

IGOR ZABEL AWARD FOR CULTURE AND THEORY 2020

Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory 2020 Grant according to the jury's selection

Slavcho Dimitrov, activist, cultural theorist, and curator, Skopje

The Igor Zabel Award Grant 2020 is given to Slavcho Dimitrov in recognition of his exceptional contributions to reimagining the cultural and social life of the Western Balkans region, and for bringing LGBTQIA+ and women's rights and struggles to the heart of this vision. As marginalized communities face increasing repression and violence, Slavcho Dimitrov's work across art and activism exemplifies how we might respond productively and urgently to this situation.

Slavcho Dimitrov is an activist, writer, teacher, and curator. He is also a campaigner for non-normative artistic and identity practices in North Macedonia and Serbia and a fighter against parochial neo-nationalisms. The Igor Zabel Award Grant 2020 is awarded to Dimitrov for his exceptional contributions to reimagining the cultural and social life of the Western Balkans region, and for bringing LGBTQIA+ and women's rights and struggles to the heart of this vision.

For more than a decade, Dimitrov has worked tirelessly to resist the resurgence of a neo-nationalism that depends on queerphobia and violence directed at anyone who does not identify as heteronormative or cis-male. During this time, governments across Europe, including those in North Macedonia and Serbia, have reduced funding health services for women's and LGBTQIA+, restricted access to adequate information services for women and queer people in need, shut down pride marches and made the celebration and understanding of difference increasingly difficult. Dimitrov champions a very different world, one grounded in diversity and opportunities for celebrating it. From 2011 to 2019, he was the executive director of the Coalition for the Protection and Promotion of Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities, an important non-governmental organization based in Skopje. Since 2012, he has served as one of the co-founders of the IPAK.Centar, a research centre for cultures, politics, and identities in Belgrade and, since 2011, as the founder and program coordinator for one of Serbia's major international cultural initiatives, the Summer School for Sexualities, Cultures, and Politics. For the last five years, he has curated the programme for the Skopje Pride Weekend, an interdisciplinary celebration of queer arts, cultures, bodies, and ideas, and an event that stands firm against the destructive and regressive forces of phobic neo-nationalism.

In the context of these initiatives, Dimitrov has created new networks between communities, practitioners, and activists in Skopje and Belgrade and performers and writers such as boychild, Vaginal Davis, Jack Halberstam, David Halperin, and David Hoyle and the Lipsinkers. He is a prolific curator, working especially closely with artists in the fields of performance and identity to create exhibitions such as: *Archive of Queer Experiences* at the Chifte Hamam, National Gallery of Macedonia in 2012; *All Beauty Must Die* (with Velimir Zernovski) in 2014; and *Affective Aliens: The*

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Art of Failure, a group exhibition at the National Gallery of Macedonia in 2014. Dimitrov has pursued an equally prolific writing and research career, authoring and editing three books, among them *Impossible Confessions: Subjectivity, Power and Ethics* (Skopje, 2014), and also writing essays for journals including *Identities*, *MASKA*, and *Aspasia* and for anthologies published in Austria, the UK, Serbia, and North Macedonia.

Central to Dimitrov's cultural and artistic politics is the need for various publics to come together and to collectively generate new lifeworlds and sensibilities. These publics – whether in summer schools or pride festivals, research centres or advocacy groups, museums hosting his exhibitions or libraries holding his books – share common features. Above all, they share a resolute grounding in local conditions, a drawing together of local and international practitioners to reimagine those conditions, and a space in which discussion, affect, desire, and debate can spark new cultures of politics and new politics of culture.

The demand for such cultural and social commitment, combining local audiences and international networks, is more pressing than ever. As marginalized communities face increasing repression and violence, Slavcho Dimitrov's work across art and activism exemplifies how we might respond productively and urgently to this situation: by creating new platforms and ideas, writing and curating, and working together with our differences and across media and platforms to generate new collective practices.

2020 jury members:

Šejla Kamerić, artist, Sarajevo

Anthony Gardner, art historian, Oxford

Franciska Zólyom, curator, director of the GfZK – Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig