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Major press reports/Längere Presseartikel*Tagesanzeiger*, Zurich, 8.06.98**Painter-poet Roth has died**

Dieter Roth died unexpectedly last Friday evening in Basel at the age of 68. Switzerland has lost one of its most important artists. Although he never attained the popularity of a Tinguely, Roth was unquestionably one of the most innovative artists of his generation. He achieved international acclaim in the sixties when he began combining life and art in an enormous variety of ways.

— TA

Tagesanzeiger, Zurich, 8.06.98

An insomniac

Shortly after the opening of two acclaimed exhibitions in Zurich, Dieter Roth died last Friday in Basel at the age of 68. Switzerland has lost one of its most important artists.

— By Simon Maurer

“My aim is to be able to die without suffering.” Dieter Roth spoke these words to us just three weeks ago during a lengthy interview (TA from 20 May). Our question related in fact to his artistic production. He related it to life. He related it to his death. We can only hope he reached his aim.

Dieter Roth was born of a Swiss father and a German mother in 1930 in Hanover, and witnessed the Second World War in Germany. When he began his apprenticeship as a graphic artist in Basel after the war, he viewed himself as a “tough” who was ready to “punch anyone in the face” if he got annoyed.

Astonishingly enough, Roth’s first artistic works were constructivist and geometrical, evidently because he thought that “it would go down well in Switzerland” — an admission characteristic of Roth’s honesty. He discovered that his constructivist squares failed to get him anywhere, so he began “daubing.” That proved more helpful for him — but made artistic acclaim all the more difficult.

Collecting mania

The key feature of Roth’s creative production is the accumulative principle. The sheer volume produced by this work-happy artist, who spent his time alternating between Basel and Iceland, was without equal. He was unable to throw anything away because it all seemed to have been designed in some way or other. Even rubbish. He collected his paper waste in 300 folders and in 1976 declared the collected rubbish to be an artwork. He published up to twelve books a year, wrote in order to soothe himself, kept diaries in order “to reply to a whole cloud of sentences that keeps floating around you.” His installations likewise obeyed the principle of ordering and accumulating. This is shown most impressively in a side room of the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel, where the “Self Tower” and the “Lion Tower” — also works in progress — have been constructed: shelf upon shelf of chocolate lions

mouldering away. And probably the “Bar 2,” which for the last 6 months has been open once a week in the Fabrikstrasse, Zurich, most clearly demonstrates the “*gesamtkunstwerk*” character of Dieter Roth’s work: every beer bottle that is emptied there joins the others on the rows of shelves, to become part of the artwork. Every snatch of conversation is recorded and archived. Life and art were intimately linked for Dieter Roth. He even turned his sleep into art: in the 150 hours of video that makes up his “Solo Scenes” (1997/98). He built himself a wooden table so that when he was suffering from insomnia, he could sit on the edge of his bed and write: “Oh, if one need never take a nap and could always stay awake, and keep a permanent look-out for safety’s sake!” In the end, the need to leave something for posterity became increasingly great: “Fear of perishing speechlessly (without leaving at least a few words behind) and not reaching the paradise that belongs (or so I imagine) to those who are listened to after their deaths.” DR, we’re listening to you!

—

Comments on the Death of Dieter Roth

Ruthless

— by André Kamber

Innocuous people called him a bugbear of the middle class, spiteful people said that he was totally obnoxious, that he was insulting in every conceivable way and situation. He became the whipping boy of those who know all there is about art and artists. The media lapped up such assertions. And now these self-righteous, grabbing people have lost the chance to make up for their overhastiness, for their lack of artistic sensibility. Dieter Roth is dead.

If they had only had an open, sensible approach to D.R., guided by their feelings and a positive approach to art, they would have realised that when this artist grew abusive — and he could be abusive, obnoxious and brutal — it was out of protest. The protest of a highly intelligent, highly sensitive person against the disregard and abuse of art, not only his own.

Consequently D.R. made life hard for himself, which made him suffer and left its mark. He talks about this with ruthless honesty in his published diaries. He describes his fears of failure, of drying up artistically, admits to his shame at losing the battle against alcohol, and how physical weakness hinders his creativity. He

talks, too, of his loneliness.

Meeting D.R., and above all trying to win his friendship, was not easy; it followed a wavy line in which openness and affection alternated with brusqueness and refusal.

Once his trust had been gained, however, there emerged a person who accepted closeness and generously radiated warmth and sincerity.

Apart from his family and friends, D.R. has left behind a large number of younger artists who have taken his work and outlook as the stimulus for their own production. A lot has now to be done: the significance of D.R. for European art since the sixties is neither truly recognised, nor has it been fully described. His unflagging efforts for other artists — both idealistically and materially — have scarcely been brought to public awareness. We lack an overview of all the many aspects of his vast work. It is sad that he will no longer be around to help, for he had indicated his readiness to work on this project.

André Kamber was keeper of the Solothurn Kunstmuseum until the end of 1997.

Caption: Dieter Roth intimately linked his life and work.

Painter-Poet

— by Dieter Schwarz

Dieter Roth belonged to the German tradition of painter-poets that includes Klee and Schwitters, and that stretches back to the Romantics. He drew on literary forms to develop the classification systems that underlie his seemingly chaotic work: the placatory rhyme, the pictorial alphabet, cryptic irony.

During the last decade Roth professed to note down his life in sober fashion. A closer look reveals that the “reportage” of these diaries and photos was carefully staged: Roth wandered through the world like a play-actor. Self-disclosure was for him a literary role — which should on no account be taken literally. He used the means of self-presentation without falling prey to the error that he was genuinely confiding intimacies. He constantly adopted roles and played them with great virtuosity, such as the poet in his garret, as can be seen in his recent video scenes. Yet Roth never became so entangled in this game that he completely hid its deeper motivation.

I recall a conversation with Roth: “I came across the word redemption during a conversation with André Thomkins. We were talking about why he did all he did, why one keeps carrying on, keeps trying things out. Then I asked Thomkins: ‘Why do you think you keep starting again?’ And he replied: ‘I’m hoping for redemption.’”

Dieter Schwarz is director of the Kunstmuseum Winterthur.

Also in *Der Toggenburger*, 9.06.98

Literature first of all

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 8.06.98

As was announced by the artist's circle of friends late Sunday afternoon, Dieter Roth died unexpectedly on 5 June. Dieter Roth, born 1930 in Hanover as the son of a Swiss father and a German mother, grew up from 1943 in Switzerland and trained as a graphic artist. Since the early fifties, when a feeling of new departure swept through the arts, Roth successfully participated in almost every field of artistic experiment in his capacity as painter, drawer, sculptor, performer, poet and musician. Even his latest works, which currently can be seen in Galerie Hauser & Wirth in Zurich, make a fundamental contribution to the art of our times. Roth was not only one of the outstanding artistic personalities of his generation in Switzerland, his work is also of international importance. An obituary will appear in the Tuesday edition.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 8.06.98

We mourn the loss of

Dieter Roth

21. 4. 1930 — 5. 6. 1998

Björn Roth

Vera Roth

Karl Roth

Family and Friends

Basler Zeitung, 8.06.98

“Uglying down and disrousing”: on the death of the artist and writer Dieter Roth

The impossibility of life and the possibility of art

At times it looked as though the artist was drowning or suffocating in the swamp of his work. Those who knew him also knew what an excruciatingly strong relationship he had to art and life. “Pictures of downfall,” as he termed his meta-biographical pictures. Pictures of downfall because they gave him the feeling that something was passing away. As he explained it, he had a great fear of making anything that would endure. Dieter Roth never overcame his fears, but despite them he did achieve something lasting. The chocolate figures that are slowly vitrifying in the astonishing room beside the Museum für Gegenwartskunst have outlived the man who cast them. And no restorer will permit the maggots to grow fat on them. And Roth’s picture of downfall was never anything but the excruciatingly strong awareness of the vividness of downfall, of the impossibility of art catching up with life.

Every attempt to grasp his utterly incommensurable artistic practice in terms of logical developments, and demonstrate something like an organised structure or linear progression, is bound to miss the mark. The work, when viewed from an almost non-existent perspective along the passage of five decades, seems like a totally shapeless colossus — with poetic and artistic sections of equal stature, and countless graphic, sculptural, photographic, actionistic and diary-like chapters that interweave and interrelate. Nothing follows on from anything else, and never does the next page erase the last. The one *assemblage* is no richer, no more to the point, no more meaningful than the other. The most recent decomposition no finer than a fine growth of mould with a history. No one workshop proved truly superior. If he allowed anything to moulder or decay to nothingness, as Dieter Roth said in an interview, he would lose the mutual competition between the pictures themselves.

Each work was like a new beginning. Each points back to the one and the same primal impulse, to the Rothian primal scene, which can already be spotted in his beginnings as a writer and painter in the fifties. It has the dynamism of a person who is getting swept or carried away. A movement which the artist liked to describe as a downward curve. It is the direction of fate, from which his entire work gains its curiously flowing form, and to which it gives lucid expression.

Wear, tear

The compulsive nature of this work corresponds with a marvellous open-mindedness that clarifies and gives concrete form to even the most innocuous manifestation of his obsessive condition. Nothing characterises Dieter Roth’s work better than his unerring feeling for a certain “falling sickness,” for the fallibility of things, for the end of their fall into fallowness and downfall. A feeling for a disastrous downwards tendency that is simultaneously a fatal, unwavering tendency to undermine any semblance of growth, with its upwards bias. True, everything that falls, leaks out, retreats or dissolves also disappears. A vortex in which everything is accelerated to reach a final state of wear and tear. “Everything that drags the picture down is permitted because in fact it lifts the picture up,” as Dieter Roth once said of his aesthetic programme, which was intended to lead to experience and away from programmes. “What interests me are the things that go wrong, that go downhill, and how they nevertheless support the picture and make it strong.”

Strong pictures, strongly-made studio junk heaps. Crude piles set against the wall. Portions of catastrophes placed indoors. Colours looking as if all the pots and tubes had simultaneously vomited. A gaudy chaos that seems only to be hindered from running completely riot by violent artistic intervention and fixation. Cold jungles of stuff, lines and words. And in the midst of the jungle, suddenly a clear view, moments of bright, painful light open out: “Hey, you, there’s a pound of anxiety hanging here on the wall,” says one of the endless Roth-texts, before breaking off and instantly falling back into its endless, sensually non-conceptual raving.

Something to talk about, something to dream of.

Thinking back to the exhibitions and the meetings with the artist, it seems virtually impossible to separate the line extending through his work from that running through his life, and follow them individually. On closer inspection, they run parallel to one another without ever crossing, and yet, full of mutually determined reflections, they nevertheless converge. His system for personal survival is dependent on his pictures and texts, as Dieter Roth once admitted. The careless and fleeting, disgust, tiredness, the desire to run away, destruction, putting off and casting away, these were only possible for him, as he said, as something he talked about (i.e. writing) and dreamt of (i.e. making it visible).

Dissolution, loss of form

Thus writing and making pictures have a tangible reason and justification in Roth's life. And none of these things, which are saturated with experience and keep metastasising away, were ever linked to any mental and emotional space outside of Roth's own mental and emotional labyrinth. There is no form-giving relationship to any such thing as a world in his work. It appears, in its self-reflective motifs, to be cut off, self-imprisoned almost, in the windowless structure of his stream of consciousness.

There, where the line dissipates its energy in empty scrolls, where it gropes its way along as fine handwriting from one page of the calendar to the next — without ever really getting to the point in all the thoughts and feelings it produces — it tells of nothing but paralysis, dissolution and the loss of form.

Regardless whether the artist integrated food into his grotesque pieces and allowed it to rot, or abandoned his chocolate figures to the melting of time. Or whether he appeared to thwart any formal intentions in his installations, as in recent years. It was never a question of what fitted or what matched when he daubed, screwed and splashed away, but what would thwart even a semblance of pleasantry and disappoint any expectations concerning art.

People, nonsense

A life programme: “uglying down and disrousing.” In many ways denobilising the art work is one of the primary instincts of his work. Already his early “slosh and daub approach to painting” made it clear that the overall construction of the work was not going to be done with fine artistic manners. Even if Roth was clearly too sceptical to set much store by dadaist shocks. Instead, his attacks on beautiful appearances — he had begun after all as a concrete poet and constructivist — obeyed the basic fact of falling. Dieter Roth's bitter ironic treatment of the sublime was always aimed at the ways culture employs graveness in its attempt to gloss over the fundamental scandal of gravity, and thus to counter the downfallen with the lofty. He preferred to stay in the cupola of the cultural superstructure, from whence he let everything smacking of rapture and pathos tumble into bottomless laughter: “When life gets up off of its back, after taking a real hard fall, I give it an almighty whack, for I see the coming pitfall.”

Dieter Roth, born 1930 in Hanover, lived from the late forties in Switzerland — “but little D. was taken from this place of horror to a place referred to as Promised, also referred to as the Homeland, one of the many

cradles of what is called democracy — which for its part is not only referred to as the cradle of the righteous — which Roth was soon to recognise as a moral hell, even if he did not refer to it as such due to his lack of vocabulary, but rather as I no longer know what” — Dieter Roth accompanied, observed and spent himself in a life that was forever falling over and righting itself, and did so with astonishment and a rarely flagging, “hard-hitting” energy. He was forever having exhibitions, occasionally live performances; he had incredibly faithful friends who had a selfless commitment to him, especially in Basel. Yet his influence on the local art Swiss scene was negligible. Not many knew and scarcely anyone noticed that between manic phases of travel, he spent the larger part of his time in Basel, in his studio flat in the Hegenheimerstrasse.

“People,” writes Dieter Roth in his *Resumé of 50 Years of Life*, “people think that you could say that that's all nonsense, utter nonsense made up or got up to by night. People then say that's nonsense. Or people then say: this town has a centre that developed within a short while, at speed. People say that towns on rivers are nonsense. What's that supposed to say? That's supposed to say that there are towns that stretch along rivers or that are stretched along them, and people in towns often say nonsense, or they say: Nonsense!” — There was no curing this projection of inevitability. Heidegger would have called it “a forever-progressing-towards-deathness.” Dieter Roth did not put it that way. He has fled into the vanishing point, into a rotting natural product, into a molten casting, into a nonsense poem, into a dilapidated junk piece, into the pedantry of collecting, into the burgeoning archive — and every time he fled he had no illusions about whether he was fleeing or not. Now he has died in Basel.

— Hans-Joachim Müller

Berliner Zeitung, 9.06.98

A master of experimental irreverence

His target was the “degenerating art game”: on the death of the object maker Dieter Rot

— By Ingeborg Ruthe

Dieter Rot enjoyed making sarcastic comments, both verbal and written, about the uplifting, the beautiful and beautifying and harmonious side of art, which are still occasionally back in vogue among the critics and public of the late modern era. But above all he produced artworks in forms that amounted to increasingly frequent blows at good artistic taste. Rot's art became progressively “an experiment with life,” as he called it, and he enlarged his representations until they were 1:1 with reality. The more crassly he did this the more the art world took notice of him. He was never missing from a major exhibition, biennale or fair. The museums collected his works, in 1989 he received the coveted Lichtwark Prize, and recently the prize of the Art Multiple fair. The object maker, who was born in 1930 in Hanover, died of heart failure on Saturday at his home in Basel.

With his death, the large exhibitions of his work currently showing in Zurich and Vienna have suddenly become commemorative exhibitions for an unusually non-conformist artist. He is classed with the Fluxus movement, and is renowned as the author of cutting essays on art and such ribald poems as “On the damned shit...” Rot left behind a wide range of work that bubbled with originality and experimental irreverence. Born Roth, he dropped the “h” during the sixties so as to assimilate his name more or less programmatically to the colour red for emotionality.¹ At times he sought the extreme, at other times the pedagogic. A trained graphic artist, he experimented with oils, water colours, collage, drawing and print-making; he combined the whole range of artistic techniques to form paintings, collages, objects, books and sculptures, and he also created music and films. As an object maker he worked with such ephemeral materials as curds, cheese or chocolate, and with his “mould-prints” he investigated the process of decay. The target of his fairly unpalatable art was always “the prevailing common sense in the degenerating art game.” Last autumn a material collage by Rot of a cautiously pedagogic nature was shown at the “Pictures of Germany” exhibition in the Gropius-

Bau, Berlin. Entitled “Homage à Lidice,” this piece from the early sixties was a loan from the Czech Museum of the Visual Arts in Prague. Not three steps removed we stood shocked before a more recent work, in which everything had been done to drastic effect: Dieter Rot had filled a zinc bathtub with almost one hundred chocolate busts of Beethoven the size of human heads: a ghastly, revolting sight, if rather ridiculous on closer inspection. The section in which he exhibited this grotesque object was entitled “Germany's spiritual heroes.” As Rot explained it, the work was concerned with the “German mentality,” in which “inwardness propped by power” lies arm in arm with “lachrymose self-ecstasies.” He wanted to present paradoxes with his work: the need, say, to tremble before Beethoven's spiritual stature while simultaneously wishing to savour him as some musical titbit in the comfort of one's home. Rot spoke ironically of “devouring the gods”: something of the sort can be seen in the “Mozart” brand chocolates that are made in Salzburg.

Caption: Dieter Rot: “Bathtub of Ludwig van”, 1969, collection Forum Ludwig, Aachen.

¹ The word “Rot” means red in German [Trans.].

Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, 9.06.98

Versatile, impertinent innovator of the arts
The artist Dieter Roth has died at the age of 68

Dieter Roth, the great generalist of the arts in Switzerland, has died of heart failure at his home in Basel at the age of 68. The wide-ranging, scintillating, multifarious work of this internationally acclaimed artist is currently on show at three parallel exhibitions in Vienna and Zurich.

The unexpected death of the great all-rounder Dieter Roth was confirmed by André Kamber, the former director of the Solothurn Kunstmuseum and long-standing friend of the artist.

Roth, who also signed with Diter Rot or simply DR, combined the whole gamut of artistic techniques to create paintings, collages, objects, books and sculptures. He also distinguished himself, however, as a filmmaker, composer and poet.

As a result of its sheer diversity, Roth's work is "hard to grasp and its true importance has probably yet to be fully appreciated," as Kamber said in tribute to the artist. Dieter Roth was born 1930 in Hanover and came to Switzerland during the war. He trained as a graphic artist in Bern between 1947 and 1968, and in 1953 co-founded the legendary arts magazine *Spirale* with Eugen Gomringer.

In 1957 he moved to Reykjavik, in 1968 he received a professorship at the academy in Düsseldorf, and worked alternately between the USA, Düsseldorf and Hanover. Since then, Roth has created a body of work that is unmatched in its variety, bubbling originality and experimental irreverence.

As a poet he created ideograms using a highly individual typography, produced over one hundred books, and founded the genre of the artist's book in Europe. As an artist he experimented with all the available techniques and permutated them: oils, water colours, collage, drawing and print-making. As an object maker he worked with such ephemeral materials as curds, cheese or chocolate, and with his "mould-prints" he inquired into the process of decay.

For his "Bath tub of Ludwig van" from 1969, he filled a zinc tub with 60 Beethoven busts made of enamel, brown chocolate coating and lard. The Print Collection of the ETH, Zurich, is currently exhibiting a selection from Roth's creative universe in the form of 200 "books". The early concrete or geometrical artist's books are followed by those based on typography. From

1961 Roth turned to discarded materials, such as comics and newspapers, which he then modified.

His "Shit" poems of the sixties and seventies, which are quite spectacular in their protesterly, nonsensological flippancy, were published in books bearing titles like *die Die DIE GESAMTE SCHEISSE* (the The THE DAMNED SHIT), or *Die die Die DIE GESAMTE VERDAMMTE KACKE* (The the The THE COLLECTED DAMNED CRAP). Simultaneous to the ETH exhibition, works of the departed artist are also on show at the Albertina in Vienna and at Galerie Hauser & Wirth in Zurich.

Caption: Dieter Roth at the keyboards with cassette recorder and typewriter

Frankfurter Rundschau, 9.06.98

Diter Rot is dead

— dpa

Kölner Stadtanzeiger, 9.06.98

Curds and chocolate

The multi-faceted artist Dieter Roth has died

— dpa

Erkelener Nachrichten, 9.06.98

The 68 year-old artist and writer Dieter Roth has died in Basel

Beethoven from chocolate

Caption: The tub is full: in 1969 Dieter Roth filled a zinc bathtub with chocolate busts of Beethoven, and called it “The Bath tub of Ludwig van”. The object can now be seen in the Ludwig Forum, Aachen.

Süddeutsche Zeitung, 9.06.98

All-rounder

The artist Dieter Roth has died

— dpa

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 9.06.98

“Putting up with uncertainty”

On the death of Dieter Roth

So now we have it, Dieter Roth’s complete works, brought to an all-too abrupt close by his death. The brotherhood of critics and historians can start the process of dissecting and classifying — a thing previously denied them: the artist’s diverse strategies for eluding them constantly allowed both him and his work to slip, in protean manner, through the nets they use to fix and tie down. Roth felt that every attempt at evaluation was accompanied by an attempt at devaluation. So who will dare to tackle these works? Even assuming that everything will remain as it is, it would be a task for a titan, because over the years Dieter Roth compiled an unparalleled medley of ideas and mountain of material. Garbage rubs shoulders with treasures, and not just figuratively. The question also arises (questions were always important to him) who has the right to work through this agglomeration. Roth was a painter-poet in the Romantic tradition, so a knowledge of literature is no less important than a knowledge of art when approaching all that he left behind. A certain knowledge of music would also be useful, and likewise of food, but above all of life. Brimful of life’s experiences, that is how the works (assuming one actually wishes to use such a hackneyed term) of this Swiss cosmopolitan come across. At times it was said that he “lives and works in Reykjavik, London, Düsseldorf, Berlin, Lucerne and Brunswick.” The remark that everything in Dieter Roth’s work is directly connected with his life brings us into the realm of broad generalisations. Admittedly, his life, which began 1930 in Hanover and ended on 5 June in Basel, had the touch of a novel about it, although it is almost impossible to separate truth and poetry here. Dieter Roth was well-read and his imagination extended far beyond his experiences. It is the love of telling a tale or, put more scientifically, the narrative structures, that link his literary and visual works to create a smooth-flowing continuum. Roth was a manufacturer of ideas who rated these higher than the finished works; yet unlike other concept artists, he brought these mental sketches to fruition. Ideas generally resulted in lengthy series and sequences of works. The attempt to pick out one single example is liable to end in clutching at thin air. The sequence and the overall connection, alone, are of significance: everything branches out and goes its own way. For this reason collaborations were important to

Dieter Roth, whether with artists close to the Vienna Actionists (Arnulf Rainer), with Richard Hamilton, or with his children. His own impulses flowed into those of others to develop a life of their own — even after the direct exchange has ended — as part of a reciprocal process. This method, which has been adopted by many younger artists, is one of the best ways to quash the notion of the artist as a creative genius.

Anyone who wishes briefly to stop the ceaseless flow of words, signs and objects that constitute Dieter Roth’s *oeuvre*, must do so in the transitional areas. There, at the point where one thing transforms suddenly or imperceptibly into something else, meaning shines through for a few moments. But otherwise the meaning is woven into the whole. And that is an amalgam of media, because Dieter Roth dissolved the boundaries between poetry, graphic art, sculpture or music, so that poems could become prints, or books become objects. With his “heaps”, “islands” or “chocolate sculptures” he raised the gradual decomposition of organic material into a formal principle. A process which to Roth’s delight proceeds by chance, and only gradually, if ever, comes to an end. Not only transformation, but also dissolution can be the goal. Even the leftovers, along with the many ephemeral items in the artist’s work, are spectacular objects that keep returning to one’s mind. And simultaneously the tender poetry that Dieter Roth concealed behind the crude title “Shit” was of no less importance to him.

Until now, writing about Dieter Roth, the way he wrote poetry, drew, lived, had always meant writing about something that had ceased to exist. The artist constantly presented himself anew in all that he wrote or drew and also in the way he lived, thus showing that he had moved on from the previous vantage point he had established. Now the work must continue to write for the artist, and prevent the words and images from becoming petrified by the phrases of the critics and flattened by the art business, which he hated. Even without its creator, his overall work has enough explosive force to counter such tendencies. Moreover, the enormous impetus he gave so many artists continues to live on. He gave us an important lesson (Dieter Roth worked time and again at art schools): there can be no clear division between reality and fiction, not in art works at least. One of the many consequences of this is that the identity of the artist and the observer is constantly questioned when looking at these objects. Dieter Roth’s life showed us how to bear this tension, without capitulating in the face of the arduous task of ego-construction.

— *Matthias Vogel*

???### NZZ???

In Memoriam Dieter Roth

From the homeland, beyond lightning so red,
That is where the clouds come from,
Yet father and mother are long since dead
And no one knows me, whence I come.

How long, how long before I shall greet
The time of quiet when I shall lie
In Sylvan solitude 'neath leaves so sweet
And none shall know me, by the by.

the Galleries Hauser & Wirth and Hauser & Wirth 2
Iwan Wirth, Eva Presenhuber, Manuela Wirth, Ursula
Hauser and all the staff

Dieter Roth wrote this poem by Joseph Eichendorff in
the gallery guest-book on the opening of his exhibition.

