

G E R H A R D  
R I C H T E R  
P I C T U R E S / S E R I E S

GERHARD RICHTER  
PICTURES / SERIES  
MAY 18—SEPTEMBER 7, 2014

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**CAUTION:** *Please do not touch the works of art!*



*Whenever this symbol appears on the exhibit labels, it means you will find the work of art discussed in detail under the corresponding number in this guide.*

### Films

Two documentary films will be showing in the museum's Winter Garden during the exhibition:

**Gerhard Richter. Meine Bilder sind klüger als ich**, 1992 (60 minutes), by Viktoria von Flemming and  
**Gerhard Richter Painting**, 2011 (97 minutes), by Corinna Belz.

**GERHARD RICHTER**

Gerhard Richter (born in Dresden in 1932, based in Cologne) is one of the most important artists of our time. In a career spanning sixty years he has created an oeuvre of striking thematic and stylistic variety. On show at the Fondation Beyeler are figurative works, including portraits, still lifes, and landscapes, and abstract paintings, in which the artist draws on a large store of forms and colors. Richter's work is notable for a fascinating interplay between abstraction and figuration, original images and reproductions, control and chance, as well as for a blurring of the distinctions between painting, photography, digital printing, and sculpture.

The exhibition *Pictures / Series* explores for the first time works conceived as series, cycles, or interior environments from all periods of Richter's career. Single pictures, some of which have attained iconic status, form a counterpoint to the multiple images. As visitors move from work to work, and from space to space, they experience a constantly changing set of relationships between individual images, serial works, and the spatial surroundings.

Richter has always produced series alongside individual works. That applies to his earliest essays in painted photo-realism, to his abstract pictures, to the pieces involving mirrors and other kinds of glass, to his recent digital prints, and to his overpainted photographs. Interested from the outset in how his art is presented, he has created several works for specific locations. In the 1950s he studied mural painting at the Art Academy in Dresden. Since then many sketches and statements by him have testified to the crucial role played by architectural contexts in his work: "That is such a dream of mine—that the pictures will become an environment or become architecture."

The exhibition has been realized in close cooperation with the artist and organized by guest curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in cooperation with Sam Keller, Director, and Michiko Kono, Associate Curator at the Fondation Beyeler.

**1 • 1024 Farben, 1973***1024 Colors*

At the entrance to the exhibition, visitors are greeted by a work that presents itself like a wall-size color chart. 1024 enamel squares are aligned next to and one on top of another in a strict geometric grid. The colors were distributed using a random process, but were mixed according to strict rules. As Gerhard Richter explains: "In order to represent all extant color shades in one painting, I worked out a system which—starting from the three primaries, plus grey—made possible a continual subdivision (differentiation) through equal gradations.  $4 \times 4 = 16 \times 4 = 64 \times 4 = 256 \times 4 = 1024$ . The multiplier 4 was necessary because I wanted to keep the image size, the square size and the number of squares in a constant proportion to each other. To use more than 1024 tones (4096, for instance) seemed pointless, since the difference between one shade and the next would no longer have been detectable."

In spreading out before us all the nuances of color that our human eye is still physically able to perceive, the artist offers us an impressive point of entry into the exhibition. In contrast with *1024 Colors*, two small paintings are also on show in the Foyer, including a delicate, subtly blurred flower painting.

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**ROOM 1**

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**2 • *S. mit Kind*, 1995**

*S. and Child*

The realistic portraits in this eight-part cycle all center upon mother and child, who present themselves to the viewer from different sides, at times in intimate close-up. The paintings are based on personal photographs, but at the same time reveal links with the topos of the representation of the Virgin and Child, and in their iconography and subject bring into play the question of the relationship between tradition and present.

Gerhard Richter worked on the surfaces to a varying extent, resulting in eight small pictures with differing textures and degrees of abstraction. According to the artist, it is “the same as with a piece of music: there are eight little sequences—soft ones, brash ones, whatever happens to emerge.” The eight paintings are united by their intimate subject and belong firmly together as a group, and yet the quality of focus, choice of angle and lighting mean that each portrait can be perceived as an independent, stand-alone work.

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**ROOM 1**

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**3 • *Januar*, 1989**

***Dezember*, 1989**

***November*, 1989**

*January / December / November*

Opposite Gerhard Richter’s intimate mother-and-child pictures are his monumental diptychs *January*, *December* and *November*, which number among his most impressive abstract paintings of the late 1980s. Created in 1989, they represent the cold winter months as a triad, so to speak. Richter applied his paint among other things with a huge squeegee—a transparent acrylic blade used to scrape off excess paint. The drag marks left by the squeegee are clearly visible in all three paintings.

Richter himself discovered parallels with music in his abstract oeuvre: “The composition of different forms, colors, structures, proportions, harmonies, etc. comes out as an abstract system analogous to music. It is thus an artificial construct, as logical in its own terms as any natural one, except that it is not objective. This system draws its life from analogies with the appearance of nature, but it would instantly be destroyed if any object were identifiably represented within it. Not because the latter would make it too narrative, but because its explicitness would narrow the expression of content and reduce everything around it to mere staffage.”

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## ROOM 2

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### 4 • *Abstraktes Bild*, 1990

#### *Abstract Painting*

*Abstract Painting* of 1990 is distinguished by its complex structure. The overlaying of successive applications of paint results in constantly shifting impressions of spatial depth. These regularly seem to confound our eye, which is likewise dazzled by an infinite wealth of color nuances. The painting served Gerhard Richter as the starting point for his artist's book *Patterns. Divided, Mirrored, Repeated* (2011), which he subsequently drew upon in turn for the creation of his *Strip* pictures (5 •). By applying the processes of division, mirroring and repetition, Richter arrived at compositions which formed the basis of large inkjet prints, which he mounted on aluminum and covered with Plexiglas. The original work—*Abstract Painting*—was thereby completely transformed and translated into a different state of aggregation.

### 5 • *Strip*, 2013

The *Strip* pictures dominating the second room of the exhibition are attractive and at the same time irritating in their effect. They create a distinctly unusual visual experience: we see these powerful, large-scale works, but our eye cannot really land, enter the picture, or fix something within it. The horizontal strips of color seem to slide away from us, accelerating towards the left or right, depending on where we are standing in the room. No one position is privileged either in front of the picture or within it: movement thus becomes the central motif.

The *Strip* series, begun in 2011, is based on Richter's 1990 *Abstract Painting* (4 •). A scan of this painting was split vertically into two strips, then into 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024, 2048, and finally 4096. The width of the strips decreased as their number increased, until each of the 4096 individual strips was only 0.08 millimeters wide. Every strip was then mirrored vertically, generating a new image that was repeated until its total width was identical with that of the original *Abstract Painting*. The mirror images initially produced patterns that resembled columns

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## ROOM 2/3

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and ornaments. With the continuing division into ever narrower strips, the vertical striations turn through 90 degrees to horizontal. At the latest with the division into 1024, the eye can only register fine horizontal lines. The legible marks and structures of *Abstract Painting* have evaporated.

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## ROOM 3

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### 6 • *Overpainted photographs*

Gerhard Richter's oeuvre includes a large number of photographs overpainted with oil colors or enamels. The artist values the dialogue with photography, and the multifaceted possibilities offered by the medium when its surface is first hidden and then rediscovered. Sometimes the paint is merely splashed onto the photograph or applied like a veil in thin, in places transparent smudges, while at other times it forms an opaque layer. In these 48 works from the *Museum Visit* series of 2011, the original photographs have been largely concealed behind paint. Only around the edges, and between the abstract veils of color, do the last vestiges of photographic reality still remain.

**7 • *Abstraktes Bild, Rhombus*, 1998**

*Abstract Painting, Rhombus*

The six-part cycle *Abstract Painting, Rhombus* originated in conjunction with the project for the pilgrimage church designed by Renzo Piano in 1997 in the small town of San Giovanni Rotondo in Apulia, in honor of Saint Pio of Pietralcina. “The paintings were supposed to be figurative and related to the life of Padre Pio, the Franciscan Order, and the stigmatization of the depicted saint. I immediately said I didn’t think I would succeed in this and couldn’t accept the commission. All I could do was to give something a try and then offer them the results.”

By connecting the corners of the diamond-shaped canvas with a vertical and a horizontal line, the shape of a cross is produced. The powerful reds and oranges of the abstract rhombuses are the cumulative effect of numerous layers of paint. Fine gradations of hue and scattered patches of black allow us to sense the presence of these underlying coats. Layering is a fundamental principle of Richter’s working method and is employed in several of his cycles and series.

