

## VLADIMIR IVANOV

Born 1946

### About the Artist:

Vladimir Ivanov graduated in graphic arts from the National Academy of Arts in 1975. Already in his high school years (he studied at the French Language School in his home town of Varna) he became interested in visual arts and the two foreign languages he mastered allowed him to have access to international art magazines and catalogues. In those early years he was equally impressed by pop attitudes and minimalist aesthetics, photography and video, visual paradoxes and irony that he was finding in the examples of Western art he encountered. Very quickly, during his first years of studying at the Art Academy he began experimenting with what looked more like conceptual art than the graphic art he was taught by his professors. He began to introduce text in his compositions or to use photocopying machines. Philosophy, mathematics and poetry became the logarithm of his work. Not surprisingly these experiments were not something art education at the time encouraged and although the artist continued to work in this direction, most of his purely conceptual works remained a personal practice and were never shown.

The field of graphic arts in Eastern Europe during socialism was one of the areas of most freedom and experiment. A lot of artists from the young generation in the 60s and 70s in Bulgaria worked in graphic techniques and managed to stretch the limits of what was permitted. The graphic biennials that took place in Eastern Europe allowed artists like Ivanov to travel and share experiences. Still, even in the field of graphic artist in Bulgaria, the works of Vladimir Ivanov were considered too risky. The first works he proposed for the National Collective Exhibition in 1975, the year of his graduation, were refused as too abstract. For a while Ivanov found an escape in the themes of science fiction, where he was able to propose his conceptual work with less control. He was also an illustrator for the publishing house G. Bakalov.

After graduating Vladimir Ivanov returned to his native Varna, and took part in the development of an important and vivid art scene there. For a long time his work with conceptual strategies and minimal and abstract interventions within the image, as well as his installations, were quite an exception in the Bulgarian art scene. It was not until the late 80s, when, with the avant-garde wave in Bulgaria, his work could finally be incorporated in a larger movement. In 1987 he was one of the founders of the group Vulkan (Volcano) in Varna, which was famous for its experiments. After a several years stay in Holland (1990-1994) he returned to Varna, where in 1996 together with Vesselin Dimov (considered as one of the first avant-garde artists in Bulgaria) and Tsvetan Krastev, he founded the group "Club Var(t)na" with which he became again part of the most experimental part of contemporary art in Bulgaria at the time.

**VLADIMIR IVANOV**

Like many of their contemporaries, they used the possibilities afforded by installation art, object art, photography and text, but their ultimate goal was different. Their works remained quite removed from the provocative social art and even from the reflection on contemporaneity that is normally inherent in that type of art. What was important to them instead, was the metaphysical connection between reality and art; they were interested in the philosophical and the poetic principles embodied in objects or works of land art. This is why, and quite logically so, their leaning toward Eastern cultures and philosophies showed through in their work, and they felt most at ease with the expressive means of early conceptualism and minimalism.

## VLADIMIR IVANOV

### 1. *Dutch Landscape*, 1988

Installation of 4 Framed Black & White Photos  
40cm x 40cm each,  
Vertically placed red scotch tape, variable dimensions  
**Edition:** Unique

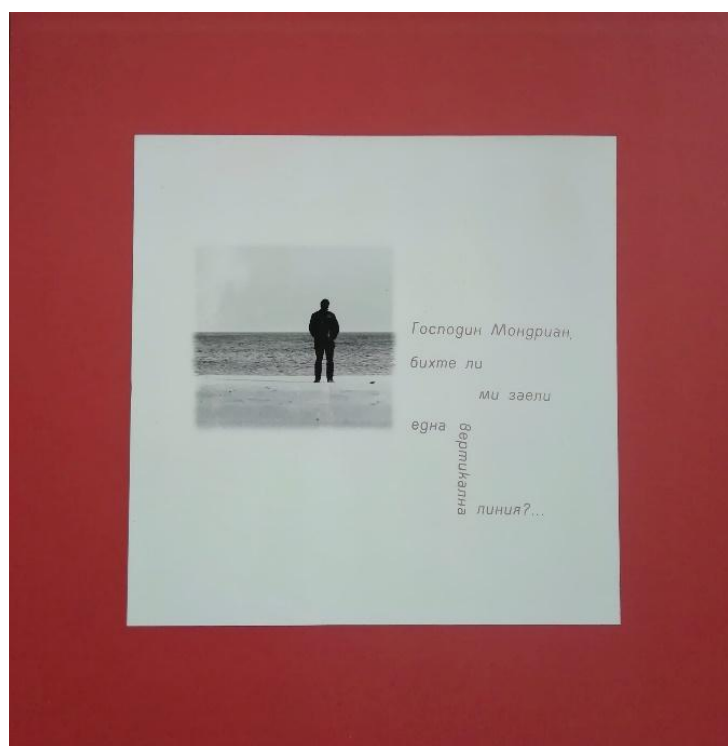
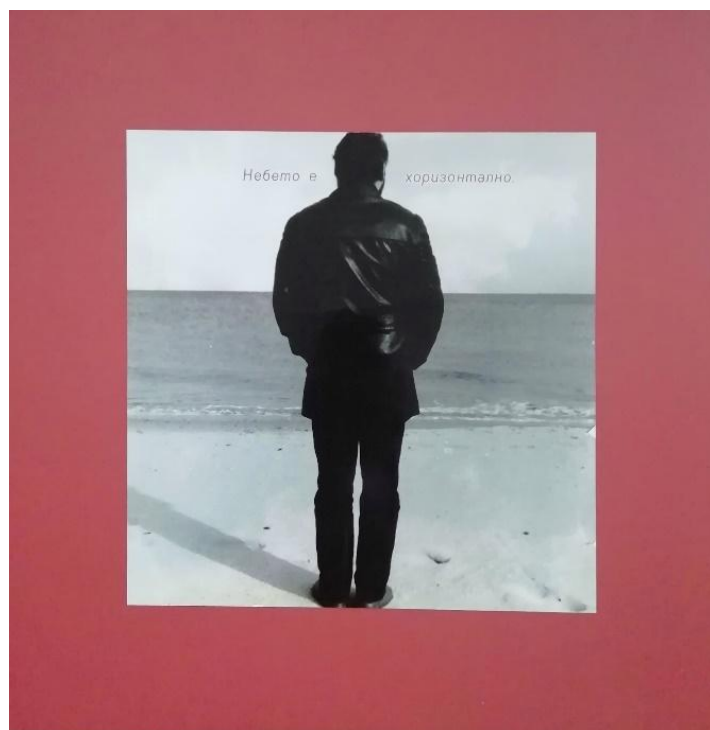
**Ownership history:** The Artist



