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- Vladan Sibinovic



Listen to the Hummingbird, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 160 x 130 cm

# Vladan Sibinovic

## Marbles & Happiness in a Capitalist World



Serbian artist Vladan Sibinovic at his studio in Belgrade, Serbia

**Hello Vladan, it's a pleasure to have you. Let's start with some basics for people who don't know you. Who are you and what do you do?**

My name is Vladan Sibinovic and I was born in Serbia, where I received my Master's Degree in painting from the Faculty of Fine Art in Belgrade. I work across a wide range of different media. Primarily known for my acrylic on canvas paintings, I also make painted sculptures, installation, pastels and prints. Since 2015, I divide my time between New York and Belgrade, where I work as a visual artist. When creating, I am questioning the relationship between the individual and society, of external and inner spaces, consciousness and unconsciousness - personal and collective, sameness and difference. Often the focus of my work is dedicated to exploring the notion of happiness and nature of human communication, of both verbal and body language.

**Before speaking more about your work, I'd like to go back to your beginnings for a moment. Do you remember how you got into art in the first place? And from there, how has your art journey evolved?**

Ever since I can remember, I have had a strong desire to create something new and materialize my ideas, which I had innumerable in my head. Sometimes, it would be making up the entire storylines in which the actors were toys, inventing magical machines like a bicycle with wings, writing fairy tales and poems, drawing a comic about a robot called "Kvik Kvik" or painting with soft pastels. I am still convinced that I managed to push myself off the ground and soar a few centimetres into the air, descending at high speed on that flying bicycle down the street, haha. I believe that a child's life is very creative and how children at an early age endlessly enjoy and learn through play and creativity. The first few years of education are also cre-

ative and include making paintings, collages, sculptures and other craftworks. What often happens, when people grow up, most of them stop doing it on a daily basis. The artists continue with that practice. I did the same thing, I've never stopped playing, making art and I guess, I've never grown up in a way. At the age of ten, I took a more serious step into the world of art by taking my first painting lessons and after just three years had the first solo exhibition, childish but a bit ambitious as well. From 2002 to 2006 I was in a "Tehnoart" Grammar School- School of Arts & Crafts, department of conservation of cultural goods. Then in 2006 I entered the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade and my path toward becoming a professional artist kicked off.

During my junior year I was a recipient of the Traunkirchen Akademie Summer Fellowship, where I had the opportunity to learn from artists such as Arnulf Rainer, Eva and Adele, and Xenia Hausner. After graduating, I partook in many projects through artist residency programs. I participated in Glo' Art in Belgium and the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg, where I was honored by mentor Imran Qureshi. Most recently, I participated in Artist in Residence programs at Chinatown Soup, NYC and Éva Kahán Artists in Residence Programme in Tuscany, Italy. So far I have had eight solo shows and have been involved in several other group exhibitions in USA and Europe.

**Your work revolves around the relationship between society and the individual, the nature of human condition, and the notion of happiness. Can you please tell us more about it?**

The phenomenon of happiness and the search for it through a physical and spiritual journey is the keystone that unites the latest series of works "Marbles" and is a logical continuation of my previous series "Helpful Things". Every painting in this body of work introduces a fragment taken out of a particular event, specific moments, objects and places which have positively affected me and left a sense of joy in an inventory of my inner experience; art itself, travel, mountains, sea, love, friendship, artist residency programs, animals, books etc. Hap-

piness is always elusive, an ideal to which we aspire to. It is very difficult to define.

***"Through my paintings, I try to capture that thin line between the idea that happiness is outside of us and the concept that we need to find happiness within ourselves."***

The duality (internal-external) that I encounter when trying to understand happiness is present in the paintings in the interior-exterior relationship. The viewer is placed inside a comfortable, safe and seemingly perfect room where it can be lost in reverie. Surrounded by elements rich in symbolism that tell stories, person is led to introspection, while at the same time is faced with a portal in the form of a window or door that introduce it to the outside world. "Our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word." - Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space.

