

Nedko Solakov

(Cherven Briag, Bulgaria, 1957)

After graduating in Mural Painting from the Academy of Fine Arts of Sofia, Nedko Solakov is known most of all for his tiny drawings and written annotations, thin and interstitial, inscribed with black ink on the immaculate walls of the exhibition space. Despite being small-scale interventions, intentionally anti-monumental, his works manage to radically change the perception of the architecture of the museum or the gallery, turning around the expectations of the visitors who walk through the door. In his early versions, presented from 1993 with the title *Wallpaper*, the walls were entirely covered with rolls of elegant flowery wallpaper: Solakov did nothing more than add writings and figures only a few centimetres in size, which inevitably ended up mixing in with the dense pattern of the covering. With the passing of time, the artist found the courage to empty the space of all its contents, to the point of transforming the bare white wall into the ideal setting for his narrative. On first sight, the room appears relatively empty and only those among the visitors who decide not to pass through it straight away are rewarded, drawing ever closer towards the pen strokes applied by Solakov. Small and undecipherable, filled with anthropomorphic hominoids, they may easily be mistaken for scribbles left by some rather irreverent visitor who managed to sneak past the gaze of the museums guards. His 'doodles', as the artist himself calls them, lead the audience to carry out unusual movements: they need to bow forward, squat down, lean to the side or stand on tiptoe, gaze at the ceiling or screw up their eyes to interpret his minute writing. It's a matter of attention which challenges even the sharpest of gazes. We see this in *Eight Ceilings*, the site-specific intervention produced in 2013 along the architecture of the stairway at the GAM in Turin. The drawings are small, hidden among the bulges and stains of the ceiling: a fragmented tale is thus created which, dispersed in a space of passage between one floor of the museum and the other, only with great effort may be not just noticed but grasped in its entirety.

It's amusing to think that a previous version of these works foresaw an intervention on the wings of a number of Boeing 737s belonging to Luxair, thus being visible only to the passengers on board. In fact, Solakov has never hidden his own fear of flying, and has placed this defining element of his character under the lens of his own art on various occasions. His research, which takes the form of painting, installation, video and performance, is self-ironic and autobiographical, at times sentimental, other times cynical and open to the dimension of failure. Poised between reality and fiction, he is always capable of embracing wider themes, from the freedom of expression to the residues of the Soviet regime, right up to the dynamics that pull the strings of the contemporary art system.

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