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# The World According To Solakov

*Working in an ever-proliferating range of mediums, Bulgarian Nedko Solakov uses fiction, confession and equivocation to navigate a post-Soviet landscape of loose ends. Playfulness, his midcareer survey suggests, is the skeptic's best weapon.*

**BY SARAH MCFADDEN**



... [I]t is precisely this masquerade of fictions and ironies and fantastic scenarios that can draw us out and bring us close to ourselves. The paradox of the arts is that they are all made up and yet they allow us to get at truths about who and what we are or might be.

—Seamus Heaney, *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001*

**F**iction—quite literally, storytelling—is at the heart of Nedko Solakov's art. The artist's midcareer survey brings together an assortment of materially and formally heterogeneous works—the masquerades and fantastic scenarios of his many-faceted, profoundly entertaining conceptual practice—which since 1990 have been presented mostly one at a time in a slew of international biennials and in other

*Just imagine*

*What would happen if I were to start to live as an ammonite, as a stuffed duck, as a rock crystal, as a snowflake, as the color spectrum, as the material that this very floor (or which you are now standing) is covered with...?*

*Normally, everybody dreams to be "somebody else" a famous actor, a beaver knight, a rich hero.*

*I want to be "a something else" — "something" which I know from my old school books, from the natural history museums' collections, or just from INANIMATE NATURE.*

*Who knows—maybe in this case, with me as an ammonite, as a stuffed duck, as a snowflake, I could establish a more suitable relationship with the society around me.*

group and solo shows in the U.S., Europe, Asia and South America. Jointly organized by the Rooseum (Malmö, Sweden), Casino Luxembourg and O.K. Centrum (Linz, Austria), "Nedko Solakov: A 12½ (and even more) Year Survey" opened in Luxembourg, where some 35 pieces fanned out to fill the Casino's exhibition space, as well as a portion of its vaulted brick basement. Physically, the works ranged from a single

*View of Nedko Solakov's This is me, too . . . , 1996, mixed mediums, collaborators include Slava Nakovska, Angel Tzvetanov, Stefan Dimitrov, Kalin Serapionov and the Museum of Zoology, Lund; at the Rooseum. Photo Vegur Moen. Collection De Vleeshal, Middelburg, the Netherlands. Photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö, Sweden.*

**It is probable that Solakov's prolonged experience of political absolutism contributed significantly to his becoming a champion of ambiguity.**

statement written on the ceiling to the nearly operatic *This is Me, Too...* (1996), a sprawling, multifarious, 3-D extravaganza that threatens to swamp its nominal subject. (That is part of the intended effect.) In all, there were nine room-size installations; a couple of deliberately unfinished monochrome wall paintings; several extended series of delicately rendered figurative drawings, most incorporating inscriptions; handmade books; diverse small objects; performance videos and DVDs; large-scale color photographs; an interactive CD-ROM; and, from the 1980s, a constellation of works—small paintings, altered found objects and images and a large collage of souvenirs from a month's stay in West Germany in 1988—many of which have not been shown previously outside Bulgaria, where the artist was born in 1957 and still lives.

It's probable that Solakov's prolonged experience of political absolutism went into his becoming a champion of ambiguity and loose ends. No doubt to his delight, it is neither totally true nor completely false to say that the present show tracks his progress from academically trained mural painter engaged in the struggle for artistic freedom in Bulgaria to the successful, globetrotting postmodernist he is today. True, all the ingredients of such a story are assembled, but with the exception of the Soviet-era works, their arrangement is a-chronological. Thus his artistic evolution is "available," but only as one discontinuous subtext among myriad others.

