

# The Means, The Milieu

2014/2021 SOLO SHOW Arsenal Gallery in Bialystok, Poland 19.02-28.03.2021 Curator Monika Szewczyk

# **Fungal Rhythms**

on Iza Tarasewicz's The Means, The Milieu

-by Borbála Soós

"Evolution is no linear family tree, but change in the single multidimensional being that has grown to cover the entire surface of Earth." <sup>1</sup>

#### **Feral forms**

Making the world is not exclusive to humans. 'The Means The Milieu' is a concrete example of this, an artwork that goes beyond metaphors and representational modes and instead enacts an elaborate parasitic mushroom takeover. Within the apparent randomness of the elements, junctions emerge. They highlight interconnectedness, constant feedback loops, repetitions and patterns of self-organisation. They create an alternative logic, a wild and disobedient position while revealing the hidden structure of chaos underlining our world with complex and entangled connections. This sprawling artwork colonises the gallery and interrupts its neat narratives. In doing so, it complicates our understanding of space, time and even how the self might be understood.

'The Means, The Milieu' creates its own microclimate and patterns, which were slightly different at each site the work has been installed. Consisting of thousands of variable units it can be continuously rearranged and reconfigured to adapt to different exhibition contexts as each time it spawns radically new formats. Since its first iteration in the basement of Objectif Exhibitions in Antwerp in 2014, with each exhibition the installation offers something new. The underlying structures that create its main space are provided by the forest of hexagons made of manually bent and oxidised metal rods. The hanging modular scaffolding – not unlike DNA – encodes the ability of the structure to multiply and expand. This large sculptural installation creates a network of several layers. It is a mycorrhizal network where mycelium interacts with the root system of a forest; it is a three-dimensional manifestation of a web of communication with links branching out in cyberspace; and the connections of neural pathways from within our bodies. It is all of these things and more. Each constituent piece is handmade. The labour, the consideration, touch and handling generates a living form. The caoutchouc-infused

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Lynn Margulis, Dorion Sagan, What Is Life?, University of California Press, 2000.

hemp ropes, ochre, plaster, mushrooms and other elements offer varying manifestations of certain characters in the artwork. This sensibility reminds me of quorum sensing, a phenomenon typical of bacteria, but also characteristic of fungal cells. Quorum sensing is nature's ability to feel the presence and density of other cells, to repress or express specific genes as beneficial, as well as to coordinate form and behaviour en masse. For example, bacteria express energetically expensive processes as a collective. Or in the presence of other fungal cells, they coordinate behaviour to form a mushroom in unison.

## The questions of individuals

Species boundaries are a slippery concept. DNA sequencing in mushrooms only undermines the confidence in the species as the basic category for understanding kinds.<sup>2</sup> The Lingzhi (Ganoderma Lucidum or Reishi) mushrooms that Tarasewicz employs in her work are known as the 'flower of longevity' or 'herb of immortality' in Chinese medicine. These names feel especially well-articulated as the mushrooms in question are not only agents of entropy – for example, breaking down trees – but they help form soil, the birthplace of much new life. They can be found in most places on Earth, however, as Lingzhi are able to cross with other related mushrooms, including some not yet described by science, we cannot always surely separate the species from others. This ultimate unknowability profoundly suits Tarasewicz's complex and growing installation.

Sometimes one encounters a boundary along which two elements are spreading apart, with momentous consequences. It was said you may well discover seams and sutures in yourself. While the cap is originally from the same as the stem, as the stem rises it starts to swell, growing further rings as materials on the side are pulled away from each other. It rises up in the middle and divides to multiple parts and opposite flanks. The force which causes mushrooms to push up and out: this is gravity's doing and undoing. Sensing all other mushroom cells, the dampness, the wind, the temperature and other lifeforms causes them to push through the rest of the material – stretching, cracking, splitting open and folding out. As they mature and lose some of the initial impetus the waxy surface hardens and solidifies. They change colours with age from beige to orange and other and eventually deep reds and browns while the spores underneath are readying to be released and set sail.

Just like Tarsewicz's 'The Means, The Milieu', mushrooms and their spores contain a large variability of genetic materials within. Fungi spores spread all over the world (and can even be found in outer space), or stay close to home. To add to the possibilities, they sometimes have rather queer reproductive techniques, such as the haploid spores joining with mushroom body cells that already have chromosomal pairs, to create genetically different offsprings.<sup>3</sup> Some fungi have tens and thousands of mating types (which we would call sexes in human terms), while the mycelium of many fungi can also

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Anna Tsing: *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.* Princeton University Press, 2015. p 227–239.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid.

fuse with other mycelial networks if they are genetically similar enough, even if they are not sexually compatible. While fungal self-identity is important and the hyphae tips can recognise their own body and cells, the self can also shade off into otherness gradually.<sup>4</sup>

We are inseparable from our companion species, and dependent on them for our survival. It is an illusion that we can detach ourselves, and keep only within the borders of our bodies, or retreat within the walls of our homes. Instead, what we can do, is to redefine ourselves with adaptable and soft boundaries. We can start to understand our evolution as a story of an ongoing cross-contamination. Humans are a result of symbiosis, adaptations to circumstances, living with and being hosts to others. The human body (as well as the space of the gallery) is a site of nature in the past, present and future. As social beings, economic and ecological factors, we are inseparable from the world around us, and as such, our fate is bound to other living creatures.

# The politics of adaptation

How do fungi maintain a sense of self and body while remaining capable of constantly revising their shape and form?

Do you remember the familiar feeling you get in your cells while watching honey drop from the spoon? As more and more liquid flows into the drop, it becomes thicker and thicker. Then it slowly starts to stretch out, while simultaneously becoming narrower in one part. At some point, the drop develops a waist which eventually breaks off. The drop separates and each part becomes rounded again. Imagine this process not driven by gravity but by a sense of curiosity: the one cell wide hyphae grow and divide in new directions wanting to explore.

Evolutionary theorist and biologist Lynn Margulis defined life by its ability to continuously grow, rearrange and transform itself while creating its own scaffolding.<sup>5</sup> In this sense Tarasewicz's work is alive. Mushrooms are constantly adapting to their environment through growing various shapes and forms both under and above ground. A small shift transforms one system or one order into another.<sup>6</sup> They break down, and die in one part, while progressively developing to mend the internal damage through new remodelled and dense architectures in another direction. Fungi can discard less competitive genomes and pick up others. They can also merge with others and become part of a new communal body. Connections between fungal hyphae and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Merlin Sheldrake, Entangled Life. How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures, Penguin Books, 2020. pp 39-42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Documentary directed by John Feldman, *Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis rocked the boat and started a scientific revolution*. 2017.

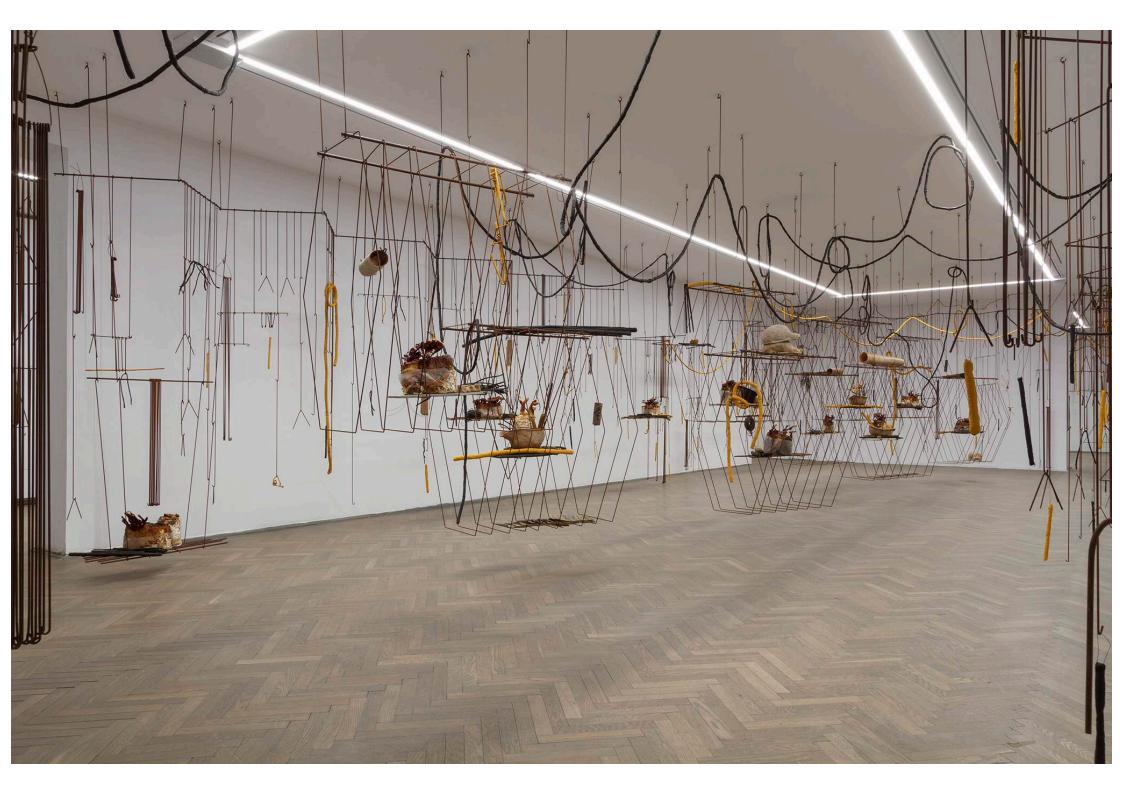
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Michel Serres, *Le Parasite*. Grasset & Fasquelle, 1980.

plant roots are dynamically formed and reformed as mushrooms actively encourage certain plants while hindering others. Fungal structures are dependent on moisture, temperature, the quality of soil and companion species. Some can only live on very mature trees and in undisturbed forests, while others prefer recently cut vegetation and disturbed soils, hence responding to human disturbances. As the ongoing colonial and capitalist territorial expansions have colonised life, mushrooms and forests, like all of us, have become equally dependent on political agendas, funding cycles and business interests.

