UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW
Winchester School of Art

How to Create an Ideal Past: Continuities from the Communist Era in the Relationship between Abstract and Figurative Painting in Post-Communist Bulgaria

by

Nina Pancheva-Kirkova

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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HOW TO CREATE AN IDEAL PAST: CONTINUITIES FROM THE COMMUNIST ERA IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABSTRACT AND FIGURATIVE PAINTING IN POST-COMMUNIST BULGARIA

By engaging with 'realism' in the context of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria, a notion that inhabits the space in between fine art, ideology and art history, this practice-based research offers new insight into the examination of continuities between fine art during Communism and post-Communism, exploring the relationship between the abstract and the figurative and their functioning both within, and exceeding, the pictorial space of painting.

The two main research questions that inform the studio work and underpin this study have been: How can art practice explore the official representations of Socialist Realism in post-Communist Bulgaria in the axis between photography and painting? How can this process affect an understanding of the relationship between abstract and figurative painting within the context of 'realism' of Socialist Realism and contemporary fine art in the country? By focusing on these research questions, this study conceptualises the relationship between the abstract and the figurative in the context of Socialist Realism in fine art in Bulgaria and its official representations after the collapse of the Communist regime. This relationship marked one of the central oppositions in fine art during the Communist era in the country, often constituting a dividing line between what was considered 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' art.

This study is concerned with the differences in the definitions of 'realism' within Socialist Realism in Bulgaria over the years, differences which may be considered as ruptures in its development. Yet it acknowledges these differences within the framework imposed by the Communist ideology. The latter remained unchangeable, yet had a determining impact on the development of fine art throughout the Communist period. Furthermore, the study explores how fragments of this framework are transferred into the post-Communist period, and how they function in state-funded institutional representations of Socialist Realist works and in examples of former 'official' artists' works, as well as in the readings of Socialist Realism after the fall of the Communist regime, readings which fluctuate between the oppositions of 'official or unofficial' art, praise or disavowal of Socialist Realism. In order to explore both the ruptures and the continuities, the research looks at Socialist Realism and its specificities in Bulgaria in relation to Socialist Realism in fine art in the Soviet Union and other post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe. The relationship between the abstract and the figurative is situated within this context and explored through a series of transformations of photographic sources into paintings. These transformations are performed by my practice, engaging with the photographic sources' production, dissemination and display in relation to 'realism' in Socialist Realism.

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3. Painting “The Island of Utopia”
4. Painting “How to Create an Ideal Past”
5. Installation “How to Create an Ideal Past”
6. Installation “Preserved Memories”
7. Installation “How to Create an Ideal Past 2”

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Nina Pancheva-Kirkova

declare that the thesis entitled

"How to Create an Ideal Past: Continuities from The Communist Era in Post-Communist Bulgaria in the Relationship between Abstract and Figurative Painting"

and the work presented in the thesis are my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:

    - "Between Propaganda and Cultural Diplomacy: Nostalgia towards Socialist Realism in Post-Communist Bulgaria", in: Art as Cultural Diplomacy: European Perspectives, 2014, ed. by Cassandra Sciortino, Cambridge Scholars Press;

    - "Fragments of a Past: Socialist Realist Images in a Post-Communist Situation", in: Behind the Eyes. Making Pictures, 2013, ed. by Beth Harland, London: RGAP & Camberwell;

Signed:

Date: 12.10.2015

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1. Introduction

Everything must change so that everything can stay the same.

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

The starting point of this research was my series of paintings "Fragments of a Past" (10 paintings, acrylic on canvas, sizes vary between 30 x 30 cm and 30 x 45 cm, fig. 1). A representation of a detail from an industrial plant as captured by a photograph is depicted on a white background in the first painting from this series (fig. 2). The factory is obviously working as we can see smoke coming out of the chimneys: yet we cannot notice any people in the painting. This observation changes the perception of the building which starts to look self-sufficient. The colours suggest that the photographic source was produced a long time ago. Indeed, the painting's development began with looking at an old black and white photograph - from the Communist[1] era (fig. 3). Date and author are unknown. It appears to be one of the seemingly documentary-style photographs taken during Communism to

1 This study uses the term 'Communist' era instead of 'totalitarian' era. The implication of the term 'totalitarian', namely that the Communist regime had achieved 'total' control in the country, is questioned here as it does not seem to contribute to the examination of this period. Rather, this implication appears to 'close' the discussions by hindering the questions 'to what extent did the Communist regime achieve homogeneity and total impact?'; and 'to what extent the relationship between fine art, ideology, political practice and art institutions remained unchanged?' among others.

Fig. 1 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"Fragments of a Past",* acrylic on canvas, sizes vary between 30 x 30 cm and 30 x 45 cm

'display facts'. But not quite. David Hockney says that "the best use for photography …is photographing other pictures. It is the only time it can be true to its medium, in the sense that it's real" (1981, p. 8). So how 'true' and 'real' is the old photograph? According to the postulates of the Communist ideology, economics is the base of any society; consequently the represented industrial building could be an architectural embodiment of ideological success. Despite this, the colours and lack of people in the photograph the building resembles a monument more than a factory. It does not tell a story about a successful industry irrespective of the photographer's intentions. The rigid composition, flat sky and detachment of the architectural structure reference Bernd and Hilla Becher's typologies. The typologies – grids of black and white photographs of industrial buildings in East Germany - were produced in a systematic approach that included the neutral lightning of an overcast day and repeated compositional decisions. The latter encompassed a rigorous frontality of the buildings and a symmetrical composition, both evoking the simplicity of diagrams and the timelessness of monuments.

Having turned a factory into a memorial of ideological illusions of Communism, this photograph suggests an alternative view of the dominant, ideologically defined 'realistic' one. Through an act of 're-seeing' details from it and transforming it into a painting, the photograph is detached from its claims to mimic the reality. My painting does not try to copy or describe the photograph. "In front of a photograph, the feeling of 'denotation', or, if one prefers, of analogical plenitude, is so great that the description of a photograph is literally impossible" (Barthes, 1977, p. 18). Rather, by looking at its formal characteristics in relation to the contexts of its production and distribution, it endeavours to explore how they interact with and impact on each other.

In the process of developing the series, each painting has led to the differentiation of new relationships between the photographic representation of the past and its new, post-Communist context - and consequently to a new painting. The initial relations between a public space (the factory) and a private one (a house) have been made more differentiated by adding images of new spaces, both private and public. Fragments of the Communist party's headquarters, the national bank of Bulgaria, Socialist Realist monuments and factories are juxtaposed to details of houses and blocks of flats. Situated between the timeframes of Communism and post-Communism, the meanings these photographs produce emerge in the thin and nebulous constantly changing boundaries between the institutionalised notions of the past, the formal features of the photographs and the subjects they depict.

Drawing on David Kaplan's model of analysis of art based on the relationship between pictures and what they are of, Charles Harrison offers an approach for exploring realism in visual representation as an inquiry into generative conditions as opposed to iconicity. According to Harrison and the other artists who founded the group "Art and Language", the question of what a picture is of cannot be addressed without an inquiry about its genesis

Fig. 2 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, from the series *"Fragments of a Past",* acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 cm, 2011

(2001, p. 142). The genesis of a picture is recognised as a more powerfully explanatory concept than resemblance is. This series of paintings and consequently this study adopt an approach which looks at both resemblance and genesis of the photographic sources. Iconic and genetic connections to the initial photographic images are explored as interrelated. In my series, "Fragments of a Past", these connections are to be found within the ways in which the paintings treat the photographic sources. By re-contextualising details from photographs produced during the Communist era and distributed through mass media both before and after the fall of the Communist regime, the series identified important procedures that have been developed further in my studio practice later on in this research project, such as acknowledgment of the contexts of production, dissemination and display of the photographic sources and accordingly of Socialist Realist works; and examination of the complex interactions between the abstract and the figurative components in my works and their functions between the source images and the debates on Socialist Realism, in which they are situated.

The details in my paintings from the series "Fragments of a Past" resemble torn pieces of photographs. The completeness of the depiction is interrupted, which guides the viewer's attention to the missing 'entity' and how it could be reconstructed. The figurative elements themselves do not give an explicit answer. Yet another property of the works draws the viewer's attention when looking at the paintings from a distance – the pieces of torn photographs, depicted on the canvasses' surfaces, appear as they would fit and this could reconstitute the integrity of the representation. This observation leads to another concern; namely, would it be possible to restore an 'integral' image of the pieces from the past? In other words, to what extent could our knowledge on the recent past and Socialist Realism be coherent? Or authentic? And how does this 'authenticity' connect to 'realism' in Socialist Realism? This series does not suggest a definite integral image. The latter could only be attained by the viewer; i. e., it becomes the result of the process of how the paintings are perceived.

The torn pieces are depicted on a white background. In this series the relationship between the abstract and the figurative emerged as central; consequently it became central for this study. The abstract and figurative elements function cohere in my paintings in order to explore the imagery of Socialist Realism and its representations after the collapse of the Communist regime. In this 'dedramatised' pictorial space the figurative elements bear connection to both the initial objects photographed and to their photographic representations. The abstract elements, on the other hand, maintain a two-dimensional space. This space functions on two levels. On the first level it draws attention to the fact that we are not looking at pictures that endeavour to create an illusion of a three-dimensional and accordingly - a 'real' space. Rather, we are aware that we perceive a constructed picture (a painting) which itself engages with another constructed picture (a photograph). This shift of attention is developed further in my practice as an approach that supports the exploration of the relationship between the abstract and the figurative.

In the examination of this series new questions arise: how are these photographic representations of public and private spaces, produced in the Communist era, depicted in the paintings, interpreted in a democratic context? To what extent could these photographs be defined as 'realistic'? How does the relationship between the abstract and the figurative in these paintings connect to 'realism' in Socialist Realism and accordingly to the exploration of continuity between fine art during the Communist regime and after its collapse? These questions additionally underpin the research project and influence its development and scope.

1. 1. Main research questions and aims

By engaging with 'realism' in the context of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria, a notion that inhabits the space in between fine art, ideology and art history, this study aims to contribute to the examination of continuity between Communism and post-Communism with new ways of exploring the relationship between the abstract and the figurative and their functioning both within, and exceeding, the pictorial space of painting. The two main research questions that inform the studio work and underpin this study have been: How can art practice explore the official representations of Socialist Realism in post-Communist Bulgaria in the axis between photography and painting? How can this process affect an understanding of the relationships between abstract and figurative painting within the context of 'realism' of Socialist Realism and contemporary fine art in the country? These questions remained the core of the research throughout the whole project, from which the other questions extended and expanded out. By focusing on these research questions, this practice-based research offers new ways for conceptualising the relationship between the abstract and the figurative in the context of Socialist Realism in fine art in Bulgaria and its official representations after the collapse of Communism. This relationship marked one of the central oppositions in fine art during the Communist era in the country, often constituting a dividing line between what was considered 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' art.

This study is concerned with the differences in the definitions of 'realism' within Socialist Realism in Bulgaria over the years, differences which may be considered as ruptures in its development. Yet it acknowledges these differences within the framework imposed by the Communist ideology. The latter remained unchangeable and had a determining impact on the development of fine art throughout the Communist period. Furthermore, the study explores how fragments of this framework are transferred into the post-Communist period, and how they function in state-funded institutional representations of Socialist Realist works and in examples of former 'official' artists' works. In this sense the study argues that there is an interrupted succession between the two periods. In order to explore both the ruptures and the continuities, the research looks at Socialist Realism and its specificities in Bulgaria in relation to Socialist Realism in fine art in the Soviet Union and other post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe. The relationship between the abstract and the figurative is situated within this context and explored through a series of transformations

of photographic sources into paintings. In this way it questions the opposition between 'form' and 'content' developed in Socialist Realism as one that reduces the construction and analysis of the works under scrutiny.

Two types of photographic sources are explored in my practice. The first one consists of photographs produced during the Communist period as part of a party and state-funded direction to depict the progressive development of the Communist society. One matter that requires specific attention in relation to this type of photograph is the relationship between the objects they depict and assumptions about the processes of their production, both being considered here as equally important in the analysis of the photographs. These photographs were not produced as aesthetic objects; their production was the result of an ideologically outlined strategy, developed and conducted by the Communist party and its apparatus. Photography was mobilised as "folk, progressive, realistic art" (Boev, 2000, p. 11), "a powerful ideological weapon in the struggle for political education and visual mass agitation and propaganda"[2] (Boev, 2000, p. 11). The adjectives 'folk', 'progressive' and 'realistic' align with the Communist ideology in three of its main aspects. 'Folk' correlates to the importance attained by the working class, the 'people', understood as the driving force of the class struggle. Marx's (1976) belief in historical progress - the belief that human history unfolds according to a distinct series of historical stages - was adopted by the Communist ideology. Thus the adjective 'progressive' attached to photography would assume acknowledgment of this progress and produce photographs which reflect it. 'Realistic' and its implications are examined further in this study, placed here in the ambivalence between 'reflecting reality' and 'constructing' it. The photographs provide a glimpse into this carefully controlled strategy to reach the mass audience. On the other hand, the photographs' consumption has been explored here as performed in the post-Communist era, in different state and private institutional contexts, as well as at the individual level. By looking at these strategies, this study explores the construction of the photographs in relation to their claim to represent an 'authentic' image of 'reality'.

The second type of photographic source is produced after the fall of the Communist regime and captures selected Socialist Realist works in their post-Communist existence. These photographs focus on the official representations of Socialist Realism articulated by the institutional context of the display of these works. The objects captured in this type of photographs and their production span the Communist and post-Communist periods, engaging with 'realism' in Socialist Realism on a new level – in the Socialist Realist works in their claim for 'truthfulness'. The selected Socialist Realist works are placed in an institutional context which outlines a state-supported framework of guided readings. The strategies of display have been regarded here as interrupting the flow of associations, which the works provoke, endeavouring to confine and reduce them. These constraints have become one of the main foci of this study as they are regarded here as transferring fragments from the Communist past into the 'present'. In both types of photograph the

2 This and all Bulgarian texts in the thesis are my translation.

photographic mediation adds new aspects to the development of my practice. The latter engages with these photographic sources as already-constructed pictures which embody the claims for 'truthfulness' and the frameworks of their guided interpretations.

The outcome of this research relates to both paintings and installations. My paintings are produced to be perceived in series. The juxtapositions between them open up the space for new associations and connections between the elements to be discovered by the viewer. My installations also evolve from and around paintings. They function as to provide particular spaces for perceiving the paintings, thus expanding their pictorial space. The figurative elements 're-see' fragments from the selected photographic sources, and the depiction of these elements proved to be useful for exploring 'realism' in Socialist Realism as the latter employs the concrete depiction of the 'reality' as its fundamental feature. The fragments retain their connection to the initial source images – the scenes remain recognisable and resemble the initial ones. Yet they do not endeavour to copy the Socialist Realist works. They also focus on the formal characteristics of the photographs, drawing on their faded colours and surface of the photographic paper as signs of their existence over the years, in-between the moments of 'then' – i. e. of their production, and 'now' – i.e. the moment of their perception. These fragments are re-contextualised in the paintings. In this process my studio practice looks at their construction and the relationships between their particular 'parts' and 'integrity'.

Each series of works unfolds in exploring different aspects of the relationship between abstract and figurative components. In some series (for instance "Details of Socialist Realism", "Fragments of a Past", "How to Create an Ideal Past 1") the figurative elements are placed on white background. In the installation "Preserved Memories" the figurative elements are drawn on paper and then torn into pieces. Exhibited in jars, the abstract elements are constituted by the empty space *between* and *in* the jars. These juxtapositions are supported both in the theoretical findings and the decisions provoked by the process of 'making'. As Engels-Schwarzpaul asserts, "a creative work (written, designed, made, performed) will exceed the already known criteria and rules" (2008). Thus developing my studio practice involves an interplay between theory and practice, between the languages of critical thinking, and thinking through 'making'.

In juxtaposing figurative and abstract elements my paintings constitute a space of 'illusion' which functions together with a two-dimensional space. Yet my studio practice attempts to avoid any form of fiction; rather it critically engages with the representations of the Communist past that constitute continuity between the two periods. In a discussion held in 2012, Hal Foster pointed out some of the dangers that emerge from the reliance of art practice on the fictive. According to him the latter often does not acknowledge its fictiveness and thus it may lose its ability to demystify and itself turn into a 'myth' (as understood by Barthes) (2015). Departing here from these words, my practice endeavours to remain conscious about its own 'mask'; by moving away from fiction, it seeks to direct

the viewer's attention to the strategies of representations of the past performed by Socialist Realist works, thus creating a distance between the viewer and the works that obstructs experiencing works as 'natural' objects. My practice does not attempt to create narratives on the past but rather to critically explore the already existing ones, which are embodied in the pictures from the Communist era, in their modes of production, display and consumption.

1. 2. Background of the research

The relationship between the abstract and the figurative has its importance in a wide context, extending its role to the debates in the context of the Cold War, in particular the debate about Socialist Realism and American abstract art. The importance of exploring the specific development of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria[3], in the context of this debate, ensues from its specific relationship to the Soviet Socialist Realism which was imposed directly by Moscow in the first years after the revolution, but also from its particular deviations from the Soviet directives. This specific national development indicates the existence of certain cultural identities, which were not erased by the Universalist Soviet social experiment, as maintained by Boris Groys (2008, p. 156). Therefore, special attention in this study is given to a trend in fine art which occurred in the '70s in Bulgaria. This tendency deviates from the postulates of the Communist ideology and its proclaimed internationalism in particular and constitutes an example of Socialist Realism which draws on a form of nationalism by focusing on historical scenes of the nation's recent and distant past. To what extent these examples deviate from the directives of the Communist ideology embodied in Socialist Realism is one of the questions which this study examines.

Another tendency which did not follow the strict postulates of Socialist Realism developed in the '70s and '80s, most likely under the impact of the first one. According to Getova (1988) it grew widespread in the country. Examples of this tendency could be found mostly in painting and graphics. These works combine figurative elements representing scenes from different time periods with abstract backgrounds. They employ a multiple-viewpoint perspective which itself draws away from the requirements of the 'realistic' representation and the linear perspective which Socialist Realism adopts. Depiction of 'pure' abstract forms could also be found in examples from the '70s and the '80s. According to Svilen Stefanov it could be argued that some artists living during this period, for instance Nikolay Maystorov, Lubomir Savinov, Petar Popov, Georgi Baev and Vanko Urumov, were engaged, to a greater or lesser degree, with visual and conceptual approaches that reference Expressionism in Germany (Stefanov, 2003). In some examples the reference is quite direct. In 1979, before leaving the country, Doychin Rusev dedicates one of his works to the "New Wild" movement in Germany which, in his words, was "to mark the occasion of their appearance in Bulgaria"

3 The question whether the term 'Socialist Realism in Bulgaria' is more appropriate than the term 'Bulgarian Socialist Realism' appears relevant here. The former is used in this study as the term 'Bulgarian Socialist Realism' would suggest close affiliation of Socialist Realism to nationality. Such assertion would not take into account the proximity between Socialist Realism in Bulgaria and in the Soviet Union, a proximity that was maintained throughout the Communist period despite particular differences, discussed in this thesis.

(quoted by Stefanov, 2003). Using timber, the artist writes on the snow "New fauve" and then paints around it by splashing and pouring paint.

One of the emblematic examples of an artist who produced abstract works without any figurative elements during Communism was Ivan Georgiev[4]. He did not to follow the rules of Socialist Realism; instead his work indirectly opposed the official canon of fine art production, consumption and distribution. After a rejection of one of his works, while being a student at the National Art Academy, the artist chose not to show his paintings at exhibitions and kept his promise until the end of his life in 1991. He preferred "a complete non-participation in a totally juried, managed, caressed and encouraged art" (Iliev, 2008, p. 1). "He did not want his art to be judged by hanging-committees because he distrusted 'the authorities' of the time (both before and after the fall of Communism)" (Shapkarov, 2005). The abstract elements in his works could be derived by a subjective willingness for self-expression; yet in the context of the Communist regime they appear to be functioning in a different way - as an alternative, a form of rebellion against the rules of Socialist Realism. This form of resistance should be distinguished from revolt as suggested by Michel Foucault – the impulse by which a single individual or group of people says "I will no longer obey" and throws the risk of their life in the face of an authority they consider unjust, an impulse that "interrupts the flow of history and its long chain of reasons" (Foucault, 2002, p. 449). In the context of the sensation that Communism will never end, Georgiev's rebellion, developed in his work, more resembles an existentialist rebellion as described by Albert Camus – an action without planned goal.

After the collapse of the Communist regime, Georgiev chose not to look back. Communism and Socialist Realism do not exist in his paintings. None of his paintings is concerned with the subjects or aesthetic approaches of Socialist Realism. Thereby the artist changes the official and dominant art history and suggests another, alternative one. In this 'personal art history' Socialist Realism is replaced by strivings to unfold new realities within painting itself, developed in the constant exploring of colours and abstract shapes, and their interrelations. In his book "From Art to Politics" Murray Edelman suggests that art creates new realities and worlds; works of art are the medium through which new meanings

4 Georgiev's work and his choice not to take part in any organised artistic activities relate to the concern of the underground art-world in the country during Communism and the question why there were not any in particular. In her article "Tracing Back", Boubnova claims that "it is an incredibly difficult task to speak of alternative or underground artistic activities in Bulgaria prior to 1984-85" (2000, p. 153). Furthermore, the question why there were no underground movements in Bulgaria during Communism relates directly to the situation after 1989 and the fragmentation of the contemporary art-world. This question exceeds the scope of this research. However, two hypotheses deserve to be mentioned here as they could contribute to new hypotheses as to why there are no organised artistic groups – alternatives to the official ones after 1989. The first hypothesis concerns the atmosphere of constant suspicion in the country. This atmosphere, as suggested by Georgi Markov, was ubiquitous. The author describes examples of community meetings (students or workers gathering) that agents of the State Security took part in. And as their presence was always unconfirmed, but probable, gradually the suspicion became so all-embracing that creating a professional or artistic group became impossible (Markov, 1990).

The anticipation that Communism would last forever could be another possible explanation of artists' inability to organise underground art movements. It is pointed out, by Markov again, that the rigid and total ideological rules of Communism affirmed the sensation that the regime would never end (Markov, 1990). Therefore underground movements become inconceivable and useless. Furthermore, the control over the artists was almost total, facilitated by the small territory of the country.

emerge. “People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures, and images” (1995, p. 7). In the pictorial spaces of Georgiev’s paintings, a new reality is created, where the epistemological reality is replaced by another one, as arbitrary as the former.

The existence of these examples of abstract works in the ’70s and ’80s and the differences of the adopted approaches signify the extent to which the art-world of the Communist era in the country could not be explored as homogeneous. Likewise, variations at different time periods should be considered both in the definitions of Socialist Realism and the development of fine art. Here new questions arise; namely, how does the abstract operate in the context of the ideological framework of Communism, and later in the context of post-Communism? According to Stefanov, in the ’80s, in the intensity from the whiff of the perestroika political climate, “one of the attractive points of possible oppositions appeared to be ‘the purity’ of abstract art. In this period many young artists at the National Art Academy disputed their professors [about abstract art]” (Stefanov, 2003). Yet, in a very short time “the Bulgarian art experienced this partial annihilation of the figurative. And also in a very short time abstract painting ceased to be perceived as an alternative” (Stefanov, 2003). This assertion resonates with the main concerns addressed in this study; namely, can my practice, by engaging with the potential of abstract elements, constitute an alternative to Socialist Realism and its official representations and, if so, how?

The direct interaction between fine art and ideology during Communism suggests that a study devoted to this period should not separate these two areas of research and should consider their close relationship. Thus the examination of the abstract and the figurative in this study is situated in the institutional and ideological contexts of that time as compared with the corresponding contexts in post-Communist Bulgaria. These contexts have their impact on the definitions and functions of the terms during and after the Communist era. The figurative and its affiliation with Socialist Realism were elaborated on a series of congresses and plenums conducted by the Communist Party in the 45 years of its governance. In the strivings for homogeneity the artistic life of the country was centred on the plenums of the Bulgarian Communist Party which took the most important decisions concerning the development of fine art. The other fundamental element of the artistic life were the so-called ‘Common group exhibitions’. They were organised each year by the Union of Bulgarian Artists. These exhibitions did not present individual artists but followed sets of priority themes.

By organising these exhibitions, which were the only possibility for the artists to show their works, the Union of Bulgarian Artists became a defining factor in the field of fine art after the revolution. Its creation was a result of the post-World War II absorption of all artistic organisations in the country.

> Pyramidal centralized management models made every sphere of culture institutionalized and administered by the authority of the party-state. The creative unions became instruments of the state monopoly in fine art; they concentrated the control over the processes of creation and dissemination of artistic products and made the individual forms of expressions

> almost impossible. The artist became absolutely dependent on the party-state (Ministry of Culture, 2014).

During the Communist era, as well as being sole organiser of artistic activities, the Union was the main arbiter of artworks. "[It] became the strange context of merger between ideology, party and state power and artistic self-management by individual artists not only trusted by the regime but also entrusted with an authority, power and freedom to make decisions that seem incredible in retrospect" (Boubnova, 2006, p. 154). The Union was also responsible for disciplining those judged to have strayed "from the straight and narrow path mapped out by the regime" (Brown, 1970, p. 243). According to Boris Danailov, all parts of the creative process became objects of interest and were centrally organised; i. e., they were in a position to be ruled. "In practice the Union of Bulgarian Artists was state-owned, and the state gained more and more direct artistic opportunities" (Danailov, 1990, p. 10). The promotion of cultural products did not depend on the public market, but entirely on the strategy of the state, and in this environment, artists essentially became civil servants (Cherneva and Arkova, 2002).

Membership in the Union was a necessary condition for taking part in exhibitions anywhere in the country as the institution not only encompassed the only available network of art galleries, but also owned a structure of committees which controlled the publication of all art journals and newspapers, state commissions, caricatures and even calendars in the country. This membership itself required membership in the Communist party. By linking political membership to opportunities for exhibition and recognition, this selection process created and maintained relations in the art-world of the country where the political encompassed the artistic life and artists were divided between members and non-members of the Union and, accordingly, as recognised and marginal ones. Over the years the Union built a "solid subsystem of financial and capital assets" (Trifonova, 2003), which supported its institutional stability. Despite certain liberalisation developed in the '80s (Popov, 1994) which allowed the exhibiting of artworks that deviated from Socialist Realism in terms of formal features, the overall framework of correlation between political membership and 'artistic' membership was not challenged. Furthermore, the Union's structure and network of galleries and studios have not changed after 1989, and its management has remained highly hierarchical. Indeed, in a democratic context, the Union's members do not define the criteria for fine art in the country. However, the Union's 'net-like organisation' provides opportunities to show and evaluate their own work by reconstructing the simplified canonical relations between 'recognised' and marginal artists; between 'official' and 'unofficial' ones. A network has been created that embodies relations of power in an attempt to form an artistic 'hegemony' if we paraphrase the term from Michel Foucault.

The other institution that had a great impact over the development of fine art during (and after) Communism is the Ministry of Culture. It was (and still is) the supreme central executive body with the right to initiate legislation in the sphere of culture and formulate the main principles of national cultural policy in Bulgaria. The Ministry of Culture has its

origins in the Department of National Propaganda which was established during World War II and aimed to coordinate the work of the censorship and state propaganda in wartime conditions. After the revolution in 1944, the Department of National Propaganda attained the rank of ministry. In 1948 it was transformed into the Committee for Science, Art and Culture, which marked the establishment of a centralised system of cultural administration. The institution "imposed total control over all spheres of cultural life and de facto turned culture into an instrument to achieve non-cultural - i.e. political, ideological, Socialist and propaganda - objectives of the state" (Cherneva and Arkova, 2002). It was renamed Ministry of Culture in 1954 (Bulgarian State Institutions from 1879 to 1986, 1987, p. 79). After the collapse of the Communist regime, in 1993, the Ministry of Culture was re-established as an independent institution, and in 2006 a new Structural Regulation of the Ministry of Culture was introduced. The existing national art centres have been transformed into Directorates (Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, 2009). As a result, instead of being decentralised, the Ministry of Culture has become once again highly centralised and still distributes the main part of state funding. "Alternative art forms often suffered from the fact that the state rarely supports contemporary arts, preferring cultural heritage and traditional art forms instead" (Varbanova, 2003).

In the post-Communist context, the model of "the state as the main 'owner' of cultural industries is being gradually replaced by the model of the state as the main regulator in the art-world through its economic and legislative functions" (Varbanova, 2003). Three main sources have funded the arts after 1989: the government, the market, and the third sphere (non-profit sector). The state no longer supports culture as a priority. It has not had a consistent policy for preservation of cultural heritage and has not supported the processes in contemporary art (Petkova, 2012). As a consequence the budget has been divided in favour of social and economic spheres (Trifonova, 2003).

While there is a general consensus among the researchers that culture is no longer a priority of the state, there is no agreement on the post-Communist development of the cultural institutions in the country. Some authors (Trifonova, 2003, Cherneva, 2002, Arkova, 2002) maintain that in the course of the transition to democracy and market economy, important cultural reforms have been conducted, including decentralisation of the administration and financing of culture; formation of market-oriented attitudes of cultural institutions; guarantees of the equality of state, municipal and private cultural institutions, and strengthening of the role of the non-governmental sector. Others (Doynov, 2008, Kiossev, 2001) suggest that the highly hierarchical structure of the cultural institutions has not been challenged after the collapse of the Communist regime and they still function as structures responsible for defining 'official art'.

