

Game Levels of Reality _

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For the project "Art Girls", Kunsthalle Göppingen has become a film set, an experimental laboratory for students, an exhibition space as well as the setting for a simulated catastrophe. The film was commissioned by ZDF and Arte.

By Sabine Riker

"Rescue operation at the service of cinema: the art and rescue staff are real; the catastrophe and its victims are fake."

Blood-smearred bodies are lit by the glare of blue flashing lights that cast shadows on the walls, and are refracted in the reflective strips of volunteers' uniforms: an emergency alert. Hospital beds are filled to maximum capacity, sports halls are overcrowded, Kunsthalle Göppingen has become an emergency ward. Ghostly figures flit about with cameras. – But no reason to panic: this is not a real catastrophe. The Kunsthalle has been turned into a location for a film commissioned by ZDF and Arte.

A sharp "shhhhh!" emerges from the darkness. Then: "action!" A cameraman is pushed past on a wheelchair with another man in tow angling for voices with a microphone. Robert Bramkamp hovers above or rather right in the middle. He is the director. And he directs without interruption. Even journalists are subjected to the will of the master. It takes minutes before Bramkamp is happy with the interview scene.

He then takes up his position, breaks off because the camera needs to be reloaded, makes use of the break to fetch coffee before continuing with the interview. This material is going to be used for a "making of" of the feature film, a few scenes of which were filmed in Göppingen at the weekend. If

everything goes to plan, the film "Art Girls", with well-known actors such as Inga Busch and Peter Lohmeyer, will appear on cinema and television screens in mid-2012. The long wait is common with low-budget productions, Bramkamp explains.

Reality and fiction sit close together. The members of the Red Cross and the Agency for Technical Relief are real. They are from the district of Göppingen, and are using the Kunsthalle for routine training. However, the filming process has its own rhythm, and around 4pm the duty manager of the Göppingen Red Cross, Peter Schätz, who is becoming a little restless, wants to know the schedule. The volunteers are getting tired with the long waits, he says, and points out that the Red Cross normally works in a very structured way. Nevertheless, he and his colleagues from Geislingen, Hattenhofen and Süßen are treating this unconventional exercise as a "totally new experience", one that strengthens the sense of solidarity.

The interplay between documentary and fiction also completely surprised the director himself. The film plot has been "implanted" – as he puts it – into the simulated catastrophe scenario. The story: three Berlin-based artists participate in an exhibition and discover that their art has unexpected effects on reality. People begin to lose control of the former reality and, after an evolutionary leap with casualties and many fantastical occurrences, a new nature and positive utopia appears to take its place.

Also contributing to this utopia are film students from several colleges.

Bramkamp who works as a professor at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts was able to engineer that too. Last but not least, the Kunsthalle is also showing the exhibition "Nikita Neufeld and Guests" with video installations by the artist Susanne Weirich who provided Bramkamp with the contact to the Director of the Kunsthalle, Werner Meyer. Nikita Neufeld, played by Inga Busch, is also the main character in the film.

As we reach evening, the extras are still engaged despite having to hold out for hours. Hakan and Senem from Red Cross Youth are particularly

enthusiastic about their bit parts: "It's incredible how often a scene has to be shot before it's in the can", the two fifteen-year-olds say with amazement. Jan mainly raves about Inga Busch: "She's an awesome actress!"