

**JAKOB LENA KNEBL**  
**COME TOGETHER, RIGHT NOW.**  
**OVER ME.**

07.06.2019 – 31.07.2019

If the notion of negative space will be familiar to any architect, town planner or geographer, it remains remarkably unusual in the art world. A curator usually starts from the principle that an exhibition is defined by the total amount of works presented in a given space: the exhibition as a *composition* of artworks. And yet it is obvious that the ontological characteristics of any artwork go beyond its purely physical properties.

For centuries it was possible to observe an image while blanking out its immediate surroundings. The frame delimited the field of vision required for appreciation of the work, which was presented as a window isolated from its context, a fixed point in time and space. As we know, however, the 20th century worked tirelessly to shatter this “window-vision.” For example, minimalism confronts us with an “insignificant object” and thus impels us to broaden our field of vision and let our gaze go from the work to the floor, from the floor to the lighting and so on, taking in all the elements present within a given space: the ceiling, the visitors, the labels, the sounds – and of course, the works constituting the exhibition, too.

This may seem blindingly obvious, but our way of apprehending artworks has so long been formatted by the practice of “window-vision” that even today we still find it difficult to think of an exhibition as something other than a composition of artworks, in other words, the presentation of a certain number of works in a certain order based on a precise composition, or even theme. However, what takes up the most space in an exhibition is not the art but the space between the works, which connects and makes possible each element in the exhibition, and this space can be described as negative. What, then, if the curator’s task was precisely to manage this negative space? It is, after all, this space that the visitor moves through; their comings and goings between the artworks adumbrate a choreography that is constantly being renewed. But if it is easy for a town planner to point out the existence of negative spaces on a map, for example, it is much harder for a curator to make such spaces visible. Even so, such a task is capital, since the workings of our vision depend upon it.

A film, a book or a play necessarily position us facing or around the medium. An exhibition is the only medium that we can move through physically, and in moving our body reacts within a system of physical correspondences with the works. It takes a certain amount of time to walk from one work to another, and this time depends on each visitor, on their physical and psychological state. The exhibition is received and understood essentially with the body, in a way of moving through space, in a way of discovering and reflecting with our body.

Not many curators integrate the notion of negative space and the movements of visitor’s bodies into their practice. The difficulty is due in part to the fact that these notions are relatively hard to visualise. Negative space is precisely the space that we do not perceive, or not, in any case, in a classic exhibition, where the visitor is expected to concentrate on what is *exhibited*, in other words, the artworks. As for the movements of the body, these are also expected to be determined by the works, that is, by the ideal distance and the lighting conducive to their appreciation, and perhaps also the distance to be crossed in order to read the label.

The work of Jakob Lena Knebl highlights the way in which personal and collective identities can be transformed, renewed and adapted in accordance with the environments constructed by the artist. To see an artwork integrated into a context that combines design, fashion, architecture and interior decoration cracks the wall of the curatorial conventions that prescribe a relatively neutral environment and, above all, the reciprocal impermeability of mediums. In a traditional exhibition, you do not

hang clothing from a Giacometti sculpture, you do not play with a Bellmer doll, and you do not show a Magritte painting in a mirror.

In an exhibition conceived by Jakob Lena Knebl, though, you do! Not that these actions are meant to shock visitors. This artist-curator's ambitions are bigger than that: she wants to offer the viewer the chance to forget the cultural hierarchies that generate mutually exclusive levels of interpretation. We have not learnt to look at a Renaissance painting the way we do a piece of contemporary art, and it seems natural to us to interpret a work of conceptual art differently from a decorative tapestry; we tend to view a living room table differently from an Aztec sculpture. These multiple ways of approaching the objects around us usually lead us to establish ontological hierarchies between, say, the fine arts and design, or between architecture and interior decoration.

By conceiving environments that flatten any kind of hierarchy, in which a painting is integrated into architecture that is itself steeped in elements from decoration, design and fashion, Jakob Lena Knebl creates a situation in which negative space evaporates. It is no longer a matter of getting the visitor to move from point A to point B, from one work to another, with the space between the hierarchically superior poles of A and B being merely an invisible path traced by each viewer's body. The situation created by the artist-curator makes it possible to consider the exhibition space as a field of varying intensities in which each element helps to create what the philosopher Tristan Garcia, citing Manuel DeLanda, calls a "flat ontology," endowing each object and each image with equal "dignity."

Marc-Olivier Wahler, director of the Museum of Art and History (MAH), Geneva  
Translation: Charles Penwarden

*Jakob Lena Knebl was born in 1970 in Baden, Austria. She lives and works in Vienna and Berlin. She is represented by Belmacz Gallery in London and Georg Kargl Gallery in Vienna. In her works she is questioning how identities are co-constructed through art and design and how they can be transformed within these disciplines. Recent works have intervened with the compositions of other artists artworks, historic and contemporary, as well as objects of contemporary European culture borrowed from Fashion or Design, and otherwise. This manifests in multimedia installations that the artist calls "desirerooms".*

*« Come together, right now. Over me » is the first solo show in France by Austrian artist Jakob Lena Knebl. On this occasion she will be drawing on the Galerie Loevenbruck collection and, alongside her own latest creations, composing with works by Morton Bartlett, Hans Bellmer, Alfred Courmes, Sonia Delaunay, Key Hiraga, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux, Tony Matelli, Philippe Mayaux, Paul McCarthy, Pierre Molinier, Frédéric Pardo, Steven Parrino, Ashley Hans Scheirl, Alina Szapocznikow, among others.*

*Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl will be exhibited at the Biennale de Lyon from September 18, 2019 to January 5, 2020, at the Usines Fagor.*

**Further information:**

Alexandra Schillinger, alexandra@loevenbruck.com, tél. 01 82 28 38 21  
assisted by Lola Ector, lola@loevenbruck.com.

Gallery opening hours : Tue-Sat, 11am-7pm and by appointment