One particular aspect of the post-Communist development of fine art in Bulgaria that poses new questions in relation to the continuity between the Communist past and the post-Communist present is the observation that most of the former official artists, the so-called "statist intelligentsia" as suggested by Prodanov (2011, p. 492) whose works and lives

were closely connected to the implementation of Socialist Realism in the field of fine art, and as such produced works that corresponded to Communist ideology as a "set of ideals" (Prodanov, 2011, p. 492), still occupy influential positions at the artistic institutions in the country. To name just a few examples: Luben Zidarov was vice-president and later president of the Creative Fund of the Union of Bulgarian Artists in 1970. From 1996 to 1999 he was president of the Union of Bulgarian Artists. Ivaylo Mirchev was awarded the prize for Plastic Arts "Southern Spring" in 1985. He also won the grand prize of the National Youth Exhibition in 1986. He was the son of Nikola Mirchev – member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and member of the Presidium of the National Council of the Fatherland Front. Between 1950 and 1952 he was organisational secretary of the Union of Bulgarian Artists; later also chief secretary of the Union, as well as its chairman from 1970 to his death in 1973. Dimitar Kirov was a member of the governing body of the Union of Bulgarian Artists between 1968 and 1985, and in 1987 he became Chairman of the State Commission of Fine Arts. Bencho Obreshkov was Chairman of the creative fund of the Union of Bulgarian Artists between 1969 and 1970. Svetlin Rusev has been professor of painting at the National Art Academy since 1975 to the present day[5]. Between 1973 and 1985 he was Chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Artists and, from 1985 to 1988, Director of the National Gallery of Art. From 1982 to 1984 he was vice-president of the Committee for Culture. After the fall of Communism, in 1990 Rusev became MP of the Grand National Assembly as a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, among other positions.

Actually, if one looks at the list of the artists who took the position of Chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Artists after the fall of Communism, one would discover that all the names (with the exception of the last Chairman) belong to successful and highly recognised artists of the Communist regime. This observation seems surprising given that it is made more than 20 years after 1989, particularly after taking into consideration the fact that the country has developed a free art market and is taking part in continuous international dialogue in and beyond the European cultural context. How and why do these artists' careers seem independent from the political and economic changes that occurred in 1989? The hypothesis that fine art in the country has developed as detached from the political and economic changes would be difficult to justify anyway, but since these artists occupy positions in state-funded art institutions, such justification seems impossible. How did the political and economic changes affect fine art then? Even more surprising is the fact that most of these artists claimed to be dissidents 'from within' the Communist party. Here we face another aspect of the continuity between the two periods; namely the official artists' discourses on their own past. The example of Svetlin Rusev - his work before and after the collapse of the Communist regime - is discussed in more detail later in this thesis in connection to this aspect.

Apart from the institutional contexts of post-Communism, the relationship between the abstract and the figurative is situated in the framework of prevailing notions on the recent

5 At the time of writing, the artist was 82 years old.

past developed after the fall of the Communist regime. In the context of transition between highly centralised state institutions and a free market economy, the influence of the Union of Bulgarian Artists and the Ministry of Culture extends over the constructions of notions on the recent past. The institutional context which they create affects which notions of the past are being recognised as dominant in the art-world of the country and which are being left behind in silence. As already pointed out above, in the case of the Union of Bulgarian Artists, not only its structure, but also its specific individual embodiments are recognised in the Communist regime. These Chairmen's views on the past are inevitably influenced by their personal experience and could explain to some extent the impact that nostalgia for the recent past has had during the years following the collapse of the Communist era. Apart from nostalgia, which some of them undoubtedly feel towards the era when the relations in the art-world were far more simplified and predictable, the efforts to reconcile 'the two parts' of their personal stories – pre- and post-1989 - and to explain why their success and high institutional positions remain unchanged in radically different political conditions. The reconciliation of these two 'parts' often requires approaches that merge fictional and actual images from the past.

In the years following the changes in 1989, the attempts to build the newborn democracy of the country determined the public agenda; at that time the Grand National Assembly was called and a new constitution adopted, several elections held, and new political parties formed. The General Prosecutor's Office launched five separate lawsuits against the former Communist leader, Todor Zhivkov, and a large part of the industrial heritage of Communism was privatised. The new market conditions endorse new relationship between the works and the public. The latter has been recognised as potential buyers; as a concrete market subject in opposition to ideological subjects, "'ideal projection', [the] abstract and ideological term 'the people'" (Marazov, 1990, p. 2) as was the case before 1989.

How did contemporary fine art practices reflect these changes? After the collapse of the Communist regime, the artists in the country found themselves in new relations, situated between the free art market and the art institutions. The viewers have become The processes in fine art, of course, are multi-layered, but if we nevertheless need to discern several trends, one of them would be the expanding of the range of mediums. After 1989, fine art left the medium of painting, graphics and sculpture, searching for new approaches that differed from these adopted by Socialist Realism. Svilen Stefanov argues that the amendments had a comprehensive nature, far beyond the simple division between "old" and "new" means of expression (2003). According to him, the changes in Bulgarian art in the '90s questioned the leading position of painting. In addition to individual direct negations of painting, its 'system' experienced major transformations. The criteria for assessing the 'value' of works of art have changed (Stefanov, 2003). The new trends are defined by terms such as 'avant-garde', 'neo-avant-garde', 'postmodern', 'conventional', 'unconventional', and 'conceptual' in a number of articles.[6] The changes seem fundamental and radical. The new,

6 See newspaper Pulse, 1990; newspaper Culture, 1990; Vladaya Mihaylova, The Case Bulgaria. Contemporary Art beyond the Battlefield of Language Games towards Strategies of Possible Political Decisions, in Nail

pluralistic context of fine art appears to reject the monologue of Socialist Realism and its claims to be the only authentic aesthetic.

At the same time, in this atmosphere of national ferment, surprisingly only a few artists joined the discussions on political and ideological subjects with their work. Some symptomatic examples are mentioned here. Andrey Filippov, for instance, arranged hammers and sickles on a dining table in his installation "The Last Supper" (fig. 4), thus exploring the connection to the pseudo-religious features of the Communist doctrine. In 1990, the City Group organised the happening, "The Chameleon". The artists (Gredi Assa, Bojidar Boyadzhiev, Nedko Solakov and Svilen Blazhev) built a skeleton covered with membership cards for the Bulgarian Communist party, the so-called Komsomol cards. The viewers were also included in the happening as they could add their own Komsomol cards. After that the skeleton was burnt, presumably in an attempt to mark the new, democratic period as breaking with the past.

In 2009, 20 artists took part in the installation "The Wall", working with and on separate pieces of walls, representing the Berlin wall. On an island, formerly named Bolshevik, they drew on and transformed as sculptures and installations, 20 pieces of wall, sizes 150 x 200 cm (fig. 5). The pieces were then transferred to the capital and displayed in one of the main squares. The visitors also had the chance to draw their own perceptions of the Berlin wall and its subsequent demolition. Then, after a discussion which included the opinions of politicians defining themselves as 'anti-Communists', all the walls were demolished. Here again the Communist past represented in the event ended up with a demolition, probably implying that 1989 is, or should be, a break with the Communist era.

Socialist Realism itself also provoked contrasting reactions after 1989. Four different approaches towards it were discussed by Plamen Doynov: *denial* – Socialist Realism did not exist, it was an artificial product of Communism and it has no value as art; *contempt* - Socialist Realism is pseudo art that does not deserve attention; *disgust* – Socialist Realism is a result of relations between 'butchers' and 'servants', and it is a part of the mechanism of power; and *oblivion* – Socialist Realism is a thing of the past, and it is more important to consider its alternatives. These categories signify the extent to which the reactions towards Socialist Realism went to extremes. They do not seem to contribute to the further examination of Socialist Realism. Instead of looking at Socialist Realism in its differentiations, debates based on these categories would suggest moving away from it. To some extent, my practice could correlate with the endeavours for an alternative indicated in one of the categories. Yet there is an important difference - in this study, Socialist Realism is not regarded as a 'thing of the past'. Rather, the research project considers it more productive to examine Socialist Realism in its relationship with contemporary art in post-Communist Bulgaria in terms of rupture or continuity.

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magazine, issue 4, 8.11.2011; Galina Lardeva, Art of the Transition: the Problem of Unconventional Art in Bulgaria, 2008; Vasileva, The Beginning of Our Avant-Garde; Popova, Evolution of Unconventional Forms in Bulgarian Art During the Second Half of the '80s and the First Half of the '90s, Danailov, Thoughts about our Avant-Garde, 1990, etc.

The dialogue between the political changes and contemporary fine art in the country aroused responses that also approached extremity. Despite their diversity, these could be summarised in two opposing ways. According to Ivan Marazov, after the changes in 1989 "the artistic culture 'de-semiotizes'" (1992, p. 5) itself and thus it deprives itself of the peculiar rituals from the past. The fragmentation of the preceding connections and dependences which were inherited from the totalitarian period, as well as the "'de-hierarchization' of Bulgarian artistic life" led to a "desacralized" existence of art (1992, p. 5). On the other hand, Galina Lardeva, the author of a book on the development of 'unconventional art' in Bulgaria after the fall of the Communist era, which happens to be one of the few books that examine contemporary fine art in Bulgaria[7], maintains that in the cases of artists whose works are provoked by particular political events after 1989, their practices tend to represent ritualised actions rather than ideological positions (2008, p. 185).

The desacralised existence of fine art is questioned here as it is placed in relation to the pseudo-sacral Communist ideology and its claims to offer an 'absolute truth' about the inevitable progress and direction of history, claims that are regarded as metanarratives[8] in this study. The last two examples of art installations mentioned above provide a glimpse into one of the main characteristics of the dominant discourses on the past developed after 1989, namely the degree of extremity of the assessments. In a context of swiftly disintegrated representations and narratives about the recent past, the interpretations varied between the Communist regime being demonised and idealised, condemned and praised, forgotten and compulsively living among us through nostalgic memories at the same time. These perceptions constantly shift in a 'pendulum-like move' as defined by Nikolay Vukov (2009, p. 3). The latter encompass "notions [on the 'national' past] both detached from the previous Communist versions and capable of embracing collective identities beyond the points of divergence" (Vukov, 2009, p. 3). Attempts at sublimation, displacement, erasing or forgetting the recent past (Vukov, 2009, p. 4) connected with attempts of constructing history that builds "the new on the basis of the negation of the old" (Pejic, 2003). These approaches developed and were disseminated together with nostalgic attempts for a revival of the past. According to the Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov, who recently initiated a project for collecting and publishing personal memories from the Communist era,

7 There are only two more books dedicated to contemporary fine art in Bulgaria: "Avant-Garde and Norm" by Svilen Stefanov (2003) and "Postmodern Informational Environment and Contemporary Art" by Evgeni Velev (2010).

8 The term 'metanarrative' in relation to the Communist ideology is used in this study as indicating an overreaching, all-encompassing story which attempts to account for all aspects of a society. It is also a story which refers to the ideological constructs of history, a story which not only explains, but legitimates knowledge. The metanarrative of Communism had a direct impact on the Communist and post-Communist art-world. According to Mazin and Turkina, during the Communist era "the artist in his own way adapted himself to the Great Story, in particular to its ideological aesthetic – either he/she served its directly, or indirectly, from the opposition of the counter-cultural Story of Dissidence. Identity in one way or another structures itself around the Great Story. When the Great Story collapsed, the sudden loss of former identity led to confusion, melancholy, and nostalgia" (Mazin and Turkina, 1999, p. 75). This impact presupposed the central place of the term in this study.

> For too long we thought about Communism as something enormous, monumental, as pure ideology or in symbols: flags, five-pointed stars, proletariats, the spectre who is haunting Europe, etc. Or, as "a good idea with poor implementation", as deluded left intellectuals try to defend it (2006, p. 12) … The totalitarian past as personal experience has remained unelaborated; it appears in between particular rival narratives only: of the victims, of nostalgia, of those in power at that time (2006, p. 13).

Nostalgia emerged as a widespread discourse on the Communist past of the country. It is manifested in the field of fine art in particular attitudes towards Socialist Realism and towards the overall system of art production, distribution, assessment and consumption. Apart from the state-sanctioned views, articulated in institutions such as "The Museum of the Socialist Art"[9] nostalgia can be found in the celebrations organised every year in honour of the achievements of the former political leaders. These celebrations are usually held near Socialist Realist monuments that still can be found throughout the country. It appears that the notions of the past connect with the meanings that these monuments and their perceptions produce. Organised both by political parties and as individual initiatives, and receiving broad media and institutional support, these events are one of the indications of the deep and widespread impact of nostalgia in the country. Furthermore, according to a survey held at the Union of Bulgarian artists in the '90s,

> Practically none of the artists admitted to having felt a lack of freedom in his/her professional activities. Most artists even claimed that they felt absolutely free in their choice of subject matter, visual language, form, etc., as well as when exhibiting their works (Boubnova, 2000).

The current study considers nostalgia as a discourse that both indicates and derives from an unfulfilled debate on the recent past. Nostalgia collects and preserves components from the collapsed Communist era, keeping open the possibility for - at some point - 'the integrity' to be reinstated. As suggested by Svetlana Boym, two types of nostalgia could be distinguished: restorative and reflective (2001, p. XVIII). It could be argued that the post-Communist nostalgia in Bulgaria acquires some aspects of restorative type of nostalgia; namely, it aims at a transhistorical reconstruction of the past.

By transferring selected components from the past into the post-Communist 'present', and reliving them in the reverie of the "good old days", nostalgia does not offer critical knowledge of the past. In this way it additionally prevents critical debate, thus maintaining a circle that reminds one of eternal return. Nostalgia in post-Communist Bulgaria seems to go beyond the longing for 'the good old days'. Placed between the images of the past as either "shameful" or "glorious" (Kudrvinov, quoted by Tzvetkov, 2013), the debate is constructed by one-sided points of view. Nostalgia is both affected by and affects these notions of the past. On the one hand, the partial narratives about the past and the ways in which Socialist Realist works are displayed and perceived in the post-Communist context presuppose a nostalgic notion. Socialist Realist works themselves also tend to evoke a nostalgic notion for

9 The translation of the name does not belong to me; it is written on a sign outside the museum.

a ‘desired’ past. On the other hand, nostalgia influences public debates as supported by the Socialist Realist works and their ‘readings’; it directs the discussions towards a re-living and re-experiencing of a constructed past.

An interesting view on nostalgia and its relation to the post-Communist ‘present’ is articulated by Nedko Solakov’s installation “I Miss Socialism, Maybe” (fig. 6). The artist showed his work as part of his solo exhibition in Beijing. On a wall, painted in bright red, are drawn the eyes of Big Brother, who stare at the viewer with a look of indifference. Twenty one videos are spread amongst cushions in the shape of Chinese letters, constituting the “I miss Socialism, maybe” phrase. According to the artist;

> Almost none of these videos are directly related to that theme defined by the title. But what they do show is the confused inner world of a middle-aged man who still believes that a better world will come, again (Solakov, 2011).

In order to further elucidate his viewpoint on the subject, he added the following handwritten text on the wall (fig. 7):

> I miss the Big Brother eyes, why? Because my friends and I dream of how nice it would be when the Big Brother’s eyes would be gone forever. Yes they are gone, but they have been replaced by many more pairs of eyes following you (Quoted by Fowkes, 2013, p. 14).

To watch the videos in Solakov’s work, the viewer has to sit on or walk around the cushions. Some of the screens face the eyes of Big Brother while others are turned to the opposite side; i. e., the installation could not be perceived only from one point of view. It requires two levels of perception depending on the distance: perceived from a greater distance it appears that the eyes of Big Brother dominate over the space and thus over the views that the videos present. Watching the videos requires positioning oneself a short distance and different points of view. In this sense the installation rejects any ‘total’ notion on the past in favour of different views in their synchronic existence and constant juxtaposition. The linearity of the views on the past has been disrupted by the spatial positions of the videos. This aspect of Solakov’s installation corresponds to my studio practice and its aims to detach itself from any ‘totality’ and linear connections between the notions on the past and the ‘present’.

The installation “I Miss Socialism, Maybe” could be regarded as nostalgic; yet at the same time it opens up possibilities for a dialogue on nostalgia as a reaction to the post-Communist conditions, which have not met the expectations of the artists, lived during Communism. It evokes new questions on nostalgia, on its aims, and on its impact. By doing so, it contributes to a critical debate on the past. Such a contribution is also one of the aims of this study.

1. 3. Theoretical framework

My study draws on different theoretical sources without engaging in a substantial theoretical discussion. However, selected aspects of a concept of 'myth' underpin to some extent its development. The concept belongs to Claude Levi-Strauss and it is presented in his structural analysis of the Oedipus myth. Several specific aspects of this concept are chosen for the purpose of the current research. According to Levi-Strauss, "[the myth] explains the past and the present, as well as the future" (1963, p. 209). It constitutes a "two-dimensional time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic" (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 210). In our times 'myths' are replaced by politics, asserts the author. Politics, as well as 'myths', is looking not for sequences of events in the past, but rather for timeless patterns that could be detected in the present (Levi-Strauss, 1963). This is one of the main aspects of Levi-Strauss' concept which the current study adopts. The former official artists in Bulgaria are staring into the past with the eyes of politicians. They look for timeless patterns that could be transferred to the present. But the artists go one step further. Instead of trying to detect these patterns in the past, they endeavour to construct them by means of art. In the examples, investigated in this study, the processes of producing particular art works, and the choice of subject matter, form and ways of displaying these works are regarded as strategies for constructing these patterns. In the examples, the artworks correspond to the double structure of the 'myth', at once historical and ahistorical, as described by Levi-Strauss. Thus the patterns surmount the contradiction of their construction, which is a result of a concrete historical moment. These patterns could be, for instance, of revolutions or of particular relations between politics and fine art. In any case, by adopting the double structure of the myth, the works reaffirm these patterns as timeless.

In order to analyse the myth, Levi-Strauss used the following technique – he broke down the story to its smallest possible constituent units and wrote each one on an index card. Each unit was regarded as a function which connects to a given subject in the myth (Levi-Strauss, 1963). This technique disregards the sequences of events created by its narrative. Instead, the units, or mythemes, if we use the term coined by Levi-Strauss, are arranged and compared according to their relations. Four different types of relations - opposition, correlation, permutation and transformation - among these elements guide the analysis.

This type of analysis allows the juxtaposition of both synchronic and diachronic relations in connection to the abstract and the figurative in 'realism' of Socialist Realism. Furthermore, according to Levi-Strauss, the meaning of the 'myth' cannot be found in its elements when regarded as isolated from one another; it lies in their relations. Thus the primacy is given to relations over entities. My studio practice engages with elements from selected Socialist Realist works taken from a period which defined fine art in terms of linear progression. It removes these elements from their original context, i. e., of both the outer context of linear progression and the initial sequence of forms which constitute their narratives. These elements are regarded as constituent units of the work. In Levi-Strauss's analysis, each

constituent consists of a bundle of relations and together they could produce meaning. My practice unfolds these bundles of relations in an attempt to explore how they correspond to the relationship between the abstract and the figurative. The elements' ability to reconstruct the 'whole' from a fragment also proves to be helpful for the specific needs of this study. As already pointed out, the re-contextualised elements from Socialist Realist works are regarded here as connected to the absent integrity of the pictures. Thus the Socialist Realist works are placed between their structural entities as constructed by the bundles of relations that form their components on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the contexts of their display and perception.

It would have been possible to explore 'realism' in Socialist Realism in Bulgaria within a psychoanalytic framework. Socialist Realism could have been scrutinised in the context of the Communist past as an experienced trauma. The official representations of Socialist Realist works in post-Communism could also have been treated as related to this trauma. However, looking at these representations is directly connected to the institutionalised contexts of the works' display and requires an approach which acknowledges and focuses on this correlation, an aspect which a psychoanalytic approach would ignore. Furthermore, exploring 'realism' in photographic sources produced during Communism make gains from examining the processes of their production, distribution and consumption, aspects that would have been marginalised by a psychoanalytic framework.

My works emerge in a post-Communist and Postmodern context: yet in this context the official representations of Socialist Realism attempt to convey some of the oppositions developed during Communism by which all artistic works appeared to be defined. The readings of the development of fine art during and after the fall of the Communist regime fluctuate between the oppositions of 'official or unofficial' art, formalism or Socialist Realism, praise or disavowal of Socialist Realism. My practice transcends these oppositions, developing an alternative space for a new way of visualising and conceptualising the heritage of Socialist Realism. Thereby it aims to open up possibilities for a critical debate on Socialist Realism and its development in the country as an alternative to the monologic views on the past articulated by the official representations of the Socialist Realist works. In the context of this research the flatness of the paintings achieves more than an aesthetic response to Socialist Realism. It acquires metaphorical character. It signifies the new, post-Communist context with its ambiguity, complexity and plurality. There are, though, no signs of a concrete historical moment implied in the abstract background. Rather, it indicates the context constituted by the debates on Socialist Realism in the country with their engagement with extreme viewpoints on the Communist past.

1. 4. Overview of the thesis

This research project is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter is concerned with positioning my practice in the context of artists who explored the relationship

between the abstract and the figurative, as well as in the context of other contemporary Bulgarian artists whose work engaged with examination of the Communist past. Aspects of my practice's references to the works of Gerhard Richter, Komar and Melamid, "Art and Language" are examined by focusing on the engagement with photographic sources; with Socialist Realist works; and with the integrity of the pictorial space of the paintings. The functions of the surface of the painting in the tension between abstract and figurative elements in my works constitute another important part of the chapter. These functions are explored in relation to examples of the specific national development of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria and their official representations after 1989.

The second chapter examines the "Museum of the Socialist Art" and its strategies to display Socialist Realist works within a post-Communist situation. The debates surrounding its name, space and exhibitions are discussed in relation to the official representations of Socialist Realism that the museum provides. My series of paintings, "Details of Socialist Realism", reflects on photographs of Socialist Realist works displayed at the museum. By doing that, it connects them both to the main subjects of Socialist Realism - the cult of personality, the proletariat, and partisan movements as well as to how they are perceived in post-Communist Bulgaria. The relationship between Socialist Realism and utopia is examined in my painting "The Island of Utopia".

The third chapter of this thesis looks at the example of Svetlin Rusev – an 'official' artist, who took part in the implementation of Socialist Realism during the Communist era; yet after 1989 he claimed to be a dissident. His work and life are explored in this study as correlated to each other, as well as to the specific development of Socialist Realism in the country. They are placed between the oppositions, supported by the artist's work: between 'official' and 'unofficial' art; between the notion of an 'objective' past and 'fragmented present'. My painting and installation "How to Create an Ideal Past", as well as my installations "Preserved Memories" and "How to Create an Ideal Past 2", attempt to offer an alternative of Rusev's work in terms of transcending the oppositions it suggests.

The conclusion of this thesis brings together the sets of arguments and procedures developed in the course of the research project. It presents the results of the study performed in the interrelations between my studio practice and theoretical inquiries. It also suggests possible directions for future research.

2. Transforming photographs of Socialist Realism into paintings: positioning my practice

In one of his speeches to the Politburo of the Bulgarian Communist Party and activists of the Cultural front in 1963, the Bulgarian Communist leader Todor Zhivkov pointed out:

> No artist should forget that only artworks saturated with high revolutionary ideas and great artistic force can reach the heart and soul of man. The highest duty of our artists is to devote their talents to the people, to serve with their art the great struggle for Communism; with inspiration to reflect the beauty and greatness of our era, and the feat of the builders of Socialism and Communism (1963).

Of course, this kind of statement is not new or uncommon for the Communist period, when party and ideological postulates were constantly filling the media and public space in the country. What is interesting about this particular statement, however, is the fact that it was articulated by the longtime leader of the country, whose utterances outlined the 'right' directions of the development of fine art. In accordance with the Communist concept of the 'universally developed personality', on each Congress and Plenum of the party, the leader outlined specific guidelines for the development of an impressive range of fields: economics, politics, art, media, and advertising. In the field of art he was concerned with the development of literature, fine arts, music and theatre and gave detailed directions for each one of them. The statement from 1963 appears to be more than a linguistic discourse that intervenes directly in the space of fine art. It endeavours to synthesise in a few sentences the tasks and aims which the artists in the country were expected to follow. The speaker is a politician, so in this sense the intervention is both linguistic and ideological. Later, this speech, as had been the case with his other speeches, was published in large circulation (for the scale of the country), sometimes reaching several hundred thousand copies. The interaction of the ideological with the aesthetic had a direct character.

What is of particular interest for the current thesis in this statement, however, is the implied concept of 'realism'. The term 'realism' itself is not used. However the correlation is implicit as the term 'Socialist Realism' is inevitably referenced. The statement outlines a framework for the most important tasks that the artists in the country face. By this means it poses a bundle of questions which underpin this chapter. The artists are expected to 'reflect reality' - but what constitutes this 'reality'? In the statement 'reality' is defined as 'the beauty and greatness of our era' and 'the feat of the builder of Socialism and Communism'. How would that connect to 'realism' in Socialist Realism in its specific development in Bulgaria? Furthermore, would this 'reflection' mean a presentation or representation, mimesis, or unveiling of 'reality'? To which pictorial tradition would this 'reflection' belong? In what ways would the outlined framework restrict the production of artworks? How would these questions be explored by the means of an art practice developed from a post-Communist viewpoint?

These questions inform the development of my practice. In each of my paintings and installations both the figurative elements with their resemblance to 'real' objects and illusion of three-dimensional space, and the flat two-dimensional space of the abstract elements function together in order to scrutinise the 'realism' of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria and its official representations in post-Communist Bulgaria.

The figurative elements depict fragments of photographic sources. They bear a likeness to and thus directly connect to the imagery of the selected Socialist Realist works and their photographic representations. This direct connection operates on two different levels. At one level, it gives an account of the concrete subject depicted in the painting. In this process we, as viewers, are aware that this subject relates to another picture – belonging to Socialist Realism. Here another concern arises – how these two depictions relate to each other and to what extent my paintings constitute a 'copy' of the initial source image. If the two pictures are positioned side by side and compared, particular differences will be observed. At this point a shift of perception is needed – that we are not looking at depictions of monuments or other objects but at depictions of photographs of monuments. This poses new questions about the process of constructing the paintings; namely, why the photographic sources were needed, and how they function to explore 'realism' of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria.

The abstract elements, at the second level, draw our attention as viewers to several other properties of the paintings: to the observation that we are looking at a constructed picture which itself works with a constructed picture, i. e. a photograph. These elements also focus our attention towards the construction of the paintings themselves. They function as reminders that the paintings do not endeavour to create an 'illusion', a resemblance with objects taken from the world; rather we are looking at paintings which appear to be self-conscious about their own construction, and through this self-consciousness they examine the 'realism' found in Socialist Realism and its official representations. In my practice 'realism' is placed in the tension between the Communist ideology as a discourse, the visual language of Socialist Realism, and the official representations of Socialist Realism in the context of art state-funded institutions after the collapse of the Communist regime.

My practice encompasses paintings and installations. My installations also include paintings (for instance the installations "Preserved Memories" and "How to Create an Ideal Past 2") or derive from them (for instance the installation "How to Create an Ideal Past"). Thereby the installations in my practice create settings which guide the perception of the paintings – but they do not interfere or disrupt their pictorial spaces. In this sense pictorial decisions of painting between the space constituted by the surface of the canvas and the representational space are central for exploring the research questions posed by this thesis.

Why was painting chosen for exploring the relationship between the figurative and the abstract? Figurative painting is time-consuming and specialised in terms of techniques and means of expression. The flatness of the surface and the range of pigments could be added

to its limitations. Yet these were precisely the characteristics needed in my practice which presupposed the choice of this approach to a great extent. Painting as a medium connects closely to Socialist Realism in its ability to engage with 'realistic' images. It is a medium that 'speaks' to the approaches employed by Socialist Realism in order to question its heritage, which remained unquestioned by the contemporary art practices in the country. Additionally, this decision is underpinned by one of the hypotheses of this thesis, namely that the transition between Communism and post-Communism could not be described as a complete break with the past. Hence my practice seeks to retain a connection with the approaches and imagery of Socialist Realism, thereby exploring both the ruptures and the continuities between the two periods.

The slow execution of a painting meant a prolonged time was needed deliberate choices and placing limits to its imagery, limits that were found necessary for drawing attention to the constructed nature of the photographic sources used in my works. The physical limits of a painting inevitably relate to the illusions of its representation. These limits embody a type of perception that draws attention to the processes behind the painting's production.

2.1. Functions of the surface of the paintings in my practice between the abstract and the figurative

Accentuation of the surface of the painting is emphasised in my paintings by the usage of abstract elements – in particular by the abstract background. The latter interrupts the perception of the figurative elements as three-dimensional space with its illusion of depth and draws attention to the painting itself. Thereby this abstract background calls into question any form of mimetic relation to the world otherwise acquired by the figurative elements with their consistent tonal modelling and linear perspective. Emphasising the surface of the works functions as something different from a 'pure opticality' in my practice. This form elicits more than an aesthetic response. The viewer might see a painting as a picture first, becoming aware of the flatness before perceiving its representation, which, according to Greenberg, is "the best way of seeing any kind of picture" (1982, p. 8). "The Old Masters had sensed that it was necessary to preserve what is called the integrity of the picture plane: that is, to signify the enduring presence of flatness under the most vivid illusion of three-dimensional space" (Greenberg, 1982, p. 6). A tension unfolds, tension of seeing what is in the painting and the picture itself. "Realistic, illusionist art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art" (Greenberg, 1982, p. 6). In this sense my practice moves away from from endeavours to constitute 'realistic art'. The canvas does not stand as a 'window onto the world'; it retains its relative independence. This approach is developed as an alternative to the notion of 'transparency' of the surface in the pictorial tradition of Socialist Realism. The space in my paintings preserves the integrity of the picture in a composition without dynamism.

This integrity of pictorial space in my practice references Ilya Kabakov's approach in juxtaposition between the abstract and the figurative. In one of his exhibitions - "Return to Painting 1961 – 2011" (fig. 8) at Henie Onstad Art Centre, Norway, the artist displayed several series of paintings which engage with the imagery of Socialist Realism. In these series Socialist Realist paintings are depicted on white background using a multi-view perspective. In this way the figurative elements start to resemble abstract shapes which reference the dynamism of the Russian Suprematism. According to the artist,

> Modernism has removed the dramatic aspects contained in many paintings and replaced them with more peaceful ones, without any conflict in them. Since Impressionism, canvas has become a unified unproblematic object. We could say that our paintings bring us back to the drama which can be conveyed through figurative art. Here the tension resides in the collision of several entities (Kabakov, 2012).

