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Pressemitteilung

Gerhard Richter | Achromatic

Februar 8 – März 2, 2021

For me, grey is the welcome and only possible equivalent to indifference, refusal to make a statement, lack of opinion, lack of form. (Gerhard Richter, 1975)

They are a contrast to his colour-intensive abstractions, which have dominated Gerhard Richter's late work for around twenty years: Works that refuse any colouring. From the beginning of his work, grey tones have been a central theme in all of the artist's work groups - from figurative and non-representational paintings and prints to photographs and objects. The exhibition *Gerhard Richter Achromatic* at Sies + Höke is dedicated to this reduced and at the same time extremely complex understanding of art, which for Richter is far more than pure painting. On the basis of over 30 works from 1965 to 2019, it becomes clear to what extent grey - or rather: the renunciation of any seductive power of colour - can be understood as the conceptual superstructure of Richter's oeuvre as a whole. But how did it come about?

In the summer of 1959, Gerhard Richter visited the documenta II in Kassel and could not believe his eyes. The pictures by Jackson Pollock and Lucio Fontana were different from anything he had seen before. Suddenly it becomes clear to him: GDR realism, which he has to follow as a young muralist in Dresden, has put him in a corset of vision that does not allow any other view than that of the Party. "I could almost say that these pictures were the real reason for leaving the GDR. I realised that something was wrong with my way of thinking," he will say 27 years later in an interview with Benjamin Buchloh. In fact, Richter never committed himself again after his visit to Kassel - to no way of thinking and to no style.

In 1961 Richter fled to the West and studied painting at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. But although the consumer world of post-war Germany is colourful enough to react to mass media, the economic miracle and petit bourgeoisie with a certain Pop Art attitude, grey of all colours becomes the hue that reflects Richter's demonstratively indifferent attitude. When he painted the first photos in 1962, their black and white turning into soft veils of grey, it reflected his decision to no longer trust any reality he had not experienced himself. The fact that his blurs also allow the viewer several points of view is a novelty in contemporary painting: no representation is unambiguous - the supposed image of reality suddenly becomes individual. To this day, this is the core of Richter's work. "I do not distrust reality, of which I know next to nothing, but the image of reality that our senses convey and that is imperfect, limited," Richter says in 1972. In a world overflowing with manipulated photographs, he is almost half a century ahead of his time.

The artist attaches central importance to the colour grey. For him, it stands for blurriness and neutrality, in short: for Richter's freedom to be without judgement. In 2020, Hal Foster speaks of "neutrality as protection against ideological restriction" and places him alongside Roland Barthes, "for whom the neutral does not erase meaning, but rather 'suspends' it." This is precisely what Richter does when he uses grey in all groups of works - he takes away the certainty of the viewer's evaluative gaze. Whether painted and smudged photos from the newspaper or the family album, anonymous colour panels and framed window panes, sensual pasty and cold smooth monochromes, multi-layered abstractions and simple mirror surfaces in which one sees only oneself: Richter never settles on one perspective.

It is this method that Richter uses to evade any corset imposed on him after his time in the GDR. With him, painting is never what one expects of it. With him, it becomes conceptual art, with which - parallel to developments in the USA - he declares the viewer to be an interactive part of his art. And

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so to this day, colour, which is not colour, forms the basis of an oeuvre that does not fit into any pigeonhole. Whatever Richter does is based on a wholly undogmatic position. His work embodies the ultimate freedom, a devotion to experimentation - and a humanism far removed from any didacticism that is unparalleled in contemporary art to this day.

In addition to the presentation of the exhibition on site, the exhibition will be documented online with numerous installation views:

<https://www.sieshoeke.com/exhibitions/gerhard-richter-achromatic-2021>

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue with texts by Hubertus Butin and Dietmar Elger.

A visit of the exhibition is possible by appointment.

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