Talks and Events Calendar

For a full programme of talks, events and workshops pick up a Bulletin.
To book for events contact the bookshop. **Numbers are limited so booking is essential.**

Talks

Jeremy Millar: Wanderweg
Wednesday 21 November, 6.30pm. Free
In March 2005, Millar walked with Roman Signer from Appenzell to St. Gallen, retracing the route of the artist's 1989 work *Action with a Fuse*. Millar, artist, writer and academic, talks about this journey, and his work with Signer over the past decade.

Rachel Withers:
Roman Signer's Time Sculptures
Wednesday 12 December, 6.30pm. Free
Art critic Withers discusses Signer's work in relation to questions of time.
(BSL signed)

Richard Clay: Sign(er's) Transformations
Wednesday 23 January, 6.30pm. Free
Richard Clay, art historian, explores how Roman Signer's blurring of boundaries between making and breaking relates to historical understandings of iconoclasm.

Events for Young People

Flashes and Bangs – the Chemist's Art
Saturday 10 November, 11am–12.30pm. Free
Suitable for children aged 5+. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.
12 places available.

Explore how different things react to make art with the help of scientists from the University of Edinburgh. Hands-on activities and demonstrations offer insights into Roman Signer's work, and show the connection between science and art with added flashes and bangs. *Organised in collaboration with The Chemical Connection. Funded by the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council.*

Seminar

Experiments and Experience:
Getting inside the work of Roman Signer and Monika Sosnowska
Tuesday 6 November, 2–7pm
£5 (£3 concesssions). Free to students (with proof of status). Seminar Venue: Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh
Evening Reception: The Fruitmarket Gallery

This seminar brings together a range of critical perspectives on the experiential and experimental qualities of the two galleries' current exhibitions. Speakers include Monika Sosnowska, Isla Leaver-Yap (curator, Baltic), and University of Edinburgh lecturers Richard Coyne (Architecture), and from History of Art, Angela Dimitrakaki and Tamara Trodd. Chair: Moira Jeffrey (arts writer and journalist). *Organised in collaboration with Talbot Rice Gallery, whose Monika Sosnowska exhibition runs from 27 October to 8 December.*

Tour

Ways of Seeing Gallery Tour
Thursday 17 January, 11.30am-1.30pm. Free
A tour for visitors over 60 led by freelance gallery educator Mary Keegan.

Free Primary School Workshops

Monday 14 January – Friday 25 January, 9.30–11.30am, daily. Free. Places for 10 schools

Artist-led workshops, offering P5–P7 classes the opportunity to investigate science through art, and art through science. These creative workshops offer teachers the opportunity to make links across the curriculum, and expand their pupils' understanding of creative energy.

Exhibtion supported by

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Roman Signer

Exhibition **2 November 2007 — 27 January 2008**

Mon–Sat 11am–6pm, Sun 12–5pm
Admission free

Over the past three decades, the Swiss artist Roman Signer has exhibited his work in hundreds of solo and group exhibitions and public performances around the world, including the Venice Biennale, Documenta, Sculpture Projects Munster and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. At The Fruitmarket Gallery, Signer has conceived an exhibition of new and recent sculptures, films and installations. For Signer, each work is an event, an experiment in which a force such as wind, water, gravity or fire transforms everyday things like umbrellas and plastic bags. In all of his work, Signer proposes new relationships between ordinary objects and elements brought together in extraordinary ways.

The Fruitmarket **Gallery**

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Scottish Arts Council

Born in Appenzell, a village in northeast Switzerland, Signer started his career as an artist at the age of 28, after working as an architect's draughtsman, a radio engineer apprentice, and a short stint in a pressure cooker factory. His work has grown out of, and has affinities with both land art, where materials are drawn from the natural world, and performance art, where the artist's body and its actions are the subject of the work. But Signer's work is not typically representative of either category. For the land artist Richard Long, his walks are the artwork, whereas Signer's walks might either lead to a site for a work, or present an idea or a route for a work which incorporates a journey. Similarly, performance artists such as Vito Acconci and Carolee Schneeman are the protagonists in their films, but Signer insists that he is just one of the materials he uses to make a work.

