

University of Pécs, Faculty of Arts, Doctoral School of Fine Arts

The Possibilities of Standing up for Painting in the Twilight of Art

**Dissertation on the state of art along with the connection between
Gerhard Richter's and my art.**

Theses of DLA dissertation

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As part of my DLA theses I would like to give a brief, few page long account of how I became acquainted with the chosen field of art through the research I carried out at the doctoral school. I endeavour to define the means and methods of this writing and my researches and thus outline the way to the final structure of the dissertation. Finally and perhaps most importantly I attempt to disclose the results and novelties of my paper and put forward propositions issuing from the implication of my essay.

Taking the basic experience of the world around and inside me into consideration (such as its fragmentation, changeability and celerity) I have arrived at the conclusion that things that exist in a different way can only be discovered and learned about in a different way. The way I see it, the era we are living in is synthetic and eclectic in character thus I assumed it would be appropriate to paint synthetic-eclectic pictures here and now.

Richter's oeuvre, which bears a lot of similarities to synthetic paintings, first and foremost represents to me the ideal¹ of a synthetic lifework. Due to his influence, nowadays I tend to think in more, parallelly positioned intellectual activities as well as in a general approach, which from time to time kindle ideas that bring forth pictorial representations. The direction of my pursuit, which I previously assumed to be the one and only way, has moved away from the possibility to use one, single, unquestionable language towards more targets².

The way I have observed it, even the greatest thinkers' mentality can be followed by anyone. The secret of their method is that there is no special, exclusive method at all. To put it in a more descriptive way, their method is arbitrariness which involves constantly changing the starting points, the approaches, the visual angle and the parameters. As beauty can be found in almost anything, we can feel attracted to virtually anything. The sensitive perception of inspiration is clearly discernible in

¹ I applied to the DLA course of Pécs with the programme called Synthetic Still Life. My works of art were created by the superposition of several pictures (mainly of still life) taken from several viewpoints. Later the individual pictures which were superposed appeared as part of a different language system, but at the same time they retained their individuality. My aim that I set for the course was to extend the possibilities to synthesise in the visual domain with the help of *Ernő Tolvay*. Coming to know *Richter's* work I realised that one's lifework can also be tackled and is attainable even through the running of different, parallel programmes.

² These contain programmes which are more limited; considering the depiction of the whole they are smaller in scale. A general development can be observed in these programmes, though it is not necessarily linear nor is it steady.

Gerhard Richter's work as well as the way he moves freely among them thus maintaining extensive intellectual freedom.³

When choosing the subject-matter of my dissertation I was not pursuing competitiveness, comparativeness or unconditional admiration. Rather, I was drawn by an intellectual parallelism⁴ I came upon by chance, which I endeavoured to scrutinise. Along with describing and analysing *Richter*'s work, I set out to reveal the foundation of my own creative work, which would be of equal emphasis. However I do not wish to write about myself and my work in a historical manner. I would not like to – and perhaps I am not able to – draw complex conclusions in the field of aesthetics or art theory and produce authoritative consequences.

The essay comprises propositions, suggestions and observations regarding art history, more specifically a part of it and its current state as well as *Gerhard Richter*'s and my disposition concerning artistic attitude. It also contains the ever present thoughts, doubts and certainties which perpetually accompany my – and as it seems other artist's – creative work. Therefore, although I do not specifically aim to, I will draw on psychology. Being an art therapist this field is of central interest to me.

I have long been intrigued by the alternation and contrast of different styles, qualities, structures, pictorial forms and compositions and their visual realisation, mostly in the form of individual works of art. Pictures which model such a fragmented, so to say, eclectic world – if not so much as my early paintings which had sharp contours and boundaries – are fairly close to a human's system of perception, therefore they say a lot about us. In conclusion, I would like to synthesise but in order to do that I first had to shake off all the inhibitions and limits which had been building up inside me and thus had become internalised throughout the years. My master, *Ernő*⁵ *Tolvaly*, has provided me with invaluable help to achieve that.

³ What can one be inspired by? Anything. Any reality seen or imagined can serve as the basis of my work: an exciting narration of a novel or at other times just a beautiful and lyrical phrase. Moreover the above mentioned sources of inspiration may come from the same text.

