



MARIANA VASSILEVA
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"It's important for me that every work functions like an individual entity." For Mariana Vassileva, producing a work is a "mystic organism" with its own rhythm, its own speed and its own proposition. She listens for that indeterminate moment in the creative process when a certain idea begins to define itself through "its very insistence." Vassileva tends towards minimalism in her work. She strips the image to its barest essentials in order to allow the underlying idea to take form. "I like to leave a work 'open,'" she says, "and from a certain moment onwards, I no longer exist. It's only the idea..." Quite often, in Vassileva's art, this idea unfolds only through a change in spatial and temporal observation. < <

Born in 1964 in Tornovo, Bulgaria, Mariana Vassileva has lived and worked in Berlin since 1991. This first Canadian showcase of her work presents *Tango*, *The Milkmaid* and *j Toro!* In each of these three video pieces, Vassileva portrays a single individual: a woman in *Tango* and *The Milkmaid*, a man in *j Toro!* This solitary figure is engaged in a movement, a gesture, a situation. Each work offers a picture of remarkable poetic intensity. "Whatever the medium I'm working with, I'm always thinking in a painterly way. From a philosophical point of view, you could regard everything as a painting, as a surface phenomenon." < <

The Milkmaid differs from the other two works on display with its reference to art history. In 1658, Vermeer captured the gesture of a servant girl carefully pouring milk in his celebrated painting *The Milkmaid*. Vassileva says she looked at the girl for such a long time that she could not get her out of her mind. "I thought I should thank this great master of light, thank him in my own way." She has bled all the colour out of the Vermeer work, while retaining the composition and gesture of the painting. "The endless space, flooded with light, was crucial." To act as her model, she looked for a proud young woman, with a boyish kind of beauty and pristine dress. The entire composition is dominated by white, as the artist lets the milk flow endlessly: the pitcher never totally empties, the bowl never fills. To the sounds of a medieval song combined with a minimalist electronic composition by Berlin artist Carsten Nicolai, alias Alva Noto, Vassileva pays tribute to Vermeer by transposing his motif to an undefined present, a moment in eternity. < <

Mariana Vassileva looks at solitude as a phenomenon. "I've been thinking about loneliness and isolation for a long while. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes in one of his books that when we feel very lonely, we unconsciously touch objects in our environment. You touch the object and, although you still don't see others, you are not so alone anymore." < <

The individual is indeed alone in *Tango*, *The Milkmaid* and *j Toro !*, but it is in *Tango*, in particular, that Vassileva evokes the sense of loneliness. *Tango* was shot in Bulgaria, after the artist had returned from a visit to Argentina. Vassileva would often go to a meadow that she found "so perfectly beautiful," she wanted to take it with her. Since she couldn't pick the meadow up in her arms, she decided to roll around in it like a little girl. "What concerned me most when creating *Tango* was communication with nature. I was literally yearning to be one with this beautiful, shimmering meadow, even with the whole place.... The dance movements in the video have a symbolical meaning for me. One step forward, two steps back—there's a connection to our common fate. We are born alone, we're always on the move, and still there is this desire to put down roots, like a tree...." < <

Movement, speed and rest are important elements in the work of Mariana Vassileva. In *j Toro !*, she presents the solitary and senseless struggle of a man mimicking a bullfighter's gestures to fight back the ocean waves. She is interested in what she calls "every life's formation." Each wave has a life of its own: in the space of a few minutes, an energy builds, a movement forms and a wave sweeps out of the ocean; each wave has its own force, its beginning and end. No human being can control or oppose it. The man in *j Toro !* heads into the waves, using his suit coat as a cape to provoke the ocean into fighting. Transformed in the face of the unyielding force of the eternal rolling of the waves, these "classic" bullfighter's gestures, dignified movements that are deeply ingrained in Spanish culture, also conjure up a world of illusions worthy of Don Quixote: an impossible ideal of honour, futile efforts to exert control and a refusal to acknowledge reality. The work becomes a metaphor for an attitude to the world and to life itself.

Louise Simard



Born in Tornovo, Bulgaria, in 1964.
Lives and works in Berlin.

Biography

(*) Exhibition accompanied by a publication.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 *Mariana Vassileva: New Works*, DNA Galerie, Berlin, Germany.
- 2007 *Reflections*, Städtische Galerie Bremen, Bremen, Germany.
Speedformel, DNA Galerie, Berlin, Germany.
- 2006 *Nothing Is Just* (with Rivka Rinn), DNA Galerie, Berlin, Germany.
Mariana Vassileva, Gallery Art & Food, Gijón, Spain.
Mirrorlight, Goethe-Institut, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- 2005 *Spiegel/Licht*, DNA Galerie, Berlin, Germany.
- 2004 *Rasender Stillstand III*, Prima Center, Berlin, Germany.
- 2003 *Rasender Stillstand II*, DNA Galerie, Berlin, Germany.
- 2000 *Rasender Stillstand*, Galerie Weisser Elefant, Berlin, Germany.

