

THE NATIONAL GALLERY
MUSEUM OF ART FROM THE SOCIALIST PERIOD

presents

LABOUR: When the Foundations Were Laid

20 June–24 November 2024

Vernissage on Thursday, 20 June, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.,

7, Lachezar Stanchev St., Sofia

The exhibition focuses on one of the most significant themes in the art of Socialism—labour. Among the artists behind the paintings, sculptures, graphics and applied art works, names such as Iliya Petrov, Dechko Uzunov, Stoyan Sotirov, Nikola Tanev, Stoyan Venev, Ekaterina Savova-Nenova, and Alexander Poplilov, stand out.

Both classic examples of Socialist Realism and unknown or previously unexhibited works are on display. In addition to their high artistic qualities, some of them represent authentic documents from one of the most controversial and dramatic periods in Bulgaria's political history. Such is Nikola Tanev's graphic series of the construction of the Lovech-Troyan Railway, the Kutsian mine, and the Republic colliery in Pernik, as well as graphic works by Pavel Valkov depicting the erection of the Georgi Dimitrov Mausoleum in Sofia.

After the Second World War, a totalitarian model of governance was established in Bulgaria, with the Communist Party at the helm. Within a few years only, control had been imposed on all spheres of political, social and cultural life. Art and culture began to perform propaganda functions. The new 'proletarian' or 'Party' art created its mythologemes, among which—along with the 'leader' and the 'hero'—the image of the worker was assigned a central place.

The Socialist world view made labour one of the principal ideologemes turning it into a rigid narrative and a tool for imposing its own power. It was labour itself that was the instrument, the means for transforming society and the moulding of the new man. The social demiurges remodelled this fundamental, age-old impulse and necessity of human beings to work to ensure their livelihood, into a glorified, almost sacral activity, standing on the loftiest pedestal of Socialist virtues.

The parade pathos of Socialist Realism dominated Bulgarian art from the late 1940s to the end of the 1950s, bequeathing classic examples of this artistic style and thematic engagement. In the subsequent decades of totalitarian rule, the interpretations and intonations of the expression of the theme would change; other motifs and novel imagery were to come, but these will be the subjects of the next editions of the 'Labour' exhibition.

Media Partner: BTA / Bulgarian News Agency.

For further information:

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