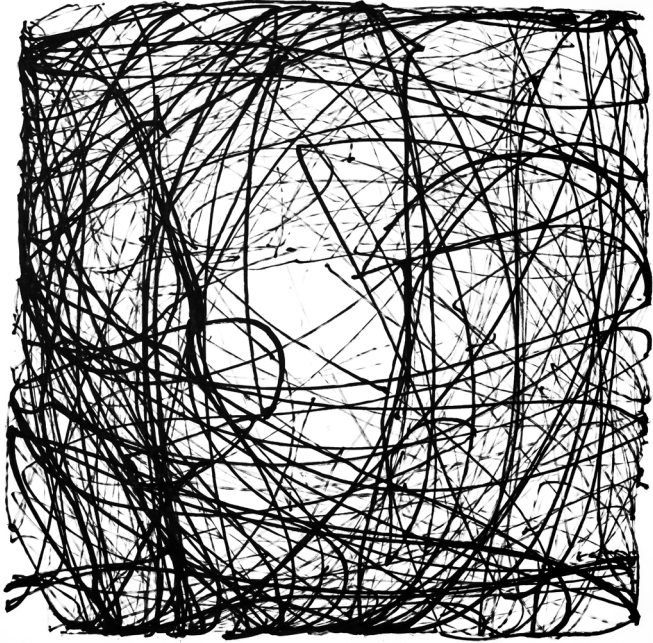


opa
professional

**POST-CONCEPTUAL
CONTEMPLATIONS**





POST-CONCEPTUAL CONTEMPLATIONS

BY

opa professional

OPA Professional

is a project by **OPA group (Obsessive Possessive Aggression)**, working on the borderline of art, media and performance. OPA researches social, cultural and everyday issues, as well as researching the ways of thinking and behavior of certain communities in shifting social and political conditions.

OPA was founded in 2001 by visual artists Slobodanka Stevceska (*1971, Skopje, Macedonia) and Denis Saraginovski (*1971, Skopje, Macedonia). Both artists studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje. OPA has had solo exhibitions in Macedonia, Estonia, Slovenia, Croatia, France, Germany, USA and the Netherlands. OPA has also exhibited widely in group exhibitions and festivals, such as: *Transmediale*, Berlin; *Transeuropa - European Theatre and Performance Festival*, Hildesheim; *Freewaves' Biennial of New Media Arts*, Los Angeles; *Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, Moscow; etc. OPA has received residency fellowships in Estonia, France, Germany and Switzerland.

Using the language of abstract art, ***OPA Professional*** expresses the cosmogonical artistic impulse to penetrate into the ontological strains of their own microcosm. The inventiveness and intuitiveness of the unrestrained gesture is the driving artistic force of the composition, tending towards a certain generality and bringing closer the metaphysical inner world of the painter, where the use of colors adds complexity to the process of uncovering the components of rational thought and of spontaneity. Thus, the playfulness of the repetitive patterns, emphasizes the permanent possibility of new creative impulses, with an integrity towards the overall expression and with complete affirmation of the drawer's idea.

With this self-representation using the associative forms of the artistic creations *Something In Nothing*, *A Stone In a Shoe*, *Infinity* and others, OPA Professional opens a new chapter in the contemporary trends of the Macedonian fine arts, in general.

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SOMETHING IN NOTHING

This catalogue essay coincides with a new step in my life: returning to Skopje, Macedonia, after 16 years in London, and establishing a new platform for art and curatorial experimentation, through a wide range of media - public exhibitions; online exhibitions; international residencies and an agency. This context is relevant for this essay, especially as it coincides with my newly-formed perspective of the cultural scene/art system in Macedonia that I am currently revisiting. It is likewise relevant in view of the fact that the OPA group's proposal for an exhibition deals precisely with the very conditions which define the visual arts at this very moment in Macedonia.

I enjoyed observing Dana and Denis preparing the exhibition, gently unfolding the immense sheets of paper, carefully maintaining the flatness of their surface and closely checking for dust particles and indentations. The paper sheets (300 gsm, white, grey, red, black sheets...) contain fine and precise drawings with a multitude of lines made by coloured marker pens. Feeling somewhat anxious about the growing desire to indulge in the sense of visual pleasure provoked by these interwoven lines, I ask myself: how were those lines made? Why do they interlock in the ways that they do? By asking myself those questions, I am stepping into the 'safe grounds' of contemplating the production of fine art. But instantly, the question arises within me - am I trapped in that most misleading and misguided approach to the evaluation of visual art - assessing the work of art according to the artist's method of (physical) production of the work?

I recall a review of Matthew Barney's exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, in the Telegraph newspaper: *'Matthew Barney - perhaps the **most original artist alive** - has his first UK show this week. Dorment **was given exclusive access** to his **extraordinary creative process**...'*^{*1}

After numerous years of working as an artist, I still find those highlighted words puzzling. What does it mean to describe something as being '*most original*'? How do critics define '*originality*'? How is Richard Dorment actually, physically observing this '*extraordinary creative process*'?

The members of OPA have often tried to dematerialize the work of art (*Announcement*, 2011; *Bollocks*, 2009); furthermore, they also made themselves into a service (*Professional Site-Specific Installers*, 2004), but they have never previously contemplated a 'return to the origins' of fine art production, where words such as '*original*' or '*extraordinary creative process*' may be applicable.

One wonders if there are any particular motives that influenced OPA to create *OPA Professional* project? If this remains (intentionally) unclear, the following set of thoughts explain (with certainty), why *OPA Professional* has been selected to inaugurate the opening of the **Serious Interests Agency** in Skopje.

