

Erwin Wurm

Football-sized lump of clay
on light blue car roof



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Erwin Wurm at the Kunsthaus Graz

Günther Holler-Schuster

Erwin Wurm has a number of connections with the city of Graz. It is where he grew up, it was formative in his artistic socialisation, and it was here also that he experienced his first successes at the beginning of the 1980s. He participated in various exhibitions at the Neue Galerie Graz—run at that time by Wilfried Skreiner—under the label of ‘New Sculpture’, parallel to ‘New Painting’. These were essential early steps towards an international career that has made Erwin Wurm one of the leading contemporary artists of our time. The most recent comprehensive show of the artist’s work in Graz took place in 2002, also at the Neue Galerie. A positioning of his artistic oeuvre, at the time this landmark exhibition was curated by Peter Weibel as a retrospective. Alongside many solo shows set to take place this year—from Sao Paulo to Vienna, Bangkok and New York—Wurm has been nominated for the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Biennale by former director of the Neue Galerie Christa Steinle, a further highlight in the course of his extraordinary career as an artist.

So the fact that Erwin Wurm has accepted the invitation to this exhibition at the Kunsthaus is all the more welcome. Rather than a retrospective, this is an insight into his current artistic deliberations—an experimental investigation of this special place and the organic design of the building, as well as developments from his *One Minute Sculptures*, a concept that is now twenty years old. Part of the tradition of ‘sculpture as action’, actively integrating the public and designed to be temporary, these

sculptures were the main reason for Erwin Wurm’s definitive breakthrough at an international level. Here, the sculptural state exists for just a short moment as an action context. After this, it remains solely in the imagination of the ‘viewer’, who has acted according to the artist’s instructions. In this way, the sculptural is no longer just space-based, it is also time-based.

Hence it is only logical in this exhibition for the artist now to leave out in part the actual world of objects, entirely omitting props and confronting the audience with only the idea of the sculptural. As a result, at the Kunsthaus we encounter actors who address the public directly from pedestals. ‘Football-sized lump of clay on light blue car roof’. To imagine this scenario, to follow this image mentally, to accept it as a sculpture, producing the sculpture yourself, as it were, is the radical progression of the *One Minute Sculptures*—and at the same time a new challenge for the public. No level of documentation, photographic or otherwise, no objects, no materialisation in the conventional sense: the imaginary becomes the only location of images and of the sculptural.

The imaginary is also the starting-point for the mimetic and performative energies that are generally inherent in images. Like language, the imagination is a ‘*Conditio humana*’—a human condition whose essential characteristics lie within the constitution of the human body. The imagination ultimately controls the theatrical character of human action. We use it, for instance, to weave together the past, present and future. The ‘anthropology of images’ (Belt-ing) speaks of the ambiguity of images as ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’. Here the human body is defined as a medium that both receives and also creates images itself—perception as a physical activity. By implication, the human body is one of

the most important media to create multi-sensory images with its senses and movements. With the help of the imagination, the outside world and its objects become the human inner world—and these are, on the other hand, shaped according to the images of this inner world. Thus Erwin Wurm’s ‘imaginaries’ or *Word Sculptures* are symbols of a world generated by humans. The control of image generation is ultimately also a form of power in the real world. The artist pre-sets the framework of the imagination, retains control to a certain degree and so prevents arbitrariness. As in the *One Minute Sculptures*, the public follow the artist’s instructions, and he has at that moment access to the mental image production of his counterpart.

Erwin Wurm’s works are generally deceptive and ambiguous, which makes them particularly successful. Picking up on the ordinary, they point out the strangeness of the familiar to us. As a result, they cause a great deal of uncertainty in the minds of the public. Absurdity, which according to Freud also plays a fundamental role in humour, is one of the reasons why many of Wurm’s pieces work. Their humorous, at times satirical undertone is essentially derived from this. His combinations of objects and instructions lead to scenarios of an absurd nature, arising from a post-modern lightness, a certain unselfconsciousness, and yet in turn are corrected, as it were, by the regularities of modernity and the avant-garde. It is in this interplay between strict guidelines and a coexisting liberation that the potential of Wurm’s oeuvre lies.

When philosopher Markus Gabriel states that ‘the composition of an artwork is the fabric of the fields of meaning, the order of its layers, which makes it this particular work but not that one, this particular object but not that one,’ this can also be read in

terms of sculpture. Fields of meaning, layers, dimensions, volumes, these are all terms that are crucial in conceptualisation within the sculptural and which the artist uses proportionately in his considerations. This becomes especially noticeable in Wurm’s examination of works by other artists. He adopts a playful approach to their connotations, their cultural significance and their actual content. Wurm seems to want to expand their framework of possibilities and does not accept their one-dimensionality, instead looking beyond and seeing them as material for his own ideas. The result is a shift in the correlations of their functions. The figure becomes the pedestal, the everyday object becomes an art object. This interplay produces a new concept of the sculptural. Hence Wotruba’s *Reclining figure*, for instance, is temporarily given the entirely opposite purpose of providing a shelf, a pedestal, when suddenly a roll filled with sausage is placed on it. It is the audacity with which this gesture is carried out by the artist, but also the strict regularity required in order to understand this action, that are effective here. Both objects have clear, almost unquestionable definitions of content—they are, as it were, ‘icons’. The decisive moment is when they coincide—‘the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table’ (Lautréamont). At any point, the otherwise insignificant everyday thing can become something like accidental poetry. Duchamp’s act of painting a goatee beard on the Mona Lisa, thereby placing Leonardo da Vinci’s world famous artwork within the context of the readymade concept, seems also to have been taken up ironically here.

A small bronze figure by Josef Pillhofer, which Erwin Wurm enlarges to vast dimensions and fits with climbing grips, is a variation on this process of appropriation. In its fragile materiality (polystyrene), this

'climbing tower' is not designed to be actually used. As with Wotruba's sculpture, this is again a question of shifting functionalities. The original intention of the artwork—as a Modernist reduction of the form of the human body—is switched into a trivial context. The deceit, however, lies in the fact that both of the apparent functional connections break down in reality. The artwork is no longer a formal examination of the human body, nor is it suitable as sports equipment. Rather, what the artist is asking here is the question of the determination and/or ambiguity of an object, whether it is art or something for everyday use. The encounter between Erwin Wurm's works and the architecture of the Kunsthaus essentially becomes a scenario of the sculptural. It is this confrontation that calls forth the sculptural qualities of the architecture. Wurm's bloating and shrinking houses (*Fat House*, *Narrow House*), which follow the sculptural logic of growing and shrinking, form an immediate mental link to the architecture of the Kunsthaus. The features that look so sculptural from the outside, its swollen, amorphous shape, now become discernible as a sculpture inside, too. The presence of the location, a postulate of Minimal Art, is suggested here. A huge pink pullover becomes an imaginary piece of clothing for a building. Monstrously distorted, the everyday object mutates into the *Weltraumschwitzer*, the space sweater, into an object between function and autonomy, which takes the architecture into an unknown galaxy, so to speak. Space or the universe as synonyms for infinite expanses become the basic conceptual disposition of the exhibition space, itself perceived as boundless, acting in total contradiction to the 'White Cube' (Brian O'Doherty). In 2003, Sol Lewitt attempted to give this same space a constant, to make it tangible, by installing a curved wall. The *Space Sweater*

does the opposite. It floats, as it were, through the space, and speculates with the boundlessness of the spatial situation. The materiality of the textile refers to the flexibility and permeability of this element in the space, at first glance perceived as architectonic. If one imagines the public actively engaging with the *Space Sweater*—sticking their arms through the sleeves or their heads through one of the collars—the functional interaction changes. What can I put on here? On the one hand, in this situation I become part of the sculptural concept—in line with the logic of the *One Minute Sculptures*—on the other hand, I connect with the space in a special way. I put it on, so to speak. In an earlier work, Wurm showed an *Artist who swallowed the World*—a spherical male figure. It is based on an absurd idea, similar to being able to put on eternity—or developing a pedestal on which the entire world can lie (Manzoni). The element of deformation, which generally plays a crucial role in Wurm's work, is of course primarily sculptural. And yet it also alludes to the socio-cultural state of the individual within the mechanisms of society—to standardisation, consumer stress, the economic utilisation of a person.

