

Project *77½*

Iskra Blagoeva and Valentina Sciarra

Curator: Zoya Petrova

Project Title:

77½

77½ presents a monumental installation exploring female ancestral knowledge, collective healing, and the emotional ecology of contemporary life through a reimagined ritual structure inspired by the Orthodox iconostasis.

Artists

Iskra Blagoeva (BG)

Blagoeva's multidisciplinary practice investigates religious and mythological systems that regulate feminine subjectivity. In *77½*, she approaches the ritual as embodied, non-discursive knowledge transmitted through repetition, gesture and collective participation.

Valentina Sciarra (IT)

Sciarra's practice explores material agency and collective memory through sculpture and installation. Her long-term engagement with stone rejects extractive logic, treating matter as collaborator. Within the project, stone functions as a carrier of accumulated gestures and intentions.

Together, the artists articulate a collaborative feminist practice grounded in embodied knowledge, affect, and material attention.

The project is the result of a long-term research by Iskra Blagoeva and Valentina Sciarra. It was initially launched in 2022 with a performance at the Alpinarium in Sofia, as part of Sofia Art Week. In 2023, the project received the Competition and Production Prize from the Toplocentrala Center for Contemporary Arts. In 2025 *77½* further expanded in Kazanlak, with the support of the Kazanlak Municipal Gallery.

For the Bulgarian Pavilion, the installation is reimagined as a site-specific, immersive experience rather than a conventional exhibition. Visitors are invited to engage with the space through a fusion of video, sound, sculpture, and spatial dramaturgy, creating an environment that encourages participation and reflection. In alignment with the Biennale's theme, *In Minor Notes*, the project celebrates forms of knowledge that have survived not through dominance, but through transmission in whispers, gestures, intimacies, and communal rites.

The project originates from research into Bulgarian women's rites as embodied knowledge systems that persist beneath dominant social structures. A midsummer legend provides its conceptual seed:

Herbs harvested for the winter should be 77 and a half – for all diseases, and for the nameless disease.

The nameless disease—the half—is red as a collective sadness emerging from precarity, where instability becomes the dominant condition and care is reduced to an individual responsibility rather than a shared practice. The cure proposed by the legend is collective ritual: minor actions repeated across generations, forming a quiet emotional ecology.

Description of the works

A monumental wall bisects the Tiziano Hall, reconfiguring the architectural logic of the Orthodox iconostasis. Stripped of icons, hierarchy, and didactic symbolism, this structure operates as a

contemporary ritual device—porous rather than prescriptive, charged with presence rather than authority. No longer a boundary between sacred and profane, it becomes a threshold between inner and outer states, inherited ritual knowledge and present-day vulnerability. Reimagined as a feminist, minor architecture, the iconostasis functions as a site of passage, permeability, and transformation.

Beyond this threshold, visitors enter a reconfigured altar space housing an three-channel video installation by Blagoeva and Sciarra. The videos engage with vernacular ritual practices through re-enactment and embodied attention performed by the artists and four other women. Central among them is the gesture of breathing underwater—an act of suspension, endurance, and quiet resistance. The videos resist spectacle, dwelling instead on breath, repetition, and collective presence, inviting viewers into a slowed, attentive mode of encounter.

The center of the re-imagined altar is articulated through a restrained constellation of objects: a large stone lightly covered with small coins and flowers. This gesture references a widespread ritual of throwing small change at sacred places, springs or fountains. Here, the act is reframed as a quiet economy of care. The coins signify intention rather than value, while the stone anchors endurance and continuity, and the flowers introduce fragility and impermanence. Together, they propose healing as something carried through small, repeated gestures rather than grand symbolic acts.

The sound work, part of the installation is a result of a collaboration with the project **Pistamashina**. The sound of the dew is a microscopic symphony—but it becomes the vibrational heart of the work: fragility that heals, humidity that regenerates. The altar becomes a minor sanctuary: a space for emotional presence, attunement, and shared, non-verbal participation.

Relation to the exhibition space

Situated within the former religious architecture of the Don Orione complex, the pavilion activates the latent spiritual memory of the Tiziano Hall. Its axial proportions guide visitors from public exterior to intimate interior, from daylight to softened illumination, from observation to participation. Rather than imposing a foreign structure, the installation works with the hall's existing architecture, reprogramming it as a contemporary site of collective care and emotional reflection.

