
Familiar Strangers. The Eastern Europeans from a Polish Perspective *[Znajomi Nieznajomi]*

14 marca '25 »→ 29 czerwca '25

PRESS FILE / Materiał prasowy



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, "Papuszakri Gili" ("Papusza's Song"), 2024, textile, acrylic on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.
Photo: Marek Gardulski

Komunikat prasowy

***Familiar Strangers (Znajomi Nieznajomi)*. Głos diaspor i mniejszości mieszkających w Polsce na wystawie w brukselskim Bozar**

Już od 14 marca w Centrum Sztuk Pięknych BOZAR w Brukseli będzie można oglądać wystawę *Familiar Strangers. Eastern Europeans (Znajomi Nieznajomi)*, która przygląda się przemianom w Europie Wschodniej z perspektywy artystek i artystów mieszkających w Polsce. Ekspozycja oddaje głos osobom z diaspor i mniejszości, a także tym, którzy poprzez sztukę i aktywizm poszerzają rozumienie sfery publicznej. Wystawa towarzyszy zagranicznemu programowi kulturalnemu Polskiej Prezydencji w Radzie Unii Europejskiej 2025 i potrwa do 29 czerwca. Projekt powstał dzięki zaangażowaniu Instytutu Adama Mickiewicza i jest współfinansowany ze środków Ministerstwa Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego.

Kuratorowana przez **Joannę Warszawę** wystawa jest przestrzenią spotkania artystek i artystów, którzy przez swoją twórczość eksplorują zmieniającą się rzeczywistość Europy Wschodniej. Za architekturę wystawy odpowiada **Aleksandra Wasilkowska**, a wśród prezentowanych na wystawie twórców i twórczyń znaleźli się: **Oliwia Bosomtwe, Assaf Gruber, Zuzanna Hertzberg, Renata Rara Kamińska, Jasmina Metwaly, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Natalia LL, Ngo Van Tuong, Open Group, Janek Simon, Shadow Architecture, Jana Shostak i Mikołaj Sobczak**.

Jak pisze kuratorka wystawy, Joanna Warsza: „Brutalna inwazja Rosji na Ukrainę uwidoczniła pęknięcia i różnice pomiędzy Europą Wschodnią i Zachodnią, podkreślając dotychczasową dominację prymatu zachodnio–centryczności. Wystawa ukazuje unikalny charakter i różnorodność regionu z perspektywy jego mieszkańców i mieszkank, w szczególności mniejszości.

Familiar Strangers to wielogłos zaangażowanych społecznie i politycznie osób, przede wszystkim z diaspor i mniejszości: Romek i Romów, intelektualistów–przedsiębiorców wietnamskich czy białoruskich i ukraińskich artystów, artystek, aktywistów i aktywistek. Wystawa odnosi się też do złożonej historii polsko–żydowskiego współistnienia poza «umową sublokatorską», w ramach której prawa niektórych osób są warunkowe i mogą zostać zawieszone. Ekspozycja śledzi feministyczny i queerowy opór, dobrowolną lub przymusową migrację z Polski oraz, coraz częściej, do Polski, a także uwrażliwia na to, co znaczy być kimś o innym kolorze skóry w przeważnie białym społeczeństwie.

Wystawa pokazuje jak wrażliwe i skomplikowane są negocjacje między własną tożsamością i widzialnością a współistnieniem i dostrzeganiem innych. Między tym, co lokalne i co transkulturowe, bliskie i nieznajome. Tytuł zainspirowany jest biografią Stuarta Halla, jamajsko-brytyjskiego badacza, dla którego kultura była procesem ustawicznego stawania się, wraz i wbrew innym, ku sprawiedliwшему społeczeństwu.

Każda z sal wprowadza do świata jednej z artystek i artystów, jakby otwierając drzwi ich pracowni czy przestrzeni prywatnych, przywołując tradycję latających uniwersytetów czy galerii w mieszkaniach, i czasy, gdzie to co polityczne było tworzone przede wszystkim w przestrzeniach prywatnych. Różnorodne wątki spotykają się we wspólnej hybrydycznej i nieformalnej przestrzeni, zaprojektowanej z odpadków z azjatyckich hal kupieckich przy ulicy Bakalarskiej w Warszawie. Wystawa w Centrum Sztuk Pięknych Bozar oferuje spotkanie «znajomych nieznajomych», tych którzy szukają miejsca na ziemi pomiędzy strukturami opresji a wiarą w nowe możliwości, w społeczeństwie już nie post-komunistycznym a jeszcze nie post-migracyjnym, gdzieś w Polsce, Europie i na świecie.”

Wystawa jest współorganizowana przez Instytut Adama Mickiewicza i współfinansowana przez Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego.

Familiar Strangers. Eastern Europeans (Znajomi Nieznajomi)

Miejsce: Centrum Sztuk Pięknych Bozar, Bruksela (Bozar – Centre for Fine Arts of Brussels, Rue Ravensteinstraat 23, 1000 Brussels)

Daty: 14 marca – 29 czerwca 2025

Konferencja prasowa: 13 marca 2025, godz. 11

Wernisaż: 13 marca 2025, godz. 19

Artystki i artyści: Oliwia Bosomtwe, Assaf Gruber, Zuzanna Hertzberg, Renata Rara Kamińska, Jasmina Metwaly, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Natalia LL, Ngo Van Tuong, Open Group, Janek Simon, Shadow Architecture, Jana Shostak i Mikołaj Sobczak

Kuratorka: Joanna Warsza

Architektura wystawy: Aleksandra Wasilkowska

Więcej informacji: <https://www.bozar.be/en/calendar/familiar-strangers-eastern-europeans-polish-perspective>

Sztuki wizualne i performatywne w zagranicznym programie kulturalnym Polskiej Prezydencji w Radzie Unii Europejskiej 2025

Wystawa *Familiar Strangers* towarzyszy zagranicznemu programowi kulturalnemu Polskiej Prezydencji w Radzie Unii Europejskiej 2025. Program, organizowany przez Instytut Adama Mickiewicza pod hasłem „Culture Sparks Unity” jest częścią programu kulturalnego

koordynowanego przez Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego i ma na celu promowanie idei solidarności i międzynarodowej współpracy. Prezentuje najciekawsze zjawiska współczesnej polskiej sceny artystycznej, na pierwszym planie stawiając nowe pokolenie. Co jeszcze w dziedzinie sztuk wizualnych wydarzy się do końca czerwca w ramach programu?

