

# SARIEV CONTEMPORARY

**SARIEV Contemporary, Plovdiv**

presents:

**Stefan Nikolaev**

I WALK A LABYRINTH WHICH IS A STRAIGHT LINE

solo show

the exhibition will be held at SARIEV Contemporary and St. Joseph Church, Plovdiv

**19 May – 30 June 2017**

Opening: 19 May 2017

18:00 – opening at SARIEV Contemporary in the presence of the artist

18:50 – walking tour – 9 min.

19:00 – opening of the second part of the exhibition at Saint Joseph Church

20:00 – opening of FLUCA – austrian cultural container (in front of SARIEV Contemporary)

SARIEV Contemporary is pleased to present the solo show *I Walk a Labyrinth Which is a Straight Line* by Stefan Nikolaev. The exhibition will be presented in two spaces in Plovdiv – the white cube of SARIEV Contemporary on 40 Otets Paisiy Str. and the Catholic Church from the 19th century St. Joseph<sup>1</sup>. This will be the first exhibition in the history of the St. Joseph Church, which will set the beginning of the collaboration between SARIEV Contemporary and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sofia and Plovdiv. The artist Stefan Nikolaev will be present for the opening and exhibition tour.

*Exhibition text by art critique Svetlana Kuyumdzieva*

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*"To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being, who from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing." - Marcel Duchamp, The Creative Act, 1957*

The most harrowing and pernicious of all labyrinths, according to Borges, is the one in which you don't wonder in corridors, passages and tunnels, but you pass through a single rigid straight line. Stefan Nikolaev has taken on such, unusual for him, dramatic route, but through out all of it he stares at the rear-view mirror in which he sees part of himself and everything that has passed - events, works, memories, dreams. His line of movement is just as straight and direct as the associative links between marble and sculpture, the painting and the frame, the reproduction and the original, the space and the function of the object. The paradoxes and the traps of the labyrinth appear with each shift of the gaze; ahead of its supposed exit or back to the path that one has already passed.

His journey appears very much like a retrospective, with works from the past nearly 15 years or even as an introspective self-analysis in which the author systematically arranges his experience in periods, titles, and percentages. And if Duchamp claims that the artist is immune to such analysis because his work is purely intuitive, then Stefan Nikolaev does the exact opposite, disjoining even his most intuitive and subconscious experiences into percentage diagrams. The contradictions, the verbal game, the quoting and the constant reconciliation with the past are not means unknown to the arts, but here, they are rather a part of the navigation. If the "father of the ready-made" takes away the function of the object - a bottle rack, Nikolaev returns it as an acting candelabrum. Through self-contradiction, he repeatedly overturns his concepts from image to object, to text, and to image again, and then reverses them again. His inscription of the mystical insight about his way through the labyrinth is also shining in the back. In contrast to his unyielding linearity he has placed the whole hedonistic abundance of luxury, splendor and joy typical for his art.

*Come to Where the Flavor is* (2004) may look like the end of the journey, but it is actually the beginning and one of the first works of a whole series "dimmed in tobacco smoke", produced by Stefan Nikolaev.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Catholic Church of St. Joseph is one of the little known temples in Plovdiv. Its history is connected to the Catholic college for girls "St. Joseph", created by the Josephine sisters, one of the most prominent representatives of the French Catholic missionaries in the 19th century. The college was established in 1899, in the same year St. Joseph Church opened its doors. The church was built with the assistance of the Sofia-Plovdiv Bishop Roberto Menini and its construction was supported by the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph I. Until 1948, when the building of the college was nationalized, it raised generations of girls in a European educational model and the virtues of the faith. The church is under the management of the Sofia-Plovdiv Diocese of the Catholic Church.*

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The luxury brand cigarette box, monumentalized and turned into a tombstone, is one of the most famous personal uses of the ready-made strategy applied by the artist.

