KUNSTHALLE BASEL

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Özgür Kar

Rock Bottom

30 Oct. 2026–24 Jan. 2027

Introduction

With *Rock Bottom*, Kunsthalle Basel presents Özgür Kar's (b. 1992) first solo exhibition in Switzerland. Kar's work brings together video, drawing, sculpture, and sound. His figures are based on hand-drawn sketches and are displayed on monitors, which are an equally integral part of the work. As video sculptures, where the screen and the technology both give the figures form and, at the same time, impose limitations upon them.

In the exhibition spaces, figures that appear independent of one another linger, each alone in an otherwise bare room, in its own unique state of mind. Trapped within their respective devices, they repeat the same movements endlessly. Sounds ring out and start over; a conversation loops relentlessly. Whether as animals, humans, or anatomical bodies, the figures are trapped in states that slowly bring them to a standstill or overstimulate them. Their monumental presence fails to conceal their inherent powerlessness and vulnerability. They persevere within a present that offers no moments of respite.

The title derives its meaning from this sense of hopelessness. *Rock Bottom* refers to a moment of crisis and exhaustion where all hope has been abandoned–the lowest possible point. Yet, upon reaching this point, one finds themselves on solid ground, indicating that a situation can only change in one direction from there. The exhibition remains at this juncture, offering no hints about what, if anything, may follow.

Özgür Kar: *Rock Bottom*

The animated figures distributed throughout the rooms of Özgür Kar's exhibition *Rock Bottom* possess no biography, no backstory, no narrative, and no destination. Each one embodies a state that fluctuates between exhaustion, sensory overload, and a form of perpetual failure—prolonged moments of limbo in which the figure lingers on the fringes of its current condition. Without dramatic buildup or resolution, each moment is complete in itself.

Cow and the Flies (2026) presents a larger-than-life cow, motionless and circled by flies. Only an occasional rise of the flank indicates the animal is still alive. Here, life is reduced to minimal signs—a tremor or a breath—barely distinguishable from its opposite. The longer one remains with the animal, the more the flies' buzzing fills the large, empty exhibition space. What begins as a faint hum becomes increasingly ominous as more flies circle the body, as if they have long been aware of what will happen to it. Kar captures the animal at that final moment when signs of life are still discernible.

In the next room, *Transparent Figure (Anxiety)* (2026), shows a green monochrome figure, also curled in on itself, held in a similar state, at the last moment in which life can still be discerned. Here, the screen poses as a canvas. By using the monitors as the support of the image, Kar lends the device a significance that reaches well beyond its role as a carrier of mass-media images.

Each figure begins as a hand-drawn sketch, scaled to fit the screen dimensions, and is animated only later. The sketch serves as a test bed: what works on paper determines which figures ultimately become part of the work. Anything that cannot be resolved within a sketch is discarded—sometimes after days of work, and occasionally even just before completion. Kar treats the medium of video as sculpture. Each figure is tethered to its designated screen, presented in an endless loop, without ever leaving its self-contained space. With no beginning or end to wait for, the works appear as physical presences within the room.

Duration shapes not only the individual works but also the exhibition as a whole. Each work has its fixed place in the space, giving the exhibition the appearance of a deconstructed theater in which the figures perform as actors in their isolation. The scenes repeat themselves, all belonging to a single, shared moment. Beyond an interest in the logic of theater, the artist draws on a wide range of references—from Renaissance prints and anatomical illustrations to depictions from Christian altarpieces—to fine-tune each figure's demeanor and posture. *Transparent Figure (Pain Relief)* (2026) refers to Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521–22). While Christian iconography typically upholds the hope of resurrection, Holbein's painting seems to forego it entirely.

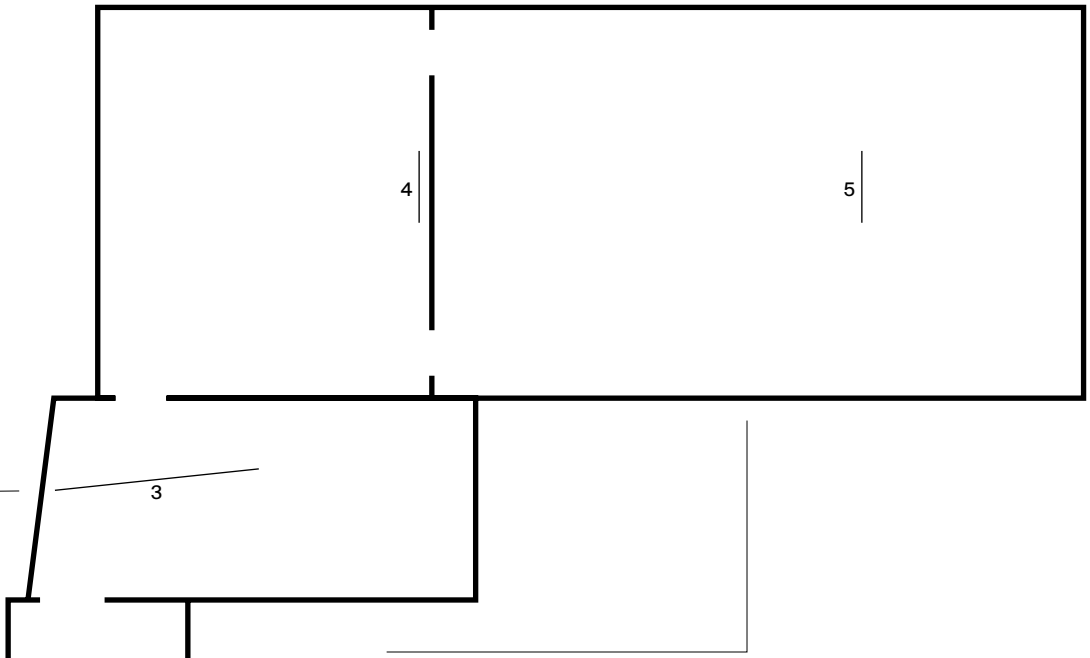
Black-and-white skeletons are a recurring motif in Kar's work; here, he introduces a new layer, unveiling the intricate network of nerve pathways that traverses the entire body. The tracts glow like sites of inflammation, throbbing in an erratic rhythm. Rendered in bright colors as individual lines or as dense, branching structures, they show an overstimulation that finds no release. The figures remain in a restless state that never exhausts itself.

