

BWA

BWA Wrocław Główny
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11.10.24–26.01.25

The Temple of Tales

The of

a collective
story/exhibition

11.10.2024–
26.01.2025

Artists:

Justyna Baśnik and Paweł Baśnik,
Wanda Bibrowicz, Urszula Broll,
Jagoda Dobecka, Inside Job
(Ula Lucińska, Michał Knychaus),
Paweł Kulczyński, Marta Niedbał,
Stanisław Szukalski, Stach Szumski,
Aleksandra Waliszewska,
Henryk Waniek, Magdalena
Wrońska-Wiater

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Temple of Arts

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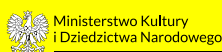
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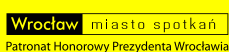
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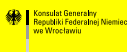


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A Handbook

The point of departure for making this exhibition was the discovery of a peripheral piece of art history—Sagenhalle (Temple of Tales) in Szklarska Poręba, no longer extant. This small wooden construction was built in 1903 on the initiative of Hermann Hendrich (1854–1931), a German painter, Symbolist, and founder of Berlin’s Art Nouveau. Enamored with the Giant Mountains, where he found his place on earth, and with the idea of the **Gesamtkunstwerk** (the total work), he created a small “museum” devoted to the history of the Mountain Spirit (also known as Rübezahl, Liczyrzepa, Karkonosz). The Spirit of the Mountains is a fantastical figure from numerous tales and legends of the Czech/German borderlands, who took on various shapes: from a trickster and guardian of an underground hoard of gemstones, or a Samaritan who is particularly kind to the poor and defenseless, to a god of weather, a sinister demon or a gray-bearded traveler with a hat and walking stick. For this painter, the Mountain Spirit figure was, above all, an embodiment of the power of nature. Hendrich’s large-format canvases presented in the Hall of Tales—expressive landscapes with mountain vistas—thus showed the might and unpredictability of natural phenomena. In eight pictures (**Cloud Wanderer, Goddesses of Spring, Castle of the Giant, Rübezahl’s Garden, Shadow of Clouds, God of Thunder, Misty Women, Sleeping Giant**) he depicted the legend of Rübezahl, interpreting it as a nature myth—the cycle of the four seasons.

Taking a closer look at this remarkable phenomenon, I reached for a small brochure—a guidebook published in 1904—with texts by the German writer Bruno Wille. On the first page we read: “The Hall of Tales is an artistic monument to an old feeling for nature.” This way of phrasing it struck me as especially interesting in light of today’s climate and environmental distress. If 120 years ago artists wanted to leave a monument to “an old feeling for nature,” that meant it must have been forgotten for a time. Perhaps the gesture of creating a temple to nature and evoking a spiritual sense was a response to a feeling that it was more and more remote. It could also have responded to an emerging and not fully conscious intuition that the image of unblemished, wild, nature separate from culture and civilization was ceasing to exist, that the

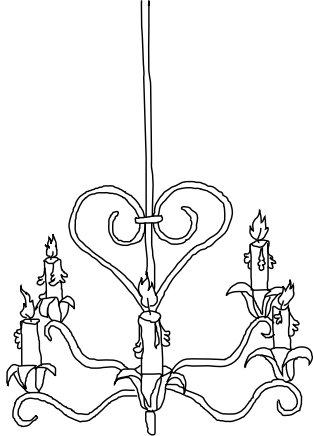
modern world was increasingly bound by various ties. The old story of Sagenhalle inspired in me a need to investigate the present. In an era of environmental crisis, and a crisis of the imagination, how are we to redefine a sense of nature which is quite different from 120 years ago? Might a complex relationship with it, based on an acceptance of what is dark and unwanted, become a contemporary “religion” to save us from our impasse and catastrophe? We have a lot to say at present about our connection to nature, particularly in terms of politics and the climate crisis. Each of us has our own approach. Apart from attempting the hard management of its resources, we should also find a place for a spiritual bond.

The Temple of Tales replicates the gesture of Sagenhalle. The exhibition’s construction resembles the floor plan of a church. The parts are divided into a nave, chapels, and crypts. The nave reinterprets the meanings behind Sagenhalle: the nearness of the Giant Mountains and experience of nature, regional identity (the vitality of legends, myths), sanctity (the appearance of a temple), the figure of Rübzahl and the bond between his body and the landscape (shown in pictures where he is the main character). Karkonosze artists whose works deal with the Mountain Spirit are: Stach Szumski, Urszula Broll, Henryk Waniek, Wanda Bibrowicz, and Magdalena Wrońska-Wiater. The sketches by Stanisław Szukalski relate to identity and temples. The connection between the body and the landscape—or in rather, its oppressiveness—appear in the menacing gouaches of Aleksandra Waliszewska. Marta Niedbał’s works speak of the physical and spiritual experience of nature.

The chapels and crypts surrounding the nave create a contemporary version of the temple, which ties in to the idea of the Hall of Tales. Here artists can weave their speculative, fantastical tales (after all, the German *sagen* means “to tell”). The works presented here orbit around the point of departure, but Sagenhalle hovers like a specter in the background. The crypts bring the whole thing closer to the notion of the “synthesis of arts,” introducing sound and moving images. In their dark depths, on the opposite sides of the wings, you’ll find works by Jagoda Dobecka and Paweł Kulczyński. The chapels, in turn, have been composed like the links of a chain, one next to another, in a narrative created by Paweł and Justyna Baśnik, and the Inside Job duo (Ula Lucińska and Michał Knychaus). The former presents an alternate version of the history of religion, the latter depicts the world after the catastrophe, in which technology and nature are linked for good.

