

May 25 – June 28, 2023

Michael Pilz Film Retrospective

Austrian Filmmuseum, Vienna

The commentary accompanying the retrospective at the Austrian Filmmuseum, May-June, 2023, follows a different approach than on previous occasions. It is comprised of texts by Michael Pilz himself, of passages and quotes from his work notes, emails, and statements that reflect on his entire oeuvre and thus provide insight into the strategies guiding his artistic practice. The filmmaker himself takes the floor.

The work as a whole forms a unity, represents a quest for a spiritual core, and reflects the need to continually deepen our awareness of our unconscious. “How did I become who I am? Who am I?”

All his films are alike, all films are distinct from each other, the frame of mind remains the same. Sometimes only the air that cinematic images breathe is different. Every movement, every breath opens up an entire universe. Seemingly unintentionally, the same eye (of the camera) gazes at other manifestations of the world. Branches, flowers, a table, people, windows, dogs, and horses... whatever enters the frame and is illuminated by the artist’s gaze—it is not judged, while also not arbitrary. This often results in a curious form of hovering over beings and things that correspond to each other through the montage.

But there is never the suggestion that “You have to look at it the way I do.” It’s just, “Look, if you like, that’s the way it is—that’s how it was *there* in a here and now. This is how I saw it.” He often talks about how his films could also be shown in a room with no audience—in an endless loop. Perhaps that would even be the ideal setting.

Thus, the following texts will certainly not outline any content—there is none to speak of in a narrative sense. But scenes and vistas aren’t lined up randomly, either. Rather, every cut needs to be exactly where it is. Once takes have been selected from a huge pool of footage, the result is irrevocable and definitive.

These films and writings reflect our lifelong search for our own self and a yearning for beauty that cannot be described or achieved. Perhaps also a longing to dissolve and simply disappear into these pictures. Some may want to follow his example.

(Birgit Flos)

“This is what, or approximately what, the opening of my new film could look like: Candidly, freely associating, stringing together images and sounds like the words of a poem, a kind of poetry (condensation), its meaning only revealed *between the lines*—through individual cinematic elements—in the immediate perception of what is seen and heard. Yet not only in front of oneself, on the cinema screen so to speak, but also experiencing, at the same time, what it does to oneself, here and now. It is not all that important *to know* what is seen or heard, where this and that originated, what it may indicate. What matters is our personal involvement, the immediate experience, the emotional quality of the *event of cinematography*. What effect do the images and sounds I encounter have on me? What does the—different—film they evoke in me look like? What am I *really* perceiving?”

(Michael Pilz)

This Is How I See, How I Remember My World

A Film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2022, DCP, color, 159 min.
Persian/English/Spanish/German

Everything you do, you have to do for yourself first.
Everything you think, you must first think for yourself.
Everything you want, you must first want for yourself.
If you are not connected to yourself—deeply connected—
you are not connected to anything (in this world).
That’s why you need to connect with yourself first and foremost.

Your eyes must be *your* eyes.
Your actions must be *your* actions.^{{}L}_{{}SEP}
Your will must be *your* will.
Your fear must be *your* fear.

It’s about finding (!) a *form* that touches us, touches us from within.^{{}L}_{{}SEP}
A form for *the hearts*.^{{}L}_{{}SEP}
From the heart.

(Michael Pilz)

For You

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2013/2018, DCP, color, 6 min

A long film, but not long enough, you don't want it to end.

This is all the dream of the film promises: Son et Image. A black film screen is an image, too, a projected, supposedly empty shade of black. A secret. It can conceal everything, bury or protect it within itself. The only thing it can't cover up is the sound. A nocturnal drama glides across the screen, one of parting, grief, and loss. Or maybe not. A different drama for everyone. You want to hold on to the real parameters—sound, image, chronology—so as not to lose yourself altogether in the associations they evoke. It's as if you had closed your eyes and were experiencing the invisible with open eyes. Then the motion picture slowly opens its eyes. The dream leaves you with an afterimage. There it is, gradually disappearing again. Then black, then wind, then waking up. Where was I?

