KUNSTHALLE
GIESSEN

Raphaela Vogel
THE DRESSAGE OF SPACE: ZIGGURAT OF DEAD ZONES

29.11.2024 – 02.03.2025

English

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The works of Raphaela Vogel (*1988 Nuremberg, lives in Berlin) often consist of video films, music and noise collages integrated into sculptural and installation-based settings. The artist frequently employs *objets trouvés** (found objects), machines, and technology, along with self-produced sound and visual materials. Her multimedia and multidisciplinary works interact with the architectural and spatial conditions of exhibition environments. This interplay creates unique experiences for the audience that arise from the reciprocal interaction between the artwork, the viewer, and the site. These elements cannot be detached or viewed in isolation from one another or from their specific context.

* All terms marked with an asterisk are explained in the glossary at the back of the booklet.

FOYER

In the Kunsthalle Giessen, Raphaela Vogel explores the concept of space from diverse perspectives, while directly referencing the distinctive features of the exhibition site. The exhibition begins with a striking introduction: a banner in the foyer depicts the artist herself in her former studio, sitting on a carousel horse, mirrored, distorted, and framed by the title of her solo show: *The Dressage of Space: Ziggurat of Dead Zones*. Prominently positioned, the title sets the tone for what's to come.

In the image, Vogel collages "killer drills," dripping with blood, alongside a distorted Kunsthalle logo symbolizing her thematic engagement with the exhibition site. These elements surround her self-portrayal as a rider on the horse, embodying the concept of domestication. Each visual component reflects Vogel's multifaceted approach to space and hints at what visitors can expect in the Kunsthalle.

Here, Vogel delves into the violent subjugation, taming, occupation, and disciplining of space, as well as its gentle shaping and domestication. Space appears alternately pliable and responsive, or unruly and defiant. The exhibition's subtitle suggests that, within the artist's conceptual framework, space might even be perceived as a mythical entity, resisting all forms of domestication. The term *ziggurat* refers to the tiered temple towers of ancient Mesopotamia, serving as religious-spiritual centers and symbolic connections between heaven

and earth. Meanwhile, the *dead zone*—by definition—eludes direct perception, pointing to the elusive, incomprehensible nature of space itself.

The drill, rider, and horse from the studio reappear in the site-specific, expansive installation created exclusively for the Kunsthalle.

ZIGGURAT OF DEAD ZONES

Vogel combines a historical sleigh with found objects, such as spherical speakers from the 1970s, which flank the sleigh like flagpoles on a chariot. The expansive construction is complemented by newly produced steel and wood elements, arranged symmetrically to resemble a scale—a classic metaphor for justice. These elements form two pyramidal, three-tiered ziggurats that, with seven projectors each, nearly reach the ceiling of the Kunsthalle.

The 14-part video projection on the scale features found video material and newly produced films by Vogel. Alongside a theoretical exploration of space from a macro perspective, these works also reflect the artist's personal experiences with the economy of art, serving as a conceptual starting point.

The lowest section of the projections on the sleigh-scale construction depicts the assembly and disassembly of temporary exhibition walls, directly referencing the Kunsthalle Giessen as an exhibition site. This material consists of marketing videos appropriated by Vogel from a company specializing in mobile partition walls, such as the temporary walls used in the Kunsthalle. Every artist invited to the Kunsthalle must inevitably engage with these architectural elements in the context of an exhibition.

