polke/richter
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Essays by
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Faith Chisholm
Dietmar Elger
Jill Lloyd
Axel Hinrich Murken
and Crista Murken-Altrogge
Kenny Schachtter
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We cannot depend on good paintings being made one day: we need to take the matter into our own hands!

If someone wants to become a painter, he needs to consider first whether he wouldn't be better suited to some other activity: teacher, minister, professor, manual worker, assembly line, because only truly great people can paint!

(Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter, catalogue text for polke/richter, 1966)

The names Polke and Richter, like Picasso and Matisse or Freud and Bacon, are so regularly linked throughout art folklore that it is incredible to think that they have not had a two-man show since their 1966 exhibition at galerie h in Hanover. Unlike these other celebrated pairs, Richter and Polke were the best of friends from the start, forming an instant bond when they met in Karl Otto Götz’s class at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in 1962. They were born within seven years of each other (1934 and 1941 respectively) in East Germany as the Nazi regime overtook first Germany and then waged war in Europe. Polke fled to the West and settled in Düsseldorf in 1953, while Richter did the same in 1961. Growing up in a time of extreme social and cultural disruption, when daily reality was filled with horror, and developing as artists in a period when this reality was being rejected in favour of total abstraction in the 1950s, the pair came together at a kind of Ground Zero in post-war art history. At this point, the movements of pure abstraction in America and Europe had virtually run their respective courses and the obituaries for painting were being written.

However these artists chose this moment to begin a complete and utter deconstruction of painting, to strip it back to its bare bones and rebuild what could be conceived as the ‘possibilities in painting’. From this moment on, both embarked on painterly projects which not only completely revived the idea of painting in the post-modern period but injected energy, surprise, enjoyment and intellect into the agenda – painting became exciting again. They took all pre-existing styles in painting and threw them into the mixer, creating magical works which have become more and more influential to the point where it is hard to think of any painter emerging today who cannot count one of them as a direct influence. Although their friendship waned towards the end of the 1960s, their art would continue to respond to each other’s over the next 50 years until Polke’s sad passing in 2010.

For me, the ‘annus mirabilis’ for these artists was between 1994 and 1995, the year of Richter’s landmark retrospective in Bonn and Polke’s retrospective at Tate Liverpool. As an art student at the time, I travelled to see both of these revelatory shows: to encounter two such rich evocations of these artists’ work in a single year was inspirational and opened my eyes and mind to myriad new ideas about the power of painting. Although both artists started from similar foundations of thought, the pursuits of their projects could not have been more different. Along the way a few similarities arise in terms of the imagery used: their pursuit of black-and-white in the 1960s for example, whether it be in the Rasterbilder of Polke or the photo-paintings of Richter, or their gradual merging of figuration and abstraction in the 1980s. It is, however, their divergent approach to a similar philosophy over a
fifty year period that makes the prospect of bringing them together for this rare exhibition so special. Richter has been the meticulous architect of his own career, remaining in virtually the same environment in Cologne over the entire period, categorising each painting and painstakingly cataloguing every work he makes in his exhaustive catalogue raisonné. Polke, on the other hand, pursued a purposefully anarchic approach to picture-making, travelling all over the world, getting lost in the 1970s in São Paulo, Afghanistan and Pakistan, using a wide variety of media alongside paint, such as photography, sculpture and film-making. He has also experimented with multifarious materials in his work, from the fabrics on which he paints, to the use of a variety of chemicals and even uranium as he has pursued an alchemist’s approach to the investigation of the nature of paint. Like a chess player, Richter has always thought six moves ahead of his next painting as he mapped out his course, while Polke has pursued his own impulsive and maverick course peppered with moments of genius.

The photograph from 1965 of the Richter and Polke families having breakfast together provides an insight into their relationship at the time, both dressed in a similar suit and tie. Polke already had two children and above the table are two paintings by Richter and one by Polke. The tongue-in-cheek nature of Polke’s Wurst painting contrasts directly with the apparent seriousness of Onkel Rudi, Richter’s painting which would go on to be included in the 1966 polke/richter exhibition, and was the only one of Richter’s paintings included in their collaborative artist’s book that served as the catalogue for the show. Also included in the exhibition was Richter’s painting of Sigmar Polke’s family with him as a child Mann mit zwei Kindern made from a photograph given to him by Polke. The catalogue for our exhibition has been conceived as an homage to this original artist’s book, which was smaller in proportions. We have also sourced two paintings from the original exhibition, Flämische Krone by Richter and Bavarian by Polke. We would particularly like to thank the anonymous lenders of these two works, alongside the many other anonymous lenders to this exhibition who have helped to make it so comprehensive.

Taking these two works from the 1966 exhibition as a starting point, this show charts an almost chronological path for both artists over the past five decades. It aims to present juxtapositions between Richter and Polke that we hope will stimulate thought on how these two artists continuously reinvented painting, incorporating new techniques and media into the art form and – most importantly – using it as a medium for exploring their philosophical ideas about the role of painting in the post-modern period. Aside from the astounding selection of early work, where we see Richter’s black and white blur cast against Polke’s dots, I am particularly looking forward to seeing the installation of the room of Richter’s 1980s landscapes and bringing together a group of Polke’s Laterna Magica from the same period. Richter’s landscapes present the mundane nature of suburban landscape, however his deft handling of the photo-real approach and subtle shift of light and tone elevate these views to a magical state of almost dream-like being. On the other hand, Polke’s Laterna Magica, executed on clear resin that makes them double sided, create a kind of child-
like wonder. Endlessly mysterious, his attempt to compose multiple layers of imagery through a thin transparent veil invites us to dream in a different way.

We are fortunate that this exhibition has benefitted from the collaboration of so many talented individuals. I would like to thank Kenny Schachter, the co-curator of this show with Christie’s Darren Leak, for bringing this project to our attention and for his unwavering enthusiasm and commitment, as can be seen in his engaging introduction to this catalogue. He has brought an American viewpoint to this show, reminding us of connections to Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns in his text and providing a different cultural perspective on the work.

I would also like to thank Darren Leak for curating this exhibition with an unwavering eye, and also Jacob Uecker for cataloguing the work and assisting Darren Leak on every aspect of organizing this show.

We would also like to thank Micha Weidmann for his beautiful catalogue design and Jill Lloyd, Robert Brown and Faith Chisholm, for their illuminating catalogue texts exploring the art and ideas of these two protean painters. Dr. Dr. Murken, a medical professor and art historian and his wife Dr. Crista Murken-Altrogge, also an art historian, have allowed us to re-publish their text on Gerhard Richter. I would also like to thank the poet and writer Michael Hoffman for his translations of the German texts.

Dr. Dietmar Elger, the Head of the Richter Archive, generously contributed his catalogue essay documenting the original 1966 galerie h exhibition and the artist’s book created by Richter and Polke. This essay comes from his catalogue for an exhibition currently on show by the Gerhard Richter Archive, at the Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, on the creation of the original artist’s book from the 1966 exhibition. We would also like to, of course, thank Gerhard Richter for his inspiring artistic vision but also for invaluable assistance in the catalogue with Konstanze Ell from the Atelier Richter. Of course, it is extremely sad that Sigmar Polke is no longer with us, but hopefully his spirit lives strongly in this show and it offers an interesting counterpoint to his concurrent retrospective exhibition at Museum of Modern Art in New York. We would like to thank Michael Trier and his colleagues at the Estate of Sigmar Polke for their assistance with the catalogue and shining a new light on various works in the show.

We hope you enjoy the exhibition.

Francis Outred
Head of Post-War and Contemporary Art, Europe, Christie’s
‘I remember how close this friendship was, but also how tough it sometimes was. I didn’t realize it at the time. For us it was just the natural way of dealing with each other. In retrospect, I’m amazed it was so brutal. All of us were very unsure of ourselves, and each tried to cover this up in his own way. I can only say that that’s the way it was. Polke drifted away into the psychedelic direction and I into the classical’


Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke were close in the early stages of their careers, in the late 1960s. Jesting photographs show them in bed and in the bath together. They collaborated on texts, like Polke’s invented interview of Richter in 1964 (‘Interview with John Anthony Thwaites and Sigmar Polke’); exhibitions, such as polke/richter, 1966, at galerie h in Hanover; and prints, like Hotel Diana (1967) and Transformation (1968). Their paths, both personally and professionally, diverged, and by the time they hit their respective strides, they could not have been more dissimilar in their approach to art-making. They are responsible for some of the most extraordinary and covetable artworks ever created.

Although they drifted apart, their early relationship is significant, and established the basis for a kind of artistic rivalry that would last until Polke’s death in 2010. (They were less friendly, over the years, than Matisse and Picasso, but equally as mindful of what the other was up to.)

The catalogue for the 1966 exhibition in Hanover, Richter’s first artist book, was the first and, to date, only one among hundreds he went on to do that he would ever collaborate on with another artist. The present exhibition is the first time in nearly fifty years that the two artists’ works have been displayed side by side. What is revealed in the juxtaposition is a conversation across disciplines. As their shared enthusiasms gave way to guarded reticence and competition, Polke bungee-jumped into a series of chemical and material accidents. Richter, meanwhile, seemed to adhere to a rigidly internalised set of formal rules, even in his missteps. He further cultivated his interest in realism and its distortions, on the one hand, and paint-intensive abstraction, on the other. Polke conducted prolonged experiments in unpronounceable toxics, incorporating both representation and abstraction; he cut, pasted and poured his way into history. Within single frames, both artists could tell stories as spellbinding as Vertigo, as enticing as Death in Venice.

In America, they had their analogue in Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Johns, like Richter, became ever more hermetic in his mapping of the psyche, employing flagstones, crosshatches and other formal means. Rauschenberg’s work, like Polke’s, seemed to thrive on chaos and uncertainty. In many ways, the two artists complement one another. Richter’s sombre, unsettling quasi-narratives and colour cerebrations are offset by Polke’s snide obnoxiousness and sly humour, evident even (and perhaps especially) in the saccharine hues of his disturbingly explicit erotic works from the early ‘70s.

Polke relished the unforeseen; Richter, aside from in his abstractions (which are deliberate in their own
manner) aimed for a predetermined point. Both were intent on process. Their work evokes that of research scientists, with Polke’s the more dangerous of the two laboratories, and his experiments the more provocative. To continue with the metaphor of science, Polke’s method of experimentation was messier — he embraced his failures. Next to him, Richter would always seem controlled, seeking objectivity. Anything deemed remotely a botch is immediately squeegeed over, erasing the trace of an unwanted gesture.

Though prices are certainly no measure of intrinsic value, they nevertheless tell us something about the perception of an artist. Richter’s prices have skyrocketed in recent years — he himself has called them fantastical — and with Polke’s first comprehensive retrospective up on us (Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963 –2010, Museum of Modern Art, New York, April – August 2014, Tate Modern, London, October 2014 – February 2015 and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, March – July 2015), there is reason to believe his will catch up, earning him a position in the market for post-war art commensurate with his position in that period’s history.

What Polke and Richter shared was a driving work ethic and lifelong dedication to art. Their rivalry was more philosophical conversation than intellectual gunfight. Richter’s forays into exuberant colour and disquieting realism answer Polke’s magical, piss-taking picture potions. They may often have been at loggerheads, but their legacies will be mutually enriching. To see their highly influential work together is to revel in some of the Apollonian and Dionysian extremes of the art of the past sixty years, and to better understand the art that is being made today.

Kenny Schachter, co-curator polke/richter richter/polke

Gerhard Richter, Hotel Diana, 1967
screen-print with varnish on lightweight card 59.4 × 80cm
The earliest hint of the exhibition of the two young Düsseldorf artists Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter at the galerie h, which August Haseke was to open in Hanover in November of that year, is contained in a letter that Richter wrote to his gallerist René Block on 6 August 1965: ‘Yesterday Haseke was round (new gallery in Hanover). Is thinking of putting us on on December 3, but isn’t sure yet.’ On 17 August, he informed Heiner Friedrich of the planned exhibition, at the same time calming the anxieties of his Munich gallerist by stressing that it wouldn’t present any commercial competition: ‘It looks as though I may put on a demonstration exhibition in Hanover (Gallery Haseke, to open in December), with Polke and probably Lueg as well. That’s if the Tartaruga plan doesn’t come off, as I fear it might not. There wouldn’t be much prospect of sales, the gallery is pretty insignificant. It’d be a matter of putting on a show, and a piece of paper with pictures and text.’

The young art students Richter, Polke, Konrad Lueg and Manfred Kuttner met in February 1962 at the annual atelier tour at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. The following semester they were all enrolled in the class of the Informel painter Karl Otto Götz, who had taught Kuttner since 1960. Richter had studied with Ferdinand Macketanz in his first semester; Lueg switched to Götz from Bruno Goller, and Polke from Gerhard Hoehme’s class (to which he returned for the summer of 1963). During their year with Götz, the four painters found themselves briefly united under the rubric of Capitalist Realism. At that time, exchange with friends was particularly important for Richter: ‘Contact with like-minded painters – I need to be in a group, you get nowhere on your own. We partly developed our ideas through talking. Being stuck out in a village somewhere would be a nightmare for me. I need my setting. In that way, exchanges with other artists, and specifically working with Lueg and Polke, is important for me, and gives me some of the information I need.’ But it was Gerhard Richter who was always careful to avoid all appearance of a defined group of artists. In a letter to Heiner Friedrich of January 1965, he complained at being thought of as a kind of second zero group. The exhibition they put on together in May 1963 in Kaiserstrasse in Düsseldorf remained the only time the four artists shared a common cause. ‘There were the rare moments where we would do something together, and made a kind of emergency union,’ Richter recalled in 1993, ‘apart from that we were mostly in competition with each other.’ And so Manfred Kuttner was still a part of things when they presented themselves in an improvised front yard exhibition at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal in February 1964, six months later; by the time of the actual exhibition, he was no longer in the group. And at the Living with Pop show in Berges’ furniture store, Lueg and Richter excluded their fellow student Polke.

What Haseke had in mind was a joint show with Polke and Richter, followed by individual shows from all three of the Düsseldorf artists. Then, on 18 August, Polke was forced to admit he didn’t have enough material: ‘I hope it doesn’t throw your plans out too much if I tell you I’m in no position to mount a solo exhibition in December, I don’t have enough pictures. But perhaps I can make the following suggestion: a joint show in December, with Richter, as planned, or else put off my solo exhibition to some future date. I would do everything in my power to see I had enough pictures for it.’ In the end, the joint exhibition
of Polke and Richter took place in March 1966. A solo show by Lueg followed in June.\(^7\)

August Haseke had himself studied at the Kunstkademie Düsseldorf from 1954 to 1959, for a time alongside Konrad Lueg, who had introduced him to his friends Polke and Richter. On graduation, Haseke had moved to Hanover to take up a teaching job. On 19 November 1965 he opened his gallery on Alleestrasse 14, with an exhibition by the Düsseldorf painter Gotthard Graubner. There followed shows by Siegfried Neuhausen and Raimund Girke, both ex-Düsseldorf students as well, but living in Hanover. By favourable circumstances – his father-in-law owned a printing firm – the gallerist was able to offer all his painters a small catalogue. The joint exhibition of Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter, from 1 to 26 March 1966 was only the fourth in the history of the young gallery.

In his letter to Heiner Friedrich, Richter had already drawn explicit attention to the experimental nature of the exhibition, and so made clear that he had no hopes of commercial success with the presentation in the gallery. ‘People like Haseke’, he recalled later, ‘they had a job and ran the gallery on the side; it was for love of art, and the social engagement. The commercial aspect didn’t matter so much to them.’\(^8\)

Richter assembled all four artists for a demonstration exhibition as early as April 1963; the show ran from 11 to 26 May in some former commercial premises on Kaiserstrasse 31 A in Düsseldorf. In a letter to the Neue Deutsche Wochenschau he stressed the non-commercial nature of the show, which, considering the unartistic venue, was almost a given: ‘There can be no question of a gallery or museum or exhibition space for this exhibition, which is to be entirely uncommercial.’\(^9\) A few months later, in October 1963, Richter and Lueg put on an exhibition for Capitalist Realism in Berges’ furniture shop under the title Living with Pop, in which they presented pieces of furniture and themselves as living sculptures on white pedestals.

What chiefly appealed to him and Polke about Hanover (more than a commercial exhibition) is suggested in a letter from Richter to Friedrich in August 1965, when he refers to ‘a piece of paper with pictures and text’, because that was exactly what their joint catalogue was to be. Although Richter at this time could only point to a small fold out catalogue from his show at René Block in 1964 – and Polke had nothing at all – they decided against a conventional documentary style of catalogue and in favour of something they would design themselves, an artists’ book. Both were subsequently to attach huge importance to this catalogue, and even list it in their bibliographies.\(^10\)

The foregoing and now in its entirely first-published manuscript edition of the 20-page catalogue clearly demonstrates the collage nature of the work, with its array of sources. Polke and Richter assembled their pictorial and textual content from staged photographs, original formulations, and found texts in pulp fiction. Above all, they drew on the science fiction series Perry Rhodan and the issue of 6 August 1965, entitled ‘Andromeda’s Guardian’. ‘We’d been reading the stuff, and it seemed to fit in with the utopian climate of the 60s, those notions of other planets. The artless quality of those mags seemed to go really well with photographs and magazines, and that gave us our pop content’, Richter said of their weakness for pulp writing in a 1993 interview.
The catalogue presents itself with a double title on front and back of the red cover, that reads now polke/ richter and now richter/ polke. The unusual opening does more than prepare the reader for the unconventional contents. Richter advances another, pragmatic justification for the twofold title: ‘Alphabetically, I come second, but I did more of the work, and that’s maybe why I suggested it. But probably the real reason why it came out like that was just to make the catalogue look more unusual.’ When the reader opens the catalogue at both ends, his eyes are greeted by two short biographies with lists of exhibitions, and the black and white reproduction of a work in the show. With Polke, it is the large-format raster-dot painting Bedroom from 1965, and with Richter his – also recently finished – painting Uncle Rudi. Not for the first time, Richter gives his place of birth as Waltersdorf, though in fact he only moved there at the age of 11 in 1943. Later on, he justified the false information by claiming that the name sounded more interesting and mysterious than the place he was actually born, namely Dresden.14

Gerhard Richter had worked with readymade texts before. On the occasion of his very first opening in autumn 1962 (a joint exhibition with Manfred Kuthner in the Galerie Junge Kunst in Fulda), he played a tape of himself reading the beginning of the story of ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, with a surprise twist later on.15 At the private view of his first solo show at René Block in Berlin on 21 November 1964 (when Richter was not able to be there) the visitors were also treated to his taped readings. Half a year later, Block suggested a larger publication, juxtaposing Richter’s pictures with banal texts.16 On 20 June 1965, Richter put forward various ways of sourcing such texts, including the following: ‘pick a 70 pfennig true crime mag, which is reprinted in full, interspersed with the pictures. Any cuts to be made by me (question of space, evidently). Then the Krimi would become my work.’ By the time Block was forced to cancel the publication in November16, Richter and Polke were already hard at work on their text-picture montage for the Haseke catalogue. Many years later, Richter recalled the collaboration with Polke in conversation with Hans-Ulrich Obrist: ‘We met up, and had a wonderful time. We were cutting and pasting, and laughing ourselves silly the whole time. We took a lot of pleasure in the provocation. Everybody else was doing serious catalogues, and we were taking the mickey.’18 And Richter said elsewhere: ‘At the time we were working on the texts, I was as close with Polke as I’d ever been with anyone.’20

While the printed catalogue masks all traces of the collating, smoothing over the different sources, they are clearly visible in the manuscript edition. In a format of 40 × 27 cm, the manuscript is almost twice the size of the printed version. In January 1966, Polke explains this in a letter to Haseke in terms of the size of typewriter lettering: ‘We had to make it [the catalogue] that big, because typewriter letters are so much bigger than type.’21 Polke and Richter prepared their montage for typesetting with great precision. With the readymade texts, they counted the number of characters per line, and noted the lines per column. The passages they copied out on typewriter followed the line-length of the readymade text. Their original contributions are clearly distinguished because Polke used a lighter shade of paper. Richter also copied out several extended passages of text on his typewriter. Via coloured marks in the margins, these quotations (marked in green) can easily be distinguished from text originally by, or in some cases adapted by, the artists (which are marked in red). The illustrations were stuck down by the artists in the places they would occupy in the catalogue, and their dimensions marked for the printer.

The textual collage begins with a few remarks by Richter about the sizes of his paintings; it is followed by a childhood memory of his sister, and then switches to a short story, in which Richter takes a found text, changing a phrase here and there. There follows a long extract from the Perry Rhodan adventure ‘Andromeda’s Guardian’ which goes into a text by Polke, on the subject of his raster-dots: ‘Believe it or not, I see the world in dots.’ In some parts of the catalogue, because of the refusal to separate or attribute the sources, passages from Perry Rhodan, other magazine fiction, jokes and personal information from the artists flow seemingly indistinguishably into one another. Most strikingly, this happens when Polke and Richter inject themselves into the Perry Rhodan adventures. Then all at once, one reads: ‘Perry Rhodan, Polke and Captain Richter stride through the space that was left by the two lines of Epsalic commands.’

The catalogue is also the source of some of the best known statements of both artists. Richter’s claim that painting is a moral act is still often quoted today, and stands like a motto at the head of his oeuvre. Polke’s statement, ‘We cannot depend on good paintings being made one day: we need to take the matter into our own hands!’ is printed in splendid isolation on the catalogue cover for his 1984 retrospective in Zurich.

The collage text is accompanied by eleven photographs, in which the two artists are shown...
in various stunts and poses. More than forty photographs were taken for the project; the negatives are in Richter’s photographic archive. The unused pictures show alternative or corresponding situations. Thus the large-format group portrait of the Polke and Richter families is supplemented by shots of them at the tea-table. Polke’s ironic pose with the seductive ‘ball-thrower’ on Graf-Adolf-Platz has its pendant with Richter in the t. The used photographs can be put in three groups: portraits of a petit bourgeois family idyll; shots of the two painters, apparently featuring in a detective story of some kind; and provocative stunts in front of the camera. ‘Larking around’, was Richter’s subsequent comment on pictures like the one of him naked, in a lambskin. As had been his plan for the book project with René Block, pictures and text are juxtaposed in absolute irrelation. At the time he asked Block in a letter of 4 May 1965: ‘Should you and the publisher go ahead without me, I’d like to ask you to select and arrange the texts in such a way that there’s no relation at any point. Do you understand – I want them neither to fit in with the pictures nor be in opposition to them.’

In the galerie h catalogue it was only the portrait of the two artists’ families standing outside Richter’s council house on Bensberger Weg 10 that would counter the fantastic interstellar adventures of Perry Rhodan and Co.

Their artist statements, the found texts and the contrived photographs form three separate but intertwined narrative strands that give meaning to the work, such as the texts by themselves do not have, and the pictures alone do not show. Polke’s and Richter’s adaptations of other originals and the integration of these into artistic montages of text and image parallels the use of media images in their art. Nonetheless, the artists lay claim to the other texts as their own. ‘Then the krini would become my work’, Richter had said at the time of the never-realised project with René Block, claiming authorship of quoted material for himself.

On 18 January 1966, Sigmar Polke sent the completed dummy to August Haseke in Hanover. The artists had worked on the project together right to the very end, page 17 of the manuscript names January (‘1/ 66’) as the date of completion – in contrast to the ‘October 1965’ that appears in the text. In his accompanying letter Polke writes ironically about it, but he is clearly proud as well: ‘Here is the design for our catalogue. We think it’s very successful, and will certainly gain a lot of attention of all sorts (I reckon it’s the best catalogue that’s ever been made – till today, anyway…).’

At the exhibition opening on 1 March 1966, August Haseke read from the catalogue. Richter showed thirteen pictures in all, among them The Tiger (No. 78), Uncle Rudi (No. 85) and The Swimmers (No. 90), which at DM 2400 was the most expensive picture in the exhibition. Polke had – in addition to The Bedroom in the catalogue – other large format canvases, including Bavarian, Dublin and Family I. Polke’s exclusive concentration on his raster-dot paintings, and Richter on his grey photograph painting bore out the demonstrative character of the exhibition: both artists presented techniques and subjects that had their orientation towards an objectified and mechanically-reproduced media world. While Polke’s raster-dots imitated cheap offset printing, Richter went for photographic qualities: the documentary black and white, the amateurish
out-of-focus and the refusal of artistic composition. He made photographs by other means, not paintings with the quality of photographs.25 Richter said in a 1972 interview on the translation of photography into painting in his work. Polke’s coarse dots and Richter’s softening and blurring of contours produced a continual indecisiveness and ambivalence.

In one of his rare interviews in May 1966 Polke explained his interest in raster-dots as a pictorial device: ‘I like the impersonality, the neutrality, the industrial quality. Raster dots are a system, a principle, a method, a structure. It breaks up, scatters, organizes and equalizes. Then I like the way the enlargement of the image creates a commotion in the dots, a quick change between identifying the image and not being able to identify it, the indecisiveness and ambivalence of the situation – its openness. I like it because I think it corresponds to me.’26 Richter then had more time for some of Polke’s other work, and as he confessed in a letter to his gallerist Heiner Friedrich on 17 December 1964: ‘Polke: I think he’s very gifted, much more than Lueg. But I think his “Polke dot” paintings are awful, he has picked up my difficulty with transcribing images, enlarges photographs one dot at a time (a process I like very much on account of its absurd dull-wittedness), but the outcome is decoration and arts-and-crafts. His varnish paintings, on the other hand, which he is carrying on with, I think are excellent, artistic and original.27 Since then, he has revised his premature judgment on Polke’s raster-dot paintings, and sees their painterly qualities.

Two days after the opening, Richter wrote to Friedrich: ‘Hanover was great. The show looks terrific. No sales.’28 Later on, Haseke would sell the small Curtain (48–15) for DM 180, and he bought for himself Richter’s Chair in Profile (98), which was listed at DM 800. The reviews (three in total) were all favourable, with the conversion of photographic subjects the focus of attention.29 ‘All painters should paint from photographs’30 was the title of Rudolf Jüdes’ review in the Hanoversche Rundschau, and he quoted a short extract from the textual collage without referring to the catalogue. The other two reviews made no mention of the publication that had been so important to Polke and Richter.

Dietmar Elger, Head of the Richter Archive

Translated by Michael Hofmann

Opposite:
Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter at galerie h, Hanover, 1966
Courtesy Gerhard Richter Archive © Gerhard Richter, 2014
Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke

Umwandlung, 1968
offset print on lightweight card, 46.5 × 67.2cm

1 Letter from Gerhard Richter to René Block, 6 August 1965. Archive Atelier Gerhard Richter, Cologne.


6 Letter from Sigmar Polke to August Haseke, 18 August 1965. Archive August Haseke, Cologne.

7 The Solo Exhibition of Konrad Lueg was the seventh exhibition at the galerie h and took place from the 10 June–2. July 1966. On the occasion of the exhibition a leaflet was published with biographies, quotes and an inlay of a silkscreen poster. In between Haseke Jiri Kolar and Antonio Calderara.

8 D. Elger, Gerhard Richter, Maler, Cologne 2007, p.119.


10 Letter from Gerhard Richter to Heiner Friedrich, 17 August 1965, op. cit.


15 Comparable: letter from Gerhard Richter to Wieland Förster, 14 October 1962. Gerhard Richter Archiv, Dresden. ‘On occasion of the opening I had recorded, ‘The Emperor’s new clothes’, very beautiful, slightly altered, the child in the end was put into the Dungeon, because it understood nothing, nothing about art.’

16 Comparable: letter from René Block to Gerhard Richter, 3 May 1965, Archiv Atelier Gerhard Richter, Cologne.


18 Comparable: letter from René Block to Gerhard Richter, 18 November 1965, Archiv Atelier Gerhard Richter, Cologne. ‘Sadly the book project is held up more and more. There must be some very cruel scheming at play.’


20 D. Elger, Gerhard Richter, Maler, op. cit., p. 120.

21 Letter from Sigmar Polke to August Haseke, 18 January 1966, Archiv August Haseke, Cologne.

22 Another motif, in Klebeumbruch on p.10 illustrated in the left, is however not available there anymore.

23 Letter from Gerhard Richter to René Block, 4 May 1965, Archiv Atelier Gerhard Richter, Cologne.

24 Letter from Sigmar Polke to August Haseke, 6 January 1966, Archive August Haseke, Cologne.


Text originally published in the exhibition catalogue, for the exhibition polke/richter at the galerie h in 1966.

A lot of my pictures are 150 × 200 cm, a lot are 130 × 150 cm, or 130 × 140 or 120 cm, some are much smaller, maybe 40 × 30 cm, or even 18 × 24 cm; to date my biggest pictures are 200 × 190 cm. Maybe I’ll only paint little pictures in future, or only middle-sized ones and a few big ones, I can’t say.

A childhood memory: I let my little sister toboggan down the hill, without thinking that she was bound to crash into an iron railing at the bottom. The result was a deep wound on her forehead; it required stitches, and I got a beating.

Carlton watched the front gardens, the birds and the women, and then it suddenly dawned on him – he knew he would never be able to copy all that. He asked me for a cigarette, and took his leave.

Amidst the roaring of the unleashed nuclear thrusters, the massive space globe lifted off the grey surface of Sexta. The blinding bursts of energy spewed out by its goal-sized engine-maws were like little suns, and glowing waves of debris raced across the plain ahead of the radiating roll of fire. The men at HQ didn’t feel much of it. A few of them glanced at their dead screens; the rest of them were inured to the spectacle.

