

CHRISTIE'S

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REUNITED AFTER NEARLY HALF A CENTURY: THE FIRST TWO-MAN EXHIBITION OF GERHARD RICHTER & SIGMAR POLKE SINCE 1966

PREVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION
ON 24 APRIL AT 10AM AT CHRISTIE'S MAYFAIR, 103 NEW BOND STREET



Sigmar Polke
Untitled, 1983
Acrylic, artificial resin, lacquer and
dispersion
On printed fabric, 199.5 x 160cm



*Taking a bath together: Sigmar Polke (in the back) and
Gerhard Richter (in front), 1966.*
Photo: Image courtesy Gerhard Richter Archive
© Gerhard Richter, 2014



Gerhard Richter
Kerze, 1982
Oil on canvas, 83 x 62.2cm
On loan from a private collection

London – On 24 April 2014 Christie's Mayfair will open *Polke/Richter-Richter/Polke*, celebrating two giants of painting: Gerhard Richter (b.1932) and Sigmar Polke (1941-2010). The show brings together 65 works from 30 collections to create the artists' first joint show in almost 50 years, since their now legendary 1966 exhibition at *Galerie h* in Hanover. This show was a declaration of their intention to resurrect painting, a medium presumed dead, by deconstructing it and opening up new possibilities. Christie's *Polke/Richter-Richter/Polke* reunites two of the works from this show (*Flemish Crown*, by Richter and *Bavarian* by Polke, illustrated below), as well as others from the period, and then surveys the artists' careers since then, until Polke's death.

Francis Outred, Christie's Head of Post-War & Contemporary Art, Europe, says: "Richter and Polke are the dynamic duo of German painting in the past 50 years. They became friends in the early '60s, seeking to reinvent painting by deconstructing it, mixing all the pieces together and putting it back together again to open up new possibilities, as witnessed in their landmark 1966 two-man show, *Richter/Polke*. We take this 1966 exhibition as a starting point for charting their work in the ensuing decades. While their friendship waned and they developed in different directions - Richter stayed close to home in Cologne, Polke wandered the world - both remained true to their shared belief in painting as an essential medium. Despite their divergent paths, their art and ideas overlap in interesting ways."

Polke/Richter-Richter/Polke is co-curated by Christie's specialist Darren Leak and collector, curator and writer Kenny Schachter. It will span more than five decades of the artists' work and will bring Richter and Polke into an intimate dialogue once more.

Christie's Darren Leak says: "This exhibition re-visits the initial close friendship between the two artists and includes two key works from the original 1966 show. Soon after that historic exhibition, Richter and Polke sped off into wildly different directions, like the poles of two magnets pushed against each other. Richter took a more classical route, Polke a more cosmic."

Gerhard Richter commented on their friendship and later rivalry: "I remember how close this friendship was, but also how tough it sometimes was...In retrospect I'm amazed it was so brutal. We were very unsure of ourselves, and each tried to cover this up in his own way. I can only say that that's the way it was. Polke drifted away into the psychedelic direction and I into the classical."

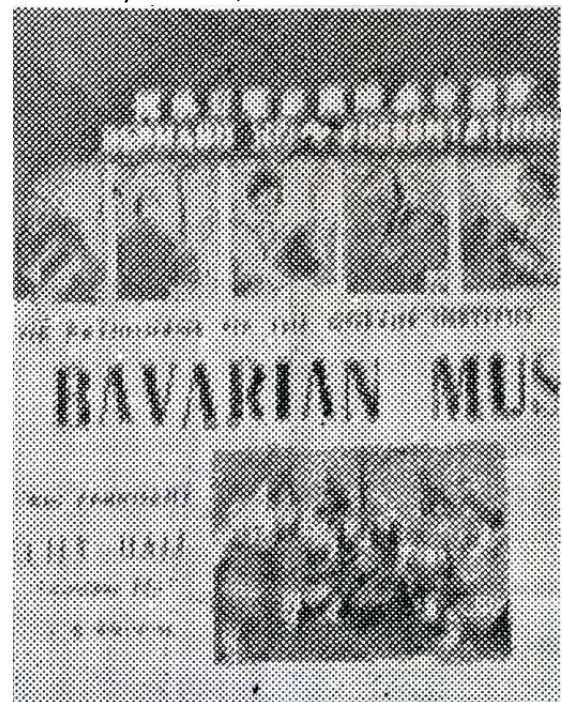
In their 1966 joint exhibition, Richter and Polke showcased their radical approach to painting, seeking to expand the possibilities and methodologies of painting at a time when the medium was often considered passé in the face of conceptualism. In Richter's blurring of his paintings from photographs and in Polke's exaggerated distortion of the raster dot process (a commercial printing process), both artists probed the limits of abstraction and figuration. These investigations would continue throughout their work, but the 1966 *Galerie h* exhibition in Hanover was the only show until now that presented only the works of these two artists in dialogue. The pair collaborated on every element of the 1966 exhibition, including jointly writing the catalogue text and designing it together as an artist book, which we celebrate in our own catalogue, reproducing their original essay and many of their original archival photos. The original artist book is currently featured in a documentary exhibition at the Albertinum in Dresden, curated by Dr Dietmar Elger, Director of the Richter Archive, Dresden, who has contributed an essay on the 1966 *Galerie h* exhibition to the Christie's catalogue.



that reflected West Germany's social and economic conditions and its embrace of Capitalism, rather than American popular culture.

Their work aimed to puncture the complacent bourgeois façades of the post-war *Wirtschaftswunder* years under the Marshall Plan, characterised by rapid reconstruction and ignoring the recent past. Richter's blurred portraits and the ambiguous imagery of Polke's magnified raster-dot paintings exposed the manifest falsity of all images, mechanically produced or otherwise. *Bavarian* (1965) is one of Polke's first raster-dot paintings, the so called *Rasterbilder*. It is a semi-abstract oil painting depicting a banal extract from a contemporary newspaper article in a style that mimics the

The 1966 exhibition marked the beginning and foundation of the artists' "Capitalist Realism" phase, an ironic twist on the Socialist Realism both artists had grown up with in East Germany. Two of the earliest works by both artists, from the original 1966 exhibition, will be on display: Richter's *Flemish Crown* (1965), *illustrated left* and Polke's *Bavarian* (1965) *illustrated below right*. During this period, Berlin had been divided by the Wall for two years and, as former residents of the East, Polke and Richter created a version of Pop



mechanical process of reproduction by which such mass media is made. Polke used a printing technique called “rastering”, which created a cohesive image with tones out of the Ben-Day dots. Rather than precisely reproducing the neat dots like Roy Lichtenstein, Polke used the dots as an abstract device to distort his images and almost parody American Pop. With *Bavarian* Polke created a painting that openly displays its own artificiality at the same time as it exposes the banal unreality and artifice of the mass media.



Richter's *Small Car Park* (1965), from the same period, features a row of cars at the base of the Siegesallee (the victory column in West Berlin, which Hitler moved to its current location) and encapsulates many of the issues that Richter would explore in his Capitalist Realism phase, namely the economic power and affluence of *Wirtschaftswunder* Germany and, by hinting towards the location of this car park, at the

bottom of the Siegesallee, Post-War Germany's Nazi past.

The 1966 *Richter/Polke* exhibition also marked the high point of the artists' friendship, which waned toward the end of the 1960s and turned into a kind of painterly rivalry on par with those of Picasso and Matisse, Freud and Bacon. Unlike these celebrated pairs, Polke and Richter began as the best of friends, forming an instant bond when they met at Dusseldorf Art Academy in 1961, both of them having fled East Germany before the Berlin Wall was erected. Having grown up in a time of extreme social and cultural disruption, in the midst of the horrific daily reality of war followed by Russian occupation, and developing as artists in a period when this reality was being rejected in favour of total abstraction in the 1950s, the pair came together at a kind of ground zero in post-war art history. As the movements of pure abstraction in America and Europe had virtually run their courses, these artists chose to begin a complete deconstruction of painting, to strip it back and rebuild what could be conceived as the 'possibilities in painting'. Their painterly projects not only revived the idea of painting in the post-modern period but made it exciting again. They took pre-existing styles and threw them into the mixer, creating magical works that influenced future generations.

Co-curator Kenny Schachter says: “Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter shared a driven work ethic and lifelong dedication to art. Their rivalry was more philosophical conversation than intellectual gunfight. Richter's forays into exuberant colour and disquieting realism answer Polke's magical, piss-taking picture potions. To see their highly influential work together is to revel in some of the Apollonian and Dionysian extremes of the art of the past sixty years, and to better understand the art that is being made today.”

