A large, abstract painting by Gerhard Richter, featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes in a vibrant palette of reds, oranges, yellows, greens, and blues. The composition is layered, with a dark, textured foreground and a more luminous, colorful background. In the lower center, the back of a man's head and shoulders is visible; he has short, grey hair and is wearing a dark jacket. He is holding a long, cylindrical object, possibly a rolled-up scroll or a piece of wood, which is partially unrolled. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

**tiff.** toronto  
international  
film festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2011

**GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING**  
**A FILM BY CORINNA BELZ**

# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The idea for the film about Gerhard Richter developed during my previous work documenting the creation of the artist's 115-square-meter stained glass window for the Cologne Cathedral, the first film project that Richter had agreed to after 15 years of refusing all requests.

"It's pointless to talk about painting". Thus spoke the artist as early as 1965, a sentiment he would later repeat. Thankfully, he nevertheless agreed to publication of a 600-page book of personal notes and interviews: When it comes to expressing himself in words, Richter prefers written ones. It became clear to me that a film about a painter must focus on painting. The actual work in the artist's studio was what interested me most: The present moment; the authentic and immediate process of putting paint to canvas; the instruments, gestures and movements involved – emotional as well as physical.

"Painting is a secretive business anyway." Richter said at the start of filming. Except when creating very large pictures he always works alone, which begged the question: Would he be able to cope with the presence of a small film team in his inner work sanctum for weeks and months on end? My task was to establish a mental and emotional space with the "ideal distance relationship", as the writer Thomas Bernhard once called it, one that would allow us to coexist in the uncluttered studio, each pursuing his work unhindered; Richter painting and our team filming.

Working on  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-1'



Working on  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-1' (left) and  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-2'

The main shooting period between April and September 2009 was an exceptional stroke of luck, a gift, and also a process punctuated by the occasional crisis. A fundamental skepticism of the status quo is not only inherent in Gerhard Richter's worldview, it also drives the very act of his painting; the giant squeegee the artist uses to apply and scrape off his incomparable monochromatic layers of paint becomes an instrument of both assertion and doubt in Richter's hands.

Clearly, the rare ability to question everything and yet continue to produce with tremendous continuity and reliability is a key to the achievement that is Gerhard Richter's rich and prolific oeuvre. As we watched the painter at work we too became caught up in the tension and dynamics of the process, saw pictures emerge and disappear. Like the paintings themselves, we had to withstand the artist's skepticism. The filmmaking process gave rise to insightful conversations in which Richter speaks openly about his approach to work and his personal history.

Using footage shot over a three-year period, the film sensitively accompanies the artist Gerhard Richter, allowing the viewer to become immersed in the subtly suspenseful cycle of the artistic process: making, viewing, judging, destroying, waiting, making, showing.

Working on  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-1'



## **GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING**

**A FILM BY CORINNA BELZ**

Gerhard Richter, one of the internationally most significant contemporary artists of our times, granted filmmaker Corinna Belz access to his studio in the spring and summer of 2009 where he was working on a series of large abstract paintings. GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING offers us rare insights into the artist's work. In quiet, highly concentrated images, the film gives us a fly-on-the-wall perspective of a very personal, tension-filled process of artistic creation. We see Richter painting. We see him observe and dialogue with his paintings. We see him contemplate, wait, reject, rework and sometimes destroy only to begin anew.

In her intelligent and perceptive film, Corinna Belz brings us closer to the complex processes of artistic creation. Our perceptions expand. The paintings themselves become the protagonists. GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING is the penetrating portrait of an artist at work – and a fascinating film about the art of seeing.

# SYNOPSIS

For almost five decades Gerhard Richter has been one of the world's most significant artists. The media-shy painter granted filmmaker Corinna Belz access to his studio where he was working on a series of large abstract paintings over six months in the summer of 2009. GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING gives us rare insights into the making of these paintings and the work of the artist.

“Painting is another form of thinking,” Richter had said early on. The film takes this premise seriously. In highly concentrated images, we are given a fly-on-the-wall perspective of a very personal, tension-filled process of artistic creation. It is a quiet yet highly charged process of action and reflection, driven by years of experience and shaped by an intense physical presence. We see Richter painting. We see him observe and dialogue with his paintings. We see him contemplate, wait, reject, rework and sometimes destroy only to begin a new.

