

Westfälischer Kunstverein

Rothenburg 30,
48143 Münster
westfaelischer-
kunstverein.de

Opening times:
Tue-Sun 11am-7pm

Admission: 4 €,
Concessions: 2 €,
free admission
for members

Slavs and Tatars "Saalbadereien / Bathhouse Quackeries"
3 February - 15 April 2018

Formed in 2006, the international, Berlin-based collective "Slavs and Tatars" combines three modes of expression within its overall artistic practice: publications, lecture performances and exhibitions, all of which draw upon the stylistic palette of popular culture, spiritual and esoteric traditions, oral histories, modern myths, as well as rigorous academic analysis. They have fixed their field of research geographically to the area "east of the Berlin wall and west of the Great Wall of China" - often left unspecified as an area, frequently neglected and yet so endless and diverse. Through their idiosyncratic eclecticism and undauntedly interdisciplinary approach, Slavs and Tatars have opened up new, unexpected discursive channels. Generally speaking, they challenge our unquestioning trust in rationality, our scepticism toward spirituality - attitudes born of the Enlightenment and that shape us to this day.

In addition, Slavs and Tatars' thematic focus is upon languages, scripts and alphabets that they deem to be far from neutral or innocent entities, instead the handmaidens of empires, religions and political power plays. Thus, the carpet "Alphabet Abdal" features script in Arabic, which more or less translates as "Jesus, son of Mary, he is love". Inextricably linked with Islam, this script refers here to the basic tenets of Christianity, which was itself, in its early incarnation, closely connected to the Arabic alphabet. The letters have small feet and move hastily - a reference to the Exodus. The mirror "Love me, love me not (Kaliningrad)" likewise alludes to the mutability of alphabets and languages by listing the changing names of the same city as they reflect the respective regime in power.

Today's Kaliningrad was the birthplace of the writer and philosopher Johann Georg Hamann, who died in 1788 in Münster, and who Slavs and Tatars have made the starting point of their exhibition at the Westfälischer Kunstverein. It comprises the large stage plus microphone stand, the work "Stilbruch", as well as the audio piece "Elastic Grain". The artist collective is interested in Hamann inasmuch as he was critical of a radical Enlightenment and strove to unify sensibility and reason. He enjoyed a love/hate relationship with Immanuel Kant, penfriend of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's, ally of Johann Gottfried Herder and is considered to be the genius behind of Sturm und Drang. He only published short works during his lifetime, but not a single extended book and was famous for his extremely concentrated texts packed with innumerable footnotes and alternating between different languages and alphabets. In a similar way to Hamann's two essays on the letter "H", Slavs and Tatars devoted a whole book to the phoneme "Khhhhhhh". Both of Hamann's texts are reproduced in the new publication "Kirchgängerbanger" together with an essay by Slavs and Tatars. Replete with its ample steps, the stage invites one to sit and share communal readings and will be further activated as part of the lecture performance on 10 April.

The sound takes up a Hamann quotation and exposes him as a lover of boredom, which he considers a productive muse, a quality that ought to be at the reader's disposal when concentrating on his writings. Hamann as a stand-up comedian, Hamann as a hip-hop star – both associations made by the artists are revisited on the stage: in the shape of the microphone stand "Gut of Gab" and the Hamann posters. His extremely telegrammatic prose style, the density of his metaphors and rhapsodies provide the source material here.

The small exhibition room is home to three works that provide a neat insight into Slavs and Tatars' overall practice. The book-kebab "Kitab Kebab" skewers a pile of books diagonally, an axis designating a middle path between horizontal and vertical education, which is either widely dispersed and shallow or in-depth and thoroughgoing into a particular subject. In real terms, we are dealing with a kofta kebab, a skewer with small lumps of minced meat as opposed to small chunks of meat – putting academic education through the mincer and thoroughly compressing it as an image for an interdisciplinary middle path. Intellect and food, head and stomach, reason and gut feeling – this collaborative proposition in matters of an understanding of the world is invoked here. The forked tongue "Szpagat" launches a similar salvo and alludes to the idea of 'mother tongue'. The car rear window "Weeping Window (Morgenländer)" illustrates Slavs and Tatars' view of themselves as anti-modernists: progress, forward movement, but with eyes cast backwards through the rear window toward the past, not unlike Walter Benjamin's concept of history inspired by Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus".

And finally the Pickle Bar at the "Königsberger Gitter", where sauerkraut juice is dispensed: just like the gherkin breasts on the poster in the foyer, the process of fermentation, of pickling and conserving (with salt) is drawn upon as a potent metaphor for transformation – the creation of something new through a breaking down and decomposition. And, in spite of all this intellectual engagement, it goes without saying that the stomach also needs to be readied. The fence is hybrid barrier and church pew – both tried and tested methods of controlling the masses. A short poem on the posters uses a linguistic joke to make a connection between the exercise of power and nourishing and caring – generally regarded as the role of the state (motherland, fatherland, avuncular 'Uncle Sam'). This power can also turn, sour and ferment. Time for something new.

