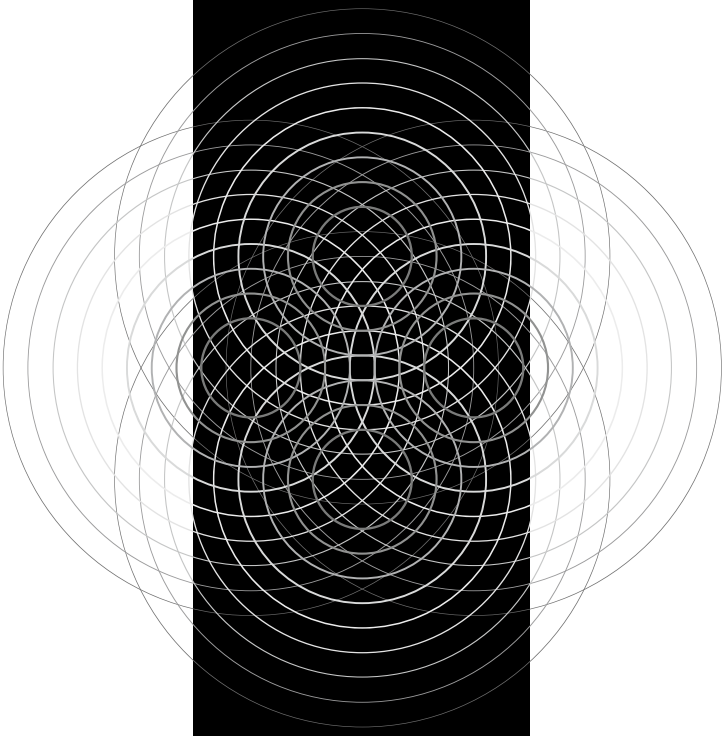
BWA WROCŁAW
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Studio BWA Wrocław
Ruska 46/301 (3rd floor)

TRACTOR OR REACTOR



ENERGY, WORK, AND UTOPIA
AFTER PROGRESS

EN

Tractor or Reactor: Energy, Work, and Utopia After Progress

Tractor or Reactor examines the metamorphoses of energy: the systems that structure its circulation, and the ideologies, narratives, and imaginaries that accompany them. Its historical context is the experience of socialist modernity and postsocialist transformation in parts of the former Eastern Bloc. The challenges of the future are dictated by the planetary ecological crisis, which calls prevailing visions of progress into question. The archival materials and works by contemporary artists on view focus on how raw materials and energy infrastructures were used in models for building and distributing social prosperity under both socialism and capitalism.

Seen this way, energy is not merely a physical quantity, nor is it solely embedded in raw materials: in coal, uranium, natural gas, crude oil. It is a social product, the result of human labor transforming matter into energy that powers production. The exhibition stages a clash between the ideological, social, economic, and ecological dilemmas these processes give rise to. Its scope encompasses long-term phenomena and geohistorical events: the program of energy-intensive socialist modernity, and the environmental and social consequences of Soviet and Russian energy imperialism, including the Chornobyl disaster. The artists also reflect on the transformation of the energy sector in capitalist economies. The exhibition reaches toward the horizon of a speculative future, guided by visions of the functions of energy that go beyond designing technological transitions. At stake is the opportunity for systemic change in the relationship between the demands of production and the biophysical conditions of life on Earth.

