

Franz West
Auto-Theatre
Cologne-Naples-Graz

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Space01

This text is published on the occasion of the exhibition

Franz West
Auto-Theatre
Cologne - Naples - Graz

Kunsthaus Graz
Universalmuseum Joanneum
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*In Cooperation with
steirischer herbst*



Franz West is considered one of the most important artists of our day. The extensive retrospective at the Kunsthaus Graz was developed in close cooperation with the artist, his studio and his archives. Works from all periods of creativity, in a wide range of different materials and using very different media and techniques, show the complexity and individuality of his oeuvre.

Please note: works marked  may be used!

Franz West

Auto-Theatre

Cologne–Naples–Graz

Untitled

Franz West invites you to undress and spend a few minutes behind the partition and act however you see fit. The iron frame roughly daubed with plaster thus becomes a garment, an adaptive that at the same time gives the nude user behind it a feeling of freedom and security. You could sit or keep watch. You could take stock, or just monitor what is going on outside. Experiencing the inside of a museum naked and out of sight could certainly have its charms. The experience is however reserved for owners of the work, which is why the notice that goes with the work can only be read from a retrospective point of view.

UNTITLED, 1989

Installation consisting of a partition, chair, adaptive, pedestal and text on wall
Collection Generali Foundation, Vienna

Step behind the partition, undress and place the garment on the chair. Remain for 5 minutes behave at your own discretion. In order not to be disturbed, please inform the security guard in advance. He will inform other visitors that this object is occupied and will keep them away.

Bellini and Rembrandt

In 1989, Franz West exhibited armchairs and couches in an interaction with classics of art history at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Pictures of Vincenzo Bellini or Rembrandt could be contemplated sitting on the chairs West provided. The question was, did the classics look any different when you sat on a raised platform, as it were, eyeball to eyeball with the works? The public was rather taken aback and too inhibited to get on the plinth and accept the offer. Classic art-going in museums runs in clear grooves, which is why interventions like those by Franz West are unsettling.

UNTITLED (REMBRANDT CHAIR), 1989

UNTITLED (BELLINI CHAIR), 1989

Steel
Herbert Foundation

Lamps

“For 15 years, I sat on a sofa every evening and leant back with a glass of wine. I found myself looking at the ceiling lighting, which I thought was awful,” recalls Franz West, accounting for his interest in lighting. Disappointed with the aesthetic shortcomings of the commercial products on offer, he decided to design and construct some himself. The result was tall, slender lights whose shades bathe the surroundings in soft tones. As so often with Franz West, the support material is welded iron poles. Seen in a group, their sublime sculptural effect is enhanced still further.

THREE LAMPS, 2009

steel, Plexiglas, electric bulb paint, electric wiring, neon light
Private collection

Dortmund and Gmünd

With the two heads given shape by wide-open, emotionless mouths (wordplay on *-mund*), the old, worn cabinets are involved in a theatrical ambiguity that oscillates between furniture, sculpture and ensemble. On the one hand, the boxes act as plinths for the sculptures, but at the same time they are block-like containers that may conceal all sorts of things inside. But then again, with the characteristic print by Roland Göschl, it is a situation you might come across in an apartment, which reinforces the furniture aspect of the boxes. The title *Dortmund and Gmünd* accords with this rhythm, diverting attention to the openings in the two heads.

The work behind (*Boxes*) features plain white boxes on wheels that can be used according to the spatial situation. This group of sculptures illustrates Franz West's cross-boundary approach, as does *All-Purpose Box*, where a tall white cabinet with marks of wear and tear acts as a base for a pink shape.

DORTMUND AND GMÜND (THE VISUALIZED RHYTHM), 1993

Installation consisting of two sculptures on two wooden cabinets as well as a silk screen print by Roland Göschl
Sculptures: wood, plaster, plastic, gauze, dispersion
Collection Grässlin, St. Georgen

BOXES, 2008 / 2009

Wood, dispersion, furniture wheels, metal, papier-mâché, paint; seven elements
Private collection

ALL-PURPOSE BOX, 1998

Wood, papier-mâché, gauze, plaster, paint, polyester, four wheels; two pieces
Jan Piessens Collection, Sint-Katelijne-Wave, courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

Plural

"I like it when you just see a blank wall from the chairs," says Franz West, and has implemented the idea in the exhibition room. *Plural* consists of two steel armchairs, four monochrome white pictures and two armchairs placed in a spatial relationship with each other by a slab of flooring. The pictures are taken from the lining of the studio wall, and the flooring likewise comes from there. As the title suggests, two viewers can each look at two pictures at the same time, i.e. on the wall there's one picture for each eye, making plural picture-studying possible. That is incidentally also how Dürer explained the way we see perspective.

PLURAL, 1995

Installation consisting of two chairs, four objects on the wall and a floor slab
Armchairs: steel, paint
Wall objects: dispersion, burlap
Floor slabs: wood, linoleum, paint
Museum Ludwig, Köln / Cologne

Tournure

You can of course 'turn' *Tournure* any way you want. But if you want to take the title in a different sense, you would have to pull down the parts to hip-level. A tournure was a kind of crinoline fashionable c. 1870. The crinoline no longer enveloped the whole lower body but puffed out the skirt only at the back.

