

Wolfgang Laib

The Beginning of Something Else

June 17 – November 5, 2023

- **This exhibition was developed in close collaboration with Wolfgang Laib and presents groups of works from all phases of his career. It is his first major show in his home state of Baden-Württemberg since the 1990s.**
- **A film made especially for the exhibition grants visitors an insight into Laib's work in Oberschwaben (Upper Swabia) and at his second home in southern India for the first time.**
- **Accompanying the exhibition, a very personal book will be published with writings and images that have inspired Laib throughout his life.**

Already in the late 1970s, the artist Wolfgang Laib began investigating our existence and actions as part of fragile environments—something that could not be more relevant today. His subtle works are created in a direct engagement with nature and in accordance with the seasons. Whether he is collecting pollen for his minimalist, bright yellow floor works, or involved in the time-consuming process of creating his sculptures made of beeswax, a respect for and an involvement in nature are driving forces for the artist. Nature is the starting point for his works, and it is the source of his ideas.

Born in Metzingen in 1950, Laib's life has revolved around his home near Biberach in Baden-Württemberg for more than thirty years now. As an artist, he works globally and has a studio in New York and a second residence in southern India. Laib began traveling extensively already when he was young. He became acquainted with Far Eastern cultures and philosophies, which left an impression that is clearly palpable in his works. With their reduced language of forms and concentration on only a few materials, they invite us to perceive them slowly, while appealing to our body and mind to equal degrees. Laib's works have the air of evolving in a resonance chamber of the holistic understanding of life and the world—one in which humans are part of a greater whole.

Beeswax, milk, pollen, rice, and marble are natural materials Laib primarily uses in his art, varying them in several concentrated groups of works. His most well-known works include wax rooms, pollen fields, rice houses, wax houses, milkstones, drawings, and photographs. Visitors to the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart are likely to be

already familiar with Laib's art. There are nineteen of his artworks in the museum's collection, including expansive works like *Zikkurat* (Ziggurat) (2001) and *Wachsraum* (Wax Room) (1989). The latter was permanently installed on the lower level of the museum in 2005. In the entire world, there are only seven of these rooms, which are clad with sheets of beeswax and enable visitors to have a visual as well as olfactory experience.

In this exhibition, which was developed together with Laib, the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart is presenting artworks from the most important groups of works from all phases of his career. The museum's specific architecture was taken into account when selecting and deciding the placement of the works. Relying on context, his works unfold their full potential in the interaction and interplay with the sites and spaces where they are shown. Distributed over the three levels of the Kubus, the visually diverse works also form a unity or harmonic *Gesamtkunstwerk* that can be explored in the context of this specific exhibition.

The Kunstmuseum Stuttgart is presenting *Reishäuser* (Rice Houses), *Reismahlzeiten* (Rice Meals), *Zikkurat* (Ziggurat) and two *Treppen* (Staircases) coated in Burmese varnish, *Wachshäuser* (Wax Houses), one *Milchstein* (Milkstone) (1993), along with the room-filling installation *Not Here* (1996), as well as drawings and photographs made by the artist on his journeys. Changing the usual order, the exhibition will begin on the third level of the Kubus. In this spacious, unusually open exhibition room, the artist has arranged thousands of *Reisberge* (Rice Mountains) in a seemingly infinite grid structure. The exhibition continues on the second level with *Türme des Schweigens* (Towers of Silence) (2019–2022), which is being presented in a museum exhibition for the first time. The shape of these sculptures made of beeswax is based on the architecture of religious buildings used by the Zoroastrians (followers of the religion of Zarathustra) as sites for sky burials. In the central, high-ceilinged room of the Kubus, Laib created a pine pollen field, a floor work for which the artist collected pollen over several weeks before sifting the delicate material onto the floor in the museum to form a bright yellow carpet of pollen. The view from above provided by the museum's architecture grants visitors new and unique perspectives on an what is perhaps Laib's best-known series.

A documentary film about Wolfgang Laib made especially for this occasion will be shown at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart beginning on July 20, 2023. The filmmaker Maria Anna Tappeiner, who is particularly well-known for her artist portraits and culture documentaries, accompanied the artist at work with her film team for twelve months. It shows how the changing seasons are just as decisive for Laib as where he lives and works in Upper Swabia and southern India. The film project was initiated by the museum and not only sheds light on how Laib develops and creates his works; it also captures the things in life that are relevant for his artistic practice.

Accompanying the exhibition is a richly illustrated "reading book" published by Hirmer Verlag that offers a unique approach to Laib's work. It is a collection of all the writings and photographs that have been especially important in the artist's life

and thoughts—and that are also reflected in his artistic work. Included are passages from the Epic of Gilgamesh, a poem by the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma, and quotes from the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche or the American artist Agnes Martin. These are accompanied by photographs Laib took on his many journeys, discovered in books, or collected as postcards.

Curators Ulrike Groos, Anne Vieth

Assistant curator Alina Grehl

Kunstmuseum Stuttgart opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday 10 am – 5 pm

Fridays 10 am – 8 pm

Admission

€ 11 / € 8

Kids under 18 years free of charge

Book

Hirmer Verlag, German / English, 362 pages

Museum price € 37, ISBN 978-3-7774-4228-0

Retail price € 39.90, ISBN 978-3-7774-4196-2

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Press images available at: www.kunstmuseum-stuttgart.de/presse/laib

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