



The Latvian Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia
MAREUNROL'S and Bruno Birmanis
Untamed Assembly—Backstage of Utopia

9 May – 22 November 2021

Arsenale di Venezia

Venice

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Titled ***Untamed Assembly: Backstage of Utopia***, the exhibition for the Latvian Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia presents a new work by the interdisciplinary artist duo **MAREUNROL'S—Rolands Pēterkops and Mārīte Mastiņa-Pēterkopa**—in dialogue with alternative fashion designer **Bruno Birmanis** and the archives of the **Untamed Fashion Assemblies (UFA)**, a series of experimental fashion, art, and performance events founded by Birmanis that took place in Riga between 1990 and 1999.

Curated by **Inga Lāce** and **Adomas Narkevičius**, the exhibition links past and present, highlighting utopian thinking at moments of transition. It asks how collective imagination, desire, and visibility are produced as political and economic systems shift, and how futures and new forms of togetherness are rehearsed behind the scenes rather than on the main stage. The installation by MAREUNROL'S rethinks the legacy of UFA and is conceived as a backstage—a space of preparation, invisible labour, joy, improvisation and human connection. The clothing rack, ubiquitous in any backstage, becomes a holding device and the architecture of the stories, while recurring motifs such as birds and textile sculptures, carry memories of flight, risk and fragility.

Taking place during a decade of profound political transformation, UFA expanded fashion across visual art, music, and club culture. Defying conservative social norms inherited from the Soviet era, the Assemblies offered an alternative to the commercialised fashion markets in the West. Bodily display and costume also became tools for negotiating new identities through drag, role-play and deliberate exaggeration. For a short time, international media coverage positioned Riga as an unexpected avant-garde hub. Improvised and collaborative, the Assemblies brought students and international stars onto the same stage. Young Baltic designers such as Bruno Birmanis, Juozas Statkevičius, and Sandra Straukaitė appeared alongside

Paco Rabanne, Vivienne Westwood, Zandra Rhodes, and Andrew Logan; among future global icons, Viktor & Rolf passed through as students.

Across the installation, newly digitised footage from Birmanis's archive traces the threads of travel and border-crossing, transnational community building, scarcity as the force for creativity and newly gained yet fragile political freedom. Returning to this archive, the pavilion asks what can be gathered today from the utopian visions of these festivals.

The Latvian Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La di Venezia is located in the Arsenale di Venezia and commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia.

Commissioner: Solvita Krese

Organisers: LCCA (Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art)

Exhibition title: Untamed Assembly: Backstage of Utopia

Artists: MAREUNROL'S—Rolands Pēterkops and Mārīte Mastiņa-Pēterkopa and **Bruno Birmanis**

Curators: Inga Lāce and Adomas Narkevičius

You can view the press kit [here](#), and for press enquiries please contact [Alexia Menikou](#)

Note to Editors

About the artists

MAREUNROL'S is a Riga-based interdisciplinary artist duo—Mārīte Mastiņa-Pēterkopa and Rolands Pēterkops. Working at the intersection of visual art and design, they continually push boundaries, often positioning fashion beyond its traditionally functional role. The duo's distinctive approach is a poetic expression of magical realism, emphasising narrative as an artwork, expressed through their interdisciplinary practice, which comprises fabric and textile sculptures, fashion design collections, installations, video and sound art, drawings, photography collages, and costume design for opera and theatre.

MAREUNROL'S have participated in numerous international competitions, festivals, biennials, and group exhibitions, including the Arnhem Fashion Biennial, International Talent Support (ITS) competition, Barcelona 080, RIBOCA 2, The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, and more. They have also exhibited their work at art venues such as the contemporary art centre kim?, Riga, La Gaîté Lyrique, Paris, Casino Luxembourg, The Riga Contemporary Art Space, among others. In 2009, they received both Grand Prix, the two highest prizes at the 24th international fashion and photography festival Hyères, and in 2016, they were among ten European nominees for the prestigious International Woolmark Prize.

MAREUNROL'S made history as the first-ever Latvian brand to be included in the official programme of Paris Fashion Week, and their garments and artworks are in the archive collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art, as well as numerous private collections, including the VV Foundation. Their retrospective exhibition at the

Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Riga was the museum's most visited exhibition of 2019, and in 2020 it was nominated for the Kilogram of Culture prize in the 'best visual arts exhibition' category. In 2024, their exhibition Invisible Exercises was nominated for the Purvītis Prize, one of Latvia's most prestigious art prizes. The duo is also active in education, appearing as guest lecturers in art academies all over the world.

Bruno Birmanis (BB) is an artist, performance maker, and curator whose practice unfolds at the intersection of conceptual fashion, the body, and spatial imagination. His work approaches fashion not as a functional system but as a cultural language—capable of articulating ideas, emotions, and collective experience.

Birmanis graduated from the Riga School of Applied Arts as a metal designer and jewellery artist. Since the mid-1980s, he has been actively engaged in alternative and experimental fashion, exhibiting and performing across Eastern and Western Europe. In the late 1980s, in collaboration with designer Uģis Rūķītis, he created Postbanalism Ball, a seminal multimedia [WP1] performance work staged over thirty times across the Soviet Union. The project was widely recognised by international media as a defining expression of perestroika-era cultural transformation.

In the early 1990s, BB initiated and created the Untamed Fashion Assembly, an independent platform dedicated to alternative fashion and performative practices. Emerging at a moment of political and social rupture, the Assembly became a transnational space for freedom, non-conformism, and creative risk, bringing together young artists from across Europe and redefining fashion as a performative and critical act.

Birmanis's works and performances have been presented in Rome, Venice, Paris, London, Moscow, and Vilnius, including at the Latvian National Museum of Art. Alongside his artistic practice, he has worked across architecture, interior design, and visual culture, collaborating with leading architectural studios and producing large-scale cultural and fashion events.

Currently, Birmanis is also active as an educator. He heads the Styling Department at the Liepāja Secondary School of Art, Music and Design and lectures internationally. His recent work focuses on process as a generator of value, intergenerational collaboration, and artistic practice as a vital form of cultural responsibility.

About the curators

Inga Lāce is Chief Curator at the Almaty Museum of Arts, Kazakhstan. She was C-MAP Central and Eastern Europe Fellow at MoMA, New York (2020–2023) and has been a curator at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (2012–2020). In 2023, she co-curated New Visions—The Henie Onstad Triennial for Photography and New Media in Oslo, as well as the Kaunas Biennial, the contemporary art festival Survival Kit 14, and the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts.

Adomas Narkevičius is a Lithuanian curator and art historian based in London and the Founding Director of Upė Foundation. He curated the 15th Kaunas Biennial, Life After Life (2025), and is the co-curator of the Latvian Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale (2026). From 2021 to 2025, he was Curator at Cell Project Space, London, and he previously worked at Rupert—Centre for Art, Residencies and Education in Vilnius, where he led the Alternative Education, Public, and Residencies programmes.



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