"I believe in the possibility of the absurd, and of the paradox. Laughter, and humour, is a side effect of questioning the absurd." - ERWIN WURM

Few artists mix the style and imagery of high fashion with the high concepts and social commentary of fine art as effectively as the Austrian artist Erwin Wurm, whose work plays on the tropes of magazine photography in order to disrupt the status quo. Witness the turn-out Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar pages he paints on in his 2011 volume, Wear Me Out: he makes chaos out of art-directed beauty, and in doing so makes beauty out of chaos. Here, Wurm has created an extensive series of exclusive artworks for Modern Matter in collaboration with Olu Oduyoye, using special-edition cover issues of the magazine as raw material, as part of our ongoing Overprint project. From this particular Overprint portfolio’s first conception — inspired by the sight of those fashionable painting-collages in Wear Me Out — to its eventual execution, more than a year of work has gone into the pages reproduced here. Proof, if proof were needed, that good things come to those who wait, and to those driven to create.

The filmmaker Michael Haneke is not exactly known for making comedies — it might be fairer to say, with the bloody prep-on-bougie satire of the ironically-titled Funny Games, or with the soapy, feel-bad evil of the also-ironically-titled melodrama Happy End, he has tended to make films that encourage us to laugh uncomfortably at our worst aspirations. In 2013, the cultural critic Molra Weigel described Haneke’s work as a prime example of a genre she called sadomodernism: “[it consistently] examines the possibilities of contemporary (haute) bourgeois life, consistently [show] its protagonists to be at best trapped and ineffectual and at worst, much worse.” Little wonder, then, that Wurm professes to be fond of Haneke, and of the elegance with which he skewers the indulgence and the amorality of those who at first seem to possess everything a person could desire, and who eventually end up losing everything as a result of their self-interest, or of fate and the inherent cruelty of the universe. “And we are both Austrian,” he muses. “I don’t know where this impulse comes from, exactly: but for example, [the playwright] Thomas Bernhard is Austrian, and he is also very specific, and very much interested in looking at these psychological issues, with a certain kind of humour — a very particular, very dark hu-
mourn. There seems to be something like an Austrian affect.”

Wurm has been working since the eighties, in particular on an ongoing series he refers to as One Minute Sculptures — objects, often quotidian or familiar, are left in the gallery space for members of the public to experiment with. In the most famous examples, these experiments are photographed, the images appearing like a cross between a fashion editorial and an uncanny installation: combined, what was mundane becomes minatory, unsettlingly strange, as in the definition of surrealism that Breton first stole from Ducasse. In his work in general, the “Austrian affect” Wurm refers to manifests itself as a love of the intersection between commentary and absurdity, the result being that he is occasionally mischaracterised as a comic artist when he is in fact, at heart, a pitch-black satirist. (“I will often use humour to seduce people,” he has said. “To entice them to look closer. But it’s never very nice when they do.”) It is possible to detect notes of violence, too, in the way that those photographic documents of his One Minute Sculptures often look like scenes of torture, or like fetishism gone wrong. A woman sits atop a pole that looks more like a stake than like a seat; a man has stationery crammed into his ears and nose and mouth, looking like a substitute teacher victimised by classroom bullies. Heads and limbs are obscured until it is no longer entirely clear whether they have been removed. Participants lie face-down, play stone dead.

Discomfort is the byword, either literally or figuratively, so that looking at the work is as unnerving as participating, and so that to participate is to give oneself over to ritual humiliation. “I believe in the possibility of the absurd, and of the paradox,” Wurm confirms. “Laugh- ter, and humour, is a side effect of questioning the absurd. So the work addresses the emotion of embarrassment, and also the ridiculousness of it. The most marginal concerns of our existence can also be the most important ones, because they help us to address the bigger issues, like death and so on.” To pervert a coveted red sports car into something that looks terminal- unly unfit is to highlight the terminal unfitness of our capitalist society to function without killing us, making Wurm’s admittedly-funny Fat Convertible a work that’s as much about dying as it is about consumerism. Even working with a brand, the artist finds a way to suggest that all brands are meaningless, and that our ideological attachment to them as a means of personal definition slows us down like dread, dead weight.

“I did my first ever collaboration with a company in Vienna, Palmers,” he explains, “which is a very well-known brand of underwear that uses famous models, and works with famous fashion photographers. When they asked me, as an artist, they were surprised that I accept- ed. It never worked out; they were not satisfied, and in the end they did not make an advertisement out of it. But I could still use the pieces in a museum context. Work in the fash- ion industry, and with furniture and so on, is not a closed circle, like the art world very often is. I try to push my work, for many reasons, into many outside contexts, and into outside spaces — and this helps me to make public work. I strongly believe that this is what qualifies, nowadays, as making public sculpture: working in the media, in music and in fashion magazines, and so on.”

A look at the images originally made for Palmers leaves no mystery about the reason for their general unsuitability as advertising. In one shot, a girl in a yolk-yellow leotard poses, kneeling, like a double-ampuete; showcasing a black-and-white bodysuit, another mod- el has no discernible head. The photographs are perfect, and disturbing, and might not im- mediately make the average viewer anxious to invest in a new set of lingerie as much as they might make them anxious, period. But then isn’t feeling anxious half the point of advertising? And isn’t most fashion media all about the idea that we’re fundamentally in- complete? “When I use people in my work,” Wurm agrees. “I very, very rarely show a face, or a body. Very rarely. In magazines like House and Garden or Architectural Digest, you see the ‘portraits’ of the houses of rich people, or of famous people, but you never see the people. You see the apartment, you see the furniture; you see the cars, the clothes — but not the people. That’s an interesting factor for me, and it’s one of the biggest things in my work. In all my sculptural work, the human body is only represented by clothes, and by representative objects.”

Which brings us to the age of Instagram. Where once celebrities alone were defined by the regular documentation of the things they owned, or wore, or the homes that they lived in, anybody with a working camera-phone and even the most minor inclination towards exhibitionism can reveal themselves the same way. Books, not previously a status symbol, have become popular still-life objects, sometimes enhanced by the presence of hands with perfect manicures; underwear, as in Wurm’s 1997 images for Palmers, is routinely photographed for public view, the model’s face obscured or left out of the frame. Strangers’ cars are used for props in order to suggest extreme wealth. Knees are shown in isolation, propped up as the sole accessory to a Bahamian sunset, the same way they might peer out from underneath a bucket or a blanket in a photograph of a One Minute Sculpture. Another accidental parity, albeit an interesting one currently, Instagram allows its videos to be one minute, maximum, in length, so that many of them are their own attempts at creating one minute sculptures.

The embarrassment factor of humiliating oneself in a gallery setting for exactly sixty seconds is, in other words, somewhat negated by a newfound public willingness to quite literally make an exhibition of day-to-day life, in real-time and for global audiences. Just as Funny Games nihilistic take on class-based retribution has begun to seem less and less like a horror movie and more like a smart prediction of inevitable class war, the One Minute Sculptures series looks in retrospect like a precursor to a visually-conscious, self-consciously-quirky culture in love with its own mortification. Props, plus people, plus time, equal “content” in the parlance of the internet. Those who do not learn from art history are, of course, doomed to repeat its mistakes, minus irony or commentary. “We do create new and very public ways of being through social media,” Wurm shrugs casually, already moving on to the next new thing in his mind the way all great contemporary artists do. “Privacy as it was defined appears not to exist any more, because everything is online, and everything is being shown and shared all the time, and being watched constantly. It’s definitely a gigantic change. I don’t care if that development is positive or negative, necessarily: I just care that it’s a fact. I just care about what’s true.”

The interview was conducted by Philippa Snow in London, 2017.
Erwin Wurm has created a series of exclusive artworks for *Modern Matter* in collaboration with Olu Odukuoga, using archive issues of the magazine as raw material.

**ERWIN WURM**

**Artist**

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The New Face endure[s], endur[s]ing its own grotesquely outwards into much subhuman. Cameron Diaz, Lindsay Lohan, Renee Zellweger, McGowan and Melanie Griffith to list a make-five and all been tarred with the "puffy filler face" of the same red-carpet manipulators who, I have no idea have torn them to pieces for errant crow's feet. As a case, no image overhaul is ever entirely un—such transformations are her Kabbalah char—alter. Always lacking the sunny, Dorito-dusted affability of, say, a Jennifer Lawrence, the Mate—

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"Jocelyne created a ritual mask that was vaguely African and so taut that she could barely blink," reports *Vanity Fair*.
Madonna and the End of Middle-Age