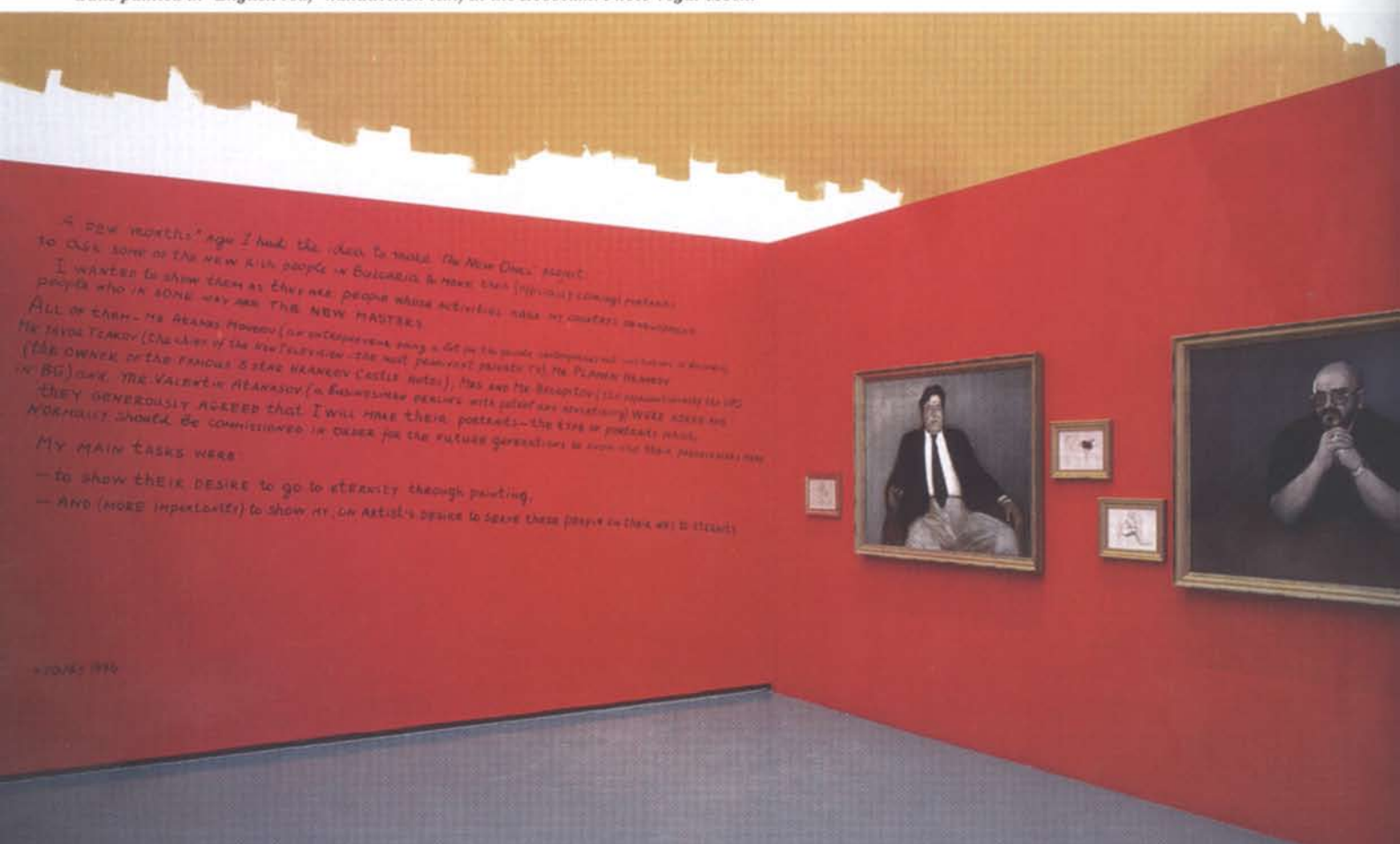
Still, connecting the dots has its rewards, and in this regard the "(and

even more)" group of pre-1992 works was most valuable. Disappointingly, Solakov's so-called "subversive" paintings, some of which made it into the state-sponsored, juried "All-Bulgarian" annuals, were not presented.<sup>1</sup> This lack was partly compensated for by the inclusion of individual components of *The Bathtub*, the artist's first fully realized installation, which was exhibited in a watershed group show in Sofia in 1988.<sup>2</sup> Made in 1986, the selected objects are bits of altered domestic bric-a-brac that attest to Solakov's already evident proclivity for undermining order—in this case, pictorial. In one of the items, called *Vampire*, a leering black bloblike figure, precursor to a type that still crops up in Solakov's works, has been painted into the background of a black-and-white mass-market print showing a bare-breasted, female Narcissus bending over a pool of water. The lecherous looking intruder transforms the kitsch-romantic portrayal into a batty variant of Susannah and the Elders. In *Hunting*, a traditional hunting scene printed on a serving tray is given a surrealistic twist by the artist's addition of a reptilian blob squirming helplessly in the path of its pursuers. You can't help feeling sorry for the wretched thing.

