

Dominique White

All Great Powers Collapse from the Centre

13 Feb. –
17 May 2026

Dominique White (b. 1993) transforms the galleries of Kunsthalle Basel into a series of charged environments with her sculptures. Moving through *All Great Powers Collapse from the Centre* evokes the feeling of submersion. The space feels weighty, like water, as if walking along an ocean floor where orientation shifts and measures begin to dissolve. What appears are not intact objects but remnants. These are fractured bodies and broken structures, shaped by corrosion and bearing the marks of rupture. They resist classification. They resemble evidence of a collapse that has already begun.

At the center of this exhibition is the figure of the ship. Not a single vessel, but a shifting and layered form. The ship emerges as a motif of organized power, extraction, movement, and border-making. It is the warship, the cargo carrier, the asylum seekers' vessel, the fishing boat, the luxury yacht, and a space-faring rocket. It is a machine that mutates continuously to adapt to maintain control.

The exhibition unfolds like a threshold space, a kind of shoal. It is a zone where currents collide and where surfaces abrade. It marks the meeting of sea and land, of violence and escape, of the sublime and the threatening. In this space, movement slows down and stability becomes precarious. The ship, once a structure of containment and direction, begins to fail. Its breakdown is not contained. It draws the whole system into disarray. The hunger that once drove it turns inward. Collapse begins at the center: the machinery of extraction starts to grind through its interior, making the hold, built to contain and manage life, the site where the system devours what keeps it afloat.

White's sculptures inhabit this moment of turning. They hold the weight of collapse without resolution. Their presence is dense and unresolved. Iron, rope, fabric, and other materials remain in process. Surfaces oxidize. Fragments hold tension. The sculptures refuse closure. Instead, they accumulate traces. They record abrasion and hold on to the aftermath. What survives reveals through the cracks that expose the conditions of its resilience.



Dominique White:

All Great Powers Collapse from the Centre

Entering *All Great Powers Collapse from the Centre* feels like stepping onto a surface that no longer holds. The light is dim, the horizon seems low, the ground appears to be shifting, as if you're walking across something long submerged. Dominique White places her sculptures on this seabed like remnants of shipwrecks that have been hidden for years and now resurface. They do not seem like sudden disasters, but rather like traces of the aftermath, like conditions that have remained.

This exhibition is the third installment of White's *terror* series, which follows an alternative narration of futurity through the many imaginings of the self-destructing ship. The title, a reflection by the American political activist, author, and former leader of the New York Black Panther Party, Dhoruba bin Wahad, is used by White to shift the focus from notions of escape or attacking the ship from the outside to eliminating the beast from within. It reads as diagnosis and prognosis. It names a movement that unfolds from within.

In the Shallows

Light spills into the exhibition through skylights, opened across the rooms like searchlight beams, like underwater archaeologists tracing the seabed. With each step, a rhythm emerges. You approach, pause, step back, shift position, and look again. What is revealed comes in fragments. The experience resembles navigating a shoal, where ships run aground and inadvertently cause harm to themselves and those they are meant to protect. The sculptures in the first two rooms evoke ribs, beams, struts, and arches, ship-building structures that also gesture toward something organic. Forms appear contorted, surfaces scratched and weathered, shaped by corrosion and the warping of time. Within that duration, Black subjectivity gathers. White describes the *Shipwreck(ed)* as a convergence of maritime myths from the Black diaspora, of Black thought, Afro-pessimism, and rebelling beyond the confines of social class and status. Here, the shipwreck is not a singular fixed event but an enduring process.

The ship doesn't speak for a single past, present, or future. It is a tool of control, structured to manage movement and maintain hierarchy. The hold is its organizing chamber, the site where captivity is built into the design, where Blackness is fixed as confinement and duration. And because the ship must keep this space sealed in order to function, the hold also names a captivity that turns inward. *Whiteness*, staged as exterior command, becomes bound to the interior it refuses to face: a false outside secured by an inside that decays. The center contains not only the captives but also the conditions that imprison the system itself.

In this underwater logic, it is not only a matter of order. Whoever controls water, controls routes, and with them land, goods, and people. *Hydrarchy* describes precisely this form of power. As you move through the first two rooms, White's seabed proves not neutral. It is the place where mechanisms begin to crumble. Entanglement appears throughout. Forces twist together. The state, imagined as a ship, becomes visible within its own infrastructure. It holds not through strength, but through imposed burdens. It assigns weight, deciding who must carry it and who remains afloat.