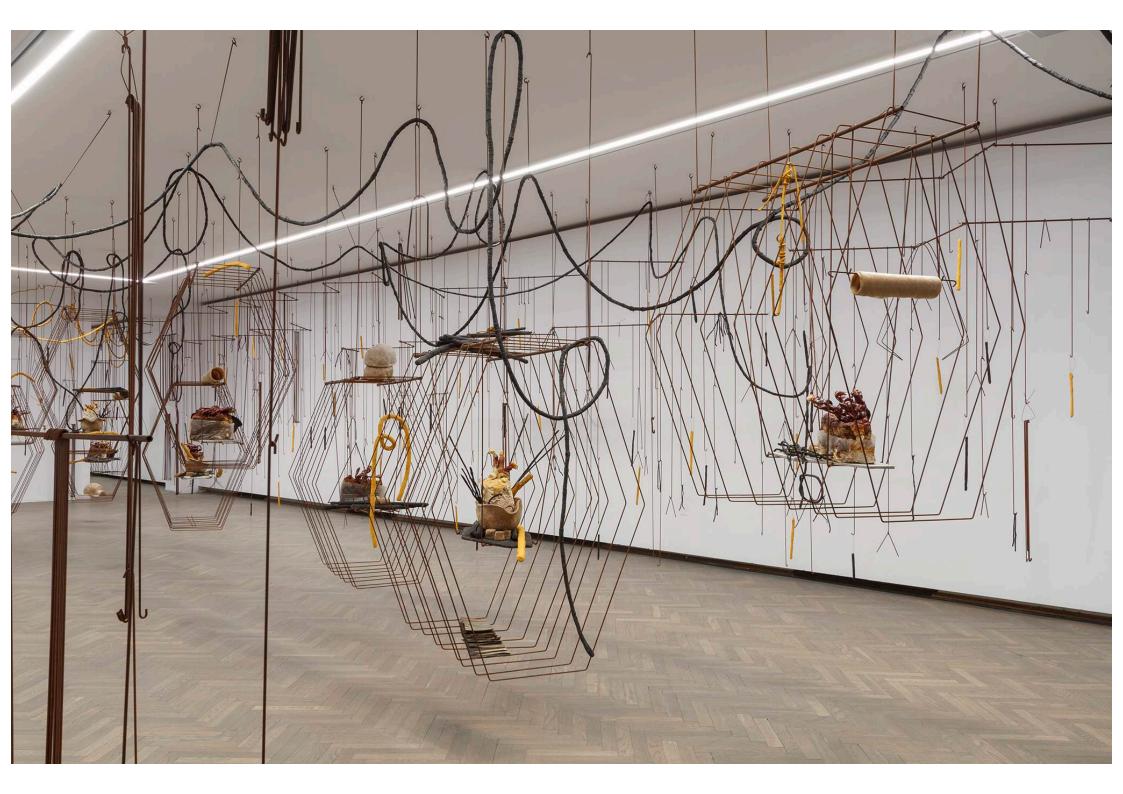
### **Emergence**

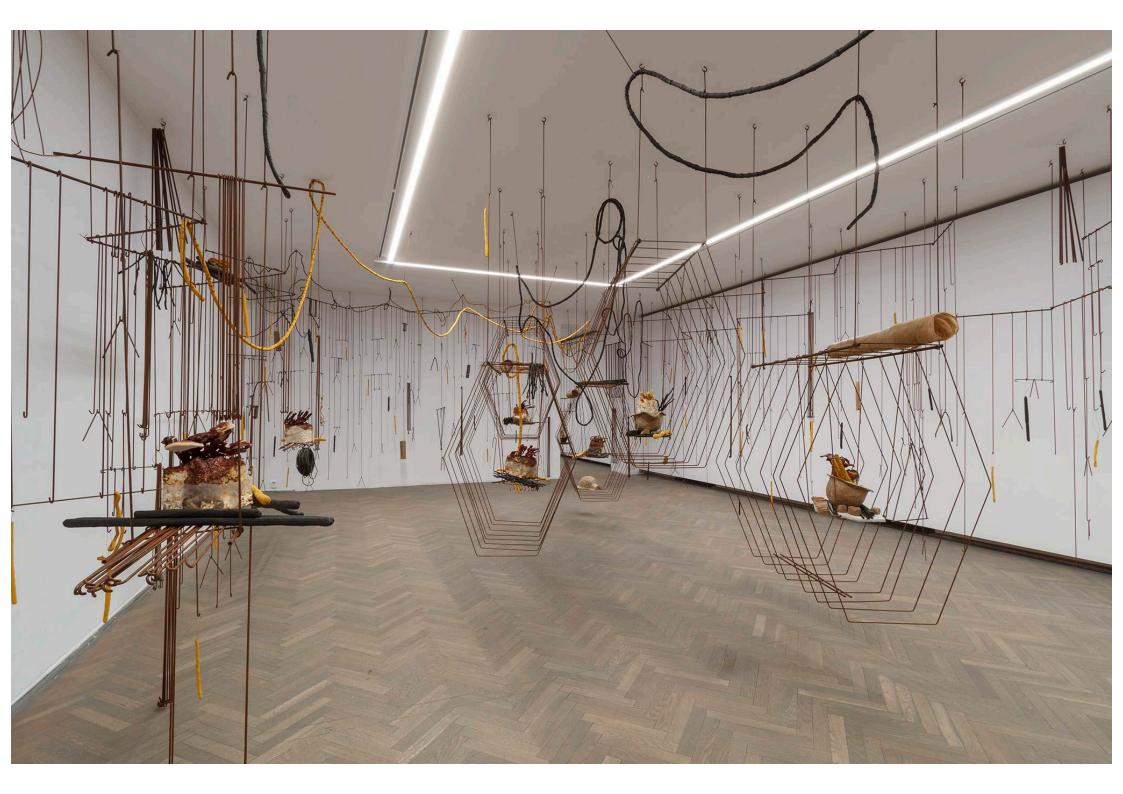
Excess is in the logic of the mushrooms. As described above, there is much potential in the almost infinite opportunities encoded in spores, mating types and growth patterns. This richness is something that Iza Tarasewicz's piece inhabits. How can we embrace the prospects of mushroom encounters to trouble existing definitions of the self? What kind of productive patterns and properties can arise from this plethora of possibilities? This abundance fills me with hope. I feel that places where a multitude of possibilities can be tested and enacted create the chance for alternative forms and perhaps even alternative political imaginaries to emerge.