- **13 lutego – 30 marca 2025:** Wystawa *EUROPEAN KINSHIP. An Eastern European Perspective* w ramach cyklu *Fotografia – więcej niż rzeczywistość. Sztuka obrazowania* (Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center, Budapeszt)
- **6–31 marca:** Wystawa polskiej ilustracji i grafiki: “Words and metaphors. The latest illustration from Wrocław” (Gellerup Bibliotek, Aarhus)
- **12–23 marca:** Wystawa Weroniki Gęsickiej *Encyklopedia* w ramach cyklu “Fotografia – więcej niż rzeczywistość. Sztuka obrazowania” (Galeria i23, Madryt)
- **14 marca – 29 czerwca 2025:** (PROGRAM TOWARZYSZĄCY) Wystawa *Familiar Strangers*, kuratorka: Joanna Warsza (Centrum Sztuk Pięknych Bozar, Bruksela)
- **22 marca** – Spektakl *RAPEFLOWER* chor. Hana Umeda prezentowany w ramach cyklu *Wybrane polskie spektakle na europejskich festiwalach teatralnych* (The International Bazaar Festival, Polish Focus, Praga)
- **21 – 23 marca:** *Inbetweening. The Art of Exchange* – program performatywno-taneczny we współpracy z Dance House Lemos (Teatr Rialto, Limassol, Cypr)
- **25 marca:** Spektakl *Rzeźbiary* chor. Weronika Pelczyńska, Magda Fejdasz prezentowany w ramach cyklu *Wybrane polskie spektakle na europejskich festiwalach teatralnych* (The International Bazaar Festival, Polish Focus, Praga)
- **27 marca – 25 kwietnia 2025:** Wystawa Lii Dostlievy *The Book of Long Objects* w Instytucie Polskim w Budapeszcie (wydarzenie towarzyszące wystawie *European Kinship, Eastern European Perspectives* w Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center)
- **27 – 29 marca 2025:** *Weekend Ekspercki (Expert’s Weekend)* w Budapeszcie (wydarzenie towarzyszące wystawie *European Kinship, Eastern European Perspectives* w Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center)
- **2–5, 8–10 kwietnia:** Spektakl choreograficzny Wojciecha Grudzińskiego „Teach Me Not” (Zodiak – Center for New Dance, Helsinki).
- **4 – 5 kwietnia:** Mapping Krzysztofa Wodiczko w ramach cyklu “Fotografia – więcej niż rzeczywistość. Sztuka obrazowania” (Festiwal w Lille).
- **4 kwietnia – 18 maja:** Wystawa *Bujność. Sztuka kobiet w XXI w.*, kuratorka: Dorota Monkiewicz (Narodowe Muzeum Sztuki Mołdawii, Kiszyniów)
- **16 – 27 kwietnia 2025:** Wystawa prac Sainera (Przemysław Blejzyka) – *Kolorganism* (Künstlerhaus, Wiedeń)
- **25 – 27 kwietnia 2025:** *Unending love, or love dies, on repeat like it’s endless*, chor. Alex Baczyński–Jenkins w ramach cyklu *Wybrane polskie spektakle na europejskich festiwalach teatralnych* (Réplika Teatro | Centro Internacional de Creación, Madryt)
- **9 maja – 30 czerwca 2025:** Prezentacja pracy Małgorzaty Mirgi–Tas (Królewskie Muzeum Sztuki i Historii, Bruksela)

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- **14 – 16 maja 2025:** Spektakl choreograficzny “Malign Junction (Goodbye, Berlin)” Alexa Baczyńskiego–Jenkinsa na belgijskim *Kunstenfestivaldesarts* w ramach cyklu “Wybrane polskie spektakle na europejskich scenach i festiwalach teatralnych” (*Kunstenfestivaldesarts*, Bruksela)
 - **23–25 maja:** Konferencja *Identity Crisis Network* (Online, Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej w Zagrzebiu, Chorwacja)

Szczegółowe informacje na temat całości zagranicznego programu kulturalnego polskiej Prezydencji można znaleźć na stronie: <https://poland2025eu.culture.pl/>.

