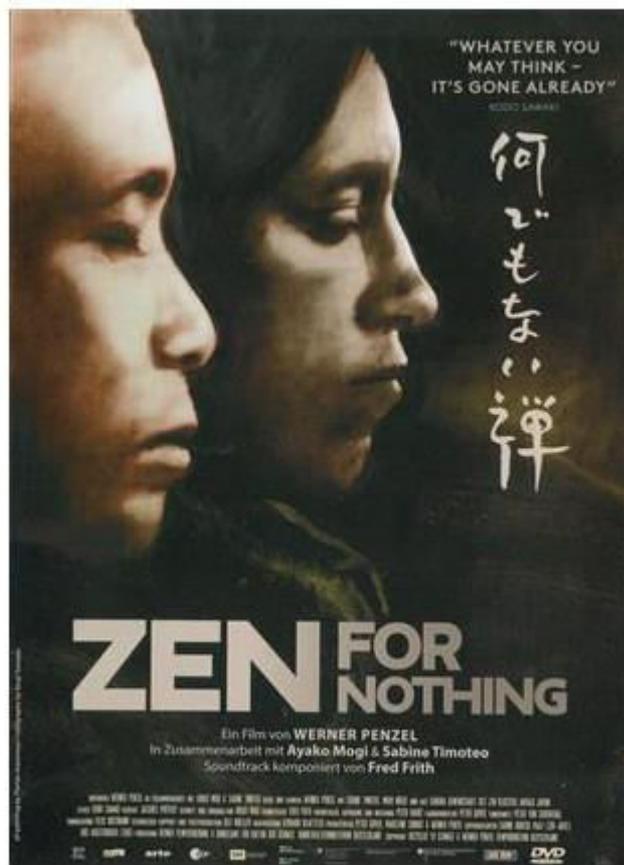


Zen for Nothing/ Germany & Switzerland/2016/95 min/ English, Japanese and German/Non-fiction

Director: Werner Penzel



Synopsis

Zen for Nothing is a masterly immersion into life at a Japanese Zen monastery over three seasons. Swiss novice Sabine arrives at Antaiji and, after a brief welcome, she begins to learn the monastery rules: how to bow, sit in the meditation hall, carry out movements with chopsticks, etc. There's more to life there than meditation, farming, and maintenance, however—there are picnics, music, and Wi-Fi. And after the last snow has melted away, the nuns and monks travel to Osaka, where they recite sutras in front of subway entrances as they solicit offerings in their traditional monk's robes. Quotes from renowned early twentieth-century Antaiji abbot Kodo Sawaki are interjected throughout. Simple and beautifully filmed, with composer Fred Frith performing the eclectic, elegant score. —*Freer Gallery of Art*

Director's Bio

WERNER PENZEL born 1950. Plays in a rock band and writes poetry in the 60s before turning to moviemaking in the early 70s. Works with the Brazilian theatre company „Oficina/Uzyna“ in Sao Paulo, studies at Munich Film Academy, travels through South and Central America, Amazonia, North Africa, India, the USA and

Japan. After producing and directing VAGABUNDEN KARAWANE (1980), ADIOS AL ODIO (1986) and other movies, in 1987 he establishes the production company „CineNomad“ together with Nicolas Humbert, to collaborate among other movies in two works for cinema STEP ACROSS THE BORDER (1990) and MIDDLE OF THE MOMENT (1995), the film-triptych THREE WINDOWS (1999), the films WHY SHOULD I BUY A BED WHEN ALL THAT I WANT IS SLEEP? (1999), NOT LIKE BEFORE (2005) and BROTHER YUSEF (2005). In 2006 he constitutes „Laboratoire Village Nomade“ together with friends in Switzerland to do research and exchange with artists from Europe, USA, Asia, Palestine and Israel, resulting in the installations IN PRAISE OF SHADOWS (2007) and I LOVE YOU I KILL YOU (2008). In 2009 he moves to the island of Awajishima in Japan, to establish the cooperative "nomadomura" together with Ayako Mogi, creating the installations ONE DAY (2011), WALKING ON SOUND (2012), and the movies WHILE WE KISS THE SKY (2016), ZEN FOR NOTHING (2016).

Credits

directed and photographed by Werner Penzel

written by Werner Penzel in collaboration with Ayako Mogi & Sabine Timoteo

**featuring Sabine Timoteo, Muho Noelke & Sangha
Community of Antaiji Zen Monastery Japan /**

quotes by Kodo Sawaki /

poetry by Jacques Prévert /

original sound recording and editing by Ayako Mogi /

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Filmproduktion Germany 2016**

Director's Note:

A mix of philosophy and self-deprecating humour

Werner Penzel's film transports us out of space and time and into the complexities of the present. Over a period of several months, from autumn to spring, Werner Penzel followed protagonist Sabine Timoteo on the edge, taking us on a rollercoaster ride to her inner core. Hidden between the tree-lined mountains of the Western coast of Japan (Werner Penzel's country of adoption), the small Antaiji zen monastery, run by a priest from Berlin who is atypical to say the least, seems to have become a refuge for wayfarers in search of spirituality. When you look closely though, what initially seems an oasis in the middle of nature slowly but surely becomes a place of purgatory for people to try to atone for their sins. Incapable of freeing themselves from their consumer mechanisms, the monastery's guests torture themselves in search of something that has no name or form but that they know can save them. A chimeric here and now that they realise clashes cruelly with the solution sold by many new age citizen gurus.

Between the complex, almost abyssal, reflections on being gushing from zen philosophy and the clumsy surprises of the everyday, *Zen for Nothing* brings us a portrayal of an extraordinarily contemporary humanity, universal in its imperfections.

A film which, beyond the profoundness of its reflections, gives us moments of complete levity, an unexpected marriage between the essence of being and self-deprecating humour that warms the heart despite the icy cold Japanese winter.

Werner Penzel uses his camera not only as an eye but as an ear, nose, hand and heart too, giving us an experience that can truly be defined as sensory. An explosion of complex and unexpected undertones of the imitation of life itself.