Tagesspiegel (Berlin), 9.06.98

Mould artist

Anarchism and Neo-Dada
On the death of Dieter Roth

His artistic material was all that children dream of; his poems focussed on what parents have vainly tried since time immemorial to prevent their offspring from saying: chocolate and shit. And then he let the chocolate, along with cheese and curds, turn mouldy in highly artistic ways. To call Dieter Roth a highly idiosyncratic artist is almost an understatement. As a result of this and his versatility — he was also a film-maker, performer, designer and composer — this son of Hanover kept slipping through the meshes of the museums and anthologies.

Nevertheless, he always had friends and patrons who recognised the importance of this all-rounder and provided him with a suitable forum. Consequently, two museums of contemporary art that were recently opened in grand style, the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, and the Galerie der Gegenwart in Hamburg, both had rooms dedicated to this artist who lived in Switzerland.

Somewhere at last had presented a world that should be given its own museum: the chocolate objects under their bell jars and his artist's books.

Just as his sculptures and mould pictures celebrate the process of gradual disappearance, the artist also enjoyed doing a vanishing act: sometimes he signed his first name with an "e", sometimes without, and likewise his surname either with or without an "h"; not to mention his pseudonyms Otto Hase, Max Plunderbaum and Fax Hundetraum [Otto Rabbit, Max Junktree, Fax Dogdream].

For this reason, at the award of the Berlin Art Prize four years ago, he permitted himself the joke of simply disappearing from the stage in slow motion, holding a rose, his flat cap and a bottle of champagne. But not before he had heckled and bemused the speaker, Walter Jens.

The Neo-Dadaist simply wouldn't allow himself to be tied down, let alone be used for making any kind sense of things. As has been announced, Dieter Roth died last Friday night of heart failure at his home in Basel. He was 68.

— NK

Rheinische Post, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth has died

Under the spell of decay

It must have been in the seventies; an artwork disappeared in a mysterious manner from the Schloss Morsbroich Museum in Leverkusen: a chocolate rabbit from Dieter Roth. Astute researches revealed that a mouse or some other small animal had been at work on the ephemeral sculpture in the museum's depository. A loss for the museum, but certainly not for Dieter Roth. For what better could happen to an artist who inquired into the process of decay than to learn that one of his works has disappeared over the course of time?

The artist, designer and author Dieter Roth, who was born in 1930 in Hanover and later lived for many years in Switzerland, has died of heart failure at his home in Basel. As an artist he had two faces: that of the graphic artist, who enjoyed experimenting and above all exploring the possibilities of collage, and that of the object maker who passed off junk as sculpture and loved most of all tinkering with such ephemeral materials as curds, cheese and chocolate.

His main topic was decay. He tried to capture it in "Mould Prints," and was alluding to it when he erected his various rubbish heaps. Like Daniel Spoerri, Dieter Roth collected discarded objects in order, among other things, to pit himself against the way everything inevitably decays, and to stop this for at least a while. He liked to drag the sublime through the mud. And he wrote about this in poetry: "When life gets up off of its back/after taking a real hard fall/I give it an almighty whack/for I see the coming pitfall."

From 1968, Dieter Roth (who also goes by the names Diter Rot, Otto Hase, Max Plunderbaum and Fax Hundetraum) was for several years professor at the art academy in Düsseldorf, and during that time he commuted between the Rhineland, the United States and Hanover. His protest against traditional art stemmed from Marcel Duchamp, but in his boisterous way he went far beyond the Frenchman, as shown by his "Shit" poems of the sixties and seventies.

Dieter Roth's irreverence won himself a permanent place in the European art scene. The prize of the Düsseldorf Art Multiple Festival 1998, which was awarded to him in March of this year, will now no longer reach him.

— Bertram Müller

Stuttgarter Zeitung, 9.06.98

**Everything that decays is beautiful
On the death of the writer and artist Dieter Roth**

Like Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, he had a disjointed relationship to tradition and serious art production. Yet he was one of most prolific, talented, versatile and original, as well as most contrary and contradictory artists of our time: Dieter Roth, who died last Sunday at the age of sixty-eight at his home in Basel.

The term “Neo-Dada” scarcely does justice to Roth’s provocative outsider stance. He was an artist who scorned and denied the deeper meaning of art, but whose graphic, sculptural and poetic outpourings developed within a boundless vista for meanings. This sceptic, who believed in nothing, was imbued with the belief in the transiency and mutability of our lives and in the transitoriness of things. He postulated the beauty of the banal even more radically than Schwitters, and without the slightest trace of pathos or maudlin sentimentality. His chocolate and mould sculptures, the models of his rubbish and decay aesthetic, culminated in the initially shocking “Shit objects” and “Shit books” which, in a complex, roundabout way, ultimately paid homage to the beautiful and sublime.

All of the things that he tirelessly picked up, collected and archived were subjected to a kind of aesthetic process of digestion, in which the sordid and offensive elements were a mere allusion to the vanitas theme, and certainly not the logical end product. Time and again surprisingly new, often delightfully beautiful pictures arose from the sweepings, the scraps and the compost. Metamorphoses, variations and series were a part of his experimental methods, which led him constantly into new and unknown lands. Roth’s art can be read as the never-ending story of his visual life. In the multi-media show that he put on at the Venice Biennale in 1982, he demonstrated the imperceptible transition from biography to art. It was not always possible to follow him that far.

Perhaps the principle of permanent transformation and change was already ingrained in the artist’s character. He had always fled from anything that seemed conclusive, and in the final analysis he fled from himself. He had always attempted to cover his tracks, escape the middle class bonds, and to revoke what was taken as “valid.” Even his name signalled uncertainty: Dieter Roth also spelt his name Diter Rot, and he enjoyed adopting pseudonyms like Otto Hase or Fax

Hundetraum. He questioned everything, above all himself, with a witty irony, not least in his *Tränenmeer* [Sea of Tears] sequence and his “Self-Portraits”. He cut up many of his multitude of books, or punched holes in them, or forced them through the meat grinder to make “Literature Sausages.”

His biography is equally diffuse, and doesn’t really seem to tally with his prizes and teaching activities. Dieter Roth was born of a Swiss father and a German mother on 21 April 1930 in Hanover. Did he already inherit his “Merz” approach there? After training as a graphic artist in Bern, he worked as a textile designer and film-maker in Copenhagen. In 1957 he moved to Reykjavik. During the sixties he taught in the USA, and from 1969 to 1971 at the Düsseldorf art academy. Nowhere kept him for long. A person who felt shy of others, he found refuge in Iceland and Switzerland.

Roth mastered a number of techniques and media with great virtuosity. He once referred to himself as a “wealth-creating player.” He worked with scribbles, blots on paper or desk pads, classical techniques as well as stencils and rubber stamps or letters of the alphabet, printed matter and drawings, photos and films, pictures and texts, poetry and tomfoolery, the artistic and the chaotic. And all of this mingles together in his labyrinthine work. Two-handed speedy drawings and refined printing techniques, small objects for show-cases and installations that fill factory floors — everything has its place. His means of expression developed from naturalist mimesis to constructivism and tachisme, to freely availing himself of all the things he found in this world, and which this melancholy mocker found particularly delightful “when they shatter.”

— Wolfgang Rainer

Die Welt (Hamburg), 9.06.98

The artist's fear of the beautiful

On the death of the versatile artist Diether Roth

“I hate it when I notice that something appeals to me, when I can master something in such a way that I have only to repeat it to create a new trick. I stop then immediately. Also when it threatens to get too beautiful. ... I prefer it when the heterogeneous parts of the pictures scrap with one another.” Diether Roth wrote that. An artist who scarcely viewed himself as an academician, even though he taught from 1968 as professor at the academy in Düsseldorf. Roth remained a restless spirit. Born in 1930 in Hanover, he took to Switzerland during the Second World War. Although he became a trained graphic artist, he was not the type to become a proper career-man who designs adverts and brochures. Instead, he got involved in art and tackled all manner of artistic subjects. In 1953 he and Eugen Gomringer published the magazine *Spirale*, which was dedicated to visual poetry. He made a name as a writer, as a drawer, painter, sculptor, object maker and actionist, he composed music, made films, produced videos and finally documented his daily routine and his surroundings by means of a large series of Polaroids. He distrusted anything that was finished, made “mould pictures” to provoke transience — and the viewer. He lived in Düsseldorf, Hanover, Reykjavik, the USA, and finally in Basel, where he has just died. He was nowhere really at home, except in his art.

Die Presse (Vienna), 9.06.98

Departure from the programmes.

Dieter Roth is dead. He was one of the most restless and stimulating artistic personalities of his generation, always on the go. An obituary.

— by Kristian Sotriffer

He said that gradually he had no time left to order his work, no time left to clarify it, for himself and others. “I just pump it like that through my life,” as Dieter Roth, who died on Friday night in Basel, said in an interview with Hans-Joachim Müller almost ten years ago.

In spring 1995 he and his son Björn crammed the main room of the Vienna Secession full with a chaotic array of his paintings, appliances, books, records and films. He said at the time that he felt that his days were numbered... And now the current overview of his art prints and artist’s books, on show at the Albertina in the Akademie-Hof until 5th of July, has become a commemorative exhibition. Roth came to set it up here in Vienna, a city with which he still had a lot of active connections, including ties of friendship with such people as Gerhard Rühm or Arnulf Rainer who, like him, also collaborated with others, and generally with enthusiasm.

The fragmentary, the unfinished, works that called for sequels, enlargements, alterations, discontinuation or new starts — that was Roth’s main artistic concern, was what kept him alert and full of life. He called it the departure from the programmes.

Dieter Roth was born in 1930 of a German mother and Swiss father in Hanover, and after 1943 grew up in Switzerland. His artistic work was first influenced by the “concrete” nature of visual poetry. His desire to communicate by means of various media — in the end mainly by writing — was as great as his urge to move and travel. This led him to the north, where in 1957 he married in Reykjavik. It was there that he worked on his cosmography, the *Mundunculum* (published 1967). Roth also taught in the USA, in London and Düsseldorf.

Wherever he was, he set up temporary workshops in order to expand his inexhaustible stream of work. Naturally he was closely connected with the Fluxus movement of the sixties.

Everything he saw, discovered, thought and felt was somehow collected, stacked up, annotated, corrected, discarded, edited, and constantly enriched. One example is the catalogue of the Kestner-Gesellschaft, which in 1974 gave his home town a first view of his manic book production. It was put together from a batch of offset

prints. Roth was like a man possessed, an artist who was impatient with and exploited himself to the point of excess, and who had a tendency to self-destruction. He knew as much: in the end he simply waited to be transported from the “ego-being,” as he once termed it, into a different state (“a different being”).

Berliner Morgenpost, 9.06.98

Everything that's pleasing is dangerous

Universal poet: the artist Dieter Roth has died aged 68

Dieter Roth is dead. Or "Diter Rot," "Otto Hase," "Max Plunderbaum," "Felix Hundetraum"? So perhaps: "Diter Red" is dead.² He would have liked the rhyme, the play on words. Perhaps. Born 1930 in Schwitter's home town of Hanover, he was his equal as a player, as a constant appender and expander of his works, as a process artist, and as an executor of an estate — in line with Schwitter's Merz principle.

In the same way Roth merrily toyed with his pseudonyms, he hated any form of *finis operis* or completed work. "Everything that's pleasing is dangerous": this sentence from Picasso could well have come from him. He for his part said: "I hate it when something appeals to me, when I can master something in such a way that I have only to repeat it to create a new trick. I stop then immediately."

And now he has stopped once and for all, has died of heart failure at his home in Basel at the age of 68. As one of the last of the avant-garde or anti-artists of the ebbing 20th century, with its wealth of decorative, reiterative gestures. Happening, Fluxus, Neo-Dada, object art? Painter, graphic artist, typographer, filmmaker, composer, poet, actionist?

It is impossible to get a proper grip on Dieter Roth. But one thing is for certain: he always worked very close to life. So what could be more obvious than to make the move to organic substances? He shut chocolate, sausage and cheese away in perspex or plastic foil. Condemned it to rot.

That at last was just what he wanted: the mould bacteria kept everything in flux to create a constantly changing form of reality. Above all, these monuments to process art — Eat Art — made him famous.

Dieter Roth was never fashionable, but he never ceased to be radically modern. Like his Fluxus colleagues George Brecht, Al Hansen, Nam June Paik or Robert Filliou, he constantly involved the audience. Sometimes in Düsseldorf, where he was a professor at the academy, and sometimes in Iceland. But mostly he lived in Basel, especially in his latter years, after his Swiss father moved there with his family in 1943.

That is why Roth could be seen in the Swiss pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1982. Texts and photos were

projected across the room, driven on by the eye of the artist who wanted the sum of the perceptions in the moment they came into being, without — perish the thought! — any wish for museums or conservation. His "Speedy drawings" of the seventies were also along these lines, two-handed drawings that numbered into the hundreds.

Comparable intuitive scribble-creations, one-offs of the first Roth-water, sprung from tablecloths, telephone noteblocks, the floor and so-called writing mats. During the sixties it was "rubber stamp pictures". Dieter Roth, a universal poet of the atomic age, subsumed all of this under the general title "Collected Shit."

It was in this spirit that in 1961 he created "Literature sausages" from wastepaper and newspapers: daring metaphors for still unknown phenomena like "information overload" and the "data explosion". He created ideograms by means of highly individual typography, produced over one hundred books, and founded the genre of the artist's book in Europe. When in 1994 Dieter Roth received the Berlin Art Prize of the Akademie der Künste — awarded for the first time by a "united east-west" Academy — Roth's attacks on meaning with his sometimes angry, sometimes mocking cat-calls were also directed at the president of the Academy, Walter Jens. The rhetoric expert and football fan added promptly: "That's great, that's really fun, so now the stiff ceremonials are over."

— Roland Gross

Caption: Attacks on meaning: process artist Dieter Roth

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Also: *Westfaelischer Anzeiger*, 9.06.98

Process artist

² The word "Rot" means red in German [Trans.].

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 9.06.98

The commonplace is debased

Chocolate magic: on the death of the object maker

Dieter Roth

It all began quite simply and innocently with rubber stamp pictures, books with holes and serial prints. It ended in an outburst of objects and montages, in a volcanic eruption, a boundless, gargantuan *gesamtkunstwerk* that filled a factory floor. Dieter Roth, who died Friday night in Basel, was a man of metamorphoses and play, an artist with a clownish mask and melancholy shadows behind a glittering façade. The legitimate heir to the pasting mania and ironic wit of Schwitters — who bored holes in his “cathedral of erotic misery,” the MERZbau, until it was like a Swiss cheese, and allowed it to spread in all directions — Roth saw the soon-to-darken light of the world in Hanover, in 1930. School and Nazi drill became a nightmare for him, “anxiety” the word that was to leave the deepest mark on him. Shortly before the terrible night-time bombings of 1943, he was evacuated to Switzerland: his father’s Swiss origins were his saving. Curiously his activities as a commercial artist, with which he initially battled to make a living, left no trace of paralysing perfectionism. Right from the start, Roth’s work was always “work in progress.” Nothing here is clearly delineated or finished. Regardless whether one leafs through one of his countless books, looks at a drawing, or studies a relief print or one of his sculptures made of nutritious substances: one is instantly sucked into a labyrinth of allusions, ironic reflections and a questioning of artistic evaluations.

Dieter Roth, who on several occasions changed the spelling of his name, was a chameleon who always regarded change as more important than adhering to the positions he had already attained. Even the outward circumstances of his life, the moves from one town and country to the next, reflect this inner urge for personal and mental itinerancy. The cosmopolitan stuck it out the longest in Iceland, guested in New York, London and Düsseldorf, and spent the latter part of his life in Switzerland. His son Björn became the co-author of his creative production, which rarely allowed itself to be contained by the accepted dimensions of traditional picture surfaces. Nothing could be too worthless in the eyes of this tireless, impassioned collector of every tatter and object for it to be part of his material, which ranged from blotting paper to spices, to chocolate and mould and the desk pads that he transformed into “mat

pictures.”

He was always a magician and enchanter, and obviously a poet. The more Dieter Roth attempted to destroy the aura of his works through disparaging titles that made them ridiculous, the less he damaged their durability in the long term. This was not, however, always guaranteed on the material level, because Roth’s intentions were directed more to decay and auto-destruction — the reason why restorers fail to number among his world-wide circle of friends and admirers. Although Dieter Roth was a lone wolf, his friendships with like-minded artists were of life-long importance to him. Thomkins, Spoerri and Gerstner formed with him a quartet that was occasionally presented together in exhibitions. Scepticism and self-irony, already his constant companions in the seventies, grew in the end to melancholy, disgust and world-weariness. His accumulations of rubbish, his piles of material outcasts were just the right level for him to express his inner state: “The commonplace: housekeeping, financial worries, general states of confusion, uncertainty and anxiety, drag everything I try to build or raise up and debase it.”

Like Schwitters, Dieter Roth also left a literary *oeuvre* independent of his visual work. The threads of his creativity can be seen permeating the volumes of the *Collected Works*. And that is why this row of works was the darling of this passionate book-producer, who at times even turned minced printed matter into sausage form.

— P.W.

Caption: Look and see what you can use: Dieter Roth

Berner Zeitung, 9.06.98

Displeasure pleased Dieter Roth

The internationally renowned Swiss artist Dieter Roth died last weekend aged 68. His work is characterised by falling: he worked systematically with *Zufall* or chance — and with fading *Abfall* or rubbish.

— Konrad Tobler

“Yes, I think my time will soon run out,” Dieter Roth said in 1989 during an interview with Hans-Joachim Müller. Well, nine years later the wild artist’s time has indeed run out. He had always reckoned with expiry dates: in his own life, in which he was never afraid of extremes, and in his work, which lived from extremity. Contrary to the customary rules of art, Roth employed decay and chance, rubbish and infestation by noxious growth. He was indifferent to applause; he exhibited his work, but referred to museums as “funeral parlours.” This artist, who was obsessed by change and marked by inner unrest and anxiety, also changed his identity several times: on one occasion he was Dieter Roth, then Dieter Rot, then punningly Diterrot. This all-rounder of the Swiss art scene was born Dieter Roth in 1930 in Hanover. The son of a Swiss, he came in 1943 to Bern, where he learned graphic design under Friedrich Wüthrich. He remained in Bern until 1955, after which he led a restless life between Reykjavik, the USA and Germany.

Mould and cheese

Standing before the chaos of his works, it is astonishing to realize that during the fifties Roth adhered to the strict rules of concrete art, wrote concrete poetry and, together with the latter’s mentor, Eugen Gomringer, founded the legendary periodical *Spirale*. Perhaps the step from the concreteness of the paint to “Shit” — the name Roth gave his poems in the sixties — was not so great. It all boils down to the thing itself, the way it is. And that includes its personal decay.

In the same way Daniel Spoerri worked with left-over food in his “Snare pictures,” Roth — taking the idea a further twist up the spiral — systematically employed curds, cheese and chocolate. He worked with mould and pressed foodstuffs until they were as flat as pictures, thus passing the pressure and suffering he felt on to things. And then the process of infestation: the chance patches that grew on a surface would often inspire him to produce restless accumulations of paint. He also used this “slosh and daub style” for his musical

compositions and films. This could be seen in his contribution to the Venice Biennale in 1982: for several months he recorded everything he did — “to fulfil my muddle-headed quota.” The result: a video installation in which Roth documented the progression and passing of time. But also this “unhooked life.”

Klee and Cézanne

Who were the people that this often incomprehensible artist held in regard? In an interview he named Paul Klee: “He has just this one dream, forever new. That’s really beautiful. And I like Cézanne, that’s also a dream; permanent summer.” Is that the longing of an anxious man, while simultaneously being ironic — unfathomable before the abyss of chance and transience? One of Roth’s paradoxical mottos was: “The mishaps, the slips, are what interest me, and how they nevertheless support the picture and make it strong.” And that is exactly what Dieter Roth is.

Captions:

Top: infested, smeared on and pressed on: a typical material picture by the Swiss all-rounder Dieter Roth.

Bottom:

Dieter Roth: Work with transience.

Box:

“Thrashed and flogged tremblebird pissing his anxious-pants in the permanently-burning stoves, which is to say in the permanent blaze of blows — blows from rods, fate, feet and fists — little Dieterboy writhed through the people-grinder that was pressing him flat.”

Dieter Roth: *Ein Lebenslauf von 50 Jahren* (1980).

Langenthaler Tagblatt, 9.06.98

A versatile and restless artist On the death of Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth, the great generalist of the Swiss art scene, died of a heart attack at the age of 68 in Basel.

[...] Dieter Roth came to Switzerland during the war. From 1947 he lived in the vicinity of Solothurn, where he first trained as a graphic artist. In 1951/52 Dieter Roth worked for Frigerio, a firm of painters and decorators in Solothurn, for whom he created a large mural. Only recently has it been rescued and transferred after great difficulties to the keeping of the Kunstmuseum in Solothurn.

A broad oeuvre

In 1953 Dieter Roth moved to Bern, where he was the co-founder of the Galerie 33 and co-editor of the first four issues of the legendary periodical *Spirale*. His range of interests and activities increased rapidly, as did the forms and means he used for his work. His early artistic production was already marked by the attempt to transpose what is depicted into another dimension of vision. He received further impetus from his close examination of new currents in art — such as the concrete poetry and constructivism championed in the young scene in Bern. He was not interested here in picking up new possibilities, but rather in breaking with what was already known in order to create his own form. As a result, he embarked on the greatest possible adventure for an artist: he linked art with his own life. On the occasion of an exhibition of Dieter Roth's works dating from 1951 to 1961, held at the Kunstmuseum Solothurn in 1995, André Kamber noted that the whole breadth of Roth's work could be already seen in his early production: he drew, painted, and laid the foundations of his graphic *oeuvre*. He developed his own system of spelling, made his first experimental films, composed music, and drew up kinetic concepts for relief and spin pictures that he was only to realize much later. He experimented with contrasting patterns and complementary colours, with reflected and incidental light for pictures and sculptures. He accepted commissions from advertising agencies and created designs for the Danish textile industry. He created his first books.

And Dieter Roth's ever-widening interests and activities also had an increasing effect on his life. At first he worked in Bern, then in Copenhagen and then in

Reykjavik, where from 1957 he had his permanent residence, and then in Philadelphia, New York, Basel and Amsterdam. In 1968 he received a professorship from the Düsseldorf art academy. He also taught in London and in the USA. But many years later he was to note: "I am more and more appalled when I look at how I hurried and sped through life, pursuing activities whose only fruits were fame or money."

Over 10,000 drawings

In 1988 André Kamber mounted a large retrospective of Dieter Roth's drawings at the Kunstmuseum Solothurn. His more than 10,000 drawings were represented by selections from his major thematic groups. These include self-portraits, designs for objects and sculptures, telephone drawings, letter-drawings he sent to friends, drawings with poems, soft drawings, speedy and parallel drawings, and collaborations with such artists as Richard Hamilton, Arnulf Rainer and later his children. Also included were the drawings to his books, the principle works being his *Mundunculum*, the *Scheisse* [Shit] complex and the *Tränenmeer* [Sea of Tears] books. With these works, in which word and image were brought together so that his drawings and writings interacted and extended and interpenetrated one another, Dieter Roth established himself as the founder of the artist's book, in which the artist is responsible for both the form and the content.

[...]

Neue Nidwaldner Zeitung, 9.06.98

The Swiss artist Dieter Roth has died
Up to the boundaries and beyond

Art was everything to him, his whole life. His art manifested itself in paintings, drawings, diaries, films, photographs and music, as well as in friendships, actions and provocations. For him art was permanent change, the constant flow of life's energies. As was announced at the weekend, Dieter Roth has died at the age of 68 in Basel.

— Niklaus Oberholzer

A melting and re-solidifying chocolate mass, fashioned into a sculpture and placed in a show case, begins to grow mould and gradually to decompose, while a restorer of modern art works take pains to conserve the work's economic value. Yet paradoxically, in the early sixties Dieter Roth revealed an anarchic slyness by placing his money on a new form of art. One that acts as a metaphor of transience and transition, of new beginnings born by destruction.

Roth saw food in general, and linked with that the digestive processes — the conversion of ingested matter into energy and the excretion of the transformed matter — as a topic that goes far beyond revulsion or provocation. For him it focuses on the key questions of an art whose effect, and the energy it produces, remains a mystery, and that goes its own, uncontrollable ways. Consequently the titles of his books, such as *The Complete Shit*, are programmatic rather than merely provocative.

A steadily flowing self-portrait

The *Review for Everything* is also one of his titles: art can no longer be divided off, for it consists of everything that makes up life — and in this Roth was similar to the Fluxus artists who numbered among his friends. His appearance at the Swiss Pavilion at the 1982 Biennale is an eloquent example of this: Dieter Roth filmed his day-to-day life over a period of four months, and condensed the Super 8 reels to a 45 minute-long simultaneous film shown by thirty projectors: an apparent chaos and confusion, a steadily flowing self-portrait that avoided all structure, and that was complemented by a printed diary-cum-catalogue consisting of hand-written pages and glued-in Polaroids.

[...]

Westdeutsche Zeitung, 9.06.98

Decay encompassing the world

On the death of the object maker Dieter Roth

— Sophia Willems

Dieter Roth, who often created deliberate uncertainty by writing “Diter,” was one of the brashest figures of the art scene. He had a refreshing and sometimes startling lack of respect.

His work cannot be assigned to any one genre. As an object maker, Dadaist and critical realist, everything was the subject of his art, so that it is impossible to characterise and survey his *oeuvre*. It included collages, books, sculptures, objects, installations, compositions and poems.