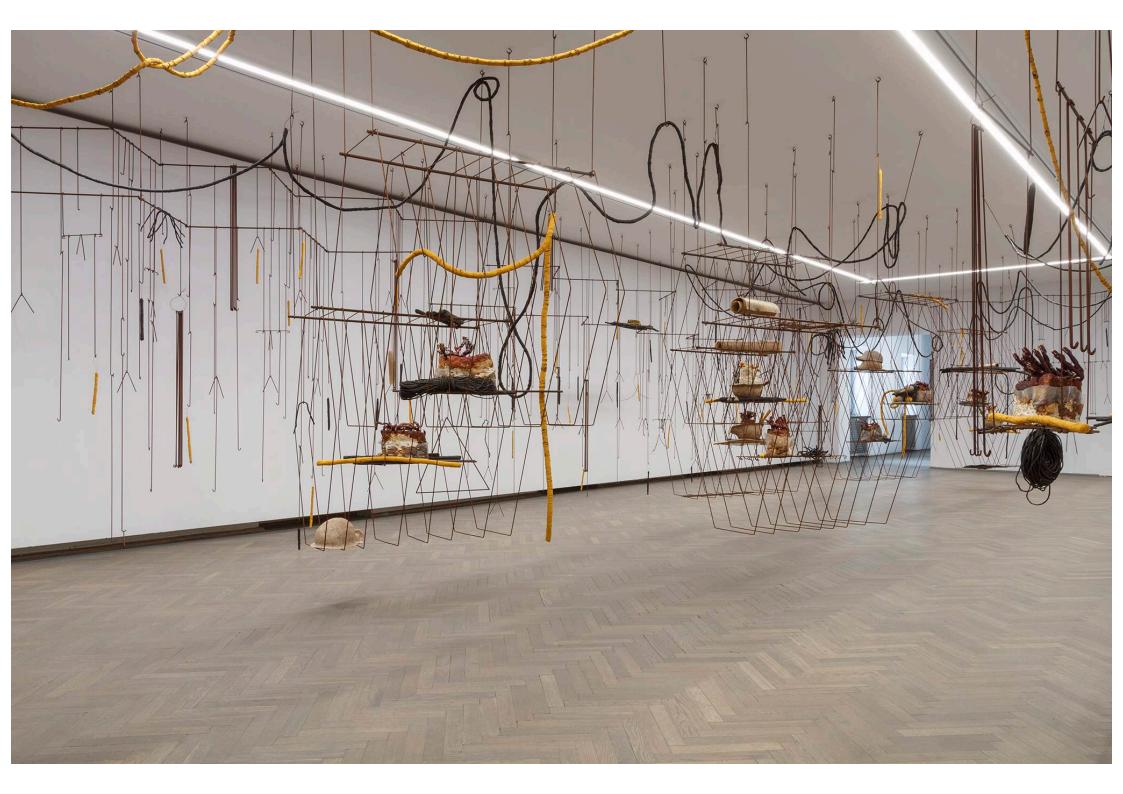




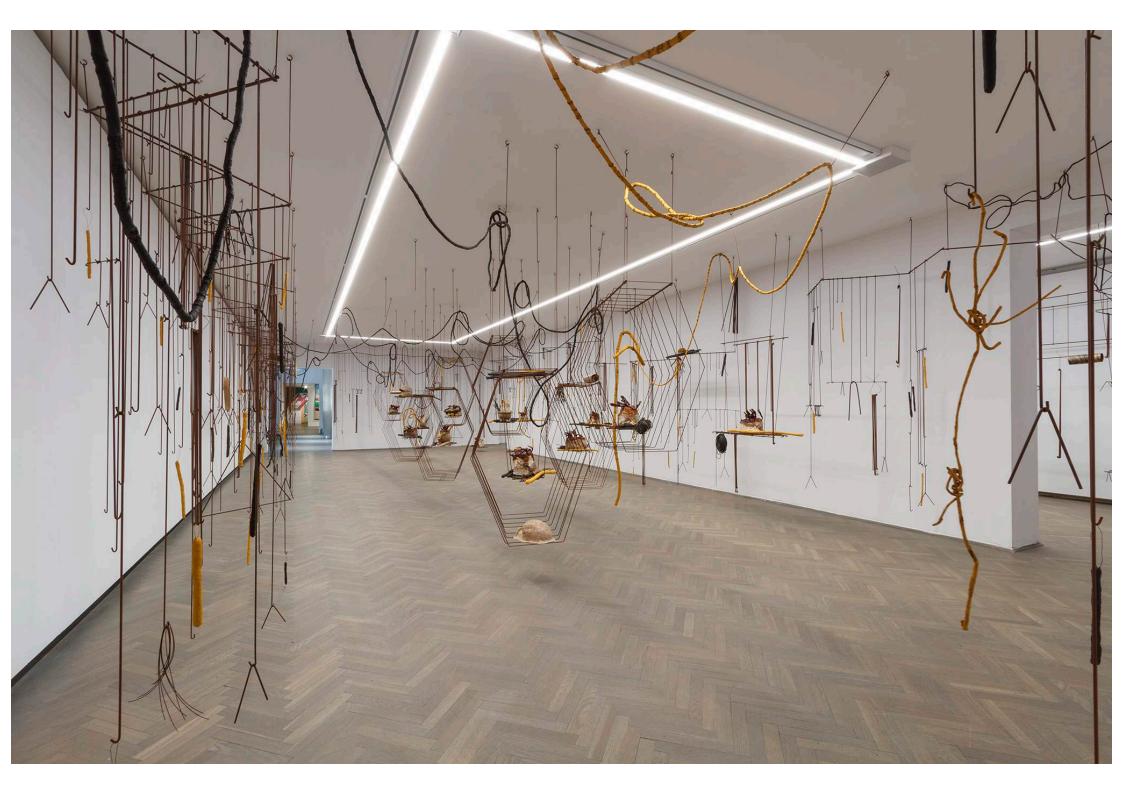






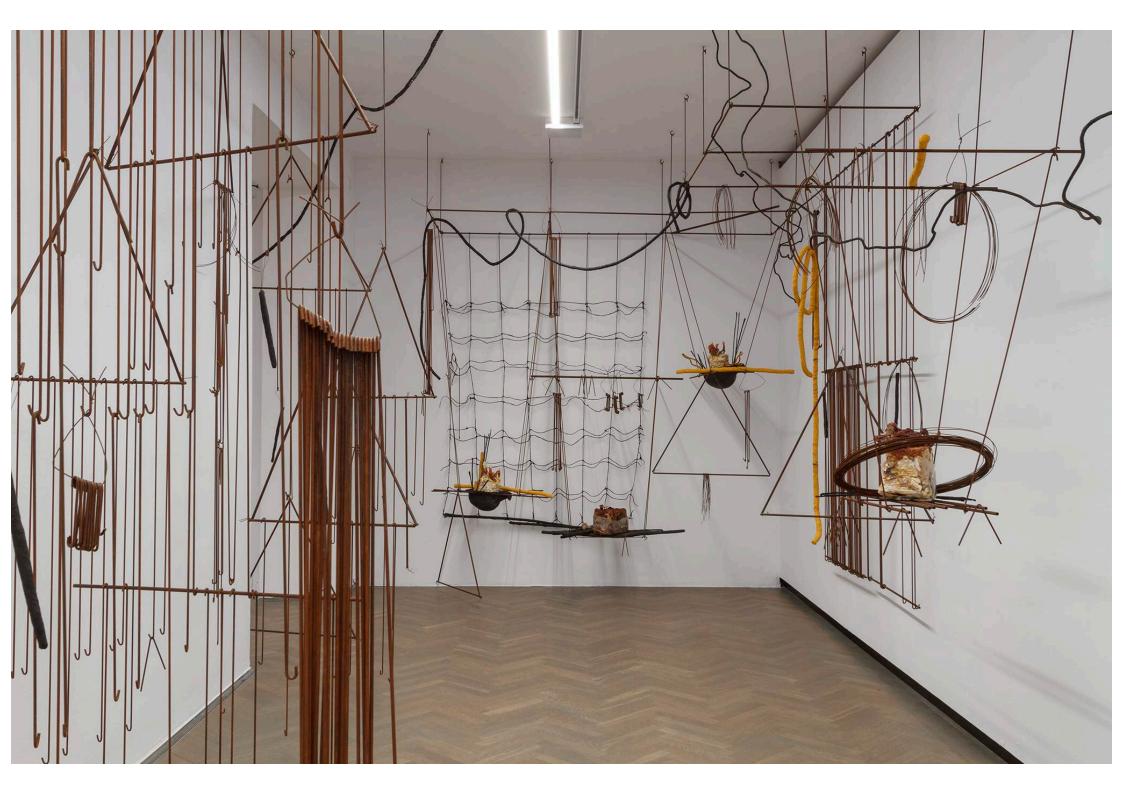






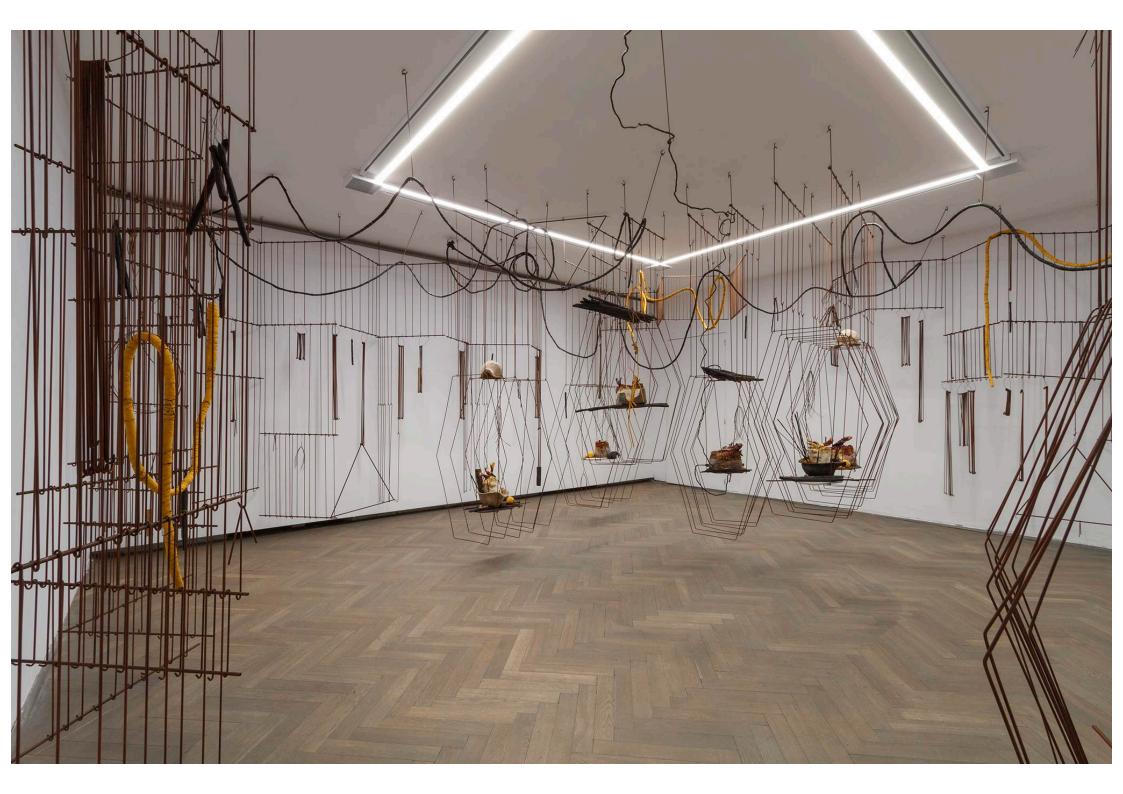


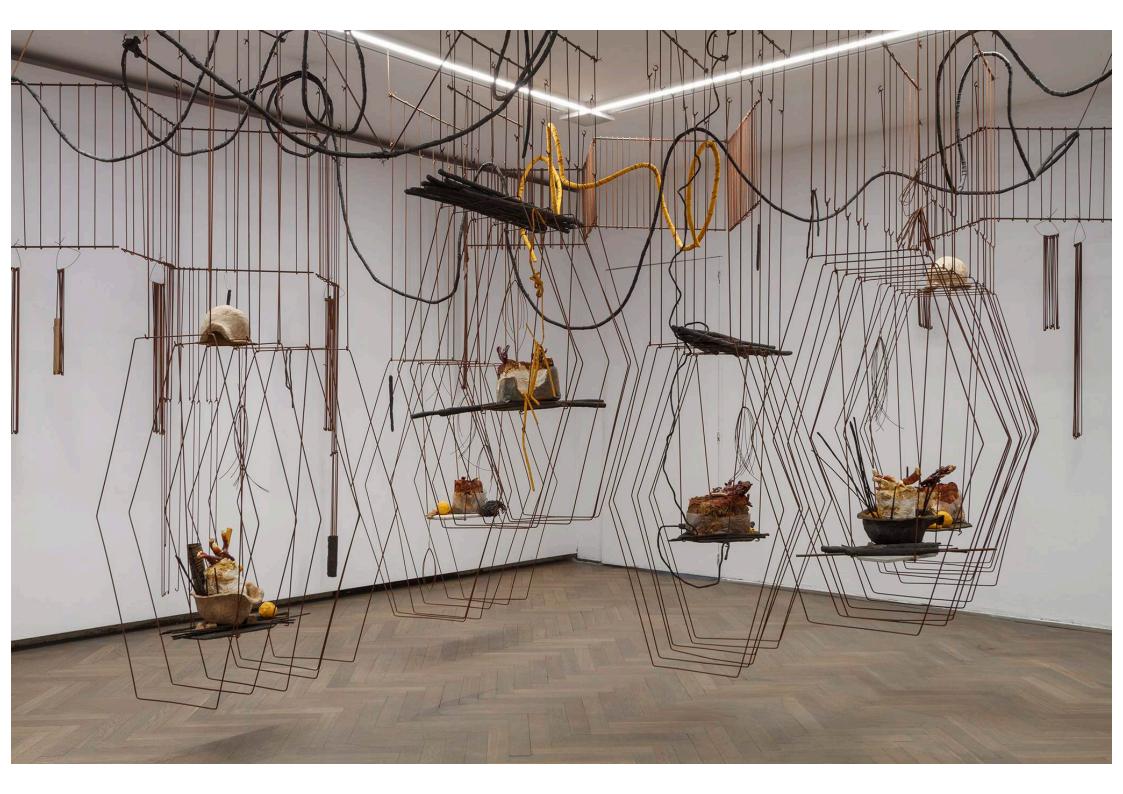






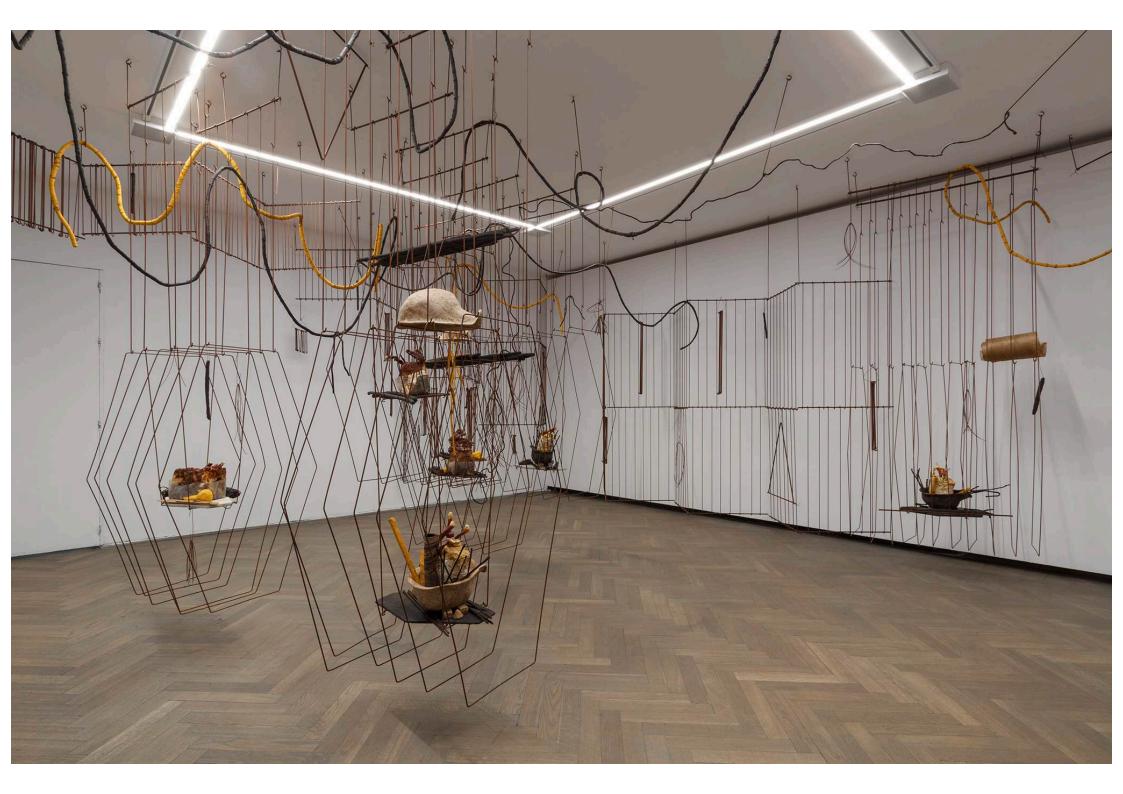


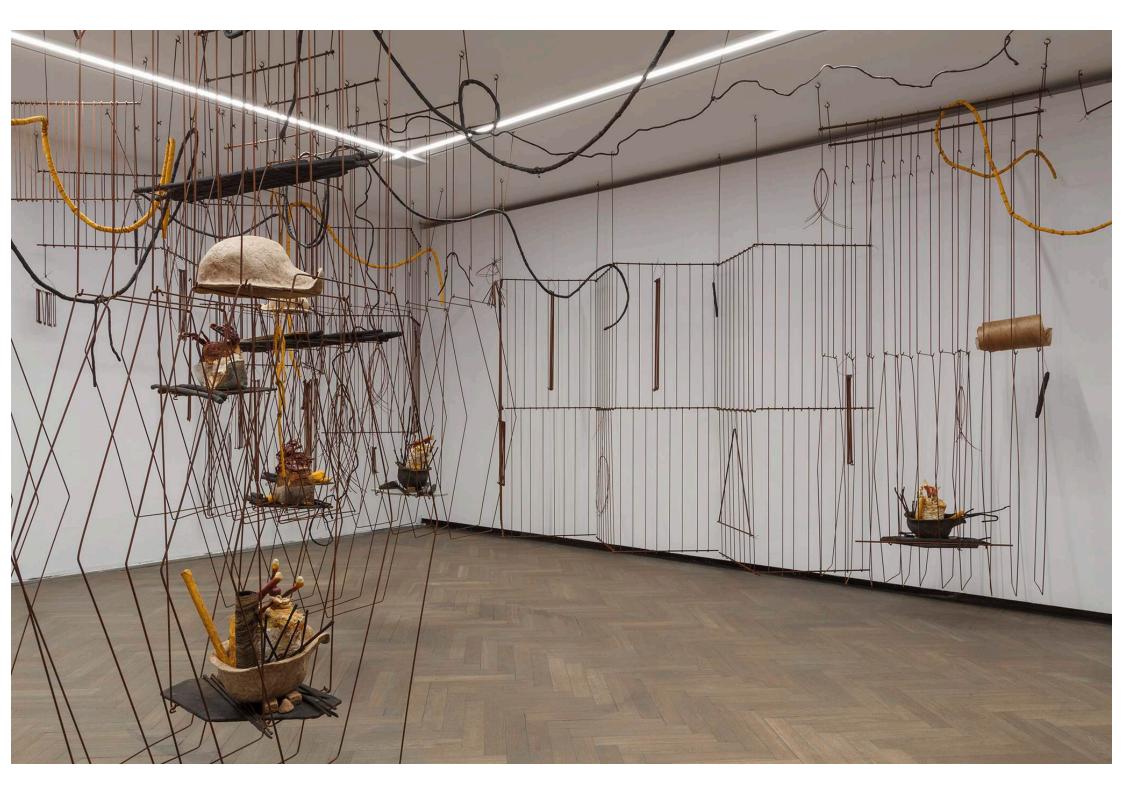


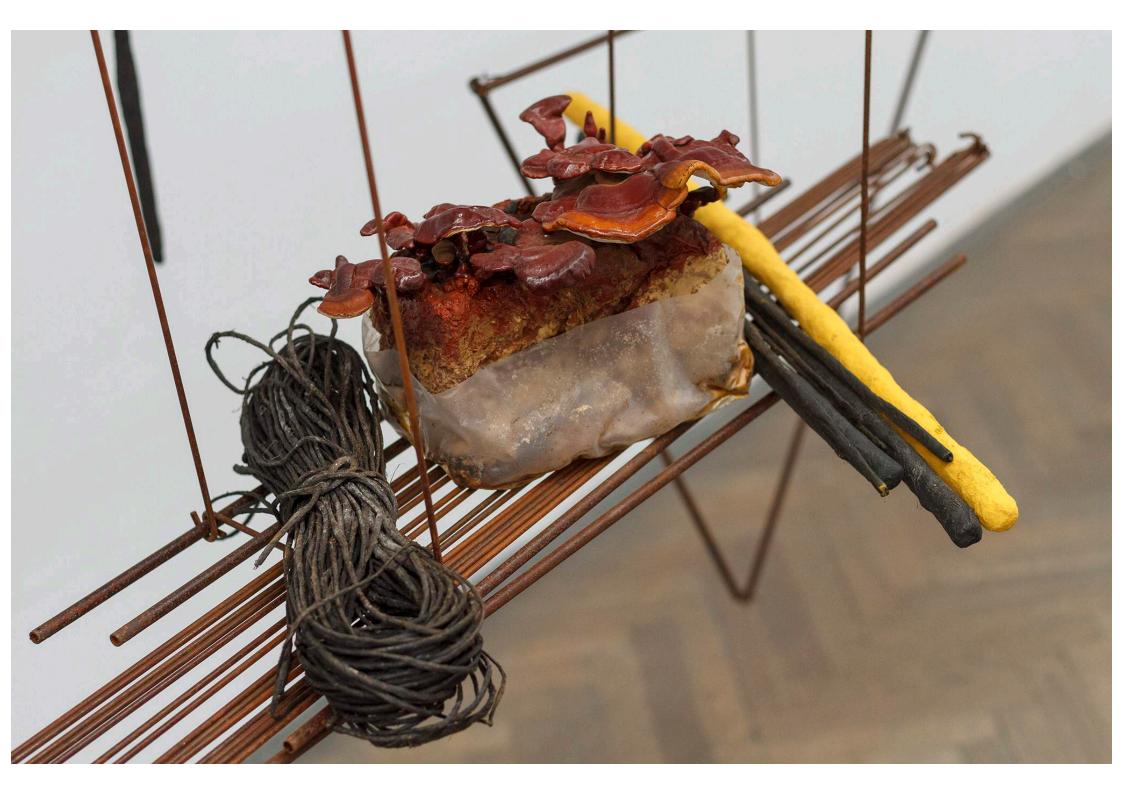














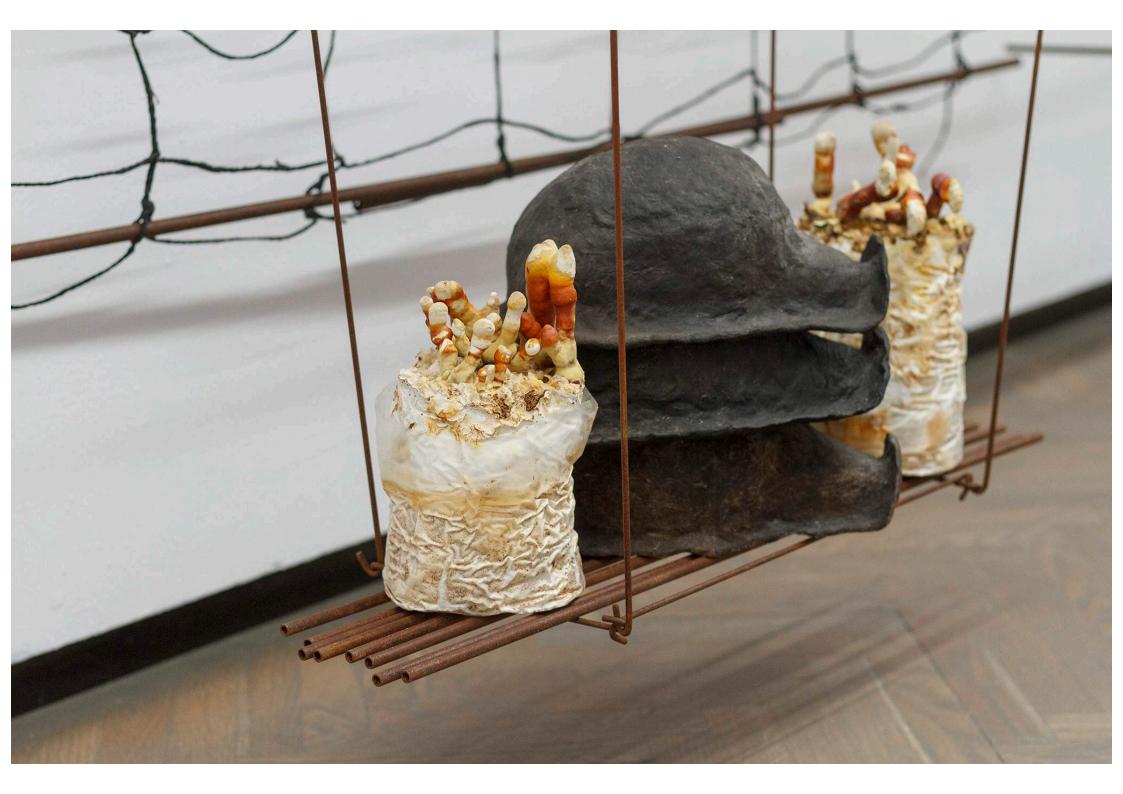










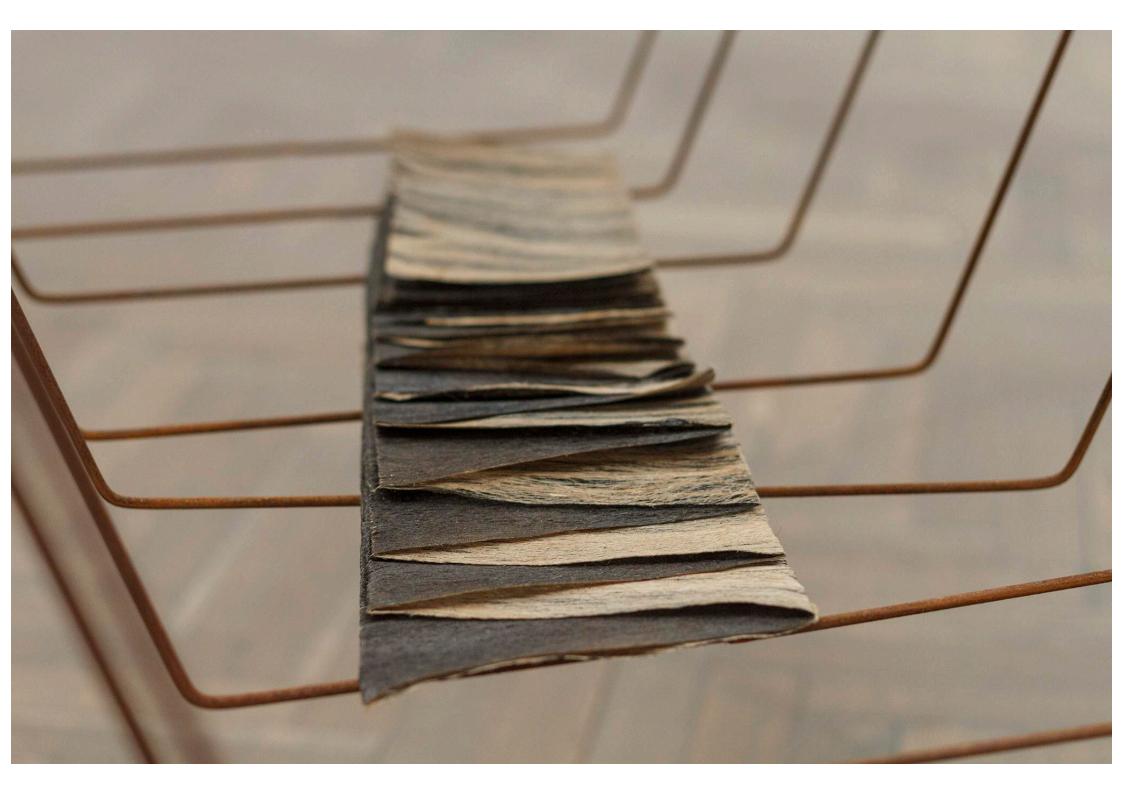
















## Flowing in Waves Towards Equilibrium Płynąc z falami w kierunku równowagi

2020

Group show 'SCULPTURE IN SEARCH OF A PLACE'

<a href="https://zacheta.art.pl/en/wystawy/rzezba-w-poszukiwaniu-miejsca">https://zacheta.art.pl/en/wystawy/rzezba-w-poszukiwaniu-miejsca</a>

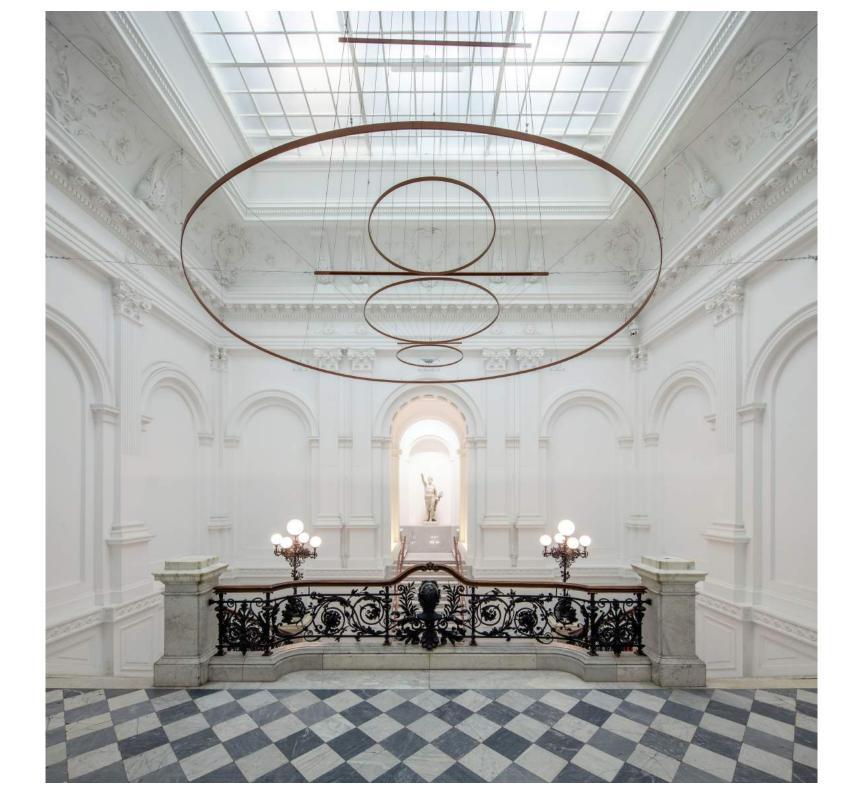
ZACHĘTA NATIONAL GALLERY IN WARSAW, POLAND

30.11.2020- 24.03.2021

1,117 9 w cm w x 958 length x 1132 h cm aluminium, steel wires
Site specific installation

photo by Daniel Rumiancew







## Disturbances and Multiplicities

Iza Tarasewicz
PGS Sopot, Sopot, Poland
8 October - 22 November 2020
Curator: Post Brothers

From 8 October until 22 November 2020, the State Gallery of Art (PGS) in Sopot, Poland presents *Disturbances and Multiplicities*, a solo exhibition by Iza Tarasewicz featuring highlights from the last decade of her idiosyncratic art production. Drawing inspiration from the philosophy of atomism, information theory, biology, quantum physics, and chaos theory, her sculptures