



# RICHTER 858

EIGHT ABSTRACT PICTURES



EDITOR DAVID BRESKIN

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**MUSIC**

BILL FRISELL  
WITH JENNY SCHEINMAN  
HANK ROBERTS  
EYVIND KANG

**EIGHT ABSTRACT PICTURES**

GERHARD RICHTER

**PANORAMA**

**POEMS : PASSAGES**

W.S. DI PIERO  
DEAN YOUNG  
ANN LAUTERBACH  
RICHARD HOWARD  
PAUL HOOVER  
DAVID BRESKIN  
CONNIE DEANOVICH  
ROBERT HASS  
BRENDA HILLMAN  
MICHAEL PALMER  
JAMES MCMANUS  
EDWARD HIRSCH  
JORIE GRAHAM

**TEXTS : PASSAGES**

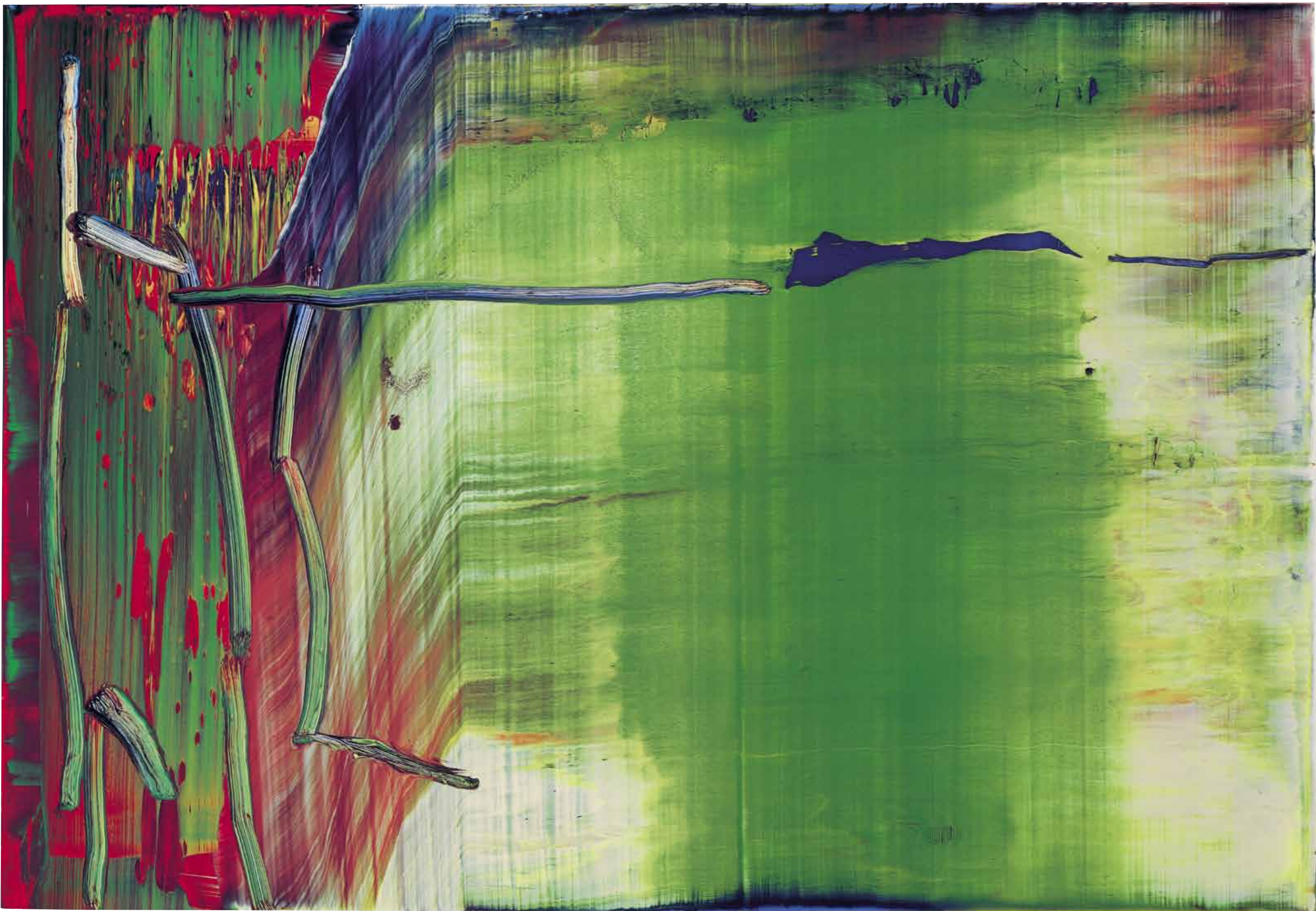
KLAUS KERTESS  
DAVE HICKEY  
GERHARD RICHTER

**INFORMATION**

**858 UNBOUND**







858-1  
Abstract Picture, 1999 Oil on Aluminum 50 X 72 cm

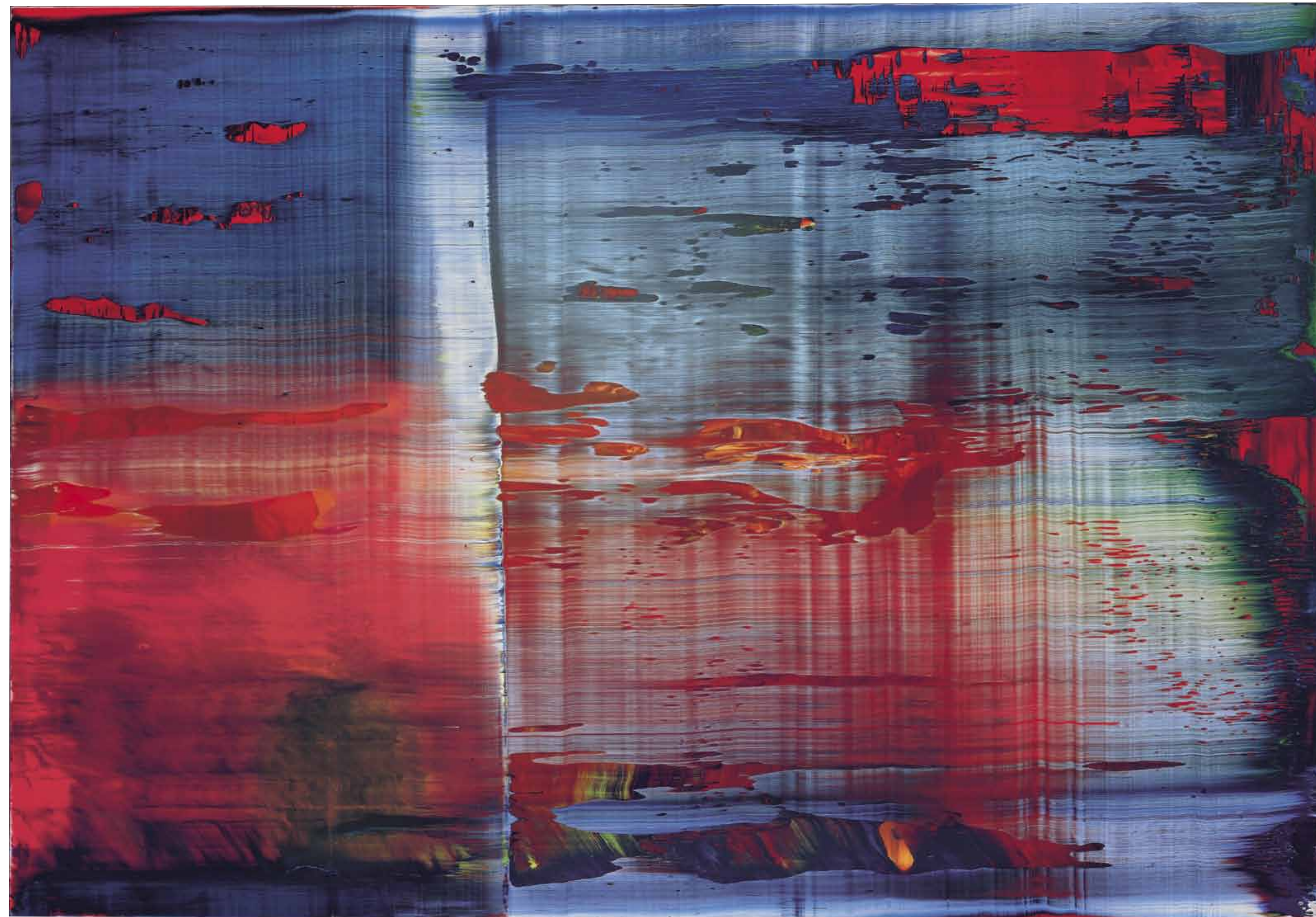




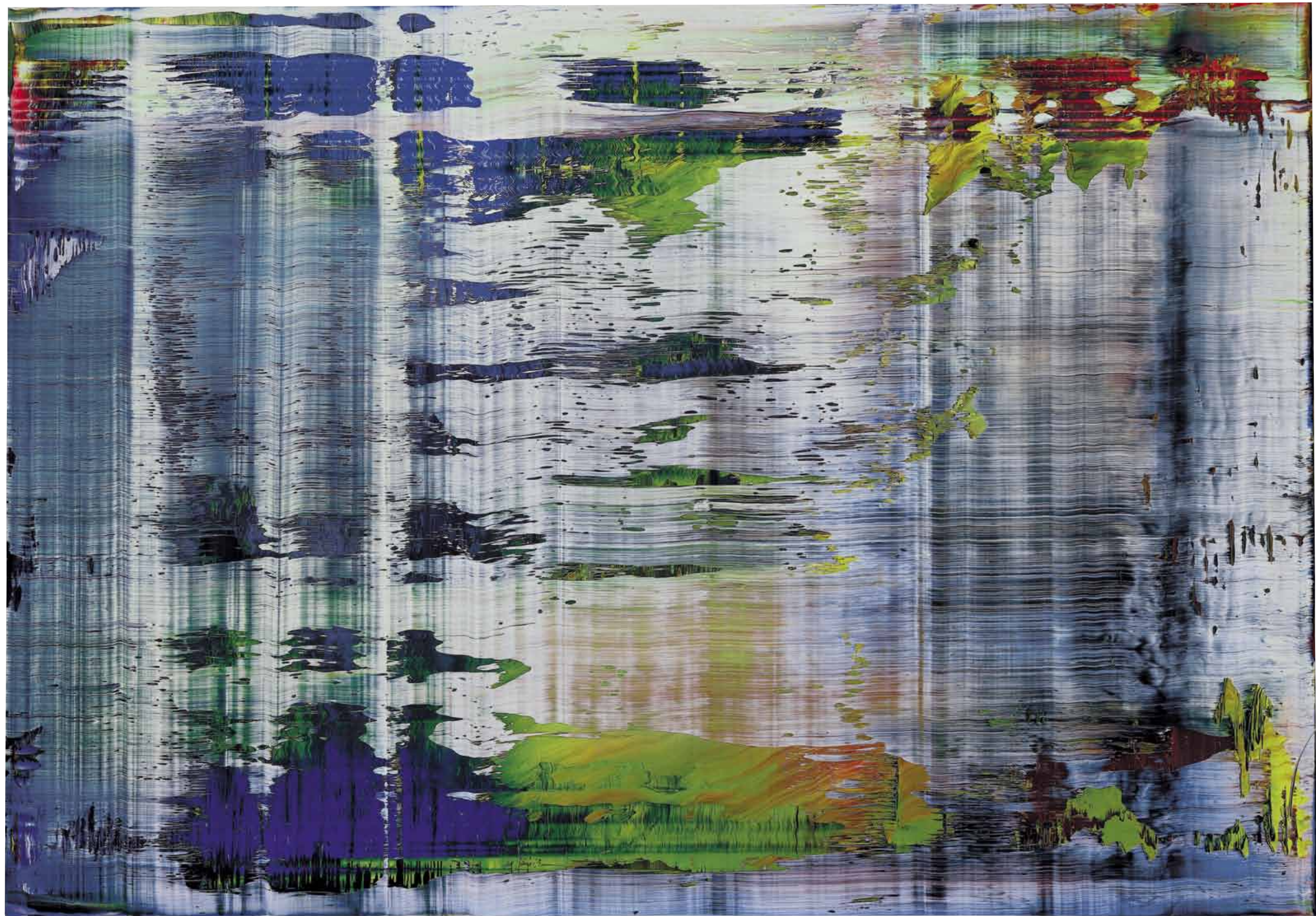
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ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON ALUMINUM 50 X 72 CM



