

## Concept

The proposal "Dreaming Against the Drift" is for a solo presentation of the artist Kalas Liebfried (Kaloyan Lyubomirov). The project explores extinction and disappearance - both in the context of nature and the global ecological crisis, and in terms of memory and history. The proposal offers a poetic journey against the flow of the Danube, intertwining personal narrative, the indefinable solitude of the stranger, and the grand narrative of man in the Anthropocene. The Danube stands as a potent symbol of both a border and a link, deeply embedded in European culture and history. For Liebfried, the river is connected to the estranged home and the attempt to return.

The theme of extinction is central to Liebfried's artistic practice. In 2022, he created the platform "Fragments of Sonic Extinction," where, along with other artists from around the world, he collected sounds from vanishing species, recreated through speculative musical compositions. The project positions itself on the border between science, collective practice, and artistic experiment, and its collection becomes an elegy for nature quietly disappearing due to devastating human activity.

As a continuation of this project, Liebfried explores the disappearing sounds of the Danube and creates a complex musical composition that lays as the very basis of this proposal. At the heart of his research is the Danube sturgeon - the largest freshwater fish, a descendant of ancient sturgeon - today an endangered species carrying the history of evolution. In the exhibition, it becomes the main protagonist and a collective image of ecological catastrophe, alienation, and vanishing history and identity.

Visitors are greeted by sculptures in the courtyard, inspired by the unique anthropomorphic Mesolithic plastics found at Lepenski Vir (Serbia), hinting at the cult significance of the sturgeon and other river species in ancient cultures along the Danube. The sculptures are 3D-printed ceramics. The technique, combining digital technologies and the use of traditional materials, emphasizes the problematic connection to past and heritage, focusing once more on the question about authenticity and extinction in the Anthropocene. The ceramic sculptures are complemented by green-brown glass spheres resembling the sturgeons caviar - its most valuable, embodying life and its disappearance simultaneously. Among all sturgeons, the Danube sturgeon migrates farthest up the Danube to spawn, but its path against the current is obstructed by the dam wall at the Iron Gates (Romania), close to the Bulgarian border.

The view of the sculptures is obstructed by fishing nets that divide the entire exterior space, extending to the inner room as well. In the autumn of 2023, Liebfried spent several weeks in his hometown of Svishtov, where he began his research on extinct river species and sounds. There, he met local fishermen who weave fishing nets, which become an integral part of his exhibition concept.

The exhibition in the interior space is structured as an oratorio, where each artwork carries its song, forming together a choir of different voices and stories.

The installation "Black River Sound System" comprises 7 sound sculptures forming the outline of the Danube River, and the movement around it represents a peculiar sonic navigation against the drift. Each of these sculptures, constructed from glass and artificial leather printed with the pattern of the Danube sturgeon's skin, contains an amplifier that "amplifies" its otherwise elusive song. Each of these personalized amplifiers is branded with the imaginary "Black River" (between the Black Sea and Schwarzwald, German for Black Forest), through which Liebfried raises questions about identity, personal history, and the uncertain concept of home.

Another key element of the comprehensive musical composition is the film "By the River." It is based on Liebfried's eponymous poem, recreating the lamentation for the vanished home and destruction.

The song of disappearance is complemented by the melody of three sculptures - custom musical instruments based on the principle of vibraphone. The metal plates are replaced by 3D-printed replicas of the Danube sturgeon's spine. These sculptures will be activated through musical performances during the exhibition.

The artworks in the exhibition tell individual stories of disappearance, loss, and oblivion between the personal and the global, nature and history. Together, they create an immersive acoustic landscape enhanced by the green light filtered through the windows, suggesting the color of water at a depth of over 5 meters.

Given its performative nature, the exhibition will offer a series of performances to activate the artworks involving musicians from Bulgaria and Germany. To expand the project and enrich its program with events, an existing network of artists and partners from the "Fragments of Sonic Extinction" project and the Rosa Stern Space in Munich, co-founded by Liebfried, will be utilized. Thus, the Bulgarian Pavilion has the potential to transform from an exhibition into a space for experience, encounter, and discussion - addressing local issues concerning Bulgaria and Eastern Europe as well as the global theme of vanishing nature and extinction.