Joanna Kobylt

Nave



Urszula Broll *Jan in Extenso*

oil on canvas, 111 × 60 cm, 2003

Urszula Broll saw the Mountain Spirit, the main protagonist of the Hall of Tales, as a symbol of a spiritual journey. Previously tied to the esoteric Oneiron group working out of Katowice, in the 1980s she moved to Przesieka, near Jelenia Góra. The proximity of the mountains and nature were extremely vital to all of her later artistic and personal life. Here she could finally follow her Buddhist path of development. She painted mountain landscapes, which she called emotional states. She gave herself to tranquil meditation, achieving spiritual harmony. Broll's paintings—far from art conceived as creating objects—evolved toward what she called “art as yoga.” This practice freed her from the demands and criteria of the art world, but also situated her outside the mainstream narrative in Polish art history.

The titular Jan is one of the names given to the fantastical figure of Rübzahl, probably connected to the Christianization and “humanization” of his demonic pagan appearance. According to some theories, the old man with the walking stick and long beard was inspired by depictions of Saint John the Baptist. Yet in this artist's work, we do not find the anthropomorphic figure. At the bottom of the picture we see abstract, symmetrical forms, perhaps alluding to a mandala—a symbol of harmony and spiritual balance. The sharp outline of rocks visible in the background, on the other hand, is Turnia Popiela (Popiel's Crag) in the Śnieżne Kotły (Snowy Pits), previously known as Rübzahl-Zahnstocher (Rübzahl's Toothpick). The peak's contemporary name came from the postwar process of “degermanizing” the history of Karkonosze, evoking Popiel, the legendary ruler of the proto-Polish tribes. The rock formations might also remind us of the Holy Mountain of Meru, the central point of the universe in Buddhist cosmology, a symbol of a spiritual journey and a striving for enlightenment, for higher states of consciousness.

Henryk Waniek

Rübezahl

oil on canvas, 65 × 54 cm, 2002

As with Urszula Broll, Karkonosze occupy a special place in the art of Henryk Waniek. The landscapes of Sudetenland, with their legends and spirituality, are among the most important sources of inspiration for and a backdrop of his work. Nature and mountains are a symbolic space reflecting inner experiences and spiritual exploration. This is demonstrated by the title, **Rübezahl**. The horned demon of the title hovers over a mountain range, and lightning shoots from his open hands. Paradoxically, however, the most interesting part is not the fantastical creature, resembling an impish faun. When we look more closely at the figure at the bottom of the picture, we discover it is a self-portrait. The artist showed himself on a mountain hike with his characteristic hat and stick. Equipped with these attributes, he looks like the Mountain Spirit himself. For Waniek, entering the mountains is a metaphysical journey in which you can feel a connection to the universe and the isolation he craved. It seems this personal moment has been captured on the canvas.

Sagenhalle was an inspiration for and the main theme of Henryk Waniek's essay "The Hall of Legends in a State of Collapse." In an erudite manner, the artist describes its history and eccentric originator. He points out an amusing fact: this was a prosperous and profitable tourist attraction. Most important, however, it places the ruin of this peculiar building that burned down in the 1950s on the map of the storied history of the "Regained Territories" (or as other prefer: "Claimed Territories") and the tourism that erupted in communist Poland. We can see signs of the tourist boom at present in the rising prices of plots of land around Szklarska Poręba. The state of collapse thus concerns not only the spiritual aspect, but the material and spatial ones as well, which include both the neglect of cultural heritage and the commercialization of the region. The spread of tourism, especially in postwar times, caused places like Szklarska Poręba to transform into spaces that gradually lost their original cultural and historical value, hoping to turn a quick profit. This makes Sagenhalle a symbol of how, confronting a growing need for history in tourist sites, mythology and art can be pushed aside by pragmatic commercial concerns.

Wanda Bibrowicz

White Raven

tapestry, 173 × 68 cm, ca. 1908

Rübezahl

pencil crayon on cardboard, 30 × 20 cm, 1939

Wanda Bibrowicz definitely saw Sagenhalle with her own two eyes. In 1911–19 this artist ran the Silesian Weaving Workshops in Szklarska Poręba (then known as Schreiberhau). At that time, she participated in the arts colony Hermann Hendrich belonged to, and the folk legends of the Polish/German/Czech borderlands were a recurring motif in her poetic and symbolic works. Some saw her as a keeper of pagan beliefs, especially Slavic ones. The color palette in her textiles was inspired by the Karkonosze landscape and colors of the changing seasons.

White Raven comes from the early period of Wanda Bibrowicz's work and one of its interpretations points to the legend of Rūbezahl. The raven is an animal attributed to the Mountain Spirit. He appeared before people disguised as this bird in numerous tales and legends. When something extraordinary occurs on a mountain trail, suggesting his presence, the appearance of a raven dispels all doubt. In Nordic mythology, two ravens named Memory and Thought accompany Wotan, whose local equivalent, according to Hendrich, was Rūbezahl. Another interpretation is that the white and black ravens in the tapestry are incarnations of the Slavic gods Chernobog and Belobog. Another piece by Wanda Bibrowicz alluding to the Mountain Spirit is a lost tapestry of 1939. It was made in the last days before World War II, when the artist was in Plinz. She probably felt the urge to make it owing to her longing for Karkonosze, where she spent her youth. Although we have only the sketch, we know it depicted Rūbezahl as a bearded oak, whose left branch holds a bird's nest of twigs as if in the palm of a hand, and whose right embraces a deer.

Stach Szumski

Krkonoš

jacquard, 150 × 200 cm, 2024

Jacquard Tests Vol. 1

jacquard, 150 × 200 cm, 2024

The Birth of Insane Temple

110 × 500 cm, 2024

Stach Szumski's work displays a demonic, pagan version of Krkonoš. The hybrid figure seen on the jacquard fabric alludes to the Riphean Devil—the oldest depiction of the Mountain Spirit, a figure from a map by Martina Helwig, dating back to 1561. On his first map of the region just past Kowary, amid the Risenengebirge hills, this Silesian cartographer put a horned creature with a devil's tail, hooves, and the head of a griffon, holding a walking stick. There was nothing else among the rocky peaks; no churches, no homes, no people. This is the land

of Růbezahel. The creature drawn by Helwig shows the pagan origins of the Mountain Spirit, probably tied to the cult of the Lába River. According to some, he may have been the Svetovit or the Flins deity worshiped in the Ižera Mountains, from whom Bad Flinsberg (Świeradów Zdrój) gets its name.

Szumski's work at the **Temple of Tales** exhibition is a contrast to the sculpture by Hugo Schuchardt in the foyer to the Sagenhalle, which showed the Mountain Spirit as "the medieval people remembered him"—as an old man with a walking stick and a long beard. This image corresponded to the one imposed in the Christianization process. The strange and diabolical **Krkonoš** emerges from budding organic forms in Szumski's interpretation, displaying a peculiar and many-sided nature. His frame is composed of many small parts: wavy lines, pulsing patches of color, and body parts from various creatures, creating a fantastical, mutating figure. The Mountain Spirit on this textile has another peculiar quality—multiplicity. This trait might be understood as a multitude of symbiotic connections, micro- and macrocosmoses, subjects, stances, and strategies inside an interspecies community. The old pagan Růbezahel might symbolize new ways of perceiving relations with nature, which is not a separate being, but a multitude with which we are inextricably bound.

Stach Szumski

Kostra Krkonoš 1

installation; wood, screws, 300 × 200 × 300 cm, 2024

Kostra Krkonoš 2

installation; wood, screws, 150 × 200 × 100 cm, 2024

Pillar of the Woodworm

installation; wood, 400 × 50 × 50 cm, 2024

Stach Szumski is inspired by the nature of Karkonosze, and especially the forms of life found in the forest. He is fascinated by slime molds, lichens, and fungi, but his works often touch upon not only the fascinating biology of those organisms, but also forest plant cultivation policies. In the installations at the exhibition, the choice of wood has symbolic significance. In creating them, the artist used dead wood he found in a monocultural Alpine spruce forest that was planted by human hand. The trees growing in the lower shelf region replaced the original deciduous beech and oak-hornbeam forests. Because of settlements, agriculture, and consequently, a growing need for wood, these lands were almost entirely deforested by the eighteenth century. The original forests were

replaced by quick-growing single-species plantations. This, in turn, affected the balance of the ecosystem, which, together with the acid rain caused by pollution from thermal power plants and power stations on the Polish/German/Czech borders, led to environmental catastrophe in the 1990s in Sudetenland. Another name for this process is the “death spiral of a forest ecosystem,” essentially the simultaneous action of factors of various origins: anthropogenic (industrial pollution, plantation), biotic (species composition, age, bacteria, fungi), and abiotic (climate, temperature, rainfall, soil). Owing to the present considerable reduction of industrial emissions in the region and the new approach to forest management, the results of this disaster are less and less visible in the Sudetenland region. This does not solve our problems, however. Spruce forests decrease the retention of mountain areas, which in turn leads to flooding. As I was handing over this text for the artist’s approval, I never suspected the Jelenia Góra Valley and Karkonosze region would soon be experiencing the nightmare of a flood.

Rübezahl was often identified with a tree, especially one with an odd appearance—twisted and bent by the highland climate. It even had a German name: **Krummholz**. In the Sagenhalle guidebook, we read: “This monster almost makes us believe that the knotty, gnarled tree miraculously uprooted itself from the mountain earth and now boldly walks among us.” The titular **kostra** means “skeleton” in Czech. These forest skeletons are recalled by many people who have explored the nature of Karkonosze and might symbolize the loops that occur in ecosystems.

Stanisław Szukalski, *Temple, 10 IX 1923,*

photograph of a drawing, 15.7 × 13.8 cm, ca. 1925

Design for a Temple, 1924,

photograph of a drawing, 13.8 × 16.7 cm, 1925

Temple

photograph of a drawing, 14.1 × 18.3 cm, 1925

In creating Sagenhalle, Hermann Hendrich saw nature and culture in terms of local identity. In the guide to the temple we read of an “old German feel for nature.” In the Silesian Rübezahl the painter saw an incarnation of Wotan, the Germanic god of war, victory, the dead, whirlwinds, and bad weather. Though Sagenhalle was not meant to introduce a strictly nationalistic program, its creator did hearken to Romantic folk ideas tied to the concept of the nation and was lauded by the Volkist creative scene, which promoted national and ethnic values through art, often with a racist slant. If we were

to see the structure through a nationalist lens and try to find a similar idea in Poland, certain analogies might be found in Stanisław Szukalski's **Duchtynia**. This controversial sculptor, painter, drawer, art theorist, and founder of the Szczep Rogate Serce art group often shocked people with his behavior and radical views. Myths were the main drive behind Szukalski's fantasies, particularly an old Polish legend that is repeated to this day: the tale of Prince Krak and the dragon. This legend of the origins of the Polish state became the direct point of departure for the concept of his secular temple. It was meant to be created in the Dragon's Cave at Wawel and serve the contemplation of the cultural and historical beginnings of Poland. The artist proposed cutting through the ceiling of the cave and joining it with the Wawel Cathedral. The name and idea of the Duchtynia was a reference to the Slavic temples. In his manifesto, Szukalski wrote: "Our forefathers called their sacred place [...] a **Gontyna** or **Kontyna**, where the white steed of the Sviatovid arrived, and the Temple is the place where Świątek stood. And so [...] it will be called Duchtynia, because there the Spirit of the Reborn Poland shall reside." The various designs Szukalski crafted foresaw that a marble pillar would stand in the interior illuminated by an oculus, and on that pillar would stand a great sculpture of the Svetovit. The four-headed figure was meant to be four Polish heroes on a white horse, an attribute of a pagan God. They were to be: Piłsudski staring east, Casimir the Great turned to the south, Copernicus facing the west, and finally, Mickiewicz looking to the north.

Szukalski's bizarre concept based on pagan beliefs was undoubtedly inspired by Slavic sites of worship closely tied to nature. The role of the temples was originally played by trees designated by the sect, as well as glades and sacred forests for worshipping the power of nature. "Descending" to the dragon's lair, Szukalski touched something dark and primordial. Although in the legend conquering evil was the founding myth of Krakow, we can imagine a quite different storyline. The reptile is not conquered (in many cultures a dragon symbolizes good fortune), instead the creature becomes a companion for the townspeople. Its presence makes enemy invasions less of a threat.

Magdalena Wrońska-Wiater
*Rzepiór as a Sleeping
Giant—Mały Staw*
(Small Pond)

oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm, 2002

*Rzepiór as the Shadow of
Clouds—Wielki Szyszak*
(Great Wheel)

oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm, 2002

*Rzepiór as a Wandering
Cloud*

oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm, 2002

Magdalena Wrońska-Wiater's series of paintings are copies of Hermann Hendrich's lost works from Sagenhalle, based on visual materials for the permanent exhibition being created at the Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann House (a branch of the Karkonosze Museum). In these eight pictures Hermann Hendrich interpreted the legend of Karkonosze as a nature myth. He saw Rübezahl's adventures as a metaphor for the seasons of the year. The weather god embarks on his lonely journey accompanied by wolves and ravens (*Rzepiór as a Wandering Cloud*). When he descends from the mountains, he finds the goddess of spring has just appeared in the valleys, bathing by a stream, and falls in love with her (*Goddess of Spring*). He decides to kidnap her to his castle (*Rzepiór's Castle*). The goddess tricks her way out with her lover (one of two pictures not reproduced by Wrońska-Wiater; *Rübezahl's Garden*). The infuriated god takes the shape of a cloud and chases after them (*Rzepiór as the Shadow of Clouds—Wielki Szyszak* [Great Wheel]). The lovers manage to get away and Rübezahl flies into a terrible rage and looses a storm (*Rzepiór as the God of Storms—Śnieżne Kotły* [Snowy Pits]). This storm causes the mountain streams and waterfalls to swell, the element of water runs wild all around (missing from the reproductions; *Misty Women*). Exhausted and disappointed, the Mountain Spirit slips into an eternal dream and turns into stone (*Rzepiór as a Sleeping Giant—Mały Staw* [Small Pond]). In this last scene, Hendrich showed the symbolic blindness of faith in gods and demons that Christianity brings. "Rübezahl, Donar, and Wotan retreated to their rough mountain hermitage, secretly worshiped only by the highlanders, abandoned by the new priests. Only the legend persists, though human imaginations sometimes see the Mountain Spirit in the mist, in a snowstorm, or in strange rock formations," Bruno Wille wrote in his guidebook to Sagenhalle.

Looking at Magdalena Wrońska-Wiater's reproductions, we find bodies joining or melting into landscapes. We might get the impression that while the main power of the original works was the expression of the landscape, in these reinterpretations a sensuality and corporeality fused with the landscape prevails. The body of the Mountain Spirit becomes an integral part of the landscape. Nature is not only a backdrop for human activity, as was often the case in Romantic painting, it is an active participant in events, it shapes the protagonists' fates, even becoming the protagonist itself. It is not unequivocally good, nor does it serve human interests, it has its own aims and clear subjecthood, even emotions. The desire for revenge is shown as the menacing shadow of a cloud pursuing the fugitives in *Rzepiór as the Shadow of Clouds—Wielki Szyszak* (Great Wheel). It gives us a chill, as its effects are easy to imagine. Just as it is easy to make nature a subject, giving it an anthropomorphic and anthropocentric form.

Aleksandra Waliszewska

Untitled

21 × 29.7 cm, 2022

Untitled

21 × 29.7 cm, 2022

Untitled

21 × 29.7 cm, 2022

Untitled

21 × 29.7 cm, 2022

Untitled

21 × 29.7 cm, 2022

Untitled

21 × 29.7 cm, 2021

In Aleksandra Waliszewska's gouaches, the landscape is not a safe place, it appears as a source of oppression and violence. What was fairy-tale illustration and a Romantic depiction of the Mountain Spirit in Hendrich here becomes a folksy nightmare. Nature is not a source of relief, on the contrary, it stirs anxiety. The subterranean monsters inhabiting the cellars under people's houses lie in wait for their inhabitants. Yet these huts seem empty, no light burns in their windows. Could the dragons have devoured the locals? Or perhaps the terrified home-dwellers have doused the lamps, hiding from the ravenous beasts, knowing all too well what one false move could cost them? The reptilian monster under the floorboards could also symbolize an archetypal evil lurking underground, a slumbering power that can only be stirred

by the call of history. In another scene we see a mountain topped with a rocky peak shaped like a human hand, its index finger pointing toward the scarlet sky. Below, another hand presses a long-haired human head to the ground with its index finger. The face's grimace clearly shows this mysterious figure is not pleased. As if the same power was also working in the other direction: making it push toward the mountain, press itself mercilessly into the rocky ground. In another work, a nocturne with a strange specter flitting through a dark mountain landscape, a skeleton on a skeletal horse rides across the firmament in a pale dawn. At the bottom of the composition, two sketched figures hold hands and observe the unusual phenomenon. Waliszewska's landscapes seem to illustrate what Thilo von Hahn, the mortally tubercular protagonist of Olga Tokarczuk's *The Empusium: A Health Resort Horror Story*, called "the landscape that kills." In a diseased, near-death vision, the young painter says: "The landscape has consumed us and now is slowly killing us, tearing us to bits. The landscape is the murderer." Bodies in Waliszewska's work, both the human ones that feel the oppression of the natural environment and those that creep out of the landscape and wreak violence, seem inextricably linked.

Marta Niedbał

Sungazing (Alchemical Curtain)

textile, wool on burlap, 400 × 600 cm, 2021

Portal

beech wood, textile, wooden parts,
300 × 280 × 200 cm, 2024

Apnea

beech wood, wool, 150 × 150 × 115 cm, 2023

Marta Niedbał's work focuses on physicality and its fluid boundaries. She does not divide the world into inner and outer. She believes that blurring the distinctions between the two can erode a normative understanding of nature, liberating us from its Romantic image, unspoiled by human hand. "Outside" and "inside" are topologically indeterminate, like a Möbius strip.

Sungazing is a woven alchemist's curtain whose title pertains to meditation practices that involve staring at the sun. Although this method is the source of controversy and could be hazardous, especially for the eyesight, it holds a trace of the old solar cults—a yearning for a religious relationship with the world, especially the planetary system.

In *Apnea*, in turn, the breathlessness of the title plays a key role—the moment "in-between," when an inhalation does not follow the exhalation. A long time without taking

a breath leads to a serious lack of oxygen in the bloodstream, but can be controlled by the conscious practice of a state of deep mindfulness and connection with one's surroundings, particularly with the air. For Niedbał, breathing is an important example of trans-corporeality.

On a physical level, the solar plexus (*plexus solaris*), sometimes called the “abdominal brain,” regulates the frequency of breathing. Because it is closely connected to the nervous system, anxiety can cause it pain—including anxiety caused by the infringement of our physical boundaries. Bodies are porous, and in this porosity they may catalyze changes against the logic imposed upon them. All symbiosis with the environment carries a risk and has its price: a change in a familiar shape, or previous limits of comprehension.

The **Portal** installation is devoted to this perspective; its form recalls a porous creature, a kind of passageway through unwrapped entrails. Made from old rocking chairs, it resembles a figure whose open beech-wood is bent like arms hyperextended in the elbow joints. Its materiality belies a history and tales told on arc-shaped runners. Change is the way of things. We experience it through orifices poised to negotiate: ears, eyes, mouth, nose, vagina, pores. These are portals—places where worlds intermingle.

Niedbał is particularly interested in points of contact, transitional fields. This space is well described by Sophie Strand, author of **We Must Risk New Shapes**. Her philosophy, inspired by symbiogenesis—the coexistence of species which, owing to their mutual interaction, create new life forms—stresses that life, individual or collective, is the result of fusion, cooperation, and constant interaction. This cooperation occurs in the cracks in the body; infringing upon them is a condition for mutual interaction.

West Crypt

Jagoda Dobecka

Living Water

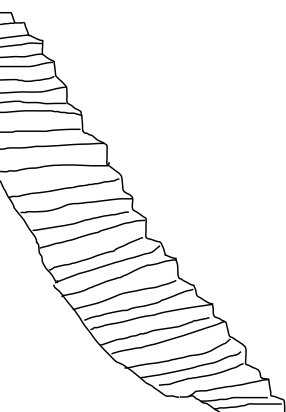
video, 15' 42", 2024

Jagoda Dobecka's film alludes to the philosophical dialog between teacher and pupil. The conversation is between a personified Wilczka stream, flowing through Międzygórze, where it creates a spectacular, twenty-two-meter high waterfall, and a young person concerned about the stream's future. The main axis of the conversation is loss and slow departure—or, in the context of the climate and ecological catastrophe, withering. The Socratic method presumes that one side purposefully shows restraint, seemingly seeking instruction from their interlocutor, while the latter reveals their erroneous views. In this case, however, it is hard to judge which roles the participants have taken. Julka is rational, she uses the scientific method, but her image of the world seems to show a narrow perspective. The Wilczka, in turn, believes in magic, but speaks from the point of view of its long existence, going beyond the human grasp of time and concept of beauty. It polemicizes with the human need to strictly define phenomena. It sees identity as fluid and multi-layered. The title of this oneiric tale alludes to a biblical term, also found in legends and fairy tales. Living water refers to a kind of miraculous font guarded by monsters and demons, providing strength and immortality, resurrecting the dead, restoring eyesight, or breaking curses and spells.

In July, when the film was shot, the water level in the Wilczka stream was exceptionally low, confirming the hydrological state of drought observed in Poland since 1981. As I write these words, we are feeling its most painful consequences. A wave of flooding has hit Międzygórze, and the dam on the Wilczka is breaking. Mount Śnieżnik has been severely deforested in recent years—logging has caused a reduction in the mountain regions' retention capabilities.

