

Marcin Dudek

NEST

Harlan Levey Projects

65 Rue Isidoor Teirlinckstraat, 1080 Brussels, Belgium

Opening: Saturday, January 24, 2026, 12:00 - 18:00

January 24 - April 4, 2026

Marcin Dudek was ten years old when the Polish People's Republic collapsed, and his childhood unfolded within the turbulence that accompanied Poland's transition to capitalism. In the social housing estates on the outskirts of Kraków, the dismantling of state industries and support systems produced conditions of scarcity, instability, and improvisation that shaped daily life for working-class families. Dudek's practice emerges from this environment, not as a retrospective illustration of hardship, but as a sustained inquiry into how social pressure, precarity, and endurance form subjectivity, memory, and imagination over time.

NEST gives this inquiry architectural form. Installed within the gallery is a reconstruction of Dudek's fifty-square-meter family apartment, where he lived with seven relatives across two decades. Visitors ascend a staircase and pass through a narrow corridor before entering a compressed domestic interior. Devoid of furniture, the space resists nostalgia or documentary reconstruction. Instead, it operates as a hybrid structure, part period room, part sculptural installation, part theatrical environment, in which memory is not represented but spatialized. The apartment functions as a psychological and social map, where artifacts, artworks, and gestures accumulate into an environment that feels at once intimate and unsettled, provisional and uncanny.

A taxidermied hoopoe (or dudek), suspended at the entrance, marks the passage into this charged interior. Echoing the artist's family name, the bird introduces a logic of doubling and slippage that recurs throughout the installation. Within the apartment, a radiator bears a sculpted hand chained to its surface, while a small painting nearby depicts a snake poised above a clutch of eggs. Meaning circulates between these elements without settling into fixed allegory. Dudek treats memory as mutable and relational, subject to condensation, displacement, and recombination. Trauma is neither narrated nor resolved, but reworked through metaphor, material juxtaposition, and a deliberate openness that allows play and ambiguity to coexist with gravity.

The installation preserves material traces of Dudek's youth, including windows, curtains, photographs scorched into the walls, court documents, early sketches, and magazines that once offered a mental escape. These remnants are interwoven with gestures and artworks that summon lived moments rather than reconstruct them: the glow of a television, the repetitive training of a brother in the living room, parcels of dry goods and coins sent through international aid networks, an early oil painting that once hung in the kitchen, the low acoustic presence of hunger and failing infrastructure. Four works from the *Klatka* series appear as altar-like structures that fold open like manuscripts or journals, recording fragments of life on and around the housing estate. Together, these elements form an environment where memory and imagination overlap, and where the past persists as an affective, dreamlike presence rather than a closed narrative.

Throughout Dudek's childhood, the apartment remained in a state of flux. Sleeping arrangements shifted, inhabitants came and went, and privacy was limited. Toward the end of this period, Dudek shared a room with one of his brothers, an arrangement that introduced a fragile continuity. This modest stability made space for repetition and concentration. Drawing, copying, and sustained looking became daily practices, gradually transforming withdrawal into discipline. In *NEST*, the bedroom is reconfigured as an atelier, where new paintings are shown alongside historic documents and artifacts. Hung on the walls or stacked on the floor, these works reveal the persistence of figuration, narrative, and structure beneath surfaces that might initially appear abstract.

Exiting the apartment, visitors encounter a large painting depicting the surrounding housing estate as a single, looming form. The work is painted over a panel which carries almost three hundred thousand tiny cuts of medical tape, remnants of an abandoned attempt to tally each inhabitant individually, before the mass became too large to count. The painting's surface remains animated by this buried labor, its marks suggesting bodies in motion and collective presence. From here, the exhibition extends into a reconstruction of *Café Cobra*, an underworld bar from Dudek's former neighborhood. Like many such spaces embedded within social housing estates across different geographies, the bar operates as a site of informal community, social ritual, and cultural memory, even as it remains vulnerable to erasure.

In returning to *Café Cobra* last year, Dudek undertook a project without commercial or professional incentive, bringing together local residents, younger generations, and figures from the art world. Archival photographs were installed directly into the space, and new paintings were exhibited, shaped by the bar's atmosphere and social history. Within *NEST*, this gesture is preserved not as documentation but as continuation, emphasizing the resilience, solidarity, and forms of care that emerge under conditions of constraint.

Across painting, sculpture, installation, performance, sound, collage, and photography, Dudek articulates a singular visual language in which abstraction and figuration, process and image, remain inseparable. His practice resonates with the archival and site-specific approaches associated with Harald Szeemann, for whom lived experience functioned as a curatorial and artistic medium. In *NEST*, personal history becomes a lens through which broader social and historical forces are rendered visible, not as fixed conclusions, but as open, shared terrain shaped by memory, struggle, and imagination.



Marcin Dudek, exhibition view of *Nest*, 2026, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels.
Photo: Shivadas De Schrijver

Marcin Dudek (b. 1979) lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.

After leaving Poland aged 21, he studied at the Mozarteum University Salzburg (AT) and at Central Saint Martins (London, UK), graduating in 2005 and 2007 respectively. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including the Museum Ostwall (Dortmund, DE); IKOB - Museum of Contemporary Art (Eupen, BE); Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles (Paris, FR); MNAC National Museum of Contemporary Art (Bucharest, RO); and the MWW Wroclaw Contemporary Museum (PL). Dudek has participated in group exhibitions at the BPS 22 - Art Museum of the Hainaut Province (Charleroi, BE); SMAK - Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art (Ghent, BE); 8th Biennial of Painting (Deinze, BE); The Warehouse (Dallas, US); the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (RU); the Salzburger Kunstverein (AT); the Arad Art Museum (RO); Bunkier Sztuki Gallery (Kraków, PL); the Goethe-Institut Ukraine (Kiev, Ukraine); and many others.