Although his obituaries referred to him almost exclusively in their headlines as being Madonna's Plastic Surgeon, an earlier profile in the New York Times described late Dr. Fredric Brandt as an "art collector and user of the most nonconformist-looking personage, a man who is firmly familiar with the trick mirrors of celebrity," Ed Lefkowitch, Richard Prince, Marilyn Minter — certainly, Brandt's reputation was suggestive of interest in a certain brand of art, out of hand. Whether there are more general parities between the art collector and the plastic surgeon or not, it is harder to call, but the two professions, when connected as a story, are almost certain to remind a reader of the Wildstein Lie and the jaguar-woman bride. Like Frederic, Jocelyn Wildstein took a more experimental approach to the work she undertook on her face, eventually embodying a kind of abstract-modernist vision of beauty; a cubist variation of sexual attractiveness which would never catch on in polite society, but which had its own freaky, animalistic charm. Dr. Frederic Brandt — the consummate art lover, given to notions of self-surgery — was master and masterpiece in one, and his suicide spelled the end of a high-glamour New York era.

Six years ago, Brandt's most famous artwork appeared on the cover of New York Magazine; the head of Madonna Louise Ciccone, whose features were used as the test book illustration for a surgical style that the magazine had dubbed the New New Face. Not light, but somehow planar, less angular than pillow, and more infantile than feminine fatalize the New New Face has the large and open eyes and doll, and the apple cheeks of a baby, at least in theory, in reality the overall effect when applied to the patients may skew little more Mister Punch than Little Miss Copperstone, but since when did such possibilities ever dissuade this trick of dysmorphic? The New New Face endures, expanding the reach as if swollen grotesquely by the same red-carpet malingerers who, I have doubt, would have torn them to pieces for errant crow's feet.

In Madonna's case, no image overhaul is expected — such transformations are a staple of chal-lah and butter. Always lacking the sunny, Dorito-dusted gee-shucks affability of, say, a Jennifer Lawrence, the Material Girl has evolved, instead, into that rarest of beasts — a superstar that nobody really knows; a habitual over-share whose nakedness is all exhibition and no real exposure. A casual observer might describe her, variously, as a cowgirl or a sex-pot — a black-sheep singer-songwriter, or a Lucille ball in rubber-band bracelets or a racist cartoon pimp. Not they know her as the face of the New New Face, with the circular arms of a yogi and the buoyant buccas of a three-year-old. That she has always lacked real humanity cannot be a failing — how else, if not through a certain esoteric remoteness, would Bowie have forged his career? "Love the product!" Ciccone's agent yelled to a reporter, asked about her face.

I know they're humans with broken hearts, but you know, they're people, they are remembering, improving on you, and you're the business they're in.

Are you the layman's or, as is likely, the woman's — might be? The real affect of glasses for the face, the anti-Gaga, the plastic surgeon's style as "descend Suntan," casual, but something of a suggestion in the fragment the passed into lips. "Descend" says, "simply pass a small, but forward spiral. Suntan people can add to filiming you crack and receive in their magnification."

A prominent Ben Ratner's dermatologist told NYR, "The end point goal is to the extent that you're sitting with somebody who says I want another of good place in my lips, and I'm saying, 'I can't put any more here, it's coming out the other side.'" If one's goal is not necessarily to look young but simply not to look old, then the easy way of avoiding the latter is to stop oneself from aging man altogether. As society we are familiar with the little that a woman who reigned to forty-five or fifty will inevitably can we know that she's elasticity, or that she will develop a wrinkle. Besides, it is if the mood.

Conversely, if Jocelyn Wildstein is recognisable and engaging seventy-four, is it as a matter of fact, seventy-four stage in the human life-cycle, for instance, would the object's eyes begin to migrate towards their temples? 74.

Cosmopolitan, Perlane, Juvéderm, Evolution, Sculptra would be home-planets just as well as they could be, etc.

"Jocelyn created a ritual mask that was vaguely African and so taut that she could barely blink," reports Vanity Fair.
"The success of a party," writes New Yorker Editor Ayesha Siddiqui in an essay which is about both Harmony Korine's Spring Breakers, and the ways in which it is possible for a woman to wield power while wearing a neon bikini, "whether Carnival in Brazil, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, or Spring Break in Florida, is judged by how many pairs of tits are exposed. Nothing else adequately proves you're having a good time than barring your chest in ecstatic investment in the moment. Female nudity is an accessory due to the truly haute accessory is nudity, of course, and not nakedness, as the two are different, and the former is rarer; more aspirational. John Berger believed that to be naked was to be seen entirely as oneself — what greater terror than this? To be nude instead, he wrote, affords us some essential camouflage. It is a kind of letting, and the female, even an actress; one just like the eponymous Drake Burnette, who stars in Larry Clark's Girl. With an eye towards her career, she droops and makes herself less of a business is case. If, as has been written, women's femininity is a commodity that Drake unapologetically looks at in a round free-to-worthy turn.

