

An exhibition by

Natalia Romik

Curated by Kuba Szreder

Plague Crystals

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Plague Crystals

Natalia Romik

Plague Crystals is the newest chapter in Natalia Romik's travelling project exploring sources of anxiety in a world threatened by multiple crises. Before Koffler Arts, previous iterations were presented in Passau and Berlin in Germany, and Będzin in Poland.

Drawing on the biblical story in the Book of Exodus, Romik identifies and symbolically contains material embodiments of contemporary plagues: climate catastrophe, social injustice, political malaise, and other forms of collective vulnerability. Some objects were selected by the artist; others were selected by the communities with whom she collaborated.

The artist enclosed these symbolic representations within exquisite crystal vessels. Together with her friends and collaborators, she assembled these contemporary plague towers from upcycled secondhand glasses, vases, cups, and flowerpots, that she fished out at flea markets and antique shops. In Toronto, these findings are paired with contributions from individuals.

Together, the *Plague Crystals* form a growing archive of lived vulnerability across places and generations. By giving a physical form to contemporary perils, the project asks how they might be confronted and contained.

Despite its sombre theme, the installation is not governed by despair. The crystal vessels sparkle with optimistic hope rooted in the continuous efforts of people working together to contain these threats. Echoing the Lurianic Kabbalistic image of shattered vessels tentatively rejoined, these semi-transparent structures are symbolic architectures of care and persistence: small gestures of communal repair.

At Koffler Arts, *Plague Crystals* brings this existing constellation together for the first time, expanded through collaboration with participants in Toronto who selected new objects enclosed within freshly assembled crystalline structures: fragile, translucent, and unexpectedly resilient.

Kuba Szreder, curator





Natalia Romik using ultraviolet optical adhesive that cures when exposed to UV light, creating an optically clear, permanent bond to assemble the crystal vessels. Photo: Shay Markowitz

NATALIA ROMIK was born in 1983 in Warsaw, Poland. She is an architect, scholar, and artist whose work has focused on Jewish memory and Holocaust commemoration in Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Ukraine.

Romik earned an MA in political studies from University of Warsaw, and a PhD in Architecture at Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, that combined architecture, Jewish studies, and design. Created as part of her doctoral research, the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* (2016-ongoing) is a mirrored, synagogue-like structure that travels through Central and Eastern Europe to preserve and map the forgotten, pre-war Jewish heritage of former shtetls. Her book *Architecture of Memory* was published in 2026 by UCL Press.

Romik's postdoctoral project and research-based exhibition, *Hideouts: the Architecture of Survival* (2020 - ongoing), focused on the hiding places built and used by Jews during the Holocaust. It was exhibited in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, CCA TRAFÓ in Szczecin, and the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt.

Open on May 24, 2026, Romik's *Flickering Architecture* is included in the 12th edition of *Arte in Memoria (Art in Memory)*, at the ancient synagogue in Ostia, Rome's antiquity-era port. Her installation consists of a series of black beeswax candles bearing impressions of Warsaw's ruins after Nazi devastation.

Plague Crystals at Koffler Arts is the Toronto iteration of a project that was exhibited previously in Poland and Germany.

Since 2016, she has been a member of the SENNA architecture collective, responsible for, among others, the Museum of Upper-Silesian Jews in Gliwice, the House of Memory in Płońsk, the permanent exhibition at the Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw entitled *Beit Almin – Eternal Home*, and the Oneg Shabbat Monument at the Okopowa Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw.

Romik has been awarded numerous grants and scholarships including the Dan David Prize 2022, the London Arts and Humanities Partnership, the Scholarship of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of Poland, Gerda Henkel Stiftung, and the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah.

KUBA SZREDER is a researcher, curator, and lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He collaborates with artistic unions, consortia of postartistic practitioners, clusters of art researchers, art collectives, and artistic institutions in Poland, the UK, and other European countries. He is the editor and author of several catalogues, books, readers, book chapters, articles, and manifestos that scrutinize the social, economic, and theoretical aspects of the expanded field of art.

His current research interests include the conditions of artistic labor, new models of artistic institutions, artistic self-organization, artistic research, and postartistic theory and practice.

His book *The ABC of the Projectariat: Living and Working in a Precarious Art World* was published in 2021 by Manchester University Press and the Whitworth. In 2025, together with Kacper Greń and the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam, he published the visual essay *Duckrabbits Unveiled: A Sneak Peek at Postartistic Theory and Practice*.







From Matthew Jocelyn, General Director

I first met Natalia Romik at Koffler Arts, when she was in Toronto briefly two and half years ago to speak about her work with the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, curating an exhibition of the paintings of Toronto vernacular artist Mayer Kirshenblatt.

At that time, we invited Natalia to Koffler Arts to give a talk about that exhibition, but also about her work on the Architecture of Survival – a truly remarkable body of sculptural and documentary work which Natalia created by making moulds of actual hiding places used by Jews in Ukraine or Poland during the Holocaust: the inside of an old tree, an abandoned grave, a hidden cupboard...

The resultant sculptures – life sized – were then silver-plated, creating an exhibition of untold beauty and emotional power, as these improvised and last-effort-to-survive “homes” of some 80 years ago were transformed into grandiose jewels of recognition and memory. It’s almost impossible to find words to describe the alchemical force that Natalia operated in this work, transforming and memorializing the deepest kind of anguish into a distinctively elevated and elegant gesture.

Plague Crystals continues Natalia’s poetic and alchemical investigation of Jewish history, this time leaning on the chapters from Exodus about the ten plagues of Egypt. The result has been a growing collection of crystals towers each carrying within it layer upon layer of story, a refraction of what those who Natalia has invited to join her in this project might consider as contemporary plagues. It is Exodus brought into the world of today; memory materialised; shining a crystalline and perhaps even healing light on the ills, small and large, of our time.

Exhibition Credits

Plague Crystals by Natalia Romik

Curated by Kuba Szreder

Exhibition technicians: Brett Despotovich, Emily di Carlo, Will Wang

Exhibition photography: Jeremie Warshafsky

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