

BWA

24.04–6.09.2026

BWA Wrocław Main Station



**Inner
Tales**

Artists:

Nils Alix-Tabeling

Martyna Czech

Aneta Grzeszykowska

Natalia Kopytko

Magdalena Lazar

Angelika Puff

Marianna Rodziewicz

Joanna Sitarz

Agata Słowak

Wojciech Ireneusz

Sobczyk

Natália Sýkorová

Ilona Szwarc

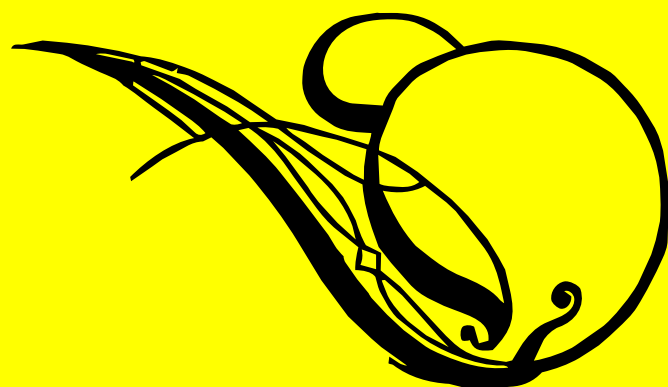
Joanna Wierzbicka

Marek Wodzistawski

Curators:

Magdalena Lazar

Katarzyna Oczkowska



Dark Paradise Inner Tales

24.04—6.09.2026

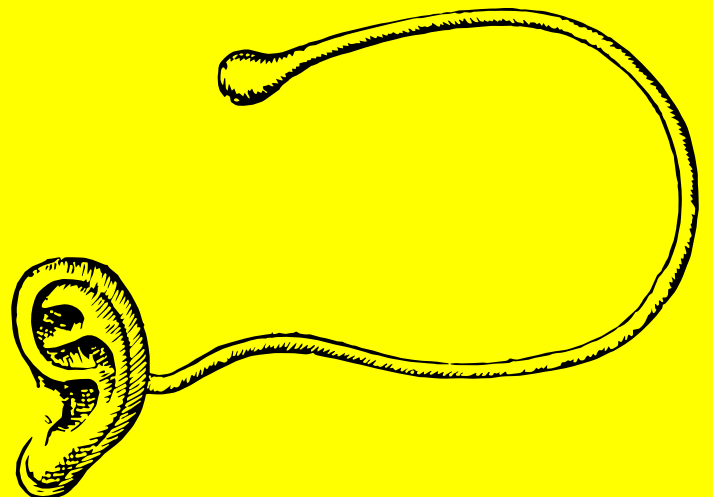
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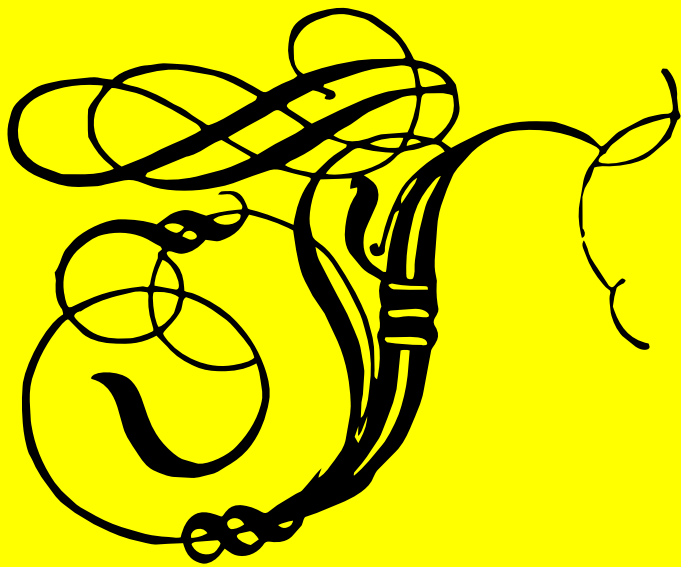
Sometimes it looms behind closed eyelids. Other times it unfurls in dreams that linger long after waking. Fairy tales summon it, and the stories lodged in our memory. A dark garden in which wonder and dread are intertwined. It lures us with its beating glow, while an unsettling something pulses at its heart. And indeed, when we venture deeper, we encounter a landscape marked by monstrosity.

