

Curated by: Edit Molnár & Marcel Schwierin

Mario Pfeifer

NEGOTIATING THE LAW

DAS
RECHT
VERHANDELN
29.10.
2020
- 10.1.
2021

NEGOTIATING THE LAW — DAS RECHT VERHANDELN

Zelle 5 – 800° Celsius: Act 1–2 is a multimedia installation and performance that stands at the center of *Negotiating the Law*, a solo presentation of German video artist and filmmaker Mario Pfeifer. Through the artistic reworking of forensic materials and investigative strategies related to the deeply troubling case of the death of Oury Jalloh, a Sierra Leonean asylum seeker in Germany, the work aims to spark discussion about the coexistence of visual evidences, racism and institutional violence, and the importance of civil activism. The artist has closely collaborated with activists from *Break the Silence*, an initiative in remembrance of Jalloh that continues the investigation into his 2005 case—which remains one of Germany’s largest police controversies in relation to accusations of institutional racism.

On January 7, 2005, Oury Jalloh burned to death in detention cell 5 of the Dessau-Roßlau police station, and almost sixteen years later the case is still widely debated both juridically and in the media. Pfeifer’s complex *Zelle 5* installation not only provides insight into the production of the visual evidence used to build the case but also allows protagonists from politics, the judicial system, and civil right movements to speak up and introduce their evidence, in a space entirely dedicated to representing their findings. This gesture of representation encourages both the participants and the audience to take an active role in judging pieces of evidence and court protocols, like fire reports and to delve into the image-making processes used in law enforcement. Pfeifer’s work further opens up space for debate on social controversies and the complexities of how law is constructed, executed, and influenced.

Populated by a cast of everyday characters, the exhibition space comes to evoke the scene of the incident, where both documentation of evidence archived and a re-enactment of the creation of visual evidence are presented. *Act 1* is entirely dedicated to one object: an ordinary disposable lighter, which is the central piece of evidence in Jalloh’s case. It appeared three days after the crime scene was secured, with investigators claiming it had previously been overlooked. No DNA traces of Jalloh or materials secured in the cell were found on the claimed evidence. *Act 2* takes the form of a live performance that restages the court room narration through the reading of court files and testimonies by performers. The search for and reconsideration of the truth in the case of Oury Jalloh will unfold in all its depth through this theater re-enactment, revealing for the spectator the different concepts of “truth” as they appear in court, in life, and in the art space.

The artist has also invited *Break the Silence—In Remembrance of Oury Jalloh* to present their activist work, which demands justice for Jalloh and the prosecution of those responsible for the events of January 7, 2005.

Act 3 of the *Zelle 5* project is a video installation and film that Pfeifer will premiere at the Edith-Russ-Haus in 2021. It focuses on five different fire scenarios. The official investigators were unable to reconstruct a similar burn pattern as that made by the fire in cell 5, and for *Act 3*, Pfeifer will reconstruct these four failed fire reports as well as produce a fifth scenario—a potential solution—in collaboration with an international fire forensics specialist. *Act 3* comprises the production of visual evidence through an artistic practice.

Alongside *Zelle 5*, the *Negotiating the Law* exhibition includes two earlier works by Pfeifer that reflect on current social discussions on institutional racism and the status and treatment of refugees in (East) Germany.