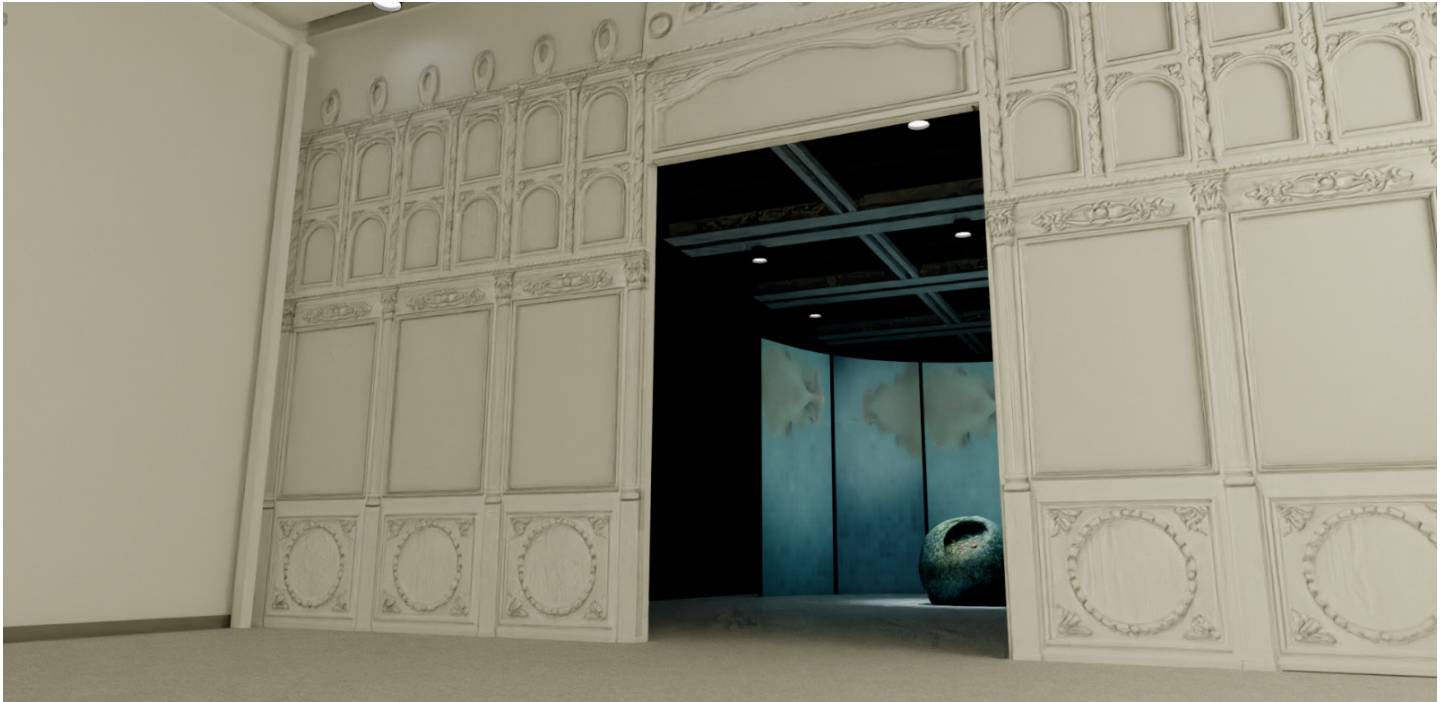
77 ½ is a testament to Bulgaria's cultural depth, emotional intelligence, and ritual imagination—offered to Venice as a space where visitors may cross a threshold, sit with their sadness, and listen to what minor knowledge can teach us.



Iconostasis front view: white plaster wall, detail produced and installed in stucco technique, three spotlights - rendering



Backspace: Alter - three-channel video installation - projection on six panels 300 x 140 cm. each, naturally carved stone with a concave opening containing flowers and small change, one spotlight



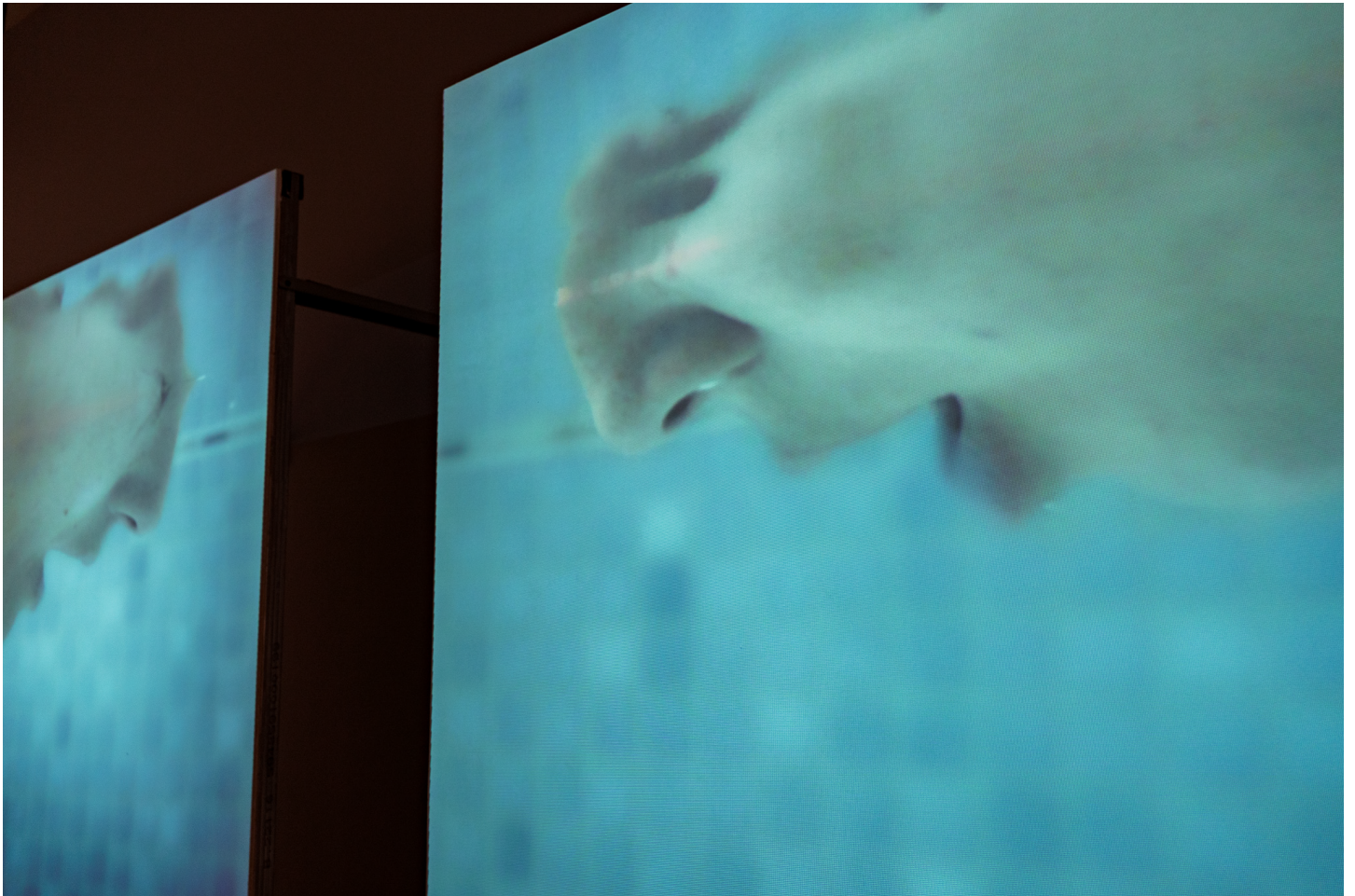
Iconostasis side view, white plaster wall, detail produced and installed in stucco technique, three spotlights, front and back space - rendering

Sound description - front room:

Those who enter perceive a dense silence, like a room that listens.
 First vibration emerges: a deep breath, similar to the voice of eternal stones. It is a rough, mineral sound, as if time were speaking through the friction of ancient rocks. This deep foundation is the root of the installation: the memory of the world that precedes wounds, the geological voice that has never stopped breathing.



Naturally carved stone, small change, rose petals (close up)
 rendering



Chanting - video installation (detail)

Video link:

<https://vimeo.com/846650252>

Sound description - back room:

Above this earthly murmur, quiet melodies rise, obtained from real and synthetic instruments mixed with recordings of herbs stirred by the morning: medicinal herbs, rich and moist because they are harvested while the dew is still alive on their bodies.