and installations often take the form of modular, mobile, and reconfigurable systems that are adjusted according to the spaces in which they are displayed. Working from her home in a small village in eastern Poland, Tarasewicz utilizes rural logics and humble materials to invoke communal exchanges of energy and labor between humans and their environments. By organizing material information, she explores forms of survival and making sense in an increasingly chaotic world.

With the unprecedented situation of COVID-19, impending environmental disaster, war, and the eruption of mass demonstrations, our world today is in a state of constant turmoil and precarity. The exhibition *Disturbances and Multiplicities* addresses these dynamics of disruption and order by emphasizing the roles that noise, turbulence, and the spontaneous assembly of the multitude play in our social, ecological, and formal systems.

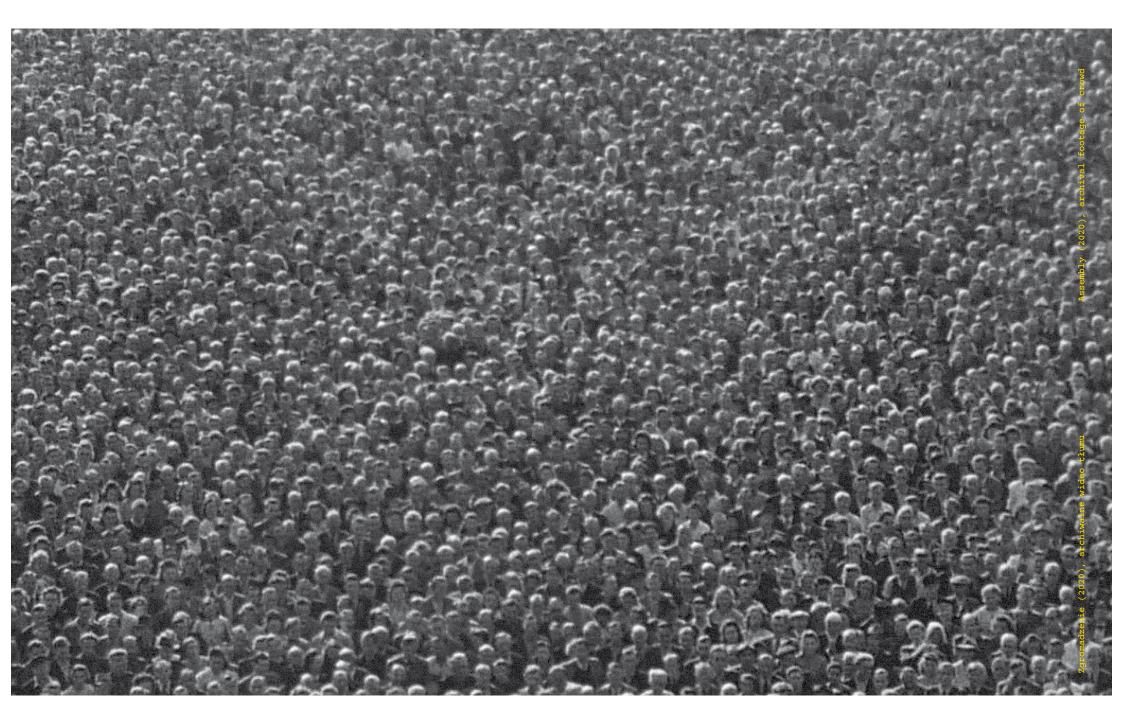
Using raw and ready-at-hand materials, Tarasewicz's artworks test out group dynamics, arranging collections of forms within an interface to model relations. The repetition and aggregation of elements provoke a sensitivity to moments of disequilibrium, revealing where a system breaks down

and confusion gathers and self-organizes. Her practice encourages us to consider how production and relationships are organized across scales, connecting the economic, biological, political, and social world to the molecular and the cosmic.

