

The Ratcatcher

Exhibition scenario

One of the artists featured in *The Ratcatcher* exhibition utters the following words during her performance: “I’ve set up this situation to create the present.” Through her action the artist performs a gesture aimed at a confrontation with reality. By investigating the structures of reality we may avoid falling into the traps of the world’s automation or randomness, and consequently – understand and deregulate its mechanisms. All the works shown at the exhibition, from the 1950s until now, present a multi-pronged attempt at perceiving the changing role and position of an individual vis-à-vis the social, political and civilisational conditions. Although the invited artists represent various points of view and differ in their experience, all the works add up to tell a story about human nature and psyche.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from Andrzej Czarnecki’s documentary about a professional rat exterminator and his strategies. The main character reveals the methods of his work by describing how he exterminated rats in a meat processing plant. Although the man appreciates and respects rats’ intelligence, he is ruthless. His knowledge of the rodents’ psyche and behaviours makes it easier to kill them. By acting methodically and consistently, he always wins. First he gains the rats’ trust by giving them food, and once they have got used to him – they die.

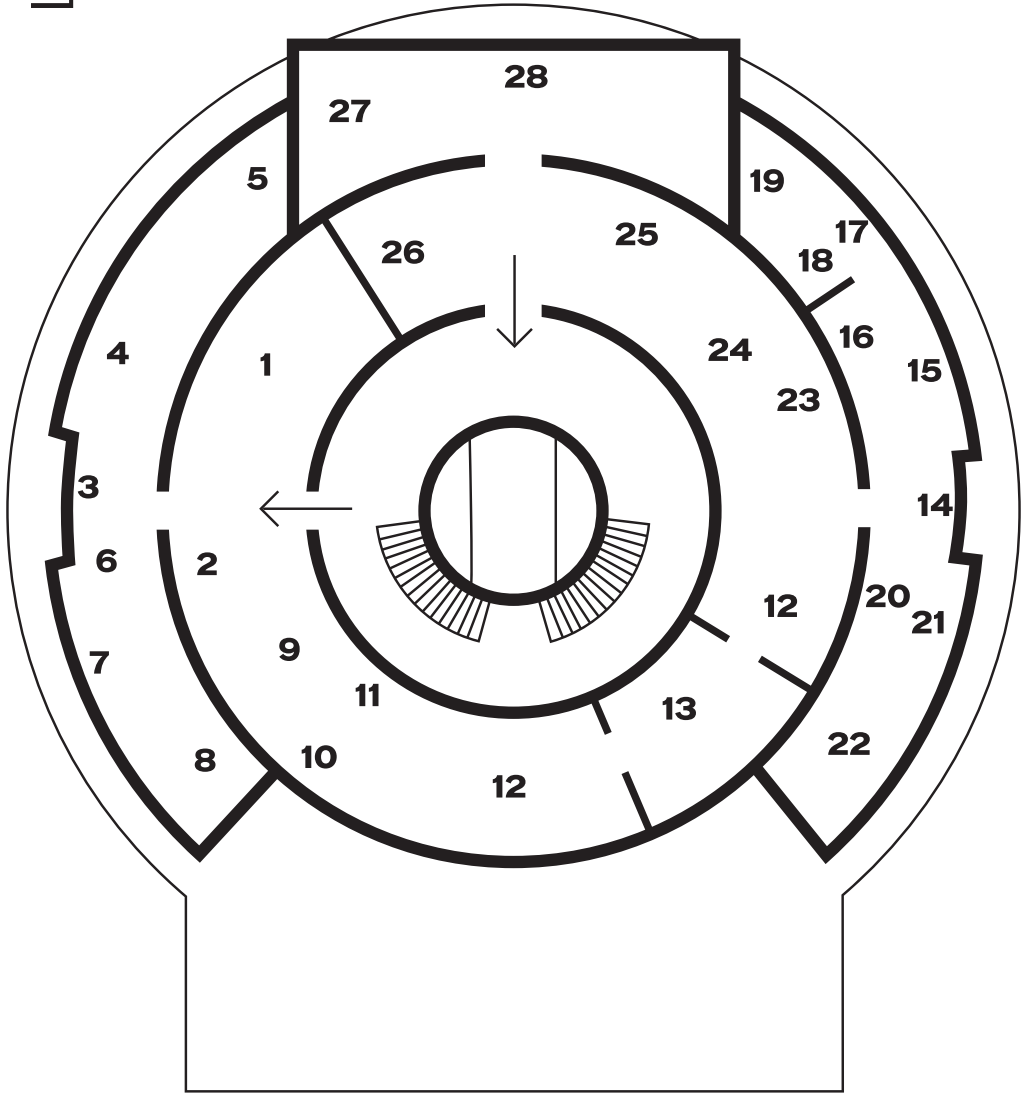
The documentary was made in 1986, three years after the end of martial law in Poland. At that time it was interpreted as a metaphor of the systematic surveillance of the anti-communist resistance movement by the secret services. Nowadays the film and the strategies of extermination featured in it justify other, not only purely historical, interpretations. In the exhibition, the story has been treated as a starting point for a parabolic narrative about reality and a phantasm of the fall of the Latin civilisation. Owing to its essay-like form, the display accentuates tensions between the ideas, needs and desires of an individual and the social determinants. One of the main questions posed by the exhibition asks: “Is your mind full of goodness?”

In the same year when *The Ratcatcher* was made, the Chernobyl disaster occurred while the German sociologist Ulrich Beck published his treatise *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. The book’s eponymous notion emerged in the wake of a critique of the industrial society. It turned out that the consequences of the development of civilisation and technology have led to irreversible and uncontrollable changes, which had transformed the parameters of social life. Beck proved that the old order, based on nation states, class divisions and patriarchy, belonged to the past. He emphasised threats – environmental, health, technological and social – arising from the emergence of the risk society as well as their global character. He wrote in the introduction: “There has certainly been no shortage of historical catastrophes in this century: two world wars, Auschwitz, Nagasaki, then Harrisburg and Bhopal, and now Chernobyl. This calls for caution in choosing our words and brings our view of distinctive historical characteristics into sharper focus” (Beck 1986, p. 7).

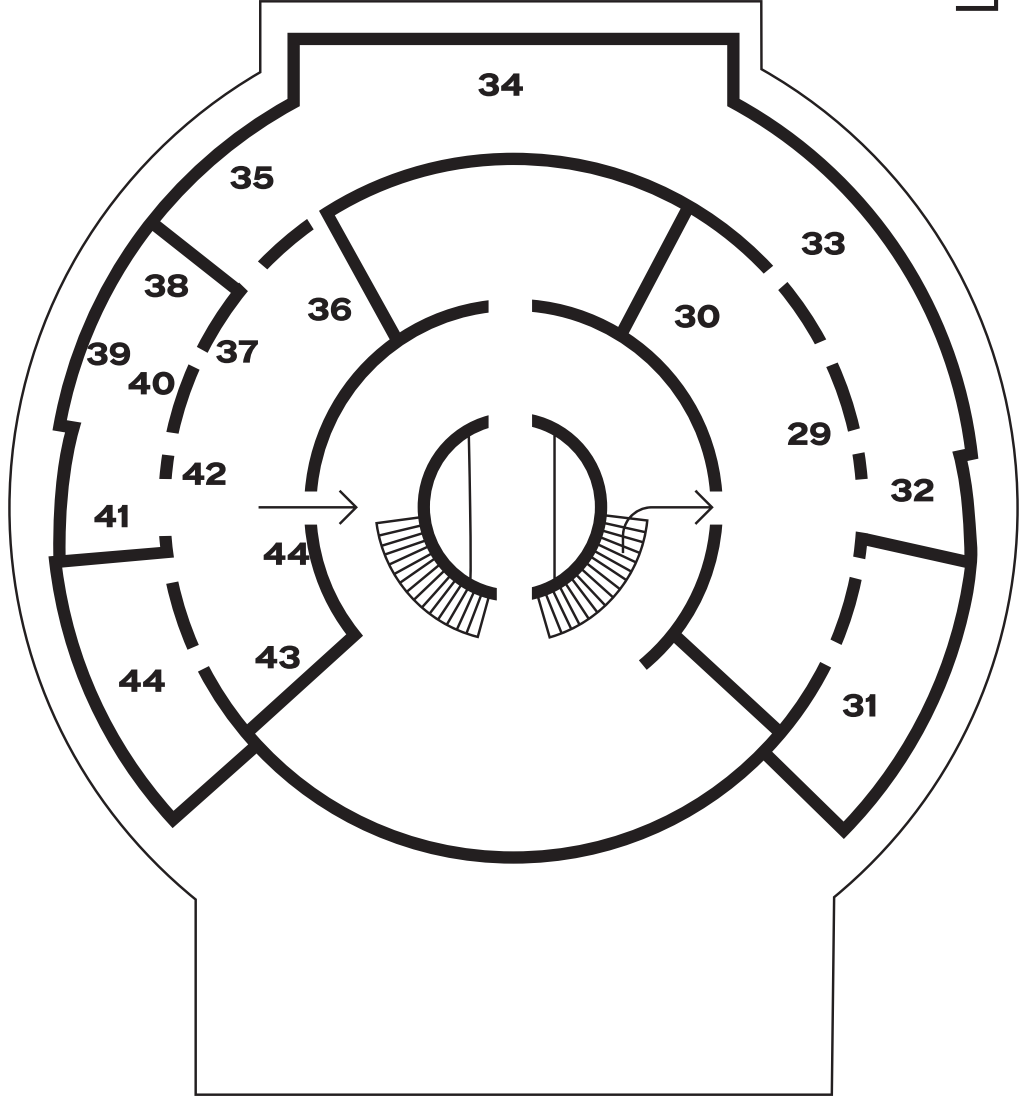
Today, in a fully globalised world thirty years after Beck’s diagnosis, avoiding the consequences is increasingly difficult. The technological advances that have ensured the supremacy of mankind are simultaneously the source of the destabilisation of the socio-political order. The status quo is dangerously upset by the awakening of radicalisms, the migration crisis, economic inequalities, armed conflicts, terrorism or environmental threats.

Instead of diagnosing the condition of society from the angle of risk, *The Ratcatcher* identifies borderline states, tensions and fears by focusing on interpersonal relationships and the consequences of the decisions we make. While analysing these areas, we are haunted by the image of Paul Klee’s Angel of History, who is constantly moving away from the present with terror in his eyes.

Level 3



Level 4



1

Gustav Metzger
Eichmann and the Angel

2005, multi-element installation; newspaper packages, chipboard painted white, aluminium, glass, roller-belt conveyor, colour printout, various dimensions
 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher of Jewish descent, in his essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History (On the Concept of History)* analysed Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* in the following way: "An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm." Fleeing the ravages of war, Benjamin ended up in France, where at the beginning of 1940 he wrote his last text, from which the words above were taken. Later, while trying to flee to the USA, he and a group of refugees reached Portbou, a French-Spanish town in the Pyrenees, where in September he probably committed suicide. These tragic events and Benjamin's catastrophic theses on the philosophy of history serve as the beginning of a narrative in which Gustav Metzger also situated Hannah Arendt and Adolf Eichmann.

Eichmann was the chief coordinator of the "final solution of the Jewish question", who after the war hid in Argentina. In 1960 he was captured by the Israeli intelligence in Buenos Aires and later tried in Jerusalem, where he was sentenced to death. The trial of the Nazi war criminal attracted a lot of media attention. Eichmann testified in a special bulletproof cabin. Hannah Arendt, a German philosopher with Jewish roots who was Benjamin's friend and unlike him managed to reach New York during the war, in the early 1960s reported the trial for *The New Yorker*, and her account evolved into *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, one of the most important essays of the 20th century. Arendt emphasised the ordinary and common character of evil, which can be done without thinking, without any motivation to do harm, and even without breaking the law.

Metzger referred to this multi-aspect story by using the elements of the installation: a replica of Eichmann's cabin, walls made from newspaper packages, a roller-belt conveyor, books by Arendt and other authors, and a reproduction of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. In spite of its scale, the work is ascetic in character and allows the audience to interact with it. By leaving the cabin door slightly open, Metzger invites the viewer to come inside and at the same time stresses the ceaseless flow of media information, in which all of us participate. Shown in this way, the artist's vision of the philosophy of history makes us aware of the complexity of historical reality and the inevitability of human choices – those that have already been made and those which are yet to be made.

2

Jacek Malinowski
Cell

2012, photographs on glass, 11×21 cm each, ed. 1/2
 Collection of the Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu in Toruń

Malinowski's work consists of a set of photographs depicting Adolf Eichmann's cell in the prison in Ramli, Israel, where the Nazi war criminal spent the last nine months of his life. The cell was meticulously reconstructed by the artist on the basis of photographs published in *Life* magazine, which had been taken during Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

3

Andrzej Wróblewski
Rider

1956, paper, gouache, 29.6×42.1 cm
 Property of Leon Wyczółkowski Regional Museum in Bydgoszcz

As depicted by Andrzej Wróblewski, the coachman and the horse symbolise the demise of human civilisation. The emotional tension and the otherwise reserved and precise composition is further emphasised by the strong colours. Wróblewski is not showing death; instead, he focuses on the emptiness of the broken man, as he did in other works from the series *Execution by Firing Squad* or *Chairing*. However, this work makes a reference to another story. On 3 January, 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche was walking the streets of Turin when he saw a merchant flogging his horse. In an attempt to help the horse, he embraced the animal's neck. After returning home, he spent two days lying in silence in bed. The breakdown resulted in severe mental illness which confined Nietzsche to bed for the last ten years of his life. Looked after by his mother and sister, he had practically no contact with the world. The story also became the starting point for the Hungarian film *The Turin Horse*, directed by Béla Tarr, which concentrates on the life and agony of a coachman, his daughter and the eponymous horse.

There exists a belief that the approaching death is preceded by peculiar signs. According to folk tales, animals often become harbingers of death. Horses' unusual behaviour in particular is said to herald a funeral or warn the owner against a catastrophe.

Photo wallpaper: *The Turin Horse*, 2011, directed by Béla Tarr, still frame from the movie

4

Łukasz Surowiec

From the series *Herbarium*

2016, own technique (dried plants, epoxy resin, glass), 99 × 73 cm,
39 × 21.5 cm, 38 × 35 cm, 103 × 77 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Art Agenda Nova gallery

herbarium – a collection of plant specimens or drawings, printed or drawn by hand, usually in the form of a notebook

In 2016 Łukasz Surowiec went on a journey to places that witnessed tragic historical events. Diverse in character, all of them were sites of mass execution and burial of not only soldiers and prisoners of war, but also entire families, ethnic or religious groups. The journey was intended to collect memories of these events, which are gradually fading or being erased from human consciousness. In the end, however, it was nature that turned out to be the main carrier of human tragedies. Plants growing on graves are symbolic witnesses to past events, a living monument to the dead. By preserving herbs or grasses in epoxy, the artist created collections that function as intimate monuments. The anthropological layer overlaps with botany. Collecting and preserving memories of local people in writing is combined in the work with keeping specimens of plants growing in areas where tragic events occurred.

