

Media release
Zurich, 13 January 2021

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Gerhard Richter. Landscape'

From 26 March to 25 July 2021, the Kunsthhaus Zürich celebrates the work of Gerhard Richter, with its first solo exhibition by the most important contemporary German artist. It focuses on one of the genres that is central to his oeuvre: landscape painting. On display are 130 works, most of which are being shown for the first time in Switzerland or have not been seen in public for decades; they include 'Townscape PX' (1968), spectacular 'Seascapes' from Berlin and Bilbao, and the energy-laden 'Jungle Picture' (1971) from a private collection. Some 80 paintings are accompanied by drawings, prints, photo collages, overpainted photographs and artist's books.

The exhibition initiated by guest curator Hubertus Butin and put together with Kunsthhaus curator Cathérine Hug is arranged thematically. Extending over 1,200m², it guides visitors through Richter's creative process from 1957 to 2018.

SECOND-HAND LANDSCAPES

From the outset, Richter views the landscape through a medium of mechanical reproduction: photography. The photos that form the basis for his pictures are mostly ones that he has taken himself, and he uses them to create not painted landscapes, but paintings of photographed landscapes. The specifically photographic aesthetic that informs the composition, structure and colour palette remains clearly visible, as in the oil painting 'House in Forest' (2004), with its view of the staff building at the famous hotel in Sils Maria. Thus begins his critical reflection on the lost potential of painting.

ROMANTIC IMAGES ARE 'CUCKOO'S EGGS'

The German Romanticism of an artist such as Caspar David Friedrich is a key point of reference for some of Richter's paintings. He draws on the aesthetic of those earlier works, depicting expansive skies and low horizons, atmospheric sunsets, misty landscapes, cloudscapes and rainbows. Yet at the same time he is compelled to question the Romantic tradition, as with 'Ice' (1981) which, while reminiscent of Friedrich's 'Sea of Ice' (1823), can no longer function as the visible manifestation of the divine that Friedrich felt it to be. Because the atmospheric

nature of many of Richter's landscapes nevertheless prompts many to regard them as Romantic, he tellingly describes them as 'cuckoo's eggs'.

LANDSCAPES IN ABSTRACTION

In the 1960s and 1970s especially, Richter produced highly abstract images of mountains, parks and cities that, through painting, further explore the potential of an abstraction that has its origins in photography. These works alternate between landscape motifs depicted as reproductions of originals and a self-referential materiality of colour expressed through broad brushstrokes. This dualistic principle does not aim at a classical abstraction in which the form becomes autonomous, but rather asks to what extent the form can achieve autonomy from a basis in photographs. Measuring 250 x 680 cm, the two-part work 'St. Gallen' (1989) pushes abstraction so far that even locals are unable to recognize any topographic or architectural features of their city.

LANDSCAPES AS FICTIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

In the 1970s and 1990s, Richter also produced landscapes in the form of fictional constructions. Working in oil painting, printing, photo collages and three-dimensionality, he creates landscapes and monumental spaces that can never exist in reality but are highly suggestive. The motifs of seas, mountains and clouds have been put together in such a way that their size or arrangement transcends any real experience.

OVERPAINTED LANDSCAPES

From 1965 onwards, Richter produces non-representational overpaintings using oils, employing a wide range of often strongly corporeal techniques including peeling, scraping, smearing and squeegeeing. The photograph of a landscape conveys a representational motif by means of reproduction, while at the same time paint is applied to the surface in such a way as to produce abstraction. These two levels of reality – including titles devoid of locational information such as '10. Apr. 2015' (2015) – appear as an interlocked unity, forging a bond that is close and replete with tension, yet at the same time subtle.

LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

In 1981 Richter said of his landscapes: Such works show my 'longing', they are a 'dream of classical order and an unspoilt world.' And indeed, the term landscape mostly comes with positive connotations. From the viewer's perspective, all will surely agree with the assessment that there is nothing in Richter's landscapes to offend our idea of what is 'beautiful'. Equally, the art historian Dietmar Elger, biographer and director of the Richter Archive in Dresden, has noted a subversive element in Richter's further statement from 1970 that he wanted, in his landscapes, to paint 'something beautiful': at the time, other artistic movements

such as Pop Art and conceptual art as well as politically motivated works were setting the tone. Richter was bucking the trend.

