

DR. GALENTIN GATEV

Born 1963

About the Artist:

Dr. Galentin Gatev, born 1960 in Bulgaria is a MD, specializing in dermoveneorology and oncodermatology. He is a collector, and later an artist, of contemporary art since the early 1990s.

Dr. Gatev joined the Bulgarian art scene in the early 1990s - a period of time when it was living fully its neo-avantgarde moment. Although a lot of experiments have had started already in the 80s, in the years following immediately 1989 nearly all artists active at the time joined this movement. Later most of them went back to their more “traditional” practices of painting and sculpture. However Dr. Gatev was the only person from the outside of the artworld who got engaged in art at this moment. Even after 1989 art remained a codified and elitist sphere, where having studied at the Art Academy was a prerequisite for a legitimate artistic career.

Dr. Gatev’s practice is positioned precisely at the point of transition between two historically different understandings of the role of art in society that implied different systems of its social inscription. One was the socialist ideologically based idea of art and the other was the Western autonomous and individualist project. Dr. Gatev confronted these two modes of art’s existence through the perspective of yet a third one – the idea of redefining an avant-garde practice, a form of merging between art and life. Dr. Gatev chose to perform the merging of art and life simply through *work*.

Gatev’s work was heavily influenced by the writings of Bulgarian philosopher Vladislav Todorov (most notably author of *Red Square/ Black Square – an Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*, 1994, State University of New York Press) and other theorists of the intellectual circle “Syntesis” (including cultural theoretician Alexander Kiossev, author of the term of “self-colonisation”, which has been largely used to describe post-socialist cultures). The authors around “Syntesis” wanted to reveal the monstrous character of totalitarianism not from the outside, as a critique, but from the inside as a grotesque “simulacrum” of what is to be dismantled. Todorov in particular explored the symbolic structures around factory work and productivity, which find echo in Gatev’s staging and deconstruction of factory work and its products.

Gatev participated in international art forums, among which Manifesta 2 (Luxembourg, 1998), SITE Santa Fe (USA, 1999). Since 2010 he creates large scale solo projects. “By

All Means Spice It Up” (2010), curated by Ruen Ruenov in Credo Bonum Gallery was accompanied by an extensive monograph. “The Other Aroma” (2010) was displayed in the National Art Gallery. “The Paintings Are To Be Put On The Walls” and “You Hear What You See” were curated by Prof. Pmoukchiev at the Gallery of the National Art Academy in 2012. “Sporadic Biphocality” at Sofia Arsenal Museum for Contemporary Art and “Noli me tangere” from 2013, “Doll-Uniform” – at Credo Bonum in 2016 and “WARTEN AUF DIE EINS” at Goethe Institut – Sofia were curated by Yovo Panchev.

DR. GALENTIN GATEV, *In Defense of Solid Material*, 1994

1. *In Defense of Solid Material*, 1994

Installation, Documentation of 1994 action

- 5 A4 documents in wooden frame, 38cm x 30cm x 2cm
- 5 A4 technical drawings in wooden frame, 38cm x 30cm x 2cm
- Video information accompanies the documentation
- 6 metal boxes with paired identical objects made of wood and metal; objects sizes are up to 20cm x 20cm x 10cm maximum.
- 5 metal pedestals, 20cm x 20cm x 30cm

Edition: Complete version: Unique

(Exists in two versions: Complete version, proposed here and a smaller version consisting of objects and a copy of the directive)

Ownership history: The Artist.

(The smaller version of the installation is in the collection of Nedko Solakov)

