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Building ruins:

Ruins as a Symbol and a Stage in the Creative Process

(Budowanie ruin. Ruiny jako symbol i etap w procesie twórczym)

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Introduction

About what is a ruin and what may be

What exactly is a ruin? A ruin is, of course, a destroyed building. But is it only that? Can, say, broken glass be considered a ruin? Or a spoon with soup leaking through it? Can a fallen tree be called a ruin? Colloquially, certainly yes. But what exactly makes a ruin ruinous? The ruin must be ruined. That is, damaged. It must, in a word, lose its completeness as a result of some force, external or internal. Must have some damage. Like a building that, being in ruins, has lost what constitutes the essence of the building, i.e., the roof and the strong walls that previously defined it as a shelter. A house without a roof — can it still be called a house? It is probably just a reminiscence of what it once was or was supposed to be.

What about a thought? Can a thought be in ruins? A thought always arises in response to a situation. To think means to categorize, to simplify reality so that you can find your way through it. Sometimes we memorize a thought — a thought that seems good enough to us that we conclude we can use it again. Be able to suddenly pull it out of the depths of memory in an appropriate situation and use it to describe a new but similar situation. What if a thought remembered for later turns out to not be entirely compatible with the new reality? It is then necessary to revise it and rebuild what has collapsed a bit due to the passage of time and the new situation.

To create, means to build. To build, according to one's own thoughts, in the image and likeness of the ideal that persists in the mind of the builder. Transfer the ideal from the world of imagination to material reality. Does an idea or a concept lose its completeness when it comes into contact with reality? Doesn't it become a ruin? You don't have to be a Platonist to believe this. Those who, when creating anything, are surprised that the effects exceed their original imaginations and intentions are rather in the minority. Or maybe such a person, completely satisfied with the result, would lose the need to continue building? As we know, a static state is a non-developmental state.

And by creating something that is known in advance that it will not fully realize the intentions, that it will only be a part of them, that it will be incomplete—by creating

something like this, does the creator not build a ruin? But does this make the creator an idealist or a naive person? Is this a sufficient reason not to create anything?

These are just thoughts—maybe accurate, maybe meaningless. Or maybe relevant for a moment only for the person behind them. But isn't creation sometimes about catching, for a while, thoughts that seem current to us, taking a deep dive into them, preserving them in the space of the work, and then abandoning them for new concepts that are more relevant to the situation?

Perhaps this text accompanying the exhibition, which is the main part of a doctoral thesis in the field of art, also has the structure of a ruin. Ruin, i.e., an open, incomplete, somewhat unfinished building. However, if I had decided to write a text that is a solid, flawless building, wouldn't I ultimately end up creating ruins but also being disappointed? This open building stands on the pillars of several thoughts that accompanied me during my work and which I found interesting enough that I decided to develop them in the form of texts, which are subsequent chapters of this work.

Art and Human Survival

About art and evolution

Only by believing in the distinctiveness of man with his civilization from all the rest, called nature, can we maintain the belief that some human activity, for example, art, can be something "liberated" from the world of nature, unusual, and so extraordinary that it is difficult to find in the behavior of other species any analogies to it. However, this old fence placed between humans and the natural world has been shaky for a long time. Of course, like every other species, we also have our own perspective and unique way of functioning in the world. Our distinctiveness from the rest of organisms results from our biological structure, whose unique shape determines our original way of perceiving reality. However, it is not as big as we liked to believe at certain moments in our history. Moreover, although we certainly see and understand the world differently than other organisms, our senses, in most cases, are very similar in structure to those of other animals and perhaps even plants.

*„It has, I think, now been shewn that man and the higher animals, especially the primates, have some few instincts in common. All have the same senses, intuitions, and sensations,—similar passions, affections, and emotions, even the more complex ones, such as jealousy, suspicion, emulation, gratitude, and magnanimity; they practise deceit and are revengeful; they are sometimes susceptible to ridicule, and even have a sense of humour; they feel wonder and curiosity; they possess the same faculties of imitation, attention, deliberation, choice, memory, imagination, the association of ideas, and reason, though in very different degrees. (...) Nevertheless, many authors have insisted that man is divided by an insuperable barrier from all the lower animals in his mental faculties” (K. Darwin, *O pochodzeniu człowieka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warszawa 1959, s.36).*

In his very interesting and thoroughly written popular science book about plant physiology, biologist Daniel Chamovitz states:

Of course plants don't "see" in pictures as you or I do. Plants can't discern between a slightly balding middle-aged man with glasses and a smiling little girl with brown curls. But they do see light in many ways and colors that we can only imagine. Plants see the same ultraviolet light that gives us sunburns and infrared light that heats us up. Plants can tell when there's very little light, like from a candle, or when it's the middle of the day, or when the sun is about to set into the

horizon. Plants know if the light is coming from the left, from the right, or from above. (D. Chamovitz, *Żmystowe życie roślin*, Wydawnictwo WAB, Warszawa 2012, s.12).

I am writing about our inseparability from the natural world in order to introduce a problem related to art, which, due to my personal interests, has intrigued me for a very long time. From the beginning of my school education, apart from art, I was also passionate about biology. Evolution textbooks teach that nature does not like unnecessary expenses. In nature, little is unnecessary. What is not useful to the species for its survival in the world gradually disappears in the course of evolution because evolution usually strives for optimization. That is why I have been asking myself for a long time what the connection is between art and biology, namely why we, the species *Homo sapiens*, need art. Because if we have not given it up for so long, it is very possible that it somehow contributes to our survival, i.e., it has some evolutionary significance. This is a very basic question with an indirect connection to the topic of my doctoral project. However, these issues are very interesting to me, especially since for a long time I have started to depict nature in my works. In the second chapter, I write about the issue of artists' aspirations from a more idealistic perspective, while this chapter was supposed to answer a very important question to me personally: why does this arduous pursuit of the ideal, undertaking the effort of artistic creation, appear in humans at all, and what can it serve? Also, in my opinion, the nature of the creative process is similar to the process of species evolution, hence my idea to include these issues in this text.

I do not promise to present here precise data on the biological determinants of a human undertaking various activities that could be considered artistic activities. Art itself is also such an open and imprecise concept that, even for this reason, it would be impossible to present any hard data here. Rather, I want to emphasize the issues that interest me and indicate certain directions of thinking about art, such as pragmatic aesthetics, evolutionary aesthetics (Ellen Dissnayake, Denis Dutton, Jerzy Luty), cultural psychophysiology (Steven Pinker, Semir Zeki). I would like to answer the question of why, from a biological point of view, art may exist. I also do not think that art is, to use the language of biology, an adaptation, i.e., that it was created as part of our body adapting to the environment in which we live and is itself a mechanism necessary for the survival of the species. In my opinion, art is a child of other, more biologically necessary behaviors. However, it is also not a side effect of evolution that has no impact on survival, such as some morphological features, which, according to the spandrels theory by Gould and Lewontin, are a side effect of other,

evolutionarily important features. Art is not a feature but a complex mechanism that, in my opinion, cannot be reduced to an event occurring with no significance, such as the whiteness of the bones. I also do not consider it a purely cultural product unrelated to biology, evolution and survival because, as I mentioned above, I am convinced that the cultural achievements of man are closely related to his biological sphere and the environment in which he lives. I am inclined to the opinion that art, which is a complex phenomenon, appeared thanks to the development of a number of adaptive behaviors in humans through evolution, such as interest in interesting objects, the ability to communicate, creating social structures with other individuals of the species, the ability to understand and create symbols, the desire to decorate, and imagination. Furthermore, I believe that art can support survival, but based on the existence of many component behaviors, it is rather a peri-adaptive phenomenon. In my opinion, art is primarily a mask under which other, more pragmatic and, at the same time, easier-to-define activities that have strict evolutionary significance are hidden. Because art, as we know, is pretending.

Most researchers dealing with this topic start by trying to define, at least in a sketchy way, what art is. I'm not going to do that. My text is a free, subjective record of thoughts and interests accompanying work on the doctoral series; I do not aim to research the topic in detail. I don't feel competent. I also expect that this text will be read only by people who are well acquainted with the intricacies and problems related to defining art and who, at the same time, due to many years of experience as a creator or recipient, intuitively feel, perhaps not what art always is, but what it sometimes is. Furthermore, I refer the reader here to Denis Dutton's book, *Instinct of Art*, in which the author presents his cluster definition of art, with which I agree. Dutton's definition may be simplified, but the author convincingly explains why, in his considerations, he ignores all untypical phenomena, uncertain in terms of definition, which contemporary art theory eagerly deals with. I would also like to emphasize that, due to the area of my creative activities, when I talk about art in this text, I always mean visual arts, especially painting, which is closest to me. While writing this text, I thought little about dance or music, which are in no way related to my artistic research, yet the presented concepts are often adequate for all forms of creative activity. I am also closer to the perspective of the creator than the perspective of the recipient, although I also talk about the functions of art that can be described as social. Another thing worth emphasizing is that the functions of art I have distinguished often overlap and flow into one another. I know that. When I think about these things, I see a school drawing of a set with several overlapping

subsets. However, I think that the more subsets I draw, the better the general set will become visible, which on the board of my imagination is labeled art and human biology.

Having clarified the issues that required clarification, I move on to the point. So why, in my opinion and not only my opinion, do we, bipedal monkeys with higher cognitive abilities than other representatives of the Hominidae family, need art, and why, from a biological point of view, is art needed for this special case of a representative of *Homo sapiens*, which is someone who deals with art for a significant part of their time, i.e., the artist?



1. The catatonic cat before undergoing disorientation, still from Monty Python's *Flying Circus*, Series 1, Episode 5, 1969.

There is a sketch from Monty Python's *Flying Circus* that I adore: *Confusing the Cat* (Series 1, Episode 5): The cat became stagnant. He sits numbly on the lawn, is not interested in anything, and does not respond to any stimuli. “It’s the stockbroker syndrome, small-town decadence, or, in other words, indifference,” says the helpless vet, much to the despair of the concerned owners. Only a special team, a company that disorients cats, can come to the cat’s aid. A field stage is set up in front of an uninterested cat. The special team shows the cat

various tricks, makes strange gestures and surprises him. Thanks to these treatments, a disoriented cat wakes up from its stupor. And that's why, firstly, there is art. Art throws down the gauntlet to the numb stagnation – normality. Normality, i.e., norms. That is, the rules of conduct, but also ordinary, stable, standardized everyday life. After all, where there is normality, there is routine. When you act according to established rules, you don't think too much and follow well-trodden paths. We need rules and procedures so that we don't have to constantly think about everything, so that we can react automatically and thus save time needed to perform other activities. Art, on the other hand, is a creative activity that opposes conventional thinking. Disturbing order. Art is a spoon stirring the tea of everyday life. And evolutionarily, this is very necessary for us, extremely gregarious animals.

Conventional thinking is also needed to some extent; living in a herd, individuals must imitate each other, respect norms, and follow well-trodden paths. In this way, the herd does not scatter in all directions, and speaking of the human herd, i.e., society, there is no complete chaos. Most individuals imitate, in fact, in some areas, we all imitate, sometimes quite thoughtlessly. This is clearly visible in pigeons, which sometimes sit quietly in some safe place, undisturbed by anyone or anything, and take flight only because an individual, perhaps as a result of being bitten by a tick, has made some sudden movement. The rest, accustomed to imitating, jump up and the pigeons make a wave above the ground. Because if you blindly follow, you can, in the so-called sheep rush, jump off a cliff. Artists, on the other hand, like to defy the rules, do something differently than everyone else, and thus set directions for the rest of the herd, break them out of their stupor, or at least direct this stupefied imitation in a different direction. And this is very, very necessary for the herd. I'm not saying that artists always set a trail for others, but usually, by questioning norms, even the ordinary, everyday rules of "normal" life, they claim to do so. By violating the norms, you can show the herd new paths. Unfortunately, you can also be pecked. Individualists, in addition to thinking unconventionally, must also develop other abilities in order to take the lead in a group, such as intelligence, leadership skills, and, above all, social competence. Experience shows that those who love the established order, those who worship normality, and those who love rules usually hate artists. Or they like the old, dead ones the most, who no longer question anything, but thanks to the patina of time that their works have acquired, they are so famous that the majority of society does not question the artistic value of their achievements, so you can, without fear, hang on your wall some reproduction, bought on sale in a supermarket.

Another very important role that art plays in the human herd is its ability to consolidate a social group by reducing tensions and strengthening group emotions. This topic is discussed at length by Ellen Dissanayake in her book *What is Art For?* Ellen Dissanayake is a pioneer of evolutionary aesthetics and the first to deal with this issue in more detail. She was also of the opinion that art is an adaptation, or more precisely, that the evolutionary adaptation is not art itself, which cannot be defined in a universal way, but „artification". Through artification, a person accomplishes what Dissanayake calls “making special.” This term, coined by the researcher, means: giving things or situations uniqueness, through the use of aesthetic means, in order to introduce an extraordinary element to the world known to man. According to the researcher, our need to demonstrate broadly understood artistic behavior is innate, regardless of whether this behavior will result in creating an artifact in the form of a work of art. In her opinion, this need is also universal, typical of everyone, not only artists, which is quite an important condition that behavior must meet in order to be called adaptive (in this case it would be behavioral adaptation). The scientist emphasizes the connection between articulation behaviors and other human behaviors, namely ritual and play, which perform a similar function in human societies - they introduce a second, alternative, supra-normal sphere into everyday reality. From an evolutionary point of view, the ability to introduce an unusual element would have a beneficial effect on the survival of the species by consolidating the group and reducing fear in moments of particular danger and therefore, according to the researcher, it could be considered an adaptation.

Although I am not convinced that the concept of artification, despite its simplification in relation to the very complex concept of art, meets all the necessary conditions to fit the definition of biological adaptation (not everything that has a beneficial effect on survival is an adaptation), I definitely agree that artistic behavior can help a community survive, precisely thanks to the ability to bring group emotions to a common track (this is more clearly visible in the case of arts such as music or dance, which "spread" emotions very quickly, but painting, being a carrier of various content, also influences the emotional state of the recipient group). I also agree that introducing the unusual is an important and useful element of art, as I expressed in the previous paragraph. The long tradition of connections between art and religion results precisely from art's ability to shape emotional states and reduce tensions.

I am moving on to the next stage of these considerations. This time I change the object of observation—I stop observing the herd and look at the individual. Why does an artist need art? Why does an artist, intentionally or unintentionally, leave the safe backyard



2. Painters' hands in one of the Cueva de las Manos cave complexes in Argentina, between 7300 B.C. and 700 AD.

furnished with things he knows well and turn to the unknown, looking for new values, new stimuli, and things he has never seen before? Because an artist is often intellectually restless. Perhaps just as it helped the human herd keep their emotions on track, art can help an artist stay emotionally balanced. This is an issue that is particularly popular among researchers who tend to practice biography in art research. However, I have the impression, although I admit the possibility of a mistake, that the myth of the romantic artist who works in the ecstasy of emotional frenzy has not been very fashionable recently. Practicing creativity in order to reduce one's own emotional tensions is associated with amateur activity, or art therapy. Nevertheless, although I do not believe that an artist is a frantic automaton who, when creating, necessarily expresses only their own emotional states (after all, an artist can also be an emotionless liar disguised as a romantic), I am convinced that, to some extent, what comes out of someone's hand reflects the creator's mind their emotional state. I believe that for many artists, practicing art can be an effective way of reprogramming the errors of their own limbic system, which definitely has a positive impact on their survival in the world.

Since we are talking about mind programming, I will move on to the next function of art that is beneficial for survival: art intellectually develops both the creator and the recipient. Art provides the brain with stimuli. I will return here to Ellen Dissanayake because an important element of her artification behavior hypothesis was the observation that humans have a natural tendency to show interest in unusual objects. She devoted a lot of space to this in the above-mentioned book. This tendency actually occurs, is common, evolutionarily reliable and is not unique to humans. It is crucial to our survival, and in this case, we talk about an authentic biological adaptation. Without carefully observing the surroundings, we would quickly get into trouble. If we find an object we have never seen before, our instinct for self-preservation tells us to take a closer look at it, think about its function, search the brain for connections with concepts we know well, and estimate potential threats or possible benefits. And works of art, precisely because of their strangeness, force the viewer to look for a conceptual category in which they could fit, and if there is no appropriate drawer in the brain, to create a new one. This is related to the mechanisms of conceptual thinking, specifically the formation of acquired concepts in the brain, which, unlike innate concepts, are subject to numerous transformations. These mechanisms will be mentioned in another chapter of this work, but I support the above statement with a quote from the book *Splendours and Miseries of the Brain* by neurobiologist Semir Zeki:

*“Therefore, unlike inherited concepts, acquired concepts are susceptible to extensive influences from other brain areas and show a clear dependence on the brain's memory and judgment systems. Therefore, these concepts are also significantly influenced by the so-called higher brain centers located in the frontal lobe. Let's use the example of color vision again. As I have already mentioned, color perception occurs as a result of comparisons in the brain's color center. However, it does not depend on the processes taking place in higher centers located in the frontal lobes. "But when we look at Fauvist paintings in which objects have 'unnatural' colors - i.e. different colors than those to which we have become accustomed through experience - the frontal lobes become active, as if trying to solve a puzzle.” (S. Zeki, *Blaski i cienie pracy mózgu: o miłości, sztuce i pogoni za szczęściem*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2017, s. 56).*

Not only perceiving but also practicing art develops intellect. I think this is obvious to most people involved in artistic creation. Creating is about setting challenges and then solving them. Solving both technical and intellectual difficulties makes the artist wiser with new experiences, and it is not only about expanding the state of knowledge. When working on a given issue (even if it is a purely formal issue), we also study it, returning to the theory of

brain concepts—we transform the concepts stored in the brain. So we develop the brain because, as we know, the brain develops throughout life, it is neuroplastic. Here I would like to mention very interesting research on mouse intelligence (after neurobiologist Robert Sapolsky): neurobiologists studying the influence of genes and environment on intellectual development in mice have bred rodents with genetically determined, significant impairments in the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory. The selected rodents were extremely unintelligent from birth, unable to orient themselves in space, learn, etc. At the same time, exposing them to a stimulating environment in the form of mouse toys resulted in the compensation of some intellectual deficits over time, despite the significant primary impairment of an extremely important brain region. I am quoting:

“To be perfectly clear, this is not about some trivial genetic modification versus a few rides and rubber toys. We are talking about an extensive genetic defect—a complete shutdown of an important gene in the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory. And a properly stimulating environment was able to fix that.” R. Sapolsky, *Małpie amory i inne pouczające historie o małpie zwanej człowiekiem*, Prószyński i s-ka, Warszawa 2008, s. 71).



3. Rats playing basketball at the Virginia Museum of Science, 2019.

At the biochemical level, our brains are no different from those of mice, so a stimulating environment also has a positive effect on our intellectual development, and practicing creativity, as well as exposure to it, certainly provides a brain with stimulation. Having a broader conceptual framework not only makes it easier for an individual to survive, but also makes it possible to more effectively support others in their fight for survival.

The next issue I am going to write about is more a property of art than another function of it, but I am raising this topic because of its connection with the above-mentioned issues. Art gives pleasure, which is why it reduces emotional tension, and also teaches because, as has been proven many times, we learn and remember better when something gives us pleasure. Of course, not every art work is pleasant to look at, but we can derive pleasure indirectly, e.g., by admiring ourselves as a connoisseur, an intellectual, or a person with specific views (I will discuss this issue in a moment). However, I argue that giving pleasure is not a separate, survival-supporting function of art because not everything that is pleasant is good for us, although what is good is often pleasant. We are biologically shaped to have a tendency and derive satisfaction from doing things that are biologically beneficial for us—eating fatty and sweet foods, having sex, staying in the most comfortable environment possible (apart from the fact that one can lose the sense of proportion and start fulfilling a healthy need in an unhealthy way, at the expense of other needs). Steven Pinker, in his book *How the Mind Works*, described art as a technology of pleasure; according to Pinker, art can be a way to induce pleasure through shortcuts. Therefore, it is probably not surprising that when we perceive an art work we like, an area in the brain called the reward system (Semir Zeki) is active. Probably the same area "lights up" when an artist, having completed the painting, is satisfied with it for some time. We feel pleasure, a feeling of fulfillment. This is where the dark side of art can also manifest itself: just like with fatty food, we can lose our sense of proportion and, both as the creator and the recipient, escape into its world from real life; then art will cease to be a harmless technology of pleasure and will become a drug.

Art can help humans in their evolutionary fight for survival in another way: by facilitating the transmission of genetic material to the next generations, i.e., by supporting reproduction. It sounds funny and maybe even controversial to some, but it is true. Art, like many other human activities, in addition to meeting other needs and fulfilling other functions, can support procreation. I will mention the bowerbird here, although it is a heavily overused example in books on similar topics. However, it is classical because it shows much better than the example of a trained painting monkey or an elephant the behavior that some

people call animal art, which may be important in studying the mechanisms leading to artistic creativity in humans. Bowerbirds are a whole family of birds living in Australia, the males of which build impressive arbors in order to attract mates. These are decorative, nest-like structures decorated with colorful objects, but they are not nests. The female builds the nest herself. Moreover, the bowerbird can sing, often imitating other birds, dance, sometimes even in a dance routine with other birds in supporting roles, and, above all, each individual has its own style of building a bower, resulting from personal preferences in the selection of decoration colors; different individuals of the same species choose different colors. The female is also guided by her personal preferences; she carefully examines the bower and decides whether she likes it. In evolutionary biology, this is called a display of fitness. The bowerbird shows that it is intelligent, healthy, strong, conscientious, creative and self-confident.



4. Creative bower bird.

I think that an artist uses art to convey the same messages about themselves as well as their political views, worldview and tastes. The issue of expressing personality through art is probably nothing shocking, and it is difficult to deny that such a presentation of an

extraordinary personality may, even unconsciously, serve to impress the opposite sex. Because gender roles in humans, are not as clearly outlined as in the bowerbird (the offspring are usually taken care of by both parents, representatives of both sexes take an active part in seduction), art female art exists in our species.

The same mechanisms occur among art recipients and people who purchase art. When buying works, a collector presents to the world various things about themselves: refined taste, education, intelligence, passion for beauty, or vice versa, lack of prejudices about ugliness, openness to what is new, or, conversely, traditionalism, and often simply excess financial resources. Since we are animals that build complex social structures, these displays are not necessarily directed solely at potential partners. Every day, we also go to great lengths to find friends, discredit enemies, or simply support the entire social group in some way, increasing the circulation of what we consider favorable views. Presenting our beliefs to others by ostentatiously appearing at exhibitions, organizing them, buying them, or presenting purchased works can support our survival in society and help us find a partner. These issues are discussed extensively by Geoffrey Miller, an evolutionary psychologist who deals with the theory of consumer capitalism, in his books *The mating Mind*. Miller connects ostentatious consumerism or presenting one's advantages through art with the concept of costly signals developed by biologist Amotz Zahavi, which states that only animals in good shape can ostentatiously waste energy resources and time to show themselves to others in a favorable light. Many birds risk their lives by adopting their mating colors to show off their fitness. Practicing art also involves risk, but it may be more interesting in the eyes of others than performing more common professions. Acquiring it can also be a costly way of self-presentation. Miller states:

"In other words, I would like my collection of works of art to reflect my 'taste', which in this case means that (subconsciously) I strive for it to be an expression of my openness (to art inspired by hallucinogens and to paintings depicting the ghostly temporality of life), conscientiousness (respect for artists with obsessive and compulsive attention to detail), and intelligence (my appreciation for quasi-conceptual art and knowledge of little-known 21st century artists). My taste should not only attract like-minded people to me; it should also repel those who think differently" (G. Miller, *Teoria szpanu. Seks, ewolucja i zachowanie klienta*, Prószyński i s-ka, Warszawa 2010, s. 47).

As I announced, the above-mentioned functions of art, such as setting new directions of thinking, consolidating a group, emotional and intellectual shaping of both the recipient

and the creator himself, and manifestation of personality traits and views, are interconnected. In all of them, what is important is the ability of art to evoke specific thoughts as well as arouse emotions, i.e., states of somatic stimulation combined with evaluation (an emotion is a preconscious negative or positive reaction to a stimulus). In most functions, it is important that an art is a medium of communication, including with oneself; in other words, it is important that an art is a type of language. And this is a very important area that, in my opinion, should be explored when thinking about art as peri-adaptive behavior. Although painting itself is not an adaptation in the strict sense of the term used in evolutionary sciences, it is one of the ways of expressing a natural, genetically determined behavior that developed as an adaptation—the ability to communicate. Communicating, unlike painting or writing, is an adaptation caused by a genetic sequence called FOXP2. People with an impaired FOXP2 gene do not have communication skills and are therefore unable to function properly in the social structures of the species for which these abilities are the basis, which is why they are pushed out of the population. Expressing thoughts through art or writing is simply a special case of adaptation, which is communication, although the implementation of these complex phenomena is also based on the manifestation of other, evolutionarily developed behaviors, e.g., the ability to efficiently use the hand or the ability to distinguish colors. Therefore, although art, as I have shown above, can definitely have a beneficial effect on survival, it may, in my opinion, be a peri-adaptive behavior resulting from other behaviors developed in the process of evolution rather than an adaptation as such.

I know that the question about the meaning of art in the fight for survival is in fact one of the versions of the question about the meaning of art in general. It is a very basic issue, and it was not critical to raise it here in this text. However, I wanted to do it due to my personal interests. Moreover, the research I conducted helped me write the next chapter, which is more important for the main topic. I found the connection between creativity and evolution to be such an interesting and new issue that I decided to include it in this work, believing that it would be an interesting shift from conventional ways of thinking about art. Of course, I realize that the ideas discussed above are only one layer of answers to extremely complex issues. The most basic layer. I don't want to be accused of reductionism. I am convinced that the aspirations of artists and all humans are far more complicated than the aspirations of all other animals. Man is not a bowerbird, nor is he a chimpanzee, and although it is true that we share 98% of our genes with chimpanzees, the remaining 2% creates such a huge qualitative difference that it allows us to use an incomparably larger

number of concepts, to have very complex social structures, to build civilizations and cultures, and to create art. At the same time, when creating all these things, we do not go beyond our biologically conditioned properties because we perceive the world subjectively, with the human brain, through human senses. I will never be able to understand what ultraviolet light looks like, seen by, for example, jackdaws with an additional photoreceptor; in my imagination, it will always be some shade of purple.

In order to build a bridge between the first chapter of this work, where I talk about the ways in which art can support the realization of the basic instinct, which is the desire to survive in the world, and the next chapter, where the aspirations of artists from a much more idealistic perspective will be examined, I must clarify certain beliefs of mine. Undeniably, most of our actions reflect an attempt to fulfill the basic need, which is the survival instinct (although we are not always aware of it), but we also have a number of other, less basic instincts, such as the need for self-realization, the need for respect, or the need for understanding the world, that some people evince. These instincts are extremely important if we consider the motives of artistic creation. However, I agree with Geoffrey Miller that, despite its usefulness in some situations, Maslow's pyramid of needs model is a bit too simplistic from the perspective of evolutionary research. The graphic model known to everyone may suggest that basic needs are somehow separated from higher needs. Miller also questions the categories themselves, considering them too reductive. In this work, I have already expressed the belief that although the radical separation of higher needs from lower ones, biology from spirituality, and man from animals has a long tradition, it is definitely outdated. I am of the opinion that when striving to fulfill the most idealistic goals, it is possible and even necessary not to be in conflict with basic instincts but to support them. The Cartesian dualism Body < Mind is, as neuroscientist Antonio Damasio showed in his famous book *Descartes' Error*, a mistake, so it is a mistake to separate the needs of the mind from the needs of the body.

Moreover, I would like to mention once again an issue that may have been appropriately emphasized in this text, but which I would like to emphasize once again because it is extremely important when we deal with evolution in relation to the complex problem of artists' aspirations. In my opinion, this issue has often been forgotten in the common understanding, associating Darwinism with a ruthless and extremely selfish fight for the survival of the individual. In fact, Darwin's theory assumed that egoistic instincts were not the only ones that guided animals in their fight for survival. For humans, as well as for other

herd animals, social instincts are extremely important, which explains various noble behaviors occurring in humans that contradict the instinct of self-preservation. The idealism of some artists or scientists who tried to discover something for humanity, often at the expense of their own private well-being, may indicate that they have above-average social instincts. Darwin understood that the implementation of social instincts against the private interests of an individual has a positive effect on the survival of the whole and, as a result, also helps the individual. He believed that conscience, as well as many other internal human conflicts, arise as a result of contradictions between these two basic instincts:

„It must not be forgotten that although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over the other men of the same tribe, yet that an increase in the number of well-endowed men and an advancement in the standard of morality will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another ... At all times throughout the world tribes have supplanted other tribes; and as morality is one important element in their success, the standard of morality and the number of well-endowed men will thus everywhere tend to rise and increase”
(K.Darwin, *O pochodzeniu człowieka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, Warszawa 1959, s.121).

Building ruins

About the incompleteness of an artistic work

This chapter has the same title as the entire text, so it is very important for this work; it is a direct development of the concept I submitted at the beginning of my doctoral studies. That's why he gave me the most trouble. By using the phrase building ruins, I created a metaphor in which I wanted to include something that, in my opinion, is universal for all artistic creation and is understandable to all, or almost all, creatives. However, I was terrified by the thought that I could be wrong. I lacked hard evidence to prove my hypothesis—how do I know that what is close to me—the artists whose statements I have read or those I know well personally—is so universal that I can proclaim some regularity in it? I was afraid that this whole concept was either making a general out of a special case or was a bit inappropriate for our times, like Aristotle's physics at the time of the discovery of quantum mechanics. Furthermore, I didn't want to write pseudo-philosophical fairy tales, so I tried to look for evidence as close to reality as possible. The nature of human actions is studied in biology in the most understandable and, in my opinion, most rigorous way. Hence, my search for answers to questions about the meaning of art and the aspirations of artists in the biological sciences (evolutionary sciences, including evolutionary psychology and neurobiology), the side effect of which is the creation of the previous chapter.

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As I announced, in this chapter I intend to discuss the issue announced in the title, i.e., the concept of building ruins, as a metaphor for creating with a sense of incompleteness of the work, and I will also try to provide a possible explanation for this phenomenon based on brain science. But first, I will present the concept itself.

Capturing the elusive

Balancing on the border between what is understandable and what is unclear is one of the basic properties of artistic creation. Art, unlike science, does not use the language of precision. A work of art is a space where the world of concrete meets the world of indeterminacy. The concrete world is the material world, while indeterminacy is the area of ideas, feelings or impressions that the artist wants to materialize in the space of the work. Maria Gołaszewska, who, in my opinion, had a phenomenal understanding of the complex feelings that lead to artistic creation, expressed this idea in the following way:

“Matter is shaped, and it becomes artistic when it manifests aesthetic value. Value is that factor that is both within and beyond the shape—what is fully contained in a work of art and, at the same time, what is rooted in the human world existing outside the work. Value therefore resides existentially in the human world as its irrational, illogical aspect” ((Maria Gołaszewska, *Struktura dzieła sztuki* [w:] *Żarys Estetyki*, PWN, Warszawa 1984, s. 217).

On the basis of artistic creativity lies the contradiction between the desire to materialize and visualize non-specific, even fluid thoughts, impressions and feelings and to preserve their fluxional nature. The moment of creation of a work is an effort to capture the elusive. And the point here is not that every work must necessarily be imbued with strong emotions. I will return here to the issues raised in the previous chapter. Art is one way of fulfilling the basic need for communication. It is a language. However, in my opinion, it is a special type of language. While the greatest precision is desirable when we communicate verbally, it facilitates understanding and saves the interlocutors' time, but the language of art does not have to be precise by definition, and often even should not be. Art is often used to communicate unclear things: feelings of uncertain meaning, thoughts that are difficult to classify, and unclear pursuits. By introducing a bit of unusualness, an atmosphere of strangeness, understatement, and ambiguity, a work of art can communicate things that are difficult to express verbally. Works of visual art play with our knowledge of material objects, poetry works similarly; it plays with the typical, average way of understanding individual words. The meaning of a work of art goes much beyond the material outline of the object, just as the creator's aspirations go beyond matter. I will quote a fragment of the poem *Alchemy of the Word* from the poem *A Season in Hell* by Arthur Rimbaud:

„I dreamed of Crusades, voyages of discovery that nobody had heard of, republics without histories, religious wars stamped out, revolutions in morals, movements of races and continents: I used to believe in every kind of magic.

I invented colors for the vowels! - A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green. - I made rules for the form and movement of every consonant, and I boasted of inventing, with rhythms from within me, a kind of poetry that all the senses, sooner or later, would recognize. And I alone would be its translator:

I began it as an investigation. I turned silences and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down. I made the whirling world stand still”

(A. Rimbaud, *Alchemia słowa* [w:] *Sezon w piekle*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 1998, s. 33).

The problem with communicating some thoughts and feelings is not a special property of the minds of artists, who are often accused of having a special, highly refined and complicated emotionality. It is common and probably related to the way the human brain works. Well, contrary to the rationalist tradition, not all human thoughts are so strongly conscious that they can be easily understood or expressed in language. So much of what we think about is a process in the background of conscious brain work. I assume there can be semi-conscious thoughts as well. You can also, as a creator, use this property of the recipient's brain and deliberately (or intuitively) program the work of art in such a way as to evoke these non-specific thoughts and feelings in the recipient, directing his thoughts towards unusual lands. Ernst Poppel and Anna-Lydia Edingshaus write about the incommunicability of certain thoughts in language in their book *The Brain: The Mysterious Cosmos*:

“It is a false assumption that all thought processes must be conscious, clear and directly – explicitly – expressed in language. (...) Conscious acts of the mind are accompanied by countless directly inaccessible processes in the brain. In particular, assessment processes escape direct (conscious) representation. Affective judgments are intuitive” (E. Poppel, A. Edingshaus, *Mózg – Tajemniczy Kosmos*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa, 1998, s. 28).

Moreover, art as a "special language" can, in addition to expressing what is non-specific, express many things at once. That is, like in the popular advertisement for the coconut chocolate box "saying more than a thousand words". Firstly, a work may be more or less ambiguous due to its properties. Secondly, a work of art is, by definition, subject to interpretation, regardless of the will of the author, who may more or less try to impose a version consistent with their own intentions. The way of understanding an art piece will always depend on both the intellectual and emotional state of the recipient (which may also be the creative himself) and the time in which the work is received, because the situation

always brings up some of the most obvious associations for a given moment. Therefore, each work is fluid in meaning. This idea is very simple, but it was Umberto Eco being first, who concretized it as a concept in his book *The Open Work*. This work initiated research on art to abandon the emphasis on the creator's intentions and shift the emphasis to the relationship between the work and the recipient. In my opinion, artists had understood this property of art perfectly, probably long before the concept of an open work appeared. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to create art. Moreover, not only objects of art can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the intellectual baggage of the interpreter. Even a chair can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the situation, emphasizing one of its rich meanings, yet a work of art is different from a chair in that it inflicts the situation of being interpreted.

Building Ruins. About the incompleteness of an artistic work

A work of art is always created in relation to matter. Of course, works of conceptual art were supposed to break with this tradition, but paradoxically, they almost always had some form of recording the idea, so conceptualism in its pure form is just a thought experiment. Only the declared change of emphasis between thought and matter was real. Moreover, even a work remaining in the form of an idea, not brought to the material world or even not revealed to anyone, is anchored in matter because it must be created from elements known from the material world, even if they are somehow abstracted and not completely concrete. Man knows nothing except matter and a few abstract concepts that he creates for the purpose of communicating with others. Art will never break with matter. At the same time, the work, being a materialization of what is non-specific, fleeting and changeable, is an inherently contradictory creation. There is nothing more concrete than matter. Yet, a work of art, until it is confronted with the limitations of matter, is an ideal object. I realized that when thinking about some new idea for a work of art, I often see in my mind's eye an object that, apart from the properties of the matter from which I intend to make it, also contains a component that it cannot have in itself in the material world - it is a kind of positive emanation, which consists of my dreams, aspirations and the impressions it can potentially have on the recipient (or, secondarily, on myself). It sounds quite unclear and even mystical, but I think it is a feeling known to other creators, and I also suspect that it

results from the mechanisms of conceptual thinking. Probably, being in a state of emotional and intellectual agitation, which is typical of intense creative thinking, I stimulate various areas in my own brain, mixing concepts typically known from matter as well as abstract ones, as well as areas related to experiencing various emotional states. Materializing something like this is obviously impossible. Therefore, a work of art is always a compromise between the sphere of the concept, where it exists in an ideal and, at the same time inconcrete form, and the material world, where it exists in an incomplete, defective, but materially concrete form. Since it is impossible to convey in matter such extraordinary properties of the work, which is still a purely intellectual creation, creation is like building ruins; the final structure is incomplete, and it gives only a vague impression of the original ideas and motivations. Benedetto Croce wrote about the impossibility of achieving fulfillment in creation:

“Did man as an artist strive only for an image? He strived for an image, but also for something else (...); to the image in the front row (...). And as soon as he has reached the first row, the second immediately appears behind him and becomes the direct goal from an indirect goal; a new need is born” (B. Croce, *Miejsce sztuki w działalności duchowej i społecznej* [w:] *Zarys Estetyki*, PWN, Warszawa 1961, s. 82).

I think most artists are aware that they will not be able to fully materialize their concepts. At the same time, they do not give up on creating, because it is often not the effect but the pursuit that is an important element of artistic work. The result may be disappointing, but striving to get as close to the ideal as possible can be downright addictive. Realizing the ideal is like reaching the speed of light by a particle with mass: the closer it is, the more energy you have to put in, and it is impossible to achieve it anyway. However, the race gives you the feeling of the wind in your hair. I am of the opinion that this lack of full satisfaction, both with the work and with oneself as the creator is crucial for undertaking further artistic projects. Dissatisfaction is the engine that drives creativity, as long as you have enough courage and determination to face it. I would like to quote Maria Gołaszewska again:

“(...) who is satisfied with the inner sense of their own perfection, uniqueness and their own ideas, the world of fantasy and dreams, etc., may not find enough strength to take the risk of engaging in the adventure of creation” (M. Gołaszewska, *Kim jest artysta*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 1986, s. 19).

