

VENICE BIENALLE 2024

Project application for curatorial project for the national participation of Bulgaria at the 60th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale - 2024

Curator Lars Nordby

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Artist Dimitar Solakov

Arid



Concept of the project for participation in the competition

Name of the project:

Arid

List of participants-artists:

Dimitar Solakov

List of artworks:

	Artwork	Material	Quantity	Dimensions
1	Painting	Oil on linen, unframed	2	150X210cm
2	Painting-dyptich	Oil on linen, unframed	1	150x420cm
3	Hunger stone	Stone with engraved writing on it	4	~110x110x70cm
4	AR figure	Virtual figure, accessible via smartphone	1	Virtual dimensions ~5x1,6x4,7m
5	Soundscape	audio file 30min, looped, Dolby Atmos player, 9 speakers, subwoofer, receiver	1	Variable dimensions

Curatorial statement

As there are foreigners everywhere, imagine a world where there are foreigners nowhere.

The exhibition proposal, titled *Arid* by Dimitar Solakov, reflects the topic of the 60th Venice Biennale from its endpoint. Solakov's exhibition project takes an expressionistic approach, inviting viewers to a visual and auditory experience that confronts human negligence against the backdrop of potential planetary destruction. In line with his previous work and artistic practice evolving around human impact on desolated nature, Dimitar Solakov's exhibition proposal unfolds as a hypothetical scenario, a glimpse into an arid landscape where all humans collectively grapple with the aftermath of a collapsed planetary ecosystem. The project fundamentally derives from a fatigue point of an overfocused categorisation of race, gender, class, and one's ideological belief system - to the point of neglecting the real threat that will affect us all regardless of who and what defines us. It seems we humans need an extreme overhaul to bring out real change. The exhibition *Arid* brings out that scenario. Climate immigration is still something that we think is avoidable, but the accelerating warming of the planet suggests otherwise. Once large parts of the world become inhospitable and climate emigration becomes a reality, it will dwarf every previous mass emigration by scale and veracity.

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors will enter in a soundscape that resonates with a post-apocalyptic void and a haunting voice circling through a surround speaker system, echoing like a ghost desperately attempting to convey a message from a desolate future. The ambient atmosphere evokes a sense of a world in crisis, reflecting the perils and pitfalls of human nature. The phrase "Foreigners Everywhere" takes on a dual meaning within the context of "Arid". First, it echoes the reality that wherever one goes, foreigners are omnipresent—they/we are everywhere. Second, it delves into the introspective acknowledgement that, no matter the location, each individual is, deep down, a foreigner, grappling with issues of identity, nationality, race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and freedom. This auditory experience is the initial gateway into the exhibition. Moving forward, visitors encounter the first element of Solakov's multi-sensory narrative – one of the four Hunger Stones. These stones, pointing to the cardinal directions throughout the exhibition, date back to a 16th-century phenomenon, having inscriptions foretelling despair. Hunger Stones are only visible in riverbeds during times of drought. In the courtyard, an old water well is a silent witness to the historical means of these Hunger Stones. The water well no longer functions, echoing the theme of

aridity and thus tying together the historical roots of the Hunger Stones and the contemporary urgency of Solakov's commentary on climate change. Unlike the ancient omens, the future stones reveal tangible warnings of absolute desolation due to environmental degradation.

The exhibition continues as visitors proceed to the pavilion courtyard, where an augmented reality sculpture is near the one living tree. Visitors actively summon a ghostly figure into existence with their smartphones. The figure is reminiscent of the ghostly voice in the sound installation. The AR sculpture, surrounded by the Hunger Stones, becomes a central focal point. Proceeding further into the exhibition hall, visitors are met with large-scale paintings portraying an arid landscape, in which a lone anthropomorphic figure, the same as the AR sculpture in the courtyard, pleads with outstretched arms, embracing a lifeless tree. The liveliness and lifelessness of the courtyard and the exhibition hall juxtapose desolation and hope, thus becoming a poignant commentary on the impending consequences of climate change, challenging viewers to confront the potential realities of our shared future. As Solakov's "Arid" unfolds, the curated sequence of sound installation, Hunger Stones, augmented reality, paintings, and the symbolic water well all together create a harmonious yet impactful narrative, reinforcing the exhibition's overarching theme of an arid landscape and humanity's perplexing role in its preservation.