858-3  
ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON ALUMINUM 50 X 72 CM

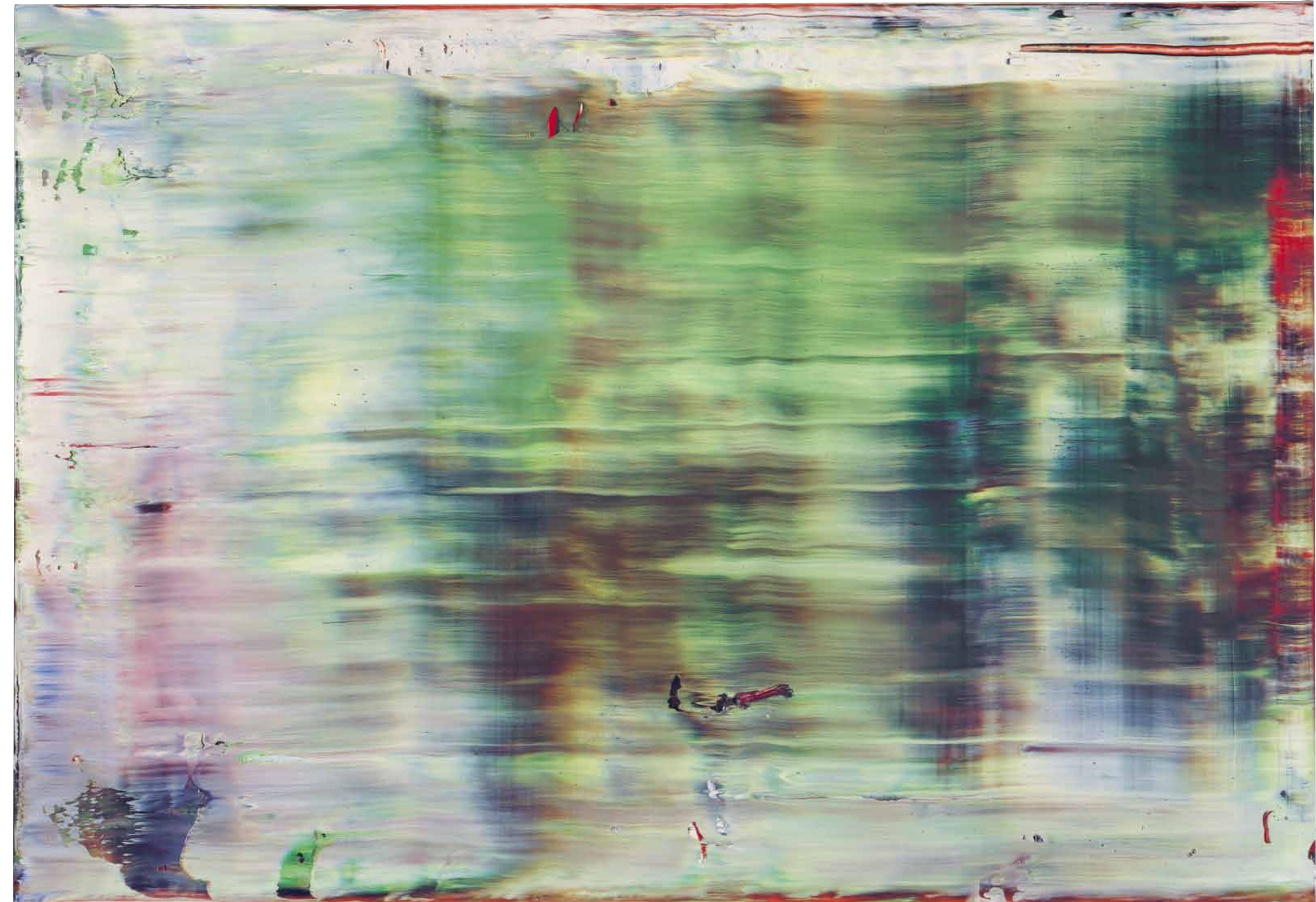






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ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON ALUMINUM 50 X 72 CM





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ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON ALUMINUM 50 X 72 CM





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ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON ALUMINUM 50 X 72 CM

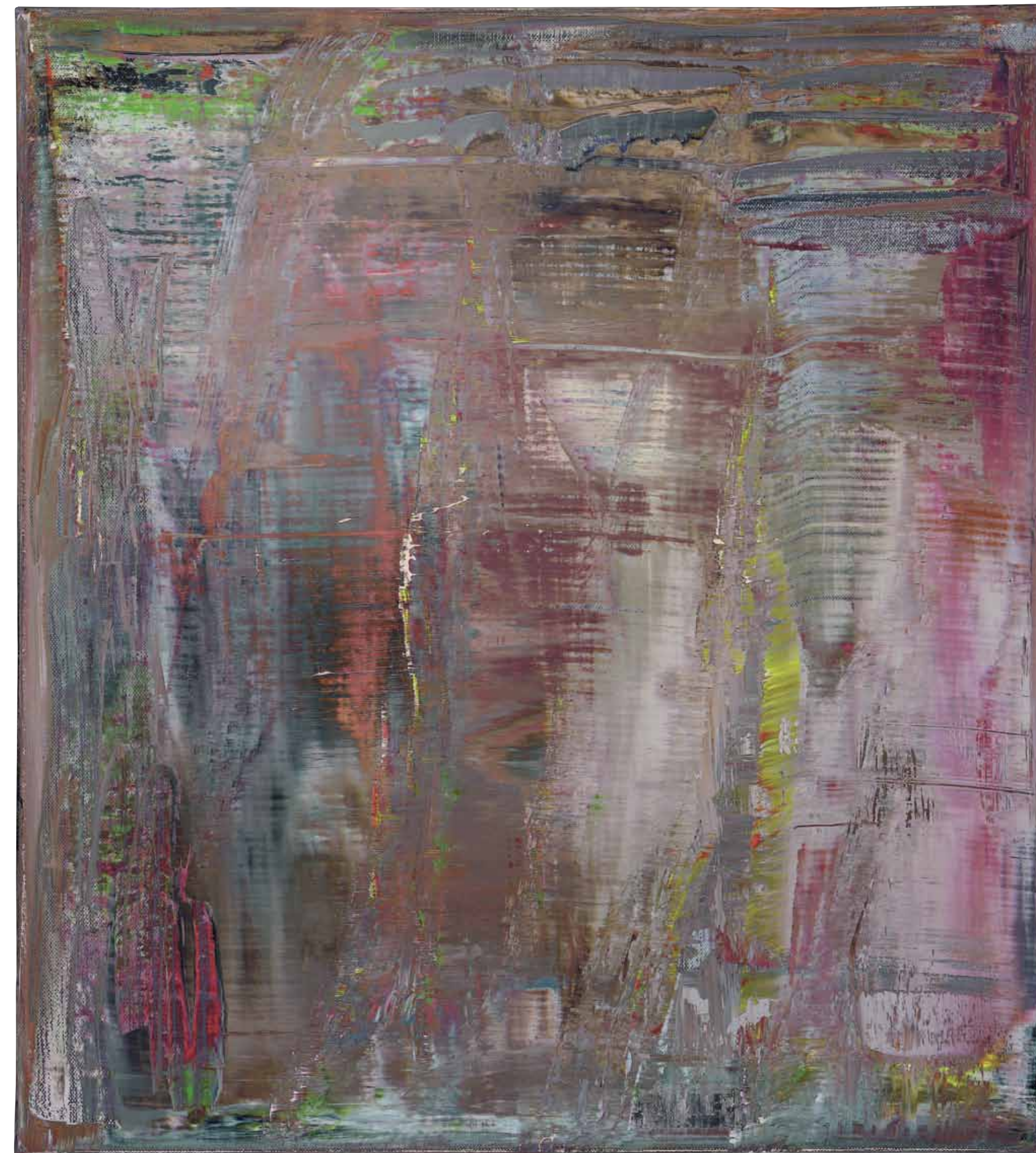




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ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON ALUMINUM 50 X 72 CM



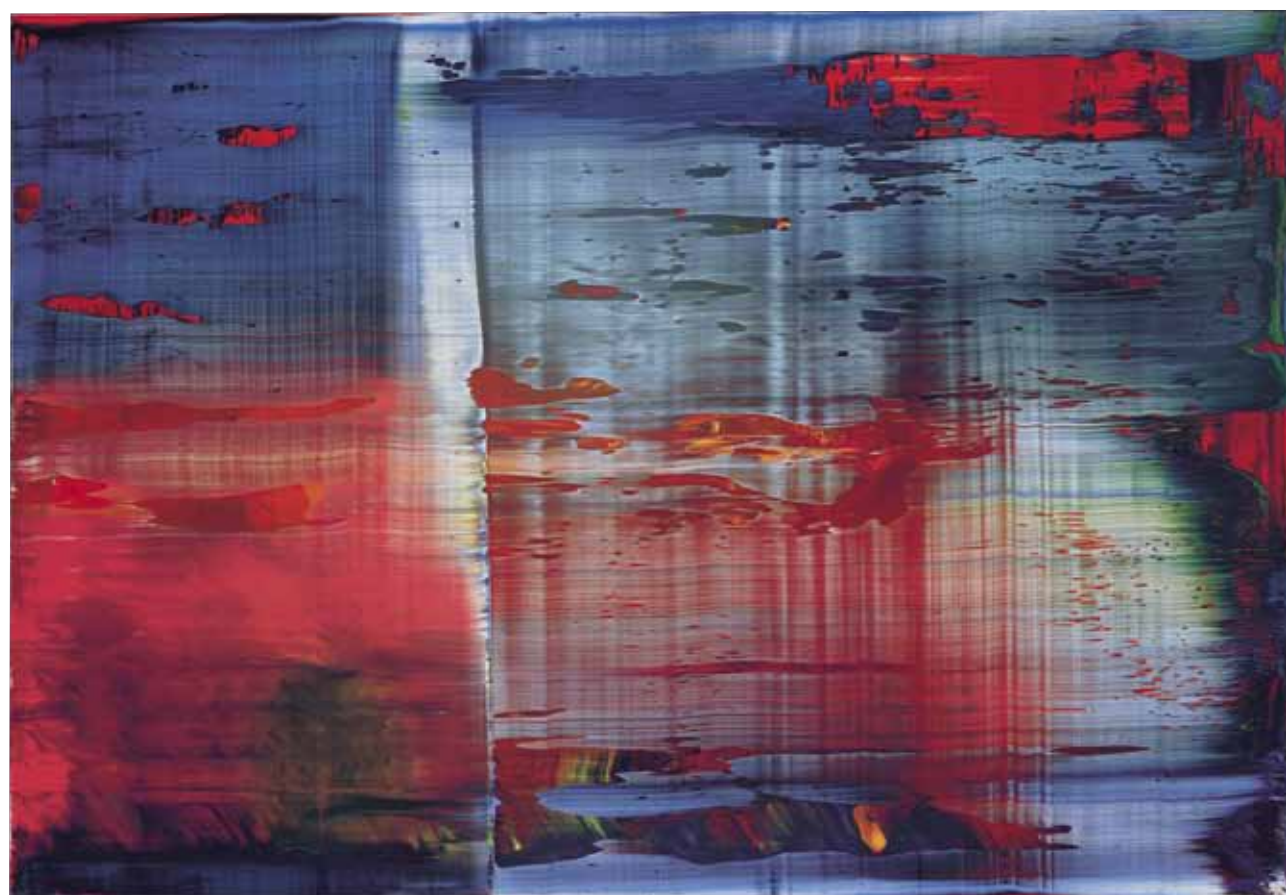
858-8  
ABSTRACT PICTURE, 1999 OIL ON LINEN 51 X 47 CM





















A VIEW OF THE STUDIO

My train that early evening  
ran toward its tunnel,  
a gray nothing, I thought,  
waiting beyond. Daylight  
shed its scales, hamlets of lights  
pumped from hillsides, trackside  
T.V. emanations streaked past,  
aluminum greens and blues  
in motion or somehow stilled,  
instant to instant, identically  
sized, the world plying form  
on form, revising itself  
as I watched. *Practice makes  
imperfect.* Headlights dissolved  
inside rockface, vineyards  
troweled my window, then meadows,  
run-off acidic pouchings,  
and marbled wind raking  
clouds into sea-motion  
minerals, veils dragged  
past my view until  
the landscape sheared off  
into combed cobalt blues  
channeled into the mountain,  
where graffiti fragments knifed  
like blue ice and deranged  
the scene. *We make meaning  
of accident.* The windows  
held our faces close  
to shadow grids masked  
by rent disclosures,  
this fresh infinitude  
of line and volume.





When we emerged, the small  
village station lay  
among its dark mountains  
in a casual perfection  
of night snow scooped by wind.  
The more it covered tracks,  
switching lights, platform, roofs,  
the more it revealed red  
umbrellas, violet coats,  
porters' wagons and clock,  
a slight place sedated  
in its changes, and I  
felt delivered, unfinished,  
to bright and solid scenes  
melting through me as I  
streamed helpless into them.





WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE

We've always been where we are,  
we have no memories of escape,  
climbing the steps with our collapsed maps,  
operating instructions dangling from our necks.  
Tide of ions, never let us go.

We sow roses into wounds.  
We know where the batteries are.  
With horses and houses we can be trusted  
and we know all about upside-down clouds.  
We've seen the valley once  
which is more than a thousand times.

Three o'clock, already dark.

I'm not sure what I'm doing.  
The procedure goes up in smoke.  
Detailed masques of solidity,  
percussion of raindrops to general effect.  
Hello nice echo,  
your flashlight couldn't be in a better place.

Hard to find the right glue.

You pull off the ribbons and that's how  
you can tell it's a gift.  
Never never never give it back.  
Are you with me? Forever?  
It's okay if you're not

on the other shore of whiplash merchandise  
or the other shore of peeled particular  
or the other shore birth estuary  
or the other shore moon hammer gull circle.

Spilled out in the gull circle.  
Beautiful face in the gull circle.  
We're going to lift you now.  
We're going to carry you away.





DETAIL (858-6)

1

Aspiring glance

bound force

array

turns of glass

how

charged by reflection

to travel quick

toward

undone

singular stroke

syntax unanchored

to recognize

*blur*

notes on a scaffold

metonymy's grace

to alter narrative adjacent to cause

*ripple*

close-up fracture

ream patch flare

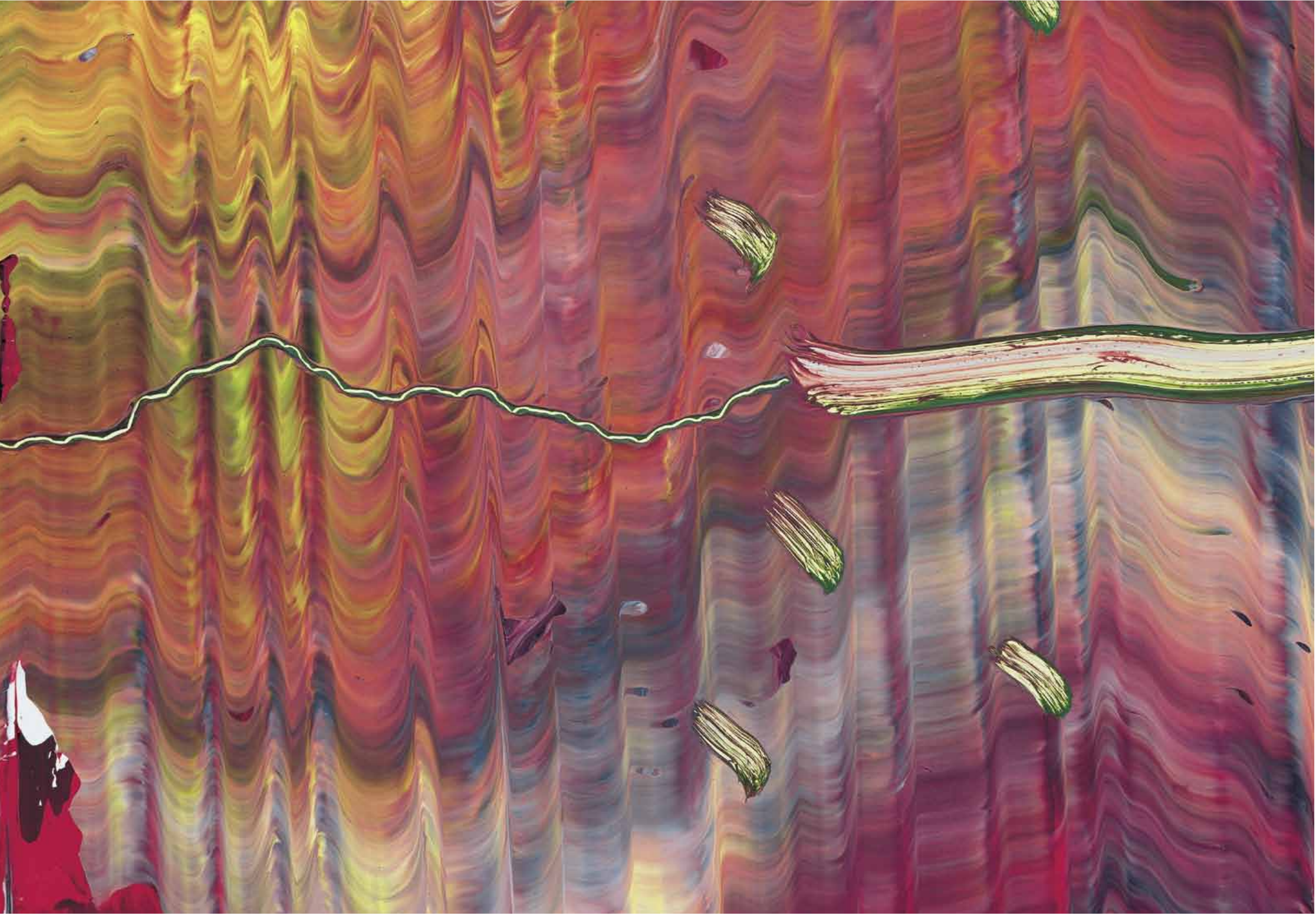
mineral strata

under skin

*shade*

forged by a figure of day

ragged impediment to horizon's door





the lewd sun's encrypted ease

risen over sand

bony sky adrift

vertigo meaning

invention's wound and peel

the transitive eye    *insight to insight*    now

hinged open

foray begun.

2

*How?*

to ask how

persuasion    begets

material inventory    you sample you measure    your

phase    within passion    locale

without gate    rift    exit    breach

lesion map    faces

a matrix of leavings

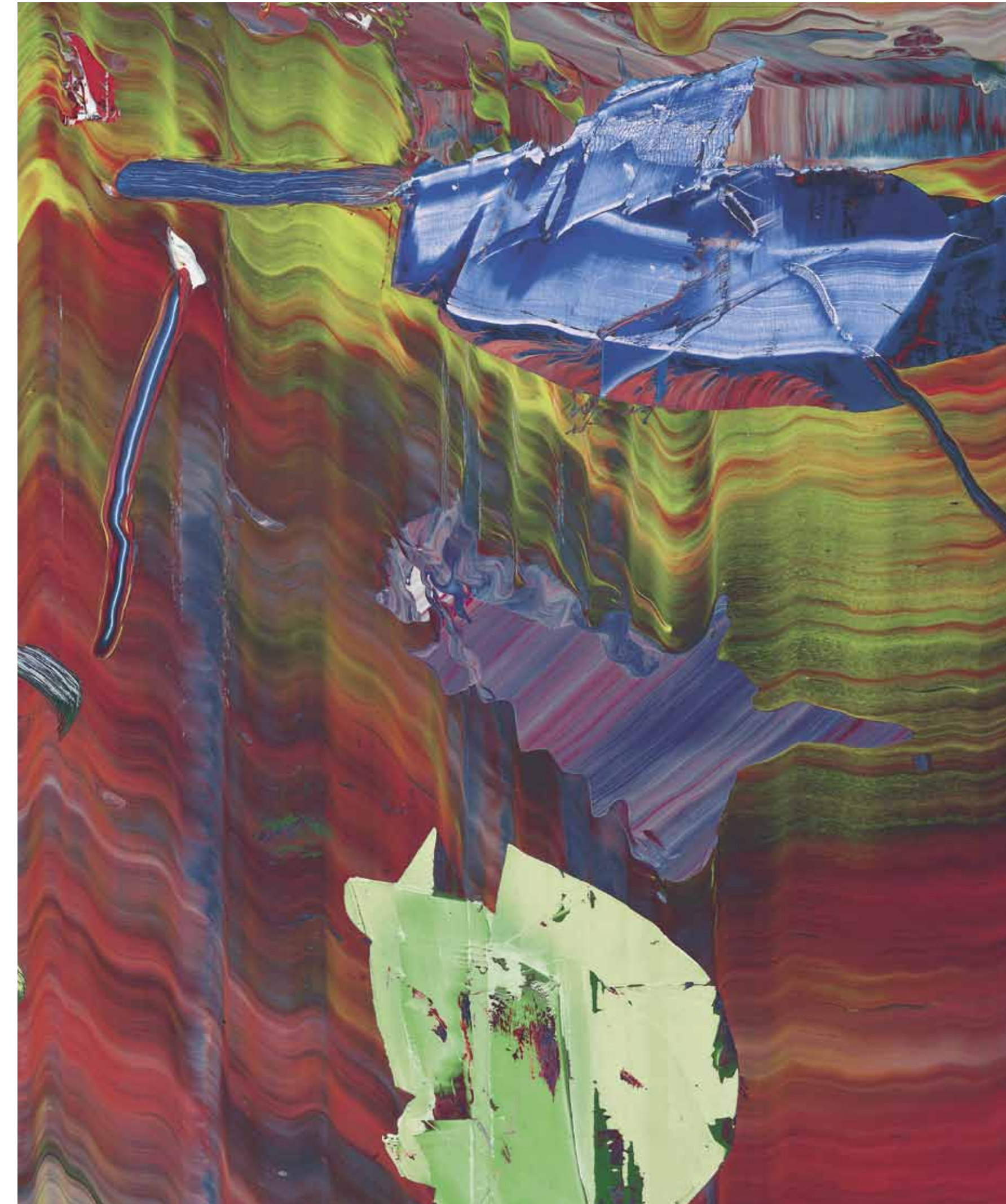
cycle of flaws attached to    *the possible*

attached to transit

the body present    the chance remark

intimate answer

quotidian care.





