Richter scales the heights 50 years on

Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts
From Budapest to London

Review by Allison Cole

Dundee’s Leith’s small, beautifully crafted show aims to crystallise a vital moment in Gerhard Richter’s career, when he went on his way to becoming one of the most admired and (collectively) critics’ favourite artists. The gallery has reconvened for the first time a group of Richter’s Colour Charts, most of which were exhibited in an accompanying show at the Galerie Friedrich & Dürrenmatt, Munich, in 1966. Not seen together for eight or 30 years, they are a shift in Richter’s practice from his black-and-white photographic paintings to the multi-coloured abstract watercolours of the Seventies.

At the time of the joint show, Richter was quoted as saying: “In January I went to a paint store to buy something, and there I saw a usual sample cards, with the shades of paints in a collection, of the sort familiar to everyone. Suddenly I had the urge to say to myself, ‘You couldn’t do it more beautifully yourself?’ They are already perfect paintings.” Dimitrijevski’s display includes an original Decolet colour sample card for metallic paints from the Richter Archive, together with exhibition ephemera and derivative works: the original exhibition drew attention to the commercial Dulux paints that Richter used to create his Colour Charts, which are, as far as possible, devoid of aesthetic motive.

Richter’s easiest medium, Colour Charts, pop-up book format, were widely exhibited, and some, such as the Independence of the Chart, which has only recently been reissued after being “lost” for four decades, Richter’ss Colour Charts are related to Minimalism, with its emphasis on “objectivity”, but more radically to Pop Art. In the essay Richter mentions, like Andy Warhol with his Campbell’s soup tins, to render commercial multiples as originals. That is, in Richter’s view, it is not the aesthetic effect that matters, but the industrial effect, focusing on a more limited spectrum. This still creates a compelling atmosphere, among others, with its very intensity and luminosity and its inherent ability to strike up relationships.

By 1972, Richter had moved from inviting fellow artists (Blinyaki Pinkam and The Bulldog) to call out the names of the colours on the sample charts arbitrarily to applying a mechanically based chart procedure to definitively remove any artistic engagement in the colour selection. The exhibition concludes with a monumental (and jumble) Rockport’s Never Paint (a print), which has only recently been reissued after being “lost” for four decades.

Shade: Gerhard Richter’s “Studie” in six of its six original variations, as exhibited in 1966.

**FOOTNOTES**

Sequenze
Rydal Albert Hall, London

Review by David Taylor

After a well-recorded introduction from Kiril Iliev’s Dulewicz, the audience is ripenously focused on the stage. But whether it’s down to the formal surroundings, the audience’s reverence, or that they are following a stellar performance from support act St John Cooper Clarke, it takes only a few bars before the room warms up.

As the chorus of “The Lobster with Love”, the audience seems to respond to St John’s Dylan-inspired take on the song. As the audience is poured into the venue, a collective excitement builds. The venue is packed, and the atmosphere is electric.

The final song of the evening, “The Lobster with Love”, is performed with a passion and intensity that leave the audience on the edge of their seats. The performance is a testament to the band’s ability to connect with their audience and create a memorable experience.
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Gerhard Richter: Colour Charts
Dominique Lévy, London
REVIEW BY ALISON COLE

Dominique Lévy’s small, beautifully crafted show aims to crystallise a vital moment in Gerhard Richter’s career, when he was on his way to becoming one of the most admired and collected artists of our times. The gallery has reunited for the first time a group of Richter’s Colour Charts, most of which were exhibited in an uncompromising show at the Galerie Friedrich & Dahlem, Munich, in 1966. Not seen together for 50 years, they mark a shift in Richter’s practice from his black-and-white photo paintings to the multicoloured abstract coloured paintings of the Seventies.

At the time of the 1966 show, Richter was quoted as saying: “In January I went to a paint store to buy something, and there I saw the usual sample cards, with the shades of paints in a collection, of the sort familiar to everyone. Suddenly I had to say to myself, ‘You couldn’t do it more beautifully yourself! They are already perfect paintings.’” Dominique Lévy’s display includes an original Dulcolux colour sample card for enamel paint from the Richter Archive, together with exhibition ephemera and derisive 1966 reviews: the original exhibition drew attention to the commercial Dulcolux paint that Richter used to create his Colour Charts, which – like the sample card – are, as far as possible, devoid of aesthetic motive.

Richter’s earliest realised Colour Chart, 192 Farben (192 Colours), rendered in oil, succeeds more in theory than in practice. The colours may be chosen at random, and distributed as arbitrarily as possible against a white background that forms a characteristic white grid, but the overall effect is painterly, and the pencil lines around the squares are visible, as is the odd brush hair. Richter quickly abandoned this method, thereafter using enamels to achieve a more neutral, shinier, industrial effect, while focusing on a more limited spectrum. This still creates a compelling atmosphere, arising from colour’s very intensity and luminosity and its inherent ability to strike up relationships.

By 1971, Richter had moved from inviting a fellow artist (Blinky Palermo) to call out the names of the colours on the sample charts arbitrarily to applying a mathematically based chance procedure to definitively remove any artistic engagement in the colour selection. The exhibition concludes with a monumental 20-panelled work (180 Farben) from 1971, which has only recently resurfaced after being “lost” for four decades.

Richter’s Colour Charts are related to Minimalism, with its emphasis on “objecthood”, but more tellingly to Pop Art – in the way that Richter manages, like Andy Warhol with his Campbell’s soup tins, to render commercial multiples as originals. They also, as Richter himself acknowledged, refer to Duchamp’s model of conceptual art – using readymades and found objects, allusion and illusion. They mine several deep veins in the history of modern art, while – as this exhibition brilliantly reveals – bringing their own pulsating light to bear.

Shades: Gerhard Richter’s ‘Sechs Gelb’ (‘Six Yellows’) was originally exhibited in 1966.

To 16 January (0203 696 5910)