

Cabaret Voltaire
Spiegelgasse 1
8001 Zürich
cabaretvoltaire.ch
info@cabaretvoltaire.ch

Künstler*innenkneipe /
Artists' Bar

Ausstellungen / Exhibitions
Dada-Vitrine / Dada
Showcase

Dada-Bibliothek / Dada
Library
Soireen am Dienstag /
Tuesday Soirées

In the entrance area there is now a bar, which is occupied by an artistic position for one year at a time and opens the house towards Münstergasse. In its designation as “Künstler*innenkneipe,” (Artists’ Bar), the bar refers to the original name of the Cabaret Voltaire: the Dadaists originally opened their art space in 1916 as the “Künstlerkneipe Voltaire.” With the gender star, the setting is updated, but the intertwining of art and gastronomy is carried forward. The Cabaret Voltaire invites people to meet without museum barriers in the midst of art.

Ilaria Vinci (*1991) kicks things off with her exhibition “Phoenix Philosophy Café.” In her practice, Vinci explores what she calls the “Zone of Fantasy”: the area in the human psyche where self-perception and world-perception meet and blur. The artist explores what constitutes reality and how people communicate and imagine. To this end, she creates installations, props and writings that make use of visual and linguistic vocabulary, start with the everyday, but always tip over into the fantastic.

For “Phoenix Philosophy Café” Ilaria Vinci took as her starting point a particular type of fireplace that has its origin in the south of Italy in the beginning of 1900: A kind of living alcove where people gather, share stories, debate, eat, drink, or play together. The partially burnt furniture, which the artist created through skillful paint effects, underline the reference to the fireplace. Kept in shades of gray, the tables and chairs however seem slightly removed, as if from an old black-and-white film. In complete contrast, the colorful flickering flames in the background are reminiscent of Tiffany lamps, a special technique of glass processing in the Art Nouveau style. The fireplace aesthetic – which includes brick pillows designed by Vinci with a digital aesthetic – in connection with the lamps turns into an avant-garde grand café atmosphere. Both the fireplace and the café are places of encounter and exchange, with fire having a special aesthetic and social power.

Individual faces and thoughts appear particularly nuanced around the fireplace, then disappear in a collective play of shadows. Flames captivate; they have a calming and stirring effect. In the blazing fire, gazes meet and lose each other again. The fireplace (and also the café) seems to be a place where existentialist questions are particularly revealed. This refers to the examination of lived experiences and the view of an individual as something that is not predetermined in its essence, but only becomes what it is by creating itself – depending on the situations into which they have been thrown. The large gestural acrylic painting, partly in airbrush technique, in the alcove on the back wall hints at such musings.

On the lower left half of the picture are three burning candles, which can be read sometimes more clearly, sometimes more abstractly as „I“ (German „Ich“). At the latest, this association is triggered when the eye wanders to the many letters „I“, reminiscent of a concrete or Dadaist poem. The repetitions of „I“ as „I“ trigger different chains of thought. For example, on the interdependence of the many individual „I“s, raising the question of where the collective „we“ should stand.

As a German speaker, the pronunciation of the English „I“ absurdly leads to the German word „Ei“ (English: “egg”), which is the focal point of the painting. In the juxtaposition of the burning egg and the candles, it is suggested that it is not so much transience as the examination of cycles of life and thought that underlie the painting. Vinci creates an image situation that changes every moment, a transformation process in which it is not clear whether something new will soon hatch from the egg or burnt-out shells will remain.

The burning egg on the nest is a reference to the mythological figure of Phoenix, which can be seen throughout the exhibition, for example on both the flanking columns of the fireplace console. Phoenix is the story of a fabulous bird, allegedly as large as an eagle, with scarlet and gold plumage, which communicated with melodious cries. When Phoenix’s life approached its end, the bird built a nest for itself in Heliopolis, the city of sun, out of fragrant twigs and spices, set the nest on fire, and burned in the flames. A young Phoenix emerged from the pyre, which is why the story became a metaphor for rebirth and resilience. However, the phrase „like Phoenix from the ashes“ also stands for the collapse of an old system and the emergence of old values in a new guise – a remarkable reference regarding the Dada house and the contexts of then and now.

