



INTERACTING THROUGH

"In most of my works, like sculptures and photographs, I need the wall as a support or a point of reference," says artist Margret Wibmer. Now Wibmer is challenging herself, and her audience, to move beyond such points of reference in a

art

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIAN BROAD

HAIR AND MAKEUP: FIEDER/HOUSE OF ORANGE

new interactive installation, appropriately titled *Off The Wall*, which debuts in March at the De Beyer Museum in Breda, the Netherlands. Wibmer calls *Off The Wall* "a virtual-reality opera." In truth, the piece is harder to pin down—it mixes digital video representations of the artist as a kind of virtual sculpture with unique three-dimensional soundscapes, both of which are manipulated by the audience.

To create this unusual interactive sculpture, Wibmer was captured on digital video wearing a yellow rubber suit that obscured her identity. She was videotaped from all angles in a variety of unusual poses. "The suit functions as a second skin, a protective layer, a sealer and a wrapping," she says. "It also works as the interface between the public and the virtual space."

Wibmer's collaborator, Austrian composer Günther Zechberger, contributed prerecorded sound clips that create a three-dimensional sound environment around the audience. Members of the audience, meanwhile, become a part of the performance as they simply move through the exhibition, manipulating the video and audio. "The public plays the side parts but also can take the function of the director, the stage designer, the conductor and the choreographer," Wibmer explains.

Wibmer, who lived in Austria and New York City before settling in Amsterdam, says she has long been interested in exploring movement and sound. When she was an art student in Vienna in 1982, she made clay disks and then listened to the crashes they created when she threw them against a wall in an industrial complex. She photographed the results and presented them as archaeological findings.

Now, with *Off The Wall*, Wibmer continues to explore the relationship between sound and image, using high-tech tools. She is also working on CD-ROM and Web (www.off-the-wall.at) versions of the installation, which will allow users to manipulate Wibmer in her suit. "The text [of the Opera] is replaced by pure image, movement and sound," she says. "I consider this virtual reality opera a case study for human behavior with new communication technologies." —Matthew Hawn

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