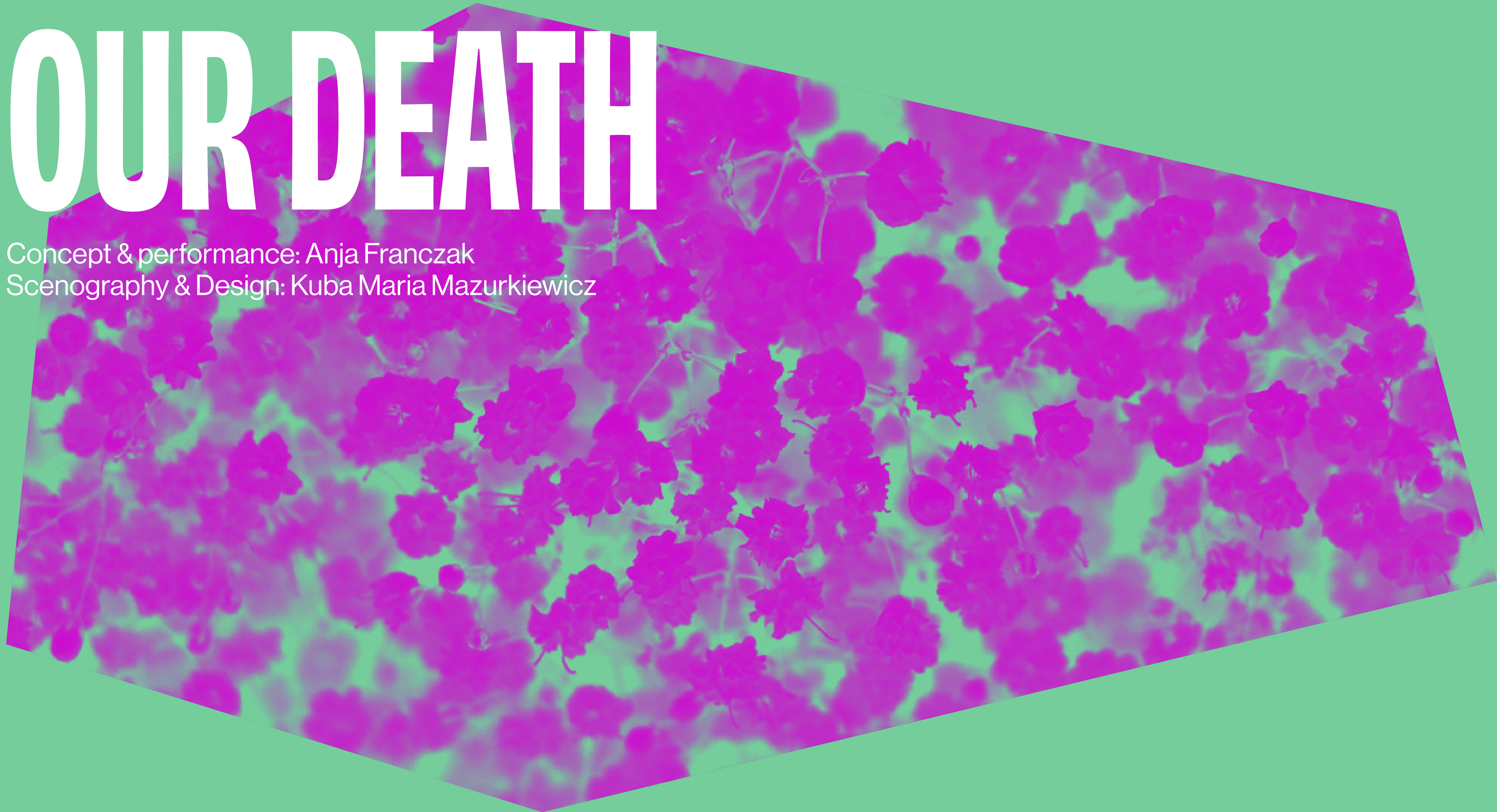


# OUR DEATH

Concept & performance: Anja Franczak

Scenography & Design: Kuba Maria Mazurkiewicz





At some point in the future, it will be the last day of your life. We don't know when and how you will die, but we are certain it will happen. Can you imagine leaving this world with a smile upon your face?

In a culture that represents death mostly in the context of tragedy, violence, and catastrophe, it is difficult to see the end of life as a peaceful event. What if we were to not only accept death's inevitability, but also embrace it as a valuable part of our lives?

Anja Franczak invites us to get in touch with Our Death. In this interactive performance, you are welcomed to step closer and say hello to your mortality in a friendly way.





## Our Death

An immersive exhibition process about mortality.

Visitors can witness the construction of a coffin and its transformation into a unique piece of art. Guided by an end-of-life doula they can experience lying in the coffin and contemplating mortality. The exhibition address the lack of supportive space in our society for the human experience of death, loss and grief.