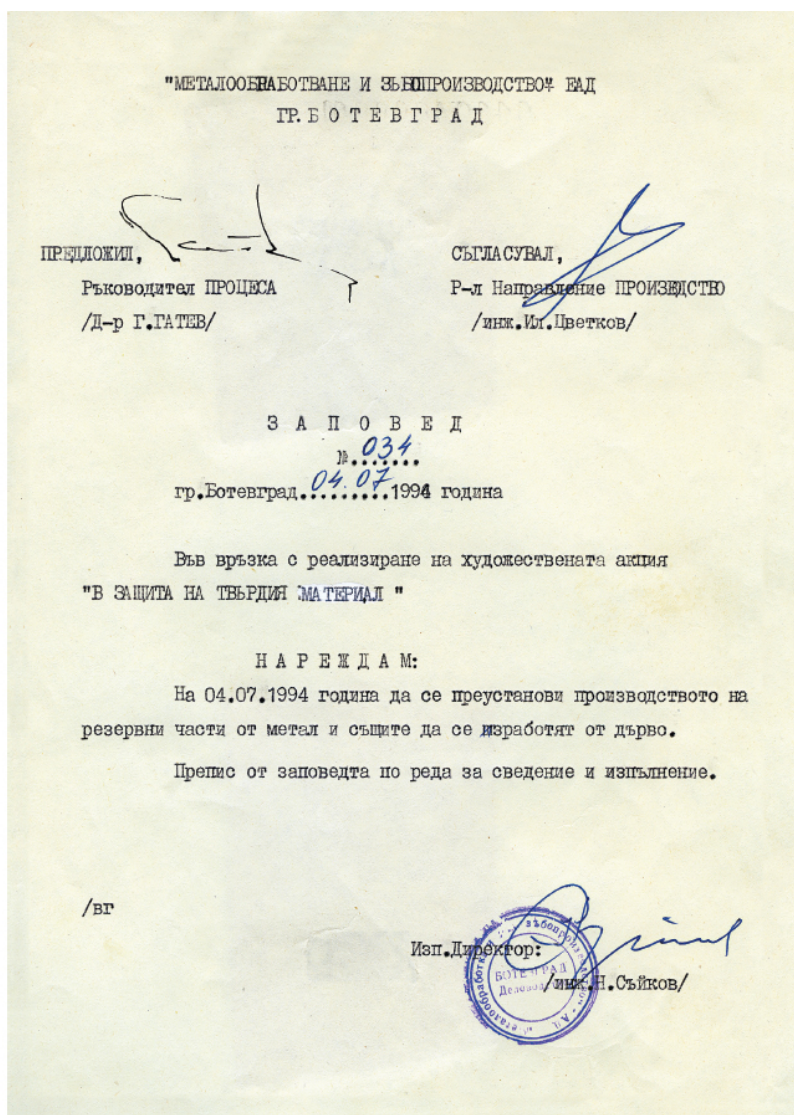


Dr. Galentin Gatev during the action "In Defense of Solid Material," 1994

DR. GALENTIN GATEV, *In Defense of Solid Material*, 1994



DR. GALENTIN GATEV, *In Defense of Solid Material*, 1994



Official directive allowing the performance, 04.07.1994

"I was appointed to the post Head of the PROCESS in Metal Working and Gear Production joint-stock company for a day on 04.07.1994.

Taking up my duties I proposed an order (issued by the Manager) to stop processing metal spare parts and the company to process wooden spare parts."

DR. GALENTIN GATEV, *In Defense of Solid Material*, 1994**About the Work:**

Dr. Gatev's first step of becoming an artist was on 4 July, 1994, with the action "In Defense of Solid Material," organized in the lobby of the Metal Processing and Cogwheels Plant in Botevgrad. The outcome of the action was shown at Lessedra Gallery in Sofia later that year.

Dr. Gatev succeeded in convincing the management of the Botevgrad plant, which employed 60 workers, to change its technological process for a day and produce their otherwise metal parts from what Gatev called "solid material" – wood. Obtaining a permission to act for one day as the director of a factory producing metal parts, his first and only directive in this position was to change their material from steel to wood. For one day heavy machines designed to shape steel struggled with the softness of wood. Several elements were nevertheless successfully produced. When the finished wooden parts came out of the production line, they would be packed and readied for transport like any other product of the factory.

Gatev oversaw the production process himself, in agreement with a legally binding contract he had signed with the management, which read:

"The parties undertake to join forces in achieving a shared goal: the stimulation and development of the artistic, cultural and aesthetic needs and criteria of the workers of the Metal Processing and Cogwheels Plant through the joint provision of conditions, prerequisites, material base and know-how for the production of an artistic event on the Plant's industrial site in Botevgrad..."

The downgrading of material, the inadequacy of the new wooden elements, their imperfection, their foreignness to use and efficacy were all filling the object with a suspicion towards its own legitimacy and determinateness, a suspicion towards the finitude of the finite world.

The process Gatev engaged with this action echoes the writings of Bulgarian theoretician Vladislav Todorov in his book "Red Square/ Black Square – an Organon for Revolutionary Imagination", 1994:

"Factories are not created to produce commodities. They create symbolic meanings... (The factories) create a deficit of goods but an overproduction of words and work-like spells. Their importance is politico-semiotic, not economic. They are the poems of totalitarian ideology... The working process creates precisely these factory-poems, and not goods. The worker labours for the existence of the factory-poem, not for the market. The goal of labour is the poetical being of the factory itself. "