

Germany

Riedel at his Frankfurt restaurant. See the artist at work in a behind-the-scenes film, creating the set for a Wallpaper* fashion shoot and a limited-edition cover (W*180), at Wallpaper.com



Times tables

Artist Michael Riedel finds a place for mathematics, history and celebrity chefs

On a recent Friday afternoon Michael Riedel was pondering if the pop star Jarvis Cocker might be interested in cooking for him. The German-born artist had gathered assistants and staff from the David Zwirner gallery around a table for a bite at the Freitagsküche, Riedel's cantina-style restaurant near Frankfurt's train station, while planning the upcoming show at Zwirner's London space, which opens this spring.

The exhibition itself seemed almost finalised, laid out in small-scale models that the group had pored over at Riedel's neighbouring studio earlier that day. But he wanted the opening to feature a pop-up restaurant and was looking for someone to take control in the kitchen. He thought of asking someone famous, like Cocker, and scanned a list of other potential chefs, among them theatre actors, art collectors and curators. He was also looking into shipping

over some German wine, and investigating whether his signature typographic and geometric compositions could be glued to the floor of the nearby exhibition party venue, a vacant concrete space on the Strand.

The Freitagsküche has become an institution in Frankfurt (and as a travelling concept), inviting guest chefs to prepare informal home-style German and international cuisine for a predominantly young and creative crowd, and hosting regular parties in its basement night club, 28 Steps Down. Run by Riedel and co-owner Thomas Friemel, the restaurant celebrates its tenth anniversary this year.

But as passionate as the always Mod-suited Riedel is about the restaurant experience, it remains detached from his artistic practice (though since his new studio is right behind the restaurant, he is considering whether to knock through the wall and put in a door for

easy access). The restaurant developed out of Oskar-Von-Miller Strasse 16, the space where he and fellow artists, fresh out of the Städelschule art school, cheekily appropriated and staged new versions of exhibitions, cinema screenings, club nights and readings from other cultural venues. 'At some point we'd copied all the different cultural events in the city,' he says.

Still, Riedel and Dennis Löesch, the co-founder of Oskar-Von-Miller, wanted to keep the space going. 'We had this house and we wanted to invite people, so we thought: "Let's start a kitchen so we can meet for no reason". Eating and drinking, everybody needs that. It's something besides the art, it's more like the absence of art.' And, he adds with a laugh, 'it was more crowded than our shows.'

The food project grew from being a private gathering of friends to become

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT, JACQUES COMITÉ (GIACOMETTI)'S INSTALLATION VIEW AT PALAIS DE TOKYO, 2013. AUDIO CASSETTE WITH THE RECORDING OF *SHITTING AND PISSING*, 2000 (SEE W*180 LIMITED-EDITION COVER). *UNTITLED (RANDOM BARS HORIZONTAL)*, DIGITAL PRINT ON ARCHIVAL CARDBOARD, 53CM X 142CM, 2014

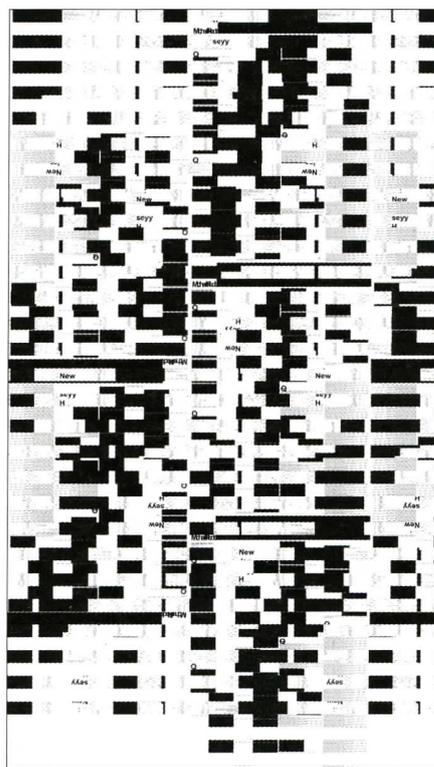


a restaurant proper and moved to its current location. The Oskar-Von-Miller building was eventually torn down in 2006.

The 'Laws of Form' exhibition at Zwirner promises to be something of a landmark for Riedel, who's also putting the finishing touches to a book documenting the Oskar-Von-Miller era. Previous works will take up the entire first floor, while the ground floor will hold new paintings. The show takes its title from a book by George Spencer-Brown, a sort of instruction manual to applying philosophical concepts to mathematical logic. Riedel, too, approaches his work with mathematical rigour. 'When you draw a circle, you're not only defining the inside of the circle, but also the outside,' he muses. 'I think identity is replaced by the difference. It's not defining a thing, it's more like talking about the difference between two things. Whenever there's a form done, you can also think about the undone version.'

That thought has permeated Riedel's work, from the precisely systematic to the intuitive and humorous. On the surface, his silkscreen-on-canvas paintings are strongly geometric and typographic. Words and shapes are used as colours and forms. Text, often code cut from various websites (W*180) mentioning Riedel or his work, are intended as image. 'It's a dialogue, in a way,' he says. 'Someone has written an article, and I'm making a poster out of it, then putting it together as a poster painting about someone that has written an article and so on.'

If this seems like cerebral heavy lifting, Riedel also does mischievous humour. Early on in his career, he hired two actors to mimic the British art couple Gilbert and George as they attended the opening of their 'Nine Dark Pictures' exhibition at the Portikus gallery in Frankfurt in 2002. When the Danish-born artist Jeppe Hein installed two moving walls inside the Galerie Michael



'The installation is like a Warhol film, you can tell the plot in a sentence'

Neff in the city in 2001, Riedel and fellow artist Achim Lengerer strapped on white cardboard boxes, entered the space and copied the movement of Hein's installation 'It was our first appearance in a white cube and to enter the white cube – as a white cube – was great!' Riedel remembers.

Those were the Oskar-Von-Miller days and true to form, Riedel has compiled a 'conference of anecdotes' from that time, a transcript of six people who, over two days tell as many anecdotes as they can remember. Yet they all speak at the same time and their voices are transcribed as such, jumble together. 'The intention was to tell everything, but at the same time, the stories are disappearing,' explains Riedel, smiling.

For the first of three ongoing installations in the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, visitors enter a landscape of text with all the Os capitalised. The text itself is a transcript, made by speech recognition software, of the ambient sound of art handlers taking down an Alberto Giacometti exhibition at the Hamburger Kunsthalle. 'It's like a Warhol film, you can tell the plot in one sentence and then you have to watch it for two hours,' says Riedel of his sound structures, citing an artist whose oeuvre is often related to Riedel's own, since both practice production as art.

Still, Riedel traces his method back not to Warhol but to an early collage of his own. In a book, he came across a chart of art history since 1800 whose entries ended in 1980. The artist copied the timeline, shrank it, added it to the end of the existing timeline and labelled it '1995', condensing 180 years into a single year and hinting at an ongoing process of recycling ideas. It's only now that he's ready to articulate what that means. 'You can say there is an artificial timeline in the real timeline,' he muses. 'This is how I work.'★
'Laws of Form' is at David Zwirner London from 5 April-31 May, www.davidzwirner.com