3

Meanwhile

fluttering wingnote fl fl fl

grasp the instant's sleeve

add looking at through

trace imperatives at arm's length

or form

a beleaguered architecture

wall field edge

micro-scale

rivets windy doubt

fragment one

enters

presently

a ground of objects

latent in underbrush

among strangers

in the roaming view

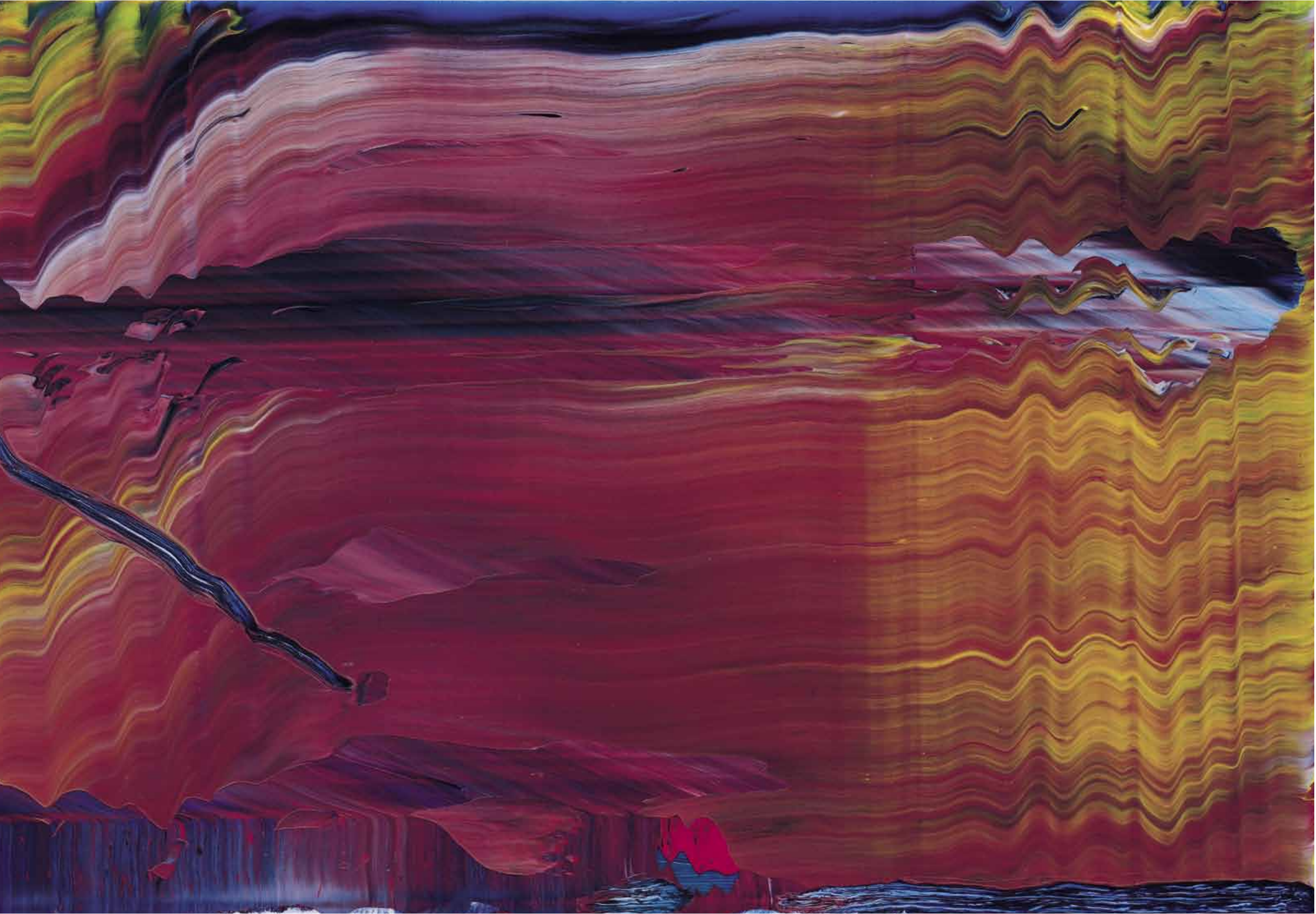
hope's radiant knot tied in fabric

ordinarily an interior well

*response to response*

a secular gift

a labor of hours.





THE APOTROPAIST

Vielleicht ist da alles sporadisch  
—Gerhard Richter

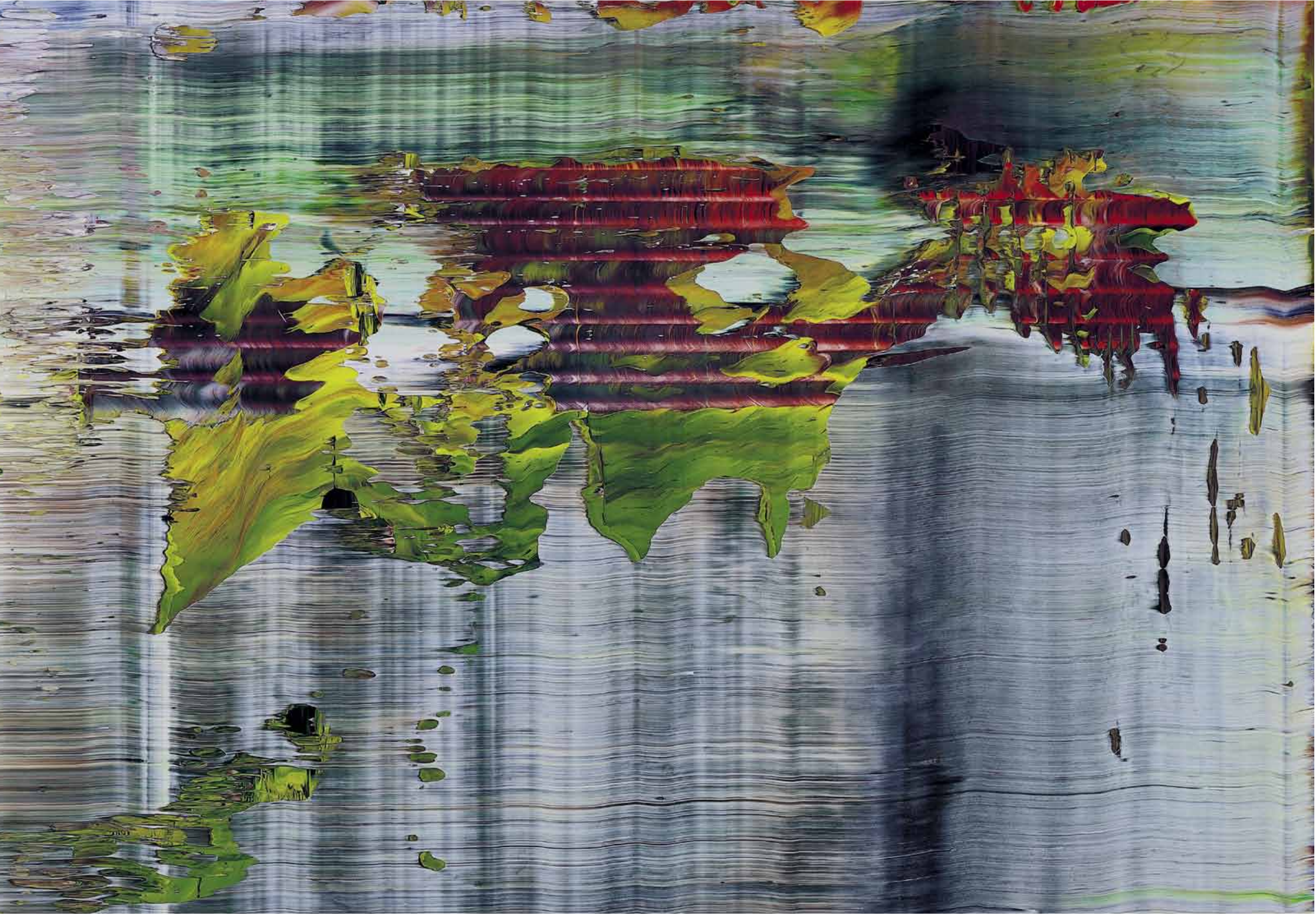
On Corfu, a digest of touristic scenery  
after the Meister’s own heart  
(as well as his omnivorous art),  
I discovered a temple where the Gorgon  
hung out, tongue out, all

terror and temerity, a Parian mask of  
divine repudiation  
which our Blue Guide to Greece maintained was  
“apotropaic: warding off evils by  
spells, charms and the like.”

True-blue guide to the real right Richter, early intent  
on a proper solution,  
his way of warding off to produce  
another eight works at variance, wrecking  
all such intention.

*Direct my concentration toward what I do not know*  
—maddening admonition—  
*the attempt being to build instead*  
*of burrowing through the undergrowth half-blind*  
(Richter half-blind!)... Yet

what evils the Gorgon can avert are familiar  
enough by now. *No systems,*  
*no programs, no ideologies,*  
*no assertion, no purpose, no style! I flee*  
*from all commitment.*





Only approximations then, experiments and  
inceptions, no end in sight.

Working, for instance, from photographs  
of forty-eight dead white masters paralyzed  
by the camera,

Richter, being an exemplary monster, destroys  
every criteria gained  
from his own entrancement, his own  
training: *once it's all averted, I can paint  
against my own will.*

*Letting a thing come rather than creating it—no  
formulations—in a word,  
painting beyond my understanding,  
abstraction an endless becoming,  
endless existing,*

space with all the blur of Being on it, *a kind of  
emergency butchering.*

Does it take the pain out of painting,  
all of this painstakingly prolific  
production of yours?

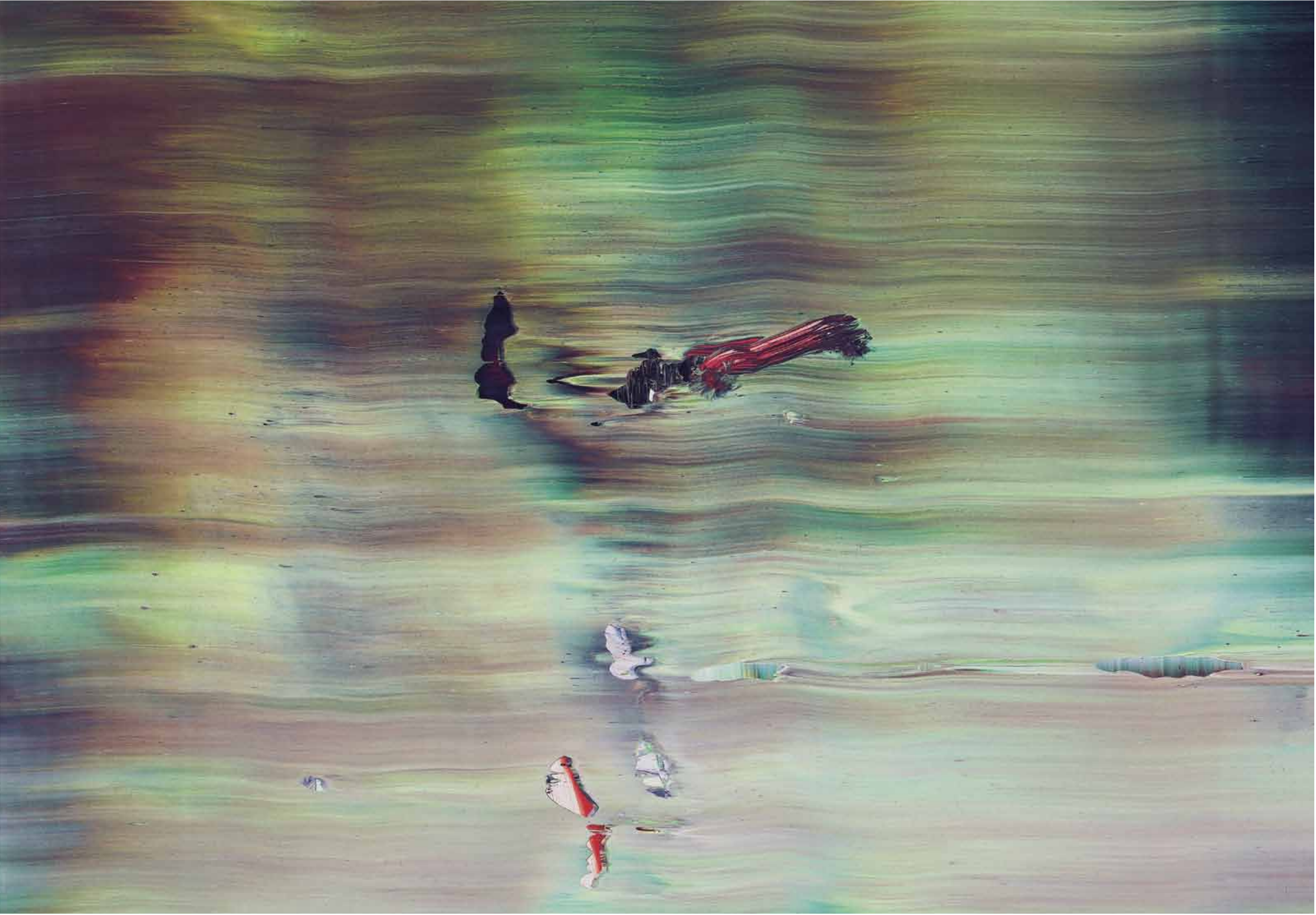
Repudiating the said in favor of saying  
is all that makes it human,  
this uncertain life of warding off,  
of refusing, this life that is *not the picture  
but the depicting.*





EXCAVATED LIGHT

The surface gives back tension.  
Along the arm and into the spine,  
the painter's body stiffens  
as the pressure of his eye  
moves across the frame.  
A scraping is a leaving. Nothing's ac-  
cidental, even coruscation.  
Heart-shaped arc  
of breath's intention  
as the hand like a voice  
deepens then lifts.  
We are forgiven our knowledge  
of the plan, trial and cessation  
like a sunlit field, ribbons at the fair.  
A face's first surface :  
excavated light :  
the ardor of the stripping.  
I myself have seen the vertical  
patient writing of reed and stalk,  
authored marks on surface nature.  
Yet the mind's  
patient signal is never quite at rest.  
Turning of hands, turning of snow.  
The voices of that town.  
After all the figures,  
archeology of intention  
beneath thirty pressings.  
Speeding green and subtle ideation.  
Blurrings of a world.  
The tool is chosen  
for the smoothness of its mark  
on feathered metal.  
The edges are prepared  
and final at this hour.  
The eye presses deeper.  
The leaving shines.





