

VERENA SEIBT
CLEA STRACKE

SELECTED
WORKS*

UNFAMILIAR FAMILIAR PLACES

JÜRGEN DEHM

The Museum Ludwig is starting to lose its balance. The artworks can no longer sit still in their allocated places. The Cologne exhibition hall, in addition to its function as an ennobling site of display, should also serve as a protective sphere against environmental influences and intrusions. Nonetheless, a sculpture by Otto Freundlich is dashing madly about the museum's red tiled floor with its cubical pedestal in tow. A Mondrian painting simply can't bear the turbulence and drops from the wall. The De Stijl artist's stringent geometries crumble into their individual elements – colourful rectangle, squares and bars rearrange themselves. The museum visitor doesn't know what's happening to them and careens alongside the work through room. With their 2013 video *Der Fall K* (The Fall K), the artists Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt bring movement into art.

A revised experience of the seemingly familiar and the visualisation of things otherwise concealed are thematic constants within the sizeable artistic output of Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt. With their 2008 work *Hobbykeller* (Hobby Basement), the artists made a space distinguished by its private character paradoxically public. In a gallery installed in the subterranean 'Universität' subway station in Munich, the artists exhibited scenes usually concealed from public view: a man fiddling at his workbench, a band practicing for their next appearance, a group of friends having an intimate conversation over beers. Every noise produced behind the sheet of the glass was transmitted onto the subway platform by a speaker installed in front of the gallery's display window. The performance of the everyday thus extends onto an everyday stage. The intimate space of privacy of the Hobbykeller collides with the public space of a subway mezzanine, which has to be traversed by the public on their way to their trains.

In his 1959 study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the American sociologist Erving Goffman develops the premise that we are all actors on the stage of everyday life. This premise, according to Goffman, implies that the actions performed in everyday life are thus a series of roles played and poses presented. Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt are interested in what happens when the stage of everyday life does not explicitly announce itself as such. How do people act in places distinguished by a remarkable indifference – more passageways than stages. How are these places themselves actually constituted? A recycling depot offers just such a space and happens to be the setting of Stracke and Seibt's 2013 video work *Weil ich dich nicht mehr liebe* (Because I Don't Love You Anymore). Old burdens are deposited here. People part with things they can't use anymore, things they've lost any emotional relationship to. In devout silence, they heave their old furniture, sporting equipment or clothes out of their car trunks and drag them to the appropriate containers. They exchange some words with the employees, if only to reassure themselves that they've made the right choice. Others stand around in grimy overalls, looking on absentmindedly as the garbage compactor bursts, snaps and splinters the things that once gave them so many beautiful hours. In the artists' 2009 video *Unterwelt* (Underworld), traces of human activity hint at all that once happened beneath the surface of the earth. Like a scanner, the camera pans across the subterranean scenarios, rendering the deserted scenes in minute detail. Tools have been left on the work benches of hobby rooms. Machines rattle and rumble to themselves. One can even hear the drops of water as they

fall from the ceiling and splash on the floor. Somewhere above, a car horn is being blown. At another point in the video, a bowling ball rolls down the alley towards the pins, as though pushed by a ghostly hand.

Alongside these stages which seem almost imperceptibly inserted into the environment at first glance, Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt's are also interested in the 'heterotopia' of the museum. In a submission to a 2011 competition for redesigning the courtyard of the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin, they proposed the installation of sleeping and roaming bronze dogs. The courtyard in question lies in front of what used to be the West Berlin entrance to the Gropius Bau before the fall of the wall – i.e. on the backside of the original and currently used main entrance. The proposal, titled *Still Life*, demonstrates the abandoned status of this historically loaded site within Berlin's contemporary cityscape and, more generally, draws attention to the appropriation of unused spaces within large cities.

