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**FRANZ WEST: EARLY WORK
through December 23, 2004**

Franz West, who is now widely considered to be one of Europe's most important contemporary sculptors, has been showing steadily since the mid 1970s. This exhibition brings together a large group of sculptures, collages and works on paper dating from 1972 – 1988 which have never before been exhibited in the United States. The group illustrates the richness of West's early production and offers significant insight into the fundamental theories, ideas and practices that still shape West's work today.

In the 1970s, West began to make sculpture which he called *Passstücke*. The works are essentially papier-mâché, plaster and fiberglass sculptures painted white that often use material from everyday life, such as bottles, broom and paint brush handles and other miscellaneous objects as points of departure. The term *Passstücke* can loosely be translated as "adaptive". They are meant to relate to the user's body, as they adapt to the body or the body adapts to them. The *Passstücke* carried or worn by the receiver effect a temporary expansion of the limits of the body; this expansion constantly changes during the interactive process and influences one's perception of reality and one's state of mind. The sculptures are intended to be handled and are not meant to be merely contemplated.

The exhibition recreates, in part, one of West's earliest exhibitions from 1980: a plaster table on view in the front gallery was used to display early films that West made of people performing with the *Passstücke*. An intricate pretzel-like sculpture currently on view can be seen in an early video on the head of a woman as she dances across the screen.

The works in the 2nd floor gallery continue West's experimentation with different media. Referred to as "Legitimate Sculpture", the three-part sculpture "Reduction" from 1986-88 is an early example of his use of papier-mâché and multi-colored paint layers. Moving from the performative nature of the *Passstücke*, West here explores the notion of the autonomous object. By employing purely aesthetic devices, West hints at figuration (one sculpture is an early head with an open mouth) and at the same time engages the viewer in a dialogue about the role of language and meaning in art. Though not performative in nature, West's autonomous sculptures still require the interaction of the viewer to complete their intended function.

Franz West has never limited himself to a specific medium or mode of expression in his work. Like other artists who have come of age during or after Conceptualism and Minimalism, he has embraced a variety of media -- from drawings to sculptures, to single-channel videos, to large-scale, room-size installations. However, two aspects of his oeuvre have been especially characteristic: his interest in the autonomous sculpture and his investigation of works of art that are interactive. Over the years he has successfully blurred the boundary between the work of art and everyday life. The *Passstücke* are now a part of art history, his trademark furniture has expanded our definition of contemporary sculpture, and his collages and magazine paintings are comfortably situated in a post-Pop canon of artists that includes such contemporaries as Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman.

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