

FRANZ WEST

27 November 2025 - 17 January 2026

Tim Van Laere Gallery is proud to present its fourth solo exhibition of the renowned artist Franz West (1947–2012), who started collaborating with the gallery in the year 2002. The oeuvre of Franz West marks an important shift in sculptural practice beginning in the 1970s. From Vienna, a city shaped by psychoanalytic traditions and a sharp divide between high and low culture, West developed an artistic language that profoundly redefined the concepts of autonomy, functionality, and social interaction.

At a time when conceptual rigor and minimalism still dominated, West developed a practice that was simultaneously playful, associative, and social in nature. His work moves between sculpture, performance, design, and installation, but is especially recognizable for its emphasis on physicality and interaction. West disrupts the traditional distance between artwork and viewer: his objects invite touch, use, or physical closeness, making the experience of art itself a form of active participation.

One of the key ideas in West's work is the "provisional." His early *Paßstücke* from the 1970s exemplify this. These were handheld sculptural objects made of plaster and papier-mâché, intended to be held or worn by visitors. The meaning of these objects did not lie in their form or beauty, but in the moment they became an extension of the body: awkward, absurd, sometimes uncomfortable. Through them, West explored the social conventions of the body in public space, as well as the ways artworks can function as catalysts for behavior. Rather than presenting art as something elevated or distant, he brought it back to the everyday; tactile, playful, and accessible.

From the 1980s onward, his sculpture evolved into larger, colorful installations and furniture-like objects. West began creating chairs, benches, and tables that were indeed usable, yet always retained a certain ambiguity. These "furniture-sculptures" balance between functionality and artwork, prompting questions about the hierarchy between art and design. Are you allowed to sit on art? And does a sculpture change in status when you actually use it? By placing functional objects in exhibition contexts, West subtly disrupted the institutions and norms of the art world.

His later monumental sculptures for public spaces, often made of rough metal structures coated in brightly colored lacquer, continued this dialogue. Despite their weight and scale, they remain playful, almost caricature-like. They invite movement and interaction; they create spaces meant not only to be viewed but also experienced. In this way, West's oeuvre demonstrates a lasting focus on social dynamics: for him, art is a means to activate relationships, not to fix an aesthetic ideal.

Alongside his spatial work, West developed an extensive body of collages, drawings, and assemblages. These works provide insight into the construction of his visual language: a playful and associative vocabulary that references traditions such as Viennese Actionism and post-conceptual art without adhering strictly to them. They show how West generates meaning by letting materials speak—often in a seemingly casual yet highly considered manner.

Franz West achieved international recognition starting in the 1980s. His work has been shown in numerous major international exhibitions such as Documenta and biennials around the world, and has been included in major international collections, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Middelheimmuseum, Antwerp; M HKA, Antwerp; S.M.A.K., Ghent; Kunsthaus Graz, Graz; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; mumok, Vienna; MAK, Vienna; Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt; Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome; Albertina, Vienna; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.