

Press release

# Wolfgang Laib

## *City of Silence*

11 March—22 April 2023  
Opening Saturday 11 March 2023, 4—7.30pm

Thaddaeus Ropac  
Paris Marais  
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Wolfgang Laib, *Zikkurat*, 2018. Wax. 43 x 44 x 6 cm

This exhibition will present a new group of installations reprising recurring motifs from internationally acclaimed German artist Wolfgang Laib's poetic and highly symbolic oeuvre. Occupying the floor of the Paris Marais gallery will be Laib's gently fragrant beeswax sculptures, while along the walls, a series of new works on paper will provide a more intimate insight into the artist's meditative and conceptual practice.

Laib employs simple, organic materials in his work that are often linked to sustenance, such as pollen, milk, beeswax and rice. Each component is imbued with aesthetic power but also carries a wealth of associations connecting past and present, ephemeral and eternal. In *City of Silence*, the artist references places of dwelling and worship that are connected to his own experiences of the Middle East, as well as in India and Southeast Asia, which

he visited throughout his youth. The title of the exhibition, in particular, recalls the ancient, circular burial sites in India and ancient Persia known as the Towers of Silence. Open to the elements, they represent the link that Laib identifies in many ancient architectural forms connected to the afterlife as ‘the bond of the sky with the earth’. His own beeswax structures have been described by poet and art critic Donald Kuspit as representing ‘the enlightenment, transcendence, and selflessness the monk pursues through meditation – the inner solitude necessary for higher consciousness.’ Together with the delicate drawings in pollen yellow and milky white, they form a poetic landscape, imbued with spirituality, inviting visitors to become, as Kuspit continues, ‘participating observers in search of our own sacred significance’.

*the simpler it is*  
— *the more essential it is*  
— Wolfgang Laib



Wolfgang Laib, *Tower of Silence*, 2021  
Wax. 76 x 20 x 18 cm



Wolfgang Laib, *Untitled*, 2022  
Oil pastel and pencil on Arches handmade paper. 57 x 76 cm

Rather than a creator or innovator, Laib considers himself a vehicle for ideas of universality and timelessness already present in nature. ‘The pollen, the milk, the beeswax,’ he explains, ‘they have a beauty that is incredible, that is beyond imagination, something which you cannot believe is a reality – and it is the most real. I could not make it myself, I could not create it myself, but I can participate in it.’ It is this philosophy that fuels the artist’s ties to the aesthetics of Minimalism, which seeks to attain a form of truth through visual purity and geometric harmony. Following a similarly rigorous formal process of conception and installation, Laib distinguishes himself through his use of materials, reminding us that there is still art being made in defiance of this profane world – an intimate art that can afford spiritual sustenance.



Wolfgang Laib in his studio. Photo: Lea Crespi.

### About the artist

Born in Metzingen, Germany, Wolfgang Laib studied medicine at the University of Tübingen from 1968 to 1974 before becoming an artist. His work was presented at documenta in 1982 and 1987, and his first major institutional exhibition was held at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris in 1986. He has subsequently been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, notably at Centre Pompidou, Paris (1992); CAPC Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (1992); Carré d'Art, Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes (1999); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2002); Dallas Museum of Art (2002); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2002–03); Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2005–06); Musée de Grenoble (2008); Fondazione Merz, Turin (2009); and MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2010). His work is currently part of the exhibition *De la nature* at the Musée de Grenoble.

Laib's largest pollen piece to date was installed in the atrium of The Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2013. The same year, the artist's first permanent installation of a beeswax room opened at The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. In 2014, Laib's *From the Known to the Unknown—To Where Is Your Oracle Leading You*, a 40-metre-long underground chamber made of beeswax, was permanently installed in Anselm Kiefer's studio La Ribaute in Barjac. In 2015, he was awarded the Praemium Imperiale in Tokyo. In 2017, an exhibition of his work was shown at the Secretariat in Yangon, Myanmar and a survey show was organised by the Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland. In 2019, several of Laib's works were shown across historical sites in Florence, Italy, in a city-wide exhibition organised by the Museo del Novecento. In 2022, the Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur, Switzerland presented a temporary installation in which Laib laid out a field of thousands of rice mounds.

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