

# Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung

**Press release**

**Zurich, 29 April 2010**

**Roswitha Haftmann Foundation to honour 2010 prizewinner Sigmar Polke**

**The Roswitha Haftmann Prize, Europe's best-endowed art award, is to be symbolically presented this evening to German artist Sigmar Polke.**

The Board of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation decided in October 2009 to bestow this year's award, worth 150,000 Swiss francs, to the painter, graphic artist and art photographer Sigmar Polke. The ceremony takes place today before an audience of 400 invited guests at the Kunsthaus Zürich. Dr. Katharina Schmidt, member of the Foundation Board, is to deliver the honorific address. The prizewinner, who is unable to attend for health reasons, will receive the award at his home in Cologne in a few days' time.

## IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

Born in Silesia in 1941, Polke is among the leading artists of the present day. For forty years, armed with a broad, eclectic practical knowledge that has earned him the sobriquet 'alchemist', Polke has been experimenting with styles, subjects and materials, as well as with a hermeneutics that includes the role of art and the artist in its reflections. The nimbus of a generative process, of the detection and liberation of a given material's own vital force, hangs permanently about his oeuvre. For Polke, the act of painting is a calculated risk, a chemical reaction between the material deployed and the artist's own creative will that has allowed him to establish a patent new conception of the abstract, one that focuses on the material dimension of the work of art as both centre and way station. He evokes in spectacular fashion such concepts as pure painting, untrammelled nature and romanticism, even as he coolly trains his sights on a society shaped by market forces, by politics and the media.

The Roswitha Haftmann Foundation has also singled out for acclaim Polke's most recent work, his windows for Zurich's Grossmünster cathedral. Here, Polke's training in the technique of stained glass has allowed him to create images that are as powerful as they are sensitive, figurative and abstract masterpieces fashioned out of agate and glass. In her honorific address this evening and in the name of the Foundation Board, the speaker will consider Polke's Grossmünster windows in particular as she recognizes his extraordinary body of work.

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#### FOUNDATION AND PRIZEWINNERS

Sigmar Polke is the tenth winner of Europe's best-endowed award for art. Other prizewinners include Walter de Maria, Maria Lassnig, Jeff Wall, Robert Ryman, Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Mona Hatoum, Richard Artschwager, Douglas Gordon and Vija Celmins.

The Prize, founded on the initiative of gallery owner Roswitha Haftmann (1924–1998), has been awarded by the Foundation since 2001 every one to three years to a living artist who has created an oeuvre of outstanding quality. The prizewinner is selected by the Members of the Board, which is made up of the directors of the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Kunsthaus Zürich. Additional members are either individuals nominated in the Foundation's constitution or co-opted by the Members of the Board. For further information on the founder, the jury, the prize and past winners, please see [www.roswithahaftmann-foundation.com](http://www.roswithahaftmann-foundation.com).

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