

ERWIN WURM

SAMURAI & ZORRO

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

31 Aug 2012 - 17 Nov 2012



From 31 August 2012, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is showing a series of 18 new works by Erwin Wurm: sculptured models of different-sized houses.

Modelled on existing buildings of European and American architecture, they were first formed in clay, then attacked in various ways – the artist punched or kicked them, hit them with his elbows or crushed them with his own body weight by lying or sitting on them. Some of the buildings chosen by the artist are well-known, others anonymous, some selected for personal reasons. The maltreated models include prisons, warehouses, a psychiatric clinic, bunkers, as well as Wurm's parental home and the house belonging to his ex-wife. The Narrenturm [madhouse tower] in Vienna bears footprints, San Quentin State Prison has been slashed open, and Alcatraz has a hole, dug out by hand, which might just as well have been made by a violent explosion.

In this group of works, violence is very much to the fore. The marks of destruction are preserved through being cast in bronze, acrylic or even polyester, and refined by silver- or gold-plating. The buildings have a closed surface area; neither windows nor doors allow a view of the interior. The cladding is the important feature, as in the artist's earlier sculptures, where the form was determined by garments on plinths.

The house, a symbol of withdrawal, but also of sociability and living together, is here the opposite: defined purely from the exterior, as an object. The works are set in a row, as a formal enumeration reminiscent of the photographic typologies of water-towers and winding-towers or silos by Bernd and Hilla Becher in the 1960s. This purely formal conception is in turn counteracted by the sensual components of the production and immediate destruction, and by aestheticisation through the material in which the models (initially made of malleable clay) are cast, and the patina they may acquire.

The artist made the models first out of clay, only to ruin their perfect form in a wide variety of ways. There is something playful yet compulsive in this process of creation and destruction, and of preservation and thus re-creation of form

The deformation gives the works the amorphous character that has made his style iconic, but in a quite different way; it is not through inflating or narrowing, or any other distortion of the scale, but through destruction, that the works get out of the norm and off balance. The results remind one of Buster Keaton's wrongly assembled prefab in *One Week* – a kind of surreal distortion. By casting the works in bronze, acrylic or polyester, Erwin Wurm to some extent blurs the sensual gesture in the malleable clay. The marks and impressions of this gesture still, however, remain clearly visible, as for example the trouser seams on a stereotype American farmhouse which the artist sat on.

The often alluring gold or silver or gloss-varnished surfaces trivialise and conceal the course of the purposeful attacks, and add glory to the destruction. The buildings on which his sculptures are modelled are often bunkers, warehouses, his parental home, or the house of his ex-wife, as well as well-known prisons – places where locking in or out is, in the widest sense, important.

Erwin Wurm was born in Bruck an der Mur/Austria, in 1954; he lives and works in Vienna and Limberg. He gained a reputation in the early 1990s for his "One-Minute-Sculptures", for which his models posed in relation to everyday objects, holding their position for a minute and thus becoming, however briefly, sculptures.

He was recently distinguished by a solo exhibition in the Bass Museum of Art/Miami and the Dallas Contemporary Art Museum/Texas. On 21 September, a solo exhibition of his works opens in the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga/Spain, where some loans from the gallery will also be on show. In December this year a solo exhibition will be held in the Albertina/Vienna, and next spring a solo exhibition in the ZKM/Karlsruhe.

A book with a text by Abraham Orden will be published to accompany the exhibition.