5

Piotr Kmita

118 000 000

2015, digital print, 31.3 × 41.3 each
Courtesy of the artist. The work was commissioned and financed by SURVIVAL 13 Art Review

The roots of all totalitarianisms are based on eliminating civil liberties and any forms of individual autonomy vis-à-vis the state. It often happens with social approval. When individuals yield to the pressure of tyrants, masses become blind and seemingly inviolable moral rules are relativised. The same mechanism has been repeating itself for centuries.

In order to see the images hidden in the three black printouts, the viewer must look from the right angle. It is best to kneel on the marked line. The title of the work is the estimated number of victims who died because of the three depicted persons.

6

Kuba Bąkowski

The Ratcatcher

2007, sculpture of human and rat, epoxy resin, rubber, steel, plastic
Regional Collection of the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Szczecin

Kuba Bąkowski's *Ratcatcher* is a sculpture inspired by the figure of the stalker from the novel by the Strugatsky brothers, which was popularised by Andrei Tarkovsky in his film under the same title. Stalkers inhabit an exterritorial space and live in symbiosis with the post-industrial surroundings. Their profession of choice is smuggling. *The Ratcatcher* is depicted as a self-sufficient inhabitant of an abandoned, devastated world, who uses any tools and objects that he comes across. He is wearing a rubber uniform and carrying makeshift survival tools – traps, weapons, and parascientific apparatus of unknown origin and use. *The Ratcatcher* is a character made by combining bits of different realities, and as such he is subject to constant transformations. As a relic travelling in time, he belongs to the past. He is a worker-stalker, an explorer, a wanderer living on the fringes of reality who feeds on its waste and seems to be exempt from its laws.

7

Aleka Polis

Trickster: Europa with the Bulls' Head

2010, photo wallpaper 100 × 150 cm, digital photography 50 × 35 cm,
35 × 21 cm. Photograph by Andrzej Paruzel, Tomasz Kula
Special thanks to Profile Foundation for help in producing the photographs.
Courtesy of the artist

Europa, a Phoenician princess known for her exceptional beauty, enthralled Zeus so much that he decided to capture her. Having assumed the form of a bull, he seduced the girl with gentleness and delicacy. Once she got onto his back, the Greek god started running and eventually reached Crete, where Europa was forced to live.

The Greek myth about the abduction of Europa contains an element of violence, which comes to the foreground in Polis's work. The artist attempts to achieve the seemingly unachievable – to reverse the course of events of the Old Continent's founding myth, and consequently – to disrupt continuity and overthrow the historical order. To do so, she assumes the form of a trickster who opposes gods' will, just like Prometheus who brought fire to people. Aleka Polis as a tricksteress brings out a new version of the world and reconstructs its history. Her Europa defeats Zeus by beheading him, which shifts the balance of power, forestalls the rape and punishes the intent. In this way, the foundation of European civilisation is undermined, and the power of Olympian gods is finished. Polis's action also makes a reference to the biblical story of Judith, who insidiously decapitated Holofernes and saved her homeland from Babylonian invaders. The artist's practice viewed from the angle of herstory reveals violence and cruelty to women, and brings social injustice to the foreground.

8

Irena Kalicka

From the series *It is hard to slay a dragon, but you must try*

2016, analogue photography, lambda print, frame, 48.5 × 69.5 cm,
98.5 × 98.5 cm, 31.5 × 21.5 cm, 54.5 × 44 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Profile Foundation

New Athens by priest Benedykt Chmielowski is Poland's first encyclopaedia, published in the mid-1700s.* It was one of the most popular publications from the period of the Saxon dynasty rule in Poland, which would later be criticised as a symbol of backwardness and ignorance of that era. *New Athens* had a dual character. The first part consisted of more or less reliable encyclopaedic entries, and the second was a collection of curios. Thus the encyclopaedia contained descriptions of magic, spells, and characteristics of weird beasts living in faraway lands and seas, including dragons, basilisks and two-head snakes. There was also advice about how to cure toothache, prevent hair diseases and bad dreams; how to boil water without fire, what to do to ensure harmony in marriage, how to go to heaven or transform lead into silver. The world depicted in the encyclopaedia is a mixture of biblical traditions, ancient legends and folk tales. The anthropological and geographical aspect is interwoven with sensational curios, full of oversimplifications and stereotypes. The mounting falsities and absurdities provoke not just laughter, but also terror, especially when we realise that these judgements and fears have been subconsciously shaping our image of reality until today.

The photographs by Irena Kalicka, inspired by individual sections and entries from *New Athens*, enter an ironic game with common associations and stereotypical representations of the world. Just like in the encyclopaedia, the world shown in the pictures emerges through intermediated images and ideas. By piling up stereotypes and challenging popular beliefs, the artist situates her work in the contemporary narrative, identifying the phenomenon of social resentment. It is most visible in works referring to two motives common in medieval iconography: *danse macabre* and *ars moriendi*.

* Some literary scholars argue that the first works of encyclopaedic character were herbaria from the 16th century.

9

Natalia Wiśniewska

Carrot, Mace, Rat Tail

2016–2018, sculpture (worn-out towels, starch, paint), 79 × 9.5 × 7 cm,
78 × 9 × 7.5 cm, 106.6 × 5.5 cm, installation: tin, wood, worn-out towels
Courtesy of the artist

Power and its inseparable ingredient – violence – are frequently reproduced models of behaviour. When copied on a microscale, we can observe these mechanisms in settings such as the army, school, boarding house or summer camp. One of the instruments used by a group to bring an individual to order is the so-called “blanket party”. The victim, usually asleep in bed, is restrained with a blanket thrown over the head and hit with twisted towels. Because of their shape, the towels are sometimes called “carrots”, “maces” or “rat tails”. This form of punishment is often used by youths for fun or revenge. The exact dynamics depends on group loyalty and its hierarchy. The towel,

which is the material used for making the sculpture, comes from a very intimate sphere, which is characterised by delicacy due to the proximity to the naked body. By using worn-out towels, the artist borrows objects that are considered to be very personal. Her instructions on how to turn the soft matter into tools of punishment emphasise the arbitrary aspect of the division between official power models and its “soft” or “homemade” versions. The decision about how to use the towels is up to the viewer, which makes us aware that fear of violence is a very strong stimulus and a double-edged sword.

10

Katarzyna Malejka

Bed

2016, object, metal bed, polyurethane foam mattress, fabric,
200 × 90 × 140 cm
Courtesy of the artist

The distorted bed has lost its functionality. The artist's gesture has endowed it with a peculiar subjectivity, which comes down to a symbolic form of waiting, suspension and absurd. This waiting can turn into the forced state of sitting, and to some extent – into incapacitation and objectification.

11

Katarzyna Malejka

1254,2

2018, photography, dibond, 40 × 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist

A group of people jump at each other, knock and pin each other down. Nineteen participants (women, men and children) weigh a tonne in total. Together they build a human pyramid. This kind of play is commonly known as “sandwich”, “hay” or “stack”. As is the case in other forms of teenage fun, the activity has an element of competition and risk. It is also based on physical contact. The higher the stack, the more dangerous it is for those at the bottom. The heat and the cumulated weight takes their breath away, to the joy of those at the top. Being “stacked” is mostly corporeal in character. Euphoria mixes up with embarrassment and pain. Trapped in the stack, we become helpless, feeling both closeness and powerlessness. At a glance, the “sandwich” looks like a heap of inert bodies, triggering associations with images of war and mass killing. In this context, a reference could be made to the labour camp in Świętochłowice-Zgoda, whose commander forced the prisoners to “play sandwich”.