Monsters, hybrids, and those whose behavior, appearance, or identity deviates from accepted norms have provoked both fascination and fear for centuries. Across epochs, from antiquity to the present, they have been regarded as omens, prophecies, aberrations, objects of analysis. The motif of monstrosity appears in mythological figures. Medusa. The Hydra. It was present in philosophical treatises about the female body, deemed incomplete and inferior to that of the male. Those who suffered from poorly understood illnesses or physical and psychological disorders were likewise labeled monstrous. Misunderstood communities living beyond Europe's borders were subjected to the same treatment. This retrograde mindset persisted into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in relation to gender, the body, sexual identity, and ethnic origin.

Across eras and regions, those deemed monsters have been put on public display as a warning, or to be shamed, or they were excluded and hidden altogether. In the face of persecution, these individuals resist eradication, persevering as an integral part of our world. For what is tamed, normalized, and disciplined tends to resurface in changed and unexpected forms—as a glistening growth on the seemingly ordered corpus of society.

Monstrosity is bound, on the one hand, to historical and social repression, and on the other to radical visibility. The Latin *monstrum* derives from *demonstrare*, “to point,” “to reveal.” Monsters are therefore those who claim visibility and demand attention, while simultaneously disrupting the established order. They insist on presence and remind us of what we do not wish to see. They emerge with something to tell, projecting to be heard—not only about their nature, but our own. If we look at monstrosity with tenderness, we may discover that it is part of ourselves. It will lead us to our own place of wonder and dread, and allow us to spin our own inner tale.





ACT I: MONSTER / DEMONSTRARE

Martyna Czech

Darkness Leading Freedom to the Barricades
2025, diptych, oil and acrylic on canvas

Work loaned courtesy of the ZORZA festival, supported by T-Mobile. The painting was part of the festival within the framework of the "Stany Skupienia" artistic platform.

Who will lead us, who will we follow, on our journey through the enchanting yet terrifying garden of monstrosity? Martyna Czech reaches back to French painter Eugène Delacroix's seminal work *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), transposing the Romantic myth of the July Revolution in nineteenth-century France with the anxieties and crises of the twenty-first century.

In Delacroix's painting, Liberty is an ideal for which the people are willing to fight regardless of their origin or experiences. The work depicts revolution not only as a revolt against injustice, but as an expression of faith in the possibility of transforming the world. Czech preserves the composition of the original: the massed bodies, the dynamic arrangement, the gesture of the raised fist, the march over the barricade. However, in place of the triumphant personification of Liberty, Czech introduces the figure of Darkness, a spectral-faced escort. Darkness takes the lead without promising salvation, a harbinger of precarity and peril.

Delacroix's Liberty is a hybrid figure: simultaneously flesh-and-blood woman of the people and classical goddess. The painting shocked nineteenth-century bourgeois audiences, and was deemed controversial and politically dangerous. In Czech's treatment, heroism yields to the grotesque and the aesthetics of monstrosity. The figures are exaggerated, at times caricatured. They evoke a waking nightmare.

The monumental scale of the painting amplifies theatricality, foregrounding the collective spectacle of emotion. The boundary between revolution and destruction is smudged. Darkness as torchbearer rises as a figure of contemporary dread. If Delacroix painted the myth of the birth of modern community, Czech captures the moment of its fracture.

Wojciech Ireneusz Sobczyk

Mask of Shame IV, from the On Vainglory and the Fleeting Taste of Strawberry or Wild Strawberry series

2020, object, porcelain, clear gloss glaze

Mask of Shame XII, from the On Vainglory and the Fleeting Taste of Strawberry or Wild Strawberry series

2021, object, porcelain, cobalt oxide, clear gloss glaze

Pear V, from the On Vainglory and the Fleeting Taste of Strawberry or Wild Strawberry series

2020, object, porcelain, cobalt oxide, clear gloss glaze

Pear IV, from the On Vainglory and the Fleeting Taste of Strawberry or Wild Strawberry series

2020, object, porcelain, cobalt oxide, clear gloss glaze

Whip II, from the On Vainglory and the Fleeting Taste of Strawberry or Wild Strawberry series

2020, object, clear gloss glaze

The title of the series *On Vainglory and the Fleeting Taste of Strawberry or Wild Strawberry* is a reference to Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490–1510), in which the Netherlandish late medieval master depicts a disquieting vision of the human condition: from paradisaical innocence through a garden of sensual pleasures, to a hellscape filled with ingenious tortures and bizarre creatures. Bosch spun a world of excess and trespass—corporeal, symbolic, and moral—in which pleasure and punishment are equivalent. Human and animal hybrids, deformed bodies, warped objects, musical instruments repurposed as instruments of torture. A composition of benighted spectacle.

Wojciech Ireneusz Sobczyk seizes this art-historical motif and translates it into a contemporary visual vernacular. With his *Masks of Shame* and paraphernalia inspired by Bosch's universe, beauty and passion are entwined with suffering and sadism. Historically, masks of shame were instruments of public humiliation and torture. They impeded speaking, breathing, and eating. In Sobczyk's interpretation, they are executed in porcelain and covered with cobalt ornamentation reminiscent of luxury goods. They become erotically suggestive, merging the experience of pleasure and pain, hinting at relationships based on dominance and submission. This displacement of function—from instrument of punishment to aesthetic object of passion and play—exposes the ambiguity of our desires.

Nils Alix-Tabeling

Heliogabalus' Daybed

2021, steel, padouk and ebony wood, wicker, rose quartz, red jasper, oyster shells, 3D print, resin, silk, pillows with medicinal herbs, jesmonite, helichrysum

An installation inspired by the figure of the Roman emperor Heliogabalus (Marcus Aurelius Antoninus), one of antiquity's most infamous rulers. He ascended to the throne at just fourteen years of age and reigned briefly, yet his rule left its mark on history as a period of scandal, eccentricity, and debauchery. The emperor was known for his extravagant religious rituals and ceremonies combining pleasure with pain. His relationships with both women and men were considered transgressive, as were his public appearances in female dress, complete with makeup and wigs. According to ancient chroniclers, he sought to alter his body to align with his experienced gender identity. His conduct provoked the opposition of the senate, the army, and the people, and four years after assuming power he was assassinated. History has cast Heliogabalus as a "monstrous" figure, who deviated from prevailing social, moral, and aesthetic norms.

Nils Alix-Tabeling's installation sets hard, cold materials into dialogue with soft, organic structures, generating tension between power and order on the one hand and corporeality and desire on the other—a desire that resists imposed rules. A site of rest, the bed appears as the afterimage of a decadent and tragic emperor whose otherness was unacceptable to his contemporaries and to history. *Heliogabalus' Daybed* invokes contemporary reflection on gender, corporeality, and the ways in which power is displayed and performed.

Gargouille

2022, epoxy resin, 3D print, textiles, metal, wood, mica powder, St. John's wort

From the collection of Michał Woliński

The legend of La Gargouille—from the French *gargouille*, meaning "throat" and the "gurgling of water"—tells of a dragon-like sea serpent said to inhabit the marshes along the Seine. According to seventh-century folklore, the creature terrorized the region around Rouen, triggering floods, sinking boats, spouting fire.

La Gargouille was vanquished by Saint Romanus, Bishop of Rouen, who subdued and burned the beast—although, as the tale goes, its head and neck remained untouched by the flames, being resistant to fire. In commemoration, carved gargoyles began to appear on buildings, serving a dual function: symbolic guardians warding off evil, and practical water-spouts channeling rainwater from walls.

Marianna Rodziewicz

Ecdysis

2025, sound installation, air-drying clay, mounting foam, plaster bandage, acrylic, varnish, synthetic hair, synthetic lashes, press-on nails, polymer glue, leather shoe, steel wire, PVC hose

Wide-Open Stingers

2025, sculpture, 3D print, acrylic

Monster Prosthesis II

2024, sculpture, 3D print, acrylic

In an eighteenth-century tract devoted to female anatomy, the Flemish surgeon Jan Palfijn, proclaiming that his book concerned “monsters,” opened it with a description of the female genitalia—the source of both pleasure and illness, unleashing disorder into the world. Monstrosity, according to Palfijn, resided in the alterity of female embodiment, a defect in the eyes of Western culture, and a site of unease and threat to the established order.

