

Olaf Nicolai

Location: Altes Schuhmacherhäuschen [former shoemaker's cottage]

Warp drive, wormholes, time travel: Science fiction movies fuel our imagination of distant galaxies. But sometimes we don't have to travel that far to experience another universe. In Engelberg, for example, we discovered one in the former shoemaker's cottage.

In 1996, Emil Waser, a retired shoemaker, closed the doors of his workshop for good. Even after his death in 2015, the family left everything as it once was. It seems as if Emil Waser had only been here yesterday. On the occasion of the *Backstage Engelberg* exhibition, we are now opening this room to the public for the first time in some 28 years.

The special aura of the two intimate rooms in the shoemaker's cottage inspired Olaf Nicolai to create a new work. At first, he didn't want to change anything in this place, so captivated was he by the unique time capsule he discovered here. However, his thoughts quickly turned to the fascination that distant galaxies have on us and he found the right inspiration in his studio: Nicolai has been collecting space photographs from newspapers for many years, including stunning images of the Carinan Nebula, which stretches an incredible 200 to 300 light years. For his installation *Gateway. AU RO RA*, Nicolai selected three of these images from his archive to develop three new video works. In each work, the viewer sees an extremely slow zoom into the center of the photographs. The recordings are accompanied by the singing of mezzo-soprano Noa Frenkel, with whom Nicolai has already worked several times. Her voice combines with the galactic images and the atmosphere of the workshop to create a magical spatial experience.

Nicolai titled the three videos AU, RO and RA. Together they form the word Aurora, which on the one hand refers to the Roman goddess of the dawn and on the other to the aurora borealis. The overall title of the installation alludes to a gateway to another, strange world. To show the videos, Nicolai chose a Brionvega television, whose cool 1960s design blends into the whole, as if the device had always been here.

Gateway. AU RO RA invites us to travel back in time. Or as the physicist Stephen Hawking so beautifully described in his last book: “In 2009 I held a party for time travellers in my college [...]. To ensure that only genuine time travellers came, I didn’t sent out the invitations until after the party. On the day of the party, I sat in college hoping, but no one came.” (*ds*)

The conceptual artist Olaf Nicolai, born in 1962 in Halle (Saale), Germany, has had numerous solo exhibitions and participated in important international group exhibitions, including *documenta X* (1997) in Kassel, Germany, and the Venice Biennale, Italy (2001 and 2005). Nicolai has received numerous grants and art prizes; he lives and works in Berlin. Further information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olaf_Nicolai