## Our Death

11-25 June 2023 at Galeria Dizajn BWA Wrocław / Poland

The performance consists of 3 stages:

- I Creation
- II Contemplation
- III Cremation

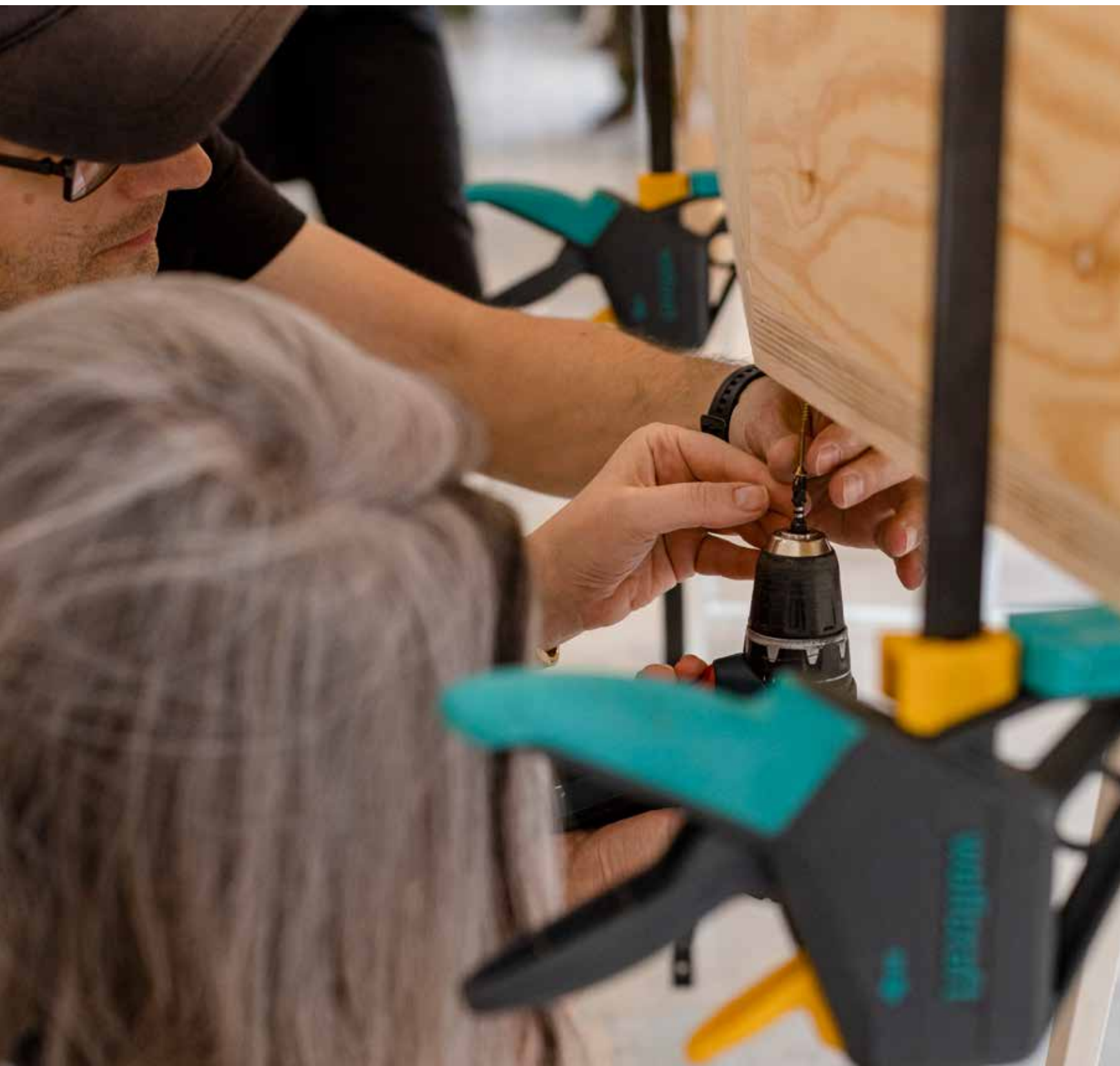


# I Creation

The performance starts in the empty gallery space.

Anja carries wood panels and tools into the exhibition space.  
With the help of staff members and visitors, she constructs a simple coffin.

The visitors and gallery team use brushes and paint to decorate the coffin.  
It transforms from a functional item into a collective piece of art.





## II Contemplation

### The Coffin

The visitors of the gallery can lay down in the coffin and experience the thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations coming up in this position.

During certain hours each day Anja, who is a trained death doula, is present to guide them through a meditation on transience. She invites them to take a look at their life from the perspective of its end.



Our

Death





*This coffin has been built and decorated with good thoughts and wishes – for you. If you want, you can lie down in it. Just take off your shoes and climb in.*

*Take your time. Observe your thoughts and feelings.*

*One day in the future, you will lie in a coffin once again. Before that happens, you still have some time. Ask yourself how you want to spend it, so you will be able to die in peace, with acceptance and maybe even with a smile upon your face.*

*What do you still have to do?  
What do you still need to learn?  
And which gifts would you still like to bring into the world?*





# The Spiral

On their own, the visitors can walk into and out of a spiral on the floor, which is created out of natural material: soil and sticks, seeds and sprouts.







*Is there something in your life that you need to change?  
Some kind of weight that you would like to let go?*

*Take a stone.  
Feel it in your palm.  
Let it represent the grief and pain you are carrying.*

*Walk the spiral and place the stone into the basket.*

*Take a ball of earth from the bowl. It contains seeds.  
Walk out of the spiral and back into your life.  
Find a good place to plant the seeds of something new.*





*If there is something you still want or need to experience in your life, please share it with us on the Wall of Wishes.*





III      Cremation

The flowers, candles and other objects used during the performance are placed into the coffin.



The coffin is taken to the crematory.



The urn with the ashes returns to the gallery.





We meet in a ritual circle to share what we have experienced and listen to the stories of others. We say goodbye to what has passed and honour what we would like to remember.

Together, we return the materials used during the exhibition back to nature:

- The seeds are buried in earth.
- The sticks are offered to fire.
- The stones are entrusted to water.





## Note from the curator

We all live as if death will never happen. This simple rule means that death as a topic rarely appears in the programs of cultural institutions. However, artists have been asking about the meaning of life and the mystery of death since prehistory. This topic is increasingly arousing interest among designers who question current funeral practices and their material culture. We have lost contact with the dead and therefore with our own mortality, replacing it with the so-called work of mourning and the cult of memory. The „Our Death” project brings the topic of death back to its proper place in public debate in a sensitive and human way.

For all of us at BWA Wrocław, working on this project has been a turning point. Anja Franczak is an artist, death midwife, founder of the Institute of Good Death, which revolutionises the topic of death in Polish public space. It proposes a performative format that has enormous social potential and has helped us build new relationships with the audience. It was also an event that helped us build ourselves again as a team.

Katarzyna Roj  
Curator of “Our Death” at Galeria BWA Dizajn in Wrocław







## Anja Franczak

Death and grief educator.  
Founder of the Institute of the Good Death.

As a death doula and grief counsellor, Anja works with people at the end of life and/or after a loss of a loved one. As a celebrant she creates and conducts personal farewell rituals and non-religious funeral ceremonies.

Trained in Heidelberg / Germany at the Institute of Clinical Spiritual Care (Institut für Klinische Seelsorgeausbildung), she is a professional grief counsellor certified by the Federal Association of Grief Counsellors in Germany (Bundesverband Trauerbegleitung e.V.). As instructor of Last Aid Courses, she shares knowledge about dying as a natural process.

[anjafranczak.com](http://anjafranczak.com)  
[instytutdobrejsmierci.pl](http://instytutdobrejsmierci.pl)



# Kuba Maria Mazurkiewicz

Designer and artist.

Creator of artistic initiatives (including Mental Structures Studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, interdisciplinary design studio Zespół Współ). Currently runs his own design studio. He is interested in everyday life, social change and the impact of infrasctructure, broadly understood, on the practice of people’s lives. He holds a PhD and teaches at the Faculty of Artistic Research and Curatorial Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

He is the author of two exhibitions on death and burial: *Funerary Imagination. In View of the Polish Burial Law 1959–2021* at Dizajn BWA Wrocław gallery (Wrocław, Poland, 11.2021–02.2022) and *Samples of Alternative Death Symbols* at Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw, Poland, 10–11.2022). Member of the Institute of the Good Death.

[mazurkiewicz.work](http://mazurkiewicz.work)





## Cultural references

“Coffin Clubs” give citizens the opportunity to literally take the subject of coffins into their own hands and create their own personalised and unique coffin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsmWV3vzni4>

Progressive funeral homes invite their clients to express their love for the deceased person by beautifully decorating their urn or coffin.

<https://www.thanatos-berlin.de/der-sarg/>

Many spiritual paths of cultures around the world emphasise the benefits of contemplating death. A contemporary example are “coffin meditation workshops” in South Korea.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2016/08/learning-life-lessons-by-faking-ones-own-funeral/493883/>





# Community involvement

The exhibition process actively engages visitors and a variety of partners, who contribute to the project.

Local partners of “Our Death” in Wrocław:

- Fashion designer – providing dresses for the performer and textile for the inlay of the coffin
- Florist – creating the flower decoration
- Perfume designer – creating custom-made incense with herbs traditionally used during wakes and funerals
- Funeral home – transporting the coffin
- Crematory – cremation service
- Ceramist – creating the urn







## Variations

- In order to address the topic of ecology and natural burial, the coffin can be buried (in the garden of the gallery or a private garden) instead of being cremated.
- Instead of the Spiral, there is the possibility to create another ritual of transformation.
- Instead of the Wall of Wishes, there can be a Book of Wishes.



# Accompanying events

- Lectures and panels
- Death Cafes
- Grief Circles





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