BWA

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BWA Wrocław Główny
Piłsudskiego 105

SIC! BWA Wrocław
Pl. Kościuszki 9/10



The Crystal Palace

The Crystal Palace



In 1851, a monumental glass-and-iron structure was erected in London's Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition. Nothing like it had ever been built before. No one had ever attempted to bring together the contemporary accomplishments of "the whole world" within a single space. The enormous building, called, at first mockingly, the Crystal Palace, was designed by Joseph Paxton. The architect, who had previously specialized in designing palm houses and orangeries, created a structure that seemed almost impossible. The giant of prefabricated cast iron and glass embodied the miracle of progress, the work of human hands and intellect. Miracles were precisely what the undertaking was about, as the extraordinary exhibition was intended to display wonders from across the globe: works of art, raw materials, machines, manufactured goods, and colonial artifacts. The progressive West was set against Oriental, tropical, and overseas worlds, which turned the exhibition into a theater of "this world and the otherworldly," where everything seemed within arm's reach. This multifaceted story of excess fostered a belief that the world was wondrous, and that modern civilization was powerful enough to explore it and bring it closer.

To house "the whole world" within a single interior was a daunting task. Therefore, the Crystal Palace promised more: not just to contain it all, but also to do so in a transparent and orderly manner. After all, to see everything is to know everything. The same gesture of embracing the whole world with a single gaze was made by other popular modern institutions of the time: natural history museums, ethnographic museums, zoos, and botanical gardens. The underlying idea was to collect and systematize magnificent plants, animals, stones and minerals, sculptures, paintings, devices, and groundbreaking inventions because the world known to people at the time had become too vast not to do so.

Soon, people across Europe and beyond were dreaming a similar dream. Successive incarnations of the Crystal Palace sprang up like mushrooms in Madrid, Prague, Vienna, Munich, New York, and Sydney. Even Breslau, a rather provincial city, gained its own cast-iron and glass pavilions. One was erected in

what is now Wolności Square, and the other in Staszica Square. Rather than just reflecting an aspiration to be progressive or a desire to participate in the colonial division of the world, the collective fervor also stemmed from the conviction that noble, transparent architecture was capable of remedying "the whole world" by exposing and then abolishing its inequalities.

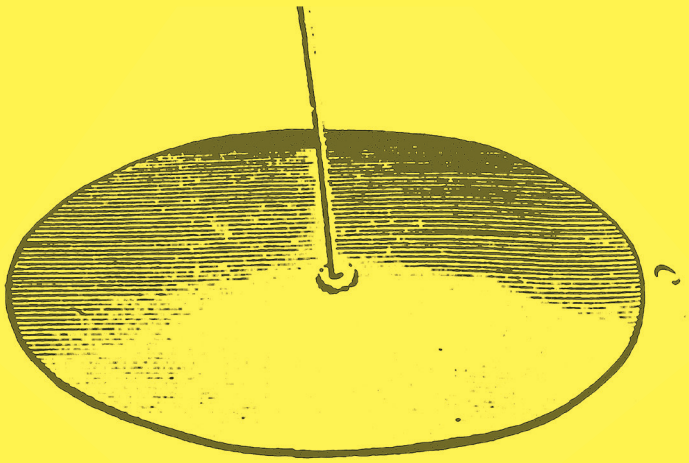
Glass proved to be more than just a construction material or an achievement of 19th-century technology. Over time, it became one of the languages of modernity. Glass houses came to symbolize a new order, with their transparency promising fair distribution of wealth and public life founded on truth. Transparency ceased to be just a property of glass. It became a way of thinking about the world and a vision of reality in which everything could be seen, ordered, and understood.



Every dream, however, comes with a price. A pane of glass, though invisible, will never disappear altogether. It remains a thin boundary between what is near and what is inaccessible. It allows us to see something, but prevents us from touching it. It opens up a landscape while simultaneously bracketing it. The less we see a pane, the stronger its impact on how we see. This crack—between openness and separation, visibility and control—reveals a contradiction of modernity that we still experience today.

This is evident both in the architecture of the railway station, which houses the BWA Wrocław Główny gallery (the building is only five years younger than London's Crystal Palace), and in the display windows of the SIC! gallery in Kościuszko Square. Both venues reflect the afterimages of modernization myths that we have inherited and continue to live with in these interesting times.

The Crystal Palace exhibition is split into two venues and combines two areas of our curatorial interests: the history of modernity and the medium of glass. One might ask: what is the point of revisiting a story that dates almost two centuries back? The answer can be found in the symbolic image captured in engravings from that period: the glass giant appears



infinite, and at its feet, crowds swarm so densely that human faces are no longer visible—only a sea of heads. This area enclosed under a single transparent roof can indeed be called a "Grand Interior."

