

NINA KOVACHEVA & VALENTIN STEFANOFF (NINAVALE)

Born 1960 & 1959

About the Artists:

NINA Kovacheva (1960 - Sofia) and Valentin Stefanoff (1959 -Sofia) and graduated from the National Academy of Art, Sofia in 1985. Since 1995 they live in Paris, France. NINA and Valentin have lived and worked together for several decades. During this time, they have created both individual and joint works. Often, art critics speak of them as three artists: Nina, Valentin, and Nina & Valentin (or ninavale). Such a collaborative practice is unique on the Bulgarian art scene. Nina and Valentin create video and video installations designed for museum facades, public buildings and other public spaces. Among them is "In the Out" (2002), a video installation shown at the 4th Biennial of Contemporary Art in Cetine, Montenegro, for which they were awarded The UNESCO, 2002, Prize for the Promotion of The Arts. In 2005, they create "Phases of Accumulation and Extraction in a Limited Space", a video installation designed for the facade of the National Gallery, Sofia, it was the first of this type of art intervention in a public place in Bulgaria. ninavale's video installations and site-specific works are shown at: Sofia Arsenal - Museum of Contemporary Art / City Art Gallery, Sofia / MOCA Taipei / Jeju Museum of Art, South Korea / The National Gallery of Art, Skopje / Arossita Gallery, Sofia / National Art Gallery, Sofia / Dartington College of Arts, UK / Nanjing Shenghua Arts Center, China / Kunsthalle Hannover / Zendai MoMA, Shanghai / Duolun Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai / Macedonian Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki / National Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia / ZONE: Chelsea Center for the Arts, New York / Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit / MNAC, Bucharest / Musée d'Art Modern et Contemporain, Strasbourg / Nuit Blanche, Paris and many others.

"...Nina Kovacheva and Valentin Stefanoff's collaborative works are actually an avenue to the authors' and each spectator's individuality. With their unalloyed vehicles of expression and with their well thought-out structure, they convey the message of the freedom of the individual in a contemporary society of complex social interrelationships. The road to this freedom goes through sharing rather than through isolation and closure. This is why their projects turn into spaces of genuine mental and emotional interaction..."

Maria Vasileva / Sharing as an avenue to the self/ 2015

“...Three artists will be discussed here: Nina, Valentin and Nina&Valentin... Three of the perfect pair work with construction and destruction in their sublime concurrence. Their conceptual minimalism – a trade mark of their work – is brought to the level of aesthetic rigor. The play with focus and distortion, with movement and motionless, with color and its decline, with light and its restraining, with silence, sound and their musical dissemination – at the end of the day it always leads to a pairing between closing and disclosing, to insightful revelation and to deferring residue, insusceptible to decoding. The three artists do not stop asking about inside and outside, about closed and open, but also about the critical interval between them.”

Dimitar Kambourov / A Proliferating Minimalism: Nina Kovacheva and Valentin
Stefanoff

NINA KOVACHEVA & VALENTIN STEFANOFF (NINAVALE)

1. *Wet Contact*, 2002

two-channel video installation
duration 30 min.

Edition: 4/5

Ownership history: The Artists



NINA KOVACHEVA & VALENTIN STEFANOFF (NINAVALE), *Wet Contact*, 2002

About the work:

A big screen split in two. A double image, two faces, a man and a woman, the portraits of the authors. They both stare at the camera. It does not move. Nothing happens in the first few minutes. The viewer has the illusion that they are watching him, watching him... That they are expecting something from him... Suddenly, water is thrown on the face of one of the two protagonists. The projections alternate from one to another. Some projections are loud and disturbing. The light fades to signify the passing of time. The soundtrack was created from sound combinations extracted from everyday life and mixed with a musical composition by Heinz Weber.

The artists seek the intimacy of the spectator so that he or she can feel their physical aggression, their loneliness, prompting him or her to ask fundamental questions about life in today's society.

The video "Wet Contact" was created in 2001 for the eponymous exhibition of ninavale at New Media Space and the New York-based Experimental Intermedia Foundation for Video and Avant-garde Music.

Over the years, "Wet Contact" has become one of the most emblematic works of ninavale, exhibited in various galleries and museums/

"Before video art almost completely disappeared in favor of a new kind of cinema, there were the magicians of the electronic image on one side and those who found it a relay for performance on the other. Nina and Valentin (Ninavale) belong to both trends, even though their magic effects are simplest and lack any technical prowess. Video performers film their faces in close-up, waiting and receiving a basin or bucket of water in their faces. It looks like anti-performance, like a Fluxus gesture to refresh the artists' ego, or like a parody. But that is an analysis that can be made coldly, whereas what strikes and seizes us at the moment is the fact that it is an ordeal imposed on individuals who are trying to endure with as little betrayal as possible of their grasp and surprise. By taking a basic gag of burlesque comedy and acting it out (but is it really play?) with restraint and gravity, Nina and Valentin produce a dual and almost abstract vision of oppression and resistance. "Wet Contact", the title of the installation also responds to this desire for distance, to this reduction of effects more conducive to reflection and contemplation."

