

Alla Georgieva

Between Difference and Understanding*

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Bulgarian feminism was short-lived. Born in 1996, it died in 2006; if, that is, one was to judge by the timeline “**drawn**” by Alla Georgieva and fellow artist Adelina Popnedeleva. In 1996 both artists initiated *Erato’s Version* (1997), reportedly, the first exhibition by women artists based in Bulgaria publicly declaring their feminist stance (1). In 2006 Popnedeleva conceived a survey of the last ten years of Bulgarian artists’ film and video art and as part of it curated *After Feminism*, an exhibition section of work by Bulgarian women artists. Worthy of a mid-career survey on its own, the work of Ukrainian Bulgarian Alla Georgieva in the last ten years explores the complex relationship between advertising, gender and contemporary art. The artist’s oeuvre hovers between the feminist and the universal, the constructed and the confessional, the baroque and the minimalist. Her work could be seen to represent the approach expressed by the Bulgarian French philosopher, Julia Kristeva:

I have the impression that American feminists cling to differentialism and fan the flame of a war between the sexes that is no doubt quite real. My goal is to inscribe difference at the heart of the universal and to contribute to what is much more difficult than war: the possibility, with a little bit of luck, that men and women, two human species with sometimes conflicting desires, will find a way to understand each other. 2

In her latest video piece *BG Souvenirs* (2006) the artist focuses on the issues of human trafficking and tourism. Her short film has the air of a tongue-in-cheek flyer for escort services which could have been downloaded from a *Sofia by Night* guide. Clichés of Bulgaria’s national identity such as the rose, the high blue mountains and the young women clad in national costumes are complimented by a fitting soundtrack from a popular folk song. Using subtitles in the style of the silent movies the two protagonists Yana, ‘**the smiley babe**’ and Gergana, ‘**the all dressed up lady**’ are portrayed as crudely packaged souvenirs, deprived of their own voice and reduced to a set of rhyming advertising slogans.

The reverie of nationalism is interrupted abruptly – a tantalising slit opens on the front and the back of the ladies’ heavily pleated skirts. The slit opens to reveal sexy lingerie and suspenders paraded underneath the folk dance routine. A deliberate tacky two-dimensional animation is used to undermine the sexual appeal of these ladies of the night. One is left with a wry grin and the impression of half-stripped paper dolls or poll dancers in sparse, traditional attire.

Whether due to the lively rhythm or the looping of the sequence, this ultra short video appears longer than its sixty seconds as it overflows with contradictory images and coded messages. While playing on, even parodying, Bulgaria's top export product - its folk culture - the video at the same time calls for a ban on the export of women's bodies. Bulgaria's unique traditional culture has long been one of the country's biggest selling points for tourists. Georgieva's work-cum-ad however appears designed to put tourists off with its annoying, repetitive and awkward composition, especially those who are looking to acquire a cheap place in the Bulgarian sun with a souvenir wife included.

Circuitously, Georgieva's *BG Souvenirs* becomes a comment on tourism, one of the largest growth areas in the Bulgarian economy in the last decade which is set to become the most prominent sector of the economy in the future. A key feature of selling Bulgaria as a tourist destination has been its unique night-time culture, its Yanas and Gerganas. Tourist policy and literature focuses on Bulgarian dance, music, conviviality and conversation. This focus, along with the rise of the Bulgarian theme pub, has led to a "**commodification**" of Bulgarian identity and culture. This has had an impact on the perceptions of Bulgarian people in general, but artistic activities are also affected by their reproduction in order to satisfy the tourist market. 3 Georgieva's choice of form and content seems to demonstrate an abhorrence, or an ironic critical distance, towards this market.

The carnivalesque atmosphere evokes an ethnographic scene worthy of the canvases of Ivan Mrkvička – the Czech Bulgarian realist painter who captured the everyday lives and loves of the country in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. *BG Souvenirs* is also a poignant marker of some of today's most pressing political issues. Its origin as an artwork was in a social engagement project. Georgieva's work was one of ten artists' videos commissioned by CARE Bulgaria and curated by fellow artists Bogdanov and Missirkov for the exhibition *Human Traffic: Ten Opinions* at the Red House Centre for Culture and Debate in Sofia as well as forming part of a nationwide campaign which included television and urban outdoor screenings.

