

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# The New York Times

### Franz West, Influential Austrian Sculptor, Dies at 65

By Roberta Smith

Franz West, an influential Austrian sculptor who pushed his objects toward design and abstract painting while maintaining a subversive attitude that undermined the notion of the artwork as an autonomous object, died Wednesday in Vienna following a long illness. He was 65 years old.

The cause was liver disease, according to his family.

A favorite of international exhibitions and blue chip galleries, Mr. West consistently enacted a kind of friendly iconoclasm in his work, in which form and function were pitted against each other and rough-surfaced materials like plaster or papier mache, sometimes doused with color, challenged accepted taste. His efforts contributed equally to two of contemporary art's most persistent trends—the socially-oriented interactive art of relational aesthetics and the convention of cobbled-together, assemblage-like objects called bricolage—but were also in their own way steeped in the figurative traditions of post-war European art.

Born in 1947 in Vienna, Mr. West studied art in the Academy of Fine Arts there. His early work developed in opposition to the harrowing performances of the Viennese Actionists, which were fraught with physical ordeals and existential intensity. Instead he emphasized a benign, relaxed lightness. Among his first known efforts were eccentric pieces that he called Adaptives, white sculptures made of plaster or papier mache and sometimes rebar that could be held, carried or worn by the viewer. They executed a neat truce between performance and art objects.

Starting in the early 1980s, he also made spindly chairs, couches and tables out of rebar and colorful woven straps that parodied elegant furniture while being quite elegant and surprisingly comfortable themselves. A large presentation of row upon row of his couches, covered with Oriental rugs and suggesting a theater without a stage, was displayed, and available for lounging in, at the 1992 Documenta, and was later installed on the roof of the Dia Art Foundation in New York.

Mr. West worked throughout his career in painted collages that combined images from advertising, pornography and fashion with slap-dash brushwork. His most effective sculptures involve strong color, either in the form of bulbous plaster pieces brusquely brushed with paint, or the immense monochromatic steel sculptures that he turned to in the late 1990s, their patched together, cartoonish shapes, also available for sitting and lying, parodying the sleek forms of much public sculpture.