

***The chamber.* Ryszard Szozda**

curator: Eleonora Bojanowska

Documentation submitted for the competition
for the curatorial project for the exhibition
in the Polish Pavilion at the
59th International Art Exhibition in Venice in 2022

The chamber is a large-scale installation – a 1:1 reconstruction of the interior of the gas chamber situated on the grounds of the former German concentration camp Majdanek.

Historically, gas chambers were built for mass execution of innocent people and constituted a place of death from which there was no way out. The gas chamber was invented by people only to kill other people. It was a place where one walked from life to death. Today we associate gas chambers only with inhumanity and cruelty.

The (art) chamber will be formed with the use of 38 oil paintings, which will, piece by piece, recreate the looks of the gas chamber at The State Museum at Majdanek, at the same time being its painterly interpretation.

Our installation will be entered from a low, darkened corridor and exited on the other side into a high, bright space. It will be, therefore, a place of execution.

However, as we enter the art chamber voluntarily, we can stay in it as long as we need and can also leave it. The choice is ours to make. Therefore, entering the art chamber requires courage. Why? Because before we decide to get out of it, we must face the truth and confront human hatred, fear, greed, lust for power, intolerance, general insensitivity, and selfishness; admit the havoc we are wreaking, disrespecting other human beings and the planet.

However, we believe that everyone should enter this chamber because we are all guilty of or complicit in the world's dramatic situation.

Entering the art chamber, we give in, we let “art annihilate us”, symbolically kill us, strip us of our ego.

Still, if we don't surrender to it, nothing will save us, we will destroy what is left and annihilate the remnants of our humanity.

That said, the art chamber is not a place of total execution, but a space of transformation. If only we are ready for it, we can exit and go from darkness into the light. By doing so, we leave behind all the burden created by the previous generations.

By annihilating us, the art chamber allows us to be born again, open our eyes and see clearly – to go into the light.

We have reached a point where only the mass execution of ourselves will allow us to break this impasse. Unless we take radical steps, our doom seems inevitable.

Art can break the spell, we just need to trust it and believe that there is light on the other side, that a free and limitless world is still possible. We must also let go of fear that we have something to lose and that only the world in its present form is possible. Art has power, sensitises, confronts what is uncomfortable, encourages reflection, stopping for a moment and looking from a different perspective. Art gives us space and allows us to see the bigger picture. **Entering the art chamber is like shock therapy, but we must surrender to it completely, because half measures aren't enough anymore.**

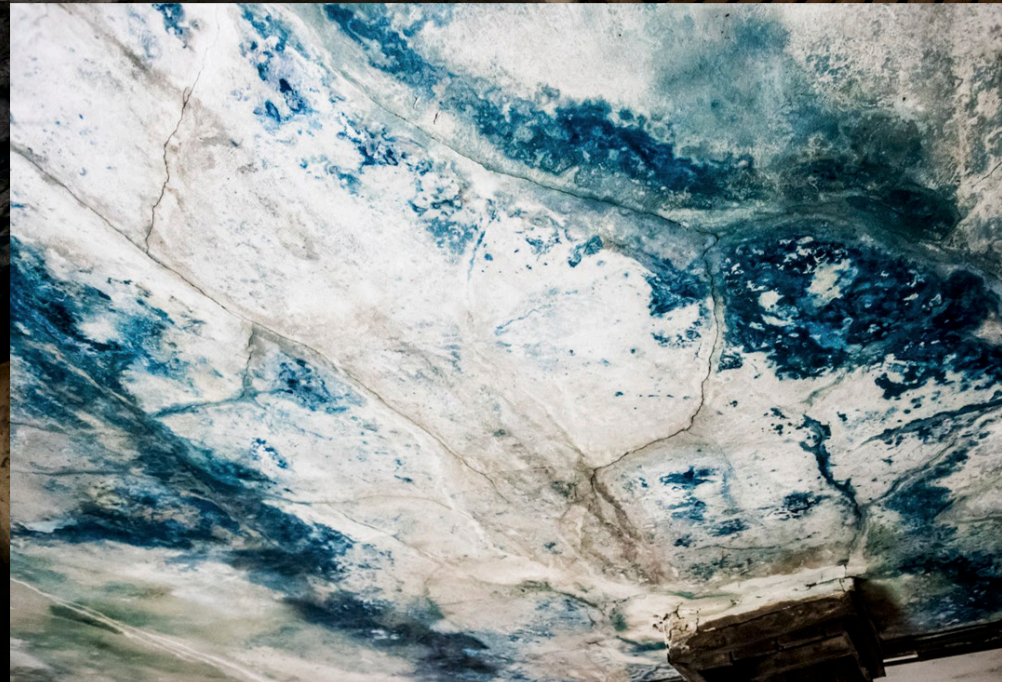
Today we can see ever more clearly the survival of our species is at stake; we can observe a deepening and accelerating climate crisis. Already today it is predicted that climate change will have catastrophic effects, that heat will be so intense that it will destroy crops and cause people's deaths just from staying outside (the latest 2021 UN report on climate change). We also know that anthropogenic emissions are the cause of the climate crisis. What is more, we are observing an increase in social tensions, radicalisation of societies and states, a deepening crisis of values, and ever clearer social fracture and divisions. **In response to the approaching decline of anthropocentrism, the idea of an art chamber emerged to give us a chance to be reborn by destroying us.**

Installation description

- The art chamber, which will resemble gas chamber no. 3 located on the premises of the State Museum at Majdanek but without its items of equipment and moving parts (doors, lamps or pipes for gas injection), will be built in the centre of the pavilion. It will be a 1:1 reproduction of the original gas chamber.
- **The project assumes close cooperation with the Museum** to make a detailed photographic documentation of the chamber, which will be used to create images for installation.
- **The blue colour** which will be visible in the pictures, accumulated on the walls and ceilings of the gas chambers under the influence of ferrocyanide, a by-product of Zyklon B – the gas used to kill prisoners.





