

## **EL DORADO**

curated by Herwig Kempinger

Artists: James Lee Byars, Gelatin, Mathieu Malouf, Franz West, Heimo Zobernig

### Point of Reference

Since the early civilizations, rulers have used golden symbols of power and insignia to express their worldly power and their political claim to the people. The metal thus symbolizes the claim to power of the son of the gods and his special position as king of the gods. In this tradition, US President Donald Trump has announced plans to turn Gaza into the golden "Riviera of the Middle East".

### Fragmented Subjectivity

Modern society leads to self-alienation and a loss of the personal dimension. This leads to a one-dimensional pattern of thought and behavior that rejects ideas, aspirations and goals that go beyond the established universe of discourse and action. At the same time, according to Foucault, this change in individualization has led to a sense of fragmentation and separation. New moral, ethical and spiritual systems have replaced traditional religious beliefs and must give people meaning and purpose in order to achieve authenticity and individuality. However, this process leads to the simultaneous coexistence of several different faiths.

According to Jannis Kounellis, there is no substitute for a religious center, and as a result, there is neither a standard for life in the present nor a direction for the future. The artists of the 20th century have reinterpreted the traditional meanings of gold in very different ways and reflected them in numerous, sometimes very different contexts.

### Holy Shit

On a psychological level, shit has also been equated with a precious gift (money, gold), especially the first one we all excrete as babies. Once children grow up, their interest shifts from shit to money as the most precious gift in life. The alchemists of antiquity persistently tried to turn base elements into gold. In the 1960s, Piero Manzoni packaged his own excrements in small tin cans labeled *Merda d'artista* and sold them for their equivalent weight in gold.

At the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 2018, the Austrian artist group Gelatin demonstrated their alchemical craft in transforming the abysmal into art by planting four oversized piles of excrement made of clay in the museum. On the canal leading to the museum is a dwarf by Paul McCarthy with a butt plug and a little further on, right by the water, are Franz West's sculptures *Qwertz*, sugar-colored sausages.

**Opening days:** 5. Sep 5th: 11am–9pm, Sep 6th & 7th: 11am–6pm

Exhibition duration: 9.9.–25.10.2025