The abstract shapes in Kabakov's canvases are described by the artist as utopian forms, combined with non-utopian scenes, but connected with the Socialist utopia. And these elements do not match. This approach interfaces with, yet at the same time differs from, the strategies adopted by my practice. In my works the Socialist Realistic scenes are juxtaposed to an 'empty' space which in some cases prevails or yields to the figurative in the canvases. The initial photographic sources are not transformed into abstract shapes; they keep the imagery of the figurative scenes to the extent that they remain recognisable. The paintings employ the linear perspective as a direct reference to the construction of the Socialist Realist works. The abstract background does not aim to disturb the pictorial space of the figurative elements; the two are in coexistence on the surface. It could be argued that the abstract and the figurative both do the work of representation, and in that sense are closely related. Functioning together, they aim to break with the concept of 'realism' in the context of the concept of painting as 'window onto the world' by drawing attention to the surface of the painting as two-dimensional - i. e. as constructed.

Gerhard Richter maintained that he valued photography for the way in which it keeps the artist from stylising, from seeing 'falsely', from giving an overly personal interpretation to the subject. Likewise, my practice avoids developing personal interpretations of the chosen subject. Indeed, the development of the works involved a process of selection, an individual element which was not avoided in the creative process. This selection, however, was based on the main subjects of photographs produced during the Communist period and not on individual reactions that they provoke. This procedure appears to be appropriate for exploring 'realism' in the context of Socialist Realism as the latter was focused on the 'content' in correlation with the 'form' of the works. The subject matter constituted a fundamental aspect of developing the Socialist Realist works, an aspect that was seen in my practice as worthy of attention as the perception of pictures as 'pictures'. The topics of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria connect to the ideological postulates and their direct relationship with fine art. Furthermore, they correlate with the traditions of the development of figurative art in the country. According to Svilen Stefanov, "the whole

history of our [Bulgarian] unfulfilled visual modernity follows the tradition of figurative principles" (2003). This leads us again to the relationship between the figurative and the abstract. In this context it is regarded by Stefanov as a continuation of particular plastic principles and problems of line, splash or colour which are developed as combinations of formal elements (Stefanov, 2003) - or, in the works of Ivan Vukadinov from the '70s, for instance, the non-figurative elements are developed with reference to the symbolism of the medieval Orthodox[1] iconography.

Engaging with Socialist Realist works and in a wider context with the Communist past from a post-Communist perspective locates my practice within a specific trajectory in fine art in Bulgaria concerned with exploring the recent past, extending from Nedko Solakov and Andrey Filippov to the works of the City Group and Luben Kostov among others. Yet the manner in which my practice works with the Socialist Realistic sources is distinctive from these examples[2]. None of the artists whose practice was concerned with exploring Socialist Realism after 1989 chose to develop paintings which incorporate figurative elements. The latter were probably perceived as embodying too many formal characteristics of the aesthetic practice of Socialist Realism which did not allow any deviation from the means of figurative painting, graphics and sculpture. Rather, the artists preferred to produce installations, performances and happenings – artistic approaches known only as a remote and forbidden Western practice under Communism. This tendency indicates a desire to break with Socialist Realism and its aesthetic methods, a desire which also manifests itself in the debates concerned with the Communist past and their extreme viewpoints as discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

The works concerned with Socialist Realism in Bulgarian fine art were the result of the work of artists who lived during Communism, i. e. they embodied a direct interaction with the artistic life during that time. This marks one of the major underlying differences in positioning my practice against these examples. By the virtue of their temporal position, my works are not provoked or underpinned by a tangible experience of the Communist regime. In embodying temporal distance, my practice also embodies a critical distance. This factor is included by placing the Socialist Realist imagery in a context which is saturated with post-Communist 'readings' of the source images.

Despite its remote temporal position and specific disposition toward Socialist Realism, my practice does not aim to break with the past. The approach of painting as one that embodies features from Socialist Realism supports this deliberate choice. Nevertheless, this painting seems to be 'self-conscious' about its own construction, an aspect which references "A Portrait of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock" (fig. 9) produced by the "Art and Language" group. According to Charles Harrison this work itself references the work of

1 The term 'Orthodox' here is used in relation to the Bulgarian Orthodox church which shares a common iconographic tradition with the Greek, Russian, Serbian and the Romanian churches, referred to as Byzantine iconography.

2 The examples were discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

Pollock as an "established stereotype of Modernist style" (2001, p. 135) and the head of Lenin as "a hackneyed political symbol" (Harrison, 2001, p. 135). My installations evolve from and around paintings and constitute a layering of approaches rather than a rupture with the approaches employed by Socialist Realism. What my practice endeavours to 'break', however, is the readings of a causal link between Socialist Realism in the Communist and post-Communist periods; instead, it aims to transcend the discussions on the Communist past defined by the oppositions 'continuity or rupture', 'nostalgia or oblivion', and 'praise or disavowal'. The official representations of Socialist Realist works are placed in a multi-layered context of interrelations between the photographic sources, the contexts of their production, distribution and display, and their transformations into paintings and installations. The abstract and the figurative coexist on the surface of my paintings, transcending the simplified oppositions of the discourses on Socialist Realism and the extreme viewpoints on the Communist past.

2. 2. Photography between 'realism' of Socialist Realism and my practice

The figurative elements in my paintings depict fragments extracted from photographic sources. The latter are transformed by a set of procedures performed by my practice. These procedures begin when looking at the formal characteristics of the fragments from the initial photographs. Their colours, faded, black and white in some cases, the surface of the photographs and the physicality of their condition - each of these formal features is transferred and explored in my works, yet the paintings do not endeavour to copy the photographs. The procedure of copying yields to the transformation performed not only by the cropping itself, but also by the selection of fragments and their treatment.

In what ways are the photographic sources important then? According to Peter Osborne, Gerhard Richter's 'photopaintings', because they use photographs as the source of paintings, would seem at first to "partake in the recognition of the historical negation of painting by photography" (1992, p. 105). But if these works seem to acknowledge the displacement of painting by photography as the most powerful means of image-taking in contemporary culture, they also affirm the continuing possibilities of painting (Green, 2000, p. 36). They do this quite simply, according to Osborne, by being and remaining paintings. To paint 'after' the photograph could seem as an act which privileges the original (Green, 2000, p. 36). My paintings, being 'self-conscious' about their own position *after* photography, seek to explore their relationship in a constant shifting between the abstract and the figurative.

In this context my practice's photographic appropriations were sustained by a general sense of the cultural impact of lens-based imagery as part of a 'history', since the photographs are situated simultaneously in the present (as we perceive them in a 'present' moment) and the past (as the photographs' origins lie in a moment that already belongs to history). This double moment of historical awareness, defined by Barthes as "an awareness of its having-been-there" (1977, p. 44), evokes the perception of the captured scenes as 'facts'. However,

as Pettersson points out (2011, p. 186), the identification of the object photographed and its image could not be maintained as an ontological claim. Rather, it only describes how the photographs and their relations to the objects photographed appear to us. This study does not dismiss Azoualay's claim that photography as a 'civil medium' could be a sovereign source for information (2010, p. 10). "Images can both reinforce and resist power regimes", adds Azoulay (2010, p. 10). In the specific case of photography during the Communist era, it is used precisely to reinforce power. Yet this study does not presuppose the photographic sources to be perceived as partial, biased, or an unreliable source for information or as the mere signified of an event. Furthermore, they are not considered as a product of a single, stable point of view of the photographer, as this would assume that the viewer "stands parallel to the photograph" (Azoulay, 2010, p. 11) and thus perceives it in a 'vertical view', as described by Luski, a view which presupposes facing the photograph as a closed image, which is externalised.

A photograph, maintains Azoulay, "is the product of an encounter of several protagonists, mainly photographer and photographed, camera and spectator" (2010, p. 11). In the case of the photographs used in my practice, their production was the result of an ideologically presupposed strategy, or, in other words, of a controlled 'mass production' developed to depict, in a systematic and planned way, "life in its essence and constant revolutionary movement forward" (Gadzheva, 2012). The casual processes that constitute the production of a photograph are reduced to their minimum in Socialist Realism – each photograph carefully represents a subject that relates to one of the main subjects of Socialist Realism; for instance, heroic figures, the proletariat, or the prosperous state-planned economy. Impressive undertakings, channels, hydropower plants, factories, landscapes, architectural ensembles, city centres, public buildings and various production processes became major themes in photography. The photographs were published in magazines[3] and newspapers and distributed throughout the country. This method of distribution presupposed their functioning as mass images, as well as their consumption. In an attempt to overcome the encounter of the photographs as externalised, as 'closed images' (Azoulay, p. 10), in my practice the photographs' formal features are explored in relation to their production, dissemination and perception. The treatment of the fragments, depicted in my paintings, was the result of an encounter with the photographs that acknowledges the multiple points of view that the photographs might have recorded as well as the multiple points of view that they provoke.

The mechanical approach of photography was considered fundamental for the purposes of these pictures during the Communist era because of its ability to produce 'true to life' imagery. According to one of the most active ideologists of photography during Communism, Georgiev,

3 According to Gadzheva (2012), most of the magazines were a replica of already existing Soviet magazines: "Our Motherland", "USSR", "Woman Today", "Workers", "Young Cooperator" and "Young Kolkhoz".

> Every photo report affects the reader exclusively with its power to offer strong visual impressions and realistic images. [...] The most characteristic feature is its ability to record facts and events of the visible world in the exact moment of their occurrence (1948, p. 12).

As a mechanical tool, a photograph was supposed to 'mirror reality' - yet this 'realism' had to offer images that inspire people in their pursuit of Communism. The utopian visions of the inevitable revolution followed by the building of the Socialist society had to be perceived as reality and had to be embodied in the photographs. The representation of the "desired" as "real" is embedded in the very essence of Socialist Realism (Doynov, 2011, p. 14). In this sense the mass production and distribution aimed at something more than just 'reflecting the reality' – a 're-education', even 'enlightenment' of the wide spectatorship. Furthermore, it had to be distinguished from other forms of realism, especially from the American Social realism, with which it had often been associated (Tupitsyn, 1994, p. 307).

The photographer, following the Marxist-Leninist postulates, had to choose the objects of his or her interest carefully, avoiding any form of contemplation as a means and a goal of producing a photograph. Rather, the latter was supposed to focus on fulfilling its ideological function. According to Georgi Dimitrov, ideology, art, and the cultural policy of the country had to be developed together in order to form this 'new socialist consciousness'. The production and perception of photographs (as well as of artworks) had to be underpinned by the defined aims and tasks, one of which was "the creation of the new man, the man of Communism" (Vasev, 1972, p. 2). It is this ambivalence of photography in the context of Socialist Realism - on the one hand, its claims to 'mirror reality', on the other hand, its functions to participate in 'the reality's construction – that my practice focuses on in the process of selecting the photographs from the Communist regime.

Vitaliy Komar points out some of the similarities between state propaganda and commercial advertising, similarities which led him and Melamid to produce works related to Pop Art. By using photographic sources that were products of the state propaganda and were distributed as mass images, my practice references American Pop Art and its incorporations of imagery and resources of the mass media within the construction of the works. However, an important difference between the images used by Socialist Realism and American Pop Art emerges. Apart from their close connection to the Communist ideology and 'Marxism-Leninism', the photographs produced in Socialist Realism functioned as images that had to 'educate' and 'enlighten' people. Similar functions appear unusual for images used by American pop art. Although my practice engages with photographic sources which are products of mass production, my works themselves are individual paintings and installations produced by layering oil or acrylic paint on paper or canvas. Commercial reproduction techniques as those used by Andy Warhol were not employed by my practice; instead, in my installations, this approach unfolds into incorporating the paintings into different spaces and do not attempt to disrupt our perception of them as pictures.

The claims for 'objectiveness' of the photographs during the Communist era were probably needed, on the one hand, to distinguish Socialist Realism from any kind of formalism as an aesthetic approach which belongs to 'the West'. On the other hand, though, the claims for 'realism' were closely connected to the mass production of the photographs. This type of production was directed to a certain type of viewer, namely the working class; that is, the imagery had to be accessible and easily recognisable. Perception was 'guided'. No specific knowledge was needed in order to perceive the 'messages' of the photographs, at least at the level of iconography, as they showed objects from everyday life engaged in subjects which often were interpreted quite literary. An encounter of the photographs that focuses on their formal characteristics could disrupt the perception of their ideological 'message'. In this sense the photographs had to be perceived as 'windows onto the world'; i. e. their surface acquires a 'transparency'. In other words, the processes behind their development remained 'hidden'.

In the desired 'unity of content and form' the latter was in dependent on the former as the ideological 'messages' formed the ultimate aim of the works' production. By transforming the photographic sources into paintings, my practice draws attention to the ways they embody this construction of reality. The 'unity of content and form' is questioned here, while the abstract background draws attention to the surface of the painting.

The perception of my works constantly shifts between seeing what is in the paintings and seeing them as pictures. Yet this perception is not regarded here as universal. In this aspect my practice references the relationship between the abstract and the figurative as addressed by "Art and Language" and their work "A Portrait of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock" in particular. Discussing this painting, Charles Harrison renounces the forms of approach which treat visual images solely as *pictures* as being 'too microscopic' (Harrison, 2001, p. 130). The figure referred to in Richard Wollheim's formula as 'the adequately sensitive, adequately informed, spectator' has also been questioned. Rather, the artist propounds an approach that focuses on the problems of perception and reading.

> Even if we restrict our interest in paintings to their iconic (picturing) aspects, and our understanding of representation to the matter of how pictures are graphically connected to the world, we will still have to acknowledge (pace Flint Schier) that pictorial systems are individuated in terms of competences, and that competences are relative (Harrison, 2001, p. 130).

Furthermore, the iconicity of a symbol is an aspect related to the genesis of the picture, asserts Harrison. Certain colour could be assumed to be 'expressive' (metaphorical) or iconic – an assumption which seems to be connected to assumptions about the content of the painting. In respect of these concerns the painting "A Portrait of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock" is regarded as polemical by Harrison. A set of different spectators would confer possibly different identities to the painting, which range between perceiving the painting as "an arbitrary and virtually meaningless thing" (Harrison, 2001, p. 132) to perceiving it as "an intentionally paradoxical thing" (Harrison, 2001, p. 132). The range

depends on the extent to which the spectator is familiar with Socialist Realism and Pollock's work and could or could not see the picture of Lenin in the painting.

My practice acknowledges this relativity of perception. Depending on his or her competence on the discourse of Socialist Realism, the spectator would perceive my works as either containing internal inconsistencies and ambiguities (in the sense that abstract art is generally seen as ideologically and semantically incompatible with the priorities set by the practice of Socialist Realism) or, if he or she is not familiar with the imagery of Socialist Realism, as works which simply represent old monuments (in the sense that they could be seen as mere exotic, probably meaningless experiments). Thus, a semantically competent reading, depending also on the spectator's disposition towards Socialist Realism, could provoke a type of perception which focuses on particular 'familiar' elements in the works and disregards the 'unfamiliar' ones. An 'adequately informed spectator' (Harrison, 2001) would be familiar both with the main subject matter and approaches of Socialist Realism, and thereby with their incompatibility with the abstract elements in painting.

Despite the acknowledgement of the different types of perception, my practice does not aim for an 'absolute subjectivity' in the perception of the photographic sources. The distinction which Barthes develops in "Camera Lucida" between the *stadium* and the *punctum*, or between the culturally informed readings of a photograph as opposed to the surprising details that provoke a more individual reaction and an 'expansion' of meaning has its connection to my practice. The extraction of a fragment from the photographic source is not presupposed by an individual reaction. Indeed, it aims to trigger an individual response and to expand the framed institutionalised 'readings' of the Socialist Realist works. However, the strategies developed by my practice differ from the private contemplation described by Barthes in a sense that they do not aim for an 'absolute subjectivity' and a state of 'pensiveness', to use his terms. Rather, my practice works with the imagery and visual vocabulary of photographs and aims to transform them by re-contextualising and juxtaposing selected elements in a process that encompasses the context of their official display and their subject in a new space, constituted by the surface of the paintings. In this sense, the pictures step aside from the subjective and reflect on the claims of 'objectivity' of Socialist Realism. The fragments are transferred into a new context, constituted by the tension between the pictorial space of the painting and the functionality of the representation.

This approach references the approach applied by Komar and Melamid in their recurrent engagement with the tension between the abstract and the figurative in painting. The artists explore the line between the two artistic domains in a series of works, 'defined by Vitaly Komar as examples of Conceptual eclecticism' (2013). Abstract and figurative elements are depicted on separate canvases and then displayed next to each other. Komar and Melamid's paintings (fig. 10, fig. 11) involve unlikely fusions - elements of Abstract Expressionism, Socialist Realism, Pop Art, and Italian Renaissance painting are connected in pictorial decisions that build surprising, sometimes surreal paintings. The main focus remains on the

relationship between Socialist Realism and Pop Art, a relationship on whose examination the artists dedicated their underground art movement Sots Art from its establishment in the 1970s onwards. The movement was an immediate response to the constraints of the artistic life in the Soviet Union and thus the works produced as belonging to it bear an unambiguous connection to Socialist Realism. Komar finds direct juxtapositions between the figurative and the non-figurative in Socialist Realism itself. One of the Soviet monuments of Lenin, for instance, is placed on a pedestal which the artist discusses as an example of Cubo-Futurism. This juxtaposition unfolds in their works as situated between different visual languages. My practice engages with this juxtaposition from a different perspective both in terms of formal decisions and in terms of distance. The latter, understood here as distance which relates to temporality, does not provoke such an immediate response to Socialist Realism. In my practice the latter is perceived and explored from a different temporal position that, once again, presupposes the focus on the photographic sources in opposition to working from the original paintings and monuments.

Apart from the methods of their production, discussed above, another concern which presupposed the selection of these particular photographic sources was constituted by their subject matter and accordingly by their connection to the main subject matter in Socialist Realism in Bulgaria. The importance of this type of selection lies in the emphasis on the 'content' as understood in the context of Socialist Realism[4]. Thereby an examination of Socialist Realism could not disregard its main subject matters. A division into several categories is proposed in this thesis. My practice engages with these categories, with their correlation to the Communist ideology and artistic practice of Socialist Realism.

- *The Cult of personality* (fig. 12) – this category includes portraits of Communist leaders, usually large-scale paintings, mural paintings, or massive sculptures. The portraits depict idealised images of party and ideological leaders, often resembling mythological figures.

- *Utopian images* (fig. 13) – this category consists of works which focus on factories, steelworks, and rural landscapes with tractors as images from 'the bright future' of Communism.

- *Ways of living* (fig. 14) – this category includes scenes from the daily life of the proletariat. Often depicted were workers at home or at work, as well as villagers in their domestic surroundings.

- *The Revolutionary past* (fig. 15) – this category is interested in depicting subjects related to the history of the Communist party and its connection to the national history of Bulgaria. The works include executions and interrogation of partisans, vows of partisans, and meetings of partisans and Red Army soldiers after the revolution in 1944.

4 Hegel reckons that art "has as its basis the unity of content and form" (1975, p. 602) which should be connected in dialectical synthesis.

- *Eulogies of the past* (fig. 16) – works in this category were produced mostly at the beginning of the 1970s, when a more 'nationalist' cultural policy was implemented in the country. They consist of historical scenes from the distant Bulgarian past, related to wars or conflicts represented as revolutions which, according to Marx, defined the course of history.

The photographs capturing this range of subject matter embody another aspect of 'objectiveness' which deserves attention here. According to Barthes, "in photography I can never deny that the thing has been there" (1981, p. 76). Of course, the precise moment of its production has irretrievably passed. Since it was obviously taken in a moment in the past, would this mean that the object does not exist in the present? A photograph persistently reproduces an event that happened once; "it mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially" (Barthes, 1981, p. 10). The formal features of a photograph might indicate the period when it was taken – we could make an assumption on whether it belongs to the distant or recent past. But the picture itself cannot give us an explicit answer. In this case how does the viewer perceive it - as an 'existing' reality or already 'vanished' reality? It appears that this 'reality' exists both 'then' and 'now'. As such, it constitutes an element of the continuity between the two periods which my thesis explores. The production of the photographs which my practice explores – 'official' photographs produced during the Communist regime and photographs of Socialist Realist works exhibited in post-Communist Bulgaria - was defined by the specific development of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria. In this sense, looking at this development constitutes a key part of searching for the answer to this question.

According to Marx and Engels, art in every epoch in human history is subordinate to Socialist development and structure (1976); it is an outcome of the methods of production and distribution. This ambivalent position of fine art in the Communist era as a dependant yet important function of the Communist ideology is entangled in the photographs used as source material for developing my works. Socialist Realism was specified distinctly by the Communist ideology, and digression from it seemed hardly possible in the context of the authoritarian regime. "Integrity, completeness, ubiquity – this was the demanded condition of the system, in which the immovable and immutable core is the ideology" (Danailov, 1995, p. 14). In this context, fine art and photography were regarded as means of the 'culture revolution' and the 'Culture front', the latter itself being a part of the so-called 'ideological front'[5]. They appear as an appendage of the ideological struggle against capitalism which, according to Zhivkov, is a 'struggle of life and death', a struggle where there is no place for compromise. As such, fine art and photography acquire two of the central aspects of the Communist ideology in their ambivalence – its historicism, on the one hand, and its strivings to 'get out of history' (Eliade) on the other. The latter could be most clearly observed in the works developed as belonging to the so-called 'Cult of personality' developed in the first two decades after the revolution – the Communist leaders are depicted as almost mythological

5 The military terms themselves indicate the Communist party's uncompromising attitude towards fine art and photography.

figures, capable of building the ideal Communist society which would last forever. It was not only the large scale of the monuments and paintings that represent the leaders but also their heroic postures and features that aimed to emphasise this mythological status.

The photographs which function as documentation of Socialist Realist works seem to embody this distinct feature of Socialist Realism; they transfer this imagery into the present and the future, thus depicting a prolonged, 'frozen' moment that urges to be perceived 'outside history'. "Thanks to photography events lose their historic character and fall into a magical ritual in a perpetual repetitive motion" (Gadzheva, 2012). How would this perception 'outside history' connect to the engagement with temporality of the photographic sources used in my practice, described above? The objects captured by the photographs appear as they will exist after the end of the Communist regime. This is confirmed by the very existence of the photographs. In these photographs it seems as these Communist leaders will stand on their heroic pedestals forever, indifferent to the changing contexts of our perception. This sensation of 'eternity' is explored and developed in my practice in relation to the strivings of the Communist ideology to 'get out of history'.

2. 3. Socialist Realism between the Soviet Union and Bulgaria

My practice engages with aspects of Socialist Realism as developed in Bulgaria, acknowledging the differences between this specific national development and the development of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union, for instance. According to Doynov, by 1944, Moscow had become not only the capital of the USSR and head office of Stalin but also the place where the leader of the Bulgarian Communist party Georgi Dimitrov lived. He gave instructions to the Bulgarian government "prepared by Stalin himself" (Doynov, 2011, p. 10).

Indeed, Socialist Realism was imposed in the country as directly influenced by the Soviet Union. Yet, despite its inevitable close relationship with the Communist ideology as imposed by the Soviet Union, deviances were possible in fine art. Even some of the founding principles of Socialist Realist aesthetics had their different definitions in the Soviet Union and Bulgaria. According to Vaughan James, Soviet aesthetics is based on three basic principles: *narodnost* (people-ness) – "the meeting point of artistic quality, ideological content and social function" (1973, p. 4), *party-ness*, and *class-ness*. In Bulgaria, the three main principles were described as *ideynost* (which could be defined as the correlation between 'idea' and ideological content), *party-ness*, and *people-ness* (Obretenov, 1983, p. 639). The term 'the people' is used in this case as a class term which depends on the particular historical conditions; i. e. 'the people' is the historical community of those layers and classes of the population which create "the material and spiritual conditions for the progressive and revolutionary development of society (Obretenov, 1983, p. 65)". The *party-ness,* which originated from a statement by Lenin (Doynov, 2008, p. 19), remained one of the immutable fundaments of Socialist Realism until the end of the '80s. This principle justifies the deprivation of the autonomy of art by politics which was implemented after the victory

of the revolution. It also connects the politisation of fine art to its nationalisation. The so called 'class-party principle in art' was also defined as fundamental in Bulgaria (Obretenov, 1972). It was regarded as "central to artistic observation, ways of thinking and feeling; of creating". It constituted a substance which "directs the creative process throughout and remains its essential defining feature in the whole "'fabric' of work of art'" (Obretenov, 1972, pp. 2-4).

Within the aforementioned framework of fundamental aesthetic principles, realism was proclaimed by the Communist party as the main task of art. After the revolution in Bulgaria, the artistic life of the country was changed with verve worthy of a total ideology. Having been restructured, the artistic unions in one Union of Bulgarian Artists no longer organised exhibitions of individual artists; rather, they were replaced by thematically defined group ones. The first group exhibition was held only two months after the revolution – in November and December 1944 - and was titled "Front and Rear" (Marinova, 1990, p. 15). It was followed by two more in the same year – two "Anti-fascist" exhibitions in the largest cities of the country, Sofia and Plovdiv. From this year onward, every year, the Common Artistic Exhibitions (CAE) of the Union of Bulgaria Artists showcased 'the most important' artworks in the country. Carefully selected by the committees of art and culture, they were expected to demonstrate the highest achievements in Socialist Realism in the country, as well as the main themes, elements of visual language and tendencies for the next year. This organisation of the artistic life together with the highly centralised structure of the Union of Bulgarian Artists presupposed simplified relationships between the production and display of works. In the narrow framework of postulates of the Communist Party and their constantly touted "correct interpretations" articulated on party congresses, plenums and filling the mass media, variation in the field of fine art seemed hardly feasible.

Nevertheless, in the '70s, a more nationalistic approach was adopted, an approach which was developed in contradiction to internationalism proclaimed by Communism. A massive national cultural programme of events, celebrating 1300 years since the establishing of the country was developed under the direction of the daughter of the Communist leader Todor Zhivkov, Lyudmila Zhivkova. As president of the Committee of Art and Culture and chairman of the Council of Creative Unions she commissioned the monument "1300 Years Bulgaria" to be erected in the centre of the capital; she also initiated the "Banner of Peace" World Children's Assembly and began an extensive global promotional campaign of the ancient historical heritage and achievements of Bulgarian culture. The National Palace of Culture and the National Gallery for Foreign Art were also built under her direction. Furthermore, she developed a long-term programme of aesthetic education which aimed to promote the role of art in a 'comprehensive and harmonious development of personality'[6]. For the first time, the Bulgarian public had the opportunity to see exhibitions of works by Leonardo da Vinci and Nicholas Roerich, events which were welcomed as an unprecedented opening of the country to the world ("Protocols and Decisions of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party", State Agency "Archives").

6 This programme was influenced by Zhivkova's interest in Theosophy, Hinduism and Buddhism which was probably another reason why it was met with widely spread criticism.

This series of projects, however, did not meet the approval of most of the members of the Communist party. It was criticised because of the large amounts of state funding spent on it ("Protocols and Decisions of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party", State Agency "Archives"). Furthermore, the adopted nationalistic approach was met with disapproval because of its incompatibility with the internationalist postulates of the Communist ideology. Despite this, although most of Zhivkova's projects were abandoned after her death in 1981, her activities had a substantial influence over the development of fine art in the country. One of her protégés, Alexander Lilov, for instance, became leader of the rebranded Bulgarian Socialist Party in 1990. The artist Svetlin Rusev was one of Zhivkova's closest friends and her patronage promoted not only his career but had a direct impact on his works, in particular in relation to his paintings dedicated to the distant Bulgarian history.

Furthermore, an interesting trend engaged with exploring subjects from the national history was developed in painting and graphics of the 1970s under the influence of Zhivkova's programme. It marked a substantial detour from the formal requirements of Socialist Realism. One of the distinctive features of its visual language is the combination of elements from different time-space positions. These explicit figurative elements are placed on an abstract background, an approach which my practice directly references. The latter not only being unusual, but representing an incompatible approach for Socialist Realism as any form of abstract art, together with "formalism and naturalism" was declared 'the main enemy'. As Zhivkov points out in one of his speeches,

> The social role of abstractionism is to disorient the workers and especially the artistic intelligentsia from the political life and struggle against capitalism, from the burning issues of struggle for peace, democracy and socialism. Furthermore, abstractionism is an item of the ideological expansion of capitalism, a fashion item which is designed for export mainly in socialist and least developed countries (1963, p. 121).

In 1948, the 5th congress of the Bulgarian Communist party (then: Bulgarian Workers Party - Communists) defined the main tasks for building Socialism. According to the report presented by Vulko Chervenkov[7] on the congress, the main goal of the 'ideological front' is described as overcoming "the reactionary and harmful bourgeois traditions and trends of formalism, individual aestheticism, and naturalism" (Chervenkov, 1949). Thereby Socialist Realism is placed within the dialectics between the 'bourgeois art' with its "pessimism, decadence, and hopelessness" and 'socialist art' with its "vitality, gushing inexhaustible strength, optimism, and affirming pathos" (Obretenov, 1972, pp. 3-4). Culture during Communism is regarded by Obretenov as resulting from a homogeneous progressive process in which each 'new unit' appears as a 'negationist' and successor of the past at the same time, and as base and preparation for the future; as something that was born from

7 Vulko Chervenkov was one of the leading figures in imposing the Communist postulates in the country after the revolution, known for his activities which aimed at developing Bulgaria according to the Soviet model. He was the leader of the Communist Party between 1950 and 1954, and Prime Minister between 1950 and 1956. The Chervenkov period featured harsh repression of all deviation from the party line, arbitrary suppression of culture and the arts along the lines of Soviet-prescribed Socialist Realism, and an isolationist foreign policy.

the dialectical negation of the previous one and which, with its transience, prepares the subsequent one" (Obretenov, 1972, p. 3).