(Birgit Flos)

Meeting in Petalidi

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2018/2023, DCP, color, 52 min. Greek/German

Summer vacations at the sea in Petalidi, Greece, staying with my dear friend photographer Angelos Dimitriadis and his wife Stavroula. We were like two relaxed, cheerful, knowledgeable, elderly gentlemen, philosophizing into the sunny afternoon; musing about our work with images, with photographic and cinematic methods, and whatever else was on our minds; while close by, old and young went swimming, or splashed about, in the shallow waters at the beach; and in the evenings, the lights of Kalamata beckoned in the distance. This film is also a farewell to Angelos, who passed away on March 23, 2023 and to Stavroula, who died seven months later in Athens.

(Michael Pilz)

Windows, Dogs and Horses

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 1993/2006, DCP, color, 40 min. German

My film *Windows, Dogs and Horses* comprises a montage of individual takes as well as entire scenes that give precedence to cinematic reality over the reality of objects. They were not created a priori to foreground the representation of objects, but to serve as elements of the cinematic composition. When I had completed the film and looked back over just a few weeks, I had the sense that, in a way, the film had created itself of its own accord.

(Michael Pilz)

With Love #3

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2010/2021, DCP, color, 101 min. Persian/English and other languages

I see a certain analogy between the way I approach and create films and other forms of artistic expression, such as abstract painting and contemporary music. For many years now, I have had the sense that my way of working with photographic images and sounds is akin to creating compositions with paints and brushes (or even with my fingers) or sounds. Much of it remains uncertain as to its origin and often mysterious. And it should remain uncertain. While I do direct my attention at individual *things* (and the camera thus records them), most of the time I find them without intentionally looking for them, and ultimately (often many years after their initial creation), transform them into something new through a process of amalgamation (according to the formula $1 + 1 = 3$).

(Michael Pilz)

With Love—Volume One 1987–1996

A film by Michael Pilz. With friends and friends of friends. ^[11]_[SEP] AT, 1987/2020, DCP, color, 102 min. German/English/Latvian with English subtitles

The cinematic *gestalt* represents a conglomeration of depicted objects and moments in which I look at them. It is only through my personal, deeper experience, by placing my gaze on them, that the objects are brought to life and acquire meaning. Depending on what I am able, willing—or unwilling—to do.

Film is atmosphere (just like music). On the part of the subject, it's about personal attitude, sensory perception, impressions, feelings, and expressing them as truthfully and credibly as possible. On the level of objects, it's about images, sounds, their creative interplay, emotional coloration, temporal sequences, rhythms, tempos.

In his *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn wrote that “Art isn’t a matter of *what* but of *how*.”

(Michael Pilz)

Noli Me Tangere—The View

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 1996/2015, DCP, color, 41 min.

I aim to harness the tension between the unfamiliar and the familiar so as to render the *inner stories* it reflects transparent and recognizable. Everything depends on your personal mindset, your vantage point, and your perspective.

The film develops on several levels. On the one hand, objectively, superficially, on the level of featured objects. On the other hand, subjectively, on deeper layers, in the cinematic *subtext*, in the unspoken, where words fail us. In the unconscious and in its sign language.

The film approximates its true form in a roundabout way through its sign language, it doesn't blurt things out. In the sense of the aforementioned relationship between subject and object, the process of gaining self-knowledge through encounters with the world continues in every viewer.

(Michael Pilz)

MF / Für Marianne Fritz

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2008, DCP, color, 52 min. German

The House

A film by Michael Pilz and Maryam Farhang, AT, 2018/2022, DCP, color, 31 min., Farsi, Arabic

The individualization of perception: I don't do feature films; rather, I am a filmmaker who works with images and sounds in a manner that enables viewers, the audience, to train their perception. That's what I explained to the composer yesterday: My aim is not for you to applaud my work or praise my film, I'm not interested in applause for my films at all. They provide me with an opportunity to train, in a playful fashion, your perception through your perception over the course of 60 or 200 minutes or however many minutes the film runs. Education of perception, that's what I do. The government should be paying me for that. I invite people to hone their perception.

