Stephen Ongpin Fine Art

Gerhard RICHTER (1932 -)

7.1991

Black (India) ink on paper.

Signed and dated Richter VII.91 at the lower left centre.

296 x 398 mm. (11 5/8 x 15 5/8 in.)

Gerhard Richter's oeuvre of works on paper – watercolours, pencil or graphite drawings, brush studies in India ink, oils on paper and overpainted photographs – only began to be exhibited to the public in the mid- and late 1980s.

The present sheet is part of a small and distinctive group of twenty-four abstract compositions on paper, drawn in a rich black India ink, produced by Gerhard Richter in late June and July of 1991. (Twelve of the drawings, including the present sheet, were exhibited alongside recent works on paper by Richard Long and Lawrence Weiner at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London in 1992.) As Barbara Steffen has noted of this series of ink drawings by Richter, 'These works are concerned with the observation of dripping black ink, its various layers, and the splashes that form a path across the picture plane following the principles of chance. They are about highly differentiated techniques of glazing, of allowing the ink to run, and of abstractly shaping the sheet. Attention is focused on the material – india ink – and on the fact that everything can be glazed in black to produce a plexus that consists entirely of uncontrolled forms of abstract shapes. By producing a drawing of black india ink in a manner that recalls a black watercolor, Richter dissolves the boundary between the categories of drawing and watercolor. India ink is made from extremely fine lampblack and a binding agent such as gelatin or glue. After this mixture has dried and solidified, it is mixed with water for use. Richter dispenses with the historical approach to india ink and uses it precisely as lightly as he uses watercolors in his abstract paintings. By producing works of glazed india ink that look like casual watercolors, he takes aim at the classical use of india ink.'

Of the twenty-three other India ink and wash drawings from the same series, three examples are today in the collections of both the Kunstmuseum in Wintherthur and the Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain in Nîmes, while one is in the Deutsche Bank Collection and the remainder are in private collections.

Exhibitions

London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, New Work on Paper: Richard Long, Gerhard Richter, Lawrence Weiner, February – March 1992.

Literature:

Dieter Schwartz, Gerhard Richter. Drawings 1964-1999: Catalogue Raisonné, Winterthur and Düsseldorf, 1999, p.299, no.91/16.

Artist description:

One of the most significant painters working today, Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in the former East Germany and studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste there between 1952 and 1956. Much of his early independent commissions took the form of mural paintings for public buildings in Dresden. He moved to West Germany in 1961, settling in Düsseldorf and studying at the Staatliche Kunstakademie there. From 1963 he began inventorying his oeuvre in a self-organized catalogue raisonné, starting with a painting that he had completed the previous year and thereby choosing to ignore the work he had done in East Germany. In 1962 Richter produced his first photo paintings and began participating in group or joint exhibitions, alongside artists such as Konrad Lueg (later Fischer), Sigmar Polke and Blinky Palermo. He had his first solo shows in 1964. Two years later he began painting his first Colour Chart paintings, soon followed by monochrome paintings of corrugated iron and tubes, townscapes, clouds, mountains, shadows and grey compositions, as well as constructions made of glass. Throughout his career, Richter has painted purely abstract works alongside paintings of representational subjects, often based on photographs. He also worked as a draughtsman and printmaker. In 1970 he began exhibiting his work with Konrad Fischer, now an art dealer, and the following year a retrospective exhibition of his oeuvre up to that point was mounted at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf. Another large exhibition of his work was shown in the German pavilion at the 36th Venice Biennale in 1972, and in 1973 the artist received a commission to decorate the BMW corporate headquarters in Munich with three monumental paintings, in preparation for which he moved into a more spacious studio that allowed him to work on a much larger scale.

By the second half of the 1970s Richter's reputation had spread beyond Germany, with numerous gallery and museum exhibitions in New York, Brussels, Amsterdam, Paris and London. The artist's status continued to grow throughout the succeeding decade; in 1980 he produced his initial colourful abstract squeegee paintings and early in 1981 the first Mirrors (which were exhibited in a joint museum show with Georg Baselitz in Düsseldorf the same year), while in 1982 he began a series of Candle paintings. The following year he moved from Düsseldorf to Cologne. Further gallery exhibitions were held in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and England, as well as America and Canada, where a major travelling retrospective was mounted in 1988. Towards the end of the decade he began working on a cycle of canvases entitled October 18, 1977, based on press photographs of the German Baader-Meinhof urban terrorist group. The 1990s found Richter at the peak of his international success and firmly established as one of the most significant contemporary artists in Europe. He won numerous prizes and his works were acquired by major modern art museums throughout the globe. In 2002 Richter received a commission to design a monumental stained glass window for the south transept of the Cathedral of Cologne, which was eventually installed and dedicated in 2007. Between 2002 and 2003 a major retrospective entitled Forty Years of Painting, including nearly two hundred works, was shown at museums in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Washington D.C., while in 2005 the Gerhard Richter Archive was established at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden.