

Alexandru Mihai Budeş



TEN OF SWORDS
Exhibition at Atelier 35, 2024 (RO)



TEN OF SWORDS

Recently, during the summer, I had the opportunity to pass by a cemetery in a Romanian village and observed an adorned spruce tree. In funeral ceremonies, evergreen trees mark the passing of young, unmarried individuals, perceived as a premature departure, and considered a deviation from their intended life path.

Exploring the theme of fatality and endings, I encountered the imagery encapsulated in the Tarot card known as the Ten of Swords. In its upright orientation, this card signifies devastation - a state of being pinned down by a multitude of circumstances or forces. The person lying on the ground, defeated and bleeding, may allegorically represent a sense of hopelessness, entrapment by emotional or mental turmoil. Dark clouds hovering above the person signify despair and a grim predicament, but a hint of optimism endures; the distant golden sky indicates that improvement is possible.

I remember as kids, we used to retrieve discarded Christmas trees to craft makeshift swords for our games. The potency of our imagination lets us travel to the past and future, be whoever and wherever we wanted.

Through the realm of childhood intuition, the fir tree, often seen as a symbol of everlasting life across diverse cultures, undergoes a symbolic metamorphosis and resurrects into an icon of courage - a sword. This symbolic weapon is capable of overcoming space and time, yet remains fragile enough to snap at any impact. Where did that spirit go? This inherent strength should persist within us.

In its inverted position, the Ten of Swords suggests a different outlook. It implies that a potential disaster or significant challenge has been successfully averted, the worst is behind, healing has commenced, and the person in question, contrary to initial estimations, emerges fortified and more resilient in the face of adversity.





Ten of Swords, 2024
Sculpture: stoneware clay, ceramics glazes, 32x 14 cm

Swords, 2020 - 2024
Installation: carved and bent recovered fir trees, stoneware clay & porcelain, ceramics glazes, aluminum pipes, wood planks, various sizes

Light Swords, 2023 - 2024
Installation: carved and bent recovered fir trees, road marking paint and reflective glass, stoneware clay & porcelain, ceramics glazes, aluminum pipes, wood planks, various sizes

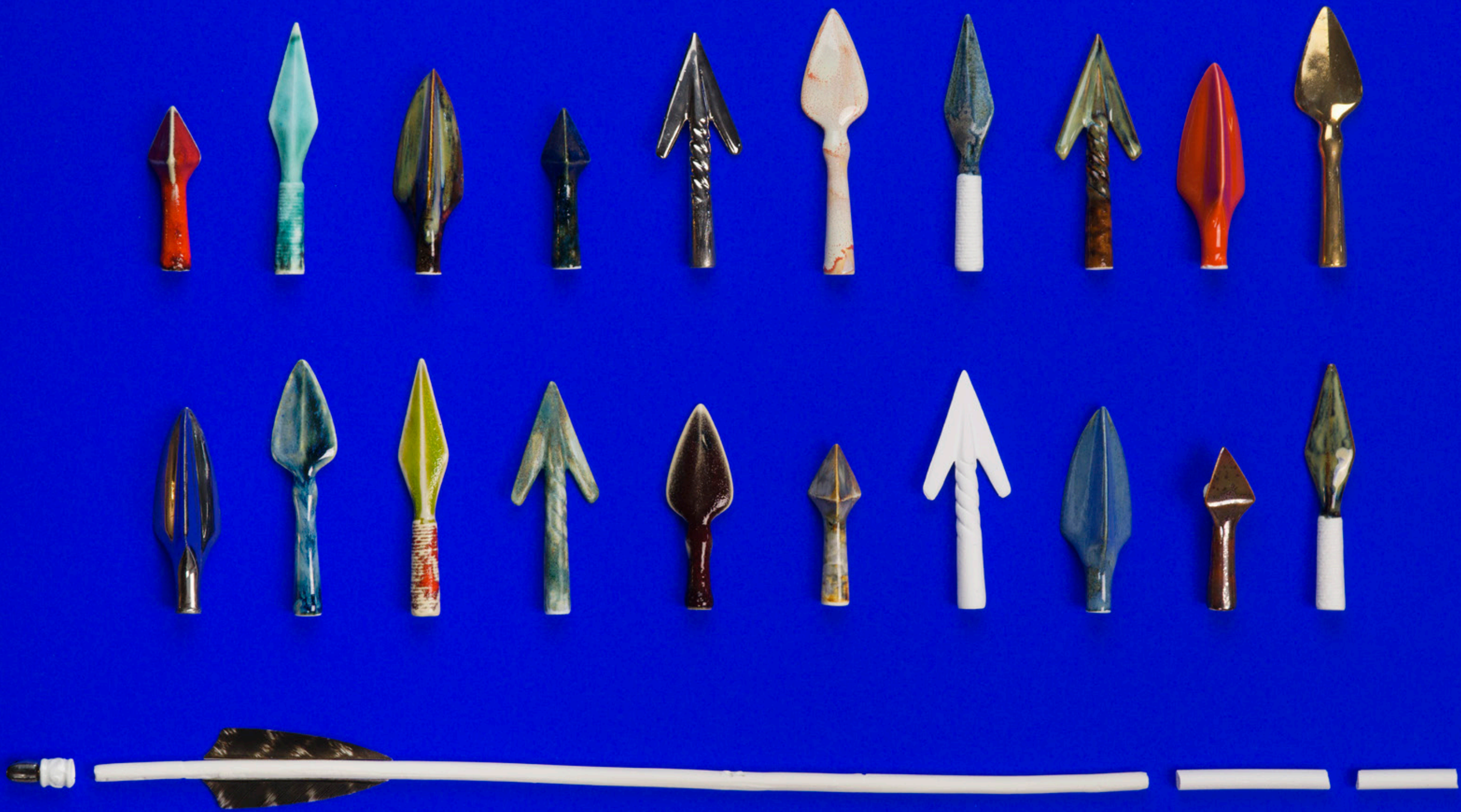
Safety Matches, 2024
Edition of 100: digital print mounted on found object providing from the Monopoly for Safety Matches cca. 1940-1950, 4.5 x 3.5 x 1.5 cm

Echoes, Spells, and Disenchantment, 2022
Sound piece, 14:30 min. & self-published artist book: edition of 30, 96 pages, 120g matte paper, color laser print, thread-sewn binding (visible), 14.1 x 10.6 cm

Song of the Fir Tree at the Cemetery & Song of the Fir Tree in the Yard, 1937

Found footage: singer Anuța Medrea from Galda de Jos, Alba, Transilvania, recorded by Constantin Brăiloiu, 1'36" & 2'06" min

Note: Every 10 minutes, a song would play



EIDOS (I)
archival digital print on
Hahnemühle FineArt Baryta paper, 40x60 cm, 2022
ed. 10 + 2 AP



EIDOS

audiovisual installation, 2022
porcelain, ceramics glazes, feathers,

Starting from the mechanism of thoughts, of ideas, I could observe a fragility that characterizes them. There is an omnipresent danger, either through forgetfulness, the influence of factors outside our awareness, personal insecurity, etc., which can alter or even destroy ideas, blocking their access to the target.

According to Plato's Theory of Forms, the physical world is not as real or true as that of the timeless, absolute, and unchangeable Forms or Ideas (from the interchangeable terms of *eidos* [εἶδος], "visible form", and *idea* [ιδέα]). These are the non-physical essences of all things, and what we know, the objects and matter of the earthly world are reduced to imitations, being only shadows of them.

We are often confronted in our everyday life with similar ideas (in the sense of mental concepts) which in the art field it raises one of the most complex problems. Uniqueness, one of the most valued characteristics of the art object or act is maybe the most difficult thing to achieve, if not impossible. Parallels (intended or unintended) between ideas always exist.

Extrapolating, we can consider that for each idea (thought) there is an ideal Form, an essence, characterizing it, and all similar thoughts. The uniqueness lies precisely in the quality of the "shadow", of imitation, of deviation from the ideal Form.

Eidos [εἶδος] proposes a physical representation of ideas (thoughts), of their mechanisms, of the intention and not of the outcome.

Stripped down to their universal characteristics: they are feather-light and move quickly; they have a sharpness and aim to hit a target; they consistency, a density, yet they can shatter easily.

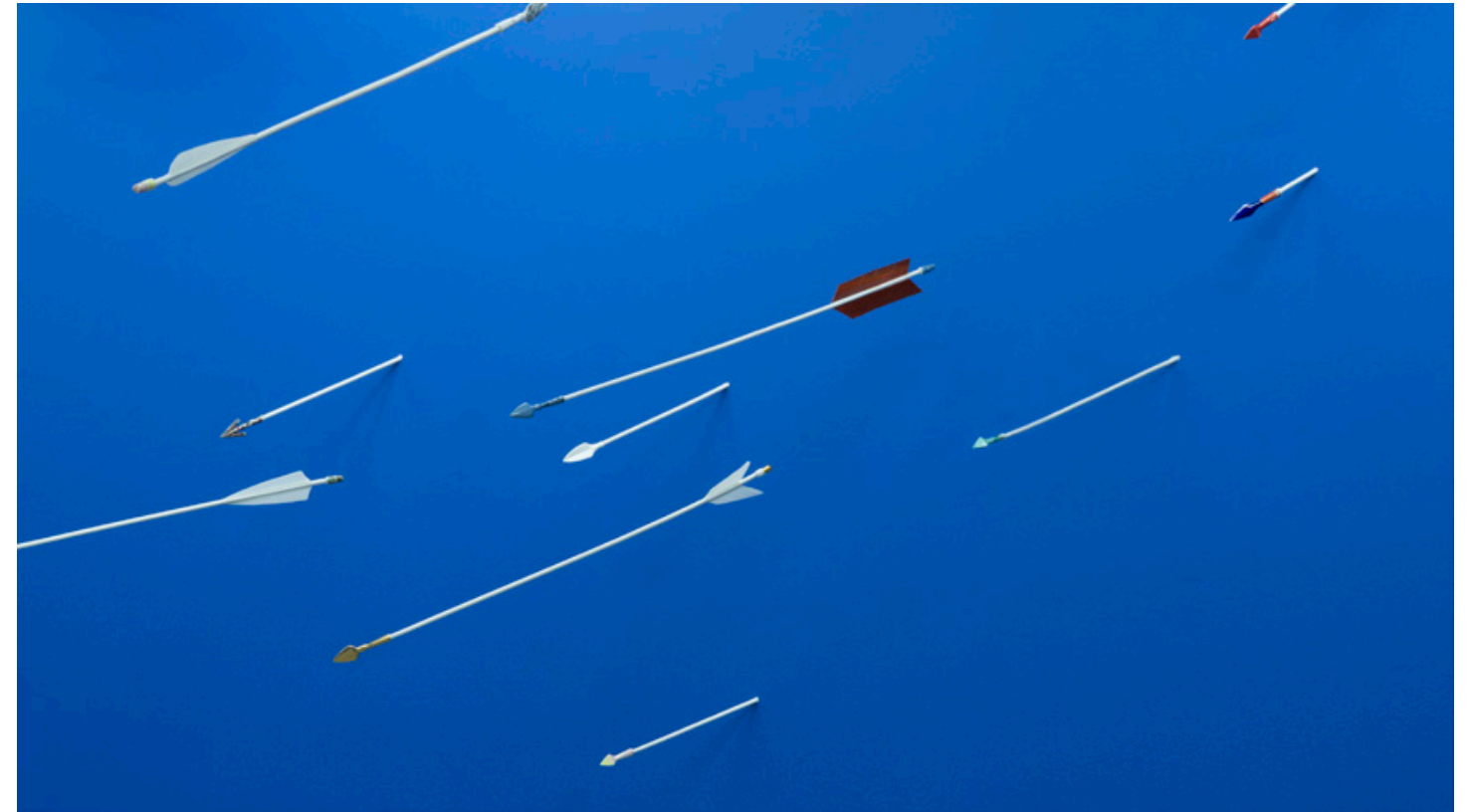
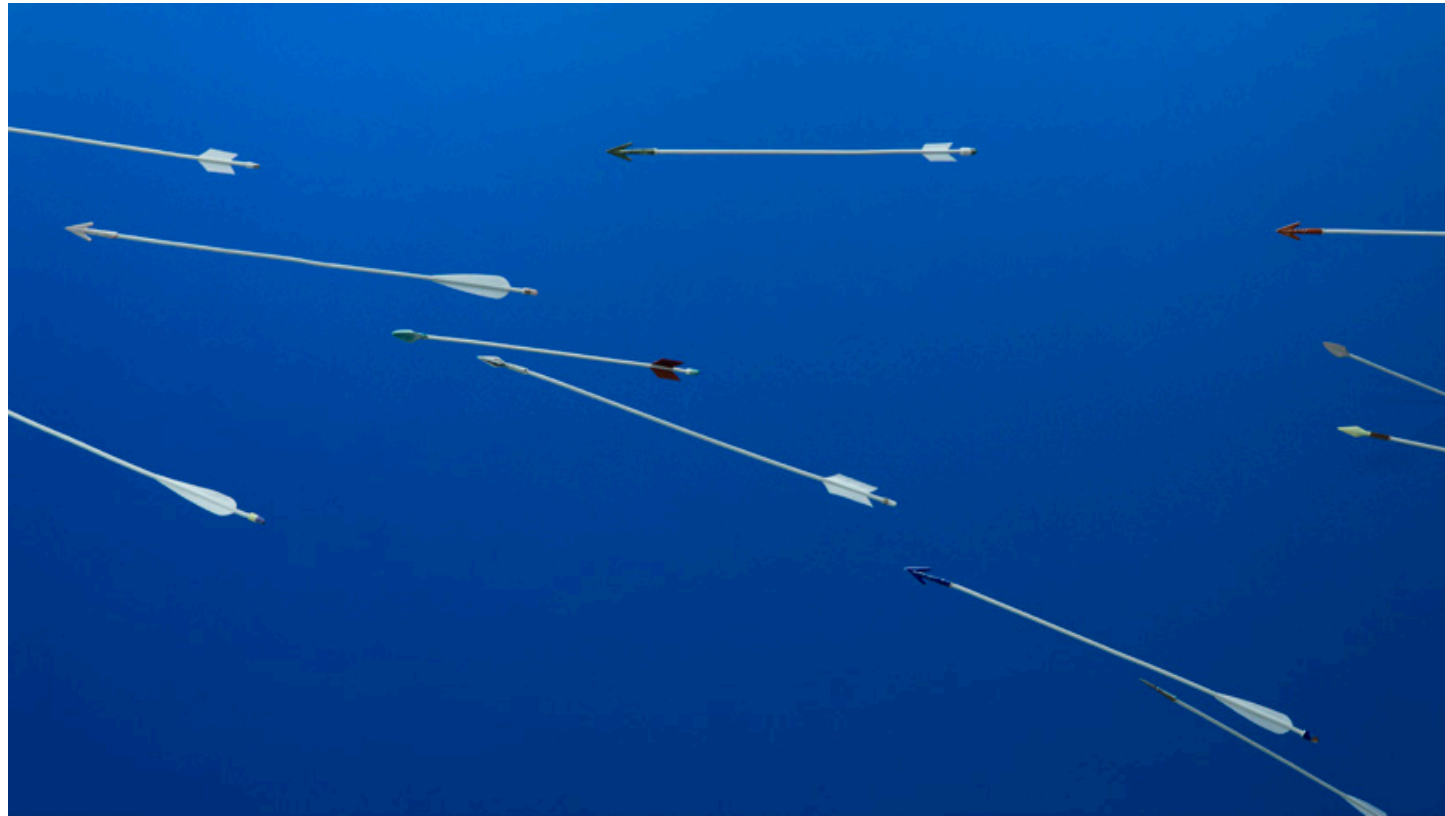
To be extracted from the world of ideal Forms, they must first find a physical object to host them, an essence of all, taking the shape of ceramic arrows.

This transition also takes over the exhibition space. Painted in a certain intense darker blue it references the TV and film post-production techniques of the blue/green screen used to cut out the subject from the background in order to replace it. It borrows the Chroma-key function to eliminate the space itself, bringing in that colorless, immaterial, timeless, and absolute world of Forms.





installation view
Hangar F, 2022 (RO)



installation view
Hangar F, 2022 (RO)

Echoes, Spells, and Disenchantment

sound piece, 14:30 min. & artist book, self-published, 2022
141x106 mm, 96 pages, 120g matte paper,
color laser print, thread-sewn binding (visible)
edition of 30

Memory is a subjective recollection of the past, each time used, information being modified. An echo is a distortion of a sound that travels and bounces off surfaces, but can it be seen as a blurry image of the past?
The two-part project, sound piece and publication, began by speculating on the linearity and circularity of time, how it affects places, and how memory works.

Small villages like Şona, from Braşov county, Romania, are places where time seems to flow more slowly. Villagers live their lives according to a solar rhythm, to the length of the day, to nature and its seasons. Their rare extraordinary happenings are remembered through stories passed on orally. By researching the local myths, legends, and conspiracy theories, the collection came out rather fragmentary, blurred by the locals' more present-day, recent history and media-affected interest.

To clarify the vague and overlapping view, I've used text-to-image Artificial Intelligence as a consulting of collective memory, trained on billions of images, successfully working as a measuring tool for the possibility or truthfulness of the fragments, but also recovering missing parts. The more probable the information, the better the results. Like in a game of hot and cold, I feed the AI with the fragments and images taken in Şona, going through art history as the scenes dictated, modifying the description after each result, and getting slowly to the bigger picture.

These filtered-out echoes are singing a legend beyond the known past, about destiny, the passage of time, the circularity of history, and human nature bringing me back to the intent of my research.

If the sound piece is a boat trip that ends where it starts and vice versa, hearing along distant bits and parts of more clear and more distorted information, the book focuses on these details, filtering, and recomposing them.



>> [Book Preview \[click here\]](#)

<< [Listen on SoundCloud \[click image\]](#)





30
DE ANI DE
Optimism

30 de ani de Optimism / 30 years of Optimism,
Single-channel video, 43.43 min, 2021

**30 de ani de Optimism /
30 years of Optimism**

In 1992 shortly after the fall of communism Michael Jackson was the first Western megastar to come for a concert in Bucharest. While until 1989 great mass events served only political purposes, suddenly thousands of youngsters made a pilgrimage from the North Station to the National Arena blocking tramways, buses, and streets, singing loudly, turning the whole city upside down.

Mihai Coman, Media Scientist and Professor at Bucharest University, describes this event as a ritual of collective purification, with almost religious meaning for the people in a country in an unclear, very insecure political and economic situation.

30 de ani de Optimism is a collaborative project between German artist Lisa Marie Schmitt and Romanian artist Alexandru Mihai Budes interweaving the socio-political phenomenon of the Jackson concert in 1992 with the story of Florian Istrate, former owner of a porcelain manufactory in Alba Iulia.

In the mid-'90s, Istrate was contacted by Dieter Wiesner, who later became Michael Jackson's manager, for a commission of over 100.000 figurines of the King of Pop decorated in gold and platinum.



