

EXHIBITIONS

Maria Loboda "Havoc in the Heavenly Kingdom" at Kunsthalle Basel

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"I am aware that I am speaking about battles that were fought, lost, and won, and empires that collapsed a long time ago, but I still wonder if these historical examples provide an eternal warning in their recurrence."

—Maria Loboda

Pay attention to her titles. There is subterfuge in Maria Loboda's use of language and in her deployment of stories at once obscure, magical, or strange in the making of her art. Their historical exactitude is largely irrelevant; what matters is that they circulate and in so doing tell us something about our desires, fears, pasts, and potential futures. As a student, the artist's first public presentation was an assembly of rather ordinary items, including white wood, verbena, fine steel, goatskin, and green ribbons. But its title, *The Evocation of Lucifuge Rofocale* (2004), meant that visitors who read it inadvertently found themselves calling forth the dark lord in a room full of all the items from the classic demonological recipe to summon him. The project revealed the artist's persistent fascination with how mere things can be bestowed with a mysterious and auratic force.

What better way, after all, to describe that numinous thing we call "art" than to realize that besides kings and priests and bankers, artists are perhaps the only beings with the power to give value to things that ostensibly have none? Loboda does just that, rendering strange and unforgettable her combinations of willfully austere or simple-looking objects by layering them with encrypted backstories culled from the likes of obscure military treatises, alchemy, mythology, the occult, and museological research. Her tactics are neither nostalgic nor merely referential; rather, she transforms her findings into sculptural and photographic works whose force lies beyond any surface aesthetic appeal.

At Kunsthalle Basel, Loboda's first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland, the artist presents an ensemble of newly commissioned works that continue her particular brand of contemporary archaeology.

at Kunsthalle Basel (<http://www.kunsthallebasel.ch/en/>)
until 14 May 2017