

Franz Erhard Walther: *The Body Decides* offers an in-depth look at an influential German artist whose pioneering work straddles minimalist sculpture, conceptual art, abstract painting, and performance all while posing fundamental questions about the conventional idea of the artwork as an immutable, obdurate pedestal- or wall- bound thing. Bringing together pivotal works made between the late 1950s and the present, this exhibition focuses on Walther's ability to transform notions of objecthood and perception through drawings, paintings, fabric sculptures, participatory forms, language-based works, photographic documentation and archival material.

Having participated in Harald Szeemann's legendary *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) and *documenta 5* (1972) as well as the Museum of Modern Art's landmark *Spaces* (1970), Walther's remarkable coupling of elementary forms with conceptual ideas and a radical rethinking of the relationship between sculpture and action, so influential to the contemporary practices of young artists today, deserves renewed attention. With his novel use of fabric forms, which he developed while in art school in the early 1960s, the artist's aesthetics of action incites visitors to engage with both sculpture and the institution in challenging ways. His ambitious *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set, 1963-69), a large-scale, sculptural installation comprised of fifty-eight elements of sewn cloth with pockets, pleats, and padding, introduced many of the ideas that would become central to his entire oeuvre: they are infinitely mutable forms that function as invitations for use, acting as what Walther calls 'instruments for process'. As he explains: 'This moment of manipulation and action – as a component of the work, or as the work itself – became my main theme. The decisive fundamental idea was to build up an oeuvre from action'.

The show at WIELS, the first for the artist in Belgium and one of the largest of his retrospective exhibitions to date, will underscore the essential tension provoked by Walther's work and the ways it thinks about what an artwork can do, or what can be done with it as opposed to how merely it appears or what it is. The show will trace this tension via a sweeping panorama of the artist's production, including more than a dozen of his earliest pieces from the late 1950s and early 1960s, the artist's own First Work Set, over 500 drawings, and more than one hundred work sculptural elements, spanning from the 1960s to the present, while also drawing attention to the artist's acute relationship to documentation, both photographic and drawn. The project reveals Walther's fundamental conception of the exhibition itself as a platform for social action and will also include numerous objects to be manipulated in the exhibition and will be animated by several workshops and performances led by the artist.

Franz Erhard Walther was born in 1939 in Fulda, Germany, where he lives and works. From 1957 to 1964, he studied at the Werkkunstschule in Offenbach, the Städelschule in Frankfurt and the

Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, where he had studio classes with Joseph Beuys and was surrounded by such artists as Blinky Palermo, Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter. His teaching at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg, from 1971 until 2005, has left its mark on several generations of students, among them Martin Kippenberger, Rebecca Horn, John Bock, Jonathan Meese and Santiago Sierra.

His work has been featured in a number of important historic exhibitions, including: When Attitudes Become Form (Kunsthalle Bern, Bern; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, all in 1969); Spaces (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970); documenta 5 (1972), documenta 7 (1982) and documenta 8 (1987, all in Kassel); and Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949 -1979 (The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1998). Recent solo exhibitions include: Franz Erhard Walther (Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, 2013); Franz Erhard Walther: Space Through Action (ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2012); Franz Erhard Walther: Drawings (Drawing Room, London, 2012); Franz Erhard Walther: Gesang der Schreitbahnen (Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2010- 2011); Franz Erhard Walther: Work as Action (Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2010-12); and Franz Erhard Walther: De l'origine de la sculpture (Mamco–Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva, 2010).

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