

BIRDS AND FLOWERS

25.07–28.09.2024

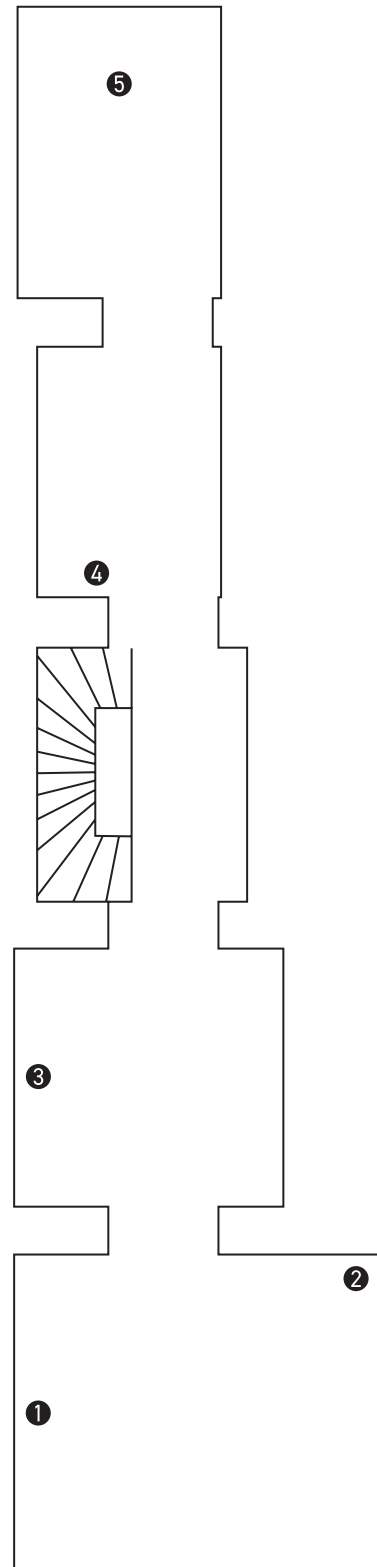
The feathers scattered in the corner of the room are a work by Kosovo-born artist Petrit Halilaj (b. 1984). As a child, during the war in Kosovo, he spent two years in a refugee camp. Today motifs of feathers, birds, and other flying creatures symbolize emigration and temporality in his work. Petrit's work links up with Felix Gonzalez-Torres's famous piece. The person assembling this work needs to choose a pillow that belongs to someone they love. I chose a pillow belonging to Irenka and Kazik—my children.

In 1985, Andrzej Mitan (1950–2019), a few other artists, and forty parrots borrowed from the "Egzotyka" pet store shut themselves up inside Warsaw's RR gallery. The audio recording of this event includes the birds' voices and Mitan's disquieting Tantric singing. Two years later, Andrzej Mitan released a recording with the sounds from this project. The cover was enclosed in metal mesh. Carrying out this project required no small amount of determination in late-communist Poland, where material shortages were an everyday event. He got his hands on the mesh from a businessman friend.

March II is a dramatic and gripping project by a pioneer of Polish performance art, Zbigniew Warpechowski (b. 1938). A central part of the project is the march, with a canary tied by a ribbon to the marching man's leg. It is not difficult to link the work's message with the historical context, the realities of the socialist regime. It is a nearly literal picture of the Martial Law era, the helplessness of the individual and the brutal, primitive rulers. The artist not only builds an image of this relationship, but physically recreates it, being extremely brutal with the bird. In the end, the canary is released and the artist burns some of his own hair. The performance was staged on March 17, 1984. By some ghoulish coincidence, this is also the day I was born.

The picture by Krzysiek Grzybacz (b. 1994) depicts large, decorative flowers that seem to be staring at us. The artist uses a special technique: he smears wet paint with sponges. Formally speaking, the works recall herbariums, with the plants' morphologies sketched as diagrams. Grzybacz's seemingly decorative pieces have a deeper layer of disquiet; the flowers seem to have human attributes and might be observing us.

In Agnieszka Polska's (b. 1985) film *The Book of Flowers*, the captivating voice of actor Tina Greatrex guides the listener through the shared histories of humanity and flowers. The narrative is fabricated: it depicts something like an alternate prehistory. According to the narrator, the blossoming flowers were once gigantic, and their main pollinators were people. There was a complex symbiosis between the species; neither the people nor the flowers were capable of multiplying without the other. The film was created using AI, and then was transferred to 16 mm tape.



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| ① Andrzej Mitan
<i>Ptaki</i> , 1987
vinyl
37'04" | ② Petrit Halilaj
<i>untitled (for Felix)</i>
feathers of a pillow
previously belonging
to a loved one | ③ Krzysztof Grzybacz
<i>Flowers</i> , 2024
oil on canvas
320 × 280cm | ④ Zbigniew Warpechowski
<i>March II</i> , 17.03.1984
performance
9'25" | ⑤ Agnieszka Polska
<i>The Book of Flowers</i> , 2023
16 mm film
9'30" |
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