The trend engaged with exploring subjects from the national history was "widespread in the 70s, encompassing events with many episodes and a variety of content aspects" (Getova, 1988, p. 18). Several examples of works produced as part of this tendency will be mentioned here: "Your Sons" by Teofan Sokerov, "The Horseman of Madara" by Stoyan Tsanev, "Antique Land" by Lyubomir Yordanov, "The Beginning" by Dimitur Kirov (fig. 17), "Time" by Sava Savov (fig. 18), "Supporters of Partisans" by Atanas Patzev (fig. 19), "The Birth of the Red Victory" by Dimitur Kirov (fig. 20), among many others. What unites these works is the specific depiction of the space in which the figures are composed. It does not aim to create an illusion of a 'realistic' environment for the figurative elements. Rather this approach depicts abstract 'fields' in which various historical images coexist (Getova, 1988, p. 18). The latter are connected in a non-linear manner and could be juxtaposed by the viewer in numerous ways. Indeed, the subject matter follows the requirements of the Socialist Realism and is concerned mostly with conflicts and scenes from 'revolutions'. However, what is even more surprising for a trend developed under the Communist regime is the extent to which some of these works are the product of subjective 'readings' of the topics. Some of them are constructed as memories. Their imagery evokes their readings as metaphors whose usage was presupposed by a personal engagement with the subject. This trend disturbs the 'reading' of history of Socialist Realism in the country as a homogeneous one. Its visual language juxtaposes abstract and figurative elements and thus directly correlates to the set of procedures adopted by my practice.

In one of his speeches to the Politburo of the Bulgarian Communist Party and activists of the cultural front, the Communist leader Todor Zhivkov points out that the arts have to follow the principles of Marxism-Leninism and to mirror reality deeply and truthfully, to be closely connected to the life and fight of the proletariat, of the people; not to have any other interests and aims than the interests and aims of the people (1963). Furthermore, the requirements of the artist go further - any deviation from Socialist Realism is defined as 'the wrong way' (Zhivkov, 1963). This would assume that Socialist Realism is the 'right way' in fine art, i. e. it acquires truthfulness. This assumption poses an intriguing question. What does this 'truth' mean in Socialist Realism and how it can be rendered in painting? According to Derrida, there are four different possibilities for presentation or representation depending on how one defines the model of truth in painting; they are "presentation of the representation, presentation of the presentation, representation of the representation, representation of the presentation" (1987, p. 6). My practice examines these models by looking at mediated pictures, i. e. their claims for 'presentation' would be difficult to maintain. The model of truth that Socialist Realism develops derives from the principles of the Communist ideology and rejects the empirical knowledge of 'reality'. Hence the reference point becomes constructed by the ideology reality. In this case, presentation would require a direct connection between the pictorial and the 'truth' of Socialist Realism.

How would this connect to the concept of 'reality' in painting? As constructed pictures, "images which have been elaborated and manufactured" (Chevrier, 2011), paintings connect to the idea of constructing reality. In this construction, the Communist ideology seems not only an inseparable part of reality but a defining factor in the choice of subjects and means of expression in fine art. In this sense 'reality' could be rendered as a representation on the surface of the painting. A direct, 'mimetic' depiction would not be possible.

The fragments from the photographic sources, re-drawn in my works, are depicted in similar colours as those employed in the initial photographs; they are limited to almost monochromatic nuances of grey. As a glimpse of their physical existence the surface of the photographs is carefully depicted too. Scratches, torn and damaged corners, folds on the paper become not only signs of the time in the past when the photographs were produced, but also of their 'life' in the hands of the viewers and probably in their family albums. These formal characteristics signify a 'history' and open up to the complexity of its development. In some of my paintings, for instance the series "Fragments of a Past" and "Details of Socialist Realism", the positioning of the canvases - i. e. of the fragments - disrupts a linear or a chronological understanding of 'history', rather indicating simultaneously diachronic and synchronic 'readings' of the latter. The fragments accumulate and prolong the moments between 'now', when the photograph is perceived, and 'then' - when it was taken. The time between 'now' and 'then' seems materialised, history appears embodied in the hundreds of encounters that the viewers had with the pictures. Furthermore, these accumulated moments embody the complexity and variety of the perceptions of the photographs over the years. Each scratch, fold or torn corner signifies a different personal engagement with the photograph - yet we do not know how these engagements are related to each other. This adds new layers of readings to the complexity of the photographic perception. The photographs' existence over time becomes a central concern of the works, as well their subjective perceptions in the hundreds of moments before 'then' and 'now'; of their specific presence 'in between'. These subjective perceptions do not appear passive; they leave their physical mark (the folds and scratches) on the photographs. The physical marks intervene in the space of the photographs and change them. In this sense the photographs' claim for 'objectiveness' functions between the prolonged moments of their existence, in the countless readings of their imagery. This adds a particular distance between the perception of the photographs, transformed into paintings, and the objects of their interest.

In my paintings, each detail is depicted with the same attention; the surface of the canvases is smooth and the paintings do not emphasise the materiality of the paint. This procedure required an act of 'objective perception', of stepping aside from the personal engagement with the photographs and the objects in them. In this approach my works reference Gerhard Richter's decision not to impose any 'style' when producing his 'photopaintings'. Richter claimed that he valued photography for the way in which "it keeps you from stylizing, from seeing "falsely", from giving an overly personal interpretation to the subject" (Richter, 2009, p. 32). In my practice, striving to develop a 'style' would disrupt the correlation between

the photographic source and the painting. It would draw attention to the painting as an object itself, disregarding the process of its development. Rather, this process, developed in constant interrelations with the theoretical enquiries of this study is here considered equally important as the final work (as an object).

In my practice taking mediated pictures as the primary material implies beginning with a certain mode of temporality already in existence as an inherent part of the object to be reworked. 'The initial reality' with all the ambiguity of the term no longer constitutes the starting point of my paintings. Instead it is replaced by photographs in a sense of already constructed images. According to Peter Osborne, Richter's 'photopaintings' act as a moment of cognitive self-reflection of the experience of the photographic image by creating time and space for reflection upon that image, which is qualitatively different from the initial photograph (Osborne, quoted by Gaiger, 2004, p. 115). Discussing his works, Richter points out,

> The photograph makes a statement about a real space, but as a picture it has not space of its own. Like the photograph, I make a statement about real space, but when I do so I am painting; and this gives rise to a special kind of space that arises from the interpretation and tension between the things represented and the pictorial space (Richter, 2009, p. 34).

"When I paint from a photograph, conscious thinking is eliminated. I don't know what I am doing. My work is far closer to the Informel than to any kind of 'realism'. The photograph has an abstraction of its own, which is not easy to see through" (Richter, 2009, p. 29). According to Gaiger, using photographs freed Richter "of the traditional demands that have been placed upon painters: problems of perspectival organization, the achievement of coherent pictorial space and the grouping or arrangement of the subject were already resolved by the photographic source" (Gaiger, 2004, p. 104). Ironically, "this enabled Richter to focus on such pure 'painterly' concerns as the handling of the paint, the distribution of tonal values and the format and size of the canvas" (Gaiger, 2004, pp. 104-105). Gaiger elaborates on the constitutive tension between the subject of the painting and the painted surface, referring to this process as 'double-register' (2004, p. 108). The 'double-register' allows Richter to "give heightened prominence of the artefactual or illusory character of painting: the photo-paintings do not offer a 'window to the world', but rather a strategic intervention in the mass-circulation of images" (2004, p. 108).

By making a painting of a photograph Richter seeks to overcome the artificiality of painting and to get 'reality' back into his work. Rather than simply endorsing the triumph of photography over painting, his 'photopaintings' open up a space for critical reflection that allows us to see photographs as themselves "constructs of representations whose putative claim to truth can itself be an object of scrutiny" (Gaiger, 2004, p. 108). The approach adopted by my practice differs from Richter's paintings in this manner. My works are the result of a series of deliberate choices and procedures concerned with the selection of the photographic sources and the fragments to be used. The figurative elements are explicit;

their abstraction is not a concern which presupposed their examination and depiction. My practice does not focus on pure 'painterly' concerns without taking into consideration their relation to the subjects and ways of production and distribution of the particular source image. In this sense, the approach adopted by my practice does not attempt to distinguish the formal characteristics but to examine them as deeply connected to the imagery of the selected photographs.

2. 4. Scale and status of painting in Socialist Realism and my practice

The scale of the works in my practice as one of the formal elements also is correlated with the selected Socialist Realist works. It varies, yet overall it appears quite small in comparison with the works of Socialist Realism. The large scale of the latter was employed as signifying the status of the works and their subject matter. This approach was mainly used in the pictures of Communist leaders. Apart from the emphasis on the importance of these portraits, the large scale requires a specific type of consumption. The artworks were not offered to the viewer in the conventional contemplative way, but were meant to be perceived in a most "striking, even shocking way" (Petkova-Campbell, 2010). The shock was needed as these works functioned as part of the Communist metanarrative. Their perception had to suggest that the contact with these works is a contact with something absolute and transcendent. This type of consumption was questioned by the production of small-scale works in my practice. Some of my works' sizes, for instance the paintings from the series "Fragments of a Past", do not exceed 30 x 30 cm. Instead of 'shock' the small details in the works invite a kind of contemplation. The small size of the paintings suggests that their status has also been changed. The claims for connections with a metanarrative of Communism have been replaced by a critical notion on Socialist Realism which is one of the synchronously developed perspectives post-1989. They lose their status of 'true' depictions of a 'reality' and instead fade to mere viewpoints on Socialist Realism which co-exist in a pluralistic context.

Taking into account this 'secondary', constructed nature of a painting, our perception of it presupposes a certain distance to the objects depicted on its surface, as well as on its subject matter. This distance functions in my practice as a critical distance that draws attention to the pictures' construction and thus to the notions of the past which the Socialist Realist works transfer into the post-Communist period.

3. Between 'realism', utopia and the official representations of Socialist Realism in a Post-Communist Context: the "Museum of the Socialist Art"

3. 1. Socialist Realism between 'realism' and utopia: my painting "The Island of Utopia"

Utopia and Socialist Realism correspond to each other[8] and influence the positioning of the present, thus constituting an important aspect of the examination of continuity towards the Communist past. Illusions, belonging to utopia as unfulfilled ones, are not rejected and could be transformed into demands. Utopia tends to impose ready-made rules in searching for new, better conditions as required by the ideal. As Taylor stated, "Dialectical materialism would compel men to live in Utopia whatever the promptings of their hearts" (1967, p. 10). The 'promptings' had to follow rigid ideological principles. Both Socialist Realism and utopia influence the present by imposing aims and directions relating to how they are understood, as well as the on the 'construction' of the past and the future.

My painting "The Island of Utopia" (120 x 80 cm, oil on canvas, fig. 21) reflects on this correlation. The focus is on a utopian dimension of the Communist ideology as influenced by Marx's writings, components of which have been transferred to the post-Communist situation in the country. The latter sit side by side with the notions on the past as manifested in Socialist Realist works exhibited in post-Communism. Therein, of particular interest for this chapter is the example of the 'Museum of the Socialist Art' as the first state-funded institution in the country which displays Socialist Realism after the collapse of the Communist regime.

In his support of 'scientific Socialism', Marx distances himself from Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen and their utopian visions. Despite this, in his writings, elements that resemble a utopian project could be found, whose imposed rules require totalitarian measures to ensure the utopian vision is pursued properly. In "The Communist Manifesto" Marx develops his view on "all existing society" as the "history of class struggles" (2010, p. 20). History unfolds in the binary opposition between bourgeois and Communist societies. The two societies are set against each other and the Communist one offers alternatives to the main characteristics of the bourgeois: private property, family, education, women's rights, countries and nationality, state, and others need radical change or abolition, according to Marx; changes that the Communist society will accomplish (2010, pp. 40-49). In addition, Marx formulates his view on man's consciousness, i. e. that "it changes with every change

8 Utopia also might be considered in correlation to nostalgia towards the Communist past. Despite their different temporal positions, nostalgia and utopia both disregard the present. While avoiding focusing on the current conditions, they are concerned with visions of an ideal world that could be achieved by means of pre-formed concepts. The latter are not related to empirical studies but are derived from a dominant paradigm. Utopia could be regarded as nostalgia for an ideal future; likewise nostalgia could be understood as a longing for a utopian past that never existed.

of his material existence, […] Socialist relations and Socialist life" (p. 48). At the end of the chapter he states:

> When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character (2010, p. 52).

Furthermore, in his manuscript "Private Property and Communism", written in 1844, Marx claims that "Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution" (1844). These affirmations, brought together, would assume that the Communist society constitutes a final stage of the course of history. In this way they resemble utopian visions for the future, based on the materialist conception of history.

In contrast to Fourier and Owen, who tried to test their hypotheses by establishing communities in accordance with their concepts, Marx was "secure in the belief that historical determinism would prove him right in the long run" (Coverly, 2010, p. 99). Marx's ideas influenced the implementation of Communism and accordingly the development of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria. This influence mainly manifested itself in the concept of society's hierarchy, built on the idea of base and superstructure, as well as in the abolition of private property, and "centralization of credit in the hands of the State" (Marx, 2010, p. 51). According to him, relations of production constitute the economic structure of society. This structure becomes the real basis of society and defines the forms of Socialist consciousness. The mode of production determines the social, political and intellectual processes in society.

Applied to Socialist Realism, this concept outlined its main subjects, pictorial decisions and adopted aesthetic approaches in fine art. Images of the utopian Communist future could be found in a number of Socialist Realist paintings, depicting an ideal world with state-planned economy, equality, and mutual understanding between the classes resulting from the successful revolution of the proletariat. Smiling faces of workers, who appear to be satisfied by their participation in the cooperative farms or building new factories and communal residential buildings, signify the new, 'bright' future and its inevitability in the progress of history.

My painting "The Island of Utopia" reflects on these utopian visions developed in the past and connects them to the post-Communist present. It is both a representational and an abstract work: its representational space draws the viewer's perception to a mysterious place with its illusion of deepness and space. At the same time, this space is disrupted by rough brush strokes in the right corner of the painting; these constitute a flat, abstract shape which divides the viewer's attention between the figurative scene and its surface. The abstract shape covers the staircase and obstructs the viewer's 'arriving' on the island. The illusion is swept away, replaced by a more distanced perception. This perception directs critical attention at utopia as part of the Communist ideology. Instead of being drawn into the mysterious utopian space, the viewer is invited to question its construction.

Fig. 21 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"The Island of Utopia", oil on canvas, 120 x 80 cm, 2013

Fig. 22 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
Abandoned Factory, photograph, 2012

The work's starting point was one of my photographs, taken near an abandoned factory from the Communist period (fig. 22). The photograph almost accidently brought together part of the neglected structure and the two cypresses. Their relations evoked Arnold Bocklin's painting "The Isle of the Dead" in my mind. The mysterious, almost surreal atmosphere in the painting, as well as the fact that we see a scene without a particular point in time reference the concept of Communism as mythology, an idea strongly supported by the aims of the Communist ideology to re-build society and re-invent man.

Thomas More describes an island in his vision of a utopian society. Aldous Huxley also envisages that utopia could be built on an island. In many respects Communism created an island; a closed society estranged from the rest of the world. Furthermore, the island remains a valid sign for fine art in Bulgaria after the collapse of the Communist era as it refers to the notion of a peculiar "self-sufficiency of the Bulgarian artist", described by Boris Danailov (1995, p. 1). As pointed out by the author, the notion of self-sufficiency is a consequence of the function of Socialist Realism as a "metastasis" of power (1997, p. 1).[9] In this context the two periods – the Communist and the post-Communist - appear to be connected again in particular continuity.

In Bocklin's work the isle represents the underworld where Hades rules over the dead. In my painting "The Island of Utopia" this connection to Bocklin's picture is retained in order to emphasise the sense of eternity that the Communist utopian visions maintained. Mircea Eliade points out the millenarian pattern in the Communist phenomenon (Eliade, 1964) as a way to 'escape history', using the functioning of concepts understood as scientific laws rather than religious beliefs. The painting reflects on this idea of timelessness; it appears that time in it has stopped and the utopian visions seem inevitably close.

9 This could be regarded as one of the reasons behind the inability to form a critical debate after 1989.

In my painting, the rocky shore from Bocklin's work is replaced by a concrete one; and the rocks by buildings. There are almost no signs of nature on the island. Instead, massive concrete edifices fill the island, leaving space only for a small ruined building on the right side of the picture. There are no doors or windows on the constructions, and their function remains ambiguous. They could represent either a city or a pagan sanctuary, or maybe a monument. This ambiguity reflects on the ambiguity of the utopian visions of the Communist 'progress', fluctuating between the scientific, the pseudo-religious and the mythological. How to render this ambiguity open to inquiry and to explanation was one of the main concerns of the painting.

A photograph of the memorial complex to the Founders of the Bulgarian State has been used as source material for depicting the buildings in the painting (fig. 23). Built in 1981 on a hill near the city of Shoumen, the complex consists of eight concrete structures in the shape of spirals, most likely related to the idea of historical progress. Twenty one sculptures representing scenes from the earliest period of the Bulgarian state supplement the complex, thus emphasising the continuity between the Communist period and the distant Bulgarian history. Since the fall of the Communist regime the complex has not been maintained; despite that, it is frequently visited. Built on a hill, even abandoned, the complex retains its visual impact over the city. In my painting the memorial complex is removed from its dominating spatial position. The worshipful effort of climbing hundreds of steps is replaced by floating.

The place in the painting looks quiet and austere; it might be forgotten or neglected. Or just not visited very often. According to Marx, "Socialism was to be developed from its Utopian stage to its scientific stage" (Popper, 1945, p. 79). The painting "The Island of Utopia" represents a stage of an 'accomplished utopia', a moment after the Communist regime was in existence. It pictures a myth which claims to be a scientific construction; the contradiction seems obvious. Lucian Boia describes Communism as a mythology that could be defined "as *determinist* and *voluntarist, libertarian* and *totalitarian, democratic* and *elitist, internationalist* and *nationalist"* (1998, p. 8, emphasis in the original).

The layers of meanings hidden within the picture of the abandoned factory, Bocklin's work, and their correlations unfold in the process of developing the painting. The elements taken out form the source images: the cypresses, the ruined building, the low horizon and the island have been 're-seen' in the painting. The painting juxtaposes in a new way these components from the source images and by this means explores Communism as an 'entirety' that combines all of these contradictory elements – it constitutes a mythology with its sacred place, and at the same time it attempts to represent a construction based merely on scientific paradigms; it is praised and detested; it is forgotten, but still existent.

My painting "The Island of Utopia" does not aim to reconcile the contradictions found in the aspects, implementation and pervasive understandings of the Communist ideology examined above. Rather, by juxtaposing abstract and figurative elements, it offers an

artistic approach which facilitates a further examination and new visualisation of these contradictions. The work seeks to open up possibilities for a critical dialogue on the Communist visual heritage by developing new, still unexplored juxtapositions between selected elements of Socialist Realist monuments, photographs taken in the post-Communist period, aspects of the Communist ideology and elements of other source images, such as Bocklin's work.

The painting aims to explore their implications and to encourage the flows of associations and new relations that they evoke, found in the images both as 'entities' and in their particular elements. They all constitute a spiral movement of interrelations between the parts and the 'integrity', which my painting seeks to induce. The interrelations between abstract and figurative components constitute a space of translation which allows for expanding the 'readings' of the works. Their meanings are no longer constrained by the ideological principles of the Communist regime. In the space of my studio practice, these pictures offer a starting point for a critical discussion about the heritage of Socialist Realism in its complexity and differentiations over the years.

The utopian visions as an aspect of the Communist ideology appear to be transferred in the post-Communist 'present' by state-supported institutions such as the 'Museum of the Socialist Art". The institutional framework of the museum which surrounds the exhibited Socialist Realist works constitutes a space which resembles a mausoleum, a sepulchre where the dialogue on the heritage of Socialist Realism is absorbed in a pseudo-religious ritualistic experience. For that reason the museum is of particular interest for this thesis. The discourses on its name and establishment, and its selection of works and space are scrutinised in this chapter in relation to Socialist Realism and its representations in post-Communist Bulgaria, in the ruptures and continuities between the two periods.

3. 2. *Fait Accompli*: debates about the name of the 'Museum of the Socialist Art'

The 'Museum of the Socialist Art' was the first museum dedicated to the Communist era in the country after the fall of the Communist era. It was established in Sofia, in 2011. Indeed, it was a long time in coming, because Communism had collapsed more than 20 years previously; despite this, the museum opening was a significant event. As a state-funded institution[10], which was going to articulate a state-sanctioned view on fine art about this so very traumatic and controversial period from Bulgarian history, the museum's opening was anticipated with caution far beyond discipline-bound discussions. Since the first day of its existence, the museum drew a wide range of reactions and heated discussions. Journalists, politicians, art historians, curators and critics were actively involved in these discussions.

10 The "Museum of the Socialist Art" is an affiliate of the National Art Gallery and it is under the direction of the Ministry of Culture. Its establishment cost 3.5 million levs (around 1.3 million British pounds) taken from the budget of the Ministry of Culture.

Fig. 24 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"Details of Socialist Realism", oil on canvas; sizes vary between 50 x 50 cm and 80 x 65 cm, 2012

The active participation of politicians before and at the opening of the museum[11] presupposed the politicising of the debate. In an official declaration, one of the right parties at this time – The Union of Democratic Forces – called the museum "an attempt to centralise writing of history… that goes beyond the rehabilitation of the Communist regime" (2011); and declared, "This is an attempt of the government to tell all of us what Socialism, Communism and art are" (2011). The museum's exhibitions, gallery spaces, selection of works and even its name provoked a variety of questions and concerns which, together with its state-sanctioned view, define its important position as an intersection between Socialist Realism, Communist and post-Communist state policies and contemporary fine art in Bulgaria.

Acknowledging this position of the museum, my series "Details of Socialist Realism" addresses the relationship between the abstract and the figurative in the official representations of Socialist Realism, articulated by the institution. The series consists of six paintings (oil on canvas; sizes vary between 50 x 50 cm and 80 x 65 cm, fig. 24). Each painting depicts a detail of an artwork exhibited at the museum, thus constituting metonyms of these pieces. Each detail is mediated through photography; i. e. it does not represent a 'direct' interaction with the works. By a process of re-contextualisation and transformation, these details acquire new signification – having lost their claim for presenting 'true images' of the past, they turn into viewpoints on Socialist Realist aesthetics and its functions in society.

11 The Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture, as well as other ministers and MPs attended the event.

The details are depicted in a way that keeps them recognisable and preserves the connection to the initial pictures – both to the original Socialist Realist work and its photographic representation. These figurative elements explore three fundamental topics in Socialist Realism - the 'cult of personality', the proletariat, and the partisan movement - correlated with oppositions of understandings on Socialist Realism, developed and sustained both before and after 1989. Three different aspects of the 'cult of personality' are addressed in the first three paintings: cult of personality about political leaders, cult as a ritual, and as a cult about an anonymous figure. These aspects are situated in the opposition between 'canon' and pseudo-religious ritual in Socialist Realism. The unobtrusive yet constant presence of Socialist Realist monuments and their relationship to the opposition between bygone and revived 'reality' in the museum is the central focus of the fourth painting - "Pedestal". In the fifth painting, "Proletariat", this key for Socialist Realism subject matter is transferred into the post-Communist context of the "Museum of the Socialist Art". The last painting of the series - "Looking into the Bright Future" - explores the subject of partisan movement as part of the revolutionary past, emphasised as fundamental for the historical development of the country by the Communist ideology.

The works in this series are produced deliberately in a way that they are experienced by observation that requires distance. The latter is understood here in terms of critical distance – the works do not attempt to 'draw' the viewer to experience particular narratives. Rather, the paintings invite him or her to perceive them as visual embodiments of critical making performed by means of the studio practice. In this way they encourage the viewer to reflect on the Socialist Realist works' formal features and meanings, wrapped in a bundle of relations arising from the context of their post-Communist contexts of display. In this sense, my paintings aim to operate as an alternative both to Socialist Realism and the official representations of it, articulated by the museum. The small-scale canvases, the painted edges, the juxtaposition of the abstract and the figurative constitute the main approaches employed to construct this alternative. What the paintings are attempting to achieve, however, is to constitute a space for a dialogue with the current institutional engagements with Socialist Realism and accordingly with the Communist past between the strivings to 'break' with the past and continuity towards it. In this sense the elements of the museum's representation of Socialist Realism constitute an important aspect of the works.

The name of the institution, 'The Museum of the Socialist Art', is the first of these elements. It poses a bundle of questions about the museum's position towards fine art during Communism. As Roland Barthes maintains, a "title helps me to choose *the correct level of perception,* permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding" (1977, p. 39, emphasis in original). As suggested in the name, the institution claims to exhibit works which belong to the period of 'Socialism'. Two questions immediately arise: since the term Socialist Realism is not included in the name, what would the curators mean by 'Socialist Art'? Did they maybe intend to present a new, unique art style or movement, obviously closely connected to Socialism?

Another implication of the name could be that the museum displays an overview of all works produced during the Communist era, or at least examples of all movements and styles in the country - yet we discover that the exhibitions only display examples of Socialist Realism. This would imply that Socialist Realism was the only artistic approach that Bulgarian artists were dedicated to during the Communist era. Unofficial fine artworks are not featured at the exhibitions. Apparently they do not fit into this overall image of fine art during Communism that the museum articulates. How does the term 'Socialist art' operate in the name in this case? With its combination of an ideological and the artistic, it suggests that fine art was in a close position to Socialism. Its usage also excludes the differences in the definitions of Socialist Realism over the years, as well as the relationship between the party, the state and the artists whose analysis also requires certain differentiation. It appears that the development of fine art in the Communist period is regarded in the museum as a homogeneous one. The contradiction of terms does not seem to be resolved.

In the beginning, the suggested name for the museum was "Museum of Totalitarian Art". The name was proposed in the document "Provision about Leading Museums in the Capital" prepared by the Ministry of Culture in 2010. It was changed in the month before the museum's opening. The person who changed it is still unknown. The change of the name provoked widespread public discussions. Because, though, it was revealed just a few days before the official opening of the museum the debates could not change anything. Here, new intriguing questions arise: who takes the decisions then, since public discussions encountered a *fait accompli*? And who reaches the conclusion on whether these decisions are taken with the necessary level of expertise? The answer in this case is the Ministry of Culture, or, in other words, a state power structure. Again, an answer which poses more concerns: it appears that, claiming to offer a 'whole' and monologic view on the Communist art-world of the country, this institution suggests that it possesses an 'undeniable truth' about the past. This 'truth' could easily be linked to the metanarratives of the Communist ideology with their claims for universal knowledge. The name and the strategies adopted by the museum produce representations of the Socialist Realist works and thus lead to other, more general concerns which exceed the scope of this research yet which are worth mentioning as directly connected to aspects of continuity between the two periods. These strategies and their impact explore the extent to which the relations between fine art and the state art institutions changed after the fall of the Communist regime. Thus, they also question the extent to which the Communist past and Socialist Realism have been overcome.

3. 3. Between oblivion and revival: colours and abstract space in my series of paintings "Details of Socialist Realism" and their functions in exploring Socialist Realism in the museum

This aspect of continuity between the Communist and the post-Communist periods in the country, as articulated by the Socialist Realist works at the 'Museum of the Socialist Art', has been transferred within the approaches adopted by my practice. My series of paintings

“Details of Socialist Realism” acknowledges it as part of the context that surrounds the Socialist Realist works at the museum. In my paintings the abstract and the figurative interact with each other directly, as in the other works in my practice. Yet, as distinct from my series “Fragments of a Past”, discussed in the introduction, for instance, this series focuses not on the processes of production of the photographs, but on the context of display of the selected Socialist Realist works. This context is constituted by the “Museum of the Socialist Art” and is regarded here as having a significant impact on the ‘readings’ of these works, forming a framework of constraints that aim to ‘guide’ our understanding of the Socialist Realist works and, accordingly, Socialist Realism in Bulgaria.

By emphasising the importance of the formal aspects within the source images, namely their colours, materiality, spatial position, and decision-making approaches (both aesthetic and ideological) among others, the procedures employed for developing the paintings elicit critical attention to the construction of the works themselves. The tension between the flatness together with the absence of an apparent centre of interest in the paintings and the deepness of the photographic representation is brought into a conjunction. This is emphasised by the painted edges of the works.

The colours in the paintings are almost black and white, rendering the colours of the photographic sources; thereby their usage implies three moments in time that the paintings refer to – the moment of producing the initial photograph, the moment of its observation, and a third moment of perception, situated in the complex notion of ‘now’. In the represented details of Socialist Realist works, the colours indicate that the monuments and reliefs are old and corroded; i. e. the paintings represent a post-Communist viewpoint on a past that has already dissipated. The Socialist Realist works appear as massive, yet rusted objects in the paintings. Rust is not only sign of the post-Communist temporal position of the works. It also indicates the peculiar oblivion that envelops the Socialist Realist works, manifested in the lack of critical discussions after 1989. Here an ambiguity unfolds. On the other hand, being massive, the Socialist Realist works in the paintings appear as objects that exist and will exist for long time. Thus they embody the timelessness of these heroic images from the past, transferred into the ‘present’.

The white abstract space in my paintings references Ilya Kabakov’s paintings from his exhibition “An Alternative History of Art”. The latter showcases paintings by three fictitious artists who look back at the development of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union (fig. 25). A white background is depicted in the paintings together with scenes from Socialist Realism, concerned with the first decade from the Communist regime and accordingly with the hopes for achieving the ‘bright future’ of the Communist society. In the different stages of the fictitious artists’ work, the abstract components change – they gradually fill the space, confronting with realism in their intention to cover almost the entire space of the canvasses. The realistic elements become small parts included in abstract compositions. This juxtaposition reflects the concepts of an artist who has accepted the formal ideas of the suprematism and has connected them to the Socialist Realism. In my series “Details of

Socialist Realism" white also indicates the hopes of the new period, in this case the post-Communist aspirations - yet it has other indications too. At one level, it functions as a reference to the specific engagement with temporality suggested by it. At another level its function was based on the commitment to the 'readings' it could generate. "White has this harmony of silence which works upon us negatively, like many pauses in music that break temporarily the melody" (Kandinsky, 2006, p. 78). In my paintings it breaks the temporality of the experiences of the past, constituting a moment of silence outside the extreme views on the past, one which opens up possibilities for a dialogue based on a critical discussion of Socialist Realism. This discussion emerges in the details, both within the depicted elements from monuments and in acknowledging the different definitions of Socialist Realism in its development. It does not possess the ambition to develop an 'overall' view on history of Socialist Realism, nor to replace the old metanarrative with new ones.