Instytut Adama Mickiewicza (IAM) łączy polską kulturę z ludźmi na całym świecie. Jako instytucja państwowa tworzy trwałe zainteresowanie polską kulturą i sztuką, wzmacniając obecność polskich artystek i artystów na globalnej scenie. Inicjuje innowacyjne projekty, wspiera międzynarodową współpracę oraz wymianę kulturalną. Promuje twórczość zarówno uznanych jak i obiecujących twórców, ukazując różnorodność i bogactwo naszej kultury. Instytut Adama Mickiewicza prowadzi także portal *Culture.pl*, stanowiący wszechstronne źródło wiedzy o polskiej kulturze. Więcej informacji: www.iam.pl

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Press Release

Familiar Strangers. The Eastern Europeans from a Polish Perspective

14 Mar.'25 »→ 29 June'25

Bozar, Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels

***Familiar Strangers. The Eastern Europeans from a Polish Perspective* is an exhibition of contemporary art reflecting upon recent changes in Eastern Europe. It starts from the perspective of diasporas, minorities and those who make the public sphere richer, in a region long considered culturally homogeneous, even if it was never truly a case. Each of the rooms of the exhibition is inhabited by a different artist, presenting paintings, sculptures, videos, films, installations, and textiles, gathering over 40 works by 13 artists, most of which are shown in Belgium for the first time. In a highly turbulent period for Europe, the exhibition explores how social and political struggles intertwine with personal stories. *Familiar Strangers* calls for the necessity of a Europe in which we see and hear each other for who we really are, with and despite our differences.**

The diaspora and minorities take centre stage in this exhibition and show how fragile and complex interactions can be, between the transcultural and the local, the individual and the collective, the familiar and the uncanny. “Many of those works are presented in Belgium for the first time. They all go beyond any local specificity” explains Joanna Warsza, curator of the exhibition. “*Familiar Strangers* is an encounter of various voices: specifically of diasporas and minorities and their political struggles, from the Roma people, the Vietnamese socialist intellectuals–cum–early capitalists or the Belarusian and Ukrainian artists and activists in Warsaw.”

From the video–performance *Consumer Art* (1973) of pioneering Polish feminist artist Natalia LL, via Polish–Romani artist Małgorzata Mirga–Tas’ patchworks, to Assaf Gruber’s *Miraculous Accident* recently presented at the Berlinale (Feb 2025), the exhibited artists forge a sense of place in the world: in Poland, in Europe and beyond.

Joanna Warsza adds: “While the world is going in a disturbing and violent direction, the ideas of the exhibition pull the other way, towards the image of a non–violent and plural European collective with its West, its East, its North and its South, in which we can live together as familiar strangers against the confiscation of democracy.”

Curated by Joanna Warsza, an international curator originating from Warsaw and currently a city curator of Hamburg, the exhibition is designed by Aleksandra Wasilkowska and features works by Oliwia Bosomtwe, Assaf Gruber, Zuzanna Hertzberg, Renata Rara Kamińska, Jasmina Metwaly, Małgorzata Mirga–Tas, Natalia

LL, Ngo Van Tuong, Open Group, Janek Simon, Shadow Architecture, Jana Shostak and Mikołaj Sobczak.

This exhibition is co-organized by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute and co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Poland.

Quotes

Joanna Warsza, curator of the exhibition:

About the importance of the exhibition:

It is an exhibition about Familiar Strangers, on one hand the Eastern Europeans, and more particularly, the various identities and positions which pluralise the public sphere in Poland, taking Poland as example of the wider region. It is an exhibition about the Westo-centricism of the European collective that has been only palpable since the tragic invasion of Ukraine. It is finally about the necessity of a Europe in which we SEE and HEAR each other for who we really are, with and despite our differences.

Growing up in Eastern Europe in the 80s, many of us had a feeling that the real Europe was somewhere else, and that we were only its poorer version. The mechanism of self-colonisation was all-encompassing. The road to emancipation and self-determination was (and remains) long and complex. I am thrilled to show the work of those who pave the way: various affirmative diasporic, dissident and critical voices, such as Roma and Sinti, Jewish, Arab, Ghanian, Vietnamese, Belorussian or Ukrainian, who through their art and activism work towards a more just society.

About the originality of the point of view:

Many of us inhabiting Europe do not identify ourselves as Europeans. And yet it might be a moment in which we should start to do so, for good or bad. But for this we need to see its full picture, both Western and Eastern. Familiar Strangers presents the dilemmas, sweat, tears and hopes of one society on its way from being a post-communist towards the post-migrant one.

About the quality and diversity of the works presented:

Many of those works are presented in Belgium for the first time. They all go beyond the local specificity. Familiar Strangers is an encounter of various voices: specifically of diasporas and minorities and their political struggles, from the Roma people, the Vietnamese socialist intellectuals-cum-early capitalists or the Belarusian and Ukrainian artists and activists in Warsaw. It addresses the complex history of the Polish-Jewish co-existence beyond the so-called "subtenant contract", in which the rights of some people are conditional and can be revoked. It traces the feminist and queer resistance, the impact of wilful or forced migration from (and increasingly to) Poland, and it shares what it is to be a person of colour in a predominantly white society.

Christophe Slagmuylder, CEO and Artistic Director, Bozar:

The exhibition Familiar Strangers brings together artists whose work encourages the circulation of ideas and the free expression of voices that societies have marginalised. From Poland, it presents a porous and cooperative European space made up of exchanges and openness. In other words, the opposite of what we hear every day in many political speeches – and this is what makes this exhibition essential today.

Zoë Gray, Director of Exhibitions, Bozar:

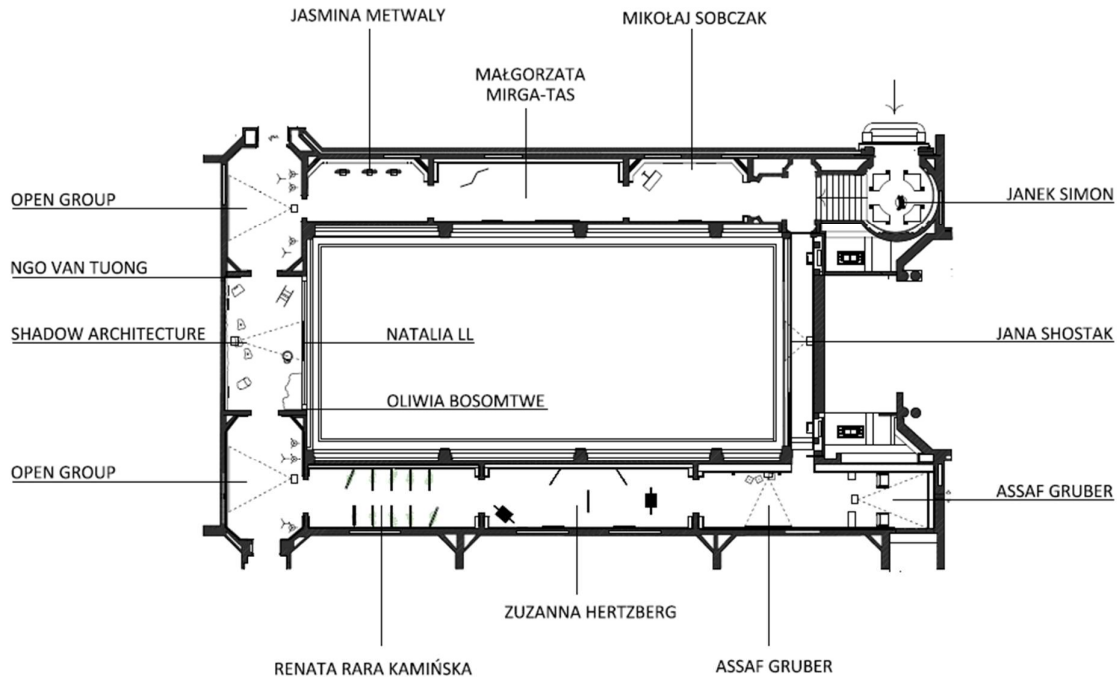
We invited Joanna Warsza to curate this project as she combines a critically engaged curatorial practice with playfulness and intellectual curiosity. She has a deep understanding of the artistic scene in her native Poland, but also an international perspective and has brought this dual outlook – as both insider and outsider, as both familiar and stranger – to this dynamic exhibition. I am very struck by the way in which she has brought together a diverse range of artists, writers and thinkers in this project who all have a connection to Poland, but whose perspectives are resolutely global.

This is a very timely exhibition, which looks both backwards and forwards. It speaks to our current moment of uncertainty, offering the hope that we will find new ways to look at ourselves and those around us.

Practical information

Date: 14 March »→ 29 June 2025
Tickets: € 4/€ 8 (reductions at www.bozar.be)
Address: Bozar – Centre for Fine Arts – Brussels
Rue Ravenstein 23, 1000 Brussels
Open: Tuesday > Sunday, 10.00 > 18.00
Closed: Monday
Info & tickets: www.bozar.be – +32 (0)2 507 82 00

Exhibition Circuit



Introduction

Familiar Strangers is an exhibition of contemporary art reflecting upon recent changes in Eastern Europe. Sadly, it is only since the violent invasion of Ukraine that the self-understanding of the European collective has expanded beyond the Western viewpoint. The exhibition presents political and social processes from the perspectives of multiple and critical identities that expand the public sphere in a region that was long considered to be culturally homogenous, even if this was never truly the case.

Familiar Strangers is an encounter of various voices: specifically of diasporas and minorities and their political struggles. It shows how fragile and complex those two-way negotiations can be, between the transcultural and the local, the individual and the collective, the familiar and the uncanny in a post-communist society on its way to becoming a post-migrant one. Its title is inspired by Stuart Hall, the late Jamaican British theorist, for whom culture was not a way of *being* but of *becoming*, with and despite others, towards a more just society.

Each gallery is inhabited by the world of a different artist, as if it was a room of their own, and they meet in an informal shared space in the middle. In Eastern Europe, during the communist era, the public sphere was often practiced in intimate settings, be it a kitchen or an apartment. Welcome to the worlds of some extraordinary “familiar strangers”, who, through their art and activism—between structures of oppression and spaces of possibility—forge a sense of place in the world: in Poland, in Europe and beyond.

Janek Simon



Can an algorithm suggest a more surprising cultural hybrid than human creativity of what is familiar and what is strange? Rather than reproducing our human bias, how could AI and machine learning also help in an ongoing transcultural dialogue and construct a shared value system? For many years Janek Simon – a self-taught artist, programmer, anarchist and researcher – has been asking those questions in his series *Meta Folklore*.

His 3D sculptures, like this one made with the help of machine learning which welcomes you into the exhibition, come from the random encounter of thousands and thousands of images from the Internet, representing human and android bodies, from art, religion and history. The resulting sculptures deconstruct homogenous identity concepts that emerge through complex symbolic and cultural processes, which are constantly (re)constructed and (re)negotiated. Our *Familiar Stranger*.

Mikołaj Sobczak



“I understood that Polish heritage and legacy are also my heritage and legacy, even if I profoundly disagree with it” – says Mikołaj Sobczak (born in 1989 in Poznań, lives in Düsseldorf). His rich, erudite and meticulous counter-historical paintings decentralise the grand, often right-wing, or pompous narratives through various emancipatory lenses, such as the transgender or peasant perspective. Mythological scenes cross with art historical references and moments from countercultural movements, forging an explosive and queer language of myth-making that escapes firm dichotomies.

The first work presented here, *Diana i Akteon* [*Diana and Actaeon*], introduces salient threads in Sobczak’s iconography. It paraphrases the painting of Titian, as well as the erotic lithographs by Édouard-Henri Avril, touching on the ever-changing mechanisms of moral and cultural norms of desire. The shape of the work is borrowed from the emancipatory LGBTQ+ movement of the 1970s, Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin, whose logo represented the raised fist in a continuous and proud resistance.

Two paintings, *Zniewolenie* [*Enslavement*] and *Pogrzeb* [*Funeral*], depict, among other elements, the history of serfdom. This feudal form of forced dependence and

oppression, which disappeared in Western Europe around the 15th century, persisted until the 19th century in Central and Eastern Europe. The Elbe River can be seen as its symbolic border. East of the Elbe, serfdom persisted, while west of it, the slave trade was delegated overseas and developed through colonisation and modernisation. European capitalism and wealth were thus built on various kinds of unfree labour and violence inherent to both systems.

Zniewolenie [Enslavement] depicts one of the plantations in Ukraine governed by Polish colonial nobility and includes references to historical works by Jan Matejko and Juliusz Kossak, as well as to the Ukrainian painter Paulina Rajko who found freedom in turning her house into a work of art. *Pogrzeb [Funeral]* is a tribute to the vernacular form of ornamentation and storytelling, as well 'as to the unwritten history of peasantry celebrating everyday life despite the oppressive status quo.

Finally, *Modliszka [Mantis]*, is a scene showing a way out. A motorbike is carrying various key figures of feminist and activist struggles who were active in Compton's Cafeteria riot, the first movement for sexual minority rights in the USA in 1966. It is a droll and hopeful tribute to the importance of even the smallest resistance gesture. recalls or echoes something seemingly known and yet it is impossible to say what exactly or where it hails from.

Janek Simon (born in 1977 in Kraków, lives in Warsaw) is an artist whose work is driven by constant curiosity, erudition, and the quest for what he calls "meta folklore"—the question of how to cherish what is particular, while constructing a planetary value system with the use of new, not only dystopian, technologies.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (born in 1978 in Zakopane, lives in Czarna Góra) is a Polish-Roma artist and activist, who constructs an affirmative iconography of the largest European minority in her vibrant works. Her textiles are created from fragments of various fabrics by a process she calls 'throwing material into the painting'. Many of the pieces are taken directly from the wardrobes of those depicted, bearing traces of energy and use, others come from second-hand stores and carry a previous life of their own. Mirga-Tas weaves an image of Roma as proto-Europeans, transcultural, and non-violent people, reshaping the stereotypical conventions.

The room presents two recent threads of Mirga-Tas' work. The first two textile paintings, *Przytradle Kola So Przedzidzile* [*Those who survived have arrived*] and *Katarina Taikon*, tell the history of Swedish-Roma advocacy. First depicts the White Buses, which, at the end of the Second World War, carried many survivors of the concentration camps to safety in Scandinavia, they were however banned for Roma survivors. Katarina Taikon, a Swedish Roma activist, was a key figure in the community struggles.

Miri Daj [*My mother*], as well as the portrait of the poet Papusza, are part of the on-going series *Herstories*, an affective archive presenting various Roma artists, activists or educators, who are a personal inspiration for the artist. All these heroines practice what the scholar Ethel Brooks calls "the feminism of minority", one which does not cut women off from their backgrounds, but works instead from within a specific context, on both the local and structural level.

Jasmina Metwaly



Jasmina Metwaly (born in Warsaw in 1982, lives in Szczecin and Cairo) is an Egyptian–Polish artist and filmmaker whose work connects art and activism. Metwaly explores the intersections of protest and the politics of clothing, and critiques state power by examining how visual and material culture operates within systems of control, resistance, and survival.

Metwaly investigates how clothing, from military gear to protest wear, can act as both protection and a statement of defiance. *Anbar* demonstrates how the aesthetics of camouflage—military designs, patterns, and fabrics—originally intended to protect and conceal the body in conflict zones have been appropriated by street fashion, sometimes subversively, sometimes cynically. In collaboration with Marta Szypulska, she subverts traditional camouflage patterns with delicate butterflies; her jackets, vests and dresses become a form of poetic and liberating armor—both physical and symbolic—against these acts of military violence and state coercion against women, including stripping and sexual assault. In Yasmin El–Rifae’s words “In Tahrir, we realized our bodies were not merely personal: they were political terrain.”

Jasmina Metwaly was a member of the now inactive civic and activist collective Mosireen, known as a citizen media platform collecting and using raw footage to challenge state narratives and amplify the voices of protesters of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Metwaly presents here a selection of raw footage from 858.ma (the collective’s archive) depicting the unsettling presence of helicopters patrolling Tahrir Square in 2011 or activist marches from Egypt towards the Gaza border to show solidarity with the Palestinian people in 2012. Displayed on smartphones, this footage is a testimony to the resilience of the people in the omnipresence of state surveillance and violence, back during the Arab Spring and today.

Open Group



Repeat After Me, 2022 is a collective portrait of witnesses of the ongoing war in Ukraine. All the protagonists are civilian – domestic refugees – who fled from east to west Ukraine. They recall the war through the sounds of weapons that their bodies remember and invite others to repeat after

them. The artists use the karaoke format, yet not to the accompaniment of popular pop songs, but to the sounds of shots, missiles, howling or explosions, with the descriptions of deadly firearms as lyrics. This is the soundtrack of the war and the trauma it causes.

The video was shot in a camp for domestic refugees in Lviv. *Repeat After Me, 2022* is a picture of war seen from the inside – here the only sense of peace comes from the summer landscape and the protagonists' static poses. The video from 2022 is the immediate response to the full-scale invasion by Russia. After the initial shock came the resistance, global mobilization and immediate assistance, and a prevailing sense of power and unity in a shared goal. At the end of his book *Sonic Warfare* (2009), Steve Goodman says: 'There is no need to fear or hope, but only to ... [listen] ... for new weapons.' When it comes to recognising the future of war by its sounds, in the three years since the start of the war, the entire population of Ukraine has been listening closely to the new weapons used against them with the aim of terror and extermination. The spectre will remain with us for as long as nationalist imperialist policies are accepted, even as part of a diplomatic compromise. *Repeat After Me* speaks of all refugees of the world. This video, together with *Repeat After Me, 2024*, shown further in this exhibition, was shown as a joint installation *Repeat After Me II* at the Polish Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale. – Marta Czyż Curator of the Polish Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale

Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga) is a Ukrainian collective founded in 2012 in Lviv, and since 2015 scattered in various countries, some of its members reside in Poland.

