



**Никола (Николай) Дюлгерев.**  
*Музика.* Публикувано в списание *Пламяк*. 1924, N 4, 25 април.  
**Nikola (Nikolay) Dulgieroff.**  
*Music.* Published in *Plamuk* (Flame) magazine. 1924, N 4, 25 of April.

## Historicizing Balkan Modernism. The Bulgarian Condition

### I. Modernism on the Balkans – Difficulties of historicizing

From the very beginning of my research on art between the two world wars, I have been most attracted by the idea of finding an approach to the study of Bulgarian art that would allow its interpretation within a broader context – a European as well as a Balkan one; of discovering how one could talk about it within the framework of more general cultural phenomena.

1. At the level of form and style, the connecting threads are so subtle that even the use of terms denoting art movements (impressionism, symbolism, cubism, constructivism, etc.) becomes more or less problematic. If I try to draw a chronological parallel between the works of art and the art tendencies in my country and those familiar from the art chronologies and panoramas of Europe, I would be confronted not so much by possible links as by a succession of missing tendencies in the history of artistic form in Bulgaria.

During the 1990's the interest in the manifestations of modernism in Balkan art has found expression in several retrospective exhibitions<sup>1</sup> and in numerous publications not only by Balkan art historians but also by Western European and American ones.<sup>2</sup>

Although the attention to a–central phenomena has enriched our cultural map with artistic solutions that differ in genesis and character and that reveal other perspectives on the cultural problems of the period, no new historical constructions on modernism have as yet been proposed.

The most frequent procedure for presenting Balkan modernism, in both texts and exhibitions, has been the selection only of those works and tendencies that could fit easily enough into the already existing chronologies and panoramas of European (actually Western European) art. The rest of the new tendencies in art – i. e. the predominant part – have been ignored and excluded; the question of their discussion has been removed from the agenda.

The removal of such a significant proportion of art phenomena had been predetermined by the search of Western European art critics and curators for unfamiliar but formally and stylistically recognizable works of art. The process of “stitching” the two Europes together, which started after the symbolic demolition of the Berlin Wall, has been accompanied by a series of exhibitions and publications.

One good example is the “Europe – Europe” exhibition organized in Bonn in 1994 and the voluminous catalogue accompanying it<sup>3</sup>. Since the art material from the “other Europe” was somehow or other accommodated to and made to match the existing ideas about the tendencies in European (Western European) art, it only included names that were already popular in the established European context and familiar from previous publications and exhibitions. How the material was arranged becomes obvious from the thematic selection of the entries in the first volume of the catalogue: Giving Way to Avant–garde, From Symbolism to Abstraction, In the Surroundings of Cubism, To Construct a World, The Jewish Presence, Surrealistic Imagination, Politics versus Avant–garde: Socialist Realism, etc. Only Christo (Christo Javashv) and Georges Papazoff from Bulgaria were included in that structural scheme, but with no connection whatsoever being established with the Bulgarian artistic environment. If some more names, journals, and documents had been included as well, this inclusion would have followed the logic of their relevance and connection to the West European context rather than that of their impact and importance within the Bulgarian artistic environment.

Balkan art from the first half of the 20th century cannot be placed within the classifications that have been “custom–tailored” for West European art, but at the same time it is dependent on West European culture and turns out to be unable to create its own classifications.

2. It seems that texts written on Balkan art of that period have sought to establish links with the European context mainly through the biographies of artists.

In Bulgaria, exponents of such links have been the key figures in the existing historical narratives, who studied and practised in different countries, cities, art schools and cultural environments in Europe. This biographical approach, however, no matter how much weight it has added to our perspective on those contacts, is not sufficient to determine a stand and a perspective in terms of Bulgarian art from the first half of the 20th century. Even if we restrict our scope, and feel content with such an approach, we will discover that only few artists managed to find their way into European art reference books of that time. Some

have, indeed, been included: Georges Papazoff (who lived in France – Paris, Vance) and Nikola Diulgheroff (who lived in Italy – Torino) are the names that come to the minds of our best-informed foreign colleagues when they think of Bulgaria and modernity/modernism. However, those artists did not exert any significant influence on art tendencies in Bulgaria<sup>4</sup>.