3. 4. Socialist Realism between the bygone and the revived 'reality' in the museum

"To me death is non-participation in communication" says Kabakov in an interview with Boris Groys (2010, p. 8). He refers to his works that include quotes from signposts and posters on the street. Indifferent to the viewer's existence, the visual signs on the street seem to avoid any form of communication, which Kabakov describes as frightening. Absorbed in their past greatness, Socialist Realist monuments seem indifferent to our existence. In their silence they signify elements from the past, elements that form and influence our understandings of the Communist period.

In my painting "Pedestal" from the series "Details of Socialist Realism" (67 x 90 cm, oil on canvas, fig. 26) the monuments have disappeared and only a pedestal remains. Thus the representational components in the painting focus on the sculpture's presence itself rather than on a specific figure from the past. This depiction of the pedestal also addresses the hierarchy of subjects in Socialist Realism. The pedestal itself could be perceived as an abstract shape, an approach adopted by Komar and Melamid in their paintings on Socialist Realism. The artists discuss some of the pedestals of Socialist Realist monuments as examples of Cubo-Futurism (2013). My painting employs a different approach. The pedestal remains a figurative element in the work, maintaining its connection to the imagery of Socialist Realism by using linear perspective and focusing on details on the surface of the pedestal rather than on its abstract shape. This anonymous part of a monument signifies the presence of Socialist Realism in the country after the collapse of the Communist regime, thus referencing the sculptures in the "Museum of the Socialist Art".

Before being included in the museum's exhibitions, these sculptures inhabited squares and parks around the country for decades. They represent various subjects: from monuments of Soviet and Bulgarian Communist leaders (Lenin, Stalin, Dimitrov, Blagoev and Zhivkov, among others) to small sculptures of workers and partisans (fig. 27). The majority of

Fig. 26 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"Pedestal"*, oil on canvas, 67 x 90 cm, 2012

Fig. 27 - ‘The Museum of the Socialist Art”, sculpture park

the works are collected from the National Museum of Bulgarian Art and partly provided by municipalities and local galleries. They are exhibited on their original pedestals - the monuments of the political leaders have high stands, while the sculptures of partisans and workers are placed directly on the ground: the hierarchy of subjects seems to be preserved. Most of the paintings, graphics and sculptures in the gallery space are from the '40s and '50s[12] whereas those in the sculpture park date from 1944 to 1989. The focus on fine art from the first two decades of Communism is explained by the head of the museum, Bissera Yosifova: "In the 40s and 50s no one was forced to paint or carve figures. It was an idealistic time back then. All were enthusiastic and carried away by the new ideas" (quoted by Purvanova, 2011).

In their new, institutional context, the sculptures at the museum are not arranged chronologically or thematically. The portraits of political leaders are randomly exhibited among the sculptures of partisans and workers. The spatial position of the works gives the impression that the space is a part of an actual reality rather than a museum. It seems that the context is placed 'outside history'; that is to say, the works could be transferred together with their status and framework of 'readings' to any time period.

My painting removes the context of the pedestal. Only a detail from the source image is depicted. In a few places the viewer can spot the bricks which the pedestal is made of, a detail that indicates how 'trivial' this construction appears to be. Thereby this sign of hierarchy acquires new 'readings', 'readings' that might fluctuate between the notions of the past glory of the Socialist Realist monuments; of their constant, sometimes subtle presence in the public spaces; of their not entirely lost influence in fine art and the representations of the recent past.

The framework of 'readings' of Socialist Realism is endorsed by the affirmation of the curator of the museum and the Minister of Culture. In order to be included in the collections of the museum, "the main criterion [was] the high artistic value of the works", noted the Minister of Culture, Vezhdi Rashidov (quoted by Purvanova, 2011), who was actively involved in the preparation and establishment of the museum and the selection of works. According to the museum's curator, the exhibitions at the museum are

> a representation of the Socialist idea that goes beyond specific historical periods and artistic styles. ...A manifestation of the best in Bulgarian art in the second half of the 20th century. It is pure art of the highest quality that painters during the Socialist period were able to produce (quoted by Guencheva, 2012, p. 126).

It seems that one of the functions of the museum is to convince visitors that, during Communism, 'highly valuable' works were created; an assertion which, apart from being rather nostalgic, appears undeniable if one looks at the entire art-world in the country, but

12 The exhibitions displayed in the gallery space are temporal and change every six months. However, most of the works were produced in the '40s and '50s.

which seems questionable when applied to the selected works at the museum. The usage of the term 'highly valuable' suggests that the institution aims to propose a system of criteria applied to the selection of works.[13] Furthermore, the institution appears to exclude other viewpoints on the Communist past, again suggesting that there is only one, homogeneous 'art history' of this period. This raises new concerns about the institution's view on fine art during the Communist regime, as well as on the criteria for 'valuable' art developed during and after this period. The criteria seem to follow the same paradigm, which itself constitutes another aspect of continuity between the two eras. It appears, though, more than 20 years after the collapse of Communist regime that this state-funded art institution disregards the variety of styles and individual approaches employed by unofficial artists, which undoubtedly existed before 1989: and what is of special interest for this chapter and my painting "Pedestal" in particular is the means by which such a monologic, institutionalised view be legitimised as valid in a pluralistic democratic society, which – supposedly - the post-Communist period in Bulgaria is.

3. 5. Socialist Realism between homogeneity and differentiation in the museum

The abovementioned claim for homogeneity of Socialist Realism suggested by the museum is questioned by my series "Details of Socialist Realism". The paintings focus on the specific visual language of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria acknowledging the differences in its definitions over the years of the Communist regime - yet these differences are explored within the unchanging framework which the Communist ideology imposed.

The selected Socialist Realist works are not only assessed by the museum and exhibited in a manner that does not appear to be chronologically or thematically presupposed; they are displayed without any additional information about the context of their production. The museum consists of a sculpture park of 7500 square metres and an indoor exhibition space (550 square metres). In a separate small space the viewer can watch a documentary film about Communism (with English subtitles, fig. 28, fig. 29), which assembles segments of propaganda films produced before 1989 and a small number of images from post-Communist Bulgaria, added at the end of every part. In the film, the pathos of the narrator is expressed by phrases such as "they [the children] are brimming with filial affection and gratitude [towards the visiting leaders]"; "we are an army with red ties, with bold sparkles in our eyes"; "on earth shall be Communism", "…the faces of working people, shining with joy", among others. In opposition, the frames from the post-Communist present (fig. 29) show images of destruction and gloominess: demolition of monuments, the disassembly of the ruby five-pointed star at the top of the Communist party headquarters, as well as dreary landscapes of abandoned factories and grey residential buildings. The past seems to be reduced to the imagery of the old propaganda films which evokes the sensation of as

13 The term 'pure art' itself contradicts with the name of the museum and does not explain why the latter was not named "Museum of Fine Art during Socialism", for instance, which would acknowledge an independence of the artistic and the ideological, as articulated by the museum's curator.


They are brimming with filial affection and gratitude.
The third graders of School ¹ 127 in Sofia received their Pioneer ties.
Every day, he overfulfilled the quota with 1220 %
in the defense of our freedom, independence and state sovereignty
We're an army with red ties, with bold sparkles in our eyes!
ПРОЛЕТАРИИ ОТ ВСИЧКИ СТРАНИ ЪЕДИНЯВАИТЕ СЕ!
ДА ДЪРЖИМ ВИСОКО И ПАЗИМ ЧИСТО ВЕЛИКОТО ЗВАНИЕ ЧЛЕН НА БРПК
WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

Fig. 28

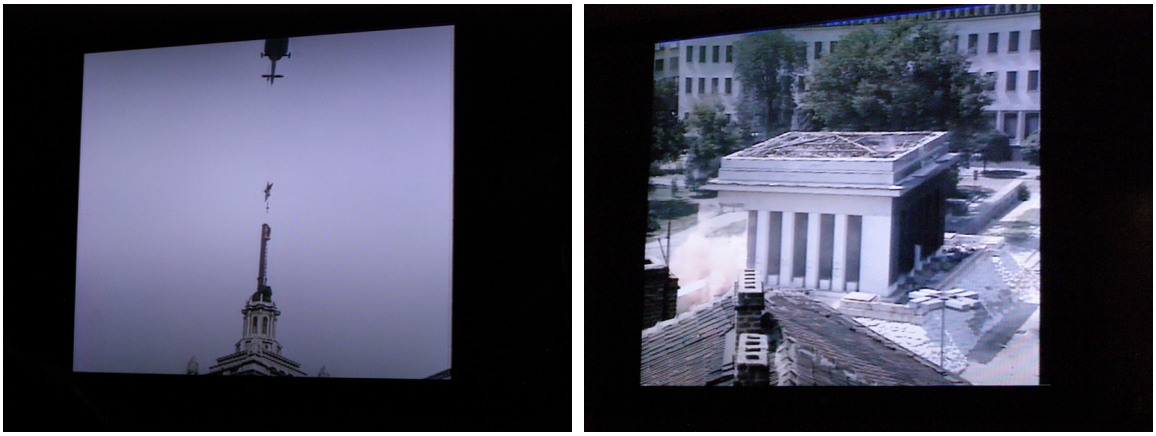

Fig. 29

a seamless period, whereas the present is regarded as consisting of gloomy landscapes and images of destruction.

There are no comments or information about the films; the images are left to speak for themselves about the past and present[14]. Thus we face an ambivalent position towards fine art articulated by the museum – images are left to recall the past by themselves, which would assume that fine art has a crucial role in representing the past. The creators of the expositions suggest that images would be powerful enough to represent a 'truthful' image of the past. Furthermore, they did not consider it necessary to 'anchor' the meanings of the images by adding linguistic constraints to the 'floating chain' of signifieds, as suggested by Barthes (1977, p. 38). On the other hand, fine art is placed in a deliberately created framework of interpretations, which attempts to obstruct any 'unnecessary' critical views. The latter is constructed by the name of the museum and the state-sanctioned view that it represents only 'high value art'. This assertion assures the necessary 'anchor' of the meanings of the works at the museum.

The same approach is applied to the monuments exhibited at the museum. There is no factual information about Socialist Realism or the most famous and influential artists of the Communist period. The political events that surround the implementation of Socialist Realism are also not included in the space. The only information provided are plates indicating the name of the artist and the work, placed on every painting and sculpture. Most of them do not include the year of the work's production which additionally perplexes the attempts for comprehension of the development of the definitions and implementation of Socialist Realism over the years. The viewer is left alone with them and this creates a direct connection between him or her and the works. Does this mean freedom of interpretation? John Berger says that "the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled" (1977, p. 11). How we see these works to a great extent is defined by our memories and knowledge about Communism. The ambivalence of positioning fine art as 'valuable' enough to produce images of the past that could maintain a 'truthful' notion and as inferior to the totalitarian ideology at the same time is manifested again, within this framework of 'readings', our interpretations and associations could not be limitless. The museum does not invite us to critically discuss Socialist Realism but rather to experience it, guided by its acquired status (indeed, the same status was acquired to Socialist Realism before 1989).

3. 6. Socialist Realism between 'canon' and pseudo-religious ritual: 'Cult of personality' in the museum

The "Museum of the Socialist Art" seems to have even a greater ambition, namely to define which works produced during the whole period of Communism 'deserve' to be called 'valuable art' or, on the contrary, to be excluded by the 'official' art canon. The museum itself

14 The subtitles only translate the original propaganda films without adding any comments.

inevitably falls into the context of other museums dedicated to the Communist past. Almost all post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe built this kind of museum. The House of Terror in Budapest, Occupation Museum in Riga, Museum of Genocide Victims in Lithuania, to name a few, explore mainly the political system of Communism and its influence over the particular country. The national art galleries of most of the post-Communist countries offer exhibitions of fine art produced during the Communist era.

The "Museum of the Socialist Art" differs from the examples listed above. Discussing the National Art Gallery in Vilnius, Lithuania in relation to the museum in Sofia, Guentcheva finds resemblances between the two museums as they both approach Socialist Realism as "valuable and of high quality" (2013); however, the similarities stop here. According to Guencheva, the works in Vilnius are "arranged in a manner emphasizing the history of artistic styles" (2013). Socialist Realism is exhibited in the hall entitled "Art and ideology" and shows the struggle of artists trained in a different tradition to comply with the requirements of the new norm as well as their complex predicaments in abiding by it. The last hall, "The Limits of Reality" "explores the uneasy process of negotiation between official canons and individual experimentation, exhibiting abstract and photo-realist works of art" (Guencheva, 2012, p. 132). The museum in Sofia is not concerned with works outside the canon and does not approach individual experiments and struggles with official fine art. The difficulties that artists experience in producing alternative art works remain outside the interest of the museum's expositions; indeed a strategy of canonisation whose genealogy could be found in the Communist era when the 'unofficial' works were not discussed by the art critics, nor were the oppressions on the 'unofficial' artists, drew the focus of the public attention.

The first three paintings from my series "Details of Socialist Realism" engage with the 'cult of personality' in the context of the museum. The 'cult of personality' connects, on the one hand, to the specific development of Socialist Realism in the country and to the definitions of 'realism' as part of this development. On the other hand, it connects to the pseudo-religious function of Socialist Realist works as an aspect of their canonisation.

In this regard new concerns arise; namely, what concept of 'museum' underpins the establishment of the institution, and how this concept would articulate an official representation of the 'cult of personality' after the fall of the Communist regime and in relation to Socialist Realism. As early as 1996, Nicholas Serota framed 'the dilemma of museums of modern art' as a stark option, 'experience or interpretation', which Hal Foster rephrases as "entertainment on the one side and aesthetic contemplation and/or historical understanding on the other" (2015, p. 26).

> Nearly twenty years later [after Serota's assertion], however, we needn't be stymied by this either/or. Spectacle is here to stay, at least as long as capitalism is, and museums are part of it; that's a given, but for that very reason it shouldn't be a goal (Foster, 2015, p. 26).

In this context, does the 'Museum of the Socialist Art' provide a space for entertainment or contemplation, or does it promote new interpretations of Socialist Realism and thus of the 'cult of personality'? Or probably all of these three? For Hal Foster, museums can unite these three functions.

> They [museums] can be spaces where artworks reveal their 'promiscuity' with other moments of production and reception. A central role of the museum is to operate as a space-time machine in this way, to transport us to different periods and cultures – diverse ways of perceiving, thinking, depicting and being – so that we might test them in relation to our own and vice versa, and perhaps be transformed a little in the process (Foster, 2015, p. 26).

In comparison to the above assertion, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Simeon Dyankov said at the opening of the museum, "now we close a page of Bulgarian history and Communism goes where it belongs - in a museum" (quoted by Hristov, 2011). What concept of museum and its functions does this utterance articulate and how would it connect to the concepts discussed above? It appears that the museum is rendered by the Deputy Prime Minister as an institutional space where the discussions on the past and its connections to the 'present' do not start but rather end. It does not appear that he expects a debate to be provoked by the Socialist Realist works.

In one of the discussions dedicated to the museum in Bulgaria, the art critic Yara Boubnova compares the museum to a "dark and quite expensive warehouse" (2012, p. II). "Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association," Adorno wrote in 1953 in "Valéry Proust Museum" and added "museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralisation of culture" (1988, p. 175). How does Dyankov's assertion relate to Foster's and Adorno's? If the "Museum of the Socialist Art" is considered as a 'sepulchre' of the Socialist Realist heritage, the assertion that the selected works - examples of 'pure art of highest quality' - starts to have different implications.

Since the works in the museum are not supposed to be discussed, as implied in the Deputy Prime Minister's utterance, this would refer to another hypothesis; namely that these works, exhibited as the only ones with 'high aesthetic value' during Communism, endeavour to maintain a canon already established before 1989. As Wolfgang Iser reckons, the process of canonisation is the choice of the texts itself, in this case the choice of works, which become objects of interpretation (2004). Canonisation transforms these works into certain type of 'censors' in relation to others; that is to say, the other works are marginalised by their status and as such they are not discussed. As a result, interpretation and examination of 'marginal' art is discounted and even forbidden. The canonisation requires a different type of perception and 'reading' of the 'canon' works, suppressing the distant and critical reaction. It serves only as a background of the 'canon', emphasising its authenticity (Iser, 2004).

The details from these 'canonical' works, re-contextualised in my paintings, function as metonyms of the pieces at the museum. They question the 'canonical' works' status and draw attention to the development of the canon. The small scale of the paintings contributes

Fig. 30 - Tsanko Lavrenov,
"The Red Horseman. 9.9.1944", oil on board, 1940[8]

to this change of status. These different sizes presume new forms of consumption and would require a different kind of discourse for their description and analysis. The initial Socialist Realist works with their large scale and strategies of display invited quite specific art consumption. The monuments were often placed on hills. The effort of climbing hundreds of steps was rewarded by the chance to admire the image of the leader, whose figure dominates over the space. Thus they were perceived in a process that resembles worship, i. e. a religious or, more precisely, a pseudo-religious ritual.

As 'sacred' images, these works discourage critical discussion. Rather, they require a particular type of exegesis according to which the experience of the works is absorbed in the admiration of their content and significance to the historical development of Socialist Realism. This type of perception correlates to another specific feature of Socialist Realism which could be observed at the museum; namely, the pseudo-religious function of the works. This function seems to be 'revived' in the space of the museum. The 'sacred' images are not supposed to be critically discussed; rather, they prompt viewers to commemorate them in a performative action, which resembles ritual. In comparison with Carol Duncan's concept that finds the basis of the museum as ritual, this chapter discusses formal parallels between the ritual actions performed during Communism and the concept of the museum visit as pseudo-religious in its correlation to the Communist ideology. The selection and arrangement of works closely connect the post-Communist context to the strategies of exhibiting works during Communism.

Fig. 31 - *"Stalin"*, artist unknown

> Art under centralised Communism not only acted as a set of pseudo-religious allegories but also fulfilled ritual functions by integrating the viewer into the painting. …This aesthetic method – enlarging the viewer's psyche by inducing him into different realities of consciousness while simultaneously turning the act of viewing itself into a visual 'ritual' – is found in almost all Socialist Realist pictures (Holz, 1993, p. 77).

Furthermore, pseudo-religious functions might be found in the exhibited works themselves. "The Red Horseman. 9.9.1944" (fig. 30) by Tsanko Lavrenov adopts Orthodox religious iconography; yet replaces religious connotations with ideological ones. In the painting, St. George is depicted as a soldier from the Red Army and the dragon has four heads that resemble a swastika. The religious fight between good and evil is turned into an ideological one, thus acquiring a new, pseudo-religious function, one needed for the rituals performed by and for the Communist Party.

Three small-size sculptures of Stalin (fig. 31, artist unknown) at the museum repeat an almost identical image of the leader. Only small details distinguish the works from each other. Even the posture is almost the same – Stalin appears as a heroic figure, standing up and staring out with confidence. By repeating the same image, a search for new formal means of expression is ignored, and the repetition itself resembles a ritualistic action. Exhibited together at the museum, the three sculptures emphasise this repetition. The subject, i. e. the portrait of Stalin, is enhanced as the main goal of this ritual.

'The cult of personality' in relation to the pseudo-religious features of the Communist ideology has its significant place in the development of Socialist Realism in the country.

Over the first three decades of Communism in the country, the portraits of Lenin, Stalin and Marx, as well as the leaders of the Bulgarian Communist party, Georgi Dimitrov and Vulko Chervenkov, were central subjects for fine art as part of this 'cult'. The plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist party in 1956 marked a substantial change in the development of the 'cult of personality'. It followed the death of Stalin and the 20th conference of the Communist party of the Soviet Union[15] and was dedicated to discussing, or, to be more precise, to criticising the 'cult of personality' towards the leader of the party and accordingly the country at that time[16], Vulko Chervenkov[17]. After the plenum in 1956 Todor Zhivkov, the new leader of the Communist party, became the central figure of the 'new' 'cult of personality'. The change did not concern only the specific personification of the 'cult'. In fine art, it created the illusion of weakening of the control over the production of works, which in turn quickly led to numerous convictions.

During these changes, however, the 'cult of personality' retained its fundamental role as subject matter in Socialist Realism. As responsible for implementation of the Communist ideology, the political leaders had to be depicted as its personifications - and here we face an ambivalent element of the Communist ideology, manifested in fine art. On the one hand, their posture, facial expression, gestures and even body structure were supposed to picture them as 'common people'. On the other hand, they had to resemble almost mythological figures, capable of building the new, Communist society. In Socialist Realist paintings the surrounding landscape expands their image as 'close to the people' - wheat field or factories are often depicted as backgrounds in the paintings (fig. 32). They correlate to the Communist ideology and to the means of production and state-planned economy as the foundation of society in particular. The resemblance to mythological figures is exalted by the grand scale and the high pedestals of the monuments.

The first painting of my series "Details of Socialist Realism" - "Cult of Personality 1" (63 x 85 cm, oil on canvas, fig. 33) - depicts a detail from the monument dedicated to Lenin produced by Lev Kerbel, a Soviet artist (fig. 34). The sculpture is approximately three metres high and it was transferred to the museum from the square in front of the Communist Headquarters in 1989. The monument was central in the processions (the so-called 'manifestations') dedicated to anniversaries from the revolution and other important dates for the Communist party. The monuments of political leaders lay at the centre of these pseudo-religious rituals. During the processions they were carried in the same way

15 The plenum in Bulgaria was organised just over a month after the 20th conference of the Communist party of the Soviet Union.

16 In the double system built by the Communist party on the correlation between 'party and country', where each state position had a corresponding party one, the party position was the leading one.

17 The 'cult of personality' was criticised on the plenum as a "gross violation of the Leninist principles and the norms of Party life on behalf of the comrade Valko Tchervenkov; [gross violation] of the collective leadership; isolation and placing himself above the Politburo and Central Committee" (April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1956. Verbatim Report, 2002, p. 16). After these criticisms Vulko Chervenkov was dismissed from the post of Prime Minister and appointed as Deputy Prime Minister.

Fig. 33 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"Cult of Personality 1", oil on canvas, 63 x 85 cm, 2012

Fig. 34 - Lev Kerbel, *"Lenin"*

as icons in the Orthodox tradition would be. Organised by the local committees of the Communist party, these processions were compulsory for almost everybody - from children in kindergartens to people in retirement. Refusal to participate was reported immediately to the Secret Service and was treated as a sign of disloyalty to the party/state system. In these celebrations and demonstrations of the successful Communist system, each group had to prepare banners that indicated their accomplishments in service of the state.

The monument – portrait of Lenin - displayed in the museum bears connotations to these rituals. This parallel evokes emotional response and thus quite a specific perception. In my painting "Cult of Personality 1", the portrait is taken out from its institutional context and placed on a white background. This changes the perception of the monument, drawing attention to the flatness of the canvas and thus to the painting as a constructed image. Furthermore, it functions as a metaphor that signifies the new, post-Communist context of display and representation. The process of developing the work included intuitive decisions that transcended the initial intentions. At the beginning the sketches depicted an image of the sculpture as integral (fig. 35). Gradually an active intervention in the source image was taken. Eventually the portrait of Lenin is depicted cut into halves and displayed in a way that allows the viewer to see its internal hollow core (fig. 36). By dividing it and emphasising

Fig. 35 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, Sketch, pencil on paper, 32 x 45 cm, 2012

Fig. 36 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, Sketch, pencil on paper, 32 x 45 cm, 2012

its materiality, the sculpture of Lenin is explored in my painting as an object rather than work of art. The 'sacred' character implied in the sculpture is exposed here as untenable. By enhancing the sculpture's obsolescence over time, the image of Lenin once again loses its appearance as a 'sacred' image and resembles a trivial object.

It is ambiguous whether the image depicted in the painting is the moment of creation or destruction of the monument, or if it represents a completed sculpture. Thereby, the painting reflects on the ambivalence that characterises the discussions on the recent past in their extreme views – between the rejection of this past and the 'restraint' of alternative views as performed by the "Museum of the Socialist Art". In this sense the 'cult of personality' also takes part in the discussions on the Communist past. In my painting it has not lost its influence, both as meaning and as strategy for art consumption.

'Cult of personality' is also regarded here as about the Communist party and the rituals which are dedicated to its history. This aspect is addressed by the second painting of my series "Details of Socialist Realism" - "Cult of Personality 2" (63 x 85 cm, oil on canvas, fig. 38). The figurative components in the painting depict two hands holding torches, a detail from a monument dedicated to the Communist Party (fig. 37). The monument is the so-called "House-Monument of the Party": it is displayed on a hill and consists of a building and a sculptural composition at the foot of the hill. The building is composed of a domed room and a 70 metre-high pole. On top of the pillars, two five-pointed, 12 metre-high stars are

Fig. 37 - *"House-Monument of the Party"*

Fig. 38 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"Cult of Personality 2"*, oil on canvas, 63 x 85 cm, 2012

fitted. The monument was an ambitious project - its development took more than 10 years and involved the efforts of 60 artists. In the ’90s the building was abandoned and since then it has existed only as a symbol of a previous glory. Each year since 1989, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the former Bulgarian Communist Party) has organised a party convocation near the monument, attended by its supporters. Each time the meeting starts with the anthem of Bulgaria and the “Internationale”. The idea of the nation is connected to the party again, as it was in the ’70s.

The sculpture of the hands carrying torches is part of the monument’s composition. Its spatial position corresponds to the hierarchy of subjects in Socialist Realism, in which the leaders and the party are in the centre (in this case, on a hill) and the working class is on the periphery. This hierarchy itself questions the claims by the Communist ideology to be egalitarian. According to Marx, the proletariat and its struggles define the course of history: yet the scale of the monument and its position suggest not equality with but rather awe towards the leaders. Their role in building ‘the new society’ is recognised as much more important than the role of the proletariat.

The torches resemble images of the fire brought by the torches of Prometheus or Persephone, as in both cases they would signify purification and enlightenment. Asen Ignatov argues that Communism is built upon an archetype, a belief in the sacred role of the ‘bailout chaos’, a peculiar catharsis after which society will be recovered (1991). Hence the torches would represent the ‘catharsis’ of the revolution, after which a new, Communist society and man are going to be created.

In the context of post-Communism, the building on the hill has been abandoned, yet it is still visited and honoured. The processions organised by the Socialist party after the collapse of the state Communism appear as attempts to repeat the processions from the past. They do not discuss the ‘cult of personality’, rather they keep it alive in a ritualistic repetition. In this new temporal position the initial meaning of the sculpture is being transformed; it no longer signifies the glory of the Communist Party. Rather, now it focuses on the glory of the Communist party as articulating an element from the past, which attempts to be transferred into the ‘present’. By directing the viewer’s attention to the ritual of respecting the party, the sculptures endeavour to reflect on the latter as an image that signifies a Communist past, which is honoured rather than discussed. Thus the image of the ‘cult of personality’ uses not only the subject itself, but also the context of monologic views surrounding its perception in the past in order to maintain its influence in the ‘present’.

In my painting “Cult of Personality 2”, the hands carrying torches are placed on a white background. They lose both their connection to the “House-Monument of the Party” and its dominant spatial position. Furthermore, they lose their massive scale and thus the viewer’s perception of them: yet the details still bear connotations to the initial image and connection to the rituals in the shadows of the sculptures both before and after the collapse

of the Communist regime. Again, the work functions on two levels – by preserving both the representational 'illusion' of space and the flatness of the canvas. In the figurative elements the details from the monument are depicted cut into pieces. In this way they lose their pretention for both totality and a dominant viewpoint on history. The 'cult of personality' is regarded here as an ambivalent and imposed construction in the context of Socialist Realism, transferred in post-Communism.

The importance of the 'cult' itself, outside its personification and temporal position, is addressed by my painting "Cult of Personality 3" (90 x 67 cm, oil on canvas, fig. 40). The source image for the painting is a photograph (fig. 39, artist unknown) probably taken in a studio for producing monuments. The photographic source shows only a detail from the space; the place and the other monuments remain unknown. The observation of the photograph triggered the development of this painting. The face and figure of the leader are left outside the canvas and the viewer can see only a fragment of a hand. It is not clear to whom the hand belongs. The large scale of the detail itself refers to the 'cult of personality' in its importance for Socialist Realism.

In the set of transitions between the abstract and the figurative, my painting emphasises the 'cult of personality' as one of the important factors supporting simplified oppositions of the past, opposition developed during Communism and transferred in the post-Communist context. Time is turned into space in the painting - a figure from the present may replace the old 'cult'. The painting refers to the 'cult' as a desire to 'escape out of time' (Eliade) sought by and in service of the Communist ideology; i. e. the 'cult of personality' appears here as an ahistorical construction.

The fingers depicted on the canvas are cut into pieces, which do not appear to fit perfectly. Despite this, the sculpture does not disintegrate. This representational detail of the work correlates with the process of construction (or again, as in the previous paintings, it is ambivalent, i. e. it could be of destruction) of the 'cult of personality'. The viewer sees a cult exposed as artificially constructed in contrast to the claims for mythological figures, articulated by the Communist ideology. At the same time the process of construction itself remains unknown, and unknowable, such as the way that the elements remain in the space without falling apart. The unknown process corresponds to the debates on the recent past, signified by the context of the museum. Assuming that the image depicts a moment of destruction of the past, i.e. the Communist regime, we see a moment in the careful dismantling of the components of an 'entity'. In this sense, in the painting, the 'cult of personality' is not 'destroyed' but is rather disassembled. Parts thereof keep their own integrity, as well as their relationship with the 'whole' and thus retain the possibility to rebuild the 'entity' at a given moment.

