

JOCHEN GERZ

THE WALK – NO RETROSPECTIVE

23 September 2018 to 5 May 2019

The Lehmbruck Museum Duisburg will not host a retrospective by Jochen Gerz from 23 September 2018. This exhibition is neither an exhibition nor will it take place inside the museum: THE WALK, a 100-metre path, takes visitors along the iconic glass front of the museum, where they can read a text that interweaves the artist's life and works with eight decades of contemporary history. A look back, an unusual look from the outside at the museum and its influence on the city, and a look forward towards the future of art and civil society. The text transforms the museum into a giant book: each pane of the seven-metre-high glass front becomes a column in an exemplary narrative. The biography becomes a reference to the world – and to the view from outside.

This is Jochen Gerz's first museum show in 15 years. Gerz is one of a number of artists who, since the beginning of modernity, have condemned museum practice and eschewed the commercial dictates of the art world. The Duisburg exhibition was preceded by two years of intense discussion, doubt and self-doubt. Gerz comments: "It's always the first exhibition." According to the artist's catalogue raisonné, this is his 170th solo show. The museum's invitation to organise a retrospective turned into a commission to produce a work for public space. THE WALK is not a retrospective. Not a single work will be displayed in the original. Instead, as part of the show's preparation, the e_Catalogue Raisonné was produced, which makes Gerz's complete works accessible online from everywhere and at any time.

"There can be no doubt that Jochen Gerz is one of the strongest communicators among the artists of our country," says Sören Link, Lord Mayor of the City of Duisburg. "He creates intelligent and strikingly simple combinations of "new" digital and "old" analogue media and is one of the strongest artistic advocates for democratic basic rights." Thomas Krützberg, Head of the Cultural Department of the city, adds: "It's a great achievement that an important part of the artwork – the footnotes to the text displayed on the museum facade – will be published in an important daily newspaper with a circulation of 300,000. It's an amazing opportunity, not just for the paper, but also for the Lehmbruck Museum, to be able to address such a large audience."

THE WALK's central theme are eight decades of contemporaneity, linking personal experience and contemporary history. One aspect of the exhibition, which starts with the war, are migration and mobility. The artist and the museum have invited people who fled from wars in their home countries to act as mediators between his artwork and the audience at the museum. Museum director Dr. Söke Dinkla and the whole team consider this "a tremendous opportunity to collaborate with young people who were forced to flee from their home countries, which will enable them to learn from us and us to learn from them. Work has already started and it's wonderfully enriching to be able to make a contribution to our future co-existence."

THE WALK describes a path – the artist's as well as the visitor's – through turbulent times: the war, the 1950s "stone age" of the Federal Republic of Germany, the birth of civil society in the 1960s, the topos of memory in the 1970s, the technological invasions of everyday life, the discovery of sustainability and Europe's increasingly unstable perspective from the 1980s and 1990s to the

present day. Someone narrates his life, is the author of this story, and at the same time asks: how do you experience this time? Is this your story? How do you imagine our future? Authorship means contemporaneity. If you want to see yourself in the world you must become its author. THE WALK is a shared path, even though each of us walks it alone.

Jochen Gerz (*1940) is certainly one of the most radical internationally renowned artists of his generation. He spent his youth in the Rhineland, where he laid the foundations for an unusual shift from literary to artistic creation. THE WALK completes a circle which began at the Lehmbruck Museum in 1975 – one year before he represented, along with Joseph Beuys and Rainer Ruthenbeck, Germany at the 37th Venice Biennale – with a first comprehensive show of his works. Even at the time, he closely examined the institution of the museum. Gerz has consistently questioned the purpose of art – including his own.

For the German artist who has lived abroad since 1958, the public is the result of social creativity: a work authored by all of us – and not just by the “happy few”, as opposed to those who consume or are governed. In consequence, Gerz has returned to the street again and again. The social role of authorship is central to his work, from his photo/texts, performances and installations to the counter-monuments, memorial works which have sparked international discussions for decades, through to the authorship projects in which thousands of individuals in many countries have participated over the years. For Jochen Gerz, the “emancipation of the viewer” is not a utopia but a question of the responsibility of art for democracy.

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