

# **Roth time : [brochure] a Dieter Roth retrospective : March 12, 2004-June 7, 2004**

Author

Roth, Dieter, 1930-1998

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The Museum of Modern Art, Queens



# ROTH TIME

A Dieter Roth Retrospective MARCH 12-JUNE 7, 2004



# Dieter Roth

was an artist of astonishing breadth and diversity, producing books, graphics, drawings, paintings, sculptures, assemblages, installations, and audio and media works involving slides, sound recordings, film, and video. He was also a composer, musician, poet, and writer. In many of his works he consciously obliterated categories and hierarchies, and he often collaborated with other artists, subverting the principle of authorship. Art and life for Roth flowed readily into each other and were impossible to separate.

Roth was born in Hannover, Germany, in 1930, to a German mother and a Swiss father and died in Basel, Switzerland, in 1998. Through much of his life, Roth was restlessly peripatetic, moving between studios in many cities. His two primary bases of activity—Iceland and Basel—were outside the mainstream. He was suspicious of galleries and dealers and skeptical of museums and curators as interpreters of his work. An iconoclastic individualist, Roth has remained elusive to a broad public, despite his singular importance within art circles and his impact and influence on subsequent generations of artists in Europe and the United States.

The first comprehensive overview of Roth's career, *Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective* spans fifty years of his work. The exhibition is being presented both at MoMA QNS and at the Museum's affiliate P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center. The portion of the exhibition at MoMA QNS charts the development of Roth's work from its beginnings in the mid-1940s until the end of his life, across the full range of issues that preoccupied him, the diverse materials he used, and the shifts in scale from tiny and intimate works to the grandly theatrical. Five large-scale sculpture and media works, among the most complex, ambitious, and dramatic works of his career, are shown at P.S.1 in a closely integrated presentation.

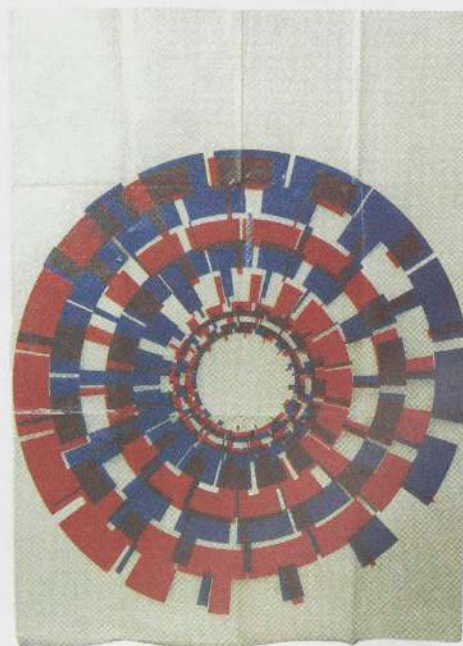
# 1

In 1943, to escape the war and intensive Allied bombings, Roth's parents sent him to Zurich, Switzerland. Alone in a rooming house, the young man wrote of his loneliness, but immersed himself in music, literature, and art—copying reproductions in art books and writing his own poetry. By 1946 his family joined him in Switzerland, and in 1947 Roth apprenticed himself to a prominent graphic

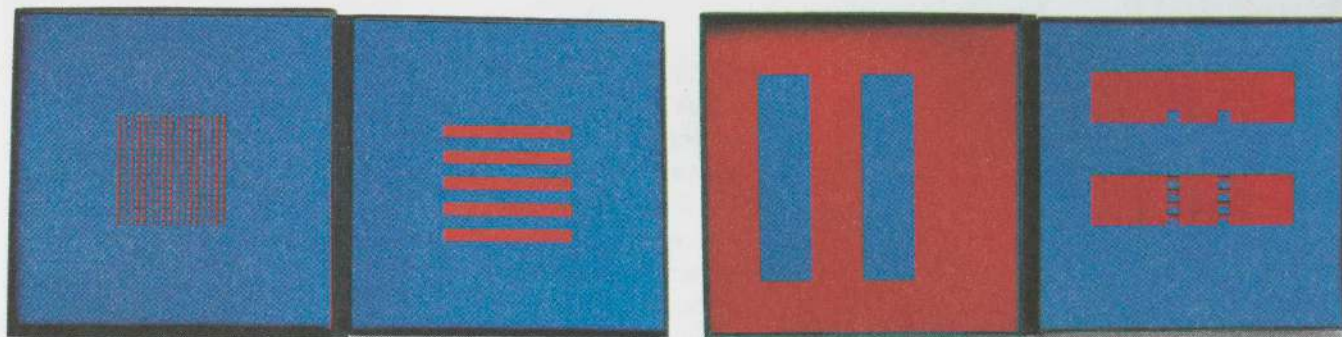
ON THE COVER: Dieter Roth and Ingrid Wiener. *Grosser Teppich* (Large tapestry). 1984–86. Wool, 86 5/8 x 71 1/4" (220 x 181 cm). Private collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth. *spirale 1*, *internationale zeitschrift für junge kunst* (Spiral 1, international journal for young art). 1953. Woodcut, 19 11/16 x 13 13/16" (50 x 35 cm). Edition: 600. Publisher: Spiral Press, Bern 1953. Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kupferstichkabinett. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeil, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg

Dieter Roth. *Neujahrsgabe* (New year's gift). 1954. Line etching on parchment, 29 1/2 x 21 1/4" (75 x 54 cm) Published by F. Gygi, Bern 1955. Estate of Dieter Roth. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeil, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg







designer in Bern. In 1946 Roth made his first prints, including a self-portrait. While taking watercolor lessons, he visited the Paul Klee retrospective at the Bern Kunstmuseum, an experience he would later describe as a shock and an obsession. He increasingly studied modern art, and not only the influence of Klee, but also Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, and Jean (Hans) Arp can be seen in his early works. Recognized by teachers and fellow artists as precocious and enormously gifted as a draftsman, Roth finished his apprenticeship in 1951 and supported himself as a carpenter and graphic designer. He became involved with a group of artists and writers in Bern who decided to publish an "international journal of young art," which they called *spirale*, for which Roth designed the first cover in 1953. Due to criticism of his poetry as overly romantic, Roth destroyed his early poems and for a time ceased writing poetry. He played trumpet in jazz sessions and collaborated on organizing exhibitions and showing experimental films at a local bookstore.

In 1954, Roth's artwork coalesced under the influence of Zurich "concrete" artists such as Max Bill and Richard Paul Lohse, with their constructivist style of geometric abstraction. His work was distinguished by a concern with light, motion, and optical effects, evident in an etching on parchment he made that year as a *Neujahrsgabe* (New Year's gift) for friends. In a practice that he would follow often for the rest of his career, Roth printed each sheet separately, altering the composition and colors so that each print would be a unique variant. Many works of the mid-1950s, including sculpture, are characterized by an ethereal, shimmering presence, and the viewer's shifting relationship is intrinsic to Roth's intention that perceptions and understanding of the work are constantly changing and transforming.

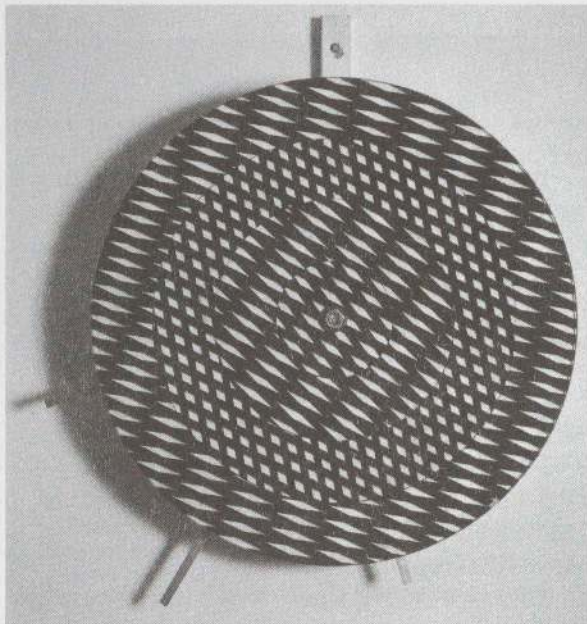
Dieter Roth. *book*. 1958–59. Portfolio with 18–24 black, white or colored cardboard sheets with hand-cut slits, 14<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 14<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (38 x 38 cm). Edition: various editions. Publisher: vorlag ed, Reykjavik, 1958. Graphische Sammlung der ETH, Zürich. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeli, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg

## 2

In 1956 Roth moved to Copenhagen to accept a job as a designer with a major Danish textile manufacturer, while his own work focused on books and his own first experimental films. Roth met and fell in love with a young woman from Iceland, Sigríður Björnsdóttir, and early the next year he moved to Iceland to live with her and to start a family. He and Icelandic writer Einar Bragi founded a publishing house, forlag ed, the first of a number of book publishers with which Roth would be associated for the rest of his life. Roth supported himself with odd jobs in graphic design and also designed furniture and toys and made jewelry for a goldsmith. At this time Roth made the first of several changes and plays on his name assuming the name "diter rot," to self-consciously evoke the eighteenth-century French encyclopedia writer Denis Diderot.

With his own publishing house, Roth made book production his central preoccupation, bringing to fruition ideas initiated in Bern and Copenhagen. *Kinderbuch* (Children's book), originally made as a prototype in 1954, was the first book to be finished. Varying the size of squares and circles and the combinations of colors—red, yellow, blue, and green—a progression of shifting patterns occurs as the





reader flips through the book. The use of ring binders invites the viewer to take the book apart and experiment with different sequences and combinations. Roth's journals and books experimented with lettering, typeface, and simple combinations of dots and dashes, a kind of "concrete," visual poetry. Completed in 1958–59, the project simply called **book** consists of loose pages with no binding, in both color and black and white, each with different arrangements of hand-cut slits, with no set order, so that the viewer inevitably would create different variations of patterns in sequence.

Roth's involvement with optical effects and viewer participation culminated with the rubber band pictures and **rotary relief sculptures** of 1960. With the rubber band pictures, Roth intended that the viewer would make his or her own compositions, arranging and overlaying rubber bands on a grid of nails. With the rotary

relief sculptures, he intended that the viewer would spin the various disks. In those composed with parallel bands, the patterns would mutate according to the changing speed of the disks and the chance arrangements of the bands. In one example with wooden pellets, both visual patterns and sound would shift as the balls would fall through the grid of nails. Undoubtedly Roth was aware of the precedent optical disks made by Marcel Duchamp in the 1920s, and these projects brought him fully into the European avant-garde, in which optical and kinetic art was a major tendency.

### 3

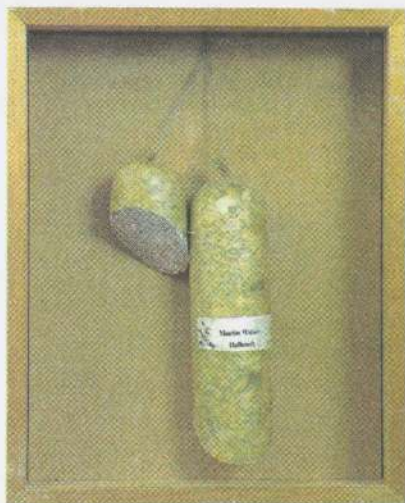
By 1961, just as Roth's work was gaining recognition, he made a fundamental shift that set the foundation for the remainder of his career. He met the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely in Basel soon after Tinguely returned from New York, where he had staged the legendary *Hommage à New York*, a large sculpture that self-destructed in The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden of The Museum of Modern Art. Roth later wrote, "It was simply a completely different world from my Constructivism, it was something like a paradise that I'd lost." With that profound change in his work, essential influences included not only Duchamp and Tinguely but also Kurt Schwitters and Robert Rauschenberg.

Roth began to make books out of cut-up wastepaper and newspapers, including the *daily mirror book* and the *Dagblegt bul*, both from 1961. Similarly, in the first in a series of works titled "**Literaturwurst**," Roth replaced the meat from sausage recipes with the minced pages of books by authors he did not like or envied. He embarked on the production of the *Copley Book*, which would not be completed until 1965, for which he intermittently sent pictures, drawings, and texts to London to have them printed by the artist Richard Hamilton—a collaboration of sorts. In a 1962 letter to Hamilton he wrote, "think I will give up worrying about accurateness of execution I want to give the executioner a chance of his own."

For the *Copley Book*, Roth developed a rubber-stamp alphabet in which pictorial motifs take the place of letters. Over the next few years, Roth produced about 300 rubber-stamp drawings on tracing paper, most of which he published in a 1967 book *Mundunculum*, which he described as a "tentative logico-poeticum." The title and description refer back to the writings of the twentieth-century linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and are an ironic refutation of his premise that language could explain the world. The images are composed with repetition, mirroring, and symmetry—moving, fading, and vanishing over the page, they form a set of signs that are intuitive, personal, and physical.

Dieter Roth. *Scheibe No. 2* (Disk no. 2). 1960–91 (reconstruction). Tape on rotating wood disks and tape on rotating glass pane with aluminum handles, 31½" (80 cm) diam. Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg





Separating from his wife in 1964, Roth left Iceland for the United States, beginning a long period of itinerant life as an artist. In Philadelphia, he experimented with new graphic techniques and photography at the print workshop at what was then the Philadelphia Museum School of Art (now the University of the Arts College of Art and Design). Roth papered a large gallery with hundreds of images, inviting visitors to take a sheet. From the left-over sheets he created *Snow*, piling as many sheets as possible in acetate sheets collected in a large handmade book. A kind of lightbulb motif is dominant, suggesting spontaneous ideas, enlightenment, knowledge, but also the physical body, both a phallus and womb.

Invited to be a visiting professor of graphic design at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1965, Roth resided in Providence until late spring of 1966. While teaching, Roth completed the *Copley Book* and most of the *Mundunculum*. He resumed making prints, developing motifs related to *Snow* and *Mundunculum*, as well as figure and landscape images, and also resumed writing poetry.

Dieter Roth. *Literaturwurst* (Martin Walser: "Halbzeit") (Literature sausage [Martin Walser: *Halftime*]). 1961. Chopped book pressed into sausage shape, frame. 20 1/16 x 16 1/16 x 4 1/16" (52.5 x 42.5 x 12 cm). Edition: 50. Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeli, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg

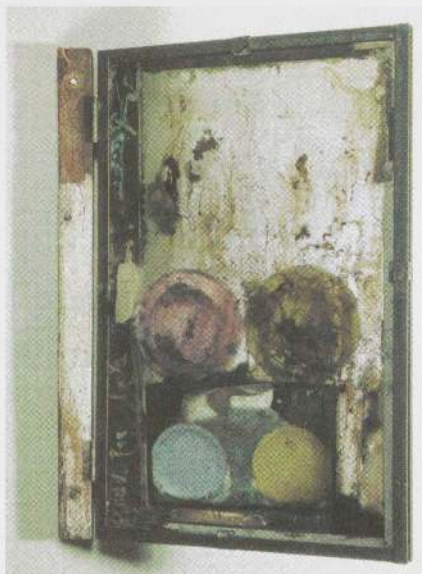
Dieter Roth. *Snow*. 1963–69. Mixed mediums on paper in plastic sleeves bound as book with metal screws and plastic tubing; wood commode; two wood chairs; and six glue, ink, and paper collages on board. Book (closed): 4 x 18 x 20" (10.2 x 45.7 x 50.8 cm) (irreg.); collages: each 20 x 18" (50.8 x 45.7 cm); commode: 22 5/8 x 58 3/4 x 25 7/8" (57 x 149 x 65.8 cm); chairs: each: 24 1/8 x 17 3/4 x 18 1/2" (61 x 45.1 x 47 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Committee on Painting and Sculpture Funds. © Estate of Dieter Roth

# 4

While in Providence, Roth expanded on tentative experiments with organic, edible materials—chocolate, fruit, and cheese—that he had begun shortly before leaving Europe. By adding chocolate and bananas to sheets of paper for prints before passing them through the press, he again made each print a unique variant. For *Fruits of a crash* and other works, he built thin glass vitrines, into which he added a variety of materials that would decay and mold. Slices of sausage sealed between sheets of plastic or glass developed an aura of mold, which transformed them into sunsets or clouds. These "decay objects" became major preoccupations and signature works through the decade.

*P.O.T.H.A.A.VFB*, small self-portraits cast in chocolate that are among Roth's most well-known works, were sold as multiples and stacked as towers or monuments that inevitably crumbled under their own weight. New chocolate figures have been cast from the artist's molds for this exhibition, so that the sweet, putrefying scent, intrinsic and important to the overall effect of the work, is not lost. As Roth once remarked: "Smell is a key vehicle of memory for me."





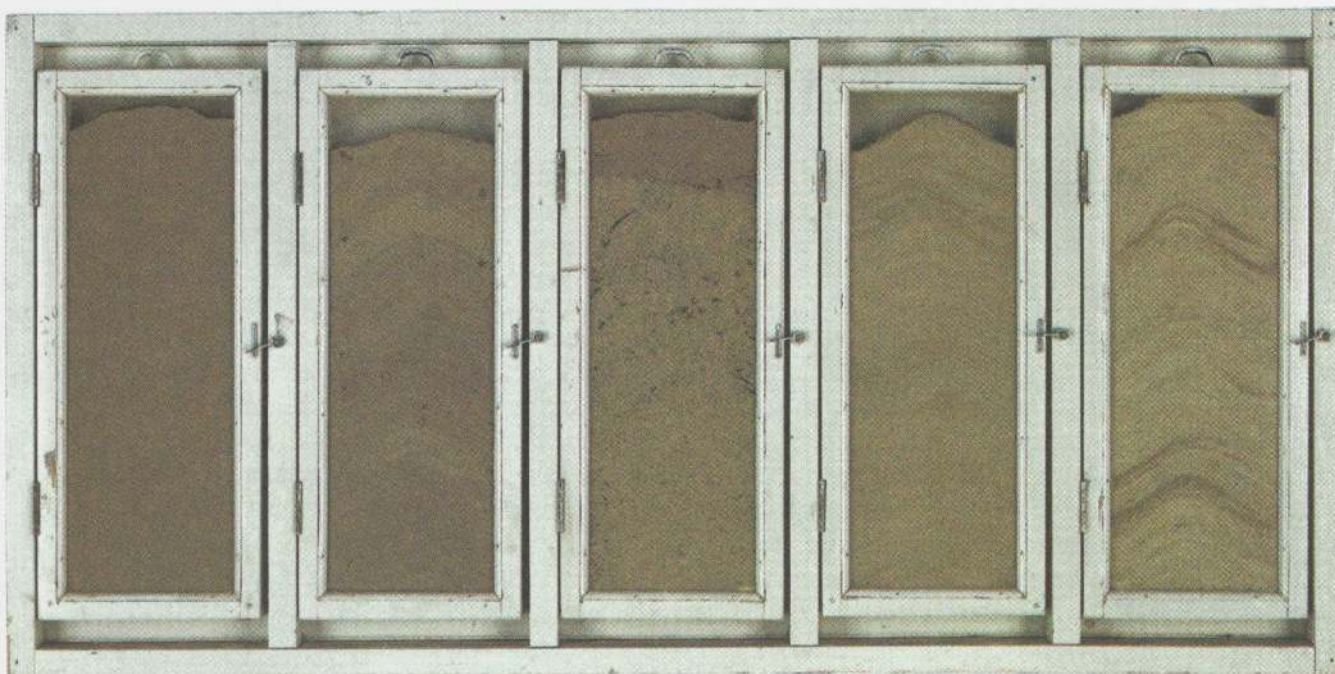
Dieter Roth. *Fruits of a crash for G + J*. 1965. Leftover food and dishes between glass panes in iron frame with hinge, on wood strips, 38 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 27 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 1 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (97 x 69.5 x 5 cm). Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg

Dieter Roth. *P.O.T.H.A.A.VFB* (Portrait of the Artist as *Vogelfutterbüste* [birdseed bust]). 1970. Chocolate, 9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 5 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 3 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (23.5 x 15 x 10 cm). Private collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Martin Bühler, Basel

After Roth left Iceland as his permanent home, the image of the island emerged as an important subject. Iceland is a volcanic landscape, crystallized and barren, but also seething with geysers, still living and transforming itself. Roth found that various combinations of organic materials, plaster, and paint could express the idea of the landscape as a constantly mutating, growing, and flowing form. Pouring different spices into thin glass vitrines for ***Gewürzfenster (Spice window)***, he built up layers akin to geological cross sections of a landscape.

In all these works, the conflation between self-portraiture, the body, and the landscape is an important strategy. Mythical themes of mortality and mankind's hubris are evoked. Sexuality and impotence, sensuality and decay, romance and tragedy, wonder and sadness permeate Roth's array of experiments with organic materials.

Dieter Roth. *Gewürzfenster* (Spice window). 1970. Spice between glass panes in wood frame with handles, hinges and locks, 19 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 43 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" (50 x 110 x 7 cm). Courtesy Galerie Stampa, Basel. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler, Basel





# 5

Between 1968 and the early 1970s, Roth moved and worked between many cities—London, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Berlin, Stuttgart, Vienna, Zurich, and Los Angeles, among other places, and always in and out of Reykjavik, where his family resided. Perhaps because of this peripatetic life, postcards become a primary material source for Roth's art. He would overpaint and alter images, as in a series of cards of puffins—North Atlantic seabirds common in Iceland—sent to his close friend, the Fluxus artist and poet Emmett Williams. Postcards of Piccadilly Circus, a major traffic interchange in the heart of London, became the basis for an extended series, most notably **6 Piccadillies**, six graphic works in which the image was enlarged, with sections selectively overworked, highlighted, and obliterated. Technically complex and unorthodox, these prints are made with cocoa, tar, and glue as well as ink. The word *circus* suggests both a ring and the notion of carnival, combining his interest in formal qualities—the spiral or circle that recur in his work from its beginning—and social life.

In 1969, together with the Stuttgart printer and publisher Hansjorg Mayer, Roth began to reissue older, originally handmade, small editions as much larger runs available to a much broader public. He called the series the **Gesammelte Werke (Collected works)** and planned a total of forty volumes. The series was numbered according to the chronology in which Roth had made the original works, with the first to be published, Volume 15, reproducing five issues of a poetry journal from the mid-1960s. Volume 10 followed, reproducing the *daily mirror book*, one of the first experimental books from 1961, and then Volume 11, a printed version of the large handmade book *Snow*, from 1964. The last volume to be published, Volume 35, came out in 1991, and Volumes 21–34 were never published.

In the mid-1960s, while living and teaching at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Roth, though fluent in English, used German for his first poems since abandoning poetry in the early 1950s. For *Scheisse. Neue Gedichte von Dieter Rot* (Shit. New poems by Dieter Rot), the first published edition of these poems, he had his students handset the text in type. Not knowing German, they made many mistakes, which Roth intentionally kept. He repeatedly reworked these poems over the next ten years in different formats, each time letting mistakes multiply. His delight in the play of letters and words, in elusive, shifting, and transforming meanings is evident, with his work acting as a staging ground to spark the imagination of his readers or viewers.

Dieter Roth. **6 Piccadillies**. 1970. One from the portfolio of six double-sided screen-prints over photolithographs, one with iron filings, mounted on board. Housed in paper-covered cardboard box with photolithograph on front, handle, and paper tag. Composition: (each) 19 1/8 x 27 3/16" (48.6 x 69.0 cm). Board: (each) 19 5/8 x 27 5/16" (49.9 x 70.0 cm). Publisher: Petersburg Press, London. Printer: H. P. Haas, Kornthal, and Staib & Mayer, Stuttgart. Edition: 150. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase, 1990. © Estate of Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth. **Gesammelte Werke (Collected works)** in slipcase. 1979. 11 x 24 x 9 5/8" (28 x 61 x 24.5 cm). Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeil, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg



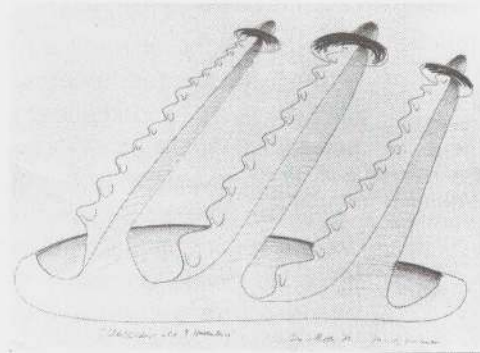
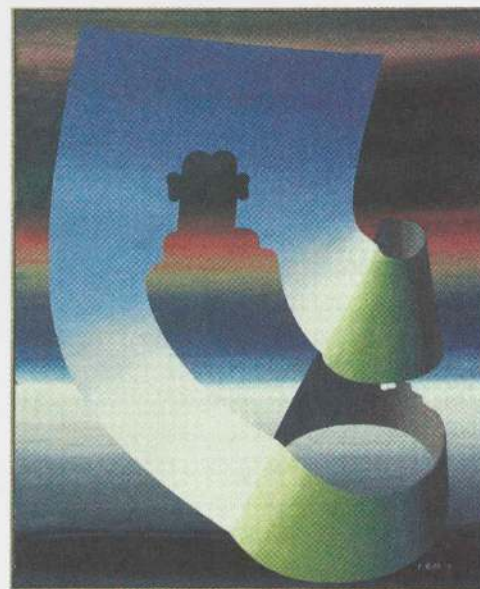


# 6

In what are probably the most traditional works of his career, Roth executed, in the early 1970s, a series of paintings, including *Doppel-Selbstbildnis (Double self-portrait)*, in oil on luminous and brilliant color, meticulously and carefully worked, with subtle blending of brushstrokes. The figure in these paintings is rendered like a cutout, often doubled and mirrored, as a somewhat phallic form, still and motionless but floating and suspended in ambiguous, flattened space. The image is both eerie and beautiful, strongly Surrealist in feeling, recalling the self-portraits of René Magritte in his bowler hat.

In counterpoint to the paintings, drawings such as *Selbstbildnis als 3 Nasenbeine (Self-portrait as 3 nose bones)* and prints from this period suggest dizzying motion, the spiral of his earliest work now occupying complex, unstable, transmutative three-dimensional space. Roth used line to create complex and ambiguous forms that can be read in multiple ways, as elevations and topographies, as faces, bodies, and landscapes. The dense overlaid lines create equally open webs and gestalt forms. Organized by symmetry and a central axis, the pictures seem posed to dissolve their structure or lose their balance but maintain a precipitous poise. Their energy is exuberant but tightly controlled.

In this same period, Roth also published one of his most important print portfolios, *Containers*. In a series of more than thirty prints, he summarized all of the printing techniques he had developed since the 1960s, and he designed a portfolio and cardboard cover in which the prints could be mailed. Since the early 1960s Roth often housed his work in boxes or vitrines with handles, the idea of the artwork as readily moveable aligned to the idea of the artwork as time bound, fleeting, transforming.



# 7

In 1976, the artist Richard Hamilton, Roth's longtime friend, invited Roth to vacation with him in Spain, proposing that they make an exhibition of collaborative works for dogs and people, an idea first proposed by the artist Marcel Broodthaers, who had recently died and to whom they dedicated the project. Through the end of the 1970s Roth and Hamilton collaborated on series of works, including the *Collaborations of Ch. Rotham* and *Interfaces*, in which Roth and Hamilton face off and work over their

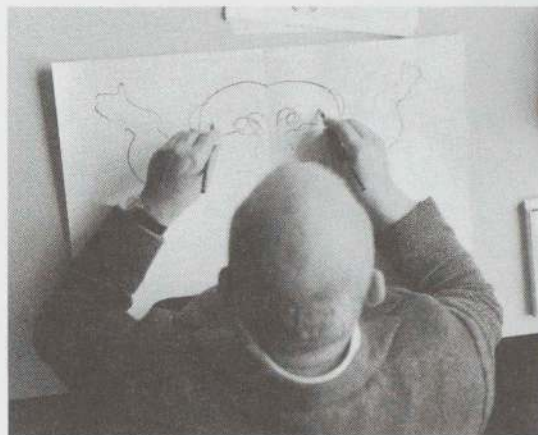




respective self-portraits, both drawings and photographs. In more than fifty groupings of portraits, the two artists confront and confound each other and their identities—interior and exterior, brooding and playful, constant and metamorphosing.

Discovering a dog pound on Monte Tibidabo, Barcelona, in the summer of 1977, Roth decided to make a recording of twenty-four hours of barking, but depressed by the conditions he quit after only a few hours. Roth and his sons Björn and Karl took hundreds of photographs of the dogs, and Roth embarked on the first of what he would call the *Schnellzeichnungen* ("speedy drawings"), spontaneous, quick sketches of the dogs, one immediately following the other, totaling about 1600 drawings, now bound in sketchbooks. These drawings, photographs, and sound recordings were integrated into one large installation, *Tibidabo—24 Stunden Hundegebell* (Tibidabo—24 hours of dogs' barking).

Whereas Roth's drawings in the first half of the decade are dense with line upon line bearing down on each other, in the "speedy drawings," pursued through the end of the 1970s, Roth shifted instantly from one sheet to the next, capturing the spontaneous, fleeting character of thought in as direct a form as possible. Since the Renaissance, the idea has endured that drawing provides the most immediate connection between the mind and the hand of the artist, but with Roth the concept of the character of drawing was itself transformed. In related series, he drew figurative scenes with **two hands at once**, again emphasizing symmetry and mirroring, theme and variation, in constantly mutating, almost filmic sequences.



Roth making two-handed sketches. © Estate of Dieter Roth

## 8

By the early 1980s Roth traveled less but still kept two or three studios where he concentrated his work. His son Björn became an increasingly close collaborator. Following a retrospective of his books and graphics in 1979 that traveled throughout Europe and the publication of Volume 40 of the "collected works"—a catalogue raisonné of his prints from the 1970s—Roth moved away from printmaking. Delighted by the instantaneity of developing technologies of photocopying, he increasingly made small editions of books and graphics using this new, contemporary medium.

His "material pictures" of this period generally remained in place in a studio, on which he worked intermittently, sometimes over years. These works do not decay over time but are rather accretions of materials typically found in an artist's studio—varieties of paints, brushes, tools as well as the miscellaneous flow of the materials of daily life. These become portraits not only of the artist but also of the studio itself, the place of the artist's work.

As he became increasingly interested in sound, music became an integral part of Roth's assemblage sculptures, adding the dimension of time to the experience of the work. Radios and tape recorders sometimes mixed the sound of real-time sound with recorded sound. In *Keller-Duo* (*Cellar duet*, 1980–89), a synthesizer and two electric organs for children were built into two wooden constructions along with several tape recorders and speakers. Roth and his son Björn recorded themselves on the cassettes. Blocking the tapes so they could not be deleted, they were incorporated into the work with the intention that the audience could play along at the same time.