(Michael Pilz)

Curtains

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2014/2021, DCP, color, 57 min. German /English

Invocation of Bliss

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2006/2009, DCP, color, 52 min

I feel the same way about writing as I do about editing films. I'm highly self-critical there, too, and (usually) only "release" something once I've gone over it thoroughly, discarded it several times and put it back together again from scratch. When it comes to cutting, the truth is really that there is always *only one* possible solution! Not two or three, no, just *one*! The challenge lies in finding that one possible solution. I can't search for it (because all "searching" lures you in all the wrong directions). That's why I need to carefully watch and listen to the raw material over and over (because often a cut is determined by the sound, and that point—in the audio track—needs to be found, as well). Anything else is just empty puffery.

(Michael Pilz)

Teatime Teheran

A film by Michael Pilz and Gabriele Hochleitner, AT 2007/2021, DCP, color, 19 min., German

One-to-One Teheran Connected

A film by Michael Pilz **K:** Hamid, Hanieh, Michael, Nora, Torang **M:** Lucia Nirmala Schmidt. AT, 2012, DCP, color, 115 min.

On filming other people: “Looking others in the eye” has to do with feeling at home with oneself and trusting others. Can I even present myself to others the way I really am? Are others—actually—taking me seriously? Am I able to trust others myself? It’s all based on reciprocity, because other people will perceive me the way I present myself to them. And I will experience others as they reveal themselves to me. Thus, it’s all about your own openness towards others. This openness (or reticence) has to do with (past) experiences: Was my candor (or reserve) received by others? Or was it ignored? Did people try to empathize? And did I make them feel understood?

(Michael Pilz)

Roman Diary

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2009/2011, DCP, color, 124 min

Every true artist connects with their own unconscious, at times with the collective unconscious, as well, and draws on the depths of their own being without being able to say in advance what is going to rise to the surface from the deep. The process of emergence cannot be clad in the corset of a concept, in the framework of imaginary ideas. To a large extent, it has to be and remain a speculative venture that involves a great deal of *risk*.

Because human nature generally tends to confine, control, and gain power over everything that’s alive. The driving forces behind this are feelings of anxiety, ultimately fears of losing life itself.

Any truly creative process touches on these *ultimate questions*, and the more openly and fearlessly it does so, the *deeper and more convincing* the ensuing work will appear to others.

(Michael Pilz)

Rose and Jasmine

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 2006/2010, DCP, color, 106 min

Looking back on my life from my current perspective, I think it's safe to say that everything I do, which of course includes filming, photography, writing, taking notes, as well as collecting useless materials and trivial objects, is an attempt to compensate for shortcomings or experiences of inadequacy, to make up for them. Everything I do falls under this umbrella. Including my endeavors to strike a balance. If there is less on one side, I have to add a bit more on the other. If something tips the scale in one direction, let's say over 50 percent, I'll have to add some counterweight. To ensure that the balance is maintained. To have a sense that I am keeping my balance, psychologically, mentally, physically and energetically. When we're hungry, we need to eat. Eating is also about balance.

(Michael Pilz)

Himmel und Erde / Heaven and Earth

A film by Michael Pilz K: Michael Pilz, in collaboration with Helmut Pirnat, Wolfgang Simon, Moritz Gieselman Featuring: residents of the mountain village of Sankt Anna and the surrounding area. AT, 1979/1982, 16/35mm, ^[L]_[SEP] color and black-and-white, 295 min
Part 1 – **Die Ordnung der Dinge / The Order of Things**: 141 min,
Part 2 – **Der Lauf der Dinge / The Course of Things**: 154 min]. German ^[L]_[SEP]

With *Heaven and Earth*, my aim was to create something (altogether) new. It was not about the reality of mountain farming, but about *my* way of seeing it (Watzlawik, Godard, Laotse, Freud). It wasn't about all sorts of "things," but about my gaze on them. In other words, subject versus object.