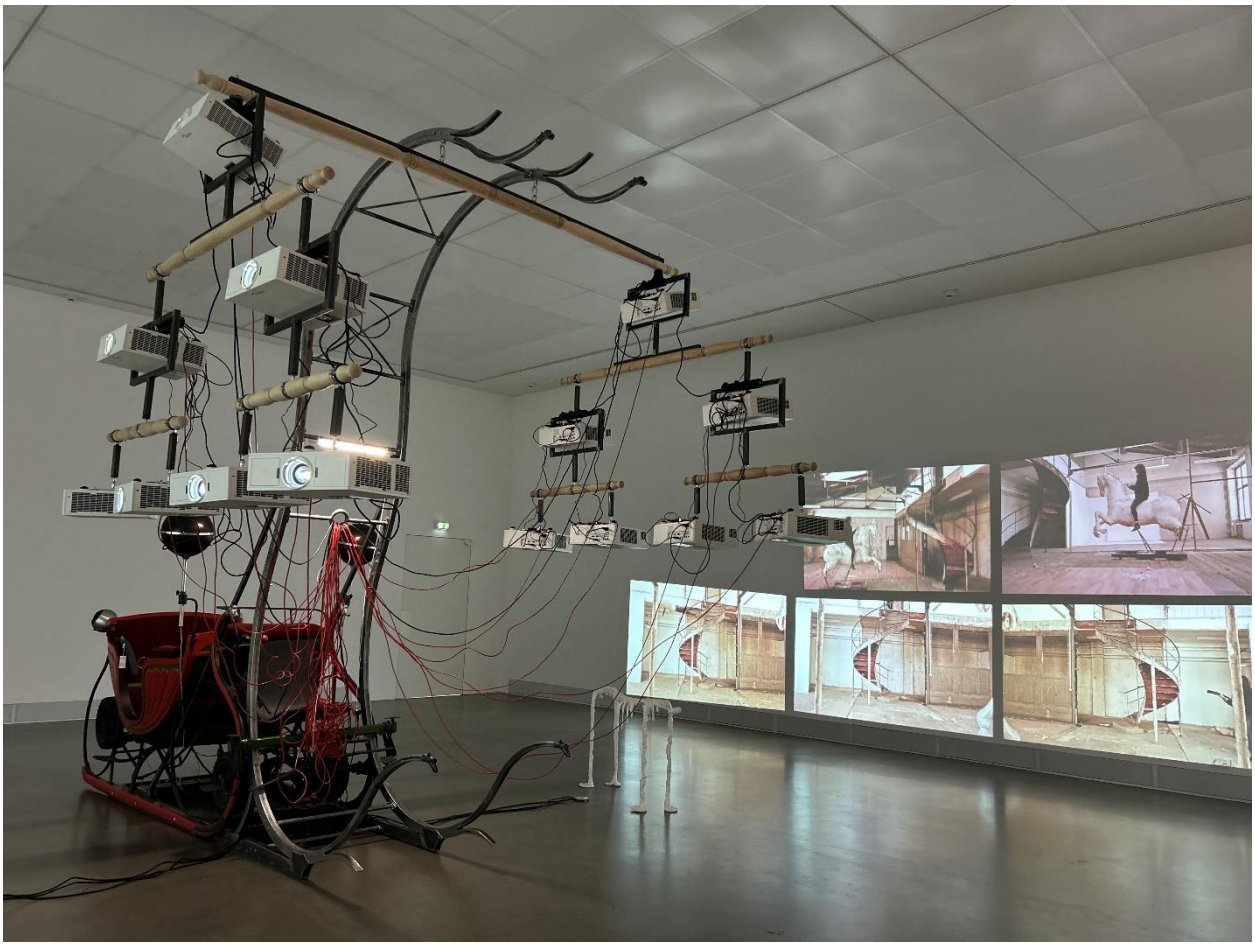


Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, Ziggurat of Dead Zones, 2024. Courtesy the artist

The protagonists in the videos busily assemble and dismantle walls and building elements. By making the architecture of the exhibition itself a subject of her installation, Vogel references the work of American conceptual artist Bruce Nauman (*1941). Like Nauman, Vogel creates immersive environments through spatial manipulation, enveloping viewers both mentally and physically.

The unconscious actions of visitors are directly integrated into the conscious deconstruction of space: their steps may set the scale into slight vibrations. As they move, they pass through the images, influencing the projections, which shift and distort as a result. In this way, as in the videos, space is constantly reconstructed and deconstructed. Additionally, the pyramidal arrangement of the video projectors subtly alludes to a class system, with the lowest level representing the workers. The scale, as a universally recognized symbol of justice, visualizes the (in)equitable distribution of property and resources. Vogel's manipulation of the videos—playing the workers' actions forward and backward—renders them trapped in their tasks, seemingly condemned to eternal labor.

Elsewhere, the artist's voice amplifies this impression. In a singsong rhythm, she accompanies projected text fragments on the uppermost level of the scale, proclaiming: "Als ich heute Morgen aufstand und mich wusch, scheint mir plötzlich alles klar: der Mensch muss arbeiten (When I got up this morning and cleaned myself, everything suddenly seemed clear: man must work)." This refrain elevates work to a kind of law and an unavoidable destiny for the depicted scene. The text fragments, which leap across the image, dissolve, and distort, simultaneously resemble graphic patterns and evoke

art-historical references to “liberated” or playful typography, such as in psychedelic poster art or Jugendstil (Art Noveau).