Thus Erwin Wurm's deliberations never remain in the formal or in the narrow sphere of experience defined by what is visible at the moment. They are also extensions of immaterial conditions such as psychoses or social conditionalities—ultimately external deformations of inner processes. Shrinking and growing are dynamics that are not limited to the sculptural. Investment volumes, value appreciations, purchasing power, all of these can grow and shrink and hence become sculptural reality. Just as a bucket placed over one's head can become a question of identity. Wurm's postulate that 'anything can be a sculpture' should be understood within this expanded context.

And so the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Graz is not a show of the artist's work in the conventional sense, at which a distinguished selection is presented. Instead it is an experiment that the artist, thankfully, was willing to take on. Until now not substantially present in Erwin Wurm's work, the investigation of architecture, the logical progression of the *One Minute Sculptures* with a further escalation of the imaginary aspect, as well as the direct confrontation of his own concepts with works by other artists—all of this can be described as innovative, so giving this exhibition a particular value.

The original impetus for this show was the 'Honorary Prize for Fine Arts of the Province of Styria' awarded to Erwin Wurm in 2015. The timing of this exhibition could scarcely have been better chosen, with the artist currently at the preliminary peak of his artistic development.



Marcel Duchamp, reproduction of *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), from: *Boîte*, 1966
Neue Galerie Graz, UMJ

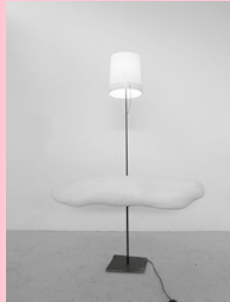
Red Light 2015-2017

Iron, electricity, plastic (PE bucket), wood
170 × 80 × 50 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm



Red Sunset 2015

Iron, plastic, polystyrene, light, cable
189 × 128 × 60 cm
unique
EW/S 602
Foto: Studio Erwin Wurm



Evening Star 2017

Iron, Acrystal, electricity, plastic
(PE bucket), polystyrene
192 × 140 × 50 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm



Blue Light 2017

Iron, Acrystal, electricity, plastic
(PE bucket), polystyrene
192 × 120 × 48 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm



Northern Lights 2017

Iron, Acrystal, electricity, plastic
(PE bucket), polystyrene
192 × 140 × 50 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm

Glade 2017

Iron, Acrystal, electricity, plastic
(PE bucket), polystyrene
192 × 140 × 50 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm

In 1997 Erwin Wurm achieved his international breakthrough with the concept of the One Minute Sculptures. In this group of works, visitors are invited to follow instructions (for example, hanging a clothes hanger complete with clothing from their lower lip, or thinking of a philosopher such as Kant or Spinoza in a particular pose, or lying on tennis balls), and to remain in that position for one minute. In this way the viewers themselves become performers and objects of aesthetic experience, such as we usually expect to find in exhibitions. Here Wurm focuses on the conditions under which a sculpture exists, and asks whether an action can be transferred into sculpture. The series of sculptures that can also be lamps are an extension of this concept. They are independent, furniture-like objects that invite the visitor to merge themselves physically with the piece of furniture by, for instance, imitating the lampshade and putting a bucket on one's head (as with Red Light) or musing on the concept of sculpture while drinking a glass of red wine (as with Glade).





GHS: The Kunsthaus Graz seems to be ideal for Erwin Wurm's art. You come from Graz, too—is Graz a special place for you?

EW: Graz is the city of my childhood, it's where I also began as an artist. What's more, I find the Kunsthaus interesting architecturally. This alien, the spaceship in the midst of the old Baroque or Renaissance roofscape. Inside it's very hard. But very hard conditions can be challenging, too.

GHS: I can well imagine the interior—especially the top floor, the Space01—as a sculpture.

EW: Yes, for sure, you walk in and have the feeling you're in a black hole. That is already difficult, because the space is of course more easily defined if we can see the end of that space, perceive it, understand it. Except there seems to be no end to it because everything is black. Initially that's unsettling. It is almost as though one had

cut out a photo of a sculpture and stick it on white paper. The three-dimensionality cannot properly develop as a result, because it bears no relation to a beginning and an end of a room. In the Kunsthaus I feel it like that, too.

GHS: So the main ideas of this architecture lie essentially in the sculptural, the performative, the mobile and the organic. Those elements are also central to your work. If, for example, we take the large pullover, the *Space Sweater*, which certainly derives from the physical: it is a piece of clothing despite its monstrosity. This dimensioning does something with the space.

EW: The pullover is an ideal thing because it determines space through the colour body that it indeed is, and through the way in which it meanders through the space. It also creates definitions for the space and forms three-dimensional coordinates.

MHK: That means the pullover wouldn't have arisen without the space, the space

provoked this work in a certain way. Is the *Climbing Sculpture* after *Figure* by Josef Pillhofer also a work that has been created for this size of space? So as to oppose the sculptural interior space of the Kunsthaus?

EW: *Figure* by Pillhofer is actually small, in fact. We've taken the liberty of making it large so that it can assert itself and establish a claim, as it were.

GHS: Your art gives the impression through humour and paradox of being subtle, subversive, even resistant to a certain extent.

EW: In this context, the term paradox describes very precisely what I want. Paradox is a finding or attitude that runs counter to the generally expected and prevailing opinion. At the same time the investigation of this paradox results in a deep understanding of terms, situations, actions etc., which in turn is meant to resolve the contradiction. The term humour, on the other hand, describes only the reaction to paradoxical situations, encounters, etc. But this puts the focus on laughter, which then wrongly reduces the whole thing.

GHS: Is a moment of general failure often a theme in your work?

EW: If we see contradiction as failure, yes.

GHS: There's a reason why your pullovers can surely be interpreted as mental conditioning.

EW: That too, sometimes.

GHS: Is the large pullover—like the *Fat Car* or *Fat House*—a linguistic translation of what is perhaps present emotionally? An atmosphere of the monstrous?

EW: A reflection of a monstrous world that displays its monstrosity in increasingly radical ways.

MHK: Considering the whole oeuvre, one work is an important symbol for me: a car that's close to toppling over. It looks simple but in reality is very elaborate and yet unspectacular, like a matchbox car that has been stepped on. The instant just before it topples over. How can such a moment be made tangible?