In giving us the opportunity to participate as viewers, Corinna Belz's intelligent and perceptive film brings us closer to the complex processes of artistic creation. Our perceptions expand. The paintings themselves become the protagonists. We experience another form of thinking. GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING is the penetrating portrait of an artist at work – and a fascinating film about the art of seeing.

Working on  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-1'





## INTERVIEW WITH CORINNA BELZ

**Did your previous film on Gerhard Richter's stained glass window for the Cologne Cathedral inspire you to make this one?**

My interest in making a feature length documentary about Gerhard Richter did indeed start with the Cologne window. I'd seen a photo of some sample panes in a newspaper in 2005. It looked absolutely beautiful – the coloured squares, backlit. I immediately thought it should be documented, and I called Richter's studio. Ms Ell, his studio manager, promised to talk to him, and I was amazed at how easy it seemed. And she actually did call back two hours later: Mr. Richter was interested, but he himself would not be available for the project. It was ten months before I finally met Richter for the first time, during a site meeting at the Cathedral builders' workshop. That's how things gradually progressed.

**How did the full-length film come about?**

Working on the cathedral window film gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into Gerhard Richter's entire body of work. I knew, of course, that the material presented a wealth of possibilities and different angles to think about. Richter had been approached by filmmakers before, and I believe he knew there would come a time when he would be ready to agree. In 2007 I'd completed the cathedral window movie and Richter had approved of it. That gave the impetus for considering another collaboration. It was a fluid process.



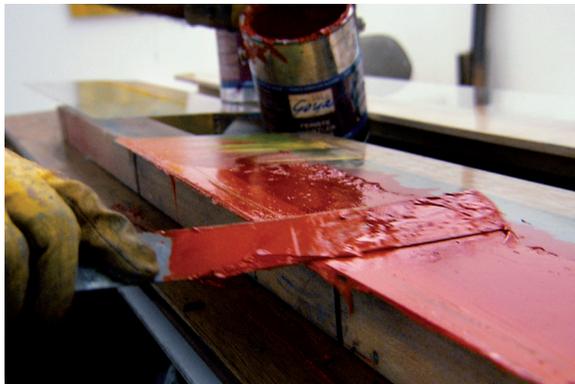
Working on  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
911-4'

**Did Gerhard Richter have a personal objective - for instance, an interest in seeing his own work process from the outside?**

I don't know. I think it was more about finding out whether a film could work at all: Can I work with a camera behind me? Maybe he didn't give it much thought at all. It didn't become clear until much later that the film is also a record of the genesis of a series of paintings – which were first shown at the Marian Goodman Gallery in NY. It's difficult to recall every stage in the making of his paintings; they are so extremely complex.

**Was it clear from the outset that you would film Gerhard Richter during the production of a series of large abstract paintings?**

I started shooting outside the studio, official stuff: A site visit at Museum Ludwig before his exhibition *Abstrakte Bilder* in 2008, and then the opening. But it was clear from the start that the film should focus on the production of a series of paintings. I wanted to film how he paints. I was not at all certain it would be possible, though. His assistants Hubert Becker and Norbert Arns occasionally discussed it with him. I didn't know when he was going to start a major new series. In the end I waited 1 1/2 years. In 2008 his assistants told me they were mounting blank canvasses, which we duly filmed. Then nothing happened. That, of course, had to do with the fact that when Richter is preparing for an exhibition he pays meticulous personal attention to everything that needs doing. That takes up a lot of his time, which means he is rarely at unconstrained liberty to paint, as you ideally probably should be. In March 2009, after big shows in Cologne, Munich and London, I heard his assistants were about to start mixing paint. Then I met Richter by chance at a private view, and he said: I'm starting a painting tomorrow, you can come along.



Working on  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-1'



