FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER



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FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER: WORK AS ACTION, USA

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER, GERMANY

BIOGRAPHY

Franz Erhard Walther was born in 1939, in Fulda, Germany, where he lives and works.

Since the 1950s, he has been developing work that examines the role of spectators in the grasping of a piece, and also its status. As the creator of pieces to be put into motion, with his famous multi-part sculpture First Work Set (1963 – 1969), he has turned public participation into one of the drivers of his art. His use of fabrics combines elementary forms with conceptual notions, engages visitors, and marks a radical rethinking of the relationship between sculpture and action.

Franz Erhard Walther participated in the legendary exhibitions When Attitudes Become Form, 1969, curated by Harald Szeemann at the Bern Kunsthalle, Switzerland, as well as Spaces, 1969, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA. Since the 1960s, he was invited to present his work in numerous international solo and group shows. He participated in Documenta 5 to 8 (1972, 1977, 1982, 1987) in Kassel, Germany. He was invited to the 57th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale “VIVA ARTE VIVA”, and honored by the Golden Lion Award for the Best Artist of the exhibition.

His recent solo exhibitions include : Franz Erhard Walther, de l’origine de la sculpture, Mamco, Geneva, Switzerland (2010); LINE/FRAME/ACTION/DRAWN NOVEL, Drawing Room, London, UK (2012); Franz Erhard Walther, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany (2013); Franz Erhard Walther, The Body Decides, CAPC, Bordeaux, France and WIELS Centre d’art contemporain, Brussels, Belgium (2014); Architektur mit weichem kern, MUDAM, Luxembourg, Luxembourg (2015); Franz Erhard Walther, A Place for the Body, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain (2017); Thinking Action. the awarding of the Aachen Art Prize at Ludwig Forum Aachen, Germany (2017); Franz Erhard Walther. Objects to use, Museo Jumex, Mexico (2018); Migrations of Forms 1956-2006, Peter Freeman Inc., New York, USA (2019); Franz Erhard Walther, Shifting Perspectives, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2020); Body Space Time, Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland (2021).

The VILLA, a museum dedicated to Franz Erhard Walther’s early work, based on the Seng Collection, opened in 2022 in Fulda.

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

ATTEMPT TO BE A SCULPTURE

Curated by Selen Ansen

February 27 - October 5, 2025
ARTER, Istanbul, Turkey

Year 1958. A young man is sitting before a sheet of canvas, cross-legged and barefoot, within close reach of a metal bowl containing a mixture of baking powder, water and milk. He spits out the mixture while a friend of his captures his ephemeral gestures with a camera. 19-year-old Franz Erhard Walther, growing up in Fulda (Germany), breaks from his family's bakery business by expelling the ingredients involved in the making of bread. At the same time, with this action-work titled Attempt to be a Sculpture, he steps into the territory of art by distancing himself from artistic conventions.

The exhibition Attempt to be a Sculpture draws from the eponymous work that lays the foundation for Walther's ongoing commitment to reformulating sculpture as an open process and action, as well as shaping new modes of bodily presence in time and space. The works presented in the 4th and 3rd-floor galleries highlight the conceptual turning points of the artist's oeuvre, spanning more than six decades, through a non-chronological trajectory. Since his early processual works in the 1960s, Walther has forged a new concept of work that turns the living body into a material, while allowing the viewer to become an "actor" engaged in the realisation of the work through their imagination or bodily action. Most of Walther's sculptural works can be experienced either in their "storage form" (Lagerform) – the state in which objects are folded and stored – or in their "action form" (Handlungsform) when they are activated by their "users".

Conceived around concepts pivotal to Walther's practice, the exhibition Attempt to be a Sculpture builds a dialogue between his early paper works such as Outline Drawings and Word Images, pillow shapes that use air as material, Work Drawings, Handpieces from the 1960s, and his later groups of works, including his Layer Drawings, Action Paths and Wall Formations, which fuse architecture and human proportions. It also features an extensive selection from his autobiographical work Dust of Stars, composed of drawings and handwritten texts that unfold memories and reflections across time and space. The iconic First Work Set, presented for the first time in its entirety in 1969 at MoMA in New York, introduces the crucial role of cloth, a malleable and wearable material, in the artist's endeavour to challenge the objecthood of art and to shift the production of meaning from the object to the body in action. Coming down from its pedestal and conversing with architecture, sculpture departs from its customary stiffness and inertia to join the reality of human life. Never given / never finished, it comes to us anew, at various speeds, in the form of a collective endeavour that may (or may not) actualise countless possible shapes and states of being.

The activation area on the third floor offers visitors the opportunity to engage with and activate 12 different exhibition copies of the First Work Set on designated days and hours.

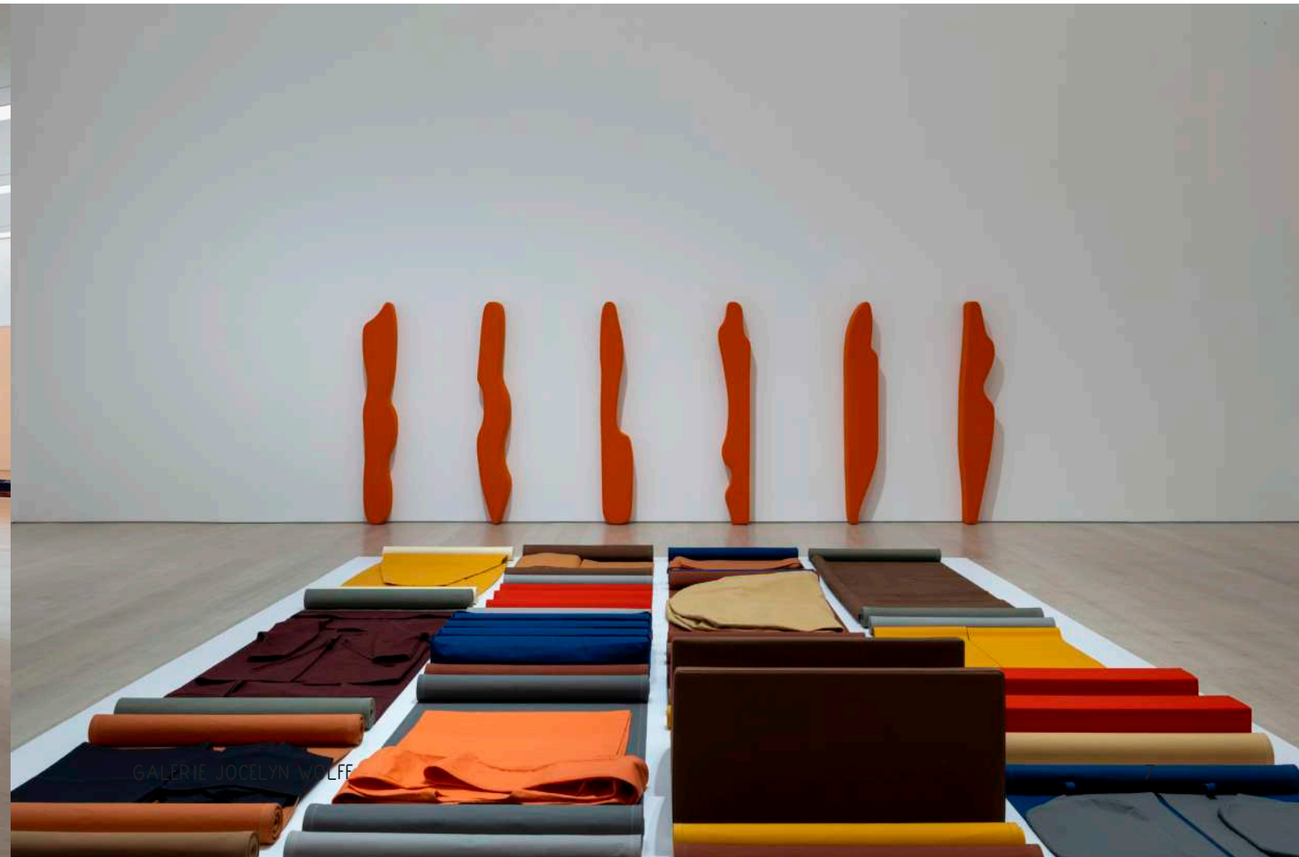
Source : press release




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FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

VILLA

Permanent exhibition Space opened in 2022
Fulda, Germany

A joint project by the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation and the City of Fulda

The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation and the City of Fulda are delighted to announce the opening of VILLA, an exhibition space in Fulda, dedicated to Franz Erhard Walther's early work.

Ever since Franz Erhard Walther embarked on his artistic practice in Fulda in the late 1950s, his work has been marked by a radical openness, which at first incorporated material processes and later the spectator as an active participant in the realization of the work. Based on the Seng Collection, the VILLA will be presenting alternating Work Presentations showcasing the works that Franz Erhard Walther produced in the late 1950s and early 1960s, augmented by loans from the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation and other lenders. The VILLA ties in with the specific place and period in which the works were created, while at the same time contextualizing Franz Erhard Walther's artistic production in its temporary relevance.

The activities of the VILLA are based on the fundamental principles of Franz Erhard Walther's work. It is a space in which the work is constantly realized anew – a space in flux, in which the early works are shown in ever new constellations.

The trajectory of Franz Erhard Walther's articulation of his participatory concept, which underwent a radical change in 1963 with the production of the first pieces of the First Work Set, will be conveyed as a dynamic process that underscores the simultaneity of contrasting approaches and the anticipatory theoretical conception of works that only later came to be materialized.

Between the changing Work Presentations, annual exhibition projects will be staged that place Franz Erhard Walther's early work in transcultural and transgenerational dialogues and establish references to their specific place of origin, Fulda and the Rhön region. In an exhibition planned for 2023, Franz Erhard Walther's early works will be shown in dialogue with those of Lygia Clark. 2024 will see an ex-hibition with Jimmy Robert, in which the artist engages with Fulda's booming jazz scene in the 1950s. 2025 is dedicated to the realization of the unrealized exhibition Yellow, which Franz Erhard Walther had conceived for the Galerie Junge Kunst in Fulda in 1965.

Source : press release











FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER
ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

March 4 - July 31, 2022
Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St Louis, Missouri, USA

Assembly Required features nine artists and collectives whose work calls for your active participation. Each gallery represents a single artist who invites you to build, shape, and use the artworks, collaboratively or on your own. These artists believe public action is vital for transforming society. Through their work, they offer unique perspe tives on social change, addressing the need for optimism and hope in the face of global tensions.
Many works in this exhibition helped contribute to a profound transformation in the relationship between artist andaudience. This shift grew out of larger social movements that arose in the mid-twentieth century. In the tumu tuous period following World War II (1939-45), society questioned how to prevent governments from exerting control over citizens' lives. Philosopher Hannah Arendt proposed one potential solution in her influential book, The Human Condition (1958). She argued that only public assembly, which she termed "action," could affect real soci tal change.
In the following decade, artists, students, and activists across the globe joined in mass demonstrations against governmental restrictions, capitalism, and imperialism. Experimental artist groups flourished, often working to democratize art by moving it from the museum into the public realm, whether it be performances in the streets or books sent through the mail. Many of these works were among the first to transform passive audiences into active co-creators, requiring participation for completion.
Over the past sixty years, later generations of artists have carried these ideals forward, creating new platforms that bring people together in public, civic, and virtual spaces. While many of the artworks in Assembly Required respond to distinct moments of social and political turmoil, most were not purely created as gestures of protest. Instead, they engage with what artist Rasheed Araeen called the "radical consciousness" of their time while remaining open to individual interpretation.
In the current moment, new forces isolate us from each other both socially and physically. These artists' questions have become increasingly urgent and global as the way we relate to shared space changes with the evolution of the digital landscape and a post-pandemic reality. The works in Assembly Required prompt us to consider what we can achieve by coming together and how art might help us imagine new ways of being in the world.

