

Press release

Erwin Wurm

Tomorrow: Yes

17 January—11 April 2026
Opening Saturday 17 January, 3pm—6pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Pantin
69, avenue du Général Leclerc, Pantin



Erwin Wurm, *Tomorrow Yes (Dreamer)*, 2025
Acryl, polyester, paint. 67 × 142 × 150 cm (26.3 × 56 × 59 in)

Tomorrow: Yes is an exhibition of works by Austrian artist Erwin Wurm, and his first solo presentation to occupy the entirety of the extensive Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Pantin space. The exhibition unfolds around two monumental sculptural installations: a compressed schoolhouse, and a 6-metre-tall bent sailing boat. The works on view, the majority of which are exhibited here for the first time, encompass materials from marble to bronze to aluminium and span some of the artist's most celebrated series, including his iconic participative *One Minute Sculptures*. Brought together, they form a sculptural vocabulary for the abstract

and the intangible, testifying to Wurm's radical disruption of the limitations of sculpture.

Visitors are invited to step inside *School* (2024), which distorts the 19th-century silhouette of Wurm's local village schoolhouse. In its narrow, low-ceilinged interior, the walls are plastered with vintage posters retracing some of the lessons once taught in French schools now considered outdated. The school's cramped interior, complete with compacted chairs and a small blackboard, creates a sense of claustrophobia in the visitor who enters, mimicking the



Erwin Wurm, *Mind Bubble Walking (Mind Bubbles)*, 2024
Aluminium, acrylic paint. 227 x 160 x 126 cm (89.37 x 62.99 x 49.61 in)

restrictiveness of teachings of the past, while encouraging us to reexamine the unquestioning beliefs we hold today. ‘School is about the sculptural mass of knowledge, and how it changes over the decades’, Wurm explains. ‘My intention is to suggest that if we cannot recognise our current distortions, perhaps we will see them clearly in 50 or 100 years’ time.’ The French version of *School*, made specially for Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Pantin, follows Austrian and Japanese versions presented in the artist’s retrospective at Albertina, Vienna (2024), Marmorschlössl Bad Ischl (2025), and Towada Art Center (2025).

Star (2025), Wurm’s full-size sailing boat, is inspired by the Salzkammergut resort area in Austria, whose many lakes are popular with pleasure boaters. Curved in the middle, the fully-functioning vessel is designed for ‘going round corners’. Perfectly adapted to sailing in aimless circles around a lake, it epitomises the absurdities and futilities of modern life. As Max Hollein, art historian and director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has said, Wurm ‘has succeeded in conveying to a large audience, in a hugely suggestive way, the tragedy of its own social condition.’ By giving it material form, Wurm positions *Tomorrow: Yes* as an investigation into how the philosophies we live by are built and bent, and an invitation to the visitor to question the ideas they take for granted.

Wurm finds in the shifting nature of ideas, perceptions and thoughts a sculptural plasticity. Just as *School* accords sculptural form to the received knowledge of an era, across the exhibition, Wurm gives shape to the immaterial. The *Blurred Memories* sculptures are anthropomorphisa-

tions of Wurm’s own school-age memories, beliefs and experiences. Commenced in 2024, his *Mind Bubbles*, meanwhile, place ovular forms atop cartoon-like legs in anthropomorphic reimaginings of the thought bubbles found in comic strips or graphic novels. Oscillating between figuration and abstraction, the gravity-defying sculptures’ spindly legs are weighed down by the rounded, organic shapes in a play of proportions that reevaluates the balance between body and mind in making us who we are. As Wurm says: ‘Everything is perception’.

Across the exhibition, the visitor encounters sculptures that, as Wurm put it, are ‘about human beings, but without human beings’. The *Box People* (2009–present) – cubic forms dressed in formal attire but lacking heads – interrogate the human condition and the role of the individual in the social, political and environmental conditions of the contemporary world. The theme of clothing, which played an important role early in Wurm’s career, is once again at the heart of his recent work. In new works from his *Substitutes* series (2022–present), clothing appears in the form of unworn, empty shells – as if suddenly vacated by their wearers – from which sculptural forms are cast.