**Did you have to try to be “invisible” in the studio?**

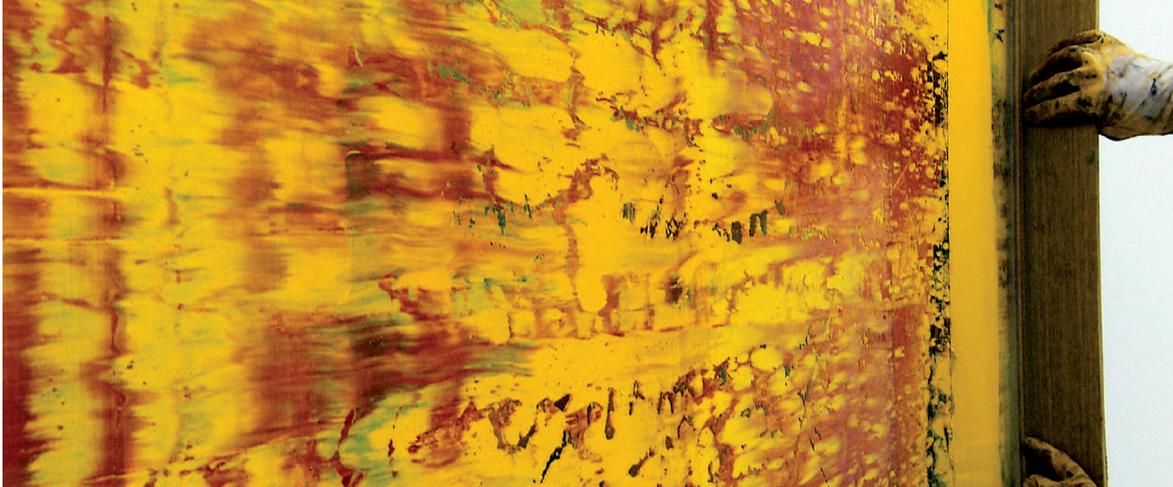
There’s no way to be invisible in that studio. There’s nothing in it. If there is any doubt about the willingness you immediately feel you don’t belong there, so Richter’s support was vital. There were situations where I felt the mood wasn’t so good, strained somehow. I didn’t leave though, just hung on. That gave rise to conversations and situations, like the one in the film where he interrupts the work on a particular painting. Of course, he was well aware of our presence. That comes out in the film, when he says: “When I know I’m being filmed I walk differently; something changes.” He didn’t pretend we weren’t there and neither did we.

**Did you make specific prearrangements with Richter about the concept, the size of the team, scheduling?**

We planned from one shoot to the next. Individual days, never a week at a go. Usually we shot for two, maximum four hours, which is long with this kind of work. I said from the beginning I wanted to keep the crew to a minimum. The very first time we shot in the studio in 2008 there were, in fact, only two of us – the cameraman and me. We filmed him working on the “Sindbad” Series. During the second period of filming Richter turned to me spontaneously, and a conversation began. There was a fine balance between watching and talking.

**When did you get the idea of installing a camera in the studio?**

I had the idea straight away. For a while we even thought we could make do with just that camera to avoid distracting Richter. We considered installing a camera he could adjust to suit himself. The problem was, he usually works on several paintings simultaneously. So how do you maintain continuity with several paintings at once? They changed so quickly, sometimes beyond recognition within a morning. We had to be really careful with our film material, to ensure each phase could be clearly assigned to the appropriate painting. E.g. for every close up of a specific stage of work we had to make sure to get a corresponding long shot. I also realized that the fixed camera on its tripod didn’t really do justice to the physical dimension of how he works. You could see how the paintings changed, but you couldn’t see Richter contemplating them. That’s why we decided to use a hand-held camera after all, starting with the yellow paintings. That worked really well – it became indispensable for me. There’s physicality to Gerhard Richter’s pictures, because he really works the paint on canvas, and the layers and movements of colour are so beautiful. And Richter himself has a strong physical presence when he’s painting. The way he works with the squeegee, the elegant sweeping motion, his assessment of the paintings – we could capture all that better with the hand-held camera.



**Did you concentrate on particular paintings in the series?**

I knew it would be an entirely unpredictable process; that it was impossible to predict how each painting would develop. We started with four paintings, which you see in a take early in the film. They were actually destroyed later due to problems with the wooden backing. We simply tried to shoot as much as possible so that we would end up having the entire work process of several paintings at least.

**Watching your film, the paintings seem to become protagonists in their own right. Was that intended?**

I wasn't aware of that at first. But as soon as I stood in the studio I started relating to the paintings. There you are, with this heightened sense of awareness: What's going on now, what's happening on the canvas, how is the relationship between the artist and the painting developing, what will he do next? Sometimes I looked at a painting and thought: Its good like this. But then came the next step in the process, and what I had perceived as a finished picture would be destroyed before my very eyes; just painted over. It's not easy when your 'protagonists' are constantly disappearing. And there is one scene in the film where you get the feeling that the paintings are staring at you.

**You mentioned the scene where Richer interrupts his work and challenges the very idea of the film. How did you cope with that?**

Things came to a head one day when he was working on the yellow paintings. He wasn't sure he would be able to continue working while being filmed. That's when he stopped the scene. We discussed the situation. That's how we coped. He told me when something bothered him. Then we took a break so everyone could go away and think about it – tidy up, listen to some music – and then continue on. Gerhard Richter is able to overcome a lack of enthusiasm once he's set his mind on something. His scepticism is part of the overall dynamics of the situation: By articulating doubt he is upholding the continuity of the collaboration. Richter has an exceptional capacity to persist with something and question it at the same time.

**Did you ever feel at risk of losing the necessary distance to your subject, due to the long shooting period and the intimacy of the studio situation?**

I don't think I ever lost the necessary distance. I never knew when and how things would progress. The only way I could find out when the paintings were finished was to keep going back to the studio. So I was always in a state of inquisitive suspense that kept me from getting too comfortable.

### **Did you ever consider doing conventional interviews as well?**

Initially I told Richter he wouldn't need to talk at all. I knew he rarely does interviews and he didn't know me. Then I thought of including people he knows, like Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. I asked questions as they arose out of a situation. Richter never soliloquises; that's not him. He and his assistants are always provoke active engagement: They're not giving a speech, they're speaking to someone. That's why I left my voice in the film, asking questions.



### **Your focus does not seem to be on exploring theoretical positions in modern art.**

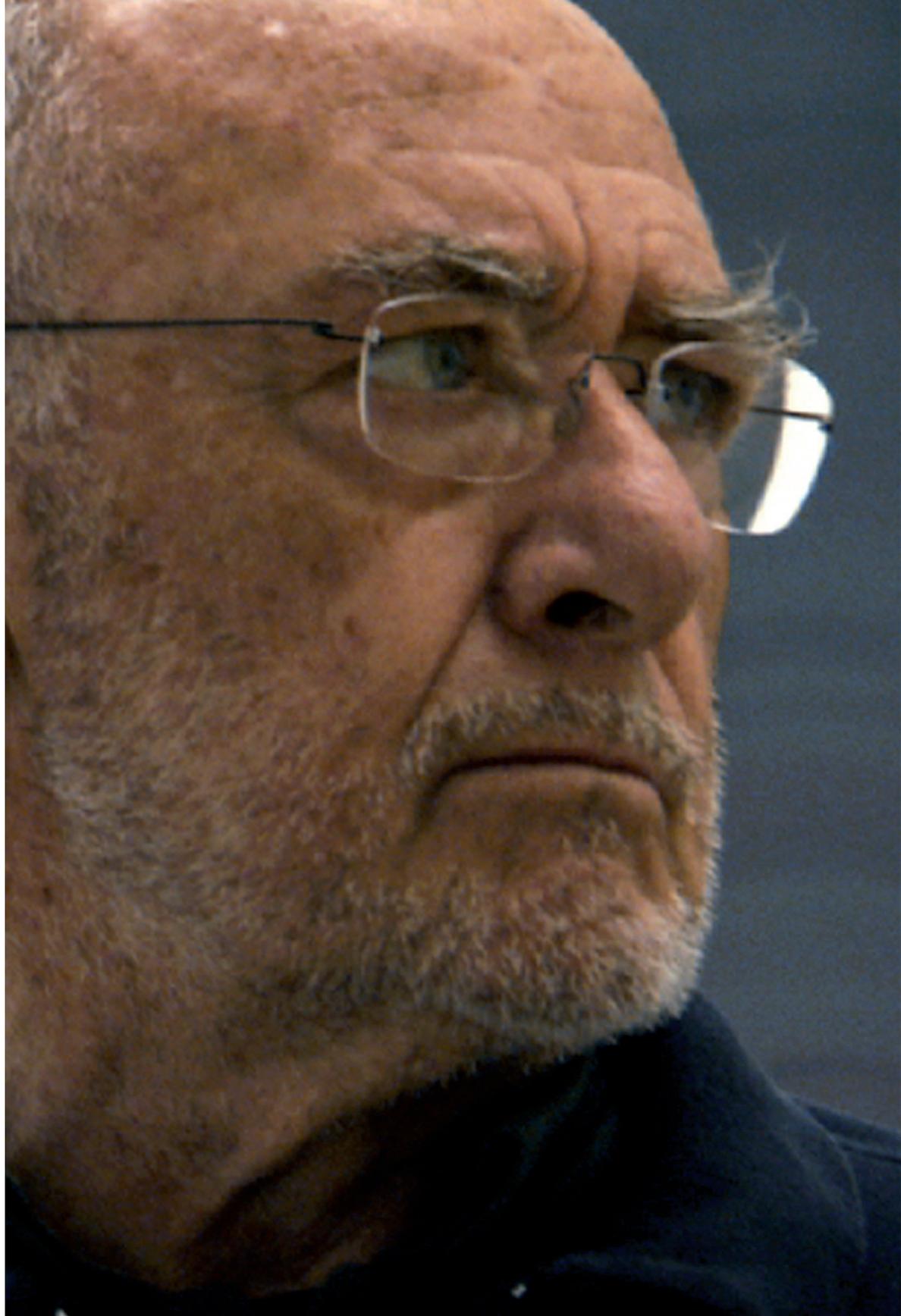
My interest was to show Gerhard Richter at work: How he moves, how he applies paint to canvas, his compelling squeegee technique. The purpose of the film was not to reflect the art historical discourse. It's not that I didn't have such concerns in mind, but I didn't want to use the film to interpret the paintings. Books are a better medium to articulate theoretical positions. And the actual act of painting is hard to describe in words: The way Richter mixes primary colours on the canvas, generating such a complex colour system. How layers are built up and submerged, how sculptural they appear on canvas. The most important thing for me in this film was to show something uniquely visual.

### **To what degree did that aspect influence the editing?**

Initially we assembled long sequences of the genesis of two paintings. We had 80 minutes of the yellow paintings in the rough cut alone, which, of course, had to be condensed. The most important thing was for the viewers to be able to follow the development of the paintings, to shift their focus from the painter to the paintings. You have to allow time for that. We also included archive material from a 1960s interview. It shows that Gerhard Richter has always taken a very considered approach to speaking about his art.

### **How did Richter react to the finished film? Had he seen rough cuts?**

We had agreed that he would vet the film before its release – that goes without saying. You are really asking a lot of someone when you feature them in a documentary. But he wasn't in on the editing process. He first saw the film shortly before its completion. He viewed it with great interest and did not suggest any changes.



# ABOUT GERHARD RICHTER

Gerhard Richter was born in 1932 in Dresden where he had his initial artistic training at Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste from 1951 until 1956. After his diploma, Richter specialised in mural painting and began working as an independent artist. Though Richter had several official commissions until 1961, he became increasingly dissatisfied with his artistic situation. Through books and a couple of trips to West Germany – he saw the 1959 documenta – Richter had been in touch with international art. In 1961 he and his wife Ema managed to flee via West Berlin to Düsseldorf, where he began new studies with informal painter Karl Otto Götz.

As of 1962, after early experiments in abstract painting, he became increasingly fascinated by photographic reproductions which were so prevalent in the western mass media. Richter began scanning illustrated magazines for suitable subject matter for his paintings. His grey photo paintings of the 1960s with their blurred motifs appear as complex and disparate as the stream of images in the mass media. There is no unified thread of content, no unified subject matter to bind these images together, except that they were all done after photos, which they manifest clearly. Their fuzzy nature has often been taken to simulate the blurred imagery of amateur photography. For Richter it is more than simply a formal element. It rather represents the limits of comprehension, the consequence of an incomplete experience of reality.

Benjamin Buchloh  
in the artist's studio



'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-1' (left) and  
'Abstract Painting,  
Catalogue Raisonné:  
910-2'

Gerhard Richter's body of work has been conceived out of the competition between photography and painting for superiority in the best representation and interpretation of reality. The death of painting has been foretold repeatedly since the invention of photography, but it has persisted in defiance of numerous premature obituaries. In the 1960s, Richter was concerned with how painting could be possible at all, faced with this competitive situation and a deluge of media images. He took on the challenge by clinging to traditional oil painting on canvas, but imbuing it with the properties of its rival medium, photography. Painting, according to Richter, could only maintain its status if you adapted it to the changed conditions of the media age. Richter dismissed the apparent contradiction about painting trying to emulate photography in an interview in 1972 with Ralf Schön: "I'm not trying to emulate a photograph, I want to produce one. By defying those who consider a photograph as a sheet of exposed (light sensitive) paper I'm making photographs by other means, not pictures that have similar qualities to a photograph." Hence painting has survived in Richter's oeuvre liberated from the traditions of the genre and redefined as photography.