British neuroscientist Semir Zeki, in his book *Lights and Shadows of Brain Work*, presented the concept of the impossibility of realizing the ideal. He substantiated it with data

about the mechanisms of brain operation. Thinking in humans (and not only humans) involves using concepts, each of which is physically located in the brain in a specific area designated by specific neuronal connections. The basic concepts are innate, these are called hereditary brain concepts. They are unambiguous, unchanging, and unlearned, it is impossible not to have them. Such concepts are, for example, the concepts of color, beauty, and love (although the concepts of a person to be loved, a beautiful object, or individual colors are variable, but the concept itself is unchangeable). It is impossible not to have the concept of color in the brain, although it is possible not to have a separate area for the concept of some specific type of grey-brownish color. These inborn concepts have specific areas in the brain dedicated to them. The situation is different with acquired, synthetic concepts. They develop in the brain through experience. They are composed of basic building blocks in the form of innate concepts. They undergo multiple transformations throughout life. In a sense, it is a brain tendency towards Platonism, but with the difference that these abstractions are secondary to experience and are not universal for everyone. In the process of gaining experience, you can develop a concept in your brain, for example, a chair. They will consist of various images of chairs known from the material world, as well as other sub-concepts such as furniture, shape, thing, etc. This chair will, of course, be average, abstracted from reality, individual for each person, and rather non-specific. When we think of a chair, the corresponding areas of the brain light up. The next chairs we encounter along the way will change our brain chair. Zeki writes about these concepts:

„Another feature of the acquired, synthetic, concept is that it may change internally, through thought processes in the brain”

*„But whereas the capacity to generate both the experience and the concept is the province of inherited brain concepts, and is thus not hostage to the acquisition of new experiences, the generated concept of a car itself is capable of many modifications throughout post-natal life. Indeed, it could be said that the rule for acquired concepts - a synthesis of many experiences - is to be continually modified. Just as the inherited brain concept is indispensable for generating the experience, so the experience is indispensable for generating the acquired concept” (S. Zeki, *Blaski i cienie pracy mózgu : o miłości, sztuce i pogoni za szczęściem*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2017, s. 57-58).*

As I stated in the previous chapter, it is well known that the creative process molds the intellect. Semir Zeki points out that in the creative process, the transformed brain concept always precedes reality; the artist tries to express in matter his brain concept of the work,

developed through experience and reflection. At the same time, throughout the process of creation and after its completion, as a result of reflection and new experiences, the acquired brain concept changes. Thoughts evolve. The reality differs from the ideal again. Moreover, as I wrote above, matter is fraught with imperfections that the idealized concept does not have. Therefore, artists very often look for new means of expression to express the same concepts, revise the concept, change something in the work, or feel permanent dissatisfaction. I will quote two more fragments of the above-mentioned book that are extremely important to me and directly related to the problem of unfulfilled aspirations in art:

„The splendor of the brain is that it is capable, seemingly effortlessly, of generating so many concepts and thus acting as a very efficient knowledge-acquiring or, if one prefers, knowledge-generating system. The misery that this splendid machinery entails is in fact the result of its very efficiency. The incapacity of our daily experience to live up to and satisfy the synthetic concepts that the brain generates commonly results in a state of permanent dissatisfaction. This does not much matter in many cases. It may be relatively unimportant whether a bottle of wine fits my concept of the perfect wine or whether a house or a symphonic rendering corresponds to my brain-constructed ideals of them. It is quite another matter when the concept of love or a work of art is left unsatisfied”

„The latter [dissatisfaction] constitutes one of the main motive forces for artistic achievement, as well as for the constant endeavor in the face of numerous dissatisfactions to find in a work of art, or in life, a true reflection of the synthetic concept in the brain” ((S. Zeki, *Blaski i cienie pracy mózgu : o miłości, sztuce i pogoni za szczęściem*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2017, s. 61-62).

This dissatisfaction does not have to be debilitating, of course. It's not that all artists tear their hair out in despair because of art. The point is rather that the feelings of "lack of completeness of the work", the sense of inexpressibility of one's own concepts, are important elements of artistic creation, a factor driving further exploration. Evidence of these feelings can be found in quotations from artists in which they express their incomplete satisfaction with the work, their impression of the inexpressibility of the idea, or their incomplete understanding of their own concepts that change over time. I quote both real authors and literary heroes, who are created on the basis of experiences, either the writers' own or those observed in the work of other artists.



5. A compilation of four different versions of the same motif in Matisse's works, Nus Bleus Series, 1952

Premonition of Ruins. Striving as a means and goal of artistic work

In their texts and interviews, artists very often emphasize the role of striving as an extremely important element for creative work. I have the impression that most people talk about the work as a complete and satisfying fulfillment of aspirations less often, and with less certainty. One can read about the dissatisfaction accompanying creation, difficulties in expressing ideas, or the feeling of impossibility to materialize the work in the perfect form that appears to the artist in his mind. This is the feeling that I called the premonition of building ruins, whereas Semir Zeki called it the failure to realize cerebral concepts.

Henri Matisse, whose response to the problem of the failure to realize an idea was to repeatedly return to the same motifs, wrote:

“I do not renounce any of my paintings, but if I were to paint any of them again today, I would paint them completely differently. Still striving for the same goal, I choose a different path to achieve this goal” ((H. Matisse, *O malarstwie* [w:] *Artyści o sztuce*, oprac. E. Grabska i H. Morawska, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1969, s. 91).

Antoni Tàpies explained why the element of destruction is present in his artistic work:

„That what we call reality is not real at all. When I draw a head, for example, I immediately feel an urge to destroy it, to erase it, because the drawing only captures an outward appearance, and for me the vital issue is what lies behind the visual form of the head” (Cyt. [za:] A. Vidal, *Tapies: from within*, <https://tropicult.com/2015/02/ashes-to-dust-antoni-tapies-from-within/> (dostęp: 05.12.2022).

Quotes that exemplify the above hypothesis are also present in fiction literature. An example would be Emil Zola's thoughts on art put into the mouths of the characters in his novel *The Masterpiece*. Of course, the artists described in the book are fictional characters, but Zola, famous for the incredible realism of his texts, was undoubtedly an outstanding artist himself, and he also knew the Parisian community of visual artists perfectly. Contemporary critics of Édouard Manet saw the prototype of the hero of Claudius Lantier's novel Claudius Lantier in Édouard Manet, while Cézanne, who knew Zola from school, saw himself in him, which is said to have been a grudge against the writer. So Zola knew what he was writing about. And he wrote this:

„This time he felt certain of painting a masterpiece, exalted as he was by that happy day of good-fellowship, his mind pregnant with a world of things. He had discovered at last what painting meant, and he pictured himself re-entering his studio as one returns into the presence of a woman one adores, his heart throbbing violently, regretting even this one day's absence, which seemed to him endless desertion. And he would go straight to his canvas, and realise his dream in one sitting. However, at every dozen steps or so, amidst the flickering light of the gaslamps, Bongrand caught him by a button of his coat, to repeat to him that, after all, painting was an accursed trade. Sharp as he, Bongrand, was supposed to be, he did not understand it yet. At each new work he undertook, he felt as if he were making a debut; it was enough to make one smash one's head against the wall” (E. Zola, *Dzielo*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1960).

„I have told you a score of times that one was for ever beginning one's career afresh, that joy did not consist in having reached the summit, but in the climbing, in the gaiety of scaling the heights” (Ibid.)

„Then this really seems to you all right? I myself no longer dare to believe anything. My unhappiness springs from the possession of both too much and not enough critical acumen. The moment I begin a sketch I exalt it, then, if it's not successful, I torture myself” (Ibid.),

„True, I work. I work out my books to their last pages—But if you only knew, if I told you amidst what discouragement, amidst what torture! Won't those idiots take it into their heads to accuse me of pride! I, whom the imperfection of my work pursues even in my sleep—I, who never look over the pages of the day before, lest I should find them so execrable that I might afterwards lack the courage to continue. Oh, I work, no doubt, I work! I go on working, as I go on living, because I am born to it, but I am none the gayer on account of it. I am never satisfied; there is always a great collapse at the end” (Ibid.).

Although there is no evidence that Zola actually described only Cézanne when writing *The Masterpiece*, the painter actually had reasons to see himself in the person of Claudius Lantier. Cézanne, like Lantier, was truly eternally dissatisfied with his own achievements, each of his works quickly turned into ruin. He repainted his own paintings many times, and sometimes, after devoting weeks of work to a given work, he came to the conclusion that the painting was only worth destroying. He returned to some themes, trying to find new solutions to the same issues. Cézanne himself, shortly before his death, wrote in a letter to Emile Bernard:

“Now I feel better and I see the direction of my studies more clearly. Will I achieve the long-sought goal I have been striving for for so long? I want it, but until I have achieved it, there is a state of indefinite anxiety that will not disappear until I reach port, that is, I achieve something better than before and thus confirm my theories, which are always easier to create; only proving what you think poses serious difficulties. So I continue my studies.” (P. Cezanne, Z listów do Emila Bernard [w:] *Artyści o sztuce. Od Van Gogha do Picassa*, oprac. E. Grabska, H. Morawska, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa, 1969, s. 49)

This way the famous dealer and art collector Ambroise Vollard described the eternal dissatisfaction of Cézanne, whom he knew personally and, as it were, discovered to the Parisian public:

“If Cézanne was dissatisfied with his work or was disturbed, he had terrible fits of rage, and then woe to the objects that were within his reach, even on canvases. He liked to say: “You have to transform Poussin into nature.” But in the pursuit of something that, in his discouragement, he himself considered chimerical, how many paintings were destroyed! The canvas was cut into small pieces and thrown into a coal bucket, and also thrown by the painter into the middle of the garden, where it hung on a tree” (Ambroise Vollard, „Souvenirs sur Cézanne”, *Cahiers d'art*, 6e année, 1931, n° 9-10, p. 386-395, p. 389-394 [za:] <https://www.societe-cezanne.fr/2016/07/30/1899/> (dostęp: 10.12.22).

“Although Cézanne rarely encountered favorable conditions, he always took up the brush with the same optimism. But he made absolutely tyrannical demands towards the living model. He literally treated you like you were a thing. And when his son told him: “If you make Vollard come to the studio all the time, you will eventually tire him out”, Cezanne

listened, not understanding what his son was saying, because he was absorbed in his work and staring at the painting and did not think that anyone might need a rest. And only when the son began to insist: "If you tire him out, Vollard won't pose well!" — the painter woke up to reality.

-You're right, son. You have to save the model!

And so, after one hundred and fifteen sittings, Cézanne said satisfied.

"I can't say that I'm happy about this fireplace front!" ((A. Vollard, Wspomnienia handlarza obrazów, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków, 1963, s.147).

In the same memories, Marchand quotes the following anecdote about Degas, who also did not hesitate to waste many months of work because the work did not correspond to the idea that was maturing in the artist's mind:

"Another time, I came to his studio and saw that he was crushing in his hands a wax figure that he had been working on for several months.

- How so, Mr. Degas! Are you destroying it?!

"My dear," he replied, "even if you gave me a hat full of diamonds for this figurine, I would not give up the joy of destroying it so that I could make it again!" (Ibid.)

Arnulf Rainer, an artist known for his expressive technique of aggressive apply blurs and scratches to photographs, talked about the motives behind using destruction as an artistic method:



6. Arnulf Rainer, *The Great composers*, 1973.

„I cannot delight in works of art, because in a painting straightaway I always see the weak points. The intuitive desire to cover up these very defects, to block them out one by one, until nothing else can be seen, this led me to paint on top of what already exists. It was for this reason, out of love and the impulse to perfect. However, I do see that the weak points are endless, even if the canvas is already completely black, because this process of overpainting creates a new and autonomous visual structure, and once again new weak points emerge, black on black. In this way I never stop working on my canvases. I am tormented by a constant feeling of dissatisfaction” (A. Rainer: Obras Recentes, katalog wystawy, Fundação de Serralves, Porto 1992, s. 18 [za:] <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rainer-the-great-composers-t06778> , dostę: 11.12.22).



7. Georgia O'Keeffe, Special nr. 7, 1915.

Although Georgia O'Keeffe was extremely consistent in her artistic explorations, and her perfectly wrought watercolor compositions show no signs of hesitation, in a letter to a friend she included a sentence that is a perfect example of the artist's awareness that it is impossible to fully convey the idea of an art piece:

*„Did you ever have something to say and feel as if the whole side of the wall wouldn't be big enough to say it on and then sit down on the floor and try to get it on to a sheet of charcoal paper – and when you had put it down look at it and try to put into words what you have been trying to say with just marks – and then – wonder what it all is anyway – I've been crawling around on the floor till I have cramps in my feet” (Z Listu Georgii O'Keeffe do przyjaciółki Anity Pollitzer [za:] H. Drohojowska-Philip, *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*, WW Norton. New York 2004, s. 101).*

The Scottish painter Alan Davie, known for his extremely expressive paintings in which symbols and shapes overlap, creating compositions on the border between abstraction and figuration, emphasized the role of intuition in his creative process. In my opinion, the working method chosen by him perfectly reflects the difficulty an artist encounters when trying to materialize in the matter the fleeting and changing inner world of his own ideas. Davie painted automatically, relying only on his own subconscious. Not being satisfied with the results, like Master Frenhofer from the novel *Unknown Masterpiece* by Balzac, he covered with new layers the fragments of the painting that did not suit him, thus creating multi-layered works in progress in which hundreds of other paintings are hidden beneath the visible last layer. The artist revealed his motifs:

„When I am working, I am aware of a striving, a yearning, the making of many impossible attempts at a kind of transmutation - a searching for a formula for the magical conjuring of the unknowable. Many times the end seems just within reach, only to fly to pieces before me as I reach for it. In this respect I feel very close to the alchemists of old; and, like them, I have in the end reached some enlightenment in the realization that my work entails a kind of symbolic self-involvement in the very processes of life itself” (Alan Davie oprac. A. Bowness, Lund Humphries, London, 1967).

Another example of an artist who believed that a work of art is only a record of striving for an ideal, proof of an attempt to express his own visions, which in fact are impossible to express using matter, was Picasso. The artist has expressed himself in this spirit many times. His extremely searching creative attitude, which results in a rich and extremely diverse artistic output, is a testimony to the fact that this extremely creative artist was

constantly trying new means of expression to express his own concepts. Let the following two quotes be proof:

“Braque always said that in painting, only intention counts, and this is true. What matters is what you want to do, not what you do. This is what is important. In Cubism, what ultimately mattered was what you wanted to do, the intention you had. And this cannot be painted” (Pablo Picasso [w:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. D. Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, s. 4).

“How do you want the viewer to experience my painting the way I experienced it? The image comes to me from afar; who knows how far away, I invented it, I saw it, I painted it, and yet the next day I can't see what I did. How can you enter my dreams?” (Pablo Picasso [w:] *Malarze mówią – o sobie, o swojej sztuce*, oprac. J. Guze, WL, Kraków 1963, s. 249).

Oskar Kokoszka also expressed his views on expressing the inexpressible through an artistic work. In his opinion, art was a way to introduce a spiritual element into life that cannot otherwise be transferred to the world of matter:

„For the growth of the inner life can never be brought into any scientific formula, whatever the technician and the scientist of the soul may try. The life of the soul is expressed by man in his art. The mystery of the soul is like that of a closed door. When you open it, you see something which was not there before” (Oskar Kokoszka [w:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. D. Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, s. 17).

Another expressionist, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, wrote in a similar way. He also, like Kokoszka, associated the impossibility of transferring one's own visions to the canvas during creation with spirituality:

„This great mystery which stands behind all events and things [sometimes like a phantom] can be seen or felt when we talk to a person or stand in a landscape or when flowers or objects suddenly speak to us. We can never represent it directly, we can only symbolize it in forms and words” (Ernst Ludwig Kirchner [w:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. D. Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York 1985, s. 28)



8. Alexander Calder, *Two Spheres within a Sphere*, 1931

A good example of the issue of the impossibility of expressing the fullness of work in matter is the following quote from Alexander Calder. He defined the effect of the artist's work only as a sketch of the idea. I believe that these words referred to the work reproduced above:

„When I have used spheres and discs, I have intended that they should represent more than what they just are... A ball of wood or a disc of metal is rather a dull object without this sense of something emanating from it. When I use two circles of wire intersecting at right angles, this to me is a sphere... What I produce is not precisely what I have in mind - but a sort of sketch, a man-made approximation” (Alexander Calder [za:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. D. Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York 1985, s. 96).

A slightly different case is the statement of Theo van Doesburg, who transfers the inexpressibility of ideas from the artist-work of art relationship to the work-recipient relationship. Inexpressibility results from the impossibility of understanding the concept by the viewer, whose inner world is different from that of the artist and who will never see the work as its author sees it. This is related to what I wrote earlier about the Eco's concept of an open work. Theo van Doesburg:

„The artist speaks from within his interior and the exterior worlds in words and images which come easily to him because they are elements of the world in which he alone belongs. The public's worlds, however, are totally different and the words with which it expresses its ideas are entirely characteristic of its own world. The perceptions of different people, each of whom inhabit different interior and exterior worlds, clearly cannot coincide” (Theo van Doesburg [za:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. D. Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York 1985, s. 84).

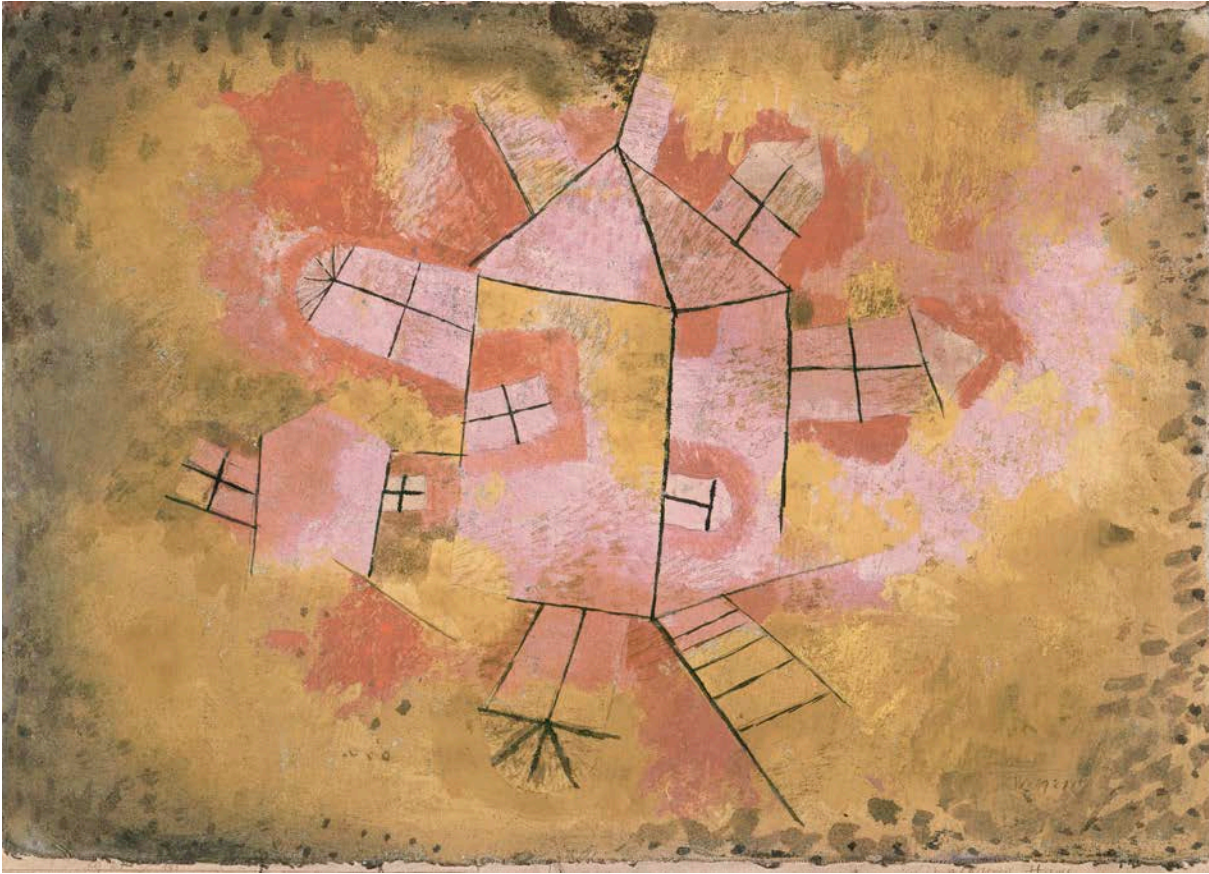
Paul Klee's texts about art, often being a part of his scientific work at the Bauhaus, were characterized by a free, almost poetic style. This extremely prolific, constantly experimenting artist wrote about his aspirations:

„Sometimes I dream of a work of really great breadth, ranging through the whole region of element, object, meaning, and style. This, I fear, will remain a dream, but it is a good thing even now to bear the possibility occasionally in mind (...)