Natalia LL



“Crossing the borders is still within art borders,” famously said artist Natalia LL (1937–2022). She was a bold forerunner of feminist art in Eastern Europe. Her most memorable work is the series *Consumer Art*, produced between 1972 and 1975, featuring women erotically eating and licking bananas, salty sticks or other luxury goods inaccessible in the communist bloc. The work was immediately censored, it was however very eagerly received in the capitalist West, since

western liberalism encouraged the objectification and tokenisation of women in the public sphere, often pairing capitalism and erotic motifs. *Consumer Art* can be read today both as a mix of eastern longing for consumption and sexual expression as well as a criticism of western patriarchy, advertisement culture and the fetishization of ownership.

In 2019, during the recent right-wing regime in Poland, Natalia LL’s work was again submitted to an act of censorship at the National Museum in Warsaw. What went viral under the hashtag #bananagate was an act of protest in the form of a collective banana eating, an objection to the abrupt censorship of several feminist works. Here we show the work in yet a new context, in relation to the history of rampant capitalism in the Eastern Bloc, built upon the shoulders of various diasporas, and within today’s social media-oriented and narcissism-driven culture. *Consumer Art* seems to be one of those works gaining meaning while moving through time.

Shadow Architecture



Shadow Architecture, founded in 2007 by Aleksandra Wasilkowska (born in 1978 in Warsaw, lives in Warsaw/Brussels), is an architectural studio that, in addition to building practice, conducts long-term research and produces publications related to informal architecture and transcultural infrastructures. For a decade, Wasilkowska has been working with the Vietnamese community to redevelop the multicultural Asian Town Bakalarska Market in Warsaw, as an architect, advisor and curator of an exhibition called *The Alley of Claws* (2021) and presented in an alley of

nail salons. For “Familiar Strangers”, she has arranged a shared, hybrid space, where various identities and influences of the exhibition meet. The space is a place of encounter between our own individual power and our interdependence. *Diasporic chairs* are inspired by different ways of sitting and passing the time, conditioned by cultures, functions, religions or social backgrounds. They span from Vietnamese street stools to Jewish zydel; from Catholic kneelers, and Ghanaian ekurasi to European highchairs. The chairs in this reading and resting living room have been fabricated from reused leftovers from

Bakalarska Market. As such, they are a living tribute to a place where informality, circularity and diversity prevail. Such principles can be read as political concepts necessary to change society in a bottom–up manner.

Ngo Van Tuong



Ngo Van Tuong (born in 1964 in Doan Xa, Vietnam, lives in Warsaw) arrived in Poland as a student in the 1980s. He is a Vietnamese oppositionist, an engineer, a nail salon owner, a certified translator for the Vietnamese community, an amateur actor and a public life commentator mostly relating to the topics of inclusion and diversity. In 2006, together with Joanna Warsza and Anna Gajewska, he co–realized Trip to Asia. An Acoustic Walk Around the Vietnamese Sector of the 10th–Anniversary Stadium, a public art project in the Asian section of a huge, early capitalist

and multicultural market called Jarmark Europa in Warsaw, which was dismantled to give place to the construction of a new, white and red, national stadium. In 2007, the project received a Wdechy award from Gazeta Wyborcza, a nationwide Polish daily newspaper. We present here the documentation of the project, alongside a selection of Ngo Van Tuong’s Facebook posts from the last 2 years commenting on Polish current events. His new biographical essay *An Amateur Stuck with Poland* commissioned for this exhibition is available for consultation here, as well as on the site www.culture.pl.

Open Group



Repeat After Me, 2024 is a collective portrait of witnesses of the ongoing war in Ukraine, and a sequel to *Repeat After Me, 2022*. All the protagonists are civilian refugees speaking of the war through the sounds of weapons they remember, then inviting the audience to repeat after them. The artists use the karaoke

format, yet not to the accompaniment of popular pop songs, but to the sounds of shots, missiles, howling or explosions, with the descriptions of deadly firearms as lyrics. This is the soundtrack of the war and the trauma it causes.

In this video from 2024, the witnesses' stories come from an international community. The protagonists stemming from Ukraine, reside now in other European cities—Wrocław, Berlin, Vienna, Vilnius and Dublin, as well as New York—among many other refugees. The new perspective brings a different state of mind: in Ukraine they were in a state of readiness, and in constant threat; abroad, they experience returning trauma. The change of setting expands the refugees' geography but also shows them at a point when the war has been continuing for two years and has left its mark on everyday life without a clear future. The protagonists add information about the countries in which they found themselves.

Comparing the work from 2022 with that of 2024, one sees a change of mood - help is delayed or fails to arrive; the lack of ammunition and support is palpable, the hope for an end is fading. Western countries are increasingly counting their domestic losses, giving up to pressures of societal fatigue, more conflicts are emerging, and one war is beginning to obscure another.

This video together with *Repeat After Me, 2022*, shown previously in this exhibition, was shown as a joint installation *Repeat After Me II* at the Polish Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale. - Marta Czyż, Curator of the Polish Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale.

Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga) is a Ukrainian collective founded in 2012 in Lviv, and since 2015 scattered in various countries, some of its members reside in Poland.

