

TEO ALA-RUONA & THE WORKING GROUP

Damnat

2027



Photo of rehearsals: Alana Proosa / Kanuti Gildi Saal Residency, 2026

CONCEPT

Damnat is a performance for two performers, and a chef. The work continues Teo Ala-Ruona's long-term practice and artistic research into the effects of sociopolitical norms on how we relate to and understand the body. It is the last part of the trilogy following the performances *Lacuna* (2021) and *Parachorale* (2024). *Damnat* is a co-commission with **Zodiak – Center for New Dance** and co-production by **Toaster**, Copenhagen and will premiere in **Pannuhalli, Dance House Helsinki**, in May 2027.

Damnat is composed of dances that aim toward metaphysical transformation and processes of emptying the body of language and its categorising force. Accompanying the two performers, a chef cuts abstract jelly sculptures referencing organs, which are also shared and consumed by both performers and the audience during the performance.

On stage, the performers move through a series of transformations into different characters, passing through dreamlike situations shaped by a recurring sensation: that someone is forcing you to internalise a particular language about yourself. Language—and its power to categorise, as

well as its potential to be reimagined—lies at the centre of *Damnat*. In the performance, language and food begin to mirror one another: words are “force-fed” to the performing bodies in the form of food. The performance also includes dances and body-based practices in which the performers attempt to empty themselves of linguistic meanings. In this way, the characters gradually fall away from the performers’ bodies, revealing a kind of nothingness—an opacity that cannot be fully translated into words.

Damnat’s artistic process is rooted in Ala-Ruona’s exploration of medicalized and diagnostic modes of thinking that categorically divide the body into parts—particularly the brain–gut axis—and reconsiders language’s role in producing the normative subject. **Through devoted dance that strives toward shifts in body and psyche, growling vocalizations, and staged character development, the piece subverts expectations of the body and communication.** The work pushes aside classifications of body parts as either normal or pathological, confronting the audience with a body whose distortions unfold across linguistic, physical, and symbolic registers. The choreography emerges from an intensive, multi-year shared practice of dance, movement, and character research between Ala-Ruona and Tomic.

Underlying the work are two personal experiences through which Ala-Ruona approaches these questions: intestinal pain and transcorporeality. In *Damnat*, these experiences are opened up as spaces for reflection, inviting anyone to consider their own embodiment. While the research behind the piece addresses the history of pathologizing trans people, the shared exploration with the working group ultimately expands the inquiry toward broader questions concerning conceptions of the human.

Trans embodiment has often been approached in psychological discourse as a neuroanatomical disorder, e.g. through structural differences in the brain. In *Damnat*, this “disturbance” represents the performers’ capacity to transform limiting and categorising thought into a merged, holistic, and category-transcending bodily experience. Likewise, the gut becomes a site where categorical thinking dissolves, breaking down and mashing like food.





**PERFORMANCE MATERIALS:
*CLINICAL SPACE, FOOD AS LANGUAGE, EGG AND THE EMPTY BODY***

Spatially, *Damnat* examines the clinical space as a modernist institution designed to diagnose and classify bodies, separating the “sick” from the healthy. The piece takes place within an abstracted clinical environment that recalls a psychiatrist’s office, hospital or a space of interrogation. On stage, two custom-made tables designed by Teo Paaer reference autopsy tables, together with a stainless-steel wall structure that—depending on the technical conditions of the theatre—either descends from the ceiling or moves forward from upstage to the front part of the stage midway through the performance. The lighting design also constructs clinical, emptied spaces in which a solitary body on stage seems to come under heightened scrutiny. The sound design is binaural and creating a sense of travelling through vessels, filling them and sounding through them: revealing empty space between intervals.

The shape of the egg recurs both in the figures and in the stage materials, appearing as jelly sculptures and as silicone, egg-shaped headpieces worn by the performers. Egg functions in the world of the piece as an emancipatory symbol of a body that has not yet been defined as this or that. The egg is uncategorised and unmarked.

WORKING GROUP

Concept, direction: Teo Ala-Ruona

Choreography, script, performance: Teo Ala-Ruona & Mina Tomic

Culinarian: Pola Sutryk

Dramaturgy: Ami Karvonen
Sound design: Tuukka Haapakorpi
Light design: Sofia Palillo
Spatial and costume design: Teo Paaer
Production: Sanna Ritvanen

PREMIERE

Zodiak, Pannuhalli, Helsinki, May 2027

TOURING

InKonst, Malmö, 2027
Toaster, Copenhagen, Toaster Biennial 2028

CO-PRODUCERS

Toaster, Copenhagen, Toaster Biennial

SUPPORTERS

The Finland-Institut, Berlin
The Finnish Institute UK+Ireland

RESIDENCIES

Tuo Tuo -residency, Joutsa
Reykjavik Dance Festival -residency, Reykjavik
ZK/U -residency, Berlin
Kanuti Gildi Saal -residency, Tallinn
○ Espaço do Tempo -residency, Portugal
Mocvara Gallery, Zagreb

PRELIMINARY SPATIAL / TECH INFO

- Adaptable to different sized spaces
- Frontal staging
- The venue must be able to support the aerial lifting of one performer using a harness system
- Audience capacity depends on the venue. The spatial configuration can be discussed and adapted to suit different venue dimensions and audience capacity ratios in collaboration with the artist and set designer
- Two lavalier mics
- The sound design can be scaled to small and large systems
- Additional technical requirements will be specified as the process develops and can be discussed with the artist during the creation process. A final technical rider will be provided closer to the premiere

SCHEDULE

2025:

Preliminary production, applying for residencies and grants, seeking co-producers. Inviting musicians, and a chef to the process. Writing texts in collaboration with Karvonen, and preliminary development of performer practices. Initial design work with sound, set, and costumes.

January - June 2026

Residency work at **Kanuti Gildi Saal**, Tallinn, refining performers' work, choreography, and dramaturgy. Initial rehearsals with the chef.

August - December 2026

Residencies. More rehearsals with the chef. Finalizing the script with Karvonen.

January - May 2027

Residency work at **O Espaço do Tempo** -residency, Portugal. Intensive rehearsal period. Premiere of the work in Zodiak, Pannuhalli, in Helsinki.

June 2027 onwards

Touring with the work. Toaster, Copenhagen. **InKonst**, Malmö.

BIO

Teo Ala-Ruona is an interdisciplinary artist based in Helsinki, working in the expanded field of performance at the intersection of choreography, contemporary theatre, and visual arts. His practice seeks an embodied metaphysical transformation that shifts the attunement of human corporeality, navigating the intersections of linguistic, somatic, and social existence. In Ala-Ruona's work, trans embodiment operates as a conceptual framework and a philosophical apparatus through which he critically examines society's conception of the body, expanding the understanding of what a body can be. Rooted in embodied practice, philosophy, and theory, his work considers the performer as both a reflective surface and an active agent in negotiating pre-given categories.

His work derives enjoyment from the absurd, the transgressive, and the impure, weaving carefully crafted audience engagement with deeply embodied performance practice. It balances emotional and psychological tension with moments of humor and tenderness.

Ala-Ruona's work has recently been shown in **The Biennale Architettura 2025** (Venice), **Performa Biennial** (USA), **The Vilnius Biennial of Performance Art** (LT), **The Finnish National Gallery Kiasma** (FI), **The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London** (UK), **Sequences** festival (FI) and **Toaster** (DK). In the spring 2025 he will show new work in **the 19th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice**, in the **Nordic Countries Pavilion**.

Ala-Ruona is the associate artist of **Zodiak – Center for New Dance** 2025-2028. In 2025, Ala-Ruona was awarded the **Linnamo Foundation Award** for openness in artistic work.

MORE INFO OF THE ARTIST

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Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/teoalaruona/>

Email: teo.alaruona@gmail.com

Ala-Ruona's producer: sanna.ritvanen@gmail.com

TEASER

<https://vimeo.com/1192382138>

rehearsal material from Kanuti Gildi Saal residency, 2026

Footage by Alana Proosa, edit by Mina Tomic

PHOTOS OF REHEARSALS BY ALANA PROOSA / KANUTI GILDI SAAL RESIDENCY

All photos in this dossier by Alana Proosa