Assembly Required includes work by Francis Alÿs, Rasheed Araeen, Siah Armajani, Tania Bruguera and INSTAR, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Yoko Ono, Lygia Pape, and Franz Erhard Walther.

Assembly Required is curated by Stephanie Weissberg, Curator at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. Texts written by Heather Alexis Smith, Curatorial Associate at the Pulitzer, and Stephanie Weissberg.

source : press release





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

ONE POINT FIVE

October 10, 2021 - September 10, 2022
Kunsthalle Mainz, Germany

Maintaining physical distance from other people, staying away from crowds, reducing the number of your contacts – in a time of pandemic, separation and isolation (keeping populations apart) hold the promise that you will pers nally remain healthy and the spread of the virus itself will be contained. Segregation becomes something that is both therapeutic and an act of solidarity.
But the relationship between closeness and distance shapes our entire existence, as well as the way we deal with distance. A human being is a creature that lives through and with bodily contact, and this leads us out into the physical world. It is what enables a child's immune system to develop in the first place. Over the course of our life we develop a feeling for what kind of closeness is damaging, appropriate or pleasurable. We keep away from fire, walk a safe distance from the road, avoid certain people. All these examples comprise learned techniques that protect us from dangers. Establishing distance between yourself and everyday life, specific events and other people is a crucial part of human interaction. But how does it work with a prescribed distance? Or when forgoing closeness is imposed upon us?
During a pandemic the mandatory distancing requirements extend further than 1.5 metres: "Stay home!" is the solution nowadays. That means: stay isolated, avoid any kind of physical contact in order to avoid endangering yourself and others. Stop existing in a social community.
Managing without closeness in the long term causes human longings to atrophy and an absence of stimuli makes people more narrow-minded. What does it mean when a society functions in a contactless manner? How do our bodies, feelings and ideas develop when movement, face-to-face encounters and a process of mutual exchange are taken away from them? And what happens with art when it develops exclusively in digital space, when we only have a limited perception of it through our senses and can no longer actually experience it? A work of art that you can't relate to at a physical level, that you can't get close to or away from, that you can't access through feeling, smell or taste in association with movement and self-perception, is a different work, and it affects you – at best – differently.
One Point Five is an exhibition dedicated to distance and its multifacetedness. It highlights different forms of clos ness over distances, and how this very category changes.
Everyone operates within a dynamic system, on an axis between two poles. This axis is called distance. The twin poles between which this axis are fixed, are called touch and the loss of contacts – isolation. Depending on the situation you get nearer to one pole or the other, you're absorbed into it and become affiliated to it before veering apart once more and rotating together around the axis of distance.

The exhibition is supported by Kultursommer Rheinland-Pfalz.
Curated by Stefanie Böttcher

Source : Press release





Franz Erhard Walther
Exhibition views: Kunsthalle Mainz, 2021. Photo: Norbert Miguletz

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

BODY SPACE TIME

April 18 – June 27 2021
Kunsthalle Winterthur, Switzerland

The series of special exhibitions on the occasion of Kunsthalle Winterthur's 40th birthday ends with Franz Erhard Walther (b.1939, lives and works in Fulda), one of the most influential German artists of his generation. A series of his signature works titled Erster Werksatz (1963 – 1969), comprises of 58 so-called Werkstücke; textile sculptures that call for physical interactions with gallery goers. Walther's works become comprehensive artworks only by the physical initiative of the public. The objects, which are fabricated from sewn linen or cotton are carefully folded into convenient parcels and placed on the floor. Once unfolded and opened, their shapes and construction invoke bodily interaction; flaps seem to ask for grabbing, cavities encourage filling out. The Werkstücke refer deliberately to human scale and proportions; either they offer themselves as counterparts to the body or they propose a direction for looking, positioning and/or performing.

In reference to the inclusion of the human performer, Franz Erhard Walther speaks of the idea of "activation". By using the artist's objects, the individual image of the performer as well as their physicality becomes integral, activating both object and participant. A reciprocal relationship is formed where participant becomes live sculpture, and sculpture frames, borders, compliments and positions a body. The historic artwork is updated with each new interaction as clothes and changing fashion inevitably become subsumed into new images of the freshly activated work, thus providing Walther's work with a fresh contemporaneity.

The presentation at Kunsthalle Winterthur focuses primarily on the Werkstücke's historical documentation, beginning from conception and moving on to subsequent historic activations up to the present. The exhibit provides exhibition copies of four Werkstücke (Nr. 28 Gegenüber 1967, Nr. 29 Form für Körper 1967, Nr. 42 Vier Körpergewichte 1968, and Nr. 57 Zehn Sockel 1969), preliminary sketches as well as later drawings, a film documentation of an activation of each of the Werkstücke, as well as a comprehensive selection of photo documentation of various other past activations. The exhibition copies are ready to be carefully activated by the audience, guided by the staff of the museum. By advance notification, groups of 10 people will be offered a professional photographer to document their interactions and thus given the opportunity to become part of the works' ongoing living history. Also under instruction by the staff, every Thursday from 4:00 to 6:00 pm, all visitors are welcome to activate the works alone or in sets of two, four or ten.

Source : Press release





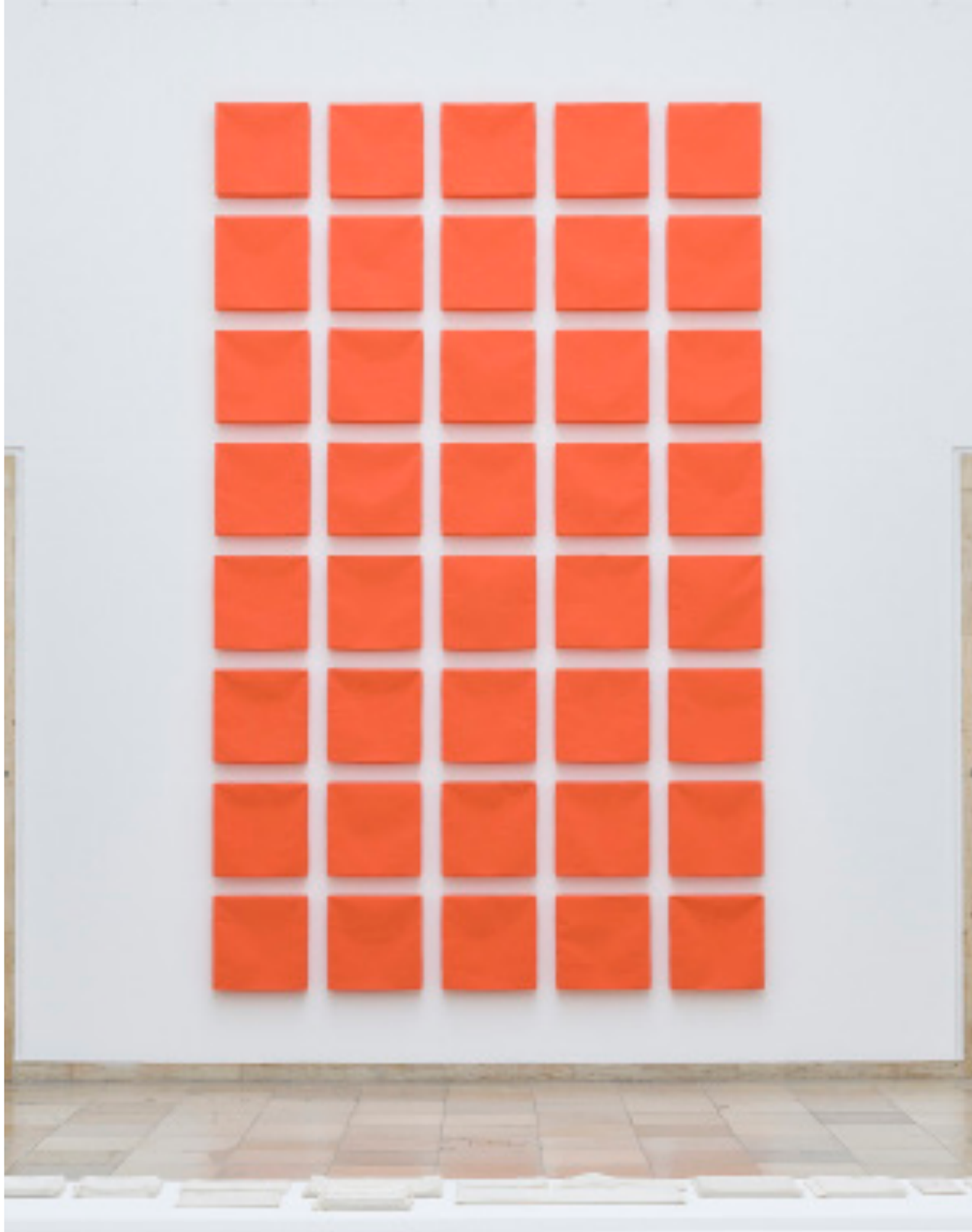
FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

March 06 – November 29, 2020
Haus des Kunst, Munich, Germany

Franz Erhard Walther (*1939 in Fulda) – winner of the Golden Lion at the 2017 Venice Biennale – is a key figure in the departure from the image since the European postwar period. Beyond the classical understanding of sculpture and painting, Walther formulated a completely new concept of work that included the viewer as an actor.
Already in his early work, Walther dealt with the coincidental and the processual as design principles in various media. At the same time, fabric – until then an unusual artistic material – became a source of innovation for Walther, from which the “activation objects” emerged. With the key work Four Body Forms (1963), the body became a motif. Between 1963 and 1969, Walther created the First Work Set, which consists of 58 activatable pieces that place the viewer in extraordinary interpersonal situations. The First Work Set was Walther’s breakthrough in 1969, when he presented it at the «Spaces» exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Under the influence of Pop Art, Walther’s textiles became increasingly colorful. In the wall formations of the 1980s, he achieved an incomparable interweaving of painting, sculpture, and architecture that continues to this day.
Some of the exhibits can be worn or entered. In this way, they challenge the viewer’s understanding of a traditional pictorial logic. The body becomes a medium in that it transforms life processes into images.
Curated by Jana Baumann
An exhibition in collaboration with the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation.
Work activations in cooperation with the Munich-based initiative TanzQuelle.

source Press releasee









FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

October 19 – December 14, 2019
Brighton CCA, United-Kingdom

In a career spanning more than 50 years, Franz Erhard Walther has continually challenged conceptions of sculpture and performance; questioning received ideas about how we engage with art and insisting on the importance of the viewer to complete the work in their imagination. This exhibition brings together rarely seen works from across Walther's practice including sculpture, drawing, typography and performance presenting a cross section of his prolific output.
A common thread across Walther's practice is his ground breaking approach to engaging an audience through systems; using language, performance instruct instructions to display strategies, incorporating the viewer within the work itself. Central to this way of working is a physical engagement with the objects, from the activation of sculptures to the body's relationship to a defined space, the viewer is invited to understand the Walther's work through an engagement that is both physcial and intellectual. preceded many of the socially engaged and participatory practices seen in contemporary art today from Jeremy Deller and Tanya Brugera to Olafur Elissson and Francis Alys. through an engagement that is both physcial and intellectual.
In perhaps his best known work, the fifty eight part series First Work Set (1963- 69), Walther creates a poetic, visual dialogue between object and action and the systems through which these interactions are mediated. The First Work Set is a set of canvas sculptural objects or structures which the artist refers to as instruments – read to be worn and interacted with as part of demonstrations within the gallery spaces. Activations of a selection of these works will take place throughout the course of the exhibition.
Walther's work has been shown widely internationally and is included in many public collections including Centre Pompidou Paris and MoMA New York. He participated in many seminal exhibitions of the 20th Century including Harald Szeemann's When Attitudes Become Form (1969) and MoMA's Spaces curated by Jennifer Licht in 1970. A contemporary of Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke, Walther also taught at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg from 1970 – 2005, and is a continuing point of reference those who studied with him including John Bock, Martin Kippenberger and Rebecca Horn. His work however remains relatively under represented in the UK.

Walther continues to live and work in Fulda, where the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation is also based.

source : Press release





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

SYNAGOGE STOMMELN

September 13 - November 18, 2018
Synagogue, Stommeln, Germany

Franz Erhard Walther's exhibition at Stommeln Synagoge seems at first to be a conversational presentation of the two-part sculpture Zwei Köperformen GELB [Two Body Shapes YELLOW, 2013]: a pair of equal-sized, almost isosceles triangles made of yellow cotton with irregular protrusions on their vertical sides, have been set slightly staggered in the space. As such, the positioning of the two pieces is flexible, but for Stommeln, Walther felt that a staggered arrangement was best. With their plain and simple materiality and powerful chromatic presence, the sculptural configuration in the square space radiates nothing short of a religious sublimity. Even though the work already existed before-hand, this choice for the synagogue in Stommeln could scarcely have been more suited as regards to form, size, and proportions. Although the simple triangular shapes fit, on the one hand, the calm grammar of forms employed in the neo-Romanesaque building, at the same time they break with the canon of architectural design – above all through the irregular protuberances on their sides. But these protrusions are the key to a deeper understanding of the work, because they have a direct relation to human proportions. The contours of his head, abdomen, and feet can be seen in negative form alongside the faces of the triangles. It becomes clear with the performative activation of Zwei Körperformen GELB – as soon as a person places himself before or at a freely chosen distance to the form (both being valid forms of activation) - that the work is about the relationship between object and body, and the relation of these two "components" to space and time. In a broader sense one could say that it is about bringing the mutual relationship between man, object, surroundings to awareness. Like oversized, materialized shadows, the triangles extend the physical volume of the human body into space and enter with it into a silent yet vital dialogue. Here too the focus in on thought connected with sculpture, on theoretically playing with through all the possible actions, and on the openness of the setup. Thinking through the action in advance, in various phases, albeit independent of any actual realization, is a fundamental conceptual part of the work. Yet it is not only the action that has to be thought through, but also one's own relationship to the work and the surrounding space: how one acts as actor – and always in relation to the material, the form, the other, to space, and in time. Apart from these purely artistic aspects, it is also perhaps and above all the positive image of the human being that informs Franz Erhard Walther's work, because he regards the person freed from the role of passive viewer as able to think for him- or herself, to act and work self-reliantly. With his sculptures Walther sunders the traditional binary of actor and recipient in truly artistic fashion. He as the artist no longer stands diametrically opposed to the viewers as some ingenious creator but lets them take active role in his works. Especially in times marked by complex crisis and challenges, in which many people trust blindly in populists and frequently leave it to them to do the thinking, the political power in Franz Erhard Walther's work becomes apparent: people can think, and ideally should always do so in relation to their surroundings in the broadest sense, and take full responsibility for their actions. These components make Franz Erhard Walther's work so timeless and fundamentally human.

Source : Press release



FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

MURALNOMAD

February 23 - August 19, 2018
Le Quadrilatère, Beauvais, France

Commissaire : Tiphanie Dragaut-Lupescu
Scénographie : Dominique Mathieu
Signalétique et design : Syndicat

Text in french :

Le Quadrilatère présente l'exposition MURALNOMAD. Empruntant son titre au concept de Le Corbusier le « Mural-nomad », l'exposition est indissociable de la vie errante de l'homme moderne et les œuvres sculpturales, souvent porteuses d'un message politique répondent à ce besoin de construction et/ou de déconstruction de l'espace. Lieu commun, espace à vivre et à expérimenter, MURALNOMAD convoque les visiteurs à chan- ger leur regard sur la tapisserie et l'art tissé. À travers des œuvres produites par des Manufactures nationales et privées, l'exposition valorise les savoir-faire et la technicité des artisans d'art. Par la rencontre avec des pièces et installations textiles monumentales MURALNOMAD tisse des liens entre la structure architecturale du Quadrilatère et le désir de beauté et de confort voulu par Le Corbusier selon les normes du Modulor.

Présentant plus d'une quarantaine d'oeuvres originales MURALNOMAD propose de vivre une expérience de l'art tissé en écho aux évolutions des pratiques artistiques contemporaines. Les œuvres présentées sont représen-tatives de problématiques d'une grande diversité et les artistes ont fait appel à des médiums différents. De cet ensemble naît un lieu vivant, une plateforme ouverte à tous les courants, allant de la tradition à l'avant-garde

L'exposition est produite en partenariat avec le Mobilier national et avec l'ai- mable collaboration de la Cité interna-tionale de la tapisserie et de l'art tissé, Aubusson, du Centre national des arts plastiques, du Musée national d'Art moderne - Centre de création indus- trielle, du Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, ainsi que du FRAC Centre, du fracpicardie I des mondes dessinés et des galeries Art Concept, Salle Principale, Obadia, Jocelyn Wolf,...

Artistes : Caroline Achaintre, Olga de Amaral, Michel Aubry, Karina Bisch, BLESS, Alighiero Boetti, Ulla von Bran-denburg, Jagoda Buic, Le Corbusier, Patrick Corillon, Josep Grau-Garriga, Benjamin Hochart, Chloé Jarry, Philippe Mayaux, Mathieu Mercier, Isa Melsheimer, Otobong Nkanga, Mai-Thu Perret, Gianni Pettena, Bernard Piffaretti, Laure Prouvost, Klaus Rinke, Franz Erhard Walther, ...

Source : press release





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

DU CORPS VERS LA SCULPTURE

October 18 - December 22, 2018
ie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France

Notes from a conversation between Franz Erhard Walther, Susanne Walther and Jocelyn Wolff on October 16th 2018

«Sockel-Standstelle UMWANDLUNG, (1970, executed 2018)» needs a site and a direction: when you step on it, you relate to the word engraved in it with a specific font that I designed. This simple plate of metal becomes a pedestal when a person is on it, who then can see herself as a sculpture.

The usual questions I am being asked are: Why are you using fabric? Why are you using these colors?

I started using fabric in the early 60's (1963) specifically because this technique at the time was not used in the field of art and was seen as belonging to that of craftsmanship. It gave me lots of freedom, especially when I started working with sewn fabrics, thanks to Johanna (who also realized all the works here in the show) and was no longer gluing fabric as I did a few years before, a technique referring to collage, which did not fit with my intentions.

In the 60's, I didn't use bright colors because this was not needed in the work concept. I started to use bright colors "as material" with the Wall Formation series.

As the show states, everything with me starts with drawings: I conceived approximatively a hundred Wall Formations between 1979 and 1986. When I started this new series of works, soon after the Stride Pieces in metal, it was not planned that it would become such a large and central group in my work. The reception of this group was difficult at the time, and I had to fight for it (because of the Werksatz diffusion mostly). Wall Formations use the body as a part of their formulation, not the body as a work. They are centered around this idea that they work as a sculptural image when you face the work, but when you step in it it becomes a kind of pedestal in the wall.

All Wall Formations are participatory works and body-related in terms of proportions. They basically remain fragments that you complete by imagination or stepping in it.

I also would like to add that the drawings of the show were not meant as works: for me they are rather an implement, they became such as the Workdrawings of the Plandrawings.

For this show, in addition to Susanne's initiative to execute the non realised Wall Formations I found also interesting her idea to integrate "Wandgesang (1990)", a multiple, that gathers as a library of samples all the colors I use (except the natural cotton) in the Wall Formation and the Configuration series and other workgroups.

Previously exhibited on the floor in Herford, "Two Box Shapes, Inserted Sculptural Frame" is a little bit the "chainon manquant" between the Wall Formation group and further work groups to come...

Source : Press release





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

OBJETOS, PARA USAR / INSTRUMENTOS PARA PROCESOS

OBJECTS, TO USE / INSTRUMENTS FOR PROCESSES

May 12-September 30, 2018
Museo Jumex (Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo), Mexico City, Mexico

Museo Jumex will present Franz Erhard Walther. Obje s, to use. In ruments for processes, the first comprehensive survey in Latin America of Walther's oeuvre, anning a career of six decades.

The work of Franz Erhard Walther (Fulda, Germany, 1939) addresses a series of complex issues at the center of the ruptures and shi s that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. This was a time in which new forms of arti ic produ ion emerged that radically broke with art-hi orical categories and conventions; from those that ressed the role of information and communication in the generation of ae hetic situations to those that aimed towards a dematerialization of the work of art, resulting in a sy ems-based approach that included the artwork, the public, and the gallery ace.

Franz Erhard Walther. Obje s, to use. In ruments for processes presents a significant selection from his major bodies of work, such as 1. Werksatz [Fir Work Set], (1963-1969), Kon gurationen [Con gurations], and Werkzeichnungen [Work Drawings] and Wortbilder [Word pi ures]. These works in the exhibition manife the ideas at the core of his pra ice as an arti , and underscore his various intere s in language, communication, process, ace, scale, and the a ive role of the e ator.

At the center of the exhibition is Walther's seminal Fir Work Set which can be considered the conceptual, operative and material matrix from which his subsequent produ ion unfolds. Possibly one of the mo radical works produced in the 1960s,
the Fir Work Set destabilized traditional notions of sculpture, redefined the object as well as its relation to the gallery space and the spectator, and like many practices of the 1960s, also proposed linguistic and discursive functions for photography.

This exhibition is parallel and complementary to the exhibition at E ancia Femsa Casa Luis Barragán Determinaciones de proporción.

Source : Press release















FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

DETERMINACIONES DE PROPORCIÓN / DETERMINATIONS OF PROPORTION

May 12-September 30, 2018
Estancia FEMSA, Casa Luis Barragán, Mexico City, Mexico

Estancia Femsa – Casa Luis Barragán with the support of Franz Erhard Walther Foundation presents Determinations of Proportion, a solo exhibition by German artist Franz Erhard Walther.

Walther was one of the most notorious and unique voices leading the artistic experimentations around language and the materiality of the art object that took place in the 1960s. The exhibition in Casa Luis Barragán brings together several works created by the artist throughout the 1960s and until today. Determinations of Proportions showcases pieces from Walther's iconic series First Work Set (1963-1969), a selection of early drawings installed in the Barragán Studio and a new site-specific drawing created by Walther especially for the house.

Estancia FEMSA – Casa Luis Barragán invited Mexican curator and independent critic Daniel Garza Usabiaga to collaborate in a publication parallel to this exhibition, delving into the conceptual connections between Walther's material, poetic explorations and Luis Barragán's legacy. This publication will also include the first translation to Spanish and English of Walther's text Architektur: Vernichtung des Raums, written in the 1990s.

Throughout his artistic career, Franz Erhard Walther has explored topics related to the body, sculpture, architecture and the concept of action. Most of his work takes place in the intersection between different techniques and artistic languages, emphasizing the mental and poetic associations that arise the moment when the body of the viewer experiences and thus brings a work of art into completion. Walther understands the artwork as an act of communication, a "sculptural action in space". As such, time, body, language and memory become the building blocks of his sculptural actions. In the context of Casa Luis Barragán, the curatorial approach proposes a dialogue with the legacy of Luis Barragán by pointing out the affective and emotional dimension of his architecture, concepts addressed by Walther in his own practice through the haptic quality of his pieces, as well as in the unpredictability of the artwork's activations by spectators. These qualities evoke a spatial experimentation that is central to both Walther and Barragán's practices.

Determinations of Proportion complements and takes place alongside the exhibition Objects, to use / Instruments for Processes in Museo Jumex.

sOURCE / Press release













FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

ODRADEK

February 17-May 6, 2018

Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden

In his short story The Cares of a Family Man, first published in 1919, Franz Kafka introduces Odradek as a deliberately undefined protagonist. It is simultaneously a thing, an object, which he describes as an informal entanglement of threads, and a being, a living organism able to move, talk, and even laugh. It is also, and primarily, a word, seemingly uproted from any language. Odradek suggests an open field for interpretation, but in the first place, it emphasizes the potential of the caring gaze and of closely paid attention to animate the inanimate, which blur the boundaries between object and subject.

