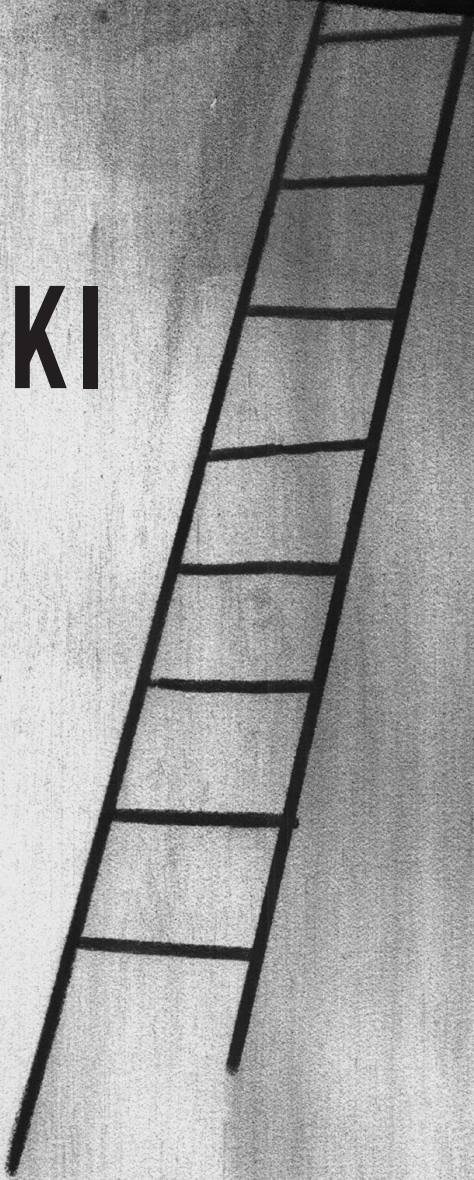
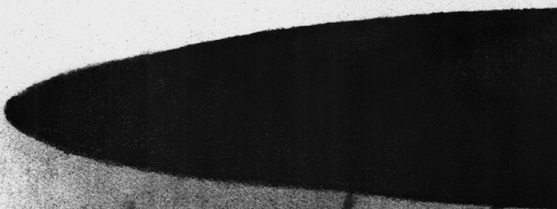




IVANCO TALEVSKI



**Back and Forth:
The Space In Between**

Ivanco Talevski
Back and Forth:
The Space in Between

September 24 – November 13, 2021

The Print Center

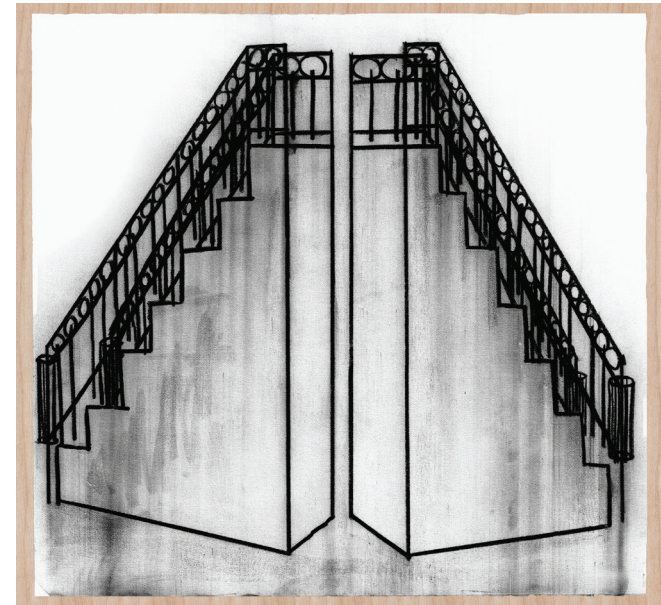
For the exhibition *Back and Forth: The Space in Between*, **Ivanco Talevski** draws from the dualities of his personal narrative: his childhood in Communist Yugoslavia and his adulthood in the United States, as well as his travels back-and-forth between his homes in Philadelphia and Bitola, Macedonia. Co-curated by The Print Center's Executive Director Elizabeth Spungen and Jensen Bryan Curator Ksenia Nouril, this exhibition reflects on how each of these places evoke the sense of home for Talevski. He layers and reseats their salient graphic motifs: architectural structures, figures, foliage, mirrors and flags, in his screenprints, projections, photographs and installations. Their amalgamation creates a space "in between," an imagined community into which the artist invites us. Threaded through the work is the influence of late 19th century folklorist Marko Cepenkov and his ethnographic sketchbooks. *Back and Forth: The Space in Between* premieres a major audio work composed and recorded by Vasko Dukovski in response to Talevski's artwork. The following essay was written by Nouril for *Book of Drawings*, a publication by Talevski that complements this exhibition.

