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Gerhard Richter: Recovery and Memory in Postwar Germany

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Gerhard Richter: Recovery and Memory in Postwar Germany

Abstract

Gerhard Richter explored themes of memory and national identity in a society with a controversial past and a difficult recovery. He broke the silence that permeated the country and created a dialogue about remembering, memorializing, and politics.

After World War II, Germany had difficulty facing the atrocities of the war and ignored the flaws in the country's recovery. Richter witnessed first hand the social and political struggles of the country as a citizen of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic, societies that required strict conformity to their ideologies. Upon his escape to West Germany, where he was exposed to Pop Art, Abstract Expressionism, and the expected rejection of Socialism, Richter forged a painting career devoid of stylistic or content conformity.

Richter's family paintings and his October 18, 1977 series from 1988 directly confront Germany's struggle to recover from the Second World War. The family paintings address the ways in which World War II affected his own family's dynamic and identity. The October 18, 1977 series comments on the events involving the Baader-Meinhof group inside Stammheim Prison, and in doing so highlights social unrest and political controversy in Germany in the 1970's. Richter's refusal to stay silent about these issues allowed him to bring to light the reality of Germany's condition. Although these pieces were painted in a photorealistic style, the literal blurring of these images makes a statement about clarity, perception, and reality while toying with the norms associated with the mediums of painting and photography. Richter addresses unspeakable topics with an unconventional painting style to create a dynamic juxtaposition of ambiguity and directness.

Keywords

art history, art, World War II, Germany

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Comments

Art History Thesis

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Gerhard Richter: Recovery and Memory in Postwar Germany

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I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

Gerhard Richter is one of the most daring artists in the modern world. Throughout his painting career, he has tackled topics that other German artists avoided and created paintings that reflected the ambiguous and distorted reality of German society. After World War II, Germany had difficulty facing the atrocities of the war and attempted to overlook the flaws in the country's recovery. Richter witnessed first hand the repercussions of strict and ruthless ideologies like the Nazi Party and the German Democratic Republic. Upon his escape to West Germany, Richter realized that the abstract style valued in the capitalist society could not be sufficient to represent the societal issues going on all around him. Richter combined the teachings from art academies in the East and the West to forge a painting career fixated on the unpaintable, specifically subjects related to World War II and German terrorism. His unique and ambiguous style used photographs collected from magazines, newspapers, and family albums to serve as source material for his large, photo-based paintings.

In the 1960s, Richter created several family paintings that addressed the ways in which World War II affected his own family's dynamic and identity. These paintings explored the ways in which perpetrators and victims were remembered and accepted by their families. "The Nazi in the family" made home life difficult for many Germans, while controversy stirred because former Nazis were still involved in government and economic affairs for many years after the end of the Second World War.¹ Terrorists that were part of the Baader-Meinhof group attacked Germany with violence in protest against the unsuccessful denazification of the state. The *October 18, 1977* cycle from 1988 commented on the events involving the Baader-Meinhof group inside Stammheim Prison, and in doing so highlighted social unrest and political controversy in Germany in the 1970s. Richter's refusal to stay silent about these issues allowed

¹ Gerhard Richter in Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2002), 40.

him to bring to light the reality of Germany's condition. Although these pieces were painted in a photorealistic style, the literal blurring of these images makes a statement about clarity, perception, and reality while toying with the norms associated with the mediums of painting and photography. Richter addresses unimaginable topics with an unconventional painting style to create a dynamic juxtaposition of ambiguity and directness.

Gerhard Richter explored themes of memory and national identity in a society with an unspeakable past and a difficult recovery. He broke the silence that permeated the country and created a dialogue about memory and reality. Through the examination of his early pieces during his time in the Dresden and Düsseldorf Art Academies, his family paintings from the mid 1960s, and his *October 18, 1977* cycle from 1988, it can be demonstrated that Richter created his photorealistic paintings to confront Germany's dark history and highlight its complicated recovery.

Early Life

Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in 1932, just one year before Adolph Hitler rose to power in Germany. As a child during the Nazi regime, Richter was subject to the lifestyle and rules of the National Socialist Party. He barely knew his father, Horst Richter, whom like most men of military age, was required to enlist in the German army. Richter participated in the Hitler Youth as many young boys did; however, he did not thrive there because he was not athletic and did not fully understand or believe in the ideology behind the group. Although his family had moved to a small village outside of Dresden, they constantly lived in fear of allied bombing, especially after the destruction of Dresden in early 1945.²

² Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 19.

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union took over East Germany, including Richter's village. Horst Richter returned from an American prisoner-of-war camp in 1946 after many years of absence. He was unable to return to his teaching post because of his involvement with the Nazi party, which caused financial tension at home and complicated his relationship with his son even further. Richter dropped out of grammar school and focused on drawing and photography until he acquired a job working for the German Democratic Republic making Communist propaganda banners. Ironically, he was only allowed to wash the banners and never had the chance to paint, which caused him to jump around between a several other jobs as a theater set painter and a sign painter for Stalin in addition to attending art classes. Despite being originally rejected from the Dresden Art Academy for being unprepared and for his commercial portfolio content, Gerhard Richter was accepted to the academy in 1950 and began his formal art education in the Communist school.³

The Dresden Art Academy curriculum was strict, traditional, and rarely ventured from the ideals of Socialist Realism, which was the official style of the Soviet Union. This style served as its own form of propaganda for the Communist state and depicted a "blueprint" of the ideal society that Communism could create.⁴ Socialist Realism rejected modernist trends like abstraction or expressionism, which would have clouded the Communist messages that were communicated through the art, and instead conformed to a more academic style. Figures in Socialist Realism paintings were idealized to support this political agenda and attempted to convince the common people of its reflection of reality; artists in the academy were only allowed

³ Ibid, 20. (Storr)

⁴ Ann Demaitre, "The Great Debate on Socialist Realism," *The Modern Language Journal* 50 (1966): 264, accessed February 18, 2015.

to exhibit their work if they followed the strict conventions of this style.⁵ These qualities can be seen in Gerhard Richter's *Mural* (fig. 1, 1956), which he created for the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden. All of the men, women, and children in this mural are happy, healthy, and enjoying each other's company. The figures, painted on the shore of an idyllic lake, lack any individuality, allowing this mural to serve as a general example of the simple and happy life that citizens of a Communist civilization can attain. Richter painted a simple and traditional Socialist Realism piece that conforms to the artistic teachings of the academy.⁶

Richter became fairly successful in the Dresden mural department and was rewarded with a steady income and freedom to travel outside of the German Democratic Republic for the purpose of visiting galleries and museums. Although Pablo Picasso was somewhat accepted in the East because of his Communist beliefs, the students of the Dresden Art Academy were relatively unaware of the artistic styles in the West. It was not until Richter's privileged visits to West Germany and Paris that he was exposed to the modernism and abstraction of Western art and decided to escape to West Germany. Richter admitted, "I was enormously impressed by [Jackson] Pollock and [Lucio] Fontana.... The sheer brazenness of it! That really fascinated me and impressed me. I might almost say that those paintings were the real reason I left the GDR. I realized that something was wrong with my whole way of thinking."⁷ These trips opened Richter's eyes to an art world where artists could create art that was personal and experimental rather than art that was dictated by Communist ideology. He began to realize how the academy manipulated his ideas of his self-importance and proficiency in the art world by rewarding or denying him the opportunity to exhibit his work. In 1961, just a few months before the

⁵ Ján Bakoš, "Prologue: Strategy of Socialist Realism," *Centropa* 11 (2011): 109, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁶ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 21.

⁷ Gerhard Richter, "Interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 1986," in *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2002), 22.

construction of the Berlin Wall, Richter and his wife, Ema, escaped to West Berlin and eventually made their way to Düsseldorf.⁸

Upon his relocation to West Germany, Richter enrolled in the Düsseldorf Art Academy where he restarted his art education, this time with abstraction, under the instruction of Karl-Otto Götz, who was an important figure in Abstract Expressionism, a style characterized by gesture and formlessness. Pieces such as Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* (fig. 2, 1950) and Götz's *27.5.1954* (fig. 3, 1954) defined Abstract Expressionism while the neo-Dada movement known as Fluxus dominated the world of performance art. These movements, which were emphasized in the Düsseldorf Art Academy, caused him to experiment with basic elements of painting, especially paint distribution and balance, absence of figurative subjects, and creating works with process-based rather than form-based results. Richter's *Untitled (One of Many Efforts to Paint Abstractly)* (fig. 4, 1960) demonstrates his dedication to abstract studies. However, despite his many attempts to create completely abstracted painting, he struggled to entirely abandon the representational images that had been emphasized in Dresden, and in an effort to practice both abstraction and representation, he created his first photo-based images. He gathered photographs from magazines, newspapers, and other publicly-distributed sources as material subject matter for his paintings, a process that would later dominate his works. *Party* (fig. 5, 1962) depicted several women and a man enjoying a night out, a scene inspired originally from a magazine image, but Richter sliced the canvas and painted stitched but dripping wounds onto the figures. Richter's painting examined edgy subject matter as well as formal elements made famous by Fontana, who often slashed a knife through his canvas.⁹ *Party* was also one of

⁸ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 22-24.

⁹ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 24-28.

Richter's first paintings that demonstrated his distaste what he considered the overly commercialized aspects of Western society.

Despite his constant practice and experimentation, Richter became increasingly frustrated with the styles that were taught at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. He and several other students at the academy, including Sigmar Polke and Konrad Leug, began to focus more on the beginnings of Pop Art, which emphasized the recurring images and consumer culture and of Western society.¹⁰ Richter experimented more with his photo-based paintings while using banal, everyday images for his subjects. *Cow* (fig. 6, 1964) features the front half of a cow with the German word for cow (kuh) written in large print in the lower left corner.¹¹ The lettering makes obvious what we already know about the image and in doing so creates redundancy and at the same time reminds the viewer of the image's self-awareness. The cow acknowledges the viewer's gaze by looking directly into the viewer's eyes. The image also presents the many ways that consumption plays in its interaction with the viewer; the viewer is consuming the word, the image, the advertisement, and eventually the cow itself as a meal. The aspects of consumption, however, are less glorified or appetizing, which indicates Richter's more critical stance on the role of consumerism in the West. *Toilet Paper* (fig. 7, 1965) is simply a monochromatic painting of a toilet paper roll hanging on a blank wall. The subject matter is both mundane and uninteresting, but manages to capture the attention of the viewer because it is not usually present in high art. Much like Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (fig. 8, 1917), which brought everyday objects into the high art realm, Richter toys with the idea of what is worthy of being represented in the art world. The blurred toilet paper has become mysterious and intangible despite the photographic feel of

¹⁰ Ibid, 32. (Storr)

¹¹ Richter's *Cow* preceded Warhol's *Cow* wallpaper. Michael Edward Shapiro, "Gerhard Richter: Paintings, Prints, and Photographs in the Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum," *Bulletin* 20 (1992): 9, accessed February 18, 2015.

the image. Despite the ambiguity of the piece, the understanding of the means of the object's consumption requires no context other than the object itself, demonstrating the power of representation that had been lost in the flurry of Western abstraction.¹² *Toilet Paper* examines a private space in a public display and marks an important point in Richter's stylistic development toward the interaction of private and public experiences in postwar Germany.

Photo-based paintings were becoming a staple in Richter's portfolio as he delved into more critical subject matter. *Dead* (fig. 9, 1963) plays upon the same ideas of public images and consumption and follows a similar structure to *Cow* with the German word for "dead" (tote) written in the top corner of the painting with the top of the lettering cut off slightly. A magazine clipping had "tote" printed directly above the photograph (fig. 10, 1963), and Richter translated this word placement directly onto his painting. The original magazine article reports a ship that sunk off of the coast of Long Island and three of the nine sailors' dead bodies washed up on the shore.¹³ The painting portrays just one of these bodies, which was crushed by a large ice block, leaving only the bottom half of the corpse in view. *Dead* comments on the fascination with death in the media and how an ordinary person's single moment of fame is in his or her demise.¹⁴ This piece relates to Andy Warhol's "Death and Disaster" silk screens, which experimented with repetition and desensitization in the American media.¹⁵ Richter believed that this obsession stemmed from the "inexplicable and utter senseless nature of death" which he depicts almost comically in this painting.¹⁶ The ridiculousness of a huge ice chunk landing on a man with

¹² Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 191.

¹³ Uwe M. Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era* (Hamburg: Hirmer Publishers, 2011): 19, 195.

¹⁴ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 38.

¹⁵ Foster, *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha*, 109-110.

¹⁶ Gerhard Richter, "On Pop, East and West, and Some of the Picture Sources: Uwe M. Schneede in Conversation with Gerhard Richter," in *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era* (Hamburg: Hirmer Publishers, 2011): 195.

absolutely no explanation as to how the event happened has an almost cartoon-like effect and leaves the viewer with many questions. The truncated word requires the viewer to draw conclusions based on insufficient information, which directly relates to the blurry depiction of the truncated body about which the viewer must also make inferences with little the minimal information provided.¹⁷ The only parts of the image that are clear are the shoes of the man surrounded by a ring of definition, a clue that Richter had edited that portion of the painting to make sure that the shoes were discernible, only adding to the uncertainty of the piece. Despite all of the missing pieces, the viewer can easily sense the tragic nature of the event, hinting at a universal understanding of death and the unavoidable obscurity of its meaning.

Richter's references to consumer culture conform to trends in Western art, but his unusual style and obscure subject matter mark the beginning of his break away from the teachings of the Düsseldorf Academy and movement toward works that are personally and politically charged. *Ema (Nude on a Staircase)* (fig. 11, 1966) depicts Richter's then wife, Ema, as a ghostly, nude figure walking down a set of stairs. The piece undoubtedly references Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)* (fig. 12, 1912) in its name and its content. Duchamp was a celebrated Dada artist who was one of the main inspirations for the rise of neo-Dadaism during Richter's education at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. However, *Ema (Nude on a Staircase)* is not a tribute to the respected Dada artist. Duchamp's nude was created from multiple viewpoints in the cubist style while Richter's nude is delicate and static, as if Ema is stagnant rather than moving as the title suggests. While Richter's painting does not embrace a modernist style, it also rejects the conventions of a traditional declining nude. *Ema (Nude on a Staircase)* also ventures into the realm of personal and intimate subject matter. Richter chose a photograph of his own wife and painted it for the public sphere, exploring the boundaries

¹⁷ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 38.

between private and public life. The intentional blurring of the piece is the only privacy that Richter awards his wife and himself.¹⁸ *Ena* marks Richter's larger frustration with the trending movements, teachings of the academy, and accepted subject matter, which leads to his exploration of more taboo topics.¹⁹

Each work of art from Richter's early life and career, starting with his life in Germany's Third Reich, his Communist art education in Dresden, and his experimentation with abstraction and neo-Dadaism play an important role in the development of his style. *Dead* and *Ena (Nude on a Staircase)* were precursors to a long and successful career in which Richter pushed the limits of subject matter and memory in postwar Germany. Richter's family paintings explored his personal connections to the harrowing history of his nation.

The Family Paintings

For many years following World War II, German artists avoided any references to the war in their artwork. The nation as a whole struggled to recover from the physical and psychological damage that it had created and the people of Germany were not ready to face the reality of their involvement in the war. Swastikas were banned and Germany was essentially required to forget its past in order to recover financially and emotionally from the war. The subject of World War II was certainly taboo in the German art world, so when Gerhard Richter created paintings in the mid 1960's that addressed this topic, many German viewers were shocked. Richter produced several images that touched on the subject of the Second World War,

¹⁸ Paul Moorhouse, *Gerhard Richter Portraits: Painting Appearances* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 108-111.

¹⁹ Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era*, 202; Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 40.

but his most personal paintings addressed how the war affected his own family's dynamic and identity.²⁰

Like many Germans, several of Richter's family members that enlisted in the German military during the Third Reich, whether they joined by choice or were coerced to join by the government. Richter's *Uncle Rudi* (fig. 13, 1965) features his maternal uncle wearing in a military uniform, smiling at the viewer. This piece essentially transcribed a photograph that was taken of his uncle just before he left for Normandy where he was killed in action. Rudolph Schönfelder was the family favorite as he was charismatic, artistic, and handsome and served as Richter's childhood hero. At the time the photo was taken, Rudi was preparing to defend the beliefs of his nation, and the family was devastated when he died in 1944.²¹ This image was relatable and recognizable for most Germans because many men willingly participated in Nazi party affairs and fought for the ideas that the regime taught. However, after Germany had been defeated, the once respected and celebrated men burdened the family with their unforgivable pasts. "The Nazi in the family" caused many identity problems for men who returned to their homes and raised questions on how to remember the men who did not return.²²

Uncle Rudi reflects a larger German family experience of coping and acceptance during and after World War II. The original image was captured by a proud family seeing the young man off to war but had since been hidden in the pages of a family photo album. Richter reflected on Nazi soldiers returning home after the war, saying that "nobody wanted them."²³ The painting

²⁰ Robert Storr, "Interview with Gerhard Richter," in *Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2003): 161.

²¹ Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era*, 110, 200.

²² Gerhard Richter in *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 40.

²³ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 19.

shared a similar fate and was eventually donated to the Czech Museum of Fine Arts because no one wanted it.²⁴

The blurring of the painting plays an important role in the perception and meaning of the piece. Literally blurring the image makes it difficult for the viewer to perceive exactly what he or she is looking at. It is clear that there is a man in the German Wehrmacht uniform is standing in front of a plain wall, but any details beyond these are difficult to discern. While the painting is made to look photographic, the blur of its surface declares its separation from photography and intentionally obscures the image.²⁵

Richter plays with the expectations of what photography and painting are supposed to accomplish by combining them into an unusual style to guarantee that the piece does not fully achieve the status of either. Photography is supposed to record a clear and accurate representation of subject, but Richter's piece is blurred, creating a piece that resembles a photograph but fails to capture a careful record of Rudi's features or location. Painting during this time period was mostly abstracted, intentionally polarizing itself from photography, but Richter's embraces the photographic aesthetic, blurring the boundary between painting and photograph.

Painting had been an important method of recording history. However, once photography was invented, the identity and purpose of painting came into question and many artists, especially in the 1960s, believed that painting was coming to an end. Douglas Crimp in his article "The End of Painting," wrote:

But during the 1960's, painting's terminal condition finally seemed impossible to ignore. The symptoms were everywhere: in the work of the painters themselves, each of whom seemed to be reiterating Reinhardt's claim that he was "just

²⁴ Ibid, 40. (Storr)

²⁵ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 40.

making the last paintings which anyone can make,” or to allow their paintings to be contaminated with such alien forces as photographic images.²⁶

Richter, who created *Uncle Rudi* in the middle of this painting crisis, plays with the idea of the end of painting and juxtaposes the history painting with unspeakable subject matter. Rudi’s centralized figure dominates the foreground of the image, spatially indicating his importance and historical legitimacy. However, Richter depicts a villainous figure from an unpaintable time in history, confronting the viewer with a topic that Germans were expected to never mention. This painting combines the traditional conventions of history painting that Richter learned in the East with a hint of abstraction from the West to create a piece in which he does not conform exclusively to either of the teachings.²⁷

Another one of Richter’s family paintings, *Aunt Marianne* (fig. 14, 1965), alludes to the story of a victim rather than a perpetrator. This painting features Richter as a baby being held by his young aunt. She smiles slightly as she caringly holds the child. Marianne suffered from schizophrenia and was institutionalized early on in the war until Nazi doctors euthanized her in 1945. This tragic story, which was rarely discussed in the Richter family, is concealed by the blurry banal quality of the painting.²⁸ The situation in which the perpetrator and the victim exist within the same family demonstrates the complex combination of experiences that occurred as a result of World War II.