In the early video *Und das Schiff fährt* (And The Ship Is Leaving) from 2009, the new building of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich – where Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt completed their studies – goes lost at sea metaphorically suggesting the precarious status of artists after they've left the 'safe harbours' of educational institutions. A concern with their own status as artists reappears in many of Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt's works. In their most recent video, *Floß der Medusa* (Raft of Medusa) from 2014, the emphasis shifts however towards questions about what fundamentally determines the status of art. For reasons we can only speculate about, Géricault's monumental painting literally goes overboard. Without a specific time or place, the painting floats along in uncertain waters, rising slowly to the top before the waves swallow it up again. Can it manoeuvre itself out of these uncertain waters? Will it be rescued? Or will the once controversial painting disappear once and for all? In Stracke and Seibt's video, the safe rooms of the Louvre, where Géricault's eponymous *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (Raft of Medusa, 1819) is currently shown to the public, have gone astray. The Paris museum seems to have failed at its most simple tasks, namely presenting and protecting the work. But perhaps the painting simply gave up its status as an artwork or forfeited its exhibition value at some point. Or has the museum, as a safeguard of cultural memory, simply disappeared from the architectural ensemble of the city? Without its aesthetic surplus value, the Raft of Medusa, literally falls back into the function of its historical prototype – a raft built from the remains of the frigate Medusa's shipwreck. It thus becomes a place: a raft that can save lives, a raft that can bring salvation. In 1816 however, the anticipated rescue would not come quickly, leading the surviving members of the crew to turn to cannibalism, a barbaric act which destroys any social community. Nonetheless, Clea Stracke and Verena Seibt hardly try to generate attention through shock effects and extreme situations. Rather they subtly investigate places' political, social and cultural functions. In their work, familiar terrain often emerges as a deceptive obstacle course. Home, it seems, is elsewhere.

AND THE SHIPH GOES ON...*

Half-HD Video, 5:10 min., 2009



“Fluctuat nec mergitur.
– It is tossed by the waves, but does not sink.” (Parisian city motto)

The Video is titled after the 1983 film “E la nave va” by Italian director Federico Fellini. (In the plot of the film, a refined group of travellers on a large passenger ship are on their way to the sea burial of a celebrated soprano singer. Their plans however are overtaken by greater political realities on the eve of the First World War and nearly result in disaster.) In the eponymous instal-lation, this becomes recognisable



as the new annex to the Münchner Akadmie by Coop Himmelb(l)au only at a second glance. An ostensibly stunning luxury liner with an aesthetically educated crew voyages into an uncertain future. Set to Franz Schubert’s ode to the gracious art (“An die Musik,” D 547 op. 88,4), the comedy of the film collides with the melancholy of late classical longing. The muscally grotesque vision parodies the academic self-image and sense of reality with allegorical self irony. (Christian Gögger, 2009)



1-3 Videostills
4 Installation View, Sailor Choir sings Schubert's „Hohe Kunst“

DRIVE-IN CINEMA *

Space Installation, Car, Rain machine, Video projection on canvas, 10 x 2 m,
2009

The Peugeot 205 faces the screen, like at a drive-in theatre. The wipers run and run. They tirelessly sweep away the water from the rainmachine, mounted on the roof rack. Sitting inside the vehicle, the beholder hears a soundtrack combining a radio program, engine noise, and the pitterpatter of raindrops. On screen, a night-time drive. Out of the darkness, oncoming cars appear like ghosts, glaring spotlights. Two beams of light hit you and then, in the blink of an eye, darkness again punctuated by the rhythm of white lines. Movement despite standing still, a hurtling standstill. Not only constructs "Drive-in Cinema" a homage to the drive-in culture of the 1950s and 1960s, but also crafts an illusion-machine, that's, standing still, simulates spatial forward motion and holds on to a moment, like a precious memory, with a conic melancholy. (Anna Schneider, 2011)

1 Mirrored projection in pit
2 Installation's inside view
3 Installation View total



THE FIRST YEARS OF BEING PROFESSIONAL*

Galerie der Künstler, München, 2010

As part of “The First Years of Professionalism” exhibition series, the eponymous installation questions the societal system of success and failure, fortune and misfortune.

