists see how this works and they want to share in this.

We turned down a proposal to exhibit this as a project in a museum in Bulgaria, because we are an alternative to that. We don't need the most famous artists, and we don't need a bigger

space. We want the type of audience you can't reach at Art Basel or when exhibiting in a commercial gallery. We are mainly interested in a local audience, like the small crew of kids in Shabla who come to the openings, but we know that this creates specific meaning that can be useful in a broader context.

The art world eats every interesting idea by repeating and developing it until it is no longer relevant. We don't put too much value on the fact that this is a situation on the periphery. That's just the way it happened and many qualities have emerged because of that. It could not happen in another way.

The cellar is nearly 130 square feet and six feet high, so most people can stand up in it, but tall people cannot. The house is falling apart because it is very old, but the space has a clean and neutral look when you come in so there is no compromise in what is offered. It is a white cube—a Bulgarian white cube. Last summer, Mladen Bizumic made an installation here that took the form of a library of collaborative works. This summer the Vienna-based collective Dienstag Abend have been invited. Twenty-one artists are coming, so Baba Vasa will need a lot of coffee.

The project is scaled to what is possible. It is a fine evening in the middle of nowhere.

— *As told to Lisa Ruyter*

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