

Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung

Press Release

Zurich, 10 November 2005

Today the American artist Robert Ryman is to receive Europe's most valuable art prize, awarded by the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation.

Today in the Kunsthaus Zürich the Board of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation will present the Roswitha Haftmann Prize – worth CHF 120,000 – to the American artist Robert Ryman. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1930, Ryman lives and works in New York and is regarded as one of the leading artists of our time.

In March 2005 the Jury of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation selected Robert Ryman as this year's prizewinner. In the presence of 450 invited guests in the Kunsthaus Zürich, Dr Christoph Becker, President of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation, will present Robert Ryman with his award. The laudatio will be given by Dr Matthias Frehner, Director of the Kunstmuseum Bern. Often associated in passing with the Minimalism, Ryman has been recognised for the fact that over the decades he has created a pictorial world of his own, producing works that are consistently compelling and beautiful. In the context of the history of painting and its more recent developments, Ryman's art is ground-breaking and timeless. In Switzerland his work is prominently represented in the Hallen für neue Kunst in Schaffhausen.

THE ARTIST

Ryman, who initially devoted himself to music, began his career in the visual arts as an autodidact. Since the mid-1960s his paintings have systematically evolved through his precise calibration of paint substances and brushwork which in itself has meant that his square-format paintings seem to follow on from each other in a wholly logical sequence.

His paintings are white, and often seem unspectacular at first glance. Their surfaces are shiny or matt, covered with a layer of impasto paint or fine-grained, transparent or impenetrable, calm or agitated. The edges document the process of the painting's making and relativise the apparent objectivity of the artistic process. Pressure on a brush, the movement of the artist's wrist, ceasing work and starting out again – all of these become precise visual events. The artist's concentration communicates itself to the viewer. Seeing is liberated from conventional attitudes.

In Ryman's case, labels have always proved inadequate because his work cannot be associated with any single direction or style. This in itself is connected with one of the very special qualities of his paintings which – apart from the actual process of their making – are strikingly timeless.

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THE FOUNDATION AND ITS PRIZEWINNERS

Following in the footsteps of Walter de Maria, Maria Lassnig, Jeff Wall and Mona Hatoum, Robert Ryman is the fifth winner of the Roswitha Haftmann Prize. The Roswitha Haftmann Foundation awards this prize every one to three years to a living artist whose work is of outstanding importance. Valued at CHF 120,000 this is the most generous art prize in Europe. The Board of the Foundation, which selects the prizewinner, consists of the Directors (or a representative) of the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Kunsthaus Zürich, and other members named in the Constitution of the Foundation or co-opted by the Board itself.

Roswitha Haftmann (1927-1998) – a language teacher who subsequently modelled for American photographic agencies – was married to the art historian Werner Haftmann. She ran her own art gallery in Zurich until her death in 1998. Born in St. Gallen, she relished social occasions and used her not inconsiderable fortune to set up a Foundation which now funds this award – the Roswitha Haftmann Prize.

The author Ludmila Vachtova has written a monograph, 'Roswitha Haftmann', remembering and celebrating the life of this patron of the arts – renowned for her beauty and sophisticated appreciation of art. Published by Scheidegger und Spiess, it is available for CHF 38.– in the Museum Shop in the Kunsthaus Zürich.

More information on the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation is available online at www.roswithahaftmann-foundation.com.

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