Fig. 40 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"Cult of Personality 3"*, oil on canvas, 90 x 67 cm, 2012

3. 7. Representations of the 'proletariat' between Socialist Realism and the 'Museum of the Socialist Art'

Another fundamental subject matter for Socialist Realism, which also has its important place within the framework of the museum and the 'readings' of the past, is the 'proletariat'. In "The Communist Manifesto" Marx maintains that, historically, every form of society has been based on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes (2010). A relief, dedicated to the class struggle, is exhibited at the "Museum of the Socialist Art" (fig. 41) on a wall just beside the name of the museum. In the context of Marx's assertion its central place at the museum appears well-deserved.

A photograph of the relief has been used as source image for developing my painting "Proletariat" (85 x 63 cm, oil on canvas, fig. 42) The details of the six figures depicted in the piece show them facing in one direction. They represent different people from the working class, of various ages. The viewer sees a bandaged head and a man holding a staff, maybe a flagstaff or some kind of weapon. The figures seem to be part of a bigger scene from an organised fight, presumably an uprising or a revolution. The figures almost merge into one entity, emphasising the unity of the people against a common enemy.

My painting "Proletariat" takes the figures out of the relief. At first sight, the faces look similar to the initial image - yet small details have been changed and the picture appears to present a different view on the initial subject. The painting comments on the source image, yielding its 'originality' as a picture. The faces look pale and seem almost ghostly. Their eyes cannot be seen in the shadows, a detail which enhances their lifelessness. The focus of the initial image – the fight - has been changed. The status of the subject itself has been changed by its transformation into this small-scale painting. The post-Communist proletariat has lost its previous enemy and faces new obstacles. The faces could either look at the unrealised utopian Socialist project, staring at an unknown future or at their past, lost in the striving for the same utopia.

In this painting, through their engagement with photographic mediation, the abstract and figurative, explore the interrelations between the visual discourses on the past and the

Fig. 41

institutionally supported ones. Thus the subject 'proletariat' – its importance and impact - is examined in accordance with the new meanings of the Socialist Realist works. The class struggle no longer holds its central position. The hierarchy of subjects itself, as defined by Socialist Realism, no longer functions in the post-Communist and postmodern context. The new 'readings' of the initial work which has been transformed in my painting, emerging in the juxtapositions between the source image and my painting, by the flat background, by the disruption of the illusion of three-dimensional space and by the representation of the figures, question the 'sacred' notion of this subject.

3. 8. Socialist Realism between the representations of the past and the future in the 'Museum of the Socialist Art'

'The revolutionary past' as another fundamental subject in Socialist Realism looks for 'patterns' in history. Works depicting scenes from the partisan movement's activities in the country constituted a widespread trend in fine art during Communism. Images of partisans had a central role in Socialist Realism as they were considered as situated in the foundation of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the revolution in 1944. Monuments dedicated to commemorate them were erected in key areas in which the partisan movement took place throughout the country.

The partisan movement comprises a series of military actions organised by the Communist Party during the Second World War. The Communist Party, as understood by George Lukacs, is "the institutionalized will and expression of proletarian class-consciousness and thereby endowed it with a superior view of 'total' reality" (Watnick, 1958, p. 53). Between 1941 and

Fig. 43

Fig. 42 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"Proletariat"*, oil on canvas, 85 x 63 cm, 2012

1944, armed guerrilla action against the Wehrmacht and state authorities in Bulgaria was organised, including terrorist attacks (Bojilov, 1993; Tzvetkov, 2008).

A photograph of a sculpture titled “Partisans”, exhibited at the “Museum of the Socialist Art” was used as a source image for developing my painting “Looking into the Bright Future” (55 x 55 cm, oil on canvas, 2013, fig. 44). The photograph is produced with a digital camera and, as such, possesses the formal characteristics of this type of photograph, i. e. bright colours and certain pixilation. On it we see a sculpture of three figures (fig. 43) which almost fills the entire space of the photograph. It appears life-size. The figures seem as they are in the middle of a fight - their bodies are intently focused on one direction, probably towards the enemy whose presence is left outside the space of the work. The positions of the men suggest that the work represents the exact moment when one is falling and the other two are turning to fight back. Their hands look massive and exaggerated. The sculpture is placed on a low pedestal; it almost lies on the ground. The pale traces on its surface suggest that it has been displayed outside for a long time. We can clearly see the label of the work, although it would be hard to read it in the photograph.

One of the figures from the sculpture has been depicted in my painting “Looking into the Bright Future”. The detail represented in my work shows the face and the shoulders of the figure on the left from the sculpture “Partisans”. The way the image of the figure is cropped interrupts the connection to the action represented in the initial work. We can only see that the man’s gaze is directed upwards – a pictorial decision that indicates the first transformation of the photograph, performed by my painting. Only a fragment of the monument is chosen, i. e. the painting does not endeavour to repeat the Socialist Realist work as captured by the photograph. Furthermore, the painting does not seem as detailed as the photograph. In what way is the photographic source important then? And why is this particular photograph chosen?

As Alan Sekula liked to say, “We have passed from the myth that a photograph is the truth to the myth that it is always a lie” (quoted by Foster, 2012). The photographic source of this painting is caught in this ambivalence; and the existence of the sculpture is acknowledged by its presence in the photograph. The photograph also includes fragments of the context in which the sculpture is displayed. The green branches and dry grass suggest that the photograph was taken in the summer. The photograph’s background represents a grey building, apparently a sign that it was taken after the fall of the Communist regime as we can see several air-conditioners on the windows. In this sense it indicates a certain space-time moment.

My painting “Looking into the Bright Future” examines the relations between past and future embodied in the connections between the monument and the space of the museum. According to Harrison, “concepts of representation – beliefs about the scope of representation and about the cognitive activities with which it is associated - function between the world and paintings as conditions of exclusion and inclusion” (2001, p. 220).

Fig. 44 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"Looking into the Bright Future", oil on canvas, 55 x 55 cm, 2012

By taking only a detail from a sculpture of three partisans, namely the face and shoulders of the figure on the left, the painting excludes the initial context of the detail. The background invests the surface with a metaphorical flatness. Detached from the source image, the image's meaning changes to a great extent. Instead of an enemy, the partisan gazes blankly at an unknown point, which could be the collapsed 'bright' future promised by Communism. The face of the partisan becomes a sign of the unrealised utopian concepts of the Communist ideology. As such it also signifies the framework of 'readings' produced and elaborated by the museum with the absence of the historical/ideological nature of the exhibited works. In this painting, as well as in the other from the series "Details of Socialist Realism", this framework seems to fade, replaced by critical views on components of Socialist Realism, in turn emerging in the new associations which the paintings provoke. Inducing these associations, the series aims to suggest new ways of discussing the heritage of Socialist Realism and accordingly the continuity between the two periods.

4. Between a 'heroic' past and a 'failed' present: Svetlin Rusev's work in relation to Socialist Realism and contemporary fine art in Bulgaria

4. 1. Between a 'heroic past' and a 'failed present': Rusev's paintings on Bulgarian history in relation to my installation "Preserved Memories"

In 2007, Svetlin Rusev curated and showed his solo-exhibition at one of the galleries owned by the Union of Bulgarian Artists – Rayko Aleksiev. The exhibition comprised 13 paintings dedicated to 13 moments from Bulgarian history – scenes from the distant Bulgarian past dating back to the tenth century together with 'moments' from our post-Communist 'present'. One of Rusev's paintings in this exhibition is titled "Execution – 1923" (oil on canvas, 260 x 208 cm, 1963, fig. 45). It depicts five figures on a bright red background, thus directly juxtaposing abstract elements against figurative. They seem to be under arrest which leads us to the painting's subject matter. The latter is dedicated to one of the most dramatic events in Bulgarian history - an armed uprising against the government organised by the Bulgarian Communist Party on the 13th of September 1923. The plan involved a mass uprising in the country followed by the formation of an organised militia which attempted to capture the capital Sofia and establish a new government under the rule of the Communist party. The uprising was headed by Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov - two fundamental figures for the Communist regime after 1944[18]. Rusev's painting depicts the moment when the uprising was crushed and its instigators were sentenced to death. The artist drew the figures of five insurgents – members of the Communist party. The vocabulary of descriptive techniques, evoking surfaces of marble sculptures; the consistent skill of modelling the forms - the exaggerated legs and arms - referring directly to Socialist Realism; these are deployed in a representation of the dramatic event. The red background removes any temporal references. It constitutes an abstract space which surrounds and envelops the figures, thus functioning together with the representational in the painting. The bright red colour might allude to the violence of the uprising, or might indicate the colour of the Communist party. The question of whether its function in the painting is presupposed by an individual will of expression seems relevant here. The abstract appears to be situated in the tension between the formal and the social, between the 'historical' (with all the ambiguity of the term) and the 'present'.

The low horizon emphasises the figures' massive appearance and they start to resemble monuments; they emerge as heroic in a context which, despite taken from 'history', is placed 'outside' it. In this sense the functions of the abstract and the figurative seem to exceed

18 After the defeat of the uprising, Georgi Dimitrov fled to Austria. In Bulgaria he received a death sentence *in absentia*. After 1944 he came back in the country and became the first Communist leader of Bulgaria (from 1946 to 1949). He was also Head of the Bulgarian Communist Party and Chairman of the Comintern (from 1935 to 1943). The defeat of the attempted revolution forced Vasil Kolarov into exile too – he lived in the Soviet Union and Austria until 1945. After his return to Bulgaria he became provisional president of the country (from 1946 to 1947). After the death of Georgi Dimitrov he replaced him as Prime Minister of Bulgaria (from 1949 to 1950) and 66th (1950). He was also Chairman of the XXVI National Assembly (from 1945 to 1946) and of the VI Grand National Assembly (1946-1947).

the pursuit of a mere individual emotional response to the uprising. The painting looks at the past in searching for timeless patterns. Furthermore, it suggests that these patterns might be found in the depiction of uprisings or maybe revolutions; indeed a focus on patterns supported willingly by the Communist ideology. Having been displayed in a post-Communist context, this painting induces concerns that correlate with the main research questions of this study. In their direct juxtaposition, the abstract and the figurative function in an integrity which refers to the approaches employed in my practice. Rusev's painting exists in and between the context of its production in the '60s, in the time when discussing abstraction was "dangerous" (Uzunov, 2014), and the context of its post-Communist display, thus spanning the two eras. Yet might we consider this painting as contingency in Rusev's practice?

As part of the exhibition in 2007, Rusev chose to display paintings that belong to different stages of his artistic career, both before and after the collapse of Communism. One is immediately struck by the observation that all of them focus on representations of heroism and self-sacrifice in scenes from distant Bulgarian history to the post-Communist present. They "form the core of the exhibition [and] guide us to the metanarratives that Rusev relies on", asserts Mitev (2007) without commenting on how these metanarratives connect to the Communist past or the post-Communist present. The exhibition with its subjects indicates a quite ambitious project that aims to provide an overview of 'the whole' of Bulgarian history. Heroes are correlated with revolution; self-sacrifice could also be related to revolution - a metanarrative that not only connects to the Communist ideology but also suggests that the pre-Communist past, Communism and post-Communism are connected in a cause-effect relationship. By doing so the exhibition tends to simplify the complex relations between events, occurring synchronously rather than in diachrony.

This comprehension of a causal continuity, together with the subjects of the paintings in this exhibition and their treatment, mark important aspects of Rusev's work and its relationship to the functions of the abstract and the figurative in between the two eras. They are addressed further in this chapter as they are considered here the main merits for exploring Rusev's work. How would the approaches employed by his work connect to 'realism' of Socialist Realism and its official representations after the fall of Communism? As part of the investigation of this question, my practice constitutes an alternative to Rusev's work. It also seeks to provide an alternative in terms of positioning itself in relation to the artist's biography (taking into consideration Rusev's status of an 'official' artist during Communism), as well as implying a distance to 'realism' in Socialist Realism and adopted pictorial approaches. In a wider context my practice develops an alternative to the debates on Socialist Realism and its 'heritage' in post-Communist Bulgaria. Rusev's practice and my practice are discussed as simultaneously - in a diachronic and synchronic relationship - placed between the specific definitions of Socialist Realism in the country, and the debates on abstraction along with their post-Communist 'readings'.

As an alternative to Rusev's ambitious projects and their claims to provide an overall view on Bulgarian history, my practice focuses on details – within and around Socialist Realism and its representations after 1989. According to Gavrail Panchev, Communism constitutes a text which proclaims to know everything: the ultimate goal of history and the necessary methods to be achieved. A dialogue with such a text would be impossible and would leave us two possible reactions: consent, which would be equivalent to retelling; or a new text, which, for the Communists would be equivalent to nonsense (1991). In these oppositions, developing an alternative hardly seems attainable. If we represent Communism as an image, it would be a 'total' one. In this case how would it be possible to react to it? My works' position does not aim to break with the approaches adopted by Socialist Realism and consequently by Svetlin Rusev. Rather, in an attempt to 'decode' the monologue of these approaches, they aim to sustain a dialogue with them. This dialogue unfolds in layering, rather than replacing pictorial and spatial decisions in the works.

In my installation "Preserved Memories" (jars, acrylic on paper, shelves; 100 x 180 cm, fig. 46), the relationship between the abstract and the figurative leaves the flatness of the canvas in a new spatial construction. The representational elements preserve their connection to Socialist Realism - portraits of Communist leaders, images of a 'successful planned economy', public buildings, and personal photographs are depicted on small pieces of paper, then torn apart and closed in jars. Why jars? As objects they acquire a unique position, both temporal and spatial. In the years of the Communist regime, state-planned economy and constant economic crisis, winter supplies were a way of survival. Usually prepared by the elderly in the villages, the jars of food were delivered in the cities to support the young in their pursuit of the 'bright future' of Communism. In the post-Communist struggles for democracy, marked by a new economic crisis, the jars remained an important way of survival. Small, hidden in the underground layer of the home, they protect the memories from the past. In the installation they are displayed on wooden shelves, i. e. as if they were taken out from one's cellar. Their spatial position as 'underground' objects in the space of the house was transferred in the installations as an 'underground' position towards the Communist period, i. e. they correspond to personal 'readings' of the past. The jars were not supposed to leave the space of the home. Thus they embody a correspondence to attempts for reconciliation with the past on an individual level, in personal narratives of the past confined in a private space: yet these personal narratives do go beyond the space of the home. They signify perceptions of the past which connect to the public narratives, interacting and corresponding constantly with them and thus adding another dimension to the construction of discourses on the past.

My installation consists of 45 jars: 45 is the number of years between 1944 and 1989, when the Bulgarian Communist party ruled over the country. Each jar contains pieces of a painting executed in acrylic which depicts images of either public or personal memories. The latter are represented by pictures of children's, family or passport photographs. Press

Fig. 46 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"Preserved Memories", installation, jars, paper, shelves,
100 x 180 cm, 2013

photographs correspond to public narratives of the past. In this way the installation looks not at the memories themselves but at their representations and conservation in the context of post-Communism. Public and personal memories are displayed together and juxtaposed in the installation. Their interactions reflect on the boundaries between private and public narratives, boundaries which are often blurred in the post-Communist representations of the past, where they merge into complex, constantly interlacing and changing notions of the past.

As source images, the installation uses propaganda and personal photographs produced during Communism. The subjects of the press photographs used in the installation vary in correspondence with the range of official representations of the 'successful life' produced during Communism in opposition to the 'decadent world of capitalism'. Photographs of political leaders are depicted alongside pictures that show Communism in its well-being and economic achievements: new factories, cars, seaside resorts, harvest in wheat fields, members of brigades, etc (fig. 47). Some of the photographs are re-drawn more than once, reflecting their mass production. This seeming diversity of representations avoids any 'unpleasant' fragments and depicts almost utopian images of the past.

The public memories are depicted as articulated by the official party's representations – by press photographs published in newspapers and distributed throughout the country. In the context of post-Communism these photographs were found on websites dedicated to the totalitarian past. The transient nature of the press photographs creates an interesting connection to their presence on the Internet more than 20 years after the fall of the Communist regime. In this case, the Internet serves as an archive, preserving the photographs in a seemingly ahistorical space. This space does not add new comments on the photographs; they are published with their original titles taken from the old newspapers. Certainly the viewers may perceive them in new ways. On the one hand, the photographs are given the position to articulate notions of the past without almost any verbal or written linguistic interference. On the other hand the space does not acknowledge these changes of perception and meanings. According to Barthes, "the press photograph is a message. Considered overall this message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception" (1977, p. 15). The new, digital context seems to retain the formation of this message - yet it is stretched in a prolonged frozen moment, which appears outside any concrete historical moment.

The source images are re-seen and re-drawn in small-scale paintings. Here, as in the other works in my studio practice, photographs' materiality – old paper, surface, faded or black and white colours, and framing - are emphasised in the paintings. They have become the focus of the paintings, as important as their subjects. After I drew the paintings I tore them to pieces. This process excluded any conscious decisions related either to the form or the content of the paintings. The process reflected the ambiguity of the post-Communist 'readings' of the past as discourses that could not be controlled in a democratic situation – the images from the past as placed in a post-Communist context create unplanned and

Fig. 47 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"Preserved Memories",* acrylic on paper,
sizes vary between 7 x 10 cm and 10 x 18 cm, 2013

unexpected connections to each other. They interact with the contexts of their display, with the ways of in which they are perceived and understood. These interactions between the pictures' representational elements and abstract space constantly change their meanings. The lack of acknowledgment of these changes as articulated by the context of the websites cannot prevent the layers of associations that the photographs evoke. Displayed in jars, they are arranged in a way which stimulates their juxtapositions in a non-linear way. Moving freely around the installation, the viewer can adopt a range of subject positions and discover new relations. An informed viewer would quickly identify the pictures as belonging to Socialist Realism. Yet only fragments of them can be seen. The primacy is given to relations over 'entities'.

The jars confine the paintings; they squeeze and stretch them. Thus, the abstract space surrounds and distorts the pictures. Their perception is disrupted, shifted between their pictorial space and the acknowledgment of their constructed nature. Yet what the installation transforms are not only the pictures themselves, but also their functions as 'myths' (in the sense that Levi-Strauss suggests) in the new context. The installation explores how these 'myths' are constructed. The pieces of torn paintings reflect an inability to reinstate the 'integrity' of one notion of the past. Their correlations to the metanarratives of Communism seem interrupted.

With these literal constraints, the installation addresses the attempts for reducing the complexity of notions of the past. By displaying the photographs from the past as torn into pieces and displayed in small, closed spaces, it seeks to raise awareness about these constraints by commenting on the ways the past is perceived in the post-Communist present. Surprisingly, by 'confining' the pictures from the past, the installation aims to 'free' them.

The installation explores these notions on the Communist past outside the public discussions – in the level of individual of biographies and personal stories. It engages with views on the past articulated by dominating and mass-distributed sources such as newspapers. It looks at processes of personal reconciliations with the past that rely on the utopian pictures from the past to transfer an imaginary past into the present. Such reconciliation could be correlated with a form of self-censorship in the art-world during Communism; a self-censorship that preceded the censorship imposed by the Communist party and hence could be regarded as one of the reasons for the small number of underground artworks.

The work references Levi-Strauss' technique for analysing the 'myth'. To achieve this, he broke the story down to its smallest possible sentences and wrote each sentence on an index card. Each sentence was regarded as a function which connects to a given subject in the 'myth' (Levi-Strauss, 1963). Then, by disturbing the linearity of the sentences, he explored their new relations. This way of juxtaposing elements could be found in my installation. In this way the work directly connects to Rusev's biography and his own 'readings' of it after the fall of Communism; thus positioning him as both an 'official artist'

responsible for the implementation of Socialist Realism in the country and as a 'dissident' in a seemingly indissoluble linear connection. Rusev's artistic career constitutes an uninterrupted sequence of achievements which appears to be independent from the radical changes in the country. In 1959 the artist graduated from the State Art Academy (now National Art Academy) receiving a degree in painting. From 1975 to the present day he has been professor of painting at the same institution, the latter described by Yara Bubnova as "one of the strongholds of conservatism and Socialist Realism" (Boubnova, 2006, p. 153) during the Communist era. Between 1973 and 1985 he was Chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Artists and between 1985 to 1988 - Director of the National Gallery of Art. From 1982 to 1984 he was vice-president of the Committee for Culture.

> [Rusev] influenced political decisions and even participated in the creation of cultural policy in the country (Nozharova, 2013).

After the fall of the Communist regime, in 1990 Rusev became an MP in the Grand National Assembly as a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party[19]. In 2001 he was conferred the prestigious Paisiy Hilendarski award[20] (Ruleva, 2001), and in 2003 he was titled Academician by the Bulgarian Academy of Science – the highest title in the academic hierarchy of the country. He has also been collecting artworks over the years.

During the Communist era Rusev's political activities and work took part in the implementation of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria. Most of the subjects he depicted were dedicated to themes and priorities that the Ministry of Propaganda defined in 1944 as

> Organising the struggle for moral and political eradication of fascism and reactionary ideologies, as well as conducting internal and external propaganda policy of the new government (Central State Archive, 1945, p. 90).

Dinova-Ruseva (1986) and Raynov (1985) emphasise the artist's achievements in the implementation of Socialist Realism. In his laudatory article, Raynov discusses Rusev's "most important canvases, which have ensured him a place of distinction in our contemporary art" (1970, p. 42) - large scale compositions, devoted to distant Bulgarian history - "partisan struggle, constructive labour and the new way of life under Socialism" (Rainov, 1970, p. 30). Some of his paintings' titles are "Partisan Oath", "Execution – 1923", "For Freedom", "Blockade", "Unemployed" and "Bread" (fig. 48). Rusev's paintings "Exile of the Partisan Families" (his final project at the Academy) and "Diggers" were first noticed by the Committee of Culture and the Union of Bulgarian Artists. He received the gold medal at the First Youth Exhibition in Sofia in 1961, as well as Dimitrov's Award for his painting "Oath" (fig. 49).

19 The Bulgarian Communist Party was renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party in 1990.

20 The state Paisiy Hilendarski award was established in 2000. Since then it has been awarded annually by the Prime Minister to Bulgarian artists or musicans whose works "are connected to the Bulgarian history and traditions" (Ministry of Culture, 2011).

With no concern about Rusev's artistic career during the Communist regime, his image as a dissident has become a widely held view after 1989. His work has been explored as a "spiritual corrective of the ruling ideology" (Boubnova, 2006, p. 158). One of the official manuals of history (History of Bulgaria, 2009) describes him as one of the active dissidents pre-1989. In 1987 Rusev took part in the establishment of the first structure for 'organised resistance' against the Communist regime – the so-called Committee for Defence of Ruse (History of Bulgaria, p. 226). The organisation was launched after an attempt by the Bulgarian Communist party to hide information concerning ecological problems in the city of Ruse. What the manual does not mention is the fact that the Committee for Defence of Ruse was composed entirely of members of the Communist party. It appears that was one of the ways used by them to establish their new identities after 1989, a process described by Lomax as "elite replacement" (1997, p. 47). In 1984 similar protest movements, instigated by intellectuals, took place in Hungary. Lomax discusses such activities as "little more than a surrogate or 'quasi-opposition' movement" (p. 44) where "the civil initiatives and Socialist movements of the 1980s never for a moment had as their aim the creation of an autonomous civil society independent of the political sphere" (Lomax, 1997, p. 47). After the ban on political parties was lifted, in Hungary as well as in Bulgaria, the former environmentalist activists moved to political parties not related to environmental concerns. The question of whether these facts are coincidence or a common tendency remains unanswered.

Regardless of its complexity, Rusev's work and its development could be described as linear; it does not possess the duality suggested by Tzvetan Todorov in his book about Francisco Goya, where Goya's works are divided between his life as a court artist and as an 'independent' one, constituting two different approaches in terms of choice of subject matter, visual language and concepts. Rusev's work is consistently connected to his life as an artist in a position close to power. Its development lacks any disruptions or radical changes. After the fall of the state Communism he started to experiment with new materials and techniques; he created paintings on stone and added installations at some of his exhibitions - yet these changes could hardly be considered to suggest radically new ideas and do not add new dimensions to his work.

4. 2. Between Socialist Realism, nationalism and abstractionism: Rusev's work in the '70s

Despite the fact that the work and life of Rusev are subjects of a great number of texts, there are only a few studies concerned with the question of how his life and work were related to the past and current ideological and political systems, as well as to artistic conventions during that time in Bulgaria. These relations within his work also remain unexamined. How did an artist who followed with such conviction the aesthetic and ideological rules of Socialist Realism become one of the most famous and influential artists in Bulgaria in the post-Communist, pluralistic context? How was an artist who is claimed to be one of the

creators of art dogma during Communism interpreted as a dissident at the same time? How does his work relate to his career? Possible answers to these questions are investigated here by looking at examples of Rusev's paintings in relation to his life during and after the Communist era and in the relationships between the abstract and the figurative, and Socialist Realism. Rusev's work is not scrutinised here as a unique example but rather as a valid model for the majority of 'official' artists in Bulgarian fine art after the Communist era, and as such it is considered deserving of further attention and examination.

Most of the articles dedicated to Rusev tend to adopt critical approaches that separate his work from his life and examine his paintings regardless of the political conditions in Bulgaria both during Communism and democracy. This approach is questioned here because of the specific definitions and dissemination of Socialist Realism, supported by ideological and institutional apparatus. The studies tend to focus on the 'artist's talent' and contribution to the 'development' of fine art in Bulgaria. The term 'development' itself has been questioned by Dobrenko in the case of Russia (1999, p. 2) and could also be questioned in Bulgaria, which itself would pose new questions about the status of Rusev's paintings. Nonetheless, the artist's work is described as "virtuosity"(Mitev, 2007) and "unique" (Vacheva, 2011, p. 1), and the artist himself is described in phrases such as a "naughty child of history - because good children do not change their mother" (Leonidov, quoted by Georgiev, 2009, p. 3); "one of the most prominent representatives of Bulgarian art today" (Djurova, 2005); "one of the people who create Bulgarian culture" (2010), "a charismatic teacher and painter of high quality" (Boubnova, 2006), and numerous others[21]. Rusev himself comments on his work and life as if they were part of a context of political freedom and independence. Relations between the Communist authorities and the artists during that time are referred to as an "ambiguity" (Rusev, quoted by Tetevenska, 2009).

In his speech "Return to Truth with Lasting and Eternal Value" delivered at the opening of Kalina Taseva's exhibition in 2008, he interpreted Communism as an almost democratic system in which artists could be independent. The artists promoted by the Communist party were described as artists "with dignity and independence" (Rusev, 2008, p. 134). According to Rusev he became Chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Artists not because he was a member of the Communist party but because he was a talented artist (2009, p. 3). In his words, in the Communist country fine art was 'valuable' for its own sake, not as correlated to a certain ideology but rather as a 'pure' aesthetic. Ivan Elenkov, however, argues that relations within the framework of Bulgarian culture during the Communist period were "entirely relations of power, and all activities within this field could be interpreted as remarks in these relations" (2008, p. 9). The two assertions could hardly communicate.

21 Actually, if one looks at the articles about Rusev's work and life published both before and after 1989, one discovers only two texts that articulate a critical position towards the artist's changing position between and 'official' artist and a 'dissident', as well as towards his close relationship with the Communist party. The articles belong to one author – the journalist, Yavor Dachkov (2008). The rest of the texts dedicated to Rusev appear to achieve a consensus about his contribution to fine art in the country.

In this context, Rusev's work is explored by Raynov as a "reflection of reality in a contemporary plastic language" (1970, p. 41). Rainov also interprets Rusev's work as 'immanent' of the "Bulgarian culture". The difficulty in defining what constitutes Bulgarian culture and to which aspects of it Rusev's work contributed seems inexplicable. Furthermore, the assertion that the artist's work is 'immanent' to the national culture appears even more ambitious as a statement. However, this viewpoint is important as it could explain the lack of unofficial art movements in Bulgaria to some extent; i. e. if Socialist Realism and its aesthetic was 'immanent' to the national culture, other approaches seem superfluous. On the other hand, it does not explain why the Communist authorities needed the oppression apparatus in order to implement the aesthetic dogma of Socialist Realism. Oppression appears unnecessary if Socialist Realism was accepted universally as a long-awaited aesthetic approach. The use of violence suggests that there was resistance against the new methods of art production, perception and distribution; thereby, Socialist Realism needed the political and ideological force of the Communist party and its institutional system in order to be implemented.

Rusev's work spans a long period of time during Communism and post-Communism and therefore is situated in a wide range of discussions on these two divergent artistic principles in the country – realism and abstraction – and consequently in Socialist Realism. That said, if the emphasis needs to be placed on a particular decade, this would be the '70s, when the artist along with five more intellectuals became closely involved in Lyudmila Zhivkova's ambitious culture programme[22]. This was the time after the so-called April Plenum in 1956, when the new 'cult of personality' towards Todor Zhivkov[23] replaced the old one a 'dynasty' was formed – the children and relatives of the leader took up important political places in the country[24] in a structure that started to resemble a pseudo-monarchy, as distinguished by the model of a new 'class', suggested by Milovan Djilas in Yugoslavia. As part of this 'circle', Rusev's position appears even more influential[25]. Furthermore, this new political structure indicated one of the aspects of continuity between the two periods as the offspring of the Communist leader retained their leading positions after 1989[26].

22 Aspects of this programme were discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

23 After the adoption of a new Constitution in 1971 until the end of 1989, Todor Zhivkov became Chairman of the State Council, i.e. he was *de facto* head of state.

24 Apart from Zhivkov's daughter being Minister of Culture at this time, his son Vladimir occupied leading position at the same Ministry; his brother-in-law was appointed as Vice-Minister in the Ministry of Health and Chairman of the Medical Academy. In a career that seems to embody the concept of 'a universally developed personality', Zhivkov's son-in-law Ivan Slavkov held at least five posts simultaneously – he was the head of the state television company, member of the Central Committee of the Communist party, vice chairman of the Television Association of the Socialist Countries, Chairman of the Club of Young Philatelists and Numismatists, and editor of the journal "Bulgarian Photo". After the fall of the Communist regime he became president of the Bulgarian Olympic Committee and, later, a member of the International Olympic Committee.

