

IVA GUEORGUIEVA / DONA NELSON – PORTAL

March 16, 2018 – May 3, 2018

Sophia Contemporary is pleased to announce *Portal*, the first two-person show of American artists Iva Gueorguieva and Dona Nelson. Gueorguieva and Nelson come from two successive generations of artists whose work is at the forefront of contemporary abstraction in the United States. Through painting and sculpture, both artists grapple with the history of painting, redefining abstraction and challenging the material and conceptual boundaries of their media. The exhibition initiates an intergenerational visual dialogue through fifteen works including Iva Gueorguieva's vibrant acrylic and collage works and Dona Nelson's signature double-sided freestanding paintings. *Portal* will open to the public with a talk by both artists from 6-7PM on Thursday, March 15, 2018 followed by a private view from 7-9PM. The exhibition will remain on view through May 3, 2018.

Portal will demonstrate how Gueorguieva and Nelson question the intrinsic flatness of the canvas by exploring the sculptural properties of painting, in particular through the use of collage and the deconstruction of the form through the process of cutting, dyeing, ripping, gluing, and painting on both sides of the canvas. While collage is an integral part of both artists' work, they use it in different ways: Nelson controls the composition of her paintings by erecting physical boundaries on the canvas with gauze soaked in glue while Gueorguieva uses various means to push and move the colour as it gets absorbed by the raw canvas.

The artists became friends after Gueorguieva studied under Nelson's supervision at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia in the late 1990s. This exhibition will display the artists' shared interest in pushing the boundaries of their media, as well as the intensive process and labour involved in challenging painting's two-dimensionality. *Portal* refers to an opening through which one passes with one's body, alluding to the the physicality of Gueorguieva and Nelson's approach to painting.

Often associated throughout art history with the Jackson Pollock myth of the individual male painter expressing his physical prowess on the canvas, Abstract Expressionism has been recently reassessed by casting a new light on female artists who played an important role in the movement such as Lee Krasner or Grace Hartigan. *Portal* furthers the dialogue about the continued significance of American women abstract painters.

Iva Gueorguieva (b. 1974, Bulgaria) moved to Baltimore in her teenage years. After studying on the East Coast of the USA in Baltimore and Philadelphia, Gueorguieva moved to the West Coast in Los Angeles in the mid-2000s where she has been living and working ever since.

The fragmentation of space characteristic of her work comes not only from a working-through of cubism, futurism, vorticism, and constructivism, but also from her experience of the collapse of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1988. In combining simple elements such as metal scraps, fabric, and stone to create sculptural assemblages, Gueorguieva also draws her inspiration from the Californian landscape where she resides, while also referencing the legacy of American and European movements such as Dada, Arte



Povera, and California Assemblage. The work presented in *Portal* particularly explores the figure, bringing Gueorguieva into a close dialogue with Pollock's early surrealism-inspired abstractions and Philip Guston's late figurative works.

Gueorguieva's paintings and sculptures are based on a material practice of building up and peeling back layers as a means to construct and deconstruct both the figure and the space around it. Her intricate compositions of painted paper and fabric collaged on the canvas seek to investigate the fine line between the intrinsic illusion of the painting's plane and the physicality of its surface. The artist's sculptures echo her painting practice in their exploration of the spatial properties of materials.

The sculptures were produced during a series of artist residencies at Graphicstudio, Tampa, Florida, USA.

Her work is included in many public and private collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; University Art Museum | California State University, Long Beach, Long Beach, CA; Art, Design and Architecture Museum at UC Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA; and Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, CA.

Notable group exhibitions include "Variations: Conversations in and around Abstract Painting," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; "Making Sense: Rochelle Feinstein, Deborah Grant, Iva Gueorguieva, Dona Nelson," USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, FL; "Graphicstudio: Uncommon Practice at USF," Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL; and "Desire: Six Los Angeles Artists," Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena, CA, among others. She is the recipient of the Orange County Contemporary Collectors Fellowship for 2012, the California Community Foundation mid-career fellowship for 2010, and the Pollock-Krasner Grant for 2006. Gueorguieva lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

Dona Nelson (born 1947, USA) is considered one of the most influential contemporary American painters of her generation. Celebrated for her inventive, tactile, and physical approach to her medium, Nelson has spent the past four decades striving to continuously reinvent the definition of contemporary abstraction. Born in Nebraska, Nelson moved to New York in 1967 to participate in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program where she remained until moving to Pennsylvania in 1999.

Over the past four decades, the artist has avoided settling on a single 'signature style', preferring constantly to experiment in order to investigate both abstraction and figuration in separate, yet interrelated bodies of work. By creating complex compositions of paint, drips, and marks in a complex web of colours and materials, Nelson's paintings invoke the physicality of Jackson Pollock's *Drip Paintings* as well as the mark-making and materiality of European works such as Juan Miro's *Anti-Paintings* and Lucio Fontana's *Spatial Concepts*.

Her double-sided paintings, some of which will be displayed in *Portal*, have been critically acclaimed for challenging the boundaries of the media and establishing painting as a freestanding object, blurring the boundaries between the painterly and sculptural realms. By showing the 'invisible' material side of the canvas, its sides, back and stretcher, Nelson's practice connects her to the 1970s' quest to deconstruct painting and free it from representational conventions.



In the words of *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith: “Incrementally and without nearly the attention she deserves, Dona Nelson has become one of the best artists working today, partly by spending over two decades wrestling with the idea of a painting as a free-standing object with two distinct sides and, in many ways, a mind of its own. Just as the Minimalists plunked sculpture into the viewer’s space, minus pedestal, Ms. Nelson has liberated painting from the wall.”¹

Nelson’s work was featured in the 2014 Whitney Biennial and is part of numerous public and private collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC; Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Contemporary Art Museum, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida; Perez Art Museum, Miami, Florida and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, among others.

She was the subject of a major survey at The Weatherspoon Museum of Fine Art in Greensboro, North Carolina in 2000 and will be the subject of a survey of more recent paintings at The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College, New York in the spring of 2018. She was the recipient of an Artist Legacy Foundation Grant in 2012, a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts in 2011 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1994, among others. Nelson currently resides in Pennsylvania and is a Professor of Painting and Drawing at The Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Exhibition Details

- Title:** *Portal*
- Address:** Sophia Contemporary Gallery, 11 Grosvenor Street, London, W1K 4QB, UK
- Website:** www.sophiacontemporary.com
- Dates:** 16 March 2018 – 3 May 2018
- Private View:** 6 – 9 pm, 15 March 2018
- Opening Hours:** Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm, Saturday 11am to 5pm
- Admission:** Free
- Travel:** Green Park, Bond Street or Oxford Circus Tube Station
- Twitter:** @SophiaCGallery
- Facebook:** SophiaContemporaryGallery
- Instagram:** SophiaContemporaryGallery
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¹ *The New York Times*, Art in Review, Roberta Smith, May 8, 2014.