Group Exhibitions

- 2008 *Beyond Stereotypes*, NAK Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, Germany.
Collection Videos and Films Isabelle and Jean-Conrad Lemaître, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany.
Hernandades Escultóricas, MACAY Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Ateneo de Yucatán, Mérida, Mexico.
- 2007 *BAC! '07 Babylon*, International Festival of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.
Bienal del Fin del Mundo, Tierra del Fuego, Ushuaia, Argentina.
Bulgaria?... Oh, yes, Bucharest! Week of Contemporary Art 2007, Art Today Association, Plovdiv, Bulgaria.
Cine y Casi Cine, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain.
Faccia Lei, Spazio Thetis, Venice, Italy.
Garten Eden: Der Garten in der Kunst seit 1900, Kunsthalle in Emden, Emden, Germany.
Leibhaftig, Kunstverein Konstanz, Konstanz, Germany.*
Leibhaftig, Städtische Galerie Ravensburg, Ravensburg, Germany.
Mariana Vassileva, Asli Sungu, Zeitraumexit e. V., Mannheim, Germany.
Martes de Galería, Martes de Videoarte, BlackBoxArt Foundation, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

- Portrait: Berlin*, The Moving Gallery, Omaha, Nebraska, United States
[itinerary: Goethe-Institut, Washington, D.C., United States; Nuovo Polo Natatorio, Trieste, Italy].
- Video Killed The Painting Star*, DA2 Domus Artium 2002 Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain.
- Visões Berlinenses*, Paço das Artes, São Paulo, Brazil. *
- Visual Immortality VI*, Projektraum M54, Basel, Switzerland.
- Wunder der Prärie, zeitraum_ex!t: Internationales Festival für Theater, Performance, Tanz, Kunst = Wonder of the Prairie stands for: International Festival for Theatre, Performance Art, Dance, Fine Art*, Zeitraumexit Büro für Kunst Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany.
- 2006 *Babylon's Shade*, ARTos Foundation, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Das kommt davon*, Backfabrik, Berlin, Germany.
- Il Festival de Videopoesia Internacional 2006*, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- International Biennial for Contemporary Art - Shumen*, Shumen, Bulgaria.
- LOOP International Festival and Fair for Video Art*, Hotel Pulitzer, Barcelona, Spain.
- Optica 2006: Gijon International Festival of Video Art*, Gijón, Spain.
- Paradise: A Step to the Left*, TactileBosch, Cardiff, United Kingdom.
- People and Spaces*, Riga Congress Centre, Riga, Latvia.
- Videoart Una Visiō Actual*, Sala d'Art Caixa de Manlleu, Vic, Spain.
- Vokuhila: Fragen der Form*, DECK Gallerie Für Aktuelle Kunst, Stuttgart, Germany. *
- 2005 *In Absentia*, The House, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, United Kingdom.
- VideoNow!*, White Trash Contemporary, Hamburg, Germany.
- 2004 *LOOP International Festival and Fair for Video Art*, Barcelona, Spain.
- Neither in the Sky, nor on the Earth*, Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje, Skopje, Macedonia.
- 2003 *Group Show*, Keumsan Gallery, Seoul, South Korea.
- Zeitgenössisch! Kunst in Berlin*, Karl Hofer Gesellschaft Freundeskreis der UdK e. V., Berlin, Germany.
- 2002 *Blaue Nacht*, Kunst Bunker, Nuremberg, Germany.
- Insideout 5. Festival der Neuen Kunst = Festival of Contemporary Art*, Bunker, Berlin, Germany.
- 2001 *Fünf Sterne: Fluchtwege*, Galerie Weisser Elefant, Berlin, Germany.
- 2000 *Festival of Vision, Hong Kong - Berlin*, Hong Kong, China; Berlin, Germany [in collaboration with The House of World Cultures, Berlin].

Program



The Milkmaid, 2006

3 min, PAL, loop

Sound: Alva Noto, from op. 2005 *Transrapid*,

Dominique Vellart

Model: Maria Dabow

Courtesy the artist
and DNA Gallery, Berlin



¡Toro!, 2008

5 min, PAL, loop

Courtesy Art.es and DNA Gallery, Berlin



Tango, 2007

45 sec, PAL, loop

Courtesy the artist
and DNA Gallery, Berlin

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