

Erwin Wurm

Synthesa

8 November 2013–4 January 2014

Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to present an exhibition of new sculptures by Erwin Wurm.

Famous for his *One Minute Sculptures* (stagings of bizarre situations, each lasting precisely 60 seconds and captured in photographs), Wurm's work has evolved in recent years from the ephemeral to finely crafted, technically complex sculptures and large-scale public commissions. Although Wurm's principal medium is sculpture, his work encompasses a wide variety of media and materials, including text, video, architecture, photography and painting. Interested in the fundamentals of sculpture, he defines and establishes all of these typically separate disciplines as a sculptural means of expression.

Humour, irony and paradox play an important role in his oeuvre. While his work can, at first glance, seem anarchic or subversive, it ultimately reveals a layer of disturbing, or revelatory, social, personal or art historical implications. Nostalgic references to the architecture, food and the colours associated with his childhood often crop up, and the sausages that feature in a new series of bronzes are a type of frankfurter that is ubiquitous throughout Europe. Arranged into recognisable human forms, or even a building (*Tower of the Socialistic Internationale*), each 'figure' seems to acquire its own distinct personality. The series reflects Wurm's interest in transforming the existing material world and his fascination with the way that the mind can alter the perception of reality.

The related *Abstract Attack* series shows various different buildings being destroyed by sausages. Architecture and destruction are recurrent themes in Wurm's work and the *Attack* series involved a particularly difficult production process. The artist began by first making models of the various buildings, including prisons, warehouses, bunkers and domestic architecture. Says Wurm: 'And then came the most important part: I had to work on the houses to attack them... With only one model of each form, I had to find a balance between being willing to try everything I wanted to and not wanting to try something for fear of destroying the building.' The final part of the process involved preserving the smashed buildings by casting them in bronze.

Increasing, remodelling or removing volume – the classic concerns of many a sculptor – are given a new twist in Wurm's *Synthesa* series. Wurm has always been interested in destroying, distorting and extending volumes to the limit – any form of action or gesture that skews the everyday 'normality'. Taking a typically cross-media approach, Wurm deconstructs and reassembles the human body: he enlarges and reduces bodily parts, subtracts segments and adds new and unexpected elements (in this case a plastic bucket). These works investigate the relationship between deeply emotional conditions and the human body. Can anger or fear, for example, become a sculptural form by searching for a physical manifestation of the psychological condition in the human body?

Erwin Wurm was born in 1954 in Bruck an der Mur/Styria, Austria. His most recent exhibitions include *Abstract Abstruse*, Wincavod - Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia (2013); *Good Boy*, MOCAP - Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Poland (2013); *Home*, Vitra Design Museum, Germany (2013); *De Profundis*, Albertina, Vienna (2013); *Am I A House*, CAC Malaga, Spain (2012); *Beauty Business*, Bass Museum of Art, Miami, USA (2011), Dallas Contemporary, Texas, USA (2012); *Wear Me Out*, Middleheimmuseum, Antwerp, Belgium (2011); *Liquid Reality*, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany (2010); *Narrow Mist*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China (2010) and *The Artist Who Swallowed the World*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2008). In 2011, Erwin Wurm's *Narrow House* was installed at the Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti as part of Glasstress 2011, a collateral event of the 54th Venice Biennale.