



EXHIBITION COURSE

The Presence of Absence

12 October 2024 – 2 March 2025

The exhibition is in co-operation with the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research and the Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Goethe University Frankfurt.

With works by the artists Heidi Bucher, Lawrence Malstaf, Marshmallow Laser Feast, Petra Noordkamp, Claudio Parmiggiani, Toni R. Toivonen and with exhibits from the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, the Florentine Museum and Institute of Prehistory 'Paolo Graziosi', the Natural History Museum Vienna, the LWL-Museum of Natural History in Münster, Associazione Gibellina Parco Culturale and with Prof Dr Luciano Rezzolla, Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Goethe University Frankfurt

Curated by: Prof Franziska Nori, Director Frankfurter Kunstverein
with scientific support from Anita Lavorano and Laura Perrone

Energy is a state variable that makes all natural processes possible in the first place. It is the central, active force of life—from atomic elementary particles to cells—in all living bodies and the rhythm of the entire cosmos. The relationship between energy and matter is a formative factor in nature. It shapes and leaves imprints and traces. Thus, the exhibition *The Presence of Absence* opens symbolically with a **fulgurite**. Since ancient times, lightning has struck the surface of our planet. With temperatures of 30,000 degrees Celsius, it melts sand and stone, which then cool down again. This creates unique formations. Thanks to a **loan from the LWL-Museum of Natural History in Münster**, one of the largest existing specimens in Germany, measuring 210 cm in length, will be on display in the exhibition.



Heidi Bucher (b. 1926, Winterthur, CH; d. 1993, Brunnen, CH) worked intensively on the relationship between spaces and the traces of human life. Bucher searches for what has been experienced in spaces, what the places symbolise and what power structures they have produced. The artist developed a technique and working method known as *Raumhäutung* (spatial skinning). She covered surfaces with latex and gauze, allowed them to harden and removed them from the walls with great physical effort. What remained were negative moulds, like delicate skins. Thanks to the collaboration with the artist's sons and **the Estate of Heidi Bucher**, *Kleines Glasportal* (Sanatorium Bellevue, Kreuzlingen) (1988), as well as moving documentation of Bucher's actions, can be seen in the exhibition.



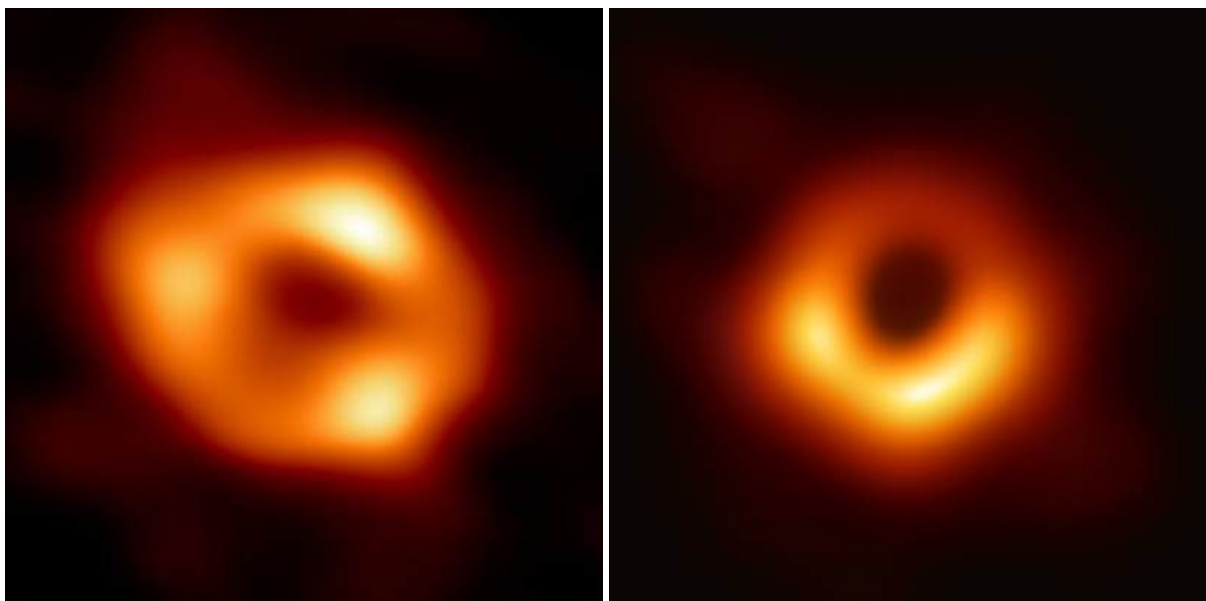
Breath is the starting point for the work *Shrink 01995* (1995–ongoing) by **Lawrence Malstaf** (b. 1972, Bruges, BE, lives and works in Tromsø, NO). Two large, transparent foils are stretched across a framed structure. A person is pressed into the space between them. Wrapped in this skin, he/she holds two tubes. One removes air, the other supplies air. One creates a vacuum so that the body floats in a compressed state, while the other enables breathing. A profound experience of space and physicality, isolation and limitation, as well as peace and protection opens up. Over the summer, the Frankfurter Kunstverein launched an open call for people from completely different areas and backgrounds to be part of Malstaf's work. The artist prepared the participants for the experience in several sessions. The 20-minute stagings can be seen every Saturday and Sunday between 3 and 5 p.m.



