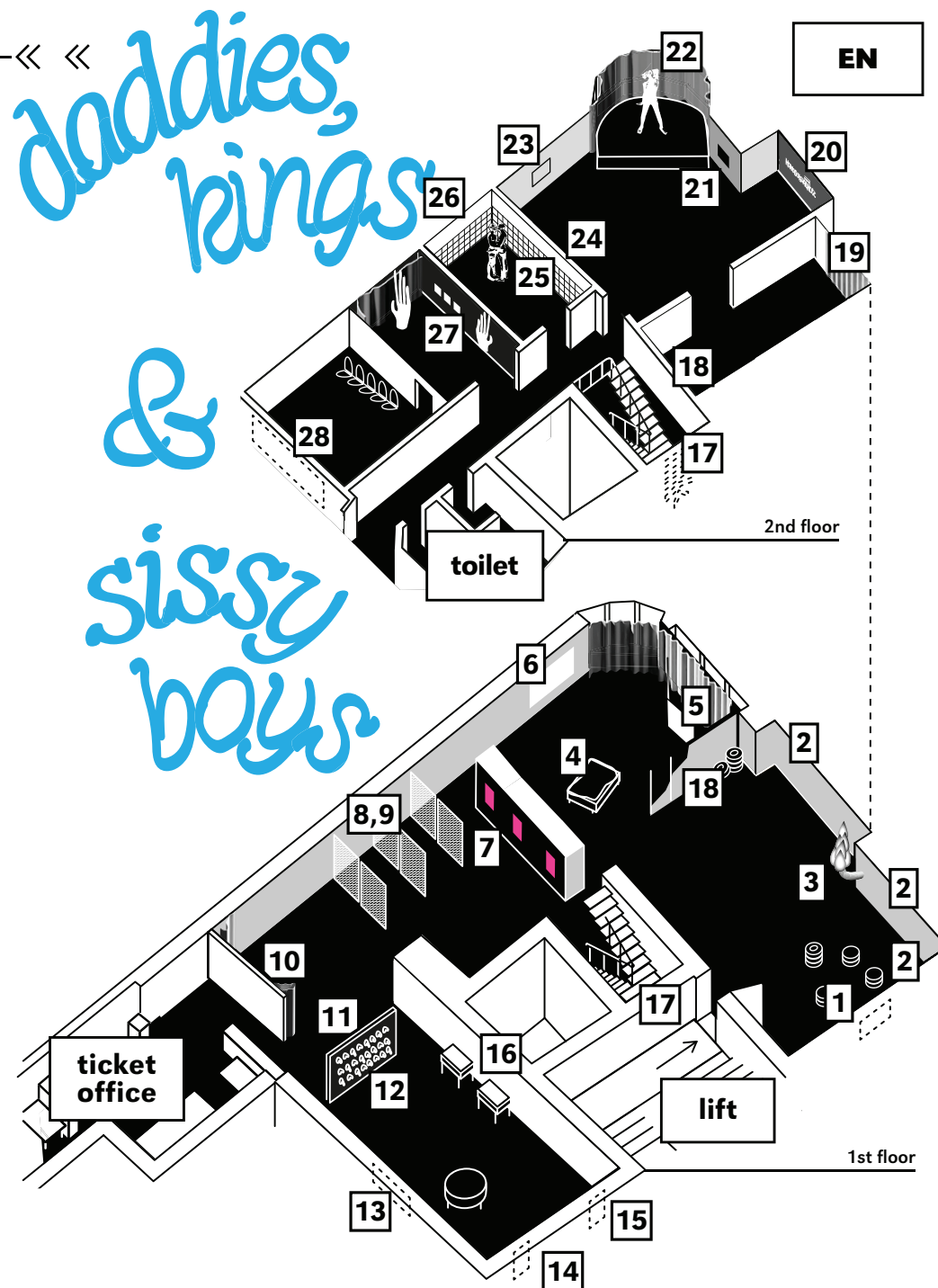


- 1** Diane Torr, *Drag Kings and Subject*, video, 7'11" **2** Exhibition design, *Men's Cave* **3** Iwona Demko, *Burning Log*, object **4** Liliana Zeic, *Self-Portrait with a Borrowed Man*
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28 Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki, *We Wanted to Talk About Masculinity and Became Friends*, video 57'50"



