

NEW MODELS

Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia presents: NEW MODELS

Artist: Oriol Vilanova

Curator: Dessislava Dimova

From June 16 – July 23, 2022

Opening: June 16, Thursday, 6-8 pm ICA-Sofia Gallery

The way we structure our knowledge of the world as well as the way we choose to represent the world is a historical and ideological phenomenon. Arguably, the most widely accepted incarnation of this phenomenon is the museum. The museum is collecting and preserving but it is also selecting, interpreting and displaying knowledge thus reflecting the value system of the place and the time we inhabit.

Oriol Vilanova is engaging with the museum as precisely such kind of a sign of our time and world outlook. He is focusing mostly on museums of art and history. However, the artist has shifted his attention away from the value of the museum items themselves (as we know, the museum is often the main factor determining or confirming the value of a given object). Instead he has allowed himself to be “distracted” by the peripheral or plain utilitarian elements of the museum system for display and distribution.

For instance, the picture post-cards used to reproduce artifacts from the museum collections. Vilanova though acquires the postcards not from the museum shops but from the flea markets in various cities. The artist is tracking the “secondary” distribution of the postcards (which had been mailed as precisely postcards), their “death” (having been discarded from their primary use value) and their subsequent recycling within a new value order – not as images of historical artefacts, but as historical artefacts in themselves.

The “New Models” exhibition demonstrates another element from the language of the museum expositions – the display vitrines. “New Models” is part of an ongoing project for which the artist is borrowing display vitrines from various museums in the cities where he is presenting his works. He is showcasing the vitrines as exhibition items within the show. Completely empty, with no indication as to their origin and history, the vitrines transform into artefacts as if waiting to be interpreted, dated, classified, and potentially, why not – turned into museum items themselves.

Without being specifically altered nor selected by the artist, the vitrines in his exhibition in Sofia, represent a momentary snapshot of the institutional history and politics of the city’s museums. From the used materials and design, through the choice of a specific manner of visibility, and all the way to the practical availability (or not) of vacant vitrines, or to the reactions of the museum staff to the request of the artist – the vitrines are as much works of art as “clues” to the hidden narrative of the museum. Their empty volumes turn the viewers’ gaze outwards and back onto history, the people or all the accidental circumstances surrounding them.

An empty display vitrine is part of the ecology within our attitudes towards both the past and the future, towards the animate and inanimate nature; of our ability to preserve and destroy, to produce surplus and to create rarities. The static and distinct clumsiness of the vitrines is a reminder that it is a marker of an ever more outdated inclination we have to systematize and isolate instead of to filter through the objects (as well as ourselves) within

the flow of life.

The overcrowding of the small gallery space, dedicated to contemporary art and nestled in a former apartment, with museum display vitrines is an act of comparing and juxtaposing various regimes of representation and historicity while ultimately bringing forward the question about the vitality of art here and now.

Photos: Teodora Dzherekarova