In the next room, *Human Hide* (2026) hangs suspended in nothing but its own casing, stripped of any bone frame and nerve fibers. In the final room, language is revealed as a form of exchange that leads nowhere but back to itself. In *Transparent Figure (Data Retention Plea)* (2026), the figure that was once slumped now kneels on the floor, seemingly confined by the edges of the image. It has become entangled in a perpetual, hyperstimulated soliloquy, staged as a conversation with an unknown entity that, like an echo chamber, reflects its thoughts back at it. The title of the work already hints at what this monologue produces, for the storage of data is no longer experienced as an intrusion but as an existential plea. For the figure, being recorded and then presented back in an increasingly optimized form serves as a substitute for intimacy, acting as the sole proof of its existence. It neither seeks liberation nor an end to its current state; instead, it asks only that the loop continue, begging to be retained, recorded, and kept in place.

In all these works, *Rock Bottom* repeatedly returns to the ambiguity of continued existence. Enduring and remaining suggest both a form of resistance and an inability to find an end. The cow survives by remaining still. The nervous figure endures because its state of agitation never dissipates. The reclining or suspended bodies exist in a state of absolute stasis from which there is no return. The same force that enables these figures to exist also traps them exactly where they are. The solitary figure in each room, the hand-drawn line, the borrowed gesture, and the voice that cannot stop—none of these elements explains these conditions; rather, they hold them in place.

Room 4

4 *Human Hide*, 2026
2-channel 4K video
with sound
98" Samsung displays,
media players, wall
mounts, cables
5 min, looped
436 × 124 × 13 cm



Room 3

3 *Transparent Figure (Pain Relief)*, 2026
3-channel 4K video
with sound
85" Samsung displays,
media players, truss
structure, cables
10 min, looped
108 × 570 × 80 cm

Room 5

5 *Transparent Figure (Data Retention Plea)*, 2026
2-channel 4K video
with sound
85" Samsung displays,
media players, speakers,
truss structure, cables
22 min, looped
380 × 108 × 160 cm
Voice: Ivan Cheng

Room 2

2 *Transparent Figure (Anxiety)*, 2026
2-channel 4K video
with sound
85" Samsung displays,
media players, wall
mounts, cables
5 min, looped
190 × 216 × 9 cm

Room 1

1 *Cow and the Flies*, 2026
3-channel 4K video
with sound
98" Samsung displays,
media players, truss
structure, cables
15 min, looped
124 × 654 × 80 cm

All works, unless otherwise stated, courtesy the artist, Emalin, London, and Édouard Montassut, Paris.

The exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel has been generously supported by François Gutzwiller, Bilge Ogut-Cumbusyan and Haro Cumbusyan, and SAHA.

In parallel with the exhibition, Kunsthalle Basel is pleased to release Özgür Kar's first publication in January 2027, with the generous support of Jaap Harten Fonds, Mondriaan Fonds, and SAHA.

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Curated by Mohamed Almusibli

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The Kunsthalle Basel bookshop stocks publications on Özgür Kar alongside its broader selection of art books. You will find a selection of publications related to the artist in the library of the Basler Kunstverein.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

Public Programs

Screen Dialogs, at Stadtkino Basel, in English
10.11.2026, Tuesday, 6 p.m.
An art and film program by Kunsthalle Basel at Stadtkino Basel. Free admission.

Mal•Mal, in German and English
18.11.2026, Wednesday, 6–8 p.m.
Life drawing in the current exhibition; drawing materials provided.

Basel Museums Night
22.01.2027, Friday, 6 p.m.–2 a.m.
6 –11 p.m., *Talk to Me*, in German and English
6 p.m–midnight, Workshop: *Aufgedruckt*, in German and English

Thursdays at Kunsthalle Basel

✱ *Director's Tour*, with Mohamed Almusibli, in English
05.11.2026, Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

Espresso Tour, in German
14.01.2027, Thursday, 12.30 p.m.
The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes, accompanied by an espresso.

Sundays at Kunsthalle Basel

Public guided tour, in German
01.11.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Espresso Tour, in German
15.11.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.
The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes, accompanied by an espresso.

Tandem Tour, with S AM Swiss Architecture Museum, in German
06.12.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Espresso Tour, in German
13.12.2026, Sunday, 3 p.m.
The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes, accompanied by an espresso.

Curatorial Tour, with Lena Katharina Reuter (Head of Exhibitions), in German
10.01.2027, Sunday, 3 p.m.

✱ Registration at kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch
More information at kunsthallebasel.ch