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Portrait of Klaus Littmann, 2019, Photo creat Emmanuel Fradin, Courtesy of For Forest

# “FOR FOREST – THE UNENDING ATTRACTION OF NATURE”

## When the vision of an artist transforms into reality

Since 8 September 2019 the audience has an opportunity to see the biggest temporary art intervention in Austria, entitled **Swiss artist, Klaus Littmann, is the one who came up with the idea of this intriguing project. His inspiration came from a drawing by Max Peintner, who is an Austrian artist. Assisted by Enzo Enea, a renowned landscape architect, Littmann masterfully combined art, nature and architecture. Fruitful cooperation of the duo gave an unbelievable result – in the enormous Wörthersee football stadium in Klagenfurt mixed forest is growing that has as much as three hundred living trees. Visitors have almost two months to admire this extraordinary and riveting manifestation of nature, which will carefully be replanted in a nearby location as soon as the intervention finishes.**

### SURREALIST IMAGES TRANSFERRED INTO REALITY

#### The destruction of nature and the environment

When Max Peintner (1937) worked on his “The Unending Attraction of Nature” (1970/71) drawing he could not have assumed that his vision will become a reality some time in the future. What he probably strived for was merely preserving the unconventional vision by depicting it on paper. The drawing may have been shocking for the audience 50 years ago, but nowadays it is astoundingly relevant. Today we are thinking more and more about our destructive relationship with the natural environment and try to make it progress in a more suitable direction. The futuristic image by Peintner is by no means absurd anymore, it may, however, still stir up emotions of certain viewers, especially football fans. Everyone expects to see football players on a pitch but it is not what the audience sees in this drawing. Contrary to their expectations, they see forest in the middle of a stadium, as surreal as it may sound. Max Peintner who drew “The Unending Attraction of Nature” holds an engineering degree and a degree in architecture. He is an iconic figure of the Austrian environmental movement who became popular in the 1970s thanks to his works that criticized the modern way of living. He is keenly interested in what we are putting our planet through. He was shell-shocked by the Chernobyl disaster and his feelings manifested themselves clearly in poetic and philosophical visions. The drawing we are talking about is not very unique among all of Peintner’s works. Futuristic visions were what characterized him from the early beginnings of his artistic activity. A perfect example here is his series of drawings entitled “Contributions to the Future. Critics of Technology and Civilization under the Guise

of Utopia”, which he created at the early stage of his career. The common features of Peintner’s drawings are undoubtedly anxiety and melancholy, just like we see them in the paintings by Giorgio de Chirico. Futuristic visions is another aspect which combines all these drawings into a coherent unit. Nonetheless, we have to bear in mind that this topic is by no means the only one the artist focuses on.



Image credit Max Peintner, The Unending Attraction of Nature, pencil drawing, 1970/71, hand-coloured by Klaus Littmann in 2018

### GESAMTKUNSTWERK CREATED BY A STUDENT OF JOSEPH BEUYS

#### A soccer ball in a gallery and forest growing in a football stadium

The vision of Max Peintner materialized in real world thanks to Klaus Littmann (1951) who could not stop thinking how to make “The Unending Attraction of Nature” a reality since the moment he saw the drawing. The vision accompanied Klaus Littmann for thirty years and became an enormous artistic challenge. Nearly fifty years passed since the drawing was made until what Max Peintner imagined came into being. The project we are discussing is the biggest art intervention in Austria and, at the same time, it is the biggest project Littmann had ever carried out. It was not a coincidence that Klaus Littmann was the artist who came up with this fascinating idea. Undoubtedly, the ability to convince others to go along with his initiatives is a very strong skill of this curator, gallery owner and artist specializing in art interventions in the public space. The skill must have come handy while working on such a big and expensive project. Klaus Littmann understands art in a very unique way. Since the very young age he has been fascinated with works by Kurt Schwitters, the author of an individual utopia, who tried to find new ways of artistic

expression. Littmann was also a student of Joseph Beuys (1921) at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf. He therefore is perfectly familiar with works and achievements of his professor and understands the concept of social sculpture, whose underlying idea is activity and provoking the society. Nevertheless, Littmann's work is quite far away from this concept. It is a dynamic process, fully experienced through what is being done in connection with the project.

"FOR FOREST – The Unending Attraction of Nature" is not the only project by the Swiss artist related to football. One of his previous engrossing projects was prepared together with Werner Jehle and entitled "Fussball in der Vitrine" (Basel, 1982). Another famous project by Littmann whose topic was related to this sports discipline was "Faces of Football" (Vigo & Vitoria, 2008). These projects clearly show that the artist is truly interested in everyday life and a cultural phenomenon.

### CREATIVE DIALOGUE WITH NATURE

#### Social sculpture and experiences in the realm of aesthetics

When the current project is being discussed, other works that served as attempts to establish a creative dialogue with nature are referred to as well. An example of such work is "7000 Oaks" (1982, Kassel) by Joseph Beuys, a representative of conceptual art and a performer. This work is also an example of social sculpture. The artist proposed to plant 7000 oaks in the city of Kassel. Each of these oaks had one basaltic rock assigned, which were arranged in a single pile. The rocks were put in front of Fridericianum, the pile getting smaller each time an oak was planted. This project was deemed to be an attempt at urban greenery restoration and later on it spread onto other cities in different parts of the world. "7000 Oaks" was meant to be just the initial stage of tree planting campaign, thanks to which social and environmental changes were to be triggered off. Another nature-related project, mentioned by Klaus Littmann himself is "Wrapped Trees" by Christo and Jeanne-Claude (Basel, 1997-1998). These artists converted 178 trees in the park around Fondation Beyeler into sculptures by wrapping them in woven polyester fabric. Customized silver polyester wrapping was prepared for every single tree so that branches could freely define the shape of the fabric. In this way every tree got its own, unique appearance. Altogether, trees wrapped by the artists created a dynamic panorama of form, texture and colour. Christo and Jeanne-Claude created 178 independent sculptures. These trees remained wrapped in polyester for three weeks, standing there and facing changeable autumn weather. The artists emphasized that the temporary character of their works highlighted their fragility and served as an encouragement for the audience to come and see what the duo had created. They were mostly focused on bringing joy and showing beauty and were of the opinion that this can be successfully achieved thanks to large-scale artistic projects presented to the audience beyond gallery space. This tree-focused project is also a testimony to the artists' extraordinary patience and

perseverance in striving towards achieving the set goal, especially if we take into account that "Wrapped Trees" came into being thirty years after the idea originated.

### NATURAL FEATURE OF UNIQUE VALUE

#### A stimulus for rethinking the future of our planet

The two projects I just mentioned are not just some random projects chosen to extend the narration. They were described in order to help you understand what really motivated Klaus Littmann to work on "FOR FOREST – The Unending Attraction of Nature". Obviously, all three projects revolve around trees. Another important thing is the close relationship between Littmann and his teacher – Joseph Beuys. "Wrapped Trees" is the project involving truly motivated artists – Christo and Jean-Claude – who spared no effort to make their vision a reality. The situation was very similar for Littmann, as he also had to show extraordinary patience and wait for almost thirty years to make his idea materialize. The forest in the football stadium satisfies aesthetic needs of the audience with the bright, colourful, wide-spreading crowns, which together look like a sparkling monument.

It is, however, highly possible that with his breathtaking work the creator of art intervention in Klagenfurt football stadium mostly wants to inspire a discussion that would bring about social and environmental changes. The drawing by Max Peintner served as a motivation to use the trick known for a long time, namely placing the artwork outside of its inherent, self-evident context. This remarkable image influences the way nature is perceived and makes the audience wonder about its future. When people realize that climate change is very dangerous and will lead to irreversible damage, such as disappearance of certain ecosystems and increased frequency of extreme weather events, Littmann's project becomes a monument which lets us remember that nothing is given to us forever. Perhaps in the near future we will only be able to see wildlife in special nature reserves.

There are obviously groups which are against this art intervention, and this is not surprising, because what you can see in the stadium if you do not know how Littmann's idea for the project originated and what his inspiration was is merely forest. The opposition is particularly strong among the fans of WAC football club, as they are currently not able to use the stadium that serves as a venue for the intervention. They have the right to be somehow embittered, although, as we found out, the stadium has not been fully utilized. Nevertheless, it seems that the city accepted the artist's idea. The intervention itself attracts huge audience, particularly due to its grand scale and temporary character. Even Leonardo DiCaprio, who supports activities aimed at preserving the environment, was delighted with Littmann's project. Therefore, we can conclude that the artist achieved his goal and his project became an impulse for discussion and deeper reflection.



# VIENNA CONTEMPORARY A CONVERSATION WITH THE NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR — JOHANNA CHROMIK



This week we are in Vienna. From September 26 to 29, Austria's largest art fair **viennacontemporary** take place. This is the most renowned contemporary art fair in Central Europe. That's why we spoke with the new Artistic Director of the fair — Johanna Chromik, on how the art market is changing, the impact of the fair on the Viennese art scene and the most visible trends in the art market.

Each year **viennacontemporary** gives an opportunity to sell, network and to present a Central and Eastern European galleries and artists. From this year you will continue this idea. As a new Director, what is your main goal?

Now in its 8th year **viennacontemporary** has become the region's leading fair through its focus on quality, cooperation and its special attention towards galleries and artists from CEE which has always been one key aspect of the fair and a very important part of its positioning. Located in the Marx Halle **vc** is a platform for collecting and exchanging, of contact and experience with a solid foundation.

For our core clientele being mid-size and young galleries we aim to provide a fruitful setting to successfully use the fair as a tool. Therefore, it will be crucial to further sharpen the profile, be a potential partner throughout the year, work even closer together with other events taking place in the city to increase the appeal of September in Vienna for international visitors. To make the fair more accessible and attractive we will strengthen our non for profit part of the programme with Talks, special guided tours and other events, as well as add art editions into the fair's profile to lower the entry point for collectors to be. We also work towards further enhancing our social media and online presence to keep up with our audience not only during the five days of the fair but also throughout the year.

**Will we see some changes? What is the biggest difference?**

What I can see for the upcoming edition is that we

have a very good line-up of galleries, first-timers and galleries which return and here particularly from CEE. At the same time the special categories are stronger than ever. Working in a time span of a few months so far there was time to develop and implement ideas within the existing structure which leaves room and potential for 2020.

**Providing galleries from Central and Eastern Europe a significant presence, could you tell us the highlights that we will see during **viennacontemporary**?**

I would like to name them all - we are honoured to have them with us. So easiest is to look at the countries which should give you a good idea: Definitely the 4 galleries from Slovenia which this year is our "Focus" Country with the project **NSK State in Time**; **Window Project** (Tbilisi/Georgia) in our special category **Explorations**; **Maksla XO** (Riga/Latvia); **Meno Nisa** (Vilnius/Lithuania); **Stereo and Galeria Wschód** (both Warsaw/Poland); **Galeria Plan B** (Cluj, Berlin); **Galerie Iragai** (Moscow); **Eugster II Belgrad**; **Zahorian & van Espen** (Bratislava, Prague); **hunt kastner and SVIT** (both Prague); **Voloshyn Gallery** (Kiev); **acb and Kisterem** (both Budapest).

**What does the selection process look like? What are your criteria for choosing? What kind of galleries/artists are you looking for?**

We have a very knowledgeable selection committee consisting of 5 gallerists. Together with them we go through each and every single application and they vote. The most important criteria is quality.

**What are the most visible trends in the art market at the moment? Which type of art gaining its popularity among collectors?**

On the one hand there is the tendency to play safe by investing in blue-chip art which is possible only for a fraction of collectors taking into the pricing into consideration. On the other hand we see a (re)discovery of female artists which mainly have a different price tag so far.

**Each year you collaborate with local galleries and museums. How do you involve the Viennese art scene during the art fair?**

Ever since I arrived in Vienna in January I have been in constant dialogue with as many gallerists, curators, and museum directors as well as off spaces and other partners as possible. Many contemporary Viennese galleries — established and young — participate at the fair which adds to the solid and vivid foundation of vc. The museums will have the chance to access the fair early on. Moreover, most of them are part of our active VIP program. There are also a few high-profile corporate collections in Vienna which are very important, too.

**Do you think that the art fair influenced a Viennese and Austrian art market? How has this situation changed?**

viennacontemporary plays a crucial role in the fall season and to a certain degree throughout the year. With its timing at the end of September and its location it is a must-see in Vienna, in the region and on an international level. The fair is a strong brand and certainly — in collaboration with galleries and the local collectors — draws in the international art crowd. It energises and mobilises.

**Working on an art fair is not just one month before the fair. It is a full-time job that last all year long.**



**How many people work with you? Do you have an office?**

Our viennacontemporary office is located in Vienna's lively and lovely 7th district. The Museumsquartier with Kunsthalle, Mumok, and Leopold as well as the KHM is in our neighborhood as well as some galleries and off-spaces plus great lunch-spots. With only a few weeks to go our office is buzzing with people; soon most of us are going to move to Marx Halle, the fantastic building the fair takes place at. After the fair the core team with 7 people will move back to the 7th.

**How you attract new galleries? How important are constant networking and travels?**

Certainly active networking is one of the key elements. It is also important to see the space where a gallery is located and build a (somewhat) personal relationship. Therefore, I have been traveling extensively to renew and deepen existing partnerships as well as to broaden them.

**As viennacontemporary's new director where do you see the fair in ten years?**

Among one of the most important regional fairs which provides the best framework possible for galleries, collectors, art experts, and a general audience interact. A partner throughout the year vc will also cater to a young audience via a strong digital presence and tools.



# AUGUST DESIGN STUDIO: Say hello from your studio

August Design is a design studio, founded by Irina Grishina and Olga Milczyńska. They create ceramics, design objects for everyday use and work with photography. In August Design Studio, they've decided that careful observation of human beings and their surroundings, the functionality of objects, and above all the simple joys will become the core of their design philosophy. Their goal is to create beautiful, modern objects; however, they use traditional techniques. While collaborating with craftsmen, they make sure that both sides learn something from each other. We met to find out what their daily work looks like.



## Your morning routine:

O.M.: Exercise, good breakfast and a walk to the studio.

IG: Bathroom, breathing exercises and breakfast.

## The first thing you do when you come to your studio:

Both: Water the plants outside and do the office work.

## Instagram, Fb or no social media?

Both: Instagram and Fb.

## Magazines/books you like to read?

O.M.: I love novels, both by the classic writers, as well as by the modern ones. Lately Houellebecq and Virginia Woolf.

IG: Books about photography and photographers, recently though I went back to classic Russian novels.

## Three objects which are essential at your work?

O.M.: I'm a collector. I gather objects, it's impossible to choose just three crucial ones.

IG: A computer, a camera and light.

## What are your favourite tools to help you to get the job done?

Both: A pencil or something to draw, my favourite wooden tool and an old credit card.

## What inspires you and motivates you to get your work done?

O.M.: Tradition that I can admire in all sorts of museums, old craft techniques, patterns and structures as well as modern art and nature, which I spend time surrounded by whenever I can.

IG: News from around the world on design and photography, nature and traveling.

## One funny story from your work?

O.M.: Just recently I was building a monument in Indonesia. When people from there heard that I'm coming to do it, they imagined a tall and big woman, and then they saw me – 150 cm tall.

IG: I don't remember any. Work is serious, there is no fun to it. (That's a joke)

## The project you are working on right now.

O.M.: I'm working on a new series, inspired by landscapes and old collections: Wunderkameras.

IG: Something that's really close to my motherland's culture.

## What do you love about your job? And what sucks about it?

O.M.: Concentration – while creating a new piece I get totally involved in the process, and I live in my own world then. Paperwork sucks.

IG: Observation and research are what I like the most; I don't really like folding and unfolding boxes.

**Hand-made or mass-production?**

Both: Hand-made definitely!

**Do you work individually or with a team?**

Both: Depends on a project, but lately, we've been working more on our own.

**How do you rest and relax after work?**

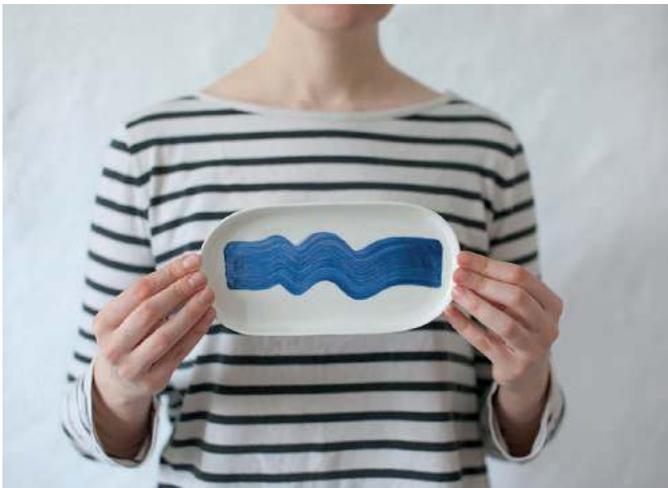
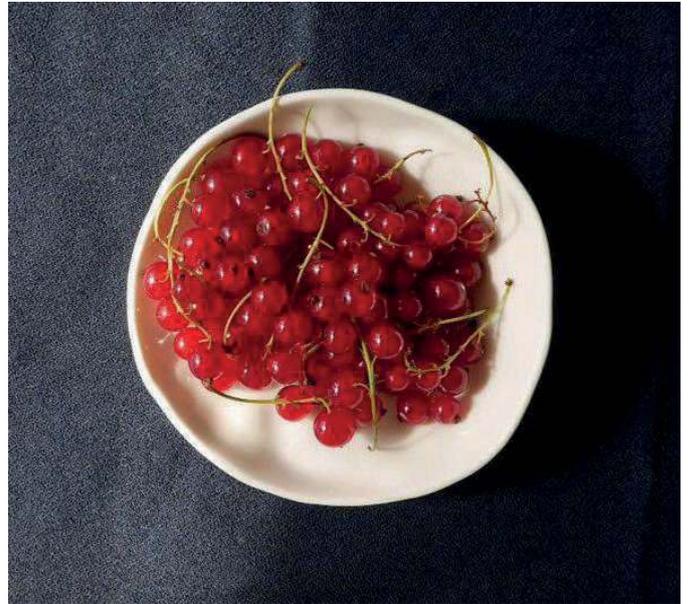
O.M.: Reading, meeting friends and going to the forest.

IG: Yoga, cycling, listening to music.

**Do you have any advice for someone who wants to work in your field?**

O.M.: Focus on your own style, work hard and be patient.

