



Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

## Krassimir Terziev. *Background Action*

February 23 – May 4, 2008

**Press conference:** Friday, February 22, 2008, 11 am



**A joint exhibition by**  
Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart  
and Akademie Schloss Solitude

**Curated by**  
Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

## Introduction

From February 23 to May 4, 2008, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart is presenting the multimedia installation *Background Action* by the Bulgarian artist Krassimir Terziev.

With photographs, graphics, slides and videos, the installation draws attention to 300 Bulgarian extras who were flown to Mexico in 2003 for one of the most expensive Hollywood films at the time, *Troy* (USA 2004). Recruited as “elite troops” corresponding perfectly to the physiognomic ideal of the ancient Mediterranean fighter, the extras were first of all cheap labour, with a daily wage of US\$12.

*Background Action* is a walk-in “Making of” from the viewpoint of those people whose silent bodies create film crowds. The focus is on expectations, hopes, conflicts and disappointments. At the same time, the work critically and ironically traces the global, economic and political interconnections in the film industry.

The installation is a further development and three-dimensional translation of the experimental documentary film *Battles of Troy* that Terziev produced in 2005.

The exhibition is being developed in co-operation with Akademie Schloss Solitude. The publication *EXTRA WORK* will be available at the exhibition and showcases various of Terziev’s works that deal with the status of extras (2007, ed. Jean-Baptiste Joly, Akademie Schloss Solitude; concept and design: Krassimir Terziev).

## Background Action, 2006/07

### Spatial multimedia installation in four parts

- Slide show (mapping a film production in time and space)
- Nine channel video installation (extras talking)
- Photo/video installation (one vs. many)
- Spatial video installation (being everywhere at the same time)

In April 2003, less than a month before the Iraq War broke out the filming of one of the most expensive Hollywood movies of the time began – *Troy* by director Wolfgang Peterson starring Brad Pitt and Eric Bana. It was dedicated to Homer's famous epic of war of the same name.

Krassimir Terziev's documentary, *Battles of Troy* (2005), and the installation based on the latter, *Background Action* (2006-2007), are an account of the Hollywood production in the "Making of ..." style. *Troy* was shot on locations in Shepperton, UK, in Malta and Baja California Sur in Mexico. The main battle scenes were first to be shot in Morocco but due to the break out of the Iraq War, the producers moved to Mexico – a place of cheap labour for the US-American film production. However, *Troy* not only was shot in a country of cheap labour, but more people were shipped in, paid so little that it was affordable to transport them all the way from Bulgaria, 16,000 km away. With the help of the National Sports Academy in Sofia, 300 Bulgarian extras were recruited as an "elite army" because their appearances looked more like the Greek, respectively Trojan faces than those of the Mexicans. They were first paid \$12, and after a strike, \$22 a day. Their physical looks turned out to be of little of advantage to themselves, but greatly to the benefit of the entire endeavour.

Krassimir Terziev's work traces the format of the "Making of ..." film back from promotion film to documentary. Through interviews, geographic maps, scenes from the movie and shots from the set, he describes the micro and macro structure of the global economic and geopolitical relationships of the film industry. While superlatives of the type "the most expensive movie of all times" should guarantee its success, Terziev focuses on exploitation and profit-making from people's misery. It is not the director or the stars who are interviewed for this work, nor the producers or special effects experts – instead he interviews the Bulgarian extras. The silent bodies of the movie here not only tell about their own experiences. They also add images from Mexico in which for some brief seconds they are indeed the stars.

*Background Action* reveals the multi-layered interweaving of the filmed legendary war and the real violence taking the form of exploitation, of physical exhaustion in the heat, the accidents on the set, the social and in some cases physical conflicts within the ethnically diverse crowd of extras. And besides the fact that the filming of *Troy* coincided with the outbreak of an actual war, Terziev has drawn a number of other analogies between the Hollywood production and military operations. For instance, the Bulgarian extras were chosen by military experts. The maps with which Terziev visualizes the global operations during the filming of *Troy* resemble the plotting of military operations.

The "battles of Troy" were not just for cheap labour, but also in the name of attracting attention. The Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture, for instance, wanted the scenes to be shot on the original locations of the events – the Hissarluk mount in Çanakkale. But their efforts were in vain. Even the opening of the movie was not there but in Berlin, between the Sony Center and the Museum of Ancient History. Çanakkale received the Trojan Horse built for the movie. In Berlin Heinrich Schliemann's Troy returned back to itself. Wasn't Troy a German adventure, a German legend?

The adventure in *Battles of Troy* as well as in *Background Action*, however, is a journey into precariation, a kind of tourist precariation. The battle was taken up by bodies of low pay against other bodies of even smaller pay. "Sometimes it did seem like a battle between the Bulgarians and the Mexicans," Borislav Limonov said. Terziev places the Bulgarian participants in the focus of this adventurous conflict without taking sides himself. Instead, he leaves the ambivalence of the situation open: on the verge of exploitation, competition, gullibility, narcissism and the desire for self-assertion.

