

U DORTMUNDER U
ZENTRUM FÜR KUNST
UND KREATIVITÄT

MO
MUSEUM OSTWALL

Dieter Roth

(Dieter Rot
Dieter Rot
Dieter Roth
Dieterich Roth
Karl-Dietrich Roth)

Shit Sublime Imperfect Masterpieces

Stadt Dortmund
Kulturbetriebe



For the exhibition, a richly illustrated catalogue will be issued containing the complete list of Dieter Roth's works in the Museum Ostwall Collection and of the works on permanent loan from the Spankus Dieter Roth Collection.

Dieter Roth

Shit Sublime Imperfect Masterpieces

21 May - 28 August 2016

f www.facebook.com/museum.ostwall
ig www.instagram.com/museumostwall
tw www.twitter.com/MuseumOstwall

#schönescheisse_mo #museumostwall

The Museum Ostwall in the Dortmund U Tower

Leonie-Reygers-Terrasse

44137 Dortmund

Germany

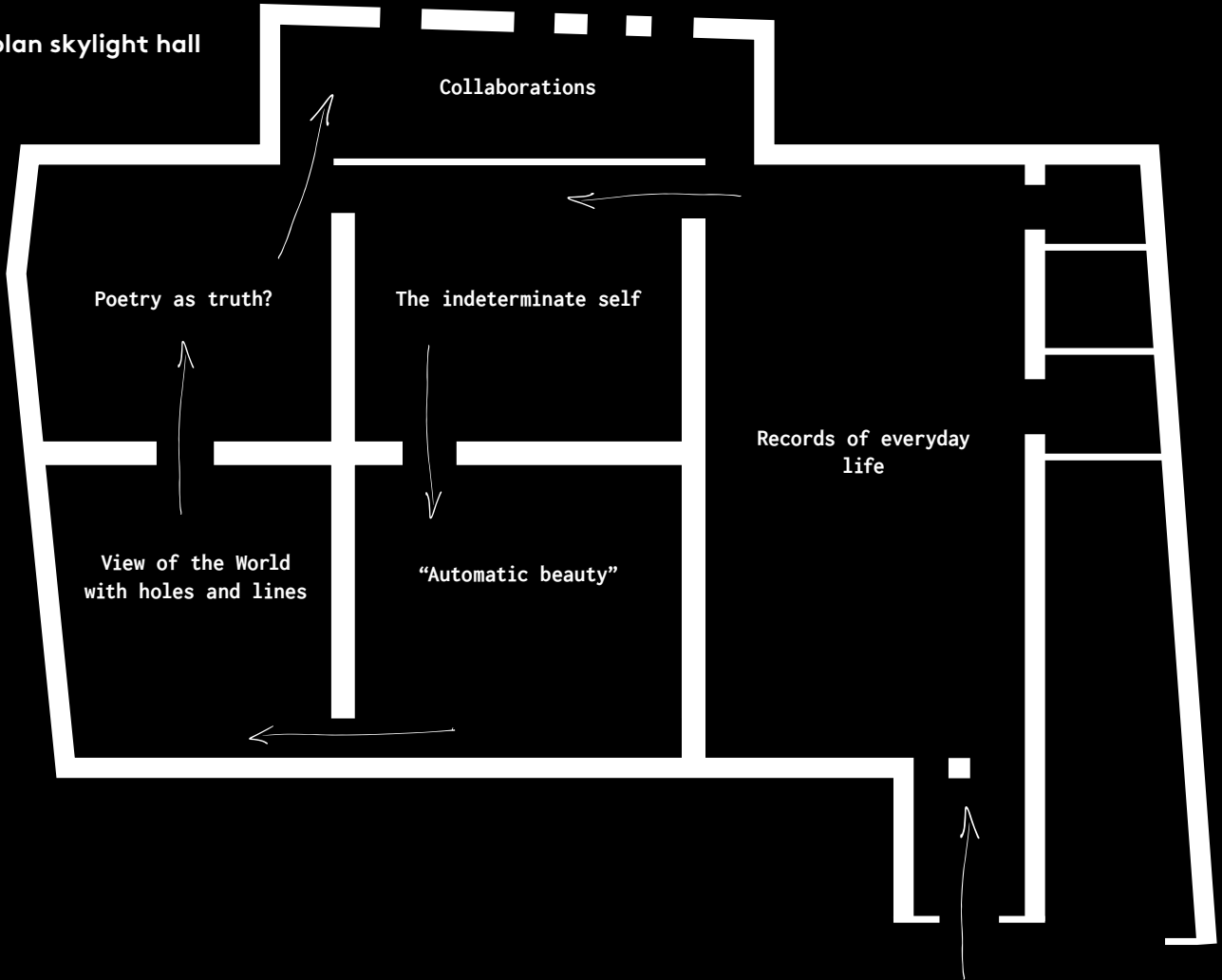
+ 49 (0)231 5024723

mo@stadtdo.de

www.museumostwall.dortmund.de

An exhibition by the Museum Ostwall in the Dortmund U Tower including works of the Museum Ostwall Collection and Spankus Dieter Roth Collection

Groundplan skylight hall



Introduction

To some, the title chosen for the exhibition may seem blatantly provocative. In fact, however, it is intended literally. Firstly, Dieter Roth often resorted to the imagery of digestion to describe his work and, secondly, his entire output as an artist was pervaded by a desire to unite the supposed opposites of beauty and waste, of dilettantism and artistic mastery.

In its collection, Museum Ostwall possesses numerous works of Fluxus and allied art forms of the 1960s and -70s. During this era, there is a fundamental shift in the understanding of the artist's authorship. Valid until then has been the notion of the artist genius whose own specific masterly skills find expression in the artwork. Conflicting with this, group works are now produced that made it impossible to attribute individual authorship, and everyday activities and incidents became the subject-matter of art. The materials now used are often items of daily use or waste products. The artistic idea takes precedence over "mastery", i.e. precision craftsmanship to create a work of material value.

Roth searches for new forms of expression during this period. A graphic artist by training, he had started his career as an artist with accurately executed Constructivist works. Motivated by constant doubts about his own artistic abilities and the desperate search for his place in the world, as a person and as an artist, he now turns to art with a stronger orientation to everyday life. Roth oscillates between manic and depressed phases, regarding himself as a universal genius one day and an abject failure the next. He experiments with very different media,

e.g. graphic prints, music, mould pictures, video art and even poetry. With self-irony he restrains his envy of fellow artists, girding himself against criticism at the same time. He publishes a series of volumes of poetry entitled "*shit* books" because "I wanted to be able to offer shittiness with impunity [...]." Roth, a jack-of-all-trades and yet a supposed blunderer ...?

This exhibition takes a closer look at Roth's various authorship strategies. Which artistic strategies does Roth choose for expressing his relationship with the world? Which self-conception - as an artist and as a person - finds expression in Roth's works? The breadth of his work shows that Roth is a seeker. The question of whether he has anything at all to say to the world resonates in many works just as much as his wish to compete with other artists. Roth's quest often entails failure and starting anew - a process that becomes visible in some groups of works with his constant revision, overlaying and correction. Many of Roth's works are or will never be finished. This constant failure in the face of the masterpiece, the flaunting of the imperfect and the inadequate - or, in a nutshell, dilettantism - ultimately becomes reflection on the making of art itself.

Records of everyday life

Few artists have made their own lives the subject of their art as explicitly as Dieter Roth. By documenting his everyday life in various media, he tries to assure himself of himself and his role in the world. For Roth, keeping a diary thus becomes an important means of his (artistic) expression. His notebooks contain appointments and notes, which he considers just as much part of his work as the sketches and drawings accompanying them.

In his *Diary Sketches (Tagebuchskizzen)*, Roth prints two different drawings one on top of the other in red and black and thus creates a multi-layered configuration. This way he makes it clear that the complexity of everyday living defies linear narrative structure. The *Silkscreen Prints (Siebdruckbilder)* are part of an interview that Emmett Williams conducted with Roth about his diaries. Roth “answers” each of Williams’s questions with a drawing from one of the diaries and in doing so stresses that, in his view, text and image are equivalent forms of communication.