Living Water corresponds with one of Hermann Hendrich's pictures from Sagenhalle, **Misty Women**, which depicts nymphs dancing around the Kamieńczyk

waterfall in Szklarska Poręba, swollen and raging after a storm. Its feel is positive, it creates a harmonious vision, in which, after an intense discharge, there is a return to a state of balance. Like the choir song at the film's end, it accentuates the transformation inscribed in the ecological cycle.



Chapel I



The chapel of Justyna and Paweł Baśnik is based on an alternative history of religion, inspired by the teachings of Apollonius of Tyana—a Neo-Pythagorean philosopher of the first century C.E. Like Jesus of Nazareth, Apollonius engaged in public services and was said to have supernatural powers, such as curing the ill and seeing the future. The main premise of his faith was metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls—the conviction that the soul is immortal and goes through various incarnations before achieving spiritual purity. Apollonius also posited avoiding all violence toward living creatures and vegetarianism.

Let's imagine instead of Christianity, it was Apollonism that became the dominant religion for thirty-one per cent of the world's population (2.38 billion followers). Owing to this belief in metempsychosis, consumption of meat and animal products would drop by thirty per cent, reducing global livestock farming. Greenhouse gas emissions, though still present, would be significantly decreased, and farmland could be used for the production of crops. The natural environment would be better protected—cutting down forests, polluting and destroying ecosystems would be serious ethical transgressions, subject to strict regulation. Societies would function in small, self-sufficient communities and cities would be designed to coexist with the natural landscape. The art of Apollonism draws inspiration from nature, sacred geometry, and cosmic harmony, supporting spiritual contemplation.

Paweł Baśnik
Apollonius of Tyana
oil on canvas, 250 × 175 cm, 2024

Paweł Baśnik, Justyna Baśnik
Orpheus Playing to the Animals
jacquard tapestry, 400 × 300 cm, 2024

The chapel's iconography features a monumental likeness of Apollonius of Tyana, rendered in the style of the Greek philosophers or gods. In one hand he holds a

snake, a symbol of healing and renewal, recalling the staff of Asclepius, and in the other, a walking stick—the symbol of a spiritual guide. Apollonius seems to recall the Mountain Spirit, a figure endowed with supernatural powers. One wall also has a tapestry with **Orpheus Playing to the Animals**, symbolizing the archetypal harmony of nature, in which human beings and other creatures coexist. This scene alludes to the wandering of the soul, which can live in either a human or an animal body.

Either side of the tapestry has fossilized reliefs of trilobites, one of the Earth's most ancient creatures. In Apollonism these fossils, like other plant and animal remains, are sacred, reminding us of life's long history on this planet. The center of the chapel has a tabernacle to protect the shell of a deceased ammonite, a prehistoric cephalopod. Its shell inspired the development of the golden ratio theory, considered to be the formula of cosmic harmony.

Paweł Baśnik

Hybrid (1)

oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2024

Hybrid (2)

oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2024

Hybrid (3)

oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2024

Hybrid (4)

oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2024

Hybrid (5)

oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2024

Hybrid (6)

oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm, 2024

Justyna Baśnik

Larix decidua (I), from the
Solastalgia series

acrylic on canvas, 60 × 45 cm, 2024

Larix decidua (II), from the
Solastalgia series

acrylic on canvas, 60 × 45 cm, 2024

Pinus sylvestris (I), from
the *Solastalgia* series

acrylic on canvas, 60 × 45 cm, 2024

Pinus sylvestris (II), from
the *Solastalgia* series

acrylic on canvas, 60 × 45 cm, 2024

Betula pendula (II), from
the *Solastalgia* series

acrylic on canvas, 60 × 45 cm, 2024

Betula pendula (III), from
the *Solastalgia* series

acrylic on canvas, 60 × 45 cm, 2024

Picea abies, from the
Solastalgia series

acrylic on canvas, 250 × 180 cm, 2024

Betula pendula (I), from the
Solastalgia series

acrylic on canvas, 250 × 180 cm, 2024

Tabernakulum, from the
Solastalgia series

plywood, varnish, ammonite (Early Cretaceous),
60 × 31 × 20 cm, 2024

The chapel also has a series of pictures. The first depicts hybrid animals symbolizing the complexity and intermingling of species—it is an image of a multi-species community. The theme of the second series is solastalgia, or ecological grief—an existential anxiety tied to environmental change. These sorts of “new feelings for nature,” the environment, and the whole planet are a new experience that used to be unconscious. Justyna Baśnik’s work commemorates plants native to our climate zone: birch, larch, pine, and spruce. According to current prognoses, if the CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere continues to rise, tree species that constitute seventy-five per cent of Polish forests could disappear. The main causes of the rise in temperatures are agriculture (including deforestation), and above all, industrial production.

Chapel II

Inside Job (Ula Lucińska and Michał Knychaus)

Paradise Rot (The Observer I–III)

multi-part installation; stainless steel, chrome steel, electric cable, linen, organza, silk, LED lamp, soy wax, spray paint, 230 × 200 × 70 cm, 2024

Paradise Rot (The Pond I–IV)

multi-part installation; stainless steel, black steel, electric cable, black pigment, oil, rubber, 155 × 47 × 37 cm, 2024

Paradise Rot (Curtains)

installation; cotton textile, spray paint, changing dimensions, 2024

In these abandoned neo-Gothic interiors built in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a time of flourishing industry, some odd plant-like objects appeared. They are propped up on cast-iron columns, with which they appear to bear a strange resemblance. The wavy lines of the stems shine metallically, and the leaves, sharp as thorns, glisten with steel, occasionally betraying their industrial origins with traces of rust. Most peculiar, however, are what seem to be neither flower cups, nor wispy cocoons crowning their apparently delicate steel stems—inside they glow with an electric light. This initially confusing ambiguity, this connection between the natural and the technological, raises a question: What are these peculiar beings?