Like Ernst Jandl, Franz Mon, Ferdinand Kriwet and Jiri Kolar, he was also preoccupied with language — with the linguistic signifier as an object for visual images, with the letter as a semantically emptied emblem — and created numerous artist’s books.

Born 1930 in Hanover, he moved to Switzerland during the war, and later lived for many years in Reykjavik in Iceland. In 1968 he received a professorship for the Düsseldorf art academy, and in his latter years he lived in Basel.

Roth caused a sensation with his mould objects. More radical even than Daniel Spoerri’s encrusted dinner plates, Roth allowed such materials as curds, cheese or chocolate to decompose and putrefy, to the despair of not a few restorers in the museums, who were forced to watch this deliberate destruction without intervening. The aesthetic of decay fascinated him, for he saw it as an aesthetic of transformation.

It was not his aim to transport the world into art, but rather to bring art into the world by filtering the one out of the other. Consequently Dieter Roth’s works contain a lot of the world, and expose the seemingly banal and everyday to the essentially unsuited processes of art. Dieter Roth died on Friday night of heart failure at the age of 68.

Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 9.06.98

Tracks in Stuttgart and cosmopolitan counter-plans: On the death of the artist Dieter Roth

Restless against all forms of constancy

Stuttgart and Dieter Roth — that is a story in itself, one that was never written in its day and that can no longer be recaptured, because many of the witnesses are scattered to the four winds. In 1967, the 37 year-old Hanoverian returned from giving “non-lessons as lessons” in the USA to have his first one-man show. Entitled “Die verwurstete Literature” [Sausagised literature], it clearly questioned the boundaries of the various art categories.

In 1968, Roth began his collaboration with Edition Hansjörg Mayer; encouraged by the critic Günther Wirth, Roth worked with Schreiber’s, the collotype printing firm, to produce the first collotype to be declared an original artwork. Important for this and his subsequent, important production was the printer Frank Kicherer.

It was also in Stuttgart that Dieter Roth, who had allied himself with the circle around Max Bense and Reinhard Döhl, transformed a temple of the arts into the laboratory of an art researcher. Roth presented this “show” in 1979 in the Print Collection of the Staatsgalerie: an artist’s cosmos *in situ*, accompanied by a resounding farewell to art. Dieter Roth put it tersely in an interview with this newspaper: “Art is finished for me.” Why? “Because it has nothing more to say, it can’t tell the truth. As soon as a drawing is hung on the wall it no longer has anything to say. It’s simply there for the eye to look at. Take this drawing for instance. I’ve done the most stupid thing I could possibly do. But it doesn’t look at all silly on the wall, it simply looks aesthetic.” He took refuge in literature, which was also a constant source of material for his work — and 15 months later he presented Stuttgart and Wendelin Niedlich with a blistering *Stuttgarter Bilderbogen* [Stuttgart Broadsheet] that recalled Fluxus (and Roth’s constant contact with Siegfried Cremer). An excerpt from this world of words: “A — Anger and rage... /B — What are they — or should I say: what is that?/A — Here’s a jest for you, my query-top: You should have asked: Whats are they? And now in all seriousness: didn’t I say to you: IS, that doesn’t exist?/B — So, dat exists, huh, DAT and WOT, and DATSUN?” In 1988 the Staatsgalerie opened its doors for a second time to Dieter Roth, the painter, print-maker, typographer, actionist and poet (and moreover professor of art in Düsseldorf since 1968, and

lecturer at various European and American colleges). But unlike in 1979, this time the art critics kept the reins firmly in their hands. In the end, Johann-Karl Schmidt decided to pick up the lost or merely snarled threads of the Roth-Stuttgart relationship. Quite immodestly, the director of the Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart strived to set up the “foremost Dieter Roth collection of the world.” How would the Bastel-novella 3 by Jerk Foames. With many poems in the Graeco-Roman style by Rat Dogfood (Edition Mayer) have fitted into that projected world of images? Well, the scheme came to an early standstill. The last exhibitions date from 1993 (Galerie Fred Jahn) and 1995 (Landesgirokasse).

The director of the “mould prints,” the founder of the still fondly loved genre of the artist’s book, this standard-bearer for Fluxus, a man restlessly struggling against all forms of constancy — Dieter Roth, Diter Rot, Otto Hase, Max Plunderbaum has died of heart failure at the age of 68.

— Nikolai B. Forstbauer

HNA Hessische Allgemeine, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead
When art does not come from ability

The artist Dieter Roth, who was born 1930 in Hanover and lived in Switzerland and Iceland, has died of heart failure. In 1968 and 1977 he was a participant in the documenta.

Friedrich Hölderlin wrote that “the first child of divine beauty is art”. Sentences of this kind have shaped art history. Yet many of the artists of this century were up in arms against precisely this view of art — first in the Dada movement (from 1915), and then in actionism and Fluxus during the sixties. One of the most important of them was the writer, graphic artist and object maker Dieter Roth (also: Diter Rot). He questioned everything that traditionally went to make up art — notions of beauty, perfection and eternal values. Art, as he wished to demonstrate, does not come from ability.

Obviously that was never quite true of Roth. He was an artist who could unleash his creative energies with both pen and pencil. He used paper to develop both his everyday as well as his highly complex thoughts — sometimes as descriptive (literary) texts, sometimes as drawings. When Roth represented Switzerland in 1982 at the Venice Biennale, he had a collection of photocopied pages handed out in place of a catalogue. The pages documented his preparations for the Biennale show by means of diary-like texts and Polaroids. What first might have seemed to be an act of refusal appears, in retrospect, to be a comprehensive reflection of everyday life.

His love of writing, texts and drawings made Roth one of the masters of the artist’s book. But whilst these artist’s book tended only to reach the connoisseur — even when circulated as facsimiles — numerous of his objects and sculptures became widely known, if not legends, for they turned the fundamental rules of art on their heads. Up until the end of last year, Roth’s sculpture tower “7 x 3 gnomes” (from 1969) was on view at the Neue Galerie in Kassel as part of the Herbig Collection. It consists of 21 garden gnomes baked in cooking chocolate. There, beneath its perspex dome, the tower had begun to lean and sprout mould. The sweet gnomes in the sweet mass had become a provocative portent of transience.

And when nowadays the restorers stop to think how to preserve such an object, they complete the perversity of the art business, just as Roth intended. He grinned and

observed what he had once set in motion.

— Dirk Schwarze

Caption: Hit out at the art business: Dieter Roth

Mannheimer Morgen, 9.06.98

Ingenious anarchist

The world, above all the art world, would be much the poorer if Dieter Roth had never existed. Who else could have given us the fantastic experience of seeing large quantities of liquid chocolate oozing from the doors of an old kitchen stove? Dieter Roth, film maker, composer, chaotic author and gifted artist, has died at the age of 68 in Basel of heart failure.

It is said that he was of German origin. But what can be certain about a person who also wrote his name “Diter Rot” (using only the most essential letters) and (almost) flagrantly presented the fundamental insight into transience in the form of mouldy food? A lot of people took him to be Swiss, not only because of his frequent use of chocolate and cheese, but also because he had many contacts there, and also a flat.

Yet he was born in Hanover, the city of his Dada predecessor Kurt Schwitters. And from 1957, long before he rose to fame in the days of Pop Art, Eat Art and other avant-garde movements, he lived in Iceland, which could not be further away or more isolated. Admittedly, that did not really help him. In 1968 he was appointed to the art academy in Düsseldorf. Apart from which, he created a sensation in the frantic sixties with his wild faecal poems. And by publishing these and other, no less anarchic texts, he invented the artist’s book: objects made of outlandish sheets of paper or other materials, printed with invented or “proper” words, and using outrageous typography, and with pictures that seemed to have been culled from dreams.

Already in 1974, when the staid and somewhat scandalised art public remarked what a profusion of ideas was gushing forth from this man, he was given a show by the Mannheim and Ludwigshafen Art Societies. Not without good reason the critic from this newspaper was reminded of the writer Jean Paul.

Jean Paul’s meditative and ironic view of contemporary 19th century society really does have something of the ludicrous intensity with which Dieter Roth forced the viewer into his “Taschenszimmer” [Pocket rooms]. He took a glass-topped wooden box the size of a postcard, and stuck a slice of real, gloriously rotting banana onto a table drawn inside in pencil... So who will now conjure up for us sunsets in which the rays of light come from the grease of a slice of salami?

— Christel Heybrock

Appenzeller Zeitung, 9.06.98

“Doesn’t go running for his overalls”

[...] Roth viewed his art as a record of his life: art as documentation. For this reason he always included everyday articles in his works. The artist Karl Gerstner wrote of him: “DR is a meticulous observer of his own self. One is reminded of Montaigne, but in contrast to him Roth’s observations never turn into analyses. He sticks to observation.” [...]

Bernhard Luginbühl got to know Roth and his son Björn through their work together: “dieter is an artist who doesn’t go running for his overalls before he starts to paint.” [...]

Alles für Wien, Vienna, 10.06.98

Dieter Roth at the Akademiehof

As reported in the greater part of yesterday's edition, the deceased German artist Dieter Roth, who was born in Hanover in 1930, had a special affinity to Austria. He was virtually a part of the Vienna scene, and friends with, among others, the painter Arnulf Rainer and the art dealer Kurt Kalb. Three years ago, the Secession was host to a room-filling installation which Roth created with his son Björn. The current exhibition at the Albertina in the Akademiehof, entitled "Gedrucktes, Gepresstes, Gebundenes," shows prints, books and portfolios from the years 1949-1979.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 10.06.98

Dieter Roth — the artist as collector

The recently departed artist Dieter Roth always employed an enormous range of materials. Two exhibitions, in the Print Collection of the ETH and in Galerie Hauser & Wirth, present the opportunity to gain an insight into Roth's prodigious work.

The Blue Tide — Dieter Roth in two exhibitions in Zurich

The recently departed Swiss artist Dieter Roth was a tireless worker. The range of his materials knew virtually no bounds, and the sheer quantity of the things he collected and worked with was immense. His art can be assigned to the Fluxus movement. He is also regarded as the inventor of the artist's book. Two exhibitions — in the Print Collection of the ETH Zurich, and at Galerie Hauser & Wirth — currently present an opportunity to gain an insight into Roth's prodigious work.

Dieter Roth's work can best be approached by leafing through his numerous artist's books, which are not only on show at the Print Collection of the ETH Zurich, but can also be handled. Books, of which the Fluxus artist Dieter Roth said: "that which is gummed or sewn and piled up either alone or as company for its kind or stands around or stands about or stands there wedged in or lies there (not wedged in)." So there they lie, the books, all beautifully displayed in their glass cases — the books that the Print Collection has amassed with the help of private owners and patrons, and which must be the most complete Roth library in the world. Or there they hang, on chains, some sixty additional copies for the visitors to read. With this exhibition, the Print Collection is showing for the very first time the whole breadth and variety of one of its main collections.

Dieter Roth produced his first artist's book privately, in 1957, and is consequently regarded as the actual inventor of the genre. Since then he has shown an astonishing commitment to publishing. He has not only published postcards, records, tapes and videos, but also about three hundred artist's books, some in minute editions, some even made by hand. And he constantly collaborated with his fellow artists, such as Arnulf Rainer, Richard Hamilton, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely and Roland Topor. Roth's artist's books amount to an enormous tide of texts and pictures. Notes,

diary entries, poems, essays, expositions on his world picture and philosophy of everyday life, drawings and sketches, photos, postcards and pictures from newspapers, entire collections of newspaper cuttings, written-over and painted-over pages, multi-layered and stacked-up palimpsest-like material — all this has accumulated here to form a library of and about everything. For Roth, things amass to form a "Blue Tide" (to quote the title of a collection of his essays). Whilst the first issue of the *Review for Everything* he launched in 1975 had only a modest 32 pages, issue 10a from 1987 had swollen to all of 1252 pages, and had to be supplemented by volume 10b. In his *Collected Works*, which comprise no less than forty volumes and must be regarded as artist's books in their own right, Roth documented his work, including his previous artist's books, and thus enlarged his work by yet another dimension according to the "Russian doll principle". This enormous catalogue embraces novellas, books and prints, thousands of "Speedy drawings", the "Piccadillies" (a series of modified postcards), his "Stupidograms", and even the complete "Shit poems with all the illustrations."

Parallel to the show in the Print Collection, the Zurich Galerie Hauser & Wirth has dedicated its two spaces to a double exhibition of Roth's installations. The opening of the exhibition was attended by the artist. His endless library continues here, as in the work "Flat Scrap" dating from 1976: 700 neatly labelled files arranged chronologically on wooden shelves. Roth's "Flat Scrap" contains everything that fell into the artist's hands during that year in the way of invoices, stickers, envelopes etc. Dieter Roth was like a man possessed, an incredible mover and shifter of material. He had a great love of the thousand and one incidental and inconsequential things with which people surround themselves, without their even realising. An intimate relationship with the frail and fleeting can be read in these agglomerations. Consequently his monstrous installation, the *Tischruine* [Table Ruin], exudes an odour of dust and decay in this spotless gallery space. It could almost be a work by Fischli/Weiss, but this time the genuine thing and not copied in clean polyurethane. The twelve meter-long accumulative sculpture, which came into being between 1970 and 1998, consists of old furniture, planks, electrical appliances and all the tools and utensils used during the various phases of work, even to the empty beer bottles, the overflowing ashtrays and half-full coffee cups.

— Philipp Meier

Die Zeit, 10.06.98

Falling and Decaying

On the death of the multi-faceted artist Dieter Roth

He was born in Hanover in 1930, and died in Basel on 5 June 1998, but shortly beforehand he was awarded yet another befitting honour, the Kurt Schwitters Prize of the City of Hanover. Schwitters, who assembled his world from fragments of words and images, and Roth, who allowed them to decompose in his chocolate and sausage pictures under perspiring glass cases. A case for maggots and noses. Which were then free to breathe again in front of the wonderful Spice Pictures. There is not *the* one picture, *the* one deed, *the* one book by Dieter Roth, an artist who spanned writing, actions, painting, drawing, photography and self-destruction through alcohol. There is, as Hans-Joachim Müller once wrote, a chaotic mass that is infected by the “tendency of things to succumb to falling sickness.”

Dieter Roth, who has left behind a great omnium-gatherum of a work, was also a great collector. For him this was a possibility for incorporating a little opposition into his philosophy of fall and decay, and simultaneously for verifying this philosophy in his own life. Little was to be heard of Dieter Roth in latter years, after his great manifestations and exhibitions of the seventies, when his friend Daniel Spoerri ran his Eat Art Gallery in Düsseldorf and Fluxus created such uproar. But right to the end he always had a couple of generous collectors who were friends, and who stuck to him in word and deed. The most imperishable of his works will probably prove to be his books, the prints and texts of his *Collected Works*, which make up over one hundred volumes. And not simply because of the material. “What I always find most interesting are the departures from the programmes... What interests me are the things that go wrong, that go downhill,” wrote Dieter Roth, referring not to mundane computer programmes but to the eternal gravitational pull on a life sliding downhill.

— P.K.

Tageszeitung, 10.06.98

Rabbit droppings in baking moulds

Artistic failure as a central topic: on the death of the object maker Dieter Roth

The so-called catalogue is contained in a so-called three-part folder from the Austrian firm “bene.” It has “a part, where everything appears that was ready for printing at kl. 18:00 on 7th February 1995.” The people who bought the catalogue were also granted the right to acquire the second part, “which will be sent to the buyer after the middle of February 1995.” Apart from the “so-called catalogues” — so called in the foreword to the catalogue of the Dieter-Roth/Björn-Roth exhibition held at the Vienna Secession that spring, and which cannot be described in a few words — there were also lists in which the catalogue buyers could enter their addresses. The second part of the catalogue was sent to the buyers after the exhibition had closed, and was similarly interspersed with texts, sketches, photos and classification and disordering systems.

The more or less artistic process of failure was a central topic for Dieter Roth, who died of a cardiac arrest on Sunday at the age of 68. His bibliography comprises countless books, collected under the heading “text-like matter.” With wonderful titles like *Who was Mozart?*, and the follow-up *Who’s the one who doesn’t know who Mozart was?*, published by edition hansjörg mayer in Stuttgart/London/Reykjavik. Or *Early Writings and Typical Shit, selected and with a heap of half-digested matter by Oswald Wiener*. The *Tímarit fyrir allt* or *Review for Everything* was also founded by Roth, but had to be discontinued after the tenth and heaviest, 1,252 page-long issue. It was aimed at presenting “something more legitimate.” Literally anyone could make contributions, and they were all published: the project could no longer be funded due to its enormous success. Dieter Roth’s biography for 1952 mentions not only “Cleaning the Jesuit Church in Solothurn,” but also his successful attempt to refuse doing national service in Switzerland. In 1953 he displayed his “first baked sculpture,” a spiral of dough, in a shop window. In 1961 he created his “Literature Sausages” and put an ingenious end to the terror that emanates here from books and sausages. They consist of sausage skins filled with minced books, water, lard, spices and gelatine. At the same time he produced “stupidograms,” “silly pictures,” mould pictures and prints. Josef Beuys inquired systematically into chance, mistakes and slip-ups, gave them form and understood any uncertainties as

an intuitive process of groping forwards to a benign whole. Dieter Roth, on the other hand, pressed rabbit droppings into baking moulds to produce rabbits, filled a bathtub with busts of Beethoven made of rancid chocolate, and tore a print he had just produced in two: he simply didn’t like it. The two-part work from the print he “didn’t like” ended up behind glass.

On another occasion Roth was annoyed by the devout attention that the visitors were giving to a Beuys installation, consisting of a table, chairs clad in felt, and a bucket filled with lard. He countered it with his own arrangement, consisting of a camping table and folding chairs. The result: the visitors sat down on the camping chairs in order to study the Beuys’ installation. Furious, Roth stepped into the bucket of lard, attempted to pull his foot back out, and finally stamped along the accompanying copper gutter in lard-bespattered shoes. He escaped having to pay damages after telling Beuys of his financial hardships. They agreed to call the demolished work a co-production.

A fairly large collection of his prints and objects is located in Nylistasafnid, the Living Art Museum he founded with the Icelandic artist Magnús Pállson in Reykjavik. Roth came to Iceland in 1957 through his marriage to Sigridur Björnsdóttir. He frequently collaborated with her and their children, Karl, Björn and Vera. During a journey along the Icelandic coast (“Car Journey 17. April 1979, klukkan 15 — 16”) Björn and Dieter chatted in Icelandic. The trip took forty minutes on the LP, where it can now be found. No more than that would fit on the record.

— Wolfgang Müller

SonntagsZeitung, 14.06.98

Traces of an extreme friendship

Dieter Roth is dead: the collector Franz Wassmer on an enthralling artist.

— Roland Falk (text)
— Bruno Schlatter (photos)

He was a cryptic rubbish recycler, a nervous drinker and a cosmos of a human being: the Swiss artist Dieter Roth died the Friday before last at the age of 68. The former cement mogul Franz Wassmer was one of the most avid collectors of his unique work.

Roth is dead, but it is obvious that Franz Wassmer is unable to make any rhyme or reason of this irrevocable fact³. Sitting there in his living-room lined with art, the retired industrialist is only aware of the present when he invokes Roth — the almost manic archivist and revitaliser of the banal, tattered and debased. For him the artist is a monolith in the Swiss cultural landscape, and almost a berserker in his lust for life. Roth was sitting here just a while ago, signing works, the distinguished collector tells us. He was in a convivial mood, and accompanied by his sons Björn and Karl and the whole entourage that always helped him to put on his exhibitions. “But perhaps he was slightly more tranquil than usual.”

It was the “rotten, broken-down things” that inspired and drove him on — and nagged him to work, the artist would sometimes rant. On that evening he had done justice to the finest of wines: Château Perus 1970, Château D’Yquem 1986 and a Mouton Rothschild 1989. “I can assure you there wasn’t any drop of sourness in these last moments we shared,” says Wassmer. These two friends, who at first sight seem so incompatible, got drunk together some twenty times, here in the former construction material dealer’s haven for the muses. On the one side the stylish, rather straight-laced career-man, dressed in the choicest cloth and seated on black leather, on the other the sometimes grubby Roth who often extolled himself in his meandering biography as a tramp-like scruff. The one generally broke, the other the owner of a Bugatti and a Rolls-Royce Phantom 1961. A harsh contrast, but “somehow or other opposites always meet.” Over the years the two would get tipsy together, while

³ The German word for “dead” rhymes with Roth
[Trans.]

maintaining a very formal, “respectful distance” and remaining on second-name terms. Then one day, on the square before the station in Olten after visiting a Tinguely exhibition, Roth suggested to his admirer that they call each by their first names.

He sat at the piano and played melancholy ballads for an extremely long time

A “Fleeting mat” and a “Forced mat” hang on the walls of the room in which Roth, lost to the world, often played melancholy ballads on the piano for an extremely long time. His multi-layered works are a gigantic conglomeration of objects which the artist, who occasionally even worked with maggot-eaten food or used toilet paper, found at his workspaces and arranged on the principle of poetic chance. They are contrasted by the cubist, strongly geometrical forms of the Frenchman Auguste Herbin whom Roth, “who never wanted to deliberately step into the limelight,” loved beyond all measure.

Before this backdrop, which also includes the opulent picture-puzzle-cum-tapestry that Ingrid Wiener wove according to this multi-talent’s instructions, the two of them met time and again for a lively exchange of ideas. According to Wassmer, Roth never showed any rudeness: “I only knew about his angry outbursts from hearsay.”

At first, in 1983, the two men discussed the difficult problems of separation with which they faced. During this period Wassmer bought the “Diver,” his first Roth: a person plunging bird-like into a sea of gouache clouds. A frequent topic of conversation was alcohol — the trusty companion of an artist who was known for the misanthropic impression he made. “Letting yourself go, drunk, and then picking yourself up again — he often said that he had the strongest feeling of being alive from these alternating states.” Despite that, Roth knew that boozing was doing him no good: “I’m slowly softening up. My heart doesn’t work any more,” as he said in an interview in May. The evening before his death, he was supposed to fly to his doctor in Hamburg. “I’ve no idea what stopped him.”

Roth’s works often included his characteristically round head, which he indicated by a few strokes. “What he would most liked to have used it for was writing,” says Wassmer. The artist filled an enormous number of books to produce works of filigree playfulness and wit, and so serpentine and simultaneously concentrated that not even the greatest culture-vulture could quote him off the cuff. He simply paints in order to support his writing, as a friend once remarked. Joyce was a guiding light for

him, and *Ulysses*, with whose lost and fumbling principal character Roth could largely identify, was for him “the only truly great work of literature.”

He warded off his anxiety by means of hurtful coarseness

Roth, who first exhibited at the age of 38 and was “spurred on by his drives” (the Basel gallerist Klaus Littmann), to create a “hyper-mega-mega-oeuvre” (*Weltwoche*), was a nomad between Switzerland and his adopted country of Iceland. His anxiety kept him on the move throughout his life. He first felt it at the age of eight when he witnessed the heavy bombing of Hanover by the Allies. And in his attempt to ward it off he resorted to a hurtful coarseness. He had to “go for a piss,” he bellowed on the television programme *ZischtigsClub* in 1986. He left the studio several times and disrespectfully promised the stunned chat-show guests a “couple of slaps round the kisser.” “Roth felt that he was constantly surrounded by wildcats,” says Wassmer. He managed to bury his fear of them before his death: in a picture of the lion monument in Lucerne, which is now in the possession of the former industrialist. The king of the steppes looks out of the frame: petrified, indolent and harmless. The work alone has bite.

Captions:

top: Franz Wassmer among his Roth works; over the years the two would get tipsy together on very formal, second-name terms.

bottom: The artist in an opulent work: detail from “Roth-Wiener-Tapestry II.”

“But then the day comes when you sense it’s starting up again.”

The *SonntagsZeitung* chatted with Dieter Roth at the opening of the exhibition “Junge Schweizer Kunst” at the Kunsthaus, Zurich, on the day before his death. The brief exchange circled around one topic: drinking.

Dieter Roth: Are you sober at the moment?

Yes, but I won’t be for long.

Roth: What will happen then?

I’ll start getting loud and merry.

Roth: Why don’t you come back when you’re merry...

Mr Roth, you are a hedonist. Would you mind telling me how long can one keep that up? Can one keep drinking

one’s whole life long?

Roth: Well, you have to take breaks.

Lengthy breaks? Weeks? Months?

Roth: Yes, although it depends very much on the person. I used to drink for half a year and then stop for three months. Later I started putting in a twelve month break after two years’ of drinking.

And that wasn’t any problem for you?

Roth: No, of course I had problems. People would say to me: “Stop boozing, you drunken fool.” And I’d say: “There’s nothing anyone can do about it.” But when it stops tasting good that’s a sign that your liver doesn’t want to take any more.

At some point the liver doesn’t want to take any more?

Roth: Sometimes I’d say to myself: oh-oh, that doesn’t taste good any more. And then I knew I could stop.

And your liver would recover?

Roth: It seems so. But then the day will come when you sense that it’s all starting up again. When that happens I look for the first bar and quickly down one.

What should one drink? I can handle vodka best.

Roth: I don’t think I should say anything to that.

But you’re experienced in these matters.

Roth: I’ve always drunk what I liked the taste of.

Is it true that the worst hangovers come from mixing your drinks?

Roth: I’m sorry, but I can’t answer you in as much detail as you’d like. I really don’t know! I simply stick to one thing and that’s that.

I thought you were a man of experience in this field.

Roth: I’m too perceptive to be taken in by this commonplace, much as I’d like to be ...

— Thomas Haemmerli

Der Spiegel, 15.06.98

Obituaries

Dieter Roth, 68. During a speech given in 1989 in praise of the artist — he had won the Hamburg Lichtwark Prize — mischief-maker Roth interrupted his advocate with a few words of criticism, saying he missed “the negative side” of his life: “I’m a jealous cuss, a trouble-maker and an alcoholic — and I can’t continue this list because I haven’t anything to drink.” The Neo-Dadaist, who was born in Hanover and lived in Iceland and Switzerland, was obsessed with making lists. He tried constantly to cheat chance and chaos, decay and transitoriness, by aesthetically archiving his life. What remains is a *gesamtkunstwerk* in the form of a turmoil of photographs, prints, paintings, artist’s books, records and junk sculptures. Dieter Roth died on 7 June in Basel of heart failure.

Jungle World, No. 25, 17.06.98. Berlin

Shit

On Dieter Roth, who died twelve days ago.

— Stefan Ripplinger

There are some sensitive souls for whom the bourgeois sensibility will never suffice. The provisional crown of human evolution, the ultimate product of our highly industrialised society — is nothing but shit to them. The niceties of civilisation, its marvels of technology, the perfection of its communications are nothing but an “institution for incubating shit-eggs.” They reach into this shit and hurl it back. If they are lucky, people don’t take offence because they are artists.

Dieter Roth (aka Dieter Rot, aka Dieter Roth) was an artist of exceptional abilities. Yet at the same time one could never shake off the feeling that he was putting on an act, that there was something quite different behind it all, a pain, perhaps, that is not even allowed for in the blueprints of language, or perhaps we should say something-like-pain. Since a feeling and its interjection are regarded as identical, people distrust feelings when they cannot find a word for them. “Hey, you, there’s a pound of anxiety hanging here on the wall.” A sentence like that can be viewed as tomfoolery, or as unsuccessful existentialism. Or as an indication that no sentence can do justice to the fact that a pound of anxiety, say, is hanging on the wall. Doubting the communicability of the heart is, according to Nietzsche, a mark of distinction.

Roth viewed unsuccessful, surplus things, the ones people throw into the paper bin when writing or drawing, the doodles on beer mats, the thoughts that catch people unawares, drunken jabberings, regressive sexuality, the errors, the misused and misunderstood as the material for his work. He did everything in his power to maintain it all in its provisional, degraded and questionable state.

A reading by Roth I attended many years ago began with the artist reciting some poems. Suddenly he paused and muttered: “Ah, this is shit.” He flipped over a couple of pages, began another poem, paused again and uttered in annoyance, “More shit!” and looked for a better one. Sometimes he read a text to the end, only then to dismiss it with a terse comment; sometimes he leafed irresolutely through his manuscripts for minutes on end; sometimes he deliberately stressed the words wrongly. Gradually those who had come for a traditional reading left. And those who enjoyed this process of stumbling from one piece of shit to the next experienced

three wonderful hours.

I know of no other artist apart from Arthur KÝpcke who could transfigure such serious problems and such a bitter message with such high spirits. Rot and KÝpcke knew each other. In the late fifties, early sixties, Rot exhibited the strongly constructivist works that he made at that time in KÝpcke’s gallery in Copenhagen. Works like “books consisting of black and white sheets of paper punched with holes, which could be moved to produce constantly changing patterns behind the holes. The observer was allowed to participate in the work’s realization.” (Susanne Rennert)

Rot and KÝpcke’s anti-academic outlook, their art that lived from what was excluded from bourgeois communication, their destructive power, their playfulness and of course their idea of art by everyone, for everyone and about everything, brought them close to Fluxus. But the two were too self-willed, too radical to actually consider joining this group of radical, self-willed artists. But nevertheless Rot realized typically Fluxus ideas during the eighties. Such as the *Review for Everything* (published together with Barbara Wien), which diligently printed everything that was submitted without any editorship or correction. The review swelled to such a size that in the end it could no longer be funded.

So whilst he brought the unsuccessful, the excluded and fatal things in life to public awareness — motivated by a deep distrust of the ruling forms of communication, and without ever subscribing to the opinion that this was in any way more “real” — he simultaneously discarded everything connected with reputation and cultural values. His most renowned works are his “Literature Sausages.” Rot soaked the complete works of Hegel and a Günter Grass novel, among other books, in water, pickled them, and forced them into sausage skins. Some of these sausages were made apparently for a dentist and art collector in the latter’s bathtub. In return, the dentist attended to the teeth of the chronically broke artist. Things material, things physical, the living and thus the dying, the rotting and thus the stinking — Rot’s imagination was captured by organic decay. He punched signs into slices of sausage and then let it all turn mouldy behind glass. He piled up slabs of chocolate into increasingly rancid and ultimately collapsing mounds. But he was not some strongly sensual artist, concerned with refining the senses; it would not be wrong to surmise a wicked thought at back of it all. There can be no return to eye, ear and nose art after Duchamp. His friend Oswald Wiener recognised that Rot’s production was based on a “specific interference

between naivety and reflection.” The result is that highly advanced thoughts — this “art nouveau of cognition” (Wiener) — will assimilate crude or vulgar forms which, when manipulated by him, lose their coarseness. There are echos here of traditional adages, like the pearls of wisdom one sees framed on pub walls: “bleibe dabei: / bei eins / und zwei! / vielleicht auch drei. / an vier / reite vorbei / fuenf lass! / und sechs auch. / sieben ist zu gross! / acht ist das zu grosse leben! — leb da vorbei, / and auch alles drueber / ist vom uebel!”⁴ (from *SCHEISSE*, Providence, 1966).

Wiener also wrote: “his sensitivity is rooted in *anxiety*.” Rot gave a few inklings of the dawn of this anxiety in his astonishing *Lebenslauf von 50 Jahren* [*50 Years of Life*], which Helmut Heissenbüttel and Bernd Jentzsch published in 1980 in their magazine *Hermannstraße 14*. Rot remarks on his childhood in Hitler’s Germany: “He lived his days in that place, trembling and despairing, forced to hear or listen to the scourful rabble of cannibals, a self-heap forever reshitting himself, a thrashed and flogged tremblebird pissing his anxious-pants, a spurting tot wanxing in the anxiety-sheets.” This terrible place, this “grey city of Hanover” where everything took place, this city which made Theodor Lessing run the gauntlet and which produced Gerhard Schroeder, further humiliated the artist shortly before his death by awarding him the Kurt Schwitters Prize. And yet the horror of existence does not finish in mere biographical details, nor even in the disaster of growing up among murderers, say. Rot, who for a long time lived in Switzerland and Iceland, can give scant hope to those who wish to flee. They will not escape the problem at the very base of it all: “There, in foreign parts, things look like at home, you can go and shit there, so that’s why some go and why many a one goes, or that’s how it comes about that some or many a one moves to foreign parts, where the language-closet is not completely full of shit. But the foreigner is deceived, being foreign he deceives himself. Everything is already full of shit, the more he learns to shit in the language of these foreign parts the fuller he sees the vicinity coughed full with shit or crap, that murderous barking harmlessly called righteous barking which, disguised as speech salad, falls from the mother tongues.”

For at least 100 years, this assault on language, on isolating, standardizing and reductive communication,

has been the impulse for art rebels and everyone who is unwilling to give up their thinking without a fight. Several years ago, Tomas Schmit wrote on Dieter Roth, who died in Basel on 5 June: “i think of him incidentally in the same way that others see or saw beuys, say, or rauschenberg: as the boss, the king.”

⁴ Stick to your guns / stick to one / and two / perhaps even three / but ride past four / keep away from five! / and six as well. / seven is extreme! / eight is the extreme life! / -- live past it, / and everything over and above / is also bad. [Trans.]

Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, 18.06.98

Pieces in the mosaic of Dieter Roth's life

An hour of commemoration for the artist at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst

The sudden death of the versatile artist, writer and musician Dieter Roth, one of the most formative artists of our times, came as a shock to his numerous friends and relatives. His work, which steadily accumulated and mushroomed over the years, remains to be sorted through and assessed by art connoisseurs and critics. Roth began this body of literary and visual works in the fifties, and constantly employed new materials, forms and ideas for it: Dieter Roth was a collector, searcher and discarder.

A number of the deceased artist's close acquaintances and friends organised an hour of commemoration for him in the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, and doubtless they never expected that so many people would turn up. It was not an occasion for examining Roth's work with a critical eye. It is too early for that, that can only be done in the future. The people who spoke during the hour of remembrance were those who knew him well and were near to him.

Bernhard Luginbühl, the famous sculptor, put it aptly when he said that the memories that each person had of the artist were simply small pieces in the large mosaic of Dieter Roth's life. As a close friend, the piece he had to offer was a particularly glittering one, beginning with a note he put in his diary after hearing of Roth's death: he had known him very well, and also very poorly, but at any rate very long, said Luginbühl, adding that they were the same by nature and simultaneously very different. The two had served an apprenticeship and attended the recruit school, and had been constantly on the verge of giving up. They had also received the same grants, and had kept bumping into each other at certain points in the world.

Other pieces of the mosaic were contributed by Roth's daughter-in-law, Laura Magnúsdóttir, and a friend, Emmett Williams: highly personal facets concerning the nature and character of this lovable man and artist.

Dieter Roth was rather quiet and gentle as a boy, said his brother Wolfgang, who had remained fond of the artist throughout his life, even if he had not always understood everything his brother created.

Before the participants had the opportunity to exchange memories with one another, Jan Voss read out a number of Roth's nonsense poems.

— Paul Schorno

Vorwärts, Zurich, 19.06.98

Dieter Roth — dead

The internationally renowned artist Dieter Roth died last week in Basel.

He often altered and varied the spelling of his name. He was an extremist when it came to the truth, although initially his extremity was more concerned perhaps with precision, and later with authenticity. His early works are viewed as belonging to “concrete” art: clear, non-figurative, geometrical shapes, in Dieter Roth’s case mostly black on white.

His subsequent production — the pictures, films, books, tape recordings, classified ads, sculptures, prints, *assemblages* etc. that form his main body of work, and which snowballed to untold dimensions — is no less radical, but utterly different. Its anarchic subversiveness mocks the bourgeois expectations of sublime and timeless art, and yet it is disarmingly authentic. Roth accepts spontaneity, transience, the sounds, the smells, his uncertainty, doubts, pride, shame and so on, yet none of these are simply the subject of his work, but rather the means. He likewise struggled against society’s stupid throwaway mentality: he collected everything and abolished hierarchies. He even found an artistic dimension to decay. He was a realist and made himself unpopular.

Without being too literal, Dieter Roth’s development could be described as the diametrical opposite to that of Hans Erni, for instance. While the latter became increasingly conformist and paid increasing homage to beautiful appearances, Roth became increasingly truthful.

— Guido Nussbaum

SonntagsZeitung, 21.06.98

Predated attacks

“Traces of an extreme friendship”,

SonntagsZeitung from 14 June

Roland Falk writes that Dieter Roth witnessed the heavy bombing of Hanover by the Allies at the age of eight.

The way I was taught it, that must have been in 1938.

There were however no air raids in 1938, the war began in autumn 1939. The raids started in 1942 at the earliest.

— Ulrich C. Adler

Basler Zeitung, 26.06.98

Hansjörg Schneider is an author and lives in Basel.

Dieter Roth

He was a great win for this district. People stopped and stared when he lumbered across the street in his worn-out jacket and with his tattered cap perched on his grey-bearded head.

The people loved him at the grocer's where he went to shop. At first the owner had felt afraid of him, she told me, because there was something wild about him. But then he began to talk, first about the weather, then about eating and drinking, in a nice, friendly manner. In the end he would always stop for a few minutes and have a civilised conversation with her.

The walls of his studio were alive with the samba, the rumba the Viennese waltz. The pictures danced. He sat beside them at the table, brooding misanthropically over something.

Sometimes he would ring at the door of our flat, in the evening when it was dark. He would sit at our kitchen table, drink a bottle of wine and lament. And after an hour he had slowly filled his stomach with ten boiled potatoes. He had searched for human warmth, but once he found it he laughed at his misery.

He had erected the most perfect obstacle to personal success I ever came across. Out of sheer anxiety of becoming a classic in his lifetime, he had studiously insulted all the high and mighty in his fraternity. He had ruined things with many a person, including himself. He was as delicate as a raw egg. He was hurt to the core. And he made music from this hurt and hurled it at the canvas.

He was the least boring person I've ever met. After all, he had taken life so seriously that he knew that the best thing in life is play. And he played, with his hands and feet and arse.

Apart from Beuys, he was the greatest magician of his generation. Beuys celebrated magic. Roth laughed at that. He considered it childish to take one's own magic so seriously. He played with his magic, like a child.

That's why his works are so cheery.

He has left behind a body of work that could fill the Central Station. And then one should send the children there, they would love it.

His name is Dieter Roth. He died on 5 June in his studio in the Hegenheimerstrasse.

Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, 27.06.98

“Basel Tidbits”

Four hours earlier he was sitting in a restaurant, he wanted to fly to Germany, realized in Blotzheim that he had forgotten his ticket, drove back to his studio and died of heart failure. That was on 5th of June 1998. Dieter Roth reached the age of 68. He had never made his peace with Basel ever since he first worked there, almost forty years ago, as a graphic designer in an advertising agency. At that time he was a relentless champion of an austere typography and “concrete” graphic art. Yet shortly afterwards he created a large collection of mould pictures in an attic. He was often drawn back to Basel during his roundabout life, because his inability to make peace with the city was in many ways a declaration of his love. While dining at Donati’s on the day of his death, Mrs Donati took a photo of him. After he died, not only was the photo hung on one wall, all of the walls had pictures by Dieter Roth on them — a commemorative exhibition. What is a cultural city? One in which a landlord comes up with such proofs of his love for his (not always easy) guest.

— Markus Kutter

Süddeutsche Zeitung, 30.06.98

Anxiety by day, anxiety by night

Exhibitions by Dieter Roth in Zurich and Vienna

Everything in this artist's life was extreme. Dieter Roth wanted to show it, and did so in a very literal way. The range of activities he mastered is incomparably large. The wild and wondrous cosmos of this painter and poet, this drawer, sculptor and graphic artist, this writer, book-maker, publisher, film-maker, musician, video and performance artist, reveals itself in an incalculable wealth of objects. Someone has attempted here to give form to the whole of their life.

A gigantic scenario stretches out across the two storeys of the Zurich Galerie Hauser & Wirth. Indescribable things open up before our eyes. Tangible chaos stirs us, crazed and confused. Fantastic constructions harbour the refuse of the world. A large scale version of Caspar David Friedrich's "Dashed Hope", as it were, three-dimensional. Pictures of downfall, large and small: projectors cast the "Reykjavik Slides" on the wall to clattering rhythms, every building in the city, street by street, approximately 14,000 slides. The first series was taken between 1973 and 1975, and followed by a second series of 20,000 in 1990/93. Flickering from forty monitors come Dieter Roth's simultaneous "Solo Scenes," a hundred videos of the artist's day-to-day life, a kind of visual diary, a disillusioning deluge of images that wants only to show one thing, "the total sadness, the absurdity and tedium of life." Life's melody resounds in "Long Distance Sonatas" or in dog barks. We circle round enormous shelves filled with archives, leaf through the 750 painstakingly kept files of everyday life: we inspect the daily catch of "Flat Scrap" in its distended see-through folders — collected and put into compressed, plastic form in 1976.

The longing for beauty sets out in other directions in this artistic realm, that much becomes quickly clear. Here everything has been collected and rescued, all the broken light switches, battered appliances and utensils, paint tin lids, beer bottles and cigarette ends. Unvarnished material reality in all its randomness and banality, formed into a picture, a sculpture encompassing the space and in which one can walk around. Constantly criss-crossing layers of material and time, we move about the "Table Ruin", an installation dating from 1970 that has undergone twenty-eight years of accumulation to result in its present form. A dizzying installation that transports us far away from all that we are accustomed to; a Rothian labyrinth of thoughts and

feelings, in which a sometimes extreme loosening up of the elements goes to create one last great reprise. In a world of surrogates, this artist gives us authenticity, nothing but authenticity. He tirelessly adds the products of decay, works away outside of the conventional concepts of quality, exploits the whole gamut of possibilities, large and small, beautiful and ugly, possible and impossible. "A work of art is produced by the artistic devaluation of its elements." Kurt Schwitters said that. Even more radically than this great authority on an art of artlessness, Dieter Roth is fired by the desire to blend the categories, to transgress the boundaries, sabotage the hierarchies of art and non-art and smash apparent coherence. He is interested in "things that go wrong," that "slide downhill." "Everything that drags the picture down," as he once said, "is permitted, because in fact it lifts the picture up."

Dieter Roth has gone much further than others in his attempt to blend the realities of art and life. With unmatched radicality he shackled his art to his own person, thus putting the processes of life and work in mutual contact. The incredible and unparalleled challenge of this utterly incomparable work is not least the result of the artist's self-disclosures and generous revelations, of the idea of unconditionally transposing every snatch of his life into his work. It was in this way that Dieter Roth's pictures of downfall came into being in all their beauty, sadness and elegiac sweetness. Works like the "Table Ruin," which once began as a desk with a variety of implements, constitute a self-extant cosmos that stands for an artistic universe free of any aesthetic pleasantries. The "Table Ruin" is a multi-media *assemblage* of strangely stacked-up sculptural elements and endless videos, with old films from the fifties and croaking radios from now, with photos, drawings, texts, painting and hybrid forms.

Cosmological humour

Everything about this work, this overview of his work, oversteps the boundaries. Everything can be grasped without any philosophical effort, simply by sensual perception. At times the "materials impregnated by mankind" (Apollinaire) speak so intensely in all their shabbiness and power, it is as if the artist had poured his feelings into form. But also wit and irony, and that thing that Emmett Williams once called Dieter Roth's "cosmological humour." What Roth admired in Kafka's diaries, the fact that "he took his suffering as his subject," became the backbone of his own work. "Great anxieties during the night and small anxieties during the

day” drove him, aesthetically, to a kind of realistic quest for truth. Dieter Roth put up this exhibition with one great, final effort. It has become his bequest.

The current art business, which so blithely spells out those fetishised concepts “context,” “crossing” or “arsenal of memories,” has largely ignored this artist. An exception was the Vienna Secession, which in 1995 paid Dieter Roth its respects by putting on an unrepeatable show of his entire *oeuvre*. This was followed by the Graphische Sammlung Albertina. In their retrospective “Gedrücktes Gepresstes Gebundenes 1949-1979,” they have displayed his graphic work of three decades. From the earliest concrete, constructivist pieces that even pre-date his activities with the arts journal *Spirale*, to his speedy and speediest drawings, and his collaborations of the seventies, not least with the Vienna artists Attersee, Brus and Rainer. And the exhibition presents one genre that can safely be called his “invention”, because Dieter Roth staked out such an unparalleled field of possibilities for it: the artist’s book. One constant in this life work, which is of equal literary and artistic stature, is transformation. Few have exploited the print medium with so much innovation, anarchic experimentation and cunning. Some things could only ever have come from this artist: conjuring up an entire universe with rubber stamps, or a “Small Sunset” with a slice of sausage. The exhibition, Dieter Roth added by way of a cheeky parting shot, displays his “years of apprenticeship,” but he would soon enough display his “years of mastership.” Others will have to do that for him now. And then we will have another chance to be amazed by this lone wolf, who can truly be called one of the greats. Dieter Roth died, as previously reported, on 5 June in Basel.

— Dorothea Baumer

Caption: Dieter Roth. “Tischruine,” 1970-1998. The world’s refuse as a fantastic construction.

HandelsZeitung, 8.07.98

Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich/Dieter Roth (1930-1998), one of the most singular personalities of the post-war art world — comparable with Duchamp or Beuys — was already a legend before his unexpected death several weeks ago. The exhibitions in Galerie Hauser & Wirth 1 and 2 in Zurich can be regarded as a living testimony to his trailblazing and ever-changing work. Eva Presenhuber and Iwan Wirth worked together with the artist on the concept for the retrospective, which is now like a posthumous tribute. Roth's *oeuvre* is associated with Fluxus. During his constant self-examination and search for innovative forms of expression, Roth came up in 1957 with the first artist's book, followed by another 250 in the forty years thereafter. A sensation when it first appeared, this means of expression has been adopted by numerous of his colleagues, in much the same way that Roth's overall influence has had such a lasting effect on younger artists, such as Martin Kippenberger, or the Fischli/Weiss duo. Eva Presenhuber, who was closely acquainted with the artist, saw him as an intelligent, generous, humorous and uncompromising person, and not least as a man with a manic desire to realize his ideas. Among the major works on display at this double exhibition is the room-filling "Table Ruin," which Roth kept on developing as a kind of work in progress from 1970 until his death. It began quite innocently in his flat in Stuttgart, when he attached objects to a billiard table and recorded the accompanying noises. In 1979 the Table, which had grown to a length of three meters, was exhibited in the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart and, as was often the case, Roth could not resist continuing his work on it during the exhibition. It now measures all of twelve meters. Roth was born of a German mother and Swiss father in Hanover. Apart from Basel, Vienna and Philadelphia, in which he pitched his tent for one year each, it was his wife's home town, Reykjavik, that was to become his main destination. In one of the gallery spaces, 34,000 slides have been piled up to form an installation, while a projector permanently projects photographs of houses from the Icelandic capital onto the walls. Among the most impressive of Roth's works is, however, his "Solo Scenes," in which the sober reality of the artist's daily life between 1997 and 1998 flickers past the viewer on 44 video screens. The work was prompted by his deep disgust with television and an all-too sober withdrawal cure. The works are priced between 55 and 150,000 Sfr.

Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung, 9.07.98

The liar

The all-round artist Dieter Roth has died

"I'm lying. Everything a person says is a lie." The liar was standing next to the books that he had suspended close together on long chains from the ceiling of the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hanover. He was talking about what prompts him to make art. It was summer 1974, and in this installation Dieter Roth, who was born 21 April 1930 in Hanover and was thus 44 at the time, and who also produced pictures and texts under the pseudonyms Otto Hase, Max Plunderbaum, Fax Hundetraum, Diter Rot or DR, was showing over 60 of the books he had created to date. Books with titles like *Die gesamte Scheisse* [The Complete Shit] or *Noch mehr Scheisse* [Yet More Shit], or even *poetry 5-1* and *Das Tränenmeer* [The Sea of Tears]. Last weekend the agent provocateur Dieter Roth, who had just turned 68, died of heart failure in Basel, the town he chose to make his own.

At one of his last exhibitions, which Roth, a winner of the Nord/LB Art Prize, put on three years ago at the Vienna Secession, the all-round artist transformed the art nouveau temple into a labyrinth of junk: the rubbish gave birth to a *curriculum vitae*. Accordions and cigarette butts, beer bottles and bread were formed into confused and bizarre sculptural compositions that could be walked around inside. "A work of art is produced by the artistic debasement of its elements." This axiom comes from Kurt Schwitters, and Roth, with his material pictures of simply monumental proportions, has proved a virtuoso pupil.

With breath-taking radicality Roth brings life and art in line. His "Sausage Horizons" from the sixties are already legends. He spoke of how a thing that goes wrong, that goes downhill, interests him, and "and how it nevertheless supports the picture and makes it strong." Writing has other functions for him: it soothes him at night when he is awoken by nightmares.

Roth, who five years ago presented forty small rubber-stamp pictures to the Sprengel Museum in Hanover, and who is represented in its permanent collection by a "Spice Window" from 1971, was a compulsive collector and archivist. His objects mushroomed from trivial beginnings, his jottings from lines of thought become word. He never overlooked a thing and keenly studied transiency. Even his "Spice Window" never remains static: it changes colour and structure like a chameleon. When the Galerie Ernst in Hanover presented Roth's

"Letzte Ladenhüter" (Last Dead Stock) almost thirty years ago, the stench in Warmbüchen Street was appalling: there in his home town, the former Bismark School pupil had piled up 215 pieces of Limburger cheese under glass to create a melting pyramid.

Ten years ago, the Hamburg Kunsthalle and the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie put on an extensive show of Roth's droll graphic works. It began with a naturalistic study of his mother's head, dated 1946, by the at that time 16 year-old DR, and provisionally concluded with various thematic groups: "I draw, therefore I am" — a strategically calculated chaos.

The son of a Swiss father and German mother, who was evacuated to Switzerland after the night-time bombings of Lower Saxony in 1943, Roth tirelessly created an *oeuvre* which, according to the Zurich newspaper *Weltwoche*, brought him success and a reputation as one of the "most innovative artists of Europe." Fifteen years ago, this great experimenter with life presented his all-in existential diary at the Swiss pavilion of the Venice Biennale. Texts and photos flew about the room.

Timm Ulrichs said of his brother in dada-spirit, the scrupulous self-observer and football fan Dieter Roth: "He has tried out a great many things and never received the respect he deserved." He was suspicious of recognition, and he felt sorry for the visitors to his exhibitions and "the fact that they go there rather than do it themselves". An artist for all the senses.

— Alexandra Glanz

Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, 23.07.98

A first class spray-painting
“Sculptures and New Media” in Reinach: Dieter
Roth

[...] Almost everyone has got hot under the collar at some time over graffiti-pictures. Next to the entrance to the College of Commerce in Reinach, to one side of the Weiermatten car park on Brunnengasse, a picture has been sprayed on the wall that at first sight looks like one of these “wall decorations,” and which is even called “Spray Picture.” On closer inspection one can find a signature and a date. The work comes from the recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, who painted it in 1997. Roth was also a great master of bewilderment. Many will recall his “Eat Art” works, or the tables that he captured for all eternity after first serving meals on them. At the end of the meal Roth would fix them with glue and paint. The process of decay was an integral part of his artworks, and the artist accepted that such pieces had a limited lifespan.

The “Spray Picture” in Reinach is also not intended to last forever. As little as the works alongside the railway tracks which it appears to be modelled on. Roth plays with the genre, and transforms it with great virtuosity. In contrast to the graffiti with their often highly static comic-book style, Roth’s picture bubbles over with a movement and vitality that is almost reminiscent of the Italian Futurists. Nothing in the picture stays still. One’s gaze is caught time and again by the whirl of spinning movements, which leave the eye no time to rest before whipping it on to the next vortex. It is as if Roth wished to show the moment in which a bowling ball strikes the skittles and sends them hurtling in all directions. After a while the viewer feels he can make out various figures that are attempting to step out from this tapestry of motion. It seems as though one can distinguish human bodies, even if they never totally reveal themselves. Once again Roth has adopted one of the graffiti artists’ methods, for they often create a mere allusion with a few strokes, while leaving everything else as rigid ornament. In Roth’s case, the ornament continues to mutate into movement and thus maintains the painting’s tension.

— Alexander Jegge

Caption: Graffiti do not have to be boring: Dieter Roth’s “Spray Picture” next to the Weiermatten car park by the entrance to the College of Commerce.

Kunstzeitung, Zurich, No. 23, July 1998

Statement for Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth, an artist who combined art and life in a unique way, is no more. The 68 year-old German artist, who for many decades lived in his second home of Switzerland and travelled back and forth between Basel and Iceland, died of heart failure in June.

I last saw him a few weeks ago, surrounded by his family and his Icelandic assistants at the opening of his exhibition at Galerie Hauser & Wirth in Zurich. The evening ended up in the "Roth Bar," a former shop in which the artist had stationed his "functional" installation. Icelandic folk songs rang out late into the night to the accompaniment of gin and tonic. I first got to know Dieter Roth personally last Summer in Marseille, where the Museum for Contemporary Art (MAC) had put on a kind of retrospective. I also came face to face there with a work in progress that I had last seen ten years previously in Palais Harrach in Vienna, the "Big Table Ruin," a bewildering three-dimensional work made of a diversity of materials. At that time it belonged to the collector Oswald Schmidt. Roth had worked on it from 1970, first in Danneckerstrasse in Stuttgart, then in Switzerland, and finally two years ago in Vienna, where the work was the centre-piece of the exhibition at the Secession. The "Big Table Ruin" is one of Roth's major works. It combines the artist's typical materials, such as paint pots, brushes, film and video equipment, cables, cardboard boxes, battens etc., with the remnants of physical existence, such as empty beer bottles and food packaging, to produce an overwhelming environment. And almost like Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa", it is crowned by a mast and a sail in the form of a home movie screen. Parts of the installation act simultaneously as projector and projection surfaces, which allow the diary-like scenes from Dieter Roth's eventful life to flow past in video and film. Dieter Roth was interested in placing this enormous work in the space vacated in the Abteiberg Museum in Mönchengladbach by Joseph Beuys' "Unschlitt". But obviously he wanted to sell the work. For just under a million marks, a considerable sum, yet much more reasonable when one considers the size and importance of the work. Perhaps the purchase of this splendid work could have been funded by state and regional foundations. A lot of people are sympathetic towards the artist, even in the ministries. But only the younger generation of artists has recognised the mould-artist's

true significance. The works of Martin Kippenberger and Franz West have grown on this autobiographical, self-ironic soil. The only of Dieter Roth's room-sized installations in Germany is privately owned, and not in a museum. A work in the Abteiberg Museum would be able to show links with Beuys, Filliou, Broodthaers, West and Kippenberger. The initial reactions in Mönchengladbach spoke however of junk, which would be virtually an insult to the local populace. The same would doubtless have been said several decades ago of Kurt Schwitters' Merz-Bau, a key work of twentieth century German sculpture. The combination of *assemblage* and biographical details in the version by Roth from Hanover is so original that it can quite safely be placed beside the Merz-Bau of the older Hanoverian as a congenial counterpart — in my opinion at least. The cash-strapped museum's attempts to raise the funds took too long for Dieter Roth. So without further ado he put the work on show in his Zurich gallery, where it can currently be seen. In all likelihood it has already found a buyer. If not, the ministries and foundations, which subsidized Beuys for many times the price of this work, should recall a great German artist who has slipped slightly into obscurity, and whose work is now historical. An artist whose extreme individuality scared off many a gallerist, critic or museum director. The museum in Mönchengladbach is still ready and waiting. Perhaps it is not too late — but it five minutes to twelve.

— Veit Loers

Kunstbulletin 7/8, 1998

Dieter Roth at the Galerie Hauser & Wirth

“Looking and crapping” was his reply to the question of how he personally would characterise his art. Dieter Roth (1930-1998), who was born in Hanover and died in Basel on 5 June, was not only one of the most important artists of the post-war era: with his no less radical than highly idiosyncratic creative production, he generated important impulses for the current art scene, even if this is seldom realized.

Nothing is unconditional, least of all in contemporary art. But all too often the restricted horizons of “topicality” drive the prior conditions out of sight and out of mind: we busy ourselves pursuing an archeology of ancient civilisations and the present, but have regular attacks of amnesia when it comes to the recent past. Jason Rhoades and Thomas Hirschhorn are feted on all sides by the art establishment, but the obvious points of reference for these accumulations of material, which merely create the impression of running riot, get simply forgotten. Galerie Hauser & Wirth is a notable exception, for directly after Rhoades’ extravagant “Creation Myth” they have come up with Dieter Roth, the younger artist’s venerated model, complete with “Table Ruin.” This object-cum-audio-visual-*assemblage* began in 1970 as a table top, and since then has grown steadily to fill a good hundred cubic meters. With its industrious chaos of clattering projectors, wooden ladders, tangled cables, moths and mountains of coffee filters, it is simultaneously the prototype and ideal for those “self-digesting” works in progress that now keep popping up on all sides.

Whilst the mould expert and decomposition experimenter Dieter Roth has had a telling influence on the “trash-’n’-splash” aesthetics of a Mike Kelley or Paul McCarthy, in the sixties the inventor of the artist’s book already set the pace in the way he dissolved meaning amidst the burbling of the media: with mini-books in stock cube format made from newspaper cuttings, and 176 pages of unbroken “murmur”ing that would have delighted Martin Kippenberger.⁵ Equally important was the manic collector’s early and rigorous examination of the “archive” — something that now occupies many artists’ minds in view of the present

⁵ The book, entitled *Murmur*, consisted entirely of the one, repeated word *murmur*, which means either murmur or marble in English.

information explosion shortly before the turn of the century. Apart from his “Reykjavik Slides,” a highly assiduous work, the viewer will above all be impressed by the 700 files of his “Flat Scrap” from the year 1976. What could be more effective against honeying reminiscences or memory loss than the used toilet paper from one of those 366 days?

The fact that Dieter Roth’s enthusiasm for mixing up art and life was far from flagging after he reached pensioner age is demonstrated by the video piece “Solo Scenes” from 1997-1998. Roth counters television’s deliberate over- and under-exaggerations of everyday life with scenes from his own life filmed in VHS. Forty soundless monitors placed on plywood shelves show the old, white-bearded artist, naked and in long johns, while urinating, eating, shaking up the bedclothes or reading on the toilet. If “Solo Scenes” at first seems almost a parody of the abiding “real-life” trend in recent art, this reality-TV portrait of the artist, the wordless record of his ageing and his daily life, soon proved alarmingly topical in a very different way. Until 25.7.

— Ralf Beil

Caption: Dieter Roth. “Table Ruin,” 1970-1998
Various materials and objects, approx. 12 x 6 m.
Installation at Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

Basler Zeitung, 7.10.98

Bruno Steiger on Dieter Roth
So there are no Easter bunnies either, are there?

Dieter Roth's written work is as hard to estimate in terms of size and its form-breaking contours as his visual *oeuvre*. The fact that people chose to overlook it in favour of the latter must have really rankled him because Roth, who died this year aged sixty-eight, was many things, but in his opinion he was one thing above all else: a poet. A poet without text, it could be said, while he for his part called his written ventures "exercises in backlash naivety." The bibliography in the volume of his writings selected by Oswald Wiener and published by Luchterhand in 1973 speaks of "text-like matter." Obviously this excludes the genuine, the essential, not to mention the much-vaunted Other. It seems that what Roth was striving for was a totality of approximations and left-overs: poetry as a production of remainders.

The reduction to created rubbish that can no longer be evaluated: the title of the book from Luchterhand is "Early Writings and Typical Shit." The collection is unpaginated, the range of this heap of printed matter extends from Roth's early contributions to concrete poetry (which almost read as a criticism of the genre) to serial poems and sonnets, to essays, novellas, daily notes, all within the parentheses denoting "as-if", error, and the unattainably false. Somewhere in the middle of the second third of this volume is an example of a "dialogue-like" text. The text can be viewed as a casually mutilated found poem, as a dismal, gloomy moaning session between an exceptionally sober Karl Valentin and a Wittgenstein, who was once-again slightly merry, or simply as chit-chat. With Roth taking the minutes it becomes an art work, a poem. It demonstrates that the "forced," elemental "backlash naivety" of the minute-taker is to be read as the self-protection of a poet whose plight is no longer ennobled by scepticism.

It is necessary to view a despairing person as a happy one — or so it goes, more or less, somewhere or other. The selected text from Dieter Roth tells us why: a person in despair is never alone. His questions — insofar as he has any — always receive an answer. Without answers questions would not be necessary, or indeed: not even possible. This answer is not the solution, but it answers. As he knows, he himself is the question and the solution, that is all that he knows. As inconsequential as it is: it is this knowledge that actually

authorises him to pose the question. And by articulating the question and laying claim to the answer, it turns out that he is simultaneously both more and less than one alone; and that is how he permits himself to be perceived:

- *Why are there two fuses here?*
- *There aren't any here.*
- *Why aren't there any fuses here?*
- *I don't know.*
- *Why is the Idon'tknow here?*
- *I don't know.*
- *Why is there no forgetmenot here?*
- *I don't know.*
- *I also don't know.*

"I also don't know." This "also" sounds like a cry of comfort; it resounds and keeps multiplying throughout Dieter Roth's work. What it conveys is neither defiance nor gallows humour, nor even malicious glee. It is this "also" lurking in every beginning that is congruent with the postulate: here is something and it is this and this and it is double. The observation is created by the question about the reason: why is something here, why is it that and that, and why is it double. Most importantly, the "why" of the first, suppressed "also" is what gives the reader the certainty that the conversation is about fuses. It could be about summer coats, or Easter bunnies — brown, big, small, plump Easter bunnies — but they are not Easter bunnies, they are fuses. The question "why" can never be directed to anything but adequately defined things, to what is known or potentially knowable, whatever that is.

It is only posed once. By (provisionally) excluding its repetition, it comes across as the hasty discontinuation of any conceivable pursuit of the question, which could range from "Why are there two fuses here and not two summer coats?" to "Who's asking such silly questions?" The "why" of the actually posed question puts an end to all the other questions that are *also* possible. With its unique and specific, which is to say irredeemably accurate formulation, the question is nothing more nor less than the last valid supposition that we can make about the nature of what is: two fuses; here they are; they are here; they are. There are fuses, fuses exist. The shadow of a lie emerges in this protestation, for the entreaty is itself a call for argument. There are fuses because there is something that is "not a fuse." That is the great act of giving which is a taking and removing, at ninety degrees to time. This constant subtraction is interrupted during the speech, during the enumeration; everything here transforms bit by bit into everything, so that in the end even apricot trees seem possible. Inger

Christensen's clandestine alphabet of anxiety and of panicky comfort is anticipated in Roth's "why" and attested to early on with all the necessary brashness. The answer can only be a contradiction. It twists the "why" into an equally absolute "why not," which is close to that most daring "because." It sounds paradoxical, it sounds beautiful, it has the resonance of a short-circuit: here are two fuses because there are none here. If these fuses were here as this and this, as fuses, as objects working stubbornly away at their own verisimilitude, you would not have to ask about their reasons for being-here, you wouldn't even know what you were supposed to ask.

But because you — of all people, a human and not-Easter-bunny! — ask about them here of all places and now of all times, they are (because and if they are here) in the wrong place, which is called here: not elsewhere. Which is the right place for them, being the only one accessible to us. Consequently the second question is no more than a correction of the answer that preceded it: "Why are there no fuses here?" This second question is like a slap in the face. It's saying: "fine, I've got it, let's leave it at that!" But the person who is answering does not leave off. He's not going to stand for this question, not even this question, this question of all questions. And so he reveals himself as that which he can never become: as the Other, "I-don't-know" is his name, although he doesn't even know that much. Doesn't even know why he doesn't know it, and yet he cannot forget it; the "also" of the concluding line is the reply that makes all further questions superfluous. Writing "in order to make the world readable, right to the point or moment where both the author and the world must coincide in their mutual illegibility." This sentence forms the conclusion, the sum total of Inger Christensen's essay on Dante from 1969. Against the backdrop of the *Divine Comedy* she explains her programme for a "functional allegorical poem" which, by rigorously maintaining the external perspective, can also include self-reflection and be self-assimilatory. The world wishes to be manufactured in poetry, in the kind of self-certainty produced by the literary artefact, free from all conceivable phenomenological or personal, historical expectations. In the "functional" allegory word and world are not to be forced into one, but must be able to coincide, be simultaneously protected and erased. Dieter Roth, who was far removed from anything like a calculated ontological pessimism, appears to have seen and lived a text in which "world and word" no longer counterbalance one another in the poetic sketch. Anything that is made congruent in such a sketch has

long since fallen to pieces in Roth's view. All that he is left with is registering, stacking up and adjusting the rubble and "rubble-like things." Nothing should be staged! He was not driven on by the question about the evidence of something that has been smoother over for some reason or other, but more by the question of the infinity of the combinations, of the overall vastness *per se*. The wish to take a look at the back page of the lexicon is supplanted and thwarted by collecting mania, by the "crying and surmising" of the man already replete with reality, which is to say with answers. Surrounded, as if spellbound by answers which are no answers, encircled by the image. So it is a question of gobbling one's way through this image, which is a reversible one, with every available bit of "backlash naivety," fired by the energy of aporetical floundering. What finally appears as a result is the "also" of the doubled beginning, the genuine remainder. It can also be found in Oswald Wiener's astute selection several pages on:

- *Why are there 2 fuses here?*

- *There aren't any here.*

"Two is already speech, and more or less than that does not exist here among speakers," as Dieter Schwarz wrote in his still curiously solitary study of Roth's literary work. What we arrive at when we launch this "There is" is speech, not the world. One might equally say: in our speech, regardless whether in the form of objections or stutterings of praise or refrains without a song, words or things — "words-as-things" / "things-as-words" — simply play their mysterious part on the periphery, which is an — unguarded — border. Dieter Roth would doubtless have called it a rubbish heap.

Box:

Dieter Roth:

I saw a vase standing there
on a table, among ... people.

A flower stood inside.	A
flower stood inside.	
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From: *Frühe Schriften und typische Scheiße*, verses 2-5 and lines 1-2 of verse 6 have been omitted.

Caption: Dieter Roth, *Frühe Schriften und typische Scheisse*, Sammlung Luchterhand 125, 1973.

Marcel Beyer on Dieter Roth's *Mundunculum* Flat Objects

When poetry is being written, everyone involved is facing one another eye-to-eye, is upright, crushed, depressed or crashed out. When poetry is being written, there is no bending: nothing bends under pressure, nor does the poet bend to his readers and listeners, or the painter, graphic artist or photographer to his spectators. Poetry can only be written where hierarchies are viewed with uneasiness: regardless in which context a word, a sentence, a construction is required outside of poetry — an element becomes poetry when it appears to have equal status with the other elements of the work. In the case of Dieter Roth, poetry is produced without any reservations about the possible material and never condescendingly: more “ascendingly.” He definitely noticed differences in elevation, his work is strongly concerned with such differences: but its main thrust is constantly directed against hierarchies. When it’s a question of haughtiness and abasement, of superciliousness and submissiveness, Dieter Roth responds with flat objects. To distinguish them from paintings, sculptures and installations, Roth designated

all works of less than two centimetres in height — including literature — as flat objects. This is a technical term that turns one’s attention to a particular image of man: if poetry has any significance, it is as a place where encounters between (or: in the form of) above and below are omitted.

One of Dieter Roth’s books seems exemplary in this respect: his *Mundunculum. A tentative logico-poeticum, represented like a plan and programme or dream as a provisional mytherbarium for visionary plants*. This universal book, which first appeared in 1967, developed between the years 1962 and 1965 from Roth’s work with 23 self-made rubber stamps, which he used to create stamp pictures. Almost 200 of them are included in the *Mundunculum*.

According to Roth, it was intended as a “preeminent” work, but essentially it proved a failure (all that is known is “Volume 1: The Rothian Videum”): preeminence would have meant hierarchy, whereas the *Mundunculum* is based in fact on equality, and proposes ordering systems other than those of vertical differences. Given such textbooks as Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* or Paul Klee’s *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, given people’s love of formal deduction and chains of proof, given all the explainers and instructors, the vocabulary of the *Mundunculum* is defined from the outset as raw material for constructing attempts at apologies, to which a catalogue of questions was later appended. Cursory derivations sprout like angel’s wings, growing at different rates. Motorbikes drive across the paper in lines. OuLiPian fields are staked out by means of “Queneauisms.” Layers of differing stamp motifs produce rubbish heaps for sweets. The interrelationships between “Schwanz” and “Futz” (“prick” and “cunt,” changed in the first edition to the German words for “black” and “foot”) are explored. The trains of thought of the vegetarian, the non-smoker and non-drinker are to be depicted graphically, as are those of their opposite. The fundamental requirements for an artist are interchange and communication with the environment and nature (of which he is a part), to quote Paul Klee. Roth goes further and takes interchange literally, by swapping the elements around. He explores symmetries in the visible and non-visible world, axes of symmetry as battlefields, language as a symmetrical gesture of asymmetrical beings. Roth also brackets off individual sections of the book. Headings, legends, footnotes appear as commentaries to the stamp-pictures, sketches as elucidations of an essay, prose sections provide commentaries to single lines of poetry, a stamp-picture to a stamp-picture. And likewise: a playtext is an

illustration for a sequence of pictures.

Instead of placing things above or below, we have here a process of layering, of reciprocal elucidation and in the end distortions. “Roth’s thinking flows around the things that got under his skin,” we read in *Mundunculum*. That’s how poetry can be created.

Dieter Roth. *Mundunculum. Ein tentatives Logico-Poeticum* [...], slightly amended and increased edition of the book published by Dumont Schauberg, Cologne 1967: Stuttgart, London, Reykjavik, Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1975.

Thomas Kling on Dieter Roth Roth, Roth, Roth

“Where the wallpaper of silence shines in the mourning house from the walls of the suffering-room ...” This strange beginning to a poem of parting was written by the compelling writer Dieter Roth, who died aged sixty-eight on 5 June 1998 of a heart attack and a hole in the head. And he was more than just some drunken painter-poet whom high society steered clear of, as the shameless obituary in *Die Zeit* tried to convince us. Roth was a marginal figure inasmuch as he belonged neither to Germany nor to Switzerland, but to the northmost tip of Europe, to Iceland. And the Icelandics truly appreciated who they had living and working there among them: after Roth’s farewell ceremony in Basel on 16.6. there was another one in the capital of Iceland on the 20th. It was held in the time-honoured Holt Hotel where, according our source and friend Andreas Züst from Zurich, everyone “drank like madmen.” The day after, 21 of June, Dieter Roth or diter rot or Diter Rot or whatever was buried at the foot of Snaefelljökull volcano in Hellnar. A remarkable place of burial for a remarkably great artist and person: it was the starting point for Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. Roth is the co-inventor, if not the sole inventor of the artist’s book. There must be around 600 of these scattered about the continent, small editions, one-offs, reproduced works with such lovely titles as *bats and dogs* (two-handed drawings), *Fax Hundetraum*, *150 Speedy Drawings*, *6 score soft speedy drawings*, or the Icelandic *bein i kölldu ofni* (bones in the cold stove). And-so-on-and-so-on. The Icelandics truly appreciated, as I said, who they had there among them: the major dailies published full-page obituaries for *eight* days in a row — more than after Laxness’ death, and he was a Nobel Prize winner. Heavens! Him, there, Roth, like

some despotic, playful megalocreator, who published his *Collected Damned Shit* in twenty volumes, only to begin his book production again with volume forty and number the books backwards (and arrive roughly at volume 35), Roth was the “sad writer on the wallpaper,” as it goes in the poem mentioned earlier, or more precisely: on the wallpaper of his world, just like a child in a cellar who daubs the walls in rage, all the walls: “Malr-,”⁶ three taps of the space bar, “paints on the wallpaper, fat Botty jumps at it...” Malr, mark you, a word as kaput as Old Norse: nor should it be forgotten that etymologically, “Mal” has two meanings in German: a moment of time and a mark: a (dirty) stain and a unit of measurement: writing and painting in one: that was Dieter Roth.

When Ute Langanky and I met Roth in Zurich at the end of May — where we were X-rayed by him and looked at each others’ books and talked together — his eyes shone, language-wallpaper and hooch, and I had to run after him as his taxi turned to leave the courtyard and add: “I just wanted to say it’s been an honour getting to know you.” Roth, a difficult person, smiled and said: “Thank you for saying that.” And he gave a wave as he drove off and called out: “Ahoy.” We want never to forget him.

⁶ Abbreviation of the German word “Maler” for painter [Trans.].

Wiener Kunsthefte, Vienna, No. 2, 1998

Dieter Roth

An exhibition that became an obituary

— by Leonore Maurer

Dieter Roth, born 1930 in Hanover, lived and studied from 1943 in Switzerland. Between 1947 and 1951 he served an apprenticeship as a graphic artist under Friedrich Wüthrich (woodcuts and linocuts), and in 1950 he received private tuition in lithography, and studied typography under Eugen Jordi. His earliest known works — drawings, pastels and poems — date from 1943, his first print, an etching on the tin of a can, from 1946.

Dieter Roth, who also called himself Diter Rot, employed a large number of artistic techniques: he drew, painted in watercolours and on canvas, constructed architectural models, worked as a goldsmith, was an actionist and writer... and he made films, collages, montages, music, illustrations, prints, multiples, books and objects. The latter were unusual due to the combination he used of organic and inorganic materials: he baked sculptures and produced mould heaps and book sausages.

The first major topic in Roth's work is mixing and combining: Roth also borrowed techniques and materials from outside of art, reintroduced various forms of craftsmanship to art production, adopted modern media, ignored in his new creations the traditional boundaries between genres, and worked with other artists in a wide range of fields. The second major topic in his work is the depiction and analysis of processes, in which he freed decay and destruction from their negative connotations and made them the focus and indeed the goal of his artistic production.

These two topic areas, the combination of the traditionally artistic and non-artistic, and *décollage* and deconstruction, won Roth the esteem of those who view modern art as a philosophical act. His innovatory use of techniques and materials fascinates those art historians who concentrate on the actual practice of art-making. His active rejection of the museum and the elitist aspects of art revitalised the political-artistic traditions of the second decade of this century. Although meeting with the highly elitist approval of the museums, this has proved exciting and stimulating for those who draw on political or sociological arguments for their interpretations.

Dieter Roth's "work is marked by a dedicated and demonstrative refusal that attempts to deter a simple approach through known structures and thought patterns.

Roth confronts dialogue and communication with a massive collection of items and a flood of images. These attempt to turn language systems upside down and reduce their significance, to blur their systematic potential and to work against their theoretical assimilation through the process of analysis and cognition."¹

A considerable part of his mental and practical experimentation was dedicated to documenting change, and making changes in what he had documented. The immanent contradictoriness of these interests, which is quite exemplary in modernist art theory, helps explain the unwieldiness of his work for art philosophy when it comes to interpreting the role that systematic procedures and inspiration play in it.

In recent years the Albertina and the Austrian Stiftung Ludwig have concentrated on amassing a large portion of Dieter Roth's prints for the permanent collection at the Albertina. Dieter Roth describes his own approach to printed works by placing them in three categories: "**flat** (objects) refers to those items that have been printed squeezed pressed squashed or sieved in a squashy manner to a height of under two centimetres **books** are called here or in this context that which is gummed or sewn and piled up either in groups or as company for its kind or stands around or stands about or stands there wedged in or lies there (not wedged in) **prints** are called in this context (of flat objects) what appears or has appeared alone or lonesome and lies around singularly or solitarily as well as hangs about wedged in ... The categories Roth lays down here represent the clear attempt to expand the possibilities of the printed form. Essentially he argues that his book objects and above all his material collages should also be integrated into this system. In the case of material collages, however, this only applies when they have attained a certain flatness through the application of pressure, which may be understood as a slight ironic dig at the "classical" print."²

The Albertina is now showing the exhibition "Dieter Roth, Gedrucktes Gepresstes Gebundenes 1949 - 1979", curated by Felicitas Thun, from 7th of May to 5th of July 1998 in the Akademiehof. A book which simultaneously acts as the catalogue, comprising 200 pages in German and English, has been published under the same name by Oktagon Verlag, Cologne. It contains numerous illustrations with an index, a foreword by Konrad Oberhuber, a commentary on the work by Felicitas Thun, a presentation of Roth's literary production by Ferdinand Schmatz, a conversation

between Dieter Roth and Felicitas Thun from 1998, an extensive biography dating up to 1995, and a bibliography. Both the book and the exhibition were produced in collaboration with Dieter Roth. In 1999 the exhibition will be shown at the Goldie Paley Gallery at the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia. Dieter Roth was to be presented with a 20,000 DM prize at the “art multiple”, which will be held from 1st to 4th of October 1998 in Düsseldorf. The prize is awarded by the Federal Association of German Art Publishers. Dieter Roth died of heart failure on 5th of June 1998 in Basel.