JUMPING OVER YOUR SHADOW  
SLASH LANDSCAPE WITH SQUEEGEE

Knockdown-dragout tween arched guitar and fatback drums, a bass line punches *the one* with thumbslap torque, wobbling excited atoms. Form flows. Thanks for the straitjacket, always makes for a nice trip. Awake on this phase-shifted ring-modulated morning, a plan in hand from Control, we begin optimistically enough, on the off chance weather will smile and our contrail write *PEACE* across azure. Who knows whether our empennage will stresscrack or delam on climb out, sending eyes scattering toward flames, waves, beryllium, faceless survivors, crushed hopes.

Ah, feathers of an arrow, shot high. A baby emperor penguin's hopes lie on daddy's toes and momma, jammed with krill, making a swift return trip from the leopard seal's bewhiskered rip-toothed scream-eyed hunting ground: ice water. Talk about doubt! Mega-mega. Form a circle, facing inward against sledgehammering wind. Only *ism* known to work: mass cuddle. Like Mao, but less starvation no party line sportier orange plumage. Getting a grip in sideways snow means chance meetings, strangers in the night, the howling gist of a wedding plan.

Master say: *I could spend my life arranging things*. Spend, spend. Plan A always comes with a lumpy dowry. Mascara rivulets puddling eyes introduce Plan B to the shocked shocked participants. Hardly a chance to catch breath after the stickymoon sojourn, a brochure-fringed trip to empyrean isles (Darwin's wetspot dream) where each party's past toes the line before rolling over in bed like a crushing blue-veined iceberg—the 10% hope 90% underwater surprise of every *J. Caird* marriage. Riprap, swamp. The known world can't compete. Then, at customs, upon re-entry, a most unusual form.

A scissoring. A sex change of robots. A restraining order. Form follows fiasco. Brave men run in my family. Tinker to Evers to Chance. Berserker manners: a careful riot, stockbrokers at a buffet whispering *Know what? You gotta own it—GAARP, EBITDA*. But beauty's in the eye of the bondholder. Suckers! He may have come from a place called Hope but all night long it was honor, offer, honor, offer. The firebombing plan for Dresden included Vonnegut and Richter as bit players, just boys, a story line in the flick now showing at the Googolplex. A scissoring. A freaky trip.





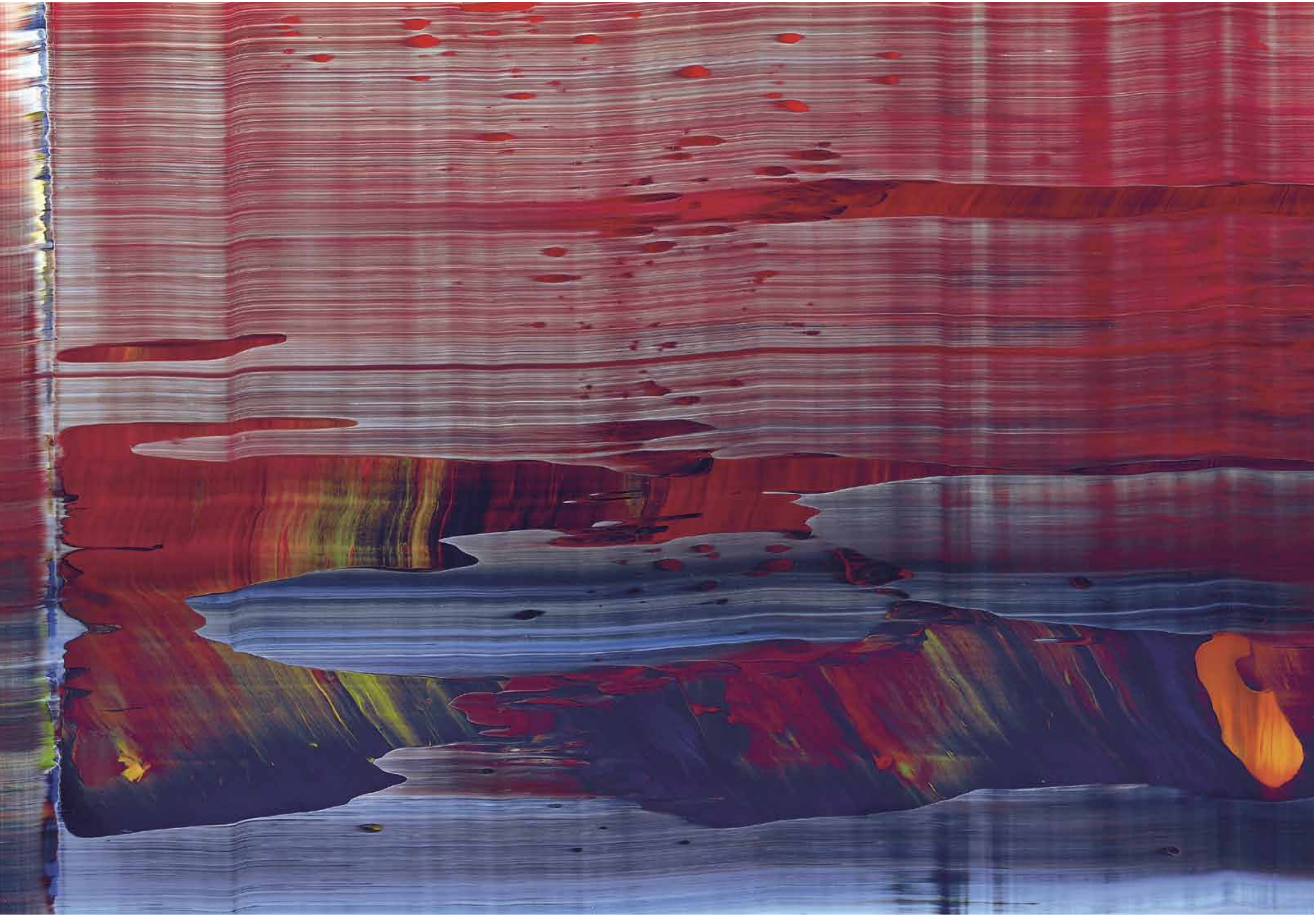
Hanging round as Speektators, eight student nurses on an Illinois death trip.  
Hanging against chambered walls, eight buckets of pulverized earth known  
to the perp as dirty pictures. Exactly what—he axed anxiously—is your line  
of work, sir? “Not *creating* good god,” having overheard the chance  
remark about god being in the details. “More shattering windows: no health-plan  
no normal hours though steady work where I grew up.” But now conventions form  
congealed sentiment: beat your *Kristall*rocks into shared squeegees, hope  
you don’t live to see the Reichstag’s mirrored dome flaming your glass-flagged eye.

Luxe prison, hyperbaric cell, this prismatic retreat from the eye-for-an-eye  
double-blind test of the dumb world’s acne of failures. A fictive line  
in the sand, real as razor wire. And how that floated line, with care, hopes  
to speak to the next, and the next, and next next next, now known  
to each other on courtly yet boppish terms, dancing through cruciformed  
sphered starred fractals of light. Wrecktangles. Rhomboids. Squares. Trip-  
wired triptychs springing traps on regiments of card-punching, retirement-plan  
postmodernists. The skeptic’s strange battle call? *Give paint a chance.*

Boogaloo. Shag. Frug. Swim. Lindy Hop. Shimmy. Bump. Chance  
encounters while dancing mix colors in ways only hoops and barbecue hope  
to, blending egg and jizz in a get-down grisaille, the melting plan  
we need for survival. See our possibilities? The best stem cell line  
cooking in the fridge can’t promise more than the miscegenation trip  
overlayed twisty on a cold metal platter of deep South funk and high-eyed  
Romantic North, every slab pulsing with wiggling zipping form,  
slurred and slang color charts uncharted, remixed, not yet known.

Secede from the Either/Or. Join the Both/Ands, the Neither/Nors. What’s known,  
in the Biblical sense, accept, but shred the rest of that testament tomb. Plan  
on a hard landing and the cynical gaze of those who cry “cynic.” Form  
no opinions that can’t evolve like amphibians into upright facts. Hope  
springs infernal, and occasionally those springs rust. That’s when your /  
needs all its crackbrained blowtorching spit to clean away craggy mischance—  
lame barnacled hitchhiker relentlessly talking your ear off on every trip—  
slip open the door and *push*...then pop some wheelies over the centerline.

Eye trip through your wires, skinned pupils, this functionless form  
a snaking line round the block in a downpour of facts and beamed-eyes,  
all just the planned chance of a steely, well-vetted chance plan.  
Still, moving still: lookout for hope, alive in the superunknown.





M O M E N T A R Y

In the wild what will come will come

Here is a flower  
spinning around in a beautiful pond

Its petals tell nothing except they are petals

They do not point out the path  
or choose you a lover

The water clear and cold  
might well be paint spread solid  
whose mood suggests the liveliness of frogs  
the snap of an early March breeze

Step into this barefoot

Feel it existing despite you

There before you is a moment of the world  
and then, like a dragonfly, it's gone  
and stays going on without you  
its air and its light  
the colored shape of its movements

All of it going on forever

Your wet footprints  
mark the privacy ending

And the world goes on even further





TIME AND MATERIALS

1       Layers, as if  
         they were a steadiness of days.

It snowed; I did errands at a desk.  
White flurries out the window thickening; my tongue  
tasted of the glue on envelopes.

On this day sunlight on red brick, bare trees,  
nothing stirring in the icy air.

On this day blurs of color where  
the heat of bodies meets the watery cold surface of the glass.

Made love, made curry, talked on the phone  
to friends, listened to the one whose brother  
died crying and thinking alternately,  
like someone falling down and getting up  
and running and falling down and getting up.

2       The object of this poem is not to annihila

To not annih

The object of this poem is to report a theft,  
      In progress, of everything  
That is not these words  
      And their disposition on the page.

The object o f this poem is to report a theft,  
      In progres s, of everything that exists  
That is not the se words  
      And their dis position on the page.

Th objec of his poe is t epor a theft  
      In rogres f ever hing at exists  
Th is no ese w rds  
      And the r disp sit on o the pag





3      To score, to scar, to smear, to streak,  
To smudge, to blur, to gouge, to scrape.

'Action painting', i.e.,  
the painter gets to behave like time.