Perry Rhodan sat in the command position from which he could survey the whole control centre, and whose curiously-shaped desk had its own intercom and telecom connections. His wife Mory had sat down on one of the surrounding chairs, as had Melbar Kasom – though he required a special seat – and Atlan. Gucky’s hammock was empty.

The beavermouse wasn’t around – probably scurrying around the spaceship somewhere. Rhodan managed to give his wife a curt nod as they took off. During the mission, they would be comrades, no more no less, comrades in a fight whose end might be found somewhere in eternity. Their emotions had to take second place to their responsibility for mankind’s space-empire.

The Halutian’s broad mouth split into a grin. His large red eyes sparkled. His nodding seemed almost human. ‘Could have been worse,’ he said calmly. ‘The biggest mistake was mine. I should have given the storage sector of my plan brain my knowledge of spores… Believe it or not, I see the world in dots.’

‘I love dots. I am married to many dots. I support happiness for dots.

The dots are my brothers. (I am a dot as well.) We used to play together, today we have gone our separate ways. We meet at family occasions and ask each other: how’s it going?

‘You know, Elly’, he said perfectly calmly, ‘we are only allowed to love things that have no style, e.g. dictionaries, photographs, nature, me and my pictures!’ I sighed: ‘How right you are. Style is an act of violence, and we are not violent, and…’ ‘… and we don’t want war’, he ended for me, ‘no more wars!’ When I met the love of my life, I was so much in love with her that I would have married her on the spot. But there was something we had in common as well as our great love: looking after our relations. She had lost her father early on, and was looking after her mother and sisters. I was looking after both my parents. So we were in the same boat. The time flew by, and we were terribly happy.'
It’s good that they report on it. Although they should point out that what is at stake here are individual destinies.

I want to be like everyone else, think what everyone else thinks, do what gets done anyway.

The heavy armoured bulkhead of the airlock slid almost inaudibly into the hulls of the vessel. Perry Rhodan, Polke and Captain Richter strode through the space that was left by the two lines of Epsalic commandos. Rhodan stopped at the opening of the airlock.


‘Lieutenant Afg Moro, sir!’

‘I need one of your men!’

‘Sir, I…’

‘Not you. You stay here and await further instructions!’

Lieutenant Moro spun round. ‘Sergeant Man Hatra, escort the Senior Administrator!’

One of the Epsals, 1.60 meters tall but almost as wide, stomped up with echoing strides and stopped in front of Perry Rhodan. He wore the standard uniform, but was carrying an unusually heavy disintegrator as well as an impulse blaster; an earthling would have needed both hands to carry it. The Epsal had it in a special holster, while the equally heavy disintegrator was stuck casually in his armpit.

I have a great deal of time on my hands because I am alone. My husband died two years ago, and my two sons are both married. My life revolved around those three men. When there were still the four of us, life was full and beautiful. What would become of me without values I can live my life by today? As before, duty stands at the pinnacle. I have widened the sphere of my duties a little, to take in others. Classical music – which used to connect me and my husband internally – now hurts me to listen to, but I find I cannot do without it, it is life itself to me. Good books, nature, and not least visits with my beloved children and my adorable grandchildren are a cornerstone of my existence. Following lively and stimulating pastimes, I like to meditate. I sit very still and relive the wonderful times I had with my husband and sons. Even a 61-year-old woman can be life-affirming.

We cannot depend on good paintings being made one day: we need to take the matter into our own hands!

‘Nonsense!’ chipped in his logic sector. ‘Tolot is in the same fix as we are. If he ever wants to get out of here alive, he will have to support us.’ Atlan set his shoulder to the wheel.

‘We need to act’, he said resolutely. He could hear Henderson breathe a deep sigh of relief. A smile creased his face.

In all my life I have never snored, no matter what the tape machine claims. I know that good painters don’t snore.

My intelligence has no limits. Presumably the excitement was still upon him. ‘It was – it was terrible!’ Sherriff Beatty had to sit down. ‘Do you mean to say the driver of the car turned and wilfully ran over the girl a second time?’ Smiles nodded.

‘That’s exactly what happened.’ Beatty lit a cigarette. ‘And why has it taken you till now to come forward, Mr Smiles? Why didn’t you tell us what you saw straight away?’

Smiles gave a nervous laugh.

I would like to have a lot of children, I would like
to walk down the street, and have all the children call out Daddy, and I would lay my hand on the head of one and say, what’s your name, how old are you, be a good boy, say hello to your mother.

My wife is 4 cm shorter than me, but since I walk with a stoop, it looks as though I am only 1.68 cm as well. My mother-in-law is very small.

The aspect of the yellow-grey sandy slopes and the jagged mountain peaks filled Perry with dismay. Without having to take recourse to scientific analysis he understood that such a world could not have come about by natural means. Someone must have built it. He had kitted it out with a sun, and gravity, and a breath-taking atmosphere. Why – that was neither here nor there. The oppressive part of this was the notion that men would have to put in another couple of millennia on earth before reaching the state where they were able to construct a planet.

Today he has many friends. They want to give this intelligent man a job in the pharmaceutical industry, just as soon as his English gets a little better. A major publisher is interested in his memoirs.

In wild despair, the Nomad Scout leaped up and hurled himself against the locked airlock of the craft. He rebounded, returned to his senses. The alien guard was still watching him. Crash-Ovaron was staring at him. What a creature! He supposed he could take on the best hunters in the city.

The alien made a move. He pointed in the direction of the city. It was a threatening gesture, all right. It commanded Crash-Ovaron to withdraw.

‘I need the craft,’ said Crash-Ovaron distinctly, but at the same moment he understood that his words were but unintelligible sounds for the guard.

The guard’s arm pointed implacably in the direction of the city. Crash-Ovaron’s body was racked with pains. The time to lay was approaching. Even before the chase was over, he would have to have found a place, or else he and his brood would die together. Slowly the alien came up to him. He looked resolute.

Crash-Ovaron understood that there was only one chance left for him to change the situation in his favour. He had to take down the para-block, and ask the stranger for help.

Crash-Ovaron shuddered. He vowed that they would all die because they were forcing him to cast off his dignity.

All painters and everyone else should be made to paint from photographs. And in the same way that I do (which means the choice of photographs as well). The resulting paintings should be exhibited everywhere and be put up on walls in flats, and restaurants and offices, in stations and churches, I really mean everywhere. Then big painting contests would be organised, and the judges would weigh up choice of theme and accuracy and speed of reproduction, and hand out medals. Every day there would be reports on radio and TV about the latest paintings. After a while, laws might come into operation to punish people who hadn’t painted enough photographs. This would go on for maybe four hundred years, and at the end of that time, the painting of photographs would be banned in Germany.

The wail of the sirens stopped him in his tracks. Colonel Carl Rugo gave a shout of dismay. Reflexively, Rhodan’s glance brushed the controls that were nearest to him. What he saw there told him about the full dimensions of the approaching catastrophe.
All the nuclear engines of the CREST II were failing. That meant CREST II would fall. Bang in the middle of the battlefield outside the city.

I am averagely healthy, averagely tall (172 cm) and averagely attractive. I mention it because you have to look like that to paint good pictures. Paintings are made following a recipe. Their manufacture must happen without any inner participation on the part of the painter, the way streets are paved, or house-fronts painted. Making paintings is not an artistic act.

Harskin looked in the direction indicated and spotted a giant monster. It was like a sort of living island, a cross between a turtle and a dinosaur. The mighty skull was protected with armour plating, but the expression of the eyes was not at all hostile or bloodthirsty. Round the monster’s neck was a kind of basket, with three Gnorphs sitting in it. The three scaly creatures looked with curiosity and compassion at three beings swimming in the water. Evidently a rescue party. The girl looked at the photograph intently, then pointed at a man with her red-varnished fingernail. ‘That’s him!’ she said excitedly. ‘And no possibility of a mistake?’ asked Jo. The girl shook her head energetically. ‘No, Jo, I’m not mistaken about this.’ Jo folded up the newspaper clipping, and put it away. ‘You’ve been a big help, Dolly,’ he said.

Perry stood on the terrace, sipping at his drink, and said softly, his voice slightly quaking: ‘See this beetle here on my sleeve.’ And he pointed to a little beetle that was on the point of flying away. ‘You mustn’t disturb them, you must never disturb them, leave everything the way it is, not plan anything, not make up anything, not add anything, not leave anything out…’ He hesitated before going on: ‘It is this state of wise modesty that allows us to grow beyond ourselves, to do something that exceeds our own intelligence, that we can only appreciate with our hearts. I don’t mean it requires passivity, but…’ – with a subtle smile he watched the beetle fly off – ‘…but it will be a form of action less noisy than we are used to, but much more powerful and comprehensive, transforming our being in a way that will make us shudder…’ His gaze lost itself in the infinite space of the room, and we understood that at that moment he had given us the gift of the cosmos. We stood there for a long time in silence, till Icho Tolot, the powerful cheerful Halutian, brought us fresh wine.

If someone wants to become a painter, he needs to consider first whether he wouldn’t be better suited to some other activity: teacher, minister, professor, manual worker, assembly line, because only truly great people can paint!

The last patient left at half past ten. Unfortunately things had transpired in such a way that they went to the surgery on Saturdays as well. The doctor took off his white tunic and washed his hands. As he did so, he looked at himself in the mirror.

When Paddy awoke from deep sleep, the craft was floating through space. He took a look out of the porthole. The eternal cosmic night surrounded him. Behind them shimmered Schaet, on their left hung the golden orb of Alpheratz, and in front of them the stars of Androeda – Adil, the body, Mirach, the loins, Almach the shoulder.

‘I have to scan now!’ Icho said in Intercosmo. The language had proved easy to learn. He mastered it flawlessly. The only thing that gave him trouble was that he couldn’t speak as loudly as he was used to, otherwise the walls would have shaken.
There was not much furniture in the room. Three of the items were comfy chairs. 'I just need to scan!' he said.

It was eleven o’clock. I was sitting with my father on the terrace of the Carlton Hotel under a big sun umbrella. In contrast with the wide blue sea, and the curls of white foam, the crazy events of the night just past seemed like something from a dream… Or a nightmare perhaps… Shining blue-and-white striped sun umbrellas along the beach...

Smell of the sea. Happy babble of swimmers’ voices up and down the four kilometres of beach. Mingled with the calls of ice cream sellers, mermaids with slender naked forms dipped into the water and surfaced snortingly. 'Marvellous,' I said. My old man didn’t have a moment to answer. He was just opening his breakfast egg.

They were strapped into their moulded seats, racing towards the inferno. The opalescent liquid began to surge, pushed its way into their mouths and noses and gave a feeling of drowning. Icho Tolot began to surge, pushed its way into their mouths and noses and gave a feeling of drowning. Icho Tolot surfaced snortingly. 'Marvellous,' I said. My old man didn’t have a moment to answer. He was just opening his breakfast egg.

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Could he stand to remain where he was and work out a problem whose solution might not even impact the situation? Was it correct to base a hypothesis on just two analogical processes? The button of the overall prom line flashed green. The machine was ready to accept the new instructions. Perry clenched and unclenched his fist. Then he punched the button decisively. The green light went out. ‘Problem,’ said Perry hoarsely, ‘establishing the structural parameters of two six-dimensional force fields. Guidance: the force fields in a synchrotronic particle accelerator…’

Within seconds, the machine was grappling with the problem.

If it was up to her, all policemen would wear windowpane uniforms, and they would replace the bird of state with plaid. Everyone would carry spotted handkerchiefs.

There were three of them, shimmering in the intense blue. For aeons, they had been floating over their world, that was dipped in dark red light. Their flight was silent, although they were enormous. They didn’t follow any particular course, only their appearance over Kroo, the biggest city of the world, was predictable. One hundred and twenty times they would appear singly, and then they would appear all three together.

My husband likes a drink. I put it in such a way so that you can see I have a sense of fun, and don’t mind the occasional tipple myself. Only the way my husband drinks, that’s deleterious to his health. He’s forever finding an occasion to celebrate and drinking to other people’s health. That’s what makes him so popular among friends and colleagues – but less so with me and his family. Because he pays for this habit of his in time, money, cosiness and finally also health.

As a vegetarian teetotaller myself (though I don’t mind a laugh), my role is difficult. Can you understand that? People smile when I raise objections, even if they’re fully justified. That’s why I’m turning to you for support now. Maybe you can make my husband see sense, I know he’s a great admirer of yours. I know that for a fact. Perhaps you can raise it with him some time. Someone who is in difficulty or has a screw loose shouldn’t paint, he should seek out a psychiatrist. Painting should be reserved for healthy people. The newlywed Inge says: ‘The things my father gives away rarely have much in the way of value.’ ‘That’s true,’ growls her husband. ‘You’re the best example of that!’

S. Polke and G. Richter, October 1965

Translated by Michael Hofmann

All archival images courtesy Gerhard Richter Archive
© Gerhard Richter, 2014
Installation view: galerie h, Hanover, 1966
Courtesy Gerhard Richter Archive
© Gerhard Richter, 2014

Sigmar Polke
Bavarian, 1965
acrylic dispersion on canvas
159.4 x 124.5cm
on loan from a private collection
Gerhard Richter
Flämische Krone, 1965
oil on canvas, 89.5 × 110cm
on loan from a private collection

Gerhard Richter
Kleine Tü, 1968
oil on canvas, 50 × 50cm

Sigmar Polke
Freundinnen I, 1967
gouache and silkscreen offset on card
418 × 60.5cm
Sigmar Polke
Don Quichotte, 1968
dispersion on canvas, 80.3 × 60.3cm
on loan from a private collection

Gerhard Richter
Stadtbild Ha, 1968
oil on canvas, 180 × 150cm
on loan from a private collection

Gerhard Richter
Kleiner Parkplatz, 1965
oil on canvas, 28 × 58cm
Gerhard Richter
Wolke, 1969
oil and graphite on canvas, 99.9 × 80cm

Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 1966
watercolour on paper, 94 × 124cm
on loan from a private collection
Gerhard Richter
*Grau*, 1970
oil on canvas, 99.5 × 80cm

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled (Franz Dahlem)*, 1969–1972
dispersion and enamel on canvas, 50 × 40cm
At the 1972 Venice Biennale, in the main hall of the German pavilion, which was given over to his work, the then forty-year-old painter Gerhard Richter showed forty-eight portraits of noted authors, composers, philosophers and scientists. Richter had chosen these four-dozen famous men, all of them born in the nineteenth century, and all of them imbued with something of its spirit, and had painted their likenesses with great care, all in the same grey, the same slightly out-of-focus manner, and in the same format (70 × 55 cm) from encyclopedia photographs. The resulting sense of uniformity was intensified by hanging the pictures at the same height on white walls.

People, Landscape, Aeroplanes

The thematic range of Richter’s work as painter and graphic artist, in which so much of our daily life is reflected, makes art-historical classifications much more difficult. He has always painted people, but there are also animals, landscapes, clouds, townscapes, buildings, furnishings, aeroplanes and cars. One could almost make a list of subjects in chronological sequence, but there are repeated overlaps, and sometimes a subject will find itself picked up afresh under different painterly conditions. Richter’s landscapes from 1968 to 1971 have been put through an exhaustive stylistic analysis.

Gerhard Richter
Ihrwalddörrner See, 1965
oil on canvas, 120 × 150 cm
on loan from a private collection

Gerhard Richter
Vierwaldstätter See, 1969
oil on canvas, 120 × 150 cm

reflections on gerhard richter’s paintings of human subjects/axel hinrich murken and crista murken-altrogge
But even more than the landscapes, it is the paintings of people that form a sort of continuum throughout the oeuvre of this diversely gifted painter. It would be possible to separate Richter’s human subjects into various different groups: there are the anonymous individuals (the secretary, the pilot, the female gymnast); the usually unidentified family pictures (family, family by the sea, mother and daughter); pictures of celebrities (Teresz Andeszka, Helga Matura, Jacqueline Kennedy); group pictures (of blacks, female swimmers, sailors, nurses); and the portraits of artists, collectors and gallerists from the personal and professional surroundings of the painter. Further, there are pictures of historical figures (Philipp Wilhelm, Hitler, Mao, Elizabeth II). As a distinct sub-group there are also single and group pictures of doctors and nurses, to which our special attention will be given in this essay.

Universality Foregrounded

Richter deploys art as a tool through which to interrogate visual phenomena, just as in earlier decades philosophers questioned language (Heidegger, Wittgenstein). Hence his preference for anonymous subjects, his use of varying degrees of blur, and avoidance of over-specific titles for his pictures. And even in the cases of portraits bearing first and last names and titles, their personal individuality would be returned to them only if one knew of other pictures, or was familiar with the persons in question.

The interchangeability, the anonymity that so paradoxically shines through, even in the case of commissioned works that emphasise the universality of the subjects, is especially prominent in the single and group portraits. In the cases of works bearing a name or a group designation, one would tend to expect some kind of closer identification. But such an expectation is only loosely fulfilled. As examples we might adduce named pictures from the demi-monde or the emphasis on a particular calling. The bases for these works were found by the artist in salacious magazines where the reader is fed a diet of thrills and spills, love and violent death in quick-motion time.

Typical of such tabloid contents are the ‘family photographs’ of the Frankfurt prostitute Helga Matura. Following her murder by an unknown assailant, these pictures were leaked to the German press. Gerhard Richter painted two pictures of this woman. They are directly based on the magazine photographs.

In the case of the painting of Matura with her fiancé, there was no need even of additional blurring; the original photograph was already blurred.

Once again, it’s only the name that asserts the identity of an individual of whom there is otherwise little trace. It takes knowledge of the events associated with the photograph (prostitution, engagement, the villa in Munich, murder, money) – acquired by looking up back issues of the magazine in question – to create something of a context for the interpretation of the figure.

But even such information remains trapped in the realm of cliché and generality – as tends to be the case with such magazines. The painter took a seemingly innocent engagement photograph of an averagely attractive woman called Matura (mature, maturity, the Matura, the German ‘A’ level), and by attention to the subject, brilliant technique and large-scale format (200 × 100 cm) distorted it so that a reverse effect was the inevitable result.
It is possible to read Helga Matura and related works of Richter’s (Coffin Bearers, Wee Girls, Spanish Nudes) as a sort of contemporary Vanitas, or picture of warning, comparable to the Demoiselles d’Avignon of Picasso (1907) in a tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages.

The blurred grisaille technique, that only three generations previously was deployed to lyrical effect by the French painter Eugène Carrière, signals the emptiness and uninterestingness of human wishes in Gerhard Richter. The endlessly soft gradation of greys bespeaks a depressive, hollowed out sense of life.

**Group Portrait of Nurses**

On the poster announcing Richter’s first exhibition in Zürich (1966), which uses a photograph taken by the artist, individual characteristics similarly fall away. The white overall and the two signs on the right gate-post permit only a vague guess as to the activity of the man thus depicted. It could be a doctor or health worker, one thinks, standing in front of the premises of a clinic. In fact, the building is the ophthalmological department of the polyclinic in Burgstädt, East Germany. The original photograph comes from the files of Dr. Eufinger. The flattening, the suppression of casual details is compensated for by the professional stature of the person in question.

In contrast, the painter made portrait heads of the *Eight Student Nurses* in the same year, carefully following press photographs of the young American women who were all stabbed to death by a madman. The photographic model was supplied by *Time* magazine of 22 July 1966.

Here, the identifiable individual features, accentuated by their racial characteristics, have once more...
Gerhard Richter
_Uecker_, 1964
oil on canvas, 47 × 29cm
been voided by lack of context and identical presenta-
tion. The memory, blurred over time, of an unspeakable
crime allows these heads to become those of any
random assortment of young women. The monoto-
nous, eight-fold repetition, the refusal of any narrative,
are enough to disable from the outset any efforts by the
spectator to respond to the eight portraits individually.

Serial Monotony
The reductive principle of the uniform series is
impossible to ignore in the case of the 48 Portraits
we began by discussing. An early inkling of it was
present in the Eight Student Nurses eight years
previously. The row of portraits of famous men from
our recent past, in whom, on account of their different
achievements and fields of endeavour we should really
expect a maximum of characterisation, ends up boring
us rigid at first blush.

The uniformly grey painting technique with the
typical blurred contours we have seen in other Richter
pictures equalises all subjects to just ‘one’ or ‘Man’.
Only the names continue to evoke important writers,
composers, physicists, chemists, philosophers,
psychologists and doctors. No painters among them,
not one.

But even if we look at a picture from this line-up on
its own, we find ourselves missing the artistic char-
acterisation we have become accustomed to in the
works of Cézanne, Gauguin, Paula Modersohn-Becker
or Ernst Kirchner. Richter attaches little value to an arti-
ficial form of language or to emotional expressiveness.

The Richter Portrait
Gerhard Richter covers over everything typical or
expected that one might otherwise cling to with
a smooth, masking veneer of grey paint. As an
element in a greater ensemble, any face, no matter
how markedly spiritual, is in danger of becoming
uninteresting to the eye. Something of the effect
may be experienced in a gallery of old family
portraits, even though some of these will continue
to differentiate themselves by details, posture, colour
and intensity.

The painstaking, quasi-directorial presentation
of the portraits at the Biennale in 1972, or in the
exhibition catalogue, gives one a sense of walking
past or leafing through different views of the same
model in a film book; from an en face picture
(Alfred Mombert) to right and left profile and then
the next en face (John Dos Passos). Where the Pop
artist Andy Warhol achieves variety through the use
of colour in his identical silk-screen prints of Marilyn
Monroe (aligning him with the classical tradition of
Expressionism), Gerhard Richter’s series of famous
men does something of the opposite.

In the face of a series that mocks the school-
textbook-like pantheon of greats, Rilke’s hallowed
assertion, ‘You must change your life’ (1908) becomes
nothing but an empty slogan. There are no
illusions in these paintings, just the endless iteration of human
life. The ground-notes are despair and agnosticism
towards the possibilities of a positive view of the world,
just as they are in the critical theories of the empirical
sciences: ‘Around us are pseudo-events to which
we adjust with a false consciousness adapted to see
these events as true and real, and even as beautiful.
In the society of men the truth resides now less in what
things are than in what they are not’ (R. D. Laing).

Pictures of human beings are a substantial part
of Richter’s work, but still only a part: they are among
a host of subjects and methods that Richter has followed. But, as in the case of Cézanne, formal considerations and painterly analyses of reality give rise to magnificent portraiture.

Richter’s own uncertainty as he interrogates his predecessors is propelled by a soberly scientific, questing attitude: ‘There is no clearer statement that I can make about reality than my own relation to reality, and that is informed by blurring, uncertainty, provisionality, partiality and what have you,’ says Gerhard Richter. For that reason he favoured in his paintings of ordinary people and other realistic subjects the second hand photograph, which is seen ‘as a picture, without all the baggage I connected with art.’ Emotionally freighted disturbances are therefore excluded from the very outset.

It seems likely that this is why – almost alone among artists – Richter has never painted a self-portrait.

In attempting to summarise Richter’s portraits, one might put it this way: that, while avoiding traditional formulas, they are clear, painterly definitions of the people of our time. A hundred years ago, Gerhard Richter might have become a writer, composer, philosopher or scientist. Maybe that’s why he didn’t include a painter among his forty-eight cultural heroes.

Contemporary cutting-edge art – pictorial art – is, to use the now celebrated dictum of the American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth: ‘art after philosophy.’ Or, to leave the last word to Richter himself: ‘Seeing as there are no more philosophers and priests, artists are the most important people in the world.’

Axel Hinrich Murken, medical professor and art historian and Crista Murken-Altrogge, art historian
The art historian Robert Storr has described the connection between Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke as one of the 'most beneficial exchanges between two first-rank artists in modernism’s history'. He harks back to the reciprocal influence that existed between Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, or Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, to underline an aesthetic dynamic that profoundly impacted on the course of contemporary art and postmodern discourse. The careers of Richter and Polke — two luminaries of painting — were entwined by biography and circumstance. Their relationship and the impetus for their art largely originates from their experiences as refugees from the former East Germany. Richter attended art school amongst the rubble of Dresden’s past and under the stifling authority of Socialism. He defected to the West in 1961, two months before the Berlin Wall was erected, in search of creative freedom. The family of the younger Polke was expelled from their Silesian village in 1945, and fled the repression of East German life eight years later. The pair united as friends at the avant-garde Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1962, where they were drawn together by their shared outlook and status as outsiders.

During the summer of that year, Richter, Polke and their friends Manfred Kuttner and Konrad Lueg (later the gallerist Konrad Fischer) joined the class of the Informel painter Karl Otto Götz, where they formed a tight-knit circle of somewhat competitive allies. As a Düsseldorf native, the well-connected, well-informed Lueg became their leader, and it was he who introduced the group to American Pop art via an all-important January 1963 issue of Art International. Seeing reproductions of Roy Lichtenstein’s paintings was a revelation; they had discovered an art that circumvented inherited and prevailing artistic movements and referred directly to images of modern life. This was the way forward that they had been collectively searching for. They saw in Lichtenstein’s work a kind of conceptually driven anti-art and were immediately driven to further develop their nascent experiments with mass media imagery. The young artists set about creating equally individual and original styles that acknowledged many of the influences forming West German culture. Having experienced life during both Nazi and Communist regimes, and now a society essentially occupied by American military and cultural interests, Richter and Polke assumed an attitude of wry cynicism and politicised detachment in their art. Their practice rejected all dogma or narrowing of the truth and they would both become defined by their own unique brand of aesthetic indifference.

Richter began to copy found black-and-white amateur and photojournalistic snapshots, which he regarded as having ‘no style, no concept, no judgment’. Among these early paintings, the monochromatic Table (1962, private collection) has been cited as the template for much of his subsequent work. The image of a designer table was copied directly from an advertisement in the Italian interiors magazine Domus and then partially erased with broad, sweeping strokes of paint. The chosen motif can be seen as a reflection on the consumerist culture Richter now found himself living in (a testament to the post-war Wirtschaftswunder or economic miracle), but the overpainting interferes with the illusion of representation and makes plain its status as a painterly construct. The conflicting modes of figural and gestural painting opened the way for
Richter’s further exploitation of banal, everyday photographs, as well as the objective examination of pure abstraction, which stressed the physical act of painting itself.

For Sigmar Polke, the example set by American Pop art provided the stimulus for a similar focus on consumer products and appropriated imagery. Yet his faux naïve paintings of goods such as socks, sausages and biscuits displayed a decidedly sardonic overtone that contrasted markedly with Richter’s dispassionate methodology. Polke would also delve more noticeably into the techniques of photomechanical reproduction by recreating the raster-dots used to print halftone images. His adoption of the ‘raster dots’ (similar to the coloured Benday dots mimicked by Lichtenstein) allowed Polke to ‘treat the whole surface in the same way — like Cézanne — and to treat all subjects in the same way: a horse, a woman, an ass, etc’. For his first experiment, Polke selected a newspaper photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald and manually replicated the image’s individual dots by dipping the rubber tip of a pencil into ink and using it as a stamp. This painstaking procedure allowed no space for personal expression or emotion, but the subject was clearly a loaded one: earlier in 1963, President John F. Kennedy made a declaration of solidarity with West Germany in Berlin and was assassinated several months later. Polke was thereby following the quintessential Pop strategy of evoking tension between a ‘hot’ subject and its ‘cool’ delivery.

The Rasterbild paintings that followed typically replicated far more mundane subjects, showing nameless people and unidentifiable places, although the subtext of Polke’s chosen motifs remained an important aspect throughout. These paintings disrupted the precise, uniform nature of raster-dots by enlarging and blurring areas, and by welcoming errors in the original print or mistakes of Polke’s own making. The images therefore became destabilised, inviting the viewer to question its reliability. In the same way that Richter was blurring his paintings of photographs to create an ambiguity at the heart of his imagery, Polke’s trademark raster-dots assert the essentially abstract nature of all images as well as the inscrutable nature of reality.

Polke and Richter first exhibited together in May 1963, alongside their colleagues Kuttner and Lueg. All four artists were looking for gallery representation and had decided to take matters into their own hands by renting a vacant shop for a show. Richter wrote to a newsreel company to explain the trailblazing nature of the exhibition: ‘For the first time in Germany, we are showing paintings for which such terms as Pop Art, Junk Culture, Imperialist or Capitalist Realism, New Objectivity, Naturalism, German Pop and the like are appropriate. Pop art recognises the modern mass media as genuine cultural phenomenon and turns their attributes, formulations and content, through artifice, into art. It thus fundamentally changes the face of modern painting and inaugurates an aesthetic revolution … Pop art is not an American invention and we do not regard it as an import though the concepts and terms were mostly coined in America and caught on more rapidly there than here in Germany. This art is pursuing its own organic and autonomous growth in this country; the analogy with American Pop Art stems from those well-defined psychological, cultural and economic factors that are the same here as they are in America.’
This statement was the first use of the term ‘Capitalist Realism’, a parody of East Germany’s state-imposed style of ‘Socialist Realism’ and Pop Art’s rootedness in a capitalist consumer society. Of all the ‘isms’ listed in Richter’s letter, this was the one to which he and Lueg returned later the same year with their exhibition and performance piece, Living with Pop: A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism in which they appropriated the entirety of a Berges department store in Düsseldorf. Throughout the shop were installations, objects, paintings and actions, Richter himself sitting on a sofa on a pedestal, reading a detective novel with a documentary on the television in the background. Other props included the works of Winston Churchill and antlers from stags supposedly shot between 1938 and 1942. Polke did not participate in the event due to a minor falling out with Richter, but they did stage two further group shows under the Capitalist Realism banner: Neo-Dada, Pop, Décollage, Capitalist Realism at Galerie René Block, Berlin in 1964 and Capitalist Realism: Richter, Lueg & Polke at Galerie Orez, The Hague in 1965.

