

# HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

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IRÈNE HUG - VON WAHL TO WHALE

Winner of Hošek Contemporary Prize 2022

Opening reception: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022, 7 - 10 pm

Exhibition period: 7<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Curated by Linda Toivio

A site-specific light and sound installation in the belly of an old cargo ship

Known for text art installations, Swiss-born (\*1964) artist Irène Hug is presenting new light sculptures in her first solo exhibition with Hošek Contemporary. Consisting of ordinary fluorescent tubes, the installation *Von Wahl to Whale* hangs in the former hold of the ship. Arranged in five rows and observed from particular angles, the light tubes form letters. Written in both English and German, the words WAL, WHALE, WAVE, WALL and WAHL are connected through the superficial link of similar or related phonetic sounds; they form a sonic chain of words, in which certain associative and content-related connections can be perceived. Irène Hug's *Von Wahl to Whale* project was selected as the winner of Hošek Contemporary Prize 2022.

In *Von Wahl to Whale*, a total of 54 fluorescent tubes lighten the interior of the exhibition space to an unusual level of brightness. The artist's aim was to create a strikingly luminous installation to contrast against the roughness of the space. These mundane objects are at the centre of the work, assembled and aligned into sculptural word art, highlighting the authority of subtle semantics. Glowing in the dark, the words are floating, as if materially weightless, yet charged with meaning.

Typically working with short sentences and slogans, Irène Hug has now chosen individual words, ordinary and almost dull, but compelling in their simplicity. Standing alone, one word could leave room for various interpretations, yet in the current world order, they are each relatively evocative, if not political as they introduce topical issues. The chain of associations shifts from environmental crises (whales) to natural and man-made phenomena (waves in contrast to sound and light waves) to unjustified and artificial borders (walls) and finally to social achievements and their repercussions (elections).

The power one simple word carries is accentuated here by the clarity and the unsophistication of the chosen vocabulary, making the work and its connotations accessible. Although the words "Wal" (German for whale) and "Wahl" (choice, election or vote in German) for instance sound the same, they carry contrasting meanings. Curiously, however, it may be thought that the existence of one can directly connect to the other. The large mammal, also Irène Hug's first inspiration for the exhibition, is often seen as a symbol for the protection and preservation of marine ecosystems as well as endangered animal species. Truthfully, isn't the whale's future existence a matter of our choice, an ongoing battle between those in power?

Throughout her artistic career, Irène Hug has consistently used several languages in her works, for instance German, French, Italian and English. With roots in a multilingual country, such

feature undoubtedly occurs naturally to her, but perhaps to a greater degree, it might reflect our globalised world by questioning the significance and hierarchy of national languages when addressing universal themes. Now more than ever, we are facing common threats and disasters, where national borders gradually lose their previous meaning.

Inside the space, the light waves are encountered by sound waves, especially composed for the installation by Swiss musician Joke Lanz. The sound collage takes form through found footage, including whale songs, wave and construction noise, and election speeches. The ensemble of the composition amplifies the themes evoked by the minimalistic word sculptures, steering the viewer's mood and enhancing the visual experience along a sonic journey.

Text © Linda Toivio

### Hošek Contemporary

Established by Petr Hošek in 2016, Hošek Contemporary is a gallery and art residency located on a historical cargo ship next to Fischerinsel in Mitte, Berlin. The gallery focuses primarily on site-specific pieces, performing arts and experimental sound works. During the spring and summer months, the gallery is hosting weekly improvised and experimental music installations, with local and international musicians.

### MS Heimatland

Built in 1910 in Fürstenberg an der Oder, MS Heimatland was initially operating under the name Ida and used for transporting coal to Charlottenburg. After the Second World War, the 58-meter long cargo ship was renamed Heimatland, meaning "homeland". Until the 90s, the ship was sailing on Elbe and Havel, moving other boats, sand and chipping. It served for artistic and cultural purposes for the first time in 2002, when German sculptor Christiane Möbus chose it for her Nackte Tatsache Tatsache project. Finally, in March 2018, Heimatland became the main exhibition space and artist residency of Hošek Contemporary. The boat is permanently anchored in the historic port of Berlin.

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