



1 *Skinwalker*, 2023, stainless steel, hand-dyed fabric, wax, 64 x 70 x 80 cm each

2 *Untitled (Resting Spores) I*, 2023, hand-dyed fabric (linen, cotton), screenprint on cotton, wax, aluminium frame, 132 x 190 x 5 cm

3 *Diaphanous Growth I*, 2023, stainless steel, brass, 72 x 53 x 5 cm

4 *Cocoon I*, 2023, hand-dyed fabric, stainless steel, wire mesh, wax, 100 x 40 x 60 cm

Cocoon II, 2023, hand-dyed fabric, stainless steel, wire mesh, wax, 100 x 40 x 60 cm

5 *Untitled (Resting Spores) IV*, 2023, hand-dyed fabric (linen, cotton), screenprint on cotton, wax, aluminium frame, 85 x 102 x 4 cm

6 *Flowerbed II*, 2023, stainless steel, black steel, epoxy resin, hand-dyed linen, synthetic fabric, rubber cables, 52 x 58 x 260 cm

7 *Flowerbed I*, 2023, stainless steel, black steel, epoxy resin, hand-dyed linen, synthetic fabric, rubber cables, 52 x 80 x 280 cm

8 *Diaphanous Growth II*, 2023, stainless steel, brass, 74 x 27 x 5 cm

9 *Untitled (Resting Spores) II*, 2023, hand-dyed fabric (linen, cotton), screenprint on cotton, wax, aluminium frame, 132 x 190 x 5 cm

10 *Untitled (Resting Spores) III*, 2023, hand-dyed fabric (linen, cotton), screenprint on cotton, wax, aluminium frame, 190 x 132 x 5 cm



Inside Job
(Ula Lucińska, Michał Knychaus)

There are flowers that
are born of mud

curator: Joanna Kobyłt
21.09 — 4.11.23



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The industrial ovens that baked bread for the army have long since cooled down¹. Besides, no fire could burn in an environment almost devoid of oxygen. The viscid dust floating in the air invades the body. Between the three cast-iron columns, new life has blossomed. Vines swirl upwards and fall to the ground. They rose from inanimate matter, yet they are alive, soaking up the muddy, slimy liquid. Subject to continuous morphogenesis, they freeze in their current form but for a moment. Their presence is intoxicating, so it is hard to tell whether this is just the old world after the collapse or the beginning of a new one, no longer dominated by the species we know.

This question will not be answered in the reality created by Inside Job. For mysterious reasons, there are no soldiers, baker’s apprentices or guards here. There are no humans at all – no beings that we used to call that. Instead, there is a new state of matter of strange images, energies and a kind of expanded consciousness, of feeling and understanding more, being differently connected to the world.

Perhaps, along with the bread consumed on a large scale, the red bread grenadier fungus entered the human bloodstream, having previously infected the rye grains used for baking. The parasite found a conducive environment in human bodies, causing ergotism, a disease formerly known as St. Anthony’s fire – its symptoms include sensory disturbances, hallucinations, manias, severe burning pain, fever and convulsions. Mutating rapidly, the fungus spread to densely populated areas, infecting more and more people. The aftermath of this pathogenesis can be seen underfoot, covering walls, filling the space around us. But is what we see really happening? Perhaps these are just hallucinations, delusions created in ergot-poisoned minds?

Some clues are provided by the plant-engineered hybrids, bizarre incarnations of the illustrations filling the pages of the *Voynich Manuscript*. The mysterious medieval or modern codex, written in a script that has never been deciphered, is most likely a kind of alchemical treatise. While this is far from certain, it is easy

to imagine that the text predates its era as a meditative reflection on the coexistence of technology and nature. The depicted floral systems of interconnected vessels and organic architecture foreshadow future forms of symbiosis – a prophecy that is coming true before our very eyes.

There are flowers that are born of mud is the latest brainchild of Ula Lucińska and Michał Kynchaus, a vision emerging between speculation and hope, end and beginning. The starting point for their reflections on the aftermath of an environmental disaster are metaphorical objects from a future that has become past and come too soon. Suspended between the living and the inanimate, the works seem to represent a post-natural – and post-human – order that has emerged in the cracks of our relationship with nature, on the ruins of civilisation and amongst environmental relics.

Ula and Michał’s method of work combines organic materials with machine-produced parts that are later subjected to manual processes such as painting, sanding, bending, stitching and waxing. The final result is a collage-like installation in which natural and artificial elements, made by machines, humans and non-humans, are woven together to create a sense of suspension between different systems. This practice regularly appears in Inside Job’s work, as do their distinctive motifs and ornaments, creating an indecipherable code, an aesthetic language unique to their work.

The title of Inside Job’s latest exhibition refers to the symbolism of the lotus – an aquatic perennial whose impressive inflorescences can grow thanks to a root system that draws organic compounds from the muddy bottom of a body of water. In this context, a popular motif from the religious traditions of the Far East can be equated with the dark ecology preached by Timothy Morton, among others. Instead of anthropocentrically rejecting that which is considered disgusting and repugnant – i.e. trying to pull the world out of the eponymous mud – we should look at this substratum more closely, for it will bear the fruits of the new world.

* The space of 66P is housed in an old garrison bakery erected in 1900–1901.

