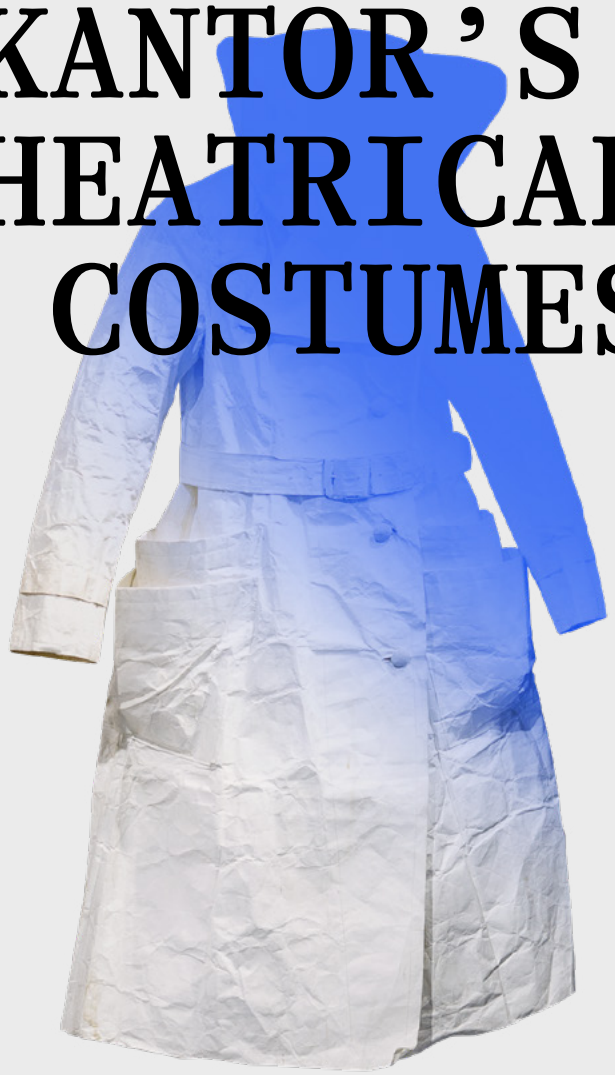
PRIVÁTE

TADEUSZ KANTOR'S THEATRICAL COSTUMES



cricoteka

PRIVATE

MAGDALENA LINK-LENCZOWSKA
NATALIA ZARZECKA

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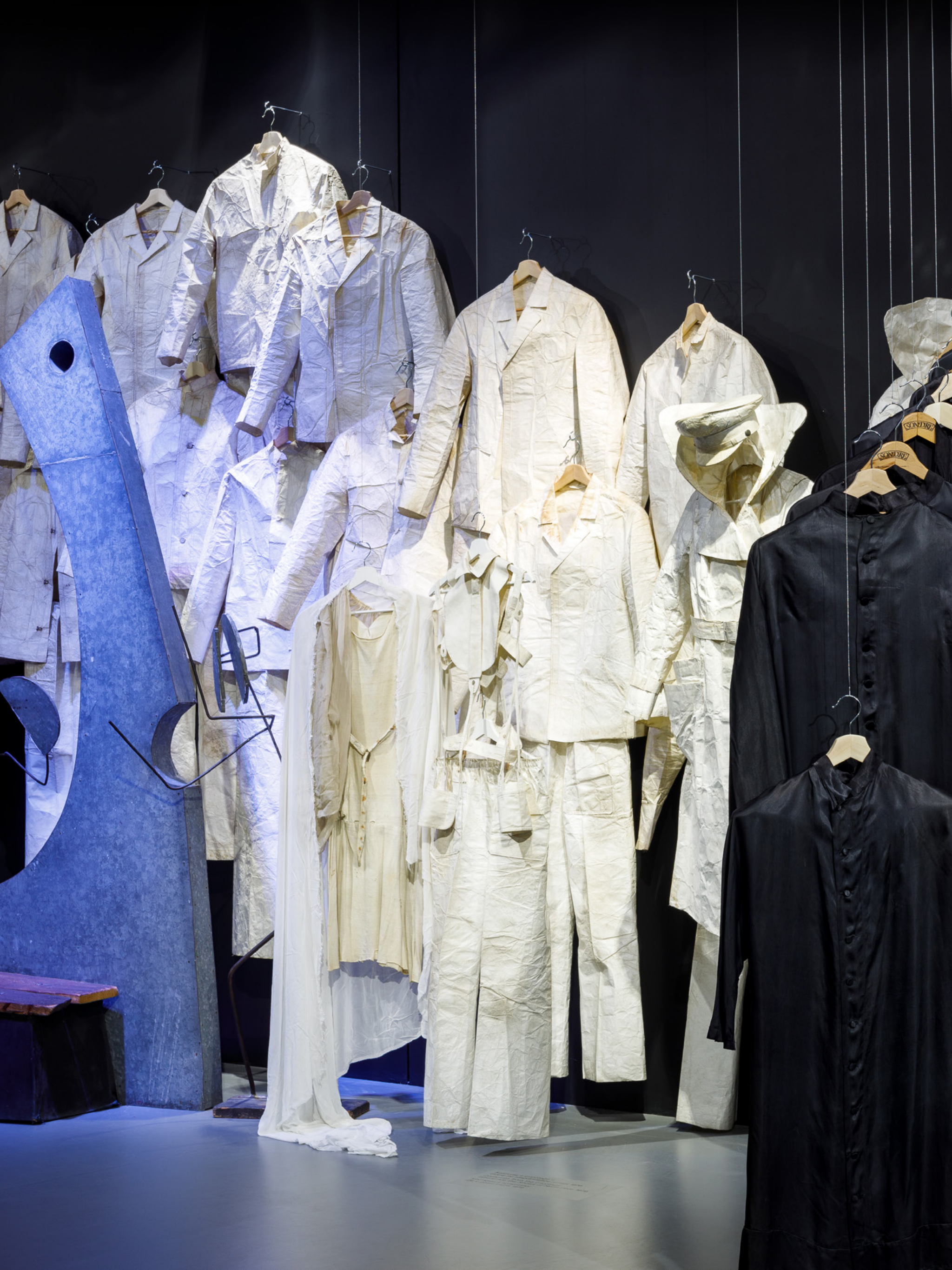
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"Let two mirrors reflect each other; then Satan plays his favorite trick and opens here in his way (as his partner does in lovers' gazes) the perspective on infinity,"[1] wrote Walter Benjamin in *Arcades Project* as he wondered about the omnipresence of mirrors in public spaces across modern Paris; smooth surfaces effecting an instant confrontation between the idea of one's self and the real image of it, but also multiplication of the ego. A discovery of oneself, but not without getting simultaneously entangled, more or less willingly, in the ambiguity of a heterogenous, distorted and delusion-driven space.

The eponymous arcades – shining arteries of commerce running through the grey bodies of bourgeois tenements, glass caskets for nineteenth-century opulence brimming, like stores in Schulz's stories, with sellable items of putrefying prosperity that pile in the strangest of constellations which enter into unfretted dialogues with one another. The function performed by Cricoteka's gallery is hardly different, even if the space has been tightly enclosed within black walls one of which is obscured by a mute crowd of costumes grouped to form distinct spots of colour: black, sepia, the striking white of paper clothes, the carmine of bishop robes from *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear*, as well as an astonishing blue emanating a soft metallic glow around the costume for Goplana – a constructivist sculpture of galvanised metal. Gradually, the costumes rise up from the concrete floor and soar towards the ceiling only to become a canopy of three-dimensional, dangling shapes. They seem to be holding spirits of a substance that used to fill them and is now, in a space evocative of Kantor and the Cricot 2 Theatre, materialising again through these specific holograms – actors

1 W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, Cambridge MA and London 2002, p. 538.

imprinted on the air. The opposite wall is covered with an uneven surface of vast mirrors that reflect and absorb at the same time, appropriating viewers and their gaze, drawing them into a world inhabited by costumes. Despite their bewildering and illusory effect, the mirrors also expose – as has been intended by the curators – the strategy of beholders who can now position themselves towards the exhibits, among them. At the same time, the mirrors lay bare the agency and decisive essence of the costumes in their newly founded Benjaminian pact with nonexistence, entered into again and against via reflection.

Reflection here is in fact a relation between objects, their new subjectivity that constitutes itself at the laboratory of the exhibition. Its constitution is not so much a process initiated by a traditional curatorial gesture, but rather new relationality of a specific community constantly recomposing itself, made up by people – curators, visitors, workshop participants – objects and the exposition space. This dynamics is possibly best visible within the context of Michel Serres's theory of the quasi-object which emancipates objects from the ancillary role they are traditionally believed to play. The scholar stresses that objects themselves constitute the axis of relationality which is, in turn, synonymous with life, or subjectivity. To clarify the matter, the author employs the metaphor of a ball game wherein the ball is not, as we have come to believe, a tool subordinate to man. It is the central point and reason why the rules of the game were set out for players to go by. It is also what gives subjectivity to players through a network of passes; the "I" is here a fleeting phenomenon, something that is exchangeable and passed to others. As a result, this ongoing changeability of subjects begets a community based on its eternal dynamics – "I" is passed from one player to another and so "we" is created[2].

The subjectivity of costumes in Kantor's theatre is undeniable; for him, costumes were living entities with identities of their own, parasites on actors, feeding on them, sprouting from them and growing

2 Cf. Michel Serres, "Theory of the Quasi-Object", in: *idem, The Parasite*, translated by L. R. Schehr, Baltimore and London 1982, pp. 224–234.

increasingly independent from the hosts[3]. Taking this idea of costumes as their departure point, the curators set out to augment their function. Excised from the reality of performances, extracted from museum storerooms, the costume becomes a guarantor and transmitter of experience. It is no longer a utility item, not even an object which assumes control and appropriates subjectivity. Instead, it transforms into a medium enabling the formation of an ephemeral community encompassing the material and the immaterial: viewers, costumes, absent actors, Kantor's artistic ego, but also public and private histories recorded by the director in performances and brough along by visitors. By installing mirrors which reflect / absorb, the curators have managed to radically democratise this multitude of perspectives and beings.

An aspect fundamental to his idea of the exposition is revealed by the curator Bogdan Renczyński in the interview printed in this exhibition catalogue. He says openly that, to him, costumes are merely used clothing once the element of theatre is taken away, with the smell of a previous owner lingering on them, the memory of his or her silhouette impressed into the creases of the fabric, a pattern of tiny dirt particles deposited on the clothes as they rubbed against the body. They are thus – like in Christian Boltanski's work closely akin to Kantor's creative output, presented at Cricoteka back in 2015; he is the artist to whom the exhibition is dedicated – a symbol of absent corporeality.

The theme of affectivity inherent in this kind of privacy allows the curators to encourage empathic vision in the audience. Proposed by Jill Bennett in her study of trauma in art, this reception strategy seems particularly serviceable when it comes to devising new ways of showing Kantor's work, an art addressing the grim history of the 20th century. The idea behind Bennett's proposition is to avoid the risk of colonisation, or appropriation of somebody else's painful experience. The author points out that new art continues its quest for representing trauma by a method other than thematic. "Under these conditions, the affective responses engendered by artworks are not

3 Cf. Tadeusz Kantor, *Spotkanie z nosorożcem*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, series Pisma, v. 1, Wrocław–Kraków, Ossolineum and Cricoteka, 2005, p. 327.

born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather, they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work."[4] Identification, on the part of the artist or the viewer, is replaced by an emotion performed by the very matter of the work which is then supposed to evoke critical intellectual reflection in the viewer. Empathic vision assumes distance ensuing from the act of looking; in this way, the viewer feels compassion while being aware of his or her separateness from the essence of experience.