Sabine Moritz-Richter  
and Gerhard Richter  
in the National  
Portrait Gallery,  
London



Marian Goodman  
in the artist's studio

This also applies to Richter's later work, which no longer relies on the blueprint of the photographic image. He did his first curtain paintings in 1965, and a year later started his colour panels. Both groups still had antecedents in photography, but without directly copying from concrete motifs. Throughout the ensuing years Richter rapidly conceived an entire spectrum of new motifs and means of expression which expanded his painting by numerous, and often ostensibly contradictory options. In 1966 there were grey aerial city views and mountain scapes, executed in thick heavy brushstrokes, two years later softly blurred romantic sea and cloudscares appeared. Richter applied the three primary colours red-yellow-blue in tracks of washed-out paint, or he mixed the colours into an expanse of an indeterminate shade of grey. Richter articulated his artistic stance of the time in 1966, in a private note: "I'm not pursuing any objectives, no system, no direction. I have no programme, no style, no cause." The critics at the time went for his seeming style of a lack of style. The terminology stuck for a long time, precluding other perceptions of his work. Indeed the artist appeared to adapt to any style, quoting, fast rejecting it again, only to revert to it maybe a couple of years later. However, Richter's artistic approach has remained the same since 1962. In all his smudges, his colour expanse panels, the grey paintings, he's been trying to create photographs as defined by him, by painterly means. The same criteria he had defined for his early photo paintings are maintained throughout: Objectivity, authenticity, illusionism, and the eschewal of composition. Since 1976 so-called "Abstract Paintings" with heterogeneous and complex shapes and colours have been the focus of his work. This group has now evolved over three decades into considerable maturity. What began with varied colour expanses and open spatial colour arrangements has become increasingly dense and woven into complex structures. Using a squeegee has introduced a decisive element of chance to the creative process, in which Richter intervenes, controlling, steering. The work on these abstract canvases is interspersed by breaks yielding smaller groups of realistic landscapes, still lifes with flowers, or portraits. One of these breaks produced his grandiose 15-part series 18 October 1977, now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Richter has never got seduced by the trappings of international acclaim and the popularity of his work, and he has remained sceptical about his own works. In the documentary *Gerhard Richter Painting* he conceded to an exceptional intimacy from the camera. The film shows how working in the studio is not just a painterly, but also an intellectual process. Richter repeatedly talks about the limitations of his own painterly options as his abstract canvases evolve, and how failure looms at any stage. "It gets increasingly hard with every step, and I become less free, until I get a result that leaves you with nothing to do anymore, when I'm coming to the conclusion nothing is wrong anymore." he says at one stage during the film, "that's when I stop, it's alright then."

Dietmar Elger is head of the Gerhard Richter Archive, Dresden and the author of several books on modern and contemporary art. He has also written a comprehensive biography of Richter "Gerhard Richter, Maler" (Gerhard Richter, A Life in Painting, Chicago, 2009).





## BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

**1932** born February 9 in Dresden.

Early days in Reichenau and Waltersdorf/Oberlausitz.

**1948** Mittlere Reife, Handelsschule in Zittau.

**1949** Sign painting apprenticeship.

**1950** set painting internship at Stadttheater Zittau.

Unsuccessful application with Staatliche Kunsthochschule Dresden.

Company painter, Dewag electricity utility, Zittau.

**1951** Admittance to Staatliche Kunsthochschule Dresden.

**1953** principal studies, mural painting, with Heinz Lohmar.

**1956** Diploma, with mural for Deutsches Hygienemuseum, Dresden.

Post-graduate, 3-year engagement with own studio at Staatliche  
Kunsthochschule Dresden.

**1959** Visits Documenta 2.

**1961** Leaves GDR. Moves to Düsseldorf.

Studies at Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with K.O. Götz.

Friendship with Konrad Lueg (aka Konrad Fischer), and Sigmar Polke.

**1964** Completes studies. First individual show with Galerie

Friedrich & Dahlem, Munich, and with Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf.

**1967** Visiting professor at Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg.

Awarded Junger Westen prize by Recklinghausen city.

**1970** Travels with Blinky Palermo to New York.

**1971** Professor at Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf.

**1973** First individual show at Reinhard Onnasch Gallery, New York.

**1978** Visiting professor at Nova Scotia College of Art, Halifax.

**1981** Arnold-Bode-Prize, Kassel.

**1983** Moves to Cologne.

**1985** Oskar-Kokoschka-Prize, Vienna.

**1988** Visiting professor at Städelschule, Frankfurt/M.

Kaiserring award by city of Goslar.

