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Cover image: Gouache on paper. *Peacock*, 1949. Tetiana Pata (Coll: National Museum of Ukrainian Folk Decorative Art)

Sofia and Its Inhabitants: Irony and Compassion, Visual Reference, Traditional Patterns, and Non-Identities in Two Works by Nadezhda Lyahova

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SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE Ottoman Empire and the creation of independent states, the question of nation and identity has risen and been amplified several times for Bulgaria and for the neighboring Balkan region. In the second half of the nineteenth century, with the formation of national states in the Balkans, an aspiration to construct and express a national cultural identity took shape in various ideological and form-and-style variants that characterized the artistic scene for decades on end, and accompanied, competed with—or, in many cases, interacted with—an attempt to find a modern artistic language.

This attempt became more determined in the years after World War I, when, after a series of national disasters, state officials in the Balkans, as elsewhere in Europe, became passionately insistent on promoting a national vision of the state as a community. In Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Croatia (at the time part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) new artistic trends, cultural movements and artistic associations, referring to “native” / “national” art began to unfold. The Native Art movement in Bulgaria, the rise of Byzantinism and Neoclassicism in Greece, the “Romanian Art” program and the call for Balkanization in the Zenit milieu in Belgrade and Zagreb, all sought emancipation from Europe by looking for original, unimported modern artistic expressions. In Bulgaria, this tendency played a central role in its modern art.

In the 1930s in Bulgaria, the ideological desire to present a “glorious national history,” often combined with lessons from academia, brought about a recognizably nationalist orientation.

Under communism, national identity and identification were expressed in memorials, which, by the late 1970s and 1980s had become larger in scale than those built in the 1960s. One of the most important of these, the monument to unknown soldiers, titled “1300 Years of Bulgaria,” stands before the National Palace of Culture in Sofia (Fig. 1). It is a memorial to great persons and unknown heroes in an idealized, comprehensive and the awe-inspiring, centuries-long, continuous Bulgarian history—a landmark in many

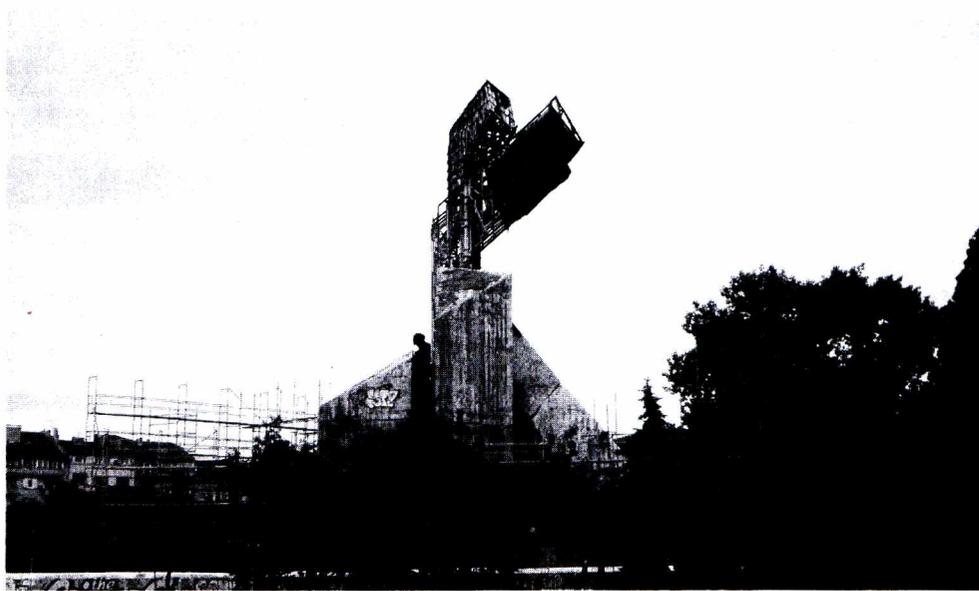
respects, including that of its present fate—it has been abandoned for many years.

In the 1960s the form and style of artistic production, such as painting, graphics, and monumental painting, as well as an interest in the history of national art, especially decorative and pre-academic art, was politically encouraged. For artists, a direct reference to folk art became a way to avoid the problem of adapting to or avoiding ideologically “correct” content and it enabled them to work relatively freely with color, texture, line, etc., as a means of expression. A multitude of works in monumental painting and the graphic arts testify to this decorative trend, with its denial of a specific environment and social neutrality.

Over the last twenty years, following the political changes that occurred after the end of communist rule, the question of national identity has often been formulated in the public and private spheres, and is of great interest to political parties and politicians. In 2002 the author Anthony D. Smith wrote: “Nationalism continues to resonate so widely, even among those who repudiate many of the political actions it legitimates, because it is a popular movement of collective freedom, and because it mobilizes people by drawing its strength from the vernacular cultures, the poetic landscapes, and the golden ages of what is felt to be an authentic ethnic past.”¹ Indeed, globalization and its visible aspects—from the sphere of everyday life to the field of ideas—is now counteracted by a new enthusiasm over local identity. It is this (reactionary) enthusiasm that is the topic of this paper, which is concerned with the use of contemporary art and contemporary artistic techniques (such as photography and performance art) as a commentary on older “national”—but also “folk”—art in the work of one contemporary Bulgarian artist.

Nadezhda Lyahova²

Nadezhda Lyahova (b. 1960) already has had a long artistic career. She graduated in stage design from the Fine Arts Academy in Sofia in 1984. Although she has not been



1 Steel and granite monument and scaffolding, with bronze figures. “1300 Years of Bulgaria.” Sofia, National Palace of Culture. 1981. Valentin Starchev (sculptor); Alexander Barov, Atanas Agura, Vladimir Romenski, and Alexander Braynov (architects). (Photo: Irina Genova, 3 July 2011)

involved in stage design, we can easily detect her professional affinity to the theater—including stage space and lighting, sound and silence—in any work of hers, from installations to video works, however different they may be.

For nearly two decades now, Lyahova has been involved in book design, especially the design of art books, catalogues and other typographic forms that accompany exhibitions, including exhibition posters and billboards that have caused her to become aware of street culture. Her artistic interest in photography and her experiments with the application of photographs to canvas and to other materials, has combined well with this type of work. This work—seemingly related to the pragmatics of generating personal income—has succeeded in altering the tastes and habits of much of the artistic milieu in Sofia. Lyahova sees her involvement in the design of catalogues and books of photographic reproductions as an opportunity and a responsibility to look closely at thousands of images of people of different characters and ages. This experience is distinctly reflected in her art work. In all of her manifestations, the artist forges relationships between classical painting, theater, contemporary art practice, and the various environments of everyday life.

In the two series of her photographs, “Sofia Lions” (2004) and “Digital Still Life” (1999–2004), Nadezhda Lyahova does not aspire toward direct suggestion. Indeed, there does not seem to be any subject matter in her images, but only observation. The themes that she records are intended to be defined by the viewer. Thus, the two series do not lend themselves easily to critical discussion.

The “Sofia Lions” Series

“Sofia Lions” is a series of seven works based on photographic images that are printed on canvas (see Figs. 3–9). It was created in 2004.³ The subjects of the images are an integral part of this city. Bulgarians are so used to them that they are hardly ever noticed. From these photos we have the sense that the residents of Sofia, like the bronze lions, always appear to be in their place—changing, yet remaining the same, for decades on end, repetitive and timeless.

The technology used by the artist—photo frames with an aesthetics of undirected, instant framing, and a digital moment, with a print on canvas which suggests the materiality of traditional painting—is meaningful, and intentionally engages us in the ambiguity between our daily experience and the concept of classicism.

The series presents typical residents and places in the capital city. It must be noted that in the modern city of Paris—the capital of the nineteenth century (according to the title of Walter Benjamin’s study⁴)—the pragmatics of urban solutions, the network of streets, boulevards and squares, are in harmony with the symbolic locations of the key places and monuments in the overall texture of the city. There is an assumption that the city is permanent, unchangeable—a rationale that lies behind the organization of any modern city in the period of nationalism.

The title of Lyahova’s series, “Sofia Lions,” is symbolically loaded. The lion is associated with Bulgarian history: it is a symbol of independence during the struggles for national liberation. The central heroic figure of these strug-



2 Granite with bronze figure.
 “Monument of the Unknown
 Soldier.” Sofia, The Basilica of St.
 Sofia (south wall). 1891. Andrey
 Nikolov (sculptor); Nikola Nikolov
 (architect). (Photo: Irina Genova, 6
 July 2011)

gles in Bulgaria was known by the name of *Levski* (the old Bulgarian linguistic form “Ĭ” (*luv*), meaning “acting like a lion.” A lion is represented next to Raina Knyaginya⁵—a Bulgarian heroine, who waves the flag of the State of Bulgaria, which was aspiring to sovereignty, a flag that she had embroidered herself. The sword and lion represented on the Bulgarian flag, often together with an olive branch, can be found in most of the allegorical images of the independent state and the Republic of modern Europe. Lions appear in important symbolic locations in Sofia, chosen to be the capital of Bulgaria in 1879, after the establishment of modern Bulgaria. In addition to the Lions’ Bridge (1889), lions are located at the front of the Court house, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Basilica of St. Sophia, where the bronze lion by the famous sculptor Andrey Nikolov (1878–1959) forms a part of the Monument to the Unknown Soldier (Fig. 2). There is a lion on a bronze shield at another famous bridge in the capital—the Eagles’ Bridge (1891), as Maria Vasileva recalls in her article on Nadezhda Lyahova’s work,⁶ noting that “A lion also stands prominently in the heart of Sofia’s coat of arms.”⁷