A large number of artists, poets, and writers have been perceived as personifications of modernism in the cultural history of each Balkan country. Those were intellectuals displaying a new active and versatile artistic presence in society. Such personalities were Geo Milev and Sirak Skitnik, Lubomir Micic, Ion Vinea, Marcel Janco, Max Maxy. Particularly important were contacts between Geo Milev and Lubomir Micic; between Geo Milev, Sirak Skitnik and Herwarth Walden; between Lubomir Micic and Herwarth Walden. One could say that these short-lived relationships were of the same nature as those in the international European modernist circles. However, the compilation of biographies does not add a new quality to the historicization of Balkan modernism<sup>5</sup>.

The overcoming of the barrier to the discussion of Bulgarian art in a broader, European context remains problematic.

## II. Modernism and Avant-garde

The new tendencies developed in the art of the Balkan countries carrying meanings that were not quite the same as the meanings they had in other artistic centres. One may say that before the Balkan wars and World War I and in the first post-war years, the tendency towards the renovation of the artistic language manifested itself in Balkan art as a promotion of subjectivity.

The “modern” expression declared itself in the aspirations to an autonomous, anti-illusionary pictorial space, in different versions of symbolism and secession.

In one way or another, the influence of German expressionism also permeated Balkan artistic circles. Characteristic of those cultures was the frequent coexistence of different tendencies. One can see, for example, crossbreeds between German expressionism and late secession, between constructivism and late secession, between constructivism and primitivism, etc. in Bulgarian art of that period. This eclecticism, the superimposition of many diverse stylistic features, although varying in the different milieus, is a common characteristic of all Balkan art. The superimposition of cultural and artistic phenomena which leads to a terminological polyvalency in their description and analysis has been noted by many art historians studying the first half of the 20th century in Balkan cultures<sup>6</sup>.

The new wave in the art of the Balkan countries after World War I included phenomena which can be identified as versions of modernism and, in some cases, as various hybrid variants of avant-garde trends.

The term “avant-garde”<sup>7</sup> usually designates the commitment of artistic tendencies to revolutionary sociopolitical ideas. Researchers are unanimous that the historical avant-gardes attacked art as an institution and developed anti-institutional strategies. As far as representation was concerned, it was no longer seen as a mimesis, but rather as a construction.



**Анна Балсамаджиева.** *Молитва.* Суха игла. 14 x 17,8. Частна колекция. Публикувано в: Ирина Генова, Татяна Димитрова. *Изкуството в България през 1920-те години. Модернизъм и национална идея.* София, 2002.  
**Anna Balsamadzchieva.** *Pray.* Drypoint. 14 x 17,8. Private collection. Published in: Irina Genova, Tatyana Dimitrova. *Art in Bulgaria during the 1920's. Modernism and National Identity.* Sofia, 2002.

In the case of Russian avant-garde, art was conceived as an instrument for the reconstruction of the world and as bound to the ideas of the revolution. Paradoxically, in Western Europe the Russian avant-garde was long perceived mainly as a generator of new forms.

In Bulgaria and in other Balkan countries, the first institutions of artistic life emerged at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The institutionalization of art was viewed as a valuable achievement and as an essential feature of modernity.

In this cultural field, ideas for the “reconstruction” of the world – ruined materially and morally during World War I – had no strong manifestations. The “total art”, the radicalism in relation to the status quo were not present. It seems to me that one of the peculiarities of the manifestations of avant-garde in Balkan cultures was the lack of “negative energy”, of destructive pathos. Though an anarchist inclination did develop among Bulgarian poets and artists for a short period during the 1920s, it did not result in any significant works of art.

