

Franz West

Double Squint

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For the first time, the Almine Rech Gallery Brussels is devoting an exhibition to recent works by Franz West.

Born in 1947 in Vienna, where he lives and works, West is one of the key figures of the international art scene. Franz West studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. When he started out in the sixties, Viennese Actionism dominated the Austrian art scene. This movement's focus on the body and performance echoes throughout his oeuvre, though West himself claims his work is a reaction against Actionism.

In 1974, he created his first "Paßstücke" ('Fitting Pieces' or 'Adaptables'), a series of small sculptures made of wood and fragments of wire netting covered in papier mâché painted in white. These sculptures were designed to be manipulated or worn by visitors. These modest and interactive pieces, deliberately stripped of any appeal, distinguish the artist's approach. Indeed, West, who claims to follow Joseph Beuys' theories, has stated that "the Paßstück is a primary process of art". In the course of the eighties, some of these sculptures, redeveloped on a large scale, would become outsize aluminium pieces or installations. These works extend the formal and conceptual relations of the Paßstücke: made with the same materials – which are, in appearance, both humble and raw – they explore the relation to the body as well as to social issues. In 1989, on the occasion of an exhibition at PS1 in New York, West installed metal sofas in the passageways between the venue's different rooms, while a selection of scores by Viennese composers played in the background. The sofas and chairs would become the central elements of his installation at the 1992 Documenta in Kassel. These functional installations were intended to disconcert spectators, who were invited to use them as they so pleased, thereby shifting the perception of the work.

Today Franz West's statements cover the practices of painting and sculpture, as well as installations and monumental outdoor pieces. For his exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery in Brussels, Franz West will present a selection of recent pieces, including paintings, papiers mâchés, outdoor pieces, as well as a joint work by West and Polish artist Rudolf Polansky.

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