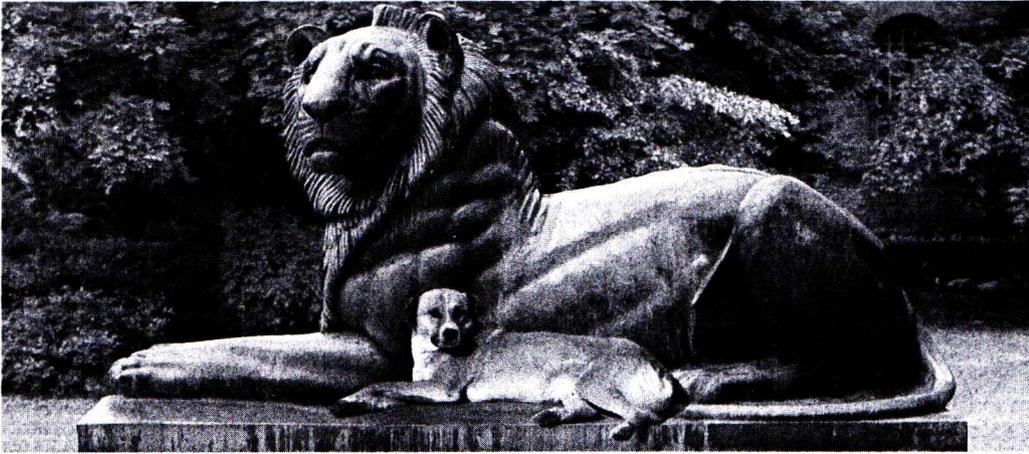
The sites photographed by Lyahova are a part of the permanent scene of Sofia: The Lions’ Bridge was the first modern bridge in this capital city. The garden before the National Theater (the City Garden) has been the heart of the capital since its creation, and many writers, actors and playwrights, as well as royal figures have appeared there before the citizens. Both of these have been the subjects of cityscapes, created by the earliest significant artist of the modern city in Bulgaria, Nikola Petrov (1881–1916).⁸

Petrov’s Monument to the Unknown Soldier is in a well-chosen location—on the site of the oldest necropolis in Sofia, in which are preserved early Christian tombs, some of

which are below the Basilica of St. Sophia, where ceremonial festivities are held on national holidays. In his article on the historical monuments erected after 1989, Nikolay Vukov points out: “...the memorials and commemorations of soldiers who died in wars, and of heroes who died in the national liberation movements, have, last but not least, the aim of overcoming the dissolving symbolic links of national unity and of finding communion through the resources of the shared past.”⁹ This common identification with impersonal suffering and sacrifice is believed to have led to the revival of the nation. Interestingly, at the end of the entry on the lion in Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant’s *Dictionnaire des symboles*, the authors remind us that “Christian tombs were decorated with lions. The lion itself is a symbol of resurrection.”¹⁰

Symbolic places “celebrate” the heroes, visualize great narratives, and bring their *topoi* into our everyday experience. In the experience of Sofia citizens, for example, such an undeniably symbolic place is the monument of the national hero Vasil Levski (1837–1873) and the National Assembly Square. This square is important because of the institution—the National Assembly—that fronts it, though few people know what Russian tsar the statue of the horse in the center of the square represents.

There have been many debates about the Monument to the Soviet Army, which have been reopened as different narratives have formed in the memories of different communities in the city. Benedict Anderson wrote about this type of memorial: “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers:” they are “saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings.”¹¹ Initially, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier was, as were other Sofia monuments,



3 Photograph on canvas.
 “Sofia Lions” series:
 “Bronze lion from the
 Tomb of the Unknown
 Soldier, with stray dog.”
 2004. Nadeshda Lyadova.
 (Collection and photo: the
 artist)

intended to appeal to an awareness of national belonging and identity with a common national history dating back to ancient times, to a history full of heroic deeds and personalities. Now official ceremonies at this monument are a new attempt, in the post-communist period, to consolidate the past around a national symbol that represents common suffering and sacrifices.