The avant-garde attitudes of the Zenith Circle (in Zagreb and Belgrade) contained characteristics of dada, futurism, and constructivism.

In Bucharest, the manifestations of constructivism seem to have been more consistent.

In the milieu of Bulgarian modernists one can see the connection with German culture, with expressionism, but also with German symbolism and post-symbolism. The presence of the Russian avant-garde was felt in the 1920s and early 1930s mainly in graphism and in the publications of some leftist magazines.

The modernist ideas of *Vezni* journal, the echoes of expressionism, futurism, and constructivism in *Plamak* journal, resounded for a short time in *Novis* journal (from the Russian for “new art”) at the turn of the 1920s.

Some of the most genuine attempts in the avant-garde vein in Balkan cultures were made in the field of graphic art. In Bulgaria, one can find a more liberated and innovative attitude in the sphere of magazine and book design (cover sheets, type fonts, illustrations).

One of the important aims of those journals was to inform their audience of the foreign tendencies towards which they were gravitating. It would be very interesting to make a careful examination of the repertoire of the authors and works of art which they reproduced and discussed; to study the coincidences and the differences between the choices they made.

*Vezni* published an article on Kandinsky by Geo Milev<sup>8</sup>.

*Plamak* ran a series of texts on futurism in Russian poetry<sup>9</sup> and on Tatlin's *Tower*, and published a reproduction of that project for the monument of the Third International<sup>10</sup>.

In 1928, *Slovo* weekly published a text by Sirak Skitnik on constructivism in Russian architecture.

At the turn of the 1930s, articles on constructivism in poetry and architecture appeared in *Hyperion*<sup>11</sup>, commonly known as a symbolist journal.

In the 1920s, the intense interest in the inventions of the technical era, which changed human perception of the material world, was a common feature of the orientation to the contemporary spirit. In Germany, France, and Italy such inventions provided nourishing soil for constructivism and futurism – the poetry of the machine reality.

In the Balkans, the new orientations found expression in a belated interest in futurism and in contacts with Marinetti, which resulted in his visits to several Balkan capitals – Belgrade, Sofia, Bucharest, and Athens – at the end of the 1920s and the very beginning of the 1930s.

The new technical reality did not remain outside the field of interest of Bulgarian artistic milieus. "The airplane brought not only technical revolution, but also a new perspective and a new vision, whose elements were quick to appear in the visual arts", Bulgarian artist and critic Sirak Skitnik declared in 1927<sup>12</sup>. But these ideas found expression only in brief and ephemeral artistic essays – by Mircho Kachulev, Kiril Krastev, and Sirak Skitnik (in painting and drawing), by Petar Ramadanov (in sculpture), by Vasil Grejov (in cinema).

In the wide range of manifestations between modernism and avant-garde, art in Bulgaria (and in the Balkan countries) surmounted the academic requirements of classical perspective, chiaroscuro, and so on, as well as the impressionistic approach, on the one hand, and the boundaries between art and technics or between art and a radical political stance, on the other.

### III. Modernism and National Continuity

In the field of ideas about the renovation of artistic language, the aspiration to achieve a national identity was also present. By means of "remembering" the old "forgotten" authentic artistic structure, the Movement for National Art in Bulgaria, byzantinism and the neoclassicism in Greece, the programme of "Romanian art", the call for "balkanization" at the heart of "zenitism" in Belgrade and Zagreb all sought to achieve their "own" (not imported) modern expression.

After World War I, the quest for cultural continuity and for new props for one's national identity was a common feature of the new wave in Balkan art, which seemed opposite to the crossbreeds of modern trends, to the avant-garde attitudes. In the cultural field there emerged an aspiration to a distinct national presence in civilized Europe.

