

4.) Concept

4.a) Description of the project “The New Limits to Growth” and its relevance

“The New Limits to Growth” is a multidisciplinary exhibition project that explores the interrelationship between the physical, spiritual, and existential dimensions of human existence. These “new limits to growth” manifest in an era of accelerated technological progress, environmental instability, and deepening socio-economic inequalities where contemporary art is given a special role in shaping public attitudes.

“The New Limits to Growth” is an elusive reality reflecting the imperfection of human tools - the projections of global development with digital technologies that began with publishing of *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, the world statistics registered by worldometers.com, and micro-analytical studies of the Shroud of Turin.

By presenting object, visual message, and statistical data, the project builds a conceptual environment that encourages a deeper understanding of humanity’s relationship with the planet’s limited resources, while simultaneously posing questions about the ethical, ecological, and spiritual consequences of living in an interconnected world.

At the core of the project’s conceptual basis are the messages of the report published in 1972 by a team of scientists under the title *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome. The report warns that if humanity continues to grow exponentially in terms of population and consumption while relying on finite resources, the world will inevitably reach its ecological and economic limits. This is not the first theory concerning the limitations of the physical world we inhabit, but it is the first in modern history to be published and disseminated globally. For this reason, it was chosen to represent the theoretical framework of the project. It envisions possible scenarios, possible paths the world may take. In a certain way, these are choices we make continuously as individuals and as a society, choices that shape the reality in which we will continue to exist, the reality we inhabit at this very moment. The two editions - the original one from 1972 in English and the first Bulgarian edition from 2022 are part of the exhibition.

At the centre of the exhibition are three large format works by Milko Pavlov, created using the technique of graphite frottage on canvas, each measuring 260 × 200 cm. They are a distinctive interpretation of the face of Jesus Christ from the Shroud of Turin—a relic, a sacred object, an “acheiropoietic image” with profound spiritual and emotional significance. For science, it remains a mysterious artifact, whose age and origin continue to be subjects of research and debate. In his practice, Milko Pavlov employs an asymmetric approach, consciously disrupting linear time by dating his work in the future. By incorporating future dates, he turns each work into a message and challenges conventional notions of chronology. In doing so, the boundaries between past, present, and future blur, revealing how art can exist simultaneously in multiple temporal states. The technique through which the works are created—frottage on canvas using wire fencing placed beneath the fabric—relies on rubbing and strong physical pressure. The

procedure is not fully controllable; the artist initiates it and then allows “chance” to come into play. This technique was introduced into 20th-century art by Max Ernst in connection with his theories and research of the subconscious in 1925.

The third key element is the real-time data generated from the website Worldometers.com, which will be projected in the exhibition space. The platform collects, processes, and publishes a wide range of global indicators in eight main categories: world population, government and economics, society and media, environment, food, water, energy, and health. The data comes from reliable international sources, scientific institutions, and official reports. Frequently used by students, journalists, researchers, and the general public, it serves as a resource for understanding global trends through constantly updated statistics. The site is maintained by a small independent group with no political, governmental, or corporate affiliations.

“The New Limits to Growth” connects the timeless themes of human relationships through art - as a convergence of technologies that measure indicators in real time; a scientific report created as early as 1972 with the purpose of forecasting and raising questions about the future of our planet; and the art of Milko Pavlov, coming from the future, but realized in and inhabiting a state of simultaneous non-simultaneity.

The project is conceived as a critical analysis of what we call reality - of the linear time in which we live and the way we think about it, of the inexplicable thread of our existence, and the interpretations of human relationships.

“The New Limits of Growth” addresses current contemporary challenges related to sustainability, systemic limits, and the way humanity understands time, responsibility, and reality. Drawing on the seminal 1972 report, published as the book *The Limits to Growth*, the project connects historical scientific forecasting with present-day global conditions, emphasizing the continued relevance of its warnings in an era of ecological instability and accelerated technological development.

The main theme of the project is time. The exhibition brings together a prognostic book from the past that forecasts possible future scenarios, real-time global data reflecting the present moment, and frottages dated in the future - artworks that appear as messages arriving from what is yet to come. This asymmetrical structure challenges linear notions of progress and invites viewers to reflect on where, and when, we are actually living.