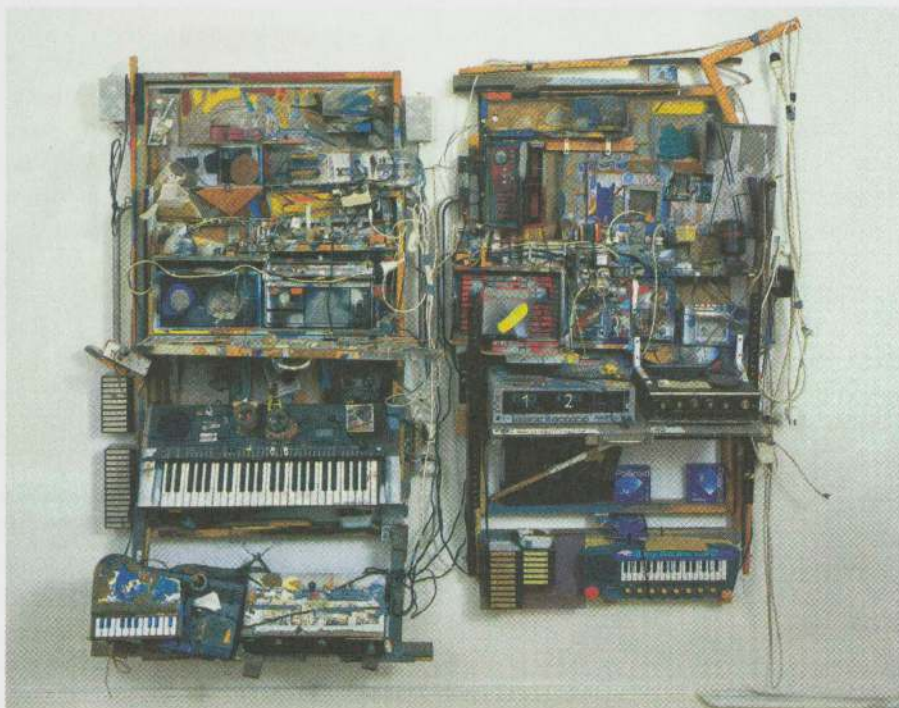
Drawing remained an obsession throughout the last two decades of Roth's life, directed to mats with which he would cover his desks and working tables. These drawings,

AT LEFT: Dieter Roth. *Doppel-Selbstbildnis* (Double self-portrait). 1973. Oil on canvas, 43 x 35 7/16" (110.5 x 90 cm). Theo and Elsa Hotz Collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Christian Baur, Basel

Dieter Roth. *Selbstbildnis als 3 Nasenbeine* (Self-portrait as 3 nose bones). 1973. Pencil on paper, 22 1/16 x 31 1/16" (57 x 79 cm). Private collection, Basel. © Estate of Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth and Richard Hamilton. *Interfaces 15–16*. 1977–78. Synthetic polymer paint, gouache, enamel, chalk, glue, pencil, ink and/or collage on cibachrome or on cardboard or on wood, in three-part hinged wood frames, 17 5/16 x 24 1/4" (44 x 61.5 cm) (closed), 17 5/16 x 48 7/16" (44 x 123 cm) (open). Tanner Teufen Collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeil, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg





like the sculptural works, were built up over time, often with Polaroid photographs added, making collages that are analogous to sketchbooks and diaries. They would be moved, reworked, sometimes rotated, and in the end were self-consciously composed.

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s Roth embarked on new collaborative woven tapestries with the Austrian artists Ingrid Wiener and Valie Export. **Grosser Teppich (Large tapestry)** began with the premise that Roth would sit behind the warp so the artists could make his portrait, while incorporating objects surrounding him in the apartment. However, because of the time involved, Roth was often not available and objects in the room shifted. Eventually Export dropped out of the project, and Wiener completed it by incorporating drawings and Polaroids sent to her by Roth of things that "had become dear to him." The complexity and richness of Roth's life and mind and his grand presence are captured in this composite portrait in which time and memory are made visible.

Dieter Roth, Vera Roth and Bjorn Roth. *Keller-Duo* (Cellar duet) 1980–89. Collage of cassettes, radio/cassette players, loudspeakers, electric piano, violin, photographs, toys, lamps, Polaroid camera, and painting utensils; oil and synthetic polymer paint on wood. Two parts: 78 3/4 x 94 1/2 x 23 5/8" (200 x 240 x 60 cm). Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeil, © Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg

Roth's work developed over a fifty-year period with both a diversity and a logical coherence that establish him as one of the most singular and important artists of the second half of the century. Roth shifted from a foundation in classic modernism into the arena of contemporary art, or what has been sometimes called "post-modernism." Testing fundamental issues of authorship and the notion of the self is fused with equally essential questions of the character and nature of art, the materials from which art may be made, as well as the hierarchies and distinctions between media. While this exhibition has been organized around a loose chronological and thematic structure informed by his life and art, Roth continually circled back to earlier ideas and processes, reinterpreting and transforming works, so that linearity or closure is consistently defied. Transience and order, destruction and creativity, playful humor and critical inquiry, the abject and beautiful maintain an unrelenting balance throughout his work. A sense of art and life as imminently tragic but boundlessly open distinguishes the career of Dieter Roth, unfolding over decades but remaining alive and relevant today.

Gary Garrels, Chief Curator, Department of Drawings, and Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art



The exhibition is organized by Schaulager Basel in collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Museum Ludwig, Cologne. The exhibition is made possible by Schaulager Basel and the Laurenz Foundation.

Additional generous support is provided by Kathleen and Richard Fuld, Novartis, and The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

The Museum also acknowledges the assistance of Mimi and Peter Haas, Pro Helvetia, and The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

The accompanying educational programs are made possible by BNP Paribas.

The installations at P.S.1 are supported by James Family Foundation.

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### Audio Tours of Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective:

At MoMA QNS, Acoustiguide audio tour units are available. P.S.1 Chief Curator Klaus Biesenbach discusses the installations through a special messaging system accessible by cell phone. Simply dial (212) 708-9491 and listen to the prompts.

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### Directions from MoMA QNS to P.S.1

**Walking (15 minutes):** Turn left when you exit the Museum, and turn left again on Queens Blvd. Follow Queens Blvd. until it becomes Thomson Ave., then turn right on Jackson Ave. The entrance to P.S.1 is at the corner of Jackson Ave. and 46 Ave.

**Subway:** Turn left when you exit the Museum and take the Manhattan-bound 7 two stops to 45 Rd./Court House Sq. Exit onto Jackson Ave. The entrance is P.S.1 is one block south, at the corner of Jackson Ave. and 46 Ave.

### Directions from P.S.1 to MoMA QNS:

**Walking (15 minutes):** Upon exiting the P.S.1 courtyard, continue on Jackson Ave. past the Citibank Building and turn right on Thomson Ave., which turns into Queens Blvd. MoMA is on the right, at the corner of Queens Blvd. and 33 St.

**Subway:** Upon exiting the P.S.1 courtyard, continue on Jackson Ave. to the elevated 7 platform. Take the 7 Local (to Queens-Flushing/Main St.) to 33 St. The 7 Express train does not stop near MoMA QNS.