We must go on seeking it!

We have found parts, but not the whole!”

(Paul Klee, *On modern art* [za:] *Modern Artists on Art*, Ten Unabridged Essays, oprac. Robert L. Herbert, Prentice Hall Press, New York, 1986, s.90)



9. Paul Klee, *Rotating House*, 1921.

Pierre Alechinsky, a Belgian painter working in France and a member of the CoBrA group, wrote about the course of the creative process, in which it is not always known what the final result will be while it is still ongoing but in which the artist tries to express his own fluid and undefined ideas. His expressive painting, inspired by Eastern calligraphy, in which shapes known from the material world are intertwined with forms that originate only in the painter's imagination, perfectly illustrates the thoughts expressed by the artist in the following quotes:

„When I paint, I liberate monsters, my own monsters-and for these I am responsible. They are the manifestation of all the doubts, searches, and groping for meaning and expression which all artists experience, and at the same time they represent my doubts, my searches, and my most profound and diffuse difficulties. One does not choose the content, one submits to it” (Pierre Alechinsky)[za:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. Dore Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York 1985, s. 111)

„A picture exist in its own right, it refers to nothing, no exterior scheme or idea. I start a painting. Will anything become of it? Will I be distracted, will I block the essential moment of inspiration? I don't know. Let's just go on. How far? Until the point when laziness takes over again. Is that why I suddenly stop? But no, I do not stop, I go on, I start again. . . . Ideas and their consequences, facts and the consequences they draw from Ideas, arrive, flow, die, flounder in depths, reappear” (Ibid. s.112)



10. Pierre Alechinsky, *La Nuit*, fragment, 1952.

Israeli op art and kinetic art artist Ya'acov Agam, explained the motives behind creating sculptures that play with the viewer's eyes, which change with the movement of the person looking at them, revealing different images:

„From my very first experiments, it has always been my intention to create a work of art existing beyond the visible, getting away from the image, which could only be grasped in stages, with the awareness that what one had there was but the appearance of a partial and dynamic revelation, and not the finalized perpetuation of an existing thing. My aim is to show the visible as possibility in a state of perpetual becoming” (Ja’akov Agram [za:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. Dore Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York 1985, s. 160).



11. Ya’acov Agam, *Fire and Water Fountain*, Tel Aviv, 2015.

Philip Guston, a representative of abstract expressionism, was characterized by a searching creative attitude. He had enough courage and creative dissatisfaction to completely change his means of expression several times during his life. Having achieved success as an abstractionist and feeling that this type of painting was exhausted for him, he returned to figuration. He wrote about his artistic struggles:

„Failures are always around, waiting. It has always been mystifying to me, why, on a lucky day, the images do take hold, grip, and there is no urge to clear it off. This temporary satisfaction, very temporary, is always a surprise to me. Then a sort of chronic restlessness enters the studio and you begin again” (Philip Guston [za:] *Twentieth century artists on art*, oprac. D. Ashton, Pantheon Books, New York 1985, s. 211).



12. Philip Guston, *Couple in Bed*, 1977.

The words of the Northern Irish artist Siobhán Hapaska confirm the need to make new attempts to express the idea that is stored in the artist's mind. To do this, in her opinion, one must constantly look for new means of expression, new ways, even if the idea remains the same. This artist, born in 1963, creates unusual sculptures that are difficult to classify and are somewhat reminiscent of the activities of members of the Arte Povera group. By juxtaposing familiar elements with completely abstract forms, natural and synthetic forms, and materials that seem to be very incompatible with each other, the artist extracts new

meanings from things, builds tensions, and uses the form efficiently. Her works are close to me because of my interest in natural forms as well as the contrast between what is natural and what comes from the world transformed by humans. Hapaska said in an interview:

“I always had a clear idea in my mind of what my work was about. It is very difficult to let go of the things that make me the person I am, but it is also necessary to think anew about the ways to manifest these ideas. If you can say it this way, can you also find another way to say it?”(Siobhán Hapaska, Another way to say it, interview by Hester R. Westley [w:] Talking Art 2, Art Monthly interviews with artists since 2007, Ridinghouse, London 2017, s. 78).



13. Siobhán Hapaska, *Delirious*, 1996.



14. Cornelia Parker, *Thirty pieces of silver*, 1988/89.

The next person whose statement I would like to quote is a very interesting British artist, Cornelia Parker. Her activities are characterized by diversity; the artist uses various media; her works cover a wide range of topics, from literature through climate issues to human rights; and she often uses destruction as a means of expression. Although it does not speak to dissatisfaction or incompleteness of the work, it does raise an important issue related to these matters: variability of purpose. Her words can be considered evidence of the fluidity of aspirations, which probably result from the quickly changing idea of the work that the inquisitive artist has in her mind:

„I remember, years ago, I was on a panel discussing *Intention in making art*' at Tate Britain. I found that idea terrifying, intention is very hard to describe. There's an Eastern saying about how you can describe a hole. The hole is not made of wood or marble, but the {material} around the hole is what defines it because you can't quantify what the hole is because it's a negative space. In the same way you never see your true self, only a reflection in a mirror or by how people react to you. Somehow intention can only be described by its opposite; if you try to focus on it, it falls away. I've just been in Lima and I gave a guided tour of my museum show there and somebody in the audience said, *What's the punctum - the punctum of the work?*' I said, *I don't do punctums!*' It's not pointless, but somehow, that's not the point" (Cornelia Parker, *Stuff*, interview by Lisa le Feuvre [w:] *Talking Art 2, Art Monthly interviews with artists since 2007*, Ridinghouse, London 2017, s. 139).



15. Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010.

The last quote will be a statement by Christian Boltanski, in which he talks about the inexpressibility of his own ideas, and also cites the history of problems with transferring his own aspirations to canvas, which Alberto Giacometti allegedly experienced. Boltanski was interested in the anonymous past, the memory of forgotten tragedies and their victims, life

that passes unnoticed, and death. In his works, he uses photographs of anonymous people and things that do not belong to anyone. He said about his aspirations:

*„I always knew that I was going to fail. I try and I try, but I fail all the time because you can't hold on to life. Also, if you try to preserve a life, you kill a life. If I put these glasses in a vitrine in a museum, they are not going to be destroyed but they are not going to be glasses any more. They are going to be imaginary glasses. Every time you try to preserve something, you kill it. For this reason what I was trying to do was impossible, and I knew it. But perhaps it was important to me to try. I'm not Alberto Giacometti, unfortunately. I love Giacometti, but I'm not Giacometti What I love about Giacometti is that he tried every day to make a portrait of his wife or his brother but he was never happy with it, so he tried again and again, I think there is something about the act of making art; it is a way of fighting against the fact of death and disappearance, a way of trying to catch a life, even though it is totally impossible” (Christian Boltanski *Wait and hope*, interview by Rikke Hansen [w:] *Talking Art 2, Art Monthly interviews with artists since 2007*, Ridinghouse, London 2017, s. 139).*

Similar quotations could be multiplied, but I am afraid that this work might seem quite boring. The selection of examples I chose is completely subjective; I tried to choose artists who lived in relatively recent times, those whose activities I consider interesting, and, above all, those whose reproduced works I would like to include in my work. I believe that I managed to provide evidence of the existence of a feeling among various artists, which I have metaphorically called "building ruins", which results from the inability to express in the material space of the work something as variable and non-specific as the creator's idea. An idea that, as Semir Zeki put it, changes with the creative process and the development that follows and that, while remaining connected with the material world in the relationship with which it arises, is at the same time a product of thoughts and feelings. I believe that this feeling of uncertainty is the reason why, having completed one work, the artist finds the strength and enthusiasm to take up the hardships again.

About plant ruins

Evolution of the doctoral series

My interest in the issue of striving for the ideal and the impossibility of achieving it began while working on my master's diploma. It was a period of great dissatisfaction with the results of my work, each subsequent attempt to materialize my ideas into a work of art resulted in disappointment. However, I came to the right conclusion that since I could not create a perfect work, I had to be satisfied with what I could achieve. The simple, maybe even trivial conclusion brought me relief: after all, apart from what is hidden in the painting, i.e., the author's thoughts and his aspirations, the painting is primarily just a layer of paint. I decided to devote my master's series to this unsophisticated but true idea. Therefore, I titled my diploma simply *Paint*. It concerned the pursuit of the ideal and the aforementioned material structure of the image. It consisted of paintings that had been repainted many times, the paint of which was so thick that it symbolically and literally separated from the canvas; layered paintings, made of many layers of paint removed from another canvas; paintings without a canvas, made of just painting; as well as figurative paintings, also without canvas, with deliberately banal motifs taken from newspapers, painted on thin films of acrylic paint. One, slightly different series of works depicted a river bank, but the method of its creation was similar to the other paintings: the river motif was created by imprinting a blot of paint on the canvas. The creation of this diploma was accompanied by reading books such as Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece* and *Too Loud a Solitude* by Bohumil Hrabal, which I believe contributed to the creation of this type of work.

After graduation, I continued with similar issues, touching on various threads of what I had formulated in my diploma. My activities were constantly carried out in several directions, on the one hand, they were various types of stories about painting itself and its technical side, on the other hand, figurative works, mostly without a backing, on thin films of acrylic paint. I usually deliberately chose motifs that meant something to me only temporarily, of little importance. Just like before from newspapers, now I deliberately obtained them from the Internet. These were fleeting associations, the results of my travels without leaving home - the fruits of everyday reading, other people's photos seen on the Internet. I still used working methods such as scratching paint and repainting.

An important moment was the creation of works from the series *Scratched Images*. This series, although important to me for personal reasons, was shown almost anywhere because, at that time, I had had no prospects of any exhibition for a long time. They were paintings in the 140 x 100 format on plywood. The action consisted of applying many layers of acrylic paint, and on each of them I painted a motif that was interesting to me, sometimes it was just a plane of color, a pattern, a transition between colors, or sometimes a picture representing something, in other words, what I wanted to paint. At the same time, these paintings were not intended for the public; after painting, I scratched them off, and something new was created in their place. The only evidence of this action were the accumulated paint chips as well as the canvas itself, which had traces of previous layers. I didn't document the process.

The Scratched Images were a liminal moment for me. I felt a constant need to paint, but at the same time I saw no point in producing new works: my living space was shrinking, I was not at all satisfied with the results, and there was no prospect of exhibitions where I could show these paintings. They remained private.

Over time, I became bored with this extreme attitude. I concluded that in my actions, I had been focusing too much on dissatisfaction and destruction, as well as on my own issues. I noticed that so far I had been implementing my concepts by creating paintings using painting media, but the selection of a motif had been always a secondary issue for me. I felt a strong need to change this state of affairs, I wanted to express myself primarily through motifs, and my interest in representational paintings was growing. The first response to this need was the creation of the Google Igloos polyptych. It was a work in many respects similar to previous works - a film of acrylic paint without a canvas, a seemingly unimportant motif taken from the Internet, as indicated by the title. But in fact it was a carefully selected motif, chosen due to its meaning and atmosphere. An Igloo seems to me as a symbol of overcoming a difficult situation unscathed, proof of human creativity and not giving in to adversity. At the same time, it is the work of human hands and can be understood as a symbol of an artistic work in which snow expresses the matter being shaped by an artist. The awareness of the existence of problems such as global warming or globalization makes this motif melancholic again. Therefore, it is a surprising object of uncertain meaning, having a very interesting form. The fact that the motif was taken from the Internet referred to my previous doubts - is there any point in painting when images are everywhere and in such quantities?

*

When I started my studies at the doctoral school, I was not sure what direction my work on the diploma series would take. I haven't been used to planning my artistic explorations well in advance, but in this case, it was supposed to plan for as long as four years. At the same time, I was extremely happy about the new perspectives that appeared unexpectedly in front of me with joining the school. Along with the creation of the diploma series, a text was to be created that would constitute a coherent whole with the works. That made the task even more difficult. Since writing is also a creative activity for me, but of a completely different kind, it seemed to me an extremely difficult task to start working on these two projects at the same time. The creative process is similar to the growth of a tree: the main goal is, of course, to be as close to the sun as possible, but the tree produces many branches that sometimes go in completely unexpected directions, depending on external conditions. I was afraid that these two trees might grow completely separate, and I didn't want them to suffocate each other. For me, one of the best aspects of creativity is unpredictability—twists and turns that appear as a result of things that happen suddenly—and the obligation to present a detailed Individual Plan of Work at the beginning of the studies seemed to me to be something truly inhibitive.

As the previous form of imaging had become exhausted for me, I had to look for something new. My decision was to implement my concepts solely through the selection of motifs. I felt the desire to return to two dimensions. I also wanted to move my painting away from the area of self-reflection into a neutral space. Furthermore, I wanted to explore the outside world and, using forms taken from it, present my personal stories only indirectly and in the background. I dreamed of painting similar to the works of the old masters, in that everything happened in it thanks to the motif and the way it was presented. For me, the natural area in which I started looking for motifs was nature. The urban one, which is very close to me because of my lifestyle, interests and habits. I spend a lot of time, when I have it, walking. Every day, I observe the urban ecosystem. Nature walks around the city are my favorite form of spending free time. I have always been passionate about biology. I like reading about plants and their physiology and watching nature films.

Another stimulus that made me decide to look for motives to express my doctoral concept in the world of urban nature was my growing internal need to draw attention to this

phenomenon. As Menno Schilthuizen writes in his book *The Evolution in the Urban Jungle*, in a few dozen or a few hundred years, urban ecosystems may become the dominant form of nature on our urbanized planet. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the seriousness of the situation and start to shape cities in such a way that they will be places of symbiosis between humans and other species, not lifeless ruins. Ruins that could grow in place of the natural environment, offering nothing in return, leading to a natural disaster of which we will also be victims. While observing urban plants, I thought that images of them could illustrate the idea that I wanted to pursue as part of my doctoral research. I noticed an analogy between the creative process and the processes that occur in nature. I started observing, taking photographs, and at the same time thinking about the connections between art and nature and art and biology. The result of these activities and reflections is a series of paintings and this text.

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The connection between art and nature is obvious. Art draws from nature. I do not believe that Aristotle's views on the mimetic nature of art can ever be considered an outdated concept. We can paint abstract pictures, create performances or practice conceptual art, but we will not free ourselves from imitation. It does not have to be direct, manifesting itself in the form of figural images. It is enough that there is a similarity of forms or imitation of processes. Rhythms in a painting can imitate rhythms in nature, pure color planes imitate and thus evoke things that we see in the world in such colors. We would rather look with disbelief at a person without any visual impairments who would associate the red color with water or state that green color is not associated with vegetation. Even if the representation of forms known from the visible world was not the author's intention, the viewer will often see them in the painting himself. The temptation to look for known forms in abstract paintings (preferably human and animal forms) is irresistible and definitely biologically determined.

However, I am also interested in another dimension of art's mimetism. Imitation is included in the act of creation itself. The creative act is a dynamic, changing process involving the creation of new, previously non-existent beings out of the pure need to create. It is a process similar to life itself. Of course, works of art are not alive; they do not have the ability to self-replicate or counteract entropy, the opposition of which is a necessary condition for any system to be described as an animate form. The creator's constant participation is

required in the creation of a work. That is why art is not life, but it has been inspired by it from the very beginning of its history.

The first work created during my doctoral studies was a series of paintings titled *Hollows*. The idea came to me spontaneously while walking around the Stary Gaj preserve in Lublin. I went there to calm down a bit and clear my head of the persistent thought that I don't know what awaits me or what direction to take, especially artistically.



16. Małgorzata Pawlak, *Hollow 26*, 2021.

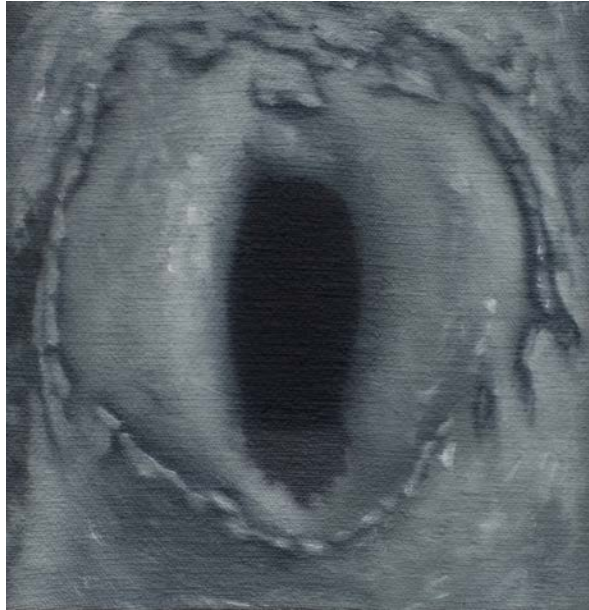
The motif found me on its own, it stood before my eyes as a visualization of the question about the meaning. I thought it was a good idea for a series—a trivial but intriguing image.

I had been thinking for a long time about looking for motifs that were uncertain in meaning. Furthermore, I didn't plan that *The Hollows* would be part of the doctoral exhibition, it was supposed to be a holiday joke, a break from intellectually exhausting studies at school. I had

been preparing for an exhibition at Labyrinth Gallery, and I thought this idea was quite funny and worth implementing. Over time, my involvement has increased, and from time to time I add new ones and collect documentation. Now I think they fit well into the atmosphere that accompanied me at that time: uncertainty of what awaits me, excitement at the thought of facing the unknown, and at the same time fear that, just as something nasty may be lurking in a hollow tree, I may also end up being deceived by my search for new ideas. I think that similar feelings accompany the creation of all new artistic projects: excitement and, at the same time, fear, curiosity mixed with uncertainty. I like this series because it is light and mysterious. This is my Rorschach test, everyone sees what they see, even if they see what they see. Although they look different visually, they remind me of the works of Jan Dobkowski or O'Keeffe - organic, erotic associations, undefined meaning that is projected onto the image by the viewer himself.



17. Jan Dobkowski, *Owocowanie*, 1970.



18. Małgorzata Pawlak, *Hollow 26*, 2021.



19. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Black Iris 6*, 1936.

The coronavirus pandemic, which began halfway through my first year of study, helped me decide what my PhD would look like. It caused me to finally decide that it would be oil paintings. It forced me to take my walks mainly at night. I walked a lot, but I hardly met anyone, the city was completely deserted. I was thinking about life, about humanity, and about death. Also, I was seeing wild animals more and more often and watching urban plants come to life. I imagined how everything would look if our species became extinct as a result of a pandemic or some other disaster. I thought about what the ruins of our civilization would look like. As a result, I came up with the idea of night vision images.

The appearance of such optical tools as the camera obscura or the photo camera left its mark on the formal aspects of the paintings of the artists who used them. I chose night vision as a design tool. I liked the atmosphere resulting from the characteristic arrangement of lights in the night vision image, as well as the associations it evokes. I think everyone associates night vision mainly with photos from hunting, the battlefield, or monitoring. I was also interested in extracting additional meanings that appear when the objects in the painting, instead of in the safe, well-known daylight, are portrayed in the uncertain night environment.



20. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Chase*, 2022.

Initially, I photographed animals. My favorite work from this period is a series of paintings with slugs. I liked them because of their mysteriousness and the fact that they evoke ambivalent feelings. Just like my ideas for paintings that come to me suddenly, snails appear out of nowhere after the rain, and when it's dry, they disappear. They are almost invisible during the day, but at night, there are plenty of them. I imagine how long it would take them to cover the same distance as I covered in the city on my walks. Sometimes I also feel like a snail. I have a great will to push forward, but sometimes I get the impression that my work, my aspirations, everything is going very, very slowly, and I never reach the horizon of my plans. It's a race against yourself. I decided to insert here a detail of the painting titled Pursuit (Pic. 21).

