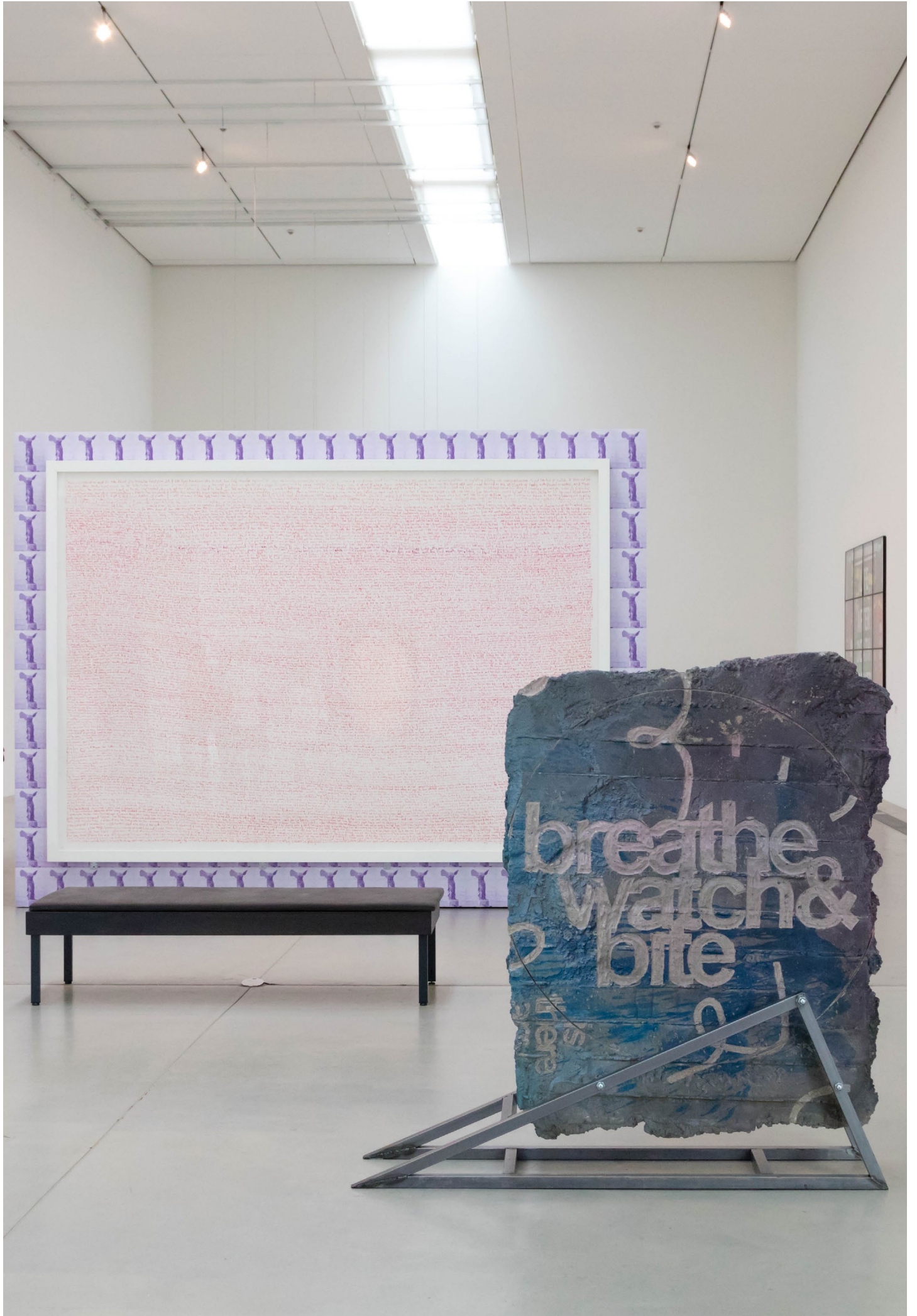


How to See [What Isn't There]

Burger COLLECTION



HOW TO SEE [WHAT ISN'T THERE]

How to See [What Isn't There],
at Langen Foundation, Neuss, Germany
9. September 2018–17. March 2019
Curated by Gianni Jetzer

Burger Collection, Hong Kong is happy to look back on its hugely successful major exhibition *How To See [What Isn't There]*, curated by Gianni Jetzer, at Langen Foundation, Neuss, Germany. The show, which ran from 9 September 2018 until 17 March 2019, attracted over 10'000 visitors, with more than 1'000 on the opening day alone, including many of the artists in the show. Well received by art critics and journalists the exhibition received both local and international press coverage.

