

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
May 1990

PROJECTS: FRANZ GERTSCH

May 12 - June 26, 1990

An exhibition of monumental prints by Swiss artist Franz Gertsch opens at The Museum of Modern Art on May 12 and continues through June 26, 1990.

Organized by the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, PROJECTS: FRANZ GERTSCH includes nine portraits and one landscape. Executed with extraordinary technical skill, these giant works confront viewers at just below eye level. Shown together, they create an environment where the faces seem to observe their observers.

"In this uncanny way," writes Riva Castleman, director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, "Gertsch transforms the meaning of print by putting his viewers in the space of the print itself, held captive there by these enigmatic faces."

A photorealist since 1969, Gertsch has concentrated exclusively over the past four years on creating oversize wood engravings that represent people in larger-than-human scale. These ultrarealistic images are rendered in an unrealistic monochrome. The artist employs the oldest printmaking technique—relief printing; however, contemporary photographic blow-ups and close-ups influence both the dimension and focussed intensity of the works.

Gertsch projects slides of models onto eight-foot-long blocks of split planks of aged wood. He then cuts the blocks with tiny gouges, picking out his composition small areas at a time. The finished blocks are covered with dense webs of tiny pits and disclose the subject within the granular field of

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the uncut, inked surface when printed. Two or three blocks are printed to achieve a monochromatic impression of each portrait. The main block provides the strongest color, a second is a lighter tone to give it depth, and a third outlines the shape. Because every example within the editions is printed in different colors, the uniformly expressionless faces are considerably transformed.

Born in 1930 in Bern, Switzerland, Franz Gertsch enrolled in Max von Muhlenen's painting school at age seventeen and had his first solo exhibition two years later. In the early 1960s Gertsch was making pop art pictures. By 1969 he began making photorealistic works and by 1970 was painting family scenes and portraits of groups of friends. His work continued to become more focussed on individuals, tightly framed, in single or double portraits. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gertsch traveled widely throughout Europe, the United States, and Japan. His work was included in the 1978 Venice Biennale. After experimenting with various woodcutting techniques in 1986, Gertsch began to devote all his working time to making prints. He lives and works in Ruschegg, Switzerland.

This exhibition is supported by Art Promotion Services Ltd., Skibbereen, Ireland; Möbeltransport AG, Zurich, Switzerland; Schott Schleifer AG, Muttenz/Basel, Switzerland; and Perimeter Gallery, Chicago.

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