Odradek, an exhibition at Malmö Konsthall, invites eight artists whose works similarly transgress the fixed dualities between subject and object, and who tend to include the viewers in processes characterized by attention, care, and participation. The exhibition aims at making links and weaving affinities between the practices of these artists from various backgrounds and generations: Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971, Iran), Katinka Bock (b. 1976, Germany), Henri Jacobs (b. 1957, the Netherlands), Laura Lamiel (b. 1948, France), Judith Scott (b. 1943, d. 2005, USA), Hassan Sharif (b. 1951, d. 2016, Dubai, the Emirates), Oscar Tuazon (b. 1975, USA) and Franz Erhard Walther (b. 1939, Germany).

Source : Press release





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

VIVA ARTE VIVA - LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

WINNER OF THE GOLDEN LION AWARD FOR THE BEST ARTIST OF THE 57TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION

May 13 - November 26, 2017
Arsenale, La Biennale di Venezia, 57 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, Venice, Italy

Curated by Christine Macel

Today, faced with a world full of conflicts and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human, at a time when humanism is precisely jeopardized. Art is the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions. The role, the voice and the responsibility of the artist are more crucial than ever, within the framework of contemporary debates. Viva Arte Viva is a Biennale designed with artists, by artists and for artists, about the forms they propose, the questions they ask, the practices they develop and the ways of
life they choose. Rather than broaching a single theme, the exhibition offers a route that molds the artists' works. The journey unfolds over the course of nine chapters, beginning with two introductory realms in the Central Pavilion: the Pavilion of Artists and Books and the Pavilion of Joys and Fears, followed by another seven across the Arsenale through
the Giardino delle Vergini: the Pavilion of the Common, the Pavilion of the Earth, the Pavilion of Traditions, the Pavilion of Shamans, the Dionysian Pavilion, the Pavilion of Colors and the Pavilion of Time and Infinity. There is however, no physical separation between the various pavilions which flow together like the chapters of a book. From the Pavilion of Artists and Books to the Pavilion of Time and Infinity, these nine episodes tell a story that is often discursive and at times paradoxical with detours that mirror the world's complexities, a multiplicity of approaches and a wide variety of practices.
The exhibition is intended as an experience, an extrovert movement from the self to the other, towards a common space beyond defined dimensions.

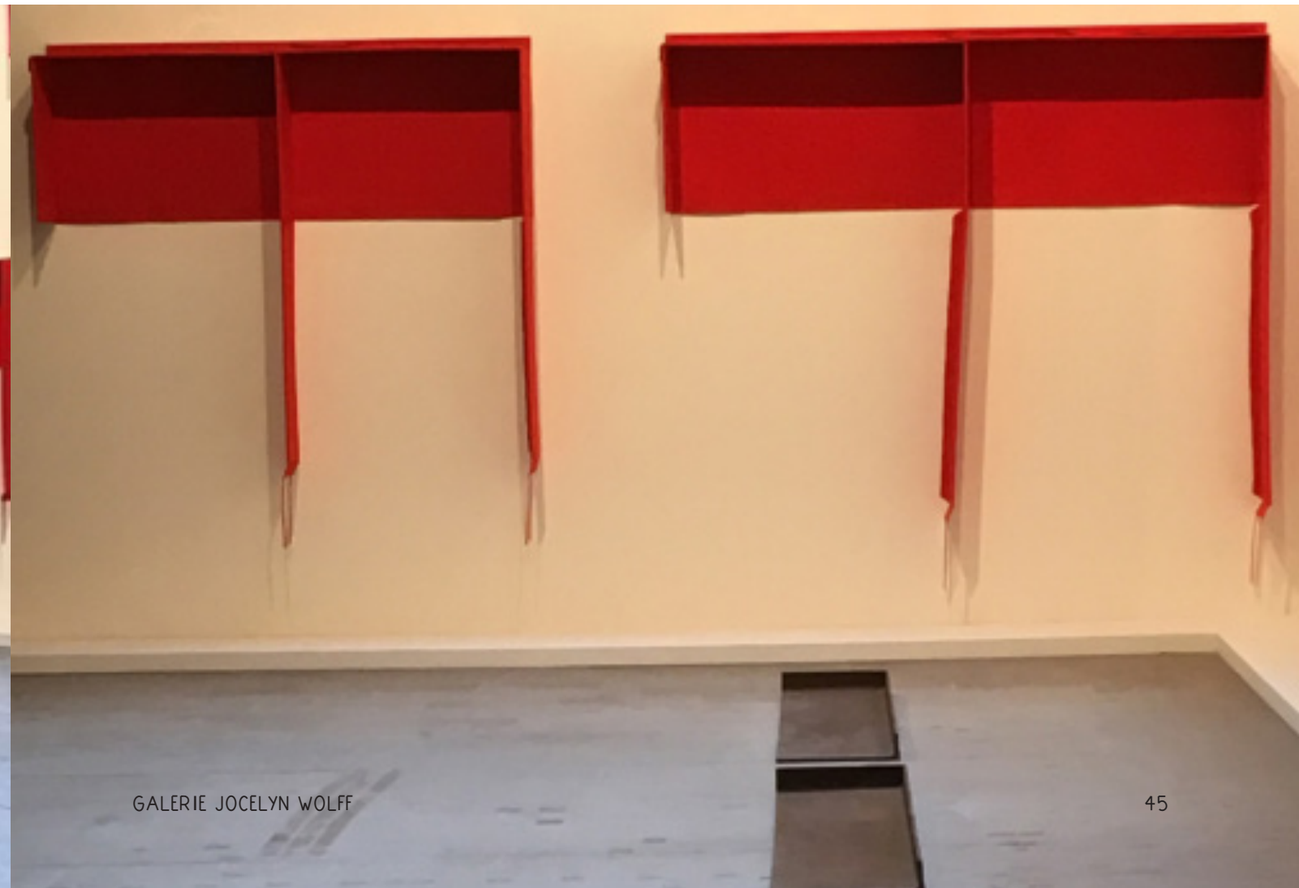
Source : press release











FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

DISOBEDIENT BODIES:

JW ANDERSON CURATES THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD

March 18 - June 18, 2017

The Hepworth Wakefield, England

Disobedient Bodies: JW Anderson curates The Hepworth Wakefield sees one of the world's most innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary fashion designers responding to Wakefield's impressive collection of modern British art. This is the first in a new series of exhibitions at the award-winning gallery, curated by key figures from creative fields outside the visual arts, from fashion and music to film and literature. As his starting point for the exhibition, Anderson was drawn to early works by Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore from the 1920s and 1930s that represented the human body in radical new ways. These increasingly abstracted, yet defiantly figurative sculptures led to an exhibition exploring how the human form has been reimagined by artists and designers across the 20th and 21st centuries.
The exhibition gathers together a personal selection of more than 100 objects spanning art, fashion, ceramics and design in a series of unexpected and irreverent groupings. Using fabric from JW Anderson's archive, 6a architects have transformed the David Chipperfield-designed galleries into a series of rooms
that are designed to conjure an intimate social gathering. Sculptures by artists including Jean Arp, Louise Bourgeois, Lynn Chadwick, Naum Gabo, Alberto Giacometti, Barbara Hepworth, Sarah Lucas, Henry Moore, Magali Reus and Dorothea Tanning are brought into direct dialogue with fashion pieces by designers such as Christian Dior, Jean Paul Gaultier, Rei Kawakubo of Commes des Garçons, Helmut Lang, Issey Miyake and Vivienne Westwood. At the centre of the exhibition, Anderson has created an installation comprising a forest of oversized jumpers, which invites visitors to transform their own bodies into abstract forms. The physical experience of interacting with materials, silhouettes and shapes is an important element of Anderson's vision for the exhibition. An introductory gallery presents Henry Moore's masterpiece Reclining Figure (1936), a highlight of Wakefield's Collection, against a series of photographs by Jamie Hawkesworth. The Thinleys series is a creative collaboration between Hawkesworth and Anderson that the pair have returned to annually exploring different fabrics each time – knit (2015), fur (2016) and cotton (2017) – turning the human form into sculptural shapes that have interesting parallels with many of the artworks shown throughout the
exhibition. Jonathan Anderson said: "This is a rare and exciting opportunity for me to bring together pieces of art and fashion that have long inspired my own creative work and to see what happens when these objects rub up against each other. I want the exhibition to mirror the speed and unexpected encounters that characterise the way in which we consume images today, as well as being a space in which to explore ideas of gender and identity that have been an ongoing part of my creative practice." Simon Wallis, Director of The Hepworth Wakefield said: "We are absolutely delighted to be working with one of the world's most talented contemporary fashion designers and a leading architectural practice to show our collection in an unconventional and innovative way. This ambitious exhibition was born out of Jonathan's genuine and long-standing passion for modern art twinned with his experiments with nongendered clothing. This very personal interpretation will entice visitors to enjoy our outstanding collections in a very different context and get inspired by the cross-pollination inherent in the creative process."

source : Press release





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

A PLACE FOR THE BODY

April 6 - September 10, 2017
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain

curated by João Fernandes

The work of Franz Erhard Walther (Fulda, Germany, 1939) spans a period from the late 1950s to the present day. It anticipates many issues that came to the fore in later art history, such as the condition of the artistic object (sculpture, its materials, techniques and uses) and the nature of the viewer as receiver and participant.

A Place for the Body, the first major anthological exhibition to be held in Spain on Franz Erhard Walther, presents a large number of sculptures, drawings, paintings, photographic documentation and archive material from the whole of his career. The exhibition is articulated around the two main themes of action and language.

Walther sees his sculptures as places for the body, inhabitable spaces that modify their appearance and significance in accordance with multiple formal solutions, and also with the actions (which the artist terms “activations”) suggested to the public by the artist and the works themselves. By these means, the artist reinterprets the definition of the artistic object, as well as the relationship between art and the viewer. For Franz Erhard Walther, the body in itself is already the sculpture.

Since the early sixties, Walther has been using textiles in the configuration of his works. Couture here functions as a constructive principle, rather as 20th century collage and assemblage do when they are conceived as processes for the approximation of art and life. Their undeniably tactile appearance, reinforced by a complex use of color, gives these works a ludic character replete with possibilities. In the artist’s own words, these textile prototypes become “a set of conditions rather than a finite object”.

Walther’s work with textiles and its use within the framework of an action might appear at first to bear a relation with the initiatives that emerged in Brazil in the 1960s, such as Hélio Oiticica’s Parangolés, Lygia Clark’s sensorial objects, or Lygia Pape’s Divisor. However, Walther’s activation should not be interpreted in a performative sense, since the action and movement are not intended for an audience. When the pieces are activated, the action implies a moment of presentation, not representation.

Together with action, language is another of the tools used by Franz Erhard Walther to redefine the work of art. This places him within a genealogy stemming from Mallarmé and extending up to concrete poetry. In his case, the artist resorts to his profound knowledge of the history of typography to represent the word as working material, from the drawings of his Wortbilder [Word Pictures] series to the reinvention of typographic forms revealed in his sculptural alphabets, volumes which invite the viewer to discover their legibility in space and interact with them.

