

Designboom

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Erwin Wurm: Wear Me Out at Middelheim Museum

The open air Middelheim Museum in Antwerp features works of Austrian sculptor Erwin Wurm in the exhibition, 'Wear Me Out'. The 20 pieces on display highlight consistent and interconnected topics in the artist's work, such as the body, color, and clothing; these themes are further developed by a new collaboration with Antwerp based fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck as well as two original projects installed at the location's Braem Pavilion.

With a contemporary interpretation of classical sculptural tenets, the forms and the materials in Wurm's work yield results that both examine and push the boundaries of the medium, ranging from extremes of permanence and transience. Arranged throughout the sculpture garden, the engaging works are well suited to the interactive site.

Using materials of bronze and polystyrene, Wurm gives human-like qualities to non-living objects such as houses ('Fat House', 'Melting House'), boats ('Misconceivable'), and clothing ('Big Sweater'). These everyday forms are instantly recognizable to the viewer, but striking for their transformation in scale and volume.

Walking a fine line between form and formlessness, Wurm also renders the human physique in works like 'Big Gulp' or his 'Big Psycho' series. These pieces consistently depict unusual postures, examining the sculptural potential of revealing psychological mood through body language.

Wurm's depiction of the body is not limited to durable materials, but also flesh and blood. Drawing in viewers with color, Wurm collaborates with Walter Van Beirendonck in the creation of living 'performative sculptures', or five hired actors wearing oversized costumes made of ruffled tulle, whose texture and form explore the human body's role in transforming objects.

This new series extends Wurm's 'one minute sculptures', which can exist only if an audience member participates: if sculpture is all about volume and space, then anyone can be an artwork, simply by adding or removing clothing and weight.

The artist uses textiles inside the museum's Braem Pavilion as well, creating a gigantic 'sweater' by covering the ceiling in pastel purple knitwear. On the ground below are a completely new series of 'möbeln performative sculptures', in which the artist converts second-hand furniture into hybrid objects that act as performance stages: by the artist's instructions, someone takes on the guise of a sculpture, around, in or on the artworks on every day of the exhibition.