

Exploring Bulgaria thro' its Art

Ronald G Young



Boris Denev (1889-1969)

Being a considerably expanded version of -
[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#) (2012)



Nenko Balkanski (1907-1977)

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to produce this book without the support and encouragement of the following people -

Yassen Gollevi of Konus Gallery - also painter and lecturer.

It was he who suggested the initial names of painters I should know something about and who would produce, from time to time, works for me to consider. Latterly, he supplied me with the details of some of the painters of whom I was despairing of getting any more information than their date of birth! As well as glasses of choice rakia!

Yovo Yovchev was the artist who really introduced me to Bulgarian painting in 2008; who sold me my first Bulgarian painting; subsequently helped me in my searches; and served great meals and wines in his studio!

Vihra Pesheva of Astry Gallery who introduced me to the canvasses of the younger generation; assisted me in the final stages of the production of the original booklet which has grown into this much larger E-book; and always gives a warm welcome in her gallery.

The website and auction catalogues of **Victoria Gallery and auction house** have played an important role in my education about Bulgarian realists. The website contains a great archive of photographs as well as brief information about some of the painters. The photographs in this book and on the CD Rom have four basic sources - the Victoria Gallery; municipal galleries; my own shots of paintings; and the internet (eg ArtPriceBG). Details of these websites are given in relevant sections of the booklet and I gratefully acknowledge their use.

The publications of some of the municipal galleries have also been useful in filling out the information on painters given in the table - particularly those of **Sofia City Gallery**, **Stara Zagora City Gallery** and **Kazanluk** (with the latter giving electronic access to one of their catalogues).

Inevitably, some errors will have occurred in the dates given for key events in painters' lives - for which I have to assume complete responsibility. In some cases, dates are disputed and, in these cases, I have had to make a personal judgement.

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About the author

1. The Neglect of Bulgaria

Last year my E-book [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) used 16 different ways which can be used to throw light on one of the two countries which I now count as home. These were -

- travel guides;
- travelogues - which can be divided into the serious or the (sadly increasing number of) tongue-in-cheek type;
- histories - dealing with what are considered to be the key events in the shaping of a nation;
- novels;
- social and cultural histories (including jokes) - which give insights into how ordinary people lived their lives;
- memoirs and diaries - dealing with those who were more "distinguished";
- blogs of ex-pats;
- magazines;
- television, films and plays;
- photographs;
- paintings and caricatures;
- buildings;
- conversations and encounters;
- friendships;
- music;
- food and wine



It's not easy to find books which help us access the soul of a country - travel books do their best but are somewhat one dimensional. More serious books suffer from being written from one particular academic discipline - be it history, economics, politics. Anthropology seems to offer more eg [The anthropology of Ireland](#) which I encountered while surfing. And this series on the [cultural history of cities](#) is quite excellent.

Because perhaps of its size - or Cyrillic language - Bulgaria is a rather mysterious country for most people. [My blog commented](#) a couple of years ago on its neglect - despite the tourism its ski-slopes and Black Sea sands enjoy. [A Concise History of Bulgaria](#) is the only history book I can find (although [Wikipedia has a long and useful note](#) on the various phases of its history) - and the Lonely Planet website [could list in 2010 as books worth reading](#) only the 1912 novel Under the Yoke; other novels on the same theme of war with the Turks; and books about gypsies! You can find [a rather fuller list here](#).

The best Guides for me are [The Rough Guide to Bulgaria](#) which does contain (at page 461-64 of the link) a list of English books on Bulgaria (many out of print) as well as a useful section on the country's music. A locally-produced [Bulgaria Tour Guide](#) (Tangra 2006) - a glossy 670 pager with superb small illustrations - is a great buy at only 15 euros. And also this delightful little book which features some of the [amazing small bed and breakfasts in the countryside you can stay at for a song](#).

Of course, if you look hard, you can find treasures such as Ivan Daraktchiev's amazing [Bulgaria: Terra Europeansis Incognita](#) - 600 pages of superb photographs and provocative (English) text about the history (ancient and recent) and landscape of the country and its relationship with neighbours.

The owner of Sofia's Neros Gallery, Ruhmen Manov, went one better in summer 2014 by giving us a bilingual [A Fairy Tale about Bulgaria](#) which weighs in at 7 kilos and 700 pages - based on his personal collection of old Bulgarian photos and cultural artefacts. It does indeed give a stunning sense of Bulgaria's history. Four other good reads are -

- [Sofia Enigma and Stigm](#) - a little book which contains evocative black and white photos of old, crumbling buildings in Sofia;
- the marvellous 600 page [Sofia's Mount Athos](#) is a superb study (complete with photos and GPS coordinates) of the 46 monasteries which cluster around Sofia - many since the 14th century.
- Elisabeth Kostova's [The Historian](#) is a Gothic novel which takes in both Bulgaria and Romania (as well as France, thanks to the Bogomils)
- and the fascinating memoir replete with photos - [You Live your Life But Once - A Memoir from Bulgaria](#) by Dimi Gachev

2. Purpose of the booklet

"Very recently a prominent Bulgarian assured me that water colors by the leading Bulgarian artists are second to none in Europe and when I showed some reluctance in accepting so sweeping a judgment, my interlocutor "guaranteed" me that his statement was perfectly accurate and offered to prove it by comparing the best Bulgarian paintings one by one with the best of the contemporary European masters. Being unacquainted with the European masters I accepted the guarantee on faith, though even yet I am a bit doubtful.

Nevertheless, I was very much impressed by the fact that a lawyer, who had given much of his life to politics and was at that moment engaged in trying to improve Bulgarian agriculture, should be so much interested in art".

RH Markham (Meet Bulgaria 1931)

Plus ça change.....It was only in 2007/08 when I was living and working in Bulgaria for the first time that I stumbled on the landscapes and seascapes painted by the Bulgarian painters who were working in the early and middle of the 20th century. I had the same reaction as Markham all of 75 years earlier (although it is only recently that I came across his comments). I thought the paintings beautiful - and affordable - and have found myself an art collector! Of not only 100 works of the older school in my collection but of various young contemporaries I also admire.



And it wasn't just a question of quality. It was also the sheer number of painters - dead and alive. I had the sense that, pro rata, Bulgarians has more painters, cartoonists and sculptors than other countries.

And yet Bulgarian painters generally (let alone of this particular period) are not well known abroad. Hardly surprising when no book exists (or seems ever to have been published) about Bulgarian painting in the English language. A book on "contemporary bulgarian painting" was apparently published in English in 1996 but is out of print. The incredible Posada art bookshop in Brussels had Europe's largest collection of artbooks and, in 2010, I could find (and buy) there only a 1947 edition of Art Moderne Bulgare (French) published by the (then) new Ministry of Culture

I hope this book will help change that. Its aim is to introduce "modern realist" Bulgarian painting to visitors and to encourage them to spend time (and perhaps some money) browsing the galleries here. You will be received in a very friendly way - all the more so if you show that you know something about the Bulgarian painters.

It is written by a complete amateur - someone with absolutely no art training or skills but who, for the past few decades, has always put a visit to the municipal art gallery at the top of his list when visiting the various cities of Europe (and central Asia) - for example

- Berlin in the early 1960s (to discover the pre-war works of Grosz and Kollwitz and 19th century realists such as Adolf Menzel);
- Brussels in the mid 1980s (to be moved by the 16th century Flemish art - and late 19th century realists);
- Istanbul in the late 1980s (and the delight of their minitiarists and calligraphists)
- the stunning Hermitage in Leningrad in January 1991 (the Russian Itinerants); and
- Tashkent in the early 2000s (for the Asian side of Soviet art).

Of course most of these paintings are figurative whereas what I initially fell in love with here in Bulgaria are the paintings of their land- and sea- scape artists. Perhaps that it nostalgia for my home country, Scotland, which I left 20 years ago - and the glorious landscapes painted in Victorian times by people like John Knox and William MacTaggart and, in the early part of the 20th century by the Glasgow Boys and Colourists. I have lived in Sofia on and off since summer 2007; have a mountain house in the Romanian Carpathians; and blog regularly - not least about Bulgarian paintings. I do therefore have some terms of comparison - which strengthen my conviction that Bulgaria has something very special to offer the visitor.

This does not pretend to be a comprehensive guide to the painters who have been active in Bulgaria in the past 100 years. There are so many painters that that would be a difficult task even for a Bulgarian! Its purpose is rather



- to give a sense of what "realist" (as distinct from abstract) Bulgarian painters of this period offer
- to encourage visitors to Bulgaria to visit both the private and municipal art galleries - where, as a foreigner, you are generally received as a VIP;
- and to inspire you to make your own discoveries and purchases.

The list of painters therefore goes far beyond that of the well known painters - Zlatyu Boiadjiev; Vadimir Dmitrova (Maistora); Ivan Mrkvichka, Nikola Petrov; Benko Obrshekov; Nikola Tanev; Jaroslav Vesin, and Mario Zhekov, for example, whose names you should certainly have memorised if you wish to impress the dealers. You will not be able to afford their prices - but mentioning them will certainly establish your credibility!

My selection criteria are beauty and "affordability" - and the list includes therefore artists who would not necessarily be rated by art critics.

Bulgarian art, as Markham recognised in 1931, is a comparatively new creation — almost as new as the state itself (1878). *"To be sure, there were ikon paintings of a rather high order a hundred years ago. Likewise, a number of first rate artists appeared even before the liberation, at the same time that the awakening nation was beginning to print books and papers, to give theatrical performances and to insist on having mass sung in their own language. Yet practically all the art productions worth mentioning have been created since the nation won its freedom"*. Perhaps this is one of the things which accounts for the freshness of its paintings in the early decades of the 20th Century.



gobbledygook...

This book lists some 200 painters from the early part of the 20th century and tries, in a few lines, to capture their significance. This wasn't easy - I first have to put the artist's name in Cyrillic script and then copy and paste on Bulgarian google - then google translate what seem to be promising entries. Then there is the problem that these give the barest facts (except long lists of exhibitions and honours which add not a jot to our understanding of the person!) And it goes without saying that most art "criticism" is

What I need is a sense of the character - how they lived their lives.....the friends they had. I am, for example, very fond of [Gregor Naidenov's aquarelles of café life](#) in Sofia in the 1930-1950s - but, so far, have been unable to find out anything about the man.

But I was impressed with a book on Boris Denev which included lovely black and white photographs of him with friends and in various studios and exhibitions....also a recent book on a [classic Bulgarian photographer, Stoyan Sertev](#) which not only reproduced many of the old photographs (including lovely ones of Nicola Tanev) but included a CD of the quartet he led.

Painting is a good "handle" on a country - others have used literature, food, buildings or cinema see Peter Robb's [Midnight in Sicily](#) for a "food and Mafia" take or [Simon Winder](#) and [Neil McGregor](#) for "cultural" takes on Germany

A dissertation - [The Conformists - creativity and decadence in the bulgarian cinema 1945-1989](#) by one Evgenija Garbolevsky (2011) which looks at Bulgarian cinema here during the communist period -

My research focuses on the development of Bulgarian film between 1944 and 1989, as the youngest and most dynamic medium during the period. I explore several forms of subversion, such as decadence, silence and irony, among others, which fostered the creative imagination of the intellectual elite, and made the film art successful. I search for resilience in the oeuvres, in the operation of the institutions, and by looking at the views of the filmmakers and the works of the film critics.

I argue that the Bulgarian filmmakers, similar to their counterparts across the Eastern Bloc, vigorously resisted fitting into the role of lackeys of the Communist regime. Instead, the cineastes articulated their personal visions in their oeuvres by developing aesthetic practices and coded language, expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo, and communicating their complex political and cultural views to the audiences. The filmmakers eluded censors while including the spectators as accomplices. The tension between rebellion and conformism in the cinematic discourse was intense. Despite the powerfully oppressive cultural policies of the regime, the cineastes succeeded loading their works with subversive messages. Regardless of the ideological straightjacket imposed on them, they sublimated their artistic passions and creative impulses, protested, and mocked the Establishment.

For this second edition, I have added more than 60 new names; this introduction; and a series of diary jottings done over the past 4 years.

3. A Lost Era

Sofia is my favourite European City - it has the liveable atmosphere which has disappeared in other capitals - with great parks, restaurants, galleries and public transport - and few high-rise buildings in its centre (!). I love nothing so much as a brisk morning walk/cycle to the pool/fitness; browsing in one of the great vegetable markets or second-hand bookshops; a chat with my gallery friends; often livened by a shot of Kalyshka Rakia... and a lazy dinner with a superb Bulgarian wine

The city has an old-fashioned gentility - mainly from the tiny shop and gallery units of its centre with both young and old eking out a fragile existence but at least one whose rhythm they control. With its parks and buskers with their retro music; narrow streets, small shops and atmosphere, the owners on the doorstep with a coffee and cigarette talking with friends, Sofia should be one of the pin-ups of the slow food movement.

The modest grid-iron system which is its centre developed after the 2nd WW bombing; has kept cars in their place; and created small spaces which old and young alike have been able to use to pursue their dreams - whether shops where they sell the clothes they design themselves, micro art galleries, tobacco, wine cellars, great ceramics.

Of course the downside of such charm is that those who run the tiny vegetable, dressmaker, thread, tobacco shops and various types of galleries are just eking out a living. But the spirit they represent is priceless - and deserves more support.

I also have a mountain house in the Romanian Carpathians and therefore have [a term of comparison](#) - which strengthens my conviction that Bulgaria has something very special to offer the visitor. Both countries have superb landscapes - and they are both proud peoples. Somehow, the Bulgarian pride is simpler. Since Winston Churchill's put-down in the late 1940s of the Leader of the Labour Party - "a modest man - he has a lot to be modest about", I hesitate to use that adjective. But that is part of the attraction of the Bulgarians - they are not pretentious and have not spoiled the glorious heritage and landscape (and wines!) with which their country is endowed.

Bulgarian painters generally (let alone of the first half of the 20th century) are not well known abroad. Hardly surprising when no book exists (or seems ever to have been published) about Bulgarian painting in the English language. The incredible [Posada art bookshop](#) in Brussels had Europe's largest collection of artbooks and, in 2010, I could find (and buy) only one book about

Bulgarian art - as it happens a lovely 1947 edition of Art Moderne Bulgare (French) published by the (then) new Ministry of Culture.



So, in 2012, I published the first edition of "Introducing the Bulgarian Realists" to help, in its own small way, change that perception.

Despite (or perhaps because of?) its size, Bulgaria seems more difficult to penetrate than its larger (and still estranged) neighbour to the north but painting is still, I have discovered, a good route to use to explore its interior....Remarkably, its artists had only some 60 years of freedom before they were faced from 1944 with the [diktats of communist rulers](#) and, even today, art history in the country is shaped by figures who had power in that 45 year period.

I have [a growing library of art books](#) both from that period and contemporary - and their silences and gaps speak volumes.

[Bulgarian caricaturists](#) of the first half of the 20th century were amongst the world's best - names such as Alexander Bozhinov, Ilyia Beshkov, Marco Behar, Stoiyan Venev and Boris Angeloushev - many of them good left-wingers in the 1930s who found themselves in positions of authority a decade later. I would love to have witnessed a conversation between Beshkov, for example, and artists such as Boris Denev, Constantin Shtarkelov and Nikolai Boiadjiev who were [forbidden from painting](#).

There is still all too little written (even in Bulgarian) about this period of the country's life....

All the better, therefore, to see this book of superb black and white photographs of the period (including



delightful shots of Nikola Tanev) edited by [Bulgaria's best photographer Ivo Hadzhimishev](#). Black and white photography is a wonderful if neglected art-form - particularly from the early-mid part of the 20th century when brutalisation extended to give us concrete. Masters of the genre were [Ansel Adams](#), Henri [Cartier-Bresson](#), Robert [Capa](#), Robert [Doisneau](#), George [Brassai](#) and [Andrei Kertesz](#).



and opera performances.

[Ivo Hadzhimishev](#) is recognised as Bulgaria's best photographer and recently produced a great monograph - "STOYAN SERTEV (1906 - 1974) AN EPOCH IN BLACK & WHITE" which contains photographs of prominent artists from the late 1940s. Those of Nikola Tanev, for example, have taken the breath away of friends I have shown it to. Others show sculptors working on the monumental work of the period.

Stoyan Serteve was actually a musician whose other passion was the camera. His huge archive has kept hundreds of frames from 1939 till the end of his life. He mainly shot works of art and their creators, architectural projects, theatrical

Ivo Hadzhimishev was responsible for an exhibition on his work at the National Gallery late last year (and also the catalogue) and says about the latter:

"The images that we can see in front of us have passed the test of time - they have emerged from oblivion, and, with them or because of them, a multitude of Bulgarian artists and intellectuals who have left a trace in Bulgarian and European culture have returned and taken their place in the image memory of Bulgaria. These photographs have been lived through. They have been created first and foremost by the heart and spirit - and that is their value!"

Bulgarian National Radio provided recordings of "Avramov" quartet from the Gold Fund for the audio disc accompanying the edition and Alexander Serteve's family.

The first photograph on the previous page is of Nikola Tanev - with an actress friend in 1947 at Sozopol.

The book gives an amazing feel for an era and some of the personalities which dominated it - particularly poignant in view of the traumatic events of that period. The book deserves a higher profile - significant that my friends had never seen a copy.....



This photo has, in the middle, the unmistakable figure of Vladimir Dmitrov- the Master - and, below that again, a favourite of mine Zdravko Alexandrov



I find it so important to have such personal reminders of my favourite artists. It is one thing to see their paintings and some text about them - quite another to see their photos, particularly if animated - or sometimes better - caricatures!

Despite the continuing political silences about the 42 years Bulgaria

spent under communism, the 20th century can still be felt in Sofia -

I bought recently a (copy of) a little 1947 woodcutting of the part of Vasil Levsky Street which has the University at the end, complete with a couple of cars and a horse and cart - part of a series dictator Georgi Dimitrov apparently commissioned of artists then,

That was the same day I came across a lovely 1935 landscape by Boris Denev - banned by the communist regime from paintings after 1944 - which had been lying in a house for several decades. It still has the typical white frame used in the 1940/1950s. The 2 photos above show them quite clearly....



And one of my prize possessions is a 1942 journal on every page of which are several pencilled figures - clearly the work of Ilyia Beshkov, the famous caricaturist.

4. What's in a name?

Paintings speak in different ways to each of us - although that doesn't stop art critics and historians from imposing a lot of words and noise on us.

I don't know about you - but, whenever I see a painting which I like, I always want to know something about the painter. Where did (s)he grow up? Where were they trained? What were the defining inspirations and influences?

And Bulgaria is particularly interesting for the art lover since it was under Communist rule for 45 years - and the artist played an important (but difficult) role in communist regimes. Bulgaria had a fair number of leftist political caricaturists in the first half of the century - who might have been expected to welcome the advent of a more progressive regime. Some flourished - others suffered. One, Rayko Aleksiev, was imprisoned and quickly died under suspicious circumstances in the immediate aftermath of the communist takeover. Painters who did not toe the official line had

simple choices - migration (geographical or professional); banishment or compromise. Many painters chose to go into theatre design or cinema. Some, like Boris Denev, Konstantin Shtarkelov and Nikolai Boiadjev, found themselves banned from painting - let alone exhibiting.

Maria Vassileva - Chief Curator of the wonderful Sofia City Gallery - gives an excellent introduction to Bulgarian painting on [the Gallery's website](#). This, in my view, is best read after you have seen a few of the paintings - but these excerpts identify some of the key figures -

*The earliest post-Liberation artists (Ivan Mrkvichka, Anton Mitov, Jaroslav Vešin, and Ivan Anghelov) bear testimony to the changes in Bulgarian painting that were setting in during this period. The individual human being was no longer at the centre of the artist's quests. These were directed towards the depiction of the real world with all its variety and tangible concreteness. The people's way of life was considered a sign of fidelity to the national cause suited to keep up the spirits of the people. ... The landscape plays nearly as important a part as the human figures. These canvases belong to the earliest attempts at plein air painting. The artist is fascinated by the effects of sunlight, the transparency of the air, the play of shadows cast by the trees. While the figures are depicted with meticulous accuracy, the landscape setting is distinguished by a certain ethereal quality, sketchiness of treatment and luminosity. The same is true of Ivan Mrkvichka's *Going to Market*, one of his classical genre paintings, in which the artist's attention is focused on the subject-matter and the costume of the central character, but no less on the winter landscape, which envelops the scene and occupies the greater part of the canvas.....*

*Besides genre painting, portraiture continued to evolve as a favoured art form. Both Mrkvichka and Mitov have painted portraits; Mitov's *Self-portrait* is a widely known work...*

*The earliest serious attempts to break away from the old academic line in painting date from the early twentieth century. The founding of the *Savremenno Izkoustvo* (Contemporary Art) Society in 1903-4 was an expression precisely of these trends characterized by the interest not only in subject-matter but also in plastic values and by the desire to apply certain of the lessons of West-European painting. Nikola Mihailov, Tseno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, Nikola Petrov, Elena Karamihailova rank among the notable artists of this period.*

Most of the younger Bulgarian landscape painters were pupils of Jaroslav Vešin and developed further his achievements.

The most significant development during this period was the definite breaking away from academism and the increasingly strong and fruitful influence of Impressionism, which affected most Bulgarian artists to a higher or lesser degree - Nikola Petrov, Yordan Kyuvliev, Nikola Tanev, Assen Belkovski, Konstantin Shturkelov, Alexander Moutafov, Atanas Mihov, Marin Georgiev-Oustagenov, Vladimir Dimitrov-Chiraka, Peter Morozov.

Elissaveta Konsoulova-Vazova and Elena Karamihailova have created a gallery of intimate and psychologically penetrating portraits. Having both received their academic training abroad, these two women artists had not only a rich artistic career, but also exerted a considerable impact on the development of painting during the first half of the century. Their works evidence the mixed influences of German Romanticism and German Impressionism.

Vassileva's list contains the "top 20" as it were of the early period - ie those born in the last part of the 19th century. Mihov, Moutafov and Tanev are three of my favourites - although I'm not able to afford a Tanev. And I would certainly have included Boris Denev - of one of whose 1935 paintings I proudly acquired recently.

Other artists whose names I would include in my roll-call of honour are Nenko Balkanski, Vasil Barakov, Nikola Boiadjiev, Zlatyu Boiadjiev, Dobre Dobrev, Kolyo Kolev, Christo Kriskaretz, Vera Lukova, Kiril Mateev, Grigor Naidenov, Ilyia Petrov, Christo Rubev, Stanio Stam-atov, Boris Stefchev, Kiril Tsonev, Ivan Trichkov, Stoian Vasilev, Mario Zhekov and, of course, such satirists as Ilyia Beshkov and Stoian Venev.

I realise it is difficult to classify painters - many are versatile; or change their style over time; and I don't want to use terms which baffle (eg post-impressionist).

This is a book about the painting style I like - and the word for that seems to be "realism" - the style which tries to portray a likeness rather than an abstraction (and that includes caricaturists and impressionists). It includes -

- urban and rural landscape
- seascape
- Figurative (includes portraits)
- Graphic - particularly satire
- Still life

5. Getting to see the richness of Bulgarian art

5.1 Sofia

The National Gallery is worth a visit - although its exhibited collection is not very large and it never seems to circulate the paintings. The City Art Gallery, on the other hand, is very imaginatively run - and is free!

One of the many delights of Sofia is the profusion of its small, friendly galleries in the centre - the majority displaying modern art but a handful concentrating on the mid 20th century artists who are the focus of this booklet. If you are serious in your search for particular artists, most of the owners will be able, in a day or so, to let you have a look at some which are on the market. The Annexes gives all the detail...

5.2 The regional municipal galleries

Bulgaria has an excellent network of municipal art galleries, details of which are given in the Annex. All operate under tight budget conditions - which means that few can even afford heating in the winter. But, as a foreigner, you will receive a very warm reception in the regional galleries - each of which has its own local painting heroes.

5.3 Sofia City Gallery - a case study

The special exhibitions of Sofia City Art Gallery play an important role in Bulgaria in bringing together the paintings of people like Dobre Dobrev, Nikolae Boiadjiev (to mention 2 recent events) from the various municipal and private museums in the country. But the Sofia gallery has a large collection of Bulgarian art (3,500 pieces) and how therefore to ensure that they see the light of day?

In 2010, the Gallery curator Dr. Maria Vasileva started a series ("The other Eye") to overcome the problem - which consists of inviting outsiders to comb the dungeons of the gallery where the collections are stored, strip off the protective covering and select some paintings.

I just missed the first two exhibitions of such works - selected by an artist Luchezar Boyadjiev and a philosopher Boyan Manchev. The small booklet which accompanied the second exhibition tells of Boyadjiev expecting to find a large section of the museum's collection covering major events - whether historical or personal). Instead "the representation of various aspects of people's private world obviously prevails, there being, conditionally speaking, an "idyllic" thread running through the works, which unifies all those aspects through the representation of elements of everyday living, which are not directly related to either big moments in history and monumental events, or to essential existential and metaphysical issues such as life, death, birth, violence, suffering, etc." The third exhibition was of artefacts selected by 43 prominent Bulgarian art and cultural historians belonging to different generations and fields of work (lecturers, researchers, museum curators, directors of art galleries, museums and nongovernmental organizations, art critics, curators and freelance researchers.

6. Diary Entries 2011-2014

In 2012 I published 1000 copies of a little book on Bulgarian Realist painting of the 20th Century. Its 56 pages consisted mainly of short notes on some 140 painters - although it did also contain a CD with reproductions of more than 1000 paintings.

An E-book cannot incorporate a CD - but it can go one better by including both hyperlinks (see section 8) and the reproductions which have headed many of my blogposts in the past few years.

I still remember the first time I set eyes on Bulgarian paintings - it was in 2007/8 in the small park in which the Sofia City Gallery is situated - and I was being shown a catalogue of Sofia's Victoria Auction House by someone who later became a good friend. I was immediately hooked by the sensitivity of the paintings....and have since spent many happy hours and days in their pursuit. I started to blog soon afterwards and reproductions of the paintings slowly became a feature of the posts - with celebrations of Sofia and Bulgaria following in 2011 when I was able to take the time to visit the various regional galleries.

The Bulgarian posts of the past 3 years take up more than half of the book but are as important a feature as the notes on the 200 painters which follow - since they capture what might be called the "spirit of the chase" as well as its serendipity.....My last project here gave me the luxury of visiting most of the regional galleries - and I have retained the sections of the posts which include discussions of matters relating to my professional concerns.....as well as those which touch on more personal matters.....

Beating the snow - drive to Sofia - Jan 2011



Snow forecast for all Saturday in Bucharest - but just a flurry at 07.00 as I drove off, alone, for first a Russe meeting at 09.00 with Zhechka my great local colleague on the project 2 years ago who has an office both in her home town and in Sofia. The flurries grew thicker as I crossed the Danube at 08.30; bought my Bulgarian road vignette for the year (34 euros not bad) and met up with Z who took me to her office for coffee and briefing - she tells me she managed to get the rent of an office suite (and shared common facilities - an entire floor) dropped to 200 euros a month!

The route she led me to exit Russe took me past some great fin de siecle buildings (by the gorge) and, with some trepidation, I joined the snow-flecked highway - thinking I would be lucky to make my 16.00 meeting in Sofia with my Italian friend Enzo's landlord but in the event - with the snow flakes disappearing as I had anticipated as I headed south - I was able to phone him at 14.00 (on the start of the Balkan mountains highway) to report that I would be an hour early!

I had had some initial difficulty finding a place to rent for 2 weeks when, just over a week ago, the Dicon company announced that my presence would be appreciated on 25 and 26 January for the start of the training activities of the project of which I am (titular) Team Leader.

Initially they said they would be happy to recomend a flat for me (they have, after all, a local office - and experience of people needing short-term rents). I refused the palace their agency first offered me - and accepted the next 2 (they had problems paying a deposit for me!) but, when I said I wanted a small dining table to celebrate Rabbie Burns' birthday, the letting agency warned me that their flats were not suitable for "meetings and parties"!

My bawdy reputation of laughter and poetry must have spread from 2001 Tashkent and 2008 Sofia! Assuring them of my respectability and sobriety (and calling my previous landlady here into the lists - the widow of a Bulgarian Ambassador), they first graciously accepted and then (after overnight reflection) rescinded. I consider this quite a feather in my cap at my age!

And (to continue the metaphor) hats off to Enzo - whose friend Blago came to the rescue (at very short notice) with a flat they normally don't offer for short-term rentals. It's for long-term rentals to Bulgarians who normally bring their own facilities - so it lacked the basics - eg kettles, pots and pans, knives and forks, reading lamps, radio, bedding (!!) - so Blago was very good in trekking around with me to get this stuff in. A young man with a majority shareholding in his own (property company), he drives a plush Mercedes - as do all the best young men like my friend Ivo (I almost said Iago!). And Zhechka tells me that my young (ever so diplomatic and skilful) friend from the Institute of Public Administration here in 2007/08 is not only still there - but is now the Director!!

I'm always happy to drive down the pass from the Balkans into the bowl of Sofia - the first time I saw it (on my way to Thassos in early summer 2007), I was horrified by the smog which concealed the famous Vitosha mountain which towers over the central pedestrian st (Vitosha) where our office was. But I've seen glorious views of the mountain as I've completed my drives from Bucharest (to emulate the painting I have). Today fog and smog prevented vision.

Another disappointment was the experience of yet another fucking shopping mall (Siderca - 10 minutes walk away from the flat). But this latest is so huge that we actually got lost in it. Typically neither the flat nor the mall had any reading lamps (stupid man! But the Bucharest IKEA has such fantastic deals so there have to be some readers here!). At least there is a wine barrel shop nearby (from Divin no less - not far from Romanian Recas the other side of the Danube whose Pint Griş/Riesling I have actually brought with me - for Burns' night - in a 5 litre drum)

Neither the central heating nor the internet is yet operational in the flat - but heating is adequate - and 48 hours without access to the internet is an excellent discipline - not least encouraging me to read some of the large volume of stuff I've downloaded in the last few months!

The painting is a Dobre Dobrev

A typical old consultant's day



blue for the same price.

Then InterNos Gallery which I eventually found (with a number 1 trolleybus) at 58b V Levsky Bvd (after a slight incident with a hoodie who refuses to let me out from the seat!). It's a larger gallery - covering my favourite period of the mid 20th century - but doesn't quite come up with the goods. They did however have one small Boris Stefchev - for 250 euros - and I am keen to add him to my collection (also Russe Ganchev; Dobre Dobrev).

I had a meeting at 13.00 with my landlord (for him to bring extra chairs; fix wireless internet etc) but had time to visit the Tourist Info Centre cunningly concealed in the underpass opposite the University Entrance - and also the bookshop next to it (for more music).

Connecting to the internet is always a problem when I hit a new country (less so in central asia!) - so don't talk to me about European Integration! So basic! Why doesn't a company like Vodaphone (with

whom I have a good deal in Romania) offer me a deal in Bulgaria - just next door????? It takes 4 young Bulgarians 90 minutes to set up a wireless system for me. In the meantime I have to find my haggis dealer - his phone number is on my E-mail but Mirela comes to my rescue and I set up a meeting for the transfer!

Then off to my 15.30 meeting with my new BG consultancy company, Dicon - just 10 minutes up the road I am assured. I've been told to look for an office next to block 204. The first place I hit (a 2 storey furniture shop) I'm told is number 50 (it's not marked) and they tell me 200 is far away - so I catch another bus which seems to take me away from civilisation and I hop off at the next stop.

There are flurries of snow and my patience is starting to wear thin (why can't people put themselves in the shoes of visitors????). I phone - and am quickly rescued - to return to the (exact) point from which I started (shades of TS Eliot). Number 50 sits next to another 2 storey building - blue with graffiti - which is the one I was seeking! I tell my contact that in future they should forget about the address - and simply describe the place as the "blue 2 storey building with the graffiti next to the furniture shop"! They think I'm joking - but I'm deadly serious!

The meetings go well - but not the simple task of printing a few Burns' poems. It's a pdf file - and the system can't cope! But eventually I get the four critical ones (Address to the Haggis; Tae a Louse; Tae a mouse; A man's a man for a' that)

I know Sofia from the 2007 project I led here - when I rented a great flat for 18 months. The project was to develop a capacity to train local officials in the implementation of the famed European Acquis. And, in the initial months when we trapped in a game going on between consultancy companies and a corrupt Ministry of Finance, I had some fun working on the implementation and "compliance" (the key EU word) concepts. I was cheeky enough to use a famous Burns' quote as the lead for the Inception Report -

*The best-laid plans o' mice an' men
Ganf aft agley
An' leave us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy*

The haggis assignment takes place outside a theatre. I wonder if Andy has ever been accosted for drug dealing?? It's now 18.30 and I still really don't have the proper accoutrements for a Burns supper so, after picking up tatties, carrots and (the superb Bulgarian) leaks (but no naps), I phone around and get agreement that Rabbie's do will be postponed 24 hours!!

The painting is a Petar Velchev I have - up in Sirnea.

artistry

As I wait in central Forum Hotel for the start of the Training of Trainers session which I am, as team Leader, to kick-off, I have a nice chat with Belin Molev (an architect by background and Deputy Minister of Regional Development here for some years) who is now a key trainer for the ToTs for Objective Three SF work. I declare myself a terrorist as far as Malls are concerned and

extol the civility of central Sofia - now hanging by a thread. The word "globalisation" is like a red rag to a bull - "more of us can and need to say simply NO" I thunder. Not the most diplomatic of ways to introduce oneself - but I feel a kindred spirit.

Six local officials selected by an intensive process Dicon explain to me later have beaten the snowy conditions to get to the Hotel by 09.00 from various parts of Bulgaria - and are clearly keen to start this 2 day session which will launch them into about 25 two-day courses over the next 18 months. I open the session by saying how much I enjoy coming to Sofia (so true!); describing very briefly the training work I did here 3 years ago and saying that my favourite activity was the work with trainers like themselves (true again). They are the engine of the system! Not only do they need the (theoretical and practical) technical knowledge but they have to develop an understanding of (and sympathy for) the trainees' needs and, finally, they need to develop the methods and skills to meet those needs. And they need, above all, an open mind and passion. To treat each workshop as an opportunity for them to develop their understanding and skills. This was the lesson I took from my last project here - and whose philosophy and tools is captured in one of the papers on the website - [What do we have to do to ensure that training helps people learn?](#)

Then back to the Dicon Office - for a presentation of the draft Progress report. Very impressive how they in just 20 days (including Xmas and Boxing Days!!) got 140 CVs and whittled them down to 36 trainers for 6 modules (with 10 reserves) - and now have more than 3,000 officials designated by all 200 plus municipalities available for workshops which will start in March and be held in each of the 40 Districts. This is a new role for me - hands-off, supportive, reflective. I'm glad I'm able to offer a couple of practical ideas - to which they seem receptive. The staff I meet are also impressive - particularly young Danny who is helping me produce a personal visiting card which I want to use to market my website. I've (almost) decided to use the designation „explorer". Perhaps „*explorer and epicurean*"?? At lunch, he introduces me to a great dessert - honey, nut and whipped yoghurt!



I'm free by mid-afternoon - and in a hurry to get to Neron gallery - but I discover that the trams are no longer coming past the synagogue and mosque to Vitosha; the metro works are still going on and I have to walk. Par hasard, I pass the antique shop where D and I bought a couple of old carpets last summer from an old guy (Nedko) who was very knowledgeable about painters - and lo his son Koso has a colourful 60 year-old Chiprovci kilim for me at 50 euros! It's nice to see Ruhman again at Tsar Samuil ulice and, this time, I have my list of painters - many of which he has! So 2 Russi Ganchevs and one Petar Boyadjiev are now under consideration. Then off to my friend Yassev's [Konus Gallery](#) (Xan Aslarich 32) who sells contemporary paintings but knows the older painters and with whom I always have great chats. This one is enlivened with some tasty Yambolski Raki - and a visit to a friend Biliana who has a new Gallery a few minutes away on Tsar Assen ul - all of these are tiny little streets. She has some superb large aquarelles by a 35 year-old

Bansko artist Atanas Matsoureff - and also some tasty champagne! A woman worth knowing.

I raise with Yassen my idea of producing a booklet in English about Bulgarian painters of the last 100 years - and learn from Biliana that he comes from a literary family. He is also working with some friends to try to bring some honesty into the tricky market for older paintings. He is perhaps the partner I have been looking for! When I ask him about the absence of the trams, he raises some doubt about whether they will actually return to the area - whose future planning has some uncertainty. Alarm bells start to ring - since, as I've said above, the Sofia centre is a unique European asset for me.

To round off a great day, I also find opposite this new gallery the small one I had bought my Bahar sketches in (a mad bearded guy) and also stumble across another gallery which combines paintings with wine; a few books; and weekly happenings (chamber music; folk etc) I am invited to come on Thursday evening. The place is called „Snezana'?? At this rate Sofia could get a nice little niche for itself as a European art centre! And what's even more satisfying is that it apparently replaces one of these dreadful "Diesel" branches. Now that is real progress - although I have to wonder about the economics of the cavernous Gallery - even although it does rent the place out for business functions. I manoeuvre round the metro constructions works at the Sheraton and have to wait only one minute before a 22 tram picks me up at the Mosque. Now there's divine design!

The photo is one of the walls of my Bucharest flat - already replete with Bulgarian paintings. The large one is by Milko Kostadinov - whose paintings also grace the Snezana walls

innovation; paintings; and paranoia



I arrive at the Forum Hotel just in time for the coffee break - and a chat with Stella, the Greek specialist on cross-frontier projects within the Structural Funds. She then leads a lively and interactive session (in Bulgarian!) with the 6 Bulgarian local officials who have been selected as co-trainers for the intensive round of workshops on SF which will start in

March. I learn later that the problems Bulgaria is having with managing the money are so great that the penalties and clawbacks to which it is now subject means that it is currently one of only three EU member states which is a net contributor to the EU - the other two being Britain and Germany! Stella makes a nice effort to bring me into the discussions by asking me why some countries have such a poor record in generalising the lessons generated by the various projects. I look quickly at a short executive summary of Good Practice on a Greening Regional development project which ran for three years led by the Environment Agency for England and Wales, South West England Region (UK) with a Europe-wide network of 17 legal partners from 8 EU Member States (UK, Austria, Spain, Italy, Malta, Poland, Hungary and Greece) and with a budget of 1.5 million euros. The results seemed positive. My tentative answer would run at several levels -

- It's a small budget - particularly for a complex cross-boundary project
- It's doubtful whether key national actors saw the project as a demonstration or pilot one. It seemed to be more of a local initiative
- Bureaucracies have a cunning habit of giving innovative work to new sections and younger people while the mainline work trundles along on its old tramlines (I know from bitter experience in

Scotland in the 1980s)

- Some governments have proactive strategies for encouraging mainline departments to work more innovatively. Most don't. And strategies sometimes are never implemented! (remember Burns - „the best-laid schmes o'mice and men gang aft aglay“!)

There is a large literature on the huge differences between even older EU member states in implementation of new *acquis* obligations. This reflects different styles of government (in some cases absence of government!); and presumably this also the case for take-up of good practice?

After a good lunch with the group, I catch the number 5 tram (which arrives just as I reach the stop!) - and pop into to see Vihra and her [Astry Gallery](#). You can get a sense both of what she brings to the venture - and also of the gallery and the annual exhibition she organises of smaller (30cms by 30 cms) paintings [on this video](#).

Vihra is a friend of Yassan - and the two of them would make great partners for this idea of mine about a booklet about Bulgarian painting of the past century. I promised to draft a concept paper to discuss with them

Then off to the shops for final purchases for the Burns supper - which was, in the event, very enjoyable. The haggis - despite the initial suspicion with which it was received - was much appreciated; and some good wines followed it down! In between it all there was some heavy discussion of the mess Bulgarian public administration is in - and the lack of trust, if not paranoia, which basically prevents any real cooperation. I remember the interview I had in 1992 in Warsaw with the Local Democracy Foundation where it was clear that an outsider simply could not win - either he knew too little about the Polish context; or he knew too much (and the wrong people). I had spent about 2 weeks in Poland in 1991 for the World Health Organisation and could drop some names - but they were probably not the right names! At that stage, Poland was notorious for the suspicion and paranoia - but at least they had an excuse! As Enzo says, countries like Romania and Bulgaria were wrongly called Eastern countries - they are actually southern. Everything operates by informal contact and the debts you build up. Superiors have to have the low-down on inferiors - and confident that they can control them.....

The latest issue of Eurozine has an article about [how the newer EU members have developed in the last 20 years](#).

The painting is the one painting I own by Alexander Mutafov

State hypocrisy



The upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt and even Yemen have shown the limits of both „authoritarianism“ and of „democracy“. Those who rule without even the veneer of passive popular support are doomed to become corrupt, inefficient and unjust; to repress the protest this creates - thereby creating a vicious circle of repression and protest. However, the arab world world is supposed to be fatalistic and immune from aspirations of democracy. So says a large (American inspired?) literature. And watching American statespeople cope with these protests is a real education about the

reality of democracy in the USA. Two years ago, the world was full of hope when Barack Obama was sworn in as American President; but he has neither the will nor the capacity to change his country's consistent support for dictators who give America what it needs - whether that is repression of alternative ways of governing or access to the petrol America needs.

And a year ago Hilary Clinton delivered a paen of praise to the internet - and its contribution to freedom and democracy. But her strong reaction to Wilileaks showed how empty and self-serving were her words. State interests conquer all.

People like *Chomsky* and *Arundhati Roy* have been exposing these hypocrisies for many years. The Guardian carries today a [good interview with Roy](#) - whose work, I have to confess, is not well known to me. A quick search threw up a strong 2002 piece on [the damage Enron was doing in India](#) and a much more recent (and longer) article on the [time she spent with Indian Maoist rebels in the field](#). If you're a regular reader of this blog, you'll know that I am interested in labels and Roy readily admits, in the Guardian interview, that she sees her writing as an important tool in the struggle for dignity and respect for ordinary people. In that sense she is a "writer", „activist“ and „visionary“ - although that latter term sits uneasily with activism. Someone (William Murtha) had a nice idea recently - to ask (200) people to put their vision into 100 words and also to list the five books which had inspired them. The result was - [100 words; 200 visionaries share their hope for the future](#) I said it was a nice idea - not necessarily a good book! The invitations seem to have been restricted to "new age" Northern americans - and the contributors don't say why the books have inspired them. It was [Scott London's blog](#) which put me on to this - at least in that posting he does give a nice little summary of what his 5 books meant to him.

Nice bit of serendipity yesterday - the 22 tram outside takes me to the old (outdoor) market in the down-at-heel area just past the mosque and Jewish synagogue. My main interest was the Araab shops - for spices for the flat. I had intended to have another look at a (modern) painting of Varna port which is a good buy at 225 euros but decided to check again on the *Valmar Gallery* (at 55 Stambolovski Bvd where it crosses Hristo Botev Bvd) which seemed to have disappeared last time I

tried to go in the summer. Lo and behold it was still there - and open - although its windows were covered in shrouds and it looked closed and derelict. To enter it is to enter an Aladdin's Cave. I showed Valery my list - and he spent the next 90 minutes hours pulling paintings from the piles. What a contrast with the reception you get when you go to the Viktoria Gallery (and auctioneers) - where you are met with a deadpan look!! Not satisfied with showing me examples of those I had on my list, he introduced me to the works of more than 15 painters whose work was sufficiently attractive to me to have me scribbling their names down. By the end, I had almost 10 paintings put to one side for consideration - having regrettfully passed on a 15,000 euros Nikola Tanev painting and a 4,000 euros painting by one Ianko Marinov (born 1902). But I did get a Dobre Dobrev (which I have been looking for for some time - an example is above) - and another Alexandra Mechkuevska to add to my collection.

Monday, January 24, 2011

[Snowy sunday in Sofia](#)

So much for my theory about the warmer weather in the south - I awake at 05.00 Sunday to the sight of the streets and buildings suffused in the yellow glow of street lighting with snow which has followed me south. I count my lucky stars that I decided to make a break for it yesterday rather than delaying until today when the road conditions will be horrific. Good also that I have brought my mountain boots in the car which I'll need to struggle to the



galleries and Knigomania bookshop today. But first another trip to the detested Mall - arriving just before it opened at 09.00 and had the place to myself. One of the cleaners was very helpful in taking me to get the papers stuff - I shook his hand - such kindness is becoming rare. Perhaps my (collapsible) aluminium stick helps!

I try to avoid the wine section - but, after picking up rye bread and gorgonzola cheese, am drawn like a moth to a flame to the section - of course just to check what new brands there might be a year or so since I had the leisure for such an aesthetic trip. Katarszynski wines had something new but its too pricey - so I buy a Chardonnay from the Magret range I found a couple of years ago produced in the gangster lands at the Greek and Macedonian borders (3 .50 euros a bottle) and what purports to be a 2006 Brestovitza merlot reserve which I used to get from my wine cave on Macedonski Bvd (3 euros a bottle). The bottles are entirely for scientific purposes (!) - to test against the 2 euros a litre Romanian wines I have brought with me (the Romanian Recas white scores; and so does the Brestovitza which has a buttery finish) . Having dumped the produce in the flat, I found the ticket booth for the tram tickets open and was able to get a 22 tram to just beneath the lovely Alexander Nevsky Cathedral - few antique touts were braving the weather conditions in front - so I went on to the City Gallery which had just started an exhibition of Nikolay Boyadjiev (what's the connection with Petar I wondered) - but it did not open until 11.00. Graffiti outside the empty little art kiosk just to the Gallery's left tell me that „Danes are racists“ What's that about ??

So on to the Knigomania bookshop - near the British Embassy. Glad to see it's (still) open - but slightly disappointed with the range (and prices). After an hour of browsing (and tempted only by Katharine Mansfield, Raymond Chandler and Ernest Hemingway) I emerge with a nice edition of Louis de Bernieres Birds without wings about the emptying of the Greek Anatolian villages a century ago - I had left my hardback copy in the library of the Azeri Civil Service Agency. My knees are beginning to ache - but I wanted to get back to see the City Gallery's special exhibition - picking up a couple of discs to have for the music system (Cesar Franck; and Giuliani) and also an update of the great little guide of the Bulgarian Association for alternative tourism www.baatbg.org which gave me a couple of years fantastic prices (12 euros) for superb rural accomodation here. A must!! And prices are still very reasonable.

I was very taken with the N Boyadjiev exhibition - the first, it claimed, since his death in 1963. He was born in 1904 and, according to the publicity sheet, was kicked out of the Painters' Association just before his death for refusing to toe the line on socialist realism (as so many of the younger PhD generation is now toeing the line on EU integration!!).

Sunday, January 30, 2011

Le Flaneur

Back into the tiny gallery on San Stefano St (at what I think is the north-east corner of Doctor's Sq at the University area) to have another look at the large Tomev coastscape painting.

Then into the marvellous Alexander Nevsky church and am shocked to see the deterioration in the Nouveaux Arts paintings - many of which have large patches of white (dampness?) spreading downwards.

I stroll to the City Gallery to try to buy another copy of their large catalogue which has a (black and white) reproduction of every painting they have in stock. Only to find that they have some sort of problem with their little shop and they can't sell its books! All that seems to be missing is a key - and the authority and/or the goodwill for the 2 people lounging at the reception! It reminds me of the situation in Bucharest where - despite the cutbacks - there are apparently many small heritage buildings and facilities with surplus staff.



I have a nice wander around a (quiet) centre - wondering once again why the young Sofians profess to disliking the place. To me it's a painter's paradise - not just the friendly little galleries but also the charm of the urban landscape with a mixture of old houses and 4 storey blocks - the space between always revealing a nice perspective. And almost no high rises - as if the supremely ugly 20 story M-tel block on Hristov Botev opposite the majestic beauty of the Ministry of Agriculture building is there to serve as a warning to modernists. The 2 towers of the Ministry building are unique for me. Sadly, however, there is a huge hole in the ground on the corner with Macedonskiya

Bvd.

A visit to the small music shop at the end of Solunska St (beside the Methodist church) confirms my fears about the consequences of the change in ownership - a year ago it had in the basement one of the best collections of classical music I had ever seen and now that is gone and the choice much restricted. I need music when I'm working or reading - and forgot to bring some with me. I manage to find a nice collection of Bassoon concerts and an historical recording of Richard Strauss and Belle Bartok.

The Assen Vasilev gallery is just across the road and, although its stuff is more superficial, I pop in - after all I have bought a couple of things there. And, indeed, I recognise a Mitko

Dimitrov painting and indeed pick out one of his without realising it's his - a rather stormy slightly surrealist one with a country church at the top of a hill and a view down a valley to a distant village. Has a nice symbolic touch for me - and only 125 euros. Not quite sure.....My collection is now at the stage I have to be careful about having too many landscapes with houses; I need more seascapes and, above all, paintings with people! And one picture catches my eye - with lots of people in a square, It's by 74 year old Ivan Manoilev - but a bit pricey for me.

14.00 sees me at Konos Gallery for my meeting with Yassen and his other gallery friend who are bringing some more paintings in for me to look at. This time I've brought a wine - I tried to find a Brestovitz but could only manage a Telish. Nothing can be better than a bottle of wine, cheese, bread, friends and paintings!

I'm introduced this time to Todor Kodjamanov (born the early part of the 20th century) whose 1940s quiet river scene with some beached canoes has a lovely soft pastel colouring. He's sought after - but I can get this large painting for just under 1000 euros. And there are 2 seascapes for me to inspect - a large Petar Boiadjiev and smaller more dramatic Boris Stefchev which I quickly go for. The Russe Ganchev they have for me is not very exciting - he's on my list because I liked the exhibition of his work I saw 3 years ago at the National Gallery but have not really taken to the 10 or so I have seen so far for sale.

The tiny 1911 Alexander Mutafov river scene still entices - but is, of course, pricey. Clutching my Stefchev, I say goodbye with another session fixed for Monday afternoon - when, hopefully, they will have an Emilia Radusheva for me which has something in common with the one I already have (see top).

Amazingly I stumble across two more antique shops on the way home - one in a tiny basement next to the Assen Vasilev gallery. As I emerge, my attention is drawn to a river scene which is hanging outside (!) and it's mine for 100 euros!

So ends a very pleasant Saturday flaneur (wandering).

Today's Observer has a touching article by a young Egyptian woman about the [developments there and in some other countries of the Arab world](#)

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

paintings and books - what else?



An early and cold trip across Sofia to Central Forum Hotel - first by tram to the centre, then by foot to catch a 5 tram down Makedonia Bvd. A coffee warms me as I explain to Violetta what I want to say in my few introductory remarks to the 6 finance officials who will be spending the next three days learning how to present material and to engage their fellow officials in the 20 odd courses they will be leading this and next year. The aim is to help the Bulgarian municipalities make better use of the EU Structural Funds. Basically I just want to elaborate on the nice saying by *Ernst Schumacher* which is one of

opening quotes on my blog ("*Four sorts of worthwhile learning*"). That done, I listen with interest as each of the 6 (women!) explain what they want to get out of their three days. Job done, I wrap up against the bitter cold and catch the tram up to the centre - with the aim of visiting the nice little art shop in the National Gallery building. On the way I pop into the Booktrading shop and emerge with Umberto Eco's *Turning the clock back - hot wars and media populism* and a lovely Taschen edition about the Belgian painter [James Ensor](#).

This is another nice feature for nomads - visiting new bookshops with different collections. Of course, the second-hand bookshops are the best for sheer serendipity. Last week I found in the boxes of a pavement bouquiniste a couple of books about Russian painters - a 1966 Moscow edition with aquarelles and drawings of the *Tretyakov Art Gallery*; and a superb 1971 Leningrad edition with full page colour pictures of paintings by *Levitan*. And a Moscow edition of Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* thrown in for free!

Zhechka joins me for a coffee and takes me to her office - but another small gallery catches my attention. **Lily** (the name of both the owner and the gallery) is a friend of Vihra at **Astry Gallery** and has 2 *Mitko Kostadinovs* at very reasonable prices which I quickly snap up. And I'm not done yet - I had spotted another gallery at the top end of the Vladimir Zaimov Park not far from my flat. It turns out to focus on handicapped painters and I buy a *Nadejda Beleva* sea-cliff view and a nicely executed painting of a couple of boats bobbing in the sea (slightly cliched I know but the water is well done and I do miss my Ocean!).

Then to the shops to pick up some food and wine for the meal my friends have opted to take at my place rather than in a restaurant - the ultimate compliment!

I've enjoyed these last few months of leisure - not particularly interested in getting new projects. But some project possibilities are now beginning to swirl around. A friend and I are waiting for word of a Serbian project - that would be 18 months and me not in a Team Leader role. I don't like the paperwork it now entails. And I've also been asked to go forward in a bid for a framework project -

which are short (eg 60 day) assignments which are contracted very quickly - in Macedonia. A group of us are also talking about going for major project here in Bulgaria. Now that would really interest me!

*The painting is a nice example of a **Russi Ganchev** - one of whose landscapes I bought this week.*

Thursday, February 3, 2011

Revisiting the scene of the crime



The biting cold continues - just as well I have friends who know the good Rakis (or are prepared to share their home elixir) and that there are so many red wines whose acquaintance I still have to make here. As I write, I'm tasting a Chateau Rossenovo from the „southern black sea region“ (Pomorie??) which I took from the sparse shelves of my old wine merchant in his little basement store on Bvd General Tottleben (did they make that up? The German name means "deathlife"!) just before it hits Bvd General Skobelev (Did these two generals have a feud - over a woman perhaps??)

It's not as good as the Brestovitzza reds to which he introduced me some 3 years ago.

Although I spent a couple of hours today with the trainers, most of my time in the last 2 days has been with paintings, drawings and artists. Even last night's meal with close friends was at the Architects' Association - one of Sofia's best restaurants (for me).

I still haven't made up my mind about the Dioneshev seascape at Valmar (a bit gaudy). But I was deeply impressed with a dark blue young Stoian Vassilev seascape - and a powerful Petar Boiadjev cliffscape.

The nice thing about revisiting the scene of your crimes (previous projects) is the possibilities of building some continuity. As the trainers were working on their exercises, I had the time to look again at the Discussion paper I left behind here 2 years ago and was interested to see again some of the points I made in that final document. The project aim was to help Bulgaria implement new EU requirements in fields such as food safety, environment, consumer protection by working with the Institute of Public Administration to design and deliver training programmes (including some distance learning) for local officials charged with the implementation of the new systems, procedures and obligations. I was not, frankly, very familiar with what is called the EU Acquis Communautaire (the huge volume of legal obligations on EU member states) and found quite fascinating the huge academic literature which has developed on "the transposition and adoption of EU norms"(as the jargon puts it). As a "political scientist" (I don't like the term) rather than a lawyer, it is not surprising that I have become pretty critical of the emphasis placed on legislation. For me, legislation is perhaps necessary but never sufficient to achieve the changes being sought.

As I put it in the conclusion to the Final Discussion Paper [Learning from Experience - some reflections on the role of training in developing administrative capacity](#) -

- laws are enacted in order to achieve specific social purposes
- they are one tool amongst many to achieve such purposes
- although EU law is dominant in many fields -particularly those relating to the single market - considerable scope is left to member states for complementary national legislation and structures of implementation
- this is particularly true of enforcement systems (in the general rather than legal sense)
- the transposition of EU laws in new member states outruns the capacity of institutions, budgets and societies

to apply them in the manner intended

- derogations which were negotiated at the accession stage recognise this - but perhaps not fully
- governments in new member states are, however, hesitant about admitting too openly that they have to - and actually do - prioritise areas for improvements consistent with the EU acquis and good practice. Setting priorities is currently one in an ad-hoc and implicit manner
- transparency requires that this process of setting priorities is done more explicitly and openly - and reflected in the action plans
- such a process requires a realistic set of monitoring instruments
- effective training is linked to realistic action plans

Of course, I was just indulging myself since I was just a foreigner parachuted in for a year and why should anyone (let alone senior) listen to me? In fact I did have some conversations with one of the Deputy Ministers (of the Ministry for Administrative Reform) and the Final Conference did give an opportunity for an exchange about such things with one of Bulgaria's prominent jurists who understood perfectly what I was driving at and gave as good as he got! I'll say more about the project tomorrow

*The painting is a **Petar Boiadjiev** - the one I bought yesterday is much much better!*

Friday, February 4, 2011

case study in sustainability

The EU project I spoke about yesterday was supposed in the jargon) to "develop the capacity of the Institute of Public Administration to design and manage training to assist the implementation of the EU Acquis". I have to confess that I struggled to see the logic of the project as it had been designed. The Institute consisted of about 20 administrative staff - the trainers they used were a mix of civil servants and academics.



We had to appoint 6 regional coordinators who would select, train and manage appropriate trainers. The Institute did not have the budget for additional staff (even for their existing staff) so the 6 coordinators would be temporary appointments - responsible to the project - and not, therefore, help develop the Institute's capacity. More seriously, most of the topics of the acquis (food safety; consumer protection; environment) are technical and specialised and do not obviously relate to the core mission of an Institute of Public Management.

The project was also supposed to help the Institute set up training centres in 6 Regions - but, again, had no budget for this. Finally, for reasons too complicated to explain here, our project staff (7 key experts!) were not able to develop close working relations with the relevant Institute staff - and little or no "technical transfer" (and therefore capacity development) took place. Sure, we delivered on the tangible outputs - the training manuals; the E-learning platform; the training of trainers; more than 500 local officials trained; and the formal, signed documents for 6 regional centres - but there was absolutely no sustainability.

And how could there be from a 12 month project - which, for various political reasons, was actually 6 months?

My frustration showed in the Executive summary of the final Discussion paper I left behind -

- The Bulgaria state system is suffering from "training fatigue". Too many workshops have been held - and many without sufficient preparation or follow-up. Workshops with these features are not worth holding.
- There seems little to show from the tens of millions of euros spent by projects here in the last decade on training of public servants. Training materials, standards and systems are hard to find.
- Training is too ad-hoc - and not properly related to the performance of the individual (through the development and use of core competences) or of the organisation (through, for example, strategic management)
- Laws do not implement themselves. They require political and managerial commitment and resources.
- Such commitment and resources are in limited supply. Organisations (state bodies) perform only when they are given clear (and limited) goals - and the commensurate resources and support. This requires the skills of strategic management. Helping senior management acquire these skills is - or should be - the core mission of the Institute of Public Administration.
- A serious effort needs to be undertaken to establish a network of training suppliers (or community of learners) which can, for example, share experience and materials - and help develop standards.
- It is not enough, however, to operate on the supply side. Standards will rise and training make a contribution to administrative capacity only if there is a stronger demand for more relevant training which makes a measurable impact on individual and organisational performance.
- In the first instance, this will require Human Resource Directors to be more demanding of training managers - to insist on better designed courses and materials; on proper evaluation of courses and trainers; and on the use of better trainers. A subject specialist is not a trainer. We hope this book (and the project's paper on assessment tools) will help give some benchmarks.
- It is critical that any training intervention is based on "learning outcomes" developed in a proper dialogue between the 4 separate groups involved in any training system (funder; training managers, trainers and learners)
- senior management of state bodies should look closely at the impact of new legislation on systems, procedures, tasks and skills. Too many people seem to think that better implementation and compliance will be achieved simply by telling local officials what that new legislation says.
- Workshops have costs - both direct (trainers and materials) and indirect (staff time). There are a range of other tools available to help staff understand new legal obligations. These are outlined and briefly assessed in [section 9 of the final discussion paper](#)
- Workshops should not really be used if the purpose is simply knowledge transfer. The very term "workshop" indicates that exercises should replace lectures - to ensure that the participant is challenged in his/her thinking. Suitable exercises force the participant to examine their own (all too often hidden) assumptions and create an environment in which presentations about legal and policy frameworks become more alive and meaningful. This type of workshop aims at extending self-awareness and is generally the approach used to develop managerial skills and to create champions of change.

