



Erwin Wurm – Two Head-Foot Figures for Hotel Sacher Vienna

For 150 years, the famous façade of the Sacher remained unscathed: until now. Two peculiar figures – familiar strangers – have taken hold of the dignity of the house, defying its etiquette much like Maestro Karajan once did when he attempted to dine here without the required tie.

As surprising as it is rich in art historical references, Austria's most prominent sculptor, Erwin Wurm, has created two monumental sculptures that occupy the very portal which has welcomed so many distinguished figures from culture, politics, and business: a precious lady's bag and a serious gentleman's briefcase crown five-metre-long slender legs, performing a whimsical ballet in front of this storied establishment.

They are descendants of that archetypal depiction of the human figure we know from childhood: the "head-foot" figure, that elemental form from early children's drawings in which head and body merge into one, from which the legs emerge directly.

This visual form also has a long art historical lineage. We encounter such bizarre hybrid beings as early as the grotesque imagery of late medieval illustrations, on Gothic cathedrals, or in the monstrous creations of Hieronymus Bosch – figures whose bodily order has come undone. In the art of psychiatric patients, too, the head-foot figure appears as an expression of a simplified, existential representation of the human being: a creature composed of head and upright movement. From the earliest cave drawings and idols to android toy robots, the head-foot figure has always pointed to the very birth of the human image.

Erwin Wurm takes up this tradition and translates it into the language of our time. The dominant presence of the seat of the mind is replaced by those objects that shape our modern lives and identities: bags, accessories, lightweight symbols of status. These comical figures with their rubber-like legs form a parable of the age of consumption. The head – the seat of consciousness, memory, experience, identity – has disappeared, displaced by the symbol of a world in which consumption and status have assumed the role of thought. This "homo consumens" becomes the emblematic figure of a society in which human beings increasingly define themselves through objects. "You are what your accessory represents."

This absurd pair – seemingly sprung from a cartoon – occupies precisely that section of the façade which, for centuries, was reserved for the insignia of authoritative architecture such as columns, caryatids, or atlantes. Armed with their bags and ready to take in all that the world has to offer, this grotesque duo leaves its noble domicile to step out into the city that awaits them; or to return to their refined refuge after the adventure of urban exploration.

Who are these two? Are they merely anonymous symbolic figures of the guests who pass through the welcoming portal each day? Or do we recognise, in the delicate decisive and hesitant step of the lady's handbag, the equally elegant and dynamic Alexandra Winkler? Together with her brother Georg Gürtler, she is the owner of the Sacher Hotels, and thus the embodiment of hospitality and a culture of welcome.



And does the serious, masculine briefcase, poised on its exuberantly leaping legs, not bear the title “Dancer” by chance, and represent her brother?

Perhaps. In any case, what unfolds here before the Sacher’s portal is an enchanting theatre of anthropomorphized objects. In contrast to the immobile caryatids and the rigid statics of the grand columns, these offspring of our present age perform an elegant and comical, monumental and playful ballet, one in which we cannot say whether the legs are taking the bags for a walk – or the bags are taking their legs out.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Schröder', written in a cursive style.

Prof. Dr. Klaus Albrecht Schröder

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