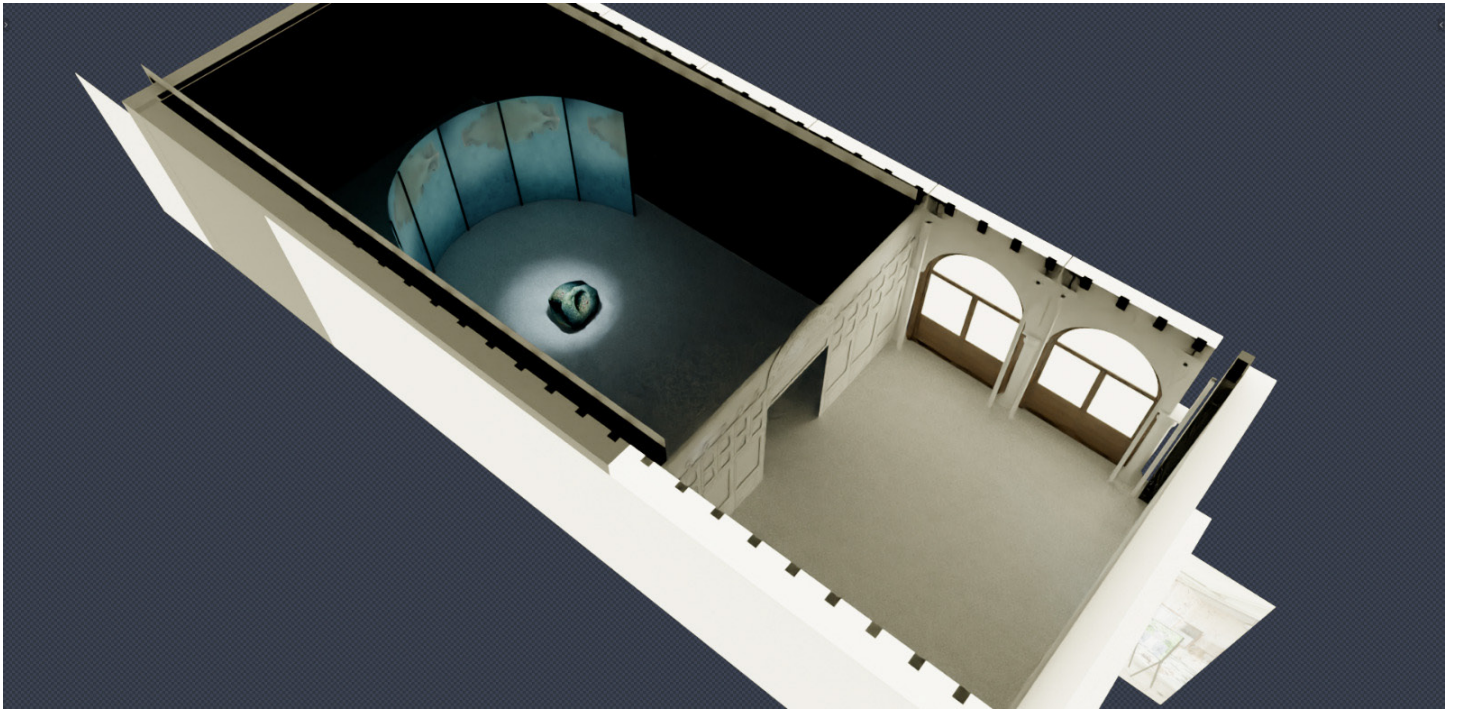
The sound of the dew is a microscopic symphony—but it becomes the vibrational heart of the work: fragility that heals, humidity that regenerates.

Then, slowly, female voices emerge. They don't sing words: they vocalize.

They seem to come from centuries ago, like songs waiting in the folds of oblivion, finally audible because we are ready to receive them.

These choirs rise like underground water after a fracture.

