

## 4. Konzept

**Mariana Vassileva** is an internationally known Bulgarian artist who lives in Berlin. FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US, her project for the 60th Venice Biennale, revolves around her different experiences of estrangement and adaptation ever since she left her homeland in 1990. Different periods of her life are reflected here in a multitude of new and older artworks and, while each work stands strongly in its own right, together these provide a subtle and coherent response to the challenges and opportunities of being “foreign”.

Mariana Vassileva confronts power through different forms of poetic resistance as, for her, the understanding of the Other is the true path to oneself. Her chosen work is contextualized within the Biennale’s theme “Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere” – and includes a wide range of different media: sculpture, installation, photography, video art, drawing and film.

When she left Bulgaria she regarded the creation of art as a form of support, like a cane or walking stick that would give her the confidence to understand, feel, and invent herself anew. For years, she roamed across boundaries using a camera to connect herself with the here and now. For example, when she showed her video JOURNAL that she had shot in Berlin and New York, she became fascinated by how unconsciously similar images had emerged in different cities and another continent. At the same time she made the video MIRROR LIGHT as an attempt to connect with strangers on the street, to learn more about them, to really see them and be seen.

In 2015, before the present refugee crisis, she built a 10 m. long boat out of white shoes in which each shoe contained a light. This work will now be re-envisioned in the Biennale by the addition of 7 interactive metronomes of different sizes that both reflect and are triggered by human presence. The small ones have a fast beat and the bigger ones get slower according to their size. About this, Vassileva has commented: “The metronomes must all have the same importance.”

Over the past four years Vassileva has been working on FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US, a 90 min., multichannel video installation, a parable about love, dictatorship and the self-determination of a woman, that takes place in two parallel time scales: the mountains of Bulgaria during an indeterminate past and a modern metropolis in an indeterminate future: a world of artificial intelligence, robots, talking holographs, futuristic costumes and spaces. By intertwining past, present and future, this film stretches the scope of imagination through space and time.

YOU ARE, THEREFORE I AM has been solely conceived for this Biennale 2024. Pieces of broken mirror glass are scattered on the floor, which is also partially covered with sand. These shards of glass reflect light from a beamer onto a white wall in the barely recognizable shape of a human body. Also in the room is a lit sign in English and Italian: “To view this installation you must ask another visitor for help. At the end of the room there is a stone on a string with “Pull me”. When a visitor pulls the stone down, the figure made of the mirror shards rises up and becomes fully visible as a human figure, surrounded by birds, now standing and beautifully illuminated. A humming, song-like sound emerges from the figure for the duration of a minute; its tone changes from being initially tender and vulnerable to being increasingly strong and self-confident. Vassileva invites us to watch this conglomerate of broken pieces metamorphosing into a body of restored dignity, which can only be accomplished with the help of another visitor.

“Without light, none of us - humans, plants and animals - would exist. Maybe that’s why it is the strongest metaphor for love and life.” said Vassileva in a 2020 interview about the frequent use of

light in her work. But for this liberation, for this raising up of a body to take place we need “the Other”. In real life this could be just through a simple gesture, a word, or a gaze.

**a/** Titel of the project:

## FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US

**b/** Mariana Vassileva

Motivation:

Having moved far away from my homeland, I am always motivated to create the best possible embodiment of this theme - being a stranger in the world, in a particular geographical, economic or other, cultural value system or even in one's own family. .. Or simply because you are strangers to yourself.

When I saw the trace of a white puddle in the entrance of the exhibition space in Venice, my first thought was: How can I remove it? And at second glance I thought that one room had invaded another room. The water was strange here, unwanted... but perhaps we humans are taking away space from the water.

..I thought about the thousands of people who have set out on their journey on the water to a better life. Many of them lost their lives. We watch... we see everything on our square digital screens and yes... I feel compassion... and I feel guilty on behalf of humanity.