The aspiration to a national identity was manifested in different degrees in the different cultural milieus<sup>13</sup>. In Bulgarian culture of the 1920s, artists and writers began to conceive of the pre-academic artistic heritage (icon, wood-carving, folk crafts) as a possible mediator towards a modern artistic expression. This interest in other, non-academic systems of representation, in the fact the primitivist forms, could be viewed as corresponding to the modernist orientations. The contradiction consisted in that in Western Europe the choice of these new impulses was a rejection of the immediate national tradition that was related to the academic education; while in the Balkans those alternative systems of representation, the primitivism, were not searched for around the world (for instance in cubism, collage, and Grebo masks), but only within a "national artistic heritage". The artistic identity, which in the 20th century was quite individual, in Balkan cultures (and other a-central areas) was emphasized as national. Under those conditions, the demand that works of art within the modern aesthetics should be based on the national tradition seemed paradoxical, because the premises and the criteria of being modern lay outside the local area, in the (West) European cultural space. The validation of the "worth" of art was dependent on international artistic circles.

The question of modernism and cultural continuity in Balkan art at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th centuries is related to the cultural conditions themselves. Some common features of the cultural conditions could provide a key to the character and peculiarities of the artistic phenomena.

#### **IV. Modernism and Modernity**

When my expectations to find a model of writing on art tendencies that were comparable to those in Bulgaria from the first half of 20th century and to try analogous procedures failed, I decided to look for an explanation of the manifestations and absences of artistic phenomena by means of the similarities and dissimilarities in the forms of artistic life and contacts. Gradually, I began to seek and arrange other parallels: of institutions (art schools, museums) – both state-run and private; of artistic circles and publications (and especially their foreign contacts); of the exchanges of exhibitions and of who and why organized such exchanges.

These parallels reveal new absences of a different nature yet related to the stylistic tendencies and experiments absent in our country. The questions that may arise would concern not the reasons why cubism, constructivism, and surrealism were not consistent enough in our artistic environment, but rather why the National Museum in Sofia was not based on large private collections; why the collective foreign exhibitions in Sofia, organized informally, were extremely few; why there were no artistic circles/journals in our country that could organize exhibitions with the participation of the international avant-garde; and what the consequences of those circumstances were<sup>14</sup>. In the Zenith exhibition the following artists participated: Robert Delaunay, Albert Gleizes, Laszlo Moholy Nagy, Alexander Archipenko, Ossip Zadkine, Vassili Kandinsky, El Lissitski, Vilko Getzan, Ossip Klek, Enriko Prampolini, Anna Balsamadjeva, Ivan Bojadjev, Mircho Kachulev, etc.

**Сирак Скитник.**

*Футуристична рисунка.*

Мотив и цветен мотив. Ок. 1930-1931.

Централен държавен архив, София.

Публикувано в: *Непознатият Сирак*

Скитник. Съст. Татяна Димитрова,

Ирина Генова. София, 1993.

**Sirak Skitnik. Futuristic drawing.**

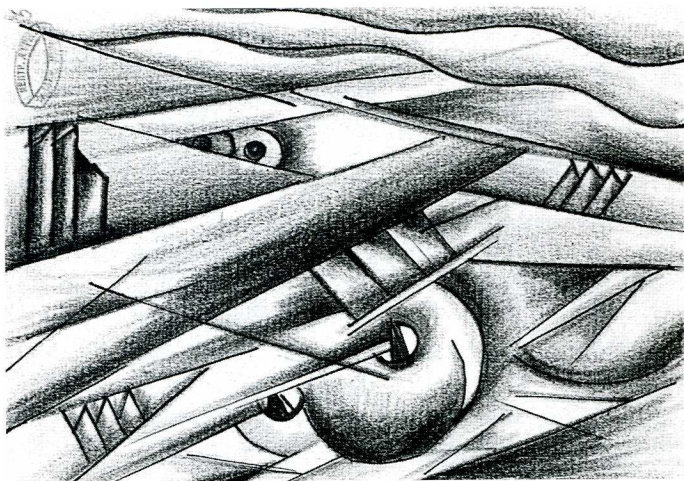
Pencil and colour pencil. Ca. 1930-31.

