



ECHOES OF RADIANCE EXO OT OZAPENIE

project by Marta Djourina
with participation of Sonya Yoncheva

curator: Boris Kostadinov

THE AUTHORS

The project for the Bulgarian Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale entitled *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* presents the works of **Marta Djourina** - one of the most original and internationally awarded contemporary Bulgarian artists in collaboration with **Sonya Yoncheva** - the star of the Metropolitan Opera, New York, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Wiener Staatsoper, Vienna, Deutschen Oper, Berlin and globally recognized as one of the most talented soprano voices of her generation.

ECHOES OF RADIANCE is curated by **Boris Kostadinov** – a curator with many years of international and organizational experience and current director of Scope BLN in Berlin. The project is realized with the support of **Berlinische Galerie** - Museum of Modern Art in Berlin, providing a small series of works by Marta Djourina - part of the museum's permanent collection.

There are three main reasons for the creation of this artistic team:

- The possibilities of the artists and the curator for creation of significant projects in the field of contemporary art, their presentations on prestigious stages and their experience in institutional work - both in a national and in a broad international context.
- The project for the Bulgarian pavilion is based on a concept that is going beyond the boundaries of the local or narrowly specific and speaks the universal language of the contemporary art community.
- The harmonious symbiosis between the large-scale visual and spatial installation of Marta Djourina and the vocal participation of Sonya Yoncheva - as a condition for the creation of a monumental, homogeneous and significant national pavilion.

THE CONCEPT

If “foreigners are everywhere” (which is the theme of the biennale), then *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* proceeds from the hypothesis that we are all foreigners - regardless of our voluntary or involuntary participation in one or another social, cultural, economic, technological, political or migration context. Indeed, even if we have never crossed the threshold of our home, our technological modernity makes us foreigners every single second, sending us to virtual “foreign territories” and bringing us into contact with artificial intelligence.

How could the contemporary person, ultimately recognized as a “foreigner”, in this conceptual framework, navigate the unknown, the other, the incomprehensible?

One of the most inherent impulses embedded in our instinctive nature is to seek the light - so that we can see, to orient ourselves, to find the way, to understand the world, to know others and ourselves.

Therefore, *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* is largely based on the complex theme of light, which is at the same time the most defining theme and main means of expression in Marta Djourina's work. The main method in her work is the interaction of the artistic act with light. Through her extensive artistic research work in the photographic darkroom, she investigates, experiments with scientific and technical facts, provokes and manipulates the behavior of different light sources.

Lasers, bioluminescent organisms, mobile light sources and the movement of the artist's own body are the main tools of work. In this complex process of interaction, light is a "co-author" and driving mechanism for the creation of huge photographs, sculptural objects, spatial and performative installations.

The explosion of colors and the choreography of forms create the spectacle, lifting the heavy curtain behind which are questions such as: "How our sensory perceptions can be the result of a scientific experiment?", "How does our individual perception and evaluation relate to the visual information we receive in the real, media or digital world?", "How can light be a means of discovery, but also a means of manipulation?"

It is at this point in its development that *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* is inspired by the article "What is the Contemporary?"¹ by Giorgio Agamben, the famous professor of philosophy at the University of Venice.

In this milestone text, he writes that the conscious contemporary is one "who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light but rather its darkness."

Strongly focused lights on an object, a phenomenon or a process in our post-capitalist society, not only do not provide a guarantee of understanding the true nature of things, but it is often a means of skillful deception and carefully considered mass manipulation. Therefore, in *ECHOES OF RADIANCE*, the concept of the "Guiding Light" goes through the process of studying darkness and its nuances, which are recognized as a means of orientation, a source of knowledge, self-finding and the formulation of what we call "contemporary".

But how would we even navigate the foreign, in a foreign and unfamiliar environment if the visual markers are missing? If light and dark turn out to be irrelevant?

Here comes the second level of *ECHOES OF RADIANCE*, which includes the vocal installation with the voice of Sonya Yoncheva, where auditory perception becomes a crucial navigation tool.