Just as the symbols and typography she employs become objects of her art, Vogel herself is repeatedly featured in her work. Videos on the second level show her navel, a hint of her pubic area, and water dripping from her fingers. The impression is sensual, even languid, contrasting sharply with the workers depicted on the lower level. At the same time, this literal navel-gazing reflects Vogel’s self-ironic humor and a touch of sarcasm, especially when she continues singing: “Denn die Arbeit macht mir Spaß, vielmehr Spaß als irgendwas (Because I enjoy work, much more than anything else)”, thereby proclaiming work as the ultimate value.

Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, Ziggurat of Dead Zones, 2024, film still. Courtesy the artist

On all levels of the projections, videos show Raphaela Vogel engaged in various activities in her former, now emptied studio. In one scene, she sits filming on a wooden horse, revealing the banner from the foyer as a still image. In another, she throws a mannequin down the narrow spiral staircase of her studio. Later, she is seen surrounded by skeletal dogs—these ghostly figures, cast in recyclable plastic, also appear in the exhibition space as if they had emerged directly from the video. In this scene, the camera seems to swing through the room on a rope, with the increasingly distorted image heightening the sense of spatial disorientation, visually unhinging the space.

Having leapt from the video into the exhibition space, the "skeletal dogs" are stripped of their presumed function as sleigh animals, yet remain far from liberated. They are, for instance, "trained" to wait by the drawbar or hold the showerhead of a bathtub.

The artist's real dog also makes an appearance in another scene. Playful and cheeky, the royal poodle peeks out from behind a monument in a Berlin park. Upon closer inspection, it is revealed to be the Julius Fučík Memorial in Berlin Pankow, commemorating the Czech writer and communist resistance fighter (1903–1943) who was murdered by the Nazis. Here, too, Vogel offers a subtle political commentary—an engagement with themes of justice and injustice that runs throughout the entire body of work.

The accompanying soundtrack alternates between abstract and concrete sound elements, interwoven with the artist's own vocals. Water bubbles, wood creaks, and ominous, threatening string instruments herald an impending calamity. Amidst this, an anonymized conversation sketches Vogel's struggle with the looming takeover of her studio space by a male artist—a narrative addressing the involuntary "seizure of space" without the artist's consent. In doing so, Vogel confronts questions about artistic occupation of space and the personal fight for a creative territory, while also

referencing broader experiences of unequal power dynamics, such as gentrification and gender roles.

Finally, the artist expands the metaphorical, political, and personal dimensions with another conceptual and symbolically charged representation of space. In images captured with a fisheye lens, a drill appears stationary at the center, while the room rotates around this axis—pushing the abstraction of space to its limits. Vogel almost violently unsettles the viewers.

Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, Ziggurat of Dead Zones, 2024, film still. Courtesy the artist.

THE DRESSAGE OF SPACE

Surrounded by a massive steel framework, a narrow corridor acts as a room within a room, extending the elongated horizontal of the sleigh-scale structure into the rear section of the exhibition space while simultaneously slicing through it. Like an exoskeleton, this space is enclosed by a heavy industrial steel construction. At its front and back are mounted the wooden double doors from Vogel's former studio. A small sticker above the mail slot on the front door still bears the inscription "Atelier Raphaela Vogel (Studio Raphaela Vogel). "

In her struggle for her studio, Vogel ultimately prevails by reclaiming the defiant space and reshaping it according to her vision and will. However, she takes the thematic exploration to an extreme in her artistic engagement: the space is stretched to an exaggerated length, made claustrophobically narrow, and appears trapped within its architectural metal elements—a replica of the steel structure in her actual studio. Vogel inverts this skeletal frame outward, confining and dominating its surroundings. Through this dramatic "dressage of space," she demonstrates her triumph over the space and its boundaries.

The Dressage of Space (Interior)

Inside the installation, a 10-meter-long, narrow corridor unfolds, where clusters of angel heads made of recyclable plastic float, merging into a body composed of animal hides. Leather fragments, reminiscent of outstretched wings, are emblazoned with uniform stenciled letters spelling “NACHT” (night), accompanied by non-linear numbering. Here, space, narrative, and communication intertwine. Vogel introduces a reflective layer addressing the origins of language and communication.

The angel heads are cast replicas of façade ornaments from classically styled villas, while the stenciled text and numbered titles of the objects reference stories from *One Thousand and One Nights,* which are counted night by night. The utilitarian stencil lettering and the use of numbers as ordering elements suggest an allusion to a politically or historically significant event.

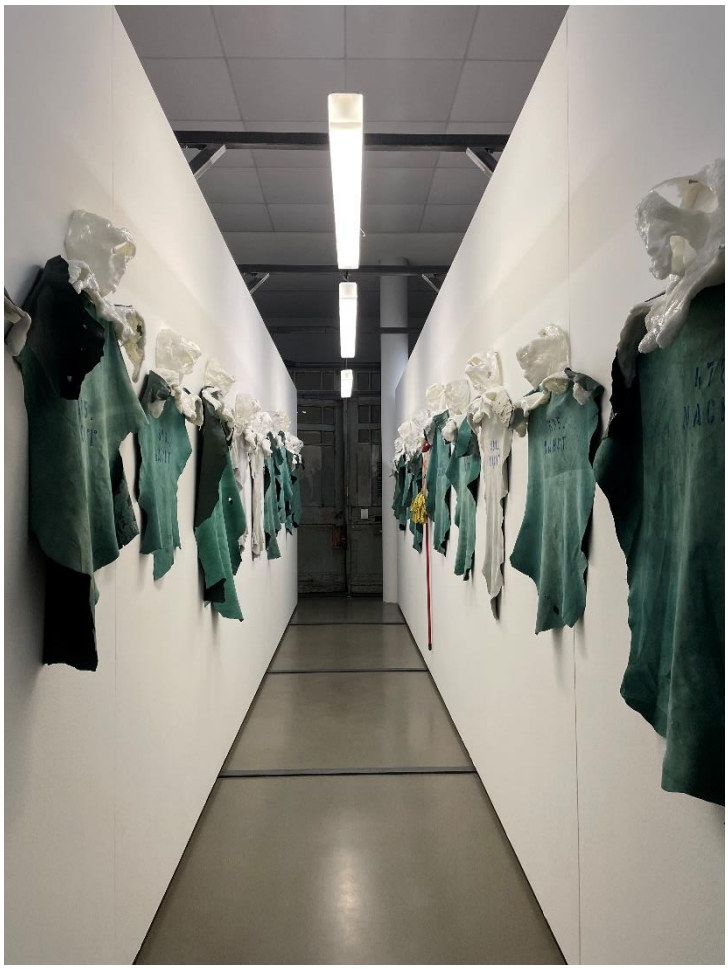


Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, The Dressage of Space, 2024, installation view. Courtesy the artist

On the leather surfaces, the artist presents meticulously executed drawings. Her original designs are complemented by borrowed motifs, such as an angel, dogs, or a man adorned with opulent earrings. These elements are drawn from a ceiling fresco by the Venetian artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770), created in 1752/53 for the Würzburg Residence. As the largest ceiling fresco in the world, it captivates viewers with extreme visual perspectives that create a grand spatial experience.

In contrast, the angelic figures depicted here—equipped with hands, rags, and an actual mop—evoke the laborious task of cleaning, their distorted and dissolving faces hinting at toil. Along with the use of goatskin, often employed for making window or cleaning leather, they subtly and humorously reference the unseen labor of those tasked with cleaning public buildings or private homes. This expression of hierarchical relationships mirrors the pyramidal structure of the installation, resembling an inverted ziggurat.

The Dressage of Space (Exterior)

Through large-scale banner prints in her signature animal-hide shapes, the artist stakes a territorial claim. Martial in appearance, these banners flank the tubular exterior of the corridor's structure. They are the end product of a layered creative process in which Vogel paints and draws on fabric and animal hides. The motifs include charming owls, skeletons, faces, and claw-like hands. She photographs these drawings and digitally manipulates them for further refinement.

In this collage-like approach, she integrates fragments of art and pop culture. Recognizable examples include the swimmer from the logo of the clothing brand Chiemsee, a cityscape from a work by Italian Futurist Tullio Crali (1910–2000), and the cover of the oldest magazine by and for Black audiences, *The Crisis* (1910–present). After digital editing, Vogel prints

the “skins” onto banner fabric and then paints over them again.

The finished banner skins resemble slain animals, embodying the “dressaged space” that has been tamed through Vogel’s interventions.

I’M WAITING FOR BERNHARD HERRMANN

In one corner of the Kunsthalle, a bathtub stands seemingly at random. It echoes the scene where water drips from Vogel’s hands onto her navel, transposing it into the exhibition space. The ominous dripping sound on the audio track and the presence of the bathtub evoke memories of classic horror scenes, such as those in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) or Brian De Palma’s *Dressed to Kill* (1980). The installation's title further nods to Bernard Herrmann (1911–1975), the composer renowned for his iconic film scores for Hitchcock’s thrillers.

Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, I'm waiting for Bernard Herrmann, 2024. Courtesy the artist

However, for the artist, the bathtub represents more than just a nod to the horror genre—it signifies a retreat, a personal space of calm and inspiration. In the seemingly inefficient idleness of activities like counting the dripping water drops in a trance, creative processes unfold, and new ideas begin to bloom.

THE MAN WHO SPEAKS BACKWARDS

In the small video cabinet, a pulsating projector, mounted on a child's swing, sets the tone with its rhythmic back-and-forth motion. The sounds of the hydraulics from the motor incorporated into the installation echo like heartbeats or labored breaths. The swing's up-and-down motion merges with the film's forward-and-backward movements, creating a disorienting, vortex-like pull that draws viewers into the depths of the projection.

The film features a superimposed baby, swaying in sync with the hydraulic motor's rhythm, set against abstract digital visual fragments, some of which hint at the silhouette of the artist. Eventually, a voice begins singing the satirical song "*Du bist der Mann, der rückwärts spricht*" (You Are the Man Who Speaks Backwards) by the punk band *Die Kassierer*. The song is interrupted by an appearance of cultural theorist, author, and critic Diedrich Diederichsen, whose words are played in reverse, making him literally sound like the titular man who speaks backward.

This increasingly complex exploration of the confusions of language is further amplified by the use of Vogel's signature fisheye lens. The baby, lying on the ground and resting on a fur, is surrounded by angelic figures. A chain draped over its head resembles a halo, deliberately presenting the child in the

style of Christian iconography as the Christ Child. In Christian doctrine, Jesus embodies the Word of God made flesh, entering the world. Thus, the video installation explores language as a sometimes disorienting realm of experience, one that gradually becomes accessible through maturation but can always be subject to instability and misunderstandings.

Flanking the video installation is a trophy (*Pokal*) that appears to be in a state of decay. Its perforations extend the psychedelic sequences of the video into the physical space, creating a seamless dialogue between the virtual and tangible worlds.

Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, Der Mann der Rückwärts spricht, 2022 und Pokal, 2023, Installation view. Courtesy the artist

TROPHIES

Triumphantly, a second oversized trophy towers in the exhibition space. As a counterpart to the trophy in the video room, these are casts of real trophies that sit atop the roof above the entrance portal of the artist institute *De Ateliers* in Amsterdam, where Vogel trained as an artist. Like their

originals, they are made of metal and faithfully reproduce their monumental size.

With this pair of works, Vogel highlights the formative role of her artistic education. The casts function both as mementos and as relics, allowing a connection to the originals and the associated past. At the same time, the appropriation of such objects—similar to the gates of her studio—can be understood as an attempt to assert her dominance over these spaces. In this way, the studio remains hers, albeit as a distorted replica. This space, her “realm of creation spanning a thousand and six nights,” became a place where creativity flourished through a mix of leisure and hard work. It was here that the most important exhibitions of the last decade came to life.

Thus, the depiction of the trophies carries a hint of nostalgia—a reminder of spaces that, while functional and architectural, also shape identity. In the end, not only does Vogel leave behind a “dressaged” space, but she, too, has been shaped in part by that space.

Biography

Raphaela Vogel (*1988, Nuremberg, lives in Berlin) studied at the Städelschule in Frankfurt and the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg. She was a guest professor at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe and is currently a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. The artist was part of the exhibition *The Milk of Dreams* at the Venice Biennale and has had solo exhibitions at venues such as the De Pont Museum for Contemporary Art in Tilburg, the Kunstverein am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin, the Neue Museum in Nuremberg, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Haus der Kunst in Munich, and Kunsthalle Basel.

Glossary

Dressage refers to the process of deliberate training and conditioning to develop desired behaviors or skills. The term is primarily used in animal husbandry and equestrian sports, but can also be applied to humans or general behavioral patterns. In equestrian sports, it specifically refers to a discipline in which horses are trained to perform precise movements and figures in a defined space.

Objets trouvés (French) means “found objects” and refers to everyday items that artists take from their original context and place in a new artistic context.

A dead zone (or blind spot) refers to an area that is not visible to a person despite direct sight or mirrors. The term is commonly used in traffic but can also appear in other contexts where visibility is restricted. The term is also used metaphorically to describe blind spots in thinking or actions—areas that someone does not perceive, even though they would be relevant.

A ziggurat is a temple complex built in ancient Mesopotamia with a terraced structure. It consisted of several stacked levels that became smaller towards the top, forming a pyramid shape. The highest platform housed a sanctuary dedicated to the gods. Ziggurats served as religious centers and symbolized a connection between heaven and earth.

Famous examples include the Ziggurat of Ur and the legendary "Stairway to Heaven" of Babylon, often associated with the Tower of Babel.

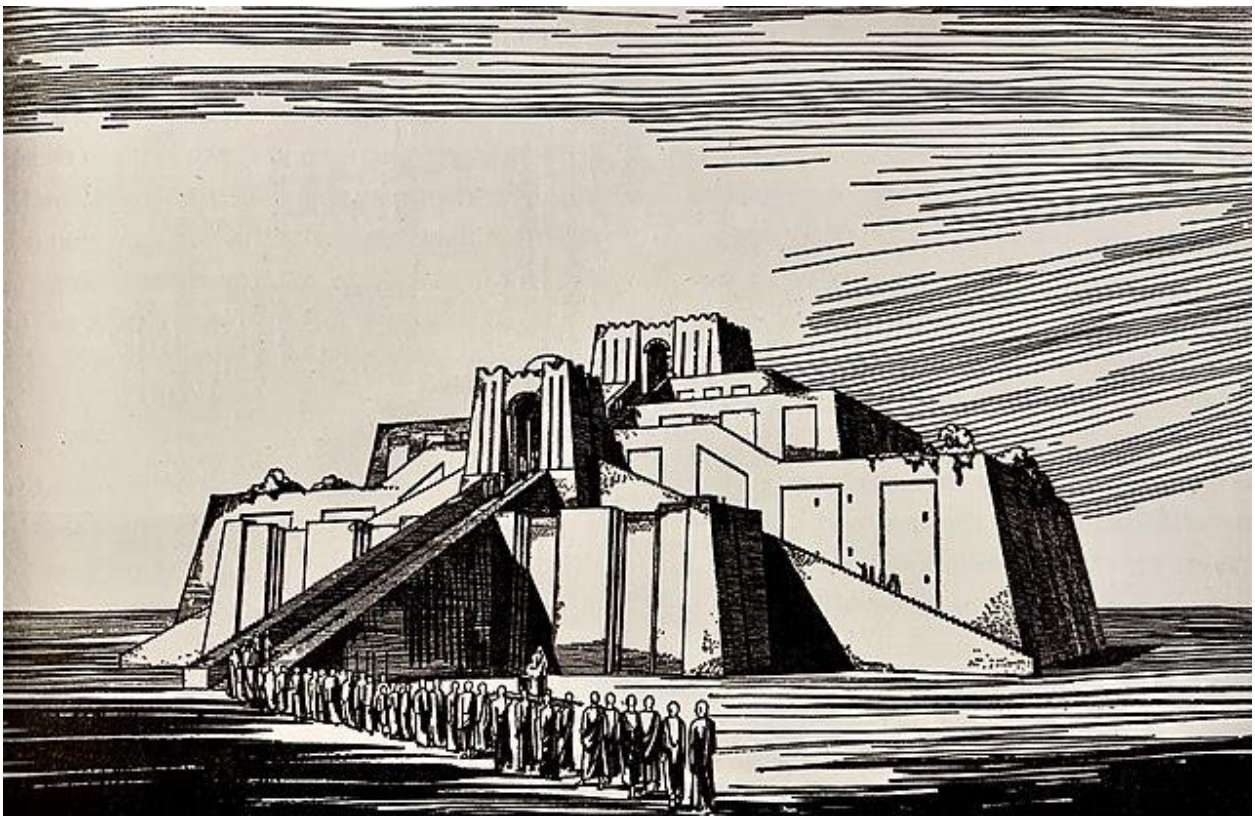
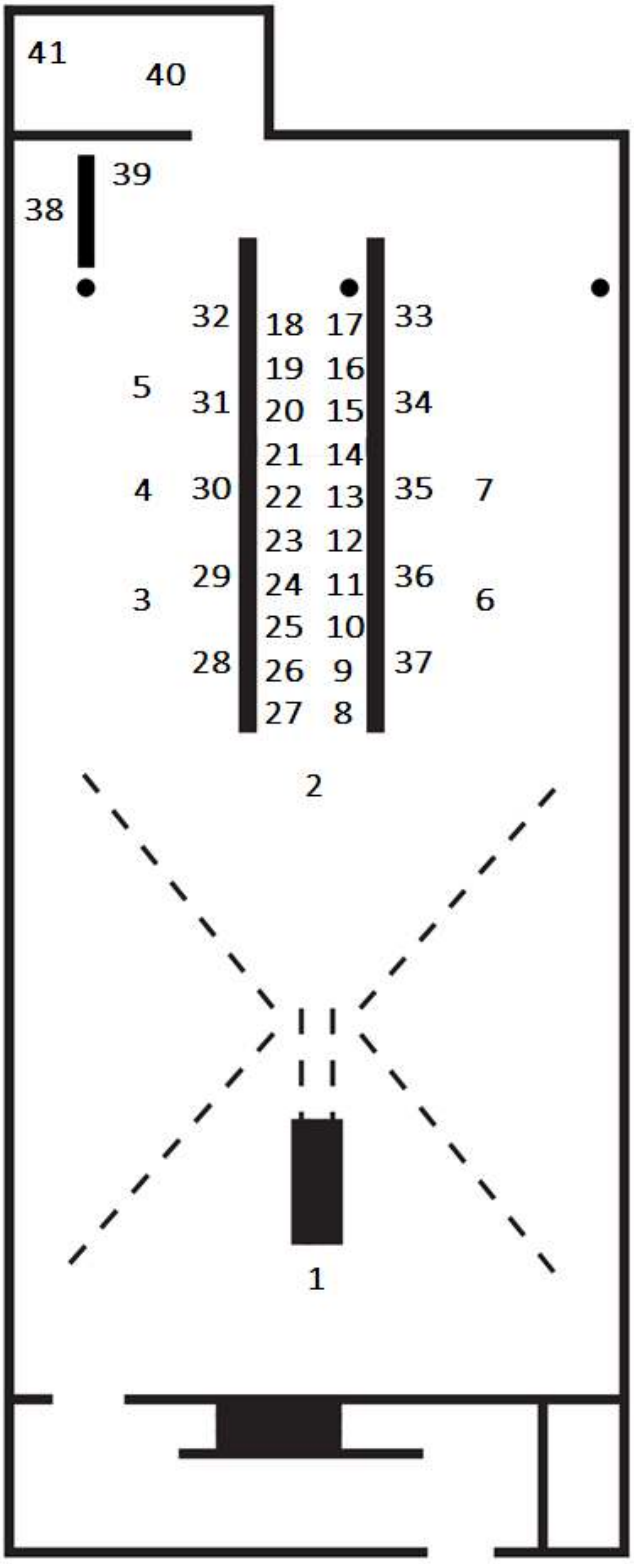


Fig.: Drawing of the Ziggurat of Ur, Iraq, by Marjorie V. Duffell for C. L. Woolley, 1937. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Floor plan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List of Works

1 *Zikkurat der toten Winkel (Ziggurat of Dead Zones)*, 2024
Carriage, spherical loudspeakers, suspension construction made of metal and wood, 14 projectors, media player

2 *Die Dressur des Raumes (The Dressage of Space)*, 2024
4 doors with metal construction
Wood, glass, steel, neon tubes
3,53 x 11,6 x 2,5 m

3 *Nett*, 2024
Recyclable plastic
ca. 83 x 133 x 42 cm

4 *Adrett*, 2024
Recyclable plastic
ca. 83 x 133 x 42 cm

5 *Kokett*, 2024
Recyclable plastic
ca. 83 x 133 x 42 cm

6 *I'm waiting for my woman 1,* 2024
Recyclable plastic

ca. 83 x 133 x 42 cm

7 *I'm waiting for my woman 2,* 2024
Recyclable plastic
ca. 83 x 133 x 42 cm

8 *Die Geschichte vom Propheten und der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

9 *Der Schluss der Geschichte von der Schlangenkönigin*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

10 *Die Geschichte von dem Schuhflicker Maruff*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

11 *Die Geschichte von dem Oberägypter und seinem fränkischem Weibe*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

12 *1002 Nacht*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

13 *Die Geschichte von Zain El-Asnan, die Geschichte von den nächtlichen Abenteuern des Kalifen, die Geschichte von Chudadad und seinen Brüdern, und die Geschichte von Ali Zhawadscha und dem Kaufmanne von Bagdad, die Geschichte von Harun Er-Raschid und Abu Hasan, dem Kaufmann aus Oman*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

14 *Die Geschichte von El-Malik Ez-Zahir Rukn Ed-Din Baibars L-Bundukdari und den sechzehn Wachthauptleuten*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

15 *1004 Nacht*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

16 *1003 Nacht*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

17 *Die Geschichte des Königs Dschaliad und seines Sohnes Wird Chan und darin die Geschichte von der Katze und der Maus*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

18 *Die Geschichte von dem frommen Israeliten*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

19 *Die Geschichte von der Weiberlist*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

20 *1006 Nacht*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

21 *Die Geschichte von den beiden Schwestern die ihre jüngste Schwester beneideten*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

22 *Die Geschichte des zweiten Bettelmönches, darin die Geschichte vom Neider und dem Beneideten*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen

ca. 89 x 72 x 13

23 *Die Geschichte von dem Oberägypter und seinem fränkischem Weibe*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

24 *Die Geschichte von Harun Er-Raschid und dem falschem Kalifen*,2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

25 *Die Geschichte von dem Oberägypter und seinem fränkischem Weibe*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

26 *1005 Nacht*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

27 *Die Geschichte vom Wasservogel und der Schildkröte*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, leather, ballpoint pen
ca. 89 x 72 x 13

28-37 *Die Dressur des Raumes (The Dressage of Space)*, 2024
ca. 365 x 185 x 5 cm
Oil paint, oil crayon, silk paint and sharpie on flag fabric

38 *I'm waiting for Bernard Herrmann*, 2024
Recyclable plastic, bathtub, shower head
Variable dimensions

39 *Pokal*, 2023
Recyclable plastic, green patinated bronze
120,5 x 106 x 73,5 cm

40 *Der Mann der Rückwärts spricht*, 2022
Wooden swing, electric spring cradle, video projector, video: 5:14 min, 2 loudspeaker boxes

41 *Pokal*, 2023,
Green patinated bronze
111 x 90,5 x 67 cm

All Artwork: Courtesy of the artist

Note
There are magnets in the exhibition that can affect implants such as pacemakers.
This exhibition contains explicit language that may be considered provocative.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog produced in collaboration with Kunsthalle Giessen, Synagogue de Delme, France, Kunstverein at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, and Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers, France.

Accompanying Programme

Guided tour by the curator Dr. Nadia Ismail (in German)
Thur.,16.01.2024, 6 pm

Art and coffee (in German)
Wed. 04.12., 3 pm
Registration by: 02.12.
kunsthalle@giessen.de, +49 641 306 1041
Participation fee 2,50 €

Artist Talk (in German)
So. 02.02.2025, 5 pm

Art education in individual conversation
every Sat. 2–4 pm
(English on request)

Sunday Guided Tour (in German)
Sun. 4 pm
01.12.2024 + 05.01. + 02.02. + 02.03.2025

Further Information
www.kunsthalle-giessen.de

Exhibition imprint

Director and exhibition curator: Dr. Nadia Ismail
Assistant curator: Theresa Deichert
Project coordination and art education: Marta Dannoritzer
Technician: Carsten Sehorz
Social Media: Lena Fries
Exhibition design: Marcus Morgenstern
Steel constructions: Jörg Adam and Moritz Hirsch
Exhibition texts and editing: Theresa Deichert, Nadia Ismail, Raphaela Vogel and Marta Dannoritzer
Exhibition installation helpers: Miriam Braun, Anna Horz, Selina Rinn, Anna Seibel, Enrico Schierer, Helena Steffes, Ann-Christin Veeger, Dirk Zschoke
Volunteers: Brigitte Arvin, Karin Bosco, Angelika Hammes, Monica Hillenbrandt, Elvira Jaworski, Ulrich Jost, Sabine Kirchhof, Sebastian Kortz, Christine Luh, Sabine Page, Barbara Pisker, Gaby Gladisch-Schneider, Janina Schastock, Myriam Schmidt-Raphael, Ursula Spies, Ingeborg Weigel, Silvia Wirth
Art education: Wanda Sina Berger, Tillmann Schorstein, Silvia Tretin, Tatjana Wild
Graphics: Harald Schätzlein, Raphaela Vogel

Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, The Dressage of Space, 2024. Courtesy the artist.

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Morgenstern & Wildegans
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Daniel Roth

Free Entry

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Opening Hours

Tue–Sun: 10 am – 6 pm

Closed

23.12.2024-01.01.2025

Front Fig.: Raphaela Vogel, The Dressage of Space, 2024. Courtesy the artist.