Liliana Piskorska

Public Displays of Affection

2017, installation, video, 6'40", series of photographs, lightbox 165×110 cm each, printout 150×464 cm
 Video: Daniel Danilovic (camera), Bartosz Pawlikowski (colour postproduction), Paweł Rychert (audio postproduction), Liliana Piskorska (script, editing)
 Courtesy of the artist

"Public displays of affection", or PDA, is a term denoting an act of physical intimacy performed in front of other people's eyes.

One of the forms of expressing democracy is a public gathering, which makes it possible for people to communicate with each other and voice their opinions. The freedom of assembly is a constitutionally guaranteed right intended to enable people to formulate opinions in public space. Liliana Piskorska in her project *Public Displays of Affection* comments on tensions between the notions of public space and public assembly. The artist focuses on the physical aspect of borders constituting the demarcation line between the gathered people and the police who are protecting the assembly. The police units act in synchronicity and establish constant contact between bodies; the integrity of the unit depends on the permanence of the connections, while the bodies are being forced to constantly move and act. In this situation, closeness and intimacy is a direct result of the function of the police unit, which is of greater importance than the body of an individual.

Public space should be conducive to establishing social bonds. However, the moment of contact between opposing parties makes us aware that this postulate often depends on changeable individual and collective needs. The behaviour of a group, repeated in a ritualised manner, is internalised by many as the only way of making a statement in public. A space in which powerlessness and anger are mixed up gently transforms individual identity into a collective one.

The border between the opposing sides, visible for just a second, shifts and disappears, only to re-emerge in another place. This one structure focuses the idea of a border understood as a place of simultaneous meeting and separation. The legal order and the social contract seem to be a fleeting state whose impermanence has been painfully revealed.

Marcin Dudek

Tunnel Recording

2006/2018, installation (foil, tape, stretch, furniture), ca. 400×420×250 cm, video documentation, 10'44"
 Collection of Wrocław Contemporary Museum
 Co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage

The installation entitled *Tunnel Recording* is a recreation of the original version of the work, which was made by Marcin Dudek in London in 2006. The artist used tape and self-adhesive film to make a kind of tunnel in his room. The peculiar sculpture gradually expanded, first resembling a cobweb, and later, as the skeleton became filled

in – a cocoon devouring all the furniture. While working on the installation, Dudek kept living in the room, which was increasingly claustrophobic day by day. Just like the nervous system, the installation responded to the artist's movement during sleep or when working on the computer. The main point of reference for the action was *Merzbau*, a construction by German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters. Built in Hanover since 1923, it was a spatial installation made from various materials available to the artist. Its appearance resembled a cavern filled up with random objects and waste. As time went by, the construction began to encompass the entire flat. The process was stopped when Schwitters fled Germany from the Nazis in 1937.

Jerzy "Jurry" Zieliński

The Dove of Anxiety

1969, oil on canvas, 150.5×200 cm
 Courtesy of Zderzak gallery

The painting *Dove of Anxiety* was done in 1969, which marked a turning point for "Jurry", one of the most interesting Polish painters of the second half of the 20th century. It was then that the artist arrived at the ultimate version of his language of expression, and his painting acquired a deep and coherent philosophical background. His style was based on poster-like shortcuts and symbols, which could be perceived as pastiche of the propaganda aesthetics of the socialist state. His practice from that time was also influenced by the political situation. The intervention of the Warsaw Pact soldiers in Czechoslovakia in 1968, self-immolations in Prague and Warsaw in protest against the invasion, and the social and political unrest in Poland in the years 1968–1969 sped up "Jurry's" artistic and intellectual development, endowing his paintings with metapolitical and anti-Soviet aspects. *The Dove of Anxiety* is a reference to the popular motive of the dove of peace, which was designed by Pablo Picasso during the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace held in Wrocław in 1948. It is often said that the Congress was a propaganda event intended to mobilise the global public opinion against "American imperialists" and an attempt to slow down the research on nuclear weapons in the West, due to the fact that the USSR did not possess this kind of weapon at the time. It was the beginning of the Cold War, cementing the division of the world into East and West. The conflict, which lasted until the end of the 1980s, was characterised by a constant arms race and a real threat of using nuclear weapons on a mass scale.

15

Jerzy Koszałka

A Therapeutic Toy for Adults

2017, own technique, cardboard, plexiglass, styrofoam, canvas, plastic, glass, aluminium, 42×30 cm each
 Courtesy of the artist

A set of toys comprising a board, a transparent container with an effigy of a Jew, a lighter and a small bottle with liquid grill fuel. The background to the set shows a collage of two photographs. The first one was taken in the 1930s and shows the New Synagogue in Łąkowa St in Wrocław. The edifice, which was the second largest Jewish temple in Germany and Austria, was burnt down by Nazi supporters on Kristallnacht, 9/10 November, 1938. After the end of WW2 it was not rebuilt. The second, contemporary picture shows an episode from a demonstration against admitting refugees to Poland, which was held in the Market Square in Wrocław on 18 November, 2018. During the protest one of the demonstrators burnt a Jew in effigy.

16

Tytus Szabelski

Protest Activities

2018, photographic installation, collage, digital print, video found footage, different dimensions

One Hundred Years. A Proposal for a New Polish Flag (1918–2018)

2018, flag, fabric, 150×250 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

Tytus Szabelski has been observing the growing number of protests in Poland since 2011. He has participated in different public assemblies: from a rally of environmentalists and a march for equality, to a trade union protest, a mensiversary of the Smolensk plane crash, to the march of independence and an anniversary of establishing the far-right National Radical Camp. At first he documented the marching crowds and edited the photos by erasing any slogans or symbols so that a blank space was left. Later he started to take more active part in the events and joined the protesters with a white banner of his own. As he commented, “When I marched with the white banner for the first time, it was an attempt to unite three very different demonstrations organised to mark the Independence Day in Warsaw. So I walked with the empty placard with far-right nationalists, members of the Committee for the Defence of Democracy, and left-wing protesters against fascism. They could be united only by ‘nothing.’ But perhaps there is no need to unite people against their will? Perhaps the mythologised dream about unity is actually harmful?” Judith Butler, quoted by the artist, wrote about assemblies in which people are free to walk any way they want and say different things, even contradictory. Szabelski appears at protests mainly to observe their specificity: mechanisms, rituals or the power of the crowd. However, his blank placard is not an empty statement. Its meaning changes depending on the context and the people who see it. Any look at it endows it with meaning.

In his most recent action, the artist transformed the white placard into a white flag, which is displayed on the façade of the Contemporary Museum during the exhibition. The work titled *One Hundred Years. A Proposal for a New Polish Flag (1918–2018)* is based on the simple symbolic gesture of removing the red colour from the flag of Poland, which in heraldry symbolises fire, blood, bravery and valour. What is left is immaculately pure whiteness.

Source: Facebook: Grupa Stonewall; Facebook: Polityka; Facebook: Wirtualna Polska; Facebook: Marsz Niepodległości; Youtube: wolnosc24.pl; Wojtek Szabelski

17

Jacek Rydecki

Archive

1982, printing matrix, 46×27 cm, kites (prisoners' notes), 6.5×4.5 cm each
 Courtesy of Pod Atlantami library in Wałbrzych

In 2017, during a renovation of a house in Sobięcín, a district of Wałbrzych, an archive was discovered containing materials connected with the Solidarity movement, which operated in the region in the first half of the 1980s. The finding consisted of leaflets and calendars, samizdat publications, song books for the interned, books by banned authors (including Czesław Miłosz, Witold Gombrowicz, Kazimierz Brandys, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn), and stamps of Solidarity Postal Service referring to places where its members were interned after the imposition of martial law. The house and the secret cache belonged to Jacek Rydecki's family at that time. In the 1980s Rydecki was an active artist who mostly did performance, and an active member of the anticommunist underground. He was involved in printing and distributing illegal publications in Wałbrzych, for which he was investigated by the secret police. At the beginning of 1982 he was arrested and detained in the Penitentiary Facility in Kamienna Góra. While interned, he sent “kites” with instructions about how to prepare Solidarity's illegal materials for print. What is particularly interesting among the hidden materials is a serigraph printer for printing certificates confirming 500-zloty donations to Solidarity's Regional Strike Committee.

