

## Connective Tissue

Karolina Bielawska  
Wschód, Warsaw

29 September - 11 November, 2023

Opening: Thursday, September 29, 11- 19 pm

*More broadly, we all know that loving someone means potentially setting yourself up for pain in the future. If you want to avoid any possibility of loss, you would have to completely shut yourself off from love. (...) that's the conundrum that we all have to solve for ourselves.*

Ted Chiang, *Facing the Future*

The citation above is sourced from Ted Chiang's recent contribution to *e-flux Notes*. Coincidentally, the starting point for *Connective Tissue* – the new exhibition by Karolina Bielawska, presented at WSCHÓD within the frames of Warsaw Gallery Weekend's 13th edition – was *Arrival*, a science fiction film based on *Story of Your Life*, one of Chiang's short stories. Both text and movie tell a tale of Dr. Louise Banks, a linguist assigned with a seemingly impossible task of decoding an alien language. Dubbed as "heptapods", the broadcasters of the extraterrestrial signal, try to communicate with the human addressees with inky circular signs, resembling marks on a white tablecloth left by a cup overflowing with coffee. In the course of the story, together with the protagonist, we learn that this way of communicating is synchronous and not linear. Each of the round symbols the senders form, consists of distinct sequences and shapes, corresponding with verbs, nouns, and phrases humans use. The only thing missing in this system is time. This has several significant consequences to the plot. Since there is no end nor beginning in the loops carrying the sense of entire paragraphs, it is implied that the "heptapods" perceive time in a different way than we do: the past, present, and future occurs to them simultaneously. Towards the end of the film, Dr Banks deciphers one of the signs as containing a pattern meaning both "gift" and "weapon". Her interpretation will determine the character of humanity's relationship with the otherworldly visitors.

The desire to be heard, the urge to convey a message, and the longing to remain in the mind of one's counterpart, are the core ideas behind *Connective Tissue*. The artist prepared a pair of large-scale painting

compositions – one nestled on the floor, the other hanging from the gallery ceiling – both formed of seven canvases, themselves independent (and interdependent) works. The two larger structures comprise of Bielawska's signature abstractions, which – with reference to their visible, surface contents – might be compared to either an anatomical cross-section, a bird's eye view of a landscape, or an alphabet yet unknown. Bielawska consequently uses symbolically rich materials: the blue shapes are painted with light gouache, the darker ones – with acrylics mixed with earthy bitumen, often used as a binder in road construction. The titles of the pieces in the respective rows of the upper and lower formations, aim to reflect the whole installation's vulnerable nature (*Your name, Underbelly, Beneath the Skin*) and firm attachment to its initial position (*The Rock and the Thread, Just in Time, The Place of One's Own*).

In addition to this animistic reading of Bielawska's works, ascribing personality and intentions to inanimate objects, one can argue that they exist in three and four dimensions at once: the configuration of the upper and lower compositions will gradually change over time. Every week, throughout the whole duration of the exhibition, one element from each painterly structure will be switched with its twin above / below. With these simple yet metaphorically capacious means, Bielawska transforms individuality into something connective, hinting at the fact that networks – not places – are our most suitable homes. As all connections do, the exchange between the upper and lower compositions, risks discontent and misunderstanding. The individual works were designed in a way to support this claim: the successive phases of the transformation of the painterly surfaces on the ground and ceiling, might appear counterintuitive or conflicting. Such is the price of relationships. However, the alternative suggested by Chiang in the opening quote, sounds even worse. To come full circle: *If you want to avoid any possibility of loss, you would have to completely shut yourself off from love.*

Ewa Borysiewicz