Georgieva's annual series of postcards *Happy New Year* (1997-2001) also displays similar tactics, this time in a spoof on fashion photography and performance for camera. As with many of her projects she employs herself as the sitter. The setting is invariably her own home studio, and her attitude swings between being critical and frivolous, informed and innocent, festive and pensive. She started the series with postcards offering the standard good wishes plastered over a photographed image of herself only to culminate in 2001 with a self-mocking caption in small print as if derived from a fashion magazine: '**make up & hair** (with possibly a deliberate typo 'hear') **ANN-G; styling Alla Georgieva**', etc.

Although not as clinical and scientific of other experiments with self-portraiture by women artists, such as the one by the Spanish artist Esther Ferrer who takes her self-portrait every five years in the same studio under the same light and circumstances, one can detect both ageing and personality shifts in Georgieva's postcards. The churlish face and cleavage painted in deep red of 1997 contrasts with the representation of herself as a short haired artist with fairy lights glowing overhead like a human Christmas tree and reminiscent of an early Julia Margaret Cameron in 1998. This is a theatrical re-enactment of the Medusa myth where the snakes from Cameron's sitter's hair are traded for the garland of fairy lights around Georgieva's face. This is also a testimony of the classic use of photography as a pure evocation of darkness and light.

For the 1999 *Happy New Year* postcard the artist's naked body is boldly wrapped up as the ultimate fetish present in see-through cellophane and adorned with a big red bow on top. The 2000 self-portrait is by far the most sinister of all in the series. The artist sports a decadent pose with a gun in one hand and a glass of red wine in the other. The image appears as an act of self-defence against the worst of the Balkan Wars and the mass rapes of the late 1990s, while anticipating the US launching itself into a war against terror in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite the reference to postcards and the implied unlimited edition, *Happy New Year* was made as a series of unique photographs which endeavour to use the ephemera of the Christmas card as a political-personal medium of choice, as a transient document of everyday life. This is a medium collected by many people, researched by academics from The Ephemera Society in the UK and USA, and often celebrated by artists, for example, those associated with Royal College of Arts, London who donate an artwork within the format of a Christmas card for the annual mystery charity sale.

Georgieva's series *Happy Birthday to You!* (2003-05) is intricately related to the ideas in both *BG Souvenirs* and *Happy New Year*. Challenging the relations between gifts and guns, commercialism and consumerism *Happy Birthday to You!* is composed of six inkjet prints, three cakes and three tables. Created as a quest for the ideal birthday present, the artist continues to appropriate strategies from advertising. Her six billboard-style prints advertise six different trademarks of war weapons featuring six boys aged from five to fifteen. As if they were made to advertise John Lennon's ominous song *Happiness is a Warm Gun* 5, the posters are designed to sell the idea of a "**bright future**" where revolvers like *Taurus* are deemed safe and desirable for any young, free and therefore armed citizen. The academic research into the power of play in child development is here subverted into the creation of a '**Power & Play**' corporate logo imbedded in the posters' schematically outlined backdrop.

Alternately humorous and horrifying Georgieva's *Happy Birthday to You!* installation is the artist's critical response to the rise of a new underclass of children-as-killers. It echoes Michael Moore's documentary *Bowling for Columbine* and likewise hopes to discover why our pursuit of happiness is so riddled with violence. Georgieva's quest leaves us with the bittersweet taste of a half-eaten birthday cake turned stale. The optimistic messages which adorn the cakes '**Happy Birthday to You!**', '**Especially for You!**' and '**Good Luck to You!**' contrast with the scenes of mayhem, massacre and murder sculpted in sugar glaze and marzipan on top of each.

Instead of the ubiquitous plinth, the artist places each cake on a round table covered with white linen when exhibiting the delicious sculptures. She abandons the classic cake themes of pirates and princesses, and introduces plots of vice and unhappy endings instead, including school shootings, swimming pools turning blood red and birthday celebrations of murder. Are we invited to a party to "**celebrate**" the fact that thousands of people die in the world each year at the hands of gun violence? How have we become both the master and victim of such enormous amounts of violence? Who is to blame? Everyone and everything? Satan? Popular films and video games? Arms traffickers from Bulgaria and the Ukraine?