*If I have an idea  
I have a house  
and a boat.  
At the same time  
I am the river  
and the wind,  
They rock me,  
make me crack,  
move me forward,  
As well  
as they bring me closer  
to destruction...  
But I have a home.*

*MV*

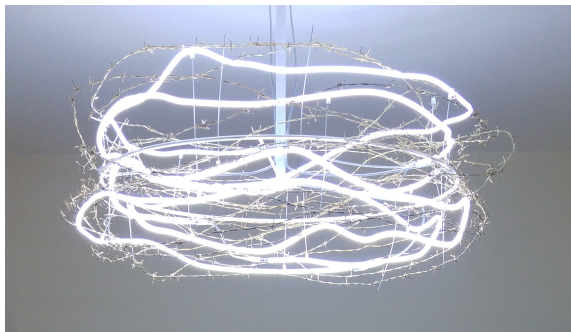


b/ **LIST OF THE WORKS**

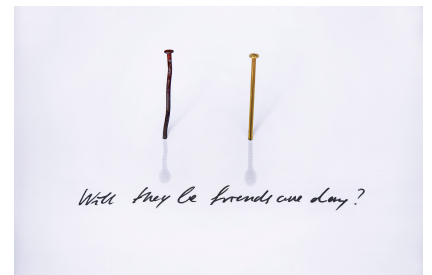
for the Projekt - FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US

1. DILEMMA - site-specific work - new  
Neon light, gold barbed wire,  
variations  
100x100x35cm

I consider mostly the place with its previous history and what is there happening today. It is appropriate to place this duality in the work, progressive and regressive input.



2. WILL THEY BE FRIENDS ONE DAY? site-specific work  
2011, one rusty and one golden nail,  
variations  
10 x 20 cm



3. JUST A GAME  
2009, lead, aluminum 180 x 60 cm



4. SEATEARS, site specific work - new  
Text on the floor in the color of the water  
at the front of the building.

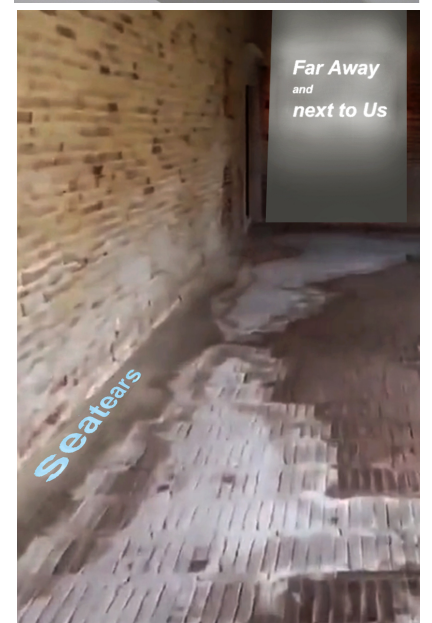
Salty drawings on the floor, that are reminiscent of maps.

5. FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US - Neon Light  
the title of a video and the title of our  
a project for the Venice Biennale

One individual work  
dimension - see the place first

6. YOU ARE... THEREFORE I AM - new  
performative installation.

When you first see the reflection of light on the wall  
It appears as a half human figure. There is a hanging stone nearby.  
A visitor has to pull the stone to complete the human figure.



Without the others... we are not.



7. MAKE ME MOVE - new  
7 Metronome - interactive installation.  
If you stand in front of each individual object,  
only then will the metronome become active.

Metronomes have different pitches but  
with the different base, they are equal.

7. PEOPLE OF THE SALT - salt sculpture.  
While the figures are inlaid, they touch each other.  
copper and alchemical products for honey cultivation  
... paralyzed by danger and fear
8. TORO, 2008 video, PAL, 5:00 min., loop  
Don Quixote fighting the waves  
<https://vimeo.com/34050340>



9. BOAT PEOPLE II new shoe variation, white paint, LED

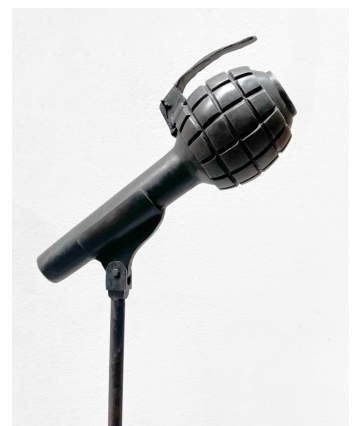


10. BE CALM - Photography, 2017, C Print



11. BE CALM - Video, 2018, 4:44 min., loop  
<https://vimeo.com/889487644>

12. MIKROPHONE  
2018, sculpture, bronze  
120x20x20cm



Freedom of expression is a human right and a very important feature of democracy.

