

# GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



Opening on February 29

**Richard Artschwager**

## *Richard Artschwager*

- Dates: 29 February – 10 May, 2020
  - Curators: Germano Celant, curator, and Manuel Cirauqui, curator of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
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- Halfway between painting and sculpture, Artschwager develops a unique language using the new domestic materials of his time, always working toward the fusion of figuration and abstraction, artistic innovation and design, and ironically seeks to combine the functional and the useless.
  - Designed as an open labyrinth, the exhibition features a comprehensive selection of paintings and sculptures dating from the early 1960s to the first decade of this century.
  - Artschwager represents places, scenes from everyday life, and common objects such as tables, chairs, and dressers, interpreting them in ordinary, standardized industrial materials such as Formica, Celotex, acrylic paint, and rubberized horsehair.
  - Artschwager's work continually questions appearance and essence, offering us a delicate and realistic, humorous yet monumental interpretation of the world.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents the exhibition *Richard Artschwager*, a unique occasion to survey the creative career of Richard Artschwager (Washington, D.C., 1923 – Albany, New York, 2013), an artist who worked halfway between painting and sculpture and who developed a unique language using the new domestic materials of his time. This ambitious project, conceived by world-renowned curator Germano Celant and co-organized by the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and MART – Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, comprises some 80 pieces alongside a selection of rarely-seen archival documentation.

Designed as an open labyrinth highlighting the main nuclei of Artschwager's oeuvre, the exhibition features a comprehensive selection of paintings and sculptures dating from the early 1960s to the first decade of the 21st century: from his first wood and Formica structures and paintings on Celotex to his nylon-bristle sculptures and "corner pieces," including works in horsehair and so-called *b/ps*, which the artist began making in 1968 and displaying individually or on a citywide scale.

Artschwager, who had a crucial experience as a cabinetmaker at the beginning of his career, always worked toward the fusion of figuration and abstraction, artistic innovation and design, and ironically sought to combine the functional and the useless.

With the paintings and sculptures of a long and varied career, Artschwager plots a distinctive course between handcraft and industrialization, encompassing space as well as the objects and beings that inhabit it. He represented places, scenes from everyday life, and common objects such as tables, chairs, and dressers, interpreting them in ordinary, standardized industrial materials such as Formica, Celotex, acrylic

paint, and rubberized horsehair. He also explored pure geometric form, particularly in his sculptures, venturing into abstraction and solid figures evoking a sense of pictorial illusionism.

Stylistically, Artschwager purposely maintained a characteristic ambivalence, challenging the iconographic dogmatism of tendencies (like Pop Art and Minimal Art) that claimed to be antithetical. Rather than allowing any conflict between schools, he practiced a synthesis that included all the elements, however different, and held them together. "What interests me, he declared, is above all the line of demarcation between ordinary things and the ones we recognize as objects of art."

Artschwager's work continually questions appearance and essence, venturing into the realms of ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics with wit and intelligence. It offers us a delicate and realistic, humorous yet monumental interpretation of the world.

### **About the artist**

Richard Artschwager was born in 1923 in Washington D.C., and died in 2013 in Albany, New York. After receiving a BA in 1948 from Cornell University, New York, he studied under Amédée Ozenfant, one of the pioneers of abstraction. In the early 1950s, Artschwager became involved in cabinetmaking, producing simple pieces of furniture. After a ruinous workshop fire at the end of the decade, he began making sculpture using leftover industrial materials; then expanded into painting, drawing, site-specific installation, and photo-based work.

Artschwager forged a unique path in art from the early 1950s through the early 21st century, making the visual comprehension of space and the everyday objects that occupy it strangely unfamiliar. In his work, both pictorial and sculptural, an anonymous sheet of walnut-patterned Formica is both itself and a depiction of a wooden plane; a table or a chair is furniture, sculpture, and image all at once; and a painting or a sculpture can be a "multi-picture" or "three-dimensional still life". Artschwager foregrounded the structures of perception, striving to conflate the world of images—which can be apprehended but not physically grasped—and the world of objects, the same space that we ourselves occupy.

Artschwager's first exhibition took place at the Art Directions Gallery, New York, in 1959; and was followed by the first of many solo exhibitions with Leo Castelli in 1965. Solo exhibitions include *Up and Across*, Neues Museum, Nuremberg, Germany (2001); Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna (2002); Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2003); *Painting Then and Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami (2003); *Up and Down/Back and Forth*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2003); *Richard Artschwager!*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2012).

### **DIDAKTIKA**

As part of the Didaktika project, sponsored by BBK, the public can find information on Richard Artschwager's career and the context of his work from the early 1950s through the first decade of the 21st century in the 'Did you know...?' section of the exhibition page on the Museum's website.

In addition, the following activities have been organized in connection with the exhibition:

### **Conversation with Germano Celant on Richard Artschwager** (February 26)

Germano Celant, curator of the exhibition and an international figure of contemporary art as a historian, theorist and exhibition curator, will talk with Manuel Cirauqui, curator of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, on the importance and uniqueness of this Richard Artschwager's work.

### **Shared Reflections**

Unique tours led by members of the Museum's Curatorial and Education Departments, offering different perspectives on the content of this new exhibition:

- Curatorial View (March 11)

Manuel Cirauqui, Curator of the Museum, will lead a visit through the main works of the exhibition.

- Key Concepts (March 25)

Luz Maguregui, Education Coordinator at the Museum, will engage visitors in a dialogue on the main aspects of Artschwager's work.

\*Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre

### **Screening of *Shut up and Look*** (March 20)

This documentary, directed by Maryte Kavaliauskas and produced together with Morning Slayter, looks at the many-faceted career of Richard Artschwager through his own words, often humorous, to reveal his unique creative philosophy.

### **Cover image:**

Richard Artschwager

*Door }*, 1983-84

Acrylic and lacquer on wood and glass, metal, two parts

207.6 x 165.1 x 24.8 cm

Collection Kerstin Hiller and Helmut Schmelzer, on loan to Neues Museum Nürnberg

Photo: Annette Kradisch

© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020

### **For more information:**

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All the information on the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at [www.guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es) (Press Room).

Press images  
*Richard Artschwager*  
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

**Online press image service**

In the press area of the Museum's website ([prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es)), you may register to download high-resolution images and videos of both the exhibitions and the building. If you do not yet have an account, you can register and download the material you need. If you are already a user, enter your username and password and you can access images directly.

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For more information, you can get in touch with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao press area at tel. +34 944 359 008 or email [media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus](mailto:media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus)

Richard Artschwager  
*Table and Chair*, 1963-64  
Melamine and wood  
755 x 1320 x 952 mm  
Object: 1143 x 438 x 533 mm  
Tate: Purchased 1983  
Photo: Tate  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Apartment House*, 1964  
Liquitex, Celotex, Formica  
177 x 126.5 x 16 cm  
Museum Ludwig, Köln  
Donation Collection Ludwig, 1976  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Fabrikhalle*, 1969  
Acrylic paint on drywall and chipboard, HPL  
73.30 x 92.60 x 7 cm  
Museum Ulm – Stiftung Sammlung Kurt Fried  
Photo: Armin Buhl  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Tower III (Confessional)*, 1980  
Formica and oak  
152.5 x 119 x 81.1 cm  
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, permanent loan to the Öffentliche  
Kunstsammlung Basel  
Photo: Bisig & Bayer, Basel  
Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Two Point Perspective*, 1994  
Acrylic on Celotex, Formica on wood, acrylic on wood  
136 x 139 x 5 cm  
Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Heinz and Marianne Ebers-Stiftung  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Door }*, 1983-84  
Acrylic and lacquer on wood and glass, metal, two parts  
207.6 x 165.1 x 24.8 cm  
Collection Kerstin Hiller and Helmut Schmelzer, on loan to Neues Museum  
Nürnberg  
Photo: Annette Kradisch  
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Richard Artschwager  
*Search for Tomorrow*, 2004  
Acrylic and fiber panel on artist's frame  
120.6 x 189.2 cm  
Private collection  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Exclamation Point*, 2010  
Plastic bristles on a mahogany core painted with latex  
165.1 x 55.9 x 55.9 cm  
Private collection  
Courtesy Gallery Xavier Hufkens, Brussels  
Photo: Allan Bovenberg  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Standing woman (Dirne)*, 1999  
Acrylic, rubberized hair on Masonite  
213.4 x 114.3 x 6.4 cm  
Private collection, Vienna  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*City of Man*, 1981  
Acrylic and charcoal on Celotex and plastic laminate with plexiglass  
197.5 x 458 x 13.3 cm  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Promised gift of Emily Fisher Landau  
P.2010.17.a-c  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager  
*Portrait Zero*, 1961  
Wood, screws, and rope  
114.9 x 68.7 x 14 cm  
Sammlung Michalke, Germany  
© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager

*Weave (Green)*, 1991

Acrylic and Celotex on panel

171.2 x 131 x 9 cm

Courtesy Galleria Alfonso Artiaco, Napoli

Photo: Luciano Romano

© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager

*Table Prepared in the Presence of Enemies II*, 1992

Wood, metal, screws and Formica

The SYZ Collection, Switzerland

© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager

*Splatter Table*, 1992

Laminate, wood, aluminum

Variable dimensions

Collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst Ghent

© Estate of Richard Artschwager, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2020



Richard Artschwager

*This Way - That Way*, 2012

Acrylic on handmade paper on soundboard

130 x 116.8 cm

Augustus and Clara Artschwager Collection, Courtesy of Gagolian

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