

Video Walkthrough | Paul Maheke: In spite of my own desire to see you disappear

Paul Maheke gives a virtual tour of his ongoing exhibition, *In spite of his own desire to see you disappear*. Introducing his newly commissioned work, Maheke describes the collaborative process of transforming his journal into a multimedia sound installation.

Watch the walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:

<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/in-spite-of-my-own-desire-to-see-you-disappear>

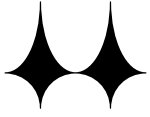
Paul Maheke: There's always this tension in my work between moments of visibility and moments of withdrawal. And this desire of making the absent present and then sometimes also the opposite, like just reclaiming a form of right to kind of disappear.

In spite of my own desire to see you disappear is a sound installation presented at Mercer Union. It's a newly commissioned work and it encompasses wall paintings, sound, and also some architectural elements. As you are entering the space, you are first met with a long corridor and the sound work is kind of peering through the walls. And this sound work has been composed by a collaborator of mine, Ndobemma who is a musician and singer, composer, who I invited to reinterpret sonically and lyrically a journal that I wrote between 2020 and 2021.

This journal is tapping into various questions but mostly questions of resilience and vulnerability in relationship to a situation of abuse that I've kind of like, uncovered during lockdown in a past relationship. And I was interested in closing this chapter by literally handing over this storytelling to someone else for them to kind of appropriate this material and produce something new from it.

It kind of coincided as well with the pandemic and so when our social interactions were potentially the site of death, and so naturally the writing kind of like circled around the idea of death and then vulnerability, resilience, these big words that we are often using in a very vague way. And for me it was important to redefine them and what it meant for me, and what victimhood meant, what it meant also to feel like my voice needed to be heard.

For the project here I wanted to bring this idea of a certain choreography, without necessarily having to either represent a body or be physically present. And I think this is kind of the main interest that I have at the moment is playing with this tension between visibility and invisibility, and sounds that are heard but also sound that is maybe felt. So that's why we created this kind of corridor where the sound is experienced in a more bodily way, and not necessarily just through hearing.



Alongside the writing of the journal that's when I also started to draw in a very improvised, intuitive way and that's also something that I kind have wanted to push a little bit further in thinking about drawing as a practice of emergence, and letting images surface without necessarily controlling them, almost like a form of automatic writing. And so the drawings that I've selected here in the show are part of this moment of this journal, but they are not necessarily an illustration of that. They belong to their own kind of realm.

There is different strategies that I've used, which are kind of always acknowledging in a way the distinction between what's left outside what's invited in. And these borders are often very porous. And so, for example, in the show here, there are moments of transparency, translucency, but also opacity. This is a finished architecture, but it does have an openness to it. It's not, we don't know if it's finished or not, like there's breathing in between, almost like a ruin of some sort or something being built, I don't know. The state of inbetweenness was very interesting.

I often use materials or forms that are referring to a certain domestic environment and domesticity is interesting for me because those objects are inherently designed in purpose for body. So the relationship that you have with the space is already kind of unthreatening, almost. Even though my work can seem on the surface very soft and tender, there's also an underlying of violence that is very present.

For me it's very important to think about this space, the space of art or if you can put it like that, as not outside of the world, it's not outside of the bubble, it's part of it, it's made of it. And so I was also interested in thinking of the space as a space that other people could use, other practitioners could use, as a way to expand on you know, the idea of like a solo show by a solo artist and acknowledging the fact that this is a network and there is an interconnectedness. And it's very important for my shows to always be somehow connected to where they exist.