



MIRA MARCINÓW

# Five fundamental feelings as five fingers

MIRA MARCINÓW

# Five fundamental feelings as five fingers

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Anger</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Portrait of a Woman</i>	8
<i>Portrait of Nena Stachurska</i>	10
<i>Mercy!</i>	12
Bird-shaped Goblet	13
<b>Sadness</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Melancholy</i>	16
<i>Pensive Christ</i>	18
<i>Son and His Killed Mother</i>	20
<i>Dragon Fighting against Panther, Jagiellonian tapestry</i>	22
<b>Joy</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>Bacchante</i>	25
<i>Ko-omote Mask of the Nō Theatre</i>	27
<i>Untitled [They realized that their capacity...]</i>	29
Plaster Cast of an Ancient Sculpture – Wild Boar	31
<b>Disgust/Revulsion</b>	<b>33</b>
Fortune-telling Bone	34
<i>Envy (Invidia)</i>	36
<i>The Seville Series No. 16</i>	38
Under-window Tapestry With Monkeys	40
<b>Fear</b>	<b>42</b>
<i>Défilé #6</i>	44
<i>Surprised</i>	46
<i>Team of Four</i>	48
<i>Fight Between a Rooster and a Cat</i>	50
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>52</b>

# Introduction



The day my daughter turned three, I taught her the names of her fingers. That day for the first time ever before going to sleep we enumerated them all: thumb, index finger, middle finger, ring finger, and little finger. My daughter repeated the sequence for several consecutive evenings, counting her own digits. Sometimes I think that's the only thing I taught her. Anything else came on its own. On second thought, I also handed her the names we attribute to feelings. Our mnemonic technique involved an act of imagination where each finger embodied a different emotion: the thumb was joy, the index finger – fear, the middle finger – anger, the ring finger – sadness, the little finger was disgust. We need all these feelings as much as we need all our fingers. Five basic emotions like five fundamental feelings. Five facial expressions recognised by humans all over the world, just like five fingers. And then we segued into senses. Another enumeration: joy is touch, anger is hearing, because it is audible whenever we shout at each other or stamp our feet. Fear makes cowards of us all and is a sight to behold. Sadness leaves its bitter aftertaste, while certain smells fill us with disgust. There's no doubt we need all five senses.

But why have I just introduced this highfalutin didactic tone in discussing commonplace human emotions? Because naming them remains a challenge into adulthood, stretching well beyond primary school. In fact, these are problems that have frequently originated there. This is because we, the adult children we are, have been socialised to learn how to feel, how to experience unwelcome emotions also, such as sadness, or forbidden ones, such as anger. It's exhausting when universal feelings are in most cases negative psychic states. We shy away from experiencing them yet whenever we decide to feel them anew, we're at a loss about how to do it. How to feel what for years we've been denied? Conditioned to perform risk-free joy, we act out the dystopian script of *Brave New World*, in which Aldous Huxley warned us against prioritising the senses of joy, pleasure, and comfort over the full world of emotions – not just the positive, simple ones. This is a warning about the tolerant parental voice saying "I only want my child to be happy. Nothing else". Nothing else? Can anyone simply want less? As if that faux-minimalist parental voice wasn't demanding too much of us?

Years ago, psychologists Beverly Fehr and James Russell remarked that "Everyone knows what an emotion is until asked to give a definition. Then, it seems no one knows". As a psychology student, I'd heard my disarmingly helpless professors repeat this catchphrase, which in time I came to pass on to my own students. Hard-pressed and fumbling for an academic definition of emotions, I spoke of conscious or unconscious, relatively long-lasting psychic states, preceded by a specific real-life event. By the same academic token, feelings are interpretations of emotions, while moods are less intense feelings and more uneventful. This does the trick, if only superficially.

---

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, French physician Hippolyte Baraduc asserted that he could capture emotions by means of a standard camera. To do so, Baraduc would search for emotionally disturbed individuals. By placing lightproof paper a few centimetres above their heads, he showed that different feelings caused different shapes to appear on a photographic plate behind it, with the same emotions yielding the same images. For instance, anger always looks like fireworks. But Baraduc isn't moonlighting as an assistant curator of this online exhibition. Anger fabricates diverse images: once it's a portrait of a woman, another time a decorative goblet.

Today, my intention is to guide you through this emotional turmoil: from the hall of anger via the room of sadness and into the funhouse. As we explore, we'll take our sweet time in the cabinet of disgust then pick up speed in the house of horrors.

Come along, follow me this way, please.



# Anger

---

## *Portrait of a Woman*

STANISŁAW IGNACY WITKIEWICZ – WITKACY • 1922, ZAKOPANE, POLAND •  
TATRA MUSEUM IN ZAKOPANE

I've selected Witkacy's *Portrait of a Woman* as our starting point. Immaculately made-up, hair alluringly ruffled. Hard pencil strokes, darkly outlined eyes and brows, sharply drawn clenched lips, and that is all there is to it. Enough to call it a malicious portrait. But accomplished. I just wanted you to consider that one single frame of female anger suffices.

Hannah Gadsby reminds us that anger is a forbidden feeling. Forbidden to whom? To women, obviously. Female anger, dear sisters, is instantly recognised as an extreme state, rather than one of emotional commonplaces. It's unbecoming to women. And that's why I'd like to begin by posing a question: can one feel feelings? Do women who are looking feel anger, awe, or perhaps attraction?

