

# Venice Biennale 2022: Three Pavilions To See in the Arsenale

Fi Churchman   Reviews   22 April 2022   artreview.com



Skuja Braden, 'Selling Water by the River', 2022 (installation view). Photo: Kristine Madjare. © and courtesy the artists

## **Skuja Braden, *Selling Water by the River***

### Latvian Pavilion

You know all those bizarre, abject and unsettling thoughts you try so very hard to stuff into the furthest corner of your mind? So as not to give anyone an inkling of how truly disturbed you are? You know the ones. Well, they all seem to have splurged out at *Selling Water by the River*, materialising as surreal painted porcelain sculptures sprawled across the Latvian Pavilion, perched haphazardly on long white tables, sitting on the floor and mounted on the walls. Different domestic areas are vaguely recognisable because of the forms the ceramics take: there's a sort of 'kitchen' section where plates depict body parts, a wall lined with vessels in the shapes of pairs of boobs decorated with jewellery or 'tattooed' with images of animals and words like 'Tiger Milk' and '12% MORE FAT', food-shaped porcelain crawling with giant bulbous-eyed mosquitos, and serving bowls



propped up by unidentifiable ceramic creatures eating one another in a kind of ouroboros fashion; a ‘dining room’ laid out with more crockery-like sculptures that have eerie, leering and grotesque faces; and a ‘bedroom’ with decorative ornaments inspired by Buddhist imagery and a ceramic bedspread installed vertically against a wall from which a pondscape seems to be leaking out – lily pads and aquatic creatures spreading everywhere. Among all these are many, many porcelain eyes, staring out from containers, vases, jars, even seemingly erupting out of the ground in organic blobs of eyebally mass; there are a lot of genitals – spiky-haired vaginas and anemone-like penis sculptures and more penises crucified, the gonads split apart.



Skuja Braden, *Selling Water by the River*, 2022 (installation view). Photo: Kristine Madjare. © and courtesy the artists

Judging by the convoluted exhibition text that accompanies Skuja Braden’s (Ingūna Skuja and Melissa D. Braden) installation, it’s unclear whether this was the effect they were going for. The meandering text draws on Zen Buddhism, bodies of water and borders, hospitality, LGBTQIA+ identity, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro’s experimental performance space *Womanhouse* (1971), 1930s German kitchen design, private space, the body, gender equality in the Soviet Union, sexuality, the role of ceramics in modern and contemporary art and the ‘global circulation of water’. My advice? Just enjoy the disorientating madness.