

BWA

27.03-31.05.2026



Lulu MacDonald

**Where the Light
Won't Reach**

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Lulu MacDonald solo exhibition

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curator: Mika Drozdowska

Where the Light Won't Reach is an exhibition about growing in darkness—understood both literally and metaphorically—through processes undergone beyond the reach of sight, on thresholds of control and visibility. The wellspring for the exhibition was the Rhubarb Triangle, an area in West Yorkshire where rhubarb is grown in absolute darkness and later harvested by candlelight. In Lulu MacDonald's project, this peculiar cultivation technique, enduring and exacting, functions as a metaphor for work performed in "dark" times: precarious, invisible, and yet persisting. The artist asks whether darkness, instead of arousing fear, can provide a cover for activity, growth, and survival.

In this sense, MacDonald's practice hews close to an understanding of hope such as Rebecca Solnit writes about in *Hope in the Dark*—not as a feeling or guarantee of success, but as a form of action under uncertain conditions, when the future remains unpredictable and the efficacy of endeavor is apparent only with time. In the face of present-day ecological, political, and technological instability, this attitude takes on additional meaning as a path for functioning in a reality devoid of fixed reference points.

From this perspective, the history of the Rhubarb Triangle is embedded in the industrial landscape of Yorkshire, an area where for decades mining and horticulture coexisted, and the experience of working in darkness was inherent to various forms of human activity. In the lore of miners, the underground realm was not merely devoid of light but required symbolic domestication through legends, narratives, and imaginings that served cognitive and psychological functions. They provided orientation in a sightless sphere, and sustained the capacity for action despite threat. Storytelling served as an effort as essential as physical labor, even if its yield was intangible.

Against this background, rhubarb cultivated in darkened sheds is subjected to a process termed "forcing": compelling growth through regulation of temperature, humidity, and temporal parame-

ters. This concept reveals a relationship in which development does not arise solely from natural cycles but is achieved via strict management and acceleration. Where coal was once extracted, today it is plant growth that is extracted, in darkness still, in an environment controlled by humans. Between these orders of work, control, and narration, a tension emerges: survival is made dependent on exploitation, while the production of meaning is shaped by material processes.

SIC! BWA Wrocław gallery transforms into a landscape corresponding to the artist's sensibility. Her glass works appear to grow from architecture, to emerge from beneath the soil's surface, from realms beyond the reach of light. Organic forms, lightsome as Art Nouveau ornaments, are rooted in the experience of growing up between France and England, in environments marked by mythology, politics, and ever-present natural forces.

Present in the installation are material traces of engagements with ecology and migration—structures that connote both movement and tension, as if carrying within them the memory of processes of growth, erosion, and ceaseless adaptation to changing conditions. What develops here is not always visible or immediately recognizable, similar to the transformations Solnit writes about, stretched across time, indirect, and often lacking a single author. The space responds to the slightest shifts like an ecosystem requiring both care and attentiveness.

In a world where uncertainty has become a shared experience, *Where the Light Won't Reach* reveals growth that is sometimes regulated and accelerated, and work that remains invisible. Yet in darkness, something continuously finds its form: slowly, imperfectly, but tenaciously. The exhibition tells a tale of endeavors undertaken beyond the light of day, about growth occurring under difficult conditions, and about the coexistence of humans, plants, and technology in an environment that is simultaneously oppressive in its logic of control and nurturing in its sustenance of life.

While the exhibition does not affirm darkness, it shows that action is possible even when we cannot foresee its eventual path and outcome. In this sense, the role of storytelling reasserts itself

as a tool for orientation amidst the invisible and for sustaining agency in the absence of guarantees. The exhibition shows that even in darkness, processes that allow us to endure, adapt, and gradually develop are possible. That which is unseen continues to grow.

1. *The Dressing Room*

installation, 2026

In the changing rooms of mining facilities, miners' clothing was stored in individual metal baskets or tubes, and hoisted to the ceiling after each shift. This system allowed wet, contaminated garments to dry in the rising heat, while keeping them separate and protected. The metal construction—a material associated with safety, durability, and control—reduced the risk of fire igniting among fabrics saturated with oil and coal dust. The hoisting ritual underscored the nature of mining work: as the miner descended into the darkness below, his clothing traveled upward, suspended like emptied shells. At a certain point, the distance between them becomes so great—the body deep underground, the clothing lifted to the ceiling—that it becomes difficult to think of them as belonging to a single, coherent order. The dressing room takes the form of a threshold space in which labor is divided vertically, and identity undergoes temporary displacement.

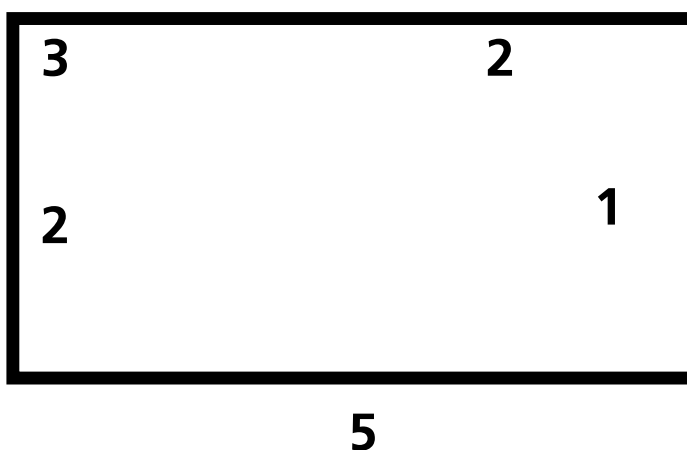
In this installation, the tubes house a different sort of uniform: a collection of clothes called "Salad Dressing," comprised of garments made over the past five years, adorned with photographs of vegetables. These images speak to growth occurring under regulated and partially invisible conditions, much like rhubarb cultivated in darkness. The material that in the mine was subject to protection and control becomes, in this context, a carrier of a different kind of life: fragile, organic, and ambiguous. The garments appear as forms of surrogate presence—objects entrusted with the memory of warmth, effort, and care, in the absence of a physical body. Suspended between floor and ceiling, they point to the traces and residues of human endeavor, and to the ways in which subjectivity may persist even when the material body disappears. In this sense, the installation develops one of the exhibition's central threads: acting under conditions of uncertainty and limited visibility. What remains on the surface is not the full picture of labor, but its remnants. What is hidden does not disappear—it continues to act, to transform, and to sustain the processes of life.

2. Sunset

wallpaper, 2026

The wallpaper lining the gallery space reproduces a photograph of a sunset in Sweden, taken by the artist's brother ten years ago. Lulu MacDonald transfers this image onto the gallery walls in a modular grid which breaks the landscape into a zigzagging rhythm, calling to mind the structure of traditional wallpaper. Each print is installed separately, yet together they form an environment which transforms the gallery's architecture, drawing the viewer into a state between intimacy and expansiveness.

In MacDonald's practice, wallpaper functions as a tool for activating space. It is not merely a surface but a presence that extends the field of vision and shifts perception. It points to intermediate spaces between the real and the imagined—above, below, behind, and before us. Repetition and refraction construct a performative structure involving the viewer. The image ceases to be flat, expanding instead into a spatial and temporal experience, unfolding in the gallery as something simultaneously visible and felt.



1. *The Dressing Room*

installation, 2026

2. *Sunset*

wallpaper, 2026

3. *Knocker*

installation (steel), 2025

4. *The Marrow of My Bones*

installation (ceramics, metal), 2019–2026

5. *Forcing Rhubarb*

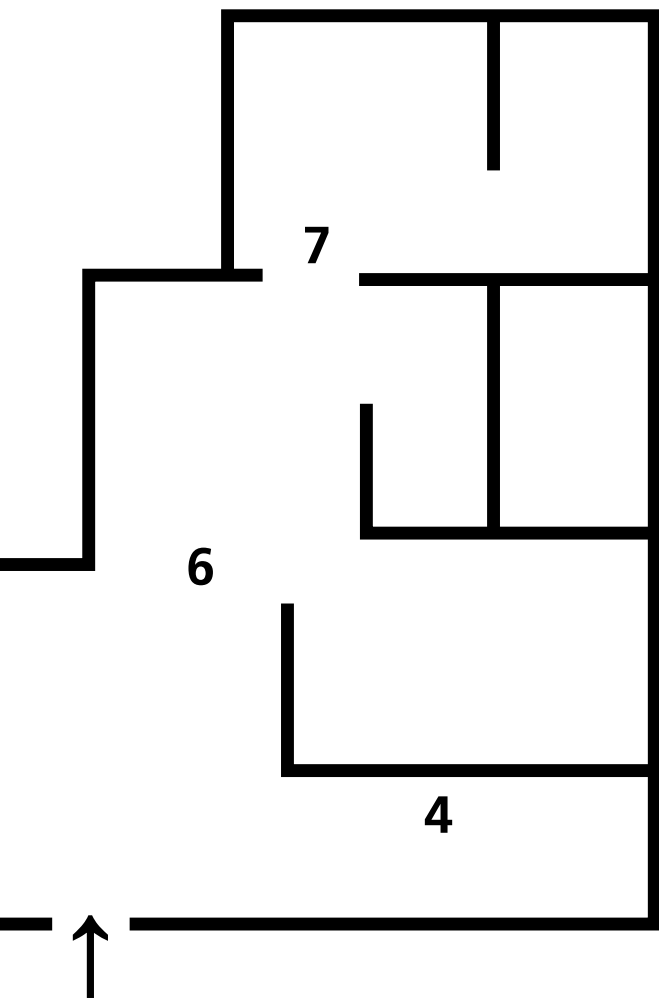
sound work, 2026

6. *Saint Barbara*

sculpture (glass and metal), 2025

7. *Moon Faces*

light installation, 2026



3. *Knocker*

installation (steel), 2025

The work *Knocker* takes the form of a fuchsia rendered in steel. The suspended flower retains its characteristic pendulous state, but its organic softness is replaced by the industrial rigidity of the steel. The form does not spread across the wall but has been purposefully introduced into the corner of the room, where, yielding to the geometry of architecture, it adopts an angle of its own.

The title of the work refers to Cornish “knockers,” being gnome-like creatures or spirits inhabiting mines. Their “knocking” was once believed to guide miners toward veins of a desired resource. Over time, they knocked to warn of tunnels at risk of imminent collapse. This introduces an element of vigilance toward what is hidden: invisible tension manifesting in matter and space.

The placement of the sculpture in the corner emphasizes the significance of transitional zones—spheres that typically remain on the margins, between one plane and another. Here, the corner becomes an active field in which forces and directions converge. In this position, the work functions as an intermediate form: between drawing and sculpture, decoration and construction, botanical fragility and metallic strength.

However, the work itself is not limited to an image of a plant or reference to folklore. What matters most transpires at the site of tension, where the steel line is bent by architecture while simultaneously resisting it. This gesture recalls a landscape subjected to pressure: it is molded, adapts, and changes direction, but it does not surrender completely. With this delicate deflection, a balance between force and persistence is revealed. A moment in which form accepts the shape of space without sacrificing its own integrity.

4. The Marrow of My Bones

installation (ceramics, metal), 2019–2026

The Marrow of My Bones has its origins in a set of vessels that Lulu MacDonald began collecting as a teenager, acquiring serving dishes shaped like vegetables at markets. Many of these were brought to the island of Jersey, in the 1970s, by Portuguese seasonal workers employed on farms under precarious conditions. Growing up on Jersey, such dishes were part of MacDonald's everyday landscape. Over time, they began to circulate in the secondary market, sold and resold by successive generations of islanders.

Initially, their tender literalism attracted MacDonald: tomatoes in a "tomato" bowl, lettuce in a dish resembling lettuce leaves. This small gesture of matching and repetition evoked both the paintings of Giuseppe Arcimboldo and the illusionistic strategies of trompe l'oeil, combining humor with intimacy. Over time, the collection was transferred to the artist's studio, where the dishes began to serve as sculptural material, containing within them the history of migration, labor, and the carrying of soil.

Suspended in space, the installation's elements arrange themselves into forms resembling earthworms or organisms moving beneath the earth's surface. In this way, the work engages with the theme of animating the circuits of migration, evoking flows of people, matter, and nourishment. The ceramic vessels become a material trace of shifting soil from one place to another, and simultaneously a representation of labor undertaken on adopted terrain.