Why not have a 'turn' with the adaptive and see whether *Tournure* suits you?

TOURNURE, 2001

Three adaptives
Epoxy resin
Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt a. M.



Autonomous sculptures

Good craftsmanship is important to Franz West. "But I don't plan it ... What happens is, packaged material accumulates around me, and I use that to make volumes from the packaging." He works on it until it feels like sculpture.

The amorphous and biomorphous shapes of *Group with Cabinet* stand very precariously on tables. They appear to outmanoeuvre their centres of gravity and only get a purchase as a group. The material used is papier-mâché. Making it is very absorbing work, leaving the imagination time to get going. The shape taken by the pulpy mass depends on the kind of paper used, and the mass can be applied to all kinds of objects and material. Franz West continues the protracted process of looking for the right shape until he feels that it's sculpture. *At last two good sculptures* and *Gupf* are good examples of this working technique.

GUPF, 2003

Papier-mâché, lacquer, acrylic, metal box
Private collection

GROUP WITH CABINET, 2001

Installation consisting of eight sculptures on seven tables and one cabinet Papier-mâché, paint, wood

Variable dimensions Centre Pompidou, Paris
Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle

AT LAST TWO GOOD SCULPTURES, 2002

Installation consisting of two sculptures, poster design and stool
RROSE: Papier-mâché, acrylic, lacquer
CIELO: Papier-mâché, acrylic, lacquer
Poster design: digiprint painted on cardboard, double-sided
LABYRINTH: steel Ernst Ploig, Vienna

Approximation and Quotation

These two works reveal a minimalist approach. Quotation (at the beginning of the exhibition) is considered Franz West's first large-scale sculpture, in which an old bedstead is cloaked in humble leaden grey to the point of unrecognisability. It was produced for the *Spuren, Skulpturen und Monumente ihrer präzisen Reise* exhibition curated by Harald Szeemann for the Kunsthaus Zurich in 1985, and established Franz West's international reputation. 'Approximation' happens in West's work by the juxtaposition of the two parts, one of which features a red ear. In a figurative sense, one work gives voice to the quotation while the other represents hearing what is said. How does language work? In their complexity, both works draw on Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus* was a formative influence on Franz West.

APPROXIMATION, 1986

Metal, paper, plaster covered with wax;
in two parts
Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig
Vienna

THE RED EAR REVEALS ITS VERTICALITY AND IS THEREFORE PRESENTED HERE IN A SPLIT SETTING.

QUOTATION, 1985

Wood, tin foil, polyester cement, papier-mâché, steel
Herbert Foundation

AUTO-THEATRE

"I did adaptives because I'd love to have been able to respond actively myself in a museum." Franz West wants viewers to be active and not just store his work away in memory. To avoid embarrassment, there is a booth where you can try out the adaptive you've selected. Or you can just go in and gesticulate vigorously. Both can be liberating experiences. "The objects are there to be used. They constitute a potential attempt to give shape to neurotic symptoms. ... Their relationship with the vehicles concerned lends the objects an additional dimension. Which is independent of the creative capacities of the users." Unlike Joseph Beuys, Franz West does not see everyone as an artist, but with his 'adaptives' he does offer an opportunity to give vent to personal conflicts or neuroses. He is interested in his art being used and how one can play with the body. The associated video is not intended as an instruction manual but merely as a prompt to try something out.

INTEGRAL, 1997

Partition, Steel, cardboard, fabric, dispersion, glue, plaster, papier-mâché
Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig

IF YOU ENTER THE CABIN AND GESTICULATE VIGOROUSLY, THIS COMPLIES WITH THE TITLE.

MIRROR IN CABINET WITH ADAPTIVES (with Michelangelo Pistoletto), 1996

Installation consisting of four adaptives, floor slab, cabinet, newspaper, video, monitor, pedestal, and mirror by Michelangelo Pistoletto
Adaptives: Epoxy resin Cabinet: press wood, paint Variable dimensions
Private collection

TAKE AN ADAPTIVE AND GO INTO THE CUBICLE



Devianz, POUF and Psyche

The word 'pouf' is onomatopoeic - if you sit heavily on the pouf, it may make a noise like the word. Though the pouf is obviously a seat, its shape also suggests the puffed-up hair-dos worn by 18th-century ladies of fashion. The hair-do not only involved a great deal of effort but also produced a kind of sculptural headgear. *Psyche* is another example of how important wordplay is for Franz West. If you sit down in front of this piece of furniture and look in the mirror, you can ask yourself who you are in essence. According to Freud, the psyche represents the system in which perception and thought are based, i.e. the affective and rational motives of our actions What will you do in front of the mirror? In *Deviance*, one piece is different from the other. Despite their mirror image positioning, they do not resemble each other. The ego in the mirror is often indeed someone else.

PSYCHE, 1987

iron, wood, mirror, paint, acrylic paint
Collection Grässlin, St. Georgen

DEVIANCE, 1989

Installation, in two parts
Day bed: steel
Pedestal: wood, gauze, glue
Stiftung Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

POUF, 2009

Steel, foam, linen
Private collectio



AUTO SEX

(with Heimo Zobernig), 1999

Installation consisting of a transparent mirror foil and a rubber floor slab by Heimo Zobernig as well as two chairs by Franz West
Private collection



Wegener Räume

Franz West first exhibited *Wegener Rooms* in Vienna at the Galerie Pakesch. The Galerie Jürgen Wegener had already exhibited West's works early on in Frankfurt and was willing to swap old works for new works by the artist. The title of the installation thus becomes a double tribute – first to the loyal collector, and secondly to the famous polar explorer Alfred Wegener as well, who discovered Continental shift. By swapping the works, Franz West was able to combine earlier works with later ones so as to develop a collage in space that leads viewers into the middle of the picture. As in Pangea, the similarly structured rooms are clustered together. In this work you can sit, look, take in, reconsider, combine and reach personal conclusions. Does anything move?

WEGENER ROOMS 2/6–5/6, 1988

Installation consisting of cruciform wall, four collages, four sculptures on pedestals and four seating objects
Collection Grässlin, St. Georgen

Mutterings and The Impalpable

Franz West is no respecter of demarcations. For him, there is no clear line separating furniture, a plinth and the sculpture standing on it, any more than there is between an autonomous work of art and a utilitarian everyday object. However, language does play an important part in all his works. *Mutterings* opens its mouth and issues surly remarks. This is one of the figures first exhibited in Venice in 1988, where Franz West noticed that a few minor changes to the papier-mâché could lend an abstract shape a human aura. The *Genealogy of the Impalpable* puts a collection of superannuated adaptives into a showcase, thereby becoming as it were a museum within the museum. The adaptives date from 1981 to 1984. They had served their turn. In effect, a wide range of past neuroses are arrayed white on white behind glass in three-dimensional form. 'Refreshers' are a particular form of adaptive. Franz West was paying tribute to bottles emptied of their contents, which (as he says) would otherwise have

been inside him. With their contents removed, the bottles can only provide visual refreshment. His particular kind of language-based humour is also evident in *Fake*, *German Measles* and *Temper*.

GENEALOGY OF THE IMPALPABLE, 1997

Installation consisting of 5 adaptives in a display case
Collection Generali Foundation, Vienna

REFRESHER, 1989

Glass bottle, plaster, iron, linen
Hall Collection

MUTTERINGS, 1988

Papier-mâché, steel, paint; in three parts
Private collection

(CITED) RESPONSE, 1986

Papier-mâché, wood
Private collection

TEMPER, 1986

Metal (pot), papier-mâché, wood
Collection Günter Förg, Colombier

GERMAN MEASLES, 1987

Steel, plaster, papier-mâché, paint, brush and broomstick
Private collection, Turin

FAKE, 1997

Epoxy resin
Private collection

OUTDOOR SCULPTURES

The showcases arranged as *Corner* contain 15 models for outdoor sculptures with which Franz West stamps a presence in urban or rural open-air locations. This collection of ideas shows three-dimensional collages into which Franz West incorporates cut-outs of human figures in order to demonstrate size relationships. Thanks to these roughly executed three-dimensional drafts, clients can gain a first impression. Hallmarks of these works are various attempts at capturing volumes in a way that defines public spaces, e.g. by coloration. The Graz outdoor sculpture *Ein Hod* is all pink, the intensity of which would make it bright pink (as opposed to a pale antique pink). Wherewith we come in conclusion full circle to Freud's psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein's play on words.

CORNER, 2009

Private collection

EIN HOD, 2008

Epoxy, painted
Studio Franz West, Vienna
In *La Pensée Sauvage*, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that testes were a man's most female part. It is not Eindhoven (*ein Hoden* / a testicle) but the name of a village in Galilee (Ein Hod) that reminded me of this thought. This is a memorial to that (Franz West).

About the setting

“The crates were left in the room because there’s a reasonable attendant here, i.e. I was able to explain to him why I wanted it left that way.

For many years I’ve had exhibitions time and again where I’ve been on the spot during the setting up. I often find the way the exhibitions are set up very successful, though of course the transport crates and technicians’ trolleys are then put away and you’d have to start all over again. The thing is, I don’t think my work is specifically planned for museum contexts, whether it’s a white cube or a black bubble as here. It’s created in studio contexts, and at least in the techniques I use it’s kept on track by a determining volume, the shape of which is not initially of importance. But it’s a lengthy procedure. Studios have not only various boxes lying around – there are also paint stains and litter. In other words it’s an organic environment, even if an artificial one. That’s not being imitated here, just left as it is. I don’t produce my works to satisfy the compulsive cleanliness of the

keepers of law and order. I think the works are appropriately presented in a less managed environment. Leaving packaging here is just an indication of that.”

Franz West

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