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Fane Întuneric and Speranța Muncescu, dioramas, mixed media 2022

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Tales of the Dead – IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION, 2024–2025

MALLEUS MALEFICARUM

On Power and Myth

Braunstein Palace, 13.5–24.5.2026, Iași, RO
Curatorial statement — Marlene Herberth, RCW 2026

Power has never functioned through force alone. It depends on a fragile architecture composed of subjects, resources, rules, institutions, and—above all—legitimacy. As Max Weber articulated in *Economy and Society* (1922), domination endures only insofar as it is believed in. Within this matrix, fear operates as a primary technology of governance: a mechanism designed to produce obedience, internalize norms, and stabilize belief.

First published in 1487, the *Malleus Maleficarum*—the notorious Hammer of Witches—offers a stark historical example of how fear is translated into doctrine and law. Written by Heinrich Kramer (with disputed attribution to Jacob Sprenger), the treatise systematized suspicion, codified violence, and provided juridical and theological justification for the persecution of alleged witches. While not the sole cause of the European witch hunts, its influence during the 16th and 17th centuries was profound, shaping both ecclesiastical and secular prosecutions across large parts of Europe.

Through its rhetoric, the *Malleus* transformed paranoia into moral order. Fear was framed as vigilance; suspicion as virtue. The text repeatedly insists that what is hidden, nocturnal, or opaque may conceal an enemy of humankind—and that constant scrutiny is therefore a form of salvation. Within this logic, fear becomes inseparable from righteousness, legitimizing torture, surveillance, and forced confession. Long before the emergence of the modern prison, inquisitorial systems perfected techniques of internal discipline. Fear migrated inward, inhabiting the conscience. Delusion, suspicion, and self-policing became instruments of power.

Yet one of the most toxic legacies of the *Malleus Maleficarum* lies in its explicitly gendered ontology. The text notoriously constructs women as morally and intellectually inferior, more susceptible to temptation, desire, and deception, and therefore more prone to witchcraft. This reasoning did not vanish with the end of the witch trials.

It reconfigured itself over centuries, reappearing within patriarchal, religious, medical, and economic systems that continue to regulate bodies, labor, reproduction, and desire. The witch, as figure, became a sophisticated and durable technology of exclusion.

Where Weber described social actors as individuals endowed with agency and resources, later feminist theory exposed the limits of this model. Subjects are not abstract; they are embodied, relational, and situated within intersecting hierarchies of gender, class, race, and sexuality. Feminism has negotiated these structures to reclaim voice and agency. Queer theory pushes further, destabilizing the grammar of power itself through parody, performativity, and fluid identity. Both operate as practices of resistance, reclaiming imagination from the machinery of control.

This exhibition approaches the *Malleus Maleficarum* as an x-ray of oppression that opens a space for potential transmutation. Fear is never inert. It crystallizes into law, sedimentates into architecture, and infiltrates the rhythms of everyday life. But fear can also be metabolized. It can dissolve into myth, ritual, storytelling, and aesthetic excess. Just as historical dread once generated the gothic imagination—monsters, vampires, Frankenstein, the uncanny—so can anxiety become a generative force. Cultural narratives offer alternative epistemologies: ways to survive power, to reconfigure it.

Malleus Maleficarum examines the anatomy of domination and its vulnerabilities. It traces how fear is codified, how discipline is internalized, and how myth can reverse the vector of control—turning obedience into critique. The exhibition proposes delusion as a creative strategy: a refusal to fully comply with imposed realities. Viewers are invited into a space where fear, authority, and imagination intersect—an arena for reflection on how every system of power, no matter how rigid, contains within it the possibility of subversion, mutation, and transformation.

atelier VRAC

setup design

KraftMade

production

Anti-feminine violence does not emerge in isolation; rather, it is constituted within that fragile architecture of power in which fear is transformed into an instrument of control and exclusion. Projected onto what is perceived as deviant or inexplicable, this fear situates the figure of the woman who does not conform to social dogmas within a register of dangerous otherness, historically associated with witchcraft.

In this sense, witchcraft functions as an “expression of the misery of the age,” becoming not only a symbolic construct but also a mechanism for the release of collective tensions. Communities, confronted with a succession of natural disasters and social instability, project their own fears onto vulnerable and marginal groups—predominantly women—who are transformed into scapegoats for an order in crisis (Ion Albu, *The Witch Trials of Chirpăr, (1727–1728)*, 1998).

The theme of the exhibition is interpreted through the lens of the “impure agent,” understood as a bearer of evil and as a manifestation of a latent potential inscribed within what is perceived as inexplicable or deviant (“within every woman lies a potential witch”).