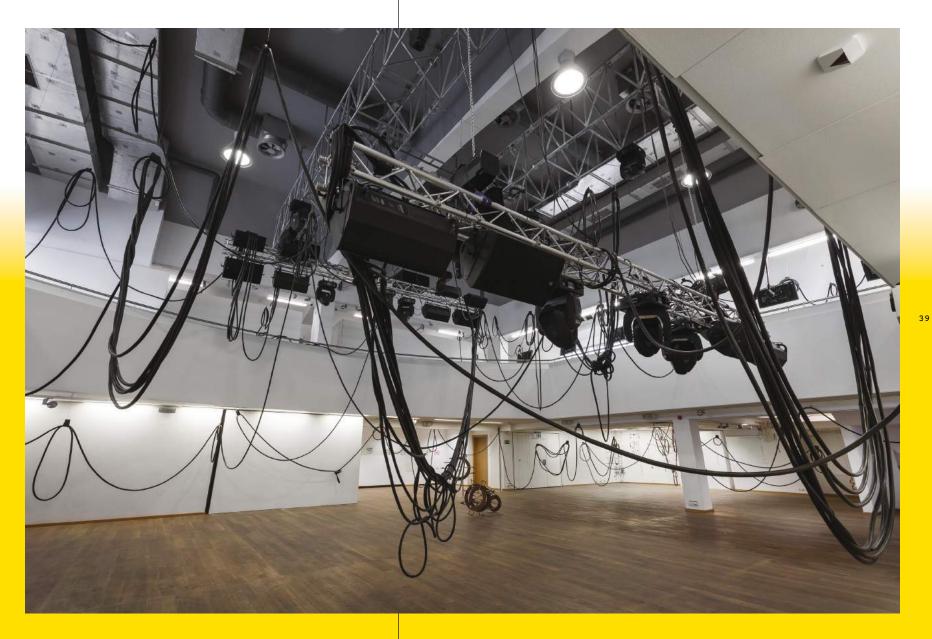
The centerpiece of the exhibition is an 800-meter-long loop of black silicone rope that drapes from the ceiling and crisscrosses throughout the exhibition space. Its title, *Arena III*, refers to ancient enclosures where events would take place: the amphitheater, the stadium, and the marketplace, the first stages of politics, recreation, performance, debate, and collectivity. In 2018, this work was wrapped around the venerated building of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, provocatively declaring the museum as a site for public discussion. Here, the massive circle is brought from the outside in to produce a soft and fluctuating architecture akin to a dense jungle of vines or a giant intestinal track. The monumental liana is an instrument for mark-making, for bounding entities together and dividing. This three- dimensional drawing traces a route of loops and twists, generating an abstract choreography for the eye and the body, and framing the rest of the exhibition.

A key component of the exhibition is a selection of preparatory drawings and a series of hanging assemblages made of entangled nets and dense forests of delicate metal rods. These works chart relations and linkages within a matrix, accentuating the importance of noise and multiplicity in communication. Spontaneous and improvised as if tracing out a thought process, the compositions are diagrams of possible architectures and recall the role of repetition in folk traditions. This connection of the handheld to the monumental is also present in a photographic series and other objects that model parallels between cellular, social, agricultural, and celestial interactions.

A set of oxidized steel display apparatuses and wall-mounted reliefs organize cluttered information. Appearing as a form of outdoor shelving or almost as rusted rudimentary spacecrafts, the machines collate and display inventories of base materials such as plant fiber and iron oxide color pigment. The aggregates produce multicolored formations that are at once abstract and familiar, displaying principals of fusion and fission. Information is embedded in these combinations of materials, which are metabolized and organized within a productive system. At the margins and boundaries of the exhibition space, yellow ochre pigment accumulates like dust. Titled *Yellow Coal*, this installation references a short story by the Polish-Ukrainian author Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, where a society channels bad feelings, anger, suffering, and negativity into a limitless energy resource. Iza Tarasewicz's practice invokes this reframing of bodily and ecological economics through technologies of preparation, distribution, and connection. She mobilizes a functionality of abstraction to make visible the inventiveness of life to harness and accommodate dynamic, uncertain, and destructive forces. The exhibition *Disturbances and Multiplicities* considers how such experiments in organizing the noisy masses can help us imagine a reordering of our world.



Arena III (2018), 800 m w pętli zamkniętej, silikon. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.





Arena III (2018), 800 m circle, silicon rope. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot. 41 Arena III (2018), 800 m w pętli zamkniętej, silikon. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.

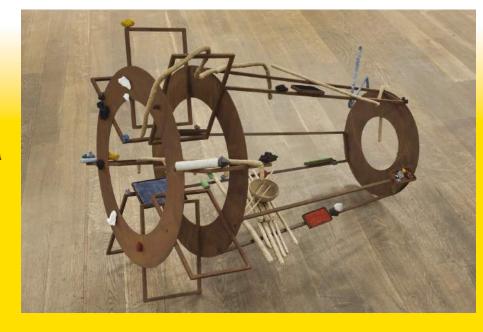




Arena III (2018), 800 m w pętli zamkniętej, silikon. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.

widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. Arena III (2018), 800 m circle, silicon rope. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.

exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.





Halt The Cyclone 4 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty Halt The Cyclone 4 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments detal, Halt The Cyclone 4 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty detail, Halt The Cyclone 4 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments





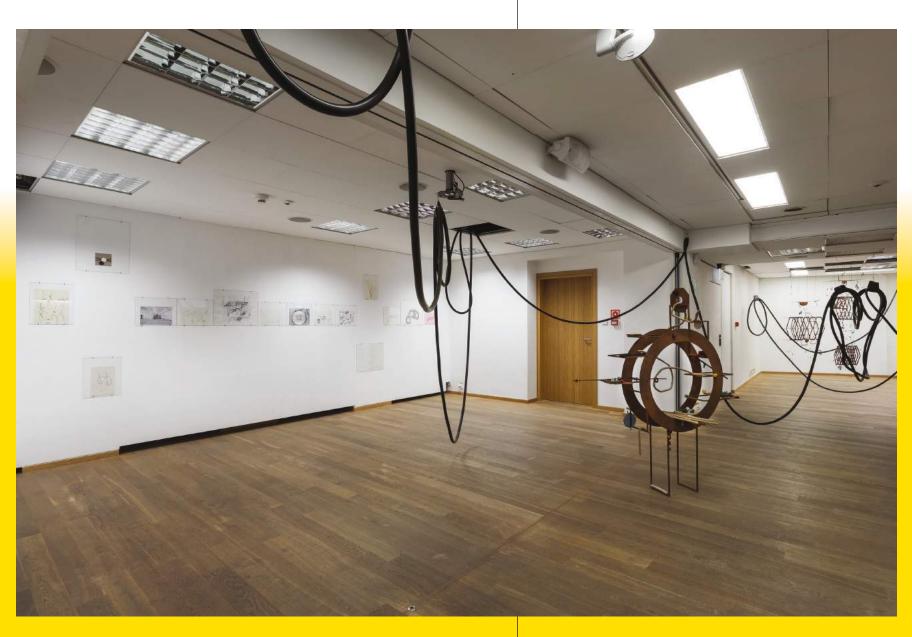
Halt The Cyclone 6 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty

detal, Halt The Cyclone 6 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty Halt The Cyclone 6 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments

detail, Halt The Cyclone 6 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments

exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.

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Rysunki, (2010-2020), 15 szt. na papierze. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.







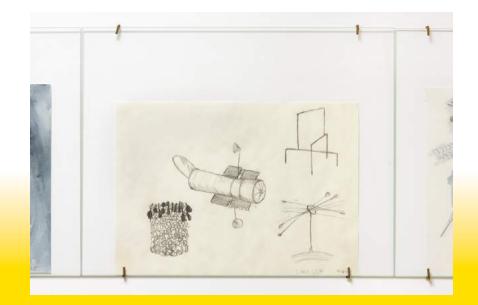


























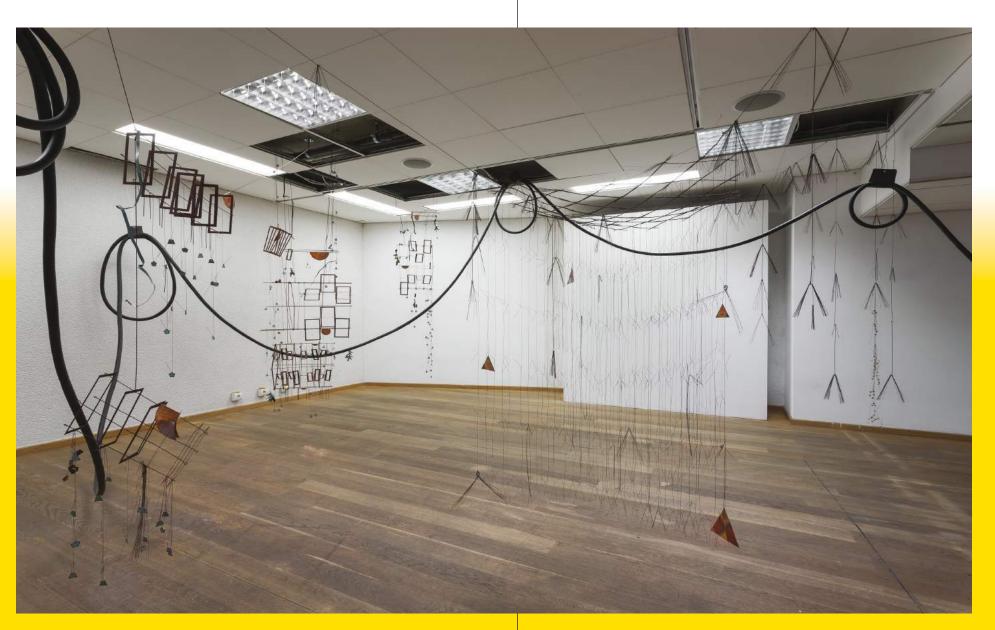












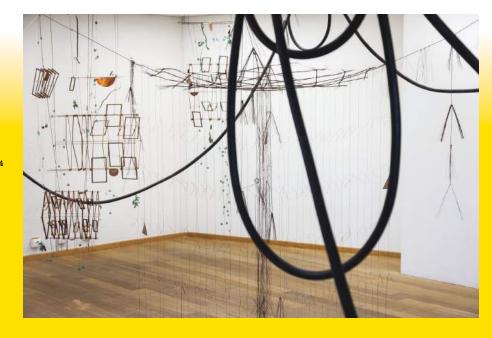
widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. In Myriads, Things Cry Out XI (2020), stal, miedź, mosiądz. i What Whispers Are These? X (2019), stal, mosiądz.

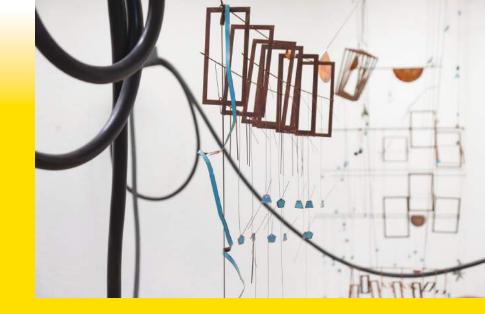
exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:

Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.

Featuring: In Myriads, Things Cry Out XI (2020), steel, copper, brass. and What Whispers

Are These? X (2019), steel, brass.



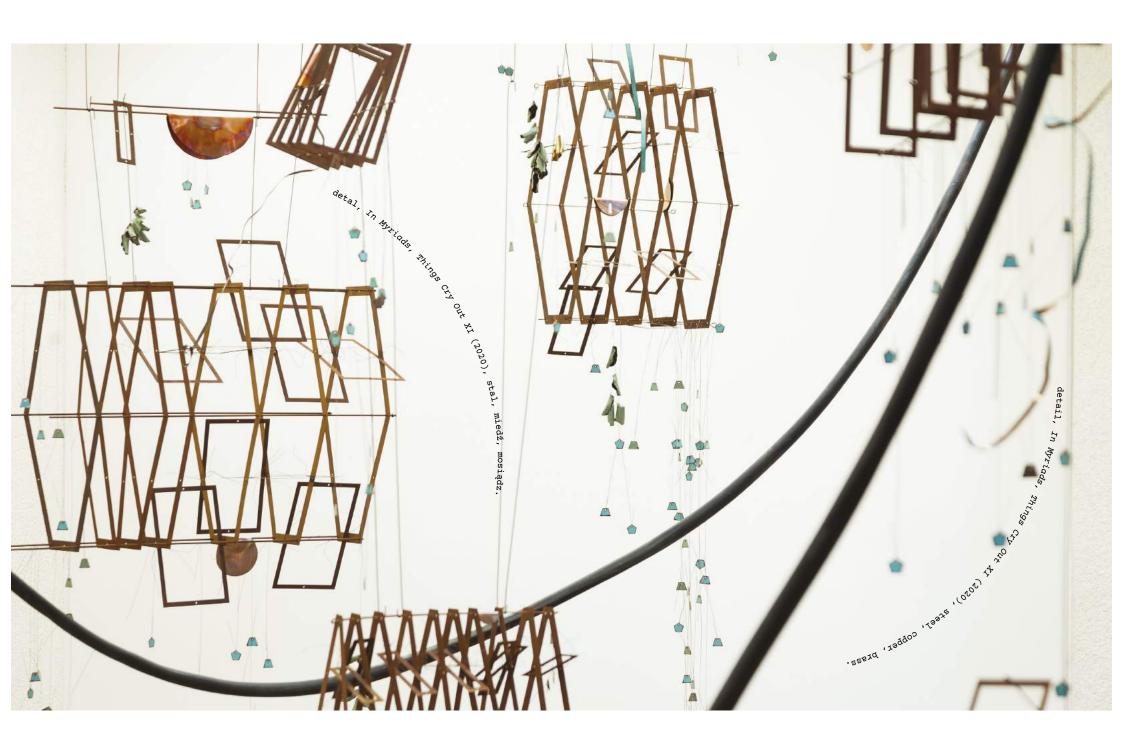


widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz:
Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS
Sopot. In Myriads, Things Cry Out XI
(2020), stal, miedź, mosiądz.
i What Whispers Are These? X (2019),
stal, mosiądz.

