

Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung

Press Release

Zurich, 16 March 2005

The American artist Robert Ryman is to receive Europe's most valuable art prize, awarded by the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation.

The Board of the Roswitha Haftman Foundation, meeting in Zurich, has awarded the 2005 Roswitha Haftmann Prize – worth CHF 120,000 – to Robert Ryman. Born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1930, Ryman lives and works in New York and is regarded as one of the leading artists of our time.

The jury of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation has chosen Robert Ryman as this year's recipient of Europe's most valuable art prize in recognition of the fact that over the decades he has created a pictorial world with its own unique beauty and coherence. Against the background of the history of painting and the direction it has taken in recent years, Ryman's art is both ground-breaking and timeless.

Ryman, who initially devoted himself to music, began his career in the visual arts as an autodidact. Since the mid-1960s his paintings have systematically evolved through his precise calibration of paint substances and brushwork which in itself has meant that his square-format paintings seem to follow on from each other in a wholly logical sequence.

His paintings are white, and often seem unspectacular at first glance. Their surfaces are shiny or matt, covered with a layer of impasto paint or fine-grained, transparent or impenetrable, calm or agitated. The edges document the process of the painting's making and relativise the apparent objectivity of the artistic process. Pressure on a brush, the movement of the artist's wrist, ceasing work and starting out again – all of these become precise visual events. The artist's concentration communicates itself to the viewer. Seeing is liberated from conventional attitudes.

In Ryman's case, labels have always proved inadequate because his work cannot be associated with any single direction or style. This in itself is connected with one of the very special qualities of his paintings which – apart from the actual process of their making – are strikingly timeless.

Following in the footsteps of Walter de Maria, Maria Lassnig, Jeff Wall and Mona Hatoum, Robert Ryman is the fifth winner of the Roswitha Haftmann Prize. The public award ceremony will take place on 10 November 2005 in the Kunsthaus Zürich.

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The Roswitha Haftmann Foundation awards this prize every one to three years to a living artist whose work is of outstanding importance. Valued at CHF 120,000 this is the most generous art prize in Europe. The Board of the Foundation, which selects the prizewinner, consists of the Directors (or a representative) of the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the Kunsthaus Zürich, and other members named in the Constitution of the Foundation or co-opted by the Board itself.

Roswitha Haftmann (1927-1998) – a language teacher who subsequently modelled for American photographic agencies – was married to the art historian Werner Haftmann. She ran her own art gallery in Zurich until her death in 1998. Born in St. Gallen, she relished social occasions and used her not inconsiderable fortune to set up a Foundation which now funds this award – the Roswitha Haftmann Prize.

The author Ludmila Vachtova has written a monograph, 'Roswitha Haftmann', remembering and celebrating the life of this patron of the arts – renowned for her beauty and sophisticated appreciation of art. Published by Scheidegger und Spiess, it is available for CHF 38.- in the Museum Shop in the Kunsthaus Zürich.

More information on the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation is available online at www.roswitha-haftmann-foundation.com.

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