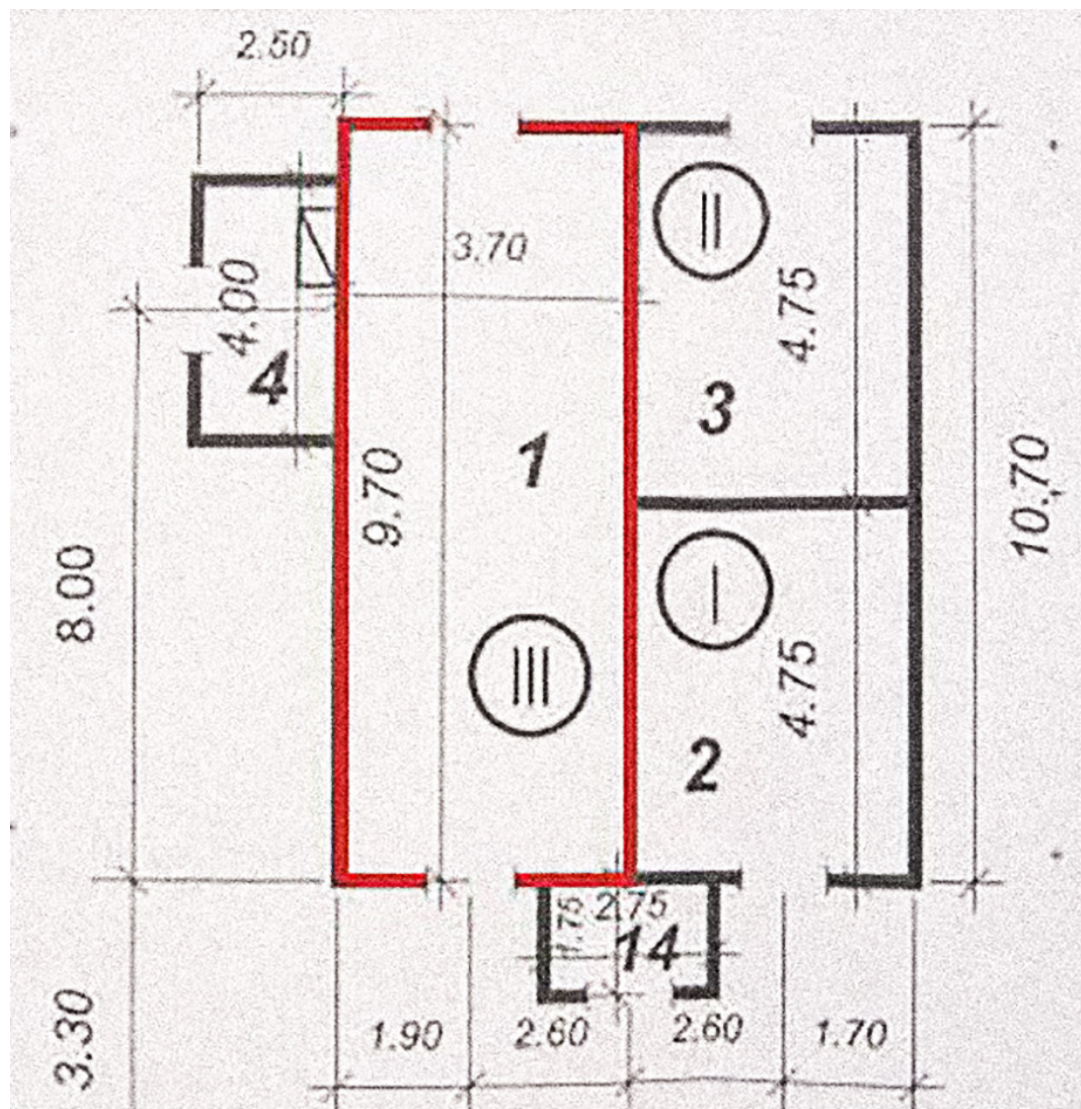












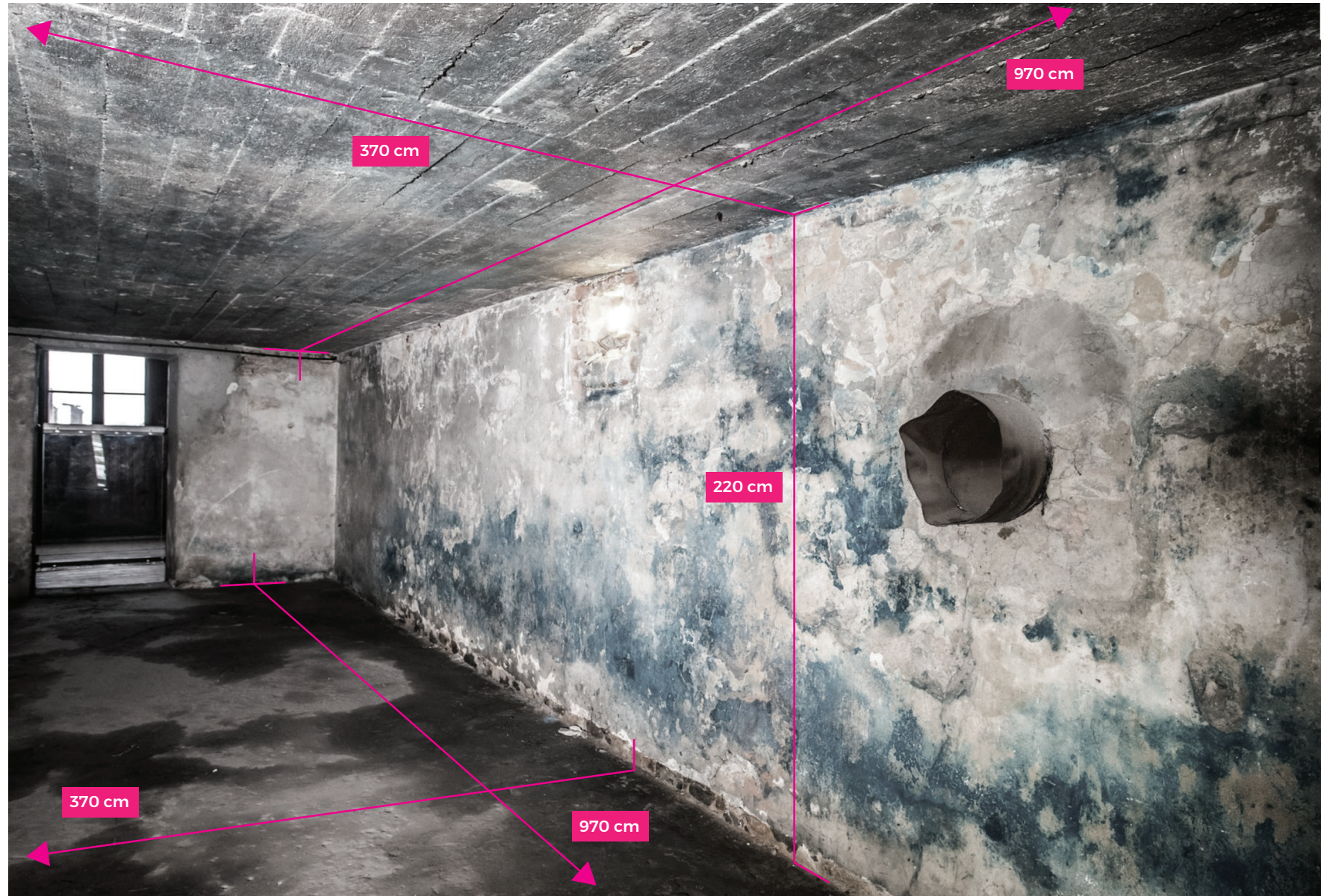
KOMORA GAZOWA NR 3 / GAS CHAMBER No. 3

The bath barrack for men (no. 41) was used for washing prisoners from the spring of 1942. In front of the entrance to the shower room there was a place where men were undressed and shaved. Concrete vats for disinfecting prisoners were also installed in the bath barrack. The adjoining room was used to disinfect clothes with Zyklon B, and to hand out camp clothes (striped uniforms) or appropriately marked old civilian clothes to prisoners. The gas chambers adjacent to the bath barracks and used for the extermination of prisoners were built in the late summer of 1942. They were arranged in a brick building