Closely related to the phenomenon of happiness is the motif of the game, which is repetitively presented on the paintings in the form of marbles, that occasionally leave the canvas as a site-specific installation. Through play, we free ourselves from learned patterns, explore unknown landscapes, descend into the unconscious and get to know aspects of our psyche, the elements from which the human being is woven, archetypes, shadow, self (Carl Jung). That way we get to know others through ourselves.

**Is there any piece that you'd like to speak more about in detail?**

I would like to mention a painting that was a part of my solo show at the Monolog gallery in Belgrade in September 2023, after which it ended up in a private collection in the New York City. The central work at the gallery, after which the exhibition was named "Listen to the hummingbird" (p. 41), was inspired by Leonard Cohen's last track recorded for his 15th and final studio album, "Thanks for

the Dance”. For me, the poem radiates depth, beauty and simplicity, which reminds me that at certain moments we have the privilege to catch a glimpse of the answers to some big questions in the little things and to let ourselves go to them in order to take us from the complexity of life to a certain sense of tranquility.

**“Accordingly, when my mind is cluttered and overwhelmed with information, through my works I try to summon things, simplify my environment and present temporary moments of happiness.”**

As I mentioned earlier, the primary inspiration for creating the painting is Cohen’s song. However, just as my paintings are layered in composition and narrative, so the very motifs we can see in them often have multiple meanings. In the painting “Listen to the Hummingbird” I wanted to present the atmosphere of love, life, awakening, spring, physical and spiritual prosperity. It’s all about love! Starting with the hummingbird, which as the main actor represents the lightness of falling in love and engages in a love game with the poppy flower that symbolizes the feeling of intoxication and creates addiction in us, through the figures on the vase who passionately and hurriedly strive for physical union, as well as returning to the ideal wholeness in a transcendental sense, to the strawberry, which symbolizes seduction and sensual pleasure, because no matter how much we eat this fruit, it does not satisfy our hunger. Therefore, the need for a heavenly feeling in love and the desire for wholeness that we occasionally achieve, but which at the same time constantly eludes us.

**A more practical question now, concerning your creative process. Where do you find your ideas and once you’ve found them, how do you materialize them?**

Most often I find my ideas in poetry, music, movies, books, especially works by Gaston Bachelard, Mircea Eliade or Carl Jung. I have been returning to the foundations

of Jung’s teachings and his thoughts for many years, and it seems to me that his comprehensive observations on human nature are a source of infinite inspiration for me. I am especially interested in reflections on the personal and collective unconscious, archetypes, symbols and individuation. Also, I look for inspiration in the history of art, as well as in the works of contemporary artists. Then I combine those initial ideas with personal experiences, wishes and needs. Thus, the material for a new artwork of mine begins to slowly cook.

It takes a certain amount of time until the idea for a new work takes tangible form in my head and flourish enough to be ready to start materializing it. Most of the time, I don’t make sketches, but I visualize the entire composition and the elements that will be part of it, and then I transfer it to the canvas. Additionally, I enjoy the very process of making art and pay special attention to the technique and materials I use. At first glance, my paintings may seem simple to execute because they are made of large and mostly monochromatic surfaces. However, this technique requires a lot of patience, time, precision and practice. Achieving flat and clean surfaces without visible brushstrokes is a demanding process, involving the preparation of the canvas to attain a smooth surface, as well as the use of special natural bristle brushes made in Japan and specific acrylic paints.

When we add to that various detailed painted elements, we come to the point where I work on large scale paintings for two or three months...which in the capitalist world is not the happiest solution.

