

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

PRESS RELEASE

Potsdam, July 31, 2025

Katharina Gaenssler: *UP!*
September 20 – October 13, 2025

From 20 September, artist Katharina Gaenssler (*1974, Munich) will activate the outdoor area of DAS MINSK Kunsthau in Potsdam with a temporary installation. For three weeks, a six-meter-tall, vividly colored balloon—illuminated from within at night—will soar above DAS MINSK's terrace, visible from afar as a sculptural image-object. Not as an flying object, but as a social sculpture.

The work *UP!* recalls one of the GDR's most spectacular escape stories: the home-made hot-air balloon used by the Strelzyk and Wetzel families to cross the inner-German border into the Federal Republic. Gaenssler draws on an iconicevent of German history and transforms the balloon into an unmistakable symbol that connects memory and the present. *"I'm interested in the balloon as a visual vessel for democracy and freedom,"* Gaenssler explains. *"In a moment of extreme danger and a life-threatening decision, the Strelzyk and Wetzel families created what has since become a colorful, iconic image—one that we can now use as a symbol of democracy. The fact that the balloon can symbolically travel back into what was once the GDR today without putting anyone at risk is, for me, a powerful image of hope and freedom."*

FROM FLYING OBJECT TO SOCIAL SPACE

With *UP!*, Gaenssler transforms a historic means of escape into a public artwork. Using documentary technical drawings and fabric analyses, Gaenssler has created a color- and scale-accurate version of the balloon in order to come as close as possible to the original, which was made of umbrella silk, taffeta, and bed linen. As an art installation the balloon becomes a symbol of self-empowerment and the strength of collective action.

As in many of the artist's works, translation into different forms plays a key role in this installation: at the end of the exhibition, the balloon casing will be recycled and transformed into a mobile seating sculpture for DAS MINSK. The upcycling process is an integral part of the artistic concept: a symbol of escape becomes a space of encounter and community—now permanently located in the building's public space.

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"The balloon represents the power of dreams and collective action," says DAS MINSK's director Anna Schneider. "The fact that both families managed to build this gigantic flying object without being noticed and succeeded in their daring escape to the West remains incredible. Katharina Gaenssler's installation pays homage to this historic escape story, but goes beyond it, inviting us to reflect on current sociopolitical issues. Today, this search for freedom, community, flight, and exile poses great challenges for many people and we urgently need spaces to engage with these topics. As a temporary artistic installation at DAS MINSK in Potsdam, it encourages us to dream together and trust in our own capacity to effect change. I hope it will also lift DAS MINSK a few centimeters higher!"

ART, HISTORY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

UP! also invites renewed engagement with the art history of the former GDR, in which motifs of flight—whether through balloons, aircrafts, birds, or the multi-faceted figure of Icarus—frequently appeared. In East German painting, for example, the Icarus motif held an ambivalent meaning: on the one hand it symbolized socialist progress; on the other, it served as an allegory for the pursuit of freedom and self-determination. In this sense, the installation connects with DAS MINSK's collection and history, opening it up to contemporary perspectives. *UP!* encourages reflections on both historical and current movements of flight and migration, as well as on democracy, courage, and social solidarity.

A multi-faceted public program will accompany the installation over the course of three weeks. Workshops for children, film screenings, an artist talk, and DJ sets open various points of access to the work and create space for exchange, creativity, and reflection. The program invites visitors of all ages to engage with the artistic and social themes of the installation. A particular highlight: On 27 September DAS MINSK will celebrate its third anniversary—and warmly welcomes everyone to join in celebrating this special occasion together.

UP! is on loan from the Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte in Regensburg, where Gaenssler won an art-in-architecture competition with the project. Since 2024, a scaled-down replica of the escape balloon has risen above the museum on selected days throughout the year.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Katharina Gaenssler (*1974 in Munich) uses photographic material to create large-scale, temporary works that cover entire walls in the form of photo collages, wall-paper, or textile fabric—always conceived as architectural interventions within a conceptual context. After training as a silversmith, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. Her work has been shown internationally, including at the Galerie im Lenbachhaus, the Museum Folkwang in Essen, the Sprengel Museum in Hanover, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Rencontres d'Arles, and the Chicago Architecture Biennial.

Gaenssler has been awarded the Bavarian Art Promotion Prize (2009) and the Neustart Kultur scholarship from the Stiftung Kunstfonds (2020), among others. She has taught at the HBK Braunschweig, the HFBK Hamburg (guest professorship, 2013-2015) and the AdBK Munich (substitute professorship, 2022-2023). She has been a member of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts since 2017. Gaenssler lives and works in Munich.

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SCHEDULE AND PROGRAM

SA, 20.9.2025: OPENING

- 4:30pm: Exclusive preview for children and families: watch the balloon being inflated live
- 4:30–5pm: Introduction to the work and its historical context for children
- 5/5:30pm: CHORWERK-POTSDAM performance and collective “Human Rights Singalong” with the audience
- 6–9pm: Art: Dialogue in the exhibition *Wohnkomplex*
- 6pm: Official opening and artist talk with Katharina Gaenssler and Anna Schneider
Followed by a DJ set with Eric D. Clark

SA, 27.9.2025: ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND – 3 YEARS OF DAS MINSK

- 2–5pm: Drop-in workshops for children, featuring creative activities linked to the balloon installation *UP!*
- 4pm: Birthday cake cutting
- From 6pm: DJ set

FILM PROGRAM FOR THE INSTALLATION *UP!*

Thu, 2.10.2025, 7pm: Film Screening *Verbotener Flug*, 2014 by Hester Overmars (director), 56 min

Chronicle of a failed escape attempt by Michael Anhalt (artist)

Fri, 3.10.2025, 6pm: Film Screening *Ballon*, 2018, by Michael Herbig, 125 min, German feature film

followed by a discussion with Günter Wetzel

Sat, 4.10.2025, 6pm: Film Screening *Green Border*, 2023 by Agnieszka Holland, 147 min

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PRESS CONTACT

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We would be happy to assist you if you need further information or images.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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14473 Potsdam
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www.dasminsk.de
Instagram: @dasminsk

OPENING HOURS
Daily except Tuesdays
Wednesday to Monday 10 am – 7 pm

ADMISSION
10 Euros, 8 Euros reduced admission

Combined ticket 20 Euros, 12 Euros reduced admission
The combined ticket is valid for the Museum Barberini and DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam.

DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam is a project of the Hasso Plattner Foundation. The goal of the Hasso Plattner Foundation is to promote the digitalization of scholarship and education, to improve access to art and culture, and to support the preservation of the environment.

www.plattnerfoundation.org