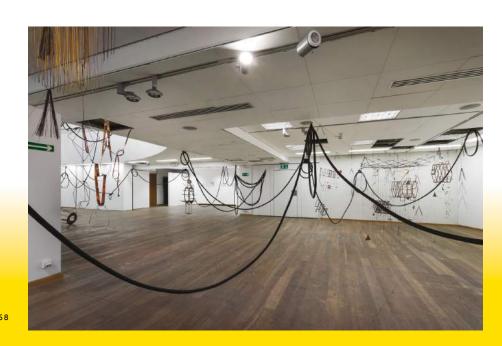
exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS
Sopot. Featuring: In Myriads, Things
Cry Out XI (2020), steel, copper,
brass. and What Whispers Are These? X
(2019), steel, brass.

detal, In Myriads, Things Cry Out XI (2020), stal, miedź, mosiądz.

detail, In Myriads, Things Cry Out XI (2020), steel, copper, brass.







widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.

What Whispers Are These? XII (2020), stal, mosiądz. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.

What Whispers Are These? XII (2020), steel, brass. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.









What Whispers Are These? IX (2020), stal, mosiądz. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.

What Whispers Are These? IX (2020), stal, mosiądz.

What Whispers Are These? IX (2020), steel, brass. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.

What Whispers Are These? IX (2020), steel, brass.







In Myriads, Things Cry Out IX (2018), stal, miedź, mosiądz

widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. In Myriads, Things Cry Out IX (2018), steel, copper, brass

exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.





Narzędzia (2018-2020), drewniane narzędzia do wyplatania modeli.

widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. Narzędzia (2018-2020), drewniane narzędzia do wyplatania modeli. i Sieci (2019), kauczuk, sznurek konopny. Tools (2018-2020), wooden tools for weaving models.

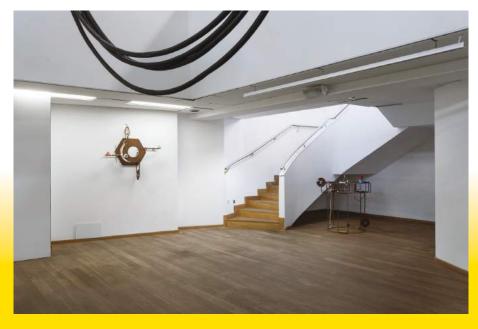
exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot. Featuring: Tools (2018-2020), wooden tools for weaving models. and Nets (2019), rubber, hemp rope.







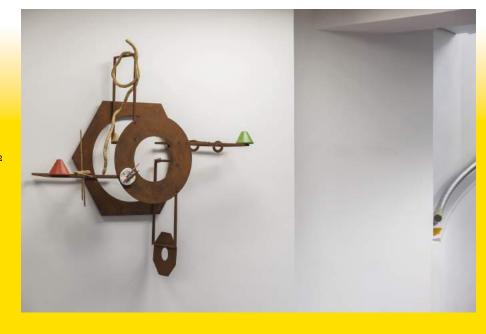




widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz:
Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.
What Whispers Are These? VII (2020),
stal, mosiądz. i Yellow Coal (2015),
Instalacja suchy pigment-żółta ochra.
I Arena III (2018), 800 m
w pętli zamkniętej, silikon.

widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities
at PGS Sopot. Featuring: What Whispers
Are These? VII (2020), steel, brass.
and Yellow Coal (2015), site-specific
installation using dry yellow ochre
iron oxide pigment. And Arena III
(2018), 800 m circle, silicon rope.

exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.





Halt The Cyclone 3 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty. Halt The Cyclone 3 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments. szczegółowy obraz, Halt The Cyclone 3 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty.

detail, Halt The Cyclone 3 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments.



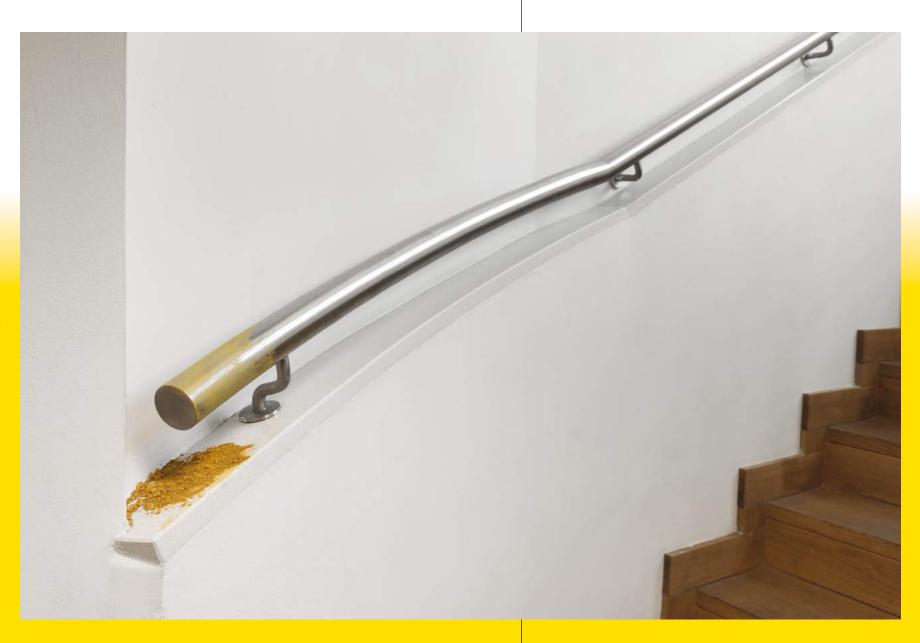


Halt The Cyclone 5 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty.

detal, Halt The Cyclone 5 (2016), cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana, pigmenty.

Halt The Cyclone 5 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments.

detail, Halt The Cyclone 5 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments.





exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.







Zmienne (2020), kompozycja okienna, stal, mosiądz. widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.

detal, Zmienne (2020), kompozycja okienna, stal, mosiądz.

detal, Zmienne (2020), kompozycja okienna, stal, mosiądz.

Variables (2020), window compositions, steel, brass. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.

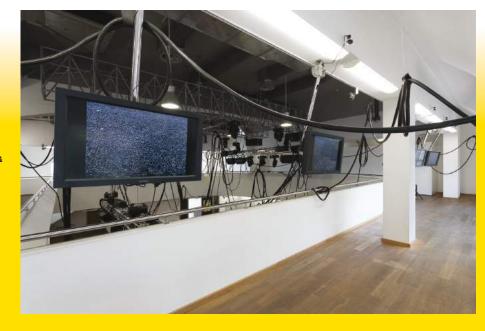
detail, *Variables* (2020), window compositions, steel, brass.

detail, Variables (2020), window compositions, steel, brass.



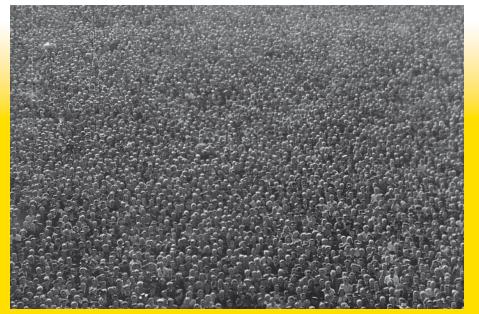






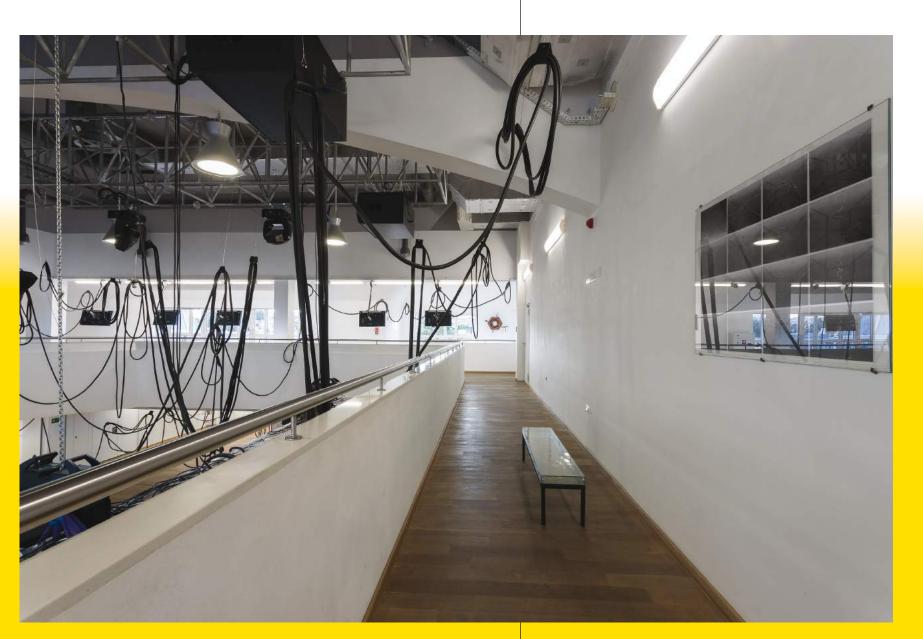
widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz:
Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.
Assembly (2020), archiwalne wideo tłumu,
8 telewizorów. i Arena III (2018), 800 m
w pętli zamkniętej, silikon.

exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities at
PGS Sopot. Featuring: Assembly (2020),
archival footage of crowd, 6 sec. loop,
presented on 8 video monitors. and Arena
III (2018), 800 m circle, silicon rope.



Assembly (2020), archiwalne wideo tłumu, 8 telewizorów.

Assembly (2020), archival footage of crowd, 6 sec. loop, presented on 8 video monitors.



97 widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. Macierz (2013), Czarno-białe zdjęcia analogowe, kopia wystawiennicza i Punkty (2010), preparowane jelita wieprzowe, szkło, metal.

exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot. Featuring: Matrix (2013), Set of 16 analogue photographs, glass frame. and Points (2010), hog intestines, glass, steel.





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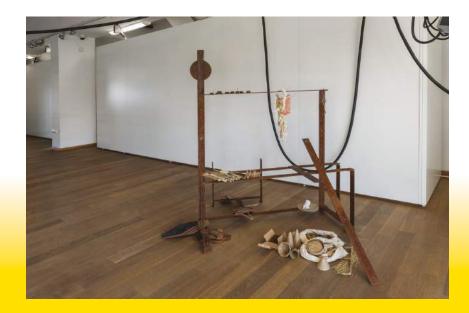
widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz:

pigmenty.

Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot.

Zmienne (2020), kompozycja okienna, stal, mosiądz. i Halt The Cyclone 1 (2016),

cement, włókno konopne, stal oksydowana,



exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz: Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot. Featuring: Variables (2020), window compositions, steel, brass. and Halt The Cyclone 1 (2016), cement, hemp fiber, oxidized steel, iron-oxide pigments.

Do, Dico, Addico II (2017), stal oksydowana, włókno konopne, naturalne pigmenty (indigo, dracena smocza, , kurkuma, czerwce z kaktusa, blogwood, madder root, aloes, orzech włoski.

Do, Dico, Addico II (2017), oxidized steel, hemp fibre, natural pigments (indigo, dragontree, curcuma, cochenile, blogwood, madder root, aloe, walnut), clay, terra- cotta, oxidized wire, plastic, paper.





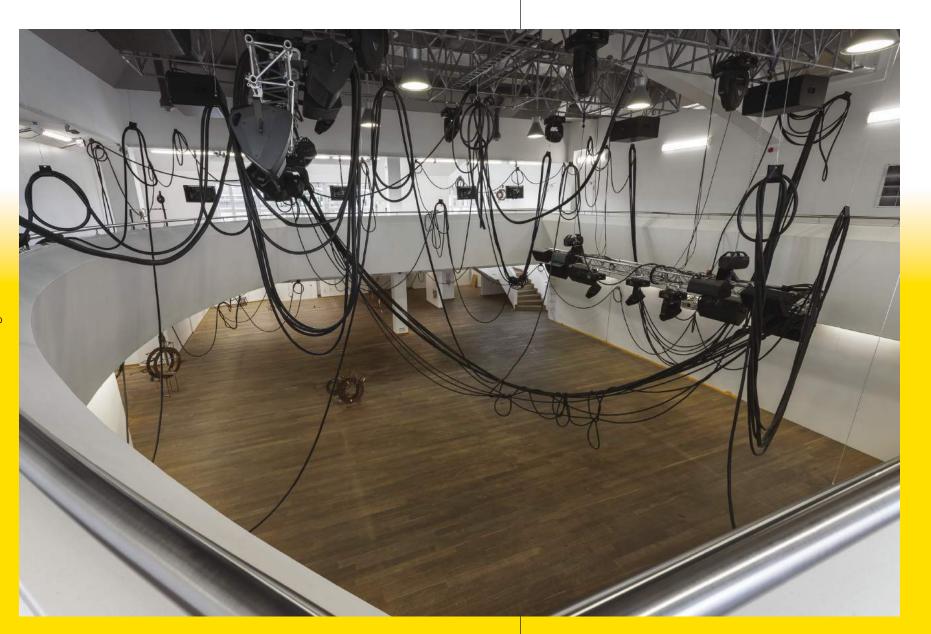


widok wystawy, Iza Tarasewicz: Zakłócenia i Wielokrotności w PGS Sopot. Yellow Coal (2015), Instalacja suchy pigment-żółta ochra. i Untitled (2018), akwarela na papierze.

Untitled (2018), akwarela na papierze.

