

GLARE

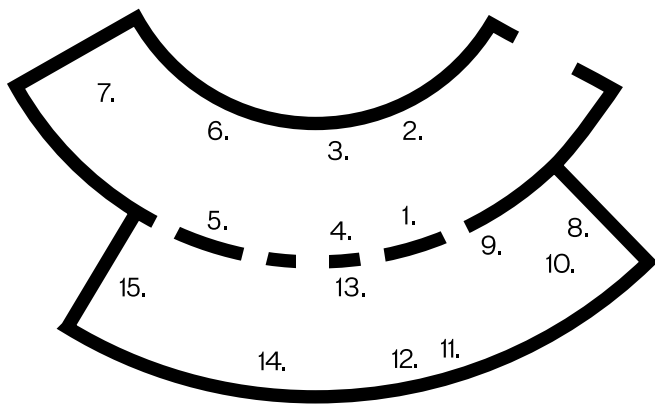
17.09.21– 7.03.22 Kama
Sokolnicka

MWW

Muzeum Współczesne
Wrocław

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BLASK



1.
Heralds of a New Order
installation; print on silk, thread, brass, fan
2021

The exhibition space opens with the installation *Heralds of a New Order*, in which glare is manifested as a glimpse into the future, a harbinger of things to come, but also a reflection of the past. The fluttering piece of gilded silk with the printed image of a flag refers to current socio-political problems. The flag-fabric with the motif of a pleated skirt waves slightly as the air moves. The artist's symbolic gesture of support for the ongoing social changes echoes Emma Goldman's famous slogan: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." More works emerge from behind the floaty curtain, acoustically accompanied by the constant noise of the fan.

The work is based on the collages from the *Believing in Utopias* series, made for the exhibition/research project entitled *Reclaimed Avant-garde. Utopias of Social Change* (2018), which was carried out by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

2.
Italian Woman
collage; wood, brass, paper, vermiculite fabric
2021

A collage-afterimage made during the artist's journey across southern Europe, which also became the starting point for her new works. In Mediterranean countries, modern window frames are often made of aluminium with a golden shade, which reflects the harsh sunlight and does not heat up like plastic. The casement windows of buildings standing in the heat are usually open, sometimes covered from the inside with something to limit the inflow of hot air. You can see everyday life in them: people bustling around, swimsuits hung out to dry, perhaps a cat basking in the sun.

Among the juxtaposed fragments one can make out a pink, spindle-shaped object, to which female fingers are reaching in a gesture of concern. The fraying threads at the edges of the golden material in the central part of the composition resemble hair, and the fabric itself is covered with vermiculite – a clay with fire-resistant properties. The sketched stone pine, unlike other pine species, is able to resist strong winds and can survive prolonged droughts. The collage thus presents resilience as an ability to deal with harmful external factors, including social inequality or gender-based discrimination. Viewed from this perspective, it makes up a semantic whole with the works *Heralds of a New Order* and *Urania Propitia*.

3.
Urania propitia
collage; wood, paper, brass
2021

The work makes an indirect reference to Maria Cunitz, a Lower Silesian astronomer, author of the book *Urania Propitia** and populariser of knowledge about the solar system. This Schweidnitz-born scientist wrote the first book on astronomy in the German language (the dominant language of science at that time was Latin), in which she corrected Johannes Kepler's *Rudolphine Tables* – an astronomical catalogue from 1627 describing the stars and motions of planets. She also observed the phases of Venus and discovered an impact crater on its surface. According to the reports on the life of the 17th-century researcher, her lifestyle was considered controversial by her contemporaries: she slept during the day and worked at night. Despite her immense contributions to science, Cunitz is much less known than her male colleagues living at the same time (Kepler, Galileo, Hevelius).

The collage is an attempt to restore the memory of women's contribution to the development of knowledge and the

Glare is a basic parameter characterising the light environment, an undesirable effect in the process of seeing. Staring at the glare causes persistent afterimages. Light and illumination are often associated with a state of mind that allows one to transcend the human horizon. Upon seeing the light reflecting off a tin vessel, Jakob Böhme, a 17th-century Silesian mystic, experienced vision: he was enveloped by lightness and the secret of being was revealed to him. Light metaphors also appear in the philosophical and religious systems of the East. Enlightenment is a state achieved through meditation, resulting in freeing oneself from suffering and lifting all veils of ignorance. In the Tibetan traditions, radiant light can be understood as an inexhaustible source of good for all sentient beings.

In her exhibition, Kama Sokolnicka focuses on the ambiguity of the eponymous glare, defined as bright light, illumination, flash and radiance. The artist's works are semantic constellations based on associations that add up to form a non-linear visual essay. Most of the works were created during warm, sunny summer days, and the materials selected for them are the carriers of the content: brass with a dendritic microscopic image conducts heat, felt insulates against sound, vermiculite improves soil structure and makes objects coated with it fireproof. The protective properties of the materials may trigger associations with the practices known from plant cultivation, emphasising alertness and care for the environment. Alertness is a characteristic manifested both in Sokolnicka's individual works and in the creative process itself, which is particularly evident at the exhibition in the windowless air-raid shelter. By attempting to go beyond the individual, inner experience of the world, the artist affirms an attitude based on understanding for the search for one's own place in a complex reality, being part of a larger whole.

process of explaining the world, which has been marginalised for centuries. For Sokolnicka, Maria Cunitz is a rocket shining with an inner glow; a persistent scientist who had to contend with the social limitations of her time.

**Urania Propitia*, i.e. "astronomy made accessible/understandable to the reader"

4.

31°C

collage; paper, brass sheet

2021

The motif of the veil has been present in Kama Sokolnicka's practice for a long time, e.g. in the 2010–2016 collage series *Vienna Set* depicting critics of Austrian culture (*Nestbeschmutzer*), or in sculptural reliefs entitled *Folds* and placed on the facade of the Barbara bar in Wrocław. As Sokolnicka explains, "Depending on the method of use, it may provide protection or cover, stress the importance, add lightness, but on the other hand, it hides, separates and blocks access. It also signals intentions that are not entirely clean." Although the textiles shown in the work *31°C* may be associated with a bourgeois interior, they are weightless. Gauzy and bright, they protect against excessive light and merciless heat penetrating into the home through the windows. The aforementioned protective function does not trigger unambiguously positive associations: although it does offer protection, it simultaneously makes whatever is hidden behind it invisible, bringing to mind the mechanisms of unconsciousness and repression. In Buddhism, lifting the veils of ignorance eliminates the source of suffering; in psychoanalysis, looking under the proverbial curtain can lead to a better understanding of one's fears. Both methods of cognition lead to a greater awareness of existence in the outside world. The title of the work is the reading of the air temperature on the day it was created.

5.

Five Arrows

installation; wood, black ink, golden thread, brass

2013

Sokolnicka became interested in the parable of the enlightenment of the Buddha, who, as he was meditating under a tree, was attacked by Mara, a demon capable of introducing an atmosphere of fear, regardless of whether it is fear of drought, hunger, disease or terrorism. Hordes of evil spirits led by Mara attacked the monk in various ways, but the stones, arrows and flames could not reach the edge of Sidhartha's luminous aura. Instead of hurting him, they turned into flowers and fell at his feet, while he continued his meditation with an unwavering smile on his lips.

According to other sources about the Buddha's teaching, it is possible to avoid poison arrows if they come from far, but they cannot be stopped if they are shot from within. Arrows can be impregnated with poisons such as lust, anger, aggression, doubt, distraction, stupidity or selfish ecstasy.

While the installation *Heralds of a New Order* is about being active, taking the initiative and triumphing, *Five Arrows* focuses on a passive attitude, inaction. Tied and suspended on a golden thread, the arrows – wooden rays sharpened on both sides and painted black – are no longer used for hunting, just like the brass hunting horn placed on the ground with the bell facing down. The grounded instrument, whose position is in contrast to the one during hunting, suggests the cessation of unjustified violence and pointless suffering, opposition to dominance-based attitudes towards other living beings.

6.

Crystal Stranglers,

installation; selenite, rock crystal, felt, wool, glass, brass

2021

A polished rock crystal acquires excellent optical properties. It is said that in ancient Egypt it was cut in such a way that it resembled a lens and could be used to start a fire by focusing sunlight. The installation refers to the work of Roberto Burle Marx, a modernist landscape architect, or to be more precise – to the concrete, crystalline forms located in Praça dos Cristais (Crystal Square) in Brasília. When designing this park, the Brazilian architect was inspired by the stone mined in the town of Cristalina – locality was one of the characteristic features of his style. He was famous for his unique approach to nature; he studied rainforests and he was involved in their protection. His landscapes were developed with great respect for the plants used in them; he was interested in the relationships and interactions between different species of plants and animals and their influence on the life of the entire garden.

The forms quoted by the artist and the humorous title of the work contain ambivalence. Crystal stranglers are concrete phantoms looking at their reflection in the mirror of old times. Concrete as an innovative material was supposed to be a response to the housing deficit. The idea of mass housing was based on concrete, but its excessive use contributed to the degradation of the landscape and the natural environment.

7.

Passive Fire Protection

sculpture; brass, acrylic glass, bronze

2021

To radiate "inner light" is to feel good with oneself, to be in balance, which means to accept the positive and negative qualities of one's personality and body. The installation is dedicated to visitors to the exhibition and serves to "shine with internal light," as the artist put it. It is a place designed to build resilience by using elements that are associated with pleasant sensations, such as warm fleece, shimmering vermiculite, soft light and cat's purring. The purring sound in particular has the power to reduce stress due to associations with blissfulness and its low frequency (25 to 150 Hz), which is soothing to the human ear. In this setting, self-criticism, or the constant sabotage of one's constructive actions, becomes less important, because the mind is forced to take a rest, like on a hot summer day. In the era of multi-faceted crises – in climate, the economy, healthcare to those more local and individual – the need to develop resilience* is becoming ever more urgent.

