



# Daniela Dostálková, Linda Dostálková: **Kino Kosmos**

Curatorial text for the exhibition at PLATO.



Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff: Paradise, 2020–2022; on the left Rudolf Štafa: Cosmic Sun, 1970; Kino Kosmos (c) Martin Polák, PLATO

## **Kino Kosmos**

**Vladimír Bichler, Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács, Andreas Greiner, Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, Selmeci Kocka Jusko, Stéphanie Lagarde, Rudolf Štafa, Markéta Žáčková**

**29/5–26/10/2025**

The exhibition Kino Kosmos presents an archive of ideas emerging in one of the most interesting Czech regions today and may serve as a sensitive seismograph recording discussions about theory, fiction, satire, science fiction, and activism. It explores not only the physical space of the real Kosmos cinema<sup>1</sup> in Třinec, but it also opens up its mental dimension as an imaginary field in which various layers of meaning, memory, and experience overlap. It does not try to interpret the region through the prism of large self-determining phenomena, such

as industrialization or heavy industry; instead, it focuses on more subtle, yet highly stimulating impulses that are specific to this region. The entire exhibition is thematically spread across genres traveling around the orbit represented by Kosmos cinema. The institution of the cinema here is not just a geographical and cultural point, but it is also a spatial and cognitive structure where we watch cinema (film) as a medium that can mediate any domain of thought. Using audiovisual, sculptural, and photographic forms representing both local and foreign artists, we attempt to define the specific (filmic) grammar of this place. The starting point is the Kosmos cinema, that is, the cosmos, whose name and function open up a space for reinterpreting the relationships between history, the local dialect, the moving image, nature, borders, and territoriality. The artists take a sensitive approach to working with this complexity, which could be described as a form of hypercontemporaneity – a state in which investing in fiction is more reliable than betting on reality.

In places, so-called multiperspectivity occurs, when artists present related concepts and in doing so expand the local context into a broader field of meaning, effect, and interpretative possibilities. We are also interested in the peculiar mental routine involved in thinking about this place and the ephemeral processes that disrupt such established clichés. The cinema thus becomes a platform for exploring not only physical space, but also the space of cinematography itself – that is, an area that generates and spreads information allowing us to think not only about the conventions of two-dimensional projection but also about the universe.

If we are to characterize the examined region as rough and industrial, and view life in it as being difficult, then it is important to keep in mind a related factor – it is an environment that is at the same time caring, sophisticated, sensitive, and accommodating. Between language and image, between critique and nostalgia, thus emerge an acoustic situation and a pictorial echo of the region. We focus on places that were historically split between two neighboring countries: Czechia and Poland. The Czech part of the area is bordered on the west by the Ostravice River; to the south is the historical border across the Moravian-Silesian Beskids south of Staré Hamry, Dolní Lomná, and Mosty u Jablunkova; and elsewhere its boundaries are identical to the Czech Republic's state border with Poland and Slovakia. For many of the inhabitants of the Těšín region and beyond, a common means of communication is the Těšín dialect, also known as *gwara* or *po naszymu* (our way). In the exhibition, the dialect becomes not only a bearer of cultural identity but also an active element creating a fine filter of insight into the set of conventional linguistic expressions in contemporary visual art.

MARKÉTA ŽÁČKOVÁ's sound installation, titled *Kino Kosmos – An Attempt at a Screenplay* (2025), combines the local linguistic heritage with research focused on the history and architecture of Kosmos cinema in Třinec. At the center of the work are the voices of female natives reading an original text in the local dialect. In this form, language becomes not just a means of communication but also a complex bearer of culture. The installation reforges it into a performative element – a space in which references to classic literature, avant-garde film, art history research, and architectural analysis intertwine. The resulting composition is reminiscent of a unique several-minute-long thriller: suspenseful, theatrical, and caring. The narration of the women's voices evokes the space of the theater, in which a linguistic choreography of gestures, looks, and hidden comments is realized.<sup>2</sup>

French artist STÉPHANIE LAGARDE brings together in the exhibition everything that is both earthly and alien, bound to art and lying outside its borders, airy and geologically rooted. In the film *Minimal Sway While Starting My Way Up* (2021) a lift becomes something more than just a means of vertical mobility – it connects us to the cosmos, it turns into a metaphysical subject, into a being that is trying to understand its place among the structures that created it and at the same time limit it. Here, the lift is a vehicle of consciousness exploring the space between extreme height and depth – between the mirroring facades of speculative skyscrapers and dark mineshafts, where the material foundation of this vertical domination is hidden.

Stéphanie Lagarde's poetic-philosophical short film intentionally blurs the lines between documentary, fiction, and essay. Through the "thinking" of the lift, which is learning and forming its consciousness in a world of algorithmic and architectural predetermination, the artist reveals the tensions between natural resources and their technological processing, between the human ambition to control verticality and the ecological, social, and existential consequences of this effort. The metaphysics of moving upward and downward transforms into a reflection of social stratification, in which the upper floors are not just the top of a building but also a representation of an unachievable privilege, whereas the bottom floors and underground symbolize the neglected hard-working stratum of society.

The film's aesthetics are reminiscent of a dystopian science fantasy but without the classic narrative – in its place the author assembles a postmodern collage of images: skyscrapers, mining equipment, underground corridors, rotating mechanisms. These fragments carry the symbolic power of dreams – sometimes hallucinatory, other times anxiety-ridden – and serve as the building material not only of the space itself but also of the consciousness of the lift, which is being formed in real time. Thus, the film creates a vertical philosophy of being, in which physical height and depth correspond with the metaphorical values of power and loss, knowledge, isolation, and the relationship to the universe.

The series of free-standing sculptures in the space of the gallery is reminiscent of sets or fragments of a film with a futuristic tone – as if they bore the patina of time. Although their aesthetics may not clearly help us categorize them temporally, in their humble refinement they seem to be models for future screenplays. This quasi-choreographic principle is created at the exhibition by the free-standing works by the artist duo known as SELMECI KOCKA JUSKO. Their selection brings to the exhibition its own fundamental meaning in connecting technology and the "archaeology" of visionary dreams; it combines traditional sculptural elements with an exotic imagination and an interest in artificially created reality. Material austerity imparts the objects with a distinct energy and allows us to look behind the scenes of a film production. This collection of seemingly functional objects creates an unstructured archive of efforts at connecting the behind-the-scenes of a film and staged reality. Objects, installations, and videos serve as vehicles of social communication: interactive, usable, located in physical space. The piece *basket 03* (2022) may be a real basket, *Wind Catcher I, II* (2024) are windsocks giving a visual indication of the wind's direction and strength, and *Five Working Days I* and *Five Working Days II* bring to mind the page of a weekly planner. *Untitled (high seat)* (2022), *Untitled (window)* (2022), and *Untitled (jester's wand)* (2022) refer to the American writer Ursula K. Le Guin, cited by the artists, who further develops the idea of vessels being carriers preserving and transmitting cultural, emotional, and mental contents. The works of Selmeci Kocka Jusko thus are not necessarily just physical objects; they are also symbolic reservoirs, metaphors for preserving memories or ideas that are reformed and interpreted in time. Two videos from the *Uncombative Tools cycle – Traced and*

*Transferred* (2021) and *Another, Larger Type of Pouch* (2021) – reflect contemporary technologies as active subjects influencing our perception of reality. A story about temptation and betrayal symbolizes the power of the media and our frequent status as passive recipients in an unlived reality, whereas we are constantly dreaming about a future that will likely not even occur. Objects and installations of unknown shape and purpose do not destroy or reconstruct the past; the artists co-create with the remnants of history, collaborate with modern ruins, redefine functional architecture, and support spatial and temporal expansion into the past and future, and in doing so create various existential arrangements of cultural forms.

Over the course of three years (2020–2022) CALLA HENKEL and MAX PITEGOFF used their TV Bar in Berlin as a dual space: it was open to the public and at the same time served as the setting for a television series. The result is a cycle of videos titled *Paradise*, in which the artists turn to the near future of 2023 and reflect the real operational structure of the bar in an imaginative semi-documentary style.