*After Me* (2017) (working title) is a replica of a work from the same period, following the same tobacco theme in Nikolaev's art. However, he now paints for the first time in a decade, re-creating the Poster Posterity poster from 2003 as a painting. The status of the work has been transformed, first from the reverse of reproduction to original, which is actually rather a pictorial reproduction of the original print, and then from a picture to a sculptural object that has become so only because of the burnt picture frame of brass. Equally paradoxical is the inscription '*I walk a labyrinth which is a straight line*', which literally materializes and defends the name of the exhibition in gold and in the dizzying curves of the neon. The statement has expanded to a static and demanding object, again in contradiction with its own content, with the transience of the words and the movement.

The most romantic of all objects placed on the line is the geometric *Dreamworks* (2017) - a journal of dreams, insomnia, visions, fantasies, and nightmares. The chart presents a certain proportion of the time spent in such experiences, but as personal as it is, it's shared with everyone for his own emotional and life balance. Or it is literally and brutally consumed – in the form of chocolate. *Nightmares* (2017) is the dark half of this work and the most logical feedback to the beginning, where the taste is ... (*Come Where the Flavor is*)

If we subscribe to the old mathematical thesis that every straight line is actually an arc of an infinite circle, then the path through this maze probably does lead to its beginning. In the exhibition, however, this mystery is open for interpretation, the beginning and the end are divided into two spaces a few steps away - SARIEV Contemporary gallery and the almost unknown for the natives of the city Catholic church St. Joseph in Plovdiv, where the gallery presents an exhibition for the first time. Here begins or ends (it is up to you to decide) the journey through the labyrinth with a familiar clerical gesture that has acquired contradictory performativity.

This is perhaps the most literary exhibition of Stefan Nikolaev, infinitely pure in form, but filled with text, symbols and references - from the Borges' kings, detectives and heroes, the Greek philosophers, the mythic centaurs, Alice, the medieval mysteries of Umberto Eco, the Kafkaesque obsession of the ball that rolls back and forth in the Chinese labyrinth to the Freudian interpretation of dreams, Jung and the Bible. Among all this, from the traditional images of doom, danger, insecurity and entrapments, the labyrinth becomes the most trusted art archetype and a safe haven for the artist.

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**Stefan Nikolaev** (b. 1970 in Sofia, Bulgaria, based in Paris and Sofia) began his studies at the Fine Arts High School in his native city (1983-1988), followed by a course at the Paris School of Fine Arts (1989-1994) and Winchester School of Art in England (1992). There have been many solo shows of his work, including *Bronze, sweat and tears, Michel Rein, Brussels* (2016); *Business, Model, Sculpture, SARIEV Contemporary, Plovdiv* (2015); *If Things Are Not As You Wish, Wish Them As They Are, Galerie Michel Rein, Paris* (2013); *Half-Life in SARIEV Contemporary, Plovdiv* (2013); *Holy Spirit Rain Down, at Les Eglises contemporary art center, Chelles, France* (2010). His work has also been shown in a large number of group shows in France, Belgium, Bulgaria, etc. He has taken part in the Lyon Biennial (2007) and presented Bulgaria in the Venice Biennial (2007, together with Ivan Moudov and Pravdoliub Ivanov), as well as the biennials at Gwangju, Korea and Cetinje, Montenegro (2004). His work has also been shown at various art fairs: ArtBasel, FIAC, The Armory Show, ARCO. For his work for the 4th Cetinje Biennial, Stefan Nikolaev was awarded the UNESCO art prize. SARIEV Contemporary represents Nikolaev since 2013 and has presented his work at Art Cologne, ViennaFair, Istanbul Contemporary and ArtInternational Istanbul.

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Opening hours of the exhibition:

SARIEV Contemporary gallery – 40 Otets Paisiy Str.

Monday till Friday from 10 am to 18:30 pm, on Saturday and Sunday by appointment.

Saint Joseph Church – Dr. GM Dimitrov Str. 11B

Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 11 am to 19 pm.