After the first delivery of the first 1.000 pieces, contact was cut abruptly and Istrate remained with thousands of unfinished figurines. After closing his company and quitting his entire staff, the ceramic workshop was left almost untouched for about 30 years, inhabited only by figurines and artifacts of production. Why Wiesner suddenly ended their cooperation remains unclear to this day.

video excerpt: [link](#)

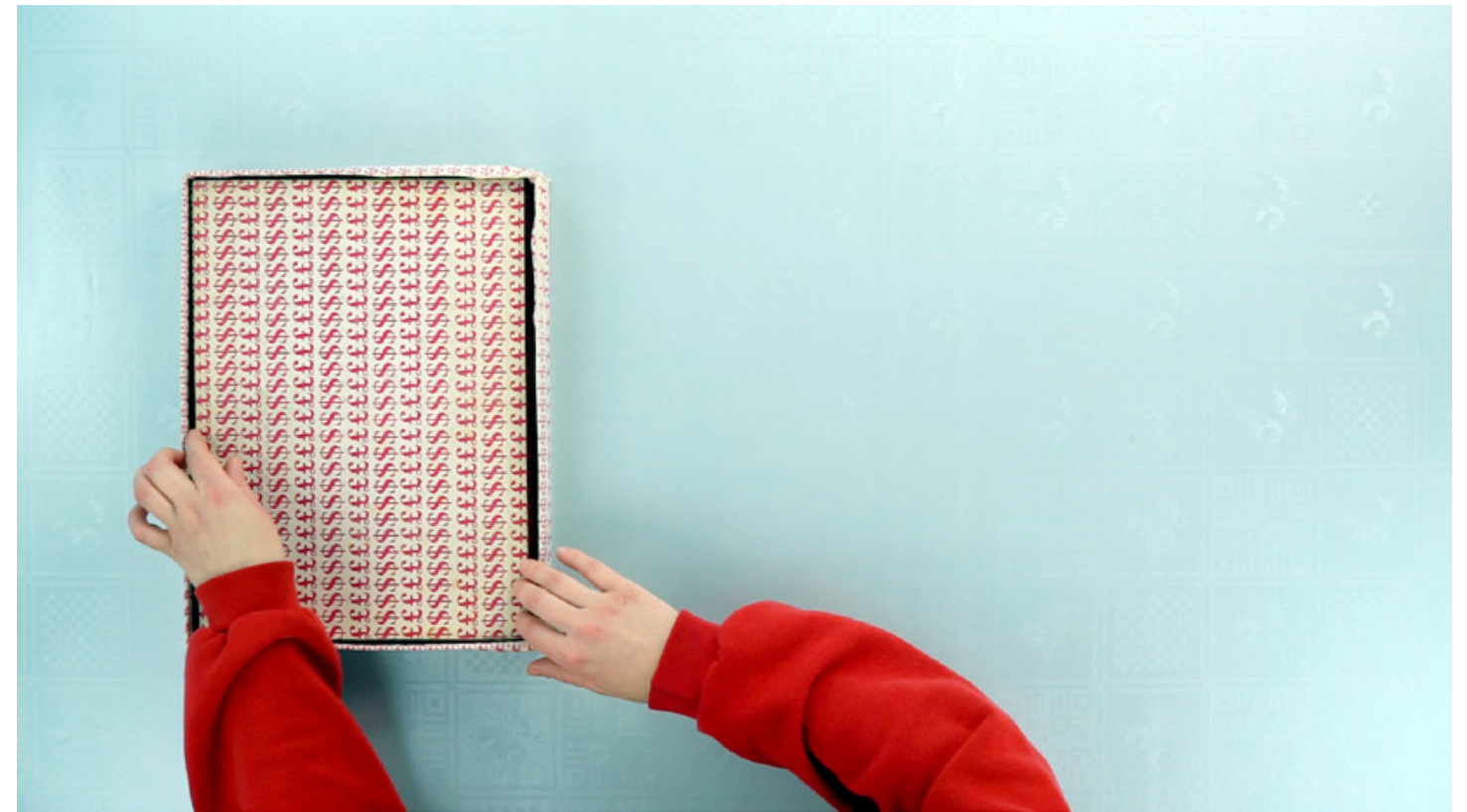
The title of the project, 30 de ani de Optimism, quotes the current Coca-Cola advertising campaign in Romania referring to the fall of communism as well as the import of Coca-Cola products. Likewise, Jackson serves as a symbolic figure here, a Western product with the bright aura of a Saint seemingly to finally bring the long-desired freedom.

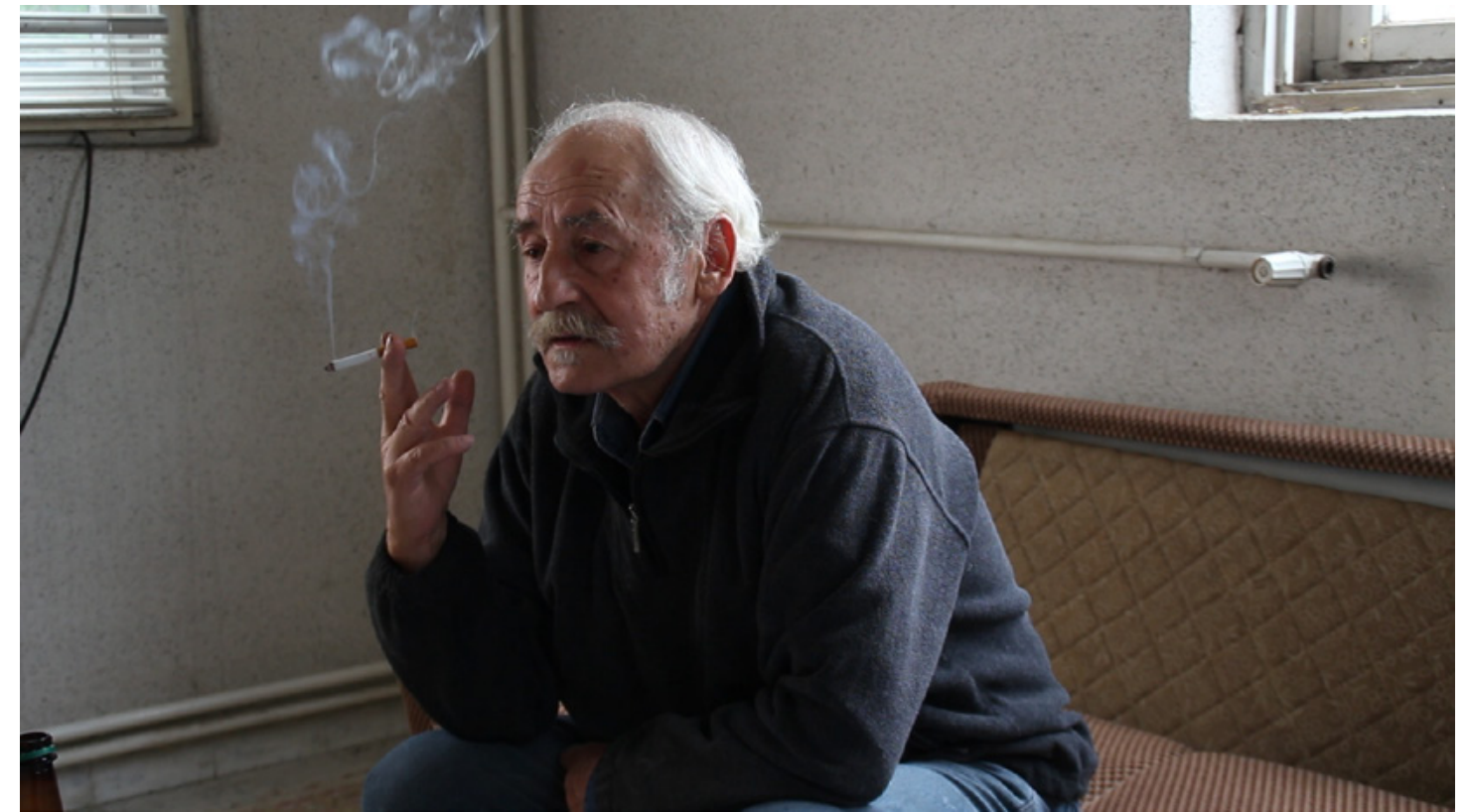
This project was funded by the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe.

