

MATEUSZ
CHORÓBSKI

PAWEŁ
CZEKAŃSKI

WOJCIECH
GILEWICZ

JERZY
KOSAŁKA

AGNIESZKA
KURANT

DIANA
LEŁONEK

TOMASZ
MRÓZ

DOMINIKA
OLSZOWY

ANNA
STILLER

WERONIKA
WYSOCKA

CONTEMPORARY
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CURATOR
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SCENOGRAPHY
TOMASZ
MRÓZ

NURDLES, DREGS AND THE CLOTHES OF DEAD EUROPE- ANS

EXHIBITION
GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION...

ŁUKASZ KROPIOWSKI

1. The Great Wastrel

Leonia, one of Italo Calvino's 'invisible cities,' is a place whose wealth is measured not so much by the goods produced and purchased as by the rubbish disposed of¹. The metropolis regenerates itself daily – every morning, residents surround themselves with foodstuffs covered in attractive packaging that attests to their freshness, the latest models of household appliances, the most fashionable clothing, and even new editions of encyclopaedias. And then, packed in plastic bags, the 'remains of yesterday's Leonia' are transported outside the city. As the art of manufacturing continues to evolve, waste becomes less biodegradable and more durable. The remains of the previous day 'pile up on top of the rubbish from the day before, and from all the earlier days, years and decades.'

This vision of civilisation as a centre of constant waste eruption captures the consumerist reality of 'throwaway societies' with such accuracy that the literary hyperbole imperceptibly becomes nothing more than an ever-so-slight exaggeration. It was on the streets of one of the thousands of "Leonias" around the world that Jean Baudrillard studied the 'myths and structures' of consumer society, concluding that products are no longer manufactured for their utility or quality, but for their ease of conversion into waste². His research showed that production order is maintained only at the expense of the 'calculated "suicide" of the mass of objects.' This operation is based on 'technological "sabotage" or organised obsolescence under the cover of fashion.'

1 I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, transl. William Weaver, Harcourt, 1974, pp.86–89.

2 J. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, transl. George Ritzer, London, 1998, pp. 40–43.

On the streets of the city, the sociologist encountered ‘great wastrels’ – stars of disposability who provide a model and media stimulus for mass consumption (although its forms are becoming a parody of themselves – a chic outfit worn by a celebrity for one evening is transformed into affordable disposable underwear). It was also on the streets of one of Leonia’s sister cities that Zygmunt Bauman noticed the fate of renegades – outcasts who failed to follow the example of the wastrels in order to fulfil their duties as Leonians: “Since the criterion of purity is the ability to partake in the consumerist game, those left outside become a ‘problem,’ the ‘dirt’ which needs to ‘disposed of.’”³ The opposite of the great wastrel is therefore the indolent consumer – a “flawed” citizen incapable of consuming quickly and disposing of their purchases equally fast. This is well exemplified by the removal of beggars from shopping centres, relegating them – just as the rubbish of Leonia – to the periphery beyond the central, commercially attractive parts of the city).

2. Nurdles, clothes of dead Europeans, dregs (The Moderate Wastrel)

The exhibition entitled *Nurdles, Dregs and the Clothes of Dead Europeans* addresses the issue of waste in the broadest possible spectrum, while at the same time providing a concise overview. The title outlines the thematic scope:

– Nurdles are small plastic pellets – granules used in the production of plastic items. They have been called ‘the worst toxic waste you’ve probably never heard of’⁴. They are produced in huge quantities, each shipment of this semi-finished product contains trillions of pieces. The nurdles in the title refer to the scale of the waste crisis and unprecedented overproduction.

– ‘Clothes of dead Europeans’ is the colloquial name used by the people of Ghana and Tanzania who sell second-hand clothing that arrives in Africa from Europe⁵. They are puzzled by the fact that clothes in good condition are thrown away. The term refers to the issue of hyper-consumption, its habits and standards (fast fashion, planned obsolescence) and ‘toxic colonialism’, i.e. the transfer of waste from the Global North to poorer regions of the world. On the other hand, second-hand clothing is also a symbol of all practices aimed at reducing the generation of waste (freeganism, freecycling, reuse, upcycling).

– Dregs are a symbol of all kinds of impurities that we fight against on a daily basis, but in which we are doomed to failure in the long run. They represent everything that inevitably accumulates, gathers and piles up around us: leftovers on the sink strainer, dust on furniture, cobwebs in room corners, junk in drawers, hair in the shower drain, plaque on teeth, dirt under the fingernails, lint in the belly button. This is a less global, more individual, personal, and often even intimate aspect of waste.

The waste generated by the modern economy and by every citizen of a consumer society is long-lasting and ubiquitous. Waste can rightly be considered an inevitable by-product of almost every human activity since the dawn of our species. However, we must be aware of the current intensity of its production. We live in an era of ‘great acceleration’ – in just the first two decades of the 21st century, humanity has already used up 40 per cent of the total energy consumed in the entire history of civilisation. It is estimated that global waste production amounts to over two billion tonnes of solid waste and tens of billions of tonnes of industrial waste annually. The waste accumulates not only in rubbish bins, landfills and dumps, but also in the soil, water and air. Litter on the slopes of eight-thousanders, new ‘geological’ formations such as plastiglomerate and technofossils, plastic bags in ocean trenches, a huge garbage island in the Pacific Ocean (and the

3 Z. Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, (trans. L. Davis), Cambridge, 1997, p. 15.

4 Oliver Franklin-Wallis, *Wasteland: The Secret World of Waste and the Urgent Search for a Cleaner Future*, London 2023, p. 78.

5 Ibidem, p. 137.

beginnings of an eighth continent called the Plastisphere), microplastics in the blood and tissues of living organisms, hundreds of millions of particles of debris in Earth's orbit, and debris left on the Moon by the Apollo mission participants – these are some of the most spectacular “achievements” in the field of modern littering. The global economic system based on continuous exploitation and shifting the costs of development onto nature – regarded on the one hand as a gift box, and on the other as an infinitely capacious rubbish bin – as well as the incessant festival of disposability, whose attractions include the luxury of unrestricted disposal, blurring the line between packaging and product, and producing “instant waste” often used to get rid of other waste (rubbish bags, poop bags, dust cloths, paper towels) – all this makes the problem of waste grow to grotesque proportions and become insurmountable. In the face of advancing pollution, Peter Sloterdijk wrote about creating a planetary ‘ecological community of interest’ from which a ‘new, far-sighted’ culture could emerge⁶. This culture would have to influence our consumer habits and economic practices, and ultimately replace the model of the great wastrel – if not with a savings superstar, then at least with a more moderate wastrel who thinks more often about durability, recycling and reusing objects.

USEFUL CONCEPTS, FACTS AND TIDBITS (OR 40 KEYWORDS TO DESCRIBE RUB- BISH)

Downcycling – a process involving the conversion of recycled materials into products of lower quality or value than the original (e.g. melting down plastics into lower-quality polymers that are unsuitable for further recycling, or reducing clothing to rags or filling material).

Electrical waste – discarded electrical or electronic devices that are no longer in use. E-waste is the fastest growing waste stream (around 1.5 billion smartphones are sold annually). Global e-waste amounts to nearly 60 million tonnes each year. Electronics manufacturers dispose of huge quantities of new products that remain unsold before the launch of a new model. It is estimated that electronic waste currently contains a total of around 7 per cent of the world's gold reserves. 1 tonne of discarded mobile phones may contain as much as 300–350 g of gold, while 1 tonne of gold ore contains on average only 1–5 g of gold.

Freecycling – a concept that involves providing unwanted items with a second life by giving them away to other users free of charge, rather than discarding them.

Freeganism – a lifestyle that minimises consumption and waste, mainly by collecting and using food and items discarded by others.

⁶ P. Sloterdijk, *A Crystal Palace (in: In the World Interior of Capital)*; transl. Wieland Hoban, Kryształowy pałac, Cambridge, 2013, p. 186.

Garbology – the study of refuse and waste which analyses its composition and impact on the environment and society. Its aim is to understand how and why waste is generated, its composition and quantity, and how it affects the environment, public health and the economy.