His work *the blue tide (die blaue flut)* is the first diary to be published, and the *Great Bear Pamphlet. a LOOK into the blue tide part 2* issued a year later can be interpreted as its sequel. This is where the principle of constant revision, later to become characteristic of Roth’s output and particularly of his books, is clearly manifest: *die blaue flut* refers back to texts from Roth’s notebook of 1966, but in these he highlights certain sections and omits the drawings. This way, Roth stresses the supposedly unimportant, commonplace side of his life as an artist, while, at the next stage, *a LOOK into the blue tide part*

2 as its continuation shifts the spotlight onto the working-over of his drawings.

Intimate insights into Roth’s life with his then partner Dorothy Iannone are offered by the silkscreen prints from the 1970s. In particular, *At Home (Daheim)*, a jumbled picture responding to Iannone’s *At Home (Bei uns)*, shows a confusion of juxtaposed and superimposed erotic images, while the titles of other works, such as *Diseased Tiger as Self of Himself & Self-Portrait as Jealous Tiger (Süchtiger Tiger als Selbst seiner Selbst & Selbstbildnis als eifersüchtiger Tiger)* refer to the couple’s emotional world. *Harmonica Curse, A Diary - Diary for the Biennale Contribution (Swiss Pavilion) (Tagebuch zum Biennale-Beitrag [Schweizer Pavillon]), A Diary (dating from 1982) (Ein Tagebuch [aus d. Jahre 1982])* and the catalogue *MAC Marseille* retrace the role of Polaroid photos as documentations of everyday life over a period of about 15 years. While the dated photo accompanying the audio cassette containing the artist’s harmonica pictures helps to locate the recording in time among the total of 74 cassettes, *A Diary, Tagebuch* and *MAC Marseille* tell the story of how artworks and exhibitions came about and thus become part of the work.

The video installation *Solo Scenes (Solo-Szenen)*, produced shortly before Roth’s death, presents largely unfiltered insights into the artist’s life: we see him at work, asleep and brushing his teeth. 131 sequences mirror the interpenetration of art and life while making it obvious that documentation, however meticulous, is incapable of truly grasping a person’s essence.

The indeterminate self

The self-portraits – called “selves” by Roth – mirror the attempt by the artist wavering between narcissism and doubts about the justification for his own existence to get to the bottom of his own personality. Traditionally, the self-portrait is a vehicle for self-questioning and self-depiction; the pictures that Roth draws of himself, on the other hand, are strangely indefinite. While in other media Roth affords profound insight into his personality, he remains barely palpable in these pictures. Many of the exhibited graphic prints show Roth from behind or only in an indistinct outline. They seem to be concerned less with Roth’s person than with his place in the world. Titles like *Self in Stuttgart (Selbst in Stuttgart)* or *By the Sea from Behind (Am Meer von hinten)* shift the places where Roth happens to be into the foreground; *Big Tardt for Richard* and *Never let up (Immer drauf)* show a man who remains unidentified looking out into the world. Self-depiction as a hole or blank space through which one looks at something else (or at nothing at all) but which itself has no substance communicates the impossibility of depicting the complexity of one’s own person. Examples of this are *Self-portrait as Hole (Selbstbildnis als Loch)* and *Double Head at the Sea (Doppelkopf am Meer)*. *Original Graphic Print (Originalgraphik)* is a reproduction of *Double Head at the Sea (Doppelkopf am Meer)* in which Roth instructs the contracted printer to add to the figure a speech balloon containing precisely this instruction (to insert a speech balloon) as a text. This way the reference to the artist as the originator of the artwork is integrated via the text into the picture, even if this person continues to remain visually indistinct. The proliferation of the self in dou-

ble forms or works like *Quadruple Self-portrait from Behind (Vierfaches Selbstportrait von hinten)* and *Afternoon* hints at a self that is constantly changing and whose essence is not clearly definable. How one perceives oneself is subject to constant external influences, and the individual’s perception by others changes according to the point in time and context. *Whipping Top (Kreisel)* thus refers to a self that loses all tangible contours due to continual revolving about its own axis.

The impermanence of his own person is addressed by Roth particularly in his chocolate work *Flat Poet’s Bust (Flache Dichterbüste)* and in the associated graphic print. They show a self-image of the artist who depicts himself as a bald-headed geriatric at the age of 38. Roth produced the bust in fact as *P.O.TH.A.A.VFB. (Portrait of the Artist as Vogelfutterbüste [Birdseed Bust])* it was intended, as illustrated by the graphic print, to be fed to the birds and thus to vanish. Finally, *Self-portrait (Contribution to “Künstlerpost”)* (*Selbstportrait [Beitrag zu “Künstlerpost”]*) manifests itself solely as a round, otherwise largely formless heap of chocolate that merely suggests the shape of a head. Like the *Self-portrait as a Lion (Selbstbildnis als Löwe)*, which shows an incarnation of the artist’s self that is less than majestic and more reminiscent of a little dog, the chocolate self-portraits – at the mercy of insects and temperature – go the way of all flesh. The silkscreen print showing Roth in a fully excreted state, i.e. *Self-portrait, as a Pile of Dog Dirt in Stuttgart on 27.10.73 (Selbstbild, als Hundehauf in Stuttgart am 27.10.73)*, then seems to be the logical outcome.

“Automatic beauty”

It is not only one's own (artist) personality but the whole world that is subject to constant change. Roth takes up this notion in his “mould pictures” and allied works. Leaving the creation of these works largely to chance, he himself recedes into the background as the originator of the artwork. Particularly his work with foodstuffs, which decompose in time and take on a huge variety of colours and shapes in the process, develop – once Roth has composed the “ingredients” – of their own accord without any further intervention. Works like these are produced in the middle of the 1960s initially on the impulse of pouring “automatic beauty” over “failed” drawings; later, Roth employs foodstuffs selectively in order to set chance-driven processes in motion. In the various versions of *Something Rattling in Oelper* (*In Oelper scheperts*), he reworks graphic prints, for example, with processed cheese that brings forth different colours and the structures of autumn leaves after a while. Works like *Large Landscape* (*Große Landschaft*) and *Pocket Room* (*Taschenzimmer*) seem technical “dilettantish”, although their subjects take up the established art-historical traditions of landscape painting and still life and thus confidently claim inclusion in the art canon. Works like *Mould Sheet* (*Schimmelblatt*) and *Untitled* (*Yoghurt Pressing*) (o.T. [*Joghurtpressung*]) place the spotlight entirely on the changing appearance of an abstract subject: initially painted “white on white” (milk on paper), the mould spores bring forth astonishing shapes in the course of time. *Cheese Race* (*Käserennen*), in which different types of cheese “run” against one another, also testifies to the artist's humour, as does the *Chocolate Bis-*

cuit Picture (*Schokoladenplätzchenbild*) in which Roth apparently parodies Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (*Schwarzes Quadrat*), an acknowledged icon of modern painting. Impermanence, on the other hand, is the theme of *Course of the World* (*Lauf der Welt*), which shows an Easter bunny and a Father Christmas made of chocolate that disintegrate to dust in the eternal cycle of Easter and Christmas. The three examples of *Graphic with Cocoa* (*Graphik mit Kakau*) form the interface with Roth's works using spices: while his spice sculptures place the emphasis on the smell, the pictures are more concerned with the structure of spices that resemble that of colour pigments. *Root Treatment* (*Wurzelbehandlung*) of rusting metal also shows a grainy, powdery surface which, like the mould pictures, is subject to a process of constant, albeit slower, change. Roth's works over-coated with paint and other substances are closely related to his “mould pictures”, but express stagnation rather than change. Although the *Garden Gnomes as Squirrel Food Sculptures* (*Gartenzwerge als Eichhörnchenfutterplastik*) can hope to be set free by nibbling rodents, the *Chocolate Object* (*Chocolate Doll*) (*Schokolade-Objekt [Schokoladenpuppe]*) is at the mercy of the painfully slow decay of the chocolate encasing it. Tin toys like the *Motorcyclist* (*Motorradfahrer*) embodying speed look like they have become frozen to the spot by the acrylic or sugar icing poured over them. More strongly affected by chance, on the other hand, is the *Black Rose* (*Schwarze Rose*), a work of cast acrylic compound that stimulates associations both with flower shapes and with piles of excrement.

View of the world with holes and lines

Unlike the randomly proliferating shapes of his “mould pictures”, Dieter Roth’s graphic prints testify to extreme precision and premeditation. Even if Roth sometimes allows his printers – assuming he does not print his graphics himself – a certain freedom of action in the execution of his works, his prints manifest the technical proficiency of a trained graphic artist. With some materials and techniques, such as drypoint on handmade paper, Roth even takes up old-masterly traditions. Nevertheless, the impeccability of his silkscreen prints (e.g. *In the West* [*Im Westen*] and *Memory Cannons* [*Die Erinnerungskanonen*]) reveal his mastery of contemporary printing techniques as well.

Unlike his in many cases revised records of everyday living and also his rampant works of organic materials, many of these graphic prints presented here are characterized by their reduced and precise delineation. In *Island* (*InseI*) and *No Comment* (*Kein Kommentar*), these lines form a network pattern reminiscent of a geodesic grid, as familiar from maps – perhaps an allusion to Roth’s attempt to find his place in the world as an artist and as a person with the aid of maps and calculations. *Quartet* (*Quartett*), *Baroque Etude* (*Barocketüde*) and *View* (*Aussicht*) also seem to depict mathematically constructed spaces, although one can detect illogical and unstable areas upon closer scrutiny.

Despite Roth’s apparent mastery of his tools of the trade, these prints lend voice to a sense of insecurity in the

world. The steamship that crops up in several of his pictures, reminding us of Roth’s nomadic life travelling between Europe, America and Iceland, must be seen in this context. Sometimes Roth seeks to capture concrete places in pictures, although the relationship between title and content remains somewhat vague: *Reykjavic* as an embossed image on white paper is barely visible, and the stereotypically depicted landmarks of German cities (*Berlin*, *Heidelberg*, *Düsseldorf* and *Munich*) turn out to be holes through which fragments of other sights can be viewed. A ferry crossing the Rhine is thus relocated to Berlin. Local characteristics are therefore presented in such contradictory way that they, too, fail to communicate a sense of security.

With holes and grid structures in these pictures, Roth seems to revert back to his early Constructivist works. Produced in the pre-1960 period, they also exhibit a high standard of craftsmanship. These works, albeit in a much more abstract way, are also concerned with space: the “slit books” *Book A*, *B* and *AA* consisting of loose leaves show precise, rectangular grids of holes, which, when randomly superimposed, create ever new, disturbingly shimmering illusions of space. In the *Picture Books* (*Bilderbücher*) produced a year earlier, the viewer looks through geometrically punched holes at the coloured circles and squares behind them, with the effect changing according to the number of superimposed perforated pages. The *Folded Object* (*Faltobjekt*), a poster featuring circular cut-outs, also changes its appearance depending on the surface to which it is affixed.

Poetry as truth?

In the course of his life, Dieter Roth publishes about 500 books. By writing and drawing, he attempts to gain certainty about himself and his place in the world – yet never arrives at any valid statement.

Among the roughly 120 books and inserts on show in the exhibition, the *Shit* (*Scheisse*) books represent the largest group. After experimenting with Concrete Poetry like the *Ideograms* (*Ideogramme*) in the 1950s, Roth returns to the traditional form of the poem with *SHIT. New Poems by Diter Rot* (*SCHEISSE. Neue Gedichte von Diter Rot*) in 1966. In content profane, they comply in form with the canon of classical poetry. His constant revision of the various books yields a complex network of interrelationships. Similar forms of interwovenness are shown by the various issues of the magazine *Poetrie* and the *Sea of Tears* (*Tränenmeer*) books, the latter being based on aphorisms that Roth posted for a whole year in 1972 as small ads in the *Luzerner Anzeiger*.