Notes

¹ Felicitas Thun, “Dieter Roth - Mein Auge ist ein Mund”, in *Dieter Roth, Gedrucktes Gepresstes Gebundenes 1949 — 1979*, ed. die Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna and Oktagon Verlag, Cologne, undated. p.8.

² Dieter Roth, *Gesammelte Werke*, introduction to vol. 20, p. 35

Falter, No. 24, Vienna, 1998

Art in Brief

Everything in a state of flux Dieter Roth was a universal and interventionist artist his whole life long. He not only worked as a painter and graphic artist, but also as a poet and actionist; he made records and created a corpus of books that distinguishes itself typographically and syntactically by its extreme idiosyncrasy (his prints and artist's book are on show at the Albertina in the Akademie-Hof until 5 of July). Roth augmented the easel painting with his spice pictures, which are in a line with his chocolate and mould objects: he packed organic substances under perspex or plastic foil so that they would constantly alter and at no point be "finished". Not only did the pieces of cheese and slices of sausage fare in this way, but also the artist's entire work, which he showed three years ago in a tightly-packed exhibition at the Secession. Dieter Roth, who was born 1930, died Friday night in Basel.

— Markus Wailand

Art multiple*dpa*, 17.08.98**140 exhibitors show “multiplied art” at Düsseldorf**

[...] An additional exhibition of multiples and book objects will be dedicated to the recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, the winner of this year’s Art Multiple prize.

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Koelnische Rundschau, 18.08.98**Strong demand for works on paper**

[...] An additional exhibition is to be dedicated to the recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, the winner of the Art Multiple prize.

++++###(etc.)

Mannheimer Morgen, 18.08.98**“Art Multiple” in Düsseldorf**

[...] A special exhibition is to be dedicated to the recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, who is the winner of the Art Multiple prize.

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Fraenkischer Tag, 18.08.98**Multiplied**

[...] An additional exhibition is to be dedicated to the recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, this year’s winner of the Art Multiple prize.

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Westfaelischer Anzeiger, 18.08.98**Glass cases at the fair**

[...] An additional exhibition of multiples and book objects will be dedicated to the recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, who is this year’s winner of the Art Multiple prize.

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Die Welt, Berlin, 18.08.98**140 dealers are coming to the Art Multiple**

An additional exhibition of multiples and book objects will be dedicated to the recently deceased artist Dieter

Roth, the posthumous winner of this year's Art Multiple prize.

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Winsener Anzeiger, 11.09.98

art multiple Prize:

The **art multiple** prize of 20,000 DM will be awarded for the third time. The prize goes to the object maker Dieter Roth. Despite his sudden death on 6 of June, the Messe Düsseldorf decided with the Bund Deutscher Kunstverleger and the prize sponsors, Römerturm Künstlerpapiere, to present the prize posthumously to the Dieter Roth Foundation. The foundation was set up by Roth's son, Björn, after the artist's death. Consequently the prize money can be used to preserve and generate interest in Dieter Roth's *gesamtkunstwerk*.

Dieter Roth is dead — long live his *gesamtkunstwerk*

[...] It is almost impossible to gain a perspective of his multiples and book publications in all their diversity. Roth already began to produce objects in series in the sixties. Some of his most renowned multiples consist of toys combined with chocolate or cake icing. In addition he made so-called pressings (food sealed in plastic wrappers), his "Karnickel-kottelkarnickel" [Rabbit-dropping-rabbits] (rabbit figures formed from dung from stables), and his "Literaturwürste" [Literature sausages], cut up magazines or books filled into sausage skins.

Special Dieter Roth exhibition

A large number of Dieter Roth's book objects, publications and multiples were published by the Amsterdam gallery and press Boeki Woeki. Jan Voss, a student and friend of Roth and co-proprietor of Boeki Woeki, will together with Björn Roth present a special show of book objects during the art multiple in honour of Dieter Roth.

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dpa Landesdienst, 30.98.98

New art fair is to replace the Düsseldorf "Art Multiple"

[...] The recently deceased artist Dieter Roth, who has been posthumously awarded the 20,000 DM Art Multiple Prize, created quite a surprise on several stands

with his objects made of foodstuffs.

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Rhein-Zeitung, 1.10.98

The art of variety

A special exhibition was dedicated to the life and work of the object maker Dieter Roth, who died in June. Roth was above all known for the way he employed foodstuffs for art. Consequently his works were deliberately exposed to an unstoppable process of decay. [...]

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Schwarzwaelder Bote, 1.10.98

Art for every purse

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Reutlinger General-Anzeiger, 1.10.98

New art fair for Düsseldorf

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Video Text, 1.10.98

"Art Multiple" in Düsseldorf

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Hellweger Anzeiger, 1.10.98

Search for original works

[...] It is symptomatic that original works are also to be had from the recently departed winner of the Art Multiple Prize, Dieter Roth. Peter Watzl is offering 50 different rubberstamp drawings on calling cards (600 DM each).

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#####Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2.10.98

Farewell Performance

[...] Dieter Roth, who died unexpectedly in early June, is this year's recipient of the art multiple Prize. Roth's friend and pupil, Jan Voss, has put on a commendable exhibition of Roth's works in collaboration with his Amsterdam publishing venture, Boekie Woekie. On sale are prints and books, such as the two volumes of two-handed drawings "Bats and Dogs" from 1981 (edition Of

300, around 4,500 marks). The Stuttgart-based manus press published Dieter Roth's last print, a traditional and picturesque screenprint of a still life with flowers, each of the edition of 106 in a different colour combination (2,200 marks each).

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Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 23.10.98

Creative sticky tape

[On new editions]

The Art-multiple-Prize for 1998 was awarded to Dieter Roth. The least that can be said of Roth, who died in June, is that he was one the most productive artists there was. It is almost impossible to gain an overall perspective of his entire printed *oeuvre*. Virtually no one has exploited the print medium with so much innovation, anarchic experimentation and cunning. Four publishers exhibited works by Roth at Düsseldorf (Catalogue Klinkhardt und Biermann). One of the last graphic works, "Blumen und Früchte" [Flowers and Fruit] is published by *manus presse*. The most daring work was presented by the Amsterdam artists' press *Boekie Woekie* (edition III, 900 DM). It is called "Ein Lebenslauf von 66 Jahren," is easy to read and hard to describe. It is best to remain with the judgement of the collector Carl Vogel: "Anyone who collects Dieter Roth will never be bored."

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???### (*Vermutlich Rheinische Post*)

Tender loving care on the washing line

[the "art multiple" show in Düsseldorf]

A second special show is dedicated to Dieter Roth, who died this year on 6 of June, and who was awarded the "art multiple prize 1998." Much like Spoerri, Roth principally held up a mirror to the grubby side of life. An old model aeroplane in a grimy cardboard box, or mouldy bread and sausages conserved for years, are reminders of an artist who toyed with transience until the end of this century.

— Bertram Müller

++++

???###

D as in Düsseldorf

No bargains

[the "art multiple" show in Düsseldorf]

[...] At 8 p.m. the ceremony began for the award of the Art-Multiple Prize to the deceased artist Dieter Roth. His son Björn received it in his place. Roth was awarded the prize on the strength of the rubber stamp pictures he did on the reverse sides of calling cards while sitting in his favourite bar in Berlin.

Laudatio for Dieter Roth on the award of the art multiple prize 1998 in Düsseldorf

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dieter Roth, whom we wish to honour this evening with the art multiple prize and this special show, is no longer with us. The news of his death deeply affected me because — if may be allowed a few personal words here — I consider this artist to be one of the most important we have.

It is my conviction that Dieter Roth will come to be properly discovered in the none too distant future, because his work — looking aside for the moment from its aesthetic and outward qualities — offers us a vast amount of material for interpretation. And not merely for art history, but most without doubt for philosophy and linguistic theory as well. A look at the enormous diversity of his work shows that Dieter Roth was one of the few universal talents in the arts, so it would not surprise me if the reception of his work came from other disciplines, and not merely from art history.

Dieter Roth has been seriously underrated for a man of his standing, and rarely perceived as one of the central inspirations for subsequent generations of artists, up to and including the present. Incidentally, Dieter Roth held a number of teaching posts at various American, English and German art schools. Here in Düsseldorf Joseph Beuys saw that he received a professorship at the art academy — even if he only remained for a little over two years. Throughout his life, Dieter Roth produced “art in series”: fine art prints, book objects and multiples. As a trained graphic artist he had a superb knowledge of classical printing techniques without, however, remaining satisfied with mere craftsmanship and finesse. The breadth of his experimentation was astonishing, and he never shyed of using reproduction techniques that are generally regarded as having little to do with art. In recent years, for instance, he worked extensively with colour xeroxes — an important source material for his diary-like notes, the biographical containers of the images and words that played such a role in his later work.

Dieter Roth was closely connected with a great range of avant-garde movements from the mid-fifties onwards. His early work can be assigned to the Swiss branch of concrete-constructivist art. He later collaborated on Fluxus editions, had links with *Nouveau Réalisme* and strong ties with the circles around the Vienna Actionists. But these are all just the stations of a tireless traveller — Dieter Roth was one of the most productive and wide-

ranging one-man movements ever to come from the avant-garde. He never allowed himself to be commandeered by artistic movements and for manifestos, or by institutions. If he saw no alternative, he would even leave renowned museum directors and curators out in the rain.

His work — he mastered virtually every artistic technique and worked in the most varied media, including music, language and film — his artistic work underwent a permanent process of change, yet there are probably few bodies of work that contain as little redundancy as Dieter Roth’s.

An overflowing vitality, an exceptional feeling for wit and humour, an immense pessimism and at times deep despair, all rubbed shoulders in this artist. He always found final pronouncements, definitive opinions and conclusive knowledge suspicious. The one thing that was certain in his view was that all things change on their way to their end.

Consequently, he also worked with organic, ephemeral materials, ones that no one prior to him had thought to use for art. The foodstuffs he worked with — fruit, juices, chocolate and much more — are actually there to be consumed and are an essential component of human reproduction. However, the actual act of eating is always one of destruction. In numerous of Dieter Roth’s works these materials have survived, have been protected from the process of being eaten, but in such a way that the act of destruction was directed to the works themselves.

Exposed to permanent weathering, decay and decomposition, these works never remained in the state in which they were made, and have reduced by now a number of restorers to the point of despair.

Dieter Roth was a highly refractory, difficult and totally non-conformist artist. He never carried favour with the art establishment, and refused to serve museums up with historicizing exhibitions. In the case of the few exhibitions he had in recent years, he attached great importance to keeping everything in his own hands — right from the initial conception to the design of the printed matter. A collaboration with Dieter Roth would never be free and easy or uncomplicated, but one thing is for sure: anyone who had the fortune to meet him was forced radically to change his views on art.

Hence we are very grateful to be able to open this special exhibition today at art multiple. And it would not have been possible without the excellent collaboration of Björn Roth and Jan Voss.

In recent years Björn Roth worked closely with his father as his friend and assistant. Hardly anyone can have a deeper knowledge of Dieter Roth’s *oeuvre*. Björn

Roth will also see to his father's enormous bequest and ensure that the work remains accessible for others. So it is our pleasure now to be able to hand Björn Roth this posthumous art multiple prize for Dieter Roth after his sudden death.

Jan Voss, who likewise was involved in setting up the exhibition and was a friend and assistant of Dieter Roth, also published in recent years Dieter Roth's book objects and other works in his press in Amsterdam, Boekie Woekie.

I would also like to thank the Dieter Roth Foundation in Hamburg, who kindly provided most of the exhibits that are on display. My special thanks goes to Dr. Dirk Dobke for his generous help and cooperation. I should mention that he is working on a *catalogue raisonné* of Dieter Roth's prints and multiples — a project that is bound to take quite a few years.

[...]

I shall now hand you to Herr Gaida of the firm Römerturm Künstlerpapiere, which once again has sponsored the prize of 20,000 marks. My thanks go to them as well.

Mentions/Kurze Erwähnungen####

Süddeutscher Zeitung, 12.06.98

Classic art acts as the bait

The Art 29'98 in Basel comes across as both cosmopolitan and traditionally-minded
 [...] One of the most magnificent three-dimensional "total constructions" to be created in our times is not on show in Basel, but not so far away in Zurich: Dieter Roth's superb sculpture that fills the factory floors of Galerie Hauser & Wirth. It makes a trip via Basel worthwhile.

— Ortrude A. Böham

++++

Frankfurter Allgemeine, 12.06.98

Today the beech tree did not take her pill with her

["May 98" exhibition in Cologne]

[...] around 100 works from twenty-five artists of the older and younger generations have been selected — works from the end of the sixties, such as from Artschwager, Oldenburg, Barry Le Va, Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Alighiero Boetti and Dieter Roth, and like some distant echo in the eighties and nineties, the contributions of Cosima von Bonin, Isa Genzken, Franz West, Rosemarie Trockel, Martin Kippenberger, Heimer Zobernig or the Peter Fischli-David Weiss Duo. [...] The visitor can sit down and feel at home, whether in Jorge Pardo's brightly coloured bedroom... or Dieter Roth's Bar stuffed full with rubbish...

— Barbara Caitor

++++

Frankfurter Rundschau, 19.06.98

The date is magic, but not the effect

Post-68 positions on art, arbitrarily linked together

["Mai 98" exhibition in Cologne]

[...] The fact that art continues to benefit from the play instinct can particularly be seen in the section "Provisional Works." In post-Pop or neo-Dada *assemblages*, for instance, as typified by the *Bar* of the recently departed Dieter Roth, which is a collection of debris, painting action and radiogram in one...

++++

Blick, 25.06.98

Alcohol — fuel for geniuses

[...]

> Romy Schneider drank her way to a cardiac arrest with Bordeaux. Ingeborg Bachmann and Uwe Johnson, the German stars of the “Gruppe 47,” lost themselves in solitary booze-ups. Likewise the installation artist Dieter Roth.

— Helmut-Maria Glogger

Caption: Drank himself to death in June: Dieter Roth.

++++

Nürnberger Nachrichten, 30.06.98

Open structures

“May 98 — positions on modern art since the sixties” in Cologne

[...] From Artschwager to Fischli & Weiss, Robert Morris and Claes Oldenburg, Klaus Rinke and Dieter Roth — to Rosemarie Trockel, Valie Export, Eva Hesse and Angela Bulloch...

++++

Sonntags Zeitung, 5.07.98

Ox to eat, chocs to look at

[Holderbank exhibition]

[...] likewise the self-portrait of Dieter Roth, who carved his head in chocolate some thirty years ago. The sculpture tends these days to be extremely worm-eaten, and is a monument to the transitoriness of life. Or to the resilience of local chocolate.

[...]

Jason Rhoades .. presented his work on the Chevrolet Impala ... with cheese from Dieter Roth in the luggage compartment.

— Thomas Haemmerli

++++

Schweizer Monatshefte, 10.07.98

Art exhibition at Holderbank

[...] Starting with the forerunners Louise Bourgeois (USA), Dan Flavin (USA), Dan Graham (USA), Bruce Naumann (USA), Nam June Paik (KO), Sigmar Polke (D), Gerhard Richter (D) and Dieter Roth (CH), this general exhibition shows the works of such international names as Stan Douglas (CAN), Marlene Dumas (NL), Fischli/Weiss (CH), Robert Gober (USA), Martin Kippenberger (D), Jeff Koons (USA), Paul McCartney (USA), Raymond Pettibon (USA), Roman Signer (CH) and Franz West (A).

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Der Standard, Vienna, 14.08.98

The value of the beasts

Zen or the art of Turing machine maintenance

[Book review: Oswald Wiener’s *Elementary Introduction to the Theory of the Turing Machines*]

[...] Oswald Wiener, the author of the sixties’ cult novel *Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa*, and also the editor of some partly-digested matter of his own (Dieter Roth, *Early Writings and Typical Shit, selected and with a pile of partly-digested matter from Oswald Wiener*, Luchterhand, 1973), has tackled the problems of artificial intelligence in a careful and meticulous way...

— Janos A. Makowsky

++++

Sonntags Zeitung, 23.08.98

Evening sales till midnight

[Fischli/Weiss vernissage in Zurich]

[...] It was a delight for young and old, an occasion to rejoice for rich and poor, or the seriously-rich and mega-rich who are known from the lists of the wealthy, stretching from the notoriously unassuming pharmaceutical family from Basel, the Oeris, to the Zurich entrepreneur Thomas W. Bechtler, to the former entrepreneur Franz Wassmer, who has one of the leading Dieter Roth collections.

— Thomas Haemmerli

++++

dpa Landesdiest, Hamburg, 24.08.98

The Krefelder Museum is showing 240 “time-tested” works

[...] New directions in fine art prints will be represented by works from Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Dieter Roth and Arnulf Rainer, to name a few.

++++

Zürichsee-Zeitung, 26.08.98

He builds traps for all

Zurich: Andreas Slominski in the Kunsthalle

[...] Like the Swiss artist Dieter Roth who died in June, he is one of those artists who relentlessly and meticulously homes in on one topic over a long period of time.

++++

Aargauer Zeitung, 29.08.98

The balance spring between figuration and geometric abstraction

“Swiss Art”: Gerhard Saner Collection in Studen near Biel

[...] The “Fondation Saner — Foundation for Swiss Art,” which Gerhard Saner has built up over the last 35 years, is virtually the continuation of [Oskar] Miller’s collection, and embraces artists from Ferdinand Hodler to Max Bill to Dieter Roth.

[...] The aim is to collect works that employ colour and form to visualise a certain vibration which the Tübingen (meta)physicist Bernd Olaf Küppers once described as a “primary longing.”

Not all of the works are able to achieve this, yet it is striking that even the third, still small section containing works by Bernhard Luginbühl, Jean Tinguely, Dieter Roth and Daniel Spoerri, is not dominated by a sense of rebellion and chaos, but by their transcendence into a different order. Not by chance has Gerhard Saner placed his large *Table Relief* from Dieter Roth opposite a pair of geometrical works from the artist’s early period in Bern.

— Annelise Zwez

++++

Neues Deutschland, 04.09.98

The general

[on Karin von Welck: secretary general to the Länder

Art Foundation]

[...] Funds from the foundation have been employed to prevent estates from leaving the country (Brecht, Roth)...

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Der Bund, 14.09.98

When farmers read the Bible and the “Bund”

[...] The striking premises of the Fondation Saner contain major examples of 20th century Swiss art, ranging from Ferdinand Holder to Dieter Roth. On entering the new space via its spiral staircase, the visitor’s eye is caught by a picture of the painter Max Buri with a copy of the “Bund.”

++++

Die Rheinpfalz, 8.10.98

Down from the mountain — and into art

[Swiss art on show at the Frankfurt Book Fair]

One exhibition, dedicated to 20th century drawing in Switzerland, had to have the courage to make omissions: so no Giacometti, no Dieter Roth and no Miriam Cahn.

— Sigrid Feeser

++++

Stuttgarter Zeitung, 09.10.98

Municipal Council approves Dieter Roth purchase

The administrative committee of Stuttgart Municipal Council ratified during a closed meeting the purchase of forty works by the Fluxus artist Dieter Roth. The purchase price is said to be 1,1 million Swiss francs, or roughly 1,3 million marks. The works are not, as originally announced, from the estate of the artist, who died on 5 of June this year, but from a private collection.

++++

Esslinger Zeitung, 11.11.98

A small donation to back newcomer galleries

[The 32nd Art Cologne fair]

[...] In strong contrast to this is the gently rotting “Spice Window” by the recently deceased one-off artist Dieter

Roth (1971), which was on sale from Gallery Holtmann, Cologne, for all of 80,000 DM.

++++

Cash Invest, 13.11.98

A manageable piece by Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth, who died aged 68 in June of this year, was an artistic workaholic. He left behind an immense body of work. Apart from his pictures and installations, he published some 300 artist's books from 1957 onwards, along with the 40 volumes of his *Collected Works*. Roth was unable to throw anything away, because it all seemed to him to have been designed. Thus he declared the rubbish he amassed over a year to be an artwork. His 12 metre-long "Table Ruin" consists of the junk from his studio, complete with beer bottles and over-flowing ashtrays.

He had a great influence on his colleagues, such as Daniel Spoerri and Arnulf Rainer, and on a new generation of artists. On 17th of November, Germann of Zurich will be auctioning his comparatively manageable object showcase "Landscape" from 1980/81.

Roth object showcase

Estimated price: 22,000 Sfr.

Recommended buy No. 3

**Headlines - press agency reports/Überschriften -
Pressagenturmeldungen ##**

dpa Landesdienst, 8.06.98

The versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

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dpa Landesdienst, 8.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead — “Master of experimental irreverence”

++++

Ruhr Nachrichten, 9.06.98

The versatile artist Dieter Roth is dead

Terrible things after an ironic face-lift

[...] “The texts from my incarceration talk about rage (in both cases these are mine) and such like. But when I allow myself to talk about terrible things it is not the same as the things themselves, rather they are now the things after an ironic face-lift, ridiculously watered-down, philosophically spaghettified. — The images are not enough to make one cry and vomit, instead they are slightly disorderly, flattering, nebulous, dreamy and self-indulgent.” Roth wrote that in a catalogue. The excerpt characterises many of his works very well.

++++

Badische Zeitung, 9.06.98

On the death of Dieter Roth

He was always unpredictable

[...] Roth’s humour was nothing less than innocuous. And his furore was like the desperate attempt of a non-swimmer to keep his head above water. “When you die, none of this concrete poetry or Mondrian painting will help you, nothing will help. All that’s left is daubing and raging.”

++++

Braunschweiger Zeitung, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

“Art is what is fun”

[...] He once summed up his artistic creed as: “art is what is fun, but nothing is fun if it is not distantly related to a rotten joke.”

++++

Augsburger Allgemeine, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth, Diter Rot, DR

The process artist has died aged 68 in Basel

Caption: Trickling from the hot-plate: Dieter Roth's
"Stove" object from 1969

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Nordsee-Zeitung, 9.06.98

"Master of experimental bafflement"

++++

Kreiszeitung f.d. Landkreise Diepholz und Nienburg,
9.06.98

Master of irreverence

On the death of the artist and writer Dieter Roth

A pioneer of the artist's book who bubbled with ideas

++++

Kieler Nachrichten, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

Master of experimental irreverence

++++

Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung, 9.06.98

The versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

++++

GF Grafschafter Nachrichten, 9.06.98

The versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

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Schwaebischer Zeitung, 9.06.98

The versatile artist Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Neue Presse, 9.06.98

Died aged 68: Dieter Roth

The versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

++++

Giessener Allgemeine, 9.06.98

Versatile experimenter

The artist Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Fuldaer Zeitung, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

Versatile object maker

++++

Schwarzwaelder Bote, 9.06.98

Versatile and hard to grasp

Dieter Roth is dead/combined every art technique

++++

Ludwigsburger Kreiszeitung, 9.06.98

The all-round artist Dieter Roth is dead

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Freie Presse Chemnitzer Zeitung, 9.06.98

An artist of great diversity

Dieter Roth has died

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Wilhelmshavener Zeitung, 9.06.98

Irreverent multi-work

Versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

++++

Nordwest-Zeitung, 9.06.98

Irreverent multi-work

Versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

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Donau Kurier, 9.06.98

Designer and writer Dieter Roth dies aged 68

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Magdeburger Volksstimme, 9.06.98

Master of experimentation

Dieter Roth has died aged 68 in Basel

++++

Esslinger Zeitung, 9.06.98

Process of decay

The object maker Dieter Roth has died aged 68

Caption: "The objects are lying on the table" by Dieter Roth, 1992

++++

Neue Presse, 9.06.98

Bubbling love of experimentation

The artist, designer and writer Dieter Roth is dead

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Lauenburgische Landeszeitung, 9.06.98

The German-born artist, designer and writer Dieter Roth has died...

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Thueringer Allgemeine, 9.06.98

Death of an irreverent artist

++++

Westdeutsche Allgemeine, 9.06.98

Beethoven in chocolate

The versatile artist Dieter Roth has died

++++

Nuernberger Zeitung, 9.06.98

The German-born artist designer and writer Dieter Roth has died [...]

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Harburger Anzeigen und Nachrichten, 9.06.98

The German-born artist designer and writer Dieter Roth has died [...]

++++

Aachener Zeitung, 9.06.98

The German-born artist designer and writer Dieter Roth has died [...]

++++

Iserlohner Kreisanzeiger u. Zeitung, 9.06.98

Universal artist Dieter Roth has died

++++

Reutlinger General-Anzeiger, 9.06.98

Original and irreverent

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Vogtland-Anzeiger, 9.06.98

Artist Dieter Roth has died

A multi-talent

++++

Badische Neueste Nachrichten, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth's work spanned the arts

++++

Muenchener Merkur, 9.06.98

Artistic diversity: Dieter Roth has died

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Thueringische Landeszeitung, 9.06.98

Shock and mould

The artist, designer and writer Dieter Roth is dead

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Badisches Tagblatt, 9.06.98

The artist Dieter Roth has died aged 68 in Basel

He turned chocolate into art

++++

Koelnische Rundschau, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth dead

Linked art forms

++++

Hohenloher Tagblatt, 9.06.98

All-round artist / "Eat Art" protagonist of the 1960s

Dieter Roth has died in Basel

++++

Rhein-Zeitung, 9.06.98

Original work

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Luebecker Nachrichten, 9.06.98

Multi-artist Dieter Roth has died in Basel

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Leipziger Volkszeitung, 9.06.98

Master of irreverence

Multi-artist Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Goettinger Tagblatt, 9.06.98

Multi-artist Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Oberhessische Presse, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Nordkurier, 9.06.98

Artist Roth has died

++++

Recklinghaeuser Zeitung, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Die Rheinpfalz, 9.06.98

Di(e)ter Roth is dead

Artist, designer and writer died aged 68

++++

Nuernberger Nachrichten, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth +

Author and object maker

++++

Allgemeine Zeitung, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth +

++++

Westfaelische Rundschau, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth dead

++++

Neue Westfaelische, 9.06.98

Master of irreverence

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Weser Kurier, 9.06.98

All-round artist Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Pfaelzischer Merkur, 9.06.98

Artist Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Freies Wort, 9.06.98

Artist D.Roth has died

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Saarbruecker Zeitung, 9.06.98

The artist Dieter Roth is dead

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Einbecker Morgenpost, 9.06.98

Artist Dieter Roth dead

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Suedkurier, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

He promoted anti-art to art and baffled with syntheses of words and objects.

++++

Nuertinger Zeitung, 9.06.98

Dieter Roth is dead

++++

Oranienburger Generalanzeiger, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth is dead**

++++

Ostthueringer Zeitung, 9.06.98**Dead****Artist Dieter Roth**

++++

Schwetzingen Zeitung, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Neue OZ Osnabruecker Zeitung, 9.06.98**Multitalent Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Hamburger Merkblatt, 9.06.98**The artist Dieter Roth is dead**

++++

Maerkische Allgemeine, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth is dead**

++++

Straubinger Tagblatt, 9.06.98**Designer and writer Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Frankfurter Neue Presse, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Darmstaedter Echo, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

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Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

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Neue Ruhr-Zeitung, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Morgen Post, 9.06.98**“Diter Rot” has died**

++++

Pforzheimer Zeitung, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Mitteldeutsche Zeitung, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Flensburger Tageblatt, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died**

++++

Westfalenpost, 9.06.98**Artist Dieter Roth is dead**

++++

Die Kitzinger, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died at the age of 68**

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Giessener Anzeiger, 9.06.98**Dieter Roth has died in Basel**

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Suedwest Presse, 9.06.98

Allround artist

Dieter Roth has died in Basel

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Die Welt (Hamburg), 9.06.98

The Artist's Fear of the Beautiful

On the death of the versatile Dieter Roth

++++

Frankenpost, 10.06.98

Artist Dieter Roth has died

A multi-talent

++++

Kleine Zeitung, Graz, 10.06.98

Death

[...] Dieter Roth, the German all-rounder who lived in Switzerland, has now died aged 59.

++++

Schweizer Revue, 9.06.98

Painter-poet **Dieter Roth** is dead:

Letters of condolence/Trauerbriefe

Gretl Kläy

Dear Björn,

I was greatly saddened to hear the news of Dieter's death. I wish you every strength in the difficult times to come.

Please accept this rose as a token of remembrance of my friendship with Dieter. Through all the years of our friendship I was always glad to have the chance to meet and talk with him, sometimes briefly, sometimes at length, as circumstances allowed.

Best wishes

Jan A. Ahlers

Dear Björn,

I was deeply upset to hear of your father's death. I send you and your family my most sincere condolences. I am glad we had the chance to speak with each other just two weeks ago.

With silent wishes

Hermann Gericke

Dear Mr and Mrs Roth and family,

I wish to send you my most heartfelt condolences to you on Dieter's unexpected death. May the legacy that the dear departed has left behind as both an artist and a many-faceted personality comfort you for the painful loss that has so suddenly entered your lives.

I gained an extremely high opinion of Dieter during our high school days in Zurich. The route we shared on our way home and the countless games of chess we played created a warm bond between us. So I am sad that Dieter had to depart so soon from us.

A few days ago, on 25 May 1998, I wrote a letter to Dieter, of which I enclose a copy. I had hoped to see him again in person. Sadly this is no longer possible, but my loyalty and great regard for him shall live on in my memories.

With my deepest sympathy

Vögtli-Druck, (printers)

Dear Mr and Mrs Roth and family,

we would like to express our most sincere condolences to you. We wish you lots of strength in the future to bear the great loss of Mr Roth.

With best regards

From Kathrin Messmer and Josef Ortner

We greatly enjoyed working together with Dieter Roth. We think very highly of him and are very sad. The “Bastelnovelle” in the daily newspaper *Der Standard* was our last collaboration....

Henrik Kolwes

I was deeply shaken when I learned the news,
with greetings from Heinz Busse, [carpenter's firm]

Klaus Däniker

On Whit Sunday I bought a signed book by D.Roth at Brigitte Bühlmann's, previously I visited the Roth Bar on several occasions, and was also among the guests at the opening of the exhibition at Hauser & Wirth's. *Freie Sicht auf's Mittelmeer*, approx 9: 30 p.m. on Thursday where Dieter Roth was sitting comfortably at the round table in the Kunsthaus Restaurant with friends. He had a good place, with a view over Heimplatz. I greeted him and we talked about the Bar, we could drive over to the Bar with him, it was getting late. During these last few weeks in particular his surge of ideas and work methods had a deep, no, complex and liberating effect on my life.

I send to you, Dieter Roth's sons, my sincerest condolences on the death of your father.

Evelyne and Stephan Brauchli

In the name of our parents, who are currently on vacation, we would like to express our sincerest condolences on the death of your father.

Jacky Brauchli

Dear Björn,

I have just returned from my vacation and learnt of your father's sudden death. For us, too, it is hard to grasp what has happened, for we spoke with him just 1 day before he died.

We would like to send our sincerest condolences to you and all your family, and wish you lots of strength during this difficult time.

With silent wishes

A. Kienle

Our most sincere condolences. Words fail us.

Daniel Spoerri

DIETER ROT

FAXGEKLINGEL (THE RINGING OF THE FAX)

Title is not from D.R.

Rot no longer had the time send the title, dimensions or photos.

Since yesterday (6.6.98) he is dead.

But his last message on the ansaphone was that his object was ready, and that he wanted to come and install it in the next few days with his son Karl.

Now Karl Rot will bring the machine that Dieter conceived back then for Tinguely's "Cyclops", but never realised. Now I am inheriting, as it were, this work for my garden from both of them – from two of my best and oldest friends.

It is an apparatus that makes sounds from the letters of the alphabet, which is to say from texts, that are sent by fax to the Giardino. So now the ting-a-ling of the texts that are sent to Dieter Roth will continue to ring out in the garden and recall him.

Hic Terminus Haeret

D.S.

or as Hans Arp put it in one of his loveliest poems: "...hell's bells, our kaspar is dead"

Christine Anliker

Dear Björn

I am grieved. Suddenly the time has come. He has departed. For ever.

My fondest wishes for you, Björn

Lisa Basu Suter

Dear Roth family,
in your time of mourning,

my husband and I would like to send our heartfelt condolences on the departure of Mr Dieter Roth. He was our neighbour, and our contact with him was not simply restricted to the "Escalier Roth". We will miss him and wish you every strength and comfort in these difficult hours.

With silent greetings

Dear Björn and family,
in your time of mourning,

we received the painful news of your father's death with sadness. We mourn with you over the great loss of a wonderful man, which fills us with grief.

Dieter was a good friend to me, with whom I could discuss all my problems and questions about life. Nor shall I ever forget the lovely hours I was able to spend with Dieter.

We shall all miss Dieter greatly, although he will always be with us when we look at his pictures!

After such an intensive life combined with work, I now wish him a peaceful rest, free of cares.

Michale Rudolf von Rohr
Alexandra
Ines

If I see a sausage which is described by a label as a hard old household sausage, I imagine sinking all my teeth into it and bolting it down, taking regular, reckless gulps like a machine. The desperation that immediately follows this act, even if performed only in my mind, increases my haste. I stuff the long strips of ribmeat into my mouth without biting, and tear them through my stomach and out through my intestines. I eat the contents of grubby grocer's shops down to the last. Fill myself up with herrings, gherkins, and every conceivable kind of old, spicy food. Sweets are poured into me like hail from their tin cans. In this way I enjoy not only my own healthy state, but also a suffering that is without pain and can pass in no time.

Literary dream by Franz Kafka, as if for Dieter Roth
Pensive greetings from

Christiane Klappert

Conversation with Dieter Roth
on 15.05.98
With Peter P. Schneider and Simon Maurer

Do you speak Icelandic?

Yes, I've been there for 40 years. I can't speak it like the inhabitants, I make mistakes. I generally speak the book language. The stuff I always read. And so there are strange moments when I say things I no longer understand, old-fashioned stuff, right. That's how it is.

Can I go back to our conversation earlier? You said you drink the whole day long. Is that right?
Sorry?

Is that right?

Yes, and at night as well.

But then you've had phases in Iceland when...

Yes, when I stop. In the old days when I went to Iceland I lived a long way away from the nearest shop where you could buy anything. Perhaps a four-hour drive away. I never took anything with me, and I was too lazy to drive there, so that meant I could remain abstinent. But now these shops are a lot more common, I only need an hour to get to one.

And you take that hour.

No, I keep an eye on myself, I've grown accustomed to that now when I go to Iceland because my grandchildren live there. And they don't want to see some boozy old grandfather. They want to meet a cheerful, sober person.

Who tells stories?

Yes, and who at all events believes what they say. And who is someone they can travel around with and so on. And who buys a new bicycle if they need one. They don't need want drunken old windbag as as grandfather.

I've never sensed any connection in your work with alcohol, like you sometimes see with writers, say. I even get the impression that some of them make it a central topic, they say it's a source of inspiration for them. But that's not the same with you, is it?

I needed it to produce my graphic work, my prints. When you go to the printer's and people say shit or the like and won't print your work, you offer them something to drink, depending on what they want, and I'd have a drink too. And then everyone's really euphoric and they're happy to print whatever you want. I must have used this means for a good forty years. I still need it, yes, they like that.

But not actually to get your ideas?

No, simply to hypnotise people. They like that. It's so boring in a printshop, you know. So when someone turns up with a crate of beer at Wolfensberger's in Zurich, for instance, goes along with a crate of beer and a couple of bottles of whisky, then...

Then everything turns out differently?

Yes, and there was some fellow who was also working there at the same time as me, and he also needed it. Some American boozier or other who was working there as well. Who was he? I've already forgotten. He was doing some lithos and he said 'that always works nicely.'

So it's more of a social element.

Sorry?

As a social element.

Yes, as a way of making people euphoric. So that everything's a bit sozzled. Wolfensberger, for instance, I phoned him recently and said I'd like to come to Zurich, I think I've time to do a litho. So, what do they want, a crate of beer or whisky, which one? I said to him: just a moment, I must find out.

That's what they said?

Yes. I didn't say: do we have to get a crate in? I first made the appointment, you know.

And then you wanted to find out what to order?

Yes. What roughly would be required.

Wouldn't you like a little drop? Just a taster.

I'm not such a gin drinker, I prefer whisky. You haven't got any of that, have you?

Let's have a whisky, why not?

But I thought you wouldn't have any. It might help the conversation along.

What would you like to drink? Coca-Cola perhaps, or something else?

I'd go for a whisky.

I'd prefer water or a coke.

But perhaps when we're upstairs, first upstairs.

Why perhaps? Why not straight away? We can tell the lady here... can I get you something? I'll go up and say.

You've got everything upstairs, there's more up there. It's not really been set up for that down here.

Yes, things haven't been straightened out yet down here. Just a second. I'll go up in a moment. Is it recording?

Yes, it's recording.

How can you tell?

From these flashing lights, it's all converted into flashes.

I'm getting flashes here as well.

We can try it out. Listening to it and writing it out is going to be hell with all that sawing going on next door.

That's just life.

Yes, but it's almost impossible, really.

But you're experienced, second to none. You've already been doing that for years now, haven't you?

Yes, of course. We're forever transcribing tapes.

How old are you, if you don't mind?

44.

32.

I'm 68. So you must have already been doing that for a decade or so. Perhaps even twenty years.

Not me, I've done it for about 10 years, 9 years.

And always for radio? Or always for the newspapers?

Always for the newspapers. Although I did do one year for television.

What difficulties do you have.

Excitable people, or what?

Not excitable. It's a complicated business, and even getting down to what you want to do gets very complicated.

Ah, the intrigues.

Yes, that's right.

The self-employee is the only person who doesn't stir things up against himself, right?

A self-employed person doesn't even have the chance to.

Right, but perhaps he'd enjoy having it. (Laughs)

Perhaps he'd also enjoy having it, but a self-employed person can only... he's always a kind of beggar.

The first time I returned to Europe after being away for a long time, around 1968, I came to Cologne for an exhibition, and these television people turned up. I realised: I'm not going to be able to tolerate this. And I thought: right, now we'll see, right. So then they simply... I had this exhibition in a gallery, and they simply set up their equipment. There were all these cables and what have you. What's going on here? Hello, we're from the television. They thought I'd realise that they were the people I needed there. So I said to them: I'm not standing for this. You can leave straight away. Please would you go. Get out of here. I can put it in plain language. Scram. I drove them away, just like that. It was a real cheek. Simply coming in there and saying: Right, let's get started.

And without any advance notice.

Yes, that's always been my battle with these people from the television in Germany. The cheek of it. I'll read something out, for instance, and then do a reading. And suddenly someone gets up and starts filming again. Then I go for him and say: get out! If they haven't asked beforehand. I really get to see how intense these people can be, these television people, the ones I've come across at least.

Do you still have this dislike of television?

I don't like it one bit these days. Fine, it's not bad sometimes when amiable women turn up. Nice, beautiful, amiable women who say: please would you come at that and that time. Assuming I don't forget.

But you've also made your own films: and now your Solo Scenes are being shown for the first time.

That's all my battle with television.

That's your battle with television?

I simply show them how they should do it.

What I would like to see. Myself, of course.

That's overstating the case. What I'm talking about is the films you see on television. I don't look at that stuff any more. It's all so exaggerated, so hysterical. People charge about and act as if they were normal people. Or vice versa: normal people stand about and act as though they were experiencing something really exciting. But things just aren't like that. They're boring and quiet and sad. That's how it is. That's how life goes on.

So you set up the camera and filmed yourself?

Yes, that's the first part. The second part starts when people start coming in. When somebody comes and talks with me I'll film it.

What I wanted first of all was to show how one sits around all isolated and does what one does. I do it on my own, I don't do anything with others.

So you filmed your day-to-day life, your own day.

I set up the camera and when I had to go to the toilet I took it with me. And simply set it up again. So that one can see what people do.

With sound as well?

Yes, yes.

How long are the individual films?

Always ninety minutes.

Always ninety?

Sometimes I forget and then it's empty. There's nothing on it. I leave to go shopping, say, and then it simply stands around.

Have you filmed whole days?

Yes, I've tried. I've got about 150 hours now. From the last two years.

While asleep?

From the last two years. While asleep. I fall asleep in the process, right.

And you leave it running?

Yes, so that I forget it. It's best when you forget it. Then you get what you really do.

And now you run all the films at the same time?

Yes, so that it doesn't look so boring. It shortens the viewing time you see. You can divide the time that I've filmed by the number of video units.

Which means it's a "two-minute" film.

Well, it would be absurd if you watched 150 hours of it, wouldn't it. Just as absurd as a film, a television film, where you have to wait until someone moves, from one place to the next. But you haven't got a second television to see if he's already arrived. One ought to be able to see that perhaps. The way he pictures that to himself. For instance, a man goes from one place to another. He pictures to himself where he wants to go to, he has to. He has this picture. And if you have to wait until you see the picture of where he's going to, that slows down the entire mental process enormously.

So you think there should be parallel televisions?

Yes, I do.

Along with these different levels?

Of course, you wouldn't make a film without first knowing where someone was going. Especially in feature films. Because there's someone there who thinks it all up and says: okay, we'll make sure he gets into some complications now, then there's a bang and someone falls over. I think that's simply a swindle. Why shouldn't other people have the same things in their heads that he has? So there's no need to make the film in the first place. Or perhaps you show how he sets off, how he mounts his horse, in America, in the West, and shoots the other down, and how the other guy falls over. So there's no need to even show how the first one ever got to this place where the other man gets his deserts.

So you'd like to be able to reel the film on at that point, right?

What I really want is that people stop all this business. That one simply experiences what one experiences and does not have to look at it as well.

I don't think I'm getting this across clearly. It's like this...

But aren't you doing the same?

I'm terribly attached to these ambitious ideas, the idea that you simply say: come on, it's starting, sit down and watch what I'm doing there. At the same time I, at any rate, know what I'm doing. For instance, when the films are shown now the books that I wrote there in the film are already on sale – so that's absurd really. For me it's a kind of protest against the suspense that is created on television, so that you will remain seated in front of it. I've spent night after night sitting in front of the damned thing. I can't turn it off any more. Ah, little Hans is back again, and look: what's he up to now? What's going to happen? When will the shooting start? When will they fall over? When will they get up again and so on? Whole nights get spent like that – for what?

Yes, but on the one hand you're also forcing people to watch... and on the other hand you're making it more exciting.

I'm making a cautious start. Naturally I enjoy showing people something that's not known. I try to show the total sadness, the absurdity and tedium of life.

What parallels or differences are there to the Super 8 films from the Biennale?

Well, the Biennale films were a lot more colourful and had more flickering and so on. Especially when they were projected. I projected them onto the walls, here and there, so that people could stand in the middle of them. So that the viewers also became part of it all because the light came from the projectors – and the people who were walking around got in the way. It was impossible to show it properly. They cast shadows. But no one casts any real shadows with these videos. At most from the television set, if you think about it. It's all there, isn't it?

Yes, it was a wall. A room full of images.

It's like a carpet on the wall, you could simply hang it there, and Bob's your uncle. It's a trick. A decorative trick.

The wall you mean?

Yes, right. But on the other hand I would like to show that people... what I mean is that it's interesting how a solitary man sits around in life. I carry on like that and then people appear. Then you can see what sort of fellows appear. Women as well. And what they get up to with each other.

Was it all done in Basel, or in Iceland as well?

All that I've made till now I made here. I think I've filmed 150 hours here.

So what you're saying is that other people appear as well.

Very few, that's the first chapter, the first volume of the affair. What I would like is if someone then appeared from time to time. That the caretaker comes and says: Okay, the fan's not working properly here. Because I'd phoned him and said: the fan's making a real din, I can't sleep any more and can't work and can't do anything any more. And then he says: right Mr Roth, we'll turn it off right away. People like seeing that, don't they. It's like when they say: we've shot the villain now.

Did he want to turn the camera off as well?

No, that must keep running, otherwise you wouldn't see it.

What did the caretaker want to turn off?

The fan. I live in a very old house with a studio in Basel, and it's very quiet there. It's under a preservation order, they can't build any parking lots or the like. But now they've built a café downstairs and have installed a fan in the kitchen, and this fan – I can hear it up in my bedroom – the fan is absolutely impossible. I can't sleep any more, can't sleep at night. Not even sit, shshshshshsh, the hoarser it gets the louder it shouts.

And he came in just as you were filming?

No, I would have liked it that way. What I'm saying is that I've not got that far yet. He came and said: right Mr Roth, you phoned, we'll turn it off straight away. That's my dream, of course, scenes like that. There's a lot that I'll get to film with time. What I thought was: first me on my own. So that I don't have any difficulties. I don't have to talk with the people, and it takes time before the people in front of the camera forget that it's there.

Yes?

Yes, that's how it is.

Shall we go upstairs?

Let's go up slowly. Do you know where to go to?

Yes, the office. I've not been there before.

He'd like to take another picture of you in the Table Ruin.

It already smells pretty ruinous.

Yes, like a cellar. Was it in storage?

In a container. In Basel.

When will it be finished? Do you think it's already finished?

No, it must get really ruinous, it must fall apart.

Fall apart? But you keep rebuilding it.

Yes, that's the businessman in me. It has to really look like something, so that it can continue to... The people you see here have no idea how beautiful it used to be. How healthy it was once.

Can we take a quick walk round?

Be my guests.

It's already belonged to various people?

The person who bought it has already gone bankrupt twice. And then I rebuilt it twice.

And then you sold it back to him?

No, not me. A friend of mine bought it back. Now it belongs fifty-fifty to me and my friend. I said I wanted to have half of it because I keep travelling around with it and keep rebuilding it. So I sold it to him.

Is that Kurt Kalb, or someone else?

Yes. He's happy now to have a third. So Hauser & Wirth can also have a third.

So that who also has a third?

Hauser & Wirth must also get something for it.

I see, they also get a third.

They also get a third.

So you're not going to add anything more to it. You're waiting now until it falls apart?

When the appliances stop working we glue another one on top. Like this tower of projector here. We show a film, and whenever a projector breaks down we stick another one on top. We've already had 1,2,3,4,5, and now a sixth on top, and that one's stopped working as well.

Did you also take some of the photos, the slides of Reykjavik?

At first they were done by my sons. Björn, who's here with us now, and Karl. And then a student from Iceland, and in the end they were done by the man with the red hair and his wife.

Why are there so many more pictures in the second sequence?

It was more thorough.

And you're showing them all here?

If we can find someone who can operate it properly we'll manage to show a lot of them during the exhibition, although I don't know whether we'll get through them all.

How are people's struck by it? Does it seem like a dreary town when one looks at it?

No, the town is an architectural wonder. Or was. It's been ruined now.

An architectural wonder?

It really was. A wonder. In my view. A really super, fantastic place. Completely naive. And then they tore down the best parts of town. I didn't have the money at that time to photograph it. So now the best areas have

already been torn down. I never got to photograph it all. There were districts there where everyone could go and do whatever they liked.

Mainly wooden buildings?

Mixed. The people took what they needed from the demolished buildings in town and built new buildings where they lived. And because they were thrifty and didn't have any money, they left the paint the way it was on the corrugated iron, which resulted in absolutely wonderful mosaics.

Where's the office?

Another floor up. Would you like the sofa or the director's chair?

Should we do some advertising for Mr West? (The writing desk is from him.) I'll go and look for some whisky.

Or a beer. I've started on beer now.

He'll be drinking water before you know it.

Yes. I found this sentence from you: "When life gets up off of its back, after taking a real hard fall, I give it an almighty whack, for I see the coming pitfall."

That was a poem. I was simply boasting.

What do you mean by boasting

As if I could see a pitfall coming and give life an almighty whack!

Why did you even want to give it an almighty whack?

That's probably just something one says.

But do you think that one should give life an almighty whack?

It's just one of those expressions.

So one don't really need to do so?

I don't know what it means any more. I think I was bragging. That's how it is. Most poets are like that, they lay it on thick and there's not actually much behind it, hmm. It doesn't get you anywhere.

But there's quite a lot behind it. Can one bear with life if it's okay?

What I'm saying is that I wrote it and printed it at some point, and now I've no clue any more what's going on. I don't know any more. That was just bragging. As if I could give life a hefty whack. In point of fact the early texts that I wrote when I was 30 or 40 are not that easy to keep under control. It's all just boasting.

So you wouldn't do anything like that any more?

No, not these days. No way. Just as a joke perhaps.

But there are texts of your's that have nothing jokey about them.

No, they come from my depressions, from anxiety. Would you like some ice cream? Here. On a hot summer's day like this?

Anxiety is an important motivator?

Yes, why not? You wouldn't even work if you didn't have any anxieties. And you also wouldn't work if you weren't afraid of not having any money next week. Or maybe you would? Perhaps you'd be afraid that you wouldn't get any more work.

But aren't your fears something different?

The same as everyone else's. That things won't carry on the way they were. That you'll not get by any more. Not have any more money. Can't afford to stay alive.

So primarily a financial anxiety?

Yes, but it keeps getting less of an anxiety because I'm getting older and my prices rise. So it's working out after all.

Isn't there also a fear of emptiness?

No. I don't experience any emptiness. For me it's always a kind of entertainment business. I can entertain myself. I find it entertaining. I can sit down and do this or that.

Are there times when you don't do anything?

No, I'm ill, I can't manage without. I have to. I'm like someone who has a tick – I have to be doing something all the time.

But you don't suffer as a result?

Yes, I do suffer. I believe I do. But that's just how life is. Suffering from suffering. One always has to suffer.

Is there anything that you do that you don't acknowledge as art?

That's a difficult one. I'm already so spoiled. I don't think I can do things any other way. Of course, if I'm physically ill, say, or when there's an argument, or when something of mine gets stolen – and then there's my anger: then I forget about art, I think. For a short while. But then it comes back again, like now, for instance, I can already talk about it. It's almost usable again. For the art market.

Is it always a question of whether it can be sold or not?

Yes. Why should you do something if you don't get anything for it? If you have to go somewhere and work, so that the plumbing doesn't leak any more, you get something for it. I don't think that anybody does anything if they don't get something for it.