Source : Press release:






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FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

NINETEEN ACTION SHAPES (2015)

2017

Erste Campus, Vienna, Austria
Press release by Kathrin Rhomberg & Pierre Bal-Blanc

Franz Erhard Walther designed his nineteen-part “Gesamtkunstwerk” for some Meeting rooms on the office levels of the Erste Campus. The parts that make up the whole here are rectangular shapes made of cotton fabrics and dyed according to the artist’s specifications in bold colours such as orange, burnt umber, burgundy, blue, and bright green. Much like in a cloakroom, these objects preserve “body shapes” made of the same material. They include arm and leg shapes, half-length coats, waistcoats, suits, and half-body sheathes. “Depending on how they are contemplated,” explains Walther, “these works can be viewed as sculptural pictures or pictorial sculptures, the action having to be imagined in either case.” Employees working at the Erste Campus can stand in front of, or even among, Walther’s works. They can take down the “body shapes” and “body sheathes” and use them like items of clothing. Walther thus declares the active participation of his viewers to be a constitutive aspect of his artistic work. “If the body shapes and body sheathes are removed and placed on a real body,” he explains, “the actors will be seen as parts of the work who, through their actions, extend the work into space.” But viewers can also stand in front of “the empty segments, where they function as a kind of intermediate form that adds definition to the pictorial and sculptural character of the works.” For the employees working at the Erste Campus, the possibility of interaction turns Walther’s “Nineteen Action Shapes” into an invitation to take time out from their everyday responsibilities and play a formative role in the ongoing creation of a work of art. Their capacity to reflect on their own actions is thus enhanced.



FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

CALL TO ACTION

October 31 - September 5, 2016
The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada

Franz Erhard Walther's first major solo exhibition in Canada brings together bodies of work produced between the 1950s to the present. Call to Action offers insight into Walther's radical ideas about the relationship between space, object and the human body. Presenting sculptural form, drawing and video, Walther's influential work emphasizes action. His work sheds light on the potential of spectators to consider their body as a means to activate sculpture and disrupt the space of display and the landscapes in which it is presented.

He first gave this concept physical form with his 1. Werksatz (First Work Set) (1963–69), a work comprised of 58 objects made of fabric intended to be used alone or in a group. The sculptures materialize through measured actions laid out for viewers to enact according to the artist's instructions: unfolding them, standing on them, lying down inside them and pulling them around and over one's body. With this approach, Walther's sculptures transcend their physical and formal qualities to position the viewer's body, and the space and time it acts within, as material form. Paired with Walther's 1. Werksatz are a series of videos that show documentation of each fabric piece being activated. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, visitors will be invited to activate various elements, reminding audiences that the work is meant to be physically experienced through their active participation.

Walther's interest in the body continues in Formantwort (Form Answers) (1989-90). Made of fabric and hung in the gallery, this body of work is installed with the architecture of The Power Plant's Fleck Clerestory in mind. The dimensions and proportions of the hanging forms make reference to the human body while their spatial configuration calls for a physical experience beyond static spectatorship. Walther does not view the physical form of Formantwort (Form Answers) as a completed work, but rather as objects that must be experienced by the viewer and read by the body. In so doing, Walther relinquishes control of the work's realization by calling upon his respective audiences to contribute to its final form. Analogous to the visitors' movement in space, the works are constantly changing. Schreitbahnen (Stride Paths) (1972) and Handlungsbahnen (Action Paths) (1997-2003) will be presented and activated throughout the exhibition at regular hours on a weekly basis. Doing so allows visitors to experience the work within the four walls of the gallery as well as outside at the waterfront, where they will change our perception and engagement with the landscape.

Walther's Das Neue Alphabet (The New Alphabet) (1990-96) is comprised of 26 sculptural objects made of fabric and wood that formally relate to the letters of the alphabet. A selection of works from this series on view at The Power Plant – hung on the wall or placed on the floor – have a human scale that evoke the possibility of action through linguistic reading.

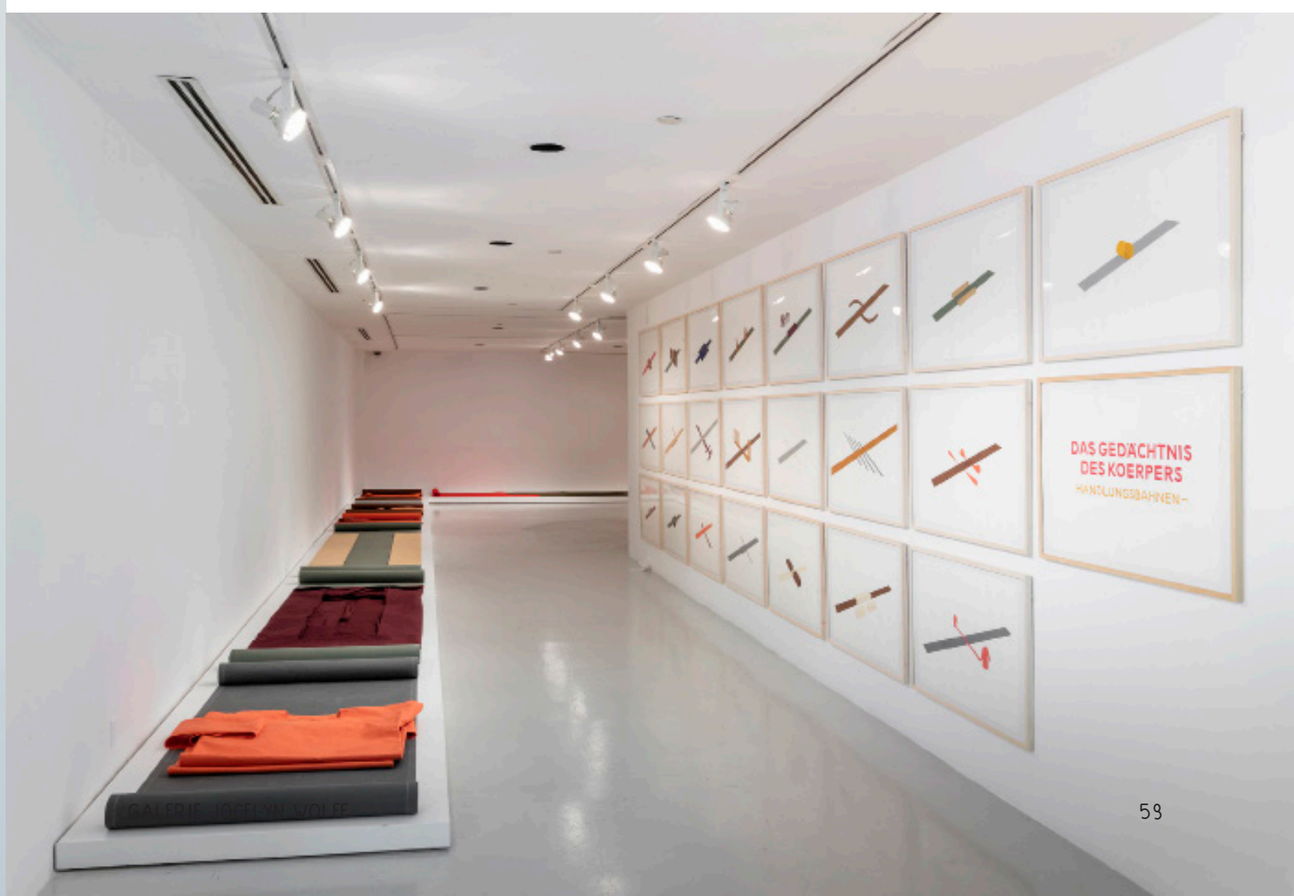
Through the presentation of Walther's past and more recent pieces, as well as video and drawing documentation, Call to Action highlights the artist's and the viewer's shared role in shaping material form.






ORAL




DAS GEDÄCHTNIS
DES KOERPERS
-HANDLUNGSBAHNEN-

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

THE BODY DRAWS

October 31 - March 06, 2016
Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, USA

The Henry presents the first American survey of the influential German artist Franz Erhard Walther (born 1939), featuring nearly 300 pivotal works from the last six decades, many never previously exhibited in the United States.

The exhibition considers the complex and rich relationship that drawing—in its broadest and most conceptual sense—has had within Walther's entire production since the late 1950s. The flexibility of the medium, as well as its capacity to transform itself without losing its inherent qualities has fascinated the artist since his earliest memories, as has its intrinsic relationship to writing and language.

Walther—long considered an 'artist's artist'—has influenced the wider discussion about contemporary art practice, while his art has served as a point of origin for many younger artists whose work directly or indirectly expands on diverse aspects of his groundbreaking investigations.

One of Germany's most prominent artists since the 1960s, Walther's work was included in When Attitudes Become Form (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969) and dOCUMENTA V (Kassel, 1972) both curated by Harald Szeemann. His first American group exhibition in 1970 was Spaces at the Museum of Modern Art. Recent exhibitions include , MUDAM, Luxembourg (2015); WIELS Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brussels (2014) and CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France (2014); and Dia Art Foundation, New York (2010–12).

His work is in the permanent collections of Museum of Modern Art, Dia Art Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Art Institute Chicago, The Centre Pompidou, Walker Art Center, and Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, Nationalgalerie Berlin, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kunsthaus Zürich, Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, and MAMCO Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva.
The exhibition will feature daily activations of elements from the 1. Werksatz (First Work Set) (1963-69).





