



**Franz West: *Where Is My Eight?***  
MUMOK, Vienna  
23 February – 26 May

**Between the conception** of this exhibition and its realisation, Franz West died. It's something of which any visitor cannot fail to be acutely conscious. Not simply because a notion of 'the final bow' is inherent to MUMOK's marketing drive, but also because of the way in which, to anyone who has experienced Vienna's art scene over the past decade or so, West sat at its heart – collaborating with local and international artists (works made with, or incorporating works by, Martin Kippenberger, Jason Rhoades and Heimo Zobernig, for example, are included in this show), supporting younger artists and being just as interactive as a personality as is his famously participatory art.

The exhibition title derives from a gouache, *Lost Weight* (2004), featuring a newly slim woman showing off her now dramatically oversized trousers. Transformation is key to West's output; even if precise meaning (of the exhibition title in particular, although it's tempting to think of it in terms of the drink measure *ein achtel*, or eighth) can be obscure. That said, the 'W' lost in the translation between title of work and title of exhibition does foreground the artist's absence. It's a sensation only enhanced on the first floor (there are three) of the show, where prior to encountering several of West's famous *Adaptives*, sculptures first developed during the late 1970s that were designed to be handled and adapted to the body (or vice versa), is a wall text warning that 'for reasons of conservation it is not possible to use all of the works originally intended by Franz West for physical interaction. Please consult the wall labels.'

In such cases, where a wall text lists West's instructions for interaction before the museum text countermands it, the interaction that remains is more about the relation between artwork and institution than artwork and viewer, and seems almost the opposite of West's conception that such works should generate 'a moment of not knowing what to do next'. At times the experience here is akin to walking past some ancient tool in an archaeological museum. Although perhaps this is the fate of all art objects. And the artist

himself was not unaware of such relationships or transformations: see, for example, *Genealogy of the Untouchable* (1997), a vitrine featuring three early adaptives and one of the first of many West-designed chairs.

While the top floor contains some of West's more recent, more conventional sculptures (eg, *Untitled*, 2012, a typically turdlike snake of yellow-painted aluminium), it's on the second floor that the show comes to life. First up is a reading room, with a dimly lit ambience that's part drinking club, part rundown library. From a collection of sofas (which you can sit on, unlike most of the sofas on the floor below), you can watch videos of interviews and performances, read magazines and catalogues – from back in the day to last year – featuring West's work. The artist is present, so to speak. And it's followed by *Studiolo* (2005), a collaboration with the aforementioned Zobernig and Zlatan Vukosavljevic, which comprises a curtained stage featuring a chair and a table on which is an inflating rubber glove and a control switch for the 'studio's' coloured lighting effects. Clambering onto the stage – particularly when other people are around – you feel a moment of self-consciousness, ridiculousness, childish glee and the sensation, too, that you are really and emphatically present. Now, where's my eighth?

**MARK RAPPOLT**