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Aesthetica

Review of Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts, Dominique Lévy Gallery, London



In 1966, Gerhard Richter produced a series of *Colour Charts* which were a diversion from his most notable style. In the same year, this body of work was exhibited for the first time at Galerie Friedrich & Dahlem in Munich. Now, on the 50th anniversary of their inception, Dominique Lévy Gallery in London is exhibiting a key selection of Richter's early *Colour Chart* paintings from the original 19 created by the artist. This exhibition is an accumulation of works from institutions such as the Hamburger Kunsthalle and the Museum Frieder Burda in Baden-Baden, and is presented with the support of the Gerhard Richter Archive.

The thoughtful presentation of this alluring and significant body of work resonates throughout the exhibition. On display is *192 Farben (192 Colours)*, 1966, Richter's earliest fully realised *Colour Chart* and the only work from this series rendered in oil. The medium tends to show more painterly mark-making with visible brush strokes and the occasional brush hair, however, Richter's decision to use enamel instead revealed the glossy industrial aesthetic the artist aimed to achieve.

Sechs Gelb (Six Yellows), 1966, one of the largest single-panel *Colour Charts* and originally exhibited at Friedrich & Dahlem in 1966, is particularly striking. The yellow hues offer a saturating warmth and a vibrancy that encompasses the essence of the 1960s with an unexpectedly contemporary light.

Sänger (Singer), 1965/1966, another earlier work, is a black-and-white photo painting with a colour chart of shades of red on the opposite side of the canvas. This work is mounted against the wall to show the paintings on either side the canvas. There is an element of theatricality here, but most importantly this double-sided canvas and its presentation is illustrating the vital shift in Richter's practice from his monochrome photo paintings to his multicoloured works in the 1970s. It also offers a greater understanding of the conception of the *Colour Charts*.

The idea for the *Colour Chart* paintings came to Richter after seeing paint sample cards on a visit to a hardware store in Düsseldorf. He set out to reproduce in them an artless manner to imitate their commercial and industrial function and presentation in the store. The charts thus became a way to employ the use of colour without former associations. His method at first was arbitrary, with chance playing a major role in the paintings, which were based on colours his friend Blinky Palermo would call out at random. Later, mathematical precision was applied, referencing Duchamp's model of conceptual allusion and illusion. Their geometric aesthetic, the grid-like pattern of rectangles against a white background, is uniform across the series. Richter used the three primary colours and black and white, a palette which generated complementary and compelling colour relationships.

Richter engaged with Minimalism in his *Colour Charts*, however they also integrate the Duchampian ready-made and a turn from figuration to abstraction. There is an undeniable relation to Pop Art in the Warhol-esque manner of showcasing commercial multiples as originals. The works express a modernity through their industrial aesthetic, perfect execution and the timelessness of their basis in traditional, familiar objects.

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Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts, Dominique Lévy Gallery, London, until 16 January, London, W1S 4PY.

For more information, visit www.dominique-levy.com.

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Credits

1. Installation view of *Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts*, 2015. Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery.

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