

Michael Beutler



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Vleugel 19



Z33 presents the first major solo exhibition in Belgium by German artist Michael Beutler. In his most expansive presentation in over a decade, he transforms the spaces of Wing 19 with a combination of new and existing works.

Beutler is known for creating monumental installations using simple, recyclable materials. He designs and builds his own tools to transform paper, cardboard and textiles into sculptural elements, which in turn become the building blocks of his expansive, space-filling installations.

For Beutler, an exhibition space is a public atelier. His art doesn't originate in the studio but evolves in dialogue with the museum's architecture and with the help of a large team. More than fifty assistants, students and volunteers contributed to this exhibition. Beutler approaches each project as a learning process, where participants explore the possibilities of materials together. The exchange of knowledge and skills is as important as the final result.

Beutler shows that with limited means and collective effort, something significant can be achieved. His work invites both physical engagement and critical reflection. How can we actively shape the world around us and our relationships with others? What tools do we need to do so? And can we strengthen both our autonomy and our sense of community by sharing knowledge and practical know-how?

For this exhibition, Beutler and Z33 collaborated with architecture students from UHasselt and product design students from LUCA School of Arts, Campus C-mine. In this way, the Hasselt beguinage – home to UHasselt's new architecture campus – was activated as a hub of collaboration, knowledge-sharing and experimentation.

Stiff Pants

Stiff Pants transforms the first gallery of Wing 19 into a colorful colonnade. Not a classical colonnade with heavy stone columns, but a row of paper-covered wire-mesh columns that lean against the wall in a delicate balance. The reference to monumental architecture remains, but is reimagined with a sense of playfulness.

Architecture and craft are key inspirations for Beutler. He reinterprets them using simple materials and techniques, making it possible for almost anyone to contribute to his installations. No prior expertise is required. Practical skill helps, but more important is a willingness to collaborate and learn from others.

With *Stiff Pants*, Beutler reshapes the museum's architecture, altering one's spatial experience and drawing attention to subtle details. This arrangement of the room echoes the street just beyond the wall; the columns, too, subtly evoke public space. The length of the gallery allowed Beutler and his team to first assemble the ten-meter columns horizontally before erecting them.

At the back of the room, visitors will discover a sort of wrapping device that Beutler devised to coat both sides of the wire mesh with paper. Long tubes were used as molds to shape the mesh fencing.

Beutler considers his hand-built tools as sculptures in their own right. By leaving them in the space, he reinforces his vision of the museum as an atelier or workshop. In doing so, he breaks with the romantic image of the solitary artist working in seclusion. He even goes a step beyond the conceptual artists of the 1960s, who delegated the execution of their ideas to assistants or specialists. For Beutler, the idea is only a starting point; the final work takes shape on site, in dialogue with the team. Together, they decide on the work's form, color and scale.



Michael Beutler, *Double Up*, 2011. Mesh fencing, paper, wallpaper paste, wood, steel pipe, paint buckets, packing tape, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Open House*, 3rd Singapore Biennale, Singapore, 2011. Photo: Paul Reinhardt.



Production of the exhibition *Stardust*, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein, 2022. Photo: Nikola Neven Haubner.

Bucket

Beutler's work always responds to the architecture of the location. Sometimes, as in the previous room, he fills the space with sculptures that shift one's sense of scale and orientation. In other cases, he intervenes directly in the architecture.

Bucket was created specifically for the large tower of Wing 19, where daylight streams in from above. Beutler constructed a wooden grid to function as a paper screen and suspended it from four columns. In the adjacent courtyard, he installed a paper mill: powered by two people, this tall, foot-operated pendulum device is used to pulp the pages of old books.

The grid is filled with paper pulp except for two sections, which are left open. After several days of drying, the pulp hardens into sturdy paper. Two people stand in the openings and hoist the screen up using pulleys, creating a lightweight, floating ceiling. Lit from above, the fibers in the recycled paper remain visible. This work plays with the qualities of the space while subtly transforming it.

The construction is partly inspired by an early student work. For *Gipsdecke* (2002), Beutler dipped a suspended ceiling in a plaster bath and then hoisted it up. As a student, he couldn't afford expensive materials or assistants, so he enlisted help from his peers. That collaborative experience laid the foundation for his current practice.

The Garden

Rustika - kommt die 0 zur 8

Zustand mit Loops und Kringeln

Michael Beutler, *Rustika - kommt die 0 zur 8*, 2007. Packing paper, painting paper, wood glue, wood, aluminum tube, pulleys, wheels, dimensions variable. Installation view, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, 2008.
Photo: Michael Beutler.



The three installations in this gallery space all center on the transformation of paper – one of Beutler’s favorite materials. It is cheap, widely available, flexible and surprisingly strong. These qualities make it ideal for turning flat surfaces into three-dimensional sculptures.

Beutler designed the tools used to create these works himself. They are simple but require teamwork. At least three people are needed: one to operate the machine and two others to process the material.

Although the production process is partly standardised, it is far from mechanical. Beutler deliberately designed the tools so that users can decide how to work with them. This results in variations in size, color, material and finish. Unlike in industrial settings, here production is not driven by market demand but by spatial needs. The process stops when a balance is achieved between space, form and volume – when the room feels neither empty nor too full.

Some sculptures are more refined than others, as participants learned by doing. As their skills developed, the production process became more efficient. Beutler chooses to present all outcomes to highlight that the learning process is part of the work. In industry, such irregularities might be unwanted. Beutler, by contrast, is interested in how standardised systems can still leave room for variation and personal expression. His tools aren’t meant to replace human labor, but to support and enhance it.



Michael Beutler, *Zustand mit Loops und Kringeln*, 2012. Stencil paper, milk carton, wood glue, pocket sewing machine, wire, dimensions variable. Installation view, Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt am Main, 2014. Photo: Wolfgang Günzel.

The Garden consists of large paper grids propped against the wall. The fragile structures resemble fences, invoking architecture, decoration and the Belgian waffle.

During their creation, the sculptures were laid flat on the floor. The size of the room determined their dimensions. The cubes on wheels you see in the space were used in clamping, gluing and pressing the paper. Now that their job is done, you're welcome to sit on them.

Rustika – kommt die 0 zur 8 consists of columns made from stacked paper rings. These were produced using a tool operated by three people. The paper is wrapped around two drums, glued in the middle and tied with string. The drums are then pressed together, producing the ring's distinctive, crumpled waist.

Not all rings are equally strong, so the columns vary in height. If you look closely, you'll notice subtle differences in shape, texture and finish.

Zustand mit Loops und Kringeln is made from tracing paper, stencil paper and drink cartons. Several layers are sewn together and pushed in one flowing movement across a curved beam, producing loops and curls. The sculptural modules are piled up into a large mass, as if flooding the room like a wave.



Michael Beutler, *The Garden*, 2011. Stencil paper, kraft paper, underlay paper, cover paper, wood glue, recycled exhibition walls, wheels, clamps, cardboard tubes, knives, wire, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Sculptural Acts*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2011. Photo: Wilfried Petzi.

Models and samples

Beutler's models provide insight into how his large-scale sculptures and installations come into being. Before beginning a project, he tests the properties of the materials and experiments with construction techniques. Often the original idea proves unworkable – because, for example, the structure collapses under its own weight. Making models is thus a learning process in which ideas are tested and refined until they are ready for full-scale execution.

Depending on the required level of detail, Beutler builds larger or smaller models. A small model might represent a monumental sculpture, while components like joints are sometimes tested at full size.



Michael Beutler, various models and samples, 2002–2014. Installation view, *Haus Beutler*, La Loge, Brussels, 2014. Photo: Lola Pertsowsky.

Michael Beutler, *Shipyard Model*, 2017. Wood, 64.5 × 180 × 94 cm. Installation view, Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt am Main, 2017. Photo: Wolfgang Günzel.



Michael Beutler, various models and samples, 2002–2014. Installation view, *Haus Beutler*, La Loge, Brussels, 2014. Photo: Lola Pertsowsky.



Haus Beutler

While Beutler fills the ground floor with sculptural installations, on the upper floor of Wing 19 he constructs a new set of rooms within the museum. *Haus Beutler* divides the space into a series of smaller rooms made from fragments of his work from the past 25 years. For the wooden structure, Beutler draws inspiration from traditional Japanese architecture – a key influence, admired for its refined craftsmanship and technical ingenuity. The walls both divide the space and connect the galleries into a unified whole.

Amid colorful walls, you'll find models, tests and videos from earlier projects. They offer a unique glimpse into Beutler's thinking, techniques and collaborations. *Haus Beutler* is both a mini-retrospective of his oeuvre and a site-specific installation. Since 2000, he has realized more than 150 sculptures and installations. Due to their scale, it's impossible to show them all, so he brings together fragments of many. This reflects Beutler's open-ended creative process: his constructions are never truly finished and can always be revisited or adapted.

Even the furniture – tables, benches, lamps – is part of his body of work. In this way, the installation playfully reimagines Z33 as a 'house' for art, design and architecture.



Michael Beutler, *Haus Beutler Frame System*, 2016. Wood, fragments of various works, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Pump House*, Spike Island, Bristol, 2016. Photo: Stuart Whipps.



Michael Beutler, *Weaving Workshop*, 2009. Recycled textiles, rope, wood, steel, wire, dimensions variable. Installation view, Atelier Michael Beutler, Berlin, 2013. Photo: Michael Beutler.

Loom and Carpet

Beutler built this enormous loom to weave carpets from recycled textiles. He initially sourced fabrics from a street market near his Berlin studio. Over the years, the loom has travelled to multiple exhibitions, producing hundreds of meters of carpet. The fabric remnants are always sourced locally.

At Z33, Beutler set up a weaving studio in one of the galleries. He trained students from UHasselt and LUCA Campus C-mine to use the loom. Each carpet requires six people and takes about a week to produce. Each one weighs around 400 kilograms.

Because the carpets are made from large pieces of fabric, they pucker slightly, creating a wavy effect. The idea to cover the entire floor with undulating carpets emerged as a response to the ceiling's design, to which this space owes its nickname: *Le Lac* ('The Lake').

Studio Door

During his visits to Z33, Beutler noticed how seamlessly Wing 19 connects to Wing 58. While this architectural continuity gives the building a sense of unity, it also has a downside: the exhibition route in Wing 19 lacks a clear endpoint. To resolve this, Beutler concludes the route with the door of his former studio.

This gesture aligns with his view of the museum as an atelier. At the start of the exhibition, you symbolically entered the artist's studio; now you exit through the same door that Beutler closed behind him every evening for many years.



Michael Beutler, *Carpet*, 2009. Recycled textiles, rope, wood, steel, wire, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Pump House*, Spike Island, Bristol, 2016. Photo: Stuart Whipps.

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