

Franz West

21 February–5 April 2019
24 Grafton Street, London

Private view: Wednesday 20 February, 6–8 PM



Franz West, *Symbol*, 1999 (foreground), in West's studio in Vienna.
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David Zwirner London is pleased to present an exhibition of sculptures and works on paper from 1972 to 2004 by Austrian artist Franz West (1947–2012). Spanning his more than four-decade-long career, the exhibition offers an overview of the artist's singular and influential body of work, and, in particular, his radical repositioning of traditional notions of sculpture.

Emerging in Vienna in the early 1970s, West developed a unique aesthetic that engaged equally high and low reference points and often privileged social interaction as an intrinsic component of his work. By playfully manipulating everyday materials and imagery in novel ways, he created objects that served to redefine art as a social experience, calling attention to the ways in which art is presented to the public, and how viewers interact with works of art and with each other.

On view on the ground floor is a group of drawings and collages from the 1970s that share the irreverent aesthetic and humour of West's sculptures. In his earliest drawings, West depicted figures in enigmatic scenes that are at once familiar and dreamlike. Often set against backgrounds that are empty or characterised by domed or curvilinear architectural elements, figures are rendered in outline or naively simplified forms and shown alone, in passive groups, nude, and at times in voyeuristic scenarios. Consistent with his later collages (a number of which will also be on view) and sculptures, his figurative drawings of this period convey a mood of comic unease through the discordant relationships between people, objects, and their environment.

In the mid-1970s, West began creating his so-called *Passstücke*, or Adaptives. These roughly hewn, plaster-and-papier-mâché sculptural forms are intended to be handled by the viewer in a manner of his or her choosing, thereby 'adapting' the works to their own physical being and context. Many of the forms are reminiscent of everyday objects, allowing the viewer to make loose associations while still handling the objects in an autonomous and unconditioned way. West later produced a group of painted aluminium *Passstücke* for his solo presentation at the 1990 Venice Biennale, several of which are also presented here, as a means of revisiting and reworking his own artistic past.

In contrast to his *Passstücke*, the works presented on the gallery's first floor anticipate the development of West's notion of 'legitimate' sculpture beginning in the late 1980s, which would become the dominant areas of his practice in the 1990s and 2000s. Using the same materials as his *Passstücke*, West began producing painted abstract sculptural forms, which were displayed on plinths, as floor sculptures, or mural reliefs and were meant to question the aesthetic ideal of the autonomous work of art by presenting a work that, on first appearance, might be somewhat confounding to the viewer. Sculptures from this period display West's characteristic wit and sly humour; many, for example, are supported by found objects that include rolls of tape and paint cans, among other common materials, or by pedestals that could easily also serve as cupboards or alcohol cabinets (West leaves their use to the discretion of the owner), and bear incongruous titles drawn from philosophy, mythology, and literature (of which the artist was an avid reader).

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The 1990s proved critical in the development of the idiosyncratic style for which West is still known today. Key innovations from this period, which included the addition of exuberant colour to his papier-mâché forms and the incorporation of furniture both as art object and as social incubator, resulted in dynamic, frequently interactive installations that helped to redefine the possibilities of sculpture and the ways in which art is experienced. Characteristic of this period, *Pleonasme (Pleonasm)* (1999) is vaguely reminiscent of an outsized human head resting on a tabletop covered in bubble wrap, with its 'mouth' holding a red, plastic bucket. Other works, such as the three-part sculpture *Symbol* (1999), are playful studies in repetition and difference.

West further expanded on his notion of legitimate sculpture in the 2000s, creating even larger and more colourful painted works that openly challenged traditional notions of monumentality and beauty, and frequently elided figuration and abstraction. For example, in *Sisyphos I* (2002), a large rock-like mass that sits precariously atop a bucket of paint, West implicitly draws a parallel between the myth of Sisyphus futilely pushing a boulder up a hill and the act of artistic creation. Likewise, in *Das linke Horn Moses (Moses's Left Horn)* (2004), biblical and art-historical imagery is conjured in the artist's signature tongue-in-cheek style.

Franz West (1947–2012) studied at the Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna, from 1977 to 1982. He began exhibiting his work in the 1970s and started to gain international recognition in the 1980s, with significant shows at such venues as the Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz; Wiener Secession, Vienna (both 1986); Skulptur Projekte in Münster (1987); Kunsthalle Bern; Kunsthalle Portikus, Frankfurt (both 1988); Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld; and the Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York (both 1989).

The 1990s brought widespread international recognition, and the artist's work was presented in numerous prestigious venues worldwide, including the Austrian Pavilion of the 44th Venice Biennale (1990); documenta IX, Kassel (1992); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Dia Center for the Arts, New York (both 1994); Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (1995); Villa Arson, Nice (1995–1996); and the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (1996). A major midcareer retrospective, titled *Franz West. Proforma*, was organised by the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, in 1996, which travelled to the Kunsthalle Basel and Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, The Netherlands. Other solo exhibitions were held at the Kunstverein Hamburg (1996); FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Fundação de Serralves, Porto (all 1997). West participated in documenta X, Kassel, in 1997, and the Rooseum, Centre for Contemporary Art, Malmö, presented a solo exhibition of his work in 1999.

Further solo exhibitions in the 2000s were held at The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Skulptur im Schlosspark Ambras, Innsbruck, Austria (both 2000); the travelling survey *Franz West: In & Out* at the Museum für Neue Kunst, ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2000–2001); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2001); Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams; Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (all 2001–2002); Musée d'Art Contemporain, Marseille (2002); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (both 2003); Vancouver Art Gallery (2005); Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna (2008); Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2009); and *Franz West. Autotheater* travelled from the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, to the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples (2010).

A significant group of outdoor sculptures was installed in the Lincoln Center Plaza in New York in 2004 (organised by Public Art Fund). From 2008 to 2009, The Baltimore Museum of Art organised the retrospective *Franz West: To Build a House You Start with the Roof*, which travelled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 2013, a significant posthumous overview of the artist's work, *Franz West. Wo ist mein Achter? (Where Is My Eight?)*, was presented at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, followed by Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt am Main, and The Hepworth Wakefield, England.

A major survey of the artist's work opened at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in autumn 2018 and is now on view at Tate Modern, London (20 February through 2 June 2019).

Work by the artist is held in major museum collections, including the Albertina Museum, Vienna; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, The Netherlands; CAC Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria; Kunsthalle Bern; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk,

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Denmark; Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna; Philadelphia Museum of Art; S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent; and ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe, Germany.

During his lifetime, West presented several solo exhibitions at David Zwirner, in 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998 (with Heimo Zobernig), and 1999. The gallery further organised an exhibition of the artist's early work in 2004, and, more recently, a show in 2014 that focused on work from the 1990s, which was accompanied by a catalogue published by David Zwirner Books, with essays by Eva Badura-Triska, Veit Loers, and Bernhard Riff.

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