**1994** Stops teaching at Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf.

**1995** Wolf-Prize, Jerusalem.

**1996** Moves to new studio on the outskirts of Cologne.

**1997** Golden Lion at Biennale, Venice. Praemium Imperiale, Tokyo.

**2000** Awarded Staatspreis des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen.

**2001** Honorary PhD, Leuven. University.

**2002** Retrospective at Museum of Modern Arts, New York.

**2007** Honorary Citizenship, Cologne. Inauguration of Gerhard Richter's  
South Transept window, Cologne Cathedral.

Gerhard Richter lives and works in Cologne.



Hubert Becker, Norbert Arns, Gerhard Richter

Detailed information about Gerhard Richter's work on [www.gerhard-richter.com](http://www.gerhard-richter.com)

# CORINNA BELZ (WRITER & DIRECTOR)

Corinna Belz studied philosophy, history of art and media sciences in Cologne, Zurich and Berlin. She has written, directed and produced numerous TV and film productions. Amongst her projects are DIE WIRKLICHEN DINGE PASSIEREN IN DER NACHT (1992, co-directed with Marion Kollbach), LEBEN NACH MICROSOFT (2001), EIN ANDERES AMERIKA (2002; nominated for the Grimme-Prize, and awarded Filmpreis des Deutschen Anwaltvereins) and DREI WÜNSCHE (2005, co-directed with Bärbel Maiwurm). In 2009 she contributed an episode for 24H BERLIN. Her first film on Gerhard Richter's work, DAS KÖLNER DOMFENSTER (2007), was awarded the World Media Gold Award – Art Documentaries. Corinna Belz lives in Cologne.

**GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING** A zero one film production in co-production with Terz Film, WDR, MDR in cooperation with ARTE supported by Media, Filmstiftung NRW, BKM, DFFF

With Gerhard Richter, Norbert Arns, Hubert Becker, Sabine Moritz-Richter, Konstanze Ell, Marian Goodman, Benjamin Buchloh, Kasper König, Ulrich Wilmes, Sandy Nairne, Paul Moorhouse

**Written and directed by** Corinna Belz **Editing** Stephan Krumbiegel **Director of Photography** Johann Feindt (bvk), Frank Kranstedt, Dieter Stürmer **Additional camera (studio)** Gerhard Richter **Sound** Gerrit Lucas, Sven Phil Lentzen, Andreas Hildebrandt **Sound design** Dominik Schleier **Sound Mix** Martin Steyer **Assistant editors** Anne Juenemann, Philipp Schindler **Foley artist** Carsten Richter **Production sound mixer** Marcus Sujata **Technical equipment** Volker Rodde, Film- und VideoTechnik e.K. **Online** Anne Juenemann, Gregor Wille, Karen Kramatschek **Digital Intermediate** The Post Republic **DI supervision** Gregor Wille, Gregor Pfüller **Digital colour correction** Gregor Pfüller **Compositing** Florian Obrecht **Post-production facilities** ARRI Film & TV Services GmbH **Titles** kühle und mozer **Production Accountant** Jennifer Guillardmain **Legal consultants** Stefan von Moers, Dr. Jörg Wacker **Co-producers** Christoph Friedel, Claudia Steffen **Line producer** Tassilo Aschauer **Commissioning Editors** Sabine Rollberg, Jutta Krug, Katja Wildermuth **Producer** Thomas Kufus

**Archive** Excerpt from “Kunst und Ketchup” (1966) written by Elmar Hügler, Wolf Vostell courtesy of Süddeutscher Rundfunk / “Hierzulande Heutzutage” Feb 10, 1976 and April 1, 1969 courtesy of Westdeutscher Rundfunk **Original Music** Aus der Ferne III / Written by György Kurtág / Performed by Keller Quartett © Editio Musica Budapest / Music for Marcel Duchamp / Written by John Cage / Performed by Theodor Pauß © 1961/1989 Henmar Press Inc. / Spazio (I-IV) / Written & performed by Dietmar Bonnen © Obst Musik und Kunstproduktion / Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor / Written by J. S. Bach / Performed by Angela Hewitt and Richard Tognetti / Courtesy of Hyperion Records, London

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