Global hectare – annual capacity for biological production and pollution assimilation per hectare. This unit is used to assess natural resource consumption, land fertility and the scale of planetary pollution. There are 12 billion hectares of biologically productive land and water bodies available on Earth. Each person consumes 1.7 global hectares. The average inhabitant of a 'highly developed' country consumes 6.5 gha. On average, each Earth inhabitant consumes 2.8 gha. The limits of the biosphere's capacity were reached in the 1980s. Since that time, humankind has been accumulating debt, consuming and polluting more than the earth is capable of regenerating.

Circular economy – an economic model in which products, materials and products are used for as long as possible (e.g. reused, repaired, recycled). The aim is to close the product life cycle in order to minimise waste generation and reduce the consumption of natural resources.

Greenwashing – a marketing strategy in which a company or organisation falsely presents itself as ecological and environmentally friendly in order to gain consumer favour. This is exemplified by many practices in the clothing industry, such as programmes for donating old clothes 'for recycling' – the vast majority of these clothes end up in landfills in the Global South, and the only result is increased consumption. This 'eco-hype' also includes the much-publicised and unfulfilled recycling declarations of many plastic packaging manufacturers.

Hoarding – compulsive accumulation and reluctance to throw things away, even when they are useless or take up a lot of space, leading to excessive clutter in the living space.

Repairability index – an indicator that shows how easy it is to repair a given product (e.g. electronic devices or household appliances). It is based on factors such as the availability and price of spare parts and the difficulty of repair. The index is intended to help consumers make more informed choices and encourage manufacturers to design more durable, easier-to-repair products.

Disposability – a new approach to using and discarding things. It originated in the second half of the 20th century with the development of the plastics industry and the media promotion of a consumerist lifestyle. After World War II, manufacturers began promoting disposable items – from plastic cutlery to packaging and clothing – as convenient, hygienic and modern. The symbolic beginning of the disposable era was the introduction of the plastic Coca-Cola bottle in the 1970s, although Life magazine had already been praising the convenient 'disposable world' and 'throwaway living' in the 1950s. The "disposable culture" has become one of the foundations of the economy, despite the costs of generating significant amounts of waste and polluting the environment. This new lifestyle resulted in a threefold increase in consumer waste between 1960 and 2010. Currently, one third of products (not only disposable ones) end up in the bin in the year of production.

Less waste – an idea based on reducing the amount of waste generated on a daily basis through more conscious choices –

e.g. avoiding single-use items, buying second-hand, planning purchases or using items until they are worn out.

Microplastics and nanoplastics – microplastics are plastic particles smaller than 5 mm in diameter, while nanoplastics are particles smaller than 100 nanometres (0.0001 mm). They are mainly formed as a result of the breakdown of larger plastic waste under the influence of sunlight, temperature and mechanical abrasion; however, they are also produced for cosmetic or industrial purposes. For example, during the washing of one kilogram of clothing, between 640,000 and 1.5 million plastic particles are released into the environment. Plastic particles have been found in almost all ecosystems – from the ocean floor to the Arctic snow. They are present in raindrops, drinking water (tap and bottled), wind, soil, and food products (e.g. seafood, honey, salt). Research shows that humans consume an average of 5 grams of plastic particles per week – the equivalent of one credit card. Nanoplastics, which are more difficult to detect, are a cause for concern due to their potential to penetrate cell membranes and enter the tissues of living organisms.

Nurdles – small plastic pellets used as raw material for the production of plastic products. It is estimated that at least 230,000 tonnes of nurdles are produced globally each year. Each shipment of this semi-finished product contains trillions of pieces.

Industrial waste (figures) – globally, tens of billions of tonnes of industrial waste (waste from factories, steelworks, farms, mines, chemical plants, etc.) are generated annually. Its quantity is difficult to estimate, as it is often concealed. Unlike municipal waste, industrial waste is not collected in landfills, but on private land, in dumps, in special containers or ponds. It is also discharged into rivers and emitted into the atmosphere. In 2023, global greenhouse gas emissions reached 57.4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. Current global greenhouse gas emissions are more than 50 per cent higher than in the early 2000s.

Solid waste (figures) – globally, over 2 billion tonnes of consumer waste are generated annually. In the Global North, the average citizen produces approximately 1 kilogram of waste per day (the leader in waste production is the United States, with an average of 2 kg per person). Global consumer waste production is growing – according to forecasts, by 2050 we will be producing 1.3 billion tonnes more waste. Over 480 billion plastic bottles are sold worldwide every year (approx. 20,000 per second). If these bottles were laid out in a single line, they could circle the Earth more than 24 times. Fewer than 10 per cent of plastic bottles are recycled. The consumption of polyethylene shopping bags is estimated at between 1 and 5 trillion per year. The most commonly generated waste is cigarette filters – approximately 4 trillion pieces per year.

Food waste – every year, humankind wastes at least one third of the food produced globally (931 million tonnes). Over 15 per cent of food (1.2 billion tonnes) is wasted before it reaches store shelves. Rotting food emits approximately 3.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases.

Plastiglomerate – a new type of ‘rock’ formed by the combination of plastic with natural materials (e.g. sand, stones, shells, lava). It is most often formed where plastic melts under high temperatures, combines with its surroundings, and then solidifies.

Plastic – was invented in the second half of the 19th century (in 1839, Charles Goodyear discovered the process of rubber vulcanisation, enabling the durable and flexible use of rubber). The first large-scale plastic material was Bakelite, patented in 1907. The plastic revolution took place after World War II, when mass production of this material began. Plastics such as polyethylene and PET began to be used on a large scale – from packaging to clothing and household appliances. Plastic quickly gained popularity due to its lightness, durability and low production costs, changing the form and scale of consumer waste. Its resistance to decomposition has made it one of the greatest threats to the environment

today – most of the plastic ever produced still exists in the form of waste and microplastics. Only 9 per cent of used plastic is recycled. The plastic recycling process uses a mixture of chemical compounds (known as ‘primers’) – over 10,000 different compounds are used, including approximately 2,400 potentially hazardous ones, and approximately 2,000 of them have not been properly tested for their impact on human health.

Plastisphere – the name given to the origin of the “eighth continent” formed by accumulations of plastic in the ocean. The masses of plastic in the ocean have no compact land structure, rather they take the form of a slurry.

Plogging – a form of physical activity that combines running (or walking) with litter picking. It originated in Sweden, and the name is derived from the words *jogging* and *plocka upp* (Swedish for “to lift”).

Postharvest – is a traditional agricultural practice dating back to antiquity, involving the collection of ears of grain left in the field after harvest. In modern times, it is primarily a practice of charitable and environmental organisations collecting unused

and surplus agricultural produce, which is then distributed to those in need.

Gross domestic trash – a term used in environmental debates to criticise gross domestic product (GDP) statistics. The term emphasises that traditional economic growth indicators fail to consider the costs incurred by the natural environment – air and water pollution, ecosystem degradation, and excessive exploitation of raw materials. When addressing gross domestic trash, experts point out that not every economic activity that is beneficial to GDP is profitable for people and the planet in the long term.

Solid waste recycling (statistics) – globally, approximately 20 per cent of municipal waste is recycled. In the European Union, over 40 per cent of municipal waste is recycled (in Poland, the average is 27 per cent). The vast majority of global waste still ends up in landfills or incinerators. On average, only 9 per cent of plastic and 1 per cent of clothing is recycled.

Reuse – the idea of using items multiple times instead of throwing them away. The aim is to reduce waste and extend the life cycle of products. Examples include reusable bags, jars, second-hand clothes, or repairing items instead of buying new ones.

True Cost Movement – a social and economic initiative that aims to address the real costs of production and consumption, including hidden costs such as damage to the environment, human health, and worker exploitation.

Consumer society (and consumerism) – a community whose lifestyle is based on frequent purchasing and use of many material goods, usually beyond actual needs. It is characterised by the pursuit of possession and consumption as a source of satisfaction and social status. A consumerist attitude consists of constantly satisfying needs, while consumerism – as an economic and marketing strategy – consists of constantly creating new needs and instilling a desire to 'keep up' with trends, fashions and technologies. According to many sociologists, consumerism is not about satisfying real needs, but about artificially creating them. As Peter Sloterdijk summed up the phenomenon: the traditional 'prohibition of extravagance has been replaced by a prohibition of saving.'

Throwaway society – Alvin Toffler considered the present day to be the era of the throwaway society. A radical change in people's attitude towards things has taken place over the last 100 years. Throughout most of their history, people constantly repaired broken items and used almost everything they could lay their hands on. Even in the 19th century, there was a complex recycling economy – paper waste, bottles, pieces of metal, rags, rendered animal fat, bones, tea leaves and even dog faeces were used in the production of leather goods.

