



PRESS RELEASE

The Presence of Absence 12 October 2024 – 2 March 2025

Press preview: Friday, 11 October 2024, at 11 a.m.

Opening: Friday, 11 October 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

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

The Presence of Absence

What may sound like a contradiction is at the heart of the exhibition *The Presence of Absence*. Breathtaking artworks and scientific exhibits at the Frankfurter Kunstverein invite visitors to experience a sense of awe and deep emotion. The casts of victims from Pompeii, who lost their lives nearly 2,000 years ago and whose figures were preserved as moulds by volcanic material—what do they reveal to the viewer? The fossilised footprints of prehistoric humans, left 3.6 million years ago—what do they tell us about the existence of these people? The monumental, sacred brass images of animal imprints by the young artist Toni R. Toivonen—why do they move us so deeply?

The various traces that capture the past in physical matter open up our thoughts about our existence in the world and in time. In fleeting moments, we connect with eternity and give moments of existence a material form. Art is a way to resonate with these moments through intuitive understanding.

The exhibition *The Presence of Absence* revolves around the theme of humankind's endless confrontation with the idea of change and transience and their forms of representation in art. The title alludes to matter as a presence in which traces of the living are inscribed. This vital energy is powerful, yet fleeting. And it leaves a mark, a trace that can outlast time. Works by important contemporary artists encounter scientific exhibits of geology and astrophysics, the casts from Pompeii, footprints of prehistoric people from Laetoli and replicas of prehistoric cave drawings. All exhibits refer to larger and smaller events in the web of life and its transformation in space and time.

Since the beginning of humankind, Homo sapiens have had the desire to understand the world. People use scientific methods to analyse the properties of the world. To do this, they have developed ever more complex instruments. The knowledge gained from this is of great importance. It enables us to gain insights and understand connections. And at the same time, our minds are not always able to be moved by facts and figures in order to perhaps change our actions in the world.

And what does art do? It brings complex scientific knowledge back to us. Through music, poetry and visual forms of expression, it questions the meaning of knowledge. It creates expanded ideas and sensory experiences that strive for overriding significance and meaningfulness. And it is narratives, and their interweaving with the bigger picture, that tie the abstraction of numbers and concepts back to the existence of individuals and bring them together.

Where do we come from? What is the origin of all matter on earth and in the infinity of the cosmos? What effects do natural events have on reshaping the earth and changing people's lives with their power? And how do people deal with the existential need to face eternity in their finiteness? What myths and images do they create in order to connect with the spiritual? Is art a way of inscribing a testimony of oneself in time?

The exhibition explores these questions, questions that have been driving people's imagination since prehistoric times right up to the present day. Ever since humans have existed on earth, they have invented stories, symbols and signs to give form to their feelings, thoughts and knowledge.

The exhibition as a collaboration between art and science

With the exhibition *The Presence of Absence*, the Frankfurter Kunstverein is continuing its collaboration with the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research for the fourth time. Following *Trees of Life* (2019), *Edmond's Prehistoric Realm* (2020) and *Bending the Curve* (2023), the Frankfurter Kunstverein is now creating a show that uses science to provide complex answers to existential questions facing humanity. The collaboration arises from the ongoing discussions between Prof Franziska Nori, Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein, and Prof Dr Andreas Mulch, Director of the Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt. In addition, we have been able to win over Prof Dr Luciano Rezzolla, from the Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Goethe University Frankfurt, to allow science and art to enter into an intensive dialogue as a common force of human thought and research.

"The exhibition The Presence of Absence is a project close to my heart and has grown over several years. The seed for it was my encounter with the casts in Pompeii. I was deeply moved. They are not symbolic, not art, but visible to us today, after almost 2000 years,

through the natural force of a volcano and the intuition of an archaeologist! At the same time, I met the young artist Toni R. Toivonen from Finland and was deeply impressed. And so the question of the presence of the absence became a journey that we embarked on together with wonderful artists and scientists: in search of traces of being”.

Prof Franziska Nori, Director Frankfurter Kunstverein

“Science and art offer different approaches to discovering nature. However, both combine wonderfully when it comes to insights into that which is absent, invisible to our eyes. If we want to understand the functional relationships between the biosphere, the solid Earth and the climate system, or if we want to understand how our planet changed millions of years ago, scientists often have to acquire information that only provides indirect insight into the past. For example, they use the chemical fingerprint left behind by a global event in geological units to give shape to what is absent and make it tangible. Turning the absence into a describable reality is the art of science”.