Daddies, kings & sissy boys

Curatorial team: Katarzyna Kalina, Paweł Wątroba

Participants: Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki (Boys Performance Group), Paweł Błęcki, Iwona Demko, Dorota Hadrian, Krzysztof Gil, Daniel Kotowski, Roman Łuszczki, Małgorzata Mycek, Oliwer Okręgliński, Joanna Ostrowska, Noah Munier, Piotr Syty, Sebastian Winkler, Marek Wodzisławski, Paweł Żukowski, Diane Torr, Liliana Zeic

Scenography: Paweł Wątroba

In collaboration with: Agata Cukierska, Agata Gomolińska-Senczenko, Natalia Kaftan, Jan Kukułka, Wojciech Major, Dominika Malska, Sylwia Marciszewska, Jolanta Schenk, Iwona Sobczyk, Ania Sokołowska, Dariusz Trzeja, Barbara Wachowicz, Marcin Wysocki

Partnership: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Katowicach, Stowarzyszenie Społeczno-Kulturalne Mischung, Śląsk Przegląd Media patronage: Magazyn Szum, MINT Magazine, Notes na 6 tygodni, Radio Katowice, Magazyn Replika, Śląska Opinia, Ultramaryna

Matronage: Kampania Przeciw Homofobii



Ministerstwo Kultury
i Dziedzictwa Narodowego

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Bibliography of quotes used in the scenography:

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- ♥ D. Jarman, "Na własne ryzyko. Testament świętego", przeł. P. Świerczek, Kraków 2025
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We still perform it with great success. Using the pandemic context, we built a show fully dedicated to Zoom while preserving “live” theater experience. We play it online, watched each time by hundreds of people from Poland and around the world.

—Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki

1

Diane Torr,

***Drag Kings and Subject*, 2002**

video, 7 min 11 sec

performance recording, excerpt, performed at the “Go Drag!” festival, Berlin, 2002

premiere: Performance Space 122, New York, 1995

Diane Torr’s performative actions are part of gender bending – experimenting with gender identity. Torr examines how the audience’s perception of her shifts when she stops looking “like a woman” and starts looking “like a man.”

This excerpt is based on Torr’s real-life infiltration, in male drag, of the misogynistic men’s association The American Society of Man. In her talk she instructs the assembled men how “real” men should behave to avoid losing status amid women’s growing equality. As she recalled:

“I wanted to infiltrate male society — to see how far I could get. I’d heard of a misogynist organization called the American Society of Men, and I wanted to see if I could gain access.

I managed to enter one of their meetings without raising suspicion. I was so stunned that I was able to pass, that I went to another meeting, and then another. I was so successful in my disguise, and became so well known, that by the fifth meeting they had invited me to be an organizer.”

**2 Exhibition design,
Men's Cave**

The exhibition opens with a “man cave” scenography inspired by DIY basement gyms. One wall is papered with frames of muscular men training. The sweaty, bulked-up bodies and gestures were generated by artificial intelligence. The set shows how stereotypes about masculinity are processed by algorithms, replicating a hyper-toned ideal of the male body – and male beauty.

Text on the walls quotes sources on traditional masculinity. One line stands out: “NO Sissy STUFF, BE A BIG WHEEL, BE A STURDY OAK, GIV’EM HELL.” These are the four rules of the Brannon Masculinity Scale (BMS) in R. Brannon and S. Juni’s 1976 model, used to analyze American men. The premise was controversial because it promoted only traditional masculine stereotypes; nevertheless, research based on it underpinned later gender studies. Today, BMS personality tests are no longer used.

Here we first encounter the exhibition’s key color: pink, which once signified masculinity. From the Middle Ages, men wore pink to signal status. Associated with red – and as its paler shade – pink also symbolized royal power. It was the costliest dye, reserved for higher classes. Blue was the feminine color, linked to the cult of Mary, symbolizing purity, humility, and delicacy. Pink suited boys as a “little red” signifying strength. The shift came only during World War II; mass culture later cemented this artificial divide.

**3 Iwona Demko,
Burning Log, 2025**

object (welded wire construction, stretch fabric, foam, batting, fleece, faux fur), 150×135×50 cm

A deep-seated cultural myth reserves high libido as a condition of masculinity. We ignore that sexuality is individual, yet we assign it by gender. We fail to see how culture

Addictions (alcohol, drugs): 800 199 990 – national helpline, daily 16:00–21:00

Behavioral addictions: 801 889 880 – helpline, daily 17:00–22:00

Domestic violence: 800 12 00 02 – “Blue Line,” 24/7

Depression / suicidal thoughts: 116 123, 800 70 22 22

Bereavement: 800 108 108

Chat, email, online:

ITAKA Foundation – Support Center: chat & email (centrumwsparcia.pl)

Platform 116 SOS – contact form, online chat (116sos.pl)

For children & youth: 116111.pl

In emergencies threatening life: 112

**28 Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki (Boys Performance Group),
We Wanted to Talk About Masculinity and Became Friends, 2020**

video 57 min 50 sec, online performance recording
performed by: Kamil Bloch, Tomasz MakGajwer Grabowski, Tomek Gromadka, Tomek J. Krynicki, Wojtek Mejor, Paweł Ogrodzki, Przemek Pstrongowski, Grzesiek Ryczywolski, Mateusz Wądrzyk, Marcel Bird-Wieteska, Julian Zubek

In 2020 we made our first show *We Wanted to Talk About Masculinity and Became Friends*. We share our experiences of being socialized as men in Poland. There’s a lot of tenderness and warmth. There are stories of violence, fear, community, sex. A democratic, empathetic energy wraps our bodies, connects, nourishes, and supports us. We don’t act roles – we perform under our own names, often changing our lines from show to show depending on what we’re with that day, how we feel, and our energy together.

The title refers to dismissing signals from people with depression or other mental disorders. We hear it at home, school, and work. It is important not to “pull yourself together,” but to ask for professional help. Poland ranks near the bottom in psychoeducation and psychological support for children and youth. We have one of the highest rates of suicide attempts among the youngest. Mental health is often taboo among men who avoid seeking help, trying to “pull themselves together.”

Statistically, more men than women are hospitalized in psychiatric wards, and about 80% of suicides are committed by men. One source is the cultivation of toxic masculinity built on strength and aggression. It blocks positive change for individual and social wellbeing — impacting families, communities, states, nature, ecosystems, political systems. Under aggression often lies shame from unattended problems. To break the impasse we must work on wellbeing, find sources, process them, and care for ourselves. This path opposes the “tough guy” who shows no emotion and “handles it.” Detoxing such behaviors, proposing other models of social cohesion, stepping away from coercive invulnerability — these are ways to social change. I know what it is to break internal, culturally imposed shame and reveal hidden emotions, which isn’t easy in contexts that often reject contemporary psychiatric and psychological prevention while nurturing dysfunctional coping.
—Paweł Błęcki

Hotlines and support for mental health crises in Poland

Key 24/7 numbers:

800 70 22 22 – Adults in mental crisis

116 123 – Adults in emotional crisis

116 111 – Children and youth

800 12 12 12 – Children, youth, and caregivers

Support for specific issues:

actively stimulates male sexuality while suppressing women’s.

The script of “real manhood” includes the imperative of constant sexual availability. This is part of what sociologists call hegemonic masculinity — a dominant cultural pattern requiring men to be strong, aggressive, and hypersexual. The pressure has consequences: social tolerance of violence and the frustration of those who can’t meet unrealistic expectations.

Watching TV with my teenage son, I noticed how often his brain is bombarded with potency ads. The message of permanent male readiness reaches us very early, before we form critical tools. The narrative is internalized as a “natural,” almost biological state.

The direct inspiration was an animated commercial for Brave-ran, which uses the blunt metaphor of a burning log for erection.
—Iwona Demko

4

Liliana Zeic,

***Self-Portrait with a Borrowed Man*, 2016**

digital photograph, patriotic bedding

from the series: *Methods of camouflage in contemporary Poland*—courtesy of lokal_30 Gallery and artist

Poland in the last few years, more and more flows with different visual possibilities to manifest political views and Polish identity. ‘Patriotic industry’ is teetering between the products which are ‘100% Polish’ (which is strongly emphasized by newly established brands and shops), and gadgets ‘Made in China’ (which is no longer underlined). Color and national symbols are legally protected, but they have been completely appropriated by the Polish right-wing and set among nationalist symbols of hatred. Using patriotic items purchased by me, I test different ways of camouflage in the city. My contemporary Polish camouflage is an inversion of masking. It is a visual manifestation, where brightness and visibility is crucial.
—Liliana Zeic

- 5 Roman Łuszczki,**
Welcome to Poland (Baseballs), 2008
object, 130×115 cm

Created as one of several objects critically addressing nationalist trends in contemporary society. Over time, its message shifts and adapts to the present.