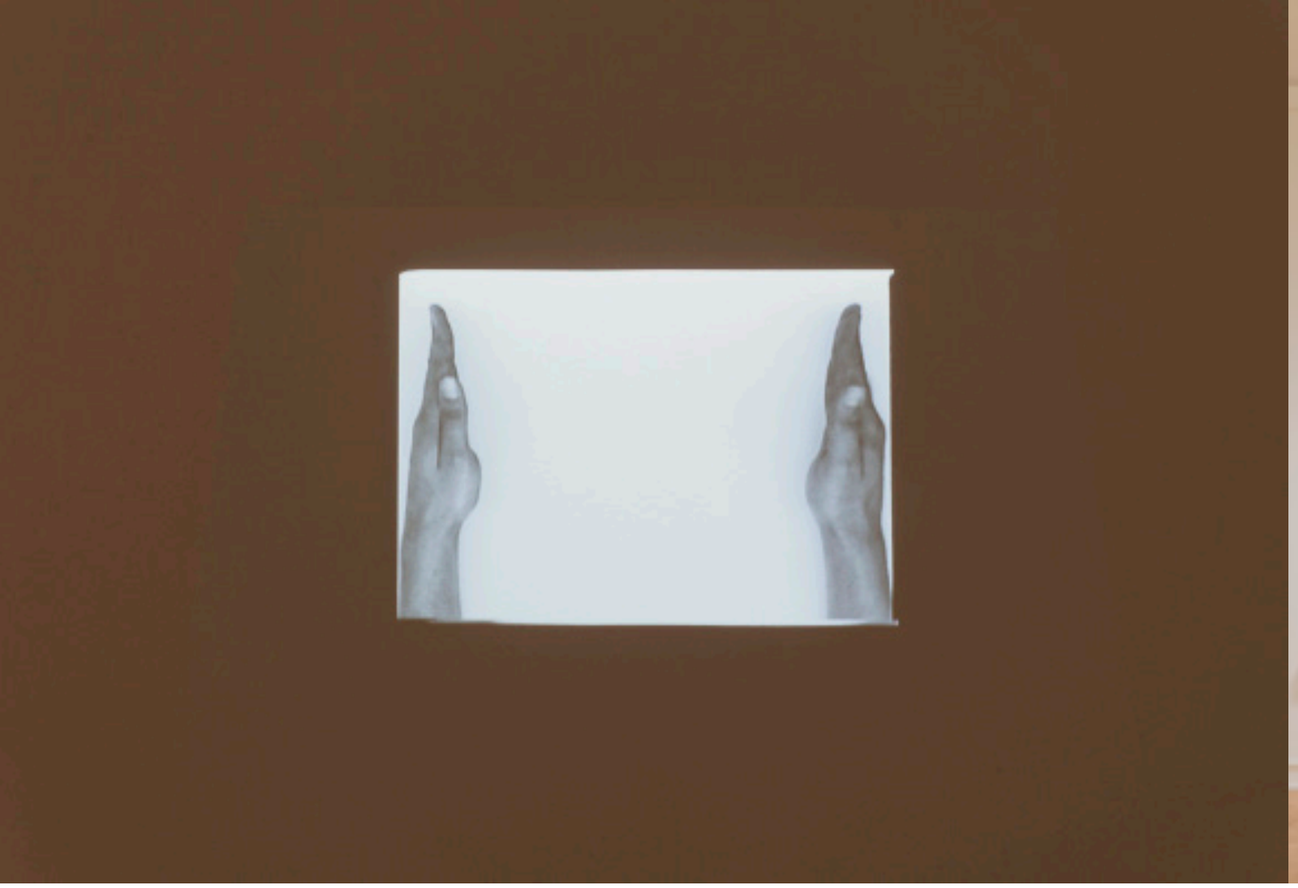

MATERIALWECHSEL



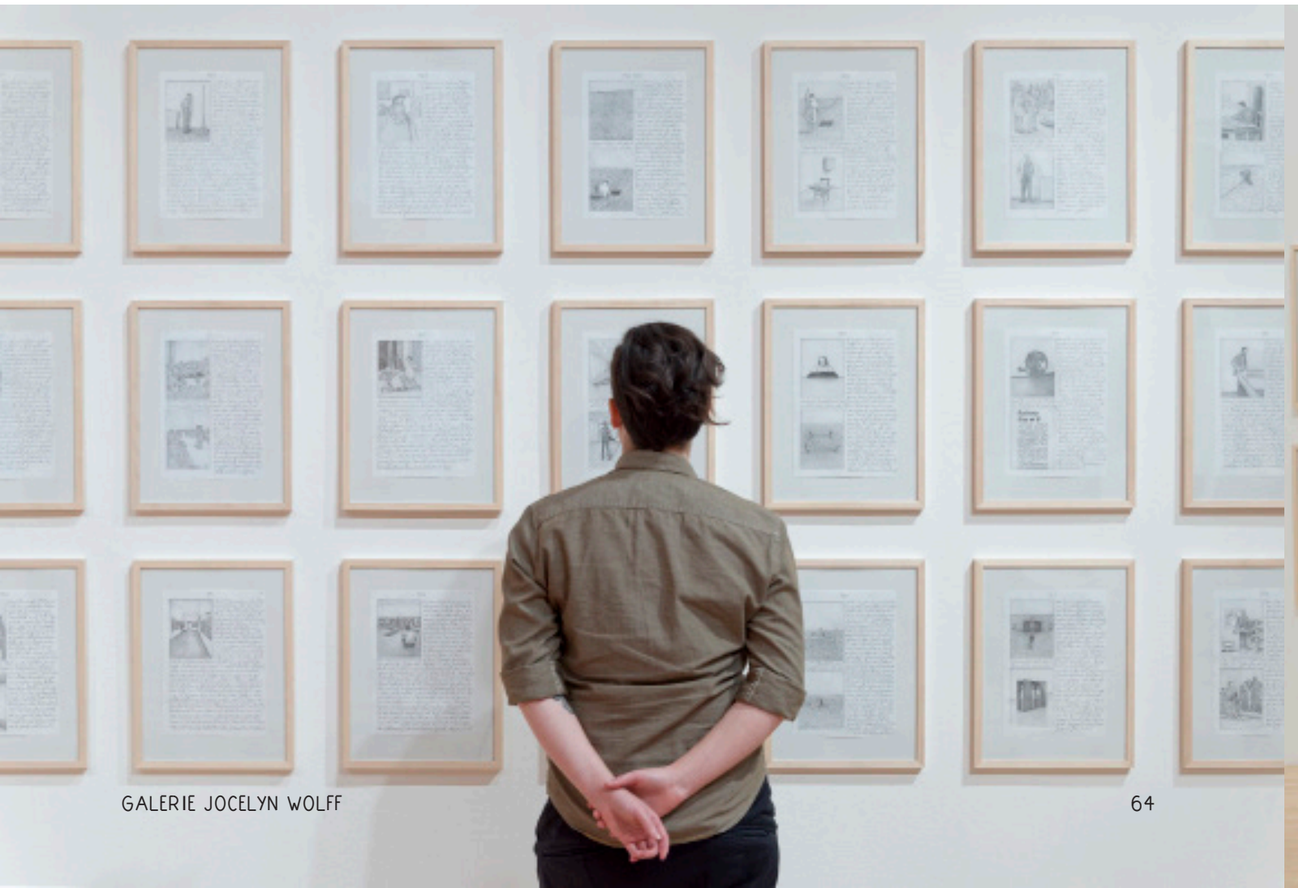














FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER
SCHREITBAHNEN UND ZEICHNUNGEN, 1972

May 30 - June 27, 2015

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, France
An interview with Franz Erhard Walther, Paris, 28 May, 2015

Nasim Weiler: Entering the gallery space I hear a recording of your voice giving performing (or should I say activation) instructions for Vier rechte Winkel mit Binnenfeld (Four right angles with enclosed field). Would you describe the piece, please?

Franz Erhard Walther: First, you may use both terms, performing or activating the piece are equally correct. By the way it is not an instruction but the simulation of a real acting. Vier rechte Winkel mit Binnenfeld is an action path piece made of bordeaux-red cotton fabric, with sewn pockets along their seam. It measures 21 x 21 m and is conceived for an activation by four persons. The piece needs to be laid out on the ground, preferably on an outside space. It consists of four angles that are attached and form a square at their center. All four participants begin at one of the two ends of their angle. The activation is done step by step, one foot follows the other sideways, each person chosing his/her own time frame. This way, time and space are articulated. After covering one third of the total distance, the participants reach a point where the track of one participant either runs into or crosses another's own track. The inner field remains untouched. Each participant refers in the first instance to the far distance, then to the enclosed field and finally to a laterally limited adjacent field, or in the reverse order. The participants relate to the surrounding as well as to each other.

NW: Vier rechte Winkel mit Binnenfeld is part of the series named Schreitbahnen (stride paths), consisting of 36 works, that you conceived in the year 1972. How do they differ from each other?

FEW: Lets speak about what they have in common first. Their fabric pockets and the fact that they are all minimal floor pieces is one aspect in common; and all are related to the idea of time and space. While working on the first pieces, it became clear that different activations created different relations to the inner and to the outer space, to a change of directions, and to the other participants. I sat down and drew all possible shapes as simply as possible. I had to find a basic measurement module related to classical ideas of proportion. The basic module turned out to be 16m. The stride paths have often been exhibited, and mostly, as seen here in the gallery, in their storage state. I see the storage state as a valid work situation. The activation of a piece is imagined from the viewer by means of a drawing and the written work definition, as you can see here on the back wall. This is the reason the drawings are of such importance. In its storage state, the fabric piece is the work, and the viewer imagines the activation. During the activation of a piece, the acting itself becomes the work and the fabric piece turns into a tool.

NW: What is the key element of your art practice?

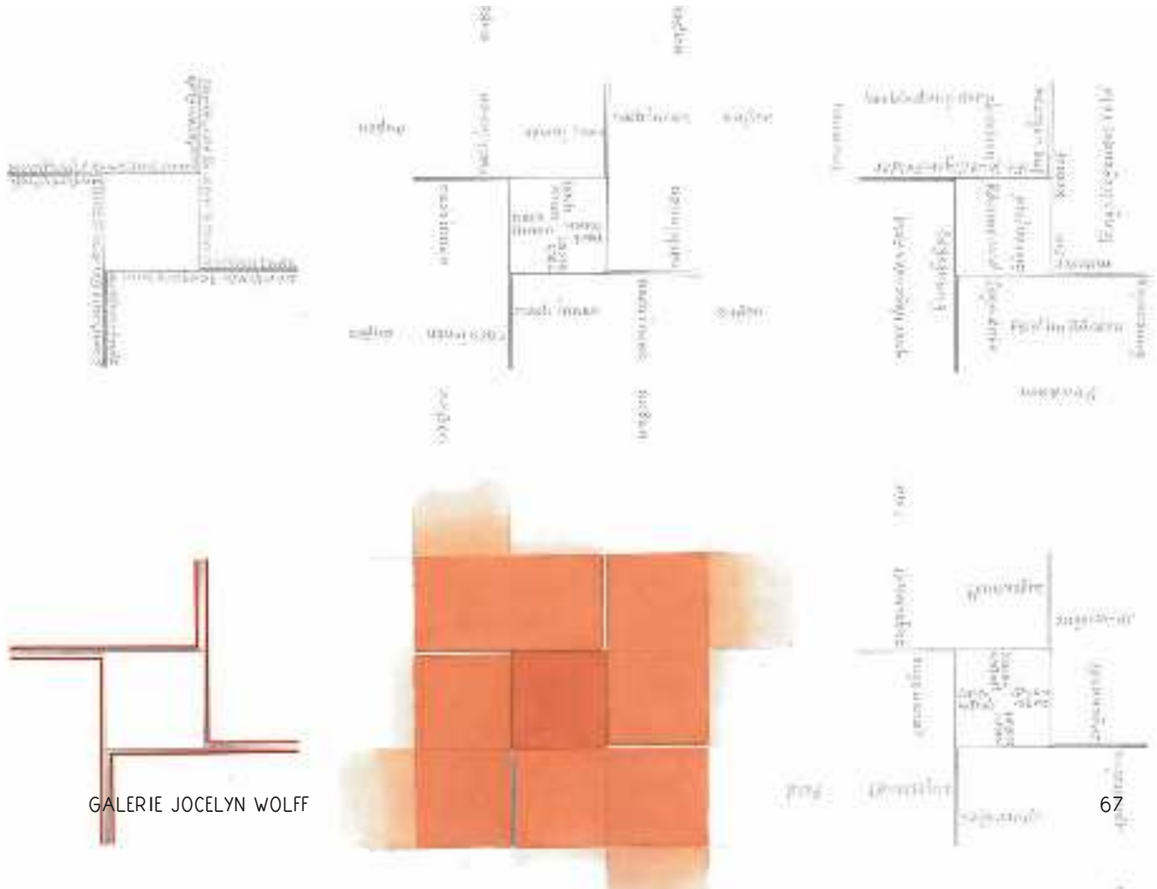
FEW: That I trust in the ability of people to imagine form and shape and thus to create an art work.

NW: Time factors into your art work – how?

FEW: In acting with the pieces one transforms real time into a material to sculpt with.

NW: The series of Schreitbahnen have been outlined as a continuation of the 1. Werksatz (First Work Set) from 1963 - 1969. What is the 1. Werksatz and how do the stride paths succeed them?

FEW: The 1. Werksatz (1963-1969) is a set of process-inducing objects, sewn from dyed and undyed cotton fabric. They introduce my concept of sculpture combining geometrical forms with simple sequences of movement, thus making the viewer to an integral part of the work. In 1972 I wanted to start a 2. Werksatz (Second Work Set) and titled the stride paths as such. But after some time I decided the term 36 Schreitbahnen to be more objective. Both set of works have in common their activation. In case of the 58 elements of the 1. Werksatz the elements each have a different theme and definition of time and space, and their articulation varies the position of the body in relation to time and space. Whereas in case of the 36 stride parths the activation is a like but each stride path organizes a different relation to its inner and outer space and time. Also for me a momentum of architecture appears. In both set of works the activation is the quality of the work. Surprisingly even after almost several decades after their first design, the Schreitbahnen seem to remain fresh and undated. This is like a miracle to me.









FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

THE ARCHITECTURE DECIDES

March 7 - May 31, 2015
Mudam, Luxembourg

Franz Erhard Walther's concept of the artwork as such developed from the late 1950s, at a time when many artists were starting to question the parameters of art. Traditional forms of art were not capable of expressing Walther's artistic aspirations at the time; he found it more interesting to examine material processes, action and even modes of exhibition as components in the definition of an artwork.

Thus, according to Walther's concept, art had an immaterial, performative character and took place within the individual physical and mental processes enacted by those encountering particular works. The role of the artist shifted from being the creator of works with a particular meaning to becoming the mere facilitator of a conscious and personal experiencing of aesthetic phenomena. This tendency had already been adumbrated in early actions such as Versuch, eine Plastik zu sein (Trying to be a sculpture, 1958), and, after many years in which Walther experimented with a variety of materials, led finally in 1963 to the discovery of the technique of sewing, a working method that met Walther's need for formal rigour. The works he produced up to 1969 using this technique were to be collected in the so-called 1. Werksatz (First Work Set). The 58 individual works sewn from sturdy fabric that comprise the 1. Werksatz, which Walther called "Werkstücke" (Work pieces) or "Handlungsstücke" (Action pieces), were for him simply "forms" that prescribed concrete patterns of action and were reliant on being actually handled by one or several participants for attaining the character of an artwork, a character that remained bound to the action itself.














als Gussform
der Konvention





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

THE BODY DECIDES

February 21 - May 5 2014
WIELS, Contemporary Art Center, Brussels, Belgium

Curated by Elena Filipovic

Franz Erhard Walther's exhibition offers an in-depth look at an influential German artist whose pioneering work straddles minimalist sculpture, conceptual art, abstract painting, and performance all while positing fundamental questions about the conventional idea of the artwork as an immutable, obdurate pedestalor wall-bound thing. Bringing together pivotal works made between the 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, languagebased works, photographic documentation and archival material.

Having participated in Harald Szeemann's legendary When Attitudes Become Form (1969) and dOCUMENTA V (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 actionincites visitors to engage with both sculpture and the institution in challenging ways.

The show at WIELS, the first for the artist in Belgium and one of the larger of his solo exhibitions to date, will underscore the essential tension provoked by Walther's work and the ways it thinks about what and 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 one hundred works, while also drawing attention to the artist's relationship to documentation, both photographic and drawn, and his fundamental conception of the exhibition itself as a platform for social action. It will include numerous objects to be manipulated in the exhibition and will be animated by several workshops and work demonstrations led by the artist.















FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER
SPACE THROUGH ACTION

May 26 – September 9, 2012
ZKM | Museum of Contemporary Art, GERMANY

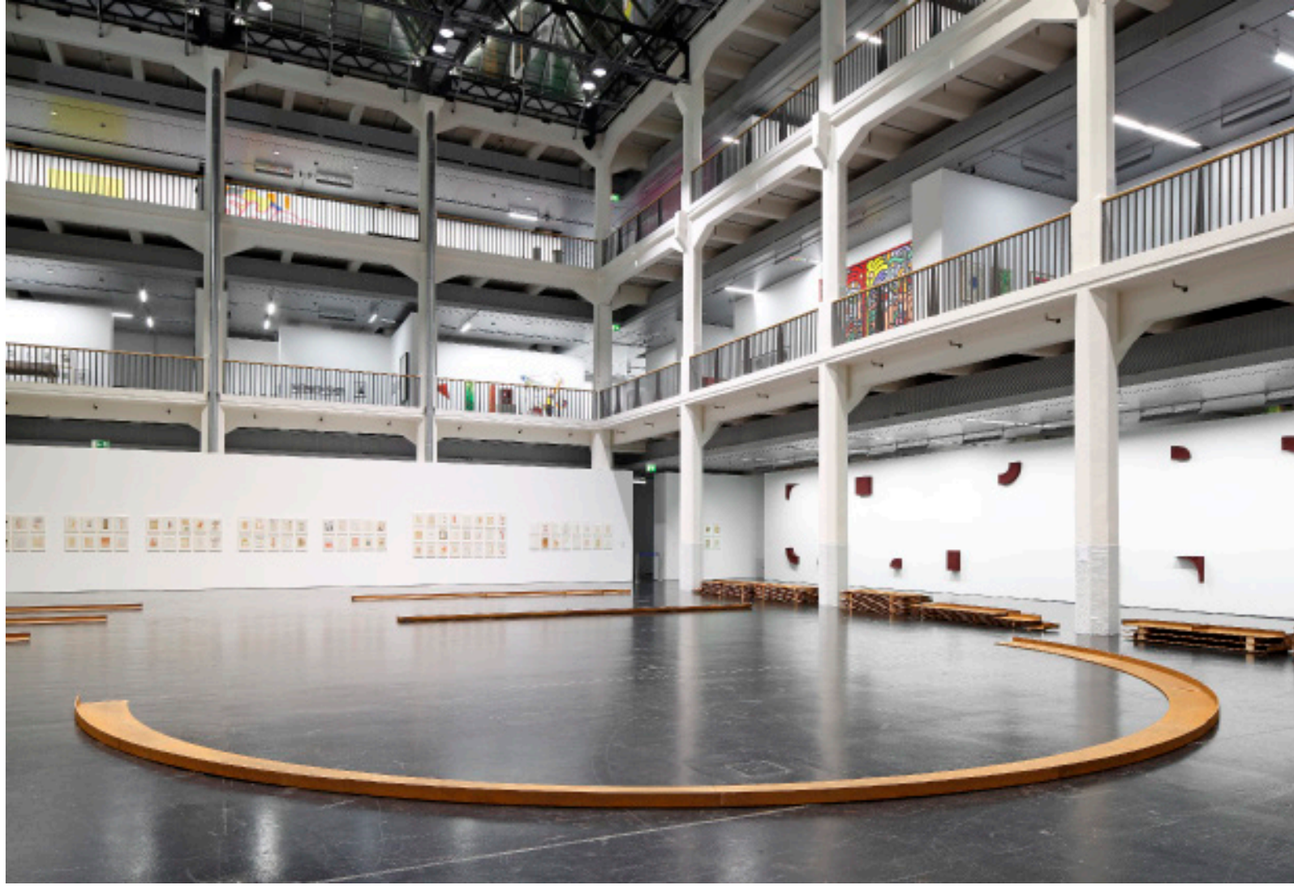
Curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas F. Beitin

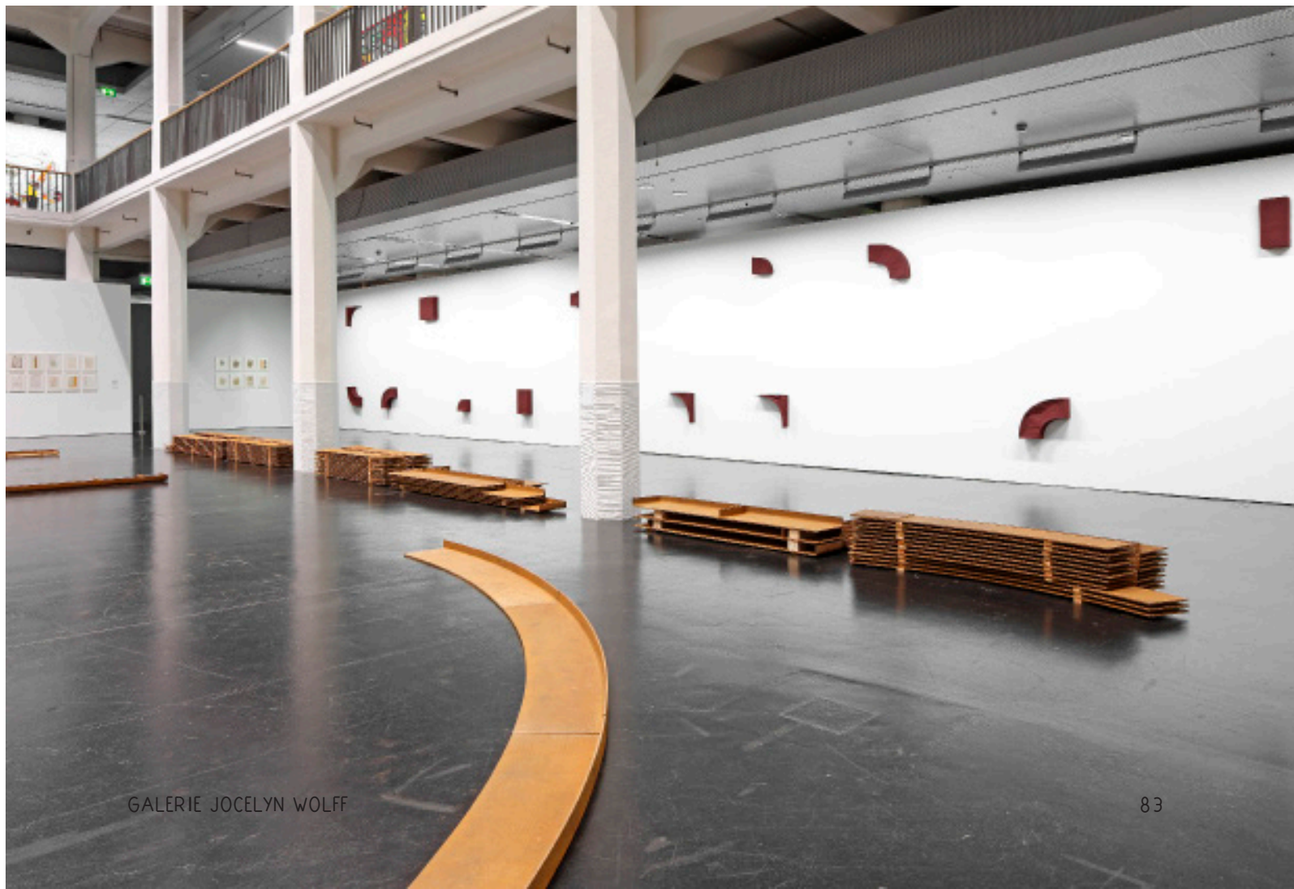
Franz Erhard Walther is unquestionably one of the most influential artists of recent decades. Scarcely any other artist has been able to change the definition of what sculpture can be, with such foresight and consequence as Walther has done. Through his participative objects and textile sculptures, he has subjected the understanding of art and the relationship between art and the observer to a fundamental re-evaluation and amplification. Not least, also through his teaching engagement over many years, he has inspired many contemporary artists. The ZKM | Museum of Contemporary Art is now showing for the first time, in the framework of this year's central exhibition theme of performativity, a large part of Franz Erhard Walther's «Stride Plinthes» accompanied by the complete series of «Stand Pieces» that are presented for the first time along with a selection of early photographs, as well as large-format drawings.

Already in his early photographic works at the end of the 1950s, Franz Erhard Walther began to further the discourse on the definition of sculpture set forth by Marcel Duchamp. The relationship between art, artist, and observer shifted into the focus of artistic creation and the role of the art consumer was questioned by inviting their interaction. Long before artists such as Bruce Nauman, among others, used their own bodies as a sculptural medium, Walther has already put himself and the audience into the work as sculptural "material."

After completing his studies with K. O. Götz, Franz Erhard Walther set out in 1967 for New York. Just two years later, at an exhibition in New York's MoMA, he showed his legendary "1. Werksatz" – a 58-part work, that today belongs to the museum's collection. Fundamentally new in his works of the 1960s was the involvement of the observer, formerly condemned to contemplation only, into the sculptural process. The exhibition visitor was given the possibility of using the works, which were made of textile materials. The artist presented the works in the exhibition as "offers," which could be unfolded, newly arranged, or stretched in between several visitors. According to this basic concept, the first publication by Franz Erhard Walther was titled "OBJEKTE, benutzen" [OBJECTS, use] (1968). The book, long out of print, will be republished in a new edition on the occasion of the exhibition at ZKM | Museum of Contemporary Art.

The active engagement with an artistic offer, experiencing haptics of fabrics and materials, the responsiveness of one's own physicality and the resulting action in the room are some of the reasons that Franz Erhard Walther's work is still today an extraordinary contribution to contemporary art. His work can be seen as a synthesis of Process art, Minimal art, and Conceptual art and stands in dialogue with numerous prominent positions within contemporary art.