**You live as an emerging artist between Belgrade and New York. How is life as an emerging artist for you in these cities and what are the art scenes like?**

In my opinion the art scene in Belgrade is very authentic and the authors are original in presenting their intimate and sincere ideas. I find it wonderful and inspiring. However, little is said about the business side of art and it is often unclear to me how most of the galleries actually survive, taking into account that most of them rarely sell artworks. Speaking about the art scene in the New York

City, it seems to me the freedom of expression for the most of American artist is very limited. There is a lot of money at stake, but it is mostly poured into projects that deal with pre-determined topics and it is very difficult to be authentic because in that case the artist is most often rejected. Young artists there often become impersonal and uncreative.

Currently, my studio is located in Belgrade and I feel lucky to be on the journey of independent artist who can make art full time. I love Belgrade and I think it is a good base for development. Here I get the opportunities to realize my dreams and grow my career globally. Also, I would like to see progress in the collaboration between galleries and artists in Belgrade, including developing business strategies and bringing all of this to a more professional level, without denying the artist freedom of expression. I am aware that it is difficult to find a golden mean, especially in these unstable economic conditions, but I believe that there is room for improvement and that it is worth thinking in that direction.

**You have been doing a lot of residencies since finishing your studies. What do you treasure about the experience of being and working in a residency?**

Being part of the artist residency programs is a great occasion that often offers artists to dedicate them further to their projects and to search for fresh inspirations in the new surroundings. For me it is a perfect opportunity to learn more about culture and history of other countries, connect with environment, locals as well as other artists or art lovers. I would definitely recommend artists to do residencies from time to time.

**Speaking of recommendations, is there any advice that you’d like to pass on to fellow emerging artists, especially those just starting out in their career?**

I would recommend them to follow their wishes, to make their art dedicatedly and regularly, and to try to make strategies and circumstances that would enable them to live from their art. Of course, the path is often not easy, but it is worth trying.

**What has influenced and inspired you recently?**

I recently read a novel “Silk” by the Italian writer Alessandro Baricco. His writing style, which often feels like the process of making painting, is extremely interesting to me. So, it is very likely that some new piece inspired by this literary work will be created in the near future.

**Looking into the close future, is there any event or project that you’d like to give a shout out?**

Recently, the results of the open call for the annual exhibiting program at ULUS Gallery (one of the most important galleries in Belgrade) in 2024 came out and I was among the eight selected candidates, which made me very happy! Additionally, I am in negotiations for potential exhibitions in Chicago and Europe. I hope there will be more to say about that in the near future.

