



Niklas Goldbach **FOR THE AGES**

Video Installation, 13:40 min, UHD, 5.1, 2026

Commissioned for Manifesta 16 Ruhr

Co-Produced by Sammlung Fluentum.

On view at Christ-König-Kirche, Bochum, 21.06.-04.10.2026

For Manifesta 16 Ruhr, Niklas Goldbach returns to the region of his childhood and youth and turns his camera towards two working environments that are significant to the Ruhr area yet almost invisible – both exist underground: mining, inextricably linked to a heroic image of masculinity, to the myths and local patriotism of the region, and the water pumping stations, which have always accompanied the work underground and, as a so-called 'eternal task', continue to endure to this day. Through a queered gaze, he re-examines the iconography of labour and masculinity.

It is only the ongoing pumping of groundwater that continues to protect the Ruhr region from literally sinking into its own history and becoming Europe's largest lake district. Over a century of coal mining has caused the ground to subside by up to twenty-five metres, diverted rivers, and pushed entire areas below the water table. What keeps the region dry today is an invisible system of hundreds of pumping stations, canals and treatment plants. It is a technical, financial and ecological obligation with no end date and, at the same time, a part of critical infrastructure, whose failure would directly endanger public safety in Europe's largest metropolitan region.

The video work FOR THE AGES, produced for Manifesta 16 Ruhr – a loop of just under fourteen minutes in UHD and 5.1 surround sound – takes these 'eternal tasks' as its starting point. The work was shot at the Gelsenkirchen Pumping Station, a structure built forty metres below ground and commissioned in 2018 because mining had already lowered the ground so much that without active pumping, nothing would drain away. Goldbach's camera dissects the monument: machines, pipes, damaged sections of the underground concrete walls through which groundwater attempts to permeate. The camera also looks upwards, towards the ceiling forty metres away, capturing the visual power of these underground spaces. They are cathedrals of engineering: cool, exposed-concrete chambers beneath the ground, whose pipes rise like church spires – monumental, modern, and hidden from public view.

Goldbach juxtaposes the images of the pumping station with a second visual layer: detailed close-ups of miner sculptures from the collection of the German Mining Museum in Bochum. The figures, in the tradition of Constantin Meunier, depict idealised male bodies: muscular, upright, unmarked by physical exertion, with a proud, self-assured gaze. They embody young, vital heroes of hard labour: small salon bronzes, once created as gifts of honour for distinguished mining and other industrial executives and intended for the middle-class living room. The collection has its roots in the visual propaganda of its time: these heroised bodies promoted a profession designed to attract young men to work underground and were readily aligned with the prevailing ideology of the 1930s.

The soundtrack for FOR THE AGES is based on a five-second excerpt from Herbert Grönemeyer's 'Bochum' (1984), the unofficial anthem of the city and the region, whose chorus features the miners' greeting 'Glück auf'. Goldbach uses the karaoke version, the most accessible and democratic form of music. Looped and slowed down, the sample sounds like a memory that can no longer be clearly located. Against the backdrop of the sculpture sequences, it expands into a floating, monumental soundscape; during the footage of the pumping station, it is reduced to a driving pulse.

The work will be on display from 21 June to 4 October 2026 in a side room of the nave at Christ-König Church in Bochum.



Credits:

FOR THE AGES

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Film by Niklas Goldbach

Editing, Sound Design, Post-Production: Niklas Goldbach

Cinematography: Alexander Eckhardt, Niklas Goldbach

Sound Mastering: Christian Obermaier

Music courtesy of Herbert Grönemeyer / Grönland Records

Music Mastering: Schneider TM

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Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum and

EGLV Emschergenossenschaft Lippeverband, Pumpwerk Gelsenkirchen

Co-Produced by Sammlung Fluentum.

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