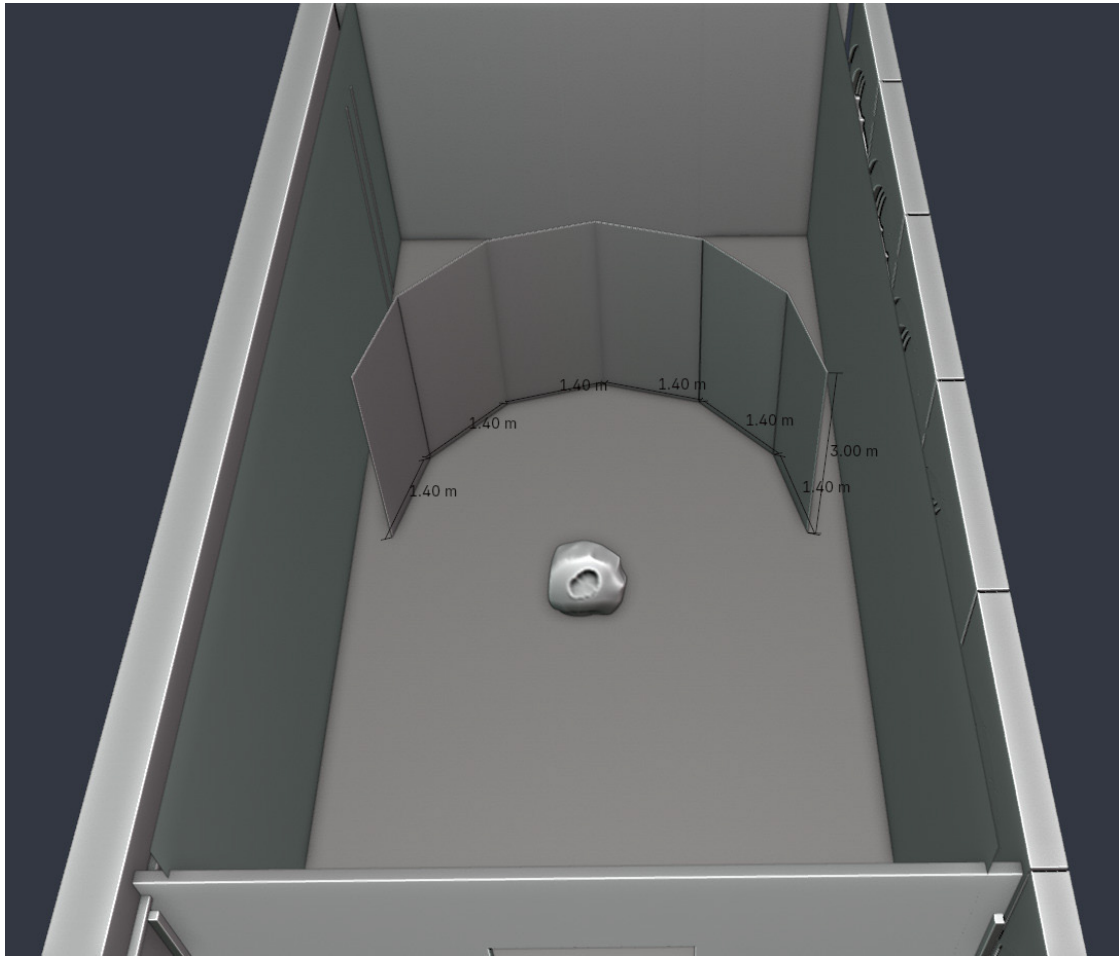
They intertwine, break, reshape themselves. Their intervals are delicate, soft, but not melancholic: they are tones that know pain without being devoured by it.



Birdview of the installation space – rendering



Altar – entrance view – rendering



Technical rendering with video projection panels sizes

A plaster partition wall, extending 6.00 m into the main exhibition space, divides the room and establishes a processional axis. Mounted on this wall is an iconostasis executed in stucco technique. A 2.00 m wide entrance portal is integrated into the wall, providing access to an inner, altar-like space.

Beyond the portal, a semi-circular immersive structure is formed by six freestanding vertical panels, oriented toward and centered on the entrance axis. Each panel measures 1.40 m (W) × 3.00 m (H) and together they define a spatial enclosure. The panels serve as projection surfaces for a three-channel video projection, consisting six parts distributed across the curved arrangement.

Centrally positioned on the floor and aligned with the curvature of the panels is a 1.00 m wide natural stone, placed directly on the ground. The stone features a concave opening containing flowers and small change on its upper surface and functions as the focal point of the inner space.

The installation requires a level floor surface and controlled lighting conditions; all structures are free-standing and do not require ceiling suspension.