Romanian Pavilion at the 61st International
Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

BLACK SEAS

Scores for the Sonic Eye

La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Description of the Project

Exhibitors

Anca Benera & Arnold Estefán

Curators

Corina Oprea
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Commissioner

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Black Seas – Scores for the Sonic Eye unfolds across two venues at the 2026 La Biennale di Venezia, bringing into focus the Black Sea as both a site and a method for understanding entangled ecological and geopolitical conditions.

The Pavilion in Giardini della Biennale presents a polyphonic installation of sound, moving image, and sculptural instruments, approaching the Black Sea as a site of acoustic memory, ecological transformation, and geopolitical tension. The work listens to the sea as a living archive—one shaped by sedimentation, extraction, and conflict, where histories remain materially embedded in its depths.

The deliberate plural *Black Seas* names not one singular geography but a shared state in which local environments are knotted into global systems. Past conflicts continue to shape the worlds we inhabit and the futures we imagine, as military logics, ecological change, and extractive pursuits inscribe themselves into the seabed. The *Sonic Eye*, meanwhile, signals a turn from visual mastery toward listening: attention to resonance, rhythm, and more-than-human registers through which submerged histories return. In this sense, the Pavilion works in what Koyo Kouoh calls "minor keys."

The pavilion creates a polyphonic system of moving images, sounds, and sculptures. Floating buoys, carried by the unpredictable rhythms of the sea, become musical instruments, while scientific devices—built to measure and endure—join the composition as resonant bodies bearing the imprints of waves, storms, and drifting currents. A geological core extracted from the anoxic depths of the Black Sea anchors the space, pointing to a time before fossil fuel extraction and human inscription.

Drawing on Romanian spectral music and an ecofeminist sensibility, *Black Seas – Scores for the Sonic Eye* engages with the sea's unrest. Here, the material performativity of these objects, eroded by water, meets the performativity of the human body, acknowledging the interdependence of human and more-than-human systems. The sea's turbulence is translated into sound as if following a score, reminding us how far we have drifted from the natural systems we belong to, asking how, from within this drift, life remains possible.

This acoustic and conceptual framework extends into the Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research, at Palazzo Correr in Cannaregio. Here, the project expands beyond the Black Sea, tracing its connections to wider planetary systems of extraction, circulation, and interdependence. The video installation *Blue Ground* (2021–22) follows a dispersed geography linking the Atlantic Ocean, the Namib Desert, and a Black Sea shipyard where the diamond-mining vessel *Benguela Gem* was constructed. Oceans and deserts emerge here as interconnected sites, shaped by the movement of resources, technologies and labour.

In *The Delusion of the Commons* (2021–ongoing), a sculptural form brings together the deep-sea hydrothermal vent and the mythical Tower of Babel. The work reflects on the sea as a contested commons—shared yet divided, governed yet unstable—while surrounding drawings speculate on submerged futures shaped by microbial life, mineral extraction, and planetary governance.

Across both sites, *How to Mend a Broken Sea?*—or a fractured world— emerges as a guiding question, not as a resolution but as a means of confronting these conditions.
Corina Oprea & Diana Marincu, Anca Benera & Arnold Estefán