

Claus van Bebber

Biography by François Couture

German turntablist Claus van Bebber (b. 1949) is one of many avant-garde sound artists also fronting a career in the visual arts. His profile is similar to those of Martin Tétreault, Christian Marclay and Philip Jeck. In his solo concerts he uses a number of antiquated turntables (usually five or six) to play prepared records bought in cheap second-hand stores. His thick layering of sonic materials has little to do with Marclay's skipping quotes or Tétreault's humorous narratives (in his early years) and no-vinyl experiments (later), but it shares similarities with Jeck's soundscapes. As a visual artist, he is mostly interested in landscape art, returning the material of nature (wood and stone, mostly) to nature in abstract forms.

Upon completing his basic education, Bebber trained to become an office clerk, following his father's wish. He abandoned this ambition after his military service, instead making a living putting together window displays while taking evening classes in painting. He left his first traces in Germany's music history in the late '70s as the drummer in a free jazz trio that also included Ron Schmidt and released an LP titled Stück für Stück in 1977. Another of his first partners was trombonist Paul Hubweber, with whom he still works to this day. In 1982 he co-founded the artists' collective Heinrich Mucken. An intermedia platform animated by a handful of experimental musicians, visual and performance artists, the group also included Dieter Schlenzog, Michael Vorfeld and Helmut Lemke who along with Bebber would all later become household names of the label NURNICHTNUR.

Heinrich Mucken folded in 1990, leaving a trail of cassettes and a single. Bebber took the opportunity to retreat to his old cottage on the Lower Rhine and focus on his art career. In parallel he abandoned all things percussive and, inspired by Czech conceptual artist Milan Knizak, began to develop his concept of the "schallplattenkonzert," the record concert, literally a performance where one plays records (mismatched ones, all at once). Part sound installation, part musical performance, his concerts have been presented throughout Germany, in The Netherlands and Italy, often accompanied by exhibitions of his artwork. A first solo EP, simply entitled Schallplattenkonzert, came out in 1993, followed by Herz mit two years later. Bebber has appeared on a number of CD projects curated by NURNICHTNUR, but has otherwise kept a low profile. His appearance at the Intermedium 2 festival in March 2002 alongside Philip Jeck has been released as Viny'l'isten.