With a live-streamed artist talk between the artist Jon Rafman and curator Gianni Jetzer, as well as various guided tours, this exhibition and its theme could be examined more deeply by a wide audience. Further a booklet in both English and German accompanied the show and was available to visitors to guide them through the exhibition and deepen the concept and their understanding of all works on display. This helped ensure a very lively atmosphere where people really engaged with works and took the time to contemplate the theme. The location, Langen Foundation, designed by Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando, located on a former missile base, provided an exceptional surrounding to showcase this multidisciplinary exhibition and further people's interaction with the art on display.

How To See [What Isn't There], which featured 46 works by 32 artists from 5 continents, reflects the global nature of Burger Collection. The works included photography, sculpture, installation, painting, video, VR and performance art, with Davide Balula's *Mimed Sculptures* being exclusively performed at Düsseldorf's K21 Museum for one week during Art Düsseldorf in November 2018. *Deluge (Raketenstation Hombroich)* by Jon Rafman, a site-specific Virtual Reality piece, was specifically created for the show and referenced the military past of the setting, Raketenstation Hombroich, where viewers experienced a dark vision of the invisible dangers of war and feverish images between delusion and reality.

The exhibition dealt with the interaction between presence and absence. In one of the most important tendencies of the late 20th century, artists created works that go beyond the visible and deal with the immaterial aspects of reality: They merely interpret ideas, set processes of disappearance or dematerialization in motion or define emptiness as content. Gianni Jetzer, curator of the exhibition, said: "*Art becomes a form of representation that makes it possible to give form to the non-existent. By means of reference systems, traces or mirror effects, an awareness of what is absent is triggered in the mind of the observer.*"

How to See [What Isn't There]

"Absences are not just what there is not, but rather what was there and *now is not* any longer, or what should be there and *yet is not*!"¹

The group show *How to See [What Isn't There]* presents works from the Burger Collection, Hong Kong, a private collection of Contemporary art representing a wide range of works from Europe, the USA, and Asia. The artists and works selected for *How to See [What Isn't There]* highlight and ultimately blur the dichotomy of presence and absence. Artists have proven to be extremely innovative in activating the immaterial in their work, often operating with conceptual gestures, disappearance, emptiness, dematerialization, and the simple – yet profound – framing of the void.

The exhibition aims to unveil some of these surprising perspectives by exploring the constant dialogue between visible and invisible, presence and absence, and material and immaterial, exploring the status of reality, memory, and other aspects of human life. The show is structured in five chapters: "Reaching for Emptiness," "Archeology of Here and Now," "The Nature of Absence," "Out of Nothing," and "I is another."

The past of Raketenstation Hombroich, as its name reveals, is military, and exists within a history once dominated by the Cold War. NATO had stationed Nike missiles here in preparation for a possible strike by Russians until as late as 1988: an anticipation of an imminent, invisible threat. To make present this invisible history of Raketenstation, the exhibition also includes three wallpapers depicting the variations of Nike: the famous fragment of the winged Greek Goddess representing victory from the collection of the Louvre in Paris, the ballistic missile named Nike, past occupant of Raketenstation, and, in contemporary usage of the antique deity, the American sports apparel company's brand slogan: "Just Do It." The visual quotations applied as wallpaper illuminate unique historical trajectories from Greek mythology to the Cold War to branded consumerism, creating a bricolage of immaterial and material references to the locational identity, united by the central signifier: Nike.

The study of signs has made important contributions to the illumination of the complex relationship between the material and immaterial invoked in this exhibition. The reciprocity between signifier and signified in Ferdinand de Saussure's theory does not rely on logical frameworks, but rather on the social conventions that consolidate these relationships. Art, akin to language, is an arbitrary system of signs whose content is delivered in material and immaterial ways and whose realities are negotiable.

Featured are works that literally direct our gaze to something other than themselves, works that act as indicators of complex histories and processes, and works that convey the presence of another human or process despite their physical absence. Together, the works ultimately question the contained meanings of images and objects, inviting us to stretch our imaginations into the void in order to see hidden layers.

Participating artists

Doug Aitken, Iván Argote, Davide Balula, Mohamed Bourouissa, Valentin Carron, Alejandro Cesarco, Angus Fairhurst, Urs Fischer, Sylvie Fleury, Gao Weigang, Gilbert & George, Douglas Gordon, Wang Guangle, Ho Sin Tung, Sabine Hornig, Huang Rui, Marguerite Humeau, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Kong Chun-Hei, Fabian Marti, Kris Martin, Hans Op de Beeck, Pak Sheung Chuen, Jon Rafman, Pamela Rosenkranz, Fiete Stolte, The Propeller Group, Kin-Wah Tsang, Wang Du, Xie Lei, Zhang Huan

¹ Elisa Adami, "In the Presence of Absence," *Mnemoscape*, no. 2 (March 2015), 2.



