

Jura Shust
Żywica* Solar Plexus
Curated by Michalina Sablik
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Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland
Photography: Maciej Landsberg

**Żywica [ʐɨˈvitsa] is the Slavic word for the resin exuded by coniferous trees—a substance that heals wounds and seals damage. Its name, preserved in Polish (żywica) and Belarusian (жывіца), derives from the Proto-Slavic root živ- ("to live"), which reflects the long-standing association of resin with vitality and regeneration.*

Żywica* Solar Plexus is Jura Shust's first solo exhibition in Poland.

The Belarusian artist, who is based in Berlin, frequently returns to his home region on the Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian border in his work. This area is home to ancient forms of folk knowledge and contains one of Europe's most remarkable natural landscapes, including primeval forests, the meandering River Viliya and transitional woodlands bordering the taiga.

Drawing on ethnobotanical research, Shust explores the remnants of animism in Eastern European cultures — ancient beliefs, rituals and practices that describe the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, as preserved in folklore and cultural texts. His transdisciplinary practice, which encompasses installations made from organic and industrial materials as well as films structured around the rhythms of the winter and summer solstices, repeatedly returns to ancient forest and tree symbolism, rites of passage and funerary customs. At the same time, his collaboration with a group of young migrants on film and performance projects, alongside references to the latest technologies, situates his work at the heart of the most pressing contemporary political and social debates.

Taking a specific geopolitical stance, Shust addresses universal questions: the erosion of connection to the more-than-human world; the transformation of spirituality; and the shifting relationship between species in the face of crises caused by extractive capitalism, militarisation and the destruction of ecosystems. He also considers how we are to navigate a world in which artificial intelligence is gradually assuming functions traditionally associated with religion and mythology, such as narrating and making sense of the world. As artificial intelligence becomes a planetary management system and a collective digital consciousness — fulfilling the desire for interspecies communication — we must begin to ask what our afterlife in the digital cloud will look like.

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