

AGATA

SZYMANEK



*PORTFOLIO*

## *ARTIST STATEMENT*

My practice is dedicated to creating artistic workshops and designing activity books and mobile apps used as educational tools. Within my pedagogical undertakings, I often try to translate encountered knowledge into artistic experience by repositioning words and images, and examining them in different contexts, to support abstract and poetical thinking. Contexts, that I am working with are related to our relationships with animals, ecological thinking, or a deeper understanding of care systems.

While working on art workshops, I focus on creating an environment conducive to better understand operating pedagogies that are situated in art processes, like discovering new emotional spaces or rising new inquiries through images. By proposing creative exercises of drawing, writing, designing, telling stories or performing, I intend to provide space for self-expression, as well as for collective thinking. I often invite participants to use metaphorical and symbolic thinking, to explore familiar ideas from different perspectives, as in the 'pipes workshop', where we tried to approach pipes with emotional engagement asking if pipes can be charming, suspicious, or seductive.

Within the workshop scenarios, I aim to determine the kinds of imagination collective learning strategies may support, for example by asking participants to draw a numbat, knowing they are not very familiar with Australian fauna. This exercise can enable playful and humorous drawing solutions and is an interesting starting point for the discussion about environments.

I constantly try to rethink my role as a workshop organizer and ask how to be a good mediator between humans and ideas, how to experiment with this position, when to stand out and when to merge with other participants and their processes. I also reflect on the workshop scheme and think about how to apply a more performative approach to the workshop scenario, by dismantling the workshop setting and applying alternative structures.

## *BIO*

Agata Szymanek was born in 1990, she lives and works in Mysłowice, Poland. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, where she obtained a doctorate. She is also a certificate student at the New Centre for Research and Practice and a lecturer at AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow and at the Fine Arts Academy in Katowice. Within artistic and pedagogical practice she seeks engagement in the relations between human and animal, or other environmental agents through dissecting linguistic and culturally produced images of nature.

Agata Szymanek is an author of the research publication *Spiritual Exercises* published in 2020 by the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice. The book contains interviews with artists on magical and esoteric motifs in their artworks, shedding new light on these topics on the Polish art scene. In 2022 as a part of the New Centre's Parallel Academia, she contributed to the program *Hyperannotations 2.0* and conducted a series of interviews with artists and curators at the 59th Venice Biennale.

Agata's educational activities are focused on developing and advancing critical and creative thinking. The workshop material consists of stories, mind games, puzzles, riddles, and creative interventions useful for questioning information and achieving new conclusions. It proposes to examine each concept from many perspectives and helps to be open to new evidence that disconfirms the normative space and introduces new worlds. In 2020 and 2021 she taught the workshop *Bees and the sword of contestation* on 6th PhilosophyCon organized by the Silesian University, the workshop *Balsamic Garden* addressed to pharmacy employees, the *Balance* workshop at Gallery BWA in Katowice, and *The creative workshop of virtual touch* at Youth Biennial in Belgrade.

She has collaborated with institutions and galleries such as Temporary Gallery (Cologne), Stiftung Künstlerdorf (Schöppingen), Pilipczuk Gallery (Copenhagen), Hornsey Town Hall Arts Center (London), Christmas Steps Gallery (Bristol), Dumbo Arts Festival (New York), Youth Biennial (Belgrade), Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki (Warsaw), Widna Gallery (Cracow), BWA Awangarda (Wrocław), Galeria Bielska BWA (Bielsko-Biała), Rondo Sztuki (Katowice), Centre for the Meeting of Cultures (Lublin), Artists' Colony (Gdańsk.), Silesian Museum (Katowice).



## *VERNACULAR THINKING WORKSHOP*

'The Vernacular Thinking Workshop' was developed during the Stiftung Kunstlerdorf Schoppingen Residency. The workshop proposed exercises of imagining and designing to help explore the idea of vernacular thinking and vernacular strategies for approaching technology. These strategies subvert existing politics of technology that favor material and intellectual resources. At the same time, during the workshop, we were thinking about models of connection with other animals, where speculative tools like 'spiral nut collector' could be used to support environmental well-being.

We started the workshop by drawing numbats without recalling their exact appearance, allowing participants to come up with imaginative interpretations. The final task was to design a 'vernacular tool' that could benefit both our imagined numbats and humans in a shared environment. This path allowed us to approach speculative design through empathy.

The workshop scenario was based on publications 'Captivating Technology' by Ruha Benjamin, and 'Rambunctious Garden' by Emma Marris.

