

frieze

Franz Erhard Walther

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff , Paris, France

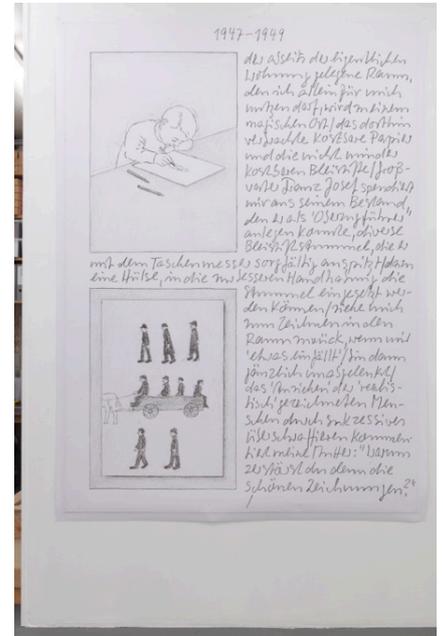
‘Sternenstaub, herausgehoben’ (The Dust of Stars, Accentuated) was Franz Erhard Walther’s third solo exhibition based on his sprawling series ‘Sternenstaub’ (*The Dust of Stars*, 2007–09), which comprises 524 pencils drawings of personal anecdotes and historical events from the artist’s life, chronologically organized from 1942 to 1973. On single sheets of A4 paper, Walther drew one or two images alongside a few brief descriptive sentences, and then assigned a year to each drawn memory sequence.

‘Sternenstaub’ traverses the realms of literature, history, and visual arts, freely borrowing from the styles of the diary, the drawn novel, and the columns or chronicles of newspapers (the poster *Sternenstaub 1968*, for instance, includes a drawn reproduction of an article titled ‘Duchamp Dies at 81’). This systematic but imperfect recollection process is one of the bases of Walther’s practice, as well as a common interest shared by many conceptual artists and others from the 1950s until now (think of John Baldessari, Dan Graham, On Kawara, Hanne Darboven, Anri Sala, Francis Alÿs, Tacita Dean...).

About this review

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By Caroline Soyez-Petithomme

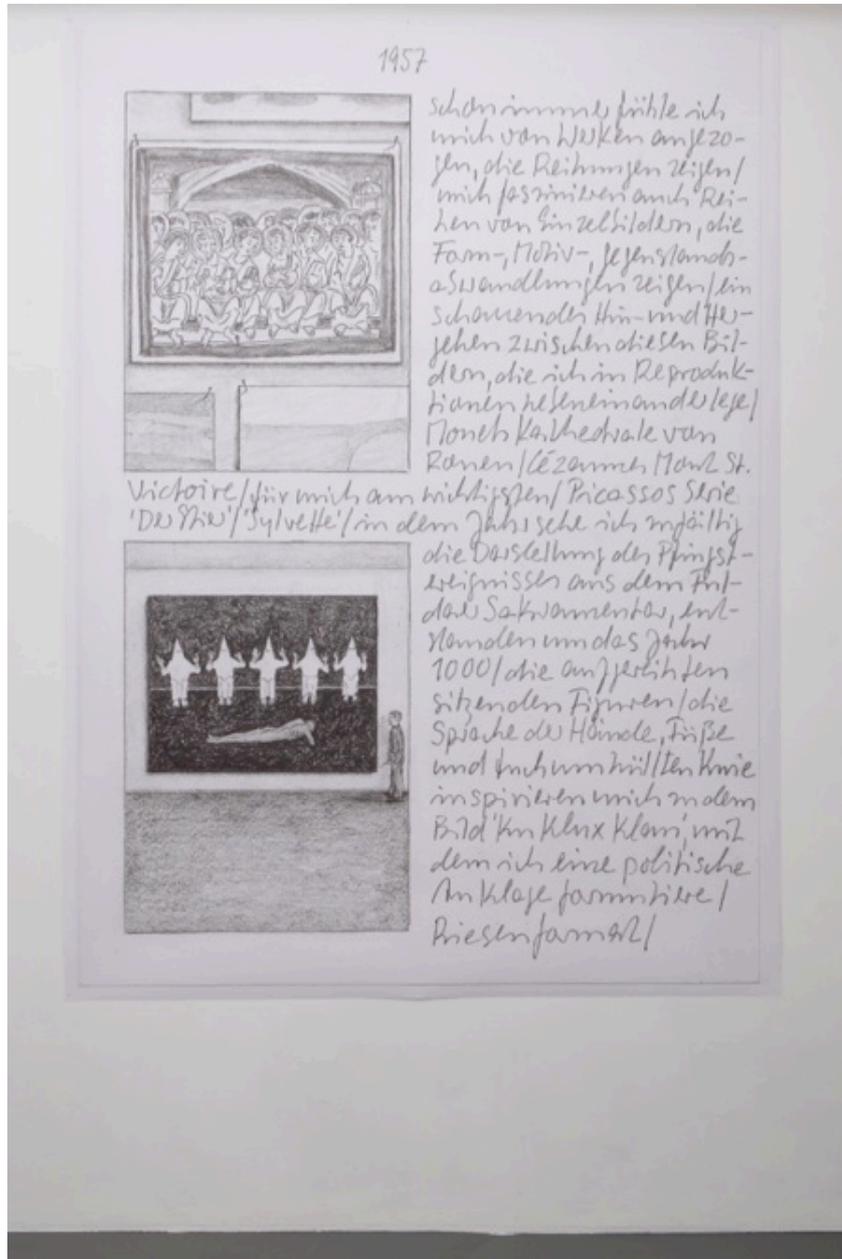


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In the middle of the exhibition space at Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Walther placed three tables presenting his drawn plans for hanging the components of ‘Sternenstaub’, which

he originally designed for his solo exhibition at MAMCO in Geneva in 2010 (the entire series is on view through February 2012 at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, Germany, and compiled in a book, *The Dust of Stars: A Drawn Novel*). The tiny, meticulously redrawn versions of each page require a reading glass to be examined. On the walls, as a counterpoint to those plans, Walther enlarged and redrew 42 drawings, as well as printing three of the original drawings as large posters. In this sense, the exhibition was a dismantling of the original 'Sternenstaub' grid.



Storytelling and anecdotes form the matrix of the legend of any artist, and Walther consciously participates in this process: the poster *From Sternenstaub 1947–1949*, for instance, depicts himself drawing as a small child. Another poster, the enlargement of a page labeled '1957', illustrates Walther's fascination for reproducing works such as Cézanne's *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire* and Monet's *Rouen Cathedral*. Walther also includes his drawn representation of some of his own previous art works, such as the performance

of the *1st Work Set* (1963/9), consisting of 58 sewn fabric elements, thereby producing new accounts of their production and performance. This open-ended and inclusive strategy (or *mise-en-abîme*) has been crucial to Walther's artistic practice. The fact that he uses his own history as fundamental source material also anticipates and emphasizes the mythologizing of his own work and of a wide range of the art of the 1960s and '70s (which is so important for contemporary artists today).

In 'Sternenstaub, herausgehoben' the blown-up or close-up effects drew the viewer's attention to the medium of drawing itself, from the composition to the texture of the pencil and paper. With these basic gestures, those formal manipulations metaphorically evoked a cosmos whose stars and their dusts had been scattered or spread out. They also revealed themselves as crucial empirical and aesthetic decisions relying on the appropriation of psychological and sociological approaches usually employed by art historians or art critics. This kind of retrospective analyzes the diverse conditions within which Walther's inspiration came. While his historical research is autobiographical, it confronts the presupposed objectivity provided by the archival document (reports, stories or photographs) with the subjectivity and inevitable partiality of memory or history. Therefore, the nature of 'Sternenstaub' remains unsolved: is it an archive, an artwork or an autobiography?

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