

PAINTING'S POLYMATH

GERHARD RICHTER'S comprehensive range of styles and subject matter coupled with innovative techniques expanded the field of painting and catapulted the German painter, now 85, to the summit of the contemporary art market. ▸

by JASON EDWARD KAUFMAN



Jason Edward Kaufman



Previous: *Abstraktes Bild*, Number: P1, 2014, 92 x 126 cm, chromogenic print mounted on aluminium, edition of 500. Left to right: Richter posing next to his artwork *Acht Grau (Eight Grey)*, during an exhibition in the German Guggenheim Museum in Berlin; Installation view of *Gerhard Richter: Abstraktes Bild* at Phillips' Park Avenue Galleries, NY, 2017.

Gerhard Richter is a master of not one but many modes of painting. In a career spanning more than half a century, he has excelled in so many styles and dealt with so many subjects that he might be taken for an artist with multiple personalities. His work ranges from paintings of photographs drawn from newspapers, magazines, and his own snapshots to minimalist grey-monochrome canvases and geometric color-chart grids, expressionistic abstractions, and conceptual objects including framed mirrors and panes of glass whose reflections play with ideas about perception, representation, and painting itself.

At a time when claims were being made that painting was dead, after photography and all the subsequent -isms of the 20th century, Richter's mix of figurative and abstract art breathed new life into the tradition. He recognized that photography had usurped the power and fascination of painted images, and he responded by importing the medium into painting. His early works are

based on mass media images; portraits of family and friends; still lifes of furniture, candles, and skulls; and rural landscapes, cityscapes, and seascapes—most of them black and white and blurred, as if slightly out-of-focus.

The photo paintings could have become a signature style on which to base a career, but Richter shuttled back and forth into minimalism, conceptualism, and most notably abstraction. His monumental abstractions are among his best-known works. He makes them by repeatedly smearing wet paint across the canvas with a long plastic squeegee, sometimes modifying the composition with a palette knife or brush, yielding expanses of interpenetrating color that shimmer with a strange atmospheric luminosity. Their unplanned effects evoke nature—the texture of rocks or water, the light of forest interiors or the sky—as well as television static, leading some to dub him a “digital impressionist.”

Working in many styles at once, Richter implicitly

questions the hierarchy of artistic representation. A photographic image, he proposes, is no more valid a depiction of reality than a color-field abstraction, nor is one more mysterious than the other. Critics see his diverse body of work as an extended critique of the mass media that floods the modern world, and an exploration of the nature and limits of painting itself. But, whether or not one brings a theoretical lens to viewing his works, many are undeniably attractive pictures. They appeal to our fascination with photographs, our affection for the picturesque, and our tendency to revel and search for associations in abstract imagery.

In the last two decades, as major museums have mounted Richter exhibitions, the value of his works has skyrocketed. The series of large abstract paintings, each aptly and simply titled *Abstract Painting* with accompanying catalogue raisonné number, have become status symbols among elite collectors, and regularly sell for more than \$20 million apiece. The record is \$46.3

million for a 1986 abstraction that sold in 2015, the most ever paid at auction for a canvas by a living artist, and a remarkable rise from the \$607,500 that the work had traded for in 1999. Photo-based works of the 1960s appear less often but command comparably vast sums. A view of Milan's Cathedral Square from 1968—at more than 9 x 9 feet, the largest of his photo-paintings—sold for \$37.1 million in 2013, and other works from the series, including a painting of Lake Lucerne and another of a speeding German jet plane, recently sold for \$24 million and \$25.6 million, respectively. (On March 8, 2017, the largest of his three iceberg paintings, *Eisberg*, 1982, will be auctioned at Sotheby's London with an estimate of £8–12 million.)

In terms of market dominance, no living artist approaches Richter. Artnet reported that from January 2011 to May 2016, auction houses sold 1,418 of his works for a total of \$1.2 billion, more than double the corresponding figures for his nearest rival, Jeff Koons. ▶



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The same study found that during that period 35 of the 100 highest-priced works by living artists were Richter's, including 5 of the top 10 and 10 of the top 20 lots. Even tiny abstractions sell for not-so-tiny prices: Two 6 x 4-inch oil abstractions on card, made in 2009, sold at Sotheby's London in 2014 for more than \$85,000 each.

The opportunity for speculation poses a challenge for Richter's commercial representative Marian Goodman. Works that sell at her Manhattan gallery for around \$5 million can immediately bring up to \$20 million at auction, and she takes care to avoid selling to speculators. Nevertheless, some collectors have reaped sizable profits in the upsurge. The guitarist Eric Clapton paid \$3.4 million at auction for three 1994 abstract paintings in 2001, and in the past five years sold all of them for a total of \$77.3 million.

Richter himself finds the art market "as incomprehensible as Chinese physics" and says the amounts paid for his works are "shocking." He is neither a careerist nor a publicity hound, preferring to focus on artmaking in his studio in the Hahnwald district of Cologne, and spending time with his wife, the artist Sabine Moritz, and their three children. Family members are the subjects of two of his most recognizable photo paintings: a 1994 profile of Moritz reading that alludes to a Vermeer in the Dresden State gallery, and a 1988 portrait of Betty, a daughter with his first wife, Ema Eufinger, that shows her turned from the camera toward one of her father's grey paintings. Richter also made a series depicting his second wife, the sculptor Isa Genzken.

Richter was born in Dresden in 1932, a year before the Nazis took power. Before the war, his family moved to the countryside where his father, a schoolteacher and pianist, was obliged to join the Nazi Party and Gerhard was conscripted into the junior branch of the Hitler Youth. His father served in the army and was captured by the Allies and survived the war, but two of his uncles died and an aunt with mental problems starved to death in a Nazi eugenic clinic. He remembers the retreating soldiers, strafing by Russian planes, and deprivation in their village, where residents learned of the bombing of Dresden.

After the war Richter studied at the Dresden Art Academy and completed socialist realist murals for the Communist regime in East Germany. In 1959, on one of

his frequent visits to the West, he encountered works by Lucio Fontana, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem De Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and other avant-garde painters at the *Documenta* exhibition in Kassel. Two years later, just months before the erection of the Berlin Wall, he and his wife fled the abysmal conditions in East Germany and settled in Düsseldorf. He never saw his family in the East again. He enrolled at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf where his notion of painting underwent a dramatic transformation.

Influenced by the Pop-Conceptual Fluxus movement, he and fellow students Sigmar Polke and Konrad Lueg began making Pop-inspired paintings, becoming a German counterpart to Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein. His reputation grew as he began exhibiting widely in Germany, and in 1972 represented West Germany at the Venice Biennale. He taught at the Kunstakademie for 15 years, and in 1983 relocated to Cologne. Two years later he had his first show with Marian Goodman Gallery in New York.

In 1995, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York bought *18 October 1977*, his suite of 15 paintings based on news images of the German extremist group known as the Baader-Meinhof. Since then he has participated in hundreds of exhibitions worldwide, including major retrospectives at MoMA, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, SFMOMA, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., the Art Institute of Chicago, Tate Modern, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, among others.

Despite suffering a stroke in 1998, from which he swiftly recovered, Richter's creative life has not slowed. At 85, he continues to experiment by applying oil paint to photographs, and pouring enamel paint onto the back of glass to create evocative painterly abstractions. He also makes prints, consisting of long, horizontal, computer-generated stripes. In addition, he has installed a handful of permanent public artworks, including an enameled glass wall piece based on the colors of the German flag for the rebuilt Reichstag in Berlin, and a stained-glass window in Cologne Cathedral.

In 2017 he will have major shows in Prague, Bonn, Essen, Ghent, and Brisbane, and 25 new abstract paintings are currently on view at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne (until May 1). ▷

Kegel (Cone), Catalogue Raisonné: 580-2, 1985, 260 x 200 cm, oil on canvas.



AN INTIMATE VIEW

Interview with **Dieter Schwarz**, Director, Kunstmuseum Winterthur in Switzerland.

When did you first meet Gerhard, and what drew you to him?

I met him in the late 1980s, a time when I was working with his then wife Isa Genzken on her first retrospective. I was at the studio when he did the *Baader-Meinhof* paintings.

It was a very moving moment. We stayed in touch and became more and more friendly. I did a retrospective and published a book of his drawings and watercolors in 1999, and have done a lot of writing on him over the years. I still see him regularly in his studio. He is pleased to discuss the work with someone he has known a long time and trusts and who visits without a purpose.

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25.1.2000, 2000, 12 x 12 cm,
oil chromogenic print.

What is he like as a person?

He is a very withdrawn person. He likes to be with his family or with a few friends intensely talking. He is always discussing art, and he is very skeptical about what is happening in the art world. We also discuss politics and the articles and books he is reading. He likes an intimate atmosphere. He doesn't like to be a public person.

How does he think about art and the market? How does his mind work?

The market is of course flattering, but at the same time it is so destructive for an artist like him to know that everything is so well accepted and there is no critical view anymore. Anything he would do is just accepted. This is a burden. It doesn't make it easy to work. Of course, support is important for an artist, but he feels really threatened by the figures his works produce. It is really something heavy to live with. Most people come and praise the works and don't even look at them, but just see what they're worth. Our conversations are mostly about which are the successful paintings.

In 2016 he did a body of almost 30 new paintings. I was there several times. We looked at them, and discussed which is more successful, less successful. He is very receptive if somebody sees differences and even says a few critical words.

Can you discuss his self-critical attitude toward his work?

For instance, this summer he had done two seascape paintings in Tenerife. Something was wrong with them, and we tried to find out about that discussing the paintings. The next time I visited he had corrected the paintings partly, but it didn't really look convincing. The third time I came he had overpainted them. Now they have become abstract paintings, maybe more successful ones than the seascapes.

Over the years he has destroyed a lot of works that upon consideration were not what he thought they should be. It takes time. The painting may go fast, but then to consider the work, to talk about it, takes weeks and months. They hang in his large studio and if somebody comes he discusses them, and he decides if this is something to keep or not. He might go back and destroy, or completely overpaint it, or slightly correct it. This second or third view is very important to him, because it is seriously thinking about What is painting? What is the quality of a painting? This is something you cannot express in words, but you compare them and see if they stand up or not. You can only see it and share an opinion, or maybe contradict it. So he is very shocked and also a bit frightened by this superficiality that the art world has developed more and more—that things have to be fresh and new and are immediately accepted. There is such an overall acceptance of things produced and he looks at this very critically.

Does he visit museums or galleries?

He doesn't go to galleries much anymore. It's difficult because he is too famous. But he likes to go to museums. He pays the entrance fee and tries to be a normal person. Often it works.

What do you find compelling about him?

On one hand, what is compelling is this immense continuity that somebody is able to build such a work over 55 years. This is rare. Because the work becomes more and more interesting the longer it's going on. So many things reference the past, and the network the work creates becomes even more dense and interesting. At the same time, I'm impressed by his candid approach to painting. After the last show at Marian Goodman in May 2016 he went back to the studio and started right away doing small paintings, very gestural and free. He had to do this to get away from an extremely successful show and back to the studio reality. He had to get back to working on painting again. I find this so admirable. He is able to do this again and again. At his age, he always says, "That's the last time, it's over now. I cannot do it anymore." He knows he is being skeptical, then he goes at it and does it again. And he is a very happy man when he can paint.

