

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

BOOKS DIETER ROTH BJÖRN ROTH STUDIO

Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street
27 April – 29 July 2017
Opening reception: Thursday 27 April, 6 – 8 pm



New York NY... Beginning 27 April, Hauser & Wirth will present an exhibition offering rare insights into the central role that books played in the remarkably diverse artistic practice of legendary German-born Swiss artist Dieter Roth (1930 – 1998).

Fueled by artistic restlessness, Roth's wildly experimental approach to drawing, printing, and book making eventually found its way into ambitious large-scale sculptural installations, many conceived and executed in collaboration with his son Björn Roth. The exhibition at Hauser & Wirth presents 'The Studio of Dieter and Björn Roth, Ackermannshof, Basel' (1995 – 2008), an installation of the actual studio in Basel, Switzerland, shared by the father and son artmaking team, that includes furniture, books, and an array of personal items reflecting not just the Roths' practice but a defining philosophy in which art and daily life are indivisible. In seeking to pulverize traditional boundaries, Dieter Roth elevated the processes by which things happen, embracing accidents, mutations, and accretions of detail over time. Hence the second major installation project 'Flacher Abfall (Flat Waste)' (1975 – 1976/1992) comprises commercial packaging, printed paper material and other daily studio detritus that highlights the banality of the everyday, filed in plastic sleeves in over 600 binders.

'Books. Dieter Roth. Björn Roth. Studio', curated by Björn Roth, will be on view at Hauser & Wirth's 22nd Street space through 29 July 2017.

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Studio

For Roth the studio was not merely a locale, but also a concept of ultimate, central meaning. In this space, he defined a physical and intellectual territory in which to develop a wide-ranging, life-encompassing, unfettered body of work. 'The Studio of Dieter and Björn Roth, Ackermannschof, Basel' (1995 – 2008), a reinstatement of the artist's St. Johanns Vorstadt studio in Basel, is the embodiment of this imperative. Following Dieter's death, his son and long-time collaborator Björn decided to preserve the space where they had worked together from 1995. So, upon vacating the studio, Björn packed up and catalogued every single object – including furniture, books, pens, and personal items – to install as a work of art elsewhere. Through art, objects, and atmosphere, the studio is a living cosmos into which visitors become incorporated, enveloped in the active spirit of the artist. Björn Roth recalls, 'I don't think the word 'art' was ever used. The studio was inventory, and the works were material. 'Now we have to root around in the inventory,' he'd say when the time had come to work on something from our studios.'

The exhibition also includes a series of gestural paintings by Björn Roth, with intricate layers of translucent oil paint washed on top of photographs of the Studio. Presented alongside 'The Studio of Dieter and Björn Roth, Ackermannschof, Basel', they highlight the artistic legacy of Dieter Roth as it lives on in the continued evolution of his collaborative works and the creative practice of his son.

Flacher Abfall / Flat Waste

Not one to tolerate boundaries, Dieter Roth avidly collected the traces of everyday life to incorporate into his work, which in turn is replete with archival accumulation. His copious diaries reveal the synoptic graphic universe Roth inhabited and expanded. In the mid-1970s, he attempted to record a year of his life by collecting and preserving all items of daily detritus less than five mm thick. The resulting opus, 'Flacher Abfall / Flat Waste' (1975 – 1976), celebrates and subverts the ordering principle of a diary. Encased in over 600 binders that fill multiple bookshelves, things ordinarily discarded – such as old food wrappers, receipts, and other traces of daily activity – are carefully preserved. What began as assemblages of flat waste expanded into a monumental work, a combination of an autobiographical record and an environment in which the viewer is forced to confront the ephemeral nature of existence through exposure to the collection of garbage.

Books

From conception to production, Dieter Roth's artist's books are immensely rich and varied in both context and design. The range of his unrestrained experimentation is evident in an array of works on view, from the first abstract geometrical books of the early 1950s, to the book objects in the 1960s, to his Copy Books (first published in 1977), volumes of omnifarious photocopied materials, to his more intimate journals, which contain a handwritten surge of personal thoughts interspersed with linear drawings, doodles, and sketches. Roth's experimental drawings series expanded upon these amalgamations, many of which were then produced in editions or in book form.

Comprised of original handwritten texts fused with geometrical and figurative drawings, '246 little clouds' (1968), reprinted in 1976 as volume 17 of the Collected Works, was the first of Dieter Roth's poetry volumes published in English. Presented here for the first time, and shown alongside, are original scripts and handwritten instructions related to both versions.

Taking its title from James Joyce's short story 'A Little Cloud', Roth's Cloud series is a stunning expression of his deft and original approach to bookmaking. When his works were photographed for printing this volume, the artist instructed that each page be lit from the right, but that the light be moved sequentially for each page to yield an effect like the movement of the sun. Roth would often collaborate with other artists in order to subvert the principle of authorship and to annihilate categories and hierarchies in his work. His '246 little clouds' is introduced with a text by the American poet and visual artist Emmett Williams.

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About the Artists

Dieter Roth was born in Hannover, Germany, in 1930, relocated to Switzerland during the war, married, and moved to Iceland in 1957. He died in Basel, Switzerland, in 1998. Björn Roth was born in Reykjavik, Iceland in 1961. He began working closely with his father on painting, music, films, and publications as well as exhibiting in various galleries and museums.

Dieter Roth's art has been the subject of numerous international retrospectives including 'Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective', which travelled to Schaulager, Basel, Switzerland (2003), to Museum Moderne Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Cologne, Germany (2003), and Museum of Modern Art, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Centre, New York NY (2004). Recent solo exhibitions include; 'Dieter Roth and Björn Roth – Islands', Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, Italy (2013); 'Wait, Later This Will All Be Nothing: Dieter Roth Editions', MoMA Museum of Modern Art, New York NY (2013); 'Dieter Roth. Björn Roth', the inaugural exhibition at Hauser & Wirth New York, 18th Street (2013); 'And away with the minutes. Dieter Roth and Music', Kunsthaus Zug, Zug, Switzerland (2014) & Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany (2015); and 'Roth Bar & Studio. Dieter Roth, Björn Roth, Oddur Roth', Hauser & Wirth Zürich (2015); 'Dieter Roth: Schöne Scheiße. Dilettantische Meisterwerke (Dieter Roth: Shit Sublime. The Imperfect Masterpieces)', Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany (2016).

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Gallery hours:
Tuesday to Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm

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Dieter Roth / Björn Roth
The Studio of Dieter and Björn Roth, Ackermannshof,
Basel, 1995 – 2008
Mixed media installation; worktables, photographs,
various objects
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Dieter Roth
246 little clouds (details)
ca. 1976
Original handwritten manuscript and template
for Collected Works Vol 17; 171 pages, 3 pages
handwritten instructions
25.5 x 38 cm / 10 x 15 in