*photo: Julia Haarmann*

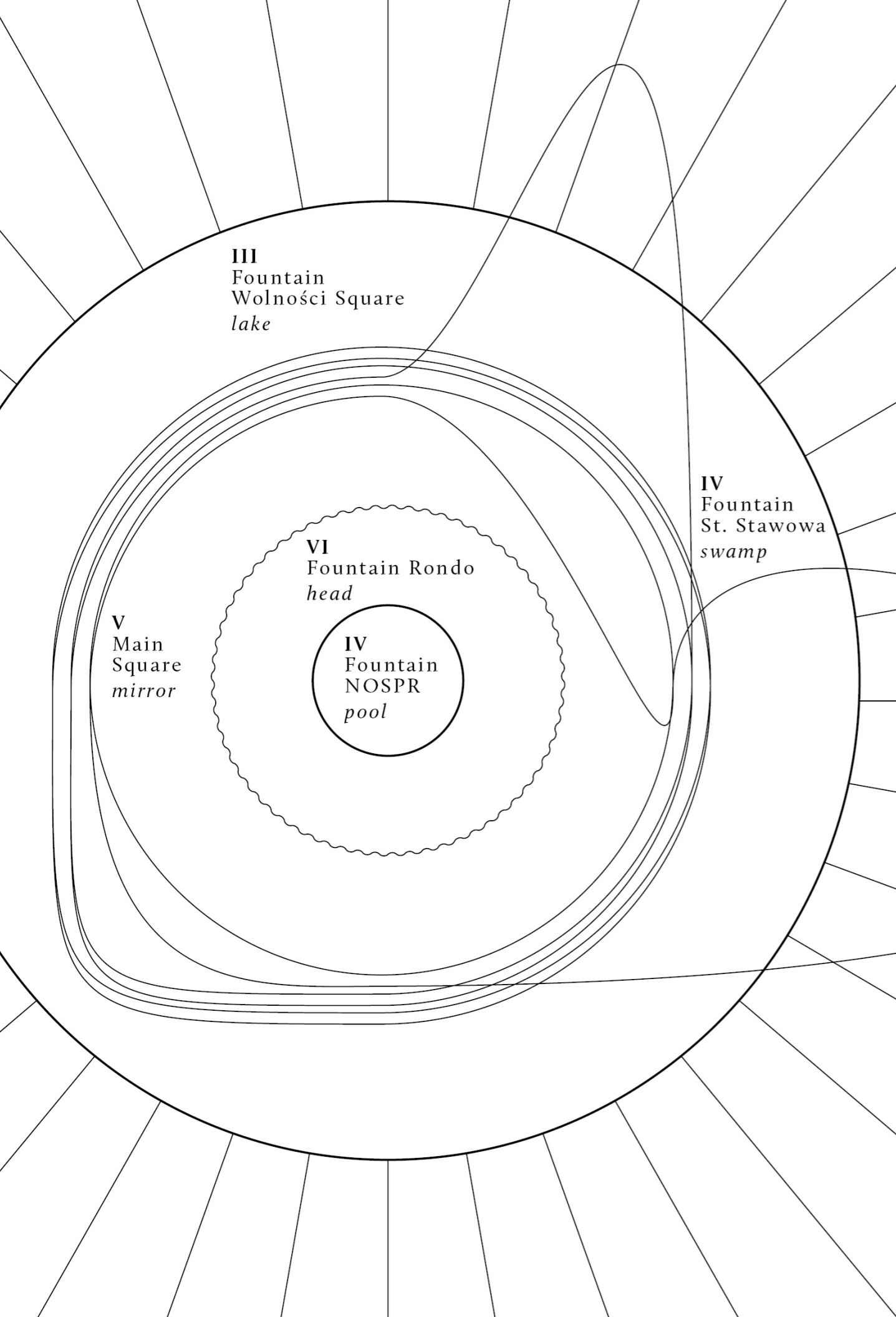


### *BE AFRAID. BE VERY AFRAID*

The workshop was organized in collaboration with Mark Cinkevich at Widna Gallery in Cracow, in partnership with VII PhilosophyCon. The workshop scenario engaged monster writing and monster visualization techniques to dismantle and then better understand complex ideas.

The workshop involved step-by-step interactive activities, including the creation of specific monster organs with their own visual characteristics and functions. An example was a tentacular moustache used to collect resources only for higher-ranking party officials. Through collective effort, we composed, speculated, and invented two monsters representing: the 'monster of capitalism' and the 'monster of communism.'

At the workshop's climax participants came up with narratives based on reflection of the historical and economic situation in Poland, in which the two monsters collided and engaged in a battle. The 'monster of capitalism,' a floating singular organ resembling a mouth-anus, clashed with the 'monster of communism' in the form of the Palace of Culture in Warsaw.



### ***POOLS & MIRRORS***

The project meditated on the alchemical process of perfecting substances juxtaposed with an imaginary tour around a gigantic waste-water treatment plant that could have taken the space of a whole city.

Each waste-water treatment plant design forms a path consisting of several steps that leads to the production of drinking water. The workshop applied and extended this narrative model with a city walk, exploring the water cleaning process and engaging participants in creative exercises.

Furthermore, the project delved into instructive paths of the soul transformation. We took inspiration from the alchemical treatise 'Splendor Solis' and the Dzogchen philosophy guide 'Rest in Illusion' by Longchenpa. Here, Splendor Solis's alchemic plaques full of symbolic and allegorical thinking were used as a tool to work with visual storytelling.

