



## Fedi Müller “Something I suddenly perceived as beauty” – Franz West’s ‘Flora’ as a participatory meeting place

When he was awarded a Golden Lion in Venice in 2011, it became universally evident that Franz West had secured himself a permanent place in international art history with his diverse and extensive oeuvre. Born in Vienna, his constantly evolving works span almost four decades, breaking with conventional art traditions and not attributable to any particular movement.

The brightly painted aluminium outdoor sculptures are among the most recognisable works in his portfolio; partly due to their intense colours and large dimensions, but also because of their interactive nature. Franz West rejected the idea of a passive relationship between artwork and viewer. He believed that art should invite audiences to participate physically by way of communicative exchange or interaction, and this opportunity for dialogue completes his works with an element of personal relatability. Interactivity also changes something within the person, since they are encouraged to react rather than merely observe. They have to consider their role in engaging with artworks which eradicate the general convention that touching art is taboo. This principle of ‘meeting art on an equal footing’ is often reflected in the way the outdoor sculptures are set up. In many cases, the artist dispenses with a base, giving the impression that the works are emerging out of the ground. The materiality of the aluminium sculptures, as the name suggests, means they are designed to stand outdoors in gardens and in urban and rural spaces.

‘Flora’ was created in 2006 during an intense creative phase in West’s work on outdoor aluminium sculptures. Measuring 3 x 4 x 2 metres, it depicts a multi-looped squiggle that cannot be assigned to any particular element of formal design. Amorphism is an interesting feature of West’s work. At first glance, his works do not seem to follow any particular aesthetic, and they can even appear arbitrary. However, this apparent arbitrariness is actually their essential stylistic characteristic. Franz West often made spontaneous changes to his works during the designing process until he was finally satisfied with the resulting form. Although the use of aluminium made it almost impossible to cut and reassemble individual parts, the artist nevertheless achieved unique compositions. “I don’t want to [...] get stuck on one form”, said Franz West in *Franz West. Gesammelte Gespräche und Interviews* [Collected Conversations and Interviews], p. 149).

In the creative process he initially made models of his works so they could be visualised. Later on they were implemented to a specific scale with the help of West’s assistants in his Paulusgasse studio in Vienna’s third district. This is where ‘Flora’ was created in 2006 by welding together lightweight aluminium and then painting it. The visible weld seams in the aluminium give the sculpture a deliberate rawness that reveals both the manufacturing process and the craftsmanship.

In his selection of colours, particularly those featured in his early works, the artist was particularly inspired by personal experiences. A muted green references the paint used in Viennese offices, while certain brown tones allude to the paint used on windows and doors in the Ottakring district. He is particularly famous for his iconic pink, which was almost exactly the same colour as the dentures his mother used in her dental practice. When Franz West began to devote himself to designing outdoor sculptures, it was not his intention for them to compete with nature for visibility or blend into the natural surroundings. This is



something that often happens with outdoor sculptures, because popular materials such as iron resemble colours that occur in nature. The objective of visual distinction led him to use deliberately artificial colours that create a rather 'gruesome' contrast with nature (Franz West, in *Franz West. Die Alusculptur* [The Aluminium Sculpture], p. 22).

Contrary to expectations, however, the sculptures are visually appealing to most people and ultimately also to the artist himself. This effect is reinforced by 'Flora's' monochrome colour scheme. The uniform shade of blue corresponds to a strong sky blue, which again underlines the role of the work in an outdoor setting. West has commented on the colour in the past, saying that he would also choose it out of cowardice in order to avoid the question of materiality. According to West, the approach of concealing material through the use of colour can be traced back to the Austrian art scene's almost fetishistic relationship with material value, as practised, so West says, by the architect Adolf Loos. "Then you have to resort to colour." (Franz West, in *Franz West. Gesammelte Gespräche und Interviews* [Collected Conversations and Interviews], p. 29). 'Flora' is a striking example of how Franz West's choices of material, colour and form stand out as unique features.

The participatory concept mentioned at the beginning is achieved by 'Flora' inviting visitors to sit or lie down. Two horizontal, tube-shaped sections provide a suitable surface on which to sit or lie, and those who accept the invitation experience the work from an entirely different perspective. It therefore makes the most sense to showcase the sculpture in a garden or park, where visitors can sit down on it and enjoy the multi-layered interrelationships between its characteristic properties. Franz West began exploring seating and reclining furniture in the 1980s when he started working on sculptural furniture and furniture-like sculptures. The idea to combine outdoor sculpture with seating furniture came when he was requested by Kasper König to design a work for an outdoor exhibition in Münster in 1987 (Franz West, in *Franz West. Gesammelte Gespräche und Interviews* [Collected Conversations and Interviews], p. 19, p. 136). West's answer was Eo Ipso, an amorphous structure of two facing seats connected by a winding strip of metal. From then on, the artist and his assistants created a large number of outdoor sculptures with seating or reclining areas, which have since been exhibited internationally, including the numerous seating structures that were exhibited in Ambras Castle Park in Innsbruck in 2000. Other examples are 'Corona' (2002) in the Zurich lakeside resort and 'Das Ich und das Es' (2007) in Central Park in New York.

'Flora' has a special exhibition history. It was first shown on Paradeplatz in Zurich in the spring of 2006, where it remained for several months (left image). In 2007, the work was sold to Generali Insurance along with two other outdoor sculptures. This prompted Franz West to combine the three outdoor sculptures and create a large-scale, three-part installation, ultimately giving the newly created sculpture group its own name as a tribute to its provenance and the new exhibition location. Together with an untitled work (2007) and 'Centripetale' (2001), 'Flora' thus arrived in Munich as 'Generally,' a pun on the insurance company's name,



Franz West's "Flora" on Paradeplatz in Zurich

where it was displayed for several years on Adenauerring in front of the company headquarters.

One of Franz West's studios, located on Esteplatz in Vienna, is now the headquarters of the Franz West Werknutzungsgesellschaft, a subsidiary of the Franz West Private Foundation, and it is open to visitors on the first Thursday of every month.



Lot 50



# 50<sup>R</sup> Franz West

1947 – Vienna – 2012

## "Flora". 2006

Aluminium, lacquered. 300 × 430 × 200 cm (118 1/8 × 169 1/4 × 78 3/4 in.). The work is registered in the artist database of the Franz West Privatstiftung, Vienna. [3267]

## Provenance

Generali Deutschland AG, Munich

EUR 600,000–800,000

USD 674,000–899,000

## Exhibition

Franz West. Drei Skulpturen im Außenraum. Zurich, Seebad Utoquai, Seebad Enge, Paradeplatz, 2006 („Flora“ was exhibited at Paradeplatz)

## Literature and illustration

Eva Presenhuber (ed.): Franz West. Galerie Eva Presenhuber 95–15. Zurich, RP Ringier Kunstverlag, 2017, ill. p. 138, 139 / Benedikt Ledebur: Raum und Aura. Das Kunstwerk im Erleiden seiner Definition and als wirkungsvoller Gedanke (Sketch of Franz West's work), in: Das Paradox des Realen. Essays zur Kunst. Vienna, Schlebrügge. Editor, 2015, p. 105–109, ill. p. 106

"Flora" was part of the sculpture ensemble "Generally", consisting of the three sculptures "Flora" (2006), "Centripetale"(2001) and an untitled seating sculpture (2007). This group was put together by Franz West in 2007 for the Munich headquarters of the Generali Germany AG and was installed there in the outdoor space until spring 2025.

We would like to thank the Franz West Privatstiftung, Vienna, for kindly providing additional information.

