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VACHEVA

CULT

## Foreword

What is it that constantly pushes artist Iva Vacheva to the edge of excess? Over the last ten years her artistic practice shows unambiguous obsession with radical states of body and soul, and the dissolution of mortal values. Her interests can be considered a critical comment about present-day morals, the excess of capitalism and the cult to consumerism. Her work could even be seen as an incriminating gesture, a march against evil that exposes vice and settles a new sacred order of light. But there is more than that. Iva Vacheva's work transcends the bare exercise of morality, existing somewhere between Christian values and disappointment in capitalism. The attraction of the abyss is much too strong. The lure is so painful that it becomes sweet. Yes, this is pleasure! The *Cult* series is a compilation of five images of a dissipated feast. Women and men lift their glasses again and again, losing count of the toasts. Grotesque creatures with baroque wigs and decaying body parts, who have long forgotten who they are or what they are celebrating. The five works in the series build a chronology of the apocalyptic celebration – from happiness to mad laughter, set against a background of destruction. The following story is a peculiar exploration of the feast. You may find in it apocalyptic visions, marked by either moralist inclinations or Marquis de Sade's touch. But most of all, *Cult* is an autopsy of the pleasure of life.

## Cult

In Ancient Greece, between a pious life, according to the norms of official religion, and blasphemy, there was a third way – more like a winding path. To this day it is not known where it leads, yet there is reason to believe that it was the shortest way to infinite bliss. These were mysterious cults – themselves a form of religious excess or extreme – accessible only via a process of initiation. The ritual includes painful catharsis, a symbolic sacrifice and a lavish banquet. The feast transforms into a spree; the spree turns into an orgy. In this excess the god Dionysus seemed to find the highest form of worship that humans could offer him. Here, the cult is in full force. The animal sacrifice has turned into a pile of meat, intestines and bones; now it is an object of seduction and appetite. Both human and animal bodies start losing their outline, turning into formless flesh. Heads without bodies, and bodies with nothing over the shoulders, hands that lift glasses, but no throats to pour the drink of joy into. There is no difference between the animal sacrifice and human – it is all just meat. If we take our eyes off the bleeding pieces of flesh just for one moment, we will notice another figure in the background. A woman, a man, or just a creature. Its face frozen in an indefinable expression of horror, pain, fear or panic. A lonely figure, a stranger to the feast, incapable to indulge in the joyous ecstasy and for that reason slowly vanishing in the curls of smoke from the burning world.

## Glory, Glory!

The feast has started long ago. It may be a great celebration on an insignificant occasion or it may be an act of worship to a god or a whole Pleiades of gods. The table may be a sacrificial altar or a feast laid out, the severed head may belong to Io or to any other cow on Earth – a sacrifice for Dionysus or just a specialty of the house. To follow the chronology of this spree is impossible. Many of the participants have long gone home and others – such as the General for instance – have descended into alcoholic delirium. Still, the two tireless Glorias continue with their celebration. They drink again and again, laughing over the shame of nudity, over the death of the General, over divine rituals and the formless leftovers of the animal sacrifice, over the intestines and decaying meat. While Gloria and Gloria drink to life, the infernal flames engulf homes and souls, the fire swallows the curtains, the furniture, the books. Everything vanishes in fire until there is nothing left but the burned bodies, trembling from the mad ecstasy of celebration. They triumph over death, over scorched reality that has lost its meaning.

## A Toast To Friendship

The fire has swept everything in its wake. Only ashes and coals are left to the world. The two Glorias are the last at the party and continue to make toast after toast. There is nothing left to drink to – Dionysus vanished in the flames with the animals and men – all are long rotten on the tables while the passing time continuously chews the flesh that is still living. The feast turns out to be the sole comfort amidst the destruction with friendship being another occasion to toast to. This is happiness and true victory – because we are together, and not alone. Let us drink to friendship!

## Cloaca Songs

The two Glorias lift their glasses yet again. They did not notice the fire and destruction. They did not notice flames burning their bodies, or their friends transforming into formless flesh. Even now they do not notice their own bodies decaying. Soon, their flesh will irreversibly turn into toxic, stinking sludge that will flow into the frighteningly silent, motionless Cloaca Ocean. Caught in the sump of disfigured reality, they continue drinking, praising and glorifying. This toast will not be the last one. Let us drink to life!

## Epilogue

Iva Vacheva explores the topic of cultish feast, mirth and drunkenness as a way for people to get closer. In the joy of celebration all boundaries and differences vanish in order to become friendship beyond the sump of reality. As with the optimism of a drunk man, who does not notice the surrounding destruction and the bitter end, Iva Vacheva infects us with the ecstasy of the feast. The celebration brings us back to life beyond the stinky reality of pain and death.