It is extremely gratifying to see this exhibition come together as the culmination of many years of studio visits and conversation with Ivanco. I was delighted to invite Ksenia Nouril to join me as co-curator for the project when she joined The Print Center's staff in 2019, adding her excellent eye and deep understanding of the art history of Eastern Europe. A project such as this, which is both collaborative and spurs an artist to think expansively and ambitiously, is for me, the most rewarding approach to exhibition-making, and I am grateful for such an opportunity.

— Elizabeth Spungen, Executive Director

Ivanco Talevski is an integral part of The Print Center's community; we are honored to present this solo exhibition. It reflects Talevski's ongoing interest in identity and migration whilst pushing the parameters of print within his practice. The accompanying publication marks a significant milestone in his career and complements the exhibition in its content and evocation of the artist's research-driven process. As an art historian focused on Eastern European art, it has been an honor and a pleasure to analyze and contextualize Talevski within the region as well as the larger context of global contemporary art.

— Ksenia Nouril, Jensen Bryan Curator



Walnut Street Stoops: May 15, 2017, 2017, charcoal on paper, 30 1/2" x 32"

Here and There: Building Spaces Within and Beyond in the Work of Ivanco Talevski

In its title, Ivanco Talevski's solo exhibition *Back and Forth: The Space in Between* crystalizes the delicate balance of the immigrant experience, which teeters between the dynamism of relocation and the reality of establishing new parameters. Arguably, Talevski has immigrated twice – once with the dissolution of communist Yugoslavia in 1990, which formed an independent Macedonia, and, again, with his relocation to the United States in 1999 in the midst of the Yugoslav Wars. Whereas the former was an internal immigration – an exercise in semantics – symbolized by the exchange of flags, passports, and national anthems, the latter involved a displacement of the body through physical movement from one geographic location to another. Talevski, among immigrants, has been fortunate in that he has not had to turn his back completely on his homeland. Today, he frequently travels back and forth between Philadelphia, his adopted home, and Bitola, his hometown in southwestern Macedonia. This duality – a kind of cohabitation – inspires Talevski to make artwork



Projection #7, 2021. *Syrian Cyclists*, September 27, 2015, 2015, charcoal on paper, projected on an empty home, Gyenimale neighborhood of Bitola

rooted in bifurcations. This manifests not only in the ways he navigates mediums, often simultaneously working in printmaking and drawing, photography and painting, but also in his choice of subject matter, which hones in on the subtle details of anonymous structures, such as stairways, open windows, and parapets, that seamlessly cross borders between here and there. Talevski self-consciously makes it difficult to ascribe a specific location to his works as he transposes scenes from one place to another and vice versa.

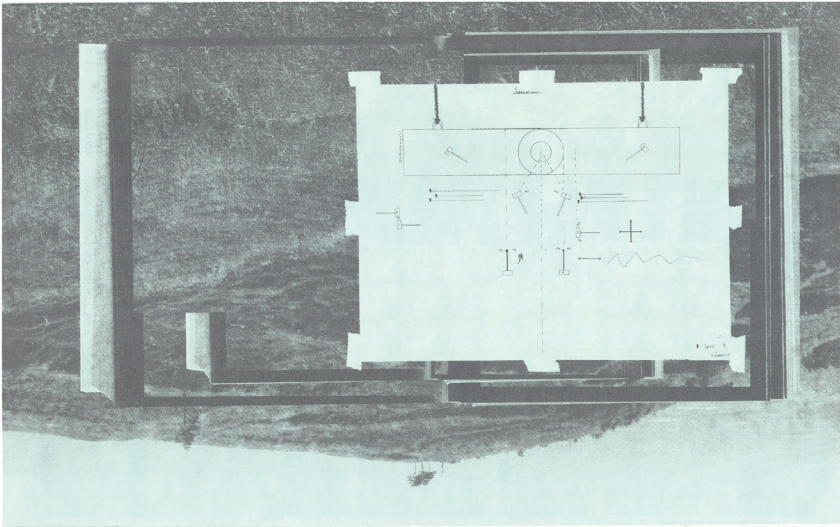
Palestinian-American literary scholar and critic of the East-West divide Edward Said writes, “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*.”¹ This phenomenon occurs when two or more musical lines are independent in rhythm and melody yet harmonically interdependent. While far from a glamorous life, that of an exile is richer and more diverse, according to Said. Yet, its challenges abound, including always feeling “out of place” and finding oneself in “the perilous territory of non-belonging.”² Most of all, exiles are keenly aware that “homes are always provisional” and that “border and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory [i.e., a nation-state], can also become prisons.”³