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## Public Programs

### AT THE DONNELL LIBRARY CENTER AUDITORIUM

20 West 53 Street

#### Taking Chances: Artists on Roth

TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 6:30 P.M.

Artists Paul McCarthy, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Christopher Wool respond to the work and influence of Roth. Moderated by Gary Garrels.

#### Dieter Roth Arrives in America

MONDAY, APRIL 5, 6:30 P.M.

Gary Garrels examines Roth's relationship to and critical reception in the United States.

#### Breaking Down Boundaries:

##### Scholars on Roth

TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 6:30 P.M.

Scholars Benjamin Buchloh (Barnard College), Christine Mehring (Yale University), and John Paoletti (Wesleyan University) offer their perspectives on Roth. Moderated by Gary Garrels.

Tickets are \$10, \$8 for members, \$5 for

students with current ID, and can be purchased only in person at the MoMA QNS Lobby Ticketing Desk and at the Visitor Center at the MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53 Street, in Manhattan (open daily 10:00 A.M.-2:00 P.M. and 3:00-5:30 P.M.). No phone registration.

For more information on Public

Programs, please call (212) 708-9781 or (212) 247-1230 (TTY), or visit [www.moma.org/momalearning](http://www.moma.org/momalearning).

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### AT P.S.1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave. at 46 Ave.,  
Long Island City, Queens

#### Dieter Roth: Poesieundmusik

SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2:00-4:00 P.M.

Poets Johanna Drucker, Kenneth Goldsmith, Kristin Prevallet, and Jerome Rothenberg read works of their own as well as works by Roth and his peers. With music and sound art by Roth via P.S.1's new online radio station, WPS1.

Admission is free but tickets are required for entry and are available at the MoMA QNS Lobby Ticketing

Desk; the Visitor Center at the MoMA Design Store, 44 West 53 Street, in Manhattan (open daily 10:00 A.M.-2:00 P.M. and 3:00-5:30 P.M.); and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center.

### AT THE GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 East 23 Street at Lexington Avenue

#### Film: Dieter Roth

MONDAY, MARCH 22, 8:30 P.M.

*Dieter Roth*, 2003. Germany. Directed by Edith Jud. The spirit of Dieter Roth's art and life is captured through candid interviews with Roth himself, other artists (including Richard Hamilton, Arnulf Rainer, and Emmett Williams), and family, friends, and students.

Tickets are \$6 for adults, students, and seniors; free for children under sixteen and for MoMA members; and are available only at The Gramercy Theatre box office.



# ROTH TIME

A Dieter Roth Retrospective MARCH 12-JUNE 2, 2004

**P.S.1** MoMA Contemporary Art Center



# Roth Time

The P.S.1 presentation of comprises five of Dieter Roth's largest and most complex works. Each developed over a period of years, they reflect the continuous process of art making and the unvarying strategy of growth and decay that was so crucial for the artist. Processes of collecting, archiving, record keeping, and accumulation, and ideas of quantity and quality, entropy and order characterize Roth's installations at P.S.1.

Seen in conjunction with one another, the works represent Roth's belief in the *gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). Roth, who constantly ignored the boundaries between techniques and genres, blurred traditional distinctions between image, text, and sound. The German word *entgrenzung* (a portmanteau word that means, loosely, "continually transgressing borders") gives an almost poetic meaning to this practice.

1

**Gartenskulptur** (Garden sculpture, 1968–96), over sixty feet long, is an installation/sculpture consisting of a staggeringly diverse array of materials—sawed-up furniture, platforms, plants, sap, and videos. Integral to the installation is the workshop used to construct the work piece by piece in the actual exhibition space. The installation is always adapted to the space in which it is shown. Continuously increasing and developing over a period of almost thirty years, it is a meditation on collecting, decay, and metamorphosis.





This work began as a bust of Roth formed out of birdseed and chocolate that was placed on an outdoor platform with the intent that it would be gradually picked apart or consumed. Over time Roth began to augment the sculpture, adding other small art pieces as well as the preinstallation sketches and drawings of the work itself. The waste resulting from *Gartenskulptur*'s exposure to the elements was recycled back into the work via a system of funnels and jars. Refuse was as integral to Roth's project as the original matter from which it was formed. In 1989 in Paris, the sculpture was assembled outdoors for the last time. The artist's son, Björn Roth, became involved in the production, incorporating live plants and found objects. In later years, furniture and other "indoor" items, such as television monitors displaying images of the sculpture's history, were also grafted onto the piece.

Evolving through processes of decay and regeneration, *Gartenskulptur* by its nature will never be unequivocally finished, reflecting Roth's belief that art is not a finite product but rather in a constant state of flux. As Roth changed, often altering his name to reflect his mutating self-image, the titles of his pieces developed and changed as well. *Gartenskulptur* was initially titled *Garten Geraet*, which can be translated as "garden tool," emphasizing the productive, mechanical function of the piece as an outdoor tool to destroy, create, and build art.

AT LEFT: Dieter Roth, Björn Roth. *Gartenskulptur* (Garden Sculpture). 1968–96. Wood, wire, rope, metal, construction materials and objects, furnishings, plants, video equipment, monitors, painting utensils, liquids in glasses, foodstuffs, toys, clothing, pigments, photographs, drawings, multiples, and collages. Variable dimensions. Flick Collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: Dominik Labhardt

Dieter Roth. *Flacher Abfall* (Flat waste). 1975–76/1992. Flat waste in plastic sleeves, in 623 A4 file folders, in 5 wood racks, variable dimensions. Flick Collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth

2

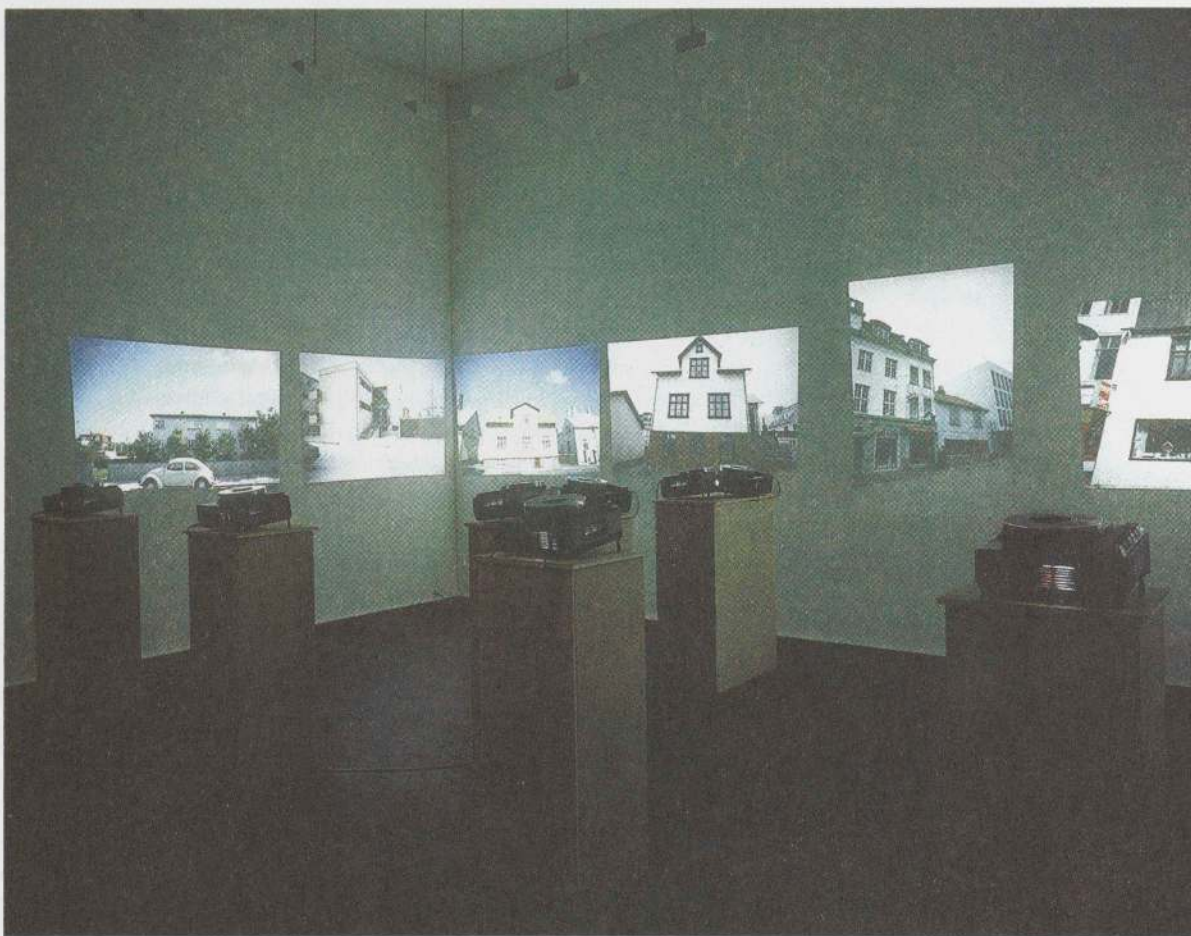
In the same gallery is *Fussboden* (Floor, 1975–92), consisting of pigment and glue on a wooden studio floor. For *Fussboden*, Roth took the floor out of his studio in Iceland and installed it directly in front of a gallery wall, as one would place a painting. This textured, ruptured surface offers a literal record of Roth's physical actions from 1975 to 1992. Thus, a studio floor is just as much a work of art as the works it supports. *Fussboden* relates to the "material pictures" on view at MoMA, where a portrait of the artist's studio—the environment in which the artist is most creative—is evoked.

3

***Flacher Abfall* (Flat garbage, 1975–76/1992)** is a veritable library of flattened trash, foregrounding Roth's role as collector, cataloguer, and archivist. Six hundred and twenty-three office binders sit on institutional shelving units, each holding flattened waste gathered by the artist at the end of each day. Roth collected items no greater than  $2\frac{3}{16}$ -inch thick, deposited them in clear plastic envelopes, and organized them in chronological order. Preserving the refuse that he and others had left behind, Roth created both an autobiographical space and an environment in which we are forced to confront the ephemeral nature of existence.







4

Iceland's capital, with about one hundred thousand inhabitants, Reykjavik was a manageable size for Roth to photograph every single house in the city. The resulting work, **Reykjavik Slides**, comprises of eight slide projectors and 30,000 continuously projected slides of the city, shot by Roth during the mid-1970s and early 1990s. *Reykjavik Slides* provides a panorama of Icelandic buildings, projected side by side without overlapping each other at any point, revealing Roth's lifelong fascination with nomadism, impermanence, and decomposition while undermining the notion of house as stable entity. *Reykjavik Slides* barrages us with houses so that no single one is home, allowing us only fleeting glimpses of an impossible security.

Dieter Roth. *Reykjavik Slides*. Part 1: 1973–1975; Part 2: 1990–1993. 30,000 slides, 3 wooden shelving units, 8 slide projectors on pedestals. Variable dimensions. Installation view. Private collection. © Estate of Dieter Roth. Photo: A. Burger, Zurich

5

**Solo Szenen** (Solo scenes, 1997–98) is an installation of 131 video monitors and players stacked in a grid of three wooden shelves, each presenting simultaneous, continuous footage. *Solo Szenen* is the culmination of a series of written, film, and video diaries that Roth began in the early 1980s, including *Diary*, made for the 1982 Venice Biennale. Composed of Super-8 films and written notes, *Diary* recorded six months of Roth's life—images of him engaged in artistic process and restless, peripatetic activity.

The *Solo Szenen* suggests a series of windows into Roth's life both in and outside his studios. *Solo Szenen* not only depicts the artist working but also makes him vulnerable to us as he sleeps, bathes, and uses the bathroom. It is nearly impossible for the viewer to pay attention to only one video



without becoming distracted by an unexpected sound or movement coming from one of the many other videos. Each monitor broadcasts a different point in Roth's routine, while the gridlike arrangement of monitors reinforces a sense of order and chronology.

Nearly all Roth's pieces on view at P.S.1 document and bring together different periods of his life, showing where and how he worked, where and how he lived, when he left and when he returned. These ever-changing works possess the quality of (self-) portraits of the artist, diaries spanning years, the biographical collection of traces and artifacts, a sedimentation of layers, of situations and images, processes and forms, objects and fragments of language.

Klaus Biesenbach, Chief Curator, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center

Dieter Roth. *Solo Szenen*  
(Solo scenes). 1997-98.  
131 video monitors with VCRs,  
three wooden stands, 131  
VHS-tapes, two shelving units,  
Overall: c. 39'4" x 6'10<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" x  
1'5<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (1200 x 210 x 45 cm).  
Installation view. Private  
Collection. © Estate of Dieter  
Roth. Photo: Heini Schneebeil,  
© Dieter Roth Foundation,  
Hamburg

