

## Venice Biennale 2022: the must-see collateral exhibitions around the city

Writhing bodies in a deconsecrated church, BDE at the Ducale and an entirely improvised pavilion—what to see beyond the Arsenale and Giardini

Gareth Harris, Hannah McGivern, José da Silva and Tom Seymour

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Photo: ORTA collective © ORTA collective / Courtesy of the artists

### **Kazakhstan Pavilion**

**LAI-PI-CHU-PLÉE-LAPA, ORTA Collective, Centre for the New Genius**

Spazio Arco Dorsoduro 1485

What should an artist do when shorn of their art? Improvise. ORTA Collective were chosen to represent Kazakhstan for the Central Asian country's first-ever pavilion at the Venice Biennale. But just days before the opening of the Venice Biennale, the collective learnt their combined years of work was stuck in transit at the Georgian border. There was no hope of arrival in time for the vernissage; another consequence of the Ukrainian war.

The collective first formed in Almaty in 2015, inspired by the legacy of Sergey Kalmykov, the unheralded Russian avant-garde artist who tragically died in a psychiatric unit in the same city back in 1967. This week, the collective planned to show the results of seven years of continuous work together in Kalmykov's lineage, spanning embroidery, painting, video and digital art.

Alexandra Morozova and Rustem Begenov, the husband and wife at the centre of the collective, admit to succumbing to a deep depression in the days before the opening. They finally roused themselves and got to work, filling the space with materials that they could find—cardboard, plastic, tinfoil, sellotape and glue. They decided, off the cuff, to use their makeshift “temple” for a series of performances that they call *Spectacular Experiments*.

There's no denying it: the performance ORTA Collective are offering visitors of the Venice Biennale resembles something you might find at the outer fringes of Glastonbury. One caustic wit compared the experience to an episode of Neil Buchanan's British 1990s children's TV show *Art Attack*.

But ORTA Collective are testament to the power of spirit in the face of adversity. They still, somehow, managed to conjure a transformative experience. For 20 minutes, wrapped in cardboard and with a ball of tinfoil sellotaped to your head, you're taken from Venice to an invented place of their choosing.

Headline works by Anish Kapoor and Anselm Kiefer loom in their historic chambers close by; intense, monumental and not a little self-reverent. Here, in this cardboard cocoon, is perhaps a needed reminder that art can leave you feeling a little lighter too.