With black pencil strokes, Witkacy demarcates the red of the woman's coat from the symbolic bile-like yellow. He applies pastel upon pastel, layering the unconscious onto the conscious. But the male stroke doesn't appropriate everything. Had Witkacy exerted more pressure on the coloured pencil, he could have filled in the gaps, the deficiencies, the breaks, the silence, and the understatement. Fortunately, the artist shied away from narrative excessiveness and didn't mansplain female anger. The portrait oozes corporeality, with the page the colour of flesh or egg yolk. In a true intertextual fashion, the poet Tadeusz Różewicz comes to Witkacy's aid in "The Story of Old Women" (trans. Joanna Trzeciak): "Because (...) old women / are like an ovum / a mystery devoid of mystery / a sphere that rolls in".

Let's also consider the abbreviation up in the top right-hand corner. It was the artist's wont. "T.B." stands for a more pronounced portrait: more emphasis on character, yet without any trace of caricature. Above that, Witkacy added "C" for C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OH, or ethyl alcohol, under the influence of which the artist was painting. He could have followed a different path. Many of Witkacy's portraits of women are emblazoned with "T.A.", the byword for his relatively more streamlined, slick, and mainstream painting. "Suitable more to female rather than to male faces", as he explained. Yet this isn't so. Here, the anger on the demonic woman's face is far from smooth and superficial.

Let me then repeat once again: one single frame of female anger does suffice!





Wittkam

T. B + O

1922

## *Portrait of Nena Stachurska*

STANISŁAW IGNACY WITKIEWICZ – WITKACY • 1929, ZAKOPANE, POLAND •  
TATRA MUSEUM IN ZAKOPANE

Psychoanalysis will lead us back to childhood. Here, you can see a child's anger. A portrait of a sulky girl. I must admit I prefer this to *Portrait of a Woman*. I identify with its exhibition of anger. In my childhood, as a girl, I would be told off for sulking ("sulky" was a favourite word of adults). I repeatedly heard the common Polish saying: "Anger mars beauty". In consequence, I stopped getting angry and started to smile: "You are always so radiant, madam". When did that happen? And why? Perhaps, like many of us raised in the patriarchy, what I most fear is female anger? This exhibition is an opportunity to raise such questions and not to walk abruptly away.

"What does 'T.E.' stand for in this portrait?", I hear somebody ask. It's for "any given psychological interpretation, based on this firm's intuition". The portraitist-psychologist notices a state that's exhausting over the long haul. But the girl is not tired enough to feel feelings. And the "p.p.c." noticeable next to the artist's signature stands for "almost after dark" (Polish: *prawie po ciemku*). Dusk falls. The girl hits a pose. Striking an attitude while striking a pose.

At this point, I want to draw your attention to similarities between these two portraits. One eyebrow like Malý Pyšný štít, a mountain in the Slovakian High Tatras; the other also raised, if less so, like Giewont, the massif in the Polish Tatras. Eyes wide open, tense, fixed, staring ahead. Cheeks and chin overflow with toxic air. Lips pursed. And the corporeality all the same: piercing, with an inkling of the unconscious.

And one more thing: examining the portrait, as with the previous one, I feel that along with anger it holds allure. Could anything be more dangerous than temptation simultaneous with a tantrum?

Female anger was wed to hysteria. Movement, gestures, facial expressions, poses of a hysteric – everything the male gaze will try and subdue, and which is nothing short of idiom. A proto-language. Through her body swollen with anger, a hysteric transmits what defies verbalisation. Here's the first stage of feminism. But this painting is no self-portrait, nor is it a story about the anger of a woman (or a girl). It's the man, the creator, who outlines hysteria, his-story, his history, his history of male fear.

Dear daughter, show the gentleman the middle finger of your anger.



WITKAMP T. E. P.P.C.

1929 IV NIT 1/2" 2 L 60x

## *Mercy!*

POLA DWURNIK • 2012 • MOCAK – MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

Behold a collective self-portrait of female anger. Anger under the pretext of other emotions and facial expressions, anger concealed in a plurality of faces. Mass hysteria expressed by one individual. The artist paints herself, her own self, her anger. At last! Beyond the grasp of the ubiquitous male gaze. Asked about her work, Dwurnik responded: “Empathy instead of mercy. I ridicule pleading for mercy in my self-portrait”. The artist’s multiplied self-portrait doesn’t ask us for sympathy, it demands of us a commonality of feeling.

A closer look at these faces triggers reminiscences of the recent Women’s Strike in Poland. Dwurnik’s portrait is also a protest against censure – against censoring anger. Alive and creative. See for yourselves how wisely and beautifully these women are throwing a hissy fit. Taking it to the streets, they intend to reclaim their hysteria and their voice. Pola Dwurnik takes it to the streets, divided into 24 faces like the 24 books of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey*. I admit this is my best-loved exhibit of anger from this roomful of emotions.

I miss you, my beloved anger.



A FEMME FATALE OR A STAR FOR LOOMING ON THE HORIZON? FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NENA AND WITKACY, [VISIT VIRTUAL MUSEUMS OF MAŁOPOLSKA](#)

---

## Bird-shaped Goblet

GEORG (JÖRG) RUEL • 1598–1613, NUREMBERG, GERMANY • DISTRICT MUSEUM IN TARNÓW, POLAND

This is no mistake. This exhibit simply had to be displayed in the room of anger. The anger of a swan. I need it to discuss universal emotionality. Please bear with me a while and allow me a slightly longer explanation. Basic emotions are also recognised beyond the human species. Their expression is similar in anthropoids, but it gets somewhat blurred when it comes to our distant cousins, other mammals, not to mention birds. A swan's anger would thus be difficult to identify as an instance of universal emotions. But it's not so. We can see an enraged animal, after all.