The exhibition space of the Braunstein Palace is itself subjected to a process of alteration, becoming a body susceptible to contamination through the infiltration of a series of blunt object interventions that parasitize the space—a kind of simulation of the building’s “infection.” These appear at precisely determined points, in relation to the exhibited objects and the geometry of the space. Their spiked surfaces destabilize the “natural order” and establish an ambiguous relationship with the viewer: they impose a physical distance while simultaneously exerting an inexplicable attraction, stimulating approach.

These strange objects appear in multiple configurations, shaping the exhibition route in relation to the space and the artists’ works: a barrier at floor level that fractures the path, a bench rendered unusable, a constrictive gate, a plinth-shield that maintains distance, or an ambivalent analogue that both invites and repels. Through these insertions, the space becomes contaminated and unstable, reflecting the mechanisms through which fear propagates and inscribes itself into bodies, objects, and architectures.

Special thanks: Savo Atelier (Andrei Savonea)—exhibition display production

Lea Rasovzsky

Fane Întuneric and Speranța Muncescu

dioramas, mixed media 2022

“I look into people’s houses in the evening, when I am walking toward my own home. I take advantage of the light from chandeliers, cold neon lights, bedside lamps, televisions, and I catch whatever I can, absorbing the details greedily. My mind tries to map everything in that fraction of a second (in fact it is 2–3 seconds, but that is how it feels), to retain clues, trying with all its strength to make the gesture seem natural, not like the semi-desperate staring that it actually feels like inside.

I wonder what it is like in there, what it smells like, where the secrets are kept, and what the people sleeping there dream about. In other people’s houses the air is different; it contains the particles of an impossible-to-know DNA, contorted like a meditative posture of the soul or like a spider accidentally crushed under a boot.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to go and knock on a door and press down the handle, for the door to swing open wide with a short scream, and to catch an irreversible, cruel scene, for us to shock one another but also recognize one another. Then the door would close again, along with that world, without us saying a single word, but knowing that we could be the other person, in another life or perhaps even in this one.”

Within the context of *Malleus Maleficarum*, Rasovszky’s dioramas focus on the tension hidden inside ordinary life. They show homes, habits, conversations, and routines where nothing appears dramatic at first. It is the embodied norm. But then, and at the same time, the artist refuses to turn the other into a stranger or a monster. Instead, it leaves us with the revealing thought that we, too, could be the other person behind the door.

Ghassan Naji /g0naji

THE BOX: Door 50: Iron Howl

NFT Edition: Unique, 2025

“Imagine yourself inside a box. Within it, countless doors stand before you, each leading to a new reality. The Box is an AI-driven art collection that explores these hidden realms, uncharted worlds filled with endless possibilities, waiting to be discovered. AI serves as the force that unlocks these doors, but the journey beyond them is ours to take.” says g0naji about his explorations into man-machine hybrid dreaming. As we step into the Door 50: Iron Howl transports us into a tormenting landscape of burning sun, water, and desert, where armoured knights dissolve into monstrous dogs and hybrid predators. g0naji creates a world in which medieval crusaders, beasts, soldiers, and phantoms continuously transform into one another, collapsing distinctions between human and animal, history and nightmare.

Within the context of *Malleus Maleficarum*, the work can be understood as a vision of recurring historical terror — from crusades and witch hunts to contemporary wars and ideological extremism — where the forms change, but the mechanisms of dread remain hauntingly familiar. We see Violence appearing as a force that returns throughout history under new names and new images. Each era invents its own enemies, demons, and justifications for brutality, showing that terror mutates across time while preserving its essential structure.

Mihai Negru

Mystical Raving Maze, seria Despisers of the Body

103 cm × h 89 cm, liner, black, coloured and and white pen on glossy plotter paper, 2024

The work *Mystical Raving Maze* asserts the body as a territory of conflict and resistance, where the vital refuses complete domestication, foregrounding an aesthetics of freedom and a challenge to social and cultural conventions.

The central creature is ambiguous. Feline in appearance, with a bird in its mouth as if it had devoured an angel, it resembles a hybrid between a medieval bestiary figure, a demon, and a ritual bird. All the other symbols depicted evoke images of martyrdom, of assumed sacrifice. Negru renders the body as something impossible to fully discipline—excessive, monstrous, erotic, irrational, and political. The text “Feminismus, mein Kampf” makes us directly uncomfortable—it brings into collision emancipation, radicalization, and historical political memory, without offering a clear resolution.

For the *Malleus Maleficarum* exhibition, the work illustrates the accused body: the body that bears marks, that becomes a field of ideological struggle, the body that is transformed into a monster because it refuses to be obedient. Negru’s creature can be read as a “posthuman witch”—not necessarily female, not entirely animal, an organism that escapes classification and, precisely for that reason, becomes threatening to systems of control.

Lynne Hocking

Texo Matrilineal (Powerhouses)

handwoven textile (handspun flax and wool) with oak umbilici, 2026

“Matrilineal genetic information originating from a common foremother is handwoven as text – information encoded within all our cells’ mitochondria; passed down from mothers to children and on again by daughters; shared by all humans alive today. Referencing the autoradiographs first used to “read” DNA sequence and the papyrus scrolls that first eased movement of written information, maternally-inherited code for energy-generating machinery within our cells is transcribed in handspun flax and wool. The work weaves together DNA, textile traditions and text – enduring matrilineal knowledge and power that no hammer can smash.”

Placed between *Mystical Raving Maze* by Mihai Negru and *The Society of Glass Tears* by Radu Belcin, *Texo Matrilineal (Powerhouses)* by Lynne Hocking occupies a crucial position: it introduces a form of evidence that cannot be bent or coerced. Negru’s work stages the condemned body—excessive, irrational, marked, and exposed to accusation. Belcin, in turn, evokes a quiet assembly of perpetrators. Between these two poles—body and tribunal—the question of proof becomes central. Historically, as codified in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, “evidence” was constructed through suspicion, forced confession, and ideological projection. The accused body was made to signify guilt regardless of truth, while the collective reinforced and validated this mechanism. Hocking interrupts this dynamic and introduces mitochondrial DNA as a different order of evidence: matrilineal, continuous, and materially inscribed in every human body. If all bodies share this encoded lineage—if what is most fundamental is a shared, inherited structure—then the division between accused and accuser is collapsing, the “deviant” is, actually, continuous with all others.

Radu Belcin

The Society of Glass Tears

oil on Linen, Series, I-VII 60x50cm; VIII 90 × 70cm

The Society of Glass Tears by Radu Belcin looks like a quiet assembly of suspended figures that creates, through its very presence, a tense mood of lingering unease. Across seven solitary portraits and one collective scene, male bodies appear as echoes of those who have historically authored, administered, and enforced dominant narratives of power. Yet the face, the primary site of identity, is systematically undone. Dissolved, corroded, or obscured by viscous, glass-like eruptions, it resists recognition. Belcin displaces the individual into a shared, sedimented condition that exceeds biography and instead points toward a collective force—an instance of authority and inherited patterns of behaviour/lifestyle that persists beyond any single figure. The “glass tears” seem a paradox: fragile yet cutting, transparent yet disfiguring. They mark the subtle, aestheticized distortions and omissions that history wants to reveal through its official narrative – in the context of *Malleus Maleficarum* the invisible consensus where “the Society of” perpetrators dissolve into the very fabric of what is accepted as norm.

Tudor Ciurescu

TRAUM

gas tank, Arduino, speaker, sensor, 65 × 30 × 25 cm, 2023

TRAUM is a sculpture resembling a gas tank, equipped with a motion sensor that triggers a gas leak sound as you move around it.

“With the advent of the pandemic, my artistic focus shifted towards introspection of my childhood. Having started creating art in an academic environment at the age of 14, my ongoing fascination with contemporary culture and the internet led me to explore the roots of my artistic inclinations, predating the influence of academia or online trends.

Turning to childhood memories as a means of distraction, I recalled the fear I felt towards my grandparents’ gas tanks, every year you would hear on the news how a gas tank blew up because the grandparents forgot it open after cooking — a fear I likened to the anxieties experienced by many visual artists during their formative years.”

Tudor Ciurescu translates a deeply personal, almost banal childhood fear into a spatial and sensory mechanism. The sculpture activates through proximity: as the viewer moves around it, a leaking sound is triggered, gradually intensifying into the suggestion of imminent explosion. The object holds latent danger, where memory, anxiety, and anticipation converge.

For the *Malleus Maleficarum* exhibition, the work resonates with the production of fear as a tool of control. The *Malleus* constructs a world in which invisible threats—witchcraft, possession, unseen forces—are made perceptible through narrative, repetition, and suggestion. Ciurescu’s sculpture operates in a similar register: there is no actual danger, yet the body reacts as if there were. The sound alone is enough to trigger vigilance, tension, and a heightened awareness of space.

Importantly, the threat in TRAUM is not externalized into a visible “other,” as in the *Malleus*, but internalized. It emerges from memory, from learned fear, from cultural narratives absorbed in childhood. The visitor is caught in a feedback loop where perception produces reality. The closer one moves, the more intense the experience becomes, reinforcing the sense that danger is tied to one’s own presence. In this way, the work exposes the mechanics of belief: how something unseen can become real through repetition and conditioning. In the exhibition space, TRAUM functions as an invisible field of anxiety that activates the body before the mind can rationalize it.

