

April 2023

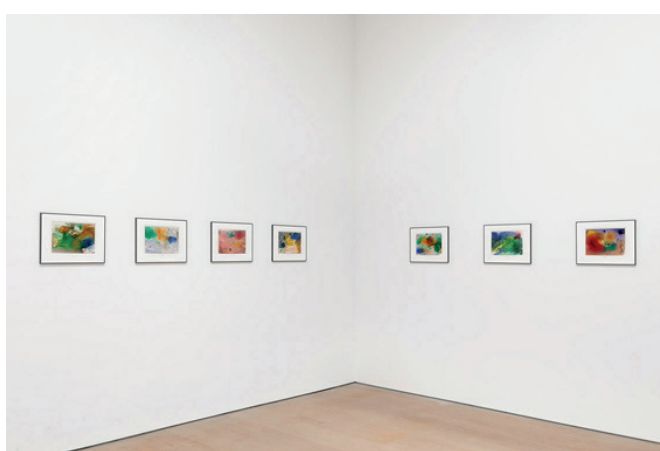
Gerhard Richter: New York 2023



A Gerhard Richter exhibition opened on 16 March 2023 at David Zwirner's in New York. It covers some of his paintings from 2016–2017, recent drawings, a new sculpture and an artist's book. The catalogue, which includes an essay by me, will appear in August. While going around the exhibition and talking to other visitors, I was astonished once again by the extent to which the works defy any attempt at categorization. If one thinks of Richter's way of working as being conceptual, the realization that the paintings and drawings are also deeply emotional follows immediately, but in turn, if one becomes enthralled by these works' visual appeal, the conceptual acuity they entail is sobering. This is true of the paintings, the most recent ones Richter has done; they were not planned to be the "last" and hence are free of pathos; rather, they can be understood as addressing the tragedy of painting as such. This insight applies equally to his new drawings, which take the basic conditions of drawing as their theme, namely, the deposition of a mark on a piece of paper.

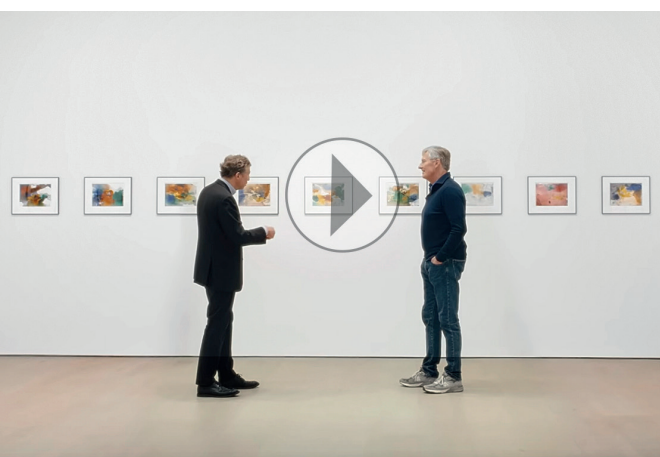


Last but not least, the works in coloured inks dating from January 2022 are a surprise. Richter published an edition of mounted and framed facsimiles of these, which are currently hanging in the show in lieu of the originals. Furthermore, these sheets have been reproduced in their original size in a book entitled »mood«, accompanied by commentaries Richter compiled from texts he had come across, including some about his work. The subtitle he gave to the book "31 annotated ink sketches" should be taken seriously, even though the texts may appear at first sight to be mere incoherent assemblages. On careful reading, the annotations turn out to be not without meaning: semantic threads coalesce from the fragmented sentences, only to revert to being empty phrases in a similar manner to the colours, which condense visually and combine chaotically. An expression of sensations is to be found among the annotations, "the shivers of coming death". Artistic work is appraised as "a speculation that is unavoidable and in the end it works out"; it is also stated that, "beyond causes and measures" you "favour such phenomena and even have a decisive share in their emergence". And doesn't the following passage even offer a valid description of the picture cycle: "This dream enraptures and its reproduction is the actual."



Whose voice is to be heard here? It is not that of the artist, since the texts come from other authors; rather, it is a matter of found snippets of writing and their host of connotations, which Richter articulates anew, in an analogous manner to the paints that, on account of their consistency, coagulate in some places on the paper. Again, these textual fragments allow us to grasp the artist's ambivalence, for he speaks without having to identify with the statements. And Richter went even further: he used DeepL for the English versions presented opposite the German texts in the book. This is a programme freely available in the Internet, and thus a machine translation devoid of any personal voice.

The exhibition is addressed in a video conversation between David Zwirner and myself available at the following link:



Dieter Schwarz