

# Kunsthalle Zürich

## PRESS TEXT

**Karol Palczak**

**Dzisiaj**

27.09.2025–18.01.2026

Exhibition opening: Friday 26 September 2025, 6–9 pm

Löwenbräukunst Season Opening Party: Friday 26 September 2025, 6–11 pm



Karol Palczak, *Drzewo płonące* (Burning Tree), video still, 2022

## Exhibition text

*Dzisiaj* at Kunsthalle Zürich is the first institutional solo presentation by Polish artist Karol Palczak. The exhibition features a new series of oil paintings on aluminium and marble connected to the artist's home village of Krzywczka in south-eastern Poland and the surrounding landscape.

For over ten years now, Palczak has been creating works devoted to his immediate environment, studying the area meticulously. Dotted with mountains and valleys, this Subcarpathian region, once inhabited by Jewish, Christian Orthodox and Catholic communities, is now marked by a sense of emptiness and stillness. Palczak's works – still lifes, landscapes and scenes featuring recurring protagonists, reveal mostly overlooked details in the economically strained, increasingly depopulated and militarised environment of his native Krzywczka. The banks of the San River that flows through the village – and which has served as the border between Poland and Ukraine since the Second World War, shaping the region politically and culturally – are also often the focus of his lifelike, almost photorealistic paintings.

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The exhibition unfolds around three large-format paintings of a burning willow tree on the banks of the San – trees on fire being another of Palczak's recurring motifs. While his subjects mostly come from photographs or video stills taken by the artist himself, he occasionally includes additional, at times fictitious elements, in this case smoke or fire. Palczak also draws on another, invisible landscape, that of local customs and rituals, which he meticulously stages – or envisages – in order to pierce the sombre silence of his surroundings. The partial smoking and charring of trees, for instance, refers to a regional practice of 'cleansing' them so they can grow back healthily in spring. The burning of straw dolls (meant to embody the negative characteristics of winter), which is illustrated in a new set of increasingly abstract paintings, also relates to a Slavic ritual at the beginning of spring that remains popular, especially in rural regions of Poland. These scenes, sometimes charged with violence, which may also be seen as acts of transgression, are staged with the support of his friends and neighbours – a community that repeatedly features in Palczak's paintings and is directly marked by the gendered consequences of the military being the region's dominant employer.

Another ensemble of works consists of three portraits of young men in shades of grey, whose absurd, seemingly pointless actions are conveyed with a sense of tenderness and immediacy. Posing with the inner tubes of massive lorry tyres in the artist's backyard, the shirtless men turn their gaze away from the viewer and busy themselves with the glossy black objects that can serve as inflatables for river swimming. A still life painted on marble featuring eels – mysterious creatures that are also native to the San – echoes the smooth surfaces and shapes of the rubber rings. What might at first seem like an expression of almost threatening masculinity is, in fact, an illustration of the experience common to people who have stayed behind in the increasingly depopulated Subcarpathian region and must face its everyday reality. Palczak's paintings – on thin metal sheets, referring to the Sarmatian tradition of posthumous portraits mounted on coffins used in funeral ceremonies notably in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century – are a testament to both an existential unrest and a need to portray it. As both witness to and part of this narrative, Palczak's painterly practice speaks about the connection between modernity and landscape – and does so with remarkable sensitivity and powers of observation.

The title of the exhibition, *Dzisiaj* (Today), reflects how temporality plays a role across the different registers of Palczak's work. The river, its landscape and its inhabitants are not just the realities that Palczak captures and documents day after day in his painting, they are also the silent objects he captures with his camera. The improvised, sometimes chaotic videos that are part of his working process reveal a different dynamic in his creative output whilst also allowing him to study the movement of fire, smoke or water and ultimately translate it into his painting. His videos and paintings document ambivalent realities that unfold against the backdrop of a depopulated region. In a moving manner they tell a story of alienation and boredom. In Palczak's works, as in *Krzywca*, time seems to linger. His motifs recur, again and again, until they are technically and emotionally exhausted – the motifs he painted yesterday, he will paint tomorrow and, inevitably, he does so today.

Curated by Fanny Hauser.

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With special thanks to Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw and Emalin, London.

The exhibition is possible thanks to the generous support of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute (AMI) brings Polish culture to people around the world. Being a state institution, it creates lasting interest in Polish culture and art through strengthening the presence of Polish artists on the global stage. The AMI initiates innovative projects, supports international cooperation and cultural exchanges. It promotes the work of both established and promising artists, showing the diversity and richness of our culture. The AMI also runs the portal CULTURE.pl, a comprehensive online resource dedicated to Polish culture.

## Artist's biography

Karol Palczak (b. 1987 in Przemyśl, PL) lives and works in Krzywczka, PL. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow in 2015, where he studied painting in the studio of Professor Janusz Matuszewski. In 2019, he was awarded the Grand Prix of the 44th Bielska Jesień Painting Biennale.

Solo exhibitions include *Blask*, Emalin at S&, New York, US, 2024, *Śreżoga / Haze*, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw, PL, 2022, *Tym co teraz widzę / With what I see now*, Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała, PL & BWA Tarnów, Tarnów, PL, 2021, and *Zadymy / Pothers*, Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, Kraków, PL, 2021. Group exhibitions include *Second Body*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, US, 2025, Arsenal Gallery Power Station, Białystok, PL, 2023, Bolesław Biegas Museum, Warsaw, PL, 2022, Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, Kraków, PL, 2022, BWA Tarnów, Tarnów, PL, 2021, National Gallery of Art, Sopot, PL, 2021, and Bolesław Biegas Museum, Warsaw, PL, 2021.

## Publication

In early 2026 a monography on Karol Palczak's work will be published by Distanz Verlag including texts by Kirsty Bell and Krzysztof Kosciuczuk and a conversation between the artist and Joanna Żeromska.

## Art mediation

Karol Palczak's exhibition is accompanied by an extensive art education programme. This includes workshops for schools as well as free public tours. Further information can be found on the Kunsthalle Zürich website.

## Events

Several events take place during the exhibition including:

Sunday 23 November 2025, 11 am–6 pm: Family Day Löwenbräukunst

Details of all events will be available on our website.

## Preview image

A preview image and credits can be downloaded [here](#).

## Press contact

For images, or to coordinate an interview with the curator, please contact Aoife Rosenmeyer:

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