**VLADIMIR IVANOV, *Dutch Landscape*, 1988 (details)**



VLADIMIR IVANOV, *Dutch Landscape*, 1988 (details)



**VLADIMIR IVANOV, *Dutch Landscape*, 1988****About the Work:**

*Dutch Landscape* is an installation from 1988, revisiting the artist's experiments from the 1970s, which he could not publicly exhibit at the time. The installation consisted of a grid of images, each of them suggesting a grid within the image, defined by the horizon, and the vertical presence of the artist. The question addressed to Mondrian is typed as a series of horizontals and one vertical, and repeats this structure. Neither the human figure (we see only the artist's back), nor the vertically typed "ve r t i c a l" are enough to offer the pure straight line needed to withstand the horizontal force of sea and sky. A higher authority is summoned – the grid of abstract art, the absolute vertical of spirit and mind. A red vertical line is indeed added next to the images. A small note humorously indicates that the line is donated by the Mondrian Foundation, which didn't exist at the time. The line in *Dutch Landscape* is not only an aspiration, but marks a separation – temporal, spatial and cultural.

There is a profound feeling of lack and impossibility in this work that cannot be disguised by its ironic presentation. Compare it for example to the vertical line separating the Russian artists Komar and Melamid from their American colleague Douglas Davis in their 1974 photographic work "Where is the line between us?". Despite the pictures being taken in two different countries, the collage visually enacts a dialogue between the artists. Ivanov's dialogue on the other hand is an imaginary conversation. His vertical line is an impossibility. There are no straight lines to be found within his own art history (the story of Bulgarian abstraction would be an interesting one to tell), they could only be borrowed and remain external to his landscape. The grid in this work is not implicit to a material or spiritual reality, it cannot originate purely from its own conditions. It is a collage of realities, an apparition, a projection.

The work was first exhibited in 1988 in Hemus Gallery in Sofia, as part of a group exhibition of the artists from "Vulcan" studio in Varna. The installation was criticized by the socialist critics and even called "non-art".

## VLADIMIR IVANOV

### 2. *Untitled*, 1974

Original printed material and photocopy, drawing

2 posters, 39cm x 50cm

- IBM advertisement
- Black and White photocopy and green marking pen

**Edition:** Unique

**Ownership history:** Collection Vesselina Sarieva



**VLADIMIR IVANOV, *Untitled*, 1974****About the Work:**

Vladimir Ivanov's work in the late 1970s had been influenced by Western trends, including Pop-art and Conceptualism. Initially, his preferred technique was photographic layering, and by the mid-80s, he was actively experimenting with installations and objects. He started overlaying photographic images in his works and after the middle of the 1980s started experimenting actively with installations and objects.

Vladimir Ivanov produced a whole series works involving grids, all from the mid 1970s, while he was still a student.

One of them is a drawing over a copy of an advertisement page of an IBM copy machine. Human and machine offer almost infinite possibilities for creating grids of various space relations. Copy machines however were not an easy thing to find in Sofia in the mid-seventies. The artist's interest in seriality was not a preoccupation stemming from his immediate reality but a knowledge of another world and other artistic practices. This is a dialogue between realities, between the copies of these realities, available through images, but also a feeling of thoughts and signals travelling through space and frontiers – an abstract grid of information circulating through temporal and spatial noise.

With its dry, conceptual form, mathematical patterns and understanding of the role of technology and techniques of reproduction, Vladimir Ivanov's work in the 1970s and 1980s was rather isolated in the Bulgarian context. It was closer to the international art of his times rather than to the authentic local avantgardes with their mythological, ritual and performative sources. He was also one of the few artists of his generation not only to have had visual examples of international art but also to have had a larger knowledge of Western art history, contemporary tendencies both in the West and in the East, critical texts and discussions. His work was not simply the translation of international art practices in the Bulgarian context, but the product of an (imaginary) dialogue between Eastern European and Western art.

In a local context where the language of ideology had become an abstraction disconnected from the reality of life, Ivanov's own brand of conceptual art was a new reading of the abstract that was equally a return to its spiritual origins as it was purely a technique of the image. What remains unique in the work and the position of Vladimir Ivanov was his vehement insistence on the connectedness between events, images and humans beyond the different regimes of politics and economies, and his desire for a true international spirit of art.