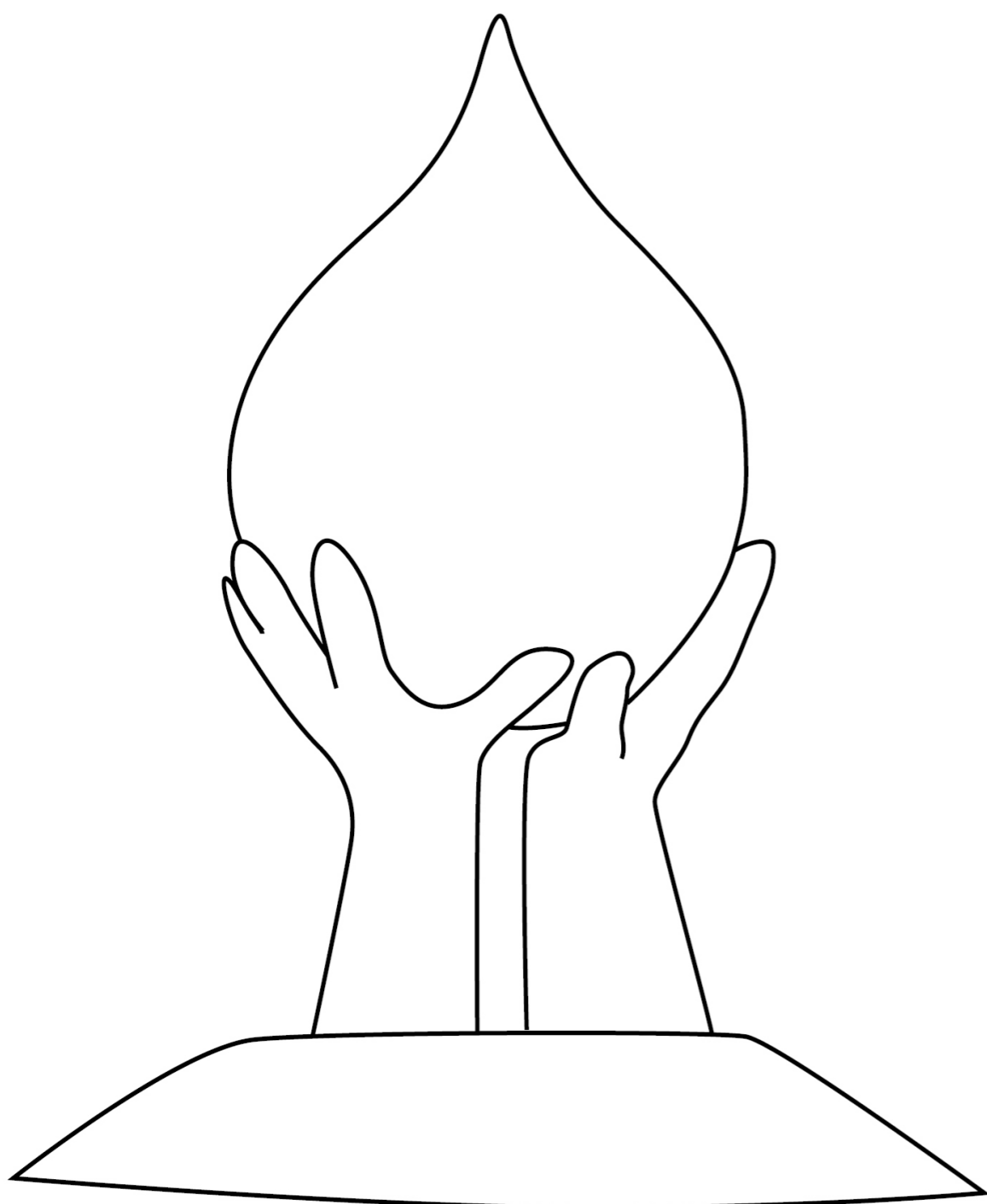
*Workshop was conducted as a part of the exhibition "Utopias/Dystopias. exhibition about the future of the cities" at Rondo Sztuki Gallery in Katowice.*

*Curator: Irma Kozina*

*The workshop was also realized at the Gemeinde Koeln Gallery in Collogne*



*Pools & Mirrors* | exhibition view  
photo Alexandra Nikitina



wyznaj اعتراف کن  
прызнайся confess

### *PLANETARY RIDDLES. ACTIVITY BOOK.*

Inspired by circular shapes and geometry, the project consists of around 90 pages filled with different visual riddles. Many of the riddles have topographical, geographical, and planetary associations.

The riddles comprise a simple drawing and a short written task. The task usually is formed as a one-word instruction. This project was initiated to explore how to influence images with verbal instructions to facilitate the creative and critical process through poetical thinking. Recipients of the activity book can interact with it by applying drawings or writing on its pages.

The concept drew inspiration from a wall calendar with tear-off pages, and it also adopted a formal format akin to a dictionary. The written task is presented in four languages: Polish, English, Farsi, and Belarusian.





### *PLANETARY RIDDLES. EXHIBITION*

The exhibition at the Widna Gallery in Cracow was intended to create a space that could facilitate collaboration and encourage reflection on a planetary perspective's imaginative potential for world-building.

The exhibition took on the workshop's ambience, inviting participants to actively engage with an installation formed with 'Planetary Riddles' activity books displayed on the wall. Visitors had the opportunity to interact with the installation and work with the riddles by drawing on the pages or using other creative means. Additionally, they were encouraged to remove pages as part of their involvement in the exhibit, which provoked changes in the exhibition setting.

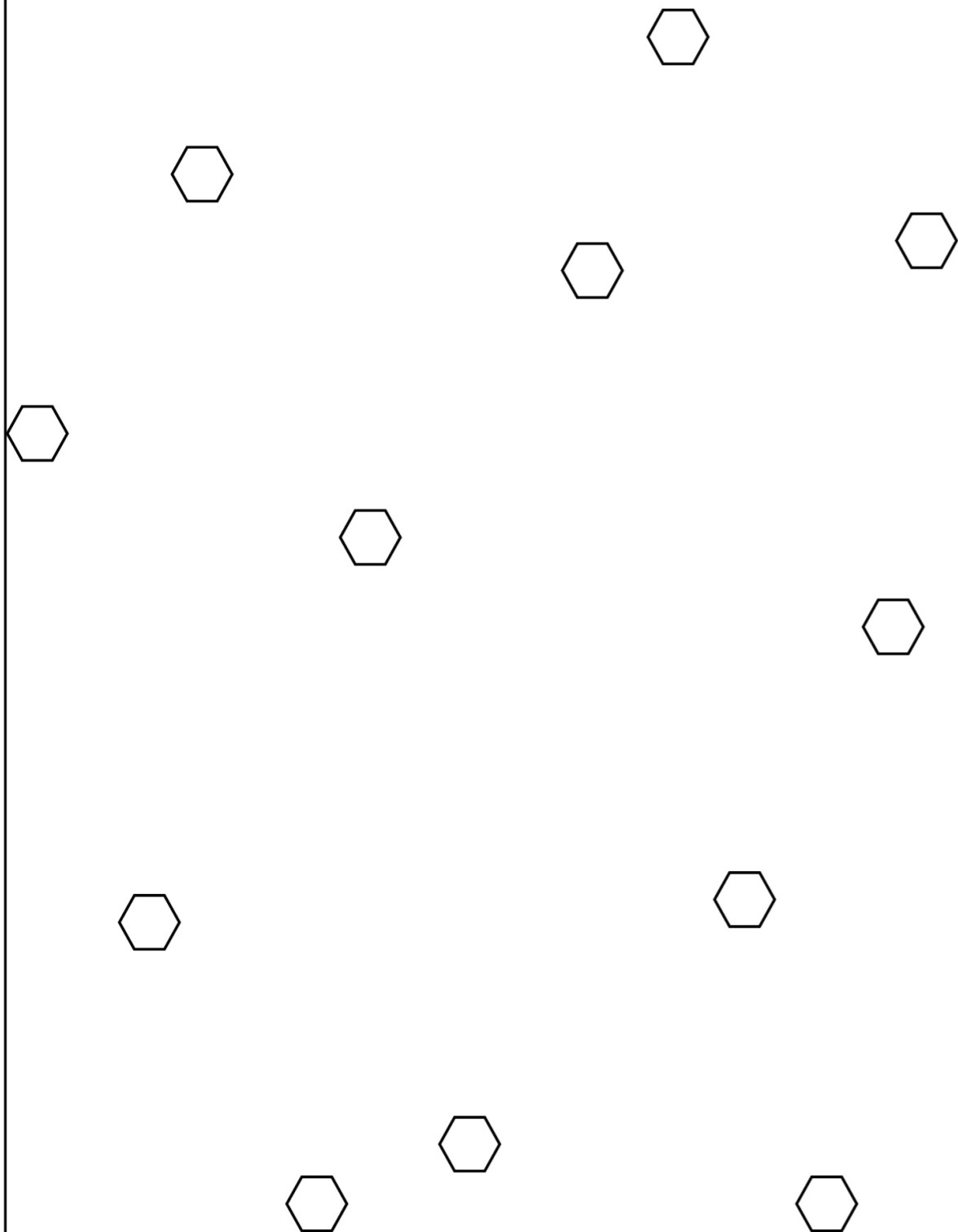
The exhibit featured as well the Whirlingword app, collages, and objects like the 'bee-lobster,' an artwork that invites reflection on speculative zoology.



*Planetary riddles* | exhibition view

photo Patrycja Gotszling

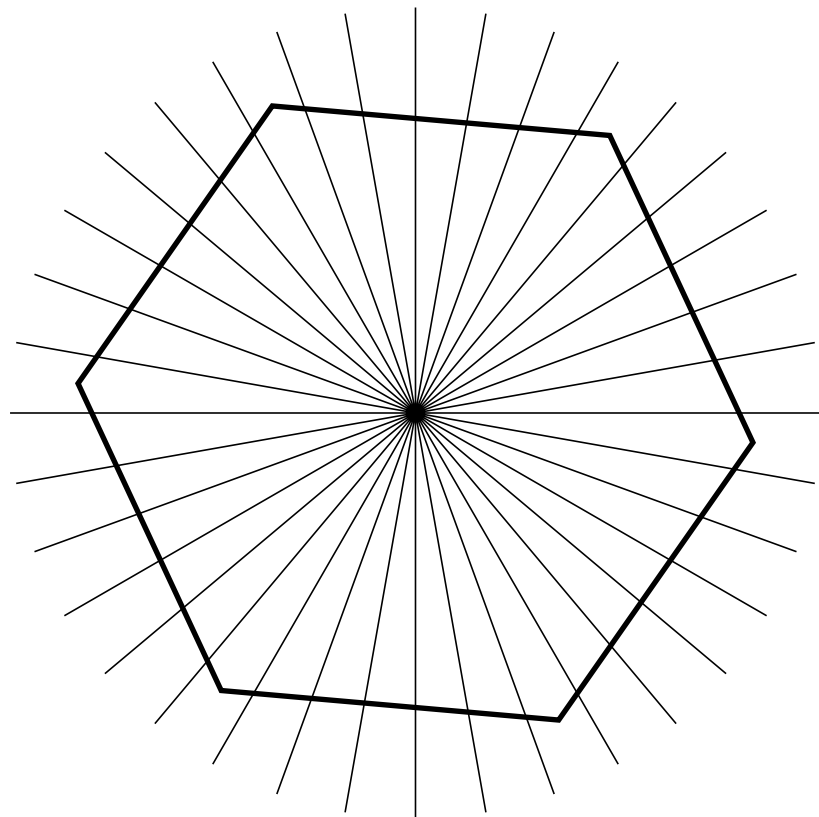
## 5. DESIGN THE MACHINE OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISTRACTION



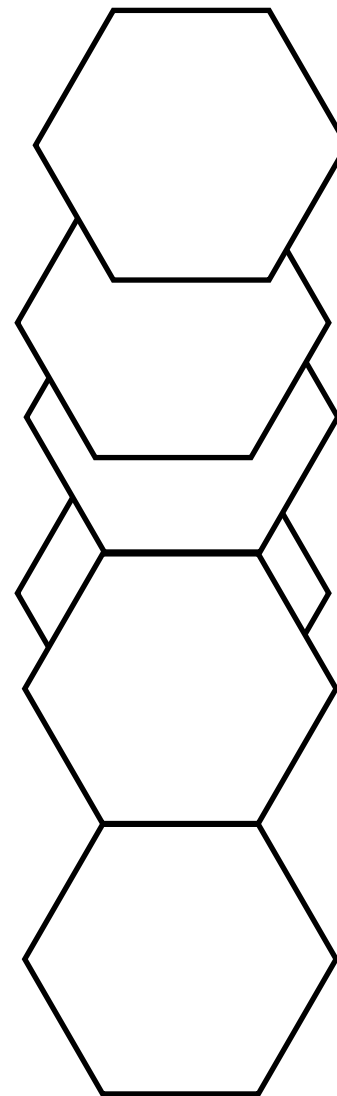
### *BEES RIDDLES. ACTIVITY BOOK.*

The activity book was created as a result of collaboration with Aladin Borioli, an artist, researcher, and beekeeper. I conducted an interview with Aladin titled 'Becoming a Bee', which was published in *Elementy* magazine run by the Fine Arts Academy in Cracow. This interview explored neuroscientific research on bees and delved into some esoteric aspects related to symbols associated with bees, such as the bee's hum and the hexagonal shape. Being inspired by our conversations, I played with these symbols and created an art zine containing 24 visual riddles. I tried to work with the hexagonal shape and build narratives around it, asking how symbolic thinking provokes the philosophical inquiry and cognition of our positions in the world.

7. ROTATE THE SHAPE. USE YOUR MIND



8. FORSEE





### *THE PHARMACIST - BALSAMIC GARDEN*

The workshop 'Balsamic Garden' was developed in cooperation with the City Museum in Tychy. It stemmed from a meeting with pharmacists and addressed contemporary and traditional methods of treatment and the status of pharmacy workers. The reference to the symbolic meaning of the garden opened themes associated with relief, sensuality, mystery and awareness that helped look at the figure of the pharmacist in a more sensitive way.

The workshop encouraged creative and abstract thinking, providing a platform for self-expression, playful exploration, and imaginative associations. Timothy Leary's illustrations from the cycle 'Nonsense Botany' were one of our inspirations, which incited playful creativity. We also invented symbolic attributes related to pharmacists and played around with language. For instance, we replaced parts of poems with drug names. These creative processes were designed to increase self-esteem and empower individuals to recognize their knowledge, competencies and talents.



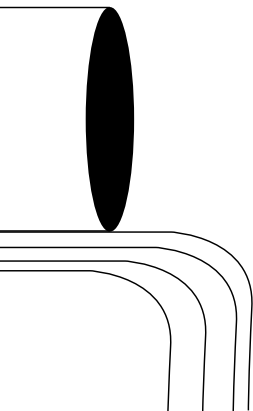
### *THE PIPES WORKSHOP*

'The pipes workshop' was organized in collaboration with activist and engineer Michael Reinders at the cultural association Niehler Freiheit in Cologne. We delved into the question: 'What is a pipe?', applying abstract, poetic thinking and engaging with a more emotional approach to the topic of pipe infrastructure. The workshop also intended to raise the question of whether pipes have a rightful place within ecosystems provoking the reflection on environmental ethics.

Many of Niehler Freiheit's facilities are full of visible pipes, which made it a perfect setting for discussing the aesthetic and the issue of pipe visibility. Over the course of this workshop we also worked with the activity book created for the workshop, and engaged our senses by listening to pipes, making sounds and sensing vibrations to finally construct a human-pipe machine. The exercises were designed with a playful and humorous approach to facilitate conceptual thinking.

*CHOOSE*

*AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD, WHERE WATER FALLS INTO SPACE, THERE IS A LONELY PIPE THAT FORGOT SHE WAS ONCE CONNECTED. SHE IS A HOME FOR:*



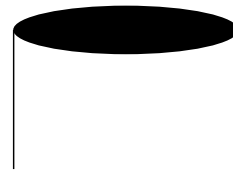
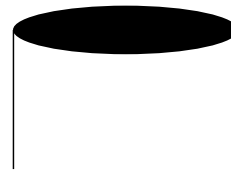
- a. SOMETHING*
- b. NOTHING*
- c. ....(YOUR ANSWER)*