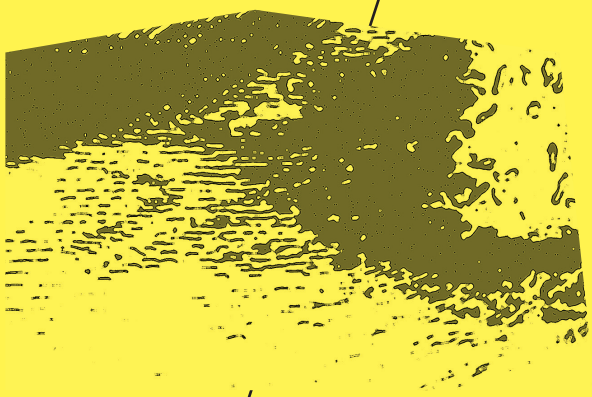
And yet, the prosperity and greenhouse-like conditions that prevail inside are not available to all. Only some benefit from them, while others must remain outside, watching what happens within through the glass panes. The "Grand Interior" thus becomes a metaphor for a world divided between those who occupy its very center and those who remain on the peripheries.

Our idea is not simply to use this metaphor to criticize the existing order of things. We also seek to take a closer look at the promise of modernity to create new worlds, if often at the expense of existing ones. Despite the distance of almost two centuries, we continue to experience the same tension. Our creations fill us with hope and disappointment both. We delight in, and are simultaneously terrified by, what we as humans are capable of.

In *The Crystal Palace* exhibition, we explore some of the micro-stories associated with this architectural marvel and the concept of transparency. We tell about the trees which were enclosed by the glass pavilion, the sparrows living within, plants shipped from distant continents, and the first public flush toilets. These seemingly trivial stories allow us to look at the Crystal Palace from a different perspective—not by reference to a grand narrative of progress, but through peripheral topics. The micro-stories crack open the glass roof of the narrative, shedding light on what has largely remained unseen. We delve into this unfulfilled and fulfilled promise, whose charm was once so difficult to resist.

Mika Drozdowska and Joanna Kobyłt

BWA
Wrocław
Główny



Jan Baszak
Aleksander Baszynski
Patrycja Cichosz
Erin Dickson
Wiktor Dyndo
JMB (John “Sleepy” Moran
and Marta Byrdziak)
John „Sleepy” Moran
Richard Mosse
Yinka Shonibare
Tom Swoboda
Paweł Szeibel

Wiktor Dyndo
from the *State of Crisis* series
2023–2025, oil on canvas

After it had been relocated to Sydenham Hill, London's Crystal Palace burned to the ground in 1936. It was not, however, the only incarnation of the idea to have suffered this fate. New York's Crystal Palace went up in flames in 1858, and Munich's Glaspalast in 1931. The causes of the fires were not always discovered. In the case of the German pavilion, the investigation found that the fire had been deliberately set.

There is a certain irony to this turn of history: a structure meant to be a triumph of modernity became a spectacle heralding the demise of modernist ideas. Watching the fire, Winston Churchill is said to have remarked: "This is the end of an age," which aptly summarizes the fate of the building, which had always been conceived as an embodiment of faith in the future.

Crisis emerges when you are in a state of suspension, when you are aware of a danger and anticipate likely developments. In an age of ubiquitous and continuous information reaching us from omnipresent screens, we become passive participants of dramatic events: wars, disasters, and social unrest. Our experience of the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine has further unsettled our sense of stability, making crisis increasingly less a distant occurrence and more a part of our everyday lives.

In his *State of Crisis* body of work, Wiktor Dyndo depicts stately interiors of palaces—buildings associated with power, order, and stability. The staircases, columns, and marble surfaces from his paintings evoke a sense of permanence, one of architecture's fundamental promises. In addition to inspiring awe, a palace is meant to endure for centuries and testify to the historical and political might of its founders. Palaces are displays of power—architecture to be viewed as manifestations of influence, permanence, and control.

In Dyndo's paintings, the promise of endurance is held in suspension. Behind a column, on the horizon, dark and ominous storm clouds build up, smoke curls between column capitals, and tongues of flame emerging from air vents transform images of power

into landscapes of anxiety. These are pictures of suspense, of the eve of a catastrophe, when the threat already looms large, but its consequences remain unknown.

Jan Baszak
Roe Deer
2026, metal, PVC pipes, upholstery foam, recycled polyester, cotton, polyester, cotton and linen threads, epoxy resin, recycled rabbit leather

Technical assistance in production: Daria Chraścina

In his work, Jan Baszak is interested in non-human beings, particularly in interspecies exchanges of gazes. He identifies spaces of encounter and understanding of both himself and the Other. The artist explores the intersections between the public and the private, as well as moments of intimacy and nostalgia. He investigates regimes of visibility and the ways in which human and "more-than-human" beings recognize each other. In his essay *Why Look at Animals?*, John Berger wrote about how modernity had separated humans from animals[1]. With the rise of urbanization, capitalism, and the development of industrial manufacturing, non-companion animals most often come into human view as commodities, products, images, or spectacles. On the one hand, Baszak's textile sculptures reveal the drama of animal physiology, which defies the aesthetic order of nature, and, on the other, they resonate with the stories inscribed in the fabric, which has previously "belonged" to other bodies. The sculptures restore subjectivity, with the gaze they feature becoming a space of emotion and care, but also domination.

Albinism is a genetic condition characterized by the absence of pigment in the body. Its typical manifestations in animals include white fur and red eyes, often accompanied by visual impairment or complete blindness. In the wild, the lack of camouflage makes albinos more visible and, consequently, more vulnerable. No pigment means loss of concealment and species-specific signals, which makes such organisms figures of pure defenselessness. The whiteness becomes a state of permanently being seen. It is precisely the exceptional visibility that has intrigued humans, who have eagerly included such white curiosities into specimen collections and natural history museums. The white roe deer in Baszak's work trembles. Its shivering suspends it between a living organism and a museum exhibit. It is unclear whether the animal is expressing fear or an unusually strong emotion. Conspicuous as it is, the animal itself cannot see. Therefore, rather than

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[1] John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

empowering it, the visibility becomes its weakness, over which the animal has no control.

The bird lying at the deer's feet echoes a story about the birds that inhabited London's Crystal Palace. As the giant elms from Hyde Park were enclosed by the glass structure, so were the sparrows that lived in their branches. Their presence began to trouble the organizers of the Great Exhibition, who feared that they would contaminate the space and exhibits. In the perfectly ordered interior, the birds became unwanted actors. Having learned of the problem, Prince Albert sought advice from the Duke of Wellington, who supposedly replied: "Sparrow-hawks." Coexistence was out of the question, and the proposed solution was to rid the Palace interior of the small birds. Whether this story is true or not, the very fact that it has survived as an anecdote is meaningful. It shows how quickly the presence of an animal can come to be regarded as undesirable when it disrupts a carefully planned order.

The roe deer and the sparrow meet within the exhibition space as symbols of two different modes of presence. The deer is distinct for exceptional conspicuousness and has been made the focus of gaze, while the sparrow, having found itself in the Palace by chance as an element escaping control, has become undesirable. Yet, their encounter here reestablishes a relational character. This sculptural installation utilizes interdependencies to expose the tensions between the body and the environment, exposure and protection, between the viewer who watches and is simultaneously being watched, and between the aesthetics of anomaly and the everyday reality of survival. Rather than leading to complete understanding, a reciprocal gaze can be an acknowledgment of another's presence.

Yinka Shonibare
Fake Death Picture (Death of St. Francis, Bartolomé Carducho)
2011, digital color photographic print

Collection of the Wrocław Contemporary Museum

In his work, Yinka Shonibare examines historical mechanisms and how they resurface in contemporary times. His works have repeatedly featured Lord Nelson as a central figure. The most famous admiral in the history of the Royal Navy, a symbol of British imperial power and colonial expansion, he was hailed as a national hero and surrounded by a cult of commemoration after his death. Contemporary

reinterpretations, including those by Shonibare, complicate the admiral's monumental image, drawing attention to his opposition to abolitionism and his involvement in the system of slavery, which used to be one of the foundations of British imperial power.

In his series *Fake Death Pictures*, Shonibare reconstructs iconic depictions of death known from the history of painting, replacing their protagonists with Nelson. The photograph on display draws on Bartolomé Carducho's painting *The Death of St. Francis* (1593). The artist creates a tableau vivant—a staged, photographed reenactment of the painted scene, with Nelson taking the place of the dying saint. At his feet, as in the original, lie objects that evoke the transience of human life: shoes, a bowl, a rosary, an hourglass, and a skull. A Black woman accompanies Nelson at the moment of his death. By offering him a candle—a symbol of faith and the passage into death—she reverses the power relationship: a representative of the empire at death's door becomes dependent on a person representing the world that the very empire has subjugated to its rule.

Nelson is dressed in a garment embellished with batik, which is a hallmark of Shonibare's artistic practice. The fabric, currently associated with African culture, actually has cross-cultural origins. Inspired by Indonesian folk crafts, it was produced by European manufacturers to be subsequently widespread in African markets. Shonibare exploits this paradox to challenge simplistic notions of cultural identity.

The eponymous "fake deaths" can be interpreted as deaths that never actually occurred. The imperial myth embodied by Nelson, then, has never died. The theatrical set design, the costumes, and the tableau vivant captured in the photograph transform death into a spectacle. Rather than depicting history, Shonibare reflects on how history is enacted. In this sense, his work resonates with the logic behind the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace—a space that likewise transformed reality into a carefully orchestrated performance to be viewed.

Patrycja Cichosz
Everything is Beautiful Here (The Art Nouveau Kit from the Guest Room of the Herbst Palace, 20th Century)
2025, gouache, oil, linen

Capitalism is founded on commodities and human desire to possess them. The Great Exhibition was one of its driving forces. It presented beautiful objects while ignoring the human labor behind their manufacture. Even though the items on display were mass-fabricated products—no longer handcrafted, but created by modern machinery and its operators—they were even more captivating than handmade objects.

Everything Is Beautiful Here alludes to the artist's experience of visiting the Herbst Palace—a villa erected in the 1870s in the "Polish Manchester", as Łódź was sometimes called. It was built for the daughter of Karol Scheibler, a Łódź industrialist also known as the "Cotton King." The high-quality fabrics machine-produced in his factory won a gold medal at the 1855 World's Fair in Paris. The opulence of the palace's interiors—the furnishings and ornaments—is dizzying. The objects testify to a fortune whose proportions seem difficult to comprehend even today. Yet, behind it were the people, the workers who toiled at the textile machines.

The Herbst Palace and the Crystal Palace are illustrative of the kind of narration about progress told through materiality—objects, interior furnishings, inventions, buildings, and sometimes the names of their creators. Behind Paxton's success were up to 6,000 workers who had been toiling away to make that dream of power a reality. Scheibler owed his success to a similar number of textile workers, spinners, and dyers.

The title's Art Nouveau shaving kit, which stands on a chest of drawers in the palace's guest room, is 120 old. Being a beautiful utilitarian object as it is, it can be perceived as an extravagance—an excess that goes beyond what is essential. It is precisely this excess that reveals the process whereby labor is transformed into luxury and a personal effect becomes a hallmark of prestige.

Tom Swoboda
Sketches from Nature
2026, installation: wood, glass, photograph, film, speaker

Tom Swoboda is the creator of *Animal Space*, an extensive and multifaceted project whose constituent works explore various aspects of the relationship between humans and the non-human world. One of them, titled *Mangabey's Shitty Sun*, is a record of a unique encounter between the artist and a mangabey monkey sitting across the glass of a zoo enclosure. As the artist recounts, the monkey kept observing him for a long moment, consciously returning his gaze. At one point, it began drawing on the surface of the glass separating them. Using its own excrement, it created a sun sign, glancing repeatedly at the person on the other side. It neither attempted to breach the barrier nor ignored it, but treated the glass as an interface for possible interaction.

In *Sketches from Nature*, featured at the exhibition, the artist employs a form reminiscent of 19th-century display cases, foregrounding the role of glass as an exhibition medium. Inside, he places a series of photographs documenting the successive stages of the puzzling encounter at the zoo.

The use by zoos of glass instead of bars creates an illusion of proximity and transparency. By contrast, in Swoboda's work, the boundary between the observed and the observer is unsettled. The non-human person refuses to be a mere object of gaze—they themselves watch, respond, and leave a trace. This extraordinary, yet true, story challenges the widespread belief in the exclusivity of the human gaze, restoring the animal's role as an active participant in the relationship.

John "Sleepy" Moran
Contained Within
2025/2026, installation

Work funded by: Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung, Kugler Glass, Laurian Von Stephinades, Incalmo Glass, PolyesterShoppen, Goldray Glass, and Lasikomppania

Room I
"Whichever side we stand on, gazing into rooms, halls, chambers hidden behind glass or—conversely—gazing from their interiors onto the streets, houses, the sky, an undefined longing awaits us..."
Marek Bieńczyk, *Transparency*

There are interiors that cannot be entered. All you are allowed to do is stand in front of a small window and look inside.

Behind the glass, you see a bourgeois sitting room—richly upholstered armchairs and sofas, patterned wallpaper, a fireplace, and a chandelier. Everything seems to be exactly where it belongs. There are no signs of haste or decay. There is only silence and the unmistakable sense that someone has left only moments ago, with the house still waiting for its dwellers to return.

The viewer can peer inside, while remaining outside the depicted world. The glass does not obscure the view. On the contrary, it allows for every detail to be discerned. And yet, it marks an impassable boundary. Transparency abhors distance. It only makes it easier for the distance to be forgotten. The house seems close, yet one can only gaze at it. It has ceased to be a place where life unfolded, becoming an image, a reminiscence.

Apparently, absence is just as important here as what is visible. The objects left behind bear traces of someone's life, yet reveal nothing of their story. The interior bares itself in front of us in the tiniest detail, and yet what matters most remains beyond our reach. We do not know whether the house has been abandoned temporarily or lost forever. Perhaps what is missing from it can be found somewhere else entirely.

Maybe you just need to look further…

Paweł Szeibel
object from the *Wardian Cases* series
2019–2026, glass, metal

The invention of Wardian cases made it possible for plants imported from the farthest corners of the world to be transported and acclimatized to Europe's unpredictable climate. In the 19th century, these small, glazed structures with exotic specimens enclosed within them were shipped across the oceans for weeks. Moisture circulating beneath the glass created the case's own microclimate—a small, self-contained world that allowed a plant to survive thousands of kilometers away from its place of origin.

Yet, in addition to protecting fragile life, the glass cases also carried knowledge as it traveled—expertise on how to propagate the plants, where they were likely to take root, and how to use them. This knowledge had tangible value for the British Empire.

Specimens found their way into botanical gardens, but their journey often continued further—onto plantations for commercial exploitation. Curiosity became intertwined with calculation, discovery with appropriation, and the ability to keep a plant alive opened the way to relocating it to entirely different places.

Thus, the Wardian case embodied a paradox. Created to sustain life, the case also became a tool for displacing that life and subjugating it to the imperial economy. The small garden under glass therefore conveyed a much broader story.

Erin Dickson
PISSED
2024, 23-karat gold-plated glass, PLA 3D-printed sculpture

Among the most puzzling highlights of the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace were the public flush toilets known as "monkey closets." For many visitors, the opportunity to use modern sanitary facilities was as extraordinary as the machines and inventions on display. What had previously been a strictly private matter started to be accommodated by the city's modern infrastructure. In just six months, more than 827,000 people used them.[2] However, this symbol of progress came at a price. Access to the toilets was not free, and their layout reflected the social divisions at the time—mainly those related to gender and access to public space.

In the second half of the 19th century, the lack of public toilets for women was so acute that some female historians describe this phenomenon as a "urinary leash." Indeed, limited access to public toilets restricted women's ability moving freely around the city.[3]

Erin Dickson revisits this story, shifting the focus from architecture to the body. She depicts a woman in a moment that the social convention of the time would rather hide from view. The pool of urine cast in gilded glass clashes the otherwise concealed physiology of urination with a material associated with value and luxury. The artist places what is supposed to remain out of sight at the very center. Dickson's gesture infringes upon the rules that say what a woman may do with her body and how she can display it in public spaces. Yet, there is a subversive turn to it: the transgression becomes an act

[2] www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, accessed: 22.08.2026.

[3] www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/History-of-Womens--Public-Toilets-in-Britain, accessed: 22.08.2026.

of freedom. The body no longer asks for a place—it simply takes one.

Public flush toilets offered more than just a practical convenience. Their presence meant that the essential needs began to be met by the city's infrastructure. This promise was far from fulfilled—access remained uneven and limited—but there was a major change behind it: infrastructure accessible to all started to be considered essential for one to be able to enjoy unrestrained presence within the city. Today, in order to use a toilet you will often need to enter a café, shopping mall, or other commercial space. This small everyday threshold is a reminder that accessibility does not mean the same thing to all. This being the case, when inquiring about a public toilet, you are inquiring whether you are taken care of and have your right of presence safeguarded—about who can take advantage of public spaces without major restrictions and on what terms.

Paweł Szeibel
object from the *Wardian Cases* series
2019–2026, glass, metal

The Wardian case first appears within the gallery space in a recognizable form, as a regular glass-and-metal structure. In the next room, this order begins to falter. The objects that follow capture the successive stages of a transformation process: the glass bends and flows downward, exposing the metal framework. Gradually, precise geometry gives way to matter, which is escaping the confines imposed upon it. What has been designed to create a sealed, carefully managed environment for a fragile life reveals fragility of its own.

The deformed objects evoke afterimages of the Crystal Palace after it had been almost completely destroyed by fire in 1936. The glass architecture, meant to dazzle with its lightness, scale, and technical audacity, lost its form within a matter of hours. What remained was a bare iron structure—a trace of the monumental building that had once stood there. Winston Churchill is said to have remarked at the time, "This is the end of an age." In Paweł Szeibel's works, the echo of that catastrophe is stretched out over time.

There is no single moment of rupture here. Regularity gives way to deformation, hard contours soften,

and matter collapses under its own weight. The case, which helped maintain artificially an equilibrium within the small ecosystem, begins to lose that balance itself. As its form dissolves, so does the promise of control, which has been embedded in it since the outset.

Patrycja Cichosz
You Must Bow Your Head
2025, gouache, oil, linen

Realized with the financial support of the City of Gdańsk as part of the Gdańsk Cultural Scholarship—Creative Fund

You Must Bow Your Head depicts the interior of a shell deliberately set on fire. The work alludes to a child's fascination with violence and situations where inflicting pain on weaker beings—typically animals and plants—may stem from curiosity and inability to anticipate the implications of one's actions. However, when it is not addressed appropriately by those around them and is combined with tacit approval, it may lead to serious behavioral disorders. As a result innocent experimentation may go too far and become an experience of actual violence for another human being. A gesture that seems trivial or irrelevant to one party may cause suffering to another, which the latter is unable to oppose.

The relationship between the interior and the exterior is crucial here. The attack turns the shell—otherwise a natural form of protection—into a target of torture. It can be interpreted as a metaphor for both individual experiences and social relations between one who belongs to a community and one who remains outside it, and lacks tools to defend oneself against violence. The fire also alludes to the fate of the many Crystal Palace incarnations that came to an end in flames, with the causes of the fires not always known.

Aleksander Baszynski
A Shelter for Some
2026, crystal glass, plexiglass, metal

The Crystal Palace and a tent seem to represent two different worlds. The former was an emblem of modernity and the ambition to bring together "the whole world" under one roof. The latter is one of the oldest forms of shelter, used during a journey, rather than as a permanent abode. It accompanies migration, making its temporariness an inherent quality of the experience of home.

Aleksander Baszynski brings these two distant orders together by constructing a tent made of crystal glass—material associated with status, luxury, and

prestige. This puzzling combination revamps the meanings of both: the crystal loses its emblematic splendor, while the simplest form of shelter takes on an almost unreal quality. The transparent structure seems fragile, as if its presence were only momentary. The tent becomes a visual representation of a home that cannot be kept forever—suspended between the desire to take root and the risk of loss. Abandoned and nearly defenseless, it alludes to an absence. Rather than speaking of what has happened, it speaks of the silence that has remained.

Around the tent stand boundary markers made of crystal horns of plenty. From the side facing the tent, their smooth surfaces reflect the light, creating a calm, almost decorative rhythm. Seen from the outside, they reveal sharp, spike-like tips. The structure changes its character depending on the side you view it from. A safe interior for some, it is inaccessible for others.

"Build houses of silver, like tents,"[4] wrote Papusza in her poem "I Come to You". The plea for shelter leads to an even more fundamental appeal: "I come so that you might welcome everyone." Beside Baszynski's crystal tent, these words take on an almost tangible form.

The installation becomes an antithesis of the Crystal Palace, confronting architecture of power with that of survival. The monumental structure is replaced by a fragile shelter, teetering between permanence and the possibility of disappearance. The promise of access to "the entire world" is reduced to a small interior surrounded by a border. Crystal no longer conceals anything—not even the fact that not everyone has a safe haven. Protection no longer depends just on the place itself, but also on the willingness of others to welcome those in need.

[4] Papusza (Bronisława Wajs), *Przychodzę do was* (1953), trans. Jerzy Ficowski in *Mistrz Manole i inne przekłady*, Sejny: Wydawnictwo Pogranicze, 2004.

Patrycja Cichosz
Concrete in the Pool
2024, oil, gouache, linen

In her art, Patrycja Cichosz explores the topics of injustice and resistance to it. She examines the consequences of sustaining the existing order in times of growing insecurity, often disguised under the slogan of national unity.

The work *Concrete in the Pool* references the history of the Oak Park Municipal Pool in Montgomery,

Alabama, as recounted by Heather McGhee in her book *The Sum of Us*. In 1959, when a court ruled that segregation was unconstitutional and Black residents had a right to access a previously white-only pool, city officials decided to close the facility. A shared public amenity was lost to everyone, including those who had enjoyed it previously. McGhee cites this story as an example of "zero-sum" thinking—the belief that one group's gain must come at another group's expense.

The story of the pool can be likened to the situation in the Grand Interior, where one group is privileged over those who are denied access. The court's ruling shattered the glass roof. Notwithstanding this, access to that enclosed space was not neutral. In the 1960s, Oak Park reopened to all residents, but the historic pool was never rebuilt.

Patrycja Cichosz
Golden Horn (We Are Proud)
2025, gouache, oil, linen

Realized with the financial support of the City of Gdańsk as part of the Gdańsk Cultural Scholarship—Creative Fund

The title of the work alludes to *The Wedding*, a play written by Stanisław Wyspiański, which premiered in 1901. The golden horn, handed to the Host by Wernyhora—a legendary Cossack bard and prophet—is a call to action and an opportunity for Poles to stage a countrywide uprising. However, the Host entrusts it to Jasiek, a stable boy, who loses it while bending down to retrieve his peacock-feathered cap—a symbol of vanity, ambition, and self-interest. The horn is a metaphor of orchestrated effort, national awakening, and actual action as opposed to talk. In addition to helping Poles regain independence, it is also supposed to bridge the divide between the intelligentsia and the peasantry. Hence the Straw Man's song, which begins with the words "You used to have, churl, a golden horn."

In Patrycja Cichosz's piece, this motif refers to how Polish-Ukrainian relations have developed since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the outbreak of the full-scale war. The initial wave of aid and empathy created an opportunity for genuine integration between the two nations. Over time, however, empathy gave way to resentment and tensions, fueled in part by right-wing politicians. Recently, people from Ukraine have been targeted by verbal and physical violence in Poland. Peter Sloterdijk, a German philosopher, refers to the Crystal Palace as the "Grand Interior,"

a protected community space separated from the outside. The initial surge of help referred to above symbolically shattered the glass roof—opening up temporarily the shared space to those who had previously remained outside of it. Today, we are once again witnessing reluctance for it to be shared and attempts to draw a dividing line between those who can be allowed inside and those who are denied access.

Yinka Shonibare
Planets in My Head: Young Geologist
2019, fiberglass, cotton fabric, wood, metal elements, leather, wax

Collection of the Wrocław Contemporary Museum

Planets in My Head is a series of child-sized figurative sculptures representing various areas of knowledge emblematic of Western culture. On the one hand, Yinka Shonibare draws on the Enlightenment tradition of ordering the world through observation, measurement, and classification, and on the other, challenges its claims to establish a universal picture of reality.

The eponymous *Young Geologist* is dressed in a Victorian outfit made of wax-print fabric, characteristic of Shonibare's practice. The material, inspired by Indonesian batik garments, was initially crafted in Europe to subsequently become extremely popular in Africa, where it has remained an emblematic part of its culture since. Shonibare draws on this complex history to imply that cultural identity is a process of exchange, borrowing, and transformation.

In place of his head, the geologist has a night sky globe bearing the names of scientists from around the world, including Nigerian Bashiru Ademola Raji and South African Maria Wilman. The young geologist views the world through a theodolite—an instrument used to measure angles and set directions. The geologist's "armed" eye echoes the Enlightenment's belief that reality can be known and ordered while, at the same time, challenging the universality of this conviction.

Knowledge also emerges here as a tool of control: whoever measures and classifies gains the power to organize space. Rather than just measuring space, the theodolite is also capable of delimiting it—establishing relationships between what is within and what remains outside. Shonibare reminds us that behind the seemingly objective order of knowledge,

there is always the question about who has the right to describe, organize, and define the world.

Patrycja Cichosz
Microresearcherx
2024, gouache, oil, linen

Realized with the financial support of the City of Gdańsk as part of the Gdańsk Cultural Scholarship—Creative Fund

The *Microresearcherx* explores cognitive behavioral patterns. The eye in the painting—a symbol of looking, perception, and cognition—observes the world with astonishing zeal through small-sized objects. Scrutinizing the subject of its research with utmost concentration and dedication as it does, it overlooks the broader context, focusing instead on details.

The painting corresponds with Shonibare's sculpture displayed in the same space, but rather than commenting on systems of knowledge, it addresses the psychology of cognition. Indeed, what we see depends not only on reality but also on what we focus our gaze on and what we ignore. A fragment can, over time, come to pretend to be the whole—a few selected details may be enough for us to picture a world that remains beyond our direct experience. This is also how we come to picture in our collective imagination places or communities. Based on individual images, statistics, and observations, we construct an all-encompassing narrative that may have little to do with their complexity.

Sometimes narrowing the perspective is a defensive strategy. It is easier to focus on a section of a problem than to confront its overwhelming entirety. The *Microresearcherx* is thus left suspended between the need to understand every detail and the awareness that no single detail is the whole story.

This is also how an exhibition works: it picks specific objects, images, and information from reality and arranges them into a story that begins to represent something larger than any of the constituent exhibits.

Richard Mosse
Moria
2019, digital printing, metallic paper, aluminum composite panel

Collection of the Wrocław Contemporary Museum

Richard Mosse documents major humanitarian and environmental crises of our time. The featured photographs, made using thermal imaging technology, come from the *Heat Maps* body of work. They depict two sites associated with migration and control of EU borders, which are defunct today.

Richard Mosse
Souda Camp on Chios Island, Greece
2017, photograph, photographic print on metallic paper

Collection of the MOCAK Museum
of Contemporary Art in Krakow

The first one is the Moria camp on the island of Lesbos—a refugee center for people who were arriving in Europe across the Aegean Sea. The other is Souda camp on Chios island—a smaller, open reception center near the local port and adjacent to the town, which was operated between 2014 and 2017. Although neither of these sites exists today, the causes of forced migration—war, violence, and the exacerbating climate crisis—have not disappeared. The problem is not migrating people themselves but the political mechanisms of border control and restricted mobility.

Both Lesbos and Chios are popular tourist destinations. The picturesque landscapes and holiday infrastructures were at odds with the makeshift shelters and the realities of everyday life in the reception centers. These were, in turn, encircled by control infrastructures—fences, razor wire, walls, and watchtowers. Their temporariness stood in puzzling contrast to the robustness of the system they were part of.

This contrast echoes the metaphoric meaning of the Crystal Palace to Fyodor Dostoevsky, who, having visited it, came to perceive it as symbolizing the pursuit by the West of comfort and happiness through materialism. Peter Sloterdijk elaborates on this metaphor, arguing that the glass structure symbolizes contemporary society, shielded by a sphere of security, affluence, and consumption at the cost of those who remain outside, warded off by a boundary that separates the interior from the exterior.

The two photographs illustrate two different ways of organizing this boundary. Moria was isolated from its surroundings and subject to strict controls, while Souda remained open and almost directly integrated into the fabric of the town. The former operated through separation, while the latter through visibility.

Mosse consciously employs a technology associated with military surveillance and conquest. The heat it captures reduces an individual to an anonymous point within a crowd, much as the media often do. The artist further aestheticizes the image, with the silvery paper enhancing the effect of unreality.

Photography becomes here both a document and a visually captivating artifact—a detached gaze upon spaces where decisions were made about who will and who will not be allowed into the "palace."

JMB (John "Sleepy" Moran in collaboration with Marta Byrdziak)
Travellore
2021, hand-carved and engraved glass, metal and gold leaf gilding

Maps are never innocent. They organize space, establish centers and peripheries, and delineate boundaries. They decide what enters the field of vision and what is to fall out of sight. At 19th-century world exhibitions, distant parts of the globe were brought closer through objects, raw materials, and symbols arranged according to Western European categories and imaginings. Having arrived from afar, things were being placed within completely new frameworks. Detached from their usual contexts, they were afforded meanings that followed the logic of the exhibition.

In John Moran's *Travellore*, this order begins to fall apart. Mickey Mouse's glass skull rests within the golden ring of a globe, its surface covered by a blue-and-white map. The icon of childhood imagination and a symbol of Walt Disney's mass-entertainment empire engages in interaction with the aesthetic of Delft pottery—a European response to the fascination with imported Chinese porcelain. The geography we are familiar with begins to waver. The continents lose their proportions, with a map of the Earth emerging on one of Mickey's distinctive ears and the Moon coming up on the other. What is familiar is displaced, mixed up, and rearranged.