To paraphrase another part of Agamben's article, the true knowledge of our modernity is the awareness of the invisible, of what comes as information from the future, from the Cosmos...

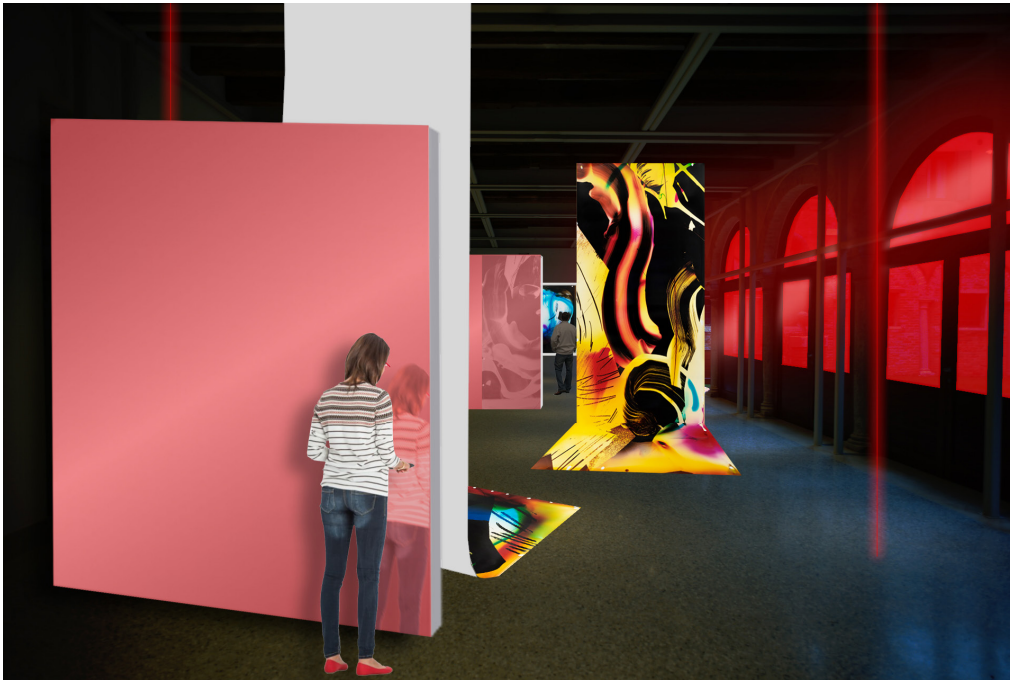
In an unfamiliar space, we can navigate only by the resonance of the voice. Sound vibrations are the only method known so far to "see" the invisible objects in the universe. Sonya Yoncheva's voice in *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* becomes a powerful guide, offering different routes, points of view and spatial perception of the architectural features of the interior and exterior.

Along with the conceptual base of *ECHOES OF RADIANCE*, the project organically connects with the great cultural tradition of Venice, making indirect references to the problem of light in the Venetian school of painting and the great musical traditions of that place, while at the same time interweaving the theories of a of the most brilliant minds of our time, such as the Venetian Giorgio Agamben.

¹ Agamben, G. What is the Contemporary? In What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays; Stanford University Press, 2009

THE WORKS AND THE SPACE

The project is specially created for the exhibition hall and the courtyard in front of the *Sala Tiziano* in the Centro Culturale Don Orione Artigianelli and is directly inspired by their architectural, visual and sound possibilities.