Most of the *Substitutes* on view are cast in aluminium coated with one or two vibrant tones of acrylic paint. Others are made in bronze or in marble: strong materials that contrast with the flimsiness of the ghostly garments. ‘As a sculptor, I’m interested in this idea of skin as a boundary,’ Wurm explained. ‘Clothes are our second skin, a shell that separates our bodies from the outside



Erwin Wurm, *Deputy (Box People)*, 2025
Marble. 181 x 47 x 42 cm (71.26 x 18.5 x 16.54 in)



Erwin Wurm, *Fallen Falls (Substitutes)*, 2025
Aluminium. 14 × 80 × 240 cm (5.51 × 31.5 × 94.49 in)

world'. The deflated outfits – collars and hoods gaping open, stockings that pool on the floor – are a reminder that clothes are a sculptural material in their own right, altering how we perceive what is within and even articulating new volumes.

Wurm's investigation of skin and clothes as sculptural surfaces is rooted in art-historical tradition. Observing that classical sculptures in bronze are hollow, consisting only of a thin outer membrane of clothes and skin, in the *Substitutes*, Wurm takes this surface as his subject. *Shadow* (2024), one of the *Substitutes* on view, nods to this art-historical connection with the verdigris patina that coats its bronze surface, giving it a time-worn aspect. Standing at over three metres in height, the majestic *Balzac* (2023), meanwhile, responds to Auguste Rodin's canonical *Monument to Balzac* (1891–97). An 'idea of a person' emerges from a pile of draped clothing, evoking the semi-abstract monolith of Rodin's homage to the French novelist Honoré de Balzac. Wurm was inspired by the myth that the French sculptor soaked the writer's dressing gown in plaster to dress his monumental form. The *Balzac* on view in the exhibition follows a first edition, unveiled as part of Wurm's 2023–24 exhibition at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, where it is now part of the permanent collection.

With its paradoxical and playful approaches to surface and material – solidity and fragility, volume and emptiness, history and ephemerality – Wurm's work draws on the

conventions and parameters of sculpture itself: what he calls 'sculptural issues'. He is interested in the buildings we inhabit as a further skin we wear. His scaled-down *School* is also a self-referential look at how sculpture works. Gesturing to the casting process, he refers to it as a 'negative cast': the negative imprint of an education system, a pool of knowledge, and of the minds it forms. As philosopher and essayist Konrad Paul Liessmann has written of Wurm's work: 'The absurdities of the aesthetic point to the reality of absurdities. It is not the work that is paradoxical, but the reality that it consistently takes at its word.'

The exhibition will also feature a selection of Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, whose time-based, participatory angle epitomises the artist's provocative, questioning approach to sculpture. Begun in 1996, they incorporate everyday objects, which they invite the visitor into brief but thought-provoking interactions with: hats, a bottle and a shot glass, or even an Issey Miyake pullover that visitors can put on to activate, following the *One Minute Sculptures* that featured on the runway in the presentation of Miyake's Wurm-inspired Autumn/Winter 2025–26 collection at the Carrousel du Louvre, Paris in March 2025. Inheriting from Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculpture, this series transforms the visitor from spectator into participant, destabilising traditional modes of engaging with art. In these ephemeral living sculptures, the visitor completes the work, becoming a temporary site for Wurm's exploration of form, thought and belief in mutation.



Erwin Wurm, 2020.
Photo: Michael Wurm

About the artist

Erwin Wurm lives and works in Vienna and Limberg, Austria. He has twice participated in the Venice Biennale, with his installation *Narrow House* at the Palazzo Cavalli-Franchetti in 2011 and when he represented Austria in 2017. Recent solo exhibitions have been held internationally at institutions including Towada Art Center, Japan (2025); Ludwig Museum, Koblenz (2025); Albertina, Vienna (2024); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (2023); SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2023); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2023); Suwon Museum of Art (2022); Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (2022); Bratislava City Gallery (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (2022); Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna (2021); Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2020); Musée Cantini, Marseille (2019); K11 MUSEA, Hong Kong (2019); and Vancouver Art Gallery (2019), among others.

In May 2026, on the occasion of the 61st Venice Biennale, the Museo Fortuny in Venice will present an exhibition of works by Wurm.

Press release

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