

Press Release

Richard Artschwager

Cornered: Celebrating the Artist's Centennial

February 10–March 23, 2024

Public Reception: February 9, 6–8pm

Sprüth Magers, Berlin

Sprüth Magers

The work of Richard Artschwager has always defied categories and continues to be marked by a spirit of nonconformity. Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to present *Cornered*, a solo exhibition of Artschwager's work at the Berlin gallery in honor of the artist's centennial. Displaying works from his "Crates" (1995) and *Splatter* (2000–08) series, Formica sculptures (1964–2008) and a large-scale painting (2000) alongside an exuberant *Exclamation Point* (2008), the show offers a synoptic overview of a practice concerned with the habits and mechanics of looking.

A dualism between opposing forces is present in much of Artschwager's work, which often reinterprets everyday objects in unusual and industrial materials such as Formica, Celotex and acrylic bristles. The pieces on view in the upstairs gallery – some shown for the first time – are marked by polarities such as faux versus real, useful versus useless, and ordinary versus art, informing their choice of material and composition. *Cornered*, the show's title, encapsulates Artschwager's signature dry wit and humor, referencing both the artist's focused attention on corners – the intersection of two planes, the join between two walls of a room, sharp edges – as well as alluding to his unwavering individuality. The works echo elements of Pop but lean much closer to the slick, pared-back language of Minimalism, refusing to be cornered and confined by art historical categories.

Artschwager, who was himself an avid pianist, featured the motif of the piano in myriad forms throughout his career. *Splatter Piano* (2005) reduces a grand piano to two dimensions and "splatters" it across a corner, the often neglected space of a room. The object is splayed out to show different viewpoints at the same time and to suggest its three-dimensional form: one side shows the bottom of the instrument, complete with mounted casters; the other side represents the top board with a yellow book of scores perched on the music stand. Challenging systems of perception, corner works such as this one and *Splatter Office* (2000) conflate and confuse the pictorial and sculptural.

RA-19 (1995), a sturdy-looking box that appears to conceal a packed object waiting to be installed, its outline suggesting one of Artschwager's piano sculptures, is empty. Belonging to an innovative body of sculpture based on handmade wooden crates used to ship and store works of art, the crate simultaneously implies an object's container

and constitutes the work, the subject, itself. A critical comment on the art market and an economy where everything is a commodity, the “Crates” also animate the viewer’s imagination and respond to Magritte’s works that substitute a coffin for the sitter and humorously explore the relationship between things, images and words.

In 1966, Artschwager begins to base a series of sculptures on punctuation symbols – quotation and question marks, commas – creating works that are halfway between object and writing. His late sculptures using the exclamation mark are often emphatic in color and large in scale, exemplified by the bristly *Exclamation Point (Chartreuse)*, whose exclamatory nature punctuates the exhibition space. While the *Splatter* works flatten dimensional objects, here the reverse is the case: the familiar flat symbol is removed from the page and its linguistic context and turned into a tactile object that activates its environment and introduces a sense of disorientation.

The presented selection of quirky works outlines the radicalism with which Artschwager questioned materials and perception. Exploring the line between the everyday and art, crossing boundaries between genres and mediums, *Cornered* showcases the artist’s resolutely original work that plays with the peculiarities of objects and spaces.

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Richard Artschwager (1923–2013). Selected solo exhibitions include Mart, Rovereto (2019, traveled to Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao), Nouveau musée national de Monaco (2014), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2012, traveled to Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Haus der Kunst, Munich and Nouveau musée national de Monaco), Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami (2003), Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2003, traveled to Kaiser-Wilhelm-Museum, Krefeld, and Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich), Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna (2002), Neues Museum, Nuremberg (2001, traveled to Serpentine Gallery, London), Portikus, Frankfurt (1993, traveled to Lenbachhaus, Munich), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1988, traveled to Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Palacio de Velásquez, Madrid; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf). Group exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (2019, 2014, 2009, 2008, 1999), Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuelle Kunst, Ghent (2018), Fischer Landau Center for Arts, New York (2017), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015, 2010, 2009), Fondazione Prada, Venice (2014, 2013), Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2011), PS1 MoMA, New York, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (both 2009), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2005), Smithsonian Museum, New York (2004) and Tate, London (1998).

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