From the weightlessness of Malstaf's vacuum-packed bodies to that of outer space. *Distortions in Spacetime* (2018) by the artist collective **Marshmallow Laser Feast** (London, UK) is a walk-through, interactive audiovisual installation. It takes visitors on a journey into the universe and into a sensory encounter with the formation of so-called stellar black holes. The immersive space is mirrored on all sides, with a frenzy of images of flowing and swirling coloured atoms and sounds that unfolds like a cosmic opera. The installation's technology captures the outlines of the people entering in real time and models them into the galactic explosions and compressions. The negative form of the human body is imprinted on the particle clouds and casts the shadow of their presence into space.



Thanks to the co-operation with **Prof Dr Luciano Rezzolla** (b. 1967, Milan, IT) from the **Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Goethe University Frankfurt**, the exhibition broadens the view of scientific findings on black holes. In these black holes, mass is infinitely condensed and gravity is so strong that all matter is sucked into them, even light. Prof Dr Rezzolla is part of the international Event Horizon Telescope association, which produced the first “image” of a black hole. What is a black hole? How can we think of and explain the black centre of this cosmic phenomenon once it becomes the theorem of the absolute absence of presence? Images and 3D models have been created for the exhibition that help make the intensity of a black hole's radio emission and the strong curvature of space and time more tangible.



A central exhibition space is dedicated to the work of the Italian artist **Claudio Parmiggiani** (b. 1943, Luzzara, IT). His soot images are created using fire and smoke. For the exhibition, the internationally acclaimed artist has produced new, monumental works. These pieces display the outlines of objects and figures, highlighting what is absent through their contours, becoming a metaphor for the passage of time and memory.



In spatial juxtaposition, the so-called **Laetoli footprints** are also displayed. 3.6 million years ago, *Australopithecus afarensis*—adults and one child—crossed the plains of the Olduvai Gorge in northern Tanzania. The traces left by these early human ancestors are the first palaeontological evidence of individuals walking upright, side by side, through the vastness of prehistoric landscapes. As fresh volcanic ash covered the ground and later hardened into tuff stone due to rainfall, the footprints were not erased but became material imprints of a moment in time. This exhibit is being created exclusively for this exhibition, thanks to the collaboration with the **3D-Lab of the Natural History Museum in Vienna** and the **Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt**.



The Dutch film artist **Petra Noordkamp** (b. 1967, lives and works in Amsterdam, NL) dedicated her film *Il Grande Cretto di Gibellina* (2015) to the landscape monument by the Italian Arte Povera artist **Alberto Burri** (b. 1915, Città di Castello, IT; d. 1995, Nice, FR). Alberto Burri's work is the largest land art piece in the world, located in Sicily, covering an area of 90,000 m². It traces the absence of an entire town, using cement, which was destroyed by the devastating 1968 earthquake. Noordkamp's film immerses visitors in this walkable artwork in Sicily, built as a memorial on the exact footprint of the destroyed houses of the town of Gibellina.



Il Cretto è casa mia (The Cretto is My Home, 2024) is a participatory photographic project created with the survivors and victims of the earthquake in the town of Gibellina. The work emerged in 2024 through the persistent determination of **Nicolò Stabile** (b. 1966, Gibellina, IT), founder of the **Associazione Gibellina Parco Culturale**. He developed it as part of his tireless efforts to preserve Alberto Burri's *Cretto* landscape work and the memorial site. Through the photographs of **Giuseppe Ippolito** (b. 1987, Novara, IT), visitors look into the marked faces of former survivors. They stand before the ruins of their homes, which Burri's artwork has preserved under a layer of cement, like a shroud. The writer **Giovanna Giordano** (b. 1961, Milan, IT) spoke with the last surviving witnesses and captured their memories. The result is a touching large-scale photographic installation.