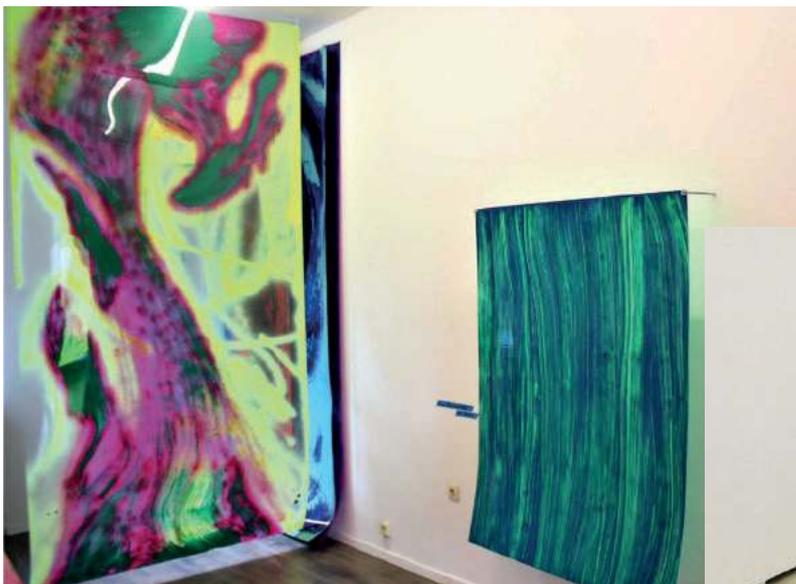
IG: Show your work!



# POVILAS RAMANAUSKAS

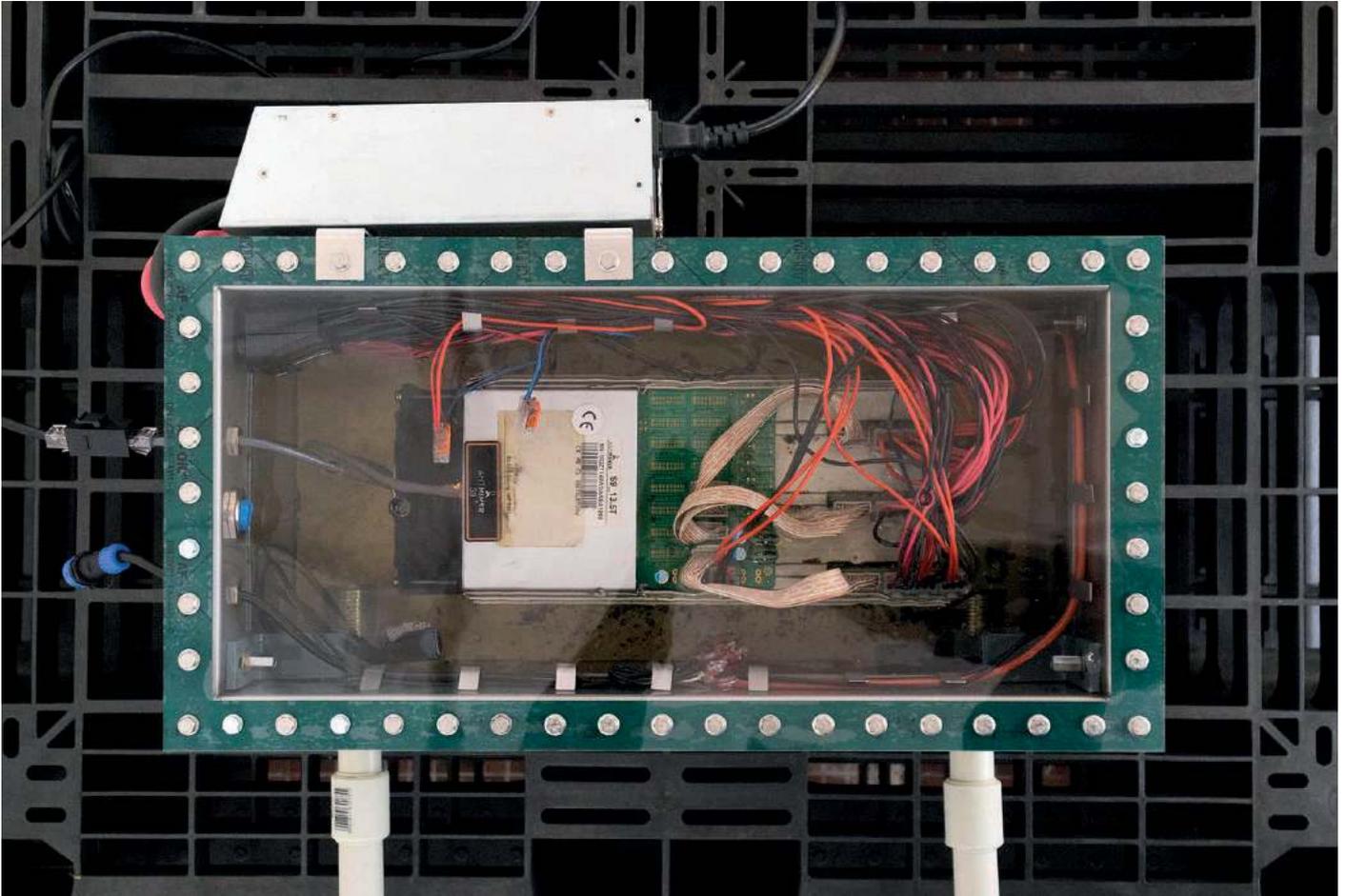
## PORTFOLIO

**Povilas Ramanauskas** (b. 1987) graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts. He has been working as the lecturer at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Faculty of Kaunas since 2017. His main creative field is contemporary painting, objects and installations. He tries to question the limits of common understanding towards contemporary painting through the aspects of new techniques, materials and concepts of contemporary art. The idea of his artworks is to show that contemporary painting, or painting as a medium, is quite versatile on the whole: while absorbing other media, while mixing with other visual expressions, painting remains. Painting is a very large, flexible and wide-ranging medium. The main motive of his work is very simple and clear – the painting. The boundaries of painting, the search for its expansion through other media. He has been looking for different ways, surfaces, substances and shapes to extend the paint.





# ART RESIDENCY: CAFE VS RESIDENCY JAN DOMICZ



Jan Domicz was invited by KulturKontakt for a 3-month residency in Vienna between July and September 2019. The program is supported by Federal Chancellery of Austria and Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

We spoke just before opening of a group exhibition by artists in residence in Concordiaplatz in Vienna.

**How did you find out about the residency programme? How did you apply?**

To quote one of the best used songs from a 90s skateboarding movie, "I Heard It Through The Grapevine". The rest was online.

**What does your regular art residency day look like?**

Wake up. Breakfast. Emails/renders/computer labour. Run. Lunch. Studio labour. Skipping dinner. This schedule is often interrupted by short trips, studio visits or hanging out with new neighbours. After some time I've learnt to appreciate the residency rhythm.

**Tell us about the work/project on which you are working right now?**

Don't get me started. There's a body of sculptures I will

present at the end of residency involving abstract copies of public furniture which went on strike and decided to interrupt human flow in the city. There is a video and a sculpture for a future show in Basel (SALTS) based in warehouses, made out of shelves and internet-circulated spam-like narratives (coppypastas), which I am developing also for a show at the end of the year in Vienna. This show will involve repurposing kitchen/storage area of the gallery. You can say my works are pure volumetric extrusions of programme.

**In your experience, what distinguishes working as part of residencies from working in your atelier?**

Partly thanks to the residency rhythm, partly because of the summer (Gurken) season when there is not much going on in Vienna, it is easier to focus on the

work. Although there was more hustle when I was finding materials and discovering supply stores in the first weeks.

What strikes me most is the distance to my close ones. I have never noticed before how my practice is embedded in everyday rituals.

**Does the change of context help you in the creative process?**

Yes. It's like going with a laptop to work at a cafe. It feels like you are cheating but (weirdly) it works. The main difference: residency is a bit further than a local cafe.

Besides, few days before the start of the residency my studio in Warsaw was robbed. I lost most of my tools and equipment, so the change of context was highly welcomed.

**Do you place an emphasis on your work or rather on meeting people and exploring Vienna?**

I don't know. All three activities are influencing or replacing each other daily.

**What challenges and opportunities did/does the residency involve?**

There is an exhibition with all (5) artists in residency toward the end of the program. However, I feel everything before that is more important: the process, discussions, meetings.

**Name three objects which are the most important to you during the residency.**

Ikea bag. Backpack. Camera bag.

**What is the role of the institution in your residency? What does it provide you with?**

Every institution providing the residency program is something between a host and an employer. As an artist, you are both humbled by their hospitality (as a guest) but still you are greedy (as a professional) and ask for more contacts, budget, consulting. These are the main three things they provide. (+ studio, accommodation and tickets.)

In my case, the institution (KulturKontakt) is represented by three extremely forthcoming women: Nicole, Brigitte, Nicole. I am very lucky to have met them.

**What would you recommend to artists going abroad for an art residency?**

Sure, try before you say no.



**Jan Domicz** (born in 1990 in Opole, Poland), studied at University of Art in Poznań (Poland) and at Steadelschule in Frankfurt am Main (Germany). Domicz uses primarily video and sculptural objects in pursuit of narrative motives. His works were exhibited in Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, District Berlin, Karlin Studios Prague, Institute of Avant-garde Warsaw, CCA Warsaw, among others. Domicz currently lives and works in Warsaw. Besides developing his artistic and curatorial practices he is a lecturer Academy of Photography, Warsaw. Jan Domicz is represented by gallery Wschód.



# THE ABC'S OF AUCTION

## Terms and Words You Must Know

**Would you like to start buying art during art auction but are terrified by the mass of unknown terms? We have prepared and collected for you the most important terms / words that you can meet at the auction.**

**Absentee Bid** (Also called: written bid, commission bid, order bid) – A client's instruction directing to bid on one or more lots up to the maximum amount that the client has specified for each lot.