At this stage, I'll take the liberty of recalling one of the most beautiful medical titles, "Hysteria in a Cat and a Canary Bird" (1898), an article by Henryk Higier discussing hysteriasis (Polish: maciennictwo) in domestic animals. Back then, the cat and the canary were the pets of choice on Polish lands. As research literature of the day tells us, they were afflicted by uterine ailments, as were their mistresses. It goes without saying that I can distinguish between a swan and a canary. My intention is just to highlight the fact that emotions of varying degrees are experienced by animals other than humans.

What about accusations of anthropomorphism? I'm aware that not everyone shares my viewpoint and takes note of the swan's anger. I skip to one side and offer the following: while bad anthropomorphism serves people, the good doesn't only suit them. My aim is sensitising you to animal emotions. Surely this can't be a bad motivation!

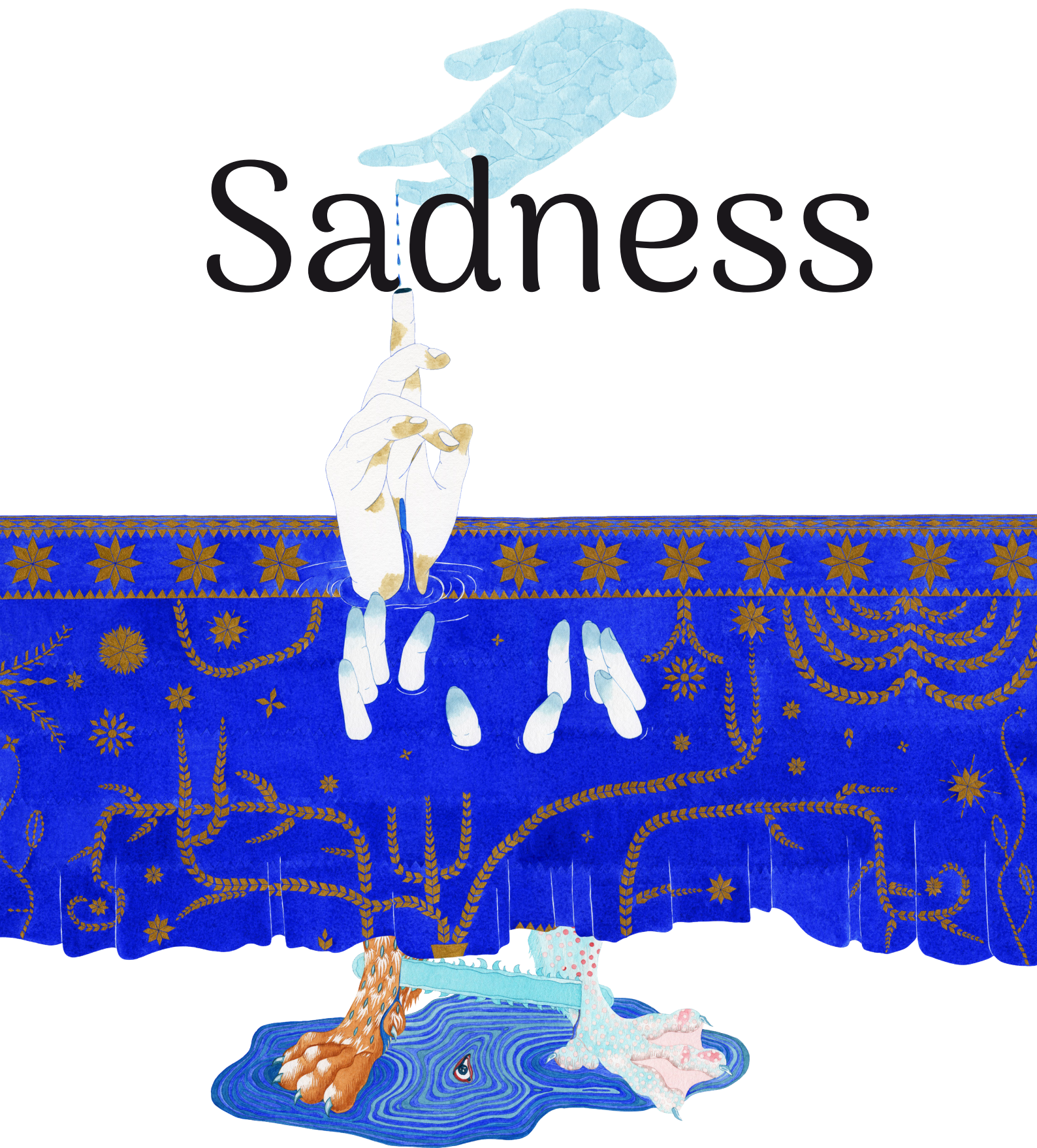
One more thing. The bird-shaped goblet.

This gargantuan, luxurious toasting chalice inspires both awe and envy. To Freud's mind, with some people only what stirs up jealousy is of any value at all. I don't think I have to convince you about the twin similarities between anger and envy. One often disguises itself as the other. Neither needs to adjust much. Let's not fool ourselves: what we consider worthless won't ever make us angry.

And now I leave you here for a sec to consider a jarring question: "So what gets you angry?"



# Sadness



---

## *Melancholy*

1775 • DISTRICT MUSEUM IN NOWY SĄCZ, POLAND

Melancholy, sister of sadness. Older, more mature, far more complicated. Melancholy is far more than a gaunt, despondent figure. It's a mood, a sensation of lesser intensity, of a less turbulent course. But a set of complex emotions, nonetheless: longing, regret, emptiness, concern for the state of the world at large, a sense of delving into reality, of vehemently protesting the real world. Dissociation from the living, apathy, and so, so much more. Melancholy has generated a cultural topos. This painting is its another manifestation. Not so obvious at first glance.