From this perspective, the female body morphs into a figure of monstrosity. Marianna Rodziewicz focuses on its fluidity, ephemerality, and expressiveness. Through deformations and mutations, she speaks of the body and its capacity to resist the norms imposed by power and social discipline. The dread she explores does not serve to shock but to illuminate the potential of femininity, its capability to disrupt entrenched gender roles. Monstrosity here is an instrument for shaping identity through transformation. This distinguishes Rodziewicz’s work from Coralie Fargeat’s film *The Substance*, where the monstrous feminine form—visually close to those Rodziewicz creates—becomes a terrifying side effect of the titular drug. Intervention in the body, biological enhancement, and chemical hacking lead to catastrophe. In the film, mutation is the unintended result of an obsession with youth, attractiveness, and the perfect life. The body subjected to manipulation rebels against control and turns against its owner.

Rodziewicz inverts this logic. Traces of decomposition, sagging skin, deformation, and elements of animality are neither a system error nor the result of a failed experiment. They do not constitute the consequence of technological violence against the body. On the contrary, the body becomes a locus of affirmation, liberation, and conscious transgression of norms.

Wojciech Ireneusz Sobczyk

Garden of Delights

2020, three drapes, fabric, pins

As with the works in the previous room, the artist returns to Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490–1510). Heavy, blood-red drapes are pierced by a decorative floral motif composed of thousands of pins. There is a tension between the soft fabric and the intricate ornamentation. The floral pattern is both enchanting and capable of wounding. It reveals its true nature when one looks at the reverse side of the drapes. Sobczyk's work evokes the Boschian garden of rapture and torment—hardly an Arcadian pastoral. It is a landscape of ambiguity, aesthetically seductive, inescapably unsettling.



**ACT II:
WONDER
AND HORROR**

Marek Wodziszłowski

C.I.4517: Vertical Garden

2025–2026, installation, orchids, resin, fiberglass

A garden begins with a fundamental gesture: a hand touching soil, loosening it, scattering seeds, planting bulbs. It is a space of encounter between nature and human will, of constant negotiation between what grows of its own accord and what is planned. The poet Stanley Kunitz wrote that a garden demands attentiveness and receptivity to its needs, comparing its tiers to the stanzas of a poem, each with its own rhythm and meaning.

In his garden, Marek Wodziszłowski foregrounds the peculiar, disrupting any vision of harmony. The gardener here is no tender custodian but rather a single-minded director of life. The plants are compelled to bioluminescence, a process by which living organisms produce and emit light through chemical reaction. Their glow hovers between bewitching and unsettling—a shadowed luminescence beguiling the gaze while raising questions about the hidden cost of the effect.

The installation emphasizes the tension between what flourishes on its own versus what is pushed toward enervation. Nature here is no innocent idyll. It is a laboratory in which form, color, and the very essence of growth are subjected to strict experimentation. Wodziszłowski's work can be interpreted as a commentary on contemporary biomanipulation, pervasive and yet nearly invisible. See, flower shops selling plants dyed in unnatural colors or artificially dwarfed, warped by aesthetic whim. The garden becomes a place where natural beauty is the product of rigorous manipulation.

Magdalena Lazar

What Happens on Earth Stays on Earth
2026, installation, glass, metal

The inspiration for this work is a fifteenth-century alchemical illustration depicting the process of putrefaction in a vessel filled with black liquid. Within it, figures of a woman and a man, entwined as if in a lover's embrace, suggest that to decay is to initiate a transformation. The artist transposes this idea into the present.

The installation's structure is formed by a closed, quasi-ritualistic circle assembled from metal waste—industrial die-cutting offcuts, the detritus of production and consumption—becoming a symbolic vessel of transformation. What is spent and discarded does not disappear, it transmutes. Within the circle, dark organic forms are suspended alongside glass objects from the Makora Krosno glassworks of the 1970s and 1980s. These decorative trinkets resemble blown funnel forms, so-called trumpets of the dead summoning associations with apocalyptic visions. The luminescence of the glass has something of a dusky radiance to it, like light leaking from the Earth's interior or spilling from the site of a catastrophe.