At the beginning, with my night vision camera, I "hunted" for animals, but soon I noticed that the botany also looked very interesting through the night vision: the central light gave a strange, unreal look, the shadows were unnatural, and ordinary things looked unusual. The ability to look at known things from an unknown angle is crucial to creation. I liked that the plants we associate with their colorfulness are black and white in night vision. Moreover, we used to see them during the day because we are diurnal, but at night, they are also active, and nocturnal animals only see them in the dark. I also thought about the analogies between the growth of plants and the creative process: the "growing" of the work in the creator's mind, its maturing, and then dying. I decided that a series of works with plant motifs would perfectly illustrate my idea. An idea was created in my head for paintings based on night vision photos, which, thanks to unusual lighting, monochrome and the selection of motifs, will have an extraordinary atmosphere. Paintings that, thanks to showing plants at different stages of their growth, will be able to symbolize the artist's aspirations in the creative process and, at the same time, will tell many other stories, including those that have their source in the consciousness and memory of the recipient of the work, who, when faced with the image, interprets it in their own way.

As I stated above, I would not like the works in my doctoral series to be explicit. I hope that the meaning of the series will remain open to the recipient. At the same time, when I was working on it, looking for motives, when I was planning its shape as a whole, I was

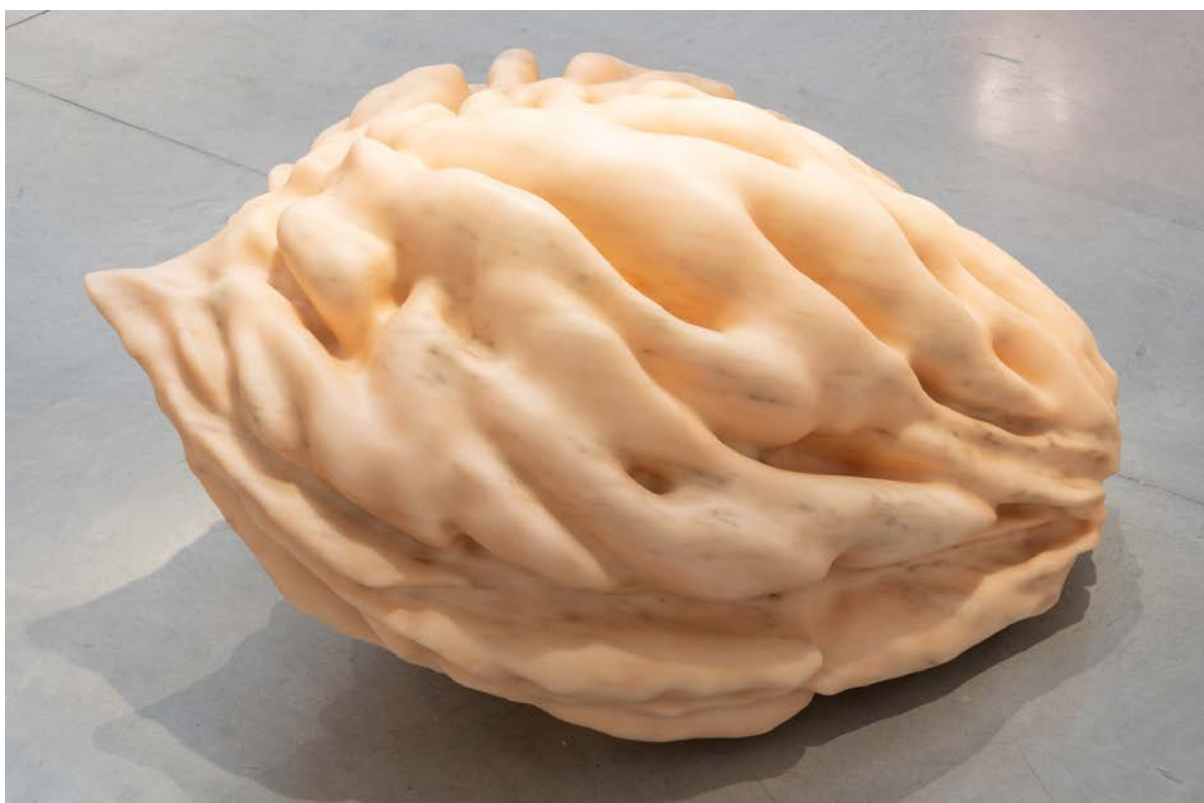
definitely thinking about the topic of my PhD, about the "maturation" and "growth" of a concept, a work, its gradual withering away, its ruin, after which something new comes. Therefore, for me personally, this series will be a metaphor for the artist's aspirations, including my own. Just as life is a constant process of transformation—a constant pursuit of perfection and processing matter to create new, previously unknown entities—creation is an equally similar process. The beginning of a plant's life cycle is a seed, seemingly something minuscule, so that from the perspective of a human, most seeds are so small as to be almost nothing. But when we think that huge California redwoods grew from something so small that a seed thawed from a glacier can sprout after 30,000 years, we realize what enormous power there is in an ordinary seed.

The seed from which a work sprouts is the creator's unjustified need to bring a new being to life. I have never understood why some people have this kind of potential energy while others have no desire to create anything. I also don't know why I have that energy. All I know is that I've had it for as long as I can remember. Maybe curiosity is at play? The desire to touch your own thoughts so that they become material reality? Maybe it's about counteracting the boredom that comes with constantly watching only what you know well? But does life know why it grows from a seed or from a zygote? This stored energy is what is important.



21. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Seedling*, 2023

Here's a picture of a maple seedling I encountered on the lawn near the doctoral school. It is probably not there anymore. A sexually mature maple produces approximately 10,000 seeds per year. Only some of them become seedlings, and none may reach adulthood. You can compare it to creation: many ideas arise from a creative need, but only a few of them turn into paintings, and even fewer give rise to something fruitful enough to be the theme for many art works. Most ideas do not stand the test of time, they die at the first contact with matter, sometimes even earlier if they are rejected. I've been thinking a lot about how important, for every artist, including me, the moment of germination of a work is—the moment of deciding that an idea is worth implementing. This is a big responsibility, after all, in these moments, we decide who we want to be and what we will tell others. Time, energy, and resources are valuable, no one wants to waste them on projects without a future. In the past, the moment of first confronting an idea with matter was associated with enormous stress for me. Often, the fear led to resignation. Over time, I realized that it is better to choose the best possible idea from those you have, even if none of them seem particularly good, and patiently make an effort to nurture it carefully, than to endlessly search for a brilliant idea, thus wasting time and energy and creating nothing as a result.



22. Hannah Levy, *Untitled*, 2022.



23. Teresa Murak, *Form*, 1975.

Quite a few associations between this painting and the works of other artists come to my mind. Seeds in particular often appear as motifs in a work of art in very different contexts, although it is possible that the connection with the germination of the idea itself was also on the minds of other creators, although they did not have to devote the same work to it. It is quite an obvious analogy. Teresa Murak's sprouting coat, Ai Weiwei's stack of handmade ceramic sunflower seeds at Tate Modern, and Hannah Levy's huge marble apricot seed that I saw at the Venice Biennale are just a few examples.

The painting with the seedling also reminds me of another thing: creativity is not an easy way of life. Many initially energetic artists go out because they did not find the right soil, they missed their time. This does not always mean that they were not strong enough, because although art often sprouts in strange places, it needs at least a little fertilizer to grow.

A motif that has interested me for a long time is a plant that grows in some unexpected, unfavorable place. I was always fascinated by the sight of a flower sticking out of some crack or a small tree that sprouted and destroyed the asphalt. This ordinary sight, perhaps completely uninteresting to many, is always fascinating to me because of its meaning. For me, views like this are symbols of great determination. All creation requires determination, and life often requires it too. Many times, I thought I was a maniac. I insisted on this lifestyle even though I often had the impression that nothing was favorable to me, that my situation was hopeless, and that my talent was insufficient. Even people close to me suggested that I should quit. I'm not the only one who sometimes feels like a water lily that decided to sprout in the desert. When reading the biographies of artists, even those widely considered outstanding today, we often learn that their lives were not a bed of roses. Even a painter as beloved by the public today as Monet struggled to make ends meet for a large part of his life, and the same water lilies, stacks and cathedrals that today attract art lovers in the world's largest museums were objects of ridicule. There would be no works by Gieryski, Cezanne, Rembrandt, Goya, Vermeer, Monet or van Gogh if these artists were not maniacs unable to compromise. I have been looking for a long time for a motif that will visualize the thoughts described here. Ultimately, I decided to paint a hollyhock, which over the following years I watched grow from the grate in the stairs leading to the back of the pharmacy at the intersection of Zana and Filaretów streets in Lublin. I had photographed this view in the past, but in previous years I was not satisfied with the results of the shoot. This year, the hollyhock grew to a height of two meters and bloomed abundantly, although its substrate was

only a handful of earth under a small metal grate. I decided to paint a narrow frame with a fragment of a grid and lush leaves.



24. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of the *Hollyhock*, 2023.

As an example of a work similar to *The Hollyhock*, I chose the work of the American hyperrealist Tony Matelli. While browsing the Internet in search of the author's interpretation of works from this series, I did not find much (the artist emphasizes the role of intuition, expresses reluctance to decode his works, says about *Weeds* that they were primarily intended to surprise with their presence, to give the impression of real weeds growing in the gallery). A reflection came to me. While viewing the sculptor's website, I noticed that his achievements are so extensive that, given that his works are hyperrealistic, there is no way he could have done them himself. I read that he has six assistants helping him on a daily basis (sometimes maybe even more). Of course, this practice is not unknown in the history of art, many works by top artists are created this way. However, I thought that, in comparison to his sculpture, my work benefits even more: I, an artist working on the periphery of the art world, compared to artists such as Matelli, probably belong to the dark matter, the precariat of the art market. I do something as desperate, absurd and out of step with our times as making my



25. Tony Matelli, *Weed 564*, 2020.

own works with my own fair hands. I am one of many like that, a common species. I am watching works by a famous artist online. Works that have some visual similarities to mine, but we do not have a lot in common. I am a weed growing in some hole, Tony Matelli is a Californian almond fuelled with fertilizer (in 2019, one weed costed \$22,000). Interestingly, such top artists actually derive profits from the recipient's idea of what the artist's work looks like, which is created by creatives, who touch the matter of the work. I think that the average recipient visiting leading institutions does not know how much of the work of top artists is done by their assistants, often also art graduates, sometimes having their own artistic projects. The recipient probably imagines a genius artist single-handedly sculpting 1,000 weeds out of bronze. The buyer of the work may also imagine this, and the artist tries to create the impression that this is actually the case: "I collect the plants, shape each strand, polish and paint them, and then assemble them together with my assistants who have been working with me for a long time." Someone who has never done similar work may actually think that it was the work of one outstanding man. I don't evaluate this practice negatively; this is what preparing great projects for leading institutions looks like; creation does not have to be about struggling with the matter on your own, and I really like Tony Matelli's *Weeds*. I also don't feel bad about where I am, I don't even compete with artists of this sort, I belong to a different world. Top artists also have to give up something: they lose creative solitude in the studio and contact with the matter of their own art work, their occupation resembles the position of a director of a factory serving great artistic events of great capitalism. They are also cogs, just in a different machine.

The time of creation is a joyful or painful process of growth, encountering difficulties and overcoming them alternately. When creating, sometimes one has the impression that they are stuck at a dead end and are not moving forward, that new ideas and new solutions are as weak as the old ones. However, looking back, one can see that even in these difficult moments, some progress was made, but being disappointed due to its unsatisfactory pace, one did not notice it. I chose the motif of tendrils precisely because they reminded me of artistic development: sometimes a small step forward or upward, sometimes only to the side, sometimes a complete change of direction, patient striving. I have always been fascinated by their look. It was proof that the plant knows perfectly well what is happening around it. Scientists were also interested, as climbing species have played an important role in the history of plant physiology research. Their form and mechanism of operation are also fascinating: perfect, sometimes very long springs controlled by touch. When the plant,

growing a long tendril, feels that it cannot grasp anything, it dies back. Therefore, it must somehow analyze its surroundings and decide whether it is worth continuing to invest energy in this place or whether it is better to grow on the other side. In life, as in creating, we face similar decisions, sometimes an action turns out to be a waste of time, and a decision to change direction must be made. Sometimes it is worth continuing to grow in the same way and trying to overcome the obstacle.



26. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Tendril 1*, 2023

I came up with the idea for these paintings while reading Darwin's works and biographies. Darwin is mainly known for his groundbreaking theory of evolution. Perhaps many people imagine him as a brilliant, infallible genius, dedicated only to inventing great theories and not wasting time on trivial matters. However, reality is never like that, and it wasn't like that for Darwin either. His life was spent making small observations, such as watching beetles. He devoted a lot of time to researching the physiology of plants, which cannot be done otherwise than by patiently noting small changes (for example, his research

on the closing mechanism of the Venus flytrap involved mechanical, single stimulation of micro bristles on the plant at a specific time). Mendel's patient and very meticulous ten-year observations on peas also led to the understanding of patterns of inheritance of traits. Great people build their great achievements by spending time observing what is very small and unimportant to most. Those who want to climb high must patiently grow in a certain direction, they must also assess whether they are heading in the right direction, yet sometimes change it, so they need the ability to assess their own position, a bit of luck and intuition, but above all, persistent striving. Tendrils often appear as a decorative element in old paintings, especially in Dutch still lives. They were portrayed, probably mainly because of their unusual shape, although probably many artists who closely observed nature wondered about their mysterious physiology.



27. Albrecht Durer, detail of *Madonna with the Iris*.



28. Clara Peeters, *Still life with grapes on a tazza, a basket of fruit, two crayfish on a plate and a squirrel*, 1612-15.

I painted a series of paintings with a rose, but none of them included what is most associated with roses—a beautiful flower. I thought it was quite funny. The rose is a motif in many paintings, but it probably rarely appears in this form. There is a story associated with this series: There was a multi-flowered rose bush, very pretty, large and blooming profusely. It was the main decoration of a rather neglected square in Lublin, which I like, although for most people it does not look interesting, and for many it is rather a place for walking dogs, secretly drinking alcohol, or for hooligan interventions. I went there many times to see this bush, which was growing wonderfully, although no one had cared for it for years. Until one day, an angry caretaker showed up. He shaved and broke off the rose, turning the large bush into a bush several dozen centimeters high. This wouldn't be so strange, because drastic rejuvenation pruning is sometimes good for a plant, but this treatment took place at the wrong time of year—the plant had already started its vegetation and, after being trimmed, it had been heavily losing juices for many days. I thought it was over because it didn't look good. To my surprise, after some time, it started foliating. So far, it hasn't lost its determination to grow, and I haven't lost my determination to create, so I have painted a few

pictures. After some time, I was able to paint the painting *Regrowth*, and now, as I write this, it is summer and my rose is blooming. It's still weak and eaten by aphids, but I guess it'll be fine.



29. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Regrowth*, 2023.

I interpret my paintings of the rose in various ways. A rose may be a person who is unhappy with the situation, who was sawed down by someone or something, or who may have even sawed themselves down but then managed to sprout back. Everyone sometimes experiences such weaknesses and disintegrations which, as stated in the psychological theory of positive disintegration by Kazimierz Dąbrowski, may ultimately lead to achieving a higher level of development. In creativity, such disintegrations are very important: moments of dissatisfaction, feelings of lack of direction, which I wrote about before, lead to the negation of previous results. When these emotions are properly used, they lead to new solutions and progress. Before new concepts appeared, before taking a new path, I always felt emptiness, uncertainty, and a lack of purpose.

The rose can mean a project, a direction of creative activities, interests, or ideas that the artist rejects, gives up on, not believing in their potential, and which reappear after time in a different, better configuration. This is a common phenomenon, in fact, everyone wanders around their "backyard", and every artist is haunted by certain recurring thoughts and topics.

The rose can be interpreted as a story of sadness and pure suffering, but sadness from which something new and positive can be born, which finally passes.

The rose can talk about time—about a second frozen forever, and then, regrown, about a sudden leap into the future, where everything looks different. About the relativity of the perception of time, which sometimes seems to flow very slowly, sometimes goes very quickly, and which we perceive thanks to our ability to associate images of the present with images seen in the past and thus perceive changes.



30. Gerhard Richter, *Rosen*, 1994

The rose may be the story of what I have already written about in this chapter: observing seemingly unimportant things that may, however, have some positive results.

First, the painting with the cut rose was created. Juice flows from it. I caught a swollen drop just before it dripped. I will hold this moment forever. Since I was a child, I have been fascinated by observing the formation of droplets. I was amazed by the fact that when there is little water, they can form a completely regular ball. I liked to sprinkle water on the table and then combine these individual drops into irregular puddles, observing that the water on the surface of the drop was moving and that the drop could clearly reflect my face and the entire world around me. These were moments of meditation; my world really enclosed itself in a drop for a moment; there was nothing for me beyond it.



31. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Drop*, 2022.

I guess every healthy person considers the sight of a drop to be something beautiful; after all, we all have a natural, biologically conditioned tendency to like and perceive as beautiful what we really need. We live in a time and in a country where water is easily accessible, but it was not always like that, it is not like that everywhere, and there may be a shortage of it again.

Drops are often the theme in paintings, not only because we perceive them as aesthetic. A small drop can add a lot of drama to an image if it drips blood, sweat or tears. I have always liked Rogier van der Weyden's paintings, I consider them extremely dramatic, although it is a drama without baroque or romantic frenzy. It is only expressed in faces and small gestures in details. Drops in Wan Der Weyden's paintings are an extremely important element in creating the atmosphere, they are where all the suffering of the characters is concentrated.



32. Rogier van der Weyden, detail of *Deposition from the cross* – tears, abt. 1435.



33. Rogier van der Weyden, detail of *Deposition from the cross* – blood, abt. 1435.

Another, this time contemporary, example of a painting where a similar way of building dramatism has been used, is Agata Kus's work titled *Tears of a Girl*. In the case of this work, the girl's face does not even express any emotion. Only the bloody drops on her face signal some kind of tragedy, the golden, insulating rescue foil on her head indicates the problem of the migration of refugees.



34. Agata Kus, detail of *Girl's tears*, 2022.

As I already mentioned, after some time, the rose recovered. So later I painted the painting *Regrowth*, thus creating a diptych (or rather a quadriptych, because there are four paintings in this series; the other two also show a cut rose; they can be shown in a combination). My associations naturally turn towards paintings with religious scenes, often polyptychs, showing life, martyrdom, and then miraculous events involving the martyr. Although I do not know of a holy image with regrowth of limbs, the miraculous leg transplant performed by Saints Cosmas and Damian (who themselves died a martyr's death by beheading with a sword) can be classified as a miracle of regrowth (today, hand transplants are successfully performed, but I don't think that it would have been possible during the lives of the saints). It is also interesting that the saints allegedly transplanted a limb from a black man, who, in some of the depictions of the miracle, lies somewhere under the saints' feet, on

the floor, dehumanized. As an example, I chose paintings on panels by my very favorite artist, Fra Angelico. At the request of Cosimo de' Medici, he painted seven scenes from the lives of Damian and Cosimo, the founder's patron, in the predella of the altar in the monastery of Saint Mark in Florence.



35. Fra Angelico, *The Healing of Justinian by Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian*, detail, 1438-1440.



36. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Regrowth*, 2023.

