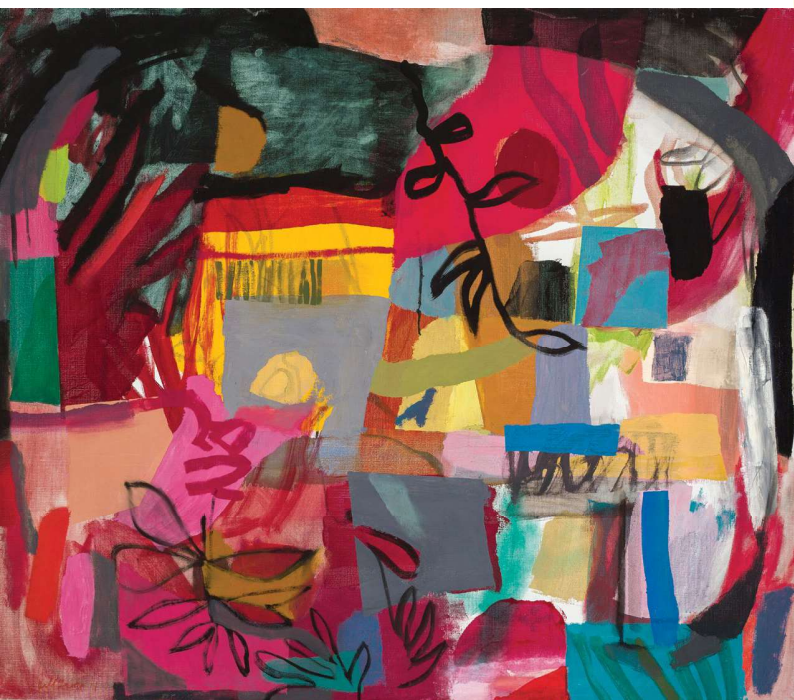


BILL SCOTT

Always Night and Day, 2014
Oil on Canvas, 37 x 43 in



COURTESY HOLLIS TAGGART GALLERIES, NEW YORK

BISTRA VELICHKOVA Forgiveness

Walking the streets of Milan, I found myself faced with a drunken beggar. ... Suddenly dawned on me that he, with his few begged coins, had long before the rest of us reached a happiness some of us have striven for all of our lives, and which we, with all our ambitions and efforts, never reached.

—Saint Augustine, *Confessions*,
Book VI, Chapter 6

I went out to beg in the streets just after Christmas Eve. This year, for the first time in my life, I had neither *sarmi*¹ nor pumpkin bread on the table for the occasion. Up until then, I'd scraped together enough money to make ends meet despite the difficult times. Eh, I'm not complaining. Though not easy, my life has been good. Most of it, I spent as a photographer for the Bulgarian Union of Photographers, yes, the official photography company of the Bulgarian state. After the nineties, however, everything fell apart. Our union, you see, was dismantled. It was part of the Communist Minister's Council. My husband was also a photographer, so after *The Changes*,² we had no idea what to do—no money coming in, unemployment everywhere. We owned a small room on the ground floor of the building we lived in and so, in the spirit of the new times, we decided to start our own business and to open a restaurant. For two years, we tightened our belts and poured in all our savings, decorating the place with love and our dreams. At the beginning, we managed to break even and even earned a little money. Soon after, however, some unpleasant people began to appear. Parked out front were black cars with tinted windows. They entered, ordered and purposefully failed to pay, drank, fought, and even shot guns. My husband, when he asked them to leave, or at least to deal with their problems outside, found a gun pinned to his head. Finally, they set the whole place on fire and that was the end of it. Soon after came Videnov's winter of massive inflation and no bread on the shelves—that must have been 1997. It was incredibly hard. People were cold, starving, and miserable. Our family struggled with the question of where and how to find enough money just for bread. Then, my son went abroad, emigrated, to seek a better life—at least for himself. Shortly thereafter, my husband unexpectedly died, and suddenly I found myself a single woman without work or money. Those years were

¹ "Sarmi" is a Bulgarian traditional dish cooked for Christmas. It is made with cabbage leaves stuffed with minced meat and rice.

² *The Changes* is a widespread term in Bulgaria (in Bulgarian, *Prehod*) that addresses the period after 1989. It is related to the changes that happened right after this year, connected with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. After 1989 started the transition of the country from a totalitarian political system and socialist economy toward democracy, capitalism, and a free market economy.