The encounter with regulatory obstacles and circumvention of them through meticulously-performed research are both Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan’s artistic process, and the material outcome of their projects. Their interest in politically-charged sites are cause and effect of this: border zones, trade barriers, and in the case of Monument to Another Man’s Fatherland, questionably-obtained artifacts and German national identity.

Amsterdam-based artists, the two investigate ideas of migration and movement and how these flows shape the contested geopolitical spaces of Europe. The performance of research-based artistic production and how the artist is implicated in his subject is central to their approach. Monument to Another Man’s Fatherland, which has three of its four components exhibited in Motive Gallery, questionably-obtained artifacts and German national identity.

What this obstruction and the artists’ subsequent circumvention has yielded, is an inquiry into the shared histories of Germany, Greece and Turkey, how shifting ideas of German-ness have been produced and an investigation into the slippages which arise from the performance of cultural reproduction. Two such slippages - those fissures, leaks and imperfections which distinguish new cultural combinations from contested originals - are at the heart of Monument to Another Man’s Fatherland.

The first is seen in Wit Dazzled Epigonos, a painstakingly-made two-dimensional reproduction of the inaccessible frieze, collaged together from more than one Prussian Possession of Culture. The sculptural narrative of a monument marking the defeat of an invading Celtic tribe by the city-state of Pergamon (in present-day Turkey) the frieze depicts a battle between gods and giants. In the mid 19th century, a German road engineer discovered the artifacts and took possession; they now reside in Berlin’s Pergamon Museum. The Foundation declined collaboration with Van Brummelen and De Haan so as to not stir debate around the repatriation of the monument.

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The exhibit’s starting point is the Pergamon frieze, and the denial of access to it by its owners, the Foundation for
hundred separate photographic sources. The imperfections of the refabrication are on display; vast variations in lighting and image quality create an intentionally mottled whole, and lengthy research notes indicate the image sources and process of pastiche. With the monument absent, this eighteen-part series is an approximation of its image and commentary on its inaccessibility.

In Revolt of the Giants — Recited by Prospective Germans, we hear the uncertain German pronunciation of the Pergamon’s poetic narrative by aspiring Turkish migrants, an attempt to make audible the story of the missing frieze. Their strained articulation, a slippage of language, in context of new regulations requiring linguistic proficiency for entry into Europe, point to a more restrictive ideology of German-ness and rhyme the movement of their bodies with that of the monument.

Should the repatriation of the friezes pose a threat to national culture, then the delivery of imperfect language poses one to the nation. Van Brummelen and De Haan make manifest these dynamics through the circumvention of official channels of access, commenting on the necessity of performance and re-production of culture, in a world where the regulation of bodies and artifacts produce hybrids perhaps more true than the originals.

The project’s final piece, View from the Acropolis, an examination of the original site of the Pergamon, extends a rumination on memory and authenticity. Building from the Turkish idea of ‘toprakın kültürü’ or ‘culture of earth,’ where culture belongs to a place, rather than a people, the sixteen-minute film explores what fixed land can reveal that mobile bodies and artifacts cannot. Using the site as a vantage point, the film reveals a place marked by absence, embedded histories and the outcomes of time, a place that is at once of the moment but also eternal, signifying what has been left behind, left in between and what is to come.