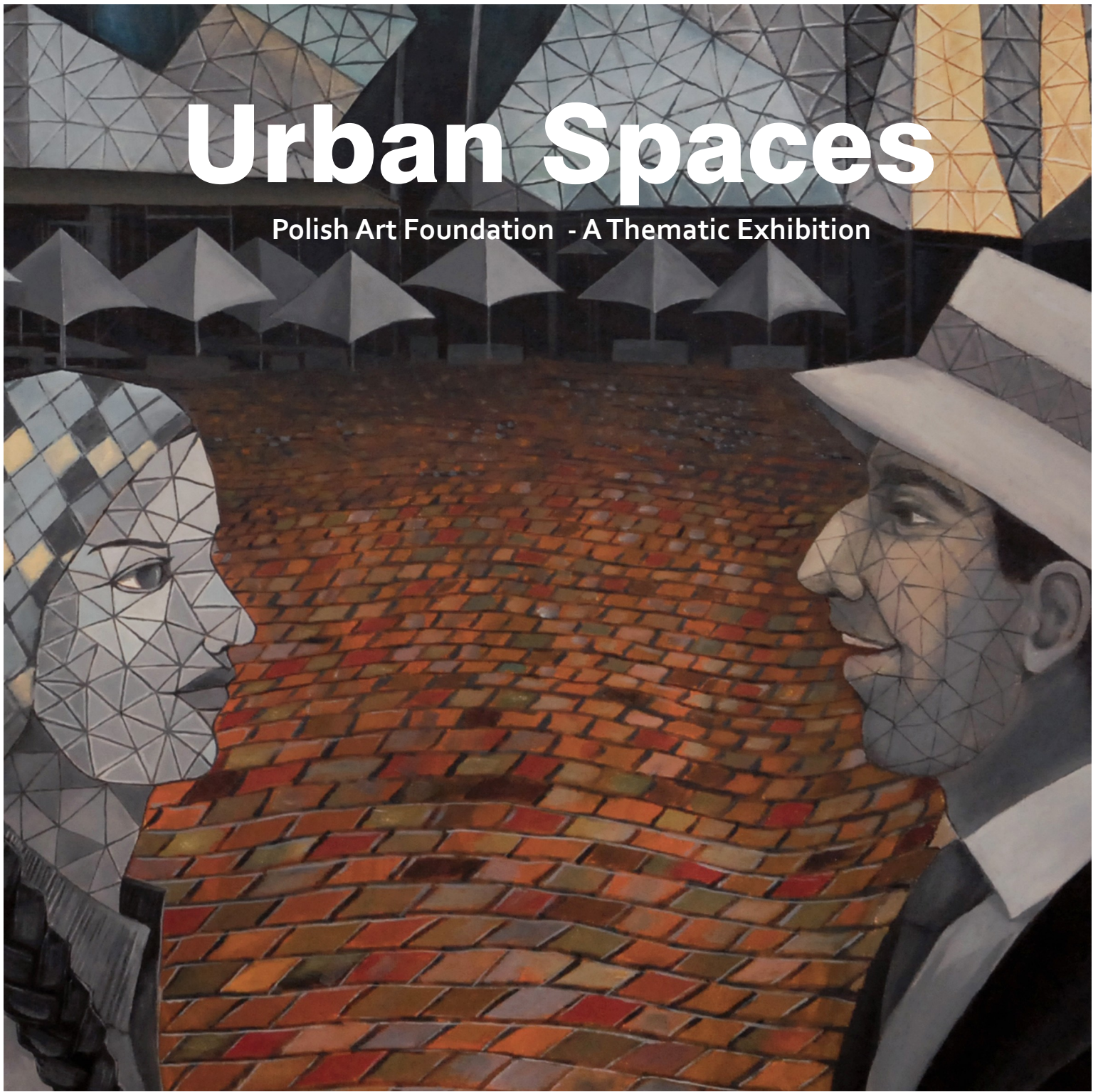


Urban Spaces

Polish Art Foundation - A Thematic Exhibition





Gabriela Rovski 'You are here'
Glass on wire and fibreglass

Surveying the city scene: artists and the built environment

As the ever-expanding hubs in which the majority of the world's seven billion people reside, urban spaces are in the 21st century the quintessential arenas where humanity fashions not only its home, but also its desires, its aspirations and its future. At times urban space may be unimaginably vast as is the case in the chaotic mega-cities of the developing world, or it may be quaint and quietly contained, nonetheless networked and well connected; it may be dazzlingly new or reduced to a state of terminal decay or bright with the promise of civic renewal. This is the landscape in which most of us spend our lives and readily take as a given.

The 26 artists exhibiting in the Polish Art Foundation's **Urban Spaces** exhibition have responded to the manifold aspects of the urban environment in ways that focus attention on the textures, spaces and complexities that define our built-up world, shining fresh light on what is generally known and familiar and revealing them as things exotic and at times uncanny.



Bolek Jesman 'Symphony of Light Hong Kong'
Pastel



Hilary Senhanli 'In the Metro'
Mixed media on paper



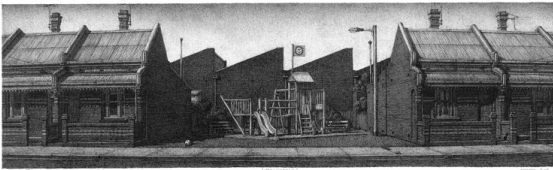
David Glyn Davies 'Remembering Pugin1' Pen and ink on paper
'Remembering Pugin2' Pen and ink on paper

Each have responded to their own subjective experiences and place within this concrete landscape – its skylines and small details, the ways that people are affected by it and how, through creative means, they have reacted to the things that ignite their imaginations.

The perspectives on show range from classic delineations of iconic city skylines, as we see in the work of artists **Bolek Jesman** and **Gabriela Rovski** to **David Glyn Davies** detailed observations of the designs beneath our feet and deeper still to the subterranean and alienating avenues depicted in the work of **Hilary Senhanli**.



Maciej Janczak 'Graffiti Murals'
Slide show



Robert Clinch 'Unrequited' Lithograph
'Dream-Scape' Lithograph
Courtesy of Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, Melbourne



Libby Schreiber
'Progress' Linocut
'Suburban Cock' Linocut

In contrast, artist **Maciej Janczak** has applied a straightforward documentary approach, in this instance focusing on the work of graffiti artists, whereas printmaker **Libby Schreiber** has created whimsical neighbourhood scenes that speak of a quasi bucolic existence, the little bits of nature that entwine our man-made towns.

In his fine lithographic composition **Robert Clinch** evokes the idea of an absent human presence, where stark Victorian brickwork conjures feelings of loneliness and isolation. And in a similar though rather more expressionist vein **Sandra Hajda** has - through her oil paintings, envisaged the heart of the bustling metropolis as a metaphor for intense human emotions. Her buildings are consumed by a conflagration and they speak of a powerful catharsis but also of new beginnings.

And while urban planners might aim to streamline our capitals, we know through experience that this is not always the case. **Sue Jarvis** explores this very point in her depiction of a road-worker crew in action. With their orange bollards in place the team go laconically about their business, and we sense rather too wearily it will go on almost forever. Similarly, in the work of artists such as **Pei Pei He**, **Miro Wrobel** and **Bogdan Fialkowski**, the city is defined less by the order it imposes than the people that bustle through its streets. Here each of the artists has responded to the presence of the crowd, depicted in ways that traverse from the anonymous cluster to scenes that are surprisingly sensuous and alive.

For many the term 'urban space' refers primarily to the contemporary built environment, as in the wasteland scenes captured by **Aldona Kmiec**. Here a lone and displaced chair, a dentist's chair no less, seems utterly incongruous in a disused city lot, the mere fact of its existence posing more questions than answers.

But where modernity is everywhere to be seen, the cities in which we reside might also date to antiquity. For example, **Artur Lyczba's** umber and sienna toned



Sue Jarvis 'Phone Message, Construction Site'
Oil on canvas



Bogdan Fialkowski 'Street people'
Oil on canvas



Sandra Hajda 'Gluttony'
Oil on canvas



Miro Wrobel 'City 1'
Mixed media



Pei Pei He 'Streetscape'
Oil on canvas



Aldona Kmiec 'Dentist Chair' Photograph
'Sydney Harbour Bridge' Photograph



Artur Liczba 'Sometimes, Someplace, Now'
Oil on linen



Jarek Wojcik 'Moment Bienheureux' Acrylic on linen
'So Quiet' Acrylic on linen
Courtesy Catherine Asquith Gallery

composition 'Sometimes, Someplace, Now', might well be a vista of Renaissance Rome or possibly a cluttered Tuscan village. So too with the work of **Jarek Wojcik**- whose towering robust forms recall the encompassing structures of fortified medieval towns, as is also the case in the work of **Przemek Cerebiez-Tarabicki**.