MUNDUNCULUM. A Tentative Logico-Poeticum (*MUNDUNCULUM. Ein tentatives Logico-Poeticum*), which refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logicus-philosophicus* (1921) on the philosophy of language, is considered Roth's theoretical chef d'oeuvre. Here he expresses the view that language is not suitable for describing reality, as the meaning of words varies according to who is speaking in which context. In the set of instructions for the *Rubber Stamp Box* (*Stempelkasten*) based on a pictorial alphabet developed by Roth and used among other things in the *MUNDUNCULUM*, Roth invites users to give their own meanings to individual pictures and thus develop their own language system.

In his essays, Roth reveals himself as an author without a message who prefers to question his role as a writer. The question *Who Was Mozart?* (*Wer war Mozart?*) he answers tersely with "I don't know." The pages of the book *ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE GENERAL TOWARD THE PARTICULAR* (*ÜBER DAS VERHALTEN DES ALLGEMEINEN ZU ODER GEGENÜBER DEM BESONDEREN*) are each filled with single letters forming the sentence, originally in German: "Some people have already given thought to this or that matter that I hardly dare print anything more, such that what is now written here is meant to say neither anything better nor different than what has already been said or written on the matter dealt with or not dealt with here, nor anything bad or worse, different or the same, new or old, whatever". *Mumble* (*MurmeI*), for its part, is a play in which the two protagonists "Mumble" and "Mumble" do nothing but mumble. Roth doesn't exactly pull out all the stops either for his group of appropriations, binding old daily newspapers, comics and magazines into books – quantity rather than quality. For the two-handed drawings, on the other hand, Roth had to practise symmetrical drawing for a long time and in a disciplined fashion, while the telephone doodles and scribbles are precisely the result of uncontrolled, i.e. quasi-automatic, drawing.

The *Collected Works* (*Gesammelte Werke*), finally, show another (failed) attempt to encompass his own personality as an artist by documenting his entire artistic output.

Collaborations: confrontation with the other

To find his place in the world and in art, Dieter Roth repeatedly seeks interaction with his fellows. Sometimes it is his admiration, bordering on envy, of others that is his motivation for such “collaborations”, and sometimes the desire to enter into direct competition with them. Productive cooperation of this kind comes about with, among others, Richard Hamilton, Arnulf Rainer and friends among the Viennese Actionists. With Hamilton, Roth develops pictures for dogs and “bipeds” which are started by one and reworked by the other. Of each picture there is an “original”, which usually looks like a rough version, and a “certificate”, which is a development of the original and aims to bring the various qualities of the originals into a “conventionally acceptable form”. The catalogue *COLLABORATIONS OF CH. ROTHAM* shows both versions, while the postcard edition *The Rotham Certificates* concentrates on the developed versions. On the record *Canciones de Cadaqués*, produced during this cooperation, one can hear Roth and Hamilton alternately accompanying Hamilton’s housekeeper’s barking dog on the guitar. Roth also collaborates for many years with Arnulf Rainer. Under the label Roth & Rainer, they produce records and videos as well as pictures: the artist’s books *Neo Nix and NEO-MIX* (*Neo Nix and NEO-MIX*) and *Mix and Unmix Art* (*Misch- und Trennkunst*) show examples of the alternate reworking of the other’s pictures, during which Rainer acquires what he calls “new techniques of graphic aggression”. The *Ratio Letters No. 1-3* (*Ratiobriefe Nr. 1-3*) parody the form of an official letter that can be filled in by the recipient, the content

