

PRESSBOOK

Michael SAILSTORFER

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Searching for Order: Meditation through Repetition on a Gallery Weekend Sunday



Michael Sailstorfer: *Antiherbst*, 2013 (installation view St. Agnes).
Courtesy Johann König, Berlin

A Sunday visit to [St. Agnes church](#) in Kreuzberg to experience installations by [Michael Sailstorfer](#) rang in the final day of [Gallery Weekend 2014](#). An impressive work itself, the Brutalist landmark designed in the 1960s by famed Berlin architect Werner Düttmann has for the past year or so become a burgeoning house of culture, thanks to the efforts of gallerist Johann König and architect Arno Brandhuber.

The fourth major exhibition at this rejuvenated space is Michael Sailstorfer's *Antiherbst* (*Anti-Autumn*). With lights dimmed to movie theatre level darkness, the sound of rushing water and rustling wind are the first experiences in this cool cavernous space.

Under a single spotlight in the former Lady Chapel across from the narthex of the church spins a large wooden mill wheel, with buckets of water cascading upon it out of a pump. A chain connects this churning apparatus to the rubber wheel of the steel cart upon which it rests,

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spurring the wheel into action. As the water in the cart is recycled and pumped endlessly back over the mill, the rubber treads of the wheel slowly wear away against a surface they are prevented from traversing, instead piling up as tiny black bits of sacrifice. It's unclear whether this accumulation is the feeble output of a tremendous effort or a meaningless by-product created at the expense of only one component. In *Reibungsverlust am Arbeitsplatz (Lost Friction at the Work-Place)* (2014), the water splashes, the mill groans, and the rubber burns indefinitely for a purpose that remains unclear, yet entrancing.

Turning to face the nave, a large projection hangs where once a preacher would have delivered his sermon. A lone tree is presented at the height of summer, with nothing but vast countryside surrounding it. Every ten seconds or so, the season progresses slightly and the tree expectedly changes orange. After autumn reaches its peak and the tree is completely ablaze, a shift in anticipation occurs. Rather than gradually shed its foliage, pale emerald patches begin to appear after each subsequent transition in the film, inducing what is at first an almost imperceptible degree of cognitive dissonance. As the film evolves, the natural flow of seasons becomes increasingly perverse as the tree obstinately reverts to a greener shade in spite of increasingly gusting wind and wetter weather. Ultimately there remains a true quandary of a sight – a brilliantly verdant tree set against a world otherwise draped entirely in grey and wintry gloom.

Between cuts, fallen leaves were meticulously collected, dyed a summery shade of green, and painstakingly reattached to eventually recreate an entirely artificial canopy. In Sailstorfer's work, viewers discover processes that exercise Sisyphean levels of meaningless, though somehow leave with subsequent moments of discovery that enlighten the senses.

Similarly sensual in his work is German artist **Wolfgang Laib**. Laib is more Buddhist monk than what traditionally comes to mind when conjuring the stereotype of a German conceptual artist. But it's this subtle spiritual resonance – some honesty – that's intrinsically interwoven into his work, like a single strand of twine caught in the endless, unstoppable mechanics of a loom.

His first exhibition at **Buchmann Galerie** since 2011, Laib is not only revisiting his gallery with *Allieurs – La chambre des certitudes*, but also returning to the warm glow and olfactory-comfort of his beeswax rooms. An artist known to work in natural materials of beeswax, milk, pollen and rice to create transcendental and universal messages, Laib's first wax room was built for *Zeitlos* curated by Harold Szeemann at the Hamburger Bahnhof in 1988. The one on display now at Buchmann Galerie is one of only three of these free-standing wax rooms in

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existence.

Camouflaged with its plaster façade and brutally minimalist outer white cube shape that blends seamless into the layout of the gallery, the entrance into the chamber emanates an inviting hue of orange, set aglow by a single naked light bulb dangling from above. The scent in the small, enclosed cave of stacked beeswax blocks – a smooth, nearly buttery smell – lends itself to the calming nature of the room. The compartment, as the artist's oeuvre, was clearly not an idea conceived of for a singular exhibition but, instead, a longstanding and personal meditation with the elements, grappled with in part, perhaps, due to the artist's previous study in the field of medicine. But more likely as a sum and essence of all his experience as a person working in solitude, having courage of consistency.

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