

# SLAVICA JANEŠLIEVA



National Gallery of Macedonia







The turbulent political and social changes that took place after 1990 in Eastern Europe, including Macedonia, could surely not but be reflected in the art scene as well. Macedonian art — in particular the visual arts — seemed to need such a radical historical upheaval in order to be awakened from the fairly comfortable and, without a doubt, the hibernating sleep known as socialist reality.

Or perhaps this was just a generational turning point — a new, young and maturing generation of artists with a different sensibility, with fresh ideas, with an uncompromising faith in their art and (maybe) in their own role in society.

Whatever the case, there is no doubt that post-1990 Macedonian visual arts were reborn as an independent territory of the spirit, open to novel brave concepts and explorations of the new frontiers of art. As there was no longer a single Dominant Truth, all individual truths were now genuine!

To begin with, this younger generation of artists took a decisive stance and *positioned* itself in favor of the post-modernist way of thinking about art on the one hand, and also showed an affinity with and great interest in dialog, comment and opinion, on the other... in the creative elaboration of many segments of everyday life, ranging from current events to deeply intimate experiences. Their art can be described as a *new outlook* on art, and basically as a *committed* position on the role of the artist and his or her art in society. To be more specific, these artists have been ready to take personal responsibility and publicly declare their position on a number of fundamental social issues of local or global significance. This is a relatively new situation in contemporary Macedonian fine art: upon his or her own initiative, the artist takes an active position and openly and clearly, often ardently or ironically, deals with current situations in society. Their interest or committed artistic expression is directed to some of the most pressing issues (not only) of Macedonia's reality: war/survival, identity/globalization, democracy/totalitarianism, tradition, social issues, problems of the individual in society, etc.

We can safely assume that post-1990 Macedonian art has two main currents:

markedly committed: these works of art are characteristic for their provocatively open and direct views of or answers to current situations:

subtly referential: these works of art place an emphasis on personal, intimate and even poetic narration, but with clear and recognizable general allusions and situations.

**Slavica Janešlieva** is undoubtedly one of the most striking representatives of that younger generation, an artist with an exceptional talent for visual narration and a fully developed and recognizable artistic expression. Her works of art, regularly present on the Macedonian and international art scenes over the past ten years, explore the essence of the visual expression in a unique way and from various aspects, looking for the appropriate "framework" which will unite the "story" and the artistic, personal and general, the part and the whole. Within the context of the two aforementioned currents, Janešlieva seems to stand firmly and self-consciously — in the middle. Her works (often executed in cycles) experiment in both directions, spanning ordinary patterns and traditional borders, persistently prodding her memory, sometimes poking our common wounds — works of art that are often seen as hermetic, even though they are open to everyone for "reading".

A fact that should by no means be overlooked is that Janešlieva specialized in graphic art/printmaking during her art school years. She is not just one of the many Macedonian graphic artists/printmakers, but one of those rare ones who have indefatigably worked in this art discipline, and with excellent results to boot. In fact, one of her first, most impressive works of art was the graphic installation entitled *Sheepfold* (1997): a particularly inventive break out of the traditional concept of graphic art, or more precisely, an exploration into the possibilities of making graphic art spatial. Why does the graphic sheet need to be two-dimensional — simply hung on a wall — when it can also feel very

comfortable in the "three-dimensional sign simulation," with its third dimension highlighted in a kind of ritual graphic installation? This work indicated that Janešlieva's interest would further lean towards the non-traditional artistic techniques, including the object, installation and multimedia projects.

Janešlieva came up with a similar concept (in the spatial arrangement) in her graphic installation, *Letters* (1998).

Sometime later, particularly in her works of the *Narratives* and *Symbols* cycles (2004), her graphic art returned to the (technically) stiller and more traditional waters of working in print, without relinquishing some of her non-typical graphic procedures (for example, the manner in which she uses photography) or her distinctive artistic narrative traits. As Kon?a Pirkoska so fittingly observes, "a common thread connects" all these works of Janešlieva's, and from that same thread "the obsessive presence of traces of the past makes itself subtly manifest."

This conclusion can be used to describe more or less Janešlieva's complete work to date: a *fragmentary* archaeology of memories — personal, family and general, combined in visual representations, full of nostalgic and symbolic metaphors and meanings.

In fact, Janešlieva's entire artistic work up to now — prints, installations, objects, etc. — adheres mainly to the general modalities of what is known as the "art in the first person," or more precisely, to the domain of "intersubjectivity" and the (self)-reflexive. This means that all of her projects — that stick to an almost continuous, very personal "story" — are linked in a kind of self-referential system composed of segmented stories with an intimate/family background. In this context, the intimate/family elements can be regarded as a substitute for those of general/social nature, as an "escape" from this specific or similar social reality, although in their very essence they are deeply connected with some important (traditional, moral...) dilemmas of the global environment.

As mentioned above, Janešlieva's explicit interest in adding a three-dimensional quality to her work was to "involve" her in a series of projects of multimedia character.



Sheep fold
13 intaglio wood prints, 250x500x100cm.; 1997.



Letters photographics, aquatint, etching, stencil, hair, plastic foil, adhesive foil; sixty objects (each 14x14cm.); 150x500X0,3cm.; 1998.

In her installation, *Reading the Clouds* (1999), consisting of pillows that represent clouds, Janešlieva returns to her childhood years, nostalgically redesigning her favorite children's games as reminiscences of that most carefree period of our lives.

But in her projects, *Remembering an Idealist* (2001), and particularly in *Story Telling* (2000 and 2001), Janešlieva opens, most directly perhaps, the family chest of generational traditions, retelling/visualizing events, stories and "legends" that have been retold in her family for decades. This is possibly a visual reinterpretation of her memories, since she re-retells the same stories she heard during her childhood by building new pictorial representations. Precisely these representations are supposed to be that pure essence, the ultimate pictorial essence of childhood memories, "images" that have remained most vividly impressed in memory as the sublimate/paraphrase of specific stories: bread pierced by forks (the body of Christ), chess and sheepskin (a prisoner's story), etc.

It was in this period that Janešlieva began to frequently "pack" her work in wooden boxes — a modern version of traditional family chests — as the best way to preserve and archive valuable memories. She "packs" her nostalgic and personal symbolic "memorabilia" in the same manner: Love and Interest, Crucifixion, A Face-A Mirror, etc.

As underlined earlier, the continuity of the self-reflexive is often interrupted by projects closely related to general and agonizing aspects of everyday life. Some of her projects that can be placed in this context include *Jars with Wishes for Things to Disappear* (2000), *Can We Do Without Doors?* (2001) and *Cry* (2002).



Reading the Clouds
12 ink-jet prints on transfer films, 6 pillows (each 70x50cm),
video beam: dimensions variable, 1999.











Jars With Wishes For Things to Dissapear plotter prints, each 70x50cm; 2000.









**CAN WE DO WITHOUT DOORS !?** 

"The basic characteristics of the religion of the old Slavs could be synthesized into the following three: animalism, magic and a cult of the predecessors, which is the most important one... Their experiences and their knowledge have been preserved in our folk literature."

Kiril Penushliski

Among the Macedonian people there is a tradition of telling and retelling a large number of legends, tales and stories and thus passing them on from one generation to the next.

The stories I am trying to tell you are about my family, which I have heard from my grandparents, both from my grandmothers and my grandfathers.

Let me ask you something? When somebody tells you a story what is it you remember? Do you remember the exact words the narrator used or in your mind do you create your own "picture" about the story? And do you use your own words when you retell that picture?

In the Balkans nothing is as simple as it seems.

I believe that both family histories and family stories are a proof of that.

S.J.

# STORY TELLING





Chess and Sheep Skin wood-case, silkscreen print, leatherette, photographics, glass-case, plotter print, plastic foil, bread chess figures; 60x45x6cm and 40x40x9cm; 2001.



Crusifixion wood-case, plotter print, silkscreen print; 32x45x10cm; 2002.

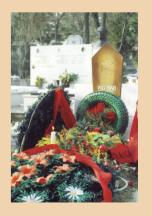


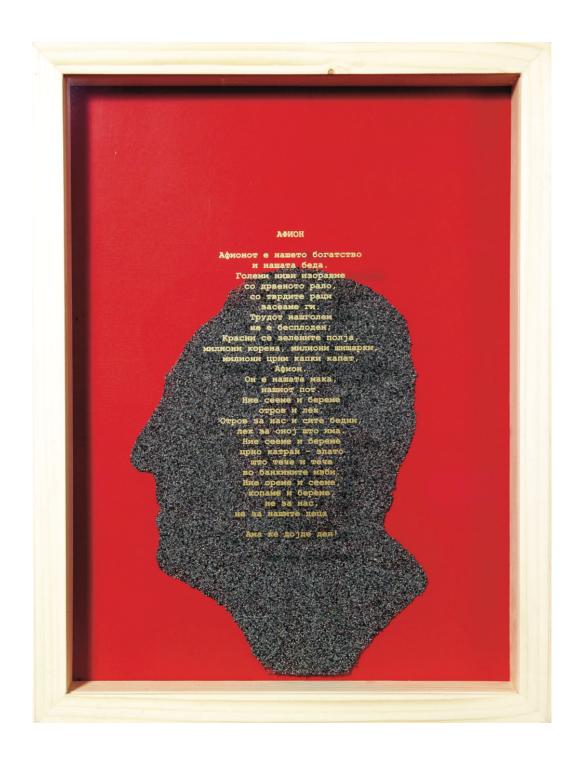
Love and Interest wood-case, sateen, plotter print, ink-jet print, silcscreen print; 53x33x15cm; 2002.











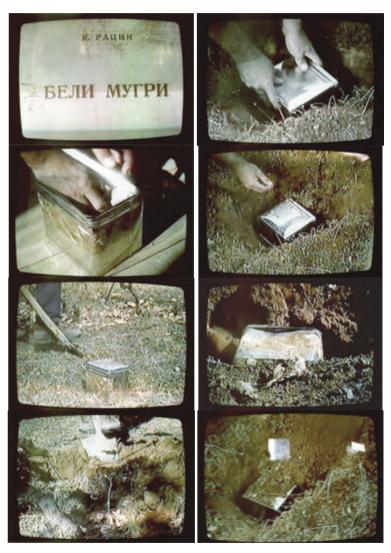
Opium wood-case, poppy seeds, paper, silcscreen print; 42x32x6cm.; 2001.



The White Dawns - The Burial of The Language metal box, ink-jet print, video, monitor, recorder; 2001.



Detail.



Details from video.

two metal beds, sateen, embroided text, shells, video beam, sound: dimensions variable: 2002.

Probably her most well-known and most exploited project of this kind is A Cry — a committed symbiosis of personal and general experiences. Emotionally affected and deeply concerned about the ecological disaster of Lake Dojran at that time, paraphrasing a local legend, Janešlieva produces an impressive combination of her personal feelings (the anguish caused by the extinction of the lake's water world) and the general situation (the circumstances in the Macedonian society). The two (hospital) beds are actually Procrustes' beds: the first is "The Macedonian National Consciousness Bed" which includes a Macedonian national flag and a pillow with an embroidered quotation referring to Macedonia from a 1906 traveler's account by H. N. Brailsford, and the other one is "The Wailing Bed" covered by dead shells from the shores of Lake Dojran. The entire "scene" is an explicit cry — pain materialized, an impressive metaphor of the traumatic temptations of Macedonia's everyday life at the time.



**A CRY** 





The Wailing Bed

"This work is actually dedicated to emotions: the feelings of sorrow, pain, revolt, pride, joy, beauty.... i.e. the ability of perciving and experiencing things as a confirmation of the individual's existence. In other words "A Cry" is a revolt against the indifference of the "subject-in-agony", or even a rejection of its position of helplessness and withdrawal...