Publication "Kirchgängerbanger"

92 pages, German/English, including an essay by Slavs and Tatars and texts by Johann Georg Hamann, edited by Westfälischer Kunstverein and Motto Books, Berlin
12 € / 10 € for members

Exhibition walkthrough with Slavs and Tatars

Saturday, 3 February at noon

"I Utter Other" – Lecture Performance

Tuesday, 10 April at 7 pm

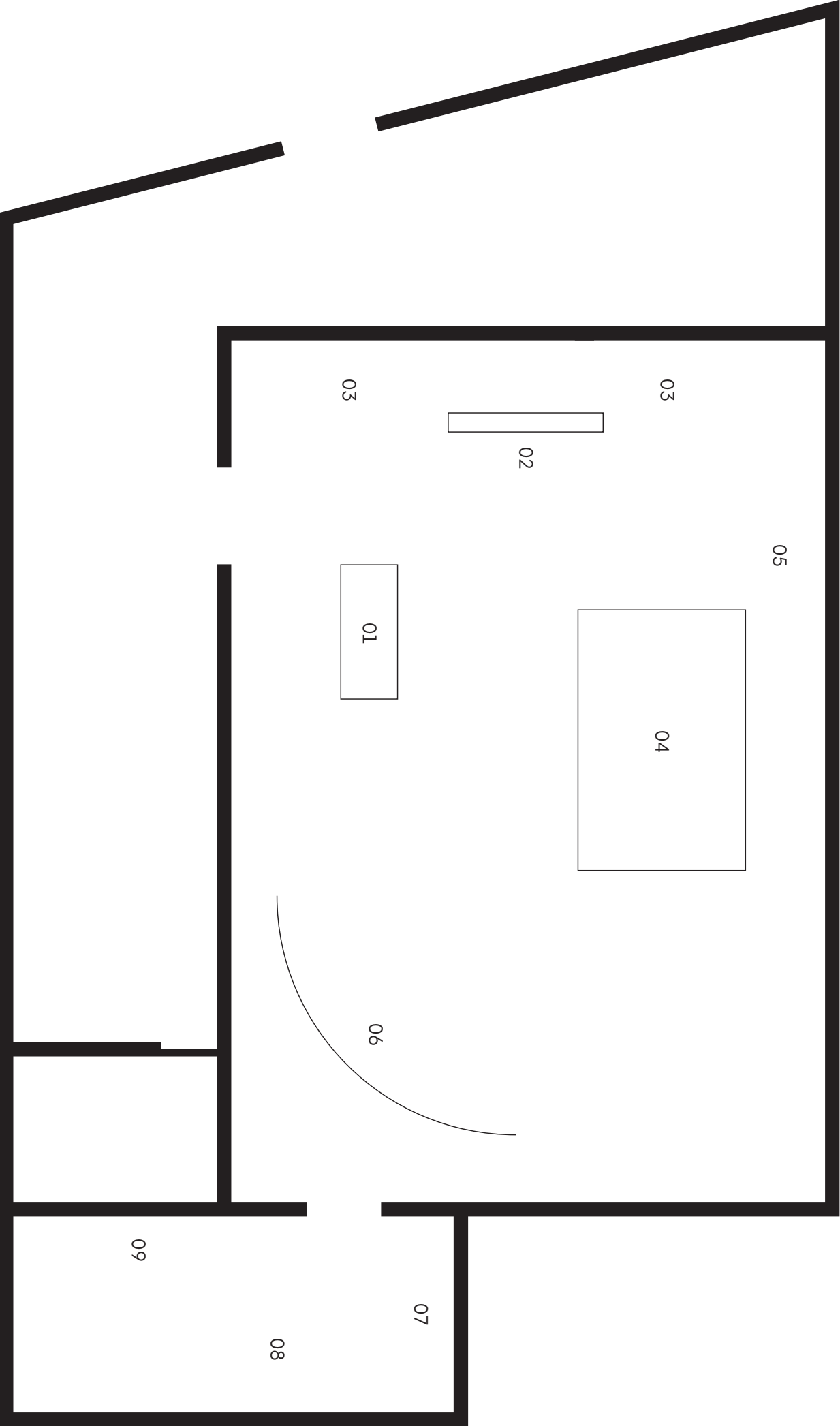
Curatorial tours: guided by Kristina Scepanski

Thursday, 15 February at 6 pm

Saturday, 3 March at 2 pm

Friday, 23 March at 6 pm

Generously supported by Kunststiftung NRW. Westfälischer Kunstverein is funded by Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe and Kulturstadt der Stadt Münster.



01: *Stilbruch*, 2018
02: *Königsberger Gitter*, 2018
03: *Elastic Grain*, 2018, 4 min.
04: *Gut of Gab*, 2018
05: *Love Me, Love Me Not*
(*Kaliningrad*), 2018

06: *Alphabet Abdol*, 2015
07: *Weeping Window* (*Morgenländer*),
2017
08: *Kitab Kebab* (*Turning towards*
Suhrawardi), 2013
09: *Szpogot*, 2017

All works courtesy the artists and
Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin