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Gerhard Richter: Mirrors Mirrored

When I opened the exhibition of Gerhard Richter's photos at Sies + Höke in Düsseldorf a year ago, I spoke about how photography and mirroring are the two main mechanisms of producing pictures that have intrigued Richter and informed his art practice since 1962. However, in discussions of his work, photography is usually at the forefront. In this new exhibition at Sies + Höke, the focus is on mirroring, both in the narrow sense of the representation of reality in the looking glass, as well as a broader kind of reflection: the multifaceted mirror effects that Richter has used as an irritant as well as a productive element in his work.



Mirrors reproduce the real world without commentary; they duplicate reality to present an intangible image, which fluctuates constantly in line with the various viewing positions adopted in space. Mirror images are immediate, one could even describe them paradoxically as the quintessence of the picture in Richter's painterly world.

For works involving mirroring, Richter did not only use reflective glass, because in actual fact a faint reflection resonates even in clear glass. In a piece dating from 1967, four transparent panes of glass can be tilted at different angles along their axis, revealing no more than what lies behind the glass – a slice of reality, neither distorted nor transfigured. In 1981, in the Baselitz/Richter exhibition in Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Richter placed large mirrors next to his paintings for the first time, in order to demonstrate that mirrors work perfectly as pictures. In the 1990s, mirrors were coated with a colour, mostly grey; these were neither proper mirrors nor monochrome pictures, but rather both at the same time.



In the 2000s, Richter became more and more fascinated by glass as a material: for example, he attached Antelio glass with brackets to a wall so that the surroundings were reflected almost imperceptibly, with a sheen added to them. Furthermore, Richter mounted reproductions of his paintings behind such glass panes, so that it was not possible to look at them without perceiving oneself as well. Glass also provided the supports for the colourful lacquer pictures, which Richter first created in small formats, but later in larger sizes. Finally, he exploited the shimmering surfaces of glass and metal; lustre and reflection are phenomena which cannot be definitively kept apart. They affect each other in some of the objects that Richter conceived of in parallel to the picture-like mirrors, for example, the three versions of matt polished steel spheres that reflect everything that goes on around them.



Last but not least, there is a third use of mirroring in Richter's work. This has clearly not been adequately appreciated, given that it has served him as a guiding principle for building a structure, whether this be for the design of the books *Eis* (Ice) and *War Cut*, or for the woven tapestries based on the mirror image of an abstract painting. This led Richter to develop the *Patterns*, which were generated digitally according to the rule "divided mirrored repeated" and from which the so-called *Strip* paintings were derived.



The fact that the exhibition at Sies + Höke opens with a piece created in 2024 demonstrates the current relevance of the topic to the artist. This work is made up of a series of eleven small grey mirrors mounted on the wall in a vertical row without any gaps between them. They differ from the large grey mirror panels that dominate a wall or a space. You move about, bend over and look up, when viewing this sequence of mirrors, thus seeing them from different angles and consequently the constantly changing mirror images.

The exhibition runs until June 28, 2025 and is accompanied by a catalogue with a text that addresses this theme in more depth.

Dieter Schwarz