

Paweł Althamer

The Neighbors

For over twenty years, Paweł Althamer (b. 1967 Warsaw, Poland) has been dedicated to joining sculptural representation with social engagement. Althamer is committed to the principle that art can be used to better understand our physical, psychological, and political position in the world. Through this conviction, figurative sculpture has become a distinctly social medium for the Polish artist, and his sculptures often take the form of surreal portraits of himself, family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. Althamer also frequently uses the occasion of his exhibitions to bring together various communities, treating interpersonal social hierarchies and public space as materials that can be manipulated and transformed.

Althamer studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (1988–93) under legendary professor Grzegorz Kowalski. During his studies, he gravitated toward both sculpture and performance as mediums that provide the greatest communicative potential. Since graduating, Althamer has collaborated with other artists, with his neighbors in Warsaw, and with individuals as well as groups who often occupy a marginalized position in society. “Paweł Althamer: The Neighbors” is the largest survey of Althamer’s work to date and provides the first opportunity to examine the ways in which his disparate projects engage personal relationships and social forces. In addition to a selection of key works, the exhibition has been activated by Althamer through a number of interventions that incorporate different communities as well as exhibition viewers. These include a rotating line-up of over fifty street musicians performing in front of the Museum, with their music broadcast into the Third Floor gallery, and the artist and his collaborators operating a sculptural workshop, creating works specific to his experience in New York during the exhibition. Furthermore, Althamer has initiated a coat drive in support of the Bowery Mission, a neighboring institution serving the homeless and hungry since 1879. By donating a new or gently used men’s coat, visitors will receive free admission to the New Museum.

This floor of the exhibition features the first US presentation of Althamer’s *Draftsmen’s Congress*. The piece originally took place in 2012 at the 7th Berlin Biennial, where it was presented in a deconsecrated church. Subsequently, the installation was staged in Eisenhüttenstadt, a small town in Eastern Germany, and was later realized in Kiev and Rome. Visitors and groups from a variety of social and political arenas are invited to paint and draw on the walls of the exhibition space, creating a singular choral portrait of disparate individuals, communities, and associations. At the end of the exhibition, the installation will be dismantled into small sections and distributed to the public and participants. *Draftsmen’s Congress* provides an opportunity for diverse parts of society to collectively represent themselves and create an image of cooperation, dialogue, and debate.

“Paweł Althamer: The Neighbors” is curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Associate Director and Director of Exhibitions, and Gary Carrion-Murayari, Curator.

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