The installation operates around the contrast between the fragility of decorative glass and the heavy burden of scrap metal. The circle promises a protective ritual—or waits to spring a trap. The closed structure of the form conveys cyclicity: what is spent and discarded may return as the material for something new. An ending may double as a beginning. Even so, the promise of regeneration is always shadowed by foreboding.

Natalia Kopytko

Human Weapon

2023, installation, ceramics, perlite

This work examines the process by which the body and technology fuse into a single entity. The weapon here is not an external, technological appendage but an extension of the human itself. A gleaming element grafted onto soft tissue. The installation draws on a lineage of cinematic references, from the films of David Cronenberg—one of the most influential practitioners of body horror—to the symbolic “dawn of man” scene in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, when a prehistoric hominid discovers that a bone can be wielded as a weapon and, moments later, violence erupts.

Displayed like archaeological artifacts, Kopytko’s array of objects can be imagined as the site of a future excavation, unearthing the evidence of our violence-scarred era. And yet every era in human history has been, to some extent, an era of bloodshed. Violence is not the exception in human history, but one of its cornerstones.

Joanna Sitarz

Ramen

2019, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

Home Office 1

2022, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

Home Office 2

2022, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

One Shrimp Left

2022, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

Take Me Away 1

2022, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

Take Me Away 2

2022, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

Take Me Away 3

2022, sculpture, epoxy resin, paint, organic materials

The corporation is staged in a liminal space, suspended between day and night, private and public, life and its simulation. The corporate atmosphere channels the aesthetics of online creepypasta, with its tales of deserted, unsettling office spaces. Buildings in which elevators halt at floors missing from the blueprint. Where the refrigerator in the kitchen annex is filled with orphaned food containers, relics of those who “no longer work here.” It is precisely these remnants—the leftovers of hurried lunches, moldering sandwiches, laptops tentacled by instant noodles—that Joanna Sitarz turns into material for her practice. The artist divides her life between creative work and corporate employment. She reveals what was meant to be disposed, arresting decay in a capsule of transparent epoxy.

Sitarz’s objects become artifacts of productivity culture, in which the body is expected to be an efficient, clean, and controlled container. The transparent sculptures are displayed on a structure resembling a dissection table. They glint under a clinical light, expendable parts of a larger apparatus: the corporate superstructure. Food becomes a reflection of a system that churns out excess and then offloads the consequences. The clinical sheen conceals a stark truth: every culture, however disciplined, has its expiration date.



ACT III: THE MONSTROUS FEMININE

Ilona Szwarc

Unsex Me Here

2019, photographic series

The title of Ilona Szwarc's photographic series refers to a passage from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The series composes itself into a surrealist narrative about "becoming a woman" and, in the process, discovering within oneself an untamed, primal spirit. The artist constructs an ambiguous, dreamlike atmosphere, weaving autobiographical threads with a fictional narrative whose protagonist appears to be her doppelgänger. In the world of *Unsex Me Here*, identity fractures, multiplying like reflections in a devious mirror that conceals the truth behind successive fictions. The German shepherd at the protagonist's side functions as her alter ego—an embodiment of repressed instinct and primal nature. The woman begins to exist in a parallel state, a hybrid helixing between human and animal, between girlhood and a feral femininity. Duality is no glitch here, but the structure of identity itself.

As in Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Véronique*, two versions of the same woman exist; although they have never met, they are aware of each other and bound by an invisible thread. Szwarc's photographic scenes likewise evoke the oneiric atmosphere of David Lynch's cinematic oeuvre, filtered through an aesthetic reminiscent of Sofia Coppola—one that seduces through visual strategies in the register of ambiguous girlhood. The pastel interiors of a luxury apartment in Palm Springs function as a film set, the protagonist performing her role within it. Beneath the unblemished façade, something unsettling pulses, resisting control, threatening to reveal itself.

