

## TEKLA ALEKSIEVA

Born 1944

### About the Artist:

Tekla Wilhelm Aleksieva graduated from the National art academy “N. Pavlovich”, Sofia, Department of Monumental-decorative painting, with Prof. Gocho Bogdanov. She has been a uniquely versatile artist, working tirelessly in numerous fields: painting, tapestry, monumental murals and illustration, stamps , animated films.

In the 1970s she made emblematic paintings marking the new tendencies among young Bulgarian artists at the time for depicting contemporary urban life and the use of photorealistic means. Tekla was particularly sensitive towards the material culture of the times and the experiences of the life in the city. The paintings she created were few in number and mostly in public collections, most notably the collection of the Sofia City Art Gallery.

However Tekla Aleksieva achieved her cult figure status for the original covers she created between 1979 and 1989 for the books in the science fiction series “Galactica Library” of the Publishing House Georgi Bakalov, Varna. In addition to the series of covers for Galactica Library, Tekla Aleksieva has contributed to science fiction in Bulgaria by participating in initiatives of the Science fiction clubs in Bulgaria and the Club of the Bulgarian fiction artists "Vassil Ivanov" – exhibitions of science fiction art.

In the 1980s, Tekla Aleksieva also illustrated the covers of the “Eco” series in Bulgaria and the collection “Bulgaria”, of Bulgarian books in Russia. She also worked on the design of textbooks, in particular the textbooks for experimental education, a system that was briefly tested in Bulgaria in the 1980s.

Never taking herself or the art system too seriously, Tekla Aleksieva was dedicated to art, looking for ways to express herself freely, never underestimating any medium, which could offer a challenge and means for expression. She is probably the only artist in Bulgaria who is still highly respected by colleagues and critics, but also known to a large public of fans.

**TEKLA ALEKSIEVA**

**1. Original drawing for the cover of the book “Moon Rainbow” by Sergei Pavlov, 1985**

Mixed media: Collage, tempera and aniline dyes on paper, 30cm x 45cm

**Edition:** Unique

**Ownership history:** Collection Vesselina Sarieva



The book cover

## **TEKLA ALEKSIEVA, *Illustrations for Original Book Covers*, 1981/1989**

### **About the Work:**

In 1979 Tekla Aleksieva was tasked with making the book covers for a new and quite brave book series - "Galactica Library" by the Publishing house "Georgi Bakalov". It was to include mostly translated books of science fiction and some detective novels. It was considered a miracle that the authorities accepted the publications.

The series consisted of around 10 titles a year, on which Tekla would continue to work for exactly 10 years, totaling 107 covers. The titles included key works by many Western authors – Ray Bradbury, Clifford D. Simak, Arthur Hailey, John Wyndham, Arthur Clarke, Ursula Le Guin, but also Russian and Bulgarian. Bestsellers of the detective novel also shine through – Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Georges Simenon.

The conditions that "Galactica Library" provided to the artist were rather luxurious for the socialist book publishing. Full color, high quality print, sober graphic design that gave precedence to the illustration – the series was fully designed to break the established norms.

The unprecedented success of Galactica Library has become a social and cultural phenomenon in Bulgaria since the 1980s, and to this day. It is largely due to the book covers of Tekla Aleksieva, whose images captured the imagination of generations of readers.

What is the magic of Tekla's cover art?

At first glance, for the unbiased, and especially for the Western viewer, they look strangely familiar, reminiscent of covers of boulevard novels, magazine ads or motifs of well-known works of art (echoes of Magritte and Dali appear in many of the covers). In any case, this is a completely non-socialist imagery. Tekla Aleksieva did not avoid the clichés and references, they were part of a collective visual unconscious. The fantastic worlds of literature were projected here on the imagery from beyond the Iron Curtain.

At the same time, Tekla Aleksieva's covers are unlike anything else we can see, in the West or in the East. They are a synthesized, artistic reading of the content of the text. Although the artist was familiar with many foreign examples of graphic layout and design, the book texts reached her as translated manuscripts and she did not have access to their other publications and visual solutions.

Although the covers of Tekla are very diverse, mainly due to the fact that they follow the text closely, we can establish a certain system in the approach, which makes their originality. The compositions are designed to include the back of the book, i.e. the cover has a sequel which can be "read"; the image almost always contains an aspect of a story, we are invited to read the story in the picture; the compositions are

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mainly single-plan, highly concentrated, even when containing multiple elements; they provide ample space for the text, which makes them atmospheric and spacious, even when they are heavily symbolic and busy, they always "breathe".

Perhaps most striking in the approach of Tekla Aleksieva, however, remains the particular attention to detail, to the elements that materialize the mental reality they recreate. This is probably also the most "Western" element of the worlds of Tekla – the interest in the object, its history and aesthetics, the desires we project on it. The worlds of Tekla are worlds of desire. Their appeal is in the encounter between the fields of fantasy and their absolute material concreteness, combined with artistic talent and skill in their execution. There is no compromise between imagination and realization, in that lies the applied modesty and intelligence of Tekla that makes these images so accessible – we can literally “enter” the world of the covers.

There is hardly another moment in Bulgarian art in which an object of desire and consumption is so accepted and recognized. This is also the almost revolutionary, subversive role of “Galactica Library” – the books in the series are probably the first "commodity" in the socialist era in Bulgaria, in which a product is recognized as an object of desire.