

Artist Resources – Gerhard Richter (German, b. 1932)



Richter, 2018
Photograph: Christian Marquardt

[Richter artist website](#)

[Richter at Marian Goodman Gallery](#)

David Zwirner Gallery's 2004 [exhibition of nine seminal landscape paintings](#) traced the artist's engagement with the genre over forty years, five countries, engaging in tireless conversations with photography, painting, representation, and abstraction.

[Richter spoke with Director Nicolas Serota in 2011](#) as the Tate Modern prepared for [Panorama](#), a major retrospective of the artist's work in the London galleries, which also houses [a permanent display of Richter's enigmatic series](#) inspired by the melodic abstractions of American composer John Cage. "I believe all things of quality have this timelessness. Art, architecture, music, literature. Otherwise it's hard to handle this life."

Richter demonstrates the labor and ingenuity of his scrape and squeegee techniques in [this excerpt](#) from the 2011 doc [Gerhard Richter Painting](#), filmed over the course of three years in the artist's studio in Cologne.

"Abstract pictures do indeed show something, they just show things that don't exist. But they still follow the same requirements as figurative works: they need a setup, structure. You need to be able to look at it and say, 'It's almost something.' But it's actually representing nothing. It pulls feelings out of you, even as it's showing you a scene that technically isn't there," Richter explained in a 2014 interview with [The Wall Street Journal](#) about abstraction and the importance of art as he prepared for [a show at Marian Goodman Gallery](#) in London.

In a [frank and thoughtful interview](#) in his native German at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark in 2016, Richter philosophized on the value of art, beauty, Germany, and contemporary culture. "I don't really believe that art has power. But it does have value. Those who take an interest in it, find solace in it...it's comforting simply because it's beautiful. These days beauty is not in fashion, we don't need it. We need entertainment, sensations. Beauty is an ideal of mine, as much as it ever was. I can't find anything bad about it."

The Met Breuer's 2020 exhibition, [Gerhard Richter: Painting After All](#) explores the duality between representation and abstraction that underpins Richter's prolific six-decade career, emphasizing the value of painting as an artistic medium. Digital resources include an [exhibition guide](#) and a [virtual tour](#) of the galleries, as well as [interviews with artists](#) on Richter's continuing influence. Curator's also [contributed their insights](#). "Ultimately, Richter's work is about pictorial and painterly traditions. Standing in front of a painting has more of a singular presence and relevance to our actual living moment than photography will ever have, because photography always marks the instant of passing—the death—of the very moment it records. It is this paradox, burrowed deep in Richter's work, that enables the image to continue to live, to be relevant."



Richter at work, ca. 2011
Still from film, *Gerhard Richter Painting*

Gerhard Richter (German, b. 1932)

Frau mit Schirm (Woman with Umbrella), 1964

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:83.3

Trained as a Social Realist painter at East Germany's Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, Gerhard Richter escaped to West Germany shortly before the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. With the proliferation of mass media technologies after World War II, the artist was inspired to explore the boundary between photography and painting. **Frau mit Schirm (Woman with Umbrella)** is based on a news photo of Jacqueline Kennedy as a grieving young widow, in the days following the assassination of her husband, President Jack Kennedy. The painting's blurry, photorealistic style heightens the emotional weight of this traumatic and unstable moment in U.S. history. To produce the work, Richter projected a photograph onto his canvas, traced the image, and "blurred" with a soft brush or squeegee. The artist explains, "I'm not trying to imitate a photograph; I'm trying to make one. And if I disregard the assumption that a photograph is a piece of paper exposed to light, then I am practicing photography by other means."

On view July 21 – December 12, 2021





Gerhard Richter (German, b. 1932)

941-5 Abstraktes Bild (Abstract Painting), 2015

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:127.4

Lifelong interests encompassing photography and painting, representation and abstraction, surface and process define the prolific and innovative sixty-year career of Gerhard Richter. The technique showcased in **941-5 Abstraktes Bild** is characteristic of Richter's large abstract paintings going back to the 1980s. First applying paint to canvas with a brush, he then quickly moves a long, homemade squeegee (comprised of a flexible piece of acrylic plastic attached to a wooden handle) horizontally and vertically across the canvas. The resulting sweep of colors creates a layered, lushly smeared surface of thin washed valleys and thick impasto peaks, celebrating the physical fact of paint on canvas, the intentionality and labor of creation, and the delicate balance between chance and artistic control.

"I would like to obtain in the end a picture which I had not planned at all," Richter reflected in 1990. "Also, this method of working with randomness, chance, sudden inspiration, and destruction lets a particular type of picture emerge but never a predetermined one...this is also a method to put into action unconscious efforts, as much as possible—after all, I would like to get to something more interesting than what I can think of myself."

On view January 4 – April 11, 2021



Gerhard Richter (German, b. 1932)

Christiane und Kerstin, 1968

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:89.1

Informed by a youth lived in the shadow of German fascism, WWII, and the communist regime of East Germany, Gerhard Richter was trained as a Social Realist painter. He escaped to the west shortly before the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and rose to prominence in West Germany in the 1960s, developing a career-defining sensitivity to medium, surface, and process. His first solo exhibition in Düsseldorf, in 1963, introduced Richter's idiosyncratic art practice, which ignores the boundaries between painting and photography, realism and abstraction. By refusing to limit his work to a single, signature style, and periodically embracing highly topical, political subjects, he helped redefine the options for contemporary painting in the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond.

Christiane und Kerstin depicts the daughters of the artist's collectors and patrons, Margot and Werner Schäfer, in the signature style of his blurred photorealism. The black-and-white, out-of-focus aesthetic of the painting was achieved by moving a squeegee across the wet surface – a technique perfected in Richter's photo paintings and employed to outstanding effect in later abstract canvases. His goal: to highlight the imprecise, uncertain, transient, and incomplete nature of vision and perception. "I wipe to make everything equal, both important and unimportant at the same time," Richter reflected in 1965. "I wipe so that all parts move a little closer. Perhaps I also wipe away unnecessary information."

On view September 30, 2020 – January 3, 2021

Gerhard Richter (German, b. 1932)

Buschdorf, 1985

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:88.3

In **Buschdorf**, Gerhard Richter entices viewers with a naturalistic view of the small titular town in Luxembourg. To the artist, the scene is more than a pastoral view of verdant fields and wild arboreal beauty. In 1986, Richter reflected: “My landscapes are not only beautiful or nostalgic, with a Romantic or classical suggestion of lost Paradises, but above all 'untruthful' (even if I did not always find a way of showing it); and by 'untruthful' I mean the glorifying way we look at Nature...which in all its forms is always against us, because it knows no meaning, no pity, no sympathy, because it knows nothing and is absolutely mindless: the total antithesis of ourselves, absolutely inhuman.”

Gerhard Richter is widely considered one of the greatest living artists. Underpinning his influential approach to painting is a lifelong interest in the mediums of painting and photography, the relationship between representation and abstraction, and the expressive potential of blurring the boundaries between them. He has returned to landscapes throughout his career as a vehicle to merge and explore the binary poles of abstraction and figuration.

On view September 16 – December 27, 2020

