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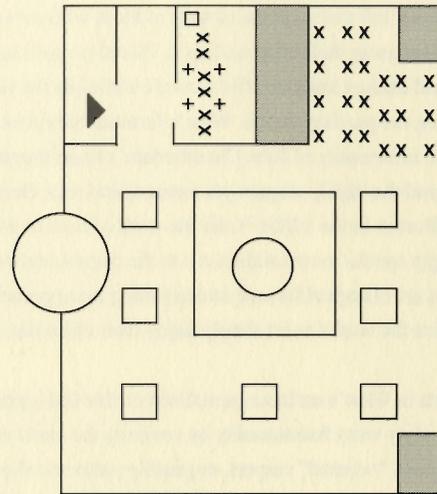
"Franz West interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, James Lingwood, and Andrea Schlieker," in *Possible Worlds: Sculpture from Europe*. London: Institute of Contemporary Art/Serpentine Gallery, 1990.

*Parkett 37* (September 1993). Essays by Denys Zacharopoulos, Elisabeth Schlebrügge, Harald Szeemann, Jan Avgikos, and Martin Prinzhorn, Franz West and Axel Huber. Conversation between Bernhard Riff, Jürgen Walter, and Franz West.

Franz West was born in Vienna in 1947, where he continues to live and work. He began making *Paßstücke* in 1976, and metal sculpture/furniture in the mid-eighties. During that decade he exhibited widely in Europe and elsewhere, representing Austria at the Venice Biennale in 1990. In 1989 a large show of his work was presented at The Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1 Museum, in Long Island City. From September 17-October 22, 1994, he will be showing new work at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York.

Funding for this project has been provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York, and the Austrian Ministry of Education and Art. It originated at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and has been reconceived for Dia.

Site Map



x — welded steel couch with black-and-white cotton slipcovers covers designed and fabricated by Gilbert Bretterbauer

+ — table, welded steel with wood, painted white

□ — *A Version*, video by Bernhard Riff

Rest

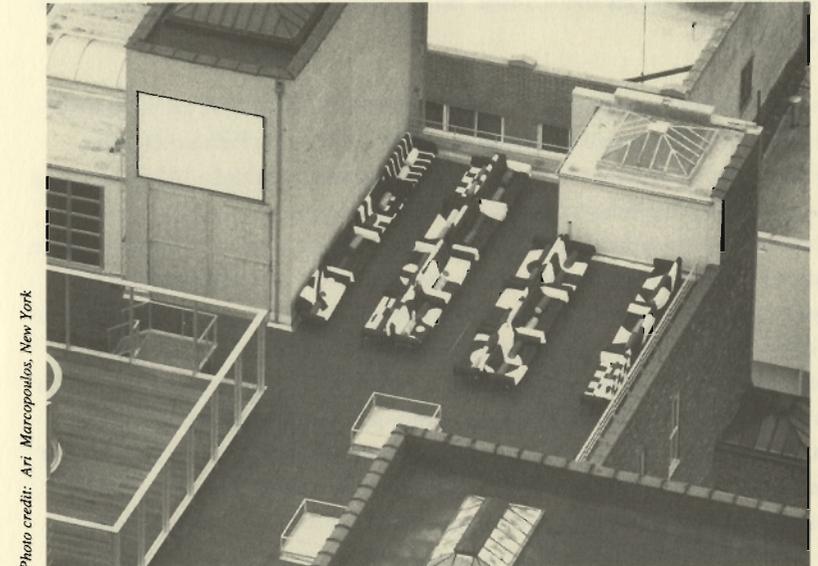


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DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

September 16, 1994-October 30, 1994

548 West 22nd Street, New York City

## FRANZ WEST

### *Rest*

"I want the artwork to be real, not like a dream or a movie," Franz West recently stated: "...[I want] to be able to step into it, to sit on it, lie on it...The artist lives in a social environment, he doesn't just produce work from the other side," West avers, continuing, "... this is the art of today, lying down on the bed looking up into space. It doesn't matter what the art looks like but how it's used. The important thing is to find a place for art, not a description."<sup>1</sup>