EW: A seemingly simple matter, which gives away nothing of the difficulty of its creation. A typical paradox.

MHK: How important in fact is the definition of sculpture for understanding all that's contained in your work?

EW: Very important for me, because my interest in the notion of the sculptural has continued from the very outset. Basically, I have never been interested in institutions or architectural space in this context. I always found institutional criticism terribly dull.

MHK: On this question I thought rather of Duchamp, where the institutional framework is the condition for the pissoir becoming an artwork. Does it matter whether the pullover with instructions for use is in a museum?

EW: I wouldn't say that the institutional framework is key, rather the understanding that we are dealing with a work of art. It needs an act of will to declare a shovel or a wheel or a urinal by 'R. Mutt' an artwork. Without it, it's something quite different.

MHK: And the transition from the performative to the sculptural and back?

Climbing Sculpture 2016

Polystyrene, climbing grips

398 × 110 × 125 cm

Studio Erwin Wurm

The exploration of sculpture in itself and sculptural phenomena in everyday life is the central theme running through Wurm's oeuvre. Within this context, he establishes a connection between sculptural quality and social issues.

Erwin Wurm's Climbing Sculpture references an Austrian sculptor he admires, Josef Pillhofer (1921–2010). Pillhofer's work Figure, 1956 (bronze on marble plinth, h = 58 cm) from the Neue Galerie Graz collection, served him as a model. While Pillhofer created his work in a manageable dimension and cast it in durable bronze, Wurm inverts the properties of the classical sculpture in terms of size, weight and elaboration. He exaggerates the size of the original work many times over, while replacing the valuable bronze with cheap, obviously glued polystyrene. The stable, apparently indestructible figure becomes a fragile, oversized climbing wall that would fall apart if you put a foot on it. The artistic reference incorporates the central questions of sculpture, with apparent lightness stripping away aura and pathos, durability and the expectation of perpetuity.



EW: That's to do with my attempts at finding my way in the world of the sculptural—what is that, the path from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional? Then from movement to standstill. When I stand here, upright, what is that? Is that an action? Is that a sculpture, can it turn into a sculpture or not? I have really concerned myself with questions like these to work out the métier I am involved in.

GHS: Originally you wanted to become a painter, so to begin with you were occupied with the two-dimensional, and so it's plausible that in the first instance you defined for yourself what sculpture is in general, and what the corresponding modes of operation look like.

EW: I took the entrance exam in Salzburg. I turned up there as a painter and I was put in Sculpture. I was clueless. In my final year at school we were in Vienna, in the 20er Haus as it was, and we saw these dark, black, boring bodies there—bronze sculptures ... all of it dreary. At that stage I knew nothing of Pop Art and so on. Sculpture at the time was just dreary for me. And I thought: what can I do with that!?

MHK: But now I have another question I'm bursting to ask: what is then so magical about Wotruba? (laughs)

EW: What I really appreciate and acknowledge about Wotruba is his great achievement in abstraction of bringing the body back to cube forms. Unlike Henry Moore, who takes the body into the amorphous. For programmatic reasons, I have always tried to make exclusively sculpture—even when I am drawing, or creating photos or performances—it was important to determine precisely: what is that, what are the

parameters, what do I have to adhere to, to be able to make sculptures today? Suddenly social issues were important. They even turned into material: when I model, whether with clay or whatever, I add volume, or I take it away. When we put on or lose weight, we add or take away volume.

So one could conclude that sculpture is putting on or losing weight. Everything's possible, in the most private sphere too, even when eating and gaining weight—that's all sculptural work. But the social aspect immediately comes in here, because as we know, putting on or losing weight is also a question of social affiliation. Or when I have asked someone to dress with many layers on top of each other, that's something the homeless do as well. Suddenly the notion of the sculptural was a catalyst for other themes, that was a sensation. The themes came to me, not the other way round.

GHS: It seems to be a similar case with items of clothing. You don't just select them according to colour and material, rather there are groups that attract a certain something. Do you consider that?

EW: I have tried to avoid that and even made a curatorial choice out of it. If I have shown the pullovers somewhere, I have said to the curator: 'you buy the pullovers'. I have arranged contracts with museums so that my works do not go the way of Fluxus works, which age incredibly badly because they turn into a curiosity of the period concerned. The contents and the idea suddenly part company. Duchamp, for example, said himself that his best work was the shovel, because he gave the instruction to go to the nearest shop and buy a shovel, and then that's the artwork. But the *Bottle Rack* did become the aesthetic curiosity of the

1920s. And so to avoid something similar, it is written in the contracts that the museums must throw the jumpers away after 20 years, and replace them with new ones. In this way they don't become souvenirs of a particular age. That is very often the case with Fluxus, and it's a pity.

GHS: The fetish of authenticity, the work must have come into contact with the artist ...

EW: That's why there was never really fallen dust on my dust sculptures. I 'faked' the dust. All that mattered was the imagination.

MHK: If the pullover is to be replaced, then it has nothing symbolic to it, it implies no stories, as is often the case in art involving textiles. The textile is often a second skin, over which a great deal of information is stored.

EW: In my works it's a second skin, too, but one emptied of meaning. Here the concern is only with the sculptural.

MHK: Do you also make large knitted works as commissions?

EW: I have done three commissioned works. I found that so absurd in a certain way that I liked it. What was interesting was that the contracts occurred in the context of political institutions. And that in turn corresponded with the criteria of traditional portraits of rulers. And I then created the works in this direction. I took as my theme the paradox of the claim to power in a democratically legitimised political system.

GHS: The politicians are here placed on a kind of stage, are showcased in a certain way—set in a performative context that only partially corresponds to their actual

one. There are generally very many figures in your work, which are almost regrettable in their awkwardness, if we look at the fat Adorno, or the man who swallowed the world, or the fat car—things become organic and begin to reflect their own situation. For example, the house considers whether it is a house, a sculpture or simply a monster that has become deformed. How is awkwardness for you?

EW: Very early on the question arose in my work as to whether it's possible to transfer emotional values such as awkwardness, ridiculousness, claustrophobic feelings etc. directly into a sculpture. Not as an allegory or with an attribute but rather by processing these emotional values in such a way that the result arouses empathy. That is of course easier in the performative area. In the *One Minute Sculptures* it's an essential aspect: I tempt people out of their boundaries, let them cross certain borders.

GHS: Back to Duchamp. The bearded Mona Lisa with the painted-on goatee beard occurs to me here. If I now look at the Wotruba with the sausage roll on the knee and consider the theme of awkwardness ... Is the sausage roll a kind of goatee beard?

EW: The sausage roll remains a sausage roll. It has no message. Only that a colleague's finished sculpture becomes material for a new work of mine.

GHS: That is also a comment on reception. The artist is not responsible for everything. He can only slightly influence the impact, the afterlife of the works. Thus a modernist sculpture can have now turned into the most clichéd and stiff object one can imagine. A certain rigour can be associated with it, even though it was never conceived in that way.

