



Galerie Gregor Staiger  
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## RAPHAELA VOGEL

*Vor den Toren der Sprache*  
May 20—June 25, 2022

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Galerie Gregor Staiger is pleased to present a two-part solo exhibition by Berlin-based Raphaela Vogel across both the gallery's main Limmatstrasse location and its temporary space at Zollikerstrasse. Opening first at Zollikerstrasse 251 on May 19th, Vogel presents an ambitious large-scale installation, along with a body of new sculptural and video works concerned with the possibilities and limitations of language.

Occupying the main room of the space, an expansive new installation bisects the room with a gate-like structure in the center. Upon proceeding through, one is met with audio sound recorded of pre-verbal infants, emitted from speakers which are fastened to the metal framework of the installation. The work's title "Vor den Toren der Sprache" (which as well lends its name to the exhibition) translates to 'At the gates of language', alluding to a unique threshold in which, during early infancy, the capability to reproduce all possible phonemes is at a heightened level. It is proposed that up to eight months, infants have the capability to absorb and pick up any sounds, hence languages, without accent. Past this stage, their potential begins to significantly narrow as they begin imitating phonetically their immediate surroundings. The speakers in the piece are held by small, plastic casts of cherubs, along with pastel-hued flowers which adorn the metal arches that part the space. The metal skeleton of the titular installation is propped up by twelve sculptures of radiators on either side of the arches, each cast in polyurethane elastomer (like the figures on the arches). Vogel frequently utilises the material in her practice which gives her forms an almost unearthly quality. Encountering Vogel's plastic skeletons of heaters, one can discern references such as Michael Asher and his seminal work *Kunsthalle Bern 1992*, where he removed the radiators from the Kunsthalle's exhibition spaces only to reassemble them as a group in the entrance of the institution. The figures and the florals on the arches however nod to Polish sculptor, Alina Szapocznikow and her idiosyncratic cast objects, both in form and colour palette. The embellished arches also unmistakably recall the distinct kitschness of prototypical trellis passageways found in garden architecture, a structure the artist has repeatedly been met with since relocating out of the city. In line with the garden motif, the formation of the aforementioned radiators can also recall hedges.

Further behind on the back wall of the space, Vogel has hung two new wall-mounted sculptural works. The figures assume the forms of angels, with the wings comprised of reworked elements of a found, leaded-glass window. The central bodies are again cast in plastic, with a post-it firmly planted on the foreheads, reading 'language' in German ('sprache'). The title of the series 'Wer bin ich' ('Who am I') references the party game in which each player must figure out which famous person they have been assigned to by asking yes or no questions. Language and interpretation once more appear as a recurrent theme within the new series of the wall-hung pieces.

In the darkened, smaller side-room, a video is projected of the artist's young son bouncing in a baby seat, filmed from above. Installed in the same cradle apparatus that holds Vogel's son in the video, the projector playing the video bounces gently up and down and physically mimics the motion of the video. As the video runs, 'Der Mann, der rückwärts spricht' (The man who speaks backwards) by the German punk band, Die Kassierer plays from the speakers resting atop the projector. Reverse speech has often been associated with the idea of subliminal messages, particularly in music where it is known as backmasking. Backmasking is a technique in which a concealed subject is recorded backwards on a song track and can be heard only when played it in reverse motion. The emergence of phantom words and phrases can perhaps be explained by the phenomenon of auditory pareidolia where one perceives a sound differently and attributes an alternate meaning where there is none. Here again, Vogel investigates the scope and capacity of language, drawing



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thematic parallels with the main installation.

Two new leather works are hung in the furthest corner of the main space. Though varying in scale, both works depict painted ice-cream cones, with the leather canvas removed in circular fashion where the scoops of ice-cream would naturally be. The title 'Ein Nichts an der Waffel' (A Nothingness in the Waffle) addresses pictorially the typical phrase of ordering a scoop of ice-cream in a cone, and is a play on the German saying 'Einen an der Waffel haben' which translates to 'having something in the waffle', meaning an undesirable quirk or a certain oddness. With this slight inversion of a colloquial phrase, the works mediate on the ideas of fixation and absurdity. Vogel's physical act of cutting out the material as 'scoops' also touches upon the notion of hollowness, a recurring approach which runs through her practice at large and the exhibition. Namely, the eponymous installation 'Vor den Toren der Sprache', retains the spectral quality of a shell (with the exposed metal tubing and the supportive carcass-like casts) whilst fully immersing and utilising nearly the entirety of the gallery at Zollikerstrasse.

To coincide with the 5th edition of Zurich Art Weekend, the second part of Vogel's exhibition will open at Limmatstrasse on June 10th. 'My Appropriation of Her Holy Hollownness', a large-scale sculptural and sound installation, will inhabit the whole of the Limmatstrasse gallery. Originally shown at Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers in the summer of 2021, the exhibition marked Vogel's first institutional solo presentation in France.

Raphaela Vogel (\*1988, Nuremberg, Germany) studied at Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Nuremberg (2009– 2012), Hochschule für Bildende Künste Städelschule, Frankfurt/Main (2011–2014) and De Ateliers, Amsterdam (2014–2016). Vogel is currently participating in the 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia in the main exhibition 'The Milk of Dreams', curated by Cecilia Alemani. She will have a major solo exhibition at DePont Museum, Tilburg in 2023.

Recent solo exhibitions include 'My Appropriation of Her Holy Hollownness', Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers (2021); 'Mucksmäuschenmusik', Kleiner Wasserspeicher, Berlin (2021); 'Raphaela Vogel', Kunsthalle Giessen (2021); 'La Scultura Senza Qualità', Galerie Gregor Staiger, Milan (2020); 'Bellend bin ich aufgewacht', Kunsthaus Bregenz (2019); 'Vogelspinne', BQ, Berlin (2019); 'A Woman's Sports Car, Kapsel 09: Raphaela Vogel', Haus der Kunst, Munich (2019); 'Ultranackt', Kunsthalle Basel (2018), 'Gipsy King Kong', Kunstpalais, Erlangen (2018), 'Gregor's Loch', Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich (2018); 'She Shah', Westfälischer Kunstverein, Munster (2016) and 'Raphaela und der große Kunstverein', Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2015).