It was about self-determination versus external control.

Thus, I attempted to find *truthful images* and sounds and to string them together. Unadorned. No ornamentation. Not illustrating anything. Not misusing things—that had been recorded—for extraneous ends. Letting them speak for themselves, in keeping with their own qualities. Bringing these traits to the fore. Because it is only in this manner that the true colors of those who expose themselves to them can be revealed and addressed.

The film has to muster the courage to embrace its own nakedness and face others with it.

(Michael Pilz)

A Prima Vista

A film by Michael Pilz. AT, 1964/2008, DCP, color and black & white, 91 min. German

You can only know the "world" in the manner in which you know yourself. And every cinematic take already carries within it its beginning and end. That's why I started focusing—intuitively at first, later consciously—on seeing the completed ("edited") film before my eyes while I was shooting it and determining the beginning and end of takes as I filmed them.

To be even more precise, a film is already finished before it is shot. In the mind, or better, in the body, because it partakes in it as a whole. Even when I'm not filming, sleeping, eating, or, right now, writing. Working with the camera, then, is just the practical realization of what has long been "completed," not consciously, but it is already "inscribed" in the body.

(Michael Pilz)

Dukhovnye golosa (Spiritual Voices)

R, B: Aleksandr Sokurov K: Aleksandr Burov, Aleksey Fyodorov, S: Leda Semyonova. RU, 1995, DCP, color, 327 min. Russian with English Subtitles

CARTE BLANCHE #1: The voice of A. Sokurov, close by, musing on Mozart, Messiaen, and Beethoven, against a wintry no man's land. The light changes, seagulls flutter, a campfire burns, far away. The forest is dark. A rumbling of thunder. The view becomes blurred.

With these momentary glances into eternity, Sokurov prepares for what is to come.

He and his keen-eyed companions, A. Burov and A. Fjodorov, follow Russian soldiers to a border area (Tajikistan-Afghanistan, 1993). They capture everyday life in the camp on film. There was only one dangerous moment. But Sokurov has something else in mind. The way he invites us to approach even the most mundane things with a wide-awake sensory awareness, carrying Mozart in his satchel at all times, that results in an exemplary reflection of cinematic reality, in other words, he consciously follows things and not their meanings. In a wondrous manner he thus transcends even the most incidental storyline and creates an aura that is deeply moving. *Spiritual Voices* has always been important to me on account of its mindful, kind, and caring approach to what it means to be human.

(Michael Pilz)

The Lost Days

A film by Laura Waddington M: Simon Fisher Turner; Voices: Marusha Gagro, Chantal Akerman. FR/UK/US, 2000, DCP, color, 47 min., English

Some Friends (Apart)

A film by Stephen Dwoskin MIT: Vera Neubauer, Harry Smith, UK, 2002, DCP, color, 25 min. English

CARTE BLANCHE #2: Laura's and Stephen's films exude that certain heart-warming atmosphere, their presence conveys a comforting sense of having arrived, of being at home. It feels like the kind of home that can be anywhere. Especially inside ourselves. The mere knowledge that they exist, these wondrous films, makes a difference. You love them, you need them. Like a breath of air. They are different in terms of form, content and atmosphere—there's Stephen's candid gaze towards the affectionate smiles of his friends, as well as at the pain, and Laura's diary, where she had friends around the world create footage of her, using visual distancing effects and connecting takes through poetic language that conveys a sense of closeness. Both powerful and comforting, these two films point far beyond themselves. "Somehow not enough, somehow never enough, such beautiful things, such beautiful things."

(Michael Pilz)

(Translation of the text from the program booklet of the Austrian Film Museum by Matthias Goldmann)