

Content

Museum Folkwang

WE IS FUTURE

Visions of New Communities

24 November 2023 – 17 March 2024



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Press release

Museum Folkwang

We is Future: Museum Folkwang dedicates an extensive themed exhibition to artistic visions of living together

Essen, 23.11.2023 – From 24 November 2023 to 17 March 2024, Museum Folkwang presents the exhibition *We is Future. Visions of new Communities*. The show presents around 160 works from 120 years of artistic reflection on an ideal way of living together. Starting with the Lebensreform movement around 1900, the exhibition leads through Bruno Taut's *Alpine Architecture*, Constant's *New Babylon* and Anna Halprin's *Planetary Dance* to works of contemporary art.

Our attitude to life today is characterised by the threat to our habitats. Demands for fundamental changes are therefore becoming increasingly urgent. But how can the seemingly unchangeable be rethought? What new forms of living together are desirable at all? Based on these contemporary issues, the exhibition *We Is Future. Visions of New Communities* examines historical and current ideas for alternative forms of living together. Using a variety of media such as painting, sculpture, graphics, video and performance, the presentation culminates in a temple-like installation created especially for the exhibition by architect and artist Yussef Agbo-Ola [Olaniyi Studio].

We is Future begins at the end of the 19th century, when the negative consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation were already becoming apparent. Counter-movements and alternatives were not long in coming. The longing for earthly paradises is outlined in the first chapter of the exhibition with a monumental wall frieze (1888-1892) by Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach, which depicts a joyful union of humans and animals and various religions. Gusto Gräser and Ludwig von Hofmann are also driven by the hope of a free life in harmony with nature. Paintings such as Hofmann's *Paradise Lost (Adam and Eve)* (1893) symbolise the lost unity between man and nature and at the same time raise the question of how the desired ideal state can be rediscovered. Elisär von Kupffer immediately sketches a new religion. In his homoerotic paintings, he shows what it might look like in the so-called *Klarwelt der Seligen*.

Bruno Taut and Wenzel Hablik used the new materials of steel and glass to design architecture whose forms were inspired by crystal. After the horrors of the First World War, their crystalline architectural designs symbolised the new age and called for a new way of building for a new society. Buildings that could be seen from afar were to strengthen the sense of community and bring about a peaceful, more liveable society. In the *Alpine Architecture* portfolio (1917/18), Taut also proposed a joint development of the Alps by the people of the neighbouring countries in order to achieve lasting peace in Europe. He found a long-term supporter in the founder of Museum Folkwang, Karl Ernst Osthaus. Osthaus published Taut's drawings in 1920 in the Folkwang publishing house and engaged him for the architecture of his favourite project, a reform school with which they wanted nothing less than to improve coexistence and society.

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A separate chapter is dedicated to Constant's work complex *New Babylon*. From 1956 to 1974, the Dutch artist designed a new modular and flexible living environment in numerous paintings, drawings and models. Here, man at play (*homo ludens*) builds his own environment for a new society. Everyone creates the desired climatic and social situation and moves through the labyrinthine sectors as part of a "collective creativity". Little by little, *New Babylon* would spread across the globe and bring people from all continents together.

We is Future also tells of the hippie modernism of the 1960s and 1970s and its consequences. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Italian design and architecture group Superstudio envisioned an earth-spanning megastructure on which people would live nomadically, without objects, without work, without hierarchies, without consumption, but full of communication, information and free development. From 1980 onwards, Anna Halprin's *Planetary Dance*, which has been performed again and again to this day, is about reconnecting with nature and renewing the community through a physical and spiritual group experience in the present. The artists' visions are brought into the exhibition space in sketches, collages and films.