It was interesting to talk with the new Head of the Institute - who was our official counterpart on day to day matters. After our departure, the Institute was transferred from the "Ministry of State Admin and Admin Reform" to the Ministry of Education where it languished until it was transferred to the Council of Ministers from which it had departed some 5 years before! Four upheavals in the course of 5 years! And during these last 2 years it has had to dispense with about 20% of its staff and operate for a significant period of time with no budget!! But shortly it will face the headache of having to manage a 10 million euro project - the 5th or 6th "capacity-

building"intervention it's had in the last decade.

*The painting (**Les Aveugles** - blind leading the blind) is one by the Walloon, Anto Carte, whose school of paintings I wrote about some weeks back*

Saturday, February 5, 2011

labour of love



I made a comment recently about how Sofia could market itself as an art city - and now find myself working on an idea to produce a small book (in English) about "modern" Bulgarian painters which would give the European visitor a sense of what is available in the many municipal and private galleries in the country - but particularly in Sofia. I've spent many pleasant hours during this visit with Yassan of the Konos Gallery and his friend who sold me the Emilia Radushava which headed my post of 30 January. Both are painters themselves and - over cheese, bread and wine -

have presented me with examples of painters and extended my knowledge of this great painting tradition. I'm defining „modern" to cover the last 100 years - from the superb little 1911 oil by Alexander Mutafov I was offered for 1,000 euros to the younger contemporary painters examples of which can be seen [here](#).

As a result of these chats and my visits to galleries, I now have a list of more than 100. I was able to buy in 2008 a nice little booklet which listed all antique dealers in the whole of Bulgaria but later editions are no longer available. The Sofia City Gallery has a few residual copies of a marvellous large book which is a black and white catalogue of all the Bulgarian paintings in their possession - but the little shop which sells it is closed!

My booklet will not pretend to be a comprehensive guide to the painters who have been active in Bulgaria in the past 100 years. Its purpose is rather

- to convey one man's passion for viewing and collecting Bulgarian painters of this period
- to encourage visitors to Bulgaria to visit both the private and municipal art galleries - and
- to make their own discoveries.

A printer did a tentative costing yesterday - and was able to tell me I could have 500 copies of a very attractive 100 page book for about 3,000 euros - about a quarter I suspect of what it would cost in the UK. I went looking yesterday for what Yassen told me was the best overview (in Bulgarian) of the period (by Dimitar Avramov). My inquiries at the large second-hand bookshop in the underground passage in front of the University threw up only a large 1982 book purporting to be about modern Bulgarian painting - which, however, had no Mario Zhekovs and only 2 Nikola Tanevs. A revealing historical remnant of socialist selectivity! But not, for me, worth the 100 euros they were asking. Neither the bookshop next door nor the cubicle on the left as you enter the School of Fine Arts could offer me a general book on the period although the shop had a great book with what seemed to be the entire works of Boris Anzelyushev - a graphic artist who lived between

1902 and 1966 and seemed influenced by Kathe Kollwitz. The Fine Arts shop had nice booklets on specific artists I didn't know - such as Marko Moneyev from Russe. And, while we're on the subject of marketing cities, there is an [interesting essay on this subject](#) in the current issue of Eurozine.

The painting is one of my Denjo Chokanoffs

Sunday, February 6, 2011

In praise of Sofia



One of my readers was shocked that I was contemplating "leaving Romania" - if only for an 18 month project in Serbia or Bulgaria. As long as I have my house in that beautiful stretch of the Carpathians, it will be difficult to leave the country - although it does stretch my patience a lot. And work in neighbouring countries (Turkey is also still a desirable possibility - although not technically a neighbour) is not inconsistent with continued access to Romania. But Sofia and Brussels are, for me, the ideal cities - and Sofia has a special charm..

Yesterday was an example. I decided to head out and buy the large book on the graphic artist I had discovered by accident - Boris Angeloushev (1902-1966). I learn that his evocation of the black and white graphics of the early 20th century German artist Kathe Kollwitz arises from the fact that he was trained in Berlin Art Academy in the early 1920 at precisely the

period she was most active in the struggle for socialism there. Since I first discovered her in Berlin in the 1980s I have been a great fan - and recall also the serendipity of my encounter with the marvellous 80 year-old Tina von Schullenberg in Duisberg (I think) who was being honoured at a special exhibition of her graphics - which included the sketches she had done in the 1930s of Nottingham miners. She was gracious enough to gift me with a set to give to the Scottish mining community and also a couple of books (with sketches) she wrote about her time with the Nottingham miners and about her life. And what a life! She was the brother of one of the Generals who took part in the failed July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler.

At a tram stop I come across another of these open stalls and pick up a collection of reproductions of Russian painters - not far away I pick up 5 great Fondazione Amadeus CDs of baroque music - for less than a euro each. No questions!!

Then a meeting with Blago, my young landlord, who is about to acquire a flat he thinks will interest me for my idea of a base here for the next 12 months (if the Serbia project does not come off) - and he is right. The ground floor of a delightful old house within minutes of Vitosha street and all my galleries. The timing fits - since it will be the end of the month before all the paperwork and slight adjustments are needed and that is the point at which I expect to hear the results of the Serbia project. I also look at a flat he will have for sale nearby which is in its original state and which they will restructure to give a living room of 50 sq metres. It would be a good investment.

Then off to see what the guy who sold me sketches (on an old magazine and scraps of paper) purporting to be from the pen of the great Ilia Beshkov has to offer. Beshkov (see example above) worked in the first half of the 20th Century. My bearded gallerist/artist Alexander Aleandriev (at Tsar Assen 38) has a tiny space in which there is room for a chair in which you sit while he pulls things (like rabbits out of a hat) that might interest you from plastic bags and piles of papers, magazines, drawings, aquarelles and oils (some his). This time he had prepared for me a superb large 1958 book with Beshkov sketches and cartoons on glorious paper and a 1965 autobiography full also of the sketches. I snapped them up - along with a 1907 catalogue of another cartoonist I had not heard of - Alexander Bozhinov - and got a 1941 newspaper with a couple of Beshkov sketches thrown in as a bonus. "Super dumping prices" he says in his only English! We communicate in Russian - and he is indeed a veritable Russian figure with his beard, flow of words and bohemian work environment.

Then off for my appointment with another gallerist - who is also sitting amidst huge piles of unframed paintings some of which he had prepared for me. I sift through a couple of hundred - and emerge with seven paintings (including a Mateev and a dramatic painting by one Ivan Getsov (1910-1991) of a scene from the war of independence) for just over 1,000 euros in total.

I just have time to take them home and change - and it's off to a very pleasant dinner with Sylvie and Vlad, from whom I rented my flat in Sofia 3 years ago. A simple salad with a very quaffable Pomorie raki starts the meal in her beautifully spacious flat; followed by a superb delicacy she calls Tsarograd aubergine which has pieces of garlic, Bulgarian white cheese and herbs on a grilled opened-out aubergine base. Tsarograd is - as I learned from the early Mario Zhekov paintings - the old name for Istanbul. Vlad is heading out for a night on the tiles - so I get his garlic aubergine too! The piece-de-resistance is, however, the neck pork stuffed/marinated with three types of cheese!! I want a second helping but know when to call time! Thank you Sylvie!

The point of this long diary entry is simply to say that I don't have such an active social life in other places. That's why Sofia scores.

Sunday, March 27, 2011

[Book on Bulgarian painters](#)

When I was in Sofia in January I realised that there was a need for a booklet in English on modern Bulgarian painting. Nothing exists for the visitor - who could spend many pleasant hours (days) traversing the charming centre, visiting galleries, talking with the owners and painters - and, ultimately, buying. I had made a short list of the painters I knew - mainly as a checklist for my visits but which (if consulted surreptitiously) also gave me the air of a cognoscenti and therefore better treatment! My friend Yassen of [Konus](#)



[Gallery](#) was very helpful in suggesting additional painters - what was 2 pages grew quickly to five. And I decided that, as I had the time and the passion, I might as well try to produce such a booklet - on the excellent principle that the best way to learn about a subject is to write a book about it. Of course, discovery is part of the pleasure - and too detailed a book would deny visitors that pleasure - so I don't have to be ambitious.

It's not too difficult to get pictures from the net - mainly from the Archives of the [Victoria Gallery](#) (which is holding another auction on 31 March - a particularly bumper one it looks) - but what is not so easy is to get some biographical detail.

If I'm lucky the Viktoria Gallery site (or the great Catalogue of the Sofia City Gallery) will give me the date and place of birth and death - and the artists under which the painter in question studies. If I'm very lucky, they will tell me that they spent a few years studying in Munich, Paris or France. But that's all.

Having worked intensively on the subject in January and produced an outline of the sort of booklet I had in mind, I gave the matter a rest. I have more than a hundred names - and should start the preparation for the month I plan to spend in Sofia shortly. So perhaps a couple of entries a day will encourage my friends in Bulgaria to give me some feedback - and data?

What basically do I need to know? Dates; place of birth; influences; genre; price range, patrimony (how easy to export?)

Let me start with someone who arrived on my list only in January - Abadjiev (Petko) (1903-2004) who was a friend of Bulgaria's greatest painter of the mid 20th century, Nikola Taney (whose charming landscape paintings now fetch for about 10,000 euros). You can see a couple of Abadjiev's paintings on the [Viktoria Gallery site](#) (a 25x20 oil can be had for 400 euros at the 31 March auction). So I'm missing quite a lot of info about him.

Alekov, Napoleon is an old favourite of mine (1912-2002). A seascape specialist, there are a fair number of his paintings available on the Viktoria site (a nice shipyard scene 50x40 went recently for only 350 euros). But that's all I have on him.

The painting at the top of this post is a new artist for me - but very striking - Alexandrov (Zdravko) (1911-1999) This large (80x70) went for only 1,000 euros

Monday, March 28, 2011

A-B Bulgarian painters

Boris Angelushev (1902-1966) trained and worked in Berlin from the early 1920s for more than a decade (returning to Bulgaria only in 1935) and was clearly influenced by the revolutionary events taking place then - and by the powerful graphics of [Kathe Kollwitz](#) of whom I have always been very fond.

A typical agitprop sketch of his headed the recent post about Romanian DNA and [more of his work can be seen here](#). When I was in Sofia in January I was lucky enough to come across a large book which seemed to contain every single one of his works. Even although it's all in Bulgarian, I considered it a bargain at 22 euros. I actually have a sketchbook I also bought then in the tiny eccentric gallery I blogged about at the time. It's by an unknown artist - my knowledgeable Bulgarian friends agree that it's quality work from the mid century and I have just realised it could be Angelushev's since the old sketchbook carries an embossed Romanian-German title - "Album de schite-Skizzenbuch" - and he worked in both Romania and Germany.



I have the sense that Bulgarian painters are more numerous (proportionately) than British. I don't pretend to know a great deal about British art (more about Scottish - the Glasgow Boys; the Colourists etc) - so Amazon delivered this week a book (A Crisis of Brilliance) about a group of 5 famous English painters of the early 20th century - [Dora Carrington](#), Mark Getler, Paul Nash, Richard Nevinson and [Stanley Spencer](#) (I had only heard of the first and last). Certainly I could make a list of no more than 20 UK painters of the last 100 years - whereas my list of Bulgarian painters is almost at the 150 mark. And one of the difficulties about compiling the list is that quite a few Bulgarian painters share a family name - some are related (eg Dobre Dobrev senior and Junior) - but most are not. And this seems to be particularly true of names like Georgiev (3 in my list) and Ivanov (five!)

Tuesday, March 29, 2011

Cartoon time!



Coincidentally, three of Bulgaria's cartoonists have a family name starting with B - Bozhinov, Alexander 1878-1968; Behar, Marko 1914-73; and Beshkov, Ilia 1901-1958. I have no information yet about the first two but I was able to buy two old books devoted to Beshkov's life and work in the chaotic antique shop I've already mentioned. Indeed I also snapped up a lot of sketches scribbled on the pages of a 1947 journal which look remarkably like Beshkov's work - not only to me but to Bulgarian cognoscenti I've shown them to.

More examples are to be seen on a short link [Remarkable old Bulgarian illustrators](#)

Beshkov was born in 1901 in a small town near Pleven. In 1918-1920, he studied law at Sofia University and briefly returned home as a teacher. In 1921, he enrolled in painting at the National Academy of Arts and graduated in 1926. As a student, Beshkov published caricatures in

magazines. He was twice arrested due to his leftist political views: once after participating in the uprising following the Bulgarian coup d'état of 1923.

He was one of the founders of a famous newspaper "Hornet" in 1940, and published in it without signature or pseudonym. In 1945, he became a lecturer of drawing, illustration and print design at the National Academy of Fine Art; he was elected a tenured professor in 1953 and led the Department of Graphics until his death in 1958.

Beshkov's political caricatures were humanist, democratic, revolutionary and national in nature. The art gallery in Pleven is named in his honour and most of his works are exhibited there. I reproduced [another of his cartoons here](#). And I have in my bathroom what [I think is a Behar](#)

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

triple Boyadjievs

Three Boyadjievs (and a Bunadjiev) will probably go into my book. The first the most famous - an entire house is devoted to his work in the marvellous old Plovdiv centre.

That is Zlatyu Boyadjiev (1903-76) who offers what I would call Folk art. In 1951 a serious illness forced him to change his painting hand. Born Brezovo, Plovdiv Region. A 65x50 is expected to fetch 15,000 euros at the Vikttoria auction in the Sheraton tomorrow evening.

Boyadjiev Nikolay (1904-63) is my favourite - a figurative graphic artist. Born in Svishtov; art teacher in Shumen High School. 1951 National Academy of Arts teacher. Expelled in 1958 from Union of Bulgarian artists for his refusal to work on prescribed themes. Superb charcoal and pencil portrait work which, unfortunately, I can't upload. **The painting above** is one of his portraits (taken from the Sofia City Gallery archives - many thanks).

Boyaidjiev, Petar (1907-63) did sea and landscapes. I bought one of them on my last visit.

Friday, April 1, 2011

Impervious power

The good news when I went online during the night was that I had gained three more Bulgarian paintings - I've actually lost count of how many I have now but it must be more than 50 (scattered in 5 locations). This one claims to be 100 years old - *an aquarelle by Kabakchiev* (know nuttin' about him/her) - and its eastern interior decoration features (carved wooden ceilings, tiled stove and carpet) represent those I fell in love with more than a decade ago in the swathe of land which stretches from Transylvania to the Central Asia plains. I also added a Chokalov and Vasilev to those I already have. The Dobre Dobrev got away (see next week). I was too mean in the upper limit I gave the auctioneer who bid on my behalf - although I got two of them for the starting price. Given that I wasn't physically present, three out of four old paintings for a total of 1,000 euros is a very good result.

Creativity cannot be controlled - so today I ignored the paper I had promised yesterday to update for the website (whose tentative title has now become "*Living for Posterity*" and focused, instead, on the Varna paper for the NISPAcee Conference whose final version has to be submitted within the week. It was time to print out what I had - and skim the physical pages in the sun at Bran as I waited for the car to be put into trim for its journey to Bulgaria. I'm able to see things more objectively as I turn the pages physically and scribble notes and arrows on them.



But, as I got home and sat at the PC to try to transfer some of the ideas on to screen, I continued to struggle with the precise nature of (and terminology for) the regimes of which, I argue in the paper, the Technical Assistance industry has neither understanding nor prescriptions. Feedback suggested that my term "*Kleptocracy*" was too general and emotional. "*Autocracy*" was also too much of a cliché. "*Sultanistic*" had been suggested by Linz and Stepan in their definitive overview of transitions in 1995 as one of the systems into which totalitarian regimes could transmogrify - but had never caught on as a term. "*Neo-feudalism*" popped up recently to describe the current Russian system - and "*proliferating dynasties*" was a striking phrase in a book edited by Richard Youngs I recently referred to. Suddenly I found myself typing the phrase "*impervious power*" - and felt that this was a great phrase which captured the essence of all of these regimes. Impervious to the penetration of any idea or person from the hoi poloi. The imperviousness of power leads to arrogance, mistakes on a gigantic scale and systemic corruption. How does one change such systems? Can it happen incrementally Where are there examples of „impervious power" morphing into more open systems? Germany and Japan in the aftermath of war - and Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1970s under the attraction of EU accession. But what happens when neither are present??? The great Perry Anderson continues to capture the essence of countries - [his latest essay on...Brazil](#)

And, somehow, I alighted on what must be simply [the best Central European Blog](#) (sorry Sarah!)- this one on everyday political events in Hungary as they unfold. She is a Hungarian who left the country in 1956; achieved academic distinction in America; and is probably now retired. I particularly appreciated her description of the contributions from the floor at a recent meeting in Mioskolc, the town in North-East Hungary where I lived for 2 years in the mid 1990s. Quite frightening picture she portrays!

A final comment - the 2001 paper I uploaded yesterday to the website had tried to identify the organisations I then admired. Since then, however, (as regular readers of the blog will have noticed) it is individuals who impress me - not organisations (my anarchistic streak perhaps?) It was interesting that my recent correspondent asked me about the organisations I admired. Last night it was the [late lamented Tony Judt](#) whose words reverberated in my ears as I tried to get back to sleep.

Saturday, April 2, 2011 [Thinking of posterity - a guide for the perplexed](#)



OK I've done it! The promised new paper is now on the website - with the tentative title "[Living in the present but thinking of posterity - another guide for the perplexed](#)" Be warned - it quickly grew from the original 7 pages to - 24. And this is just the first part - the analysis and synthesis have still to come! *And you're now seeing my new Chokanov acquisition before I even pick it up - on Monday in Sofia all going well.*

Wednesday, April 6, 2011

[Back in Sofia](#)

Bucharest and Sofia are only 350 kilometres apart - but two European capitals could hardly be less alike. Nowhere in Romania could you find the street life of the neighbourhood of my rented flat in the heart of Sofia. We left Bucharest at 08.30 and reached the flat six hours later after a leisurely drive. It's just around the corner from one of the galleries with old painting - InterNos - and we paid a visit while we waited for Blago to come with the keys. An elderly lady and a tousled artist were sharing a raki on armchairs with the owner. The flat is in the quiet old area (with narrow streets) between Vasil Levski Bvd and the circle road Evlogi Hristo Georgiev VI just before it hits the huge expanse of greenery on which the vast



brutal Cultural Centre squats. We've spent many happy hours cycling these parks - which stretch from the University down to the Viktoria Gallery on Yuri Gagarin Street (ever had the sense that socialism once rules here?) on the east.

The flat is the bottom storey of an old house still occupied by the descendants of a dramatist in whose memory a plaque adorns the wall - and next door is a very gracious if crumbling classic house in which the cartoonist Alexander Bozhinov lived and belongs now to the Ministry of Culture who let it out for painting classes etc.

Typically for Sofia, tiny shops (many hardly more than a hole in the wall!) are scattered in the neighbourhood which offer services such as dress makers and repairers (haberdashery is an old word which springs to mind), pedicure, pet food (yes some specialise in that!) and products such as coffee and cigarettes (real Bulgarian specialities!), painting and the superb Bulgarian vegetables. Some of their owners are young - some are old - and often they have pulled a table and a couple of chairs out on the pavement and are smoking a cigarette with a friend.

I see this as the essence of the Sofia I love - individuals determined to have their own existence - living a simple life at their own pace. A rarity these days! I almost added "candle-stick maker" to the list of services available in the neighbourhood as I actually went out to look for candles since we weren't sure if the electricity would be reconnected before nightfall. It was.

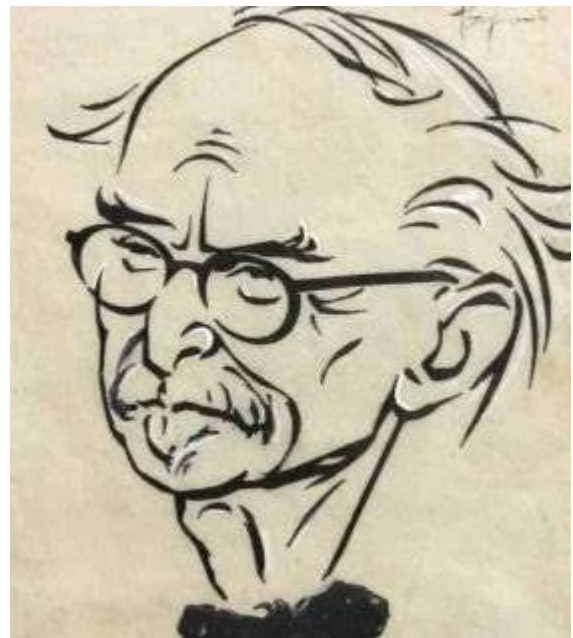
A sunny evening allowed us to enjoy a bottle of delicious Sliven Chardonnay in the small garden as we tried to entice the various neighbourhood cats to our garden. And then a brief walk across the small burn which acts as a moat around central Sofia looking for the old house which boasts a Restaurant ("The Wall" is I think its name) and encountering instead good food en plein air in a pub/restaurant called Cactus.

The sketch is a Tanev which wasa up for sale here recently

Thursday, April 7, 2011

Cowboys, bodyshops and backbone

I'm on the home strait now for the paper I shall be presenting (insallah) to the Conference of the Network of Institutes of Schools of Public Administration in Central and East Europe (NISPACEe) on the Black Sea coast here in Varna 19-22 May. It's now in two parts - with the first part dealing with the EC's recent attempt (The Backbone strategy) to make its Technical Assistance more effective. The second part explores the absence of any theoretical basis to its institution-building efforts in those countries with regimes which share the feature I have decided to call "impervious power". In 2006 I had made a critique at the same Conference which was mainly concerned with the procedural aspects of how the EC found experts



for its institution-building work in "transition" countries - but which ended by suggesting that neither the EC nor the experts really had much of a clue about the process of administrative reform in such contexts. This new paper is a much more solid version which takes account of what the EC itself has been doing in the intervening period to sharpen up its act - what it calls its Backbone strategy.

I find it significant that that 2008 strategy failed to give any analysis of the commercial companies and the (freelance) consultants on which the entire multi-billion euros EC system of Technical Assistance hinges. Companies (but not experts) are scrutinised by the EC before they are allowed to tender but only for the volume of their business - not for the quality of their work. The result is that many "cowboy" companies are in operation - who skilfully manipulate the rather simple evaluation system used for the competition for projects. There are two basic tricks. The first is to have a few excellent project writers at HQ - and to name as experts high-quality people who just happen to be ill when it comes to taking up their appointment! The second is to slip a few thousand euros into the hands of some locals.

And, as far as experts are concerned, the only thing that counts for companies is the extent to which the experience shown in the CV matches the particular job requirements. The quality of the work done by the experts in the past is irrelevant. During my 20 years in this game, a company has interviewed me just once - BMB Arcadis (now Mott MacDonald).

Working on this paper has made me realise that the continuity which capacity development requires cannot be provided by a procurement system which tries to carve knowledge and skills into commodifiable products and which allows in companies which are little more than "body-shops". Profit-oriented companies simply take the money and run. I can name the number of companies who have a serious interest in knowledge development and transfer on the fingers of one hand. And twinning isn't the answer - nor the latest wheeze of „south-to-south" institutional links. The Americans have an interesting model which has allowed a high-quality think-tank (The Urban Institute) to win a long-term contract within which it has the flexibility to negotiate adjustments from time to time.

The sketch is by Alexander Bozhinov whose house next door here in the heart of Sofia is still kept in his memory

Monday, April 18, 2011

[The painting passion](#)

By what process did I become a passionate collector of painting - let alone of Bulgarian realist painting of the mid 20th century? And what drives me now to work to try to craft a small book on the subject - let alone seek out the specific genres which I now feel I lack? I find I have sufficient landscapes (seascapes also grow apace) - but lack people and scenes of normal human activity. I would like some of the amazing heads pencilled by Boiadjiev (Nikola) and Uzonov. As well as populated landscapes. Also some signs of industrial and commercial activity; and some unusual still lives (not flowers but Rembrandt meat!) And more aquarelles. But why what process do these



signals come to me? It's a totally mysterious process.

I had no paintings in my home in Scotland - although I do remember vividly the large print which adorned the dining room/study of my father's manse. It was of a leafy, rocky shore at Roseneath where my father was born - with a glimpse of the River Clyde beyond. I lived in Berlin for a couple of months in 1964 and was stunned by what I saw in the galleries there. [Georg Grosz](#) and [Kathe Kollwitz](#) made a big impact - and later the less well-known people such as [Wilhelm Lehmbruch](#) whose sculptures I stumbled on by accident in what turned out to be his home town.

On the various trips I made for European meetings in the 1980s, I started the habit of visiting the art galleries - the Belgian realists of the end of the 19th Century on display in the main Brussels Gallery charmed me. After my (limited) sense of British artists, the European paintings I encountered during that period showed me something very different - reflecting I now realise as much the selection process of British art custodians as the different British experience. Too many British custodians of art in my time were high-class people whose style was discouraging to the ordinary person.

It was ironic but typical that I first encountered sketches of British miners of the 1930s not in Britain - but in a German town which was honouring the work of an 80 year old German artist Tina von Schullenberg who had managed to inveigle her way down Nottingham mines in the 1930s and produce great stuff. She was gracious enough to send me some of the sketches later. Of course, I was familiar with (and fond of) the Lowry stick men of Manchester mills of the 1940s; with Ralph Steadman's contemporary satire and had a copy of John Berger's [Ways of Seeing](#) - but nothing had prepared me for the originality of the European realist works of the early 20th century. So I suppose that's when I first opened up to art.

But it was only when I started my nomadic life in the 1990s that I started to acquire some paintings - initially some very cheap oils in Romania. Surprisingly for me, two still lives were my first (and last such) acquisitions - bought I suppose for their colour and composition.

But still my passion lay dormant. For a few years (1999-2005) oriental carpets became my passion - as my assignments in Central Asia gave me access to the glory of the silk and other carpets of not only Afghanistan but Turkmenistan. So much labour going into this work.

It was a visit to the Phillipopolis Gallery in Plovdiv in May 2008 which really activated my painting passion. This is a private gallery housed in a magnificent old Bulgarian house in the old heart of the town which was rescued and brought back to its glory by the new owners. Now you can view their collection; contemplate possible purchases; eat in a wonderful restaurant in the basement; or have a quiet coffee on the terrace which overlooks the town. [See for yourself here](#). The atmosphere and reception was so great that, without knowing anything at that stage about Bulgarian painting, I bought a small Zhekov and a large Mechkuevska and two contemporaries. So, be warned!

Today's painting is by **Vladimir Dmitrov (The Master)** 1882-1960. *Born near Kyustendil which is half way between Sofia and the Serbian border, he started his career as a clerk. He is considered one of the most talented 20th century Bulgarian painters and probably the most remarkable stylist in Bulgarian painting in the post-Russo-Turkish War era. His portraits and compositions have expressive color, idealistic quality of the image and high symbolic strength. Many consider his artwork a fauvist type rather than an expressionism set. Vladimir Dimitrov Art Gallery of Kyustendil has more than 700 of his oil paintings.*

Tuesday, May 10, 2011

our cunning elites



I was skirting yesterday round Plovdiv (which has an old Roman heart - like so many Bulgarian towns) at lunchtime yesterday on the way to a workshop at Assenovograd when I passed a sign (Brestovitza) which is the name of my favourite red wine. I did an about turn, drove through some great-looking vineyards at the eastern foot of the Rhodope mountains and shocked one of guys hanging around the rather decrepit winery into opening a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc and of a Rose for me to taste! I don't think they have such requests very often - although this small village apparently has 10 wineries (including the famous Toderoff

one)! I was amazed to discover they they produce the great Erigone wines - which I fell in love with 3 years ago but then couldn't find again! Now I know where! I bought 2 of the Erigone's Cabernet-merlot (4 euros); 2 Rose (3 euros); and 2 Chardonnay. Tomorrow I will pop in to one of the Plovdiv art galleries which started me on my painting collection exactly three years ago - on my way to another workshop in a small spa town which skirts the western side of the Rhodopes. What a life!

I'm staying at a superb Hotel (Sani) on the outskirts of Assenovograd with a very sizeable room with a view up a valley between the foothills - and a cavernous supermarket in the basement with rows of products (including one of the best selections of wines I've seen) - but no customers! Smacks of a "cathedral in the desert". Speaking of which, I was horrified to learn at dinner that municipal elections in November here may make half of the the 120-odd trainings this project is organising abortive! Such is the politicisation that many of the officials will be replaced - and it will take a couple of months for that to work through. And, because this project was 2 years late in starting (the usual Balkan politics), it is impossible to extend its current termination date of end-March. So even more workshops may be crammed into the autumn period before the axes start to fall in the pre-Christmas period! My initial view would be to stick with the schedule - although, in such a climate, noone probably wants to be absent from the municipal office! This is where the Brit in me loses patience - Bulgaria should be booted out of the Council of Europe for having such a level of Sultanism in its municipal systems.

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Restoration and identity

A great drive from Assenovgrad via the Plovdiv old town to Velingrad yesterday. In Plovdiv the main purpose was to visit the [Phillippolis Gallery](#) which had really been responsible exactly three years ago for starting my passion for buying Bulgarian paintings (mainly from mid-20th century). So far I have more than 50 - and not enough walls to hang them on! It was therefore not difficult to resist the temptation to buy another Dobro Dobrev (950 euros) - but I could not resist 7-8 small and highly original ceramic pieces at the small shop [BG Art Gallery](#) nearby. Before I left I had to revisit the [Atanas Krastev house](#) where local painter and conservationist *Atanas Krastev* lived until his death in 2003. His constant striving to keep the old buildings (at a time in the 1960s when tradition was viewed with some hostility) and to have them as active centres of cultural activity earned him the title of *Mayor of Old Plovdiv* - and he deserves wider recognition. The cosy, well-furnished house is strewn with personal mementoes, and the terrace offers superb views. His self-portraits and personal collection of (mostly) abstract 20th-century Bulgarian paintings are displayed. The garden also houses exhibits.

I thought it might be difficult to find the Olymp Hotel in Velingrad - since the spa town has so many. But the difficult part of the journey was actually negotiating round Pazhardik which (like Plovdiv) is very badly signposted. I have to say that everyone I stop to ask for guidance is enormously helpful.

And, as I drove straight for the mountain range, I could not see how on earth a road could be there - it is in fact one of the greatest engineering feats I have ever seen - cut right through at the side of a strongflowing river gorge. There is (or was) actually also a small-gauge railway which I seem to remember running 3 years ago when I used this road in the opposite direction. I hope its active in the summer season!

[Vilengrad](#) is 800 metres in a lovely valley surrounded by mountains - so the cold has followed me here! But I've warmed up in one of the 70 hot springs with which it is served!

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Salute to the local municipal galleries

Thursday I spent on a very pleasant drive from Velingrad in the Rhodope mountains to Bucharest (500 kms) - first through the gorge I spoke about; then east across the Thracian plain with a spectacular glowering sky; a hop past Stara Zagora over another mountain; and pulled in at Kazanluk on the basis of what I had read about its Art Gallery. And I was not disappointed. I was warmly received by Daniela who introduced me to their collection which included the Stanio Stamatov featured above - he was one of many local painters. Indeed the small town was so prolific with artists that it used to be called „the town of a hundred painters“. The collection is therefore a rich one - of both paintings and sculptures - and, amongst those



whose acquaintance I made were Vasil Barakov (1902-1991); a sculptor Hristo Peshev (1923-2000); and Spas Zawgrov (1908-1991) born in a nearby village whose landscapes and portrait sketches were in a temporary exhibition funded by his family. Hristo Genev, the Director, welcomed me into his den and presented me with a couple of discs (one of his own material). He sculpts the most fascinating pieces from wood - one of which I displayed a couple of posts back. This is a gallery worth a detour to see - and many revisits!

I don't often look at yahoo stories - but this is a useful bit of [pleading for the simpler life we should be leading](#).

There are definite advantages in attending workshops which are in languages one doesn't understand! It forces you to use other senses to understand what is going on - to look at body language, for example. And it also gives me the time to reflect - eg I suddenly remembered the paper I had written in 2008 about Training assessment Tools which have different examples which could be used at the different stages of the training cycle. I duly had it printed it out and gave it to the Council of Ministers rep who was also attending the Vilengrad session (since they had insisted on a simplistic evaluation form being used). I will add this shortly to my website. And I was also able to read more closely the paper on [Training and Beyond; seeking better practices for capacity development](#) by Jenny Pearson which I referred to recently - which sets out very well [the critique of training I was myself struggling toward in my own 2008 paper](#).

Finally three good articles on the Chinese mood. The first about a rare [critical article on Mao](#) by an 82 year old Chinese economist. Then a good piece on [the competition for the new leadership positions](#).

The last is particularly interesting - since it gives [an insight into how systematic is the Chinese way of researching issues](#).

Monday, May 30, 2011

[Opening the dark recesses of Sofia City Gallery](#)

The special exhibitions of Sofia City Art Gallery play an important role in Bulgaria in bringing together the paintings of people like Dobre Dobrev, Nikolae Boiadjiev (to mention 2 recent events) from the various municipal and private museums in the country. But the Sofia gallery boasts the best collection of Bulgarian art (7,000 artefacts) and how therefore to ensure that they see the light of day? The Gallery curator *Dr. Maria Vasileva* has different ways of dealing with the issue - first collections around themes such as "the window"; the "artists's studio and model" and "portraits of artists"(to mention three recent themes).

The Gallery has also started a series of exhibitions (and booklets/discs)(" *The other Eye*") which involves opening up the gallery's large collections to selected outsiders - who are invited to comb the dungeons of the gallery where the collections are stored, strip off the protective covering and select some paintings for public display.

I missed the first two exhibitions of such works - selected by an artist Luchezar Boyadjiev and a



philosopher Boyan Manchev. The small booklet which accompanied the second exhibition tells of Manchev expecting to find a large section of the museum's collection covering major events - whether historical or personal). Instead

"the representation of various aspects of people's private world obviously prevails, there being, conditionally speaking, an "idyllic" thread running through the works, which unifies all those aspects through the representation of elements of everyday living, which are not directly related to either big moments in history and monumental events, or to essential existential and metaphysical issues such as life, death, birth, violence, suffering, etc."

It says a lot about the richness of the Bulgarian painting tradition that only the first four of the following names selected for the exhibition are on the list of more than 140 painters I have selected for [the booklet on Bulgarian painting I am working on](#)! Naoum Hadjimladenov, Bencho Obreshkov, Dechko Ouzounov, Kiril Tsonev, Vera Nedkova, Vera Loukova, Ivan Nenov, Lika Yanko, Sami Bidjerano-Sabin, Georgi Bawev, Nadezhda Kouteva, Samouil (Suli) Seferov, Dimiter Voinov, Dariya Vassilyanska, Nadezhda Deleva, Andrei Daniel, Zina Yourdanova, Luben Kostov, Nina Kovacheva, Ivan Moudov, Nikola Mihov, Stoyan Sotirov, etc.

Of the new names, I found Loukova, Nedkova and Nenov most attractive.

And a third exhibition has just opened - [The Choice](#) - of artefacts this time selected by 43 prominent Bulgarian art and cultural historians belonging to different generations and fields of work (lecturers, researchers, museum curators, directors of art galleries, museums and nongovernmental organizations, art critics, curators and freelance researchers. The project aim is defined in very ambitious terms

- *to look into the factors that single out an artwork as valuable and important for the development of Bulgarian art from today's perspective;*
- *to establish whether selection criteria have changed as compared to the ones applied in decades past;*
- *whether the best textbook examples of artworks have stood the test of time;*
- *whether the language of art criticism has changed; what is the personal stance of the most prominent Bulgarian art historians.*

The accompanying booklet (only 5 euros) allows each of the 47 to analyze their choice both in view of its specific features and the features it shares with other works belonging to the same historical period. Alongside the collection's masterpieces there appear somewhat forgotten names, as well as some totally unfamiliar ones; alongside classical artists there stand young artists. For my taste, there is too much contemporary crap - collages and multi-media. And the text which accompanies each artefact - which could have been informative to lay people like myself - is too often self-indulgent and uninformative.

The displays which impacted on me were -

- A still life from a forgotten - Patriki Sandev (1881-1959)
- A portrait by Konstantin Shturkelov (1889-1961)
- A portrait by Kiril Tsonev (whose greatness I am only now beginning to appreciate)
- The famous Haymaking-Rest by Zlatyu Boyadjiev (1941)
- Village scene (Muslim Bulgarian women) by Simeon Velkov (1885-1966)
- Zlatin Nuriev's harrowing sculpture Window (1985) of an eyeless Pomak (carved during the "Revival Process" when those of Turkish descent were forced to take Bulgarian names.

Perhaps I can persuade the Gallery to let me into its depths?? And I wonder whether the Regional

Galleries have the same policy. I hope to visit the Stara Zagora Gallery on Sunday. *The painting is an Ivan Milev - who died so young.*

[Konstantin Shtarkelov](#) (1881-1961) was the most famous of a clutch of outstanding Bulgarian watercolour painters (including Pavel [Francalijski](#); Yordan Geshev and Kriskaretz). Shtarkelov came from a very poor family and lived in poverty in Odessa and Moscow as a youth and met the key Russian artists of the time before returning in 1909 to Bulgaria. He did portraits but preferred to draw landscapes from Rila and Pirin Mountains, Sofia and Tarnovo regions (see pp 39-42 of the Bulgarian Bank book for 4 examples). He was also a war artist in 1912-1913 and 1917. His works were exhibited in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Venice, Germany and Hungary.

But, after September 9 1944, his work was banned and forgotten because of "his ties with the Palace". They call him the "official artist of the bourgeois regime and royal favorite " ... Konstantin Shtarkelov was expelled from the artists' union and spent five months in the Central Prison before living a life of destitution. According to [an extensive article I found about him on the Artprice website](#) he did eventually manage to hold a much visited exhibition of his works in 1960. It attracted mixed reviews and he died less than a year later.



I was also very pleased to come across today [this little story about Vasil Barakov](#) (1902-1991) - one of the first Bulgarian artists to show industrial landscapes in 1948-1949 a group of artists, including Vasil Barakov, Zlatyu Boyadziev (one of Bulgaria's best) and Zdravko Alexandrov were sent to paint three months in Romania, mainly in the area of Baia Mare (Transylvania) and around Ploesti. Barakov returned to Bulgaria with many landscapes, portraits and sketches, which captures features of Romania. In early 1949

the group made a joint exhibition. Only three days later it unexpectedly closed. Critics accuse the authors of formalism. They do not reflect reality in brotherly Romania.

"My father - says son of Vasil Barakov - Dr. Miroslav Barakov - was mortified. He knew that the paintings were good - as did his colleagues but did not show his external feelings, did not react emotionally. But, after these serious charges in those dangerous and difficult years, something snapped in him and he almost ceased to paint... well, from time to time, he did a still life but focused instead on on film posters, book design. Often our salary saved my mother a teacher of mathematics. This went on for 10-12 years. "In 1967, however, the ice around the great master of the brush crushed. He was awarded the title of Honored Artist. In 1973, the maestro made a commemorative exhibition in gallery "Rakovski" 125 in the capital. When he went in the morning in the exhibition hall, the artist finds there the other great master of the brush - Ilia Petrov.

Bulgaria has had [a museum of socialism](#) for a year or so which I've not so far been tempted to visit. But [this rather superficial assessment](#) suggests that I should give it the once-over. Certainly "leftists" such as Ilyia Beshkov and Marko Behar had no problems flourishing in the new regime but quite a few others suffered greatly....

Tuesday, July 5, 2011 [Borderlands](#)

Pernik is on the east edge of Sofia and, as befits an old coal-mining and industrial area, a sad eyesore - particularly on a cloudy and rainswept day with its grey rows of jerrybuilt flats an insult to the beauty of the surrounding rolling hills. A few kilometres on, a clutch of peeling high flats announced Radomir. But it was the more charming town of Kyustendil which was my destination - reached through a twisting 20 kilometres ascent and descent of dense wooded hills. In the puddles and rain, the town was less charming than I had remembered from my last visit in 2008 - and was showing evidence of the sort of decline (derelict shops) which can afflict border towns these days. Kyustendil is about 30 kms from both Macedonia and Serbia - and several busloads of umbrella-protected tourists from Macedonia were wandering around the desolate town centre. The old minaret looks set to fall any day - although an old hammam has been spruced up and the water from its well is still gratefully taken in bottles by the residents nearby.



Apart from Monday's workshop (on EU funded territorial cooperation projects), the main reason for my overnight stay is the chance to visit the Vladimir Dimitrov art gallery - which is housed in the ugliest concrete bunker I have ever seen. Dimitrov (The Master) is one of Bulgaria's most famous painters - indeed the name of [the gallery's website](#) actually incorporates the master into it. I'm not actually a fan of a lot of his stuff particularly not one of his trademarks - a face in front of a lot of crudely painted and brightly coloured flowers - but it was good to visit this collection and see a wider range of his paintings. I was taken with some of his earlier, smaller paintings - sunrises and sunsets; his mother; his father - and some multiple face silhouettes. And his *Peasant with a hoe* (above) which is in the Sofia City Gallery is very graceful.

It was good to meet up again with Belin, one of the trainers, at dinner - who's deeply involved in the master plan for the stretch of the Danube in this part of the world. He made an interesting observation about the different attitude of the Bulgarians and Romanians to the river. For the Bulgarians, it's their link with Europe - more psychological than logistical perhaps whereas the Romanians, apparently, have tended to turn their back on it. It's part of the poor flatlands for them - although with the easing of border controls with Greece in 2007, he sees signs of change in that attitude.

The great pleasure at the workshop was to meet an official from Pernik - making a major presentation about how they had made successful bids for EC projects - who was really enthusiastic about her work and the impact which visits to projects in Denmark and Northern Ireland had made on her. Sadly such belief in change and determination is rare in this part of the world. The 2 projects with which Pernik are involved are good examples of EC programmes - [Innohubs](#) which links towns on the edge of country capitals in a network to explore and develop good practice for places which have that particular combination of challenges and opportunities. [Retina](#) is a network after my own heart - *revitalisation of traditional industrial areas* (in south-east Europe) - since I was one of the founder members in the early 1980s of RETI which brought old industrial European Regions together in a network of good practice and lobbying.

Another interesting chat with Belin whether there is any hope of reviving the derelict villages which are such a striking feature of Bulgaria - in all parts. True (and unlike Romania) Brits, Russians

and Dutch people have moved in large numbers into some of these villages - particularly around Veliko Trnovo and the Black Sea (and even on the edges of the Danube) - but the Brits certainly are older people. And it is the young who are needed. He wondered whether the new contractual and work from home patterns which the internet now allows were part of the solution; to which I added my usual input about the increased need for frugality and self-sufficiency also supplying another perspective. We both seem to agree that it is about reframing the issue. The old solution was about location marketing and inward investment. Time to develop self-sufficient strategies!

Wednesday, July 6, 2011 [Oldies](#)

Curious weather for July here near the Greek border. Relentless rain on Sunday and overcast skies and stunning claps of thunder yesterday afternoon followed by rain. This morning brings some sickly sunlight.

BBC's Through the Night is always good listening and has currently a nice idea - 2 hours of [music composed in 1876](#) - . Only available for a few days!

For those of you who don't know Jason's Godwin's writing about the Ottoman empire and Istanbul, here is [an interview which gives a sense of his knowledge on these subjects](#).

Travel writing is a favourite genre of mine. Here is a [treatment of three famous names](#) - although Robert Byron seems to have slipped out of public view.

Friday, July 8, 2011

[Balkan mistrust](#)



Summer seems to have dawned at last - with 40 expected in the plains of Bucharest and 31 here in Sofia rising to 33 Monday. I should then be in the rarely explored North-Western mountain area - first of Varshets then, from Tuesday evening, in the old fortress area of Belogradchik. In the meantime, I have my spreading fig tree to protect me from the sun in the garden.

[Amos Oz](#) has been keeping me company these last few days - first with *Black Box* mapping

ruthlessly the relations a woman has with her present (faithful and loving if rather eccentric) husband; her tight-arsed and rich ex; and their delinquent boy. Great stuff - with the powerful outpourings of emotion I have now come to expect of this writer who should have got the Nobel prize a decade ago. Now I've started on his story of the strained relations between a 60 year old nomadic planning/engineering consultant back home and living with a younger woman with a mission - *Don't Call it Night*. Oz seems to have a happy 40 year old marriage himself but he really gets into the painful crevices of relationships!

During the night I was reminded what an insightful writer Michael Lewis (of Vanity fair) is on current financial matters - the best things I have ever read on [the Irish meltdown \(his story reads like a modern version of The Emperor's New Clothes\)](#) and [the Greek crisis](#). In the classic journalistic (if not Detective Colombo) tradition, he approaches the issues from a common-sense point of view. And here is [an interesting article which was inspired by Lewis's exposure of Greek corruption to dig deeper](#) and to try to explain why the Greeks have the political and ethical problems they do.

He reminds us that, until the late 19th century, Greece was part of the Ottoman system (as were Bulgaria and Romania) - with all this means about clientilism and antipathy to authority. "Greeks are naturally distrustful of their leaders, and extremely quarrelsome among themselves" - as one can certainly say also about the Romanians. Here it's worth going back to the [Ionitsa article I excerpted from on June 13](#). There is little doubt that officials have major difficulties talking and cooperating with one another (let alone with citizens!) in this part of the world (an ex-Deputy Minister here who is one of the trainers on our programme was talking to me recently about this). And yet this is never really picked up in the needs assessment which supposedly precedes all the training which EC programmes fund here. All the emphasis is on transferring knowledge - not altering attitudes and behaviour.

Finally an excerpt from a longer piece -

The present financial conundrum is a result and not a cause. It is the result of decades of rule by incompetent politicians, certainly in the case of Greece. (It doesn't need a Marshall plan it needs a regime change. Count on the evil undemocratic EU to take over much of the decision making behind the scenes, and a good thing too.) The problem with present-day politicians in general is that they aspire to power and once they have it they don't know what to do with it. Consequently they're easily influenced by lobbyists and public opinion. The result is - predictably - indecision and procrastination or hysteria and panic. Being so unfocused our dear leaders get lost in petty detail, always a sign of people not getting the big picture. The founding fathers of the EU had a clear concept: no more war in Europe. The present lot just looks after the shop, and not very well

Two musical bonuses - first, from Romania (but only for the next few days), [the pianist and composer Dinu Lapatti](#) (1917-1950) and from [the English mining community](#) *The aquarelle is a Stamatov*

Saturday, July 9, 2011

[culture matters](#)

I changed the title of yesterday's post after inserting some of the argument of the 2nd article on Greece (which tried to explain what might be called the "[amoral familism](#)" of the country - and its neighbours such as Romania and Bulgaria (to a lesser extent I feel))

I also added the link to the brilliant paper about Romania written by Ionitsa in 2005 which had used that term -

Leaders are supposed to be promoters of their protégés; and clan-based loyalties take precedence over public duties for salaried public officials. Such behavior can be found not only in the central government but also in local administration, the political opposition, academia and social life in general, i.e. so it permeates most of the country's elites. Classic studies of Mezzogiorno in Italy call this complex of attitudes "amoral familism": when extended kin-based associations form close networks of interests and develop a particularistic ethics centered solely upon the group's survival⁷. This central objective of perpetuity and enrichment of the in-group supersedes any other general value or norm the society may have, which then become non-applicable to such a group's members. At best, they may be only used temporarily, as instruments for advancing the family's goals - as happens sometimes with the anti-corruption measures.

Since Romanian society, like others in the Balkans, still holds onto such pre-modern traits, its members are neither very keen to compete openly nor are they accustomed to the pro-growth dynamics of modernity. Social transactions are regarded as a zero-sum game; a group's gain must have been brought about at the expense of

others. This may be a rational attitude for traditional, static societies, where resources are limited and the only questions of public interest have to do with redistribution.

And I was reminded of a recent discussion I had with an ex-Deputy Minister who was bemoaning the lack in public life here of the soft skills of communications and cooperation operating for the public good. And of my realisation of how rare was the enthusiasm of the lady from Pernik. It takes me back to the early days of my work in Romania when the Head of the European Delegation handed us summaries of Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy work; civic traditions in modern Italy](#) which had recently appeared (I already had a copy of the book). She had quickly sussed out what Putnam called the „lack of social capital” in the country - ie the lack of trust and associations. Thanks to the World Bank, academic writing about Social capital then became a cottage industry. I'm not sure if we are any the wiser as a result!

As I've noticed before, "path dependency" is the phrase used by those who feel that it is impossible for a country to shake off its history. And that takes us into the murky areas of cultural studies - and of

Samuel Huntington whose views are considered so offensive here since he suggests that the line dividing civilised from non-civilised countries puts Balkan countries on the wrong side (mainly for their Orthodoxy). But his stuff is worth reading - particularly [Culture Matters](#) which is a marvellous coverage of the proceedings of a conference on the subject which brought together in argument a lot of scholars.

I wrote recently about a new Gallery of Contemporary Art opening in Sofia's south park - a magnificent renovation of an old mansion. Courtesy of Norway, Iceland and Leichtenstein no less. I paid my 3 levs and ventured in - and was bitterly disappointed. No Bulgarian artists - just a few small Chagall and Picasso etchings - and a large exhibition of Scandinavian ceramics. The second floor was roped off. I ceremoniously tore up my entrance ticket at the reception - and roundly chided them for false pretences. Apparently all the fault of the Prime Minister who wanted it open earlier rather than later to show what his government is capable of (the rehabilitation work only started in October). OK the building is nice - as are the large (Bulgarian) sculptures which surround it. But don't bother going in!

And an example of the problems of moving around in this part of the world. Next week I will be up on the Bulgarian side of the the Danube just south west of the city of Craiova - as the crow flies it is little more than 90 kilometres from there to Vidin where there is a ferry from Calafin. I thought it would be a good idea if Daniela came down from Bucharest and met up at Vidin - so that we could explore the fascinating mountain area which is the north-west. In fact it will take her about 4 hours to make that 90 kms (much longer if she were to take the train) on the Romanian side. Two hours by bus; waiting time 2 hours; and 15 minutes the ferry which deposits you apparently 5 kilometres from the town of Vidin- with no onward public transport! A bridge is half built (with European money) - but the Bulgarian side is bogged down in commercial arguments - and it could be another 18 months before it is ready (watch this space). I remember a woman from the cabinet Office here telling me that it took her a similar time and 3 changes of transport to move a similar distance within southern Bulgaria.

An interesting post this time last year - on [government matters](#).

Sunday, July 10, 2011

Vrachanski Balkans

Up and away early to avoid the midday heat which once (actually three times) disabled the car a few years back in this part of the world at this time of the year as were driving back from the lovely Thassos island. Just outside Drama in Greece - as we were beginning the ascent for the new border crossing there - the car engine just stopped. We were kindly treated (with an overnight stay needed for a petrol filter to be replaced) before the same happened at Plovdiv - after much meandering through gorges and round the densely wooded edges of the Rhodopes (with many minarets in the villages). After a mechanic asked for 300 euros with no guarantees, we discovered the car was working again and decided to proceed - over the Balkans. A Romanian lorry driver confirmed that it was the heat - it had happened to him. Just as we reached the top of the mountain ridge, the car stopped again - but, by then, I knew the trick - just to wait ten minutes or so.



Anyway I needn't have worried today - since, apart from my climb over the Petrohan Pass starting before 09.00, the road is heavily wooded and therefore protected from the heat. But the surface is bad (particularly on the descent) and the road twisty - so a 100 kilometres journey from Sofia to Varshets actually took 3 hours (including a trip to Pennywise in the nearby village of Berkovitsa for a bottle of Mezzek Sauvignon/Pinot Gris). I'm in the heart of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park here - with towering mountain ranges on 2 sides. The [hotel is very nicely situated](#) - with solar panels covering the entire roof (very rare!). I was able to check in (to a large room), get organised and have a swim all before midday.

After my last post, I got thinking about Path dependency - and discovered that the phrase originated in economic not sociological studies as I had imagined. And, of course, it takes us deep into fundamental issues which thinkers have argued about for millenia - such as free-will! [The opening pages of this paper are quite enlightening about this](#) - but thereafter the paper gets typically turgid.

Monday, July 11, 2011

Attending (on one's own) a workshop at a leisure hotel is, I find, a great aid to reflection - especially if your role is observation. I've fallen into the habit of taking with me to these workshops stuff I haven't been able to read at home. Last workshop, I took the printed version of all of this year's blog posts (more than 100 pages) - just to see what sort of coherence (or duplication) there is in it all. This time I took a small book with the title [A Very Short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about studying organisations](#) which I had criticised in the Amazon reviews when I first read it. Yesterday I romped through it again and found it an enjoyable and powerful critique of management - even justifying the flippant definition I give in [Just Words - a sceptic's glossary](#) of the verb „to manage“ - „to make a mess of“.

Here is a useful article the author wrote in 2000 about the [critical management school of thinking](#).

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

[out of this world](#)



I'm now in Belogradchik and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the first rock formations - some 20 kilometres before I hit the town. They extend over a 600-700 sq km area. The area is very poor - I detoured to the old carpet village of Chiprovitsa in an amazing bowl of mountains. A sleepy and disconsolate place - with many Trabans in the area. I had expected to see carpets displayed in the street - but all was

desolate with only a small shop displaying very expensive stuff - 5 times what I had paid for an old carpet!

There is a [very nice write-up of the Belogradchik rocks and town here](#).

Balance again - revising training material

During the preparations for a recent project bid, I could not come up with anything to say about how we might review (as outsiders) existing training material. Of course we can identify criteria such as -

- factual
- comprehensive
- balanced
- up-to-date
- user-friendly
- clear

But the subsequent judgements (for a board which is not expert in the various subjects) are inevitably subjective and arbitrary. And do they really expect trainers to use material

which had been developed by a third party? If so, it is a good example of the mechanistic thinking about organisations which has overwhelmed us in the era of project management and the logframe (treating people as things which can be manipulated). Chris Grey's book for which I gave a link yesterday, is one of the best exposes of this I have read for a long time. Indeed I now see his little book (purportedly about studying organisations) as the best tract against modern society I have read in a long time. It ties together very beautifully a lot of strands of critical social and political thought.

My recent experience attending these workshops has given me probably the most appropriate approach to this issue of revising training material. All trainers were asked last week to summarise the various difficulties which workshop participants (from the Bulgarian municipalities) have mentioned as having with the design or implementation of EC projects. This is a good approach since it requires the trainers to think about what the participants have said (rather than what they, the trainers, think) - one frequent comment is the disagreements they have with the national authority which identifies mistakes (for which they receive a monetary penalty). Of course, the way to deal with that is to have a note from the national authority identifying the most common mistakes!

Only when the trainer minds are focussed on the problems of the trainees, should they be invited to revise their material - with the following sort of questions to help them -

- Compared to what the target group needs to know about your subject, what did you assume they already knew when you drafted your slides and handouts?
- How would you now change your assumptions about what they already know?
- What changes will you now make in your slides and handouts - in the light of these comments and changed understanding?
- Do you work with a statement of "learning outcomes"? That is - a detailed statement of things participants did not know when they arrived at the workshop and that you hoped they would know at the end of the workshops?
- How much time do you take at the beginning of workshops to ask the participants for detailed statement of their expectations and the questions they bring to the workshop?



- How do you check whether these expectations have been met?
- Have you checked the split of time between your presentations - and participants input?
- Do you observe the rule that participants cannot take much more than a 20 minute presentation?
- What efforts do you make to bring participants into discussion?
- Do you put yourself in their shoes - with their concerns about HOW to draft winnable bids which can actually be implemented successfully?

Of course, this is self-assessment - and the new project I was talking about assumed that outsiders would review and update the training material. I think, however, this is a last resort. It is the trainers who have been through the experience of teaching their material. Better to have a system to encourage them to think about what they themselves learned (and then apply it to their own revision) - with the outsider's role being a facilitating one. Such an approach, however, which tries to get a balance (or dialectic) between groups does not seem to fit the positivist beliefs and "monitoring and control" culture of our times.

The photo is one I took as I left the training workshop - just a few kilometres up the road - to show the village dereliction Bulgaria has to cope with

Wednesday, July 13, 2011

[Wine, figures and power](#)

Magura is the name of a large cave 25 kms from Belogradchik - the end of the line here with no links to neighbouring countries. But it is also the name of a vineyard which produces excellent wines which I have now discovered. All due to the small kiosk they have at the entrance to the Belogradchik fortress; the two young people who manned it yesterday (as I arrived gasping from the steep climb) clearly knew nothing about wines but I did, after my tour of the fortress, buy a bottle of the attractively labelled Chardonnay (same price - 3 pounds - as the excellent Mezzek range which is currently my favourite). In the hotel last night, the Chardonnay tasted as good as the Mezzek - so today I returned and was lucky to find one of the vinoculturalists herself - with the highly appropriate name of Venelina! She was delighted with my comparison with Mezzek - and was able to tell me that they do have a shop in Sofia - Pushkin St 5. And also [a nice website](#). I bought some other stuff - and will duly report on my tastings! The shop also stocks wine from a small place I passed through on my way here - Borovitsa (sounds Romanian) - which I hope to buy tomorrow and taste over the week-end. Watch this spot!



Wednesday, August 3, 2011

summer relaxation

A very pleasant walk this morning around the old open-air market area between Hristov Botev and Maria Louisa Bvds which boasts in a small area a graceful mosque, a massive synagogue and a delightful Romanian Orthodox church called Holy Trinity (Sveti Troitsa - actually Macedonian romanian). This is the rather down-at-heel area which stretches to the Central Station (across the Lion Bridge) but which is slowly becoming gentrified - in a typically gentle Bulgarian way. I hope it doesn't drive the Syrian and Iraqi foodshops out - where I stocked up with spices and other delicacies (eg Aleppo soaps) for the mountain house.



Lunch was in the small courtyard of the ivy-clad house at the back of the British and Polish/Hungarian Embassies which are a couple of minutes from my flat. Lunches take time here!

Friday, August 5, 2011

Sofia's charms - again

Another very pleasant lazy (yester)day enjoying the incredible variety which Sofia has to offer anyone who appreciates serendipity - and who

has some aesthetic inclinations. A slow walk up Ignatiev st in the morning to the City Gallery - which, in addition to the special "Other Eye" selection of paintings from its vaults by art critics, has at the moment [a marvellous exhibition of paintings of monasteries in the Balkans](#). Then a meander in the park where the jazz musicians were, as usual, active - giving everyone great pleasure. Then across to the great Tabak cafe at the back of the National Gallery - where they were loading various fascinating sculptures (hope it wasn't a heist!).

There was a small political meeting going on nearby - of older people. And, at the open market in front of Alexander Nevski Cathedral, I picked up a large Chiproviste carpet for only 100 euros - and also an amusing small „Troitsa" painting on wood by a young Dmitrov (Ivalio?) - the trinity were a corrupt



looking mayor, teacher and priest all imbibing.

Wednesday, September 28, 2011

visual pleasures

It's good to be back in Sofia - with its vegetables (leeks and tomatoes); galleries; pleasant cycling and pace of life. The Sofia City Gallery continues to celebrate its greats - with a special exhibition of one of Bulgaria's most revered painters - Nikola Petrov (1881-1916). I can understand why his influence (despite his youth) was so great - his landscapes are delicate; his portrait sketches deft; and his nudes were clearly the inspiration for Nikola Boiadjev. A very nice little book accompanies the exhibition - at only 5 euros. I hadn't realised that Petrov was from one of the Danube towns - in the north-east, Vidin - which I haven't been able to get to so far but will certainly visit once the Romanian engineers eventually finish their half of the new bridge (another year off I suspect). The town does have [an art gallery](#). For me, Nikola Taney is the greatest and is also from a Danube village - Svishtov - the signs for whose car ferry I saw as I left the Russe District



I mentioned recently an interview with Ralf Dahrendorf on an excellent history series available on the internet. I don't use such facilities as much as I should - here's [another challenging snippet](#)

Friday, September 30, 2011

Vernissaj and wine



The Astry and Konus Galleries are both favourite ports of call for me here in Sofia. Vihra and Yassen are, respectively, highly sociable and knowledgeable about Bulgarian painting - and helpful to outsiders like myself. Vihra - at [Astry Gallery](#) - organises special exhibitions every 2 months or so - with Vernissajs and booklets - and last evening was the first I have been able to manage. For a modest and talented young landscape artist - Sabit Mesrur - one of whose paintings heads this post.

Yassen - at [the Konus Gallery](#) - also teaches and

I at last visited the small gallery which the Academy of Fine Arts has in Levski street, just round the corner from my flat. It has currently a nice little exhibition by one of the Academy's first graduates, Rumen Gasharov (1956). I was given a couple of excellent little booklets free of charge. I offered to make a contribution - but it was refused. His [website should be here](#).

And today I opened another of the [Magura range of wines](#) I have mentioned before - from the very North-East of the country. This one of the "Rendez-Vous" label - Cuvee du Sud. Crisp and tasty. Highly recommended - if a bit pricey at 6 euros - from the great shop they have here in Sofia. It may be a bit far out - but a number 5 tram from Makedonia Bvd takes you down to Pushkin Boulevard very quickly and comfortably. They have great range of whites, reds and roses (including cheap but excellent boxes). Only pity is that they don't give wine-tasting.....

[Rhodope charm again](#)



I had hoped to be reporting on the great trip to Smolyan and Kardjali at the beginning of the week in the borderland with Greece - but was a bit knocked today by the cowboy behaviour of my Romanian village mayor. Perhaps it's the just rewards for the positive Bulgarian postings I have been making! I was nicely received (as always) in the Smolyan Gallery on Monday - which has a very large space (3 floors) and a great collection but almost no money for maintenance. My colleague, Belin (who was leading the workshop) is an

architect by training; now an academic; and was, in the late 1990s, a Deputy Minister for Regional development. He explained for me the ambitious agenda of the socialist government in the 1970s when they merged 3 villages there (as they did elsewhere) and created urban systems which are now tottering. He also suggested a possible reason for the very different fates of villages in post-socialist Bulgaria and Romania. He suggests that land ownership was more completely collectivised in Bulgaria than in Romania - and that there was therefore no base left in Bulgarian villages post-1989 for the sort of self-sufficiency which still survives for example in my village amongst the old.

A marvellous journey on Tuesday through and over the mountains to Kardjali - quite amazing to see the isolated homesteads clinging so high up to the mountainsides! And all the minarets - most new. Kardjali has all the bustle and townscape of Turkish town. I was able, with some difficulty, to locate the art gallery - rather small and pathetic despite some great paintings - including the great Atanas Mihov (above) and this delightful Stefan Ivanov.

Friday, October 7, 2011 [musical and visual tributes, visit to Dionysus shrine](#)



First some musical tributes - sparked off by the very sad news that a guitarist legendary in my young days, Edinburgh-born [Bert Jansch, has died - in his late 60s](#). I hadn't realised he had an association with the Pentangle group which was a favourite of mine.

Billy Connolly, the great Scottish comedian, did [a nice video on Jansch](#) some years back.

Going down memory lane, I googled two other favourites of mine then - [Pete Atkins](#) (with words by the famous [Clive James](#)) and the [Renaissance band](#)

I visited [Perperikon](#) on Tuesday - an amazing medieval fortress topping a high hill with a superb 360 degree panorama (in the south to and beyond the Greek border). It was built in the place of an ancient Thracian sanctuary, related to the cult towards the Thracian equivalence of the Greek god of wine and feasts, Dionysius (known as Zagrey among the Thracians). It was discovered fairly recently; is still being excavated and is reckoned to have been built some 3,500 years ago - used for ritual sacrifices of animals and people. You have to be pretty fit to scramble up a steep trail for almost a kilometre - and then climb the stone staircases. I'm suffering today (knees)

Yesterday I had just over an hour's drive to Blagoevgrad to visit a workshop on private-public partnership.

Chatted with a couple of the participants and the trainer - then off to see the gallery of my favourite contemporary Bulgarian artist - Yuliana Sotirova. She is a very versatile painter - attracted to old buildings but good also with figures. She is also a sculptor (life size stuff). Before my visit, I had 6 of her paintings - including [a magnificent oil one she did of my father](#)



from a black and white photograph which now hangs in my study in the mountain house. She must have more than 200 paintings in her studio - but after an hour she had 6 fewer.



This is one of a series of small paintings she has done of various church interiors - this one in Salonika. I will post others as space allows in the next few days.

The Guardian is the only UK newspaper I look at and was instrumental in Rupert Murdoch's

recent humiliation. The Editor delivered recently a [stirring \(and rare\) statement of the importance of a strong and free press](#) which everyone should read.

And, if you are a cook and use garlic, this is [a must-see video clip on how to peel a clove in 10 seconds flat](#) without all the usual hassle (as a purist) I threw away my garlic crusher years ago

Friday, October 14, 2011 [Grim times for forgotten people](#)

The house in the past week has been busy with guests - so not much chance to blog but lots of good conversation....wine and rakia. All of which needed in the colder and damp weather now being experienced here. So yesterday saw a trip to Teteven, nestling in the heart of the Balkan mountain range with the crucial aim of picking up local rakia from an old friend of Sylvie - my ex-landlady. After a speedy 80 kilometres on what must be the most scenic highway in the Balkans, a 3rd class road took us 18 kilometres through a lovely plain marked



by signs of decline - but the industrial dereliction of Teteven still shocked us. The town straddles along a river and must have about a dozen derelict plants - of which the picture is typical. The only sign of economic activity is an Italian furniture factory. And a sad story of hopelessness emerged over the superb lunch which awaited us. Elections are in a few weeks - but the political class is seen as irrelevant and venal. I got the impression of a return to Hobbesian conditions - with youngsters having neither jobs nor hope; old people expected to live on a pension of 100 euros a month; and the European Union's agricultural policy having shafted much of the rural self-sufficiency which produced such superb food in the past.

Saturday, October 15, 2011 [Can political and academic leopards change their spots?](#)

Tempus fugit! It's time already to think about a paper for the 2012 NISPAcee Conference - which, again, will be held nearby - at Lake Ohrid in Macedonia.

The two previous papers I have presented at NISPAcee Conferences (in 2007 and 2010) were about the role of Technical Assistance in building the capacity of public bodies in transition countries. They basically argued that -

Technical Assistance based on the logframe approach and competitive tendering is fatally flawed - assuming that a series of "products" procured by competitive company bidding for discrete projects can develop the sort of trust, networking and knowledge on which lasting change depends

- The EC's 2008 "Backbone Strategy" has not improved matters - the audit which led to the review was narrowly focused on procedural issues in the procurement process and the Backbone strategy continues with this bias.
- Few comparative and longitudinal studies have been carried out of administrative reform in transition countries - and in particular of the effectiveness of the various tools in the technical assistance cupboard of administrative reform. The myriad evaluations which the EC commissions of its institution building projects in



the Region are formalistic and difficult to find - largely because of the commercial basis on which most technical assistance in this field is carried out.

- we are, to put it mildly, rather hypocritical in our expectation that tools which we have not found easy to implement in our own countries will work in the more politicised contexts of East Europe and Central Asia.

At the 2012 Conference, I propose to elaborate the latter part of this critique; with respect to three issues -

a. Can the leopard change its spots?

One common thread in those few assessments which have faced honestly the crumbling of reform in the Region is the need to force the politicians to grow up and stop behaving like petulant and thieving magpies. Nick Manning and Sorin Ionitsa both emphasise the need for transparency and external pressures. Cardona and Tony Verheijen talk of the establishment of structures bringing politicians, officials, academics etc together to develop a consensus (see [section 10.4 of this paper on my website](#)). As Ionitsa put it succinctly -

The first openings must be made at the political level - the supply can be generated fairly rapidly, especially in ex-communist countries, with their well-educated manpower. But if the demand is lacking, then the supply will be irrelevant.

This seems to imply an emphasis on civil society and democratisation - rather than institutional development.

b. Over-specialisation and lack of dialogue

Departmental silos are one of the recurring themes in the literature of public administration and reform - but it is often academia which lies behind this problem with its overspecialisation. For example, "Fragile states" and "Statebuilding" are two new subject specialisms which have grown up only in the last few years - and "capacity development" has now become a more high-profile activity. But the specialists in these fields rarely talk to one another - not least because of the professional advantages in pretending that theirs is a new field, with new insights and skills.

c. The superficiality of public management

Institutions grow - and no one really understands that process. Administrative reform has little basis in scientific evidence (See the 99 contradictory proverbs underlying it which Hood and Jackson identified in their (out of print) 1999 book. The discipline of public administration from which it springs is promiscuous in its multi-disciplinary borrowing; new public management (still alive and well) is based on a mixture of dubious managerialism and theoretical eccentricities. Traditional PA was at least aware of politics and history. Technocratic NPM denies both.

My ambitious proposal for the 2012 NISPAcee Conference is to present a paper which will explore these issues through-

- A literature review of comparative assessments of administrative reform in the Region - and of the experience and lessons of the specific tools used
- A tentative exploration of the basis and contribution of the various "disciplines" to our understanding of institutional development

The painting is of St Joan Church on Lake Ohrid - by the famous Atanas Mihov

Sunday, October 16, 2011 [Can government ever change?](#)



The UK Select Committee on Public Administration continues to do useful work – in identifying important questions to probe about the operation of government; and attracting witnesses from all sectors of society (including academia, Ministers and senior officials) to explore the issues with the Committee's members. A few months it produced a report about government IT projects with the great subtitle – "[recipe for rip-off](#)". It is currently exploring the

capacity of the civil service to deal with the Coalition government's ambitious plans for "turning the model government upside down" – through contracting even more of public services to social enterprises. Its initial report [Change in Government – the agenda for leadership](#) came out last month and is tough not so much on the civil service as the government itself –

The Government has embarked on a course of reform which has fundamental implications for the future of the Civil Service, but the Government's approach lacks leadership. The Minister rejected the need for a central reform plan, preferring "doing stuff" instead. We have no faith in such an approach. All the evidence makes clear that a coordinated change programme, including what a clear set of objectives will look like, is necessary to achieve the Government's objectives for the Civil Service. The Government's change agenda will fail without such a plan. We recommend that, as part of the consultation exercise it has promised about the future role of Whitehall, the Government should produce a comprehensive change programme articulating clearly what it believes the Civil Service is for, how it must change and with a timetable of clear milestones. In short, the Government has not got a change programme: Ministers just want change to happen: but without a plan, change will be defeated by inertia.

And this in one of the OECD's "best governed countries" – according to a 2008 World Bank assessment. What chance, then, for the sort of cooperation between policy-makers, senior officials and academics in transition countries called for by the various analysts I quoted yesterday?

The report goes on to set out what it would expect to find in a reform plan –

62. We consider that a number of key factors for success specifically relevant to large-scale Civil Service reform are vital to the success of change programmes in Whitehall:

- a) Clear objectives: there must be a clear understanding of both what the Civil Service is being transformed from and to, as well as the nature of the change process itself. This requires both a coherent idea of the ultimate outcome, but also how clarity on how to ensure coordination of the reform programme and how to communicate that throughout the process.*
- b) Scope: The appropriate scope for the reforms must be established at the outset; with focused terms of reference, but also wide enough to be able to explore all necessary issues.*
- c) Senior buy-in: A political belief that reform is needed must be matched by the same belief within the Civil Service and ministers, and both should be clear on their roles in delivering it. Sustained political support and engagement from all ministers is crucial.*
- d) Central coordination: Either the Cabinet Office or reform units such as the Efficiency and Reform Group*

must drive the change programme. This requires good quality leadership of such units and a method of working which ensures collaboration with departments, and Prime Ministerial commitment.

e) Timescales: There must be a clear timetable with clear milestones to achieve optimal impact and to ensure political support is sustained. The lifespan of the change programme should include the time taken for reforms to become embedded. Two to three years is likely to be the most effective; beyond this period reform bodies may experience mission creep.

63. Measured against the factors for a successful change programme, the Government's approach to Civil Service reform currently falls short. There is no clear or coherent set of objectives, nor have Ministers shown a commitment to a dynamic strategic problem solving approach to change. The Cabinet Office have signalled their commitment to change the culture of Whitehall, but we have not yet found sufficient evidence to imply a coherent change programme. In the absence of leadership from the Cabinet Office, departments are carrying out their individual programmes with limited coordination and mixed levels of success. Without clear leadership or coordination from the centre, setting out, in practical terms, how the reform objectives are to be achieved, the Government's reforms will fail

Useful stuff!

We were snowed upon this morning in Sofia!

The painting is another Yuliana Sotirova which I have my eye on. Has a certain appropriateness for the theme of the post.....

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

The power of images

Last evening was spent very pleasantly at one of [Astry Gallery's](#) great vernissajis, celebrating the opening of yet another exhibition. This time the work of Natasha Atanassova and Nikolay Tiholov. Natasha is on the left and Vihra, the gallery impresario, on the right. And the painting at the top of the post is one of two I bought - this one by Natasha. The second is by Nikolay and is here [Astry Gallery](#) (under Vihra's tutelage) is unique



for me amongst the Sofia galleries in encouraging contemporary Bulgarian painting. Two things are unique - first the frequency of the special exhibitions; but mainly that Vihra follows her passion (not fashion). I am not an art professional - but Vihra has a real art of creating an atmosphere in which people like me can explore. I have been to a couple of other exhibition openings here and they were, sadly, full of what I call "pseuds" - people who talked

loudly (mostly Embassy people) and had little interest in the paintings (except perhaps their investment value). Vihra and her Astry Gallery attract real people who share her passion and curiosity. It is always a joy to pop in there - and talk to her, visitors, artists, other collectors and her father.

Thursday, October 27, 2011

Downside of Sofia Charms?

I've talked several times on the blog about the charm of central Sofia - with its parks and buskers with their retro music; narrow streets, small shops and atmosphere, the owners on the doorstep with a coffee and cigarette talking with friends. Of course the downside of such charm is that those who run the tiny vegetable, dressmakers, tricotage (thread) shops and various types of galleries barely make a living. How many of them are rented, I wonder, and therefore vulnerable to landlord rental hikes and commercial redevelopment? And I wonder how many of those who engage in this sort of soulless redevelopment realise what they are destroying. Is there nothing which can counter this Mammon? Do the city authorities realise what an asset they have? If so, are they doing anything about it? The lady mayor is certainly a huge improvement on her predecessor who, I was told yesterday, used to charge significant sums for those who wanted an audience with him to discuss their problems.



In the Yavorov District on Tuesday - a leafy and lively area near the University and just across from the great park which extends from the Eagle bridge and the football stadium for more than a kilometre east along the Express way which starts the run to the Thracian Valley, Plovdiv and



Burgas. Looked at an elegant old flat which had housed the middle managers of the railways in the 30s in an area otherwise known as a residential one for the military at the beginning of the last century. And ventured into a small basement antique shop which was a real alladin's cave of old Bulgarian and Russian stuff. The prize haul was a set of the small, shaped bottles in which rakia used to be drunk.

They seem to be 1950s or early 1960s - with wry humour stamped on to the glass. I haven't discussed rakia yet in the blog (apart from the blog about the recent visit to Teteven). First time I tasted rakia in 2002, when I sped through the country on the way to the Turkish Aegean, I found it inspid. But I have now had a chance to taste various brands - and compare it with various Romanian palinka - and have become an afficiando. Here is a write up of one brand which won a few years back a silver medal in the International Review of Spirits Award -

Golden salmon colour. Vanilla and toasted nut aromas. nice oily texture. Dryish, vanilla bean oily nut flavors. Finishes with a lightly sweet powdered sugar and pepper fade. A nice texture and finish but could use more on the mid-palate

Finally - a [great blogposts about traditional sheep farming](#) by someone who spent a couple of months with the shepherds and cheese makers in the Carpathians.

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

[Sofia City Gallery scores again!](#)

The Sofia City Art Gallery has put together another excellent exhibition - this time to honour the memory of the Bulgarian Association of New Artists which was active from 1931 to after 1944. Founded in Sofia, its objective was to unite artists with similar aesthetic viewpoints who espoused new trends in art in keeping with movements in western Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Although its first members worked primarily in a realistic manner, around 1936—when membership had grown to 55—other Bulgarian artists who had studied and worked in Paris, Munich and Vienna joined its ranks.



Artists such as Alexandar Zhendov, BENCHO OBRESHKOV, Boris Eliseev, Vera Nedkova, David Perets, Eliezer Alshekh, IVAN NENOV, Kiril Petrov and KIRIL TSONEV contributed more modernist approaches, rejecting academic art, folkloric elements and especially the ideas of Social Realism put into practice by the founders of the Society. An internet review said its members created works with a „sophisticated approach to style, a purity of form and a stable internal structure“. But this sort of jargon doesn't tell me anything - and I have to say that, much as I appreciate this insight into the historical developments of Bulgarian painting and the imaginative way the City Gallery has dealt with it (with blow-ups of the agonised press receptions of the time adorning the gallery's pillars), this is not a genre which particularly appeals to me. But I was deeply impressed with the graphics of Vesselin Staikov and the work of Ivan Penkov and Bronka Gyurova. After 1944 the New Artists' Society was absorbed by the Union of Bulgarian Artists . Many of those who had been members of the Society were declared 'bourgeois artists' by the Communist regime and were no longer able to take part in exhibitions; several, including Alshekh, Elisev and Perets, emigrated.

The frequency of these special exhibitions at the City Gallery (which always borrow works from the country's regional galleries) contrasts so favourably with the lack of imagination shown by the National Gallery just across the road which never changes its permanent exhibition and rarely puts on worthwhile specials (I do remember a great tanev exhibition they mounted a year or so ago. The National Gallery charges about 5 euros - and the City Gallery is free. Therein lies a lessons about the better service generally offered by local government!

The graphic is one of Vesselin Staikov's at the exhibition. In addition to engravings with themes from nature, old towns and mountain villages, Staikov produced a cycle of engravings on the modern city: Sofia with its modern architecture, the clearing of rubble after the air-raids and the construction of new houses and buildings. The artist is also fond of doing ancient, strangely shaped trees. Labour themes occupy an important place in Staikov's work. He shows love and understanding for the worker, the peasant. Some engravings reflect the romanticism of Bulgarian scenery and architecture, others - the primitive force and ruggedness of the village landscape. .

Saturday, December 24, 2011

the charm, yet again, of Sofia!



After 4 years of familiarity with Sofia (almost 3 years in residence) it is typical that I stumbled yesterday on a well-established (and prestigious) gallery focussing on Bulgaria's old masters - hidden away in a charming and old part of Sofia between Prague Bvd and Bvds Makedonia/Totleben. It's [the Tzennotsi Gallery](#) and has the richest collection (in more senses than one) of all the galleries I have visited here.

The picture on the left is a Russi Genchev which the gallery would not deign to keep. This Boris Denev which adorns its spacious display walls is a more appropriate exemple of its exhibits.

And, like, the current exhibition at the City Gallery, there were so many painters of whom I hadn't heard. Some of the paintings seem to have been there for several years (eg some Vladimir Dmitrov's at 20,000 euros in the 2009 Antiques Price Guide) - which makes one wonder about their business model. Clearly they cater for bigger spenders than me! Probably an institutional market ie the banks! Talking of which, one of the nice features of many hotels here in Bulgaria is their display of (in many cases local) paintings.



In the same street as the Gallery (Buzludja) we also found an enticing little Weinstube ([Vestibule Wine Ambassador](#)) which turns out also to be a producer and seller of "bourgeois" furniture. Definitely worth a visit - both in winter for its cosy, traditional interior and in the summer for its garden area at the back. Also in the same street a patisserie with a great range of its own products - including a large apple and walnut cake round for 5 euros!

And we also had an interesting encounter in Tsar Samuel with the sinister Masons. One of the many tiny shops in the area between Hristov Botev and Vitosha with the products of imaginatively-crafted dresses, shawls etc enticed us in and to the purchase of an embroidered cardigan. We were so pleased we readily accepted several small calendar cards which marketed its 50-or so year-old artisan - only to discover when I accessed the website that [it had very strong masonic connections](#). I was so horrified I contemplated returning the cardigan - since, in Scotland, the Masons are a highly divisive force - in the 1970s with a strong and corrupt presence in the police forces. And I remember my (highly tolerant) father - a Scottish Presbyterean Minister - railing against their influence amongst his "Elders". But, in this part of the world where there was so much repression, [perhaps they played a different role?](#) They were certainly outlawed by the fascist forces here in the early 1940s and its members persecuted under the communists. Sadly the intrinsic secrecy of the organisation makes that [difficult to check out properly](#). Their apologists are full of good-sounding rhetoric about freedom and democracy but I cannot take seriously anyone who associates with their silly tribal initiation rituals with trousers at half-mast and quasi-religious artefacts.

Fossils and patting sticks



I spent two Xmas'es working in Baku, Azerbaijan - and very much appreciated the absence of the shopping fever and pressures which characterise these days in the West. Even His Holiness the Pope is apparently lamenting in his Christmas homily that Christmas has become an increasingly commercial celebration.

But Sofia must be one of the best places to be to avoid the crassness of Xmas. True, the walking St (Vitosha) has overhead decorations - but they are modest and hardly noticed.

Otherwise (if you avoid the malls which have opened only in the past few years) things are almost normal.

And some imagination is used to offer special attractions eg a large fossil market was open last week in the *Museum of Natural History* which offered marvellous shapes, sizes and textures at very cheap prices - eg this very aesthetic sea hedgehog fossil which doubles as a paper weight.

Saturday we wanted to buy a "soorooovachka" - a stick decorated with embroidery, dried fruit, coins etc which kids in this part of the world use for patting family, friends and visitors (in Romania its' called "sorkova") whilst saying a wish





for health, wealth and happiness to the one patted.

Bulgarians and Romanians give the child money at the end of the patting which they believe is their way of buying success for the coming year. The women's market - the collection of open air stalls between Bvds Hristo Botev and Elizabeth - was the place to find it. Most of the products are local fruit and vegetables - with the spice stalls being my favourites. Such an incredible variety of spices and medicinal teas! I realise that I haven't posted any video links of Bulgaria yet on the site - [here's a good one to start with](#).

Tuesday, January 3, 2012

[aesthetic pleasures](#)

This blog is a celebration of good writing and living - and the town of Sofia (nestling in the Balkans) and the village of Sirnea (nestling in the Carpathians) take central place in that celebration. Each has its own incredible beauty - for the most part ignored and undervalued by those who live there but so much appreciated by nomads like me. In the last days of 2011, we had the pleasure of discovering yet more Old Masters' paintings in the recently re-opened Bulgary gallery - associated with the Bulgary restaurant www.restaurant.bulgary.bg - which has lovingly recreating the ambiance of old Bulgaria.



Two of the paintings I had admired in the last Viktoria Gallery auction - Dmitrov Nikola's 'River' (1955) and Olga Shishokova's 'Coffee in Karlovo' (1940) were there (as well as most of the Trtitchovs) and were suitably negotiated into my collection. The Shishkova heads today's post and Dmitrov's below.

Today's wanderings unearthed a small, new gallery on Sulunska St with old masters such as Boris Mitov and Stanio Stomatev.

And also a glorious book celebrating, in poetic black and white pictures, the beauty which can be found adorning the older Sofia buildings - if

only you look behind the peeling walls and high enough ! It's called 'Sofia Enigma-Stigma' by Milchev and is available (in Bulgarian and English text) from <http://www.enthusiast.bg/> for only 7 euros.

Wednesday, January 18, 2012

Neglect of Bulgarian painting patrimony



We reached Razgrad via a quiet country road from Targovishte with the sparkling snow fading as we hit the vineyards. Razgrad is a fairly isolated town of 40-50,000 people lying on the plain between Russe on the Danube and Varna on the Black Sea. Its town centre is clean and lively - with the huge mosque (which I have on one of my paintings) acting as the centre for the pedestrian area in which the attractive and modern-looking municipal gallery is located.

Typically however, it being 12.10, it was closed for the long lunch break and - despite the seductive poster advertising a special exhibition - we moved on for Russe on the basis that we could visit next week when a workshop is being held nearby.

I've wanted to visit the [Russe municipal gallery](#) for some time - the town, after all, has more than 200,000 people; has been an important port on the Danube for a long time; and has a proud tradition of culture - with quite a few well-known painters to its name eg Marko Monev. And the gallery was not difficult to find - the girls in the OBV petrol station at the central station roundabout knew it was just round the corner. However the gallery is in a scandalous state for such a city - with (a) no heating and (b) the paintings in one of the three rooms lying propped on the floor with no means of identification. Unlike all the other regional galleries I've visited in Bulgaria, the Russe one charges for entrance - OK only 50 pence - but that does raise expectations a little. No Monev paintings were on display but there were some superb works from Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistera, Atanas Mihov, Benchko Obreshkov and Nenko Balkanski - all, however, at risk from the disgraceful conditions. What was even more galling was that an expensive book was on offer - at 25 euros - celebrating 75 years of the gallery. It must have cost 5,000 euros to produce - money which would have been much better spent to keep the paintings in a safer condition.

I can understand the galleries of smaller municipalities being in poor conditions - but there is absolutely no excuse for this neglect for a city such as Russe. Places like Razgrad and Kazanlak - with one fifth of the population - clearly do so much better! Pity the poor young warden who sat wrapped up and freezing in his cubicle as I happily snapped the choicer exhibits.

What sort of future does he have? He shrugged his shoulders when I asked about the Monev paintings - and smiled sadly when I asked if there was a feedback book available for me to make my comments! At the very least, the city authorities should relocate the paintings to a smaller place which is easier to heat! And it doesn't take much money to produce a CD of the gallery collection. Of course art galleries are a municipal responsibility and rightly so. And the Sofia and Kazanluk galleries show what can be done by committed local authorities and staff - with both organising special exhibitions and having a range of products (including CDs) for sale. But the protection of Bulgarian painting patrimony is surely a national issue.

Friday, March 2, 2012

[Vagabond in Bulgaria](#)

The snow had melted sufficiently by the weekend to allow me to drive down to the flat in Sofia - the snow was still lying in the Romanian fields but no longer in the Bulgarian ones. Midweek, however, the snow struck again! Earlier in the month, when snow melted in the south, the walls of a dam in the south of the country had crumbled and an entire village was inundated - with 10 deaths. The history and management of the dam give [a good insight into governance issues in this part of the world](#). Noone apparently understands what its purpose was and its ownership was split between three bodies - with obvious (and tragic) results. The story appears in the current issue of [Bulgaria's monthly English magazine Vagabond](#) which is always a good read. The current issue gave me [useful data on the property market](#)



Property prices in Bulgaria will continue to fall, experts say, but it is difficult to predict whether the downward trend will be gradual or whether the property market will crash like it did in 2009. In Sofia, the average price of residential property is 40 percent lower than in 2008, as buyers now typically pay 700-750 euros per square metre. The majority of properties are bought by first-time buyers, usually young families, who take out mortgages to buy small flats. Russians continue to be the chief purchasers of holiday properties.

Another article also threw some light on another issue which has been vexing me very recently - relating to interactions between foreigners like me and Bulgarians.

An Italian friend of mine spent almost a decade here, building up a great network of contacts - which, ultimately, did nothing to further his prospects. He left the country with some bitter



comments about outsiders never being accepted here. At the time I simply could not agree since I have quite a few people here I count as real friends. However, I have noticed recently the different assumptions about hospitality. I am very open - but find it difficult to get many friends to visit me in my flat. And it is rare to receive an invitation. An article by a Professor of multi-cultural communication confirms the point that inviting foreigners to one's home is a very big deal here - and makes the point in relation to facial expressions that "if you smile at people they will think you are either laughing at them or that there is something wrong with you"!! Little wonder that I was viewed as a madman initially by some of my local staff when I headed a project here in 2007/08!

The current issue also contains an article about the great network of small rural guesthouses here in Bulgaria where you can eat local produce; get friendly family hospitality and access to great leisure pursuits

(including horse-riding). A great Guide from [the Bulgarian Alternative Tourism Association](#) can be [downloaded here](#)

And, if you are into serious mountain climbing, then this looks a great organisation to [contact for advisers and guides](#)

While I'm on the subject, here's also an outsider's view of [the top 15 places to visit in Bulgaria](#). And also a nice piece (in English if you scroll down) [about Balçık in the far North-East corner](#) which used to belong to Romania.

I've been renewing my contact with some of the small galleries here in Sofia and saw a nice-looking and well-sized Zhekov for 1,500 euros - the same price a picture of his went for in the December Victoria Auction. The painting at the top of this post is a Zhekov - which hopefully explains why he is one of the top Bulgarian painters for me.

In a small antique shop very nearby which seems now to be stocking painters from the genre and period I like, a superb (anonymous) painting of Rila Monastery from the mid 20th century was to be had for 150 euros.

And the painting above is Vladimir Kavaldjiev from the 1960s was on sale at a 2010 auction for 750 euros but can now be had for 600.

Sunday, March 4, 2012

Liberation and Loss in Bulgaria

I knew something was special when I saw the Bulgarian flag stuck out of a neighbour's window yesterday morning; small national flags for sale in pedestrianised Vitosha Blvd; and a small crowd watching the changing of the guard at the Presidency. Young people told us it was Liberty Day - from which I thought it was Independence Day - but that in fact is September 22 and marks the declaration of Bulgaria as a sovereign nation. March 3 is in fact a more bitter-sweet date for the Bulgarians since it marks the day in 1878 when Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed [the San Stefano Treaty](#) which gave the country autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire after 500 years of Ottoman domination.

It was also awarded a large landmass (indeed access to the Aegean Sea) but lost a significant part of this new territory later the same year at the Berlin Congress (the Macedonian and Greek parts in the left and bottom of the map). According to Wikipedia

The Treaty was in fact a preliminary one but, almost immediately, became the central point of Bulgarian foreign policy, lasting until 1944 and led to the disastrous Second Balkan War and Bulgaria's even more disastrous participation in World War I. The enlarged Bulgaria envisioned by the treaty alarmed neighboring states as well as France and Great Britain. As a result, it was never implemented, being superseded by the Treaty of Berlin following the Congress of the same name.

On the square round the corner from the President's Palace, we found about 30 buses parked - with signs from Bulgaria's main towns. A Russian and Yiddish German speaking Bulgarian photographer



with whom I tried to elicit more info in Russian could cast no light on where the bus passengers were - or for what purpose.

As we approached the imposing Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, we could hear martial music. I thought this was part of the national celebrations but it quickly turned out to be part of the neo-fascist Ataka party's takeover of the celebrations. I'm not religious myself but I found highly offensive the scaffolding they had constructed over the entrance to the Cathedral and the the military music which pored from it. Presumably the church authorities were in on this? The banner which topped the scaffolding demanded freedom from foreign control.

As I turned away in disgust (from the aggression and context rather than message), I was hit with even more loud and aggressive rock music being played by louts on an open-lorry which led an Ataka demonstration of about 4,000 just as it was turning into the square. [According to the news report](#)

the march had started from the National Palace of Culture all the way through downtown Sofia to the "Nevsky" square, with several stops, such as the buildings of the Finance and Economy Ministries. There, Ataka leader, Volen Siderov, demanded the resignation of their respective ministers for betraying national interests and working for colonizers and for the impoverishment of Bulgarians. Siderov delivered a 50-minute-long speech, asking for decent jobs for all Bulgarians, European wages (current rates are about 15% of the EU average), eliminating monopolies and transferring all business back to Bulgarian hands. He accused European leaders of trying to cut Bulgaria to pieces, as all Great Forces have done, not caring about Bulgarian people and their well-being, and labeled the EU the "new Soviet Union." The nationalist leader further slammed Prime Minister, Boyko Borisov, and his cabinet of not doing anything to improve the situation for fellow countrymen and women. At the end of the speech, Siderov, appealed to all, who are banging him and want his post, to have the courage to look him in the eye and tell him what they want and let people be the judge. "Any action against Ataka only serves Turkish and Gipsy interests, and all enemies of Bulgaria," he said.



A lot of old people from all over over Bulgaria had come to take part in the march and register their disgust with how the world has treated them in the past 20 years. In that sense, it was not quite what you expect to see in a demonstration by an aggressive neo-fascist group.

It was a very subdued and sad group of people who shuffled past us.

After the march had passed, we tried to engage an elderly man in conversation, but he

insisted very proudly that he spoke only Bulgarian.

Bulgarian labour costs per hour were 3 euros in 2010 compared with an EU average of 25 euros - but the 20% plus rate which has been registered in the past years has caused [a warning to be issued recently by the EC](#)

The Bulgarian Finance Ministry doesn't see it that way. It notes that lately the country's current account deficit has declined - from 23.1 percent of GDP in 2008 to 8.9 percent for 2009 to just 1.3 percent for 2010, tracking closely with the advance of the financial crisis. What's more, the

ministry says, the current account for 2011 will show a surplus, amounting to 1.8 percent of GDP. While the Finance Ministry argued about numbers, some Bulgarian commentators went straight to outrage. "Some ... in Brussels forget that besides the relative numbers, there are also absolute ones," wrote Svetoslav Terziev in the *Sega* (Now) newspaper. "The average monthly salary in Bulgaria is 350 euros and Oli Rehn's is 22,122."

Very fair point! Cost of living is cheaper here but not one eighth cheaper - which it would need to be for those on lower incomes to survive. More like 60% of costs in any other European capital than the 12% required by labour costs!

I'm happy to accept the going rate for consultants here - which is half what I would get for work in Central Asia and at least a quarter of what I might normally expect in the UK (although I suspect the public sector redundancies there have driven the rate). My fee, however, is still ten times that of the average daily wage here!!

Ataka (and Bulgarian commentators) are quite right to target the EC bureaucrats whose behaviour, typically, is calculated to destroy the whole European edifice.

Monday, March 5, 2012

[picking up Voltaire's Coconuts](#)

A second-hand English bookshop here in Sofia which boasts 10,000 titles - this is [the Elephant Bookstore](#). Go down Rakovski St from the square in front of Alexander Nevski Cathedral, cross Dundorov Bv and its on your left - although somewhat disguised at the back of a tea Shop which you have to enter through a large iron gate.



The collection is in a tiny space - with the books piled to a high ceiling. I emerged with 5 or 8, depending on how you count them since one was a bumper collection of four West of Scotland novels written variously between the 1930s to 1980s entitled *Growing up in the West* and containing no less than 4 different books - Edwin Muir (*Poor Tom*) by one of Scotland's most respected writers of the 20th century and three less well-known writers - JF Hendry (*Fernie Brae*), Gordon M Williams (*From Scenes like these*) and Tom Gallacher (*The Apprentice*). Although the last was published in 1983 and is based on life and shipyard work in the 1950s in my home town (Greenock), I was not aware of the book or the writer. Many people say there was a renaissance of Scottish writing in the 1980s - but I would suggest that this is to underestimate what was being produced fairly consistently in the 20th century in this small country of 5 million people. I'll say something more shortly about this.

Another book was also an unknown [Voltaire's Coconuts - or anglomania in Europe](#) by Ian Buruma an under-rated writer who was born a Dutchman, writes now in English and has lived in Japan, UK and America. The book brings many European historical figures to life eg Voltaire, Goethe, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Marx - all from the perspective of their attitude to the structure of English life and government. It starts with Voltaire's famous query - "Why can't the laws that guarantee British liberties be adapted elsewhere?"

Having been imprisoned in the Bastille for publishing a satirical poem on religious persecution in France, Voltaire travelled to England to find his model of tolerance and liberty. As a universalist and a rationalist, the French philosopher assumed that these virtues could be transplanted elsewhere, and most especially to the France of the ancien Regime. Anticipating objections on the lines of "you might as well ask why coconuts, which bear fruit in India, do not ripen in Rome" he stated that it took time for those (legal) coconuts to ripen in England too. There is no reason, he said, why they shouldn't do well everywhere, even in Bosnia and Serbia. So let's start planting them now."

What Voltaire essentially admired in England was the theory of equality before the law and the separation of legislative and executive powers. England in the 18th and 19th centuries was seen by prominent French and German figures in many regards in the way we now view the United States of America - full of dynamism, workshop of money but with rather uncouth, disrespectful citizens and media.

A 1998 edition of JK Galbraith's 1958 [The Affluent Society](#) was the next book - this one with a foreward in which the author assessed what time had done to his analysis. One of the reviews I unearthed was by writer and left-wing Labour MP John Strachey in the long-defunct [Encounter magazine](#). Here is [a highly viewable video of Galbraith reminiscing](#),

Books by Saul Bellow (The Adventures of Augie March) and Louis de Bernieres (Captain Corelli's Mandolin) rounded off my purchases - all for the total price of 17 euros! Such is the joy of serendipity in foreign bookshops - and this one in particular!

The cafe also has a great atmosphere and buzz - being Sunday, parents and kids were present, with lost of activities for the latter. My one complaint is that a lot of the books were disfigured - apparently deliberately - with the back page of the cover having been torn off. This is pure sacrilege - I have never come across this apparent policy.....

I have, on this blog, already posted links to [surveys of the literature from small countries in central europe](#) particularly Hungary which I offered in [a discussion about the subject on another blog](#). The Irish are well-known as good story- tellers and writers- whether it is George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, WB Yeats, Louis McNeice or, more recently, William Trevor, John Banville, John McGahern or Sebastian Barry. As a Scot, I have an obvious bias in suggesting that the quality and quantity of the Scottish literary output of the past 80 years is on a par with the European best (Latin American and China are something else!!). For [an introduction see this assessment](#) and this [listing of the best 100 Scottish books](#)

Friday, March 9, 2012

Sliven's excellent galleries

Sliven, with 100,000 inhabitants, is half the size of neighbouring Stara Zagora; also has a dramatic location with mountains rising sheer from behind; but has a more run-down appearance. I associate the town with two things - the painter Dobro Dobrev (1918-1973) and excellent white wine (Vini Sliven which has become very difficult to find now in Sofia; Windy Hills I have not yet tasted)!

And the town has done Dobrev proud - with some 50 of his paintings on permanent display in a superb National Revival house. Here I found the painting which had so attracted me in the special exhibition mounted 2 years ago by the Sofia City Gallery - with the fingers of the man at the cafe so clearly drawn!

I was taken to the Gallery by Evelin who had been kind enough to show me round the Sirak Stitnik Gallery which is the town's main gallery - with a collection just as good as that I saw the previous day in the neighbouring town.



Not only the country's greats such as Tanev, Abadjiev and Boris Denev but a special exhibition of the graphics of a new painter for me - Kozuharev, Nikola (1892-1971).

He's famous apparently for his mythological and historical paintings but was also a war artist - covering the Balkan War and First World Wars - and some of these sketches were on display. This painting is of the capture of Bulgaria's greatest freedom-fighter - Vassil Levski. Unfortunately, there was no heating in the place - like the Russe and Targovishte galleries

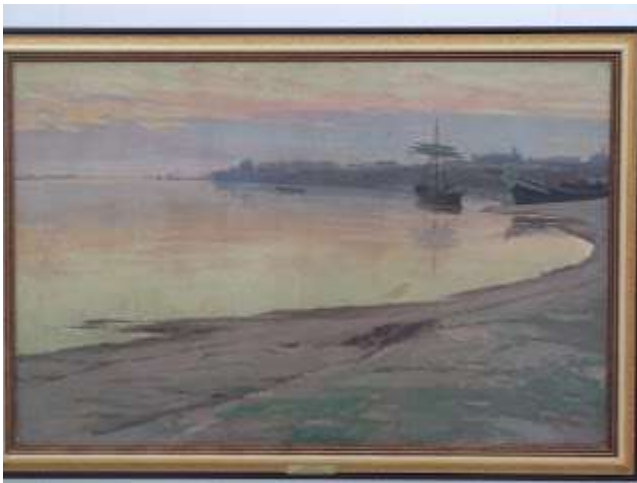
[A good display in Stara Zagora](#)

Stara Zagora was reached in exactly 3 hours - along an excellent motorway which, however, peters out at that point. It has a superb location with the Balkan mountains as a majestic backcloth. It was completely destroyed by the Turks in 1877 for welcoming the Russian army of General Gurko and was subsequently rebuilt on a strict grid-plan with leafy Boulevards.

I therefore had no problems finding the Art gallery which is a most impressive one - well maintained and offering, for 1 euro, 3 separate exhibitions.



The permanent one displays some of the works of the many painters who have been born and worked there - eg Anton Mitov, Mario Zhekov and Atanas Mihov (1879-1974) who, with Zhekov and Dobre Dobrev, is now becoming one of my real favourites. Paintings by Nikola Tanev, Ivan Penkov (below) and Moutafov were also on display.



The Gallery also offered a collection of women's portraits and, finally, a display of woodcuts and graphics in a temperature controlled room.

A superb book *The Artists of Stara Zagora* was also available - produced by the Gallery Director Marin Dobrev who was kind enough to sign it for

me. And I was allowed to snap many of the paintings - without flash, of course. The exhibits were so enthralling I spent almost two hours in total there - with a return visit after the lunchbreak.

Many new names - eg Vasil Marinov and a great portraitist Elizabeth Konsulova-Vazova (1881-1965)

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

[A painting privilege in Shumen](#)

Another workshop at Targovishte - and the morning swim and exercise we have now started in Sofia (just round the corner in at Rodina Hotel) left no time to pop in to see the Veliko Tarnovo Gallery (about which I haven't heard anything in any case). But I had learned that Shumen has [an interesting gallery from this link I had accidentally come across](#). The town of Shumen (80 kms from Varna and the Black Sea) is a bit unprepossessing as you drive in - with decaying 1950s residential blocks. But its centre is a pleasant surprise, with one the largest pedestrian areas I have ever seen - with trees, a theatre, statues and a mountain range behind. Its upper side is graced with a series

of old, large official buildings - of which a mock Italian palace (the police station) is perhaps the most interesting.



Aladdin's Cave.

The Elena Karamihaylova Gallery was known only by two elderly ladies and was initially a disappointment - since the second floor containing the permanent collection was closed for reconstruction. But conversations with 3 (of the 7) staff managed to convey our love of Bulgarian painting and the Director graciously presented us with an attractive pack containing 20 postcards of the paintings, a CD and a small booklet giving the history of the collection and short notes on the artists.

When, however, I mentioned the name Alexander Moutafov (who was apparently born in Shumen), it was literally the key to open an

Valentina Velikova, the paintings expert, took us to the archives where we saw the collection (of 1,300 items) stored and filed. And she was kind enough to find and pull out for our inspection various portraits by Elena Karamihaylova and paintings by Nikola Tanev, Alexander Moutafov and Stanio Stamatov. Marvellous to have a chance to handle such work. And great that a small gallery should have developed such a nice pack. They are rare amongst Regional galleries in having a CD - only Kazanlak (so far on my travels) has offered such a product. It is so simple, cheap to create - and so necessary given the large numbers of paintings which are doomed to spend their life in basement archives!

During the journey, I had said that I did not think that Brits had made their home in this part of the country - but, on the way back to the hotel, we popped into a Lidl supermarket and got into conversation with a British couple who have been living in a village outside Shumen for the past 5 years. They told us that quite a few Brits were in the area.

Friday, March 16, 2012

[setting priorities in municipal services](#)

[Razgrad's Ivan Petrov Gallery](#) proved worth the wait. Housed in a superb, modernised and specially-designed building (with EC funding) in the heart of the town right next to the well-kept mosque, it has an enthusiastic Director, Todor Todorov, who personally showed us round the collection on display. This included about 6 Danail Dechevs, a Tanev, a Boris Denev, several Vladimir Dimitrovs and two painters so far unknown to me - Maxim Tsankov (1877-1965) and Kosta Petrov (1894-1973).



Unfortunately Vodafone here in Romania does not give me the capacity to upload a photo from my camera - that will have to await my return to Bulgaria (on Sunday we go to a workshop at Balciik on the Black Sea for a couple of days. The art gallery there is also well worth a visit - as befits an area which has attracted so many painters.) In the meantime I post another example of Dechev's work which has smaller capacity.

Razgrad's permanent exhibition also includes an excellent graphics collection.

The gallery's catalogue is the best I have seen - with coloured reproductions and English as well as Bulgarian notes on the paintings and painters. It also has a website - although still, clearly, in the process of construction.

Razgrad's gallery, therefore, must go to the top of my unofficial list of best housed, managed and documented regional galleries in Bulgaria - with Stara Zagora a close second. Russe is the worst. Of course, these are not necessarily the best criteria - for example the poorly-housed Targovishte Gallery was abuzz with a group of school-kids - and the unheated Skitnik gallery in Sliven sponsors an annual Plein Air summer school. Such local access and use should clearly be the core of the mission of any art gallery.

I find these differences an interesting example of the effects and importance of local government - although I've made the point here before that the proper maintenance of older paintings which are part of a country's national patrimony has national significance. The lack of heating which threatens so many paintings in Bulgaria's regional art galleries is a disgrace - but perhaps it is too easy to put this down to lack of municipal funding. I found it curious that one of the galleries I visited had 7 staff. Of course I never like to recommend job-shedding but, in this case, perhaps lack of heating simply shows a poor sense of budgetary priorities!

The Razgrad Gallery is the only one I have seen which has used Regional Funds to make such a major refurbishment - which shows both official initiative and political support. I still have to visit Balçik, Burgas, Dobrich, Veliko Tarnovo and Pleven Galleries - and pay homage at Svishtov to Nikola Taney. I doubt, however, whether I will find a better gallery!

A Year Ago;

I offered a very useful annotated bibliography on [the economic aspects of social change](#).

Monday, March 19, 2012

Artists' Paradise

Bulgaria's North-East (like most of its other extremities) is pretty poor. It has known better days. The Black Sea was like a mill pond yesterday - and the blue skies and sun had Balchik's small promenade full. The small town which clings to the white sandstone cliffs is popular with both Bulgarians and Romanians - it is only 30 kilometres or so from the border and did indeed belong to Romania for almost 30 years. After the Second Balkan War, in 1913, the town, styled Balçik, became part of the Kingdom of Romania and was much loved by its Queen Mary. It was regained by Bulgaria during World War I (1916-1919), but Romania restored its authority when hostilities in the region ceased. Quite a lot of the Romanian bourgeoisie built villas - many of which have collapsed due to the soil subsidence which is a problem in the area.



But in 1940, just before the outbreak of World War II in the region, Balchik was ceded by Romania to Bulgaria. When we were last here - 10 years ago (on the way back from a trip to Turkey) - our landlady lowered her voice to speak Romanian.

The town's art gallery has apparently paintings from that period by Romanian artists - who were charmed by the strong muslim air the town had in those days. [The gallery's website](#) understandably uses the language of "occupation" when it talks about "the group of eleven Romanian artists who have painted Balchik during the occupation of Dobroudzha". The group includes two favourites of mine - Alexandru Satmari and Samuel Mutzner. Many Bulgarian artists have taken the air here - not least Mario Zhekov (I don't think the villa shown in this painting of his survives) - and the area also boasts famous cliffs further north.

Sadly, however, the permanent collection was closed - due to reconstruction (as with Shumen, the charming young woman could offer no firm date for its re-opening). But a few of the Romanian paintings were on display - as well as a temporary exhibition of paintings by an 84 year old Nedelcho Nanov - mostly miniatures of the area painted variously in the 1960s and 2000s.

He is now based in Sofia - and this "Interior" was, for me, particularly intriguing.



A trip north to Kavarna - which was also a painter's haunt - was, however, disappointing. The town has been built back from the sea - and a curious remote stretch of road leads to the sea and to an eerie ghost town of half-finished modern blocks of tourist flats. The one positive feature of the town was its gleaming new sports facilities.....

A forest of wind turbines as we approached the town suggested a progressive mayor - but turned out to be linked to horrific new golf

courses and the usual alien complexes of the rich associated with them. There was even a special Italian/Bulgarian furniture chain standing at the side of the road out of Balchik catering for these aliens. "Green" electricity is apparently more expensive than the local!

Tomorrow we hope to see the [Dobrich Art Gallery](#) collection the way back to Sofia (they assure me that it is possible to see the permanent exhibits!). That gallery offers a first for Bulgarian regional galleries - [a blog!](#)

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

[An interesting conversation in Dobrich](#)

Dobrich is some 30 kilometres inland from Balchik and has the look and feel of a town double its official size of 93,000 citizens. Its central square is one of the largest I have ever seen - and is adorned by various large buildings, one of which (previously the Court of Justice built under the "occupation") now houses the extensive art collection - which you can find listed on the [town's excellent \(English\) website](#) (at the end of its list of cultural centres)

While we were admiring the small special exhibition of Vladimir Dimitrov - the Master's work, we were approached by the Gallery's Director, Evelina Handzhieva who speaks excellent French and, very graciously, gave us a personal tour of her domain. It started with a group of schoolkids who were receiving some interactive training in the process of paper-making - the gallery, uniquely, has a collection of paperworks produced by the participants of a recent international event held here.



Separate sections are devoted to the gallery's collection of sculptures and prints - and to local artists as well as old masters - such as this rare work of Ivan Mrkvichka (1856-1938),

one of two Czechs (the other is Jaroslav Vesin) who are credited with setting Bulgarian painting on its modern path.

The breadth of the collection is one of the widest I have seen (with a nice mix of older and contemporary). The exhibition space is so extensive that the tour took more than an hour -



with Daniela being loaned a coat to protect her against the cold (no heating again).

I was very taken with this contemporary work by Plaven Valchev (born 1951). I have been nicely received in all of the Regional galleries I have visited in Bulgaria - but this was the first time I was able to have a proper conversation about the problems of running galleries here at this time. Over a cup of tea, Evelina (like all the Directors here I've met an artist herself) explained that it is the Ministry of Culture who set a formula which dictates the number of staff to which regional galleries are entitled. So much for local government autonomy!!



And, in Dobrich's case, with such an huge palace, the staff of 12 (including 2 cleaners and 3 attendants) is simply insufficient. There is no surveillance system - so security is labour-intensive. As was evident from the number of brochures, the Director is highly proactive in seeking out opportunities for marketing and funding (A Swiss Foundation was mentioned) and the Gallery's CD lists the various international exhibitions (eg China and Slovakia) which have been mounted with the support of Embassies here. But it is an uphill struggle - a good venture of bussing tourists from the beaches nearby during the summer fizzled out. It is not easy to produce a winning formula for such a problem. But one thing is clear for me - it requires local solutions and this means removing the dead hand of central control - and encouraging networking between galleries (national and international), hotels, businesses (eg the new owners of the rich agricultural land and the golf courses!!) and educational establishments. Don't get me wrong - national financial support needs to be maintained (otherwise the galleries could be at more risk)) but on the basis of more imagination.....

This is a detail of the Valchev painting

Thursday, March 22, 2012

Fine example of 1980s art



Hats off (again!) to [Vihra Pesheva of Astry Gallery here](#) who has mounted another wonderful celebration of an older Bulgarian artist. This time it is a extensive collection of the work of Vassil Valev from the 1980s. Valev was born in 1934 in a village near Burgas - and his oil and aquarelle work from this period focusses on that. He was Director for a time of Targovishte Art Gallery and is now still a Professor. His intro on the website says simply

I was born in the village where I spent my childhood and teen years. Many of my stories relate to the village: Cow yards, neighbours gossiping, rural suburbs, rural toil. Even my landscapes from Sofia are the suburbs rather than the noisy city centre. The characters in my paintings are working people, often elderly, those suffering...

AsVihra puts it - "Bulgaria's period under the socialist regime still arouses complex emotions. The art from this period is, variously, denied, ignored or treated as a collector's genre rather than appreciated individually. But it is part of our cultural heritage and Vassil Valev's work offers a rare depth". Whether showing tobacco harvesters, Iraqi nomads or family groups, the works (often gouache) show a deep human sympathy.

Vihra does not have a lot of space in her small gallery - but this time her exhibition offers not only the oils on the wall but a collection of unmounted aquarelles in folders. The average price is about 500 levs. Some of them, for me, have the Ilyia Beshkov touch.

All this in addition to the display of oils and small sculptures in the entrance area from other living artists always makes her gallery a joy to visit.

Monday, March 26, 2012

Cultural tourism in Bulgaria



Yesterday I found another [charming little private gallery \(Loran\)](#) exhibiting works from the mid century.

This got me surfing the net to try to find some information about these art journals of the early and mid part of the century. I drew a blank but did come across some interesting material on [the Bulgarian cultural heritage](#) - not least some grim experiences one young painter had [during the the Communist period](#). How artists coped during communist repression is a fascinating subject - some (like Boris Denev and Nikolai Boiadjiev refused to toe the official line on painting and

almost stopped painting); many other moved into theatre design and cinema). Things had eased by the 1980s largely due to the influence of PM Zhivkov's daughter who was a great art afficiando!

I unearthed an interesting paper on [how the communist heritage could be used as part of a cultural tourist strategy](#) (which missed this human dimension) and another paper (by the same Dobrich author) on [how Bulgaria might develop a strategy for cultural tourism](#).

Also an interesting [example of how some of the treasures here are ignored](#) even by the locals.

The gouache above may look a little like a Beshkov - but is actually one of the V Vulev's I bought a few days ago in Vihra's Gallery

Sunday, April 22, 2012

Balkan idyll in the sun?

The latest issue of Vagabond has an interesting article on the fate of many working class Brits who were attracted a decade ago by British TV programmes to buy cheap property in the Bulgarian countryside. The piece is called [British homes across rural Bulgaria lie empty. Where have all the people gone?](#) and makes the following interesting points -

The Britons who came at this time had never had the financial assets to dabble in UK property, nor any experience of speculation. Obsessed with land ownership and investment potential, the idea of a life in the sun without a mortgage was just too big a dream to pass up. By day, they would wrestle physically on village streets and by night, sedated by the tropical chirping of crickets, cheap alcohol and impossibly attractive waitresses, they would discuss their numerous purchases and renovation plans.

It was basically so damn cheap and easy, the exchange rate was good and the Bulgarians more than willing to ship old baba off to a flat in town, vacating the decaying village home, previously considered worthless. Everything was for sale and everything was within their budget. We



felt like Allan Sugar and Donald Trump all rolled into one!

But few actually thought about the implications of a life spent in a rural village. Might not self-sufficiency be difficult, when you have never looked after a plant or a pet before? It's not actually sunny all year round. Winter can be bloody freezing and then there is the complex Bulgarian language.

The British in Britain harp on endlessly about immigrants who can't speak English. They harbour a deep resentment against anyone who would have the audacity to arrive on British soil without being absolutely fluent in English. Taking up residence here, this irony goes unnoticed as they proceed to shout louder and gesticulate more wildly, in the hope that Bulgarians will understand. Few villagers would really expect you to arrive speaking their small nation's incredibly difficult language, but they do appear a little shocked that most have no idea of Russian, French or German, all languages many "simple" rural people can actually use rather well. Welcome to neo-colonialism on a village scale. My wealth here gives me status and power. If you want a share, speak to me in Enger-lish!

Not surprisingly the number of British residents here in Bulgaria has fallen dramatically - from a peak apparently of about 40,000 in the boom times to about 5,000 now. Even for those prepared to make an effort to integrate, there have been pitfalls to navigate -

Many have fallen foul of unscrupulous British agents and tradesmen who preyed on gullible and frightened newcomers. Naturally distrustful of the foreign and non-English speaking Bulgarians, they turned to their fellow expats for assistance, only to lose everything. Stories of thousands of pounds sent for renovations which were never started, thefts and houses sold several times over are the expat urban myths of rural Bulgaria.

Loneliness, culture shock and alcoholism have also played a significant role, as have unrealistic financial planning or the complete lack of it in some cases. These people, however, have largely returned home, tail between their legs, once again to plug back into our cosy little social security system. Maybe that's the point to all this. We are a spoilt and privileged nation, and with the numerous financial safety nets Brits have to fall back on, we have little need for research or planning prior to making these life-altering decisions. If it all goes "belly up" we can go home and start again, courtesy of the State. We will be OK. A house, an income, healthcare and education, all for free. We can take enormous risks on crazy, un-thought through dreams based on little more than sunshine, and not worry about ending up with nothing, destitute and ruined. Maybe if we had to plan more and actually think about what we could lose, we wouldn't take such insane risks with our families' futures. But, that said, it's these very same attributes that have brought some Britons to successfully integrate in villages across Bulgaria. This new and vital human influx has given many rural communities a tiny but significant fighting chance, against the mass tide of urbanisation and the possibility of remaining on the world map for a few more decades to come.

The wood carving was one of two I have just bought from Svetlin Mitov who is a great wood sculptor who has a stall at the corner of the SUM building near the Mosque. This original cost only 40 euros!

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

Introducing the Bulgarian Realists

What would be achieve without deadlines? Or, as Doctor Johnson said,

"Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his mind wonderfully"!

The knowledge that I will be away from Sofia for some four months at least has put sufficient pressure on me to be able to fill in a lot of the gaps I had in the text of my draft booklet on Bulgarian Realist painting of the last century - and to decide to go for a modest first venture of a 60 page booklet with an accompanying CD Rom.

Yassen (here in the Konus Gallery) and Evelina (in the Dobrich municipal gallery) have been very helpful in supplying me with much needed information on a dozen or so of the painters. But, typically, I keep encountering at this stage, new artists and new information.

First a glorious 1987 book on the satirist Marko Behar (1914-73) which my friend Alexander Aleksiev drew to my attention on Sunday at his tiny Alladin's cave at 38 Tsar Asen St. Behar combined elements of Grosz, Kollwitz and Beshkov - but was very much his own man. I imagine him a bit like Bert Brecht - the German poet of the period.

And then late Monday afternoon, I was cycling around various galleries to ensure I had the right names and addresses for the Annexes to the booklet and went into [the Lorian Gallery](#) which I discovered recently at 16 Oborishte St in the University area. Recently moved to this location, they have a smallish display downstairs with more expensive stuff upstairs eg a Tanev. They have started to produce special books on artists - and I was shown a delightful one on an artist I had never heard of - Margarita Milidjiiska. And their current exhibition also introduced me to another new painter (for me) - Boris Dankov who produced charming landscapes in the 1960s. Anyway, at 08.30 this morning, I duly delivered the final text of the booklet - now entitled [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings](#) - to the designers.

The painting at the top of the post is my latest acquisition a Georgi Velchev who lived from 1891-1955.



Saturday, April 28, 2012

Great art in Sofia



A flurry of artistic activity, starting on Thursday morning with a visit to the designers of my booklet on Bulgarian Realists to organise the CD which will accompany it (with 800 photos of Bulgarian paintings of that period); and to get an initial rough copy.