An image cut in half. On the left side, a figure, sitting in a typically melancholic fashion, head resting on his hands. Eyes lowered. The man reads, but it's a melancholy-inducing activity. Studying books of lore, especially philosophical, is a guide to undoing. A shortcut to melancholy. The melancholic depicted here resembles another famous allegorical representation of moroseness, as the melancholic state was called when this work was being created. It evokes associations with Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514), but it is also evocative of Matthias Gerung's *Melancholy in the Garden of Life* (1558). The associative 18th-century *Melancholy* is rooted in the 16th century. Along with the dog at the melancholic's feet, with an equally despondent, grim look on its muzzle. But perhaps it's mere sorrowfulness, without an iota of despair? Just some subtle sadness-inducing contemplation?

Except for its right side, the painting's melancholic mood would not have been possible. Or would not have been as poignant, at least. Red drapes separate the melancholic from the outside world. This detachment from the landscape with a pond, hills, and houses, amplifies the sense of sadness. An introspective sadness turning its gaze on itself, on reading and reflection, but doing so against the world, going against the grain. But it might have been different: the master sitting on a chair, his head facing the world, his back turned on the bookshelves; the dog, a non-human melancholic, could wallow in water, or roll about on the grass. A sombre mood is set in motion by the very opportunity to look, experience, to deeply sense one's existence. But perhaps it was never so. After all, a chair overlooking water is strewn with clothes in disarray. Someone must have taken them off, exiting the world of small joys, re-entering their own sensitivity.

Melancholy isn't all doom and gloom; it can bring delight. In the end, a question remains: how to feel feelings? Which kind? Do you like your own melancholy?





.....  
IS THE DOG IN "MELANCHOLY" A SYMBOL OF FIDELITY OR RECOVERY? FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
[VISIT VIRTUAL MUSEUMS OF MAŁOPOLSKA](#)

## *Pensive Christ*

LEON KUDŁA • 1957, ŚWIERŻE GÓRNE • ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

And where have I led you? To one of those trite figurines adorning rural shrines. I could easily have selected some other exhibit of ennobling melancholy. But hang on, just a second! This very Polish roadside cookie-cutter “angel of melancholy” speaks volumes of our domestic sadness. Sorrow (Pol. *frasunek*) is a local phenomenon. The term is Polish, though it derives from the German verb *fressen*, “to gnaw” (as both “bite” and “cause distress”); “sorrow” in English is related to the German noun *Sorge*. Unlike the Germans, Poles went ballistic with it. Now the language boasts the entire morphological gamut: along with *frasunek* (noun), there’s also *frasować* (verb), *frasobliwy* and *frasowny* (adjectives), meaning sorrowful, worried, in pain. Being sorrowful is being consumed with bottomless sadness: deep, earthly, rooted in reflecting on the human condition. The figure of the Pensive Christ (*Chrystus frasobliwy*), racked with sorrow and depicted in a traditional, meditative pose, his head resting on his hand, is the ultimate symbol of melancholy. An ideal of worry. Our Polish, Christian equivalent of Rodin’s *The Thinker*.

Obviously, the uniqueness of the French original is nowhere to be seen. The collection of the Pensive Christ Museum in Jeżowe (Subcarpathian Voivodeship, Poland) contains over 600 such effigies. Sculpting roadside figures of Christ is still going strong. Sorrow remains a living subject to this day, a theme folk art constantly represents. Look no further: the digital collection of Virtual Museums of Małopolska showcases three Pensive Christs, each from a different geographical location: Gorlice, Borowa, and Nowy Targ.

Take a closer look at them and let it be a cautionary visual tale.



---

## *Son and His Killed Mother*

ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI • 1949 • NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

This is my favourite portrait of sadness. My all-time favourite painter, my all-time favourite colour. I fear writing about this son, sadness, despair, and grief. But you've surely read something on the subject? Something about Wróblewski? With this in mind, I'll leave this exhibit of suffering without any classical ekphrasis. Instead, I'll offer a few excerpts from my book *Queenless*, which enables access to a sisterly exhibit of grief: to the image of myself-the-daughter and my late mother:

*When your mother dies, it feels like evisceration – like chest trauma – performed by bare hands, and yet it feels much worse.*

*In my childhood I obsessed with my mother's death – I feared it would catch me off guard. I was so afraid. When I finally stopped thinking about it, she died.*

*When I was small, and whenever my mother cried, I would tell her: "Please don't cry or else I'll cry too." And we sobbed together. When I turned thirty-one, I would tell her: "Please don't die or else I'll die too". We all know what came next.*

*She was the source of my greatest joy, much as now she is the source of my greatest despair.*

*Nothing in the world is more atrocious than when a human dies and leaves a fellow human behind. When an animal leaves a fellow animal behind.*



## *Dragon Fighting against Panther, Jagiellonian tapestry*

CIRCA 1555, BRUSSELS • WAWEL ROYAL CASTLE – NATIONAL ART COLLECTION,  
KRAKÓW, POLAND

Moving to our animal-like state – when we suffer like animals, when we howl like animals, I'd like to remind us of non-human emotions, of emotions beyond the human species. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton wrote about human sadness. In contrast, bestiaries, those treatises on various kinds of animals, include one anonymous physiologist writing about “the physiology of sadness”. Such sadness is experienced by animals that, as in Jorge Luis Borges' *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* (a Chinese encyclopaedia he invents in one essay), can be classified as: (a) belonging to the emperor; (b) embalmed; (c) domesticated / trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fictional ones, etc. Real and imaginary animals are the core protagonists of the tapestry it presents. Closest to us are two animal antagonists, the dragon and the panther. They don't seem satisfied with their preordained symbolic significance: the dragon-Satan is grappling with the panther-Christ. A mythical creature versus a physical animal. But it isn't their suffering that attracts our attention. What dares disturb us, oozing sadness in the background? What's come to a halt in the upper left corner? Yes, right there. The sadness of the panther.