Followed by Kantor and, generally, 20th-c avant-garde theatre, this strategy has been creatively expanded by *Personal. Kantor's Theatrical Costumes*. The title already expresses both closeness and subjectivity, while also pointing at their main custodian. The exhibition thus carries a promise of experience as much as sends us fair warning of its being distant from us, viewers. As we enter the room, we become witnesses to a forgone intimacy, participants in a peculiar afterimage. Its reflection materialises on two levels: in the material of the costumes, clothes or, to use Kantor's words, "skin-carapace," and upon the mirror wall which, incorporating us into the exposition, give us an opportunity to try on that "skin-carapace." In this way, the viewer is able to develop a personal relationship with the objects, one that is unique and eloquent.

It should be noted that this would not be possible were it not for the very matter of the installation that encompasses costumes as well as actors' private items in the section offering a reconstructed dressing room at the Cricot 2 Theatre, or the long educational table in the middle of the room that encourages members of the audience to get involved.

Each costume was designed by Kantor and each constitutes an autonomous work of art. The 248 objects put on display together for the first time provide an impulse to explore the story of the Cricot 2 Theatre, to trace the idea, influences and fascinations behind it. For the curators, costumes represent a processual work of the director. He was a total creator, engendering essential theatrical situations by creating tension, adopting an individual approach to actors and,

4 Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford CA, 2005, p. 7.

indeed, costumes which he designed himself less for characters, and chiefly for specific actors. This unconventional relationship of ongoing interrelations is accurately described by Krystyna Czerni in her book *Tadeusz Kantor. Walking a Tightrope*. Costumes were to "play the role of an emballage – a packaging, restricting actor's movement and paralysing his natural gestures, enforcing artificial, embarrassing and obtrusive situations. Their sophisticated 'anatomy', multitude of bags, straps, buckles, pockets, tied bundles and organic growths, helped to achieve this. People-wanderers, tramps carrying the memory of their entire life, the bump of the past on their backs... (...) Actors of the Cricot theatre were cornered, incapacitated by the costume restricting their moves. Kantor forced artists to play against themselves, against their abilities and habits. He transformed actors into 'bio-objects'. Bodies were knit together with objects, joined with a strange mechanism which became a part of them, their extension."[5]

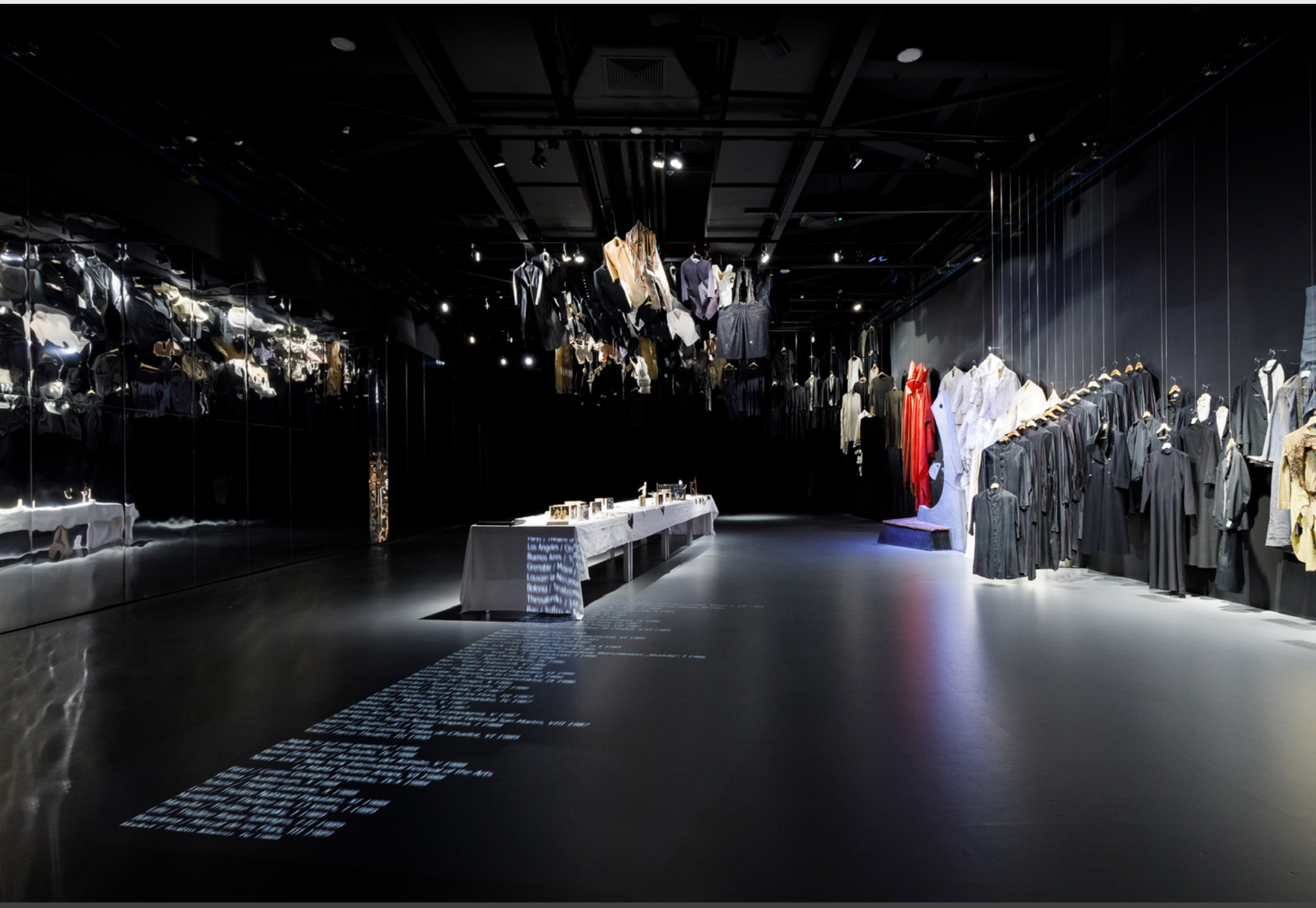
Over thirty years after the last of them was made, the costumes return to bask in glory, ultimately winning control, and liberated from the characters they used to be part of, to start a new game played between themselves and the public.

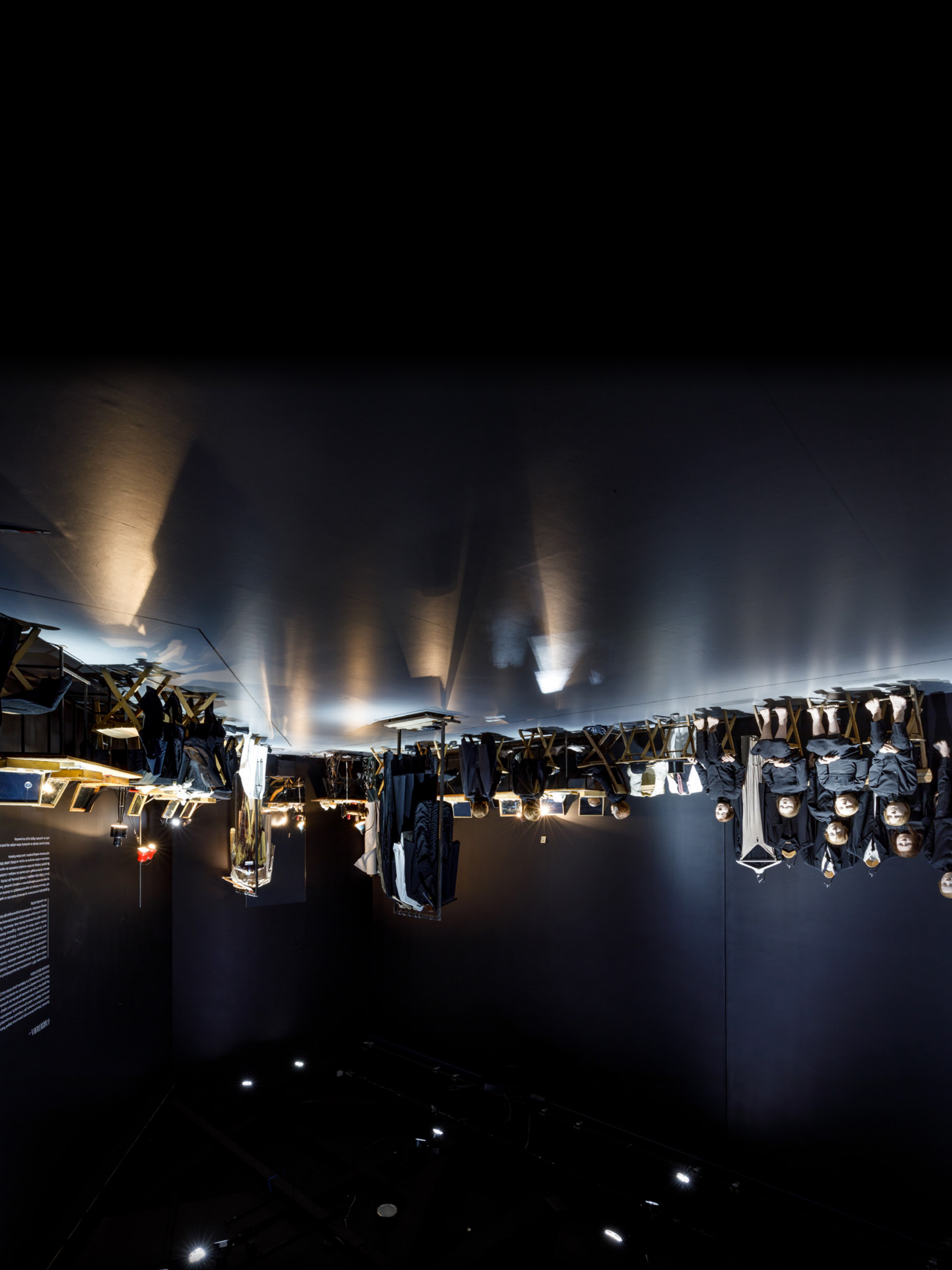
Quite unprecedented in terms of institutional practices is the curator duo that emerged for this exhibition. Bogdan Renczyński is a member of the Cricoteka team with a long acting career at the Cricot 2 Theatre. With this authorial installation he enters into a memory-driven, demanding private dialogue with costumes, oscillating between coming to terms with the past and paying homage. Usually busy with staging educational activities, Justyna Droń cares for the authenticity and liveliness of the interaction between the legacy of the Theatre and the public. The curators have come together to challenge the unofficial but very distinct division observed by cultural institutions between curators and educators, and to develop a mode of exhibiting that inspires viewers to engage more intensely than ever before.