Patrick Javault

NINA KOVACHEVA & VALENTIN STEFANOFF (NINAVALE), *Wet Contact*, 2002

“Wet Contact - what happens in this work is highlighted by the continuous states between occurrences that confer discretion and flesh on time. The hypotheses about occurrence multiply to the point of undervaluation and are rethought as a means of rhythmic fragmentation of non-occurrence that provokes suspense. The fine dynamics of reactions under the masks of stable states became the key to their work.

In their masterpiece, *Wet Contact*, the faces of the two artists share the screen. At first, their facies seem impenetrable. One jumps when water is poured on them. It changes them with aggression, surprise, lack of motive, absurd communication.

The attitudes of the faces are gradually disintegrating. "He" is attached to a model of hegemonic masculinity, in which impassive stoicism demonstrates dignity and inner strength, despite the shadow of annoyance, astonishment, protest and aversion. "She", on the contrary, gives way, not concealing the request for pity, the humility endured, the forgiveness, but also the contempt, the authentic rage that threatens to make her renounce her role as a woman-object and lead her into an alternative femininity. Her hair is barely wet and the damage has become visible, her baldness reinforces the maneuverability, the "impermeability" of man. This is what brings out the reciprocal complementarity of the faces, the inverse correspondence between beard and hair, between the regular nudity of his skull and the beautiful asymmetry of his face, stripped by his wet and plated hair. The visibly different degree of vexation, injury and vulnerability induces the viewer to take a fresh look at the gender difference embodied in the faces. But men's impenetrability and I don't care, which tend to crack, also say something else: aggression, whether we give in to it or seem to resist it, feminizes us, turns us into a minority and a victim. Only when the spectator recognizes the excessive futility, the foiled vanity of the male resistance, which neither prays nor hates nor despises, does the observer recognize Dostoevsky's death-row syndrome. The water poured in the face seems to take the man somewhere else, into another chronotype. Traditional formulas are reversed: the authors doubt the original banality of the distributed roles in order to relativize their own encroachment – biological and socio-cultural – into sex and its dictates.”

Dimitar Kamburov

“Wet Contact - the screen is split in two, with the faces of the artists arranged in close-up in each half. Periodically, their faces are flooded with a strong "lapping" of water. Again, the authors are shown in a rather vulnerable state, helpless in the face of external aggression. The video unfolds against a backdrop of changing light, as if day were turning into night, and thus to infinity. The work is about domination, stability, claims, feminine and masculine, loneliness and survival.”

Maria Vassileva

NINA KOVACHEVA & VALENTIN STEFANOFF (NINAVALE), *Wet Contact*, 2002

Exhibition history:

- Crossing Time International, Dartington College of Arts, UK, 2002
- The Mastery of Nature, Kunsthalle, Hannover, Germany, 2002
- Sound and Image, Inner Space Multimedia Art Poznan, Poland, 2002
- Return Nature II, Nanjing Shenghua Arts Centre, China 2003
- Wet Contact, video installation, Nuit Blanche, Montparnasse Museum, Paris, France, 2003
- 16th Instants Video by Manosque, Manosque, France, 2003
- The 2nd annual Detroit International Video Festival, MONA Detroit MI, USA, 2003
- Media Art Festival, Maribor, Slovenia, 2003
- Art Peripheries, Pecs, Hungary, 2004
- Cosmopolis I, Macedonian Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2004
- Beyond the Visible, ninavale exhibition, MNAC, Bucharest, Romania, 2005
- Common Borders," Center for Contemporary Art, Ancient Bath, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2006
- Face ZONE: Chelsea Centre for the Arts, New York, NY, USA, 2007
- Mediation Biennale, National Museum, Poznan, Poland, 2008
- Close Encounter, Jeju Museum of Art, South Korea, 2009
- Central Europe Re-visited Nr.3, Esterhazy Foundation, Austria, 2010
- Surplus enjoyment, exhibition ninavale, The Museum of Contemporary Art, MOCA, Taipei, Taiwan
- The Collection. New Acquisitions 2012-2013 - Sofia City Art Gallery, Sofia, 2014
- The Temptations of ninavale II, Sofia Arsenal – Museum for Contemporary Art, Bulgaria, 2018