



Franz Erhard Walther, *Eight Cushion Forms on a Rack*, 1963.
Courtesy Franz Erhard Walther. Photo: Reiner Ruthenbeck, 1964

VILLA

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 exhibition 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.

Seng Collection

In the summer of 1958, at the opening exhibition of the Junger Kunstkreis (Young Art Circle) co-founded by Franz Erhard Walther in Fulda, the art restorer Gisbert Seng (b. 1933) first encountered Walther's work and shortly thereafter met the then nineteen-year-old artist.

In a context in which Walther's works met with rejection and incomprehension, Gisbert Seng and his first wife, Helga Seng, were among the few with whom Walther could share his reflections on his own art and questions regarding art in general.

Together with Johanna Frieß, the Sengs were the only spectators at Walther's 1962 *Paper Concerto* in Fulda; and in those years, the two couples would spend time together in the Rhön region, activating the first pieces of Walther's *First Work Set*.

When the Walthers moved to New York in May 1967, Gisbert Seng safeguarded several important works which otherwise would have been lost. After the Walthers' return from New York, Walther continuously gifted early works to the Sengs with the idea of forming a collection which would be shown in Fulda one day.

After living with and preserving the works for over fifty years with the support of Gisbert Seng's second wife, Katharina Bongartz, the collection was entrusted by the Seng family to the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation in 2019 as a partial gift, with the wish that the works would be shown in Fulda, the place where most of them were created.

First Work Presentation

September 2022 – September 2023

Curators: Susanne Walther and Carolin Köchling

The *First Work Presentation* brings works into dialogue that were created in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In these years, the handling of the work became the central element of its realisation. Our aim is to show the simultaneity of different paths and intellectual approaches formulated early on that only later take on material form. The focus here is on the radical questions that had been forming since 1954 with regard to the definition of the concept of the work, which, parallel to the preoccupation with the artistic questions of the time, already represent a prelude to the later work: What manifests a picture? Who is involved in the creation of the work? How can time become a part of the work? And, above all: What is a work of art?

In 1960, Franz Erhard Walther was preoccupied with *Informel*, which was predominant in Germany at the time – i.e., with a pictorial concept of the 'formless', that which lies 'beyond form'. In the *First Work Presentation*, these paintings are brought into dialogue with the *Word Pictures* created two years earlier, with which Franz Erhard Walther shifted language from its level of meaning to writing in its architectural quality and imagined pictorial invention.

Inherent in the experimentation with existing image and text material from his immediate surroundings in Fulda in the late 1950s and early 1960s (daily newspapers, advertisements, wrapping paper from local shops) is also the intention to overcome the conventional handling of image and writing and to transfer these into formative and sensory material processes: tearing, folding, crumpling, sweeping up,

wrapping. A process that was further developed with the inclusion of the handling of the works in the stacks, hand pieces, and the first pieces of the *First Work Set* and took on central importance for the work as a whole.

As a fifteen-year-old, Franz Erhard Walther climbed a tree in the Fulda valley, inflated a paper bag from his parents' bakery, and held it in his mouth. He asked a friend to take a photo. The hitherto unpublished photograph is the document of a temporary gesture, initially performed by the artist himself and handed over to the 'activators' in later works. In the context of the *First Work Presentation*, the photograph is exhibited in dialogue with works from the early 1960s, in which the activators and the surrounding space determine the form of the temporary image.

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

Franz Erhard Walther Foundation:

Susanne Walther, Conception overall project, Artistic Director, Co-conception exhibition program

Carolin Köchling, Co-conception exhibition program, Guest curator

Julia Heldt, Educational projects (as of 2023)

Stadt Fulda:

Dr. Frank Verse, General Management

Franziska Schlemmer, Research Assistant, Coordination

Michél Kranz, Custodian

Organization of the exhibition:

Judith Mader, Museologist, Museums of the City of Fulda

Daniel Bley, Workshop Manager, Museums of the City of Fulda

Michaela Zwergel, Freelance Conservator

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Opening Hours

Friday and Saturday

2–8 pm

Sunday

11 am–6 pm

The website of VILLA www.villa-few.com will be launched on September 24, 2022.

Design: Studio Manuel Raeder