The final chapter of the exhibition shows contemporary works by Eglė Budvytytė, Emma Talbot and Timur Si-Qin. Their current works address a new connection with nature and all living beings and confront historical positions with contemporary issues. Eglė Budvytytė's film *Songs from the Compost: Mutating Bodies, Imploding Stars* (2020) follows a group living in the forest that has already entered into new forms of symbiosis with nature, is colonised by lichens and fungi and has developed a crab-like locomotion. Timur Si-Qin, on the other hand, has been focussing on a balance and collaboration between nature and man since 2016 in his work complex *New Peace*, which is intended to enable a new, mysterious spirituality. In terms of both space and content, the exhibition threads come together in *Oriji: 12 Stone Frog Temple* by Yussef Agbo-Ola, a new production for Museum Folkwang. Inspired by the endangered poison dart frog, the expansive temple raises awareness of even the smallest creatures in the ecosystems that keep the world in balance and invites visitors to enjoy a sensory experience. The word *Oriji* means "forgiveness" in Agbo-Ola's native Yoruba language and is an expression of his personal compassion for the species and his remorse towards the global context. The pursuit of an ideal community that does not (yet) exist or no longer exists is the unifying element and the driving force behind the exhibited works.

The exhibition is made possible by the RAG-Stiftung as main supporter and E.ON as main sponsor. It is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation and the Folkwang-Museumsverein e. V.

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Information

WE IS FUTURE

Visions of new Communities

24 November 2023 – 17 March 2024

Admission: 10 € (standard) / 6 € (discounted)

Tickets at: <https://museum-folkwang.ticketfritz.de>

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of events. Dates at www.museum-folkwang.de

Press image



Ludwig von Hofmann

Paradise Lost (Adam and Eva), 1893

Oil on canvas, 166 × 191 cm

Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt

Photo: Linda Breidert

Wall texts

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Earthy Paradises

As the consequences of industrialisation became increasingly apparent around 1900 the desire for a comprehensive reform of life arose. The movement's protagonists wanted to counter rigid social conventions, polluted air, and unhygienic conditions with a healthy, unconstrained life in harmony with nature. Longing for an earthly paradise, they founded various living communities. Among the most famous was the project on the Swiss Monte Verità, where members lived a vegetarian life of equality in the midst of nature.

Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach tried out life in (artist's) communes several times. In his frieze of images, *Per aspera ad astra*, he visualises the cheerful departure into a promising future. The painter Ludwig von Hofmann, on the other hand, mourned the 'lost paradise' and at the same time conjured up a new 'dreamland' full of lightsome bodies. Under the influence of philosophical or religious teachings, such as theosophy, monism, and other movements, the ideas for new ways of living together were often imbued with spirituality. Elisàr von Kupffer invented a new religion for a future community of the blessed, which he depicted in his homoerotic paintings.

Crystalline Architecture

With temples visible from afar the architect Bruno Taut wanted to strengthen the cohesion of the community and bring about a peaceful, more liveable society. In his portfolio *Alpine Architecture*, he proposed a joint development of the Alps by people living in the adjoining countries, for lasting peace in Europe. Museum founder Karl Ernst Osthaus published the drawings in 1920 through Folkwang publishing house. A short time later Taut designed a complex for a communal school in Hagen, a reform project with which Osthaus focussed on the education of the next generation.

In 1918, immediately following the First World War, Taut founded the Gläserne Kette, a secret society of German architects who exchanged ideas for a year through a chain letter. They were united by their interest in the forms of nature, especially crystals, which they saw as a symbol of the longed-for future community. Thanks to the new building materials of glass and steel, entirely new forms seemed possible. Another member was the versatile Wenzel Hablik, who wanted a world community without traditional religion and states. Instead, he envisioned a quasi-veneration of nature, which was also reflected in his designs for cult edifices, intended to create a sense of community.

New Babylon

Free from conventions and obligations, adventurous *homo ludens* travels through *New Babylon*. These playful people inhabit a world on stilts, high above the delicate surface of Earth. In view of the ruins of the Second World War, the Dutch artist Constant wanted to create a 'social space' with *New Babylon* that would enable a fine network of human relationships. Each person

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creates the desired climatic and social situation within it and moves through the labyrinthine sectors as part of a 'collective creativity'. Gradually *New Babylon* was meant to spread across the entire globe and bring together people from all continents.