The exhibition follows both artists work onto their later years, marked by a rise to fame and changes to their techniques and ideas in the late 80s. Gerhard Richter's first major retrospective began in 1986 at the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf before travelling to Berlin, Bern and Vienna, where it was greeted with critical acclaim. For Polke, whose long-overdue first comprehensive retrospective opens at New York MOMA on 19 April 2014, the 1980s saw him beginning to mix traditional pigments with solvents, varnishes, toxins and resins to produce spontaneous chemical reactions as seen in *Laterna Magica* (1988-1996). From the second half of the



1980s, Polke was experimenting with transparent bases for pictures; he soaked materials with artificial resins prior to painting on them so that the frame itself became part of the picture. Parallel to this, he also created works that were painted on both sides, the reverse side rendering the groundwork for the appearance of the picture facing the viewer. The viewer is confronted with three pictorial layers: the painted surface, the pattern of the fabric, and the reverse side showing through. The translucent, window-like paintings of the *Laterna Magica* series presented a universe of fables, fairy-tales and alchemical motifs.

Richter's *Kleine Strasse* (1987), is a view of a suburban road, echoing the tradition of Romantic landscape painting. In a sense, *Kleine Strasse* is not a landscape at all, but is a form of still life that Richter has painted from a photograph. While remaining deceptively true to his source, but also implying that this source is arbitrary, Richter introduces intriguing dialectics about the nature of truth, representation, inspiration and subjectivity.











Exhibition: Polke/Richter-Richter/Polke

Christie's Mayfair, 103 New Bond Street, London W1S 1ST
25 April – 7 July 2014

The Christie's Mayfair exhibition is accompanied by an extensive scholarly catalogue, with contributions by German art historian and director of the Gerhard Richter Archive, Dr Dietmar Elger, and British art historian Jill Lloyd, a specialist in 20th Century German Art, among others.

FURTHER HIGHLIGHTS

| SIGMAR POLKE | | GERHARD RICHTER | |
|---|--|--|--|
|  | <p style="text-align: center;">Sigmar Polke <i>Bavarian, 1965</i> Acrylic dispersion on canvas 159.4 x 124.5cm On loan from a private collection</p> |  | <p style="text-align: center;">Gerhard Richter <i>Kleine Straße, 1987</i> Oil on canvas, 61.6 x 83cm</p> |
|  | <p style="text-align: center;">Sigmar Polke <i>Don Quichotte, 1968</i> dispersion on canvas, 80.3 x 60.5cm On loan from a private collection</p> |  | <p style="text-align: center;">Gerhard Richter <i>Bäume im Feld, 1988</i> Oil on canvas, 82 x 112cm</p> |

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|  | <p>Sigmar Polke <i>Laterna Magica</i>, 1988-1996 artificial resin, lacquer paint on transparent polyester fabric verso/ recto, 134 x 154cm</p> |  | <p>Gerhard Richter <i>Flämische Krone</i>, 1965 Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 110cm On loan from a private collection</p> |
|  | <p>Sigmar Polke <i>Bikini - Frauen</i>, 1999 Acrylic and dispersion on primed fabric 126.5 x 156.2cm</p> |  | <p>Gerhard Richter <i>Vierwaldstätter, See</i> 1969 Oil on canvas, 120 x 150cm On loan from a private collection</p> |

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Images available on request

Editor's Notes

Polke-Richter/Richter-Polke will be the third selling exhibition at Christie's Mayfair. The gallery space at 103 New Bond Street, London, was launched in October 2013 with the show *When Britain Went Pop: British Pop Art – The Early Years*, the first comprehensive exhibition of British Pop Art in London. This exhibition attracted over 10,000 visitors and was followed by *Turn Me On*, an exhibition of kinetic art from Europe and Latin America.

NB: The Christie's Mayfair exhibition coincides with other exhibitions on Richter and Polke this season, including:

- *polke/richter: Documentation of an Exhibition*, April 8 – June 1, 2014, Albertinum, Dresden
- *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963 – 2010*, April 19 – August 3, 2014, Museum of Modern Art, New York (travelling to Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom October 1, 2014 – February 8, 2015; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany March 14–July 5, 2015)
- *Gerhard Richter*, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen / Basel, Switzerland, 18 May 2014 – 07 September 2014

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2013 that totaled £4.5 billion/ \$7.1 billion, making it the highest annual total in Christie's history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers around 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £760.5 million (\$1.19 billion) in 2013, an increase of 20% on the previous year.

Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 12 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Mumbai. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.
