



## **'The Neighbours' project represents Bulgaria at the 60<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia**

'The Neighbours', with curator Vasil Vladimirov and artists Lilia Topouzova, Krasimira Butseva and Julian Shehirian, will represent Bulgaria in 2024 at the 60th edition of the International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. The winners of a competition organised by the Ministry of Culture were announced at a press conference hosted at the Bulgarian News Agency. The event was attended by Ms Amelia Gesheva, Deputy Minister of Culture; Nadezhda Dzhakova, PhD, National Commissioner and Head of the Sofia Arsenal – Museum of Contemporary Art, a department of the National Gallery; Prof. Venelin Shurelov, PhD, Jury Chair; and Vasil Vladimirov, curator of the winning project. BNT journalist and producer Evgenia Atanassova moderated the event.

Curator Vladimirov spoke in person about the project, while the artists joined online from Toronto, Philadelphia, and London.

'These ethnographic and historical investigations trace both the lived experience of violence and the deep scars left by arrests and imprisonment. The project presents the consequences of the deliberate silencing of decades of state violence and the absence of memory in contemporary public consciousness,' stated the curator, adding, 'It forms a space in which one can bear witness to those people labelled as foreigners within Bulgaria's borders, in direct response to Adriano Pedrosa's [curator of the 60th International Art Exhibition] call to analyse the theme of 'Foreigners Everywhere'.

The the 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia runs from 20 April to 24 November 2024 (pre-opening on 17, 18 and 19 April) under the motto, *Foreigners Everywhere - Stranieri Ovunque*. This edition will focus on the themes of migration, exile and 'foreign origin'. 'The Biennale itself—an international event with the official participation of numerous countries—has always been a platform for the exhibition of works by foreigners from all over the world. Thus, the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia will be a celebration of the foreign, the distant, the outsider, the queer, as well as the indigenous,' stated Pedrosa.

In 2024, Bulgaria will register its eleventh national participation (the first was in 1910, followed by 1942, 1948, 1964, 1993, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2019, and 2022). The event will take place in the Sala Tiziano at the Centro Culturale Don Orione Artigianelli, near the Ponte dell'Accademia.

'This is a sustainable policy that was initiated in 2019, when Bulgaria renewed its participation in the La Biennale di Venezia, and later in the fore of Architecture. Several consecutive governments have allocated a budget for this presentation,' said Deputy Minister Amelia Gesheva.

'La Biennale di Venezia is the oldest and most prestigious forum for contemporary art, founded in 1895. It is also the largest platform for the presentation of art, its creators as well as their meeting with the public. It is an honour, a pleasure and a huge responsibility to lead the operational organisational process, preparation and implementation of our national participation; to be responsible for the Bulgarian exposition according to the requirements of the organisers, as well as to coordinate work on the project with the office of La Biennale di Venezia, added Nadezhda Dzhakova, the commissioner of the Bulgarian representation.

She described the project: 'This is a multimedia and interactive installation that brings to light the silenced and faded memories of survivors of political violence of the Communist regime in Bulgaria, and that partially recreates the survivors' homes in which the meetings and conversations with them unfolded. Staged within these private spaces are fragments of oral history interviews conducted by the artists, with field recordings and videos from two former camp sites—Lovech and Belene.'

According to her, here we have specific historical narratives but also different ways of deploying the camera—soberly registering, biographically recounting, historically analysing, or capturing traces of an action or memory.

'The jury's work was complicated. The quality and level of all the candidates were extremely high. We followed the protocol in a democratic manner—with two votes—and I exclude any possibility that the election was manipulated. This project is a most powerful sign of an ideological counter-offensive against the erasure of some highly significant events in our recent history,' stated Jury Chair Prof. Venelin Shurelov.

Vasil Vladimirov then introduced himself and the artists of the winning project, 'The Neighbours'.

### **The Curator**

**Vasil Vladimirov** graduated with a BSc in Modern History and Politics at Royal Holloway, University of London, and an MSc in Political Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His practice as a curator stands at the intersection of art, politics, and history.

## **The Artists**

**Krasimira Butseva** is a visual artist, researcher and writer based in Sofia and London. She is a senior lecturer at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. Her works are featured in gallery spaces and academic journals alike.

**Liliya Topouzova** is a Professor of History at the University of Toronto. She is a scholar and a film-maker whose work draws on history and memory, particularly in relation to political violence, silence and trauma.

**Julian Chehirian** is a multimedia artist, researcher, and writer who bases himself in Philadelphia and Sofia. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the History of Science at Princeton University, USA. In his practice-based research, Chehirian creates site-specific multimedia installations that employ architectural space, modified objects, video, audio, and experimental technologies.

The seven-member jury judged the 17 contenders. For the first time, the projects put forward by the other applicants and the jury session minutes are available for viewing on the Ministry of Culture website.

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### **Official hashtags:**

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