**Appraisal** – A valuation for estate, tax or insurance purposes.

**Auction** – A public sale in which property or items of merchandise are sold to the highest bidder.

**Auction Estimate** (Also called: estimate price) – A preliminary estimate of the amount an item may sell for at auction.

**Auctioneer** – A person who conducts an auction.

**Bid** – An offer to buy property at a specific price.

**Bidder** – An individual or entity offering to purchase property at auction.

**Buyer** – The person who won a bid. The highest bidder acknowledged by the auctioneer.

**Buyer's Premium** – A percentage of the final bid price that the buyer pays.

**Catalogue** – An illustrated record of property to be offered for sale in a particular auction. Catalogues are usually available in printed form or on web site.

**Certificate** – A document which confirm the provenance and the authorship of work

**Commission** – Charges paid by the seller.

**Commission agreement** – A document that sets out the conditions under which we issue your work for sale.

**Condition Report** – A condition report is a written and/or electronically filed record that details the condition of an art work. The report clearly records the physical condition of the painting and frame at that time.

**Conditions of Sale/Conditions of Business** – The terms that cover the buying and selling of property.

**Consignment Agreement** – A contract with the consignor to sell property. The consignment agreement includes terms and fees for services, such as insurance, shipping and illustration.

**Dedicated auction** – An auction of one collection or dedicated to one topic.

**Emergency Bid** (Also called: covering bid) – A pre-arranged absentee bid left by a telephone bidder if that bidder cannot be reached during the auction..

**Estimate** – A price range that reflects the opinion of specialists of the price expected at auction, excluding premium and taxes. Estimates are based on the property's condition, rarity, quality, provenance and recent auction prices of comparable property.

**Hammer Price** – A final bid price, whether property is sold or unsold, announced by the auctioneer when the gavel falls. This price does not include the buyer's premium.

**Lot** – An object or group of objects offered for sale as one piece of art work.

**Online Bid** – A bid via website, or on-line app.

**Pass** (Also called: return to owner, withdrawn, or bought in) – A situation when the bidding for a lot does not reach its reserve. The lot remains the property of the consignor.

**Price Realised** (Also called: Final Price) – A sold price, including the hammer price plus the buyer's premium.

**Provenance** – An information concerning a lot's current or prior ownership. A history of work that may affect a work's value.

**Registration** – The process of providing bidder information: identification, billing name and address, contact details, credit reference in order to bid. At an auction, registered bidders receive a numbered bidding paddle for that sale.

**Reserve** – The minimum price the consignor is willing to accept and below which a lot will not be sold.

**Seller** – A person who sells an object

**Starting Bid** – The price at which the bidding starts.

**Telephone Bid** – Type of absentee bid. A bid with an auction house's staff member. He telephones a client to bid on his behalf and relays the client's bids to the auctioneer during the bidding on those lots.

**Thematic auction** – An auction dedicated to one main theme.

**Viewing** (Also called: preview or exhibition) – An exhibitions held before an auction. Pre-auction viewings are open to the public.

# STUDIO VISIT: THE MELODY OF NOSTALGIA – ANNA JOCHYMEK ON CONVERSATION WITH ROMA PIOTROWSKA

'Studio Visit' is a series of interviews conducted by Roma Piotrowska with most interesting Polish artists living in the UK. They discuss their artistic approaches through the prism of the everyday life and recent socio-economic transformations in Britain and Poland. Many of these artists left for the UK shortly after Poland joined the EU in 2004. Thousands of young people, including many artists, found their new home here, studied and matured artistically. In 2019 the UK will step out of the EU, so the present moment seems to be just right to describe a completely new generation of Polish artists. Conversations take place in artists' studios or houses.

**Could you tell me about the nature of your work?**

I work mostly with performance, video and sculptural gestures. I think creating ephemeral work is more suited to our times than a solid monument. And it is also more challenging and exciting for viewers to experience.

**How did you start working as an artist?**

I joined a photo society in secondary school and I thought that applying to an Art Academy would be a good idea. My parents were terrified. I did my BA in photography but soon I realised that it was not what I wanted to do. I applied to Media Arts studies in Warsaw, where I studied under Mirosław Bałka. I was very lucky to meet Mirosław and later to become his assistant.

**Bałka is one of the most acclaimed Polish artists. What was it like to work with him?**

It was a crazy adventure. He's an amazing artist and person. But he's also an eccentric guy, so it was full of ups and downs. We used to laugh that we are both Saggiarius so it is in our nature to be a bit edgy. He gave me one of the best advices I have ever received - that I should think big first and then worry how to achieve it.

**He's got a lot of connections here in London. Do you think those connections brought you here?**

I visited London first as a student and later as Bałka's assistant. He arranged meetings with directors of major galleries. We met Gregor Muir at ICA and Iwona Blazwick at the Whitechapel among others. It gave us an insider view of the local art scene. Maybe that gave me the courage to think about moving to London, but London has always been closer to my heart than Berlin for example.

**It sounds like you see London as an important place to be as an artist.**

It's just a different city from the ones I have always known. When I decided to move here, I felt that I needed a change in my life. I used my PhD studies as an opportunity to move here. I asked the International Office at the Poznań Academy if they had any connections with London's universities. They told me that they didn't but I could arrange it myself, so I did.

**You find yourself here in London, doing this non-commercial work but London is a highly commer-**

**cial place in terms of art. What were your first impressions of this art world?**

Stupid me! [laughter] It's not a secret that London is commercialised. You have galleries, auction houses and art fairs here. Besides, I believe that there is no better place to be as an artist who works with conceptual art in performative way. The environment that is not saturated by practices similar to mine can be good for me. London is a culture capital. The biggest world institutions work here with artists I admire. I can see it live, here and now. I can speak with people who create this atmosphere, learn from them and hopefully, in near future, work with them. Watching things on-line can't replace the real experience.



**So you're finalising your PhD at Poznań Academy and your time here at Slade is some sort of a student exchange?**

Yes, I was a visiting student-researcher here. Initially, I came here for three months but after two months the university said that I can stay for the whole academic year. After a year I was invited to join their new project "Sharing Borders" and offered the position of Honorary Research Associate. It was not only a huge credit of trust but extraordinary opportunity to develop as a professional in the structures of one of the most important British universities (UCL).

**Could you tell me about your PhD project?**

I was struggling a bit with my presence here, I was observing the political situation in Poland and the Brexit battle. My PhD project is related to space, fear, power and mass. I am fascinated by Elias Canetti book and it was really important for me to transfer that theoretical research to my practical work. I invented a figure of female Polish soldier skating in the streets of London, appearing and disappearing. Like a dream that never happened. It's a kind of absurd figure, however quite intriguing. I'm very interested in the visual side, how it affects pedestrians. What they might think, how they might react. Of course, I will never know because I will not have an opportunity to ask them.

**Is it important for you to reach people that normally wouldn't go to a gallery?**

It would be amazing to involve people who are not art educated and maybe do not feel so comfortable with crossing this 'sacred' border of a gallery space, but I think about the gallery audience too. The second part of the project will be a video installation.

**What is the significance of a female skating soldier?**

I'm a skater myself and a daughter of a soldier. My father works as an instructor in a military school. When I feel unsure about something or I have doubts I always call him and have this relaxing chat about military structures. There is something very fascinating about the discipline and the structure itself. Skating and military are so different, but they also have much in common. I merged these two things and created an absurd figure of a skating soldier. It is a very tempting figure, representing my state of being somewhere in between as a migrant.

**You have come to the UK quite recently. Does being a migrant woman from Eastern Europe somehow affect you? There must be a reason you make the work about it. How important is that migrant label?**

I am a migrant, but I'm in a privileged position; I can always go back to Warsaw. I'm a millennial and we move constantly. The label of being a migrant was given to me, so I started thinking about it. We have a huge migrant crisis in Europe at the moment. Our times are terrifying. I don't want to avoid it. I want to understand it.

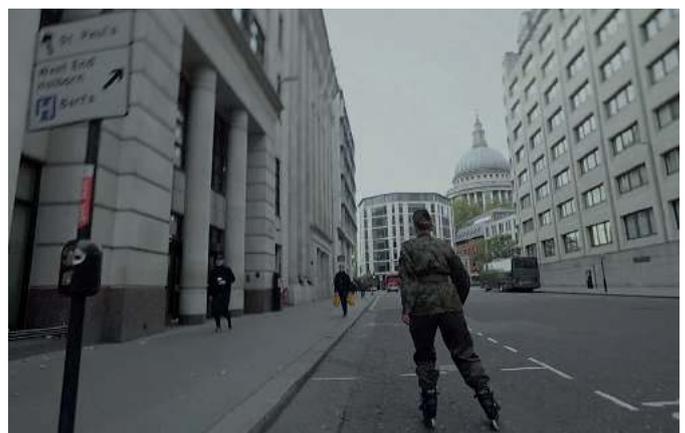
**Being a migrant is related to the recent work Melody of Nostalgia you realised in Birmingham. Could you tell me a bit about that work?**

Melody of Nostalgia was the first project I made here in



Anna Jochymek, Photo: Paweł Dziemian

the UK. I was invited to do a project by Centrala Space in the context of Supersonic Festival, which allowed me to push myself into the field of sound art. I was already doing some research into my family history, which became the inspiration for this project. During the Second World War, my grandmother's house was occupied by Third Reich soldiers, who let my family stay in the house under the condition of moving to the cellar. It turned out that the soldiers were Austrians and they were constantly listening to this very nostalgic and patriotic song about the Austrian Lake Bodensee. Both sides felt nostalgia. My great grandmother missed the time when she was a regular owner of the house, and the soldiers missed their country. That twist was very inspiring to me. When I moved here to the UK, I found myself in the position of a migrant for the first time in my life. I merged the experience of my great grandmother and my own and decided to create a universal melody of nostalgia. I collected pieces sung by Eastern European migrant women around the world. I asked the women to sing the songs themselves and send the recordings to me. I created a small database and then worked with a composer who combined all those melodies to create a new piece. I also invited a male choir who performed this piece live. Their task was to add an extra layer to the story, as I wanted to add male narration. After many hours spent together, we found a way to create this balance, one cohesive voice. I transferred my personal history into a more contemporary one.