25 Keeping his respect towards Zhivkova, in 2012 Rusev curated the exhibition "The Cultural Opening of Bulgaria to the World", dedicated to her – one of the examples of the artist's attitude to the Communist regime, expressed in the title of the exhibition and the selection of nostalgic photographs.

26 One of Zhivkov's grandchildren, Evgenya Zhivkova, for instance, established in 1999 the foundation "Lyudmila

Rusev's work from the '70s is situated between the debates on Socialist Realism and the examples of abstract art. Abstraction at this time followed the 'thaw' of the '60s[27] and the temporal weakening of the strict control over the implementation of Socialist Realism in the country. These works were produced in the context of artistic practices in other Communist countries which appeared opposed to the 'Socialist aestheticism'[28]. Peter Tzanev observed that, in the late 1960s, "the negative 'weight' of abstraction" (2014, p. 23) in Bulgaria weakened - or, in other words, it ceased to be seen as a threat. The confrontation of the Cold War between the American abstract art and the Soviet Socialist Realism was perceived as part of the past. At this point, according to Tzanev, the role of abstraction as "capable of generating illicit meanings" also weakened (2014, p. 23).

> The intellectual 'biography' of Bulgarian abstraction appears to be stretched in a particular way, on the one hand, in the tension between the formal and the social, on the other hand - between the worlds of personal and public space (Tzanev, 2014, p. 17).

In his essay entitled "Abstract-Plastic Idiom as Reclaimed Freedom" (2014), Stanislav Pamukchiev wrote that attempts for producing abstract art under Socialism often occurred unconsciously and in the closed spaces of personal formal experiments. In this sense, some artists (Kiril Petrov, for instance) discuss the abstract art in terms of extreme individualism (Petrov, quoted by Tzanev, 2014). On the other hand, Pamukchiev argues that abstraction was an attempt for a "socio-political reaction to the ideological norms" (2014, p. 55). The produced abstract works experienced a theoretical "neglect" for abstraction (Tzanev, 2014) articulated by the art institutions which continued long after the nationalist trend in the '70s. As part of the discussion surrounding the exhibition "The Untold Bulgarian Abstraction" in 2014, the participants – art historians, artists and art critics - united under the observation that abstract art in the country during Communism was the result of small, secluded spaces of individual practices[29]; it did not provoke the formation of art groups or programmes and thereby it was not conceptualised in the artistic space of the country both before and after the fall of the Communist system (Stefanov quoted by Pamukchiev, 2014).

How does Rusev's work relate to these debates? He took part in the 'nationalist' trend in fine art in the '70s, producing paintings such as "Light and Darkness" (fig. 50). Abstract

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Zhivkova - Banner of Peace" and restored Assembly "Banner of Peace". She was MP in the 39th and 40th National Assemblies (2001 - 2009), Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Children, Youth and Sports, and Member of the Commission on Culture and the Committee on Education and Science.

27 The 'thaw' period in Bulgaria coincides with the time of The Khrushchev 'thaw' in the Soviet Union.

28 See: Piotr Piotrowski (2009) In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe 1945-1989. For instance, since the early 1980s, the artistic group Neue Slowenische Kunst (New Slovenian Art) in Ljubljana acted as an alternative movement. It included artists working in various media: painting, photography, fashion design, video art, performance, music, etc. In 1985, the art group "Irwin" was established, among whose projects "Was ist kunst?" (What is Art?) could be distinguished.

29 See the examples of Ivan Kirkov and Vesa Vasileva, and the estrangement from artistic life of Ivan Georgiev and Georgi Baev (Stefanov and Pamukchiev, 2014).

elements appear in almost all of his works, mostly in the approaches employed for depicting the background. The latter is often drawn in red, black or white – the three main colours in Rusev's paintings. Their organisation contributes to the construction of an illusionistic scheme that appears as far from natural – the faces of the people are often painted in white and acquire a particular immateriality. They are often intercepted by bright red, blue or black curves which disrupt the figurative illusion of space. Yet it appears that the abstract elements function together with the figurative ones. The abstract components 'support' the figurative ones in attaining an almost metaphysical space. The latter does not appear to be the result of individualistic endeavours for self-expression. Rather it correlates to the artist's strivings to articulate an 'objective' view on the subject matter, strivings that connect to the metanarrative of the Communist ideology.

How did the approaches that Rusev took in his work change after 1989? The artist organised and curated a large number of exhibitions dedicated to subjects varying from personal ones (portraits of his friends and family) to ambitious projects that attempt to articulate an overall view on Bulgarian history. In his exhibition titled "Poorhouse", held at Rayko Aleksiev gallery, Sofia in 2001, the artist showcased 10 large-scale paintings in black, grey and white – depicting images of old people in a poorhouse (fig. 51). An installation is placed in the centre of the space; a black empty table with 12 black chairs, an image that probably references the Last Supper. In Rusev's version, the empty black chairs, surrounded by the dark monochromatic paintings of old, almost ghostly-looking faces, evoke a peculiar hopelessness. Ruleva compares the exhibition to "a journey to hell" (2001). According to Rusev, the exhibition represents a "… Home without illusions and hope… Country where the nationals live under laws of pain, sadness and misery ..."(2001, p. 1). The poorhouse appears as a metaphor of Bulgaria as examined from an outside observer's perspective.

In this exhibition we can observe one of the peculiar strategies for 'reading' his own past performed by Rusev, namely his constantly changing position: at one moment he appears to define himself as an influential artist in an important position of power, while on another occasion we observe quite the opposite – he articulates a viewpoint of an 'outsider' criticising the system. Of course, changing one's biography is not a new phenomenon in the country[30]. Georgi Markov describes a similar process in Communist Bulgaria, just after the revolution in 1944, which surprisingly resemblances the process that has taken place after 1989.

> If you read the countless memoirs published in the country, you will be amazed by the millions of feats performed against the government before the revolution. Fabricating heroic Communist biographies has become a nation-wide phenomenon; moreover the members of

30 The term 'rewriting' has been used by Plamen Doynov to describe one of the approaches used by the former official artists to change their own biographies and erase their involvement in the party-state structures and practices, including the implementation of Socialist Realism. In the field of literature, Doynov asks, "how many of the formerly recognised Bulgarian writers, instead of rewriting their own biographies and transform their former Socialist work, offered new, self-critical readings of their own past? Almost none of them. Rather they produced mythologies of memories and new, 'clean' anthologies" (Doynov, 2013, p. 1).

> the Politburo, generals and leaders set the tone in inventing their non-existent acts of heroism (Markov, 1990, p. 6).

Nevertheless, there are some significant differences between these two processes which should not be disregarded as they would support the examination of the post-Communist situation. The process described by Markov took place in the context of an authoritarian regime, when changing biographies seemed a plausible approach, given the lack of opportunities for free expression and the ideological need for a 'heroic Communist past' to achieve even the small comforts within different aspects of life. Changing biographies in post-Communist Bulgaria, on the other hand, appears an unusual approach in the context of pluralism. This comparison itself evokes a bundle of questions about the post-Communist situation. Therefore artists' changing of their own past after 1989 acquires relevance in the examination of continuity between the two periods.

4. 3. Between an 'objective' past and a fragmented present: my painting and installation "How to Create an Ideal Past" in relation to Rusev's works on Bulgarian history

Rusev's shifting position – between 'official' artist and 'dissident' – does not change his unyielding endeavours to produce works that articulate metanarratives of Bulgarian history. These endeavours correspond to his attempts to determine his own status of an influential artist, to legitimate his work, and to preserve his position to articulate 'overall views' on the past.

One of the substantial elements in Rusev's work which support his endeavours to articulate 'overall views' on history by adding a new semantic dimension to the paintings appears to be colour. His work consists mainly of monochromatic paintings in black, grey, brown and white. The only bright colour is red and it could be seen mostly in curved lines that intersect the faces in the paintings. The artist uses components from Orthodox iconography, for instance inverse perspective, where the lines do not converge on a point on the horizon, but instead they converge on us; furthermore, some of the figures depicted in his paintings are larger than others according to their importance to the subject matter, rather than the laws of perspective. Why would he need to correlate his paintings to icons? He avoids Christian symbols in his paintings; the choices of colours and subject matters do not suggest a relation to Christianity. One possible explanation could be found in a close connection to the tradition of Bulgarian painting that Rusev seeks to bring about by including elements of Orthodox icons. These components could also be regarded as belonging to a visual grammar, which the artist needed in order to articulate a 'timeless truth'.

The notions of time and history in my paintings and installations constitute an alternative to the attempts for an 'overall and objective view' on history as articulated by Rusev. These attempts inevitably correlate to the complexity of the term 'history' itself, being positioned

between the notion of an 'objective history' which, according to Lucian Boia, refers to the past in its 'objective unfolding' (2001, p. 27) and 'discourses about the past' that reconstruct what happened.

> These two histories are far from being equivalent. The first is cancelled out as one event succeeds another, while the second lacks the means to "resurrect" events in all their fullness. What we usually call history is our discourse about history, the image, inevitably incomplete, simplified, and distorted, of the past, which the present never ceases to recompose (Boia, 2001, p. 27).

The discourse about history is signified by the abstract background in my works which addresses 'historicism' as a 'frozen', eternal, and 'out-of-history' mode of representation. My painting "How to Create an Ideal Past" (oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, fig. 52) is concerned with repetition, in this case the repetition over time of the same images of the (then) political leader of the country, Todor Zhivkov, both before and after the collapse of the Communist regime. In this way it engages with a range of concerns about the functions and perception of these pictures in the context of notions of an 'objective' history, notions which appear central to Rusev's work. The portraits of the leader seem to evoke traces of another time. Fragments of them form the figurative presence in the painting. These figurative elements retain the dimensions of an illusory space. They also serve to connect the painting to the aesthetic postulates of Socialist Realism and the strategies of production of its imagery. The repetition of these portraits is regarded here as a continuum rather than a series of accidental occurrences.

In the post-Communist urban space of the country, filled with commercial banners and billboards, the leader's images are often displayed alongside portraits of other former political leaders– for instance, the portraits of Ludmila Zhivkova, Stalin, Lenin and Georgi Dimitrov can also be found in the post-Communist context – fragments of the widespread cult of personality from pre-1989. And, as we read in Georgi Markov's book on Communism, there is no cult without dogma (1990, p. 18). How is the dogma articulated in the case of the leader's portraits? The image of Zhivkov is displayed in various forms – as photographs, sculptures, even billboards. The latter constitute a quite interesting and relevant example of Socialist Realist images as an aspect of continuity towards the Communist past and, as such, have become the main focus of my painting "How to Create an Ideal Past".

Most of the billboards are commissioned every year to honour the birthday of the leader by people who use their own funds (fig. 53 and fig. 54). However not all of the billboards are products of individual initiatives - there was one billboard placed on the City Hall in a village by the mayor and the administration (Btv News, 31.08.2012, fig. 55). Apart from the nostalgic sense that these images evoke, the choice of this particular form is quite interesting and creates original objects that connect the image of the past with the functions of advertising – a connection that seems unusual yet proves to be effective as it opens up new questions about the choice of visual language in addressing the Communist

Fig. 52 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"How to Create an Ideal Past", oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, 2014

Fig. 53

Fig. 54

past. This visual language seems appropriate for the post-authoritarian plurality, where the boundaries between fine art and design quite often appear blurred. The signs from the past could be turned into objects of commercial value and this does not obstruct their functioning as valid aesthetic objects of interpretation.

On the billboards, on a bright red background we see a photographic portrait of the Communist leader, Zhivkov. The photograph is one of his official and quite popular portraits produced in the years of his rule. As such it is carefully retouched and depicts the leader at his best. He is looking at the viewer with a serious and determined, but also gentle gaze - a leader we can trust and rely on. The billboards repeat the same image over and over again; only the text, or in other words the linguistic message, as described by Barthes, changes on the different billboards: “102 years from the birth of Comrade Todor Zhivkov!”; “Todor Zhivkov – the long-time leader of mother Bulgaria!”; “Todor Zhivkov loved people and left a respected and powerful Bulgaria!”. All of these messages seem to connect the Communist regime to the idea of nationality which constitutes another interesting correlation with Rusev’s work in the ’70s and the post-Communist ‘present’.

Repetition of the image is an intriguing element itself; displayed every year in the same place, the portrait suggests that time has been stopped, a moment outside history that

Fig. 55

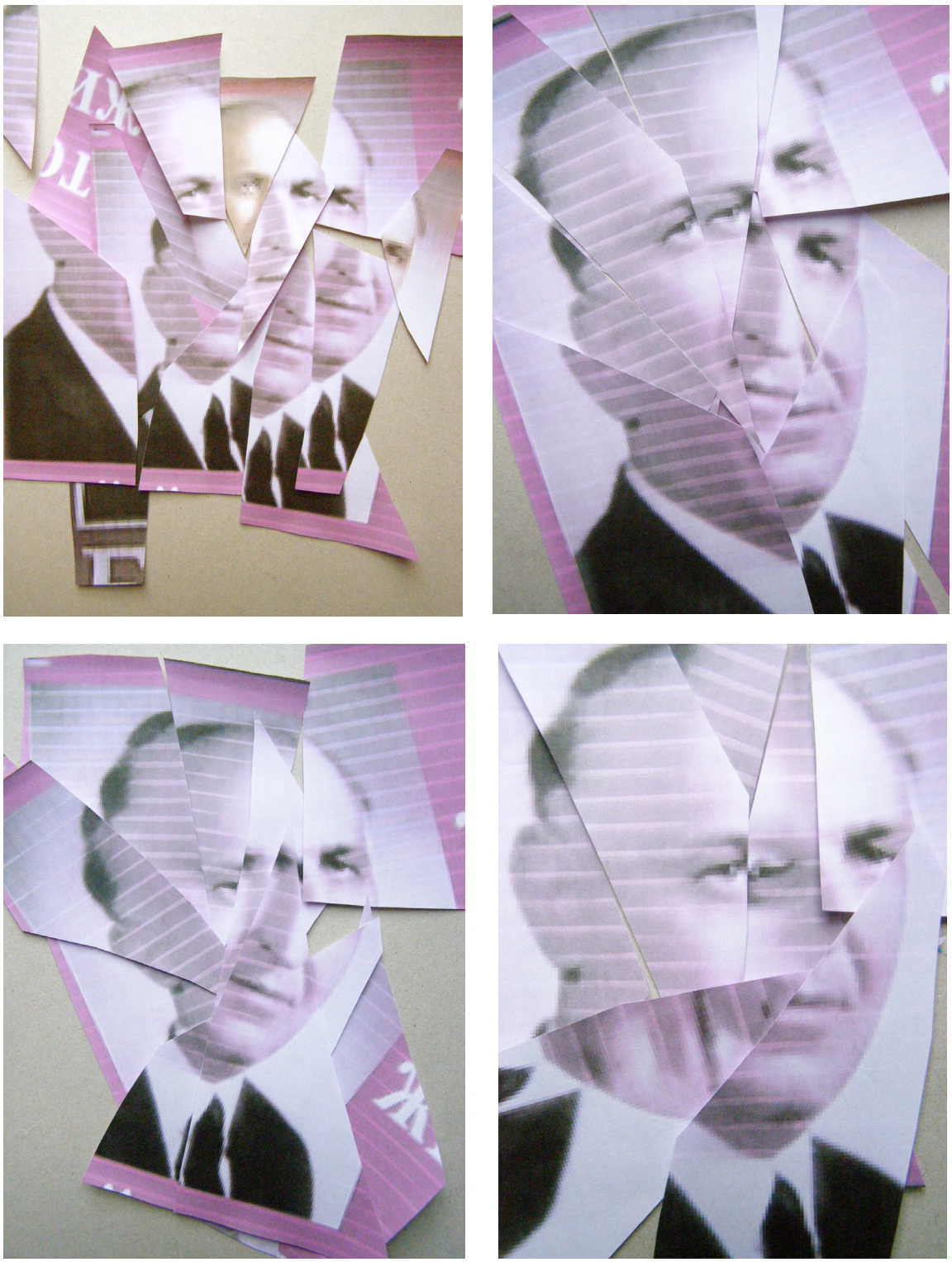


Fig. 56 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"How to Create an Ideal Past", working process

can last forever as the billboards and their linguistic messages do not change despite the different contextual temporalities of their display.

One of the photographs of the billboards published in a newspaper ("Now newspaper", 13.08.2012, fig. 54) adds a new dimension to the picture as it shows a luxury car in front of the portrait. The new element emphasises the context of the nostalgic image, a context that seems difficult to correlate with the picture itself, not least because this type of car was a forbidden dream in Communist Bulgaria under the rule of the same leader. Yet the two realities exist in conjunction in the picture, seemingly overcoming the contradictions and constituting two signs – from the past and the present. This image appears to refer to Rusev's work as an example of an incongruous combination of two specific historical moments that comprise two opposed ideologies; yet these ideologies share a common space without distorting it. The abstract red background and the figurative elements seem to constitute an integral space in conjunction with the text. The linguistic message, as defined by Barthes, directs our level of perception; it functions as an 'anchorage' to the image's meaning.

> … the anchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principal function; the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance (Barthes, 1972, p. 40).

On the billboard of Zhivkov, the linguistic message focuses our attention to a linear relationship between the current situation and the rule of the Communist leader; evoking the memory of 'the good old days' the former appears as a result from the latter, disregarding the contradictory elements of the Communist regime. Thus, by functioning together, the abstract, the figurative and the linguistic reaffirm this casual connection between the contemporary lifestyle and the Communist past, thereby constituting another aspect of continuity between the Communist and post-Communist periods.

The process of producing my painting itself is an important element of exploring the repetition of the leader's image. First I scanned the photographs of the billboards, published in newspapers – source images that show Zhivkov's official representations as preserved in post-Communism. Then I printed them out in multiple copies, reflecting the repetition of their display in the country. Trying to distance myself from any conscious decisions, I cut the photographs into pieces, without considering their juxtapositions. After that I arranged the pieces in accordance to their formal features – mainly their colours and curves, again by distancing myself from conscious decisions in relation to the photographs' content (fig. 56). The final result of this process depicts images of the leader which comprise repeating details in a portrait that appears odd and even monstrous. These images were re-drawn in the painting. The work engages with the materiality of the photographs as printed pictures; it becomes an important part of the work as it embodies the notion of mediation carried out by the photographs. The 'monstrous' image of the leader in my painting, although fragmented, is

still recognisable. The figurative elements merge into one, yet as components they still bear connection to the photographs' productions. As such they embody the continuity between the two periods as fragments of an imagined, albeit constantly revived past.

My work does not aim to look beyond the official images of the Communist leader in terms of looking at his 'human side' as, in comparison, the painting "The Trial" (fig. 57) by Adrian Ghenie does in Romania. According to the artist, he chose to explore an until-then unknown image of the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu as seen on TV only a few hours before his death sentence was to be carried out, when the layers of officially and ideologically guided associations which used to cover the party-commissioned images of the leader were replaced by an image of an 'old and frightened man' (Ghenie, quoted by Price, 2010). The pictorial scheme of my painting is devoid of those forms of mimesis that would provoke psychological elaboration of the depicted portraits. Instead, it focuses on the constructions of precisely these official pictures of the leader, leaving aside his image as a human being. By practical forms of transformation and fragmentation, the representational levels which these portraits occupy are rendered impenetrable to any search for empathy. The construction of the picture itself, with its ideological and political contexts of production, distribution and display, explores the construction of the 'readings' of the past, aspects which 'psychological' readings would not examine.

The fragmentation of the portrait references the series of paintings "Incidents in a Museum" by "Art and Language" group. As Charles Harrison suggests, the series' description would provoke an overlap between the statements 'This is the painting', 'This is a representation of the painting', 'This is part of the painting', 'This is a representation of another painting' (2001, p. 208). Such uncertainty of statements seems possible in the case of my painting. It is part of the work's attempt to constitute a space which encourages the flow of associations, thus provoking new questions on the functions of the Socialist Realist works in their Communist and post-Communist existence. The fragmentation in my work also functions as an alternative of the 'objective' notions of the past, such as Rusev's claims. It is developed as a procedure in my installation "How to Create an Ideal Past" (cardboard, paper, fishing wires, approximately 140 x 80 x 80 cm, fig. 58).

The work explores the repetition of the Communist leader's portraits in the context of post-Communism. It appears as a tendency which, as pointed out by Levi-Strauss, "focuses on the synchronic pattern of connections and oppositions they [the images] establish outside sequential, narrative time" (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 209). The piece responds to this repetition as an aspect of looking at the past, which acquires an almost ritualistic mode of representing the images from Communism. By taking out fragments from the photographs of the Communist leader Zhivkov from the two-dimensional space of the painting and transforming them into three-dimensional objects, my installation looks at these interrelations that influence the source images' meanings. The new spatial position of the elements juxtaposes them in a way which evokes new layers of associations between them.

Fig. 58 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, *"How to Create an Ideal Past",* installation, cardboard, paper, fishing wires, approximately 140 x 80 x 80 cm, 2014


Fire Exit
Rare Book
Gallery

The creative process itself constitutes an important aspect of the installation thus posing new research questions. First, using clay as a medium, I re-created one of the official portraits of the Communist leader Zhivkov, the same one which is printed on the billboards throughout the country and was used in my painting "How to Create an Ideal Past". Then I laid the sculpture out with pieces of cardboard, paper and PVA glue (fig. 59). Using this method I produced three almost identical paper portraits, which are hollow and whose inner side is clearly visible. This process directly reflected on the repetition of the authoritarian leader's images. I then cut the portraits into unequal parts, avoiding any conscious decisions while doing that. Inside I painted them a bright orange which resembles the colour of a primer – an almost industrial one. This colour references the correlation between fine art and industrial labour during the Communist era.

According to Todor Pavlov, one of the leading ideologists of Socialist Realism after 1944, the 'superstructure-ideological' character of fine art presupposes its 'defining objective factor' to be found in productive social relations, public facilities and economic base which determine the class division and class struggles in societies. Having been placed in these relations, fine art 'serves' social material production, labour and labour relations of people. However, it 'serves' them precisely because, first and foremost, it constitutes a 'superstructural-ideological' phenomenon[31] (Pavlov, 1974, pp. 113-114). Labour, understood mostly in terms of industrial labour, "determines, after all, the entire social and spiritual development of man" (Pavlov, 1974, p. 114). However, following Chernyshevsky's assertion that man is the object of "every genuine art" (1974, p. 115), Pavlov concludes that fine art must depict "the living Socialist man" (1974, p. 115) and not focus so much on the means and processes of production. In this sense, the orange 'primer' colour in my installation references these prepositions of Socialist Realism, connecting the image of the leader to the means of production and industrial labour.

I left the outside surface unpainted – it is grey and the pieces of cardboard are clearly visible, evoking associations with an almost Frankenstein's monsteresque image. I hung up the pieces of paper sculptures at different heights and in a way that they do not fit as a whole image. Hung up on one wire each, each constantly rotates on its axis in an uncontrolled way. These changing spatial positions create new juxtapositions between the pieces. The viewers' interaction with the installation engages with these constantly changing positions. Thus, the initial 'entity' of the official portrait remains unattainable. The working process has moved away from representing a whole image to creating fragments, gradually adding new relations of the initial dichotomies – official/unofficial, canon/marginal - which wrapped up the party-commissioned portrait. This procedure acknowledges the flows of associations that the official portraits evoke in their complexity and unpredictability.

31 Here Pavlov differentiates fine art from language, arguing that the latter, together with technology are social 'base' phenomena which arise and are determined above all from the social material production, of labour and labour relations between people.

The title "How to Create an Ideal Past" was added after developing the work; to some extent it derives from the piece. It alludes to the inability of constraining the 'readings' of the past to the impact of pre-1989. The layers of associations that derive from the official images in post-Communism could not be controlled with the totality required by the Communist ideology during Communism. They leave their initial intentions and are immersed into the countless readings of the images. The acknowledgment of these numerous perceptions is reinforced by the changing spatial positions of the pieces of paper sculptures.

In the pluralistic context of numerous 'readings' of fine art in post-Communist Bulgaria, Rusev's work, and especially its particular engagement with 'history', appears to transfer notions developed during Communism. That is to say, it connects closely to two of the aspects of the Communist ideology in their ambivalence – its historicism and at the same time its strivings to 'get out of history', as suggested by Eliade.

The historicism of Rusev is understood here following Karl Popper's definition as an approach which assumes that historical prediction is the principle aim of a study (or paintings, in our case) and that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms', the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history (Popper, 2002, p. 3). In what sense could Rusev's work be described as historicist? As discussed above in this chapter, history is a central concern in his work. His exhibition, dedicated to scenes of distant and recent Bulgarian past, held in 2007, is titled "The Unedited History". The title itself indicates the attitude of the artist towards history and prepares the viewer for what is expected to be seen by assessing it as 'unedited'. The paintings in this exhibition are all scenes of revolutions and uprisings from Bulgarian history. The exhibition discussed above suggests continuity between the periods before Communism, the Communist era and post-Communism - continuity based on the idea of revolution raised to the status of a sign of national identity. Marx claims that Communism is inevitable. Rusev offers us a view on Bulgarian history, according to which Communism appears as a logical stage of a linear development rather than a rupture. The pictorial approaches of the works, juxtaposing abstract and figurative elements, place the figures – participants in the revolutions – in spaces that seem outside any particular time, i. e. if they were situated 'outside history'. This seeming contradiction – that the paintings simultaneously engage with history and construct spaces 'outside' - could be resolved by the assumption that the artist, while looking at history, looks for 'timeless patterns' that could be transferred in any time period.

This assumption correlates to 'the three realities' which Socialist Realism was expected to reflect and construct – 'past, present and future' as suggested by Gorky and discussed by Pavlov. In this sense Rusev's work does not only look into the pas but it also, in a historicist approach, constructs the future. Furthermore, this construction is not a product of a subjective interpretation, as understood by Rusev. The artist says about the event:

> I am exhibiting paintings that have been made for 40 years. Each one bears emotional attitude towards Bulgarian history. …And today, when there are too many nationalists I wanted

Fig. 59 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"How to Create an Ideal Past", working process

> to show that we were concerned with the subject of nationality even in the recent past. Otherwise, this exhibition is a 'hint' that you should remember history as it was, without following any political and other prejudices (Rusev, 2007).

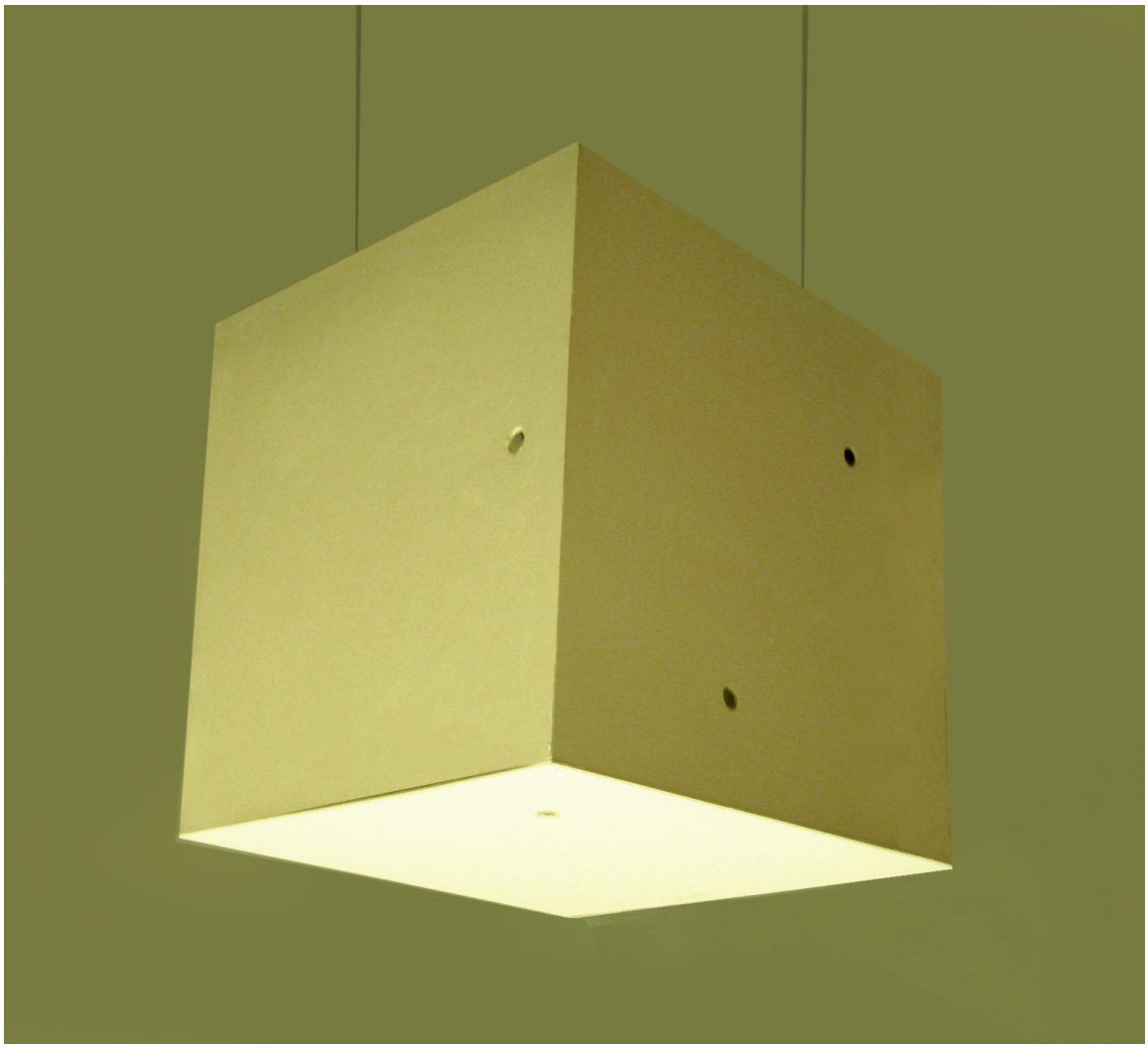
Here the concern for 'objectivity' arises again. Rusev calls us to remember history in an objective notion, which obviously his paintings can reveal to us. Maybe surprisingly, the ideologist Pavlov articulates quite a similar utterance around 30 years earlier - "art cannot be real art if it does not depict the past objectively, as it was" (1974, p. 129). This assertion seems to correlate both with Socialist Realism and Rusev's exhibition, despite their different temporal positions. Other comments on Rusev's exhibition after 1989 continue this assertion. According to Donkov, "some of them [Rusev's paintings] have become the measure of artistic righteousness to the past" (Donkov, 2007). In this exhibition "art and history speak a common language." Donkov continues with "art is the guardian of the historical truth" (Donkov, 2007). These assertions seem to connect the post-Communist past with the post-Communist 'present'.