Gaining and losing weight is sculpture

Untitled 2016 (using: Fritz Wotruba, Reclining Figure, 1953)

Cast cement, bread roll with sausage ('extrawurst') and gherkin

61 × 170 × 59.5 cm

Wotruba: Neue Galerie Graz, UMJ

Studio Erwin Wurm

The Austrian artist Fritz Wotruba (1907–1975) is one of the most important sculptors of the 20th century. The starting-point of his work was often the human figure, its proportions and qualities, which he reduced geometrically in his forms. Rough, closed shapes also characterise this reclining figure, its cubic and massive form cast in stone appearing weighty in a number of ways. Erwin Wurm admires the work of this influential teacher of the Austrian post-war period, but at the same time liberates himself from what he sees as the restrictive standards that made Wotruba a classical artist of modern sculpture. As in his work about Pillhofer, Wurm detracts from the heavy earnestness of Wotruba's scul-



ture and intervenes with a minimal shift in values: a very typical Austrian snack, a breadroll filled with sausage ('extrawurst') and a gherkin, lies in a lapidary gesture on the raised knee of the sculpture, subtly undermining the sovereignty of the classical sculpture. At the same time, however, he takes it down from the pedestal and into our daily life, full of carelessness and indifference.



MHK: Another question: What door opens with the Rauschenberg?

EW: That's a game with forms and possibilities. For the *Noodle Sculptures* I laid noodles on a picture by Kippenberger and by George Condo, on a Warhol and on a medieval sculpture. It was about rupturing and playing with the notion of the artwork. At some point, I realised that everything around me is a possibility for art, for material. So I accept other works of art as material. I once made a picture with a Maurizio Cattelan photo by sticking milk bottles into the back of the photo and then photographing it. I declare other artworks as material and make something new of them. It's not about critically questioning these positions, I appreciate them all very much.

GHS: Once again a parallel to Dechamp who suggested using a Rembrandt as an ironing board. A similar lightness.

EW: The lightness, the sauntering. Some artists just saunter along. I love this expression, because sauntering means shrugging things off with ease, and being above it all. Perhaps that's not always right—but sometimes it is.

MHK: Who comes into question for this visit of the sauntering artist? Who do you select?

EW: That's always connected to the range of experience. One has so much on one's mind, yet also no less and no more. It will always just be what I've been occupied with. The selection for the *Noodles Sculptures* was a pragmatic one. The works were close by me—not least because I appreciate them. But it could also be other ones.

GHS: In the case of Rauschenberg I have the feeling he could be a distant relative. He makes a door out of pieces of cardboard ...

EW: I find that fantastic!

GHS: ... similar to how you proceeded in those days with your wood sculptures: carpentry waste, which then turns into the equestrian statue, or into a nude on the stairs and so on.

EW: Yes, Rauschenberg achieved something fantastic there, the *Combine Paintings*, in which the picture dissolves ... Although I particularly rate the cardboard works because the contents have been displaced so much. Mostly objects are charged with contents, after all. Rauschenberg's goat is charged with content, and obviously the car tyre, likewise. Two things come together here, which are not freed of meaning, but each one takes with it a story of meaning. And that fits. That's not the case with the cardboard packaging. Nothing is delivered along with it. So no object laden with meaning. That's what makes it so likeable for me.

GHS: Will you interact with it, like with Wotruba with the sausage roll?

EW: I'll have to see what I do. But keep in mind that chance has played a role here. I asked whether there was something I can use and you said: we have a Rauschenberg. And that's how we arrived at Wotruba and Pillhofer, too.

GHS: It's the sequence of Wotruba, Rauschenberg and Pillhofer that seems 'typically Wurm-like', as it were, and absurd. In the museum that combination only occurs in the storage depot. Nobody selects it in that way.

EW: Yes, although of course Rauschenberg has in a sense created a cubist work with this door and thus a connection to the others in a special way.

GHS: He has created three-dimensionality using two-dimensional things and made an artwork from a functional context, which is also the case in your works. They are everyday objects, function has been removed, the function of art is added, becoming the object. The same with Wotruba. With the sausage roll he turns from artwork to object.

EW: The Wotruba becomes part of another work of art. A short-lived one, only as long, indeed, as the sausage roll lies on it.

GHS: So that means there's a limit in terms of time for when an artwork is an artwork.

EW: Yes, as is often the case in my work. The pullovers and other works, the *One Minutes* too of course, there's always a beginning and a defined end.

GHS: One of the most essential aspects of this exhibition—what could also be called a première—are the imaginary sculptures. These connect with this theme now. Is that the complete reduction? Imagination is a *conditio humana*, we can't escape it. We have these images, we produce them, we locate these images when we consciously deal with them etc. Is this the last form of immateriality, so to say?

EW: At the moment, yes. This is a clear continuation of the *One Minute Sculptures*, for these elements are already found in the *One Minutes*. There is an instruction, sometimes there's a text, you have to consider this, or do this or that. This could all be depicted. I didn't do so because I found the visualisation, the realisation, interesting that some-

one had to carry it out. At this point, various other aspects are added in. Someone does something according to my instructions. It's then often about embarrassment: he's standing there and everyone else is looking at him. In the case of the *Word Sculptures*—I prefer this term because it's calm—it's really about images that are sculptures. In my work, I believe in the strong image, that was always very important for me.

GHS: To what extent have you then lost control? The imagination varies greatly. We can all imagine the 'football-sized lump of clay on a light blue car roof', but the image would look somewhat different in each case.

EW: Yes, but that's okay. Here we are with Descartes: I see you, you see me, but do I see you how you are, and do you see me how I am? From the philosophical point of view that's one of the basic questions. Do we all see the same shade of orange, or do you see it differently from me? We probably all see something different and yet we define that as orange because we believe we all see the same. I think it has to do with that.

MHK: If I approach a plinth in the Kunsthaus and a person presents a picture to me, I am in that moment already part of the sculpture. I'm part of the situation. Do I think of the whole situation as a sculptural unit, or is the sculpture the person who speaks and opens up the picture?

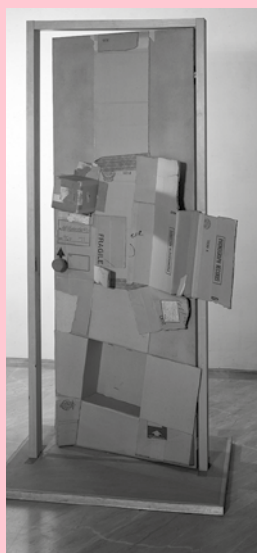
EW: Sure, so in that case it's the person who stands there and speaks and provokes the picture. Click, and then you see it. That works amazingly well, and as soon as you hear something, it's visualised. I remember, as a young lad, aged 17, I took some kind of drugs, and I came home and my father's talking about an apple tree at dinner,

Rauschenberg on Wurm 2016

Der Gurk, Bronze cast patinated,
h = 415 cm, Φ = 110 cm (using Robert
Rauschenberg, Door, 1971: offset,
silkscreen on cardboard (multiple),
203.5 × 76.5 × 30 cm

Rauschenberg: Neue Galerie Graz, UMJ
Studio Erwin Wurm

The connection between American artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) and Erwin Wurm is the idea that the use of materials that surround us in the real world—cardboard, light bulbs, furniture, clothing or even dust—make an artwork tangible. 'I think a painting is more like the real world if it's made out of the real world,' said Rauschenberg. It is no accident, therefore, that the materials of his famous Combines from the 1950s came from the streets: trash and found objects that he combined into assemblages, investigating the boundaries between painting and sculpture. The cardboard boxes with which Rauschenberg experimented in the early 1970s and from which he created pictures or sculptures, without adding anything, on the one hand thematised painting formally by creating almost monochrome pictures, while on the other hand they provided a socio-critical commentary on the material, which still today characterises the appearance of slums. Thus the linking of social issues with formal aspects of sculpture or painting is a feature common to the concepts of the two artists. Gherkins—like the typically Austrian frankfurters or knackwursts—are a recurring motif in Erwin Wurm's work. With the oversized Der Gurk, cast in bronze, a material of classical sculpture, Wurm created an impressive monument to this food icon. Rauschenberg's Door, provisionally fastened to the statue, becomes here a casual commentary—it becomes quasi Wotruba's roll with sausage.



and—click!— there was the apple tree in the room. It was just standing there and didn't go away. Cool! Something like that is certainly intended. After all we depict ourselves with images, today more than ever, Twitter and the rest of it.