We might be reminded of a construction of times past—the Art Nouveau floral ornaments of gas street lamps. It is just as though someone once anticipated this tangle, as if it were inscribed in the course of history. Like a prophetic loop appearing in the present. Yet today, so close to the end of the world as we know it, it seems a natural turn of events—not in a

Romantic way, however. These are relics of the future. “There are thoughts we can anticipate, glimpsed in the distance along existing thought pathways. This is a future that is simply the present, stretched out further,” Timothy Morton wrote in *Dark Ecology*.

*

The Chapel by Inside Job (Ula Lucińska and Michał Knychaus) is a tale of the future that is also an attempt to resolve an impasse, trapped in a Romantic vision of nature as separate from the impact of technology, civilization, and culture. Although we generally have an awareness of these relationships, of the existence of a system of joined vessels, our dualism often imposes a division that is no longer adequate. We can see this at present as the media holds a major discussion on the floods as a result of anthropogenic climate change. Although we have considerable knowledge on the effect of human action on the environment, even scientists’ statements tend to distinguish between nature and civilization. This would seem to be the greatest obstacle in reconstructing our relationship with nature.

The aesthetically-pleasing and disarming work of Ula Lucińska and Michał Knychaus might be seen as phantoms, models serving as exercises to tease out dark and undesirable connections. Our first response is helplessness—strung between states of being, these works elude easy identification. Only an attempt at analysis, dismantling them into their prime components, brings results. Here we have natural materials like canvas or wax, and industrially produced metals and cables. We see parts of a machine-made installation that is then stitched and bent by human hand. Inside Job’s way of working with objects seems to help us understand human and non-human connections and the interspecies community.


The duo’s work has motifs that gain new lives and new incarnations with every showing. The delicate yet sharp metal leaves are such examples, as are the textile cocoons, and the ponds filled with tarry fluid. These mutate into other forms, transform into other works, creating new contexts. This work model seems to correspond with the overtone of their installations.

Paradise Rot is a novel by Jenny Hval. The main protagonist, Jo, a student from Norway, ends up in an old brewery remodeled into apartments. Another resident is a woman ten years older than her, whose melancholy, nearly organic lifestyle begins to fascinate Jo. From that moment on, the story turns into a fever dream, where the space is filled with lushly spreading plants, growing and decaying all at once. The book’s sticky and oppressive atmosphere is both hypnotic and intriguing. The titular paradise reminds us of **Paradise Lost**, which might be read as a symbol of our broken connection with nature. The word “rot” then points us toward decay.

Curiously, this process is not shown as negative, but as part of the life cycle—the dynamic, pulsing presence of many organisms and transformations.



East Crypt



Paweł Kulczyński *33 Hz*

audio installation; wood, speakers, 2024

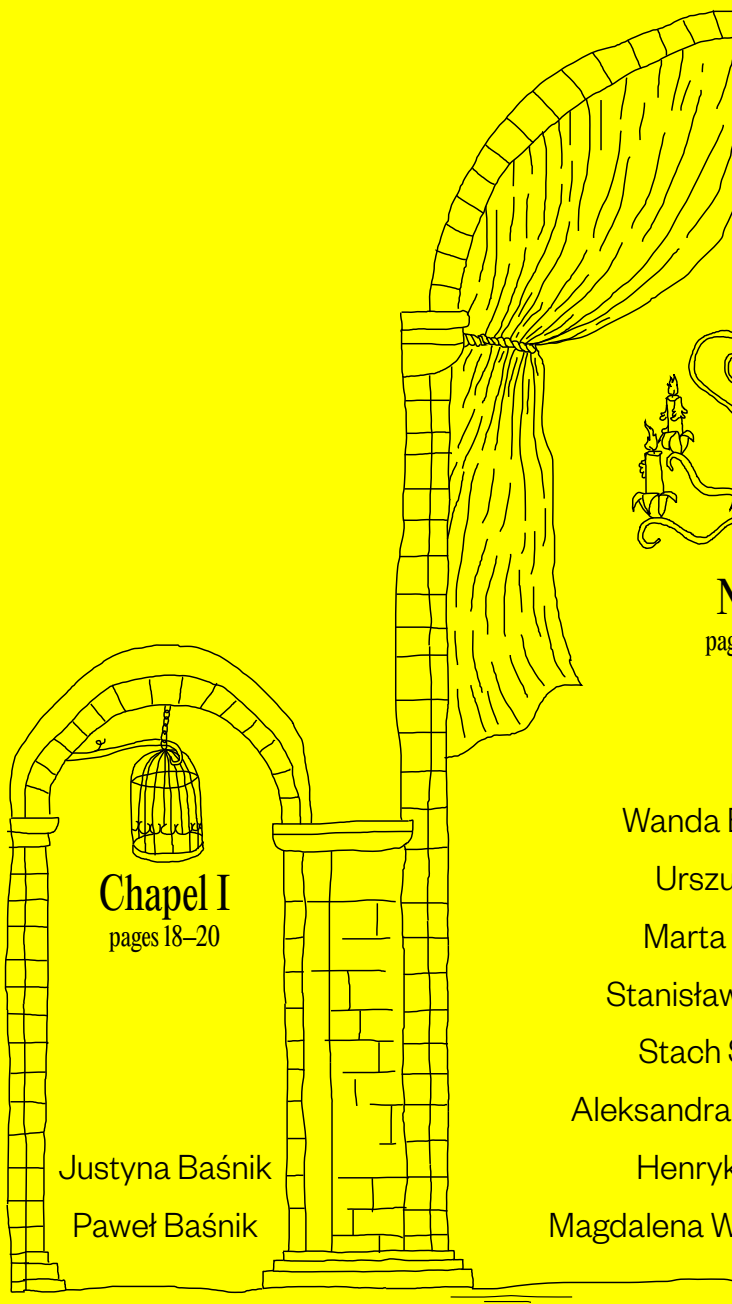
Long, long ago, during the Second World War, a Nazi airplane carrying wounded soldiers tried to escape Breslau during the Red Army invasion. Evacuation was only possible by air, and that meant a night flight through the Karkonosze. There were terrible weather conditions in Sudetenland at the time. A violent blizzard broke out. Turbulence struck the Junkers Ju 52 time and again, until it got blown off course, and flying at a speed of two hundred kilometers per hour, it crashed into the side of Czarny Grzbiet mountain. In telling this story, some say that the Mountain Spirit did not allow the Germans to flee and downed the plane in the oblivion of his land. If we were to tell this story in sounds, we might use the roar of engines and clatter of thunder.