That physiologist tells us the panther's breath is sweet, and that it'll be the undoing of the dragon and its stinking maw. Sadness can also be sweet-scented and it is then called melancholy. But this rule doesn't apply to animals. Sweet sadness is none other than what the melancholy Polish Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki wrote about: “For there are two kinds of melancholy: one originated in strength, and the other in weakness. The former is a pair of wings for those who aspire, the latter a millstone around the neck of someone who's drowning”. As right as the bard may have been with his typology, he was wrong when it comes to species at large. Along with people there are other animals, whose feelings we rarely consider.

Before we leave the room of sadness, let's cast our gaze at the panther once more.





Joy





---

## *Bacchante*

TEODOR RYGIER • 1887 • NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

Casual joys of a woman, not obliged to force a smile. Bacchantes are known for their unbridled sexuality. This one, sculpted from heavy bronze, has only draped her hips in loose fabric, casually again. And then she raised both arms. A goblet in her right hand, a sprig of grapevine in the left. Lightly. Things now will lighten up; we'll share some of her joy. Her face, her radiant eyes, breasts, and hands. Relaxed, wild, sensual.

Still, doesn't joy seem the least casual of emotions? Truth be told, we crave it, we desire feeling more of it, more often and stronger. But one can't feel any joy that way. Obligatory enjoyment negates joy instantly. And internal imperatives – Be active! Smile! Use, experience, enjoy! – pilfer all the joy and disrupt any sense of bliss. Yes, joy comes casually, just as the bacchante casually unlocked the door to the Museum of Glee.



---

## *Ko-omote* Mask of the *Nō* Theatre

SŌEI ŌGURA • 2ND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY • MANGGHA MUSEUM OF JAPANESE ART AND TECHNOLOGY, KRAKÓW, POLAND

What a joy! At last, you can all feel like you're at the fair. Even the longed-for smile gets a full-on display! Evolutionary studies teach us that a smile with teeth bared is a warning – by showing teeth we threaten whoever looks at us. By baring our teeth, we reveal our fear. Did any of you feel a rush of fear? Well, those teeth are coal-black and creepy.

This wood mask is meant to evoke winter wonderlands. The joy of fresh snow. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera wrote about “the realm of kitsch, [where] the dictatorship of the heart reigns supreme” (trans. M. H. Heim). And about two tears of sentimentality “flow[ing] in quick succession”. The first triggered by a pastoral image: children cavort on a lawn or – as evoked by the mask – young girls play in snow. The second – “[the] tear that makes kitsch kitsch” – touches us in unison with fellow humans: “How nice to be moved, with all humankind!” But this exhibit of joy is something else. Joy isn't always a byword for kitsch.

One more thing: a *ko-omote* is a mask of a teenage girl. To be precise, it is expected to emphasise the innocence of a fifteen-, sixteen-year-old gal. Perhaps only young girls feel such joy and express it so? Mind you, neither the bacchante nor a *ko-omote* has come of age yet. As if joy was forever linked to adolescence. Or perhaps less joy than its mask?



---

*Untitled [They realized that their capacity...]*

MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM • 2011 • MOCAK – MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART  
IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

*They realized that their capacity for not feeling lonely carried a very real price, which was the threat of feeling nothing at all* – so reads the caption beneath this painting of four young men. Forest, perhaps summertime, they are together, and are perhaps also zonked together. You clearly notice how blissful their eyes and bodies are. But as that wording warns us, the price for not feeling lonely at last is desensitisation: feeling nothing at all. Sometimes joy is confused with feeling nothing negative, with holding back anger, sadness, fear, or disgust. In the psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński's practice, he often quoted one Kraków-based patient: "I feel miserable because I've lost my sadness". Joy had been his cherished goal, but it all turned sour.

The painting depicts another studied multi-figure scene created by the mysterious pair known as Muntean/Rosenblum. Like their previous pieces, this work is based on a compilation of photos found in lifestyle magazines. In glossy journals where the only emotion on models' faces is vacuous glee. But it can be so multi-layered: untamed, light-hearted, casual, intense. It shouldn't ever be tantamount to inaccessible emotions. Yet, such can also be the case. Joy is suspicious – yearned for, but easily associated with artificiality. Commercialised, commodifying everything, unable to sell anything. Liked, or rather liked and hearted on socials, but constantly being devalued. But I reckon this peculiar exhibit isn't some killjoy, right? Or am I perhaps mistaken? We need a show of hands here: if you've felt any joy, please give the thumbs up!



*THEY REALIZED THAT THEIR CAPACITY FOR NOT FEELING LONELY CARRIED A VERY REAL PRICE, WHICH WAS THE THREAT OF FEELING NOTHING AT ALL.*

.....  
IS THERE ROOM FOR SPIRITUALITY IN THE MODERN WORLD? FOR MORE INFORMATION, [VISIT VIRTUAL MUSEUMS OF MALOPOLSKA](#)