### Materialization of pain

One of the essential elements in "A Cry" is insistence on the patient and long process of handwork in the creation of the artwork. In Janešlieva's symbolic language this has the meaning of some kind of a shamanic cure. The endless embroidering as a symbolic and true process of shaping the emotions and the consciousness is juxtaposed with the truth of the painful awareness that nothing has changed even after one hundred years since the statement made by H.N. Brailsford in the ironical and ridiculing anecdote about the corruptive meaning of the comfort of beds, which are at the root of "the Macedonian problem". The meaning of the suggestive treatment applied in "The Wailing Bed", is similar. There the materialization of pain and "the return of the object to history" resembles the patient spreading of lace made of sharp, but very fragile shells."

Zoran Petrovski, *A Cry* (catalogue), MOCA, Skopje, 2002, p.10, 11



Detail.

"It was once my good fortune to obtain from the Vali of Salonica an explanation of the Macedonian problem as concise as it was true. "It is all the fault of the Bulgarian schools," he declared. "In these nests of vice the sons of the peasants are maintained for a number of years in idleness and luxury. Indeed, they actually sleep on beds. And then they go back to their villages. There are no beds in their fathers' cottages, and these young gentlemen are much too fine to sleep on the floor. They try the life for a little, and then they go off and join the revolutionary bands. What they want is a nice fat Government appointment." The Vali succeeded in condensing in these brief and characteristic sentences the main facts of the situation, and his summary had the merit of illustrating not merely the Bulgarian, but also the Turkish standpoint. The question of beds (to adopt the Vali's formula) is at the root of the Macedonian difficulty. The motive of revolt, in other words, lies as much in the economic grievances of the peasantry as in the political aspirations of the educated class. In a land which ought to be one of the richest corners of Europe the villagers are sunk in a hopeless poverty-a poverty, moreover, which their rulers regard as their natural and predestined lot."

H.N. Brailsford, Macedonia, It's Races and Their Future, London, Methuen & Co., 1906, p.42



The Macedonian National Consciousness Bed



Detail.



3 wood-cases, 23 eggs, lettreset, plotter print, silcsreen print, 2 porcelain plates, 9 snail shells, mirror, 2 glasses; 100x400x15cm.; 2003.

# **FRAGILITY OF LIFE**



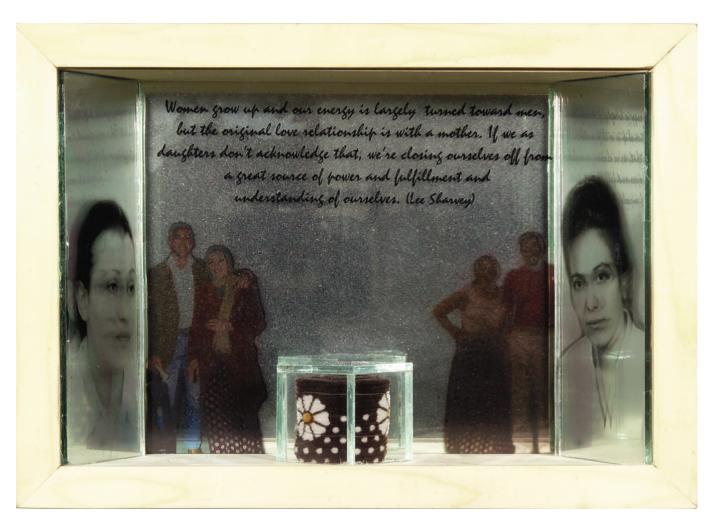
Detail.



Detail.



Detail.



A Face-A Mirror wood-case, 3 mirrors, ink-jet print, glass-case, cloth; 24x34x10cm.; 2003.