But of course it would be possible to do something like the *One Minutes*, where you invite the visitor to place her- or himself on the plinth and speak this sentence. I really like that, too. It's just that it's less fitting for the exhibition technically, because the sentence is short, the visitor goes up, it doesn't last more than two seconds, if that, and then the thing's over. An action has to be spread out for it to become sculpture; the longer you stretch it, the more sculptural it becomes. The repetition is also important for the experience. If a visitor stood on the pedestal and spoke a sentence, it would be just concentrated on the person doing it. This way it's focused more on the viewers who get the picture delivered to them. That's more interesting in terms of how the exhibition works, because the viewers are offered more.

GHS: Is poetry something sculptural? If one reads your imaginary sculptures, one's connection with them resembles that with poems. Earlier on you read them aloud very solemnly, very pleasantly. One automatically senses this feeling of the poetic, an almost romantic approach to the situation or the picture being created here.

EW: Yes, I'm no romantic, but haikus function in a similar way, for example. In haikus it's about the contents, about what they release. Here it's exclusively about the image, about the sculpture. 'Iron body lies on leather football. Leather football breathes out.' It's about the image. Nothing less and nothing more.

Pffff

MHK: That means actually, only the spoken sentence is relevant? The person's posture is secondary?

EW: I like it when someone stands with composed posture. With earnestness.

GHS: Visitors to the exhibition may feel embarrassed. If they were expecting to move secretly, or in the dark, from one exhibit to another, and then suddenly someone speaks to them. The pressure is of course great. Do I have to do something, will the next one say something too, perhaps? Will I ever get out of here without having to do something?
(laughter)

EW: You see, I never thought about that aspect of it.

GHS: In these *Word Sculptures*, we are confronted head-on in a particular way. The sculptural is carried out metaphorically within you.

EW: And the effect is quite different when spoken, as if only a text was there and each person reads it for himself. That is something completely different. As you rightly say, one asks: 'What does he want from me?'

GHS: I don't want to be spoken to in a museum. That can only be dangerous.

MHK: Well, I'd be surprised if someone said that to me on the street. I'm just wondering whether the museum or exhibition room matters in the reception of the work.

EW: Perhaps that's even possible on the street. But the street is not a space for concentrating, museums are places to concentrate in. I once tried to do *One*

Word Sculptures 2017

Persons on plinths, dimensions variable

Studio Erwin Wurm

The absence of the sculpture is the 'zero point' at which Erwin Wurm's reflections about and on sculptural aspects of life begin. So, for instance, one of his series from the early 1990s tells of objects that become visible only from the outlines they have left behind on dusty plinths. The answer to the question of what may have stood there is left up to the viewer's imagination.

Wurm adopts a similar approach in his work Word Sculptures. The plinths in the exhibition space where one would expect to find sculptures are either occupied by people or empty. If you approach one of these persons, you are given a verbal description of the sculpture that could have stood in their place: 'block of smell follows a person through the room', 'Football-sized lump of clay on light blue car roof', 'Walking over a bed, sinking into it like snow and leaving behind a track', 'Doubt lies on hope, hope breathes out'. The language used here by Wurm is somewhere between soberly reported material specifications and poetry. A further subtlety lies in the fact that it is the dematerialisation of sculpture that leads to the text, while this is in turn describes the cancelled material. Unlike the One Minute Sculptures, for which Erwin Wurm invites visitors to pose in positions that sometimes appear absurd, here sculpture does not become tangible through physical experience—instead, it is created only through the imagination of the viewer.

An artists' book entitled take a deep breath and hold it records this project, including 40 imaginary sculptures.

Football-sized lump of clay on light blue car roof



Minutes on the street – that’s so out of context, few people notice. All that’s left is slapstick.

GHS: The Pillhofer works a bit differently; it’s prepared for use, so to speak, but cannot be used. Does that mean that we should imagine this activity?

EW: The idea of climbing on an artwork appealed to me. Just like you could climb onto Richard Serra’s corten steel sculpture. That’s like Wotruba with the sausage roll.

GHS: For the exhibition, a special edition has been created by you: an annual pass for the Joanneum in the form of a knackwurst. The sausage is thus a functional object in several senses: it’s nourishment, and an entrance ticket to a museum. If someone then turns up at the ticket counter with this object, it’s like with many of your works: one finds oneself in an absurd, almost embarrassing situation and turns into sculpture oneself. Just imagine: someone arrives at the museum counter and the person opposite him fails to recognise the sausage as an entrance ticket. A horror scenario unfolds.

EW: Exactly. (laughs)

GHS: In any case, it’s an embarrassing moment, and one just hopes the person opposite you knows as much as you do: that this sausage is an entrance ticket and that the person is not going to call for the police straightaway.

EW (laughs): The sausage is a Central European icon, a food icon. After all, we’re in winterland here, where there was nothing to eat in the cold season, no fresh fruit, vegetables etc. Sauerkraut was pickled, as were gherkins, old meat was stuffed into intestines and became sausage. Food for

winter. That’s why I have tackled this theme. What’s more, I grew up in Graz with the sausage. I can remember my grandfather always giving me ‘gabelbissen’ (small jellied snacks) with ‘extrawurst’ or with a gherkin in it, as a reward.

GHS: Those things fed generations!

EW (laughs): That’s how I grew up. And I once read that one slowly turns into what one eats. I ate many gherkins and knackwurst and pickled sausages, so this is very close to me, in my mind.

GHS: *Self-portrait as Gherkin.*

EW: So that’s how I get to the sausage at all. And then of course every gherkin, every sausage has a particular form that reminds us of male parts, and this anatomical part is something very important for the man, and for the woman, after all. That’s a theme for drama and for world wars, and all that. So this theme interests me, and therefore it crops up repeatedly.

MHK: Is the pullover an icon too?

EW: No, the pullover is firstly a second skin, and then it’s quite simple to create new forms with the jumper, to deform. It doesn’t take much and doesn’t need costly materials, but when we pull on a sweater and stick our hands in underneath, it changes at once into something completely different. That interested me, that’s why I used it so often, at the beginning. Then another thing with the pullover is that people can be depersonalised. A pullover over the head may be an anthropomorphic figure, but it’s no longer a person. So it’s a simple approach, a quite simple step.