Other art historical contexts for Signer's work include movements such as Arte Povera and artists for whom everyday objects are important, such as Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys. Equally significant are artists such as Robert Morris and Robert Smithson, along with some Arte Povera artists, who were making process-based art when Signer was at the beginning of his career. However, Signer's materials and practice are unique. Although he has been called an 'action artist', with certain kinds of work labelled as 'actions', the best term for the works in this exhibition is simply 'sculpture'. Signer's works all exist for the viewer in the present – they may refer to or document something that happened in the past, or sit waiting for something to animate them in the future, but they are intended to be experienced now. Signer sees his sculpture not as the relic or remnant of a past action, but rather the result of a manufacturing process which, however unconventional, is his way of making art. In the lower gallery, *Sand Installation (Sandinstallation)* (2007), made by sand slowly trickling through a hole in a bucket above a rotating umbrella, encapsulates this idea.

Most of the work in this exhibition was made after 2002, and Signer has selected it for The Fruitmarket Gallery and overseen its installation. On the ground floor, references to his early career, found in *Installation* (2006) and *Kayak (Kajak,* 1987), highlight the range, scale and depth of his artistic practice and his public performances, and the dangers and risks involved in their production. More recent films play with the fragile relationships between danger and delight, fear and humour: in *Office Chair (Bürostuhl,* 2006), Signer holds fizzing rockets which rotate him in the chair, and in *Hayfever (Heufieber*, 2006) grass (to which he is allergic) explodes through a hole in the floor and threatens to overwhelm him. Once removed from any formal forensic crime scene, the police tape in *Don't Cross the Line* (2002) loses its potency as a barrier to gain beauty and delicacy. In *Dot (Punkt,* 2006), an explosion incites a creative act.

The ten pairs of monitors in *Installation* (2006) offer a snapshot of Signer's practice in ten films made between 1975 to 1989, each of which is accompanied by a signer who translates the events into sign language. Even without knowledge of sign language, comparing the actions of the signer with the film of the event reveals odd divergences between the two narratives. This is because Signer asked the signer to translate not the action of the film, but a written description. This work represents not only the 10 individual films and signed descriptions of how Signer made them, but also the ways Signer's work is accessed and understood: the viewer watches a translation (into film) of Signer's idea for each event, and then a translation (into sign language) of a translation of the event. Moreover each act of signing creates a sculpture in itself. Signer's language is visual and experiential and resists description.

Upstairs, Signer presents a range of sculptures. Some can be experienced as events that are taking or have taken place, and which show how the work is produced. Like the work downstairs, Signer's materials here are everyday objects and natural forces such as wind (produced by fans), fire (produced by gunpowder) and gravity, along with the process of time. These forces animate inanimate objects: wind breathes life into a plastic bag (*Round Room/Runder Raum*, 2005), moves a barrel back and forth (*Rolling Barrel/Rollendes Fass,* 2007), waves a series of flags (*Flags/Fahnen*, 2007), spins a bottle (*Bottle/Flasche*, 2007), and carbon dioxide smokes a pipe (*Pipe/Tabakpfeife*, 2006). Signer's poetic arrangements of his materials bring them to life.

Everyday objects are important to Signer, and certain objects consistently return – umbrellas, barrels, fans, sand – but he does not seek to identify and close down their meanings. The materials he uses have a relationship to the human body, and the centrality of a human scale and bodily experience is a useful way of thinking about most of his work. Pipes and kayaks have an obvious humanity, but for Signer the barrel is similarly human - 'I am not the barrel, but the barrel is a part of me'. The eyeslit in *Observation Tower (Beobachtunsturm*, 1991) transforms the barrel into a structure for one person, a hideout from which to oversee the rest of the sculpture.

Strangely, acts of destruction also animate Signer's sculptures. His use of fuses, fireworks, rockets and gunpowder transform rather than destroy objects. In *Easter Bunny with Rocket (Osterhase mit Rakete,* 2007), a chocolate rabbit has been shot, and in *Suitcase with Umbrella (Koffer mit Regenschirm,* 2006) an umbrella has been fired through a suitcase: both have lost their ordinary functions, and their irreparable states signal a point of no return. The loss of purpose and function signals death for the objects and, for the rabbit at least, as an image of a living thing (even if it is edible), prompts a curious sympathy.

But contradictions are what make Signer's work so compelling. The earliest independent work in the exhibition, *Kayak (Kajak,* 1987) presents a kayak that has been meticulously and brutally blasted into three parts by explosives, its ruptures both violently slashed and delicately fringed. At once surprising, humorous, and melancholic, Signer's works are visually simple but emotionally and conceptually complex.

This exhibition is accompanied by a new publication
available from the bookshop priced £8.95
The exhibition DVD is available from the bookshop priced £15.