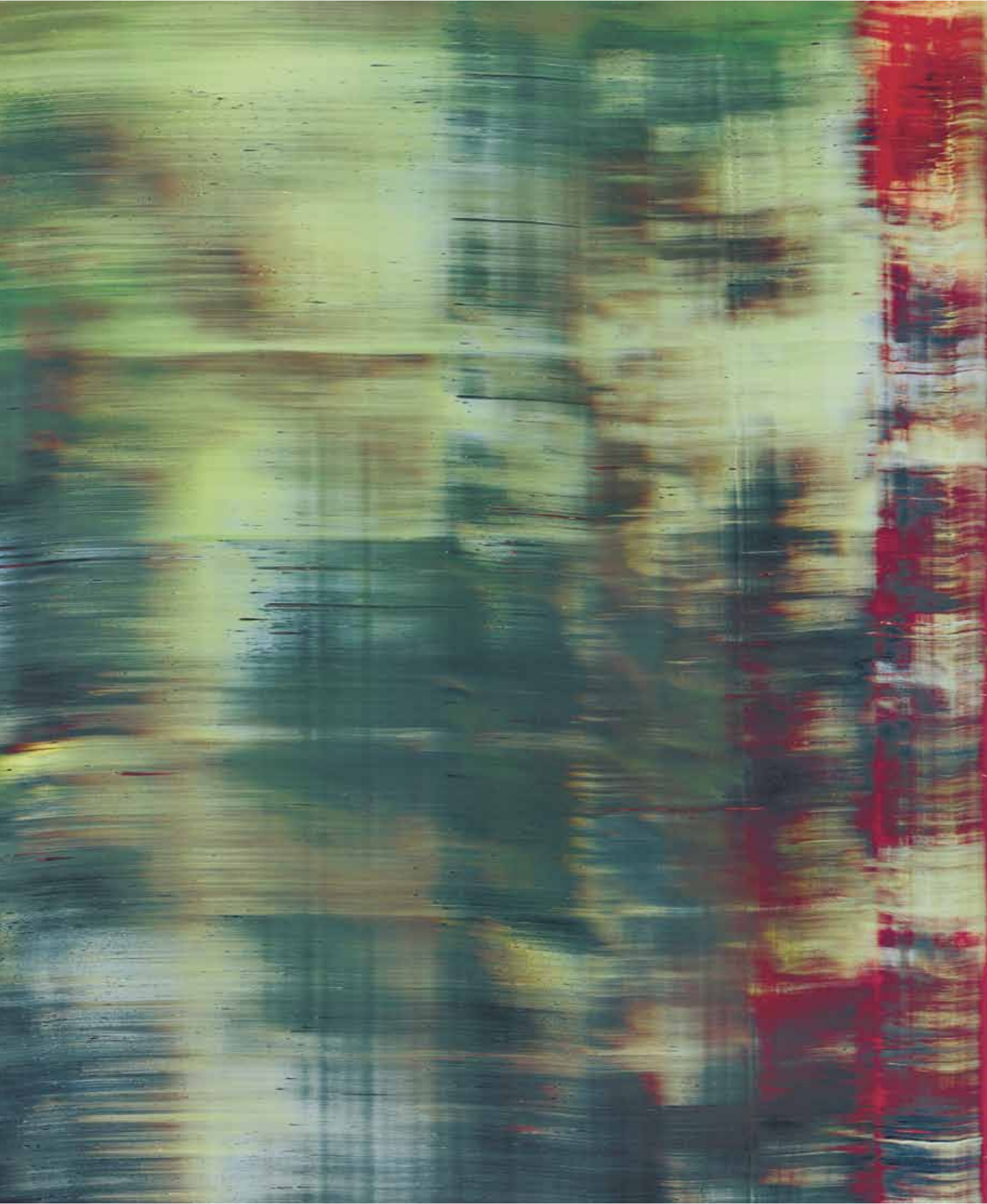
4      The typo would be 'paining'.

(To abrade.)

5      Or to render time and stand outside  
the horizontal rush of it, for a moment  
To have the sensation of standing outside  
the greenish rush of it.

6      Some vertical gesture then, the way that anger  
or desire can rip a life apart,

Some wound of color.

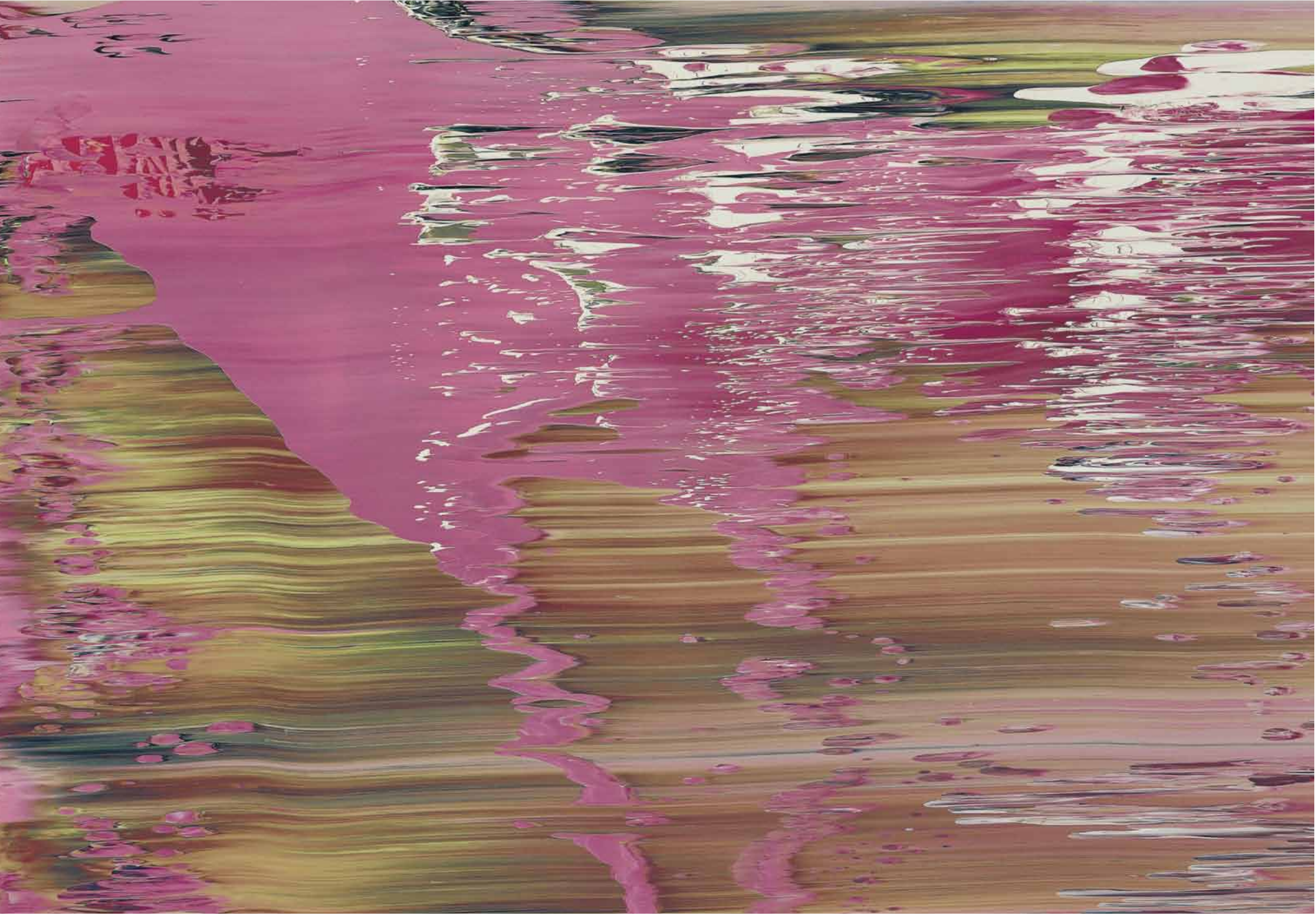




ECHO 858

1     Attempting to describe paint dear  
         someone arrives at the left  
  
         and says *Hello Nice Echo*.  
  
         New clove oil keeps  
         a green cliff  
  
         rivery but how long  
  
         will the shininess survive? — ~ —  
  
         Long enough to try by itself  
         which is totally fine because  
  
         I would like to record  
  
         a feeling that isn't there.

2     A little rip in the thought  
         violence;  
  
         paint is just another kind of  
         victim.  
  
         In the play between constriction and  
         destruction  
         something is risked among the agate clothes;  
  
         we hear him talking through  
         the stroke~  
  
         the particles have come through uncritically but  
  
         really, it is Marx coming through like  
  
         spirits of the Baader-Meinhof who hanged themselves.





3

I looked below

the air behind the paintings.

It was trying to do something  
unsystematic with our angel till

there was nothing to keep except

chance;

I made my eyes pointy to look at air in  
corners,

the strong vertical inside that sucks itself  
down in the gesture of

a tear, then a miracle revealed a  
blue lake.

4

To have an argument  
with existence you can wait

till it says something then  
say nothing. With the speed

inside set to your childhood

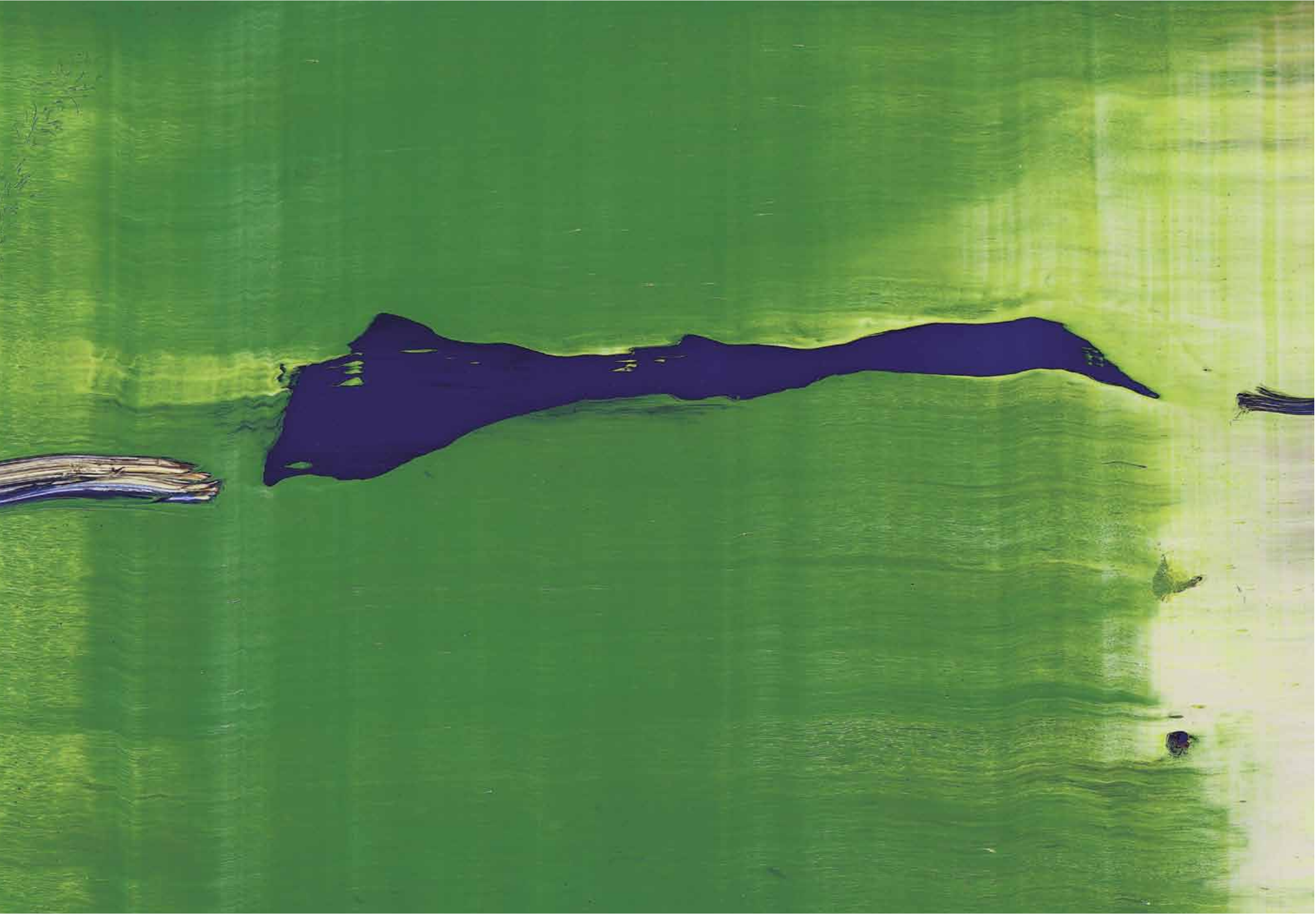
a fleck of grandfather's barn comes through the nicely  
drying doves,~

so many more colors than the one  
you're obsessed with. The kir

of a candy c/zar we once knew—

was a rose buried in there too?

your hope for it is yes.