still frame **30 de ani de Optimism**



still frames *30 de ani de Optimism*





still frames *30 de ani de Optimism*



So each piece was perfect,





30 de ani de Optimism
Exhibition at ROAM Projects, Berlin, 2023



installation views
ROAM Projects, Berlin, 2023



30 Years of Optimism (Figurine 1-5),
fine art prints on Hahnemühle Baryta Paper,
60x40 cm, framed, 2023



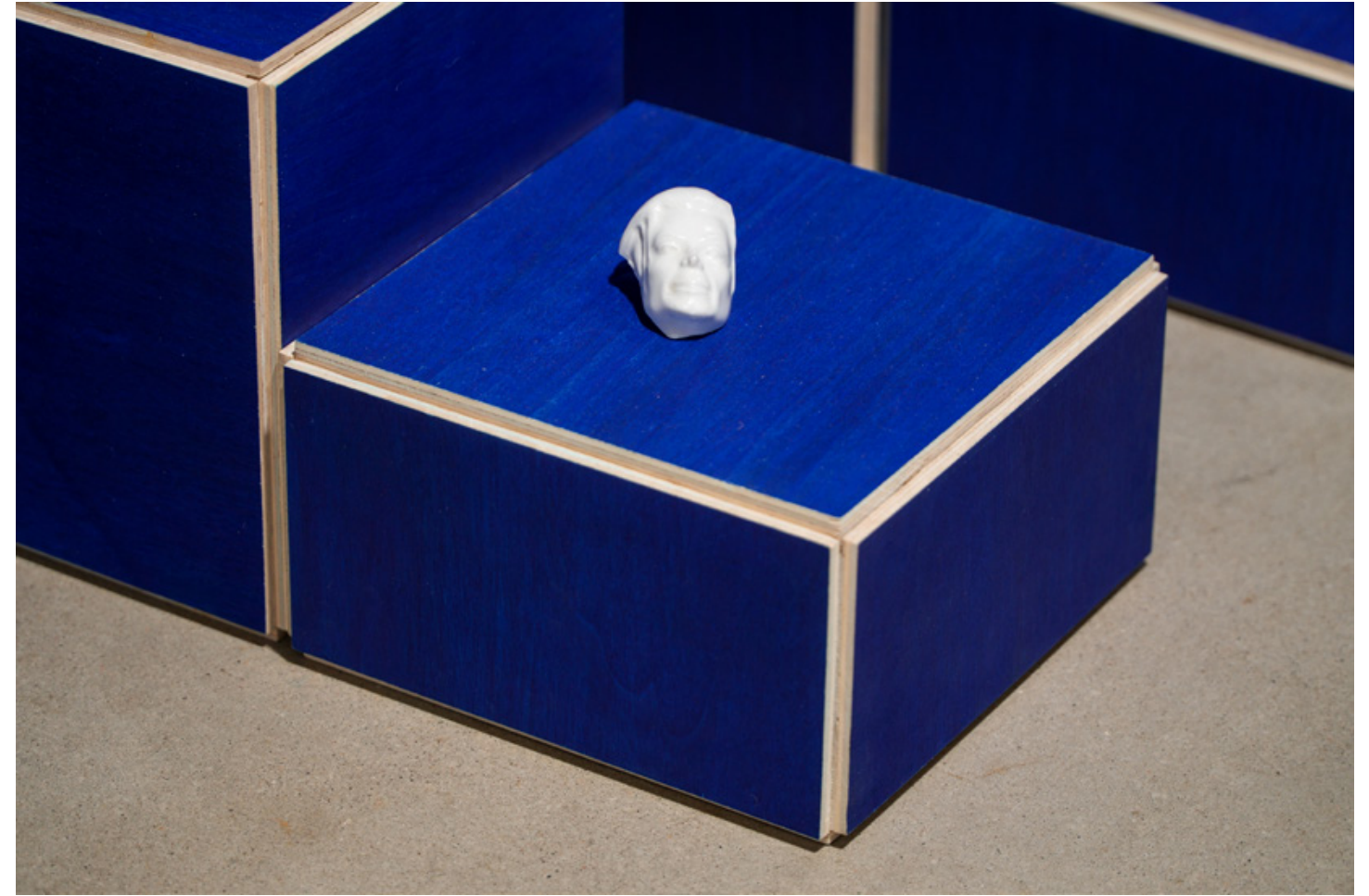
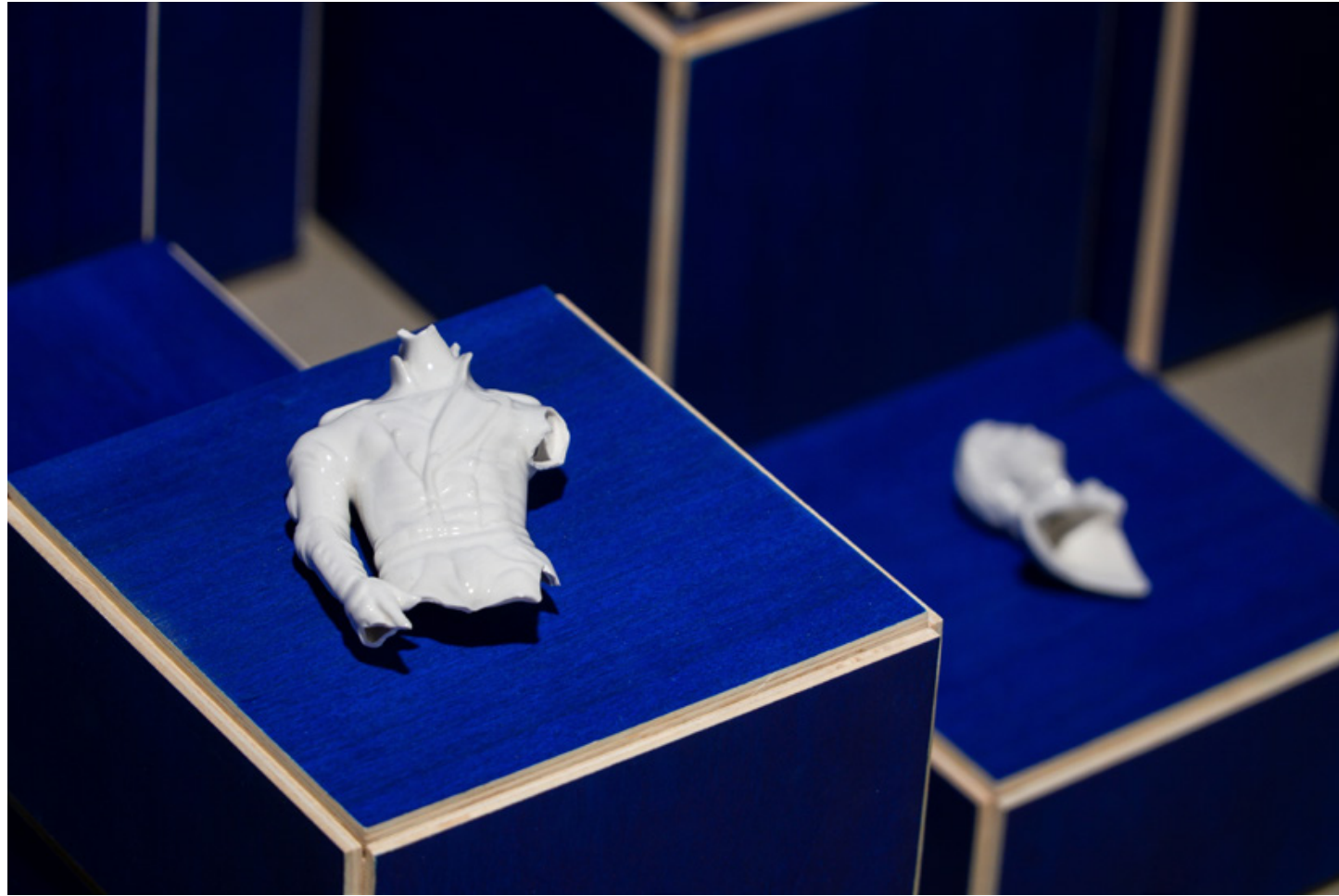
Edition **30 Years of Optimism (Fragments)**
porcelain fragments, plywood pedestal/crate,
stain color, 2023

&

Michael Jackson figurine Nr. 1001 of 1000
found object from ca. 1996, glazed for the
project in 2021 by Florian Istrate







Edition **30 Years of Optimism (Fragments)**
porcelain fragments, plywood pedestal/crate,
stain color, 2023

30 Years of Optimism (Fragments)

Edition
porcelain fragments, plywood pedestal/crate,
stain color, 2023

In 2021, when we first visited the manufactory of Florian Istrate in Alba Iulia, Transylvania, we were stunned by the thousands of leftover figurines and shards in the shape of Michael Jackson. All these are artifacts of a production line that was supposed to be the deal of his life in the mid-90s.

Tracing back the 1,000 finished figurines, glazed in real gold and platinum, launched almost 30 years ago as the Carlitta Collection, we found them still being traded as rare collector's items on certain e-commerce platforms by auction houses or private sales for a high price tag into the thousands.

As 30 Years of Optimism talks about an exemplary case of exploitation of Eastern European countries by the West, it is our concern to help Istrate compensate for his loss. Therefore, as part of the exhibition at Roam Projects, we launched an Edition of porcelain fragments originally produced in Transylvania around 1996. The proceeds were intended for Florian Istrate.

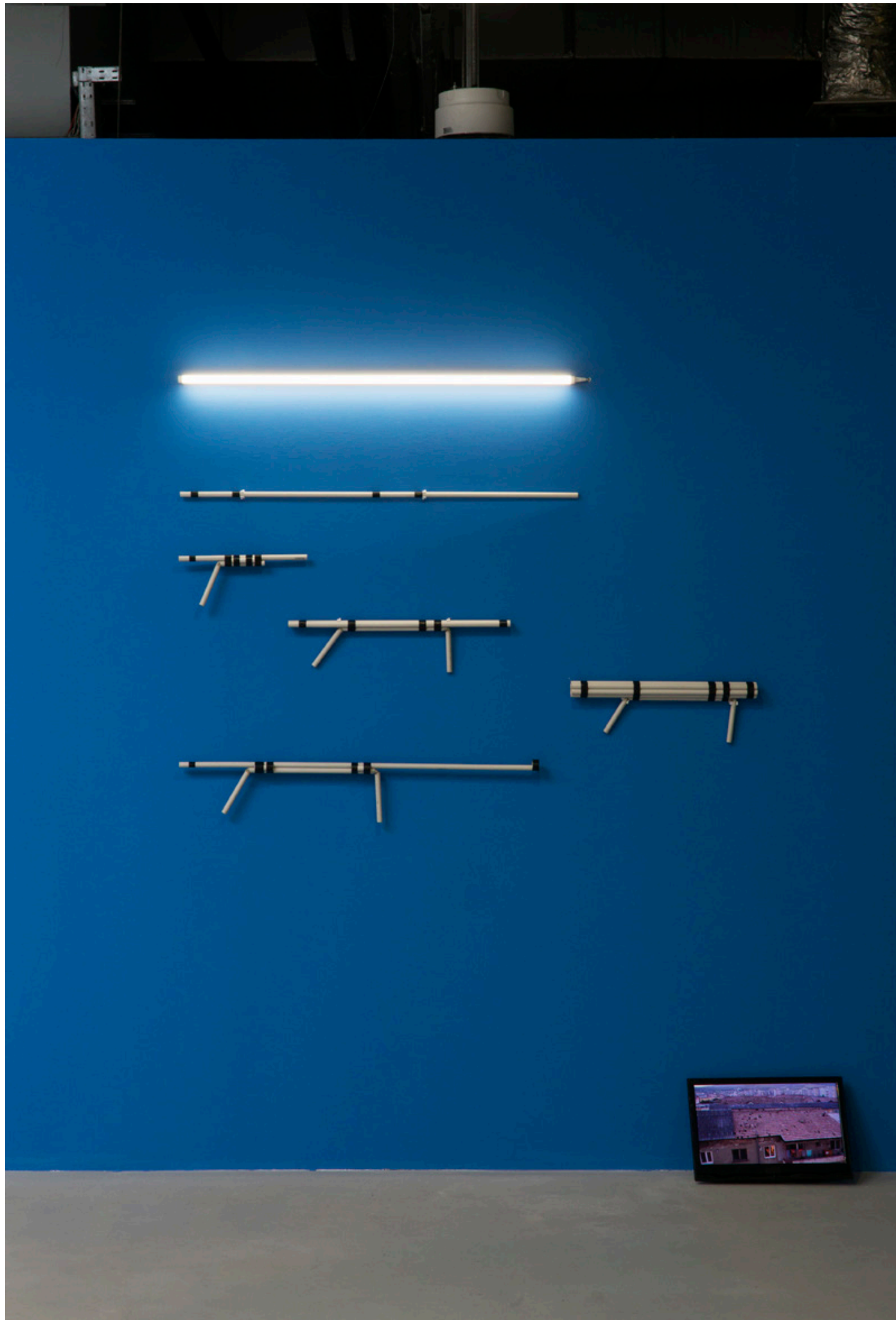
We started with the first 50 pieces in three different sizes. We will extend this edition up to 1,000 pieces, acting as a counterpart to the 1,000 golden figurines he was never paid for. Each fragment comes with its handcrafted plywood pedestal, also acting as a transport crate.