Constant developed the idea for *New Babylon*, which he pursued for almost twenty years, in 1956 in Alba, Italy. There he got to know a group of Sinti and Roma who were living in inhumane conditions – giving rise to the first model for an ideal community. Constant's work was based on the firm belief in technological achievements. These would make the construction of the sectors possible and ultimately free humanity from all gainful employment – a vision that was intended as a real project. But in view of the violence of the Vietnam War Constant himself came to believe less and less in its realisation. From then on blood, chaos, and destruction permeated his works, until he stopped working on the project in 1974.

Hippie Modernism

An Earth-spanning mega-structure on which people live nomadically, without objects, without work, without hierarchies, without consumption, but filled with communication and free development: This was the vision developed by the group Superstudio in 1971 with the project *Supersuperficie*. The electromagnetic grid was meant to enable global networking. People could use it to access information and communicate with each other, comparable to today's internet. Developed from the spirit of the hippie movement, *Supersuperficie* was more of a statement than a realisable project. Superstudio ironically exaggerated the utopian designs of modernism and in a sense marked the end of the grand ideas for a manmade transformation of the Earth.

The work of American dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin is also closely linked to the hippie movement. For decades, she explored the transformative power of dance and movement. Her art was intended to be anchored in daily life, and to be experienced by everyone. With her *Planetary Dance*, which has been performed worldwide from 1980 to the present, she sought to bring about a corporeal and spiritual renewal of society. Her dance is a modern ritual for connecting with other people and with the Earth as a living space.

Growing Together

Which new communities do we need in view of the threatening changes to our environments? By now, it has long been certain that people are part of a vulnerable community of life on Earth. And anyone who harms one part – whether people, animals, plants, fungi, or bacteria – ultimately harms themselves, too. How comprehensively should the new community be conceived against this background?

Contemporary artists are conceptualising a future full of mindfulness and healing in which all beings are equal. Eglė Budvytė, for example, shows a group living in the forest, colonised by lichens and mushrooms. The life reformist movement's return to nature has been transformed

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into a life in symbiotic connection with nature. Emma Talbot's fabric work represents the interplay of all life on Earth. Plants send forth tendrils around human bodies that are scarcely distinguishable from animals. In his work complex *New Peace*, Timur Si-Qin, on the other hand, is concerned with balance and collaboration between nature and humanity, meant to enable a new spirituality. The faith and knowledge of indigenous people shape Yussef Agbo-Ola's architectural designs. Inspired by the body of the tiny poison dart frog, his walk-in temple creates a sensory experience and gathering place that brings nature and culture together and offers space for new ways of thinking.

List of artists

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Yussef Agbo-Ola (Olaniyi Studio) (*1990)

Eglė Budvytė (*1982)

Constant (1920–2005)

Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach (1851–1913)

Gusto Gräser (1879–1958)

Karl Gräser (1875–1920)

Wenzel Hablik (1881–1934)

Anna Halprin (1920–2021)

Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918)

Ludwig von Hofmann (1861–1945)

Georg Kolbe (1877–1947)

Elisàr von Kupffer (1872–1942)

Timur Si-Qin (*1984)

Superstudio (Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Roberto Magris, Gian Piero Frassinelli, Alessandro Magris, Alessandro Poli) (1966–1978)

Emma Talbot (*1969)

Bruno Taut (1880–1938)

Interview

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Interview with Yussef Agbo-Ola

Rebecca Herlemann (RH), Antonina Krezdorn (AK): In the context of exhibition preparations, your work came to our attention. Your field of work extends into design and visual arts and seems to stimulate experiences with all senses. This sparked our interest in your vision of new communities. When invited to create a new piece for the exhibition *We Is Future: Visions of New Communities* at Museum Folkwang, what was your first approach?

