

PRESS RELEASE

SIGMAR POLKE. EARLY PRINTS

2 MARCH TO 22 MAY 2016

Press preview: Tuesday, 1 March 2016, 11 am

Städel Museum, Exhibition Gallery of the Department of Prints and Drawings

Frankfurt am Main, 11 February 2016. Presenting a focused selection of thirty works, the exhibition at the Städel Museum highlights Sigmar Polke's (1941–2010) early prints. The artist ranks among the outstanding protagonists of the twentieth-century German art scene. For the works he printed from 1967 to 1979 he preferred offset or silkscreen printing, two rather unsophisticated techniques in terms of craftsmanship and trivial methods from the artistic point of view, to transport and spread seemingly random, irritating comments on art and society. Other works by Polke surprise us because of their unusual blend of different printing techniques and material features: they combine silkscreen printing with blind blocking and punching or feature haptic surface structures, for example. Having a work printed in offset always requires a professional printer. This is why Polke dedicated himself all the more to which motifs and materials he chose. In an era informed by the belief in growth and upheavals critical of society, Polke stuck to his messages grounded on observation, wit, and irony in his printed work. The printed image, circulated by the mass media or photographically staged by the artist, remained an essential foundation of his work as an artist. The presentation in the Exhibition Gallery of the Städel's Department of Prints and Drawings shows a high-carat and concentrated selection of Polke's early prints, fathoming the works' special quality.

Born in the Lower Silesian town of Oels (now Oleśnica in Poland) in 1941, Sigmar Polke began an apprenticeship in a stained glass factory before he enrolled at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. Polke already distanced himself from the prevailing tendency to abstraction in his paintings during his time as a student (1961–1967) under Gerhard Hoehme and Karl Otto Götz. He was not concerned with the unrepresentational painterly gesture but with exploring the then accessible pictorial worlds of West Germany's burgeoning economic miracle as an artist. Together with his elder fellow students Konrad Fischer a.k.a. Konrad Lueg und Gerhard Richter, Polke staged the "Demonstration for Capitalist Realism" in a furniture store in

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Düsseldorf. While the art scene of Paris was pushed into the background through the increasing influence of American Pop art in the 1960s, Sigmar Polke made the consumer-oriented world of commodities and petty bourgeois post-war idyll of the Federal Republic of Germany manifest in magazines and advertising the foundation of his extraordinarily reflected and nonetheless ostensibly playful production.

The artist also drew on found pictorial material in his printed work. A monochrome advertisement provided the basis for his first print, *Girlfriends I*, (1967). Polke had already transferred this newspaper print into a painting in 1964/65. In the print the offset technique produces the screen structure imitated in the painting by manually adding dot by dot. The enlargement of the motif emphasizes the screen structure. The screen dots typical of Polke's work also dominate his silkscreen print *Weekend House*, which was his contribution to the portfolio *Graphics of Capitalist Realism* published in 1967.

Apart from pictures culled from print media, Polke also used his own photographs for his prints such as that of a folding rule opened to form a star and taken with a Polaroid camera (*Folding Rule Stars*, 1970), experimentally treated negatives (*Self-Portrait*, 1971), visibly damaged enlargements (*TV Picture [Soccer Player]*, 1971), or shots taken in New York City during a trip to the USA (*New York Beggars*, 1974). Contrary to woodcut, etching, or lithography, the off-set and silkscreen printing methods chosen by Polke are popular techniques in commercial art that allow much higher print runs. Seen against this background it is all the more surprising that the artist had a silkscreen print elaborately blind-blocked and punched for a series of school prints for the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1972 and upvalued the individual sheets of the edition by overpainting them with glitter paint, transforming them into unique works.

1973 saw the production of several editions in collaboration with the "Griffelkunst-Vereinigung Hamburg", for which Polke chose high-quality bookbinding papers with a sometimes haptic surface structure as a carrier. The papers were combined with picture and text layers in the printing process. The results of these elaborate overlays ensure a certain unease on the part of the viewer and, in spite of all seemingly promising references, keep him guessing. Polke's calculated treatment of pictures and text quotations from physics, biology, and mythology unfold a creative game pivoted on science and mystery in subjective trajectories.

Polke answered the question after the inspiration of all forms of artistic practice with the statement ". . . Higher Beings Ordain." This self-ironic response provided the title for an edition of fourteen offset prints of only fifty copies each published by Edition

René Block in 1968. The photo montage of Polke's later print *Mu nieltnam netorrurup* (1975), whose scenes are dominated by a huge fly agaric, thematizes the quality of mind-altering substances. The show comes to an end with Polke's *Large Head* from 1979, which was purchased by the Städel'scher Museums-Verein for the Department of Prints and Drawings in 1989. It is a complex work on paper in which Polke interwove different motifs and techniques such as drawing, stencil printing, and silhouette. Despite the closeness of its multiple approaches, *Large Head* testifies to the independent qualities of drawing, painting, and printed graphic work deliberately taken account of by the artist.

The presentation in the Exhibition Gallery of the Department of Prints and Drawings offers a comprehensive survey of Sigmar Polke's early printed work. Thanks to the Deutsche Bank Collection at the Städel Museum, the entire selection of exhibits comes from the Städel's own holdings. Twenty-eight sheets are part of the complex of six hundred works from the Deutsche Bank Collection transferred to the Städel in 2008.

SIGMAR POLKE. EARLY PRINTS

Curator: Dr. Jutta Schütt, Head of the Städel's Department of Prints and Drawings after 1750

Exhibition dates: 2 March to 22 May 2016

Press preview: Tuesday, 1 March, 11 am

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de, info@staedelmuseum.de,
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General guided tours through the exhibition: Thu 7 pm, Sun 2 pm

Special guided tours on request: please call +49(0)69-605098-200 or contact info@staedelmuseum.de.

Further offers under www.staedelmuseum.de

Opening hours of the Städel Museum: Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun + holidays 10 am–6 pm, Thu + Fri 10 am–9 pm

Special opening hours: 25, 27, and 28 March 10 am – 6 pm; 1, 5, 15, 16, and 17 May 10 am – 6 pm; 26 May 10 am–6 pm

Admission: 14 euros, reduced 12 euros, family ticket 24 euros; free admission for children under twelve years of age; groups of more than ten persons: reduced admission per person (groups are required to book in advance: please call +49(0)69-605098-200 or contact info@staedelmuseum.de)

Advance ticket sales online at: tickets.staedelmuseum.de

Opening hours of the Study Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings:
Wed, Fri 2–5 pm; Thu 2–7 pm