Anna Jochymek, Crowd Crystal in progress, 2018 - 19, Performance and video, © Anna Jochymek

### **How did you find people you worked with?**

First, I collected music pieces. I worked with people invited through a Facebook campaign. I used social media to contact Eastern European women migrants from all around the world. I also had to find members of the male choir. Finally, I created a seven-person male choir.

### **What songs were the migrants nostalgic about?**

I was surprised by the material I received: some Polish songs, some in English and some without any words. I could recognise some songs from the 90s. In general, the pieces were very delicate and full of emotions. I didn't expect the emotional impact to be so big. I was surprised that many songs had a folk vibe to them.

### **Why did you want to juxtapose those songs with performing men? Why did you want those two worlds to meet? The world of women migrants and the male choir?**

I'm a woman and I'm interested in creating democratic positions in the art field. So when I was working with women migrants – I was giving them voice and space to be vulnerable and emotional. I thought it would be nice to invite men to join women so that they could feel vulnerable and emotional too. It would be easy for me to create a piece that was fully performed by women – it would have a strong feministic drive. But I didn't want to exclude half of the society from the dialogue about the female voice.

### **Was it important that those men were not Eastern European? Or were they?**

I was considering working with only Eastern European migrants, but in the end, I decided the project need a universal representation of men. It didn't matter if they were Eastern European or British, I just needed men who were brave enough to embrace the situation.

### **At the moment we are at Slade, where you still have your studio. Could you tell me about this space?**

Being at Slade was one of the most exciting things that happened to me, mostly because of people I've met there. The cool thing about being a PhD student here is that you have a studio space, which is shareable with other students. I'm only allowed to stay here until the end of this month though. I will have to find a new studio space outside of these nice and warm academic structures.

### **You make performance, so in a way, I would think you don't need a studio...**

There is something very important about having your own space where you can gather your thoughts. Studio space is a place where you can feel free as an artist. People experiment with materials; I'm experimenting with my thoughts and ideas.

### **How would you describe your life in London?**

I've never felt as busy as I am now. I understand what people mean by saying they have absolutely no time. Life in London is very expensive. At the beginning I had a small scholarship which allowed me to have this comfortable situation of studying, being in the studio,



Anna Jochymek, *Bâton fleurdelisé*, 2013

doing research and working on my projects. But soon I had to find a job to be able to pay my rent. On Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays I work 10 hours a day in a vintage shop in Notting Hill. The rest of the week, I spend in my studio trying to work on my projects. So it's a difficult time for me because I only have four days to make research, read, watch, visit galleries, meet with other people and create projects. I hope it will pay off. My day starts at 7 am and ends at midnight. I find cycling a very important part of my daily routine. It is this amazing thing: I spend two hours a day experiencing the city. The most creative ideas appear in my head when I'm cycling.

### **How can you describe your place in the London art world?**

In Poland, it's easy to be an artist who's floating between institutions and private galleries. The art world is small and everyone knows each other. Here it's much different. You have private galleries, artists that work strictly in the commercial sector and others who work with ephemeral, time-based art in more institutional context. The latter is where I see myself but I'm still trying to comprehend challenging and confusing British art and cultural context, as it is nonetheless a foreign concept for me. I'm in the process of exchange; I'm influenced by it but I also share my own perspective. I had a pleasure to meet many respected and globally recognised artists who inspired me and encouraged to aim higher and be proud of where I'm from. That's what makes my work unique, and that's also what is very much appreciated here. So far, my work has received a very positive response and I'm looking forward to what future brings to me in this city.

# “TO ME PAINTING IS CELEBRATION OF LIFE” AN INTERVIEW WITH POLA DWURNIK

This month, I've met with Pola Dwurnik to discuss her latest series of paintings, "Apolonia's Twelve Husbands". The series will be shown as part of the upcoming Warsaw Gallery Weekend, at the exhibition organised by Krupa Gallery from Wrocław.

I'm meeting Pola in her studio located right in the centre of Warsaw. She waits for me in the corridor and as soon as we enter the space, I can smell turpentine. Paintings occupy almost the whole flat. There are the big ones and the smaller ones, the ones that Pola has finished already, and the ones that will be finished "when she finds the time". She must be really busy, I'm thinking, when she tells me about all the projects she is working on, has finished or had not yet started.



Pola Dwurnik, photo: Teresa Gierczyńska

I'd like to start our conversation with "Apolonia's Garden." In this series you depict your ex-partners as animals. Are there any other connections, in addition to autobiographic elements, between "Apolonia's Garden" and "Apolonia's Twelve Husbands" series of paintings we will be able to see in September? Both series demonstrate a similar outlook on interpersonal relations. It is extremely difficult to depict such a complicated emotional and physical relationship with another human being in a single painting, but I'm trying. In my paintings, I'm attempting to discuss a complex subject matter in very simple terms.

**While at the same time you arrange your paintings in series ... What is your inspiration?**

"Apolonia's Garden" was a collection of eight paintings, each showing a distinct relationship. They somehow arranged into a series themselves. Eight animals -

eight men to be exact - that I've dated over the period of 15 years. From the first one to the most recent one. I was inspired by an old well-established way of presenting people, their virtues and vices, with the use of animal figures. At the same time, what the series refers to most of all is the story of the sorceress Alcina, a character from the sixth canto of "Orlando Furioso" by Ludovico Ariosto.

**And "Apolonia's Twelve Husbands" series?**

These paintings also make up a series; it follows 12 months, one year in total, at the same time depicting 12 stages of human life, from youth to old age. While working on the paintings I used pieces of my life, my experiences, and my observations of other people. The paintings form a circle; the whole series is, in fact, a circle. "January" is a young boy with a backpack standing against a background of a mountainous landscape. A similar boy can be found in "December", this time taking on the role of a male nurse accompanying a dying old man. After he leaves the bedside of this dying man, he will take off his white lab gown, put on his backpack and head for the mountains. Then we have "January" again, bright and careless.

**What are the differences between the two series?**

In "Apolonia's Garden" I painted specific people, each painting's title includes a name of a man whose story is being told, and they are real names. In contrast, my most recent series is composed of portraits of fictional characters. They are compilations of various people and experiences, mine and other's, because I haven't reached the "December" of my life yet. "Apolonia's Garden" is a gallery of animal portraits, and here, there are simply portraits. Previous series had uniform stylistics, one method of applying oil paint and one portraying method. In "Apolonia's Twelve Husbands" the paintings are more diversified form-wise. The time span of working on the paintings is also different - I took me 2 years to paint the "Garden..." and 5 years to finish "Twelve Husbands."

**So, the characters are fictional in "Apolonia's Twelve Husbands," but they often remind me of someone...**

"January" is a young boy with a hamster on his shoulder. This thread goes all the way back to my early childhood. In pre-school, when I was 6, I fell in love with a blonde boy from another grade, and then in primary school, I was head over heels for another blonde

boy, this time from my grade. Of course, most children had a hamster or a guinea pig at home. Also, this character has features of a Ukrainian actor Vasily Vasylyk who resembles those two boys, these children who were my first puppy loves. So, I portrayed three people in the figure of "January."

"February" on the other hand is a heavy metal enthusiast who's wearing a black leather coat and holding a microphone, and this is a portrait of Alice Cooper, Steven Tyler and young Ozzy Osbourne. At the same time, this painting is a recollection of my two friends, one from secondary school and the other from university. They both had long hair, listened to goth music, and fascinated me. At the same time "February" marks the beginning of life's hardships, the melting snow is no longer white, it is dirty.

**And do you have a favourite painting in this series?**

Oh, this is a tough one. I painted the series for a long time. The first painting – "May" portrait – was created in 2014. This "May" husband is Bruce Wayne in the outstanding interior designed by Zaha Hadid. I remember that I was overjoyed when I came up with the idea for this series, and I remember the excitement I felt as I painted my first work. I still feel a very strong surge of adrenaline when I look at "May." But this is not my favourite painting of the series. I am very fond of "September", because I am satisfied with the outcome. It is difficult to paint a portrait of a fifty-year-old, which has a clear message but is not kitschy. The character from this painting is a fifty-year-old story-teller who takes his wife to Rome, and is telling the history of the Eternal City over a glass of good red wine.



