

# LEAL VEILEBY

## ESCANIFOBÉTICA

24/04 – 08/06/25

ZARATAN – ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA  
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WED-SUN 4-8PM

Seven syllables strung together – **ES CA MI FO BÉ TI CA** – like a discordant rendition of DO-RE-ME from Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1959 musical *The Sound of Music*, shape this Portuguese slang word from the same decade. Though its origin is obscure there's a point to be made about its off-kilter quality being expressive of what it tries to describe: something *clumsy, strange, extravagant* and *rare*. What **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** isn't is *skilful, quick* and *effective*, but neither is it *common, conventional* nor *trivial*.

Now, all attempts at understanding something involve some act of translation, and it was an evening while discussing queerness, and a potential Portuguese translation of the word QUEER, that **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** staggered through the fly curtain by the doorway and joined the conversation. For what is "queer", **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** argued, "if not a failure or down right refusal – or inability, by no fault of one's own – to play the part of the 'good little girl or boy' or to comply with the productive demands of heteronormative, capitalist society? Failure – as methodology, as strategy, and as style!", **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** declared. And if there is one thing **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** has, it's style. A sort of frivolous, fluid, joyous and irreverent style that doesn't care about hierarchy, good taste, or about being the "adult" in the room (whatever that actually means?!).

Eventually, as **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** is a good old adjective that can be applied to more than one thing, the conversation drifted towards **ESCANIFOBÉTICA**'s relation to technology, which made us all think of Hayao Miyazaki's animated masterpiece *Howl's Moving Castle* (based on the book by the same name). In it, the titular "castle" – a hodge-podge of architectural and mechanical elements unnaturally strung together like some great beast – is literally animated and moved about by the power of Calcifer, a fire demon. Calcifer, who has entered into a faustian bargain with the wizard Howl, is not only bound to the hearth of the castle's kitchen, and in constant need of wood to consume and sustain itself, but is also the very power of which the castle itself is a manifestation. Both weak and strong, both bound to a single location and free to wander. And so, when towards the end of the film Calcifer is removed from the hearth the grand structure of the "castle" is reduced to rubble – until a somewhat weakened Calcifer is reignited and the once impressive structure is resurrected – if only as a smaller, flimsier, *escanifobetic* version.

Of course, technology doesn't have to be tied to a physical object or system – it doesn't even have to be achieved through the cunning ensnarement of a magical entity (although there is more than one malevolent *daemon* currently running around the circuits of our digital devices) – it can also be the application of conceptual knowledge to achieve a practical goal.

Unfortunately, most of us are taught from an early age to see the world through a narrow and biased lens of socionormativity, so it's easy to miss and misinterpret the many *escanifobetic-phenomena* that are all around us. But could one have an *escanifobetic-technology* of the self, one that relieves you of the pressure to live up to normative, patriarchal ideas? And that opens up the possibility for unanticipated pleasures?

"And play", **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** shouted! Let's not forget about play!

It is so easy to confine play to the domain of childhood, and to think of it as not belonging to serious, adult life. We all start off in an *escanifobetic-state* as children, before reaching adulthood, and if we are lucky to live long enough we will eventually return to it as we age. A bit like Calcifer. **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** sees no reason why we shouldn't resist the idea of "mastery" and instead let *play* be the guiding principle from cradle to tomb. But then again, **ESCANIFOBÉTICA** doesn't care much about what others think is "proper" behaviour.

In the end we settled on a kind of "Venn diagram" for this envisioned *escanifobetic-technology*, one that picked up some of the best bits from the field of science, esoterica, and childhood play. Science, because scientific strategies are great for building stable knowledge structures (although it often fails to see how susceptible it is to subjectivity, cultural norms and normative assumptions). Esoterica, because its traditions are much better at addressing and acknowledging the aspects of lived reality that escape the capacity of language, and because sometimes a little bit of magic allows for some nice wiggle room (even if, from time to time, it relies too heavily on personal experience and individual biases). And finally, childhood play, domain of joy, error and mishaps. Because sometimes intuition, and aimlessly mucking about, can provide better and more surprising results than following strict rules – and most importantly, because it's FUN.