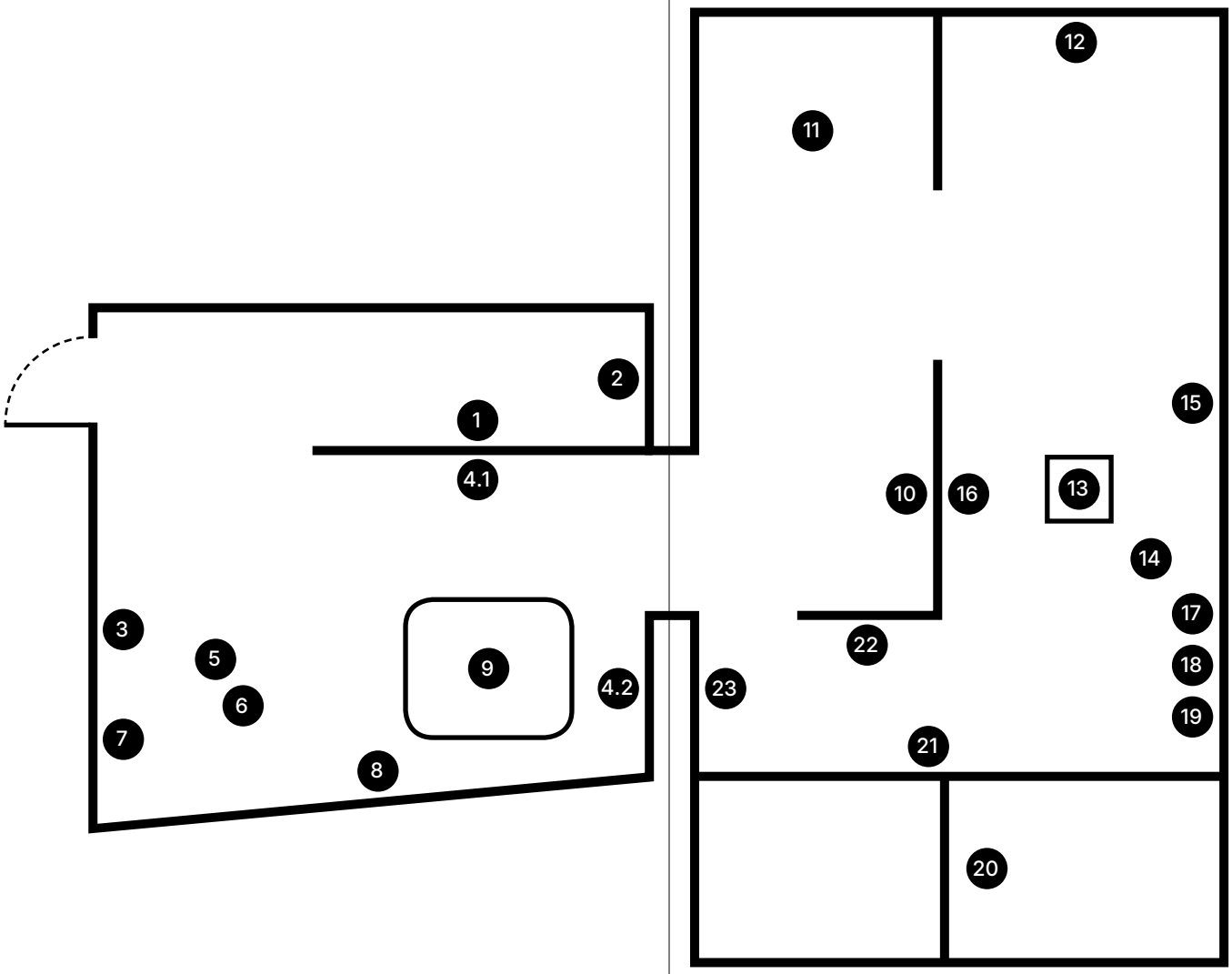
Tractor or Reactor takes as its point of departure the contradictions of socialist productivism. The histories on view unfold through postwar reconstruction, economic progress and crisis, the rise of a technical intelligentsia, and the emancipation of the masses, with matter transformed on an industrial scale driving these processes. Yet documents and artworks also lay bare the environmental and human costs of modernization. The exhibition's limit-experience is the Chornobyl disaster: an accelerant in the collapse of the Soviet Union, contributing to the loss of trust in modern technoscience. A specter that can never be buried.

The transition to neoliberal capitalism arrives as another shock, one that reorganized energy infrastructures, relations of labor and ownership, and the principles governing the distribution of wealth extracted from the earth. Despite deindustrialization (or the relocation of industry) and pledges of decarbonization, unfettered access to cheap energy remains the key condition for this system's expansion and perpetuation. Obtaining it requires not only technological development but, above all, exploitation: cheap labor, extractivism, colonialism, war. Ideological justifications oil this machinery, allowing the destructive effects of production to be offloaded onto regions relegated to the geopolitical periphery and onto natural ecosystems. The exhibition situates fragments of the former Eastern Bloc's history and its ongoing transformations within an overarching tension: the ecological and social conditions of life set against the energy-hungry aims of production and its ambitions to reengineer the world.

The interpretive key to these processes is the concept of social metabolism: the flow of matter and energy between human labor and nature. Today's global environmental crisis can be understood as a metabolic rift, an irreversible disruption of this circulation of matter and energy. It stems from the gap between the logic of modernization, or economic growth, and the planet's biophysical limits. The response is a metabolic correction: a metamorphosis that goes beyond technical repair. It requires shattering the calculus that treats the earth's resources as inexhaustible sources of energy to be exploited.