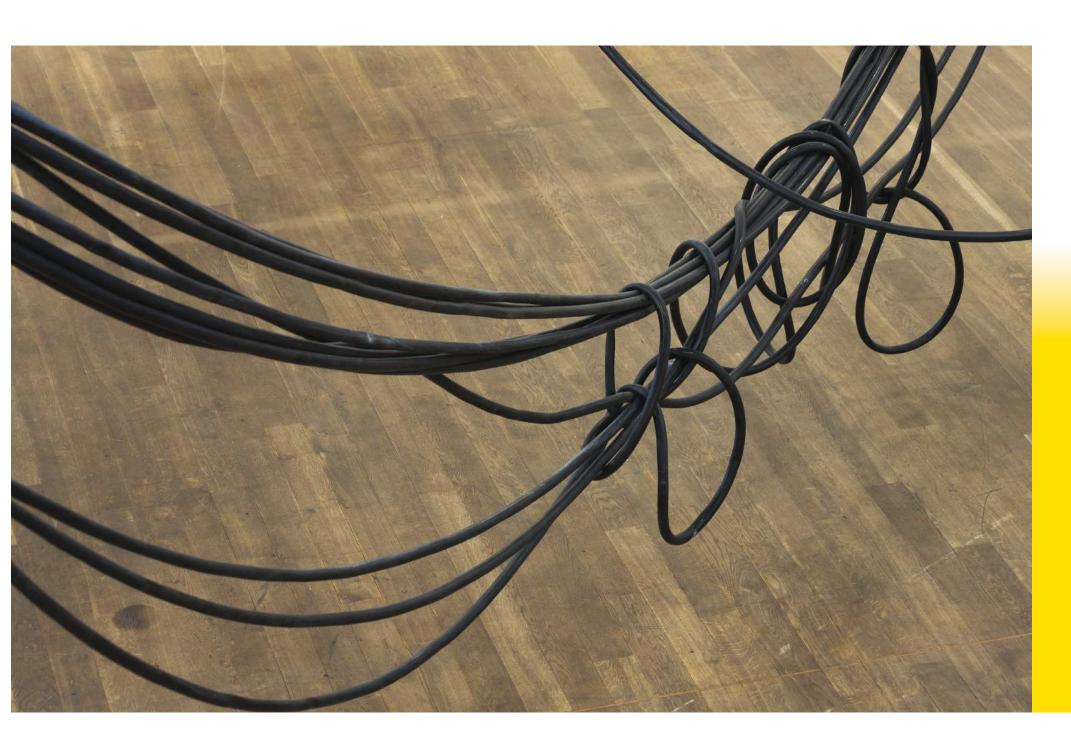
exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS
Sopot. Featuring: Yellow Coal (2015),
site-specific installation using dry
yellow ochre iron oxide pigment. and
Untitled (2018), aquarelle on paper.

Untitled (2018), aquarelle on paper.



Arena III (2018), 800 m circle, silicon rope. exhibition view, Iza Tarasewicz:
Disturbances and Multiplicities at PGS Sopot.



















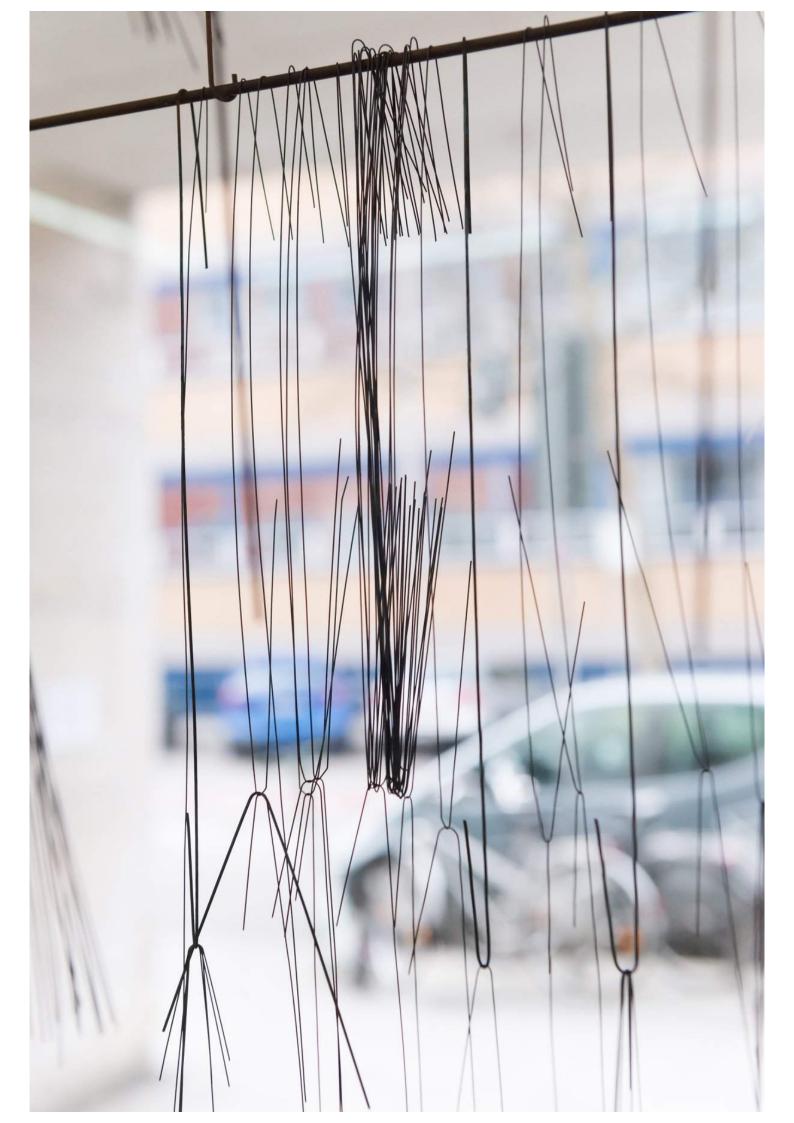














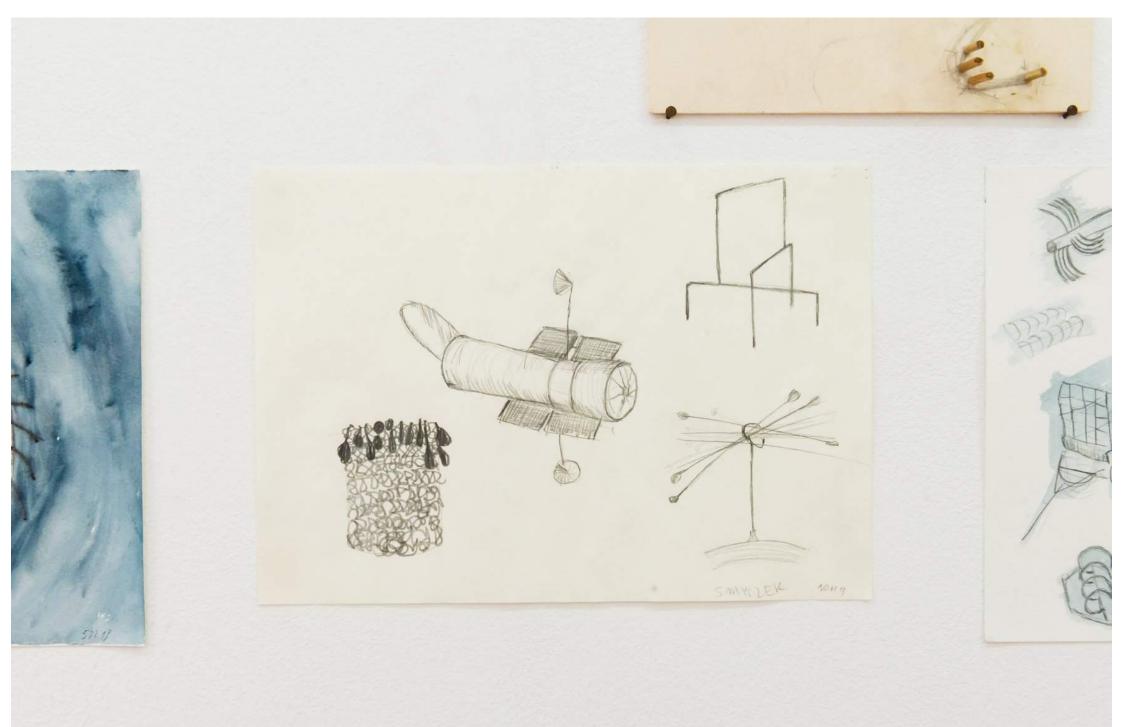


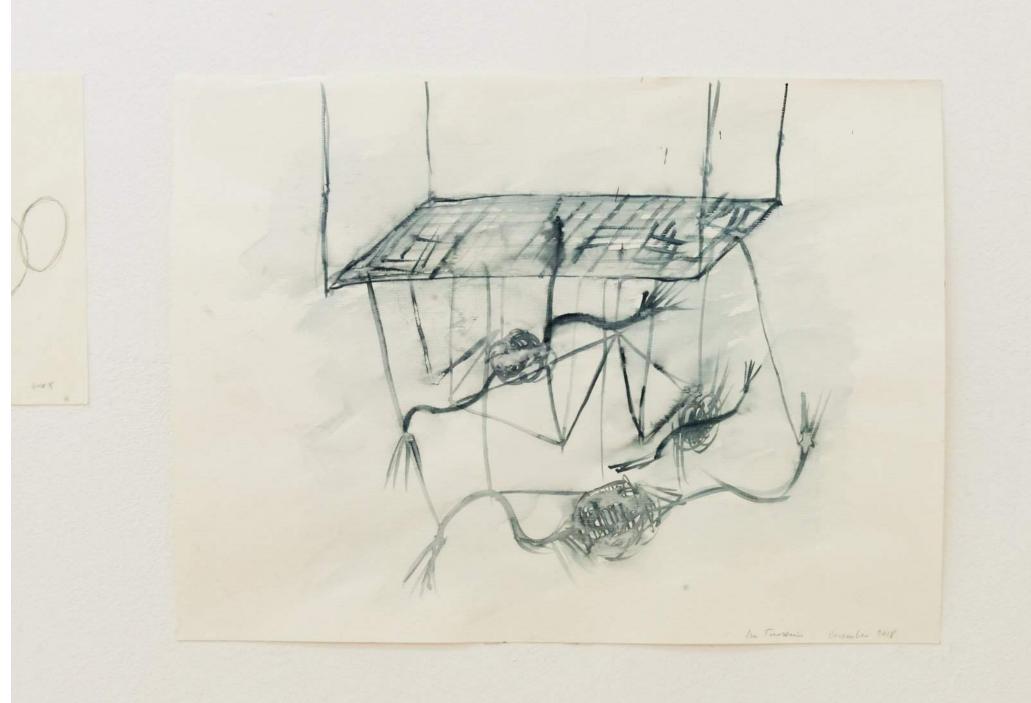






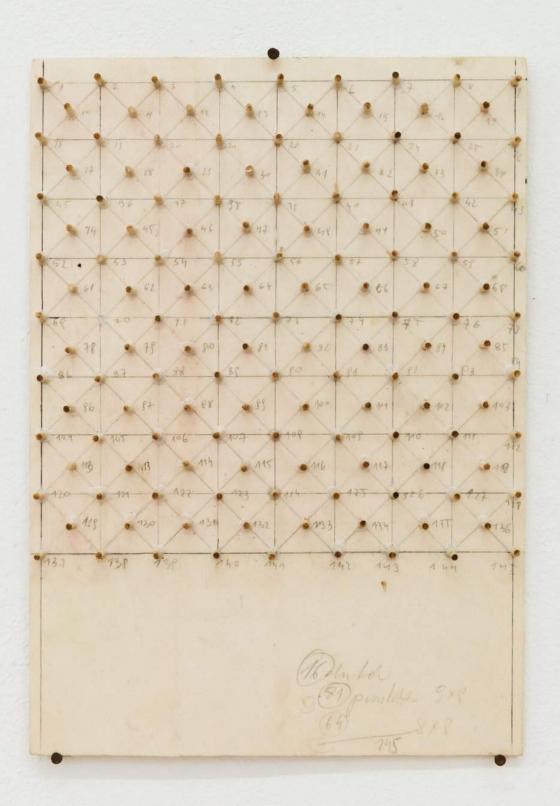




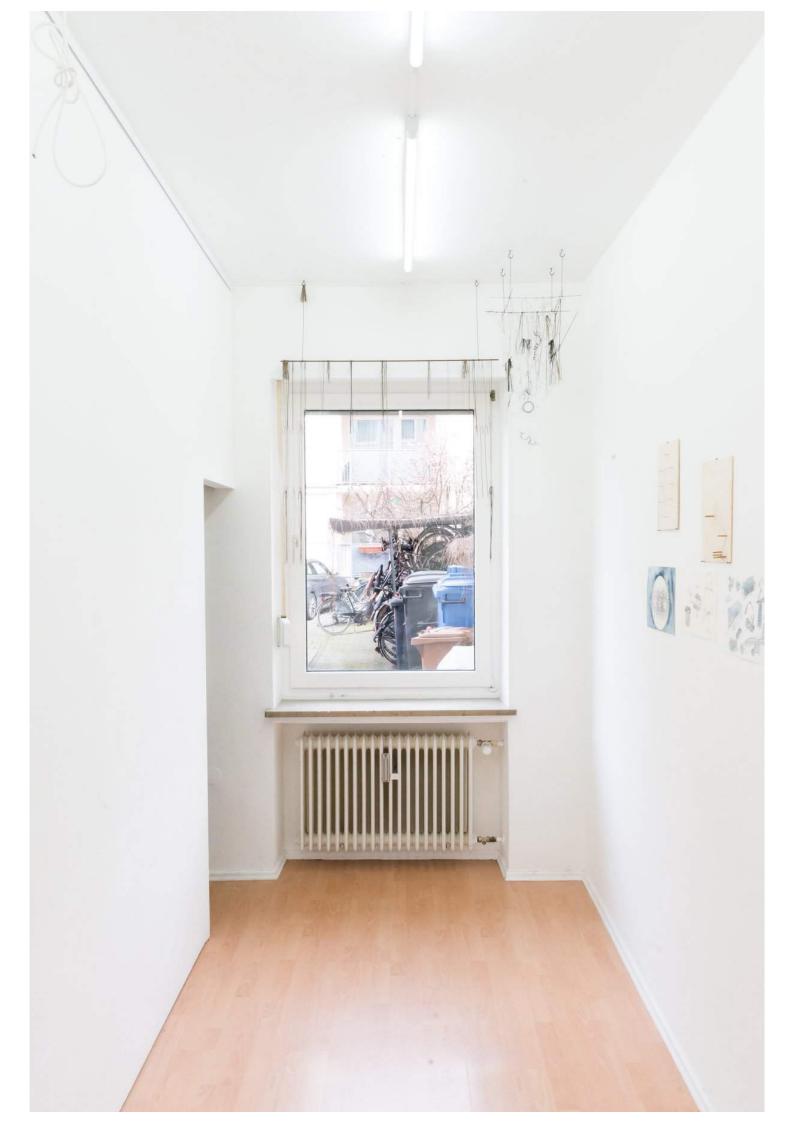






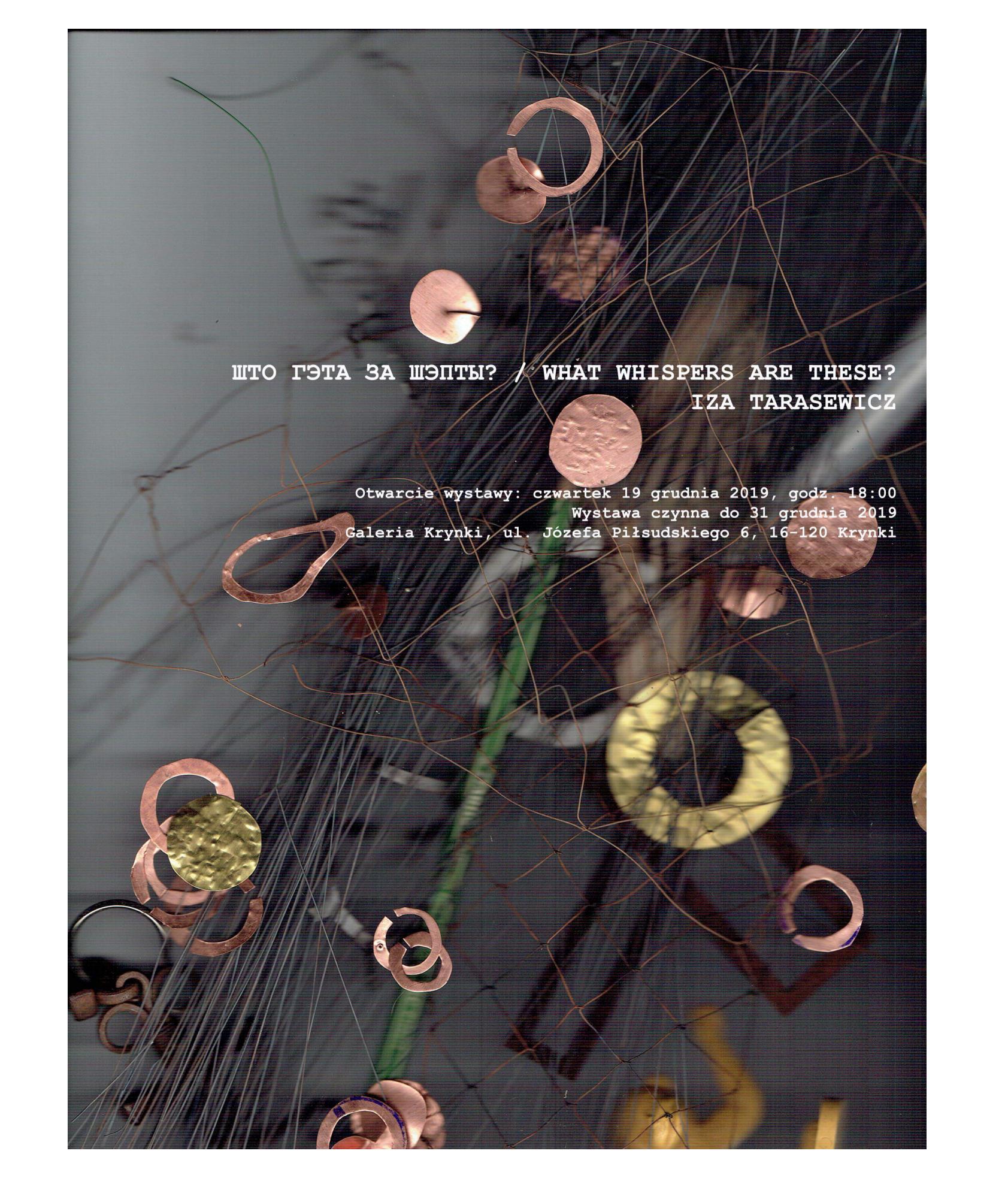




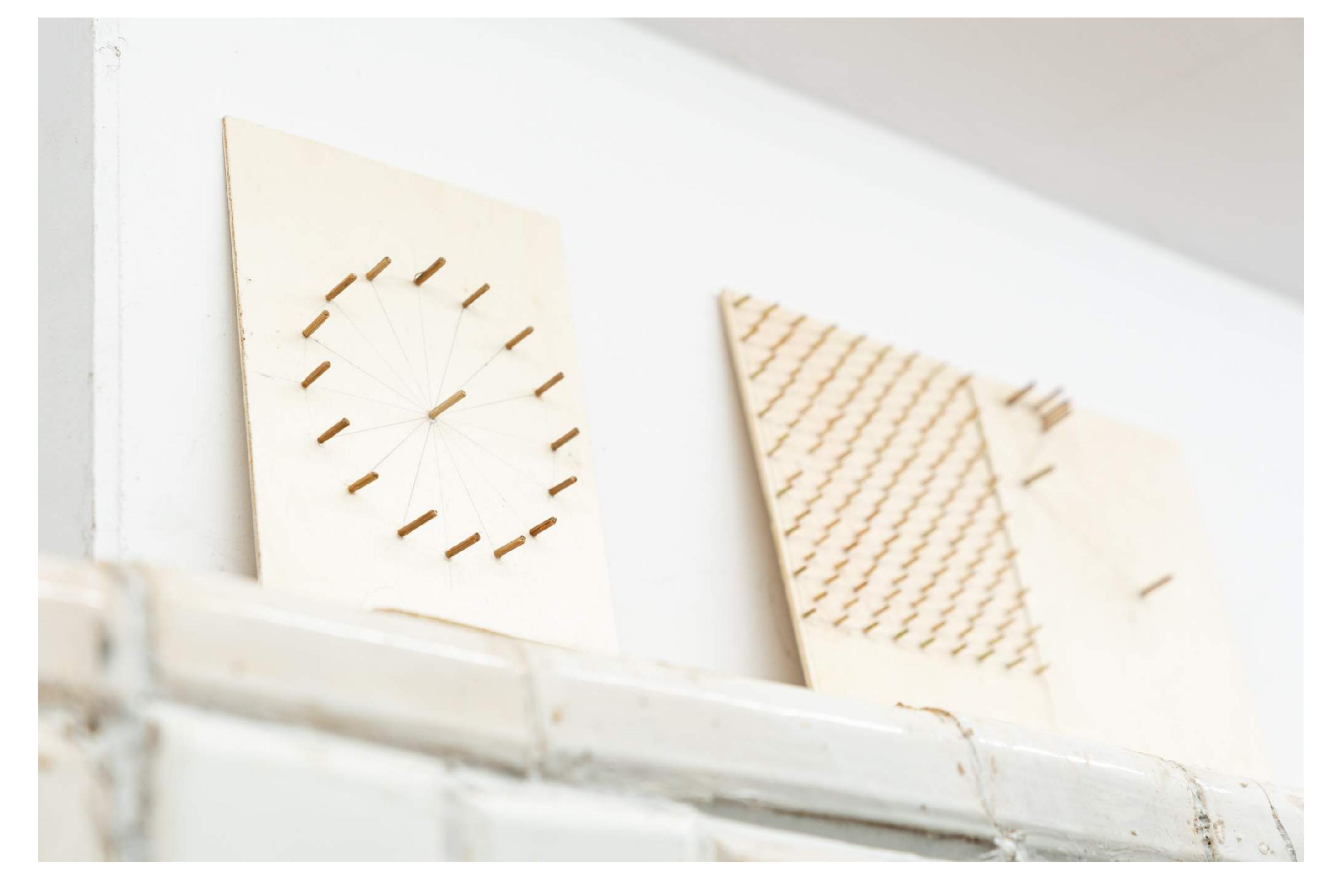
















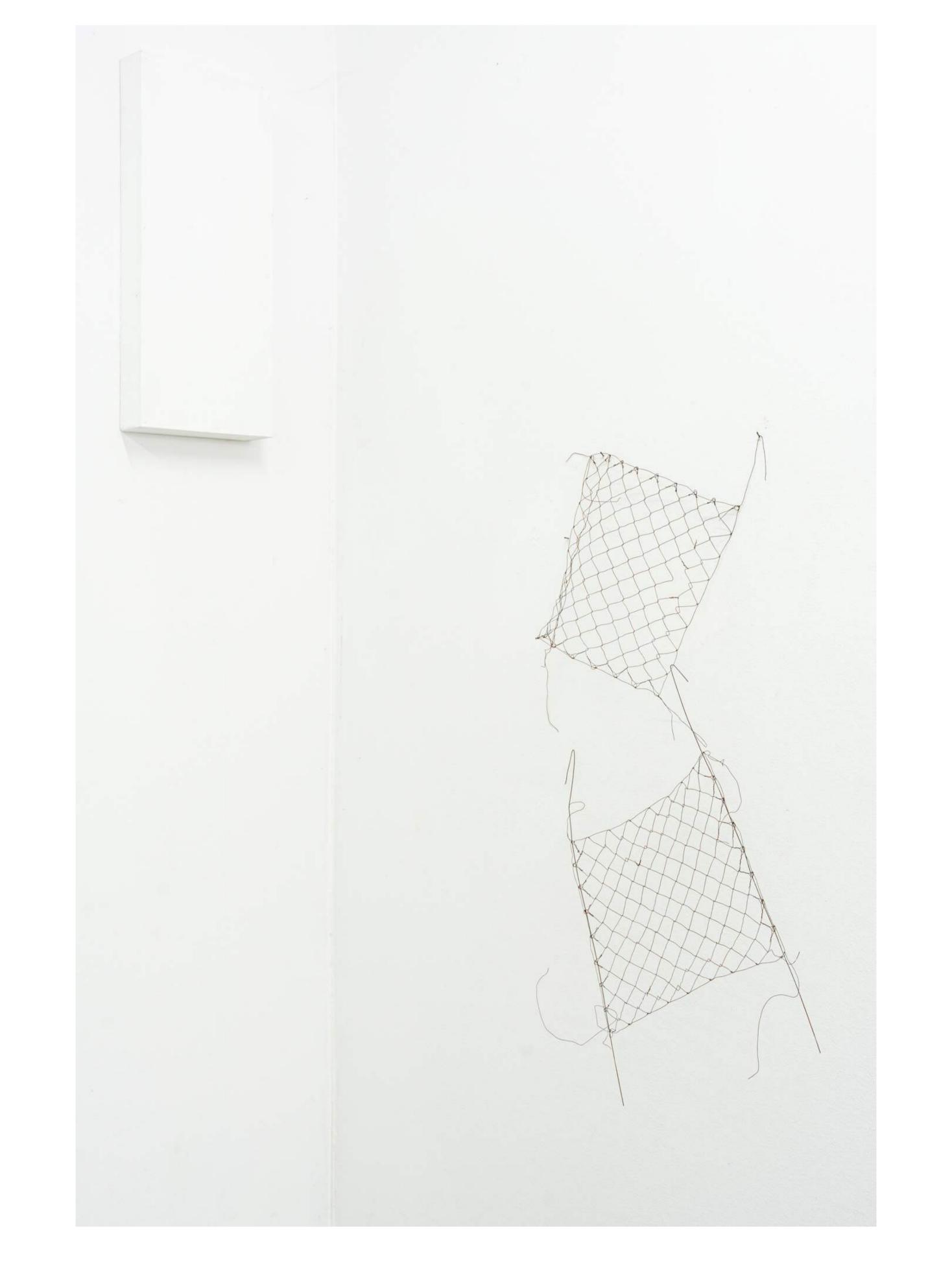


























## **Be Fragile! Be Brave!**

Pori Art Museum, Finland (2nd edition)

## THE MEANS, THE MILIEU

Steel, hemp fibre, ochre, caoutchouc, reishi mushrooms (Ganoderma lucidum)

20.09.2019 - 23.02.2020

http://www.poriartmuseum.fi/eng/exhibitions/2019/229/

Be Fragile! Be Brave! is a sequence to 2017 exhibition Anu Põder. Be Fragile! Be Brave! at Kumu Art Museum

