

Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung

Press release

Zurich, 31 March 2017

Hans Haacke receives the Roswitha Haftmann Prize

Today Hans Haacke (b. 1936) will receive Europe's best endowed art award, worth CHF 150,000, from the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation. The laudation speech will be held by Dr Bernhart Schwenk.

The Board of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation has awarded the Roswitha Haftmann Prize to Hans Haacke in recognition of his life's work. The jury praised his courageous and unflinching commitment over many decades and his ability to foster debate on social issues through provocative art, but also his intellectual brilliance and the formal quality of his works. Hans Haacke was born in Cologne in 1936 and has lived in New York since 1965. He has aroused particular controversy for the political aspects of his work.

PRESENTATION AT THE KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

Hans Haacke is the seventeenth artist to receive Europe's best endowed art award. The presentation ceremony will take place today, on 31 March 2017, at 6.30 p.m. at the Kunsthaus Zürich before an audience of around 300 invited guests. Hans Haacke will be accompanied by his wife Linda. Dr Bernhart Schwenk, member of the Foundation Board and curator for contemporary art at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, will hold the laudation speech. The prize was originally the initiative of Roswitha Haftmann (1924–1998), whose Foundation has awarded it since 2001 to a living artist who has created an oeuvre of outstanding quality. The winner is chosen by the Foundation Board, which includes the directors of the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Kunsthaus Zürich as well as other members co-opted by the Board.

CONCEPTUAL ART AND LAND ART

Haacke studied at the Staatliche Werkakademie, Kassel, from 1956 to 1960. His early works already revolved around systems and processes and analysed their workings – and failures. The young artist presented interactions between physical and biological systems, animals, plants and states of water and wind; he also made forays into land art. From 1970 onwards, he increasingly turned his attention to political developments and the mechanisms of manipulation – of opinions, sensibilities and historical facts.

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MARKET, POLITICS, MORALITY

The abrupt cancellation of his exhibition at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 1971, which was to include his 'Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971', on property ownership and speculation, led to a heated debate on the politics of conceptual art. In Cologne in 1974 he put forward a provocative project on the provenance of a still life by Edouard Manet purchased for the Wallraf Richartz Museum on the initiative of the then chairman of its patron association Hermann Josef Abs, and turned the spotlight on his role in the Third Reich. The documentation accompanying the exhibition, with its telling slogan 'Art remains art', was rejected by the museum's director. At a solo show in Oxford in 1978 he presented 'A Breed Apart', a critique of the state-owned motor company British Leyland and its exports of police and military vehicles to countries, such as South Africa, that practised racial segregation at the time.

PAINTING, SCULPTURE, INSTALLATION

Since the early 1980s Haacke has increasingly turned to painting and large sculptural installations. He created works as the paintings 'Hommage à Marcel Broodthaers' (1982), 'Tableau pour la salle du conseil d'administration' (1983) for Alcan, 'Taking Stock (unfinished)' and 'Weite und Vielfalt der Brigade Ludwig' (1984). At the historically charged Königsplatz in Munich in 1991 he presented 'Die Fahne hoch'. In 1984 he received a solo exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London, where his portrait of Margaret Thatcher with the well-known art patrons Maurice and Charles Saatchi highlighted their influence on artistic production at the time.

HIGHLY REGARDED CONTRIBUTION TO VENICE BIENNALE

Haacke's controversial 1990 collage of a smoking cowboy ('Cowboy with Cigarette') transformed a classic image by Picasso into a cigarette advertisement – a reaction to the tobacco firm Philip Morris's sponsorship of the Museum of Modern Art. In 1993 Haacke shared the Golden Lion for the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale with Nam June Paik: Haacke's striking installation 'Germania', for which he tore up the pavilion's historical floor covering installed by the National Socialists, referenced the Biennale's roots in the cultural policy of the former Fascist Italy. 1999 saw the art project 'Der Bevölkerung' in Germany's Reichstag, a variation on the building's dedication 'Dem deutschen Volke', which prompted a debate of international resonance on how Germans see themselves and their relationship to other nations. In 2006, as part of a retrospective, Haacke had the façade windows of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin temporarily covered with posters detailing the fates of 46 victims of extreme-Right violence in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1990, for his work 'Kein schöner Land. Weil sie nicht deutsch aussahen'.

MOST RECENT ACTION ON TRAFALGAR SQUARE

From March 2015 to September 2016 Haacke's 'Gift Horse' occupied the empty fourth plinth on Trafalgar Square in London. The skeleton of a horse was a reference to a key work of British art by George Stubbs in the nearby National Gallery; a ribbon around its foreleg displayed a live ticker of the FTSE 100 share index.

TEACHING, TITLES, AWARDS

From 1967 to 2002 Haacke held a professorship at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City. Recordings of his conversations with Pierre Bourdieu ('Free Exchange') were released from 1994 onward, revealing their shared interest in the relationships between art and politics. In 1998 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Bauhaus University Weimar, and in 2004 he received the Peter Weiss Prize from the city of Bochum followed, in 2006, by the Roland Prize for Art in the Public Space. Hans Haacke took part in documenta in Kassel in 1972, 1982, 1987 and 1997. Solo shows besides the Tate have been staged at venues including the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and the Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid.

For further information see: www.roswithahaftmann-foundation.com.

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