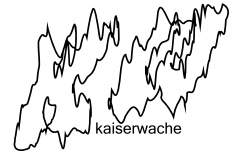


Michael Ray-Von

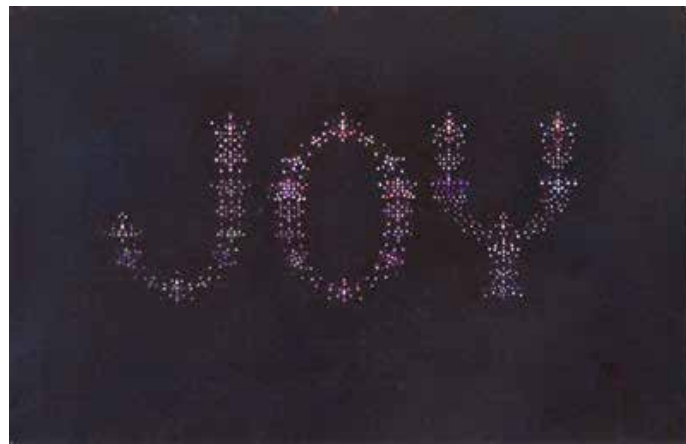
Joy

Sept. 12–Oct. 12, 2025



I quit drinking a few months ago, because I had more work ahead of me than I could reasonably complete with a hangover. This fairly dramatic change in my diet had two notable consequences: I started eating far too much candy; and the emotion I had been (largely unbeknownst to me) drowning in wine started regularly surfacing. Most prominently a feeling of abundant joy began welling up in my chest rather unexpectedly and with frequency. A lot of water metaphors here—"my cup runneth over" with water metaphors. After some time this feeling didn't return; suppose my system established a new baseline. But I thought it worth mentioning just thinking how rare joy must be for so many of us. And to report that I felt it briefly.

This exhibition isn't named for that joy, though. The titled is borrowed from Stephen Kaltenbach's painting of the same name. Despite having appeared on every relevant list of the time, Kaltenbach, a self-described "secretive person," is perhaps the least well-known of the first-wave American "concept art" cohort. He has a number of references in Lucy Lippard's "Six Years"; he was included in pioneering curator Harald Szeemann's landmark exhibition "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form"; you get the picture. He emerged in New York City at the end of the 60's, attracting attention with conceptual pieces that, with a simple phrase, injected an uncanny in the everyday and a slippage in the logic of time and space, in a manner typical of the conceptual canon. "Joy" is an instance of his "Nuclear Project," in which he made various artistic proposals for the disposal of the world's nuclear arsenal; in this case launching every nuke simultaneously into space, thereby creating a typographical explosion of the word in the night sky.



Joy [Nuclear Project], 1994, 48 x 34 in. Acrylic on black velvet

By 1969, Kaltenbach had a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum, and in 1970 suddenly announced his departure from the cosmopolitan art world of New York and from the concept art practice that won him fame. In a seemingly dramatic shift, he relocated to Sacramento, California, and rededicated himself to creating meticulously detailed, large-scale psychedelic paintings.

Sibylle and I found this jigsaw puzzle of a Francis Bacon painting at some thrift shop in Basel. It seems someone had bought it at the Fondation Beyeler gift shop but never bothered to open it, and an unopened thrift store jigsaw puzzle is the best kind. We assembled it on the coffee table over several days, starting with the border, then the figure. Once those had been completed we set in on the background. This part was a struggle; we even organized the remaining pieces by shape to help us place them. And after some hours of painstaking assembly, it was abandoned.

Michael Ray-Von

About the artist:

Michael Ray-Von (*1988) lives and works in Basel. He completed his BFA at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, and his MFA at the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst FHNW in Basel. His recent exhibitions include *Instrument Soundtrack* at Pech, Vienna (2025); *Hapax Smile* at Can, Vienna (2023); *Time, please* at Kunst Raum Riehen (2023); *Mirror Mirror on the Wall* at Alte Fabrik, Rapperswil (2023); and *Something is Burning* at Kunsthalle Bratislava (2022). In 2025, he was a finalist for the Swiss Art Awards.

About Kaiserwache:

The name Kaiserwache carries a historical irony. The building's proximity to Kaiser-Joseph-Straße and Kaiserbrücke—named after Emperor Joseph II's visit to Freiburg in 1777—points to the city's imperial past. The bridge itself was once adorned with bronze statues of historical figures such as Henry V and Frederick Barbarossa. During World War II, these statues were removed with the intention of melting them down for war production—a plan that was ultimately never realized. Due to high transportation costs, the statues remained unused after the war. To this day, the empty niches remain visible—just steps away from Kaiserwache.

Beyond this historical dimension, the building's original function as a public restroom adds another layer—perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to the throne of the king. The Art Nouveau structure has seen a turbulent past: damaged in both World Wars, used as a refuge for drug users in the 1980s, and evolving into a well-known cruising spot in the 1990s. Traces of this history remain visible—graffiti, phone numbers, and explicit inscriptions, which have been consciously preserved as artifacts of the site's unofficial past. Today, the building is under historical preservation and serves as an exhibition space since 2021.

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