

PERSISTENT SPIRITS

artist /curator

BORJANA VENTZISLAVOVA
WALTER SEIDL

EXHIBITION PROJECT
FOR THE BULGARIAN PAVILION
THE 61TH VENICE BIENNALE 2026

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01 CURATORIAL-ARTISTIC CONCEPT

title: PERSISTENT SPIRITS (A TRILOGY)
autor/artist: BORJANA VENTZISLAVOVA
curator: WALTER SEIDL

Borjana Ventzislavova belongs to a generation of Bulgarian artists living between Vienna and Sofia who have achieved international recognition through their work. Her practice bridges different generations by addressing global phenomena from a situated, attentive perspective. For Ventzislavova, close observation of everyday life plays a crucial role in reflecting on the relationships between individuals, the societies they inhabit, and the political structures that shape those contexts.

The artist's international presence, primary as a photographer and filmmaker, forms the starting point for her exhibition proposal at the Venice Biennale. *Persistent Spirits* is the title of the project comprising three films presented as a trilogy. Set in Vienna, Tokyo, and Sofia, the films explore the spirit of each city through performances by predominantly female protagonists. The connection to the cultural scenes of these cities also reflects Bulgaria's longstanding tradition of cultural exchange with these countries, a tradition rooted in the cultural politics of Lyudmila Zhivkova.

Ventzislavova focuses on artistic rituals rooted in everyday life that often remain unnoticed by the general public, yet function as *minor tones*—subtle forms of resistance that resonate with the central theme “In Minor Keys” of the 61st Venice Biennale. These gestures follow spiritual guidelines and operate as a counterpoint to dominant political forces. For over twenty years, the artist has explored care, self-empowerment, and self-determination as a multifaceted practice that understands art as a potential space for healing, social transformation, and connection to the lived experiences of others. The aim is to relieve the pressures of capitalism by foregrounding empathy, accessibility, and vulnerability, thereby fostering collective well-being and reimagining societal values.

The artist has already completed two of the films in Vienna (2018) and Tokyo (2025) and will complete the third part in Sofia as a special commission for the exhibition at the Sala Tiziano of the Centro Culturale Don Orione Artigianelli. The venue itself, characterized by a series of contemplative niches, will host the trilogy in large-scale projections within a darkened environment.

In *And the Sky Clears Up (MAGIC RESISTANCE)*, five protagonists perform artistic-magical rituals at various locations in Vienna, many of which refer to concrete historical events and sites linked to the Nazi past that continue to shape the present. Through a range of artistic-magical processes, the work seeks to counter the resurgence of extreme right-wing populist ideologies globally, and particularly within the Western hemisphere. Conceived as a visual plea, the film unfolds through individual ceremonies that originate neither from dogmatic norms nor from official

religions, but instead take the form of abstract artistic interventions calling for healing, empowerment, and solidarity.

In the second film, *7 Butterflies and We Dance. And It Will Be Our Revolution.*, four groups of performers are invited to carry out newly conceived rituals that challenge patriarchy and gender inequality in symbolically and historically significant public spaces across Tokyo. These actions seek to counter discrimination and contribute to the empowerment of women and queer communities, as well as to the dismantling of patriarchal structures. For the project, the artist collaborated with practitioners of Miko-mai (a ceremonial dance rooted in ancient traditions), feminist performance artists and students from the Art Academy in Tokyo. While Japan represents a society with deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and ranks among countries with pronounced gender inequality, it also stands as a compelling example of a broader, systemic condition affecting societies worldwide.

The third film, produced especially for the Biennale – *41 Beans. Now and Here.* – follows rituals of purification in response to acts of violence, hatred, racism, and discrimination. The rituals are performed by five protagonists at various locations in the public space of Sofia. These include sites where violence has taken place—sometimes with fatal consequences, as in Borisova Garden—as well as institutions responsible for defining, legitimizing, and enforcing the legal boundaries of intolerance and violent behavior. The project also engages public institutions involved in education and the dissemination of values such as tolerance, solidarity, and empathy, alongside media actors that play a role in countering hate speech and discrimination. All of these spaces function as a stage on which subtle actions unfold, symbolizing resistance to violence and calling for positive change.

In Venzislavova's trilogy, the individual ceremonies take the form of abstract artistic interventions. The rituals and performative tools employed in the project draw on a wide range of global traditions, including indigenous, animalistic, spiritual, and religious practices, as well as ancient pagan rituals and other artistic or spiritual traditions—such as Panorhythmy developed by Peter Deunov, or the Planetary Dance by Anna Halprin—which are rooted in specific geographical and cultural contexts. These influences are translated artistically and aesthetically to serve the conceptual framework of the project.

02 LIST OF WORKS

PERSISTENT SPIRITS (A TRILOGY)

3 channel video/audio installation



① 7 Butterflies and We Dance. And It Will Be Our Revolution., 2025

A/BG/JP, 29'30", 4K and HD, stereo, color

With: Mai Endo, Kanae (Mes), Sangonomiya, Ayu Akamatsu, Ayaka, Hikari Komae, Leia Matsushima, Marin Hibi, Minky, Yennie

Camera: Ken Yazaki

Sound recording: Kenshi Robert

Sound mix: Veselin Zografov

Composition: Milena Georgieva

For the collective poetry:

Luchezar Bojadziev, Rossen Bossev, Milena Deleva, Petja Dimitrova, Irina Georgieva, Katharina Maun, Jhenyfy Muller, Yoshiko Shimada, Maria Nalbantova, Pavel Naydenov, Dr. Renée Gadsden, Decho Taralezhkov, Rayna Teneva, Tina Teufel, Hermes Payrhuber, Constanze Ruhm, Michaela Schwentner, Maria Vassileva, Vasil Vladimirov, Voin De Voin, Maritina Yordanova, Veselin Zografov, ChatGPT 4.0 and Raichō Hiratsuka

② *And the Sky Clears Up (MAGIC RESISTANCE)*, 2018
A, 23', 4K and HD, stereo, color



With: Songül Boyraz, Renée Gadsden, Esra Emine Demir, Maruša Sagadin, Claudia Slanar

Camera: Hannes Böck

Sound: Kai-Maier Rothe

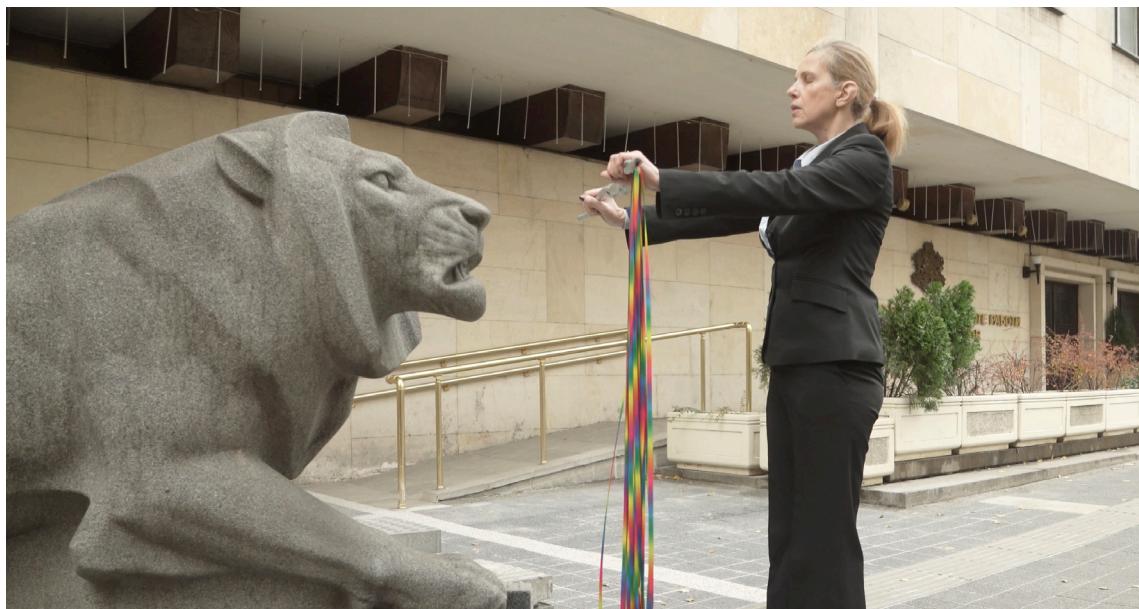
Editing: Borjana Ventzislavova

Text: Ovid Pop

Voice over: Susanne Schuda

③ 41 Beans. Now and Here., 2026

BG/A, ca. 25 min., 4K and HD, stereo, color



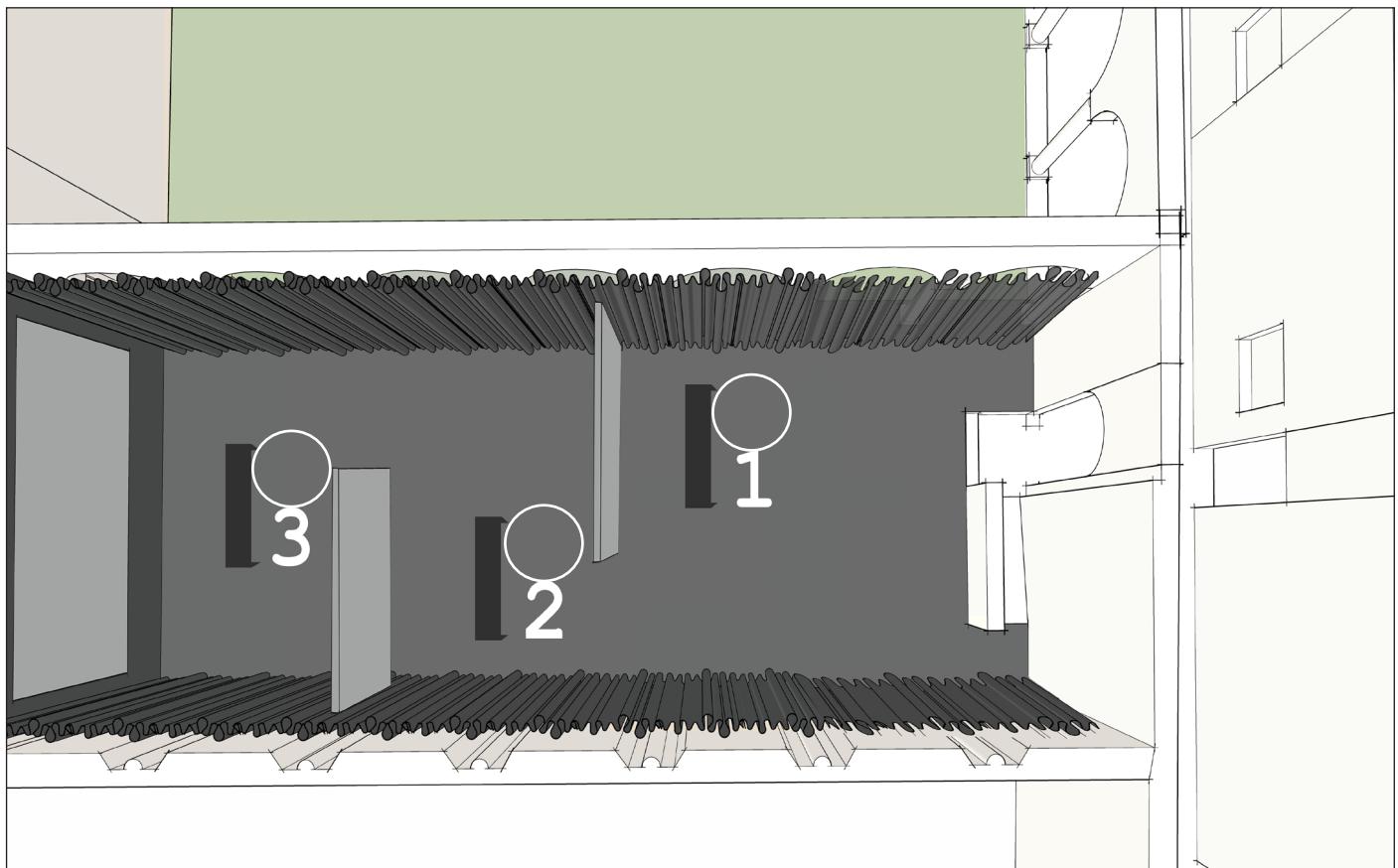
With: Linda Rousseva, Yana Krispin, Maria Nalbantova, Georgi Petrov, Voin de Voin

Camera: Petko Lungov

Sound: Vesselin Zografov

Editing: Borjana Ventzislavova

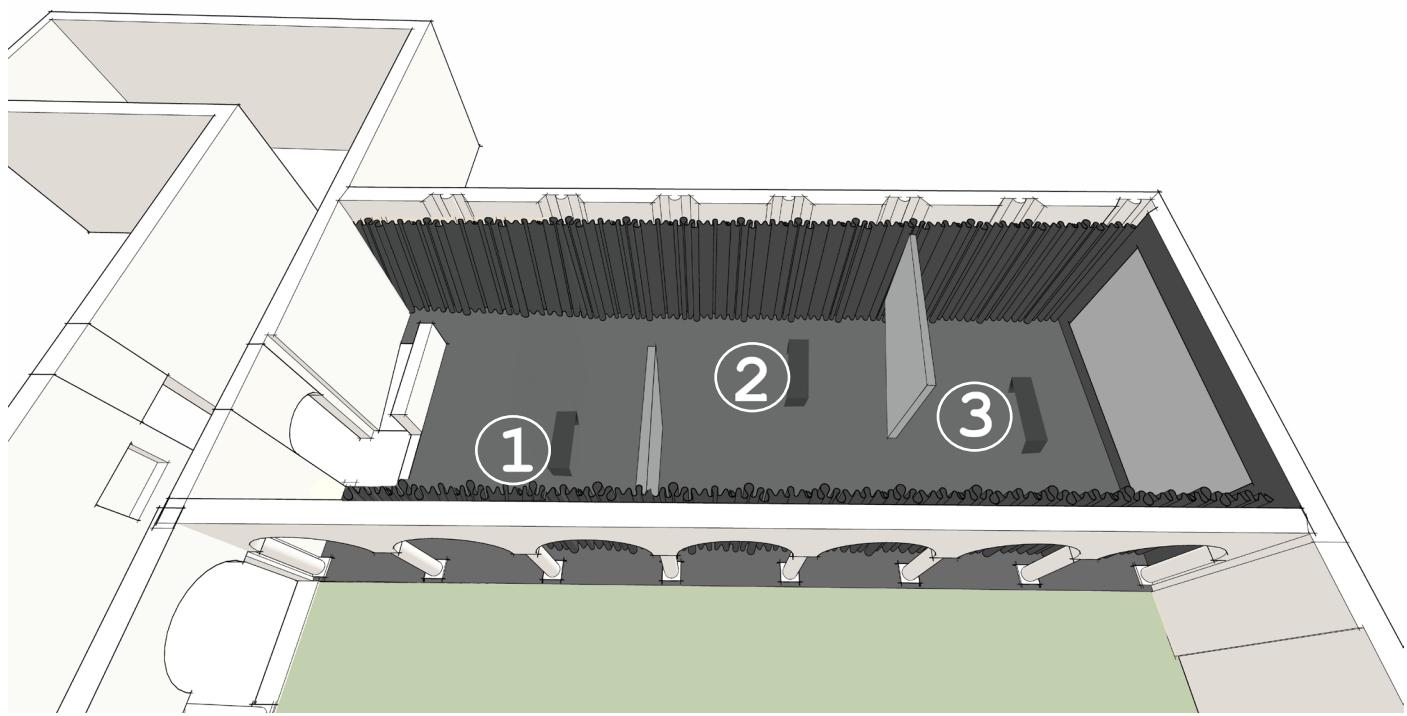
03 VISUALIZATION OF THE EXHIBITION / INSIDE SALA TIZIANO



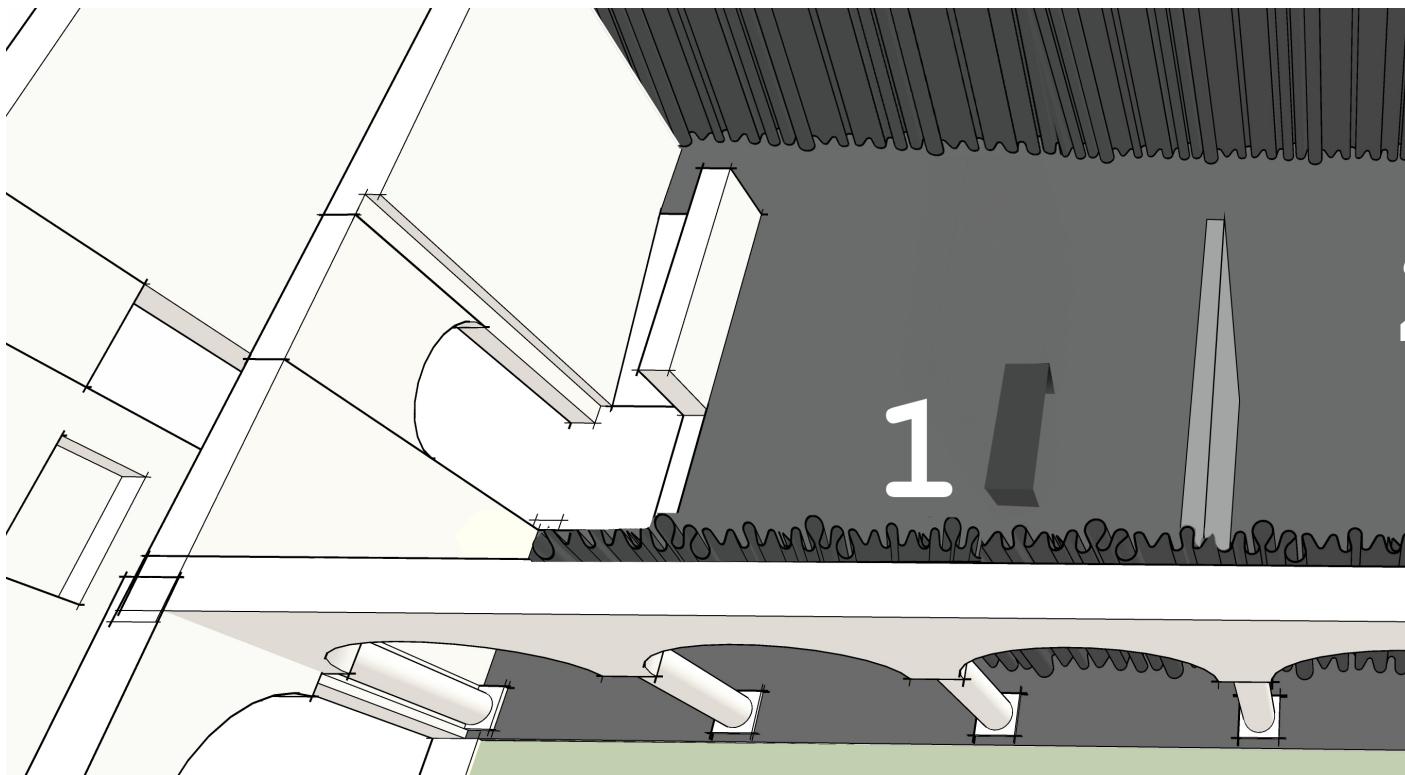
The interior space of the hall will be designed as a black box, with distinct exhibition sections formed through the interior design of the exhibition, using projection walls, benches, lighting, carpet, and curtains.