*COMPARE AND CHECK. THERE IS:*

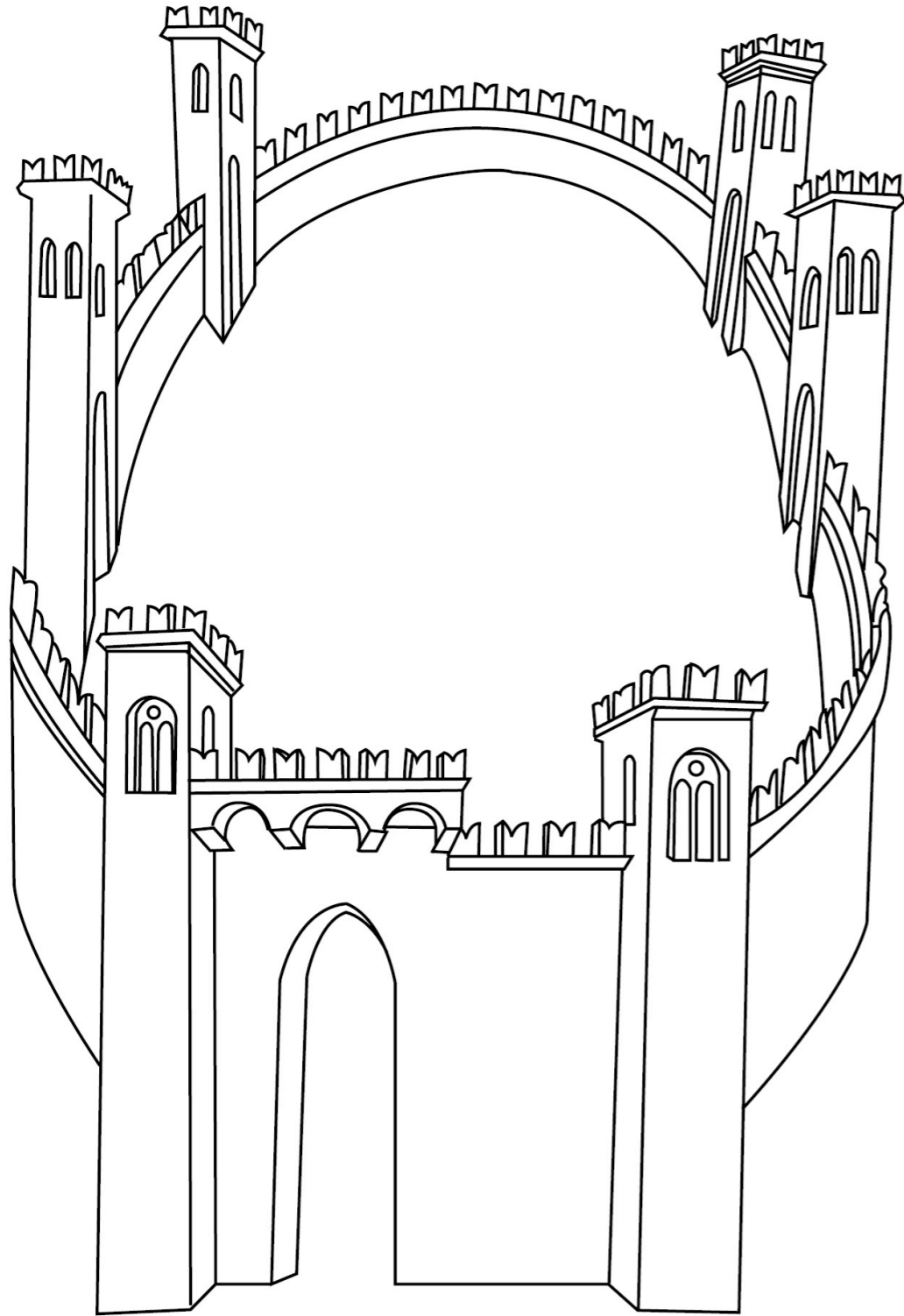
*AT THE END  
OF THE PIPE*

*AT THE END  
OF THE WORLD*

- a. ....*
- b. TIMELESSNESS*
- c. BOUNDLESSNESS*
- d. POTENTIALITY*



## 14. PASTE A PLANT IN THE BALSAMIC GARDEN



*According to ,Tractaus de Herbis', 1440*

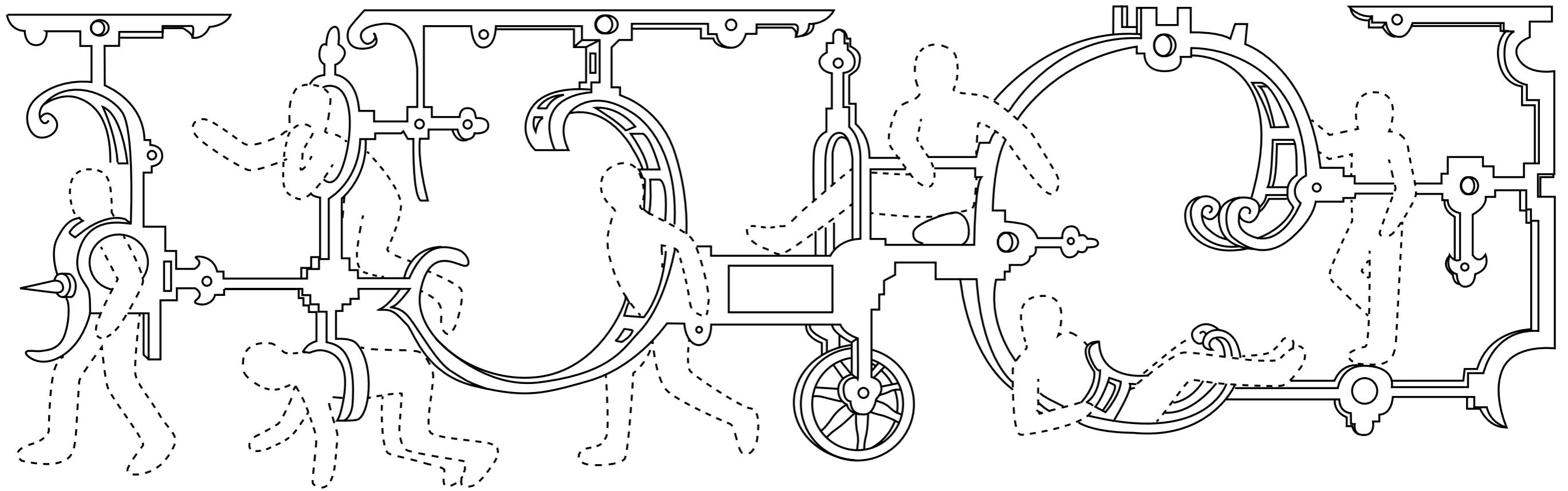
### *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES - ACTIVITY BOOK*

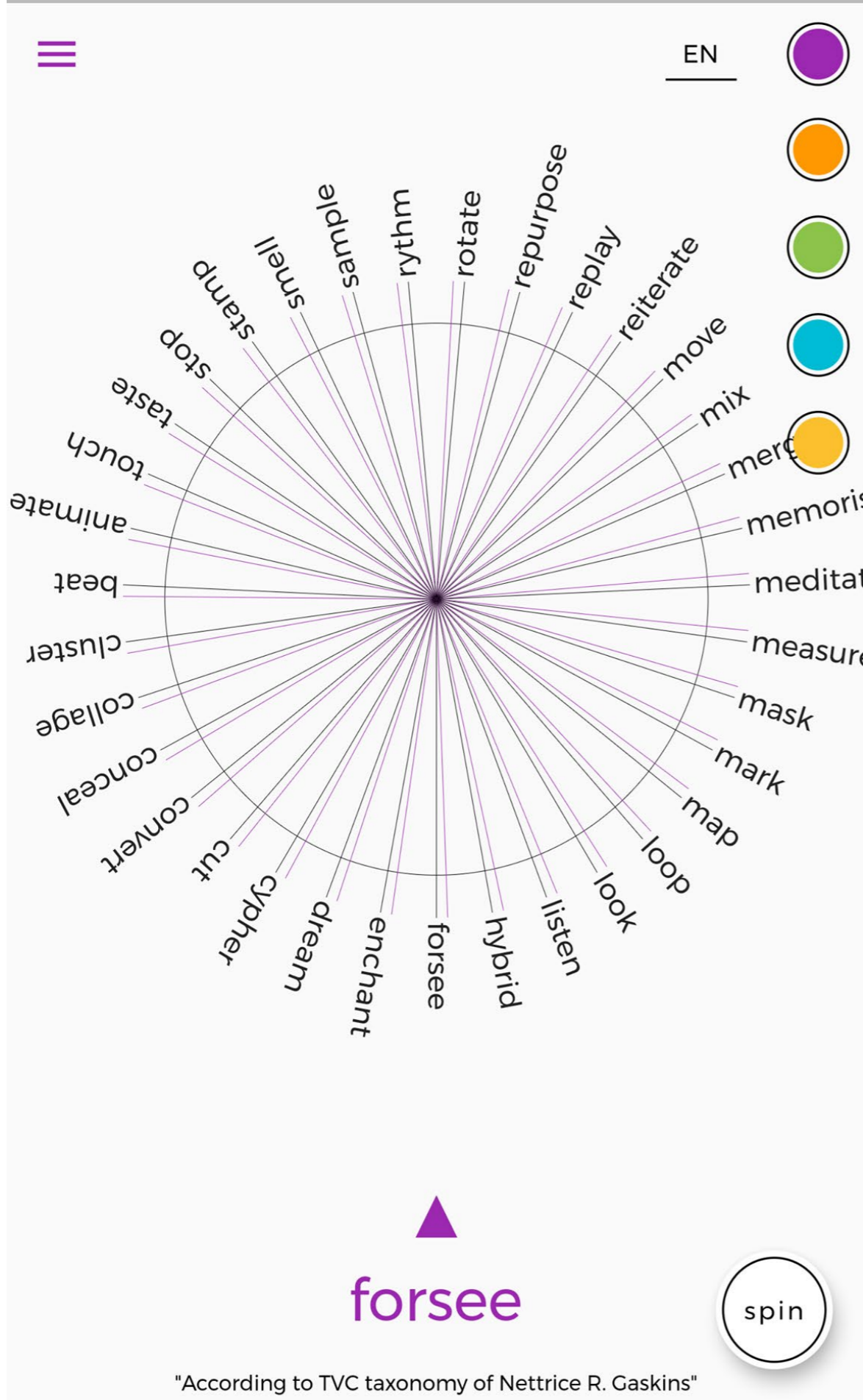
The activity book is based on the research project 'Spiritual Exercises.' This project was conducted in collaboration with the Fine Arts Academy in Katowice and was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for young researchers. The project's main focus was to create a publication containing interviews with contemporary artists from Poland, where we discussed the magical and esoteric themes present in their art practices.

While creating the activity book, I aimed to explore how to translate the knowledge included in magical thinking, magical symbolism, and correspondences into a form accessible through the art process.