Inevitably, the cakes which Georgieva baked for her *Happy Birthday to You!* installation are parodies involving cartoon-looking figures reminiscent of plasticine animations. It is nearly impossible to mimic the sleek curves of humans or any organic objects using just eggs, flour, almonds and sugar, as demonstrated by the Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas and his acclaimed work *R-5 Cake* (1999), a chocolate mocha cake in the form of a friend's Renault 5. As noted by some critics: '**Despite its crumbly impermanence, the cake staged a plucky battle against obsolescence by referencing both the notion of perfectability implicit in Modernism [...] and the persistence of the handmade, handcrafted object in the face of historical flux**' 6. Georgieva's and Cruzvillegas' desserts may have long been digested but they still provide chewy food for thought.

It is the chewing over *The Bread Book* (2000), an earlier edible sculpture by Georgieva, that provides further clues to the artist's explorations of cultural difference. It was kneaded for the Second International Artist's Book Triennial in Vilnius, Lithuania. One can argue that the reliance on text in Georgieva's work - found in her earlier *Self-Portrait as a Sexual Culinary Object* (1997) and *Ars Amandi* (1998), as well as later in *Dolce Vita* (2000) - is due to her multilingual skills alongside her acute awareness of the power of language in art from the late 1960s onwards. This probably explains why *The Bread Book* appeared as a trilingual object in Old Bulgarian, German and English.

What is less clear and even puzzling is the artist's appropriation of the scriptures. *The Bread Book* is presented as a three page book made of bread and bound by string, each page featuring the same verse from the New Testament: '**Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God**'. As one of the most quoted biblical phrases, this text has hardly escaped the violence of corruption. Likewise, one wonders whether Georgieva's work depends on the pun that in her quotation bread and word are one.

Both prophetic and ironic, Georgieva's artist's book perhaps goes beyond the Bible to unlock the Bulgarian folk tradition of making ritual bread with words and images woven on top. Distinguished from ordinary bread or artist's books in its form, preparation and decorative elements, this "**ritual**" artist's bread is a celebration of Bulgarian womanhood in its prime. It was the chore of young girls and recently married young women to make the bread in a ritual manner by walking in absolute silence from the spring to the kitchen and bring this 'silent' water to the flour.

If we consider that any book's *raison d'être* is to inform the reader, we can also see that the information contained in *livre d'artiste* could be conveyed or even contradicted not only by the use of a literal and repeated text but by the smell, touch and form of the book itself. The reader of Georgieva's *Bread Book* is thus torn between the desire to preserve

the book beyond its best before date but also to indulge in its taste and symbolism. If handled closely the words appear as if chiselled into the sheet of bread bearing the illusion of a permanent stone sculpture or even the tactile qualities of Braille's raised characters.

Related to *The Bread Book*, *The Family Album* (2004) is another series of Georgieva's bookwork objects which manifest an intimate relationship with all our senses but addresses the issue of animal rights. Fuelled by the artist's interest in family photographs, Georgieva constructed a shrine for her extended family of pets. Her albums feature photographic portraits of herself and her imaginary or real pets – a rabbit, a cat and a horse - with a separate album dedicated to each. The artist focuses on the family album cover as a territory for artistic intervention while leaving the inside pages empty and open to the reader's imagination or even available for the next generation of family relatives to complete. Consequently, artefact and audience, ponder on the questions intrinsic to assembling a family album: namely, what is our relationship to the past and what are the values we ascribe to our past?

Georgieva's approach is informed by the experiential rather than the purely visual medium of the family photograph. Each album cover is enveloped by the genuine leather or fur of the beloved pet including artist's own hair with two garlands of plaits framing the front cover. The tactile experience of the artist's albums may raise a chuckle or an eyebrow depending on one's ideological viewpoint. Feminists and animal rights environmentalists alike could perhaps pause for reflection on the use of natural fur and hair as both trophy and fetish. Art historians might critique the longevity of ready-mades in art and the artistic liberty to transform even a mass-produced family album into a unique object by attention to its surface qualities. Curators of private and public collections might discuss "*policies*" for managing deposits and discoveries of unwanted, fake or lost family photographs.

Georgieva is hardly an artist working in isolation vis-a-vis these larger questions. Edinburgh-based artist Nicky Bird shares Georgieva's interest in family photographs and often investigates their currency by using them as (found) objects within her work. In her long-term project *Question For Seller* (since 2003) Bird attempts to salvage what knowledge remains of the photographs she has been acquiring from the internet marketplace, eBay. 7 What is status and value of family photographs that have been disconnected from their specific historical origins? How do they act as indicators of our relationship to the past and to past lives? Georgieva's albums also ask such questions of their future viewer who may one day own and perhaps trade in them in the art market. What happens in the translation from photographic print to a photographic object in installation art? How do images of our private lives compare with photographs and photo albums in relation to their function as memory and substitutes for memory?