The moments when a new idea comes to me, or I encounter a new motif are usually very happy. This probably applies to most creatives because it is a profession one chooses out of interest. Then I am full of hope, convinced that some good work will be created, and a lot of energy flows into me. I'm in a truly festive mood. But pretty quickly, these strong, wonderful feelings go away. Here comes the phase I wrote about above – comes a time of patient, often tedious care for the work, accepting its incompleteness, and often even coming to terms with its mediocrity. Boredom, ordinariness, and intellectual stagnation. After all, most of a life is incredibly boring. But these short moments when something new comes along provide energy to get through the bad times. These moments are accompanied by euphoria, which is perhaps one of the most important reasons for making the effort to create again—euphoria that is undoubtedly addictive. Of course, not only the beginning of work brings positive emotions; when I finish the painting, I am usually satisfied. I always celebrate this moment. But it is a time of quiet satisfaction in seeing something through to completion, unrivaled by the excitement and hope that come with thinking about what is yet to come.

I have wanted to paint the theme of a Christmas tree thrown into the trash for a very long time. Several years ago, I made my first attempts to create something on this topic, but I was dissatisfied with the results and temporarily abandoned further attempts. This theme came back to me as another series of night vision images. I liked how much content there was in this ordinary, banal view. During the holidays, the Christmas tree is the focal point of almost every home in Poland. Christmas trees stand proudly, even in homes where holidays have no religious dimension at all. However, the holiday season passes, and as it ends, the positive energy around the Christmas tree weakens, and ultimately the unwanted, rotten tree ends up in the trash. In Poland alone, several million of them go there every year. This is a very dramatic sight, even if you are not very empathetic towards plants, or you know that most of these trees would be cut down anyway due to typical forest management, in which the vast majority of young trees are always gradually removed. I always think about how many trees there are. How many trees grow in Poland? Certainly more than 37 million.

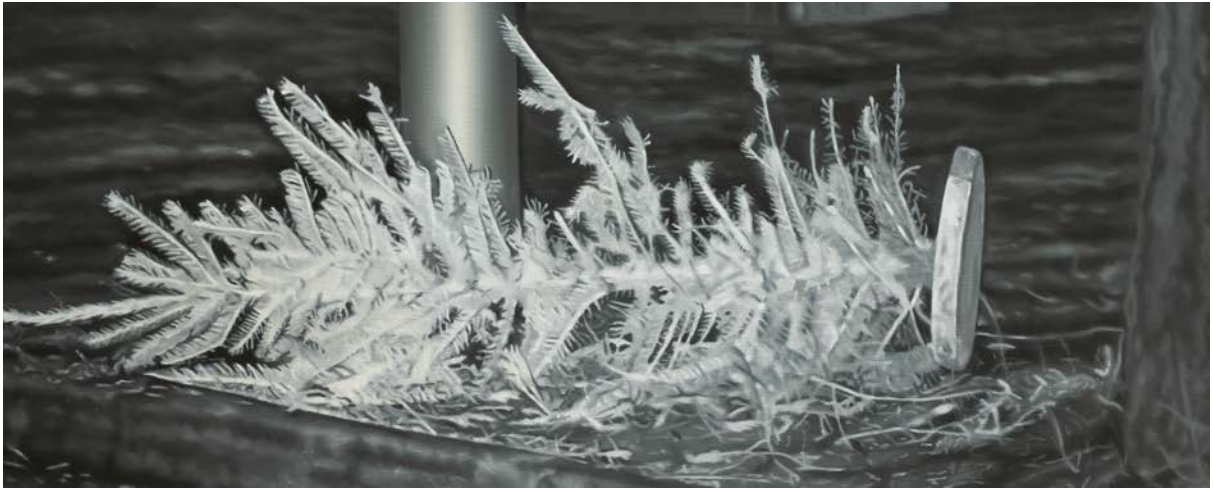
For me, however, the Christmas tree is primarily a symbol of how what seems important, great and wonderful at a given moment loses its power over time. Time completely changes the hierarchy of things. Things that seemed very important, ideas that were the central point of the creative path for some time, thoughts that did not give peace, people that were the most important, emotions that tormented us at some moment. Everything that engages us, after some time, ceases to be important even for us, and for 37

million Poles, 7 billion Polish trees, and trillions of squirrels living in the world, it is not important even for a fraction of a second. Even if what I do gains universal recognition, even if someone cares very much about my life, even if it is not one but a million people, my time of glory will inevitably and irreversibly pass.



37. Oskar Dawicki, *After Christmas Forever*, 2005/2010.

An example of a work associated with my Christmas trees can be an installation made of an artificial Christmas tree by Oskar Dawicki titled *After Christmas Forever*. I don't think I need to interpret this witty realization, one can just take a look and easily get the point, as it's a visual joke. Let the poem *The Time of Death of Christmas Trees* by Marcin Świetlicki from 1992 be a commentary:



38. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Christmass tree 3*, 2022.

*“January, the time of death for Christmas trees. Corpses undressed
from chains and decorations. Lots of heroes
abandoned in the snow. The forgotten star
left behind, tangled between
balding twigs. Lustreless.
The three kings are on their way back
and nothing guides them. They go back to their own
slaughter. Today is the last one
a crumb from the Christmas cake got under your feet
and beaks of birds. It's a huge animal that gets into those times roaring: WE'RE CLOSING!
END! END! maybe it's mean
and worthy of hatred, but one day,
when we will be tired of sunsets and sunrises,
left and right hand, I love you - I don't love you,
we will call upon it - and when it finally comes
“We will accept them with gratitude”*

During creation, the creator has a feeling that it is impossible to realize the ideal, that the work only partially corresponds to the intentions, and that only part of the ideal has been materialized. In the same way, life develops, but the sentence of death constantly hangs over it.

The Chrysanthemums series currently consists of one painting and a film, but I hope that in the future I will develop a whole series of them. I have gathered documentation for this purpose. I photographed the flowers freezing on graves, blown over by the wind. I painted that motif during the pandemic, when entering the cemetery was forbidden and the number of graves increased. They seemed very accurate to me at the time, although, to tell the truth, I had been thinking about this theme much earlier. I had already been fascinated by this sight: we commemorate someone's death with flowers, but at the same time, we condemn the plant itself to freeze or dry out. Death for death. It is like a burnt offering—the annihilation of another species in the name of human values. At the same time, chrysanthemums on the grave are still better than all the supermarket plastic from CCPR that has recently appeared in cemeteries in absurd quantities. It's just a shame that the plastic pots they're sold in usually end up in landfills, while they could be reused.



39. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Chrysanthemums*, 2021.

Fortunately, the plants dying in the cemetery do not feel pain. I had read about this before I made the film, in which the plant fragment taken from a cemetery trash can were slowly dissolving in acid. Anyway, it's quite logical. Why do plants need pain? They won't run away from the threat anyway, so it won't fulfill its warning function as it does for animals. Plants are decentralized organisms – the loss of a piece does not mean death or disability for them, so they do not have to be as afraid of it as animals, and when reproduced from scions, they are a bit like one divided organism. This is an optimistic thread in this story: they probably sometimes even benefit from our apparent exploitation of them - the fact that we eat certain plants and therefore cultivate them allows them, with our help, to expand the range of their species. Animals also help the plants they eat in this way. Maybe chrysanthemums as a whole can benefit a little from our unhealthy cemetery obsession.



40. Maria van Oosterwijk, *Tulips, Roses and Other Flowers*, 1669



41. Paweł Baśnik, *Solastalgia*, 2023, fot. Paweł Baśnik.

The painting with the chrysanthemum is also a reference to the tradition of painting vanitas still lifes. As we know, withered flowers in the history of painting have always signified the passage of time and the movement of life towards inevitable death. Usually, the atmosphere of these paintings was built by the painter on the basis of a subtle introduction of a beautiful, colorful bouquet of live flowers with just small signs of their impending decline, as is the case with the work *Tulips, Roses and Other Flowers* by Maria van Oosterwijk. My flowers are not colorful, like other paintings in this series, I took away from them what is characteristic of plants (viewed from a human perspective): the vividness of colors and the daytime environment. I think it is easy to recognize the tombstone they are standing on, as well as a typical grave flowerpot. Knocked over by the wind and covered with leaves, they look, I hope, quite gloomy. At the same time, they retain a little bit of decorativeness; I also captured flowers that are barely starting to decay, wilted but not dead.

On the other hand, Paweł Baśnik with his painting *Solastalgie*, depicted completely dead and dried flowers. The title of the work refers to the feeling of solastalgia, or climatic sadness; the artist was concerned with the negative impact of humans on nature. It also tells about killing, but in a macroscale, through all human activity. Baśnik's flowers, like mine, emerge from the darkness and are also lit centrally with an artificial light source. Their colors have faded due to the effects of time.

The evolution of a work of art during its creation is similar to the evolution of species. Constant changes in external conditions constantly hinder organisms in their efforts to perfectly adapt to the environment, thus forcing them to constantly change their internal structure, making it impossible to achieve the ideal—a life without energy loss and risk. Similarly, an artist, in accordance with the concepts presented in the previous chapter, creates under the influence of various external and internal factors, as well as the limitations of matter, which force them to constantly revise their own ideas, making it impossible to create an ideal work but thus encouraging them to take up new creative challenges. Both life and creativity are constant processes of change, a constant fight against difficulties and unforeseen situations that disrupt the established order of things.

I painted a picture of a huge tree fallen by a beaver. There's a whole story behind this. The beaver lived in the very center of Lublin, on the Czechówka River, at Aleje Solidarności. I went to observe it for a long time. At first, its struggles made me sad. A few sticks piled up near the bridge, where a new hospital is being built, dirty, very shallow river water. It was autumn, and I thought that the animal had chosen a very unsuitable place to live and that it

had no chance of wintering in such a location. To my surprise, the dam, which had been washed down several times by rain, had grown significantly in just a few weeks. At the end of autumn, the level of water past the dam was quite high. The beaver survived the winter. I saw him again a year later. It is possible that he still lives there because his traces can be still seen. This whole situation was surprising to me for several reasons. Firstly, I didn't think that an animal could survive in such a gutter as Czechówka. Secondly, I had a hard time believing that no one would interrupt. It knocked down a lot of trees in the city center. I thought it would soon be noticed, and someone would call some services to relocate it. It turned out that although this place is regularly visited by dog owners (of which my shoes fell victim many times during the observation), no one reacted, or maybe even noticed. Initially, I photographed the tree only to commemorate this situation, but later I decided to paint it.



42. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Deadfall*, 2022.

The painting *Deadfall* tells the story of the beaver himself, his hopeless struggle, and the fight against windmills, which I did not believe would succeed but which turned out to be a success. About coping with a difficult situation and achieving something seemingly impossible. This is from the beaver's perspective. From the tree's perspective, things are completely different. The tree took some time to grow, it was big. It did well for several dozen years, but one day a beaver came, and the tree's story ended, even though the animal seemed small. However, it was persistent in its pursuit and managed to move the mountain that was the tree in front of it.

Knocking down a tree is a great success, achieved with perseverance. Seen from the other side, however, it is also the collapse of something significant due to the action of some seemingly insignificant factor. Maybe the tree is a thought—some long-built order that collapses, undermined by the appearance of some unexpected stimulus? Maybe it is a work that we have been building for a long time that suddenly collapsed because it turned out to be inappropriate for the situation. I don't fully understand this story myself, I'm just an impartial observer, and I don't know who won or who was defeated. I only know that even things that have been built for a long time and persistently sometimes fall down. Sometimes something valuable is created from these ruins.



43. Artemisia Gentileschi, Dalilah cutting Samson's hair, detail of *Samson and Dalilah*, 1638.

Visually, the painting with the tree looks like a fallen column. Probably everyone knows what this symbol means. I think that even a child, seeing a tombstone with a column in some old cemetery, will easily grasp the message without having to search Kopalinski's dictionary. I don't think anyone has ever explained to me the meaning of that motif. The fallen tree-pillar also reminds me of the biblical story about Samson, which I read many times as a child and which I remember perfectly because I couldn't understand it at all, and no adult could explain it to me sensibly. I wanted to know who in this story was a positive character, because in my opinion Samson definitely didn't come up well. Maybe Delilah? It depends on whose side you look at it. It's just like my story about the beaver and the tree.



44. Piotr C. Kowalski while beavers are working on his exhibition.

The life of a human being, the life of a plant, and the existence of an object are only temporarily existing facts, small grains in the mass of all matter that die to make way for new beings. The act of creation has an equally processual character, which, like life, brings new configurations of matter into the world. Like a plant, a creative concept changes during work, matures and grows in different directions. Finally, it dies to give way to new aspirations. A state of equilibrium, or full realization, would be a static state, undeveloped and without a future. The driving force behind artistic work is the eternal determination to improve. Just as an artist must constantly revise his concepts and, striving for his own ideals, never achieve

them due to their constant changes, the living part of matter evolves, struggles with changing conditions, and is always exposed to losses. Evolution proceeds because of an eternal mismatch.

For the ending, I chose two paintings that are similar to each other because they both tell about something new growing on the ruins of what has died.

The first is a painting with a funny, maybe a bit silly, title, *Decrepit Stump*. I photographed this dead trunk near the Faculty of Chemistry at UMCS. It surprised me by the fact that completely white cap mushrooms grew on the cut tree, which through the night vision device looked quite unreal, even surreal, as if someone had made a photomontage. It was during the pandemic; I didn't interact with anyone for a long time; I went outside mostly at night; and I had the general feeling that I was in some kind of dream. And these glowing mushrooms. They were surprising. I decided to use it since the theme came to me on its own.



45. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Decrepit Stump*, 2020.

Strange white mushrooms were growing on the remains of a tree, like a new order growing on the ruins of something that suddenly collapsed. The world we live in cannot stand stillness. When something dies, something new always appears on the ruins, regardless of whether we are talking about the natural world or the orders established by man, although sometimes, when something that was solidly established collapses, we get the impression that the real end has come. It is a very difficult moment in creativity when an artist decides to abandon his current path. Sometimes the negation is gentle; as I wrote previously, when one strives to materialize their own ideas, it is difficult to feel full satisfaction; everything indicates that it is impossible. Therefore, each new project is somehow a negation of the previous one, which, once completed, usually interests us less than what is yet to come, what is supposed to be better, and what will answer new questions. Sometimes, however, artists suddenly change the path of their explorations and need a visible change. I think that it is always a difficult decision to start something completely new, it requires the courage to face the surprise of others who recognize the artist through the prism of previous activities. Especially in our times, from artists who actively participate in the art market, the audience (and above all, galleries) requires style recognition and constant maintenance of the standard of work. An experiment always involves the possibility of failure. Inconstancy looks like indecision. Yet many, even very famous artists from the past, decided to suddenly change directions. Pablo Picasso, with his periods of cubist experiments named after colors he used; Manet, who suddenly turned to impressionism; Rothko, who started painting his famous color fields when he was almost 50; Duchamp, who started out as a painter; and Sandro Botticelli, whose two late *Laments over Christ* are so different from the paintings from the time of *Venus* that only Botticelli's characteristic drawing of nostrils, which connects Mary Magdalene and Venus, indicate that these paintings were painted by the same artist.

As an example of someone else's work showing some loose similarity to my painting, I chose Anna Królikiewicz's work titled *Super Natural*, which the artist presented in Lublin in 2017, as part of the *Open City* festival. It was a wall made of cubes for home mushroom cultivation. The work was accompanied by a comment published on the festival's website:

"The title of the work, on the one hand, means 'out of this world', indicates the element of uniqueness, a new, unexpected, extraordinary element in a familiar, repeatedly seen point in the Old Town; on the other hand, as two separate words, it indicates origin from nature, and therefore true, natural and wild" (site of *Open City*, 2017, <https://2017.opencity.pl/program/anna-krolikiewicz/index.html>, dostęp: 08.09.2023).

Also a poem by Sylvia Plath titled Mushrooms was quoted there, I am citing only a fragment:

*Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves
Our kind multiplies*

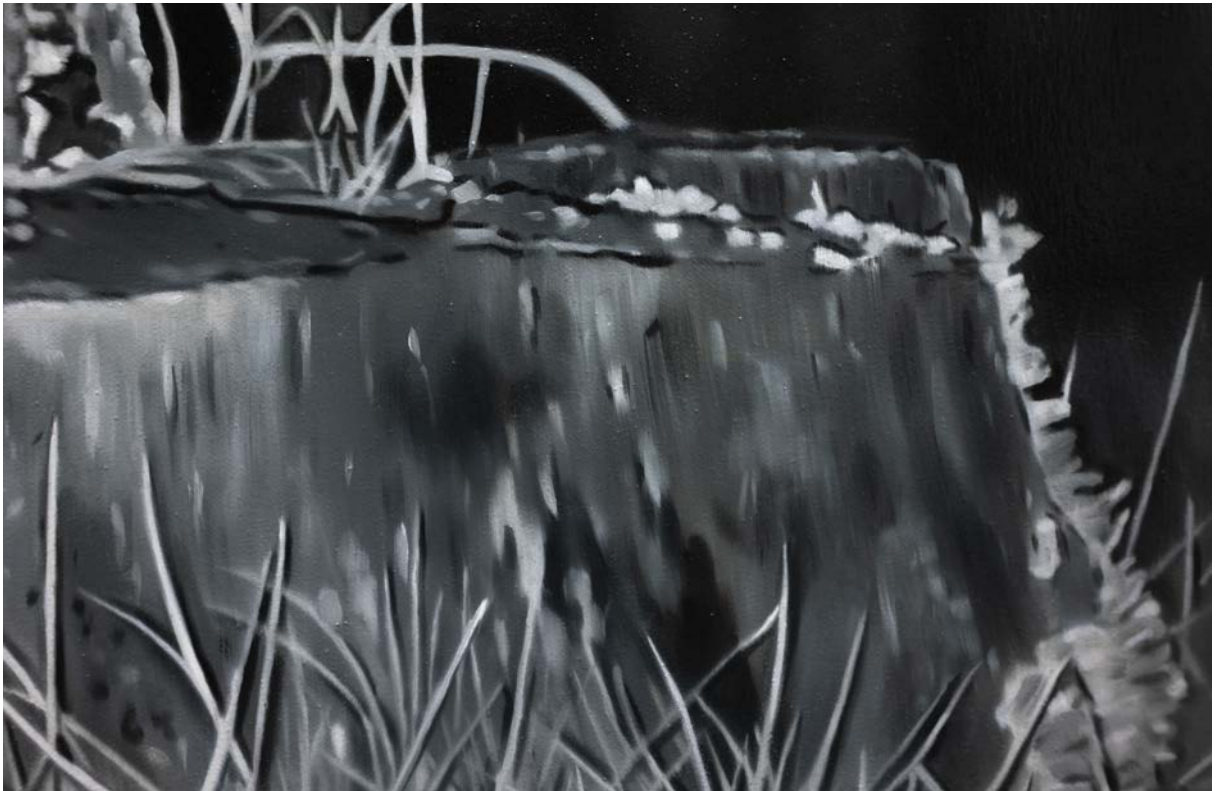
*We shall by morning
Inherit the earth
Our foot's in the door*

(Sylvia Plath, *Grzyby* [w:] *Wiersze wybrane*, tłumaczenie T. Truszkowska, J. Rostworowski, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1975).



46. Anna Królikiewicz, *Super Natural*, 2017.

Plath's poem is widely interpreted as a feminist manifesto: mushrooms are women, housewives who, in the seclusion of their kitchens, gather strength to grow and "inherit the earth". Therefore, by referring to Plath, Królikiewicz's work also takes on the context of something new emerging—an unexpected breakthrough taking place. However, her installation definitely concerned the order of the human world.



47. Małgorzata Pawlak, detail of *Decrepit Stump*, 2020.

I chose Anna Królikiewicz's work not only because she used mushroom blocks and because her work tells the story of the coming of change. I also thought that her artistic path was an example of what I wrote about: the artist initially dealt primarily with painting and drawing, mainly figurative, but today she is associated with intermedia works and installations that are intended to be perceived by the viewer in a multisensory way.

The second painting I want to describe is called *Tree Within a Tree*. I photographed them in the winter in the Saski Park. I had been looking for exactly this motif for a long time—like a phoenix from the ashes, a new tree grew on the ruins of the old one. Of course, I can interpret them similarly to the image described above: something fell and died a natural

death, but thanks to this, something else can appear. But unlike the previous story, this time it's basically the same thing, only refreshed and new.

In fact, one could ask: to what extent are there any real novelties in art in general? It is hard to deny that the vast majority of works of art more or less talk about the same issues—the topics most interesting to humanity—death, sex, conflicts, etc. In the 20th century, a lot of works of art were devoted to art itself, exploring its boundaries, redefining it, and asking about the condition of humanity and the role of art. So what is new, what is a breakthrough? Isn't it always telling the same stories but in different words? To some extent, it certainly is. We are mainly interested in what lies in our biologically conditioned nature. We cannot escape from this, and art, as a mirror of our inclinations, will always revolve around universal themes. And this is a simple way of saying, There's nothing new under the sun. At the same time, there are works or artistic events for which there is a consensus that they are groundbreaking. We have this word as a society, so we use it from time to time. What does it mean? There is no such thing as absolute newness, every new thing has something of the old in it. That's obvious. Lexicographically, a breakthrough is “rapid change.” So how do we measure this rapidness? How can we conclude that, in a given case, we are dealing with a breakthrough?

A breakthrough is always approved by the subjective opinion of the majority. There are no devices to measure it. It all starts with a private breakthrough, i.e., an epiphany. If there is a change in someone's consciousness, if there is a thought, idea, stimulus, or reflection that shakes the person out of their previously established intellectual order, hierarchy of values, beliefs, and aesthetic preferences, thus directing them to areas they have not yet explored and causing significant reorganization of her state of consciousness—we can say that a personal breakthrough has occurred. Next comes the breakthrough at the social level. It doesn't always have to be about the entire society, a breakthrough can happen in some group, even among the majority of specialists in a given field (or among a narrow group of influential people). Coming back to the case of a groundbreaking work of art, it is created as a result of someone's revelation, but in order for it to be universally recognized as groundbreaking, there must be a universal reception of it as something groundbreaking. Therefore, it must move more people to the foundations of their worldview on art, it must somehow change the current paradigm. It must shift the definition of art to new areas and thus ensure that, in the future, for the works following the so-called groundbreaking work and for the following creators, this new, changed definition becomes valid. In fact, the new

definition must no longer include things that were once at the core of the previous one. He must leave his mark on what will come. Therefore, a groundbreaking work must enter the canon of groundbreaking works, and from an avant-garde it must become a classic. It must become "a prophet among his own people".

The paradox of what is new is that it feeds on what is old. The avant-garde needs to contest the canon, and in order to become a breakthrough, it must enter this canon and reshape it.



48. Małgorzata Pawlak, fragment obrazu *A three within a three*, 2023.

These thoughts are perhaps not very groundbreaking, but I think that similar thoughts are on the minds of almost everyone who deals with art and has been fed with Massaccio, Cezanne, Pollock and Duchamp for decades. I also think that for most artists, it is absolutely indifferent whether their works enter the canon as groundbreaking works. Was 20th-century art as groundbreaking as we thought? I don't know, and I'm sure that nobody who isn't a good few hundred years away from our times can say that with certainty. The twentieth century was indeed a time of rapid social changes, a time of scientific discoveries, a time of two great wars, and therefore a time of new art that fit the new world. But did people really have the impression in earlier centuries that nothing new was happening? Were there no wars, revolutions, or inventions?

For me, my tree within a tree is a story about constant transformation, about the fall of what has been growing for a long time to give rise to something new. Is the new one different or better? It is unknown. It is known that it grew on the remains of the old one, and it is known that it feeds on these remains.

When writing this text, I tried to be, above all, honest. I wanted to talk about my own works as I understand them, to outline for the reader the contexts and associations that appeared in my head when the ideas were created, when collecting documentation, or later, during the creative process, as I encountered the motif. I compared the creative process to the life of plants; using the example of my own works, I described the process of germination, maturing and then withering away of the concept of the work, from the ruins of which completely new things can grow. In this way, I tried to tell about the issues contained in the previous chapter—I hope I did it in a systematic, although a bit creative way—the concept of building ruins, i.e., the constant feeling among artistic individuals that the material form of their ideas is only an afterimage of the concept that the ideal cannot be achieved. A feeling that does not only apply to creativity; as I described in the previous chapter using the work of Semir Zeki, we all suffer from the problem of "failure to realize brain concepts." However, it is very important for creativity, and I am even convinced that it is its driving force. Every creative process is building ruins, and every life is building ruins, but who cares when one simply still have the energy to resist the entropy?

Summary:

I am aware that when writing this text, I went beyond the description of the images, I made many digressions and included content that I probably could have omitted. If I have tired the reader, I sincerely apologize. The assumption I made at the beginning of writing and which I revealed in the introduction, I hope, justifies me a little; after all, it was supposed to be a ruin, built on the pillars of my thoughts, which were the intellectual background for the works from the doctoral series. The individual chapters of the work are loosely connected, but there is a connection indeed—my interests: art, especially painting; nature; biological sciences; the phenomenon of creativity and all matters related to it.

Building Ruins, from the title, means creating one's own ideas with a concurrent sense of inexpressibility. This is a key problem for me—a feeling that accompanies me in every project I undertake. It also accompanied the writing of this text, but, as I know thanks to the fact that I wrote it, this feeling is also present in others, inevitable and, above all, necessary.

Therefore, although both the paintings and the text would look completely different if I were to create them anew, I am forced to accept them in the form that emerged from my most sincere efforts and that I am currently presenting for evaluation.

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Doctoral series of paintings,
reproductions:

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2. *Bobrołom*, 2022, 110x220 cm, oil on canvas;
3. *Drzewo w drzewie*, 2023, 110x220 cm, oil on canvas;
4. *Żgrzybiaty pień*, 2020, 110x220 cm, oil on canvas;
5. *Chryzantemy*, 2021, 110x220 cm, oil on canvas;
6. *Choinka 2*, 2022, 70x100 cm, oil on canvas;
7. *Choinka 3*, 2022, 70x100 cm, oil on canvas;
8. *Odrost*, 2023, 25x45 cm, oil on canvas;
9. *Róża na Orzetku*, 2022, 13x24 cm, oil on canvas;
10. *Ślimak i róża*, 2022, 13x24 cm, oil on canvas;
11. *Kropła*, 2022, 13x24 cm, oil on canvas;
12. *Dziupla 1*, 2020, 30x30 cm, oil on canvas;
13. *Dziupla 2*, 2020, 24x24 cm, oil on canvas;
14. *Dziupla 3*, 2020, 30x24 cm, oil on canvas;
15. *Dziupla 5*, 2020, 18x18 cm, oil on canvas;
16. *Dziupla 6*, 2020, 25x25 cm, oil on canvas;
17. *Dziupla 7*, 2020, 18x18 cm, oil on canvas;
18. *Dziupla 9*, 2020, 22x22 cm, oil on canvas;
19. *Dziupla 10*, 2020, 30x30 cm, oil on canvas;
20. *Dziupla 11*, 2020, 20x20 cm, oil on canvas;
21. *Dziupla 13*, 2020, 15x15 cm, oil on canvas;
22. *Dziupla 14*, 2020, 13x13 cm, oil on canvas;
23. *Dziupla 15*, 2020, 24x18 cm, oil on canvas;
24. *Dziupla 16*, 2020, 10x10 cm, oil on canvas;
25. *Dziupla 20*, 2021, 22x22 cm, oil on canvas;
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29. *Dziupla 24*, 2021, 24x18 cm, oil on canvas;
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33. *Pogoń*, 2022, 13x24 cm, oil on canvas;

34. *Jabłko Ractawickie*, 2022, 13x24 cm, oil on canvas;
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Choinka 1, 2021, 110x220 cm, olej na płótnie



Bobrołom, 2022, 110x220 cm, olej na płótnie



Drzewo w drzewie, 2023, 110x220 cm, olej na płótnie



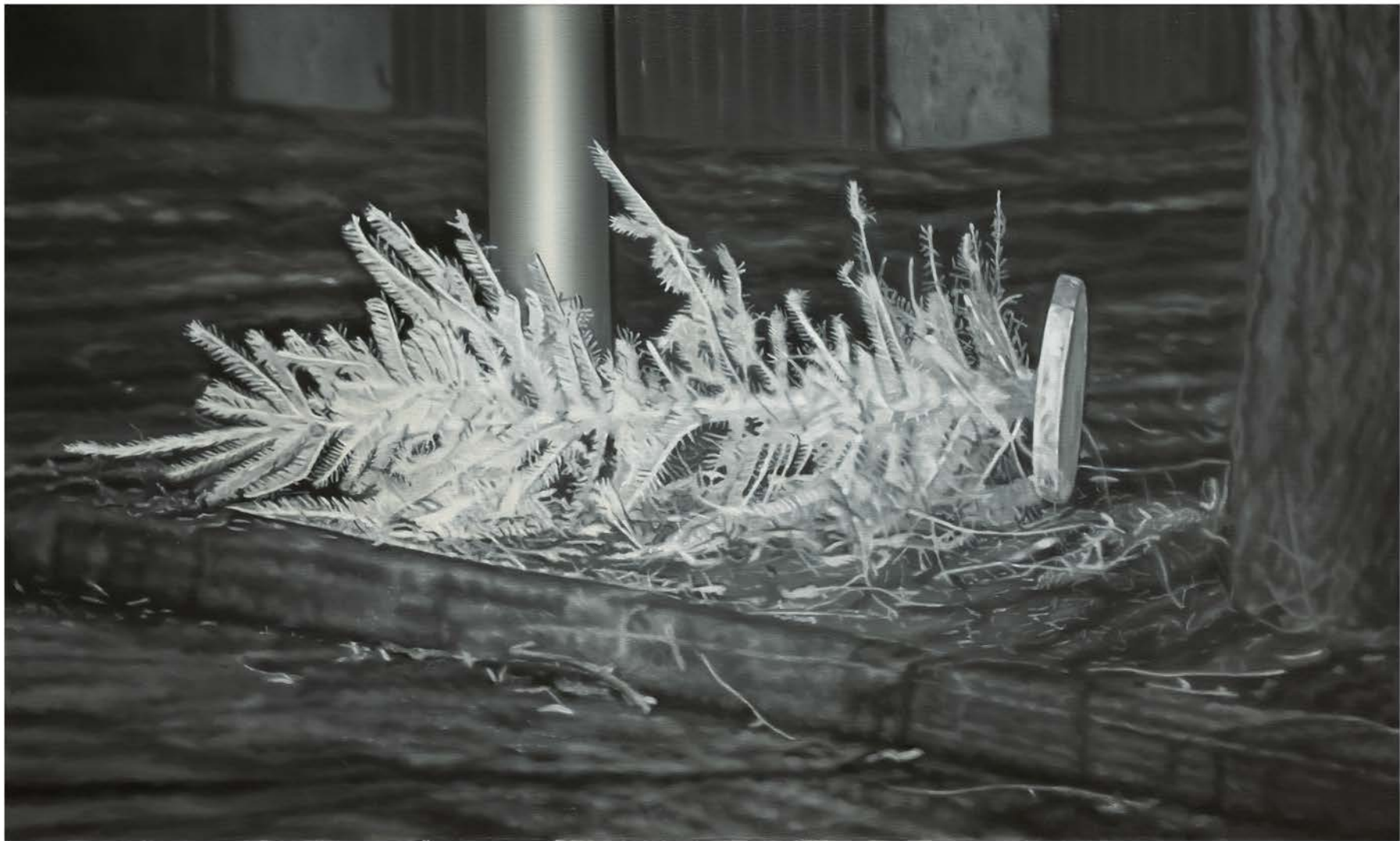
Zgrzybiaty pień, 2021, 110x220 cm, olej na płótnie



Chryzantemy, 2021, 110x220 cm, olej na płótnie



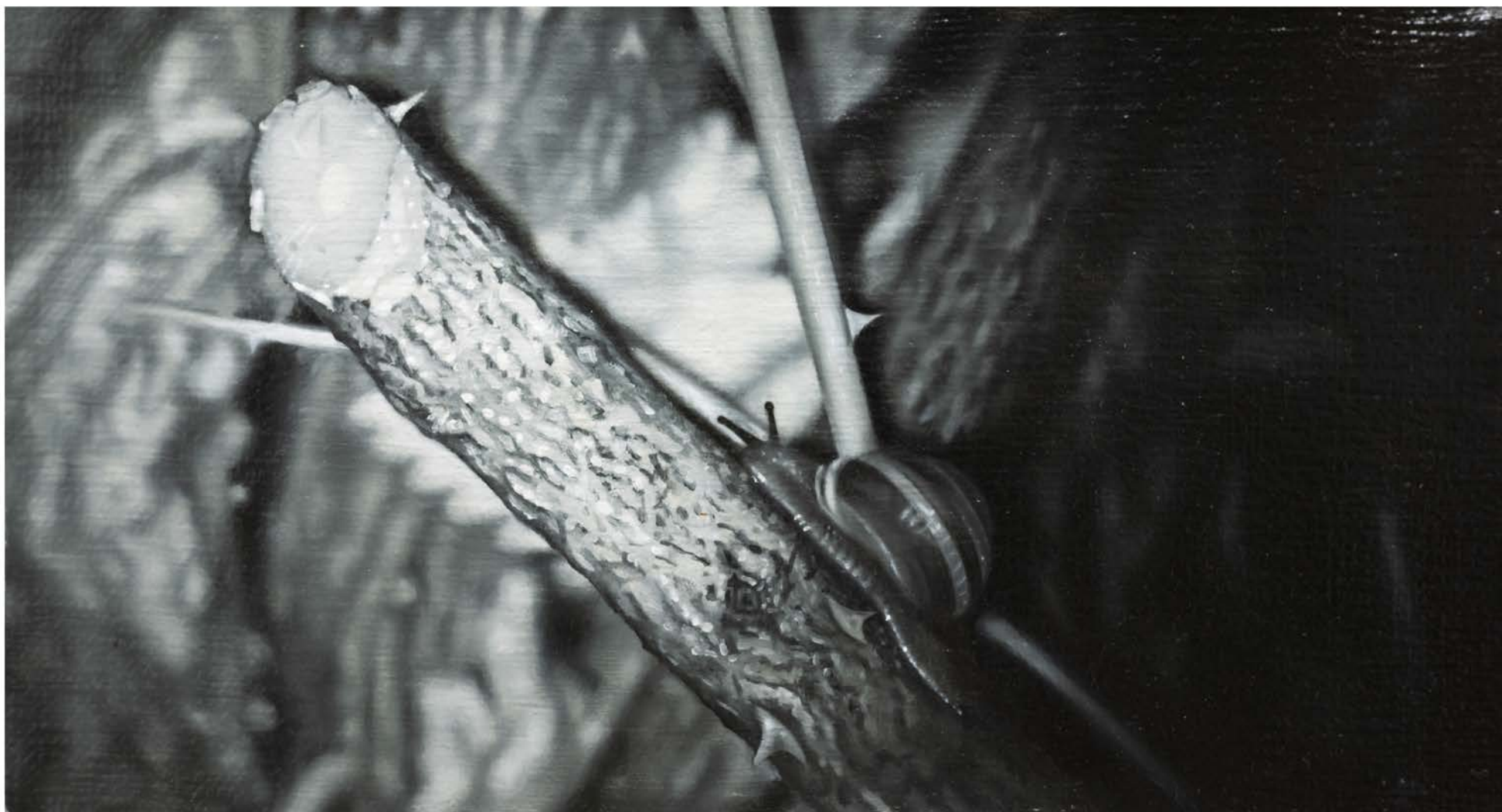
Choinka 2, 2022, 70x100 cm, olej na płótnie



Choinka 3, 2022, 70x100 cm, olej na płótnie



Odrost, 2023, 25x45 cm, olej na płótnie



Róża na Orzetku, 2023, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Ślimak i róża, 2023, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Kropla, 2023, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 1, 2020, 30x30 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 2, 2020, 24x24 cm, olej na płótnie



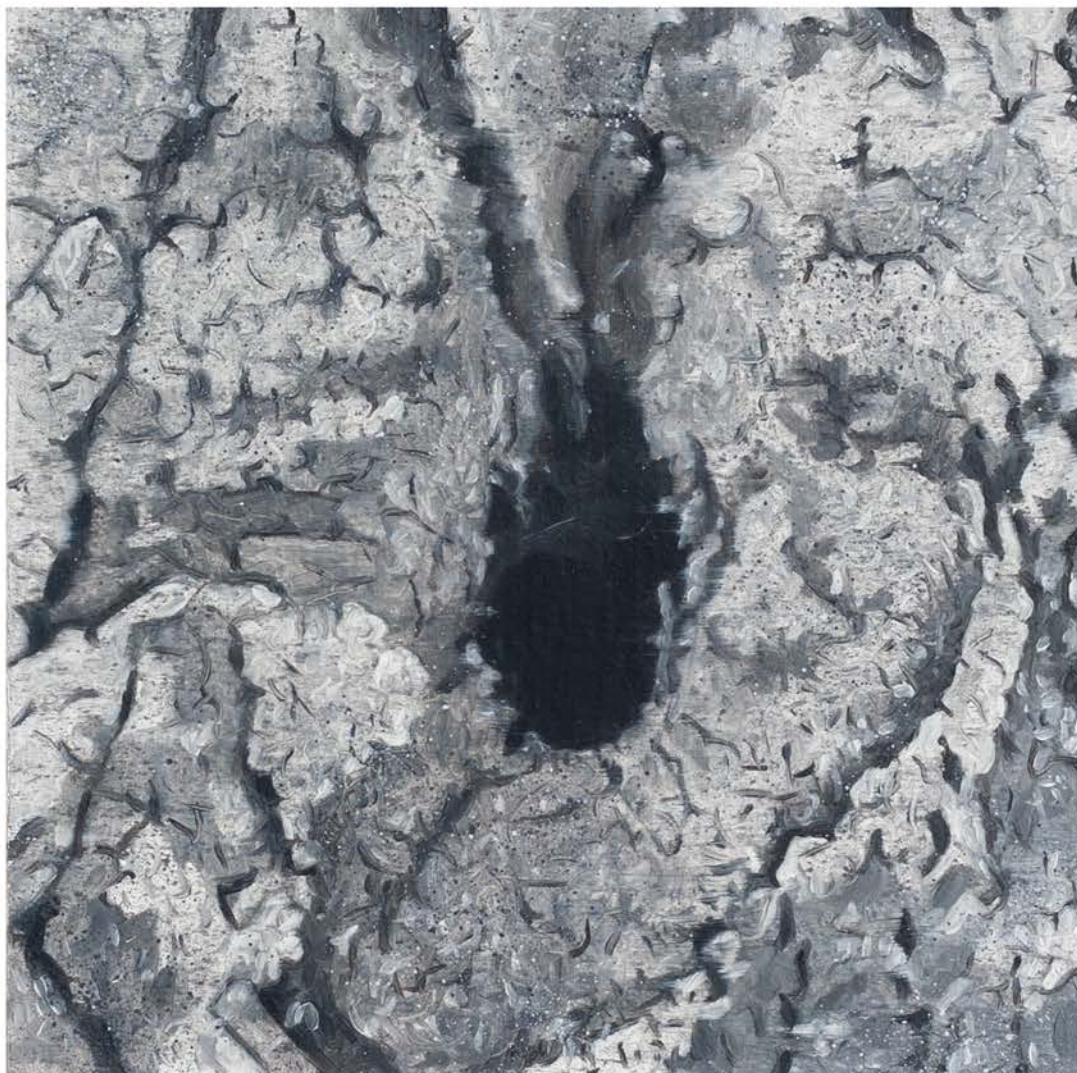
Dziupla 3, 2020, 30x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 5, 2020, 18x18 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 6, 2020, 25x25 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 7, 2020, 18x18 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 9, 2020, 22x22 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 10, 2020, 30x30 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 11, 2020, 20x20 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 13, 2020, 15x15 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 14, 2020, 13x13 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 15, 2020, 24x18 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 16, 2020, 10x10 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 20, 2021, 22x22 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 21, 2021, 14x14 cm, olej na płótnie



