

**PRESS RELEASE**

September 2024

## **GERHARD RICHTER: HIDDEN GEMS**

### **Works from Rhenish Private Collections**

**5 September 2024–2 February 2025**

**The major autumn exhibition at the Kunstpalast Düsseldorf brings together more than 120 artworks from all of Gerhard Richter's creative periods and groups of work. Many of the selected exhibits are hidden gems: pieces from private collections that have rarely – if ever – been shown in public before. As part of the most comprehensive Gerhard Richter exhibition in Germany for over ten years, these works provide an insight into the entire spectrum of his art – from his beginnings in the early 1960s to more recent times.**

Gerhard Richter (b. 1932) is one of the world's leading contemporary artists, who has been exploring the boundaries of painting for over 60 years. The artist's adopted home – the Rhineland – has proved the perfect setting for the evolution of his oeuvre. It was here that he met other like-minded artists such as Sigmar Polke and Günther Uecker, role models and provocative figures like Joseph Beuys, and eventually the curious and enterprising community of collectors that had formed around the emerging galleries in Düsseldorf and Cologne. These hidden gems are now being brought out of hiding for the current exhibition at the Kunstpalast.

"I am very grateful to the collectors for their willingness to temporarily entrust us with their works by Richter. These paintings have come from lenders' private living rooms and offices; in some cases, this is the first time that these works have been shown to the public. Even for those who are already very familiar with Richter's oeuvre, there will be something new to discover among these normally hidden gems from private collections in the Rhineland!" says Felix Krämer, general director of the Kunstpalast.

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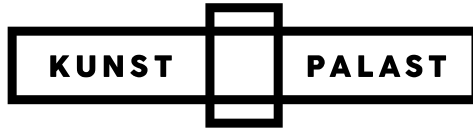
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A few months after fleeing to the West in 1961, Gerhard Richter began studying at Düsseldorf Art Academy under Ferdinand Macketanz and later Karl Otto Götz. The city "was terrifically exciting with all the exhibitions and events, and so many artists," Richter recalled in 2004. "And then I was fortunate enough to find the right friends at the academy: Sigmar Polke, Konrad Fischer and Palermo. We experienced everything together, the first happenings, the Fluxus performances, which were already making a huge impact."

As well as fellow artists, Gerhard Richter also met a new generation of collectors in the Rhineland who were no longer collecting exclusively for private households, instead taking a much more expansive approach from the 1970s onwards. The Düsseldorf gallery owner Alfred Schmela invited Richter to mount his first solo exhibition in 1964; in the years that followed, he procured numerous portrait commissions for the artist from collectors in the Rhineland in order to boost his own business. In 1968, Rudolf Zwirner exhibited Richter for the first time in his Cologne gallery, where the collector Peter Ludwig decided to purchase *Ema (Nude on a Staircase)* (1966) and the monumental painting *Five Doors* (1967). In 1972, Ludwig finally acquired all 48 *Portraits*, Richter's contribution to the Venice Biennale, while they were still on display in the German pavilion in Venice.

Richter's first institutional exhibition in 1969 at the Aachener Kunstverein, *Gegenverkehr*, resulted in a particularly active circle of collectors in Aachen. He had his first solo show with Konrad Fischer in 1970, who was running a successful gallery in Düsseldorf by then. In 1973, the collector Hans Grothe acquired a block of twelve paintings that Gerhard Richter had personally compiled for him, including the three-part, 450 cm wide landscape painting *Alps II* (1968) and *Detail (Makart)* from 1971, which are both featured in the *Hidden Gems* exhibition.

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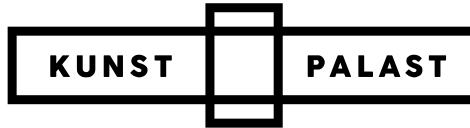
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For Richter, however, the Rhineland also served as a laboratory for experimental image and presentation formats. It was here that he displayed series of works for the first time in order to observe the reactions of the public and collectors. He presented an exhibition of exclusively grey pictures at the Museum Abteiberg in 1974, for example, and *18 October 1977* – a cycle of works about the Red Army Fraction – in Krefeld in 1989.

In addition to institutional shows, Richter also organised many of his own exhibition formats in the Rhineland, breaking with the conventions of previous generations and experimenting with new ideas. In 1963, Richter and his artist friends rented an empty showroom in Düsseldorf and put on the performance and exhibition *Leben mit Pop – eine Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus* (Living with Pop – A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism). He displayed the work *Party*, which he later gave to his studio neighbour Günther Uecker. It was not uncommon for works to end up in private collections via this route. Richter's *Pillow Picture* from 1970 found its way to Gotthard Graubner: in this piece, he lovingly satirises the cushion paintings by his fellow artist. The small format and use of irony both indicate that the picture was intended as a gift for his friend from the outset.

"The exhibition offers an insight into Richter's close relationships with his fellow artists and collectors in the Rhineland, who have supported him since the early 1960s and firmly established him in the international art world through their acquisitions," says Markus Heinzelmann, curator of the exhibition and Professor of Museum Practice at Ruhr University Bochum.

Sometimes works left Richter's studio in exchange for services rendered. The tax consultant and art collector Willi Kemp received a work as thanks for a small favour he had done for the artist. Richter's employee Ludger Schäfer also received a work in return for his services.

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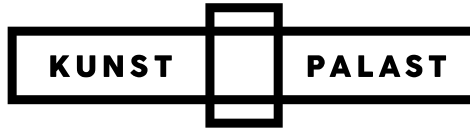
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In the 1980s, large companies joined the ranks of the more traditional private collectors. Victoria Versicherung (now ERGO) commissioned Richter to create two large paintings for the lobby of its headquarters: *Victoria I* and *II*, each six metres high and four metres wide. As part of this exhibition, museum guests can view these works free of charge in the foyer of the company's building located directly next to the Kunstpalast at the end of their visit.

The Haniel Collection acquired three abstract paintings, extending its collection of Art Informel works from the post-war period into the present. Henkel AG, Hypo Bank Düsseldorf, Bayer AG and many other companies acquired or commissioned representational works.

Thomas Olbricht has been collecting works by Gerhard Richter since the early 1990s. His "trademark", as he describes it, are the editions. Olbricht is the only collector to own all of Gerhard Richter's editions and is often the only non-institutional collector.

Collecting art has a long and rich tradition in the Rhineland. This has long been a strategic pursuit: collectors focused on ensuring the cohesion of their collections and enshrining their names in history. When early collectors began to retreat for financial reasons, the large corporations for which Richter planned and realised significant commissions took centre stage. The systematic catalogue raisonné of the artist's paintings was particularly attractive to collectors and occupies a position that lies somewhere between documentation and work.

With around 120 works, the exhibition at the Kunstpalast now provides an overview of Richter's entire oeuvre from the early 1960s to his most recent paintings, which left the studio in 2017. The works on display were acquired by enthusiastic collectors, as well as by major businesses from the 1980s onwards, and were also sometimes exchanged with

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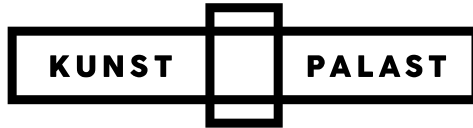
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fellow artists. Over time, many of the works have been passed down to the younger generation, who are actively keeping the tradition of collecting alive in the Rhineland today. The emphasis is on painting: more than 80 works lead visitors on a journey from Richter's first black and white photo paintings, austere colour charts and grey pictures to monumental landscapes and soft, free abstractions, culminating in his final non-representational works. Drawings, watercolours, photographs, sculptures and the only artist film made by Gerhard Richter himself all attest to the great richness of the collections here in the Rhineland and lend the exhibition a retrospective dimension.

The audio guide to the exhibition, which is available on the Kunstpalast app, was recorded by the well-known film and television actor Christian Friedel (*Zone of Interest*). For younger visitors, there is also a specially tailored Tonie Tour, which uses exciting stories to introduce children aged three and over to Richter's works.

The exhibition is curated by Gerhard Richter expert Markus Heinzelmann, Professor of Museum Practice at Ruhr University Bochum.

The show is supported by the Gerhard Richter Archive.

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