It is important to remember that to paint is an act of will. He is not a painter who can do it every day. Often for months he is unable to paint, because he needs the concentration and gets distracted by all the duties that fall on him these days. Then he gets started. Recently there was a period when he didn't do any paintings for four years. He did digital works, but not with a brush. Then he was very happy to go back to real painting. But he needs the right circumstances, a certain ambience, a certain inner balance and concentration. Then it works. It's not something that comes naturally every day.

He considers figurative and abstract work the same?

In recent years he has done very little figurative work. The problem is that, on the one hand, he says the older he gets the more difficult it is to find images he thinks should become paintings. On the other hand, abstract works more and more become a melody that goes on, whereas the figurative work is something single, something isolated. It is never part of a series. The image is something specific. The abstract works are more general. So it's easier to go from one abstract painting to the next than to go to a figurative work, because you have to find the image that strikes you. And he says it is more and more difficult to find such images.

What underlies the various approaches he takes? For example, his work in black and white or color?

Richter is somebody who lives in our time. Black and white was clearly the 1960s and early 1970s, then the world changed to color. Black and white has mostly disappeared from our world, and it would be impossible, I assume, for him to conceive a black-and-white picture these days. He is not nostalgic at all. He knows he is in our time and we cannot turn our backs on our time. ➤

Abstraction has been around since the early 20th century. What is distinctive about Richter’s approach to abstraction?

In a way, when he started to do abstraction it was like an image of abstraction, like a second approach. It was not the firsthand abstraction of Kandinsky and that generation. They were proud of discovering something. Richter knows very well that it has been there. It is like when he uses a photograph, it is an image of something that is not directly present anymore, that has a certain history, and some distance to it. For Kandinsky and his contemporaries it was a new experience, something new in painting. Obviously this cannot be anymore. So this kind of abstraction is always done with the knowledge that it has been here before, that like a photographic image it presents something lost. It is an image of an image.

But when someone makes music, they are not making sounds in quotes. Is there any irony to his abstraction?

There is no irony. What fascinates him is that abstraction is always in relation to a chance operation. For this, music and particularly John Cage’s music, has been important to Richter. Abstraction is something that is not preconceived. There is also chance involved in selecting one of millions of possible photographs or images to paint. With abstraction chance is involved, as well. This balance between chance and knowledge and reflection is what attracts him. Irony is not about chance. There is the insight that you are trying to do something, but what you do is always overridden by the fact of what happens on a canvas.

Was he ever inspired by drugs?

Drug taking was certainly not Richter’s thing. He has had a more bourgeois lifestyle. He was not a bohemian at all.

Has the Kunstmuseum Winterthur been able to acquire many Richters?

We have two figurative paintings from the 1990s that we purchased, and two abstracts that he gave on permanent loan. But we have the most important collection of works on paper by Gerhard, almost 100 drawings. I understood that we could never match other museums in acquiring paintings because they are too expensive. My idea, and Gerhard supported it a lot, was to focus on drawings and thus to create something unique.

You have mounted exhibitions of his drawings and watercolors, work that has not been exhibited much in the US. Can you discuss his work in these media?

Even in Germany this part of the work had not been well known before our retrospective. I proposed to do a works -on-paper retrospective, and he said, “Well, do it!” He got to like this idea only with time. Drawing and watercolor were in the beginning less important for him than the paintings. Painting was official and central, as it has always been in the academic world. Drawing he considered a lesser part of his work. In recent years, he went back to it and for Marian Goodman Gallery he did in 2015 a series of 40 new drawings and was interested that they were like small paintings in a different technique, but had the same



kind of density, the same kind of landscape associations that many of the paintings have. It was complementary to the paintings.

Are his drawings or watercolors ever a warm up or study for paintings?

Never. But on the other hand, it was interesting to him to use watercolors as an image to copy in an oil painting, which is a different thing.

Richter has made many works in black and white, or grey. Can you discuss his use of the grisaille palette and its significance?

The mixture of all paint becomes a grey-brownish color. When he did his first grey paintings in the 1970s it was an attempt to wipe out completely any kind of image and

focus completely on the surface and the material aspect of the painting. Thus he has often accompanied his work by doing from time to time monochrome grey paintings or mirrors. He always is dialectical in that he is able to do a great figurative work, and at the same time a grey abstraction as a negation or complementary to the figurative work. The mirrors are the same type of negating because a mirror has no image itself and always takes on another image. I think this is the same dialectical dimension in the work: the grey draws your attention to the material of which painting is made, and also the complete negation of anything, which can be shown or represented.

Richter is known as a painter, but he also has created a number of objects—the mirrors, the panes of glass, the steel ball on the floor. Can you describe these works and how they fit into his practice?

19.3.92, 1992, 12.7 x 17.5 cm, acrylic on chromogenic color print.

The steel ball was like the perfect image, the perfect mirror, because it sucks in the complete reality that is around it. It’s something ungraspable, and at the same time it is the complete image that no one can ever recreate, but the steel ball does it for a moment. At the same time it is completely non-transparent. It is just a pure reflection. The panes of glass he did in 1966 were like a demonstration of the fact that you can look through a transparent pane of glass in different directions; it does not hide, but at the same time it does not explain anything. It’s just pure presence, and we are helpless confronted by this pure presence. The mirror or transparent glass shows you what is there, but at the same time leaves you without any explanation. You can see all there is, but at the same time cannot understand anything. Maybe it is a sense of utter helplessness against the phenomena of the world or of pure acceptance. The panes can be moved in different positions, and will always show something through them in an infinite number of possibilities. Again, chance comes in. Which possibility would you choose? A photograph would fix one phenomenon, but with the glass there is no privileged moment. It was like an object to demonstrate an insight, but maybe the insight is more important than the object of demonstration itself.

Hundreds of thousands of artists have worked during Richter’s life. Why has he stood out?

It is the intelligence of the work that is classical painting, and at the same time highly reflective and critical toward his own practice. He is the only one who has succeeded to bring together the essential beauty of classical painting with a critical and intellectual view of what a painting can be. This is outstanding and exceptional. But of course it never explains that the market should react in such a way. This is something an artist cannot expect to happen. Maybe that requires an economic explanation and not an artistic one. In a way, that force is stronger than the artist, and it is a bit frightening.

What place do you imagine he holds in the history of art? How will Richter be remembered?

Maybe he will be remembered as somebody not so easily placed in art history. If you look at abstract expressionism, minimalism, and so on, you can place those artists in a logical formalistic sequence. Richter is in a way outside this sequence of modernist movements because he took up something pre-modernistic, the idea of painting in a classicist tradition that goes back to Ingres and the artists of the 18th century, and tries to use it for our time. This is a unique position, not just part of the big modernist movement to which almost everybody else belongs. ▶

The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY.



From left: Richter photographed in Düsseldorf, 1971; *Frau die Treppe herabgehend (Woman Descending the Staircase)*, 1965, 198 x 128 cm, oil on canvas.

THE RICHTER ARCHIVE

Interview with **Dietmar Elger**, Director, Gerhard Richter Archive in Dresden, and author of the biography *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*.

What is the Gerhard Richter Archive, how was it established, and what is your role in the enterprise?

The Gerhard Richter Archive was founded in 2006 as part of the State Art Collections in Dresden. Our duties are to collect all material about Gerhard Richter: books, catalogs, photos, news clippings, invitations, posters, and other ephemera. We have original letters, documents, and a small collection of artworks. We also help students, lecturers, and curators with their research, and conduct our own projects.

How many works has Richter created in total?

Approximately 3,700 paintings, 4,000 overpainted photographs, 170 editions, and about 500 drawings.

What do you think is the most remarkable thing about his work?

I have always admired that he does not hesitate to destroy or overpaint landscape paintings that do not match his quality standards, despite their market value.

Richter’s career flourished after his move to the West. Has the political context influenced his work?

When he fled to West Germany, the presence of media (news magazines, TV, cinema) had the most significant impact on his art. Also, the contact with the international Pop Art movement. But the political context has not so much influenced his work.

Is he highly ambitious, competitive with his peers?

He was in the early 1960s with his artist friends Konrad Lueg and Sigmar Polke.

Is there something characteristically German about his work or his outlook?

He is very organized.

MARKET PERSPECTIVE

Interview with **Katharine Arnold**, Director, Specialist Head of Evening Auction in the Post-War & Contemporary Art Department of Christie’s London.

How would you situate Richter in the world of contemporary art?

Richter is one of the great masters of 20th-century painting. He has managed to master so many different facets of artmaking. He does photo-real paintings that are incredible feats in technique and studied composition, and also have a conceptual dimension. At the same time he turns to abstraction. When everyone thought that the possibilities for abstraction had been exhausted by the abstract expressionist generation, suddenly Richter builds a new way of making abstract painting. He introduces chance and contingency using the squeegee, his signature technique from 1989 onward. He has a certain color palette, but ultimately the interaction of wet-on-wet paint ends up with a result that is not entirely preplanned. So, he’s a pioneer in abstraction, and also a pioneer in social painting, coming out of Germany in the 1960s and dealing with the legacy of their history. That was something radically new, and at the same time he was experimenting with grey paintings, the use of monochrome, and also making sculptures that enter into discussion with minimalism. Just one facet would have been enough for most artists for a lifetime’s career, and he’s managed to master all of them and do something novel and brilliant. That situates him as this incredible figure in artmaking of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Recognition of that has led to this whole reembracing of his practice by the marketplace.

Is there a correlation between Richter’s status in the market and what you are describing as his complex and innovative practice?

I think so. He has depth, which is why he is someone who I think will continue to be important in the marketplace and also will have an important legacy historically. He’s someone we will remember in a hundred years’ time. But some of his paintings, even if he would never himself say



that they are painted with the aim of being beautiful, *are* just beautiful. The feeling that you get when you look at some of these abstract paintings or stand in front of a big lake scene—some of them are really awe-inspiring. These are things that people want to live with. So it’s not only because he’s brilliant and very intelligent as an artist. It’s also because he’s making beautiful paintings that people want to own and live with.

Compare the Richter market with those of his contemporaries.

It’s interesting to compare with the careers of other Germans who were working around the same time, people like Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke, or Georg Baselitz. They have had some definite success, but Polke’s market, for example, didn’t move as quickly as Richter’s did. He has written less, explained less, and perhaps his works are less conventionally accessible. The big Polke retrospective that MoMA toured to the Tate and the Ludwig Museum in Cologne helped us appreciate the importance of his work, and fed through into the marketplace, but it took more explaining. Richter’s work, and the fact that Richter has written and has said so much about his practice, has given us privileged access to his work and its significance.

Richter’s auction record is \$46.4 million paid for the 1986 *Abstract Painting (599)* at Sotheby’s London in 2015. That became the second-most expensive work by a living artist ever sold at auction—after Jeff Koons’ *Balloon Dog (Orange)*. *Abstract Painting (809-4)* sold for \$34.2 million in 2012, and another 1980s abstraction sold for \$34 million in 2016. Why do the abstract paintings dominate the market?

I think it’s because he is doing something very novel with abstraction, but also that people respond very well to color. Sometimes collectors find specific color palettes or certain interactions of his paint that they fall in love with and they have to have. Rothko also understood that color has this transformative power. That’s had a huge impact, and also the scale of these paintings. In the ones that have made the great prices, the scale—some are almost 8 feet square—combines with that effect of color and its power to really overpower you sometimes. That is quite a special feeling and people want to live with that, to own that. The textures of those abstracts are also extraordinary. Because it is wet-on-wet painting you end up with this incredibly tactile surface. It’s something you almost want to touch. But, ultimately it’s the success of the composition or the way that the colors play with one another that lends it appeal.

The abstract paintings are less rare than the other series, but they have sold for more. Why is that?

They have moved first, but many of the great figurative paintings have not been available. They are still in collections and people have not been selling them. We had a painting in February, a 1969 view of Lake Lucerne that the collector had had since the early 1970s. It is 47 x 59 inches, in immaculate condition, painted in shades of grey, black, a kind of Prussian blue, and white, and this almost monochrome scene sold for \$24 million. There are four iterations of that scene, two on a smaller scale and two on this scale, and for the most part they are in collections of people who will never sell them. People just don’t want to let go of them. The owners also understand that these paintings will appreciate in value, so maybe they are not moving as readily. The last candle [painting] sold in 2011 for \$16 million, but today we’d be looking more at something like \$30 million. They are masterpieces, and I think the figurative paintings are still undervalued. I think those are ones to watch.

Which works are most highly sought-after today?

I would say candle paintings are very much sought after. There are around eight of them and the record is \$16.5 million. They are a riff on the *vanitas* theme, about the brevity of life, but the way that he painted it is kind of amazing. The surface is velvety, very smooth, and he’s brushed into it with a dry brush and extended the cone of light at the top by pulling it out in successive brushstrokes. You aren’t looking at the image and thinking of what it represents. You look at it and it looks actually hot, like there is actually a flame burning. The skill that he takes to represent this ephemeral phenomenon, people find that compelling.

Is there another sector of his market that may be undervalued?

I’m very interested in how the market will move for the rural landscapes. For the Lake Lucerne painting [*Vierwaldstätter See*, 1969] that we sold in 2015 for \$24 million, we had really competitive international bidding and great private collectors looking at that work. That is what we like to see at auction, depth of bidding. That tells us that there is ▶



still some ways to go. And think of some of the portraits, or the *Baader-Meinhof* cycle in MoMA that caused such scandal because they rendered people branded terrorists in Germany at the time almost with sympathy. The subjects that he approaches and how he paints them is so fascinating. I can only imagine that the market for the suite of figurative photo paintings will catch up with time.

Are political subjects, such as the portrait of his Nazi uncle, the WWII bombers, and cityscapes that suggest aerial maps, less appealing than more conventionally beautiful pictures?

I think in many instances they are just not available. A lot of those early works are in museum collections now, and I think that has a big part to do with it. Some of the subjects are quite challenging, more a connoisseur's picture. But what's interesting about those early period pictures is that, as with early Baselitz, they are dealing with German history and its legacy, the feeling for a country lacking direction and addressing that dark past, and having to move forward. So I think they are incredibly interesting.

Are works available at lower price points than the multimillion-dollar works we have been discussing?

Absolutely. There are smaller-scale works, watercolors and drawings, and some of his editioned works and overpainted photographs are very beautiful. Until 1968, he used found images as sources for his photo painting. Then he started photographing landscape scenes for the first time, and putting together his big *Atlas* book of source photography.

The overpainted photographs draw together these two strands. He began doing them in 1989 and completed a lot in the early 2000s. He would take a print of one of his snapshots, usually a standard 10 x 15 cm, and add oil paint left over from the squeegee-painted abstractions over the top of it. There have been some very sweet ones, such as a photo of his infant son Moritz overpainted with a sweep of abstract paint. He had made photo paintings of his partner Sabina and their son in 1995, and some of those paintings he went over with a brush and turned them into abstracts. He has done the same thing to a related photograph, covering it with paint. I think that's quite interesting and a desirable thing to own. They are much more accessible price points, perhaps 15,000 to 20,000 euros, but still have a very conceptual and very signature element of Richter in them.

How has Richter's market changed over the years?

You could say that Richter's market was more European-focused back in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Then after MoMA bought the suite of *Baader-Meinhof* paintings, it started opening up. Collectors in Germany who had bought the pictures in the 1960s started selling. And of course the market has really changed for him since 2011. That's when we first saw the big prices being achieved. It's continued to go from strength to strength.

Are buyers of his work different from those who pay enormous sums for Rothko or Bacon?

They are the same people, the top collectors. Geographically, it's across the board. We have bidders from all over looking at it. It is a universal thing. All the top collectors are looking for masterpieces by the artist because they recognize that he will have a continued and lasting legacy. Richter is someone who has contributed a huge amount and extended art history. His future market definitely is secure.

RICHTER ON FILM

Interview with **Corinna Belz**, filmmaker and writer, creator of *The Cologne Cathedral Window* (2007), *Gerhard Richter Painting* (2011), and *Richter's Patterns* (2016).

How did you come to make the film about Richter's cathedral window?

I studied art history and saw many Gerhard Richter exhibitions, so Mr. Richter was always a huge presence. His project designing the window of Cologne Cathedral was the right moment to get in touch with him. It was obvious that it might be interesting for viewers today and future generations to have a document of this historic collaboration between a modern artist and the chief architect of the cathedral.

From left: Kerze (Candle) series, 1982; Landscape with Group of Trees, Inv. D 4188, 1970, 80 x 100 cm, oil on canvas; Venice (Staircase), 1985, 51.4 x 71.8 cm, oil on canvas.

Cologne Cathedral was first built in the 13th century, and it was very exciting to see how Richter took a contemporary conceptual approach, adapting an idea from one of his color-chart paintings [*4096 Colors*, 1974]. He successfully translated the concept into a stained-glass window measuring over 26 meters in height. Combining a modern work and such a traditional context was quite courageous for both the cathedral's chief architect and Mr. Richter, but the undertaking has been wholeheartedly embraced by the general public and art critics.

Why do you think he agreed to work with you? He is said to be camera shy. Was that a challenge?

The Cathedral film was not so much character-driven as focused on the project. Richter liked that it wasn't focused solely on him. During the two years of filming, from 2005 to 2007, he got to know me and the idea for a feature-length documentary was born over a period of almost two years.

How much time have you spent with him?

In the beginning of filming *Gerhard Richter Painting*, I filmed the setup of several exhibitions, and stopped by the studio every two months or so. In 2008 we started filming ▶





From left: *Seestück (Seascape)*, Inv. B 1072, 1970, 200 x 200 cm, oil on canvas; *Seestück (Seascape)*, 1969, featured on the 2013 German stamp; Richter poses in front of one of his *Color Charts* series during his exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler on May 17, 2014, in Riehen near Basel.

in the studio, when he was working on the *Sinbad* series. In April 2009, Richter started a series of abstract paintings that he would exhibit later that year at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. I filmed the creation of 15 paintings regularly over a period of four months. On these occasions we also often filmed the everyday routine in the studio.

Can you describe the atmosphere in the studio?

As a rule, he works alone, though I also filmed him working together with one of his assistants on a very large, white monochrome painting. Since the mid-1990s he has always had two assistants, not more. While he paints, he likes to listen to music—at that time a lot of György Kurtág, which can be heard in the film. Mr. Richter also likes to work over the weekends when nobody is in the studio, except his wife, Sabine Moritz, when she drops by for a visit. She's a painter herself, so she looks at the work from an artist's perspective.

What is he like as a subject?

Once he was convinced of the idea, Mr. Richter was very committed, reliable, and also generous with his time and personal contribution. It seemed to me that, though he does tend to be introverted, he was willing and able to overcome his discomfort in regards to the camera. We decided to install a second camera in the studio, which Richter turned on when he worked alone, so that the different phases of the canvases would be documented, because the pictures sometimes changed so quickly, like weather in the mountains. So there is quite a lot of footage that he filmed himself.

You focus on his painting process, so we can actually see how he makes his work. Did Richter suggest that approach?

The focus on the paining process was my idea; we talked about it right in the beginning when I started to work on the long documentary. Nonetheless, it took almost a year until he started this series of abstract paintings. During this time I was in touch with him and the two assistants. Filming in the studio wasn't easy for him, but he was also interested in the challenge and in the end he got used to our presence. Time matters.

What did you learn about his technique, about the act of creating his paintings?

First of all, I learned that Richter mixes the primary colors on the canvas. This is a very long process that can take days and weeks. The work can unfold over a period of months before a single canvas is deemed finished. Richter prefers to work on several paintings simultaneously. It seemed to me that the various works in progress would communicate with and influence each other. So much happens in the process of decision-making. All the paintings Richter has seen and all the paintings he has painted inform the process. He draws on all his experience with color and the use of the squeegee. Painting is all about seeing and also about the beauty of a movement. There is a lot of elegance in the way he handles his instruments, and the lifelong experience that you can see in each work. That's extremely precious.

What is the most surprising thing you discovered about Richter during your time with him?

His sense of humor, and that he's so unpretentious and down-to-earth. When I proposed the long-form film he asked, "Do you really think anyone would be interested?"



GERHARD RICHTER QUOTES

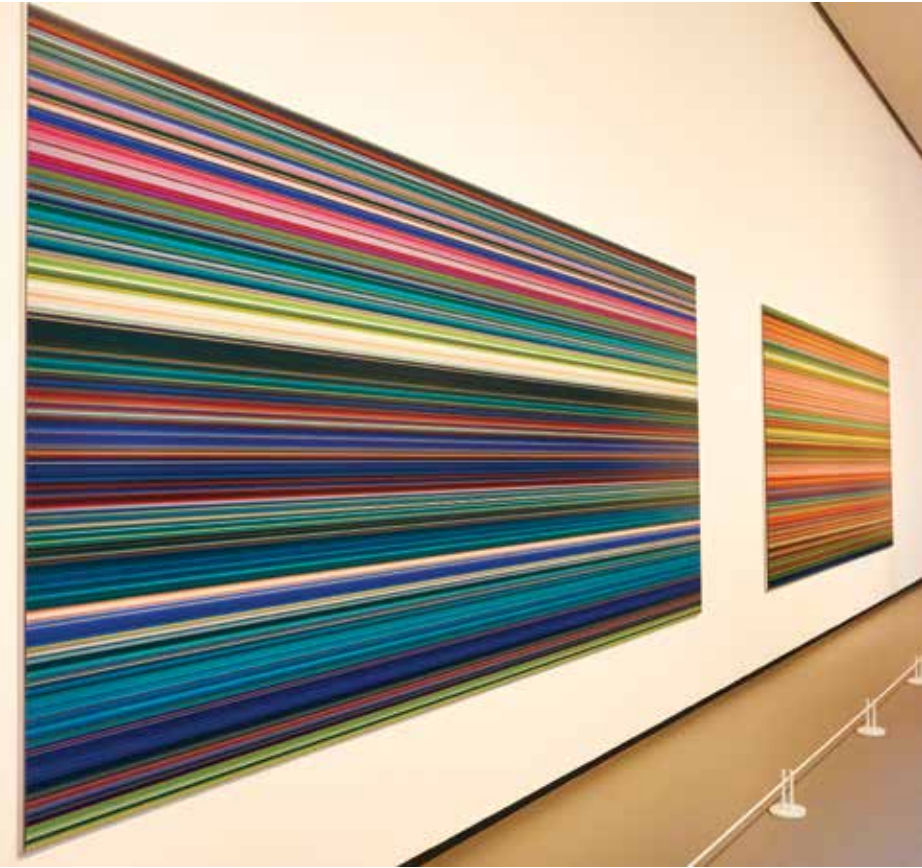
Ideas about Art

Art is not a substitute religion: it *is* a religion (in the true sense of the word: 'binding back'...to the unknowable, transcending reason, transcendent being). But the church is no longer adequate as a means of affording experience of the transcendental, and of making religion real—and so art has been transformed from a means into the sole provider of religion: which means religion itself.
Notes, 1964–65

I don't believe in the reality of painting, so I use different styles like clothes: it's a way to disguise myself.
Interview with Bruce Ferguson and Jeffrey Spalding, 1978

My method is related to an attempt to do something that might be understood by today's world, or that could at least provide understanding. In other words, doing something I understand and that everyone understands. This natural desire for communication is also found in other domains, like reading and discourse, etc. I also hate repeating myself; it gives me no pleasure whatsoever. Once I've understood something, I need to start off on new ground.
Conversation with Henri-François Debailleux, 1993

I don't really believe that art has power, but it does have value. Those who take an interest in it find solace in art. It gives them huge comfort. [It can be] comforting simply because it's beautiful. These days, beauty is not in fashion. We don't need it. We need entertainment, sensations. Beauty is an ideal of mine as much as it ever was.
Interview video produced by Louisiana Channel, 2016 ▷



From left: bpk Bildagentur/Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen/Jörg P. Anders./Art Resource, NY; Ullstein Bild/Getty Images; FABRICE COIFFRINI/AFP/Getty Images.

Painting Technique

Today no one masters technique any more at all. Painting has become so easy—anyone can do it!—that it’s often very bad. In this context, as soon as someone knows technique, it jumps out at the viewer. That said, for me technique is something obvious: it’s never a problem. I’ve just remained extremely attached to a culture of painting. What’s much more important to me is the attempt, the desire to show what I want, in the best way possible. That’s why technique is useful for me. For me, perfection is as important as the image itself.

Conversation with Henri-François Debailleux, 1993

To be filled with an idea—to have one—is the greatest thing that can happen for me. Otherwise you have nothing. You are empty and feel terrible and don't know what to paint. To come to paint again without an idea is also possible; sometimes pleasure comes with doing. I find it hard to start sometimes. There’s a painter’s block and it is very hard to wait for an idea. For me, the only way is to start without any idea. This can be good, too. Better than doing nothing.

Arts Et Culture documentary (itv.com/southbank), 2006

I don’t believe there are subjects that can’t be painted, but there are a lot of things that I personally can’t paint.

I Have Nothing to Say and I’m Saying it, conversation between Gerhard Richter and Nicholas Serota, spring 2011

Photo Paintings

When I paint from a photograph, conscious thinking is eliminated. I don’t know what I am doing. My work is far closer to the Informel [gestural abstraction] than to any kind of ‘realism.’The photograph has an abstraction of its own, which is not easy to see through.

Notes, 1964–65

I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant. I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike, but technological, smooth and perfect. I blur things to make all the parts a closer fit. Perhaps I also blur out the excess of unimportant information.

Notes, 1964–65

I was surprised by photography, which we all use so massively every day. Suddenly, I saw it in a new way, as a picture that offered me a new view, free of all the conventional criteria I had always associated with art. It had no style, no composition, no judgment. It freed me from personal experience. For the first time, there was nothing to it: it was pure picture. That’s why I wanted to have it, to show it—not use it as a means to painting but use painting as a means to photography.

Interview with Rolf Schön, 1972

The picture I used [as a model for my 9/11 painting] was very beautiful with flames—red yellows and orange, very beautiful. And this of course was the problem. I painted it at first really so colorful, then I had to slowly destroy it. I made it banal. It doesn’t tell much. It shows the impossibility to say something about this disaster.

Interview with Nicholas Serota, 2012

Abstraktes Bild, 1990.



HIP/Art Resource, NY

Abstract Paintings

When I paint an abstract picture (the problem is very much the same in other cases), I neither know in advance what it is meant to look like nor, during the painting process, what I am aiming at and what to do about getting there. Painting is consequently an almost blind, desperate effort, like that of a person abandoned, helpless, in totally incomprehensible surroundings.

Notes, 1985

I began [to paint abstractions] in 1976, with small abstract paintings that allowed me to do what I had never let myself do: put something down at random. And then, of course, I realized that it never can be random. It was all a way of opening a door for me. If I don't know what's coming, that is, if I have no hard-and-fast image, as I have with a photographic original—then arbitrary choice and chance play an important part.

Interview with Sabine Schütz, 1990

I really prefer making figurative work, but the figure is difficult. So to work around the difficulty, I take a break and paint abstractly. Which I really like, by the way, because it allows me to make beautiful paintings.

Conversation with Henri-François Debailleux, 1993

The [abstract] paintings gain their life from our desire to recognize something in them. At every point they suggest similarities with real appearances, which then, however, never really materialize.

Interview with Stefan Koldehoff, 1999

[I know an abstract painting is finished] when nothing disturbs me, and I have no idea what to do more, what I could add or destroy. This is very surprising. Often when I am painting again and again, every day, I have the feeling it is never ending and it will never become a good painting. And suddenly it's finished.

Interview with Nicholas Serota, 2012

Grey Paintings

Grey. It makes no statement whatever; it evokes neither feelings nor associations: it is really neither visible nor invisible. Its inconspicuousness gives it the capacity to mediate, to make visible, in a positively illusionistic way, like a photograph. It has the capacity that no other color has, to make 'nothing' visible.