Kessler syndrome – a phenomenon described by astrophysicist Donald J. Kessler: space debris (remnants of rocket launches and material ejected from the International Space Station) which has accumulated in low Earth orbit collides with one another, thus generating an increasing amount of waste. This self-perpetuating process could lead to such a concentration of space debris that it would prevent rocket launches and pose a high risk of collision for new satellites.

Fast fashion – a model of clothing production and sales that involves the rapid introduction of many cheap collections into stores. Clothing is mass-produced at low cost and is characterised by poor quality, which encourages (and forces) frequent purchases (and rapid disposal). Over the past 20 years, the number of clothes purchased in industrialised countries has doubled, the number of uses per product has fallen by an

average of 26 per cent, and the average consumer wears only 44 per cent of the clothes they own. It is estimated that 25 percent of manufactured clothing is not sold. Fast fashion giant Shein adds approximately 1.3 million new products annually. H&M produces such large amounts of waste that a power plant near the company's headquarters has abandoned coal in favour of burning clothes. Today, the fashion industry accounts for 8–10 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions and 20 per cent of global water consumption.

Technofossils – durable, artificial remains (e.g. fragments of plastic, electronics, concrete) or traces of human activity that are preserved in the ground and form a new geological layer.

Toxic colonialism – the practice of industrialised countries transferring waste (often toxic) or harmful technologies to poorer countries in the Global South, where environmental standards and labour laws are generally less stringent.

Clothes of dead Europeans – a colloquial name used by people in Ghana and Tanzania who sell second-hand clothing that arrives in Africa from Europe. It stems from surprise at the fact that clothes in good condition are thrown away.

Upcycling – a process in which unnecessary or used items are transformed into something new and more valuable in terms of both function and aesthetics. Upcycling increases the value of the processed material.

Municipal services (the beginnings) – basic forms of waste disposal outside the city already existed in ancient Rome; however, the waste management systems we know today only began to take shape in the 19th century. In 1875, the first sanitary regulations concerning organised waste disposal were introduced in London. In 1884, the Prefect of the Seine, Eugène Poubelle, introduced the obligation to dispose

of rubbish in special containers – his surname being the source of the French word for rubbish bin (*la poubelle*).

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch – a drifting cluster of plastic waste formed by ocean currents in the northern part of the Pacific Ocean. The garbage 'island' is currently three times the size of France. It consists of approximately 1.7 trillion pieces. Most of the plastic floating in the oceans has broken down into dust-like particles suspended in the water. The amount of this type of plastic waste floating in the northern Pacific is estimated at 100 million tonnes. Records indicate that between 8 and 12 million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean each year. It is estimated that by 2050, the mass of fish in the ocean will be less than the mass of plastic.

The great transformation / great acceleration – we are currently living in an era of 'great transformation' and 'great acceleration'. We are experiencing changes in access to raw materials and energy sources, as well as demographic, cultural, social, technological, climatic and ecosystemic transformations. Humans have permanently transformed 75 per cent of the land (e.g. by cutting down hundreds of millions of hectares of primary forests) and exploited over 60 per cent of the ocean surface. In the 1950s, greenhouse gas emissions increased rapidly, and the use of natural resources also accelerated. In the 21st century, we have already used 40 per cent of the energy that humankind has consumed throughout its entire history – including over 30 per cent of fossil coal, almost 40 per cent of crude oil and almost 50 per cent of natural gas.

Light pollution – excess artificial lighting that disrupts natural night-time darkness. It hinders observation of the sky, disrupts the biological rhythms of humans and animals, and creates energy waste.

Noise pollution – an excess of unwanted or harmful sounds in the environment that negatively affects the health of humans and animals and reduces the quality of life (e.g. industrial noise, traffic noise, noise generated by household appliances).

