

24.1–01.03 2025

Ksenia Pedan

In Ksenia Pedan's practice, painting and sculpture can sometimes merge with what we usually perceive as components of interior architecture and interior design – and the other way around. This companion text for Ksenia's exhibition at skēnē, focuses on this aspect of her work, and also looks back at recent exhibitions, from the perspective of domestic life, interior decorating and the elephant subject in the room: us the living.

There's a beautiful quote in the beginning of an Edgar Allan Poe story, about our inability as human beings to simply be in a room, quiet and alone. ***Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul! This great misfortune, not to be able to be alone!**** Our inability to just relax, without thinking about how everything is connected. The weight of the room, the pressure building up from the other side of the walls. Like mud piling up against a glass box that can burst and implode at any given moment, flooding the room.

There is no rest from our own intrusive thoughts. Like plumbers of the mind we dive head first into the sewage tunnels of uneasy thinking. That awkward downward spiral, quizzing ourselves on who we really are; the experience of the self more distant the closer we look. Maybe this begins to explain the common usage of masks and covert personalities? This timeless coming-of-age trope of chiselling out an identity through self-scrubbing. An existence which makes itself known by erasing all traces of the past, of ever having been in the room. An air guitar performance which echoes into eternity (Ich bin ein gladiator).

We like to think of the room as a shelter. But the slimy tentacles of the exterior reach into our senses with a disturbing efficiency. We're trapped within the four walls of the room (naked and afraid). From this point of view, a room is always already a prison. And the prison, given that we cannot handle being alone in a room, is a ghoulish invention. But if we can agree that a room is to some extent already a prison, interior decorating is a brilliant countermove by the Homo sapiens.

Let's not debate here whether this protective measure of interior decorating, a talismanic maneuver, was invented by the ancient Egyptians. At some point in time, the way in which we adorn our rooms begin to signal something about who we perceive ourselves to be. At some point in time, a style of the soul expressed through interior decorating begins to form (dormant brain culture). In this sense, interior architecture is not just a discipline of construction but a description of something we carry within us, an emblematic system and a means of transportation – a vehicle of the soul. The equivalent in society is perhaps that which we commonly refer to as "a standard of living"?

Some of us enjoy the freaky pleasure of spending time in a hotel room. Is that breeze blowing from the air duct a nice thing or is it making my head spin? Is the wallpaper with low resolution lavender fields snazzy or is it tampering with my self esteem? Is this a cuck chair or is this where I sit down and write my novel? This ambivalent tension is felt even in the rooms we normally inhabit, it's just less noticeable. The practice of breaking something alien down to habitual coziness is what the Germans like to call a heimlich maneuver.

Being able to be in a room could perhaps have something to do with digestion. Which brings me to the color red (profondo rosso).

Erik Lavesson

* explanatory note follows overleaf

* Edgar Allan Poe often left little breadcrumbs in his texts for future literary excavators to find and follow. The quote in question serves as the epigraph of his famous story *The Man of the Crowd* (1840). Ever since I first encountered the quote some twenty years ago, I have been transfixed by its enigmatic style. When I wanted to learn more about it, it turned into a dizzying trip down the rabbit hole. Suffice to say that the quote reaches into a long history of mystical thinking, revolving around mankind's inability to simply be, to just exist, and "to know how to sit quietly and alone in a room". The tradition also discusses how one should respond to this "vulnerability", and the merits of seclusion in relation to artistic and spiritual life. The original source seems to be the French philosopher and moralist Jean de la Bruyère (1645–1696) who wrote a series of aphorisms collected in his book *Les Caractères*, published anonymously in Paris in 1688. Poe slightly misquotes la Bruyère, perhaps deliberately. The original reads: "All our evils come from our inability to be alone". Among the commentators on the aphorism are Pascal, Poe, Baudelaire, and many others.