The exhibition does not stop at analyzing how the flows of matter and energy that sustain social and natural metabolism are reconfigured and disrupted. We also turn to alternative and utopian visions of the future, both historical and contemporary. We gather works and documents that foreground the force of social energy mobilized in pursuit of dreams of prosperity, freedom, and peace, and that weigh the dilemmas posed by competing approaches to transforming the world.

Conceived as a visual essay, *Tractor or Reactor* is the first stage of a larger project exploring how art and visual culture have represented energy, work, and their political entanglements from the Industrial Revolution to the present.



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1

Stanisław Zamecznik, Wojciech Zamecznik, Tadeusz Pawluć
Coal Pavilion at the Recovered Territories Exhibition in Wrocław, 1948
photographs from the Stanisław Zamecznik Archive (exhibition copies)
Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

The Recovered Territories Exhibition, which opened in July 1948 in Wrocław (until 1945, German Breslau), was meant to legitimize the region's identity within Poland's westward-shifted borders and to attest to the Polishness of the lands taken over from Germany. Coal was one of the exhibition's main sections, alongside Destruction, People, the Unity of Silesia, and the Oder River, across a total exhibition area of 159,500 square meters. It was a significant economic argument, a promise of a secure future, and the bond joining Lower and Upper Silesia within the borders of the new state. Hard coal was called "black gold": it powered the country's reconstruction and was its chief export, which the communist authorities traded for machinery and raw materials.

Stanisław Zamecznik (1909–1971) and Wojciech Zamecznik (1923–1967), cousins and designers schooled in the prewar avant-garde, created the Coal section together with Tadeusz Pawluć. They turned a classicist rotunda into a mine shaft. The walls were clad in coal briquettes, a globe hung beneath the dome, and white graphics broke up the heavy mass, drawing the eye upward. A diagram bearing the slogan "Polish Coal Travels the World" stood beside a film screen and extraction statistics, while thirty-five square meters of wall bore the engraved names of model workers. The whole could not be taken in at a single glance. It demanded movement. Drawing on avant-garde approaches to exhibition design, the pavilion presented the working class as the vanguard of the postwar era without subordinating form to doctrine.

2

Julita Wójcik
Wealth, 2011
video, 45´20˝
Courtesy of the artist

Julita Wójcik (b. 1971) creates objects, performances, installations, and actions in public space. Her works address gaps in collective memory, social violence rendered invisible by its broad acceptance, and the processes that exclude groups who do not fit the vision of postsocialist Poland's development: among them non-heteronormative people, women performing unpaid domestic labor, artists, and workers in unprofitable sectors of the capitalist economy.

Wealth was an ephemeral action realized in Katowice at the Monument to the Silesian Insurgents. The artist designed a large inscription reading "*bogactwo*" (wealth), heaped from five tons of coal with the help of invited participants and passersby. The inscription was gradually dismantled by residents of the city, who used the work's material to heat their homes.

The title invokes coal's long-held status as the wealth of Upper Silesia. It was the main source of energy for the industrialization of a country rising from wartime devastation and prewar underdevelopment. By commemorating the anti-German uprisings, the Monument to the Silesian Insurgents served an ideological function: to assert the foundational Polishness of the industrial force of a region with a complex history and national-cultural identity. The bronze was cast in 1967 by the Gliwice Technical Equipment Works, which operated in symbiosis with the region's mining infrastructure. Wójcik's action took place in the postsocialist period, when the extractive industry was undergoing transformation, with a reorganization of production, ownership relations, the scale of extraction, and employment. As the European Union moves toward decarbonization, coal's ideological meaning has shifted as well.

3

Mako Sajko
Poisons, 1964
digitized film, 14´
Courtesy of the Slovenian Film Center

Mako Sajko (1927–2023) was a Slovenian director, screenwriter, and documentary filmmaker. He made socially engaged films that often tackled taboo subjects in the former Yugoslavia, such as sex work, youth suicide, and the industrial pollution of the natural environment—the titular *Poisons*.