Planned obsolescence – a strategy of designing products to function only for a specific, limited period of time, after which they become obsolete, worn out, inoperable or difficult to repair. This forces consumers to quickly purchase new goods. The phenomenon emerged in the 1920s (in 1924, Philips, Osram and General Electric formed a cartel to control the production of light bulbs in order to reduce the product's lifespan). "Progressive lifespan", i.e. the willingness to throw things away in order to replace them with new and better ones, was presented as a factor conducive to development. 'Obsolescence' was promoted as progressive, and the "modern" idea of 'creative waste' – the 'creative' disposal of old equipment – was instilled. Planned obsolescence developed in the 1950s and now encompasses most industries, from electronics to fashion.

WHAT IS AT THE EXHIBITION?

"MOAT" IN FRONT OF THE GALLERY BUILDING

MATEUSZ CHORÓBSKI presents his work *Peace to Your Shadows* [1]. The artist uses recycled materials, processes scraps and waste, and minimises the production process. The presented installation consists of two elements – the 'foundation' made of old bricks from demolished houses with a glass 'trough' on top inserted into an old window frame which has been split open and unfolded. The trough fills with river water overflowing the edges during rainfall. The location of the work is meant to allude to the areas outside the city walls or moats, which were historically used as dumping sites. The need for separation from impurities, the removal of waste, and cemeteries outside city limits has always been an example of society's desire to maintain 'order'. In his installation, the artist uses a special kind of detritus. These are items that are discarded and useless, yet emotionally charged, referring to the condition of old age, prolonged existence and memory – both individual and collective. This kind of refuse pertains to a more 'archaeological' rather than 'trash' perception of remnants. The archaeological approach is characterised by distinctive respect – the relics are treated as treasures rather than junk. The title of the work, which is an obscure maxim that Choróbski noticed on Polish gravestones in Vilnius, makes us realise that remnants, as the material background of the history of past generations, prove to be more enduring than people. The gallery's 'moat' itself was intended by the building's designers to be a representational space, but has fallen into disrepair over time and, according to the new redevelopment plan for the institution, will soon disappear.

16—17

UPPER HALLS

PAWEŁ CZEKAŃSKI presents his sculpture *Danse Macabre* [5]. In his creative work, the artist uses metaphorical figures in order to restore, often in a perverse way, the symbolic and meaning-creating power to everyday objects. He addresses social habits, rituals and phobias that form the basis of civilizational patterns and ideas.

His sculpture consisting of a number of drinking straws in a synchronised 'dance of death', which is known in traditional iconography as an allegory of transience and the equality of all human conditions in the face of death, becomes an ironic commentary on the 'culture of disposability' that currently defines our attitude towards the use and disposal of objects. Modern, cheap and consumer-levelling production and the associated 'futility' of products, which have become the basis of the economy, are gaining new momentum in market strategies. Currently, one third of items, disposable or not, end up in the bin in the year of production.

If we look at the work from a slightly different angle – as an allegory of transience, in the context of the problematic durability of plastic – Czekański's sculpture takes on a touch of dark humour.

WOJCIECH GILEWICZ presents works: *Trash Walks* [8], *Food Justice* [11]. They are a part of an extensive series of works in which the artist addresses the issue of waste. Gilewicz is interested in various aspects of the issue – minimising (or even abandoning) production, the relativism of the concept of value, environmental responsibility, and all forms of reuse, recycling and recovery.

Trash Walks is a film presenting a series of performative actions undertaken by the artist on the streets of New York, whose leading theme is rubbish in the urban landscape. Gilewicz shows the wide spectrum of waste circulation in the metropolis – from mass disposal associated with the functioning

1 The numbers in brackets refer to the list of works at the end of this guide.

of residential and office buildings, through the work of cleaning services, to the initiatives of collectors. He wonders how rubbish functions in public spaces, what reactions it provokes and what forms – including artistic ones – it takes.

The video *Food Justice* was created during a residency programme of the same name at the Santa Fe Art Institute (USA), which aimed to explore issues related to food circulation. The starting point for the project was the observation of food waste by the programme participants, with whom the artist shared a kitchen space for several months. The film addresses everyday practices that contribute to the scale of food waste – every year, one third of the food produced globally is wasted, amounting to 931 million tonnes. It also refers to individual responsibility, in this case that of the artists themselves.