13. JOURNAL - Diary, video:  
video, HD, 12 min., loop  
<https://vimeo.com/81992145>



The method of touching the surrounding .. fences give me evidence.. I exist - here and now

14. JOEY 2007 plaster, artificial hair, mixed media 165 cm



15. MIRROR LIGHT  
2005, video, 8:00 min., loop  
<https://vimeo.com/47013245>

With the mirror light you can move in the human buildings. Some buildings are windowless, others are all glass, and still others have closed shutters. Some are solidly built, others are temporary like tents. I constantly observe - the outer walls of the buildings that surround me are the inner walls of my home and I am someone else. MV



16. THE TREASURE IS EVERYWHERE 2010  
fabric, metal, synthetic material, wood,  
2 bulbs 200 x 120 x 50 cm





17. FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US  
 multichannel video installation - work in progress,  
 excerpts of 10 min., loop  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlf5xjkQA3k>



Multichannel video installation of the experimental film "Far Away and Next to Us":  
 This 2-channel projection positions in parallel the stories of a mother and daughter at the same age of their lives, but whose lives have diverged across a timescape stretching from the idealised nostalgia of a distant, more innocent past, to the not-so-distant future of AI and space exploration. One channel is shot in the bucolic natural beauty of a Bulgarian mountain village lost in time, reminiscent of Vassileva's own childhood memories. While the other channel is set in the sterile high-tech interiors of a space-age loft. From fireflies in the fields to laser lights charting a course through space, the everyday lives of these two women are observed across what feels like the vastness of time, but is actually only one generation. Mother and daughter, played by the same actress, are lost in the distance between their own polar opposite worlds, yet bound together by the closeness of love. The music composed for the film forms a soundscape mostly eclipsing the need for language, while poetically capturing the feeling of both past and future in the present moment of viewing the work.

This outdoor installation connects with the space in terms of content and form.

20. THE BEGINNING OF THE END - new  
 Eggs sculpture, artificial material  
 5-6 meters high



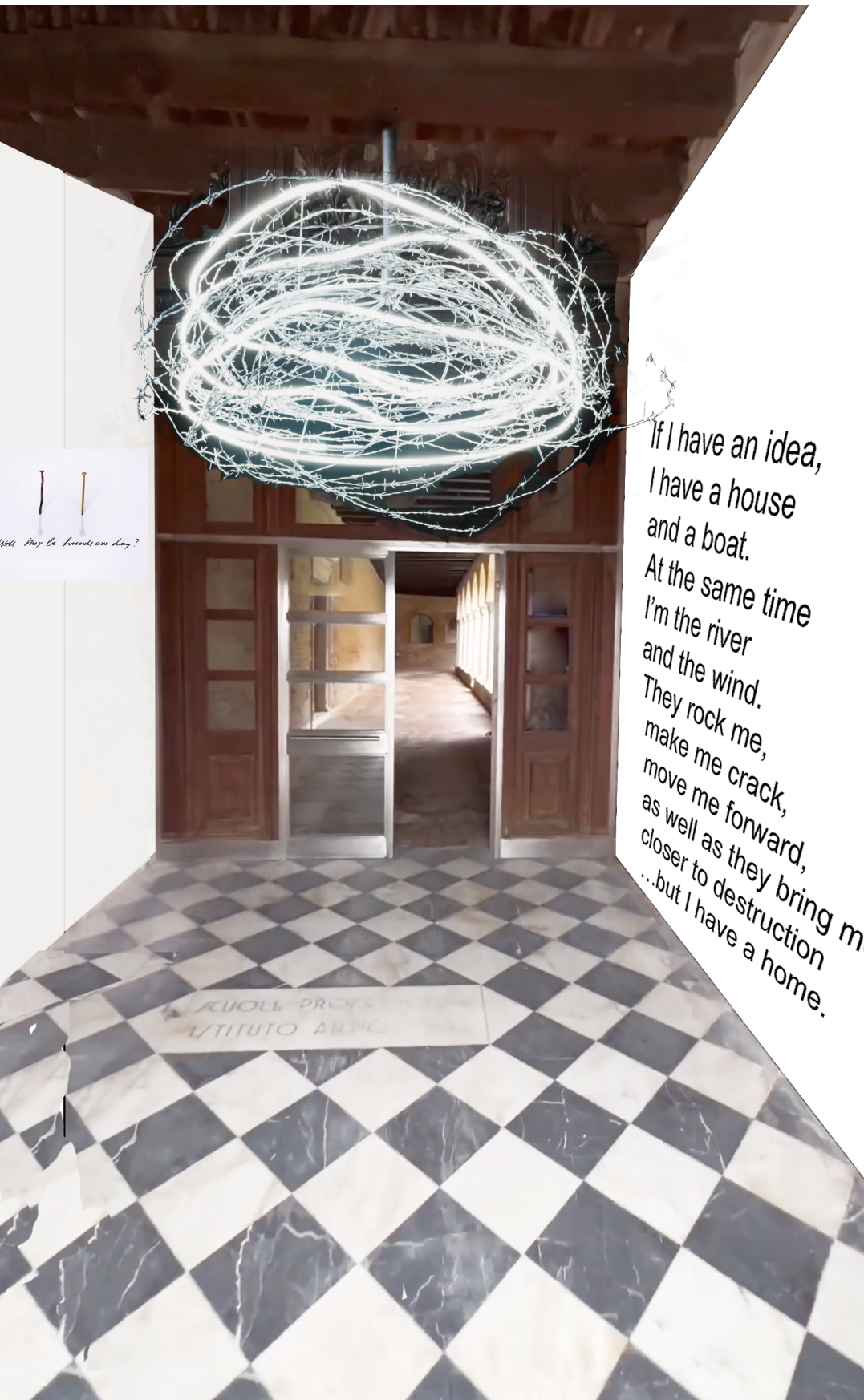
**d/ Relationship to the exhibition space:**