The Hunger Turns on Itself

In the third room, harpoons rise up, a recurring element in White's practice. They appear upright, like tools that have not forgotten their purpose. They create a field where direction remains charged. They stand as insistences in the space, holding a line of force that you register as you move around them. The Hydra takes shape again, standing as a figure of insatiable appetite. In this depiction, power becomes visible as something that branches out and reaches in several directions at once: waterways, coasts, territories, and people. When the outside can no longer be consumed, the hunger turns inward. Here, the exhibition title comes into force. The collapse starts from the core. It emerges not from pressure applied from outside but from a system that continues even as it pulls itself apart.

In this submerged terrain, even the architecture becomes vulnerable. When *disowned Land* (2026) collides a wall in the next room, it becomes clear that it functions less as a boundary and more as a weight-bearing surface. The architecture is drawn into the sculpture's force, and the room begins to read as a site where structure can be struck and made to yield. White reveals that tension as a crack, as the moment when the construction begins to give way. The boundary is not only a line. It is a structure that can break.

What remains is a state of suspension. The seabed does not let go of the wreck. In the last room, *the crushing enclosure* (2026) is held up by tension rather than a support, intensifying the exhibition's sense of a suspended breath, of endurance that is never fully secure. *All Great Powers Collapse from the Centre* stays open. The wreck is not abandoned. It is returned to. Seemingly distant light continues to search the floor, tracing what was once forgotten and revealing that it was never fully gone.

Room 5

11 *some of us did not die*, 2026
Kaolin clay, raffia, sisal, sail fabric,
iron, lifting strap
160 × 130 × 380 cm

12 *the crushing enclosure*, 2026
Iron, lifting strap
190 × 90 × 320 cm

Room 4

10 *disowned Land*, 2026
Iron, sapele wood
8 parts, dimensions variables, here:
291 × 187 cm

Room 3

6 *untethered*, 2026
Sapele wood, wrought iron
120 × 140 × 275 cm

7 *a manipulation of fear*, 2026
Kaolin clay, sapele wood, raffia, sisal,
wrought iron
150 × 180 × 293 cm

8 *a living death*, 2026
Sapele wood, wrought iron
170 × 140 × 260 cm

9 *undefeated*, 2026
Kaolin clay, sapele wood, raffia, sisal,
wrought iron
200 × 110 × 270 cm