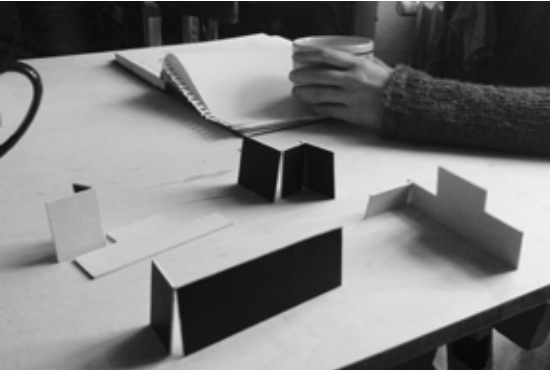


2

Winner Podium

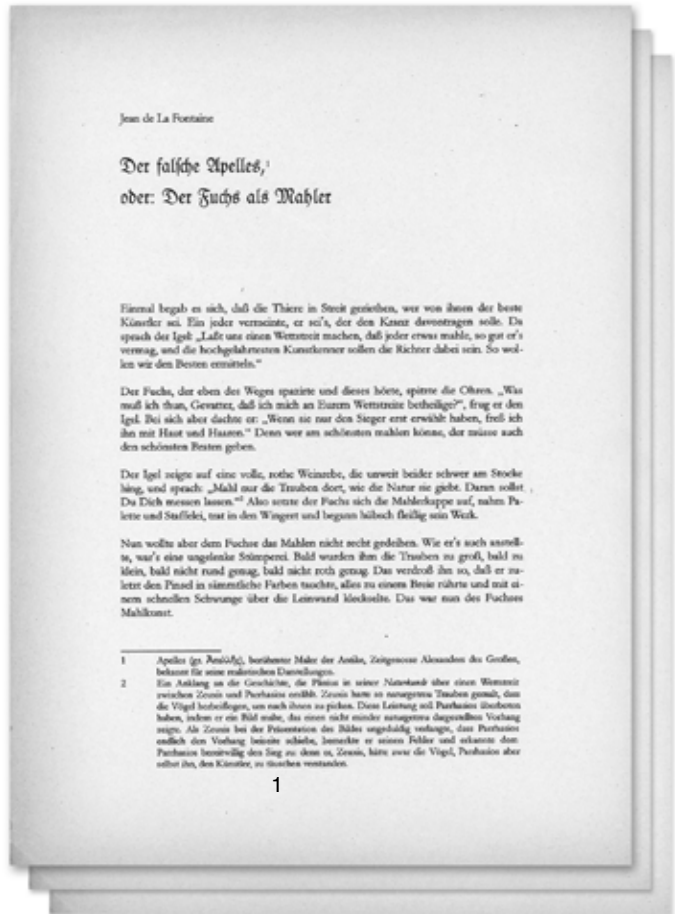
Sculpture, MDF, varnished, 10 Pieces, 220 x 100 x 70 cm, 2010

The darkly sculptural sketch “The construction of Success”, with its glamorous and abstract heaviness, may quite easily be changed from the winner’s podium into a beautiful double coffin. Consisting of 10 wooden parts, each varnished on one side, it serves as a tangible form, as a construction kit of a system of winning and losing. In its dismantled condition, it encompasses past and future: It can be take apart, having already played its role. Or it stands in storage, a shelved reagent of hope and fear, readily awaiting assembly and its cue to take stage: Whatever an individual dares to hope can become reality and the better they understand the rules, the more precisely the can piece together their own success like bits of lego, building their own precarious constructs. — Pavel Vancát, 2010



3

1 Der Falsche Apelles, Cover
2 Installation view: Konstruktion des Erfolgs, Galerie der Künstler Munich
3 Modells, Studio STRACKE&SEIBT



The Wrong Apelles

Fable, 3 pages, printed, framed, 60 cm x 40 cm, 2010

The most unclear part of the work complex is the fable of the fox as painter, fake, fabulous and ghost-written, may be seen as the last report on the artists' position: Are there some given rules in the art world at all? And if there are some, are they based on something more than intricate interpersonal relations? We are really not sure which animals we want to be, somewhere between La Fontaine and Orwell. — Pavel Vancát, 2010

Ghostwriter: Christian Hartard

UNDER WORLD*

Exhibition curated and fashioned by us
Maximilians-Forum, München, 2011



1

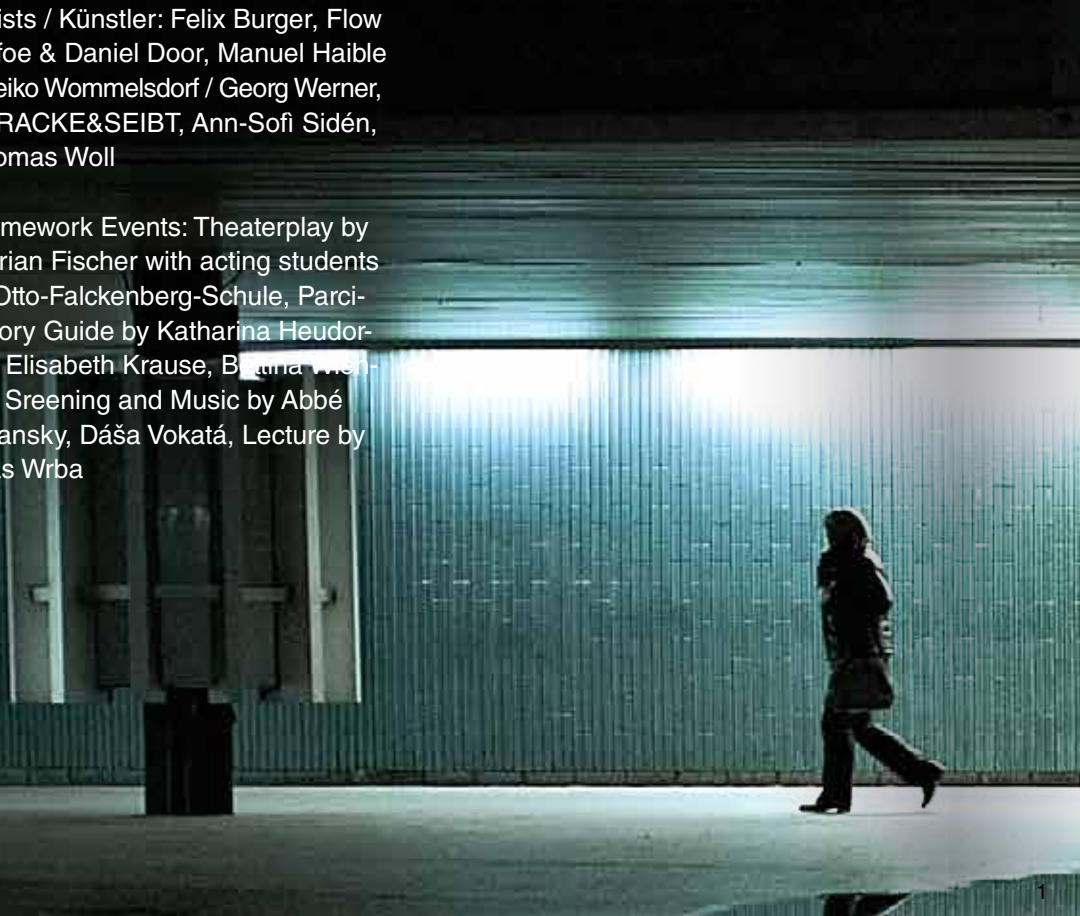
2

In the exhibition “UNDER WORLD”, the subterranean MaximiliansForum is transformed from a whitewashed exhibition space into what it maybe once was, actually is or could be. International artists invited by STRACKE&SEIBT, who in one way or another are devoted to the subterranean and concealed, play with the exhibition space as an urban underworld. The urban underworld is the invisible heart of a city traversed by infrastructure. Culturally and mythologically, the underworld always connotes the different and otherworldly, but it also connotes the enigmatic, the behaviours of subcultures distinct from the superficial world and philosophical depth. It also an un-place which enables exploration and experimentation. These investigations will be developed in diverse ways in the course of the exhibition and the accompanying programme of events. (A. Sauter)

Artists / Künstler: Felix Burger, Flow Defoe & Daniel Door, Manuel Haible / Heiko Wommelsdorf / Georg Werner, STRACKE&SEIBT, Ann-Sofi Sidén, Thomas Woll

Framework Events: Theaterplay by Florian Fischer with acting students of Otto-Falckenberg-Schule, Participatory Guide by Katharina Heudorfer, Elisabeth Krause, Britta Winkler, Screening and Music by Abbé Libansky, Dáša Vokatá, Lecture by Hias Wrba

1 Installation view with visitors STRACKE&SEIBT, Untermwelt, HD, 8:10 min.
2 Dia screening with Abbé Libansky, „My privat Underground“
3 Modell Maximiliansforum, Exhibition taking place on front and backstage



Installation view, Ann-Sofi Sidén, MC

WAITING ROOM*

Site-specific Installation, Mixed media, Munich, 2011



1

It remains uncertain whether or not there can be an end for those waiting in the room. Just as uncertain is that which actually awaits, in this at one moment phantasmic and at the next oppressive space. We are thrown into

this space, as in a dream, in which the world has become porous. Behind frontal functionality there appear, as we continue to watch, abysses. Ordered in rows, sitting-aparatuses offer space in abundance, for

those who would wait. The windows are covered over by dull blinds. The grotesque number of potted plants signify an alien idea of nature. (Anna Schneider, 2011)

2



3

4



1/2 Installation view, space Intervention, ground floor
3 Object, House in the desert, terrarium plus two vacuum cleaners
4 Video Installation Winterreise, cellar
6 Sleeping Room, Photography, 2011



6

HOLDE KUNST*

Performance, Opera Singer, Sheet, Esther Donatz, Munich,
2012



BECAUSE I DON'T LOVE YOU ANYMORE*

Video HD, 21:00 min., 2014

1



2



1 - 5 Videostills, 2013

3

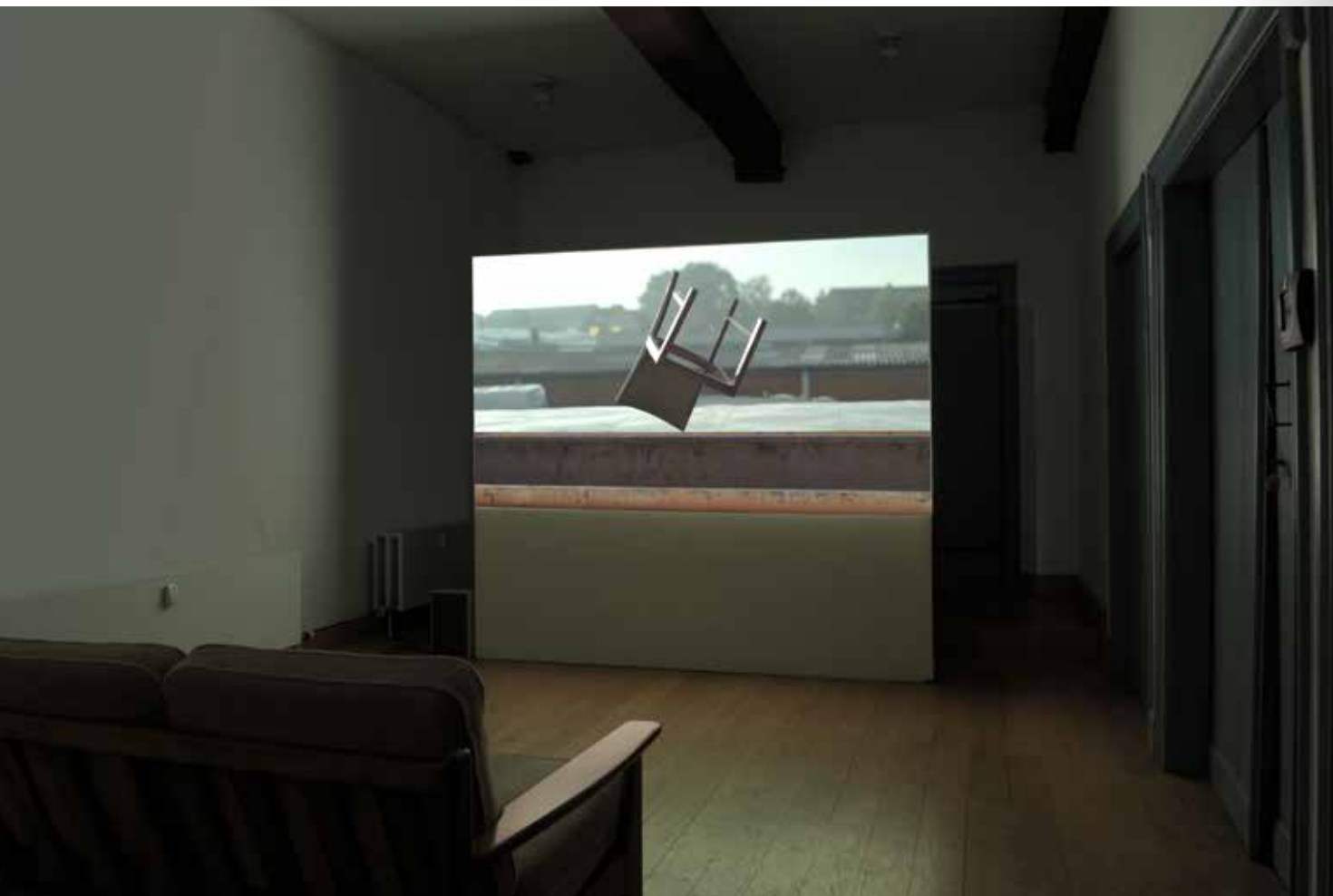


4



5





1



2

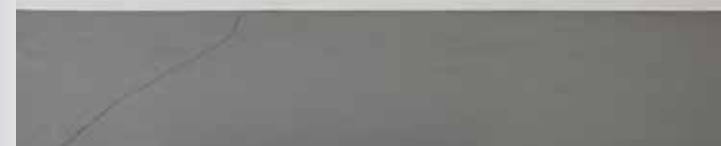
1 Exhibition view, schloss Ringenberg, Hamminkeln
2 Videostills, 2013

Because I Don't Love You Anymore plays out in a municipal recycling depot, a place where people can deposit their bulky waste in containers. The camera observes cars driving into the yard. New cars. Expensive cars. Many German cars. The cars open. People from all parts of society come out, alone or accompanied by their whole families. Everyone's brought something to throw away. The furniture of a whole city, mostly large things. (...) The film takes a tragic turn at a container with an integrated compactor. Here it becomes all too clear that the consequences of the divorce are irreversible. You climb the stairs to the edge of the container to throw your things into the metal Orcus and, before your very eyes, the machine chews them up and swallows. You could have rescued them from any other container, put them back in the car and driven home, but not here. Gone is gone. (...) With the recycling depot, the trash dumping station, Stracke and Seibt have recognised a place where every day life becomes a performance. Here, actions and feelings involuntarily and inevitably experience a certain exaggeration and intensification. They seem larger than life. (Jan Verwoert 2014)

FALL NO.1-5*

Photographic Sequence C-Prints, 5-part
42 cm x 62 cm 2014

The photo-series Fall No.1 through Fall No.5 – here 'Fall' is a word play in German, referring to both a fall and a specific instance or case – records in various versions how Piet Mondrian's painting Tableau I falls from a wall. The colourful rectangles and black lines free themselves from their given order. During the fall, they continuously form, for moments of a second, a series of new compositions, until they adopt their final configuration.



UNSTABLE TERRAIN*

Sculpture / Space Installation, Construction prop, timber, cardboard, foil, Altitude adjustable, 2014



UNSICHERES TERRAIN*

Sculpture/ Space Installation, Construction prop, timber, cardboard, foil Altitude adjustable, 2014

The installation of heavy, rusty construction supports in the white gallery space may irritate. Is it an art installation or is the gallery actually liable to collapse? The supports congregate almost threateningly at one point where the ceiling seems particularly unstable. As safety tested emergency support, they secure the building and efficiently serve as system maintenance. Additionally, they're bounded by construction planks and bits of cardboard on each end so as to increase their support and protect the floor and ceiling from damage. Plastic foil is stretched out just below the ceiling to protect the room from falling dust and pieces of plaster. As a result of their irregular arrangement and the slender poles' attempts at delicacy, they lose their heaviness and let the room seem, on the contrary, like a forest glade.

DER FALL K*

Video HD/ Pal/ Überwachungskamera, 7 min., 2014

In the video "Der Fall K." an ordinary museum visit turns out to be a surreal tripping hazard. The floor and walls begin to totter; the protagonist loses his footing and tumbles several times. perception is not reliable any more. The sculpture and their pedestals careen through the image. The paintings free themselves from the walls and crash to the floor. The image on the supposedly objective surveillance camera keeps going out. The various recording media – the protagonist's subjective camera, the surveillance camera and the pocket camera – dissolve each other's plausibility through montage. The narrative threads become blurred. What's happening here? Has anything happened at all? Nadine Seligmann

THE SHIP IS SINKING ...*

Video HD, 7:40 min., 2014

The video work The Ship is sinking shows the highly symbolic painting The Raft of the Medusa (1819) by Theodore Gericault. Being inspired by a true naval accident off the Senegal coast, it was made only few years before Caspar David Friedrich's Sea of Ice/The Wreck of Hope (1823/24). Transforming the art work itself into the raft, the video version brings up the question if the painting awaits the same fate as the passengers of the French frigate Meduse: Will it drown in the depth of the sea or is rescue in sight? Can art survive? What role will it play then? Nadine Seligmann, 2014



1 Installation view: Video, HD, The Ship is sinking, Galerie Esther Donatz
2 Light Box, 60x40 cm, The Ship is sinking

1