These sounds summon terrifying associations. A violent storm knocking down trees, an earthquake that topples buildings, water bursting its banks and sweeping off everything in its path. The rattle of an engine, the whistle of missiles firing, the screech of sirens, bombs dropping all around. Visions of catastrophe. Can you feel its shadow on your body? When the rib cage, belly, midriff, and throat vibrate, can we still feel secure? The trembling body is the trembling of a collapsing world.

Yet if we suppose that trembling does not foreshadow an invisible danger, it can also be a source of pleasure. Massaging, relaxing, soothing frequencies can make us relax, and even feel good. Yet this requires we temporarily forget the specter of collapse. It is an exercise in falling apart.

In Paweł Kulczyński's installation, the sound is generated by a 2.5-meter organ pipe, an object we associate with church interiors. The air inside it produces low bass notes. Their frequency is contained in the title, 33 Hz, which can be generated by both natural phenomena and by machines. Yet his work does not play with this dualism—we do not experience something natural or technological, but both at once, and their intensity is

similar—they coexist, they do not alternate. We might call it an audio illustration of a dark connection, in which the natural melds with the technological. This sense of ambivalence—both pleasant and disquieting, natural and civilizational—may be the internal practice of experiencing.



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Justyna Baśnik
Paweł Baśnik

Wanda K

Urszu

Marta

Stanisław

Stach S

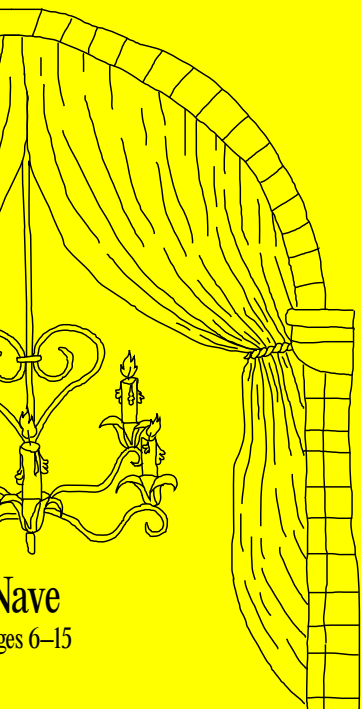
Aleksandra

Henryk

Magdalena W

**West
Crypt**
pages 16–17

Jagoda
Dobecka



Nave

pages 6–15

Bibrowicz

Małgorzata Broll

Wojciech Niedbał

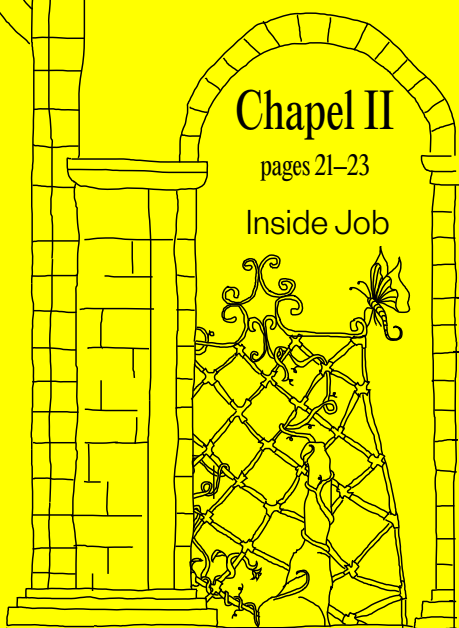
Wojciech Szukalski

Wojciech Szumski

Wojciech Waliszewska

Wojciech Waniek

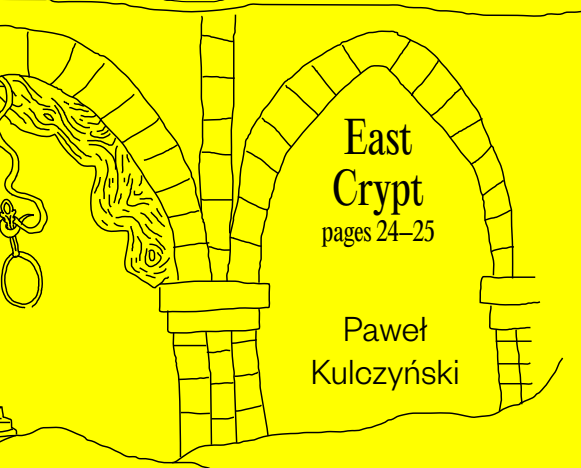
Wojciech Woźńska-Wiater



Chapel II

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Inside Job



East Crypt

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Paweł
Kulczyński

