

## **Project for the Bulgarian Pavillion of the 61st Venice Biennale for Contemporary Art 2026 :**

### **ONE SKY: A Minor Key for Collective Repair**

#### **List of participants:**

*Valentin Bakardzhiev - Artist*

Valentin Bakardzhiev is a Bulgarian artist who has lived in the Netherlands for years. His work is based on sustainable artistic practices and connects traditional crafts with contemporary techniques and themes. Creator of the installation “One Sky” and indigo artworks, in his proposal for the 61st Venice Art Biennale 2026 he uses natural materials (Japanese Washi paper, cultivated natural indigo) and traditional techniques (Shibori) to make the invisible (air, connection, fragility) tactile and visible, providing the thematic and sensory focus for the “radical reconnection with the natural environment of art”, mentioned in the main curatorial text of the biennial “In Minor Keys”.

*Nikita Nikolova – Audio Artist*

Nikita Nikolova is a multi-percussionist and audio artist based in Rotterdam. Her participation in the project brings a vital audio dimension to the installation “One Sky”. Through an audio work created especially for the exhibition, she will revive the idea of “minor keys”. Her work combines classical rigor and contemporary sensibility, which seamlessly combine with the project’s goal of creating connections across time and space.

*Nia Tabakova - Curator*

Nia Tabakova is an independent curator based in Sofia, with many years of experience in the implementation of international curatorial projects. Her role is to offer a contemporary thematic and critical framework necessary to connect the artist’s traditional, applied practice with the main curatorial themes of the Biennale concept “In Minor Keys”. She articulates the project’s vision as “worldbuilding... and a place for collective recovery”, aimed at a broad international audience.

*Sinergia NGO - Project management, production and communications*

*Sinergia via its registered TM “Advertising Artists”* is a non profit organisation aiming to foster the development of a competitive network of talented artists and illustrators from Eastern Europe, encouraging and supporting creativity and innovation. It provides the main communication, implementation and structural support, ensuring the technical feasibility of the project and its visual potential, while adhering to all budget and execution criteria.

#### **Project Concept:**

ONE SKY is an immersive, multidisciplinary installation that transforms the concept of the sky into a tangible and sensory experience. The project unites years of research and experimentation developed through Valentin Bakardzhiev’s long-term body of work *Le Grand Bleu*, which includes *The Cube Universe*, *Temples of Sky*, *Planet Nine*, and *d’Earth*. Each of these chapters explores the relationship

between humanity, nature, and the cosmos; in ONE SKY, they merge into a single vision — to reveal our shared humanity and collective responsibility under one common sky.

Bakardjiev's work combines traditional craftsmanship with sustainable practices to reimagine our connection with the natural world. Using Washi paper, bamboo, and natural indigo, he connects ancient traditions and cultures that viewed materials as sacred extensions of nature itself.

Indigo lies at the heart of his artistic language. It is one of the few pigments that has emerged independently across multiple civilizations, linking cultures through parallel discovery and shared use. From Asia to Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas, indigo has traveled along trade routes, colonial histories, and systems of labor, becoming a global material long before globalization was defined. As a dye derived from living plants yet transformed through human knowledge and time-intensive processes, indigo embodies a relationship between nature, culture, and collective memory.

Beyond its deep blue hue, which is typically associated with the state of melancholy corresponding to the curatorial theme of "In minor keys", indigo symbolizes transformation, purity, and endurance. It is a pigment that crystallizes rather than stains — a metaphor for renewal, bridging earth and sky, water and air, the visible and the unseen.

### **Description of the works:**

The exhibition is built on four interconnected bodies of work, designed to create a unified, contemplative environment:

#### **1. Installation: ONE SKY**

In the main installation, visitors enter a spatial environment composed of fine strips of handmade Washi paper, dyed with natural indigo that Bakardjiev has cultivated and processed in Amsterdam since 2020. Hanging from above, these delicate blue strips move with every breath and step, responding subtly to human presence. This quiet movement makes the invisible visible — the constant exchange between our bodies and the air we share — turning the sky itself into a living presence and the bodies of the visitors into active participants, constantly interacting with the fragile balance of the environment and influencing its delicate fluidity.

Here, the sky is not above us — it surrounds us. We walk within it. We breathe it. We become part of it. The installation invites the viewer to rediscover the horizon as a meeting place of earth and sky — a reminder of the deep interconnection between ourselves and nature.