Yussef Agbo-Ola (YAO): At the time of your invitation, I was in the Amazon rainforest researching orchids and microorganisms in the Amazon River. Shortly after accepting the invitation, I was speaking with local medicine women on their role in their communities in regard to having a responsibility to both the human and non-human species in their environments. These elders have a unique gift of acting as bridges in communicating with non-human species as a way to then help or communicate back to human species in their [own] communities. The poison dart frog, for one elder, was her medium of choice when working with pregnant women in the community. The frog's poison can be used in tiny doses as a painkiller. This exchange of knowledge was the starting point of the inspiration for the temple.

RH, AK: Interestingly, you call your structures temples, a term often used to describe a place of worship of a religious community. What role does spirituality play for you in regards to [new] communities?

YAO: 'What is sacred is ephemeral' – this sentence serves as kind of a leitmotiv for my work. I believe it is the things that we cannot hold on to, that we cannot possess or claim, that become meaningful and hold an essence of amazement or reverence within us. What is rain? When we say that it is raining do we really see rain for what it is, actually, or do we just call it rain? There are billions of drops of water that each have their own individual form, shape and quantity of water within them. The temples are designed in a similar way in the sense that each fabric skin in the design should be seen from the perspective of the single thread that holds it together. The effects that occur when one microscopic organism eats the temple's fibres or lays eggs on it is just as important as the overall form and shape of the temple from the macro scale. Moving from the material sacredness, on the other scale, the temple is a living architectural entity that is the home for the unseen ancestral spirits that are at work to keep a balance in all the environmental systems that we are connected to. In this regard the temples do not connect to a specific set of spiritual beliefs systems but rather allow for an embracing of all belief systems through a contemplative experience of sacred ephemerality impregnated within the temple's reaction to environmental systems of entropy.

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RH, AK: To build onto these 'environmental systems of entropy', as you call them, what are the materials you choose to work with and how do you use them?

YAO: Olaniyi Studio's mission is to use natural and recycled materials in all the works that are produced. We have used a lot of cellulose fibres in the past, and based on the yarn chemistry and twisting architecture, the yarns can be stronger than steel. This is of great interest because nature has been producing fibres and geometries that have been resilient since the beginning of time, yet these materials also allow for internal structural flexibility, nutrient properties and adaptation to an environment's needs and transitions. From my own heritage of the indigenous ethnic groups of Yoruba and Cherokee lineage there is a deep cultural understanding that all materials have a living energy within them and that matter has a profound memory or sacredness. This means that waste is non-existent, and that re-use and recycling only embeds a deeper meaning in a material's properties. The goal of the material selection is to create a temple that can breathe and has a porosity that allows for new life via plants or other organisms to consume or inhabit it as it creates a new microclimate and, as a result, a new ecosystem.

RH, AK: So, what you are asking is for people to take the time to reflect upon their own positions towards nature, in the circle of life and death. This engagement with natural processes and the human impact is at the heart of all your work. How do you view *Oriji: 12 Stone Frog Temple* in the context of the *We Is Future: Visions of New Communities* exhibition? What ideas do you have for a better life in the future?

YAO: Many times, the world of the microscopic or the unseen elements of an environment are overlooked because of the complexities of scale. The notion that humans have dominion over an environment breeds community perspective of dominance. It is this tension that the temple aims to counter as a way to highlight the small, fragile, delicate systems and organisms that we are connected to. Specifically, the endangered species in the Amazon forest which play a large role in making sure the oxygen that we breath is available. This temple connects to the theme of new communities by creating a sacred gathering space of environmental contemplation in the womb of a pregnant poison dart frog. This species is part of a community of amphibians that are dynamically affected by pollution and deforestation. When we have living architectural structures acting as contemplation spaces that help us to embrace, reflect and honour their role in our own existence, we create a new collective mental ecology that will impact a more grounded environmental future for humans and non-humans. This process acts as a catalyst for new communities to thrive.

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Extract from „Catalysts for New Communities. A conversation with Yussef Agbo-Ola“, in:
Museum Folkwang (Editor), *We Is Future. Visions of New Communities*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, in
preparation

Facts & Figures

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WE IS FUTURE

Visions of New Communities

24 November 2023 – 17 March 2024

Curator Team

Anna Fricke, Museum Folkwang, Essen
Antonina Krezdorn, Research assistant
Rebecca Herlemann, Research assistant

Supporters / Sponsors

The exhibition is made possible by the RAG-Stiftung as main supporter and E.ON as main sponsor. It is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation and the Folkwang-Museumsverein e. V.

Exhibition space

1400 m²

Exhibits:

160 objects:
Painting: 53
Sculptures: 2
Models: 8
Furniture: 2
Videos: 2
Video installations: 1
Light boxes: 4
Photo collages: 6
Performances: 1
Installations: 3
Textile works: 1
Drawings, watercolours and cards: 55
Printmaking: 1
Documents and documentary films: 21

Participating artists: 17

See separate list

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Lenders:

Akademie der Künste, Berlin
Archivio C. Toraldo di Francia / Superstudio, Filottrano
Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle
Centro Elisarion, Minusio
Cobra Museum for Modern Art, Amstelveen
Estate of Anna Halprin
Eye Filmmuseum
Fondation Constant
Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt
Kunstmuseum Den Haag
Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg
Monte Verità Museum Complex, Casa Anatta, Ascona
Museum der Stadt Hadamar
National Museum, Poznań
Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld & Geluid
Osthaus Museum Hagen
Petra Rinck Galerie Düsseldorf + Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam
Privatsammlung Köln
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. On loan from Mr and Mrs de Heus, Barneveld
Sammlung Kunstmuseum Bochum
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
Wenzel-Hablik-Museum, Itzehoe
Yussef Agbo-Ola (Olaniyi Studio)
Courtesy of the artists – Eglė Budvytytė
Timur Si-Qin

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday and Friday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., closed on Mondays

Admission

Admission: € 10 (regular) / € 6 (concessions)
Family Card I: 20,50 € / Family Card II: 10,50 €
Time-slot tickets: <https://museum-folkwang.ticketfritz.de>
(* For discount conditions, please refer to museum website)

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Accompanying programme

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of events. Dates and current information at www.museum-folkwang.de

Audio guide

There is an audio guide for the exhibition, which can be downloaded free of charge via the Museum Folkwang app (free of charge at Google Play and App Store).

Visitor services / Booking of guided tours

info@museum-folkwang.essen.de, 0201 88 45 444

Group tour, 60 Min: 80 € plus admission

Foreign language tours: 90 € plus admission

Public holidays

Open: 26.11.2023 – Sunday in commemoration of the dead: 26.12.2023 – Boxing Day;

1.1.2024 – New Year's Day

Directions

Transport connections from Essen Hauptbahnhof (main train station): tram and underground lines 101, 106, 107, 108 and U11 in the direction of Bredeney or Messe Gruga to Rüttenscheider Stern (the way to Museum Folkwang is signposted, approx. 7-minute walk).

On foot from Essen Hauptbahnhof (main train station): 15 minute-walk from the south exit of Essen Hauptbahnhof.

By car: navigation info: Museumsplatz 1, 45128 Essen

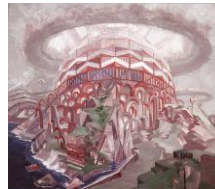
Press images

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The imagery may only be used in the context of reporting on the exhibition ***We Is Future. Visions of New Communities* (24 November 2023 – 17 March 2024)** at Museum Folkwang. No work may be cut nor altered in any way. Images on the Internet may not exceed a resolution of 72 dpi with a maximum size of approx. 20x20 cm. The usage for social media must be requested independently in advance. We kindly ask to send us a copy. Longer photo spreads require special consultation with Museum Folkwang.



