

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
September 1997

FANCIFUL ENSEMBLE OF WORKS BY FRANZ WEST INVITES AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Projects: Franz West
September 25–November 11, 1997

Austrian artist Franz West (b. 1947) makes his first major museum appearance in New York in the Projects gallery of The Museum of Modern Art. *Projects: Franz West*, on view from September 23 through November 11, 1997, features a group of works assembled specifically for this exhibition, which is organized by Robert Storr, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture. In a vein decidedly different from the violent and often perverse expressionism of some postwar Austrian art, West creates casual, approachable works that defy adherence to traditional artistic ideologies, suggesting instead a newer, more symbiotic relationship between the viewer and the art itself.

"To Beuys's heroic idea of 'Social Sculpture'—the wholesale remaking of the world according to the principles of collective creativity—West responds with his own modest proposal, a skeptical, anti-heroic 'Sociable Sculpture,'" writes Mr. Storr. "If art is to achieve its long-promised integration with life, West's curious images and objects quietly argue, then rather than mold life to art's preconceived constructs, be they the Platonic geometries of early avant-gardes, or the ideological certainties of more recent ones, let art reflect the inconsistencies and mundane necessities or pleasures of life."

A largely self-taught artist widely active in Europe (this summer alone he contributed to the Venice Biennale and Documenta X, among other exhibitions), West specializes in the creation of eccentrically utilitarian objects that imply or invite use but

-more-

retain an enigmatic quality of awkward aesthetic uselessness. Using sculptural materials such as whitewashed polyester, plaster bandaging tape, and papier-mâché, West fashions lumpy, raw-looking forms that elude clear definition and seem to be on the verge of metamorphosis.

MoMA's exhibition consists of four components. Installed in the Garden Hall is a cluster of polychrome sculptures mounted on traditional sculptural bases. Entitled *Recyclages*—or recyclings—these are “recuperated” and reconfigured versions of works partially destroyed after West's previous exhibitions. Mutable and appearing to be in the process of transformation, they defy the notion of sculpture as a fixed object.

A selection of West's collages and drawings—covering a twenty-year period from 1977 to the present—is hung along the inner wall of the main Projects gallery. West's works on paper have a casual quality; the collages are composed of cropped and crudely painted press clippings that seem to mock their appropriated subject matter—which includes not only the sexual and consumer kitsch of the mass media but cultural heroes as well.

Synchrony, the centerpiece of the exhibition, is itself an exhibition, incorporating the paintings, drawings, reliefs, sculptural objects and videos created by a varied group of West's friends, colleagues and assistants. The works are divided between those made by men and those produced by women, separating *Synchrony* into distinctly “male” and “female” halves. Two additional elements draw the viewer into the action of the work. One, a platform, with two chairs and a table affixed to it, hangs from a gallery wall during weekdays. On weekends and holidays, however, it is taken down, laid flat on the gallery floor, and viewers are invited to take a seat. Visitors may also make themselves

at home on the six *chaises longues* created by West specifically for use in the Museum's Garden Hall. Covered with highly polished metallic foils similar to the insulation materials used by the aerospace industry, *Moon Project* comprises the second viewer-interactive element.

On the nature of West's work, Mr. Storr comments, "From intimate domestic spaces plunked down in the most heavily trafficked of public institutions, to couches upholstered like modern magic carpets under the open sky, from things by others with which West surrounds himself to things he actually made, from artful objects to objects-as-art, West's world is in 'move-in' condition—and a moveable feast."

The **Projects** series is made possible by the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Mr. And Mrs. Ronald S. Lauder; and grants from The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art, and Susan G. Jacoby. Additional support for this exhibition is provided by the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs/Austrian Cultural Institute, New York.

* * *

For more information, contact Jessica Ferraro, Department of Communications,
212/708-9431. Visit our Web site at www.moma.org.

No. 53