EXHIBITION SPACE SALA TIZIANO

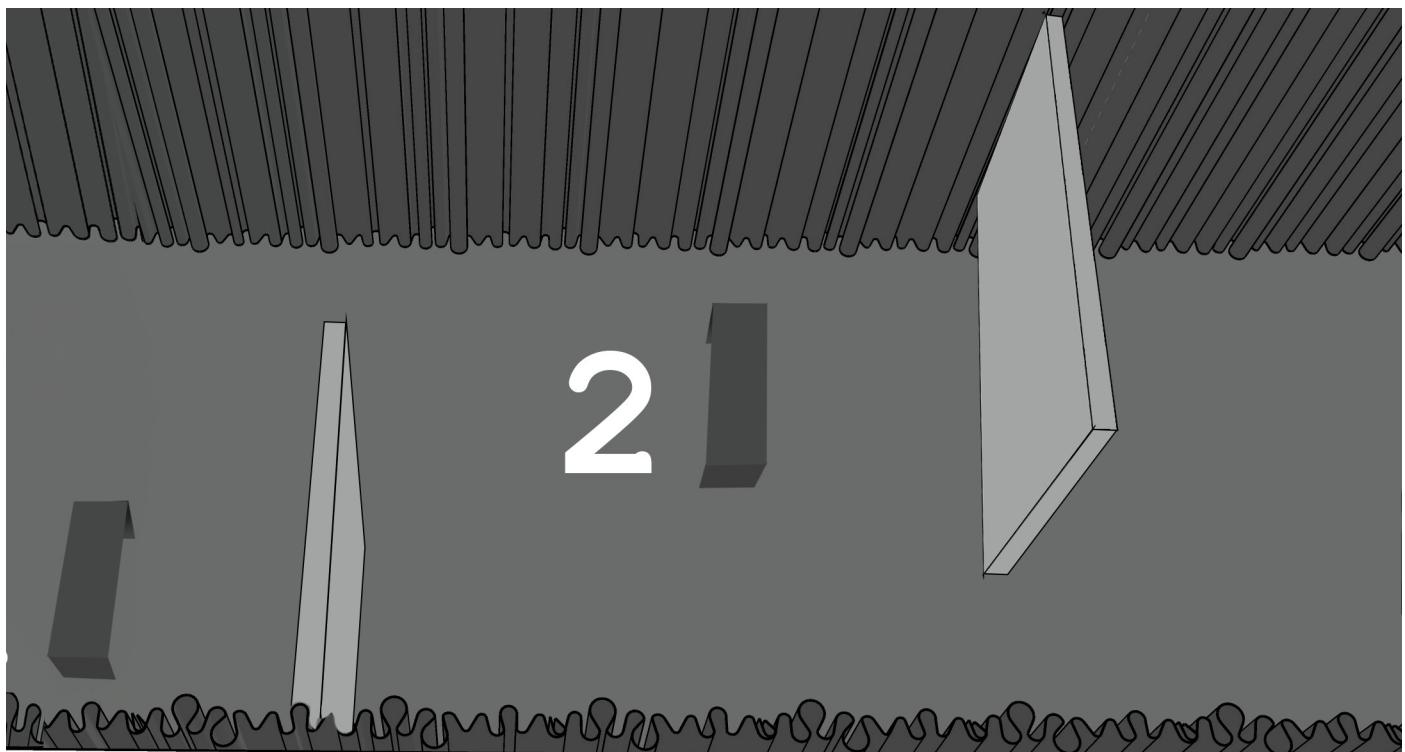
(rendeing and technical sketch)



EXHIBITION SPACE SALA TIZIANO
(PROJECTION 1)



EXHIBITION SPACE SALA TIZIANO
(PROJECTION 2)



EXHIBITION SPACE SALA TIZIANO
(PROJECTION 2)