18

Tomasz Domański

Ward no. 6

1983, analogue photography, digital print, 10×15 cm each
 Mockumentaries, mid-1980s, print, paper, photography, linocut,
 different dimensions
 Courtesy of the artist

“The defender circulated untrue information that could lead to public unrest and undermine trust in public authority organs,” read the indictment of Tomasz Domański, 20, who was charged with distributing leaflets during the martial law period and sentenced to three years in prison. He was released after a year. In an attempt to avoid compulsory military service, the artist began to feign mental illness. As a result he was diagnosed with reactive depression and sent to a closed psychiatric ward. During his stay he made friends with other patients and completed a cycle of photographic portraits. Some of the pictures show patients suffering from very serious diseases, others – conscientious objectors as well as those in detox. All of the portrayed people have their personal stories written across their faces: fears, the trauma of the disease, rejection, inability to fit in.

The series of mockumentaries, which was made at a later time, directly refers to events connected with the martial law and conscientious objection. The featured documents, including an identity card, service papers, an arrest warrant and court records, are issued in the name of “Jesus Christ”.

19

Petr Pavlensky

Threat. Lubyanka’s Burning Door

2015, action, video and photo documentation

Segregation

2014, action, video documentation

Courtesy of the artist

In the night from 8 to 9 November, 2015, Russian artist Petr Pavlensky doused the front door to Lubyanka with gasoline and set it on fire. Lubyanka, the seat of the Russian Federal Security Service, is a symbol of political oppression; it was here where, among others, victims of Stalin’s purges were tortured in the 1930s. The building housed the offices of NKVD, and later KGB. After setting the door on fire, the artist holding the empty petrol can waited patiently for arrest. On the same day he was charged with vandalism, although the artist himself insisted on reclassifying it to terrorism.

On 19 October, 2014, Pavlensky sat naked on a wall around the Serbsky State Scientific Centre for Social and Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow. After a while he cut off his earlobe with a kitchen knife. Bleeding, he waited for police officers to take him down. The action was a protest against categorising people and using psychiatry for political repression. In the USSR from the 1960s until the 1980s psychiatry was commonly used as a tool of repression against dissidents and people who were thought to breach social norms.

20

Roman Stańczak

Untitled

1994, video documentation of a performance, a.r.t. gallery in Płock, 3’21”
 Courtesy of the artist and Stereo gallery

Roman Stańczak is a sculptor who combines a critical attitude with an almost mystical approach to reality. In his work he uses common items, which he subjects to modifications such as turning a kettle or a bathtub “inside out”, or ripping leather off a couch. As a result, the objects become “naked” or reduced to the simplest form. Stańczak perceives art as a radical life experiment. By stripping the external layer off things, he strips himself. His early performances could be characterised as being “on the edge”, tempting fate in a way. Among them was an action carried out in a bathtub filled with water, which he performed in the renowned a.r.t. gallery in Płock. Reality is not safe, the artist seems to be saying while reminding us the naked truth about life.

21

Zbyszko Trzeciakowski

Untitled

performance documentation, text, *Catalogue of laureates of the Partum Award* designed by Jerzy Truszkowski, production Zigniew Libera, KwieKulik, Zbyszko Trzeciakowski, 1986, unpaginated
 Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

In the mid-1980s Zbyszko Trzeciakowski carried out radical, health – and life-threatening performances to reflect the alienation, depression and sense of threat in Poland under the martial law. His actions were also directly influenced by the Chernobyl disaster. In 1986 the artist initiated an action in Kietrz, a district of Poznań, which was intended to illustrate how easy it is to manipulate people, and at the same time he put his own body to a test. Random people were given instructions ordering them to go to a construction site and throw a rock or a brick inside a fenced-off hole. The event was recorded by two video cameras. One filmed the people, and the other – the bottom of the ditch, where Trzeciakowski, invisible to the people, was lying face up, naked, with his eyes covered with black fabric. This process of “experiencing himself” was continued by Trzeciakowski in his subsequent actions captured on camera. Also in 1986, in a private flat in Poznań, the naked artist threw himself uncontrollably onto 50 cm long bamboo shoots protruding from the floor, which was recorded on two video cameras. As a result he passed out, broke his jaw and two ribs, and lacerated his body.

Actions in which Trzeciakowski subjected his body to a test were deliberately risky. As the artist argued, a person can die on any day, accidentally or not, killed by the police during a protest. Exposing the body to risks and tests was necessary because corporeality is the only way to become aware of oneself. As the artist said, the recordings of his actions were “testimony to reflection and an attempt to strike a balance between paralysed vegetation and the power to fight one’s own mental and intellectual annihilation.” Trzeciakowski later destroyed the documentation.

22

Urszula Kozak

Żarnowiec Nuclear Power Plant – Reinterpretations

2015, video, 7'34"

Courtesy of the artist

Urszula Kozak's video performance is held on the premises of the abandoned nuclear power plant in Żarnowiec. Its construction started in 1982 and was the first step in the Polish nuclear energy programme. The change of economic situation in Poland after 1989, coupled with protests of local people, environmentalists and part of the society, especially after the Chernobyl disaster, resulted in its discontinuation in 1990. Since then the buildings and infrastructure in Żarnowiec have been slowly deteriorating, eventually turning into empty shells exposed to the power of the elements. Concrete surfaces turned into waterways, while walls falling into pieces became picturesque and mysterious landscapes. The concrete architecture of the plant resembles a dead, mutilated body whose decay is advancing every day. While exploring this lifeless architecture, the artist approaches a failed experiment that was supposed to be the crowning achievement of contemporary technology.

23

Liliana Lewicka

Place for Thought

exhibition following the First Symposium of Artists and Scientists "Art in a Changing World", Puławy 1966. Photographs by Eustachy Kossakowski
Courtesy of Anka Ptaszkowska and the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

In 1966, on the initiative of art critic and theorist Jerzy Ludwiński, the Symposium of Artists and Scientists was held under the motto "Art in a changing world." The venue for the meeting was the Nitrogen Processing Plant in Puławy. The main idea of the symposium was to underline the interconnections between art, technology, science and industry. The event was planned as an opportunity for debate of artists, art critics and theorists with scientists representing different disciplines. Liliana Lewicka, one of the participants in the symposium, critically approached the subject of the event. The artist created a kind of installation in a nearby forest that could be reached by following a path. Even from afar visitors could smell the stench of rotting meat. The installation consisted of heads of pigs and cows, which had been acquired from a local slaughterhouse, mounted on a wooden construction. Lewicka's work penetrated existential problems, but first and foremost referred to a sense of danger and the presence of death, which could sometimes result from the activity of the chemical industry. The mid-1960s gave rise to environmental movements, which postulated the need to protect nature and rationally use its resources. Against this context, the artist's somewhat radical gesture could be analysed as a manifestation of a belief in the necessity of protecting the environment.

