

Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung

Press Release
Zurich, 9 October 2003

The Canadian photoartist Jeff Wall to receive the prestigious Roswitha Haftmann Prize.

On 6 November 2003 at 6.30 p.m. in the Kunsthaus Zürich, the Canadian photo-artist Jeff Wall will receive the Roswitha Haftmann Prize. Valued at 120,000 Swiss francs this is one of the most generous art prizes worldwide and is awarded to living artists who have produced a body of work of outstanding importance.

Since the 1970s, Jeff Wall (born 1946 in Vancouver) has enriched the art of photography with large-format photographic works and light boxes; to this day he has continued with unabated intensity to create enduring art of the highest quality. The slides he produces – involving immensely complicated technical processes – are framed in aluminium and lit from behind. The resulting images, replicating reality down to the finest detail, are powerfully evocative. The spectrum of topics is distinctly limited: everyday scenes with anonymous figures and rooms, a vision of nature that appears at first sight to be bereft of any beauty. Wall's photographs are far removed from enlarged snapshots. They depict carefully stage-managed scenarios with actors and props which by definition refer to the classical composition schemas of art history. These pictorial compositions in monumental formats narrow the gap between photography and painting. The outcome – using the tools of photography on the highest possible aesthetic level – is an art form poised between realism and mise-en-scène.

The Roswitha Haftmann-Stiftung [the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation] awards this prize every one-to-three years to living artists whose work is of major significance. The Board which decides the winner consists of the directors (or a representative) of the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Kunsthaus Zürich as well as others who are named personally in the constitution of the Foundation or who are specifically appointed by the Board.

The first prize-winners were the American Land Art and Concept Artist Walter de Maria (2001) and the Austrian painter Maria Lassnig (2002), whose work will be on show in the Kunsthaus from 28 November until 29 February 2004.

Roswitha Haftmann (1927–1998) was a language teacher who also worked as a photographic model for American agencies and was married to the art historian Werner Haftmann. Until her death in 1998 she ran a gallery of her own in Zurich. Born in St. Gallen, she relished social occasions and in 1998 she converted her considerable wealth into a trust fund, which provides the resources for the very substantial Roswitha Haftmann Prize.

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The life of this beautiful benefactress with a fine sensitivity for art has been celebrated in the book "Roswitha Haftmann", written by Ludmila Vachtova and published by Scheidegger und Spiess. It is available in the Museum Shop in the Kunsthaus Zürich for CHF 38.-.

The public award ceremony, at which Jeff Wall will be present, will take place on Thursday, 6 November at 6.30 p.m. in the lecture hall of the Kunsthaus Zürich. The laudatio will be delivered by Dr Katharina Schmidt, Vice Chair of the Board of the Roswitha Haftmann-Stiftung.

On 6 November 2003, the Foundation will go online at www.roswithahaftmann-stiftung.com.

For further information and visual materials, please contact
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