The visual comments on history, tradition, urban identity and artistic connections intertwine in the series “Sofia Lions,” as if in a noisy polyphony. Lyahova’s photograph representing the pair of the bronze lion with a stray dog at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Fig. 3) is a key to one possible interpretation of her “Sofia Lions.” On the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which is a symbolically charged figure of national identity, placed in the register of the sublime on the threshold of the Temple and in eternity, is a common, stray dog, which evokes our sympathy in the real, contemporary world. Indeed, the suggestions in Nadeshda Lyahova’s entire series “Sofia Lions” shift between two poles—the symbolic placing of national identities and the everyday misery of actual existence.

Nadeshda Lyahova seems to reverse the situation which this monument and others on sites in the city were intended to create. Rather than images of the modern city with its constructed sites, the artist shows, in the same frame, both the “high” and the “low,” the “heroic” and the “banal,” the “imagined” single but “in fact” multiple identities of her subjects. The sight of those elevated on pedestals, suggesting dignity and power, which coexist with the “lions,” who provoke sympathy and banality, is invariably dramatic. In her art, the bronze lion, cast for the eternity, and the stray dog are both irretrievably and hopelessly scattered fragments of puzzles of different designs, caught in the optics of everyday vision.

The seven works of the series are images of the present, in each of which several narratives are fragmented, with no unified will to exist in a common symbolic space. Let us combine in one the impressions from the seven images of the series “Sofia Lions” without the aid (anchorage, in Roland Barthes’ words¹²) of the title. Is there anything in common between the crowded tram stop and the intrusive poster of the folk-star (Fig. 4), the flow of heterogeneous vehicles on the Lion’s Bridge (Fig. 5), the rebec-player in front of the National Theater (Fig. 6), and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier? The common, discreet and visual suggestion, which any verbal articulation risks schematizing and simplifying, is the coexistence of fragments of a grand narrative (this might even be the story of a modern hero, the folk singer Azis) and the repetition of the timeless, seemingly laughable stock scenes and sounds of our everyday life (the rebec, the accordion). Indeed, today’s Sofia residents in the works of Nadeshda Lyahova are not heroic and recognizable. They are participants “without names”—nameless individual or group presences.

Lyahova’s series of images directs, adjusts and readjusts our view of the combination of dramatic fragmentation and simultaneity. It confirms the impossibility of translating experiences and emotional registers into the “language” of everyday life. The artist seems to continually mislead us with the impression that these images have incidentally fallen onto the lens. But I defy the fallacy of natural vision. After the insightful texts of Susan Sontag on photography, after the development of visual culture, I am certain that these images and moments have long been sought, pursued, and chosen by the artist from among many others.

What kind of identity do the street accordionist, the rebec-player, the chess-player, the tram passengers, the



4 Photograph on canvas. "Sofia Lions" series: "People at a crowded tram stop, next to a poster of the popular folk singer 'Azis'." 2004. Nadeshda Lyadova. (Collection and photo: the artist)



5 Photograph on canvas. "Sofia Lions" series: "Street traffic at the Lion's Bridge." 2004. Nadezhda Lyadova (Collection and photo: the artist)



6 Photograph on canvas. "Sofia Lions" series: "Rebec player before the fountain of the National Theater." 2004. Nadeshda Lyadova. (Collection and photo: the artist)



7 Photograph on canvas. “Sofia Lions” series: “Street musician with accordion.” 2004. Nadezhda Lyadova. (Collection and photo: the artist)

8 Photograph on canvas. “Sofia Lions” series: “Chess player.” 2004 Nadezhda Lyadova. (Collection and photo: the artist)



motorcyclist or the people on the cart experience? Are they aware of their community—as citizens of Sofia? Do they recognize the urban areas that they daily traverse and inhabit as special landmarks? Can the belonging of persons to a national or a local community, as the Sofia citizens do, confer any universal value?

Let us consider the selection of photographic frames, the opportunities for looking at them and the type of communication with the viewer that they provide. The artist limits the frames vertically, and opens them horizontally as unique friezes. All the photographs are of the exterior, but there is no expanse of sky in them. The images are close-ups, they fill the frame, and sometimes go partially beyond it (as in the case of the images of the Bridge of the Lions and the chess-player). The images are fragments within a larger space. In photography, as in painting, the artist can express choice in different ways. In Lyahova’s images, the close-ups of the figures, and

the horizontal frames which seem to press down on them, suggest a reticence, a sense of claustrophobia, which, with little effort, could be interpreted as a sense of hopelessness.

