

Franz West *Echolalia*

March 9–April 15, 2023
533 West 19th Street, New York



Installation view, *Franz West: Echolalia*, David Zwirner, New York, March 9—April 15, 2023. Courtesy of David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to announce *Echolalia*, a major installation by Austrian artist Franz West from 2010, on view at the gallery's 533 West 19th Street location in New York. The installation brings together several strands of inquiry that run throughout West's decades-long career, integrating the viewer within an immersive, total environment. Not exhibited publicly in more than ten years, *Echolalia* represents the apotheosis of West's commitment to sculpture as social space.

Emerging in Vienna in the early 1970s, West developed a unique aesthetic that engaged equally high and low reference points and often privileged social interaction as an intrinsic component of his work. By playfully manipulating everyday materials and imagery through novel means, he created objects that served to redefine art as a social experience, calling attention to the ways in which art is presented to the public, and how viewers interact with works of art and with each other.

Completed only two years before the artist's death, *Echolalia* consists of seven colorful, larger-than-life sculptures that seem to stand slightly off-balance, interspersed with two cushioned divans and an armchair. The work's title—which refers to the repetition of words and sounds made by young children when learning to talk—was inspired by the artist's son, who at the time of its creation was three years old and brought his own, distinct perspective to his father's oversized works while also pointing to the playfully abstract idiom of West's multipart sculpture.

As West described, "I had the idea while watching my 3-year-old son looking up at the sculptures. The seatings make for alternative positions and viewing platforms throughout the show... When I was younger, I thought it was all right to make the visitor uncomfortable. But now that I am older it would not be correct because my problems have gone."¹

The outsized sculptural forms elaborate on West's body of "Legitimate Sculptures" begun in the 1990s—abstract, vibrantly painted papier-mâché and plaster forms that rest on unusual supports. Here, West has increased the scale of these forms, which variously balance on suitcases, trash cans, and paint

¹ West, quoted in Alix Browne, "Now Seating...", *T Magazine*, September 23, 2010.

buckets that sit atop wheeled platforms, to be so large that viewers can imagine they are seeing these sculptures from a child's perspective. He additionally bestowed several of the individual elements with humorous and irreverent titles including *Zyste (Cyst)*, *Phryge (Phrygian Cap)*, and *Drunks*, pointing to the importance of language in his practice. Like his *Passtücke (Adaptives)* from the early part of his career—roughly hewn, abstracted sculptural forms that are intended to be handled by the viewer in a manner of their choosing—West originally intended these sculptural elements to be manipulated by the viewer, literally allowing for multiple and shifting perspectives within the installation.

The sofas and chair, outfitted simply in white linen, likewise call back to West's earlier work. Beginning in the 1980s, furniture became an important part of his aesthetic output, as it allowed him to create a space for visitors to rest and reflect on the artwork and their experience of it, thus privileging social interaction as a central component of his work. In the 1990s, he developed this concept further, executing several works that created variations on a lounge, cafe, theater, or lecture hall environment and also pairing furniture elements with his sculptures to create interactive tableaux. By integrating the seating within his field of sculptures in *Echolalia*, West brings together these varied approaches, situating the viewer directly within the work.

A concurrent exhibition, which surveys West's career from the 1970s through the early 2000s, will be on view at the gallery's Paris location from March 2 to April 13. Together, these shows mark the tenth presentation of the artist's work at David Zwirner since 1993, when his solo exhibition, *Investigations of American Art*, inaugurated the gallery's program. During his lifetime, West presented several solo exhibitions at David Zwirner, in 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998 (with Heimo Zobernig), and 1999. The gallery further organized an exhibition of the artist's early work in 2004, a small survey in 2009, a show in 2014 that focused on work from the 1990s—which was accompanied by a catalogue published by David Zwirner Books, with essays by Eva Badura-Triska, Veit Loers, and Bernhard Riff—and, more recently, a 2019 overview of the artist's works in London.

Franz West (1947–2012) studied at the Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna, from 1977 to 1982. He began exhibiting his work in the 1970s in Austria and Germany and gained recognition across Europe in the 1980s, with significant shows at such venues as Kunsthaus Zürich (1985), the Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz (1986); Wiener Secession, Vienna (1986); Skulptur Projekte Münster (1987); Kunsthalle Bern (1988); Portikus, Frankfurt (1988); Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld (1989); and the Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S.1, Long Island City, New York (1989).

The 1990s brought widespread international recognition, and the artist's work was presented in numerous prestigious venues worldwide including the Austrian Pavilion of the *44th Venice Biennale* (1990); *documenta IX*, Kassel (1992); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1994); Dia Center for the Arts, New York (1994); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (*Carnegie International*, 1995); Villa Arson, Nice (1995–1996); and the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (1996). A major, mid-career retrospective (*Franz West. Proforma*) was organized by the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna in 1996 (it traveled to the Kunsthalle Basel and Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo); and solo exhibitions were held at the Kunstverein Hamburg (1996); FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims (1997); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1997); Fundação de Serralves, Porto (1997). West participated in *documenta X*, Kassel (1997); and the Rooseum, Centre for Contemporary Art, Malmö, presented a solo exhibition of his work in 1999. West's work was featured at The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2000); Skulptur im Schlosspark Ambras, Innsbruck, Austria (2000); and Museum für Neue Kunst,

ZKM Karlsruhe and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid presented the traveling survey *Franz West: In & Out* (2000–2001).

Further exhibitions were held at the Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna and MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2001–2002); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2001–2002); Wexner Center for Contemporary Art, Columbus, Ohio (2001); Musée d'Art Contemporain, Marseille (2002); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2003); Kunsthaus Bregenz (2003); the Vancouver Art Gallery (2005); Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna (2008); Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2009); and the exhibition *Franz West. Autotheater* traveled from the Museum Ludwig, Cologne to the museo d'arte contemporanea donnaregina, Naples in 2010.

A significant grouping of outdoor sculptures was installed in the Lincoln Center Plaza in New York in 2004 (organized by Public Art Fund). In 2008–2009, The Baltimore Museum of Art organized the retrospective *Franz West: To Build a House You Start with the Roof*, which traveled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and in 2013, a significant posthumous overview of the artist's work *Franz West. Wo ist mein Achter? (Where Is My Eight?)* was presented at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, followed by Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt/Main, and The Hepworth Wakefield, England.

A major survey of the artist's work opened at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 2018, and traveled to the Tate Modern, London, in 2019.

Work by the artist is held in major museum collections, including the Albertina Museum, Vienna; Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, the Netherlands; CAC Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands; Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria; Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna; Philadelphia Museum of Art; S.M.A.K. – Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium; and ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe, Germany.

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