⁴ Finding a fellow artist – however distant he may be physically – was a breath of fresh air amidst the solitary work of creation.

⁵ The motto of the dissertation evokes one of the underpinnings we established at the beginning of our successful cooperation.

Soon after commencing my studies at the doctoral school I became acquainted (through articles, reproductions and exhibitions) with the works of *Gerhard Richter*, which had an immense impact on me and the way I had been thinking⁶ about art. In fact it was a revelation. Coming to know *Richter's* work made it gradually clear for me that our intentions greatly overlap. This process of unravelling is still going on and the essay is one of the milestones representing this progression.

The intellectual coming together with *Gerhard Richter* and the thorough analysis of it is of private nature which at times results in a tone of privacy in the dissertation. Nevertheless judging from his unique status in international art life, construing *Richter's* work may be of interest to other artists.⁷ Bearing these considerations in mind, I have come to the decision that it is worth to write about the grand lifework of this diverse German painter.

Richter claims that his paintings are not meant to be the criticism of culture but simply are born of secret and beauty. The artist is captured and enchanted by a flower of outstanding depth of focus, his own family or a photo of a beautiful neck of a woman. Can it really be so simple? Is it possible that there is a concept or that there is not one? Can it be that the only message is that the picture exists?⁸ *Richter* strives to transmit a kind of objectivity in his paintings however, they unintentionally carry the artist's effort to aestheticise, his classical way of composing and selection.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, I intend the study to provoke discussion. I endeavour to use mostly authentic sources, therefore the essay is largely built on *Richter's* own writings and notes, most of which due to the lack of Hungarian translation had to be translated by me. At the same time I have elaborated and expounded on the issues⁹ which arose in my assignments during the doctoral course and which are characteristic of my work as an artist. Furthermore I set out to find answers to questions which are unanswered to the present day.

⁶ I had to turn my way of thinking upside down, or rather downside down. I had to realise that ultimately it does not matter whether a picture is abstract or figurative – as exemplified by *Richter's* oeuvre. I tend to deal with the whole of the pictorial world, the visual integrity as others do and in the meanwhile I try to reflect on its history in the least possible evolutionistic way.

⁷ Moreover due to the small number of publications which appeared in Hungary, an essay about *Richter's* oeuvre would be of major importance.

⁸ The quotation comes from a television interview with *Jasper Johns*.

⁹ In most of the cases I have expanded on the same fields of research and topics which I was most engrossed in during the six semesters of my doctoral course.

I have created a scientific piece of writing; nevertheless as an artist I found it difficult to act as an art historian and philologist to observe and analyse my own works of art. Consequently the aspects of my essay are not exclusively related to art history; however I have made every attempt to comply with scientific demands and the requirements of a doctoral dissertation.

Regarding the method of building the structure of the dissertation, I have not strictly separated my ideas and description¹⁰ of paintings from that of *Gerhard Richter*. I let them mix and combine to form a disorderly, productive unity. Thus the organising principle of my dissertation is synthesising, as usual. The incidental fragmentation of the text and the blurred boundaries separating each train of thought, reflect, echo and emphasize the subject matter of the essay. In this way I matched the form to the content.¹¹ At the same time – referring to Eco – it is an open piece of writing in the sense that it has revealed new relationships and connections hitherto unknown to me in the field of research.

Reflecting on *Gerhard Richter*'s lifework, I can see my own work more clearly as it is. Furthermore his oeuvre has proved to be the appropriate field of research to better understand the actual structure and destiny of art in general. Inevitably the conclusions I draw from the research will obviously affect my own way of creation. *Richter* – as it turns out from the title – strives to save art by standing up for painting and to transcend the numbness of posthistoire. The tautological motto could be: paint to save painting, and I myself strive to take part in the struggle.

¹⁰ I do not wish to engage in a thorough analysis of individual works of art; my main purpose is to give a comprehensive overview of the lifework instead.

¹¹ According to *Umberto Eco* we can declare that "... content and form are inseparable in art. By this we do not mean that we cannot distinguish between the two levels and the specific phenomena taking place on them. It means that there is interdependence between the changes occurring on the two levels." (*Eco*, 2006:p. 343.)