Large format frottages created through pressure and partial loss of control function as metaphors for systemic forces shaping human existence. Referencing the Shroud of Turin, they operate between scientific inquiry and spiritual mystery, mirroring the tension between measurable data and existential experience. The projection of live global data introduces urgency and constant change, situating the viewer within global processes that go beyond individual perception.

Implemented these means reach a coherent and interdisciplinary framework in which art functions as a critical tool for reflection on growth, limits, and the fragile temporal condition of contemporary life.

4.b) List of works and implementation of the project

List of Art works

- 1.) Picture of 2109
graphite and wax on canvas, 260 x 200 cm. From 2035
- 2.) Picture of 2110
graphite and wax on canvas, 260 x 200 cm. From 2043
- 3.) Picture of 2113
graphite and wax on canvas, 260 x 200 cm. From 2038

Images of the works are in the Artist's portfolio

Implementation

The individual steps for implementing the exhibition and additional activities are described in detail in the plan schedule in section 6, "Plan schedule for all project stages." The three frottage works are currently located in the artist's studio in Berlin and can be transported to Venice by an art transporter (quote available).

The digital element of the exhibition, the Worldometer figures, are freely accessible on two websites (worldometers.com and worldometers.info).

The books are available in English and Bulgarian. Only the book display case needs to be built and the windows covered with a special light film.

Sufficient time has been allocated for preparatory planning and coordination meetings.

The artist will be present during the installation and dismantling of the exhibition.

4.c) Artistic potential to increase the visibility of the Bulgarian art scene

The project “The New Limits to Growth” aligns with the objectives of national participation is engaged with globally significant intellectual, social, and ethical topics. The project presents an artistic position grounded in research, drawing directly on the internationally influential report *The Limits to Growth* published in 1972 by a team of scientists, commissioned by the Club of Rome.

The report warns that if humanity continues to grow exponentially in terms of population and consumption while relying on finite resources, the world will inevitably reach its ecological and economic limits. The frottages of Milko Pavlov present a critical artistic response to shared universal global challenges such as environmental instability, overconsumption, and the limits of technological progress, all of which are united by the factor of time.

The use of the Shroud of Turin as a conceptual and visual point of reference introduces an ethical and existential dimension that transcends cultural boundaries, making the project accessible and relevant to diverse international audiences. At the same time, the artist’s asymmetrical approach - dating the works in the future - demonstrates conceptual innovation and situates Bulgarian artistic practice within contemporary theoretical debates on the limitations of the physical world in which we live.

The logic of the exhibition narrative enters into dialogue with, continues, and develops humanity’s enduring efforts to peer into time, contributing to an awareness of that fluid reality which connects everything and everyone. However linear and clearly defined it may appear, the phenomenon of time remains opaque, and conventional measurement becomes relative. In practice, it turns out that we live in a state of constant non-simultaneous simultaneity, formulated by Ernst Bloch in 1935 and further developed by Walter Benjamin, while *The Limits to Growth* (1972) is limited to material resources.

What is new - and what constitutes the artistic potential of the project *The New Limits of Growth* - is the invocation of the future as a key factor in hypotheses concerning the development of living conditions on the planet. The intervention of frottages extracted from the XXII century and brought into our present becomes the condition that links statistics, scientific forecasts, and the reality of being.

The artistic potential of the project lies in its ability to transform complex scientific, historical, and existential questions into a medium for conveying meaning. By integrating scientific research, contemporary artistic practice, and real-time global data, the project constructs a multilayered artistic language in which art functions as a tool for critical reflection.

Central to the project is an asymmetrical approach that challenges the linear perception of time. The report published in the form of the book *The Limits to Growth* provides a conceptual foundation from the past, while the frottages, dated in the future, function as

material projections of what is yet to come. Real-time global data anchor the exhibition in the present moment, creating a dynamic dialogue between past, present, and future, in which time becomes both a subject and an artistic medium.

