

Media Release and Media Conference

Zürich, 11 September 2009

**SIGMAR POLKE  
CHURCH WINDOWS GROSSMÜNSTER**

**Media Conference**

Grossmünster Zürich, 2 October 2009, 11.00 a.m.

**Inaugural Church Service**

Grossmünster Zürich, 18 October 2009, 10.00 a.m.

**In 2006, Sigmar Polke won the invited competition to design church windows for the Grossmünster in Zürich. It has taken three years to complete this ambitious project. Seven windows in the western part of the nave consist of sliced agate, creating brightly luminous walls of stone. The five windows to the east depict five figures from the Old Testament in stained glass. They can be interpreted as precursors of Jesus and thus relate to the Christ child in the choir windows by Augusto Giacometti. Sigmar Polke has intertwined various axes and levels of time, ranging from geological and biblical times to Romanesque art and the present day.**

The Grossmünster and the History of the Project

The Grossmünster (large cathedral) was erected in several stages in the 13th and early 14th centuries. One of the most important Romanesque churches in Switzerland, it was the cradle of the Reformation under the leadership of Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli.

In 2005, the parish launched a competition for twelve ground-level windows in the nave of the Grossmünster. The jury invited the following artists: Silvie Defraoui, Olafur Eliasson, Katharina Grosse, Sigmar Polke and Christoph Rütimann. The winner, Sigmar Polke, was

announced in April 2006. Since the fall of 2006, Polke has been working on implementing the design with Glas-Mäder, a Zürich-based company. The project has now been completed and will be officially unveiled on 18 October 2009.

### The Entire Project

Sigmar Polke emphasizes the east-west axis of the Grossmünster by placing what one might call a time axis in the church. The seven windows to the west consist of sliced agate stones assembled like a mosaic, and joined with strips of lead, known as cames. The semi-precious stones were formed in the geological past and, in biblical terms, in the first days of creation. The seven agate windows are complemented to the east by five glass windows, showing figures from the Old Testament (the Scapegoat, Isaac, the Son of Man, Elijah and David). They might be interpreted as precursors of Jesus Christ and therefore relate to the birth of the Christ child, which is the subject matter of Augusto Giacometti's choir windows of 1933.

### The Agate Windows

Sigmar Polke draws on the custom of occasionally fitting windows with slices of stone in Romanesque church architecture of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This is most famously illustrated by the alabaster used in the Byzantine mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna in the fifth century. By closing off the windows and, in effect, the entire rear of the church with slices of agate stone, Polke succeeds in transforming the Grossmünster into an event of luminous colour, resulting in the seeming paradox of walls that are solid but radiantly translucent. Geologic time resonates in the images of nature within the agate stones themselves. Their intense colouring, which makes them look so contemporary, at times recalling movements of Modern Art, is, however, the consequence of the complex processes to which the stones were subjected after extraction: almost alchemical acts of applying heat, using chemical baths and adding pigments.

### The Figurative Windows

For three of the four figurative glass windows, Polke selected medieval motifs drawn from Romanesque illuminations and reworked them at the computer. He has transformed book-sized illustrations into monumental works, and pictures hundreds of years old into contemporary images. And, crucially, he had his designs implemented using only traditional techniques (Schwarzlot or soldering with black enamel, glass fusing and lead caming). The use of images found in books and the media as well as handcrafted execution, as

exemplified by handpainted halftone dots, are strategies that have consistently informed Polke's art since the early 1960s. The source image for the window that depicts the Son of Man was a photographic exception, out of which the artist, working with the computer, created a picture enigmatically oscillating between a chalice and the Son of Man.

#### Information

For further details, see [www.grossmuenster.ch/presse.html](http://www.grossmuenster.ch/presse.html). The site will be updated a few days prior to the media conference. **Press photographs** will also be available for downloading but their publication is **blocked until 3 October 2009**.

Please register for the media conference at the following address: Claude Lambert, [claude.lambert@homburger.ch](mailto:claude.lambert@homburger.ch) and, if filing a report, please send a copy of your article to Ulrich Gerster, Kirchgasse 15, CH-8001 Zürich, [ulrich.gerster@bluewin.ch](mailto:ulrich.gerster@bluewin.ch).

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