Janešlieva's most recent project, a part of her series of committed projects, is entitled The Game (2005). The game she has chosen this time is chess again one of her favorite (symbolic) playthings she also used in her other projects. In this particular case, however, the artist offers a real game — a specific, already completed game of chess with a known outcome. There is only a "slight" ironic/sarcastic artistic intervention in that identified game: the pieces bear the names of individual countries. According to some mysterious code similar to that of Nostradamus or according to her own logic of a "global strategist," Janešlieva has given the pieces the names of the world's major powers and also of many smaller countries known to us all as the world's crisis spots. But as an artist and a "strategist". Janešlieva endows herself with another advantage: in her arrangement of the game, the real power of the countries rarely corresponds to the power of the chosen pieces in chess. (In other areas of life, such an arrangement would probably cause a series of diplomatic incidents.) In this game of international and global positioning, countries gain or lose their power according to completely new, artistic parameters. Some abandon the "historical scene" unexpectedly guickly... will they manage to survive? Of course, the game has to be played to the end to find out who "the toughest" is. And if you don't like this ending, then imagine yourself as a strategist and invent your own game, guided by your own parameters!

If I am allowed to give a brief summary of ten years of an artist's creative activity, I believe that two things have to be emphasized about Slavica Janešlieva's artistic expression to date. The first thing is her impressive, captivating storytelling, the lightness with which she draws all those moments/stories from her memory, "mixing" the various contexts, periods, sequences of events and situations in the best postmodernist storytelling tradition... not insisting on her own version, but allowing the viewer to compose his or her own story. The second thing that has to be mentioned is her exceptional talent for visualizing narration: memory/narration is effortlessly transformed into representation, an object, color, materialized substance — resulting in a powerful synthesis of history/tradition and everyday life, great ideas and small things, emotions and reflections, metaphors and meanings.

Zlatko Teodosievski



The Game world map, zinc plate, adhesive foil, paper, magnets; 60x95cm; 2005.

### ANDERSSEN - KIESERITZKY

## The immortal game

```
1. e4
          e5
    2. f4
          f4
  3. Lc4
          Dh4
  4. Kf1
           b5
           Sf6
 5. Lb5:
 6. Sf3
          Dh6
  7. d3
          Sh5
 8. Sh4
          Dg5
  9. Sf5
           с6
           Sf6
  10. g4
 11. Tg1!
           cb5
 12. h4
           Dg6
 13. h5
           Dg5
 14. Df3
           Sg8
 15. Lf4:
           Df6
 16. Sc3
           Lc5
17. Sd5!
           Db2:
18. Ld6!
          Lg1:?
19. e5!!
          Da1:+
 20. Ke2
           Sa6
21. Sg7:+
            Sf6
22. Df6:+
            Sf6
23. Le7
            mat.
```

Detail.

Slavica Janešlieva' s most recent series of prints which, due to their binary structure, are entitled Narratives and Symbols, have been created in the period between 1998 and 2004. Although conceived on entirely different stylistic and thematic concepts they share a common feature which, in a very subtle way, manifests an obsessive presence of traces of time past.

After the initial reception of the differently modelled and performed series we as recipients start to look for details. The titles of the prints themselves refer to what manifests itself as their mutual distinction, i.e. the presence and the absence of (auto)referentiality, (auto)citation and narrativeness as well as to the artist's passion and pleasure in the act of experimenting with different kinds of graphic techniques. In the subtle combining, i.e. in the shading and harmonisation of techniques, we sense the emanation of the artist's pleasure in the outcomes of her alchemic play. In Janešlieva's different discourses we detect the identical rhythm of the soft, sophisticated emotional melodic structure of the line which establishes a balance between the luxuriously intoned lyric and the relaxing, economical narrative continuity of both series.

The synchronised reception of Janešlieva's prints, with the magic of their lyricism, their soft, warm lines, which since her early childhood continue their creative dreaming and hovering over the surface of the paper, fascinates us a priori. Through her dreamings and fantasies, or to use Klee's expression, by her "dreaming the line", in various chronotopic contexts we follow the gradual development, i.e. the growth and formation, of the artist's creative identity.