Solakov's art still nurtures a soft spot for the downtrodden, the unlucky and the woeful, and its obvious sympathies have expanded to encompass the merely fearful and fallible, which is to say, people like himself. But back to 1986: Solakov was already using art to interrupt order, to interfere with meaning and upset expectations. The serving tray, in all its modesty, carries a heavy allegorical load.

Two key transitional pieces made directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 have the force of a declaration of independence and foreshadow the cathartic, critical and prodigiously inventive admixtures of words, images and objects to be found in the subsequent mature work, which is the subject of the exhibition's main 12½-year time frame. *Top Secret* (1989-90), the earlier of the two, is a small, two-drawer card

*Partial view of The New Ones, 1996, five portraits, oil on linen, each 38 by 51 inches, 18 preparatory drawings in ink and graphite on paper, gilt frames, walls painted in "English red," handwritten text; at the Rooseum. Photo Vegar Moen.*



catalogue in which Solakov divulged in writing and drawing “everything shameful and depressing”<sup>3</sup> that he wanted to get off his chest. An avowedly confessional work, it details most notably his seven-year stint, begun at age 19, as an unpaid informer for the Bulgarian secret police. He ended that collaboration in 1983, before perestroika was even a glimmer on the Soviet horizon, but remained haunted by the experience. Though he was not threatened with involuntary exposure of the kind to which his counterparts in other post-Communist countries were subjected,<sup>4</sup> Solakov believed that in order to proceed honestly as an artist he needed to declare his past. His use of art as a vehicle for self-disclosure has been called “unique in the context of post-Communist Europe,” and in this regard *Top Secret* still stands alone.<sup>5</sup>

It was completed in February 1990 and shown in Sofia that spring.<sup>6</sup> Predictably, the work caused misunderstanding, and rumors began to spread about the nature and extent of Solakov’s involvement with the state security services. In response, the artist published an extraordinary apologia in a local cultural weekly. Beginning with the phrase “Once upon a time,” this explanatory text (which is reprinted in the survey show’s catalogue) reads like a modern fairy tale until the penultimate paragraph, when a change from third- to first-person narrative causes the veil of fiction to fall away. It’s an enchanting piece of storytelling—simply worded, clear and possessed of a beguiling *naïveté du récit* that finds its way into Solakov’s later, playfully ironic fictions. (The solemnity of this apologia is unique in his oeuvre.) The tale it tells of youthful trust and idealism snared, exploited and gradually destroyed goes far to explain the strong current of skepticism in his art and his penchant for institutional critique.

The second transitional piece, *Encyclopaedia Utopia*, is a 224-page, three-volume work made over the three months that followed the completion, in March 1990, of *Top Secret*. A tongue-in-cheek compendium of useful knowledge for utopian living (with Communism gone, it was time to start constructing another ideal form of society), its alphabetized entries, which the artist selected by paging through an English-language dictionary, run in a sequence that includes the following: Anus, Aphorism, Apocalypse . . . Headache, Horrible Creatures, the Ill Child . . . Suicide, Torture Instruments and more. Clearly, this is not the catalogue of elevated concepts and principles one might expect from the title.

Disjunction prevails. Physically, *Encyclopaedia*’s motley contents resemble those of a scrapbook (the “tomes” are loose-leaf notebooks), with original drawings ranging in execution from crude to meticulous, photographic reproductions and other collage elements incorporated on sheets of assorted sizes and materials. Conceptually, the sole familiar order is that of alphabetical sequencing.<sup>7</sup> Opposite the full page dedicated to “Eye” (“Organ for seeing diferent [*sic*] things and events. One of the main organs in Utopian body”), page 50 is divided into sections depicting examples of “external use,” “extortion,” “extraordinary,” “extravaganza” and “extremely long tongue.” The last-mentioned shows a photograph of a woman’s head in profile, to which Solakov has appended a drawing of a preternaturally long lingua that stretches clear across the page, where its tip rests on the end of a disembodied phallus (lingam). That this entry was not included in the “erotic” section, which harbors an image that is closely related formally and thematically (but with the action reversed), could, if it weren’t so preposterous, be seen as a willful flouting of standard criteria used in classifying and interpreting works of art. By extension, and in view of the taxonomic chaos that reigns throughout, its (dis)placement calls into question the validity and reliability of all systems of categorization and judgment, such as the ones that sank in Communism’s wake.

Two more “E” listings: “Espionage” is invoked in a small penciled landscape purporting to show seven spies. Each spy’s position is indicated by a numbered arrow, but the spies themselves are invisible. This is, of course, as it should be. Over the years, Solakov has developed this type of childish-seeming prank into a refined conjuring act, pulling our



Detail of the installation “New Noah’s Ark,” 1991-92, showing *The Creatures*, 96 pieces, thermoplastic, metal, black paint, handwritten text, accompanied by the CD *The Strange Noise*, 30-minute loop on hidden loudspeakers; shown in the artist’s studio, 1991, Sofia. Photo Anatoly Michaylov and Konstantin Shestakov.

legs to make us think and see. In another register, “Everybody is Smiling,” a heading which, however idiosyncratic, *does* seem to fit the utopian program, is illustrated by a discolored news photo of a group of attractive young women—workers or students, it’s hard to say—beaming radiantly for the camera. The image is an obvious throwback to the great Soviet utopia and its propaganda machine. One of the most powerful fictions of all time, Soviet Communism has served Solakov as both model and target.

**T**he exhibition’s nominal departure point is “New Noah’s Ark,” Solakov’s first elaborate narrative installation and his first work to attract international attention (at the 1992 Istanbul Biennial, 12½ years prior to the opening of the current show). Like *Encyclopaedia*, it’s about starting over from scratch, jettisoning all that’s familiar and braving the unknown—a prospect both exhilarating and terrifying, no matter how bad things have been. The protagonist of the narrative is an ordinary fellow, Noah, who is instructed by anonymous authorities to transport to another world alien creatures whose own world has ceased to exist. The creatures are temporarily stranded in Noah’s bathroom, which, he is informed, is a buffer zone between worlds and which they have reached via the plumbing. Noah’s world is coming to an end tomorrow, so there’s no time to lose.

Compared to the homespun *Encyclopaedia*, “New Noah’s Ark” is a sophisticated production—a theatrical, walk-in piece with multiple components. In Luxembourg, the original book-length manuscript was displayed behind glass, like an artifact, along with a polished stone (part of the plot) engraved with the Cyrillic letters for the word “you” in Bulgarian. Excerpts from the book, complete with page references, were handwritten on the walls in random order and interspersed with large framed watercolors illustrating the ark models from which the travelers are meant to choose their vessel. An oil painting, its surface clotted with sluglike globs of pigment, showed Noah having breakfast—probably his last. In an adjacent darkened space, a herd of 96 colorful thermoplastic zoomorphs—primitive, visceral-looking forms, each with its own distinct physiognomy—huddled on the floor amid sounds of running and flushing water.

The fun-house appeal was unmistakable, as were the allegorical references conflating the Biblical flood, post-Communist sea changes and (taking Noah as Solakov’s surrogate) the artist’s task of steering the

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world into the future. However, this not being Utopia, things don't stack up so simply. Noah is not a free agent, and his commanders' manipulative language and tone parody those of spies and tyrants ("Your God, Noah, already resigned"). Furthermore, the predetermined direction of the ark's course ("just open the toilet and go") is far from promising. Faced with imminent extinction, what's a fellow to do? That's all there is to the story, and we are left wondering.

Another conundrum looms in *The Truth (The Earth is Plane, the World is Flat)*, a mixed-medium installation from 1992-95 that constitutes an ingenious send-up of propaganda by its own means. In it, Solakov gathers the testimony of seven fictitious witnesses who claim that the earth is flat. The apocrypha include clippings of published news-



On the Wing, 1999-present, 14 vinyl-letter texts on the wings of six Boeing 737s from the official Luxembourg Luxair fleet. Courtesy Casino Luxembourg, Forum d'Art Contemporain. Photo Nedko Solakov.

paper reports written and planted by the artist, a made-for-TV interview with an actor playing the part of a former Soviet astronaut, a recorded speech by a made-up politician, drawings, photographs, etc.—exactly the sorts of fabricated “evidence” that can be marshaled to persuade people of just about anything, particularly when belief in the idea being promoted is said to lead to inner peace and well-being. It's a confidence game updated and used for political, or in this case, the artist's, purposes, which seem to lie partly in sowing confusion.

