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Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth was born in Hanover, Germany, in 1930. His mother was German and his father Swiss. In 1943, at the very height of World War II, his parents sent him to Switzerland. Roth showed great artistic talent from a very early age. Between 1947 and 1951, he completed an apprenticeship as a graphic designer in Berne. In 1955, he spent a year in Copenhagen as a textile designer. In 1957, he emigrated to Iceland, where he married and started a family.

All his life Dieter Roth led a nomadic existence, maintaining studios in different cities (some of them for many years) while cultivating an extensive network of artists and friends. From 1960 on, he traveled to the United States for work and exhibitions (Philadelphia, Providence, New York, and Los Angeles) and within Europe (Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Vienna, London, Basel, and other cities). From the 1980s on, his primary base was Switzerland. Wherever he was, however, he was always drawn back to Iceland, to his family and to the various places where he worked there. After numerous exhibitions Dieter Roth retreated from public life at the peak of his fame in the early 70s. Years later his contribution at the Venice Biennale 1982 and the spectacular exhibitions he staged in Holderbank (Switzerland, 1992), Vienna (1995) and Marseilles (1997) were responsible for bringing him back to the attention of a wide public. Dieter Roth died in Basel in June 1998.

Influenced by the idea of the Zurich "concretists" in the 1950s and the Nouveaux Réalistes such as Jean Tinguely and Daniel Spoerri around 1960, Dieter Roth created a richly varied and distinctive body of work that was shaped by his dual talent as a visual artist and a writer. Formal innovations and novel creative means and methods had a significant influence on his work as well as that of other artists with whom he associated. Examples include his extensive work as designer, publisher and author of artists books from 1953 on, his use of organic substances such as chocolate and cheese and their decomposition processes as raw materials for art works since the early 1960s, and his collaboration with artists such as Richard Hamilton, Arnulf Rainer, Ingrid Wiener or Gerhard Rühm, as well as with members of his own family since the 1970s. From the 1980s on, he concentrated on extending self-portraiture as a genre, lending it a hitherto unprecedented monumental expressiveness (e.g. *Diary*, 1982).

Jack of all artistic trades and subversive master of everything to which he put his hand, Dieter Roth was one of the few truly universal artists of the second half of the 20th century and a figure comparable in importance to Andy Warhol or Joseph Beuys. Equally, Roth remains one of the most influential figures for artists of subsequent generations in both Europe and the United States. His consistent identification of art with life defines the character of his entire oeuvre. The driving force behind his work was his perception of time as expression of chance, transience and perpetual flux. Dieter Roth's work confronts humorous absurdity and painful discomforts of change and impermanence with astonishing deftness. But he does not simply accept them and portray them; he explores them and intervenes in their course. The outcome is a dialectic of destruction and creativity that infuses his entire oeuvre and lends it a dynamism, vitality and humanism that make it unique.

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