In her journey along the intimate family and personal routes, in her readings and interpretations of the stories embroidered in the manuscripts and their association with the fragmentary drawings from early childhood, as well as in her personal and family photographics, in their simulated old coating we do not only recognise the brightness of her own personal myth about childhood, but also the joy in and the nostalgia for our own, although shabby and intense, nevertheless constantly existing myth.

The structure of Slavica Janešlieva's mythopoetic stories, spun and woven out of old letters, family photo-albums and children's drawings, places them on the pedestal of her current inventiveness. They signify the centre, the sacred places in which we recognise with joy the flourishing of the lines and, as Barthes says, "the blooming of symbols". The prints from the series Narratives are all a kind of testimony, a collection of multiplied fragments of family annals in which Janešlieva, through her own discourse and point of view, writes herself (in), imprints herself and reads herself. Through the concentrated emotion manifested by the colours and obscured photographs and drawings the artist at the same time becomes a narrator who guides us through the trajectory of both her own and our reminiscences. Gradually from one print to the next she subtly directs us towards an affirmation of our longing after the origin of the primary, long forgotten archaic virginity.

Retrospectively projecting, writing and dreaming herself through the play of citations and autocitations, Janešlieva suggests a subtle dialogue on love, which expects from us a response with an identical emotion and identification of her desires with those of our own. The magic of Janešlieva's lyric textual weaving secures a further flourishing, a polisemy of the narration which inevitably emanates an unstable and constantly new, a changeable image of interpretation.

Kon~a Pirkoska,

Narratives and the Blooming of Symbols (catalogue), National Gallery, Skopje, 2004, p.4,5

# NARRATIVES AND SYMBOLS



Reminiscence I, mixed media, 70x100cm., 1998.



Reminiscence II, mixed media, 70x100cm., 1998.



The Name, mixed media, 43x77cm., 2004.



Come and see! There is an angel in the room., mixed media, 43x77cm., 2004.



Transparent memory, mixed media, 43x77cm., 2003.



Love/Ljupka, mixed media, 43x77cm., 2003.



The leaves whisper to me out of the past, mixed media, 25x70cm., 2004.



Life, mixed media, 50x70cm., 2004.



Stone signs XI, mixed media, 25x30cm., 2003.



Stone signs IX, mixed media, 30x25cm., 2003.



Stone signs I, dry point, 30x25cm., 2001.



Stone signs XII, dry point, 25x30, 2003.



Stone signs VI, dry point, 30x25cm., 2003.



Stone signs II, mixed media, 30x25cm., 2001.

#### **BIOGRAPHY**

#### Slavica Janešlieva

- 1973 -Born in Skopje, Macedonia.
- 1996 -BFA, Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje, Printmaking Department.
- 1998 -MFA, Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje.

#### Selected solo exhibitions:

- 2005 Stories, "Gallery MC", Macedonian Cultural Center, New York
- 2004 -Narratives and Symbols, National Gallery, Space 2, Chifte Amam, Skopje
- 2002 A Cry, Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje
- -Remembering an Idealist, Cultural Location "Site" "one degree gallery", Skopje
   -Story Telling and video performance All My Bicycles, Gallery Open, Bratislava
- 2000 -Story Telling, Künstlerhaus, Boswil, Switzerland
- 1999 Reading the Clouds, CIX Gallery, Skopje
- 1998 -Graphic Installation *Letters*, Open Graphic Studio, Skopje
- 1997 -Exhibition of prints with the Sheep Fold project, MKC, Skopje
- 1996 Prints, Art Gallery, Bitola