called a bunker. Prisoners were killed using carbon monoxide and Zyklon B and the extermination in Majdanek lasted until September 1943.

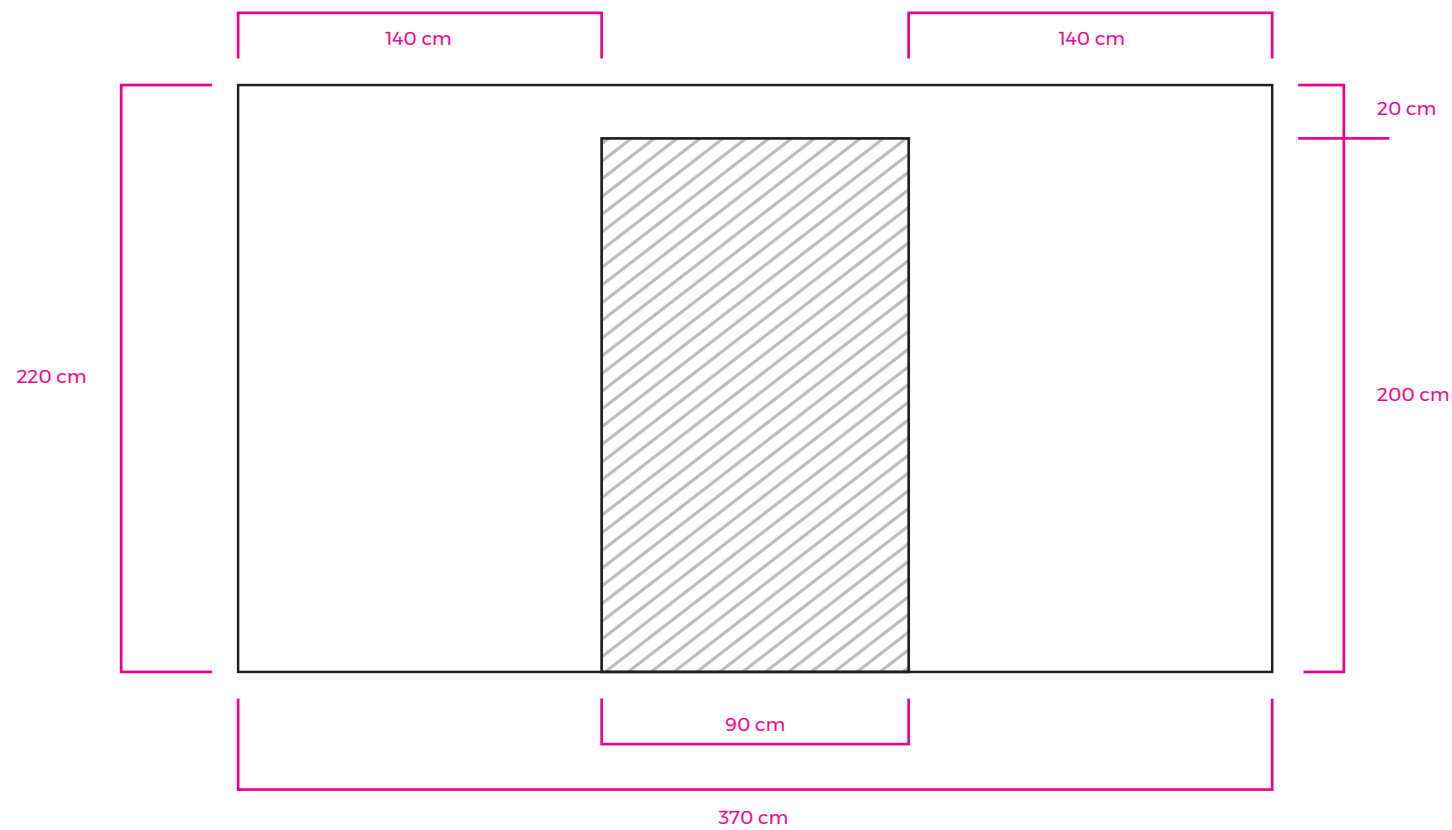
Gas chamber no. 3 has two airtight doors situated in opposite walls; entrance doors measure 2 x 0.9 metres. According to A.W. Reinartz's testimony, 240-250 people fit into chamber.



Gas chamber no 3 wall dimensions with installed hermetic doors – on the opposite side of the chamber there is an identical wall with the door.



Dimensions of the ceiling (the floor size is identical) and the side wall – the wall opposite has the same dimensions.



Dimensions of the wall with the entry - on the opposite side of the chamber there is an identical wall with the exit.

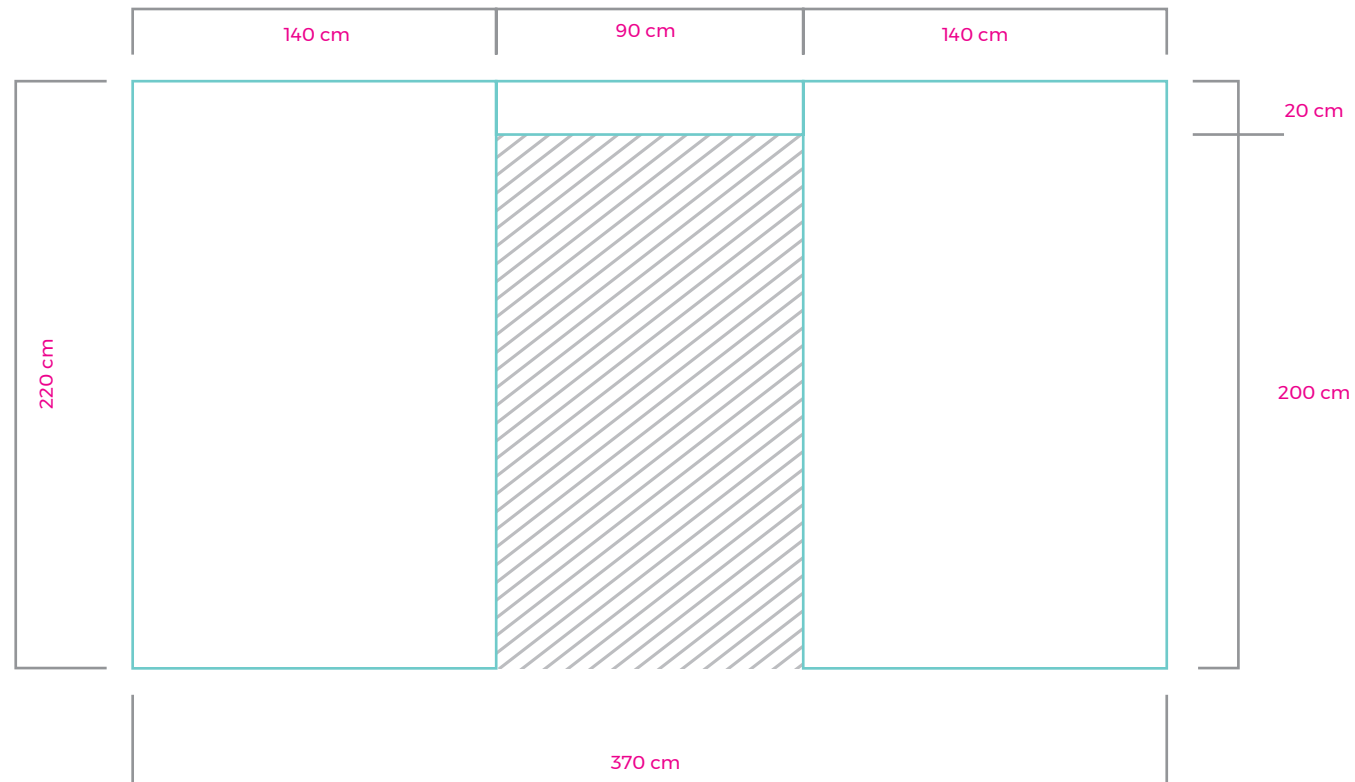


Dimensions of the ceiling and walls 1 & 2 - on the opposite side of wall 1 there is wall 2 of identical size..

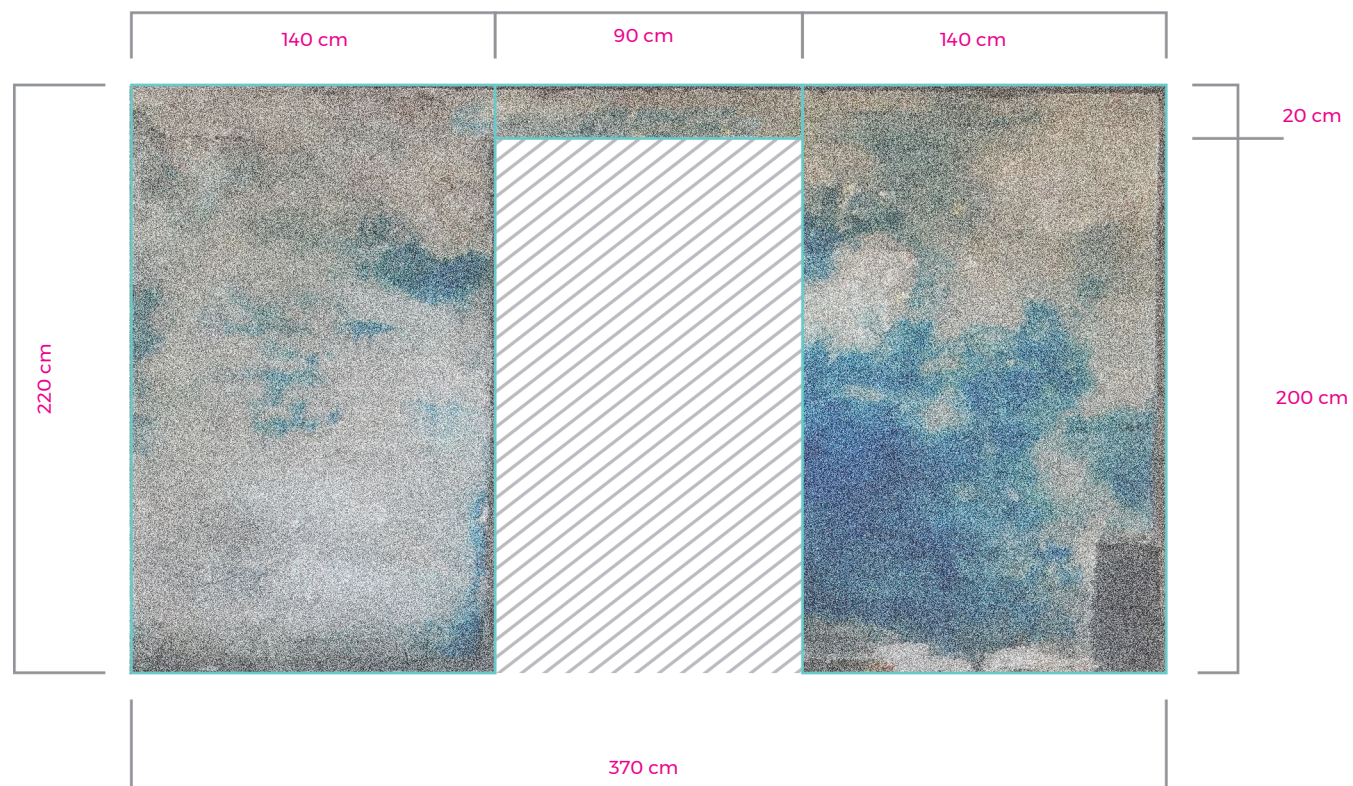


Grid of elements of the chamber: two sides with entries, ceiling and two walls.

