



Berlin, 4 April 2023

**Museumsinsel Berlin, Pergamonmuseum**  
**Liam Gillick. Filtered Time**  
6 April – 15 October 2023

## CATALOGUE TEXT

### **Barbara Helwing: Ishtar's Lions. Behind the Walls**

The Pergamonmuseum is about to close its doors. Ninety-three years after the first rooms opened to the public in 1930, the building that houses the world-famous reconstruction of Babylon's Ishtar Gate will undergo a well-deserved, thorough renovation and refurbishment. This is urgently needed, we cannot wait until the forthcoming hundredth anniversary in 2030. And when the museum closes its doors, Ishtar's lions will hide behind walls specially built to protect them. King Nebuchadnezzar's visionary Ishtar Gate constructed from lapis lazuli-blue bricks – as his texts boast – will be hidden away. Hadad's bulls and Marduk's dragons will roar unheard for many years against new sounds of reconstruction.

What does that mean for our museum? For Berlin? For our visitors? Some of our regulars responded to our Eyewitness project (Zeitzeugen) and agreed to be interviewed, answering questions about what the Pergamonmuseum and specifically the Vorderasiatisches Museum, meant to them.

The Pergamonmuseum with its iconic Ishtar Gate is part of the urban fabric of Berlin. But soon, the museum will become a non-museum. It will turn into a construction site. Its doors will be closed to visitors. Objects will be moved to restoration and storage spaces. Museum specialists will work behind the scene as witnesses to Mesopotamian history. The museum director will become a director without a museum, a homeless manager – a yurtsuz müdür – akin to the English King John Lackland – the King without a Kingdom. What can a museum do that faces such an adverse situation?

Of course, all along the way we will prepare for a future re-opening. But how can we do that? The Vorderasiatisches Museum is a permanent exhibition, created in Berlin's most exciting period, the 1920s. The layout of the museum is already a heritage monument, to be preserved as part of the greater concept of Pergamonmuseum after reopening. Hence, what can the museum do differently? Is everything about our future already settled?

But we cannot close without some reflection on all the things that have happened to make the Vorderasiatisches Museum such a unique, layered, and complex place. Prior to closure our first step was to enter into dialogue with New York based British born artist Liam Gillick. As a person attuned to his sensual perceptions, what would he make of the museum on the verge of closure? How would he react to the hidden layers of history enclosed by the present day exhibition layout? Could he show us perspectives that we museum folks – scholars looking through a professional

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lens – do not always perceive? What could we all learn when seeing our museum through an artistic interpretation?

This is the experience to which we invite you today. We entice you to follow Liam Gillick's lead to peel back the layers of museum history beyond the dates and numbers. Immerse yourself in the sounds and lights that accentuated processes of discovery and recognition. Think of all the digging, the dust, and the imagination that went into the creation of the museum's displays. Appreciate the deep blue of the Ishtar Gate's bricks while thinking about those that were recreated in the 1920s, commissioned for the Ishtar reconstruction from Helene Körting, at one of the most established ceramic companies in Weimar Berlin. Only after this experience can you say a personal, temporary, farewell to the Vorderasiatisches Museum.

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