JERZY KOSAŁKA presents his work *Power of Evolution* [7]. In his creative activity, the artist combines absurdity with critical commentary on reality. Anthropocene mutants, with bodies composed of organic and synthetic elements, are creatures representing an era in which human activity is radically transforming not only the landscape, but life itself. The toxic light they emit is not just a futuristic joke – it refers to the real issue of radioactive waste that retains its harmful properties for hundreds of thousands of years. In the 1980s, the US Department of Energy hired a group of scientists to develop a warning system for highly radioactive waste. They were looking for a way to effectively signal danger over a very long period of time. One idea was to breed a race of cats whose fur would glow when exposed to radioactivity. The warning function

of the animals was to be passed on to future generations through proverbs and legends¹.

AGNIESZKA KURANT'S work, *Hyperobjects* [4], consists of tablets formed from pulverized One Dollar Store items. The compressed particles – plastic, metal, paper, glass – take on the form of consumable tablets, ironically embodying the ease of cheap consumption promoted by the prevailing economic system. This work explores a central theme in Kurant's oeuvre: the influence of invisible yet ubiquitous systems in the shaping of contemporary societies. Timothy Morton defines hyperobjects as phenomena or entities so vast in time and space, and so complex, that they exceed human comprehension. We experience them only in fragments, inextricably linked to them as they exert a constant influence. Examples include global warming, radioactivity, and plastic pollution.

Hyperobjects also raise the very real issue of humanity literally consuming the remains of mass-produced goods. According to research, humans consume an average of 5 grams of microplastics per week.

DIANA LELONEK presents the video installation *Stork, a Sacred Bird* [6] and photographs of objects from the series *Centre for Living Things* [9–10]. The first work is the result of observations of the white stork population at the Getliņi waste dump near Riga – the largest waste disposal site in the Baltic region. The cultural image of the stork as a symbol of happiness and purity of nature is juxtaposed with the reality of a degraded environment. In the accompanying *Manifesto of a Trash-Heap Dwelling Stork*, the artist writes: "Looking at the stork as it is with respect also means accepting the uncomfortable truth about nature in the Anthropocene – with all its entanglements, toxicity and multi-layered connections."

1 O. Franklin-Wallis, *Wasteland: The Secret World of Waste and the Urgent Search for a Cleaner Future*, London 2023, pp. 331–333.

Launched in 2016, the *Centre for Living Things* is an interdisciplinary project at the intersection of art, science and environmental activism. The artist has created an 'institute' that studies hybrids found in illegal dumps and post-industrial areas – civilizational waste that has been colonised by various organisms, becoming living ecosystems. Lelonek gives names to these 'rubbish-plant habitats' that describe the components of the hybrids, for example: 'textile-polymer habitat of the pine forest type' or 'post-electronic habitat of the meadow type'. Ubiquitous consumer waste overgrown with fungi, lichens, or vascular plants demonstrates the inseparability of organic and socio-economic processes in contemporary society, challenging the traditional boundaries between the natural and the artificial.

TOMASZ MRÓZ showcases his works: *Now I was who I am* [2] and *Head* [12]. Since the start of his career, the artist has cultivated a distinctive style and perspective. He crafts a grotesque world, akin to a dark fairy tale for adults, imbued with gallows humour. The characters within his "bestiary" – mutated figures, victims of civilization and pop culture – express anxieties, desires, and alluring ideologies.

The piece *Now I was who I am* draws upon the biblical image of the burning bush. However, rather than signalling the selection of the chosen, the bush here foreshadows the irreversible devastation of the "promised land" to which they have been led. The artist evokes a feeling of helplessness in the face of an ecological catastrophe, suggesting that we will no longer witness a bush that "burned with fire, and was not consumed" but instead experience incineration and irreparable loss.

The sculptural piece *Head* consists of a bronze cast of a wolf's head "stuffed" with perishable fruit. Here, the artist alludes to the waste, destruction, and death inherent in treating "wild" nature as a bottomless vessel meant for our pleasure – a platter overflowing with "freebies."

DOMINIKA OLSZOWY presents works *Spider Web* [13] and *Notes from Home* [14]. Through her objects and installations, the artist creates spaces that hover between nostalgia and nightmare. Household appliances, rags, cob-

webs, and stains become recurring motifs in narratives filled with dark irony, sentimentality, disgust, and a sense of impending doom. By invoking the concept of junk – which relentlessly accumulates around us, gathering an ever-thickening layer of dust – Olszowy also alludes to various forms of "dirt" and aesthetic, ethical, and mental residue. Consider, for instance, the poetics of advertisements that celebrate carefree consumption, or the allure of bourgeois salons clinging to the sacred rituals of an "affluent" life, effectively insulating themselves from any uncomfortable realities or consequences.