The blue color comes with a conceptual function referencing the television and movie-making techniques of chroma-key blue (or green), where the background can be eliminated. The pedestals, or heights, become non-existent, and as boxes, it can make the megastar disappear.

When purchasing the edition, you receive a fragment of a story, while the idol remains broken and hollow.

The edition includes a photo of the golden Michael Jackson Nr. 1001 (of 1000, created in 1996, glazed in 2021 for our project), a QR-Code with a link to the film, and a Certificate of authenticity.





Tuberman (series)

installation, 2016-2021

video loop, paper cones, PVC tubes, insulating tape, polystyrene, acrylic paint,

The series quotes the tube gun and paper cones battle game that was a familiar recreational activity for Romanian children until the early 2000s.

It investigates how an aggressive act can become relaxing by shooting loosely, abandoning a certain target, and launching projectiles through figments of imagination.

In the present work, I reiterate the memory of shooting paper cones toward the sunset. Hours could pass while a meditative state was unconsciously achieved.

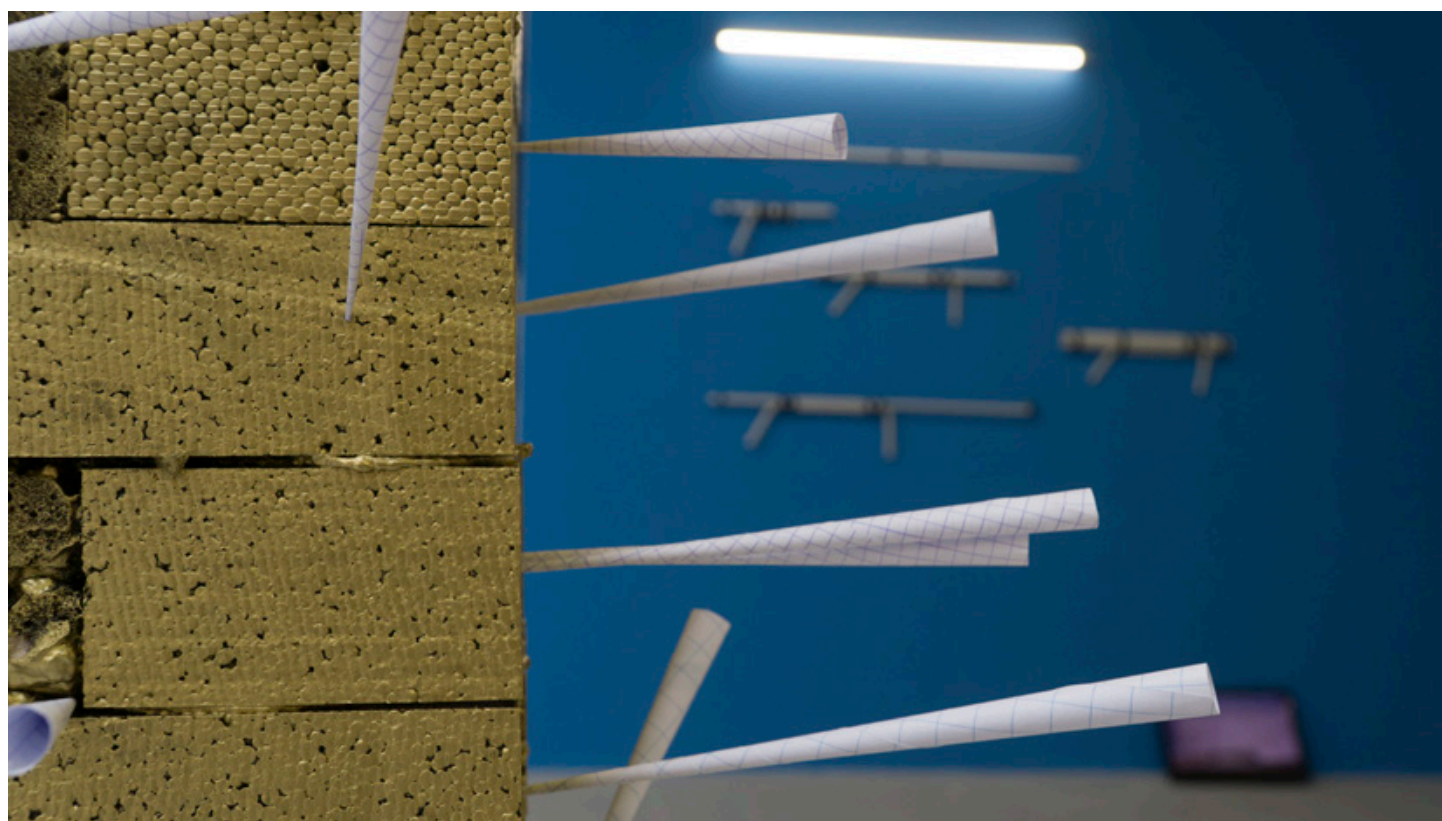
Three columns stand as portals to a context of time and space where the battle games took place: ruins, and building sites. They work as totems that glimpse at the power of the imagination of children, bending reality and changing it similar to augmented reality principles. They seem to be made from bricks yet they get penetrated and damaged by paper cones. Similar to the physics of electroplating where metal particles are transferred from one rod to another, so do the golden, silver, and copper columns passing meaning, and ideas between them, using the air and space that surrounds them.

installation view ***Tuberman***

Muzeul de Artă Contemporană București, 2021 (RO)



installation view **Tuberman**
Muzeul de Artă Contemporană București, 2021 (RO)



details installation view **Tuberman**
Muzeul de Artă Contemporană București, 2021 (RO)

still frames from video loop **Tuberman**

P.A.K. - P.A.K. (series)

2017-present

Moving your residence brings to your attention new aspects of local reality. In 2017 when I moved to Berlin, I started spotting large amounts of bullet shells on the pavement, stuck between the cobblestones, randomly around the whole city. It soon evolved into an act of collecting the cartridges and continuing to this day.

The collection is counted into the hundreds. All are of the very common 9mm diameter round that most hand pistols use, including the ones the Police use. They all measure 22mm in height, making them a "P.A." type...

9mm P.A. Knall (Blank)



GREEN. Standard "Blank" cartridges.



YELLOW. "Flash Defense" blank cartridges producing a longer flame at the end of the barrel.

9mm P.A. CS



YELLOW. "CS" cartridges are loaded with 80mg of tear gas.

9mm P.A. CN



BLUE. "CN" cartridges are loaded with 160mg of tear gas.



PURPLE. "Supra CN" cartridges are loaded with 220mg of tear gas.

9mm P.A. PV



BROWN. "Pepper" cartridges are loaded with 20mg of pepper spray.



RED. "Pepper flash" cartridges are loaded with 30mg of pepper spray.



RED. "Extra strong" cartridges are loaded with 45mg of pepper spray.

9mm P.A. Tehkrim



RED. cartridges are loaded with non-lethal rubber bullets (0.68g).

