

Erwin Wurm

Peace & Plenty

21 November 2018 – 10 February 2019

Erwin Wurm (*1954, Bruck an der Mur) has long numbered among contemporary art's global stars. And now, the Albertina Museum is mounting the first-ever exhibition focused on the drawings and watercolors produced by this exceptional artist. It shows a selection of several hundred works on paper created by Wurm over the past few years. These works' great diversity is not just thematic but also technical, involving pencil, colored pencil, ballpoint pen, watercolor and collage; sometimes in very fine lines, elsewhere in thick, generous brushstrokes.

Whether at home or on the go, Erwin Wurm sits down to draw almost every day, recording all that crosses his mind. He does so using whatever paper happens to be at hand, working in various qualities and formats. The title *Peace & Plenty* refers to the eponymous hotel in George Town (on Great Exuma, the Bahamas), where the artist has created countless drawings, as well as to the large, ca. 650-page bundle of works from which this exhibition's approximately 300 have been selected.

Wurm's drawings embody reflections, commentaries on current world affairs, and documentation of the artist's ideas, thereby encompassing his entire creative cosmos. Thematically, they're not unlike a diary, with his self-portraits being interspersed above all with images of the individuals with whom Wurm comes into contact—including artist-friends as well as members of his family.

Several drawings quote his *One Minute Sculptures*: one man balances a tube of hand cream on his nose while another attempts to stand on a chair's armrests, while a third has stood against a wall long enough to be reduced to a mere skeleton. One also sees the theme of deformation (*Blähungen und Verschnitte*), and the motifs of cigarettes (*Asthma*) and weapons (*Bullets*) put in repeated appearances.

Among Wurm's numerous portraits, one sees well-known personalities from the political world, from art history, and from cultural history such as Georg Büchner, Thomas Mann, Samuel Beckett, and Herbert von Karajan. These drawings' text elements refer to the pictorial content and can frequently also be read like barometers, as in the case of the *OH* portraits of women or the year *2018*, which would appear to reference the process of ageing.

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The transitions between Wurm's themes are quite fluid, such that *2018* morphs into the intestines that replace figures' heads in many drawings—like in *Darmgesicht* [Intestine-Face], which is simultaneously a self-portrait.

While drawing is generally regarded as the virtuosic expression of an artist's handwriting, Wurm consciously violates this tradition, elevating an impressive measure of freedom from any particular style to the status of an artistic principle.

Erwin Wurm is an astute and unsentimental observer of reality with a reliable knack for zeroing in on vulnerabilities and everyday absurdities. And these drawings bear witness to Wurm's acerbic humor as well as to his audacious way of dealing both with the world and with his own self. Situational comedy and precarious moments as well as dreams and longings reflect his interest in human beings with all their failings. The source of his works is life itself, that complex of unusual phenomena and situations that makes up our everyday experiences. This close relationship with life and the immediacy of his pictorial compositions enable such works to speak to us quite directly. And his drawings function as caricature-like, ironic, and at once cynical and critical reflections of not only contemporary everyday life, but also art history as such: with these works, Erwin Wurm consistently aims to expand the notion of sculpture, with his drawings thus also revolving around a paradox relationship between reality and its reflection that confounds general belief.

This exhibition, mounted in cooperation with the Museum of Art Lucerne, is accompanied by a large-scale publication.