

# Petzel

**RAPHAELA VOGEL**

*In the Expanded Penalty Box: Did You Happen to See the Most Beautiful Fox?*

Text by Elisa R. Linn

January 11 – February 17, 2024  
520 W 25th Street

In her debut exhibition at Petzel and first US solo exhibition, Berlin-based artist Raphaela Vogel interlocks her enigmatic form repertoire beyond aesthetic orthodoxies—hallucinogenic video environments, sculptural monumentalism, and ritualistic paintings—with questions of intersubjectivity, technogenesis, and a culture of remembrance.

The center of the gallery is occupied by a retrofuturistic apparatus, a found object that uneasily sits between (technical) architecture and sculpture in the expanded field, to paraphrase Rosalind Krauss. This 360-degree 3D scanner functions as a panoptical confessional for exhibitionist self-monitoring where visitors can become masters and servants of themselves: a metaphorical penalty box of another kind. Once inside, in a fraction of a second, 70 single-lens reflex cameras capture every detail and angle of a body. Without using a laser, it can produce mini-figurines of the self, reproduce the self, and carry out drive-through car damage inspections or forensic crime reconstructions for law enforcement agencies. Decommissioned from its “official” state and institutional service, this machine now serves the artist in her studio in Berlin. When placed in the semi-publicness of the gallery, machine and viewer find themselves as if being momentarily involved in a Dan Grahamian philosophical “architecture of consciousness”: a hybrid situation that confronts viewers with their own image and anarchic surveillance fears/desires, including Vogel’s own social (agora)phobia. However, in the split between observer and observed, accessing information and becoming information, self-absorption here gives way to transgression. Only for a fleeting moment do the scanned pictorial fractures of oneself pop up on a screen in order to vanish again without being stored in the digital ether. Here, the “rapid transmission of images and information through media distorts our understanding of events, creating a fragmented and mediated experience of the world,” as Virilio put it.

Hanging above the scanner is a steel pyramid with a triangular banner that serves as a projection screen, similar to those used for advertising billboards on festival stages for the masses. A bronze sculpture of an anatomical human model reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s “Modulor”—an ideal of man, and ableist universalism—holds the video projector like a petrified servant. To the mechanical rhythm of clicking shutters, in a haphazard stop-motion sequence of images, we see a person with a gruesome mask: three-faced instead of Janus-headed. Squirming on a round platform—the Brechtian turning stage—it is the artist herself who spreads silver-heeled legs into the air. Vogel, who has been the sole actor and performer in all her video works to date, holds two small silver lion statues—a recurring symbol for potency—diametrically toward each other. Playing with mimesis here means shuttering any lascivious clichés with rowdy phallicness.

# Petzel

“All hail the dead,” it shrills in the video montage, while the subject in the vertigo of the scanned image sequences seems to be repeatedly evading. “What is aura, actually?” Benjamin asked. “A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.” The subject becoming a spectacle object in Vogel’s work is neither absent nor present; rather, it seems to continuously shake up its own imposed subject forms in favor of a liberated fragility. This also involves revisiting and simultaneously dismantling myths and atavisms in order to eventually free itself from the alp of dead muses. Liminal thresholds are occupied here beyond the thin-skinned binaries of the modern and archaic, outside and inside, private and public—right up to the inscribed duality that a supposedly trivial tango partner dance entails: leading-following, dependence-independence, trust-distrust. “Jede Frau ist Schön” (“Every Woman is Beautiful”), Vogel can be heard singing a title-giving line from a previously unrecorded light-hearted rhythm tango song: a composition by Carla Boehl, the 1930 Miss Germany, to which the Jewish-German writer and theater director Erich Hopp wrote the lyrics. Vogel came across Hopp’s biography and work when she moved into the house in Eichwalde outside Berlin where he was hiding from Nazi persecution until being liberated by the Red Army.

Dangling from hollow horse heads made of white polyurethane elastomer, artificial animal skins carry painterly renderings. Back-to-back, these two portraits are hanging as if on the swaying scales of Justitia: Jürgen Habermas, the most prominent philosopher of the 1980s Historians’ Dispute, and Achille Mbembe, the post-colonial theorist. Such as in this work *Vergleiche vergleichen (Compare Comparisons)*, Vogel creates her own pataphysical macro- and microcosms, picture generators and carriers. These metamorphose into images themselves, where multi-perspective storytelling is made productive as one of the most fundamental forms of historical consciousness-raising.

As Henri Lefebvre or the Situationist artist Asger Jorn argue, in every seemingly irreconcilable antagonistic contradiction, a triolectical potential germinates. On Jorn’s three-sided soccer field, Vogel plays out the insufficiency of a hegemonic dualism: there is no referee or state to legislate what happens on the field. It is no longer a question of attacking and scoring the most goals. Instead, when moving from epistemic certainty to epistemic openness in the (penalty) box of Vogel’s gallery space, fragile high-voltage alliances are formed beyond the conventional psycho-sexual drama—here, ‘fuckers’ have become indistinguishable from the ‘fucked.’

—Elisa R. Linn