

Bells and Cannons.

Contemporary Art in the Face of Militarisation

Artists:

Kateryna Aliinyk, Maithu Bui, Anna Engelhardt and Mark Cinkevich, Forensic Architecture, Philipp Goll, Nikita Kadan, Lina Lapelytė, Bjørn Melhus, Deimantas Narkevičius, Henrike Naumann, Oleksiy Radynski, Indrė Rybakovaitė, Trevor Paglen, Sana Shahmuradova Tanska, Basma al-Sharif, Michael Stevenson, Hito Steyerl, Fedir Tetianych, Peter Wächtler, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Jan Eustachy Wolski, Tobias Zielony; and Berta Tilmantė, Neringa Rekašiūtė, Aurelija Urbonavičiūtė and Rūta Meilutytė

Curators:

Virginija Januškevičiūtė and Valentinas Klimašauskas

The international group exhibition 'Bells and Cannons' presents different strategies used by contemporary artists in the face of militarisation. Its title refers to the close relationship between art and war. Historically, bells were often recast into cannons and other weaponry during wartime. In other words, from its very inception, the idea of a bell has included the possibility of military use, and both bells and cannons were frequently cast by the same craftspeople. Fittingly, the exhibition employs this metaphor of unexpected congruence to explore the complex relationship between war and culture.

We could include art and culture as part of the contemporary conflict analysis vocabulary, alongside concepts such as soft power, psyop, and hybrid warfare. What connects them is the notion that it can be extremely difficult to distinguish between what belongs to war and what does not. It is equally challenging to determine when and which communication tools, data processing technologies, or energy structures are used for civilian versus military purposes, and for whose benefit. Similarly, decisions relating to climate change, altered landscapes, and historical memory can often appear ambiguous or opaque, like the motives and people behind them.

In such circumstances, strategies of militarisation, securitisation and peacekeeping inevitably invade the spheres of artistic responsibility and imagination. In the works of the artists presented in this exhibition, different relationships and compositions unfold between bells and cannons. Some ask what forces, beliefs, and strategies shape today's military conflicts, or what role art may have in this context. Works from earlier decades address the ideological side of information technology, the fragility of international relations, and other long-term historical phenomena.

This exhibition is developed as the world reels from constant crises, military and otherwise, which often feed into each other. At the time of writing this text, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry reports that Israel is committing a genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, while Poland calls for a NATO-backed no-fly zone over Ukraine after Russian drones have repeatedly violated NATO airspace. The disputes that surround these conflicts are dividing EU and global societies and, of course, artistic communities. The feeling of distress also comes with the irreconcilable simultaneity of the apparent need for armament like the deployment of the German Brigade in Lithuania on one hand and the wishing for more peaceful futures on the other.

As with works of art, where reality is revealed not through direct documentation but through the varied contexts of artistic practices developed over many years through abstraction, play, or other artistic means, this exhibition does not aim to provide a comprehensive, unequivocal, or objective reflection of militarisation and global conflicts. It can, however, be interpreted as an opportunity to explore diverse artistic practices in an increasingly discordant world.

Kateryna Aliinyk

Awe of Vines, 2025

Oil on canvas, 170 × 210 cm

From the series 'Heaven'

The landscape of Donbas has long been a key subject in Kateryna Aliinyk's work. She has painted the pre-war landscape, the war-riddled field full of debris, and terrain that has suffered from a kind of slow violence that leaves unpredictable, unaccounted change. These perspectives often overlap within a single canvas, creating layered images of perceived reality. These landscapes are sometimes depicted from a mouse's vantage point or from underground, like the way the vines in this painting expand into the vast distance of the sky. Their wandering arms and branches might just as well become metaphors for neural networks, infrastructures, and drought. Or exile – reflecting how first the occupation, and then the full-scale invasion, have separated the artist from a landscape she was emotionally bound to, and which by now might have been irreparably changed. Yet this painting belongs to the series, titled 'Heaven', suggesting a piercing and timeless presence of joy.

Courtesy the artist and Jednostka Gallery, Warsaw

Kateryna Aliinyk

Angels in the Bushes, 2025
Oil on canvas, 158 × 100 cm

From the series 'Heaven'

Since 2014, Kateryna Aliinyk's main subject has been the Donbas landscape. But in 2025, she chose to step back from this theme: her last visit to Luhansk was in 2019, and its scenery started to become an ungrounded creation of her imagination, so she could no longer work as she used to. The only other subject that, for her, offered more imaginative space was Heaven – understood by her, like Donbas, as something familiar that one can try to gain back.

'The "Heaven" cycle is full of joy because everything in it does what it likes to the max. Growing, sprawling, breathing, shining, whatever every character is about is happening naturally and fully without any obstacles. For me, this feeling is totally about 2025 in Ukraine. The backdrop of horror reveals even more beauty in nature. As Simone Weil put it, "If there were no affliction in this world we might think we were in paradise."'

'Right now, Russia launches more drones per night than it did in a season last year, and I discovered for myself a new perverted, vivid type of joy I had never felt so frequently – the joy of postponed death. Each night, I crouch like a mouse hiding from an owl flying over, I myself act the same at night, but with the rocket. And when it flies by, that joy is unmatched!'

Courtesy the artist and Jednostka Gallery, Warsaw

Maithu Bui

cu'a bom IIII, 2025

Bomb Shell I–IIII, 2025

Metal, steel balls

Maithu Bui explores the impact of war waste, especially the remains of explosives and mines, on human and non-human lives. The two series presented here speak directly to the issue of mine contamination. One consists of works that look like open fruit – similar to how some bombs are nicknamed after pineapples or cucumbers, depending on their shape. In the second series, the sculptures take on forms similar to seashells. This series was created following the artist's recent research visit to the Lithuanian coast of the Baltic Sea.

The visit coincided with a maritime operation involving thirteen NATO member states, aimed at neutralising munitions lying on the seabed in May 2025. Lithuanian Armed Forces have been clearing the sea of explosive remnants of war since 2008, and reports show that by 2024, they had detected over 40,000 explosives, not including small-scale ammunition.

In the summer of 2025, however, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and later Ukraine withdrew from the Ottawa Treaty, which entered into force in 1999 and prohibits its signatories from using landmines. The treaty, originally aimed at protecting civilians, is now being reconsidered in light of what a recent *UN Chronicle* described as 'a sobering new reality' – the heightened security threats caused by the ongoing war against Ukraine.

Courtesy the artist

Anna Engelhardt, Mark Cinkevich

Terror Element, 2025

Single-channel video (25 min), television, camera, speakers, briefcase, explosive detection spray, laboratory tables, dimensions variable

Reminiscent of a forensics lab, this installation investigates the evidence used in 1999 to justify Russia's second invasion of Chechnya, a pivotal year in Putin's rise to power.

The project scrutinises a combination of props and scripted statements manufactured by Russian media to mislead. One of these props – a spray developed and sold globally to forensic labs and security agencies to test for the presence of explosives – is presented in the installation. In an inversion of its intended forensic function, Engelhardt and Cinkevich investigate the efficacy and veracity of the test as an objective instrument used to justify anti-terror and criminalisation measures worldwide.

Created in 2025 using CGI (computer-generated imagery) but styled as if recorded on VHS, the film draws attention to the construction and dissemination of evidence, asking how often such strategies recur. The artists, Russian and Belarusian expatriates, witnessed these media narratives unfold as they happened.

Courtesy of the artists

Forensic Architecture

Herbicide Warfare in Gaza, 2019

Video

8 min. 50 sec

Photographs of affected leaves, 2018

Investigation by Forensic Architecture

In collaboration with Al Mezan Center for Human Rights; Ain Media Gaza; Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights; Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement; the Ministry of Health in Gaza; and the Union of Agricultural Worker's Committees

Extended team: Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Imperial College London), Corey Scher, Shurouq al-Aila, Roshdi Al-Sarraj

Over four decades, in tandem with the Madrid and Oslo negotiation processes, the occupied Gaza Strip has been slowly isolated from the rest of Palestine and the outside world and subjected to repeated Israeli military incursions.

The engineered borders around Gaza – one of the most densely-populated areas on Earth – continue today to be hardened and heightened into a sophisticated system of under- and overground fences, forts, checkpoints, corridors and military roads, reinforced by highly developed surveillance technologies throughout. Part of this system has involved the enforcement of an expanding military no-go area – or 'buffer zone' – on the Palestinian side of the border, which has been further expanded by the Israeli army since October 2023.

From 2014 to 2019, the clearing and bulldozing of agricultural and residential lands by the Israeli military close to the eastern perimeter of Gaza was complemented by the unannounced aerial spraying of crop-killing herbicides. Forensic Architecture worked closely with Ain Media Gaza to document these sprayings and their devastating effects on Palestinian farmlands and livelihoods.

Forensic Architecture

'No traces of Life': Israel's Ecocide in Gaza 2023–2024, 2024

Video

7 min 25 sec

Investigation by Forensic Architecture

In collaboration with Ain Media Gaza

Building on Forensic Architecture's investigation into herbicidal warfare in the occupied Gaza Strip (also exhibited here), this investigation was released on 30 March 2023 to coincide with Land Day in Palestine, examining the systematic targeting of orchards and greenhouses by Israeli forces since October 2023.

With human rights groups and journalists denied safe access to agricultural areas along Gaza's eastern perimeter, FA researchers reached out to existing collaborators at local farmers' associations and, through them, to agricultural workers in Gaza.