Room 2

5 *wrecked and wretched*, 2026
Iron
550 × 200 × 172 cm

Room 1

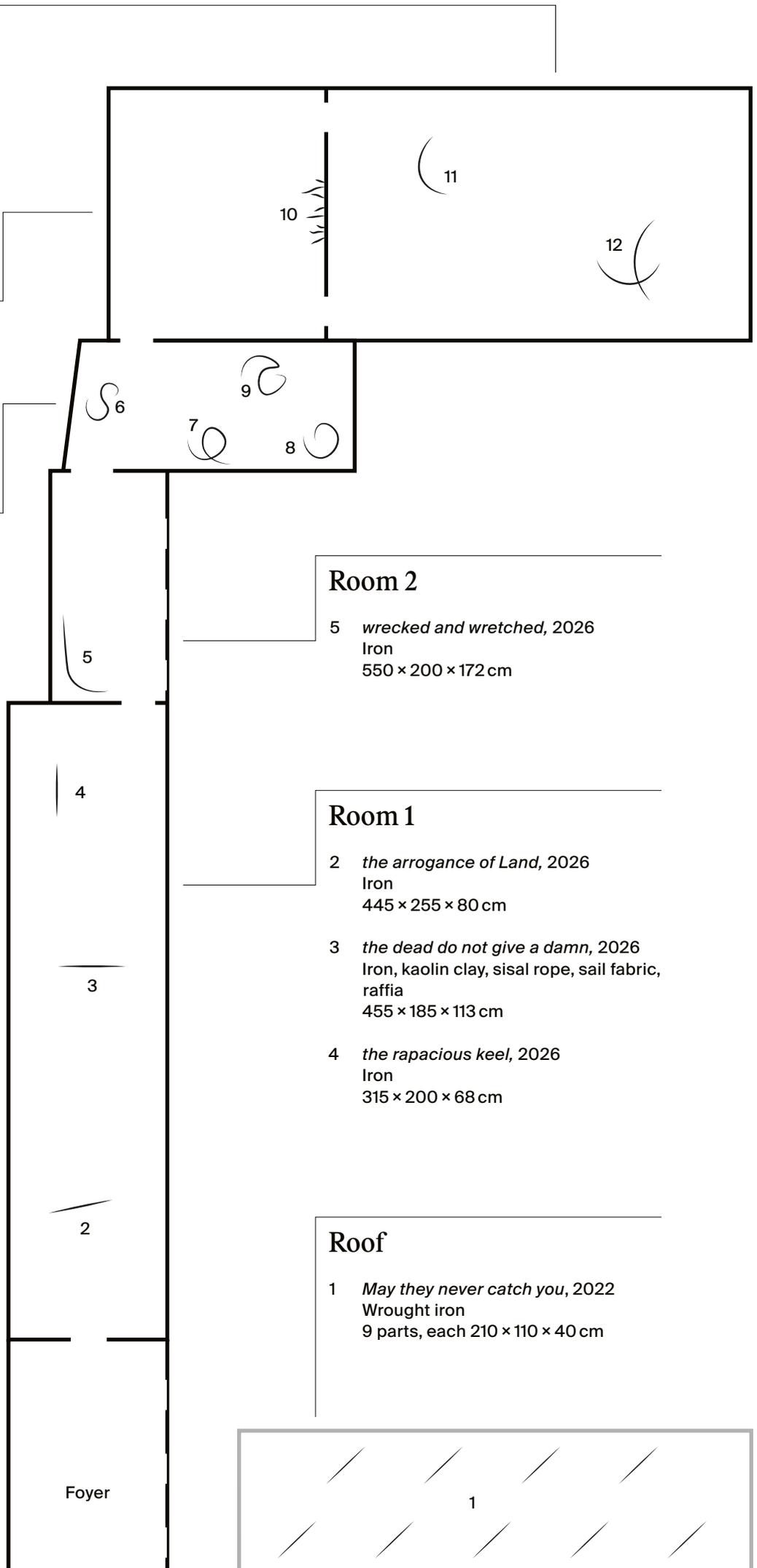
2 *the arrogance of Land*, 2026
Iron
445 × 255 × 80 cm

3 *the dead do not give a damn*, 2026
Iron, kaolin clay, sisal rope, sail fabric,
raffia
455 × 185 × 113 cm

4 *the rapacious keel*, 2026
Iron
315 × 200 × 68 cm

Roof

1 *May they never catch you*, 2022
Wrought iron
9 parts, each 210 × 110 × 40 cm



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Curated by Mohamed Almusibli

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Public Programs

Wörter wirken: Glossar-Workshop, in German

★ 21.03.2026, Saturday, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

A public editorial session. Students, experts, and visitors work together on a living glossary of maritime myths of the Black diaspora

Mal•Mal, in German and English

22.04.2026, Wednesday, 6–8 p.m.

Life drawing in the current exhibition; drawing materials provided.

Thursdays at Kunsthalle Basel

Espresso Tour, in German

07.05.2026, Thursday, 12:30 p.m.

The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes, accompanied by an espresso.

Screen Dialogs, at Stadtkino Basel, in English

07.05.2026, Thursday, 6 p.m.

An art and film program by Kunsthalle Basel at Stadtkino Basel.

Sundays at Kunsthalle Basel

Haseeb Ahmed, *Pantha Rhei on the Rhine*, Listening Session, in English

15.02.2026, Sunday, 3–4:30 p.m.

Artists Pablo Diserens, Diana Duta, and Flurina Mia Häberli were commissioned to create three soundworks through the project *Pantha Rhei on the Rhine*. Followed by a conversation.

Public guided tour, in German

01.03.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Director's Tour, with Mohamed Almusibli, in English

★ 15.03.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Espresso Tour, in English

12.04.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes, accompanied by an espresso.

Tandem Tour, with S AM Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum, in German

19.04.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Public guided tour, in German

03.05.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Curatorial Tour, with Lena Katharina Reuter (Head of Exhibitions), in German

★ 17.05.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

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Copy-edited by Amanda Gomez

The Kunsthalle Basel bookshop stocks publications on Dominique White alongside its broader selection of art books. You will find a selection of publications related to the artist in the library of the Basler Kunstverein.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

★ Registration at kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

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