Central State Archives, Sofia.

Published in: *The Unknown Sirak*

Skitnik. Ed. by Tatyana Dimitrova,

Irina Genova. Sofia, 1993.



I have not forgotten Geo Milev and his activities in the early 1920s; but everything seems to have ended by 1925.

Trying to trace the overlapping area between the study of form and style on the one hand, and sociology and the sociology of artistic life on the other, I managed to come up with some kind of answer to the questions mentioned above.

So far I have been able to find this answer in the lack of social resources for art that could serve as an alternative to the resources provided by the state. This deficiency, as an essential historical peculiarity, goes a long way towards explaining the lack of certain layers of art, the weak differentiation of art, the unfulfilled will for experiment and freedom. West European avant-garde, on the other hand, took advantage of the resources of industrially developed societies, and this has already been noted by art critics<sup>15</sup>.

Recently, researchers of economy, society, and culture have been discussing the failure of modernization in Bulgaria and in the Balkans before World War II; they have been looking for the missing preconditions for economic modernization<sup>16</sup>. Among all the important topics they discuss, economists also focus on the cultural problem that faced Bulgarian capitalism.

In such conditions – of an underdeveloped capitalism and an undifferentiated social environment – the role of the state was particularly important. Historians point out that in the Balkan countries the state's interference in the economy was not conducive to the formation of an autonomous class of entrepreneurs. Instead, a privileged but state-dependent capitalism was "cultivated," one that existed within a close relationship with the state<sup>17</sup>.

Since the state tried to substitute the missing preconditions for economic modernization, it also aimed at substituting the missing prerequisites for cultural modernization, for modernization in the arts.

There are no large private collections of foreign or Bulgarian art in our country. The predominant part of the National Museum's collections have come from purchases made by the state, not from private donations<sup>18</sup>. The main buyer and patron of art used to be the state<sup>19</sup>.

I would not like to disregard the fact of the existence of art collectors and patrons in



**Сирак Скитник. Мадона.** 1930-1931. Рисунка. 18,5 x 25,7.  
Централен държавен архив, София.

Публикувано в: Непознатият Сирак Скитник. Съст. Татяна Димитрова, Ирина Генова. София, 1993.

**Sirak Skitnik. Madonna.** 1930-1931. Drawing, 18,5 x 25,7.  
Central State Archives, Sofia. Published in: The Unknown Sirak Skitnik. Ed. by Tatyana Dimitrova, Irina Genova. Sofia, 1993.

Bulgaria. Besides the collection at the Royal Palace, some other private art collections belonging to bankers, merchants, politicians, diplomats, and lawyers are also well known. Today, it is difficult to imagine the actual range and significance of most of those collections, which were later scattered or partially damaged in the air raids on Sofia during World War II.

Among the collections of foreign art, the most considerable one, together with the Royal Collection, is that belonging to Georgi Lichev, an industrialist and diplomat<sup>20</sup>. This is how the introduction by Nikola Mavrodinov to the catalogue of Lichev's collection begins:

*"We are the only nation in Europe who do not have a picture gallery. We are not familiar with the masterpieces of our own artists, nor do we have the chance to see them anywhere. (...) The culture of art is acquired through the contemplation of the works of great artists, through visits to art galleries and art museums, which are all lacking in Bulgaria."*<sup>21</sup>

I associate Mavrodinov's comment with

the conclusion which Andrey Protitch had reached before him:

*"Talking about the influence of foreign masters on Bulgarian artists, we should mention that such an influence was only brief in most cases. On return to their country, Bulgarian artists gradually discarded the yoke of foreign influence, and did so easily because there weren't many – if, indeed, there were any at all – masterpieces of the great European artists [to be found in Bulgaria]."*<sup>22</sup>

Protitch's observations reveal the links between cultural life, institutions and the exchange of art on the one hand, and the questions of artistic form and style on the other.