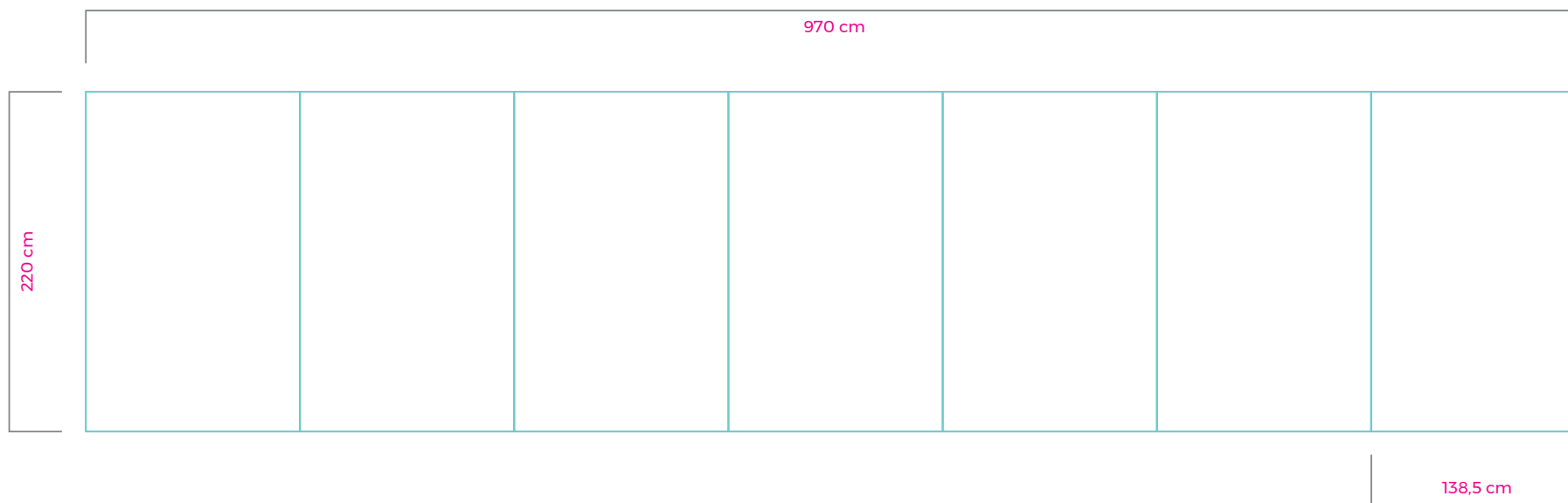
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- **The art chamber will be made of 38 oil paintings that, put together, form a room the size of the original chamber** and piece by piece they will recreate the looks of its interior walls and ceiling, at the same time leaving room for a painterly interpretation of the textures and the interior. The floor of the chamber will be the original pavilion floor.
 - The reverse of the canvases and the structure supporting the paintings will be visible from the outside.
 - The art chamber's entire structure will be supported from the outside by an aluminium or wooden frame.
 - From the main entrance to the pavilion, on the left, a corridor will lead to the entrance to the chamber-installation. The corridor will be a dark, almost black, and 220 cm high (the height of the real chamber) and 90 cm wide (which corresponds to the width of the gas chamber door).



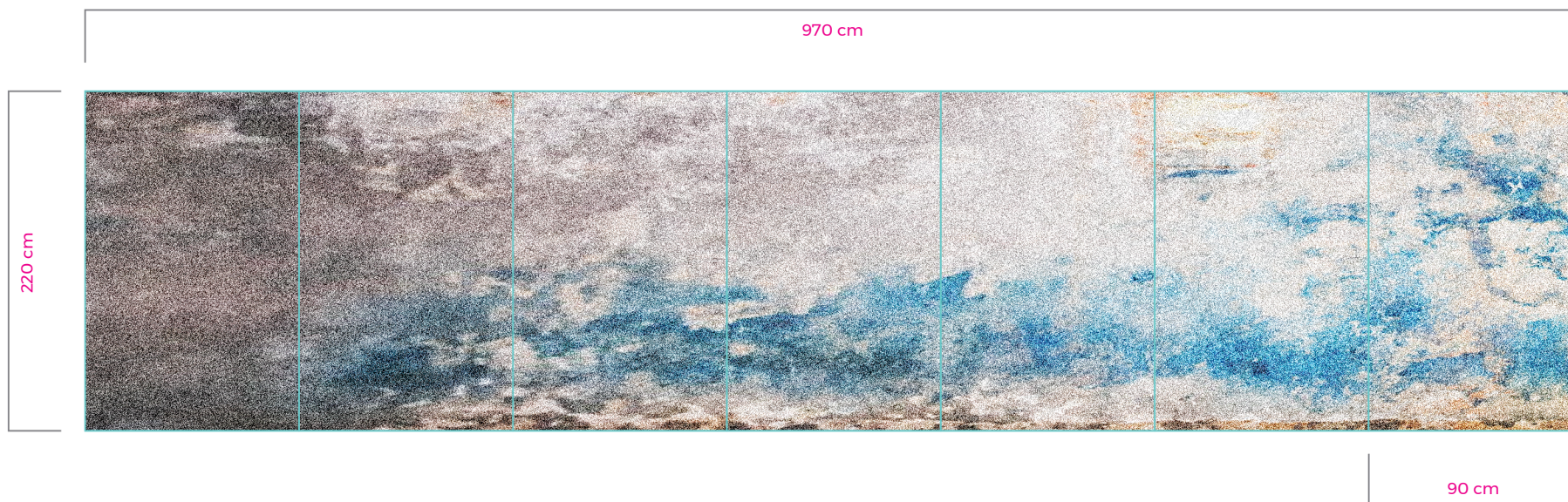
The chamber (installation) - conversion into painting formats: side wall 1 & 2 with entry and exit
 = 2 x 220 x 140 cm + 20 x 90 cm (x2)



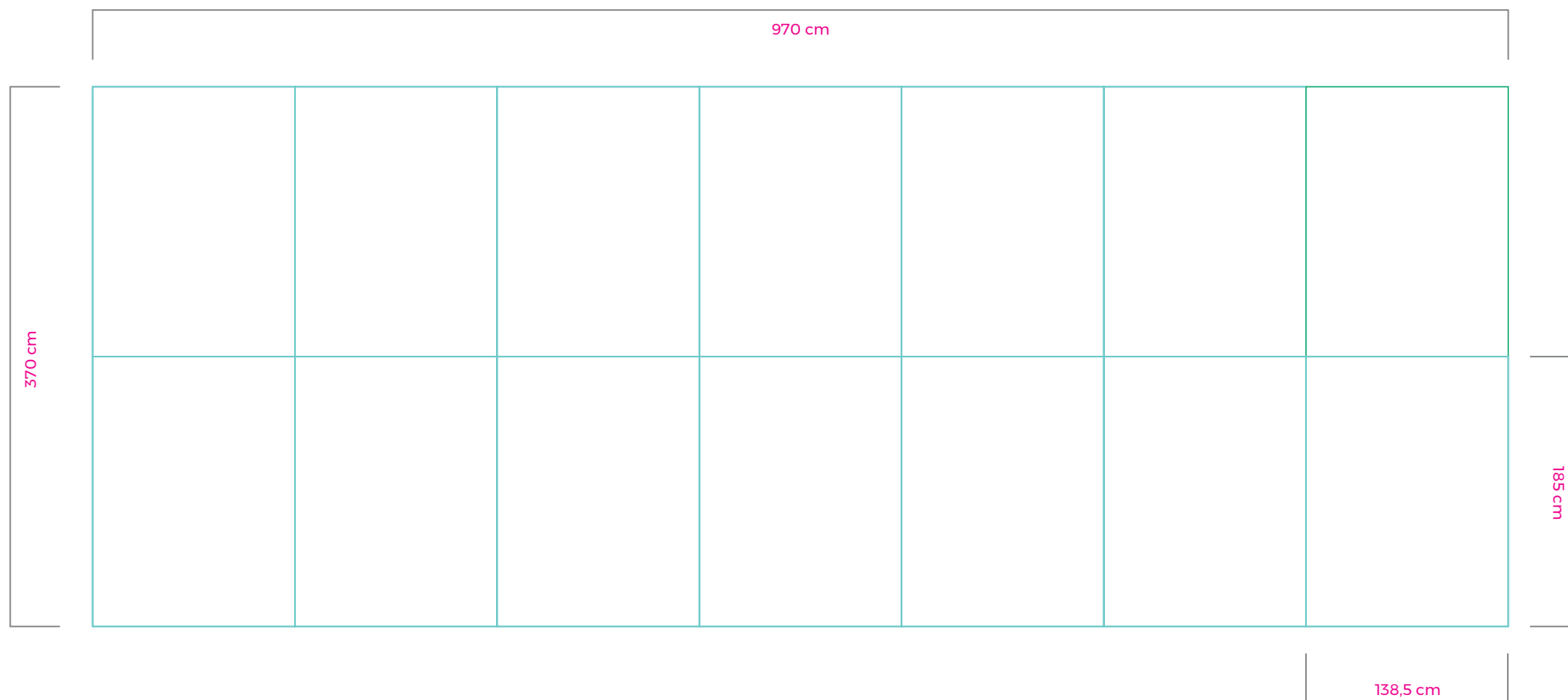
The side of the chamber consists of 3 paintings - a painterly interpretation of the original (370 x 220 cm)



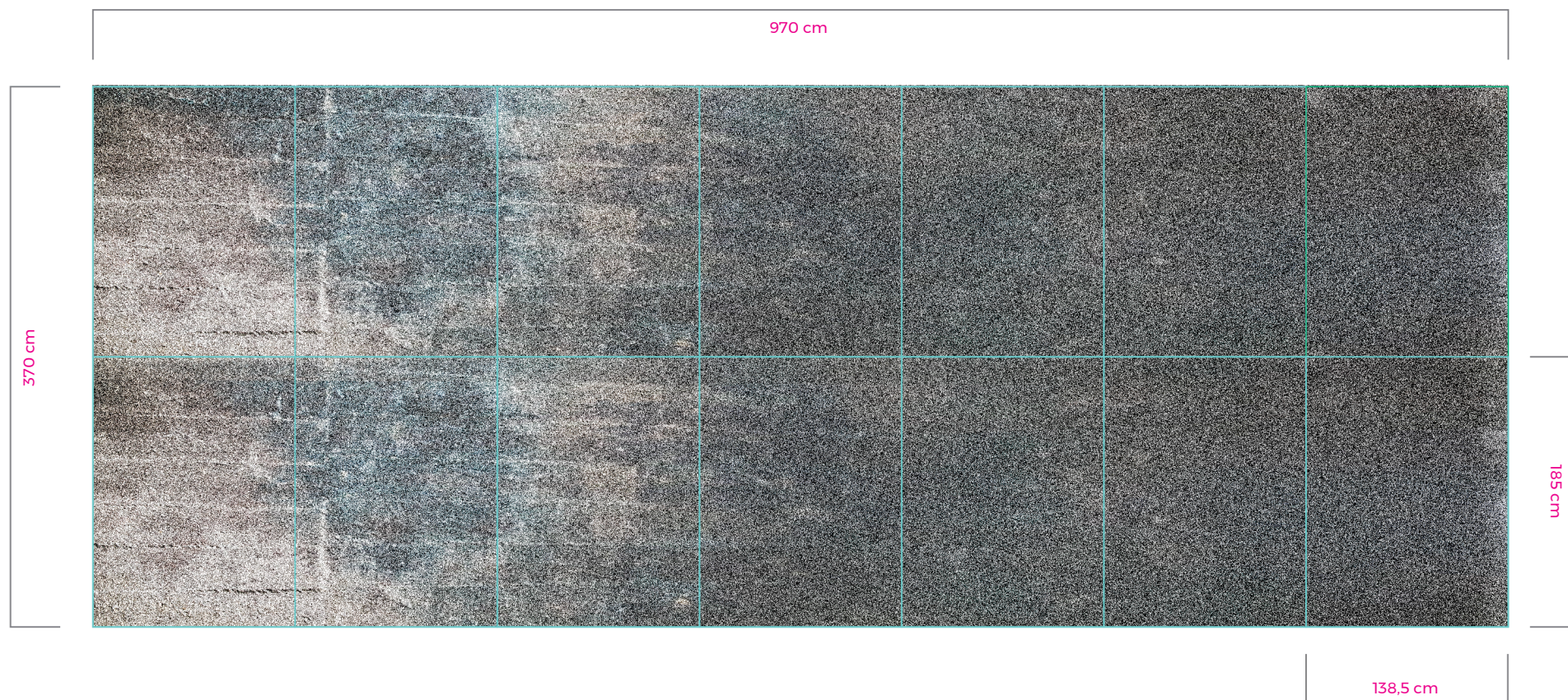
The chamber (installation) - conversion into painting formats: wall 1 & 2
= 7 x 220 x 138,5 cm (x2)