(Excerpt of the text *Precariation Now!* by Iris Dressler, in: *Extra Work*, Stuttgart 2007)

**Krassimir Terziev. *Background Action***

February 23 – May 4, 2008

**Press conference**

Friday, February 22, 2008, 11 am

**Opening**

Friday, February 22, 2008, 9 pm

**Artist's exhibition tour**

Saturday, February 23, 2008, 1 pm

**A joint exhibition by**

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart  
and Akademie Schloss Solitude

**Curated by**

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

**Supported by**

Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst des Landes Baden-Württemberg  
Kulturamt der Stadt Stuttgart

**Publication**

*EXTRA WORK*

Ed.: Jean-Baptiste Joly, Akademie Schloss Solitude  
merz&solitude, Reihe Projektiv

Concept and Design: Krassimir Terziev

With contributions by: Iara Boubnova, Ivailo Dichev, Iris Dressler, Jean-Baptiste Joly,  
Alexander Kiossev, Hedwig Saxenhuber

## Biography

### Krassimir Terziev

Born 1969 in Dobritch, Bulgaria. Lives in Sofia, Bulgaria.

### Education

National Academy of Fine Arts Sofia, Bulgarien (1997)

2006-08: Fellow of the Akademie Schloss Solitude

### Solo exhibitions (Choice)

2007 MAKING MOVIES, Galeria Noua, Bucharest, RO

BACKGROUND ACTION, Sofia City Art Gallery, Sofia, BG

2006 TERZIEV, SERAPIONOV, SULJEVIC, Beton Salon, MQ, Vienna, AT

2005 REMOTE RESEMBLANCES, Goethe-Institute Sofia, Sofia, BG

2004 EXCUSE ME, WHICH CITY IS THIS?, ATA Center/Institute of Contemporary Art, Sofia, BG

2002 ON THE BG TRACK, Belgrade Cultural Center, Belgrade, YU

2001 REALITY PIXELS, Irida Gallery, Sofia, BG

1999 EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE ALRIGHT, The Kitchen, New York, USA

1997 LET'S DANCE – CLOTHES FOR COLLECTIVE LIFE, XXL Gallery, Sofia

1996 LIBRARY PARANOIA/KRASSI'S APOLOGIES/NEGATIVE TV, P.A.R.K., 4DTV broadcasts, Amsterdam, NL

### Group exhibitions (Choice)

2007 THE PROJECTIONS PROJECT. Budapest Episode, Mucsarnok/Kunsthalle, Budapest, HU

ART VIENNA, Stand ICA Sofia, Vienna, AT

SEARCHING FOR AN IDEAL URBANITY, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, DE

KINO WIE NOCH NIE, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, DE

SUITCASE ILLUMINATED #5 ON PARALLEL ECONOMY, P74 Center and Gallery, Ljubljana, SL; Musee d'art

Contemporain du Val de Marne, Paris, FR

WE LOVE CINEMA, Hessel Museum of Art/Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, USA

ODYSSEUS IN SEARCH OF EUROPE, Online project by the Goethe-Institute, [www.goethe.de/odysseus](http://www.goethe.de/odysseus)

10 YEARS VIDEO ART IN BULGARIA, travelling exhibition, Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, BG

2006 THE PROJECTIONS PROJECT, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp, BE

WILDES KAPITAL II, Kunsthaus Dresden, DE

KINO WIE NOCH NIE, Generali Foundation, Vienna, AT

2005 PLAY SOFIA, Kunsthalle Wien, Projektraum, Vienna, AT

CENTRAL. New Art from New Europe, Kunstforum, BA, Vienna, AT

NEW VIDEO NEW EUROPE A Survey of Eastern European Video, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Dakota, USA

2004 NEW VIDEO NEW EUROPE. A Survey of Eastern European Video, TATE Modern, London, UK;

Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; The Renaissance Society, Chicago, USA

EXTENDED VIEWS, StadSchal, Maastricht, NL

2003 9TH. CAIRO BIENIAL, The Bulgarian participation, Ehnaton Art Center, Cairo, EG

BLOOD LINES & CONNECTIONS, Contemporary Art Museum, Denver, USA

VIDEO SCREENING 04, Galerie Martin Janda Raum für Aktuelle Kunst, Vienna; VTO, London; Zero, Piacenza;

Kurimanzutto, Mexico City; ICA, Sofia

THE LAST EAST-EUROPEAN SHOW, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, YU

EXPORT-IMPORT. CONTEMPORARY ART FROM BULGARIA, Sofia Art Gallery, Sofia, BG

### Screenings (Choice)

2007 CINE Y CASI CINE, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (MNCARS), Madrid, ES

14TH. NEW YORK UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL, New York, USA

2006 2ND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL FRANKFURT, Frankfurt/M, DE

28E FESTIVAL CINÉMA MÉDITERRANÉEN, Montpellier, FR

SCANNERS: The 2006 New York Video Festival, NY, USA

VISIONS DU REEL, Nyon Documentary Film Festival, Nyon, CH

RAUMPOLITIKEN. On Difference #2, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, DE

TELLING TIME, Sophiensäle, Berlin, DE

100 DESSUS DESSOUS 2006, Parc de la Villette, Paris, FR

10TH. INTERNATIONAL SOFIA FILM FESTIVAL, Sofia, BG

2005 BELLUARD BOLLWERK International Festival, Fribourg, CH

PLATEAUX Festival, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt/M, DE

2004 IMPAKT Festival for experimental film, video and new media, Utrecht, NL