

Dieter Roth, *Selbstturm; Löwenturm* (1969 – 1998)

The sculpture *Selbstturm; Löwenturm* [*Self tower; Lion tower*], by Dieter Roth (1930 – 1998), standing in a room adjacent to the Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, seems uncanny, yet familiar, like a mass of memories that have fallen out of time. A faintly sour smell of chocolate hangs in the air. Self-portraits and lions' heads, cast in chocolate and sugar, are densely arranged on rows of shelves, set in two free-standing racks. At the suggestion of Maja Oeri, the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation acquired the work in 1989 as an artistic concept that was still a work in progress.

The sculptures, which over the years have grown fragile, have their starting point in Dieter Roth's first group of chocolate multiples, made in 1968 and titled *Portrait of the Artist as Vogelfutterbüste* [*Portrait of the Artist as Birdseed Bust*] – alluding to James Joyce's novel of artistic awakening, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which Roth dismissed as kitsch. The small busts, standing just 20 centimetres tall, are made of chocolate mixed with birdseed. They were originally mounted on broom handles, with a platform provided for garden birds to perch and consume the sculptures. From 1969 onwards, Roth began to stack



Dieter Roth, *Selbstturm* [*Self tower*], 1969 – 1998, wood, glass, chocolate casts, sugar casts, approx. 96 ⁷/₁₆ × 34 ¹/₄ × 31 ¹/₂ inches / 245 × 87 × 80 cm; *Löwenturm* [*Lion tower*], 1970 – 1998, iron, glass, chocolate casts, sugar casts, approx. 102 ⁷/₁₆ × 39 ³/₈ × 39 ³/₈ inches / 260 × 100 × 100 cm, studio consisting of various materials, objects and devices, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel (Location St. Alban-Rheinweg/Basel), © Dieter Roth Estate, photo: Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Martin P. Bühler

Location

Room adjacent to the Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart
Guided access only.

the casts into towers, starting with the *Selbstturm* and continuing from 1970 with the heads in the *Löwenturm*. The towers were first exhibited in 1971 at Daniel Spoerri's Eat Art Gallery in Düsseldorf. From 1985, Roth began to augment the self-portraits and lion busts with sphinx-like figures combining human and animal features, and started also to experiment with various types of sugar. The sugar casts were deposited on the earlier, chocolate layers of the tower. Dieter Roth described this structure as an image of nature, with the brown chocolate symbolising the earth, and the coloured and light blue sugar figures evoking, respectively, flowers and the sky. Since the works were first created, their organic materials have continued to change and evolve, in complicity with the artist – decaying and crumbling, emitting odours, and altering their shape and colour. This accords with Roth's conviction that art must be part of life, exposed to the rhythms of time and caught up in a process of perpetual transformation.

The two racks, taller than head height, stand in the centre of Dieter Roth's former studio, which houses a small workshop with two cooking stoves, pots and various kitchen utensils, plaster and silicone moulds, bags of sugar and food colourings. There is also a neatly ordered desk with a telephone, a wall shelf with files documenting the work on the towers, a card index with photographs of the sculptures, a camera for still photographs and a video camera, a refrigerator, work clothes, tools, and souvenir photos of Dieter Roth, his grandchildren and his work colleagues.

Selbstturm; Löwenturm offers a unique insight into Dieter Roth's oeuvre. The installation in his former studio, exposed to a process of continual decay, is one of the boldest, most unconventional works acquired by the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation.

Further reading

FUTURE PRESENT. The Collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation

ed. Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager Basel, Basel: Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager, 2015, pp. 263–269.

Monika Wagner, 'Vom Umschmelzen. Plastische Materialien in Kunst und Küche', in: *Über Dieter Roth: Beiträge des Symposiums vom 4. und 5. Juli 2003 zur Ausstellung 'Roth-Zeit. Eine Dieter Roth Retrospektive' im Schaulager Basel*

ed. Beate Söntgen and Theodora Vischer, Basel: Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager, 2004, illustration p. 128.

Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective, ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003, pp. 256–258.

Dirk Dobke, *Melancholischer Nippes. Ergänzt und kommentiert von Dieter Roth*, Cologne: Walther König 2002, pp. 7–9, 69–70, 108–112.

check in! Eine Reise im Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, 1997, cat. 46, p. 63.

Peter Berkes, 'Die Kunst und die Würmer: Dieter Roths verderbliche Werke', in: *Nike Bulletin* (Bern), vol. 12, No. 3 1997, pp. 8–11.

Paul Tanner, 'Dieter Roth', in *Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung*, Basel: Wiese Verlag, 1991, pp. 156–162.