National templates of masculine virtue rely not only on sacrifice and love but also on aggression and violence. Country of origin strongly shapes how masculinity and its stereotypes are seen.

The artist juxtaposes an object of aggression and rivalry with national symbolism, creating tension between pride and violence, sport and politics, community and division. The bats form a rhythmic arrangement like a banner, wall, or phalanx. The work evokes a patriotic gesture and the unsettling potential of force — to protect or to destroy.

The installation asks about limits of national identity: can community symbols become tools of violence? Is the energy of national colors constructive or destructive? Through a simple formal move, the artist opens space to reflect on contemporary patriotism, collective emotion, and how easily symbols can be “weaponized” in public discourse.

- 6 Daniel Kotowski,**
I Am Reading Aloud, 2019
video, 2 min 56 sec
film, editing, captions: Tomasz Grabowski
sound: Wojciech Ulman

Normalisation of everyday life is a problem for me. As a Deaf person, I do not use speech on a daily basis. The majority of the ordinary do not accept my ordinary. The ordinary see a faulty part of me or my deficiency, feeling the need to fix or supplement it. They expect me to belong fully to their circle – the circle of the ordinary. I decide to rule my own speech, my own voice, my own message. I use

This space is inspired by a men’s public toilet, evoking an important element of gay history and culture: cruising. Before safer meeting places existed — bars, saunas, dark rooms, private parties — gay men met in public spaces, often at night, for courtship and/or sex. Quiet parks and public toilets were ideal for casual, often anonymous encounters. This practice was driven by the need to hide non-heteronormative orientation to avoid ostracism or worse: disinheritance, job loss, accusations of prostitution, psychiatric commitment, or arrest in countries where homosexual acts were criminalized.

In Poland, cruising spots are also associated with Operation “Hyacinth” (1985–1987): a mass Militia campaign that directly resulted in discrimination, persecution, intimidation, and humiliation of gay men. Officially it claimed to curb AIDS, “criminal” environments, and prostitution among the homeless, or to protect homosexuals. A likely motive was to gather compromising material for blackmail to recruit informers.

Raids took place in cruising sites with undercover officers. Suspects were interrogated; through threats they were forced to confess homosexuality. Besides issuing a “Homosexual’s Card” and taking fingerprints, detainees had to inform on others and describe sexual techniques. About 11,000 personal files — “pink dossiers” — were collected nationwide.

Operation Hyacinth led to widespread concealment; some men emigrated. Foreign media reacted, but authorities tried to suppress the story. In 2008 the Institute of National Remembrance stated the operation was legal and no rights were violated.

- 27 Paweł Błęcki,**
Pull Yourself Together, 2025
light objects, photographs, installation
Completed as part of a scholarship from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage.

- 24** **Marek Wodzisławski,**
Fever, 2025
carpet made using the tufting technique, 250×172 cm

The reference material for the carpet is a thermal image of a male nude in a position inviting penetration. The areas of the male body with the highest temperature: the anus and the bends of the knees are white.

- 25** **Dorota Hadrian,**
The Kiss, 2024
sculpture

Two young men kiss. A simple gesture carries powerful emotional and symbolic force. In the aesthetics of classical figurative sculpture, the work uses a familiar formal language to tell a contemporary story of tenderness, closeness, and the redefinition of masculinity.

In a culture where the male body has long been shown as strength, domination, and heroism, a gentle kiss becomes an act of resistance. Hadrian neither mocks nor provokes — she shows love and intimacy sincerely, calmly, almost sacral. Her protagonists are not opposites but mirror images — perhaps the same person kissing another side of himself. The gesture can be read as reconciliation with oneself, acceptance of sensitivity and emotion.

The Kiss affirms diverse expressions of affection and the need for closeness regardless of gender or orientation. It adds to the discourse on new faces of masculinity — tender, empathetic, unafraid of emotion. Using a traditional form, the artist creates a piece whose quiet simplicity becomes a manifesto of contemporary sensitivity.

- 26** **Exhibition design,**
Public Toilets / Cruising

them to meet expectations of the ordinary. Some groups of people strongly oppose me in accordance with their norms. They claim that I should not use speech. They may feel uncomfortable, bad, be ridiculed or offended by my lack of reverence for the speech. In my verbal activity, I emphasise the existing ambivalence between nonconformity and conformity.
—Daniel Kotowski

- 7** **Piotr Syty,**
from left: *Bubble*, *Under the Common Sky*, *I Am a Legend*,
2024-2025
lightboxes, 30×42 cm

A curatorial selection of Syty's drawings forms a romantic tale diverging from the stereotype of the Polish rural man bound to the cult of work, deep faith, physical prowess, and emotional coldness. Syty uses the figure of a rural "loser," a solitary man harmed by economic and cultural shifts and surrounded by the "unimaginable chaos" of the countryside — and liberates him. He allows his protagonists to feel unbounded bodily joy and unfettered homoerotic fantasy. He re-reads traditional values with satirical titles and by mixing familiar symbols with trash and farm tools.

- 8** **Roman Łuszczki,**
Baywatch, 2000
photographic series, 30×30 cm, baryta prints

Amsterdam's annual Gay Pride is a nine-day equality celebration promoted by the LGBTQ+ community. The port city calls itself the "Gay Capital of the World," citing a long equality tradition. In 1987 the world's first monument to victims of persecution based on sexual orientation was unveiled here. In 2001 the first gay couple married at City Hall on Waterlooplein.
—Roman Łuszczki

- 9** **Roman Łuszczki,**
Too drunk to fuck, lata 90.
photographic series, 30×40 cm, baryta prints

An image of the expressive life of Amsterdam's squatter subculture in the mid-1990s. Provocative behavior and non-normative lifestyles sought to create a shocking style that also offered an alternative to conformity. As an underground group composed of rejected minorities, squatters created a freedom-oriented milieu.

—Roman Łuszczki

- 10** **Piotr Syty,**
Side Altar in the Left Nave, 2025
mural, 215×300 cm
collaboration: Paweł Wątroba

The mural references the classical multi-panel polyptych. Originally transformed from Byzantine arrangements of saintly busts, such forms moved beyond sacred art by the 19th century. Syty sacralizes the image of the Polish man in his natural habitat — small-town and county Poland. Each part shows episodes from a man's adventures, echoing the lives of saints and their mythic predecessors. The pyramidal layout leads from lower, primal stages to more organized forms, culminating in the central male figure surrounded by multi-layered symbols that connect spirituality to the depressive landscape of the Polish countryside.

- 11** **Diane Torr,**
Mister EE, 2011
video, 5 min 20 sec
performance recording, "Drag King Bonanza," Bar Wotever, London, 15.02.2011

and above all liberated.

- 22** **Sebastian Winkler,**
Erotic Dance, 2025
sculpture (wood, polyurethane, paper, acrylic, PVA, pigment print)

A twist on the classic sculptural nude. A figure of unclear gender stands in a stage pose. It is wrapped in blood-red — viscera revealed as the skin peels away. Only fragments remain, forming a rickety bra. Facial expression clashes with the macabre: a broad smile, one eye closed in a flirt.

The sculpture references Robbie Williams's 2000 video "Rock DJ." On a roller rink, women circle him without noticing; a DJ watches from above. Williams tries to attract attention: his initially restrained dance becomes more erotic; he sheds clothes. He succeeds only after an extreme striptease — flaying himself. Suddenly, the bored skaters sensually rub his scattered flesh. In the final seconds, only a skeleton is left, dancing with the beautiful DJ — a riff on the art-historical motif of Death and the Maiden. Yet the dance here is no vanitas. It affirms life and co-existence: by analyzing (dismantling) his male body, the protagonist transforms from invisible outcast to full member of the community.

Inspired by Rosemary Hennessy's theory, I read *Erotic Dance* as a metaphor of disidentification — exercising imagination beyond pre-set social scripts. The figure sheds outer layers that anchor identification (carriers of social, gender, class assignment), erasing distance imposed by identity narratives. Not dissolving into the crowd, it seeks the viewer's attention and — in a slightly drastic, slightly erotic gesture — invites us to dance, to play once beyond our horizon of imagination.

