Sisyphos Sculptures

Opening reception: Thursday, June 7, 6–8pm
June 8–July 27, 2018
17–19 Davies Street, London

Franz West, *Sisyphos V*, 2002, papier-mâché, Styrofoam, cardboard, lacquer, and acrylic, 60 × 48 × 48 inches (152.4 × 121.9 × 121.9 cm) © Archiv Franz West

June 1, 2018

*Sit down in a wood, and immediately ants creep into your shoes, mosquitoes bite, perhaps a bird shits on you. A serpent might even frighten you, or inspire you to eat an apple.*

—Franz West

Gagosian is pleased to present three large papier-mâché sculptures by Franz West, from the *Sisyphos* series (2002).

Throughout his career, West manipulated everyday materials and imagery in order to examine art’s relation to life and collective experience. From collages and interactive sculptures to tables, seating, and large abstract forms, his works focus on the tensions between public and private, considering the controlled behaviors and impulsive actions of the body.

Despite their lighthearted ambiguity, West’s sculptures often flirt with philosophical archetypes, alluding to common myths, linguistic theories, and conceptual paradoxes. The *Sisyphos* sculptures are amorphous masses of papier-mâché, Styrofoam, and cardboard, expressively painted with
lacquer and acrylic. They are named after the mythical first king of Ephrya, who deceived and plotted against others in order to advance his own power and prestige. Zeus punished Sisyphos for his hubris by forcing him to repeatedly roll a heavy boulder up a steep hill, only to have the rock tumble back down just as he reached the top. This eternal burden, West implies, is echoed in the unrelenting frustration of the creative process, the Sisyphian struggle inherent to all artistic pursuits.

Like archeological specimens, the sculptures are mottled, earthy fragments, coagulating beneath layers of viscous paint. Fleshy splotches overlap in *Sisyphos V* (2002), with drip patterns moving upward against gravity; *Sisyphos IV* (2002), encrusted with naturalistic gray and terra-cotta tones, balances atop several cardboard tubes; and yellow and blue splatters give *Sisyphos VIII* (2002) a sense of forward momentum, intensified by the wide, wheel-like cylinder and wooden scraps wedged in at its base.


In September 2018, the first major retrospective of West’s work since his death will open at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. It will travel to the Tate Modern, London, in 2019.

#FranzWestSisyphos

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**Press**

**Bolton & Quinn**  
+44 20 7221 5000  
Erica Bolton  
erica@boltonquinn.com  
Dennis Chang  
dennis@boltonquinn.com  

**Gagosian**  
+44 20 7495 1500  
presslondon@gagosian.com

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