Uncle Rudi and *Aunt Marianne* explore postwar private family incidences, but these issues of memory, tragedy, and acceptance related to the public sphere as well. *Mr. Heyde* (fig. 15, 1965) depicts two men, one with a police cap, shielding their faces from the viewer in what

²⁶ Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting,” *October* 16 (1981): 75, accessed February 18, 2015.

²⁷ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter’s Work of Mourning,” *October* 75 (1996): 64, accessed February 18, 2015.

²⁸ Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 48.

seems to be a journalistic image. This painting is complete with the caption from the original newspaper clipping stating, “Werner Heyde in November 1959, turning himself in to the authorities.”²⁹ Dr. Werner Heyde was largely responsible for the gassing method used for the “Final Solution” and went by the alias of Dr. Fritz Sawade after 1945 to avoid prosecution.³⁰ However, he was exposed in 1959, after which he turned himself in and committed suicide just days before his trial. Heyde’s leading efforts in criminal euthanization during World War II in a sense made him Marianne’s executioner, transforming this particular image into a personal one for the Richter family.³¹

Richter’s family ties to Nazi euthanization ran deeper than his aunt’s death. The father of Richter’s first wife Ema was a Nazi doctor and was rumored to be involved in the eugenics program, although he never admitted this to Richter.³² *Mr. Heyde* represents German war criminals that were eventually found and prosecuted. However, many people were never incarcerated, including Richter’s father-in-law. This problem of Nazis who evaded incarceration plagued Germany for many years as it rebuilt itself as a nation coping with its dark and complex history.

Gerhard Richter purposely depicted images that relate to sensitive and difficult topics for many of his German viewers. Without the title and caption, the blurred quality of *Mr. Heyde* would leave the man in the glasses unidentifiable, providing no clues to the depravity of his actions, causing the viewer to question the events that have lead to this man’s involvement with the police. *Uncle Rudi* was the kind of memory or photograph of a young Nazi soldier that existed for many families while *Aunt Marianne* could have represented any tragic loss of a

²⁹ “Gerhard Richter,” accessed February 18, 2015, <https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/>.

³⁰ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 40.

³¹ Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era*, 200; Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 40.

³² Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right*, 48.

loved one due to war crimes. These three paintings tie together family experience and public reality in a time of grief, guilt, and selective memory that was universally experienced in Germany.³³

The painting that is the most personally ambivalent for Richter is *Horst with Dog* (fig. 16, 1965). The man in this painting dons a strange hairdo and ruffled clothing while holding a wide-eyed, tense looking dog. The gentleman in the piece is in fact Richter's father, although the portrayal of him does not reflect a standard father-son relationship. All of the details in this painting imply an emotional distance between Gerhard and his father. Horst was absent for most of Richter's childhood and when he did return home after the war, he struggled to acquire a job and incorporate himself back into his family's life. His distance caused an unsteady relationship with Gerhard, who felt the man was more a stranger than a father.³⁴ This kind of father-son relationship was not uncommon for Germans during this time period.

“That's how it was for an entire generation. Like many others my age, I had never had the experience of an exemplary father. Most of our fathers were in the war for a long time and either did not come back at all or came back damaged and broken and as guilty men. This problem of a generation with damaged fathers continues to this day... Here ... it was also more an expression of the rejection of fathers, who had simply failed in every way.”³⁵

The painting reflects this view by portraying Horst in a strange or even uncomfortable manner. Horst's hair is untamed and jutting out of the sides of his head, the clothing around his neck is tussled, and his face is half smiling, as if he wasn't quite ready to be captured in an image. All of these details suggest a strangeness about Horst that leaves the viewer feeling uneasy; even the dog seems desperate to jump out of his arms. The blurring of the image is the defining element

³³ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 40.

³⁴ Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right*, 76.

³⁵ Uwe M. Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era* (Hamburg: Hirmer Publishers, 2011): 174-175.

of the piece that declares the confusing and distant relationship between father and son. The disconnect that Gerhard feels from his father is clearly reflected in his portrayal of Horst.

Gerhard Richter's family paintings are an important personal reflection and exploration of the repercussions of World War II on German families.³⁶ Richter's pieces, aside from the blurring and the large scale, are relatively unaltered compared to the original photographs, allowing the viewer to see the straightforward but obscure representation of family experiences during and immediately following the Second World War. Richter's intentional blurring of the images reminds the viewer that events cannot be accurately portrayed in paintings and that true understanding of the past may never be attained in the real world. These family paintings, which rather indirectly deal with loss and tragedy, served as a stepping-stone for Richter's most controversial and most direct paintings, The Baader-Meinhof pieces.

October 18, 1977

Gerhard Richter's 15-piece cycle titled *October 18, 1977* (1988) was put on display in the winter of 1989 without warning or promotion in a small city near Cologne called Krefeld. The cycle, which focused on the tragic events at the end of 1977 known as the "German Autumn," shocked many Germans who were still questioning and debating the deaths within Stammheim Prison. More than ten years after the incident, Germans were still trying to make sense of the dramatic series of events that dangerously challenged German democracy.³⁷ This cycle depicted the deaths of a radical group that attempted to bring attention to the political flaws in Germany's recovery.

³⁶ Richter continued to create family paintings later on in his career, but these paintings focused on his wives and children rather than on family members who were involved in World War II. These later family paintings were done in color and emphasized the beauty and innocence. These intimate paintings, like *Reader* (fig. 17, 1994), are softer and more personal than the paintings addressing his family's involvement in the Second World War.

³⁷ Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2000): 27.

Germany's political and social recovery from the Third Reich took many years and was met with significant backlash. The Red Army Faction, founded in the 1970 by Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Holger Meins, and Ulrike Meinhof, was a West German militant group that terrorized the nation for several decades. Participants of the faction considered themselves "urban guerillas," operating in large, highly populated cities in order to seize the attention of the government and the people.³⁸ The development of the Red Army Faction was associated with a disconnect between the Nazi generation, which was known for its silence when it came to the discussion of Nazi Germany, and the youth, who had many unanswered questions and felt that the recovery of the nation was too capitalist.

Immediately after World War II, the victorious allies, having experienced the repercussions of punishing and humiliating Germany after World War I, kick-started the recovery process by helping with currency stabilization, development of industrial infrastructure, and creating a government system based on an American model.³⁹ The United States' involvement in the redevelopment of the nation solidified the divide between the West and the Soviet-run East Germany, creating political and economic differences exacerbated by physical and social segregation. In addition to these problems, in the eyes of many West German youths, the "denazification" of the country had failed because there were former Nazis still active in the government and the economy. In reaction to these issues, the Red Army Faction brought to light the flaws of the recovering nation. The first generation of the Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof group, originally began as relatively peaceful protesters until pacifist Benno Ohnesorg was shot dead by police during a demonstration in Berlin in 1967.⁴⁰ Horrified and

³⁸ Charity Scribner, "Buildings on Fire: The Situationist International and the Red Army Faction," *Grey Room* 26 (2007): 33, accessed February 18, 2015.

³⁹ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 48. (Storr October 18)

angered by this unprovoked shooting, Gudrun Ensslin said at a rally shortly after, “This fascist state means to kill us all. We must organize resistance. Violence is the only way to answer violence. This is the Auschwitz generation and there’s no arguing with them!”⁴¹

Peaceful protests became violent bombings for many years to follow as the Baader-Meinhof group used terror to draw attention to what they believed to be major problems with the Germany recovery, like the presence of former Nazis in the government and insufficient public health facilities and education programs. In 1968, Baader and Ensslin joined forces in Frankfurt and bombed the Kaufhaus Schneider, a major department store in the center of the city, at midnight. After their arrests, Ensslin claimed that neither she nor Baader had intended to put any human life in danger, as evidenced by the timing of the bomb and low number of people injured. She stated that they only meant to damage property to bring attention to their political beliefs, which in this case was their opposition to the Vietnam War.⁴² While Baader and Ensslin served their prison sentences, Ulrike Meinhof, who was active through her publications in the leftist magazine *kronket*, wrote an essay that highlighted the distinction between harming human beings and damaging property. She also compared capitalism to a department store by saying, “What you find in capitalism you find in the department store. What you don’t find in the department store is scarcely found in capitalism, an age of insufficiency and inadequacy: hospitals, schools, kindergartens, health care.”⁴³ Meinhof’s activity in the media allowed readers to understand many of the underlying issues that the Baader-Meinhof group believed were plaguing Germany.

After the official founding of the Red Army Faction in 1970, violence continued as the group’s main form of protest and began to extend beyond property destruction. There were

⁴¹ Ibid. (Storr October 18 pg. 48)

⁴² Scribner, “Buildings on Fire: The Situationist International and the Red Army Faction,” 35, 37.

⁴³ Ulrike Meinhof in “Buildings on Fire: The Situationist International and the Red Army Faction,” 39.

shootouts, plane hijackings, bombings, and even hostages taken by the Red Army Faction.⁴⁴ The activists that were caught and imprisoned for their actions were held in isolated cells and were cut off from each other, those outside of the prison walls, and even their lawyers who were often dismissed because they were suspected of being involved in the crimes, which led to unfair representation in court. The German government passed several laws in 1974 that restricted the writings and publications of politically controversial events, limited who could represent the accused during trial, and even allowed court cases to resume in the absence of the accused.⁴⁵ These laws were reminiscent of the censored and controlled society created by the Nazi regime, bringing back memories of a corrupted Germany. However, many citizens, and especially the government, believed that the law changes were a necessary evil.⁴⁶

The events of 1977, also known as “German Autumn,” were the climax of the Baader-Meinhof group efforts. Members of the Red Army Faction took Hanns-Martin Schleyer hostage and demanded the release of the group’s founders from prison. Schleyer was the president of the Federal Association of German Employers as well as a board of trustee member for the Daimler-Benz Company when he was captured.⁴⁷ The terrorists kept him in what they called the “people’s prison” and forced him to admit his Nazi past on videotape and request that the government free the prisoners.⁴⁸ Schleyer was executed a few days later when the government did not succumb to the terrorist demands. In another attempt to free the group’s founders from

⁴⁴ Heated protesting and terrorist organizations were not unique to Germany during this time period. Postwar generations from the United States, Great Britain, Italy, France, Mexico, Latin America, Japan, and many other nations were revolting throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. Many of the same terrorist tactics were used in these areas as well. However, the history of Germany regarding Hitler and the Holocaust is unique, making the Red Army Faction a particularly interesting group because of their desperation to be distinguished from their parents, who were part of “the Auschwitz generation.” Storr, *October 18, 1977*, 78.

⁴⁵ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 57.

⁴⁶ Ibid. (Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 57.)

⁴⁷ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 44.

⁴⁸ Scribner, “Buildings on Fire: The Situationist International and the Red Army Faction,” 41.

prison, group members attempted to hijack a Lufthansa aircraft but failed just a day before the eerie events took place within the Stammheim Prison.

On the morning of October 18, 1977, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe were found dead in their cells, and Irmgard Möller was severely wounded. Many people believed that they had committed suicide although it was never fully determined. Some Germans were skeptical that terrorists had been murdered by the guards, and by extension, the state, but there was not enough evidence to be able to come to a conclusion about how they died. A day after the events in Stammheim, an anonymous message was sent to a French newspaper announcing the execution of Schleyer's death and warning readers that "[t]he fight has only just begun. Freedom through armed anti-imperialist struggle."⁴⁹ Although the "German Autumn" was the most radical and climactic time for the Red Army Faction, terrorist efforts continued through the 1990s. Thousands of mourners attended the funeral of Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe while conservatives protested at the burial site. After the "German Autumn," films and other sources that were dedicated to or memorialized members of the Baader-Meinhof group were banned by the state, causing the group to become an object of collective repression.⁵⁰ Controversy over the Red Army Faction and the events in the Stammheim prison continued for several years, and were sparked again with the appearance of Richter's *October 19, 1977*.

