

MIROSŁAW BAŁKA

BEING

Opening: October 1, 2026, 17.00 – 20.00

Exhibition period: October 2 – November 8, 2026

Opening hours: Tuesday – Friday 11.00 – 18.00, Saturday 12.00 – 16.00

Nearly thirty years since his last exhibition in Sweden, the world-renowned Polish artist Mirosław Bałka presents a new body of work at Galerie Nordenhake Stockholm. Bałka is known for a deeply elegiac, poetic, and ascetic brand of minimalism. He works with raw materials like steel, cement, ash, salt, soap, and felt to confront memory, the fragility of the human body, and the historical trauma of World War II and the Holocaust.

Language itself is often a working material for Bałka. The title, *BEING*, sets the existential tone that runs through the exhibition. The sculptures connect to various Modernist literary touchstones, and Bałka once again works with pairs and correspondence, alluding to the symmetry of the human body and the duality of the human condition.

The exhibition comprises four new sculptures and two large-scale drawings. The sculptures are made of reworked found objects from the artist's local landscape — farm machinery, a street sign pole, metal piping, train tracks — together forming a scenography for this quiet drama.

The visitor first meets a hyper-realistic portrait of black tractor harrows, handmade in steel, elevated and vertical, spikes against the wall. Hanging and spread, the black angular constructions suggest an instrument of torture, or perhaps the wings of a great moth — of darkness, drawn to light. But the harrows also suggest food production, or its absence. In these contradictions, Bałka invokes the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun — later an avid Nazi supporter — whose early writing was profoundly humanist, introducing a radical, fragmented, lyrical language that portrayed a deeply subjective self in the throes of starvation.

In the adjoining room stands a green-painted steel pole, unearthed together with its concrete base. Elevated by the artist on a steel plinth, it appears to float above the floor — the ruin of Godot's tree, uprooted and re-erected. Not artful like Giacometti's contribution to Beckett's absurdist masterpiece, yet somehow noble in its crude pathos.

Across the room, the scale shifts. Parallel train tracks bridge the planes from floor to high wall in fractured angles — a pair of rusty lightning bolts finding earth in tandem, or the broken legs of a huge steel skeleton in traction, pinned together with bolts. The tracks are both wreck and structure.

The final sculpture we meet stands alone in the chapel-like room of the gallery. As tall as Bałka himself, it is built of welded sections of pipe in various diameters. The cylinders propose volumes waiting to be filled — hollow receptacles inviting engagement from the body.

In contrast to the elemental, existential character of the sculptures, the two drawings in the exhibition evoke the ephemeral. One, titled *Heart*, depicts the negative shape of a chain twisting over the black background of an amorphous cloud in a binary dance of opposites. A Yin Yang of steel and smoke. In the other work on paper, a statue of Aphrodite is cast as a dominating silhouette. This incarnation from antiquity introduces a benevolent presence into the exhibition — love and beauty softening the hard edges of the other protagonists.

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Mirosław Bałka was born in 1958 in Warsaw and lives and works in his childhood home in Otwock, Poland, and Oliva, Spain. He has been a mainstay at the world's most definitive contemporary art platforms for over three decades.

He has participated in five editions of the Venice Biennale (1990, 1993, 2003, 2005, and 2013), representing Poland with a solo presentation in 1993. He has also shown work at Documenta IX (1992), and at the biennials of São Paulo (1998), Sydney (1992, 2006), Santa Fe (2006), and the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh (1995). He is currently participating in the 16th Manifesta Biennial, Ruhr area (June 21–October 4, 2026).

Bałka has been commissioned to create a number of significant permanent works, including his celebrated Tate Modern Turbine Hall commission, *How It Is* (2009), a monumental steel chamber that plunged visitors into total darkness. Other permanent outdoor commissions include the memorial to the victims of the Estonia Ferry disaster in Stockholm (1997), *AUSCHWITZWIELICZKA* in Cracow (2010), and *HEAL* at the University of California, San Francisco (2009).

This October, he inaugurates a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montenegro in Podgorica. This follows a trilogy of retrospective solo exhibitions presented between 2015 and 2018: *Nerve. Construction* at the Museum of Arts, Łódź (2015), *CROSSOVER/S* at Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2017), and *Die Spuren* at Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2017/18).

His works are held in major museum collections worldwide, including Tate Modern, London; MoMA, New York; SFMOMA, San Francisco; MOCA, Los Angeles; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC; The Art Institute of Chicago; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Museu Serralves, Porto; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Kiasma, Helsinki; Kröller-Müller, Otterlo; EMST National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; The National Museum of Art, Osaka; Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź; Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; and Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

Mirosław Bałka has exhibited with Galerie Nordenhake since 1990; his first solo exhibition outside of Poland.