

Foreword

Nedko Solakov's work is far-reaching, continually escalating, and formally difficult to contain. Its contents comprise one big attack on the demand for perfection, finality, and clarity. Born in 1957, the Bulgarian artist began as a student of mural painting at the art academy in Sofia, but has spent the last twenty-five years developing an oeuvre as humorous as it is playful, as trenchant as it is melancholy—a body of work that fundamentally questions the validity of every sort of representational system there is. Ever since his participation in the 2007 Venice Biennale and Documenta 12, Solakov has assumed a central position in contemporary European art.

Hardly any other work expresses the artist's basic skepticism toward our desire for clarity and lucidity more than *A Life (Black & White)* (1998–present) does. In it, a painter paints an exhibition space white, while a second painter paints the white paint black, which in turn is painted white by the first artist, and so forth, without this absurd “round dance” ever reaching an end.

Looking at the many forms his work takes, it can be seen that Solakov aims to create an encyclopedia of the absurd, the remote: a history of deviations, differences, embarrassments, and aborted utopias. The collapse of the Communist system in the late nineteen-eighties significantly influenced his work and, at the same time, it spurred him on to search for a new language of his own (*Encyclopaedia Utopia*, 1989–90) that would adequately capture the complexity and fragility of reality.

His drawings, texts, videos, photographs, performances, installations, sculptures, and murals question what are apparently collective truths and the conditions of the art system and the art market (*Leftovers*, 2005); they use his own publicly exposed fears to reflect upon failure as a metaphor for human existence (*Fear*, 2002–03) and discover paradox as a dominant structure in the political ways of the world (*Discussion [Property]*, 2007). Solakov has the ability to take all of these different themes and put them into narratives that maintain an exact balance between a poetic, rhapsodic joy in narrative and constant, ironic breaks; and it is this ability that makes his body of work not only wholly inimitable, but also highly entertaining and humorous. The Kunstmuseum in Bonn, the Kunstmuseum in St. Gallen, and the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt are now producing the first large retrospective in Germany and Switzerland of Solakov's important oeuvre. The show includes pieces from the late nineteen-eighties to 2007, as well as *Some Nice Things to Enjoy While You are Not Making a Living* (2007–08), a new, multipart installation that the artist has created specifically for our exhibition.

We would first like to thank Nedko Solakov himself: from the start, he has worked on this project with a great deal of commitment and extreme precision. Acknowledgments also go to the Arndt & Partner gallery—especially to Matthias Arndt and Kristin Rieber for their support in obtaining catalogue materials and loans; to Annett Frey for the felicitous catalogue design; and to Georgi Gospodinov for his illuminating literary essay on the artist's work. We would also like to thank our colleagues at our various institutions for the perfect realization of the show's concept.

Stephan Berg, Kunstmuseum Bonn
Roland Wäspe, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen
Ralf Beil, Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt