

Press release

Wolfgang Laib *Türme des Schweigens*

23 May—18 July 2026
Opening Saturday 23 May 2026, 11am—1pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Salzburg Villa Kast
Mirabellplatz 2, 5020 Salzburg



Wolfgang Laib, *Mittelalterlicher Turm bei Spoleto, Italien*, 2026
Pencil and oil pastel on paper. 29.6 × 42 cm (11.65 × 16.54 in)

In this exhibition, Thaddaeus Ropac Salzburg presents a new, never before exhibited, series of works by Wolfgang Laib, as well as five monumental wax towers, all created within the last year. Over more than four decades, the artist's work has been characterised less by formal changes than by a strong sense of continuity. Drawing on a

way of thinking that underlies Eastern philosophies, Laib's art conveys ideas of universality and timelessness already present in nature. The new works on paper continue the themes and visual languages of his artistic thinking, drawing from central motifs of his previous work.



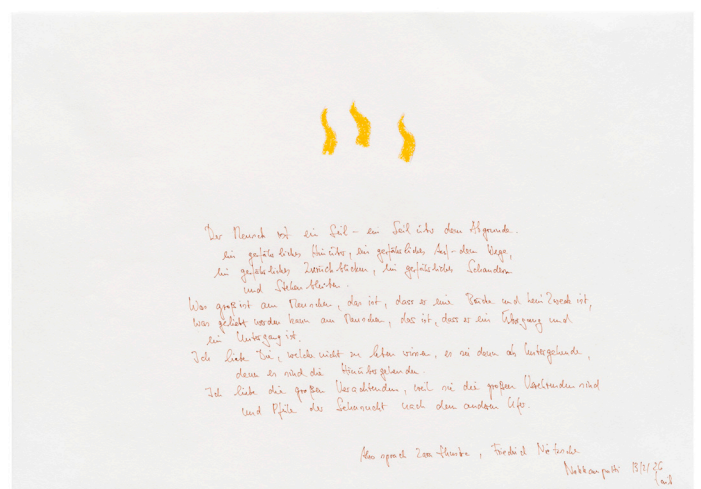
Wolfgang Laib, *Mittelalterlicher Turm bei Spoleto, Italien*, 2026
 Print on paper. 29.6 × 42 cm (11.65 × 16.54 in)

These new works take as their starting point photographs taken by Laib during his travels. The artist's work is always closely linked to his experiences in India and South-East Asia – regions he visited throughout his youth. The images document buildings and landscapes that are of central importance to Laib, both in the context of his work and in terms of his worldview. They show various towers in Italy, India and Iran, some set amidst dense forests or vast desert landscapes, or in views that evoke the impression of archaic civilisations. The artist does not attach primary importance to the exact location where the photographs were taken. Instead, he relates them to passages of text that he transcribes from writings and which have long accompanied his artistic practice. 'These are texts that have significantly influenced my life and work. They form an extremely complex world – very different worlds – from which I have learnt a great deal about what is important in life and what is not,' explains the artist. These include writings spanning 4,000 years, which mark chapters within the series of works and simultaneously define four exhibition spaces: aphorisms by Lao Tzu, the prayer of St Francis of Assisi before the crucifix of San Damiano, a fragment of a novel by Novalis, and the Upanishads, a

collection of religious writings from the late Vedic period. A fifth room is dedicated to the exhibition's eponymous thematic focus, the 'Towers of Silence'. By interweaving numerous references, the artist appeals to a sense of the universal, rooted in shared cultural frameworks and traditions. Laib's process of reduction is a process of unification. He creates connections between different cultural and temporal contexts as part of a meditative engagement with the shared human experience.

Photography [...] often depicts the physical, but it opens up so many connections that do not exist in the physical world. — Wolfgang Laib

Some of the photographs and text excerpts are complemented by delicate drawings in wax crayon that explore variations on the architectural theme of the exhibition. In one of the works, a ziggurat is depicted schematically with white wax crayon and delicate graphite lines. A passage in vivid orange from the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh serves as a visual and thematic complement to the depiction of this Mesopotamian temple structure: 'O, Gilgamesh, where are you wandering? / the life that you seek you never will find: / when Gods created mankind, / death they dispensed to mankind / life they kept for themselves.' Another work on paper dated from February of this year depicts three golden-yellow flames, in a hue that is reminiscent of the beeswax of the artist's wax towers. It is complemented by an excerpt from Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'. The rhythmic combination of select visual elements opens up a meditative engagement with the text passages and combines artistic form with conceptual precision. The works on paper, together with the wax towers, reflect Laib's idea of a unified space in which multi-layered elements form a whole and invite contemplative immersion.



Wolfgang Laib, *Also sprach Zarathustra, Friedrich Nietzsche*, 2026
 Pencil, oil pastel and ink on paper. 29.6 × 42 cm (11.65 × 16.54 in)



Wolfgang Laib, *Turm des Schweigens*, 2026
Beeswax. 197 x 63 x 79 cm (77.56 x 24.8 x 31.2 in)

The motif of the tower has occupied a central place in the artist's work for years, and last summer he created five wax towers for the exhibition, one for each room. These works form part of an ongoing series of striking architectural forms that Laib sculpts from wax on the hottest days of the year, when the material can be worked outdoors using the natural heat. The works are created in dialogue with nature and in harmony with the seasons. In addition to narrow towers, the series also includes small houses and ziggurat structures with stepped forms. Through a process of reduction, Eastern and Western traditions merge to form these representative shapes.

The impulse for Laib's exploration of the theme 'Towers of Silence' came from the discovery of an abandoned tower in a secluded valley in Italy. 'The tower is surrounded by

the ruins of an abandoned village [...]. A world from another time and yet incredibly present,' describes the artist, commenting on this formative experience in nature. He still dreams of lining this almost thirty-meter-high tower with beeswax. It is also towers that lend the exhibition its title: the so-called 'Towers of Silence' served the Parsis as a place to lay out their dead and as sites for sky burials. In this form of decarnation, the flesh and soft tissues are consumed by birds, vultures or ravens. This ancient Oriental building type, constructed from solid materials, symbolises the connection between heaven and earth, this world and the next, godly beings and humans. In his sculptures made of beeswax – a primal, fragile material that Laib has been using in his works since the 1980s – he takes up this spiritual approach and imbues the architectural, formal language of the works with a delicate, almost immaterial quality. Laib centres both the ephemeral and the enduring within his work, realising both forces of existence through his material process. He has pursued this concept since his beginnings: wax 'has an incredibly strong physical presence, and, on the other hand, dissolves into immateriality'. Above all, Laib's art aims to formulate profound, supra-individual statements about our existence in the world.

The artist's works are currently on view in a celebrated solo exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich (until autumn 2026).



Wolfgang Laib, *Tower of Silence, Yezd, Persien*, 2026
Print, pencil and oil pastel on paper. 29.6 x 42 cm (11.65 x 16.54 in)



Portrait of Wolfgang Laib, 2017

About the artist

Born in Metzingen, Germany, Wolfgang Laib studied medicine at the University of Tübingen from 1968–74 before becoming an artist. His work was presented at documenta in 1982 and 1987. In 1982, he represented Germany at the Venice Biennale 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 the 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); Fondazione Merz, Turin (2009); and MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2010). His 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-meter-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 will present his temporary installation of a laid-out field of thousands of rice mounds. A celebrated institutional exhibition took place at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart in 2023.

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