Richter spent many years collecting photographs of events involving the Baader-Meinhof group before he created any of the paintings in the series. In fact, he collected 100 photographs that were released by the police and the media between 1970 and 1977 that told a comprehensive and exhaustive pictorial story of the group's efforts.⁵¹ By the time he created the cycle in 1988,

⁴⁹ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 63.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Buchloh, "A Note on Gerhard Richter's 'October 18, 1977,'" *October* 48 (1989): 103, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁵¹ Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era*, 161.

the subject had been explored in many German films. However, the Baader-Meinhof subject was essentially untouched by German artists.⁵² When the cycle appeared unannounced in 1989, the 15 paintings were immediately controversial. Some people believed that the cycle was thought provoking and politically important while others were offended and found the pieces to be too ambiguous and their release to be too long after the original events⁵³

Richter exacerbates the already controversial subject of the “German Autumn” by focusing on the terrorists’ deaths and creating softer, more censored interpretations of the source materials. *Hanged* (fig. 18, 1988) depicts a dark and blurry image of a lifeless Ensslin hanging from the ceiling. While the image is difficult to interpret due to the extreme blurring of the entire scene, the tilted head and wilting arms reveal Ensslin’s condition. The original photograph is unforgivingly clear and made for the purpose of documentation, but the mysterious blurring of Richter’s painting makes the image more ambiguous and harrowing (fig. 19, 1977). Richter painted three renditions of Meinhof, who had also hung herself, on the ground after she was cut down, all of which were titled *Dead* (fig. 20, 21, and 22, 1988). The source material clearly displays the injury inflicted on Meinhof’s neck by the rope with which she hung herself (fig. 23, 1976). However, in the three images produced by Richter, the wound is less distinct and is softened by the blurred quality of the paintings. *Man Shot Down 1* and *2* (fig. 24 and 25, 1988) show Baader sprawled out on the floor due to a fatal shot to the head. In the photograph that inspired the piece, a large pool of blood surrounds wide-eyed Baader’s head (fig. 26, 1977). Richter’s renditions show the blood only as a dark cloud, and Baader’s piercing eyes are abstracted, making his facial expression more ambiguous. The final piece in the cycle, *Funeral*

⁵² Lisa Saltzman, “Gerhard Richter’s Stations of the Cross: On Martyrdom and Memory in Postwar German Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 28 (2005): 33, 35, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁵³ Alex Danchev, “The Artist and the Terrorist, or The Paintable and the Unpaintable: Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35 (2010): 106, accessed February 18, 2015.

(fig. 28, 1988) depicts a mass of mourners paying tribute to the deceased prisoners. Richter blurs the individuals in attendance so that they blend together, allowing the white coffins capture the attention of the viewer, unlike in the original photograph where the people are just as detailed and important as the coffins (fig. 29, 1977). All of the original images had been released to the public in magazines like *Stern* or in the newspaper.⁵⁴

Richter surprised himself during the creation of this cycle, saying, “The ones that weren’t paintable were the ones I did paint. The dead. To start with, I wanted more to paint the whole business, the world as it then was, the living reality – I was thinking in terms of something big and comprehensive. But then it all evolved quite differently, in the direction of death.”⁵⁵ Richter was compelled to paint the images that were at once the most emotional and the most difficult to discuss, just as he had with his family paintings. Germans did not want to remember these events, and the state did not want to glorify the terrorists that created chaos throughout the nation for many years. He was careful to create monochromatic images because he believed that gray “... is really neither visible nor invisible. Its inconspicuousness gives it the capacity to mediate, to make visible, in a positively illusionistic way, like a photograph. It has the capacity that no other color has, to make ‘nothing’ visible. To me, gray is the welcome and only possible equivalent for indifference, noncommitment, absence of opinion, absence of shape.”⁵⁶ By painting in gray scale, Richter believed he was able to be neutral when observing scenes involving the Baader-Meinhof group and interpreting them.

While death was a common theme in Richter’s paintings, the Baader-Meinhof deaths were of particular interest for him because they died defending their ideology. Uwe M. Schneede

⁵⁴ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 110.

⁵⁵ Gerhard Richter in “The Artist and the Terrorist, or The Paintable and the Unpaintable: Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group,” 101.

⁵⁶ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 112.

argues that Richter is fixated on ideology and believes it was the cause of conflict and death in the “German Autumn” as well as in other regimes that he had encountered:

“...Richter repeatedly made use of the word ‘ideology,’ insisting that ideology was behind the worst of human transgressions. His childhood and youth under National Socialism and his early years as an artist in the GDR had shown him how life-threatening ideologies can be. That Richter avoided the lurid pictures from press reports and chose not to paint any picture of terrorist acts was his way of shifting the focus away from terrorism to the ideology behind it.”⁵⁷

Richter painted the figures in *October 18, 1977* as if they were victims of the ideology in which they believed. He took particular care to highlight the individuality of the Baader-Meinhof figures as if to remind viewers that there was more to each of them than their ideology. *Youth Portrait* (fig. 29, 1988) features a young Meinhof gazing softly at the viewer. The source material was a photograph taken before she was ever involved with the Red Army Faction, a group whose ideology would lead to imprisonment and suicide in 1967. Meinhof was the only activist to be given a past in this cycle, perhaps because she and Richter were only a few years apart in age and had both grown up in the German Democratic Republic.⁵⁸ This piece came first in the series, highlighting the importance of her peaceful past and reminding the viewer that the members of the Baader-Meinhof group were individuals with pasts and personal lives. *Record Player* (fig. 30, 1988) depicts a record player with an unidentifiable record still on the turntable, symbolic of an individual, in this case Baader, who enjoys listening to music in his downtime.⁵⁹ Similarly, *Cell* (fig. 31, 1988) features Baader’s belongings in a prison cell, obscured by the blurred paint. Ensslin looks briefly at the viewer before returning to her solitude in *Confrontation 1, 2, and 3* (fig. 32, 33, 34, 1988). The original images of Ensslin show her wearing a strange outfit consisting of a smock-like dress with high socks and sandals which Richter cropped out of

⁵⁷ Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era*, 175.

⁵⁸ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 106.

⁵⁹ Schneede, *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era*, 160.

his paintings (fig. 35, 1972).⁶⁰ Richter's focus on the individual makes the images relatable in some way to the viewer, causing him or her to look beyond the terrorist acts and consider the members of the Baader-Meinhof group as human beings.

Richter wanted his viewers to see themselves in the subjects of his paintings. He once said that people experience fear and rage when they look at the Baader-Meinhof paintings because they see the terrorists in themselves. "We're always both: the state *and* the terrorist," he said, "[t]hese people, so alien to us, are human, all too human. They are not like us. They *are* us."⁶¹ This connection that the viewer has to the figures in *October 18, 1977* allows the viewer to be more open-minded and even sympathetic to the activists. Richter turns the relationship on its head by portraying the Baader-Meinhof group members as potential victims to the terrorist responses of the viewer.⁶²

Some of the pieces in *October 18, 1977* make references to Christianity and martyrdom. The three *Dead* pieces form a triptych that depict Meinhof lying on the floor with only her shoulder and head in a profile view. The images reference the lamentation of Christ, a subject commonly found in Christian art where Jesus has just been removed from the cross and his followers are mourning for him; Meinhof lies lifeless on the floor, similarly to Christ. The triptych is formatted so that they decrease in size from left to right as if Ensslin were fading away.⁶³ *Arrest 1* and *2* (fig. 36 and 37, 1988) show Holger Meins, who was forced to completely undress to ensure that he was not holstering a weapon, being arrested by police in a military tank. This scene is depicted many times in Christianity when Jesus is confronted before he carries his

⁶⁰ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, 108-109.

⁶¹ Danchev, "The Artist and the Terrorist, or The Paintable and the Unpaintable – Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group," 99-100.

⁶² Karin L. Crawford, "Gender and Terror in Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977* and Don DeLillo's 'Baader-Meinhof,'" *New German Critique* 107 (2009): 212, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁶³ Charles Molesworth, "Skill Beyond Skill: The Practice of Gerhard Richter," *Salmagundi* 133 (2002): 44, accessed February 18, 2015.

cross to his own death. An unmistakable cruciform shape is visible in the skyline of *Funeral* that is not in the original photograph.⁶⁴ While Richter has not always admitted to being religious himself, his inclusion of Christianity in his images demonstrate the importance of religion in his culture.

After the events in the Stammheim Prison, many Germans suppressed memories of the Baader-Meinhof group. The German government certainly did not want its citizens to believe that there were significant problems in the nation's recovery. The people of Germany, having had enough difficulty admitting and accepting the country's involvement in World War II, did not want to admit to even more problems and collectively chose to repress this subject in German political history. However, Richter's *October 18, 1977* cycle brought the events back into the spotlight, pulling the memories and public discourse back into the conscious minds of German citizens. The focus on the deaths of these members of the Baader-Meinhof group causes viewers to question the boundaries between being "unable to forget and not wanting to remember."⁶⁵ The "German Autumn" marked a time of political and social instability in Western Germany that citizens and the state did not want to remember, and yet Richter's paintings make it impossible for Germans to forget the events of 1977. Similarly, Germans did not want to remember World War II and the roles they played in the war, but former-Nazi soldiers who returned home, as well as many other social and political factors, were a constant reminder of that history. The blurring of the paintings makes a statement about clarity in memory and how memories from only a few years ago can be fuzzy and difficult to interpret.

⁶⁴ Saltzman, "Gerhard Richter's Stations of the Cross: on Martyrdom and Memory in Postwar German Art," 40.

⁶⁵ Danchev, "The Artist and the Terrorist, or The Paintable and the Unpaintable: Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group," 97.

October 18, 1977 raised questions about methods of documenting, remembering, and memorializing historic events and figures. The paintings in the cycle were based off of photographs that were taken for the purpose of documenting the events and crime scenes associated with the events in the Stammheim Prison. Richter created the paintings as a reminder of the important and taboo topic that German's were not allowed to discuss. Hanging large paintings on the walls of a gallery poses the question of whether or not the figures in the paintings are being memorialized. Benjamin Buchloh argues that Richter intended to memorialize the subjects in his paintings:

Richter's *October 18, 1977* attempts to initiate a reflective commemoration of these individuals, whose supposed crimes remained to a large degree unproven (despite years of pretrial investigation, which never even resulted in an indictment), as was the crime (never even investigated) whose victims they became. These paintings contradict the present historical moment, which prohibits reflection on the activities of one of the most important left-wing journalists and pacifists of postwar Germany, Ulrike Meinhof, a young literary historian, Gudrun Ensslin, and a young film director, Holger Meins.⁶⁶

The Baader-Meinhof paintings conflicted with German societal expectations, making them controversial because of their rebellion against social norms in addition to their controversial content. However, it is important to note that the activists had not been proven guilty for many of their alleged crimes, and the blurring of the paintings only clouds their involvement in those crimes further.

Richter's *October 18, 1977* cycle explored individuality, ideology, and memory in the Red Army Faction and the events at the Stammheim Prison. The Baader-Meinhof group, while extreme in their practices, was able to expose Germany's social and political flaws that they believed were being overlooked or ignored. However, the success in drawing attention to those flaws came at great cost and many members of the group lost their lives in order to support their

⁶⁶ Buchloh, "A Note on Gerhard Richter's 'October 18, 1977,'" 105.

ideology. Richter used photo-based paintings to confront these dark and complicated events in the midst of a nation recovering from World War II.

Contemporary Career

The Baader-Meinhof paintings marked an important turning point in Gerhard Richter's career. While he did occasionally return to his photopaintings, he essentially abandoned the gray scale that had characterized his most haunting paintings. In reaction to his completion of the *October 18, 1977* cycle and its reception, Richter realized that he "couldn't do figurative paintings" and instead created numerous gestural but calculated abstract paintings.⁶⁷ He had spent many years dealing with difficult topics surrounding identity and terrorism, and the Baader-Meinhof paintings were the final pieces before he felt he could no longer represent these issues in forms. His focus on abstraction helped him let go of the issues that had influenced his art and his country for the majority of his career.

Richter invented a tool that was similar to a spatula that allowed him to apply paint to multiple parts of the canvas simultaneously. He smeared on and scraped away several layers of paint to create a spectacular dynamic of color and movement within his paintings. The spatula tool allowed Richter to create the controlled blurring that was reminiscent of his photo-based paintings.⁶⁸ *Abstract Picture* (fig. 38, 1992) is just one of many examples of this methodology. The striking red paint is revealed under layers of smeared blues and yellows in the spots that the spatula failed to graze the surface. Richter was careful to paint each layer slowly and uniformly to create a grid of blurring paint organized and outlined by the red under layer.

⁶⁷ Michael Edward Shapiro, "Gerhard Richter: Paintings, Prints, and Photographs in the Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum," *Bulletin* 20 (1992): 20, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁶⁸ Shapiro, "Gerhard Richter: Paintings, Prints, and Photographs in the Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum," 15, 17.

Although abstract pieces have dominated his canvases since the late 1980s, Richter revisited themes of terrorism and ideology in 2005 in *September* (fig. 39). On September 11, 2001, Richter was on a flight to New York to attend an exhibition of his work when the World Trade Center was attacked. His plane was diverted to Canada where all of the passengers waited several days until they were flown back to Germany. He recalled that this frightening experience reminded him of his experiences during World War II.⁶⁹ Richter's personal experience with the attack on the Twin Towers was only part of the reason why he began to collect photographs of the burning towers. The terrorist events that occurred on September 11 were reminiscent of the Baader-Meinhof group and how ideology can be a cause of conflict and death.⁷⁰

September was inspired by a photograph of the World Trade Center taken just after a commercial aircraft hit the second tower. Richter employed the blurring effect that was essential to his earlier paintings by smearing the paint across the canvas, but this time using additional paint applied with his spatula. The additional layer of paint, which clumps slightly on the sides of the canvas, creates a physical barrier between the viewer and the scene. This barrier distances the viewer in a psychological sense as well because the abstract forms are difficult to perceive and interpret. The clouds of smoke billowing out of the towers assist in the abstraction of the image.

