

Kunsthalle Wien

Olaf Nicolai There Is No Place Before Arrival 13/7 – 7/10 2018

Press conference: Thursday July 12, 2018, 11 am

Opening and talk: Thursday July 12, 2018, 6 pm

There Is No Place Before Arrival is the title of the multilayered exhibition Kunsthalle Wien dedicates to German artist Olaf Nicolai. Renowned for his inventive work with a diverse array of materials and mediums, Nicolai's artistic output is at once conceptual, complex and poetic. He develops a variety of interdisciplinary projects that address the primary experiences of space, time and corporeality.

“The method” as an artistic approach to work

There Is No Place Before Arrival will focus on issues arising from a particular “method”. This method not only determines the way Nicolai conceives and realizes his work, but also becomes a type of work itself. For the Kunsthalle Wien space, the artist will create a temporary, site-specific installation. He selected a number of images from newspaper clippings and commissioned street and theatre painters to transfer them to the floor of the exhibition space in the form of chalk tracings. The result will be a walkable sequence of motifs – a tableau consisting of evocative images with both political and poignant connotations that will unfold under the eyes of visitors over the course of the exhibition. Visitors will be invited to traverse the painted floor, allowing the gradual transformation of the work and its process-like nature to take place. The chalk will blur, and the imagery will become unrecognizable until all that remains are fragments of the original paintings.

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What do we see and how do we see?

Another aspect demonstrating Nicolai's methodological approach is the way he engages with the context of the presentation of his artwork. In order to reflect on this context and call it into question, the exhibition will continue to take place outside of the institution, and develop in the form of interdisciplinary projects, thereby multiplying the references and interactions the works make with one another and to their environment. For Vienna, the artist is planning collaborations with Georg Fritsch Antiquarian Bookshop, ZOOM Children's Museum, Sigmund Freud Museum, and museum in progress. On certain days he will also have Helene Weigel's Mercedes Benz Ponton parked near the Burgtheater Wien and Volkstheater Wien. The wife of Bertolt Brecht bought the car in 1967 in her capacity as director of the Berliner Ensemble.

The Deserters' Monument at Ballhausplatz will be another site for his wide-ranging exhibition activities. Based on a design by the artist and built in 2014, it is a memorial to people persecuted by the Nazis for refusing to serve in the military. Reactivated for the exhibition, the monument will play an essential role in the current project, serving as a venue for vocal performers to perform a cappella pieces. The work is a continuation of *Escalier Du Chant* realized in 2011 for Munich's Pinakothek der Moderne. Nicolai commissioned eleven international composers to write songs based on political events that were of current relevance to them. Without prior announcement, the songs were then performed by Stuttgart's Neue Vocalsolisten on the museum's central staircase.

Nicolai's methodological approach will allow viewers to see his works from different perspectives and therefore relate to them in different ways. In some cases, they may not even reveal themselves as artworks. The artist frequently re-contextualizes familiar motifs or tries to recreate images from memory. He takes up questions from science and the humanities, turning them into something that can be experienced aesthetically and thus in a new context.

The exhibition title *There Is No Place Before Arrival* is based on Nicolai's work *Don't Spend Time Searching the Colorful Layered Flood of Leaking Information, or: There is no place before arrival*. It consists of a large stone slab made of Precambrian quartz sandstone that dates back to a time before the first appearance of living things on earth. *There Is No Place Before Arrival* suggests that when thoughts, words, pictures and gestures are conveyed, they don't arrive in some pre-existing place as such, but actually create it upon arrival. At the same time, the title is a poetic paraphrase of the dialectic of desire – "hoped-for duration and permanent delay in motion," as the artist says, commenting on the title of his Vienna exhibition.

Olaf Nicolai not only discloses his method in *There Is No Place Before Arrival*. In fact, he will connect performative elements, works that will transform during the course of the exhibition, and motifs from pop culture – all of which will interweave to form a dense web of references alluding to iconic moments in politics and

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intellectual history. At the same time, the exhibition will stage a set of changing situations for visitors to explore and experience in a scattered, rather nomadic way as well as by appropriating the works in a very personal manner.

St. Gallen, Bielefeld and Vienna

There is No Place Before Arrival at Kunsthalle Wien will be shown in conjunction with two other exhibitions presented at Kunsthalle Bielefeld (opens on June 15, 2018) and at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (opens on July 7, 2018), respectively. Together, the three exhibitions will provide an overview of the artist's multifaceted work and reflect the interdisciplinary concepts he has used over the past twenty years. The focus in Bielefeld will be on the museum's architecture, which was designed by Philipp Johnson, and on themes such as proximity and distance, inclusion and exclusion. For the LOK, the second venue of the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, the artist will design a walk-through environment that looks like a desert but could also be a lunar landscape. Shifting relationships between the body, space and movement play a key role here, but so (and maybe even primarily) do the effects evoked by these shifts in our imagination. In 2019, the three institutions will collaborate and produce a comprehensive publication.

Curator: Luca Lo Pinto

Olaf Nicolai (*1962) lives and works in Berlin. He studied German language and literature at the Universities of Leipzig, Budapest and Vienna, and has worked as a visual artist since 1990. In addition to participating in many international solo and group exhibitions, he has exhibited at documenta X (1997) and documenta 14 (2017), and at the 49th, 51st and 56th Biennale (2001, 2005 and 2015). For his work *In the Woods There Is a Bird...*, which was commissioned by documenta 14, Olaf Nicolai was awarded the 2017 Karl Sczuka Prize for works of radio art.

Press release

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