– LealVeileby, April 2025

## Acknowledgements

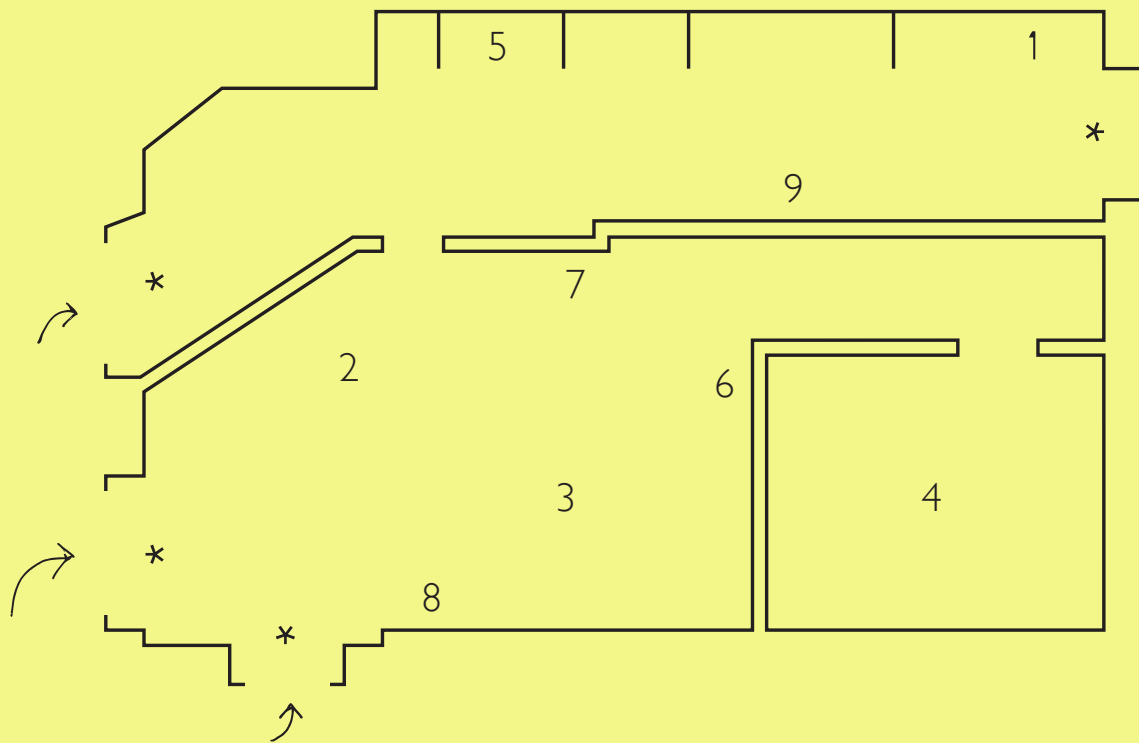
Gemma Noris, José Chaves, Carmen Zurita, Fonseca da Silva,  
Ismael Leal, Cian Burke, João Mouro, Jakob Erlandsson, Helena Olsson,  
and friends of Zaratan.

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1.  
*#OculistaOcultista VI* (2025)  
 Vertical HD digital video, colour, sound, loop, 5:45

2.  
*#OculistaOcultista VII* (2025)  
 Vertical HD digital video, colour, sound, loop, 4:38

3.  
*#OculistaOcultista VIII* (2025)  
 Vertical HD digital video, colour, sound, loop, 6:20

*#OculistaOcultista* is an ongoing series in which LealVeileby explores our contemporary relationship with mobile devices. Using moving images captured with their cell phones, the duo edits short observations – where the authentic becomes artifice and the artifice becomes authentic – and publishes them on social media platforms before, finally, assembling them into video carousels presented on vertical screens in the exhibition space.

4.  
*Haircut* (2025)  
 HD digital video, B&W, sound, 25:43

*Haircut* features Ismael Leal (b.1933), father of António Leal and long-time collaborator of the duo, getting a haircut from his son. Shot at his home in Damaia, Portugal, the familiar and social interaction between Ismael and António is one of retelling old stories and retreading family narratives of past, present and future – as the interaction progresses the moving image gradually slows down reaching a still frame.

5.  
*Fig. 16* (2025)  
 Digital print on Fine Art Baryta (300g),  
 museum glas, aluminium frame, 38,5x35 cm

6.  
*Fig. 17* (2025)  
 Digital print on Fine Art Baryta (300g),  
 museum glas, aluminium frame, 70x47 cm

7.  
*Fig. 18* (2025)  
 Digital print on Fine Art Baryta (300g),  
 museum glas, aluminium frame, 23x30 cm

8.  
*Fig. 19* (2025)  
 Digital print on Fine Art Baryta (300g),  
 museum glas, aluminium frame, 50x35 cm

9.  
*Fig. 20* (2025)  
 Digital print on Fine Art Baryta (300g),  
 museum glas, aluminium frame, 46x27 cm

In the ongoing photo series *Fig* the duo draws inspiration from illustrational imagery found in instructional literature, which they re-enact and reinterpret often using their own bodies.

\*  
*zuniilli* (2025)  
 Four yellow fly curtains, site-specific installation.