

Galleri Riis

Marte Johnslie

Fotofobia

Featuring a collaborative work with Julia K. Persson

April 16 - May 23, 2026

Photophobia is the medical term for extreme sensitivity to light. The condition is associated with visual disturbances, migraines and a longing for darkness. The exhibition *Fotofobia* explores the white pigment titanium dioxide as a catalyst for the penetrating light that the white surfaces of modernity reflect.

Johnslie highlights material transformations based on Norwegian minerals and makes visible the alchemical principle that all substances contain a seed of their opposite. In the white surfaces there are traces of a dark, material origin. A wave consisting of 800 small porcelain combustion boats, filled with an equal number of variations of titanium dioxide glaze, meander through several of the gallery's rooms, and the phases of the moon rise above the gallery's longest wall. In spiral-shaped ceramic towers, glaze flows in delicate bands from its origin in the ilmenite stone. A photographic print from glass negatives of microscope photos found in Titania's old laboratory transports us from the mine in Sokndal to the cosmos.

When titanium dioxide is used in ceramic glaze, the chemical composition of the pigment changes, and it loses its shimmering whiteness, and sometimes its opacity. The wall installation with 133 ceramic shingles, developed and executed in collaboration with research assistant and artist Julia K. Persson, shows titanium dioxide's diverse potential.

Also on view will be the series *Descend and Dwell* from 2023-26, which comprise tablets with motifs inspired by alchemical laboratory work and reproductions of Kronos Titan's advertisements and visual identity from 1918 to the late 1950s.

Titanium dioxide has traveled invisibly in the modern world in the form of paint, varnish and dye in architecture, packaging, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics – in short, in all white or bright objects we surround ourselves with. The pigment's origins can be found in the Norwegian chemical industry, Titania and Titan Co (later Kronos Titan), which was the first in the world to patent the industrial production method for titanium dioxide in 1909, and still is in operation as Norway's largest mining industry.

For the past three years, the white pigment and the mining industry's environmental impact on nature have been the subject of Johnslie's research through fieldwork, archival research and experiments in ceramic processes. The work has led her into a matter and history that extends far beyond what she believes to be the Norwegian self-conception. Surprising relationships between color, earth and cosmos have formed new ethereal connections for the artist, which she explores in her work with ceramic materials.

Johnslie has also studied Kronos Titan's advertising program from 1918, with a special spotlight on the work of Atelier E-O led by Eyvin Ovrum, known as one of Norway's first advertising agencies. In the work *Descend and Dwell*, some of these advertisements and logos are reproduced on ceramic tablets. Advertising drawings are often considered to be "of their time", and have largely escaped critical examination, and Atelier E-O's advertising drawings for Titan Co circulated in the Nordic countries for 40 years, until the end of the 1950s. Johnslie's choice to reproduce the drawings in her artwork can be seen as an insistence on the artists' part years, until the end of the 1950s. Johnslie's choice to reproduce the drawings in her artwork can be seen as an insistence on the artists' part that we see this visual material as part of Norwegian industrial history.

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The exhibition *Fotofobia* marks the end of the artistic research project TiO2: The Materiality of White, 2022-26, at the Department of Arts and Crafts, Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Marte Johnslie would like to thank her collaborator and assistant Julia K. Persson, students who have participated in the MoW group, workshop master in ceramics Knut Natvik and colleagues at the Department of Arts and Crafts. She would also like to thank her collaborator Ingrid Halland in the sister project *NorWhite*, and co-researchers Tonje Haugland Sørensen and Helene Engnes Birkeli. Thanks to Maiken Stene and Hans Edward Hammonds at Velferden Sokndal scene for contemporary art for valuable collaboration. Thanks to Hege Steen Langvik and Marianne Løken at Østfoldmuseene. Thanks to Tegneseriemuseet. Thanks also to Titania and Kronos Titan for visits to the factories and for donations of materials for the project.

The project is supported by the Program for Artistic Development, the Directorate for Higher Education and Competence and the Oslo National Academy of the Arts.

For more information please visit

<https://www.tio2project.com/>

For more information about Julia K. Persson, who has collaborated with Johnslie on one of the exhibition's works, see <https://juliakpersson.se/>