

DIE FARBE GRAU**GERHARD RICHTER MICHAEL SCHMIDT****1 DECEMBER 2018–8 MARCH 2019****Opening: Saturday, 1 December 2018, 4 p.m.****Welcome: Thomas Zander. Introduction: Martin Germann, S.M.A.K., Ghent****Opening times: Tues–Fri 11 a.m.–6 p.m., Sat noon–6 p.m., and by arrangement**

Galerie Thomas Zander is especially proud to announce its upcoming exhibition exploring the diversity of the colour grey with selected works by Gerhard Richter and Michael Schmidt. For both artists their engagement with grey as a colour proved to be an important constant in the evolution of their art.

Michael Schmidt (1945–2014) was one of the leading German photographers to emerge after the Second World War. In the 1960s and 1970s he primarily focussed on his immediate surroundings in West Berlin, in the districts of Kreuzberg and Wedding. The photographs shown in the exhibition – capturing newly constructed buildings, wastelands and gap sites – avoid traditional black-and-white aesthetics, which Schmidt dismissed as thinking in opposites. As he himself put it: 'To my mind grey is actually a colour. I first arrived at this notion of grey in 1976 when I was working on my *Berlin-Wedding* series. It was a wholly deliberate step, pushing the pictures even further into immeasurable grey, to the point where black and white really no longer feature at all.' His greys give visible form to a state of mind. This intensification of reality is not apparent in a single image; it needs a whole series to fully come into its own. Michael Schmidt, a self-taught photographer, became the trailblazer for a new documentary style and in 1976 founded the Workshop for Photography at the Kreuzberg adult education centre. The workshop put on photography courses and exhibitions and invited artists such as Robert Adams, Diane Arbus, Lewis Baltz and William Eggleston, all photographers who later became widely renowned. Schmidt himself gained international recognition for his series *Waffenruhe* (Ceasefire, 1987). This cycle, with its atmospheric close-ups, portraits and many fragments of the Berlin Wall, marked a departure from Schmidt's preferred method up to that point, with the photographer now presenting his own subjective view of the palpable ideological shift and changing attitudes to life displayed by the younger generation. Part of this series is on display in the exhibition as a wall installation. The colour grey, previously objective and tough, now takes on an absolute quality, which 'radiates perversely', as Lewis Baltz put it. *Waffenruhe*, in Baltz's view, has such intensity that it changes the world it records. Michael Schmidt regarded this series as the conclusion to his engagement with this kind of photography, confirming that he could only sustain his own, fundamental stance through constant change – a stance and worldview that was formulated as a question, that accepts uncertainty as a way of life and is expressed in Schmidt's differentiations of the colour grey.

Grey also gained an important status in the work of Gerhard Richter early on in his oeuvre. Richter moved from Dresden to Düsseldorf a few months before the Berlin Wall was built and, having turned his back on both Socialist Realism and Western postwar modernism, he now started to develop his own form of 'anti-painting'. Determined to divest painting of the burden of meaning inherent in both pathos and narration, he began to work with photographs from family albums and magazines as source materials that were seemingly without bias or recognisable styles. The painting *Mädchen im Garten* (Girl in the Garden, 1965), on display in the exhibition, is based on a photograph of Richter's first wife as a young girl. The original image is included in Richter's *Atlas*, a fund of materials ranging from photographs and newspaper cuttings to sketches of his own. The grey of his paintings originates in amateur photographs and reproductions that were mainly black and white at that time. The blurred motifs that characterise these sources also reappear in the changed medium. Richter's use of the colour grey negates any kind of artistic affiliation so that he can concentrate on the function of the image other than as a likeness, thereby laying the foundations for his own unique oeuvre. The exhibition also includes Gerhard Richter's only foray into the medium of film, *Volker Bradke* (1966). This short film, with the same blurs as in the photo paintings, is a hazy portrait of a young man who liked to seek out the company of artists in the Düsseldorf art scene. Richter's work on colour charts, seascapes and cloud pictures also led to more monochrome grey paintings. From 1972 onwards these started to appear as series, which Richter repeatedly returned to. Richter's greys first arose from negative feelings on his part, as 'the only possible equivalent for indifference, non-commitment, absence of opinion, absence of shape'. However, as he evolved images for this, which – rather than being representational – allow the reality of the painting itself to come to the fore, he managed to turn things around. The painted, spatulaed, smeared grey in the paintings on show here does not reveal some transcendental realm. Instead it presents itself as an impermeable texture of paint layers. The idea of an opaque picture returns in Richter's grey mirrors. This perhaps most radical form of indifference reflects a classical paradigm of photography and painting back at itself. The grey paint is burnt into the glass using an enamelling process, so that the mirrors affirm their own materiality in the reflection. Richter's grey works destabilise visual habits and certainties, redirecting them to the grey areas of doubt in perceivable knowledge, which in turn gives his oeuvre its overall coherence. In repeated acts of interrogation, facets of the colour grey – variously in the works of both Richter and Schmidt – reflect the artists' recognition of physical existence as something that cannot be resolved into meaning alone.

Die Farbe Grau was devised together with Karin Schmidt, Laura Bielau from Atelier Michael Schmidt and Dr Dietmar Elger from the Gerhard Richter Archive. The exhibition catalogue is published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.