*1 Richard Dorment, Title: *Matthew Barney: A visionary straining at the leash*, 18.07.2007 www.telegraph.co.uk

*2 Although this shift in the understanding and creation of visual art is characteristic of recent Macedonian art, this approach extends beyond borders and could be seen as a current international 'fashion' in contemporary art.

Reason 1 - In the recent work by younger generations of Macedonian artists, the return to beauty, formalism and visual attractiveness, is evident – it is work in which classical norms of aesthetics prevail. In this work by younger Macedonian artists, there is little, or no, direct (or even hidden) critique of the art-world as a system. There is no interfering with the position of authority, elitism or conformism, nor is there any serious engagement with social/political issues, which otherwise characterises the work by earlier generations of artists - the generation to which OPA belongs. *2

Perhaps the *OPA Professional* project, is an attempt by OPA to come closer to the contemporary flows within the art-world, an attempt to make themselves more appealing or relevant to certain critics, curators and potential art buyers. *OPA Professional* represents a certain fading-out, or withdrawal of OPA's position as conceptual artists, in order to align themselves with the contemporary canons in our society, as this seems to be the only framework within which artists in Macedonia today can operate.

Reason 2 - While revisiting the Macedonian art scene, I realised that many artists do not 'stay true' to their aims. Indeed, a number of artists are producing work that may appear to have been authored by two completely different artists. For example, the public may encounter an artist whose work is genuinely socio-politically engaged, while simultaneously the same artist produces other works primarily dealing with pure (abstract) forms, stylish colour schemes and general compositional issues. Such artists occupy two totally different identities, which could not even be associated with a 'pret-a-porter' fashion production (where the same collection is translated and produced into a cheaper version for the wider public) as the artist's two identities are essentially against one another.

This form of duality, or even schizophrenia, is supported by both the art institutions and various funding bodies: cultural workers; art critics, curators, art buyers and finally also the media – who are all essentially responsible for this approach of 'anything goes'. This situation in the sphere of culture, is a reflection of a general inconsistency in the society around us, where politicians opportunistically swap sides – from left to right, right to left, and again from right to left... without really taking a position and stating a firm set of beliefs.

Does this exhibition, therefore, represent an attempt by OPA to 'join the club' or an attempt to find ways in which to enable another, alternative, 'factory-made' (self-generative) mode of artistic production?

Reason 3 - *OPA Professional* intentionally applies the methodology of various techniques, skills and styles learned while the members of OPA studied at the Faculty of Fine Art in Skopje, Macedonia. This exhibition consists of ten works on paper, that could be judged according to the artists' ability to apply an academic set of skills and visual, aesthetic values, such as: the quality of line weight, the ability to artfully apply a well-balanced colour scheme, etc. *OPA Professional* project could therefore be evaluated from the standpoint of academicism, by local academics.

We (SIA) would like to invite local academics and critics to make their assessment and evaluation of the exhibited work according to such criteria. However, before any such attempts are made, I would like to ask the following. Does this kind of work make their other works, produced by the OPA group collaboratively since 2001 - non-academic and therefore irrelevant, even non-existent? The ten exhibited drawings are signed with the signature *OPA Professional*; should OPA therefore sign their other projects with the name *OPA Amateurs*?

And, by extension, could/should the work by all other Macedonian artists, that have likewise endeavoured to escape academic and aesthetic canons, be signed as work by amateur creators? Neither OPA, nor any of us other Macedonian artists whose work is more conceptual, contextual, site-specific, performative, etc. - have been formally educated for these specific ways of thinking and working.

In conclusion, I am not certain whether or not OPA, in their project *OPA Professional*, are applying any aspects characteristic of their previous work - a sense of layering, criticality, an aspect of cynicism or 'game strategy'. However, I am certain that by exhibiting these 10 drawings of 'nothing', that there is 'something' in this exhibition. Something that accurately and acutely mirrors the current conditions within the Macedonian art system and society in general.

Macedonian artists, be anxious about what you see in this exhibition.

Nada Prlja, 2014

LIST OF WORKS

Something in Nothing

2014, acrylic on paper, 70x100cm

Archaic Beginning

2014 acrylic and marker on paper, 70x100cm

Caught in the Net

2014 acrylic on paper, 100x70cm

Communication Error

2014 acrylic on paper, 70x100cm

Order in Chaos

2014 acrylic on paper, 70x100cm

Entities

2014 acrylic on paper, 100x70cm

Infinity

2014 marker on paper, 70x100cm

Enraged Bull

2014 acrylic and ink on paper, 70x100cm

Pebble in the Shoe

2014 acrylic on paper, 70x100cm

Eternal Flame

2014 acrylic on paper, 70x100cm

Serious Interests Agency (SIA) is an independent project space, based in Skopje, Macedonia. SIA promotes socially engaged creative and theoretical practices. SIA supports artistic, curatorial and theoretical/research activities, including urban and architecture related research. SIA is interested in work that investigates, observes, analyzes and constructively and creatively responds to our local context.

SIA engages with a wide range of media: public exhibitions, online exhibitions, residencies, presentations & open discussions, as well as publications. Initiators and directors of SIA are Nada Prlja (art) and Daniel Serafimovski (architecture).

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by OPA Professional

<http://seriousinterestsagency.com/opa-professional/>

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GALLERY OPENING TIMES

WED - FRI 11am - 5pm, SAT 11am - 2pm

Other days by appointment only.

