

Michael Sailstorfer

To the People

Fields of roses. In the middle of an old beverage factory. The roses are carefully arranged in plastic bottles, 1000 of them. Each flower is replaced every day. So that the leaves never wilt and at the same time the buds wait to emerge and unfold. A state of suspension is created, a crevice. Between withering and blooming, between being and becoming. The growth of the plant invites us to look at the process of change - and symbolically demonstrates the importance of transformation. What is the relationship between the evolution of the plant, with its stem, flower and thorns, and the evolution of our lives and societies?

"To the People" is a multi-layered installation, a meditative landscape of associations. But above all, it is a gesture: a gift from the heart to the people, who are going through a time of upheaval. Paying attention to them, acknowledging their courage and encouraging them through the language of flowers is an important part of the installation by artist Michael Sailstorfer, one of the most important German sculptors of his generation. In his works, the artist exposes the imaginary power, materiality and temporality of things and their relationships - transforming them into living sculptures of transition, in which other interpretations, forms of existence, but also a poetic life of their own, become possible.

In the installation "To the People", Sailstorfer makes a subtle reference to the German artist Joseph Beuys, whose idea of a "social sculpture" places people at the center of social change. At Documenta 5 in Kassel in 1972, Beuys staged a participatory performance for the entire duration of the exhibition, 100 days. In it, he discussed ideas with visitors about how society could be changed through creative action. On the desk in the Kassel office where the performance took place was a glass vase with a rose, which was replaced daily. Later the setting became a multiple, a similar work of art with several editions.

Sailstorfer takes up this idea - and develops it further. He multiplies the possibility of continuous beginnings that mature into social energy in interaction with the viewer. For behind every rose there is already a development that cannot be stopped. A growth that has already been achieved or is still dormant, that is also inherent in human beings. The idea is that every biography brings about change. In the open as well as in the hidden. To paraphrase the Iranian poet Ali Abdollahi (علی عبداللہی) and his poem (تا انتہا) from 2007: Every dream leads to another page. The people can participate in this. They are invited to make their own connections in silent conversation with the installation, or to bring more roses to add to the others. In this way, "To the People" will grow over time into a symbol of change, while at the same time exuding the scent of compossibility.

- Frank Steinhofer, 2 May 2023