24

Gustav Metzger

Auto-destructive Monument

1960/2018, model, metal staples, steel, 24×47×25 cm

Courtesy of The Artistic Estate of Gustav Metzger in London

Proposal of purchase for the MWW collection under the programme of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage "National Collections of Contemporary Art" 2018

In 1959 Gustav Metzger wrote the first *Auto-destructive Art Manifesto*. This idea became one of the principal axes in his practice as an artist who focused primarily on stimulating people to act on issues concerning their social and political environment. Aware of the threats brought by the development of civilisation, Metzger proposed a form of art that was intended to emphasise the contemporary society's "obsession with destruction." Auto-destructive art was meant to be impermanent by nature and subject to self-destruction. In the second manifesto from 1960 he wrote: "Auto-destructive art is the transformation of technology into public art. The immense productive capacity, the chaos of capitalism and of Soviet communism, the co-existence of surplus and starvation; the increasing stock-piling of nuclear weapons – more than enough to destroy technological societies; the disintegrative effect of machinery and of life in vast built-up areas on the person,..." One of the most characteristic examples of how the idea was put into practice was Metzger's use of acid to "paint" on nylon in the early 1960s. The DIAS – Destruction in Art Symposium, held in London in 1966 – was an important initiative connected with auto-destructive art, which gathered some of the most prominent artists at the time.

Auto-destructive Monument is a model of a monument that never materialised. The artist often made scale models of works that he intended to display in public places. Sometimes the works remained in the conceptual sphere only.

Metzger was one of the first artists who emphasised the threats carried by the development of civilisation. His works often commented on current events, wars and the looming terrorism. He also highlighted areas which urgently needed action. Although Metzger's practice was varied, it was always connected with the current political situation and responded to public sentiments. The artist, a careful observer or active participant of many important historical events, was never indifferent to the fate of our planet.

25

Angelika Markul

Welcome to Fukushima

2013, photographs, 126.5×164 cm each, ed. 2+1 AP

Untitled

2014, wax, wood, leather, felt, ca. 100×50 cm each

Courtesy of the artist and Leto gallery

Angelika Markul observes the power of nature, and especially its untameable destructive potential, which could be triggered by various factors, among them human error or as a side effect of human actions. In 2013 the artist visited Fukushima, where two years earlier a tsunami caused a nuclear disaster, comparable in its scale to the one in Chernobyl. The series of photographs entitled *Welcome to Fukushima* is a study of a ruined city. The landscape has been deformed by nature, following rules which are incomprehensible to humans. In Markul's photographs, the destructive power compels admiration and reveals the fragility and instability of our vision of the world.

The connection between humans and nature is a very organic yet brutal relation, as we learn from the second, untitled work by Markul. The sculpture made from felt, leather and wax resembles a harness made from leather belts and deformed, barely identifiable organic objects. The inspiration for the cycle was provided by gauchos, native Argentinean horsemen who trade in meat and cowhides and who have become an important part of Argentine's culture. Used to anarchy and freedom, gauchos often lived very simple lives and owned nothing but their horses. Markul, who in her sculptures concentrates on the subject of taming and subjugation, seems to suggest that nature that was killed by humans may one day restore its untameable wilderness.

26

Jerzy Truszkowski

Morality of the Body

1984, acryl on paper, 490×100 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Piktogram gallery

Jerzy Truszkowski wrote in 1985: "When I was a little girl, I was brought up and fed in such a way that I would grow up to be a beautiful and clever boy. However, my parents succeeded only in developing tertiary sexual characteristics in me. But half of my brain is female. I combine intuition originating from the uterus with the sharpness of a mind trained in gnosiology." The artist's practice in the 1980s was full of contradictions and doubts revolving around morality, existence, suffering, philosophy or God. In his works and texts, strongly inspired by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Truszkowski expressed a nihilistic attitude based on stark contrasts, tensions and provocations. The visual form was always subjected to a poetic game of associations. The work titled *Morality of the Body* mixes up biblical and erotic threads. The tension between good and evil is ambiguous, and the artist emphasises that the roots of morality are in emotions.

27

Szymon Kobylarz

Shortness of Breath

2010–2014, installation

Untitled (mask)

2010, wax, gypsum, display cabinet, wood, pane, 75×63×70 cm

Untitled (Tablo 01)

2010, drawing, photography, collage, wooden frame, pane, 70×50 cm

Untitled (Tablo 02)

2010, drawing, collage, wooden frame, pane, 70×50 cm

Untitled (Tablo 03)

2014, photography, collage, wooden frame, pane, 70×50 cm

Untitled (Tablo 04)

2014, wooden frame, pane, 70×50 cm

Untitled (Tablo 05)

2014, collage, wooden frame, pane, 70×50 cm

Untitled (lamp)

2014, object, two lamps, 40×22×48 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Szymon Kobylarz's project refers to the police investigation into the case of a serial killer, known as the Vampire from Zagłębie, who was charged with the murder of fourteen women and the attempted murder of another seven. From November 1964 to March 1970 the entire region of Silesia was in psychosis. Women kept dying, and the police were unable to identify the perpetrator. When Edward Gierek's niece was killed, it became clear that the murderer must be caught at all cost. The police conducted an extensive investigation in which psychological knowledge and the newest technologies were used to create the hypothetical profile of the murderer. In the end Zdzisław Marchlewski, an inhabitant of Dąbrowa Górnicza, was arrested. According to the official version, he was identified by a computer on the basis of personality traits, but in fact it was his wife who denounced him for money. The show trial attracted huge attention from the society. The accused was sentenced to death and hanged. After the execution a cast of his face was made, which would later be presented in a propaganda exhibition illustrating the course of the investigation. Kobylarz's installation refers to this exhibition and highlights the ambiguity of the gathered evidence, suggesting that the investigation was unethical. But failing to apprehend the murderer was out of the question. To this day the case arises many controversies.

28

Elżbieta Jabłońska
Is Your Mind Full of Good?

2005, neon light, 42×232 cm
 Collection of the Lubuskie Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts

The question posed by Jabłońska is taken from the teachings of Atiśa, a Tibetan Buddhist master. The blue neon light is modelled on a sentence written by hand by the artist's eight-year-old son. The question refers to individual attitudes and everyday ethical choices, in particular to human sensitivity and a sense of responsibility for another person.

29

Marta Kotwica
Compulsory Repetition of Trauma

2017, video, 6'02", performance
 Courtesy of the artist

Marta Kotwica's *Compulsory Repetition of Trauma* is a performance accompanied by a short video documenting the process of implanting an RFID (radio-frequency identification) biochip in the artist. The device is an emitter the size of 2–3 grains of rice, which can send out any information. Its uses include tagging animals and labelling goods. The main purpose of the chip is to identify and track by radio organisms or things in which it was implanted. Taking as her starting point the death of her beloved cat, the artist decides to subject her body to tagging. Her performance talks about dependence, control and the feeling of alienation, and simultaneously asks whether care equals control. Kotwica also refers to Freud's concept of repetition compulsion, which explains that people tend to unknowingly repeat unpleasant situations from the past in their everyday life. The performance was carried out on the opening day of the exhibition on 11 May, 2018.

30

Przemysław Branas
Hyena

2015, object, 100×40×8 cm, wax, stearin, analogue slides
 Courtesy of the artist

The artist spent several months regularly visiting a cemetery in order to obtain unburnt grave candles and stearin infills from waste containers. Later at home he laboriously melted the stearin to create a wax object resembling a small coffin. The featured work actually tracks a prolonged process by means of limited photographic documentation. This process can be perceived as a peculiar mourning diary describing the cultivation of the memory of the deceased. Unfinished mourning can sometimes transform into a highly compulsive process.

