

PF25 cultural projects Spring 2026 Programme
Dorothee Sauter: Walking the Unknown
Part I – PF25 cultural projects – Dornach Atelier

Curator's Notes by Angelika Li, Spring 2026, Dornach

Encountering Dorothee Sauter's ceramic creatures brings not only curiosity but also emotion – the pleasure of entering a world shaped by an enquiring mind, perhaps even by the subconscious. This sensibility has unfolded through her previous solo exhibitions 'Geology, Cooking Heart, Curious, and Other Stories' (2021) and 'Tumbling through Time' (2023).

As this exhibition slowly came into being, the world itself underwent drastic and often devastating transformation. The title 'Walking the Unknown' could not be timelier. Bringing together works from 2024 to 2026, Sauter introduces fresh and expressive perspectives, colours and forms alongside deeper introspections into psychological states and healing qualities. Playfulness is unmistakably present, yet it is never purely sweet and innocent; there is gravity, a subtle friction and a lyrical undertone rising from within.

Sauter's fascination with geology forms a distinctive current within her practice – layers, sedimentation, erosion – processes about memory itself. Forest, mountains, rocks, stones and sand are not mere motifs but points of origin. Terra. Strata. Surfaces resembling scar tissue – healed, yet marked. These beings exist simultaneously as organisms and landscapes: singular presences within a wider ecology. Identity here is never fixed; it gathers and reshapes after every counter. They ask questions rather than provide answers. They draw us toward what came before – prehistoric life, the formation of humanity, the persistence of memory – recurring currents within Sauter's enquiry into being.

Literature has long nourished Sauter's imagination. Among her significant influences is Ursula K. Le Guin. In 'The Word for World Is Forest' (1972), conceived against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, Le Guin unfolds a narrative shaped by the pursuit of freedom and dream. She imagines a language in which 'world' and 'forest' are synonymous, collapsing the distinction between environment and existence. Forest becomes not scenery but totality – culture, memory and being intertwined. This resonates with Taoist thought where human beings are not positioned above nature but co-exist within the same field of life.

In Sauter's creatures, matter has mind of its own. Clay remembers. Landscape breathes. What appears individual is also collective. Within this ecological consciousness, another temporality begins to surface. Walking together on a reflective path in the exhibition, the creatures here feel like beings on a threshold — arriving from what might be called dream time, a dimension beyond linear chronology where memory, myth and intuition coexist. Dream time is not escape, but return — to a knowing before words divide. In contrast to the accelerated tempo of contemporary life, these works slow perception.

Naming carries another narrative rhythm where titles echo poetically through the artist.

'Looking for a Reason' and 'Swallowed Words' are two series made in porcelain and finished with multiple layers of glaze. In the former, the gestures suggest something ancestral, almost magician-like. There is holding, protecting, writing, making. One might glimpse a priestly figure, a ritual presence, or an archaeological remnant rising from sediment. The latter feels more grounded; its surfaces seem to retain what remains unsaid. Stories appear held within — slightly restrained, slightly playful — oscillating between secrecy and mischief.

The reddish-black surface, almost pockmarked in appearance, emerged through what might be described as a "misapplication" of an industrial glaze originally designed to imitate the famous Chinese oxblood glaze. The resulting effect resembles an organic, fungus-like texture in deep red-black tones, producing an unexpected and slightly unruly surface.

Elsewhere, 'Dream reporter' appears already in motion — a walking mind. Knowledge shaped by experience and adversity. The pink squarish body, extended through multiple limbs or tentacles, evokes migration — not as spectacle but as condition. These are not static sculptures; they are pauses within movement.

'Food gatherer', numbers 3 and 4 respectively in brownish ocre pigments, hovers between archaic survival and future scarcity. It carries a quiet attentiveness and a nurturing instinct. And then 'Belly Time' numbers 1 and 2 respectively emerge with fresh green and pink vitality from the kiln — tubular, sprouting, ambiguous. Not tree, not coral, not organ — yet resonant with all three.

'Alien Mama', 'Failed investigation', 'Vagrant' — the names feel like free spirits, lightly infused with a subtle science-fiction sensibility. Not labels that confine, but companions that drift alongside the works. They carry humour, gentle satire, yet also embodied weight and alienation.

Sauter has remarked that her work does not refer directly to a particular story; it may come from the hand or from the belly, or from the mind's eyes. There is no desire to impose an idea. The first gesture is to remain quiet — to listen to what the works might reveal. They stand together without hierarchy, leaning gently toward one another: a small collective ecology. The forms hover between waking and dream.

The setting of this exhibition on the hillside of Dornach - surrounded by open sky, shifting light and fresh air - quietly enters into dialogue with the works. Sauter's creatures continue to unfold in unexpected ways with compassion and courage — never walking alone.

P.S. What path will they take in Part II of the journey in Helsinki?

Words from the Artist

"Clay is full of sculptural possibilities - with its malleability and its ambivalence between permanence and transition, its reflection of nature and existence, especially of life cycles. Pottery is an ancient craft that explores these qualities directly with the use of hands and fingers. While working with the wet material, repetitively poking, hitting, squeezing, in a process that connects the living and the dead, I let the hands guide me. I describe my daily work as thinking with the hands." — Dorothee Sauter

About [PF25 cultural projects](#)

PF25 is a Basel-based non-profit arts and cultural organisation dedicated to fostering mutual understanding, cultivating intercultural networks, and weaving collaboration through diverse, site-specific and community-engaged cultural exchanges. Rooted in research into the everyday, its activities take shape through exhibitions, residencies, performances, screenings, community workshops, publications, and conversations. With a focus on Hong Kong and Basel — while extending to other cities and regions across Switzerland, Europe, and beyond — PF25 seeks to expand the spectrum of imagination and explore emergent possibilities for future ways of living. Its initiatives continue to extend through a growing community of places and partners.



Dorothee Sauter: Walking the Unknown

A two-part solo exhibition in Switzerland and Finland

Curated by Angelika Li

In partnership with PF25 cultural project, Basel, and Kunsthalle Kohta, Helsinki

Part I

PF25 cultural projects – Dornach Atelier

Burgstrasse 3, 4143 Dornach, Switzerland

Vernissage: 7 March 2026, 14:00–17:00

14:30 Improv Set by Sharon Chan and Charles Kwong

15:30 Hong Kong Surprise Snack by Viona Lee

Exhibition period: 9 March – 26 April 2026

Meet the Artist – Open Viewing

**Beyond the opening, the artist will be present at the Dornach Atelier
on the following dates with registration at arrival:**

Saturday 14 March, 14:00–17:00

Friday 20 March, 17:00–19:00

Saturday 25 April, 14:00–17:00

Viewing by appointment only at connect@PF25.org

Part II

Kunsthalle Kohta

Työpajankatu 2 B, Building 7, 00580 Helsinki, Finland

Vernissage: 14 October 2026, 18:00–20:00

Exhibition period: 15 October – 15 November 2026

Tuesday–Friday, 12:00–18:00

Saturday–Sunday, 12:00–16:00

**Our sincere thanks to the Embassy of Switzerland in Finland for its patronage
of this Helsinki chapter. Further details will be shared closer to the opening.**

Press enquiries: connect@PF25.org