Many women artists often disappear behind various forms of masquerade and disguises, continuing to challenge the taboos of gender politics and to elude any fixed or finite identity. This is true of Georgieva's *Family Album* but more aptly of the most widely exhibited sequences of self-portraiture work *Alla's Secret: Collection 2000* (2000). Unlike her postcard series of photographs *Happy New Year*, in these large-scale tableaux the artist-cum-chef promotes the best of the Balkan cuisine: banitsa, shopska salad and kebabche. 8 They are served with a pinch of salt and provocative underwear from the artist's bespoke collection *Alla's Secret*. Georgieva throws a teasing grimace at the viewer and manages to be both funny and absurd. The ink-jet prints in the series appear as carefully choreographed fashion shots where each character is played by Georgieva and crucially directed by the artist herself. Sensual curves in romantic lace and smooth satins enhance the silky feel of booster bras and sexy knickers. This is the artist at her best – adopting the female identity-hopping style of performance artists as disparate as Cindy Sherman and Ana Mendieta. One can argue that similar to Sherman's ongoing *Untitled* project Georgieva's aim is to deconstruct hierarchies and take on the worlds of advertising, fashion and pornography.

When she tackles issues around the portrayal of women in society Georgieva is interested in the contrast between real life and life as manufactured in advertising. This concern is signaled in the very title, a slight modification on the high street brand *Victoria's Secret*. Sociologists speculate that the ultimate luxury item today is how one personalizes commodities to create a designed "*unique*" life experience, from the artworks and even wallpaper selected to be hung on one's walls to an iPod playlist curated to suit one's heartbeat. Georgieva's tongue-in-cheek offer doesn't aim to outsmart its commercial rivals. It acts as a boomerang back to the industry which itself aims to imitate real life. 'I **advertise underwear and at the same time I "advertise" my own life**', notes the artist, 9 in a manner which resounds the words of Ellen Willis,

Life without pleasure – without spontaneity and playfulness, sexuality and sensuality, aesthetic experience, surprise, excitement, ecstasy – is a kind of death [...] People deprived of pleasure don't get kinder and gentler, but meaner and nastier. 10

It may be a vagary of history (and of feminism) whether Willis will be considered a champion of *dolce vita* but “**the sweet life**” is more than a refrain running through Georgieva’s work. The artist resorted to the use of this popular phrase as the title for two of her recent works *Dolce Vita* (1999 and 2000). Georgieva then extended this series launching her own fragrance as a homage to Christian Dior’s *Dolce Vita* and making a new series of *Hedonistic Portraits* (2004-6). In the first *Dolce Vita* work Georgieva assembled some 1500 waffles and 216 cubes of Turkish delight. For the second she created a box full of the finest Bulgarian chocolate assortments. Both works accentuate sweetness itself into an aesthetic category. One could even speculate that the history of contemporary art could be written through the prism of artists’ use of real food 11 but it may suffice to recall another Bulgarian artist Tanya Abadjieva who has also been ‘**executing works made of durable foodstuff**’. 12

Georgieva’s *Dolce Vita* (1999) was probably one of the most striking temporary artists’ interventions as part of *Obsession*, an exhibition of on-site projects by thirteen women artists at the derelict Sofia Public Mineral Baths. At this ‘**temple of physical cleanliness**’ 13, the artists were allowed to vent their passions and manias as if to intensify or counteract the public hysteria surrounding the restoration and change in use of this building into a museum and spa. Georgieva created an almost Olympic-size work in one of the two swimming pools, the very heart of the baths. The artist re-tiled the empty pool using tons of pink and white honey waffles. The bold pinks must have immediately drawn the attention to the new checkered-pattern tiles which stood out amidst the decayed Vienna Secession-styled decor and permeated the air with the smell of a sweet shop.

