



**Plamen Dejanoff**

Galerie Emanuel Layr  
2.6. – 3.9.2016

Plamen Dejanoff loves his rare first name. It means “flame” in all Slavic languages, and was the name of a 1960s Czechoslovak magazine that published avant-garde fiction and commentary as well as essays by the likes of Foucault and Sartre. For an exhibition at the 21er Haus in Vienna last year, Dejanoff brought it back to life, releasing an ambitious new issue as the show’s catalogue, which was shown here, along with back issues of the original *Plamen*, on a raised platform in the centre of his sparse solo show.

Most of the other works on view related to a planned second issue of Dejanoff’s version of the magazine. As in the 2015 show, there were also bronze sculptures of graphic elements of its design. A floor piece continued a series of reconstructions of architectural details from lost Bulgarian buildings. Mock-ups of potential covers for the new *Plamen* pointed to the bigger questions of Dejanoff’s project, which concern the relationships between the artist’s self and his art, the clashing contexts of the Eastern Bloc and the art world of the present, and the unsteady boundaries of homage and appropriation.

Several works also made it clear that Dejanoff is a big fan of the Bulgarian “cult footballer” Trifon Ivanov. By fate or coincidence, Ivanov – who died, aged 50, of a heart attack



**Foundation Requirement  
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C-Prints  
25 x 27 cm / 25 x 19 cm

earlier this year – was born in the same town in northern Bulgaria as Dejanoff himself. With his intriguing face and mullet haircut, Ivanov has been, cruelly, described as looking like “a mountain wolf on a methadone programme.” The exhibition includes several photographs of him, concentrating on those featured in international football magazines. As with *Plamen*, Dejanoff uses him to memorialise and reflect on a bygone Eastern Europe. As a bona fide celebrity, Ivanov is a good hook for Dejanoff’s concerns, bringing into play the fantasy of Eastern Europe as a cliché the backward otherness. Until the next issue of *Plamen*, however, all you have to go on here is the pictures.

Nearly all artists like the limelight, but few of them put themselves as much in the background as Dejanoff does in these works, where, paradoxically enough, his name is plastered all over the show in the magazine’s logo. The accidents of his birth give rise to a complex interplay of centre and margins, the artist’s own career and the subjects of his research, historical contingency and self-fashioned identity, graphic design and art, the retro and the contemporary. But what else can an artist start with but their own self?

Alexander Scrimgeour