—Sebastian Winkler

In 2024, commissioned by Ewa Majewska, Żukowski researched Operation “Hyacinth.” Some interviewees had worked in the underground Solidarity movement. Asked about queer topics in the underground press, they said there were none. The artist argues that many collective, participatory, leftist actions with marginalized groups could be labeled SOLIDARITY, were it not for the term being reserved in Polish nomenclature for the 1980s movement. In Homosexuality he links the SOLIDARITY motif to queer issues in Poland.

The famous Solidarność logo was designed by Jerzy Janiszewski, who did not transfer personal copyrights to NSZZ Solidarność. The logo was already being altered in the 1980s. In research for Queer Dissent Archives, Żukowski found materials reading “NSZZ Sexuality” using the same letterform. Based on this, he created his own variations.

Homosexuality in Poland is a topic as “inconvenient” as independent trade unions. The artist also says he is tired of the words “discrimination” and “homophobia,” because, at the end of the day: WE ARE WORSE.

21 **Diane Torr,**
***Danny-SS*, 2010**

video 3 min 01 sec, camera performance

Using tools of self-irony, the artist creates a space where masculinity becomes body-aware and sexual orientation is fluid. The work invites reflection on what masculinity can be when free from fear and shame. Our protagonist, embodied by Torr, speaks lightly about intimate parts of his body, his pleasure, and closeness with another man. In an ironic yet sincere way, he encourages exploring one’s sexuality, pointing to benefits for the prostate and erotic sensation.

Torr challenges stereotypes that resist male–male intimacy. In the spirit of emancipation from social taboo, she proposes a new language of masculinity — sensual, tender, self-ironic,

Mister EE is one of the many figures Torr embodied. Here she becomes a “buffoon” — black eye mask, no trousers — reveling in erotic yet clumsy choreography and striptease. In this queer rendition, male archetypes appear in a funhouse mirror as caricatures: sometimes funny, sometimes pitiful. Male gestures — finger-wetting, thrusting, push-ups, manspreading, lip-licking, ostentatious bottle-drinking — are universal clichés we might see at a Polish wedding or a resort holiday.

Striptease is usually performed by women for male pleasure. The deliberately unprofessional, grotesque character disrupts expectations of the female body in art. Torr laughs at patriarchy, its urge to control and dominate, using humor as critique. Through humor and self-irony she undermines the male gaze and opens a space where masculinity becomes fluid, uncertain, even absurd.

12 **Exhibition design,**
Penises

polymer plaster casts

The casts are based on packers — prosthetic penises primarily for trans men. They fill an added pocket in underwear, easing dysphoria and enabling smoother passing in social situations (e.g., pools, beaches, places requiring undressing). Packers come in various sizes and shapes, circumcised or with foreskin. They are also used in drag king costuming. In her “A Man for a Day” workshops, Diane Torr made packers with participants from condoms filled with cotton wool and bandages. Today silicone products are widely available.

13 **Oliwer Okręgliński,**
***Dog eat dog, dog eat dog, dog eat dog / Tboy Wrestling*, 2025**

painting triptych, oil on canvas, 160×72 cm

The work focuses on trans-masculine–trans-masculine relationships. At its center is the perspective of (trans)homosexual experience: desire for another trans man, and how mutual recognition intertwines with wanting our bodies. It speaks of taming each other. Of safety and comfort. Of the promise of watching over one another. Of warmth — and of wild, intense longing. As if we could devour one another and still not be sated. As if we were to sink our fangs and claws in, and tear each other apart.

Like a tranny with a tranny.

Like a mutt with a mutt.

—Oliwer Okręglicki

14 Liliana Zeic,
Felicita Vestvali as Hamlet with Romeo's mustache,
2025

two-element marquetry (poplar burl, walnut burl, steel),
81×61 cm (162×61 cm)

courtesy of lokal_30 Gallery and artist

Felicita Vestvali (Anna Maria Stegmann; born February 23, 1831, Szczecin – died April 3, 1880, Warsaw) was a now-forgotten star of 19th-century Europe and America who began as an opera singer, debuting at La Scala in 1853. Her life challenged traditional society while inspiring with courage and independence. Denied theatrical training by her family, in 1846 at age 15 she fled home dressed as a boy and joined impresario Wilhelm Bröckelmann's troupe in Leipzig. Her first "trouser role" was Romeo. Vestvali was the first woman to play Hamlet in theater history. Known for non-conformism, she lived outside social norms. For nearly 20 years she was partnered with the German actress Elise Lund, her main heir.