Following the 60th Venice Biennale conceptual framework in the spirit of Claire Fontaine's quest for a new lexicon and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature," "Arid" seeks not an enrichment of language but a journey into unlearning, a process of abandonment of certitudes and notions that structure our understanding. Through Solakov's lens, the exhibition becomes a commentary on the urgent need for a radical shift in perspective to foster unity in the face of an impending catastrophe. It stands not merely as a doomsayer but as a warning, articulating the profound agony and hopelessness felt in the face of widespread disregard for the imminent threat of climate change.

In the specific context of environmental issues, scholars like Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, and Eric Stern has delved into the societal responses to crises and disasters, shedding light on the role of empathy and collective action. As research indicates, human nature often responds with empathy to significant destruction. Solakov's project engages with the Venice Biennale's theme, not as a detached observer but as an active participant in the global conversation on the environment, humanity, and our collective responsibility for the future. Visitors to the Bulgarian Pavilion in 2024 will embark on an odyssey through "Arid," confronting the complexities of identity, environmental crisis, and the shared responsibility of safeguarding our collective future. The exhibition *Arid* is a reminder that without immediate action caused by the large-scale perplexiveness of climate change, the shared fate of humanity overrides all differences, making diversity a moot point in a world that may cease to exist.

As there are foreigners everywhere, imagine a world where there are foreigners nowhere.

- Lars Nordby

Bibliography:

Ed Hawkins; *Warming Stripes* (2018)

Arjen Boin, Ekengren M. & Rhinard M. (2021), Hiding in plain sight: conceptualising the creeping crisis, *Risk, Hazards and Crisis in Public Policy* 11(2): 116-138.

Eric Stern: I'm a Climate Scientist. I'm Not Screaming Into the Void Anymore. *New York Times*. (18th November 2023)

Foreigners Everywhere; Arts of the Working Class in a conversation with Claire Fontaine: Em vista de uma prática ready-made, edited by Alex Ungprateeb Flynn and Leonardo Araujo, and published by the São Paulo-based GLAC Edições. (2016)

"Hunger Stone", Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 16 July, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunger_stone

Sample Exhibition Plan and Technical Information for the Implementation and Display of the Project



Visualization of the AR Figure (viewed through a smartphone) and three of the hunger stones in the courtyard of the pavilion.



Visualization of the entrance corridor, with a view towards the western stone and the label with the QR code.



Visualization of the hall, with a view towards the courtyard.



Visualization of the courtyard, with a view to the north.

Hunger Stones

The four stones will be purchased from the company "SIM-2007," which offers moraine-type stones. The stones will have an approximate diameter of 120 cm (the size references the well in the center of the garden). The pavilion's close proximity to the canal will facilitate their transportation inside. The following inscriptions will be engraved on the stones: North from here, only dust moves; South from here, there is only agony; West from here, only despair is alive; East from here, the only water is tears. The visualizations are indicative of how the stones might look. The four will be installed along the north-south and east-west axes. The "northern" and "southern" stones will be placed along the northern and southern walls of the courtyard so that together with the "western" and "eastern" stones they will describe an imaginary square, with a side twice the length of the

hall's short wall. Thus, the coordinate system penetrates the exhibition space and conceptually connects the interior and exterior spaces. The centre of this square is the well in the courtyard, symbolically tying the stones to their predecessors. The "western" stone will be located in the corridor, immediately after its entrance and is the first thing that visitors will see. The eastern stone will be placed in line with the entrance to the "Titian" hall. The inscriptions will be turned towards the center of the courtyard, encapsulating it from the "desolation" outside. If necessary, a rubber pad can be placed under the stones to ensure the preservation of the mosaic in the space and the flooring in the corridor.