As is often the case with temporary artist’s installations, we are left to appreciate their impact through a pile of documentary photographs. We are aided by Georgieva’s propensity to strip words, phrases and titles to their etymological bareness. For this work the artist used hundreds of rose-scented Turkish delight cubes to write literally ‘**Dolce Vita**’ in the middle of the swimming pool. It marked the point where leisure meets pleasure; where cleanliness becomes stickiness, where the present mingles with the past. A reminder perhaps that this landmark building was erected near a former Turkish bath which had integrated typically Bulgarian, Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox ornamental elements. The sugary smell and the powdered pinks acted as a powerful *aide memoire*, taking its viewers on a journey back in time, stirring childhood memories when the building used to work as swimming training centre for the young.

A year later Georgieva’s *Dolce Vita* (2000) took another “**delicious**” and ironic turn as part of *Mirror, Mirror*, another exhibition of women artists at the City Art Gallery of Rousse, Bulgaria’s biggest Danube city, renowned for its international music festivals. At the exhibition opening Georgieva organised a performance where she walked around the gallery carrying an artist’s designed object. This was a box full of candies which she offered to the visitors. There was a pot luck involved in so far as the luxury chocolate or plain candies all came in the same wrappers. Treating the public as private guests was one means to expose the stereotype of the hostess. The built-in random factor of luck challenged the attempt at standardisation evident in many of the “**happiness industries**” of late consumer capitalism. 14

Perhaps this artist’s project was instead about keeping appetite and pleasure alive. The problem is that similar to much consumer advertising, *Dolce Vita* exploits this by pretending to offer choice. Georgieva’s object for the performance mimics that of the luxury chocolate box complete with a fancy guide to the contents of each candy. However, its unique selling point and market niche lay in the fact that each of the wrapping paper designs bears a sticker with the individual portraits of her fellow women artists and curators. What is more Georgieva made each candy herself picking the ingredients with reference to the personality of each woman. Are we what we eat?

The performance could be read as another invitation to consider Georgieva’s mirror of self-delusion, pre-empted imagination and womanhood. One can find the same strategy in earlier works by the Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres and his equally sweet and sad eulogies that consist of piles of individually wrapped chocolates or hard candies matched to his own or his lover’s body weight which the audience are free to take away. Georgieva’s candies, however, were wrapped inside images of living woman artists. Both works are powerful metaphors of how we are gradually consumed by life and also literally by gallery’s visitors. These are also relational works which could be judged on the basis of the ‘**inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt**’. 15

New Fragrance (2001) is another resurgence of the *Dolce Vita* refrain in Georgieva's work in so far as it is a spoof of a fully-fledged advertising campaign. The artist's own perfume range called *New Fragrance* is more than a tautological reflection on the big nose industry and rose oil which remains one of Bulgaria's biggest exports in recent past. Rose is also one of the **"top notes"** of Christian Dior's classic perfume *Dolce Vita* which boasts **'the sweetness of a fruity floral fragrance'**.

Georgieva's *New Fragrance* dovetails with the artist's ongoing inquiry in themes of **"Otherness"** and **"difference"** through the language and iconography of advertising. It also introduces another aspect which has emerged more strongly in later works like *Macedonian Quilt* (2001), *Brothers and Sisters* (1997-2001) + *El Criminal Tango* (2001). These works all expose a disturbing contemporary narrative in which the media perpetuate a terror of **"invasion"** by strangers (indeed any racial, cultural or ethnic **"Other"**), positioning such **"outsiders"** as the dominant threat to both family and national stability.

For the launch of her *New Fragrance* Georgieva staged an elaborate artist-led performance in an empty shop unit at Saint Sofia underpass, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the city centre of Sofia. The artist's temporary boutique was equipped with a shop assistant (the artist herself), two large-scale posters, 12 samples of *New Fragrance* and 12 handmade paper bags. The shop assistant was instantly recognizable as the advertising face in the poster campaign which contributed to the success of the performance. What was far more difficult, as the artist recalls, **'was to discourage future buyers from sampling the products on their own skin'**.¹⁶ As no ordinary fragrance, Georgieva's range was promoted by the artist's signature: her ironic attitude. It was designed to be consumed responsibly as its principal **"top note"** is CS Gas, **'an American-style, NATO...super paralyzant'**. Caution and sarcasm strengthen the sales pitch of the posters and the aerosol spray bottles of the **"new fragrance"**. The photo-sessions for this work also herald the artist's extensive use of camouflage in her latest work, a controversial visual connotation which underpins the extent to which **"the war on terror"** has infiltrated our daily lives. This might be only a step away from Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's overwhelming installation *Camo-Family* (2006) in which a circular room full of foil, plastic and cardboard constructions depicted the lifestyle of a nuclear family of four in combat gear and through headlines.