Within Yugoslavia, Slovenia, although territorially small, was the country's economic core, home to its most technologically advanced industries. After World War II, modern, energy-intensive industry was seen as the key condition for establishing Yugoslavia's geopolitical independence from both the Soviet Union and the West. Above all, industrialization helped raise the living standards of the residents of an economically and ethnically diverse federation. It made possible the building of a socialist welfare state—a new model of universal community, serving as an alternative to societies divided along ethnic or religious lines.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the environmental costs of core industries went largely unexamined, and information on the subject was often censored. Sajko filmed *Poisons* during his journeys through Slovenia. He later recalled that, in the 1960s, he had yet to develop an ecological consciousness. However, observing the pollution of the Sava River and the industrial landscape, he decided to record it. The result was one of the earliest documentaries conveying an ecological message. Without narration or dialogue, the film achieved a cultural universality, as its popularity at international film festivals attests.

4

Rita Süveges
- *Petrocene*, 2020
acrylic on canvas
- *Gates of Hell*, 2022
acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

Rita Süveges (b. 1986) is a Hungarian artist who creates paintings and sculptures addressing climate change and planetary history. She is particularly interested in genealogy, speculative futures, and the aesthetics of the Petrocene. The term describes the transformation of the Earth through the industrial extraction, processing, and distribution of fossil fuels. It encompasses both the changes these processes have wrought on the biosphere and industrial civilization's economic, social, and cultural dependence on oil, coal, and gas.

In the diptych *Petrocene*, the artist juxtaposes the motif of geological deep time (the past of crude oil before it became a raw material) with the symbolism of Azerbaijan's contemporary petrocapitalist culture. One panel is a speculative visualization of the organic matter from which oil formed: the remains of microscopic marine organisms that settled on seabeds and ocean floors millions of years ago. The other depicts hands folded in a ritual gesture and coated in brown sludge, set against the schematic afterimage of a burning landscape. The artist borrowed the motif of the hands from advertisements for petroleum-rich

Azerbaijan's oil spas. This web of references transforms narrow, technocratic notions of oil as fuel for production into a complex image of the Petrocene: a toxic, irrational addiction to burning dead bodies. As a result, on an overheated Earth, the bodies of the living also burn.

In *Gates of Hell*, the artist recalls an ecological disaster that took place in 1971 in the Karakum Desert of Soviet Turkmenistan. While drilling for oil, geologists broke through into a shallow underground pocket of natural gas. The ground beneath the rig collapsed, leaving a deep crater. Fearing gas leaks, they decided to burn off the gas, expecting the fire to last a few days. The plan failed, and the crater burns to this day. From this story, the artist extracts the phenomenon's mesmerizing sensuality and mystery. Its strangeness is a manifestation of processes that elude the colonial logic of control whereby conquered lands are reduced to energy reserves.

5

Włodzimierz Kołodziejczyk
A Tomorrow of Our Own, 1986
digitized film, 22´
Courtesy of the Educational Film Studio (WFO)

In 1986, with the Polish People's Republic gripped by economic crisis, an educational film set out to forecast the country's development up to the year 2000. It gives the floor to men from various branches of the economy: a mine foreman from Bełchatów, a builder of the Żarnowiec Nuclear Power Plant, a power engineer from Racibórz, an automation specialist from Warsaw, a farmer from Kietrz, and a shipyard worker from Szczecin. They name problems, propose solutions, and anticipate technological progress, yet none of them imagines the end of socialism. The power plant needs modernization, not restructuring; apartments are scarce, but housing is a right, not a commodity. The film is thus a singular vision of a future that never materialized. The Polish People's Republic even had an institution devoted to divining the future: the Polish Academy of Sciences' "Poland 2000" Committee for Research and Forecasts.

6

Jerzy Augustyński (cinematography),
Piotr Hinz (direction)
Northern Landscape II, 1975
digitized film, 15´
Courtesy of Telewizja Polska S.A.

In the mid-1970s, on marshland near the Polish village of Płonia Mała, the Gdańsk Refinery was built. It was one of the most modern oil refineries in Europe, and certainly in Eastern Europe. Relying on Western technology, it was the first fully automated plant in the Polish People's Republic. *Northern Landscape II* is a reportage about the refinery's construction and the people connected with it. It presents the plant as a single organism made up of raw materials, machines, technologies, and workers at every level, united by a common goal. The labor of processing energy is shown here as nonalienated: the refinery refines oil and forges social relations, developing and directing the potential of human intelligence and the capacity for cooperation. Commissioned by state television, the reportage served a propaganda function. Today it is a relic of the past, bearing witness both to a defunct ideology and to social practices in which the aim of labor was to bolster the common good.