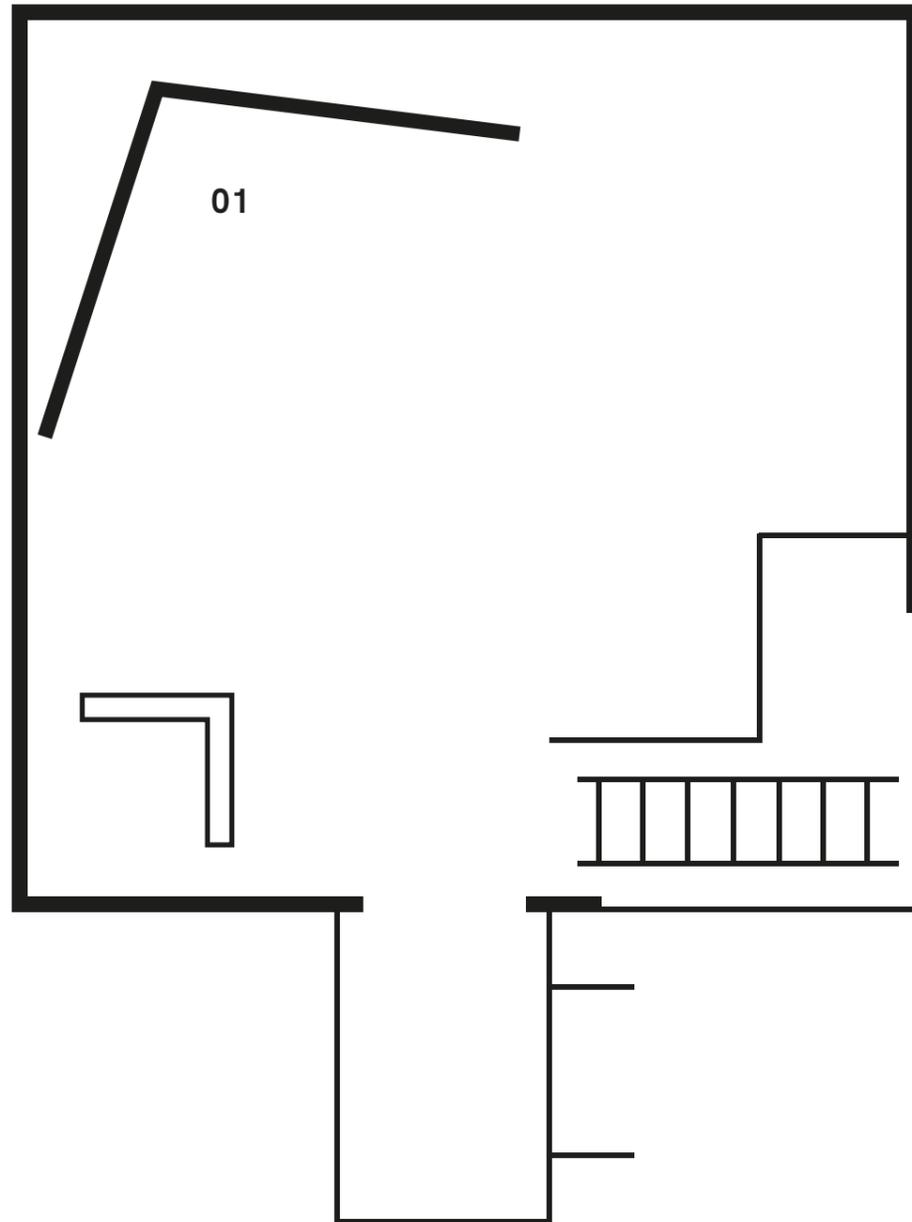
Again/Noch Einmal (2018) revisits a 2016 incident near Dresden, in which after an argument with a supermarket cashier, Shabaz al-Aziz, a Kurdish Iraqi refugee, was attacked and tied to a tree by four local men. Before the trial of these men, al-Aziz was found dead in a forest. Pfeifer reconstructed the viral YouTube footage of the attack using professional actors and invited citizens of different nationalities—most of them immigrants to Germany—act as jurors, raising question around our perception of reality, media manipulation, justice and democracy.

#blacktivist (2015) is a manifesto against police brutality, selective law enforcement, and the valorization of self-defense. The work, which Pfeifer conceived together with Brooklyn rap group the Flatbush ZOMBIES, puts sequences of police violence—captured by surveillance and body cameras—into the aesthetics of a conventional music video. This is combined with found internet footage glorifying weapons and demonstrating attacks and counterattacks, as well as documentation of a gun-manufacturing workshop in Austin, Texas, that uses at-home 3D printing technology, thereby challenging laws around weapons distribution and ownership in the US.

Pfeifer’s new monograph, *If you end up with the story you started with, then you’re not listening along the way* (ed. Gaëtane Verna, with contributions by Stan Douglas, Georg Imdahl and Nomaduma Rosa Masilela, Mousse Publishing, 2019), will be launched during the exhibition with a conversation between the artist and contributing writers.

Mario Pfeifer was the 2019 recipient of the Media Art Grant from the Foundation of Lower Saxony at the Edith-Russ-Haus, Oldenburg.

For more information on programming for the exhibition, please visit www.edith-russ-haus.de



**01
AGAIN – NOCH EINMAL**

2018
Two channel video installation, DCP, colour,
5.1, 42 min, 2018
German with English and Arabic subtitles

The work deals with an incident near Dresden in 2016 in which Shabaz al-Aziz, a Kurdish-Iraqi refugee, was attacked after a fight with a supermarket cashier and tied to a tree by four local men. Before the trial against the four men began, al-Aziz was found dead in a forest. Pfeifer reconstructed the viral YouTube footage of the attack on Shabaz al-Aziz with actress Dennesch Zoudé and actor Mark Waschke and invited people of different nationalities – most of whom live in Germany as migrants – to appear as jurors and ask questions about our perception of reality, media manipulation, justice, and justice and democracy. The exhibition audience becomes a virtual part of this jury and is thus invited to form their own impression of the events.

Featuring: Dennesch Zoude, Mark Waschke, Juan M., Dilan B.

Producer/Director: Mario Pfeifer

Co-Producers: RBB / Arte, blackboardfilms, KOW, Papermoon Films

RBB / Arte Commissioning: Dagmar Mielke

Screenplay: Lilian von Keudell, Mario Pfeifer

Director of Photography: Stephan Burchardt

Montage: Mario Pfeifer

Voice Over: Sandra Borgmann

Sound design: Thomas Wallmann

Score: Kamran Sadeghi

Production design: Susanne Dieringer

Gaffer: Heiko Grund

Costume design: Dorota Budna

Make-up artists: Adella Selzer, Julia Böhm, Nicole Krämer

Animation design: Jonas Dahl

Aerial photography: up up Berlin

Colour correction: Cinechromatix

Still photographer: Stephanie Kuhlbach

Subtitling: Alias Film + Sprachübertragung

Supported by:

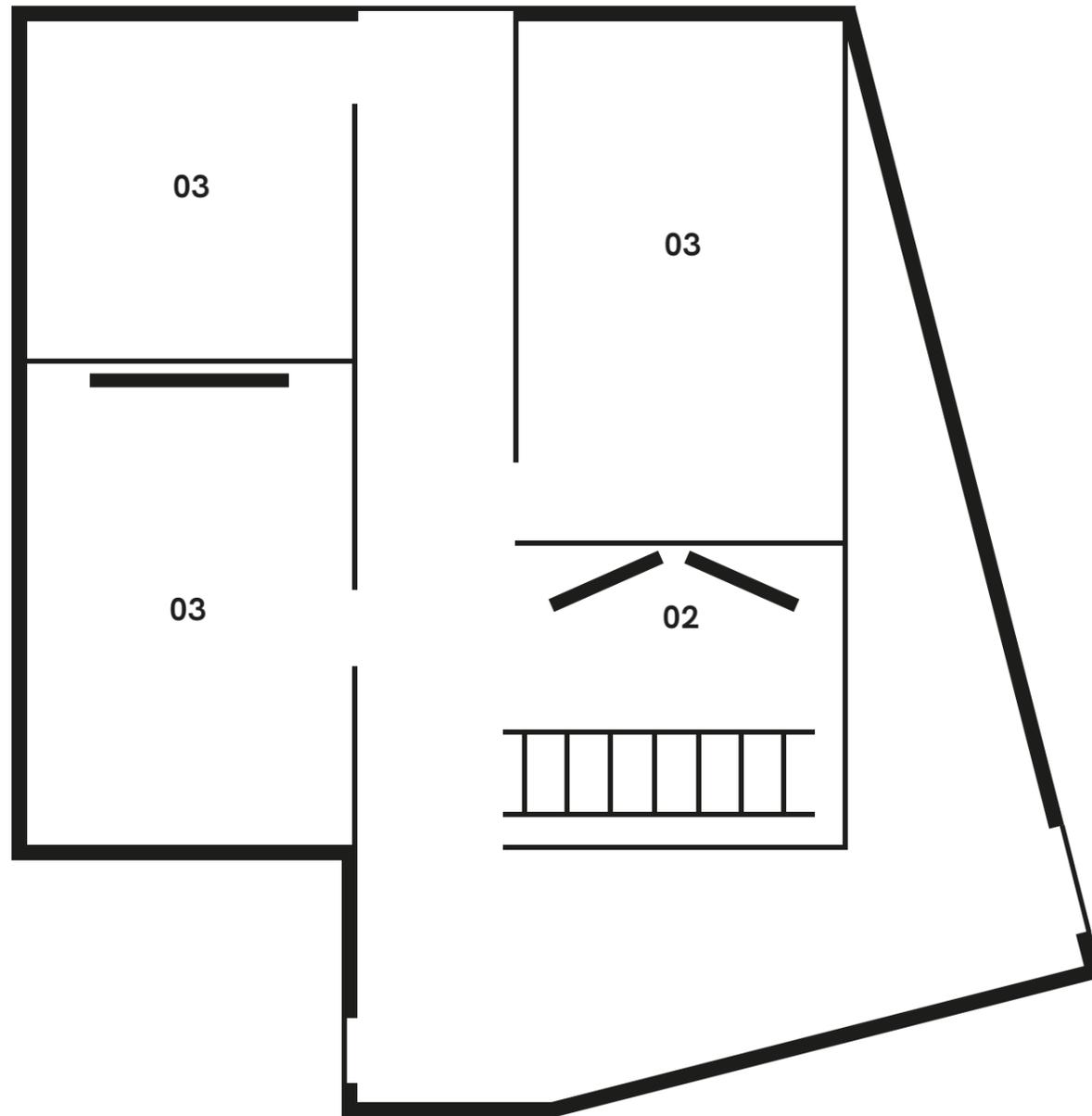
Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg

and:



(Supported by the Cultural Foundation of the Free State of Saxony. This measure is co-financed by tax revenues on the basis of the budget adopted by the Saxon State Parliament)

Commissioned by the 10. Berlin Biennale.
Curators: Gabi Ncgogo, Nomaduma Rosa Masilela, Serubiri Moses, Thiago de Paula Souza, Yvette Mutumba.



02
#blacktivist

2015

Two-channel 4K video installation, colour, stereo,
5 min
English

A manifesto against brutal police violence, the selective application of laws and the high value of self-defence with weapons. The work, which Pfeifer conceived together with the rap group Flatbush ZOMBiES from Brooklyn, integrates cinematic depictions of police violence – captured by surveillance cameras and body cams – into the aesthetics of a conventional music video. This is combined with footage from the Internet glorifying weapons and showing attacks and counter-attacks, as well as a documentary of a weapons manufacturer in Austin, Texas, using ordinary 3D printers, thereby challenging the laws on arms dealing and possession in the US.

Producers: Mario Pfeifer , Vivien Trommer / Ludlow 38, Raphael Oberhuber / KOW

Director, Montage: Mario Pfeifer

Co-Director/Post-Production: Drew Arnold

Co-Director's Assistant: Xaivia Inniss

Camera: Michael Intile, Mario Pfeifer

Second Camera Operator: Steven Gatti

Cast: Flatbush ZOMBiES, Jade M. Elliott

Soundtrack: Flatbush ZOMBiES

Green Screen Post Production: Alec Iselin

Sound Design: Thomas Wallmann

Styling/Wardrobe: Sarah Hein

Make-up Artist: Sonam Chadna

Second Camera Operator: Steven Gatti

Gaffer: Ari Schaffer

Grip: Haitham *Sammy* Rostrom

Prop Handler: Ken Again Master

Produktion assistance:

Assistant Drew Arnold: Xaivia Inniss

Production assistants: Alexander Kellogg, Kevin Westpfahl, Biancha Bacchantin

Digital image transferr: Stanislaw Grünstein

Green Screen: Bravo Studios, New York City

Commissioned by MINI/Goethe-Institut Curatorial Residencies Ludlow 38, New York, USA

© Mario Pfeifer / KOW, 2015

© *Blacktivist* – Flatbush ZOMBiES, 2015

03 ZELLE 5 – 800° CELSIUS: ACT 1

2020
Mixed media installation in three Rooms
Voice: Helen Wendt
Recording: Christian Gude

Zelle 5 – 800° Celsius: Act 1 is based on the artistic reappraisal of forensic materials in the deeply disturbing case of Oury Jalloh, a Sierra Leonean who had sought asylum in Germany and burned to death in Detention Cell 5 of the Dessau-Roßlau police station in 2005.

The artist follows this case in close cooperation with the activist movement *Break the Silence – Initiative in memory of Oury Jalloh*.