Of course, propaganda is mostly associated with deception, and everyone knows that the earth is a sphere. Its shape is an established scientific fact that we learn in school and take on faith as being true. And there's the rub. Solakov the skeptic would have us keep an open mind about such things. With the ironic aside “The strange thing is, that in one way or another, this story is related to Bulgaria,” he reminds us that as the Soviet Union lost its grip, old paradigms—round-world views—were challenged and supplanted by antithetical, and, to many, quite possibly absurd-seeming models. One of the fake documents, a letter from a supposed

detractor of the Club of the Friends of the Flat World, puts reason on what would appear to be the wrong side, the one, in this piece, of brainwashing and illogic. It reads, in part: “Is it possible that people have become so mixed up as to challenge the obvious? The members of the club are warning us to never see things as absolute and to not be sure of anything.”

That warning is the artist's own, and he has repeated it again and again in provocatively iconoclastic, as well as deeply humanizing, works that refuse dichotomies and instead embrace dualities and paradox. Straightforward examples include the drawing series “Good & Bad” (2003) and the installation *Good News, Bad News*, which was first created in 1998. Both combine visual images (composed of wash drawings and small objects, respectively) and written anecdotes that highlight the positive and negative aspects of the situations they relate, ranging from a genetically modified bean pondering its identity to an airplane about to crash into a mountain that is sure to survive the accident.

Concurrently with *The Truth*, Solakov worked on “Well-Known Stories,” a series of 23 ink-and-wash drawings, each incorporating a one-line, handwritten caption. The drawings are based on familiar motifs from the New Testament, one of the greatest good-bad stories ever told. Solakov presents his scenes from unfamiliar angles, focusing not on their subjects' well-known sacred side but on imaginary, profane details. Thus, the Pietà is represented from behind, with an atypically broad-framed Mary scratching her back with her left hand while supporting the body of her dead son with her right: “They were so stupid—these little creatures. . . . Even in such a moment they continued to disturb her.” Another scene shows her, again from behind, doing the dishes “after their (last) supper . . .” as a group of figures files out the door at the far side of the room. She gets the runs on the flight to Egypt and, after her baby is born, finally has sex with her husband: “and then (after the kings went away), Joseph was for the first time with his wife. . . .” Witty and indecorous, the tenderly rendered drawings are both shocking and affectionate.

As Sokalov's career moved into high gear during the '90s, he increasingly mocked his own ambition and success (an effective strategy which led to further success and perhaps higher ambition) and poked fun at the system that supported and promoted them. An outsider on the inside, so to speak, he quickly learned the ropes of the Western art world while staying in touch with who he is and what he hopes to achieve. Both are quite complex.

As a performer, Solakov has a gift for buffoonery. *Some of My Capabilities*, a 1½-minute silent film loop from 1995, features the artist touching his tongue to his nose, crossing his eyes, wiggling his ears, flicking his tongue in and out while blinking his eyes at a frenetic rate, bending his double-jointed thumb, executing penile gymnastics and making a small line drawing, etc. The film trails off with the words “and so on and so forth,” leading us to fantasize about the rest of his repertory of spectacularly goofy antics, which everyone understands but few can imitate. Solakov uses them as a bridge to his audience, whom he often addresses in his written works as “dear viewer,” or just plain “you.”

His art can be irresistibly humble and engaging. The show contains examples of the ways he treats interior walls, mirror frames, large photographs and even airplane wings<sup>8</sup> as message boards and doodle pads. Generally tiny, the notations tend literally to be one with their supports. The caption below a pin hole in one of the Casino's walls read “a hole with a little mouse in it”; nearby a small paint blister was labeled “a little problem is hidden here”; a small oval-shaped bump outlined in ink mutated into “a fussy wet baby.” Floral wallpaper patterns and details of photographs provide armatures and grounds for the whimsical antics of stick figures endowed with human drives and capacities for thought, speech, emotion and so on. Once you spot them, an achievement that sometimes requires getting down on

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He had to deliver this speech - the pressure on him. Who's he was speaking at all, in what he was saying (he was feeling) but this time it was different. He was applauded sluggishly. After he went to his office, looked at the photograph of his grandfather and fell asleep.

Goose the bird, woke up around 6:30 a.m. The night had brought down frost - he could see as not of him the bench stretched out took a leak, gathered his bags together.

for the center of the city. He sat his usual spot - next to the garbage can. Near the post office. "Wow, what a thing!" he said to himself and touched the crushed globe which was sticking out of the pile of rubbish...

The Truth (The Earth is Plane, The World is Flat), 1992-95, paintings, drawings, collages, photographs, maps, discarded globes, stuffed animals, DVD, loudspeakers, Bulgarian newspapers and mixed mediums; at the Rooseum. Photo Vegar Moen. Collection Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg.

# Solakov

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hands and knees or craning your neck while standing on tiptoe, it's like gazing through a zoom lens into another order of reality: what appeared to be mute planes and surfaces teem with life. Kids' stuff again: exhibition as treasure hunt, "bare" walls and occasionally the view out the window as focuses of attention.

The show ricochets between the antimonumental, chatty sublime and the self-mockingly grandiose. Solakov might have been thinking of Van Dyck when he came up with the idea for *The New Ones*, a 1996 installation featuring five gold-framed oil portraits of members of Bulgaria's new rich, plus 18 preparatory drawings hung on walls painted English red. But whereas Van Dyck was paid royally by his wealthy patrons, Solakov painted his likenesses for free, feeling duly compensated by the promise of immortality that went with the job, or so the gambit went. It was the subjects who served the artist by agreeing to sit for him.

Over the past several years, Solakov's art has taken increasingly attenuated material form, with projects ranging from an attempt to negotiate a Middle East cease-fire that would have coincided with a show he had last year in Israel<sup>9</sup> to diverting funds allocated for a Brussels exhibition<sup>10</sup> to pay for ads for the present survey in last October's issues of *Frieze* and *Artforum*. His most recent installation, *El Bulgaro*, dates from 2000. It is in many respects the culminating point thus far of his narrative work in three dimensions. In it he fashions for himself a mock-heroic lineage that includes El Greco, upon whom he bestows a Bulgarian grandmother, and the great satirist Cervantes, who was El Greco's contemporary. The piece telescopes time, travesties the jealously guarded secretiveness that attends scholarly discoveries, nods at the creativity of unscrupulous art merchants and forgers (fiction-producers like Solakov), includes apocryphal texts that parody the terminology of art historians and psychoanalysts, and features a fetching photographic portrait of the burly artist striking a quintessentially self-important pose while wearing a pair of frilly bloomers, presumably typical attire for a 17th-century male painter working in Toledo. The bloomers too are exhibited, as if to lend credibility to a story in which they have no particular significance.

The rest of the objects in the piece are conventionally aligned paintings, prints and drawings said to be copies of works attributed to El Greco's newly revealed alter ego and esthetic counterforce, El Bulgaro. The copies are signed by Solakov, who, like El Greco/El Bulgaro, is an itinerant artist formed in the East and come to prominence in the West. Ingeniously contrived, intricately woven and cleverly amusing connections such as this point to the penetrating exactness of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's observation at the end of her catalogue essay: "It is as if Nedko were whispering . . . 'What else can a sensitive artist (male, white, European and with a rather 'hulky' physique) do right now but play out his megalomaniac, deep impulses ironically, achieving and denying at once his will to power?'"

Sprinkled among the writings on the walls, the artist's own brief editorial and critical comments—"sorry for the English," "mistake," "failed piece"—speak to what he calls his immediate reaction of assessment and underscore the performative, improvised nature of much of his art. In Luxembourg one of these notations, slightly longer than the rest, was proffered as an independent work (more were intended but time ran out) that was initially planned to assess parts or all of the show. Written in the first person at the last minute (the piece is marked with the time and date), it states that, having just finished installing the works, Solakov lacks critical distance and has to hurry to take a shower before the opening. You can't be sure whether or how much posturing is involved here or in other of his spontaneous-seeming, confessional works, but the effect is a little like that of "Well-Known Stories": a tad indelicate (how bad does

he smell and do we really want to know?) and endearing for all that (the star of the hour gets sweaty and brain-tired just like the rest of us).

