

PRESS RELEASE

Dieter Roth

September 25 – December 11, 2026

Opening Reception on Thursday, September 24, 6 – 8 pm

Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

For the first time since Dieter Roth. *Drawings* (2007), Galerie Eva Presenhuber is dedicating an exhibition to Dieter Roth (1930–1998), one of the most important and influential Swiss artists of the 20th century. Bringing together works from the late 1960s through the 1980s, the exhibition exemplifies how Roth, with his open concept of the artwork, redefined the boundaries between work, material, and working process. In parallel, the gallery presents Josh Smith's eighth solo exhibition in Zurich, for whom Dieter Roth remains an important artistic reference to this day.

For Dieter Roth (1930–1998), the studio was never merely the place where art was made. In many works, it itself became the subject of his artistic practice. Over more than four decades, Roth developed a body of work that consistently questioned the boundaries between production and result, between everyday life and art, and between artwork, tool, and material. Hardly any artist of the 20th century questioned the notion of the autonomous artwork as fundamentally as Dieter Roth. His works do not emerge at a distance from life, but in immediate proximity to it. Tools, remnants of paint, Polaroids, packaging, or everyday objects do not appear as incidental remnants of a working process, but possess the same status as drawings, prints, or paintings. The studio becomes an open system in which traces, actions, and a wide variety of materials can become part of an artistic context. This attitude is exemplified by the works presented here. Painted shelves, object assemblages, prints, self-drawings, or works made from unusual materials such as chocolate or light bulbs point less to distinct groups of works than to a way of thinking that makes the working process itself the actual subject of art.

Roth repeatedly combined this extraordinary willingness to experiment with a radical questioning of the self: his own life becomes the material of art without ever turning into an autobiographical narrative in the classical sense. In particular, the numerous self-drawings and self-portraits do not constitute a continuous self-representation, but rather a constant examination of his own existence. Identity appears not as something fixed, but as something processual and fragile. Early on, Roth developed the term "Selbste" for his work (derived from the German word *selbst*, "self," with the added -e turning it into an invented plural, roughly equivalent to "selves" in English)—a term that describes less a completed self-image than an ongoing process of self-observation.

Roth's interest lies less in finished forms than in a concept of the artwork that incorporates change and process. Many of his works continue to develop over time, respond to the particular qualities of their materials, or address transience as a fundamental dimension of artistic experience. It is precisely here that Dieter Roth's enduring relevance lies. His understanding of art as an open process in which artwork, material, and life are inseparably connected has lost none of its relevance to this day.

The exhibition's parallel presentation with Josh Smith therefore points less to formal affinities than to a shared attitude toward artistic practice. Both artists understand the studio as a space of permanent engagement in which artwork, material, thought, and life are inseparably intertwined.

Dr. Raphael Gyga

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

Dieter Roth was born in 1930 in Hannover, Germany, and passed away in 1998 in Basel, Switzerland. He had numerous solo exhibitions internationally at major institutions, including Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur, Chur, CH (2023); Legion of Honor museum, San Francisco, US (2020); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, DE (2015); Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stuttgart, DE (2014); HangarBicocca, Milan, IT (2013); Camden Art Centre, London, UK (2013); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, US (2013, 2004); Centre Pompidou, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, FR (2012); Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (2012); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, NL (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL, US (2011); Schaulager, Basel, CH (2003); and MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona, ES (2001). Recent group exhibitions include at Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, CH (2023); mumok, Vienna, AT (2018); Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, US (2017); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US (2014–2015); 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, IT (2013); Grand Palais, Paris, FR (2013); und Documenta 11, Kassel, DE (2002). His works are held in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, US; Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, CH; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, DE; and Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, DE.

Dr. Raphael Gygax is a Swiss art historian, curator, and writer. Following many years as curator and head of publications at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich (2003–19), he served as Deputy Director of the Department of Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts and as Head of the Bachelor Fine Arts program (2019–23). Since 2023, Gygax has been working internationally as an independent curator, with projects in Chicago, Locarno, Berlin, Vienna, and Luxembourg. In 2024, he was appointed Curator-at-Large at Kunsthaus Zürich, and in 2026, Curator for Special Projects at Kunstmuseum Bern.

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