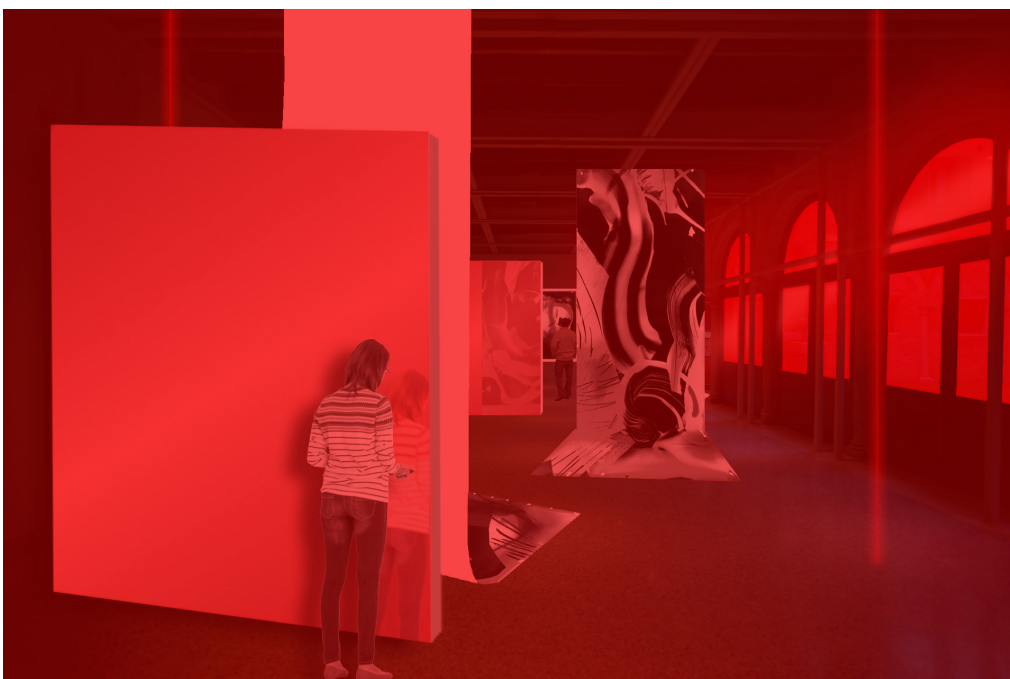


The objects

The large-scale installation of Marta Djourina is located in the hall, consisting of large-format photographic and sculptural objects and a specially created light installation.

On the central short wall of the hall is the work *Untitled*, 2021, measuring 2.40 x 1.80 m, shown at the Berlinische Galerie – Museum of Modern Art in Berlin. Three photo-sculptures are hung freely in the space, which, with their impressive volumes and intensity of colors, form the overall visual framework of the exhibition. These three works are the largest of all exhibited and will be specially created for *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* (up to 10 x 1,83 m each). The exhibition hall also features two sculptural modules made of red mirror measuring 2.70 x 2.50 x 0.25 m. One module forms a “secret gallery”

incorporated into the overall space where the series *From: Me / To: Me*, 2016 - owned by Berlinische Galerie - Museum of Contemporary Art. Based on the mystery of the photographic process, this series asks questions such as: “Who decides what to believe and why?”, “Where is the line between voyeurism and art?” The second mirror sculpture appears as a counterpoint and visual “partner” of the entire objectivity and the light installation. In addition, it houses part of the sound installation with the voice of Sonya Yoncheva, which unfolds even more fully in the inner courtyard of the Centro Culturale Don Orione Artigianelli.





The light

An important element of *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* is the specially designed lighting installation, consisting of lighting fixtures emitting neutral (day) light and those emitting red light, as well as minimalistic LED columns and colored window foil.

The original appearance of the installation envisages lighting the objects with light spots with daylight, in which case the works are perceived with their real colors.

However, there are also red light spots in the lighting. Through the use of a system of relays and timers, at certain time intervals, the daylight begins to gradually, almost imperceptibly, fade away and also delicately begins to appear the red light, which in a moment takes over and illuminates the entire space. Then all the works (as well as the visitors and generally all objects in the hall) take on a completely different look. The idea of red light organically originates from Marta Djourina's practice, which takes place in the dark photo lab with red light.

This idea, however, has another meaning, which is based on the phenomenon named after the Czech anatomist Jan Evangelista Purkyně. In this visual effect, red light completely blocks out all other colors and thus all objects and images become red-black. Only by using this specific red light, the colors disappear and the human eye only sees shades of red and black.