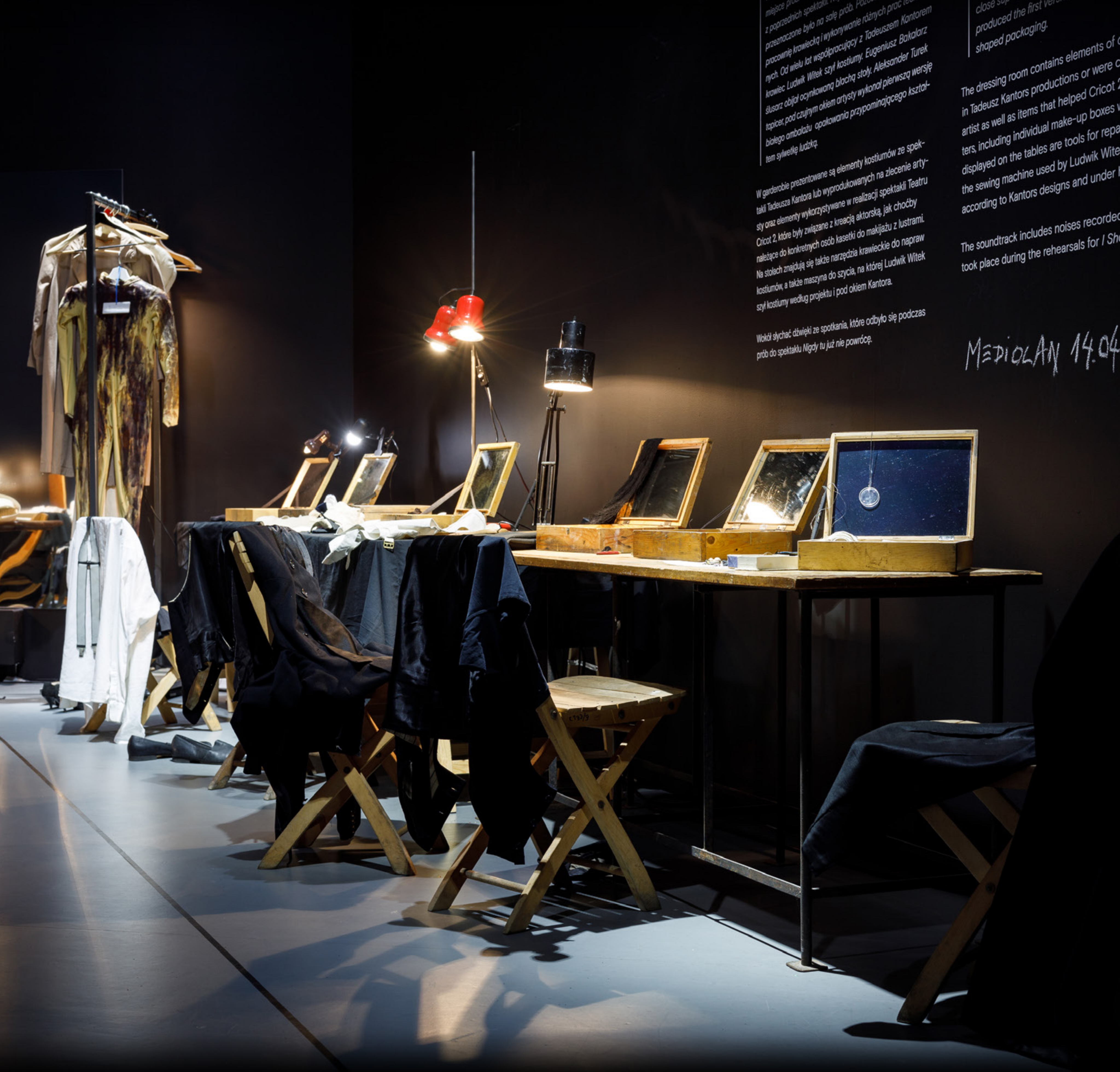
Finally, it should be stated that this is the second time Kantor's

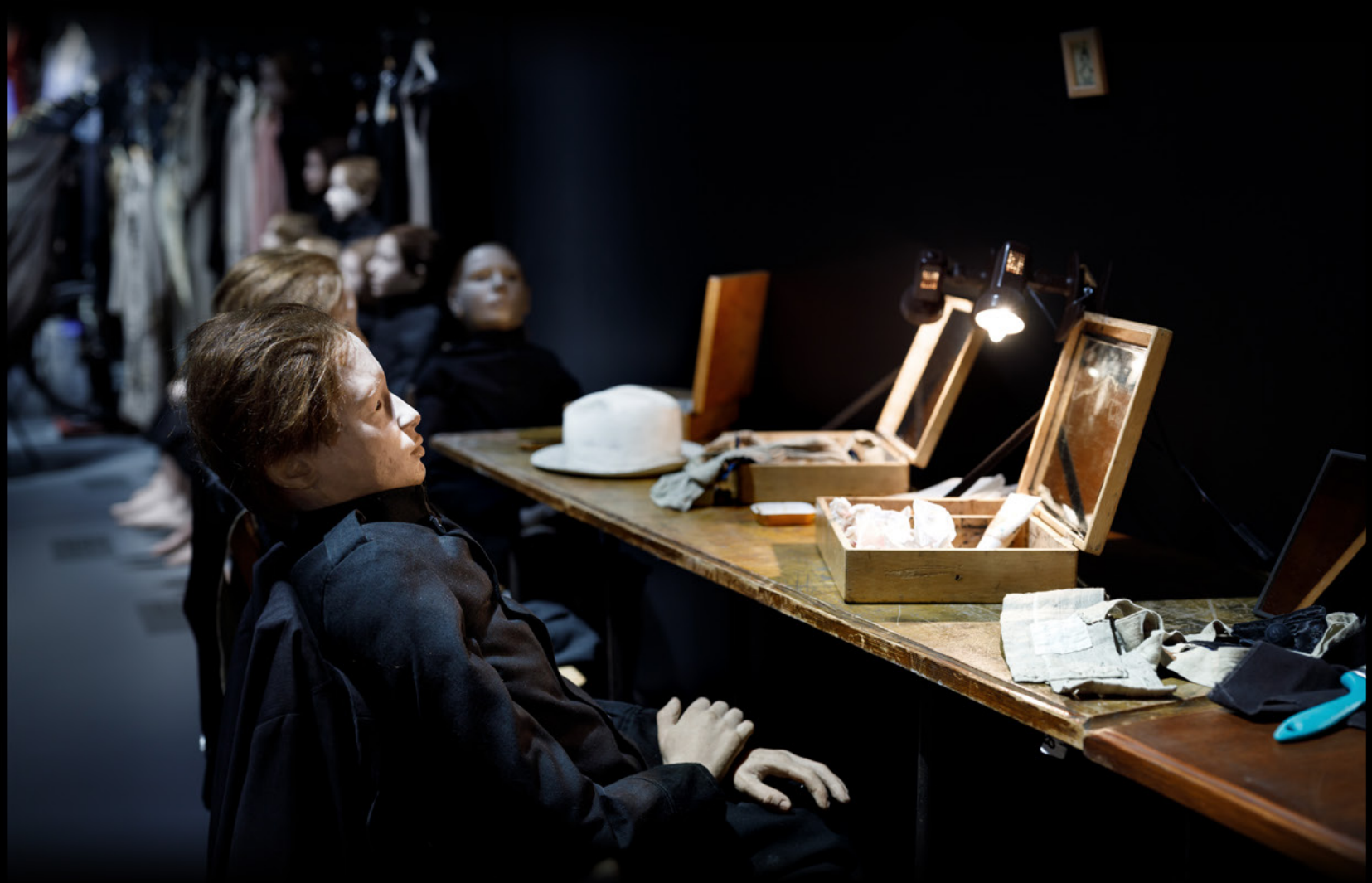
5 Krystyna Czerni, *Tadeusz Kantor. Walking a Tightrope, Cricoteka*, Kraków 2015, p. 83.

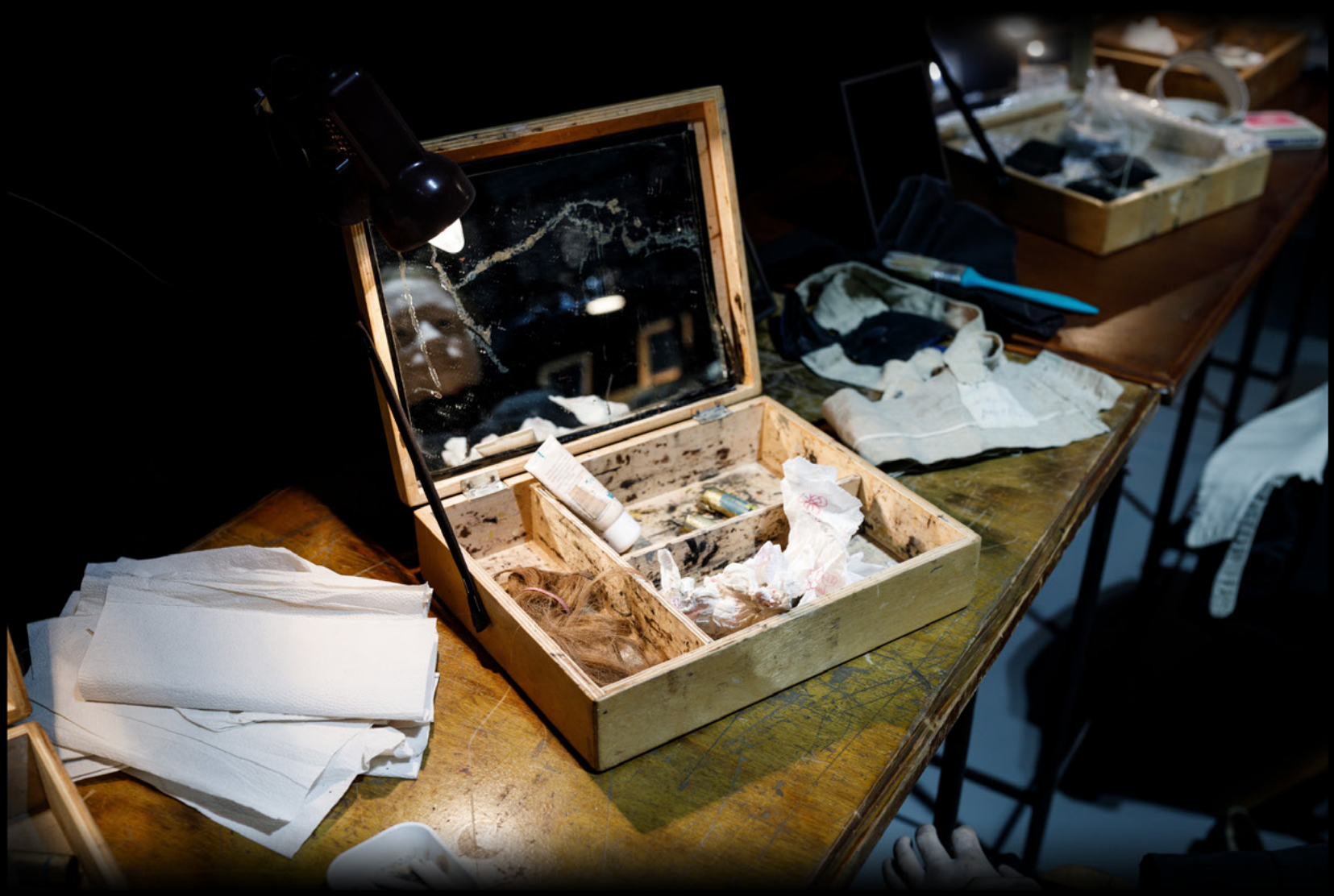
theatrical costumes have been the subject matter of a show, the first one being the 1995 exhibition *Kantor. Fantomy realności* curated by Lech Stangret. Still, it is for the first time in its history that Cricoteka has put on display the whole set, a collection that forms a substantial contribution to the unique archive of Polish avant-garde theatre in the 20th century.