Joanna Sitarz

Mirror for Crying

2024, object, epoxy resin, concrete, mirror, paint, organic materials

Oversensitive Mirror

2024, object, epoxy resin, concrete, mirror, paint, organic materials

Mirror for Oneself

2026, object, epoxy resin, concrete, mirror, paint, organic materials

The mirror is one of the most elemental and polysemous symbols in culture. It appears in the myth of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. In classical mythology, the mirror became the attribute of Venus, goddess of love and a beauty which must behold itself. From the Middle Ages through Romanticism, the mirror functioned in art and literature as a symbol of vanity and transience; as an instrument of self-knowledge; and as a reference to the uncanny and the motif of the double. In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, the surface of a mirror becomes the threshold between reality and the realm of magic. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan described the mirror stage as the moment in which the child recognizes its reflection as its own—the first step of identity formation. In contemporary digital practice, the screens of computers and smartphones become mirrors through which we shape and observe ourselves and our projected image. At the same time, digital filters and algorithms trigger advancing forms of anxiety, exploiting a dissonance between image and body. Mirrors reveal and conceal in equal measure. On their "other side" is an alternative, virtual reality.

Joanna Sitarz's mirrors are objects that accompany the process of constructing an image, gleaning truths about oneself, admiring one's reflection, and confronting it. They fulfill various functions and may serve many purposes. Yet a mirror is not only an instrument of awareness, for it may subvert what it is shown. The reflection may surface what is undesirable and suppressed, splintering the self-image. Some of Sitarz's mirrors are covered by what appears to be a magical haze, obscuring a faithful reflection. And what if, as in Alice's adventure, the glass becomes as malleable as muslin, allowing passage through to the other side? What will await us?

Agata Słowak

Love Without Organs
2022, oil on canvas

From the collection of Sylwia Krupa

The painting references those peculiar objects known as Anatomical Venuses: naturalistic models of the female body produced between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the workshop of La Specola, the Museum of Zoology and Natural History in Florence. The models, made from beeswax, were created on the basis of detailed studies of human cadavers from the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova and illustrations from anatomical atlases.

Anatomical Venuses are equipped with glass eyes and actual human hair, and their bodies can be disassembled layer by layer, uncovering muscles, organs, bones, and even a fetus in the womb. The colored wax structure renders the human body with realism, while details such as vessels and nerves were executed in linen and silk thread. Though their original purpose was educational, Anatomical Venuses almost immediately began to transfix and provoke contradictory responses. They combined an idealization of the female body in the manner of antique and Renaissance sculpture with the macabre exposure of the organism's interior. The figure of the goddess became a cross between scientific artifact and morbid exhibit.

The Venus in Agata Słowak's painting is shown against a raw landscape, surrounded by animal remains. Accompanying her is a female figure who, like a spinner, winds the entrails of the goddess as if they were a bloody ball of thread. The image balances between life and death, between scientific illustration and a symbolic portal into the recesses of the body, provoking both fascination and revulsion.

In David Cronenberg's film *Dead Ringers* (1988), a character muses: "There should be beauty contests for the insides of bodies. You know, best spleen... most perfectly developed kidneys." The line unsettles our aesthetic conditioning, compelling us to question why we perceive beauty as merely skin deep. Evolution has taught us to react to viscera with dread. Exposed organs mean illness, peril, death. Today, advanced imaging technologies allow us to peer inside the body from a different perspective. This is precisely what anatomical figures have long proposed: in exposing the body's interior without squeamishness, they may persuade us that our interiors are as stunning as the shell.

Angelika Puff

Candy Crush Saga

2026, installation, hair, sugar, lenses

The installation is the residue of a performance by the artist, inspired by the fairy tale of Rapunzel. The tale transcribed by the Brothers Grimm tells the story of a young girl with golden hair, imprisoned in a tower by a sorceress and hoping against hope to be rescued. As in many fairy tales, salvation arrives in the form of a heroic prince who climbs the tower by way of Rapunzel's tumbling locks. The scenario is archetypal: an enchanting and passive heroine, a strapping male with agency, and a maleficent witch. Despite numerous obstacles, the girl and her prince survive to live happily ever after. But did they really? Is *Rapunzel* truly the innocent tale it presents itself as? Fairy tales reveal more about social gender roles and entrenched stereotypes than might appear at first glance.