“By means of forensic investigations, it was established in autumn 2019 that Oury Jalloh had physical injuries before the outbreak of the fire, which cast doubt on whether he was even conscious at all. Likewise, the carbon monoxide content in his heart blood was 0.0 percent. In my view, these forensic findings reveal many questions. *Zelle 5* quotes from documents of politics, justice and the activist movement *Break the Silence – Initiative in memory of Oury Jalloh*. By making these materials available, which have been evaluated in the courtrooms, examination laboratories and the media, I would like to give the audience an insight into the findings as well as the educational work of the activists who are fighting for justice and responsibility in the Jalloh case. It is about taking a stand and presenting their evidence in a space reserved exclusively for the representation of their findings.” — Mario Pfeifer

The installation *Act 1* extends over three rooms. In the centre of the first two rooms is perhaps the most important piece of evidence in Jalloh’s case, an ordinary disposable lighter. This lighter did not turn up until three days

after the crime scene had been secured, with investigators stating that it had been overlooked before. No DNA traces of Jalloh’s DNA or remains of materials from the cell could be found on this piece of evidence. Instead, foreign fibres, foreign indeterminate DNA and animal hair were found. Together with a fire expert, the artist has reconstructed the combustion of such a disposable lighter and thus shows how pieces of evidence can be produced subsequently. The voice of the Oldenburg actress Helen Wendt contrasts the high-resolution recordings of the experiment with the legal language of various expert opinions. The third room is dedicated to the activist work of the initiative in memory of Oury Jalloh.

ZELLE 5 – 800° CELSIUS , ACT 2

Performance

On 7 January, the day commemorating the death of Oury Jalloh, the world premiere of Mario Pfeifer’s performance *Zelle 5 – 800° Celsius, Act 2* will take place in the Edith-Russ-Haus.

Act 2 will be a live performance in which actors read out court transcripts and witness statements, thus restaging the proceedings in the courtroom. Through the theatrical re-enactment, the search for the truth in the case of Oury Jalloh and its re-examination should gradually unfold. It conveys to the audience the different notions of ‘truth’ that are brought to bear in court, in life and in the space of art.

ZELLE 5 – 800° CELSIUS , ACT 3

Act 3 of the project will be implemented later due to the corona crisis. A video installation and a film are planned, which Pfeifer plans to show for the first time in 2021 in the Edith-

Russ-Haus. The work deals with five different scenarios of the fire.

Thanks to:
Initiative in Gedenken an Oury Jalloh e.V.
Nadine Saeed
Mouctar Bah
Tom Macholz
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Oberhuber
Jonas Dahl
Gunther Haarstrack
Oliver Thau
Markus Weisbeck

BREAK THE SILENCE – INITIATIVE IN GEDENKEN AN OURY JALLOH

Materials from the archive of the initiative

Brief description of the initiative

The initiative in memory of Oury Jalloh was founded immediately after the death by fire of Oury Jalloh in the detention cell No. 5 of the Dessau-Roßlau police station on 7 January 2005.

The reason for this was that the Dessau public prosecutor’s office limited its investigations to the theory that Oury Jalloh himself had ordered his killing. On the basis of its findings, however, the initiative assumes that Oury Jalloh was murdered.

Since then, the initiative has critically accompanied and documented the investigation and court proceedings, commissioned expert opinions, organised panels and demonstrations and supported Jalloh’s relatives in their efforts to clarify the matter.

initiativeouryjalloh.wordpress.com

Mario Pfeifer Mario Pfeifer was the 2019 winner of the Lower Saxony Foundation's scholarship for media art at the Edith-Russ-Haus. He was born in Dresden in 1981 and studied at the Academy of Visual Arts, Leipzig, the University of the Arts, Berlin, the Städelschule – Academy of Fine Arts, Frankfurt am Main and the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles. Pfeifer was a Fulbright and DAAD scholarship holder and artist-in-residence at the ISCP in New York, the Gasworks in London and the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. Solo exhibitions: including 2020, Folkwang Museum Essen; 2019 The Power Plant, Toronto; 2019 Pylon Lab, Dresden; 2018 Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz; 2016 GfZK Leipzig; 2016 ACUD, Berlin; 2015 Fotomuseum Winterthur; 2015 Ludlow38, New York. Group exhibitions: among others 10th Berlin Biennale; 11° Bienal do Mercosul, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein; KunstWerke Berlin; Städelmuseum Frankfurt am Main. — www.mariopfeifer.com

Colophon

Production:

Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst

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