Installation of the *Space Sweater* at the Kunsthhaus Graz, March 2017

LeWitt
20 Pratt St.
Box 360
Chester Ct
06412
Telephone
860 536 4226
860 536 1312
Fax 860 526 2646

DESIGN PETER

I HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT A
PIECE TO PUT INTO YOUR SPACE FOR
FEBRUARY. I WANT TO BUILD A
STRUCTURE THAT WINDS THROUGH THE
AREA ~~~~~

SINCE I CANNOT USE CONCRETE
BLOCKS OR BRICKS OR ANYTHING HEAVY,
I THOUGHT TO USE STYROFOAM BLOCKS.

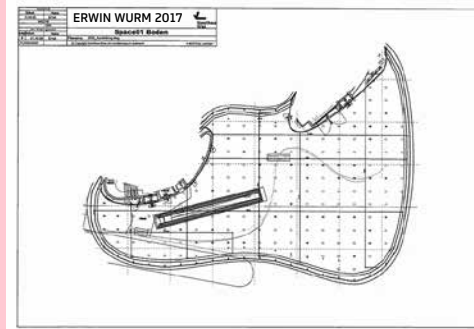
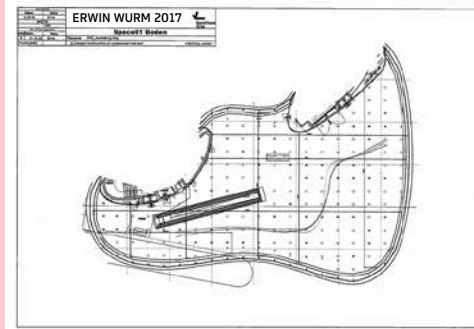
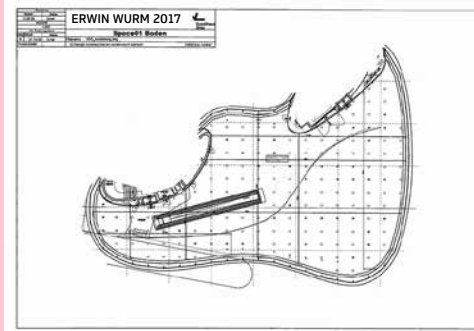
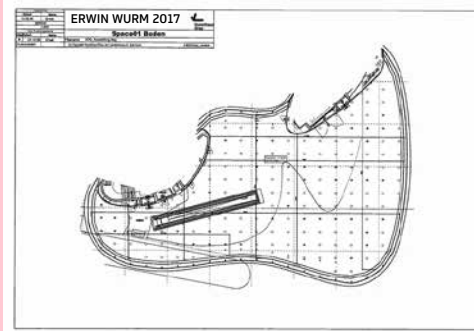
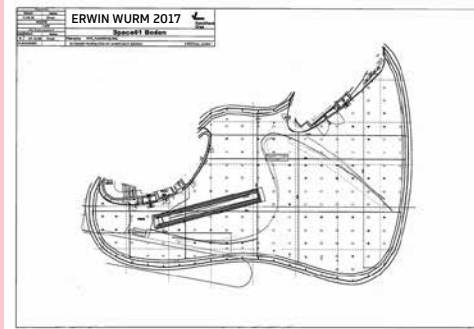
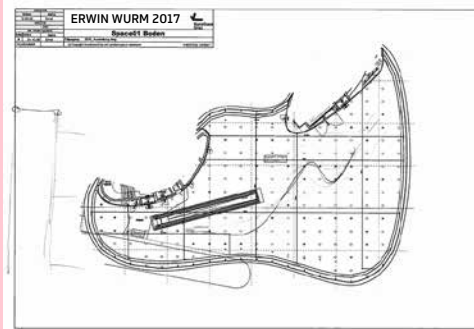


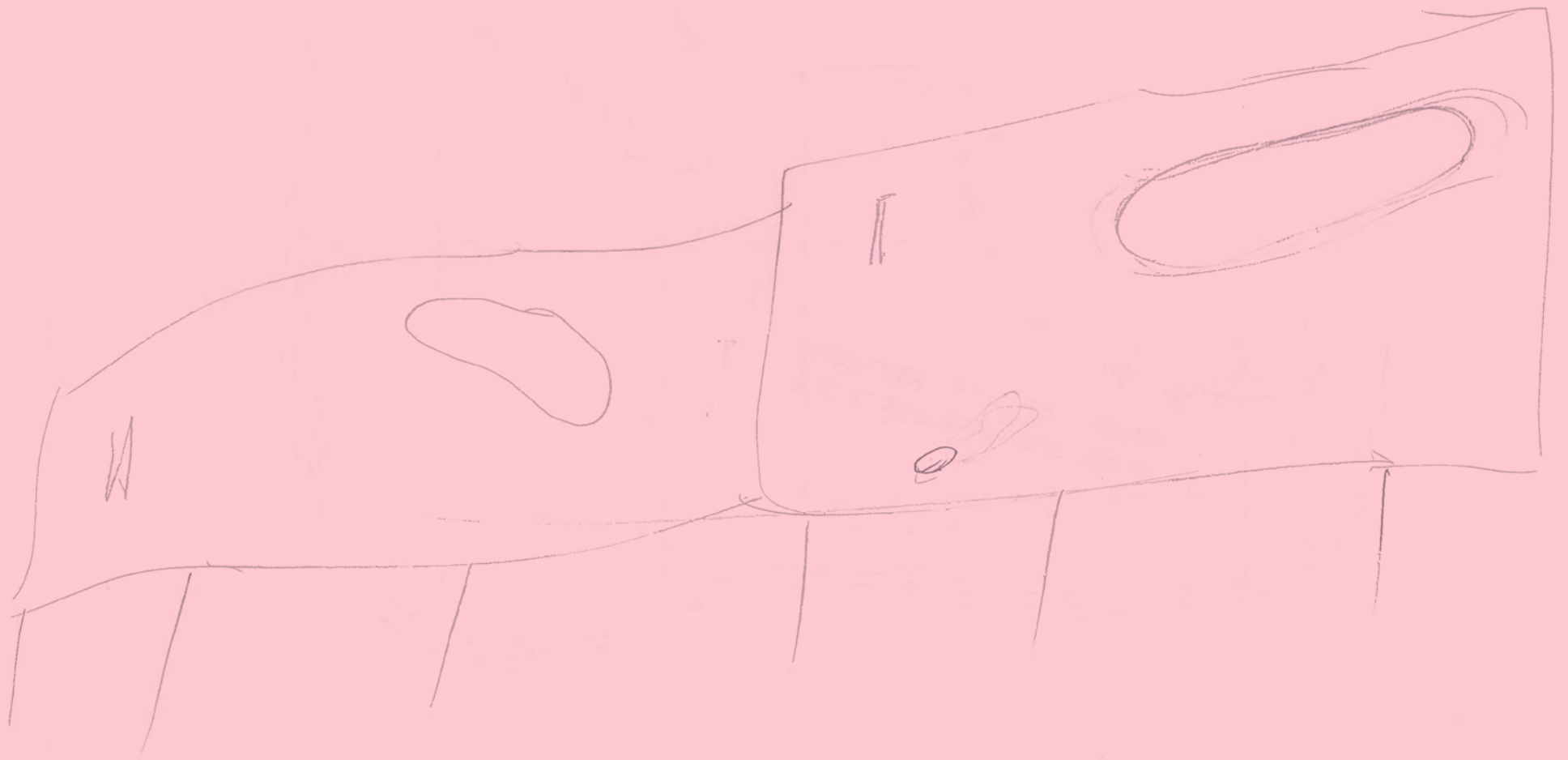
Space Sweater 2017

Wool, metal
400 × 4,000 × 5 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm

Clothing is an element that has featured regularly in Erwin Wurm's oeuvre for around 30 years now. Like other everyday objects, clothing provides him with a flexible basic material that he uses sculpturally in order to contemplate questions around covering and core, or about the absence or presence of the body.