LANDSCAPES IN UNEASY TIMES

Our appreciation of landscapes and their aesthetic quality increases with the onset of industrialization and the emergence of tourism in the 19th century; and they come to be increasingly valued as they are devastated by wars and environmental disasters. The contemplation of both art and landscapes evokes strong feelings. The year 2021 is set to be dominated by the corona crisis, the most tangible consequences of which, at a personal level, are physical distancing and drastic limitations on mobility. Scheduling the exhibition at this time offers a glimmer of hope. A visit to the Kunsthaus Zürich is a clear reminder of the value of sensory experiences in the shared social process of reception, especially when they become surfaces onto which longings are projected, as is the case with Gerhard Richter's landscapes.

In association with the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien.

Supported by Credit Suisse – Partner Kunsthaus Zürich and Swiss Re – Partner for contemporary art.

ART EDUCATION PROGRAMME: GUIDED TOURS, PODIUM DISCUSSIONS, CONCERT

An audioguide for adults in German, English, French and Italian fills in the background and explores the theme of the exhibition through more than 20 of the works on display. A separate audioguide for children in German is also available, together with a colouring sheet.

Guided tours

Public guided tours in German take place at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 3 p.m. on Fridays and 11 a.m. on Sundays. English: Saturday 10 April and 26 June at 1 p.m. French: Saturday 24 April at 1 p.m. The Kunsthaus will be happy to arrange private guided tours on request.

From idea to exhibition

A look behind the scenes with guest curator Hubertus Butin and Kunsthaus curator Cathérine Hug, moderated by Christoph Stuehn. In German.

Sat 27 March, 11 a.m.–12.30 p.m., auditorium of the Kunsthaus Zürich.

CHF 10 / CHF 8 concessions; CHF 4 with a valid exhibition ticket and for members.

The return of the sublime

A conversation between Julia Gelshorn, professor of art history, landscape architect Günther Vogt and artist Julius von Bismarck, moderated by Cathérine Hug. In German.

Wed 26 May, 6.30 p.m.–8 p.m., auditorium of the Kunsthaus Zürich.

CHF 15 / CHF 10 concessions; CHF 5 with a valid exhibition ticket and for members.

From the mind onto the paper

Armed with her typewriter, author Julia Weber accepts requests from exhibition visitors for new texts inspired by landscapes, which they can then take away with them.

Sun 27 June, 1 p.m.–6 p.m., Miró garden of the Kunsthaus Zürich.

Sound Scapes

A journey into the broad spectrum of piano sounds that could have accompanied Gerhard Richter in his work. With music from Johann Sebastian Bach to John Cage and György Kurtág; idea and production by guerillaclassics, Hiromi Gut, and Cathérine Hug, with emerging talents and surprise guests.

Wed 14 July, 6.30 p.m.–8 p.m., auditorium of the Kunsthaus Zürich and public space around the Kunsthaus.

CHF 15 / CHF 10 concessions; CHF 5 with a valid exhibition ticket and for members.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue (Hatje Cantz, 220 pp., 190 ill.) with brand-new texts by Hubertus Butin, T. J. Demos, Matias Faldbakken, Cathérine Hug and Lisa Ortner-Kreil. It is available now in German and English from the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 48.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthaus.ch

Fri–Sun/Tue 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thu 10 a.m.–8 p.m. For public holiday opening see www.kunsthaus.ch.

Admission CHF 23 / CHF 18 concessions and groups. Combination tickets including the collection and exhibition CHF 26 / CHF 19. Admission free to visitors under the age of 17. Information subject to change.

Advance sales: Kunsthaus Zürich online, with numerous additional events and products related to the exhibition: www.kunsthaus.ch/tickets.

Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

INVITATION TO EDITORS, REGISTRATION AND CONTACT

Media releases and images are available for download at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/. The press preview takes place on 25 March from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. We would be pleased to welcome you. Please register. We will be happy to organize interviews with the curators Hubertus Butin and Cathérine Hug by prior arrangement. Gerhard Richter is not expected to attend.

Contact: Kunsthaus Zürich, Kristin Steiner, kristin.steiner@kunsthhaus.ch, +41 (0)44 253 84 13