

THE ART OF BEER

The Beauty of Nature

By **DON TSE**

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I am currently reading *Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers* by Stephen Harrod Buhner (Brewers Publications, 1998). In it, Buhner gives an extensive history and analysis of beers brewed by ancient societies made from available ingredients, such as honey, pollen, herbs and roots.

Today, beers brewed with honey are common, but with a little searching, other interesting beers can be found. Heather Ale Co. (now Williams Brothers Brewing, williamsambrosbrew.com) out of Scotland produces a line of historic Scottish ales, one each made with heather, gooseberries, elderberries, pine needles and seaweed. Dogfish Head (dogfish.com) from Delaware makes various interesting brews including Midas Touch, Chateau Jiahu, Raison D'Être, Theobroma and Pangaea with such unusual ingredients as Muscat grapes, thyme or wildflower honey, saffron, hawthorn fruit, Chrysanthemum flowers, chicory, St. John's Wort, liquorice root, juniper, ginger, gesho and ground annatto.

I recently had the pleasure of tasting beers from the relatively new and unknown Trinity Brewing Co.

(trinitybrew.com) in Colorado Springs, CO. Trinity espouses the virtues of natural consciousness and since opening their doors in 2008, they've been making waves with specialty brews that include such interesting ingredients as chicory, hibiscus, chai, saffron, juniper berries and thyme.

This reconnection with nature is not so much a renaissance as it is a revival since beer, the oldest fermented beverage, used to always be brewed this way. And this reconnection recalls the artistic works of Wolfgang Laib (b. 1950), a German artist known for his conceptual, spiritual art created using natural ingredients such as rice, beeswax, pollen, stone and milk.

Even the names of his exhibitions imply a spiritual connection: "Frieze of Life", "Without Time – Without Body – Without Place" and "The Ephemeral is Eternal" are recent examples. Although his works have been shown throughout North America and around the world including Switzerland, Japan, France, New Zealand and Australia, they tend to be temporary installations in galleries, so you have to be in the right place at the right time to see them. In the meantime, some photos of his works can be seen online. Try the website of Sean Kelly Gallery

(skny.com/artists/wolfgang-laib/images/) or Sperone Westwater (speronewestwater.com/cgi-bin/iowa/artists/related.html?record=10&info=works).

His works can be very simple, such as small conical piles of bee pollen, or intricate, such as large sculptures made of beeswax into which the viewer is welcome to wander. Laib's works overwhelm the senses and can even physically envelope the viewer. Laib says of his own work, "The pollen, the milk, the beeswax, they have a beauty that is incredible, that is beyond the imagination, something which you cannot believe is a reality – and it is the most real. I could not make it myself, I could not create it myself, but I can participate in it."

The works are intended to be enjoyed not merely with the eyes, but all of the senses and indeed, even with the brain and spirit in that they are intended to invoke contemplation. The beauty is the simplicity, recognizing that the things that nature provides us are in and of themselves beautiful. And that is also very much the point of *Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers*. Humans have had a very long relationship with beer and by rediscovering ancient beers or beers with spiritual connections, beerlovers can rediscover the beauty of nature.