In this iteration of the installation, pink planters also appear, evoking the gesture of planting and care. They introduce the thread of tending, which coexists with the history of seasonal work and economic precariousness. MacDonald's work interweaves these orders, demonstrating that growth—of both plants and communities—is supported by conditions of dependency, movement, and continuous adaptation.

In the context of the exhibition, *The Marrow of My Bones* extends the theme of invisible processes occurring beneath the surface: circuits of matter, memory, and labor which, although often hidden, sustain life and enable its further development.

5. Forcing Rhubarb

sound work, 2026

Within the gallery, sound coexists with light, their presence extending through space like invisible matter. Together they shape an environment that has no sculptural form, yet gives the exhibition its weight. While elements of the work unfold in the gallery's passageways, high above the viewers in the apertures of architecture, it is light and sound that constitute the body of this exhibition.

Forcing Rhubarb takes the form of a song blending lullaby and protest anthem. Its rhythm is at once tender and unsettling, repetitive and tense. The piece was written in three parts by Lulu MacDonald and FAUXLÎ, composed and performed by FAUXLÎ, and concludes with spoken word by Lulu MacDonald over the music.

6. *Saint Barbara*

sculpture (glass and metal), 2025

Saint Barbara is made from glass and metal. Its scale exceeds human proportions, evoking a moment of sudden, unnaturally accelerated growth. Suspended between rooms or set into passageways, it activates the architecture of thresholds—liminal spaces of transit in which perspective and corporeal experience shift. The sculpture was conceived as a gate which can be crossed. Its structure allows for a physical experience of change: of moving from one space to another, from one state to another. In this way, the work traces the exhibition's central through-line, along which growth and action unfold in intermediate zones between the visible and the invisible, control and uncertainty.

The metal construction outlines a drawing in space: the outline of a bunch of rhubarb. This is the plant's first direct appearance in the exhibition—present until now as process, rhythm, and condition of growth rather than image. The material lightness of the glass and the linearity of the metal lend the form both fragility and strength, joining organic growth with the gesture of construction. The title refers to Saint Barbara, patron saint of miners and protector of those who work under conditions of danger and darkness. In this context, the sculpture interweaves the history of subterranean labor with the practice of cultivating plants in darkened spaces. It brings together the experiences of extraction and growth, suggesting that what develops in the dark requires both control and care.

7. Moon Faces

light installation, 2026

A wall of LED masks allows the viewer to momentarily become a plant. Simultaneously uncanny and familiar, the installation evokes the language of contemporary care, in which the body is subjected to rituals of conditioning, regulation, and repair. What once concerned soil and garden is transferred onto the skin.

The masks operate on the principle of photobiomodulation, a technology developed by NASA to support plant growth in outer space. Here, light functions not as an equivalent to the sun but as a substitute tool, an artificial impulse that initiates life under conditions of absence. In this sense, the work does not so much imitate nature as reveal a system in which growth becomes a regulated process.

Suspended on the wall, the masks resemble phases of the moon—pale, cool surfaces that simultaneously reveal and conceal. They constitute a symbol of contemporary consumption and extraction, and an instrument of clinical care. They invite you to draw near, and to look through them into the depths of the next room, offering a moment of intimacy with the self and with the space that lies beyond.

In this landscape, *Moon Faces* reveals conditions of growth rather than growth itself. It exposes the tension between care and control, and between light as source of development or tool for regulation.

MacDonald's artistic practice often involves text and writing. The beginning of each installation normally emerges from a culmination of stories woven together. The final moment of the exhibition—seeing through LED masks—offers an excerpt of one of those stories, experienced through light.

Cookie cutters, a nod to the domestic, evoke a space of care as well as the industrial world. They reference sustenance and repetition. A sentence taken from MacDonald's text about bioluminescence envelops the final room of the gallery: "It is only now I realize, without the darkness we would not have seen a thing."

In a true *mise en abyme* moment, the stories that formed the exhibition become, in and of themselves, part of the making and its un-making, folded into the legend of rhubarb.

The text casts its shadows over three dimly lit glass rhubarb sconces, which are themselves illuminated by their own demise: the candle. Radiance, lightness, and shadow collapse into one another, becoming as ephemeral as the darkness itself.

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