

Uwe M. Schneede **How Gerhard Richter blurred the facts with his brush and thus dynamized the image**



Gerhard Richter at Domberger. Stuttgart 1967

When Gerhard Richter moved from the East to the West: from Dresden, East Germany to Düsseldorf, West Germany, in 1961, there to continue his academic studies, he found himself caught between two fronts: He had consciously left behind the state-promoted style of "Socialist Realism" only to discover that the Western art scene was dominated either by realistic approaches that he found "lamentable" or by abstractions that bored him. Yet he wanted to paint, to be a painter. Then one day, he came across reproductions of American Pop Art in an international art magazine. That Roy Lichtenstein could seriously turn an advertisement for a kitchen appliance into a painting was pushing the envelope too far, he felt. Until he suddenly realized that this was a way to bypass painting in the conventional sense. Instead of using advertisements to criticize consumerism like the American artist, Richter resorted to more trivial subject matter: photos from his own family album to begin

with, followed by illustrations from popular entertainment magazines. But he neither imitated the photos nor did he copy them one-to-one; he was neither a realist nor a photorealist. After experimenting with various pictorial transfer processes, he found that blurring the paint used to transfer a photograph to canvas was a viable technique, and began exploiting it from 1964 onwards.

"Heidi" from 1965 is a prime example of this. The photographic template for the painting can be found on the second panel in "Atlas," a compendium of images from photos, newspaper articles, and sketches which Richter had been compiling since 1962. What piqued Richter's interest in photographs, even the most ordinary amateur photo, was their authenticity. They seemed truer to him



Galerie René Block, Berlin, Schaperstraße 11. Exhibition opening of the new rooms: Gerhard Richter. December 1966/January 1967

than invented images, but also asked to be transformed through painting, much like an edited readymade. Normally the blurrings in his early paintings run horizontally, but in this case they stretch diagonally across the image surface, which is thus dynamized, animated. The brushstrokes obscure the facts while clarifying the image. The entirely normal laughter shown on the original photo becomes a radiant outburst; and the banal family photo, a lively image. This effect is reinforced by the fact that Richter does not reproduce the patterned wallpaper in the original photo but merely implies its large floral pattern, placing them directly on the primed canvas like traces of some activity.



Lot 17

# 17 Gerhard Richter

Dresden 1932 – lives in Cologne

"Heidi". 1965

Oil on canvas. 35 × 37 cm (13 3/4 × 14 5/8 in.). Signed and dated in black felt-tip pen on the reverse: Richter, 2.2.65. Catalogue raisonné: Elger 48–13. [3310]

Provenance

Galerie René Block, Berlin / Private collection, Berlin

EUR 280,000–350,000

USD 333,000–417,000

Exhibition

Gerhard Richter. Eröffnungsausstellung der neuen Räume. Berlin, Galerie René Block, 1966/67 / Gerhard Richter. Billede efter billede. Humlebæk, Louisiana Museum for Moderne Kunst, 2005, ill. p. 30

Literatur und Abbildung

Exh. cat.: Samling/Sammlung/Collection Block. Kopenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, 1992, ill. p. 263 (not exhibited) / Exh. cat.: Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand... und etwas Neues finden. Fluxus aus der Sammlung René Block. Wuppertal, Kunst- und Museumsverein, 1996, ill. p. 263 (not exhibited)

- A major example of Gerhard Richter's early blurring technique.
- "Heidi" is based on a photo in Richter's "Atlas" compendium of images.
- This painting is new to the market and is being offered at auction for the first time.



Gerhard Richter was neither a realist nor a photorealist.

