

# Franz West

Among the most influential artists of the last half-century, Franz West (1947–2012, Vienna) redefined the vocabulary of modern sculpture. From abstract and interactive works such as the “Adaptives” – small sculptures started in the 1970s that the viewer is meant to carry around – to furniture and collage, West constantly inverted the categories of the beautiful and the ugly, anticipating the “trash” aesthetic of the 1990s. On the occasion of his first posthumous retrospective at the Centre Pompidou and Tate Modern, the following pages of *L'Officiel Art* feature three contributions by curator Christine Macel and artists Heimo Zobernig and Gelitin about West's practice – a practice that, more than ever, is still a strong source of inspiration for younger generations of international artists.

**“FRANZ WEST,” CENTRE  
POMPIDOU, PARIS,  
THROUGH DECEMBER 10.  
TATE MODERN, LONDON,  
FEBRUARY 20–JUNE 2, 2019.**

Fried Kubelka, (Graf Zokan) Franz West, 1969 (still). Black and white video, 3 min.









Left: Franz West, Heimo Zobernig, Herbert Brand, Otto Mitko, *Untitled*, 1988. Wood, papier-mâché, paint. Variable dimensions.  
Facing page: Franz West, *Untitled (Drawing, from activist inspiration)*, around 1974. Pen, self-adhesive papers on paper. 21 x 15 cm.

## Christine Macel

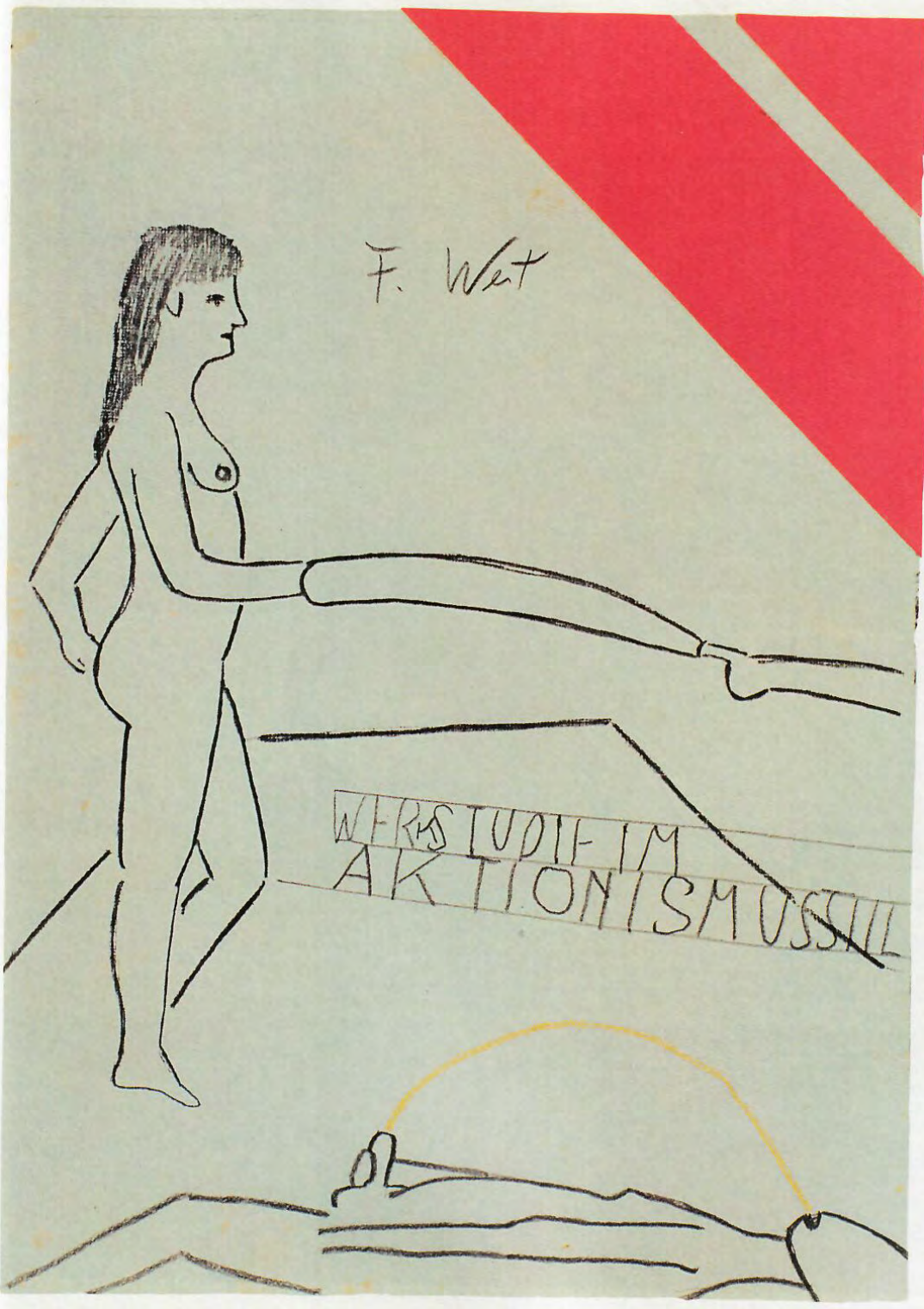
A free, independent spirit and – until aged thirty, when he started working in Bruno Gironcoli's atelier at the Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien – a self-taught artist, Franz West remained largely unknown until Kasper König and Harald Szeemann brought him to international attention in the 1980s. Today he is a major – if unclassifiable – figure in contemporary art. His dialectical work constantly blurred the boundaries between art and life at its most basic; shifting repeatedly between popular and cultivated, active and contemplative, individual and collective, corporeal and intellectual, or between art and artisanship. West's complex character – at once profoundly individual and skeptical, yet constantly engaged in dialogue and exchange, marked by a taste for play and sarcasm – was expressed in a unique body of work capable of "digesting" and going beyond all his influences.

