

Media release
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Kunsthaus Zürich celebrates Roman Signer: over 50 years of creativity and amazement

Roman Signer is one of Switzerland's most significant contemporary artists. In a solo exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich from 4 April to 17 August 2025, he will be showing works from various phases of his career, combined into a surprising overall installation in the large exhibition gallery.

Roman Signer (b. 1938, Appenzell) describes his exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich as a landscape. From the outset, he envisioned the large exhibition hall as open, without walls dividing the space. That is how he most often works. 'I spread the works around the space, and the public can explore them as if going on a walk', he explains. This also mirrors the way in which Roman Signer discovers the world himself and finds inspiration for his work: he has never been a studio artist. When Signer went to Warsaw for a year in 1972 on an exchange programme and studied under Oskar Hansen, his 'academy was the street'. He spent days walking through the city and absorbing reality. 'I encountered so many exciting situations that made their mark on me', he recalls. Over time, he discovered the potential for making art with the elements and simple objects such as bottles, buckets and boots. He still does this today. Now aged 86, Roman Signer still plays around with new ideas every day. He has also completed a range of new works for the exhibition at the Kunsthaus.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD

Nature and the elements are central to Signer's work. Water, in particular, is a recurring motif. As a child, the artist spent most of his time in and around the river Sitter in the canton of Appenzell. He observed how sheets of ice were pushed together against bridge piers to create ephemeral sculptures, or threw a message in a bottle into the water and imagined it embarking on its journey out into the world. Similar ideas continue to engage Roman Signer today. His artistic events are a fascinating mixture of process, play, experimentation and amazement. Filled with childlike curiosity, he challenges the laws of nature and creates arrangements that never cease to surprise us. Chance, as well as the containment and release of energy play a central role. Signer is fascinated by the forces that cannot be fully controlled, such as explosions or gravity, which he uses

to make his sculptures. 'I just arrange. The force makes my sculpture, or manifests itself in my sculpture', is how he explains his approach. The result is unexpected situations that open up a new perspective on the world and also cast the artist's role in a different light.

Humour is part of Signer's work, but not its aim. 'Laughter is allowed, but isn't necessary', as he puts it. The mischievous eye that is characteristic of his works gives them a certain lightness, which also extends to the materials. Many of Signer's works are temporary manifestations, and he loves objects that can be dismantled or that disappear again. The element of time plays a crucial role; and indeed, his works are often labelled 'time sculpture'. Many also have something of the performative about them, or are transformed over the course of time. His attention focuses on the experience of the event, the changes it engenders, and the forces involved. To capture that progression, Signer uses film and photography: two media that are important to his artistic practice and are also on show in the exhibition at the Kunsthau.

The main emphasis, however, is on the sculptures. Roman Signer makes these out of everyday objects such as a table, bed or chair. By having them fly through the air or travel as an improvised little ship through the landscape of Iceland, he transforms our reading of them and turns them into different characters. What they all have in common is that it is impossible to dislike them. Another often-recurring object in the more than 50 years of Roman Signer's artistic career is the kayak. Sometimes he takes it apart and makes the pieces into a kind of minimal sculpture; other times he hangs it from the ceiling or, pulled by a car, takes it on a bumpy ride through the countryside.

Supported by UBS, Partner Kunsthau Zürich, the Monsol Foundation and Boston Consulting Group.

CATALOGUE AND ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

This solo exhibition is an opportunity to meet well-known historical works by this unique artist once again, and also discover for the first time some new sculptures that have been created specially for the Kunsthau Zürich. The exhibition is complemented by a publication containing a multi-part conversation between Roman Signer and curator Mirjam Varadinis as well as numerous illustrations from the artist's archives. It is available for CHF 34 at the Kunsthau Shop.

Workshops and an art laboratory accompany the exhibition. For information, see www.kunsthau.ch. A diverse film programme has also been compiled, in collaboration with Arthouse Cinemas. Information and tickets at www.arthouse.ch.

Public guided tours take place in April and June on Sundays at 11 a.m. and Thursdays at 6.30 p.m., in May and July on Sundays at 11 a.m. and Fridays at 3 p.m. English: Sunday 20 April, 1 p.m., French: Sunday 20 July, 1 p.m.

'CHEESE WITH A BITE' SPECIAL EDITION

To accompany the exhibition and in cooperation with the Kunsthaus and the NZZ – which is honouring Signer's work in a special 'art' issue on 4 April – Roman Signer has created a limited special edition. The artist explains: 'I felt like biting into a piece of cheese. We travelled to Appenzell and bought three pieces of the local product in a cheese shop. I sank my teeth into it, and they left a neat impression behind. That gave me the idea of making a brass cast of the piece. I commissioned the St. Gallen Art Foundry to produce it for me. Whenever I see the cast, I get the urge to bite into a new piece of cheese, maybe an Emmentaler this time. The cast will then end up as a paperweight on a desk.' The exclusive object will be sold via the Kunsthaus shop and online in the NZZ shop.

Roman Signer, 'Cheese with a Bite', 2025. Brass cast, edition of 15 copies + 5 APs. Numbered with punched numerals and signed 'RS', including certificate and packaging, dimensions: 12.1 x 8 x 4.6 cm, weight: 1.9 kg, price: CHF 10,000.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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For admission prices, opening hours and events see www.kunsthaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/ and www.kunsthaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/programm/.

Tickets can be obtained from the cash desk or in advance at tickets.kunsthaus.ch. Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

CONTACT FOR EDITORS

Illustrations are available for download at www.kunsthaus.ch/en/medien-bereich.

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