Some of the original frames were shot discreetly and the urban dwellers are unaware of the gazes of the photographer, or of the viewer. Some of the beer drinkers have their backs to us (Fig. 9), as do those waiting at the tram stop (see Fig. 4). The motorcycle rider, the people on the cart, and the taxi driver are shot in profile, focused on the traffic and the flow of pedestrians, they seem to have just entered the frame of the picture, and already in a hurry to leave it (see Fig. 5). The accordionist and the chess-player are looking at the camera / viewer. They know we are looking, but unlike those posing for a portrait painter, they are not aware that they will be transformed into a picture (Figs. 7, 8). The dog is looking in our direction too, lying in an artistic posture on the bronze pedestal (see Fig. 3).



9 Photograph on canvas. "Sofia Lions" series: "Group of men and women outside a bar, drinking beer." 2004. Nadezhda Lyadova. (Collection and photo: the artist)



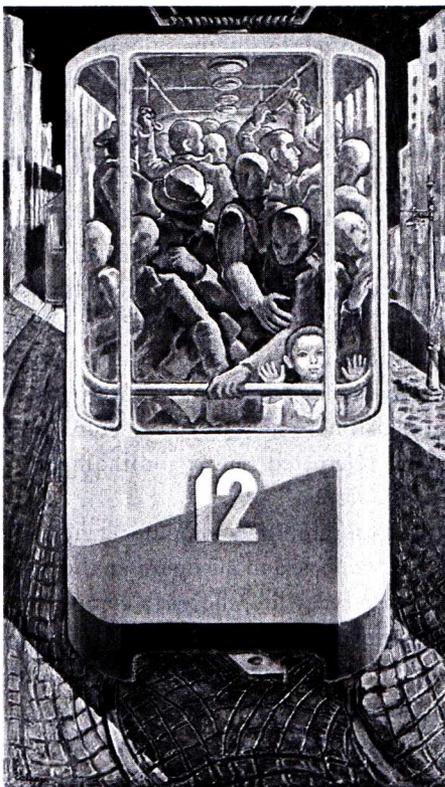
10 Oil on canvas. "Blind Rebec Player." 1929. Pencho Georgiev. (Coll.: National Art Gallery, Sofia. Photo: courtesy Sofia National Art Gallery)

In the photo of the rebec-player (see Fig. 6), he is facing the viewer, but his gaze behind his opaque glasses is unseeing, it seems to be directed elsewhere. This image in the series reminds one of the "Blind rebec-player" image from local folklore repertoire, often represented by the protagonists of the already-mentioned 1920s Bulgarian Native Art movement, such as Ivan Lazarov, Iliya Petrov, and Pencho Georgiev (Fig. 10).¹³ A rebec-player also appears in Ivan Milev's 1923 painting, "A rebec-player doesn't make a living,"¹⁴ As Anthony Smith points out: "Nations, or most of them, may be relatively recent creations, but they draw on much older ethnic motifs and symbols that have remained part of popular culture and memory. That is why the bonds of the nations, and the sentiment they evoke, are not easily eroded or dissipated."¹⁵

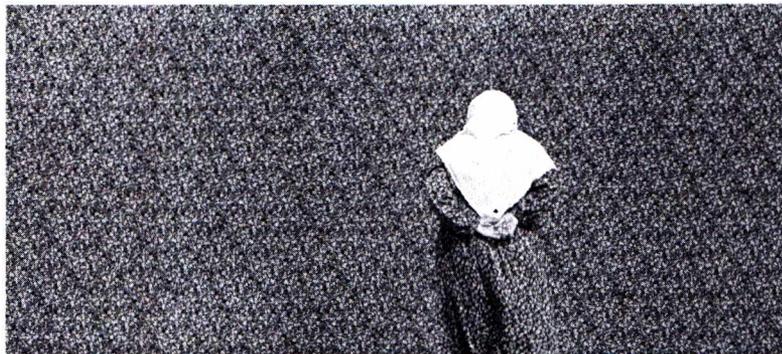
The image of the tram (see Fig. 4) is in another register—it is a landmark of modern Sofia. The first tram in the

city appeared in 1901, after the partial electrification of Sofia. Soon after, photographs of Sofia trams were printed and circulated as post cards, promoting the image of the modern city. In the first decade of the twentieth century Nikola Petrov created cityscapes with trams, a characteristic image of modernity.¹⁶ Much later, in the 1970s, Rumen Gasharov presented a painting that was emblematic, for its time: "Rush Hour" (1973), of a little yellow tram crowded with people (Fig. 11).

In these works, Lyahova stretches the ambiguity between the photograph and the painting—the moment of transformation of the not-human-made and limited-in-time frame—into a pictorial image with multiple time layers. The visual experience of everyday life is presented along with the intellectual experience of the painting. In a loose connection, it could be said that the procedure is similar to, though different from, the one that Andy Warhol used for his multiples. The artist selects images printed on the pages of daily newspapers or in advertisements intended for mass perception and impact, and then "switches" and redirects them to the field of art and to the individual dispositions of the viewers. Nadezhda Lyahova finds images that are often invisible in everyday life, and connects them discreetly with classical art that is regarded as "national," presenting them in a tense ambiguity between photography and painting.



11 Oil on canvas. “Rush Hour” / “Peak Hour.” 1979. Roumen Gasharov. (Coll.: Sofia City Art Gallery, Sofia. Photo: courtesy Sofia City Art Gallery)



12 Photograph on canvas. “Digital Still Life” series (no title). 1999–2004. Nadezhda Lyahova. (Collection and photo: the artist)



13 Photograph on canvas. “Digital Still Life” series (no title). 1999–2004. Nadezhda Lyahova. (Collection and photo: the artist)



14 Photograph on canvas. “Digital Still Life” series (no title). 1999–2004. Nadezhda Lyahova. (Collection and photo: the artist)

The “Digital Still Life” Series

The series titled “Digital Still Life” is composed of four large-format prints—the largest image is eighteen meters and includes five panels¹⁷—with images of women shot from behind, in clothes with flowery patterns that blur into decorative backgrounds composed of the same flowers as the women’s clothes (Figs. 12, 13, 14). According to Angel V. Angelov: “here the artist literally shows the meaning of ‘still life’, creating images of the endless lifelessness of flowers and feminine

silhouettes. The impact of this colorful wilderness / solitude is sickening, every touching or sentimental perception—e.g. of the flowers as beauty and pleasure—is impossible.”¹⁸ The images in “Digital Still Life” seem more closed and uncommunicative than those in “Sofia Lions” do but, in exchange, they bribe the eye with beauty.

Why has the artist called these images “still life / ‘dead nature’”? There is reason to believe that for Lyahova these



15 Oil on canvas. "Peasant Woman from Kyustendil Region." 1936. Vladimir Dimitrov—the Master. (Coll.: Sofia City Art Gallery. Photo: Courtesy Sofia City Art Gallery)

titles are important here. In still life, the center of the narrative is the symbolic role of the objects and / or the view of space. Are the images only decorative objects intended to be contemplated and admired, images outside time and history? It is appropriate to turn for references in modern art to the paintings of Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard, and to the compositions of Henri Matisse. In an exchange of artistic procedures and techniques—including repetitive prints, and photography—there is a relation to pop art and to the multiples of Andy Warhol. These images can also be connected to compositions of the type "All over" by Jackson Pollock, in which space is not decorative, but there is no perspective.

In Lyshova's large, horizontal canvases the female silhouettes appear to be pictorial slots in the smooth decorative pattern, standing out from but also merging with it. The repetitive print of the ornamental flowers has no perspective, and the silhouettes of the women, with their backs turned to the viewer, are absorbed into this impenetrable flatness. The photographer's eye has caught the women, who are a part of the everyday multitude at the big Open Market in Sofia, from behind, in an instantaneous frame.. The artist separates them, abstracts them from their usual environment and sets them in a decorative, space-less timelessness. The ambiguity between the moment of the photographic frame and the timelessness of the picture, and between the decoratively created canvas and the figures, creates tension.

According to this author, the computer-generated backgrounds compared / opposed to the figures in the photographed views from everyday life, suggest a comparison with the infinite regularity of digits (hence the title, "Digital Still Life") to the uniqueness of individual human life. The viewer is free to consider another interpretation.

"Lyahova has attained a deceptive and intimidating image, these are the Elysian fields—we are sinking in infinite uniform colour, freeing, saving ourselves—who from, if not from ourselves? The female silhouettes are seen from behind, the image size allows us 'to enter' it, but perhaps it is preferable to set the limit ourselves, the limit that the image seems to remove, and to choose—this time—the role of spectators, not of participants."—wrote A. V. Angelov.¹⁹

In her "Digital Still Life" series, Lyahova enters into a dialogue with the girls of Vladimir Dimitrov—Maystora (the Master)²⁰ who are painted among ornamental backgrounds of flowers and fruit (Fig. 15). These paintings were



16 Oil on canvas. "Lions' Bridge." 1911. Nikola Petrov. (Coll.: National Art Gallery, Sofia. Photo: courtesy Sofia National Art Gallery)

circulated in public spaces in the 1960s and the 1970s as ‘the most Bulgarian’ images. In the prints of so-called “still life” the decorative patterns remind us of cheap gingham prints with stylized flowers that seem to swell out, absorb and exhaust the environment in which the figures are situated. Maystora conceived the comparisons and the visual parallelism in his paintings as life-affirming: a woman like a rose, a woman like an apple, a woman like a poppy, etc. His images initially appear to the spectator to be aesthetic objects, rather than representations of individuals who may communicate some other pictorial meaning.