Pola Dwurnik, May, oil on canvas, 116x89cm

**Let's leave these two series for a while. In one of your interviews, you said that that a woman figure was the main protagonist of your paintings. Looking at your most recent series, I think that something has changed in this respect.**

In my opinion, the protagonist of "Apolonia's Twelve Husbands" is also a woman – a heterosexual woman who looks at men in a very specific way, since she sees in them life partners, hence the "husband" figure. After I created "Apolonia's Garden", some men accused me of treating them as objects, of "reducing" them to animals. It is an absurd accusation, of course, because we are dealing with a series of paintings as a purely artistic gesture, a simplification inspired by La Fontaine's fables. But speaking of objective or subjective treatment, I took a more "object-oriented" approach in "Twelve Husbands" because I created allegories out of people's portraits (allegories of 12 months). I am the subject speaking my mind here – as the author and as a woman

**In one of your interviews you said that you didn't like when people interpreted your art from the perspective of feminism. But in my opinion, your works are extremely feminist. Let's take "The Painter" as an example...**

I am a feminist in my private life, and what I meant to say was that that's not the only possible way to read my works, not the only right one. But yes, "The Painter" is a very feminist painting, and that is why it was exhibited in Zalipie, among the works of amateur female painters who create decorative floral motifs on houses and everyday household objects. Our presence in Zalipie, the painting's and mine, as a conscious and emancipated subject, was to draw the viewers' attention to the absence and invisibility of female painters as subjects who speak their mind, as political and critical entities.

Together with the BWA Gallery in Tarnów, we issued "The Painter" on a postcard, to disseminate it in this political context. Feminist art in Poland is not usually associated with painting, and we wanted to change that. At the same time, this painting talks about fear related to my coming out as a woman-painter, a daughter of an another outstanding man-painter. At the time (2007) I was often compared to my father and perceived as the inferior one. It doesn't happen that often these days. Besides, I have changed, and I am not hiding under a rock anymore. It is pointless to compare me and my father, and my oeuvre to his oeuvre, because my dad was an extremely prolific artist. He was very strong physically and he could paint one or two paintings a day. I'm not that fast. In this sense, I could not be a match for him.

**It's true, you work in a totally different way...**

Totally different, yes. I think a lot about each painting. I take lots of notes, I make detailed research, I collect photos and make sketches. It often takes me a few years to plan a single painting! And my dad just painted from dawn till dusk, creating his painting around loose associations, various fast connotations; he painted impatiently and voraciously. He was able to do that, because he had an agile mind, and could find associations between a lot of things in such a

way that it somehow always made sense. I prepare everything first, celebrating the whole process that way. It doesn't matter that viewers might not read or notice everything. What matters to me is that I create everything eagerly and with precision, because I love to do it. To me, painting is celebration of life. My slowly progressing career reflects that – I do not make hundreds of paintings for six different galleries.

**You are usually asked about your father, Edward Dwurnik, and since we have already mentioned him, I'd like to ask about your mum, Teresa Gierzyńska. Has she also had any influence on you, as the artist that you are today?**

Yes, she had a huge influence on me, because she taught me, like a true sculptor, how to properly paint an arm, a face, a human body. She placed the emphasis on avoiding errors or simplifications which result from insufficient technical skills or lack of knowledge on anatomy. She also taught me how to think in a conceptual way, which is something my dad never educated me on. I think that the fact that I've been painting myself for years, that I've been painting self-portraits, also comes from my mother. Though I've been doing this in a totally different way than she did. Come to think of it, I have combined the artistic practices of both my parents in my works. Teresa creates modest and subtle works, uses small formats, her works are sophisticated in terms of style, but at the same time minimalistic. My father's works are just the opposite. I draw from his lavishness and abundance of forms and colours. At the same time, I draw from my mother's reflectiveness, her tender insight into herself as a woman, into emotions, experiences, fears and traumas.

**You paint yourself, because there is nobody else you know better.**

Paintings come to me; they are displayed in my head. They come from the inside, from my mind, from memories mixed with dreams; from a desire or some kind of powerlessness, often helplessness. They stem from my problems, sadness and sorrows. The same can be observed in Teresa's works, while my father was very detached and distanced from himself. We don't really know what he actually experienced. He would hide himself inside his paintings, in the theatre of figures, cities, buildings, and themes. In my art, I try to stay very close to myself, and art is often a form of therapy in my life. "The Painter" we've mentioned before was a type of therapy. After I painted her, I stopped hiding in the bushes...



Pola Dwurnik, January, oil on canvas, 116x89cm



Pola Dwurnik, December, oil on canvas, 116x89cm



Pola Dwurnik, Suprise, oil on canvas, 150x210, 2016

# IMMERSIVE UNEARTHING - IN CONVERSATION WITH ALANJAMES BURNS

AlanJames Burns inside Creswell Crags Cave by Stephen Garnett,  
photo: Charlotte Graham



AlanJames Burns is an environmental and audiovisual artist. Since 2016, he has developed critically acclaimed multi-sensorial installations in caves of Ireland and Britain, which explored the concept of aural consciousness and mental health. The focal point of his practice remains the human mind, specifically the non-linear ever-fleeing system of divergent thoughts it creates, however his works recently have begun to engage with the problem of climate change. From September 3rd, Burns's site-specific work, *Entirely hollow aside from the dark* has inhabited Creswell Crags caves on the border of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, UK, which shelter the northernmost examples of Ice Age Rock Art in Europe.

**What exactly is *Entirely hollow aside from the dark*? I find it difficult to grasp because of its multi-sensorial, multi-dimensional nature.**

*Entirely hollow aside from the dark* is an immersive psychoacoustic sound event taking place inside caves, ancient natural auditoriums carved into the underbelly of the earth's crust. It is a visceral experience of journeying into Mother Earth's inner dialogue by using advanced three-dimensional audio system. It engages cutting edge technologies with the most pressing challenges of our time: climate change and mental well-being.

Using the cave as a physical metaphor for the mind, the cavern personifies the consciousness of Mother Earth as she struggles with her worsening mental health, brought on by the human distressing of her body. Your engagement with the work begins when you book a ticket and arrive on site at the Creswell Crags Museum & Heritage Centre in late evening. It is

here that you are given the bespoke induction to the breathing. Once everyone gets settled, we journey deeper into the body of Mother Earth together, sounds of lungs, heart beats and blood passes through the cave until we hear the voice. In total darkness, the audible inner dialogue echoing Mother Earth's thoughts, unfolding regrets and a symphony of choreographed sounds shifts around the cave, mirroring processes of the human mind. The audience leave to the sound of the cave breathing, just as they entered.

**This bridge you make between mental health and environmental awareness is quite unique. In *Entirely hollow aside from the dark*, the well-being and environmental awareness function as complementary elements of the same whole. What inspired you to combine those two threads?** This version of this site-specific artwork is the third one in the series and has been specifically created for Creswell Crags. Previously, I worked with wellbe-

ing and mental health but the character in the cave was never explicitly Mother Earth. It was always relevant to Mother Earth and environment though. At some point it became natural for me to start introducing the character, to unfold, as Mother Earth.

There are two big issues the world faces: first, the climate crisis and then mental wellbeing. For me, they both go together, they rely on each other to be healthy. Firstly, to have a good mental health and to nurture certain aspects of wellbeing you need a healthy environment, not just the one you live in but the wider ecosystem at large. There is an important aspect of wellness called biophilia, which claims that humans need connection with natural environment and other forms of life. In *Entirely hollow aside from the dark*, the natural and calming environment of the cave reduces sound and light pollution, creating an opportunity to demonstrate different states of mind, encouraging biophilia and sleep aspect of wellbeing. So we have this kind of innate condition that benefits from being in the natural environment, which is one of major aspects of wellbeing.

To develop the work I worked with music psychology researcher Claire Howlin and we looked at aspects of wellbeing and mental health that could parallel the process of climate change. I asked myself: what can I say about climate change in the form that parallels the mental health problem? What can I say about it if Earth was a human and how would our activity affect its mental health? We looked up the build-up of plastic in the world and we compared it to the tensions built up by plaques in the brain. Plaques are natural things that built up in the cerebral tissue but if you don't get enough sleep they can build up, they create mental health effects. We thought a lot about that and saw that the effect of accumulation is both true for climate change and for mental health. As we paralleled it with the environmental crisis and the problem of plastic, we realised that if Mother Earth was a person, she would undergo similar stress, but in mental health terms. So we tried to focus on those two processes and bring them together. In order to maintain healthy mental state, you have to follow the natural rhythm: getting enough sleep, getting enough light in the daytime and darkness in the nighttime, but if you're not getting enough of that, your mental health will start deteriorating. That is why in this project I put Mother Earth to sleep, because she is getting too much light, not darkness, not enough rest time. Hence the title of the artwork, *Entirely hollow aside from the dark*.

