



Fruits of Labour
Maximilian Prüfer

18 May 2023 until 9 July 2024

With *Fruits of Labour*, the Weltmuseum Wien presents the German conceptual artist Maximilian Prüfer (born 1986), whose works deal with human interventions in nature in the age of the Anthropocene and point to their global consequences.

For Prüfer, nature is not a romanticised place, but a highly particular and complex set of rules that has fascinated him since childhood. Starting with the extinction of insects in Europe, especially of bees and wild bees, and the threat this poses to biodiversity, Prüfer addresses numerous ecological issues in his work, including those that occurred as a result of political developments in China in the 1950s and 1960s. *Fruits of Labour* shows the dimension of human effort needed to compensate for the loss of biodiversity. It fundamentally questions the relationship between humans and nature.

Prüfer's works - from installation to photography and film - are set in relation to objects from the collections of the Weltmuseum Wien and are complemented by loans from the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien.

Prüfer was inspired for his series of works presented at the Weltmuseum Wien by a trip to Sichuan province. There he found a valley without insects and birds where people pollinate the fruit trees by hand. A political campaign initiated by Mao Zedong (1893-1976) in 1958 to eradicate the four plagues (rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows) during the "Great Leap Forward" led, among other things, to a massive ecological imbalance of nature. As a result



millions of people died of starvation. The effects can still be felt today. In regions of Sichuan province, the unnatural silence remains audible.

Maximilian Prüfer's photographic works *Performance - Hand Pollination* and *From Flower to Flower* testify to the human ingenuity of taking over the task of pollinating insects such as bees and wild bees and performing hand pollination on fruit trees.

In his staging of a single fruit - the pear - Prüfer refers to another of Mao's political campaigns of 1968 - the heroisation of the mango. Mao received mangoes, exotic fruits, as a gift from Pakistan's foreign minister. Mao gave them to the workers' and peasants' propaganda troops who had supported him. From then on, mangoes symbolised Mao's care and kindness and were reproduced many times in different materials.

The disappearance of pollinating insect species and the decline in biodiversity must also chasten us in Europe and Austria. The wild bee specimens on display from the collection of the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien are evidence of species of wild bees that are already extinct in Austria.

We humans are responsible for landscape destruction, excessive cultivation, monocultures, the use of chemical plant protection agents, and climate change. The exhibition is meant to inspire and make us think about how to deal carefully with the fragile ecosystem in which we live.

The exhibition was curated by Maximilian Prüfer and Bettina Zorn, curator of the collections from East Asia (China, Korea, Japan). Gerhard Veigel designed the show.

Maximilian Prüfer was born in Weilheim in 1986. He studied design and communication strategy in Augsburg and art in Bologna. In his work, Prüfer is primarily concerned with the exploration of natural processes and their transfer into visual media. In doing so, he explores existential, philosophical and political themes in relation to evolution and the manipulation of the ecosystem by humans. Particularly characteristic of his artistic practice is the recording of animal traces, which he calls nature antipodes. In doing so, the artist explores forms of collective intelligence of animals such as snails, ants and bees and the relationship to society and human instinct.

In addition to participating in international group exhibitions such as *Flowers Forever*, Kunsthalle Munich (2023); *Vienna Biennale for Change*, MAK Vienna (2021); *ponds among ponds*, ICA Shanghai NYU (2021); *Egon Schiele, Reloaded*, Leopold Museum, Vienna (2018), Maximilian Prüfer presented his work in several solo exhibitions, including *Inwelt*, Galerie Kandlhofer, Vienna (2021) and *Everything is going to be alright*, DG Kunstraum Munich (2020).

He has received prizes and scholarships such as the Bavarian Art Promotion Prize, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Scholarship, the DG German Society for Christian Art Prize and the Swabian District Art Prize.



Catalogue:

Fruits of Labour.
Maximilian Prüfer

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Honey Picture 1
2022, photo print
© Studio Maximilian Prüfer 2023



Maximilian Prüfer
Honey Blossom 2
2022, photo print
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Honey Picture 5
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Honey Picture 10
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Honey Picture 12
2022, photo print
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Maximilian Prüfer
A Gift From Him
2018, filmstill, 4K video
© Studio Maximilian Prüfer 2023



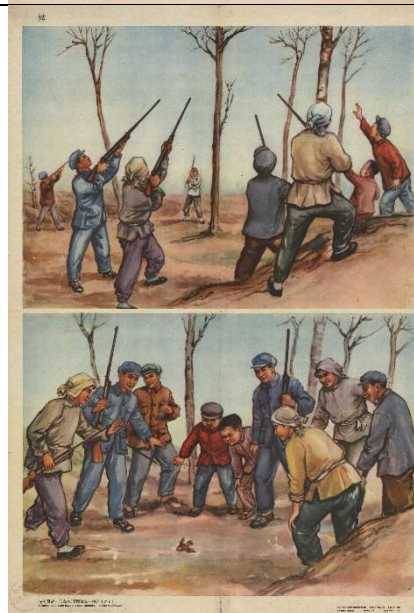
Maximilian Prüfer
Bee 1
2018, pollination and gathering tools of Chinese farmers, handmade basket, pollen jar, bamboo stick with chicken feathers, glass case on pear wood pedestal
© Studio Maximilian Prüfer 2023



Bi Chen (design)
Poster, "Come hither, all, and smash the sparrows"
大家都来打麻雀
PR China, 1956 (?), paper, offset print
(reproduction) Courtesy International Institute of Social History



Ding Hao (design)
Poster, "Eliminate the last sparrow"
消灭最后一只麻雀
PR China, 1959, paper, offset print (reproduction)
Courtesy International Institute of Social History



Shen Dan (design)
Poster, "Exterminate the four pests!"
除四害!
PR China, 1958, paper, offset print (reproduction)
Courtesy International Institute of Social History



Imitation mango under bell jar
PR China, 1969, glass, wax
Weltmuseum Wien, Helmut Opletal coll.
© KHM-Museumsverband, Weltmuseum Wien





Maximilian Prüfer
Performance – Hand Pollination
2018, fine art print
© Studio Maximilian Prüfer 2023



Maximilian Prüfer, 2021
© Ronald Claus



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