Both opposite walls of the chamber installation consists of 7 paintings 220 x 138,5 cm matching the dimensions of the original (970 x 220 cm).



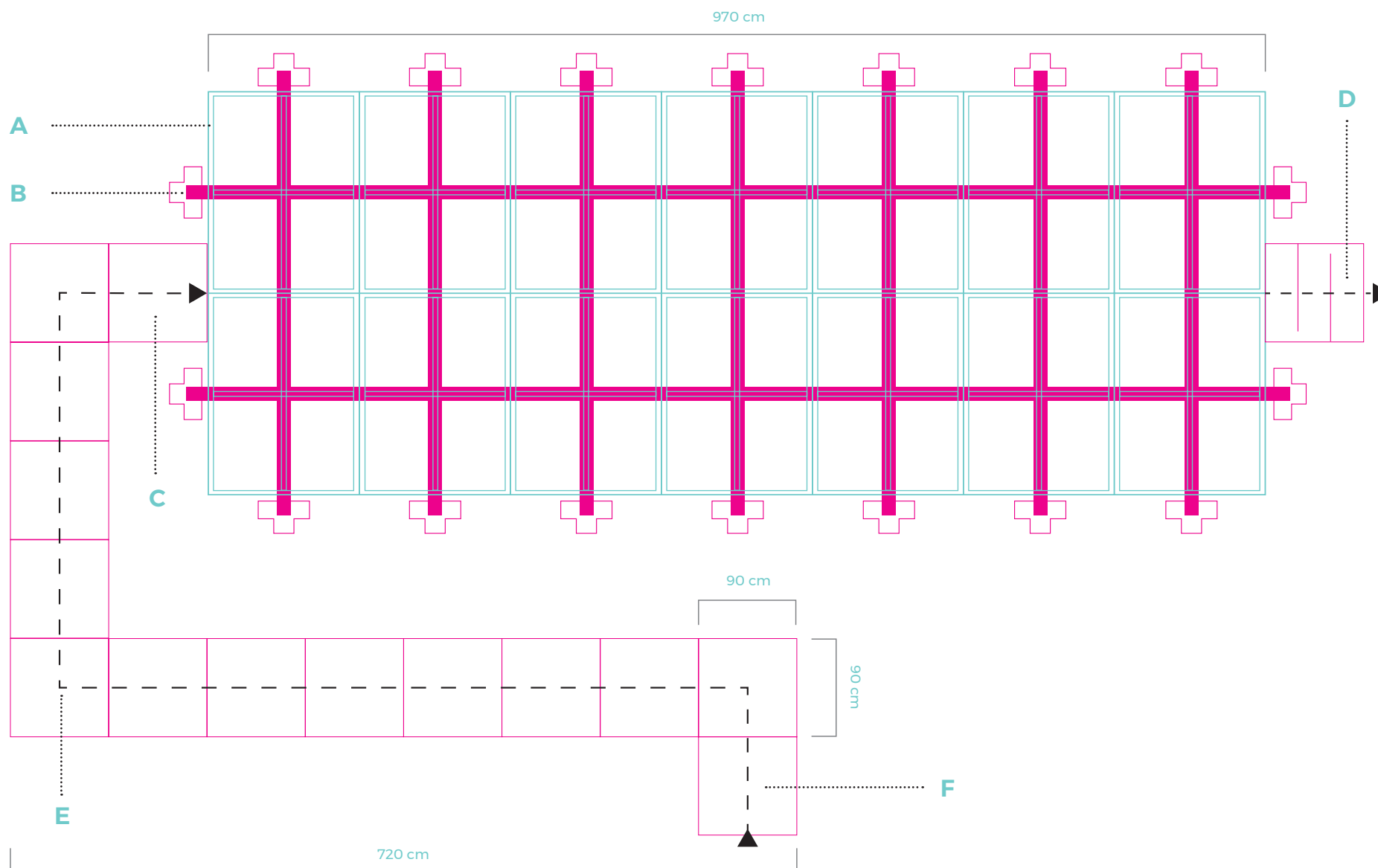
The chamber (installation) - conversion into painting formats: ceiling
 = 14 x 185 x 138,5 cm



Ceiling of the chamber installation consists of 14 paintings 185 x 138,5 cm matching the dimensions of the original (970 x 370 cm).