of which seems remarkably absurd, however. The gramophone records of Roth and his artist friends are a special form of collaboration. Roth attempts to place particularly those belonging to the series *Rarely Heard Music* (*Selten gehörte Musik*) within the canon of classical music by giving them appropriate titles (symphony, trio, sonata etc.), although their content is anything but “classical”. As in the mould works and poems, the commonplace that is not usually considered art-worthy is integrated in the artwork: conversations, drinking bouts, noises, i.e. the things that would usually be edited out of a recording. The process of making art becomes audible here in all its facets. The *R adio Sonata* (*Die R adiosonate*), which Roth records with the Südfunk broadcasting station’s sound engineer, clearly highlights the sheer pain and effort of music-making. *THY QUATSCH est min Castello* embodies a special trial of strength with Nam June Paik: *THY QUATSCH* [...] is a four-fold speeded-up recording of the piece *My Jubilee Ist Unverhemmet* by Paik, which is in its turn a four-fold slowed-down recording of Arnold Schönberg’s *Transfigured Night* (*Verklärte Nacht*). While Paik sets out to “improve” Schönberg’s piece by accelerating it, Roth’s recording is the attempt to “rescue” Schönberg. Roth’s children Björn, Kalli and Vera also often make music with their father. The recording *Car Journey No. 1. (Autofahrt No. 1)*, for example, is produced with Björn; some of the sound recordings of Kalli and Björn are issued by Roth’s family publishing venture.

Events

Public guided tours

Every Sunday, 3.00 to 4.30 pm (excluding 22 May and 28 August 2016)

Guided tours by the curators

Thursday, 16 June 2016, and 18 August 2016, each at 6.30 pm

Short guided tours, guided tours for families, workshops or visitor action areas in the exhibition

22 May 2016 (International Museum Day)

5 June 2016 (Family Sunday)

25 June 2016 (Extraschicht)

3 July 2016 (Family Sunday)

7 August 2016 (Family Sunday)

28 August 2016 (Dortmunder U Summer Festival)

Programs for teachers

25 May 2016, 4.30 pm: special guided tour

2 July 2016, 11 am: didactics lab (workshop)

The big “Dieter Roth commemoration-frying”

21 July 2016, 6 – 10 pm, with Matthias Schamp at the U-Tower vestibule

Furthermore:

- Free holiday workshops during the summer holidays
- Workshops for school classes for all age groups and school types
- Workshops for pre-school groups
- Exhibition discussions for school classes and pre-school groups

Further details can be found in the leaflet on art education or at our website www.museumostwall.dortmund.de

Registration for and information on all activities at mo.bildung@stadtdo.de

+49 (0)231 50-2 52 36 or +49 (0)231 50-2 77 91

Colophon

Editor: Regina Selter, Deputy Director of Museum Ostwall at Dortmund U tower

Text: Nicole Grothe (Exhibition Curator & Director of the Museum Ostwall Collection), Daniela Ihrig (Assistant Curator), with support from Nora Patberg

Translation: Tim Chafer

Graphic Design: NEU Designbüro, Dortmund

Lenders: Horst and Kirsten Spankus, Hauser & Wirth, Hans Klütting

Guided tours and educational activities: Regina Selter (Education and Communication Director), Barbara Hlali (Education and Communication Assistant)

Restoration: Lisa Schiller (Restoration Specialist at Museum Ostwall)

Concept and design of showcases: Ovis Wende and Lukas Kretschmer, Szeno_Art, Munich

Opening hours

Tues + Wed + Sat + Sun 11 am – 6 pm

Thurs + Fri 11 am – 8 pm

Public holidays 11 am – 6 pm, closed on Mondays

Admission

€ 5 / € 2.50

Children and adolescents under 18 are admitted free of charge.

Please register groups upwards of 15 persons.

Info line

(0231) 50-24723

Cover

Dieter Roth, 1965 (photo: Lisa Redling, Sarasota) / Dieter Roth:
detail from: Gesammelte Werke Band 8, 1976 / Dieter Roth:
Schimmelblatt, 1969 (photography: Jürgen Spiler, Dortmund)
© Dieter Roth Estate, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth© Dieter Roth
Estate, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

Förderer

Ministerium für Familie, Kinder,
Jugend, Kultur und Sport
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen



Medienpartner



RUHR KUNST MUSEEN



Stadt Dortmund
Kulturbetriebe

