

Adam Jasper, "Raphaela Vogel," *Artforum*, February 2019.

ARTFORUM



View of "Raphaela Vogel," 2018.

Raphaela Vogel

GREGOR STAIGER

The title of Raphaella Vogel's exhibition "Gregor's Loch" recalled many Gregors, among them Pope Gregory I, the gallerist Gregor Staiger, and Kafka's Gregor Samsa. *Loch*, German for *hole*, could refer to a lair or a hideaway, which in this case might have been the gallery or perhaps an orifice, Gregor's hole. It was tempting to see the title as intended to needle, to *get at* Mr. Staiger, who is known for his genial, imperturbable, lightly self-deprecating distance. You have to admire Vogel's consistency: She never smooths over the awkward question of the artist's relationship to a host institution. As if the

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name of the exhibition were not enough to create a little space between her and the gallery, Vogel made her own entrance, erecting a gate made (in white polyurethane) from a mold of the entrance to a tai chi studio, and guarding it with a couple of those awful garden gnomes that Dieter Roth so loved. The center of the gallery was filled with enough chrome and leather to build a waiting room full of Bauhaus knockoffs, but here the assemblage drew attention to the materials themselves, to the origins of the tubing in the gas pipe and of the leather chair in an animal skin.

Animal hides have become a kind of signature material for the artist. Projected on one of them here, in a work titled *Einparken* (Parking), 2013/18, was a deadpan loop of Vogel attempting the Sisyphean task of parking her van in a tight spot. Stretched across two structural columns in the center of the gallery nearby was a huge leather hide (*Ambiguar*, 2018). The checklist said it was the skin of a horse. If so, it was a big animal, rendered enormous in this case by three extra pieces of elk hide appended to its extremities, making a dugong-shaped pelt. The material fixing the extensions was silicone laced with a black-green pigment. Dragged in handfuls down the line of the spine, it also functioned as paint. The imprint of a small hand could be seen in the mess, and light passed through a few irregular holes that could be read as orifices—either eyes in a mask, or (if such a form could be worn as a giant diaper) as holes to shit and piss through. Only later did it occur to me that perhaps these were bullet holes. What looked like a couple of blind contour drawings had been scrawled on the scraped horsehide: two nudes, one spread-eagle, done with a virtuoso line skilled enough to make ironic use of a couple of blotches.

In the confines of this Swiss gallery, with its even white walls, perfect humidity, and balanced air-conditioning, the abject work found a fitting rhetorical frame: a white box so stable, so hygienic, so free of ideology, empire, or resistance that obscenity was not sustainable. Here, atrocity collapsed into a kind of flatness. The skins hanging in the room seemed not so much abject as dejected. Their forms sagged a little against the white walls. The German word *Bildträger*, usually translated as "support," did double work here, suggesting both a neutral medium such as a canvas and something that carries, or suffers, an image. As well as serving as a vehicle for an image, the skin represented itself, or, rather, the shape of the hide recalled the animal that it once covered. The skin of the horse pointed to a horse without a skin, a flayed animal we didn't see.

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It seems like there are two Raphaela Vogels: the artist who produces and produces, and the artist who reflects and intervenes. One is diligent but compulsive; the other is critical and reflective but not always in control. This apparent lack of control is perhaps deceptive. The works on view here, taken individually, appeared underdetermined, even arbitrary, but as an ensemble revealed an extraordinary level of deliberation.

— Adam Jasper

<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201902/raphaela-vogel-78472>