

Press Release

Nedko Solakov

All in Order, with Exceptions

21 September – 13 November 2011

Ikon presents the first major exhibition in the UK of Nedko Solakov, b.1957 in Cherven Briag, Bulgaria. *All in Order, with Exceptions* is a chronological survey of Solakov's practice, an amalgamation of four selections, made by three galleries - Ikon (UK), S.M.A.K. (Belgium) and Serralves (Portugal) - comprising one work per year since he emerged as an artist c. 1980. There are overlaps, where a work was chosen by two or more curators. The 'exceptions' are those works first exhibited in years following their years of production, the latter being ignored for our purposes. In addition, for the Fondazione Galleria Civica, Trento, Solakov has made a further selection from all the works not chosen for the three other galleries: *All in (my) Order, with Exceptions* is a kind of Salon des Refusés, which articulates an intimate approach to the survey format, fully autonomous from curatorial 'interference'.

The vast body of work available for consideration is evident in archival folders, painstakingly put together by the artist, which document hundreds of works by him not chosen to show on this occasion as well as pertinent facts relating to each year in question. At once very personal and encyclopaedic, this is the world according to Nedko Solakov, coloured by a characteristically melancholic sense of humour.

In 1988, Solakov was a key figure in *The City?*, a seminal exhibition staged in Sofia shortly before the fall of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Local artists worked together to propose new ways of making and experiencing art, creating installations that were cleverly critical of the status quo. Some of Solakov's paintings made around this time - with their tendency towards story-telling and figuration - were sometimes confused with a Soviet-sanctioned style, yet in retrospect they can be seen as completely consistent with the candid self-deprecating approach that informs his practice as a whole. For example, *Fear* (1987), with its isolated passenger in the belly of a jet plane, beautifully embodies the artist's own fear of flying. The broad economical brushstrokes have a cartoon-like quality that becomes very familiar in Solakov's later drawings and watercolours.

Top Secret (1990) epitomises the emotional honesty and knowingness inherent in Solakov's work and also catapulted him to fame. Shown at the height of Bulgaria's political unrest, it comprises an index box with cards inscribed to communicate his 'shameful secret', the fact that he had collaborated with the Bulgarian secret police as a youth during 1976-1983. He stopped voluntarily and no publicly known documents exist relating to the artist's involvement (22 years after the political changes in Bulgaria, in general the files remain closed).

IKON

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Ikon Gallery is a registered charity no. 528892

Made without coercion of any kind, *Top Secret* was a cathartic gesture: a means by which Solakov voluntarily unburdened his 'hurting heart', yet also funny and intelligent in its execution. Other works from the late 1980s, including *My Conscience Tormenting Me* (1988), a painting of the artist wracked with guilt, are as excruciating in their disclosure.

After *Top Secret*, Solakov's work developed an expressive range, perhaps exemplifying the complex freedom that his country now enjoys. Paintings and drawings now take their place alongside photographs, readymades and other sculptural pieces, performance, video and installation. This 'narration into 3D space', as the artist puts it, extends to remarkable uses of exhibition space: the 2006 work *Toilets* will be recreated at Ikon, a piece that involves humorous inscriptions on and around fittings in the ladies and gents lavatories.

Solakov's later work incorporates its environment to the degree that the two become one-and-the-same, with the visitor implicit: we are the people in an art gallery looking at *Studies for Romantic Landscapes with Missing Parts* (2000), and are the subjects of the artist as we encounter *A-Kitschy-Market-Somewhere-in-Eastern-Europe Stories* (2001). In this way, *All in Order, with Exceptions* is a masterpiece. It constitutes a life of the artist - an autobiography - that we have the privilege to walk through, an autobiography that engages and implicates us.

An illustrated catalogue will accompany this exhibition. Published by Hatje Cantz, edited by Ikon, it includes texts by Iara Boubnova (founding Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Sofia), Christy Lange (writer, associate editor, *Frieze*) and an interview between the artist and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (Artistic Director, Documenta XIII).

Nedko Solakov's exhibition *All in Order, with Exceptions* is organised in collaboration with S.M.A.K., Ghent, Museu de Serralves, Porto and Fondazione Galleria Civica, Trento. The exhibition is sponsored by Deutsche Bank and supported by the Henry Moore Foundation.

Ends.

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Note to Editors:

1. Press Preview, Tuesday 20 September 2011, 12-8pm
2. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm.
Free entry.
3. Ikon Gallery is a registered charity and receives core funding from Birmingham City Council and Arts Council England. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered address: 1 Oozells Square, Birmingham B1 2HS.
4. For more information and images please contact Helen Stallard, Press and PR Consultant, on 0774 033 9604 or h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk