

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SIGMAR POLKE
THE DREAM OF MENELAUS
4 March 2026
Opening Reception – Tuesday 3 March 6-8pm

VeneKlasen, New York is pleased to present *Sigmar Polke: The Dream of Menelaus*, the gallery's inaugural exhibition devoted to Sigmar Polke's (1941–2010) major four-painting cycle of the same name, completed in 1982. This exhibition offers a rare opportunity to view one of Polke's most seminal series of paintings in full.

The early 1980s proved a highly productive period for Polke, who, reinvigorated by his global travels and cross-cultural encounters of the previous decade, refocused his practice on painting after a period of working with photography and film. Exposure to diverse rituals, cultural traditions, and myths prompted Polke to experiment with new iconographies and unconventional materials that were at times toxic and volatile. In *The Dream of Menelaus* cycle, Polke incorporated natural minerals—powders of aluminum, manganese, and ferrous mica—creating dark surfaces that shift and swirl across the paintings, evoking billowing clouds, or the aftermath of a bombing. It was through this sustained period of material experimentation that Polke cemented his reputation as one of the most important and influential artists of the postwar period.

Polke draws the title of this cycle from ancient Greek mythology, referencing the story of Menelaus, the Spartan king whose wife Helen was abducted by the Trojan prince Paris—an event that set in motion the decade-long Trojan War. The dream itself derives from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the first play of *The Oresteia*, in which a seer recounts Menelaus' painful dream of Helen's abduction and fleeting visions of her that fuel his desire for revenge against the Trojans. While the title evokes this classical myth, the paintings themselves resist narrative clarity. Through the juxtaposition of amorphous forms and classical and contemporary motifs rendered in his signature raster-dots, Polke conjures a dreamlike visual experience. Only upon close examination do new figures and constellations begin to emerge from the layered surfaces, vanishing just as quickly, like fleeting fragments of a dream.

Polke's decision to invoke the mythological figure of Menelaus, whose personal conflict helped precipitate the Trojan War, invites broader questions about the continued relevance of mythology today. Rather than retelling the story of Menelaus, Polke's cycle of paintings treats myth as a point of departure, prompting reflection on war, violence, and tragedy as recurring human concerns. Born in Germany during World War II, Polke experienced the war and its aftermath firsthand, traumas that would later inform his work. In *The Dream of Menelaus* cycle, he draws parallels between the conflicts of ancient myth and

those of the modern world, underscoring patterns of violence and instability that persist across history.

Sigmar Polke emigrated from East to West Germany in 1953, settling in Düsseldorf, where he later enrolled at the Kunstakademie at the age of twenty. Since the late 1960s, his work has been subject of numerous museum exhibitions worldwide, and he participated multiple times in both Documenta and the Venice Biennale, being awarded the Golden Lion at the XLII Venice Biennale in 1986. In 2014, a major retrospective titled *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010* opened at The Museum of Modern Art, New York and traveled to Tate Modern, London and Museum Ludwig, Cologne. More recently, significant institutional exhibitions devoted to Polke's work were held at the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2024), the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (2024), and the Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles, Arles (2025). Polke died in Cologne in 2010.

Sigmar Polke: The Dream of Menelaus opens to the public on Wednesday 4 March 2026 with an opening reception on Tuesday 3 March 2026 from 6 to 8pm. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10AM to 6PM.

For more information, please contact the gallery at press@veneklasengallery.com, visit www.veneklasengallery.com, or contact Sarah Goulet Communications at sarah@sarahgoulet.com.