

# SEANKELLY

Alberti, Sarah. "30 years 'room of the wounded monkey': With her wall strip work, Rebecca Horn captured the spirit of the turning point." *monopol*. September 16, 2020.

**monopol**  
Magazin für Kunst und Leben



Photo: Grischa Meyer Rebecca Horn in the "Room of the Wounded Monkey" in the summer of 1990 at Stresemannstrasse 128 in Berlin

**Take a look behind what was walled up: 30 years ago, Rebecca Horn's "Room of the Wounded Monkey" addressed the separation and re-finding of East and West. It is now being restored**

September 1990, Potsdamer Platz. The wall was dismantled, Germany not yet reunified. In the middle of the former border strip was a lonely house at 128 Stresemannstrasse. Exactly 30 years ago, Rebecca Horn staged the "room of the wounded monkey" in a darkened room on the ground floor: coal lay on the floor, a cutting machine moved noisily up and down, and through binoculars and two holes in the facade you could look west look. Six serpentine copper pipes were mounted in pairs on the ceiling, charged with high-voltage electricity, creating arcs between them and bathing the room in a scanty light. The opposition of the bars was recorded on the floor by two metronomes who struck

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different clocks, faster in the west than in the east: "Tickticktick, fast and faster. Tack tack tack, slow and calm, "as one reviewer wrote.



© Werner Zellien / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020 Rebecca Horn, "Room of the Wounded Monkey", 1990, Stresemannstrasse 128, Berlin (as part of the exhibition project "The finiteness of freedom")

The idea of reflecting the Berlin border situation with works of art that were to be installed in the east and west of the city to perforate the wall came about as early as 1986 between Rebecca Horn, Jannis Kounellis and Heiner Müller. He thought reunification at this point in time was unrealistic. Initiatives to realize the project were blocked in East Berlin. It was only after the Wall fell in November 1989 that Rebecca Horn and curator Wulf Herzogenrath took up the idea of an exhibition in the public space in both halves of the city and realized it with Christoph Tannert and Joachim Sartorius. Just a few months later, on August 31, 1990, "Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit" opened in Berlin. The ambiguous title consciously reflects the ambivalence of the time, mixed euphoria with skepticism: "Freedom at last" implied the joy of the political upheaval; "Finiteness" also reflected its temporal limitation.

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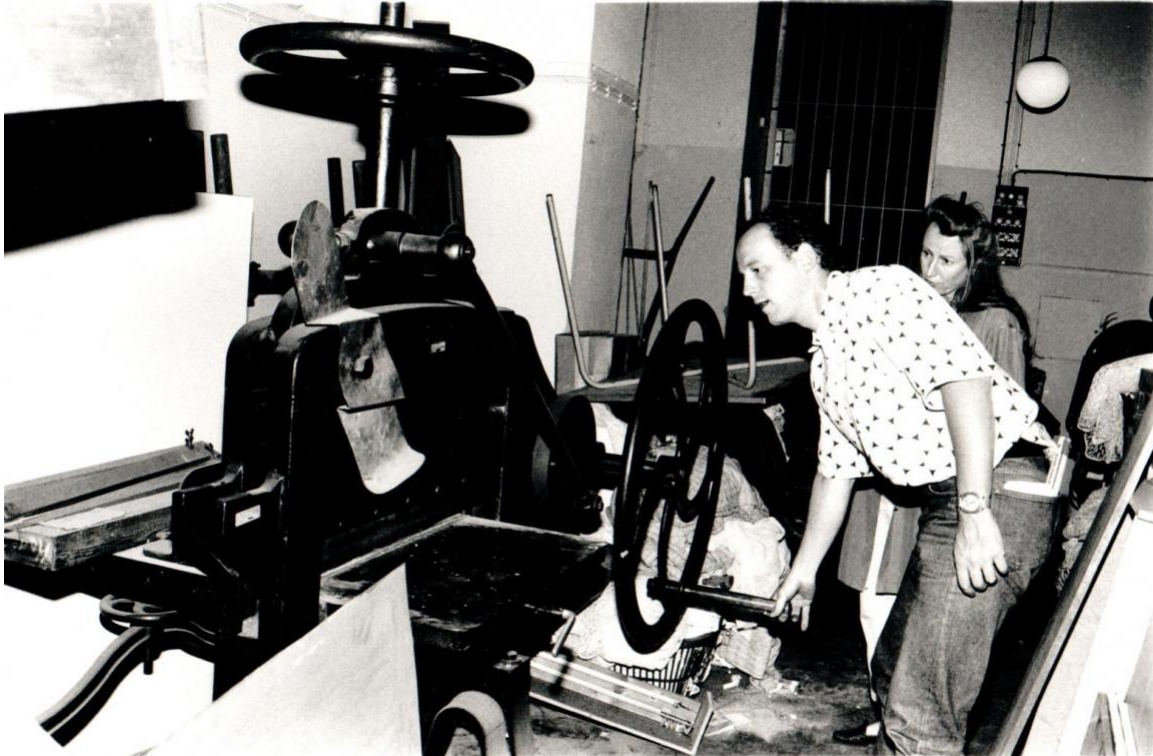


Edition Hentrich, Berlin 1990 Cover of the manual for the exhibition project "Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit Berlin 1990", edited by Wulf Herzogenrath, Christoph Tannert and Joachim Sartorius, Edition Hentrich, Berlin 1990.

It was a unique exhibition and large-scale cultural and political project during the political transition. The sometimes unclear responsibilities of the authorities made it difficult to implement individual ideas and made others possible in the first place. It was the only exhibition project of this magnitude that was jointly financed and realized in 1990 by the FRG and the GDR. The "mirror" called it the "most important exhibition" of the year. Krzysztof Wodiczko transformed the East Berlin Lenin Monument into a shopper with an Aldi bag on two evenings. Via Lewandowski, the only participant born in the GDR, covered the mosaic in the tour of the Victory Column with styrofoam. Like Rebecca Horn, other artists declared the death strip to be an exhibition space: Raffael Rheinsberg formed 50 cable drums each from an east and west company analogous to the course of the wall in front of the Martin-Gropius-Bau under the title "Joint Venture". Hans Haacke contractually delayed the demolition of a watchtower in the death strip and alienated it with a Mercedes star. With the room in Stresemannstrasse on Potsdamer Platz, Rebecca Horn also chose a place in the middle of the border that was still inaccessible to citizens of the GDR a few months earlier, a representative for the dangers and threats of the division.

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© Archive Rebecca Horn / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020 Rebecca Horn with her assistant Günter Fenner in what will later be the "Room of the Wounded Monkey" in Stresemannstrasse 128 during the preparations for the exhibition project "The Enditude of Freedom" in the summer of 1990

Rebecca Horn, since 1989 professor at the University of the Arts in Berlin, confronted the confrontation with the current situation in the city with problems of both content and practicality: "Here and now you are so involved in all these processes that it is very difficult to find yourself to distance, to switch a free space, to switch a cell in order to stage something at all, which nevertheless deals with this time and a certain place ", she formulated during the preparations in an interview. In mid-June 1990 the idea of erecting a "wailing wall" at Checkpoint Charlie began to mature: Against the background that the wall would have largely disappeared by the time the exhibition project opened, it should run diagonally to the Berlin Wall and two buildings to the east and west connect with each other. People should only be able to communicate acoustically with one another. Their second idea was to use an interior space in Zimmerstrasse with metronomes and binoculars with a view of the west. Both projects failed for organizational reasons.

The final exhibition location, the building at Stresemannstrasse 128, was inaugurated during the First World War as an extension of the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture and was in the Soviet sector at the end of the Second World War. After the founding of the GDR in 1949, the association of consumer cooperatives moved in, which administered the state-controlled food trade. The

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existing shops on the ground floor remained open for the time being. With the construction of the wall, the building became part of the border fortifications: bunkers, watchtowers, light lines and trip wires that set off alarms and flares have supplemented the system over the years. The final wall on the west side was 3.60 meters high and belonged to the fourth generation from 1975. The interior wall was attached directly to the building in the 1980s.