11-12. PLACE YOURSELF

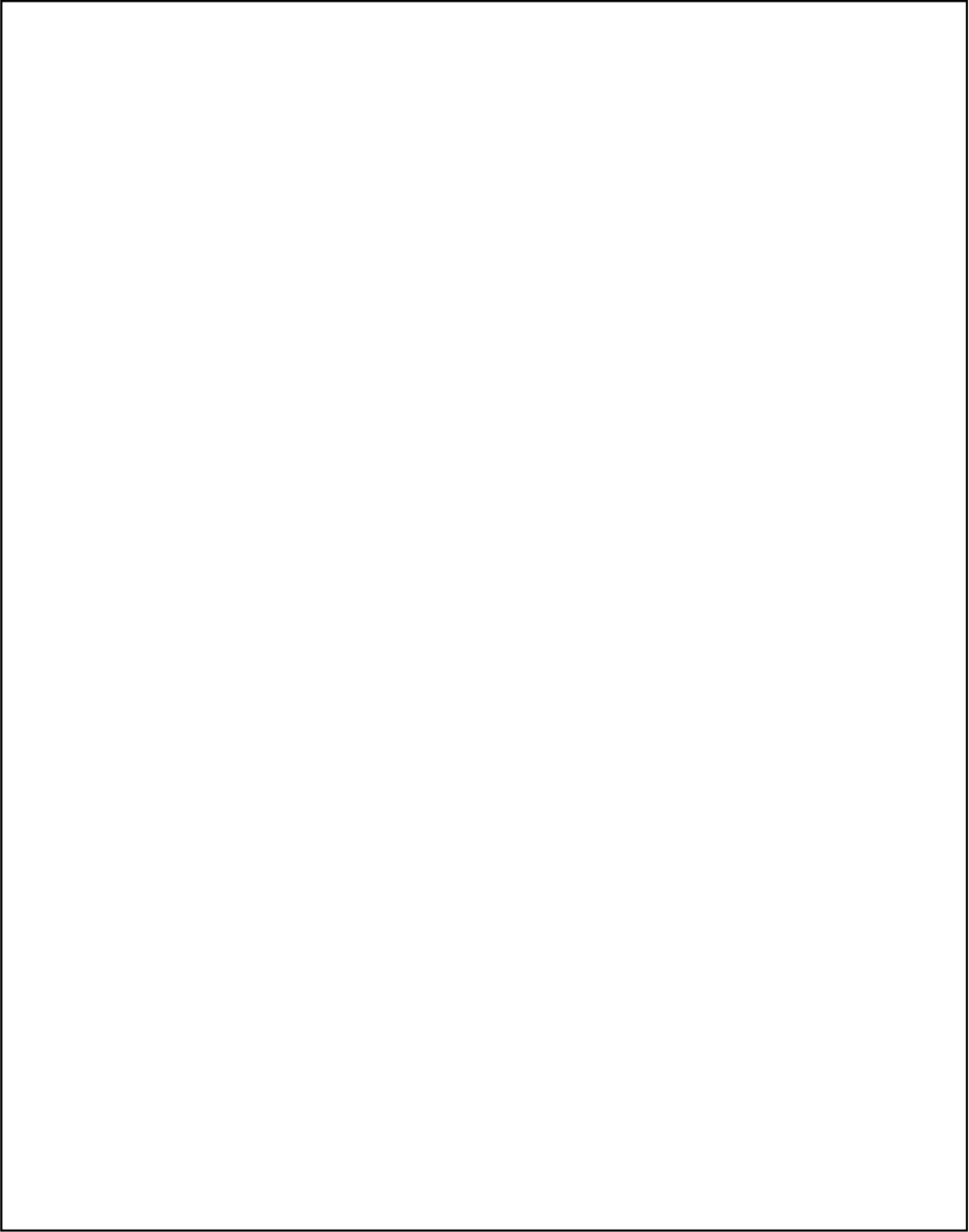




**ART ROULETTE - MOBILE APP**

Art roulette is an interactive and easily accessible tool that can be useful during different artistic undertakings. It proposes a series of generated actions to apply to the visual artwork, object, or text. The tool provokes us to expand our usual practices. It can be used in group activities and individually.

The idea is inspired by the Techno-Vernacular Creativity taxonomy diagram published in Nettrice R. Gaskins's essay "Techno-Vernacular Creativity and Innovation across the African Diaspora and Global South." Here, I intended to translate diagrammatic knowledge into an interactive format to enhance my workshop practices.



*CV*

## AGATA SZYMANEK

### CV

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### EDUCATION

The New Centre for Research and Practice, from 2020 (certificate student)  
Curatorial program What Could/Should Curating do?, 2020  
PH. D. Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, 2014 — 2019, (PH. D.)  
Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, 2009 — 2014 (MA)  
The University of Castilla-La Mancha, 2011 — 2012

### WORK EXPERIENCE

Lecturer at AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow, from 2022  
Lecturer at Fine Arts Academy in Katowice, from 2022  
Practice at Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, painting department, 2014-2017

### DISTINCTIONS AND GRANTS

2021 Equal Award at I Painting Biennial *Lublin Spring*  
2020 Scholarship of the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodeship in the field of culture  
2020 Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Poland Scholarship  
2019 Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Poland Grant for young researchers  
2017 Grand Prix at the *First New Vanguard Competition*, Szyb Wilson Gallery  
2016 Anonymous Founder Geppert Award

### PUBLICATIONS

*Becoming a Bee. Conversation with Aladin Borioli*, "Elementy", Cracow, 2022  
*Fallic woman. Interview with Agata Słowak*, "Szum", 2020  
*Spiritual Exercises*, Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, Katowice, 2020  
Illustration to November horoscope, "Vogue Poland", No.9, 2018

### RESIDENCIES

2023 *Research residency*, Gemeinde Koln, Cologne, DE  
2022 *Stiftung Künstlerdorf Schöppingen*, Schöppingen, DE  
2022 *Posthuman Research Artist Residency* organized by Foreign Objekt

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023 *Pools and Mirrors*, Gemeinde Koln, Cologne, DK  
2022 *Trespassers*, Pilipczuk Gallery, Copenhagen, DK  
2021 *Planetary Riddles*, Widna Gallery, Cracow, PL  
2019 *Possessed*, House of Culture in Jazdów, Warsaw, PL  
2019 *Day Night*, M2 Gallery, Mysłowice, PL  
2019 *Poganka*, Rondo Sztuki, Katowice, PL  
2018 *Days of Days*, Artist's Colony, Gdańsk, PL  
2017 *Hypnagogia*, Christmas Steps Gallery, Bristol, UK  
2015 *Vivarium*, Mysłowice City Museum, Mysłowice, PL  
2015 *Cabinet*, Art Center of Stara Zagora, Stara Zagora, BG

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 *The moth and the bee*, Minus 1, Katowice, PL  
2021 *I Painting Biennial Lublin Spring*, Centre for the Meeting of Cultures, Lublin, PL  
2019 *Embodiment*, Naga Art Gallery, Sosnowiec, PL  
2019 *The 44 Painting Biennial "Bielska Jesień"*, BWA Bielsko-Biała, Bielsko-Biała, PL  
2017 *Connect*, Rondo Sztuki, Katowice, PL  
2017 *Connect*, Hornsey Town Hall Arts Centre, London, UK  
2016 *12 Geppert Competition*, BWA Gallery, Wrocław, PL  
2016 *inSPIRATIONS*, National Museum in Szczecin, Szczecin, PL  
2016 *B#side War*, City Hall in Casara della Delizia, Casara della Delizia, IT  
2016 *North — South*, Great Armoury — Gallery of Fine Arts Academy in Gdańsk, PL  
2015 *Aalborg Surreal vol.3*, Ved Stranden 13, Aalborg, DK  
2015 *Transcription*, Sielecki Castle, Sosnowiec, PL  
2015 *9 Polish Print Triennial*, Silesian Museum, Katowice, PL  
2015 *Travel until the border of Utopia*, Art Place 44, Świnoujście, PL  
2014 *Polish Exhibition at DUMBO Arts Festival* organized by Consulate of Poland in New York, Little Poland Gallery, New York, US  
2014 *The Best Fine Arts Diplomas*, Gallery of Fine Arts Academy, Gdańsk, PL

### WORKSHOPS

2022 *Tender Parasites*, Temporary Gallery, Cologne, DE  
2022 *Pools & Mirrors*, Rondo Sztuki, Katowice, PL  
2022 *The vernacular thinking workshop*, Stiftung Künstlerdorf, Schöppingen, DE  
2021 *The creative workshop of virtual touch*, Youth Biennial, Belgrade, SRB  
2021 *Bees and the sword of contestation*, VI Phylosophicon, Silesian University, PL  
2020 *The Balance Workshop*, BWA Gallery, Katowice, PL

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