This last was particularly needed to take with me to the midday invitation I had received to visit what had been the home of one of Bulgaria's great painters - Tsanko Lavrenov. The invitation came from his grandson (Plaven Petrov, now the owner of the Loran Gallery) who has turned the flat in one of Sofia's nice

old areas into a great showpiece for this self-taught artist from Plovdiv.

Born in 1896, Lavrenov viewed with suspicion the new artistic trends coming from Western Europe, wanting instead to establish a style more faithful to local traditions. He spent considerable time in monasteries in the area and on Mount Athos, studying the paintings and books in the archives. He was a close friend of Zlatyu Boadjiev and Danail Dechev.

Plaven had been impressed that a foreigner was so interested in Bulgarian art as to prepare and publish - at his own expense - a booklet on the subject. Over wine, we explored some of the peculiarities of the Bulgarian market. Then an inspection of the superb collection he has of his grandfather's paintings. He was kind enough to present me with this print signed by Lavrenov himself.

Evening saw another great Vernissaj at Vihra's Astry Gallery - this time showing some of young Maria Raycheva's output from a visit she made recently to Paris.

Notre Dame and the Seine must be the most over-painted subjects of all time. Tackling them again runs therefore the risk of boredom - the artistic equivalent of a cliché.



And I feel that the painting shown behind Maria in the photograph does fall into that category. Others, however, do show a really original touch - including a couple I bought. And while there, I also bought two fine bronzes. Friday morning, it was a visit to the Sofia City Art Gallery's special exhibition of Ivan Nenov, another of Bulgaria's greats - but this time in the modernist style. He lived to the grand old age of 95 and apparently remained active and dignified to the end.



He is known for his portraits of women on the beach or at windows but, over his long life, was very versatile and went through different stages. He travelled extensively in the 1930s and took part in international exhibitions of modern art in Italy and Germany.

However, he was declared a formalist in the 1950s and, for almost a decade, could not exhibit his works. Instead he focussed on ceramics and mosaics. In 1975 he managed,

somehow, to give his first solo exhibition in Sofia (previous attempts had been thwarted).

Rehabilitated in the late 1950s, he was elected in 1994 an academician in the Academy of Sciences.



Monday, April 30, 2012

Nomad



Clearing the flat here in Sofia for a 4 month absence - during which my landlady may rent the place out.

Michael Palin's BBC 's "Other Europe" series has him today on BBC Entertainment here in Bulgaria in the Plovdiv gypsy quarter; then onto in Edirne in a container lorry; and then in Istanbul at the Bosphorus. As I watch, the idea comes of renting a flat in Istanbul for 6 months or so from next spring. This at the same time I am contemplating buying a flat here in Sofia - or in the old part of Brasov!

Tomorrow early I hope to leave Sofia and cross the Danube border at midday before the returning Romanian holiday-makers from the Black Sea cram the border. Then on to the Carpathian house for last-minute tuning before making the drive through Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Germany and Belgium to Scotland (via the Zeebrugge overnight ferry) by mid-May

Verily I am a nomad! Indeed I was just counting how many addresses I've had over the last 25 years - it works out at 25, a new one each year on average. That's why it has sometimes been impossible for me to fit some bureaucratic requirements eg informing of change of address!! Scottish courts used to (may still) have a term for people like me - NFA (No Fixed Abode). As a young magistrate in the 1970s, many of the miscreants who appeared before me were so designated. "Nomad" or "peripatetic" sounds so much better!

At a time when commentators are trying to work out how the 20% of French voters who supported Le Pen's candidacy for the French Presidency will cast their vote in the second round next Sunday, it's useful to read again what was in [my blogpost of 29 April last year about populism](#)

Saturday, May 5, 2012

Back in the Carpathians

Monday and Tuesday were the last days in Sofia until September. The last cycle rides - in quiet streets since May Day is taken seriously in this part of the world and many people had decamped in the warm weather.

Loaded the car Tuesday - except for about 12 paintings which were loaded early Wednesday.

Two new paintings which Yassen had produced for me were left in his tender care - one of which is this great Dobri Dobrev.



Then a leisurely 3 hour drive to Veliko Tarnovo to visit the BorisDenev Art Gallery there - in a superb location.



aquarelles mainly of Italian scenes.

For this post, I have selected this moving portrayal of his mother.

The walk across a footbridge over the River Yantra offers the perspective of the ancient town given by [the painting I posted last Tuesday](#)

The Gallery was originally built in the 1970s as an Art School but actually opened as a police station! Very symbolic!

It was eventually opened as an ArtGallery in the mid 1980s.

The Director showed me round a great collection - 2 Tanevs on display and a room and a corridor devoted entirely to Boris Denev's work - the room with about 7 large oil paintings of the town and the corridor with

Sunday, September 30, 2012

[Some contemporary Bulgarian artists](#)

My Bulgarian artist friends are remarkably patient about my passion for the work of their dead compatriots. And I should feel guilty that my purchases, for the most part, do not help existing painters survive or nurture new



talent. I say "for the most part"

since my collection does include about 30 contemporary works - mainly realist. Three artists in particular caught my eye early on -



Juliana Sotirova, an incredibly talented, productive and versatile young woman from whom I have bought some 12 paintings. These include [a specially-commissioned one of my father](#) which she did from a black and white photograph I gave her. I was stunned with the uncanny likeness when she revealed it to me.

She has a variety of favourite themes - old houses; African scenes; still-lives. I will try in future posts to lead with some of her paintings I love looking at.

Milcho Kostadinov's more impressionistic take on run-down

Sofia and Plovdiv buildings charmed me from the beginning - with their soft greys and small bursts of colour. Recently he has moved to boats, nudes and the sea.



Angela Minkova (on left) is the last of the trio whose work has always attracted me - with its creativity and humour. She concentrates on aquarelles (a lot on the theme of Queen Mary at Balcik) and on fantastic small sculptures made from a variety of materials eg bone and feather.

Two people in Sofia are responsible for what (little) I know about the contemporary scene - Yassen Golev of Konus Gallery (reference in previous post) and Vihra Pesheva of [Astry Gallery](#). They are lovely people - full of passion and integrity. Yassen is also an artist - a couple of whose works I have already shown on this blog.

Vihra organises special exhibitions in her tiny gallery - and it is there I was first introduced to the work of the trio I have spoken about above.

And also where I purchased my first "non-realist" works

from two Veliko Tarnovo artists Natasha Atanassova and her partner Nikolai Tiholov.

Both produce such joyful works!

It was also in the Astry Gallery that I met [Tony Todorov](#) who does amazing pieces which are growing on me. I particularly like the painting 3 minutes 16 seconds into the video.

And it was in Astry too that I was privileged to meet an old giant of Bulgarian painting Vassil Vulev - in his 80s - and it was three of his 1980s aquarelles I bought.



Finally I have to confess that this is one of the first Bulgarian paintings I bought (way back in 2008) - at the open-air market at Alexander Nevsky Church. By Violetta Stanoeva. Interesting that it was symbolic! And with all the appropriate symbols. But more than a touch of kitsch

How one's tastes change!



Monday, October 22, 2012

Worlds Apart at the Danube

Today I remember a good man who died exactly two years ago. Ion Olteanu was a friend who devoted much of his life to the youth of the country - encouraging them to get involved in their localities; to establish youth parliaments in their towns; and to make contact with their European counterparts. He was a philosopher by training and had the dry manner of the Romanian intellectual - but, unlike that class, had a passion and real commitment to make Romania a better place. And transmitted this to the teenagers he (and his wife) worked with. I saw this vividly at a couple of the events he was kind enough to ask me to perform at.

I first met him in the Prime Minister's offices at Piata Romanie in the mid-1990s where he was responsible for the initial attempts to develop a strategy for working with non-governmental organisations. I wrote this paper for him. Faced with a reshuffle, he chose to leave the civil service and move to the hand-to-mouth world of international grants. I wasn't all that close to him although we did pop in unannounced from time to time to his flat in the centre of Bucharest which was, with its mass of files and papers, more like an office - not least with the other visitors. Last year I dedicated a post on policy-making to him.



Today I devote this post to his memory. It is a post written spontaneously (ie I have no idea where it will go) on yet another glorious cloudless if nippy morning in the Carpathian mountains - between

the Piatra Craiului and the Bucegi ranges. And written in this lovely old house given a new life by his friend Daniela over the past 12 years. In her love of the vernacular Romanian architecture (and efforts to preserve it) she is in a tiny minority here in Romania - despite the [best efforts of Valentin Mandache](#) and [Sarah in Romania](#).

For reasons I don't yet pretend to understand, Bulgarians seem to value their traditional village houses much more than Romania - despite (or perhaps because) the socio-economic dereliction which has overtaken so many Bulgarian settlements. After its "liberation" in 1989 Romania went for the American dream - with all the "creative destruction" and modernist eyesores that involves. I was, therefore, delighted to purchase recently [a book which showcases some old restored houses here in Romania](#)

And also pleased to see [this post on one town's architectural heritage](#) by one of my favourite Romanian bloggers.

The pity is that people don't seem able to get together to cooperate properly here - the trust and respect which that requires seem for the moment to have been destroyed in this country. That's one of the things which Olteanu was fighting to restore.....

Alternating, as I have in the past 5 years, between Bulgaria and Romania has made me think a lot about cultural differences. Despite sharing the Danube as a border, the citizens of the two countries have (apart from the summer trips to the Bulgarian part of the Black Sea - which are such good value) little contact and know very little about each other. It hasn't helped that the Dobrogea area at the Black Sea has changed hands several times in the past few centuries - nor that the Bulgarian alphabet is Cyrillic and the Romanians so profoundly Latin. Although Romania attracts far fewer foreign residents (partic Brits) than Bulgaria, it has [a fair number of ex-pat bloggers](#) - perhaps due to its exoticism. One of them talks feelingly [in the online book he has made of his blogs about the country](#)

A Romanian wife's fury is as legendary as it is short. In the morning, you can have your ear chewed off - my sins generally rotate around where I leave my shoes in the hall and woe betide me if by briefcase ever touches the kitchen table! There are constant bumps like this - yet by evening, she is back to chilled and happy as if we never argued at all.

Romanian girls do seem to work much harder in the home than their British counterparts. My wife is always scrubbing and cleaning our 1 bedroom apartment (we even took on a maid to further help!) You do need, however, to develop a skin like a rhino, as every small mistake you make in life is blown up into something significant, before floating away again into nothingness

And two books have been produced recently by Brits on the country - William Blacker's elegant if controversial [Along the Enchanted Way](#); and Mike Ormsby's more gritty [Never Mind the Balkans, here's Romania](#). And here's [a recent documentary on the country which suggests that Ceaucescu's baneful influence is still active](#).

After several years of familiarity with Romania, I suddenly found myself based in Sofia. The Bulgarians were down-to-earth, modest and....well..bourgeois! Not least in the extent of small spaces in the centre where old and young alike can set up shop themselves - whether to sell cigarettes, haircuts, coffee, paintings or clothes. I've commented on this[here](#); [here](#); [here](#); and [here](#).

One of the key books on cultural values is Richard D Lewis's [When Cultures Clash - a complete version of which I have just discovered online](#). Some of the values he attributes to Bulgarians (on page 319) are *disciplined, sober, pragmatic, cautious, stubborn, good organisers, industrious, inventive*.

The terms he uses for Romanians are - *pride in being a Balkan anomaly, opportunism, nepotism, volatility, self-importance, unpredictability, tendency to blame others, black humour.....*

Certainly I know that my Romanian friends get impatient with what they - as tough, direct speakers - see as the polite hypocrisy of Bulgarians!

I feel an important project could be one focusing on Bulgarian-Romanian relations. The EU is putting a lot of money into trans-Danube projects - pity that cultural aspects don't seem to have been addressed.

I've reached the age when I think how the money I leave behind might be used to further passions of mine - whether conceptual or sensual. One idea which occurred to me recently was to leave a small fund which could encourage Bulgarian and Romanian painters/artists to come together once a year (starting with my village here!)

It would have been great to work with Olteanu on this!

The painting is an Atanas Mihov (1879-1974) - "washing at the Danube" which can be seen at the Russe Art Gallery

Wednesday, October 31, 2012

[Jules Pascin - man of the world from the Danube](#)



Last year, while I was compiling my list of almost 150 20th century Bulgarian painters whose work appealed to me, I would occasionally come across the name Jules Pascin - associated with (for me) unimpressive sketches being auctioned locally.

Slowly I learned there was more to the man - and that he had in fact spent little time in Bulgaria (even schooled for 6 years in Vienna) and was more famous in France and America for his paintings of women. Barbara's [It's About Time blog gives a great series of these](#) - which have, for me, more than a touch of Egon Schiele to them.

I have unashamedly stolen most of the text which follows from her blogpost about him - for which many thanks!

There's a great [catalogue of his works on paper](#) here which gives a detailed chronology. And [also here](#).

He was born in Vidin in 1885 on the Danube as Julius Mordecai Pincas of well-off Italian-Serbian & Spanish-Jewish parents who moved first to Russe (my Bulgarian sources tell me) and then Bucharest, Romania. He was educated in Vienna from age 10-15, returning in 1901 to Bucharest, where his family had settled, working briefly in the office of his father's grain-merchandizing business.

*He was, however, becoming passionately interested in drawing, for which he showed precocious talent. His early talent drew the attention of the famous Bulgarian caricaturist Alexander Bozhinov. At the age of 16, he became the lover of a woman who ran a brothel in Bucharest; and was allowed to draw the residents. In 1902 he went back to Vienna to study painting and, in 1903, he moved to Munich, where he attended the art school run by Moritz Heymann. Some of his drawings appeared in the renowned German satirical journal *Simplicissimus* when he was only 19 when he got a contract with them and met Georg Grosz.*



After Pascin moved to Paris in 1905, he changed his name to spare his family who were apparently ashamed of his dissolute life-style and became a central figure in the social & cultural life of the cafes & studios of Montparnasse - meeting in 1906 his future wife Hermine David (also a painter). He lived in the United States from 1914 to 1920 where he taught at the Telfair Academy in Savannah, Georgia, associated with the Telfair Art Museum. Pascin married Hermine David at City Hall in New York City and became a citizen of the United States. He & Hermine painted in New York City as well as in Miami, New Orleans, & Cuba. Returning to Paris in 1920, he continued to compose paintings of delicately toned, thinly painted, but poetically bitter & ironic studies of women - including his wife, his mistress, & some prostitute acquaintances.

Although Pascin's watercolours, oils, and drawings were generally well received, a series of unfavourable reviews in 1930 left him severely depressed. Suffering from depression & alcoholism, he committed suicide on the eve of a prestigious solo show by slitting his wrists & hanging himself in his studio

in Montmartre. On the wall of that studio, he left a message written in his blood saying good-bye to his love, Cecile "Lucy" Vidil Krohg. In his will, Pascin left his estate equally to his mistress, Lucy Krohg, & to his wife, Hermine David.

Wednesday, November 7, 2012

[Private collections](#)

A mixed experience at the recently re-opened National Gallery of Art here in Sofia. It had been closed for refurbishment for almost a year (still is [according to its website](#)) and, frankly, is worse than it was before - with one major room still under repair and a small and inferior exhibition of the Bulgarian classics. Only the first few paintings by Mitov, Murkvichka and Vesin stood out from the collection. Sadly they also have a really stupid display of contemporary "art" taking up some of the restricted space. Hardly surprisingly, they could offer me no book on their permanent collection - although I was able to buy a very nicely



presented book about [Alexander Bozhinov](#) which the Gallery had produced in 1999. It's amazing the number of such books about its artists which Bulgaria has produced over the years. I've built up a nice little library collection!

The saving grace was the superb temporary exhibition they have of Hungarian works from the [Gabor Kovacs collection](#)

Gábor Kovács has been purchasing works of art for fifteen years, with the intention of creating a collection that offers a worthy representation of the history of modern Hungarian painting. Covering the period from the early 18th century to the present, the collection is comprised of more than 250 masterpieces.

The collection offers an almost complete account of the development that began with the Romantic and Realistic landscape representations of the 19th century, continued with

the plein air painting of the [Nagybánya](#)

[school](#) (now Baie Mare in Romania) and ended with the "isms" of the first decades of the 20th century.

Continuously enlarged, the Gábor Kovács Collection is one of the most prestigious private art collections in Hungary. János Vaszary was one artist who caught my eye.



This is the first time I have seen an exhibition of a private collector - and follows hard on my spotting a stunning new book in the Humanitas bookshop in Bucharest about Romanian art collectors. It was in Romanian - but profusely illustrated and showing that we are not alone in our walls being crammed with paintings. In trying to find reference to it online, I came across this [interesting site about private art collections in central Europe](#) which contains [this useful entry on Bulgaria's first collectors](#)

Two more paintings were added to my own collection yesterday - another Nikolai Tiholov and a small Toni Todorov from Vihra's current exhibition of that artist (above right).

That brings my collection of Bulgarian paintings to about 120 - 100 of them by known artists, the others anonymous. I'm running out of wall space!

Thursday, November 8, 2012

The 1944 communist takeover of Bulgaria



It was a throwaway phrase in the introduction to the superb Alexander Bozhinov book which I picked up earlier in the week which alerted me "Stoyan Venev pled for him before the People's Court". So even this Bulgarian trailblazer of satire (67 years of age when the communists swept into power in September 1944) was caught in the net of deranged and murderous suspicion (by virtue apparently of his foreign travels and bourgeois life-style) and condemned to a year

in prison. He was lucky - compared to the fate of thousands of his compatriots!

As I was compiling my little book on Bulgarian Realist painters of the 20th Century I had noticed that many had had to emigrate in the immediate aftermath of the communist takeover - whether from painting (into cinema or theatre design) or from the country altogether. And that some who remained in the country (like Nikola Boiadjiev and Boris Denev) were totally banned from any artistic endeavour. But I had not understood just how savage the communist takeover in Bulgaria was in 1944 - by far and away the worst in the Soviet bloc.

We owe it to those killed in such circumstances to remember them - particularly when the nature of their demise is known by so few outside the country. A [recent issue of the Vagabond journal has the clearest statement](#)

The killings of opponents of the Soviet system started as early as 9 September 1944, the very day the Communists seized power in Bulgaria.

Nobody knows how many Bulgarians lost their lives in the first weeks of the "people's democracy," their only crime being their political opinion or their social position. However, the number of victims of the so-called People's Court, which was created to give legitimacy to the murder of politicians, artists, writers and even physicians considered "dangerous" to the new regime, is well documented. From December 1944 to April 1945 the court issued 9,550 verdicts, with 2,680 death sentences and 1,921 life terms. To understand why the Bulgarian Communists were a lot more cruel than anyone else in Europe at the time one needs to go no further than the numbers: the Nuremberg Trials against top Nazis issued just 17 death sentences.

If you are looking for a single day when the Bulgarian political class was decimated with one blow, you get 1 February 1945. On that day the People's Court sentenced to death 67 MPs and 22 ministers who had held office between 1940 and 1944, including the former prime ministers Dobri Bozhilov and Ivan Bagryanov. Also killed were the regents Prince Kiril, Bogdan Filov and General Nikola Mihov, nine secretaries to the palace, publishers and journalists of national newspapers, and 47 generals and senior military. They were shot dead on the same day, beside an unused pit left on the outskirts of the Sofia Central Cemetery after the Allied air-strikes in the winter of 1943-1944, and were buried on the spot. The mass grave was left unmarked and several years later was turned into an ordinary burial ground. In 1995, in lot 124 of the cemetery, a monument to the victims of 1 February 1945 was finally erected. The following year the Supreme Court posthumously

repealed the death sentences.

The victims of the People's Court are just a fraction of the number of Bulgarians who suffered various forms of repression during Communism. Between 1944 and 1989 thousands of opponents of the regime were detained, interned or denied education or work advancement. The reasons for the repression were many and varied: accusations – usually bogus – of espionage and plotting against the Communist state, or opposing the forced collectivisation of agricultural land, or disagreeing with the Bulgarianisation policies toward the country's Muslims. Telling political jokes, wearing mini-skirts, having a "bourgeois" past or the "wrong" relatives could all land you in a labour camp. So could listening to Elvis Presley music. The total number of those repressed between 1944 and 1990 is estimated at about 300,000.

And a [website devoted to the communist takeovers and rule in Central Europe is even more specific](#)

The date of the communist coup – 9 September 1944 – was a signal for revenge and the start of blood-drenched Bacchanalia on the territory of the entire country. The victims of the class wrath were not only politicians, businessmen, lawyers, civil servants, police and army officers. The self-proclaimed "people's revengers" attacked the Bulgarian intellectuals with the same zealotry: teachers, priests, journalists, writers, editors, artists, professors, lecturers and all kinds of people of the pen, of culture and of the spirit perished without trial or sentence in the cities, little towns and villages. It would be logical to ask ourselves why was the country's cultural elite branded and persecuted as the most dangerous "enemy of the people"?

The indictment produced by the Sixth Panel of the so-called "People's Tribunal" attached the following qualifications to the cultural elite: "career-seeking intelligentsia that had lost its touch with the people", "public evil that needs to be cut out so that it would not contaminate the public organism", "mercenaries of the pen and of speech", "instigators and collaborationists" of the persons responsible for the national catastrophe, etc. The answer is very well known: propped on the bayonets of the occupiers, the communist upper crust followed the example of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917-1921. Without choosing its means, it showed determination to deprive the nation of the voice of free speech, and – as it proclaimed itself – "to cut the democratic values from the public organism", to obliterate the notions of democracy, freedom and fatherland from public space, the carrier of these notions being the patriotic intelligentsia.

Thinking people are a barrier before any dictatorship, therefore the first task of usurpers is terror and genocide on a mass scale against the intellectual class.

Outstanding representatives of Bulgarian culture perished without trial or sentence in the first wave of the red terror: Danail Krapchev – journalist, writer and editor of the Zora [Dawn] newspaper, Yordan Badev – literary critic, Nencho Iliev-Sirius – writer, Konstantin Gindev – talented young poet, Boris Roumenov – satirist, Professor Lyubomir Vladikin, Rayko Alexiev – humorist, satirist and cartoonist, publisher of the Shtourets [Cricket] newspaper, beaten to death in prison.

A second large group of writers, journalists, scholars, artists and intellectuals were thrown into the Central Prison in Sofia and were given sentences of different length, combined with confiscations and fines. Among them were the writers Zmey Goryanin, Fani Popova, Yordan Stoubel, Dimiter Simidov, Georgi Kanazirski, Boris Makovski, the cartoonists Konstantin Kamenov, Alexander Bozhinov and Alexander Dobrinov, the journalists Hristo Bruzitsov, Krustyo Velyanov, Atanas Damyanov and Stefan Damyanov, Stefan Tanev, Matey Bonchev-Brushlyan, Dr. Peter Djidrov, Dimiter Gavriyski, who wrote for the leading daily papers in Bulgaria: Zora, Utro, Dvenvik, Slovo, etc., as well as dozens of other eminent figures in the sphere of culture. That group also included Professor Stefan Konsoulov, Professor Georgi P. Genov, the literary historian Professor Mihail Arnaoudov, Minister of Education in Bagryanov's government for two months. Their life in prison is colourfully described in the miraculously preserved notes of Zmey Goryanin, "Sketches and Stories". Even when they were at such a critical moment in their lives and their endurance was put to the test, these internationally famous scholars succeeded in preserving their dignified behaviour and continued to live

with their science and with their ideas. Their example has proven that only a man of the spirit is capable of bringing light, sensibility and nobility during times of sinister arbitrariness and social cataclysms, that only man's creative genius has the strength of withstanding the sinister downfalls of history.

A part of the intellectuals who passed through the cells of the State Security and of the Central Prison were dispatched without trial or sentence directly to concentration camps that had been established under a special law and were given the name of labour-correctional communities: Bogdanov Dol, Koutsiyan, Rossitsa, Sveti Vrach, Belene, Doupnitsa, etc., where the writers Dimiter Talev, Slavcho Krassinski, Chavdar Moutafov, Pavel Spassov, Zvezdelin Tsonev and Yordan Vulchev, as well as the artists Alexander Bozhinov, Alexander Dobrinov and Konstantin Kamenov, were sent. A new phenomenon – political-literary toponymy – emerged in the geography of the Bulgarian literature. It linked the colourful names of small villages, localities and small towns in the countryside with the saga of prominent writers and creative artists. The spiritual elite of Bulgaria were banished to mines and stone quarries, to be replaced in the cultural centres by aggressive ignorance, marginal individuals and vulgarity. The concentration camps turned into coexisting spaces accumulating the energies of violence and the suffering, amongst which the freedom-loving spirit of the Bulgarian nation waned and died.

New martyrs were added to the prisoners of the first wave shortly after 9 September 1944 in 1946-1947: together with thousands of opposition figures from the Nikola Petkov Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union and the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, emblematic names of the legal opposition became victims of terror, having stood up against the hegemony of the camouflage Fatherland Front: Trifon Kounev and Tsveti Ivanov – Editors-in-Chief of the newspapers Narodno Zemedelsko Zname [People's Agrarian Banner] and Svoboden Narod [Free People], and also writers, journalists, public figures and freedom fighters. Standing at the crucial historic dividing line, they were condemned to suffer both for their political and moral compromises, and for their dignified and valiant fight to defend the democratic ideals and the independence of Bulgaria. Together with political leaders like Nikola Petkov and Krustyu Pastouhov, the writers carried on their shoulders the heavy cross of their re-enslaved nation and proved that the real artist is ready for self-sacrifice to defend his national dignity.

During the autumn of 1944, more than 30 thousand peaceful Bulgarian citizens were killed: slaughtered with axes, bludgeoned to death, shot at point blank, thrown off cliffs into precipices, burned, hanged or buried alive. The sense of impunity and arbitrariness, encouraged openly or behind the scenes by the leaders of the ruling Communist Party, notably Georgi Dimitrov, Traycho Kostov, Tsola Dragoycheva and Anton Yugov, made the public atmosphere fraught with aggressiveness of the reactions and with frenetic hatred. Mass paranoia, thirst for blood and vindictiveness flared. Frenetic mobs shouting death slogans attacked homes and offices, lynched, stampeded and clubbed to death innocent people in the streets merely because a finger had been pointed at them as "enemies of the people." That was not a nationwide revolution, nor an uprising, nor a civil war, because there were no two fighting armed groups, as in 1923 during the insurgence. That was a political slaughterhouse. Life and the individual had lost their value, humanity was trampled and forgotten in the gigantic social and geopolitical collision. After World War II, when Bulgaria did not have even one casualty at the frontline, instead of peace and a spirit of constructivism on the basis of the protected status quo, the country was involved in a catastrophic psychological situation of self-extermination and moral genocide.

The land of Bulgaria was covered with thousands of secret graves, its tolerant people were desecrated by fratricide and were stained with the blood of its own worthiest and most talented sons. The mass act of insanity reveals how it is possible with the mechanisms of ideology and politics to bring to extremes the mentality of the community so as to be directed in the service of party, power and imperialist goals. The unabated wartime aggression of the masses was easy to manipulate and to transform into political revenge-seeking by ideological profiteers and central offices of the party. The normal behavioural thresholds of the extremist individual were deliberately undermined in the direction of regression and barbarianisation so as to serve hidden power goals. And again, literature anticipated, caught and depicted the shadows of horror, fear and death in the spiritual space of Bulgaria. The writer Yana Yazova, a contemporary and witness of the events,

recreated both concrete events and the frenzied rhythm of historical time, revealing its paranoid symbols and states. In her political and psychological novel "War", which was published in 2001, i.e., 25 years after her death and 55 years after the actual events, Yana Yazova documented the social, political and existential psychological motivations of terror and hatred, depicting the traumatically distorted mentality and the images of the "revengers" susceptible to manipulation, as well as the sufferings of the defenceless victims.

Bulgaria had apparently about 100 concentration camps in the post-war period to deal with its various "dissidents" – in most cases those whose dress or joke sense was not acceptable.

[Voices from the Gulag – life and death in communist Bulgaria](#)(1999) looks in harrowing detail at this. The photograph of [bombed Sofia in 1944 is one of a series](#)

Sunday, November 11, 2012

[New painters - and wine](#)

I'm not the only one casting my mind back to the murderous behaviour from which this part of the world has suffered in the past century as Empires came unstuck and national fervour gripped men's minds. [Eastern Approaches](#) and [Open Education](#) both have postings on the Balkan Wars of a hundred years ago.

These (and other) wars were, of course, an important focus for many Bulgarian painters some of whom were official war artists.

[My booklet on Bulgarian Realist painters](#) was very much a first draft – I felt if I waited for the missing information on various painters,

nothing would ever be produced. And it's only now that I'm back in Sofia that I can think properly about its distribution – so far it has been sent only to the Sofia galleries, to Regional municipal galleries and to EC Embassies in Sofia. With encouraging responses (apart from the Embassies!) It's a useful calling card to show how serious I am!

Now I need to approach the big Hotels – and the National Gallery who (amazingly) don't really have anything for the foreign visitor.

And, slowly I can update the entries both on artists and galleries. Yesterday was a good example. The Inter Nos Gallery (sadly its website no longer seems active) is just at the junction of Bvds Levski and Ignatieff (just round the corner from where Alexander Bozhinov built his house in Nikolai Pavlovich St) and has I think the best collection of the Bulgarian Realist painters in the country.

This wasn't obvious to me on my first few visits – and I got to feeling guilty about visiting more since I haven't so far bought anything.

But when Dr Stephanov saw my booklet, he opened up and I discovered some great paintings – and promises of more since (like many other Sofia galleryists) they have more stuff stored away in inaccessible places than on display.

So, for example, one painter whose name was known to me – Constantine Mikrenski (1921-1999) – suddenly started to look very interesting (eg the one at the top of this post). My entry about him in the book is no more than his date of birth and death.





Why is it that I want to know more about the (dead) painters I like? Technically, it adds little to my appreciation - perhaps its intimations of mortality?

There are a lot of articles (and books) predicting the disappearance of the book. [New Criterion has published an article with a very elegant \(and passionate\) defence of the book](#) (and elegy to the death of second-hand bookshops) which I thoroughly recommend

Once, staying overnight at an airport hotel in Los Angeles, I found myself without a book. How this happened I can no longer recall; it was most unusual, for by far the most useful lesson that life has taught me, and one that I almost always heed, is never to go anywhere without a book. (In Africa, I have found that reading a book is an excellent way of overcoming officials' obstructionism. They obstruct in order to

extract a bribe to remove the obstruction; but once they see you settled down for the long term, as it were, with a fat book, Moby-Dick, say, they eventually recognize defeat. Indeed, I owe it to African officialdom that I have read Moby-Dick; I might otherwise never have got through it.) Reduced in my Los Angeles room to a choice between television and the yellow pages—no doubt now also on the verge of extinction—I chose the yellow pages, and there discovered just how unusual my obsession with books was. I looked up bookstores, and found no more than half a page. Teeth-whitening dentists, on the other hand, who promised a completely renewed existence to their clients, a confident smile being the secret of success, and success of happiness, took up more than twenty pages. Not poets, then, but teeth-whitening dentists, are now the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Now sipping a superb new Bulgarian Chardonnay - Ethno - produced in the [village of Sungurlare](#) inland from Burgas on the Black Sea.

November 12, 2012

Last sanctuaries of originality

In the increasingly homogenised world in which we sadly now exist, second-hand bookshops and private art galleries are the last sanctuaries of originality, discovery and ambience.

My booklet on Bulgarian Realist painters lists 16 private galleries here in Sofia - focussing on those which sell the more classic painters of the last century. Almost by definition, there's not much room to move around in such galleries - most of the paintings are in piles against the wall or in storerooms. They have a great atmosphere - compared with the more clinical aspect of some contemporary galleries. The Inter Nos Gallery - which I mentioned yesterday - is a perfect example of that atmosphere.

Valerie Filipov is an interesting example of a dealer who used to have such an Aladdin's Cave but now operates in the more clinical



setting of The Impression Art Gallery, 11 Vasil Levski Bvd which holds special exhibitions of contemporary artists. Trouble with this approach is that it takes less than 5 minutes to see the display! I vastly preferred the serendipity of his previous Cave!

Last week I said hello to Biliana Djingova who opened [the A and B gallery](#) last year at 45, Tsar Assen St for special exhibitions of contemporaries - and was very taken with Maria Bogdanova, a few of whose works are showing (see above) - as are her husband's. A wonderful balance of precision, colour and humour. Bulgaria is lucky at the moment in having a few artists (eg Angela Minkova, Natasha Atanassova, Nikolai Tiholov) who have this combination. This is a Tiholov of mine



And yesterday I visited the small [Loran Gallery](#) and discovered a painter from the early part of last century - Petko Zadgorski (1902-1974).

The Gallery had marked his birthday with a recent exhibition of his work. They also carried on their nice tradition of publishing a catalogue to go with the exhibition and have [quite a few of his paintings for sale on their well-organised website](#).

Zadgorski was born in Sliven but spent most of his life at Burgas where he developed his love of the sea - as you can see from this example of his painting. And the Burgas Municipal

Gallery (one of the few I have so far not been able to visit) [has a nice little outline of his work](#)

The Loran Gallery seems to be the best organised of all the private galleries I know - frequent special exhibitions, catalogues to promote the artists, a good reserve of paintings for sale, active website.....Of course The Victoria Gallery, as Sofia's only auction house, [has a great website](#) and catalogue for each of its auctions (there's one on Thursday) when more than 200 artefacts are usually for sale.

Regular readers will know I am a great fan of [Astry Gallery](#) here in Sofia whose owner Vihra Pesheva singlehandedly seeks out and promotes living artists - young and old - with frequent special exhibitions and materials. But the reason Astry Gallery scores is that so much is crammed into such a small space; that Vihra shares her enthusiasm so readily; and I never feel I am imposing..... This is [what I said last year](#) about the Gallery -

Astry Gallery (under Vihra's tutelage) is unique for me amongst the Sofia galleries in encouraging contemporary Bulgarian painting. Two things are unique - first the frequency of the special exhibitions; but mainly that Vihra follows her passion (not fashion). I am not an art professional - but Vihra has a real art of creating an atmosphere in which people like me can explore. I have been to a couple of other exhibition openings here and they were, sadly, full of what I call "pseuds" - people who talked loudly (mostly Embassy people) and had little interest in the paintings (except perhaps their investment value). Vihra and her Astry Gallery attract real people who share her

passion and curiosity. It is always a joy to pop in there - and talk to her, visitors, artists, other collectors and her father.

And that is also the case with Yassen Gollevi of [Konus Gallery](#) who is in his own right a serious painter and teacher at the Art Academy.

Sunday, November 18, 2012

The vocabulary of wines



This will be a short post since I am heading out to Part II of a marathon wine-tasting which I alighted upon by accident as I was out cycling yesterday and saw large banners with images of wine bottles hanging from the building of the Central Military Club. Divino was organised for the first time last year by the leading wine magazine, called DiVino. Now comes the second edition. Wineries can participate only if invited, therefore quality is ensured. If you want to learn besides tasting, you can sit in any of the masterclasses or lectures. Bulgarian grape

varieties, pearls of Burgundy and many other topics satisfy your thirst for knowledge. If you look hard enough you should see me somewhere in the picture.

It was a glorious way to spend a couple of hours and taste wines I didn't know about - complete with a little notebook they give you when you pay your 12 leva with all the wines thoughtfully listed (in English no less). There are apparently about 200 wines available - and my notes suggest that I tasted almost 50 of them. Needless to say I have no real memory of this - but if I am to do the event justice I will have to swill and spit a good few of the remaining 150!!

It was nice talking with the various people on the stalls - and also a couple of sommeliers. I was stuck for words to describe the taste - and am basically looking for value for money - stunning taste which does not pall as you drink it for a good price. It is, obviously, the season for wines - so hardly surprising to find a [good articles here on the lexicon of wines](#).

Another good example of why Sofia is a great place to live!

Monday, November 19, 2012

Bulgarian Wine - as Culture

Well I certainly learned a lot more about Bulgarian wines over the weekend - both in the biblical sense (experience) and intellectually. Particularly about the more pricey wines I would never normally buy. You can such great quality here for 2/3 euros a litre that I would never pay more than 8 euros a bottle! I discover (through a great little book "Catalogue of Bulgarian Wines 2013" (available for 15 leva probably at branches of Casavino here) that there are at least 97 independent wineries in this small country - each with several brand names with its own range of wines. And 250 of them were available for tasting over the weekend (as this was the elite, this suggest that there are more than 500 different wines in the country!)



I was more disciplined yesterday, perfecting the swill and spit - and, even then, physically not able to taste too many reds because of the semi-revulsion my body has developed to them. One exception was a fascinating anti-oxidant red wine - Alfa Vita - which adds a strong medical tone to its marketing. It certainly was smooth and tasty. The CEO I spoke to (also the driving force behind the local Academy for Wine) was kind enough to give me a bottle in exchange for a copy of my booklet on Bulgarian realist painters! And advised me to drink 50 ml or so for breakfast!! At 5 euros a bottle, it's just what the doctor ordered!

One of my goals yesterday was to savour the Roses on offer - I have never been a great fan of these but, as my taste for reds has declined, so the few Roses I have come across have become more interesting. And there is a great choice here!

Two stalls left the greatest impression - *Villa Yustina* (established only in 2006 and located in a village in the Rhodopes foothills near Plovdiv) by virtue of the enthusiastic and helpful approach of their sales guy Vencislav Lyubenov. And the stall of the well known *Katarzyna Estate* (located on the Greek/Turkish border) - by virtue of it being the only one whose staff (women) were encouraging feedback from their customers.

The wine fair was so popular the second day that it was almost impossible to move from stall to stall! As each visitor left, they were presented with free copies of the (massive glossy) DiVine magazine which sponsored the fair. Intriguingly the cover picture is of champagne bottles in a picture frame - is this a case of the wineries bidding to be included in the European Capital of Culture?

There is a serious argument to be made for eating and wine drinking as a serious cultural pursuit - perhaps the Divine magazine should consider having a few pages on Bulgarian painting (and other cultural material) in each of its future issues? Interestingly there was a good place on Kurnigradska St (almost at the corner with Vitosha) which offered a heady mix of paintings, wines, books and musical performance. It is now not more - not at least at that address - although a new little gallery has opened in Tsar Samuil St (off Solunska) which mixes wines and aquarelles!!

The aquarelle is - of course - an.....Ilyia Beshkov - from the superb 1950s book I bought from Alexander....

Wednesday, November 21, 2012

wine as medicine



November seems to be the period for testing the Sofia medical systems - this time last year I blogged about an experience with [the excellent Military Hospital here](#) which resulted in a diagnosis of excessive uric acid and a savage diet for a month with no wine. I've been suffering for some time from some degeneration of the knee tissue - result probably of rowing, jogging, tennis and badminton over the past 50 years (did I tell you I trained with the Azeri youth badminton team a decade ago??!!). It was in Baku I had my first

treatment of the knee with electrodes (20 years earlier I had a guy with a hypnotic medallion massage the knee briefly and cure a pain which physiotherapists had not been able to shift. Since I came off a Kyrgyzstan mountain/hill climb in 2006 the knees have been weak and no one has been able to give me a decent diagnosis - let alone treatment (despite MRS etc) In April, however, a Sofia specialist ran some doppler and other tests and reckoned it was linked to some spinal weakness - so here I am now having some excellent physiotherapy in the Military Hospital. The Doctor who supervises the treatment gave me on Monday the most thorough and professional examination which I have received in a decade - and has me now undergoing a 10 day course of magnetic, electric and manual treatment. And in a section of the hospital whose walls are adorned with paintings (for sale). Great idea! So hats off to the Bulgarians - not least because we exchange tips about Bulgarian wine as it proceeds. Pavel Banyia is the place I had been advised to go for the best Spa experience (in the heart of the country) but it was fully booked. [Her advice was Hisar](#) - for both the thermal waters and wine (StareSel).

Speaking of which - as I walked back from the Hospital (aided by my antique vanity cane - which is great for smacking badly-parked cars!) I discovered another of the charming regional wine shops which are scattered around Sofia. So far I have come across shops selling Vidin; Magura; Karnovat wines and today I passed I tiny shop which had a huge advertisement about Belogradchik wines (like the first 2 in the North-East). I had driven through the village (*Borovitsa*) last year but not stopped and decided this time therefore (blindtaste) to buy 2 litres of a Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc mix - for less than 5 euros. Back home, the taste was impeccable!!

And a lovely little wine shop with quality wines at reasonable prices has opened at the Russian monument on the corner of Makedonski and Skobelev Bvds (although its situated in the latter, its address is the former!). It's the initiative of a young man - and is typical of the attitude and spirit here. It's love of wine which has driven him - not big business connections. I wouldn't find this in Bucharest.

I'm also glad to see that one of the Bulgarian wineries - [Light Castle](#) - is supporting Astry Gallery -

Wednesday, December 5, 2012

You are where you live

A Samuel Pepys - (or Marcel Proust -) type entry today.

Thanks to a couple of recent moves in my accommodation I'm seeing another side of Sofia. At the weekend I moved a little but further from the centre - trying to keep the rental low since I'm here only for a few months (if that) but would ideally like to keep somewhere to have as a base for my things and for the occasional visit. But I've been spoiled in the places I've had and just cannot adjust to the soullessness of these cheaper rented places.

The young woman showing me the various flats told me the impact I had made when I said I needed bookshelves - "no one reads here" she exclaimed "but it does make people respect you!" And the lack of reading certainly shows in the absence, in any of the flats I looked at, of reading lights. I just don't understand how people can live in places with only overhead lights! And what is advertised as "furnished" often means little more than kitchen facilities (often with dishwasher!), a bed, table and chairs. No cooking utensils, bedsheets, lamps or radio. Fortunately I travel with cooking stuff, don't need television and had bought a couple of antique carpets for the bare floors - but unfortunately I need storage space for bikes and car parking facilities not too far away.

So I've had to settle (for 300 euros a month) for a rather tawdry and shoddy new build-flat - largely on the basis that it seemed reasonably clean and had the space for my wheels! But I'm not sure how long I can put up with the place (move on after a week!!).

I also have a hateful heating system (hot air being blown through air conditioners) simple because the central heating here in Sofia is so expensive. A monopoly supplier has forced more and more people to disconnect - driving the prices for those who remain even higher. So it is much cheaper to have electric heating which you control - particularly if you're living there intermittently.

I continue to enjoy walking (and cycling) around Sofia - even in the snow and ice which have graced the streets this week - the small shops and galleries (and cheap and pleasant eating and drinking) invite so (the Elephant second-hand Bookshop with English books has relocated into larger premises in the centre and opens today!) But the cosy small flats in Bucharest and Ploiesti are definitely beginning to beckon.

Trouble is that I would have to dump the bikes (no storage or cycling conditions up there) and also some of the paintings! Choices!

I was hoping to add to my little library on Bulgarian art by a visit to the underground second-hand bookshop at the University last week. It did indeed have quite a range of 1960s-1990s books on particular artists - but at extortionate prices for battered and nondescript things of less than 100 pages. The average price was 30 euros. What Bulgarian can afford such prices?

But, just 5 minutes (and hidden) away in a courtyard at Vassil Levski 87, there is a small second-hand bookshop which offers a not dissimilar range at a quarter of those prices. I got a couple of nice little books on the satirist -Stoyan Venev - and the shaper of Bulgarian painting - Jaroslav Vesin

Ps Thursday morning I was moving some paintings from the old to the new apartment and was bitten by a stray dog just outside the new place. Fortunately I had a physiotherapy appointment at the Military Hospital an hour later and was therefore able to have an immediate swab and anti-rabies injection. Apparently everyone gets bitten here - Bucharest (despite Brigitte Bardot's antics) seems to have been able to get the stray dog problem under control by a programme of sterilisation. Here in Sofia there is only talk - no action.

That was Thursday.

Friday morning came a phone call from my new landlady who had entered my flat without warning or permission and found the cat who adopted us last summer. I had told the Agency to inform her - but they failed. "No cats" she now says - a soulless, cold and noisy flat and wild dogs have already alienated me and we reach an amicable agreement to part. By the next evening I was ensconced in a much more amenable old flat in the heart of old Sofia (Khan Khrum St) for 270 euros a month!

Saturday, December 29, 2012

Generalising about Art



What do wine and paintings have in common? It's very difficult to write about each! They impact on our senses (palate and nose; eye and brain respectively). Hardly surprising therefore that writing about art and wine produces a lot of nonsense - with adjective heaped upon hyperbolic adjective in an effort to justify the writer's arbitrary opinions. Books about these subjects, of course, are often very beautiful - but the text rarely keeps pace.

Since I began my serious collecting of Bulgarian realist painters, I've bought a fair number of books about art generally and about specific artists (even about collectors and dealers) but

have to confess that I have learned very little. The three books on realist painting, for example, taught me only one thing - that the term is a slippery one!

My recent posts on Romanian realist painters of the early part of the 20th century were inspired by 7-8 little second-hand books from the 1970s and 1980s about individual artists which I picked up in Bucharest recently. Charming books - thick paper, great fonts and mounted reproductions (modelled, it seems to me, on the great little Skira books of the 1950s and 1960s) - much easier to read than the 900 pages of Paul Johnson's Art; a new history which I did however thoroughly enjoy.

Simon Schama's "The Power of Art" may also be a bit unwieldy in its 450 page coffee-table style but does adopt the same useful focus on individual painters rather than style or eras - Caravaggio, Bellini, Rembrandt, David, Turner, Van Gough and Picasso. And there is a nice blog which gives good detail on the background to individual paintings - eg some of Van Gogh's

For me, however, the most insightful stuff on painting remains the small book written in the 1970s by John Berger - Ways of Seeing. The link gives the full text. Although I did come across in a Sofia

friend's flat a beautiful book about painting in 1920s Bulgaria which struck me as a great way to approach painting - capturing in one country how various painters relate to one another and the changing trends.

My viewings in the last few years of Bulgarian and Romanian art have led me wonder about the extent to which is it possible to generalise about a nation's painting style. My little [booklet on Bulgarian Realists](#) ("Getting to know the Bulgarians through their paintings") gives brief notes about 140 Bulgarian painters - most of whom were born in the last decade the 19th century and before the First World War; I have not been able to find anything striking in Romania from the same period. The 10 great Romanian artists I mentioned in the last two posts were born some 30 years earlier (between the 1860s and 1880s) but seem to have been the last of their line.

When Bulgarian landscapes and colours were blooming in their art, their Romanian colleagues were producing (for me) dark and insipid stuff.

If I am right, what is the reason? Romania was, of course, the larger country with a significant bourgeois class and attachments to French culture - Bulgaria more rural with freedom from heavy Ottoman rule going back less than two generations (the Romanian liberation was less significant for them because of the considerable autonomy they had won within the Ottoman Empire). The Bulgarian celebration (in their art of the early 20th century) of their land and peoples perhaps reflected a pride and spirit absent in the more cynical and worldly Romanian bourgeois?

And the paintings in the Bulgarian Orthodox Churches are so much more colourful (indeed sensuous) than in the dull and serious Romanians.

The first painting of Rila Monastery is by Mario Zhekov - the second (in my collection) by an unknown



Monday, January 14, 2013

different municipal styles

Over the past 6 years, I've basically spent most of the winters in Sofia and the summers (apart from 2008) in the Carpathian mountain house - with 6-7 weeks each year in Bucharest. So I'm in a good position to compare and contrast two (neighbouring) countries which are enjoying only their second brief period of freedom after half a century of communist control and several centuries of Ottoman domination. Each has its reasons for feeling different eg Romanian a romantic language in a sea of Slavs; Bulgarian still Cyrillic in its lettering.



Romania is aggressive - both in the size of its buildings and in social behaviour - Bulgaria much more modest in these respects. For more on the differences, see this post.

Yesterday I noted another difference - under the control of Sofia municipality, the Sofia City Art Gallery (to which this blog has often paid tribute) flourishes. Under the control of Bucharest municipality, 5,000 paintings apparently languish with nowhere to be displayed - apart from 2 rooms donated by ArtMark which manage to display about 15 of them. A rich Romanian émigré with an empty palace in the city offered the Bucharest mayor the palace rent-free to give the paintings an outlet - but the offer was turned down. Too much trouble for the lazy mayor whose favourite hobby is demolishing such old buildings.

Bucharest and Sofia appeared recently at the very bottom of the list of livable European cities - but Sofia at least tries and has indeed many features which make it highly attractive. It's where I go to cycle, swim and wander pleasurably visiting friends in small galleries!

The gouache is a Zhelezarov - of Sofia's women's market

Wednesday, November 13, 2013

1970s Bulgaria

It was apt that my last post was about the current British intellectual craze for recent decades of social history - since I visited last night the opening of an exhibition - spread over three large floors of the Bulgarian Union of Artists' building on Shipka St - focusing on Bulgarian Art of the 1970s and marking the 50th anniversary of the Art Gallery in Dobrich with works from the 1970s held by the gallery and a few from the City Art Gallery in Sofia.

Bulgarian art has been celebrating 120 years - on the basis of the first general art exhibition here having apparently taken place in 1892 and the first Association of Bulgarian artists being founded in 1893. I referred



[recently to a marvellous book which the Union of Artists published last year](#) to mark the period.

There is an agit prop air to this particular exhibition - with the huge posters of text and black and white photographs hanging from the ceilings and gigantic, generally sombre if not brutalist, paintings on the walls. There are also drawings and sculpture and the aim is to restore the appearance of the exhibition as it was in 1972 - with no concessions to present-day judgements or tastes. Thus, for example, Svetlin Russev, the doyen of Bulgarian art who still graces exhibitions here, is simply described on one of the posters as "People's Artist". I was lucky enough to get a personal tour of the Dobrich gallery last year from its Director and [recorded then my conversation with her](#)

The exhibition gives a vivid snapshot picture of one part of life 50 years ago here in Bulgaria and deserves support and comment. I, for one, felt it powerfully gloomy - and find it interesting that a large book I have of Bulgarian art of the 1980s (from an exhibition at the National Gallery in Sofia in 2002) shows a completely different zest and colour. Does this, I wonder, reflect differences in those decades - I shall have to ask my older Bulgarian friends.....

As I left the Union building, I was excited to notice a poster for a nearby exhibition of a painter [Slavi Genev - born 120 years ago](#) - one of whose Samokov works has pride of place in my collection (alongside Dobre Dobrev, Alex Moutafov, Alexandra Mechkuevska, Gregor Naidenov and Kolyo Kolev)

The sketch is an Ilyia Beshkov

Wednesday, January 30, 2013

Neglected old masters



There are two Bulgarian painters I consider hugely neglected and underrated - Marin Ustagenov (1872-1937) and Nicolai Boiadjev (1904-1963).

Both were superb painters of the human body - as I saw for myself for one of them when, exactly 2 years ago, Sofia's

City Art Gallery organised the first ever exhibition of Boiadjev's paintings -

In 1958 he had been expelled from the Union of Bulgarian artists for his refusal to work on prescribed themes and focussed instead on drawing. His work never seems to come on the market.



The painting on the right is Boiadjiev's "Righteous Job"



Until yesterday I had been able to view any of **Ustagenov's** paintings in the flesh - only in a great book which was published here in 2005. *The photo is of one of the reproductions in the book.*

He had been a war artist during the Balkan and First World Wars; studied at Munich and became one of the first Bulgarian restorers.

He participated in the restoration of Boyana Church and Monastery Zemen and was still working on this at his death. After the 1944 Communist takeover he was, presumably because of his religious themes, declared an enemy of the people; his heirs harassed ; and the study of his work removed from the curriculum at the Academy of Arts - "airbrushed from history".

But the Loran Gallery (Oborishte 16 in the Embassy area of Sofia) has at last done him proud - with an exhibition (which ends in the middle of February). And, also for the first time

they have enabled us to see many of his paintings online.

Congratulations Loran Gallery - about which I have blogged before

People here tell me that a lot of archival material on Bulgarian artists has been lost. I'm not quite sure what they mean about this. Some painters lost a lot of their artwork during the 2nd World War - Vesselin Tomas, for example, through not being allowed by Germany to take them back home and others through allied bombing of Sofia. But if we mean documentation of lives and friendships we do have artists such as the great caricaturist Ilyia Beshkov who produced diaries with drawings.... An issue for further exploration with some art historians here perhaps....



Sunday, March 3, 2013

Pleven Gallery at last



On Thursday, I eventually made it to the Ilyia Beshkov Gallery in Pleven. The gallery was easily found - in an imposing building and quiet imposing area. It was midday when I got there - I was the only visitor and it was quite freezing! So cold that the 3 curators shut themselves in the small room and left me to my own devices for almost an hour - with the lighting on and my able to photograph to my heart's content. About 50 of Beshkov's large sketches; half a dozen large sculptures some of which were Angel Spassov but most (I now realise) were Marko Markov's!; a Mkrkchvika, Mitov, Tsonev, Boris Denev, and Stefan Ivanov

I think the seated lady is a Kiril Tsonev - unfortunately I got a bit confused in my scribbling on the catalogue

- which turned out to show the work of Hristo Boyadjiev (1912-2001)

I am also confused about this one below - is it Stefan Ivanov?



No doubt about this one - it's Boris Denev!



Sunday, March 24, 2013

Stoian Venev



Various reasons for the 3 week silence - the numbing cold of the last few weeks; waiting for the results of various tests relating to my prostate; and sheer disgust with [how the power-elites have been betraying the hopes of decent people](#).

[The Mouse that roared](#) is a good post on the Cyprus crisis.

Now the possibility has been raised of removing the 100k guarantee which was previously in place for our bank savings. All I can do is collect the ammunition to use on the bankers!

It's apt that I came across a small 1950s book on Stoian Venev (1904-1989) whose sepia sketches are so evocative

Venev grew up in Kuystendil - half-way between Sofia and the Macedonian border - and was clearly influenced by Vladimir Dimitrova (Maistora) whom he knew well

He is one of a long line of first-class Bulgarian graphic artists (Bozhinov; Dobrinov; Beshkov, Behar; Angeloushev - let alone the war sketches of so many others such as Shturkelov) but his work shows a particular sympathy for the struggles of peasants.



suffering wife in this sketch!

And I particularly liked the study of the long-





Wednesday, March 27, 2013

wine and sculpture

Thanks to [CasaVino](#), an eminently quaffable new red wine variety for these cold days - from a village in the Melnik area near the border with Greece. It's Kapatovo with a blend of



four grapes, three of which I had never heard of - Marselan, Petit Verdot, Primitovo and Syrah. The first two are apparently late-flowering varieties from France and only Syrah is well-known.

The result is superb - well warranting the four stars which it gets from my little Bulgarian wine bible and certainly worth the 18 euros price-tag (for 5 litres!!).

The Melnik/Sandanski area is renowned for its robust and tasty [Mavrud wines](#) to which I have become very attached this winter - breaking out of the exclusive attachment I was beginning to form to the Bulgarian whites - particularly the St Ilyia from the Sliven area.

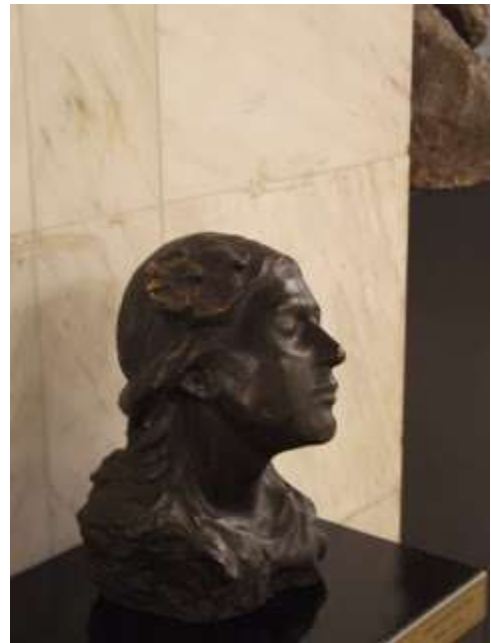
The Mavruds (including some whites) are also found in the

central plains.

My favourite little second-hand bookshop in the courtyard of Vassil Levsky at the University corner also came up a couple of nice old books - one published in 1960 on the sculptor Marko Markov (many of whose works were to be seen in the Ilyia Beshkov Gallery at Pleven) and the other one a 1974 collections of small (mainly black and white) prints of artists from the first 6 decades of the 20th century.

Unfortunately I don't know which sculptures are whose!! Are they all Markov's?? Or are some Spasskov's? The bearded guy is certainly Patriarch Eftim!

My interest in such sculptures increases in leaps and bounds. I don't, at the moment, have many such artefacts - but could be persuaded to collect more of these.....





Monday, April 1, 2013

First real day of spring



At last a pleasant day - with Mount Vitosha sharply edged in blue; white clouds scudding across its face; and people at last enjoying their coffees at the pavement cafes.

Diana Staykov's "Absinthe" gallery is a welcome new addition to the galleries which can be found on Tzar Samuil (it's at no 37). She focuses on aquarelles and set the tone by pouring us a glass of one of the most stunning Sauvignon Blancs I've ever tasted.

It was actually a 2010 New Zealand Marlborough but made by a young Bulgarian Alex Velianov who now markets the wines under the

brand Two Friends and brings the wines back to Bulgaria on his visits.

I was also taken with the work of Atanas Matsoureff in a book lying in the gallery. His website is even more interesting for its



examples of his drawings, aquarelles and paintings. Some of the portraits - such as this one - remind me of the famous Andrew Wyeth! I realised, I had already seen some of his drawings at Byliana's A and B Gallery.

But it was the 20 cm bronze sculpture of Marianna Kushevawhich really took my fancy and now has pride of place in our small Sofia attic flat.

Wednesday, April 3, 2013

More [Aquarelles](#)



Sofia's City Gallery has a nice exhibition of aquarelles drawn from its archives which give a good sense of this particular genre as practised by Bulgarians in the past century. It starts with 3 majestic paintings from one Joseph Oberbauer (1853-1926); then 2 typical military scenes by Jaroslav Veshin from 1902 and 1905; before a magnificent large picture of a schooner in rough sea (1928) by Alexander Moutafov; and typical aquarelles by Shturkelov, Frantsaliyski and Jordan Geshev. I was glad to see a Naidenov - but the stars were for me the blue-skyed Plovdiv scene by

Titrinov and

this 1950 Vladimir Manski - "Parade at the National Theatre". The viewing was made all the more enjoyable by the company and insights of the exhibition's curator Svetla Georgieva, a painter and musician in her own right.

By coincidence, I had bought an aquarelle the previous day - unusually for me. And a large one at that. It has the same feel to it as the Manski and is by a young contemporary - Andrean Vekiarov.

And I am reminded that I failed a few months back to pay tribute to the Sofia City Gallery [for its great exhibition celebrating its 60th Anniversary](#).

The accompanying book - A Possible History - Bulgarian Art through the collection of Sofia City Art Gallery - is one of the best in its series.



Thursday, April 11, 2013

Do paintings speak for themselves?



On what was supposed to be the last evening in Sofia, a burst of purchases - this time from my friend Ruhmen's small Neron Gallery on the corner of Tsar Samuel and Neofin Rilski streets-

two Petar Boiadjievseascapes;
two more Kolyo KolevRhodope landscapes from the early 1940s;
and a dramatic Cyril Mateev showing the towering Rila massif.

This on top of a couple more Naidenovs and a Kolyo Kolev a week earlier.

The painting at the top is the first Petar Boiadjiev I ever bought and one of my favourites - a 1943 one of the Kaliakra cliffs just north of Balcik which was such an attraction for Romanian painters in the early part of the 20th century. I'm told that Boiadjiev (1907-1963) studied art in Bucharest. That (and the birth and death dates) are the only things I know about him. His seascapes (for me) rival those of Boris Stefchev.