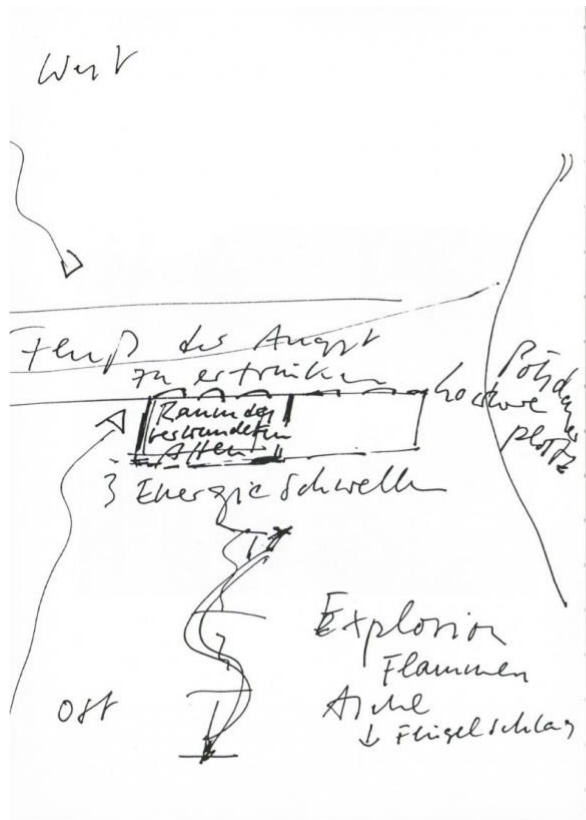


Photo: Christoph Brachmann Potsdamer Platz in spring 1990 with a view of the building at Stresemannstrasse 128 in which Rebecca Horn staged her "Room of the Wounded Monkey"

By making the room accessible, Horn emphasized the euphoric moment of the opening of the wall, which not least resulted in the end of the order to shoot. At the same time, the division of Germany was still visibly inscribed in the spatial setting, for example through a door built into the interior wall and barricaded shop windows of the former shop facing west. Horn symbolized the border fortifications in their permanent danger: the darkened room made it clear what was a reality for citizens of the GDR for decades. The cutting machine can be interpreted as a metaphor for the border guards who were deployed to protect the GDR from refugees from the republic. This impression was supported by the background noise: The clicking of the machine was reminiscent of automatic shooting systems that responded to the smallest movements.

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## Blutwurst

Es waren einmal eine Blutwurst und eine Leberwurst, und die Blutwurst bat die Leberwurst zu Gast. Und wie die Leberwurst ins Haus der Blutwurst kam, so sah sie unten an der Thüre und auf jeder Treppe, deren viel zu steigen waren, immer eine wunderbare Sache, als einen Besen und Schippe, die sich einander schlugen, einen Affen mit einer großen Wunde im Kopf usw.

Als sie nun endlich ganz erschrocken über diese Begegniß in die Stube der Blutwurst getreten und derselben über die Bewandnis dieser Dinge Fragen vorlegte, so erklärte diese jede Sache gezwungen und ausweichend. So sagte sie von der Schippe und dem Besen: »ei, es wird meine Magd gewesen seyn, die mit jemand auf der Treppe geschwätzt hat.«

Zuletzt ging die Blutwurst fort, um Anstalten zu machen; da wurde die Leberwurst von [jemand] gewarnt, denn sie würde sonst gleich vielen andern mit dem Leben büßen. Eilig ergriff sie die Flucht, und wie sie unten am Haus sich umsah, so stand die Blutwurst oben im Bodenloch mit einem langen Meißel und rief ihr nach: »hätt ich dich, so wollt ich dich!«

Brüder Grimm

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Edition Hentrich, Berlin 1990, Double page from the handbook for the exhibition project "Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit Berlin 1990", edited by Wulf Herzogenrath, Christoph Tannert and Joachim Sartorius, Edition Hentrich, Berlin 1990, pp. 110-111, left: Rebecca Horn: Sketch for the project "Raum des Wundeten Affen", felt pen on paper, 21 x 29.6 cm ( VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020)

A felt-tip pen sketch by Rebecca Horn in the exhibition catalog illustrates the location of the room in the middle of the border strip. The proximity to Potsdamer Platz is indicated by a semicircle, the border installations symbolized by schematically shown power poles. The phrase "river of fear of drowning" is a water metaphor for the threat of the border strip. The sketch is supplemented by a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, which mentions a monkey with a wounded head in addition to humanly acting sausages - title inspiration for Rebecca Horn, especially since the Brothers Grimm had lived not far from the room from March 1847. That the upper part of the paper cutting machine is also reminiscent of a monkey's head - coincidence.