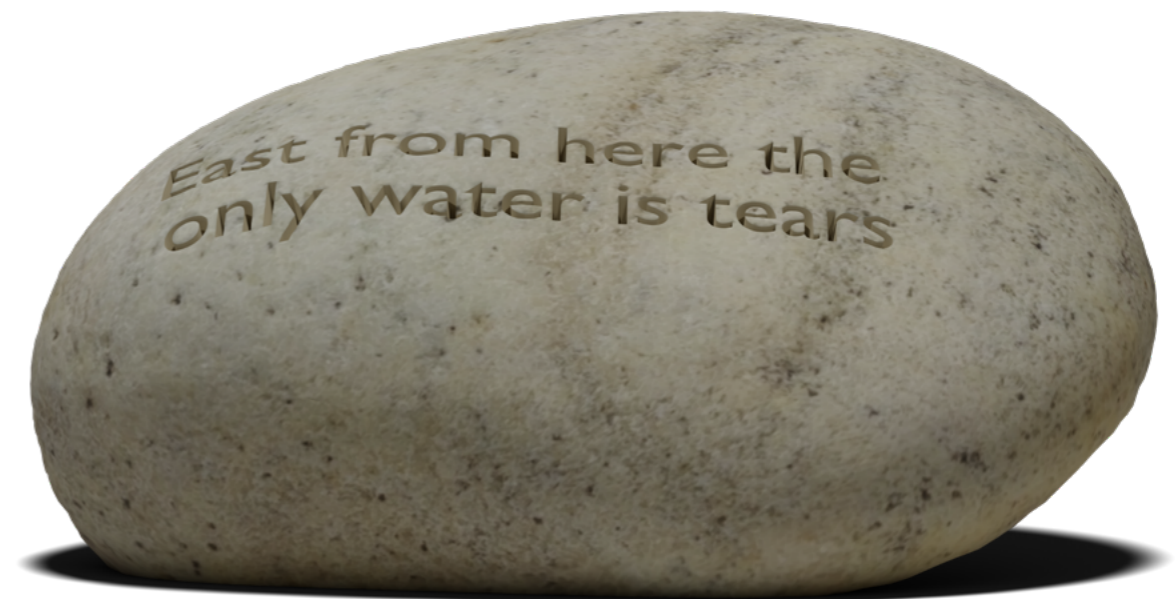
Northern stone, visualization



Western stone, visualization

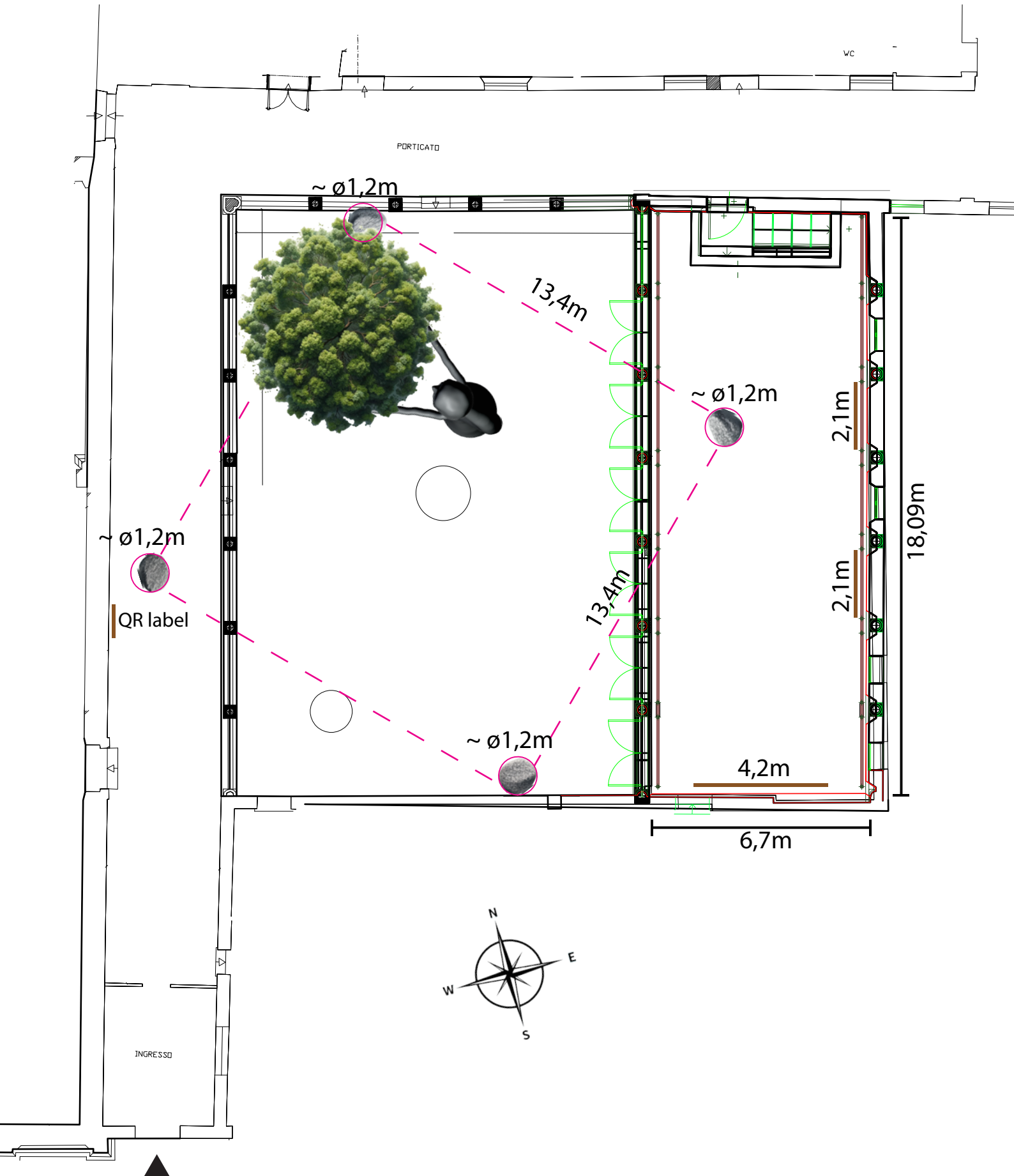


Southern stone, visualization



Eastern stone, visualization

Sample exhibition plan





Visualization of the "Titian" hall, viewed from the entrance.

Paintings

The paintings (oil on canvas) will be hung using flat metal hooks on the metal supports in the hall, without disturbing or piercing the structure itself. The diptych will be hung on the short wall at the end of the hall, and the other two paintings on the eastern wall.



diptych (150x420 cm)



detail



detail



sketch (50x70 cm) of one of the paintings measuring 150x210 cm.



