

Sigmar Polke (born 1941 Oels, Silesia [now Oleśnica, Poland], died 2010 Cologne, was one of the most important artists in recent decades. The exhibition displays works spanning from 1963 to 2010; his extensive oeuvre has not been the subject of a retrospective since the exhibition mounted in 1997 at the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, and the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. The retrospective opening at the Museum Ludwig on March 14, 2015, after having been shown in New York and London, is thus the first in over fifteen years and also the first since the artist's death. It is also for the first time that all the media with which the artist engaged intensively throughout his career are brought together in one exhibition, emphasizing the fact that Polke's work always resisted classification in art-historical terms.

The roughly 250 items on display, many of them never shown before in Germany, include not only paintings and drawings, with which he achieved his reputation, but also print, sketchbooks, objects, sculptures, photographs, films, slide installations, and photocopy pieces. This inclusive approach reveals how Polke combined different media and blurred the distinctions between them. His paintings, for example, incorporate photographic materials; raster dots derived from printed images form the basis of the paintings; photographs become unique works through interventions in the development process; and film exerts a pervasive influence on all his work. The title of the exhibition alludes to the new kind of artist that Polke represented: the artist who consistently defies expectations.

The show's title also points to the social and political dimension of Polke's art, evoking evasive attitudes toward Germany's Nazi past in the postwar decades. In fact, no other artist's work reflects historical developments in West Germany as closely as his. Polke's paintings of the 1960s allude ironically to the consumer society that flourished in the wake of the country's "economic miracle," while his collaborative works of the following decade absorb elements of mass culture and embrace a wide range of media to refer to new social trends and their subcultures. In the large abstract paintings he began producing in the 1980s he used new materials—photochemical, heat- and moisture-sensitive substances, even toxic elements—to generate unsettling, ambivalent effects. One work is ambiguously titled *Seeing Things as They Are*. Significantly, the phrase appears in reverse in the painting. This desire to subvert the "straightforward" facts of the visible world by inverting them drove Polke to engage artistically with ever new materials and techniques.

Polke was based in Cologne for over thirty years. Showing his work in the Rhineland city in which they were created lends it special relevance. This is nowhere more apparent than in his films, a broad selection of which is included in the exhibition. Film cameras formed an integral part of Polke's artistic equipment from the mid-1960s up to his death, but he showed his films in public

only on rare occasions and in carefully prepared presentations. At a symposium organized by the Museum Ludwig in association with the University of Cologne from June 12 to 14, 2015, they will be examined in the context of the vibrant film activity in the Rhineland during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Museum Ludwig is making a further contribution of its own to the exhibition by featuring a number of generous gifts of work by Polke it has received over the years. The early raster painting *Head* (1966), for instance, entered the collection in 1974 as part of an anniversary donation. Further items from the collection in the show are an untitled work (1986), *Ruin* (1994), the transparent painting *Front Window* (also 1994), and a near- complete set of artist's editions by Polke that was presented to the museum in 2009.

The exhibition is organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, with Tate Modern, London. It was initiated and curated by Kathy Halbreich, Associate Director, The Museum of Modern Art, with Mark Godfrey, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern, and Lanka Tattersall, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art. The presentation at the Museum Ludwig is organized by Barbara Engelbach, Curator, Contemporary Art Collection, Photography and Film, Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

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