Renata Rara Kaminska

“Do you know, sometimes I have the feeling that I am not a real human being, but some kind of bird, or another animal in human form. Inside, I feel far more at home in a little scrap of garden like this, or in a field among bumblebees and grass than at a party conference.” – Róża Luxemburg, *Letters from Prison*, 1917.



Róża Luxemburg (1871–1919) is best known as an internationalist, an anti-imperialist, and a Marxist revolutionary. She has been considered a key figure in Germany's anti-war and socialist movements from the late 19th and early 20th century. She is, however, less recognised as a Polish Jew and a passionate self-taught botanist. Since the end of the Communist era, Luxemburg's legacy in Eastern Europe has been obscured and forgotten, also because she considered nationalism as a violent tendency. Artist Renata Rara Kaminska (lives in Berlin), who shares Luxemburg's birthplace, the city of Zamosc has devoted a number of artworks to the revolutionary.

The installation presented here refers to Luxemburg's herbariums made during her years in prison in Wrocław shortly before her death. The herbarium becomes the garden Luxemburg always wished for and never managed to have. *Miedza* is full of dried flowers, weeds and wild plants that Luxemburg, and the artist after her, have been collecting such as thistles, nettles or trefoils. They pay tribute to the act of growing despite all odds, refusing to be unnecessary, keeping on going. Wild plants, which are often considered as uninvited guests, can in fact be essential in healing processes and stubborn in the will to grow. Something Róża Luxemburg always looked for, both in forests and in politics.

Zuzanna Hertzberg



I am an interdisciplinary artist, activist and researcher. I speak and act from an anti-fascist, intersectional and anarcho-feminist perspective. I am a Jew born and socialised in Poland, identifying with the former Pale of Settlement, an area in Eastern Europe inhabited by Jews between 1791 and 1917 (covering the former Russian empire and modern-day Belarus and Moldova, much of Lithuania, Ukraine and East-Central Poland, and small parts of Latvia).

I recover the stories of Jewish women activists since the early 20th century (revolutionaries, anarchists, anti-fascists). Most of my art and activism, which I call artivism, takes place in the public space, the one accessible to all.

My starting point is the need to defend the right to speak from a position free of shame, where minority people do not need to apologise. I terminate the sub-tenant contract, according to which minorities are the sub-tenants in the country-home called Poland. A disagreement is the ignition for all my actions, while my own experiences motivate me to tell specific herstories. I only research what concerns me.

I believe that if we strive for social justice, if we aim to build utopias through everyday practices, then we must understand the past and the sources and roots of injustice. We need to know the history of those struggles. My work is directed at recovering memories from a situated-Jewish-feminist perspective and passing on the stories of resistance. Which of these forgotten tools and strategies could be used today?

I believe that art is a way of building awareness, visualizing complexity and establishing action-reaction relationships. A tool for education carried out from a place of care to be used to fight against the ever-increasing fascism.

Women archives to the streets!

Zuzanna Hertzberg (born in 1981 in Warsaw, lives in Warsaw)

Assaf Gruber



Assaf Gruber (born in 1980 in Jerusalem, lives in Berlin) is an artist and filmmaker exploring the intersection of personal and political narratives. With subtle humour and a critical perspective, he merges fiction, documentary, and cinematic essays to examine institutions, their historical legacies set against the inner world of individuals, and the role of art and culture in our lives.

The theatrical performance *Story of a Scared State* took place in Wólka Kosowska, the largest centre of wholesale trade in Central and Eastern Europe, established by Chinese entrepreneurs in the early 1990s. The warehouses, located near Warsaw, served as fertile grounds for an investigation into the exercise of power:

In the plot, the representatives of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews negotiate the urgent shipment of a memorial of the famous Polish Second World War resistance fighter Jan Karski from the US to Poland. The monument had been vandalised and subsequently repaired by a Chinese-owned art production company, situated among other trade businesses in the wholesale centre. Entirely fictional, directed and filmed as a sitcom, *Story of a Scared State* unfolds on an awkward Brechtian battlefield where the politically correct is not where we expect it.

Assaf Gruber, *Miraculous Accident*



Miraculous Accident is a transtemporal film that narrates the love story between Nadir, a Moroccan student at the Łódź Film School in 1968, his Jewish editing teacher Edyta, and their shared relationship with Jarek, Nadir's best friend and Edyta's protégé.

Nadir is among a group of North African students sent to study communist filmmaking techniques as part of the Eastern Bloc's support for anti-imperialist struggles. Despite her opposition to Zionism, Edyta is forced to leave Poland due to the political rift between Poland and Israel following the Six-Day War in 1967/68.

In 2024, Nadir returns to the school to make a film after discovering a forgotten letter Edyta wrote to him from Haifa in 1989. The film mourns how nations, in their cruelty, unveil fleeting moments, miracles born of pure accident, encounters and loves so rare they seem otherworldly. Yet, with the same indifferent hands that created the conditions for these miracles, they tear them apart before they even have a chance to exist.

Inspired by the life of former Moroccan student, poet and filmmaker Abdelkader Lagtaâ, who plays Nadir in the film, *Miraculous Accident* weaves its plot through original footage and extracts from 1960s student films by Lagtaâ and his peers.

Assaf Gruber (born in 1980 in Jerusalem, lives in Berlin) is an artist and filmmaker exploring the intersection of personal and political narratives. For him, this film is also about a possible meeting between a Jew, an Arab and a Pole, without the mediation of the West.