The smeared layer of paint also makes a statement about the role of media in memory. The images from the attack on the World Trade Center dominated newspapers, television stations, and magazines for months after the planes crashed into the towers. Through modern technology, people all over the world were able to witness the horrifying attack and its aftermath,

⁶⁹ Kate Palmer Albers, "Reading the World Trade Center in Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*," *Art History* 35 (2012): 153, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁷⁰ Shapiro, "Gerhard Richter: Paintings, Prints, and Photographs in the Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum," 18.

similarly to how Germans were able to understand the “German Autumn” through the media.⁷¹ Richter comments on the role of the media as a filter that propagates knowledge but clouds true understanding of events by dictating the viewer’s interaction with the event. Media presence affects memory of an event because the viewer’s experience is mediated by an additional source that is often biased.

Richter believed that his return to form was crucial considering the subject matter of *September*. “My approach to form is very simple. Whatever is real is so unlimited and unshaped that we have to summarize it. The more dramatic events are, the more important the form... Form is all we have to help us cope with fundamentally chaotic facts and assaults.”⁷² In his view, nonrepresentational images could not have conveyed the information necessary to help viewers come to terms with the tragedy on the canvas. Returning to figurative painting was the only way that Richter felt he could do justice to the tragic events of September 11 and the emotions of his viewers.

Gerhard Richter explored themes of memory and identity in a time where Germany was still coping with and recovering from the atrocities of World War II. His family paintings and the *October 18, 1977* cycle sparked discussions about perception, reality, and remembering in the context of Nazi Germany, ideology, national identity, and terrorism in modern day Germany. Through the medium of painting, Richter was able to break the silence that had suppressed the German people and inspire dialogues that would help Germany leave the past in the past and move forward into a brighter future.

⁷¹ Stephen Petersen, “Lines Which Do Not Exist,” *Master Drawings* 50 (2012): 248, accessed February 18, 2015.

⁷² Gerhard Richter in “Nanotech, Blur and Tragedy in Recent Artworks by Gerhard Richter,” *Leonardo* 41 (2008): 491, accessed February 18, 2015.

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Appendix



Fig. 1
Gerhard Richter
Mural
1956
Robert Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*.



Fig. 2
Jackson Pollock
Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)
1950
105 x 207 in.
Enamel on canvas
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/57.92>



Fig. 3
Karl-Otto Götz
27.5.1954
1954
50 x 60 cm
Mixed media on canvas
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:KO54.jpg>



Fig. 4
Gerhard Richter
Untitled (One of Many Efforts to Paint Abstractly)
1960
20 x 20 cm
Mixed mediums on cardboard
Robert Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting.*



Fig. 5
Gerhard Richter
Party
1962
150 x 182 cm
Mixed media
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 6
Gerhard Richter
Cow
1964
130 x 150 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 7
Gerhard Richter
Toilet Paper
1965
70 x 65 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 8
Marcel Duchamp
Fountain
1917
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duchamp_Fontaine.jpg



Fig. 9
Gerhard Richter
Dead
1963
100 x 150 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 10
Quick
March 3, 1963
Uwe M. Schneede. *Gerhard Richter: Images of an Era.*



Fig. 11
Gerhard Richter
Ema (Nude on a Staircase)
1966
200 x 130 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 12
Marcel Duchamp
Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)
1912
147 x 89.2 cm
Oil on canvas
www.philamuseum.org



Fig. 13
Gerhard Richter
Uncle Rudi
1965
87 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 14
Gerhard Richter
Aunt Marianne
1965
100 x 115 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 15
Gerhard Richter
Mr. Heyde
1965
55 x 65 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 16
Gerhard Richter
Horst with Dog
1965
80 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 17
Gerhard Richter
Reader
1994
72 cm x 102 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 18
Gerhard Richter
Hanged
1988
200 cm x 140 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 19
Gudrun Ensslin, hanged in her Stammheim cell
1977



Fig. 20
Gerhard Richter
Dead
1988
62 x 67 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 21
Gerhard Richter
Dead
1988
62 x 62 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 22
Gerhard Richter
Dead
1988
35 x 40 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 23
Ulrike Meinhof, dead
1976



Fig. 24
Gerhard Richter
Man Shot Down I
1988
100 x 140 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 25
Gerhard Richter
Man Shot Down 2
1988
100 x 140 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com

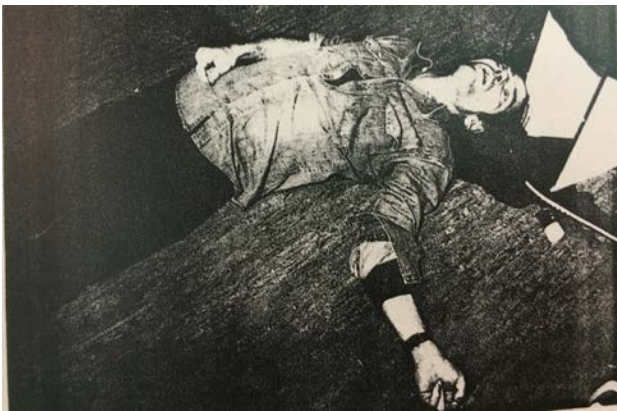


Fig. 26
Andreas Baader, dead
1977



Fig. 27
Gerhard Richter
Funeral
1988
200 x 320 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 28
Funeral of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe
1977



Fig. 29
Gerhard Richter
Youth Portrait
1988
72.4 x 62 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 30
Gerhard Richter
Record Player
1988
62 x 83 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 31
Gerhard Richter
Cell
1988
201 x 140 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 32
Gerhard Richter
Confrontation I
1988
112 x 102 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 33
Gerhard Richter
Confrontation 2
1988
112 x 102 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 34
Gerhard Richter
Confrontation 3
1988
112 x 102
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 35
Gudrun Ensslin
1972



Fig. 36
Gerhard Richter
Arrest 1
1988
92 x 126.5 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 37
Gerhard Richter
Arrest 2
1988
92 x 126.5 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 38
Gerhard Richter
Abstract Picture
1992
100 x 100 cm
Oil on aluminum panel
www.gerhard-richter.com



Fig. 39
Gerhard Richter
September
2005
52 cm x 72 cm
Oil on canvas
www.gerhard-richter.com