*Motivation for Selection:* This installation is the physical embodiment of the curatorial theme. It creates a "polyphonous assembly" favoring "quiet tones" over "orchestral bombast" by prioritizing intimate engagement, contemplation, and sensory experience. The fragile, translucent Washi paper, dyed with the transformative indigo pigment, functions as a visual and somatic metaphor for the planet's delicate balance and the profound, invisible connection between all people. By realizing that they are literally "walking in the sky," visitors experience the art as "world-building" and a necessary step toward "collective repair" and shared awareness.

#### **2. Series: Seven Horizons**

Along the walls, a series of seven large indigo artworks (approximately 50 x 120 cm each) will depict horizons symbolizing the seven continents — Seven Horizons, One Planet — continuing the theme of

unity in diversity. These works utilize the artist's technique of layering semi-transparent papers (Washi, calligraphy, recycled, 300-year-old Japanese sheets) with natural indigo and ink, employing traditional Shibori techniques, expanding on the idea of the relationship between humanity, nature, spirituality, and ecology.

*Motivation for Selection:* The series "Seven Horizons" provide the contemplative backdrop and emotional depth required by the theme "In Minor Keys." They offer a necessary stillness to counterbalance the kinetic experience of the installation. The deep blue, a symbol of the endless sky and the deepest ocean, draws from the melancholic yet profound richness of the minor key. The depiction of seven horizons reinforces the core message of unity and borderless existence, asking the viewer to look out and imagine "other worlds," thus facilitating the role of art as an "interpreter of the social and psychic condition."

### 3. Audio: Four Directions

Nikita Nikolova's composition "Four Direction" is a minimalistic suite of four miniatures for marimba and vibraphone, each written in a different minor key. To enhance the sensory experience and connection to the theme, the sound artist is commissioned to create a subtle, ambient soundscape for the internal space incorporating "minor keys". This would heighten the feeling of being in a "polyphonous assembly" of art, spatializing interconnectedness without hierarchy and reinforcing the auditory focus highlighted by the main curatorial vision.

*Motivation for Selection:* Inspired by the project ONE SKY, the piece mirrors the movement and emotional landscape of Bakardjiev's artwork. Through shifting colors and subtle rhythmic motion, "Four Directions" explores the idea of a shared atmosphere that connects us all, forming a sonic counterpart to the artist's visual narrative. Sound, like air, moves freely between directions, reinforcing the idea that difference does not divide but unifies beneath One Sky—forming a sonic counterpart to the project's vision of interconnectedness.

### 4. Garden: Indigo Cycle

*Indigo Cycle* will be a circular garden space situated in the open area of Sala Tiziano dedicated to growing indigo plants, where cultivation itself becomes part of the artwork. It extends the installation into the open square as a living process, tracing indigo from seed to plant and from cultivation to artistic transformation. The installation gives a rare insight into the core of Bakardjiev's artistic practice. Growing in the garden, the indigo plants embody the delicate yet resilient rhythms of nature, making visible the time, care, and interdependence required for growth. What appears fragile—young plants, slow development—contains the potential for profound transformation.

*Motivation for Selection:* By situating this work outdoors, the project emphasizes growth as a shared responsibility and invites viewers to experience nature as an active collaborator rather than a resource. The living indigo and circular shape reinforces the planetary symbolism of the project, reminding us that resilience emerges through continuity, attention, and collective action. These fragile plants represent the delicate state of nature, yet they are rich with a vibrant blue pigment, reflecting the strength and resilience of the Earth itself.

## **Educational Workshops: Threads of the Sky**

In support of the main curatorial theme we propose a series of workshops, modeled on the successful community engagement of Valentin Bakardjiev's "Resurrection" project (2024), which previously inspired children, students, and prisoners through art.

*Concept:* Following the spirit of "Resurrection," which finds potential and renewal in broken fragments, the 'Threads of the Sky' workshops will engage participants in creating a shared, symbolic work from leftover or discarded materials from the main installation.

*Activity:* Participants will use the fine strips and pieces of different papers (Washi, calligraphy, recycled) and remnants of the indigo-dyed paper from the ONE SKY production. They will learn a simple weaving or layering technique to combine these diverse pieces into small, united paper compositions.

*Thematic Core:* The physical act of bringing disparate layers and pieces together to form a single, coherent whole will serve as a tactile realization of the project's central idea: that the sky is not separate over each nation or continent, but is a single, united sphere that connects us all. The conversation during the process is as vital as the craft itself, allowing participants to internalize the message of shared humanity and planetary stewardship.

*Target Groups:* The workshops can be adapted for:

- o **Children and Students:** To inspire a new perspective on sustainability and global citizenship.
- o **Prisoners/Individuals in Need of Support:** To reflect on resilience, interconnectedness, and the potential for rebuilding their futures, just as the fragments are rewoven.
- o **Cultural Exchange Groups:** To facilitate dialogue on unity, craft, and environmental awareness

### **Connection to the Exhibition Space:**

The ONE SKY project transforms the long, high-ceilinged Sala Tiziano into a meditative environment in relation to the main curatorial vision of the 61st Venice Biennale "In Minor Keys." The site originally dates back to the early 15th century (1423) when it was founded as a convent of the Gesuati — a lay religious order engaged in caring for the sick. The historical setting, rooted in social care, perfectly complements the artwork's theme of collective repair.

Located along the Giudecca Canal, one of Venice's major waterways, where the blue of the sea meets the sky, the site is physically and symbolically situated on a blue horizon. The ever-shifting line between water and sky outside the space extends inward, reinforcing the project's central metaphor: a shared atmospheric condition that transcends borders and separation.

The large-scale hanging installation, composed of delicate indigo-dyed Washi paper, is strategically positioned to create open, breathable pathways. This specific design allows visitors to physically walk through the "sky," making the shared atmosphere tactile. By maintaining clear sightlines to the surrounding architecture and the historical cloister, the project integrates subtly, emphasizing that we live "on the horizon." This fusion of art and space guides the public from contemplation of the horizon to a renewed, unifying sense of interconnectedness.

# Technical Description: ONE SKY

## 1. Main Installation: "The Tactile Sky"

The central element of the exhibition is a large-scale, site-specific hanging installation designed to make the atmosphere tangible.

- **Materials:** High-quality **Washi paper** from the **Awagami Factory** (Japan), natural indigo (hand-cultivated and fermented by the artist), natural ink, high-tensile transparent fishing thread, and structural bamboo accents.
- **Suspension System:** The installation utilizes the existing internal metal support frame of **Sala Tiziano**. A grid of transparent fishing threads will be stretched horizontally across the top section of the frame to create an invisible support structure.
- **Structure & Dimensions:** Approximately **50 to 60 vertical strips** of Washi paper, each measuring approximately **30 x 350 cm**
- **Mechanism:** Each strip is fitted with a thin bamboo stick at both the top (for secure attachment) and the bottom. The bottom sticks act as light weights, ensuring the paper hangs vertically as a "screen" while remaining sensitive to the subtle movements of air and the breath of visitors.

## 2. Wall Series: "Seven Horizons"

A series of seven artworks representing the seven continents, emphasizing our shared existence on the global horizon.

- **Quantity & Dimensions:** 7 artworks, each measuring **50 x 120 cm**
- **Support:** Canvas stretched over high-stability **aluminum frames**.
- **Technique:** The artworks are created by overlaying multiple layers of semi-transparent paper. Each layer is dyed using the traditional **Shibori technique** with natural ink and indigo pigment extracted directly from the artist's own plants.
- **Placement:** These will be mounted on the primary plane wall of the hall, providing a static, deep-blue counterpoint to the kinetic installation.

## 3. Garden Installation: "The Indigo Source"

An outdoor component that connects the finished pigment to its biological origin.

- **Structure:** A temporary, circular planting pot with a diameter of **150 cm** and a height of **25 cm**
- **Craftsmanship:** The pot is constructed using traditional **basketry techniques** with natural **bamboo and rattan**.
- **Living Element:** The pot will be filled with soil and planted with **indigo seeds** at the opening in May. These will grow into mature plants by the end of the Biennale in November. The structure is non-invasive and fully removable.

# ONE SKY

**ONE SKY: A Minor Key for Collective Repair**

**Project for the Bulgarian Pavilion of the 61st Venice Biennale for Contemporary Art 2026**

“ЕДНО НЕБЕ” е имерсивна, мултидисциплинарна инсталация, която трансформира концепцията за небето в осезаемо и сетивно преживяване. Проектът обединява години изследвания и експерименти, разработени чрез дългогодишния проект на Валентин Бакърджиев “Голямото синьо”, който включва “Кубичната вселената”, “Храмове на небето”, “Деветата планета” и “Земя”. Всяка от тези глави изследва връзката между човечеството, природата и космоса; в проекта “Едно небе” те се сливат в една обединена визия, за да разкрият нашата споделена човечност и колективна отговорност под едно общо небе.

Работата на Бакърджиев съчетава традиционните занаяти с устойчиви практики, за да преосмисли връзката ни с природния свят. Използвайки хартия Уаши, бамбук и естествено индиго, той свързва древни традиции и култури, които са приемали тези материали като свещени продължения на самата природа.

Индигото е в основата на неговия артистичен език. То е един от малкото пигменти, които са се появили независимо в множество цивилизации, свързвайки култури чрез паралелни открития и споделена употреба. От Азия до Африка, Близкия изток, Европа и Северна и Южна Америка, индигото е пътувало по търговски пътища, през колониални и трудови системи, превръщайки се в глобален материал много преди глобализацията да бъде дефинирана. Като багрило, получено от живи растения, но трансформирано чрез човешкото познание и времеемки процеси, индигото възплъщава връзка между природата, културата и колективната памет.

Отвъд наситения си син оттенък, който обикновено се свързва със състоянието на меланхолия, съответстващо на кураторската тема „В минорни тоналности“, индигото символизира трансформация, чистота и издръжливост. Това е пигмент, който кристализира, а не оцветява – метафора за обновление, свързваща земята и небето, водата и въздуха, видимото и невидимото.



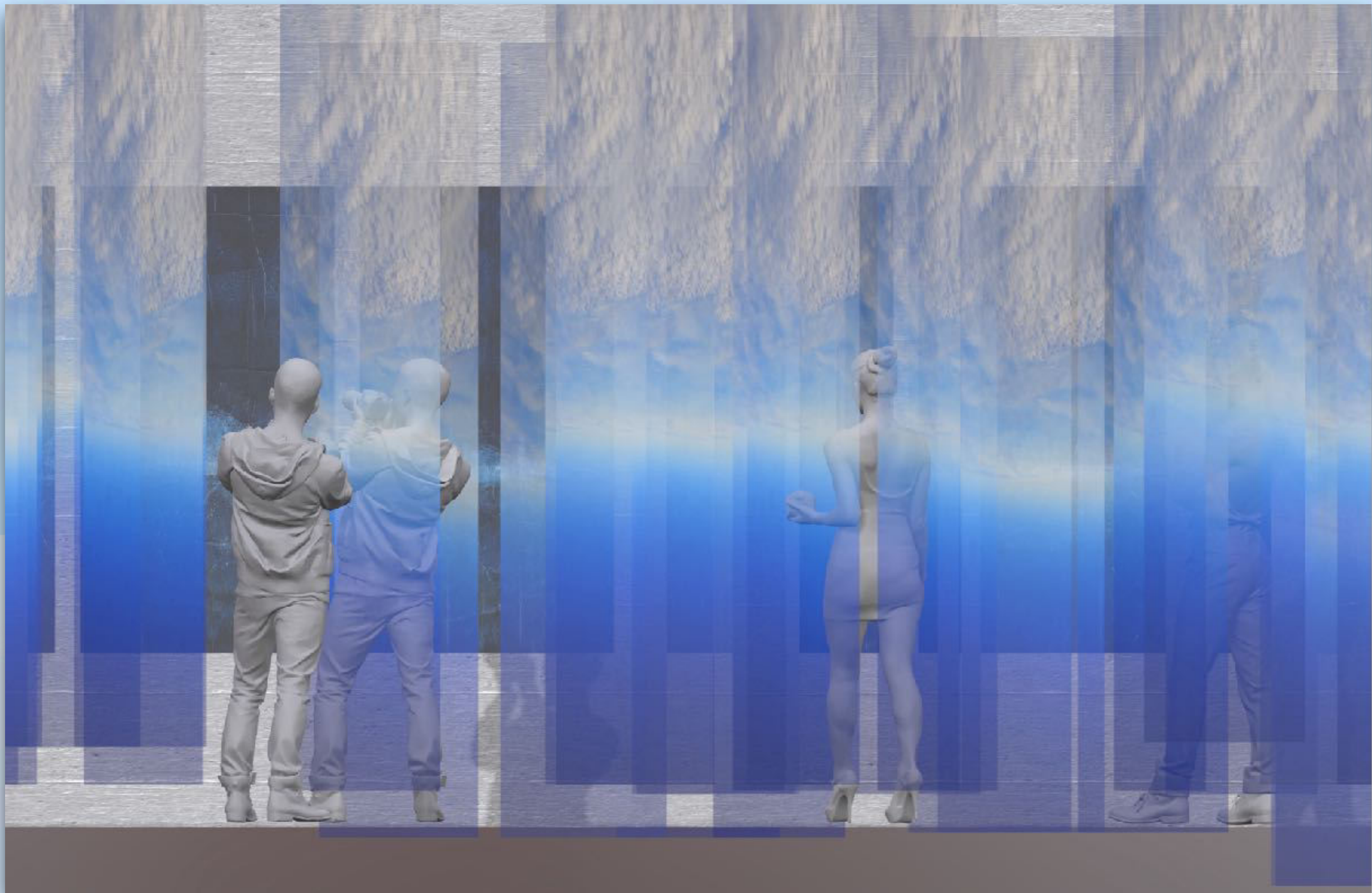
ONE SKY is an immersive, multidisciplinary installation that transforms the concept of the sky into a tangible and sensory experience. The project unites years of research and experimentation developed through Valentin Bakardjiev’s long-term body of work Le Grand Bleu, which includes The Cube Universe, Temples of Sky, Planet Nine, and d’Earth. Each of these chapters explores the relationship between humanity, nature, and the cosmos; in ONE SKY, they merge into a single vision — to reveal our shared humanity and collective responsibility under one common sky.

Bakardjiev’s work combines traditional craftsmanship with sustainable practices to reimagine our connection with the natural world. Using Washi paper, bamboo, and natural indigo, he connects ancient traditions and cultures that viewed materials as sacred extensions of nature itself.

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*Инсталация: “Едно небе”*

В основната инсталация посетителите влизат в пространствена среда, съставена от фини ленти от ръчно изработена хартия Уаши, боядисана с естествено индиго, която Бакърджиев култивира и обработва в Амстердам от 2020 г. Висящи отгоре, тези деликатни сини ленти се движат с всяко вдишване и стъпка, реагирайки фино на човешкото присъствие. Това тихо движение прави невидимото видимо - постоянният обмен между телата ни и въздуха, който споделяме - превръщайки самото небе в живо присъствие, а телата на посетителите в активни участници, постоянно взаимодействащи с крехкия баланс на околната среда и влияещи на нейната деликатна флуидност.

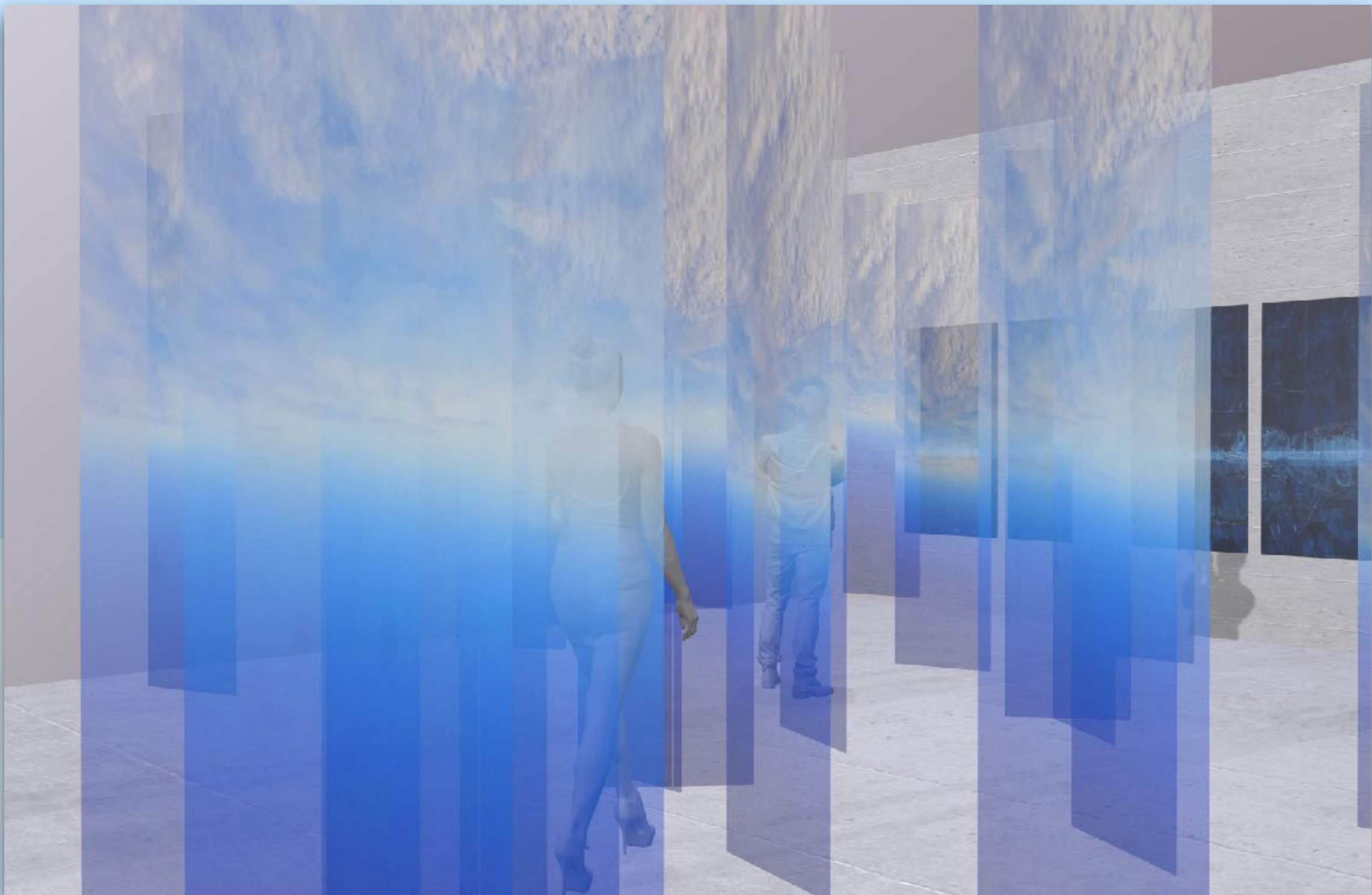
Тук небето не е над нас - то ни заобикаля. Вървим в него. Дишаме го. Ставаме част от него. Инсталацията кани зрителя да преоткрие хоризонта като място за среща на земята и небето - напомняне за дълбоката взаимовръзка между нас и природата.

*Installation: ONE SKY*

In the main installation, visitors enter a spatial environment composed of fine strips of handmade Washi paper, dyed with natural indigo that Bakardjiev has cultivated and processed in Amsterdam since 2020. Hanging from above, these delicate blue strips move with every breath and step, responding subtly to human presence. This quiet movement makes the invisible visible — the constant exchange between our bodies and the air we share — turning the sky itself into a living presence and the bodies of the visitors into active participants, constantly interacting with the fragile balance of the environment and influencing its delicate fluidity.