Within six months of the present genocidal campaign, Israel's ground invasion had uprooted most of Gaza's orchards and systematically targeted agricultural farmlands and infrastructure throughout the besieged strip. Where the ground invasion moved, environmental destruction followed, and farmlands were transformed into military forts.

FA's analysis revealed that this destruction is a deliberate act of Israeli ecocide that has exacerbated the ongoing catastrophic famine in Gaza and fits a wider pattern of depriving Palestinians of critical means of both present and future survival.

Forensic Architecture

A Cartography of Genocide: Israel's Conduct in Gaza Since October 2023

Interactive platform

2023–ongoing

Since the start of Israel's military campaign in Gaza in October 2023, Forensic Architecture has been collecting data related to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the Israeli military. FA's analysis of this conduct reveals the near-total destruction of civilian life in Gaza. FA has also collected and analysed evacuation orders issued by the Israeli military directing Palestinian civilians to areas of Gaza designated as 'safe'. These orders have resulted in the repeated, large-scale displacement of the Palestinian population across Gaza, often to areas which subsequently came under attack.

To identify patterns in Israel's conduct, the platform turns thousands of datapoints into a navigable 'map' of Gaza, within which it is possible to define regions, periods in time, and categories of events. This filtering can reveal trends within datasets and relationships between different datasets (for instance, between the military ground invasion and the destruction of medical infrastructure). The patterns observed concerning Israel's military conduct in Gaza broadly indicate a systematic and organised campaign to destroy life, conditions necessary for life, and life-sustaining infrastructure.

The platform has recently been updated to reveal the impact of two years of genocide on the besieged Gaza Strip.

Forensic Architecture's monitoring and research consists of an interactive cartographic platform and an 827-page text report, which deploy spatial and pattern analysis to observe the ways in which Israel's military operations entailed widespread civilian harm.

Courtesy the artists

Philipp Goll, Oleksiy Radynski, Hito Steyerl

Timeline: The End of a Pipeline, 2024

Research and text: Philipp Goll

Advice: Oleksiy Radynski, Elske Rosenfeld, Hito Steyerl, Anna Zett

Layout: Manuel Reinartz

Where Russia Ends, 2024

25 min, 35mm transferred to HD

Director: Oleksiy Radynski

Development: Philipp Goll and Oleksiy Radynski

Producer: Lyuba Knorozok

Leak, 2024

Pipeline structure, 5-channel video, 21 min, sound

Connections: Hito Steyerl

Research: Philipp Goll

Idea and visual research: Oleksiy Radynski

Postproduction: Christoph Manz

Installation production: Manuel Reinartz

Production: Lyuba Knorozok for Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig

Courtesy the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul

Taking up the development of the gas pipeline system between Siberia and (West) Germany since the 1970s, this part of the exhibition consists of an installative video sculpture titled *Leak* and the essay film *Where Russia Ends*, the contents of which intertwine and correlate.

The artist Hito Steyerl has integrated her 5-channel video narrative into the installation *Leak*, which deals with the Nord Stream pipeline system and its precursors. Steyerl examines the history of the so-called cultural pipeline between the Soviet Union, later the Russian Federation, and (West) Germany. The 'cultural pipeline' was an important part of the 'natural gas pipeline business': The Soviet Ministry of Culture and its successors organised major cultural exhibitions in cooperation with German companies such as Deutsche Bank to promote the fossil fuel infrastructure that had been jointly developed over decades. *Leak* also includes a walk-in sculpture. Constructed from pipes and video elements, the sculpture serves as a screen for the essayistic road movie *Where Russia Ends*. The film examines the often-overlooked history of colonialism and environmental destruction in the Russian-occupied territories of the indigenous peoples of Siberia.

In 2022, previously unknown film footage was discovered at the Kyiv Science Film Studio (Kyivnaukfilm). It documents numerous expeditions undertaken by a group of Ukrainian filmmakers in the 1980s to various parts of Siberia and the Far North. This material forms the basis for reconstructing the erased history of the numerous imperialist wars that Russia waged against its later colonies.

Where Russia Ends examines the manifold forms of complicity that played a role in this, shedding light on the ideology of exploitation and development of natural resources. The film is a collaboration between Ukrainian filmmaker Oleksiy Radynski and researcher Philipp Goll.

Nikita Kadan

Putin Huilo No. 1
Defund Russian War
Stop Buying Gas From Fascists
Gas Embargo
Stop Putin
Decolonize Russia

From the series '*Repeating Speech*', 2022
Charcoal on paper, 42 × 60 cm each

This series of drawings was started at the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when the artist, along with others, took shelter in the building of Voloshyn Gallery in Kyiv – a basement that had already served as a bomb shelter during the Second World War. Kadan's repetitive gestures insist on messages that are repeatedly rendered urgent. Written in English, the phrases address an international audience.

