

Flaunt

14 March 2019

Michael Sailstorfer | The Warranty Has Been Voided Due To Conceptual Intervention

By Shaun Parker

<https://archive.flaut.com/content/michael-sailstorfer>



Berlin in the winter is frigid. Outside temperatures drop well below freezing, regularly hovering around -10 degrees Celsius (that's 14 degrees Fahrenheit). The polished concrete buildings blend into the snow and clouds. It's stark.

In the winter of 2017, artist Michael Sailstorfer built a fire. His show *Hitzefrei* consisted of six car frames painted flat black, with a large oven set into each chassis. A haphazard black chimney climbed from each car into the ceiling. Outside, the König Galerie that held the show looked like a factory, smoke pluming from the roof.

"I was interested in this picture of a traffic jam," Sailstorfer tells me from his Berlin studio. "Or a factory, and the kinetic energy of the car being translated into something else—heat. So, it had to be pretty warm in there."

That's an understatement. While outside was below freezing, Sailstorfer's exhibition was 104 degrees Fahrenheit. "Almost claustrophobic," he says with a wink.

The mechanics and craft of the *Hitzefrei* cars is impressive. In such a minimal space, Sailstorfer created a perfect visual metaphor for the modern urban environment: a smoking vehicle carcass, cleaned up nice for a gallery.

Sailstorfer's talent as a craftsman and sculptor is undeniable. He's been doing it since forever. His father owned a stone working business in Lower Bavaria, about an hour north of Munich. His father gained the business from his father. Sailstorfer grew up in that family workshop, building things from whatever was on the floor.

"That's what I did a lot in my childhood," he says. "Building stuff using materials just laying around—pieces of wood, pieces of stone, like whatever. As long as I can remember, I was spending time at the workshop."

After high school, Sailstorfer took a year off. After that year, he still wasn't sure what he wanted to do. He applied to a few schools, and his options narrowed down to architecture or art— both building, both mechanical, but very different headspaces. He went with art school. "I picked it because it's more free and I can do whatever I like," he says. He made a deal with his father—he'd "try the art thing," but if he failed to make a living at it, he would do something else.

Turns out the Sailstorfers had nothing to worry about. By his sophomore year, their son was in the papers. His first show, *Herterichstraße 119*, consisted of a couch built out of materials from a demolished house. He got some pictures of the house before it was destroyed, and hung them above the piece. People responded, and he got some attention. "That was the starting

point," he says. "Well, one starting point." The next came only a few weeks later. The Munich Museum of Contemporary Art approached him to do a large installation outside of the museum. It had a real budget and a six-week timeline. He went for it, and created the piece "Und Sie Bewegt Sich Doch," a model of the solar system made of cars, crumpled metal, streetlights, and other urban detritus. "That was the first museum thing," he says, "That was in like several German newspapers. Then some galleries got interested..."

From the start, Sailstorfer had a very clear vision of what he wanted to do. "I was also willing to put a lot of hard work into it," he says. "At the beginning I did all of the stuff with my own hands in the studio. Maybe an important thing was that I just wanted to do it. I knew I wanted it, and so I just did it."

There's a quote by Saint Francis of Assisi that's become a bit of a cliché, but it goes, *He who works with his hands is a laborer. He who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman. He who works with his hands and his head and his heart is an artist.* Sailstorfer's hands, to start, are clearly present in his work. Everything he does is immaculately executed, and he's a great example of how strong handiwork can lead to stronger conceptual work.

Back in the furnace of the König Galerie in Berlin, a video is projected against the wall. It's a single-shot of a rustic home somewhere in the European countryside. From the top of the frame, a single tear begins to fall. It looks like a cartoon, big and bulbous and blue, falling in slow motion. Once it makes contact with the house, however, it hits like a wrecking ball, and the roof crumbles under its weight. Over time, tears continue to fall, until all that remains is rubble.

"I think it was like half a year of planning," he says. "I put three cranes around the house, and we dropped those cast-iron tears, each as heavy as around 2,000 kilos, on the house for about two days until it was completely destroyed... Then a big part of the piece was the post-production, taking away the crane cables and the shadows of the cranes. Post-production took a huge part of the production of the piece."

The resulting video, "Tränen," is well-produced and highly conceptual. The practical skill needed for creating this, from the cast-iron tears to post-production, showcases Sailstorfer's deep toolbox. The conceptual elements of it, however, show off Sailstorfer's ability to wrestle with complex themes. "I think 'Tränen' was generated more from a feeling, a feeling connected to a picture, I can't tell you exactly what it means. But, on the one hand, it has to do with sadness, and on the other it has to do with slapstick."