The women in Maystora’s paintings are young. They are paragons of natural beauty—the beauty of the nationally-determined, Bulgarian nature—and fit without any difficulty into the notion of national identity. Maystora equates the female faces to objects with aesthetic qualities. His images, however, mortify the objects, albeit unintentionally. And with their infinite replication / reproduction in calendars, magazines and all kinds of mass typographic products, the effect of mortification increases.

In Lyahova’s prints in the series “Digital Still Life,” we see female silhouettes from behind, women of a vague, but not young age, who are on the verge of merging with the undetermined color print of the uniform, infinitely deploying pattern. They are figures without identity. The misleading sensual pleasure of the large-format prints, aesthetically catching one’s eyes, undergoes metamorphoses, and the images achieve a suggestion of hopelessness in the space of the exhibition hall or outdoors.

Conclusion

In Lyahova’s art series “Sofia Lions” and “Digital Still-life” the visual references reveal a significant and meaningful perspective for interpretation of the works. The artist refers to both the European tradition and to a gallery of classical art for Bulgarian art images that create a perception of both national and modern identity—from the modern capital city, to pre-modern folklore images that have been recreated in modern art, to the ideal of the Bulgarian woman. Without exhausting the suggestions that her works rouse in the spectator, this aspect significantly expands the field of critical reflection, the field of interpretation. In addition to direct social implications, and group and personal (self) identification, the images of Nadezhda Lyahova evoke both irony and compassion for the human condition, with its eternal striving for the achieving of identity, for leaving traces, for the definiteness and durability of incarnation, and for Salvation as eternal hope.

TRANSLATED BY ALBENA VITANOVA

Notes

1. Anthony D. Smith. “Nationalism and modernity,” *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* (ed. Timothy O. Benson). Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The MIT Press, 2002. 80.
2. Nadezhda Lyahova first devoted herself to stage design at the Bulgarian National Television and the Dialog Theater in Sofia. About 1995 she began to produce objects and installations of hand-made paper. Along with this artistic activity, Lyahova is now involved in book design, especially the design of art books, catalogues and other typographic forms that accompany exhibitions.
Over the years she has explored various materials, selected according to the particular project in which she is engaged—paper, sheet-iron, spoons, soap, sand ice, ice cream, and sugar-floss. Recently Lyahova she began to use the camera in her constant effort to halt the passage of time. Some of her recent solo exhibitions are: “Eco Stoies” (curator Maria Vassileva; “Sklada,” 11 Benkovski Street, Sofia), 2011; Nadezhda Olet Lyahova solo exhibition (curator, Ana Vilenca, Center for Contemporary Art, Pančevo, Serbia), 2007; “The Lions of Sofia” (FABS Gallery, Warsaw, Poland), 2006; “Vanitas,” Yokohama Museum of Art, Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan), 2004; “The Endless Fairytale” (Book Art Museum, Lodz, Poland) 2000; and many others. She was the winner of the Gaudez B. Ruf Award for Advanced Artists in Bulgaria in 2009 and the Union of Bulgarian Artists’ Award for Young Artists in 1996.
3. Edition of 4. The first is owned by public collections: Sofia City Art Gallery. The “Sofia Lions” series was shown at the Goethe-Institut, Sofia (2005); the FABS Artists’ Association, Warsaw (2006); and the Central European House of Photography, Bratislava (2007).
4. Walter Benjamin. “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century / Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle.” The study was completed in 1939, and first published in volume 2 of *Das Passagen-Werk* (2 vols. 1928–1929, 1934–1940). Frankfurt-am-Man (ed. von Rolf Tiedemann), also published in 1983.
5. Raina Popgeorgieva Futekova (1856–1917), called Raina Knyaginya.
6. Maria Vasileva. “Sofia Lions,” *Interface Sofia* (bilingual, ed. Alexander Kiossev). Sofia (East–West Publishers, 2009). 250.
7. Idem.
8. Nikola Petrov (1881–1916) is one of the most talented artists of the early modern art period in Bulgaria. He created a series of urban landscape paintings, representing landmark images of Sofia in the period of transformation of the capital into a modern city. Among them are: the St. Sofia Church, Lions’ Bridge, Tsar Liberator Square, the National Theatre, Banski Square, etc. His landscapes, both urban and natural, are in the spirit of post-impressionism, also drawing on symbolism. Nikola Petrov’s life was cut short by tuberculosis during World War I. Today his works are considered classics of modern art in Bulgaria.
9. Nikolay Vukov, “Национална история в постсоциалистическа перспектива. Фрагменти от един монументален дискурс” (National History in a Post-Socialist Perspective: Fragments from a Monumental Discourse), *Български фолклор* 36, no. 2 (2010): 40–58.
10. Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles* (Paris : Editions Robert Laffont S. A. et Editions Jupiter. 1991).
11. Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York (Verso). 1991 [first edition 1983]. 9.
12. Roland Barthes in *Rhétorique de l’image* (1964), discussing the role of the linguistic message in terms of the image, wrote: “L’ancrage est la fonction la plus fréquente du message linguistique; on la retrouve communément dans la photographie de presse et la publicité.” Nadezhda Lyahova’s works are not from these visual spheres, but the artist often directs and signs with her