Jana Shostak



Minute of Scream for Belarus is a raw, visceral response to the ongoing political persecution in Belarus. By strategically engaging with mass media and its broadcasting systems, Jana Shostak transforms personal and collective grief, helplessness as well as the collective feeling of being silenced, into a powerful scream. It is an act of condemnation and solidarity with those arrested, tortured

and silenced for opposing Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

Shostak began her one-minute scream performances following the disputed 2020 re-election of Lukashenko, who has ruled the former Soviet republic since 1994 and was re-elected again in January 2025. The video shown here presents Jana screaming at the top of her lungs on May 24, 2021, during a press conference outside the Belarusian Embassy in Warsaw to protest the forced landing in Minsk of Ryanair Flight 4978 from Athens to Vilnius and the subsequent arrest of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich. She also performed the scream, together with fellow protesters, every day at 6 PM, in front of the European Commission building in Warsaw. Through these acts, she aimed to confront Europe's indifference to Belarusian repression. She strongly opposed the construction of the wall at the Belarusian border, the pushbacks and the inhumane treatment of migrants stuck there.

Jana Shostak (born in 1993 in Grodno, lives in Warsaw) calls herself a 'positive hacker'. She infiltrates public debate with her performative actions, in an effort to "make art effective in society" and expand its outreach to a broader audience. Her work urges us to resist injustices and human rights violations, to stand in solidarity with victims of patriarchy, political repression, migration and war worldwide.

Oliwia Bosomtwe

The book *Jak biały był owiek: Opowie o Polakach i innych* [*Like the White Man: The Story of Poles and the Others*] (W.A.B. 2024) by Oliwia Bosomtwe explores the stories of people of African descent who were born in Poland, chose it as their homeland, or visited briefly. This non-fiction work describes what it means to be Black in a predominantly white, post-communist and formally homogenous society, surrounded by stereotypes, fantasies, and imaginations about Blackness. The Ghanaian-descended author reveals the complex history of race relations from the 18th century to today, in a country where the Black population remains largely unknown. The quote presented here comes from the first chapter of the book, available for consultation in the shared space of the exhibition.

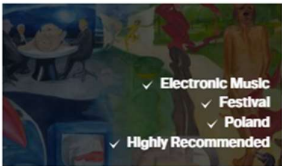

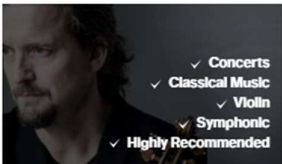
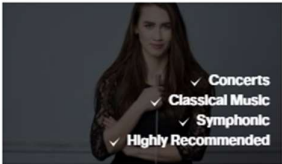
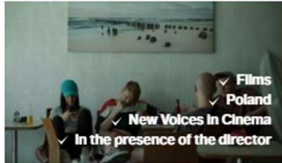

Oliwia Bosomtwe is half Polish, and half Ghanaian. Born in 1991 in Kraków, and raised in Nowy Sącz, today, she lives in Warsaw and works as a writer and editor.


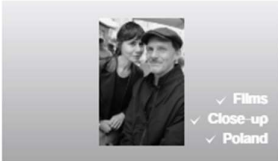
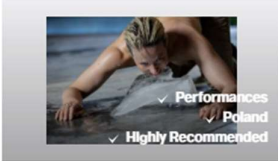

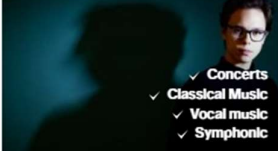
Around the exhibition

The exhibition is accompanied by a transversal program featuring lectures and debates, concerts and film screenings (in the new cinema hall *The 23*).

Focus on Poland

It is on the occasion of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU that the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Poland supports our **Focus on Poland** and this exhibition, co-organized with The Adam Mickiewicz Institute.

	14 + 15 Feb.'25	Unsound Brussels at Bozar
	5 Feb.'25 - 20:00	Meet the Writer : Olga Tokarczuk
	11 Jan.'25 - 20:00	Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Emelyanychev & Tetzlaff
	8 Jan.'25 - 20:00	Sinfonia Varsovia
	5 »→ 8 Mar.'25	Bread and Salt by Damian Kocur
	21 Mar.'25 - 21:00	Patricia Kopatchinskaja & Fazıl Say

 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Concerts ✓ Classical Music ✓ Symphonic ✓ Poland ✓ Highly Recommended 	25 Mar.'25 - 20:00	Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra & Marcin Alsop
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Films ✓ Close-up ✓ Poland 	26 »→ 30 Mar.'25	Close-Up : Malgorzata Szumowska & Michał Englert
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Performances ✓ Poland ✓ Highly Recommended 	14 Apr.'25 - 18:00	Ola Maciejewska. The Second Body
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Concerts ✓ Classical Music ✓ Piano ✓ Poland 	11 May'25 - 19:00	Jan Lisiecki
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Concerts ✓ Classical Music ✓ Vocal music ✓ Symphonic 	15 May'25 - 19:30	Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg & Peltokoski

All events >> www.bozar.be/en/calendar/focus-poland

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The exhibition “Familiar Strangers. The Eastern Europeans from a Polish Perspective”

is presented in Brussels at Bozar – Centre for Fine Arts

from 14 March until 29 June 2025

Curated by Joanna Warsza, an international curator originating from Warsaw and currently a city curator of Hamburg, the exhibition is designed by Aleksandra Wasilkowska and features the works by Oliwia Bosomtwe, Assaf Gruber, Zuzanna Hertzberg, Renata Rara Kamińska, Jasmina Metwaly, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Natalia LL, Ngo Van Tuong, Open Group, Janek Simon, Shadow Architecture, Jana Shostak et Mikołaj Sobczak. This exhibition is co-organized by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute and co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Poland.



Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
Republic of Poland



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Accreditation

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Annexes

- **Press Images** (also available via <https://tinyurl.com/expo-familiar-strangers>)