

FRANZ WEST

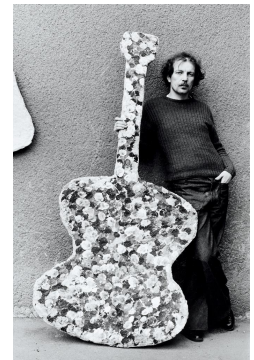
TO BUILD A HOUSE YOU START WITH THE ROOF:
WORK 1972-2008

BALTIMORE
MUSEUM OF
ART **BMA**

THE BMA ORGANIZES FIRST COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF AUSTRIAN ARTIST FRANZ WEST IN THE UNITED STATES

BALTIMORE, MD (September 5, 2008)—The Baltimore Museum of Art has organized the first comprehensive survey in the United States of Franz West, an internationally acclaimed Austrian artist whose singular vision has resulted in one of the most remarkable bodies of work produced since the 1960s. On view at the BMA October 12, 2008 – January 4, 2009, **Franz West, To Build a House You Start with the Roof: Work, 1972-2008** includes 117 objects that reflect West's extraordinary innovations in sculpture, design, and on paper—ranging from early interactive works from the 1970s to two enormous brightly colored objects created for this exhibition. Admission is free.

Known for his intriguing sculptures, provocative collages, and giant outdoor installations, Franz West (b. 1947) has played a critical role in redefining the possibilities of sculpture as a social and environmental experience for the past three decades. His manipulation of found materials, papier-mâché, and furniture is unlike any other in appearance and application. Though fundamentally sculptural in its construction, his work veers towards the biomorphic and prosthetic, mines the intellectualism of Freud and Wittgenstein, and possesses a sly wit and awkward beauty that speaks with equal fluency to the aesthetics of painterly abstraction and trash art.



Friedl Kubelka. *Franz West with Picture Object (Guitar)*. 1974. ©Friedl Kubelka

Franz West, To Build a House You Start with the Roof features rarely seen examples of West's work drawn from European and American museums and galleries as well as private collections. The exhibition is organized as a series of mini-installations that invite visitors to encounter and occasionally touch a range of objects. Beginning in September, three of West's candy-colored sculptures will greet visitors outside of the Museum. These colorful organic forms include *Dorit* (2002), a 20-foot tall column with four round orbs like pink gumballs on a pole, and *Swimmer* (2005) and *Violetta*. *To the song of Gerhard Rühm: I like to rest on aquatic corpses* (2005)—both recent additions to the BMA's collection. Inside the Museum, the exhibition begins with two 25-foot tall aluminum sculptures making their debut in Baltimore. These oversized looping objects titled *The Ego and The Id* (2008) offer a place for visitors to take a seat and become part of the art. Subsequent rooms include cabinets, tables, and chairs that infuse the art environment with the culture of bars, cafés, and domestic life (1990s), a large room with papier-mâché groupings and an installation of free-standing sculptures; and a gallery of stand-alone works that are as beautiful as they are precarious-looking (1980-1990s). In the final *Adaptives* section (1970s), visitors can handle select human-scaled plaster sculptures in a space tinged by the crimson hue of West's floor lamps. Throughout the exhibition, groupings of West's collages show the often cheeky and humorous influences of mass media, comic books, pop culture, and advertising.

The exhibition travels to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art March 15 – June 7, 2009.

—more—

INACTIVITY CENTER

In a gallery adjacent to the exhibition, an Inactivity Center inspired by West's themes of leisure and relaxation will offer visitors a place to sit down and reflect on the artist's work, read newspapers and magazines, or express their thoughts using word magnets to create poetry or prose. There will also be a telephone for curious visitors to "Dial a Curator," select questions from a menu, and listen to pre-recorded answers. Examples of questions are: "What does the title mean?" or "How does West create his sculptures?" On weekends, art interpreters called "Friends of Franz" will be available at select times to introduce people to West's work and demystify the often baffling world of contemporary art.

CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated catalogue by Darsie Alexander, BMA Senior Curator of Contemporary Art mixes intense visual content with critical commentary, an interview with the artist, a section on West's working methods, an artist's response to the work through words and images, and an extensive biography and chronology. Essay contributors are Tom Eccles, Executive Director of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College; Rachel Harrison, an artist who lives and works in New York City; and Eric Banks, former Editor-in-Chief of *Bookforum*. Co-published with MIT Press. Hardcover 288 pages, 168 color illustrations. On sale at The BMA Shop for \$44.95.

SPONSORS

This exhibition is generously sponsored by Howard Brown, The Alvin and Fanny Blaustein Thalheimer Exhibition Endowment Fund, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. It is generously supported by Constance R. Caplan, Suzanne F. Cohen and the Suzanne F. Cohen Exhibition Fund, Stiles Tuttle Colwill and Jonathan Gargiulo, Nancy Dorman and Stanley Mazaroff, Ellen W. P. Wasserman, the BMA Friends of Modern and Contemporary Art, Sandra Levi Gerstung, an anonymous donor, Sylvia Cordish, Monroe Denton, Aaron and Barbara Levine, and Lin Lougheed. Additional funding is provided by Austrian Airlines and The Austrian Cultural Forum, New York.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

West lives and works in Vienna, where he was born in 1947. West began his career in mid-1960s Vienna when a local movement called Actionism was in full swing. West's earliest sculptures, performances, and collages were a reaction to this movement, in which artists engaged in displays of radical public behavior and physical endurance meant to shake up art-world passivity. In the early 1970s, West began making a series of small, portable sculptures called *Adaptives (Passtücke)*, awkward-looking plaster objects that were only completed as artworks when the viewer picked them up and carried them around, or performed some other inherently slapstick action with them. In many ways, his large-scale aluminum sculptures from the past decade are simply overgrown versions of the Adaptives, but they also relate directly to his furniture installations. West has the ability to make comfortable and colorfully upholstered couches and chairs which transform galleries, museums, and public spaces into lounge-like, sociable environments for viewing art.

West has exhibited internationally for more than three decades in galleries and museums, and at major festivals including Documenta IX (1992) and Documenta X (1997), Kassel, Germany; Sculpture Projects in Münster (1997); and the Venice Biennale (1988, 1993, 1997, 2003, 2007). In 1997, The Museum of Modern Art presented West with a solo show. More recently his work has been exhibited at the Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía (2001), Whitechapel Gallery, London (2003); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2003); and The Gagosian Gallery, London (2006) and Gagosian Gallery, New York (2008).

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

The Baltimore Museum of Art is home to an internationally renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art. Founded in 1914, the BMA's outstanding collection encompasses 90,000 works of art, including the largest and most significant holding of works by Henri Matisse in the world, as well as masterpieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, and Vincent van Gogh. An expanding collection of contemporary art features iconic post-1960 works by Andy Warhol and Sol LeWitt, as well as exciting acquisitions by artists such as Kara Walker and Olafur Eliasson. The BMA is also recognized for an internationally acclaimed collection of prints, drawings, and photographs from the 15th-century to the present; grand European painting and sculpture from Old Masters to the 19th-century; distinguished American painting, sculpture, and decorative arts and Maryland period rooms; one of the most important African collections in the country, and notable examples of Asian, ancient American, and Pacific Islands art.

VISITOR INFORMATION

General admission to the BMA is free; special exhibitions may be ticketed. The BMA is open Wednesday through Friday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. (except major holidays). The Museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located on Art Museum Drive at North Charles and 31st Streets, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general Museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

VISIT BALTIMORE

For more great Baltimore experiences, visit web sites for the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association (www.baltimore.org), Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts (www.baltimoreevents.org), and Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance (www.baltimoreculture.org).

###

MEDIA CONTACTS: Anne Mannix (amannix@artbma.org) or Kelly Linton (klinton@artbma.org) 443-573-1870