According to Robert Hughes, Capitalist Realism was ‘about objects of desire, seen from a distance. The things Polke started piling into his paintings — cake, liverwurst, plastic tubs, etc. — were excruciatingly hackneyed, with none of the gloss and glamour of American Pop, but they also had a muffled political dimension ... they were precisely what the Germany he had left behind did not have; and the split between East and West, for ordinary Germans, lay along the ruts of consumption rather than the peaks of rhetoric’.7 Neither Richter’s muted photo-paintings, nor Polke’s ironically crude pictures blare at us with the energy of advertising. Instead, they strip away the veneers of consumer iconographies and its methods of conveyance, undermining them in a deliberate and subversively understated way. This was Pop enacted on a personal and domestic scale, and it is through this that they offered a critique of contemporary value systems and the hypocrisy of a society that seemed to blithely ignore its dark past. Richter and Polke’s Capitalist Realist artworks gave Pop art the sharp political edge that was usually only tangentially apparent in the works of their British and American counterparts. But Richter would later regret inventing the name, as he had not joined forces with Polke to start a movement and he did not wish to be confined by an overriding conceptual agenda. Both artists wanted their work to remain open, ambiguous and unaffiliated to any ideology, program or style. Towards this end they operated within the gap that opened up between the photographic image and the subject it represented. Neither abstract nor figurative but existing simultaneously as either, neither or both, Richter and Polke found a way to expose and challenge the conventions of seeing and reading an image.

The pair had an intensely close friendship during this period and, as their public profiles gradually increased, they began to collaborate on side projects together. These included a falsified interview addressing the stigma of being a German artist in the post-war era,8 a print edition entitled Transformation that ostensibly shows a mountain being turned into a sphere; and a series of photographs that amount to performance documents. Perhaps their most important collaboration was the book they co-authored six months before their first and only joint exhibition in March 1966, which contains a jarring montage of text cobbled together from a popular sci-fi series and provocative artist statements such as ‘Paintings must be produced to a recipe. The making must take place without inner involvement, like breaking stones or painting house-fronts’.9 The absurdist narrative acted as a self-deprecating diversion tactic, channelling something of the Fluxus anarchist spirit they had been exposed to at the Academy, while dissembling any ‘literary’ interpretation for their paintings.

Both the publication and the exhibition at galerie h in Hanover were given the egalitarian title polke/richter/richter/polke. At the time they made the text, Richter remembering being ‘closer to Polke than I had ever been to anyone’.9 Polke was nine years Richter’s junior and he was every bit as talented, but the creative sparks thrown between them were as exasperating as they were stimulating. The competitive streak that helped spur them on to greatness would eventually drive a wedge between them. ‘I remember how close this friendship was, but also how tough it sometimes was’, recalled Richter. ‘I didn’t realise it at the time. For us it was just the natural way of dealing with each other. In retrospect, I’m amazed it was so brutal. All ... of us were very unsure of ourselves, and each tried to cover this up in his own way’.9

The exuberant and impulsive younger artist seems to have brought out the devil in the restrained Richter, but their different temperaments eventually took them down separate paths. ‘Somebody once said that I am Goethe and Polke is Schiller; or I am Thomas Mann and he is Heinrich Mann’ said Richter in 2001. When asked to explain what this distinction means...
to non-German audiences, he replied: ‘The classical is what holds me together. It is that which gives me form. It is the order that I do not have to attack. It is something that tames the chaos or holds it together so that I can continue to exist. That was never a question for me. That is essential for life … I can only say that’s the way it was. Polke drifted away into the psychedelic direction and I into the classical’.

Richter, reflective and deliberate, continued to represent disparate motifs from photographs and introduced purely abstract paintings. The rigorous photo-based works propose that all painting is abstract if one looks closely enough, and the photo-based works propose that all painting is introduced purely abstract paintings. The rigorous representation, working through these issues in a very considered way. This is painting for painting’s sake, an endeavour reminiscent of the composer John Cage’s famous statement, ‘I have nothing to say, and I am saying it’.

The quixotic Polke meanwhile embarked on a constant stream of experiments. His art sought total freedom, with frequent and abrupt changes of style. No constraints mattered; if everyone said painting was dead, that gave him all the more reason to push at its boundaries. Nonetheless, Polke did stop painting for a period in the 1970s, turning instead to groundbreaking experiments in photography. He also delved into film and video and travelled extensively with a camera and camcorder, capturing images that he later recycled in unexpected ways, using them to explore curious juxtapositions. Many of his later paintings continued to utilise the raster-dot and appropriated imagery in addition to engaging a more mechanised means of production. Known as ‘the alchemist’, his subjects investigate the spiritual, cosmological, scientific, and sociological and engage a bewildering array of unusual materials, including patterned textiles, fruit juice, arsenic, meteor dust, resin and purple dye derived from snails.

Polke built an oeuvre based on simultaneous and multiple views of existence that coalesce within the fixed environment of the picture plane. The physical complexity of his work and its layered imagery can evoke the consciousness-expanding quality of psychedelic drugs, whereby the ordinary suddenly becomes surprising and mysterious. Whatever substances may have helped to induce these humours in Polke, they stayed with him; mushrooms are a recurrent motif in his art, and his photographs feature the opium dens that he visited in Pakistan during the 1970s. The artist also attributed his collision of images directly to the events of his past, stating: ‘I pile everything up, all the accumulated material … all the things from my travels … and when the room is filled, I lock it up and move on to an empty one … I have done this all my life. When I was seven the war broke out and the village I lived in was right on the Russian front. We had to leave immediately and left everything behind. I still remember the drawer of my table with all my things in it: pieces of wood I carved, stones, seeds, a stuffed owl … all left’.

Despite their marked differences, Polke’s and Richter’s art is underpinned by intersecting philosophical standpoints and sensibilities. Their pioneering use of photomedia prompts critical questions regarding objectivity, manipulation, authenticity, and pictorial cliché. Their appropriation tactics and elevation of the banal deflated the utopian pretensions of modernism and heralded the return of history and narrative as vital subjects for painting. They both question the visual experience of reality and favour intuition, avoiding responsibility for the resulting image and its interpretation. By drawing attention to the methods and processes of image-making, they also blur and subvert the divisions between figurative and abstract art. Both artists embody a peculiar combination of nihilism, hope and Romanticism: they actively embrace doubt yet manage to find a well-spring of potential in the supposedly moribund art of painting, whether through Polke’s energetic hybridity or Richter’s deadpan gravity.

The artists have both been recognised in contemporaneous public commissions for the
Reichstag building in Berlin and large-scale stained glass windows at the Cologne Cathedral and Zurich’s Grossmünster respectively – projects that highlight their antithetical qualities and their shared interests. Their impact on global art is irrefutable: Richter’s works are among the most sought-after paintings of all time, commanding the highest prices for a living artist, while the reclusive Polke is finally being honoured with an expansive, long-overdue retrospective at that will tour New York’s Museum of Modern Art, London’s Tate Modern, and Cologne’s Museum Ludwig. Sadly, the sudden death of Polke in June 2010 robbed the art world of one of its greatest innovators before the retrospective could be realised, but his legacy will undoubtedly live on to inspire generations of artists to come.

Faith Chisholm, freelance writer, editor and researcher, Art Gallery of New South Wales
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1973
acrylic and silver bronze on paper, 100 × 70cm
on loan from a private collection

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1979
gouache and enamel on paper
100 × 70cm
Gerhard Richter
*Abstraktes Bild*, 1981
oil on canvas, 50.5 × 70.2cm

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1983
acrylic, artificial resin, lacquer and dispersion
on printed fabric, 199.5 × 160cm
Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 1983
acrylic and gouache on paper, 69.2 × 99cm

Gerhard Richter
Ben, 1983
oil on canvas, 95.2 × 100cm
Sigmar Polke
Katastrophentheorie III, 1983
acrylic, dry pigment and resin on canvas
180 × 200cm

Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 1985
enamel, artificial resin and dispersion on canvas
40 × 50cm

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild, 1986
oil on canvas, 120.4 × 80.2cm
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1986
acrylic on card, 100 × 74.5cm

Gerhard Richter
*Abstraktes Bild*, 1986
oil on canvas, 81.9 × 67.6cm
on loan from a private collection
Gerhard Richter
*Abstraktes Bild*, 1987
oil on canvas, 120 × 100.2 cm
Gerhard Richter  
*Abstraktes Bild, 1989*  
oil on canvas, 122 × 102cm

Sigmar Polke  
*Untitled, 1988*  
acrylic, dispersion and artificial resin  
on printed fabric, 90 × 70cm
Sigmar Polke
Griech 1986
acrylic and gouache on printed fabric, 90 x 75cm
Gerhard Richter's focus on his vibrant abstract painting over the past decade, together with the success that this aspect of his work has achieved, has diverted attention from the artist's conceptual origins. In this sense the tribute paid by richter/polke at Christie's Mayfair to the original polke/richter show, held at galerie h in Hanover in 1966, is a timely reminder. For Richter's roots are indeed in the playful irony and rebellion of the sixties Fluxus movement rather than in an ongoing tradition of modernist abstraction. Crucially, Richter's abstract work emerged in dialogue with the photorealist paintings he began in the 1960s. The interaction between these two genres spurred him to chart new territory, where categorical distinctions are thrown into question and the artist is free to explore the very ontology of painting.

The philosophical dimension of Richter's abstract paintings is reflected in their appearance – the complex weave of textures, colours and rhythms that the artist has compared to the instrumentation of atonal music. In paintings of the mid-eighties such as Abstraktes Bild (593 –10 ), 1986, this results in a literal presence that is fuller, richer and more all-inclusive than his previous abstract work. Yet despite their strength and confidence, such paintings are not assertive. The materiality of the painting, its physical substance, is qualified by its visual complexity as an image, the flickering insubstantiality of its colours which never quite cohere into forms. The painting is both 'there' in a powerful convincing sense, and in some way absent when we reach out towards it, evading our control. But – like atonal music – Richter's reversals, his subversive approach to painterly style, are aimed at discovering the possibility of a new, unknown order; and the uncharted space he has carved out for abstract painting is not mystical, despite its elusiveness. It results from a powerfully directed critique of the work in hand together with a free-ranging, experimental attitude to the possibilities of the medium, which is essentially affirmative in spirit and directed towards the future. This mood of critical affirmation nonetheless has its roots in disillusion, in Richter's deep-seated distrust of the ideological alternatives of post-war painting, which had been codified during the cold war years in divided Germany into a rigid opposition of socialist realism versus abstraction. Born in Dresden in 1932, Richter moved to the West in 1951 (following five years at the Dresden Academy) and enrolled in K.O. Götz's class in Düsseldorf, where he studied until 1963. At this historical juncture the formalist rhetoric of West German Informel – like the banal illustrations of socialist realism – were viewed increasingly as empty formulae by young artists of Richter's and Polke's generation. In 1961 Joseph Beuys was appointed professor at the Düsseldorf Academy, and a new forum for experimentation emerged with Beuys' open studio and the impact of Fluxus events in the Rhineland. The critical trajectory of Fluxus and Neo-Dada in the sixties made a lasting impact on Richter's art. His continuing interest in experimental music, his exploration of 'controlled chance', the strategies he uses to dispel subjectivity – above all his Duchampian ambition to create art that is intelligent – all bear witness to his roots in Neo-Dada.

But there is one crucial difference: the neo-avant-gardism of the 1960s was committed to a revolutionary identification of art and life – for this very

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild, 1986
oil on canvas, 69.7 × 100.3cm
reason it is often deemed to have failed.\textsuperscript{1} Renewing the avant-gardists’ attack on the barriers between art and life in the consumer society of the post-war world did little more than open the floodgates of appropriation. The strategies that Richter evolved to express his insistence on difference and displacement when it came to the relations between life and art marked him out from mainstream neo-avant-gardism and testified to a new seriousness of intent.\textsuperscript{2} This did not involve him in a retreat into modernist isolation, but rather in an attempt to steer an alternative course, one that took account of the complex issues of non-identical interrelation between art and life. The history of Richter’s painting over the next two decades relates to his attempts to regain a critical distance, to interpose a difference that resisted the domination of consumerism.

If art and life were not to be reduced to a single, unproblematic unity, photography provided Richter with a means of engaging with the issues this raising. Relating to both categories, photographs can be used to reveal or to conceal – but never to resolve – the paradoxical interface between life and art. By making paintings that aspired to the state of photography, (I do not wish to imitate a photograph; art. By making paintings that aspired to the state of photography, ('I do not wish to imitate a photograph; it is as if we are never allowed to stand at quite the right imaginative distance for our visual and emotive responses to concur; our attempts to grasp, to understand, are frustrated. Concerning his landscapes, Richter wrote a 1986 diary entry:

‘my landscapes are not only beautiful or nostalgic, seemingly romantic and classical like lost paradises – above all they are “deceptive” (even when I have not always found the means to express this), and by deceptive I mean they refer to the way we view nature transfigured. Nature, which in all its forms is constantly against us, because it has no meaning, no mercy, no sympathy, because it knows nothing, is without spirit, is absolutely unintelligent – because it is the absolute opposite from us, absolutely inhuman.
Each aspect of beauty we see in nature, every enchanting colour, the peacefulness or energy of mood, gentle lineation, lofty space and who knows what else, is our own projection, which we can also cut out so that for a moment we only see the shocking monstrousness, the ugliness. Nature is so inhuman that it isn’t even criminal. It is that which we must overcome, reject – because for all our predominant atrociousness, monstrousness, pitifulness, we are still in the position to produce a glimmer of hope, which came into being with us and which we might also call love. (Which has nothing to do with the unconscious, animal impulse to nurture and care) – nature has none of that, its stupidity is absolute.

There is an ironic level in Richter’s romantic landscapes, which is sometimes more and sometimes less successfully expressed in the visual and emotive inconsistencies that puncture the transparent membrane of illusion. But they also generate an impulse in the spectator that is not entirely divorced from hope. By making us aware that our visual and emotive responses are out of kilter in this flimsy world of optical cliché, they also stimulate – although they do not satisfy – the mechanisms of desire, our aspiration to rediscover a richer and more satisfying mode of balance and cohesion.

Gerhard Richter’s stylistic pluralism, the coexistence of his ‘abstract’ and ‘figurative’ painting, is symptomatic of his distrust of absolute statements, his dislike of artistic and political ideologies that preclude critical investigation. In place of alternatives, he offers us a framework of critical polarity to stimulate a new kind of visual and imaginative elasticity. Either/or aesthetics are rejected in favour of a more sophisticated notion of differentiation, involving simultaneous contrast and analogy. On the most practical level, the alternating phases of his work, the very different demands of technique and style, prevent him from unquestioningly identifying with either mode. There is no doubt that the abstract works have been the most important aspect of Richter’s painting since the late 1980s, (the abstract works are my presence, my reality, my problems, my difficulties and contradictions), and the photorealist works have often been painted during necessary pauses and intervals, when he steps back from his alla prima painting to regain critical distance. They act like a question mark, unsettling our certainties and prompting us to look beyond the surface of what the abstract paintings appear to be. Richter himself insists on the irrelevance of style – be it abstract or figurative – in a formalist sense, as something important in itself:

I have no aesthetic problem, and the way of painting is irrelevant. The paintings do not differ from each other, and I want to change the method wherever I think it appropriate.

Does this mean that there is a philosophical constant, a thread of continuity, which is both masked and revealed by the changing appearance of his paintings?

Richter began his abstract work – initially small- and medium-sized oil sketches – in 1976, in reaction to the reductive minimalism of his grey paintings, which were shown at the exhibition Fundamental Painting in Amsterdam in 1975. Alongside his exploration of the elusive interface between art and life in the photo-paintings, Richter was also preoccupied with testing the limits and potential of art – very much in the spirit of 1970s Conceptualism, although he remained primarily concerned with the possibilities of painting. Richter has described the grey paintings as:

‘the most complete ones I could imagine... the welcome and only correspondence to indifference, to a lack of conviction, the negation of commitment, anomie. After the grey paintings, after the dogma of “Fundamental Painting” whose purist-moralizing aspects fascinated me to a degree bordering on self-denial, all I could do was to start all over again. This was the beginning of the first colour sketches conceived in complete openness and uncertainty under the premise of “multi-chromatic and complicated,” which obviously meant the opposite of anti-painting and of painting that doubts its proper legitimacy.’

Despite Richter’s ‘openness’, the first period of work on the abstract paintings involved new strategies of control, of checking and distancing, in the transition from the initial sketches to the large-scale oils. His free experimental sketches were first copied and enlarged – just like the photographs in his landscapes. In the summer of 1978 Richter took a series of photographs of an oil sketch, ‘...from various sides, from various angles, various distances and under different light conditions.’ The results were organised in two...
versions, sequentially in a book and simultaneously as a grid; photos were then projected onto large canvases and copied. Again the echo of Neo-Dada, the Duchampian method of applying order to chance, was surfacing in Richter’s art. The result was a series of paintings whose conceptual mode of gestation qualified and denied their gestural appearance. Moreover, the large abstract works involved all the preparative modes of realism. In the 1980s Richter used small works on paper as a testing ground for abstraction, and the freedom and inventiveness of his coloured drawings fed back into the large-scale works. Increasingly, after 1981, Richter cut free from tried strategies of control, no longer copying and enlarging his sketches, but rather integrating the processes of free-ranging experimentation and chance into abstract oils – such as _Ben_, 1983. Or rather, unmediated experimentation and critique became inseparable aspects of process in his abstract work, forging a kind of internal dialectic that generates the painting. The rich and spectacular appearance of Richter’s abstract work – paintings from his 1988 _London_ series such as _St John_ are among the best examples – is the result of this complex balancing act of process, that extends over a period of time and is broken by periods of inactivity and consideration, when Richter physically and emotionally steps back from the compelling presence of his work. The colours, which include deep, sombre tones and rich variations around the complementaries, are mixed wet on a large plastic spatula which is dragged over the surface of existing work so that the final surface embodies a complex archeology of overlapping presences (rather than a poetic evocation of absence, such as we might find in the work of Cy Twombly, whose painting manifests erasure rather than affirmative critique). In Richter’s case each painting has a powerful, individual and simultaneous presence, and yet their emotional impact, their resonance, deepens over a period of time.

This method of working is an attempt on Richter’s part to achieve a result that in some way exceeds his facility and expectations. Just as his use of the photo freed Richter from aesthetic decision-making (‘there was no style, no composition, no judgments. It liberated me from personal experiences’), so too in his abstract paintings the initial arbitrary marks that generate the process of experimentation and critique are understood by Richter as a self-distancing rather than a self-expressive act: ‘to let something come into being rather than to create. That is, no declarations, no constructions, nothing supplied, no ideologies – in this way to achieve something real, richer, more alive, something that is beyond my understanding?’

Again and again in his diary notes the artist stresses the importance of beginning without any aim or direction, of remaining fully open during the process and avoiding any preconceived notion of result:

‘Therefore the act of painting is a semi-blind, desperate attempt – like someone without means set down in a quite unfamiliar environment, who possesses a variety of tools, materials and abilities and who has an urgent desire to create something meaningful, useful. But this must not be a house or a stool nor anything else we can name, so he just has to start building in the vague hope that his honest competent work will eventually produce something right, something meaningful.’

What is it then that is so unusual, so ‘unknown’, about Richter’s abstract paintings? The process of self-critique is surely an established approach in modernist art. But whereas in its Greenbergian sense, self-critique was meant to result in an increasing purification of means, Richter works in the opposite direction: critique in his hands involves complexity rather than simplification, differentiation rather than synthesis, the introduction of layering and spatial ambiguity rather than flatness. Neither does his approach to abstraction fit Rosenberg’s mould: for everything possible is done to avoid identifying himself with the act of painting; strategies of distance are maintained to ensure that the work is not ‘limited’ by his own subjectivity. Richter’s abstract paintings are neither formalist nor expressive in any accepted sense of the word – and yet they do evoke mood.

Gerhard Richter
_A B, St John, 1988_
Tate Collection, London
© Gerhard Richter, 2014
and sensation. It is in this area that Richter’s critical intelligence plays the most active role, because the process of experimentation and critique can be ‘steered’ to maintain ‘this or that aspect of content’. The offbeat beauty of the abstract works, the peculiar liberties taken with composition, surface, and colour, result in a kind of anti-aesthetic that plays negative court to our memories of twentieth-century painting. But in this very negation there is an act of renewal, a breaking of new ground, an expansion of known horizons.

When we look back to the beginnings of twentieth-century abstraction, before its complex modes were codified by American theory, we find certain parallels with Richter’s art. Wassily Kandinsky, for example, also explored the possibilities of ‘atonal’ instrumentation of form and mood in a visual mode inspired by comparable developments in Arnold Schönberg’s music (for example, Fugue, 1914). In his essay ‘On the Question of Form’, 1911, Kandinsky wrote of the identity of opposites, of the coincidence of extreme realism on the one hand with abstraction on the other, when both were pushed beyond the realm of mere illusionism. Like his early twentieth-century forbears, Richter seems intent on piercing the skin of illusion to uncover the possibility of some more meaningful form of knowledge. And yet the messianic tone, the utopianism of early twentieth-century art, is quite foreign to his own laconic, self-critical style. In 1983 he wrote:

1 I have always been resigned to my opinion that we can’t do anything, that utopias are meaningless if not criminal. In this “framework” the photo-paintings, the colour charts, the grey paintings came into being. Through all this I kept in the back of my mind the belief that utopia, meaning, future, hope, might turn up, so to speak, by the back door, as something which takes us off guard because nature – that is to say us – is infinitely better, more intelligent, richer than anything that we might dream up with our shortsighted, limited, narrow understanding.

In this instance Richter conceived of nature as something larger than ourselves, of which we are a part – rather than as something foreign and destructive, which we must conquer and control with human intelligence.

There is indeed something that goes with the flow of what we might call – for want of a better word – ‘nature’ in Richter’s abstract painting: something looser, more expansive, more adventurous and liberating than the previous phases of his work. In his 1982 documenta statement Richter explained:

‘If we describe an event or give an account or photograph a tree we are creating models without which we would be animals. Abstract paintings are fictive models because they show a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can surmise. This reality we characterize in negative terms: the unknown, the incomprehensible, the infinite, and for thousands of years we have described it with ersatz pictures, with heaven, hell, gods, devils. With abstract painting we created a better possibility to approach that which cannot be grasped or understood, because in the most concrete form it shows “nothing”’.

Rather than ‘dematerialise’ in the mode of early twentieth-century abstraction, Richter has set himself the task of bringing into vivid focus that which we do not yet know. In this sense the abstracts respond to the mechanisms of desire set into motion by the photorealist landscapes. But to say they provide an answer would be too final; it would ignore the speculative qualities of Richter’s abstract paintings, the provocative ways they stretch and extend the limits of imaginative response, their resistance to visual or conceptual appropriation. Continuity in Richter’s art involves an attitude of mind rather than a style, characterised by an enquiring, experimental approach to the potentials of his medium. Like Bertolt Brecht, Richter has acknowledged that artistic forms – be they realist or abstract – are little more than tired formalisms unless they are put at the service of potential knowledge. Like Brecht, he has insisted on preserving a critical distance between life and art in order to resist appropriation. But instead of harnessing these attitudes towards political ideology, Richter proposes them as something worthwhile in their own right, as the only thing, so to speak, which will ensure a future, both for art and the human spirit. This is what makes Gerhard Richter’s painting so intelligent.

Jill Lloyd,
independent writer and curator

Gerhard Richter
Rot (Red), 1982
Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin
© Gerhard Richter, 2014


Gerhard Richter
Rheinlandschaft, 1984
oil on canvas, 100.2 × 140.3 cm
on loan from a private collection
Gerhard Richter
Bäume im Feld, 1988
oil on canvas, 82 × 112cm
Gerhard Richter
Kleine Straße, 1987
canvas, 61.6 × 83cm
Gerhard Richter
Baumgruppe, 1987
oil on canvas, 72 × 102 cm

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild 1990
oil on canvas, 25 × 37 cm

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild 1987
oil on canvas, 52 × 72 cm
Gerhard Richter
*Kerze*, 1982
oil on canvas, 83 × 62.2 cm
on loan from a private collection
Sigmar Polke
artificial resin, lacquer, paint on transparent polyester fabric
verso/recto, 134 × 154 cm
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1987
artificial resin, lacquer, paint on transparent polyester fabric
verso/recto, 134 × 151.4cm
Sigmar Polke

*Transparent 10*, 1988

artificial resin, lacquer, paint on transparent polyester fabric

verso/recto, 110.5 × 130.8cm
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1989
artificial resin, lacquer, paint on transparent polyester fabric
verso/recto, 117 × 138cm
on loan from a private collection
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1994
acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas
120 × 100cm

Gerhard Richter
*Abstraktes Bild*, 1991
oil on canvas, 112 × 102cm
Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild, 1994
oil on canvas, 71 × 61 cm
Some day we shall no longer need pictures, we shall just be happy. For we shall know what eternity is, and our knowledge of this shall make us happy. Life after death will be explored and will set us an example of new modes of conduct.

Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter, text for the exhibition polke/richter: richter/polke at galerie h, Hanover, 1966.

We want to be as free as our fathers

At the centre of an early biro drawing that Sigmar Polke made in 1964 a crudely drawn speech bubble reads: ‘We want to be as free as our fathers’. This statement was a deeply incendiary one at the time it was made. But it is also a proclamation that now, with the benefit of hindsight, seems to encapsulate much of the rebelliousness of spirit, constant dissatisfaction and fierce desire for personal and creative freedom that distinguished and drove Polke’s vast, eclectic, often mysterious, but always brilliantly inventive body of work over five decades.

Like so much of Polke’s art, this simple statement is both a challenge to convention and one that operates on several different levels. Humorous, ambivalent, provocative and also serious, it, like his paintings, aspires to an impossible ideal. For, at the time it was made, the idea of Polke and his generation (Polke was born in 1941) being as ‘free as their fathers’, or more to the point, free from the past, seemed an unattainable and contentious notion. Germany, in the 1960s, was both a divided and a haunted land full of ghosts and sombre echoes of its sinister past. Polke, who had grown up in poverty in the East until he was 12 had, in 1953, crossed over with his family to West Berlin and later Düsseldorf, looking for a better and a freer life. In the Germany of this time, almost everyone remained collectively silent about the nation’s murderous history under National Socialism. Polke’s own father had been an enforced labourer during the war and reportedly never spoke about what he had been conscripted to build during those years. To broach such a subject with him or other ‘fathers’ in those days was taboo. Yet, typically, this is just what Polke’s deliberately adolescent and faux naïve statement does. As he was to do time and again in his paintings, drawings, photographs, films, texts, actions and experiments in a whole range of media, Polke here, in this deliberately crude and provocatively artless biro drawing humorously violates the taboo, breaks with convention, upsets the rules, pokes a hole in the collective silence and sardonically disrupts the status quo. Most importantly, he does all this in a way that visibly, stylistically and verbally asserts his own right, as an artist and creator of the work, to a complete freedom of creative action.

This is one of the reasons why Polke is so often claimed and championed as an artist’s artist and also why his work perpetually continues to inspire and intrigue young painters today, despite the fact that many of his works, and so much about them – the full extent and even range of his oeuvre, for example, along with much of the media, processes and source material he employed – still remain mysterious or unknown. Polke, perhaps more than any other painter of his generation invigorated both the idea and the potential of art to be anything, say anything and do anything. Indeed, Polke’s always unorthodox paintings are, more often than not, left so open that they appear
to destabilise their own imagery and identity as works of art, actively questioning their own function and validity.

Polke’s resistance to and often mocking exploitation of all forms of convention, particularly pictorial, led ultimately to the development of what is sometimes referred to as his ‘style-less’ manner of painting and to a varied and constantly shifting aesthetic that, in turn, ended up providing him with an almost unique degree of creative autonomy and aesthetic independence. Hiding behind the mask of the idiot, the clown, druggie or prankster, Polke always revealed, on inspection, an intelligent method underlying his apparent madness. Indeed, the artist’s often secretive and hermetic approach to his work, combined with the trickster-like stance he first began to adopt in the early 1960s (and was able to maintain throughout his life) effectively redefined the role of the artist in the late twentieth century in a way that has proved both refreshing and liberating for subsequent generations.

Polke’s example also, perhaps most significantly, marked a rejection of the earnestness and elitism of the avant-garde that had so distinguished the end of modernism in the late 1960s and ‘70s; but it did so in a way that still allowed an artist to function freely as an independent pioneer and breaker of new ground. It is for this reason that in the 1980s, Polke, long before Gerhard Richter, first came to be seen as the quintessential post-modernist painter; as the artist who was ‘painting after the end of painting’ as it was referred to at the time. Polke, unlike Richter, however, was soon able to shake off even this vague categorization of his work. For whereas the anti-conventional conventions of Richter’s abstract and photographic paintings have largely retained the same clever, post-modernist-strategy-feel that they had in the 1980s and early ‘90s, Polke’s seemingly dumber, more quirky, varied and indefinable creations seem to exist outside of time, continuing to look as if they were made by accident, either yesterday or at some vague unspecified point by a mad scientist of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. If Polke does bear comparison with another painter, it is perhaps Francis Picabia – one of the few artists whose influence he did publicly acknowledge. ‘A conviction is a disease’, Picabia once said. ‘If you want to have clean ideas, change them as often as your shirts’. Doing just this, Polke, constantly inventive, re-inventive and anarchic like Picabia, was a complete individualist whose body of work can only really be seen in its entirety as part of an ever-widening search or struggle for freedom, accompanied and underpinned, in his case, by that most Germanic of artistic traits, a deeply Romantic longing for totality, oneness and the sublime.

Polke’s mercurial, permanently evolving aesthetic and his eclectic modus operandi – picking from a vast range of styles, sources and media – was founded on and remained consistent with a child-like rejection of all rules and authority and an innate mistrust of rationality that began in him at an early age. ‘Polke thinks there must be some point in painting because most lunatics paint unbidden’, Richter once wrote affectionately of him.2 As the work of these two artists’ ‘Capitalist Realist’ years demonstrated, rules and laws were, for Polke, things that were only there to be challenged.

To some extent his and Richter’s generation were indeed ‘freer than their fathers’: in the respect that...
they belonged to the ‘year zero’ generation, begun in 1945, when Germany was effectively born again from nothing. But, theirs was also a generation that was obliged to witness the apparent freedom that the nothingness of this tabula rasa might have provided, progressively being shut down by the gradual resurrection of bourgeois rules and conventions. During the Wirtschaftswunder years in Germany, as an increasingly affluent West German bourgeoisie desperately sought to reaffirm a sense of value, dignity and order in their daily lives, Polke and Richter established an art whose primary purpose was to punch holes in this objectionable façade.

Both alarmed but also fascinated by the increasing confusion then taking place between the reality and fiction of surface appearances, Polke’s and Richter’s art mocked West Germany’s attempts to paper over the cracks of its past with prettifying wallpaper, faux-exotic fabrics and the illusionary display of Kultur such as leather-bound editions of the complete works of Goethe prominently on show in the front room. Against the apparent order and niceties of bourgeois living rooms of the time instead. Polke’s brilliantly unorthodox stratagem was the creation of his art that he would adopt at various stages throughout his career. Not only did this one poke fun at almost all of modernism’s lofty claims on the spirit and of art’s ability to ennoble or uplift mankind, but it further lampooned the idea of all artistic orthodoxy and rule-making. Another particularly piercing indictment, made during this period when the abstraction of artists like Malevich, Kandinsky and Barnett Newman was still talked of in admiring terms of its ‘transcendent’ ability to ‘spiritually’ transform mankind and articulate the

to what exists, or that we are in fact obliged to do so consciously or unconsciously’, he said. ‘It can also be irony, laziness, incapacity, or dullness. But it can also epitomize creative freedom: the freedom of doing what one wants to do and what one thinks is right to do: which could be imitating something’.

Soon afterwards, Polke moved this strategy forward by supposedly now denying himself such freedom of choice and publicly declaring himself to be an artist who worked not according to his own ideas but solely at the command of others, whom he declared to be ‘Higher Beings’. ‘I wanted to paint a vase of flowers’, the first of these ‘commissioned’ works announced, but ‘higher beings commanded that I paint’ a pair of faux-exotic, decorative, ‘famingo’s’ of the kind that often decorated bourgeois living rooms of the time instead.

‘Higher Beings Command’

Marking a humorous and satirical development of Professor Beuys’s own shamanic posturing into an entirely new and seemingly ludicrous direction, Polke’s brilliantly unorthodox stratagem was the first of several pseudoscientific approaches to the creation of his art that he would adopt at various stages throughout his career. Not only did this one poke fun at almost all of modernism’s lofty claims on the spirit and of art’s ability to ennoble or uplift mankind, but it further lampooned the idea of all artistic orthodoxy and rule-making. Another particularly piercing indictment, made during this period when the abstraction of artists like Malevich, Kandinsky and Barnett Newman was still talked of in admiring terms of its ‘transcendent’ ability to ‘spiritually’ transform mankind and articulate the
freedom of the Capitalist West, is a painting like Polke's Higher Beings Command: Paint the Top Right Hand Corner Black! This supposedly commissioned, minimalistic geometric abstraction of 1969 with its grungy typewritten instruction painted over a blank surface was a brilliantly original work that managed to undermine the pictorial authority of 1960s Abstraction, Conceptualism and Minimalism all in one move.

At the same time, by claiming to work at the command of ‘higher-beings’ – as if he were merely an artisan or functionary working for a totalitarian regime – Polke not only mocked artists then working in the state-controlled cultures of Eastern Europe, but he was also poking fun at their counterparts in the West, exposing the much-lauded ‘freedom’ of their abstract art to be little more than an alternate canon or dogma. Most importantly perhaps, Polke, through the ironic logic of his own painting managed to discover and articulate a new independent artistic space for himself – done beholden to neither East nor West, but only to his own ‘reception’ of unseen and unknown cosmic forces. In claiming to be working according to a series of secret instructions, received from an unknown ‘higher’ authority, Polke had effectively found a way of absolving himself of all responsibility over what he painted and, in so doing, had, paradoxically, granted himself the freedom to paint whatever these ‘beings’ required of him. Or, more to the point, whatever he interpreted that they wanted him to paint.

Part of an ongoing assault on rationality and the monsters of reason (dogma, ideology, regulation, authority, etc) Polke's pseudo-science, without at first seeming to be, was therefore making a serious political point about artistic freedoms. It also masked a genuine fascination with the mysterious origins of the creative impulse, with the source of his own inspiration and artistic intuition. ‘It is not I who have thought (my pictures) up,’ he later wrote of this, ‘but they who have made themselves felt in me.’ These concerns he also began to pictorially articulate in the ‘scientific’ language and form of then current experiments on telepathy and ESP that, in accordance with communication theory, divided messages between a ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’. Part of yet another assault on the madness of reason that in this case parodied the then prevailing practice of American Conceptualism, Polke was taking on for himself the role of a modern-day, new-age da Vinci and starting to pose open-ended questions such as ‘does meaning create relationships or do relationships create meaning?’

Such thinking, combined with the implications of Werner Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty Principle’, much-discussed amongst the burgeoning ‘hippy’ and ‘stoner’ communities of the late ’60s and early ’70s, led ultimately to a new hallucinatory flowering in Polke’s work that was to determine the pictorial form of much of his work from this period onward. Heisenberg’s principle, first proposed in 1927 and one of the principles of quantum physics, asserts that the faster a particle moves, the less its position is known and vice versa. It is an assertion that reveals the perception of reality to be in some way dependent upon its observer. A true picture of reality, it suggests, is an image painting. In raster-dot pictures such as Bavarian and Don Quichotte (a portrait of the humorous literary figure whose own perception of reality was notoriously volatile and constantly shifting) Polke had carefully and deliberately magnified his dots to the precise point whereby they begin to disrupt and undermine both the cohesiveness and the integrity of the image they are supposed to convey without ever completely dominating or negating it. In this way, and as he was to do in a variety of ways in so many of his later paintings, Polke established an ambiguous and multi-layered surface that plays with the inherent state of flux involved in the nature of perception, imagery, image-making and reality. ‘I like the way that the dots in a magnified picture swim and move about’, Polke said of such works, ‘the way that motifs change from recognisable to unrecognisable, the undecided, ambiguous nature of the situation, the way it remains open ... Lots of dots vibrating, resonating, blurring, re-emerging, thoughts of radio signals, radio pictures and television come to mind.’

After encountering the implications of the uncertainty principle, the twin elements of flux and play, first visually developed in his raster paintings, came to play a dominant role in Polke’s approach to painting. In the late 1960s and early ’70s Polke began to invoke Heisenberg directly in several works, most notably perhaps in the many-layered, multiple-image painting The Ride on the Eight of Infinity III (The Motorcycle Headlight) in which a caption reads: ‘Through the observation of movement, one inevitably
influences movement itself’. This statement addresses Heisenberg’s supposition that the observer and the thing observed – the ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ perhaps – are mutually influenced by one another through the act of observing. It suggests also, therefore, not just that the artist is changed through the process of making of a work of art but that a similar act of communion also exists between the work of art and its viewer. The audience of a work of art can change the work through looking at it, it suggests, as much as the work of art may, or may not, change them.

The challenge now for Polke was to make images that reflected and articulated this near-mystical understanding of reality as a fluid, perpetually shifting condition of exchange. As such ideas about the interchangeability or transmutability of all things clearly recalled the gnostic wisdom and hermetic art of alchemy, it is understandable that Polke’s research was ultimately to lead him in this direction.

Seeing Things as They Really Are
Believing he was now ‘seeing things the way they really are’, as the ironic title of a 1991 transparent fabric painting of his states, Polke, in a rare statement on his working practice wrote that ‘it is clear that a progressive scientific approach like my own can no longer concern itself with boorish causalities or self-satisfied reasons but must focus instead upon relationships, since without relationships, even causality itself might just as well pack up and leave, and every reason would be without consequence. Thus in my scientific work I concentrated upon the exploration of those relationships which genuinely bind things together, beyond their tendentious subdivision into “causes” and “effects”... This whole system of classifying things as causes and effects must come to an end! We must create a world of free and equal phenomena, a world in which things are finally allowed to form relationships once again, relationships liberated from the bonds of servile textbook causality and narrow-minded, finger-pointing consecution ... (for) only in these relationships is it possible to find the true meaning and the true order of things...’

Proceeding from Rimbaud’s belief that the artist/poet becomes a true seer of things through a ‘rational derangement’ of the senses, the 1970s saw Polke experimenting heavily with multiple abstract, figurative and distorted imageries, hallucinatory visions and the adoption of a truly radical and groundbreaking exploration of artistic processes and practice that was to guide him until the end of his life. Setting up and living in a commune in the small bourgeois German town of Willich near Krefeld where he had first begun his artistic career as an apprentice in a stained glass factory, Polke embarked on a sequence of open and collaborative projects throughout the decade that generated work made from a multitude of different perspectives. In addition to his thorough and much-celebrated investigation of hallucinogens at this time (growing mushrooms and licking the skins of psychoactive toadstools for example), he also travelled extensively making expeditionary visits to Afghanistan, South America, the Golden Triangle and many other countries.

Throughout this period Polke revelled in exploring an ever-widening use of extreme, unconventional and forgotten forms of image-making – the full range of which still remains unknown. Indeed, following in the footsteps of Max Ernst and Francis Picabia, Polke’s endless research and restless, constantly evolving aesthetic grew to become a kind of hermetic exoticism, while Polke himself became a modern-day alchemist allowing his materials to determine the process of creation rather than the other way around. Like Ernst before him, he effectively began to remove himself as the author of his work. By ‘widening... the active part of the mind’s hallucinatory faculties’, as Ernst put it, he ‘came to assist as spectator at the birth of his work.’ Polke’s only rationale for directing his work appears to have been to push his materials to a point where they took new, surprising shape through an engagement with the ever-present, ‘real’ forces of nature such as chance or accident, material or chemical interaction and gravity.

In his series of photographic work from the early 1970s for example, Polke persistently undermined this mechanical medium’s supposedly fixed and faithful representation of the world by messing with the chemicals used in the development of the image. In addition to using overlapping and often scratched negatives to generate surprising apparitions and distortions, Polke also began to disrupt and extend the photographic process, allowing his pictures to remain in the developer too long or not long enough, enjoying and encouraging the ghostly effects and accidents that occurred along the way. Embracing the spillage, the drip, the pool and the cloud as uncertain, open, enigmatic and fluid entities that served as convenient symbols of the fascinating, unknowable visual flux of reality, Polke’s photography led also to further experiments with the spilling and mixing of chemicals. And he carried this spirit of invention into other mechanical means of reproduction. With photocopiers, fax-machines and other automated...
image-processors Polke began to exploit and expose the ‘ghost’ in these machines, making use of printing mistakes, mechanical errors, accidents, distortion or an incorrect mix of chemicals to create ever new and surprising images that operated on the edges of visual comprehension.

Extending the halfway state between abstraction and image that had distinguished his raster-dot paintings, many of Polke’s paintings in the 1980s now also began to take on an ambivalent hallucinogenic feel and a multivalent, many-layered, multiple-image form that, like reality itself, was impossible to comprehended in its entirety or from any single viewpoint but which nevertheless hinted at a totality or at least a many-sided sequence of different perspectives. A work such as Triptych of 1981 in the current exhibition, with its three panels of spilled and constantly changing colour clouds painted in interference paint, is a classic example.

Now ranging from the hermetic and the pseudo-scientific to a more in-depth engagement with new theories of thermodynamics or the way in which scientific to a more in-depth engagement with new theories of thermodynamics or the way in which the apparent phenomenological chaos also begun to suggest an unseen universal order underpinning the apparent phenomenological chaos of the universe. The schismatic and predominantly purple-pigment painting in this exhibition, Catastrophe theory posited a wholly indeterminate view of reality as an unpredictable and interactive landscape of almost infinite possibility. It was essentially a mathematical vision of phenomenological reality as a complex interlacing of beautiful ordered chaos very much in accordance with Polke’s own.

Pursuing the interrelationship between order and chaos Polke also began to experiment with unstable compounds and pigments that changed according to external conditions. Most notoriously he produced a series of images employing the radioactive effects of uranium and in 1986, in the 1930s architecture of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Polke deliberately disrupted the apparent order and rigidity of this neo-classical Nazi-era structure by painting its walls in colours that reacted to and changed according to the humidity caused by the lagoon.

These experiments with the transmutability and flux of his materials culminated in the early 1980s in a series of paintings on semi-transparent lacquer grounds that formed Polke’s Laterna Magica or magic-lantern installations. These were a hermetic series of multiple-image, transparency paintings that with their strange, seemingly disconnected imagery, seemed to span the entire history of man’s creativity and invention and depict it united in one expansive sequence of ever-changing screens. Executed in resin and lacquer painted on both sides of a synthetic
and transparent support that allows light to pass through, the imagery and visibility of these ambiguous, multi-form, painted screens are constantly changed by the altering light conditions around the work. Presenting an image of the figurative world of visual phenomena as an unstable but fascinating veil of Maya, these works not only emphasised the persistent changeability of everything but in their onslaught of disparate imagery and form also suggested an approximation of totality. In accordance with the hermetic idea that the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm, the screens of Polke’s Laterna Magica articulate a similar idea of a mystical union between two separate but interdependent realms. This was attained not just through the apparently harmonious bringing together of different, unconnected imagery in a chain of bizarre relationships, but was also, as Polke hinted, present in the artist’s mediative act of creating the work. “I wanted to make a mirror with lacquer where the artist’s mediative act of creating the work is the artist’s perpetual revolt against any fixed viewpoint of or Cartesian rationale. Loose, open, fluid and forever changing, all of Polke’s creative gestures and moves, and all his works advertise that it is only the energy of the artist’s creativity, or more particularly the creative life and actions of the artist that brings these works into being, that has any bearing on ‘reality’ or the true nature of existence. Through the development and extension of his painterly process into the near spontaneous aesthetic he pursued during the last three decades of his life, Polke articulated and expounded the freedom he had originally sought in his 1964 declaration ‘We want to be as free as our fathers’. As his open, freeform work of the 1980s onwards reveals, it was the only in the act of making and the momentary revelation of the new and the surprising that such freedom ever existed. The resultant creation – the work itself – was of little importance save only as an emblem of that reality, that freedom. ‘The processes are what interests me’, he once said, ‘the picture is not really necessary. The unforeseeable is what turns out to be interesting.’

As a consequence of this, Polke always rejected any attempts to classify or categorise his work. He seldom talked in public about it, was often difficult or evasive with journalists and other inquirers, and made a point of being notoriously difficult to pin down in both his private and professional life. In 1978, when Benjamín Buchloh assembled Polke’s first, and to date, only comprehensive retrospective exhibition, Polke and friends surreptitiously invaded the museum in Düsseldorf, when the show moved there from its start in Tübingen, and sabotaged it. An act of protest directed not just against the apparent rationalism of a cohesive retrospective gathering of his works, but also against the persistence of Fascistic order in Germany during the violent political unrest of the 1970s, Polke erected a fence that separated viewers from his work. Behind this, many of his most important works were left encased in the foil in which they were shipped – a symbol of their apparent transformation under a Capitalist economy into material objects of commercial value. Other canvases had been dismantled and freed of their objecthood and were displayed without their stretchers as loose-hanging, free-form fabrics. Alongside both was a slide projection of important Nazis and over the painted fence separating viewers from the works hung a crudely-made sign that read ‘Kunst Macht Frei’ (‘Art Makes You Free’). An appropriation of the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ signs that had adorned the gates of the Nazi concentration camps, Polke’s sign brought the horror and the taboo of the Nazi past into the apparent sanctity of the museum and at the same time served as a symbol of his own artistic independence and hope.

As New York’s Museum of Modern Art now prepares for the opening of Polke’s first major retrospective since that time, one cannot but lament the artist’s death in 2010 and wonder what he would have made of it.

Robert Brown, *International Head of Research for Modern, Post-War and Contemporary Art*, Christie’s

5. Ibid. Note also that Polke merged his identity with that of Leonardo da Vinci at this time in the 1969 collage *Constructions around Leonardo and Sigmar Polke: Sigmar Polke*, quoted in Dieter Hülsmanns, op. cit.
6. S. Polke, quoted in D. Hülsmanns, op. cit.
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 1992
acrylic on paper, 69.5 × 100 cm
Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 1986
dispersion on card, 100 × 74cm

Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 1993
acrylic and dispersion on printed fabric, 90 × 70cm
Sigmar Polke

Bikini-Frauen, 1999
acrylic and dispersion on printed fabric
126.5 × 156.2 cm

Sigmar Polke

Biertisch, 1999
acrylic and interference colour on canvas
100 × 120 cm
Sigmar Polke

**Druckfehler, 1999**
acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas
100 × 80cm

Sigmar Polke

**Druckfehler, 2000**
acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas
110 × 90cm
Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 2001
acrylic, interference colour and dispersion on canvas
(i) 80 x 60cm (ii) 80 x 70cm

Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 2002
acrylic and interference colour on paper
100 x 70cm

Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 2004
acrylic and interference colour on paper
198 x 149cm
Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 2005
acrylic, dispersion and enamel on paper
196 × 147.5cm

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled*, 2006
gouache, acrylic, dispersion and enamel on paper
197.6 × 148.5cm
Gerhard Richter
Hotel Diana
screen-print with varnish
on lightweight card
23⅜ × 31in (59.4 × 80cm)
Executed in 1967, this work is from an edition of eighty and eight trial proofs.

Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke
Umwandlung
offset print on lightweight card
18⅜ × 26⅜in (46.5 × 67.2cm)
Executed in 1968, this work is from an edition of two-hundred.

Sigmar Polke
Bavarian signed and dated ‘Polke 65’ (on the reverse)
acrylic dispersion on canvas
62¾ × 49in (159.4 × 124.5cm)
Executed in 1965.

Gerhard Richter
Flämische Krone
signed and dated ‘Richter II. 65’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
35¼ × 43⅜in (89.5 × 110cm)
Painted in 1965.

Gerhard Richter
Kleine Tür
signed and dated ‘Richter 68’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
19⅝ × 19⅝in (50 × 50cm)
Painted in 1968.

Sigmar Polke
Freundinnen II
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 67’ (lower right)
gouache and silkscreen offset on card
19¾ × 23¾in (47.8 × 60.5cm)
Executed in 1967, this work is from an edition of twenty-five, each uniquely hand-coloured.

Gerhard Richter
Kleiner Parkplatz
signed, titled and dated ‘Parkplatz an der Siegessäule G Richter 1965’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
11 × 22¾in (28 × 58cm)
Painted in 1965.

Gerhard Richter
Stadtbild Ha
signed, titled and dated ‘Richter 68 Stadtbild (H.)’ (on the reverse); titled ‘Stadtbild (H.)’ (on the stretcher)
oil on canvas
70¾ × 59in (180 × 150cm)
Painted in 1968.

Sigmar Polke
Don Quichotte
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 68’ (on the reverse)
dispersion on canvas
31⅝ × 23¾in (80.3 × 60.5cm)
Executed in 1968.

* Works with an asterix are available for sale.

Private sale enquiries:
Darren Leak
dleak@christies.com
T +44 (0)207 389 2025
Jacob Uecker
juecker@christies.com
T +44 (0)207 389 2400
Gerhard Richter
*Wolke
inscribed ‘Wolke für Schäfer’ (lower right); signed, titled, inscribed numbered and dated ‘242 Wolke (unvollendet) Richter 69 Wolke für Schäfer’ (on the reverse)
oil and graphite on canvas
39⅜ × 31⅜in (99.9 × 80cm)
Executed in 1969

Gerhard Richter
Grau
signed, numbered and dated ‘247–8 Richter 1970’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
39⅜ × 31⅜in (99.9 × 80cm)
Painted in 1970

Gerhard Richter
Helen
signed, numbered and dated ‘Richter 64 Helen’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
37⅜ × 27⅜in (95.2 × 70.2cm)
Painted in 1981

Gerhard Richter
FRAU IN HOLLYWOODSCHAUDEL
signed, titled and dated ‘Richter Juli 1968 Mädchen in einer Hollywoodschauspiel’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
37⅜ × 61cm (95 × 155cm)
Painted in 1968

Gerhard Richter
*Abstraktes Bild
signed, numbered and dated ‘Richter 1986 608–3’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
32¼ × 26⅝in (81.9 × 67.6cm)
Painted in 1986

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild
signed and dated ‘593 –10 Richter 1986’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
47⅜ × 31½in (120.4 × 80.2cm)
Painted in 1986

Gerhard Richter
Ben
signed, titled, numbered and dated ‘”ben” 534 Richter 1983’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
37⅜ × 39⅜in (95.2 × 100cm)
Painted in 1983

Sigmar Polke
Katastrophentheorie III
signed ‘Sigmar Polke’ (on the overlap)
acrylic, dry pigment and resin on canvas
63 × 78⅜in (160 × 200cm)
Executed in 1983

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild
signed, numbered and dated ‘593 –10 Richter 1986’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
47⅜ × 31½in (120.4 × 80.2cm)
Painted in 1986

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 86’ (lower right)
acrylic on card
39⅜ × 29⅜ in (100 × 74.5cm)
Executed in 1986

Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild
signed and dated ‘593 –10 Richter 1986’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
32¼ × 26⅝in (81.9 × 67.6cm)
Painted in 1986

Sigmar Polke
Katastrophentheorie II
signed ‘Sigmar Polke’ (on the overlap)
acrylic and gloss on paper
27 × 40in (69.2 × 91cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 79’ (lower right)
acrylic and graphite on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (100 × 70cm)
Executed in 1979

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 83’ (lower right)
acrylic and silver bronze on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (100 × 70cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 86’ (lower right)
acrylic on card
39⅜ × 29⅜ in (100 × 74.5cm)
Executed in 1986

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘593 –10 Richter 1986’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
47⅜ × 31½in (120.4 × 80.2cm)
Painted in 1986

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke’ (lower right)
watercolour on paper
37 × 49in (94 × 124cm)
Executed in 1966

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed ‘S. Polke’ (lower right)
watercolour on paper
37 × 49in (94 × 124cm)
Executed in 1966

Sigmar Polke
Karabulut Daimler
signed, numbered and dated ‘Richter 64 Helen’ (on the reverse)
oil on canvas
37⅜ × 61cm (95 × 155cm)
Painted in 1968

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 83’ (lower right)
acrylic and gloss on paper
27 × 40in (69.2 × 91cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 79’ (lower right)
acrylic and gloss on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (100 × 70cm)
Executed in 1979

Sigmar Polke
*Untitled
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 83’ (lower right)
acrylic and silver bronze on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (100 × 70cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Katastrophentheorie III
signed ‘Sigmar Polke’ (on the overlap)
acrylic, dry pigment and resin on canvas
63 × 78⅜in (160 × 200cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Katastrophentheorie II
signed ‘Sigmar Polke’ (on the overlap)
acrylic and gloss on paper
27 × 40in (69.2 × 91cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
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Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Katastrophentheorie II
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acrylic and gloss on paper
27 × 40in (69.2 × 91cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
Katastrophentheorie III
signed ‘Sigmar Polke’ (on the overlap)
acrylic, dry pigment and resin on canvas
63 × 78⅜in (160 × 200cm)
Executed in 1983

Sigmar Polke
*Katastrophentheorie III
signed ‘Sigmar Polke’ (on the overlap)
acrylic, dry pigment and resin on canvas
63 × 78⅜in (160 × 200cm)
Executed in 1983
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Medium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Abstraktes Bild</em></td>
<td>Gerhard Richter</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>47½ × 39⅜in (120 × 100.2cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dated '630-3 Richter 1987' (on the reverse)</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and artificial resin on printed fabric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35⅜ × 29½in (90 × 75cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dated '607–2 Richter 1986' (on the reverse)</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and artificial resin on printed fabric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27½ × 39½in (69.7 × 100.3cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>48 × 40⅛in (122 × 102cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dated '703-6 Richter 1989' (on the reverse)</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and artificial resin on printed fabric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35⅜ × 43⅜in (90 × 110cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>20⅜ × 28⅜in (52 × 72cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sigmar Polke</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>43⅜ × 51⅜in (110.5 × 130.8cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verso/recto, in artists frame</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>52⅜ × 60⅝in (134 × 151.4cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verso/recto</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas</td>
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<td>52⅜ × 60⅝in (134 × 151.4cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>46 × 54⅝in (117 × 138cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verso/recto</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>42 × 39in (120 × 100cm)</td>
<td>interference colour on canvas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verso/recto</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42 × 39in (120 × 100cm)</td>
<td>interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>27⅜ × 39⅜in (69.5 × 100cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>signed, numbered and dated '716-8 Richter IV. 90' (on the reverse)</td>
<td>interference colour on canvas</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9⅛ × 14⅞in (23.5 × 37cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>35⅜ × 43⅜in (90 × 110cm)</td>
<td>interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verso/recto</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35⅜ × 43⅜in (90 × 110cm)</td>
<td>interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>28 × 24in (71 × 61cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verso/recto</td>
<td>acrylic, dispersion and interference colour on canvas</td>
</tr>
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<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>40⅛ × 32⅛in (102 × 82cm)</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All artworks are by Gerhard Richter or Sigmar Polke, unless otherwise noted.
P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Untitled
signed and dated ‘Sigmar Polke 02’ (lower left)
aromatic and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (101.5 × 68.5cm)
Executed in 2000

P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Untitled
signed and dated ‘Sigmar Polke 99’ (lower right)
aromatic and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (101.5 × 68.5cm)
Executed in 1999

P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Untitled
signed and dated ‘Sigmar Polke 2000’ (lower right)
aromatic and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (101.5 × 68.5cm)
Executed in 2000

P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Untitled
signed and dated ‘Sigmar Polke 00’ (lower left)
aromatic and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 26⅜in (101 × 68cm)
Executed in 2000

P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Untitled
signed and dated ‘Sigmar Polke 2002’ (lower right)
aromatic and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 26⅜in (101 × 68cm)
Executed in 2002

P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Bikini-Frauen
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 99’ (on the reverse)
aromatic and dispersion on canvas
49⅜ × 31⅜in (126.5 × 80cm)
Executed in 1999

P. 150 Sigmar Polke
Biertisch
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 1999’ (on the overlap)
aromatics and interference colour on canvas
39⅜ × 47½in (100 × 120cm)
Executed in 1999

P. 157 Sigmar Polke
Biersteck
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 86’ (on the overlap)
aromatics and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 29⅜in (100 × 74cm)
Executed in 1986

P. 158 Sigmar Polke
Biersteck
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 97’ (lower right)
aromatics and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 27⅜in (101.5 × 68.5cm)
Executed in 1997

P. 158 Sigmar Polke
Bikini-Frauen
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 99’ (lower right)
aromatics and interference colour on paper
39⅜ × 28⅜in (101.5 × 72.5cm)
Executed in 1999

P. 159 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(i) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatices, dispersion and interference colour on canvas
39⅜ × 29⅜in (90 × 74cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 159 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(ii) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatices, dispersion and interference colour on canvas
39⅜ × 29⅜in (90 × 74cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 159 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(iii) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatices, dispersion and interference colour on canvas
39⅜ × 29⅜in (90 × 74cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 161 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(i) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatices, dispersion and interference colour on paper
78 × 58⅛in (198 × 149cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 161 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(ii) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatices, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 161 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(iii) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatices, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 162 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(i) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 162 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(ii) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 162 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
(iii) signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2001’ (on the reverse)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2001

P. 164 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower left)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
78 × 58⅛in (198 × 149cm)
Executed in 2006

P. 164 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower right)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2006

P. 164 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower right)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2006

P. 165 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower left)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2006

P. 165 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower right)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2006

P. 165 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower right)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2006

P. 165 Sigmar Polke
Triptych
signed and dated ‘S. Polke 2006’ (lower left)
aromatics, dispersion and interference colour on paper
77 × 58⅛in (196 × 147.5cm)
Executed in 2006