

Refuge

The first annual exhibition at the Sapieha Palace, Vilnius

12 April – 31 December 2024

Curators: Edgaras Gerasimovičius, Virginija Januškevičiūtė

The Sapieha Palace's inaugural exhibition seeks to unfold the palace's spirit and history as well as the diverse narratives surrounding its past. The works on display and their arrangement act as a soft, transparent layer placed over the palace spaces, having been painted and repainted multiple times. The spatial and conceptual interaction thus reveals the previous and ongoing influence of a multitude of forces. The exhibition will run until the end of the year, undergoing constant changes throughout this period.

The writer Ursula Le Guin considered most stories to be straight as an arrow, noisy and dramatic, revolving around heroes, their hardships, struggles, achievements, and tragic endings. However, weapons and hunting, as she points out, were invented later than the handful or the armful for gathering food. The stories of how something is gathered in pieces, brought home, what takes time, what falls into oblivion or repeats day after day, are neither arrow- nor spear-shaped. Yet if you take the time to listen to them, they sound just as intriguing, but also novel.

Thus, the walls of the palace begin to speak through sometimes the most unexpected stories. Tales of tranquillity, handfuls of suns, martial arts, and the art of concealment are interwoven with time travel, disputes with craftsmen, and incantations performed in a secret language.

The title of the exhibition, *Refuge*, is inspired by the Latin inscription on the front façade of the palace, proclaiming that 'the great palace, risen from the ruins, will protect the war-weary in quiet peace'.

The building, originally erected as a resting place for battle-fatigued heroes, has undergone numerous changes in ownership and purpose over its three-hundred-year history. However, it has consistently been associated with warfare and healing. At different times, it has functioned as a war tool and a trophy, housing barracks and even a military hospital. In the inter-war period, it was repurposed as an eye clinic. Later, during the Soviet era, the palace was again used for war-related purposes, only this time as a training school for military personnel to learn the operation of anti-aircraft radar systems.

The commissioner of the palace, Kazimierz Jan Sapieha, was the commander-in-chief of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, making the theme of war and peace particularly significant in the decoration of the palace. The entire ensemble, comprising the country residence, its park, and the later adjacent Trinitarian monastery complex, was intended to serve as a testament to the past and future achievements of the Grand Hetman. However, as time passed, the narratives surrounding the palace and the Sapieha family diverged. Today, the palace stands as both a monument to the past and a modern work of art, revealing a multitude of stories about its history.

As restorers uncover more traces from different periods, the walls of the palace reveal inconsistencies, interruptions, contradictions, and a wealth of diverse perspectives on the past. What may have seemed irrelevant, unwanted, or disposable at one time has been valued anew in others. The many nuances of history often remain a mystery, especially as each narrative bears witness to individuals and collective voices that have been forgotten or intentionally erased from history. The inaugural exhibition at the palace aims to highlight the coexistence of these diverse narratives and voices, as well as the various ways of reflecting on both the past and the present.

Moreover, the exhibition also reflects on the Baroque as a period that left an indelible imprint on Western culture. In Vilnius, as in much of Europe, the Baroque emerged in the aftermath of war, fires, and diseases that ravaged the city. It was an epoch that explored fragility, impermanence, and the interplay of light and darkness in its own unique way. The Baroque era emphasised both the human ability to shape the world with their own hands and the humble acceptance of elemental forces beyond human control, transforming the city and its communities. The drama of constant change and divine promise, exalted by the Baroque, continues to resonate with the fires and hopes of subsequent periods.

In his memoirs, Jan Stanisław Sapieha, one of the bishops of Vilnius during the eighteenth century, recalls watching through the windows of the Sapieha Palace as a huge fire destroyed a large part of the city. The unbearable sight left him breathless, and while the country residence provided physical refuge from the disaster, his spirit remained shaken for a long time. The exhibition, centred around the motif of refuge, aims to bring together exhibits that continue or give meaning to this and other narratives related to the palace's history. Themes of war and refuge, sickness and healing, miracle and disaster, beginning and end permeate nearly all the works on display.

Participants:

Andrius Arutiunian

Vytautas Balčytis

Giulia Crețulescu

Bojana Cvejić and Lennart Laberenz

Vladas Drėma

Ulrik Heltoft

Mindaugas Lukošaitis

Marianna Maruyama

Petras Mazūras

Domas Noreika
Rita Olšauskienė
Alina Popa
Miljohn Ruperto
Iza Tarasewicz
Gintautas Trimakas
Peter Wächtler
Darius Žiūra

Opening programme events by:

Florin Flueraș
Yen Chun Lin and Gediminas Žygus

www.sapiegurumai.lt

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Curators: Edgaras Gerasimovičius, Virginija Januškevičiūtė
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Communication: Denisas Kolomyckis, Aistė Račaitytė, Emilija Filipenkovaitė
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Funded by: Lithuanian Council for Culture

Supported by: Arc Bucharest Residency, The Administration of the National Cultural Fund Romania

Information partners: 15min, LRT, JCDecaux, Echo Gone Wrong, Artnews.lt

Acknowledgements:

Algė Andriulytė, Žygintas Būčys, Valentin Duduk, Daina Ferguson, Rimantas Garnys, Arūnas Gelūnas, Rūta Janonienė, Grigorijus Grigas Karachanovas, Radu Lesevski, Lina Michelkevičė, Micki Meng, Laura Misiūnaitė, Gunia Nowik, Christopher Pieper / Leideno universitetas, Marija Olšauskaitė, Petras Olšauskas, Evaldas Purlys, Romanas Raulynaitis, Mindaugas Reklaitis, Radvilė Rimgailė-Voicik / Sengirės fondas, Dalius Sabaliauskas, Laima Sazanova, Antanas Stanislauskas, Francisco Salas / PM8, Vadim Šamkov, Andrius Šoblinskas, Edvardas Šumila, Saulius Valius, Birutė Rūta Vitkauskienė, Louis-Philippe Van Eeckhoutte / dépendance, Žilvinas Žilinskas

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Checklist (12 April 2024)

Andrius Arutiunian

You Do Not Remember Yourself, 2022

Brass instrument (100 × 600 cm), hanging system, two contact transducers, four loudspeakers, media player

Do Not Fear, Then!, 2022

Sound, duration – 60'

Vytautas Balčytis

Sariai, 2000

Gelatin silver print, 12 × 18 cm

Library. Vilnius, 1987

Gelatin silver print, 11.6 × 18.3 cm

Šeškinė, 2001

Gelatin silver print, 12.3 × 18.1 cm

Vilnius, 2005

Gelatin silver print, 13.9 × 20.5 cm

Gariūnai, 2005

Gelatin silver print, 13.5 × 20.5 cm

Justiniškės, Vilnius, 2001

Gelatin silver print, 12.2 × 18.2 cm

Kiduliai, 2005

Gelatin silver print, 13.7 × 20.5 cm

LNMA collection

The photographs listed above will be replaced by a new set over the course of the show.

Giulia Crețulescu

Mountain Peak, 2022

Textile sponge, steel, 140 × 100 cm

Full Body Coverage, 2024

Textile sponge, 100 × 70 cm

Optimal Surface Message, 2022

Textile sponge, 270 × 130 cm

Body Contouring, 2023

Textile sponge, 130 × 80 cm

Bojana Cvejić and Lennart Laberenz

...in a non-wimpy way / steve paxton, 2019

Two screen video installation, sound, duration – 18' and 4'43"

Vladas Drėma

Fire in Vilnius in 2222, 1928

Watercolours on paper, 27 × 22.8 cm

LNMA collection

Mindaugas Lukošaitis

From the series *Vilnius in Graphite Dust, 2022*

Digital prints, 21 × 21 cm

Marianna Maruyama

Arts of Subtraction, 2024

Carrara marble, 63 × 44 × 77 cm

Incense Clock, 2024

Ceramics, various organic materials. Dimensions variable

Petras Mazūras

History Is a Nightmare You Will Never Wake Up From, 2023

Mixed media, 58.5 × 49 × 29 cm (wooden wall: 102.3 × 29 × 25.5 cm)

The Great Attractor, 2015

Mixed media, 18.5 × 32 × 22 cm (wooden wall: 101.2 × 31.8 × 27.5 cm)

Pilėnas, 2019–2024

Mixed media, 43 × 33 × 24 cm (wooden wall: 89 × 27.5 × 24 cm)

Romanas Raulynaitis' collection

Double Race, 2020

Mixed media, 27 × 20 × 37 cm (wooden wall: 102 × 28,5 × 23.5 cm)

Romanas Raulynaitis' collection

Trakehner, 2022

Calcined and stabilised piece of a wooden wall, 125 × 40 × 40 cm

Drift Ice, 2020–2023

Mixed media, 67 × 50 × 60 cm

Domas Noreika

The Conservator's Imagination Desk, 2024

Various natural materials, oak wood, glass. Dimensions variable

Table designed by Kotryna Gurskaitė, manufactured by Sigitas Žemaitis and Alius Bareckas

This artwork is animated by the artist every Wednesday.

Rita Olšauskienė

Marija's Dream, 2003

Oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm

Untitled, 2000–2003

Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

Untitled, 1993

Oil on canvas, 79 x 79 cm

Courtesy Olšauskai family and PM8 / Francisco Salas

Alina Popa

From the series *Square of Will in Square of Love, 2018–2019*

Drawings made with eyes closed in notebooks lying across the artist's chest, 14 x 9 cm (facsimiles)

Miljohn Ruperto

Janus, 2013

Digital animation, sound, duration – 3'30"

Miljohn Ruperto and Ulrik Heltoft

From the series *Voynich Botanical Studies*, 2013–2014

Specimen 02r Jaro

Specimen 30v Leto

Specimen 33r Leto

Specimen 93v Podzim

Specimen 65v Podzim

Gelatin silver prints, 50 × 40 cm

Courtesy the artists and Micki Meng

Iza Tarasewicz

Looped Processions IV, 2022

Oxidised steel, brass, wheat, wire in three segments. Dimensions variable

SUPERPOWER, 2024

Brass. 60 x 30 x 30 cm

Tomasz Michalski's collection

Yellow Coal, 2016/2022

Ochre, wood. Dimensions variable

Cluster of Contingencies IV, 2022

Steel, wheat, wire. Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Gunia Nowik gallery

Gintautas Trimakas

Lumen Negative Prints, 2023

Unique prints, artist's technique, 27.5 × 27.5 cm

Peter Wächtler

Like a Palace, 2022

Video, sound, duration – 33'35". The majority of the film contains no sound

Courtesy the artist and dépendance

Darius Žiūra

Mould, 1998 / 2013

Found coins, 15 × 7.5 × 3.75 cm