Prof Dr Andreas Mulch, Director of the Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt

“Physics is all about using the transcendence of mathematics to reveal the immanence of the Universe we live in. Taking a photo of a black hole is a perfect example of how an object whose existence was purely mathematical, has been transformed into a physical object by the collaborative work of hundreds of scientists. The exhibition guides the visitor into this journey from Mathematics to Physics, from Absence to Presence, and back”.

Prof Dr Luciano Rezzolla, Institute for Theoretical Physics at Goethe University Frankfurt

Attending the press tour: Dr Julia Cloot (Deputy Managing Director of Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain), Prof Dr Andreas Mulch (Director of the Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt), Dr Lapo Baglioni (Florentine Museum and Institute of Prehistory ‘Paolo Graziosi’), Nicolò and Alberto Stabile and the photographer Giuseppe Ippolito (Associazione Gibellina Parco Culturale), as well as the artists Lawrence Malstaf, Toni R. Toivonen and Petra Noordkamp.

The accompanying programme for science and art enthusiasts as well as children and school classes

Under the direction of Prof Franziska Nori, Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein, the institution stands for a programme that examines social issues at the intersection of art and science. Last but not least, this includes communication through an extensive accompanying programme.

An educational programme for **children, young people and school classes** is being developed in co-operation with the **Institute for Art Education at the Justus Liebig University Giessen**. What traces have we humans left behind in prehistoric times? What can we read in them? What is gravity and how does it make our everyday life on earth possible? Participants explore these questions in guided tours by reading signs and traces, but also by producing them themselves in order to experience and reflect on the world that surrounds us. The dates on which school classes can register will be communicated soon on the Frankfurter Kunstverein website www.fkv.de.

The first dates for public tours with the scientific co-operation partners are listed here; further dates will be announced on the Frankfurter Kunstverein website www.fkv.de and in the Frankfurter Kunstverein newsletter.

The mystery of black holes

On Sunday, 10 November 2024, at 3 p.m., astrophysicist Prof Dr Luciano Rezzolla from the Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Goethe University Frankfurt and Prof Franziska Nori, Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein, will give a joint tour of the exhibition. The tour will focus on gravity, black holes and the creation of the first images of the black hole in 2019 that lies at the heart of our galaxy. The question of the extent to which visual representations help non-experts to better visualise scientific theories about the depths of the universe will also be discussed.

Traces of chance—fleeting moments that are forever inscribed in physical matter

Prof Dr Ottmar Kullmer, Head of the Palaeoanthropology Department at the Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt, researches the evolution of humans. Together with Prof Franziska Nori, he will shed light on two fascinating exhibits in the exhibition on Sunday, 8 December 2024, at 3 p.m.: the footprints of prehistoric humans from Laetoli and the fulgurite from the collection of the LWL-Museum of Natural History in Münster. Both objects bear witness to fleeting but significant moments that were preserved in the material by random geological processes. Prof Dr Kullmer will report on current research into both exhibits.

Art and science? Insights into the co-operation between the Frankfurter Kunstverein and the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research

On Thursday, 16 January 2025, at 6:30 p.m., Prof Dr Andreas Mulch, Director of the Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum Frankfurt, and Prof Franziska Nori will give a joint tour of the exhibition. The tour will focus on the question of how art and science can convey knowledge together, but using their respective means.

What the traces of human bodies from the past tell us

On Thursday, 30 January 2025, at 06:30 p.m., Dr Wolfgang David, Director of the Archaeological Museum Frankfurt, will be a guest at the Frankfurter Kunstverein. Together with Prof Franziska Nori, he will follow the trail of archaeological exhibits in the exhibition. The themed tour will focus on the casts of the human victims of the eruption of Vesuvius in Pompeii in 79 AD and the footprints from Laetoli. Both finds provide unique insights into the life and death of past civilisations and make the fleeting traces of the human body tangible for posterity.

Homo sapiens' need for images of the numinous and space for spirituality

In February, Prof Dr Fabio Martini, palaeoethnologist and President of the Florentine Museum and Institute of Prehistory 'Paolo Graziosi' will be a guest at the Frankfurter Kunstverein. Prof Dr Fabio Martini and Prof Franziska Nori will talk about the possible origins of art, the nature of the finds and what cave art says about man's need for transcendence in a themed tour.

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Educational programme for children, youths and school classes in co-operation with the Institute for Art Education at the Justus Liebig University Giessen



We thank



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

Press Office of the Frankfurter Kunstverein

Email: presse@fkv.de; Phone: +49 69 219 314 30