#### **Is this the reason why the experience takes place inside caves?**

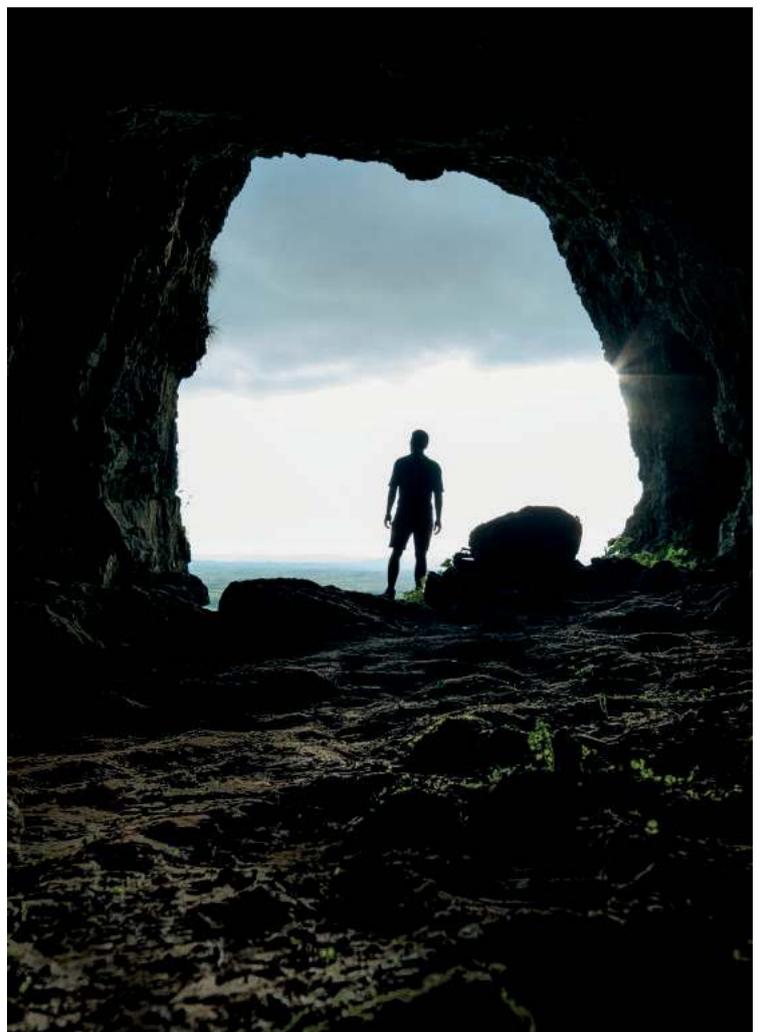
It all started one day while taking part in Resort Revelations Residency in North Dublin with Fingal Arts. I was walking the coastline of the small seaside town of Portrane, where there is an abandoned mental health facility and I was thinking about, well, the act of thinking! The tide was out and so I stumbled across Smugglers' Cave and that moment is what sparked the initial idea of mapping consciousness to the inside of a cave. When we are 'inside our heads', do we speak in

monologue or dialogue? Do our thoughts emerge in a linear process or are they sporadic? Do we humans ever stop thinking? As a visual artist, I think about these questions through making, research and collaboration. Sitting in the Smugglers' Cave that day and thinking all this through the idea for the artwork began to form.

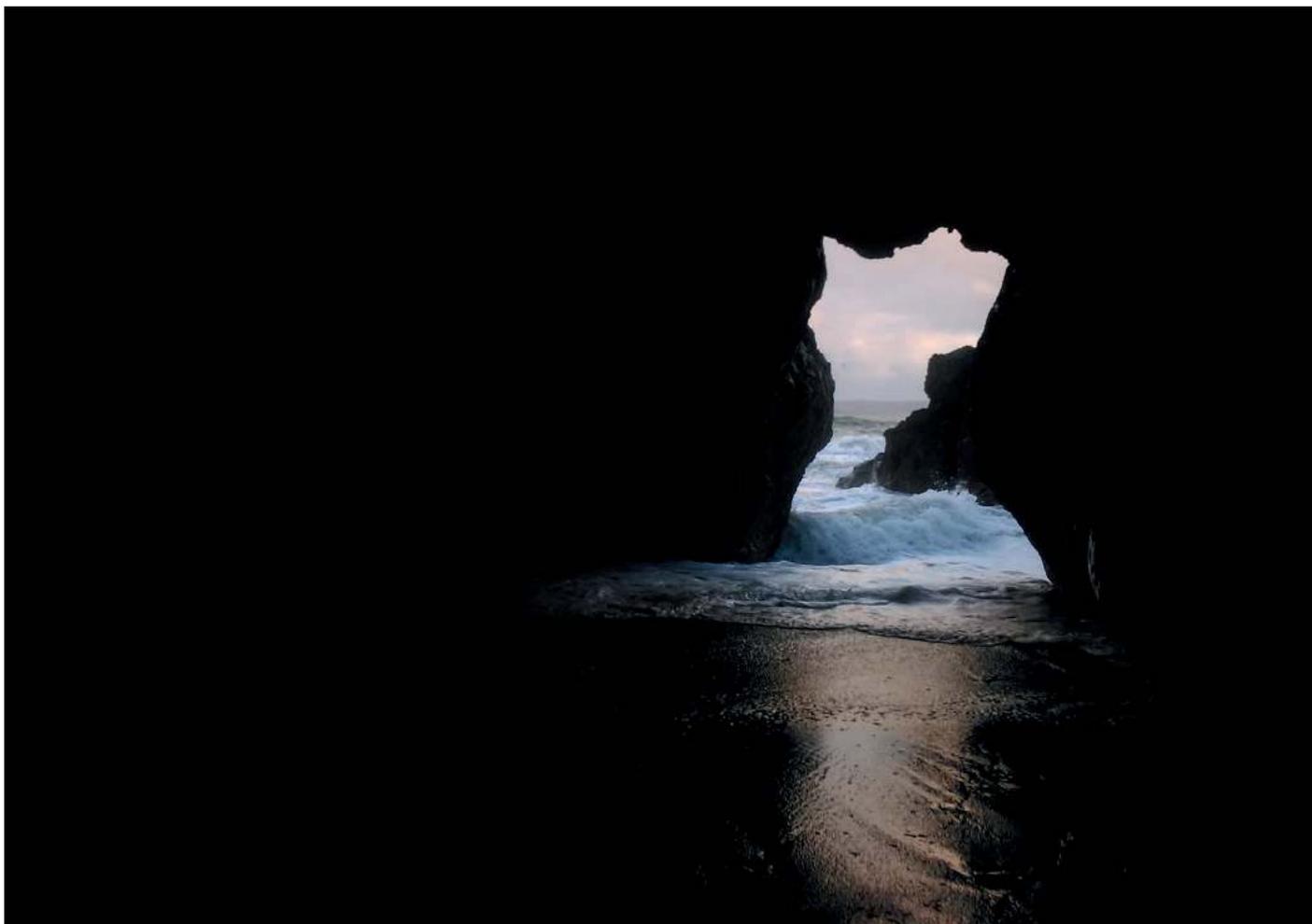
#### **But how do you approach the vast symbolic potential of caves? Especially in this version of the artwork, where it takes place in Creswell Crags, the only place in the UK to have examples of Ice Age Rock Art from some 13,000 years ago?**

Historically, caves have played a vital role in the simultaneous evolution of creativity and abstract thought. This has been a conceptual underpinning to the artworks development. Caves are the starting point of creativity and abstract art – the Blombos Cave in South Africa has the oldest documented expression of creativity which is a cross hatching marking. It is the oldest known documentation of abstract thought. We don't know why someone done this all we know is they did this in an abstract manner. In developing this aspect of the work, I conducted extensive research in South Africa and explored a number of caves and early cave art there.

That played really well with the themes developed in



*Entirely hollow aside from the dark* by Alan James Burns



the artwork and it is also why I chose Creswell Crags and their cave system which has the only pieces of Ice Age Rock Art on the Western Isles. Creswell Crags have also recently made a significant cultural discovery of hundreds of Witch Marks. These are thought to be the biggest concentration of apotropaic marks, or symbols to ward off evil or misfortune, ever found in the UK. It definitely is very important to the project and it all pieces together to make sense of the artwork.

**And I'm curious what were the main challenges when creating the character of Mother Earth? weren't you afraid to anthropomorphize of such a primordial being?**

It has been a bit of a challenge! In previous iterations of the artwork I was always conscious that the cave was some form of Mother Earth, but it was never explicitly her. I've developed it over the duration of previous projects. I've always been conscious of her gender. In order to this achieve a female mother character, I worked with Sue Rainsford, a writer who is one of the most amazing ones I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. She has done an amazing job with the script. We decided that Mother Earth is weakening, she is going through a mental health breakdown. I tried to put myself in her shoes and discovered 'Actually, you're weak, you're tired, you're trying to work with humans you've nurtured but they are not working with you.' And we thought that even though she gave us the ability to develop consciousness, she now regrets it, because the human-kind uses the conscious experience to damage her.

**Do you feel like empathy is a good strategy? Can this troubled figure of Mother Earth raise awareness about environmental crisis more efficiently than media or scientific reports?**

Humans are very complex beings and as an artist my best tool is storytelling. I want to tell the story in a way it resonates within the most diverse and the widest range of people. Doing that is one way to create this message and try to bring about a change. It's the only way I know. I don't think it is a case of one working more efficiently than the other, but a case of different attempts working together. After all it's the scientific evidence that resonated with me.

I believe that immersive artworks and experiential means of communication are one of the most effective techniques to create a connection between the subject matter and audience members. Experiential techniques directly engage participants inviting and encouraging them to actively involve in the story. Entirely hollow aside from the dark is an intense artwork and people who have experienced it do feel emotionally connected to the environmental and mental health issues it is centred around.

**Could you tell me a bit about the technical process of setting up your installation? I imagine it must be particularly tricky to make environmentally conscious art when you make a technological intervention in the living landscape. How difficult it is to make the whole artwork as little impactful as possible?**

The artwork leaves as few traces as possible and in

the physical environment of the cave we actually managed to leave no trace at all. In the climate environment, however, we can't avoid leaving some trace within the society we live in right now. What we have done is we have implemented a questioning system where every aspect of the production needs to be questioned for its sustainability and environmental impact. All the time, we were asking ourselves how can we deliver the same job in the most sustainable manner. While working on the project for Creswell Crags, my team and I successfully discarded flying, we travelled by train and boat. The entire team for the duration of the project adopted a plant-based diet. In developing this project I have worked with sound engineers and electricians to devise a low voltage audio system, which has a low impact on the environment. It does take energy obviously, but it aims not to. We tried to calculate the carbon footprint of every item we use and chose the most sustainable option, but at times it became extremely complex, as in the choice between batteries and rechargeable batteries, where you have to take into account the entire lifecycle of the item, its potential recycling and toxicity of its dumping, and in the end of the day it may be impossible to determine which option is safer for the environment.

