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Erwin Wurm: Gulp

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The Austrian artist Erwin Wurm has been making people laugh for some time. In the 1980s, he inaugurated the series "One Minute Sculptures," in which he or his models posed in unexpected relationships with everyday objects, hoping viewers would question the very definition of sculpture. For instance, one person did pushups on teacups and another stuck asparagus up his nose. He has also mounted 26 pickles on white pedestals. While such antics might seem to preclude acceptance by the establishment, he is collected by the Guggenheim, the Walker Art Center, Museum Ludwig, Musee d'Art Contemporain de Lyon and Centre Pompidou, and has exhibited successfully all over the world. It may very well be because one senses the seriousness of his intent.

In this amusing exhibit, he uses simple materials and mundane objects to convey ideas. There's the "Telkinetischer Masturbator," a sculpture of a man without arms, wearing a real shirt, looking hopeless, his dilemma clear, and the bright funny "Me Under LSD," which consists of one hand supporting a large yellow-and-white foamy-looking cloud. But as one walks around the gallery smiling at all these lost and strange figures, a theme emerges of frustration and occasionally dangerous incongruity, like the video of a car upended and perched against a wall. And poor "Gulp," a headless aluminum shape, stretched out on the floor, somehow entrapped by fabric. Everything and everyone are out of their element, overcome or ill-equipped to handle their circumstances. It's kind of him to provide us with a good time, but we also walk away chilled by the consequences of so much in contemporary life.