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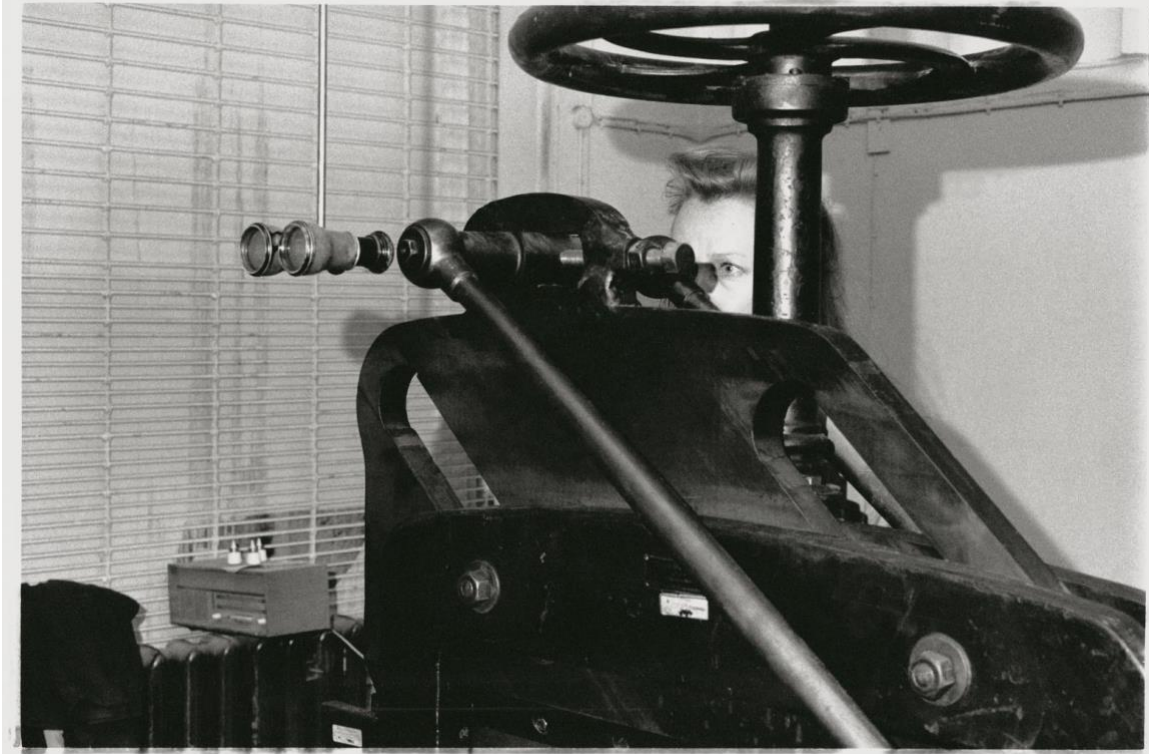


Werner Zellien / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020, Rebecca Horn, "Room of the Wounded Monkey", 1990, Stresemannstrasse 128, Berlin (as part of the exhibition project "The finiteness of freedom")

It dates from the 1920s and refers to the metropolis of Berlin at the time, and, as Horn puts it in a poem, "continuously cuts the time of the past". The movement of the machine can be interpreted as an act of separation that happened to the city of Berlin. The ape-man-machine also addresses the alienation of the soldier from the act of murder through the medium of the rifle. The telescope, which provided a view to the west due to the two holes installed in the outer facade, is representative of the border guards stationed here less than a year before the exhibition project. The situation of the one-sided view outwards, of the undisturbed observation of the ignorant,

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© Archive Rebecca Horn, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020 © Archive Rebecca Horn, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020  
Rebecca Horn at the cutting machine in the "Room of the Wounded Monkey", 1990, Stresemannstrasse  
128, Berlin

The serpentine copper pipes, understood as a symbol for the reunification of East and West, move towards each other and create arcs between them, can be interpreted positively and negatively in the sense of the ambivalent fire metaphor: Fire destroys and at the same time releases heat and energy. Rebecca Horn had already formulated it in preparation for the project: "I believe that the opening, the demolition of the wall, will create a very strange state of fear, a fear of contact between East and West. This is an exciting moment". Heiner Müller wrote in the preface to the exhibition catalog that the West and the East would come together to form an "explosive mixture". The metronomes that beat at different rates can also be read in direct connection with his foreword: "Time wall between two speeds: acceleration in the west, deceleration in the east." A comparable pair of copper snakes is part of Rebecca Horn's 1990/91 installation "Time goes by", which can be seen in the [lfa gallery](#) in Berlin until October 11, 2020 .