Some of the drawings in this series speak directly to issues of deeply rooted Russian colonialism and its international economic ties, also explored in Goll, Radynski and Steyer's installation *Leak: The End of the Pipeline* in this exhibition. Another piece from the series, *Fuck War*, was displayed as a banner on the facade of Secession, Austria's best-known contemporary art institution, becoming one of Kadan's many viral gestures denouncing the war.

Courtesy of the artist and Voloshyn Gallery, Kyiv

Bjørn Melhus

*I'm Not the Enemy *Lithuania**, 2011/2025

Video

13 min 30 sec

In *I'm Not the Enemy*, Bjørn Melhus explores the cinematic trope of war-induced post-traumatic stress. First made in 2011, the video was originally based on American cinema, itself informed, primarily, by the Vietnam War. The appropriated dialogues of American movies were set, however, in quiet German suburbs, bringing Germany's participation in the war in Afghanistan into context.

While visiting Lithuania in 2025, the artist made new shots and inserted them into the original footage. Some of the repetitive, fragmented and largely dysfunctional dialogues now unfold amid Lithuanian architecture and landscapes. The trope of an 'uncomfortable return' has also shifted, giving way to a narrative of deployment and deterrence outside active war zones. The comical montage and melodramatic way the artist performs the familiar trope appear to point to cinema's ingrained attempt to entertain – a means to both ease the discomfort and address the confusion caused by fast-evolving events.

The new version premieres in the exhibition 'Bell and Canons: Contemporary Art in the Face of Militarisation', which takes as its starting point the ongoing deployment of German troops in Lithuania, part of NATO's strategy of strengthening NATO's Eastern borders in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The exhibition explores contemporary artists' strategies facing an increasingly discordant world and maps out some of the ways culture meets militarisation.

Courtesy the artist

Deimantas Narkevičius

Legend Coming True, 1999

Digitised super 8 mm film

68 min

The film is composed of three parts.

Part one: A small girl's trembling voice reads an excerpt from a romantic legend about a city destined to become world-renowned. Indeed, this fame transpired in the middle of the twentieth century. Vilnius became a symbol of the Holocaust.

Part two: Fania Brantsovskaya tells the story of her youth in pre-war and wartime Vilnius. The fundamental topography of the film is made up of four aspects of the city: her childhood street, the school façade, the ghetto yard, and the Rudininkai forest. All of these locations are dramatically associated with Lithuanian Jewish history and remain largely unchanged since the mid-1940s. A Super 8 film camera was programmed to shoot one frame per minute over 24 hours. In this way, the 24 hours of shooting became 14 minutes of viewing time. The result is similar to an animated film. Four days and nights are compressed into a story that takes an hour to tell. Fania's narration brings together the twentieth century through the course of her story.

Part three: Chasia Spannerflieg performs a partisan song in Yiddish, exactly as she did onstage in a small theatre during the ghetto years. Chasia declined to tell her story in the film. (I found out later that her experience of that time was even more dramatic).

– Deimantas Narkevičius

Courtesy the artist

Henrike Naumann

Breathe, 2023

Coat rack, two stools, textiles, ceramics, ears of corn, chain gloves and shirt, monitor and video, dimensions variable

This installation documents a performance that Henrike Naumann staged at the Drama Theater of Ukraine's Ivano-Frankivsk in 2023. Invited to take part in the Kyiv Biennial that year, she reflected on the futility of making art during war – and on the many historical cases where art played an important role as an act of support, testing the limits of what art can do, or transgression. She cites The Prodigy's premiere of *Breathe* in Belgrade during the final week of the Bosnian War in 1995; a concert by an Iron Maiden band member in Sarajevo a year earlier; and Susan Sontag's 1993 production of Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' in Sarajevo, all of which have to some extent been seen as controversies. Is making art a way of regaining a sense of reality? Can its energy and madness become a lifeline for those trapped in a war?

Breathe is part of the artist's wider endeavour to travel to countries that had diplomatic relations with the former East Germany. In the socialist era, those relations included artistic exchange. Naumann sees her practice in continuity with that tradition, using it to build a new understanding of how such relations might evolve in the present day.

'Today, in a situation that can no longer be called "post-socialist" and where cold and hot wars force us to rethink the global order, I want to look at the role that history, art history and artists play in shaping ideas for different futures. Taking the complex legacy of whatever that "Ostblock" was and turning it into a future machine,' states the artist.

Courtesy the artist

Indrė Rybakovaitė

Checkpoint Charlie, 2025, 138 × 179 cm
Oil on canvas

Berlin Tempelhof Airport, 2025
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 146 × 263 cm

Stasi Museum in Berlin, 2024
Oil on canvas, 130 × 160 cm

From the series 'Places of Change'

Indrė Rybakovaitė's series of paintings 'Places of Change' depicts war history museums and other sites that preserve the memory of conflict. A significant number of the works in this series relate to Germany: the Stasi Museum, dedicated to the history of East Germany's secret police, drowning in intense green light; the Tempelhof Airport in central Berlin, now an oasis of nature within the city; and the famous Checkpoint Charlie, the former border crossing between East and West Berlin, prominently marked for tourists. Presented at the far end of the hall is the Berlin Humboldt Hospital bunker, which served as an operating theatre during the Second World War and is now also open to visitors.