Erwin Wurm has already realised large 'wall pullovers' in various studies and forms, whereby the free-hanging Space Sweater goes one step further. His installation in the Kunsthhaus Graz refers to one of the first solo shows to have been shown here: the sculpture project Wall, 2004, by US American conceptual artist and leading exponent of minimal art, Sol LeWitt (1928-2007). With more than 140 tons of Ytong blocks, LeWitt created a structure that meandered through the space and focused on the organic vault of the Kunsthhaus. At around 40 m long and 4 m high, the size of Erwin Wurm's sweater for Space01 in the Kunsthhaus equals Sol LeWitt's iconic sculpture, alluding to this monumental work. He does this, however, not by reconstructing it and so reflecting a past work, but rather by dismantling the idea into its original components and enriching it with his own elements in terms of form and content. In this way, Wurm restarts the discussion about the essence and meaning of space from the beginning, at the same time creating a cosy garment for the personified Space01.









From pullover to sculpture and back again

Monika Holzer-Kernbichler

The pink wool of the enormous pullover flows down from the ceiling, its free-hanging form dividing the biomorphic space. Erwin Wurm has brought a pullover for the Kunsthaus Graz, a building whose interior is separated from the outer shell of the façade by its grey skin. The shape of the blue bubble is most noticeable in Space01, its cathedral-like hall a unique space. The dimensions of this room become tangle in those of the enormous pullover. Erwin Wurm studied sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Since 1988 he has been using pieces of clothing in his work as a means to explore the concept of sculpture. His interest has always focused on the very fundamental issues of this theme: statics, shape, colour, surface, weight and volume are of vital importance. When you add and shape volume you are producing plastic forms, and also by taking away material a sculpture is created. For Erwin Wurm, therefore, gaining and losing weight are also sculptural processes at a human, physical level. He makes people themselves the focal point of his thinking, so that they can be emancipated, in all their vitality, from the stone-chiselled figures of past eras. Temporality also plays an important role here: for Michelangelo, one of the signs of a good statue was that it could roll down a mountain without sustaining any damage. A sculpture should be enduring, solid and robust—a monument able to survive out in the open. By incorporating ephemerality and swiftness as defining qualities, Wurm breaks with this key feature of durability. At the same time, however, he also breaks with the seriousness and pathos that accompany

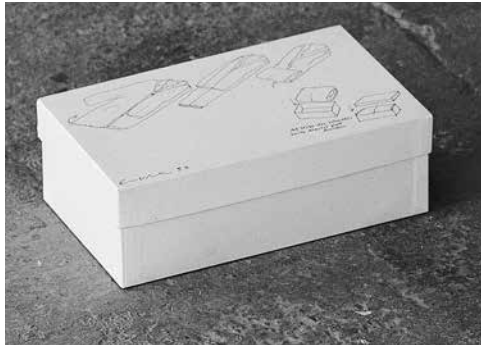
this continuing validity. He is not concerned about capturing the fertile moment for perpetuity; instead, his interest lies in stopping the present for a frozen moment, which in Erwin Wurm's work invariably becomes a time-limited sculpture. If you take away the pathos of sculptural works, you also take away their earnest gravity at the same time. Humour makes a lot of things easier—both in viewing Erwin Wurm's work and also in life itself. Humour is subjective: in Wurm's work the joke lies in the seriousness of the staging and not in a silly, comical choice of motif, as well as in a very carefully selected moment when concentration is at its greatest. Embarrassment and failure lie within the realms of what is possible and desirable, and are even aspects that can strengthen the work. People following exactly pre-composed instructions first deform themselves in order to become a *One Minute Sculpture* or, as in Wurm's early works, transform a pullover into an organic, abstract form. The human figure is reduced to the temporary, static and volumising core, encased in a colourful covering that becomes a form-giving surface. In everyday life, beyond art, the pullover is a much used object. It warms and structures the human body next to the skin, separates it from its surroundings, provides protection and support. It augments and gracefully conceals the less-than-perfect shape of its wearer, although sometimes with the effect of making them bulkier. As a functional piece of clothing, it is the reflection of a society liberated from the formal dress of the salon by the reform movements, and gradually gained greater acceptance with the emergence of leisure time. Deemed flattering, over the course of its history the pullover has achieved a tremendous variety of uses and range of styles. From being timeless and conservative through to a fashionable expression, it always—as

clothing generally does—makes a social statement, charged with an individual or situation-specific symbolism. Whether it's the existentialist black turtleneck, the thick ski jumper or as part of an elegant twin set, a sweater with or without a hood, from a chic design label or a 'no name' brand, it is without doubt one of the most common garments in the world. When it carries a slogan, it sometimes also becomes the bearer of an image or message on the best available body surfaces: the back, breast and belly. In its materiality, quality and design, the pullover also provides information about the owner or wearer's social class, status, financial means, or the effect they are seeking to achieve. Clothing is a covering, a fashion statement, a necessity. It gives support and follows our movements. In its functionality it replicates the human body, even when it is empty. Ultimately, it also offers the opportunity to camouflage yourself, to be someone else. Only in the rarest of cases is a pullover simply a pullover. Within the fashion world, the sculptural aspect of clothing is employed as effective staging, as an unwearable exaggeration that—sometimes quite humorously—resists any kind of practical usefulness for everyday life. Erwin Wurm confronted this boundary in his works for Hermès und Palmers. Fer-

tile interactions between art and fashion, between clothing and artistic objects have existed since the advent of Modernism, since fashion and also art liberated themselves from prevailing conformities with abstraction, the Gesamtkunstwerk and reform dress. So, for instance, the intellectual founder of modernity, Charles Baudelaire, saw fashion and modernity as being entirely related, both transitory, ephemeral and open in character. Since then, textiles have found a wide range of application in art, altered role models and increasingly integrated everyday life, life itself. Depending on the how the material and its inherently organic, softly woven structure is handled, it combines a range of content-related connotations: it becomes fetish (e.g. in Sylvie Fleury's work), has a mystical significance (as in Joseph Beuys' work) or acts as a memory carrier (as in the work of Paweł Althamer and Milica Tomić). Often textile is used to reference the lack of a human body, and the memories, stories, situations, experiences or happenings stored within it. The piece of clothing then refers to something no longer present and so becomes the carrier of information, the symbol, it becomes a representation. And the pullover is no longer necessarily a pullover.