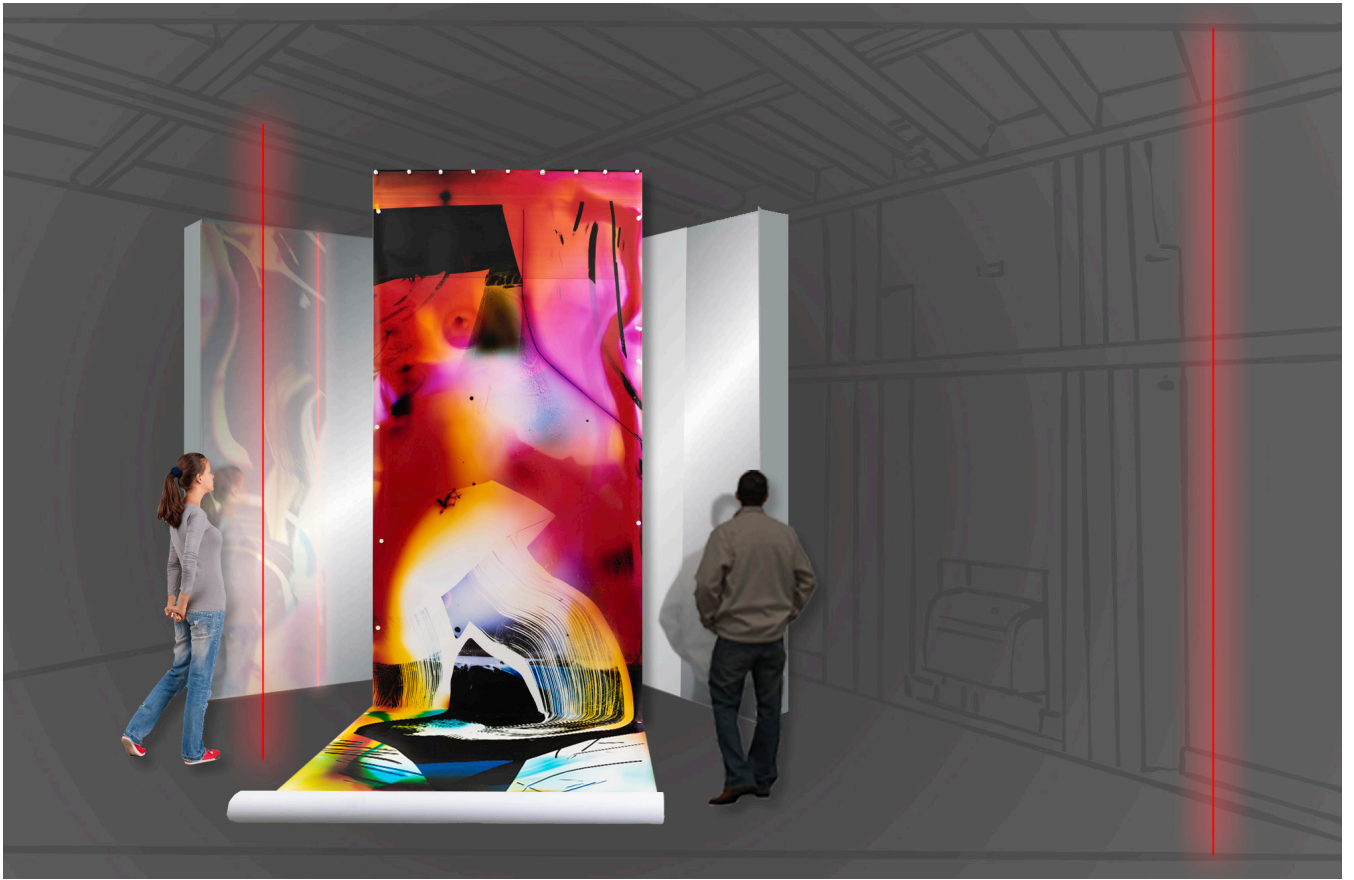
After a certain time, the timers switch the electrical relays again and gradually to normal, daylight, so that the viewers can clearly see the original color of the works and the environment again.