Kolyo Koev (1905-50) is another one of many Bulgarian painters I wish I knew more about - his Rhodope landscapes from the 1940s have a very distinctive colourful impressionist style - with the oil paint thickly applied. All I know about him is that he committed suicide in 1950 at the age of 45.

Kiril Mateev (1920-2006) was a prolific painter - particularly of dramatic mountain scenes like this one.

Interesting that information about so many of my favourites is so difficult to get hold of!

I occasionally get the gallerists to consult their "bible" (the old artistic encyclopaedia of

Bulgaria painters many of them have) but (for names such as these) even this rarely reveals much.

A previous post regretted the lack of information about the life of [Grigor Naidenov many of whose Sofia cafe scenes](#) in the decades from the 1920s now adorn my walls. But does info about the training, travels, travails and friends of painters really add much to one's understanding of a painter? The portrait of Naidenov I included in that particular post is certainly a bonus.....

I've met some of the contemporary Bulgarian painters but don't really know much about them. Somehow, however, the times in which the older painters lived holds greater fascination. I want to know how they dealt with the various dilemmas they were faced with - not least the violent communist takeover of 1944.



Thursday, August 29, 2013

[Balkan journeys](#)



Despite the name of this blog, I'm actually on the periphery of the Balkans and do not even begin to try to understand its history. I've travelled (very briefly) in Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia; spent several years in Bulgaria and have known Romania for 20 odd years but have read few books about the countries in the Region. Lucian Boia is the only serious history historian of the last country with a book currently available ([Romania - Borderland of Europe](#) 2001 (although I noticed that the Frost English bookshop has a couple of slim

histories in English); if you look really hard you may unearth in Sofia a copy of Richard Crampton's [A Short History of Modern Bulgaria](#) (1987).

Otherwise I've read only Mark Mazower's very brief [The Balkans](#); and Dervla Murphy's typically punchy description of her cycles through the disintegrating Yugoslavia of the early 1990s [Through the Embers of Chaos - Balkan journeys](#).

However, Christopher Clark's recent [The sleepwalkers - how Europe went to war in 1914](#) is the first book which really helps me make sense of the region. It is a stunning and gripping read which has also altered my understanding of the respective roles of France, Germany, Russia and England in letting loose murderous and senseless violence on the peoples of Europe -

We are introduced to a shadowy world of fanatical terrorist cells engaged in plots that range across state borders, funded and armed by secret organizations that are connected, with carefully constructed plausible deniability, to official government ministries. The fanatics in this case are Serbian nationalists rather than Islamic fundamentalists (though it should be said that Serbian nationalism has long had strong religious overtones), but their outlook and methodology seem startlingly modern. So too are the polarizing pressures and

media attention their activities generate, especially in terms of a positive feedback loop in which even presumably moderate figures feel compelled to emphasize their militancy for fear of appearing weak. When, after a series of botched attempts, one youthful member of an organization known as the Black Hand finally succeeds in murdering the heir apparent to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire, it triggers a war in which many of the participants have only a peripheral relationship to its proximate cause. Iraq and Afghanistan suddenly don't seem so far away from the Balkans.

The second part of *The Sleepwalkers* is a traditional diplomatic history reminiscent of A.J.P. Taylor's classic 1954 study *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1914*. Clark reconstructs the realignment of European great-power politics in the four decades preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

The hallmark of his approach is pluralism: he demonstrates that for every national player in this drama, decision-making power was decentralized. In parliamentary societies, there were considerations of party politics, as well as the relationships between the military, the diplomatic corps, and a nation's political leadership. But even in presumably autocratic societies like Russia, policymaking was hardly straightforward; figures like Tsar Nicholas II or Kaiser Wilhelm were often managed by their ministers rather than leading their countries, and public opinion could influence strategic considerations no less than it did in France or England.

*The final segment of *The Sleepwalkers* returns to Sarajevo in 1914, opening with a depiction of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that spools with cinematic clarity. Clark then proceeds to chart the sequence of decisions -- more like miscalculations -- that culminated in catastrophe. In light of his preceding analysis, it's clear that he rejects the notion of an overriding cause or a principal villain. As he explains in his conclusion, "The outbreak of war in 1914 is not an Agatha Christie drama at the end of which we will discover the culprit standing over the corpse in the conservatory with a smoking pistol." And yet the weight of his own analysis makes clear that Clark blames some figures more than others. Serbian nationalists were not only irresponsible in the intensity of their fervour, but in their insistence on the legitimacy of territorial claims flatly denied the realities of history and the presence of non-Serbs in places like Albania and Bosnia. (Serbian conquests in the Balkans in 1912-13 were followed by atrocities strongly reminiscent of ethnic cleansing.)*

Russia's support of the Serbs was part of a larger pan-Slavic strategy that had less to do with mystic chords of memory than trying to realize a long-term goal of succeeding Ottoman Turkey as the master of the Straits of Bosphorus, one that led the Russians to take dangerous risks. And French desperation for a strong partner to counter Germany virtually goaded the Russians to take those risks.

Conversely, Clark rejects the view that Austria-Hungary was an empty husk of an empire lurching toward collapse -- indeed, Franz Ferdinand had a plausible scenario for a reformed and federalized polity that reduced the disproportionate influence of Hungary and gave more representation for Slavs, including Serbians (one reason why radicals wishing to see the empire break up were so intent on killing him). Vienna's demands in the aftermath of the assassination were not unrealistic, though its delay in issuing them -- here again the baleful influence of internal divisions, one of which were foot-dragging Hungarians -- led rivals to mobilize their opposition. Germany is often portrayed as ratcheting up the pressure by giving the Austrians the notorious "blank check," but Clark depicts Berlin as believing the crisis could be resolved locally long after everyone else had concluded otherwise. British Conservatives welcomed war as a means of preventing Irish Home Rule, since fighting Germany would deprive Liberals of the military tools to implement a policy that had vocal, and possibly violent, opponents

Those wanting a brief overview of the origins of the war can do worse than [the Authentic History reference](#). And the masochists who want to explore the representation of the Balkans in various

writings can attempt these two academic pieces [Imagining the Balkans](#) and [Balkanism in political context](#)

Wednesday, October 9, 2013

[Two who died too young](#)

Two wonderful exhibitions - first the Sofia City Gallery's one of [Jules Pascin's amusing erotic drawings](#) from 100 years ago. I [wrote about Pascin last October](#) - referring to [a dedicated website](#) and a [blogpost about his oil portraits](#). The gallery's coverage says - Julius Mordecai Pincas, known as Jules Pascin, was born on 31 March, 1885 in the city of Vidin. In 1892, his family moved to Bucharest. Pascin graduated from high school in Vienna. Between 1902 and 1905 he received training at the art academies in Vienna, Budapest, Munich and Berlin. He contributed to the "Simplicissimus" magazine published in Munich. In 1905, he moved to Paris, where he met his future wife, Hermine David. In 1907, he organized his first solo exhibition at Paul Cassirer's gallery in Berlin. In 1914 he left for New York, where he lived until 1920. He travelled to the Southern states and Cuba. Then he went back to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1930. Pascin



reflected in his paintings the influence of Art Noveau, and later - of expressionism. The exhibition includes artworks belonging to all major themes and genres but particularly the nude body,

There is an exhibition catalogue in Bulgarian and French, including all artworks featured in the exhibition. The research paper "Jules Pascin and Artistic Developments at the Turn of the 20th Century", compiled by the exhibition's curator Maria Vassileva is also available (again in Bulgarian and French) as a separate edition.

I then paid a visit to the School of Art in Vassil Levsky Boulevard - and was very touched to view a small exhibition of the aquarelles of a young man - [Margarit Tsanev](#) - who committed suicide in 1969 at the age of only 25.

The curator told me that they had been found only in the 1980s (?) and donated to the School - which exhibits them annually on a rotating basis. Pity the exhibition ends tomorrow!



Thursday, October 10, 2013

Wordsand silences



I suppose I live an odd life - for the past 23 years in countries whose languages I don't speak (although I had a good stab at Russian during the 7 years I spent in its old empire in Central Asia and the Caucasus). But the last 6 years I've been living alternately in Bulgaria and Romania and confess to have made no real effort to learn their languages - which are just so much musical background for me. I note the different intonations, stresses, voice and delivery pitches as if I was listening to a symphony....

I think, read and write in English - and am spoiled by having access to great English bookshops in Bucharest and Sofia (the latter the second-hand "Elephant" just a few minutes' stroll

from my flat). It was my first port of call the day of my arrival and I quickly picked up a couple of books - Dennis Healey's [Time of my Life](#) (a 1989 hardback) and Dervla Murphy's [Silverland - a winter journey beyond the Urals](#). Murphy has become a favourite of mine and I have always had a soft spot for Labour statesman Healey - he may have been a bruiser but he was (indeed is - going strong at 95 like his friend Helmut Schmidt) a highly cultured man with a real European perspective - working in the Socialist International in the 1930s - a taste of poetry and paintings and strong opinions.



The next day I was back and left with three interesting books - Tony Benn's [More Time for Politics- Diaries 2001-2007](#) ; Arthur Marwick's [British Society since 1945](#) (2003) ; and Roy Jenkins' *Gallery of 20th Century Portraits* (1988)

Coincidentally I came across [an excellent Bulgarian online bookstore](#) which gives short resumes in English and actually has a short list of books in English on Bulgarian topics. The resumes give me precisely the glimpse of Bulgarian life I need.

I don't mind not being able to read the newspapers (which contain noise in every country we are better off without) but I do miss not being part of other conversations on matters literary and artistic.

And, while on the subject of noise, let me draw your attention to a fascinating read - [A Book of Silence](#) by Sarah Maitland

The sculpture is one of the bronze ones which are in the grounds of the Sofia City Art Gallery. The oil painting I got for 50 euros from my antique dealer Alexander Alesandriev and is by an unknown. The sketch (also from the AA gallery) is apparently by (or of?) Petr Chukovsky, a teacher of Ilyia Beshkov.

Tuesday, October 15, 2013

[Through Tourist eyes - and taste buds](#)



A hectic few days as my youngest daughter and her husband flew in for a long weekend. Sofia and Bulgaria were looking at their best - with the early morning mist, later sun and autumn foliage much in evidence as we visited the isolated redoubt of [Koprivishtica village](#) to the east of Sofia and, the next day, [Rilski Monastery](#) two hours' drive south of Sofia.

Koprivshtitsa is a captivating mountain town, unique with its cobblestone alleys, houses painted in bright colors with expansive verandahs and picturesque eaves.

During the Ottoman rule, Koprivshtitsa withstood

many a raid- although it was reduced to ashes several times and its inhabitants were frequently robbed and driven away.

The wealthier townsfolk managed to "ransom" Koprivshtitsa from the Turkish rulers and win some special privileges, thus keeping the [Bulgarian traditions and atmosphere of the town](#) intact.

In this way Koprivshtitsa was able to preserve its freedom-loving, patriotic spirit and hand it down to its children. Quite a few Bulgarians who laid down their lives for the liberation of their country were born here.

The April Uprising, which broke out in Koprivshtitsa on April 20, 1876, gave voice to the desire and efforts of the Bulgarian people to win back its freedom after five centuries of Ottoman oppression. A lot of foreign journalists reported the events of the spring of 1876 and showed the world that there was a people on the Balkan Peninsula who had not lost their identity and



were willing to strive for independence. Eventually, in 1878 Bulgaria won the freedom it had so long yearned for, at least partly helped by the publicity of the April Uprising and its subsequent brutal suppression. We were not the only ones to visit Rila - one of my favourite ex-pat bloggers about the Sofia scene (now sadly back in the US) was there at the beginning of the month ([and also at Plovdiv](#))



Rilski

Monastery is now a UNESCO site and, much as I enjoyed

this time the exuberance of the recently repainted artwork, I felt that it was actually a bit over the top and inconsistent with the soul of the place. The screams of hordes of kids shattered what little calm the Saturday crowds allowed the monks in their warren of cells.

The only calm element were the postures of the 3 Japanese visitors who sketched the buildings.

In between times a

bachanalian feast of Bulgarian dishes and wines was enjoyed - particularly at the two restaurants in my area, one of which is vegetarian and cooks superb black bread on the premises,



Friday, October 18, 2013

[Yovo Yovchev - a painter to watch!](#)

My great friend [Yovo Yovchev](#) of Sofia has had an exhibition these last few weeks - at the Finesse Gallery in Hristo Belchev St just off Solunska St.

Here he is with my other great gallerist friend, Yassen Gochev at the exhibition - which, sadly, ends tomorrow. Yassen's artistry is variously surrealist (oil) and realist (aquarelle and oil) - and you can find him at his [Konos Gallery](#)

Yovo was the first guy to introduce me to the great traditions of Bulgarian painting - he sold me my first Emilia Radusheva (I have about 5 now) and was the first person to show me the catalogues of the Victoria Gallery Auction House....and hence help captivate me into the incredible tradition of Bulgarian painting .



Tomorrow is the last day of the exhibition - and 3-4 of his paintings have caught my eye. I managed to buy the second of these.....

Monday, October 21, 2013

[Imagining a future](#)



A space for books, paintings, wine and....ideas? A possible new concept for Sofia - [European City of Culture?](#)

As well as conducting my usual haunts of galleries and bookshops here in Sofia, I'm looking at property - and feel that any flat has to be large enough to take my present (let alone future) stock of books and paintings.

I found a dream flat - on the edge of a forest a mere 20 minutes' drive (or metro) from the centre - but it's only 70 sq metres; and does not allow the flaneur life I love in the centre of town.

And the second-hand and remaindered books whose titles appealed to me in the last few days (and now lie around the flat) speak powerfully of the importance of serendipity and conversations - eg

[JG Ballard](#)'s dystopian novel [Kingdom Come](#) (2006);

[Charles Bukowski](#)'s collection of despairing poetry - [War all the time](#) (1984)

a book about the Anglo-Scottish borderlands between the

14th and 16th centuries - [The Reivers](#);

Desperately seeking Paradise - journeys of a sceptical muslim (2004) by [Ziauddin Sardar](#);

[Dinner with Persephone](#); [travels in Greece](#) by Patricia Storace (1996);

Hungarian Antal Szerb's 1937 masterpiece [Journey by Moonlight](#) ;
the final (third) part of Russe-born Nobel-prize winning [Elias Canetti's](#) auobiography [The Play of the Eyes](#) (1986);
[Half of a Yellow Sun](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; and
[The Language Wars; a History of Proper English](#) (2011) by the
improbably-named Henry Hitchings

So why not a small gallery space in the centre where I can hang the paintings, display books, offer wines and converse in whatever language.....? Fine for experience - but what would I actually sell - apart from glasses of wine?? The books (eg my extensive collection of about Bulgarian painters) and paintings would not leave the shop but simply be a catalyst for conversation.....
Now that the British Council here has closed its library of books, perhaps there is a place for people to go who wish a taste of European (if not British) culture. I could add French and German books; link with the British butcher and the second-hand English bookshop here; and with cultural centres such as [The Red House](#).....Dream on.....



Friday, October 25, 2013

[Temptations and turbulence](#)



The beautiful weather continues here in Sofia - 24 yesterday - and, invigorated by the exercises and swim at Rodina hotel, I strolled for some 4 hours visiting my small galleries
First the Absinthe gallery (where I bought an aquarelle of a view from a window - by a young woman - Klementina Mancheva);

then Vihra at



the [Astry](#) Gallery (tempted by this fetching Kostadinov figure in the red dress on the right):

My friend Yassen was showing his latest oil at his [Konus](#) gallery;

A rarer visit to the [Kristal gallery](#) had me tempted by an Alexandrov and a Zhekov; and, finally, a first visit to the Grita gallery just past the Opera for a Vernissaj - one of four apparently which were taking place that evening in the capital.

A lovely little area this last - between the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and General Dondukov Boulevard - with a tiny gem of a classical disc shop just outside the Opera house on Vrabcha St from which I emerged with 20 odd discs - mainly Dvorak. Incidentally, I was shocked to see the extremist party Ataka offices prominently sitting ajowl the Opera!!

Earlier I had purchased some charming Bulgarian ceramics and also reproductions of the



irresistible [Angela Minkova](#) - at Albena's wonderful tiny but joyful shop- Art Magazin at the corner of the Catholic Church and Skobelev St (number 38); and popped into the Raiko Aleksiev gallery on Rakovsky St which turned out to be celebrating the works of one [Nikolay Rostovchev](#) (1898-1988).

Rostovchev was an officer in the Russian dragoons who was part of the residue of the White Army which landed in Varna in 1921. In 1925 he enrolled in Boris Mitov's class at the Art Academy in Sofia and graduated in 1930, exhibiting in the annual exhibitions of the

Association of Independent Artists until 1945 - at which point the new communist authorities stripped him of his membership of all associations. His past was against him - not only presumably his time with the White Army but his religious painting during most of the 1930s - for example his work on the [St Nedelya Church](#). What a turbulent life he had - fleeing from the Bolsheviks only to land up 20-odd years later facing their successors who at least only ostracised him. It was appropriate therefore that the exhibition is in the Raiko Aleksiev gallery since Aleksiev died in custody a few weeks after the communist takeover.

On this historical note, I was aware of [the slaughter which took place in 1925](#) at the church but had not properly connected it with the [September 1923 communist uprising](#). I remember passing a monument to communists at the roadside near Vratsa in the north-east of the country - and wondering about it. I posted last year about the massacres which took place in the [communist takeover of September 1944](#) - 70 years ago next year. I wonder how the period will be remembered next year??

My evening finished with another nice discovery as I took a side road back to the flat - a small bookshop which had a copy of a remarkable 500 page book on Bulgaria - [Bulgaria Terra Europeansis Incognita](#) by



Ivan Daraktchiev. Original both in its provocative text and superb photos of old ceramics.

Saturday, October 26, 2013

Aesthetics and economics



Two sad departures - the lovely small Tabak café which occupied the back of the National Gallery building (the old Palace) and spread on to the quiet garden area leading up to the Russian Church was unceremoniously bundled out of its space a few months back. By the Minister of Culture himself apparently - for failure to pay back rent due. I loved the challenge the cafe represented to political correctness - and also the serenity of the garden section with its views of various statues.

And the large gallery space which used to offer

paintings,

ceramics and wine from the Katarzsyna estate in Ivan Denklogu st just down from Vitosha which also offered musical performances a couple of times each week in its downstairs basement has also disappeared - now being made over I suspect into a luxury shoe shop.

Not good for Sofia's European City of Culture 2019 bid! Although the pavements (the worst of any European capital) are now being repaired!!

Times have been bad for Sofia's small galleries for the past few years - and still don't show any sign of looking up. I talk to their owners - one of whom told me that she recoups very little of the 1,000 euros a month which her small space costs her - in rental, facilities and help. It is a labour of love - and I look forward to being amongst the participants of tonight's event which celebrates her first year. I've bought three things from that particular gallery so far - and am pleased that pride of place in the exhibition which marks the first anniversary are aquarelles from a 90 year-old! And it's good to see that the older painters still alive are honoured by several of the smaller galleries.....



Sofia's atmosphere was nicely captured for me yesterday when I was leaving another gallery (having bought the Kostadinov "lady in red" which heads the last post). A man with a painting under his arm was walking past and paused to let us examine it. "Do you like it?" he asked after he told me it was a Trichkov (a painter I have been trying to buy) and then walked off.....

Thursday, October 31, 2013

Perceiving the Balkans

[Patrick Leigh Fermor](#) is a name to conjure with - as the wikipedia entry puts it -

*At the age of 18, Leigh Fermor decided to walk the length of Europe, from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. He set off on 8 December 1933, shortly after Hitler had come to power in Germany, with a few clothes, several letters of introduction and a few books. He slept in barns and shepherds' huts, but also was invited by landed gentry and aristocracy into the country houses of Central Europe. He experienced hospitality in many monasteries along the way. Two of his later travel books, [A Time of Gifts](#) (1977) and [Between the Woods and the Water](#) (1986), were about this journey. The final part of his journey was unfinished at the time of Leigh Fermor's death, but was published as *The Broken Road: Travels from Bulgaria to Mount Athos* in September 2013. The book draws on Leigh Fermor's diary at the time and on an early draft he wrote in the 1960s.*

Neal Ascherson's [review of The Broken Road](#) in the current issue of London Review of Books puts his writing in the wider context of British writing about this part of the world -

There are fewer schlosses in this book. The explanation is that after using a good many introductions to nobility across Austria, Hungary and then Transylvania, he had entered Bulgaria. Barons with Germanic titles and estates didn't feature in this land of peasant villages and Orthodox monasteries, which had only recently emerged from centuries 'under the Turkish yoke'. And Leigh Fermor was now crossing formidable mountain barriers - the Balkan and Rhodope ranges - as winter approached. To survive, he had to rely on the food and shelter offered to him along the way. He is in no way condescending about his hosts. This strange, penniless English boy walking to Constantinople had nothing to offer them but his curiosity, and they were as interested by him as he was by them.

'Paddy's travel writing is often brilliant and moving, always humane. And yet its sheer descriptiveness, its concentration on things and people exotically "other" when contrasted to some assumed English norm, does put it in a category.' The guide here is Vesna Goldsworthy's [Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination](#) (1998). As she shows, writing imaginative or purely fictional work about the Balkans has been an overwhelmingly British habit. Byron can be said to have set it off. But the genre reached its zenith in the late 19th century and early 20th. Anthony Hope's *Ruritania* seems to be located in Germanic territory rather than further south-east, but other writers - 'Sydney Grier' (Hilda Gregg), Dorothea Gerard, Bram Stoker etc - floated their dreamlands far down the Danube and into the 'bloodthirsty' Balkans. Later, John Buchan, Lawrence Durrell, Evelyn Waugh and Malcolm Bradbury were among those who tried their hand at brutal, gaudy Balkan Ruritanias.

Weeping old houses

It seems that some Romanian architects at least have a soul. [Some months back](#) I mentioned a lovely little production on the rehabilitation of traditional Romanian houses produced by the Igloo architectural publishing house.

And this month, an even better one has been produced by the [Association for Rehabilitation](#) which started its work in 2010 and identifies "weeping houses" ie those whose semi-criminal neglect has brought houses almost to the stage of collapse.

The attractively produced [new book](#) has the underwhelming title of *The RePAD Guide* - and sets out - in English, French and Romanian - guidelines and examples for restoring old houses to their previous glory. It's available for only 7 euros!

Such initiatives need encouragement in the climate of hostile indifference which exists amongst the Bucharest and Romanian authorities! It contrasts with the celebration by the Bulgarians of their

Bulgarian revival style which can be found in abundance in so many villages - one of which ([Koprovishitse](#)) I visited again only a few weeks back.

Monday, November 18, 2013

In memory of Rayko Aleksiev

On this day in 1944 Rayko Nikolov Aleksiev- a Bulgarian painter and caricaturist who established Shturets, a hugely successful satirical newspaper in 1932. - was battered to death in a Bulgarian prison after his arrest by communists in their 1944 putsch.

Known for his uncompromising satire, Aleksiev was especially unloved by Bulgarian communists due to his famous caricatures of Joseph Stalin. After the [Bulgarian coup d'état of 1944](#) he was, like many other intellectuals, arrested by the newly formed people's militia. While under arrest, he was severely beaten over the course of several days, resulting in his death.



Aleksiev studied literature at Sofia University and painting at the Art Academy in Sofia. With the release of his first landscape in the "Exhibition of Young" in 1913 Bulgarian Queen [Eleanor](#) became one of his biggest fans. The same year, the artist had five solo exhibitions.

In 1932, he founded the weekly newspaper "Cricket", painting all the cartoons, writing articles and humorous miniatures and handled the distribution. "Cricket" was written in the artist's home - the last issue being that of September 8, 1944. Its circulation of 50,000 made it the forefront native print media. Cartoonists Ilyia Beshkov and [S toyan Venev](#) were regular contributors.

As a longtime chairman of the Union of Artists Associations Rayko Alexiev organized help for destitute colleagues left homeless after the bombing of the cit in 1944. He managed to get from the Treasury the sum of 2 million leva for the starving families of the many freelance artists evacuated to various villages of the country.

With his success Rayko Alexiev made many enemies. In the last days before the [Ninth of September coup](#), he was repeatedly warned by his family to leave the country and was indeed supplied with diplomatic passports. Alexiev refused to believe he was in danger and said:

I am not a politician. I have shown the errors of politicians, I toiled with my cartoons to deride what they do and that some politicians are bad. I have no money abroad. I paid regular taxes. I lend to anyone and I have given with both hands. I'm not a rat, leaving a sinking ship.

In 2002 the National Literary Award for humour and satire was started by the Municipality of Pazardzhik. It is awarded every three years, on March 7 to Bulgarian writers for their contribution in the field of humour and satire. The award may also be given to foreign authors for special contributions to Bulgarian studies popularization, personal creativity in the field of humour and satire, analysis and publications thematically related to Bulgaria.

Sunday, November 24, 2013

Romance of the Balkans

For the past 23 years I have wandered in central Europe, the Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus - spending an average of 2 years in some eleven countries and having about 30 different homes. Verily I am a nomad - although, for the past 5 years, with bases in the Carpathian Mountains, Bucharest and Sofia. Hardly surprising therefore that I am drawn to travel literature - the scribbles of those who seek to give us a sense of life in other places.

[Jan Morris](#) is one of my favourites (the link gives a marvellous interview with her by the indomitable Paris Review) - but I have been overwhelmed in recent days by a post-modernist account of this genre which I found on the internet - about British travel in the Balkans in the last century - complete with about 500 bibliographical references.....The version I have is a PhD thesis - [The Debated Lands](#) which looks first at the motifs of discord, savagery, backwardness and obfuscation which characterise the 19th century books on the area. In the approach to the First World War all of that changed; specific countries were embraced by economic and military alliances and some countries acquired what has been called a "pet state" status -

[Todorova](#) sums up as

.....the pet state approach to south-east Europe: the choosing from amongst the Balkan states a people whose predicaments to abhor, whose history and indigenous leaders to commend, whose political grievances to air, and whose national aspirations to advocate. Along with challenging the discourse's imperialist tendencies, national advocacy would undercut both the denigratory format of dominant balkanism and its racist codifications of the Balkan peninsula as a homogenised zone of misfortune and degeneracy with writers retaining the denigratory approach even as they delineated - without any awareness of the paradox - a people that apparently broke with the imputed essence. In this way, Trevor's valorisation of the Montenegrins, Vivian's romanticisation of the Serbs, Upward's endorsement of the Greeks, or Peacock's and Durham's clear preference for the Albanians, are all based on contrasting the positive attributes of their chosen peoples with the thoroughly negative qualities of the Balkan ethnicities surrounding them; a source of genuine confusion for the general reader, no doubt, who might find the Serbians, say, lauded against the Bulgarians in one text, and then the very opposite in the next.....

Until reading the book, I had not realised, for example, how many British women volunteered for duty in the Serbian field hospitals and how media and literary coverage of this phenomenon brought that country into the British consciousness - and how positively. That was followed by a strand of writing in the late 1920s which took the romanticisation into deeper territory - with a revolt against western modernity and mass society -

By the 1920s, Foster Fraser's misgivings about western society had not only become a prevailing feature of British travel writing on the Balkans, but gained widespread expression within intellectual circles of the day. The pace of modernisation had already been alarming such influential commentators as Arnold, Ruskin and Tennyson in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The economic rate of growth of Britain, France and Germany had reached unprecedented levels, industrial development and exports were greater than ever, producing via rapidly burgeoning empires, a global network of commercial and financial influence. Urbanisation had been radically altering the forms and values of national life, as well as eroding England's enduringly pastoral self-image and technology was achieving bewildering levels of progress. In the place of Victorian certainty came a sudden surge in scepticism, as Freud and Bergson challenged rationality and objectivity, feminism challenged patriarchal assumptions, working class radicalism increasingly threatened middle class security, and science asked ever more pertinent questions of Christianity. During the

second decade of that century, even those who had put their faith in science and progress were to find that faith severely tested.

From the end of the First World War until the outbreak of the Second, travellers were finding in this previously depraved corner of Europe.... " a peace, harmony, vivacity and pastoral beauty in utmost contrast to the perceived barrenness of the West, and which produced benefits for those weary of modernity that ranged from personal rejuvenation to outright revelation. According to this alternative balkanism, violence had disappeared from the region, savagery became tamed, obfuscation turned to honesty and clarity, and the extreme backwardness that had formerly been the gauge of Balkan shortcoming was now the very measure by which it was extolled. For many travellers, any mystery that did remain around the geographical object became less the marker of a befuddled and dishonest culture than a vital indication of spiritual depth.....

When placed in the context of the extreme denigration of earlier periods, the speed with which an established representational paradigm, its accumulated motifs and evaluations becoming rapidly outmoded, could be rejected, dismantled, and utterly brushed aside in written record was remarkable in the extreme. Trickling out in 1915, and reaching a flood by 1916, the textual sources of knowledge on Serbia elevated it into a complex, reliant, independent, 'plucky little nation' far more germane to the modern requirements of power.

Monday, November 25, 2013

[How the European powers created and destroyed the Balkans](#)

Andrew Hammond's [literary romp through the Balkans](#) is a real insight - his mix of diary collage, historical context and deconstruction a very illuminating commentary on British perspectives of the late 19th and 20th Century perceptions of Balkans

I'm looking forward to getting a copy of the anthology - [Through Another Europe](#) - which he published in 2009 based on his work and findings

Few (if any) of these travellers' tales bothered to attempt to put the scenes they saw in a wider political perspective but it is this which Hammond occasionally offers us -

At the end of the nineteenth century, once their ties with the Porte finally loosened, the Great Powers had advanced loans to Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria and, with much of that money being spent amongst the western arms manufacturers (strong national armies being deemed as useful an obstacle to Russian advance as a strong Ottoman Empire), bankruptcy and western control over domestic economies began to prevail throughout the region.' (p83).....

Clearly, with the Dual Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire now ranged on the enemy side, and the former's 'Drang nach Osten' assuming more sinister prospect since its alliance with Germany, the only means by which to protect Allied interests in the region, both during and after the war, was to carve out strong, resilient independent territories, moulding them into nation-states through all the signs, images, tropes and evaluations of a nationalist discourse, and reassigning them the value of national ally rather than cultural other (p163).....

But, as Hammond shows, British writers' generally sympathetic treatment of the area changed once again very dramatically after the Second World War

And as I shall go on to explore, the economic difficulties of the period, the political relations between the West and the authoritarian regimes of south-east Europe, the redrawing of boundaries after the two world wars, all showed that the West was not about to be a benevolent master, a point the war generation often exemplified personally. The traces in their work of a lingering authority, and readiness to condemn the locals

when they failed to obey that authority, both indicate that a very British attitude to abroad was still at work (p165).....

Misha Glenny has given us quite a few (historical) books on the Balkans and offered [a good angle in a London Review of Books](#) piece on 2 other books which detail and critiques how outsiders have created images of the Balkans - [Inventing Ruritania](#) by Vesna [Goldsworthy](#) and [Imagining the Balkans](#) by Maria Todorova -

The First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 are widely believed - writes Glenny - to offer definitive proof of 'medieval' behaviour on the part of Balkan warriors. But the Balkan nationalism and militarism expressed in these wars were much more closely related to the practices and morality of Great Power imperialism than to local traditions. The Balkan armies were largely funded by Western loans, Western firms supplied them with weapons and other technology, their officers were schooled and organised by Frenchmen, Germans, Russians and Britons. The armies were staffed, and in the case of Turkey commanded, by Westerners. Representatives of Krupp, Skoda, Schneider-Creusot and Vickers participated in the wars as observers and wrote reports on the effectiveness of their weaponry which were used to advertise the superiority of their products over those of their competitors.

Anything anyone in the West knows about the Balkan Wars has been learned from the report published in early 1914 by the Carnegie Endowment's Commission of Inquiry into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars. It is an important document and the Commission's members were serious and well-intentioned. This is a passage from the introduction:

"What finally succeeds in bringing armed peace into disrepute, is that today the Great Powers are manifestly unwilling to make war. Each one of them, Germany, England, France and the United States, to name a few, has discovered the obvious truth that the richest country has the most to lose by war, and each country wishes for peace above all things. This is so true that these two Balkan wars have wrought us a new miracle, - we must not forget it, - namely, the active and sincere agreement of the Great Powers who, changing their tactics, have done everything to localise the hostilities in the Balkans and have become the defenders of the peace that they themselves threatened thirty-five years ago, at the time of the Congress of Berlin.

Five months later, despite the Commission's belief in the inherent wisdom of the Great Powers, imperialist rivalry reached its zenith, persuading the club's senior members to divert their enormous economic and technological resources into one vast industrial conglomerate of death".

The vast massacres of the First World War relegated the ruinous social and economic impact of the Balkan Wars to the background. But those who witnessed or participated in them were afforded a unique insight into what the 20th century had in store. Several battles pitted forces larger than Napoleon's mightiest army against one another. This despite Serbia, for example, having a population of less than three million. The Bulgarians mobilised 25 per cent of their male population, just under half a million men. The fighting was characterised by trench warfare and merciless sieges; and by pitiless artillery assaults on unprotected infantry and civilians. All sides, except Montenegro and Romania, deployed aeroplanes against the enemy, mainly for reconnaissance or dropping leaflets but also for the occasional bombing raid. For the first time, technology enabled fighting to last 24 hours a day, as huge searchlights illuminated enemy defences. This was not Balkan warfare - this was Western warfare.

The violent capriciousness of the Balkans was used as an alibi by the Great Powers for covering up their own role in various crimes and for pointing the finger at countries who were acting as unwilling or unwitting proxies in a broader Great Power struggle.

'The Balkans was never the powder-keg but just one of a number of devices which might have acted as detonator. The powder-keg was Europe itself.

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Kruchma and chibouk

I have to confess to a taste for cigars - indulged in private. About one a day. Even worse, I admire the remnants of the tobacco culture one finds here in Bulgaria - the brazenness with which the owners of the tiny shops which line the narrow streets of Sofia city centre squat on their doorsteps and smoke the weed and drink their coffee. I have become an avid collector of [the aquarelles of Grigor Naidenov](#) who celebrated the café culture here of the inter-war and post-war years.

[Balkan smoke - tobacco and the making of modern Bulgaria](#) paints a fascinating picture of

the role of tobacco in the social, economic and political life of modern Bulgaria. It's by [Mary Neuburger](#)



It was not until the nineteenth century that Bulgarians began to enter the Muslim coffeehouse, where they conducted commerce and local administration, read newspapers, and engaged in debate. It was then that they learned to smoke, as they came of age politically and culturally, and as their national movement gained momentum. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, smoking, like the tobacco industry itself, drove social change, accompanying and even propelling a certain "coming of age" for social groups who joined the ranks of passionate smokers.

As Bulgarians entered the coffeehouse at home, they also began to frequent European cafes and discover themselves as "Bulgarians" abroad, amidst the intellectual ferment of Paris, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. Soon Bulgarians began to establish coffeehouses at home that took on increasingly European characteristics, mainly aesthetically. For example, the traditional hookah was replaced by the newly minted cigarette. Coffeehouses became places of intellectual and cultural activity, and tobacco became a muse for generations of the Bulgarian elite. In the interwar period, in particular, the coffeehouse was at the heart of intellectual life, though other kinds of smoke-filled venues mushroomed in the Bulgarian capital and elsewhere in Bulgaria.

Smoking became the quintessential modern habit, a necessary accoutrement for the modern man and eventually woman, in both the sober coffeehouse and the drunken tavern. Women and youth slowly entered this world of public smoking in the course of twentieth century, a fact that impelled anti-smoking impulses (however meagre). In some respects this is a familiar story, with obvious global parallels, yet the Bulgarian context continually reveals it own particular nuances. In pre-1945 Bulgaria, for example, anti-smoking impulses flowed from two rather disparate sources, American (and Bulgarian convert) Protestants and the communist left. Both had a radical vision for "moral uplift" and social reform and utopian visions of the future. But both were also, in a sense, foreign, and so faced local and official hostility in the period before 1945. Most Bulgarians simply did not want to give up their new found pleasures, and the state was an important beneficiary of tobacco industry revenues and consumption taxes.

In the post World War II period, the dramatic change to a communist form of government brought an entirely new set of practical and theoretical quandaries. The Bulgarian tobacco industry took off, producing ever greater numbers of increasingly luxurious cigarettes for the enormous "captive" Soviet and Bloc market.

There was also a veritable explosion of state built and run restaurants, cafes, hotels and sea-side resorts in the later decades of period, as the state sought legitimacy by providing the "good life" to its workers. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, communist state-directed abstinence efforts emerged, along with heightened concerns over the growing numbers of smoking women and youth. The Bulgarian communists continually connected smoking to "western" moral profligacy and "remnants" of a capitalist past, as well as "Oriental" degeneracy—or Bulgaria's backwards, Ottoman past. Yet the state continued to provide cheap cigarettes and places to smoke them as never before. Bulgarian smoking rates skyrocketed under communism and the period generated a society of smokers for whom the voice of abstinence was just another form of state propaganda.

A reference in the text to the famous Bulgarian writer Ivan Vazov's [Under the Yoke](#) has encouraged me to read this classic novel about life under the Ottomans in the late 19th century. NB Kruchma was a village tavern where long pipes (Chibouks) were smoked before being replaced by cigarettes. The same bakal (shop) in villages would be a kafene during the day and kruchma in the evening - with rakia replacing the coffee and cigarettes the chibouks of an earlier age. A year ago today I had an interesting post about "[the disease of managerialism](#)" And a nice post about an Austrian painter who was [once the toast of Vienna](#).
[Bulgarian Whites](#)

Perhaps understandably, I failed to mention the annual 2 day Bulgarian wine fair I attended 2 weekends ago here in Sofia.

It was hard work - and required a rest afterwards! For 10 euros I had a 2-day pass and more than 200 wines to taste.

I did my best on the Saturday - the white and rose day - but found red Sunday a bit of a slog - with my pallet and tongue fairly quickly getting badly coated!

For some reason, I decided to score the wines out of 6.0 and the white wines I appreciated came out as follows -

Lovica - Chardonnay (6 levs!) 4.5 out of 6.0

LV - Colombard (5 levs! and 4.5 score) and Sauvignon Blanc (SB)

Black Sea Gold - Muscat El Mar (6 levs) - find of the day! Salty Hills Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc (15 levs) - one of the best (Silver medal)

Minkov - Rheinriesling

Katarzyna - SB (4.2)

Marvin - Viognier and Chardonnay and Viognier - both 4.5s in my scoring

Villa Yustina - Blanc Cuvee (8 levs)

Zagreus - white Mavrud - 4.5 on my scoring

Medi Valley - Chardonnay Incanto (4.9!!) 18 levs and Chardonnay and Viognier

No Man's Land 600 SB 12 levs

Kapatovo - Chardonnay and Viognier 4.5 (18 levs)

On Sunday, the only wine which impressed me was [the Ethno range of wines](#). They are from [the Sungurlare valley](#) near Burgas on the Black Sea and the Chardonnay I am now drinking (3 euros) got a silver medal (in the 2013 "Chardonnays of the World" somewhere). How do they do it??

Tomorrow I will try to find some specimens of all these wines in [the CaseVino chain](#) - the Bulgarian version of Oddbins - and subject them in the next week to some tough tasting and testing. No rest for the conscientious!!

The photo is of the wine museum in Sungurlare village - the wine area very near Burgas

Saturday, November 30, 2013

Danube Divides

The Danube may be a busy river but it has also acted as a barrier between Bulgaria and Romania who have had, over the years, a rather strained relationship - not helped by the open conflict during the two Balkan Wars a hundred years ago and the absorption by Romania in 1918 for 22 years of a significant section of Bulgarian territory on the southern banks of the Danube (the Dobrogea area of the North-East).



Although I have visited the city of Dobrich in the heart of that area - and Balçik on the Black Sea which was a famous art colony then for the Bucharest glitterati, I have not yet managed the various settlements which scatter along the eastern Danube banks particularly Silistra (this is one of the paintings in my collection of that city - by one Hristo Danev from 1910)

I was therefore delighted to come across just now a post from a Romanian blogger I admire about [Tutrakan and the museum and monument there](#) which mark the battles; the role played by such outsiders as the Germans; and the eventual liberation of the area in 1940. What I particularly appreciated about the post (apart from the photographs and history) was the recognition of the dubious nature of the encroachment in the first place - the author admitting that the visit made him appreciate that this was a bit of Romanian imperialism

Although a lot of Romanians make the journey by road to Varna in the summer, there is, it seems to me, still little love lost between the nations. I do occasionally worry about my Romanian numberplates here!!

I was looking these days at some text about the characteristics of Bulgarians and those who are their neighbours. I was told (by When Cultures Collide) that -

Bulgarians differ considerably from other Slavs in their values and communication style, probably because of their origins. In general they are cooler and more pragmatic than many Slavs, particularly when compared with Serbs. Quiet and soberness are valued; you will see little of the hotheaded discussion or noisy public disputes that are only too common in Belgrade. They do, however, share with other Slavs a widespread feeling of pessimism about national helplessness. In general, Bulgarian values tend to be rural, with homespun virtues, as one might expect from people living in a predominantly agricultural society. Basic values are disciplined/sober; pragmatic/cautious; persistent/stubborn; good organizers; industrious/determined; steady/suspicious but tolerant of foreigners; inventive; highly literate/thorough

Before giving full expression to their feelings or opinions, Bulgarians engage in a series of preliminary encounters, during which they sound out and size up (albeit in a friendly manner) their conversation partners. During this period they are decidedly less flowery or rhetorical in their speech than the Yugoslavs, Romanians or Hungarians. At this stage, it is very difficult to extract opinions or eventual attitudes from them. When this exploratory period has passed, Bulgarians open up to display a modicum of quiet charm and make their requests in a circuitous manner, avoiding

confrontation whenever they can. They enjoy conversation—an art for them—but are less prone to exaggeration than South Slavs or other Mediterranean people.

And here's an interesting report which makes the case for a [different sort of leadership](#) than that which the modern (and post-modern) world has inflicted on us.

Saturday, December 7, 2013

[Salute to Varna City Gallery](#)

It's not often that one can [upload an entire book of paintings free of charge](#) but that is what Varna City Art Gallery now offers as part of its city bid to be European City of Culture in 2019.

It's not a large book (136 pages) and contains very little text - other than the names and dates of the painters - which is sad. But the quality of the reproductions is excellent and the book is a good short introduction to about 50 of the key names in Bulgarian art of the first part of the 20th Century.



I now have my beady eye on this painting from the 1940s or so - by Dimo Nikolov about whom I know nothing except that he had some art training in Prague.....The photo does not do the painting justice - the style and strong colours in particular remind me of the [Baia Mare school of painting](#) (then in Hungary - now Romania) of the turn of the century

The painting is an Alexander Moutafov - born in Shumen and educated in Varna, he studied art in



By comparison [the little book I published last year](#) gives some detail of the lives of about 150 of the key Bulgarian painters - as well as some 50 reproductions.

One of the artists in the Varna book is Alexander Moutafov, the seascape specialist, who was schooled in the area in 1880s and 1890s and trained in Turin and Munich in the first decade of the 20th century. The aquarelle above is a new one I acquired today. This is the third of his paintings I now have. You can read more on the Dec 5 post.



Turin between 1899 and 1902; then Munich 1902/03. He was also a war artist
It was the Munich experience which aroused his interest in Jugendstil. From 1921-33, he was professor of Painting in Sofia's Art Academy. First Bulgarian seascape painter, he laid the basis for this specialism for subsequent Bulgarian painters. There is, I understand, a museum in his Sozopol house

Sunday, January 26, 2014

Banned artists in Bulgaria

I visited three exhibitions last week here in Sofia as the snow threatened and then arrived at the weekend - first at the [National Art Academy](#) which was showing some of their collection accompanied by a superb 200 page catalogue called Painting Collection (1896-1940)(Museum Collection of the National Academy of Art); then the excellent City Gallery which was showing a rather disappointing [exhibition of Sirak Skitnik](#); and finally, the refurbished [National Gallery](#) which is at last showing beautiful work from its collection - at least on the second floor (and if you ignore the temporary exhibition of an artist who doesn't even figure in the updated version of my booklet on [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings](#)).

This updated version (not yet online) includes the details of



another 40 artists

I've been

able to add over the past year - as well as the links I discovered today to two of the books in my extensive collection of books on Bulgarian painters - the terrific production on the [Art Collection of the National Bank of Bulgaria](#) and also a link to an old book I found a year or so ago in the antique bookshops here - [Socialist construction in the work of Bulgarian artists](#) (Sofia 1954). This gives reproductions of more than 30 typical paintings of the period - glorifying the life of the worker. I find it

remarkable how little reference I find - particularly in the art books here - to the problems artists experienced in Bulgaria both in the immediate aftermath of [the communist takeover in September 1944](#) or in the two decades which followed.

Famous artists such as Boris Denev and Nicolae Boiadjev suffered from bans.

And I stumbled today on two more examples - [Konstantin Shtarkelov](#) (1881-1961) was the most famous of a clutch of outstanding Bulgarian watercolour painters (including Pavel [Francalijski](#); Yordan Geshev and Kriskaretz). Shtarkelov came from a very poor family and lived in poverty in Odessa and Moscow as a youth and met the key Russian artists of the time before returning in 1909 to Bulgaria. He did portraits but preferred to draw landscapes from Rila and Pirin Mountains, Sofia



and Tarnovo regions (see pp 39-42 of the Bulgarian Bank book for 4 examples). He was also a war artist in 1912-1913 and 1917. His works were exhibited in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Venice, Germany and Hungary.

But, after September 9 1944, his work was banned and forgotten because of "his ties with the Palace". They call him the "official artist of the bourgeois regime and royal favorite " ... Konstantin Shtarkelov was expelled from the artists' union and spent five months in the Central Prison before living a life of destitution. According to [an extensive article I found about him on the Artprice website](#) he did eventually manage to hold



a much visited exhibition of his works in 1960. It attracted mixed reviews and he died less than a year later.

I was also very pleased to come across today [this little story about Vasil Barakov](#) (1902-1991) - one of the first Bulgarian artists to show industrial landscapes in 1948-1949 a group of artists, including Vasil Barakov, Zlatyu Boyadziev (one of Bulgaria's best) and Zdravko Alexandrov were sent to paint three months in Romania, mainly in the area of Baia Mare (Transylvania) and around

Ploesti. Barakov returned to Bulgaria with many landscapes, portraits and sketches, which captures features of Romania. In early 1949 the group made a joint exhibition. Only three days later it unexpectedly closed. Critics accuse the authors of formalism. They do not reflect reality in brotherly Romania.

"My father - says son of Vasil Barakov - Dr. Miroslav Barakov - was mortified. He knew that the paintings were good - as did his colleagues but did not show his external feelings, did not react emotionally. But, after these serious charges in those dangerous and difficult years, something snapped in him and he almost ceased to paint... well, from time to time, he did a still life but focused instead on on film posters, book design. Often our salary saved my mother a teacher of mathematics.

This went on for 10-12 years. *"In 1967, however, the ice around the great master of the brush crushed. He was awarded the title of Honored*



Artist. In 1973, the maestro made a commemorative exhibition in gallery "Rakovski" 125 in the capital. When he went in the morning in the exhibition hall, the artist finds there the other great master of the brush - Ilia Petrov.

Bulgaria has had [a museum of socialism](#) for a year or so which I've not so far been tempted to visit. But [this rather superficial assessment](#) suggests that I should give it the once-over. Certainly "leftists" such as Ilyia Beshkov and Marko Behar had no problems flourishing in the new regime but quite a few others suffered greatly....

Friday, January 31, 2014

In Memoriam

1 February is [Remembrance Day here in Bulgaria for Victims of Communism](#) - but has been so only since 2011. September 9th (1944) is the date which occurs in most of the accounts I have read since it was then that the [Communist takeover of Bulgaria](#) took place and the lynching, execution and incarceration of thousands of people got underway- but it was on 1 February that

.....the death sentence was passed upon 147 people from the political elite of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom, including 67 former MPs and 22 ministers from cabinets during 1940-1944, among them prime ministers of that time Bogdan Filov, Dobri Bozhilov and Ivan Bagryanov, as well as the three regents - Prince Kyril of Preslav, Prof. Bogdan Filov and General Nikola Mihov. The sentence was passed in the Palace of Justice at 4 pm on 1 February 1945. The same night, the best known of the defendants were executed at the Central Sofia Cemetery and their bodies were buried in a common grave, but it was not before August 1996 that a Christian cross was erected upon it. The sentences were justified entirely on political grounds. The main defendants had first been sent for interrogation to the former Soviet Union and after their return to Bulgaria and establishment of the People's Court, their sentences were agreed upon between the Political Bureau of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (BWP) and the Soviet leadership. Present day research of the activity of the People's Court leaves no doubt that the entire legal proceedings were politically biased and the fate of the defendants was decided on outside the courtroom.

August 23 was actually named as [European remembrance day for victims of communism and Nazism](#) - although both Hungary and Latvia commemorate the victims of communism on February 25.

I am an outsider so should be careful about comments....I have to wonder, however, about the appropriateness of contemporary Bulgarian politicians selecting the best date for such commemoration. Most people these days would not hesitate to string the political class up (God forgive me!). I don't, of course, know anything about how the Bulgarian establishment was viewed by its public in the early 1940s - but it could be argued that it is more appropriate to remember the thousands of more ordinary people who, for a variety of (often dubious) reasons, were summarily executed in those early days of chaos.

It was bad enough that the judiciary put its stamp on such decisions but just as appalling was the way partisans and others took justice into their own hands and bludgeoned people to death in the even earlier days of the collapse of the old regime. Many ordinary people must have been amongst the perpetrators and constitute a blot on the country's reputation. One reason perhaps why the present-day politicians prefer another date for remembrance.....

Friday, February 14, 2014

A special day - for wine!

On the 14th of February Bulgarians celebrate the day of St. Trifon Zarezan. The roots of this holiday are hidden in the far distant past and probably is related to the Thracian god of the wine - Dionysius. The pagan customs messed with the Orthodox traditions and people invented an amusing legend about Trifon Zarezan.

He was a common wine-grower. One day he went to his vineyard to cut the vine outgrowths. He met his sister Virgin Mary and joked with her for that she had an illegitimate child. She decided to punish him. Virgin Mary went to Trifon's wife and told her that Trifon had cut his nose. His wife rushed towards the vineyard to help her husband but she saw he is fine. The woman told him what happened and Trifon started laughing. He said that this is impossible, but when he waved with a hand he really cut his nose with the pruning-knife. This accident gave him his nickname - "Zarezan" which means "truncated". Real St. Trifon died as a martyr during the roman persecution over the Christians. But people didn't want to relate his name with sadness and pain, so they crowned him with the nimbus of the wine and rejoicing.



More seriously, wine is [one of the few bright spots in the Bulgarian economy and society.](#)

"Russia is again Bulgaria's biggest wine market. We used to sell the largest quantities of Bulgarian wine on this market in the past. The good news is that Bulgaria has regained its market in the average and the high price segment there. The same thing refers to the Polish and the Czech market. We managed to step back on these markets and sell successfully our produce.

In the past, one-third of the wine market in Poland consisted of Bulgarian wines. Bulgaria used to sell more wine there than Italy, France and Spain altogether. Currently we are slowly regaining our position there. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian wine is slowly shifting from the low price segment to the medium and the high ones."

A similar trend exists on other traditional markets in Western Europe. Bulgaria sells less, but more expensive wines there. The industry has the chance to penetrate large and new markets such as China and India. The wine export to China has been constantly on the rise over the past years. Bulgaria also attempts at positioning its wines in the USA, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan, Vietnam and China, within the frameworks of the EU programme for promotion of wines in third countries.

The local wine sorts were neglected over the past decades when the curiosity of the Bulgarian producers and consumers towards foreign sorts such as Shiraz, Pinot Noir, Melbeek, etc, was huge. Now the country has the chance to find its niche in the world wine market with traditional vine sorts. Bulgaria currently plants new plots with local vines such as Mavrud, Broad-leaf Melnik Vine, Pamid, and Rubin and we are to see the results in the nearest future, says Radoslav Radev.

2013 was exceptionally favorable to Bulgarian wine-making. The grape yield was very rich and of an extremely high quality. A record-high quantity of wine (around 200 million liters) is expected to be produced this year as compared to 127 million liters produced in 2012.

The painting is one in my collection - Tihorov from Veliko Tarnovo.

Sunday, February 16, 2014

Bulgarian populism and the protests



Globalism has failed. Monetarism has failed. The liberal politics of "less government, the market has the final say" has failed. The worldwide financial crisis, caused by the US, is a clear sign of this. Market fundamentalism, transformed into a religion by the financial and political establishment of the US, has suffered an abysmal defeat.... We say no to the world's speculative capital, no to supranational corporations, which destroy market economies, no to Wall Street, and we say yes to more common sense, balance, and equity

What could be more sensible than that? And yet the words are taken from the right-wing

Bulgarian Ataka party's 2013 manifesto. I found them a few days ago in an excellent overview of Bulgarian populism on [Anna Krasteva's blog](#). The article, written, in English, by a Bulgarian academic who lives in Sofia, continues

The populist rage is targeted mostly at international capital, which "drains" the national wealth: Ataka have estimated that 28 billion 257 million leva have been diverted from the pockets of Bulgarian tax payers into the treasuries of foreign companies selling food, clothes, electricity, banking services etc. "All institutions, all ministries, the fields of culture, healthcare, and education altogether receive 10 billion leva less than the foreign colonizers!" (Ataka 2013, 8).

Anti-Europeanism is the other topic which attracts the critical pathos of populist negation.

It strikes out in three directions.

- *The first one concerns the accusations of neo-colonialism: the EU "is becoming a new Soviet Union, functioning by force and against the constitution" (Ataka 2013). The full version of the program bears the arrogant title Siderov's Plan against the Colonial Yoke; the text begins with the story of "how we were enslaved after the fall of the Berlin Wall".*
- *The second criticism is institutional and is leveled at Europe's institutional structure: "the fake figure of EU president has been imposed, which contradicts both national and international law"; this claim also targets the consequences of Bulgaria's political strategy: "The Euro Pact invalidates the Parliament and the government, the elections, and democracy at large."*
- *The third direction has to do with Europeanization as a form of globalization: "The Euro Pact reinforces the power of the supranational and corporate oligarchy". All of these criticisms converge in a cluster whose core conveys the message, "the EU is a threat to the national identity, sovereignty, and dignity": "Bulgaria is threatened with a loss of identity and with extinction"; "Bulgaria is losing its sovereignty".*

Of course, the Ataka style is highly aggressive and intolerant - but I see no reason to fault this sort of the discourse which you will find in all current European "populist" parties. The romantic pull of the village and its traditions does seem stronger in Bulgaria than (say) in Romania - and the Romanian peasantry (unlike the Bulgarian) does seem to retain its loyalty to socialist/communist elements of political organisation.....

In [a long post](#) just a couple of weeks ago, the same author has a rare and useful analysis of the protests which have now lasted here in Bulgaria for one year now.

I would identify three waves and three types of protests:

- *the anti-monopoly protests of winter/spring 2013;*
- *the anti-oligarchy protests of summer 2013;*
- *the anti-government student protests of autumn 2013.*

The political geography of the winter protests was decentralized. Sofia did not win first place, but neither did it vie for it. I have called those protests 'Varna Spring' because the protesters in Varna outnumbered those in Sofia, as well as because their outrage was well-targeted - against the mayor and a business group. Not against business in general, but against criminal groups suffocating business; not against the elite in general, but against a mayor who had brought the city to its knees before behind-the-scenes interests; not against government in general, but against that which was devouring Varna's Sea Garden and stifling the vitality and enterprising spirit of Bulgaria's seaside capital (Krasteva 2013c).

Just days after the winter protests, the government of Boyko Borisov resigned although the protesters had not demanded - nor even thought of demanding - its resignation. After six months of protests against the Oresharski government, protesters were still demanding its resignation but the government, Parliament, and even the opposition were now saying that the incumbents were likely to remain in power for some time to come. The political effect of the winter and the post-winter protests was opposite, but they were similar in that, paradoxically, both led to the opposite of the desired results. In terms of duration, the protest year 2013 is unprecedented in Bulgarian democratic history.

We remember from history how a trivial occasion - an African American woman's refusal to surrender her seat to a white man - led to the abolition of racial segregation and a profound transformation of American society. The Bulgarian protests also started from a concrete occasion - the exorbitant electricity bills and the appointment of Delyan Peevski, a controversial media mogul, as chief of the State Agency for National Security (DANS) - but the protest wave outlived the occasion (Peevski did not remain in office for more than a day), rightly interpreting it not as an exception but as an inevitable consequence of the whole political system which became the target of its outrage.

This is a most useful update of a rather [more general 2008 article on Bulgarian populism](#) entitled Radical Demophilia by Conservative MEP Svetoslav Malinov and should be put in the wider context of [the collection of articles I referred to a few days ago on European populism](#), the general tone of the articles being (typically) elitist and disapproving.

What, I have to wonder, is wrong with being in tune with popular opinion these days?????

The painting is one of the favourite Socialist Realist ones I have in my collection. Of partisans, it gives a sense of the village against the enemy.....

Ilia Petrov

Had a great privilege yesterday - to visit the house and studio of Ilia Petrov (1903-1975) - one of the great Bulgarian artists. According to the text I have, he -



worked in the style of the artists of the 17th century, combining silvery tones of Velazquez, cold pink flesh of Rubens and created powerful female portraits and nudes - with sophisticated shades of greenish and bluish, working with sophisticated techniques so that even today, 50 years after their creation, his paintings look as if they are still not dry. His paintings are almost impossible to reproduce.

He was born in Razgrad;

and studied at Sofia Art Academy 1921-26 - latterly under Prof. Nikola Marinov. He went on to specialize in Munich and gave an exhibition there in 1928. On his way back to Bulgaria he did an extended tour of German cities, France, Austria and Italy to become acquainted with European traditions. In the late 1930s, disturbed by fascism, he did a series of paintings on The War in Spain. 1941-1967 he was Professor at Sofia Art Academy. 1961 visited India
Art teacher (1928 - 1940) From 1940 lecturer, from 1957 to 1968 - professor of painting at the Art Academy, Sofia, Dean



of the Faculty of Fine Arts (1957-1962) and Rector (1965-1968. The Art School in Sofia bears his name.

After the communist takeover in September 1944, he took an active part in the management of the Union of Bulgarian Artists and was its Secretary-General (1949-1951 and 1957-1959) and participated in the work of "Monument to the Soviet Army" in Sofia.

He also did quite a few works of historical revolutionary themes: "Guerrillas in action", "Before the shooting", "Partisan Song", "The Messenger" but his true virtuosity seen in naked bodies, where he remains one of Bulgaria's greatest artists. A young student did this copy of a famous self-portrait he did which hangs in the National Gallery hereShades of Lucian Freud!

Left a tremendous amount of paintings - portrait sketches, animals - some of which, as I can testify, are still to be

displayed in public.

It was, in fact, the sketches that most interested me - and I emerged from the meeting with his nephew, with about 10 of them as well as the painting!

