ROBERT WALSER FESTIVAL

Swiss Author and Playwright (1878-1956)

"A major writer... One of the important German-language writers of this century." — Susan Sontag

"Walser wreathes himself Bacchus-like with garlands of language which keep tripping him up."— Walter Benjamin

Hailed early on in his career by the likes of Franz Kafka, Hermann Hesse and Robert Musil, Swiss author Robert Walser (1878-1956) is a writer of microscopic vision, delving deep into the apparently trivial and mundane. Walser lifts the marginal to prominence with a writing style that owes as much to fragmentation and simulation as to pastiche. This festival focuses on Robert Walser's artistic strategies and their significance for contemporary visual artists and filmmakers in Europe and in the United States.



EXHIBITION

Fragments of Imaginary Landscapes: Joan Nelson and Robert Walser February 24 through April 9

For the first time ever, this exhibition presents a selection of Walser's manuscripts from the Zurich archives. The documents have never before been on public display.

Towards the end of his creative life, Robert Walser's handwriting became minuscule, an obstacle set up between himself and any potential reader. Writing entire poems and stories on business cards, receipts and envelopes, Walser to a certain degree used these formal parameters to define his texts. Striking for their visual qualities, they are known as "microscripts" because of the handwriting's almost microscopic size. The artistic approach applied in these microscripts is reminiscent of the work of American artist Joan Nelson, who has recently begun to concentrate on miniature landscape paintings. The work of both painter and writer apparently quotes the literature or art of previous eras. Walser's and Nelson's focus on the seemingly meaningless and marginal makes them strange but natural spiritual companions.

SYMPOSIUM

Robert Walser and the Visual Arts

March 12 and 13

In this international symposium, Robert Walser experts from a variety of backgrounds discuss the author's relationship to the visual arts, essentially posing the question of the transition between different art disciplines. What inspiration did Walser draw from German Expressionism and the artists he associated with in Berlin at the beginning of this century? What is the impact of Walser's writings on, and their significance for, the visual arts today? Fragmentation, contradiction, and marginalization are some key features of Walser's style that the following speakers will explore: Katarzyna Antonowicz, George C. Avery, Susan Bernofsky, Tamara S. Evans, Mark Harman, Werner Morlang, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist.

Roundtable Discussion

Artists and writers, among them painter Joan Nelson, video artist Dara Birnbaun photographer Daniel Faust, sculptor John Miller, and poet Eileen Myles on Walser's relevance for their own work.

Reading

Christopher Middleton

Christopher Middleton, Robert Walser's first English translator, reads from Walser's short story "A Painter's Life" (1916). This important text, a tale of the triumph and struggles of a young landscape painter, has been translated for the first time into English for this conference.

FILM FESTIVAL

March 22, 23 and 24

Enthre when 200%

A selection of films by a roster of international filmmakers.

Feature-length movies based on some of Walser's texts, in addition to experimental and very intimate homages to the Swiss writer by Percy Adlon, Anne Cuneo, Friedrich Kappeler, Thomas Koerfer, Hans Helmut Klaus Schoenherr, and the Brothers Quay.

Please see reverse side for more information.