Initially an exploration of unease, the series took on a completely different tone with the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and continues to evolve before the audience's eyes. Although the architecture depicted appears immovable, these places are not static: for many people, their emotional connection to war-affected areas has unwittingly become much stronger in recent years and continues to develop. Similarly, the works remain fluid despite being finished, shaped by the audience's ever-changing relationship with their subjects and their colour palette, which evokes spaces being submerged under water.

Courtesy the artist

Indrė Rybakovaitė

The Surgery Bunker of the Former Humboldt Hospital in Berlin,
2025

Oil on canvas, 166 × 233 cm

From the series 'Places of Change'

With its particularly bleak atmosphere, this painting depicts an operating theatre in a bunker beneath the former Humboldt Hospital in Berlin, which was in use during the Second World War. The image of medical care being provided in wartime might suggest reassurance, but the oppressive atmosphere of the bunker combined with an awareness of its historical context prevents this. The effect is reinforced by the fact that the bunker is now open to visitors, combining historical education with horror as a form of entertainment.

The artist observes various ways of experiencing and making sense of history: its constant reinterpretation and retelling, which especially begins to shift as time passes and the number of surviving witnesses dwindles. The *noir* aesthetic stems from the artist's starting point: a feeling of unease, a nondescript sense of repulsion or even fear. In the series 'Places of Change', this aesthetic resonates with philosopher Paul Virilio's description of bunkers as architecture that sleeps in peacetime but can awaken at any moment, which the artist often recalls and quotes.

Courtesy the artist

Trevor Paglen

Behold These Glorious Times!, 2017

Single-channel video, colour, stereo sound

10 min

This work, created in 2017, warns of the bias inherent in artificial intelligence and the opacity of its technologies – the partial, prejudiced choices that often escape the human eye. The video is composed of two types of images: the training libraries that are used to teach artificial intelligence networks how to see, and the (black and white) representations of what a Deep Neural Network – an AI architecture – is actually ‘seeing’.

Behold These Glorious Times! is part of a larger body of work showing how the technological challenges of AI have far-reaching consequences. As the AI breaks images apart in its attempt to make sense of them, it also ‘misfires’, mislabeling what it sees or amplifying bias, for instance, consistently identifying doctors as male and nurses as female. It is also known for enforcing racial and religious bias, contributing to the controversies of profiling. Paglen’s work draws attention to how the power increasingly resides with those who control these ‘invisible images’.

The music for this piece, composed by Holly Herndon, was created in part by using neural networks designed to synthesise voices and instruments, and from training libraries used in speech recognition and other auditory machine learning applications.

Courtesy the artist and Pace Gallery, New York

Sana Shahmuradova Tanska

Fell asleep at the river shore in 2022, 2022

Oil on canvas, 110 × 120 cm

The scars came before me, I thought they were flowers, 2024

Oil on canvas, 163 × 137 cm

Apocalypse Survivors/Tethys Sea Inhabitants series #8, 2023

Oil on canvas, 158 × 205 cm

Fiery Harvest, 2023

Oil on canvas, 200 × 150 cm

One of the central themes of the Ukrainian-born artist Sana Shahmuradova Tanska is transgenerational trauma, pointing to the many periods of distress Ukraine has endured. She finds that she carries her ancestors' traumatic experiences, and uses that connection as a means to endure and reflect on the present-day violence against people and nature. It turns out to be a journey crowded with spiritual, mythological, plant-like, and planet-faced beings; emotions abound but are largely solemn, no one and nothing is fully defined, no horror swallows any vision in its entirety.

One of the works, *Fell asleep at the river shore in 2022*, addresses the year of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Made that same year, the painting appears to combine the myth of Europa, abducted by Zeus, with a more peaceful image of a bull as an appreciated aide. A planet or a satellite looms over their veiled heads as the woman sleeps, its oceanic waters running on the ground and spilling from the bull's eye.

Courtesy the artist and Gunia Nowik, Warsaw

Basma al-Sharif

Deep Sleep, 2014

Single-channel HD video, Super 8 transferred to video,
colour, sound

12 min 37 sec

A hypnosis-inducing pan-geographic shuttle built on brainwave-generating binaural beats, *Deep Sleep* takes us on a journey through the sound waves of Gaza to travel between different sights of modern ruin. Unable to travel to Palestine, I began to learn autohypnosis for the purpose of bilocating. What results is a journey recorded on a Super 8 film from the ruins of an ancient civilisation embedded in a modern civilisation in ruins (Athens), to the derelict buildings of anonymous sites (Malta) and a site that is post-civilisation (the Gaza Strip). The film is an invitation to move from the corporeal self to the cinema space in a collective act of bilocation that transcends the limits of geographical borders, time and space.