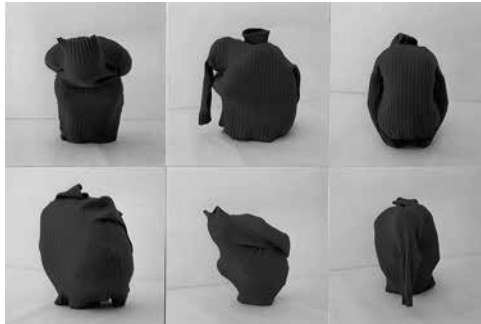


Palmers, 1997



Untitled, 1993

Taking this thought further, Erwin Wurm has liberated the pullover in many respects by emptying it of superordinate purpose and releasing it from its function. He limits it to what it is to begin with—that is to say, a pullover—so that he can continue with the next step, shaping it into a sculpture. The pullovers packed in boxes come with exact instructions that enable you yourself to carry out the transformation process, from pullover to sculpture and back again. From the outset, it has always been important to Erwin Wurm that the pullovers do not retain any sentimental or nostalgic value but instead are seen only as pullovers without associations of a particular period in time, which is also why museums are supposed to replace any of his articles of clothing in their collections every 20 years.



Untitled, 2000

Wurm also allows the empty pullover to become a flexible design material: visitors are offered the chance to slip individually or together into the large coverings and then be photographed. At this moment you become part of the artwork, which for Wurm logically includes the photograph produced. Each form of action becomes a temporary sculpture.

Wurm's oeuvre also features pullovers in layers, either as several jumpers worn one over the other, or as an independent, voluminous body. While a participant with a growing number of garments becomes increasingly clumsy, the other sculpture's stability increases with each extra item. These works very clearly also address a social issue. Although in previous ages a certain corpulence was considered a status symbol, in recent decades quite the opposite has become the case. Being fat indicates social poverty, while thinness signifies access to higher-quality, better food. Garments worn in many layers also have associations with



Polaroid of a *One Minute Sculpture*, in the exhibition 'Erwin Wurm: Fat Survival', Neue Galerie Graz, 2002

the habits of homeless people, who put on all of their clothes at once to protect themselves from the cold.

In his most recent works, the symbolic content also mutates into commissioned art that can be interpreted as cynical, since Erwin Wurm has also knitted wall pullovers for political offices. The wall pullover for Styria measures 10 by 3 metres and is in the province's official colours of white and green, with its heraldic animal as a pattern. The Lower Austrian governor of many years was immortalised by him in a large wall pullover with a portrait of his face as a setting sun, all in the province's official colours of yellow and blue, while the office of an SPÖ minister was draped in a red room pullover. The knitted wall coverings subtly convey a humorous gesture that irritates authority. The red Social Democrat pullover stands defiant in the Baroque palace; the Styrian panther, like its original predecessor, spits fire from all of its orifices. A pullover can produce self-images and create identity. Conversely, it can also lead them straight up the garden path.

Erwin Wurm uses clothing to create abstract three-dimensional shapes, decorates walls and evokes specific situations, while always playing with its distinct, original functionality. Yet the pullover always remains recognisable as a pullover. Wurm also clothes spaces that are not politically charged. Back in 2009, large-scale knitwear was central in the *Wall House* in Groningen, and it also played a role in Bangkok, where Erwin Wurm had a large solo show until February 2017. Here at the Kunsthhaus Graz it is for the first time freely suspended, and not directly enclosing or cladding the borders of the room, despite the fact that this is even called a 'skin' here. While the textile in Bangkok was produced on site, to reach Graz it will travel



The artist who swallowed the world, 2006

halfway across the world. Like exhibition opportunities for successful artists, production conditions are also global. The dimensions go far beyond the local level, have long since exceeded the limits in art and in everyday life. Economic entanglements span the whole world, networking business relations geared towards optimum profits. The world has shrunk. Shrunk so small that an artist can swallow it and create a pullover for outer space.

Untitled 1995
Oil on canvas
35 × 20 × 2.5 cm
Studio Erwin Wurm

MIT BEIDEN BEINEN
IN EINEN ÄRMEL
EINES PULLOVERS
SCHLÜPFEN.
OBERKÖRPER NA-
CH VORNE BEUGEN
UND DEN REST DES
PULLIS ÜBER DEN
KOPF ZIEHEN.
EINE MINUTE
STEHEN BLEIBEN.

Erwin Wurm

*1954 in Bruck an der Mur (AT), lives and works in Vienna and Limberg (AT)

1973 Completed high school in Graz

1974–77 Studied art history and German literature, University of Graz

1977–79 Studied art and crafts (with a focus on sculpture) at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts Mozarteum, Salzburg

1979–82 Studied design theory (with a focus on sculpture) at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (under Prof. Bazon Brock)

1979–82 Studied design theory at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

1983 Graduated as Master of Arts

1983 Assistant at the TU Vienna, Institute of Sculptural Design

1995 Guest professor at the École des Beaux Arts, Paris (sculpture)

1996/97 Guest professor at the The University of Arts and Industrial Design Linz (sculpture class), Linz

2002–06 Professor at the University of Applied Arts Vienna / Institute of Art Theory and Cultural Studies—art education

2007–10 Professor at the University of Applied Arts Vienna / Institute of Fine Arts and Media Arts, Department of Sculpture and Multimedia

Since 2014 Member of the Austrian Art Senate

Awards

1984 Otto Mauer Prize

1991 Wiener Allianz Art Prize

1993 Fine Art Prize of the City of Vienna

2004 Art Prize of the City of Graz

2007 'Artist of the Year 2007' (chosen by the periodical KUNSTJAHR 2007. Die Zeitschrift die Bilanz zieht. No. 7,

Lindinger + Schmid, Regensburg, Germany)

2013 Honorary member of ADC (Art Directors Club)

2013 Grand Austrian State Prize

2014 Silver Cross of Honour for Services to the State of Lower Austria

2015 State of Styria Honorary Award for the Fine Arts

Erwin Wurm's work has been exhibited at 110 solo shows in museums around the world. His artworks are to be found in 64 museum collections in 16 different countries and he has participated in over 1000 group exhibitions.

www.erwinwurm.at



Artist's Talk

Tuesday, 13.06., 6:30pm with
Erwin Wurm, Günther Holler-Schuster
and Barbara Steiner

Special guided tours

take a deep breath and hold it

(in German language)

Meeting point: foyer

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with Christof Elpons

Sun, 14.05., 3:30pm

with Barbara Lainerberger

Fri, 02.06., 3:30pm

with Christof Elpons

Sat, 03.06., 11am

with Barbara Lainerberger

Sun, 11.06., 3:30pm

with Christof Elpons

Fri, 23.06., 3:30pm

with Antonia Veitschegger

Fri, 30.06., 3:30pm

with Barbara Lainerberger

Fri, 14.07., 3:30pm

with Antonia Veitschegger

For further information please visit our website
www.kunsthhausgraz.at



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Erwin Wurm

Football-sized lump of clay on light blue car roof

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Universalmuseum Joanneum
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Erwin Wurm, *Untitled*, 2017 (using: Fritz Wotruba, *Reclining Figure*, 1953)

Erwin Wurm
take a deep breath and hold it
Artists' book, 2 volumes in slipcase
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