## **Fascination for the walled up**

In 1987 Rebecca Horn had the work "[The Opposite Concert](#)" as part of the "Sculpture Projects Münster" project that makes them accessible through their work. The tower in Münster remained sealed for 50 years, until 1990 the shop in Stresemannstrasse was hidden behind a wooden shed. Both places address the dark side of German history.

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The staggered rhythm of the metronomes, the rumble of the machine and the flashing of the electrical discharges gave the "room of the wounded monkey" an eerie atmosphere and involved the visitors physically. The telescope invited people to take the position of the spy and put themselves in the shoes of a border guard. The fact that this effect was largely dependent on the number of visitors at the same time is made clear by two contradicting press reports from September 1990: the journalists on the press tour were curious to look through the telescope: "It is laughable. People crowd around people to see. Nice to laugh about." A fellow critic felt the opposite: It was a gloomy, suggestive atmosphere, "that causes at least one thing (if you visit it alone, not in the host of journalists): fear, loneliness and horror". Yael Bedharsi, then a student with Rebecca Horn, supervised the room and wrote in her diary: "In front of the 'room of the wounded monkey, children sell concrete pieces from the wall, 5 DM for a small piece and 10 DM for a large piece. American tourists buy them as souvenirs. "



Photo: Grischa Meyer Photo: Grischa Meyer  
Rebecca Horn in the Berlin Wall during the preparations for the exhibition project "Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit" in summer 1990

Contemporary witnesses for 1990 are still difficult to get hold of. The exhibition project "Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit" tried to do this, firmly, but not permanently, and declared ephemeral. Only Christian Boltanski's "The Missing House" on Grosse Hamburger Strasse has survived in public space. Rebecca Horn's "Room of the Wounded Monkey" was the only one of the exhibited works with unused exhibition funds to be purchased by the State of Berlin for the National Gallery. A site and time-specific work, the components of which can also be interpreted retrospectively as metaphors for the division of Germany, for the mutual

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observation of the two German states, for border security, for the surveillance present in the GDR and for the process of reunification . In 1996, for the opening of the Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin , the installation was staged for the first time - in a white cube on a parquet floor. S tatt the wall opening to the outside, visitors looked through the binoculars like openings themselves in a mirror.



© Marc Beckmann, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020 © Marc Beckmann, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2020  
Restoration of Rebecca Horn's work "Room of the Wounded Monkey" in the Kulturforum in May 2020

As a symbolic commentary on the situation in Berlin on the way to German unity, this key work in the Nationalgalerie's collection is intended for the new building at the Kulturforum. The restoration of the installation in spring 2020, which was only visible to the public for a few days due to the corona, marked the beginning of the "[In Preparation](#)" series , with which the Nationalgalerie provides insights into the preparations of central works for its new building at the Kulturforum. The restoration of the work - after the original version in 1990 and the first museum version from 1996 - now based on intensive coordination with Rebecca Horn and close curatorial-restoration cooperation, a third version of the work, adapted to the spatial situation in the new building. "Although this type of art was about creating a work of art on site, I am pleased that this work can be restored after 30 years and re-erected again," said Wulf Herzogenrath, one of the curators of the exhibition project "Die Endlichkeit der Freedom "in 1990." Some exhibitions are very selective, but they can be saved for the museum's eternity. "

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The Berlin office of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety has been located in the building at Stresemannstrasse 128 since 2011. Fragments of the earlier interior wall have been preserved in their original location and architecturally integrated, a small photo documentation explains [the eventful history of the house](#) . A few meters further a border tower has been preserved, which is operated privately and can be climbed at the weekend for a fee. What Rebecca Horn's "Room of the Wounded Monkey" subtly conveyed shortly after the Berlin Wall opened is now [city marketing](#) : "Take the perspective of a GDR soldier who once secured the border - on the watchtower on Potsdamer Platz."

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