9mm P.A. PP9RP

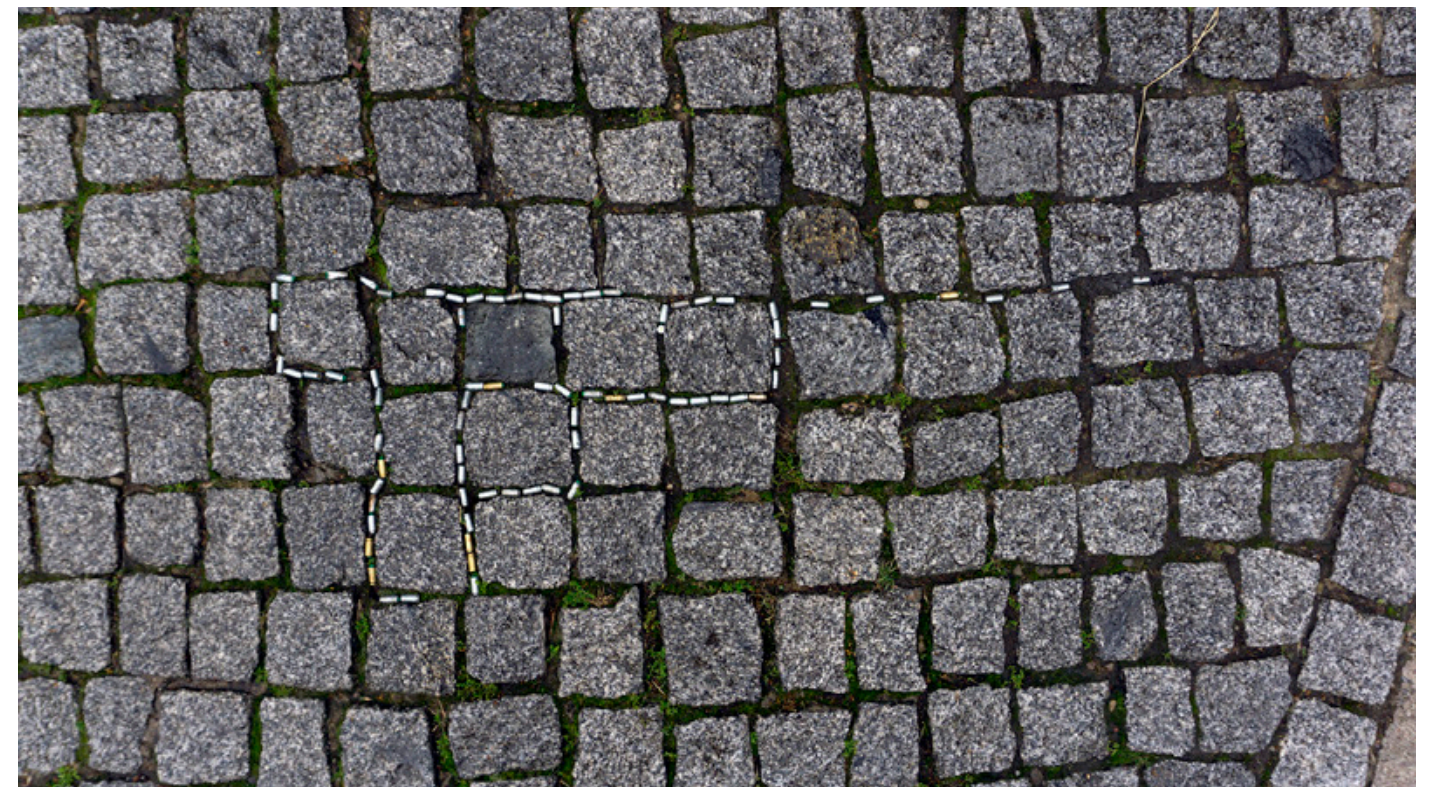


BLACK. cartridges are loaded with rubber bullets (standard, sport or magnum) similar to Tehkrims.

To this day, I have found only green shells.
We are safe ...



SAFE
archival digital print on Hahnemühle FineArt
Baryta paper, 28x50 cm, 2021



SAFE
archival digital print on Hahnemühle FineArt
Baryta paper, 28x50 cm, 2021



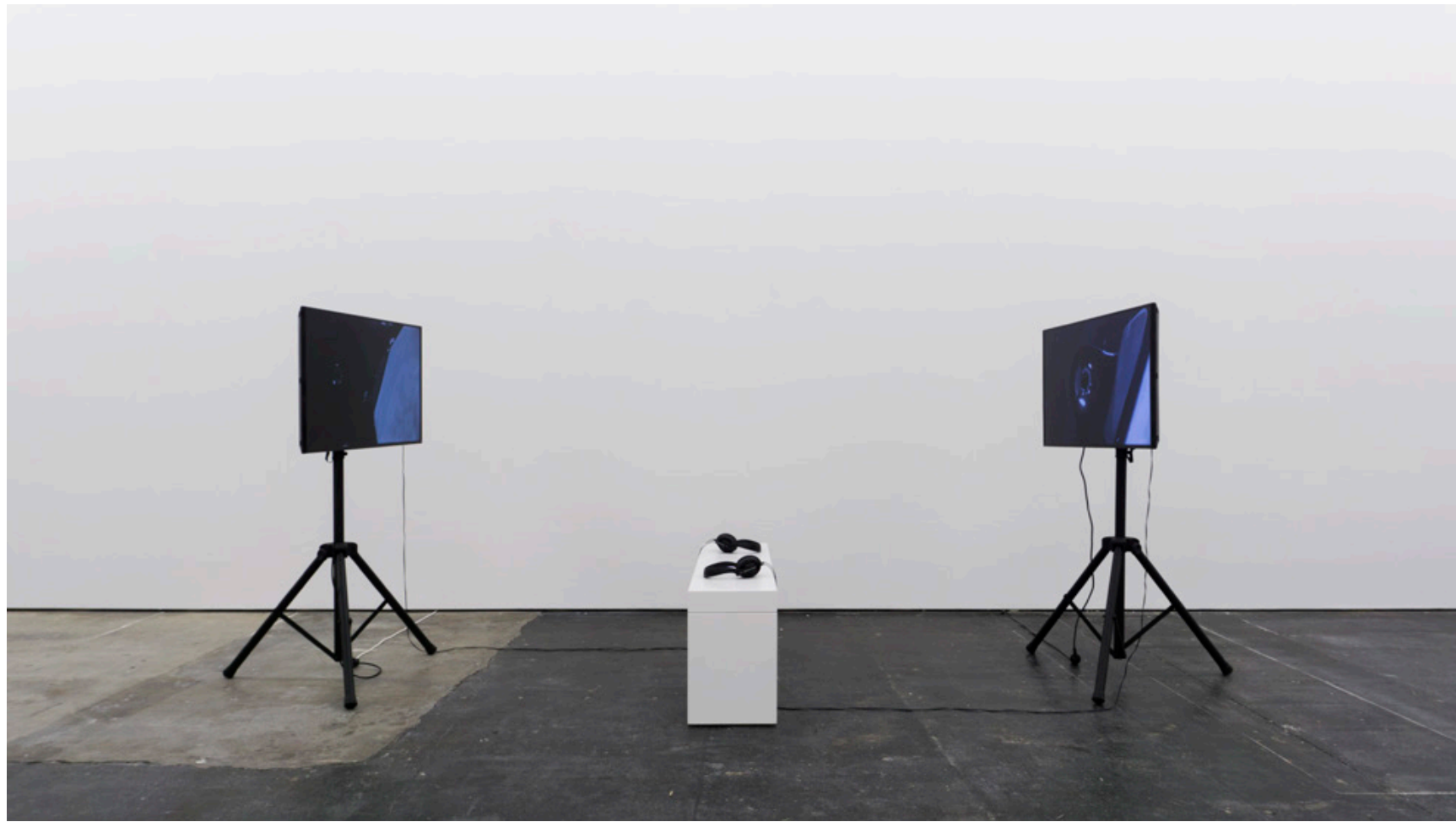
Study for new local aesthetics in architecture (Alba Iulia)
13 modules, stoneware clay, ceramics glazes, 2020-present

As my visits to my hometown become rare, the changes in architecture and the face of the town become more and more present for me.

In the old communist buildings, the concrete blocks were not made to last, nor were they built to have a high performance. In a land with no rules to govern architectural aesthetics, people decided to improve or repair their homes after their ideas and possibilities. Some would put together their monetary forces to do so and some would do it alone, while others just couldn't afford it.

The aspect of these buildings change, they become eclectic with a diverse range of repairs and improvements preferred by each individual. Windows of every type and color, some bricked in, balconies with different upgrades, different wall finishes and thickness of insulation, added attics on the rooftops, preferred colors, and kept elements from communism all combine in a complex aesthetic. By extracting examples and recreating them in modules, I play and study these new local aesthetics.

As the evolution of the city's appearance is an ongoing process, so will this work, by continuing to add modules of new findings each year.



Black hole

2-channel video, loop, sound, 2020

“A black hole is an astronomical object with a gravitational pull so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape it. A black hole’s “surface,” called its event horizon, defines the boundary where the velocity needed to escape exceeds the speed of light, which is the speed limit of the cosmos. Matter and radiation fall in, but they can’t get out.” - Wald, Robert M. (General Relativity, 1984)

A dark liquid-like matter swirls toward a *black hole* which absorbs everything in its proximity. Yet a sound manages to escape: a squeak.



installation view (up)
still frame (left)



Like a permanent roar



installation view ***Speed of Sound***
3-channel video, sound, flint stones 2019-2021
10:57 mins.

Speed of Sound

As a child, I was often taken on holidays by my nanny to the place she was born, her parent's house, deep into the mountains and forests, secluded from the rest of the world. The only people around were her, her brother, and myself. They called this place The Glade.

My time there was marked by a permanent wait to return home. A wish that remained always a mystery of when it is going to happen, as there was never a fixed date of when the departure car would fetch us. Also, the track of time was easy to lose as no gadgets, no electricity or no contact with our urban daily order was there to keep grasp.

During this permanent wait, I developed different activities in order to predict my leave. From different spots I would listen to the echoes of the valley and forest, interpreting the strange howls if they will morph into an oncoming car.

The path between the listening spots became circular, a loop, and everything else was happening along the way. On this daily path, a game was born, where I would not only listen to the incoming sounds but also send signals by hitting the metal guardrail from the side of the road.

I listened to this sound travel down the serpentine road. Sometimes I would try to catch it down the valley, by running the shortest way through the forest.