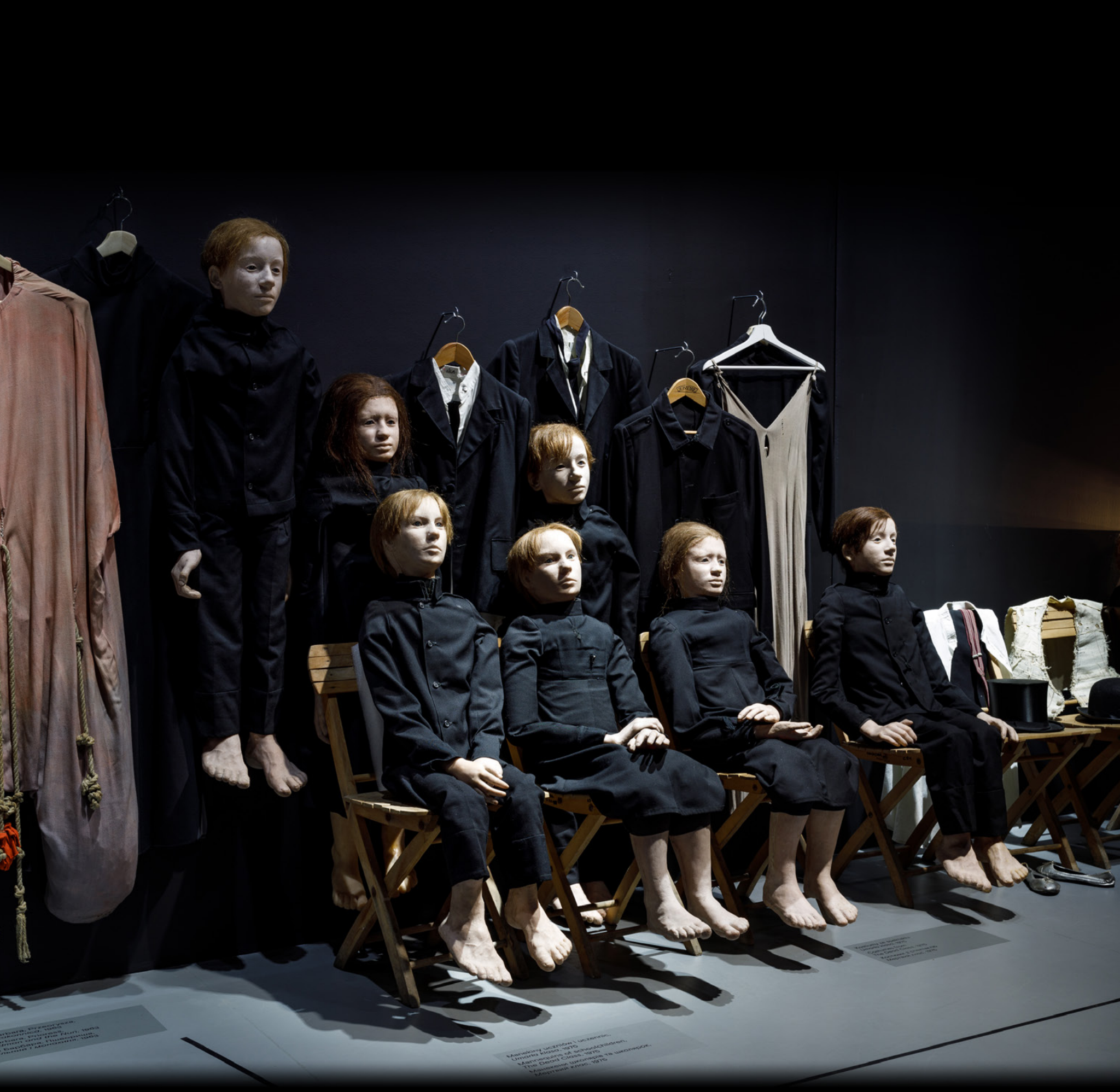


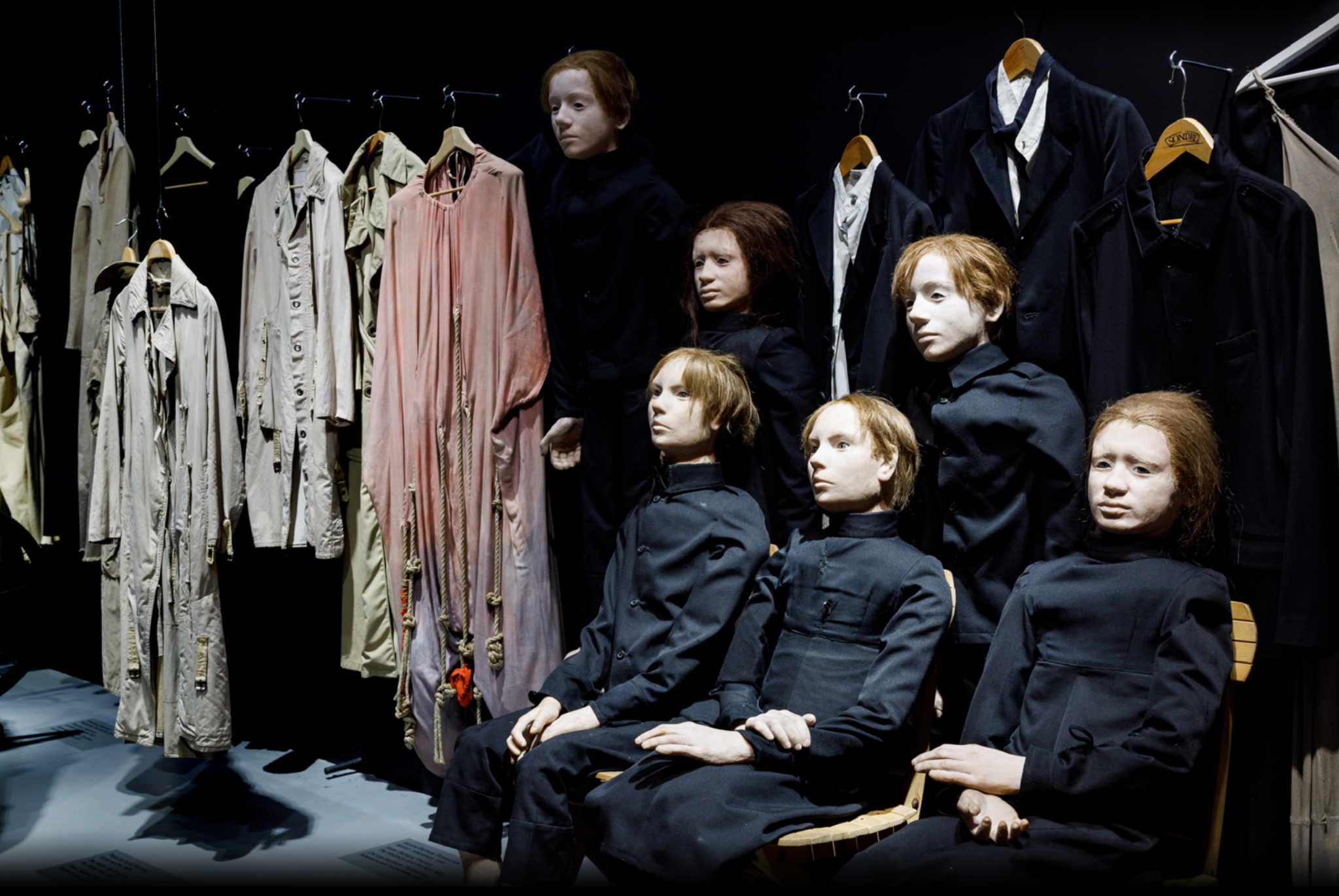


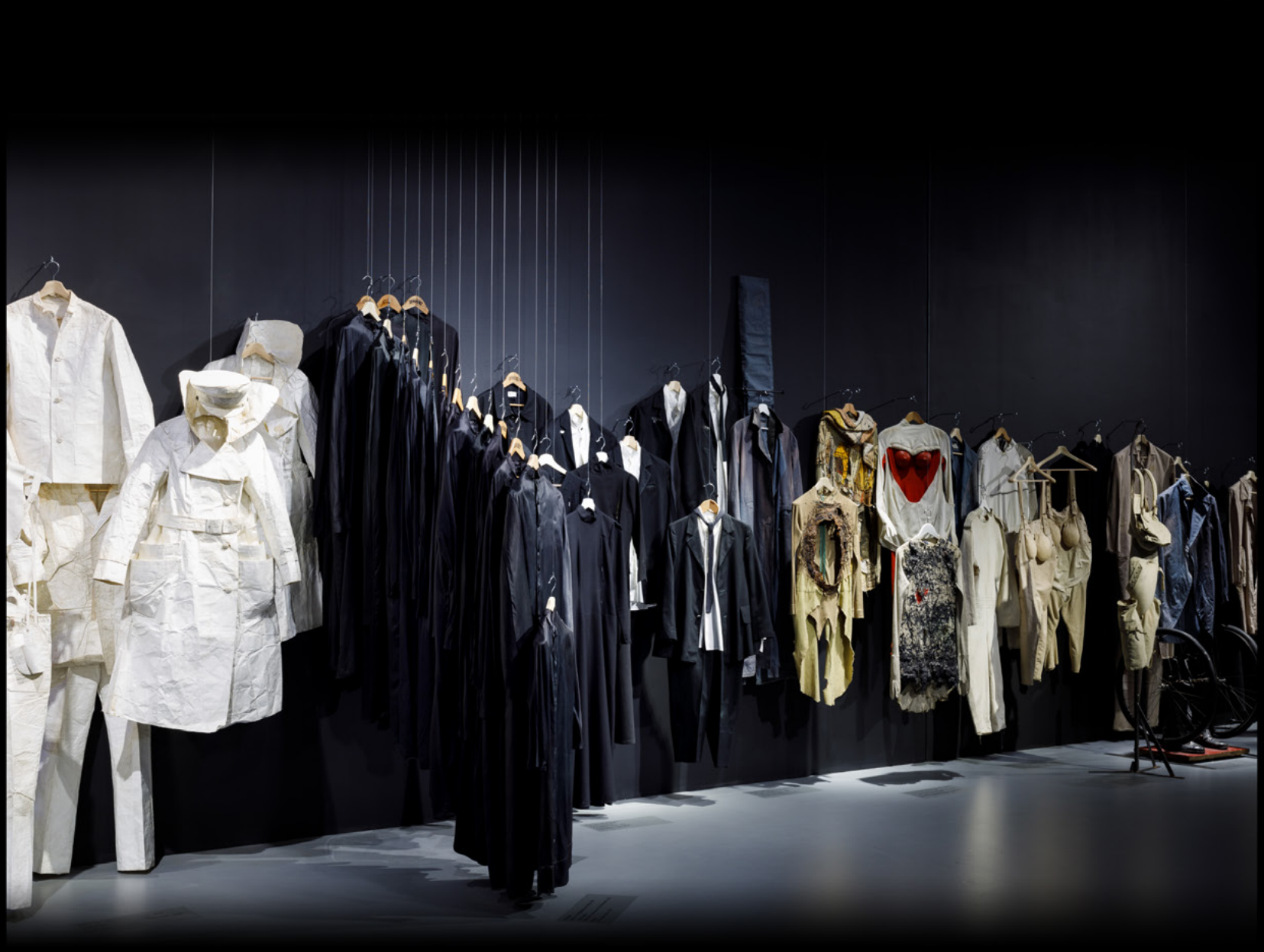

z poprzednich spektakli.
przeznaczone było na salę prób.
pracownię krawiecką i wykonywanie różnych prac
nych. Od wielu lat współpracujący z Tadeuszem Kantorem
krawiec Ludwik Witek szył kostiumy. Eugeniusz Bakalarz
ślusarz obijał ocynkowaną blachą stoły. Aleksander Turek
tapicer, pod czujnym okiem artysty wykonał pierwszą wersję
białego ambalażu opakowania przypominającego kształ-
tem sylwetkę ludzką.
W garderobie prezentowane są elementy kostiumów ze spek-
takli Tadeusza Kantora lub wyprodukowanych na zlecenie arty-
sty oraz elementy wykorzystywane w realizacji spektakli Teatru
Cricot 2, które były związane z kreacją aktorską, jak choćby
należące do konkretnych osób kasetki do makijażu z lustrami.
Na stołach znajdują się także narzędzia krawieckie do napraw
kostiumów, a także maszyna do szycia, na której Ludwik Witek
szył kostiumy według projektu i pod okiem Kantora.
Wokół słychać dźwięki ze spotkania, które odbyło się podczas
prób do spektaklu Nigdy tu już nie powrócę.
produced the first
shaped packaging.
The dressing room contains elements of
in Tadeusz Kantors productions or were
artist as well as items that helped Cricot
ters, including individual make-up boxes
displayed on the tables are tools for
the sewing machine used by Ludwik
according to Kantors designs and under
The soundtrack includes noises recorded
took place during the rehearsals for
MEDIOLAN 14.04