MALLEUS MALEFICARUM

The Hammer of the Witches

volume from the Brukenthal National Museum Library, c. 1492

This exhibition features a rare early edition of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (“The Hammer of Witches”), printed around 1492 in Speyer, Germany, by Peter Drach. The volume is kindly lent by the Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu, Romania, where it is part of the library of Samuel von Brukenthal, the 18th century Habsburg governor of Transylvania.

The *Malleus* was written by the inquisitor Heinrich Kramer (with a disputed contribution from Jacob Sprenger) and first published in 1487. It was a product of its time: a period of deep religious anxiety, social unrest, and papal concern over witchcraft. In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued the bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, which acknowledged the reality of witches and empowered Kramer to root them out. The *Malleus* followed as a practical and theological manual for that mission.

The book is divided into three parts. The first argues that witchcraft is real and that doubting it is heresy. The second describes the supposed harms witches cause – impotence, disease, crop failure – and their pact with the Devil. The third provides a chilling step by step judicial handbook for prosecuting, torturing, and executing suspected witches.

The *Malleus* was a European bestseller. Between 1487 and 1520, it was reprinted at least 13 times. After a mid century lull, it saw another 16 editions from 1574 to 1669, making it a consistently sought after text for nearly 200 years. For much of that time, it served as the “witch hunter’s manual,” consulted by both Catholic and Protestant authorities across Europe. Its influence helped fuel the early modern witch hunts, which led to the persecution of thousands – overwhelmingly women. While it contains little original theology, its power lies in its synthesis of canon law, popular belief, and bureaucratic procedure. Today, it stands as a dark testament to the fears and prejudices of its age.

Bianca Mann

Collective Memory II

resin, silicone, metal, 220 × 190 × 40 cm, 2022–2023

“Bianca Mann has, as a defining plastic feature, a modular element. It is in fact her own face. She initially took an imprint of her face, and then clay was pressed into that mold. After drying, the clay contracts by approximately 5%. Bianca then takes a new mold from this second version, which in turn dries and shrinks by another 5%, and so on, until reaching the smallest version, which becomes a kind of synthesis or reduction of identity.

The object is constructed from this module—larger or smaller—each one being the image of her laughing face. The work is organized in concentric circles, like a flower. One might say that nothing here could be hideous. What could be wrong in the face of a young woman, multiplied and arranged as a blossoming form?

And yet, the repetition of the facial mask is unsettling. A ‘too sweet’ effect emerges, and we reach a threshold where teratology begins. Too many faces arranged concentrically produce a Gorgon.” (Dan Popescu for the catalogue *Monstrul, pătratul și hohotul*, on the work *Scut Dublu*, acquired by the Muzeul de Artă Recentă).

When identity is unstable it becomes unnerving, as the role of the white mask throughout history, it is the direct effect of overwhelm. In dialogue with the *Malleus Maleficarum*, this directly challenges the logic of classification and accusation. Where the “Malleus system” depends on fixing the body into a single, legible category, Mann disperses identity into a cascade of altered selves—multiplying ripples of reality that refuse to stabilize. The mechanism serving as evidence—repetition, visibility, the face—is self-generating a means of escape. What cannot be reduced to one – cannot be fully named, and what cannot be named, cannot be fully controlled.

Elena Urucatu and Carlos Mate

Tales of Dead

immersive installation, 2024–2025

In a given framework of internalised terror, what is the exit, a possible delusional scenario to be manifested as an alternative narrative, as a glitch of history? Do we dare an escape from the matrix or do we comply with comforting #delulu strategies?

“Tales of the Dead” is the final phase of Elena Urucatu and Carlos Maté’s opera cum multidisciplinary project „The Year Without a Summer“. Its name originates from the historical 1816 volcanic winter caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora—a global climate catastrophe that led to famine, disease, and a sunless year, coinciding with the rise of Romanticism’s melancholic sensibility.

The installation unfolds as an immersive, scent-based opera and an accompanying exhibition that examines the physical traces left behind, conjuring a “punk and techno 19th century” where the gallery becomes a space of subjective excess shaped by memory, distortion, and mimicry. Drawing from the legendary 1816 ghost-story competition at Villa Diodati that gave birth to Frankenstein and The Vampyre, the work weaves themes of extinction, confinement, and sanctuary into an autopsy like display of its own operative remnants, using the Romantic spirit as a form of individual resistance against late capitalism and digital saturation—asking whether art can still offer refuge in an age of algorithmic capture. As curator Laura Lopez Paniagua writes: „Video screens and Marshall amplifiers, perfumes and Romantic memorabilia, monsters and the ruins of a false classicism are presented as an archive. Their fragmentation evokes the workings of memory: once events have occurred, only remnants remain – mementos from which to reconstruct the story that was, or perhaps invent new ones altogether. This repetition of the opera is not only imperfect but willfully manipulated – a distorted echo, a personal hallucination, a world of one’s own making”.