She became famous in the USA as "Vestvali the Magnificent." Admired by Abraham Lincoln and Napoleon III (who gifted her a silver armor for a male role at the Paris Opera in Bellini's

hospitals often perform it routinely after birth regardless of religion. In Asia, about 70–80% of men are circumcised; the custom spread after the Korean War (1950–1953) under American military influence.

The foreskin is highly sensitive; its removal means losing sensation in that tissue. The glans becomes less sensitive over time as the skin thickens to protect from abrasion. Mechanics and lubrication change. The foreskin naturally enables skin glide during intercourse, reducing friction. After circumcision, friction increases, which may affect comfort; the glans is drier, and some men report reduced sensitivity or altered sensation.

In the United States, movements openly oppose routine infant circumcision. The organization Intact America advocates education and against non-medical infant circumcision and enables complaints regarding "forced foreskin retraction, encouragement to circumcise, or other genital harm." Demonstrations and protests are organized. The group Bloodstained Men protested in Texas wearing trousers with red stains symbolizing harm. Media debate includes ethicists who argue infant circumcision without medical need may violate children's rights and bodily autonomy.

20 Paweł Żukowski,
Homosexuality (Homoseksualność), 2025
MDF board, carbon steel, hydrochloric acid, 200×60 cm

23 Paweł Żukowski,
We Are Worse (Jesteśmy Gorsji), 2025
stainless steel, carbon steel, hydrochloric acid, 154×104 cm

My father worked in Solidarity structures at his plant. There must have been many such fathers. Those fathers have children. Those children can be homosexual. My story is nothing exceptional.

—Paweł Żukowski

non-European cultures under Western gaze and colonial fantasy.

Valentino was among the first Hollywood stars to face open homophobia and social pressure due to ambiguous orientation and a style diverging from masculine norms. The press mocked his delicacy; in the Chicago Tribune (1926) an anonymous column titled “Pink Powder Puffs” sneered: “Do women like the kind of ‘man’ who powders his face with pink powder in a public restroom...?”

I invoke this tension between fascination and exclusion, between the idealized body and the marginalized one. A similar stereotyping mechanism shapes depictions of Roma in cinema and art — romanticized or demonized, reduced to simplified signs of “otherness.” I’m interested in how these schemas still shape our gaze and how we might rework them today.
—Krzysztof Gil

- 19** **Marek Wodzisławski,**
Missa Circumcisionis (Feast of the Circumcision of Christ), 2025
object

The foreskin covers and protects the glans from abrasion, drying, and contaminants. It also moisturizes and maintains sensitivity. Rich in nerve endings, it plays a role in tactile and sexual sensation. During erection it retracts to reveal the glans.

An estimated 38% of men worldwide are circumcised — for religious rites or medical reasons (e.g., phimosis, recurrent infections, injury).

In some countries (e.g., USA, Canada, South Korea) circumcision is performed prophylactically after birth, based on beliefs about hygiene and reduced risk of UTIs, HIV, or penile cancer. Benefits are minimal in populations with good hygiene. In the US about 55–65% of men are circumcised;

I Capuleti e i Montecchi), she was seen by Queen Victoria in Shakespearean male roles in London. She called herself a “Männerfeindin” (enemy of men) and was described as an “Urningin.”

She aligned with feminism, early gay and lesbian rights, and movements for racial and religious liberation. A contralto, she specialized in male parts (en travesti).

