

The Museum of Modern Art

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LANDMARK SERIES OF PAINTINGS BY GERHARD RICHTER ACQUIRED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Tuesday, June 13.....Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, announced today that the Museum has acquired a landmark work by the German artist Gerhard Richter. The fifteen paintings that make up the series, titled *18. October 1977* (1988), deal with the politically radical Baader-Meinhof Group, which committed acts of terrorism in Germany in the 1960s and early 1970s. The series, widely regarded as one of the most challenging and important works of Richter's career, was purchased from the artist.

Mr. Varnedoe stated, "The series by Gerhard Richter adds works of major and altogether unique significance to the Museum's collection of postwar European art. These pictures stand within an important tradition of modern artists confronting the historical/political events of their time, from Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* to Warhol's race riot pictures and beyond."

Adds Robert Storr, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, "As a group these paintings are among the truly great works of the last part of this century. The frustration of hopeful idealism has had terrible consequences in our day. The *18. October 1977* series is a harrowing testament to this bitter truth. At a time when people are increasingly inclined to interpret their world in sharp moral contrasts of black and white, Richter gives us an image of contemporary events that is impenetrably, but powerfully ambiguous."

The works are on view until early July 1995 in the Museum's Painting and Sculpture collection galleries, in the rooms where the 1960's works of such

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artists as Roy Lichtenstein, Ad Reinhardt, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol normally appear. The series travels to The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (September 19 - December 3), then returns to the Frankfurt Kunsthalle to complete a ten-year loan commitment, before returning definitively to The Museum of Modern Art in January 2000.

The *18. October 1977* paintings are a blend of cool abstraction and photorealism. Their blurred and murky motifs are derived from newspaper and police photographs, and television footage. An almost cinematic repetition gives an impression, as if in slow motion, of the inexorable unfolding of the drama. Shades of gray dominate; the absence of color conveys the apparent documentary neutrality of these second-hand images.

Richter's work is based on the events of October 18, 1977, when Andreas Baader, Jan-Carl Raspé, and Gudrun Ensslin, three members of the Red Army Faction (RAF), were found dead in their jail cells. . Ulrike Meinhof, another RAF leader depicted in the series, had hung herself earlier in police custody. The RAF, a coalition of politically radical young people, had turned to acts of violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s and became Germany's most notorious terrorist group. Though their deaths were pronounced suicides, the authorities were suspected of murder. The question has never been resolved.

Among the fifteen large and small paintings, Meinhof is seen in a high-school album photo and in three close-up views after her death. The apartment hide-out besieged by an armored car and the arrest of Raspé figure in several scenes. Three paintings portray Ensslin under arrest, and another shows the cell in which her body was found. Depictions of the prison cells also include one of shelves of books and political tracts belonging to Baader -- seen prostrate on the floor in two paintings -- and the record player in which he is supposed to have concealed the gun with which he is said to have shot

himself. The largest of the series is a view of the crowded funeral procession.

Richter's return to this painful subject ten years after the events, in the midst of a more prosperous and politically conservative era, revived a past many preferred to forget. By his insistence on remembering, he joins his compatriots Anselm Kiefer and Sigmar Polke, whose art has dealt explicitly with the legacy of the Nazi era; however, Richter alone has confronted more recent historical occurrences, daring to raise difficult issues and stirring strong emotions.

Richter, born in East Germany in 1932, is one of Europe's most influential contemporary artists. He has worked in a willfully disconcerting variety of styles, including forms of painterly and geometric abstraction as well as varieties of realism which evoke photography and the romantic landscapes of the nineteenth-century painter Caspar David Friedrich. Since 1963 he has exhibited extensively in Europe and the United States, including the Venice Biennale (1972, 1980); "Documenta," Kassel (1972, 1977, 1982, 1987); "A New Spirit in Painting," Royal Academy of Arts, London (1981); "Westkunst," Cologne (1981); "von hier aus," Düsseldorf (1984); AN INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF RECENT PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1984); and "The Carnegie International," Pittsburgh (1985, 1988). The artist lives and works in Cologne.

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