

On line: June, 5th, 2008

[GALERIE JOCELYN WOLFF](#)

78, rue Julien-Lacroix,
May 21–June 28

After half a century of making art, Franz Erhard Walther has drawn a novel, *Sternenstaub—A Drawn Novel*, 2007–2008, and tacked hundreds of its pages, each with fine hand-drawn illustrations, to the gallery walls. A viewer follows the story of the artist's life, bumping into legendary artists (Joseph Beuys; John Cage; Marcel Duchamp, who died not long after he called Walther for a studio visit) and inhaling the mad intensity of the postwar avant-garde, which now seems like ancient history, as far away—and romantic—as the ruins of Rome. Beside the novel, there are also interactive sculptures from the early 1960s (for instance, *Two Cardboard Rolls [piece to overcome embarrassment]*, 1962) and a five-hundred-page book of watercolors and theoretical propositions (*New York Book*, 1967–73). The exhibition has the look, initially, of a retrospective. On examination, though, one finds that the book is indeed the thing: Some of the sculptures were chosen because they are in the novel, and *New York Book* is featured precisely because it is a book. A photocopied “novel” laid open on the wall and a closed artist's book on a table (viewable with gallery assistance): This is Mallarméan territory, and it is hard not to ask, “What is a book?” The question nestles, as if in parentheses, inside a larger query about the nature of art; or (to invert the spatial metaphor) art is framed here by the question of the book, which is to say, by the problems and possibilities of interpretation. But for all these conceptual cartwheels, Walther's art is phenomenological, not deconstructive. It seeks to locate the grounds of lived experience and, by sharing them with the viewer, to somehow redeem them. Whether or not Walther—or indeed any artist—succeeds in this task is an open question. But one salutes the effort, and the ideal.

— David Lewis



View of “Franz Erhard Wathler.”

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