– Basma al-Sharif

Courtesy the artist

Michael Stevenson

Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare, 2014/2025

Doors, kinetic soft-close door closer, computing hardware, competing gaming bots, and the hiss of compressed-air lines releasing

As intelligently designed objects, doors should communicate to their human visitors everything required for successful interaction. Encounters should be frictionless... within reason. Michael Stevenson's installation tests an alternate doctrine once proposed by mathematician, playwright, and bodyguard José de Jesús Martínez, who observed frequent confusion at a door: 'Will it yield with a push... or pull?' He understood this moment of resistance as an encounter with pure evil.

At the CAC, a double-door frame has been constructed and fitted with doors. Originally purpose-built to secure an entryway at a military facility, they have remained as surplus and are now offered on the civilian market. The swings of this door-and-a-half are controlled via pneumatic hosing connected to a remote room, where four AI bots compete across different computer games. The outcomes of these games determine the door's movement, multiplying the possible encounters with evil.

The installation was first created in 2014, and with each subsequent presentation, the doors have been sourced in relation to a local narrative. For 'Bells and Cannons', the doors highlight their general role as an archetypal device of security, and how their everyday aesthetic camouflages their intended role. The work is part of the artist's long-term inquiry into religious belief and its entanglement with media, tech, business, economy, and political domains.

Courtesy the artist

Fedir Tetianych

Explosive Knowledge, 1970s

Reproduction. Original work: ink on paper, 13 × 19 cm

From the 'Explosive Knowledge' series

Image courtesy collection of Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (a gift from Hanna Tetianych, Bohdan-Lyubomir Tetianych-Bublyk and Lada Tetianych-Bublyk). Photo Piotr Rybiński

Confrontation of the Primal Forces (Mysteries of Ukrainian Eden), 1970s

Paper, ink, pen, wooden frame

20.5 × 28 × 3 cm

Biotechnospheres United by 'Ludoprovids' (Man Conduits), beginning of 1980s

Paper, author's technique, 21 × 30 cm

From the 'Biotechnosphere. Cities of the Future' series

Biotechnosphere – Mobile Shelter for Eco-disaster Situations, 1980s

Paper, watercolours, 21 × 30 cm

From the 'Biotechnospheres. 'Cities of Future' series

Storage of Spheres, beginning of 1980s

Paper, author's technique, 21 × 30 cm

From the 'Biotechnosphere. Cities of the Future' series

Biotechnospheres – Multifunctional Centres, 1980s

Paper, author's technique, 21 × 30 cm

From the 'Biotechnosphere. 'Cities of the Future' series

Sketch for the Design Project of Kyiv Planetarium, 1980s

Cardboard, watercolour, gouache, 61.5 × 84 cm

How We Are Born, How We Live, and How We Are Going, Undying to Catch Up with Our Ancestors, 1980s

Paper, watercolour, wooden frame, 14.5 × 22 × 3 cm

Sketch for Architectural and Artistic Design of Kyiv Planetarium (Fragment of the City of Future), 1988

Diptych: cardboard, gouache, wooden frame, 60 × 80 cm (each)

Kontakt Collection (Vienna)

Fedir Tetianych was a Ukrainian visual artist – monumentalist and painter – and also a philosopher, writer and performance artist, widely known for his street performances and happenings from late 1970s up to 2000s.

Among the works included here are sketches for a public commission in Kyiv. A planetarium is inherently bound to convey a relationship with cosmic scale, and the artist took these fundamental implications as a chance to express his own convictions. On one hand, as his other works show, planetary scale has always grounded his understanding of society in general and Ukrainian ancestry in particular. On the other hand, the massive piping system that he proposed as an architectural decor and that overpowers the planetarium's facade is an expression of his life-long concern with energy infrastructures and politics.

One expression of his vision of the future that recurs throughout his oeuvre is the Biotechnospheres project. There exist many drawings that envision a life organised by the means of uniform capsules, designed to provide the necessary charge and shelter to humans in a disaster-riddled future that, to the artist, seemed to have no other way forward but to rely on man-made machines.

Courtesy the artist's family unless stated otherwise

Peter Wächtler

Lupo, 2019

Bronze, 61 × 70 × 50 cm

Orso, 2019

Bronze, 77 × 49 × 60 cm

The two goofy figurines of a bear and a wolf on the floor of the atrium, exposed to the weather, are Peter Wächtler's *Lupo* and *Orso*. They appear to be sailors, but are obviously off duty and drifting – either just coughed up from inside a ship, on their way to another voyage, or maybe already retired. Neither have shoelaces, and their clothes seem a little ill-fitting and old, especially the bear's. They hint at a profession – that of a sailor – a masculine trope of pipe-smoking knot-makers and salty loners, yet these two sailors seem to have been through the mill: no longer fit enough nor bound enough to embody their kind of long-gone proud connotations.

Bronze sculpture usually has a two-fold relationship to war: they are often made to commemorate victories or sacrifices, or they are used for their 'melt value' to make new ammunition. These two bronzes represent a contemporary artist's discomfort with such associations and how they are nevertheless very difficult to escape. They are worn out by the allegories and their representational duties.

According to the artist, 'They carry such a blurry heraldic quality that people attach or connect them to different things. Even if I would say the wolf started out as a fox, there was another allegorical reading at hand, equally and reasonably connecting it to a culture of representation – to bearlike, wolflike strength and fierceness. Territories, nations and leaders tend to prefer those qualities for identification to flags featuring chipmunks and squirrels.'

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Lars Friedrich, Berlin

Clemens von Wedemeyer

Surface Composition, 2024

Video, colour, sound, music by Zsolt Sőrés

22 min

How do we arrange ourselves? How are we arranged? And how can one visualise the answers to these questions? Clemens von Wedemeyer's new film delves into the networked dimension of our existence and grapples with how to represent it.

Surface Composition illustrates the contemporary platforms on which people arrange themselves and by which they are arranged. Travelling in California, the artist recorded sites possessed of real-world network power: the headquarters of Apple, Meta, Amazon, SpaceX, and the United States Postal Service, as well as infrastructures of commerce, containers, mines, and other motifs, in impersonal documentary images. The footage shows nondescript building complexes of systemically relevant companies, empty streets, and a few transport vehicles. The reality of today's networks is opaque; their phenomenological blankness becomes manifest in the additive editing, sustained by a psychedelic soundtrack by the Hungarian improvisational musician Zsolt Sőrés.

Conventional principles of representing power (and the masses) are turned upside down in today's networked feudalism. The more influential the actors and structures, the places and processes are, the more invisible they seem to be.

Courtesy the artist, KOW Berlin and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff Paris

Jan Eustachy Wolski

Pelexiton (Excerpts 1 to 6), 2024

Oil and crayon on jute

Untitled (Far Rainbow), 2022

Plywood, 3D print of polymer PLA, watercolor and pencil on paper, epoxy resin, enamel, steel, hat made of wool, varnish, 145 × 177 × 120 cm

Jan Eustachy Wolski's painting consists of six panels, each presented as an 'excerpt' from a cinematic universe created by the artist – *Pelexiton*, its name alluding to the word 'drop' in Greek. The painting's central figure is bound by indecipherable ties within the factory scene depicted to the left, as well as to the images on the right that resemble a landscape or an organic structure. 'The two sides of the painting represent two worlds trapped inside each other,' suggests the artist, pointing at how the machinery and the organic structures appear to feed off each other. 'The painting is mainly about finding a source of energy,' he explains. The 'drop' in the painting's title might equally refer to oil extraction and nature's or human exhaustion – the 'juice of life' and 'drops of patience'.

The artist draws inspiration from cinema and the visual arts in equal measure – the German director R. W. Fassbinder, the Polish surrealist Erna Rosenstein, and the Ukrainian artist Fedir Tetianych, also featured in this exhibition. Like Tetianych, Wolski engineers artistic propositions that uncannily portray contemporary life in its baffling simultaneity of intertwinement and isolation. One of the impulses for his work is the tense atmosphere and the anxiety of the conflict, so close to our borders (the artist is based in Poland) and so present in our cyberspace, namely, Russia's military aggression.

The exhibition also includes a sculpture by Wolski, *Untitled (Far Rainbow)* from 2022, further exploring structures of power and a world trapped inside machinery.

Courtesy the artist and Piktogram, Warsaw

Tobias Zielony

How to Make a Fire Without Smoke, 2025

HD video, colour, sound

21 min 9 sec

Editing: Janina Herhoffer

Speaker: Jonas Weber Herrera

Thanks to Mike, Katsia, Aliaksey and „Sienos Grupė“

The artist began this project with the idea of recording people's thoughts as they looked into a dark forest at night, someplace close to the Lithuanian-Belarusian border. The idea was that perhaps the darkness might help to read the mood of a society that, in recent years, has been exposed to an increased militarization of the border, illegal crossings and a continuous threat of invasion. Given the high security status of the border, there was also the expectation that the closer one got to it, the less one would actually be able to see.

However, the endeavour drew the artist both deeper into the forest and threw him back to the very centre of the city where he lodged, showing how the border is not solely a physical category. The film's narrative is fictional, but it is based on interviews with members of Sienos Grupė – an organisation that volunteers to help refugees who have successfully crossed the border – and with Belarusian activists who previously crossed the same border into the EU and will probably never return. 'It's not totally dark yet,' one protagonist says at one point in the film, as if referring back to the theme of the mood of society.

