



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE PASSING OF DR THOMAS KELLEIN

On 22 September 2025, the longtime Director of our Art Consult, Dr. Thomas Kellein, passed away in Berlin after a serious illness.

The internationally renowned art historian was active as an exhibition maker, curator, author of groundbreaking art publications, passionate museum director, and advisor to major art collections.

Born in Nuremberg in 1955, Kellein most recently headed the Art Consult department of the Swiss Private Bank Bergos in Zurich. As curator of the Written Art Collection in Frankfurt, he prepared the exhibition “Sweeter than honey. A Panorama of Written Art”, which will be shown from December 2025 at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich.

Kellein’s first professional position after completing his doctorate on large-scale artistic projects was at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in 1982, where he organized exhibitions on Ad Reinhardt and Walter De Maria. As director of the Kunsthalle Basel from 1988 to 1995, he curated exhibitions on, among others, Mike Kelley, Mark Rothko, Cindy Sherman, Clyfford Still, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and Rachel Whiteread. As a guest curator, Kellein organized exhibitions in Tokyo, London, and Munich, and from 1982 to 1996 he taught as Professor of Art History at the universities of Marburg, Stuttgart, and Freiburg.

From 1996 to 2010, as director of the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, he curated exhibitions on, among others, Vanessa Beecroft, Louise Bourgeois, George Condo, Caspar David Friedrich, Donald Judd, Jeff Koons, Kazimir Malevich, Edvard Munch, and Yoko Ono, as well as the major thematic exhibition “1937. Perfection and Destruction”.

From 2010 to 2012, Kellein headed the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, founded by Donald Judd, with whom he had been closely connected since 1991, when he invited the artist to Basel to develop the façade design of the Ostbahnhof.

Major artistic projects such as Walter De Maria’s “5 Continents Sculpture” at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in 1987 and thematic projects such as “World Morality. Conceptions of Morality in Contemporary Visual Art” for the Kunsthalle Basel in 1994 revealed him to be a far-sighted, globally curious exhibition maker and scholar who understood art as an arena for ideas. Thomas Kellein stood for an art that does not stop at the museum’s doors but opens itself to public space and discourse. His exhibitions were invitations to look and to think – playful exercises of thought filled with seriousness.



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