Angelika Puff disarms this cultural schema. She presents the tale of Rapunzel and her long hair as a symbol of romanticized innocence and female submission—a pattern instilled in girls from their earliest years. In the artist's action, hair, stripped of its beauty, becomes a source of discomfort, even revulsion. For our relationship to hair is profoundly ambivalent—what Julia Kristeva, in her essay "Powers of Horror," calls the abject: that which was once part of us, intimate and desired, becomes repellent when it separates from the body. So long as it is healthy, lustrous, and—crucially—remains attached to the head, it enjoys positive associations, enchanting, arousing desire. But the moment hair separates from the skull and we find it clogging a drain or trespassing on a plate, it becomes "unclean" and triggers immediate disgust. Losing its allure, it nauseates.

Joanna Wierzbicka

Exhale, Inhale

2022, installation, digital print on Lycra, wadding, hydraulic pipe, metal mesh

In the films of David Cronenberg, the body is a recurring source of fascination—the arena where futuristic technologies and living flesh collide, generating equal measures of wonder and dread. In both *Dead Ringers* and *Crimes of the Future*, Cronenberg proposes the conceit of an “inner beauty” contest. Unlike classic pageants, it is the attractiveness of organs being judged, the body’s interior becoming a venue for a spectacle we were never meant to witness.

Joanna Wierzbicka’s installation stages the organ spectacle. The sterile, enclosed atmosphere of the consulting room or operating theater—spaces associated with examination and surgical procedures—is here transformed into a theater of interior beauty. The organs the artist enlarges appear to expand and contract, exhaling, inhaling, respiring like an installation come to life.

Angelika Puff

Corridors: Katabasis
2026, oil on canvas

In literature, katabasis represents a descent into the underworld. Delving into subterranean darkness is a recurring thread in Angelika Puff's practice. Through it, she explores the ambiguity of tropes associated with identity, femininity, the body, and sexuality. The dank and Stygian realm of the underworld is in many cultures and religions associated with baleful deities, death, and damnation. In Puff's envisioning, the underworld assumes the atmosphere of a fairy tale, filled with winding pathways, bottomless healing springs, and magical roots. In herbalism—an unjustly disregarded branch of medicine—it is roots that are sought as the most potent and medicinal part of a plant. The journey into the underworld becomes an expedition for a contemporary witch who seeks to augment her powers by coming face to face with darkness, primordial nature, and the cleaved fragments of herself.

In the work of Angelika Puff, we find echoes of Maureen Murdock's book *The Heroine's Journey*, which emerged from Murdock's work as a psychotherapist. The author observed that many cultures rest on the repetitive formula of the hero's journey—a linear quest through myths, religious fables, and popular culture adventures—yet this predominant schema failed to account for the feminine journey and the inner terrain of women's experience. Murdock proposes the turning point as the moment of descent into the underworld, described as a process of reclaiming those parts of the self that have been severed.

Angelika Puff

Hydra
2026, oil on canvas

In Greek mythology, the Hydra is a many-headed, poison-breathed serpentine monster that Heracles (Hercules) was required to defeat as one of his Twelve Labors. The Hydra could not be easily destroyed, for when one of the monster's heads was severed, two more grew in its place. Mythology is populated with female monsters destined to be slain by valiant heroes. If we critically examine mythological narratives, we see that the tragic fates of these monstrous figures, their ghastliness and maleficence, served to demonize women in general. For centuries, women were not considered equal members of society but regarded as an inferior kind of human being—or denied humanity altogether.

In Angelika Puff's painting, the Hydra is a mysterious biological form resembling a species of hydra, the freshwater hydrozoan bearing the same name as the mythological monster. This jellyfish-like hydra is defined by its extraordinary capacity for regenerating damaged parts of its body, conferring on it a form of biological immortality. The myth of the Hydra—both the mythological one and that of the phylum Cnidaria—becomes a story about the ability to survive fatal blows. Strokes that do not slay, but strengthen.