The sculpture *Wild White* closes the circle of the celebration. The artist uses her own image, mutilating it, replacing its limbs with beer bottles. This white body can stay upright only with the help of ropes, and like a drunken spirit it can barely stand on its feet, stumbling around like the good old drunken sailor. With this self-ironic act, the artist reveals her affiliation to the cult of the feast and its vice. This is not just confession and a self-portrait, but a mocking mirror. A reminder that we are all part of this celebration, and it is better to enjoy it as best as we can.



Toast to Friendship — 2009 — Acrylic on canvas — 170 x 150 cm



Choir Figures, 6 pieces — 2009 — Acrylic and pencil on canvas — 60 x 50 cm

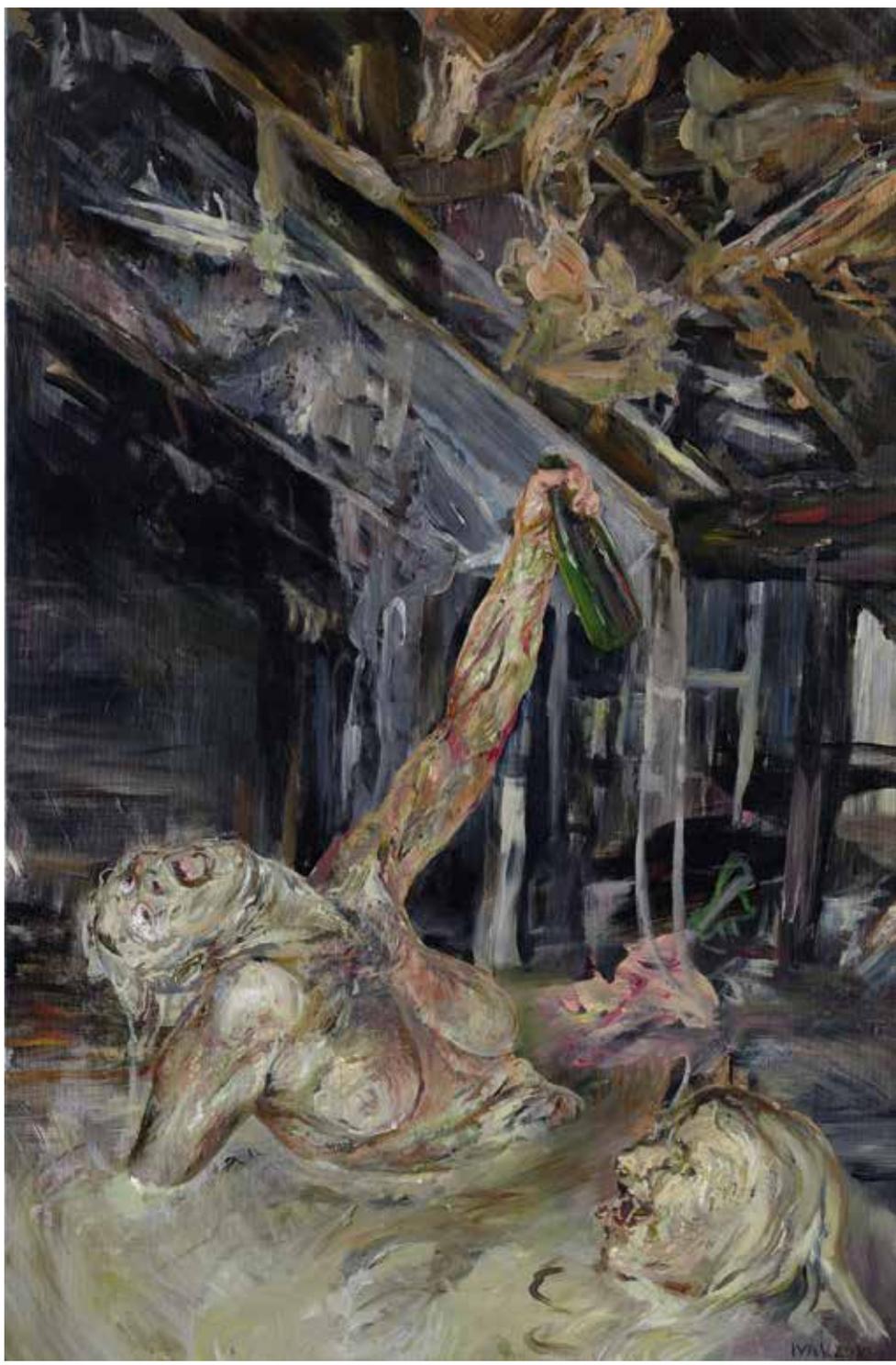


Cult — 2009/15 — Acrylic on canvas — 200 x 150 cm



Wild White — 2009 — Pulley, rope, beer bottles, canvas on paperboard — 120×70×40 cm





Cloaca Songs — 2010 — Acrylic on canvas — 150×100cm



Gloria, Gloria! — 2009 — Acrylic on canvas — 200 x 150 cm