

DOMINIQUE LÉVY

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FIRST EXHIBITION SINCE 1966 OF GERHARD RICHTER'S EARLIEST COLOUR CHARTS TO OPEN AT DOMINIQUE LÉVY IN LONDON

Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts

October 13, 2015 – January 16, 2016

Dominique Lévy

22 Old Bond Street, London



Dominique Lévy is pleased to announce *Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts*, an exhibition featuring a vital group of paintings selected from the artist's original nineteen Colour Charts produced in 1966. Presented with the support of the Gerhard Richter Archive, the exhibition is the first to focus on the earliest works of this series since their inaugural appearance at Galerie Friedrich & Dahlem, Munich in 1966. At once paradoxical and coalescent, the Colour Charts highlight an important moment in the artist's career and are situated across multiple leading art movements of the twentieth century.

In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Colour Charts' inception, the exhibition brings together works from multiple prominent international institutions. These include the Hamburger Kunsthalle, who is lending *192 Farben (192 Colours)*, 1966, Richter's earliest fully realised Colour Chart and the only work from this series executed in oil, and the Museum Frieder Burda in Baden-Baden who is lending *Sechs Gelb (Six Yellows)*, 1966, one of the largest single-panel Colour Charts, originally exhibited at Friedrich & Dahlem in 1966. *Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts* also features an earlier work, *Sänger (Singer)*, 1965/1966, a Photo Painting with a colour chart of various shades of red painted on the

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obverse side of the canvas, which provides an integral insight into the artist's conception of the series. Additionally, Richter's *180 Farben (180 Colours)*, 1971, has generously been provided by the Gerhard Richter Archive in Dresden. Comprised of twenty panels, each with a three-by-three grid, this work is the first Colour Chart Richter produced when he returned to the series in 1971, after a five-year hiatus. ***Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts is accompanied by a comprehensive book*** featuring newly commissioned essays by Dietmar Elger, Head of the Gerhard Richter Archive; Hubertus Butin, curator and author of several key texts on Richter; and Jaleh Mansoor, Professor at the University of British Columbia, whose research concentrates on modern abstraction and its socio-economic implications. This book is the first publication dedicated to the original Colour Charts.

Richter's conception of the Colour Charts originated during a visit to a Düsseldorf hardware store, where the artist noticed an array of paint sample cards. He became inspired by the industrially formulated and chromatically comprehensive selection that was utterly devoid of aesthetic motive. In order to make the paintings, he copied the cards exactly, injecting as little compositional input as he could. Each Colour Chart painting presents multiple uniquely coloured and uniformly sized rectangles or squares of glossy paint arranged on a white background. Anecdotal accounts describe the influence Richter's burgeoning friendship with Blinky Palermo had on the creation of the Colour Charts, as Palermo would visit the artist's studio and—without any visual knowledge of the painting—arbitrarily call out the names of the sample cards, which Richter would then incorporate into the work. By 1971 Richter's process for producing the Colour Charts had evolved; he began applying the chance procedure of selecting the colours at random, further removing the artist's engagement in the compositional process. **In addition to works from these years, *Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts* will present a collection of archival documents** related to the series, including an original 1960s Ducolux sample card for enamel paint.



Conceived during a period of intensive experimentation, the Colour Charts mark a considerable stylistic shift in the artist's practice, which had previously consisted of primarily black-and-white Photo Paintings. The Colour Charts have been recognised as seminal in the artist's oeuvre, as they set the stage for his renowned multi-coloured Abstract Paintings of the 1970s and beyond. On a visual level, the Colour Chart paintings are abstractions; but they are also representations of objects, that is, hypothetical examples of the colour sample card. Each painting taken as a whole also exists intrinsically as an object. In this way, they achieve a total overlapping of the object and its representation, thereby operating in a way similar to Jasper Johns's *Flag*, 1954-55. The paintings' focus on colour alone imbues the series with a conceptual ambivalence: as

Benjamin Buchloh has pointed out, colour “acts simultaneously as a substance and a sign, a paradoxical condition that no other element can claim...it can and will function at the same time as a *referential* [grounded in a universal given] and as a *differential* [perceivable only through variation] sign.” For the first time in Richter’s career, he is able to capture a referent and its representation in the same image. The canvases of the Colour Charts range from a few feet tall to roughly human height; in preliminary drawings for the paintings, now integrated into Richter’s *Atlas*, he sketched human figures alongside the layouts of some of the works, demonstrating the meticulous determination of the scale of the paintings.

Although the legacy of Abstract Expressionism still loomed large in the ethos of Western art during these years, the aesthetic quality of the series is more aligned with the contemporaneous prevalence of Minimalism—brought to Richter’s attention through Palermo—with its embrace of industrial materials, supersession of artistic temperament, and emphasis on objecthood. **Richter has also stated that the Colour Charts manifest the influence of a Duchampian model of Conceptual art.** The series is immediately preceded by *Ema (Nude on a Staircase)*, 1966, a work produced as a direct response to Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* of 1912. Further, Richter’s appropriation of paint sample cards may be connected to Duchamp’s last painting on canvas, *Tu m’*, 1918, which features a long, central, receding row of coloured squares framed by the shadows of the artist’s already famous readymades illusionistically rendered in paint alongside a handful of real, three-dimensional found objects. *Tu m’* synthesises the various means through which a painting may reflect reality: as allusion, impression, and as an object among other objects. **Perhaps more telling, however, is Richter’s statement that the Colour Charts are more appropriately designated as Pop art,** a movement in which the artist was a major player on the European art scene, and to which art historians attribute the black-and-white Photo Paintings that immediately precede the Colour Charts. Richter’s concentration on commercial serialism and repetition in the Colour Charts support this ascription: they render multiples as originals. Moreover, like the works of Warhol and Lichtenstein, the series manipulates commercial media to impart an effect that is specific to painting, allowing the artist to question the limits and possibilities of aesthetic authenticity in an era defined by Western Capitalist mass culture. Taken as a whole, the Colour Charts embody a stratification of artistic principles that allows them to be recognised as one of many important motifs in the complex progression of Richter’s oeuvre, connecting the figural to the abstract and firmly grounding his practice within a Conceptual framework.

Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in 1932. His career has been the subject of several retrospectives, most recently at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel in 2014, and at the Tate Modern, London in 2011, which later travelled to the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Other notable exhibitions of his work have been held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2002), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1998), and the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (1986). His work has been included in a number of major international exhibitions including the Venice Biennale (in 1972, 1997, 2001, and 2007) and documenta (in 1972, 1977, 1982, 1992, and 1997). He has been the recipient of many awards and prizes including the Praemium Imperiale, Tokyo (1997), the Wolf Prize, Jerusalem (1994-1995), the Oskar Kokoschka Prize, Vienna (1985), and the Arnold Bode Prize, Kassel (1981).

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Gerhard Richter

Fünfzehn Farben (Fifteen Colours)

1966/1996

Enamel on canvas

78 3/4 x 51 1/8 inches (200 x 130 cm)

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Sample card for enamel paint from Ducolux

1960s

Paint on cardboard

14 1/8 x 6 3/4 inches (36 x 17 cm)

Private Collection