

Erwin Wurm unveils his latest cast of characters at Lehmann Maupin in New York

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Austrian artist Erwin Wurm's recently opened solo exhibition at New York's Lehmann Maupin gallery, 'Synthesa', comprises new works that have, quite unusually, been made by the artist himself. *Photography: Elisabeth Bernstein*

We've come to expect nothing short of the bewildering when it comes to the work of sculptor Erwin Wurm (<http://www.wallpaper.com/art/big-kastenmann-by-erwin-wurm-at-the-standard-hotel-new-york/5959>). The Austrian artist is presenting three new series of works in 'Synthesa', his freshly opened second showing at New York's Lehmann Maupin gallery, in which he continues to explore and experiment with abstracting the human form. The big difference here is that Wurm has made all the pieces himself.

It's a disarming admission that comes straight from the artist. 'Recently I have ended up like many other artists, not making the stuff myself anymore, but with the studio [doing the pieces],' he explains. 'So I had the feeling that I was disconnected from my work and with these pieces, I have started to be reconnected again.'

Wurm's revitalised approach to his artistic practice came with its own set of challenges. 'It was a struggle at first because I had to make every little decision. Like the [seams] here, do I leave them or do I cut them away?' he says. 'They are serious questions and problems. And I had to decide them. For me, that was important because I had to get close.'

'Synthesa' is formed by three groups of works. On entering the gallery, visitors are greeted by several deconstructed figures, whose distorted forms are deliberately incomplete or interjected with plastic buckets. 'We scanned people from my studio and then printed them out in polyurethane. This is a very fragile material, so we found a way to cast them in acrylic,' explains Wurm of the ghostly, discoloured statues, exemplary of his notorious obsession with the human body (<http://www.wallpaper.com/art/the-weird-world-of-erwin-wurm/5103>). 'In my very old work from the 1980s, I used a lot of vessels because they keep things inside them, much like the body. So this is a reference to my early pieces.'

A second group of figurative works touches on another cornerstone of Wurm's past: frankfurters. 'The sausage is such a European icon. In a way, sausages are related to biological beings, like animals and people, because [they are encased in] intestines,' offers Wurm. Slender and humorous, the abstract sculptures are made from cast-bronze components, which were then painted and assembled into life-like formations. While some openly mimic the human gait, others soar into space slightly off-kilter.

The third, similarly cryptic grouping is a dimensional extension of the artist's famous 'One Minute Sculptures' series - which he paid homage to with his deep-fried gherkins recipe in our Artist's Palate Series (<http://www.wallpaper.com/lifestyle/artists-palate-erwin-wurm/5107>) (W* 138) - where the public posed in sculptural formations for short periods of time. Entitled 'One Minute Forever', Wurm's new take on the theme sees various parts of the skeleton composed with inanimate objects to curious effect.

'I had this interesting experience when I visited a famous church in Rome, with a cloister close to it. It's covered with Baroque ornaments made from human bones; of the hands, joints and shoulders, on the ceiling and on the walls. Very strange and gross,' he explains. 'But then, there were two plaques saying, "We are what you will be and we were what you are." And these were a shock. I wanted to take this [sentiment] and transform it.'

By putting his own hand back into his works, Wurm's flair for bringing together the familiar and the strange is taken to a whole new level. His take on psychology, physiology and humanity might not always be pretty, but they are striking and completely open to interpretation nonetheless.