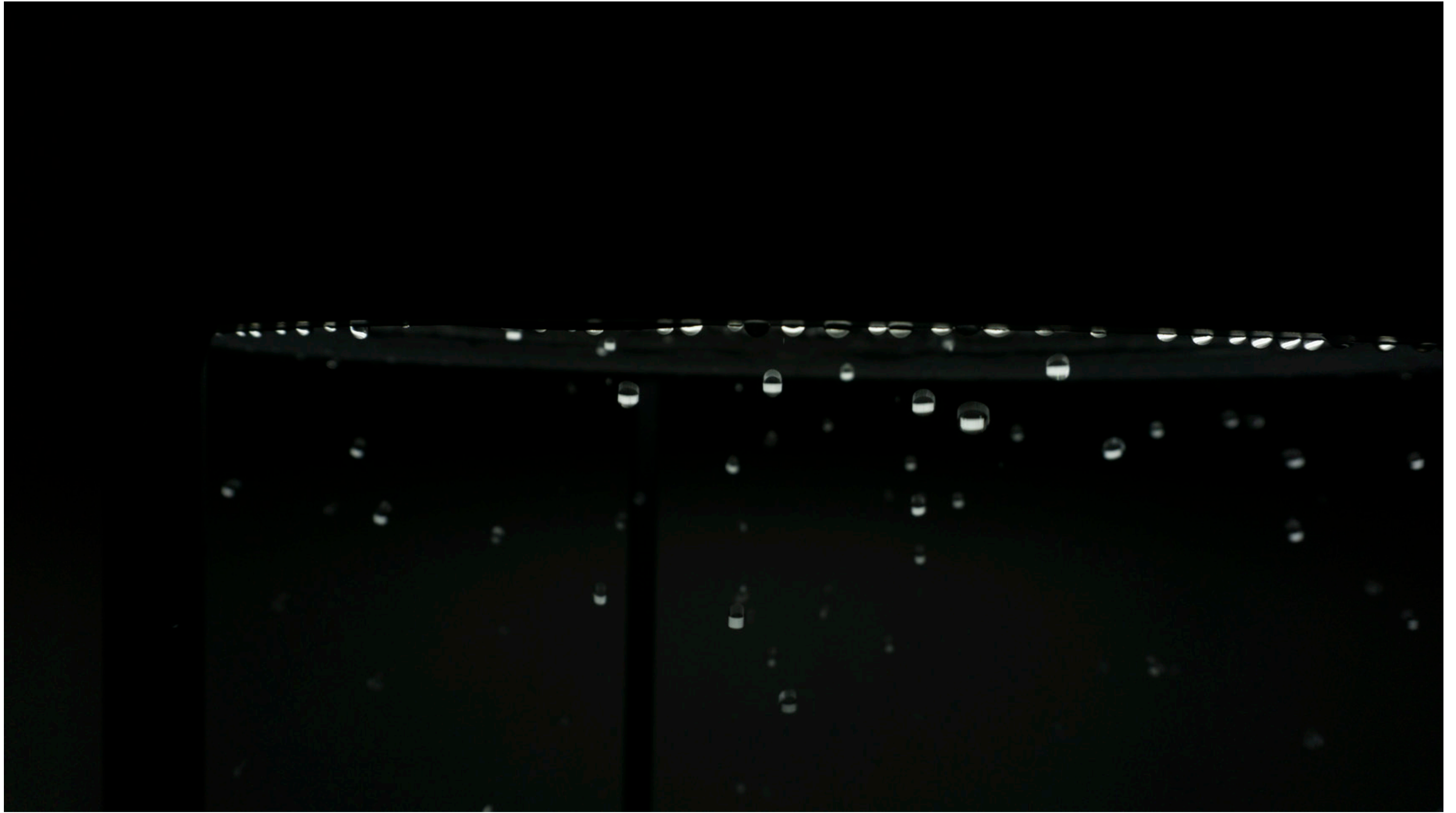
The memory of this place has a multi-layered characteristic, where thoughts and events interlay and defy the linear behavior of time. The way and chase become the omniscient element, accompanying all memories. The few distinct locations host layers of memories marked by a duality of life and death.

I realize that the memory of this space and happenings reaches a metaphysical dimension. The events and forces at stake hidden and banal then, become missed and understood now.



still frame (up)
detail flint stones (right)





detail *Pluie*
installation, 2019

Pluie

installation, 2019

crylic resin, metal, motors, microcontroller, tubing, LEDs, water
200x 50Ø cm

Daydreaming (or mind wandering, fantasy, spontaneous thoughts) is the stream of consciousness that detaches from current external tasks when attention drifts to a more personal and internal direction. A phenomenon common in people's daily life that meets the criteria for mild dissociation.

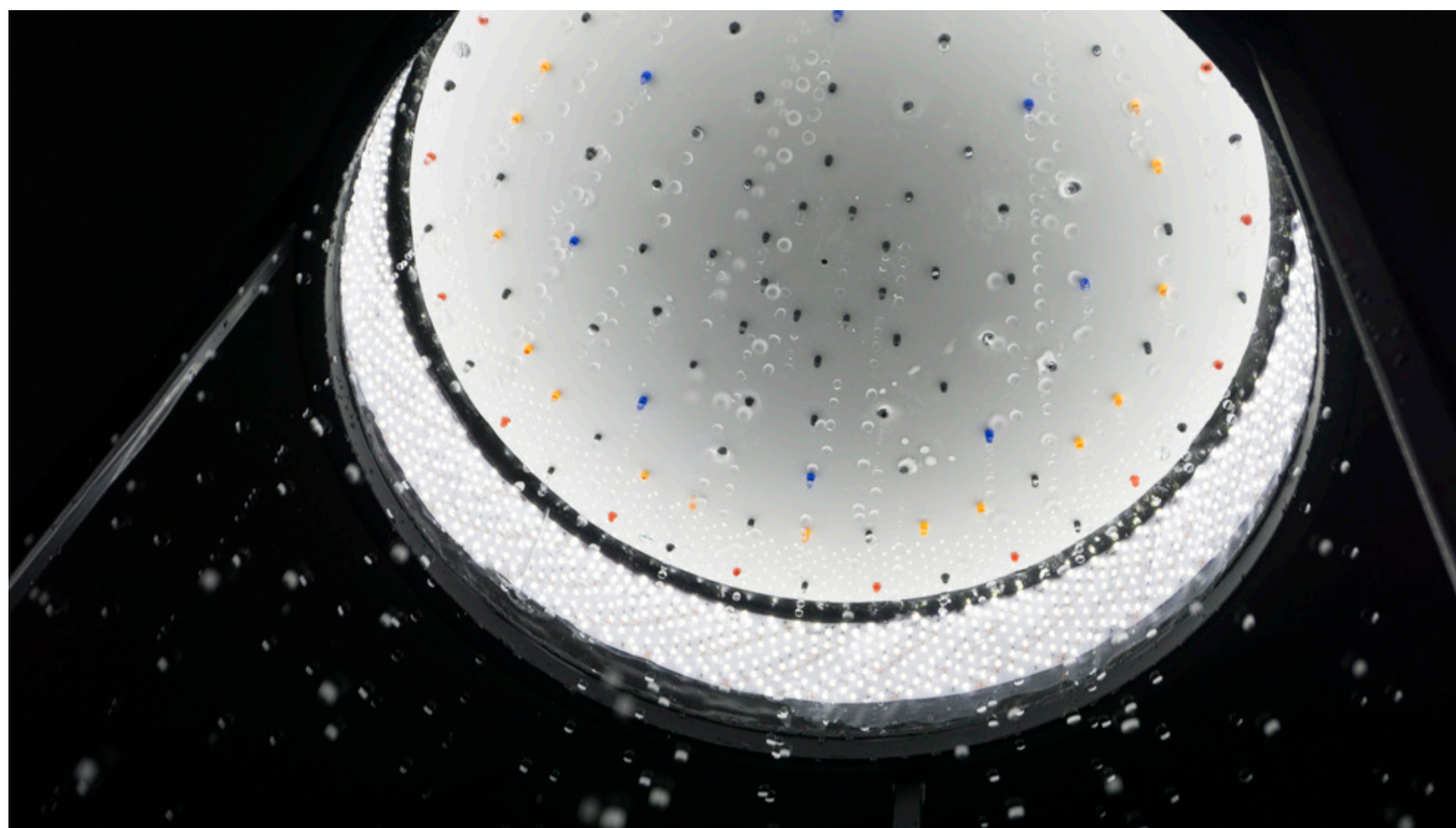
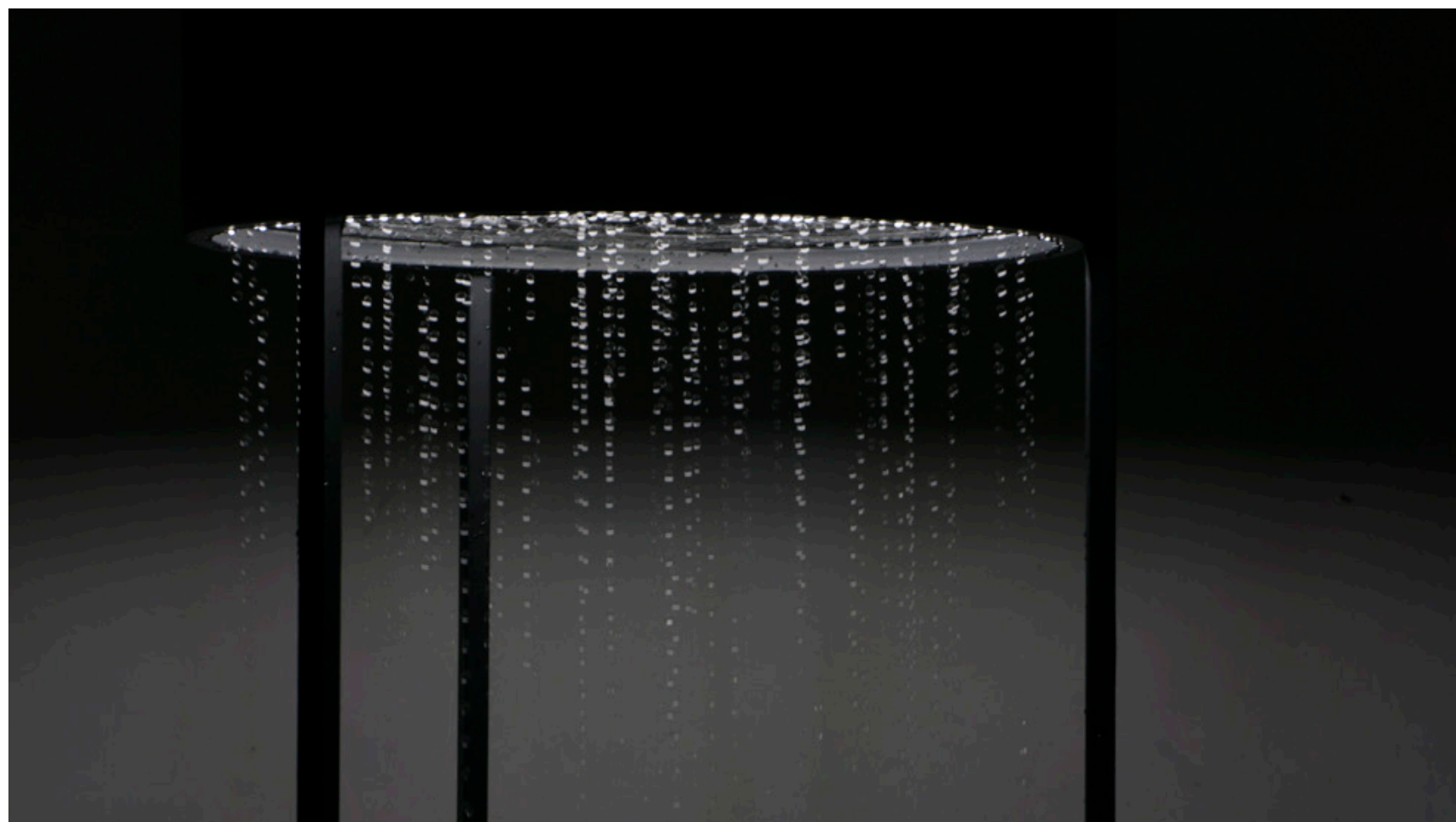
In this state of mind control is lost over the subject or course of thoughts, how far or for how long it goes. Freudian psychology interpreted it as a liminal state between waking (with the ability to think rationally and logically) and sleeping. I consider this phenomenon to be one of the sources or tools I use in my decision-making – deep thinking. Benjamin W. Mooneyham and Jonathan W. Schooler summarized five potential functions daydreaming serves: future thinking, creative thinking, attentional cycling, dishabituation, and relief from boredom.