The virtual reality experience *Gibellina Heartquake* (2022) by **Alberto Stabile** (b. 1994, Gibellina, IT) allows visitors to relive the events and context of the major 1968 earthquake through smart glasses and immersive technology. Based on the accounts of survivors and historical archival material, Stabile, himself a descendant of the people of Gibellina, has digitally recreated the experiences that have permanently shaped both the people and the landscape.



Just as the ruins of Gibellina are embedded in the cement layer of Alberto Burri's *Cretto*, the earliest human signs of art are also preserved in stone. Over 14,000 years ago, prehistoric people etched animal figures and depictions of ritual actions onto cave walls across all continents. These engravings are part of valuable palaeoarchaeological finds in Italy and France, providing evidence of the origins of art in early human history. Thanks to the support of **Prof Dr Fabio Martini** and **Dr Lapo Baglioni** from the **Florentine Museum and Institute of Prehistory 'Paolo Graziosi'**, casts of these rock engravings from the Florence collection will be on display in the Frankfurt exhibition.



The exhibition concludes with a space dedicated to the artist Toni R. Toivonen and the plaster casts from the Archaeological Park of Pompeii. **Toni R. Toivonen** (b. 1987, Helsinki, FI, lives and works in Hämeenkoski, FI) has created a sacred space. Monumental brass plates display imprints of animal figures, in both concrete and abstract forms. These were created with bodies of animals that imprinted onto the golden brass during their physical decay. The result is an aesthetic image that appears both sacred and dignified. His artworks stem from a deep connection with animals, whom he regards as companions deserving of respect and love. No animal dies for the sake of art. Toivonen navigates the delicate balance of witnessing mortality, not shying away but finding solace in the natural cycle.



Toivonen's large-scale metal works are spatially juxtaposed with two of the most poignant plaster casts of human victims from the volcanic eruption of 79 AD in Pompeii, from the collection of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii. These casts were created thanks to the intuition of an archaeologist who filled the mysterious cavities with a liquid plaster solution. The positive forms of these cavities revealed the precise outlines of human bodies that fell victim to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The figures represent a moment frozen in time, like a snapshot preserved for posterity.



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For more information, please visit our website at www.fkv.de/presse.

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Page 1: Fulgurite from the collection of the LWL-Museum of Natural History, Münster, Photo: LWL-Museum of Natural History, Steinweg

Page 2: Heidi Bucher, *Kleines Glasportal (Sanatorium Bellevue, Kreuzlingen)*, 1988, Exhibition view Parasol unit, London, 2018, Photo: Benjamin Westoby, © The Estate of Heidi Bucher, Courtesy Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art

Heidi Bucher, *Ablösen der Haut, Herrenzimmer*, 1979, Photo: Hans Peter Siffert, © The Estate of Heidi Bucher, Courtesy The Estate of Heidi Bucher and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Seoul and London

Lawrence Malstaf, *Shrink 01995*, © and Courtesy Lawrence Malstaf / Tallieu Art Office

Page 3: Marshmallow Laser Feast, *Distortions in Spacetime*, 2018, © and Courtesy Marshmallow Laser Feast

*The Black Hole Sgr A**, 2022, © Event Horizon Telescope collaboration et al., Courtesy: Luciano Rezzolla, Institute for Theoretical Physics, Goethe University Frankfurt

Page 4: Claudio Parmiggiani, *Untitled*, 2023, © Studio Claudio Parmiggiani, Courtesy Tornabuoni Art

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Laetoli footprints, Photo: Tanzania Tourism

Page 5: Petra Noordkamp, *Il Grande Cretto di Gibellina*, 2015, film stills, © Petra Noordkamp, Courtesy Petra Noordkamp and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

Associazione Gibellina Parco Culturale, *Il Cretto è casa mia*, 2024–present, Photos: Giuseppe Ippolito, © and Courtesy Giuseppe Ippolito

Page 6: Alberto Stabile, *Gibellina Heartquake VR*, 2022–2024, film stills, © and Courtesy Alberto Stabile

Casts of prehistoric cave engravings from the Roc-de-Sers Cave, from the collection of the Florentine Museum and Institute of Prehistory 'Paolo Graziosi', © and Courtesy Florentine Museum and Institute of Prehistory 'Paolo Graziosi'

Page 7: Toni R. Toivonen, *The Perfect Moment*, 2022, © Toni R. Toivonen, Courtesy Nelimarkka Foundation, Finland

Casts of Human Victims of the 79 AD volcanic eruption in Pompeii from the Collection of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, installation views Archaeological Park of Pompeii, 2020