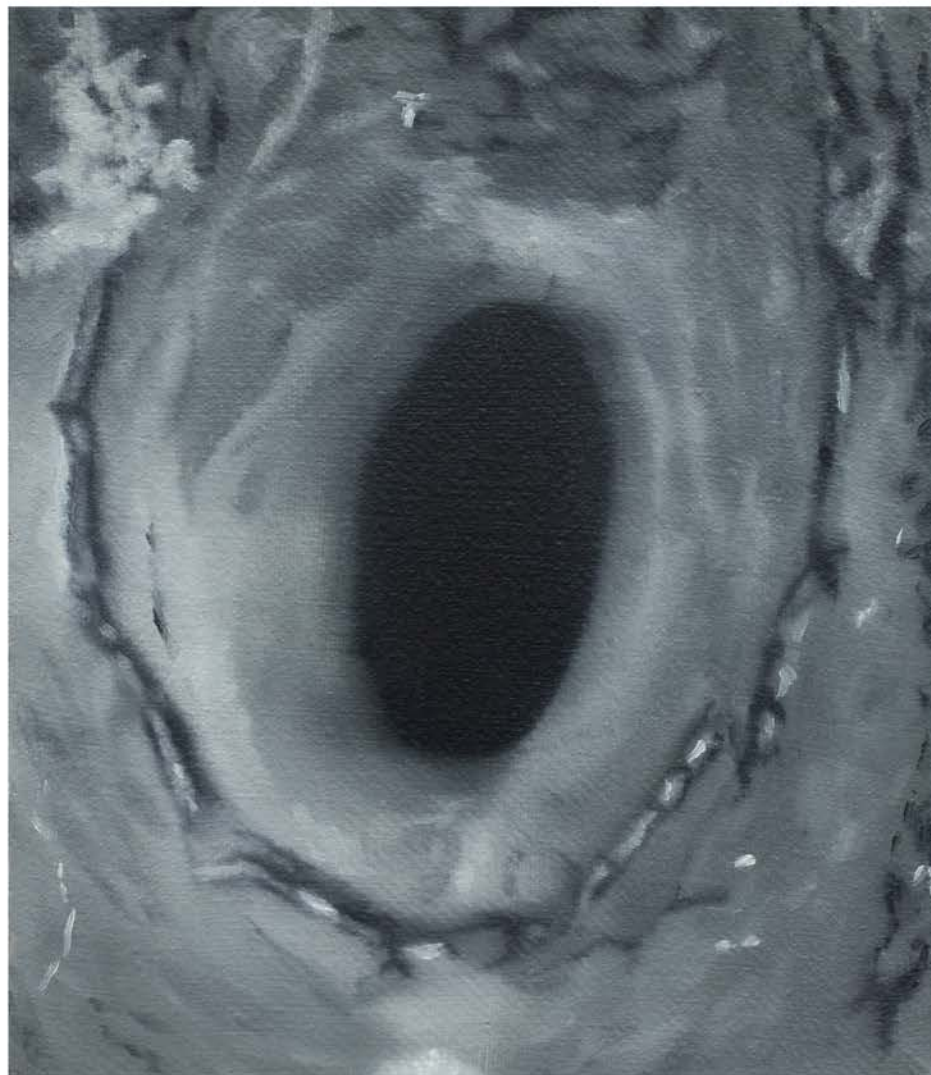
Dziupła 22, 2021, 13x13 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 23, 2021, 17x17 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 24, 2021, 24x18 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 27, 2021, 15x13 cm, olej na płótnie



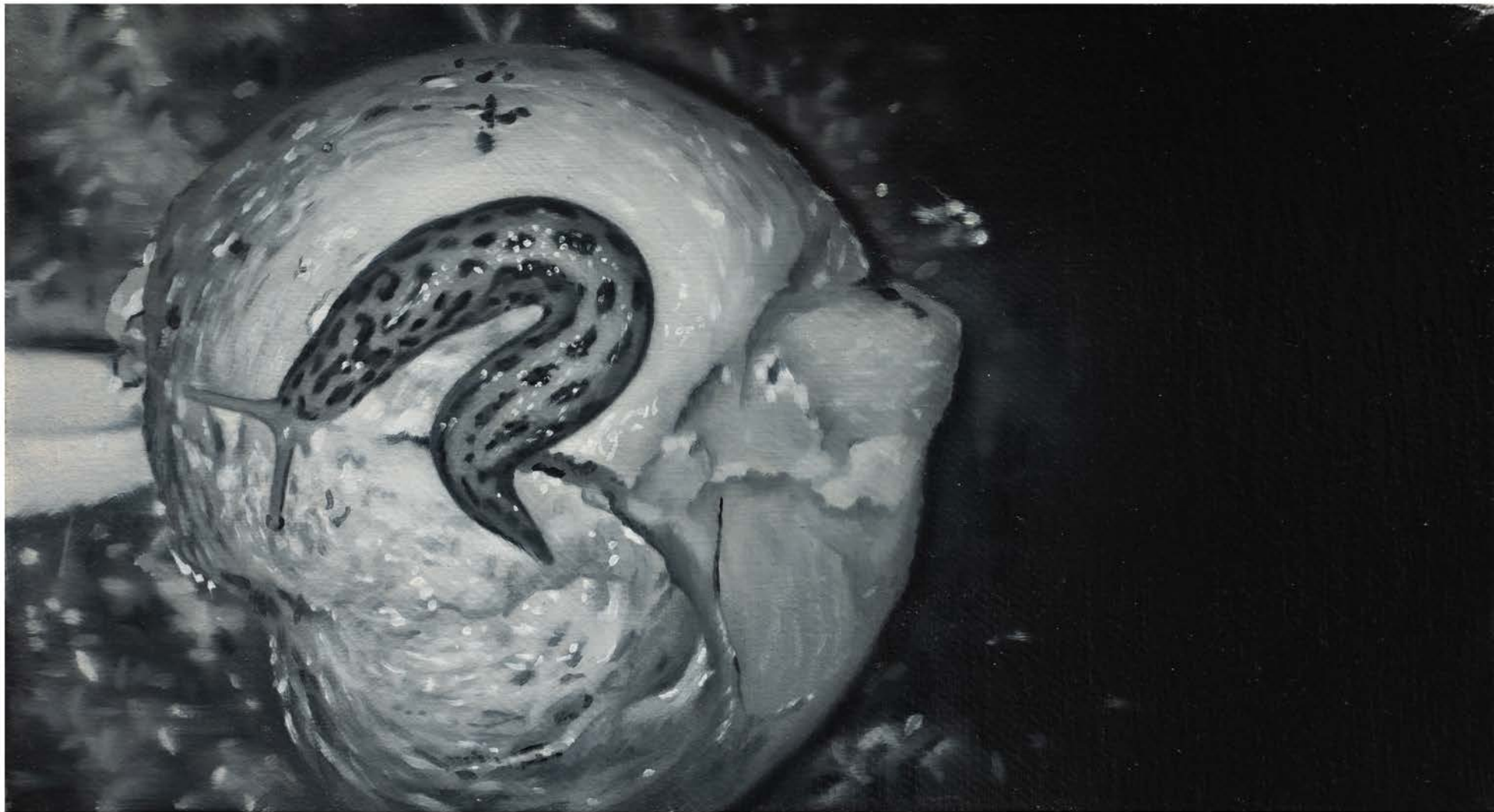
Dziupla 28, 2021, 22x22 cm, olej na płótnie



Dziupla 29, 2021, 18x18 cm, olej na płótnie



Pogoń, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



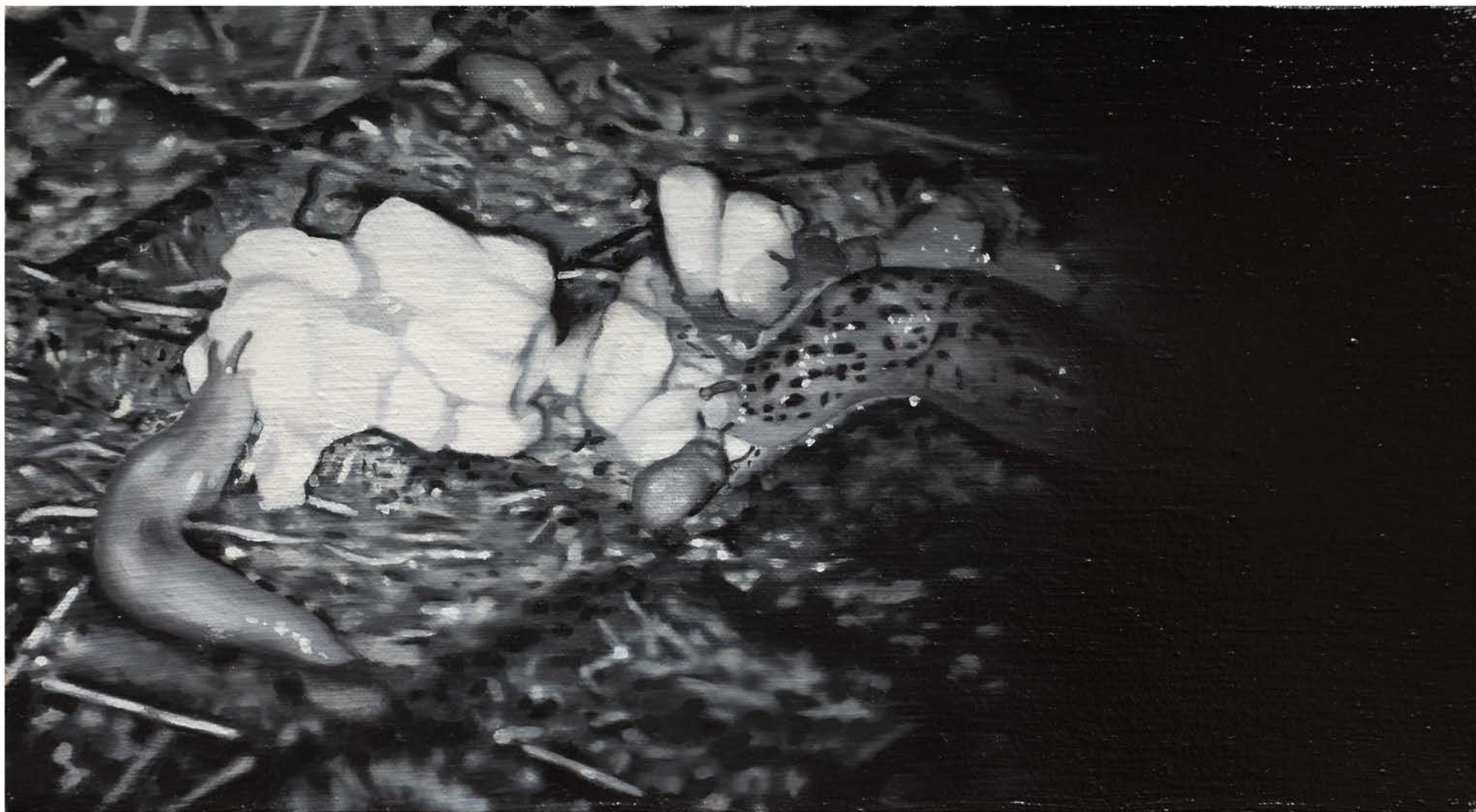
Jabłko Ractawickie, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Kamuflaż, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



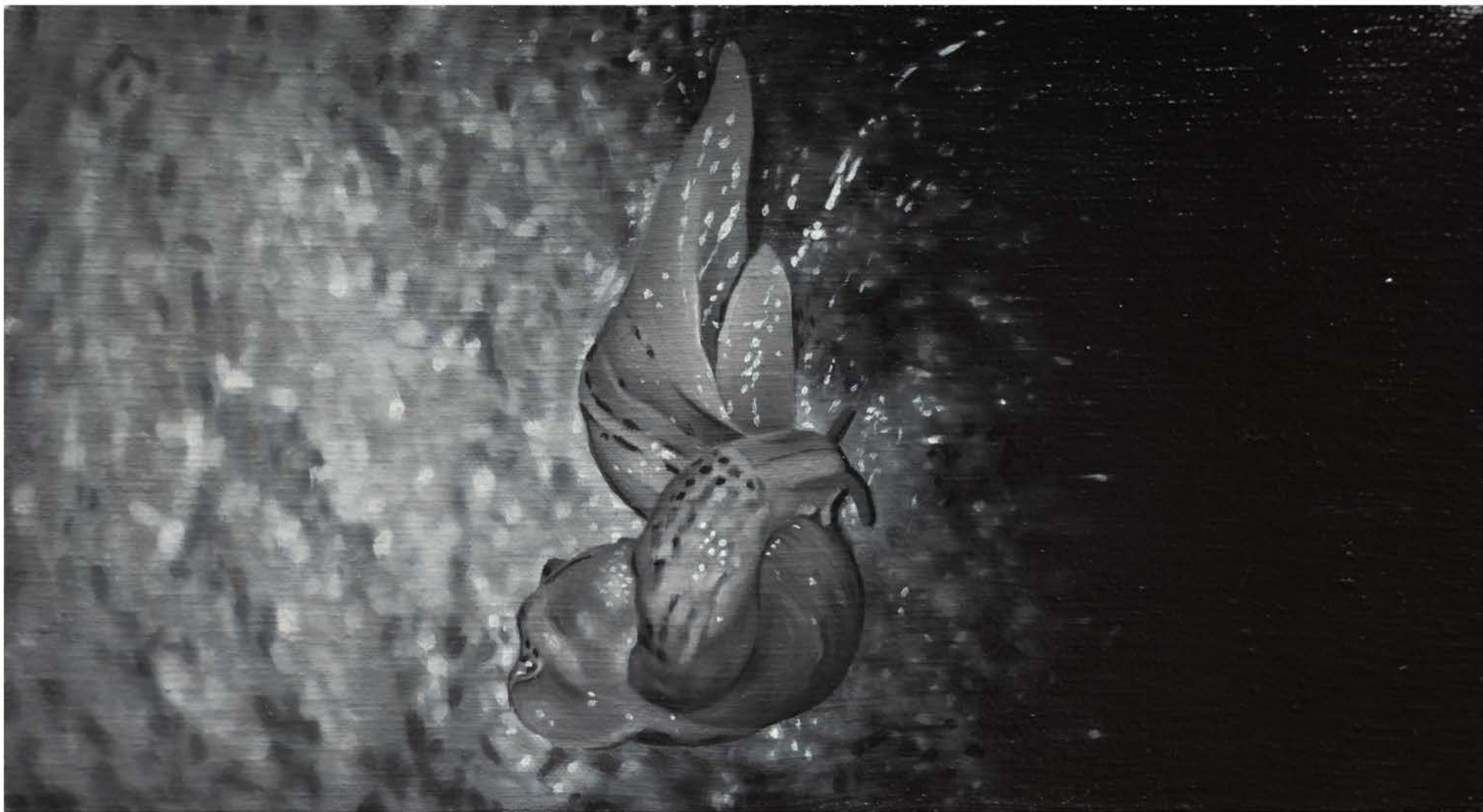
Grzybek, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Stołówka, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Wątróbka, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



ObSlimaczenie, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Leśna Ryba, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Żemniak, 2023, 15x20 cm, olej na płótnie



Pomidor, 2023, 25x45 cm, olej na płótnie



Malwa, 2023, 25x45 cm, olej na płótnie



Siewka, 2023, 13x18 cm, olej na płótnie



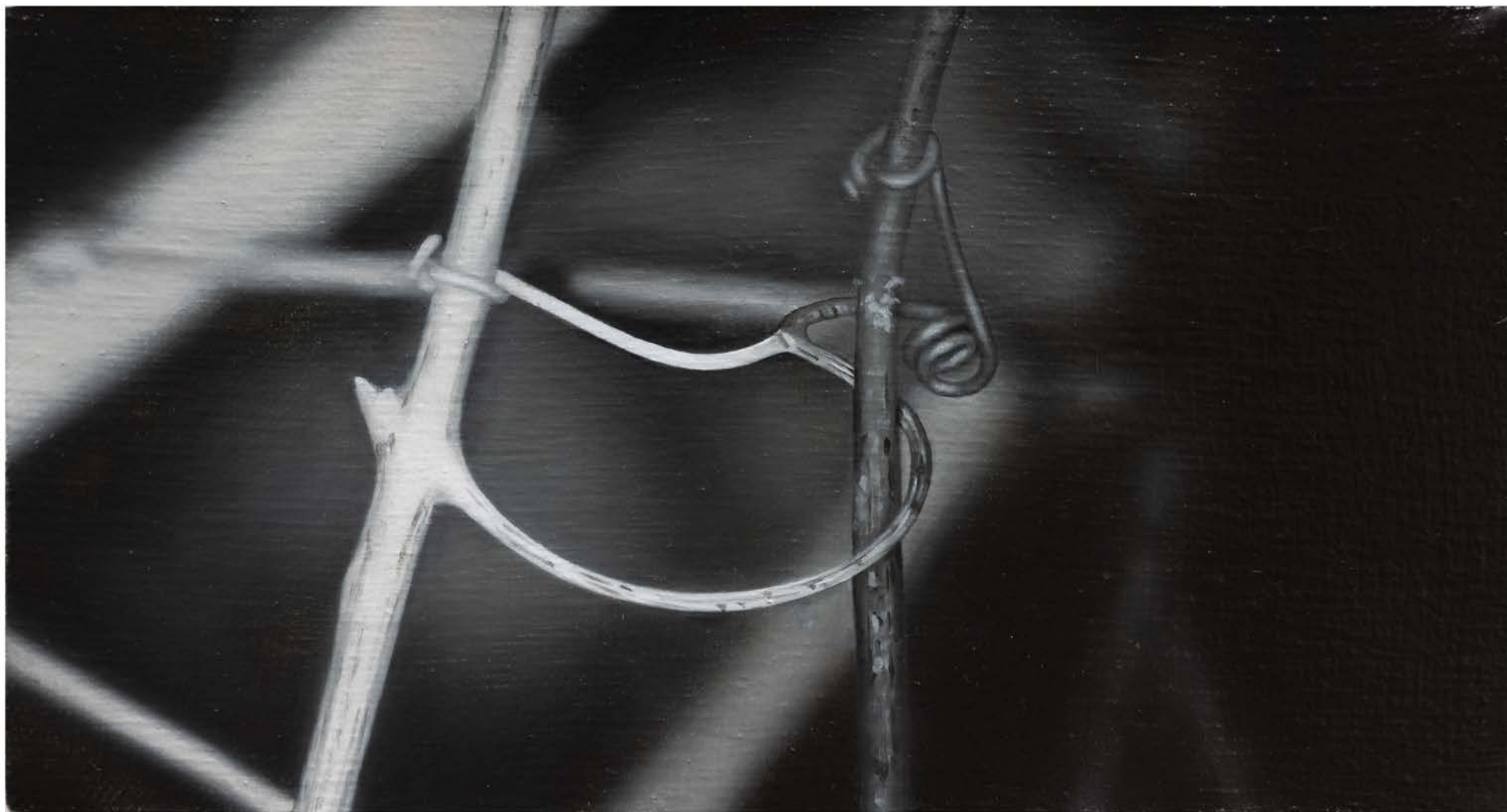
Jabłoń Filaretów, 2023, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Wąs czepny 2, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Wąs czepny 3, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie



Wąs czepny 4, 2022, 13x24 cm, olej na płótnie