Projection #13, 2021. *Wreckage: June 13*, 2021, 2021, charcoal on paper, projected on an empty home, Gyavato, near Bitola

In his work, Talevski foregrounds doubling, namely in the repetition of architectures. This occurs in a nighttime series of projected drawings onto the walls of abandoned houses in his native Bitola, which he captures through photography. His signature subjects – the stairways, windows, and parapets – are digitally layered onto roughly painted brick walls situated in an overgrown landscape. These works represent a collision of two worlds: the natural and the human, Philadelphia and Bitola. Talevski also calls attention to architecture in a proposal for an installation that re-presents this doubling using photographic wallpaper. This vinyl, rather than the actual walls to which it is applied, becomes the support for his works. Whether in practice or in theory, he once again uses the multiplicity inherent in layering as both an aesthetic and a conceptual effect. Talevski forges his own space in both the book and the installation by creating a new, in-between space.

The postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha encourages us to “think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivity” and turn, instead, to “the articulation of cultural differences” in the interstices burgeoning with new identities and possibilities.⁴ Living “beyond” requires one to leave home by crossing borders or becoming displaced in some way. The result divides one’s vision between here and there. On this border, Bhabha productively locates culture,



Ivanco Talevski and Vasko Dukovski, *Zanaetchii: Chekani*, from the series "Matriarch with Nine Stones," 2021, screenprint, 13" x 21"

which he calls "borderline work" because it reconfigures our notions of the past and present. "It [art] renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present."⁵

Talevski operates on the border, bending the parameters between the past and present in his work. Specifically, he weaves his own history and artistic production through the legacy of the late 19th-early 20th-century folklorist and artist Marko Cepenkov.⁶ Like Cepenkov, Talevski relies on the notebook as a discursive space in which drawings, whether hastily sketched or painstakingly worked over, can organically develop alongside one another, creating unexpected juxtapositions. Both artists look to the mundane objects around them as subject matter, as if trying to explicate the intricacies of our everyday lives. Like Talevski's book and installation referenced above, his resurrection of this historical figure creates further collisions between worlds that are disparate temporally – the past and the present – and aesthetically – in art across the ages. Slovenian curator Zdenka Badovinac has written extensively on what she calls "interrupted histories," or the proclivity of artists from Eastern Europe to self-historicize, due to the lack of local cultural

infrastructures as a result of colonialism, dictatorship, genocide, migration, war and instances of other violence. She writes, "Today's archetypal figure is the migrant who lives between different cultural spaces; hybridity has replaced national identity."⁷ Talevski's ability to seamlessly operate bilaterally between the United States and Macedonia may mark him as a contemporary international or global artist; yet he undeniably remains a child of the Balkans. While he has matured his artistic career by studying, exhibiting, and working in the United States, his deep roots in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav experiences inflect both the form and content of his works. As an Eastern European artist in the United States, he must work doubly hard to convey his message to audiences, likely unfamiliar with the region and its complicated geopolitical history. Thus, self-historicization, in Talevski's case through Cepenkov, is not only a viable but utterly necessary artistic strategy in order to be understood and accepted.

In her writings, Badovinac has also recognized the parallels between today's migration patterns, specifically those of refugees fleeing wars in Syria and the Middle East, and the hotspots of the Yugoslav Wars, which took place in the Balkans between 1991 and 2001. She integrates culture into this parallelism, arguing that "[a]rtists with the experience of migration share, above all, a sense of loss of human dignity," specifically in the Western European – or, more broadly conceived, Western [American] – gaze.⁸ Yet, she manages to find hope in this condition as the unstable identities of migrants can lead them to be proactive in self-organizing a new and different culture, one that is not diametrically opposed to that of the West but fundamentally outside its proscriptive binary.⁹

Talevski also astutely observes this parallelism in his work, specifically in *Syrian Cyclists, September 27, 2015*, the charcoal-on-paper drawing from 2015 that ignited his ongoing series celebrated herein. As described by the artist, he was en route to Bitola via Greece when he encountered a swarm of bicyclists at the Greek-Macedonian border. They were not a breakaway group from the Tour de France, but men who had "biked from Syria, away from the bombshells and bloodshed, in search of a safe place for their

families.” Talevski’s depiction of them is pointedly ambiguous. There are no identifying markers in their appearance. Each is a solid black figure hunched over a thinly rimmed bicycle. Clustered together, they embody a frenzy as indicative of an escape as it is of a competitive race. Above them hangs the sun – or the moon – their only guiding light in day or at night throughout their arduous journey.