A particular relationship to the exhibition space consists of the project's many references to the sea and to water in general like in the installation SEA - Tears, Frozen People and Toro (video). In the main installation YOU ARE, THEREFORE I AM the figure made of broken glass splinters arises from the sand on the ground, a reference to the

desperate struggle of the migrants arriving from the sea. Furthermore, on the floors of the corridors in Sala Tiziano are sediments of marine water, resembling various geographic sketches as a metaphor of a foreigner's journey.

**5. visual material**

1. DILEMMA
2. WILL THEY BE FRIENDS ONE DAY?







3. JUST A GAME
4. SEATEARS
5. FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US



- 6. People of Salt
- 7. MAKE ME MOVE
- 8. TORO



**YOU ARE, THEREFORE I AM.**

In the mane room is a corner with a dim light.  
The visitor see some reflectin... difficult to define.  
There are many pieces of broken mirror glass scattered  
on the floor, which is partially covered with sand.  
The pieces reflect light from a beamer to  
a white wall in the vague shape of a human body,  
hardly recognizable.

In the room is a lightly lit sign in English and Italian:  
"To view this installation you must ask another visitor for help.  
At the end of the room there is a stone on a string.  
Someone has to pull this stone down for you  
to activate the installation."

At the other end of the room is this stone tied to a string  
leading to the installation, attached to the stone is a sign:  
"Pull me". When a visitor pulls down the stone,  
the figure made of the mirror shards raises up. It becomes  
fully visible as a human figure, surrounded by birds,  
now erected and beautifully illuminated.

A sound emerges from the figure like the hum of a song  
for the duration of a minute, the tone of this song changes  
from initially tender and vulnerable to increasingly strong  
and self-confident. Vassileva invites us to watch this conglomerate  
of broken pieces metamorphosing into a body of restored dignity,  
which can only be accomplished with the help of another visitor.







10. BE CALM
11. BE CALM
12. MIKROPHONE
13. JOURNAL
14. JOEY
15. MIRROR LIGHT
16. THE TREASURE IS EVERYWHERE
17. FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US





OUTDOORS SCULPTUR and INSTALLATION

- 19. THE BEGINNING OF THE END
- 20. SCRATCHING COZY



**6. Plan - graphic**

1. As soon as I know I have this honor and responsibility, I will fly there.  
January 10-15, 2024 to Venice and 12.01 back.

Take a close look at the exhibition rooms. The video was very helpful, but it is always necessary to be there because of the proportions, the materiality, the possibilities and unexpected barriers.

2. Dilema (the neon for the entrance)  
in progress from 01/20-30/24

3. Prepare the base for the atomic bomb.  
Try to get the big artificial eggs in Venice, if not they are made in Venice at friends place...

4. The video FAR AWAY AND NEXT TO US – Max-Animation ends on February 28th.

5. Build a base for the mirrors with a very specific inclination. Hide on site with sand from above... for YOU ARE...  
THEREFOR I AM.