Natália Sýkorová

Affinity in the Drain

2024–2025, installation, etched steel, resin, wood, water, herbs, natural resin, silicone, oxide pigments

The installation recalls both an altar or shrine, as well as the layout of a motherboard. Sacral and technological associations can be extended to encompass the corporeal and its organic networks of veins and nerves—the ganglia of circuitry as pulsing organism.

Sýkorová's work balances between therapeutic ritual and mechanism of control, meditating on bodily fluids—above all, tears—as substances dense with biological and psychological meaning. Tears cleanse and moisturize the eye, and may draw others toward us in empathy and care. And yet they can also serve as instruments of manipulation, orchestrating pathos, plotting coercion.

From the center of the work rises a mist suffused with the scent of herbs, exuding a sense of solace and healing. Even so, vigilance is called for. Technological innovations ease our daily lives while simultaneously infiltrating our bodies under cover of convenience. They regulate, disrupt, and shape the body—and sometimes they commandeer it. One need only think of our relationship with smartphones and social media, pharmacology, cosmetic medicine, and procedures promising to enhance the body. And of situations in which decisions about our bodies are made by politicians with draconian agendas.

Aneta Grzeszykowska

Selfie

2014, photographic series

Published in 1818, Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* swiftly became a classic of Gothic horror. The monster assembled from slabs of the human body by the eponymous scientist Victor Frankenstein is brought to life only to be abandoned by its creator. The forlorn, shunned creature desires nothing but understanding, tenderness, and a companion like itself.

In the photographs of her *Selfie* series, Aneta Grzeszykowska enacts a female version of Frankenstein's experiment before our eyes: a contemporary monstrous figure who doubles as a self-portrait of the artist herself. Or rather, a double self-portrait. Grzeszykowska engages in a peculiar game between successive representations of herself, and between what is alive and what has perished. In tight framings, we see the artist's hands in a gesture of presentation, displaying naturalistic models of fragments of her own body made from pig skin. The tension arising from the juxtaposition of the living body with the dead object that imitates it is further intensified by the use of animal remains.

The unsettling and grotesque images are the result of both photographic and sculptural practice. They refer to self-creation, one of the recurring themes in Grzeszykowska's work. The title of the series situates it within the context of contemporary digital strategies related to the construction of one's own image—that is, the photographic selfie. Ubiquitous on social media, the selfie is reflexively pilloried, associated with narcissism, exhibitionism, and social anxieties in relation to new technologies. Against the backdrop of a digital sphere inundated with idealized selfies, the artist proposes a grotesque version of her own image, seemingly foraged from the specimen room of a horror film set.



ACT IV: I SEE THAT YOU SEE ME

Marek Wodziszłowski

Cosmic Eye: POV

2021, installation, video, and objects

Compared with other senses, sight appears to permit a far greater degree of control over its range of operation, conveying a sense of mastery over the field of vision. We direct our gaze where and when we choose. Moreover, we look in a specific way and with specific intention. The gaze is therefore neither neutral nor innocent. Understood in this way, it becomes a sextant of tension and the exercise of power.

Wodziszłowski's installation comprises two videos, *Cosmic Eye* and *Head*, and two objects, *Eyelid* and *Reflective Membrane of the Eye*. One of the projections shows a dog's eye with cataracts; facing it, the same dog consumes a cow's head. In the display cases, a bovine eyelid—a symbol of the veil separating one from the world—and an inverted eyeball with its reflective membrane visible, function as a mirror reflecting reality. The work references the *tapetum lucidum*, the natural "mirror" in the eyes of many animals, which enhances vision in penumbral conditions.

The title of the installation, *POV* (point of view), refers to a cinematic convention familiar from social media. In this case, however, it connects to a visual trope of pornographic films. This convention presents perspective in such a way that the viewer has the impression of seeing the world of the film through the eyes of a character: the camera "looks" at what the character would be looking at, generating a sense of participation and direct experience of the situation. *POV* allows identification with the protagonist through the adoption of another's perspective.

Wodziszłowski's project is a multidimensional game of gazes. It poses the question of who is observing and who is being observed. At the same time, it reverses control over the process of looking and opens space for reflection. "I see that you see me."

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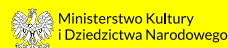
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