The fictional Paradise bar employees a group of bartenders, supervised by a mysteriously never-present boss; their job is to transform everyday conversations into news stories, which they then read to guests from a teleprompter. In doing so, they follow the absurd order from their boss to turn the bar into an improvised newsroom. This speculative game leads to the temporary forgetting about the necessity of paying rent or the other socioeconomic pressures associated with living in a major city. From the initial attempt to maintain a monotonous storyline, the characters gradually try to gain control over what they are saying – but they run up against the limitations set by what their boss has written. This confrontation results in not just a certain humor and poetry but also a critical question: Who has the right to create shared history?

Henkel and Pitegoff originally planned to hand the real bar over to their employees at the end of 2023 so that what was artistic fiction could become tangible cooperation. However, the building's owners had other plans for the space, and this idea never came to fruition. Thus, the context of the forced closing and its meaning forms an important backdrop to the entire installation. The *Paradise* series, shot on 16 mm film, mixes the genres of photography, theater, and experimental film. Friends and colleagues associated with TV Bar (for example, the soundtrack to the films was created by artist, musician, and former TV Bar bartender M. K. Frøslev) turned into actors who lay bare the drudgery, shared rituals, and desire for independence, which, although born from day-to-day routine, tend toward a utopian idea of shared space.

Behind the scenes of the screen on which all four episodes of the film *Paradise* (*Josef & Tara*, 2020; *Margarite & Tennessee*, 2021; *Jess & The Neighbor*, 2022; *The Bartenders Weren't Alone*, 2022) are projected, we can see what the artists really found in the behind-the-scenes area of the bar that the original tenants left behind. These are typical items found at bars: sets of glasses, ashtrays, vases, and so forth. Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff inventoried them and then created a set of ten black-and-white photographs similar to those in museum archives (*Functioning Antique Chandelier*, *Wooden Pretzel Tree*, *Document Tray Stack of 3*, *2x Industrial Fans*, *11 Unused Glass Ashtrays*, *9x Grappa Glasses 87 ml*, *7x Spiegelau Wine Glasses 2 cl*, *Variety of Glass Vases*, *9x Glass Fish Carafes 1 l*, *Small Cashbox [no key]*, 2022). The videos thus gained an additional layer enhancing the surrealist feeling of timelessness and of an inevitable silent rebellion in a single “ordinary” bar in Berlin.

In a completely different geographical and cultural context, the theme of the prehistoric format of nature – the old-growth forest – is developed by artists who speak about similar areas but in completely different adaptations. The Mionší old-growth forest spreads out across the village of Dolní Lomná in the Moravian-Silesian Region and is a unique refuge for rare species of large predators and a wide range of birds, mushrooms, and plants. Although there are no written records clearly attesting to the origins of the name *Mionší*, according to one folk etymology, it is derived from the name of the local stream, called Mienszy (Smaller) in the local dialect.

The body of work that VLADIMÍR BICHLER built up over many years comprises black-and-white photographs – mainly of landscapes – that the artist took in and around Mionší. Although in the past, the forest was documented by Josef Sudek and physician and photographer Petr Helbich, Bichler's approach differs significantly from their poetic visions. Whereas Sudek's and Helbich's photography often tends toward contemplation and harmony, Bichler is interested in the structure of place – its disorderliness, densification, and visual "noise." He is enticed by its broken trunks, its strangely growing landmark trees, impenetrable thickets, clumps of ferns, and pieces of wood evoking animal shapes. We encounter in his pictures the motif of "spying" through bushes and trees, as if the landscape should be less observed and more monitored.

Vladimír Bichler's photographic work captures volatile natural processes that do not try to "conserve" nature but record its spontaneous visual manifestations. A landscape can be understood as a certain segment of the natural environment with aesthetic and formal features; however, from the perspective of critical approaches, we can understand it instead as (our) mental construction providing other, more subtle interpretations. In the work of Vladimír Bichler, nature communicates directly with us: it is mystical and untouchable, and at the same time also cultural and analytical. In his photographs we can sense and interpret this intensity – the result is a selection of new narratives about the wildness of the old-growth forest as a woodland stage. The artist, in earnest compositions, simple gestures, and alluring curiosities, discovers, like the archaeologist, hidden narratives and the as-of-yet unstudied scenery of Mionší.

Białowieża Forest lies on the border between Poland and Belarus and is one of the last preserved primeval forests in temperate Europe. In 1979 it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

It is a unique example of a mixed forest that has developed for thousands of years without any fundamental human impacts. In recent years, however, this exceptional area has been facing serious challenges, including the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and controversial timber harvesting. In the context of the ongoing ecological crisis, artists PERSIJN BROERSEN and MARGIT LUKÁCS present a video installation titled *Bark with a Trace* (2022), which is based on a digital model created by combining hundreds of detailed photographs of bark fragments from the Białowieża Forest. This model is transformed into a new, virtually constructed landscape evoking a video game environment, which addresses the relationship between natural material and digital representation. Equally enchanting as the image is the work's audio track, created by Berend Dubbe. He recorded it using the shofar, a musical instrument made from an animal's horn that lets out a piercing sound. Besides serving a liturgical role during Jewish holidays, in ancient times it was used to communicate over great distances. This film offers the viewer the possibility to see the past as a model or outline of future events – not only from the perspective of the geological history of the given place but also at the level of exploring the potential of technology in forming

a biocentric perspective and the sustainable cohabitation of humankind with ecosystems and other life forms.

At the start of his artistic career, RUDOLF ŠTAFÁ (1925–2014) used a broad range of techniques; he created graphic prints and pictorial figurative compositions, worked with ceramics, and experimented with non-traditional sculptural materials such as sheet metal, wires, train rails, chains, rebar, and shaped iron. An important moment came in 1963 when he was hired to work in the promotional studio of the Třinec Iron and Steel Works, where a fundamental “material” encounter occurred. There he gained his first experience with metal and metallurgical material, gradually discovering its aesthetic and technical potential. He bent, shaped, cut, and welded steel and iron. He began creating small iron sculptures from train rails, a key product of the iron and steel works (*Chlapec v kloboučku* [Boy in a Hat], *Hlava-kámen* [Head-Stone], *Husar* [Hussar], *Jinoch* [Young Man], *Muž* [Man], *Napoleon*, *Sestry* [Sisters], *Vodní plastika* [Water Sculpture], *Žena* [Woman]; 1965–1967), smaller models of which are displayed in the exhibition. Many of these smaller sculptures were reworked into monumental pieces displayed in public spaces. Most of Rudolf Štafa’s work was of a figurative nature; he often worked with the motif of the family or the woman, which he abstracted into minimalist signs and symbols.

In the mid-1960s, art in Třinec was supported by the director of the Třinec Iron and Steel Works, Miroslav Boublík. He was responsible, for example, for the creation of Rudolf Štafa’s shaped-iron sculpture *Totem svobody* (*Totem of Freedom*, 1968), which was installed at the ceremonial opening of Kino Kosmos not far from its entrance and moved several decades later to a new location. This statue depicting a figure with a gilded “enlightened” head became an iconic landmark and a symbol not just of the cinema itself but of Třinec; a model of it is presented at the exhibition.

One of his monumental reliefs, made of nonferrous metals, can be seen in life size at the exhibition: *Kosmické slunce* (*Cosmic Sun*, 1970) located at the Slezská Primary School in Třinec. Its highly stylized vocabulary of forms combines the cosmic and the spiritual planes and at the same time becomes a symbol of order and eternal motion. Here, the artist in an austere yet sophisticated gesture moves beyond his traditional approach to metal. Thanks to the materials connected with the region’s industrial heritage, he developed a style that harmoniously combined technical coarseness with simple gestures. These gestures change the emotional and perceptual weight of the space and draw the viewers’ attention to their own physical presence and to the relationship between the piece and its surroundings, as if Rudolf Štafa’s works could change our perceptions and experience of place.

ANDREAS GREINER creates a multilayered environment reminiscent of a surrealist scene in which the audience is confronted with hybrid techno-organic objects. These works speculate about possible scenarios of future life on Earth and devise exit strategies for both biological organisms and technological entities. A series of printed circuit boards symbolizes hopes and salvation, and in an impersonal variation on Noah’s Ark forces us to reevaluate our grounding in the planetary system of life. Technological sculptures on the border between natural and digital forms of life examine the consequences of anthropogenic impacts on the form and evolution of nature and human efforts in the industrial sector. Andreas Greiner thus, using artistic means, actively opens up a space for critically reflecting ecological and social challenges.

Like Karel Zeman’s legendary film *Cesta do pravěku* (*Journey to the Beginning of Time*, 1955), which describes the adventures of four boys traveling deep into Earth’s history, Greiner’s

project offers the viewer the opportunity to experience a sense of temporal rapture. Whereas Zeman's film used visual innovation to provide immediate contact with long-past epochs, Greiner, in contrast, uses cutting-edge technology and speculative imagination to confront the viewer with the future, which is just as uncertain and fascinating as the past is distant and mysterious. Both works, Zeman's cinematic travels through a prehistoric landscape and Greiner's project as a technological-ecological allegory, share a profound interest in the process of getting to know the world, reflect on the existentialist position of humans in relation to the planet and the cosmos, and open up space for philosophizing about life, time, and our place in the variable web of existence.

Greiner's works, which in structure may seem to be referencing ancient engraving with nearly theatrical compositions, reveal upon closer inspection the use of hi-tech technologies and materials. *The works Five Feet High and Rising* (2023), *Blowin' in the Wind* (2023), *256\_bit* (2024), and *Exodus* (2023) use printed circuit boards (PCBs) as a speculative pictorial environment. Each of them has several layers (conductive, plastic, and covering), which naturally creates the tri-colored aesthetic with which the artist works. The models for each image were developed in Midjourney, and the artist then substantially modified them so that they would match the technological limitations of printing on PCB. Every board also includes a connecting cable, reminiscent of the kind used for connecting modern graphics cards.

*Joint Venture* (2024) is based on the older ATI Radeon 9500 (2002) graphics card, a cutting-edge piece of computer technology at the time. It reminds us of an era when GPUs (graphics processing units) were first used en masse in graphic design and the gaming industry, whereas today the same types of processors are often used for training artificial intelligence models. In this installation, the graphics card was artificially corroded and the organic elements were treated with glycerin, which stopped them from growing and decomposing. *Joint Venture* thus combines the technological legacy of the past with natural motifs, in a reference to the further development and interdependence of these two worlds.

*The Game* (2023) uses flip-dot panels to make a monochromatic display with a resolution of  $84 \times 84$  pixels. Flip dots are commonly used in public transport to display information; here, though, they are used as an experimental medium conveying a simple yet variable visual structure. The displayed pattern is based on the rules of mathematician John Horton Conway's *Game of Life*. Each cell changes based on the number of "living" neighbors; the results can be the death of the cell, its continued existence, or its "rebirth." Despite the seeming simplicity of these algorithmic rules, they create a highly complex and dynamic pattern that is often reminiscent of biological processes. *The Game* thus presents a visual parallel to the philosophical idea that even a small number of basic rules can give rise to systems strikingly similar to life.

Daniela & Linda Dostálková

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1. Kosmos cinema in Třinec opened in 1968. The original building, with its hyperbolic paraboloid roof supported by steel cables, was designed by Slovak architects Ladislav Bořuta and Alois Daříček. ↩
  2. *The sound installation titled Kino Kosmos – An Attempt at a Screenplay*, (2025) was created during Markéta Žáčková's research residency at PLATO, focused on the history and architectural and urban-planning context of Kosmos cinema in Třinec, as was her essay titled *Kino Kosmos under the Cosmic Sun*. The text is available from Octopus Press, PLATO's publication platform, at [octopus-press.cz](https://octopus-press.cz). ↩



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**Vladimír Bichler**, a dentist by profession, is also a photographer who has for years been documenting the Mionší old-growth forest in the Moravian-Silesian Beskids, one of the most remarkable natural sites in the Czech Republic. The extroverted nature called for by his medical job is brought into harmony in the eternal forest, whose atmosphere Bichler authentically conveys. *The Old Forest* is the title of a book of his photography published by Kant in Prague in 2019. The artist resides in Třinec.

**Andreas Greiner** creates new and provocative tales about the relationship between people and nature, which involve artificial intelligence, living organisms, and threatened ecosystems. He endeavours for a change of perspective that would challenge the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture, both human and non-human. His works, which are often stylized and heavy on symbolism, evoke a context of scientific experimentation; they explore the impact of humans on the biological and atmospheric processes of our planet. Greiner's work has been exhibited at international shows, such as the Yokohama Triennale, the Vienna Biennale for Change, and the Geneva Biennial of Art and Urban Nature, and at institutions such as the Berlinische Galerie, Hamburger Kunsthalle, and Centre Pompidou in Paris. The artist resides in Berlin.

**Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff** are an artistic duo. They work across a broad spectrum of media, and their art focuses primarily on the nature of performance. This is closely reflected in their involvement as the founders, designers, and directors of a TV Bar in Berlin and of a performance space titled New Theatre. Currently they run the New Theater Hollywood in Los Angeles. Artists explore aspects of cooperation, discuss the roles individuals adopt as part of a community, and attempt to create works in which different artists and their work can interact and overlap. Pieces by Henkel and Pitegoff have been exhibited, for example, at solo shows at Reena Spaulings in New York, O-Town House in Los Angeles, Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. The artists reside in Los Angeles.

The work of **Rudolf Štafa** was closely linked with the Třinec Iron and Steel Works. The artist worked in the mill's promotional studio, and later, inspired by his work with steel as a material and his understanding of its unique features, aesthetic effects, and ways of shaping it, he found his artistic identity. The symbolism in this artist's sculptures and paintings is based on a modernist vocabulary of forms; the subject of his primarily figurative works is the harmony between humankind and nature. Some of Rudolf Štafa's most important works are sculptures displayed in Třinec, such as *The Cosmic Sun* and *Water Sculpture* at the Slezská Primary School, the sculpture *Motherhood* on T. G. Masaryk Square, and a figurative relief and the *Totem of Freedom* originally installed in front of Kino Kosmos. The artist resided in Třinec.

**Stéphanie Lagarde** in her video essays critically examines our perception of materials and resources, which often leads to the need to make a profit. She concentrates on situations in which both living and non-living actors implement various strategies to maintain or contest control over real and virtual territories, through systems of signs, objects, and languages. She creates conflicting scenarios from assemblages of sounds, images, and texts, which are often of a speculative nature. Her works have been exhibited at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, the Kunstmuseum in Bonn, and Tallinn Art Hall. She has also received awards at international short-film festivals in Bucharest, Leiden, Beijing, and Poznań. She resides in Paris.

**Selmeci Kocka Jusko** (Alex Selmeci a Tomáš Kocka Jusko) are an artistic duo who create complex intermedia installations or, in contrast, present collections of physical objects that function as energy tabs. These objects can be either tools that create a complex situation or the by-products of this situation. This ambiguity generates a tension, which, however, also exudes a surprising calm. The artists reject traditional exhibition formats, exploring the fluidity of interpretive mechanisms through layering visual and spatial structures. They thus examine the relationship between visual representation, memory, and perception, using experimental approaches to the structure of exhibition spaces. Selmeci and Kocka Jusko have had solo exhibitions at Prague's MeetFactory, Galerie NoD, and elsewhere. The artists reside in Prague.

**Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács** are an artistic duo. They work under the assumption that, with the plethora of technology that unceasingly quotes, references, embeds, and re-tweets, the way stories are told has profoundly changed. A large part of their artistic practice is informed by these questions, deeply rooted in their interest in the workings of media and technology, intertwined with the politics of depicting landscapes culled from political, mythological, (art) historical, and filmic sources. Their work, consisting of projections, digital animations, and spatial installations, has been exhibited at institutions such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Centre Pompidou



in Paris, the Shanghai World Expo, and Hausde Kunsten der Welt in Berlin. The artists reside in Amsterdam.

**Markéta Žáčková** is a curator and art and architecture critic. She works at the Department of Art History and Theory at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Brno University of Technology, where she also serves as vice-dean. Her research focuses on the history of urbanism, regional planning, and the relationship between art and architecture, while also examining associated practices of power and commissioning. As a co-founder of CCEA, the Centre for Central European Architecture, and a member of the Café Utopia curatorial team, she has contributed to forming the contemporary architectural and cultural discourse. She resides in Brno.