Another reference is the legend of Prometheus, one of the most famous literary figures. In this story, too, fire plays an important role when it comes to man’s power to act. Prometheus is considered the bringer of fire and culture, the founder of human civilization. Depending on the interpretation, he is seen as a courageous rebel against oppressive narratives or as a progressive exaggeration of man.

Vinci’s exhibition is not only a place of traditional contemplation of art works – that is, a concentrated viewing of

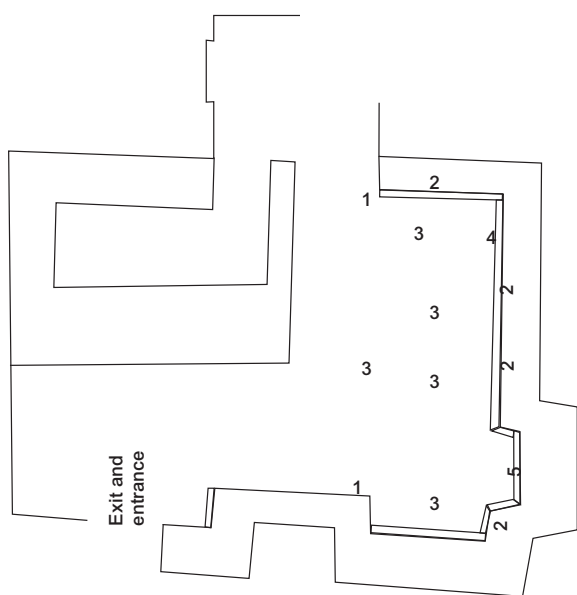
works of art according to certain ideas – but also a sitting area where people with different stories come together and interact with each other; discovering themselves and others. It is about the process of thought formation and the form of communication, as well as (thinking existentially) about moments of decision-making. Perhaps the art space, too, may be understood as such an incubator: In the engagement with big, existential, and time-transcending questions, impulses for change mature.

In addition to the fact that the exhibition is also a bar, Vinci's interventions extend into other areas of the operation: the exhibition includes, for example, the cocktail „Smoky Tear,“ a smoky drink with smoke bubbles, and soirees and various activations are to take place again and again: Readings, a joint chess game or a movie night are planned for the coming months. In „Phoenix Philosophy Café“, art experience and gastronomy, exhibitions and events blur.

For the opening on April 30, 2020, the first fringe event will take place, which will also occupy the Vaulted Cellar and the Historic Hall, while still allowing a view of the new architectural interventions. Phoenix moves from room to room, kindling fires that go out again and ignite in another place. Continuing thinking about the eternal cycle, the contributions are dedicated to sampling and repetition with difference as an artistic practice, among other things. In line with the unifying and dispersing idea of fire – and following the Dadaist legacy – different sounds and movements gather in the house. The performance „When Darkness,“ to be understood as part of the exhibition, consists of a live sound piece by Rafal Skoczek and Jamira Estrada, which will remain the soundtrack to the exhibition „Phoenix Philosophy Café“ by Ilaria Vinci, and a dance performance by the group Stay Kids (with Ave, Sunny, Tiny, Mary, Anaïs, Arun and Milo) with costumes by Ronja Varonier.

We thank Serena Scozzafava for her assistance in the production of the textiles used as pillowcases.

Künstler*innenkneipe / Artists' Bar



Erdgeschoss / Ground Floor

Glossary of the individual exhibits

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1
Ilaria Vinci
chimney frame
<i>A welcome break from the real world</i>,
2022
acrylic painting on MDF
dimensions variable</p> <p>2
Ilaria Vinci
lamps
<i>When Darkness</i>, 2022
plexiglass, glass painting, smart led
lightbulb
dimensions variable</p> <p>3
Ilaria Vinci
furniture
<i>Universal Loneliness</i>, 2022
second hand furniture, mixed media
dimensions variable</p> <p>4
Ilaria Vinci
pillows
<i>Wherever you go, there you are</i>, 2022
sublimation printing on satin
big: 80 x 40 x 7 cm each
small: 35 x 35 x 7 cm each</p> | <p>5
Ilaria Vinci
nest painting
<i>Infinitely</i>, 2022
acrylic paint on MDF 143 x 180 cm</p> <p>6
Cocktail
<i>Smoky Tear</i>, 2022
Mezcal, Rye, Triple Sec, Bitters</p> |
|--|--|