Georgieva's *New Fragrance* is marketed with the same dark humour of the new revolvers from *Happy Birthday to You* series, a quintessential self-defence item for the make-up bag of any post-September 11 woman. With the threat of terrorist attack in the air, this is **'a perfect and indispensable gift for every modern woman'**.¹⁷ A fragrance of *dolce vita*, joy and happiness for dazzling femininity with undertones of **"police action"**.

In recent years many artists including Georgieva have been using advertising and commercial products as a way of exploring difference and as a potent metaphor for the threat of the outsider. Often these works project the anxieties of a present governed by fear of invasion, communism and nuclear war onto the past. Ivory Coast artist Guillaume Paris' works *Go Away Evil* (2001) and *Ghost* (2006), for example, use a similar metaphoric language to promote what appears to be an air freshener and a **'human scent neutraliser'** with colour photographs of the aerosol sprays enlarged to human scale. In Paris' work countering diabolical forces is implicitly likened to countering bad smells. The product renders explicit the magical bond between cleanliness and spiritual purification.

As if on a mission to increase the **"dolce vita ripples"** throughout her body of work, Georgieva has sought to marry notions of hedonism and motherhood. This has led to two more works in this vein – *Hedonistic Portraits* (since 2005) and *Favourite Pillow* (1997). Both create representations of exposed breasts yet in differing media and with dissimilar sexual or libidinal connotations to those generally implied by much hedonistic philosophy.

The portrayal of women in the photographic triptych *Hedonistic Portraits* while it is both universal and abstracted from its context still offers us a visually-rich document of our time and place. It borders on the allegorical and even conjures up formal relationship to the Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (28 July 1830) (1830). Juxtaposing Delacroix's allegorical figure of women heroes and Georgieva's real heroic women of today may be contentious because it contrasts a painting contemporary to the French Revolution by a man and a post-feminist photograph by a contemporary woman artist. However, it is fruitful to remind ourselves that women artists practising today including Georgieva have been privileged to stand on the shoulders of any 'gender giants' including Delacroix.¹⁸

Liberty may be a literal and idealised embodiment of the revolutionary notions of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' but the unnamed and unsung heroines from Georgieva's large-scale photographs also stand for more than the sum of their individual documentary parts. Arguably, documentaries are more false and constructed than fiction in their inexorable posing for the camera.

Georgieva's real women also create an unsettling variation on the theme of mother-and-child in European art. This is a new generation of mothers proud and defensive of their surrogate babies – a piglet, a puppy and a kitten. The artist's bold depiction of these '**on the breast**' scenes led to the recent inclusion of *Hedonistic Portraits* in the *Wild Girls* group exhibition at New York's Exit Art. The exhibition is premised on the "**wild**" even aggressive women artists' attitude which Georgieva's women epitomise. *Wild Girls* seems to argue for a new generational and qualitative leap in the global feminism of early twenty-first century.

Georgieva's portraits also display this newly-found strength and courage when addressing the familiar issues of maternity, eroticism, vanity, and mythology. The bare breasted but fully clothed women are seemingly immersed in debauchery and excess yet fully aware of their girls' power. Surrogate motherhood here is described as thriving on careerism and minor celebrity status. Although the artist wouldn't provide us with clues as to the occupation of her sitters, anyone versed in the urban folk music industry on the Balkans would recognise the signs – from the silicon-enhanced bodies to the sexually-provocative dress codes. Images of these Bulgarian "**turbo-folk**" divas dominate the domestic media landscape and much of the nation's mindset yet they rarely appear in contemporary art. Georgieva's *Hedonistic Portraits* transgress this taboo and deliver a candid panorama of the country's pseudo heroines.

Favourite Pillow comes closer to objectifying the voyeuristic gaze of anyone who dares to watch and even touch the exposed breasts. With a surreal, dream-like twist the mundane pillow is transformed into a bosom with literal in-your-face red patches for nipples. As an artist's object, it represents a satire on the dream of large, implanted boobs. On another level, it comments also on the racial colouring of desire. Custom-designed and hand-sewn from artificial leather, Georgieva's *Favourite Pillow* is available in a limited edition of faux human skin types including white, black and olive.

Although usually exhibited on a plinth as a sculptural object, this work does not fail to behave as another quasi-utalitarian product *a la* Alla. One could believe it might come with a tag attached which reads: '**Add stylish fun to any room with Georgieva's roomy pillow. It measures a sprawling 38 cm with D Cup area so you can lounge in comfort. Removable zippered cover for easy laundering.**' In an ironic nod to Freud and his continuing influence on contemporary visual arts, the *Favourite Pillow* seems like the perfect gift for the psychologist, would be psychologist or someone who needs a psychologist with the invitation: '**Now, tell me about your dreams**'. It reverberates with the vision offered by dolce vita psychologist Adam Phillips in which it is pornography that steals our dreams by giving us pictures of sex scenarios. Unlike more imaginative forms of art, pornography stops us from creating our own dreams, limiting our own sexual fantasies in pre-determined ways. What Georgieva's work seems to indicate, in Phillip's words, is that "one has a hunger to have one's imagination pre-empted because working out what one wants is quite difficult, quite naked."

Building on the innovations of women artists that have come before her, Georgieva has entered the feminist dialogue from her unique cultural perspective. Fearless and fabulous, provocative and pioneering, astute and obsessive, she is one of the "**wild**" women artists who are breaking new boundaries, asking challenging questions and creating groundbreaking visions of everything from gender politics to the dreary aspects of daily life.

Notes

- * Published in n.paradoxa, the international feminist art journal Volume 19, IN/Difference, ed Katy Deepwell (London, KTPress, Jan 2007). Iliyana Nedkova is a writer and curator working on a range of contemporary art projects from both Edinburgh, Scotland and her native Sofia, Bulgaria.
- 1. Maria Vassileva's 'Where There is a Woman There is No Silence' in *Obsession* exhibition catalogue (Sofia: 8th March Publication, 1999) p.6
- 2. 'Julia Kristeva Speaks Out' in Ross M Guberman (ed) *Julia Kristeva Interviews* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1996) p. 269

3. Bulgarian tourism mirrors many of the features of Irish tourism. For an account of this, see Mark McGovern's 'The Cracked Pint Glass of the Servant: the Irish Pub, Irish Identity, and the Tourist Eye' in Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor (eds) *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity* Clevedon: Channel View
4. e.g. in images like Julia Margaret Cameron *Portrait of Mrs Keene with flowers in hair* entitled 'Proserpine' (1866) Dimbola Lodge collection
5. From the double-disc album *The Beatles* (also known as *The White Album*)
6. Tom Morton 'Found and Lost' *Frieze* October 2006 p.214
7. *Nicky Bird: Behind the Screens* in *Artists' Residencies 2003/4* (Edinburgh: Stills, 2004) pp 10-11
8. These are traditional Bulgarian dishes. Banitsa is a cheese pastry, usually baked in a spiral rolls using a round tray. Shopska salad, also known as Greek salad, is named after the indigenous people of larger Sofia, the Shops; Kebabche is a grilled sausage-like pork and beef mince meat dish.
9. Artist's statement from correspondence with the author.
10. Alix Kates Shulman 'Ellen Willis: A feminist iconoclast who challenged conservatism in all its forms' in *The Guardian* 13 November 2006
11. e.g. *Comer o no Comer*, Carta No. 6, (Edition Consorcio Salamanca, 2002) published to accompany *To Eat Or Not to Eat* – a comprehensive exhibition exploring the relationship between food and twentieth century art at Centro de Arte de Salamanca, Spain
12. Tanya Abadjieva's *Hubba Bubba* (1999) in *Obsession* exhibition catalogue (Sofia, 8th March Publication, 1999) p. 34
13. Maria Vassileva's 'Where There is a Woman There is No Silence' in *Obsession* exhibition catalogue (Sofia: 8th March Publication, 1999) p.6
14. See Colin Clark's *From Self to Structure: Challenging the 'Happiness Industry'*, in Variant Issue 27 Winter 2006 p. 27-8
15. from Glossary of Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (France, les presse du reel, 1998) (French edition) (English edition, 2002)
16. Artist's statement from an interview with the author.
17. Ibid.
18. For a similar analysis of Delacroix and feminism see Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smith in *Women and Art. Contested Territory* (London: The Orion Publishing Group, 1998) p.40
19. As quoted in Stuart Jeffries' interview with Adam Phillips 'Happiness is Always a Delusion' in *The Guardian* 19 July 2006