Is there a division in your work. Works that are aimed at the market, and works like the Table Ruin, which is virtually unsellable?

Yes, I have a kind of anticipatory tension. I think: the longer I wait with the *Table Ruin*, the more ruinous it will get and the easier it will be to sell. The price keeps rising. I'm almost at a loss to find anything to despair at: somehow everything's sellable when you're an artist. Why not?

Do you ever try it the other way round, making something that can't be sold?

I think I've given that one up. I'm always short of money. So I have to keep thinking about selling things. You simply can't think about anything else any more. What can I do right now, that's still works perhaps, I do that sometimes, and then someday we can sell it.

Yes, but the books, for instance, you more or less paid for them yourself.

Yes, that was for the glory of it. There are two branches. The two are almost identical, sometimes they swap round and the glory becomes money and the money becomes glory. I can't escape this prison any more, as I see it. It's those famous cages. What are they called?

I'm not sure what you're getting at. Do you mean golden cages?

I was trying to get to the point where you find hope and love and so on.

Does Iceland represent that to you?

It did. I went to Iceland as a result of an erotic thrill. I'd got to know this woman in Copenhagen, I was living there, and so I followed her. She had a grant from the state of Iceland and then it ran out, and I ran after her. She wasn't too pleased about that. I didn't give her the same thrill. But there I was. And I hadn't any money, and couldn't go back. So then in a flash: let's stay here. And then she got pregnant and we had a child, and we thought: let's get married. That's how it all began. Then the marital wars began. Bang, rows on all sides. But I couldn't get away. Thank heavens for that. No money for a ticket, no work, nothing. And I wanted to remain

with her forever. I really loved Iceland, so I thought: stay here. Stick it out.

And now she still lives near by?

No, we've been divorced for 16 or 20 years now. She lives in Reykjavik, and I live outside of town. And we no longer see each other, otherwise there'd be rows and scolding. I don't know whether you know that. The rows that people can get into?

You once wrote that "nagging is people's second profession".

Rowing. Yes, right, that's there somewhere. In print, I mean.

But a ruin like this Table Ruin is also a waste-heap of material, a comment on our times, without anyone trying to see some message in it. On the one hand you upgrade rubbish, and on the other hand...

...I devalue art.

...the rubbish gains something of the glory of art when it stands there and you attack the loftiness of art.

Yes, right, it's a tightrope act. But it's a pretty safe one. The art market net is already there below me. It wasn't always like that. When I began this Table Ruin, for instance, when I took this table in Stuttgart... I lived in Stuttgart for a while. And there were all these instruments on it because I was making a lot of tape recordings at the time, and somehow they got stuck there from all the paint I poured on top, I didn't do that deliberately, it was simply all became one big heap of stuff, as it were. And then the director of the museum, of the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, came and said: I'd like that. Good, 40,000 mark, it was about as large as that thing there. A bit bigger. Right, we'll take it. I was having an exhibition of my prints, so I placed it on one side of them. And then he said: well, I can't get my committee to raise the money, I can only pay half. 20,000. Right, in that case you can't have it. So I made a smallish picture. It was already called *Table Ruin* because it was so kaput. And then I went on my travels. To various towns, and I kept erecting it and then coming back. And when I was in a town I would often add on the stuff that was lying around. And it grew and grew. I must have shown it in some seven or eight cities. And it kept getting larger.

The choices you make – what is your aim there? What's the relationship between what you come across by chance and what you...

I only take what I need.

What do you need then? Technical appliances?

I've always made films of these things and shown them. In the old days with Super 8, but you can't really get that any more. So when I couldn't buy another of the old appliances I bought a new one and glued it on top. That resulted in these towers you can see there. And whenever an appliance breaks down I glue a new one on top. Super 8 is dead and gone. You can no longer get the equipment for it. I can't show those films any more. Perhaps one day I'll copy them onto video.

And in these films you showed how the Table Ruin was constructed?

Yes, to some extent. I also mixed them up with old films of mine. And we made a film in Iceland, which is to say two friends of mine, one of them is here now, the tall chap with the curly hair and glasses and beard. He made a film together with an Icelandic writer about 15 years ago. I bought it from them and am now the film's publisher, as it were, the same as when one publishes a book. We show that film as well. I also played in it. I joined in. So basically I only include what we need.

Which in a way is a bit self-reflective when it comes to the work on the table.

Yes. Of course. Above all we show the way the appliances start to age and stop working, and that you can't find a replacement because the technology has changed. It's already difficult finding anything for 16 mm.

Projectors and the like.

Yes, that here is 16 mm and that is Super 8, it's almost impossible to find any more. I still manage to find replacements, though. We found one in Amsterdam.

What about junk dealers. They must still have it.

But then you have to search around. And I'm too lazy for that.

16 mm still exists. It's a professional format.

Yes, but it's also a rather nostalgic format.

You said that there's already a net underneath.

Yes, the net of the art market. One can sell it.

Are you easier in your mind now?

Pardon?

Are you easier in your mind now, knowing that this net is there?

Yes, a lot easier. I've gone through some incredibly tight squeezes. I always did what I wanted to do. I wanted to have that, right? So I did it. But then there'd be no money left, and rows. My wife would say: where's the money? Dammit all. The children came. More and more children. That's a disturbance, right? But I'm past all that now. My grandchildren come and visit me, you know. And then I get tired and say: go home to mummy and daddy, I'm tired. Grandad has to go to bed. It's not the same as it used to be. When there was no one else. There was just me. I had to receive all the callers.

So you must feel better now than you ever did before?

You could certainly say that, yes. Although my body is breaking down from all the excesses. Boozing and travelling around and arguing. You fall apart.

Like the Table Ruin.

Yes, it's falling apart. But it still has a sort of glory about it. Or I add a bit to it.

Did you ever make any works that fell through the net?

That was simply an expression I used just now. I can't expand on that right now. Yes, when I think about it I'd say that certain love affairs fell through the net. I went through a number of tragedies there. I tried committing suicide two times on account of various women. Perhaps you would call that falling through the net. There was no more net beneath me. Although there was in fact a net beneath me, after all: I was taken to hospital and had my stomach pumped out.

But a person's love life isn't art. When did your art production ever fall through the net?

I can't say.

You keep raising the stakes, though, with the Mats for instance. The writing pads from your desk. Does the art market still accept that?

Yes, it's begun to. It's just starting to take off. I've already sold one. And I gave one away. But not the *Flat Scrap*. I had a collection, 1973-74. It was too much for me, so I gave it to the museum in Basel, but they never showed it. Then I made another one, in 1976, and Hauser & Wirth have sold it. So you see, it's taking off.

André Kamber said: "It's incredible what he dared to designate as art." Is it a way of testing what the art market is ready to swallow?

Maybe I do that unconsciously. But not consciously, no.

So are you concerned then with the aesthetic idea of making something that has no or scarcely any design?

But everything's already designed. Everything in the *Flat Scrap*, everything I put in there was devised by someone. Several thousand people worked on it all.

But I'm talking about the table mats, the pieces of cardboard.

It's all been designed. Someone or other designed it. There's not a cardboard box that someone hasn't designed. I don't think there's such a thing as a piece of material that someone hasn't first drawn up.

And these chance moments in them? Are they also connected with "design"?

I've no idea. I really don't know. It makes me melancholy when I think that so many people have to come up with all this stuff, that so many printers have to print it and so many people use it. And that it's all supposed to be over and done with then. The majority is simply thrown away. But I keep it and exhibit it and lug it around with me.

But you would like it if your work prompted others to continue in the same way? Over and beyond your death?

I don't know, I would like to show a certain remorse, compassion if you like. I have a certain sympathy for people. These are melancholy bon-bons, oh how sad and the like, a few tears perhaps: something of that sort, that's the feeling I have with all that stuff there.

You have prompted a lot of people to...

I can't tell.

...do the same, to work with you.

That's because of the money. They work for money.

But aren't we confusing now the Flat Scrap, the things you collected in your files, with these lengths of cardboard? What I actually wanted to ask about was these lengths of cardboard on the wall.

Ah, that card there.

Yes, this cardboard which you used for your underlays while working in Basel or Iceland, where you waited until enough had been drawn on them. And then you took these mats as...

Yes, they were my desk pads. I wasn't talking about them just now.

But they are what I meant: whether the market accepts them.

Yes, I've already sold a number of them. They're not doing too badly.

And is that important for you personally? Is the chance element important?

Chance has a force. You can't get away from it. There's no escaping it. It's not something I really look for. It simply comes, knocks you for six, and then you have to submit to it. You get old and fall apart, and then chance comes along and makes really sure of it.

Is chance the greatest force of all?

No, there are others. War, for example. The bombardments that I lived through, for instance, they were far greater. That was horrifying. I used to live in Germany, my mother is German, my father Swiss. I lived in Germany during Hitler's reign. And that's something completely different. There's nothing to laugh about then.

That was anything but chance.

No. That was appalling. That's the worst thing there is. Violent people, who jeer at you as well – yes, that's child's play by comparison. That's nothing. And there's nothing you can do about it. Just run away if you can. Luckily my parents were Swiss. My mother was Swiss by marriage. So I could go to my foster parents in Switzerland during the war.

Right, in 1943.

Thank God. You can't imagine, all the explosions, when the bombs come falling down and start screaming.

Do you have any concrete memories of the bombings?

Yes. Yes. It's all extremely repressed, of course. I can hardly recall it. Just that it was terribly frightening.

It couldn't have been that easy to find your feet in Switzerland.

No, I was like a German. I was cheeky and thuggish. I used to hit people. I had been in the Hitler Youth and had learnt to beat people up. So if some 13 or 14 year-old schoolkid said to me "you filthy Swabian" – that's what they said in those days because I only spoke German – I'd punch them right in the face. It was a long time before I learnt to stop doing that.

Has your art an unconscious connection with the bombings?

I think so, yes. With this doomsday that I lived through. Also with the fact that schoolmates, for instance, were suddenly not there any more, because they had met their end during the night. There's definitely a connection there with this gloom and doom hysteria of mine.

Do you consider your art chaotic?

(Hesitantly:) No. I don't think so. It's cautious and friendly, has nothing to do with chaos. It's all a fairly sickly, boiled-up pudding.

Do you really think it's that sickly? But you keep returning to the same point: everything you touch becomes beautiful, and then you bust it up again.

That's right. When you've got a nicely set pudding like that, a cake, and pour chocolate over it. And then cream on top of that. The more you put on it the sweeter and nicer it gets.

Is that really so?

Yes, I think so. I get angry with my art, with the fact that it's so sweet and sickly.

It's too sweet for you? So you add even more?

Something like that, perhaps. I try to put a little bit, a bit of shit on top. I'm too nervous to really pour shit over it. I'm too nervous to really make something that's kaput. I make sentimental sweeties, this ruinous thing here, it's all so peaceful and gives a nice smile. This *Table Ruin* really smiles. It's not a horrible ruin. Not like a real ruin, on top of a mountain and inhabited by terrible people, robber barons and murderers and perverse slave-drivers. Nowadays you can go there and think: Oh, how wonderful, how beautiful the sun looks on this lovely old building. It's fallen apart, there's nothing to be afraid of any more. And people go up there and have picnics and a little barbecue and so on in remembrance of the people who were incinerated there.

Does that annoy you, or do you think that that's simply the way it must be?

I use it as a little trump I can pull out during conversations. Like now.

But didn't you really want to produce shit once?

I don't think so.

Just talk about it?

Yes.

And in writing?

Yes. Just act as if. There was this old book dealer by the name of Wittenborn, I don't know whether you've heard of him, he's dead now. He was a German book dealer, a Jew who fled from Hitler. I got to know him in New York because he always bought these funny books. I knew that he was there and in 1966 I went to New York. I had just published my first "Shit" book, so I took a couple of copies with me and showed them to him, and he said to me he didn't think it was that daring. Because: you can be daring and write shit, but he didn't think it that remarkable to say so beforehand and placate people a bit and pull the wool even further over their eyes. And I realized then that he could see through what I had done. Although it actually created difficulties for me. But I always knew that I was doing this all for the walls, for the libraries. And for the money.

But you're still seen as something of a bugbear of the middle classes.

Yes, and I even charge people for it. The charging I do is a fairly straightforward business. Can you see that?

Yes...

That's how I see it.

I'm trying to imagine it, yes.

Yes, I'm telling it to you the way I feel it.

Your work is often characterised as totally honest and open.

That's going in the direction of when I say: I'm simply a pudding cook, or the like. That's a kind of honesty, isn't it? I could say: I'm not that. And people would even believe it, I think.

But let's take your diaries, for instance. They come across as very open and honest. You don't say I'm a pudding cook, you say: I'm at home, I can't sleep and so on. Is that a true record or fiction?

What I write there? That's not fiction. I don't think so. Only inasmuch as I require the German language, which has its own built-in fiction. In any case, I don't think it's such a problem if you have your own particular rhythm, a particular sentence structure. I can't speak of an accident using correct sentence structure because the horror gets lost in the correctness. In that sense what I wrote is not as terrible as I'd have liked it. What I mean is that I'm not telling the truth because it *cannot* be told – in a perfect sentence structure. I've tried making mistakes and leaving them there in the spelling, and simply crossing things out, but those are very small, cosmetic changes.

So the important thing is that everything immediately assumes a form?

Yes, because I always have the idea that I might sell it, or publish it. There are some manuscripts, like the ones written by Anne Frank, that are quite different. She didn't have a hope of doing any business with them. At most her descendants or relatives or someone who had the rights. Things like that. Obviously I can't manage that. I'm not trapped somewhere and forced to tell the truth, in my case I get out of a fix somewhere and then sell it.

Is video a particularly suitable medium for your work, then?

I think it's all the same. I don't really look at it all. I really don't know how I should change that. In fact I can't change it any more.

You don't have to add anything with video.

I try, it's an argument against the video people I know, it's an argument against television and these actors I don't like, Humphrey Bogart or what have you. I don't like all that, and I hate them. Perhaps out of jealousy, perhaps out of envy. What I want to show, roughly, is: try doing it this way. Not always just these big stories where the poor actor, the idiot, still has to play the hero.

But the authenticity is important to you?

I would feel ashamed of myself otherwise, if I wanted to fantasize as well. Film myself and then act as if it was something else.

Is it important for you not to have to feel ashamed of something when you do it yourself?

Something like that.

And do you always manage that?

That's not possible. There are some things I can't look at any more, they make me feel so ashamed.

In front of whom?

In front of my imaginary judges. The great judges of European literature and art are located somewhere in my head and play the judge there and do me in. I have to keep watching out that I don't offend them. But obviously they are simply my own creations, so they are fairly limited creatures and not exactly the best

judges – small, small, what’s the word? Scold-dumplings. Little things.

Little what?

Scold-dumplings. I imagine to myself that they scold me when I don’t behave. When I can’t keep up my heroic act – which obviously is just a part I play – then, my o my... You haven’t much time left to change your ways, they say, your days are numbered.

Do you have to feel less ashamed nowadays than previously?

In the old days I used to feel ashamed of myself in front of my teachers and parents. That was realistic, that was shit. That was revolting, truly revolting. Nowadays I only feel ashamed of myself in front of these vague figures.

But also in your art?

I am only ashamed in a very cautious way. I’m trained, you know, in not-being-ashamed-of-myself. That’s not so bad. I’d really like to be ashamed. But I can’t manage that any more, that’s over. My heart doesn’t work any more – so shame doesn’t work for me either (laughs). With a bit of alcohol the shame becomes quite simple, it dies, drowns. And civilised countries like Switzerland are also good in that respect. You can build a nice, small, civilised theatre there with civilised marionettes that don’t say anything too nasty, and you can get by quite nicely.

Has the idea of things being civilised become more important to you with age? Do you find it easier to accept this civilised exhibition business, as you called it, with age?

I’m slowly softening up. I can gradually put up with it. One gets so soft and – old. Yes, I can handle it.

This hope, this love that you mentioned – have you experienced it?

Oh yes, when you’re in love and full of hope you think: life’s really starting to take off at last. Although I must say, it didn’t take off in my case. On the contrary: things got pretty rocky.

But there was a flicker of a flame?

Yes, there was a sort of fire. And basically it burnt out in the process. Yes, one gets by with a great deal of bluster – talks, bla bla bla, and makes everything look as though it’s perfectly alright. You couldn’t do that in an African state, say, where something dreadful was going on. This conversation couldn’t even.... You need this background for that, this calm background of civilisation you find here in Switzerland. I also think that the Swiss tolerance is fantastic. I can talk here just as I like, even in High German, as you see, and don’t get silenced by people contradicting me. Like the Germans always have to put up with. In Germany I can’t...

Things are different in Germany?

In my experience, yes. I haven’t had much to do with Germany in recent years. But I really don’t get on with these interviews, television interviews... and they don’t understand that either... They don’t think it’s anything to laugh about.

You’ve not had that many exhibitions in Germany.

I can’t say any more. I always had enormous rows there: with my mother, my father, then later with teachers, then with gallerists and art dealers. Germany was a kind of battlefield. And that’s just how it should be. Why should they land that quickly in the bit that’s been saved. Why should they be saved that quickly. I mean, all they ever did in Poland was do the people in.

You came to Switzerland from a ravaged German state, and did your apprenticeship and made concrete art. That’s a kind of counter-movement to the things that you went through.

Yes. I noticed that it went down well in Switzerland: Bill, Lohse, Graeser were all in Zurich. So I tried to copy them. I thought I’d also like to be like them one day.

What happened then?

I realised that it wasn't helping me. It didn't get me anywhere when I drew a rectangle. When Malevich painted his black square, painted it all over and made it kaput, that was really something, that was a revolution. But you can't take Malevich's Black Square and paint it a nice colour and make it nice and clean, the way the guys in Zurich did, and then offer it for sale. That was an act against the museums. I think I've never got beyond that situation, never done anything to attack the museums. I've never undertaken anything against the museums, I can't do that, no, I'm no Malevich. I can't do that. But I realised that I couldn't act as though there were some mystery behind all these nice clean squares...

That wasn't on?

No. That didn't help me in my misfortune. I'm an unhappy person. I'm a noisy troublemaker and unhappy. So it didn't help me. But then I began to daub and the like, and that was more helpful. I was quite alone while I did it. I did a kind of course in "aloneliness" back there in the fifties.

So that was a lonely business? Sticking it out with your daubings?

Yes, daubing was a lonely business. But I wasn't up to anything else.

Apart from that you also made prints. And they're not daubings.

Yes, I made prints for the money. But it's not that simple. If you start daubing for a customer they say: 'thank you, goodbye'. You have to really work, make nice straight lines.

And you could do that at that time?

I have the impression that I got by.

But then the liberty you experienced, the daubing, always got the upper hand, right?

Perhaps it wasn't that way at all. I saw then that a tempered liberty, a mildly ironic non-participation was possible for timid people like me. I'm a timid person and play the role of an untimid one, say. You can do that on the art market. You can make yourself look like a plucky fellow.

And that worked?

It seems so.

And what's your aim?

(Very fast) My aim is to be able to die without suffering. That's my aim.

And in your work?

I've no aim there. I simply carry on so that it doesn't start losing its glory. One has these worries and anxieties about losing one's job and then having to cut back and never getting any more money. So – I have to carry on a bit longer.

But isn't it one of your aims to make work and life identical?

I'll never manage that. I'm such a soft-soaper and pudding maker.

Or are they already identical enough?

Yes, that's it. That's how I see it. I mean: that's what I say. And perhaps it's not that way at all. But it strikes me that way. That I'm a kind of soft-soaper and flatterer and pudding maker. The pudding often looks like a ruin. But in point of fact it's a pudding. It's a construction made of sweet nothings. Even though it looks as if it's made of solid oak.

Really?

You can almost laugh at it, can't you?

Yes.

One can really have a good laugh about it, all this stuff. Sometimes it acts as though it wasn't laughable.

(Grins)

Do you think your success is due to the fact that people want to do the same. They also have anxieties but do not admit it.

Could be, yes. But I don't admit it either. I simply act as if I hadn't any anxieties, don't I?

But basically you do admit it.

Yes, to you now. I'm ashamed of course that I'm doing better than the other scaredy-cats.

But it's quite a relief!

When one has no more anxieties?

No, for the people who look at it.

Could be.

It's an enormous relief.

I don't really know about that. I don't talk enough with people about that.

You don't know your own self?

Let's put it another way: I don't know the effect I have on others. I've a few friends who say that I'm writing a tragic chapter here. But I can't talk them out of that either.

But isn't there something that's very liberating as well?

What?

Going to exhibitions of your works.

Yes, that's not such a solemn affair, is it.

No, it's quite liberating and relieving.

Yes, that's possible.

You really lift a weight from people's shoulders.

Do you really think so? I've never thought of it like that, never heard anyone say what you've just said. That would be marvellous if it was true. I mean I could be proud of that, perhaps.

Yes, I think that's what you could be most proud of, perhaps. This relief, this liberation has an enormous value.

I wanted to be Mondrian, elegant and serious and without a trace of humour, or perhaps I wanted to become Malevich. But I can't manage that. So all that's left for me is a bit of song and dance, as if everything were in order. But that also involves quite a lot of effort, you know. I don't think that my heart has been worn out by all these things for nothing. Light music is also very strenuous, isn't it? The people who play all that entertainment music aren't exactly the merriest, are they?

Something else occurs to me: I found it liberating the first time I heard that an exhibition had been put on for dogs. Did you do that to provoke people?

No, I did it out of pity.

Pity for the dogs?

Yes, pity. I was in Spain once. I went there a number of times to visit my friend Richard Hamilton at his studio. He had a studio there and he invited me to work with him and paint over old things that hadn't got anywhere and make something of them. And we were in Barcelona because Barcelona was nearby, and in the evening we visited a fairly posh restaurant and he invited me. So we were eating and were drunk and it was wonderful and so on, when suddenly I heard this barking. Woof woof woof and then wooooo. There must

have been a hundred dogs there, all barking. The moon was shining and I thought: what wonderful music! And I asked the landlord: what's that? Why are the dogs barking like that? And he said: take a look at this menu here. He showed me a menu for dogs. The rich could go there with their dogs and order something from this menu, and the dogs would receive a small dish and eat it, and he said: we do this because over there is a dog pound that was founded by the Society for the Protection for Plant and Animal Life. Go and have a look, you can go tomorrow and see how the dogs live there, there are hundreds of them, and then look over there, the musicians are arriving. I thought to myself: I'll go and record that, it's wonderful. My two sons were with me, so we took tape recorders along and decided to record them. And then I saw that these (brown?) dogs had become really sad and crazy. That was on a hill called Tibidabo, a Christian name, I will give you the key to Paradise, to the Church, you are Peter, I shall give you the key to the Church. Tibidabo. We were on this kind of terrace, and beneath were lots of small, lovely, lively dogs. And a bit higher up they were all a bit tired, and even higher up they were even more tired, and higher still even more tired, and right at the top they just sat there, staring blankly. And so I thought to myself: I can't record them here, and my sons were feeling ill from the stench of the shit and so on. And then we spoke with this doctor, there were a number of men and women like that who looked after it all, and he said: we pick up all of the dogs that the Spaniards cast out when they go off on holiday. So every spring we take in an incredible number of dogs here. And the longer they stay here the more melancholy they get, and after three weeks at most they die. Really. And on the topmost terrace were the dogs that you could hardly offer anyone any more. Down below, you see, they would invite people to come and take the dogs away so that they could get rid of some of them. The women would come and drive off with the little tail-wagging fellows. And up on top sat the melancholics. So we made a couple of recordings, but my sons couldn't stand it. But I thought: I must record it at all costs. It all boiled down to my ambition. So I found this Spaniard, a young man, and he recorded the barking for 24 hours, and I published it as a cassette thingy. I can't hear it without crying. Because I see the dogs.

But afterwards you did an exhibition.

Yes, I talked with Richard Hamilton about it, and he said: right, why don't we do an exhibition for dogs? We were so stupid we thought we could paint sausages for them. But that's plain stupid because dogs need the smell. And Marcel Broodthaers was there, too, and he said he would make a film of lamp-posts so that the dogs could pee on them. But we didn't stop to think that a dog had to pee on it first before the other dogs would pee on it as well. That was our downfall, um, there were paintings for adults with portraits of dogs and so on. And painted beneath them were sausages and toys and plastic bones, and people brought their dogs along of course, and they said: thank you, goodbye!

It didn't go down well?

No, it was an arrogant mistake. The idea that you could do something for dogs. They want something else, right. They want a juicy bone with meat on it. A dead pig perhaps.

The dogs were the true judges?

The true meat-eaters, I think, maybe. The food in this dog pound in Barcelona was mixed with oat flakes, that was nothing for them. The sad old dogs wouldn't eat it any more.

You had already made your literature sausages by then?

Yes, that was in 1970, I think. Yes, they were for literary dogs.

Was that the idea?

No, that was simply my hatred of... There's this book by Günther Grass called *Dog Years*. It appeared round about 1956. I was visiting Germany at the time and I thought, the dog, what a revolting book, what a load of shit, and I wanted to make a dog sausage of it, that was the first book I turned into a sausage. *Dog Years*. I tore the book apart and added spices like a really revolting sausage and put it in a skin, in those days you could get proper skins made of intestines, and then I cut out the labels and stuck them on the skins. *Dog Years*. That's how it began. And then I realized that it had a certain ironic quality, that one could do more with the idea. Andersch, Böll, he was also one of my favourite literary dogs.

We've learned an enormous amount today.
That wasn't bad, was it?