

***The Great Improvisation.***

**Paweł Althamer, Przemysław Matecki**

curator: Jakub Banasiak

Documentation (excerpt) 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

## Koncepcja wystawy (angielski) / Exhibition Concept

Paweł Althamer i Przemysław Matecki have been creating art for several years in a duet. Their joint works show – contrary to appearances – that there is more that unites them than divides. They are both fluent in manual work, they have artfully mastered their tools (materials, technologies), both are consistently expressing themselves through classical media: sculpture and painting. In the end – their art rather embodies affirmation than critique. And so is in this case.

The planned exhibition consist of two elements. Part one – the prologue – is the “POLONIA” lettering covered in golden flakes on the fronton of the Polish Pavilion. Part two – the main one – is the large-format (3.6 x 18 meters) painting panorama entitled *The Great Improvisation*. The golden inscription glistening in the Venetian sun symbolises the surreal and universal world, community and hope, but also the painting effect – and as such foretells the completion inside of the Pavilion.

The main intent behind *The Great Improvisation* panorama is the synthetic representation of the two great systems: materialistic and spiritual. Althamer and Matecki display them in symbiosis, but also clashing with each other. The image could be read as a warning: the costs of modernisation are starting to surpass the profits; but also as an expression of hope: noticing the planetary and spiritual element perspective – including the non-human – may protect us from the catastrophe. The painting is governed by the surrealistic logic; ghosts and the living, crafts of human hands and atmospheric phenomena, religion and culture, fauna and flora meet here.

The panorama will be placed alongside the longest wall of the Pavilion (opposite the entrance). It will be slightly curved according to common practice, which will give the audience the ability to feel as if “inside” the image. Simple benches will be put along the opposite wall, so that the viewers are able to comfortably contemplate the multithreaded painting.

As in the case of classical panoramas (e.g. the Raclawice Panorama), *The Great Improvisation* will merge into the Pavilion space by the way of illusionistic staffage: soil, sand, plants, stones, bricks etc. However, as the classical panoramas were dedicated to a concrete event or place, *The Great Improvisation* depicts the global history, symbolised by the rising and setting sun painted at the two edges of the canvas. In between plays out the painter’s spectacle. The collage form highlights the content diversity, unifying painting, photography and found objects. At the exhibition we will find the motives characteristic for both creators: gold (Althamer) and collage (Matecki).

Even though one can plan the subject and content of the painting, it's not possible to fully foresee the final painting effect. From the authors' perspective it has a symbolic dimension. Improvisation is the most primal art gesture, unburdened by the procedures of one canon or another. The unpredictability of painting improvisation is at the same time the celebration of unpredictability of the world. And though this unpredictability brings many anxieties, it is the source of hope according to Althamer and Matecki – since the world is unpredictable, the determinism of history does not exist, then the change is possible. The ethical stake of the presented exhibition is emphasised by the very model of joint art creation. With joined forces the energy is multiplied, not divided.

The exhibition's title is naturally also a distant reference to the classical Polish drama, which combined contemporary themes and surreal poetry. *The Great Improvisation* by Althamer and Matecki is built upon similar tension: their exhibition works at the junction point of representation and fabrication, immediacy and universalism, mimetism of panorama format and visuality of represented history. The project is tasked with opening of this potential to the experience of international audience, other artists, specialists in all walks of life, and also random tourists, onlookers and all those, whose fate or destiny will lead them to the Polish Pavilion.

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The *Great Improvisation* was conceived as an autonomous statement, however it also fits in the assumptions of the main exhibition of the 59th International Art Exhibition, as expressed by the curator, Cecilia Alemani, in *The Milk of Dreams*.

## **Streszczenie scenariusza wystawy (angielski) / Summary of the Exhibition Scenario**

The exhibition comprises two elements:

- The “POLONIA” inscription on the façade of the Polish Pavilion will be gold-plated
- The interior of the Pavilion will be dominated by the main element of the exhibition: large-format (18 x 3.6 m) painting panorama entitled *The Great Improvisation*.

Gold is the symbol of universalism, and community, but also medium of painting.

The panorama will be exposed alongside the longest wall of the Pavilion, and on the opposite side, next to the second wall, simple benches will be placed. The walls will remain white, the floor will retain its original colour. In doing so the space of contemplation, and of attraction, will be created. Panorama – in line with the genre’s requirements – will be merged into the Pavilion space by the naturalistic staffage, which will repeat the foreground of the painting (soil, sand, trees, bricks etc.). The painting will be placed directly under the skylights that will allow to evenly illuminate it. If it’s necessary an artificial light will be added. The panorama will affect the audience with scale, scents, colours, texture.