---

## Plaster Cast of an Ancient Sculpture – Wild Boar

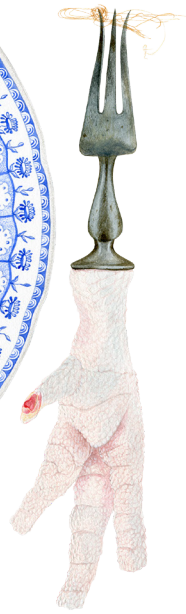
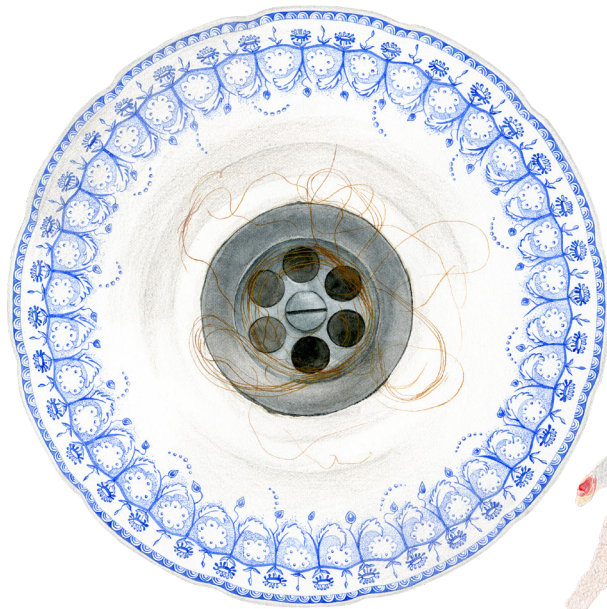
EARLY 19TH CENTURY, BERLIN • ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW,  
POLAND

Let's move on to non-human animals. Here we see a grinning wild boar. Or perhaps the grin escapes some. After all, this statue is often called a "dying boar". An expiring animal doesn't evoke such emotions. But joy never ends. Intoxicated by the wild boar's wild bliss, I respond with a grimace of a smile. Mirror neurons prompt joy, but the narrative behind this plaster cast points to sorrow and horror. For a moment, let's trust our eyes and emotional states, shall we? Anyone else see a young boar eager to frolic? Somewhat like a puppy, but no piglet any longer.

Joy is just like that: unintentional, indecent, inadequate. Everything about this statue pleases me. From the boar's pert bristles to the parted snout. For that reason, I've curated this exhibit of emotions in the room of joy. To suffuse us all with positive feelings. That's their purpose, after all. Simple as that.







# Disgust/ Revulsion



---

## Fortune-telling Bone

ANNA KAMIŃSKA – MAMCIA • 1979, TARNÓW • DISTRICT MUSEUM IN TARNÓW, POLAND

For many, a hair clump triggers disgust. Not to mention hair twisted around a chicken bone. This prop of revulsion was intended to evoke other emotions. Fear, primarily. Before we step into the house of horror, let disgust curdle our blood.

We need to be repulsed only to be attracted by something else. One doesn't exist without the other. But revulsion and fascination may go hand in hand. Instantly, simultaneously, in a parallel fashion. Hair set in an unnatural context often linked those two frameworks. Hairballs found in animal stomachs were considered talismans. They were fetishes possessing magic powers. Beyond causing nausea.

Circumstances of our revulsion also play a relevant role here. In Romani culture, such bundles of hair and bone, allegedly found in homes some Roma women visited, were believed to be objects planted to bring disaster to the residents. To stave off bad fortune, there was only one remedy: the blasted abomination you're now looking at had to be removed. Like there was but a single worry, contrary to Leo Tolstoy's famous opening passage in *Anna Karenina*: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky).

This time around I wasn't supposed to talk about unhappy families, so let's get a move on. Follow me through the slippery corridors of the room of disgust.



## *Envy (Invidia)*

JOSSE DE CORTE • CIRCA 1670, VENICE, ITALY • NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

I intended to showcase “old women”. My obsession, I admit. I’m an obsessive writer of ekphrases. I’m given to analysing artworks depicting mature women, works created by women, I like old women, evoking Tadeusz Różewicz’s play *The Old Woman Broods* (trans. Adam Czerniawski). I like how tough and hardened they are, which is what my favourite author discusses in “The Story of Old Women”: “Old women / are indestructible / they smile knowingly” (trans. Joanna Trzeciak). But here the woman on display is bereft of any positive facial expression, not even the trace of a smile is visible. She is the embodiment of what old women have become in public consciousness. Behold, the personification of envy. A feeling stronger and far more destructive than mere jealousy. A sentiment of aversion and hostility to those we are covetous of. One of the seven deadly sins. The title of the work by Josse de Corte refers to a novel lexicon, to an untapped vocabulary, at least so far. This isn’t an idiom of elementary emotions any longer, but of the complex. And a language of theology.

But no emotion is a sin. My aim is to disengage what we feel from any value judgement. Yes, jealousy and envy can be cataclysmic. Self-destructive and detrimental to others. But they exist, nonetheless. And won’t cease to be when we turn our backs. So don’t avert your eyes and keep looking at the sculpted woman. And do pay attention to what’s most off-putting on display. Her head, shoulders, one side of her neck – all are rife with snakes. Muscles bulge within her neck. Veins and wrinkled folds protrude on her forehead. This may cause disgust. But that’s not the only response on hand.



---

## *The Seville Series* *No. 16*

DANIEL SPOERRI • 1991 • MOCAK – MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN  
KRAKÓW, POLAND

Evolutionary psychology tells us that each distinct emotion has a purpose. For instance, disgust was originally to shield against consuming rotten meat. Its smell was repulsive. Thanks to this, our distant relatives avoided food poisoning and even worse afflictions.

The assemblage you are now looking at may provoke atavistic antipathy to mouldy food. It takes no imaginative leap to understand how heat affects clammy dirty plates smeared with leftovers. You can't unsee it or erase it from the shared mundane experience. That said, one can always wash up beforehand. Before things ferment and decompose, before rancidity sets in. Even so, the leftovers have to be dealt with.

Obviously, this supper-themed bricolage also brims with other allusions. It doesn't boil down to the narrow notion of an exhibit of disgust. To me, this is first and foremost a physical reminder of the impossibility of evading uncomfortable emotions. Our daily life is replete with emotional triggers, such as *The Seville Series No. 16*. Along with gravitational unease, it sets the sense on edge. It abruptly kick-starts imagination. Eventually, a scorching, stuffy evening turns leftovers into a foetid soup. The smell is ubiquitous. So is our disgust.



