



# Gerhard Richter: Large Abstracts

*Gregor Stemmrich, Benjamin Buchloh*

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Talking to art historian Benjamin Buchloh in 1988, Gerhard Richter cited the appearances of Jackson Pollock and Lucio Fontana at the second Documenta in Kassel in the late 50s as decisive encounters for his then-incipient art. Just a few years later, Richter would style himself as a German "Pop" artist, but in the 80s he returned to pure abstraction for its possibilities of "bitter truth, liberation, and... a completely different and new content... expressing itself." His abstract paintings present a heavily worked surface, blurred and scraped to both veil and expose prior layers. In other words, they manage a tension between depth (layer) and strong horizontal activity (blur). Unlike much heavily worked abstraction, and in spite of their scale, their total effect is not heroic--Richter's almost-deadpan, process-oriented transparency cancels out such chest-beating--but the artist that responded to the direct energies of Pollock's work has clearly found a way, some decades later, to conjure both zest and detachment simultaneously. Abstraction has made up a dominant portion of Richter's output since the 80s, inaugurating a fruitful dialectic with figuration, and *Large Abstracts* collects works produced between 1986 and 2006. For this volume, Buchloh (once described by former Museum of Modern Art, New York, curator and current Dean of the Yale School of Art Robert Storr as, "the artist's longtime sparring partner") returns to the fray, and, along with Beate Söntgen and Gregor Stemmrich, offers critical insight on this iconic oeuvre.

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