Manekiny uczniów i uczennic,
Umarła klasa, 1975
Mannequins of schoolchildren,
The Dead Class, 1975
Манекены школяров и школярок,
Мертвый класс, 1975





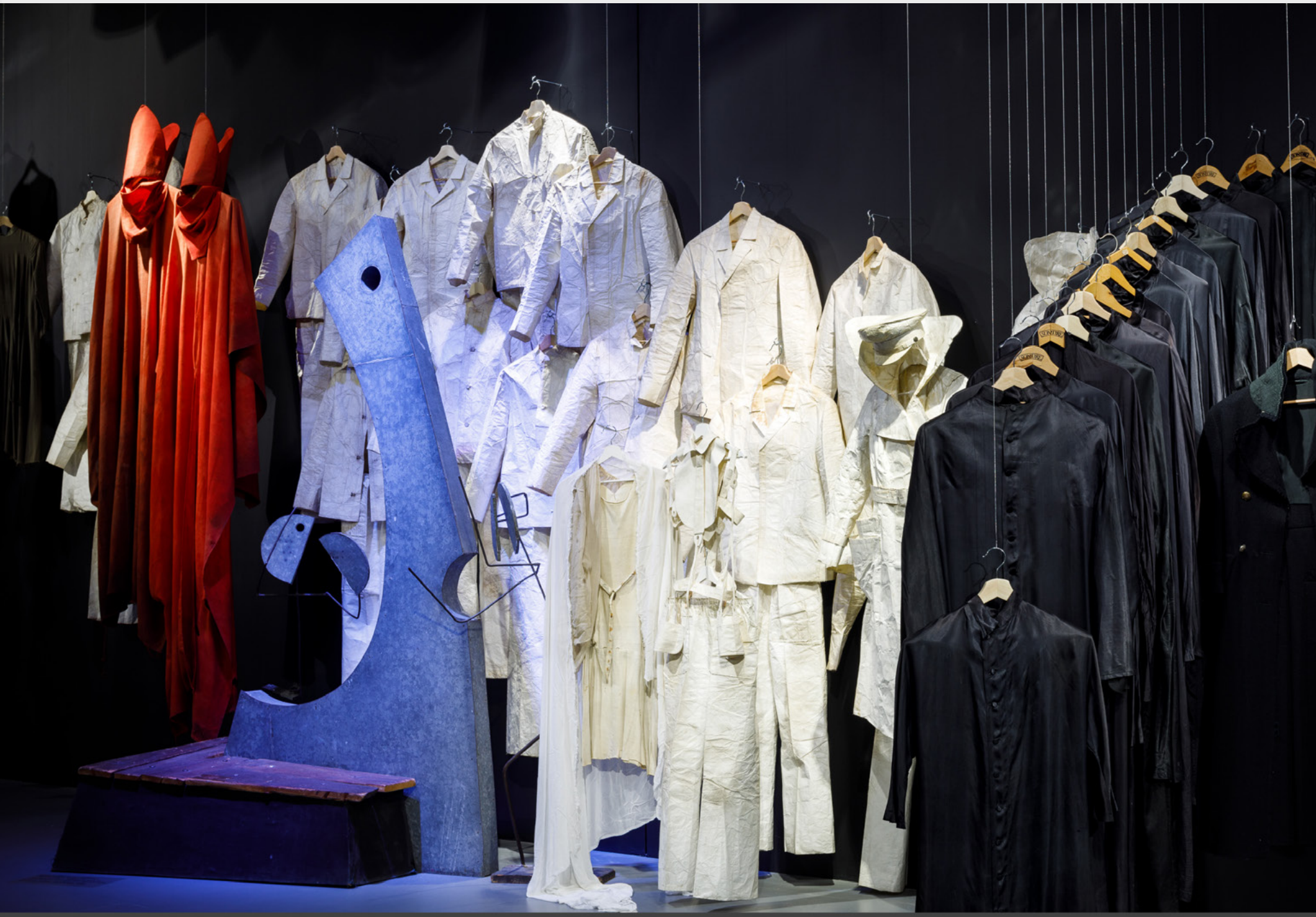
II

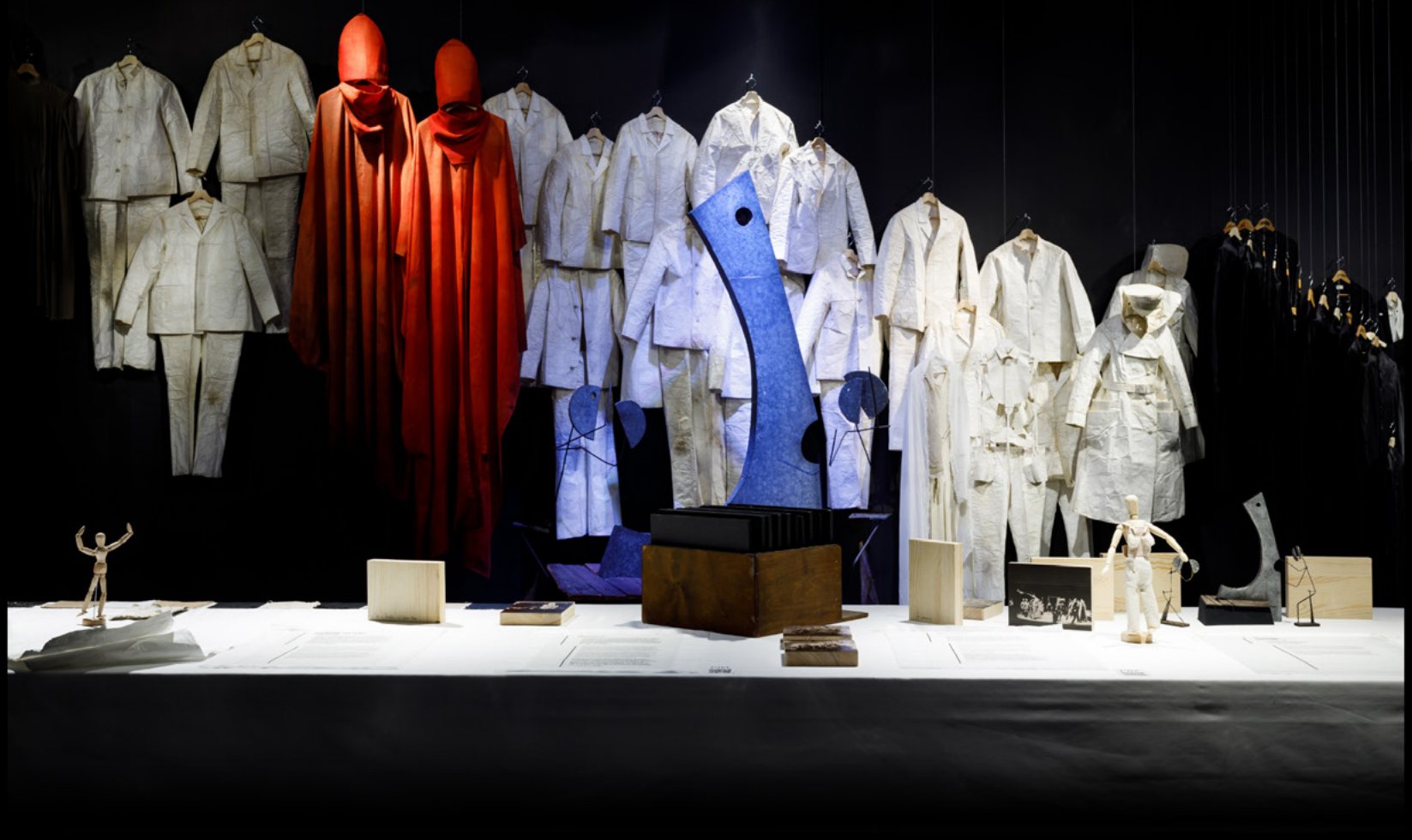
EMBALLAGE

BOGDAN RENCZYŃSKI

The costume was an executioner to me
I fell victim to it
The costume was a trap
And a rescue
It was not the remains
It was me who turned into the remnants of an actor
I did not perform a role
The role and the costume performed me
In Let the Artists Die
I was the remains of a role
The remains of motion
The remains of gesture
The remains of body
“Faithfully departed”
Dead
The costume died on me
And I inside it
The metal Balladyna
Is a costume of imprisonment
Janina Kraupe could not even
Try this costume on
All she could do was speak
But not move

Not look at the viewer
Although she could see Tadeusz Kantor
The tinned voice
Came from the imprisonment
From the trap
While at the same time the costume
Provided protection against punishment
A dead person's penance
That was not a costume, but an emballage
To cover your drawbacks
Of an actor artist
Your remains of the costume
Will do everything for you and to you
These are not costumes
But beings hung on hangers
Their corporeality has the power
To still rule our imagination
I shall only try and set them free
Open the door for them
These are the doors to Cricoteka
Let us let them prove their innocence
Or guilt
Let us let the viewer decide
Let us let them comprehend Cricoteka
Comprehend why these remnants
Call out to be seen





III

CONVERSATION— PRIVATE. TADEUSZ KANTOR'S THEATRICAL COSTUMES

JUSTYNA DROŃ
I BOGDAN RENCZYŃSKI

III

CONVERSATION – PRIVATE. TADEUSZ KANTOR'S THEATRICAL COSTUMES

JUSTYNA DROŃ
I BOGDAN RENCZYŃSKI

JUSTYNA DROŃ: The title can be read in a number of ways. Firstly, costumes are private because they are physically closer to performers' bodies than any other theatrical tool. Secondly, the installation was inspired by your long-term collaboration with Kantor. And thirdly, it provides space for all sorts of private perspectives. What are the other possible ways of interpreting it?

BOGDAN RENCZYŃSKI: It should be pointed out that some costumes are private because they belonged to a particular person, some still bear the names of their owners. We also put on display such objects as spectacles, collars, shoes, and their proximity causes very private relationships. But this space will hopefully encourage the visitors to come up with a private response to how the costumes are displayed, to the emotions that appear when the viewers are incorporated into the show by means of mirror reflections amid the multitude of Kantor's costumes. Against them, or with them. And such private meanings may come in great numbers.

J.D. Kantor wrote fairly little about costumes. And he contradicted himself quite a lot.

B.R. Kantor may not have written a lot about costumes, but in what he wrote he was sufficiently eloquent. He claimed that costume: "performs entirely new functions in relation to the living body of an actor, acting as a resonator and trap, entanglement and amplification, constraint too, it can violate the actor and be violated by them, it may be independent of them or become a tool in their

hands." This is the most dramatic and comprehensive description of costume as a work of art. Kantor's costume is tremendously corporeal. It is an entity. A separate entity grappling with the actor. It opens or closes them.