'The highest ISO setting of my camera represents the absolute threshold of the camera's ability to see. Instead of seeing something in front of the camera in the video, we start looking into the inner computations of the machine itself, very much like the afterimages we see when we close our eyes. It might be scary and confusing at the same time,' says Zielony.

Courtesy the artist

**Berta Tilmantė, Neringa Rekašiūtė, Aurelija Urbonavičiūtė,
Rūta Meilutytė**

Swimming Through, 2022

Performance documentation: video, 1 min 6 sec

Music: Viktoras Urbaitis

Documented in video and photography, this performance outside the Embassy of Russia in Vilnius attracted wide attention in Lithuania and internationally in the spring of 2022. Mass gatherings and other acts of protest took place around the same time in front of the embassy, as is also apparent from the phrase inscribed on the bridge in this video. More than three years and many other protests later, this performance remains a key example of an artwork igniting an instant sense of togetherness among those protesting.

‘It is an invitation not to turn away from the pain, not to remain an indifferent observer. This is a call to continue to defend the people who are currently being tortured, raped, killed, to defend people fundamental democratic values, the right to freedom and life. The pool of blood testifies to Russia’s responsibility for war crimes in Ukraine. Olympic champion Rūta Meilutytė’s hopeful swimming through the blood symbolises constant, tireless, unceasing efforts to swim,’ – wrote the artists at the time.

Courtesy the artists

The exhibition is part of the project “Aspects of Presence”, co-organised by the Contemporary Art Centre, the Goethe-Institut in Lithuania, and the Akademie der Künste. The project takes as its starting point the ongoing deployment of German troops in Lithuania, part of NATO’s strategy of strengthening NATO’s eastern borders in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Organisers:



Exhibition partner:

AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE

Curators:

Virginija Januškevičiūtė, Valentinas Klimašauskas

Architecture:

Gabrielė Černiavskaja

Graphic design:

Vytautas Volbekas

Coordinator and Curatorial team assistant:

Aistė Liuka Jonynaitė

Events programme coordinators:

Valiantzin Duduk, Aistė Liuka Jonynaitė, Kamilė Krasauskaitė, Gustė Skudžinskaitė-Lukšė

Curators of the educational programme:

Kamilė Krasauskaitė, Agnė Taliūtė, Margarita Žigutytė

Heads of technical team:

Vsevolod Kovalevskij, Lukas Strolia

Technical team:

Almantas Lukoševičius, Ilona Virzinkevič, Matas Šatūnas, Kazimieras Sližys, Teodoras Malinauskas, Matas Janušonis, Rokas Janušonis, Martynas Pekarskas

Light designer:

Justas Bø

Artwork logistics:

Gustė Skudžinskaitė-Lukšė

Research assistant:

Edvardas Šumila

Communication:

Karolina Augevičiūtė, Gabrielė Dubauskė, Monika Valatkaitė

Audioguide:

Eglė Elena Murauskaitė

Translators:

Paulius Balčytis, Laimonas Kinčius, Eglė Elena Murauskaitė, Ignė Smilingytė, Veronika Vasiljeva-Niparavičienė

Language editors:

Birgit Hoffmann, Virginija Januškevičiūtė, Gemma Lloyd, Dangė Vitkienė

Coordinator of translations:

Kotryna Karyznaitė

Special thanks:

Johanna Keller, Kęstutis Kuizinas, Anna Maria Strauß

Media partner:

LRT

Sponsors:



Patron of Contemporary Art Centre and Sapieha Palace:

reefo

Acknowledgements:

Rūta Baliukonienė, Tomke Braun, Aleksei Borisovok, Sebastian Cichocki, Vilius Dadašovas, Inga Dailidienė and Marine Research Institute of Klaipėda University, Gabriela Dāsagā, Ugnė Dvilevičiūtė, Constantin Engelmann, "Esther Schipper", Galina Garnaga Budrė and Environmental Protection Agency, "Gunia Nowik", Tomas Ivanauskas, "Jednostka", Kontakt Collection, Keiu Krikmann, "Lars Friedrich", Magda Lipska, Dharshan Navaratnam, Pabradė Cultural Center, "Pace", "Piktogram", Matthew Post, Pranas Gudynas Conservation Centre, Manuel Reinartz, Natalia Sielewicz, Vadim Šamkov, Mantautas Šulskus, Titas Tamkvaitis, Bohdan-Liubomyr Tetianych-Bublyk, Hanna Tetianych, Lada Tetianych-Bublyk, Mara Traumane, Alina Tvardovskaja, Marija Vaičiulytė, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Rapolas Vedrickas, Lolita Vilimienė, Vaiva Vinskaitė, Joanna Warsza, Joanna Zielinska, Roberta Žavoronkovienė, Mikas Žukauskas