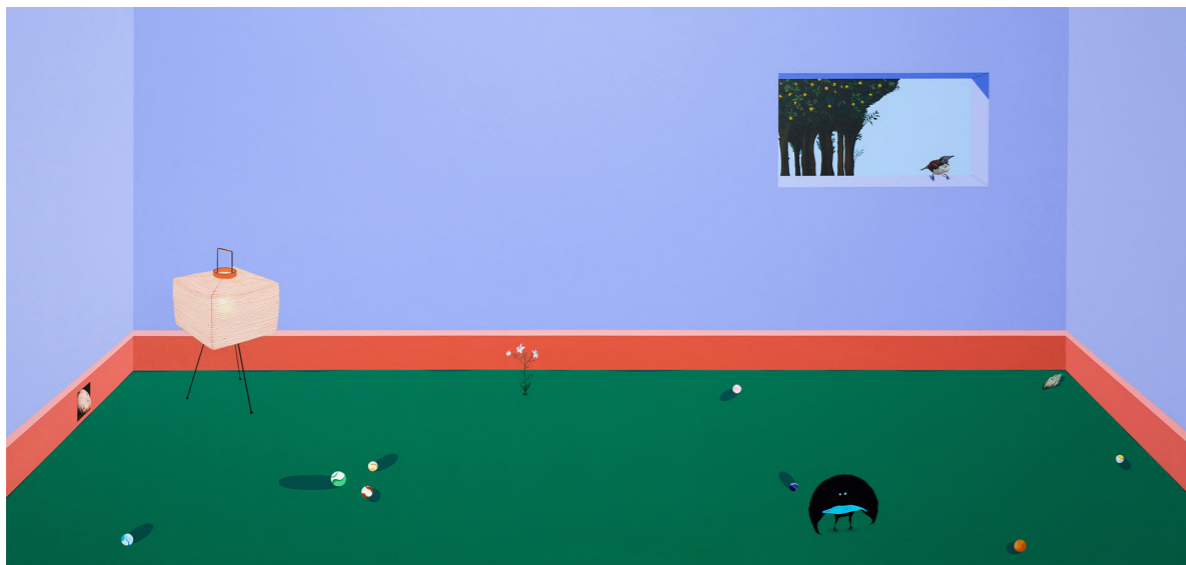
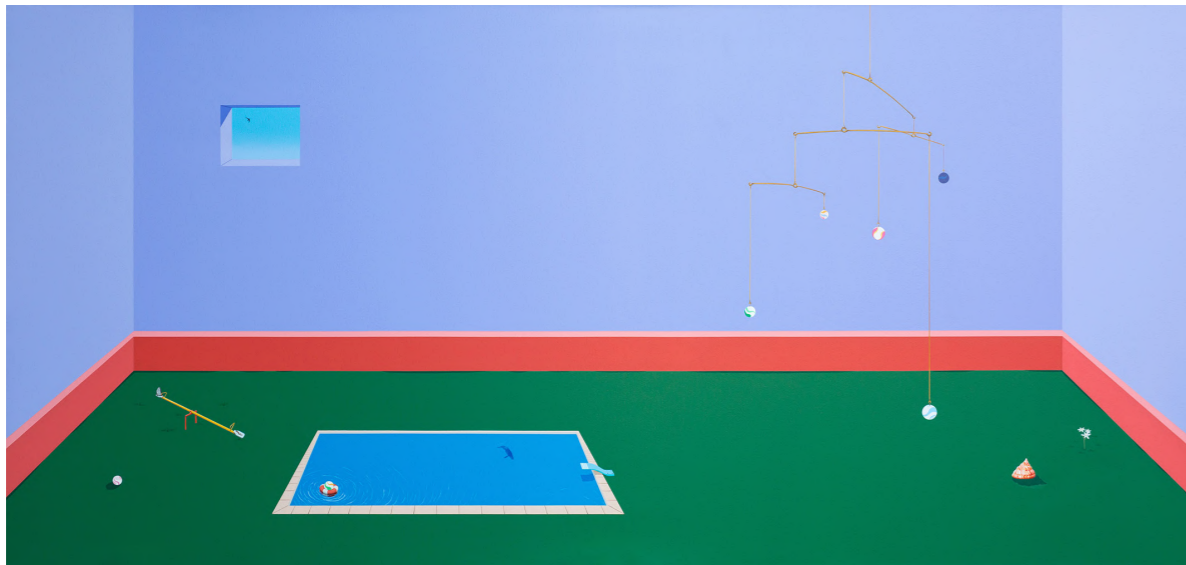
**Congratulations on the upcoming collaboration with ULUS Gallery and good luck with the negotiations. Let’s wrap up with two more questions. First, are there any fellow emerging artists you’d like to recommend?**

Answering this question is particularly difficult because there are many authors whose works I love. I will single out those artists whose works I would like to have in my collection one day: Lighting objects by Sara Devic (@nusprodukt), paintings by Rachael Tarravechia (@tarravechia), watercolors by Marija Avramovic (@avram\_mar), drawing animations by Nemanja Nikolic (@nemanja\_nikolic\_visualarts) and wool-tufted pieces by Emilija Radojicic (@emasdream).

**And lastly, what are your hopes for 2024?**

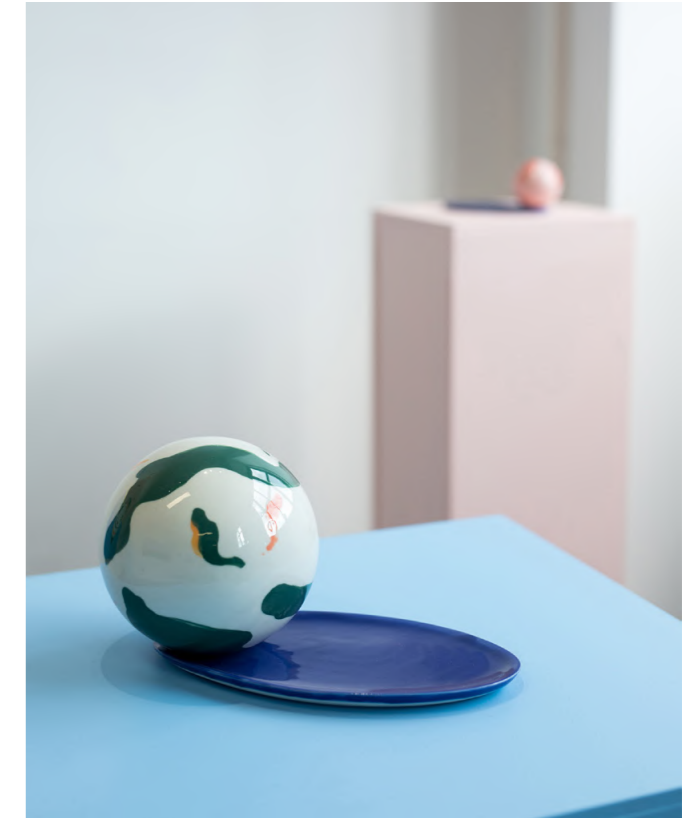
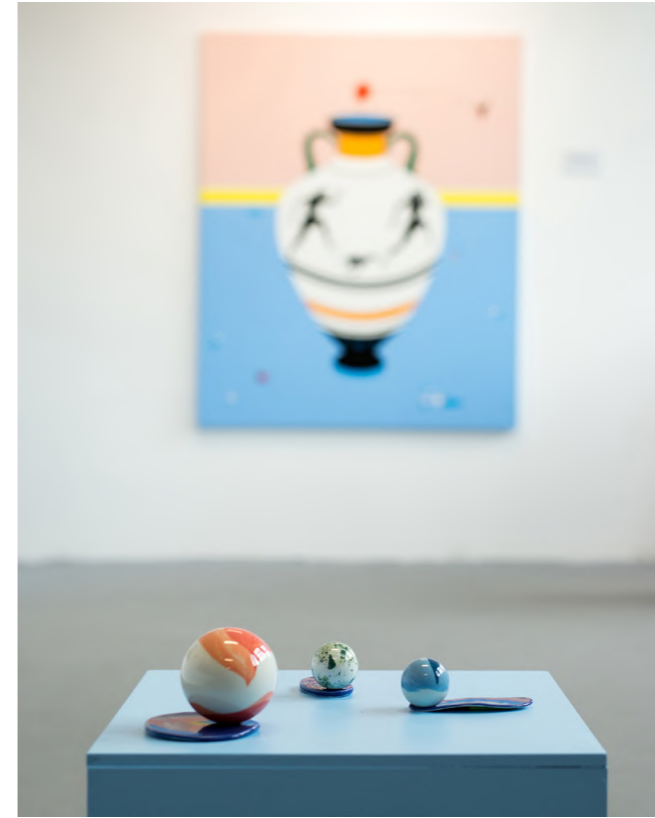
More love among people!

Get in touch with Vladan: [www.vladansibinovic.com](http://www.vladansibinovic.com)  
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Agave on the edge of the deserted sea, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 210 x 100 cm (up)  
Just keep the balance right (52 Hertz), 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 210 x 100 cm (center)  
Love story, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, 210 x 100 cm (down)  
Next page: Krita yuga, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 50 cm





A Space installation - Marbles-sculptures, 2023, Ceramics (up)  
Space Installation - Marbles, 2022, Acrylic on wood, 700 x 300 cm  
Left page: Flying around, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 35 cm