Abstract patterns inspired by city scenes appear in the work of **Pam Karouni**, derived in part from a bird's eye view of the street and the clear sky overhead. **Mathew Sokolowski** also works with pattern, fashioning a camouflage design from the footprint of city streets. His works are maze-like and frenetic, suggestive of urban development before modernity's ordering principles set in. For this however we turn to the paintings of **Gloria Stern**; her works are a celebration of rhythmic geometric forms. We note however the gently rounded edges of her interlocking shapes, as if the spaces to which she alludes are pliant and decidedly pleasant. In contrast **Bozena Wiszniewski** has drawn inspiration from the interlinked triangulated forms found in Melbourne's Federation Square; these thrust towards the sky in energetic bursts.



Przemek Cerebiez-Tarabicki 'In Pink'
Acrylic on linen



Pam Karouni 'Cities in the Sky'
Acrylic and enamel



Gloria Stern 'Sidewalk' Oil on canvas
Courtesy of Artman Gallery



Bozena Wiszniewski 'Federation Square'
Oil on canvas



Matthew Sokolowski 'Above'
Acrylic on canvas

Somewhat more humanist in scale is the work of artist **Leigh Knight**. Her houses are square to the picture-plane and utterly alive with colour, a reminder perhaps that design touches almost everything in our lives.

Whimsy and humour are a strong element in the Urban Spaces exhibition, as we see for instance in the work of **Barbara McLean**. Her sculptural piece is titled "Angus, a proctologist and passionate gardener, was known to hold his gaze for extended periods of time." He is there wandering in a garden and we sense from his odd behavioural stance that he is perhaps a little peculiar. Another example too is the artist **Gosia Kurban**, who has focused on commuters strolling by Federation Square. She has rendered them in a manner that recalls the work of Australian Modernist John Brack, a painter who was famously inspired by the pedestrians traversing this street. Common to both is a quiet theatrical irony, but also a palpable fondness for the citizens they depict. **Jerzy Glac** also has an eye for the humorous; his quirky depictions of Melbourne are replete with trams and their curious travellers who seem rather diminished in their inescapable world.



Leigh Knight 'Old and New'
Acrylic on canvas



Gosia Kurban 'Coexistence'
Acrylic on canvas



Barbara McLean
'Angus, a proctologist and passionate gardener, was known to hold his gaze for extended periods of time'
Sculpture



Jerzy Glac 'Sunday afternoon 1' Acrylic on canvas
'Sunday afternoon 2' Acrylic on canvas

Of all the work in the Urban Spaces exhibition the most ambitious in scale is that of **Joanna Kosowski**. Her large-scale ink on paper composition, which is titled 'Dear Rielly', is a sprawling hand-rendered map depicting places and scenes found throughout the city of Melbourne. It is a memory device of sorts, of places visited and recalled, full of detail and connections and amassed as a visual letter to a friend. The love of the city that is suggested by this piece is by no means sentimental for it does not shy away from the grittiness of urban life. Such sentiments might also be compared with the qualities brought forth in the paintings of **Maria Barbaro**. Her composition 'Electric Web' centres on overhead railway powerlines, which feature as a device that dissects the afternoon sky. It is at once industrial and full of romantic poise.

Studying the works in the Urban Spaces exhibition I am reminded of the words of renowned Polish-born architect Daniel Libeskind who stated: "I think there is a new awareness in this 21st century that design is as important to where and how we live as it is for museums, concert halls and civic buildings." Certainly the artists represented here are exemplars of this suggested new-century awareness, for it is here, in their works, that we discover perceptions of the ever-changing city and how it shapes us all.

Damian Smith, 2012



Joanna Kosowski 'Dear Rielly'
Mixed media



Maria Barbaro
'Electric Webs' Acrylic on canvas
'Dissected sky over High Street'
Acrylic on canvas



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