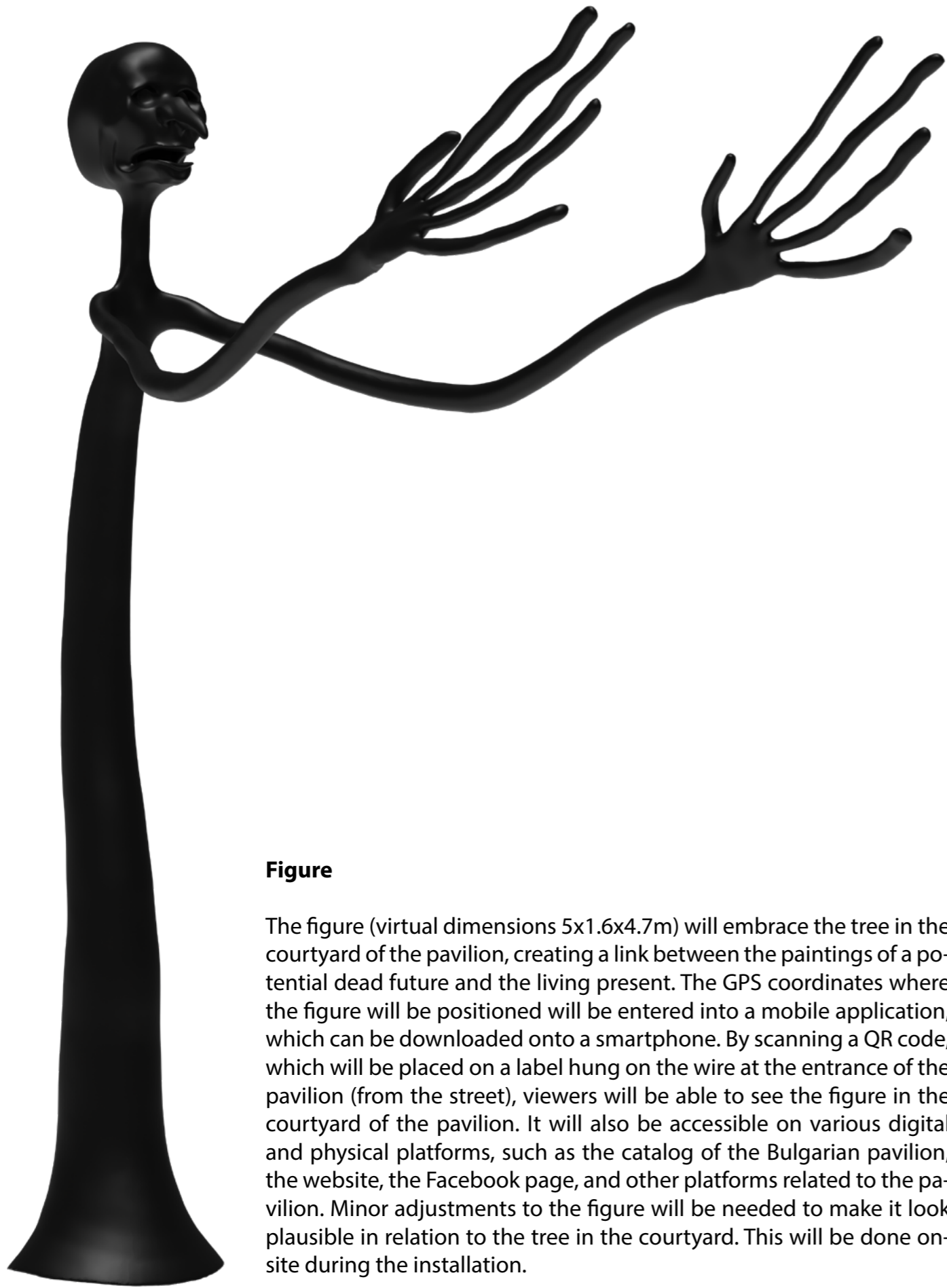
sketch (50x70 cm) of one of the paintings measuring 150x210 cm.



Visualization of the "Titian" Hall, looking towards its entrance.



Visualization of the courtyard, viewed looking north.



Figure

The figure (virtual dimensions 5x1.6x4.7m) will embrace the tree in the courtyard of the pavilion, creating a link between the paintings of a potential dead future and the living present. The GPS coordinates where the figure will be positioned will be entered into a mobile application, which can be downloaded onto a smartphone. By scanning a QR code, which will be placed on a label hung on the wire at the entrance of the pavilion (from the street), viewers will be able to see the figure in the courtyard of the pavilion. It will also be accessible on various digital and physical platforms, such as the catalog of the Bulgarian pavilion, the website, the Facebook page, and other platforms related to the pavilion. Minor adjustments to the figure will be needed to make it look plausible in relation to the tree in the courtyard. This will be done on-site during the installation.





Soundscape

The soundscape will be played through 9 speakers and one subwoofer, using a player and receiver with Dolby Atmos technology. This will create the illusion that the voice of the figure, heard in the attached file, is moving around the hall. In this way, another meaningful connection between the courtyard and the exhibition hall is established. The speakers will be hung on the metal structure using pigtail hooks. The cables will be attached in the same way. The receiver will be concealed under a white box made and designed to blend with the hall. The sound landscape itself will require fine-tuning of the sound channels, depending on the acoustics of the exhibition space.

