

PRESS RELEASE

Basel, September 2011

Robert Breer

Museum Tinguely, Basel: 26.10.2011 – 29.01.2012



The solo exhibition on the American painter, filmmaker and sculptor Robert Breer is the most comprehensive retrospective of his work to date. Organized in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition will be the first to bring Breer's work in all media together for several decades, revealing him to be as vital today as he was in the 1950s. A full-length catalogue will be published in German and English editions to accompany the exhibition, which was mounted in cooperation with the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead (UK).

Born in Detroit in 1926, Breer is one of the most ground-breaking and celebrated experimental filmmaker in history. This will be his most comprehensive retrospective to date, showing works from 1950 to the present day.

The son of an amateur 3D home-movie maker and chief engineer at the Chrysler Corporation, Breer initially studied engineering at Stanford, before switching to painting. Early enthusiasms were a 1935 BMW open cockpit racing car and stunt flying lessons in a bi-plane. His first real passion, however, was the reductive purity of Piet Mondrian's grid-based abstract paintings. Moving to Paris in 1949, Breer developed his own take on hard edge abstraction, exhibiting at the Galerie Denise René. He soon rejected the stability and harmony of Mondrian's compositions, introducing implied movement and free-floating lines into his paintings. His forms became irregular and wrestled against each other, appearing in a permanent state of unrest.

Fourteen canvases from the 1950s, including *Composition with Three Lines* (1950), *Time Out* (1953) and *Three Stage Elevator* (1955) are included in the exhibition in the Museum Tinguely. Many have not been exhibited for several decades.

Developing the implied movement of his paintings Breer also started experimenting with animation, first with flip books and then with film. In his first film, *Form Phases* (1952) the designs of his paintings were set into motion, morphing from one thing into another and shifting in colour and cinematic space. *Form Phases IV* (1954), a tour de force of movement and instability sees forms, colours, lines and actions burst, complement and contradict each other across every square inch of screen. A tension between the moving and still image defines many of these early works: *Recreation I* (1956-57) uses a different image for every single frame (24 frames per second), rejecting the supposed reality that traditional film represents and revealing movement as nothing but a repetition of static film cells.

As his career progressed, Breer became ever-concerned with the interplay between abstraction and representation. *Fuji* (1974) jumps from filmed footage of Breer's wife by a train window to a rotoscoped

sequence of a ticket collector and countless drawn depictions of Mount Fuji, all of which slip back and forth into and out of abstraction. In *Swiss Army Knife with Rats and Pigeons* (1980) the functional form of the knife and its red colour separate and dance around each other before reuniting. The exhibition includes these and other pioneering works from 1952 into the 1990s.

Another important body of Breer's work, the motion sculptures or 'floats', begun in the 1960s. These simple, almost minimalist forms, move at speed that is almost imperceptible before changing direction upon a collision. Recreating the motion and flux of his films in three dimensions, works such as *Zig* (1965), *Column* (1967) and *Sponge* (2000) surround the viewer, allowing form and change to be experienced in real time and space. Breer's greatest achievement, perhaps, has been to use one force to define its opposite – movement to counteract movement, pause to dramatise speed, and representation to concentrate abstraction. The exhibition, which was organized in close collaboration with the artist, will be the first to bring Breer's work in all media together for several decades. A full-length catalogue will be published in German and English editions to accompany the exhibition.

The exhibition at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art ran from June to September 2011. Robert Breer was present at the opening but fell ill after returning to his home in Tucson, Arizona, where he had lived in recent years with his wife Kate. He died in August 2011 during the preparations for the exhibition in Basel. In June he had commented on the exhibition and catalogue with the words "I feel very lucky" – now that he is gone, the exhibition and catalogue will also serve as a fitting memorial to a wonderful artist and human being.

Exhibition mounted in collaboration with the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (UK)

General information::

Opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday 11 - 18 h (closed on Mondays)

Admission prices: Adults CHF 15
Students, trainees, seniors, people with disabilities CHF 10
Groups of 20 people or more CHF 10 (per person)
Children aged 16 or under: free

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