

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

PRESS RELEASE

DESIGN MIAMI.BASEL 2024
Franz West – Furniture Works

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Galerie Eva Presenhuber (Zurich/Vienna) is pleased to present a solo booth of furniture by Franz West. The collaboration between Franz West and Eva Presenhuber began nearly 30 years ago in Zurich, where West exhibited for the first time at Galerie Walcheturm, then owned by Presenhuber. This initial collaboration led to a series of subsequent gallery exhibitions during his lifetime and following West's passing in 2012.

In the mid-70s, Franz West began rejecting the traditionally passive way of experiencing art and started making what he called *Passstücke* (*Adaptives*). Exhibition visitors were encouraged to pick these up and carry them around. West's furniture is a further development of this earlier work. Taking a sculptural approach to chairs, tables, upholstered furniture, coat racks, and bookshelves, West placed them in relation to his concept of sculpture through a variety of corporeal attitudes and tactile responses. By questioning the utility of art as well as our physical and psychological relationship to it, West challenged the way art is experienced and defined, and thereby posing an interpretation of furniture as both sculpture and social experience. Furniture sculptures play a central role in West's oeuvre and are often an essential part of his installations.

Franz West Privatstiftung, 'Möbelskulpturen/Furniture Works' (p. 4)



Installation view, Franz West, *Eo Ipsa 1987*, Skulptur Projekte Münster, Münster, DE, 1987
© Archiv Franz West. Photo: LWL / Rudolf Wakonigg



Installation view, Franz West, *Weitersehen*, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, DE, 1990



Installation view, Franz West, *Schöne Aussicht*, Portikus, Frankfurt a. M., DE, 1988 Photo: Gerald Domenig

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By 1986 West was clearly finding different ways to engage viewers beyond the invitation to handle objects, and if text accompaniments were one way, another was to make art as furniture. This strand of West's activities became apparent with *Eo Ipso* in the summer of 1987. That same year he also made *Psyche* (pp.86-7), where two seats are placed before a dressing table whose purple painted top sits below three mirrors. The next year, he took two yellow rubbish bins and refashioned them as seats for an outdoor exhibition, *Freizone Dorotheergasse*, in Vienna, and situated a group of metal chairs between the columns of Frankfurt's Portikus during his show there. In the spring of 1989, for a show at the Haus Lange in Krefeld, he fabricated nine chairs with Mathis Esterhazy, recycling metal sheets, poles, perforated grills and caterpillar tracks, and mounted the constructions on white pedestals, lining the seat of each chair with newspaper.



Installation view, Franz West, *Wiener Festwochen*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, AT, 1990 © Candida Höfer

Later that year West positioned a group of metal seats and chaises longues before paintings by Velazquez and other old masters in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. At the Venice Biennale in 1990 similar metal furniture was sited at the triangular point of the Punta della Dogana while his other works occupied the Austrian Pavilion; this time the seats were mounted on low grey pedestals. An untitled installation of that year featured a spindly double sofa in front of a wall-mounted slab of unpainted papier mache (p.117) and, in another collaboration with Zobernig at the Kunstverein Horn in 1990, West installed his metal seats on some low white pedestals, while other white pedestals were in fact sculptures by Zobernig, each with a face left incomplete, revealing the unpainted plywood interiors.



Installation view, Franz West, Biennale di Venezia, Punta della Dogana, Venice, 1990 © Archiv Franz West



Installation view, Franz West, *Auditorium (Freiluftkino)*, documenta IX, Kassel, 1992 © Archiv Franz West

West's two most daring installations of functional furniture were produced in the following two years -although, in the first instance, the designation 'furniture' might be a bit of a push. In 1991, on the roof of the Villa Arson in Nice, he created *Étude de Couleur* (pp.118-19). A runway of orange metal rectangular plates raised slightly above the floor lead towards a functioning urinal. This was built like the ones in pubs and football stadiums that accommodate many people at once, unlike the urinal repurposed by Duchamp, although it was clearly one of West's reference points. West, however, created a slanting enclosure indicating that this booth was for a single user only. Afforded a modicum of privacy, while peeing, he could peek out at the view of Nice beyond. This was later installed in Münster in 1997 with each of the panels repainted in a different colour, and the urinal facing over a small waterfall and stream. Shortly after the first installation of *Étude de Couleur* came West's first appearance at documenta, where, in a different location to his *Lemurenköpfe*, he created *Auditorium* (pp.140-1), an epic installation of seventy-two divans, all pointing towards the screen of an outdoor cinema. The divans' metal frames were now covered with foam slabs, and Persian carpets were loosely draped over each. The story goes that West had trawled the dry cleaners of Vienna in search of the most worn-out rugs, dropped off and then abandoned when the price of cleaning seemed to outweigh the value of the carpet.



Installation view, Franz West, *Skulptur. Projekte in Münster*, Münster, DE, 1997



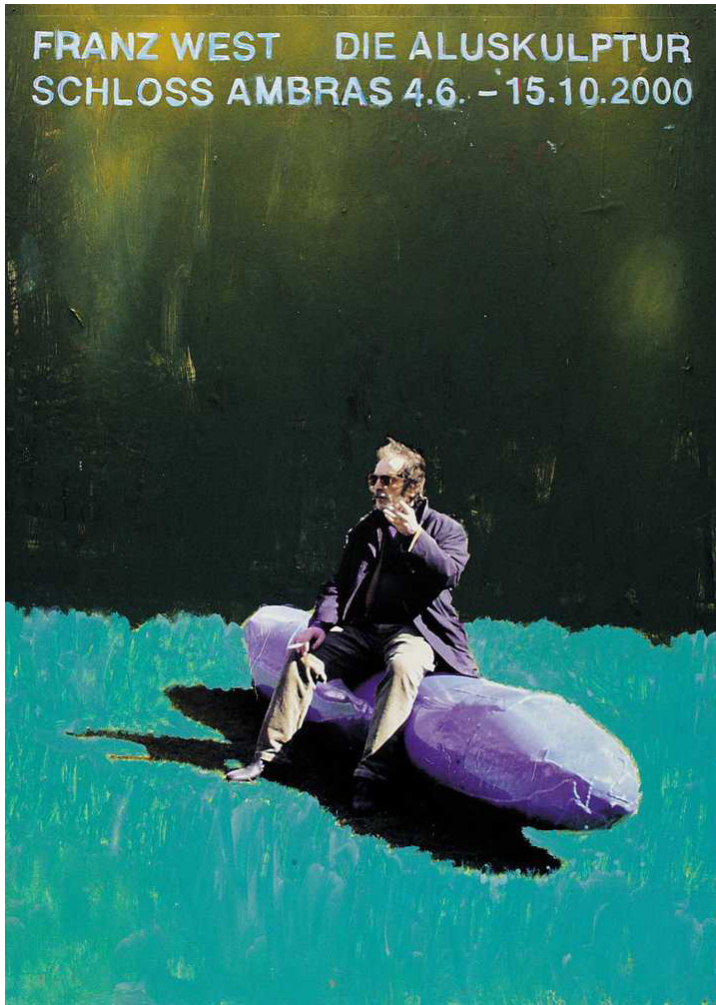
Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917 © James Broad



Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*, 1965

This strand of West's work has been considered in many ways in relation to art history. West himself spoke about walking past Eduard Hellmer's 1900 monument to Goethe in Vienna, in which the German writer is depicted sitting in a large seat on top of a six-tiered pedestal, and he would also have known well the city's monument to Maria Theresa, which shows the Empress leaning forward on her throne. Intimidated and bemused by these pompous statues, he wanted to remove the figure and create actual chairs in which real people could be raised up in the same fashion. West was also looking to more recent appearances of chairs in art: for instance Richard Artschwager's *Chair* 1963, Joseph Beuys's *Fat Chair* 1964 and Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* 1965.¹ Eschewing these artists' games about the differences between objects and words, between art and functioning furniture, West endeavoured to create things that were simply art and furniture at the same time.

¹ Franz West, *Wo bleibt das Prädikat*, 1998, in Hans Ulrich Obrist and Ines Turian (eds.) *West schrieb*, Cologne 2011, p. 136.



Franz West's *Plakatentwurf (Die Aluskulptur)*, 2000
Collage, gouache and offset printing on chipboard
© Franz West Privatstiftung/ Estate Franz West, Vienna

Another context for West's furniture has been the idea of idleness in, and as, art. In many collages and posters West depicted himself lounging on his furniture, and in so doing produced an image of the artist that contrasted the notion of the artist as worker (for instance Rodchenko/El Lissitzky), as manic creator (Picasso/Pollock), as revolutionary leader (Beuys), as master of ceremonies (Kline); as provocateur (Brus/Nitsch); as celebrity (Dali/ Warhol), as gamesman-intellectual (Duchamp/Broodthaers). The image of West lounging on his sofas instead linked to Alighiero Boetti's self-portrait of sunbathing in Turin, Fischli & Weiss wasting time in Zurich balancing cutlery on beer bottles and Martin Kippenberger getting fat and drinking too much. West's installations of furniture have also been seen to be foundational in the emergence of 'Relational Aesthetics', a current of 1990s art revolving around the creation of spaces of social congress. By setting up enticing groups of sofas in public spaces, West (it is said) not only created opportunities for relaxation, but also discussion. If previously in the *Passstücke* he had encouraged people to interact with objects, now he was enabling people to interact with people.

Mark Godfrey, 'Attitudes and Forms: Franz West after 1987' (p. 126 – 127)

Since 2014, the Franz West Privatstiftung has been manufacturing a selected group of furniture works by Franz West, which he had begun creating in editions during his lifetime (the original year of production is listed in the work details). The multiples are handcrafted in the artist's former studio under the direction of the same staff he worked with.

For more information, please contact the sales team (onlinesales@presenhuber.com).

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