I continuously examine my modes of production and the kinds of materials I use, seeking more sustainable solutions every step of the way. I embed climate action into my way of working with businesses, partners and suppliers. Engaging with them about their packaging or methods of production and transit, suggesting dif-

ferent ways they could become more sustainable. I let them know I am always looking for alternative options with more sustainable product solutions. In addition, in my own daily life, I am a vegan and I live as near a plastic-free lifestyle as I can. For us, humans, to remain in healthy mental state involves creating and producing but we have to challenge the way produce and the materials we use to express ourselves. We need to learn how to do that in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner.

**Are you working on any other project at the moment?**

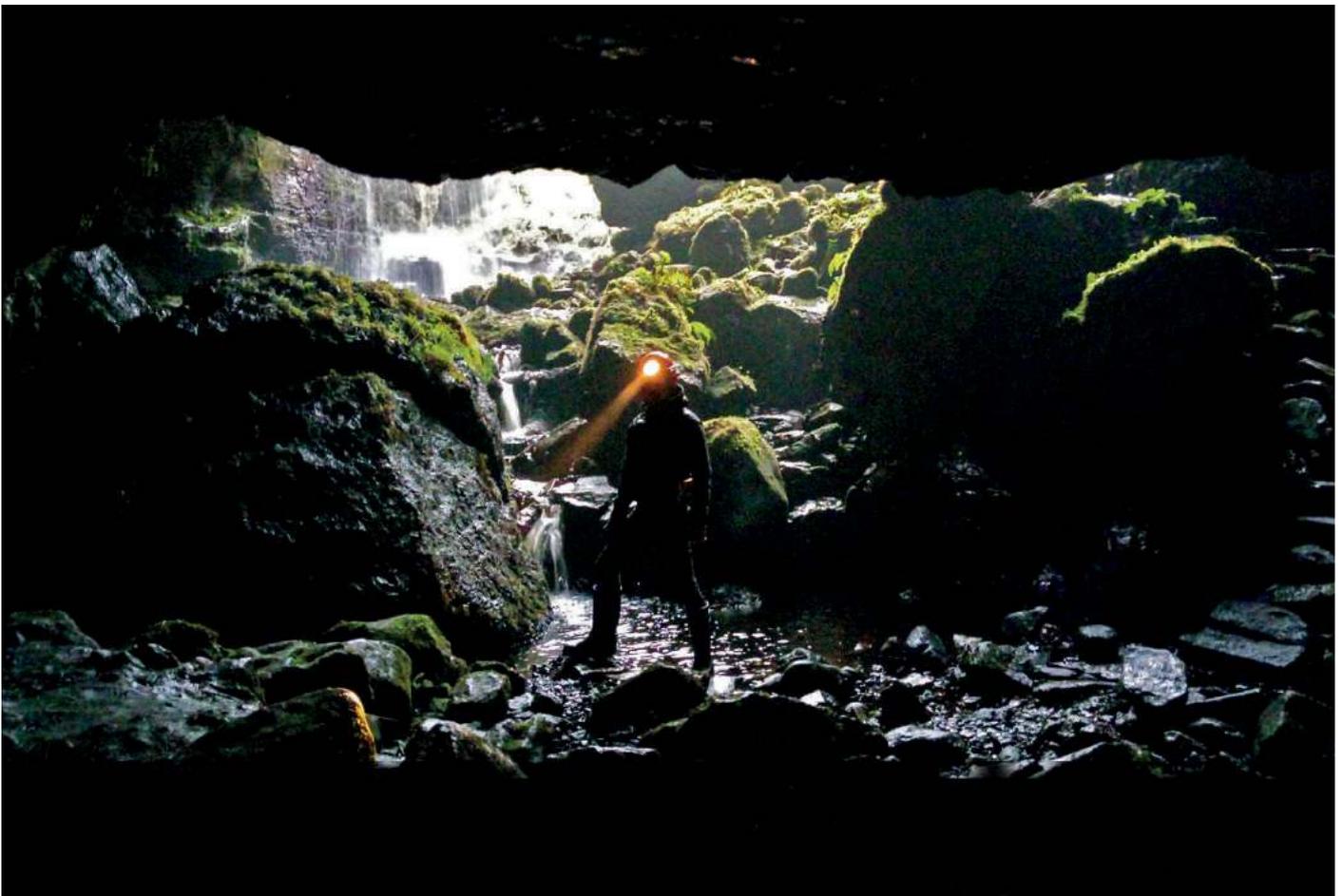
My next project is called Silicon Synapse, an immersive virtual reality and psychoacoustic sound experience that simulates a journey into the personified, conscious mind of 'Technology'. Silicon Synapse will be installed within the repurposed historic setting of the Carnegie Library, Swords. This library was once a place of knowledge and learning, shaping the minds and synapses of thousands. The audience will now enter through the remnant doors of the library and into the imagined mind of the silicon technology that has largely replaced it. This sensory artwork is experienced alone, one person at a time. You will hear the inner dialogue of 'Technology's' mind as it ruminates both sides of a lovers' quarrel. 'Technology' and its life partner 'Nature' argue about the sustainability of their relationship and their future as a couple. This transhuman, dream-like conscious realm engulfs the participants as they travel through intense listening and visual experiences.

AlanJames Burn setting up Enitirely hollow aside from the dark inside Creswell Crags Caves, September 2019, Photo: Marek Wolynski





Entirely hollow aside from the dark – Audience Skibbereen Cork



AlanJames Burns cave hunting in Fermanagh ©AlanJames Burns

# METALIC DISCHARGE

## THE MAGICAL UNIVERSE OF MAGDALENA WIĘCEK



Every September, Warsaw becomes the capital of contemporary art. During the already 9th edition of Warsaw Gallery Weekend, twenty seven private art galleries will stage premiere works by the artists from Poland and abroad. These three early autumn days are soon to be filled with displays of everything that is utterly riveting and prevalent at the Polish art scene.

The solo show of Magdalena Więcek is held in the Olshewski Gallery from the 20th of September to the 14th of October, 2019. As a prominent Polish sculptor, the artist is one of the legendary figures of the post-war period as well as the history of the neo avant-garde (alongside such artists as Alina Szapocznikow and Alina Ślesieńska).

Magdalena Więcek was born in Katowice. She was strongly influenced by her close surroundings. Her assertiveness and singleness of purpose could have their origins in a childhood spent in the capital of Poland's coal belt. And yet, her life, work and art are all deeply rooted in Warsaw. In 1945, she moves to Sopot to hone her painting skills in the newly founded art school. Four years later she studies sculpture under the tutelage of prof. Marian Wnuk and prof. Franciszek Strynkiewicz at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Even in the early stages of her career, Więcek defies conventions of a traditional sculpture. In spite of the-

ir realist style, her initial pieces are still at odds with the socialist realism of the period. Her works combine sculpture with architecture and spatial design. After she graduated from the academy, Więcek was working with clay while creating mainly figurative works. However, the texture of clay was too cumbersome, the realist forms too conservative. Magdalena yearned to create ethereal pieces and dynamic structures reaching towards the sky. The themes of flight, elation and transcendence manifest themselves in titles assigned to the sculptures, including "Take Off", "Close to Earth", "Horizons", "Infinity", and "Sacrum".

In the early 1960s, she discovered the wire mesh reinforced by cement. The technique allowed her to build massive yet light constructions. As it turns out, the material best suited for creating aerodynamic sculptures is in fact metal, a light and flexible aluminum to be precise.

The title of Magdalena Więcek's exhibition organised as part of this year's Warsaw Gallery Weekend is "Glin". In Polish, two terms are used to denote the aluminum: glin is applied when describing the chemical element, while aluminum is used when the metal is referred to in terms of the industrial production. When Magdalena Więcek began creating her aluminum sculptures in the 1970s, the material epitomized innovation, whereas its use for artistic purposes was considered

an avant-garde statement.

The sculptures presented within this show were made of steel and aluminum by casting, welding, polishing and metal sheet bending. Their abstract forms convey architecture's perpetual essence. The series "Sacrum" (initially entitled "Cathedrals") is hailed by critics as the crowning achievement in the history of sculpture.

The piece "Sacrum IV" made of polished steel is imbued with sophisticated symbolism, philosophy and spiritual experiences of the artist. The two segments engage in a dialogue with the viewer – this sort of resonance is characteristic of the entire art practice of Więcek. While appraised from above, the piece aligns itself into the open- or close-ended symbol of infinity, depending on the viewing angle. The sculpture looks like the Gothic arch from the side. On the other hand, along the vertical axis of the artwork one could clearly discern the Arabic arch after stepping approximately half a meter aside.

As opposed to "Sacrum IV" embodying a dynamic movement, flight and upward trajectory, "Tunnels" remain rather earthbound. The pieces from the series symbolize the gateway into the world of myths, darkness, death, abundant fruits of nature and concupiscence.

The vibrant drawings on velour paper (1968) representing the notions of flight, light and space are full-fledged works of art in lieu of mere sculpture drafts, which is usually the case. The 1960s was the era of thriving abstraction, change, progress and finally the exploration of the universe. It was the dawn of a new age of space travel. No wonder the artist embraced the space as her main source of inspiration.

The art of Magdalena Więcek teems with modernity and heralds the future filled with hope. The works displayed on the exhibition showcase not only some of the most resonant and meticulous pieces of sculpture ever created, but also the artistic flair of a strong independent woman.