Here, the sky is not above us — it surrounds us. We walk within it. We breathe it. We become part of it. The installation invites the viewer to rediscover the horizon as a meeting place of earth and sky — a reminder of the deep interconnection between ourselves and nature.





*Аудио: Четири посоки*

Композицията на Никита Николова „Четири посоки“ е минималистична серия от четири миниатюри за маримба и вибрафон, всяка от които написана в различна минорна тоналност. За да се засили сетивното преживяване и връзката с темата, звуковият артист има задачата да създаде фин, амбиентен звуков пейзаж за вътрешното пространство, включващ „минорни тоналности“. Това би засилило усещането за присъствие в „полифонична съвкупност“ от изкуство, пространствено оформяйки взаимосвързаността без йерархия между различните компоненти на изложбата. Звуковият елемент, подчертава връзката с основният фокус на общата кураторска концепция на биеналето.

*Audio: Four Directions*

Nikita Nikolova's composition "Four Direction" is a minimalistic suite of four miniatures for marimba and vibraphone, each written in a different minor key. To enhance the sensory experience and connection to the theme, the sound artist is commissioned to create a subtle, ambient soundscape for the internal space incorporating "minor keys". This would heighten the feeling of being in a "polyphonous assembly" of art, spatializing interconnectedness without hierarchy and reinforcing the auditory focus highlighted by the main curatorial vision.





