

WOLFGANG LAIB

“... e vidi cose che ridire né sa né può ...”

Opening Wednesday 25 October 2023, 6.30 pm -9.00 pm

Galleria Lia Rumma | Via Stilicone 19 | MILAN

Gallery opening times: Tuesday - Saturday 11.00 am-1.30 pm and 2.30 pm -7.00 pm

The Lia Rumma Gallery is pleased to announce the opening on Wednesday 25 October 2023 of “...e vidi cose che ridire né sa né può...”, the first solo exhibition by the German artist Wolfgang Laib in its Milan gallery. The title is taken from a phrase in the second *terzina* of the first canto of Dante’s *Paradiso* which reads as follows in the complete version:

Within that heaven which most his light receives

Was I, and things beheld which to repeat

Nor knows, nor can, who from above descends

The poetry of the *Divine Comedy* provides the starting point for Wolfgang Laib to embark, like a latter-day Dante, on an equally upward and spiritual journey, through various forms of “mental architectures of light”. These immaterial compositions are the result of Laib’s unceasing quest to get a glimpse of the universal and eternity in various cultures and traditions of the world, in the form of identical or similar thoughts and ideas that have appeared in different places and eras. Laib does this by making use of natural materials because, as the artist himself recounts, “What I like about pollen, milk and beeswax is that they can become spiritual entities”.

Wolfgang Laib’s mystic journey unfolds on the three floors of the gallery. At the entrance, on the ground floor, visitors encounter *Zikkurat* (2000), a large ziggurat 4 metres high, completely covered in slabs of wax, which, with its steps, from the bottom indicates the direction towards the lofty heights and the spiritual realm, from the material world to the transcendental world. The form of the ziggurat appeared for the first time in his work in 1995 and draws on the ancient religious structures of Mesopotamia, which he visited during his extensive travels in the Middle East.

Moving up to the first floor of the gallery, the artist has positioned *City of Silence* (2015-2023), an installation consisting of 34 sculptures in beeswax that evoke urban landscapes and architectural motifs - towers, houses and ziggurats – recurrent features of Laib’s visual narrative which are also inspired both by the architecture of medieval Italy and the towers of silence used in the rites of Zoroastrian exorcism in ancient Persia. It is as if the artist were handing us a sort of utopian, ideal city that belongs to everyone and no one.

The second floor is devoted to the patriarch of Japanese Buddhism, Kōbō Daishi: “a Japanese monk,” explains Laib, “who lived from AD 774 to AD 835. His tomb in Koyasan is one of my favourite places in Japan, situated at the end of a cemetery in a cedar forest. Behind the temple, there is a small wooden structure with two closed doors. Many pilgrims go there every day in the belief that the monk sits in a state of eternal meditation behind the doors”. Wolfgang Laib has done a drawing directly on the walls of the gallery which depicts the tomb of Kōbō Daishi, with two closed yellow doors at the centre, surrounded by white waves which give substance and form to the life force, almost a sound that emanates from this sacred site. On the opposite wall, *Pollen from Hazelnut* (2023), a small mountain of pollen, another element of spiritual energy, resting on a white pedestal, acts as a counter-attraction to the drawing of the temple, going beyond the concept of physical death.

In conjunction with the Gallery exhibition, Wolfgang Laib's solo exhibition, "Passageway" opens at Villa and Collection Panza - FAI, Varese, on Thursday, October 26th, 2023..

Wolfgang Laib (Metzingen, Germany, 1950), lives and works between southern Germany, southern India and New York. After studying medicine at the University of Tübingen, he devoted himself to artistic practice, creating sculptures and installations that appear to link past and present, the ephemeral and the eternal, using simple but highly symbolic organic materials, usually associated with nourishment, such as pollen, milk, beeswax and rice.

His work has been presented at Documenta (1982, 1987) and at the Venice Biennale (1997, 1999, 2019), while his first major institutional exhibition was held in the Musée d'art moderne de la ville in Paris (1986). Numerous solo exhibitions were subsequently devoted to his work, in particular at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington (2002), the Dallas Museum of Art (2002), the Haus der Kunst in Munich (2002-03), the Fondazione Beyeler in Basel (2005-06), the Fondazione Merz in Turin (2009) and at the MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt (2010). His largest work in pollen was installed in the atrium of MoMA in New York in 2013. In the same year, the artist’s first permanent installation, a room of beeswax, was opened in the Phillips Collection in Washington and in 2014, he created a permanent underground chamber of beeswax 40 metres long in La Ribaute Anselm Kiefer’s studio complex in Barjac.

In 2015 he was awarded the Praemium Imperiale at Tokyo. In Italy, the Museo Novecento presented his works in various historical sites in Florence in 2019: the monastery of San Marco, the Chapel of the Magi in Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, the Pazzi Chapel in the church of Santa Croce and at the Rucellai Sepulchre in San Pancrazio. In 2023 the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart devoted a solo exhibition to the artist’s work and presented the premiere of the documentary “Wolfgang Laib: Here, Now and Far Beyond”.