... the body is very much present throughout West's work. This is not a body subordinated by technology but a very organic, sometimes repulsive body – the forms of turd, phallus or intestine are clearly suggested by outdoor sculptures such as *Im Morgentau* and *Lindwurm* (2000). The body as flesh is sometimes confronted with raw meat, with West putting nude or sexualised bodies alongside sausages and steaks in his late posters. This organic dimension of the outdoor sculptures is evident already in the 1980s papier mâché sculptures. Formless or non-forms, impure in relation to the modernist credo, like papier mâché magma with scabby surfaces, in many respects they evoke digestion. For indeed the papier mâché incorporates newspapers and objects, "digesting" them in sculpture. But

the organic as West sees it is a long way from the sacrificial and Christ-like spirit of [Viennese] actionism, and more on the side of life and the biological cycle, conceived in a light and playful spirit that results in sculptures linked to the body and to objects that are handled and used in everyday life. For the body that interests West is also the everyday, anonymous body, the body of the viewer who will activate his sculpture.

... Playing on a certain ugliness that has since become sexy and attractive, populating his work with titles that continue to feed mental associations, West thus managed to effect a synthesis between the corporeal, psychic and intellectual dimensions of sculpture, while maintaining fluid transitions between them. While in his increasingly provocative or indeed zany outdoor sculptures from 2000 to 2012 he addressed the question of the monumental, West was also managing to combine his art and his life, to become the figure that had so fascinated him in his youth, a dandy with an elegant and rebellious body of work and an unpredictable intelligence, at once frivolous and intellectual, shifting between individualism and a taste for life in society. All of this was combined, as for any true dandy, with a large portion of mystery – which means that there is still much more to add.

\*Excerpt from "Franz West. La Grande Digestion" by Christine Macel; in *Franz West* (catalog of the exhibition), edited by Christine Macel and Marc Godfrey (French Edition: Centre Pompidou, Paris / English edition: Tate Modern, London, 2018). Published on the occasion of the exhibition "Franz West," Centre Pompidou, Paris (through December 11, 2018) and Tate Modern, London (February 20–June 2, 2019).



F. West

WERSTUDIE IM  
AKTIONISMUS





Franz West. *Ur*: 'ed. 2007. Paper mâché, extruded polystyrene, epoxy resin, synthetic enamel paint, metal.  
190 x 125 x 125 cm. Private Collection.



Franz West, *Untitled*, 1990. Collage, paint on paper. 28 x 50 cm. Private collection.