It is prescient that Talevski began this seminal series of drawings with *Syrian Cyclists, September 27, 2015*. He has gone on to fruitfully transpose these drawings into prints, photographs and projections, which comprise both his *Book of Drawings* and his installations at The Print Center. Through the dualities of his experiences as an immigrant and an artist, Talevski has built for himself what political scientist Benedict Anderson calls “an imagined community.” Rooted in “a deep horizontal comradeship,” an imagined community transcends space and time.¹⁰ It is beyond “here” yet not quite “there.” It is a nebulous place to which we are invited to come as we are.

About the Artist

Ivanco Talevski (b.1983, Bitola, Macedonia; lives Philadelphia and Bitola) is an interdisciplinary artist and educator. He received a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore and an MFA from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Talevski has had solo exhibitions at MC Gallery, New York and Napoleon, Philadelphia, as well as the Prima Center Berlin, Germany; KIC Gallery, Skopje Museum and Institute of Bitola and People’s Theater, Gevgelija, all Macedonia. His work has been in group exhibitions at the International Print Center New York; Guanlan Original Printmaking Base, Shenzhen, China; Sakima Museum of Art, Okinawa and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, both Japan; International Print Triennial, Kraków, Poland; Seoul Museum of Art, South Korea; and National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts. He has numerous awards including a Guanlan International Print Prize and Pollock Krasner Grant. He is a Senior Lecturer at the Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania.

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1. Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 186. In this essay, Said uses the term “exile” as a catchall; yet he also acknowledges the subtle distinctions among exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés.
 2. “Reflections on Exile,” 180, 177.
 3. “Reflections on Exile,” 185.
 4. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge Classics, 2004), 2.
 5. *The Location of Culture*, 10.
 6. As described elsewhere in this book, Cepenkov (1829-1920) was born in the town of Prilep, in what was then part of the Ottoman Empire but is now in Macedonia, and died in Sofia, Bulgaria. Thus, he is an important figure in both modern nations.
 7. Zdenka Badovinac, “Interrupted Histories,” in *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 96.
 8. Zdenka Badovinac, “Future from the Balkans,” in *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 275, 273.
 9. “Future from the Balkans,” 286.
 10. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 7. In this seminal tome, Anderson refers specifically to nations as imagined communities bonded by language, custom, and other fraternal aspects. Today, in an arguably post-national condition, this concept can be unbridled from the nation proper and refer to alternative collectives.

Programs

Opening Reception

Thursday, September 23, 6:00 – 7:30pm

A gallery tour, in lieu of an onsite talk, will be prerecorded and available at printcenter.org beginning September 22.

Artist Talk and Book Launch

Thursday, October 28, 6:00pm

Talevski will discuss his work and launch his new publication *Book of Drawings*, created in conjunction with the exhibition.

Ivanco Talevski, *Book of Drawings*, 2021, will be available for purchase in The Print Center's Gallery Store.

All of The Print Center's exhibitions and programs are free and open to the public.

In order to safely respond to COVID-19 conditions, protocols and event presentation details (i.e. onsite or virtual) will be announced the week of the program. Please visit our website, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter feeds for up-to-date information.

About The Print Center

For more than a century, The Print Center has encouraged the growth and understanding of photography and printmaking as vital contemporary arts through exhibitions, publications and educational programs. The Print Center has an international voice and a strong sense of local purpose. Free and open to the public, it presents changing exhibitions, which highlight established and emerging, local, national and international contemporary artists. It mounts one of the oldest art competitions in the country, now in its 96th year and the Gallery Store offers the largest selection of contemporary prints and photographs available for sale in Philadelphia, as well as being available online.

Funders

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We are grateful to Curatorial Assistant Rosemary Haynes for her assistance in preparing the exhibition. Ivanco Talevski extends special thanks to the Sachs Program for Arts Innovation, University of Pennsylvania for its support of this project and his publication *Book of Drawings*, 2021. He also thanks Micah Danges for his support and assistance.



Notes

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