From the end of the 1920s, more institutions such as banks and insurance companies started purchasing pictures, which is a proof that a new attitude to the object value of works of art was being formed. The collector and his motivation influenced the tendencies in the artistic form and style.

All those instances of collecting and patronage, however, were not enough to change the existing situation of predominantly state-provided funding for art and the consequences it produced.

The big commissions – for monumental works, polygraphically circulated forms, stage design, etc. – were also given by institutions of the state.

There existed no significant private art schools in Bulgaria. The State Fine Arts Academy, founded in 1896 as State Drawing School, remained the only one of its kind, without



any alternative institution for education in the arts. The question of that education was solved at state level. The funds for education and specialization abroad were for the most part provided by the state; the practice of private funding of scholarships did not exist.

These peculiarities, although common to all Balkan countries as a result of their common history until the mid-19th century, seem to have found their strongest expression in Bulgaria. For example, in the second half of the 19th century, Greece and Romania saw the creation of significant private collections of national and international art, some of which later constituted the collections of these countries' national museums. In contrast, in Bulgaria all the absences mentioned above were markedly expressed – in terms of the structure of artistic life; in terms of the exchange of art; in terms of the range of styles and forms.

Exchanges of art and their orientation and motivation are very important for the comparative study of modernization and modernism in different cultural milieus.

The 1930s in Bulgarian art were the period of the most active exchange of art before World War II. A large number of foreign exhibitions were staged in Sofia, many of which were reciprocated by Bulgarian exhibitions abroad.

The framework for the organization of those exhibitions – whether they were planned and organized as part of the state's policy, or whether they were the result of the initiatives of individuals and were connected with tendencies shared both at home and abroad – is essential for the character of the art contacts, and therefore for the structuring of artistic life in Bulgaria at that time.

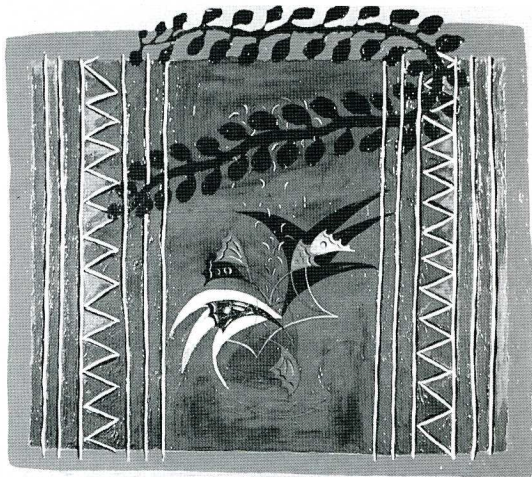
A large number of the international art events were financed by the state<sup>23</sup> and reflected its friendly political relations with the respective foreign states.

Another, though perhaps much smaller, part of the foreign exhibitions in Sofia, as well as of the collective Bulgarian exhibitions abroad, was organized through personal contacts between artists and artistic circles, through the initiatives of individuals. The informal visits and the joint art events in Sofia in the 1930s most often involved artists from the other Balkan countries, and were brought about by the informal contacts between the artists themselves.

Along with the official or private character of the initiative, another important issue in the discussion of that period is, for me, how and whether the exchange of art was conducted between artistic societies of a distinct character. The answer to the question of the unfulfilled contacts could be partly sought in the Balkans' dominant interest in the European (West European) art, in the great Western cultural centres shared by Bulgarian

**Жорж Папазов.** *Композиция 24. Българска престилка.* 1927, м. б., пл., 74 x 93. Музей Petit Palais в Женева.

**Georges Papazoff.** *Composition 24. Bulgarian Apron.* 1927, oil on canvas, 74 x 93. Petit Palais Museum, Geneva.



and other Balkan artists. Nevertheless, this hypothesis cannot explain everything about the existing situation.

In those conditions of Bulgarian social and artistic life, the international art contacts and exchanges were realized within the possibilities that were available, and were not motivated by any art programme<sup>24</sup>.

