

NADIM VARDAG
FACCIATA / FACADE / FASSADE

September 21st 2024 – June 7th 2025
Spazio ORR, Via Cremona 115, Brescia

Keep it simple. Facts first.

“Facciata / Facade / Fassade” is an exhibition by Vienna-based artist Nadim Vardag at Spazio ORR in Brescia. On view are 16 photographic works, all presented in aluminum frames. Those photographs (all “Untitled,” 2024) show sculptural and wall-mounted works by the artist (all “Untitled,” 2024). The four larger ones of those photographed works are based on a modernist table base originally designed by German architect Egon Eiermann. These table bases are then mounted to the walls with wooden panels screwed to their side, giving them the look of isolated and protruding facade elements. The panels have been cut from earlier works by Vardag, all bearing traces of their former use, of being exhibited, moved around or stored. Holes and scratches are visible.

The remaining three works are: (1) a small aluminum snap frame with an etched aluminum plate; and (2) two works consisting of light boxes. The latter hang up high on the walls, non-lit and without signs—simple, opaque objects, their front closed off with aluminum panels.

All of these sculptural works pictured seem to be installed at Spazio ORR—in precisely those rooms where, in fact, the photographs are exhibited. But the wall objects never made it to Brescia. Instead, Vardag first photographed the empty exhibition space. He then installed the wall-mounted works in his studio in Vienna, re-created the lighting situation from the exhibition space, photographed the works and, finally, digitally collaged them into his images of the rooms at Spazio ORR.

So this is, ultimately, a documentation of an exhibition that never happened, shown as an exhibition in the rooms where the initial exhibition never happened. Furthermore, for the actual exhibition documentation, the original photographic works shown at Spazio ORR showing those sculptural works never installed on-site are supplemented with installation shots showing the photographic works installed at Spazio ORR.*

Still sticking with the facts. But start looking at their effects.

Things are getting rather confusing. This is far from being due to how they are done, though. Above all, Vardag is following a multi-step and painstaking process but, ultimately, a straightforward one. Everything is plain open. Yet, simple facts here lead to complex results.

The distinction between actual works, the exhibition, and its documentation is blurred. “Before” and “after” may not be perceived as what they used to be. Yet, both are far from being simply switched around. Site-specificity, on the other hand, is equally played up. Yet it seems to vanish into thin air. Indeed, things are getting simultaneously conflated and redoubled. Merging and multiplying here feels like happening in one and the same move. Melt down.

This double move leads to a complex inter-linking of the virtual and the actual. What you see is no rendering, let alone AI-generated work. The digital is precisely not replacing the analogue sphere. Above all, the sculptural works represented in the photographs actually do exist. They have even been made especially for the exhibition but are somewhat withdrawn—not shown, only pictured. Meanwhile, the exhibition you see is not quite two, yet more than one.

The documentation, on the other hand, is elevated into the status of an artwork, the documentation of the exhibited documentation, however, is not. We are precisely not dealing with infinite regress. Photographic documentation and its online circulation do not—to pick up on a discussion prevalent in the early 2010s—replace the “real” exhibition in an actual space. Rather, the documentation here becomes “real” work, too, being shown in a “real” space. As convincing as these photographs are, they still feel weirdly “fake.” Doubt, too, arises if the depicted works are indeed real. There might be fake everywhere, even though we are still sticking with the facts. What you see is what you get. A facade. A real one.

Text: Dominikus Müller

* Due to a water damage in the premises of Spazio ORR, the electricity did not work. Thus, other than initially planned, Vardag was unable to re-create the original lighting situation once again for the actual exhibition documentation.