

Franz West

(Vienna, 1947 - 2012)

West studied and began to devote himself to art in Vienna during the period of the *Aktionismus* movement, but he soon denounced the hermeticism and even the social hypocrisy that characterized its internal dynamics. He turned his interest, instead, to sculpture, but not understood in the traditional, inviolate sense of the work's formal completeness. His works, beginning with the *Adaptives* series, truly come into being when they are used, and thus brought to life by the viewer. Art, for West, principally has a value of use. It must be touched and activated, and this is the primary reason why the artist entrusts his pictorial and graphic production with a parallel role, connoted above all by irony and social commentary, to his sculptural works, whose three-dimensionality, occupying the space of the real world, seeks to annul the presumed ontological difference of the art object. Even the surfaces of the largest sculptures, developed as juxtapositions and superimpositions of metal patches, only serve to weaken the presumed formal absoluteness that art history attempts to recognize in masterpieces.

Untitled, 2003, belongs, instead, to the artist's two-dimensional production, for which the term "production" is, indeed, not out of place. West relates that initially he personally painted his geometric motifs on the canvas, but he realized that in some way this made him unsure about the quality of the painting, since he often found himself being critical of his creative abilities. Entrusting production to others allowed him to make the works stable. Contemporary art of the last half century has divested the idea of art of any need for the artist to materially execute the work, but it is still somewhat unusual to apply this "conceptual" process to painting. West has frequently called upon not only technicians and artisans, but also other artists, to create part of his works. This process is fully realized in the *Bilderwänden (Constellations)*, where he composes walls of works by others. Here, West's signature, which often appears at the center of the work, as in his collages, or as a geometric motif, as in *Untitled* is the ironic sign of the progressive shattering of the authorial approach to art seen in his work. (EV)