However, it is not only the maps that are changing but also the ways we learn to see, desire, and imagine the distant. The Crystal Palace was one of the sites where the emerging culture of consumerism was enveloped in a spectacular setting. Rather than being merely put on display, the commodities were exhibited in such a way as to catch the eye, inspire awe, and become objects of desire. Over a century later, Disneyland took this logic in a different direction. In addition to desiring things, we are meant to crave an experience—being able to become a part of a carefully crafted narrative.

Nowadays, we are inundated with images and information nearly all the time. The world has never

seemed so close, and yet, the proximity does not make us see it more clearly. Excess does not necessarily broaden our perspective. It can narrow it just as effectively, leading us astray toward content that confirms what we already know or want to believe. This being the case, Moran's distorted cartography takes on yet another meaning. It is no longer just about who charts the map, but also about which map we ourselves choose to be guided by. Where knowledge ends, belief starts, with fiction—repeated long enough—starting to look like reality.

Tom Swoboda
Bilateral Symmetries
from the *Animal Space* series
2025, photograph

Tom Swoboda's *Diptych with a White Pelican* alludes to Jan Baszak's albino roe deer. Here, however, the animal does not return the gaze. It seems suspended between movement and immobility. Its pose brings to mind a museum specimen, with the impression intensified by the tree stump—reminiscent of a pedestal—on which the animal stands.

Instead of clarifying and organizing the image by virtue of its transparency, the glass pane that reflects the surroundings obscures the distinction between the outside and the inside. Reflections of the treetops and fences come to be superimposed on the bird's silhouette. The enclosure strikes with its artificiality. The concrete flooring and the pond carved into it are clearly at odds with what we might call a natural environment. Its primary purpose being to craft imagery, it creates a contrast between the minimalist settings and their visually striking occupants.

Similar minimalism was employed in modernist zoos, where the illusion of nature was abandoned in favor of functional, undecorated enclosures. This can even be considered a noble gesture whereby people ceased to pretend that the animal lived in a near-natural environment given that the enclosure merely imitated its habitat. Notwithstanding this, the spaces remained a place of confinement and deprivation. The animal, rid of stimuli and the ability to move freely, became a "spectacle"—all the more striking the more abstract its surroundings.

Like Richard Mosse's photographs, Swoboda's picture depicts a space isolated, enclosed, and exposed. And yet, being aestheticized as it is, the scene he

captures does not distance us from the photographed creature. On the contrary, the stillness of the scene and its almost melancholic harmony make us look at the confined animal with tenderness, rather than emotional detachment. The beauty of the image does not invalidate the situation of the pelican. Instead, it leaves it open, with the gaze itself becoming more ambivalent.

John "Sleepy" Moran
Contained Within
2025/2026, installation

Work funded by: Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung, Kugler Glass, Laurian Von Stephinades, Incalmo Glass, PolyesterShoppen, Goldray Glass, and Lasikomppania

Room II
"Whichever side we stand on, gazing into rooms, halls, chambers hidden behind glass or—conversely—gazing from their interiors onto the streets, houses, the sky, an undefined longing awaits us..."
Marek Bieńczyk, *Transparency*

Beyond the window, a landscape unfolds. Water cascades over rocks, with flowers and grass growing between the stones. The scene evokes nineteenth-century landscape painting, yet its peculiar calm is unsettling. The scenery seems familiar, as if we had seen it before, even though it may never have existed outside of the picture.

On a rock sits Prince Charming, a fairy-tale character whose presence should herald rescue and a happy ending. Nearby, Ophelia, the heroine of Shakespeare's play, drifts in the river's waters, evoking John Everett Millais's famous painting, which was created at roughly the same time as the Crystal Palace. A fairy tale meets a tragedy, but cannot change its ending. The prince remains on the rock. Rescue never comes.

In Room I, we saw a bourgeois living room awaiting its absent inhabitants. Here, the protagonists finally make their appearance, but it is unclear where they have come from or where they are headed. Perhaps, on their untold journey, they have taken on other people's dreams and notions of a better life. Now they meet in an artificial landscape assembled from fragments of different stories and cultural imagery. Its theatricality evokes the aesthetic of the American dream, where the imagined version of reality can seem more convincing than reality itself.

As in the first room, here too we gaze through glass. On the one hand, the glass evokes a longing

for a world we cannot enter, but on the other, it offers the comfort of a safe distance. We can observe the tragedy while feeling that it does not affect us. We view images of war, disaster, and suffering unfolding far away in a similar way. Distance allows us to feel compassion, but also to look away.

Both rooms engage anew with the promise of the Crystal Palace, which exposed the world to people's gaze, stirring a belief that it could thus be known and understood. In the first room, we see a house, but we do not know its inhabitants. In the second one, we see the characters, but we do not understand their stories. Moran reminds us that what we can see is not necessarily something we can know, experience, or become part of. Sometimes, looking awakens a longing for what remains beyond our reach. At other times, it allows us to believe that what happens on the other side of the glass does not concern us at all.

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