

WHISPERS

Artist: Youlian Tabakov

Curator: Vladiya Mihaylova

Minor keys are often the voices of the unheard, unseen, excluded, and forgotten. Like whispers, they are barely perceptible individual vibrations, dissolving into multitudes and disappearing within masses. Sometimes they arise from within ourselves—an inner voice amid the noise and circumstances that shape life beyond our desires, will, or control.

Youlian Tabakov's exhibition *Whispers* creates a pause for a personal connection with life. It invites visitors to remain alone with themselves and interrupt the flow of routine—as both withdrawal and a way to sustain fragile hopes and gratitude. The project unites two works within a shared framework, giving its title to one of them. **The installations are conceived for the space and placed in the exhibition hall and the adjoining inner courtyard. A key principle in their creation is the voluntary participation of diverse people and the active presence of visitors.**

The installation *Whispers*, which lends its name to the exhibition, is a large-scale visual metaphor, unfolded like a painting in space. It descends from the most distant and elevated point at the back of the hall, forming a field of red flowers reminiscent of poppies. Its visual language is clear and minimal: purified form, defined perspective, and sculptural use of canvas. The red, close to the color of blood, intensifies bodily and emotional impact, evoking the poppy-covered corpses of those who fell in the Flanders Fields of World War I, described in John McCrae's poem of the same name.

The installation also creates an immersive sound environment. Integrated speakers carry whispering voices in multiple languages. At different points of the work, the whispers overlap and the soundscape continually shifts. The voices are recordings of prayers whispered in private by people speaking different languages, belonging to diverse cultural and spiritual communities, who voluntarily participated in the creation of the work.

The artist's visual language is symbolic and emotionally engaging. It addresses the relationships between life and death, anxiety and calm, pain and consolation, horizontality and elevation. The work creates a space in which the idea of unity emerges—one that does not erase individuality but invites shared presence.

No person or prayer is more significant than another. Through them, we connect with soldiers without mission, grieving mothers, people dying from fear and hunger, and

countless other human fates. Beyond media images remain the whispers—often more real than the visuals themselves.

This approach resonates with the themes of the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. The late Koyo Kouoh's curatorial text highlights the potential of silence, non-dominant voices, and the fragile and invisible. **Here, art does not insist or critique directly but opens space for reflection—a response to the global crisis of trust and meaning.**

The second installation, *Serenity*, relates to the architecture of the space. Ropes stretched between the inner courtyard columns resemble clotheslines, alongside old woven baskets holding fabric pieces for visitors to write prayers and tie to the ropes. Inspired by customs and rituals of health, sharing, and remembrance, the work invites quiet self-reflection and standing beside others. After the Biennale, prayers will be preserved without being read to protect each participant's intimacy.

In both works, silence, whisper, ambiguity, and distance are expressive means for the artist—not a refusal of responsibility, but an invitation to conscious, attentive co-presence. The project's commentary lies in this ethic, reflecting on the place of humans in the world.

For French philosopher Simone Weil, prayer is a form of extreme attention: "Attention brought to its highest degree is itself prayer." In a world of eroding shared understanding, this gesture gains special significance. As Hannah Arendt observes, the collapse of negotiated power among people produces violence, a symptom of a profound crisis. Against this disintegration, attention opens a space of equal presence, where, as Judith Butler notes, bodies standing side by side—even in silence—form a shared field of meaning with ethical and political density.

Vladiya Mihaylova

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