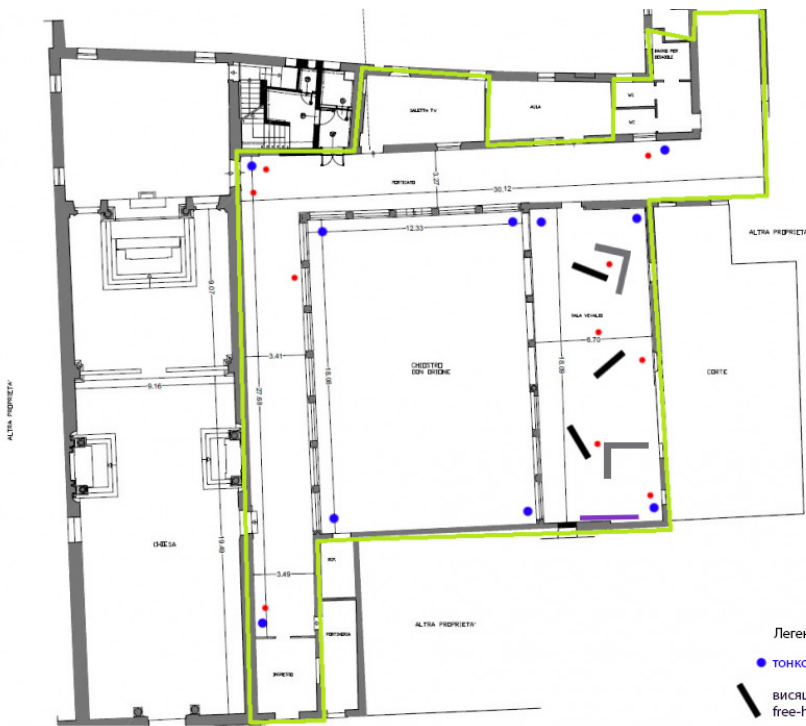
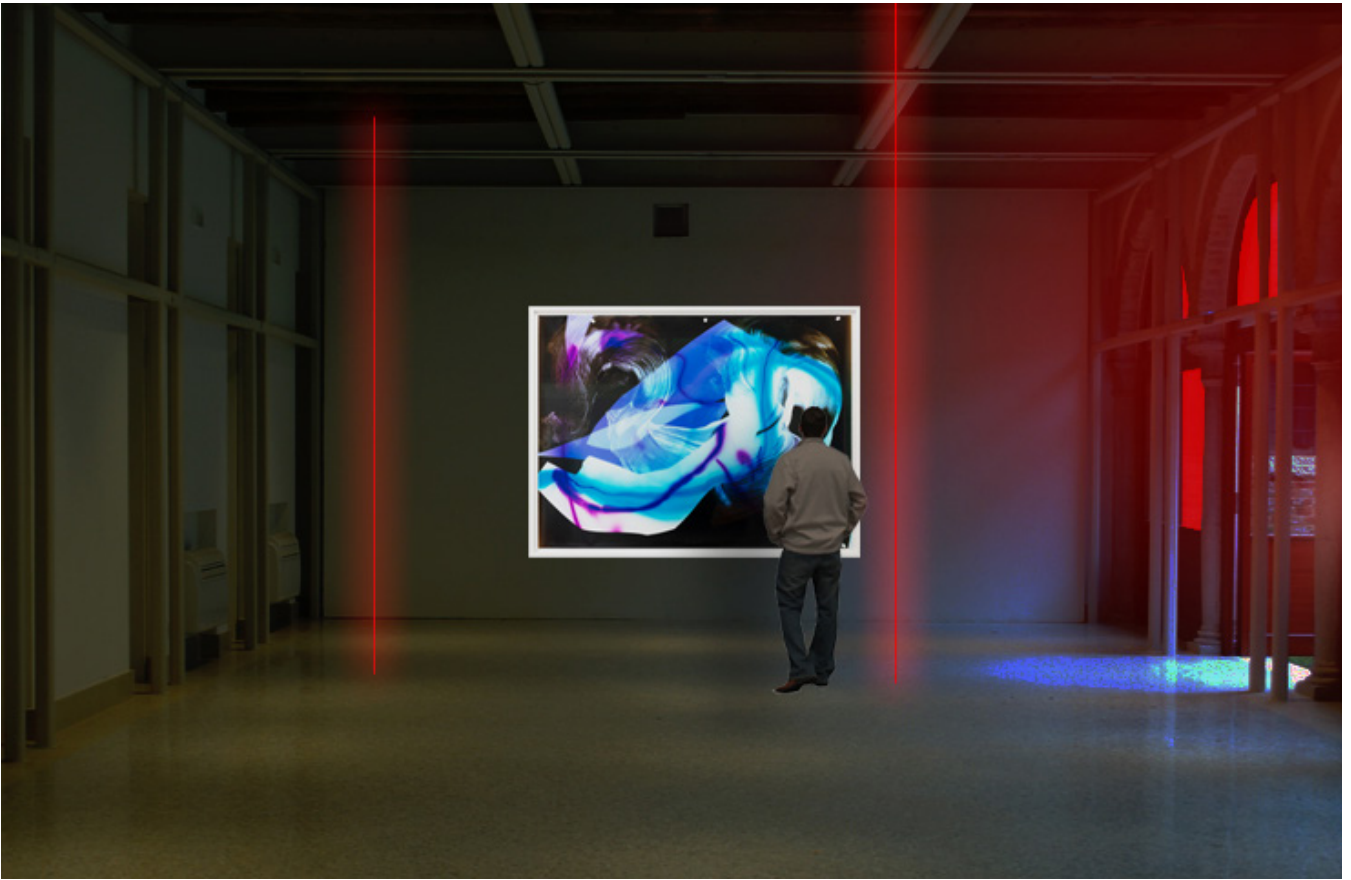
The glass doors of the hall are covered entirely in red foil. Viewers entering from the courtyard and looking into the interior of the space from the outside see the interior as colorless, and this creates further visual confusion.

