URS FISCHER
THE WORLD WAS ALWAYS ENDING
16.10 – 27.11.2026

Carl Kostyál is pleased to present 'THE WORLD WAS ALWAYS ENDING' by Urs Fischer, the artist's first exhibition with the gallery at Hospitalet in Stockholm. Comprising forty-three new sculptures, the exhibition marks Fischer's first solo presentation in Scandinavia and the unveiling of 'Flower Guy', his first public sculpture in the region, now permanently installed in the Hospitalet Sculpture Park.

Across the bay from Hospitalet, in the gardens of Moderna Museet, stand Picasso's vast concrete reliefs that emerged from his long preoccupation with Edouard Manet's controversial 1863 painting 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe'. Cast by Norwegian artist Carl Nesjar from Picasso's cardboard cutout models, they are a poetic testament to his dialogue as much with the history of painting as with that work, the result of a sustained encounter with the gaze, the body and the space between them. Their sculpted forms are animated and improbably defined by drawn lines on the concrete surface. They are both sculptures and drawings at the same time. The incongruity of the apparently hastily executed sketch being writ large on concrete, to be preserved in perpetuity, is the friction that profoundly informs both Urs Fischer's new permanent sculpture and this exhibition.

Always sensitive to context – the immediate physical space a work will sit in – as well as the cultural legacy of a place, Fischer has taken the baton and added to the conversation. In the Baroque gardens of the Hospitalet Sculpture Park kneels 'Flower Guy', a gentle figure, inclining as he tends a flower, a secular St Francis perhaps – though the title is comically casual and non-specific. No grandiose claims to artistic legacy here, its scale notwithstanding. Cats prowl, leap and frolic mischievously around him and he lets them. With the exception of three, they are black. Their eyes light up at night. Are they Macavity or Poe's black cat? Benign or malignant? Portents of good luck or bad? Or all of the above? Fischer leaves you to wonder. The simplicity of the work and its staging deliberately belies the complexity of its structure – the mechanics of the support and lighting are deftly hidden underground. The cartoonish figure is drawn out on the concrete surface. This too is both sculptural object and drawing, and a work that deliberately makes no claims to be eternal.

It feels as if the artist has wandered into art history and made himself at home. For Fischer, Picasso's work is part of the entire kaleidoscope of image making that began with cave paintings. He sees no neat, continuous narrative in art, no force that compels it to evolve in linear fashion, but rather an endlessly fascinating whole that allows an artist to jump in and be part of the story, looking back, looking forward and looking around, at the present.

For Fischer, the artists of the past register as if looking through a rearview mirror. Leonardo, Michelangelo, Giambologna, Picasso – these titans can finally be fully understood, their proximity to us determined by our curiosity, rather than by chronology. Freed from any single occasion of meaning, their work has the possibility of entering other lives and other times. Historical context remains important, but it cannot exhaust what an object may become for those who encounter it. Fischer's intervention here refuses the solemnity of succession. These two works now share a landscape and their conversation across the water has the informality of neighbours whose acquaintance need never become agreement.

In 'THE WORLD WAS ALWAYS ENDING', the artist refreshingly punctures the conceit that our moment is uniquely terminal. The knowing intent of the title instead takes the sense of the impending apocalypse as an enduring condition of making art. Occupying the light-filled, double height exhibition space, formerly the church which stood at the centre of this former mental asylum built on the instruction of King Gustav Vasa, the space is full of drawings – standing upright, glowing, crowding the space in companionable indifference to one another. A figure bends next to its pale Peter Pan shadow, one plays idly with a yo-yo, in another, a ghost peers around a newspaper balanced on a pole skewered into a found tyre. Cartoon-like ghosts and wistful, melancholic, and contemplative gestures and shadows proliferate, alongside more unsettling renderings of one body dominating another. Swedish titles abound, 'Näcken', the spirit that lures people to water, 'Odåga' – good for nothing, 'Skuggad' – shadowed, 'Den Onåbare' – the unreachable one, 'Höstrusk' – autumn gloom, infusing the scene with local folklore, memory and seasonal melancholy. Many stand on found bases, a nod to the artist's love of the honesty of the Arte Povera movement, where artists embraced the humble, impermanent and elemental in order to reconnect art with life and material reality.

Their theatrical scale is as wayward as their company. A small figure can hold the room, while a monumental body almost vanishes seen side-on. Fischer's fascination with drawing and its metamorphosis into physical object, without losing the spontaneity of the hand's gesture and the play on what he terms the topography of scale, are the twin tensions that drive this exhibition. In a nod to Jonathan Borofsky's immersive, anti-hierarchical exhibition installations of the 1970s, where he treated a room not as a place to display individual works, but as a singular, interconnected web that reflected the continuous activity of his subconscious and conscious mind, Fischer has treated the entirety of the gallery as if it were a drawing itself. Its marks are encountered by walking among the figures and objects that surround it, many of whom nod to Hospitalet's disturbing past. Strindberg's 'The Occult Diary', cited by the artist as having a potent impact on him, may have a particular resonance here. In the proto-conceptual work, the author, through observation, chance and material traces, finds hidden meaning and links between everyday events, dreams and natural phenomena. Similarly, in Fischer's forest of drawing/sculptures, relationships emerge that no single viewpoint can hold – chance and meaning shift as you move through them. Suspended between image and object, they linger like fragments of a forgotten dream (or nightmare), vivid and familiar, their story just beyond recall.

There is often the temptation to contextualise and classify art, slotting a new body of work neatly into the artist's larger oeuvre and ascribing meaning in intellectual terms. Fischer distrusts this instinct, believing art to have been hijacked by the insistence that it must first be approached cerebrally. He feels its capacity to be something much bigger is diminished in the process. He is equally dismissive of art's politicisation, which he regards as a delusion. Making art interests him as a way of taking a paradigm apart and reconstructing it, finding how to broaden it without throwing everything out. Most of all, he thinks about how he can have fun with it, preferring to wrestle with the technicalities of giving his ideas form in his studio, rather than farming it out to a foundry to realise.

For more than three decades, Fischer has repeatedly tested how much an image can change without losing the gesture that brought it into being. In his earlier work, a fist-sized lump of clay became a forty-foot aluminium monolith, its casually worked surface preserved as though a giant had squeezed it into shape. At the Venice Biennale in 2011, his wax replica of Giambologna's 'The Rape of the Sabine Women' subjected this iconic sculptural composition to the slow undoing of a flame, a colossus of art history poetically melting humbly away over time. Enlargement and dissolution pull in opposite directions throughout his long practice, yet both loosen the apparent finality of form. The drawing/sculptures at Hospitalet bring this inquiry back to the sketch: writ large or small, given weight, light and a place to stand, the passing mark retains something of the hand's freedom. What fascinates Fischer is how far it can travel into sculpture and still feel as though it has only just been drawn. He allows these drawing/sculptures to occupy the physical world without surrendering their identity as drawings, becoming thick enough to stand, strong enough to survive and complex enough to illuminate themselves, while retaining the instability and immediacy of marks on a page.

– Katharine Kostyál

Urs Fischer (b. 1973, Zurich, Switzerland) lives and works in Los Angeles.

He has exhibited widely internationally over the past thirty years. Solo exhibitions of Fischer's work include Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2022); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2013); Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2012); New Museum, New York (2009) and Kunsthaus Zürich (2004). He participated in the Venice Biennale in 2003, 2007 and 2011. In 2021, his installation 'Untitled' was presented at the Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris, for the museum's inauguration.

Public sculpture presentations and site-specific installations include 'Dance', Villa Medici, Rome (2025); 'Wave', Place Vendôme, Paris (2023); 'The Lovers #2', Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2022); 'Untitled', Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris (2021); 'Big Clay #4', Piazza della Signoria, Florence (2017) and 'Bad Timing, Lamb Chop!', Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2009).

Fischer's work is held in collections including the MoMA, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Pinault Collection, Paris; Kunstmuseum Basel and Colección Jumex, Mexico City.