"When on a vacation of some years and now in America, I was a boy only to the cast..."
—Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom, 1936
In Douglas Kurdt's *Amnesia; Various, Luminous, Fixed at Spruth Magers London*, a literal Freudian slip appeared on display: the opening page of the very first proof copy of *Fetischismus*, with the errors corrected by the author's own hand and then blown up, as neon lights, around it.

When I was working on my thesis in the late 1970s I was working mainly with people who lived just across the street from the block on the west side of the city, who began to notice that I was leaving objects around my block in these apartments which made them become a little more... They weren't necessarily heavy objects, but they were objects that existed within their private social space — objects which they felt that they were in touch with the world they were homing to and were in the way of becoming monolithic — neither the kind of social space. I became interested in objects and began to wonder. I started to record these ideas and then across these buildings, Home Court, in Bethnal Green, the tiny, the tallest single house in the country in West Europe; a tiny, soulless space, which absolutely expressed the way that people as objects, Of course, the individuals inside this was placed in leading complex, social spaces, but the visual language of the building itself was one of reduction in community and was highly institutionalized. I then looked on some still life works looking at the problem between objects and people. To work with the idea of objects and immortality. I then tried to make a sense of change in three different interpersonal networks, each new generating a different way of organizing relationships within the building — for example, in terms of networks of conflict, or a network of exchange, and then an interaction with these three-panel work. In my second work a fragment of a group of discs which I found as a fragment, which I then arranged into these. Then I then felt that there were three different ways of viewing life there.

Text by Stephen Willats

Photography by Annalid Elston.
In Joseph Kosuth's Amnesia: Various, Luminous, Fixed at Spruth Magers London, a literal Freudian slip appeared on the opening page of the very first proof copy of *Fotischismus*, with the errors corrected in the editor's own hand and then blown-up, as neon lights around it.

E.W. 29
Serpentine Pavilion: Perspectives

E.W.
I was invited to Cork, and I saw this beautiful landscape and this charming...
5th March 1984

The image contains text that is partially obscured or damaged. Here is a reconstruction of the readable content:

"At the time of the Serpentine Pavilion, we thought it would disappear as soon as the space became an educational venue. It's an interesting project, but..."

"Lots of people are using the Pavilion to change the way they think about work with subsequent movements in the idea of the Pavilion is responsible for that. [JPP: the time, when I'm Jasper Harris, it's responsible for that.]

The watching television is a form of culture that helps us to develop new forms. It's like a kind of faith in education. The way it's being used now is a permanent way of saying, 'we're making things up, we're making feelings, this project will be returned to the idea of culture and how things are made.'

This is the only way to make it work. I don't mean this to be a permanent way of saying, 'we're making things up, we're making feelings, this project will be returned to the idea of culture and how things are made.'"
I often see people going through this sense of concern. That does not diminish the fact that the furniture was completely and utterly made up. The parties, they'refun until one o'clock it's their own party really unbelievable the same time they're not the...
I Don't Want To Be Like Anyone Else (1977)

I grew up in the wastelands of West London, and I guess that's always been particularly hard for those people, which are 'leftover' or 'surplus', but still belong. This is the world of the punk movement, where those people who have been left behind and are not prepared to fit into any of the other social classes, and on the peripheries of the mainstream...
The corrections on *Fetischismus* are a fitting addition to any retrospective examination of Kosuth's work, as the life of Sigmund Freud is one of the artist's longstanding fixations; as one of the very first practitioners of conceptual art, and as one of the movement's founders, the exploration of meaning of things — both simple and apparent — is his foundation. "I must acknowledge the debt of impact Sigmund Freud's own creative production has had on the culture of modernity and, as a result, its own capacity of self-reflection," he wrote in 1989: a former student of Philosophy, Anthropology as well as art, even the earliest uses of the now-familiar medium of neon text installation still project this strident modernity. The show has since relocated to MAM Moscow.