

Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung

Press Release

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Richard Artschwager to receive the Roswitha Haftmann Prize, Europe's most valuable art award. A special award for the film-maker Jonas Mekas.

The Board of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation has awarded the Roswitha Haftmann Prize 2007 – now valued at CHF 150,000 – to the painter, sculptor and graphic artist Richard Artschwager; the film-maker Jonas Mekas will receive a special award valued at CHF 75,000. The awards will be made in Kunsthaus Zürich on 15 November 2007.

For over fifty years the American artist Richard Artschwager (*1924) has been producing a unique oeuvre exploring the conditions of perception and in the process his work has taken him into the realms of painting, sculpture and installation art alike. Artschwager has significantly widened the scope of plastic art and has opened up new perspectives that numerous younger artists have since taken up and taken forwards. It is in recognition of this extraordinary artistic achievement that the Board of the Foundation has declared Richard Artschwager this year's winner of the Roswitha Haftmann Prize.

Artschwager's artistic journey can only properly be understood in terms of the proximity and difference of the concurrent art movements such as Minimal, Pop and Concept Art. At the same time, however, his work – be it sculpture and furniture, paintings or prints – cannot be pigeonholed in any of these categories.

Largely avoiding personal handwriting and sensuous colours in favour of clear forms and formulations, Artschwager makes no real distinction between abstraction and representationalism. And when he deconstructs familiar forms and imitates everyday materials, he puts the viewer's customary processes of perception and seeing to the test. As early as 1965, he listed the qualities he was aspiring to in his work: grace, beauty, monumentality, awe, direction, a sense of the eternal, purity, truth, craft skills, significant forms, durability, honesty and strength – either in isolation or in combination with each other. In the decades since then, as the jury unanimously agreed, he has not only rigorously pursued these undeniably high aims, he has also consistently achieved them at the highest sculptural and intellectual level.

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER

From 1948 to 1950 Artschwager was a student at the Amédée Ozenfant Studio School in New York. One of his earliest sources of income was as a furniture designer. His work was first exhibited in 1965 by Leo Castelli in New York. Since then it has been seen in numerous exhibitions in the United States and Europe, and on several occasions at Documenta in Kassel.

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In 1958 Kunsthalle Basel showed Artschwager's work in Switzerland for the first time. In 1987 the City of Vienna awarded him the Kokoschka Prize and in 1988 the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, New York, celebrated his achievement with a major retrospective. Artschwager's art is represented in many leading collections.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR FILM-MAKER JONAS MEKAS

The Roswitha Haftmann Foundation is making a special award valued at CHF 75,000 to the Lithuanian film-maker Jonas Mekas (*1922). It was in the 1960s that Mekas in effect invented the genre of 'film diary'. In his films of the avant-garde art scene in New York and of his own personal surroundings he used double exposures, cut-up methods and manipulated film speeds. His first film, 'Walden' – a blend of documentary, film essay and artist's video shot in six stages between 1964 and 1969 – is typical of the new genre.

Before this Mekas had already made a name for himself as the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the magazine 'Film Culture'. Having first appeared in New York in 1955 as the voice of classic auteur cinema, by the early 1960s it had become a forum for experimental film.

As Mekas himself likes to put it, he became a cameraman and director 'in self defence'. Without intending to shoot a film as such, he made a film diary of the life of the Pop artist Andy Warhol. Clutching an amateur film camera he used to follow Warhol at parties, exhibition openings and when he was out and about. Much later, Mekas edited footage shot between 1965 and 1982 as a highly original, documentary film. With no voice-over and accompanied solely by music performed in the 1960s by The Velvet Underground, it is an authentic record of scenes from Warhol's life.

In 1970 Mekas founded the Anthology Film Archive and the Invisible Cinema in Greenwich Village, the latter being a specialist cinema that celebrates film as an art medium freed from its roots in popular culture and the entertainment industry. In the meantime, film-makers, cultural historians and art historians have adopted the standards set by Mekas. Museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Kunsthau Zürich would not be without the work of Jonas Mekas in their collections and to this day his films are regularly seen in group and solo exhibitions.

THE FOUNDATION AND THE PRIZEWINNERS

Artschwager and Mekas both live in New York. They are the latest in a line of prestigious recipients of the relatively recently founded Roswitha Haftmann Prize. Roswitha Haftmann, born in 1927, who also spent some of her life in New York after 1949, had a gallery in Zurich until her

death in 1998. With great foresight she used her own personal wealth to set up a foundation and it is the proceeds from this foundation that now fund the Roswitha Haftmann Prize. Starting in 2001, the recipients have been Walter de Maria, Maria Lassnig, Jeff Wall, Mona Hatoum, Robert Ryman, and Peter Fischli and David Weiss.

The Foundation makes an award every one to three years to a contemporary artist whose work is of outstanding importance. The prizewinners are selected by the Board of the Foundation, which is made up of the Directors of Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunstmuseum Basel, Museum Ludwig in Cologne and Kunsthaus Zürich and other members specifically nominated in the Foundation's constitution or co-opted by the Board.

Further information on Roswitha Haftmann, the jury, the prize and the prizewinners is available at www.roswithahaftmann-foundation.com.

The award ceremony will be held before an invited audience in Kunsthaus Zürich on 15 November 2007. The laudatio will be given by Professor Kaspar König of the Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

For further information and visual materials, please contact

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