

## **Inventors around the Big Tree**

project proposal by Daniel Bozhkov, artist and Margarita Dorovska, curator

Daniel Bozhkov's project presents a posthumanist reality where human inventions intertwine with natural phenomena, fauna and flora, cultural creations, and people from the Venetian Lagoon. The artist acts as a symbiotic impulse between the different forms of being and knowledge; not treating the elements as resources, but as relatives brought closer through work.

A non-hierarchical system layers the four Bulgarian inventions, chosen according to their accidental side effects, socio-cultural impacts and poetic expressions rather than by standards of efficiency or scientific and technological contribution. Short circuits and detours are considered equally valuable when answering questions that we do not know how to ask.

The artworks disguise themselves as everyday objects or laboratory experiments. They are created with contributions from various scientists - including an ornithologist, arborist, mycologist, physicist, marine ecologist, and painting restorer - as well as craftsmen and women of the lagoon such as fishermen, carpenters, ceramicists, and brickmakers.

### **The Center...and its Outposts**

In the courtyard of the Don Orione building stands the Big Tree. This 90-year-old magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is one of the oldest species of flowering trees. Magnolia flowers developed before the evolution of bees and butterflies, and so "relied" on beetles and flies for pollination.

The Big Tree is the project's center of attention, and an object of study through the seasons - research conducted with the help of Eddy Fortunato, Associate Professor of Botany at Ca' Foscari University, and Luca Mamprin, from LIPU (Italian League for Bird Protection), an expert on the flora and fauna of the Venetian Lagoon.

Birdhouses mounted on five other trees around Venice - a London plane, European white elm, umbrella pine, holly oak, and hackberry tree - will serve as outposts of the Bulgarian Pavilion.

### **Painting and Mushrooms**

What can the Venetian School of painting teach us about our relationship with the environment. Giorgione's *The Tempest* (1508), housed in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, is considered one of the most mysterious works of the Renaissance, and one which art historians still argue about - what exactly is taking place in its moist green darkness?

The traditional egg-oil technique of the Venetian artists will be enriched with mycelium and used to paint seven canvases depicting details of the tree behind the nursing mother in *The Tempest*. This "Painted Tree" is a companion species to the Big Tree, located just steps away. As a result, mushrooms are expected to grow in parts of the paintings. According to biologist Merlin Sheldrake, our relationship with the fungal kingdom has completely changed our ideas of how the world functions.

## **The Inventions**

The project absurdly reflects on the archaic structure of national pavilions maintained by the Venice Biennale since the time of London's Crystal Palace, by presenting four Bulgarian inventions - by engineers, computer scientists, architects, and mathematicians representing the country's inventive spirit, noted by the Futurist Marinetti in his sound poem "Zam Tum Tuum" (1912) about the siege of Edrine by the Bulgarians in the Balkan War.

### **The New Chushkopek (improved to roast curved peppers)**

The iconic Bulgarian *chushkopek* (pepper roaster) was invented in a small workshop in Veliko Tarnovo, in 1974, by engineer Nikolay Piperkov. It enabled newly urban citizens to roast peppers on their concrete balconies, and not rely on grandmothers to carry on doing all the roasting in the villages.

The New Chushkopek is a kiln built of bricks from the Carraro Brickyard in Piove di Sacco, which has been in business since the 17th century. It will stand in the Don Orione courtyard, and be a replica of its neighbor, the Big Tree, though covered with lime-and-sand plaster so that the bark of the Big Tree can be painted onto it using the *buon fresco* technique.

### **Portals Between Metaphor and Reality**

The Bulgarian Pavilion has an entrance from the Zattere waterfront in Dorsoduro. Part of this waterfront promenade is called *Zattere delle Incurabili* (Alley of the Incurables), a name Joseph Brodsky transformed from "sick from incurable disease" to mean "hearts incurable from love".

Such "perforation" of the membrane separating the metaphorical from the real happens in many parts of Daniel Bozhkov's project. The artist remembered from his childhood in Burgas, the poet Hristo Fotev telling a story of an engine that converted sea wave energy into electricity. While he initially thought the story was purely metaphorical, Bozhkov discovered that Bulgarian engineer Mikhail Zidarov had in fact built and tested such a contraption in Burgas and Varna in 1904. Zidarov registered his invention as patents #59,872, and #59,880 in the Imperial Patent Office of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Vienna in 1913. Artificial Intelligence has "discovered" a poem by Hristo Fotev titled "The Engine", though library searches have not yet confirmed its actual existence. In the poem, the wave converter is an invention of the waves *themselves*; the "living sea" acknowledged as an intelligence, an organism.

These winding paths create the multilayered character of Daniel Bozhkov's project. With his innate sense of the absurd and a taste for "minor keys", the artist infects us with sample powers of the banal, ridiculous, miraculous and inconsequential to reveal the radical connectivity in seemingly closed systems.