At that time, most of the buildings on Kępa Mieszczańska island were military facilities. The bakery contained ovens for baking bread and rusks, as well as special machines for kneading and moulding dough. After the Second World War, the building changed its function several times.

A new world will be born of mud.

Joanna Kobyłt in conversation with the Inside Job duo

There are flowers that are born of mud is your latest project, carried out in the space of 66P in Wrocław. What, or rather who, are the eponymous flowers?

This is a very simple, but also poetic and broad metaphor, referring to certain types of flowers that grow out of the muddy soil of ponds or riverbeds. Water lilies or marsh vermillion, for example, thrive in marshy areas. It is therefore an expression of fragile hope in the face of current changes and crises.

The title also refers to a series of our other works that we showed during the individual exhibition *And the Door Was Kicked Open Again* at the (now defunct) FUTURA Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague in 2021. That’s when we started working with the theme of contemporary post-industrial ruins and what happens to them over time – how abandoned architecture surrenders and is appropriated by the non-human world. We feel a strong connection between these exhibitions, so we chose the name of one of the works shown at FUTURA as the title of the exhibition at 66P.

And the mud?

On the one hand, it’s about all these difficult conditions, a sense of hopelessness and finality. On the other hand, mud can also be seen as a beginning. It is a building material – the primordial, bubbling, disgusting soup from which life crawled onto the land.

You seem to be mainly concerned with the future, yet inspiration for the series of new works prepared by you for the exhibition was provided by, among other things, the *Voynich Manuscript* – a mysterious medieval or modern volume, never deciphered, depicting fantastic flora. What attracted you to such an ancient artefact?

Probably its paradoxical timelessness. From the very beginning of its appearance in the sources, we know that it was passed from hand to hand as a kind of curio, sometimes even a bargaining chip. It still appears in specialist debates, but more often it is fodder for parascientific theories. We found this kind of growing tension around a hard-to-identify object very interesting. Equally interesting are the illustrations in it – mysterious plant-like beings, organic architectures, body hybrids and astronomical charts. Intuition tells us that this is a harbinger of a possible future world, and in that sense it is very much related to the future.

What other sources of inspiration fuel your work?

During the research for the exhibition we came across a text by Elvia Wilk about the (mainly medieval) mystical experiences of women, which we analysed in relation to the uncanny descriptions of nature in Jeff Vandermeer’s *Annihilation*. This, in turn, led us step by step to ergot – a cereal disease caused by red mace, which can cause ergotism (the so-called St Anthony’s fire). Many sources suggest that some of the mystical experiences in the past may have been linked to the consumption of ergot-poisoned bread. We allowed ourselves to be led by all these clues and inspirations, without imposing a single narrative to suggest one proper interpretation.

Your activity is more than the production of works of art. It could well be called an ideo-visual programme. By creating uncanny objects, you consistently develop narratives about alternative future worlds or parallel realities. How do you make them?

We feel that the worlds we refer to in our practice are only seemingly distant – often, we can look through them at what is happening here and now. Through fiction, we create a kind of distanced experience that allows us to see certain things from other perspectives, other temporalities. In that sense, what we do is a bit like writing science fiction, where, by allowing ourselves to speculate, we can grapple with the consequences of climate catastrophe, animal extinction, technological acceleration, and all the anxieties and hopes that go with it.

You often refer to the concept of dark ecology – an approach that focuses on the unsettling aspects of our relationship with nature and the environment. What does dark ecology give you, and what can it give us all?

Timothy Morton’s concept of dark ecology helps to bring together different feelings, sometimes conflicting – strangeness, disbelief and fascination, but also a sense of alienation and, at other times, of connection to the world around us.

Ula Lucińska i Michał Kynchaus work together as the Inside Job duo. They graduated in Intermedia from the University of the Arts in Poznań. In their practice, they use a variety of media and materials. Their sculptural objects create elaborate and immersive environments. Many of their projects refer to catastrophic or hauntological narratives in which past echoes intertwine with futuristic speculations. Using fiction as a working methodology, they explore its self-fulfilling potential – predicting dystopias and utopias and reflecting on their possibilities and limitations.

They were finalists of the international Artagon IV competition in Paris (2018) and shortlisted for the International Allegro Prize (2020). They have received prizes and distinctions, including the City of Poznań

Prize for Young Artists (2022, 2020); the Prize of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage (2018) and the Santander Bank Prize (2016). Their joint graduation project received awards from SZUM and Czas Kultury magazines (2018). They have presented their work during artist residencies (The Brno House of Arts; RUPERT Residency, Vilnius; A-I-R FUTURA, Prague; Aldea Residency, Bergen); at individual exhibitions (eastcontemporary, Milan; FUTURA, Prague; Šopa Gallery, Kosice; Hot Wheels Projects, Athens; SKALA, Poznań) and group shows (34th Biennale of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana; Kunsthalle Baden-Baden; BWA Wrocław; Gdansk City Gallery; BWA Zielona Gora; TRAF0 – Trafostacja Sztuki, Szczecin).

Joanna Kobyłt is an art historian, critic and curator. She studied art history and cultural studies. The starting point for her curatorial work is often provided by the historical context. She is interested in the phenomenon of hauntology, the medium of the exhibition as an ideological tool for the production of knowledge, and what lies at the intersection of the history of visuality and the history of natural sciences. She works at BWA Wrocław, where she is curatorially responsible for the BWA Wrocław Główny gallery.