The works featured in the exhibition are reinterpretations of the artist's previous projects.

ANNA STILLER presents her work *Untitled (MAMA)* [3]. In her practice – both artistic and personal – Stiller strives to minimise production and reduce the amount of waste generated. The objects that make up the installation are items found in her family home. They served as decorations and also used to separate the kitchen from the hallway. Domestic 'antiques' belong to a specific category of unnecessary items, namely junk, or 'dirt without dirt, things placed between finitude and permanence.' They inevitably accumulate and build up around us. Such waste, imbued with sentiment, is valuable, if in a different way than consumer products. In

Stiller's work, the remnants of material culture redefine the concept of value and create a space for intimate memory.

LEVEL -1 OF THE GALLERY

WERONIKA WYSOCKA presents a video entitled *Where All Problems End* [15], which was filmed in one of London's clothing sorting facilities. The work, using almost hypnotic shots, shows the scale of production in the clothing industry. Every day, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of textiles pass through clothing-sorting facilities across Europe after being rendered obsolete by 'fast fashion' practices. Over the past 20 years, the number of clothes purchased in industrialised countries has doubled, the number of uses per product has fallen by 26%, and the average buyer wears only 44% of the clothes they own. Fashion consumers donate unwanted clothing to aid organisations, often in good faith. Most of these clothes end up in markets in the Global South. However, the current model of production and sales – the rapid introduction of many cheap collections into stores – means that mass-produced, low-cost clothing is of poor quality. Furthermore, clothes sent from 'highly developed' countries are destroying the foundations of the textile industry in many countries in Africa and South America.

Today, the fashion industry accounts for 8–10 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions and 20 per cent of global water consumption.

ANEKS GALLERY

WOJCIECH GILEWICZ presents work

Box of Slides from Germany [16].

This action is an initiative that began with the discovery of a box of slides from Germany dating back to the 1960s and 1970s at a market in Biłgoraj. The archive, carefully collected and catalogued, eventually (possibly after the collector's death?) turned into an unnecessary collection. The artist organises an 'exchange' desk – he encourages people to take one of the slides with them, committing themselves to carry out an activity with it (e.g. make a print or a collage). In the process, the collection will become dispersed, but perhaps its elements will regain value – albeit different from the original one. The work addresses the boundary between what is valuable and what worthless. In the reality of 'throw-away societies,' the question of how quickly devaluation occurs and what we really consider important and necessary takes on a special dimension.

LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS

MOAT IN FRONT OF GALLERY BUILDING

1. Mateusz Choróbski, *Peace to Your Shadows*, 2025, installation

UPPER HALLS

2. Tomasz Mróz, *Now I was who I am*, 2025, video, lector: Maria Maj
3. Anna Stiller, *Untitled (MAMA)*, 2025, installation
4. Agnieszka Kurant, *Hyperobjects*, 2017, object
5. Paweł Czeakański, *Danse Macabre*, 2022, sculpture
6. Diana Lelonek, *Stork, a sacred bird*, 2022, three-channel video installation, 10 min
7. Jerzy Kosałka, *Power of Evolution*, 2025, installation
8. Wojciech Gilewicz, *Trash Walks*, 2021, video, 15 min 13 s
9. Diana Lelonek, *Wasteplant I*, 2022, fine-art print
10. Diana Lelonek, *Wasteplant III*, 2022, fine-art print
11. Wojciech Gilewicz, *Food Justice*, 2014, video, 4 min 23 s
12. Tomasz Mróz, *Head*, 2025, sculpture
13. Dominika Olszowy, *Spider Web*, 2025, sculpture
14. Dominika Olszowy, *Notes from Home*, 2025, installation

LEVEL -1 OF THE GALLERY

15. Weronika Wysocka, *Where All Problems End*, 2018, video, 9 min 45 s

ANEKS GALLERY

16. Wojciech Gilewicz, *Box of Slides from Germany*, 2025, artistic action

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