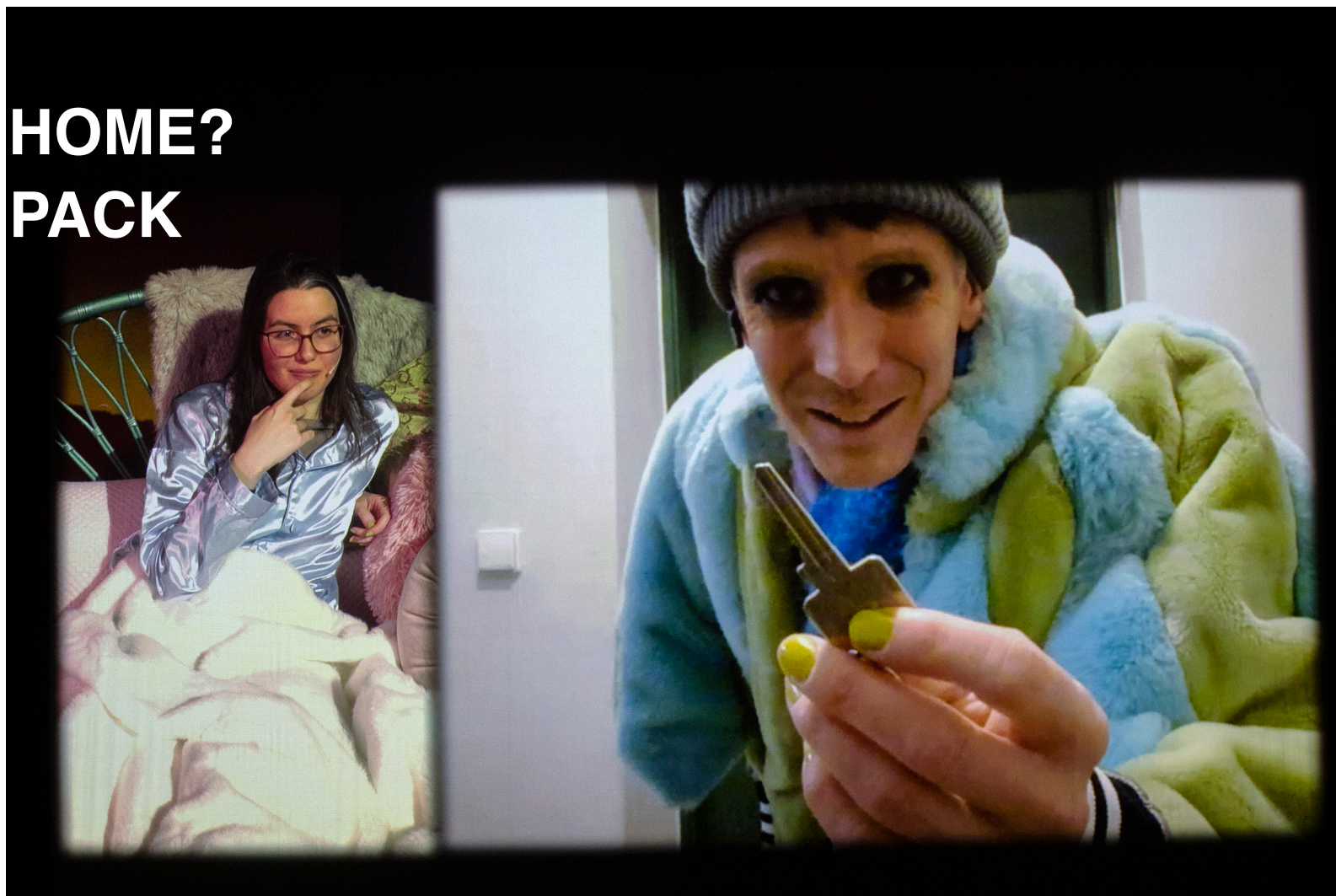
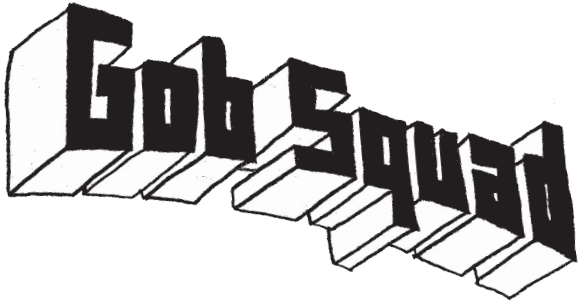




IS ANYBODY HOME? PRESS PACK





About the group

"This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine" - The Guardian

Gob Squad is a seven-headed monster, a multinational **arts collective** with seven bosses, a patchwork family, a Berliner institution and a social utopia. Gob Squad have been devising, directing and performing together since 1994, working where **theatre meets art, media and real life**.

For 30 years, Gob Squad have been searching for **new ways to combine media and performance**, producing stage shows, video installations, radio plays, interactive live films and urban interventions. The use of audio and video technology plays a prominent role in their work, with the result that alienated forms of intimacy have become a central theme. They try to scratch beneath the shiny, pixelated surface of the 21st century, seeking out the dark corners and hidden desires of contemporary culture.

Always on the hunt for beauty amidst the mundane, they place their work at the **heart of urban life**: in houses, shops, underground stations, car parks, hotels or directly on the street, as well as in theatres and galleries. **Everyday life and magic, banality and idealism, reality and entertainment** are all set on a collision course and the unpredictable results are captured on video.

Motivated by a desire to elevate the everyday and **empower audience members** to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators, Gob Squad set up often absurdly **utopian scenarios** where **meaningful collective experience** and genuine encounters involving local guests, passers-by and audience members are suddenly possible. They are always looking for ways to **transcend barriers of language, class, age and culture**. Anything might happen during an evening with Gob Squad. You might be asked to dance, sing or even kiss one of the performers. You might play in a band or the part of a lover or liberator in an improvised film or a home video. You might be part of a temporary community or simply be asked to bear witness to the organised chaos unfolding on stage before your very eyes.

Gob Squad was founded in **1994**, whilst its members were still at Nottingham Trent and Giessen universities. **Berlin** has been the group's creative home since 1999. HAU Hebbel am Ufer is their home theatre and long term production partner. **Core members** are Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost and Simon Will. The group is managed by Marta Hewelt (Company Management), Caroline Gentz (Funding und Financial Management), Grischa Schwiegl (Financial Administration & Production), Talea Schuré (Touring und PR) and Christina Runge (Production Management and Dramaturgy). A pool of collaborative artists are regularly invited to join the creative process.

Gob Squad's **international reputation** has grown steadily since coming to prominence at documenta X in 1997. Their productions have been shown on all the continents (apart from Antarctica) where projects such as SUPER NIGHT SHOT (2003), GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN (2007, winner of New York's Drama Desk Award 2012), SAVING THE WORLD (2008, winner of the Goethe-Institut Prize), BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES (2011, selected for Germany's Theatertreffen), WESTERN SOCIETY (2013), CREATION (PICTURES FOR DORIAN) (2018) and SHOW ME A GOOD TIME (2020, selected for Theatertreffen and awarded with the Friedrich Luft Prize 2021) have received wide acclaim. In 2020, the group was awarded the Tabori Prize, Germany's highest honour for the independent theatre sector. Their latest works are IS ANYBODY HOME? (2022) and HANDLE WITH CARE (2023). The group will be awarded the Silver Lion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.





About the show

This is the front door to where I live, isn't it? And this is my key? Is anybody home? OK, I'm going in... Is this my own room here? And this big double bed, it's mine, right? All just for me! I'm so exhausted. I'm going to lie down now. But first of all, tell me: What gets me out of bed in the morning? Am I happy here?

Gob Squad have made an interactive live film in which empathy and the idea of sharing the experience of others are taken to the extreme. Each night the performers swap places with a new local guest who is invited to watch a film, set in their own private apartment. While the film unfolds live in the theatre before their very eyes, boundaries of privacy and property are constantly being negotiated, strangers' beds are slept in and bodies are taken over. Where do you start, and where do I end? Is this a nightmare or a dream to come true?

Meanwhile on the streets, we see another body on a mysterious fairytale-like quest. What is home outside of four walls? Where do we find the opening in the membrane of the private, to make connections rather than draw divisions? Where can we come together? In the theatre? In a stranger's house? In my body? Our minds? On the streets? Is anybody home?

Credits

Concept and Direction: Gob Squad

Development and performance:

Mira Partecke, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost, Simon Will

Sound Design: Catalina Fernandez, Isabel Gonzalez Toro

Video Design: Miles Chalcraft

Lighting Design: Frank Novak

Set Design: Nina von Mechow, Gob Squad

Costume Design:

Sarah Thom, Ingken Benesch, Frank Salewski

Dramaturgy:

Johanna Höhmann, Christina Runge

Production Management:

Christina Runge

Production Assistant:

Anna Zrenner

Dramaturgy Assistant:

Leonie Jennings

Set Design Assistant:

Konrad Walkow

Intern: Zhuoer Chen

World premiere:

15th December 2022,
Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

Gob Squad Management Team

Company Manager: Marta Hewelt

Funding & Financial Planning: Caroline Gentz

Financial Administration & Production:

Grischa Schwiegk

Touring & Public Relations: Talea Schuré

"Is Anybody Home?" is a production of Gob Squad and Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

Supported by Fonds Darstellende Künste with funds from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media as part of NEUSTART KULTUR.

Gob Squad is regularly funded within the Konzeptförderung programme 2024 – 2027 by the Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt Berlin.





PRESS QUOTES

ON GOB SQUAD:

Gob Squad has always felt similar to a gang – and watching it, you want to sign up and join in.

THE STAGE

This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine.

THE GUARDIAN

Gob Squad virgins, please stop reading now, and go get your tickets!

TIME OUT NEW YORK (on WESTERN SOCIETY)





Gob Squad: The unruly Anglo-German theatre collective still evolving after 25 years

THE STAGE
Jul 3, 2018

The Anglo-German theatre collective considers itself 'a bit like a blob' – 'morphing' to meet its members' needs. Founder member Sarah Thom tells Matt True-man how the company has grown together over 25 years

The Japanese art of flower arranging, ikebana, features heavily in Gob Squad's latest show. Throughout *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)*, flowers are serenely slotted into place under a heat lamp. As an art form, ikebana elevates the act of arranging over the final arrangement, and it celebrates the plant's life cycle – growth and decay – over the pristine beauty of blooms at their peak. As the performance plays out, petals wrinkle and wilt.

Gob Squad's seven members have grown up together, over 25 years, but age has hardly withered them. The iconoclastic Anglo-German collective has built up a body of rambunctious performances unlike anyone else's – and is still going strong.

Creation, a careful meditation on ageing, art and visibility, which premiered at Brighton Festival, felt like Gob Squad's most mature work to date, but it still showed the silly side that has set the collective apart. En route, it has sent signals into outer space with *Calling Laika*, incited insurrection from the Institute of Contemporary Arts in *Revolution Now* and taken to the streets with camcorders and superhero capes to capture every single thing in existence for *Saving the World*.

Gob Squad has always felt similar to a gang – and watching it, you want to sign up and join in. But behind the buccaneering playfulness, there's always insight and

purpose. From its early site-specific shows to its own brand of real-time films, splicing the best bits of theatre and live TV, Gob Squad's work has consistently pushed performance. Its shows stretch their limits and expand horizons, whether riffing off classics, such as *War and Peace* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or teaching robots to talk, such as in *My Square Lady*. But, for founder member Sarah Thom, it all adds up to something bigger: **"Just being Gob Squad, that's our greatest work. Some have come, some have gone, but we've managed 25 years. It's a piece in itself."**

Like ikebana, Gob Squad is an ongoing act: unfolding, evolving, undergoing growth and decay. It's more than its shows – more, even, than its members. Gob Squad is a process – perhaps a way of life. **It functions as a collective, completely and utterly. It doesn't just create work collaboratively, the team members run their lives and their company in the same way.** Touring dates, pay packets, funding applications – all of it comes from communal decisions.

"There really is no boss," Thom stresses. "It's a struggle, but we believe in the politics of that. You're constantly in process, negotiating things, working everything out so it's completely fair and egalitarian. We're all one – a bit like a blob. We can't exist without each other, but each of us is absolutely replaceable. Gob Squad would go on without any one of us."

It's not easy being Gob Squad. In fact, Thom reckons theirs is "the most inefficient way of working ever", but the benefits outweigh the hassle. "Everything takes longer, but it does mean that, at the end, everybody owns it." And nobody gets left behind, either – the company "morphs" to meet its members' needs and fit their lives. It has shifted to accommodate relationships, babies and illnesses – people

always come first. "There's no institution to defer or submit to. Everything's open to debate, everything's up for grabs. It's what has held us together all this time," she says.

Gob Squad grew out of Nottingham Trent University. Its founder members – four of which remain – met on its Creative Arts course, an inter-disciplinary programme rooted in collaborative practice that criss-crossed from video to visual arts. An exchange scheme with Giessen University gave the company its Anglo-German core: Berit Stumpf and Johanna Freiburg clicked with Thom and Sean Patten. They still do: "There was a kindred spirit. We just got on – that's the most important thing."

For the last 20 years, Gob Squad has been based in Berlin – the funding's much better, commissions matched by the state – but it has retained relationships with theatres in the UK. "The UK is so important to us, way more than people realise," says Thom. They still "feel very at home here", but homecomings are getting harder. "Funding's less available given the size we are now. Our shows practically have to fit into suitcases to tour."

Having begun making site-specific work, taking over houses, offices and a furniture shop floor to subvert everyday spaces, Gob Squad began taking "baby steps" towards theatres at the end of the 1990s. For its first foray on to the stage, *Close Enough to Kiss*, it built a mirrored box to block the audience out. "Theatre's about the act of looking," Thom explains, "not just telling stories. We wanted to ask questions about the stage as a space."

Effectively, it treated theatres the same as any other site, toying with their configurations and conventions. The show *Safe* likened theatregoing to travel: ticket checks, stewardess ushers, a pilot MC. *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* is all about "frames within frames". Similar to Wilde's



novel, it examines the triangular relationship of art, artists and audience.

On stage, however, Gob Squad found itself constrained by the need to stick to the script. Since *Safe*, it has created structures, then improvised as it goes. **“Rules, risk, reality, rhythm” – that’s the Gob Squad playbook.** “Without them, something’s missing: the element of not quite knowing where you are. **We create a space where we’re able to be alive and to be ourselves** – and that is fun. It’s always at risk of being dropped and that makes it so much more exciting.”

If Gob Squad shows are alive, they’re also electric – literally as well as figuratively. Video is often at the heart of its work, the camera adding to and emphasising the quality of being live. *Room Service* plonks four lonely souls in separate hotel rooms for a night with only a camera for company. *Super Night Shot*, which it is doing for the National Theatre of Scotland this summer, sends four performers on to the streets to shoot a blockbuster film. One’s the hero, another the villain; one casts extras, another scouts locations. Their four feeds are mixed live.

This, perhaps, has been Gob Squad’s most pioneering front – not just in terms of performance, but in relation to society. Since the members of Gob Squad first picked up their VHS camcorders, cameras have become ubiquitous. Anyone can be a social media star. “When we first started using it, lots of people had home video cameras, so it felt quite universal, quite a DIY aesthetic,” Thom says. It proved liberating, freeing Gob Squad from ‘stageyness’ and participants from inhibition. “As soon as you’ve got a camera, you’re not crazy. You can ask people quite full-on questions in the street and they’ll answer.” In today’s camera-centric world, it can go one of two ways: either

people are cautious, wary of protecting their image online, or they’re comfortable – too comfortable.

That might explain Gob Squad’s retreat to the stage of late, and to those classic texts. Practically, it’s useful. Thom says: “Source material brings us all back to one point, as we go off on our seven different tangents.” But there’s politics too: about looking back, about remaking, engaging with the past. “You’re always standing on the shoulders of giants,” adds Thom. History, like Gob Squad, art and ikebana, is a process.

Matt Trueman

Five Facts about Gob Squad

1. *Gob Squad started in 1994. Its members wanted a way to get into Glastonbury for free.*
2. *Gob Squad has toured every continent but Antarctica.*
3. *Among the unusual spaces Gob Squad has performed in are the Steffi Graf tennis stadium in Berlin and a bingo hall in West Bromwich, UK.*
4. *Gob Squad’s smallest production was To@ster, which involved two performers, 10 toasters and 1,000 slices of bread. The biggest, My Square Lady, involved a 40-piece orchestra, a choir of 35 children, 30 technicians, seven opera singers, seven scientists and a robot called Myon.*
5. *Performing Super Night Shot in Rio, Gob Squad faced arrest. The show ends with performers running through the streets in pants – illegal in Brazil. They bought bikinis and swimsuits, which are fine.*



rbb

Theatre review | Gob Squad at the Volksbühne A small, fine school of empathy 16.12.22

In the live film "Is Anybody Home?", the German-British performance collective Gob Squad takes over the life and flat of a young woman for an hour. Banal? Not necessarily. It's a journey you have to embark on.

Only for a few moments on this evening at the Volksbühne in Berlin is there a person in the flesh on stage. It's Zarah Kofler, a performer from the Volksbühne P14 youth theatre. She comes in wearing pyjamas, carrying a pillow in her arms and looks around searching: "Hello, anybody home?"

A typical sentence from horror films before the murderer jumps out from behind the door. Here, however, only the performer Mira Partecke is switched on from the dressing room, on a large screen that stretches across the entire width of the stage. The two make a pact: Zarah gives up her life and her flat to Gob Squad for an hour.

She is allowed to walk across a wide walkway that stretches from the stage right through the audience and lie down in a cosy bed behind the last row. From here, she watches on the screen as Gob Squad make their way to Zarah's flat - and the audience watches Zarah watch Gob Squad.

A fairytale journey via live film

These live films are a good tradition for Gob Squad. Most recently, in their twelve-hour work "Show me a good time", with which they were invited to the 2021 Theatertreffen, the performers had themselves filmed live from the street into the theatre.

So what are Gob Squad doing in Zarah's flat? At first, a fairytale-like and slightly uncomfortably charged journey begins. The key to the flat has to be found like a treasure hunt, and only one performer can win. The second, Sean Patton, continues to wander through the freezing Neukölln night, asking passers-by like oracles to show him the way.

Then we watch Simon Will become a cautious and charming flat intruder. He is now Zarah and asks her about herself via a button in her ear. "What makes me get out of bed in the morning?" She answers: your niece. So they get closer to the family. He tries on her exquisite home-made clothes. He asks, "What am I dreaming about?" He even reads her diary and learns that something has happened in her life - she adds live from the stage bed that she was very ill a year ago and had to learn to walk again.

Philosophical truths behind the curtain of banality

Whether you find this banal or discover an artistic value in it - this has always been a divisive issue with Gob Squad. You have to embark on the journey and push aside many banalities like a curtain in order to discover touching little truths. For example, when Simon, as the new Zarah, discovers that he not only gets on well with his father, but also has a chosen family of friends with whom he lives. And is incredibly happy about it - how such happiness can often only be appreciated from the outside.

The evening thrives on these philosophical moments between the everyday. And from the genuine rapprochement between the young Zarah and Simon, twice her age, to whom she opens up her world. Not everything is rehearsed: Different performers visit different flats for each performance.

The search for a place in life

Of course, the evening also questions the place in life that everyone is looking for and the safe home in contrast to the homelessness through which Sean Patten wanders for a long time. Even the evil wolf makes a final appearance in the person of Mira Partercke - although this artificial fairytale level would not have been necessary. Even without it, the evening is a small, fine school of empathy that tries to understand the life of the other person as well as possible.

New venue?

The premiere was announced to take place in the Volksbühne's new "Prater Studios" - but these "studios" turn out to be a fraudulent label. What is meant is simply a play on the reduced front stage or on the back stage with fewer spectators. It is certainly not a "new venue".

It remains a mystery why it was said for a long time that the Prater Studios were not yet ready. In autumn, a premiere was even cancelled because there was allegedly not enough rehearsal time available in the "Prater Studios" after a case of illness. A typical communication confusion of the new Volksbühne, in which expectations are raised without need and not fulfilled. In any case, Gob Squad's new production is not damaged by this.

By Barbara Behrendt



Berliner Zeitung

16.12.2022

Gob Squad asks "Is Anybody Home?" at the Volksbühne

As always, the German-British performance troupe Gob Squad brings theatre life and live theatre outside into exchange, this time it's too staged.

Anyone at home? - No? Well, let's just step into the good old Volksbühne theatre, which looked a bit deserted last Thursday. At least for a première evening, to which a rather small audience had found its way this time. However, this may have been due to the slightly unusual name of the venue, "Prater Studios", for which the beautifully titled new work "Is Anybody Home?" by the German-British performance troupe Gob Squad was created.

In fact, the Prater on Kastanienallee was supposed to be the Volksbühne's second venue again long ago, but this is out of the question for the time being due to the ongoing construction calamities there. At the beginning of the season, the theatre on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz has therefore once again branched off part of its infinite playing space and renamed it Prater Studios in order to show the productions intended for the Prater.

This series begins with Gob Squad, which is by no means content with just one corner of the backstage. Rather, the troupe's tireless social researchers unfold their live art, which has been tried and tested for almost three decades and once again opens up space wonderfully, from the dressing room, where Mira Partecke slowly puts on make-up to become a werewolf, to the main stage, which becomes a giant screen, to the last row in the high stalls, where P14 actress Zarah Kofler intervenes in the action from a bed.

The Gob Squadders are never unfriendly

And it goes even further out into Neukölln at night, where the two vampire clowns Simon Will and Sean Patten first loiter on the street and then break into Zarah's flat. Of course, they do so with a key and the express permission of the tenant, because the Gob Squadders are never unfriendly. A pack right at the beginning allows them to enter the life of the good-natured hostess and she even provides guidance from the Volksbühne.

All of this takes place with a sophisticated live film technique that, as always with Gob Squad, attempts to bring the most diverse spheres, above all theatre life inside and live theatre outside, into a direct exchange that radically unhinges both positions. The fact that such live encounters always play with the unplannable harbours the special potential of the shows, which can create unexpectedly illuminating, poetic moments.

However, "Is Anybody Home?" lacks precisely this boundary-pushing strength because it lacks the truly unplanned outside. The well-conceived and vampirically seductive intrusion into the most private realm of a gullible woman remains too staged. And there is no doubt that it touches on one of the most contradictory desires of the social media age. But the actual trapdoors beneath this hardened, naïve private sphere remain closed. Nevertheless, the strong performers prove themselves to be masters of the atmospheric by consistently creating a tension between three to four parallel venues that is as eerie as it is comical. The flat victim changes in every performance - will the perspective change at some point?





PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER