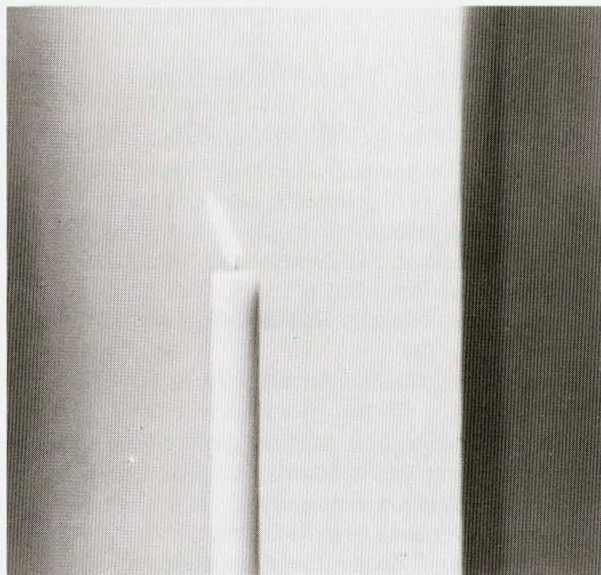


*Gerhard Richter/MATRIX 95*  
*July 2 - September 6, 1987*



*Candle (before Tapestry) (Kerze  
[vor Tapete]), oil on canvas, 1982*

MATRIX is supported in part by  
a grant from the National  
Endowment for the Arts, a  
Federal agency.

*Gerhard Richter/MATRIX 95*

Perhaps more than any other contemporary artist, Gerhard Richter has attempted to undermine any critical system which would assimilate his work with any one stylistically established group of artists. His only consistency seems to be in the constant shifts of style in his work. Yet, despite the apparently confusing variety of formal presentations and of source material which he has explored, there may be a way to understand his overall conceptual approach without denying him the provocative role of devil's advocate which he seems so consciously to have chosen for himself.

Richter was born in 1932 in Dresden, in what is now East Germany. He had formal training in the art school of that city from 1951 to 1955. By the time he moved to the west in March 1961, just before the erection of the Berlin Wall, he had already attempted to separate himself from the official realist art dictated by the state. In Düsseldorf where he settled and where, since 1971, he has been a professor at the Staatlichen Kunstakademie, Richter immersed himself in the latest experiments of a rapidly expanding artistic community. However, as one distanced by both artistic and political background, he remained an outsider and was thus able to comment critically on the very ideas which were then current in the West German artistic environment which was just beginning to sense its freedom after the years of state imposed Nazi realist art.

Richter's first major exhibition was one he staged with Konrad Lueg (now the gallery dealer Konrad Fischer) and artist Sigmar Polke, also a refugee from East Germany. *Capitalist Realism* opened in October 1963 in a furniture showroom with paintings (including **Mouth** [1963] in this exhibition) by the artists scattered among the wares and with the artists sitting in a living room environment commenting on the situation. Although clearly responsive to Pop happenings in this country, the

---

*Capitalist Realist* show also had sharp political and critical edges. The artists were asking, in effect, if Pop, with its obsessive references to consumer culture, was, in fact, a capitalist art, one with inevitable ties to the economic (and thus political) system in which it was produced, and, therefore, one which could only be carried to those places which aligned themselves with the post-war political activities of the United States. Moreover, in a Germany rushing headlong into westernization under Konrad Adenauer the term realism had uncomfortable echoes of the Nazi regime, memories of which the government was successfully trying to erase. And, of course, for Richter realism had been the official style of the communist government under which he had been trained. So the *Capitalist Realism* show was concerned as much about conflicting political systems as it was about different possibilities of artistic style.

Richter's early paintings are complex in the double reference to contemporary explorations in the arts and to the social realities of the world created. **Mouth** actually derives from a photograph of Brigitte Bardot, clearly a reference to Warhol's **Marilyn** images of 1962. Unlike his American counterpart, Richter refused to give up the painterly quality of the surface; the world of the technically produced image and the world of the artist's own manual dexterity become fused in the single image. Significantly, Richter's image is more overtly sinister and threatening than the glamorous publicity icon of Marilyn. In paintings like **Helen** (1963) and **C. Dereal** (1964), Richter makes further comment on the issue of technical skill by painting an apparently minutely accurate representation of the figure and then drawing a wide brush over it so that the image becomes blurred. Richter simultaneously presents a forceful image and, in a seemingly gratuitous act of aggression against the viewer, makes it hard to read.

The problem of legibility raises a number of concerns central to the content of Richter's work. Virtually all of his images derive from photographs, many of which he has kept in what he calls his "atlas." He adamantly maintains, however, that he wants to paint a photograph, not a painting after a photograph. This equation between the painting and the photograph is Richter's way of evading the term realism while at the same time complicating the discussion of replication. For just as the photograph does not replicate the world which exists before the camera, neither do Richter's paintings replicate the photograph. Tellingly, Richter uses techniques



*Portrait of Holger Friedrich,*  
oil on canvas, 1972



*Little Landscape at the Seaside*  
(*Kleine Landschaft am Meer*),  
oil on canvas, 1969

stemming from photographic "mistakes" - the out-of-focus image, the blur, the accidental or awkward snapshot detail - to comment on the artistic choices being made about what reality to present. The small details of implied larger views (*Candle*, 1982; *Administrative Building*, 1964) suggest that Richter chose them because they have some privileged position within the larger view, yet they stubbornly refuse to divulge any more information than the purely painterly quality of the surface.

When Richter in effect defaces his image by dragging a brush over a meticulously painted form, he not only explores our ability to recognize, process and understand the image, but he also questions our tendency to equate quality with technical skill. And even if we manage to decipher Richter's individual images, we discover that his subject matter is completely banal, unlike the commercial images of Pop which at least provide us with something familiar and valued in the culture (that double-edged word) to consider. Unimportant family snapshots, journalistic photographs and the traditional landscape, portrait or still life from the history of art all play a role in Richter's



*Loo Paper (Klorolle)*,  
oil on canvas, 1965

work. As subjects they are important because they suggest personal histories and age-old traditions which here seem to be fading from consciousness regardless of how much we wish to retain our heritage and memories. While we are left with an intriguing painting as a work of art, we are also left with a nagging suspicion that we have lost something or that our perceptual abilities have been dulled beyond repair, perhaps from the very glut of media images from which Richter himself finds his non-subjects.

The effaced image also places Richter squarely in the middle of the ongoing dialogue concerning representation and abstraction which has been central to modern criticism. He seems to favor neither figurative nor abstract art (neither the art of the East nor that of the West), but instead provides an amalgamation of the two. Those painterly blurs on the surface, comparable to the later out-of-focus images like **Holger Freidrich** (1972), are, after all, but a form of pictorial abstraction, even



*Portrait of Henry de Montherland,*  
oil on canvas, 1971

though the figure still exerts a demanding presence. And the close-up detail and cropping in *Tubes* (1967), while depicting the shining cylindrical forms virtually diagrammatically, ultimately present merely abstract pattern on the surface.

In 1976 when Richter began to make pictures which he himself calls abstract paintings, he was, in fact, simply carrying on his earlier investigations. In these images, however, the object depicted is presumably but a photograph of a small section of a larger abstract painting, and it is painted with meticulous realistic detail. Richter has succeeded in erasing the questionable distinctions often made between realism and abstraction and in so doing provides a critique of our normal critical predispositions. That Richter is able to raise these critical and perceptual questions, while at the same time providing us with paintings which are visually brilliant and conceptually captivating, is a measure of his importance as an artist.

John Paoletti  
*Guest Curator*  
*Professor of Art History*  
*Wesleyan University*  
*Middletown, Connecticut*

*Works in MATRIX:*

*Helen*, 1963, oil on canvas, 44" x 40". Lent by Collection PaineWebber Group Inc., New York City.

*Mouth*, 1963, oil on canvas, 26 1/2" x 29 1/4". Lent from the collection of Raymond J. Learsy, New York City.

*President Johnson seeks to console Jacqueline Kennedy*, 1963, oil and ink on paper, 4 1/4" x 3". Private Collection.

*C. Dereal*, 1964, oil on canvas, 35 1/4" x 35 1/4". Private Collection.

*Administrative Building (Verwaltungsgebäude)*, 1964, oil on canvas, 39" x 58". Lent by Luhring, Augustine and Hodes Gallery, New York City.

*Loo Paper (Klorolle)*, 1965, oil on canvas, 21 3/8" x 15". Private Collection, Connecticut.

*Hunting Party (Jagdgesellschaft)*, 1966, oil on canvas, 45 5/8" x 46 5/8". Lent by David Nolan Gallery, New York City.

*Tubes (Röhren)*, 1967, oil on canvas mounted on stretched canvas, 7 1/4" x 6 7/8". Private Collection, Connecticut.

*Townscape (Stadtbild)*, 1968, oil on canvas, 21" x 17". Private Collection.

*Townscape (Stadtbild)*, 1968, oil on canvas, 21" x 16 1/2". Private Collection, Canada.

*Vintage (Weinernte)*, 1968, oil on canvas, 37 1/4" x 45 1/4". Private Collection, Connecticut.

*Shadow Picture (Schattenbild)*, 1968, oil on canvas, 26 1/4" x 34 1/8". Private Collection, Connecticut.

*Little Landscape at the Seaside (Kleine Landschaft am Meer)*, 1969, oil on canvas, 28 1/8" x 41 1/4". Private Collection, Connecticut.

*Portrait of Henry de Montherland*, 1971, oil on canvas, 28" x 22". Lent from the collection of Raymond J. Learsy, New York City.

*Untitled (Ohne Titel)*, 1971, acrylic on paper, one unit from a suite of one hundred fifty, each 15" x 15". Private Collection.

*Untitled (Ohne Titel)*, 1971, acrylic on paper, two units from a suite of one hundred fifty, each 15" x 15". Lent by David Nolan Gallery, New York City.

*Portrait of Holger Friedrich*, 1972, oil on canvas, 55" x 55". Private Collection.

*Grey (Grau)*, 1972, oil on canvas, 18 1/4" x 18 1/8". From the LeWitt Collection, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

*Abstract Painting (Abstraktes Bild)*, 1980, oil on wood panel, 17 1/2" x 25 3/8". Private Collection.  
*Candle (before Tapestry) (Kerze [vor Tapete])*, 1982, oil on canvas, 35 1/2" x 37 1/2". From the LeWitt Collection, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum.  
*Broom (Besen)*, 1984, oil on canvas, 89" x 79". Lent from the collection of Raymond J. Learsy, New York City.  
*Rack (Gestell)*, 1985, oil on canvas, 98" x 78". Private Collection.  
 25.3.86, 1986, oil on photograph, 39 1/2" x 31 1/2". Lent by Mathew Marks, courtesy of David Nolan Gallery, New York City.

#### *Selected One-Person Exhibitions:*

Möbelhaus Berges, Düsseldorf '63; Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich '64; Galerie h, Hannover '66; Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf '70; Museum Folkwang, Essen '70; Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf '71; Venice *Biennale*, '72; Reinhard Onnasch, NYC '73; Kunsthalle, Bremen '76; Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels '76; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris '77; Sperone Westwater Fischer, NYC '78, '80, '83, '85, '87; Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven '78; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London '79; Marian Goodman Gallery, NYC '85, '87; Nationalgalerie, Berlin '86.

#### *Selected Group Exhibitions:*

Kaiserstrasse, Düsseldorf *Demonstrative Ausstellung* '63; Deutscher Künstlerbund, Haus am Waldsee, Berlin *Möglichkeiten* '64; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Biennale de Paris* '67; Stadtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts - Freie Berufe sammeln* '71; Stadtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf *Prospect '71: Projection* '71; Kassel, *Documenta 5* '72; Stadtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf *Prospect '73 '73*; Kunstverein Hannover *Kunst aus Fotografie* '73; Parcheggio di Villa Borghese, Rome *Contemporanea* '73; Kunsthalle, Cologne *Projekt - Aspekte der internationalen Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre* '74; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam *Fundamentale Malerei* '75; Art Institute of Chicago, *Europe in the Seventies: Aspects of Recent Art* '77; Kassel, *Documenta 6* '77; Venice, *Biennale* '80; Hayward Gallery, London, *Pier + Ocean* '80; ARC, Paris *Art Allemagne Aujourd'hui* '81; Royal Academy of Arts,



London, *A New Spirit in Painting* '81; Kassel, *Documenta 7* '82; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam '60'80, *attitudes/concepts/images* '82; The Museum of Modern Art, NYC *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* '84; Messegelände, Düsseldorf *von hier aus* '84; Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf *Aufbrüche* '84; The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto *The European Iceberg* '85; Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst, Munich *Deutsche Kunst seit 1960* '85; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh *Carnegie International* '85; Nationalgalerie, Berlin 1945-1985. *Kunst in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* '85; Royal Academy of Arts, London *German Art in the 20th Century* '85.

*Selected Bibliography by Richter (and Interviews):*

Hulsmann, Dieter. "Das Perfekte Bild", *Rheinische Post*, Düsseldorf, May 3, 1966.

Statement in *Grafik des Kapitalistischen Realismus: K. P. Brehmer, Hodicke, Lueg, Polke, Richter, Vostell: Werkverszeichnungen bis 1971*, Berlin 1971.

Interview with Rolf Schon, in *Gerhard Richter*, Essen, Museum Folkwang, 1972, p. 23+ (used as catalogue for 1972 Venice *Biennale* exhibition).

Interview with Rolf Gunter-Dienst, in *Gerhard Richter*, Essen Museum Folkwang, 1972, p. 19+.

Interview with Peter Sager, *Das Kunstwerk*, July 1972, p. 16+.

Lebeer, Irmeline. "Gerhard Richter ou la réalité de l'image", *Chroniques de l'art vivant* vol. 36 (February 1973), p. 14+.

Statement in *K. P. Brehmer, K. H. Hodicke, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Wolf Vostell: Werkverszeichnungen der Druckgrafik. Band II: September 1971 bis Mai 1976*, Berlin, 1976.

Ferguson, Bruce and Jeffrey Spalding. "Interview with Gerhard Richter", Halifax, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1978.

Gruterich, Marlies. "Poetische Aufklärung", *Ink*, Zurich, 1978, p. 87+.

Statement in *Pier + Ocean*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1980, p. 114.

Statement in *Documenta 7*, Kassel, 1982, vol. 1: p. 83+.

Dietrich, Dorothea. "Gerhard Richter: An Interview," *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, vol. XVI, no. 4 (September-October 1985), p. 128+.

Statement in *The European Iceberg*, The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1985, p. 365.

*Selected Bibliography about Richter:*

Collins, James. "Gerhard Richter," *Artforum* vol. 12 no. 5 (January '74), p. 72+.

Flynn, Barbara. "Gerhard Richter," *Artforum* vol. 16 no. 8 (April '78), p. 62.

Welish, Marjorie. "Gerhard Richter at Sperone Westwater Fischer," *Art in America* vol. 66 no. 3 (May-June '78), p. 116.

Danoff, Michael. "Gerhard Richter: Multiple Styles," *Arts Magazine* vol. 52 no. 10 (June '78), p. 150+.

Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "Ready-made, photography and painting in the painting of Gerhard Richter," *Gerhard Richter*, London, 1979 (exhibition catalogue for the Whitechapel Gallery).

Lawson, Thomas. "Gerhard Richter," *Flash Art* no. 96-97 (March-April '80), p. 18.

Linker, Kate. "Gerhard Richter," *Artforum* vol. 21 no. 8 (April '83), p. 71+.

Reason, Rex. "Gerhard Richter," *Flash Art* no. 112 (May '83), p. 64.

Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "Richter's Fracture: Between the Synecdoche and the Spectacle," *Gerhard Richter*, New York, 1985 (exhibition catalogue for Marian Goodman Gallery and Sperone Westwater Gallery).

Indiana, Gary. "Living with Contradictions," *The Village Voice* March 26, '85, p. 91.

van Bruggen, Coosje. "Gerhard Richter: Painting as a Moral Act," *Artforum* vol. 23 no. 9 (May '85), p. 82+.

Harten, Jürgen. *Gerhard Richter: Paintings 1962-1985*, Cologne, 1986 (catalogue for retrospective exhibition in Berlin, Düsseldorf, Bern and Vienna; includes extensive bibliography and exhibition lists).

Grasskamp, Walter. "Gerhard Richter: An Angel Vanishes," *Flash Art* no. 128 (May/June 1986), p. 30+.

Ellis, Stephen. "The Elusive Gerhard Richter," *Art in America* vol. 74 no. 11 (November '86), p. 131+.