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Shuttling between artistic phenomena and the state of modernity of the cultural field, I arrived at the belief that the question why there were no pronounced modernist and avant-garde tendencies in Bulgaria and in other Balkan countries, with the meanings those tendencies carried in Western Europe, is of special importance.

In the above mentioned article on modernism Charles Harisson<sup>25</sup> acknowledges the contradiction in the concept of modernism from the point of view of the contemporary post- and after postmodern epoch. Whether modernism represents realism, i.e. the degree of involvement of the artistic works in the human existence in modern times, or it could be reduced to some formal qualities.

A speculation on those questions is possible only when one thinks outside the modernist paradigm. If modernism is the connection of the works of art with human existence in the modern world, then, going back to the beginning of this text, the reason for the missing modernist tendencies in Bulgaria is the inadequate degree/the lack of modernization of the society and of the urban environment, and the non-manifested private interest in art. Thus, the (missing) motivations and the (missing) consequences of artistic contacts are also clarified.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Bulgarian Art in the 1920s" – National History Museum, Sofia, 1992; "Metamorphoses of the Modern – the Greek Experience" – National Gallery, Athens, 1992; "Bucharest 1920s – 1940s: Between Avant-garde and Modernism" – Bucharest, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Among them I would like to mention the series of articles by Steven Mansbach in *Art Bulletin*, Washington. See: "An Introduction to the Classical Modern Art of Bulgaria", *Art Bulletin*, March 1999, pp. 149–162. See also: S. A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890 – 1939*, Cambridge University Press, 1999. (The book does not cover Bulgarian or Greek art.)

<sup>3</sup> "Europa – Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa", Bonn, 27 May – 16 October 1994. The catalogue consists of 4 volumes: I – fine arts, photography, video arts; II – architecture, literature, theatre, cinema, music; III – documents; IV – biographies, bibliography, catalogue list of the exhibition, names index.

<sup>4</sup> Georges Papazoff exhibited in Sofia in 1919, 1928, 1934, and 1935; Nikola Diulgheroff exhibited unsuccessfully in Sofia in 1924 and in Kyustendil in 1930.

<sup>5</sup> The biographical approach as a solution to the historical representation of modernism in Bulgaria was proposed by the exhibition "Sofia – Europe" (National Gallery of Art, Sofia, 1996 – 1997) and the catalogue which accompanied it. The end result was a new compilation of biographies.

<sup>6</sup> In the catalogue of the exhibition "Bucharest in the 1920s – 1940s: Between Avant-garde and Modernism", Magda Carneci wrote: "This title was intended to suggest an eclectic cultural reality equally suitable for disciplines like architecture, theatre and music, where there was no avant-garde proper, but a comprehensive modernism."

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the use of the term, see Ann Gibson, "Avant-Garde", in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 156 – 169.

<sup>8</sup> *Vezni* journal, 1919–1920, No 6, pp. 177–179.

<sup>9</sup> *Plamak* journal, 1924, April, No 4, pp. 141–143.

<sup>10</sup> *Plamak* journal, 1924, May, No 5, pp. 163–164.

<sup>11</sup> *Hyperion* journal, 1928, Nos 1–2; 1930, Nos 1–2, 9–10.

<sup>12</sup> *Slovo* weekly, 15 February 1927 (No 1406) (in Bulgarian).

<sup>13</sup> “Greekness and modernity in the same phrase? The paradoxical nature of the juxtaposition provides a good opportunity for raising a series of questions. Should we be thinking in terms of a national variation on the modern, now assimilated and local? Was this a modernity of a moderate, derivative kind? Could it have been an anti-modern modernity? The answer is both yes and no...,” Anna Kafetsi wrote in “Metamorphoses of the Modern”, p. 87.