J.D. Costume functions midway between the real and the unreal, the dead and the living, the individual and the collective. From such perspective, this is a somewhat magical, exceptional tale about presence.

B.R. It was that very clash of the actor's corporeality and the 'corporeality' of costume that constructed the dramaturgy and essence of stage presence. When the costume appears on stage, the space is beginning to fill with spectres, characters, images, colours... It gets a life of its own, there is no need for a body any longer. The costume lives, in a way, in the actor, in behalf of the actor. And it lives in an impossible way.

J.D. So, as Artur Sandauer would say, it is not the actor that performs the role, but the role that performs the actor?

B.R. It is the same with costumes. It is not the actor who plays with the costume, but the costume that plays with the actor.

J.D. Kantor's costumes are not aesthetically pleasing, except for a few that are very attractive visually. But the idea that these costumes are partners to actors, helping to create a complementary vision on stage, reveals a new and exceptional significance of them.

B.R. This immediate impression is all an illusion; what truly matters is what the costume is and what is inside it, what kind of corporality has left its imprint in it, its aura and emotions. Many costumes have a smell of their own, and it is very personal as well. Interestingly enough, dummies and the tin Goplana also count as costumes. The idea of costume, clothing and actor's corporality were incorporated by Kantor into the space of the stage. The costume is an image, impression, picture.

J.D. Kantor's costumes are misleading. They may be largely consistent with the actor's corporeality, like a coat tailored for a specific person or the Bride's costume, or they may also be as alien as it gets, like Goplana, which is actually a costume made of tinplate. What is the position of costume in Kantor's work?

B.R. When Kantor was working on *Balladyna,* humanity was facing the greatest risk ever of war civilisation. The purpose behind the costume was to conceal the body, to give protection against the outside world, against danger and death, and that might be the reason why it looks this way. As though he had wanted to say that the costume, clothes do not matter, what does matter is what is going on in it. The costume is responsibility, it reveals who we are.

J.D. The more Kantor draws on his biography and memories, the stronger their presence on stage, the more the costumes come to life, the more they turn lifelike and very private. This means that the way Kantor used costumes helped him create an identity, relationship and a story about the human being.

B.R. That is true, in the last period of his work there was no specifically "theatrical" costume, or a specific sculpture. Whatever character it had, it was the actor's individuality that was the source of it. Kantor often said that "art is not created for aesthetic reasons," that it is made of one's failures and defeats. Hence the costume is also ordinary clothing. Mother's dress is a copy of the dress Kantor's mother wore, and so is the hat. This is not a hat made for the performance, but one that is already there, a private one. This is true about many costumes, for instance those in the last production.

J.D. Does the costume conceal or reveal?

B.R. The costume conceals all the time, and it reveals all the time. The costume is in constant motion, like exhalation and inhalation. It is in this sense that the costume breathes.

J.D. Were you, the actors, able to have a say when it came to costumes? Were you allowed to choose it?

B.R. At first, when there were costumes from previous performances and rehearsals we were free to take whatever we considered useful. Kantor did not like us wearing our private clothes. Then the costume took shape in the form of a drawing.

J.D. Kantor said that Polish craftsmen were the best. That included his tailor. What was the preparation of costumes like?

B.R. Kantor had a drawing which served as the base, but it was not a proper design. Kantor talked a lot about his ideas to Ludwik Witek, the tailor, who sewed a coat, for example, which Kantor would then cut and tear, and Ludwik would sew it back again until the costume was ready. More damage was done during performances, by characters, actors.

J.D. You would start working on a play with a general idea, but there was no design of the whole thing. Costumes and objects emerged and developed at rehearsals.

B.R. At first, we only had some room – a bar, waiting room, train station, room or Kantor's studio, like in our last production *Today Is My Birthday*, where we were his guests.
My costume for *Let the Artists Die* changed a lot. We started with a costume I really liked, a black one, but I ended up with tatters. As we went on, the costume gradually assumed a shape. Like the object that inspired Kantor to found his own museum. Dreams of a museum, of a collection that will be still there when he is gone.

J.D. That dream partially came true. In 1984, Kantor formed the Committee for Assessment and Valuation and made a list of objects, thus elevating them to the position of works of art. The four costumes which are on this list can be seen at the exhibition. This means that, for Kantor, the status of costumes was equal to that of objects, and that they were particularly important to him.

B.R. I remember the moment Kantor began proclaiming theatrical objects as works of art. That was when it started. I think that all the objects in the Cricoteka collection would be included in the list, but Kantor had not enough time to finish it. It should also be remembered that he had worked in institutional theatres for almost thirty years and that most costumes from that time have not survived. Kantor struggled to give them artistic identity that would make them – artworks as he saw them – safe from destruction. Which is the fate, for instance, of stage design.

J.D. The director renounced traditional theatre, and that included related terminology. He rejected such terms as "decoration," "scenography," "prop" or "costume". Was it because he feared destruction that Kantor referred to costumes as sculptures?

B.R. He did so, to some degree, because "sculpture" belongs to the vocabulary that applies to works of art. For Kantor, sculpture did not face the risk of being met with indifference.

J.D. The way these costumes are arranged is absolutely untypical of museum exhibitions. Why have you decided to hang them in the air?

B.R. There is no way you could mount a traditional display of Kantor's costumes. They keep escaping, and they call for an arrangement that is as absurd as possible. The energy and power they posses precludes traditional presentation, they cannot be obliterated, tied up, enclosed in a display case. With a dynamics of their own, they have their own biographies, they make sounds, they breathe. It seems to me that this dynamic form is what makes them authentic.

J.D. Is this exhibition about presence or absence?

B.R. It is about absence in a way, because a theatrical work disappears, passes, leaving some bits and pieces behind, the only evidence of existence. But Kantor continues to 'act', to be relevant, and this is why the exhibition is what it is. This is the first time we have put on view so many costumes, so courageously, with trust and faith in their exceptionality.

J.D. You present a choice of items that come from various periods, starting with costumes created in 1961 for the Stary Theatre in Kraków, to those made in 1991 for *Today Is My Birthday.* Is this a story of consistency or a tale of a crazy search for variety?

B.R. This is a story about an artist who never stopped experimenting, though he was also extremely conservative. Kantor looked for discrepancies in himself, not outside. He had a highly fertile imagination and great sensibility. He made use of military costumes till the very end. The soldier that is present in every performance and, for Kantor, represents the human condition is usually dead. This is also a story about Cricoteka – a place established to take care of the artist's collection.
Life with Kantor was exceptional. This show is a recapitulation of sorts of the forty years of my involvement with those costumes day in, day out.
Kantor wore his private clothes on stage. And the only outfit that is not here is the one Kantor died in, which was his stage costume as well. The only one that has not been catalogued with conservation guidelines and a technical description.

IV

BENEATH THE LINING

KAROLINA SULEJ-KUBIK

BENEATH THE LINING

KAROLINA SULEJ-KUBIK

The Foksal Gallery, 1969. The place is swarming with colourful people enjoying themselves. By the walls, sitting or standing on the wooden floor are long-haired hippies, wearing John Lennon glasses, women in brightly pattered skirts. In the middle of the room there is a table – and a man lying on its top. He has a shirt, a pair of jeans and a jacket on. Bowing attentively above him is an artist wearing a suit and a tie. This is Tadeusz Kantor, a theatre director, visual artist and stage designer, here impersonating Nicolaes Tulp, a doctor and mayor of Amsterdam, immortalised in *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, an oil painted by Rembrandt in 1632, commissioned by the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons. The picture shows a post-mortem examination conducted by the professor for a group of students, clad in black robes with white ruffs. The naked body has been opened to reveal its viscera, contrasting starkly with the clean form of the clothes worn by the group. It is ripped open, they are well-dressed.

The 1969 happening represented another type of examination. Tadeusz Kantor is standing by the table like the Flemish professor but not to analyse the anatomy of the body; instead, he is studying the anatomy of the garments the body is wearing. This is not an operating theatre, but a theatre of fashion. Gathered around the body are young adherents of the counterculture movement, rather than a bourgeois elite. The artist's speech is overly serious, academic.

"It suffices to take the first step, to pluck up enough courage and separate something to discover a new world inside. The lining! The upper layer! I am cutting this off, here is the middle section! Take notice of these fascinating details: buttons, holes, hook and eye fasteners, snaps, safety pins, clasps, that take upon themselves the task of creating order.

Of fastening, stiffening, giving shape and form, developing style. And here we find ourselves in the antipodes of clothing."[1]

For the artist, clothing is a product unwilling to reveal its structure, hiding its innards like the skin hides the inside of the body. The attire becomes an emballage, a kind of protective cover for the biological body – as well as a bag for culture. This vivisection culminates in the exploration of pockets. Kantor scrupulously itemises his finds: handkerchiefs, photos, pens, toothbrushes, bottle caps. Small personal items – stuck in the pockets as though it were a purgatory between the significant and the disposable – are exposed to public view. Here is the artist's commentary in the flyer issued by the Foksal Gallery: "This is the intriguing content of these intimate hiding places and secret dens, this is the real and unadulterated aspect of individuality, forgotten rests, shameful waste, creased and crumpled pockets!"[2]

For Kantor, the importance of clothes lies in their ability to acknowledge their own materiality, their – as the artist would probably say – outfit nature. A garment is not different from a body in that is has its nooks and crannies, imperfections, and is prone to violence and disease. But bodies and clothes cannot stop pretending that this is not so – the fashion industry creates the illusion that our skin must be smooth like a doll's, while our clothes, make-ups and haircuts should give a stylish form to the body, to keep it in order and make it look spotless.

But Kantor calls on us to take the blue pill! Truth does not dwell in bodies polished by plastic surgeons, or in *haute couture* garments. The truth about nature comes to light when the "reality of the lowest rank" is scrutinised, those things that are "poor," coarse, used, worn-out, shabby, old, damaged. A hippie look, if anything. Clothes and faces that promise perfection tell nothing about life, they tell us about death. In her poem "Edge," Sylvia Plath wrote: "The woman

1 *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorfozy: teksty o latach 1934–1974*, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, pp. 437–40.

2 Tadeusz Kantor, ibidem.

is perfected. Her dead body wears the smile of accomplishment."[3] It is only after death that the body is without fault, immaculate. A doll, puppet, dummy – in Kantor's theatre, these always represent a premonition of death.

Death is also present in his fascination with the series of the Infanta Margarita Teresa's portraits by Velázquez, sent from Madrid to Vienna, to her husband-to-be, Emperor Leopold I. In them, she has the appearance of a fragile porcelain doll.

In *The Infanta's Manifesto*, Kantor writes: "(...) like relics or madonnas with artificial heads of the dead and human hair, enveloped in real extravagant coats……from underneath the layers and flaps of seemingly calloused skin of an extinct species – the proud Infantas draw out their poor and petite lymphatic bodies……above their little rickety legs cerebral canopies of courtly crinolines have been stretched……inside those ceremonial attires, with well-trained gestures and gravelike void in their eyes, they are immobilised there, helpless, humiliated, shamelessly exposing their total indifference for the public to see. Mock-ups of death. Trapped inside cardboard boxes."[4].

A young heiress with a blank lovely face, her little body dressed in sumptuous gowns acts as a stand for folded fabric. In his cycle of reliefs inspired by the Infantas, Kantor placed a common postman bag on the whalebone, instead of a dress. The Infanta's head is floating above it like a ghost – bodiless.

Entangled in clothes are also figures in the production of Henry Becque's *The Crows*; black skirts stretched upon wire frames, laces and bustles hamper their movements causing them to trip. In *Today Is My Birthday*, Kantor's last play, a dress placed on a frame acts like an alarming plinth. The human being is reduced to an accessory.

Fashion objectifies the body, immobilises and turns it into an ornamental and rather inconvenient item – like an umbrella. Umbrellas

3 Sylvia Plath, "Edge" in: *The Collected Poems*, Perennial, 2008, p. 372.

4 Tadeusz Kantor, "Infantki", in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Teatr Śmierci: teksty z lat 1975– 1984,* Pisma vol. 2, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, pp. 320–321.

captivated Kantor for years – and first of all the "umbrella space,"[5] as he put it, created by unfurling and furling it. It provides protection for the body and its gestures like a garment does, but – being at some distance from it – it also constitutes an installation of sorts.

Tadeusz Kantor's puppets and dolls bring to my mind models walking along fashion catwalks. Their position is also that of a framework for supporting the clothing that is in the limelight, that is there to be viewed. Garments often restrict the movements of those who are presenting them, and they mask tripping by feigning nonchalance. A model at a fashion show is like Velázquez's Margarita Teresa – too perfect to be alive, to be real. The gaze which makes us cover up our "imperfections" and iron our blouses as well as faces is omnipresent in the contemporary world of popular culture and social media. Popular beauty standards reduce us to our appearance. We are interested in the packaging, not the content. As if we were dead or hollow. This is poignantly illustrated by Kantor in his production of *Balladyna*, where actors are reminiscent of dummies, with lipstick and powder on their faces and additional extremities attached to their bodies. There are real dummies on stage as well, and they have glass eyes and genuine beards. Goplana's costume is an abstract iron sculpture that makes us think of a totem, not a gown. Who is who? Who is the human here?

In his *Little Dictionary of Fashion,* Christian Dior wrote that the key objective of couture is to conceal imperfections, and the designer is there to make women look perfect[6]. Today, this illusion of perfection is sold not only by designers, but by the massive industries of clothing, beauty, fitness, and wellness. Kantor, on the other hand, insisted that art should lend voice to the imperfect, marginalised, "poor." This is ignored by the industries, as they require us to purchase more illusions.

The rag trade is well acquainted with poverty chic, or luxurious imitation of genuine poverty. Suffice it to say, the Japanese fashion

5 Dominika Labionow, *Wystarczy tylko otworzyć drzwi... : przedmioty w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2005, p. 109.

6 Christian Dior, *Christian Dior's Little Dictionary of Fashion, A Guide to Dress Sense for Every Woman*, Cassel 1954, p. 5.

brand N.Hoolywood designed clothes inspired by garments worn by the homeless in the streets of American cities.[7] Or Balenciaga that sells dirty used sneakers for 1,600 dollars.[8] Irony? This could be so, but a well-priced irony for sure. All this notwithstanding the aesthetic revolution of the 1980s when the fashion industry came to question the illusion of style for the first time in the contemporary world. In 1981, Rei Kawakubo, the founder of the Comme des Garçons brand, debuted at the Paris catwalks. Her style was described as “Hiroshima chic.” The clothes were tattered and full of holes, discoloured, asymmetrical, and loose. They were darkish and plain. They appeared to be unfinished, disintegrating, not fitted. Similar garments were designed by Yohji Yamamoto and the Belgian Martin Margiela, who joined the world of fashion a few years later. The Belgian avant-gardist collaborated with a microbiologist for one of his projects. The results of their work, Margela’s pieces that received exposure to the forces of nature and selected strains of bacteria, were displayed in Summer 1997 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The clothes kept undergoing transformations during the show: colours were gradually changing, mould formed on fabric and, finally, the exhibits fell apart having been eaten through.

Such installation seems akin to what Kantor did. The artist conceived of costume as a growth on the human body, a communion that would lead to the formation of a “plasma connecting body with costume.” The “plasma” would reflect the deep coalescence of different layers of our existence, their delicacy and transience. Here is the director’s account of the entrance of Circus Actors in his production of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz’s *The Shoemakers*: “We can see them now (...) These ridiculous and tragic mock-ups of humans, wearing costumes that remind us of skins and carapaces, with consecutive layers having formed upon them throughout the ages, calcified fossils, prehistoric specimens. This decaying, helpless, bombastic, absurd, and

7 https://fashionista.com/2017/02/n-hoolywood-homeless

8 https://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2022/05/10/balenciagas-destroyed-trainers-roasted-on-twitter-hefty-price-tag/

desperately outdated shell sticking to naked bodies with some rests of underwear on."[9] Clothes are traces of culture here, a geological layer of our history, a testimony to our fight to survive, as persistent as it is doomed to failure.

I do not think that Kantor would appreciate a couture fashion show also because he did not like objects which were clearly theatrical, made distinctly to be used on stage. Costumes and props brought to his mind dusty theatrical storage rooms where things become patinated, bombastic, pretentious and totally out of touch with life. Ordinary clothes, used things held attraction for Kantor. The stage is part of everyday life, after all, and the objects – including costumes – should be it as well. Daily life was fished out of them with utmost care like pieces of fluff out of the pocket. In Kantor's productions clothes did not sustain the pretence of being an impeccable creation suspended in timelessness. They revealed their true nature as imperfect costumes for our imperfect bodies.

If we think about Kantor, we first see blackness, then comes whiteness, sepia, planed timber, hemp bags, wrapping paper, sheet metal, canvas and old suitcases. Costumes are raw, sculptural, made of coarse fabrics, patchwork-like, made up of pieces sewn together, falling apart, and worn-out as can be. It is as though the glittery cover of fashion, the illusion, the Baroque splendour from Velázquez's portraits were taken away, uncovering what costumes truly are – a fragile emballage that may easily turn into a piece of rubbish, rest, rag.

This kinship of the vulnerability and transience of people and things in Kantor's work is amplified by the context of the war from which his philosophy sprang.

The Second World War robs people of their personal belongings, its armed forces conquer the most intimate antipodes of clothing. Garments become rags, amassed in untidy piles – like dead bodies. Things lose their apparent value, or 'grip', what they have been through

9 Tadeusz Kantor, "Szewcy", in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorfozy: teksty o latach 1934–1974*, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Pisma vol. 1, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, p. 500.

demonstrates how easily they as well as their owners can be discarded. Those items which have the right to provide cover for people in ghettoes, camps, in the streets of occupied towns and cities, these clothes “of the lowest rank” – torn, dirty, stained, unable to protect bodies against weather conditions or disease. Helpless. Sometimes they make the war-time life even more difficult – outsized, uncomfortable, too thick or inadequate – like the ball gown thrown to the Jewish prisoner Zdenka Fantlova after she had been admitted to the concentration camp in Birkenau and there were no striped uniforms available. This was sheer jeering. The prisoners write that they feel they are dressed up, turned into buffoons whose funny costumes make people laugh. They compare the camp to a gloomy circus, a world turned outside out. These are true antipodes of humanity.

They see instantly the change this kind of “costume” makes in the daily life in the camp. Those who happen to have more or less the right size of the uniform or manage to smoothen their headscarves with the weight of the heads at night so that they look more elegant, gain advantage in the fight for life. They look more like people in the eyes of torturers – they are not that easy to be killed. The prisoners observe the change brought about by the culottes and jackboots worn by German girls who come to work in the camp. A few days are enough for their gaits, gestures and thoughts to alter – they are now capable of performing their criminal tasks, formatted.

When I think about the system of violence at the camp, the play *The Lovelies and the Dowdies* comes to my mind, its action took place in the theatre cloakroom. In the score for this work, Kantor wrote: “When we give a coat to the cloakroom attendant, it is our fate that we entrust to them.”[10] We reveal ourselves, expose ourselves to view, while our personal item is hanging on a hook, no longer a piece of us. It turns into a motionless object, wreck.

10 Krzysztof Miklaszewski, *Kantor od kuchni*, PIW, 2011, p. XXX.

In Polish culture, the cloakroom carries unpleasant associations – it is the vestibule to the theatre, but after the war it would always bring to mind a vestibule to the hell of a gas chamber where clothes are put on a hook like a personal identity.

The clothes in Kantor's happening mentioned at the beginning are scrutinised with painstaking care. Such care is nowhere to be seen in culture today as its focus is not on the 'outfit' character of clothing, and it fails to draw on the anthropology of attire or spectacle that are so acutely present in Kantor's work. Western culture views clothes as purely aesthetic objects, interpreted within the logic of capitalism, voiceless things to be purchased. From this perspective, a humanistic reflection on fashion inspired by Kantor's theatrical works seems absurd as it treats garments as an existential adventure, rather than something used for decoration. Nevertheless, we need Kantor today, in the second decade of the 21st century. His sensibility drops us a hint as to possible objectives of a revolution today's fashion industry needs so much. Fashion as business, a factory of trends, is a spectacle of illusive wealth, an emballage of the golden age. In an era of climate and migration crises, such fashion, bearing little relevance to life, is out of place.

What we need is a new tale of clothing – a tale not rooted in the imagery of capitalism, but originating in anthropology and everyday life. In this tale, clothes are our partners in experience, part of it. In this tale, the status of what is material, real, sensual or typical of daily life is elevated to that of the personal, human, exceptional. This is not a supermarket selling goods, but a small stage where we, with used costumes on, perform social roles. The theatre of daily life.

This kind of life is the essence of those clothes that we give to migrants or the unemployed, that we exchange with friends or that once belonged to our grandmothers, those that we take care of, mend, and when they cannot be of use anymore we put them with the recycling, not with landfill waste.

Kantor has an endless fascination with trash. And trash – in its metaphorical sense as well – is where he looks for objects to salvage. It is there that the "poorest" ones, discarded before their time, kept in the anteroom of passing, are found. After all, Kantor believed that

art ought to give voice to poor matter, to acknowledge our privation, tożtake care of and find delight in it.

This is a circus-type of sensibility – and Kantor's thought is surely akin to circus. The name "Cricot" is an anagram of the Polish phrase to cyrk ("it is a circus") – and the circus is present in the entire body of the artist's work. Clothing is an integral part of a sideshow, highlighting the character of a figure, acting in performance put on by a body. Kantor would often say that theatre – including the theatre of everyday life – was a "tawdry show."[11] Sweaty costumes used season after season, low pay, but the show must go on. Circus is a theatre revealing its entrails – and the point is to laugh, be frightened, excited, disgusted – and enchanted! It is all about matter because it is in the matter that the spirit dwells.

There is no point in pretending there is no matter, it is better to take a careful look at it as if it were an exhibit in a cabinet of curiosities. Kantor wants us to realise that clothing is an intriguing object, that our bodies are astonishing, that those things we consider ordinary and obvious, are in fact astounding. Like in the anatomy lesson, Kantor wants us to discover the wondrous matter around us, and to marvel at it.

The tawdry show – metaphorically and literally – is a poor theatre. A theatre for all. The barker who calls out to people and tells them about the curiosities inside is like Kantor from his scores. Calls, short phrases, slogans meant to convey surprise, emotions. Come inside, see for yourselves!

Conference with a Rhinoceros, 1968, is like a circus act per se in which any creature of "extraordinary appearance" could replace the eponymous rhinoceros from Dürer's picture. Kantor writes: "Suddenly, a creature enters which is dirty, grey, its clothes all in tatters, some coats, like a formless bundle, nothing human in him. A monstrous backpack almost like a growth on his back. He sits by the table. And me – elegant, black patent shoes, a scarf, broad-brimmed hat and

11 *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorfozy: teksty o latach 1934–1974*, selected an edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Pisma vol. 1, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, p. 373.

everything that some attribute to me – a buffoon of an artist."[12]

This is an encounter of highly polished form and uncontrolled matter. Kantor claimed that Dürer's woodcut made him dream of developing a new branch of costumology – natural costumology. "It can hardly be referred to as skin – the whole fixture or beastly case, apparently ignorant of the body alive and slowly pulsating inside it, grew beyond measure in explosions of lavish imagination, outlandish whims, bold ideas and multiplying ornamental details, scales, lumps, embroideries."[13] Kantor is *bello*, the rhinoceros is *brutto* – but what is the truth? The artist's penchant for the Italian Peninsula was not accidental – Italians value the surface – costumes and fashion – because they believe it allows insight into the what is deep inside. Kantor wants to expose the brutta to view, not to hide them, as this is what art is for, unlike kitsch-generating commercialism.

