

The artist who swallowed the world

This book accompanies a retrospective of Erwin Wurm's work as it tours to a number of different museums. It is much more an artist's book than the catalog of works that might perhaps have been expected. This is due to the genesis of the exhibition project and how it subsequently developed. The directors of four different museums devised a sort of "open project" that, even at an early stage, attracted interest from other institutions. Together, they selected a pool of works that would enable each museum to compose its own exhibition in accordance with its specific curatorial intentions. The individuals involved at the conception of the project—Robert Fleck from the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, Harald Kunde from the Ludwig Forum Aachen, Edelbert Köb from the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien and Roland Wäspe from the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen—had previously worked with the artist on many occasions, so they were quickly able to reach a consensus over the contents of the project. The focus is on the artist's most recent work, mainly large-format sculptural pieces. Working from this basis, the museums are then free to present those aspects of Wurm's long, multifaceted and yet consistent oeuvre that they consider most important for an understanding of his current work.

One result of this concept, and the freedom for subjective interpretation it allows, is this artist's book—*The artist who swallowed the world*—developed by Wurm together with Élise Mougin and Edelbert Köb. The artist's interpretation of his own

artistic intentions, strategies and contexts using the visual dramaturgy of images of his works, and using his own texts and excerpts from interviews, can be seen as an act of emancipation. As an artistic work, the book fits in beside other works by Wurm from recent years in which he treats the relationship between artist and the art business ironically and affectionately on the whole: instruction manuals, comprehension aides and commentaries—not always meant to be taken entirely seriously—have, in fact, long formed part of the artistic media Wurm uses to explain the world to us.

So as not to water down this concept, the curators decided against including historical or theoretical texts in the book itself; these are included as separate sheets in the language of the country where the exhibition is shown. An exception has been made in the case of an essay by Robert Pfaller, a profound analysis of Wurm's work from the standpoint of a philosopher and psychologist. Pfaller's essay offers additional reading material without competing with the artist's own texts.

In a sense, this publication has freed itself from the organizing museums. Nevertheless, it forms a fitting accompaniment to the retrospective in the various locations it has been shown and will be shown in the future, and can also function as a catalog. his self-confident statement by the artist is a welcome addition to Wurm's long list of publications at a time when interest in his work has reached a new level.

All texts commenting the images are by Erwin Wurm (if not specified otherwise).

They are excerpts from interviews with: Danilo Eccher, Claudia Gioia, Edelbert Köb, Élise Mougin, Abraham Orden, Antonella Soldaini and Virginia Tieri.

All untitled black & white drawings and handwritings are extracts from the artist's notebooks.