- 15** **Małgorzata Mycek,**
Sylvin Rubinstein attacking Nazis, 2025
modular mosaic (ceramics, crystals, stones on OSB boards),
50×50 cm (100×150 cm)

Sylvin Rubinstein (b. 1914, Moscow – d. April 30, 2011, Hamburg) was a Jewish-Russian dancer and a member of the resistance during WWII. He left Russia with his mother and twin sister Maria after his father was executed by the Bolsheviks. The twins earned money dancing in markets. In the 1930s they performed professionally as the flamenco duo Imperio and Dolores, touring Europe, New York, and Melbourne. They worked at Warsaw’s Adria Theater when Germany invaded Poland. In 1940 they were sent to the Warsaw Ghetto, from which they escaped. They survived with help from German Major Kurt Werner, who remembered their shows. Thanks to Werner, Sylvin joined the resistance in Krosno under the name Turski. He helped hide Jewish children and took part in sabotage. Shortly after an action in which, dressed as a woman, he threw grenades into a restaurant frequented by Nazi officers, he moved to Berlin, lived in Werner’s apartment, and survived the war. Maria and their mother died in Treblinka.

In the 1950s Rubinstein returned to dance in German cabarets in female drag. His first dress was sewn from a Hitler flag; he embodied Dolores, inspired by his late sister.

Rubinstein’s gender identity and sexual orientation remain unclear. From today’s perspective, we might read his stage career as a drag queen. His descendants in Podkarpacie avoid

any queer association, a telling example of hiding or erasing queer biographies.

16 Joanna Ostrowska & Noah Munier,
Archive of Fellow Sisters / Archiv der Mitschwestern,
2025

archival materials gathered through historical research

The pink dots on the map mark trans* individuals who belonged to the queer community organized around Berlin corset maker Hella Knabe. The sisters – Mitschwestern – communicated with each other by writing letters and reading Knabe's joint customer newsletter. Sometimes they met in Berlin at Hella and Richard Knabe's apartment. Among them were: Georgette from Grünberg (today Zielona Góra), Mathilde from Danzig (today Gdańsk), Anita Maier from Ulm and Königsberg (today Dolní Krupá in the Czech Republic), Emi Wolters from Niedergruppai (today Dolní Krupá in the Czech Republic) and many other sisters.

Beuthen (today Bytom) is an important point in the history of the trans* community associated with the Knabe business. Richard, Hella's husband, identified as a “transvestite.” Together with Hella, they ran a salon in Berlin at Ansbacherstr. 35. However, before Richard came to Berlin, he/she worked as an actor, making his/her debut at the Stadttheater Beuthen in Oberschlesien. This was a turning point in his/her biography. In 1920-1921, he/she starred in several silent films, which is why we know his/her face.

Richard's support for the community of fellow sisters emboldened other trans* people from the Silesia region. Peter Naumann, née Bendkowski, was born in 1903 in Brzezowitz-Kamin (Brzozowice-Kamień). At the turn of 1922 and 1923, he worked at Schlesische Aktiengesellschaft für Bergbau und Zinkhütten Andalusiengrube, and after being dismissed, he moved to East Prussia, where he started a new life with his husband Hans, running a restaurant.

—Noah Munier, Joanna Ostrowska

17 Paweł Żukowski,
Dicks, since 2017
scarves, machine embroidery, 135×17 cm

Paweł Żukowski — an “artist” — has staged numerous public actions, such as “LGBT TO JA” (LGBT IS ME) in front of Gazeta Polska and the pandemic-era “DAMY RADĘ” (WE’LL MANAGE), and co-created the protest against mail-in voting “LIST.” His artistic practice is protest, often using simple, strong, graphic slogans. He says he truly developed as an artist when he realized he wanted social change and aimed his work at it. These actions can be framed as gay emancipation. Speaking openly about his sexuality, he still faces social ostracism.

In *Dicks*, he uses the format of supporters’ scarves. First seen in England before WWI (in Poland in the 1970s), scarves have always signaled recognition, loyalty, support, even adoration — and belonging.

The work harnesses the aesthetics of objects that symbolize belonging, pride, and collective emotion in stadium culture. The artist transforms the motif by replacing a typical club slogan with the word “dicks.” It can be read as commentary on exclusion and symbolic violence shaping contemporary stadium and national culture.

Yet among fans we also find forms of substitute, camouflaged intimacy, where men show each other tenderness.

18 Krzysztof Gil,
After the Pink and Blue Powder Dust, 2025
oil on canvas, 190×160 cm

The painting is inspired by Rudolph Valentino in “The Young Rajah” (1922), where he plays an Indian prince — an example of early Hollywood exoticism, based on superficial notions of