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

GESANG DER SCHREITSOCKEL (BORDER BASE SONG)

October 30, 2010 - February 6, 2011

Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, Switzerland

With the 1975 installation Gesang der Schreitsockel, Museum of Art Lucerne was able to acquire a major work by the German artist Franz Erhard Walther from his 1992 solo exhibition in the old Kunsthaus. The 55 individual pieces that can be arranged into different-shaped tracks are matched with a 70-part series of working drawings. Together they convey sculptural ideas, possible arrangements and instructions for an actual use of the 'walking-tracks' presented in 'storage form', and represent a concept of the work that includes the visual idea of a level of action alongside the real object. The work is now being shown for the first time in the new museum spaces, and made available for discussion.





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

ATLAS: HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE´S BACK?

November 26, 2010 - March 28, 2011
Museo Nacional Centre de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain

Starting from the Mnemosyne Atlas:
Atlas is the name given in Greek mythology to a titan who, along with his brother Prometheus, contested the power of the gods of Olympus in order to make that power available to man. Legend has it that while Prometheus had his liver torn out by a vulture in the far East, Atlas was forced (in the West, between Andalusia and Morocco), to bear on his shoulders the weight of the celestial vault. It is also said, that from this weight he gained an unsurpassable knowledge of the world and an – albeit hopeless – wisdom. He is the ancestor of astronomers and ge graphers; some even say he was the first philosopher. He gave his name to a mountain (Mount Atlas), to an ocean (the Atlantic), and to an anthropomorphic architectural form (an atlas or atlantes) which is designed to support an entablature. Atlas, finally, gave his name to a visual form of knowledge: a gathering of geographical maps in a volume, and more generally, a collection of images intended to bring before our eyes, in a systematic or problematic way – even a poetic way, at the risk of being erratic, if not surrealist – a whole multiplicity of things gathered there through elective affinities, to use the words of Goethe. The atlas of images became a scientific genre in itself in the 18th century (we can think of the plates of l'Encyclopèdie) and it developed considerably in the 19th and 20th centuries. There are very serious atlases, very useful atlases – which are often very beautiful – in the life sciences (for example, the collections by Ernst Haeckel on jelly fish and other marine animals); there are more hypothetical atlases (for example, in the domain of archaeology); there are absolutely detestable atlases in the fields of anthropology and psychology (for example, L'Atlas de l'homme criminel [The Atlas of the Criminal Man] by Cesare Lombroso, or certain collections of "racial" photographs made by some pseudo-scholars in the 19th century). In the visual arts, the Mnemosyne Atlas of images, composed by Aby Warburg between 1924 and 1929, and yet left unfinished, remains for any art historian – and even for any artist today – a reference and an absolutely fascinating case-study. Warburg completely renewed our way of understanding images. He is to art history what Freud, his contemporary, is to psychology: he opened the understanding of art to radically new questions, those concerning unconscious memory in particular. Mnemosyne is his paradoxical masterpiece and his methodological testament: it gathers all of the objects of his research in an apparatus that is also a reaction to two fundamental experiences: that of madness, and that of war. It can therefore be considered a documentary history of the Western imagination (as such, the inheritor of the Disparates and the Caprichos of Goya) and as a tool for understanding the political violence of images in history (comparable, as such, to a collection of Desastres).

source : Press release (exerpt)





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

HABITER POÉTIQUEMENT LE MONDE
(THE WORLD LIVING POETICALLY)

September 25, 2010 - January 30, 2011
Lille Metropole Musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain, et art brut (LAM), Lille, France

With over 350 works, the exhibition Habiter poétiquement le monde (The world living poetically) highlights the artist's technique, as well as the writers and filmmakers, describing and interpreting their presence in the world. "This is the measure of a man. Rich in merits, but always poetic, man dwells on earth," writes the poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Creation and everyday are not separate, but merged; strolling, wandering, disappearing, accumulating and performing are at the heart of the formation of real and imaginary space with the capacity, according to the requirements governing their creation, open or closed from the outside.

Transversal art (contemporary art and art brut) consists of multiple echoes and associations between the works and the archived documents from a very different context over more than century, the exhibition is designed "in constellation", as a tour that crosses different museum spaces (exhibition spaces, auditoriums, parks, internet sites). The exhibition brings together works, that for some of them, are familiar with the museum space, although some resist the confined space; others are entered for the first time, and their unexpected meeting permits the questioning of artistic acts, of the aesthetic gesture, or of the poetic experience.

They relate their archival gestures to the self and to the world, from maps and traces of experience, documenting relationships, at times painful and erratic, between the individual and their environment. Finally, they are considered life performances, forms of expression, transmission, and communication, at times open to the other while contained in their own complex systems.

City routes, long crossing landscapes, walking aimlessly, the nomadic life: the artist (like travelling writers) takes the measure of the world, establishing a relationship between words and drawings, between gesture and line. The artist "explores the world", as Thomas Hirschhorn wrote, and the poem becomes a place to explore its own disappearance or dissolution. It is sometimes, or simultaneously, a construction that takes form in real space, trajectory, cursive, and seismically transient.

This discovery of reality can drive an artist to find an intervening space: to be physically here and now, but caught in a time where past and future merge. The journey, both physical and internal, pressured or sometimes lost, of reality is transmitted or related like a travel diary. The everyday is not separated from the work. The borders between intimate and common are blurred in a question that seems commonly shared. "Poetically living" turns away the everyday gestures and the most obvious appearances, and reveals the strange and normal. It creates, as Pierre Dhainaut says, a child-like spirit that permits, without comfort, living in the world like a poem.

Press release







FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER: WORK AS ACTION

October 2, 2010 - February 13, 2012

Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries, Dia Art Foundation, New York, USA

Press release:

DIA ART FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES MAJOR EXHIBITION BY GERMAN ARTIST FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER AT DIA:BEACON, RIGGIO GALLERIES

Dia's presentation marks the artist's first major exhibition in the United States since 1990

New York, NY – Dia Art Foundation presents Franz Erhard Walther: Work as Action, opening October 2, 2010, at Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries. This major exhibition will comprise more than two dozen works by Walther (German, b. 1937), who is internationally recognized for his five-decade-long investigation into the foundations of action, language, and space. Organized by Dia curator Yasmil Raymond, Franz Erhard Walther: Work as Action will remain on view through February 13, 2012. It is the artist's first solo museum exhibition in the United States since 1990.

While the exhibition will include a diverse selection of works created between 1962 and 1973, it will focus on the artist's Handlungs tücke (Action Pieces) and Werkstücke (Work Pieces) from the early 1960s. It was in these works that Walther first explored using straightforward physical actions—such as pressing, folding, unfolding, and covering surfaces with malleable materials— as a sculptural principle. The centerpiece of the exhibition will be the complete presentation of a Work Piece from Dia's collection, titled 1. Werksatz (First Work Set). Dating from 1963–69, this comprises fifty-eight fabric elements, or instruments for processes, that are intended to be unfolded, used, and worn by visitors according to the artist's instructions.

Walther's provocative meditations on the concept of art as an act of doing that is temporal, subjective, and open to interpretation have resulted in an interdisciplinary practice that challenges conventional categories of painting and sculpture. He elaborated on these ideas in First Work Set, which will be shown in its totality for the first time in the United States since 1970, when it was included in the exhibition Spaces, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. This major work, acquired by Dia in 1978, is a pioneering example of installation art, one that reconsiders the space of display as a storage site where objects are accessible to visitors and their forms determined by the ways in which they are used. With each of the work's elements, Walther poses a spatial and temporal challenge for the beholder, whose physical actions and presence become integral parts of the conception and completion of the work. A selection of elements from First Work Set will be made available for interaction with visitors, from 11am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm
on days the museum is open, for the duration of the exhibition.

In the early 1960s, Walther trained at the Offenbach School of Applied Art and at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie. Early influences included the work and manifestos of artists Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and Piero Manzoni, among others, who together triggered his conviction to, as he once said, conceive work out of an action. While at the Kunstakademie, he also became acquainted with Joseph Beuys and befriended fellow students Gerhard Richter and Blinky Palermo, the latter of whom he shared a studio with. Both Beuys and Richter have works on long-term view at Dia:Beacon, and Blinky Palermo: Retrospective 1964–1977 will be on view at Dia:Beacon from June through October 2011, concurrent with Walther's exhibition.

Despite the importance of his work, his relationship with many American artists, and the influence of his extensive output on subsequent generations of artists, Walther's practice remains largely unknown in the United States. Dia's exhibition recognizes the historical significance of the artist's First Work Set and his radical conception of the work of art as an experience of uninhibited action.





FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

November 6, 2010 - February 5, 2011
Koch Oberhuber Wolff, Berlin, Germany

The work of Franz Erhard Walther has attracted critical attention since the mid 1960s. It becomes increasingly apparent not only how much he contributed to the development of an action-oriented concept of art in the second half of the 20th century, but also how his position continues to serve younger artists as inspiration. The notion that one is permitted to look at art but not touch it, that there is some impregnable boundary between a work of art and our physical selves, our demeanor, our social roles, continues to provoke opposition. Walther was one of the forerunners in this protest, an
exponent of a relational aesthetic avant la lettre, one that takes into account the physical nature of the work of art on a substantial level.

Walther's work has been included in four documenta exhibitions. Since 1963 he has consistently championed the concept of sculpture as performance and participation, the notion that art is a collaborative event in which artist and public contribute on an equal footing. For Walther the "meaning" of a work has always been primarily what results from this collaboration, not something to be discovered through detached and solitary contemplation. His uncomplicated, straightforward objects and installations address their viewers with partly tactile, partly intellectual stimuli; they trigger the temptation to act, the desire to experience things in a physical way, and question their viewers' positions in space and in relation to each other. As evolved over the last five decades, Walther's oeuvre presents an exemplary variety of methodological approaches. It also illustrates the difficulties faced by any form of art that hopes for participation on the part of the public, with the intention of making the appreciation of art a more collective, even democratic enterprise.

Our exhibition reprises some central themes and approaches in Walther's work from the late 1950s to the present.

• We present the artist's variant of a minimalist aesthetic that we have chosen to call "PARTICIPATORY MINIMALISM" (KOW ISSUE 1, 2009) as a way of distinguishing it from the canon of American Minimalist Art. In the period of early Minimalism, Walther conceived works similar in form but substantially different in intention. His sculptures, though intended as exhibition pieces, induce in viewers a desire to manipulate them and become physically involved. At the same time, the viewer's actual participation is itself expected to be minimal.

• We trace how Walther first questioned the confinement of the picture support and then transcended it between 1960 and 1963. His "escape from the picture" is apparent as an interest in open, flexible framing situations. The objects stitched out of fabric from his "First Work Set" (1963–69) can be seen as the conceptual and sculptural consequence of this search for a sustainably dynamic dimension in his plastic work, one that also characterizes his architectonic space modules of the 1970s. For the first time the stitching technique itself, developed by the artist beginning in 1963 and realized by Johanna Walther, is illuminated more precisely.

• Ever since he first practiced typography at the School of Applied Art in Offenbach, one of Walther's primary interests has been the formal organization of language, the design of text and idea. From the "Word Pictures" (1957–58) up to the "New Alphabet" from the years 1990–96, we illustrate how Walther's aesthetic program continuously mediates between pictorial space (in drawing and sculpture), textual space (including book space), as well as the physical space of the active subject, and questions how they are interrelated.

The exhibition includes some thirty works supplemented by documentary pictorial material–from various phases of the artist's oeuvre. In cooperation with INTERNATIONALES JUGENDKUNSTUND KULTURHAUS SCHLESISCHE27 we invite Berlin teenagers to handle individual pieces of Walther's and discuss them publicly. Please ask about times.
Text and photos: Alexander Koch





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