31

Artur Żmijewski
Glimpse

2017, video, 14'05", digital copy of 16 mm, ed. 3 + 1AP
 Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery
 Proposal of purchase for the MWW collection under the programme of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage "National Collections of Contemporary Art" 2018

Glimpse is a silent black-and-white recording of the artist's visit to refugee camps in Calais, Paris and Berlin. Żmijewski films immigrants vegetating in primitive shelters. He enters their makeshift beds and thus brutally intrudes on their privacy. In return he gives them new boots or jackets. On the back of one of the refugees he paints the white sign X; another one is given a broom and shown how to use it. He tells them to stand in front of the camera, treating them like anthropological objects. As the artist said, the formally limited film, inspired by Nazi and Soviet propaganda materials, is intended to direct out attention to hate speech dominating the public debate on the perception of refugees.

32

Tymon Nogalski
Green White Orange – Composition

2016, video, 2'54"
 Courtesy of the artist

Shot from a bird's-eye view, the film shows the surface of earth covered by rubble and rubbish. What we slowly come to realise is that we actually see a huge heap of life jackets. We are in Lesbos, a Greek island in the north-eastern part of the Aegean Sea near the coast of Turkey. Since 2015 the island has been the destination for boats carrying illegal immigrants, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Their numbers could be estimated by looking at tens of thousands of life vests scattered on the beach. For many, this was the first contact with European soil.

33

Irmina Rusicka

Article 14

2017, audio and video installation
 Courtesy of the artist

Article 14

Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries
 asylum from persecution.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Under international law formulated in the Refugee Convention, the status of a refugee should be given to a person who is outside the country of his nationality for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

According to the data of the Office for Foreigners, in 2017 Poland provided international protection to 742 foreigners. A total of five thousand applications was examined. The biggest number of persons wishing to apply for refugee status reach Poland through the Brześć-Terespol border crossing with Belarus. Since July 2016 efforts have been made in that area to prevent potential refugees from asking for asylum, which is against Polish and international law. After expressing a request for asylum, refugees should be allowed onto Polish territory and their cases should be investigated by the Office for Foreigners. However, the decision is often made much earlier than the law allows – the Border Guards prevent their entry to Poland.

In May 2017 Irmina Rusicka went to the Brześć-Terespol crossing to investigate the problem. As a result she made a work focusing on the people she met there. The installation consists of recordings of people requesting the refugee status who have been denied the possibility of entering Poland multiple times. Each megaphone represents one person. The device is a carrier of their voice, saying “I request the refugee status” in Polish and Russian. The recordings were made mostly among refugees from Chechnya who were camping near the border crossing in Brześć. Their requests for asylum had been ignored by the Polish Border Guard for a long time. The recordings are supplemented with interviews with four people explaining their reasons for leaving their homeland. Rusicka's action is intended to give the floor to people who are excluded and completely anonymous to us. Equipped with the megaphone, they are symbolically given identity and a chance to speak out.

34

Richard Mosse

Moria

2016, dibond, metallic paper, plexiglass, digital print, 126×431.5 cm
 Collection of Wrocław Contemporary Museum
 Co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage

Richard Mosse returns to the island of Lesbos to photograph one of Europe's largest transition camps for refugees in the town of Moria. To analyse different ways of presenting contemporary conflicts, the artist experiments with thermal imaging cameras, which capture the heat produced by the human body. This specialist equipment, typically produced for border patrols and the army, is used by the artist to photograph the refugee camp. The panoramic photograph of the camp reveals places where the greatest amount of heat is concentrated. The heat map, as the artist called it, shows fences on the camp's perimeter, people queuing for food, in tents and other makeshift shelters, and isolated tracks of human and animal movement. In the work, heat is treated as a metaphor of everyday struggle for survival in the situation in which the refugees ended up. Mosse's camera does not capture individuals, but masses. This was done on purpose in order to refer to the offensive language used by the media when describing immigration, which dehumanises refugees by comparing them to a “plague”.

35

Dorota Chilińska

The Tower of Babel

2006, video installation, 10'
 Collection of the Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu in Toruń

Dorota Chilińska composed her *Tower of Babel* by juxtaposing two images. The first one is the slowly growing frame showing New York after the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001. The second is a black screen with the white line of a scanner moving through it every now and then. Following each move, a sentence in English appears, which is a fragment of the biblical story about the Tower of Babel. The phrases are read out by a speech synthesizer, but each time the English text is pronounced with a different accent. The attempt to say the text by the machine turns out to be unsuccessful. As a result, the computer is unable to pronounce the words correctly, and the sentence loses its meaning due to information noise and overload. This is how we return to the starting point – to the biblical story explaining how this semantic chaos originated. People are still trying to build new towers of Babel, using increasingly sophisticated devices based on artificial intelligence, but, as Chilińska shows, the dream cannot come true.

36

Justyna Scheuring
Everyone, Merry-Go-Round

2017, video, performance documentation, 26'12"
 Courtesy of the artist

By involving herself in performance, Justyna Scheuring attempts to reach the most basic aspects of the situation – meeting and presence. The artist typically uses actions based on performance, which she defines as sculptures co-created by space, people and objects, composed in the same way as a piece of music or poem – respecting time and rhythm. The action titled *Everyone, Merry-Go-Round* was originally performed at Canal Gallery, London, where the artist situated a spatial installation in which the performance was held. An important role in the event was performed by two teams of professional interpreters who translated the artist's words into English and sign language (Polish and English). The setting consisting of attributes of power, words, gestures, sounds, the artist's outfit, translation – all of it was intended to strengthen an "individual voice" talking about numbness, suffering and identity in the context of personal traumas, global migrations and the experience of otherness. Through this accumulation of gestures, words and languages the audience became aware of communication problems resulting from misunderstandings and linguistic limitations. Thus a key role was played by the interpreters whose presence simultaneously symbolised "the other/otherness" and functioned as a binding element making it possible to understand what the artist was saying.

37

Andrzej Wróblewski
Flying Houses

undated, feather, ink, paper, 22.7×22.7 cm
 Private collection. Courtesy of Andrzej Wróblewski Foundation /
www.andrzejwroblewski.pl

Andrzej Wróblewski chose careful and direct observation of reality as the main source of inspiration in his practice. He subjected his experiences to artistic interpretation, aiming to express himself by using or deforming a flat, synthetic stain of a vivid colour. The early suggestive visions of war and human degradation were gradually replaced with works supporting social realism by showing efforts to build a new society. Soon, however, optimism gave way to disappointment with the system, and the canvases became permeated with a sense of apathy, numbness and intimacy, which remained in the artist's work until his premature death. *Flying Houses* is an undated drawing, a sketch kept in a surreal tone. The peculiarly grotesque study depicts a reversal of socio-existential order. As Wróblewski observed, "Earth has lost its moderate level."

38

Mariusz Tarkawian
Progressism

2018, drawing on the wall, black oil-based marker
 Courtesy of the artist

Mariusz Tarkawian's diptych comments on the phenomenon of militarisation and the ever-present tendency to develop the armed forces and participate in the arms race. The progress of advanced technologies coupled with scientific research from different fields leads to the creation of increasingly accurate methods of killing. The military industry is a very profitable branch of economy in many countries in the world. Tarkawian in his work juxtaposes two images. The first one presents the newest achievements in the global arms race, such as drones, robots or prototypes of laser guns. It is contrasted with the second image showing the consequence of their use. The artist asks a question about the logic of constantly improving weapons and using scientific progress to design more efficient ways of killing, and highlights the fact that the new solutions are currently being tested by various countries in real conflicts, in particular in the war in Syria, which has continued for over seven years now.

