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Press Release

Lebendige Skulpturen

Gilbert & George, Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter

September 7 – October 31, 2018, Opening Friday September 7, 6 – 10pm

An exhibition catalogue with texts by Hubertus Butin, Dieter Schwarz and Moritz Wesseler will be published.

In the history of art, the title *Living Sculpture* is associated with the UK-based duo Gilbert & George. It relates to an artistic mindset the two artists presented to the public towards the end of the 1960s when they decided to make their lives, or rather themselves, the object of their art: "The day we said that we are the living sculpture, that was it. Art and life became one, and we were the messengers of a new vision. At that moment that we decided we are art and life, every conversation with people became art, and still is."¹

This stance broadened the notion of sculpture within the context of the Pop, Minimal and Conceptual Art movements being discussed around this time and caused a stir – not least among the informed circles of the European art scene. Gilbert & George's ideas made quite an impact on Germany's Rhineland where the closely affiliated artists Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter had been seeking new ways of making art both individually and collectively since the early 1960s. Not only working within the medium of painting these three artists also experimented with works that, to differing extents, approached the genre of sculpture. Becoming Gilbert & George's gallerist as Konrad Fischer from 1969/70² Lueg therefore explored this thematic complex in various manifestations. Marking the start of this exploration were two papier-mâché figures made in 1963 depicting the Düsseldorf gallerist Alfred Schmela and the US President John F. Kennedy.³ Realized by Lueg together with Gerhard Richter

¹ "Gilbert & George: Interview with Andrew Wilson," first published in: *Journal of Contemporary Art*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Winter 1993. Cf. *The Words of Gilbert & George*, ed. by Robert Violette and Hans Ulrich Obrist, London 1997, p. 196.

² Cf. "My Name is Konrad Fischer. You Will Do Somezing wiz me in Düsseldorf, eeh...?," in: *okey dokey Konrad Fischer*, ed. by Brigitte Kölle, Cologne 2007, p. 206-207.

³ Catalog of works Marzona No. 16 & 15, in: *Ich nenne mich als Maler Konrad Lueg*, ed. by Thomas Kellein, exhibition catalog P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; Kunsthalle Bielefeld; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Gent, 1999/2000, Bielefeld 1999, p. 53-54. It should be noted that

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these objects formed part of the initiative *Leben mit Pop. Eine Demonstration für den Kapitalistischen Realismus / Living With Pop – A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism* and reflected the virulence of Fluxus and Pop Art.⁴ Shortly after this Lueg made a larger number of sign-like objects depicting women, boxers or soccer players which can be located somewhere on the borderline between sculpture and painting. From 1967 he then broadened the spectrum of his sculptures to include small and large inflatable cubes made of shower curtain-like plastic film. With their patterning and voluminous form these can be read as a response to American Minimal Art while also displaying a sense of humor that resonates with Gilbert & George's works *As Used by the Sculptors* (1972) or *Reclining Drunk* (1973).

A fascination with sculpture can be detected even more strongly in the work of Sigmar Polke who made, or had made, a whole series of objects and installations. Worth mentioning in this connection is *Kartoffelhaus / Potato House* (1967) as well as *Polkes Peitsche / The Whip* (1968) or his 1969 'potato machine' *Apparat, mit dem eine Kartoffel eine andere umkreisen kann / Apparatus Whereby One Potato Can Orbit Another*.

Furthermore, Polke's drawings form the basis of the conception and imagination of the sculptural works even though the majority of the sketches were not realized as objects. At the same time, Polke planned and realized a series of objects he ultimately used as staffage for photographs and films. In turn, it is precisely these works – which certainly also include the 1968 portfolio ... *Höhere Wesen befehlen / Higher Beings Ordain* – that are closely linked with performative actions and form another conceptual bridge to Gilbert & George's approach.

Gerhard Richter, on the other hand, only produced object-like works again years later after his rather experimental collaboration with Konrad Lueg: first in 1967 with *4 Glasscheiben / 4 Panes of Glass*, which was followed in 1969/70 by *Kugelobjekt / Spherical Object* and then in 1971 with *Zwei Skulpturen für einen Raum von Palermo / Two Sculptures for a Room by Palermo*. Moreover, Richter's drawings also contain representations that suggest an interest in sculptural expression and installation. One example is the 1968 draft for *Zwölf Röhren /*

Dietmar Elger's catalog of works does not include the two works. Cf. *Gerhard Richter. Catalogue Raisonné*, Vol. 1, ed. by Dietmar Elger, Ostfildern 2011.

⁴ Cf. Susanne Küper, "Konrad Lueg und Gerhard Richter, 'Leben mit Pop – Eine Demonstration für den Kapitalistischen Realismus,'" in: *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 53, ed. by Freunde des Wallraf-Richartz-Museum und des Museum Ludwig e. V., Cologne 1992, p. 289–306.

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Twelve Tubes, which Richter realized that same year.⁵ In addition to an open mind for testing out works that can be seen as existing beyond a classical canvas, he has something else in common with Gilbert & George: an affinity for romanticism, as the duo have produced countless drawings, photographs, and postcards referring to this period of cultural history.

A shared interest in alternative forms of expression and a similar mindset prompted these three artists to enter into a lively exploration of Gilbert & George's work. For instance, Richter produced paintings referring to the duo, Polke took photos of them that he colored by hand while Konrad Lueg invited them to create a contribution for an edition.

The exhibition *Lebendige Skulpturen / Living Sculptures* – which this publication accompanies – aims to introduce Gilbert & George, Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter's little-known yet still influential encounters with the medium of sculpture while also highlighting the similarities, differences and fruitful dialog between their artistic stances.

⁵ Dieter Schwarz, *Gerhard Richter, Zeichnungen 1964-1999*, catalog of works, Düsseldorf 1999, p. 198, No. 68/16.