I think that today Kantor would like the writer Małgorzata Halber or the artist Paweł Żukowski as both of them retrieve garments, objects, books and other items from waste. They use these things in private lives, given them to friends, or treat them as objects of art. An object enjoying its "prosperity status," as Kantor put it, is not interesting – its true nature is concealed, it is flat. A used one has a history of its own, a circus potential for causing surprise, it is exceptional.

The artist was fascinated with the unemployed, wanderers taking their belongings wherever they went. *Omnia mea mecum porto*. Layers of clothes like a cross-section of skin. Everything may come in handy, not a single thing is superfluous.

In 1963 Kantor wrote: "Wanderers, shaped by their obsession with, or passion of wrapping their bodies with coats, blankets, sheets, engrossed in the complicated anatomy of clothing, the secrets of bags, bundles, parcels, thongs, strings protecting the body against the sun,

12 Tadeusz Kantor, "Komentarze intymne", 1986–88, typescript in the Cricoteka Archive, pp. 30–32. https://www.cricoteka.pl/pl/emballages/.

13 Tadeusz Kantor, ibidem.

the rain, and the cold."[14] Art needs to wander, too, to keep everything, to move along the margins. Against pathos, celebration, festivity – as the author write in his Milano Lessons – but in the name of rebellion and subversion. Literally so – "I am interested in human clothing. Its underneath. Where the lining is unstitched."[15]

The artist analyses everything that is concealed, shamefully camouflaged, discarded as ugly, useless, ownerless, ruined, ill, harmed, strange. "The phenomenon in question is balancing between eternity and rubbish (...) in the hierarchy of objects those at the lowest level are doomed to waste from the start – at the threshold of destruction, they reveal at the last moment their autonomous objective existence."[16]

Or soul – if you wish. This idea is very similar to the cabalist idea of *tikkun olam*. According to this mystical philosophy, putting the world right means "mending the holes in its fabric so filled with overlapping patterns, squiggles, tangles, trails."[17]

In 1942, Rachela Auerbach wrote in the Warsaw Ghetto: "*Tikkun* signifies fulfilment of the destiny of living creatures and products of human work. For it to happen, clothes that belonged to people who are now dead should not be sold or given to persons of unknown conduct. They must be worn by the deceased's sons and daughters, or friends, or poor people who are God-fearing and respectable, and willing to accept the gift."[18] In this way, the *tikkun* of things is multiplied, while the earthly *tikkun* of the departed is fulfilled.

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14 Tadeusz Kantor, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorfozy: teksty o latach 1934–1974*, Pisma vol 1, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, p. 360.

15 Tadeusz Kantor, "Antypody ubioru", w: *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorfozy: teksty o latach 1934–1974*, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, p. 298.

16 Tadeusz Kantor, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorfozy: teksty o latach 1934–1974*, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Księgarnia Akademicka Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, p. 486.

17 Olga Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, trans. by J. Croft, Riverhead Books, 2022, p. 868.

18 Rachela Auerbach, "Lament Rzeczy Martwych", Przełom, no. 2, 1945, pp. 6, 7.

Clothes pass, like people do – yet there is a metaphysical bond between them that must be cared for till the very end. Assiduous attention is to be given to the poorest items that pass away unwanted. The more humane out attitude to objects, the bigger the chance that we will not objectify people.


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kupi
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meleniki, cylindry
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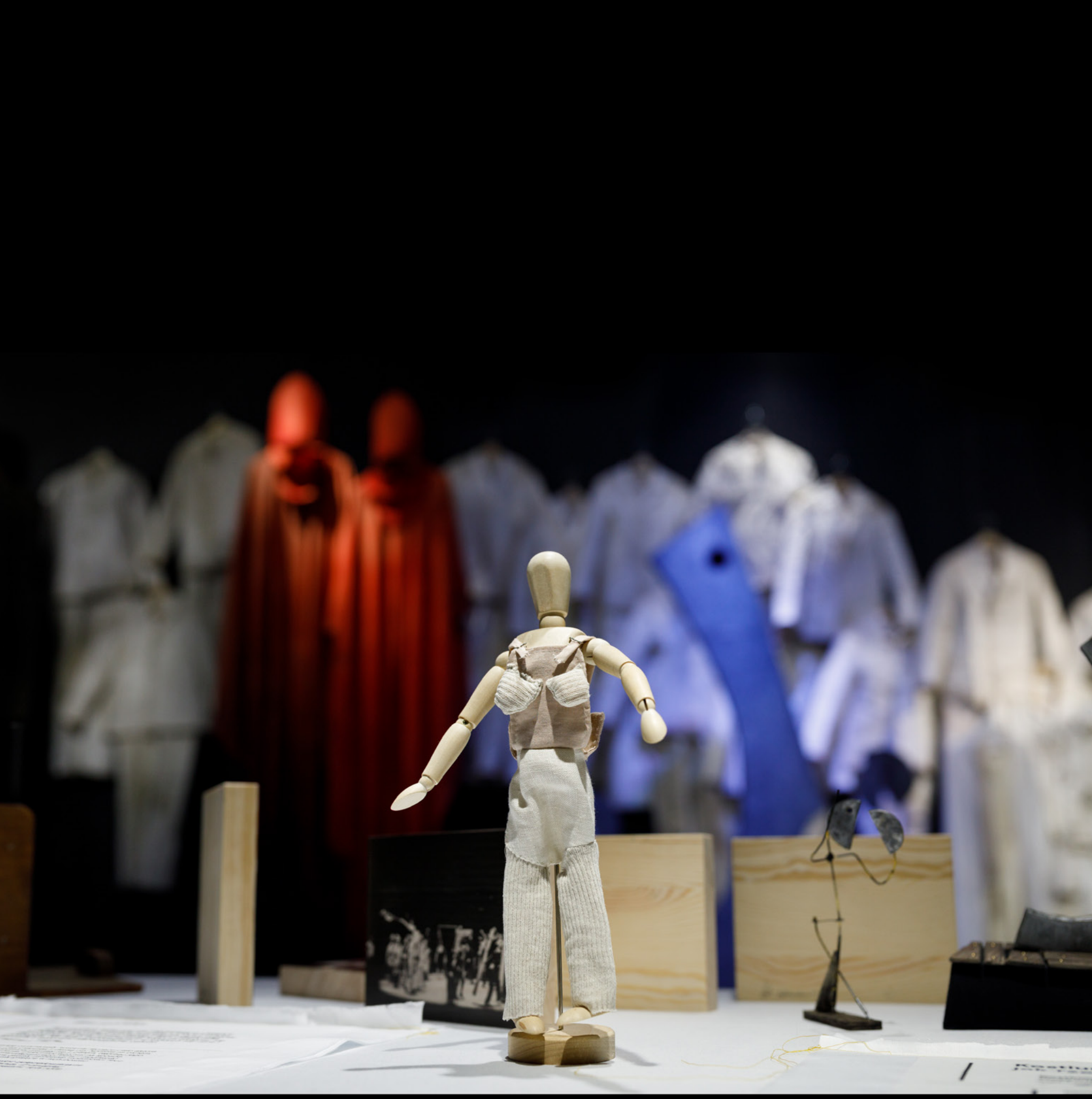

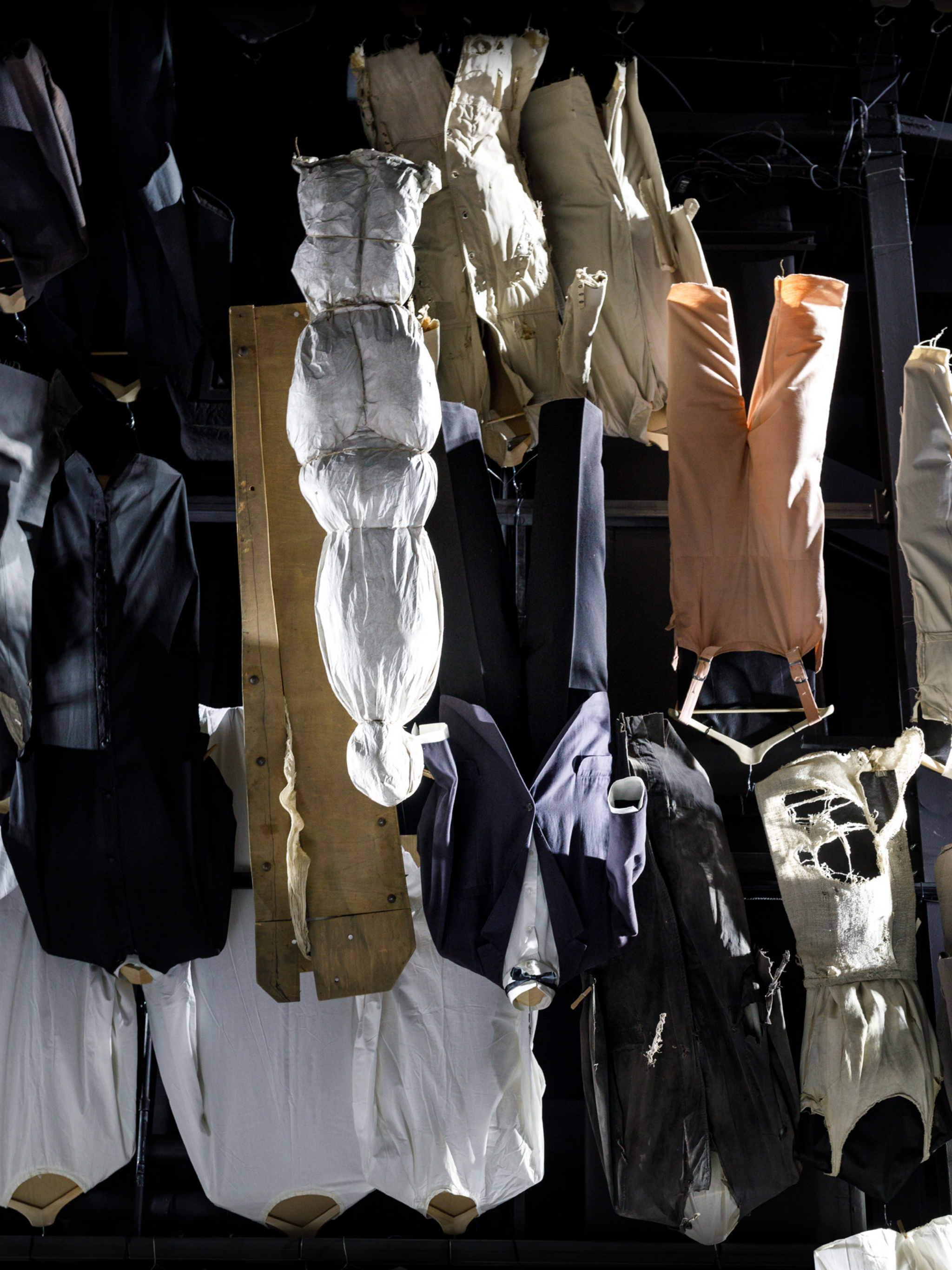

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