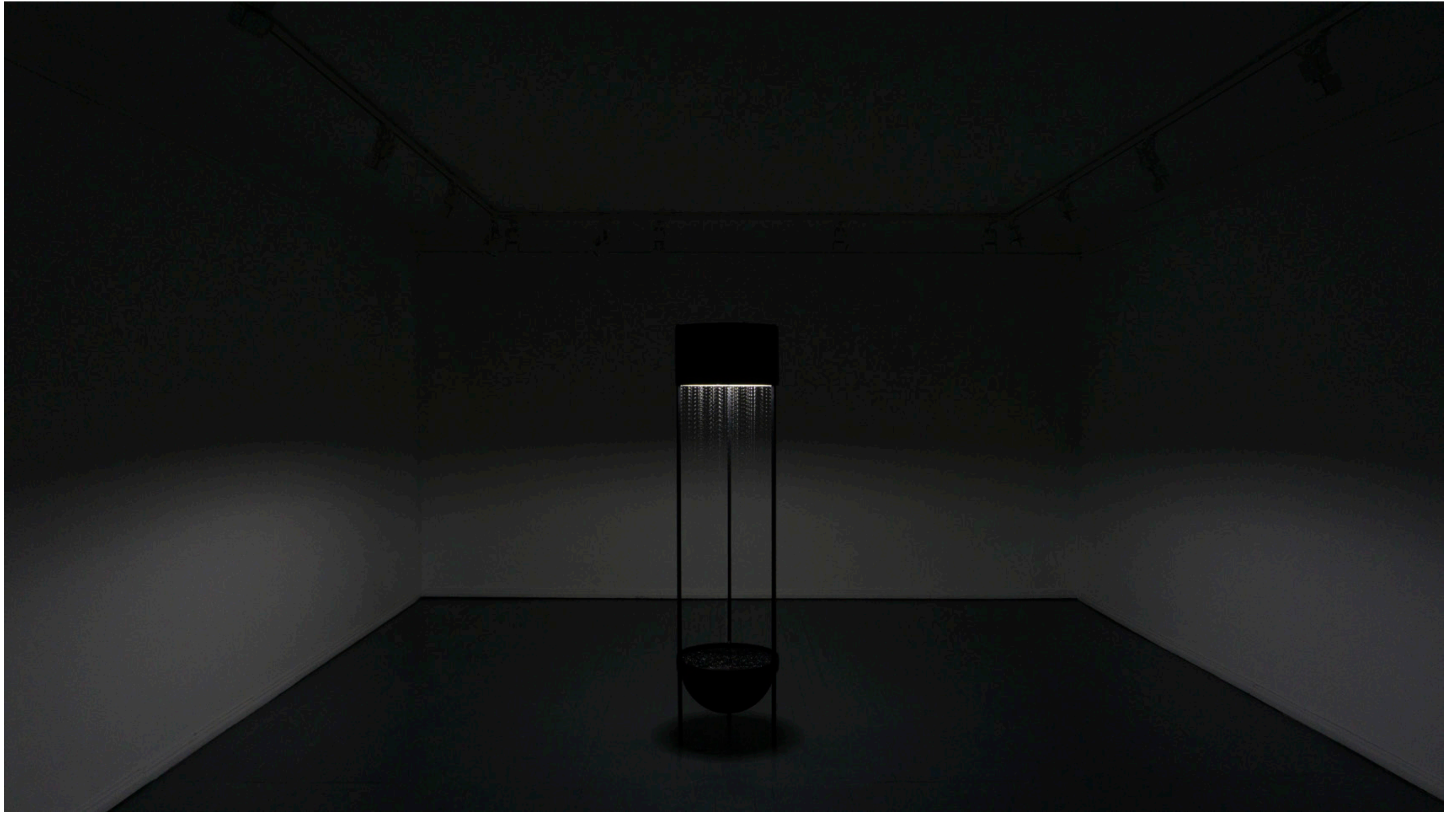
Rain produces a sound akin to white noise, decreasing our needs for sensory input, calming us down, and sometimes inducing the above-mentioned daydreaming. Eye focus is lost and in that blurred vision, drops disappear, time seems to lose its grasp, and thoughts overlap, weaving and unraveling to an infinite extent.

In the project "Pluie" I call upon this perceptual decoupling and try to trigger the mind wandering of the viewer by creating a rain and stroboscope light installation, placed in a dark room. The work invokes the calming effect the sound of rain has and uses pulsating light to achieve the mesmerizing effects of levitation, slow motion falling, and reverse going of water drops.

A looping cycle of the slowly decreasing and increasing frequency of pulsating light plays with the limits of the human eye and its capabilities and thus obtaining these effects. The cycle starts with a light sequence of on/off at a speed that surpasses our perception, seeming normal, and continuous. The slight downgrade in speed every 3 seconds isn't noticeable by most and this trains your mind and eyes to think nothing is changing, but the rain drops. The cycle goes for 15 minutes downwards to stroboscope-like frequencies and then turns upwards for 15 minutes, taking in and bringing back the viewer from its effects.

In the whole rain, a few drops will be affected at a time and just for a few seconds until the pulsating light rhythm changes. Yet on the new rhythm, other drops will react. Each person will notice this at slightly different times, as our eyes' frequency capabilities differ greatly. The work manages to induce loss of time and state of mind where we are in a deep connection with our subconscious.





video documentation:
<https://vimeo.com/alexmbudes/pluie>

installation view *Pluie*
Institut Culturel Roumain, Paris, 2019 (FR)



Arrows

performance, Dendermonde, Belgium 2018
51.00 min.

Loosely based on a Romanian folktale an action is performed in order to answer unsolvable questions.

In the story, the young prince asks for the change of the death penalty for his blameful brothers. Instead, the two would have to shoot an arrow above their heads to receive universal judgment. The hero voluntarily submits along with his brothers. A sudden out-of-character act of bravado, or internal conflicts hidden from us push him towards the only moment and way to solve them?

In my performance, I shoot arrows above my head with a rope tied to them, which is describing an answer in their flight, landing, and final drawn layout. A measuring system of moral dilemmas is created. The positive becomes measurable, while the negative can be fatal.





still frame from video documentation
excerpt: <https://vimeo.com/alexmbudes/arrows>



Road
short film, Romania 2017
18:01 min.

still frame

video trailer: [link](#)

video: [link](#)

password: courage





Road

“What drives us? What do we look forward to and why?”

Somewhere in the multitude of equations, there is always a positive human emotion. The Law of Polarity says that good implies the existence of evil, so along with these emotions, there is also the possibility of their downfall. And as we raise and raise them, don't we expose them more and more?

“Road” is an allegorical representation of a path familiar to all, but denying universality. It's a personal view, one option, one path of a multitude that is waiting ahead on the Great Road. In the film, a wanderer travels the road of human emotion, its evolution, its downfall, and beyond, in a world filled with meaning and symbols.



installation view
film **Road** and earthenware clay sculpture



Golem 3 (left)
C-type print, 2014
45 x 30 cm

Golem 4
C-type print, 2014
30 x 45 cm

Golem
2014-2016

In religious literature and legends, the creation of a Golem appears as a very laborious process. Perfection is needed linking the act to a derived from or imitating the creation of human beings by God.

Any mistake fails the creation ... and likewise, the literature on this topic has a dramatic finale, with the creations becoming impure, suffering, murdering, and dying.

The Golem works as a metaphor for our acts, the never-ending trial of overcoming our own limits towards perfection: a mirror.

The purest water and earth (or intentions) transform from matter into being - a crystallization

into perfection. But as any of our acts, somewhere, for someone or something, from a different perspective, our positive intention can be seen oppositely.

So is the Golem: a coin that has two sides, where the good and the bad, the positive and the negative get to be relative.

The main element of the religious/ esoteric recipes of Golem creation is the previsualization in the creator's mind of the final alive state of the Golem which is transferred through the process into dead matter. In the same manner, I'm creating a 3D virtual model, then printing and composing it into sculpture form, a comparable process to the contemporary attempts at creating artificial intelligence.



Golem
C-type print, paper cut-outs,
paper sculpture, 2016



Golem
C-type print, 2016
42 x 27.8 cm

detail **Golem**
paper sculpture, 2015-2016
31 x 56 x 230 cm