7

Teofil Ociepka
Barbórka (St. Barbara's Day), 1956
oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Teofil Ociepka Foundation

Teofil Ociepka (1891–1978) was a self-taught painter employed at the Wieczorek Coal Mine in Katowice. He was the best-known member of the Janów Group, a circle of amateur painters from the same mine, founded in 1946 as part of a Party initiative to promote nonprofessional art. Ociepka himself never ventured underground. He worked instead as an engine operator at the mine's power station. Propaganda of the 1950s, however, blurred this distinction, promoting him as a miner whose sensitivity to color supposedly came from hours immersed in darkness. The true source of his painting was also passed over in silence at the time. The fantastical world Ociepka created emerged from his deep study of esoteric literature, not from the imaginative intuition generally attributed to naïve art.

The 1956 painting, however, contains none of the cosmological or esoteric motifs characteristic of Ociepka's work. It depicts St. Barbara, patron saint of miners, and a miner injured in an underground accident. During this era, mining was among the most mythologized subjects of official art. Underground labor endangered life and health, but in paintings and monuments the miner was invariably a muscular hero, not a victim. Weaving fairy-tale aesthetics with a religious theme, Ociepka's painting is a rare depiction for its time of a mining accident shown outside the context of the heroization of labor.

8

Ludwik Holesz
Fantastic Landscape, 1985
oil on fiberboard
Private collection

Ludwik Holesz (1921–1999) was a miner at the Moszczenica Coal Mine and a painter. From the mine, Holesz brought home imprints of Carboniferous plants he had spotted in the coalface. He studied and copied them. During breaks, he sketched his first ideas on the paper in which his lunch had been wrapped. Once he obtained paints, Holesz translated them into dense paintings pulsing with color. The primeval forest, with its towering plants, giant insects, and amphibians, became his principal subject. His paintings bring different temporalities together, showing that the time it took fossil fuels to form was not merely a scientific concept but something felt by those who extracted the coal themselves. For Holesz, being part of the coal industry also meant tunneling through geological time.

With no training in paleontology, Holesz reconstructed the world of three hundred million years ago in his imagination. Yet in the ornamental thicket of his paintings, specific species can be identified: tree ferns, sigillarias with scarred trunks, calamites, horsetails reaching twenty meters, and lepidodendrons. On the one hand, the fantastical landscape is a romantic dream of descent into the depths of the earth and the return to the Arcadian nature of a preindustrial past. On the other, traces of prehistory surface only because a miner cuts through layer after layer of ground. Here, intimate insight into the distant past is a byproduct of extraction.

9

Justyna Mędrala
Necro Nero, 2022–2025
asphalt, beeswax, bituminous compound
Courtesy of the artist

Justyna Mędrala (b. 1988) works in drawing, sculpture, and installation, exploring the histories and properties of organic materials, particularly raw materials used in industry.

"Justyna Mędrala turns to asphalt, exploring the physical properties of this material

as the basic ingredient of the mixtures used to pave roads. This black substance, hypnotic in its ductility, is a sign of both civilizational progress and an unbridled lust for conquest. Though it has served humanity for several thousand years, only in the nineteenth century was its use perfected through the refining of crude oil. This made mobility possible on an unprecedented scale. Asphalt roads laid across terrain where there had once been only mud or sand opened up endless possibilities for exploration of the landscape—as well as its devastation."
(text: Marta Lisok)

10

Deimantas Narkevičius
Energy Lithuania, 2004
video (Super 8 transferred to DVD), 17´27˝
Courtesy of the artist

Deimantas Narkevičius (b. 1964) is a Lithuanian artist whose films examine ideological narratives and the methods by which history has been produced. The communist past and the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe are the core concerns of his practice.

Elektrėnai is a model town built in the early 1960s in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic to house workers constructing the local power plant. Narkevičius' film reconstructs the social energy and ideology bound up with the place in Soviet times. Its guide is Pranas Noreika: former director of the plant, distinguished engineer, educator, and public-spirited community figure. Noreika embodies a vanished formation, the Soviet technical intelligentsia responsible for developing the forces of production—the industrial might of the communist empire. In his telling, the energy that drives industry is a mighty Promethean force that transfigures the world to meet societal needs. Electricity becomes the fire of progress and modernization.

The film's portrait of Elektrėnai was made under postsocialist conditions. The power plant remains in operation, but the ideology and social practices that underpinned its establishment were erased with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The distance between the two eras is underscored by the artist's use of anachronistic Super 8 film, once a staple of amateur film clubs.

11

Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas
Druzhba, 2003–present
silicone wall drawing, video
Courtesy of the artists

The interdisciplinary projects of Nomeda Urbonas (b. 1968) and Gediminas Urbonas (b. 1966) investigate the intersections of social and environmental histories, examining what became of public space, infrastructure, and collective imaginaries after socialism. *Druzhba* is an archive of the metabolism of the pipeline of the same name, built from 1960 onward and running four thousand kilometers from Siberia through Ukraine and Belarus to the Baltic states, Poland, Hungary, and Germany. The name Druzhba ("friendship") was meant to describe a community—the pipeline was hailed, in the language of the era, as an undertaking that would lead the world toward a new reality—yet it revealed a geography of dependence.

For years, the artists have worked with the pipeline's visual archive: maps of its branches, press reports on new sections and planned expansions, refinery openings and closures, photographs of pumping stations and of housing estates built for oil-industry workers. In successive iterations, they reread and analyze this material anew. The celebration of extraction was part of the culture of modernization, and the mechanisms of power, colonization, and subordination it entrenched are by no means a thing of the past. The version of the project presented in the exhibition takes the form of a wall drawing in black silicone: an enlarged nineteenth-century satirical map of Europe on which the countries have faces and personalities. A historical image of geopolitical power returns in a material that visually evokes crude oil. Accompanying it is footage from the Lithuanian Central State Archives, tracing the rapid transformation of the rural landscape during socialist modernization while revealing the cracks through which resistance becomes possible.

12

Saodat Ismailova
Down the Throat of the Sun, 2026
single-channel video, 24´53˝
Courtesy of the artist

Saodat Ismailova (b. 1981) is an Uzbek filmmaker and visual artist. She belongs to the generation that came of age after the collapse of the USSR. Her speculative film essay draws on both history and myth, weaving together two stories: Soviet nuclear testing in Central Asia and the figure of al-Muqanna, an eighth-century prophet. More than four hundred nuclear tests were carried out at the Semipalatinsk Test Site in Kazakhstan, where contamination by some measures exceeds that of Chornobyl. The Soviet program of atomic modernity, which gave rise to power plants and cities, elsewhere left a legacy of scorched earth.

Al-Muqanna, the historical figure Ismailova invokes, proclaimed himself an incarnation of the divine and led an uprising against the caliphate. Although he promised a just society that would not depend on exploitation of the land, his vision was never realized. When the uprising collapsed, he reduced his own fortress to ashes and took his followers with him. Twelve hundred years later, Soviet historiography recast him as a proto-socialist and a forerunner of the revolution. Ismailova sets the two promises side by side. Successive visions of justice and transformation went unfulfilled, and each time the consequences were borne by the people and land alike.

13

Marcin Derda
Maquette – Atom, 2026
black steel, 3D print,
70 × 110 × 110 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Marcin Derda (b. 2000) creates installations, sculptures, performances, and videos. His wide-ranging artistic explorations arise from encounters with particular materials, places, and histories, such as those tied to the history of industry and technology.

The point of departure for *Maquette – Atom* is Roman Pawelski's 1975 outdoor sculpture *Atom*, located in front of the auditorium of the University of Wrocław's Faculty of Chemistry. Its distilled modernist form corresponded to the rational beauty and abstract logic of scientific research, harmoniously blending into the urban plan and architectural aesthetics of the postwar section of the campus.

In Derda's interpretation, Pawelski's sculpture becomes a model of bygone socialist modernity: a time when education, science, spatial planning, and art were meant to power and organize the energy of social progress. The maquette the artist has built harks back to that predigital era, when the future was designed with physical models. A maquette then was not a representation but a tool, giving material form

to visions of a reality yet to come. Derda's work does not reproduce a specific place. Rather, it speculatively extends a vision Pawelski may have held of the work's future potential, as a nucleus organizing spatial, social, and energy systems. For Derda, *Atom* thus becomes a model for utopia.

14

Marcin Derda
Black Sun, 2024–2026
black steel, canvas, ash,
260 × 70 × 70 cm
Courtesy of the artist

"*Black Sun* is a figure of the future after catastrophe: a future cooled, slowed, and left ambiguous. The object absorbs light rather than emitting it, and so recalls a dead star or a technological relic. Yet the Sun is ceaselessly burning. This process unfolds beyond our direct experience and remains invisible to us. The work makes this hidden process visible, revealing energy, combustion, and the gradual exhaustion of matter. I am interested in the tension between ruin and the possibility of drawing matter back into renewed processes of life, production, and relationships with the planet."
(text: Marcin Derda)

