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*Lubomir Dalchev against the Art History and/or the Art History against Lubomir Dalchev:
Approaching the conundrums of the study of XX century Bulgarian visual arts*

In Bulgarian cultural history Lubomir Dalchev is designated as the “Patriarch of Bulgarian monumentalism”, and the XX century in sculpture is often titled “Dalchev’s century”. He was born at the very beginning of the century, and formed as a visual artist in the cultural atmosphere of the artistic movements in Rome and Paris in the period between the two world wars. Later, he has dominated the sculpture of the socialist period and finally emigrated to the USA in the late 70s of XX century. In my research project I am particularly interested in the development of socialist realism in Dalchev’s artworks created in the second half of XX century. From my point of view, in the context of the lack of a written “art history” of the socialist period in Bulgaria, Lubomir Dalchev’s artistic heritage indicates a micro-historical perspective for the study of the history of XXth century visual arts in Bulgaria. In my terms, the microhistory of Dalchev’s artistic experience from the late socialism offers an opportunity for the understanding of both the Bulgarian visual arts and culture, as well as the possible regimes of historicity of the socialist realism in Bulgaria.

Considering Dalchev’s artistic biography, I am specifically interested to observe and analyze the deliberations and the censorship strategies applied to different artworks of Lubomir Dalchev by the state/artistic authorities. I focus my attention on the stylistic transitions/ revolutions and the tensions between artistic canon/ tradition and artistic experiment, in the ways they could be observed in Dalchev’s visual language, as well as on the interpretative strategies of the art critics during the era of socialism and the first two decades of the Transition period, which in turn allowed to trace specific behaviors of autonomy / dependence / resistance in the artistic field in the second half of the last century. The most important obstacle I will try to overcome is the interpretative difficulty posed by the so called turn/revolution of Dalchev’s visual language from socialist realism to constructivism in the mid-60s, that in my opinion embedded a counter-evolutionary view of both art and history. The transformation in Dalchev’s artistic style is considered as a characteristic of his artistic production after the 60s of the XXth century. This

turn in the system of visual representation apparently impugned the official aesthetic of the totalitarian authorities and art institutions and provoked the Bulgarian artworld, but I will try to prove that it has additional value because it also has deflected the course of the official art history.

Based on my previous interest in Lubomir Dalchev's artistic heritage, I propose a qualitative research developed through an experimental methodology, basing it on the synthesis of recent studies in the field of Visual/Image Studies, and Visual Semiology. In this context, I see as important the opportunity to apply the idea of the so called „end of art history” to the interpretation of the dynamics of Lubomir Dalchev sculptural production in the late XX century, as well as to the narrative strategies used by the art historians and art critics from the socialist period and the period of Transition.

Having in mind the above-mentioned considerations, I plan to adapt and apply the methodological proposal of prof. Teikmanis, whose intention is to go beyond approaching the images of the socialist realism as “figurative texts”. He conceived a visual semiotic approach to the art history of socialist realism based on a variety of “modes of interaction between political textual discourses and visual discourses of images”. The model proposes an innovative tool allowing a politically neutral interpretation, categorization and periodization of the artefacts produced during the socialist period of Latvian visual arts, but I see an opportunity to apply it also to the analysis, categorization and interpretation of the Bulgarian art history from the recent past, and specifically to Lubomir Dalchev's artistic production and experience during the period. In my opinion it gives an opportunity to initiate a narrative strategy that transforms the history of visual arts of the socialist realism in the singular into histories of the arts of the socialist realism in the plural.