**8 • *Cage*, 2006**

With six large canvases Gerhard Richter has created an impressive cycle: *Cage*. The paintings reference each other in format and palette and likewise with regard to pictorial space. Their animated surfaces exhibit scrapes and cracks and can vaguely call to mind landscapes or weathered walls. In the abraded and fissured areas, yellows, reds and blues testify to multiple underlying layers of paint. The residues of color shimmering through arouse a desire to remove the topmost level in order to bring hidden marks back to light. Detecting the lower layers is hampered by thick smudges of color and opaque areas that prevent us from penetrating through to the chromatic colors.

Gerhard Richter recalls that he was listening to the music of the American composer, John Cage, in his studio while working on the *Cage* pictures. The title of the cycle does not allude to any namable pictorial content, however, but indicates that Richter recognized certain commonalities between his painterly creations and Cage’s musical compositions. Through the use of various chance procedures, both artists withdraw the production of their works from their conscious control and create space for spontaneous and unpredictable outcomes.

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## ROOM 4

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### 9 • *Seestück*, 1975

*Seascape*

### *Eisberg im Nebel*, 1982

*Iceberg in Mist*

The starting points for these mysterious landscapes were photographs taken by Gerhard Richter himself. In *Seascape*, the elements of water and sky are barely distinguishable one from another in the hazy atmosphere. Only a band of mist on the horizon and a patch of blue sky on the upper left-hand edge of the canvas offer points of orientation. In *Iceberg in Mist*, the transition between sea and cloud is defined somewhat more clearly by the block of ice, but the latter's true scale and sheer massiveness remain hidden behind veils of fog. These views of the open sea capture what otherwise remains intangible: the swell of the waves, the drifting banks of mist and the dissolving and accumulation of clouds.

The original photographs behind these paintings were taken in 1972 on a trip to Greenland, which later provided an important stimulus for Richter's seascapes. Looking at these pictures, we are transported to the middle of the Arctic Ocean—a place that can trigger wonder, astonishment and fear in equal measure. The artists of Romanticism similarly aimed to evoke subjective feelings of this kind, insofar as they made enigmatic landscapes the projection screen for their yearnings. Richter, as he has said himself, was inspired by the polar paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, echoes of whose sublime representations of nature can be heard in *Seascape* and *Iceberg in Mist*.

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## ROOM 5

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### 10 • *Grau*, 1975

*Gray*

The eight canvases in the *Gray* series form themselves into an impressive environment. They are arranged in such a way that they face the small portrait of *Ella* (11 •).

In the 1970s Richter experimented with color charts, that is to say, with strictly separate squares of color that he combined into geometric patterns, as in the case of *1024 Colors* (1 •). He then began overlapping and overlaying his paints, in the shape of his abstract pictures. Richter continued this process to the point that his chromatic paints ultimately blended into a monochrome gray. He sees the use of gray not as a rejection of artistic creativity, but on the contrary as an experiment with its possible variations and specific qualities. To the question "Why do you repudiate color?" Richter replied: "Gray is a color—and sometimes, to me, the most important of all."

The works from the Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach mark the culmination of the phase in Richter's career in which he focused on monochrome gray paintings. Through their inconspicuous and sober tone, these gray paintings neither arouse strong emotions nor occupy any specific position—a quality that enabled the artist to lend expression to absence of opinion, noncommitment and absence of shape, in short, to make 'nothing' visible.

### 11 • *Ella*, 2007

Counterpointing the monochrome gray surfaces is the small portrait of *Ella*, in which Gerhard Richter uses the technique of blurring. The reddish black background, the girl's lowered head, and her pink shirt with its green collar swim out of focus behind an evenly worked surface. Richter, who first used this technique in the 1960s, later said in an interview: "The smudging makes the paintings a bit more complete. When they're not blurred, so many details seem wrong, and the whole thing is wrong too. Then smudging can help make the painting invincible, surreal, more enigmatic."

**12 • *Acht Lernschwestern*, 1966***Eight Student Nurses*

These portraits are modeled on a newspaper clipping showing photographs of eight student nurses reproduced from their college yearbook. The pictures were accompanied by the following caption: "The Chicago police are searching feverishly for a mass murderer, who, for unknown reasons, brutally killed eight student nurses in a dormitory on Thursday [...]. A ninth nurse was able to hide and later called the police."

The black-and-white representation, the position of the head on the canvas and the blurred silhouettes immediately establish the formal connection between the works in the cycle. Since the pictures are deprived of their explanatory caption, the dramatic events underlying them remain in obscurity. Removed from the context of the newspaper article, the portraits no longer refer to a specific content but generate their own, purely visual message. The out-of-focus outlines of the young women, their rigid gazes and their smiles frozen into grimaces seem ghostly and unreal. The portraits can trigger a sense of unease and anxiety and arouse a sense of foreboding in the viewer.

**13 • *Verkündigung nach Tizian*, 1973***Annunciation after Titian*

On a trip to Venice in 1972, Gerhard Richter was deeply impressed by Titian's painting of the *Annunciation*, which he saw in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco: "I just wanted it for myself, for my apartment, so I decided to copy it, as far as I could. But I couldn't even manage a semi-presentable copy. So then I painted five variations on the Annunciation that didn't have much to do with Titian's Annunciation but that I was quite happy with."

In his five canvases, Richter has largely adopted the division, established in the original composition, into a left-hand pictorial zone with the angel and a right-hand zone with the Virgin. Even if the figures increasingly dissolve into abstract whirls of color, their link to the original motif is upheld by Richter's adherence to reds, blues and blacks.

In contrast to the *Eight Student Nurses*, the Titian series is not about the search for the formal similarity of the subject, but about the relationship of a theme to the possibilities of its variations. Richter approaches the Renaissance composition with increasing degrees of abstraction. The canvas that is the most blurred of all is not the last in the series, however, but the second. The first and second versions thus establish the framework for the 'missing' intermediary stages. At the same time, the most abstract picture does not become the definitive result of the creative process, but one possible solution among many.

**14 • *Bach*, 1992**

In the pictures of the *Bach* cycle, a weave-like texture was produced on the canvas using a squeegee. The alternation of sharp edges and elongated tracks of paint allows the signature of the squeegee to emerge and lends the pictures their structure. Primary colors intermingling at different levels reveal that Gerhard Richter repeatedly applied and scraped off his paints while they were still wet, and thereby constantly re-examined the relationship between mixing and overlaying. Each of these steps changes the character of the composition and brings to light marks that place the painting process as such on display. The smudges and stripes suggest a certain speed, the adhesion or non-adhesion of the paint, and chance. Working with the squeegee makes it impossible to predict the final outcome. Richter himself describes this process as “a good technique for switching off thought. I can’t consciously calculate what will emerge. Subconsciously, though, I do have an inkling of it. It’s a pleasant state of limbo.”

**15 • *Betty*, 1988**

The four large paintings of the *Bach* cycle are joined by these two tranquil portraits of young women, both of which radiate charm and intimacy. Richter’s handling of the medium of photography, and the familiar character of his subject, have here yielded pictures with warm hues and a gentle lighting. These paintings based on personal visual sources are diametrically opposed to those created on the basis of material found in newspapers, as in *Eight Student Nurses* (12 •). Gerhard Richter has captured Betty in a twisting pose. She thereby leans towards the viewer, and her shoulder seems close enough to touch. Her hair, combed back into a loose plait, and the texture and floral pattern of her bath robe, are painted with extreme precision, while the background is monochrome and empty. Betty’s head faces resolutely towards the rear; what she is looking at, however, remains unclear. Through this simultaneous combination of physical proximity and a turning away, intimacy and distance combine in one figure: “The averted face”, thus Richter, “may be a somewhat hackneyed way to introduce a sense of mystery into the portrait, but the core emotion, surely, is one of painful regret related to loss and separation—something along those lines. But, of course, I was not aware of this when I painted it”.

**16 • *Lesende*, 1994**

*Reader*

In this portrait, Gerhard Richter deliberately invokes the example of Jan Vermeer’s *Young Woman Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (ca. 1659). Both paintings show a profile view of a young woman reading. Bright light falls into the room from above and gently models the figure against the dark background. The reduced, diffusely defined room is bounded in the background by a door in schematic outline. The girl is wholly immersed in her reading and exudes an air of contemplative calm and private inwardness.

**17 • *Wald*, 2005**

The twelve-part *Wald* cycle asserts itself on the boundary between figurative and abstract painting. Vertical and horizontal welts, lines and bands of paint structure the surfaces against shadowy backgrounds. Gouge marks that abruptly start and stop furrow the canvases. Spatial depth is evoked by means of superimposed layers. Dark and mysterious sceneries offer the viewer spaces full of potential new discoveries.

The pictorial motif of the forest (the German word 'Wald' means 'forest' or 'wood') is strongly anchored in the age of German Romanticism, in particular. As an alternative world and a place of yearning that gives meaning to existence, the forest is a perfect vehicle of the irrational and mystical. The paintings of Gerhard Richter's *Wald* cycle create an environment of complex emotions, in which the tension between feeling lost and feeling safe becomes acutely palpable. In these powerful canvases, the artistic act of creation and Richter's searching and experimenting during the painting process can be visually retraced. Richter himself names the feeling of bewilderment as "the strongest motivation for and during painting. And the forest in general has a special significance, perhaps more so in Germany than anywhere else. You can lose your way in forests, feel deserted, but also secure, held fast in the bosom of the undergrowth. A fine Romantic subject."

**18 • *4900 Farben*, 2007**  
*4900 Colors*

Gerhard Richter's *4900 Colors* transforms this gallery into a spectacle of color on a monumental scale. The work dates from the same year in which his monumental window was unveiled in the south transept of Cologne Cathedral. The work consists of 196 panels, which can be combined and arranged in different constellations. Each panel "comprises 25 squares, each of identical size, but of more or less different color, [that were] sprayed onto small (97 x 97 x 2 mm) Alu-Dibond plates." The distribution of the individual colors is based on a principle that Richter first used in 1966 in his color charts and which he broadened in the 1970s by introducing the element of chance (see **1 •**). Insofar as Richter uses industrial methods to manufacture the square panels and avoids all signature by generating the distribution of the colors randomly by computer, he undermines the principle of personal authorship. In the chance order of the 4900 colored squares and the configuration of the panels into different wholes, the conceptual aspect of this work becomes clear.

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## ROOM 10

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### 19 • *Tote*, 1988

*Dead*, from the cycle **18. Oktober 1977**  
(*October 18, 1977*), 1988

The title of this 15-part cycle, also known as the *Baader-Meinhof Cycle*, goes back to events that took place in Stammheim prison, Stuttgart, involving members of the Red Army Faction (RAF), who were imprisoned there. After Ulrike Meinhof, co-founder of the terrorist group, had been found hanged in her cell on May 9, 1976, three other members of the RAF also held in Stammheim prison—Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe—died during the night of October 18, 1977. Investigations indicated that they had committed suicide. Eleven years later, Gerhard Richter made the extensive visual material that he had collected on the subject the basis of a cycle of paintings.

The pictures of the dead bodies of the prisoners are shattering images. At times sharper, at others more diffuse and blurred in their painting, they avoid all clarity of focus. The *Youth Portrait* of Ulrike Meinhof (ROOM 11) could not present a greater contrast to her portrait in *Dead*. In their different sizes and their variations of the motif, the three pictures of the dead Ulrike Meinhof resemble attempts to grasp the intangibility and incomprehensibility of the event of death. The smallest picture in the cycle is the most blurred of all: despite the close-up view of her head and shoulders, we are granted only a veiled glimpse of the body of the dead woman. We find ourselves plunged into a chapter of contemporary history, whose visualization in painting Richter explains not as a political act but as a representation of human tragedy: “There is sorrow, but I hope one can see that it is sorrow for the people who died so young and so crazy, for nothing.”

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## ROOM 10/11

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### 20 • *Plattenspieler*, 1988

*Record Player*, from the cycle **18. Oktober 1977**  
(*October 18, 1977*), 1988

Richter's *Record Player* painting has a particular function within the *Baader-Meinhof Cycle*. It is the only picture to show a single object—one that played a major role, however, in the events of October 18, 1977: the casing of the record player served Andreas Baader as a hiding place for the weapon that killed him. The banal object is charged with heightened significance given the way in which it was used, so that the record player becomes an important part of the events surrounding the deaths of the RAF members. This image thus assumes an explosive relevance that contrasts with the harmlessness of the still-life representation.

### 21 • *Abstraktes Bild*, 1988

*Abstract Painting*

In protest against the conditions of his imprisonment, Holger Meins, a member of the Red Army Faction, went on a hunger strike of many weeks' duration, resulting in his death on November 9, 1974. Gerhard Richter originally intended to include a picture of the dead Meins in his *October 18, 1977* cycle, but in the end painted an abstract image over the work. The portrait of the dead Meins has been rendered unrecognizable by the application of several layers of paint.

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## ROOM 11

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### 22 • *Decke*, 1988

*Blanket*

After completing the painting *Erhängte (Hanged)*, also on view in this room, Gerhard Richter created the present second version, identical in size to the first. He subsequently removed it from the *October 18, 1977* cycle and painted over the image in an abstract manner. In its porous structure, the paint seems to be corroding the support and in this way to obscure the original motif.

**23 • 7 Scheiben (Kartenhaus), 2013***7 Panes (House of Cards)*

*7 Panes (House of Cards)* and *12 Panes (Row)* in ROOM 4 are the most recent of several glass objects in Richter's oeuvre, the earliest of which he created in 1967. The 'free'-standing arrangement of the panes of glass in the room conveys the impression of (pictorial) surfaces that have detached themselves from the wall. The reflective properties of the panes of glass, which lean against and mutually support each other, are heightened by a fine coating that at the same time reduces their transparency. In his work, Gerhard Richter regularly interrogates the meaning of figurative representation and its veiling. He himself describes his glass objects as "gates onto nothingness." In the case of these glass works, however, there can never be an absolute void. Surfaces are duplicated, inverted and sliced. The viewer becomes part of the constantly changing, only temporarily existing pictorial space, one that at the same time engineers an architectural space. The panes tip out of the vertical axis, underlining the fragility of the material and their precarious equilibrium. Glass has a symbolic content for Gerhard Richter as a sign of the impossibility of knowledge. On a sketch, he noted: "Glass—Symbol (see everything / understand nothing)."

**24 • Doppelgrau, 2014***Double Gray*

Gerhard Richter has explored the multifaceted medial properties of picture, mirror and glass pane in multiple artworks since 1981. In his most recent work, *Double Gray*, he brings together the specific qualities of monochrome paintings and reflective surfaces, and thereby thematizes the picture as an illusory space in a new way. The gray initially evokes a kind of blank space, the absence of pictorial representation. These monochrome color spaces are repeatedly filled, however, by their incorporation of the viewer and fragments of the surrounding room as reflections within them. The viewer's visual involvement in the pictures prevents them from being perceived as static objects. In *Double Gray*, Richter thus once again interrogates the relationship between picture, room and viewer.

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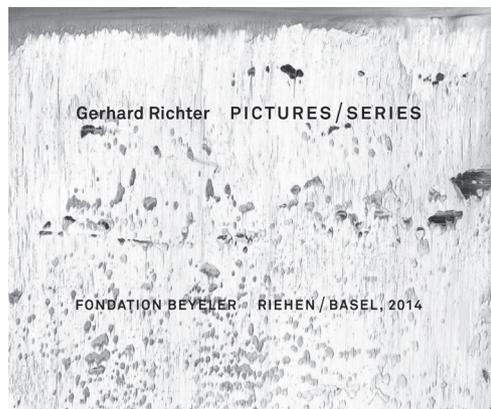
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The exhibition is accompanied by the catalogue **Gerhard Richter: PICTURES/SERIES** available in English and German, with texts by Georges Didi-Huberman and Dieter Schwarz, and an interview with Gerhard Richter by Hans Ulrich Obrist.

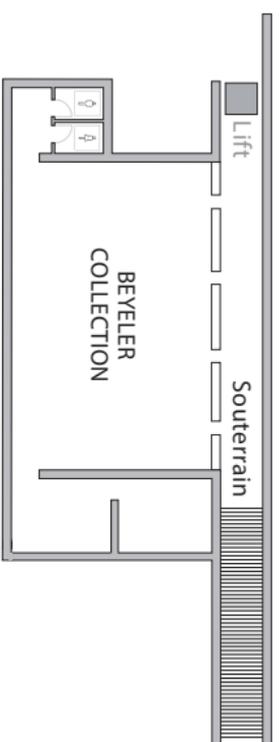
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**CAUTION: Please do not touch the works of art!**



■ GERHARD RICHTER

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