15

Marcin Derda
Rays, 2026
wood panel, ash,
100 × 100 × 4 cm
Courtesy of the artist

"What draws me is the moment when energy dies out: the state after combustion, in which matter does not disappear but enters another cycle. The sun-like form is made of ash and raw wood, becoming at once a symbol of destruction and of potential rebirth. The rays symbolize the force of energy hidden within the ash—energy that despite its apparent extinction remains present and ready to be released anew. It is an object of arrested force, suspended between decay and regeneration, as if holding within it the moment right before the next explosion."
(text: Marcin Derda)

16

Praffdata
Tractor or Reactor, 1987
performance documentation
(photographs: Tomasz Jagodziński)
prints, exhibition copies

Praffdata was formed in 1984 at the School Sociotherapy Center in Warsaw as an independent artistic collective of musicians, painters, and other artists. At their spectacular, high-energy concerts, the musicians swapped instruments, and each performance doubled as a visual arts event.

In the spring of 1987, at the Kwadratowa Club in Gdańsk, the group staged a performance protesting the planned construction of a nuclear power plant in nearby Żarnowiec. As the musicians played an improvised session, the painters worked on a wall of cardboard boxes, and two members of the group, dressed as a tractor and a reactor, fought a duel. The audience spontaneously joined in demolishing the reactor. The concert took place a year after the Chornobyl disaster, when the atom had turned from a promise of modernity into a source of fear and a target for resistance. Circles linked to the anti-communist opposition and the environmental movement had been organizing protests against the Żarnowiec plant since 1984. Chornobyl further heightened public fears and intensified the wave of protests. Praffdata regularly played concerts with a political message, and the group took up energy policy in other actions as well: concerts in Gliwice and Katowice, for instance, foregrounded the hardships of coal mining.

17

Roman Pawelski
Atom, 1975
outdoor sculpture
(photograph: Zbigniew Nowak)
Courtesy of the Remembrance and Future Center

Roman Pawelski's concrete outdoor sculpture is an artistic interpretation of the model of the atom. It was unveiled in 1975 on Joliot-Curie Street, near the buildings of the University of Wrocław's Faculty of Chemistry. The sculpture echoes the modernist aesthetics of the university's architecture and the ethos of science and progress promoted in the Polish People's Republic.

18

photographer unknown
Let the Atom Be a Worker, Not a Soldier
archival photograph
Courtesy of the Pripyat-Film Archive and Oleksandr Syrota

The neon slogan "Let the atom be a worker, not a soldier" lit up Pripyat, the model communist town built to house workers at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. According to Soviet propaganda, the atom was to provide the energy for building a better world. The symbol of Pripyat was Prometheus, whose statue stood at the heart of the town. This communist Prometheus bestowed upon humanity limitless thermal energy to power a peaceful world. Not far from the power plant loomed another structure: the Duga radar, part of an early-warning system for detecting missile attacks on the USSR. The facility was officially designated a radio telecommunications center. In reality, it was attached to a military complex that housed a missile battalion. In parallel with "peaceful" Pripyat, the closed settlements of Chornobyl-2 and Liubech-1 were erected for personnel and their families.

19

Ludmila Rusova
The Atom for Peaceful Purposes Only, 1985
poster reproduction
Private archive

As Soviet state propaganda would have it, atomic energy was to serve as a catalyst for job creation, to enlighten and civilize the populace, and, by ushering in an age of progress and prosperity, to contribute to world peace. At the same time, the atom was, and remains, a powerful weapon in the arsenal of Soviet and Russian colonialism's "struggle for peace." The Belarusian artist Ludmila Rusova (1954–2010) produced this poster, a state commission, exactly one year before the Chornobyl reactor explosion—a catastrophe that marked the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union.

20

Oleksiy Radynski
Where Russia Ends, 2024
single-channel video, 25´
Courtesy of the artist

Oleksiy Radynski (b. 1984) is a Kyiv-based filmmaker and essayist who investigates Soviet and Russian energy infrastructures and their political consequences.