His work has been acquired by the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection (Berlin, DE); IKOB - Museum of Contemporary Art (Eupen, BE); Collection de la Province de Hainaut - BPS 22 (Charleroi, BE); Uhoda Collection (Liège, BE); Verbeke Foundation (Kemzeke, BE); Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (Lisbon, PT); Zabudowicz Collection (London, UK); MNAR - Muzeul Național de Artă al României (Bucharest, RO); and MWW Wroclaw Contemporary Museum (PL). His first monograph, *Slash & Burn*, was published by Hopper & Fuchs in 2023. In 2025, he was awarded the Prix de la Fondation Marie-Louise Jacques. This prize is given for excellence in contemporary sculpture in Belgium.

1 COBRA, 2026

Wood, paint, image transfer, steel, aluminium dust, glass neon
Open: 95 x 144.5 x 24 cm - 76 3/4 x 56 7/8 x 9 1/2 in
Closed: 195 x 144.5 x 3 cm - 76 3/4 x 56 7/8 x 1 1/8 in

2 Hotel, 2026

Acrylic paint, linen, wood, aluminium, medical tape, UV varnish
244 x 175 x 3.7 cm - 96 x 68 7/8 x 1 1/2 in

3 Bidul, 2026

Steel, chain, oil on wood
Sculpture: 134 x 39 x 21 cm - 52 3/4 x 15 3/8 x 8 1/4 in
Painting: 23 x 17 x 0.5 cm - 9 x 6 3/4 x 1/4 in

4 Offal 3, 2023

Paper, steel, foam, UV varnish
110 x 40 x 50 cm - 43 1/4 x 15 3/4 x 19 3/4 in

5 Sovereign Heads, 2025

Cork, steel, aluminium, jesmonite, acrylic paint, paper
Open: 37 x 26 x 10 cm - 14 5/8 x 10 1/4 x 4 in
Closed: 37 x 19 x 10 cm - 14 5/8 x 7 1/2 x 4 in

6 Klatka III Idol, 2026

Acrylic paint, wood, steel, image transfer, paper mâché, medical tape, UV varnish
Open: 39.5 x 57.5 x 10 cm - 15 1/2 x 22 5/8 x 4 in
Closed: 39.5 x 21 x 3.5 cm - 15 1/2 x 8 1/4 x 1 3/8 in

7 Klatka IV Balety, 2026

Acrylic paint, wood, steel, image transfer, paper mâché, medical tape, UV varnish
Open: 39.5 x 57.5 x 10 cm - 15 1/2 x 22 5/8 x 4 in
Closed: 39.5 x 21 x 3.5 cm - 15 1/2 x 8 1/4 x 1 3/8 in

8 Klatka V, 2026

Acrylic paint, wood, steel, image transfer, paper mâché, medical tape, UV varnish
Open: 39.5 x 57.5 x 10 cm - 15 1/2 x 22 5/8 x 4 in
Closed: 39.5 x 21 x 3.5 cm - 15 1/2 x 8 1/4 x 1 3/8 in

9 Klatka VI Here, 2026

Acrylic paint, wood, steel, image transfer, paper mâché, medical tape, UV varnish
Open: 46 x 74 x 8 cm - 18 1/8 x 29 1/8 x 3 1/8 in
Closed: 46 x 24.5 x 4 cm - 18 1/8 x 9 5/8 x 1 5/8 in

10 Klatka VII Education, 2026

Acrylic paint, wood, steel, image transfer, paper mâché, medical tape, UV varnish
Open: 50 x 86 x 18 cm - 19 3/4 x 33 7/8 x 7 1/8 in
Closed: 50 x 30 x 5 cm - 19 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 2 in

11 Nest II, 2010-2025

Oil on wood
44 x 57.3 x 2 cm - 17 3/8 x 22 1/2 x 3/4 in

12 Nest III, 2010-2025

Oil on wood
44 x 57.3 x 2 cm - 17 3/8 x 22 1/2 x 3/4 in

13 Nest IV, 2010-2025

Oil on wood
44 x 57.3 x 2 cm - 17 3/8 x 22 1/2 x 3/4 in

14 The Last Supper, 2025

Oil on wood
29 x 27.5 x 0.7 cm - 11 3/8 x 10 7/8 x 1/4 in

15 Bioly, 2025

Oil on wood
36.2 x 25.4 x 0.7 cm - 14 1/4 x 10 x 1/4 in

16 Tramwaj, 2025

Oil on wood
36 x 27.5 x 0.7 cm - 14 1/8 x 10 7/8 x 1/4 in

17 Japa, 2026

Oil on wood
23 x 16.8 x 0.5 cm - 9 x 6 5/8 x 1/4 in

18

Misiolek, 2026

Oil on wood
35.1 x 25.6 x 0.7 cm - 13 7/8 x 10 1/8 x 1/4 in

19

Mr Six, 2026

Oil on wood
36.5 x 25.3 x 0.7 cm - 14 3/8 x 10 x 1/4 in

20

Skwara, 2026

Oil on wood
22.2 x 16.6 x 0.4 cm - 8 3/4 x 6 1/2 x 1/8 in

21

Zarowa, 2026

Oil on wood
37.6 x 27.8 x 0.7 cm - 14 3/4 x 11 x 1/4 in

22

Still life, 1999

Oil on canvas
18 x 24 x 2 cm - 7 1/8 x 9 1/2 x 3/4 in



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