

The Gerhard Richter Art Foundation has committed a total of one hundred artworks to the collection of the Nationalgalerie as a permanent loan. A selection is now being shown for the first time at the Neue Nationalgalerie according to the artist's plans. In the future, the works will be presented with curatorial or artistic interventions in changing contexts.



In his artistic work spanning six decades, Richter explored the possibilities and limits of painting. From the very beginning, he was confronted with the much-discussed question of the extent to which art is still possible at all after the Holocaust and the terror regime of National Socialism. Since then, Richter, who moved from East Germany to West Germany in 1961, has repeatedly addressed the topic of the Holocaust and its artistic representation.

He destroyed his first paintings, such as "Execution" and "Hitler" (both 1962). They were followed in 1965 by the paintings "Aunt Marianne", "Uncle Rudi" or "Mr. Heyde", which he based on photographs and which can be seen here in the exhibition as photo editions. In these, Richter dealt with the German past and his family history. At the same time, he began to collect historical, sometimes private, visual testimonies such as photographs, newspaper clippings and sketches in his "Atlas". For decades he has used this as a resource, drawing his motifs from it.

The "Atlas" includes photographs from the concentration camps. In the 1990s, Richter tried to use them as pictorial motifs for the first time. He then rejected the idea and realised "Black, Red, Gold" (1999) for the entrance hall of the Reichstag building, which houses the German Bundestag, instead, a work made of enamelled glass plates that he intends as a sign of a new beginning. In this exhibition we show the small-format glass work "Black, Red, Gold" (1999), which refers to the version in the Bundestag. It is

Gerhard Richter, Düsseldorf ca. 1965



presented in combination with two mirror works, Richter's above-mentioned photo editions and the painting "Skull" (1983). The artist achieved the blur effect in this work by blurring oil paint that was still fresh, a technique that represents a possibility for him to avoid a direct depiction of the image.

He is also concerned with the refusal of a direct image in his abstract paintings, which he has made since 1976. Richter now paints with intense colour and in several layers. The paint is applied with a squeegee, mixed and at the same time partially scraped off again. Layers of colour tear open

Gerhard Richter, Cologne 1985

and the lower surfaces shine through, which gives the image a pronounced, deep structure. The result is an interplay between chance and conscious decision in which the process of creating the work of art remains visible.

The monumental works "Strip" (2013/16) and "4900 Colours" (2007) are similar. The painting "4900 Colours", which is composed of 196 individual square panels, each of which is subdivided into 25 colour squares, Richter returned to the investigation of colour fields that he began in 1966. At the time, he was fascinated by industrially produced colour sample cards, their smooth perfection, their accuracy of colour reproduction and the possibilities of variation. The squares were the exact opposite of emotional emphasis, sublimity or expressiveness – that is, of properties that until then had seemed to be characteristic for painting. Until 1974, he had realised various strict colour field distributions. In 2007 he returned to the topic with two works, in the context of his work on the south transept window for the Cologne Cathedral and "4900 Colours". In "Strip", on the other hand, Richter divided the "Abstract Picture" (724-4) from 1990 into ever smaller segments by means of a computer-controlled process, stretched them out by mirroring the axes and rearranged the sections.

The result is a combination of seemingly randomly-found striped motifs and their deliberate ordering by the artist. Both "Strip" and "4900 Colours" are

Information

NEUE NATIONALGALERIE
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
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Further information: smb.museum/nng

Opening Hours

Tue–Wed 10 am–6 pm, Thu 10 am–8 pm,
Fr–Sun 10 am–6 pm, Mon closed

Public Transport

U-Bahn / S-Bahn U2, S1, S2,
S25 Potsdamer Platz,
Bus M29 Potsdamer Brücke,
M41 Potsdamer Platz Bhf. / Vosstrasse,
M48, M85 Kulturforum,
M200 Philharmonie.

Admission

All Exhibitions, permanent collection incl.:
14 Euro, concessions 7 Euro.
Online-Tickets: smb.museum/tickets

Information, Advice

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Loan Gerhard Richter Kunststiftung
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a radical evolution of abstract painting in which Richter tested the boundaries of the medium once again and took it to its logical conclusion.

Ultimately, the notion of painting's possibilities and limits also plays a central role in the series "Birkenau" from 2014. Richter's starting point were four photographs from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, secretly taken in August 1944 by Jewish prisoners who risked their lives to do so. The photos show the grounds and crematorium V with many deaths. They are the only known photographs from the extermination camp that were taken by the victims themselves. They were only published after the Second World War. In 1967 Richter had already included one of these photos in his "Atlas". But it was not until the publication of these images in Georges Didi-Huberman's book "Images in Spite of All" (2008), in which the French philosopher used

"Abstract images are fictional models because they visualise a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can infer."

Gerhard Richter

them to analyse how the Holocaust could be represented, that Richter felt the impetus to address the subject again.

Richter transferred the four motifs with charcoal and oil paint to individual canvases and then decided to paint over them abstractly. With each additional layer of paint, the painted originals disappeared a little more until they were finally no longer visible to the viewer. Richter thus carried out a process of abstraction, born of the conviction that he could not do justice to the incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust with a direct depiction. His abstract painting offers moments of form and colour that create a melancholic, thoughtful mood, especially

Gerhard Richter, Cologne 1994
photo: Benjamin Katz @ VG Bild-Kunst 2023



Gerhard Richter, Dresden 2017
photo: David Pinzer

and our own time. "Birkenau" and the other works in this exhibition highlight the tension between abstraction and figuration, between photography and painting, which underlies Richter's entire oeuvre. This relationship appears on a new level in the series of Overpainted Photos, begun in 1986. These are small-format photographic prints, often 10 x 15 centimetres, which the artist draws from his own private collection: photos of museum visits, trips, walks or his family. Despite their small dimensions, they play an important role in the artist's development: they embody the interface between abstract painting and the representation of a photographic image as no other group of artworks does. The overpainted elements erase the image and complete it at the same time. With this method, between illustration and abstraction, Richter succeeds in extracting the unknown from the known.

Maike Steinkamp and Joachim Jäger

in the many black and grey surfaces. The abstract does not exclude the figurative; instead, the works create a space between showing and not showing, enabling a broad range of open-ended reflection.

Opposite the four "Birkenau" paintings is a large, grey, four-part mirror. Almost since the beginning, Richter's paintings were accompanied by sculptures made of glass and mirrors, with which he explores the boundary between "natural" and "artistic" images in a variety of ways. The mirrors refer to an external reality and enable personal reflection for everyone in the room. After all, not only are the four paintings and the contexts that they conjure up reflected by the mirror, but the viewers are as well. Therefore we, the observers, are asked about the content and what we see.

This series invokes the complexity of an image or a representation, thus touching on fundamental questions of painting that precede Richter himself



100 Works for Berlin

Gerhard
Richter