Where Russia Ends is a film essay assembled from archival material: footage shot in the 1980s by Ukrainian filmmakers from the Kyivnaukfilm studio during expeditions to Siberia, rediscovered in 2022. Radynski juxtaposes documentary images of Siberian nature with a narration that seeks to decolonize the region's history. Russia's conquest of Siberia and the Far North has gone on for centuries, accompanied by successive wars against Indigenous peoples. Resource extraction is both the goal and

instrument of empire: oil, gas, and coal finance the apparatus that seizes ever more territory. The narration was developed in collaboration with anticolonial activists from Siberia's Indigenous communities. The work emerged from *Leak. The End of the Pipeline*, a research project on the gas pipeline system that linked Siberia with West Germany from the 1970s on. It begins with a question: who pays the price at the other end of the pipe? Bonn's and Berlin's long-standing gas deals with Moscow provided energy comfort for Western Europe. The pipeline's point of origin, meanwhile, was scarred by exploitation and violence.

21

Mykhailo Nazarenko
These Places Are Dear to Me, 1986
digitized film, 14´16˝
Courtesy of the Pripyat-Film Archive and Oleksandr Syrota

Mykhailo Nazarenko (1953–1993) was the official photographer and filmmaker of Pripyat, the closed *atomgrad*, or atomic town, built in 1970 to house workers at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Nazarenko led the amateur film club Pripyat-Film, based at the "Energetik" Palace of Culture. He also taught photography and film to children and adults, wrote poetry, took part in theater productions, and organized the town's amateur photography competitions. His great passion was the short film.

Most of the films—both Nazarenko's own and the club's collective productions—documented the privileged life of the model communist town. *These Places Are Dear to Me* is a montage of footage shot before, during, and following the Chornobyl disaster. The time before the reactor explosion appears as a golden age, forever lost. Footage from this period captures modern buildings and urban infrastructure, young families with children at playgrounds, cultural life, leisure, sports, and the natural beauty of the surrounding Polesia region.

Defying censorship, Nazarenko was the first filmmaker to document the immediate aftermath of the explosion: the work of liquidators, doctors, and the army, and the evacuation and subsequent resettlement. This record of events in Pripyat and around Chornobyl is complemented by footage shot in the summer of 1986 at Young Pioneer camps in Crimea, organized for children evacuated from the contaminated zone. Nazarenko and his team presented the children with sketches and a photomontage of peaceful Pripyat before the disaster. They returned from the camps with a film for parents showing their children resting and playing by the sea.

22

Vadim Fishkin
Electronic Prometheus, 2013
wax candle, electric thermogenerator, electric candle
Courtesy of the artist and Gregor Podnar gallery

Vadim Fishkin (b. 1965) lives in Slovenia. He creates sculptures and installations exploring the history of science and the relationships between technology, utopia, and metaphysics.

Lenin's famous dictum, "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country," expressed the conviction that modern technology, the development of the energy sector, and electrification formed the foundation for building communism. Fishkin's work engages with the history of this ideology through a model of a small device—the thermogenerator—that converts the heat of a flame into electricity. Its principle recalls one of the most fascinating inventions of 1950s Soviet engineering: the so-called kerosene lamp radio. In the postwar USSR, electrifying the empire's vast territory was a priority and a challenge. In villages and regions without electricity, kerosene lamps were the main source of domestic light.

The Soviet thermogenerators of the period converted the heat of the flame burning in a kerosene lamp into electricity to power a radio receiver. Communist propaganda broadcasts from Moscow could thus resound in every home of an ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse empire. Fishkin built his model in a reality in which that voice on high had long since dissolved into the ether, and in which the communist version of the myth of Prometheus bestowing fire for the good of humanity had lost its vitality. The artist summons the bygone era as a transient specter manifesting in unassuming form, defused by time and by the context of art.

23

Monika Zawadzki
• *Hearth*, 2026
digital print
• *Cowtractor*, 2026
digital print
Courtesy of the artist

Monika Zawadzki (b. 1977) is a sculptor who also makes drawings, prints, and posters. Since the early 2000s, she has been developing a precise formal system for analyzing and designing relationships between the various agents of an ecosystem: animals, humans, inanimate matter, machines. Most of her works address the mechanisms that reduce life to a resource.

The artist develops this theme in new works concerning the principle of biomass. Here, everything living is killed and processed into fuel for transforming the world through labor. Labor, in turn, demands endless supplies of energy from burned bodies. The artist delves into the seemingly rational rhythms of productivity, revealing their hidden dynamic, at once lethal and self-destructive.

Artists:
Marcin Derda, Vadim Fishkin, Ludwik Holesz, Saodat Ismailova, Justyna Mędrala, Deimantas Narkevičius, Mykhailo Nazarenko, Teofil Ociepka, Praffdata, Oleksiy Radynski, Mako Sajko, Rita Süveges, Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas, Julita Wójcik, Monika Zawadzki

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