The exhibition draws on three factors:

***The Limits to Growth* (1972):** The groundbreaking report by the Club of Rome on sustainability, resource limits, and population growth is central to international discourse and has shaped contemporary thinking about the imprint that humankind leaves behind. The presentation of both the original English edition (1972) and the first Bulgarian translation (2022) emphasizes the enduring relevance of these issues to our times.

Three frottages by Milko Pavlov, graphite and wax on canvas, 260 x 200 cm ([each](#)), **interpreting the image of Christs from the Shroud of Turin:** Contemporary artistic engagement with the relic, which connects historical spiritual and ethical questions to present-day concerns. For science, it remains a mysterious artefact whose age and origin continue to be subjects of research and debate. It addresses the theme of time in its own distinctive way.

Statistical Data (Worldometers.com): Continuously updated in real time statistics on population, resources, and health offer an immediately legible layer, creating a direct link between the exhibition and the present moment. The data comes from reliable international sources, scientific institutions, and official reports. Frequently used by students, journalists, researchers, and the general public, it serves as a resource for understanding global trends through constantly updated statistics. The site is maintained by an independent group with no political, governmental, or corporate affiliations.

4.d) Relationship of the project to the exhibition space

The New Limits to Growth is conceived in direct dialogue with the exhibition space. No repainting is planned, nor any additional walls, curtains, or extra elements that would disrupt the unity of the space. The windows and doors will remain visible. The only intervention is a semi-transparent foil, which allows natural light to enter. Its placement is easily reversible and non-invasive.

Natural light entering the space is key to the perception of the project. Instead of being directed or dramatized, it is allowed to function in its natural way - to change throughout the day, revealing and emphasizing different details as it does. In this way, the exhibition uses the space as it is, allowing the project to unfold within the existing conditions rather than imposing a new scenography on them.

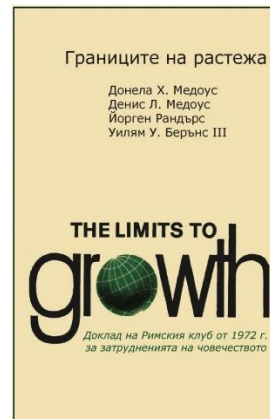
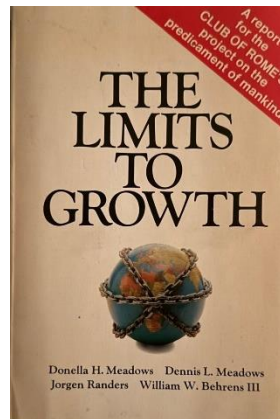
5.) Exemplary exhibition plan

The entrance to the exhibition space is accessed from the fondamenta facing the Giudecca Canal in Venice. To enter the pavilion, the visitor passes under the column of the atrium of the historical building Centro Culturale Don Orione Artigianelli. After a few meters, the visitor enters a space, leaving behind the everyday noise of the city. This transition can be perceived as a border that must be physically crossed before reaching the exhibition space. It allows the visitor to detach from the surrounding world and enter a specific state. The proposed exhibition project builds upon the atmosphere of the pavilion located within the grounds of a spiritual retreat.



The door for the entrance to the exhibition hall is yet another boundary to be crossed in order to enter the main exhibition space. Upon entering Titian Hall, the lighting is dimmed, allowing natural light from the windows to filter into the room. Through a special foil applied to the windows, the light becomes softened, indirect, yet it still shapes the perception of the exhibition. In the spirit of the Biennale's theme "In Minor Keys," the space of the Bulgarian Pavilion has been transformed into a place for awareness while preserving the original architecture.

At the center of the dimmed room, placed under a glass case and illuminated by a spotlight, two copies of *The Limits to Growth* will be displayed - the original 1972 copy in English and the first Bulgarian edition, from 2022.



The second fundamental component of the exhibition consists of three large format frottage works by Milko Pavlov, 260 × 200 cm, suspended freely in the space. Hanging from the ceiling beams by almost invisible cords, their height nearly fills the available vertical space. Positioned in a staggered arrangement, they form a kind of labyrinth and give a sense of levitation.

