

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, May 2, 2005

Franz West

Vancouver, BC – The Vancouver Art Gallery will present the work of Franz West, considered one of Europe's leading contemporary sculptors, from May 28 to September 12, 2005, in an exhibition featuring more than 25 works from the past three decades. West emphasizes the human body as a key component in his art. His notions of the grotesque, as well as his wickedly subversive humour, have created new perspectives on sculpture at the turn of the 21st century. Despite his recognition in Europe, Franz West is not as well known in North America and this is a rare opportunity to view the first major exhibition of his work in Canada.

Franz West is a renowned Austrian artist who lives and works in Vienna. He has exhibited worldwide since the mid-1970s. He has contributed work to Documenta IX and X, the Venice Biennale and Skulptur Projekte Münster. He has had solo exhibitions of his work at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; the Renaissance Society, Chicago; the Kunsthalle, Basel. West's art emerges out of the history of Viennese Actionism, an art movement in the 1960s in which Austrian performance artists made theatrical and violent actions intended to offer a cathartic shock to the conservative, post-war citizens of Austria. Franz West was heavily influenced by this movement and in turn his work has influenced a younger generation of artists.

The exhibition examines three closely related aspects of his work – *Adaptives*, sculpture and furniture. West's *Adaptives* are presented in a variety of contexts and visitors are invited to handle and pose with them. The viewer plays an integral role in activating the work. On many occasions West has described the interaction between the viewer and the *Adaptives* as a fulfilling gesture that brings meaning to both; "Without this active reception, the work would remain somehow wanting, unfulfilled, without this loving gesture whose theatricality, boldness, or elegance you will modulate at your own discretion – it would remain the equivalent of a lack. So go ahead and grab. No stranger's eye is spying on you." West's sculptures range widely in size but are consistent in their form – grotesquely formed lumps of paper maché, plaster or pieced metal. West's work is a parody of traditional sculpture and either sits directly on the floor or balances precariously on a readymade plinth. West's furniture is strategically placed in the Gallery and is intended to reorient the viewer's perception of other works and create an awareness of their actions as viewers.

The exhibition is one of four exhibitions on display this summer in the *Body Slam* suite, an international convergence of recent contemporary work focusing on the human form. Comprising works by artists from Austria, France, the UK and Vancouver, *Body Slam* explores the human condition through the mediums of sculpture, photography and video. *Body Slam* is being presented in juxtaposition with an exhibition of historical works by the legendary sculptor Rodin, providing visitors with a unique opportunity to explore the human body in all its many dimensions.

- 2 -

All media are welcome to attend the opening celebration at 7pm on Friday, June 24, 2005.

Media contacts:

Sue Lavitt, Communications, Vancouver Art Gallery, 604 662 4700, x309

Julie-Ann Backhouse, Communications Specialist, Vancouver Art Gallery, 604 662 4722

- end -

The Vancouver Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, the Government of Canada through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Program and the Greater Vancouver Regional District.