Ludwig von Hofmann
Paradise Lost (Adam and Eve)
Das verlorene Paradies (Adam und Eva), 1893
Oil on canvas, 130 × 195 cm
Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt
Photo: Linda Breidert



Wenzel Hablik
Self-Supporting Cupola with Five Mountain Peaks as a Base, 1918-24
Oil on canvas, 166 × 191 cm
Wenzel-Hablik-Museum, Itzehoe
Photo: Wenzel-Hablik-Stiftung, Itzehoe



Eglė Budvytė
Songs from the Compost: Mutating Bodies, Imploding Stars, 2020
4-K video, colour, sound, 28 min
Courtesy of the artists
© Eglė Budvytė © Marija Olšauskaitė;
© Julija Lukas Steponaitytė
Photo: Eglė Budvytė



Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach
Per aspera ad astra, 1888-1892
34 paintings, each 100 x 200 cm
(Plate 26 of 34)
Stadtmuseum Hadamar
Photo: Norbert Miguletz, Frankfurt/M



Planetary Dance, since 1980
Performance 2002 at Mount Tamalpais, California, USA, led by Anna Halprin
Courtesy of the Estate of Anna Halprin
Photo: John Veltri & Marguerite Lorimer
www.earthalive.com



Superstudio
Fundamental Acts, Life (Supersurface).
Fruit & Wine, 1971
Gli Atti Fondamentali, Vita (Supersuperficie). *Frutta & Vino*
Collages and prints on paper, 66 × 89.5 cm (sheet)
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée nationale d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle
Achat, 2000
© Superstudio
Photo: bpk/CNAC-MNAM/Georges Meguerditchian

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Bruno Taut

Alpine Architecture, Part 5: Astral Building. Sheet 28, Solar System, 1917-18

pencil, watercolour, opaque white, brush in silver and gold on drawing paper, 48 x 5.6 cm
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Alpine Architecture from the Bruno-Taut-Archiv, Sign. 34
Photo: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Alpine Architektur aus dem Bruno-Taut-Archiv, Sign. 34



Bruno Taut

Alpine Architecture, Part 4: Earth's Crust Building. Sheet 25, Earth, Asiatic Side, 1917/18

Pencil, pen and ink in grey and black, watercolour, opaque white and brush in silver (oxidised) on drawing paper, 55.9 x 76.5 cm
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Alpine Architecture from the Bruno-Taut-Archiv, Sign. 30
Photo: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Alpine Architektur aus dem Bruno-Taut-Archiv, Sign. 30



Constant

Small Labyr, 1959
Metal, plexiglass, wood, oil paint, chalk, 70 x 35 x 56 cm
Kunstmuseum Den Haag
© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2023
Photo: Tom Haartsen



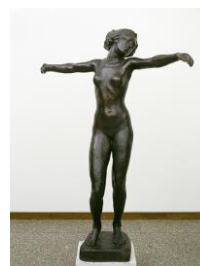
Constant

New Babylon - Ruhr Area, 1963
Geographical map, ink, 52.8 x 64.1 cm
Kunstmuseum Den Haag
© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2023
Photo: Tom Haartsen



Constant

Tribute to the Odéon, 1969
Oil and lacquer on canvas, 190.7 x 200.2 cm
Fondation Constant, long-term loan
Kunstmuseum Den Haag
© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2023
Photo: Tom Haartsen



Georg Kolbe

Dancer, 1911/1912
Bronze, 154 x 127 x 88 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie
Photo: bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / Jörg P. Anders



Emma Talbot

Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?, 2022 (Detail)
Acrylic on silk, 3.1 x 14 m
Petra Rinck Galerie Düsseldorf, Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam
© Emma Talbot
Photo: Emma Talbot