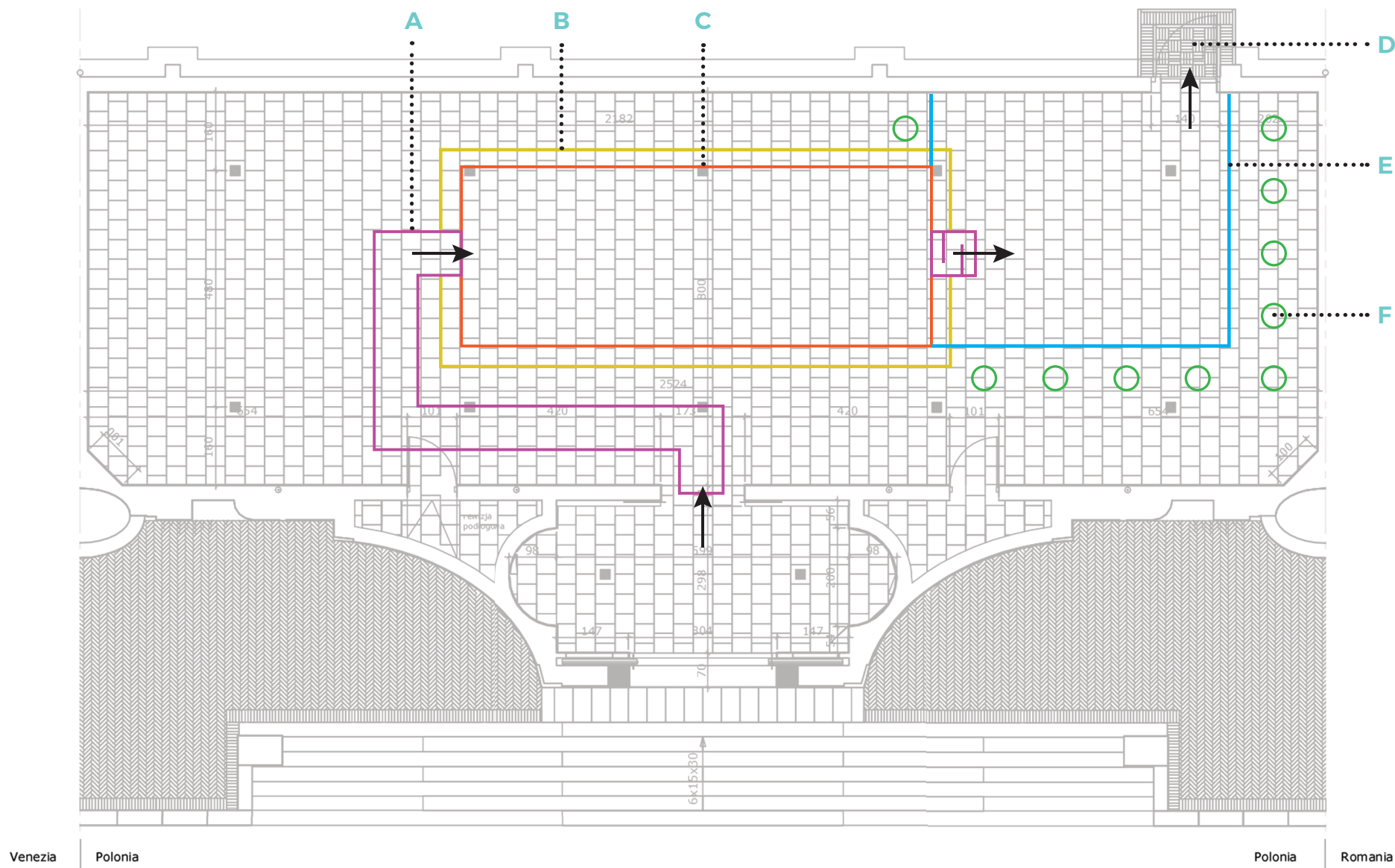
- After passing through the corridor, visitors will enter the chamber-installation. The first impression is the smell of oil and turpentine (entering the gas chamber, the prisoners felt the physical smell of extermination).
- The interior of the art chamber will be dimmed, yet lit sufficiently enough for everyone to see the paintings that make up the walls and the ceiling. Their structure and colours will recreate the looks of a gas chamber, while each separately will be an abstract image. As there was only technical lighting in the real chamber, in our installation the only source of light will be one or two small technical lamps. Being inside, we will be aware that we are, in a way, in a reconstructed gas chamber, and feeling the weight of this place, its history, we will realise that innocent people died in en masse in the chambers, and those responsible for these senseless deaths were their fellow human beings. Today, entering the art chamber from darkness, we go in as “the white man from the Anthropocene” who is guilty of or complicit in the present condition of the world. As people don’t change, the last chance for us is to annihilate ourselves, be awoken with art and thus be born again – because there is an exit from the art chamber.
- The exit from the chamber will be located opposite the entrance. It will be covered with a black lightproof fabric so that people inside cannot see what is on the other side. **After walking through the door, visitors will be struck by a bright, blinding light** and find themselves in a space limited by walls made of white translucent material, behind which white light lamps will be placed. The space won’t be covered on the top so the pavilion ceiling will be visible. The light will symbolically indicate that we have opened our eyes and can see clearly – **we have been reborn.**
- This white, illuminated space will lead to the back door, through which visitors will leave the pavilion.
- Paintings that will form the art chamber will be of various formats. Separately, they will look like abstract paintings, some might even be called “decorative”.

Prints accompanying the exhibition: postcards in the classic 10.5 x 14.8 cm format with reproductions of paintings that form the art chamber. Anyone leaving the art chamber will be able to take its fragment with them.



Chamber (installation): plan view with external construction frame and dark corridor.

A- rear of paintings with bars B- construction frame with brackets C- chamber entry D- chamber exit with lightproof curtain E- corridor F- corridor entry



Chamber (installation): Pavilion view.

A- dark corridor B- construction frame with brackets C- chamber D- Pavilion exit E- walls made of translucent material F- lamps

The concept of the art chamber was born out of observation of the contemporary world, a feeling of helplessness and the conviction that without radical actions our species has no chance of survival. In its form, the art chamber will resemble one of the gas chambers at Majdanek. However, our chamber will be made of 38 oil paintings with total surface area of over 80 square meters supported by an external frame, that will, piece by piece, recreate the gas chamber's interior.

Originally, the chambers were used for mass and senseless killing of innocent people. They were like a transition from life to death. Our chamber will be the gateway to life, a place of transformation. In the art chamber, visitors shall confront all the evil and devastation we cause in the world. We believe that everyone should go inside because we are all guilty of or complicit in causing the world's dramatic situation. Entering the art chamber, we surrender to it, we let art annihilate us, and then open our eyes and be born again – by coming out into the light.

Our installation will lead from darkness to light. Entering the pavilion, we will walk through a narrow, low, black corridor that will lead us to the art chamber. Everyone can spend as much time in the chamber as they need to be ready to go into the light again; after leaving the chamber through the exit located opposite the entrance, a high space will open before visitors, filled with blinding white light.