The visitor to *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* asks: "What is real and what is imagined?", or "Are these two equally valid realities, just presented in a different light?", "What are the clear landmarks among this conflicting visual information?"

And all this, combined with the large mirrored surfaces of the sculptural elements in the space, creates an even more unreal look to the exhibition, which would actually be more inherent in a digital environment than in the physical world.

In this way, the project becomes a metaphor for the complex labyrinth we go through in our attempt to understand our modern times - with all its real and unreal signs, guiding or confusing the points.





Легенда / key:

● тонколони / speakers

↖ висящи от тавана големи фотоработи / free-hanging from the ceiling large-scale photo works

▬ рамкирана фоторабота / framed work

↖ стени покрити с огледала / walls covered in mirrors

● светлинни колони / light columns



The sound

The sound installation builds another level of the multi-layered structure of *ECHOES OF RADIANCE*. Sonya Yoncheva's voice performs very short vocal etudes inspired by the arias from her latest album *The Courtesan*, 2023, recorded in Genoa with the Orchestra dell'Opera Carlo Felice Genova, conducted by Marco Armiliato.

For the creation of this album, the opera prima was inspired by the biography of the Venetian Veronica Franco (1546 – 1591), who was a courtesan but at the same time a poet who asserted herself in territories traditionally reserved for men, such as public debates about politics and even sexuality.

This background to *The Courtesan* album, besides being so connected to Venice, brings a new nuance relevant to the debates about the place of women in our modern times.

Of course, this part of *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* also discusses orientation and wayfinding – literally or figuratively.

A high-quality Dolby sound system is located in the courtyard as well as inside the Sala Tiziano. Here, like the light installation, through a system of timers and relays – different voice fragments are turned on at different times and heard from one place or another. The sound is synchronized with the red glowing LED columns that vibrate in sync. They are placed in different places in the interior and exterior spaces. The delicate vibrations of these luminous columns are a reference to the “free voice” that changes the concept of our orientation in the world.

The visual labyrinth of *ECHOES OF RADIANCE* is juxtaposed with the sonic labyrinth, in which the human voice reflects the spatial dimensions of the architecture and thus charts the trajectory of the visitor to the pavilion.

In this way, an architectural, visual, light and sound environment affects the senses of the visitors, immersing them in a reality as foreign and unknown, as attractive and provoking to be discovered, revealed, unraveled and felt sensuously and mentally.