"The Pretentious Retrospective," the tongue-in-cheek title of the series inaugurated by the piece just mentioned, is appropriately inappropriate to this generous yet incomplete survey, from which Solakov's best-known and arguably most cogent work, *A Life (Black & White)*, 1999-2001, is conspicuously missing. Labor- and material-intensive, it is an emblematic postmodern performance piece that calls for two hired hands to repaint the walls of an exhibition space continuously for the duration of the show. One painter uses white paint, the other black, and they advance in the same direction, covering one another's work as they go. The piece is finished when the show ends.

Omitted because of its familiarity and high cost, *A Life* is nevertheless not forgotten.<sup>11</sup> It is pictured prominently on the catalogue's wraparound cover and features in its pages, where the full retrospective is staged in print. No doubt to the artist's delight, the book is perplexing. To assure that it retains its indecisive, nondefinitive, unruly character, the artist determined the order in which the works would appear in its pages by drawing their titles blindly from a proverbial hat. Actually it was a teacup. □

1. "Some of the jury members were clever enough to realise that such 'subversive' works were useful, even for socialism. . . ." Solakov, interviewed by Iara Boubnova, *Nedko Solakov: A 12½ (and even more) Year Survey*, Malmö, Folio, p. 86.

2. "The City?" Rakovski 125 Gallery, Sofia, curated by Philip Zidarov. The exhibition was a key event in a series of projects and debates organized by The City, a small artists' collective whose pioneering efforts are credited with paving the way for contemporary art in Bulgaria.

3. Quoted from Solakov's "The Action is on (for the time being) . . .," originally published in *Kultura*, June 22, 1990. Reprinted in the exhibition catalogue, pp. 105-107.

4. After the fall of Communism, Bulgaria did not stage a wholesale opening of classified government records, as happened in East Germany, for example.

5. *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, New York, Museum of Modern Art/Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2002, pp. 277-80. Quoted in the exhibition catalogue, p. 104.

6. *Top Secret* was later shown in the U.S. in "Beyond Belief," curated by Laura Hoptman. The show opened in the summer of 1995 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago [Sept. 2-Nov. 26, 1995], traveled to the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio [Feb. 6-Mar. 24, 1996], the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia [Sept. 6-Nov. 2, 1996], and the Jocelyn Art Museum, Omaha [Feb. 1-Apr. 6, 1997].

7. In his catalogue essay, p. 28, Jordan Kantor notes the similarity between *Encyclopaedia's* heterotopic listing and that of the imaginary Chinese encyclopedia described in Jorge Luis Borges's "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," collected in *Other Inquisitions*, 1952.

8. *On the Wing* (1999-), a project originally executed for Casino Luxembourg's exhibition "Faiseurs d'histoires," consists of 14 short texts printed on the upper sides of the wings of six Boeing 737s belonging to Luxembourg's national carrier, Luxair. The texts are legible from the window seats. One reads: "Hi! Yes, it's me who just said 'Hi!'" And another: "The same text appears on the right wing too . . . but you better check."

9. "Negotiations," Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv, dates Sept. 12-Oct. 18, 2003.

10. "Advertisement," Sint-Lukasgalerie, Brussels, Oct. 24-Dec. 13, 2003.

11. Video documentation would have been a welcome stand-in. On Oct. 20, 2001, hour-long recordings of the work were made simultaneously in Venice, Munich, Glasgow and Dublin, where it so happened that *A Life* was being performed. (Like Sol LeWitt's wall drawings, the piece is executed according to a set of written instructions.) Another was made in Solakov's studio in Stockholm (where he was temporarily living); there the artist performed a solo version of *A Life* on a sheet of paper lying flat on his work table. Holding a brush loaded with black paint in his right hand and one with white in his left, he proceeded to paint from left to right, in the same direction as the performers covering vertical wall planes at the other locations. Solakov had to work hand over hand in the manner of a pianist when the black reached the right edge of the paper and he had to resume painting with white on the left. Thus for 60 minutes the conceptual artist experienced some of the painters' physical ordeal.

"Nedko Solakov: A 12½ (and even more) Year Survey" debuted at Casino Luxembourg [Dec. 13, 2003-Feb. 29, 2004] before traveling to the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö [Mar. 17-June 13], and the O.K. Centrum für Gegenwartskunst, Linz [Dec. 2, 2004-Feb. 20, 2005]. It is accompanied by a 220-page catalogue with essays by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Jordan Kantor, Daniel Kurjakovic and Saul Antas, as well as an interview with the artist by Iara Boubnova.

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