*resilience is the ability to recover lost or weakened forces, regenerate after psychological trauma, which is connected with resistance to harmful factors.

8.

To Exit the Solar System this Month

sculpture; brass, acrylic glass, bronze

2017

Made of brass rods and acrylic glass, the object triggers associations with sunrays. Brass is a metal alloy whose microscopic image reveals its dendritic, tree-like structure, proving its organic origin. The eponymous exiting of the solar system, unattainable from the human perspective, expresses not so much the desire to run away, but the inner strength and energy needed to break out of the existing order. The need to get out could be driven by bursting creative potential, a sense of wonder caused by activeness, but on the other hand – by impotence, energy-draining limitations.

9.
In Curved Air
video installation
editing: Emanuel Geisser
2021

One afternoon, during the April lockdown, the artist was listening to Terry Riley's album *A Rainbow in Curved Air*. At one point, the interior of her flat brightened with sunlight, and a reflection of the rotating record appeared on the wall above the turntable. This phenomenon was captured by Sokolnicka on film. The video is an unobtrusive instruction to carefully observe reflections – the emanation of being in everyday surroundings. Shining with reflected light, the moving halo resembles the rings of Saturn, introducing a broader, planetary context.

10.
Photometric Solid of Light
paper, pencil, crayon
2021

The drawing resembles an illustration from a physics textbook. The photometric light cone (illustration of light distribution area) is the geometric location of the ends of the light vectors coming from the common pole, from the optical centre of the light source. It explains how we perceive the luminous aura surrounding an object that generates light. It corresponds with the featured video work, constituting a kind of footnote. However, this is not a strictly scientific commentary, but rather a form of poetic translation of a physical phenomenon into a visually attractive image. Thus, it reveals the unique beauty of the laws that govern the world, including those that normally remain invisible.

11.
Thanka, 40 °C
installation; velvet, threads, turned-off fluorescent lamps
2021

In the Tibetan language, *thanka* literally means "flat painting," which is the most common type of embroidered appliqué, a scroll that can be rolled up and easily transported. It is used in meditation as a tool for visualising various aspects of the mind. Its central part is taken up by a mandala, the image of the chosen buddha or demon, depending on what is currently being meditated on. *Thankas* may be hung in monasteries or private homes, they are ceremoniously carried in processions.

The non-figurative nature of Sokolnicka's work encourages the viewer to stare at the surface of the fabric. Stretched between two deactivated fluorescent lamps, the velvet cloth refers to the tradition of abstract art. Discoloration on its surface was caused by fading due to the action of light. Gradients of alternating yellow or golden stripes resemble Earth's geological structure or the technique of applying paint on the underpainting with a broader brush. Yellow ochre has been used by man since ancient times, and in Buddhism gold is the colour of the earth, wisdom and balance. The temperature in the title of the work emphasises the rate of ice melting on the Roof of the World, which is caused by the unsustainable global economy.

The adjacent work *Faded Velvet*, made with ink on cardboard, reflects the pattern of stripes visible in *Thanka, 40 °C*, only on a smaller scale.

13.
The Melting of Glaciers
installation; limestone, Carrara marble, glass, rock crystal, thread, brass, photo filter
2021

The small installation, thematically corresponding to *Thanka, 40°C*, has been arranged from various found elements. Due to its size, it resembles a cabinet sculpture with a natural theme. Presenting a natural disaster as a visually attractive motif can be seen as an attempt to simultaneously make it more familiar and remote. The year 2021 turned out to be exceptionally difficult for Himalayan glaciers. Their melting period usually coincides with the summer monsoon (lasting from April to September), but this year's weather anomalies extended this period by four months. In January, weather stations recorded maximum temperatures above the freezing point for eight days. On 13 January 2021, the temperature in the Mount Everest area peaked at 7°C.

14.
Post-growth Cone
installation; concrete, soil, gold, neon
2021

A form that accumulates goodness for an uncertain future, intended to encourage the reduction of production and consumption. The cone has been laid out of pressed soil-blocks on a foundation made of development waste. This kind of *stupa* (Buddhist religious building) is a homage to the degrowth* dream. The base of the cone is a concrete block, and the dried blocks of the nutritious, pressed soil are "cultures" for new seeds. A stream of neon light is flowing down the cone, on top of which a gilded nugget has been placed. The artist herself explains that the work refers to the Benjaminian metaphor of progress as a chaotically growing ruin of history.

*a term used both by political, economic and social movements as well as in many theories criticising the economic growth paradigm.

15.
Death Valley, 52°C
installation; concrete, reed, lamp, brass, gold
2021

Death Valley is a drainless depression area in the Mojave Desert in southern California. It is famous for its extreme weathers: the highest recorded temperature was 56°C (in 1920), and the average air humidity is 1%. The ubiquitous concrete and rising average global temperatures are a hellish combination that has turned drought into a global problem. This year's heat wave matched the record-breaking temperature from 100 years ago. Scientists specialising in this issue indicate human activity as the decisive factor influencing climate change.