## Heimo Zobernig

I met Franz in the mid-1980s through the curator Peter Pakesch. We first showed work together when his papier-mâché piece, *Redundanz* (1986), was shown with some of my black painted-cardboard sculptures at Galerie Christoph Dürr in Munich in 1986. Our first proper collaboration was in 1988 at Galerie Isabella Kacprzak in Stuttgart [now Galerie Isabella Czarnowska, in Cologne]. Neither of us knew what to do about pedestals, and that's how this project – where my pedestals sit on top of his objects, or his objects rest on my pedestals – came about. We worked out what we wanted to do at Pakesch's space in Vienna, then sent the group of works to Germany. At the time, I thought coloring sculpture was a stupid idea, so I chose a rather institutional color scheme: brown, orange, black, white and gray. I liked orange because it seemed typically used for plastic; brown imitated rusty steel. Franz was not very confident about what to do with colors, so he invited friends like Herbert Brandl and Otto Zitko to paint his sculptures. I respected him a lot, so when he suggested I put one of my columns on his sculpture, I thought it was great, a real sign of his openness. The project came about in a playful way; but when you worked with Franz it was not always clear that it was a collaboration. He always liked being with others and delegating exercises. After the show in Stuttgart, we next worked together at the Kunstverein Horn in 1990. I had been making pedestals that were only built up and painted white on two sides, so if you turned them around, you'd see their structure. The show was just supposed to include these

objects and Franz's chairs, but Franz felt the chairs should be lifted off the floor, so he asked me for low white pedestals.

One of our later collaborations was at documenta X, seven years later. The artistic director Catherine David wanted me to design a good seating area in the documenta Halle for her 100-day program of discussions and events. I knew that Franz's chairs seemed casual, but that they actually worked for the purpose she wanted; they were inviting and comfortable to sit on. We soon began to work on the adjacent space as well, a kind of coffee shop and Internet café.

We continued working together, and in 2005 we reached a peak with Studiolo, our project for the Venice Biennale the same year. The French art dealer and curator Romain Larivière asked us to create a contemporary version of a studiolo – a secular sanctuary, a place of refuge for work, reflection, meditation and, sometimes, erotic experiences that has existed since the Middle Ages and was particularly popular during the Renaissance. We invited the artist Zlatan Vukosavljevic and the curator Eva Badura-Triska as “communicators.” I designed a structure made of aluminum trusses encased in transparent, semi-mirroring elements, with two white Molino curtains enclosing the space. Stage elements elevated the space so it became a raised platform, in the center of which Franz placed a table and armchair. To create a modern version of an hourglass, he laid a yellow rubber glove on one end of the table. The glove mechanically inflated and deflated, rising and falling at intervals. Additionally, I put a rotary switch set on the table, which allowed visitors to control the color of the light in its full RGB spectrum. The work was installed in a room in Palazzo Barbarigo, under a fresco by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.









Franz West, *Ecke (Coin)*, 2009.  
Two tables, 14 displays containing  
mock-ups: steel, wood, epoxy resin,  
synthetic glass. Variable dimensions. Maja  
Hoffmann Collection/LUMA Foundation.



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## Gelitin

Yes and yes and yes we liked Franz West a lot and we still do.

Talking or writing about him in a grammatically correct past tense is too sad.

Feels better to switch to some present times.

Franz West is a very generous, good-looking, Renaissance, dandy genius who loves to be alive and collaborate with people who have a good sense of humor and who are relaxed enough not to take advantage of his status and possibilities.

He is primarily interested in art. In making art and exchanging ideas, energy, new words and phrases, titles, jokes and in doing good shows together with others.

A friend once asked him what he thinks of Gelitin, and if he thinks what we do is good or bad, or if it is art at all.

West's answers to such questions are usually precise, mysterious – with bits and parts of meta-analytical humor – and always entertaining.

He said that what he really likes about us is the schizophrenia, the Dissociative Identity Disorder of Gelitin.

That when you ask one of us a question about our motivation or what the idea behind a specific show or work is, you would receive some illocutionary act.

And then he would walk to the next one of us and ask the exact same question and he would get a completely different answer – sometimes opposite performance – to this exact same question.

And this is – what he thinks – the real quality of Gelitin.

A *wunschmaschine* driven by schizophrenic motivation, that happily stumbles into yet unknown psychotic territories.

Some people say that you should not analyze too much, because it hinders you from producing.

Franz West was able to manage both.

Have a nice day,

Gelitin





Franz West, *Lemur Heads* (Franz West's studio, Vienna), 1992. Plaster, gauze, cardboard, iron, acrylic, foam and rubber; four pieces.  
243.8 x 127 x 243.8 cm; 243.8 x 137.2 x 76.2 cm; 218.4 x 124.5 x 53.3 cm; 221 x 109.2 x 73.7 cm.

“FOR ME IT WORKS LIKE THIS: THE LESS  
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DO ALMOST NOTHING IF I WANT TO DO  
IT WITH MY WILL... IN OTHER WORDS,  
TURNING IDEAS INTO REALITY, ONE TO  
ONE, DOESN'T WORK FOR ME.”

(FRANZ WEST, 2008)