

***Monoculture. Wojciech Ireneusz
Sobczyk***

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for the curatorial project for the exhibition
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EXHIBITION IDEA

Wojciech Ireneusz Sobczyk's *Monoculture* project for the Polish Pavilion is composed of a large-scale installation of moving elements that refer to the agricultural practice of monoculture farming. This system of growing crops limits the cultivation of a particular area of land to a single species of crop or several species that can be grown in similar conditions. In the long-term view, the practice carries negative consequences for the environment and leads to soil degradation and reduced biodiversity, along with a higher risk of disease or infestation.

Monoculture is a term borrowed from the sciences and Sobczyk brings its significance over to the social sciences. It serves as a metaphor for the synthetic cultivation of unified ideas that tend to monopolize cultural debate and block the "natural" evolution of diversity with regard to ideas and perspectives. In pushing less popular, alternative approaches to the side, such a monolithic stance effectively eliminates any diversity of opinion, flattening the landscape and degrading the entire value ecosystem of society. In reality, the diversity of opposing goals and priorities allows for a complex web of interdependencies to be woven, providing a foundation of balance and sustainability for all its components.

With regard to form, the installation takes its shape from monumental plantations of densely planted crops. There are hundreds of identical metal leaves rising into the air and blocking the spectator's view of what lies beyond. These shining plants, with the sharp edges, appear as alluring, but also forbidding, thicket of spears. These spears are speckled with rain at constant intervals by way of a irrigation system. After each rainfall, all the leaves suddenly fall to the side (thanks to a hidden automated grid system), revealing a series of delicate plants made out of glazed porcelain, which had previously been hidden from view. The forms of these plants are inspired by extinct flora taken from the *Red List of Threatened Species*. After a moment, the metal spears rise back up to their initial position.

The work demonstrates Sobczyk's characteristic approach to drawing on and linking together symbolic inspirations from the realms of culture and religion coming from Europe and the Mediterranean. Water not only serves as a sign of the Earth's creation but also a fluid passageway, as with the river navigated by Charon to bring human souls to the other side in Greek mythology. Water can also be seen as a channel for both the physical world and a link between the world of the senses and that of the psyche. In many folk cultures, water has the ability to cleanse, as well as to give life and to protect that life. It is a universal symbol of a remarkable power that is uplifted in all faiths as well as in human cultures far and wide. This power has been evoked in numerous narratives, at the very least, the biblical flood that has the capacity to sweep

all life away. Then there are the real-life depths of our oceans, full of strange and unknown creatures. Water is the source of all life but it also contains the potential for destruction.

In creating such visually refined objects that refer to such a very organic symbolism, Sobczyk once again poses fundamental questions with regard to human values and of humanism, such as goodness, ethics, community and urges us to consider how these values continue to evolve in the face of our dynamically changing reality. These uncomfortable questions do not come with any clear answers. Instead, the viewer is left to work out their own uncertainties about the state of the world.

EXHIBITION SCENARIO SUMMARY

The interior of the exhibition space is taken up by the installation titled *Monoculture*, arranged cross-wise to the entrance and measuring ca. 15 x 4 x 1,7 m. The installation is made up of about a thousand nearly identical leaves carved out of sheet metal, with sharp edges. The lancet-style shape of the leaves creates a thick hedge of metallic foliage that blocks the spectator's view of what lies beyond. These leaves are arranged on an automatic grid system that is hidden below. At a certain interval, the grid shifts the leaves into a near-horizontal position. As the leaves fall, they hit against each other, making a sudden and startling metallic noise.

The fall of the leaves allows the spectator to see what lies beyond them, namely, a collection of delicate plants made of glazed porcelain. Their forms are inspired by the extinct plants contained in the *Red List of Threatened Species*, published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature since 1963.

Above the installation, there is an irrigation system installed (dimensions: 10,9 x 2,5 m) that is controlled electronically and showers the piece with rain, producing the sound of water pattering upon the metal leaves. This mechanism is synchronised with the grid action that flattens the leaves after the rain.

The foundation of the piece is built so that there is a space of one meter from the edges of the shortest sides of the installation (namely, the height of the metal leaves when they are in the horizontal position) and ca. 20 cm on the longer sides. The foundation itself is 65 cm and contains the automated grid system, the engines, a slanted surfaces that collects the rainwater into a reservoir and a pump that sends water to the irrigation system above (as a closed-circuit irrigation system that is installed in the pavilion, which is restocked regularly to replace any water that may have evaporated using water reserves stored in the pavilion's technical space).

The leaves are made out of untreated sheet metal, and they undergo a process of corrosion as a result of the rainfall, which can be witnessed over the course of the Biennale. At the initial state, the leaves will have a uniform, shiny and smooth appearance. They will gradually become covered in rust and a residue that is reminiscent of the pestilence and disease that plants are often subject to in the process of industrial farming.

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