39

Tobiasz Jędrak
Untitled

2018, digital print, text, 30×21 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

Tobiasz Jędrak's formally laconic work is a conceptual proposal concerning the future destiny of Earth and its inhabitants. The work makes a direct reference to the tradition of conceptual art. It invites the viewer to reflect on the potential consequences and possibilities of interpreting an event which in mass culture is often depicted as a post-apocalyptic exodus or the colonisation of space by humans.

40

Jerzy Truszkowski
Farewell to Europe

1987, video 12'39"

Collection of the Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu
in Toruń

The video entitled *Farewell to Europe* was made by Jerzy Truszkowski in cooperation with Zbigniew Libera shortly before the former was called up into the army. The work was intended as a gesture of defiance against a sense of disempowerment by the military machine of the communist state. The artist belonged to a generation that came of age in the 1980s, bearing the mark of martial law. Truszkowski's public appearances at the time – controversial, somewhat narcissistic and considered to be anarchic in character – resulted from his reflection on philosophy, religion and culture. At the same time, they directly referred to the political situation in Poland. While criticising totalitarian regimes, the artist simultaneously avoids formulating a politically unambiguous message and veers towards existential reflection. *Farewell to Europe* contains a number of features typical of his practice: disagreement with the figure of a leader and with being ruled, rejection of the symbols of power and totalitarian ideology, unwillingness to play social and political roles. The work is also an exploration into the creative potential of an individual, which is another characteristic feature of Truszkowski's practice. An important means of expression for the artist was self-mutilation, which he inflicted on numerous occasions. He usually cut symbols on his body (hands, chest, forehead) – five – or six-pointed star, or different variants of cross (Latin, Greek, Maltese). Truszkowski wrote: "In my understanding, performance is not a colourful flower – it is rubbing salt in an open wound. It is fight with Others to convert them, and to convert oneself to oneself."

41

Douglas Gordon
Self-Portrait of You + Me (David Bowie)

2007, burnt photograph, mirror, 63.2×53 cm

Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

Proposal of purchase for the MWW collection under the programme of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage "National Collections of Contemporary Art" 2018

The work by Douglas Gordon titled *Self-Portrait of You + Me (David Bowie)* is part of an expanded series in which the artist used popular photographs of famous people connected with popular culture. In the photograph of David Bowie, his eyes and mouth have been burnt out and replaced with pieces of mirror. The use of fire was an important element of the creative process because the artist could control the outcome only to a limited degree. What emerged as a result was a portrait with burnt holes and shiny surfaces inside them, which makes the musician's face blur with the viewer's. Gordon's action is therefore a game with the perception of identity. Confronting the image – the superstar's mask – with one's own reflection makes us aware that we all play a role in the process of the making of an icon. At the same time, the work is iconoclastic in character. Combating the cult of sacred images is an important theological problems for the biggest monotheist religions, which sometimes leads to armed conflicts and

acts of aggression. Gordon focuses on a secular depiction of a contemporary icon. For him, the process of creating the image is a destructive act.

42

Tymon Nogalski
It Would Be Silly to Miss Your Own Fire

2017, wax, 5×10 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The Coliseum, one of the greatest achievements of ancient Roman architecture and a symbol of the empire, was transformed by Nogalski into a tiny object-candle. "It would be silly to miss your own fire," the artist says ironically while referring to defeatist post-apocalyptic visions. What comes to the foreground is not fear, but acceptance of the gloomy future. The work contains an aspect of obsessively thinking about the future from the angle of twilight, and looking for symbols supporting this conviction in prosaic situations. The artist's aim was to create a work balancing between the rational and the grotesque, to combine prophecies of doom in a light form with the bitter taste of the present time.

43

Kasper Lecnim, Irmina Rusicka
It Was All Right, It Is All Right, It'll Be All Right

2018, installation, different dimensions

Courtesy of the artists

Nowadays, the uncertainty of what can happen forces people to always be alert. There are many potential reasons for a catastrophe, or even an apocalypse: an armed conflict, a cyberattack, a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, an economic or political crisis. The ever-present spectre of the looming collapse of civilisation is what characterises the movement of the preppers. They are people who are aware of the threats and, in order to survive, try to prepare for all possibilities. It is worth bearing in mind that problems can be posed not only by global issues, but also by "small apocalypses", which are far more likely. This state of uncertainty and the resulting need to be prepared are accentuated by Irmina Rusicka and Kasper Lecnim. Their backpack contains all the items necessary to survive for 137 days, which is exactly how long the exhibition will last. The fact that the museum is situated in an air-raid shelter is significant. The one-meter-thick walls made from reinforced concrete and 1.5-meter ceiling ensure safety. Guided by the motto "It was all right, it is all right, it'll be all right", the artists are getting ready for the worst case scenario. However, the bitter irony is permeated with hope – a belief that a life-changing event may be coming.

Rafał Wilk

House under the Crazy Star

2015, video, 31'51"

Courtesy of the artist

Hero

2017, digital printout 3d fdm, height 20 cm, edition 3+1

Private collection. Courtesy of Ireneusz Piecuch

Rafał Wilk in his works combines stories of people and animals confronted with an extreme situation, namely war. The film titled *House under the Crazy Star* talks about events which occurred in the zoological garden in the occupied Warsaw. Its director Jan Żabiński and his wife Antonina hid fleeing Jews in their house on the premises of the zoo, for which they were later named Righteous Among the Nations of the World. The Żabińskis also gave shelter to many animals. In the context of the film story, the sculpture of a snail on a razor edge becomes a metaphor of crossing the border between life and death. By secreting an appropriate amount of mucus, the snail is able to safely move across the razor edge.

*

Łukasz Dziedzic

Ratcatcher [Original Exhibition Soundtrack]

2018, ten-channel audio installation

Courtesy of the artist

Ratcatcher, composed especially for the exhibition under the same title, is a soundtrack in its own right. It refers directly to film scores and performs a similar function – to build tension and weave a narrative through sound. Just like film music leads the viewer through the story, *Ratcatcher* accompanies the visitor in the subsequent parts of the exhibition and constructs new relations between individual works and the space of the museum. The compositions refer to the music used in the *Ratcatcher* documentary, traditions of experimental electronic music, and soundtracks of futuristic C-grade horrors.

The Ratcatcher

11.5–24.9.18

Wrocław Contemporary Museum

Artists:

Kuba Bakowski, Przemek Branas, Dorota Chilińska, Tomasz Domanski, Marcin Dudek, Łukasz Dziedzic, Douglas Gordon, Elżbieta Jabłońska, Tobiasz Jędrak, Irenka Kalicka, Piotr Kmita, Szymon Kobylarz, Jerzy Koszałka, Marta Kotwica, Urszula Kozak, Kasper Lecnim, Liliana Lewicka, Kasia Malejka, Jacek Malinowski, Angelika Markul, Gustav Metzger, Richard Mosse, Tymon Nogalski, Piotr Pawlenski, Liliana Piśkorska, Aleka Polis, Irmina Rusicka, Jacek Rydecki, Justyna Scheuring, Roman Stańczak, Łukasz Surowiec, Tytus Szabelski, Mariusz Tarkawian, Jerzy Truszkowski, Zbyszko Trzeciakowski, Rafał Wilk, Natalia Wiśniewska, Andrzej Wróblewski, Jerzy „Jurry” Zieliński, Artur Żmijewski

Curator of the exhibition:

Piotr Lisowski

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Aleksandra Kozioł, Marcin Pecyna,
Dominika Sośnicka

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MWW

Wrocław
Contemporary Museum

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of the city of Wrocław

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