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### Call the Absurdity Police! Erwin Wurm Brings His Chair Hats and Vaginal Sweaters to Lehmann Maupin

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NEW YORK— Austrian artist Erwin Wurm is in town for the opening of his debut solo show, "gulp," at Lehmann Maupin. Perhaps best known for his sculpturally obese "Fat Cars," Wurm is showcasing recent work that uses oversized police caps and enormous sweaters to explore what press materials term the "social envelope."

"You feel protected," he said, standing beneath "New York Police Cap" during ARTINFO's preview of "gulp." The police hat is of the New York City variety, although Wurm admits that his experience with Manhattan's finest is primarily cinematic. "I haven't seen police here, but I see them in movies," he said. "They're like a landmark." Instructions scrawled on the wall prompt gallery-goers to pose beneath the cap, turning it into a highbrow photo op.

Wurm first had the idea to enlarge police headgear when he was commissioned to do a piece for Vienna's law enforcement. He proposed an enormous Austrian cap, which would have been installed in the Heldenplatz (Hero's Square). "I was planning to do a very big police hat, like three meters, on three sticks," he said. "People could go there and feel protected from the weather." The proposal was turned down, but the idea survives, now executed in a smaller form at Lehmann Maupin. "To me, police are scary," Wurm said. "Official violence...." He paused. "My father was a policeman. But that's a long time ago."

Nearby is a figurative sculpture on the floor, "Big Gulp Lying" (2010). It resembles a man struggling to disappear inside his own sweater. Like many of Wurm's works, it's both absurd and oddly beautiful. "It transforms into something else," the artist explained, pointing out the shape and location of the sweater's hole. "The middle of the sweater is very nearly the sex of a woman." Sweaters return in the artist's 2007 "Mental pink," which looks like a giant-sized garment stretched over a canvas. "It becomes a landscape," Wurm said, noting that the waistline of the sweater suggests a horizon line, and the neck-hole a sun floating in the sky.

There's also "Mr. Mutt" (2010), which references Duchamp's infamous urinal and combines it with the trousers of a very fat man, and "Me On LSD," which resembles a three-dimensional rendering of a Baldessari brain, set atop a human arm. "It's a kind of cloud," Wurm said of the resin-and-spray-paint piece. And does the title refer to a personal trip? "All these experiences I did a very long time ago. Now I don't anymore — I don't need it, actually."

A few photographs and a 2007-08 video piece, "Tell," round out the exhibition. The video is a quietly hilarious short in which a man and a woman engage in a philosophical debate while driving. How can we know what reality is, the woman wonders. What if we were about to bite into a sandwich, and it turned out to be a frog? "Maybe you fuck someone," she ponders, "and it's a banana milkshake...." The

piece concludes with the couple driving their car directly up the side of a building, and then walking back down its façade to the sidewalk.

Cars have always figured strongly in Wurm's work, but he doesn't mean to critique our driving culture, despite the fact that the "Fat Car" series can easily be read in this manner. "For me, the car is a prolongation of the living room," he said, adding that he spends so much time traveling that he keeps his clothes in his automobile. "I have a feeling that the car is the only place I really stay, driving from one place to another."

Wurm's classic human-based sculptures are also included in the show: three photographs from a series called "The Idiots" show various figures posing while 'wearing' chairs. The chairs are all classic examples of Austrian design from the 1950s, the decade in which Wurm grew up. "You don't know who is the idiot," the artist said. "The person who does this? The architect? The public?"