.....  
"THE ART OF EATING", "PICTURE-TRAPS", AND GRAVITATIONAL DISTURBANCE. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON DANIEL SPOERRI, [VISIT VIRTUAL MUSEUMS OF MALOPOLSKA](#)

## Under-window Tapestry With Monkeys

ARTIST ASSOCIATED WITH CORNELIS FLORIS AND CORNELIS BOS • CIRCA 1555,  
BRUSSELS • WAWEL ROYAL CASTLE – NATIONAL ART COLLECTION, KRAKÓW,  
POLAND

No more abominations. Some animal issues, for a change. It's not just that the dynamic of introducing human-like emotions into the realm of non-human animals lets us abandon anthropocentrism. It also makes a natural memento of the neurobiological evolutionary trajectory. Emotions are governed by the most "animalist" component in our nervous systems: the rhinencephalon (smell-brain), the paleocortex. And disgust seems the most animalist of all, elementary and fundamental to survival emotions. But while we're likely to have seen expressions of universal emotions among other mammals, revulsion is less common.

With three dogs in my family home, not once did I say: "My dog is disgusted with something". Any expression of disgust was absent from the muzzle of either Sara, Ansu, or Agata. Yet I often saw our pooches walk away from a bowlful of food they found detestable. I saw, but what did I really see? I can't recall.

I admit: the artwork you're looking at right now is an uncanny exhibit of abomination. There's no expression of disgust in sight. Instead, on the left, the artist positioned two monkeys re-enacting a scene from the Book of Genesis. Monkey Eve tempts monkey Adam with an apple. Adam bares his teeth – out of glee, out of fear, out of anger, we aren't privy to that. However, undeniably, there's no grimace of disgust. There is a fruit. There is reluctance. Literalism is missing. It's thus because disgust encompasses a range of situations when – not just literally, but also metaphorically – we refuse to eat something, to munch, to lick, to savour it. The still-untouched forbidden fruit may trigger such emotions. But there's no obligation. Just as it's not obligatory to decode the tapestry as a blatant allusion to the biblical motif of original sin. But such an option remains. And, well, though it's no news to us, let's repeat over and over again: Disgust is no sin!





.....  
ROOSTER AS ALERTNESS AND HERON AS PATIENCE. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON TAPESTRY BIRDS, [VISIT VIRTUAL MUSEUMS OF MALOPOLSKA](#)

# Fear



---

## *Défilé #6*

AES+F GROUP • 2000–2007 • MOCAK – MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

To many, death is the most frightening thing about the house of horror. Here what we have is the well-dressed, dead body of an old man. *The American way of dying*. Perhaps it's not the height of funeral fashion, but there's certainly sartorial grandeur. And this piece of art fascinates like no other. It evokes a US-style aestheticization of death, where a yellowish cadaver is kept under wraps beneath a veneer of beautification procedures – thanatopraxis (embalming), maybe? – and all we see is a man in his Sunday best.

This immediately made me think of “the pornography of death”, as understood by Geoffrey Gorer, who originated the term. Death suppressed, death as a taboo – as with sexual intercourse in Victorian times – stimulates pornographic imagination. To put it simply: death today is what sex was in the 19th century. This doesn't mean we fear less, however – on the contrary, we're more prone to fright than ever.

We spy on death in its weird, warped, larger-than-life form. We are voyeurs of death from home. Witnessed on-screen in a crime film, a horror flick, even in a romcom, it turns into entertainment. It produces a cultural phantasm about dying. Removed from reality. In a home we share together, our nearest and dearest may be drawing their last breath, while we, glued to pop-cultural representations of death, forget how vastly those differ from a real-life death just across the hall. Just as pornography isn't like real sex. Death is no fiction.

Please also notice that the man in the photo only seems a streamlined, high-end version of a cadaver. This is a frightening, contrastive revision of memento mori. If, as Gorer suggests, death is like sex, then *Défilé #6* is an orgasm. A paroxysm reminding us of dying. Or, put simply, a little death.

But there's something else. Fear, immortalised on a dead face. Or maybe a mere projection of what we see ourselves, while looking at deathly facial expressions: lips parted, chin withdrawn, eyelids sunken, caved-in cheeks. Eyes remain open, but something's missing here: eyebrows fail to shift, eyeballs that don't bulge. Corpse no. six, part of *Défilé* by AES+F, doesn't feel any fear. It's us who are filled with dread.



---

## *Surprised*

JEAN-ANTOINE HOUDON • LATE 18TH CENTURY / EARLY 19TH CENTURY, FRANCE  
• JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM, COLLEGIUM MAIUS, KRAKÓW, POLAND

A young, sculpted woman. But a far cry from that other statuesque beauty, the bacchante. Surprised. Just so. In many cultures expressions of fear and surprise were often confused. This is not such a case, though. Jean-Antoine Houdon created a piece of art about astonishment, shame, and studied innocence. A woman desired and desirable. She did not expect the male gaze. She is sculpted from that male gaze.

Except that the cult of conventional femininity has internalised apprehensiveness. A subtly neurotic attitude chimes in with the ideal of a fearful, subdued woman. Even the figure of the tease, that male phantasm of disastrous femininity, a misogynistic notion of a femme fatale, is founded on a timid, soft-hearted element, which then wins over the man only to exploit and abandon him afterwards.

The surprised woman clumsily covers her breasts, coquettishly tilts her head, resting her cheek on her shoulder. With eyes wide open, she looks sideways: amazed, taken aback, perfectly petrified. Her pose is removed from overt emotionality. And yet I sense dread, looking at this template of female beauty. It exists, neither real nor necessary to endure fright. Instead, it exists as the illusion that only by artificially engendering helplessness among us as women, by proliferating relentless surprise and fearfulness, can we be attractive. This is something I can't abide.

Dear daughter, please show the artist your finger of fear. Yes, that one. Yes, precisely.



---

## *Team of Four*

JÓZEF CHEŁMOŃSKI • 1881 • NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

A monster of a painting. Its gargantuan size will likely spur chills. Especially when the artist painted life-size figures of beasts that outmatch humans. Especially as they rush headlong towards us, the spectators. Driven by a Ukrainian peasant, a team of four gallops straight at the viewers. We feel the horses' panting and huffing on our own cheeks. But the peasants aboard the wagon don't share our sensation – they seem intoxicated and enraptured. They rush headlong, performing a death-defying stunt, undertaking a life-changing experience. Sociological research says men are most afraid of death and women fear life most. Such are their responses, at least. And yes, the men Chełmoński painted aren't scared of life. Even if they are fearful, they've headed straight at what they're scared stiff of.

A psychoanalyst could interpret such breakneck speed and this haste to embrace one's biggest fear as possible recovery or could suspect something counterphobic. A peak symptom of hysteria. Absolutely no thought given to paralysing fear. The people in the painting seem desensitised to fear, yet the horses are frightened to death.

Exceptionally telling is the painting's left side, where the artist depicted a terror-stricken animal. So much more is visible there. White eye orbs, white teeth, white fear. Pale with fear.



.....  
CAN YOU HEAR THE SOUND OF BRASS WHEELS, THE SQUELCH OF MUD, AND THE SWISH OF THE WHIP? FOR  
MORE INFORMATION, [VISIT VIRTUAL MUSEUMS OF MAŁOPOLSKA](#)



---

## *Fight Between a Rooster and a Cat*

JACOB VICTORS • 1674, AMSTERDAM • NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW,  
POLAND

Let's stop by my all-time favourite animalist exhibit. Dears, take a closer look at these undeniably upfront emotions. No need to anthropomorphise anything. Even if occasionally it's possible to do that well, here it's not necessary, because the animals' visible emotional states will trigger our mirror neurons.

The fear both the cat and the rooster are experiencing might rightly become the subject of a psychological description as with the hysteria of the cat and the canary mentioned above. Indispensable fear, requisite for survival, a prerequisite for avoiding life-threatening conditions. On second thought, though, who poses any real threat here? And who is really threatened? The answer hinges on our own personal formula. It all depends on whether we fear sharp objects more, such as claws and talons, or hard ones, like that beak? But this again is about us. And it was meant to be about others.

The Cannon-Bard theory of emotion is a psychological staple. According to it, we animals react to fear by the general discharge of the sympathetic nervous system, thereby preparing for either fight or flight. Jacob Victors accurately illustrated this enigmatic fight-or-flight response here. But the animals' follow-up behaviour captured in this freeze-frame remains a mystery. Still, plenty is revealed in their gazes. To this end, just as our guided tour wraps up, let's once again look at animal eyes. Let's look a horse in the eye. Let's look a cat in the eye. Let's look a rooster in the eye. Each animal looks back and looks on.

And each feels. And feels. And feels.





Conclusion

Each person ends their exhibition tour in a different place. Personally, I leave the house of horror as if it were an old folks' home. After all, with each year aren't we becoming more and more scared? The very opposite of what we tell our children: *Don't fear, my daughter. Don't fret, my son. When you grow up like your mother, you'll fear nothing.* But we still fear. Perhaps only sometimes, like just a moment ago during our tour, we fear feeling less. To simply feel. My aim has been to curate and sequence these exhibits to have you experience universal emotions. Even when we fail to explain what fundamental feelings are all about, we can still experience them. It's not just old women, to paraphrase Trzeciak's translation of Różewicz's "The Story of Old Women", but also emotions "are like an ovum / a mystery devoid of mystery / a sphere that rolls in".

Obviously, each feeling earns its separate exhibition. Each could have its own brick-and-mortar museum. I can already see passels of melancholics slipping into reverie, sipping red wine at an exhibition opening held by the Museum of Sadness. Or protesting as part of the women's rights movement, and then dashing from the demonstration to the Museum of Anger. Here, online, all feelings are fused, fumbled, as they are in their natural state – in a clenched fist.

But even that's an exhibition.

Joy, anger, fear, sadness, revulsion. This is an uncomfortable and disturbing gallery. A register of fundamental feelings. A record of elemental emotions. A museum of facial expressions. So be it. Let it upset. And perhaps with time it'll soothe someone, bring relief as with a clench that is eventually relaxed. For just as you can name every finger, you can also feel everything.



INSTYTUCJA KULTURY  
WOJEWÓDZTWA  
MAŁOPOLSKIEGO



**Małopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow**

30-233 Kraów

ul. 28 Lipca 1943 17C

tel. 12 422 18 84

[www.mik.krakow.pl](http://www.mik.krakow.pl)

Director: **Joanna Orlik**

Text: **Mira Marcinów**, CC-BY 4.0 PL

Idea: **Kinga Kołodziejska** (VMM)

Editorial assistance: **Kinga Kołodziejska, Marta Dvořák** (VMM)

Graphic design, illustrations: **Kira Pietrek**, CC-BY 4.0 PL

Translation: **Bartosz Wójcik** (VMM)

Photographs of exhibits from the collection of **Virtual Museums of Małopolska**



Exhibition was implemented under the Virtual Małopolska project, co-financed by the 2014–2020 Regional Operational Programme for the Małopolska Region and by the Małopolska Voivodeship.