In these understandings of Rusev's exhibition, 'realism' undergoes a transformation here and becomes 'righteousness'; a 'historical truth'. It supports an 'objective' view on the past. How would this view connect to other art practices engaged with a different position towards the past, both in terms of formal characteristics and choices of subject matter? Obviously, compared to an 'objective' and 'rightful' view, the other practices would be left into position of 'wrong', 'partial' or probably 'biased'.

4. 4. Between 'official' and 'unofficial' art: my installation "How to Create an Ideal Past 2"

My practice also falls into this opposition. In an attempt to transcend it, my installation "How to Create an Ideal Past 2" (42 x 42 x 42 cm, acrylic on paper, fig. 61) questions its own place in the post-Communist space. Here another opposition arises, supported by the 'objective' claims of Rusev's work, namely between 'official' and 'unofficial' fine art. For that reason my installation investigates the relations between the abstract and the figurative in the context of 'unofficial art' during Communism. It endeavours to develop an alternative to Rusev's 'official' works. A self-portrait of the unofficial artist Georgiev was chosen as a source image (fig. 60). A parallel is drawn between the artist's visual language, which gradually transformed into abstract shapes and colours and my practice, which, without being in the position of 'unofficial' in the sense of Georgiev's practice before 1989, still appears as an alternative to the 'official' fine art practices, the most influential of which was (is) Rusev's practice.

My installation explores Georgiev's self-portrait in the context of his decision not to take part in any public artistic activities, a decision which is understood here as a peculiar form of resistance against the rules of Socialist Realism in the context of an art-world where no underground art movements were organised. As such it becomes an extension of the



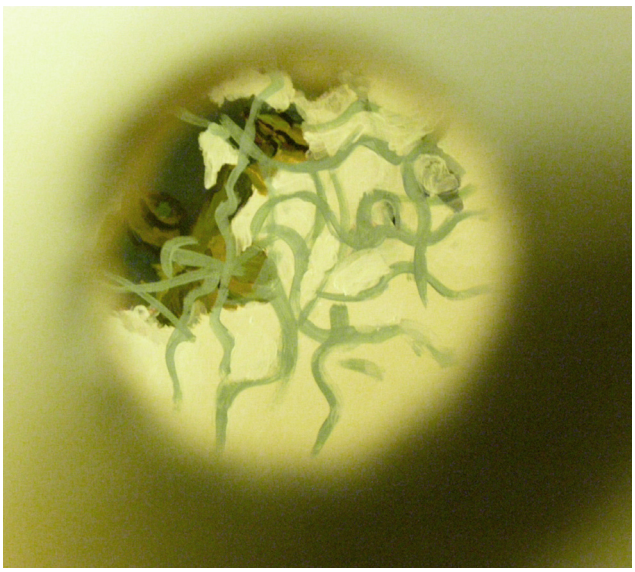


Fig. 61 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova
"How to Create an Ideal Past 2",
acrylic on paper, 42 x 42 x 42 cm, 2014

self-portrait itself. My installation consists of a cardboard box with the dimensions 42 x 42 x 42 cm. From outside it is painted white and resembles an almost abstract shape. Upon closer scrutiny, the box has small holes on each side which allow the viewer to peek into its inner space. The latter is covered with fragments re-drawn from Georgiev's painting on an abstract white background (fig. 62). The elements are placed on the six inner sides of the cube. This positioning of the images aims to break their linear perception; instead their 'readings' provoke new relations between them to be discovered and a parallel analysis to be applied. The elements constantly shift their interactions; they could be juxtaposed in numerous new ways. In this installation I do not try to repeat Georgiev's painting; instead I work with its photographic reproductions as source images. It is produced after 1989 and thus reflects upon the new context of perception. The six sides of the inner space depict six representations of the artist's self-portrait, focusing on exploring the development of Georgiev's visual language. The latter gradually changed from figurative to abstract - from realistic portraits and still lives to abstract images, and at the end of his life, his paintings rejected any concept of 'mirroring' reality, the figurative elements gradually melted and the images depicted could not be related to any 'real' object. Therefore the artist's face from his self-portrait is depicted on each of my paintings in the installation using different formal approaches, executed with various brush strokes, shapes and colours, reflecting on the formal features of selected Georgiev's paintings. The face gradually disappears and transforms into abstract shapes; it becomes more fragmented and ambiguous, almost unidentifiable.

In my installation the paintings can be observed only by small holes on each sides of the box, i. e. the viewer's perception is limited. At the same time, the paintings can be seen from different points of view as each hole provides a new perspective and way of engaging with

Fig. 60 - Ivan Georgiev, *"Self-Portrait"*, oil on canvas, 1960s

Fig. 62 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"How to Create an Ideal Past 2", acrylic on paper

Fig. 62 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"How to Create an Ideal Past 2", acrylic on paper

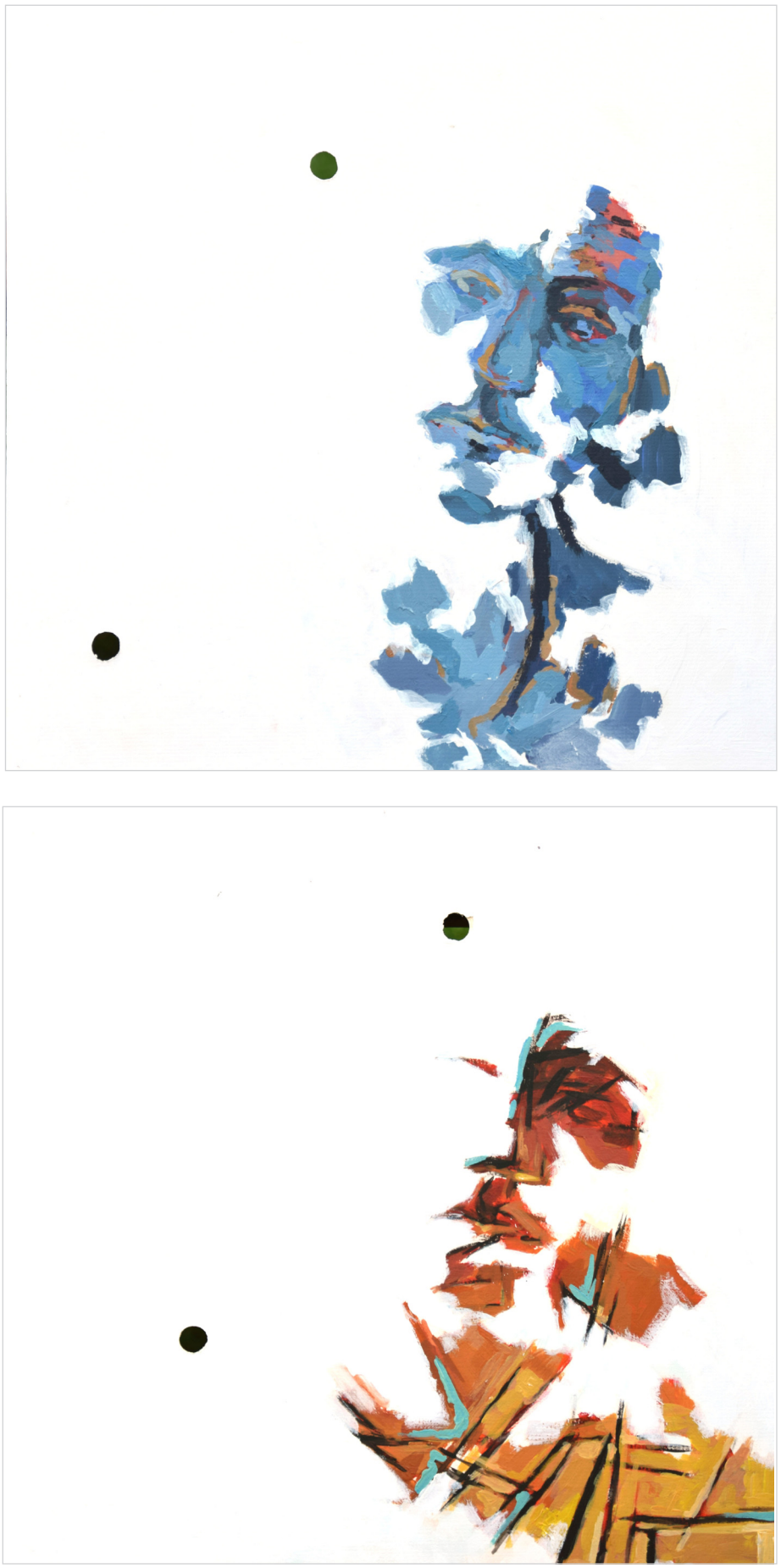


Fig. 62 - Nina Pancheva-Kirkova,
"How to Create an Ideal Past 2", acrylic on paper

the inner space of the installation. This limitation of our perception constantly shifts our attention between the identifiable objects, shapes and colours. By restricting and guiding the viewer's perception, my installation reflects on Georgiev's work and the ways it has been displayed; both as a photographic source and in the context of silence, which appears to wrap up his work as an 'unofficial' art.

Furthermore, this particular form of the installation addresses the form of resistance to the dominant aesthetic and political discourse that Georgiev chose, i. e. his refusal to participate in any public activities. It reflects on the display of Georgiev's work - confined in the small space of the artist's studio. My installation explores the way Georgiev's work could be perceived and discussed – between the form and the meaning of his paintings. Dividing them, my installation examines the ways their meanings are produced.

Elements from Georgiev's visual language are repeated as signs in the installation, exploring the combinative aspect of speech, signs, whose recurrence in successive discourses turns them into part of the artist's visual language. By working with selected paintings by Georgiev, and re-drawing fragments from them on different surfaces, my installation endeavours to look at the use of paint, abstract shapes and layers of paint, among other factors. Thus it explores Georgiev's visual language by combining elements from his self-portrait with colours, curves and shapes from other selected abstract paintings he made. His use of layers of paint constitutes a central element of my analysis of Georgiev's work as corresponding with the layers of meanings produced both by the paintings themselves and by the relations provoked by their juxtapositions. These elements of images examine not *isolated* relations but *bundles* of relations; thus the paintings are analysed as a time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic.

It could be questioned whether Rusev's and Georgiev's works could be able to form a dialogue on the past. They constitute two visual languages which develop as closed fragments. These visual languages continue to exist in synchrony, yet in parallel, one to another, in the post-Communist context. In this sense my installation questions its own place in parallel with the two artists' work and the oppositions between 'objective' and 'partial', 'official' and 'unofficial' supported by Rusev's work. These oppositions appear as rubble transferred from the Communist 'reality' to the post-Communist one. Following them, a dialogue between the art practices seems scarcely possible. Furthermore, both rejection and acceptance as reactions of these oppositions would reaffirm the 'closed spaces' of monologic discourses on the past. Transcending them appears as a reaction that could overcome the inability to form a dialogue between the past and the 'present', a reaction performed by my practice in its juxtapositions of abstract and figurative elements and thus strivings to 'free' the flows of associations, interrelations and non-casual understandings of Socialist Realism and its post-Communist heritage.

5. Conclusion

Through a layering of visual and discursive practices, this study has offered new insights into continuity between fine art in Communist and post-Communist Bulgaria. In order to explore this continuity, it has focused on the relationship between the abstract and the figurative on the axis between painting and photography and within the context of 'realism' of Socialist Realism and contemporary fine art in Bulgaria. As an integral part of this study, my practice has been engaging with visualising aspects of this relationship throughout the research process. Thereby, it contributed to the development of the study by generating new research questions and concerns. A key element of my studio practice has become the examination of photographic reproductions. On the one hand, these have been photographs of Socialist Realist paintings and monuments, produced after the fall of Communism. On the other hand, my practice has explored photographs from the Communist era; these depict aspects of the 'successful life under Communism', of a state-planned economy, the proletariat, and partisan movements, among others. Both types of photographs have been explored here together with the processes behind their production, distribution and consumption. These processes span the Communist and post-Communist periods and for that reason were engaged with Socialist Realism in the country in the context of the fluctuating definitions over the years of the Communist regime, as well as with its post-Communist representations.

The outcome of this research – paintings and installations – includes a direct juxtaposing of the abstract and the figurative. This juxtaposition is performed on the axis between painting and photography, in recognition of the latter, in its claims for authenticity in conjunction with its inevitable interpretative decision of depicting reality, has been found productive in exploring 'realism' within Socialist Realism with its claims of 'objectivity' and 'reflection of reality'.

Several stages of transformation of the initial source images have been performed in order to explore their functioning within or in relation to 'realism' in Socialist Realism. By re-contextualising elements from the photographic sources, my studio practice has been looking at their construction, relationships between their formal features, subject matter and contexts of their production, distribution and perception. The genesis of the pictures has been recognised as an equally powerful explanatory concept as that of resemblance. The photographs' production (and accordingly perception of Socialist Realism after 1989) has been regarded here as situated in the oppositions, developed during the Communist era and transferred after its fall, namely the oppositions between 'official' and 'unofficial'; 'sacred' and 'profane'; 'canonical' and 'marginal'; between a 'heroic past' and a 'failed present'.

Socialist Realism, as a component of the Communist past, has been perceived after 1989 with extreme notions which support a diachronic understanding of this aesthetic approach and practice. The discussions in the country have been fluctuated between 'nostalgia or

oblivion', 'praise or disavowal', and 'continuity or rupture'. My practice aimed to transcend these oppositions by looking at Socialist Realism in both its synchronic and diachronic development; in its relationship with contemporary fine art as both continuity and rupture. The abstract elements in my practice, as appropriated by an artistic domain understood in the framework of the abovementioned oppositions during Communism as inacceptable and decadent has contributed to this transcendence. The abstract components function in my practice in conjunction with the figurative components, thus evoking numerous associations. This juxtaposition is not a move towards a homogenisation, but rather an interrelation that functions through acknowledging the differences between these two domains.

The photographs produced during the Communist era operate between the three realities which Socialist Realism was expected to address, as suggested by Gorky and introduced in the country by Pavlov – 'past, present and future'. In this respect, 'realism' acquires a dimension other than the proclaimed 'reflection of reality', namely the construction of the future which exceeds the definition of 'realism' as mimetic practice. This presupposed the search for new approaches in Socialist Realism; yet the mass production and dissemination of the works of art required adherence to realistic images which would be easily perceived and 'read' in a predictable manner consistent with the given ideological framework. In this way ambivalence was maintained – between 'reflecting' and 'constructing' the Communist 'reality', the latter being understood as past, present and future at the same time. My practice, in its remote temporal position and specific disposition toward Socialist Realism, has been questioning the photographs' 'unity of content and form' throughout the research process by drawing attention to the strategies they embody to construct and reflect 'reality'.

In this procedure, the abstract space in my studio practice has emerged as central. It functions, on the one hand, as focusing the viewer's attention to the surface of the painting itself, and on the other hand, as a metaphor of the oppositions which influence the viewer's perceptions of the photograph. It disturbs the illusion of a three-dimensional space by constructing a novel space – a space of a 'painting-reality'. This space appears as a moment of silence between the extreme views on the past, one that is needed for a critical reflection, and opens up possibilities for a dialogue on the Socialist Realist heritage.

The examination of photographs produced after the collapse of the Communist regime has expanded the process of investigation of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria as it has added new aspects, namely Socialist Realism's official representations in post-Communist Bulgaria. These representations have been examined in the institutional context of the state-funded "Museum of the Socialist Art", in its selection of works, exhibitions and organisation of space. In this section of the thesis the pseudo-religious functions of Socialist Realism have emerged as a central concern in correlation with the concepts underlying the establishment and the functioning of the museum. Having provided a framework that 'guides' the viewer's perceptions of the works, the institution interrupts the flow of associations, which they

provoke, endeavouring to confine them. These constraints have become one of the main foci of this study as they are regarded here as transferring fragments from the Communist past into the post-Communist 'present'. The correlation between utopia and 'realism' in Socialist Realism has also been addressed in this study to support the hypothesis that it constitutes in important aspect of continuity towards Socialist Realism and, by implication, to the Communist past.

The example of the 'official' artist, Rusev, has placed the relationship between the abstract and the figurative in a new perspective – in the oppositions between a 'heroic past' and a 'failed present'; between an 'objective' past and a fragmented present; and, accordingly, between 'official' and 'unofficial' fine art. 'Realism' in Rusev's work, as closely connected to the nationalist tendency in fine art in the '70s discussed in this study, undergoes a transformation here and starts to function as an 'objective' approach of looking at the national past. In this section, the abstract and the figurative in my practice leave the flatness of the canvas and occupy the three-dimensional space of my installations. In this three-dimensional space, the fragments of Socialist Realist painting are at once squeezed and stretched by new forms of abstract space, which stimulates new juxtapositions to be observed by the viewer, juxtapositions that differ each time when perceiving the works.

Retaining recognisable figurative depictions of Socialist Realist paintings, monuments and photographs, my practice aimed to sustain a dialogue with this approach, a dialogue that transcends the abovementioned oppositions. By doing this, it also acts on the border between the original and the copy, questioning the authenticity of the original. To copy was more than a repetition of a particular form. The 'repetition' here has changed the initial pictures, producing new 'unique' pictures – the result of a slow handmade execution. In these procedures of execution, the originals' methods of production, distribution and dissemination have been explored by the process of critical 'making', expanding in this way the understandings of their perceptions. In these procedures my practice has become self-aware of its own position towards the original. By yielding its own originality, it aimed to explore the approaches adopted by Socialist Realism, but at the same time to situate them in the new, post-Communist and postmodern contexts in relation to other contemporary practices and accordingly new artistic approaches.

This 'transformation of the original' aimed to open up possibilities for a critical dialogue on the past within, with and around the Socialist Realist works preserved in the post-Communist context. It aimed to disrupt the monologic views in Socialist Realism; to transcend the understandings of its 'homogeneous' development by looking at the ruptures in the development of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria. These ruptures, though, are located within the bigger context of a framework of constraints. During the Communist regime these constraints were presupposed by the postulates of the Communist ideology and imposed by the Communist party in its merging with the state. After the fall of Communism the official representations of Socialist Realist works have endeavoured to transfer the

framework of monologic perceptions surrounding Socialist Realism in the new context, an attempt that, my study argues, contributes to the fragmentation of the post-Communist art-world in the country by not allowing a dialogue on the Socialist Realist heritage.

Rather than stopping the flows of associations within and around Socialist Realist works as displayed after 1989, my practice sought to acknowledge the complexity of their interrelations and constantly changing perceptions. This acknowledgment has been considered here as a necessary basis for a critical dialogue on the past, a dialogue that would go beyond the mythologised notions and searching for 'timeless' patterns from the past and would develop new understandings, both by means of contemporary art practices and as theoretical approaches.

5. 1. Future research

By contributing to the translation and discussion of significant texts on the implementation of Socialist Realism in Bulgaria and the debates on its heritage after 1989 (comprising a wide range of materials by ideologists of Socialist Realism; documents from plenums of the Bulgarian Communist party, the Union of Bulgarian Artists and Ministry of Culture; and interviews with artists working both before and after the collapse of the Communist regime, among others), this study has also added the specific case of continuity between Socialist Realism and contemporary fine art in Bulgaria to the English-speaking dialogue, thus opening up the possibilities for further debate and comparative research between Bulgaria and other post-Communist countries.

The temporal limitation of the current study, though, did not allow the examination of other aspects of the relationship between the abstract and the figurative in fine art in Communist and post-Communist Bulgaria. The lack of research projects dedicated to the development of fine art during these periods, on the other hand, presupposes the need for further research in this field. This could consider the discourses on abstraction and their relation to Socialist Realism in a debate whose examination would offer a conceptualisation of the function of abstraction within and after the Communist regime, as well as on the impact of the state-proclaimed 'realism'.

The relationship between the abstract and the figurative could also be investigated in the realm of the underground art in the country, looking at its conceptualisation by the unofficial artists in terms of alternative (or not) to the 'official' art, placed between the 'individual' attempts for self-expression and a form of resistance against the dominant aesthetic approach of Socialist Realism.

The relationship between the abstract and the figurative could also be placed on the axis between state-funded and private galleries – and thus on the axis between art perception in relation to the viewer as 'the people' or as 'consumers'. In what position were the abstract

works of art in relation to Socialist Realism after 1989 in terms of their display at the galleries? How did these state-funded and private galleries react to the changes in 1989 and what strategies did they develop in order to present Socialist Realism in the new context? How does the network of galleries before 1989 relate to the networks of galleries that emerged after the collapse of the Communist regime? These questions could form the basis of another research project in this field of enquiry.

Appendix

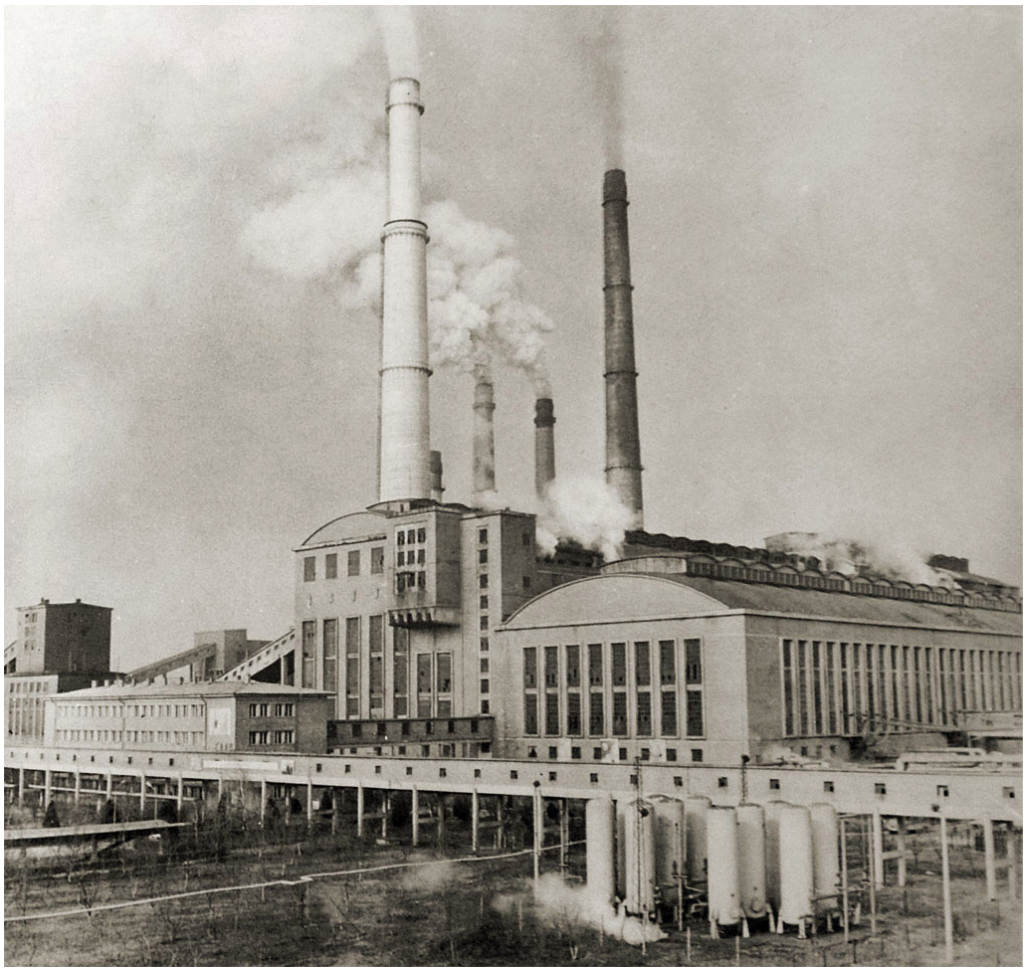


Fig. 3

Fig. 4 - Andrey Filippov, *"The Last Supper"*, installation, 1989

Fig. 5 -*"The Wall",* installations, 2009

Fig. 6 - Nedko Solakov, *"I Miss Socialism, Maybe",* installation, 2011

Fig. 7 - Nedko Solakov, *"I Miss Socialism, Maybe",* installation, 2011

Fig. 8 - Ilya Kabakov, paintings from the exhibition *"Return to Painting 1961 – 2011"*, Henie Onstad Art Centre, Norway

Fig. 9 - Art and Language, "*A Portrait of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock VIII",* 2 parts, enamel on paper 63,5 x 59,5 cm, ink on paper 20 x 19 cm, 1980

Fig. 10 - Komar and Melamid, *"Girl and Stalin"*
lithograph, 77 x 76 cm, 1992-93

Fig. 11 - Komar and Melamid, *"Skyscraper"*
oil on canvas and wooden panels in five parts,
212 x 272 cm, 1986-87

Fig. 12 - Sekul Krumov, *"Georgi Dimitrov"*, 1982

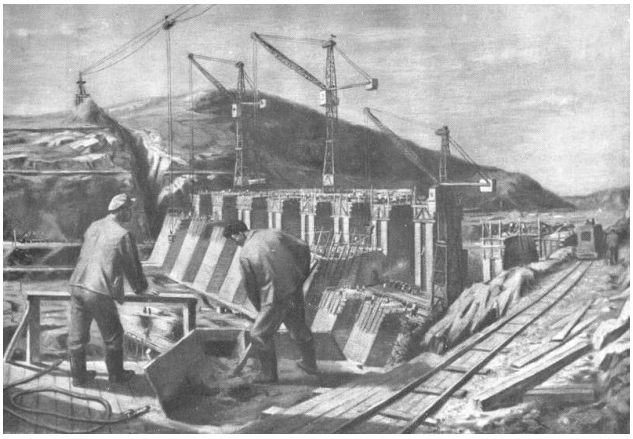


Fig. 13 - Aleksandur Petrov, *"Construction of Dam"*, oil on canvas

Fig. 14 - Nikola Lilov, *"The Bet"*, oil on canvas

Fig. 15 - Nikola Mirchev, *"Interrogation"*, oil on canvas, 1954

Fig. 16 - Monument dedicated to the partisan group "Chavdar", Trudovetz

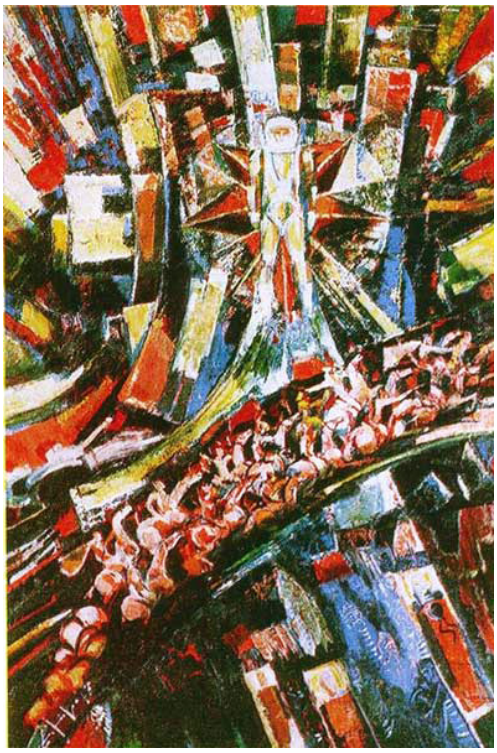


Fig. 17 - Dimitur Kirov, *"The Beginning"*, oil on canvas, 1977

Fig. 18 - Sava Savov, *"Time"*, oil on canvas, 1980

Fig. 19 - Atanas Patzev, *"Supporters of Partisans"*,
oil on canvas, 1975

Fig. 20 - Dimitur Kirov,
"The Birth of the Red Victory",
oil on canvas, 1972

Fig. 23

Fig. 25 - Ilya Kabakov, paintings from *"An Alternative History of Art"*, 2005

Fig. 32 - Panayot Panayotov, *"Vulko Chervenov"*, oil on canvas, 1953

Fig. 39

Fig. 45 - Svetlin Rusev, *"Execution – 1923",* oil on canvas, 260 x 208 cm, 1963

Fig. 48 - Svetlin Rusev, *"Bread",* oil on canvas, 1960s

Fig. 49 - Svetlin Rusev, "*Oath"*, oil on canvas, 1960s

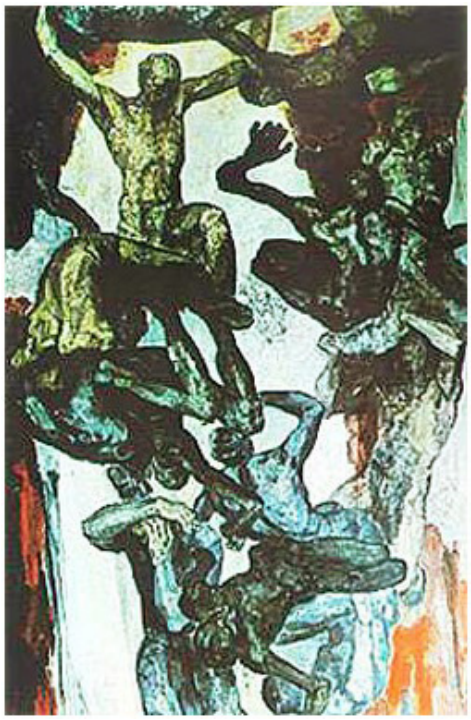


Fig. 50 - Svetlin Rusev, "*Light and Darkness*", oil on canvas, 1970[s]

Fig. 51 - Svetlin Rusev, paintings from the exhibition "Poorhouse"

Fig. 57 - Adrian Ghenie, *"The Trial",* oil on canvas, 363 x 200 cm, 2009

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