

**BWA**

13.09–10.11.24

SIC! BWA Wrocław  
9/10 Kościuszki Sq.

**How  
to Talk to the  
Weather Deacons**



In Slavic mythology, weather demons (*planetnicy*) were creatures responsible for atmospheric phenomena—especially rainfall and storms. In our day, when weather anomalies have become the new norm and the climate crisis makes itself felt in consecutive floods and droughts, people feel an increasing urge to control nature. It is still difficult for us to comprehend the gravity of the current climate crisis. We see salvation in technology and progress, believing in it as blindly as we once believed supernatural creatures had control over the weather.

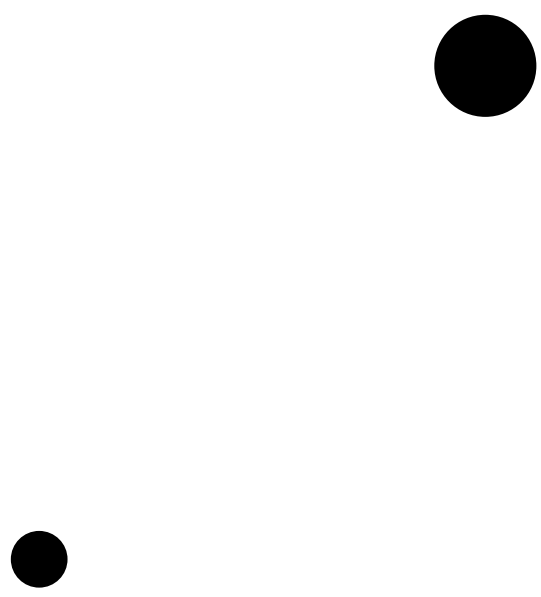
The *How to Talk to the Weather Demons* collective exhibition focuses on water as a key resource for survival and a common good we are destroying. The artists tackle such issues as river regulation, access to drinking water, and the modification of the weather, while also calling attention to social problems tied to water.

Being independent of humanity's needs and whims, the weather has been the subject of beliefs and rituals since the dawn of time. Negotiating with gods and demons through dances, spells, and prayers for the sun or rain to appear was eventually replaced by technological experiments. For centuries, humanity has explored the limits and capabilities of affecting atmospheric conditions. An example of attempts to alter the weather is the hail cannon, whose use goes back to 1895, though shooting into the clouds was practiced in Europe as far back as the fourteenth century, owing to a conviction that sound changes the weather.

Excitement over the capabilities of technology to impact the weather led to the mass production of cannons and numerous scientific conferences in the nineteenth century. A similar wave of enthusiasm, now centered in the United States, swept through the twentieth century from World War II to the 1980s. During this time, Bernard Vonnegut, an American atmospheric physicist, studied the effects of silver iodide on the reaction between ice crystals and water drops in order to modify precipitation. These experiments were even found in literature, serving as the basis for *Cat's Cradle*, a science-fiction novel by his brother, Kurt Vonnegut, whose main motif is research on a mysterious substance code-named "Ice-nine."

The present surge in research on cloud-seeding to cause rain is conducted mainly in the United Arab Emirates and China, used as propaganda by dictatorships to "chase away" clouds during their leaders' speeches and by private companies selling these cannons as the best way to protect crops or greenhouses. This is in spite of the fact that the efficacy of hail cannons has never been scientifically proven, and cloud-seeding has been proven effective only in special laboratory conditions. At the same time, plenty of research has shown that what really has a serious impact on precipitation, particularly in the depths of continents, is hundreds of kilometers of forests and wetlands, and not specialty technologies whose efficacy remains disputed.

This conclusively shows that we cannot take a "business as usual" attitude to the climate crisis, counting on technological progress to save us from the droughts and hurricanes, and we need to change our extractivist approach, focused on economic growth whatever the cost. There is a flip side to this situation as well. Not everything ascribed to the climate crisis is directly tied to it. The climate catastrophe has become a convenient



alibi—a cover for industry and business to keep on ravaging the environment. The damage arising from exploitation of resources is blamed on climate change. And so, for instance, the low water level in the Vistula is closely connected to the mass extraction of sand from the bed of the river, flash floods are caused by the clear-cutting of forests (especially in mountain terrains) and the widespread mania for concrete, the increased salinity of rivers comes from mining dumps, and some lakes (such as Ostrowski Lake near Przyjezierz) have dried up as a direct result of the nearby surface mining. This last connection is explained by Diana Lelonek, who features in the exhibition: “for the mine to operate, the groundwater has to be pumped out. This leads to what is called a ‘cone of depression’—the nearby groundwater flows into the surface mine, drying out the vicinity.” We would not hear so much about “climate migration” if politicians managed water properly, ensuring fair access to it.

## **Diana Lelonek**

### ***Sky Gives Back***

**1**

Sound design: Joanna Szczęsnowicz

Diana Lelonek’s sound work is the result of field research in Siechnice, outside Wrocław, home to Citronex, which produces tomatoes. They have been using hail cannons for several years to protect their vulnerable greenhouses. Various standpoints were expressed in conversations with the locals, as well as bureaucrats and company representatives. These were joined by calling attention to sounds emitted by the cannons over half an hour, at seven-second intervals. The artist joined sound designer Joanna Szczęsnowicz in making an installation to experience sounds like those the cannons produce. This is a symbolic reversal of the situation: the sound comes from above, it falls.



## **Marta Krześlak**

### ***The Melting Iceberg***

**2**

From the collection of the Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź

The landscapes created in Marta Krześlak’s objects do not normally exist in reality, or may soon cease to exist. These are objects of a “past future,” speaking of a future that is not to come, which we have lost. They join a nostalgia for the past (personal or otherwise) with an anxiety about the future (in a global, planetary sense). Glaciers and mountain snow are the main sources of drinking water. Yet the glaciers are melting, vanishing. Switzerland’s Pizol and Iceland’s Okjökull have even had funerals. It is estimated that in seventy years, eighty percent of the world’s glaciers will be gone. The rising sea and ocean levels, release of methane gas, rise in temperatures, loss of natural animal habitats—these are only some consequences of the degradation of permafrost. Yet we still treat nature as a resource to be endlessly plundered. In 1949, oceanographer John Isaacs came up with the idea of hauling an iceberg from Alaska to California. This was meant to solve the drought problem. In 2018, when the water levels dropped critically in Capetown and Day Zero was said to be approaching, there was talk of shipping a fragment of a glacier from Antarctica. Meanwhile, the effects of these actions are lamentable and, in the long term, they exacerbate the crisis.



## **Diana Lelonek** **Glacier du Rhône**

3

The topic of melting glaciers and other anthropogenic changes in the landscape has been present in this artist's work for several years. Diana Lelonek always does in-depth study before making her works, to get a firm grasp of the pressing issues and capture them in the form of her art. The photograph shows the Rhône Glacier in the Swiss Alps covered in swaths of material. The white fabric, reflecting the sun's rays, was meant to impede its melting. The main aim of this undertaking did not come, however, from concern for the environment, it was about maintaining income from tourism: so long as glaciers exist, tourists will pay to look at them. Over time, using large-format fabrics to slow the melting of glaciers generated negative effects. The fabric gets dirty and is less and less effective at reflecting the light, the temperature increases between fabric and ice and, worst of all, the polyester fibers from the disintegrating material mix with the melting water at the very source of the river, polluting the entire Rhône with vast quantities of microplastics. Considering the financial cost and ill effects of covering glaciers with geotextiles, it begs the question if it would not be better to spend these millions on complex solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—the main cause of the glaciers melting?

## **Alicja Patanowska**

### **Fountain 1: A History of Many Weaves** 4

Alicja Patanowska has specially created a ceramic fountain with sculpted objects for this exhibition. Using an intricate and fragile form, the artist shows the complexity of the climate catastrophe through the example of water circulation. This fountain recalls a park decoration and encourages respite, yet its symbols—animals, plants, industry, farming, raw materials—suggest we cannot rest easy. When we take a broader perspective, factors that seem remote from one another form a network of relationships that is hard to break apart. Human and non-human actors appear together on the "stage" of this catastrophic fountain. Water flowing in a closed circuit washes over them, showing a circle of dependencies. Observing how essential water is in so many spheres of life, we swiftly realize that these needs and interests are often mutually exclusive. Let us try to name a few: water is used on a vast scale by the coal industry—in Poland it accounts for sixty-four per cent of the country's total water consumption. Monoculture plantations lead to clear-cutting forests, which naturally store water in a region. Pesticides used in agriculture seep into groundwater, and then into animals' bodies.

Women living in areas with water shortages must give up on education to devote time to getting drinking water from a local town or traveling cistern. In countries like Mexico, where mafia business poses a threat to protected natural areas and native populations, there are many abductions and homicides of environmental activists. Forests are natural fountains for the hydrologic cycle. Trees suck water from the ground with their roots and release it as steam through their leaves in the transpiration process. "Sky rivers" can form over forests—streams of moisture in which clouds form and which transport water many kilometers on, releasing it as rain. The disappearance of precipitation is directly tied to the leveling of tropical forests, which disrupts the hydrologic cycle. A local inspiration in creating this work was the concept of water circulation in the city by Janusz Szymański, a landscape architect who designed an as-yet-unrealized arrangement of the courtyard in the KDM (Kościuszko Residential District) neighborhood, where the SIC! gallery is located. Szymański stressed that the water in the courtyard "improves the microclimate, making the plants grow better and helping the people get a healthier rest."

## **Kornelia Dzikowska-Demirska**

### **Contribution and Negative** 5

From the collection of the POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews

This installation is made of a glass object filled with water. The form alludes to a mykvah—a pool or bathhouse used in Jewish culture and tradition for ritual cleansing. The water should come from a natural source (e.g. rain), and the person participating in the ritual is meant to immerse their entire body in it. This work calls our attention to the fact that we need water not only to survive, but it is an important factor in many religious (and secular) rituals. The holy books also speak of water. "The Talmud has over one hundred references to rain, and the most famous of prayers, the Shema Yisrael, says a lack of rainfall is a punishment for failing to observe the lord's commandments" writes Szymon Opryszek in his book *Woda: Historia pewnego porwania* (Water: The Story of an Abduction). The fact that water is an important part of religious rituals is visible in the usage charts, which spike every Friday in Israel. In the context of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, water takes on another dimension—it is a key factor in waging wars. We can speak of Jerusalem through its water history. Then we should recall the ancient source and pool of Siloam, which ensured peace between Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and the reconstruction of a hydraulic network and change in the flow of the Jordan River; the use of water as a means of

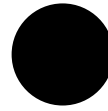
sabotage; the central management of water by the national Mekorot waterworks; the prohibition since the 1960s on Palestinians building new water installations without the Israeli army's permission; a water apartheid. In July 2023 Israeli soldiers destroyed wells and irrigation systems in Hebron on the West bank, leaving over a million Palestinians without access to clean water. Water has been a cause and a means of waging wars since the dawn of time. Probably the world's first conflicts, fought thousands of years ago, broke out because of unequal access to water. The great wetlands in Polesia and the Smoleńsk Gate that gave access to them were key elements in many wars, including the Polish-Bolshevik conflict in 1919. During World War II the Nazis used the metaphor of mud and swampland to dehumanize people. During the Vietnam War, under the code name Operation Popeye, American pilots seeded clouds to extend the monsoon season. At present, one of Ukraine's ways of defending itself against the Russian invasion is blowing up dams on the rivers. A list of historical and ongoing conflicts on water is kept by the Pacific Institute.



**Cecylia Malik / Siostry Rzeki**  
**skirts prepared for the *Let's Give Space to Rivers, and Safety to People* happening in Chobienia and Lubiąż on the Oder** 6

Siostry Rzeki (River Sisters) is a woman's environmental art collective that uses happenings, protests, actions in the public space, exhibitions, and workshops to protect wild and unregulated rivers. In 2015, the seven-kilometer stretch of the Oder between Domaszków and Tarchalice in the Wołów Region regained its breath. The right embankment was removed, allowing it to safely overflow when it swells. The Oder gained over six hundred hectares of floodlands. This eliminated the risk of reflooding in the surrounding areas, which suffered considerably during the flood in 1997. To celebrate this moment, Cecylia Malik and Maruna (Małgorzata Grodzka) designed skirts for a Siostry Rzeki happening. Their width is meant not only to remind us that rivers are not confined to their riverbeds, they are whole ecosystems, in which floodlands play a key role. Embankments have not since been removed from further segments of the Oder on a similar scale, nor from other Polish rivers. The dominant narrative, especially from those lobbying for inland sailing, is for maintaining the embankments to protect against floods. Meanwhile, just the reverse is true—safety (in terms of both floods and droughts) might come from giving rivers space to self-regulate.

There are many more advantages. Swamplands, peat bogs, and riparian forests created around flooded rivers are not just safety features, they also absorb carbon dioxide; they are terrains of high retention and homes for endangered species, such as some birds. They work like natural water storehouses, "sponges" holding water in the soil, keeping it from pouring into the seas and oceans. The colorful outfits and unusual happenings of the River Sisters are an example of how art can help bring change by stirring curiosity.



**Agnieszka Mastalerz**  
**and Michał Szaranowicz**  
***Sluice*** 7

*Sluice* came about as a commentary on the construction of apartment housing estates in Port Praski in Warsaw. Initially, Agnieszka Mastalerz and Michał Szaranowicz turned their attention to changes in the social urban fabric with the new housing investments. In an altered set-up, prepared for the exhibition at the SIC! BWA Wrocław gallery, the work acquires new significance. It pertains to two ways people use rivers: for business exploitation and harmonious coexistence with nature. A key element of the investment is the water sluice—a condition necessary for building a housing estate, and also a major disruption to the river's ecosystem. The sluice was created in 2019, a year after Mastalerz and Szaranowicz's work was finished. Capital was the decisive argument for the fate of the common good that is the river. The investor in the housing estate is Zygmunt Solorz-Żak, one of the wealthiest Poles, owner of Polsat and the ZE PAK coal company, which has been running such greenwashing campaigns as the Uniejów Earth Festival for years. The situation is aptly summed up by Jan Mencwel in his recent book *Hydrozagadka* (The Water Riddle): "Owing to the sluice the billionaire could seriously think about building more apartment blocks on the old Warsaw swampland. [...] The building development is to be as dense as possible, and the apartment windows [...] will give onto a panoramic view of the Vistula. The same Vistula whose sand doubtless was used to build them." The dark, stuffy space in which *Sluice* is housed causes discomfort. We feel as if we are in a trap. A trap not unlike those formed by structures that dam a river's natural flow for the organisms living in it, making it difficult for micro-organisms and animals to travel freely. *Sluice* could also have an optimistic aspect: the oyster shells could be associated with another Vistula phenomenon. Just a few kilometers from Port

Praski, on the same river, people “cooperate” with animals. Drinking water in Warsaw gets to the taps after passing through thick-shelled river mussels. Like other shellfish, these mussels are sensitive to changes in the make-up of water. When they sense impurities, they close their shells to protect themselves. This mechanism is used as a bioindicator system—thanks to the mussels we know the water in the Gruba Kaśka intake is sufficiently clean.

## Centrala (Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone De Iacobis)

### *Synoptic Game*

8

Collaboration: Zofka Kofta

Water circulates in a hydrologic cycle. There’s always the same amount on Earth, but the renewal of fresh drinking water depends on atmospheric conditions. The Centrala design group has prepared a game about weather phenomena. The several dozen cards have meteorological photographs, names, descriptions, and symbols. Some are well known, but others, owing to climate change, are gone, or the regions of their occurrence have changed. The words used to describe them have vanished as well. The extinction of a species (or, in this case, the disappearance of weather phenomena) is sometimes called a double extinction crisis—the phenomenon/species vanishes, and with it, the word and a whole range of connected connotations, a stock of knowledge and traditions. This game recovers vanishing synoptic phenomena, or at least restores memory of words used to describe them. In the instructions, Centrala use the concept of “ocean of air” coined by Alexander von Humbolt to describe the Earth’s atmosphere. This ocean is made of water in all its states, and its course is shown by the synoptic phenomena on the cards.

**anthropogenic climate change** – climate change mainly caused by human activity. Today’s climate change (which has been underway for around 100 years) is anthropogenic in nature, as all major science centers agree; the main cause of this is the hothouse gases we emit. This does not mean that all people are equally to blame for global warming.

**environmental engineering** – engineering projects aiming to preserve the balance of the natural environment and its capabilities to self-regenerate.

**extractivism** – a model of capitalism based on unlimited exploitation of natural resources, particularly extracting raw materials and then exporting the profits or products abroad.

**geoengineering** – intentional, large-scale manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological aspects of the Earth’s ecological system to counteract climate change.

**hydrocolonialism** – purchasing land in the countries of the global south to take control of the water found there and draw financial profit, thus depriving local residents of access to drinking water.

**hydrologic cycle** – the natural circulation of water on Earth. It includes processes occurring in the atmosphere (evaporation, condensation, precipitation, the movement of steam), the biosphere (plants gathering water and releasing it in the transpiration process) and in the lithosphere (absorption, underground and surface run-off). The hydrologic cycle includes changes in the state of water concentration and the flow of water through and between ecosystems.

**microplastics** – particles of synthetic materials of a diameter of less than five millimeters. Microplastics enter living organisms (including humans) through water, air, and foodstuffs. They are found literally everywhere—in the air, the soil, the oceans, even on Mount Everest or in mother’s milk.

**techno-optimism** – an uncritical faith in the power of technological progress.

**water footprint** – the total quantity of water needed to produce a product.

# How to Talk to the Weather Demons: An Exhibition on Water, Weather, and Climate

Artists: Kornelia Dzikowska-Demirska, Centrala (Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone De Iacobis), Marta Krześlak, Diana Lelonek, Cecylia Malik / Siostry Rzeki, Agnieszka Mastalerz and Michał Szaranowicz, Alicja Patanowska

Curator: Joanna Glinkowska  
Gallery curator: Dominika Drozdowska

BWA Wrocław program: Katarzyna Roj

Exhibition design: Zuzanna Kofta  
Visual identification: Joanna Dyba

Production: Patrycja Ścisłowska  
Promotion: Agata Kalinowska

Networking: Berenika Nikodemaska  
Accessibility: Magdalena Weber

Audience engagement: Anna Kwapisz, Daniel Mroczyński, Zofia Straczycka  
Assembly: Jakub Jakubowicz, Tomasz Koczoń, Marcin Pecyna

Scientific consultation: Prof. Szymon P. Malinowski (Geophysics Institute, University of Warsaw Institute of Atmospheric Physics), Dr. Andrzej Kotarba (Polish Academy of Sciences Center for Outer Space Research, Earth Observation Institute)

Editorial oversight: Joanna Osiewicz-Lorenzutti  
English translation: Soren Gauger

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