

RETO PULFER «FACHZUSTAND»

1.6.-18.8.2024

Reto Pulfer (*1981 in Berne/CH) transforms architecture. With self-sewn tents, repurposed bedsheets, and plant-dyed linen, the artist reimagines the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen. In his cosmos, we meet Kurumina, Theazea, earthworm snakes and animate nettle leaves that inhabit the details of the fabric panels. An autodidact, Reto Pulfer works in a variety of textile techniques, with performance, painting, sound, gardening, words and text. His world is rhizomatic, immersing us in intertwining stories and taking us from one state (*Zustand*) to another.

Zustand, German for current state, hints at the ephemerality of Pulfer's tent-like installations, shape-shifting in every show and often repurposed for newer arrangements. *Zustand* also refers to the state of mind that his works evoke by creating spaces of affect.

Kurumina schreibt auf (Theaceas Traum) [room plan 1] obstructs the entrance to the exhibition. The sandy yellow comes from the turmeric root, which has been used to dye fabrics for thousands of years. Originally exhibited in Basel's historical city center, the sail-like work has been torn at the edges by wind and weather. Various details shimmer through splashes of plant colour: cryptic numbers in black marker label the largest piece of fabric as industrial remain, while a blue strip indicates Japanese linen production. Faded handwriting bears witness to Reto Pulfer's processual approach: collecting fabrics online, in second-hand shops, or from his family, he uses them for diary entries and sketches, dyes and washes and dyes them again, only to repurpose them along the way.

Kurumina, Theazea and Gina are recurring protagonists. In *Kuruminas kurkuma-gelben Mulltücher (Theaceaes Traum)* [2] a pillowcase made of polyester features an ancient Egyptian-style hieroglyphic print. Roughly suggested circles and a spirit-like silhouette in blue ink tell of Theazea, the tea insect, who pours tea into cups with her six arms. Along with Kurumina and other figures, she is part of Reto Pulfer's fantastic cosmology, which spans many of his works and various media, including fabric, novels, woven pieces, and digitally designed Jacquard ribbons.

One such ribbon can be found at the foot of *Der Himmel im Blau des Halbtoten* [3]. Micro-stories and quotes from the book *Gina. A Zustand Novel*, published in 2020, unfold over a length of one meter and across seven color levels. Blue is a colour that has long accompanied Reto Pulfer: it is the colour of the sky, of water, of the unconscious, of depth, and the colour

frequency of the night. It is also present in the pigment powder of the indigo plant, whose synthetic production in Germany made chemical history in 1878.

Pfeil [4] is partly coloured with indigo. The tent-like polygonal prism was made specifically for the exhibition. It consists of cheap polyester curtains, mass-produced goods that evoke traditional St. Gallen embroidery. Their translucency allows a vista of the large-format installations forming a space reminiscent of an Italian piazza, with the woven work *Form, Fachzustand* [5] at its center. References from architectural history are a primary source of inspiration for Pulfer. Similar to Chinese garden architecture, Renaissance frescoes, Egyptian burial chambers, or Baroque grotto settings, his works transcend architecture and painting.

Tunnel [6] is site-specific to the Kunst Halle. Made of cheesecloth, it leads the way to the next room. In cheese-making, cheesecloth is used to separate the solid curd from the liquid whey. Here, the artist transforms it into a new state, forming a tube of 15 × 5 meter strips that will undoubtedly be repurposed in future works.

The end of the tunnel gives way to two tent-like structures and three wall works. *Livingthing* [7] serves as a shelter made from old clothes and fabrics dyed with walnut, elderberry, and goldenrod. The tent-like structure is suspended from braided cords, Jacquard and hand-woven ribbons designed by Reto Pulfer. Similar to the pieces in the initial room, this artwork extends beyond its sewn surfaces; the ropes and ties that suspend it hold equal significance for the artist. The lanyards and outer sides of *Livingthing* quote passages from the novel *Gina* (published in English in 2022). While the cat Majoran complains «I am tired of practicing tear jerker tonal purity», Pulfer ponders the fundamental nature of art with a ballpoint pen: «Is it comprehensible? Can it be bought? Is it handmade? Is it professional? Is it legible?» (*Ist es verständlich? Ist es käuflich? Ist es handgemacht? Ist es professionell? Ist es leserlich?*)

The wall piece *Plot* [8] also contains a whole story. «Out of the hole comes / comes a story / an adventure / of clones / all the same» (*Ausdem Loch geflogen kommt / kommt eine Geschichte / ein Abendteuer / aus Clonen / alle gleich*). It is about reality and simulation: a being in constant mutation navigates from one simulation to another in search of the one true world. The plot winds through a map of jeans seams and fabric lines, adorned with machine-embroidered planetary shapes.

The fabric lines seem to continue on the adjacent work *Simulat* [9]. In a similar exploration of reality, Pulfer employs airy, transparent fabrics sourced from nightgowns, sewn together in curves and bends to create spatial depth. These fragile fabrics juxtapose heavy, coarse materials dyed with plants before transitioning back into silk, lace, and chiffon. Amidst these textures, one can spot two earthworms rendered in Jacquard fabric. The artist drew them digitally, with each pixel corresponding to a woven stitch. Just as textile and digital histories intertwine, the autodidact seamlessly integrates various disciplines and forms of knowledge.

The theoretical and often humorous exploration of ornamentation, hinted at in the work *Sonnen/Sterne* [10] and elaborated into a complete system in the wall piece *Verungimpflichen* [11], exemplifies this multidisciplinary approach. A notation of swirls on the right-hand part of the image provides a key to this ornamental system. Following its principles, paint strokes and fabric applications in the form of nettle snakes grow around four axes of symmetry. The piece is framed by an ornamental frieze of nettle leaves, at times smiling, at times sad, at times amorous, and at times indignant. A colourless leaf at the lower edge has to discover that disorder is part of every order: «I am outside of the pattern!» it exclaims in a speech bubble (*Ich bin außerhalb eines Musters!*).

Reto Pulfer's ornaments, codes, metonyms, and motifs converge in the middle room of the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen. We enter an unfinished state: raw fabrics, a Jacquard work, and potential details on the floor await to be incorporated. A work-in-progress weaving turns the room into a loom. The artist's roughly recorded electric guitar sounds are woven into the fabric garlands strung from wall to wall. An instrument-object concentrates the thematic undertones: the composition builds on the tension essential for sound production in strings, weaving frames, and the creation of art itself.

In weaving, tension forms the *Fach* (*shed* in English), the temporary opening created between the warp yarns through which the weft is woven. It is a poetic and even musical space, dynamically opening and closing amidst taut strings. *Fach* also refers to *field of expertise*, considering that Pulfer's self-taught practice spans many techniques and approaches. With gardening and engaging in nature as further elements of his work, Pulfer created a habitat for nettle, calendula, cosmea, and borage plants in the backyard of the Kunst Halle, connecting his architectural transformations to the public space. Maybe this is where we meet the protagonists of the *Nettle Poem* [19] one last time:

we are the seven sages and my name is Kurumina
the others are Caps, Thea, Majoran, Thymus and Dschina
in the twilight the six sages whisper from afar
when will the seventh shine like a star?

VERANSTALTUNGS- UND VERMITTLUNGSPROGRAMM

PRESS PREVIEW

On site: Friday, 31 May 2024, 10 am
Online: Friday, 31 May 2024, 11 am
Zoom link via kiolbassa@k9000.ch

OPENING

Friday, 31 May 2024, 6 pm
With a performance by Reto Pulfer, 7 pm

INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

On site: Tuesday, 4 June 2024, 6 pm
Online: Thursday, 6 June 2024,
7 pm to 7.30 pm

GUIDED TOUR ON TUESDAY

Tuesday, 4 June 2024, 6 pm

PAINTING AFTERNOON FOR KIDS

Wednesday, 12 June 2024, 2.15 pm
register via info@k9000.ch

ART SNACK

Thursday, 27 June 2024, 12.30 pm
Short guided tour and a snack
Admission: CHF 10/members CHF 7;
No registration required

SUMMER PARTY

Saturday, 6 July 2024, 6 pm
with performances by Reto Pulfer and
guest artists

ART LUNCH

Thursday, 15 August 2024, 12 pm
Guided tour and lunch
Admission: CHF 25/members CHF 22
Register via rsvp@k9000.ch

FINISSAGE

Sunday, 18 August 2024, 3 pm
Guided tour and concert by Puder
(Barbara Pulfer and Reto Pulfer)

WORKSHOPS FOR SCHOOL CLASSES

From 5 June to 4 July 2024. For more
information, see www.k9000.ch

PRESS

You can find high-resolution images in
the press kit on our website under
Info/Press. For further questions
contact Giovanni Carmine
carmine@k9000.ch or Barbara Kiolbassa
kiolbassa@k9000.ch

RETO PULFER (*1981 in Berne/CH) grew up in Arlesheim, Basel/CH and lives and works in Angermünde/DE.
Solo exhibitions (selection): «Hüllen Zustand», Studio Mondial, Berlin/DE (2023); «Livingthings», Hollybush Gardens, London/UK (2022); «Blitzzustand», KunstHausPotsdam, Berlin/DE (2022); «Gegenwartsgewächse», Fundaziun Nairs, Scuol/CH (2020); «Ein Nebel aus Prä-Adamitischen Sternensprossen», AWHRHAR, Los Angeles, California/USA (2019); «Dehydrierte Landschaft», Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva/CH (2015). Group exhibitions (selection): Art Basel Unlimited, Basel/CH (2024); «Parasiten», Kunst(Zeug)Haus, Rapperswil/CH (2024); «The Stomach and the Port», Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool/GB (2021); «Art en Plein Air», Môtiers, Neuchâtel/CH (2021); «En Pratiques», Lafayette Anticipations, Paris/FR (2020); «Weiche Raster», Kunstmuseum Olten, Olten/CH (2018); «Metamorphosis», Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin/IT (2018).

KUNST HALLE SANKT GALLEN

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Di-Fr 12-18 Uhr
Sa/So 11-17 Uhr