

THE WORLD AS A HERBARIUM

Nature in Art from the 17th to the 21st Century

September 5th – December 6th, 2026

ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań

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We are both witnesses and perpetrators of irreversible changes in nature. The four seasons are disappearing, plant life is undergoing a radical transformation, flowers bloom at different times, and the bird nesting seasons have shifted; the non-human beings that make us up are going extinct. The climate crisis not only destroys and alters our ecosystems—indeed, the entire planet—but also irrevocably deconstructs our culture, art, traditions, and heritage, our very identity. Verging on cliché, this observation does not necessarily help one appreciate the magnitude of the issue. The images and videos flooding the internet fail as well: storms, hurricanes, tsunamis, torrential downpours, and floods have become dangerously commonplace. The wars waged in various parts of the world are equally tragic in their impact on the natural world.

This exhibition presents works of artists from various periods (17th – 21st century), which span a range of media, including paintings, prints, pastels, sculptures, collages, and installations. Many of these works were created specifically for this exhibition. The pieces by contemporary artists correspond with those created by old masters, while the art of the Western world meets Japanese art, which brought forth its own nature-focused genre: the *kachō-ga* (paintings of flowers and birds), colour woodcuts, silk paintings, and illustrated volumes (herbaria).

In four interiors of the Castle, we are going to explore four phenomena in art from the 17th to the 21st century where nature remains the core theme:

- **botanical and entomological illustrations and herbaria:** this section is dedicated to one of the most extraordinary figures in science and art, Maria Sibylla Merian, who so deeply inspires contemporary artists and the botanical art of the 21st century; Merian's oeuvre is accompanied by the works of the now forgotten Elizabeth Blackwell and 17th-century floral compositions;
- **nature interpretations in the art of Young Poland:** insights into a unique approach to landscape, as seen in the works of Stanisławski and Ruszczyc, among others.
- **depictions of nature in Japanese art:** exemplified by the work of Watanabe Seitei, whose artistic world is second to none.
- **visual oeuvre of contemporary bio-artists and artists:** the artists highlight the objectification of non-human beings and various ways in which they are manipulated. Their work uses eloquent visual symbols to convey what is barely sensed and has not yet been articulated, but already manifests in an artistic form.

The world is like a herbarium in which visual signs of nature are/will be preserved. Art has always possessed the capacity to reveal and to transform. And although at first glance its agency may appear limited, it is precisely today that its power is at work.