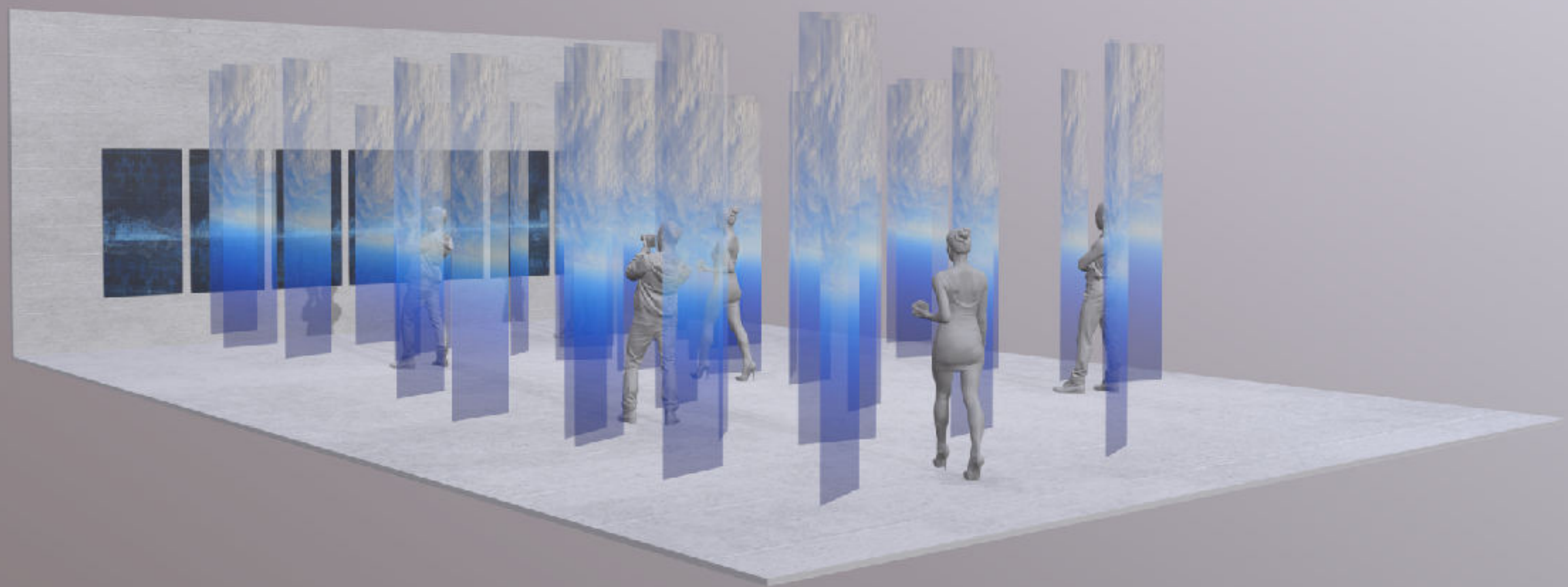
Серия: Седем хоризонта

На една от основните стени, серия от седем големи индигови произведения на изкуството (приблизително 50 x 120 см всяко) ще изобразяват хоризонти, символизиращи седемте континента. Тези произведения използват техника на наслагване на полупрозрачни хартии (Уаши, калиграфия, рециклирани, 300-годишни японски листове) с естествено индиго и мастило, като прилагат традиционни техники Шибори, разширявайки идеята за връзката между човечеството, природата, духовността и екологията.

Series: Seven Horizons

Along the walls, a series of seven large indigo artworks (approximately 50 x 120 cm each) will depict horizons symbolizing the seven continents — Seven Horizons, One Planet — continuing the theme of unity in diversity. These works utilize the artist's technique of layering semi-transparent papers (Washi, calligraphy, recycled, 300-year-old Japanese sheets) with natural indigo and ink, employing traditional Shibori techniques, expanding on the idea of the relationship between humanity, nature, spirituality, and ecology.

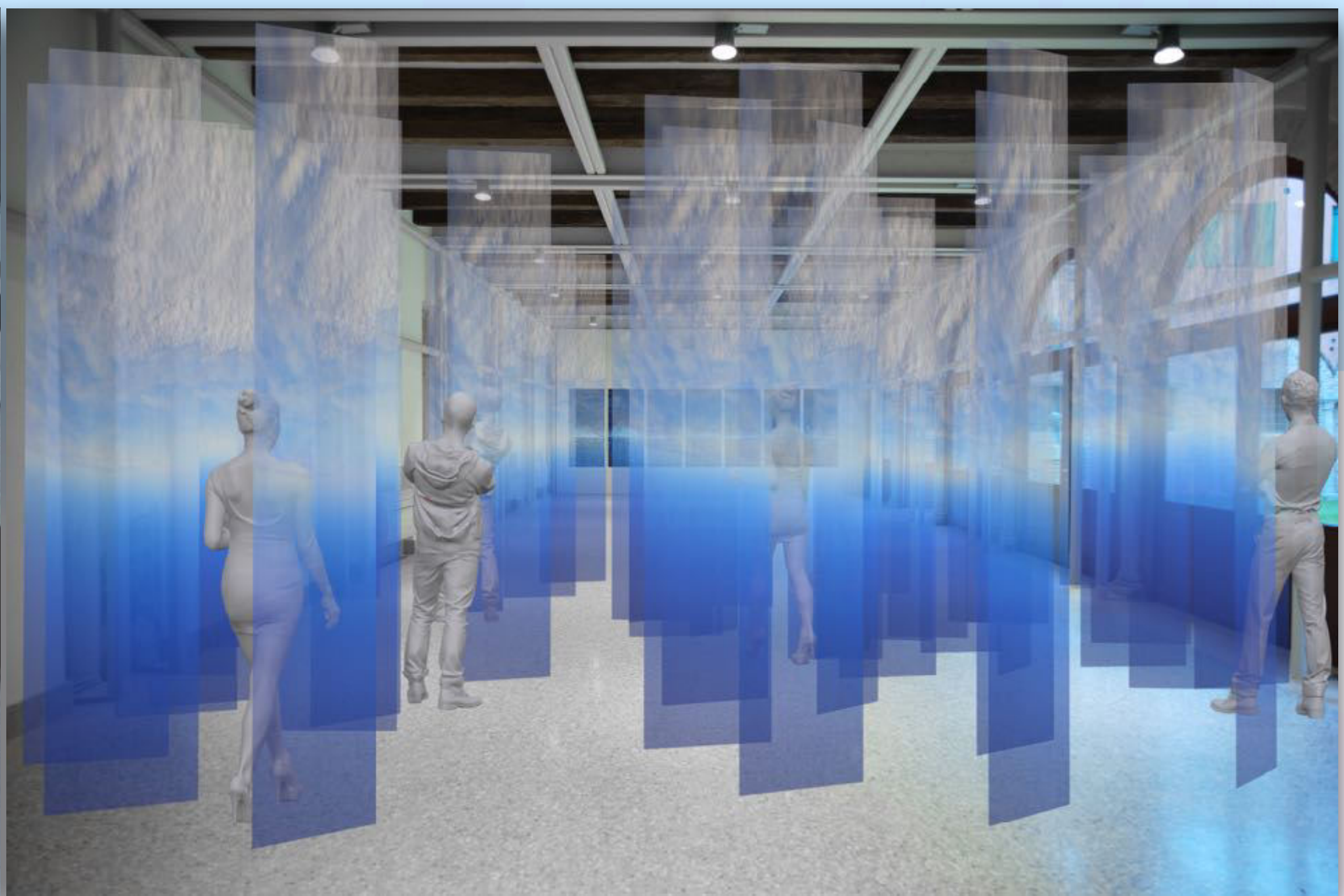




3D link

<https://app.vectary.com/p/4x2jdmjBpevb4APe7f4Q7D>





video link





Градина: “Кръговратът на индигото”

“Кръговратът на индигото” ще бъде кръгло градинско пространство, разположено в откритата част на Зала Тициано, посветено на отглеждането на индигови растения, където самото култивиране става част от производението на изкуството. Тя разширява инсталацията в открития площад като жив процес, проследявайки индигото от семе до растение и от култивиране до артистична трансформация. Инсталацията дава рядък поглед към същността на артистичната практика на Бакърджиев. Растящи в градината, индиговите растения въплъщават деликатните, но устойчиви ритми на природата, правейки видими времето, грижата и взаимозависимостта, необходими за растеж. Това, което изглежда крехко – младите растения, бавното развитие – съдържа потенциал за дълбока трансформация.

Garden: Indigo Cycle

*Indigo Cycle* will be a circular garden space situated in the open area of Sala Tiziano dedicated to growing indigo plants, where cultivation itself becomes part of the artwork. It extends the installation into the open square as a living process, tracing indigo from seed to plant and from cultivation to artistic transformation. The installation gives a rare insight into the core of Bakardjiev's artistic practice. Growing in the garden, the indigo plants embody the delicate yet resilient rhythms of nature, making visible the time, care, and interdependence required for growth. What appears fragile—young plants, slow development—contains the potential for profound transformation.