For the past fifteen years Franz West has consequently been making art that is variously interactive and performative. In an early body of works known as *Paßstücke* (*Fitting Pieces*), visitors to the exhibition were invited to manipulate the objects. Having picked up one of these ungainly forms with rough, faux-clumsy surfaces, they could then wind it around their bodies, adapting their forms to it, using it as the occasion to strike an attitude, adopt a pose or take a stance, aware always that there never could be perfect unison. By rapidly applying plaster to filigree struts, or winding bandages onto a metal infrastructure, or seemingly nonchalantly moulding papier-mâché, West produced modestly scaled sculpture with white surfaces guaranteed soon to become grimy and unhygienic. Far from the purist Minimalist aesthetic, which had recently prevailed in sculptural discourse in international circles, they were equally removed from Aktionismus, the dominant ethos of West's native Vienna during his years as a student. Soon atrophied into sclerotic reiteration, this performance-based coterie prompted West to devise a way of making art where the audience became the active agent, rather than the passive receptacle of a spectacle orchestrated by the artist and his cohorts, as was the case with the older generation.

After the *Paßstücke*, West began making sculpture that could inhabit a variety of sites, and that could be variously oriented depending on the will or whim of the beholder. Pieces in this way gravitated from their makeshift pedestals to sites on the gallery walls or were repositioned according to different sight lines or in relation to the viewers' notions of optimal presentation. The temptation to participate in the installation of these indeterminate works generally proved irresistible to viewers long conditioned never to touch and certainly never to intervene in curatorial decisions. Relinquishing definitive control over the placing his work proved preliminary to West's renouncing sole authorship of certain other work as he began to engage in a series of collaborative projects with a number of artists and then with several volunteer novices who sought to work with the by now renowned artist. The former contributed to the introduction of color into his art, the latter led to the production of welded furniture comprising discarded filigree rebars. Stark and rudimentary

in form, these benches, chairs, and tables gave little sense to the eye of the ergonomics determining their structures. The nonchalance of their forms was matched by covering the seats with newspaper, which left traces on the clothes of those who sat on it and on the fingers of those who whiled away their time reading it. Placed on pedestals when shown in museums, these chairs and chaises longues offer a comfortable site for viewing the art in the gallery or for watching the passing parade. West's furniture might be placed somewhere between the casual informality of John Chamberlain's foam Barges with their sprawling sixties ethos, and the highly elegant yet monumental rock chairs and granite seats designed by Scott Burton in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Like the work of both of these American artists, West's increasingly speaks to two audiences: to the cognoscenti who appreciate the conceptual strategies and art-historical lineage underpinning his approach, and to those who in failing to recognize the works as art simply enjoy their utilitarian properties.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent developments in West's art have capitalized on this dual appreciation of his couches, extending their slyly witty functionality by covering the metal armatures with, on occasion, cheap second-hand "oriental" carpets, or gaudily patterned slipcloths of African fabric. For *Rest* at Dia, West has devised a new smart color scheme in black and white, which his collaborator Gilbert Bretterbauer has sewn into bold iconic patterns. The stark dark-light contrast was provoked by the site, by its physical characteristics as well as its cultural ones, and not least its preferred sartorial codes. Sheltering on the northeast corner of the urban rooftop, West's couches provide an inviting respite after the luminous pure form of the Dan Graham pavilion nearby and the cool, pristine gallery spaces below. "Without this active reception," West said on an earlier occasion, "the work would remain somehow wanting, unfulfilled. Without this loving gesture—whose theatricality, boldness, or elegance you will modulate at your own discretion—it would remain the equivalent of a lack. So go ahead..."<sup>4</sup>

L. C.

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1. "Franz West interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, James Lingwood and Andrea Schlieker," in *Possible Worlds: Sculpture from Europe* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art/Serpentine Gallery, 1990), 83, 85.

2. The tradition of melding borders between the fine and applied arts has roots in Vienna in the Secessionist movement. West's proclivity for hybrid forms has stretched to encompass video works that are quasi-documentaries and philosophic linguistic text poems.

3. The "unconscious" aspect of this reception of his work greatly interests West whose engagement with key twentieth-century Austrian thinkers, most notably Freud and Wittgenstein, has been instrumental in forging his aesthetic.

4. Franz West and Axel Huber, "3 or 17," *Parkett* 37 (September 1993), 97.