Wednesday, February 26, 2014



Toward the End

Faithful readers will know that, at the start of the new millennium, I started to express my own personal anxieties about the direction globalisation was taking us all - and to muse about [where a guy with my age and experience should be putting his energy and resources](#) (not least time)

The global crisis of the past 6 years confirmed my worst fears - but I still haven't found an answer to my simple question. In the meantime I've continued to try to identify the people who are writing seriously about the various issues involved.....

Several years ago I was very impressed with the work of people such as [Richard Douthwaite](#) and, in the past couple of years, with the (rather more apocalyptic) books and blogs of JM [Greer](#) and [Dmitry Orlov](#) - see also [here](#).

The latter's recent blogposts have been reassessing the scale of the global crisis (in its various forms - fuel, economic and environmental) [here](#) - and [here](#), suggesting that things have now gone beyond the point of no return.

Before I give you a flavour of these posts, let me share with you the [eloquent final thoughts of a seasoned campaigner which were found on his laptop](#) after his death

As I survey my life, which is coming near its end, I want to set down a few thoughts that might be useful to those coming after. It will soon be time for me to give back to Gaia the nutrients that I have used during a long, busy, and happy life. I am not bitter or resentful at the approaching end; I have been one of the extraordinarily lucky ones. So it behoves me here to gather together some thoughts and attitudes that may prove useful in the dark times we are facing: a century or more of exceedingly difficult times. How will those who survive manage it? What can we teach our friends, our children, our communities? Although we may not be capable of changing history, how can we equip ourselves to survive it?

I contemplate these questions in the full consciousness of my own mortality. Being offered an actual number of likely months to live, even though the estimate is uncertain, mightily focuses the mind. On personal things, of course, on loved ones and even loved things, but also on the Big Picture. But let us begin with last things first, for a change. The analysis will come later, for those who wish it.

Hope. Children exude hope, even under the most terrible conditions, and that must inspire us as our conditions get worse. Hopeful patients recover better. Hopeful test candidates score better. Hopeful builders construct better buildings. Hopeful parents produce secure and resilient children. In groups, an atmosphere of hope is essential to shared successful effort: "Yes, we can!" is not an empty slogan, but a mantra for people who intend to do something together — whether it is rescuing victims of hurricanes, rebuilding flood-damaged buildings on higher ground, helping wounded people through first aid, or inventing new social structures (perhaps one in which only people are "persons," not corporations). We cannot know what threats we will face. But ingenuity against adversity is one of our species' built-in resources. We cope, and faith in our coping capacity is perhaps our biggest resource of all.



Mutual support. The people who do best at basic survival tasks (we know this experimentally, as well as intuitively) are cooperative, good at teamwork, often altruistic, mindful of the common good. In drastic emergencies like hurricanes or earthquakes, people surprise us by their sacrifices — of food, of shelter, even sometimes of life itself. Those who survive social or economic collapse, or wars, or pandemics, or starvation, will be those who manage scarce resources fairly: hoarders and dominators win only in the short run, and end up dead, exiled, or friendless. So, in every way we can we need to help each other, and our children, learn to be cooperative rather than competitive; to be helpful rather than hurtful; to look out for the communities of which we are a part, and on which we ultimately depend.

Practical skills. With the movement into cities of the U.S. population, and much of the rest of the world's people, we have had a massive de-skilling in how to do practical tasks. When I was a boy in the country, all of us knew how to build a tree house, or construct a small hut, or raise chickens, or grow beans, or screw pipes together to deliver water. It was a sexist world, of course, so when some of my chums in eighth grade said we wanted to learn girls' "home ec" skills like making bread or boiling eggs, the teachers were shocked, but we got to do it. There was widespread competence in fixing things — impossible with most modern contrivances, of course, but still reasonable for the basic tools of survival: pots and pans, bicycles, quilts, tents, storage boxes.

We all need to learn, or relearn, how we would keep the rudiments of life going if there were no paid specialists around, or means to pay them. Every child should learn elementary carpentry, from layout and sawing to driving nails. Everybody should know how to chop wood safely, and build a fire. Everybody should know what to do if dangers appear from fire, flood, electric wires down, and the like. Taking care of each other is one practical step at a time, most of them requiring help from at least one other person; survival is a team sport.

Organize. Much of the American ideology, our shared and usually unspoken assumptions, is hyper-individualistic. We like to imagine that heroes are solitary, have super powers, and glory in violence, and that if our work lives and business lives seem tamer, underneath they are still struggles red in blood and claw. We have sought solitude on the prairies, as cowboys on the range, in our dependence on media (rather than real people), and even in our cars, armored cabins of solitude. We have an uneasy and doubting attitude about government, as if we all reserve the right to be outlaws. But of course human

society, like ecological webs, is a complex dance of mutual support and restraint, and if we are lucky it operates by laws openly arrived at and approved by the populace.

If the teetering structure of corporate domination, with its monetary control of Congress and our other institutions, should collapse of its own greed, and the government be unable to rescue it, we will have to reorganize a government that suits the people. We will have to know how to organize groups, how to compromise with other groups, how to argue in public for our positions. It turns out that "brainstorming," a totally noncritical process in which people just throw out ideas wildly, doesn't produce workable ideas. In particular, it doesn't work as well as groups in which ideas are proposed, critiqued, improved, debated. But like any group process, this must be protected from domination by powerful people and also over-talkative people. When the group recognizes its group power, it can limit these distortions. Thinking together is enormously creative; it has huge survival value.

Learn to live with contradictions. *These are dark times, these are bright times. We are implacably making the planet less habitable. Every time a new oil field is discovered, the press cheers: "Hooray, there is more fuel for the self-destroying machines!" We are turning more land into deserts and parking lots. We are wiping out innumerable species that are not only wondrous and beautiful, but might be useful to us. We are multiplying to the point where our needs and our wastes outweigh the capacities of the biosphere to produce and absorb them. And yet, despite the bloody headlines and the rocketing military budgets, we are also, unbelievably, killing fewer of each other proportionately than in earlier centuries. We have mobilized enormous global intelligence and mutual curiosity, through the Internet and outside it. We have even evolved, spottily, a global understanding that democracy is better than tyranny, that love and tolerance are better than hate, that hope is better than rage and despair, that we are prone, especially in catastrophes, to be astonishingly helpful and cooperative. We may even have begun to share an understanding that while the dark times may continue for generations, in time new growth and regeneration will begin. In the biological process called "succession," a desolate, disturbed area is gradually, by a predictable sequence of returning plants, restored to ecological continuity and durability.*

When old institutions and habits break down or consume themselves, new experimental shoots begin to appear, and people explore and test and share new and better ways to survive together. It is never easy or simple. But already we see, under the crumbling surface of the conventional world, promising developments: new ways of organizing economic activity (cooperatives, worker-owned companies, nonprofits, trusts), new ways of using low-impact technology to capture solar energy, to sequester carbon dioxide, new ways of building compact, congenial cities that are low (or even self-sufficient) in energy use, low in waste production, high in recycling of almost everything.

A vision of sustainability that sometimes shockingly resembles Ecotopia is tremulously coming into existence at the hands of people who never heard of the book. Now in principle, the Big Picture seems simple enough, though devilishly complex in the details.

We live in the declining years of what is still the biggest economy in the world, where a looter elite has fastened itself upon the decaying carcass of the empire. It is intent on speedily and relentlessly extracting the maximum wealth from that carcass, impoverishing our former working middle class.

But this maggot class does not invest its profits here. By law and by stock-market pressures, corporations must seek their highest possible profits, no matter the social or national consequences — which means moving capital and resources abroad, wherever profit potential is larger. As Karl Marx darkly remarked, "Capital has no country," and in the conditions of globalization his meaning has come clear. The looter elite systematically exports jobs, skills, knowledge, technology, retaining at home chiefly financial manipulation expertise: highly profitable, but not of actual productive value. Through "productivity gains" and speedups, it extracts maximum profit from domestic employees; then, firing the surplus, it claims surprise that the great mass of people lack purchasing power to buy up what the economy can still produce (or import).

The first sketch at the top is one I found in several drawerfuls of Ilia Petrov rough sketches. I suppose its from the 1944 period here.....The aquarelle is one of several (from the 1970s) I have from Vassil Vulev (when I met him a couple of years ago) who's still going at 79/80

Saturday, March 22, 2014

Some recommendations for those visiting Sofia



This has become the time of the year when my mind turns to the Carpathian house. Most of the last 7 winters have been spent here in Sofia (with forays to the small Bucharest flat and some sad weeks in a Belgrade winter) and I have been particularly happy with the latest attic flat (right in the old quarter, off Patriarch Eftemi Boulevard) with the 1927 date carved in the stone entrance.

It has the sort of stairhead I imagine Ilyia Beshkov using for one of his wry sketches..... and my small flat (which I've been renting for 16 months) has all the original wooden features and

stained glass as well as a nice veranda onto a set of leafy courtyards. I thought I would have to give it up but my landlord has changed his mind and offered me an extended lease - which I am happy to take. Despite its centrality, there is no noise - except that of the bells of the old nearby Church on Ignatiev St

I will miss (for the next few months) my home-made walnut, sesame and sunflower seed bread which I buy from the corner vegetarian restaurant - with superb fragrances wafting across just before I hit the shop itself. I will also miss the Bulgarian Rakia and its incredible range of white wines - although I have been changing my allegiances in the lists of the last two.

Rakia is rather tasteless - compared to Romanian Tuica let alone Scottish or Irish whisky. But it is the spirit I have grown to prefer - although still insisting on the wine rather than plum or pear variety. For the past year or so, under the influence of my arty Bulgarian friends, my preferred "poison" has been Yambolski (a town in east-central Bulgaria). Half a litre for 4.5 euros! But I have now been introduced to Kailashka Rakia from Pleven, north central of the country. It has very good marketing - with a label reminding us of a Kentucky Bourbon and a 1922 date.



So I'm in mellow mood - having had a delightful afternoon cycling and picnicking with 2 young friends in the famous South Park with the quiet retro music one finds in Sofia's parks - generally guitar or jazz.

I used to be a fan of reasonably-priced St Ilyia white wines in central Bulgaria (Stara Zagora area) - part of the Edward Miroglia group - but have now gravitated to the [Black Sea Gold winery](#) of Pomorie (Burgas) whose Soroko (Chardonnay) has the sort of "tickle" I love. And the nearby [Ethno winery](#) offers amazing tastes and prices.



And restaurants I will miss?

- For sheer value for money and atmosphere, the atmospheric house nearby - at the corner of 6th September and Khan Krum Streets - is the greatest. [Divaka](#) is actually a chain of three with the more central (and cavernous) being just off Vitosha Blvd and Solunska St.
- The [Club of the Architect](#) is the classiest restaurant.
- *The Rocket* offers a great experience (with a retro decor and rakias a speciality) in the gardens at Blvd Dondukov right next door to the Vaska Emanouilova Art Gallery
- [Grape Central](#) Tsar Samuel 45 is a new addition to a small street which offers great art experiences. Nice brick décor and a fantastic selection of Bulgarian wines, grouped by Region - with modest eating to match the wine.
- *Made in Home* (Angel Knchev ul. 30A) is a small local restaurant (house wine only) with the best atmosphere (for me). It's just off Vitosha.

Beshkov drawings illustrate the text

[Georgi Markov - a forgotten writer](#)

What do Europeans think when they think of Bulgaria? Until last year's fuss about immigrant workers, the typical response would probably have been a scratch of the head and a reference to the Black Sea coast. A minute's more thought by older respondents might produce a reference to the poisoned umbrella which killed a Bulgarian dissident in London in the 1970s.

[Georgi Markov](#) was a famous writer assassinated on a London street by the Bulgarian secret services - although the [precise details are still not known](#).

A well-known sculptor, Spartak Dermedjiev, is someone who has tried to keep Markov's memory alive - initially [with an exhibition](#) and, earlier this month, by marking Markov's



birthday [with a small monument](#) in a square in central Sofia. Coincidentally [The Nation](#) journal published a piece about the man -

When Georgi Markov left Bulgaria in 1969, at the age of 40, he was one of the country's most lionized writers, the darling of readers and, until that point, party officials. By all accounts, his success was astounding. He was a chemical engineer by education and worked in various factories in his youth, writing only in his spare time; yet his second novel, "Men", was named novel of the year by the Bulgarian Writers' Union in 1962. Markov was immediately granted full membership in the organization, an unprecedented honor at that time. The award flung open all of the important doors. "Men" was quickly adapted into a movie, a play and a radio drama, and translations of the novel appeared throughout the Eastern bloc. Markov's subsequent books were also praised by critics and his plays staged in major theaters in Sofia and across the country. He was appointed to a cushy editorial position at Narodna Mladezh, one of the most prestigious Bulgarian publishing houses. And that, in turn, brought him more rewards and privileges.

He became increasingly critical of the regime and eventually failed to return from a foreign visit - landing up in London where he broadcast for the BBC and Radio Free Europe. His broadcasts (often about aspects of Bulgaria) were collected in a book called *In Absentia* which (sadly) I cannot find online. The article recounts what is known about the role of the Russian KGB and its Bulgarian equivalent in the eventual assassination of the writer in 1978 - but also makes some comments about the lack of proper recognition today of the man.



*Last year, a sociological study spearheaded by the Hannah Arendt Center in Sofia examined young Bulgarians' knowledge of totalitarianism in Europe and at home. The respondents were between the ages of 15 and 35, and the results were striking: 79 percent hadn't heard of the Gulag; 67 percent hadn't heard of the Iron Curtain; 51 percent didn't know the reason for Markov's death; and 89 percent had no knowledge of the book *In Absentia**

Reports. The Bulgarian crisis of historical memory is hardly peculiar to young people, especially when it comes to Markov's literary works. Most adults are familiar with his name today, but only in the context of his murder. Few have read his essays or novels, and only the biggest bookstores in Sofia stock a book or two of his by chance. It is much easier to find a copy of the memoirs of the dictator Todor Zhivkov than, for example, Markov's excellent novellas "The Portrait of My Double" and "The Women of Warsaw."

His work is not taught in schools..... The Bulgarian who should have taken the same position in his nation's literature and political history as Brodsky in Russia, Havel in the Czech Republic and Milosz in Poland has been relegated to the dustbin of memory. After his murder abroad, Markov was killed a second time, this time in his home country.

Well at least there is one person, [Spartak Dermedjiev](#), whose work keeps his memory alive!

Monday, July 14, 2014

Balkan Struggles



Can a Greek historian (even if one who now teaches at an American University) cast aside his preconceptions and offer the English-speaking reader an understanding of "the Balkan Wars"? This is the question I have after reading Andre Gerolymatos' [The Balkan Wars: Conquest, Revolution and Retribution from the Ottoman Era to the Twentieth Century and Beyond](#)

It was one of two books I bought recently to help me throw some light on the two 1912-13 Balkan conflicts in which first Bulgaria, Greece

and Serbia united to fight (successfully) the Ottomans and then [divided to fight one another](#). I quickly discovered that the book is mistitled and that the Balkan wars to which the title referred are in fact the various struggles (not least between brigands) and bloodletting which have characterised the area for centuries. It is none the worse for that wider focus. The second book - by a Serb - has the narrower focus.

As [one review puts it](#)

this book is a work of cultural sociology in seeking to uncover the patterns of history that have led to constant conflict, the choices that led to cycles of endless acts of retribution, the cultural scripts of martyrdom, betrayal, and defeat that have led to the nursing of grudges. There are a lot of people who come off looking very poor in this book, whether it is exploitative Phanariot Greeks in areas like Moldova and Rumania; the Ottoman sultans (even when in reform mood); or the brigands whose oppressive and exploitative ways was a result of and contributed to chaos and anarchy throughout the Balkans. But towering above all this is the two-faced nature of the interest of the "Great Powers" in the region

We know little of these wars in the West - coverage of the ethnic cleansing of the 90s focused on older struggles, not on the events of 100 years ago. And there were very few commemorations in 2012 and 2013 - particularly in Bulgaria which risked (and lost) everything by its wanton attack after the cease-fire on its previous ally Serbia in order to try to win the disputed lands of neighbouring Macedonia. Illusions of a lost grandeur! Of course, with my interest in Bulgarian painting of that period, I come across frequent references to the time many of my favourite artists spent as war artists in this period....

Sunday, July 27, 2014

Dealing with Sofia's Past

The day started early with the urgent chimes of the venerable Church [Cyril and Methodius and the 5 disciples](#) - whose birthday it apparently was.

I'm not normally in Sofia in summer - although the currents around the Vitosha mountain and the trees in its streets and courtyards do offer relief from the summer heat which has not been as evident as usual. Lots of rain - indeed severe hailstones at the beginning of the month. Cars were banged shapeless.

The flat I've been renting (from December 2012) is a West-facing attic flat in a very central (Khan Krum St) classic 1922 building - with a leafy courtyard, gratefully populated by cats who are well looked after by the city's older citizens.

The Sofia City Gallery has now introduced entry charges - but at such a reasonable level I can forgive them. 1 euro for adults - 2 euros for a family ticket - and free for senior citizens. So I had no problems parting with 5 euros for a book about "[unknown artists from one picture](#)" which focuses on a famous 1952 painting by one Asen Vasiliev of some 20 Bulgarian painters examining and discussing a painting. The magisterial figure of Vladimir Dimitrova - known as "the Master" - dominates the group and the book identifies each of the painters, sketches their lives and gives an example of their work.

The book is exceptional, however, in being the first I know to detail (in English) the circumstances of the cultural crackdown in the late 1940s on Bulgarian painters. But it does so in the strange elliptical fashion I have begun to recognise as the true Balkan way.....

I know something about the events - and the artists affected.....starting in the early (but vicious) days of the September 1944 communist takeover with the unexplained death in prison of graphic artist Raiko Aleksiev and soon affecting such famous artists as Boris Denev, Nikola Boadjiev and (royal aquarellist) Constantin Shtarkelov - none of whom figure in the book. Instead the text focuses on Alexander Zhendov, a good communist satirist who strongly objected to the wooden bureaucrats who were foisted to lead the cultural struggle against modernism.....Other good communists such as the great Ilya Beshkov are simply not mentioned.....

The nepotic (or "Balkan") nature of the editorial process is still evident in many of the new art books produced here.....eg the large one celebrating 120 years of art [produced by the Bulgarian Union of Artists](#) a couple of years ago. The images are great but the text tells us little beyond of the dates of the various artistic Associations, some of the names of the key artists and vague hints of struggles and conflicts.....And some curious omissions - perhaps these were the more independent-minded artists who weren't "belongers"?

I had hoped to see the exhibition in the Vaska Emanouilova Gallery - a largely unknown branch of the Sofia City Gallery in a lovely garden beside Boulevard Dondukova. It was supposed to be open - but wasn't. Coincidentally, the Loran Gallery was showing paintings of Shtarkelov and Boadjiev and will mark September 9 1944 with an exhibition of banned artists.

Saturday, December 13, 2014

[Access to National Galleries](#)



I've been a bit sniffy in the past about Sofia's National Gallery of Art - so let me take my hat off to them for their display of digital facilities. I was a bit annoyed on Thursday to be denied access to an exhibition of Nouveau Art's Nikola Rainov (for reasons of some private party) but was placated by being given the opportunity to use a smart phone to access some 200 watercolours of the past century which have not so far been available to the public - along with useful information about the painters.

This is part of a wider project of gradual digitization of the entire archive of the museum in 2015.

I managed to see the Rainov exhibition the following day - you don't often see his work. And it was accompanied by a superb small catalogue - sadly almost entirely monolingual.

Running in a neighbouring room, was another delightful small exhibition of urban life here a hundred years ago - with a charming video of an elderly lady displaying various artefacts from the period.

And my ever-ready camera was able to catch this shot of a very sharply-dressed elderly visitor to the gallery.....

Lack of translation is one of two features which used to distinguish the National Gallery from the municipal one across the road - whose catalogues have been bilingual for quite some years. The second feature is pricing - the national Gallery used to charge 5 euros (now 3 - with pensioners half price). The municipal gallery was free - until last year when a nominal charge was introduced (with pensioners free).

It reminded me of one of my political colleagues in the 1970s [Janey Buchan](#) (who became an MEP in the 1979), She was a tireless advocate in the 60s of the rights of ordinary people (before the days of the Consumer Association) and was particularly strong on the importance of free entry to museums and art galleries, Thatcher put pressure on to introduce charges ([although the British Museum held out](#)) but entry was made free again in 2001 - with significant subsequent increases in visitors.

And I was glad to see that the Neil Mc Gregor, the renowned Director of the British Museum had declined an invitation to direct New York's Metropolitan Museum because it charged an entry fee.

The attitude of Sofia City Gallery is yet another proof of the superiority of municipal to central government

7. Two Hundred of the Best!

The first edition of this booklet listed some 140 painters who had come to my notice - the intervening two years has allowed me to add another 60 names. And every few weeks I will come across another painter whose name deserves a place.....

In the following list, I try to say something about -

- Date and place of birth - and year of death
- Where they trained - sometimes under which artists
- Genre
- Main places of work - and influences (such as close artist friends and/or membership of Associations of artists)
- Price range

Note on Listing and Spelling:

The Cyrillic alphabet has more letters than ours and the order of the letters in the Bulgarian ([or Russian](#)) language is not the same as "romantic" languages. For example they have 2 "B"s, the second of which is actually pronounced V. This makes the listing of artists' names confusing for English speakers.

Bulgarian lists are also confusing since the list is often constructed using the first rather than the family name.

The final difficulty is what is called the "[transliteration](#)" problem - there are actually different ways in which the English equivalent of the Bulgarian name can be constructed. Take the artist Shtarkelov - or should it be Shtrkeloff? Criskaretz or Kriscaretz?


Note on terminology; In 1896 the "State Drawing School" was opened in Sofia. In 1908 it is renamed "The State Industrial School of the Fine Arts" which changed, in 1921, to "The State Academy of Fine Arts". In 1954 it changed again to - "The Higher Institute of Fine Arts Nikolay Pavlovitch". In 1996 it was declared by government decree as "The National Academy of Fine Arts". Following the Scottish tradition I have often shortened the name to Sofia School of Art.

Ronald G Young


www.nomadron.blogspot.com


200 of the best - gaining the dealers' attention!

Artist	Dates	Focus	Location of birth, training; genre; some recent prices
Abadjiev Petko	1913-2004	Landscapes	Born in Karlovo. Colleague of Nikola Taney's and, not surprisingly therefore, a great colourist. He paints scenes from Karlovo, Plovdiv and the Black Sea A nice painting of his went unsold at a recent Victoria auction - reserve price 325 euros
Alsheh, Eliezer	1908-1983	landscape, portrait	Born Vidin. Graduated 1933 from the Sofia School of Art. His first exhibition in Sofia in 1934 caused some outrage for its "pictorial boldness" - but he was supported by other artists such as Kiril Tsonev. Worked for some time as a house-painter in Palestine but came back to a second, much more successful exhibition in Sofia - the proceeds of which allowed him to spend 3 months in Paris. Spent only 10 years in BG - some in concentration camp. The new communist regime was hostile to his work and he emigrated in 1951 to Argentina
Alekov, Napoleon	1912-2002	seascapes	born Tulcea, Romania and came to Bulgaria at age 2. A prolific painter, he apparently left about 10,000 paintings and had 25 exhibitions. http://artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=506 from 300 euros
Alexandrov Zhdravko	1911-1999	landscape	Born Mokresh, Lom. Master of rural and industrial landscapes. Graduated from Sofia Art Academy in 1935 - under Professor Zahariev. Three years later, presents his first solo exhibition - the fruit of a year's work in Smolyan and Raikovo. Inspired by the awesome beauty and majesty of the mountains, these early works already reveal his gift of an original interpreter of Bulgarian nature. recent large painting 50x70 went unsold at reduced price of 1,300 euros
Andonov, Nikola Kostov	1887-1981	Figures, still life	Superb realism of peasant life http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=117
Angeloushev Boris	1902-1966	graphic	Born and grew up in Plovdiv; trained in Berlin Art Academy in the early 1920s and was clearly influenced by the revolutionary events taking place then and by the powerful graphics of Kathe Kollwitz.. Returned to Bulgaria in 1935. For some examples, see http://www.gallery-victoria.com possible to get sketch for 200 euros
Anghelov, Ivan	1864-1924		Born Brestnica. 1882-86 Munich Art Academy. 1888/89 studied in Rome before returning to teach in Sliven and Plovdiv until 1890. Then teacher at the newly opened State Drawing School in Sofia. Exhibited extensively in Europe Made large impact in the period.

Balkanski Nenko 1907 -1977 Figurative				<p>Born Kazanluk. graduated from Sofia Art School in 1930. He then went to study in Germany, France and later Italy.</p> <p>He seems to have been a modest man and his portrayals of family life were well regarded by the socialist authorities who used his work on stamps. I saw a superb small portrait of a woman by him in the Konus Gallery in Sofia for about 1,400 euros - brought especially for my edification.</p> <p>A large still life of his is priced at 3,000 euros in this week's Viktoria Gallery auction.</p> <p>The Gallery in Kazanluk has some of his art and others who painted there and seems to be well worth a visit. His grandson is also a painter.</p>
Balkanski, Pencho	1908-1985	Landscape painter and Photographer	<p>Born Lovets, Troyan area</p> <p>In 1923 comes to Sofia School of Art and works in his brother's photographic studio. In 1930 has his first photo exhibition of portraits of Tzvetana Tabakova. His photo lab 'Luna' is a legend and up to today. Pencho Balkan is inspired entertainer in all genres, in which works - paintings, graphics, photography. In 1936 he had photographic exhibitions in Vienna. friends are David Perez, George Papazov, Vasil Ivanov, Nayden Petkov, Georgi Velchev, Daniel Dechev</p> <p>In 1958, his work was declared unacceptable and he left for Vienna and Paris where he meets friends such as Peretz, Nayden Petkov and anya Decheva. In 1978, seventy-year old anniversary makes a retrospective exhibition featuring works from the last three decades.</p> <p>about 1,000 euros see superb National Gallery Catalogue of his photographs</p>	
Barakov Vasil	1902-1991	landscape	<p>born Kazanluk. - and graduated after an apparently turbulent time from the State Academy of Arts in 1937. One of first to paint industrial landscapes. Part of a group consisting of David Peretz, himself and N Boaidjiev known as BARATZI. Exhibited widely in Athens, Belgrade, Berlin, Budapest, Bucharest, Vienna and Moscow. An uncompromising artist, he suffered poverty - but did enjoy some honours in 1963 and 1976.</p> <p>His paintings are generally sombre.</p> <p>70x60 sold for 2,000 euros in 2011</p>	
Behar, Marko	1914-1973	graphic, satire	<p>Born in village in Yambol, schooled Burgas where his family moved in 1927, No early art education, he worked initially in the retail trade in Sofia in 1935 and had a first exhibition in 1940 by which time he was active in the communist movement.</p> <p>He spent 1941/42 and 1943/44 in a Jewish Labour camp. 46-49 he worked for the (Starshel) Hornet magazine</p> <p>It was the 1950s before he was able to start an art education (in Leningrad) and returned to Bulgaria in 1957 to become Deputy-Editor of Starshel</p>	



			1958-63 he was an instructor in the problems of art at the Central Committee of the Communist Party
Belkovsky, Assen	1879-1957	landscape portraits	<p>born Assenovgrad, he studied at the state drawing school from 1896-99 after which he spent 4 years at Kazan art academy (Russia) - followed by a year at St Petersburg art academy. Then some teaching at Munich and a visit to Paris.</p> <p>He returned to Bulgaria in 1907 - and engaged in restoration work and art criticism</p>
Belstoinev Georgi	1909-	aquarellist	<p>Born Samokov</p> <p>See small booklet</p>
<p>Beshkov, Ilia</p> <p>1901- 1958</p> <p>Graphics; cartoons</p>			<p>The country's greatest caricaturist</p> <p>born in a small town near Pleven. In 1918-1920, he studied at the Faculty of Law of Sofia University and briefly returned home as a teacher. In 1921, he enrolled in painting at the Sofia School of Art and graduated in 1926.</p> <p>As a student, Beshkov published caricatures in the Maskarad, Div Dyado, Balgaran, Starshel and Vik magazines and illustrated the issues of the T. F. Chipev and Hemus printing houses. From 1925 on, he co-operated with the Pladne magazine among others. He was twice arrested due to his leftist political views: once after participating in the June uprising following the Bulgarian coup d'état of 1932 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat_of_1932 and then during 1925 in the wake of the St Nedelya Church assault http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Nedelya_Church_assault</p> <p>In 1930, Beshkov became a member of the Narodno Izkustvo movement. He was from the founders of the famous newspaper Sturshel (Hornet) in 1940, and published in it without signature or pseudonym. One of his best known comic characters was 'Spekulanta Maks'. In 1945, he became a lecturer of drawing, illustration and print design at the National Academy of Fine Art; he was elected a tenured professor in 1953 and led the Department of Graphics until his death in 1958 in Sofia.</p> <p>Beshkov's political caricatures were noted for their sarcasm and deep connotations. His works were humanist, democratic, revolutionary and national in nature. The Pleven art gallery is named in his honour and most of his works are exhibited there.</p> <p>sketches not difficult to find for 200 euros</p>
Boiadjiev, Hristo	1912-2001		<p>Studied at the Sofia Academy with future big names in Bulgarian art eg Zlatyu Boyadziev Vladimir Kavaldjiev Vasil Barakov and others. Studied under George Karakashev and others. " Girl in golden ochre " received an award at graduation of the artist.</p> <p>Remained until the end of his life in Pleven, became one of those honorable labourers of art in which creative and enlightened spirit is fully alive, and without which the picture of Bulgarian art from the first half of the twentieth century would not be complete</p>
Boyadjiev Nikolay	1904-1963	Figurative, landscape	<p>Born in Svishtov where he quickly developed an aptitude for drawing. Graduated from the State High School in Commerce there and was sent by the family to continue his economic studies in Sofia. He decided, however, at short notice to try for enrolment at Sofia Art</p>


			<p>School and emerged in 1925 in the top few of those qualifying - despite his lack of preparation. He studies in Boris Mitov's studio and graduated in 1930.</p> <p>From 1932, he was an art teacher in Shumen High School and attracted increasing fame. In 1942 an article compared his colouring with that of Rubens and spoke of his "great style, acute sense of tone, clarity of technique and pronounced individuality"</p> <p>In 1951 he became a teacher at the Sofia Art School. Expelled in 1958 from Union of Bulgarian artists for his refusal to work on prescribed themes, he increasingly focused on drawing.</p> <p>Superb charcoal and pencil portrait work - an underrated artist, his work s are not easy to find.</p> <p>See booklet</p>
Boaidjiev, Petar	1907-1963	sea and landscape	<p>a superb and underrated artist</p> <p>http://auction-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=109</p>
Boiadjiev, Tsenko	1902-1972	portraits, landscapes	<p>born Totleben village, Pleven</p> <p>1928-32 zagreb</p>
Borov, Yordan	1904-1962		<p>Born Dryanovo, Kaz</p> <p>1932 graduated (Zahariev Bodhov)</p>
<p>Boyadjiev, Zlatyu</p> <p>1903-1976</p> <p>Folk art</p> 			<p>Born Brezovo, Plovdiv Region.</p> <p>Known sometimes as the Bulgarian Breughel.</p> <p>http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1903-1976.html</p> <p>His work is divided into two very different periods due to stroke and partial paralysis of the right side in (1951). The first period is characterized by stylistic influences typical of Dutch paintings from the XVI-XVII century The second period is characterized by fabulous, often symbolic images and compositions of rural life.</p> <p>He graduated Painting at the Art Academy - Sofia (1932), under Professor Zeno Todorov .</p> <p>In the first period Zlatyu Boyadziev creates the most valuable paintings, most of them in the big state museums. This is a high European painting applied to our reality. If one of the greatest European artists walked on our land and painted Bulgarian life. "Brezovski shepherds" (1941), "In the Field" (1943), "Svinarka" (1945) "Mini Pernik" (1945), "Brigade" (1947) and others. portraits Zlatyu Boyadziev feature precise and concise pattern, solid modeling of forms and deep insight into the character portrayed: "Portrait of the artist's father" (1940), "Mother ia artist" (1940), "Family Portrait" (1941), "Portrait of a Young Girl" (1941) and the like.</p> <p>Following a stroke in 1951 Zlatyu Boyadziev became paralyzed and no longer painted. He then began frescoing with his left hand disparate works. A hundred compositions, portraits and landscapes with pronounced expression and drama - others are filled cover plate of strange characters, is often fraught with symbolic meaning: "Brezovo Village" (1959), "to the slaughterhouse."</p> <p>Slowly but confidently Boyadziev began to paint with his left hand. feat that is not within the reach of everyone. Some his masterpieces like "Rhodope wedding", "April Uprising", "Return of the hunt" and</p>

			<p>"Apocalypse" - in various versions - were created then.</p> <p>He died on February 2, 1976 in Plovdiv. After November 10 Zlatyu Boyadziev becomes an obsession for collectors and is the most counterfeited Bulgarian artist. According to some newspapers, Plovdiv has a whole factory of his works. Usually imitates the second period Boiadzhiev because artistry is in the first reach of counterfeiterers.</p> <p>65x50 fetched 15,000 euros in March 2011</p>
Bozhinov, Alexander	1878-1968	cartoonist	<p>born Svistov, educated Russe, he laid the basis for Bulgaria's strong tradition of caricaturists. He studied drawing at the newly opened state school from 1896-1899 and went in 1901 to Munich where he stayed frequently during the next 20 years, being influenced by the Simplicius magazine there. He edited from 1904-09 Sofia's satirical magazine „Balgaren“.</p> <p>Paintings not easy to find - although one sold recently for 750 euros</p>
Bradistilova, Olga	1908-1981	master of classic genres - portrait, landscape, still life.	<p>She was born on October 3, 1908 in Stara Zagora. Graduated in painting from the Academy of Arts in Sofia (1929), then specialized in Rome (1934-1936).</p> <p>In 1936 Olga returned to Bulgaria, makes exhibitions, After September 9 1944 works as a free artist often does portraits on demand. two exhibitions in Italy (Milan and Rome). Exposure in Rome received a gold medal in 1969. In 1972 she was awarded Academician of the International Academy Tiborina in Rome - the same title carried by Salvador Dali and Joan Miro.</p> <p>Bratistilova Olga was also awarded the Golden Legion contribution to the art of Italy</p>
Bunardjiev, Petar	1921-1995	Landscape	<p>nice colourist</p> <p>500 euros</p>
Chokanov, Denjo	1901-1982	landscape	<p>Born Veliko Tarnovo.</p> <p>Graduated 1926 from Sofia Art School - from class of Prof Gyundiev.</p> <p>A great colourist</p> <p>700 euros 40x50</p>

Cholakov Zivko	1914-1978	portraits landscapes	born in the village of Beloslav, Varna, in 1914, and died 1978 in Sofia. In 1939 he graduated in painting Prof. Nikola Ganushev at the National Art Academy in Sofia. In the period 1946-1978 Zivko Tcholakov taught drawing at the Architectural Institute. Founder of the Department Drawing and Modeling together with Boris Kolev, and later became the dean of the department. Specializes in Czechoslovakia, Italy and France. Prof. Zivko Tcholakov creativity devoted exclusively to the art of the portrait. Controlled picturesque craftsmanship are the main characteristics of his works.
Chorbadzhtiyski- Chudomir , DMITAR 1890-1967 Caricatures			<p>Born Turia, Kazanlak 1906 State Drawing School 1920 Kazanlak teacher 1930 Director of Kaz Gallery</p> <p>"Chudomir" is the alias of one of the most popular Bulgarian writers and artists - Dimitar Chorbadzhiyski. His many friends and acquaintances call him simply "Miracle" is probably not only to express closeness, but to highlight his extraordinary originality. Choudomir is truly unique phenomenon in the history of Bulgarian culture. Above all, it combines extremely rare gifts and writer, and artist. No one has yet dared to argue which one is stronger. Because his brilliant (2500) sketches, drawings, caricatures, portraits, compositions, and its magnificent humorous stories and feuilletons (issued five collections and reprinted more than 60 times) decades are laugh and invigorating Bulgaria, both countries being single and comprehensive Chudomir artistic world. Choudomir is not only a first-class writer and artist and prominent museum and cultural figure, researcher, lecturer in painting, journalist, editor, public ...</p> <p>Choudomir was born in the village of Turia, teaches in Stara Zagora; Art Academy in Sofia; specializes in Paris; traveled through Italy, Austria, Germany, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Turkey; desired and is constantly invited to associate in the most prestigious metropolitan editions; has close personal and creative contacts with celebrities such as Dimcho Debelyanov, Nikolai Liliev Dimitar Podvarzachov, Nikolai Raynov Hristo Yassenov Georgi Raichev, Elin Pelin, Geo Milev, Shtarkelov Constantine, Ivan Pickles; has a worldwide reputation (his short stories have been translated still alive twenty languages), but despite all this, never left home for long in his home town and the Valley of Roses, remaining throughout his life close to the people of this region, which are the source of his inspiration.</p> <p>Proceeding from the assumption that while satire is a scalpel, humor is a salve for the wounds Choudomir has a dominant artistic ambition - by means of humor to heal human ills and social vices. Inexhaustible humanism moves his pen and brush, when seeking support on the Bulgarian and the universal character of his characters - earth, vital and wise as nature itself. Chudomirova creative world has long since become a key measure penetration Bulgarian mentality. His representative art exhibition "Fellow Countrymen" in recent years visited several European capitals and was hailed as magnificent spiritual ambassador of Bulgaria. Almost all the creative heritage of Choudomir stored in Literature and Art Museum "Chudomir".</p>
Chorbadzhtiyski, Maria	1895-1974		Grad 1921 - when settled in Kaz From 1936 teacher there

Christov Ivan	1900-1987	landscapes	<p>Born Vidin In 1925, graduated in painting at the National Art Academy, Sofia under Profs. Nikola Ganushev and Nikola Marinov.</p> <p>Specialised at the Art Academy in Munich.</p> <p>After his return, he began working as a teacher in Tryavna. Since 1943 he was a freelance artist. He spent every summer in Veliko Turnovo to paint picturesque landscapes, inspired by the architecture of the old city.</p> <p>His works of this period are characterized by deep colour, handled with verve impulsive. Preferred is a dark blue-green range</p> <p>The painter created panoramic landscapes from Tarnovo, Plovdiv, Melnik and Sozopol.</p> <p>600 euros</p>
Dankov, Boris	1906-1997	portraits, landscapes, still life	<p>born Kazachevo village, Lovech 1920 - his family moved in Lovech. In 1931 he entered the Art Academy in Sofia . Graduated " Painting "with Prof. Nikola Marinov, 1933 - 1946 he was an art teacher in Lovech, 1946 - 1949 - a teacher of drawing in Sofia ; 1949 -1950 - Chief Inspector of drawing in the Ministry of Education, 1951 - 1970 - professor, associate professor, professor of "painting" at the Art Academy in Sofia, 1960 - 1964 and 1966 -1970 on - Vice Rector of the Academy of Arts</p> <p>good landscapes for reasonable prices</p>
Dachev, Petar	1896-1968	landscape	<p>Born Kotel 1,600 euros 40x50</p>
Dechev, Danail	1891-1962	landscape,	<p>Born Razgrad. Self-taught painter. Graduated from the industrial textile school of Sliven.</p> <p>1932 visited France and Italy. From 1919 to 1939 lives in Plovdiv, and after 1939, in Sofia, but rarely stays in one place. Opens his first individual exhibition in Sofia in 1933. January 1, 1962. struck down by paralysis.</p> <p>work sold in april 2012 auction for 1,250 euros</p>
Denev, Boris 1889 (??)-1969 Landscape			<p>Born Veliko Tarnovo; In 1903-1908 he was teacher in drawing in Tarnovo. His first solo exhibition as amateur artist held in Sofia in 1909. From 1909 to 1913 he studied in Munich. As official war artist from 1914 to 1935 he created battle oil paintings, many sketches and drawings depicting soldiers' everyday life. His preferences were in the fields of landscape and portrait. He was inspired by the beauty of Melnik, Samokov, Plovdiv and Sofia region.</p> <p>Stripped of his membership of the Union of Bulgarian Artists for a decade until being readmitted in 1956. During this period, he was forbidden from painting in the open air- and had to resort to painting the back yard of his house!</p> <p>1,000 euros</p>

			
Deneva, Slavka	1929-1984	Figurative, still life etc	daughter of Boris Denev, a highly original artist who „never favoured splendid nature but consciously sought the banal“ (Angelov p 29). Her paintings vibrate with colour and life. They rarely come on the market.
Djambazov, Ivan	??	Landscape	Spent time in Razgrad interesting - and reasonably priced
Dmitrov Nikola	1894-1989	landscape	Born 1894 in the village Pudarsko, Plovdiv. Graduated Arts Sofia in 1921. Member of the Association of South Bulgarian artists .
Dmitrov Todor			The unframed complex thick impressionist painting on board in Inter-Nos gallery - 700 euros
Dimitrov, Vladimir (The Master) 1882-1960 Romantic folk			
		<p>born Frolosh (Kyustendil) and started his career as a clerk. In 1903 he enrolled in the School of Drawing in Sofia where he had been called the Master (Maistora) for the first time. Visited St Petersburg, Moscow and, in 1910, Italy</p> <p>Then to Svishtov where, from 1911-18 he taught gymnastics and calligraphy. During this period he was a war artist.</p> <p>1918 returned to teach at Kyustendil</p> <p>1922-23 worked in Italy. In 1922 he met the American John Crane in Rome and sold him much of his work for the next few years.</p> <p>He is considered one of the most talented 20th century Bulgarian painters and probably the most remarkable stylist in Bulgarian painting in the post-Russo-Turkish War era http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Turkish_War,_1877%E2%80%931878</p> <p>His portraits and compositions have expressive colour, idealistic quality of the image and high symbolic strength. Many consider his artwork a fauvist type</p> <p>More than 700 oil paintings of him are in the Vladimir Dimitrov Art Gallery of Kyustendil.</p> <p>http://artgallery-themaster.com/gb/index.htm</p>	

Dobrev, Dobre Sr 1898-1973 Landscape			<p>born Sliven graduated 1925 from Prague Fine Arts Academy. 1926-1938 he lived and worked in Republic of Czech. Afterwards he came back to Bulgaria and to 1954 he lived in Sliven and afterwards in Sofia. From 1954-1965 he taught at Sofia Art School.</p> <p>He created paintings revealing the life in villages. He painted landscapes, daily scenes, figurative compositions. His preferred topic are the markets in his native town of Sliven.</p> <p>His paintings don't often appear on the market. They will cost a minimum of 600 euros</p> 
Dobrimov, Alexander	1898-1958	Great cartoonist	<p>Born Veliko Tarnovo. In the period 1915 - 1919 he studied at the Arts school (Sofia). Specializing in Vienna, the famous "School of Applied Arts" (1921-1924).</p> <p>From 1921 worked in the field of caricature and portrait images create psychological depth. Prints cartoons in newspapers, magazines, collections "Temida", "Hornet" in programs for theatrical performances and some humorous magazines abroad.</p> <p>Works in Vienna (1921-1921), Prague (1927 - 1932), Rome (1932 - 1933), Warsaw (1937), creating cartoon portraits of prominent public and cultural figures.</p> <p>In the 50s cooperated with the newspaper "Literary Front," "National Culture", " Worker's Act", "Evening News" and others.</p> <p>Not easy to find his work on the market.</p>
Dobrogea Todor	1904-90		
Dobrujdanski, Todor	1904-1990	Landscape	900 euros (for 52x72)
Doganov, Liuben	1884-1975	Landscape	Student of Atanas Mihov
Donev, Bocho	1904-1969	Figurative	Born Oreshak Lovech district. 1929 - 1944 was a high school teacher in

			<p>town.</p> <p>He painted landscapes and genre painting with a social purpose. . He worked in the field of applied arts. Studied painting at the National Academy of Arts under Prof. Dimitar Gyudzhenov.</p> <p>1935 - 1936 at Warsaw School of Fine arts ability. Also studied graphic. Drew inspiration from museums in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia.</p> <p>500 euros (for 45x64)</p>
Draganov, Dimitar	1908-1996	graphics	<p>born Izvorovo village, Targovishte</p> <p>Prof Todorov taught him at the Sofia School of art from which he graduated in 1932 after which he returned to teach at his village school.</p> <p>Concentrated in his graphic work on miners</p> <p>There is apparently a gallery in his village with his works</p>
Eftimov, Vasil	1900-1987		<p>Vassil Eftimov was born on June 29, 1900 in the town of Kyustendil. Graduated from Art Academy in 1925, majoring in painting. Initially, under the influence of his close friend Vladimir Dimitrov Vassil Eftimov turned to portraits and genre painting. Upon completion of the academy, he was a teacher in Pazardzhik. Later, he worked three years in the State Printing House - Sofia, as an artist, where he created 23 projects for stamps with historical themes. Vassil Eftimov twice visited Paris, where he had a solo exhibition.</p> <p>After World War II, worked at the National Art Gallery and the Ethnographic Museum. In 1955-1956, the artist visited China for six months and made exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities. He was among the founders of the Bulgarian-Chinese Friendship Society. He created his own theory of spectral colours in different ranges like musical tones - major and minor. His monotypes are rich in shapes, colors and invoices. Participated in numerous exhibitions in Kyustendil - 1979 Munich - 1985.</p> <p>The largest collection of his works in the Art Gallery "Vladimir Dimitrov - the Master" - Kyustendil. Vassil Eftimov painted a series of portraits of famous personages Sofia families, still lives, landscapes and figurative compositions.</p>
Emanouilova, Vaska	1905-1985	sculptor	<p>City Gallery has lovely 2005 celebration booklet</p>
Enchev-Vidyu, Ivan	1882-1936	theatre	<p>Born Kazanlak</p> <p>1901-03 National Drawing School</p> <p>1906 Munich</p> <p>Back to Bulgaria 1908</p>
Frantzaliiski , Pavel	1884-1956	Aquarelle	<p>Born Samokov, he graduated in 1907 in the class painting of Ivan Mrkvicka. After two years of teaching in Sofia and Stara Zagora came back to his hometown and taught drawing at the school from 1909 to 1931 - taking an active part in the public life of the city. His name is associated with the establishment of the art collection at the Museum of History in Samokov. He was also an active hiker and mountaineer. He painted mostly with watercolour mountain landscapes, with Rila as the main theme. Topics of rural life moved him. Had over 30 solo exhibitions in Sofia, Dupnitsa, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Zagreb, Ljubljana.</p>

Funev, Ivan		sculptor	See 1956 monograph
Ganchev, Rusi	1895-1965	Landscape	<p>Born in Ruse. Graduated from the Academy of Art in 1924. He returned to his hometown and was a founding member of the House of Arts and the Art Gallery. Besides being possessed undeniable talent landscape, Ganchev has worked as a teacher at that time in Rousse and villages. In the late 40s he moved to Sofia and worked until 1960 as an artist at the Ethnographic Museum.</p> <p>Ruse gallery there are only three of his paintings, and national - none - but not difficult to pick up his work.</p> <p>In paintings dominate river scenes with landscapes of the Danube coast, landscapes and still lives.</p> <p>300 euros. See National Gallery booklet</p>
Gancheva, Nevena	1897-1984		Born Ruse.
Gasharov, Ruhmen	1936-	naïve, pop art	<p>"His major topic is man and his daily routine. Pieces of embroidery and lace, fluttering angels and showy shooting galleries, leaflets and newspaper pieces all combine to give rise to the Bulgarian type of pop-art. The markedly naive manner the artist employs has developed into a subtle artistic style. The lyricism his personages invoke, contrary to the expectations, stem from the banal, the kitsch and all that is very close to the manner of the daily routine.</p> <p>The freshness in Gasharov's canvases comes from the artist's subtle understanding of man, his feeling for the human soul and his ability to recreate in a concise manner the specific moments of the mass culture that have revealed most vividly throughout the years man and man's daily life. The artist's credo: „I love simple beauty and ordinary things“, goes hand in hand with the graceful culture of artistic expression".</p> <p>See booklet - and http://www.gashar.dir.bg/</p>
Genev, Slavi	1893-1977	Landscape	<p>studied at Sofia School of Art until 1923 - with a spell 1917/18 at Munich Art Academy. And 1926/27 at a paris art school. Worked as an art teacher. Made Samokov his base in 1930 ; taught art there from 1931-1948; and became the Director of the Historical museum from 1949-1958</p> <p>works cost about 400 euros</p>
Georgiev, Boris	1888-1962	graphic artist	<p>born Varna after which his parents moved to Odessa where he had his schooling.</p> <p>Studied art in St Petersburg 1905-09. He continued his art studies in Munich from 1910. 1911-1913 he travelled by foot throughout Europe - from Norway to Spain - studying drawing in Florence for a few months. Two years he lived in an alpine house he built himself near Trentino. Italy was his base - although he also travelled to India making friends with Mahatmi Gandhi and Nehru.</p> <p>He does not seem to have returned to BG before his death in Rome.</p>
Georgiev, Gospodin	1909-1978	Landscape, portrait	<p>born Stara Zagora. Graduated Sofia 1931 and 1932 studied at Academy of Art Rome.</p> <p>Teacher in Stara Zagora.</p> <p>Awarded Cyril and Methodius medal 1971</p>

Georgiev, Pencho	1900-1940	secessionist - theatre design with strong interest in graphics, woodcuts etc	born Vratsa. Set designer Sofia. 26-29 worked in Russe's municipal theatre. 1929-34 Paris where he specializes in applied arts in the workshop of Paul Laurent. Social issues dominate in his work He tends to turn ordinary rural people in monumental characters. Used chalky colors. Exhibited 11 international exhibitions
Geshev, Jordan	1907-1973	Aquarelle landscapes	born in Chichil in the Vidin region. In 1930. graduated from the Sofia Art School - receiving a special decoration by prof. Haralampi Tachev. Member of the "Modern Art" association. Organized 22 solo exhibitions. Participated in joint and collective exhibitions. A significant part of his works occupies landscapes of Rila, Pirin, Stara Planina. Exceptional aquarelle master
Getsov, Ivan	1910-1991	creates portraits, landscapes, figure compositions. Independence wars	Born in Liaskovets. In 1938 graduated from the Painting in the Art Academy under Prof. Dechko Uzunov. Participate in the DAE. His paintings at the National Gallery and other galleries in the country. Visited many countries in Europe. Central Committee of the Dimitrov Young Communist League
Gloginkov, Simeon	1919-97	Landscapes, portraits	Born Burgas. Graduated Sofia art school 1943 under Boris Mitov
Goev, Vladimir	1925-2013	various genres of painting	born in Burgas, in a family of immigrants from the village Mokreni . From 1939 to 1944 he studied at the Real School in Burgas, where his class teacher is the big Burgas artist and sculptor Petko Zadgorski . Painted portraits of Vasil Levski (1966), Lenin (1967), Georgi Dimitrov (1969), Ivan Bashev (1972), Nikolay Manolov , Nikola Vaptsarov . Member of the Union of Bulgarian artists and for more than 20 years a member of the Management Board.
Goyeva, Elsa		Sombre abstracts of buildings	
Gyudzhenov, Dimitar	1899-1979	Historical themes	In 1915 he graduated in painting in the class of Prof. Zeno Todorov Industrial School of Arts (now the National Art Academy) in Sofia, meanwhile studied two semesters at the Paris National School of Fine Arts (1913-14) . He started painting as a war artist in the headquarters of the Eighth Infantry Division Tundzha - see his paintings preserved in the Museum of Military History . His aim is to portray them the essence of military events inseparable from the lives of ordinary soldiers. Between 1920 and 1933 Dimitar Gyudzhenov taught at the Academy , where he was professor . Among his students there are Stoyan Venev and Titirinov . In 1925 painted his first paintings of historical subjects , which occupies the main genre in all its work. Other genres in which Gyudzhenov works are domestic painting, landscape and portrait . From 1933 to 1945 , he worked as a painter at the headquarters of the Bulgarian army , which inspired a whole series of paintings of military and historical themes and personalities. After 1944, the social issues are also well represented in his paintings . In 1959 Dimitar Gyudzhenov and Professor Nicholas Kozuharov were entrusted with the the restoration of Stara Zagora church "St. Dimitar " . In 1961 they painted the Varna Orthodox Church " St. Nicholas " . Gyudzhenov also


			<p>Painted murals of churches in Burgas , Plovdiv.</p> <p>Participated in exhibitions of these companies in Bulgaria and abroad (Berlin, Vienna , New York, Prague).</p> <p>See booklet</p>
Gyurova, Bronka	1910-1995	landscape	<p>born Shumen; in Belgium 1937/38 for a special course in illustration.</p> <p>First solo exhibition 1943. Married artist Eliezer Alesheh in 1947.</p> <p>Emigrated with him to South America in 1952</p>
Hadjimladenov, Naum	1894-1985	Figurative	<p>Born Samokov</p> <p>In 1921 he graduated the National Art Academy, Sofia subject of painting, by Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka. The same year, organized his first solo exhibition in Samokov. He began to work as a teacher in his hometown.</p> <p>From 1934 to 1946 the famous painter works and lives in Sofia - accepted as a member of the Unit of Bulgarian Artists, works at various newspapers, illustrates literary series "Ancient Bulgaria".</p> <p>During this period Hadjimladenov participates in a number of General Art Exhibitions in the capital and other cities, in the presentations of Bulgarian art abroad - 'Roerich Museum' (New York, 1935), Athens (1938). Participates in the International Biennial of Humour and Satire in Gabovo city.</p> <p>In 1937 Hadjimladenov was awarded a gold medal at the Paris presentation for his work 'Market in Samokov. " In 1938 an exhibition of Bulgarian painting in Athens was awarded the medal "St. Alexander ". In 1954 and 1964 he was awarded the medal "Cyril and Methodius" - first degree. In 1975 he was named honorary citizen of Samokov.</p> <p>1,500 euros for 30x30</p>
Ivanov, Boris	1904-1993	portraits	<p>born Sofia and graduated from Sofia Art School in 1927, Exhibited internationally; taught applied graphics and painting at Sofia Art School 1946-51. In the 1960s he wrote numerous articles about artistic life in Bulgaria.</p>
Ivanov, Ivan	1879-1966	landscape, portrait	
Ivanov, Lyubo	1891-1974	Urban landscape	
Ivanov, Sabi	1896-1976	Landscape	<p>1918-21 studies at Art Academy, Sofia</p> <p>My "end of the village" and ?? boat at Soz?</p>
Ivanov, Sergei	1881-1967	Portraits, landscapes	<p>studied at Sofia's Drawing School 1898-1905; then 2 years at Munich's Art Academy. Most of his works were destroyed during the 2nd WW Sofia bombings</p> <p>700 euros for 50x33</p>
Ivanov, Stefan	1875-1951	portraits landscapes	<p>graduated Sofia Art School 1903 - following Miroslav Markvitchka's class. Teacher at the School from 1907 - full Professor from 1914</p>
Ivanov, Vasil	1909-1975		<p>http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/vasil-ivanov-vasil-ivanov/paintings</p>

Karamihailova Elena	1875-1965	portrait	born in Shoumen, she graduated from Robert College Constantinople in 1895. Then a graduate of the Art Academy in Munich, Germany She is the first Bulgarian lady-artist. The portraits of women she painted are strong psychological studies.
Kabakchiev, Hristo	1879-1970	aquarelle and architectural landscape. Depictions of ancient Tarnovo.	He originated from a family of strong Bulgarian national revival and revolutionary traditions. In 1899 he was one of the first graduates of the School of Arts. He was then a teacher in Veliko Tarnovo, Koprivshtitsa. Painter of the museum of ethnography in Sofia. A great part of his works were destroyed during the bombings in 1944.
Kantemirov, Petar	1885-1967	town landscapes	Born Sopor. 1907-09 Munich Art Academy with visits to St Petersburg. In 1912 he was one of the team painting the new Alexander Nevski Cathedral. 1932-1950 Russian and drawing teacher at Karlovo
Karakashev, Georgi	1899-1970	Theatre; landscape	Born Russe. studied art at the Bucharest Academy of Art between 1919 and 1920. In 1931 graduated from the Art academy, majoring in painting in the class of professor Tzeno Todorov. Creative career began in the 20s in the area of picturesque-decorative direction of Bulgarian art direction and in 1930-they deal mainly with applied art (layout, advertisements, labels, posters). As a painter, he excels in the field of landscape and portrait - his preferred techniques being pastel and oil paints. In 1931-32 he taught drawing in male high school in Sofia and, from 1934 and 1945, taught internal architecture and style in Rousse. Worked as art director in Rousse dramatic theatre (1945-48), Youth Theatre in Sofia (1948-52) and the National Theatre "Ivan Vazov" (from 1952 year).
Karasimeonev, Tudor	1889-1937	Caracatures - of intellectuals of Kaz and Burgas	Born Kazanlak 1906-1917 State Art School 1918-22 Gabrovo 1922 Burgas
Karshovski, Preslav	1905-2003	landscape	
Kavarnaliev, Hristo	1892-1951		Graduated Sofia Art School 1915. He studied under Prof. Ivan Markvichka, Anton Mitov, Ivan Angelov and Jaroslav Vesin Travelled across Russia, Italy, France, etc. 900 euros 70x100
Kazakov, Dmitar (Neron)	1933-1992	folk	born in Village in VT. Graduated in graphic arts from the Art Academy in Sofia under Prof. Evtim Tomov in 1965. He created paintings, prints and wood carvings. The artist depicted uniquely folk motives in his works. Since 1966 he participated in art exhibitions in Bulgaria and abroad. He presented his works in solo exhibitions at Sofia, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Athens, Vienna and New York. The National Collection of Contemporary Art of the Louvre, Paris, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow and the Emperor Collection in Tokyo own his paintings. During his lifetime Kazakov made big donations to the towns of Lovech and Tryavna, which have permanent exhibitions of his works. Works don't often appear - and will cost upwards of 5,000 euros
Kiureliev	1877-1910	landscape	born Sliven superb painter whose life was cut tragically short when he drowned in

Jordan			the Black Sea
Klisurov, Petso	1865-1933	Portraits, genre, still life	Born Kazanlak 1884-88 Florence Academy of Arts For next decade, a high school teacher of arts at Kazanlak, Sliven, Varna, Plovdiv and Sofia 1911-1920 National School of Drawing
Kodjamanov, Tihomir	1892-1975	landscapes, portraits	Born Gabrovo, schooled Vidin. In 1913 graduated at the Art Industrial School, Sofia, with Professor Ivan Mrkvicka. Specializes in Vienna from 1923 to 1925 He worked primarily with landscapes - his preferred subjects are the coast of Danube. Author and portraits. Long worked as a teacher in Vidin.
Koichev, Ganyo	1887-1951		Born Kazanlak 1910-1914 Sofia Art school From 1918 Harmanli
Kolev, Boris	1906-1986		born Kyustendil. Graduated 1932 from Sofia Art Academy. Also art historian and critic
Kolev, Kolyo	1905-1950	Landscape Graphic	Born Kazanlak Thick complex technique; Rhodope mountains focus Committed suicide 400 euros; 250 in 2013
Konsulova- Vazova Elizabeth	1881-1965	portraits	born in Plovdiv. In 1902 graduated the second alumni of the Arts school, in the class of Jaroslav Vesin. Between 1909 and 1910, she specialized in portraiture in Munich Academy. Her first exhibition in 1919 in Sofia is the first solo exhibition of female artist in Bulgaria. Exhibitions then followed in Prague (1931), Plzen and Bratislava (1932) and again in Sofia in 1934 and 1956. She prefers techniques such as pastel, oil and watercolor. She leaves many paintings of flowers and is also the first Bulgarian female artist painting the nude body Konsulova Vazova is one of the founders of the association "Native Art". Develops social activities as an editor of "Lecture" magazine (1934-40) and the "Home and World" magazine (1940-43); cooperates with the magazines "Artist" and "Art" with art critical articles on Bulgarian and western fine arts. In 1961 she was awarded the medal "Cyril and Methodius" - I degree.
Kosev, Dmitar	1904-1980	Landscape, genre	Born Dryanovo 1929 graduated 1936 teacher Kazanlak
Kostova- Vladeva Radka	1907-2002	landscapes	Born Shipka 1931 graduated Teacher 1932 Burgas Donated work to Shipka
Kozuharev, Nikola	1892-1971	portraits	born Kazanlak but raised in Stara Zagora where his father was a teacher and founder of the Regional Museum. Studied under Tseno Todorov in Sofia and in Paris 1914/15. Was war artist. In 1920s and 1930s specialised in national historical scenes. Worked for the king From 1929-63 he was Professor at Academy of Arts.

			1963/67 he was head of Dept at Higher Institute of Education VT
Krastev, Mihail	1877-1956	graphics	Born Pirot - studies Drawing School Sofia 1899-1902. Taught at Karlovo HS - then from 1910 lived in Plovdiv for a decade - then from 1920 at the High School for Girls Sofia. Retired in 1931 and devoted himself to graphic studies of literary and artistic figures - and sketches of Bulgarian streets and buildings. See charming booklet
Krastev, Kiril Vasilev	1904-1947		born in Yambol. Between 1923 and 1925 should initially firosofiya at SU . Eventually he graduated in 1930 natural sciences. In 1938-39 specializes Art in Paris. Literary critic , essayist , scientific popularizer , art . Kiri Krastev is a great figure in Bulgarian Art . Issued monographs on Papazov , Sirak Wanderer , bench Obreshkov . Doing research on the frescoes in the Boyana Church , the Zemen monastery. Wrote works on Michelangelo's "Understanding Painting" , 1947
Kraskarets-Yonchev, Xristo	1879-1950	Aquarelles Mountains	Born and lived Samokov. Graduated in 1912 from Sofia Art School where his teachers were Prof. Ivan Angelov and Professor Ivan Mrkvicka. Working mainly in the landscape field he uses watercolour, tempera and oil he organizes many exhibitions in Sofia and Samokov. His famous works are the series "Landscapes from Rila" (1936). In 1931 took part in the founding of the Historical Museum in Samokov city and subsequently worked as a museum curator. 500 euros. See pamphlet
Kutev, Hristo	1869-1943	Portraits, landscape	Born Shipka; graduated VT (teacher a Czech) Settled Krakow Tatra scenes In 1950 his wife donated 50 of his paintings to Bulgaria
Kutzkarov, Dimitar	1835-1963	aquarelle	born Stara Zagora and graduated 1908 from State Academy where he studied under Mrkvichka. Then teacher in SZ; 1918-1927 teacher in Yambol, Pleven, Svishtosh and SZ. In 1927 appointed to Berkovitz where he settled permanently and where more than 1000 of his works are housed at the Art Gallery
Lavrenov, Tsanko	1896-1978	vivid and mystical portrayal of monasteries and cities	No formal education See lovely small 1957 book
Lazarov, Ivan	1889-1952	sculptor	Born Karlovo. 1917/18 Munich Art Academy. Mid 1920s travelled in Europe. 1924 became Professor at the Sofia Art School - 1950-52, the first Director of the Art Academy One of the most sensitive sculptors - of peasants, soldiers etc
Lazarov, Miladin	1894-1985	portraits, landscapes	graduated 1916 from Sofia Art School
Lukova, Vera	1907-1974	portraits	born plovdiv. Graduated 1930 from the Art School sofia

Makedonski, Dimitr	1914-1993	Figures, landscapes	1944 graduated from Sofia Art School 1945-65 Curator of Sofia City gallery
Mandov Radomir	1883-1947.		born on January 8, v1883 , Kazanlak. Graduated (1906) painting in art school , Sofia studied under Professor Ivan Angelov and Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka . Member of the Society "Modern Art ." gentle landscapes and compositions .
Mandov, Dechko	1886-1969	Portrait, genre, landscape	Born Karnovat. Childhood Shipka 1912 graduated Sofia
Manski, V	1905-1969	Urban landscapes	Born Vidin He graduated from the Academy of Arts in Sofia in 1938, major art of painting, the class of Dechko Uzunov. He created a number of urban and industrial landscapes. He worked in various formats and employed all techniques: oil paints, water-colour, Indian ink. He painted a lot of compositions devoted to daily life and building. Manski is one of the masters of colouring in the Bulgarian landscape. From 1941 he participated in general art exhibitions, the exhibitions of the Bulgarian artists, exhibitions abroad, and organized 4 individual exhibitions in Sofia /1946, 1953, 1964, 1965 His works from Vidin, Sofia, Sozopol, are well-known for their exclusive qualities.
Marinov, Ilyia			
Marinov, Nikola	1879-1948		
Marinov Vasil	1897-1943	landscape, genre	born Stara Zagora, Graduated Sofia's Drawing School in 1907 where he studies under Vesin and Mrkvicka. Delightful colourist War artist.
Markov, Marko	1889-	Monumental sculptor	See 1960 monograph
Matyev, Kyril	1920-2006	Alpine	graduated 1945 in mural painting from Uzunov's class. A prolific painter 300 euros
Mechkuevska, Alexandra	1907-1993	Seascape	born Burgas. Graduated in 1933 in painting from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia under prof. Nicola Kozuharov and prof. Haralambi Tachev and additional graphics under prof. Vasil Zahariev. She was a member of Union of Bulgarian Artists since 1945.. From 1934 participated in group exhibitions and exhibitions of women artists, in Paris - Exhibition/1937/, Belgrad/1938/, Cairo/1938/, Alexandria/1939/; individual exhibitions in Burgas /1934, 1936, 1948/, Sofia/1935, 1937, 1945, 1947/, Plovdiv/1936/, Kazanlak/1937/. She was awarded a medal at the Paris Exhibition /1937 800 euros
Mihailov Boris	1868-1921		Born Kazanluk Graduated Plovdiv ? (under Mrz) 1887-92 Florence Academy of Art


			<p>1892- art teacher in Sliven and Sofia</p> <p>1901</p> <p>http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=40</p>
<p>Mihailov Nikola</p>	<p>1876-1960</p>		<p>Born in Shumen.</p> <p>Nikola Mihaylov devotes a large part of his painting to women. Female characters are complemented by the interior and clothes painted by master sweeping drapes and folds</p> <p>He painted portraits of our cultural personalities and one of the founders of a realistic portrait painting in Bulgaria.</p> <p>He began studying painting in Sofia srt academy with Professor Ivan Mrkvicka . In 1895 went to study in private art schools in Athens and Munich. Opens School of painting in Munich (1900). Teacher in Sofia (1902) and became a painter of the Ministry of Education. In 1897 participated in the Second Art Exhibition. Specializing in Paris and London, where he continued to learn, making copies in museums. In 1911 returned to Germany and lived as a freelance artist in Berlin and Hamburg. Travelled almost all his life, staying briefly in a country. Painted portraits in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Italy, England, Austria.</p> <p>Most famous paintings:</p> <p>"Portrait of Katya Mihailova" (around 1900), "Woman of the artist Ida Mugler" (1905, 1907, National Gallery), "Portrait of Ivan Hadzhova" (1906), "Portrait in Blue" (1909) "Portrait of Countess Voinovich" (1910, National Gallery), "Portrait of Penka Georgieva" (1915).</p> <p>Also created numerous compositions inspired by folklore and mythology "Fairy Dance" (1900), "Fairies" (1901) " Fairies and Rider "(1901)," Cheese "(1906) and landscapes,"</p>
<p>Mihov, Atanas</p> <p>1879-1975</p> <p>Landscapes</p>			<p>Born Stara Zagora. Graduated 1904 from Drawing School. Sofia where he studied under vesin and Mrkvicka. One of initiators of Bulgarian impressionist painting.</p> <p>1906-09 teacher in Silistra; 1910-12 Razgrad; 1918-23 Russe. War artist during Balkan War and First WW. Settled in Sofia 1923 where he worked in Knyazhevo until 1932</p> <p>misty horizons, and peculiar tender veils covering the landscapes,</p> <p>The gradual escape from subject painting, with which Atanas Mihov begins, in favor of the pure landscape, is noticed in 1908 when at the International Fair in Munich he receives a golden medal and honorary diploma for best painter, where he participates with his two emblematic paintings The Ices of the Danube and By Silistra, kept in the National Gallery of Art at the moment. At the fair in Munich he becomes a member of the International Union for Fine Arts and Literature. This recognition which he does not make public at all, gives him the confidence to devote his life entirely to art, so steadily that after almost twenty years of teaching in the country, he devoted himself solely to painting in his house in Knyazhevo and to participating in exhibits. Thus was among the participants in exhibitions in Munich, Liège, Venice, Prague, Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Rome and many others. His works can be found in all of the big galleries in our country and abroad, especially in Switzerland and Italy.</p> <p>1,000 euros 50x40</p>
			
<p>Mikrenski, Constantin</p>	<p>1921-1999</p>		<p>Aquarelles</p>

Milanov, Ivan	1928-		Graduated 1950 from Sofia Art Academy under Ilyia Petrov 1962 seascape in Rakurski gallery off book market
Milenkov, Alexander	1882-1971		Born Samokov 1906 painted murals on stage work in Munich. First professional stage artist
Milev, Ivan	1897-1927		Born Kazanluk. Regarded as the founder of the Bulgarian Secession and a representative of Bulgarian modernism, combining symbolism, Art Nouveau and expressionism in his work. In 1917-1918, he fought as a soldier in WW1. In 1920, he was admitted to Sofia Art School. He also contributed to the communist comic magazine Red Laughter as an illustrator and cartoonist In the summer of 1923, he visited Turkey, Greece and Italy with a group of fellow students.. In 1926, he graduated in set decoration from the National Academy and worked as a stage designer. Afterwards he became an independent freelance painter and illustrator and he also painted frescoes. Generally living in poverty, Milev had a brief 18-month marriage to opera singer Katya Naumova; their daughter Mariya Mileva eventually became an architect. Regarded as one of the great masters of distemper and watercolour painting in Bulgarian art, Milev often created socially-loaded works. His characteristic decorative style was much influenced by the European Secession, but it was also related to Bulgarian folk art and icon painting. http://www.ivan-milev.com/bulgarian-modernism.htm
Minkov, Laliu	1911-1985	Urban landscape	600 euros 75x63
Mirchev, Nikola Stoilov	1921- 1973	portraiture and cartoonist .	Born in the town of Kyustendil in 1921 Joined NAA in 1940, but due to lack of funds interrupted his studies. He graduated from the Academy of Arts in 1948 in the class of Prof. Ilya Petrov in painting pursuing socialist realist work. He was a member of the UBA from 1948 and Secretary of the UBA in the periods from 1953 to 1955 and from 1963 to 1965 and Chairman of UBA from 1970 to 1973 during his tenure as Chairman of UBA built exhibition complex "Shipka " № 6 in Sofia in 1970 in 1971 he was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party . Nikola Mirchev is one of the founders of the " Hornet ." Published drawings and newspaper " Fatherland Front " and " Workers work." He paints portraits of Todor Zhivkov , Lenin Dzerzhinski , people from his family and a famous one called "Interrogation" (1954). Created posters and cartoons on foreign policy issues. Illustrated many books , including " Bulgarian Folk Tales" by Ran Basil and "Tobacco" by Dimitar Dimov . Nikola Mirchev was twice winner of the Dimitrov Prize . In 1970 he was awarded the title " People's Artist" . Nikola Mirchev is the father of artist Ivaylo Mirchev , chairman of the UBA 2004 Nikola Mirchev died in 1973 in Paris, where he was receiving treatment .

Mitov, Anton	1862-1930	genre, war, portrait, landscape	<p>Born Stara Zagora. Graduated Florence 1885.</p> <p>Worked as teacher in Stara Zagora, Varna, Plovdiv and Sofia.</p> <p>1896-1927 Prof of History of art and Perspectives, Art Academy Sofia (its Director 1912-18 and 1924-27).</p> <p>Author of first book on history of art written in Bulgarian. Co-founder of Society in Support of Bulgarian Art in 1893.</p> <p>Among his most famous works are : " Return of the vintage ", " Market Grape Evksinogad near Varna ", " Goldsmith the Sofia market ", " From the Sofia market ", " Group of farmers market in Sofia ", " group of peasants market in Silistra ", " Portrait of Ivan Mrkvicka ", " Self-Portrait " .</p> <p>Author of the first seascape in Bulgarian painting : " Varna port ", " Varna beach ", " Varna Sea."</p> <p>Actively participate in the socio- cultural and political life and manifests as passionate publicist .</p> <p>Constantly traveling around the country to export reports and interviews because he believed that art should become closer to ordinary people. While writing art criticism , painting murals in churches and monasteries , as well as illustrations for novels such as " Under the Yoke" and barely has time to rest. Long before his death in 1930, he was recognized not only as one of our greatest artists, but also one of the greatest patriots . Managed to cultivate the spirit of art and his son Boris (1891-1963) , who also became a famous artist, lecturer and professor at the Art Academy .</p> <p>http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1862-1930.html Upi're</p>
Mitov, Boris	1891-1963	portraits	<p>Born Varna - son of the famous Bulgarian artist Anton Mitov , his mother Olga Hramtsova is Russian. Born in Varna, where his father at that time was a teacher. In 1894 , when he was three years old , the family moved to Sofia. Boris began to paint as a child and participated in exhibitions from age of fifteen . He studied with Professor Ivan Angelov in Industrial School of Arts - Sofia. In 1911 graduated from the general course and went to Paris , where he remained until 1914 , working with Professor Fernand Kormon and attended the Academy of Fine Arts. Completed the artistic education under Ivan Mrkvicka in 1915.</p> <p>During World War I was a military artist (1915-1918) . Lecturer (1924-1929) and professor (1929-1959) in drawing and painting at the Art Academy in Sofia.</p> <p>Works in portrait and nude. One of the prominent Bulgarian portrait , created portraits of his father, Anton Mitov , Ivan Shishmanov Dobri Hristov , Sava Ognianov , Elin Pelin, Georgi Dimitrov and many other famous Bulgarians</p>
Mitov, Georgi	1875-1900		<p>Born Stara Zagora - Brother of the painter Anton Mitov .</p> <p>Died only 24 years old and therefore leaves little heritage - landscapes, portraits, nudes and academic study. These show the hand of the great artist, plastic craftsmanship and sophisticated sense of colour.</p> <p>died on 27 November 1900, Plovdiv. Graduated (1898) painting at the Art Academy in Turin gold medal with Prof. Giacomo Grosso. He returned home and until his death he taught drawing in Gabrovo, Plovdiv (1898-1900)</p> <p>Works of Georgi Mitov rarely go on the market, prices are high and his name is often the subject of speculation. In 2003, the auction house "Apollo and Mercury" sell "Landscape of the museum" 1903</p>

			<p>picture of Georgi Mitov, even though he died three years earlier than the date of creation of the canvas. After the scandal in the newspaper "Trud" money was returned to the purchasers. Journalistic investigations showed that the picture is sitting in the cheap capital antiques while traders did not think it could pass for a piece of myths. See "Interesting Facts "</p> <p>Works of Georgi Mitov: "Study of praying girl" (1894), "Study of the monk" (1895), "Study of a girl with pearl necklace" (1895), "Profile of the curly-haired Italian" (1896), "Study of old woman "(1897)," Study of an old man "(1897).</p>
Monev, Marko	1939-2004	Landscapes; buildings	<p>born in village in Pleven and moved in 1959 to Russe</p> <p>typical modernist painter</p> <p>see booklet</p>
Morozov, Peter	1880-1951	Romantic landscape	<p>Born Russe</p> <p>1905-1915 specialised in graphic art in Paris</p> <p>Graduated in painting under professors Ivan Markvicka, Yaroslav Veshin and Ivan Angelov from the Art Academy in Sofia in 1905.</p> <p>From 1905 to 1915 he specialized in graphic arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, at the Art Academy in Sofia and under Joseph Peter.</p> <p>The artist participated in the Balkan War and the World War I. He began his artistic career as painter but gradually devoted himself to printing and he contributed significantly to its development in Bulgaria and to colour aquatint in particular.</p> <p>He created hundreds of works depicting ancient Bulgarian monasteries, churches, houses and bridges,</p>
<p>Moutafov, Alexander</p> <p>1879-1957</p> <p>Seascape</p>			<p>born in Shumen and educated in Varna, he studied art in Turin between 1899 and 1902; then Munich 1902/03.</p> <p>He was also a war artist</p> <p>It was the Munich experience which aroused his interest in Jugendstil. From 1921-33, he was professor of Painting in Sofia's Art Academy. First Bulgarian seascape painter, he laid the basis for this specialism for subsequent Bulgarian painters.</p> <p>There is, I understand, a museum in his Sozopol house</p>



			
Mrkvichka Ivan	1856-1938		born Czechia and studied art in Prague. Came to Plovdiv in 1881 and moved to Sofia in 1889. 1896 co-founder of Academy of art. Prof of Painting there until 1921. Became member of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 19918 and edited book in 1929 on Bulgarian painting but returned to Prague about 1937.
Naidenov, Grigor	1885-1983	Café scenes	http://artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=180 http://auction-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=229
Naumov, Vladimir	1897-?	Rural scenes	
Nedkova, Vera	1908-1996		Skopje 1924-30 vienna
Nenov, Ivan	1902-1997	portraits, landscape	born Sofia but family moved in 1914 to Kyustendil where he met Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistora. On returning to Sofia in late teens he was influenced and helped by Ivan Lazarov and was accepted in 1919 as an extra-curricular student in scupting at the Art School - becoming a full-time student in painting in 1920. Worked and lived extensively in Italy from 1932 Founded the studio for mosaics in the Art School. Preferred tempera See booklet
Nikolov, Damyian	1898-1958	Genre; portraits	Born near Burgas; graduated 1929 from Sofia Art Academy under Stefan Ivanov 1933-35 Paris spent time in Prague

Obreshkov Bencho	1899-1970	Fig, still life, landscapes	<p>Born Karnovat. Studied under Oskar Kokoshka in Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden in 1926 and sculpture under Antoine Bourdelle, Paris in 1925 - 1927. He was a member of the "Native Arts" Union (1925), a member of the Union of the New Artists (1931)</p> <p>See 2009 booklet</p>
Panayotov, Panayot			
Parov, Stefan	1905-1971	Landscape, genre, portrait	<p>Born Kazanlak Graduated 1931 - then teacher Kaz Settled Sofia early 1950s</p>
Pascin, Jules	1885-1930	graphic artist	<p>born Vidin to a rich family (grain trader, family moved to Russe when he was young and he completed his (secondary) education in Brasov (Romania). His early talent drew the attention of the famous caricaturist Alexander Bozhinov but he never attended art school. Some of his drawings appeared in the renowned German satirical journal Simplicissimus when he was only 21. After unsuccessful attempts to involve him in the family business, he moved to Paris in 1905 where - with various forays to the USA and Caribbean, he remained until his suicide. http://www.shepherdgallery.com/pdf/pascin.pdf From It's About Time http://bjws.blogspot.ro/2012/10/a-wife-lover-painted-by-european.html Born as Julius Mordecai Pincas of Italian-Serbian & Spanish-Jewish parents, he attended secondary school in Vienna, returning in 1901 to Bucharest, where his family had settled, working briefly in the office of his father's grain-merchandizing business. He was, however, becoming passionately interested in drawing, for which he showed precocious talent. At the age of 16, he became the lover of a woman who ran a brothel & was allowed to draw the residents. In 1903, he moved to Munich, where he attended the art school run by Moritz Heymann. After Pascin moved to Paris in 1905, he became a central figure in the social & cultural life of the cafes & studios of Montparnasse. At the outbreak of World War I, he lived in the United States from 1914 to 1920, sitting out World War I. He taught at the Telfair Academy in Savannah, Georgia, associated with the Telfair Art Museum. He & Hermine painted in New York City as well as in Miami, New Orleans, & Cuba. Pascin married Hermine David at City Hall in New York City. The witnesses were fellow artists Max Weber (???) & Maurice Sterne. Pascin became a citizen of the United States. Returning to Paris in 1920, he continued to compose paintings of delicately toned, thinly painted, but poetically bitter & ironic studies of women - including his wife, his mistress, & some prostitute acquaintances. Although Pascin's watercolors, oils, and drawings were generally well received, a series of unfavorable reviews in 1930 left him severely depressed. Suffering from depression & alcoholism, he committed suicide on the eve of a prestigious solo show by slitting his wrists & hanging himself in his studio in Montmartre. On the wall of that studio,</p>

			<p>he left a message written in his blood saying good-bye to his love, Cecile "Lucy" Vidil Krohg. In his will, Pascin left his estate equally to his mistress, Lucy Krohg, & to his wife, Hermine David.</p> <p>http://www.lonbersyl.com/pascin%20a.html</p>
Pavlovich Nikolai	1835-1895		<p>was born in Svishtov on December 9, 1835 . Son of the famous Renaissance figure Hristaki Pavlovich , one of the great educationists of the early Renaissance , was able to raise and an excellent way his son. He , in turn, from a small beginning to develop his talent , Russia illustrations to books by Dr. Petar Beron . Of them managed to earn money and ultimately collect the necessary sum to follow illustrations in Vienna. He continued his education in Munich , where he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts. His touch with the German school affects the professional development and he became a devotee of the detail in the painting. So his portraits have photographic accuracy, but at the same time imbued with the charm of the people , which the artist perceived flawlessly . He knows how to recreate the specifics of each character , and this brings him job offers that are too attractive financially.</p> <p>Love for Bulgaria but determines the future of the artist. Rather than remain in Germany , where he would enjoy a peaceful and secure life , Nicholas Pavlovich decided to return home , saying :</p> <p>"I wanted to give to his people as my powers permit, something of my profession - he wrote in a letter of 1860 - will look to picturize glorious deeds of our kings . "</p> <p>Thus Pavlovich became the first master of the historical genre in Bulgaria . Later he stated that through his paintings not only wanted to evoke admiration , but also to influence the people to make them love you even more Bulgaria . Started helping by her talent and the national liberation movement - moved to Belgrade, where he met George GSRakovski and illustrates his book</p> <p>After the liberation Nikolai Pavlovich not take advantage of his connections with the revolutionary circles and refused to take part in the management of the state. Instead became a teacher and taught some of the future artists of Bulgaria . decided to join as a volunteer in the Serbo- Bulgarian War. He died on February 13, 1894 .</p>
Penkov, Ivan	1897-1957		<p>born Kazanluk - moved to Burgas in 1915 when his father dies. Studied at art school in Sofia 1919-1922.</p> <p>After a joint exhibition with Uzunov (with Milev a childhood friend), both travelled to Munich where he stayed a year and was influenced by Jugendstil and by German architecture.</p> <p>On his return to Bulgaria in 1923, he worked with theatre decorations. From 1939-1955 he was Professor of Theatre decoration at Sofia Art Academy.</p>
Peretz, David	1906-82	portrait, still-life, landscape	<p>born Plovdiv. From 1936 travelled in Europe.</p> <p>Spent a year during the war in a concentration camp</p>
Pessov, Hristo	1923-2000	sculptor	born Kazanluk
Petkov, Naiden	1918-1989		
Petrov, Boyan	1902-1971	portraits and figure composition	<p>born Sofia. Grduated from Sofia Art School 1928.</p> <p>Early 1930s worked in France and Italy. 1934-1948 worked in various schools in Bulgaria and became teacher at Sofia Art School from 1948</p>

Petrov, Costa	??	old village scenes	lived in Razgrad area
Petrov, Ilia 1903-1975 Graphics Populated landscapes			<p>born Razgrad; Sofia Art Academy 1921-26 - latterly under Prof. Nikola Marinov. Won the competition in 1926 and went on to specialize in Munich. 1928 to attend the private school of Heinrich Mann and learn from the masters of the world of painting (Art Academy). Gave an exhibition there in 1928. On his way back to BG did an extended tour of German cities, France, Austria and Italy to become acquainted with European traditions.</p> <p>1941-1967 he was Professor at Sofia Art Academy. 1961 visited India Art teacher (1928 - 1940) 13 and in junior high proletarian neighborhood " Yuchbunar " , Sofia.</p> <p>From 1940 lecturer , from 1946 - an extraordinary professor and from 1957 to 1968 - professor of painting at the Art Academy, Sofia , Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts (1957-1962) and Rector (1965- 1968), the Academy , and in 1972 became academician. / Encyclopedia of BAS /</p> <p>Ilia Petrov is a Bulgarian artist , one of the greatest of our artists working in the style of the artists of the 17th century , it combines softness and translucency of colours , silvery tones of Velazquez, cold pink flesh of Rubens and creates female portraits and nudes that are not performance only Bulgarian art . Sophisticated shades of greenish and bluish, working with sophisticated techniques so that even today , 50 years after their creation his paintings look like they are not dry. Painting of Ilya Petrov is almost impossible to reproduce and photos published anywhere not represent his true grace and skill.</p> <p>Art School in Sofia bears his name.</p> <p>Participated in exhibitions of the "Native Art" and later became a member of the Society of Independent Artists and Society of New Artists .</p> <p>After the seizure of power on September 9 1944 by the communists takes an active part in the management of UBA and its Secretary-General (1949-1951 and 1957-1959) . Makes mural frieze ' to 1944 ' in the lobby of the theater Sofia "Dimitar Blagoev" (1946) , the frieze "From the struggles of the party in the region of Gabrovo " Party House in Gabrovo (1963) . participate in the work of " Monument to the Soviet Army " in Sofia.</p> <p>Began to work the works of historical revolutionary themes : " Guerrillas in action " (1974 , National Gallery) , " Before shooting " (1954 , National Gallery) , " Partisan Song" (1959 , National Gallery) , " The Messenger " (1963 , National Gallery) and dr.Ot that time compositions "Fishermen " (1948 , National Gallery) , " Fishing women" (1948) and , but his true virtuosity seen in naked bodies , where it remains one of our greatest artists. Among the most famous of them are " Nude - Woman with Mirror " (1937 , National Gallery) , " Nude " (1941 , National Gallery) and others.</p> <p>Left a tremendous amount paintings - portrait sketches, animals , some of which still have not been displayed in public. They impress his acute observation and expressive language.</p> <p>Makes several attempts at sculpture , " Figure " (1939) , " caryatids " (1940) , " Landscape " (1939) , . Caring " (1971).</p> <p>The painting "The Return of Ivaylo in Veliko Tarnovo " library -museum Veliko Tarnovo " (1961) .</p>
Petrov, Ivan	1909-1991	Fig and	Born on 17th September 1909 in village Razpopovci.

		landscape	He graduated from the Academy of Arts in Sofia in 1931 and became Professor at the Academy of Arts in Sofia
Petrov, Nikola	1881-1916	landscapes	<p>born Vidin.</p> <p>A defining figure in the country's painting tradition - despite his short life. Only 22 when he helped found the Modern Art Association in 1903 aiming to change the course of Bulgarian art.</p> <p>Can be considered founder of urban landscape in the country</p> <p>In 1908 began his studies in the second class of the National Academy of Arts, where he studied painting classes with Ivan Mrkvicka, Jaroslav Veshin and Ivan Angelov. After interruptions graduated in 1913 Nikola Petrov painted mostly landscapes. It is close to the art of the French Impressionists (Manet, Monet, Renoir). Part of his work is a genre paintings in which the artist combines modern technology with Bulgarian subjects. In 1912 participated in the murals in the temple - monument "Alexander Nevsky" with the composition "Introduction to the temple" in the northern altar.</p> <p>See 2011 booklet</p>
Popov, Georgi John	1906-1960	Figurative	<p>In Paris 1930 - 1935 and 1937 -1939 which acquainted him with French art and the representatives of surrealism, futurism and cubism.</p> <p>Between 1947 - 1948 the artist lived and worked in Sweden where he created mainly illustrations. That period is also noted for his water-colours which stand out for their extraordinary intensity.</p> <p>He found the constraints of the new regime oppressive and, from the late 40s worked entirely in pastel and in cinema. He explored the topic of "Fishermen" in a cycle of preparatory sketches and pictures. At that time he was attracted by the still-life genre.</p> <p>See booklet</p>
Popova-Balarewa, Vaska	1902-1979	Figurative	<p>born in the city of Ruse on April 7, 1902.</p> <p>She was raised in the family of a general and a mother who was an artist and a musician.</p> <p>Her love of art took her to the National Academy of Arts, Sofia, where she took up studies in Prof. Tseno Todorov's painting class. Under the mentorship of Prof. Nikola Marinov, she mastered the language of colours, graduating in 1927.</p> <p>Two years later she was admitted to the Academy of Arts in Rome for further specialization. There she got acquainted in detail with leather crafting techniques.</p> <p>After her return to Bulgaria, she established herself as a pioneer in this field. In 1933 she married General Hristo Balarev, with whom she had a son. The artist's home was frequented by intellectuals Soya Paprikova, Bistra Vinarova, Alexander Poplilov, Cyril Petrov, Raphael Mihaylov, Andrey Nikolov, Boris Ivanov, Alexander Zhendov, Mara Georgieva, Vaska Emanuilova, Veselin Staykov, Lyuba Palikareva.</p> <p>There is an interesting group of paintings standing out, representing the images of tenor Stefan Makedonski, composer Lyubomir Pipkov, artists Cyril Petrov and Raphael Mihaylov, author Elisaveta Bagryana, all of whom were friends with the artist. applied arts (leather crafting).</p>
Poptoshev, Todor	1879-1956	aquarelles	

Rachev, Alex	1927-2007	historical	<p>Born Pleven. Painting completed in VIII "Nikolay Pavlovich" / NAA / in Prof. Ilia Petrov and Sculpture (1964) in G.Kotsev.</p> <p>The Art of Alex Rachev moving in two parallel directions - historical and landscape painting. While his landscapes are light, modern and artistically managed, isdtoricheskite his paintings oscillate between baroque and romantic to impress with surprising compositional solutions and dynamic accents. He is an author whose works are yet to be rediscovered by art historians and critics. The world in his paintings is intriguing and unexpected result of intellectual harmony between reality and fantasy author.</p> <p>More famous works of Alex works Rachev: "Battle of Vladislav of Varna" (1965), "The Fight in the Batak Church" (1969), "assimilate the Rhodope Bulgarians" (1971), "Export flag" (1982) and others.</p> <p>The pictures of Alex Rachev located in the National History Museum, National Museum of Literature, Museum of History in Sofia, the Regional History Museum Pleven, Panagyurishte Historical Museum, Museum of History in Batak, Art Gallery in Pleven , Sliven, Pazardjik, Burgas, Veliko Sofia, Kyustendil.</p> <p>http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=60</p>
Radikov, Dmitar	1879-1940	Genre, landscape, portrait	<p>Born Samokov. Taught by Mchkrk</p> <p>From 1901 teacher at Kazanlak</p> <p>1907 teacher Samokov</p> <p>1918 teacher Russe - with A Mihov and Lazorov</p> <p>Part of group painting icons of Russe and Samokov</p>
Rashev, Sasho	1927-2012		
Radoikov, Dmitar	1878-1940	landscape, portrait, military	<p>graduated 1901 from Sofia Art School - from Professor Markvichka's class</p>
Rainov, Nikola	1889-1954		<p>born in. Kesarevo , Veliko Tarnovo, into a family of prominent activist for national liberation Ivan Raynov . Brother of the painter Stoyan Manolov , professor of ceramics and father of the eminent sculptor Bojan Raynov and writer Bogomil Raynov</p> <p>Graduated from seminary in Sofia (1908). Follows a philosophy in the University of Sofia (1911). Participates in the First World War as a war correspondent to 9th Plevan Division occupied area of the defense line of the Southern Front, known as Dojransko.</p> <p>Graduated from State Art-Industrial School in Sofia (1919).</p> <p>Writes poetry , fiction , cultural anthropological works on the history of art , folklore , ethnography ; cooperate with the press; examine many cultural monuments ; published a number of articles on art and literature .</p> <p>Editor of the magazines " Zenica "and" Orpheus "newspapers" Belltower "and" ankhing ". His first book " Bogomil Legends " (1912) was published by the pseudonym Anonim .Several months later, Anton Strashimirov published a large review of the book in two successive books of the magazine "Our life" (v. 9-10), calling the author "creative talent to look you've never experienced," and his debut - " event. " [2]</p> <p>In the period 1918-1919, the cooperate of Geo Milev , writing several articles for his magazine "Balance". The same year issued several books: "Visions around ancient Bulgaria", "Book of Kings", "The eyes of Arabia", "Solar Tales", "Between the desert and the life", the poem "The City." Makes the second edition of the "Bogomil legends" expanded edition of the "Book of the mysteries", translated "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" of Friedrich Nietzsche . In 1919 embarks on a</p>

			great journey in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor. During the period 1922-1927, he worked as chief librarian at the National Library in Plovdiv. Seconded for two years in Paris to meet with cultural monuments in the French capital. When he returned, accepted a teaching position at the Art Academy in Sofia, where he was professor of art history from 1927 to 1950.
Rainov Stoyan	1894-1978	Aq	
Rilski, Vladimir	1905-1969	portraits, landscapes	<p>born in Peshtera in a family of renowned intellectual George Rilski. He joined the Art Academy in Sofia in 1925, where his teachers were Prof. Dimitar Gyudjenov, Prof. Nikola Marinov and Stefan Ivanov.</p> <p>In 1929 he moved to Vienna for specialization. After his return to Bulgaria, Vladimir Rilski began working as a high school art teacher in Plovdiv. Associate to the circle of "Baratsi" - the artists Vasil Barakov, Zlatyu Boyadjiev Tsanko Lavrenov whose motto is deeply in the spirit of the national art.</p> <p>His first solo exhibition was in Plovdiv city in 1938. He also organized a joint exhibition with Zlatyu Boyadjiev.</p> <p>From 1945, taught at the Art Academy in Sofia. During this period he participated in many General Art Exhibitions. In 1949 Rilski money pressures forced him to do fairly menial work in Smolyan - doing posters, wall paintings and painting the interiors of public buildings. Indicative of the personality of Vladimir Rilski is the attitude of his contemporaries to him - because of his idealistic spirit and selflessness is called by Rhodopeans "Bezsbarnika" and 'Forest King'.</p> <p>His painting brings the romantic iconography of the church and the realism of the Bulgarian folklore. While he was alive, the artist was considered as one of the most prominent representatives of the movement of native art in the 30s and 40s of XX century. Of the same, period (30s of XX century) is his emblematic cycle "Houses of Koprivshtitsa town". Picturesque views of the Rhodope Mountain Rilski shows at his self-exhibition in Sofia in 1964. He died in 1969 in a tragic accident in "Shiroka luka" village.</p>
Rubev, George Hristo	1894-1975		<p>trained in Prague after 1919</p> <p>see little booklet</p> <p>600 euros</p>
Sachariev, Vasil	1885-1971	Aquarelles; graphics	<p>Painted Samokov area</p>
Sakazov, Milen		Marine- scapes	
Savova-Nenova Ekaterina	1901-1980	portrait, still-life	<p>born Sofia.</p> <p>Graduated 1925 from Prof Marinov's class</p> <p>One of founders of group of women artists in 1928</p>
Shahanova-Shishkova, Olga	1895-1978	landscape, interiors, still life	<p>Born in Plovdiv. Graduated from the Art Academy in Sofia in the class in painting under Professor Ivan Mrkvicka in 1920. Until 1925 assistant teacher in painting at the School in Sofia. From 1930 s lived and painted in Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Germany where she had</p>

			<p>exhibitions. Wife of the famous industrialist and producer of wines Shishkov.</p> <p>in 1946. returned to Bulgaria.</p> <p>Shahanova Olga was a member of the Association of South Bulgarian artists and the company of women artists and president. In the 60s Shahanova Olga went to Athens. For some time he lived and painted there.</p> <p>Most famous are the interiors. These people are recreated in a particularly intimate, ordinary atmosphere. Filled with vibrant color.</p> <p>900 euros 44x49</p>
Shivachev, Marko	1892-1946	Portraiture; aquarelles	<p>born Kazanlak</p> <p>graduated 1922 plus</p> <p>teacher in Elena, Chipra, Kadzhali</p>

Shtarkelov, Konstantin (1889-1961) Landscape, aquarelle

Born Sofia.

He studied at the Art Academy in Sofia from 1906. In 1909 departed for Moscow. His first solo exhibition held in 1911. He was war artist in 1912-1913 and 1917. He was the most famous and outstanding Bulgarian watercolour painter who preferred to draw landscapes from Rila and Pirin Mountains, Sofia and Tarnovo regions. His works were presented at national and solo exhibitions in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Venice, Germany and Hungary.

After September 9, 1944 his work was denied and forgotten because of his ties with the Palace . They call it the "official artist of the bourgeois regime and royal favorite " ... Constantine Shtarkelov is deported , expelled from UBA and spent five months in the Central Prison.

http://artprice.bg/autor_details.php?act=data&elem_id=451

His father George was a citizen of Sofia, a shoemaker by trade, and his mother, Mary (d. 1925) was born in Nis.

The father of the artist died early - Constantine was only 13 years old. Began to assist his mother to feed the family - works shoemakers, selling newspapers, extra in Opera and the National Theatre in the evening ...

In 1906 Kontantin Shtarkelov joined the school of drawing and even the first semester participated in the competition among the students of all courses autumn landscape, winning second prize. Just a few months later received the first prize for the winter landscape. This is a surprise for professors and students and creates a well-deserved popularity of previously unknown young man. However, Konstantin Shtarkelov remains among the most modest, silent and diligent students of drawing school.

"Because of the financial status of the Stork family was forced at the end of the second year of drawing leave school. barely eighteen, he arrived in Russia and stay for a while in Odessa. No money, no acquaintances and recommendations, he found shelter in the first place in the famous Odessa monastery "Andreevskoe clergy" - a refuge for many Bulgarian migrant workers, students and craftsmen fallen. The monastery provided the residents have only shelter, tea and bread ..

I was pleased when I had a piece of bread and a cup of hot tea. "Only a few months Constantine finds its environment - also wandering and homeless, but filled with bright hopes and foremost with unquenchable love for art.

Little is known about either the days of the young artist. Lalyu Metev gives us valuable fragments of the time, writing: "Worried by the obligation to return to the dormitory of the monastery at the specified time, Shtarkelov rather rent a bed in a crowded room in the city where he lives during their stay in Odessa . Here lies before him passes a gallery of images and judgments - acquaintances with vagrants pursued by misfortune and unhappiness people, idealists or spiritually corrupt, scammers unrecognized poets, artists, young and enthusiastic theatergoers, clean and noble souls and schemers petty crooks. The huge world of pre-revolutionary Russia in their daily lives, with southern temperament, with all of its sounds, colors and contrasts that undoubtedly left irresistible impression on the young artist.

Every day Shtarkelov out by the sea, to the Bolshoi fountain or single remote districts of the city to draw. Found a permanent buyer Georgian-known bookseller, whom he undertakes to sell everything you draw. In Odessa is natural and its initial meeting with paintings of Russia, because he sees the originals here in arranging exhibitions of the "Company of the south Russian artists" and "Peace iskusstva."

Again, we can refer to the writings of Lalyu Metev: "In the second year the young Bulgarians went to Moscow, and again rent beds for rent in a shared room with six workers. Old Russian capital, its rich spiritual life, exhibitions, workshops of the famous Moscow School of Painting made extraordinary and lasting impression on the stunned new and unusual experiences Bulgarian. In Moscow Shtarkelov acquainted more close and true characteristics of the Russian soul, not only as a manifestation of individuals, but also as an expression of ethnical psychology. For a fascinating insight helped his close friendship with a young Russian writer, late

offshoot of dying populism and incorrigible idealist - David Maksimchuk. Thanks to him Shtarkelov could not only penetrate the cultural and spiritual life of Moscow to meet with the various events of the then artistic world, but go touch the charm of the Russian soul. The strongest experience Shtarkelov in Moscow was meeting in the Tretyakov Gallery with great masters of Russian painting - Ventseslavov, Shishkin, Pollen, Savrasov and foremost Levitan and Kuindzhi. Days he roamed the quiet halls of the Tretyakov Gallery, pausing in front of paintings by Repin, Serov, Vrubel and Vasnetsov from ... "

At the end of 1909 Shtarkelov Constantine returned to Bulgaria with enough experience to work alone but hesitates. He wants to have an artist diploma and thereby assume more secure future because such a document entitling him to be a candidate as a teacher.

In 1910, due to material difficulties the student decides to submit to the gallery Trapkov four unsigned watercolors, which were immediately purchased.

But the young artist understands that he needs contact with nature, the living beauty of Bulgaria, summer meadow, rain and storms, including born scent and fresh beauty of all nature. Therefore, in the summer he goes to Pavlikem, Sevlievo, Gabrovo, Tarnovo, and paint all the way. This is where Constantine Shtarkelov met for the first time with those adorable spots foothills of Bulgarian nature - the blossoming summer lawns briars scrubs with sunspots shadows near the deserted road, which will remain favorite stories of all his future work. Searches are aligned with a spiritual urge of the artists we find the face of Bulgarian, attract the world's attention on the natural beauty of our Revival architectural tradition and nature.

This tour became the occasion for the next 1911 Shtarkelov to organize his first solo exhibition - nearly 80 works, many of which were purchased at the outset of the exhibition.

This success makes name Shtarkelov popular among the general public. He suddenly found himself the owner of an incredible amount of money for it, Shtarkelov leaves a significant portion of her mother, and the rest goes to the West to visit major galleries in Vienna, Munich, Paris, London, Lausanne, Geneva and Venice.

After 75 days Shtarkelov Constantine returned to Bulgaria with rich impressions of the centuries-old treasures of European art with new 35 painted during the trip with pictures and more greater hope to recreate and inspires in his works Bulgarian nature.

During the Balkan War (1912-1913) and the subsequent Second Balkan War (June to July 1913) Shtarkelov a martial artist and leaves a number of drawings, sketches and drawings of the life of the soldiers.

In 1917, once again war artist during the First World War lasted from July 28, 1914 to November 11, 1918, leaving more than 300 sketches and drawings.

In 1915 he graduated in painting at the State Art-Industrial School in Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka. Ranks in the list of legitimate and regular members of the Union of Bulgarian scientists, writers and artists. In 1919, he was among the founders of the "Native Art" and participated in all its exhibitions. Upon completion of the First World War artist devoted almost entirely to watercolor landscapes. Acquired a mature and reliable technique in watercolor, it shows previously unknown in our achievements in this most difficult and most delicate painting. The lack of established predecessors worked extremely watercolor landscape reveals a rich field to the artist to use all the features of the technique to achieve true and powerful transformation of our country's nature and his own state of mind.

He remains, however, the incomparable singer of the mighty mountain ranges - Rila and Pirin, raw beauty and pristine nature. Variety of rich colors and landscapes are his from the Rhodopes, painted in the thirties. These are not the Rhodope Mountains Barakov or Zdravko Alexandrov of Detchev or Tcanko Lavrenov - the world of human emotions, daily care and joy. Rhodope's paintings are Shtarkelov song about nature, the timeless beauty of nature that is born and lives by the light of the sun. fascinating beauty of native nature artist presents in their field and mountain flowers - sometimes a single squill, wild hollyhock or geranium leaf, filled not only with virtuoso mastery of drawing but with sincere emotion and love: "When I paint - either landscape or flower, I hear music or if you read poems of Lermontov or Nadson. And when I hear a great orchestra or choir I see landscape ... These landscapes, as are the days of my sad songs, these little cosmic, of which the soul is spiral Sharing is its mood. There her real life "- confesses the artist Konstantin Shtarkelov.

He exhibited in solo exhibitions in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Venice, Germany, Hungary, he participated in collective performances of Bulgarian artists.


After September 9, 1944 Konstantin Shtarkelov is deported, expelled from UBA and spent five months in the Central Prison. His property was confiscated, and his apartment was destroyed in the bombing - there were destroyed and two unique landscape Aivazovsky the artist bought in the 30s.

See 2009 booklet


Shtiliavona Tsvetana	1903-94	Still life and portraits	Born Kazanlak - 1917-22 Sofia art school under Todorov 1925-28 under Guvdzhinov
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			studied Paris, Prague and Vienna 1929-33
Skitnik, Sirak	1883-1943	modernist	<p>Born Sliven. Draughtsman, stage designer, writer, critic, editor and publisher. He studied (1908-12) under Léon Bakst at the Academy of Arts (Akademiya Khudozhestv) in St Petersburg and became a follower of the aesthetic concept of WORLD OF ART, dominated by the innovative decorative designs of Vera Komissarzhevskaya and Tairov. After he returned to Bulgaria, Skitnik was engaged in a variety of projects, writing poetry, critical reviews of exhibitions and plays and monographs on other artists such as Bencho Obreshkov.</p> <p>He also designed sets for the National Theatre (Naroden Teatâr) in Sofia. He painted mainly landscape and still-lives in oils (e.g. Interior with Flowers, 1920), tempera (e.g. Russian Monastery , 1912), gouache (e.g. the Kiss of Judas , 1920;) and watercolour; he also drew in coloured pencil.</p> <p>During the 1920s and 1930s he became known in Bulgaria as an innovator who experimented with new mixes of colour and form. Both his poetry and his original and highly emotional painting show his allegiance to the Symbolist movement. From 1920 to 1940 he was editor and publisher of the intellectual magazine Zlatorog (Golden Horn).</p> <p>He also belonged to the National Art Society of Bulgaria and was one of the founders (1932) of the Union of the Societies of Artists of Bulgaria</p> <p>See little booklet</p>
Slavov, Peter	1908-1988		
Sotirov, Stoyan	1903-1984	portrait, landscape	born in Gradevo village, Blagoevgrad region. Graduated in painting under Prof. D. Gudzenov and Prof. St. Ivanov from the Academy of Fine Arts - Sofia in 1928
Staikov, Anastas	1905-1988	interiors, landscapes	<p>born Smolyan first solo exhibition there at age 20 graduated 1929 from National Art Academy 1928-31 Paris 1932-48 painting teacher in various Plovdiv schools celebration of traditional Rhodopes living - frequent use of tempera. Bright colours</p>
Staikov, Vesalie	1906-1970	Graphics	<p>born Peshtera, a small town nestled in the picturesque northern slopes of the Rhodope Mountains. On his mother's side he is descended from a prominent family of fighters for church and political independence. These militant traditions tended to develop certain tendencies in the artist's work. He worked on a whole cycle of engravings based on the national liberation struggle of the Bulgarian people from the epoch of National Renaissance down to our times.</p> <p>Vesselin Staikov spent his childhood at the house of his grandfather, one of the enlightened and educated men of his times. Here, at an early age, he had an opportunity of browsing in the old family library, acquainting himself with books and illustrations not easily accessible in that epoch. These opened up a new world to him. He would sit for hours studying the pictures of the world-famous masters of Renaissance and of eminent Russian Painters.</p> <p>The illustrations of the Russian Niva magazine and Gustave Dore's fine engravings in the Bulgarian translation of Dante's Inferno had a particularly strong and lasting impact on the impressionable child. The</p>

			<p>second major influence in the youth's life was the Bulgarian painter and pedagogue Vitko Babakov, who used to spend summer vacations in Peshtera. Young Staikov would go out together with him and paint the attractive environs of the town and the scenic beauties of the Rhodope Mountains. During these excursions the two would engage in long discussions on the problems of art.</p> <p>In 1925 Vesselin Staikov left for Sofia. As soon as he saw Staikov's exceptional gifts, the eminent Bulgarian Painter, Professor Stefan Ivanov, permitted the youth to join his last-year class before he was even admitted to the Academy of Art. Once he took one of Staikov's etudes and showed it to his class, citing it as an example of rare talent in a schoolboy.</p> <p>In 1926 Staikov enrolled at the Academy of Art in Prof. Nikola Marinov's class as a non-matriculant, for he had not yet completed his secondary education. Later he took all the necessary examinations, became a regular student and in 1932 graduated from the academy, where he had attended Prof. Tseno Todorov's course in painting.</p> <p>In the summer of 1932 Vesselin Staikov left for Arbanassi, a Bulgarian village famous for its original old architecture.. 1933 Staikov joined the State Printing House in Sofia as engraver. Here he lived amid engravers and technicians and acquainted himself with printing technique. Staikov remained about a year at the State Printing House. He increasingly establishing himself as a creative artist with a social consciousness, as a bold master of composition, as a portrayer of Bulgarian architecture and of Bulgarian land.</p> <p>Parallel with his successful participation in the Bulgarian National Art Exhibitions, Vesselin Staikov achieved considerable renown abroad. At the 1937 World Fair in Paris Staikov scored his greatest success, winning a gold medal. In 1938 the artist left for Munich, where he organized an individual exhibition, The same year he participated in a Bulgarian exhibition shown in New York. In 1940, after a competitive examination, Staikov went to Italy for further specialization. In Florence he studied painting with Prof. Felice Carena, and in the course of his tour of Italy he painted landscapes with architectural subjects from Florence and Venice.</p> <p>In 1945, Staikov was appointed assistant professor in graphic arts at the Sofia Academy of Art. He also turned his attention to postage stamps.</p> <p>In 1951 Staikov left his chair at the Academy of Art to devote himself completely to creative work. In addition to engravings with themes from nature, old towns and mountain villages, Staikov produced a cycle of engravings on the modern city: Sofia with its modern architecture, the clearing of rubble after the air-raids and the construction of new houses and buildings. He shows a particular liking for the architectural landscape with its contrasting plasticity.</p> <p>The artist is also fond of doing ancient, strangely shaped trees.</p> <p>http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/veselin-stajkov-veselin-staikov/paintings</p>
Stamatov, Stanio	1886-1963	Fig	<p>born Kazanluk.</p> <p>Graduated in painting under Prof. Ivan Mrkviska in 1911, Academy of Fine Arts - Sofia.</p> <p>He specialized in painting in Germany 1925 -1927 and in France in 1926. He taught painting at Kazanlak.</p> <p>Participated in the Balkan and First World War as a war artist.</p>

			<p>Stamatov organized over 40 exhibitions in Bulgaria. He worked mainly in the figure compositions and landscapes. Has left many domestic scenes from his familiar rural life, large-format chamber and scenic landscapes from different corner of Bulgaria.</p> <p>Died in Munich</p> <p>1,400 euros 44x64</p> 
Stamenov, Alexander	1905-1971		<p>Born Koukoush, Macedonia</p> <p>1921-26 Art School under N Marinov</p>
Stanchev, Christo	1870-1950		Svezhen, Karlovo
Stanchev, Niagul	1900-1964		
Stefchev, Boris	1894-1983	Seascapes	<p>Graduated in painting in 1916, Art-Industrial School in class of Prof. Tseno Todorov, and then a student of decorative art with Professor Stephan Badgov.</p> <p>In 1918 Ministry of Education granted scholarship for his studies in Munich. But due to the outbreak of the First World War, he specialized in the Royal Academy of Art in Vienna 1918-22. In the first year he is under Professor Pohvalski and the next two continued their studies in class of Prof. Jungvirt.</p> <p>His first solo exhibition is in Sofia in 1921. Stefchev began working as a teacher of drawing in Sofia.</p> <p>His early compositions are defined as part of the symbolism of Bulgarian art in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Since 1927 he devotes most of his work of the sea view. Suggestion of mysticism create specific character of most of the landscapes of Boris Stefchev.</p>
Stoilov, Vasil	1904-1990	all genres of art of painting - portraits, daily scenes, landscapes	<p>Born 1904 in the village of Podene (at present a Sofia quarter) in a large family. In 1922 he began his studies at the Academy of Arts, in the art of painting class of Prof. Tzeno Todorov. From 1929 to 1932 he studied and worked in Paris as he earned his living, selling his pictures. From 1958 he was professor of drawing. At Faculty of Arch He produced a gallery of deep emotional images of rural villagers. He preferred the technique of water colours and themes of daily life.</p> <p>http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/vasil-stoilov-vasil-stoilov/paintings</p>

Svetkova, Kostadinka	1929-2006	Still lives	Classy Matisse-like colouring
Tabakov, Ivan	1901-1977	Versatile	<p>Born Sofia. In 1925 he graduated in painting under professor Nicola Ganushev at the Art Academy - Sofia.</p> <p>1926-32 he was at the Art Academy Paris with professor A. Bernard and prof. M. Bashe. Participated with portraits in the Salon of French artists and "Independent Artists". Worked on portrait, landscape and figure compositions.</p> <p>The first two decades of his work creates an intimate, mostly psychological portraits and a series of images of eminent figures of culture.</p> <p>He painted a series of landscapes of Ohrid, Kavala and others.</p> <p>80x70 3,400 euros</p>
Tachev Haralambi		Like Milev - nouveaux arts	
Tanev Nikola 1890-1962 Landscape			<p>One of Bulgaria's greats! Fantastic colourist...</p> <p>Born Svishtov, the family moved to Sofia in 1896. At age 13 sent to Paris with brother to study print techniques but began to reveal his artistic talents.</p> <p>Studied under Paul Renoir and, in 1910, under Claude Monet.</p> <p>Returned to Bulgaria in 1912 - with first one-man show in Sofia. From autumn to May 1912 back in Paris for painting. The catalogue to his 2nd exhibition in Sofia in 1913 was written by the famous caricaturist Alexander Bozhinov</p> <p>War artist from 1916-18.</p> <p>1919 exhibition in Sofia had 168 works and another catalogue by Bozhinov. He was a prolific painter - sometimes averaging 4 a day!</p> <p>1920-22 Lived and painted in Austria and Germany.</p> <p>1927 started to paint in Karlovo village - site of his most famous paintings.</p> <p>Travelled extensively in Europe 1928-39.</p> <p>Was imprisoned for several months after the Communist takeover - for little reason.</p> <p>1949 suffered a stroke which left him paralysed</p>

			
Titirinov, Strahil	1905-?	aquarelles	Colourist
Todorov Pavel	1894-1989??		
Todorov, Tseno	1877-1953	Landscape, portrait	1896-1901 State Drawing School 1901-07 Paris
Toma, Evtim	1919-1997	Aquarelle, graphics	<p>Born in the village Treklyano , Kyustendil . He studied graphics under Prof. V. Zachariev and painting under Prof. Nikola Marinov. In 1943 graduated from the Painting Academy under. Prof. Boris Mitov . Specialized (1943-1944) graphics in Vienna.</p> <p>After September 9, 1944 is actively involved as an artist - art editor in the publishing activities of the State Military Publishing. From 1957 he was professor at the VIII "N. Pavlovich " , Sofia. Doctor of Art (1976).</p>
Tomov, Veselin	1909-1993	Fig, urban landscape	<p>grew up in the town of Byala Slatina.</p> <p>studied specialty-painting under Professor Nicolas Ganushev Academy in Sofia. He graduated in 1934 with honours.</p> <p>Germany granted him a scholarship in the late 1930s and he went to Munich. At that time there were many Bulgarian students and graduates - artists, musicians, architects and lawyers. A Bulgarian trader of fruits, buys the still lifes he had brought from Bulgaria. The merchant continually gives Bulgarian fruit - especially grapes and so he began to paint still lifes.</p> <p>independent artist 41-43 Art Academy Munich</p> <p>At this time closer to German artist Willibald Demmel, whom he often travels and paints landscapes. Many of the landscapes were purchased still wet on the spot.</p> <p>His sponsor Prof. Constantine Gerhardinger was dismissed from the Academy and deprived of his studio for opposing Hitler.</p> <p>Vesselin Tomov has already completed four semesters and decided to go back to Bulgaria because of the severe bombing. All his paintings were left in Germany because of the prohibition to export artwork and lost forever.</p>

			<p>After returning from Germany, Vesselin Tomov spent a year in Sofia in October 1944. moved with his parents in the town of Byala Slatina. There he remained until the end of the year. He painted portraits of friends and children. Illustrated poems of the poet George Veselinov.</p> <p>During 1945. he briefly worked in the Ministry of Information as Head of Fine Arts propaganda through a period in which he often had to show ingenuity and courage to protect national values. An example is the position when a committee of Soviet military wants to requisition paintings from the National Art Gallery. With much tact and perseverance Vesselin Tomov managed to deflect them and lead them to the studios of prominent artists, where they buy paintings. So it except that keeps our national wealth helps his colleagues in the difficult post-war years.</p> <p>First solo exhibition February.1947</p> <p>For years Vesselin Tomov works in the field of stamp design, decorative and monumental art. His mosaics and graffito are in Slatina, Dupnitsa, Bulgaria, Kozloduy NPP</p> <p>http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/veselin-tomov-veselin-tomov/paintings</p>
Tsankov, Maxim	1877-1965		born Razgrad
Tsonev, Kiril	1896-1961		<p>born Kyustendil.</p> <p>Studied Vienna Art Academy 1920/21 - then Munich Art Academy 1921-25 and stayed there until 1929. .</p> <p>One of the innovators of his time, Influenced by German New Objectivity. Travelled 1930-32 in south america (Mexico and Cuba) and returned to Bulgaria in 1933 after the nazis came to power in Germany.</p> <p>1942-50 he was Professor at Sofia Art Academy - and an art critic and historian.</p> <p>See 1996 booklet</p>
Trichkov, Ivan	1892-1959	Landscape	<p>Born Vratsa. Graduated painting under prof. Petko Klisurov from Art-Industrial School in Sofia.</p> <p>His work is characterized by diversity of colours, play of shadows and penumbras, inspiration, precise lines. Unchanging decor are old farmhouses, shepherds' huts and mountain cabins presented with a rare realism.</p> <p>Favourite artists of King Boris III who had many of his paintings</p> <p>http://artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=76</p>
Tringov, Constantin	1907-1981	landscape	<p>born Kazanlak.</p> <p>Densely worked paintings</p>
Urumov, Georgi	1891-1957		
Ustagenov, Marin	1872-1937	Spectacular all-rounder	<p>born in Russe; studies art in Sofia and specialised in restoration skills in Munich. - then becoming one of the first Bulgarian. restorers and conservatives</p>

			<p>Founder of Lada school.</p> <p>Was a war artist 1912-18 and struggled to exist - with various unsuccessful business ventures</p> <p>He participated in the restoration of Boyana Church and Monastery Zemen Because dealing with the business until his death in 1937, after the September 9 putch, was declared an enemy of the people, his heirs -. harassment, and pictures Ustagenov - kicked out of the curriculum at the Academy of Arts</p> <p>an under-rated painter in my view</p>
Uzenov, Dechko	1899-1986	portrait	<p>born Kazanluk. Bulgaria's Picasso</p> <p>1922/23 Munich. Teacher Art Academy Sofia 1924-1932; 1937 Professor and from 1945 its rector.</p> <p>The Dechko Uzunov gallery possesses 13,000 oil paintings, water colors, drawings, designs and sketches by Uzunov. The works were donated to the Sofia municipality by his heirs: artists Hristo Neikov, Atanas Neikov, Elena Vulchanova and Penyo Vulchanov.</p> <p>The gallery is housed in Uzunov's workshop on Dragan Tsankov Boulevard, a two-story building in the compound of the artist's house.</p>
Valchanov, Ivan	1889-1953		<p>Born Kazanlak</p> <p>Grad 1914</p> <p>Teacger Lom, Harmanli</p> <p>War artist</p> <p>Friend of Bozhinov, Dmitrov, Sht</p> <p>Teacher Kazanlak. Karlovo and VT</p> <p>From 1935 Sofia</p>
Valkanov, Dmitr	1907-1997	battle canvases, portraits, figural compositions and landscapes	<p>born on May 13, 1907 in the village Aprilovo District. Graduated (1934) Painting at the Academy of Arts in Sofia, with Prof. Nikola Marinov / from whom he inherited the picturesque feeling / and master Dimitar Gyudzhenov historical paintings, which ignited his interest in recreating history.</p> <p>longtime head of the military artists studio, a veteran of World War II.</p> <p>draws a number of paintings on this subject: "Destroyed Budapest" (1949), "August 1941 - native shore" (1961).</p> <p>famous paintings: 'Spring near Sofia "(1958)," Reflection "(1959)," Waiting "(1959</p> <p>His father is the artist and author of tales Venelin Valkanov.</p>
Vassiliev, Asen	1900-1981	Bulgarian art critic, painter portraits, landscapes and still lifes.	<p>Born in 1900 in the town. Kyustendil. In 1925 graduated at the Art Academy under Dimitar Gyudzhenov Nicolas Ganushev, Stefan Ivanov and Nikola Marinov.</p> <p>He worked as a high school teacher in Berkovitsa (1926-1927), Shumen (1927 to 1930) and Sofia (1930-1940). Artist AM Sofia (1940-1950), a referent of museums and art galleries in KNIK, deputy director (1957-1959) at the Art Institute at BAS, Professor at VIII. Pavlovich "(1974). He was among the first people started to create the bibliography of Bulgarian art archives after liberation, the library of the Institute and others. As an artist working primarily in the field of household composition and history, portraits, landscapes and still lifes.</p> <p>Participates in several art exhibitions in the country and Sofia.</p> <p>Participates actively in the construction of the museum</p>

			<p>network in the country in the reconstruction of the Archaeological Museum , museums in Rousse, Shumen, Panagyurishte and others.</p> <p>In 1942 traveled through Macedonia, exploring the monuments of Bulgarian Renaissance art, which published in several articles in the magazine. "Macedonia", "Macedonian thought" and others. Three times travel around Mount Athos and conduct research - mainly in art Zograph monastery.</p> <p>In his research deals with the frescoes in the rock monasteries in with. Ivanovo, the Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak, the old Renaissance churches in Sofia.</p> <p>Participated in a number of complex and scientific expeditions of BAS : in Dobrogea (1954), Northwestern Bulgaria (1956), Rhodope Mountains (1958) and others.</p>
Vasilev, Stoian	1904-1977	landscape	<p>Born Pazardzhik.</p> <p>In 1927 he graduated from the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, arts of painting with Prof. Tzeno Todorov. He preferred themes from the Veliko Tarnovo region.</p> <p>A really prolific creator. He worked in various formats. Professor of arts of painting at St. St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo for many years.</p>
Velchev, Georgi	1891-1955	one of the great masters of the seascape .	<p>born on November 18, 1891 in Varna. From 1910 to 1920 (with two interruptions due to World War I) are painting at the State Art - Industrial School in Sofia at Ivan Mrkvicka and Stefan Ivanov.</p> <p>Even in his earliest works from 1917 - 1920 r. tends towards modern and liberated picturesque imagery that gravitates to the Impressionist , symbolist. Part of the generation of artists such as Nicolai Raynov Ivan Milev , Vassil Zahariev and some others who in the late 1910s and early 1920s trying to resist traditional realism</p> <p>From 1920 to 1922 Velchev lives in Paris. Magnificent Oil and gouache works created then showed his affection for the style of Pierre Bonnard</p> <p>...contemplation of romantic and sometimes mystical view of nature and man</p> <p>In 1923, he resides in Germany - Munich , Berlin, Bremen.</p> <p>There are well received exhibitions in Karlsruhe and Wiesbaden roam and paint in the mountains of Tyrol, visiting Italy . He was invited by the famous symbolist and expressionist Heinrich Fogeler in the famous artistic colony in Worpswede near Bremen. In this period Georgi Velchev is a European artist who gives meaning and eagerly accepts the impulses of the new art in its very center .</p> <p>In 1924 he was already in New York, where he resided until 1931 and made eight exhibitions. Traveled to Miami , San Francisco, Philadelphia, visited Canada and Hawaii . The economic crisis in the U.S. forcing him to return to Bulgaria , where he remained until the end of his life. He visited Australia and China.</p> <p>In Bulgaria, the artist lives and works in his native house in Varna. He continues his tireless journey - in villages and towns in mountainous and coastal areas - and contemplate the life of the small Bulgarian world. Creates in his paintings poetry sunny courtyards of old tilted Vratnica , bridges and fountains, rural and urban houses and streets. In this type of picture it is comparable to artists such as Nikola Taney and Daniel</p>

			<p>Detchev .</p> <p>But most attracted to the sea as a pictorial motif . Prefers to interpret filled with rich symbolism meeting between the sea and the lonely cliff . In these landscapes especially haunting tension, a dramatic feeling , and sometimes symbolic spirit. Comparable only with paintings of Alexander Mutafov .</p> <p>Georgi Velchev was a proud, freedom-loving person , adamant and forthright in expressing his views . He was one of many artists who, after 1944, was rejected by the authorities and died poor and destitute . His most famous self-portrait from 1948 shows a mature and dignified artist whose gaze shows scepticism and disappointment.</p>
Velkov, Simeon	1885-1963	Landscape, portraits	<p>Born in Panagurishte. - Graduated (1910) Painting in the Industrial School of Arts , Sofia, (now NAA) with Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka . Visited many museums in Italy and Germany.</p> <p>High school teacher in Plovdiv and Asenovgrad (until 1923), professor (1926-1947) at the Art Academy , Sofia.</p> <p>During the Balkan war in the press cooperate with drawings and creates a number of battle works. Illustrates historical works and textbooks. Most of his works are in the Museum of Military History in Sofia, Sofia City Art Gallery , the galleries in Plovdiv, Gabrovo, Strajitsa and elsewhere.</p> <p>was awarded the title of Honored Artist. He died on September 10, 1963 in Sofia.</p>
Venev, Stoian	1904-1989	all genres	<p>born Skriniano village, Kyestendil wwhere he spent his school years. Met Vladimir Dmitrov there and was strongly influenced by him. Graduated from Sofia art school in 1931. Created images of everyday life and Bulgarian villages - with a strong satirical tone. Apparently influenced by <i>G Grosz</i></p> <p>see lovely small 1955 book</p>

Vesin, Jaroslav 1860-1915

a [Czech](#) painter who worked in [Bulgaria](#) and who was noted as a master of [genre painting](#). The realistic depiction of battle scenes from the [First Balkan War](#) (1912) are the subject of a substantial part of his work.