From a letter to Edy de Wilde, 23 February 1975

The grey paintings—a painted grey surface, completely monochromatic —come from a motivation, or result from a state, that was very negative. It has a lot to do with hopelessness, depression and such things. But it has to be turned on its head in the end, and has to come to a form where these paintings possess beauty. And in this case, it's not a carefree beauty, but rather a serious one.

Interview with Christiane Vielhaber, 1986

One step toward abstract painting was the grey painting. [When] I was unsatisfied with what I did—a bad [representational] painting—you feel helpless so you destroy it, overpaint it [in grey]. Then you discover it has a quality, a very special quality. It tells the truth.

Interview with Nicholas Serota, 2012

Landscapes, Townscapes, Seascapes, and Still Lives

I paint landscapes or still-lives in between the abstract works; they constitute about one-tenth of my production. On the one hand they are useful, because I like to work from nature—although I do use a photograph—because I think that any detail from nature has a logic that I would like to see in abstraction as well. On the other hand, painting from nature or painting still-lives is a sort of diversion [that] creates balance. If I were to express it somewhat informally, I would say that the landscapes are a type of yearning, a yearning for a whole and simple life, a little nostalgic.

Interview with Dorothea Dietrich, 1985 ▷



My landscapes are not only beautiful or nostalgic, with a Romantic or classical suggestion of lost Paradises, but above all ‘untruthful.’ I mean the glorifying way we look at nature—nature, which in all its forms is always against us, because it knows no meaning, no pity, no sympathy, because it knows nothing and is absolutely mindless: the total antithesis of ourselves, absolutely inhuman.

Notes, 1986

Color Charts

The first color charts were unsystematic. They were based directly on commercial color samples. They were still related to Pop Art. In the canvases that followed, the colors were chosen arbitrarily and drawn by chance. Then...I developed a system based on a number of rigorously defined tones and proportions.

Interview with Irmeline Lebeer, 1973

The starting points are the four pure colors red, yellow, green, and blue; their in-between shades and scales of brightness result in color schemes containing 16, 64, 256 and 1,024 shades. More colors would be pointless because it wouldn’t be possible to distinguish between them clearly.

Notes for a press conference, 28 July 2006



Counterclockwise from top left: *Stadtbild F (Cityscape F)*, Inv. 2778, 1968, 200 x 200 cm, oil on canvas; *Stukas*, Inv. WAF PF 22, 1964, 80 x 80 cm, oil on canvas; Installation view of *18 October 1977* (partial series), 1988, included in the exhibition, *MoMA 2000: Open Ends*.

Counterclockwise from top left: bpk Bildagentur/Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, Germany/Wolfgang Pankoke/Art Resource, NY; bpk Bildagentur/Pinakothek der Moderne, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen/Art Resource, NY; Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/ Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

18 October 18 1977 (Baader-Meinhof or RAF series)

There was no special event that made me decide [to paint the *Baader-Meinhof* group]. I had collected some photos and the idea was in the back of my mind for a long time. It was growing and growing, so finally I said, ‘I must paint this.’ I come from East Germany and am not a Marxist, so of course at the time I had no sympathy for the ideas, or for the ideology that these people represented. I couldn’t understand, but I was still impressed. Like everyone, I was touched. It was an exceptional moment for Germany.

Interview with Gregorio Magnani, 1989

In the early 1960s, having just come over from the GDR, I naturally declined to summon up any sympathy for the aims and methods of the Red Army Faction [RAF]. I was impressed by the terrorists’ energy, their uncompromising determination and their absolute bravery; but I could not find it in my heart to condemn the State for its harsh response. That is what States are like; and I had known other, more ruthless ones. The deaths of the terrorists, and the related events both before and after, stand for a horror that distressed me and has haunted me as unfinished business ever since, despite all my efforts to suppress it.

Notes for a press conference, November–December 1988 (held at Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, February 1989)

I was frightened by [the RAF], and I was amazed to see an incredible blindness there that exposed our cruelest and most vicious side. But the most frightening aspect for me was the sympathy accorded to these fanatics.

On Pop, East and West, and Some of the Picture Sources. Uwe M. Schneede in Conversation with Gerhard Richter

The reason these paintings are destined for New York is not because I am disappointed about a lack of German interest, but because MoMA asked me, and because I consider it to be the best museum in the world.

Interview with Hubertus Butin, 1995

Portraits

I had always taken photographs and used several for pictures during the 1960s, although I began using my own much more in the late ’60s. I mainly photographed objects, rarely taking portrait shots. The portraits I painted at this time were based on passport photographs...I began painting pictures of people with the painting Ema (*Nude Descending a Staircase*) [CR: 134]. The photographs I used mainly came from illustrated magazines and that was the simple reason why most of the pictures were black and white.

Comments on some works, 1991

Only about one per cent of my paintings show family members. Do they help me deal with problems? It’s likely that these problems can only be depicted. But photographs, private ones and others, keep appearing that fascinate me so much that I want to paint them. And sometimes the real meaning these images have for me only becomes apparent later.

SPIEGEL interview, conducted by Susanne Beyer and Ulrike Knöfel, 2005

Other Media & Subjects

[Compiling the *Atlas* of my photographic source material], my motivation was more a matter of wanting to create order—to keep track of things. All those boxes full of photographs and sketches weigh you down, because they have something unfinished, incomplete, about them. So it’s better to present the usable material in an orderly fashion and throw the other stuff away. That’s how the *Atlas* came to be, and I exhibited it a few times.

Interview with Stefan Koldehoff, 1999

[The idea of making objects] came to me and I said, ‘I am allowed to do this.’ Not so many—some glasses. These are not sculptures. They are objects, not paintings. Painting is flat. Paintings show what isn’t there.

Interview with Nicholas Serota, 2012 ♦