### Selected group exhibitions:

- 2005 -Global Fusion Close Up, urban art, Melbourne, Vienna
  - -Alien Body, Skopje City Museum, Skopje
  - -Tokio International Mini-Print Triennial, Tama Art University, Tokyo
- 2004 Cosmopolis 1 Microcosmos x Macrocosmos, State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessalonika
  - -Multiplication The Macedonian Way, Open Graphic Studio, Skopje
  - -ReAffiliations: Sightings, National Art Gallery, Skopje, National Art Gallery, Sofia
  - -Prints from the Balkans, Faluntriennailen 2004, Dalarnas museum, Falun, Sweeden
- -The Conceptual Discourse in Macedonia, Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje
   -6th Mondial Triennial of Small Sized Prints, Association Mouvement Art
   Contemporain, Chamalières, France
  - -We Are The Weather Second Biennial of Contemporary Visual Arts By Balkan Female Artists, National Art Gallery, Sofia
  - -The Masters of Graphic Arts, 7th International Biennial, Municipal Museum of Arts, Györ, Hungary
  - -Dialogues, UNESCO, Paris, Ministry of Culture, Rome
- 2002 *-22nd Nadezda Petrovic Memorial*, Art Gallery "Nadezda Petrovic", Cacak, Serbia *-Body Thinks*, Open Graphic Studio, Skopje
  - -Bound/less Borders, Goethe Institute Inter Nationes, public art project with billboards, Belgrade, Skopje, Sofia, Bucharest, Saraevo, Kassel)
  - -Links, Graphica Creativa 10th Triennial, Jyväskylä Art Museum, Jyväskylä, Finland

2001	-Small Talks, Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje -Perfect Match, exhibition of public art projects, City Shopping Mall, Skopje -Five contemporary macedonian printmakers, Gallery "Cvadrato di Omega", Rome	
-Communication. Experience of interaction., Buisiness Ce -Graphic Experiment 2, Open Graphic Studio, Skopje -International Triennial of Graphic Art, Institute, Museum		•
	Bitola, Macedonia	d Gallery Bilola,
	-Artist(s) in Residence (participation in the project of Luchezar "Social Reality/Existence/Politics", L'autre moitie de l'Europe	,
	Paris, France -The 1st Cheju International Print Art Festival, Sogwipo Kind Cheju, Korea	dang Gallery,
1999 -Matrix, Trieste Contemporanea, Trieste, Italy -International Print Biennial, Art Gallery of Varna, Varna, Bulgaria -4th International Triennial Exhibition of Prints, Ino-cho Paper Museum, Kochi-shi, Japan		
		er Museum,
	-12th German International Exhibition of Graphic Art, Stadtsaal	, Frechen, Germany
	-The First Peep-show in the City, CIX Gallery, Skopje	
1998	-5th Biennial of Graphic Art, Cvijeta Zuzoric Art Pavilion, Belgrade, Serbia	
1997	<ul> <li>-19th International Exhibition of Prints, Prefectural Gallery, F</li> </ul>	kanagawa, Japan
Award	ords:	
2004	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	
2003 -Atanas Muchev Award, <i>Selection 2002</i> , Strumica -DENES Award, <i>Nominated Artists Exhibition</i> , Annual Award by the Civil		I by the Civil
	Society Foundarion in New York, Trust for Mutual Understar	•
Contemporary Art Center in Macedonia, Skopje		
2001	-First Prize, 1st International Mini Print Triennial, Tetovo -Grand Prix, 5th Biennial of the youth artists, Skopje	
2000		
	-Ratko Nestorovski - Kines Award, Revijalna exhibition, Skopje	
1998 1997		
1997	DA SE PR	ROVERI
Works	•	A TEKSTOT
	-National Gallery, Skopje, Macedonia -Jyväskylä Art Museum, Jyväskylä, Finland	
	IVVASKVIA ALI IVIUSEUITI .IVVASKVIA EIITIATIO	
	-World Bank, Washington D.C., USA	

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### Selected bibliography:

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- > Cankulovska, Maja "Slavica Janešlieva", Golemoto staklo, Nr. 14/15, p. 102-105, Skopje, 2002
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- > Petkovski, Boris "Slavica Janešlieva", MATRIX, Trieste Contemporanea, Italy, 1999
- > Vili}, Nebojša "Few Candies for Venice Art in Macedonia at the End of Millennium", p. 30, 31, 1999
- > Baceva, Zaharinka "Slavica Janešlieva / Ana Stojkovi\], Golemoto staklo, br. 7/8, str. 122, 123, Skopje, 1998

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