Věšín studied at the [Academy of Fine Arts in Prague](#), but moved to the [Academy of Fine Arts Munich](#) in 1881 and graduated in 1883. Afterwards he worked in [Munich](#) and in [Slovakia](#), with his paintings of the period mainly related to [Slovak](#) village life.
<http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1860-1915.html>

Věšín arrived in Bulgaria in 1897 and remained there for the remainder of his life. Until 1904, he was a professor at the [National Academy of Fine Arts](#) in [Sofia](#) and mainly worked in the area of genre painting, with notable paintings such as Threshing near [Radomir](#) (1897), Ploughman (or Land, 1899), Horse market in Sofia (1899), Smugglers (1899), In front of a market (1899), Threshing (1900), etc. The main topic of his interest was the life and labour of the Bulgarian villager.

After 1904, Věšín became the head painter with the [Ministry of War](#) and, although he did not abandon his old interests (with works such as Coalers (1910), Lumberjacks (1910), On the game's track (1910), Hunter with hounds (1911), etc.), he became famous with his masterpieces of battle painting: Manoeuvres (series began in 1899 and lasted until the [Balkan Wars](#), The [Samara flag](#) (1911), Onslaught (or Bayonet charge, 1913), The Turkish retreat at [Lüleburgaz](#) (1913), Lüleburgaz-[Catalca](#) (1913) and a series of sketches and complete works on the [siege of Edirne](#), among which Bibouac in front of Edirne (1913), Resting after 13 March 1913 (1913), etc.

Many of his works are displayed in the [National Museum of Fine Arts](#) in Sofia. Among Věšín's students were [Nikola Petrov](#), [Atanas Mihov](#) and other major Bulgarian painters.

The father of the artist, Frantisek Veshin , a physician by profession , is an active participant in the struggle for liberation of their homeland. Activity gets death sentence, but shortly before the execution and pardoned . To be saved from further persecution , settled in picturesque Czech town of Vranje . Here, on May 26, 1860 was born painter Jaroslav Veshin future . His mother, / home German woman / out of respect for her husband, she does not speak German to him , but formed in their children homage to the music of Beethoven, Haydn and Schubert . She fell in love creativity of the Czech Smetana .

Although two floors , their home was modest. As a child , Jaroslav filled his notebooks with drawings . This passion led his father

to sacrifices in order to allow the son to enroll at the Prague Academy of Arts. After completing 1876-1880 / Veshin soldier entered the service in Slovakia and its specific costumes and customs leave a lasting impression on him. To improve his skills , he continued his studies in Munich. There began his real career in art . He lives Theresienstr and his studio is Landvershrase where he visited many friends and admirers . Established a very close friendship with the writer Slovak Svetozar Urban Vayanski . Very soon in the artist begins to exist the idea that the Slavic peoples could obtain its natural place among other European nations only through general assistance and cultural activity.

Jaroslav Veshin was rated almost immediately , even with his first mature compositions. Acquires prestige and international renown.. Among his closest admirers and patrons is Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria . He is a passionate hunter and simultaneously has large interests in the arts. His father, Emperor Ludwig , whose mysterious death of Shtarnberger lake is among the events of the stories told German history , supported Richard Wagner . Prince Ludwig unexpectedly located in Jaroslav no less passionate connoisseur of nature and its inhabitants , of customs, of weapons of good outings , tireless , fearless ...

" Tall, slender, with a good view , nice smile , a thick as Chatel neprigladena hair , long mustache, pointed beard , wearing glasses ... " - this seventeen-year Cornelia describes her first impression of nine years older than her still unknown artist Jaroslav . She was with her parents at the resort of Zbraslav . Her enormous family, over 15 people have taken the house of an old fisherman. " My yard is large and great river for all of you " - he said while being installed. . With new insights begin to meet in secret, though her mother does not approve it because he was a man of Bohemia and do not know what the future would . And the instructions are great party ... / brother- and held in Prague private gallery " Rukh " and communicated with a number of artists /

In 1897, at the invitation of the Bulgarian Minister of Education Konstantin Velichkov Czech artist Yaroslav Veshin arrived in Bulgaria to teach at the newly opened School of Art in Sofia. So Veshin became one of the most significant foreign artists who have devoted their lives to Bulgaria .

A lot of courage and adventurousness were needed Yaroslav Veshin to arrive in Bulgaria in 1897 during this risky step the Czech was an established artist who has neither of recognition or money. The only thing that inspired him to come to Sofia, was a noble desire to help a toddler art .

Jaroslav Veshin comes to live in Bulgaria in the name of his Slavic ideal. Risking much.

In Bulgaria Veshin born and his daughters - Cornelia and Hope ...

In Sofia family Veshin first inhabited over the ground , first floor of a corner of the " September 6 " and " Graf Ignatiev " . From below, beneath them are bakery , butcher and grocery .

In 1899 Veshinovi move to "L.Karavelov " and " Gourko " - opposite Zoo. Morning family it would awaken the roar of the lion. Its hunting accessories adorned him Artist studio.

Immediately after arriving in Sofia Veshin started painting various subjects , which reflected domestic scenes , rural labor market dynamic city , romance little-known natural areas. At the same time he continued his work in art school , where dozens of famous artists prepared , including Nikola Petrov , Atanas Mihov , Elizabeth Konsoulova Vazova . In 1903, due to disagreements with the management of the school he left his teaching post. At the same time you receive an invitation to become a court painter in Germany and Austria- Hungary. But to the astonishment of many of his friends, he preferred Bulgaria .

In 1904 became a war artist and thus established as the father of Bulgarian battle genre painting. Most of his best paintings from this period are shown in the exhibition of the Military Museum . His works reflect the ugly and bloody scenes of two wars (1912-1913) , Morbid and suffering of the people in these crucial years.

Leaving the front along with the army, he managed to create his famous paintings " The Turkish Retreat at Lyuleburgaz " , " on vacation after 13 March " and the famous " Bayonet " became a symbol of the courage of the Bulgarian Army.


Veshin continued to paint almost until his death , which occurred suddenly on May 6, 1915 His outstanding performance was notorious . Renowned literary critic Andrei Ongoing wonders in a letter : "He runs continuously from 6 to 12 and 14 to 18 hours - and at other times observe the battlefield. " So the legacy that Veshin left behind is extremely rich with its historical and artistic value. Moreover - he managed to do what many compatriots do not want or know how - to become fond of Bulgaria more than people born in it.

See lovely 1955 monograph

Vulchev, Nikola	1897-1984	Landscape. figurative	Born in the village of Mokresh, region of Vidin. In 1924 he graduated from the Academy of Arts - Sofia, art of painting the class of Prof. Stefan Ivanov. For long years he was a teacher in Lom and Sofia. For the period 1931-1952 he had lectures in painting at the Institute of Secondary School Masters in Sofia.
Vulchev, Vasil	1931-2002	painting and graphics	graduated 1955 under Ilya Petrov

Vulev, Vassil	1934 -	village life, small groups, portrait	born Sigmen, Burgas. gouache, aquarelle favourite techniques 2012 signed catalogue
Vulkev, Pavel	1908-1956	Aquarelles Aquatint engraving	Born Burgas 1936 graduated Sofia Art Academy under Nikola Marinov and Vassil Zahariev (graphics) Focused on port scenes 1953 Reader at Pavlovich Art School, Sofia See 1968 booklet
Watson, William	1894-??	portraits, landscapes compositions from the urban and rural lifestyle, thematic still- life and painting	born in Paisley, Scotland. During World War I he was an officer. He remained in the Allied mission in Bulgaria and then he settled in Bulgaria. William Watson had higher education of a textile engineer. In 1931, he became stockowner and a representative of Bulgaria OOD, Kazanluk for production and trade with threads and textiles. In 1924, he married Theodora Popova - daughter of the regional governor of Varna, Vassil Popov. After 1930 the Watson family settled in Sofia in the house of Professor Al. Balan, N 4 Kliment Ohridski Street. In that period until 1939
Zadgorski, Petko	1902-1974		Born Sliven. From early left an orphan, he was raised in the spirit of patriotism and patriotism of her grandmother Anna, a relative of Hadji Dimitar. The Art Academy / 1924-1928 / teach in the class of Professor Dimitar Gyudzhenov, an artist whose work is entirely praise of Bulgarian history. Under his influence, he was joined by the realistic art, to plot composition, often associated with literary subtext. When later arrives in Burgas and remained there for the rest of his life, his romantic attitude overflows into love for the sea. He studied by the researchers tides, sunsets, which sank somewhere beyond the horizon. Long walks into the sea made it very boat took him to the mirage which merge real and his imaginary world. "Fog over raid," "Boats" "Landscape from salinas" impressionist show direction of his search. To the viewer reaches the splash of the waves, the cry of seagulls ... Children of delicate sensitivity and imaging original thought, these paintings speak of the artist's hard work in bringing their message to the viewer. They figure prominently in his legacy because he interact with the next generation of artists Burgas - Georgi Baev, Genko Genkov Vladimir Goev, Todor Atanasov. Petko Zadgorski paintings created in the fifties of the last century, although they carry the spirit of his time, showing personal creative position of the author, his direction to purely artistic tasks. Although recreate reality in its physical form, his quarrel with the nature nearly always goes into general idea collecting and saw in a dream, an ideal space of the picture. The viewer is transmitted conviction of inseparability of beauty from morality. Inner freedom of the artist's belief in the rightness of the selected item, the interest in the history and past of the Bulgarian people have reason to be born beautiful works such as "The Flying Band", "Lopoushna read", "Rise of Women" and more. These pictures show not only the ideological direction of the author, but the sense of the original composition, diagonal or front, with very fluid angles and

			<p>unexpected juxtapositions. Personal feeling, he had saturated his works is so compelling that the viewer is transported thrill of his experiences, and it was essential task of the artist</p> <p>Booklet from http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/petko-zadgorski-petko-zadgorski/paintings</p>
Zagarov, Spas	1908-1991	graphics; aquarelle landscapes	born village outside Kazanluk; Director Plovdiv municipal art gallery
Zahariev, Vassil	1895-1971	graphics	<p>Born Samokov - considered the founder of Bulgarian graphic. http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1895-1971.html</p> <p>In 1911 he entered the Industrial School of Arts in Sofia, where he graduated in 1919, after a long break (1912-1913 , and 1915-1918) during which took part in the wars in decorative art and graphic Prof. Zeno Todorov, Professor Haralampi Tachev and Stefan Badjov . In 1921, a short time as a teacher in Samokov, but between 1922 and 1924 State Academy specializes in Graphic Arts in Leipzig with Prof. A. Kolb and Professor H. Muller. Since 1924, after his return to Bulgaria , is a professor of graphic and decorative arts at the Art Academy in 1929 - an extraordinary professor , and from 1934 to 1945 - full professor . Vassil Zahariev rector of the Academy between 1939 and 1943 His students are Georgi Gerasimov , Zdravko Alexandrov , Veselin Staikov, Preslav Karshovski , Vasil Stoilov and others. In 1928 initiated the announcement in the Official Gazette a list of architectural and artistic monuments of national importance to be subject to protection of the law for the protection of national antiquities . Zachariev is among the people who have contributed most to the museum in his home town of Samokov. In the period 1959 - 1961 , he worked at the BAS Institute of Fine Arts, where he was Head of the Department of Fine Arts . He actively participated in the artistic life of the country - a member of the "Modern Art" , the "Native Art" (to whom is the Chairman) , the Society of Independent Artists .</p> <p>In 1920 he performed in Sofia his first exhibition , which displays various paintings and graphic works , it is in the 20s of the twentieth century artist formed his style in the spirit of national tradition , but with a contemporary vision and craftsmanship. Author 's lithographs and black and white and color woodcuts and linoleum . Zachariev works in the field of applied arts - bookplates , shaping and bookbinding , art addresses, stamps , banknotes and other folk inserting trim. He is the first Bulgarian artist whose works are at the international exhibition of the library sign (in 1929 in Zagreb) . His works are owned by Bulgarian and foreign galleries.</p> <p>Zachariev participated in almost all general art exhibitions and exhibitions of "native art" , but particularly large participation in many international general and graphic exhibitions abroad : Zagreb (1927) , Venice (1928 , 1942) , Warsaw (1929 , 1936) , Los Angeles (1934) , Chicago (1937) , Paris (1927) , New York (1938) , Athens (1940) , Berlin (1941-1942) , Budapest (1934) , Prague (1947) , Lugano (1954) , Ljubljana ([955) , London (1955 , 1965) , Moscow (1958) , São Paulo (1963) and others.</p> <p>Both creative and educational activities the artist is engaged in research , even if there are periods (1937 - 1948 years. In his research is particularly interested in the Renaissance , applied arts and in particular the illustration and decoration of the book.</p> <p>Vassil Zahariev has won many awards - Graphic Arts of the Ministry of Education (1936) , a silver medal at the International Art Exhibition in</p>

			Paris (1937) , the prize " Cyril and Methodius" Art of BAS (1941) "Cyril and Methodius " - I v. (1965 and 1970) , medal " Red Banner of Labour " (1970) and others. Died November 29, 1971 in Sofia.
Zankov, Doncho	1893-1960	high mountain landscapes, frequently winter ones	Born in Sevlievo. In 1921 he graduated from the Industrial School of Arts in Sofia. He worked as teacher in the village of Tzarkva, region of Pernik. He was also a teacher in Sofia. He was an artist with First Bulgarian Army during the First World War (1914 - 1918). Initially he used to draw water-colour drawings, afterwards oils.
Zhakaiev Vasil	1895-1971	graphics	
Zhekov, Atanas	1926-2006	landscapes	Director of Sofia City gallery
Zhekov, Mario 1898-1955 Coasts and sea 			born Stara Zagora.. In 1917 became a student at the Bulgarian Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. Two years later he enrolled in the Painting Drawing School of Paris. In 1921 he moved to Constantinople Turkey-where he made First Constantinople`s cycle. In this cycle he recreates the Bosphorus. The castle, the port and near the city. In 1927 returned to Bulgaria and went to the Black Sea-there he painted Sozopol, Nessebar. In 1930 he moved to the southern Mediterranean Italy, France. Two years later he returned to his homeland. Here he finished his second Black Sea cycle-scales of Sozopol and Nessebar, Varna, Balchik, Ropotamo Kamchia and also landscapes. In 1937 he moved to Dalmatia. In Dubrovnik he created some of the most important and remarkable of his painting. Many of this works he presented in many galleries in Croatia, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest. He became more popular in Europe , than in Bulgaria. In 1938. made exhibitions in Stara Zagora and in Sofia. In 1941, went to Greece, Aegean, Aegean Sea, there he painted in the islands of Thassos, Chios, Samothrace and Ohridskoto lake. In 1943 Mario Zhekov returned to Sofia. With the help of artist Pencho Balkanski organized most representative exhibition. Part of it he shows in Bucharest and in 1946 - in Stara Zagora. His paintings now normally sell for a minimum of 1,500 euros - and usually much more.
Zhelev, Zahari	1868-1942		Born Kazanluk 1893-98 Turin Art teacher Shumen 1898-1906 From then Kaz teacher
Zhelezarov, Georgi	1897-1982	landscapes, subject paintings, urban sceneries,	one of the classics of Bulgarian landscape and genre painting. After success in 1941, disappear from the artistic scene The circle of friends, with which Georgi Zhelezarov shares his work, is limited to a few, among who his best man Boris Denev, and Preslav Karshovski. His studio though, has no limits. It is Pirin, Rila, Vitosha mountains, the Sofia field, the City Park, Constantinople, Marocco, Florence, Tunisie,

			<p>Algiers (1926-1928).</p> <p>His landscapes are covered with light, always populated with people, painted as is characteristic for pantheism, proportionally much smaller in comparison to nature. In this sense, his landscapes carry particular elements of romanticism. With his attitude to the subject of art, and the creative act, he naturally joins the number of Bulgarian painters after World War One, who try to revive the academic realism through naturalistic painting,</p> <p>http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/georgi-jelezarov-georgi-zhelezarov/paintings</p> <p>600 euros 32x42</p>
Zhelyazkov, Gospodin	1873-1937		<p>born Demircha village, Romania.</p> <p>Graduated in painting under Prof. I. Mrkviska and Prof. B. Mitov from the Academy of Fine Arts - Sofia in 1899. Graduated from the Studio of Ilya Repin.</p> <p>Secretary of the Union of the South Bulgarian Artists "Lada" and one of the initiators for the grounding of the Union of the Artists - icon-painters and wood engravers /1925</p>
Zhendov, Alexander	1901-53	cartoons, graphics	<p>born Sofia.</p> <p>As early as 1917 he was contributing cartoons to various magazines. From 1923-25, he was extra-curricular student in painting at Sofia Art School (under Marinov)</p> <p>Police repression then forced him to seek refuge first in Vienna then Germany (1926-30).</p> <p>Grosz, Kollwitz and Masserel had a great influence on him.</p> <p>Returned to Bulgaria 1930</p> <p>He studied graphic and decorative art in Berlin, and in 1930 graduated from the Higher Artistic-Technical Institute in Moscow.</p> <p>Communist since before World War II, in 1950 he was expelled from the Communist Party and his work is declared inconsistent with public policy in the arts. Author of many political cartoons and graphics printed in almost all newspapers. In his work has clearly expressed his sympathy for the poor and disadvantaged.</p> <p>One of the "fathers" of the Bulgarian cartoon. 22 of his cartoons stored in artistic pool "Humor of Nations", "House of Humour and Satire" in Gabrovo. He also illustrated books.</p> <p>In 1950 published a critical letter about socialist realism for which he was expelled from the Communist Party and Union of Artists - thereby finding it impossible to get painting commissions.</p>
Zlatareva, Binka	1891-1972		
Zlatev, Nikola	1907-1989		

8. Further References

This section is for those whose appetite has been whetted by this booklet - and tries to summarise the material which is available if you look hard enough!

It would be interesting to see if anyone has done a dissertation on Bulgarian art during this period! You have to work hard to assemble anything remotely like a systematic treatment of Bulgarian art even in the Bulgarian language - let alone English.

Four recent publications offer a good start - although only one is freely available to download on the internet ie [The Treasures of Varna City Art Gallery](#) (2013) - all 136 pages of superb reproductions.

The other three can be bought here in Sofia -

- [A Possible History - Bulgarian art through the collection of Sofia City ArtGallery](#) . It's 200 pages of material well organised into the various time-periods with appropriate selections of reproductions and short Dimi Gachevt (bilingual) intros to each period - costs 25 leva
- Last year the Bulgarian Union of Artists gave us a curious 350 pages (in English) - [Bulgarian Art - 120 Years](#) (2013) with 350 pages and costing a whopping 120 leva. It's a history of the various artistic associations - with reproductions - but gives absolutely no information about the individual artists. The text gives technical and very boring details of the various splits which occurred - with no attempt made to explain the significance or reasons for the changes.
- The Academy of Art recently offered a marvellous catalogue to accompany its current, rather small, exhibition of some of the items from its extensive archives - Painting Collection (1896-1940) (Museum Collection of the National Academy of Art) (2014) It's 190 full page reproductions with a very short and general (bilingual) introduction and costs a very reasonable 25 leva.

But the one problem with all of these publications is that virtually no information is given about the individual artists (in whatever language)! This is also the problem with the other three older collections you can also download free of charge -

- [The Art Collection of the National Bank of Bulgaria](#) (2009) 143 pages of beautiful illustrations
- [Kazanlak Art Gallery's](#) offerings
- [Socialist construction in the work of Bulgarian artists](#) (Sofia 1954)

Four other very good and substantial collections are available if you look hard enough -

- The Stara Zagora municipal gallery collection (2007) - about 200 pages with nice outlines of the artists (including a short English summary)
- Bulgarian artists and Munich (City Gallery 2009) - German and Bulgarian
- The Association of New Artists 1931-1944 (Sofia City Gallery 2012) - with short (bilingual) summaries of the artists
- City Art Gallery's Catalogue (2003) - 500 pages of postage-size black and white reproductions and brief bilingual blurbs about the artists

Those who read Bulgarian can access a large Dictionary of Bulgarian artists which was produced some decades ago but there does not seem to be an introduction to Bulgarian art for the generalist (even Bulgarian) who wants to know something about the life of the artists - including how they dealt with communism.

The question, of course, is what exactly does information about an artist's life add to our appreciation of his/her actual output - be it a novel, painting or [piece of music](#)?

Most people would argue for a separation of the works from the life. One can (like Brecht or Dali) be a bit obnoxious as a person but still admirable as an artist. But I certainly enjoy biographies such as the recent one by Hilary Spurling of [Matisse](#) for the light they throw on the choices artists make or the influence of family and friends. The book on Matisse, for example, helped me understand his use of bright colours - they were the surroundings of his daily life as he grew up in a Belgian silk town! And I particularly value the black and white photographs of the artists - whether in streets or in their studios.....

One of my hobbies is to trawl Sofia's second-hand bookshops and galleries - as a result I have accumulated a little library (most in the Bulgarian language) of detailed studies of individual artists which is a roll-call of the key names - thus

- **Alexander Zhendov** (1959); savage political satire
- The Strusht Caricature Alamanac (1971) - a wonderful collection of classic Bulgaria cartoons
- **Ilyia Beshkov** (1983) - 500 pages of comprehensive coverage of most items with extensive text (ed by Bogomil Rainov) which makes me regret not being able to read Bulgarian - although I have found a 1957 copy of a German edition - and also have an old copy of his autobiography
- **Marco Behar** (Bulgarian Publishing House 1987) - 200 pages of great (black and white) repros and substantial text - by Ivan Mazarov
- **Dmitir Gydjenov** (1992)
- **Kiril Tsonev** (1996) - monolingual booklet about a significant Bulgarian modernist
- **Alexander Bozhinov** edited by Ruza Marinska (National Gallery 1999) - most beautiful and detailed 125 page treatment with an English intro and some annotations
- **Boris Angeloushev** - by Atanas Stoikov (2003) - a very extensive 450 page coverage with a lot of text and what looks an almost comprehensive treatment of his works. I also have a 1961 edition
- **Vaska Emanouilova** (City Gallery 2005) - a lovely (bilingual) celebration of the sculptor's life
- **Marin Ustagenov** (2005) - good selections and a lot of (Bulgarian) text
- **Georgi Popov John** (2006) - bilingual guide to an interesting fairly neglected -Bulgarian painter
- **Russi Ganchev** (National Gallery 2007) - about 100 reproductions and introductory (Bulgarian) text
- **Bencho Obreshkov** (2009) - monolingual guide
- **Konstantin Shterkelov** (2009) - delightful little Varna catalogue
- **Marko Monev** - a monolingual guide to a Russe painter (2009)
- **Nikola Tanev** 1890-1962 (National Gallery 2010) - two books, one (2000) by the famous art critic Ruzha Marinska, the other (2010) produced by the National Gallery to go with the special exhibition they held then for Tanev.

- **Vaska Popova-Balaverwa** (Context 2010) - a wonderful (bilingual) 120-page celebration of her life edited by her son. Complete with old photographs and reproductions of her many paintings of artistic and literary figures, it gives a wonderful sense of artistic life in Sofia in the first half of the 20th century
- **Slavka Deneva** (Support for Art in Bulgaria Foundation 2010) - great (bilingual) study of the work of Boris Denev's daughter
- **Pencho Balkanski** Photography - in the trail of his Vienna 1936 Exhibition (National Gallery (2010); a wonderful collection of an artist's photos from the 1930s
- **Nikolai Boiadjiev** (Sofia City Gallery 2011)
- **Nikola Petrov** (Sofia City Gallery 2011) - attractive bilingual booklet
- **Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistora** - the flower and the universe (National Gallery 2012) - wonderful 200 page bilingual publication!
- **Ivan Nenov** (City Gallery 2012) - a good bilingual booklet
- **Vasil Vulev** (2012) - a signed catalogue of an artist who is still going strong in his mid 1980s
- **Petko Zadrovski** (2012) - catalogue of a lovely, neglected painter
- **Boris Denev** (2013) - a superb (bilingual) 200 page collection of text and full-page reproductions of one of Bulgaria's best artists. A nice feature is the black and white photos of him in his studio and with friends (such as Nikola Tanev)
- **Jules Pascin** (City Gallery 2013) - typically professional and extensive treatment by the City Gallery staff
- The Teacher; retrospective exhibition of **Mihail Krastev** - excellent bilingual catalogue to an inspiring but modest teacher (City Gallery 2013)
- **Nikolay Raynov** (National Galley 2014) - beautiful booklet of this Nouveau Art artist

Most are out of print. In the 1950s and 1960s a lot of short monographs were produced on Bulgarian artists and I have editions about **Stoian Venev, Jaroslav Veshin, Tanko Lavrenov** and Pavel Vlkev.

Missing names, for me, are Alexander Moutafov (promised by the National Gallery).....Mario Zhekov,

In 2008 I found (in a Gallery) a nice little booklet which listed all antique dealers and gallerists in the whole of Bulgaria (containing about 30 coloured reproductions of paintings of the mid 20th century) but later editions are no longer available.

My inquiries at the large second-hand bookshop in the underground passage in front of Sofia University threw up only a large 1982 book purporting to be about modern Bulgarian painting - which, however, had no Mario Zhekovs and only 2 Nikola Tanevs. A revealing historical insight into socialist selectivity! But not, for me, worth the 100 euros they were asking. In the city's various antique shops, it is generally possible to find catalogues of individual painters - thus I acquired one on one of Bulgaria's classic artists - Nikolai Boiadjiev.

The *Sofia City Gallery* has a few residual copies of a marvellous large book which is a black and white catalogue of all the Bulgarian paintings in their possession.

The City Galleries of Dobrich and Kyustendil also have such a Catalogue.

The Sofia gallery also occasionally prints booklets on their temporary exhibitions - a recent wonderful example being a large book about the painters who were active in the Association of New Artists in the 1930s - another being a fascinating 2014 study of the 20 painters grouped in 1951

around one of Bulgaria's most famous painters - Vladimir Dimitrov-Maistora - *Restoration of the Memory - The Artists from One Picture*

The Stara Zagora gallery has a beautiful book with reproductions from the famous painters who came from that city.

One dealer was able to give me copies of three excellent booklets which were produced (in 1985!) by *Samokov Gallery* (alas no more) on Vasil Sachariev, Georg Velstoinev and Xristo Kriskaretz. Alexander Aleksiev's tiny antique shop at 38 Tsar Assen St is one of the few where you might be able to pick up the odd copy of these sorts of catalogues - another is just off Vasil Levsky Bvd at the corner with the University

Internet

Two auction websites have excellent archives of paintings. These are [ArtPrice.BG](#) and the [Victoria gallery](#) in Sofia. But be aware that the Bulgarian habit is to list by first name - not family name! And, although they give useful information on price, there is little information about the artists themselves. The [website of Sofia City Art Gallery](#) has an excellent overview of Bulgarian painting - which I have already mentioned. It also stores information on each special exhibition it has held since 2001 - and this proved an excellent source of detailed information on a few artists. The marvellous (private) [Phillipopolis Gallery in old Plovdiv also has a website](#) with a small archive of painting.

Those interested in [contemporary painters can find websites](#).

There is also a [curious website](#) with a lot of entries I have never heard of.

Apart from the intro on the Sofia City art gallery, I have been able so far to find only a couple of articles in English about Bulgarian painting - a rather academic piece ([Images of Modernity](#)) about developments at the turn of the 19th century and early 20th. The other piece is a [charming chapter of Markham's 1931 book](#) which can be found on the internet. Sadly the great book produced in English 2012 by the Union of Bulgarian Artists gives no detail of the various painters whose names are simply listed (without even dates)

CD Roms

An obvious format for those with restricted budgets. But they are often old - and some galleries cannot afford even that.

Annex 1: Notes on the municipal galleries

Bulgaria is a great country to tour around. Amazing scenery, great wines and food! Its many municipal galleries are an additional bonus.

Here I simply reproduce the blogs I posted after my visits - and, regrettably, I have not been able to visit them all. Burgas, for example, remains to be conquered.

Please note that this information is correct at the time of printing but should be verified.

Balchik Art Gallery

4 Otets Paisiy St

tel.: +359 579 41 30 +359 579 41 30 , 43 09

Burgas – Petko Zadgorski Gallery

"Metropolit Simeon" Str.24

tel: +359 56/84-21-69

Dobrich Art Gallery

9300 Dobrich, 14 Bulgaria, Bulgaria St

tel.: +359 58 28 215 +359 58 28 215 , 29 091

Exposition: paintings, prints, sculpture

Highlights: works by Vladimir Dimitrov- the Master, Bencho Obreshkov, Alexander Petrov, Ivan Markvichka, Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, Dechko Ouzounov, Naiden Petkov and others, a collection of foreign prints.

Open: 9 - 12 a.m., 1 - 5 p.m.

Closed: summer: Sundays and Mondays; winter: Saturdays and Sundays

The Director very graciously gave us a personal tour of her domain. It started with a group of schoolkids who were receiving some interactive training in the process of paper-making - the gallery, uniquely, has a collection of paperworks produced by the participants of a recent international event held here.

Separate sections are devoted to the gallery's collection of sculptures and prints - and to local artists as well as old masters such as a rare work of Ivan Mrkvichka (1856-1938), one of two Czechs (the other is Jaroslav Vesin) who are credited with setting Bulgarian painting on its modern path.

The breadth of the collection is one of the widest I have seen (with a nice mix of older and contemporary). The exhibition space is so extensive that the tour took more than an hour.

I was very taken with some contemporary work by Plaven Valchev (born 1951).

I have been nicely received in all the municipal galleries I have visited in the Bulgaria regions - but this is the only one where I was able to have a proper conversation about the problems of running galleries here at this time. Over a cup of tea, Evelina (like all the Directors I've met here) an artist herself explained that it is the Ministry of Culture who set a formula which dictates the number of staff to which regional galleries are entitled. So much for local government autonomy!! And, in Dobrich's case, with such a huge palace, the staff of 12 (including 2 cleaners and 3 attendants) is simply insufficient. There is no surveillance system - so security is labour-intensive.

As was evident from the number of brochures, the Director is highly proactive in seeking out

opportunities for marketing and funding (A Swiss Foundation was mentioned) and the Gallery's CD lists the various international exhibitions (eg China and Slovakia) which have been mounted with the support of Embassies here. But it is an uphill struggle - a good venture of bussing tourists from the beaches nearby during the summer fizzled out.

It is not easy to produce a winning formula for such a problem. But one thing is clear for me - it requires local solutions and this means removing the dead hand of central control - and encouraging networking between galleries (national and international), hotels, businesses (eg the new owners of the rich agricultural land and the golf courses!!) and educational establishments. Don't get me wrong - national financial support needs to be maintained (otherwise the galleries could be at more risk)) but on the basis of more imagination.....

Kardjali - Stanka Dimitrova art gallery

Kardjali has all the bustle and townscape of a Turkish town. I was able, with some difficulty, to locate the art gallery - rather small but some great paintings - including the great Atanas Mihov and the delightful Stefan Ivanov.

Kavarna - The Art Gallery

9650 Kavarna, Bulgaria, 1 Aheloi St

tel.: [+359 570 84 236](tel:+35957084236) [+359 570 84 236](tel:+35957084236)

Kazanlak Art Gallery

Permanent exhibition

Address: SS Cyril and Methodius "№ 9

Contacts: Tel: 0431 / 63762 E-mail [artgallery.kz @ gmail.com](mailto:artgallery.kz@gmail.com)

In addition to the magic of the rose and the oil wealth of the Thracian art, Kazanlak is also famous as a city of artists. Here, many artists are born, some of which have marked some of the highest peaks in Bulgarian art, such as: Ivan Milev, Ivan Penkov, Dechko Uzunov, Nenko Balkanski, Vasil Barakov and others. It is therefore not accidental that Kazanlak owns one of the oldest and richest art galleries in the country.

I was warmly received by the staff who introduced me to their collection which includes several pieces by one of my favourite Bulgarian painters - *Stanio Stamatov* - one of many local painters. Indeed the small town was so prolific with artists that it used to be called „the town of a hundred painters“. The collection is therefore a rich one - of both paintings and sculptures - and, amongst those whose acquaintance I made were *Vasil Barakov* (1902-1991); a sculptor *Hristo Peshev* (1923-2000); and *Spas Zavgrov* (1908-1991) born in a nearby village whose landscapes and portrait sketches were in a temporary exhibition funded by his family. Hristo Genev, the Director, welcomed me into his den and presented me with a couple of discs (one of his own material). He sculpts the most fascinating pieces from wood. This is a gallery worth a detour to see - and many revisits!

Kyustendil – Vladimir Dmitrov (Maistora) Gallery

"Patriarh Evtimii" St. No. 20

78-55-0029: Curator

78-52-3172: Director

Opening Hours

Summer time : 09:00 - 12:00 14:00 - 18:00

Winter time: 09:00 - 12:00 13:00 - 17:00

Housed in the ugliest concrete bunker I have ever seen. Dmitrov (The Master) is one of Bulgaria's most famous painters. I'm not actually a fan of a lot of his stuff particularly not one of his trademarks – a face in front of a lot of crudely painted and brightly coloured flowers – but it was good to visit this collection and see a wider range of his paintings. I was taken with some of his earlier, smaller paintings – sunrises and sunsets; his mother; his father – and some multiple face silhouettes. His *Peasant with a hoe* which is in the Sofia City Gallery is very graceful.

Pleven – Ilyia Beshkov Gallery

Director - phone/fax: + 359 64/802091

Working hours:

9.00 - 12.00 a.m., 1.00 - 5.00 p.m.

Closed: Sunday and Monday

The first floor presents the works of Nikolay Pavlovich, Anton Mitov, Ivan Markvicka, Tseno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, David Perez and many others. The sculptures of Ivan Lazarov, Angel Spasov, Ivan Funev, Marko Markov and other sculptors who had worked in the period to 1940 are included in the exposition. By the accompanied annotations for each artist and work the visitor unnoticeably passes from the art of the 1940s to 1970s

Plovdiv

The old town of Plovdiv is well worth a visit – with its cobbled streets, stunning National Revival houses, Roman amphitheatre and several galleries.

City Art Gallery

"Saborna" St. No. 14a

32-635-322: Director

www.galleryplovdiv.com

working hours (summer);

Open every day (Thursday free)

10.00-12.30

13.00-18.00

Art Gallery-Museum Philippopolis

29 Saborna str., Plovdiv 4000, Bulgaria

e-mail: gallery@philippopolis.com

tel.: +359 32 622 742

tel.: +359 32 624 851

This is actually a private gallery housed in a magnificent old Bulgarian house in the old heart of the town which was rescued and brought back to its glory by the new owners. Now you can view their collection; contemplate possible purchases; eat in a wonderful restaurant in the basement; or have a quiet coffee on the terrace which overlooks the town. Its website [has a virtual gallery](#) which allows you to see for yourself. It was a visit to the Phillipopolis Gallery in Plovdiv in May 2008 which really activated my painting passion. The atmosphere and reception was so great that, without at that stage knowing anything at that stage about Bulgarian painting, I bought a small Zhekov; a large Mechkuevska and two contemporaries. So, be warned!

Atanas Krastev House

The [Atanas Krastev house](#) should be visited - where local painter and conservationist *Atanas Krastev* lived until his death in 2003. His constant striving to keep the old buildings (at a time in the 1960s when tradition was viewed with some hostility) and to have them as active centres of cultural activity earned him the title of *Mayor of Old Plovdiv* - and he deserves wider recognition. The cosy, well-furnished house is strewn with personal mementoes, and the terrace offers superb views. His self-portraits and personal collection of (mostly) abstract 20th-century Bulgarian paintings are displayed. The garden also houses exhibits.

Razgrad - The Art Gallery

the modern green building beside the central Mosque

tel.: [+359 84 27 067](tel:+3598427067) [+359 84 27 067](tel:+3598427067) , 29 618

Exposition: a standing exhibition and temporary thematic exhibitions of paintings, prints and sculptures.

Open: 9 - 12 a.m., 3- 7 p.m.

Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

Housed in a superb, modernised and specially-designed building (with EC funding) in the heart of the town right next to the well-kept mosque, it has an enthusiastic Director, Todor Todorov, who personally showed us round the collection on display. This included about 6 Danail Dechevs, a Tanev, a Boris Denev, several Vladimir Dimitrovs and two painters until then unknown to me - Maxim Tsankov (1877-1965) and Kosta Petrov (1894-1973).

Razgrad's permanent exhibition also includes an excellent graphics collection.

The gallery's catalogue is the best I have seen - with coloured reproductions and English as well as Bulgarian notes on the paintings and painters. It also has a website - although still, clearly, in the process of construction.

The Razgrad Gallery is the only one I have seen which has used Regional Funds to make such a major refurbishment - which shows both official initiative and political support.

Razgrad's gallery must go to the top of my unofficial list of best housed, managed and documented regional galleries in Bulgaria - with Stara Zagora a close second. Russe is the worst. Of course, these are not necessarily the best criteria - for example the poorly-housed Targovishte Gallery was abuzz with a group of school-kids - and the unheated Skitnik gallery in Sliven sponsors an annual Plein Air summer school. Such local access and use should clearly be the core of the mission of any art gallery.

I find these differences an interesting example of the effects and importance of local government - although the proper maintenance of older paintings which are part of a country's national patrimony has national significance. The lack of heating which threatens so many paintings in Bulgaria's regional art galleries is a disgrace - but perhaps it is too easy to put this down to lack of municipal funding. I found it curious that one of the galleries I visited had 7 staff. Of course I never like to recommend job-shedding but, in this case, perhaps lack of heating simply shows a poor sense of budgetary priorities!

Russe Art Gallery

Somewhere in the centre!

The gallery is in a scandalous state for such a large city - with no heating and the paintings in one of the three rooms lying propped on the floor with no means of identification. Some superb works from Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistera, Atanas Mihov, Benchko Obreshkov and Nenko Balkanski - all, however, at risk from the disgraceful conditions. What was even more galling was that an expensive book was on offer - at 25 euros - celebrating 75 years of the gallery. It must have cost 5,000 euros to produce - money which would have been much better spent to keep the paintings in a safer condition.

I can understand the galleries of smaller municipalities being in poor conditions - but there is absolutely no excuse for this neglect for a city such as Russe. Places like *Razgrad* and *Kazanlak* - with one fifth of the population - clearly do so much better! Pity the poor young warden who sat wrapped up and freezing in his cubicle as I happily snapped the choicer exhibits. He smiled sadly when I asked if there was a feedback book available for me to make my comments! At the very least, the city authorities should relocate the paintings to a smaller place which is easier to heat! And it doesn't take much money to produce a CD of the gallery collection.

Shoumen - The Elena Karamihailova Art Gallery

81 Tsar Ivan Alexander St

tel.: [+359 54 42 126](tel:+3595442126) [+359 54 42 126](tel:+3595442126)

Exposition: paintings, prints and sculptures

Highlights: works by Elena Karamihailova, Alexander Moutafov, Hristo Kazandzhiev, Ilia Petrov, Vasil Stoilov, Dechko Ouzounov, Nikola Mihailov.

Open: 9 - 12 a.m., 2- 6 p.m.

Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

The town of Shumen (80 kms from Varna and the Black Sea) is a bit unprepossessing as you drive in - with decaying 1950s residential blocks. But its centre is a pleasant surprise, with one the largest

pedestrian areas I have ever seen - with trees, a theatre, statues and a mountain range behind. Its upper side is graced with a series of old, large official buildings - of which a mock Italian palace (the police station) is perhaps the most interesting.

Younger people we asked about the location of The *Elena Karamihaylova Gallery* clearly had never visited the place - but two elderly ladies pointed us in the right direction. The gallery was initially a disappointment - since the second floor containing the permanent collection was closed for reconstruction. But conversations with the staff must have conveyed our love of Bulgarian painting and the Director graciously presented us with an attractive pack containing 20 postcards of the paintings, a CD and a small booklet giving the history of the collection and short notes on the artists.

When, however, I mentioned the name Alexander Moutafov (who was apparently born in Shumen), it was literally the key to open an Aladdin's Cave.

Valentina Velikova, the paintings expert, took us to the archives where the collection (of 1,300 items) is stored and filed. And she was kind enough to find and pull out for our inspection various portraits by Elena Karamihaylova and paintings by Nikola Tanev, Alexander Moutafov and Stanio Stamatov. Marvellous to have a chance to handle such work. And great that a small gallery should have developed such a nice pack. They are rare amongst Regional galleries in having a CD. It is so simple, cheap to create - and so necessary given the large numbers of paintings which are doomed to spend their life in basement archives!

Silistra Art Gallery

Svoboda Sq

tel.: +359 86 26 838 +359 86 26 838 , 22 395

Exposition: paintings, prints, sculptures

Highlights: works by Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, Danail Dechev, Stoyan Venev, Tsanko Lavrenov, Vasil Stoilov, Bencho Obreshkov, Nenko Balkanski.

Open: 8 - 12 a.m., 2- 6 p.m.

Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

Sliven

The city's „Dimitar Dobrevich“ gallery has three permanent expositions:

Contemporary Bulgarian art - **gallery hall “Sirak Skitnik”**,

2 “Tzar Simeon” Blvd., tel. +359 44/ 25342

The Old Sliven - paintings of Dobri Dobrev in the “**Mirkovich” house**,

iO “Mirkovich” Str., tel. +359 44/ 22796

Christian Art - **Christian Art**,

13 “Tzar Osvoboditel” Blvd., tel. +359 44/ 22083

Art Gallery “Dimitar Dobrevich” works everyday from Monday to Friday, from 09.00-12.00 and 13.30-17.00.

Non working days: Saturday and Sunday.

The home of Dobri Dobrev. And the town has done Dobrev proud - with some 50 of his paintings on permanent display in a superb National Revival house - Mirkovitch House. I was taken to the Gallery by one of the curators of the nearby *Sirak Stitnik Gallery* which is the town's main gallery who had been kind enough to show me round it. It has a great collection - not only the country's greats such as Tanev, Abadjiev and Boris Denev but a special exhibition of the graphics of a new painter for me - Kozucharov, Nikola (1892-1971). He's famous apparently for his mythological and historical paintings but was also a war artist - covering the Balkan War and First World Wars - and some of these sketches were on display.

Unfortunately, there was no heating in the place - like the Russe and Targovishte galleries

Smolyan

Dicho Petrov 7

tel: 0301 62 328

open; 09:00-12:00 & 13:30-17:00 Tue-Sun

A great collection - well worth the trip. And in a Rhodope town in a superb location.

Amongst other local artists, I was introduced to the work of Anastas Staikov by a Slovak woman who guided us around and introduced us to the Director.

What struck me was what they were achieving against the odds - they had insufficient money for proper maintenance - let alone advertise the gallery and its great paintings.

Sofia - the City Art Gallery

1, Gen. Gurko Str

<http://sqhg.bg>

working hours:

Tuesday-Saturday: 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Monday: day off

admission: free

The City Gallery has no permanent exhibition but plays a crucial role in putting on special exhibitions which not only bring out paintings from its own large collection but exhibit paintings from the other municipal and private collections. Exhibitions in recent years have focussed on people such as Dobri Dobrev and Nikolay Boiadjiev.

In 2010, the Gallery curator Dr. Maria Vassileva started a fascinating series ("The other Eye") which consists of inviting outsiders to comb the dungeons of the gallery where the collections are stored, strip off the protective covering and select some paintings. So far, three such exhibitions have been held - each with a very useful booklet.

Stara Zagora Art Gallery

Address: Stara Zagora, 27 Ruski Blvd.

Working time: tue-sat 10:00-18:00

Phone: 042 62 28 43

Phone: 042 62 23 80

The town has a superb location with the Balkan mountains as a majestic backcloth. It was completely destroyed by the Turks in 1877 for welcoming the Russian army of General Gurko and was subsequently rebuilt on a strict grid-plan with leafy Boulevards.

I therefore had no problems finding the Art gallery which is a most impressive one - well maintained and offering, for 1 euro, 3 separate exhibitions.

The permanent exhibition displays some of the works of the many painters who have been born and worked there - eg Anton Mitov, Mario Zhekov and Atanas Mihov. Paintings by Nikola Tanev, Ivan Penkov and Moutafov were also on display.

The Gallery also offered a collection of women's portraits and, finally, a display of woodcuts and graphics in a temperature controlled room.

The exhibits were so enthralling I spent almost two hours in total there - with a return visit after the lunchbreak. Many new names - eg Vasil Marinov and a great portraitist Elizabeth Konsulova-Vazova (1881-1965)

Targovishte - The Nikola Marinov Art Gallery

Park "Borovo Oko"

tel.: [+359 601 27 760](tel:+35960127760) [+359 601 27 760](tel:+35960127760)

Exposition: paintings, prints, sculpture

Highlights: a collection of water colours by Nikola Marinov

Open: 8 - 12 a.m., 2- 6 p.m.

Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

The gallery has a rather remote location (at least for present wintry conditions) in a park on the town's periphery next to a lake which must be glorious in summer (and also to the football stadium). From the outside its cavernous size held some promise - but this was quickly dashed by the iciness of the air as we stepped inside. There was no heating (and loud leaks from the roofs) for the Gallery's 2 huge rooms - which held little of interest. One Neron and one Svetlin Russe which must be fast deteriorating in such conditions. No sign of the Marinov water colours which I learned about later!

Varna - Georgi Velchev Art Museum

8 R. Dimitriev St

tel.: [+359 52 238 011](tel:+35952238011) [+359 52 238 011](tel:+35952238011)

Exposition: paintings and drawings by one of the best masters of sea scapes in Bulgaria. Landscapes

from France, Germany and Bulgaria, portraits and self-portraits by Georgi Velchev (1891-1955).

Open: summer 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.;

winter 13 p.m. - 5 p.m.

Closed: summer- Mondays,

winter- Saturdays and Sundays

Varna - Boris Georgiev Gallery

1 L. Karavelov St

tel.: [+359 52 243 123](tel:+35952243123) [+359 52 243 123](tel:+35952243123) , 243 141

tel./fax: +359 52 243 088

Exposition: on 1600 square metres: West European art of the 17th century, Bulgarian art from the beginning of the century, contemporary Bulgarian art.

Highlights: works of art of national importance: Vladimir Dimitrov- the Master - "A young girl with grapes", "Prayer"; Zlatyu Boyadzhiev- "Rest in the fields", 1943, "Opening mines Pernik"; [paintings by Ivan Markvichka, St. Ivanov, Vasil Stoilov, Tsanko Lavrenov](#), Dechko Ouzounov, Stoyan Venev; sculptures by Kiril Shivarov,; collection of west European art.

Open: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Closed: Mondays

Veliko Tarnovo - Boris Denev Art Gallery

"Park Asenevtsi"

(0)62-638-961: Director

(0)62-638-951: Curator

(0)62-638-941: Ticket window

opening hours

10.00- 18.00

closed; Mondays

Note also that several villages eg **Berkovitsa** in Vidin Region and **Izvorovo** village in Targovishte Region apparently have galleries - the first focussing on the work of Dragonov, the second on Kutzkarov

Annex 2; Private galleries in Sofia which concentrate on “realistic” Bulgarian painters of the mid-20th Century

Antique Shop and Gallery

next door to Alexander Aleksiev's wonderful tiny antique shop at 38 Tsar Assen St, this gallery has three rooms with an interesting selection of older paintings - some from outside Bulgaria.

Antique Shop and Gallery

34 Solunska St

- looks a bit kitsch from outside with a dummy in soldier uniform but they have some worthwhile stuff inside. The son speaks English.

Baltoff;

37 Ezrah Yosiff St

www.antiques.bg

Barnev and Doychev Art

15 San Stefano St

- charming small gallery in the University area - on the doctors' square. More than meets the eye since they have a lot of paintings in piles against the wall. They speak English.

BULGARI

69 Bvd Dondukov

www.gallery.bulgary.bg

- part of a larger complex which includes a lovely restaurant (on the top floor you can dine in real privacy amongst some of the paintings). The painting selection they have makes this gallery a must visit - although be aware of the “mutti” connection.

CLASSICA

32, Liuben Karavelov St

0896 854210

- a charming old converted flat near the crossroads of Ignatiev and Vessil Levski. A fairly small selection on display - although you can view on their computer other paintings they can bring for you. But they do quote rather high prices.

IMPRESSION ART

Valeri Filipov

11 Vasil Levsky Bvd

0898 566 667

- Valeri has recently moved to this more up-market (and contemporary art) gallery but still has a stock of the older works he displayed in his previous gallery (Valmar). He has great sources - and is worth cultivating. He speaks English.

INTER NOS

58b Vassil Levski Boulevard

www.internos-galleryantiques.com

- this atmospheric gallery has now sadly been sold on to people who specialize in tasteless kitsch. It had a great selection of older work - actually on the side street

KRISTAL GALLERY

100, Rakovski St

0896 621113

- well established gallery with a small but select collection. The lady speaks English.

KRISTAR Gallery

11, Kan Khrum St

0887 989977

- some interesting stuff but a bit too eager to do a sale for my liking.

LORAN Gallery

Plaven Petrov

16 Oborishte St

www.galleryloran.com

- recently moved to this location, they have a smallish display downstairs with more expensive stuff upstairs. They occasionally produce special books on artists. The young ladies have excellent English.

NERON

Tsar Samuel 12

- at corner with Rilski St. One of the best dealers - who has written two large books. Language a problem

STARI MAISTERI (Old Masters) Gallery

13, Parehevich St

- very small antique shop with a few paintings.

TZENNOSTI(Values) Gallery

Buzludja St

<http://www.values-gallery.com>

- a well-established (and prestigious) gallery focussing on Bulgaria's old masters - hidden away in a charming and old part of Sofia between Prague Bvd and Bvds Makedonia/Totleben. It has the richest collection (in more senses than one) of all the galleries I have visited here.

There were so many painters of whom I hadn't heard. Some of the paintings seem to have been there for several years (eg some Vladimir Dmitrov's at 20,000 euros in the 2009 Antiques Price Guide) - which makes one wonder about their business model. Clearly they cater for bigger spenders than me! Probably an institutional market ie the banks!

VICTORIA Gallery

Yuri Gagarin 22a

0888 572 172 (Pavlina)

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/catalog.asp>

- THE place to go for this sort of painting! Pavlina is very knowledgeable! Their website is the most comprehensive for this older, more classic sort of Bulgarian painting. And, for each of their (quarterly) auctions, they produce a great little Catalogue - free of charge.

The auctions - generally at the Sheraton Hotel - are a great experience.

Annex 3: Contemporary Galleries – two of the Best!

Although my main interest is the realist painting from the middle of the 20th Century, I do have more than 20 paintings by contemporary artists – Milcho Kostadinov, Yuliana Sotirova, Natasha Atanassova, Nikola Tihonov and Atanas Matsourref are some of my favourites.

And I have learned so much (and spent many happy hours) in two galleries in central Sofia which focus on contemporary art, ceramics and sculpture – namely

Konus Gallery

32, Khan Asparuh St
proprietor – Yassen Gollev
0898 537673

www.konusgallery.net

Astry Gallery

34, Tsar Samuil St

proprietor – Vihra Pesheva
02 986 3780
0885 230717

www.astrygallery.com

Every two months or so, Vihra organises a special exhibition of a contemporary artist – duly opened with a delightful Vernissaj

Getting paintings Home

Most visitors to Bulgaria come (and leave) by plane. And this would seem to create some problems for visitors buying paintings. A large, framed painting is not exactly the easiest thing to squeeze into an already fairly full suitcase. And how will those handling the screening devices at the airport treat such an object? Will they assume you are making off with a local treasure? And what exactly are the rules of national patrimony?

Let's deal with the last issue first. It's fairly straightforward - someone (often the dealer) simply takes the object to the ticket desk at the National Gallery where, in a few minutes, they note its nature and size and issue a certificate which authorises the object's export. Of course they won't do that if it is considered part of national patrimony - but only very old objects (eg icons) are covered by that rule. Certainly not paintings of the 20th century. Just be aware that the certificates are issued (for 3 levs) only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

As far as the physical size is concerned, it is a simple matter to strip the canvass from its frame and pack (or roll) the canvass only. You can frame it again back home.

And there are some places in Sofia where you can find interesting paintings which are not yet framed. Often the painter is unknown (or the painting unsigned) and for these reasons, you can get it for a good price. About twenty paintings in my collection fall into this category - and their purchase and study gives me particular satisfaction.

About the author

Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

The last 24 years have been spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

He first came to live in Bulgaria in the summer of 2007 - and has since then divided his time between a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains.

In 2008 he started [a website](#) which contains the major papers he has written over the years about his attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles he has had - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propaganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

In 2009 he started a blog www.nomadron.blogspot.com to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours he has been involved in - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on. To restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time or inclination -as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

He now has a new website - www.mappingthecommonground.com - which is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

The painting above is by Denyo Chokanov (1901-1982) a couple of whose paintings I am very happy to have in my collection



