

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

IN THE SPIRIT OF WALSER

"We don't need to see anything out of the ordinary. We already see so much."

December 2011– April 2012

A number of years ago, I enjoyed reading a selection of short stories by Robert Walser, with a forward by Susan Sontag and a postscript by the translator Christopher Middleton, and from there I went on to read his novels: The Assistant (1908), Jakob Von Gunten (1909), and The Tanners (1907). He is a modernist but at the same time unlike any other modernist. He can be self-effacing, indignant, curious, happy, but always about the most modest people, things, or occurrences. Walking was important to him and The Walk (1917) is one of his best-known short stories. During his lifetime he crisscrossed Switzerland on long, solitary hikes and he died on Christmas Day walking in the snow. The finest writing on Robert Walser and his work is by another walker/writer W.G. Sebald who described him as: "A clairvoyant of the small." And started his essay for The Tanners as follows: "The trace Robert Walser left on his path through life were so faint as to almost have been effaced altogether...he was only connected with the world in the most fleeting of ways. Nowhere was he able to settle, never did he acquire the least thing by way of possessions. Even the paper he used for writing was secondhand. And just as throughout his life he was almost entirely devoid of material possessions so too was he remote from other people." Of his writing Sebald wrote that Walser, "almost always wrote the same thing and yet never repeated himself." And that his, "prose has the tendency to dissolve upon reading so that only a few hours later one can barely remember the ephemeral figures, events, and things of which he spoke." Walter Benjamin went, as far as to say that, "the point of every one of his sentences is to make us forget the last one." Sebald also wrote: "If Walser had any literary relative or predecessor, then it is Gogol. Both of them gradually lost the ability to keep their eye on the center of the plot, losing themselves instead in the almost compulsive contemplation of strangely unreal creations appearing on the periphery of their vision, and about whose previous and future fate we never learn even the slightest thing."

I was fascinated by the microscripts, which I first saw in an extraordinary exhibition in 2008 in Berlin entitled "Notation. Kalkul und Form in den Kunsten". Then Christine Burgin worked on the book Microscripts with its translations by Susan Bernofsky and was interested in creating an exhibition in New York with the help of the Walser Center in Bern. We decided to collaborate on showing the microscripts together with first editions of his publications, many of which were illustrated by his brother, as well as photographs. I became more and more interested in the connection between his writings and certain

contemporary artists and out of this has come a series of exhibitions: "In the Spirit of Walser". This is a purely subjective choice and avoids any attempt at an inclusive exhibition or homage to the writer. Hundreds of artists have made work in homage to Walser--many of a highly personal and sometimes romantic and sentimental nature. This is not an area that interests me personally and I am confident that the artists who have agreed to work on this project will produce work that is as original as its inspiration. With this in mind I have asked each artist to write a text that will be published with the documentation of the exhibition.

--Donald Young

The Donald Young Gallery is pleased to present a series of exhibitions inspired by the Swiss writer Robert Walser. On December 3rd, the gallery will open the first part of the exhibition with the archival material being shown together with 3 clay sculptures by Peter Fischli and David Weiss. This will be followed by Moyra Davey in January, Thomas Schütte in February, Rosemarie Trockel in March and Tacita Dean and Mark Wallinger in April.

Working across a range of media, Fischli and Weiss create work that finds the fantastical amidst the everyday. Their practice exemplifies the obvious and the implausible, applying philosophical and theoretical themes with sardonic humor and sharp wit. The artists have exhibited internationally at museums and institutions including: MACBA, Barcelona; San Francisco Museum of Contemporary Art, San Francisco; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Kunsthaus Zurich, Zurich; Tate Modern, London and most recently at the Art Institute of Chicago.

A symposium on Robert Walser will be held at the Goethe Institut in late February and the gallery will publish a book with contributions from the participating artists. If you would like more information please contact Emily Letourneau or Robyn Farrell at 312-322-3600 or at gallery@donaldyoung.com.

The exhibition is in collaboration with Christine Burgin, New York and the Robert Walser Center, Bern and Konrad Aeschbacher, Erlach.