titles the direction of the impact that interests her. This gives me grounds to use Barthes' term *anchorage / ancrage*, when commenting on the function of the titles in Nadezhda Lyahova's series.

13. Pencho Grogiev, "The Blind Rebec-Player," 1929. Oil on canvas. Coll.: Sofia National Art Gallery; Iliya Petrov, "The Blind Rebec-Player," 1927. Oil on wood (80 x 75cm). National Art Gallery, Sofia; Iliya Petrov, "The Blind Rebec-Player," 1920s. Oil on canvas (97 x 81cm). Private collection; Ivan Lazarov, "The Blind Rebec-Player," sculpture, majolica (47 x 26 x 30 cm) 1920s. Private collection; and others.

14. Ivan Milev. "A rebec-player doesn't make a living." 1923. Tempera, paper, 20.5 x 20 cm, private collection.

15. Smith, article quoted in note 2 above, p. 80.

16. Among them are: "Sofia in Winter" (1907), oil on canvas (63 x 119 cm), private collection; "Lions' Bridge" (1911), oil on canvas (68 x 128 cm), National Art Gallery, Sofia; "Tsar Osoboditel (Liberator) Boulevard" (1911–1913), oil on canvas (30 x 50 cm), private collection.

17. "Digital Still Life" (1999/2004), print on canvas. The series consists of four parts, each 135 x 300 cm; there is an edition of 4 copies. When the series was presented at the Yokohama Museum of Art, Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan, 2004, one of the compositions was 18 m long, with a row of five additional prints, with only the flowery pattern, unfolding along the horizontal wall of the gallery. The work was also shown in the following exhibitions: 2002—"Terrestrials," Department of Museum of Technology, Warsaw; 2005—"Vanitas," Sofia Art Gallery, Sofia; 2005—Third symposium for contemporary art, Art Gallery, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria; 2005—Fine Art Collection, Embassy of the U.S. in Bulgaria, Sofia Art Gallery; 2005—Association Espace Gibert, Lezignan-Corbieres, France; 2005—"Donumenta," Regensburg, Germany; 2006—Kunstlerhaus, Vienna; 2007—Helmut Junger Gallery, Germany; 2005—Gallery for Contempo-

rary Art, Panchevo, Serbia. In Regensburg the four printings of the series, now on vinyl and much larger than the usual size, were exhibited outdoors, in the urban spaces. Separate prints are owned by: Sofia City Art Gallery; Art Gallery, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria; Gallery for Contemporary Art, Panchevo, Serbia; Fine Art Collection, Embassy of the United States, Sofia.

18. Angel V. Angelov, "Нарцис: отражение и смърт" (Narcissus: reflection and death), Историчност на визуалния образ (Historicity of the visual image). Sofia. 2008. 162.

19. Idem.

20. Vladimir Dimitrov Maystora / the Master (1882–1960) was a central figure in the "Native Art" movement in Bulgaria. While still a student at the Academy he was nicknamed "the Master" by his fellow students because of his exceptional ability and talent. While he was a student he visited the cities of Odessa, Kiev, Moscow, Saint Petersburg in Russia and Venice, Florence, Naples, and Rome in Italy. He traveled to Paris, London, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, and Munich. He worked as a teacher after the wars. He created drawings, watercolors, and oil paintings within the genres of landscape, portrait, and figural composition painting, using intense colors and revealing his growing interest in decorative aspects. He went on to have another visit to European culture centers and in 1924 he traveled to New York. He settled in the village of Shishkovtsi, Kyustendil District. During the 1920s the master's art drew on the local art traditions, perceived as the national traditions, as well as on styles in western European modern painting such as Art Nouveau / Secession and Expressionism. His later works are considered to have attained unity and harmony between man/woman and nature, more specifically between typical Bulgarian characters and Bulgarian nature. The images of adolescent girls, brides and mothers, having been repeatedly reproduced for decades, are considered to be the best examples of Bulgarian national style in modern times.