On the same question in the Romanian artistic field Ioana VlasIU observes: “Some spirit of competition, the desire to overcome the consequences of the belated entering in the occidental artistic arena – stimulated by the international exhibitions, by the cultural contacts, still more intense – which opposed the Romanian art to the European art, explain, without doubt, the double orientation of our painting, directed to assimilation of the European artistic tradition, but also to the regain of its proper tradition.” – Ioana VlasIU, “La peinture roumaine des années’ 20 et les débats autour de la tradition”, in *Revue roumaine d’histoire de l’art*, XXI, 1984, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> The exhibition organized by “Contimporanul” included works by: Constantin Brancusi, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, Paul Klee, Hans Richter, Lajos Kassak, Marcel Janco, Victor Brauner, Max Maxy, Miliuta Petrachku, Hans Mattis-Teutsch, etc. What is striking is that artists from other Balkan countries (Bulgaria and the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom) were not invited.

In the exhibition, organized by “Zenth”, took part Robert Delaunay, Albert Gleizes, Laszlo Moholy Nagy, Alexander Archipenko, Ossip Zadkine, Vassili Kandinsky, El Lissitski, Vilko Getzan, Ossip Klek, Enriko Prampolini, Anna Balsamadjieva, Ivan Bojadjiev, Mircho Kachulev, and others.

<sup>15</sup> See: Ann Gibson, “Avant-Garde”, In: *Critical Terms for Art History*, University of Chicago, 1996, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> The economist Rumen Avramov has done research on the underdevelopment of the banking system. His conclusion about what underlay “the ligaments of the social tissue – cemented by the family links, not by the rules of a more complex formalized communication,” which is “one of the signs of cultural backwardness”, has relevance to the questions raised by my study. See: Rumen Avramov, *The Unfulfilled Conservative Manifest in Bulgaria*, in: Stoyan Bochev, *Capitalism in Bulgaria*, Sofia 1998, p. 82 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>17</sup> See: Rumen Daskalov, “Development in the Balkan Periphery Prior to World War II: Some Reflections”, in *Sudost-Forschungen*, 1998, Vol. 57, p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. “From the National Museum to the National Gallery. New Bulgarian Art Department (1892–1948)” – Exhibition catalogue, Sofia, 1996 (in Bulgarian); Dorotea Sokolova, “Art Department”, in the same catalogue; Andrey Protitch, “Fine Art in Bulgaria – The Balkan States Exhibition, Earl’s Court 1907”, pp. 20–21. The author traces the purchases made by the state for the National Museum back to their beginning in 1892.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Tatyana Dimitrova, “Between Modernism and Totalitarianism: The Projection of the State’s Cultural Policy on Bulgarian Artistic Life in the 1930s and the Early 1940s”, in *Art Studies Quarterly*, No 1, 1996, pp. 3–13 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>20</sup> The collection was inherited by the Lichevs from Count Teodor Zichi from Budapest in 1926. Thanks to the catalogue, published in 1934 in connection with the collection’s exhibition at the National Museum in Sofia, we have a most detailed account of the works included in it.

<sup>21</sup> “Georgi Lichev’s Collection”, by N. Mavrodinov, head of the Arts Department of the Museum – National Museum, Sofia, 1934, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Andrey Protitch. *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> The important role of the state as a patron of the arts was commented on with a slight feeling of envy in the foreign press: “Bulgarian art, owing to the patronage of the Bulgarian state, is being displayed abroad in a number of exhibitions in Rome, Prague, America, Paris, Berlin, Belgrade and Bucharest.” (*Proya* daily, 6 June 1940)

<sup>24</sup> As an exception, perhaps the only one, I can mention the foreign contacts established by Geo Milev in the early 1920s. Two exhibitions are associated with his project for the popularization of West European modernism in Bulgaria: the so-called “Expressionist Exhibition” of graphic prints by European artists, shown at his place, and the participation of Bulgarian artists in the Zenith exhibition in Belgrade.

<sup>25</sup> See: Charles Harisson. Modernism. In: *Critical Terms for Art History*. University of Chicago, 1996.