5      With the fire that has gathered in me

I put my head to the wall to see the gargoyle  
pushing  
from the back of the painting—it loves and chokes the painting—

but no use; details are spurs that hurt us  
when we try to mount extra beauty. The artist

has proceeded with not one  
color but

twins which is why art historians sound stoned.

N sitting on the floor under #8 holding her bandage up

for here, we're little divers  
giving Oz value to hiding behind the curtain~

6      Great paint resists the character. You  
know this.  
If you tilt your head sideways the

smoothness

feels

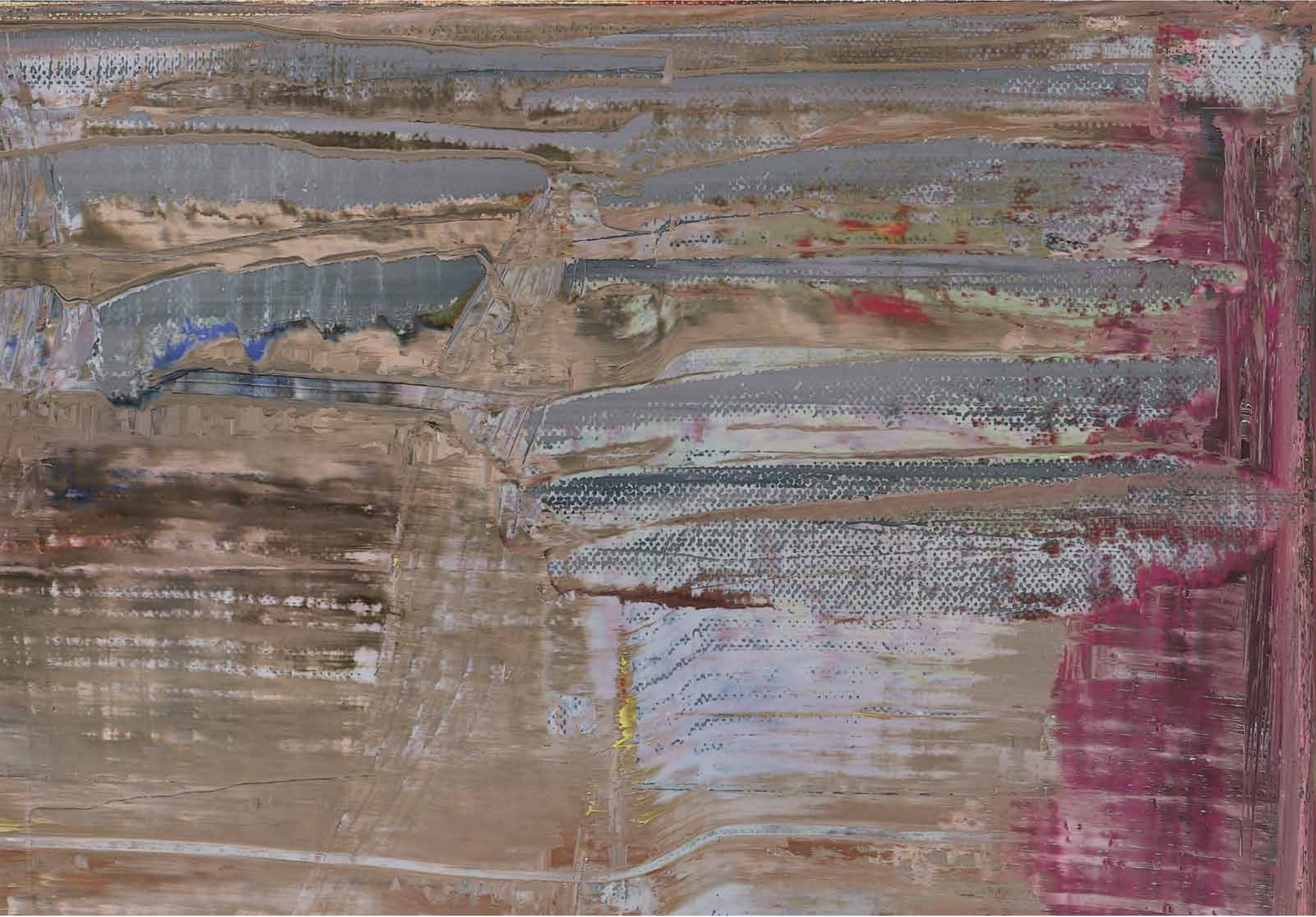
something. It does not tell you till the magic

probes. The air tripling and crippling,

D holds our hand as  
we nearly skip the ladder up to air

that rises behind the east  
where bombing is. Great bird perched in

the limb/o where contradiction kills time.





7      To escape  
the war we watched a color  
field with its line

emphatically drawn in a daily

way;

our love had dreamed and faced  
*the bedspread*

from a wide-wing chair;

what has never not  
existed grows horizons

in it. Why bother trying to

trap it with description.

8      You shouldn't ever say  
you'll give up art. Why did you say that? Take it back.

The interesting length is always death

but paint and ink  
resist no matter

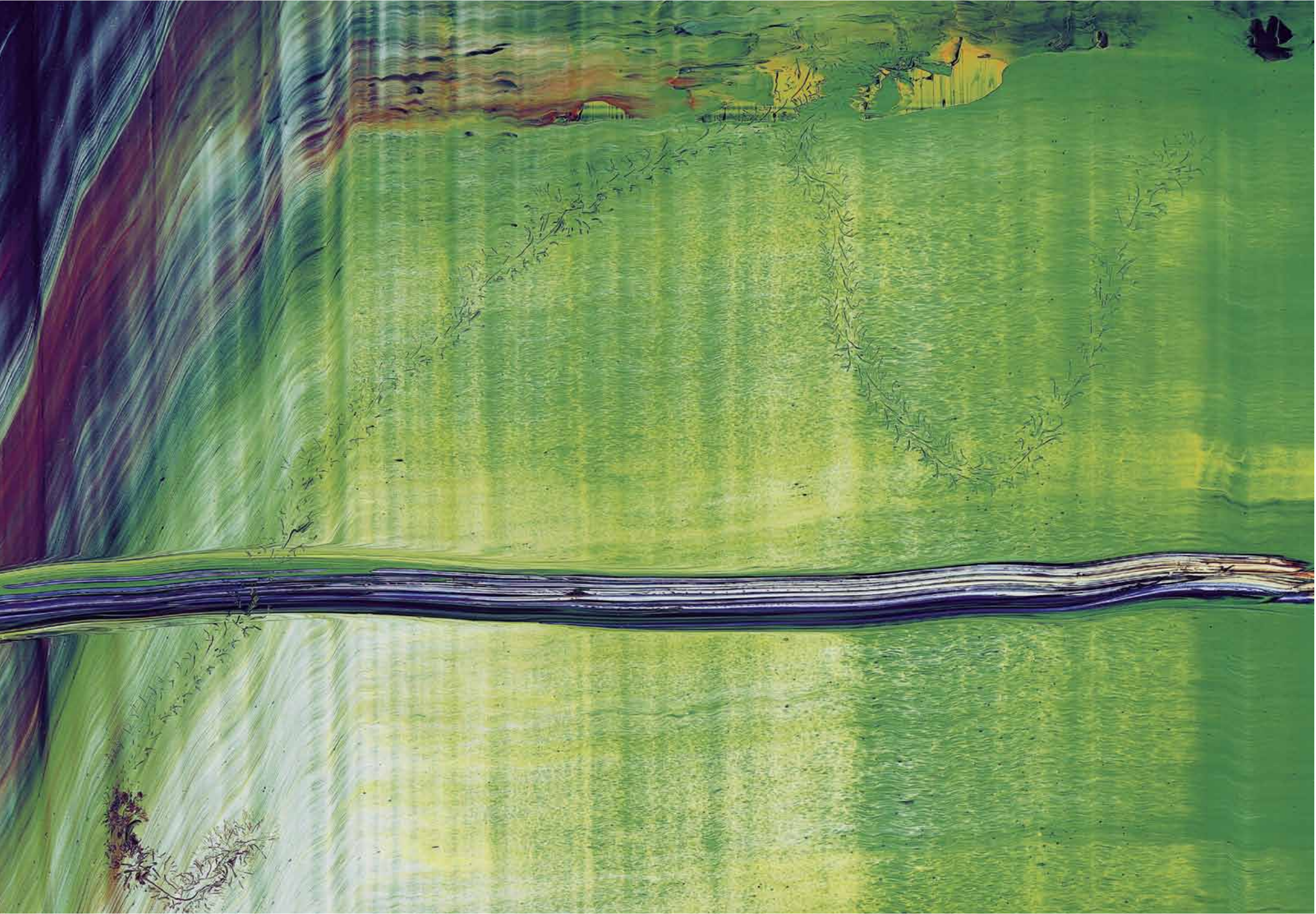
what

stages of furious alarm are  
set;

the combed paint takes a line

from Hamlet—a point in fact  
that hesitates. How strange to give up wanting. Life's

action amazes you.





SCALE

The

The red vowels, how they spill  
then spell a sea of red

And the bright ships—  
are they not ghost ships

And the bridge's threads  
against flame-scarred hills

And us outside  
by other worlds

So

So the promise of happiness?  
he asked a frog

then swallowed the frog  
And the buzz of memory?

he asked the page  
before lighting the page

And by night the sliding stars  
beyond the night itself

A

A table erased  
It is not realism makes possible the feast

Gray face turned away  
Jam jar of forget-me-nots

Girl with gold chain  
cinching her waist

But is it true  
And what will become of us

As

As if the small voices—  
one-erum two-erum

pompalorum jig  
wire briar broken lock

then into and into  
the old crow's nest—

and so when young,  
before all the rest





Crease

Crease in the snowy field  
of evening within us

How the owl stares  
and startles there

fashioning mindless elegy  
So the remembered world's

songs and flooded paths  
This heap of photographs

This

This perfect half-moon  
of lies in the capital

Crooks and fools in power what's new  
and our search has begun for signs of spring

Maybe those two bluebirds  
flashing past the hawthorn yesterday

Against that, the jangle of a spoon in a cup  
and a child this day swept out to sea

But

But the birth and death of stars?  
The birds without wings,

wings without bodies?  
The twin suns above the harbor?

The accelerating particles?  
The pools of spilled ink?

Pages turning themselves  
in The Paper House?

Soon

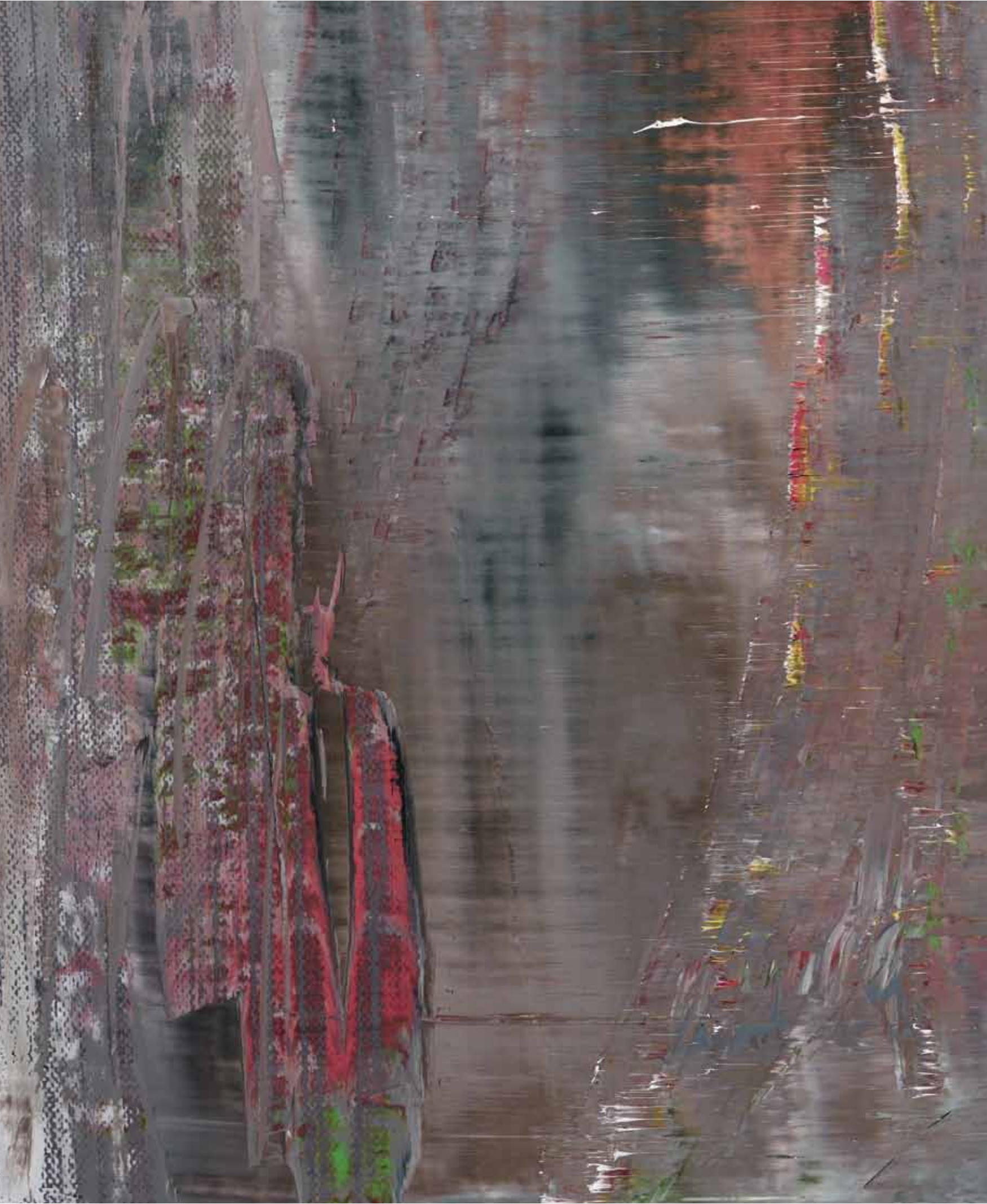
Soon the present will arrive  
at the end of its long voyage

from the Future-Past to Now  
weary of the endless nights in cheap motels

in distant nebulae  
Will the usual host

of politicians and celebrities  
show up for the occasion

or will they huddle out of sight  
in confusion and fear





THE SHUFFLE

One Hammered American Looks  
at 858-3 on 31 December 2001

God may play dice with the universe, in spite  
of Einstein's last hope, but a serious gambler  
prefers no-limit Texas hold 'em. Tonight

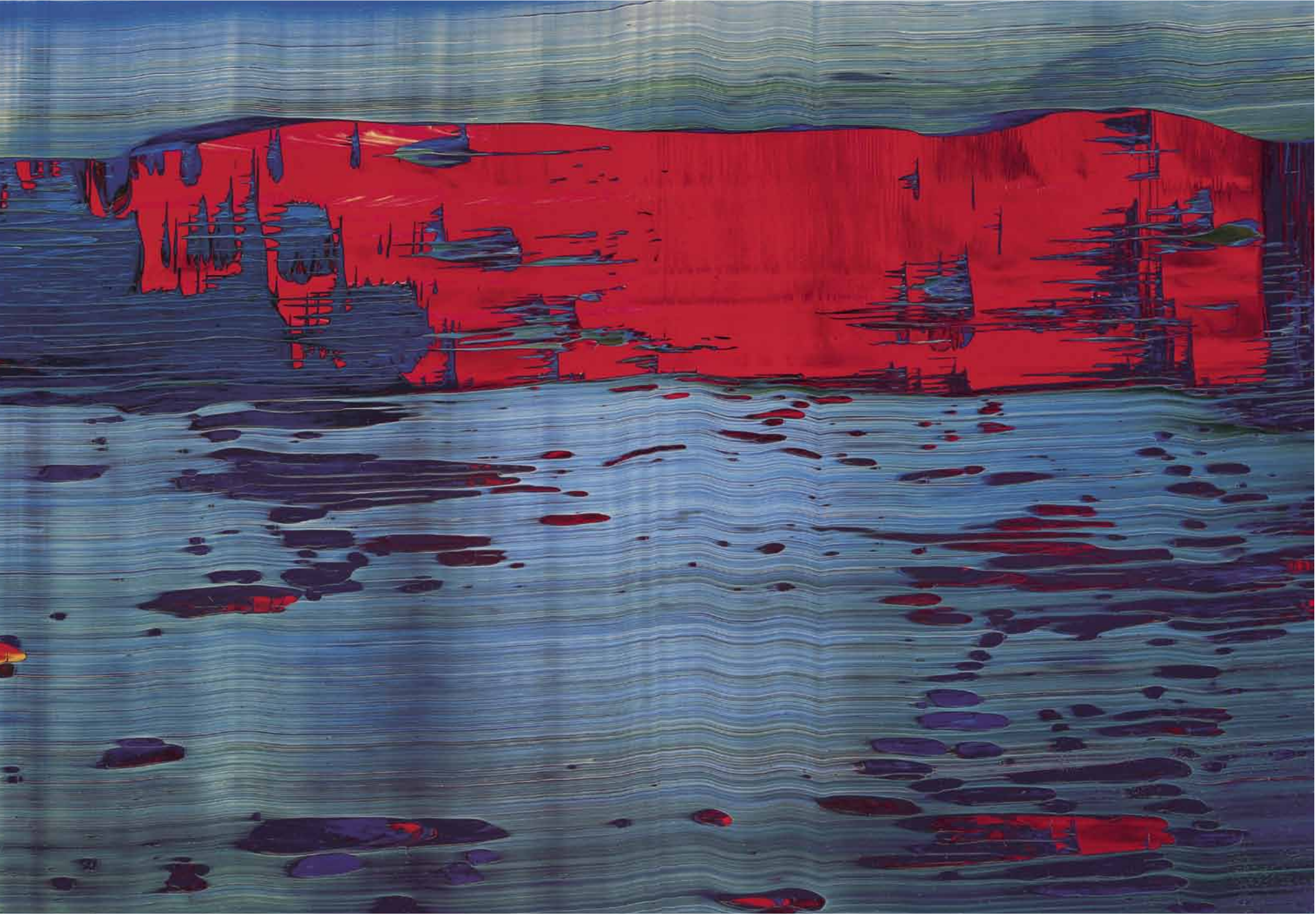
our virtual dealer's blue-black, red and white slur  
will put me in position to win the next hand  
(or will not) just as sure as the wet-on-wet smear

across this woven rectangle makes it hard  
not to think stars and stripes now.  
Dred Scott. Jasper Johns. My first pocket card

makes me ejaculate heartily, "Uncork more Widow,  
Allah!" The next? "Thank you, God!" With Big Slick  
(albeit unsuited) and a flop of *whoa*

cowboy...jack...jack,  
I make it \$800,000 to go, which would put you all-  
in, my anonymous friend, in this, my daily practice

of poker. Did our patriotic miracle shuffle  
provide a third or fourth jack for you, Einstein  
or Ahmad? Oh, yeah? Call me, Ishmael.





THE EVANESCENCE

1     The day was green and abstract  
      Like looking at a field from a shaking train

      With yellow light smudged  
      And smeared in the distance.

      The dark trees blurred in the wind  
      And the earth was always rushing past.

2     How the windswept beach at dawn  
      Resembled Abraham’s dream:

      He carried a small body  
      Trembling in his arms,

      A sweet kid dipped in blood  
      For a terrible meat-eating God.

3     The morning was still bruised  
      By the lingering memory of darkness,

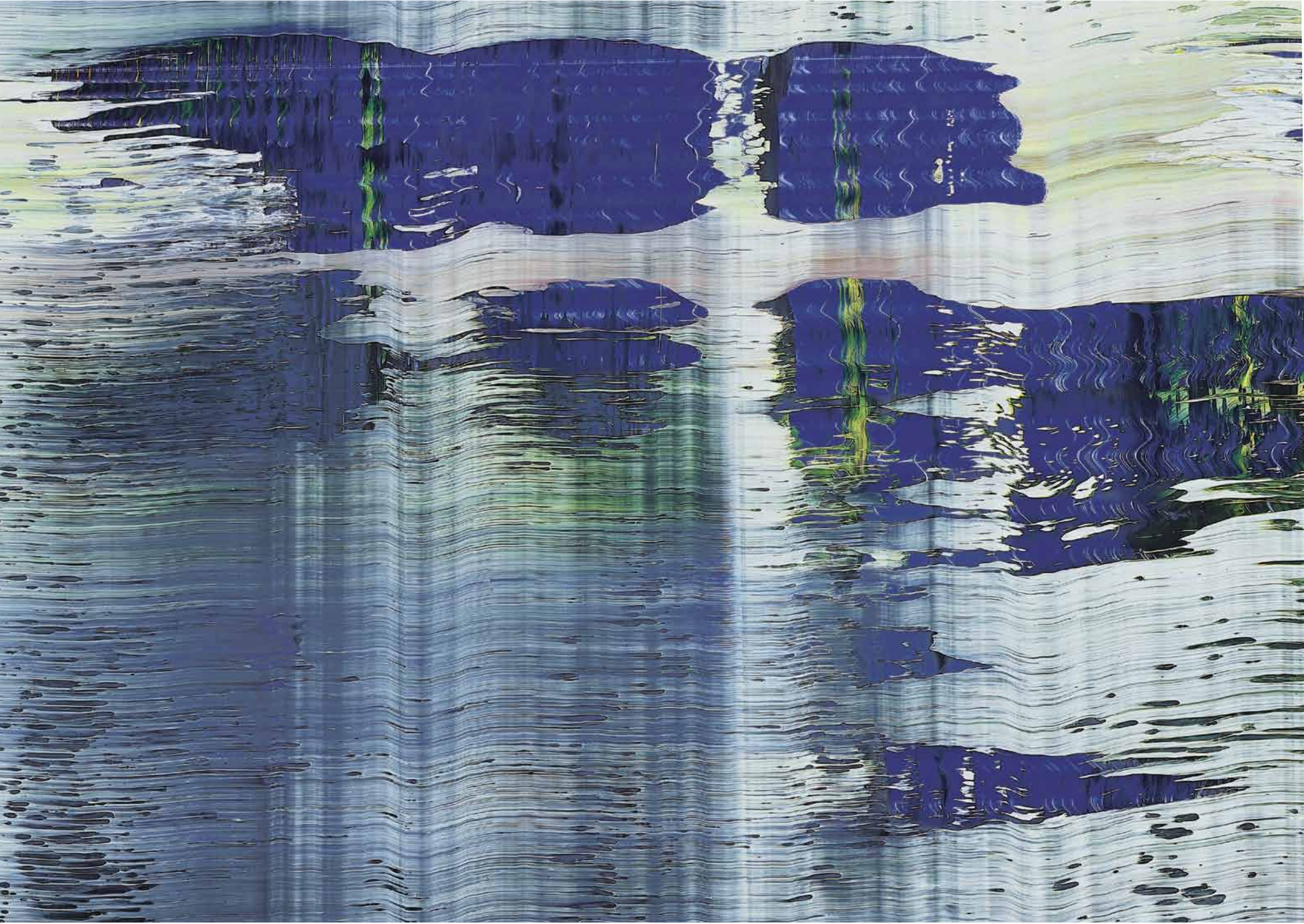
      But the gulls—the bloodthirsty gulls—  
      Called us back to the shore.

      Walk with me a while  
      In the black and blue wake of night.

4     The clouds dissolved in the sky  
      Over the scumbling waves.

      A beach littered with debris,  
      A sky scribbled with erasures,

      And a watery sun floating away.  
      How does anyone ever sleep?





5 I glimpsed a yellow-beaked redbird—  
Radiant, luminescent—

Tilting on one wing  
And skimming the shoreline

Just as it was getting dark.  
Look. I swear I saw it.

6 I dreamt of a German forest  
Dissolving into a red sea.

There were insect creatures  
Chasing us, there were metallic birds...

The sea parted for us, love.  
But then it was soaked in blood.

7 I stood at the Memorial Wall at dusk  
And pictured the barbed wire fences.

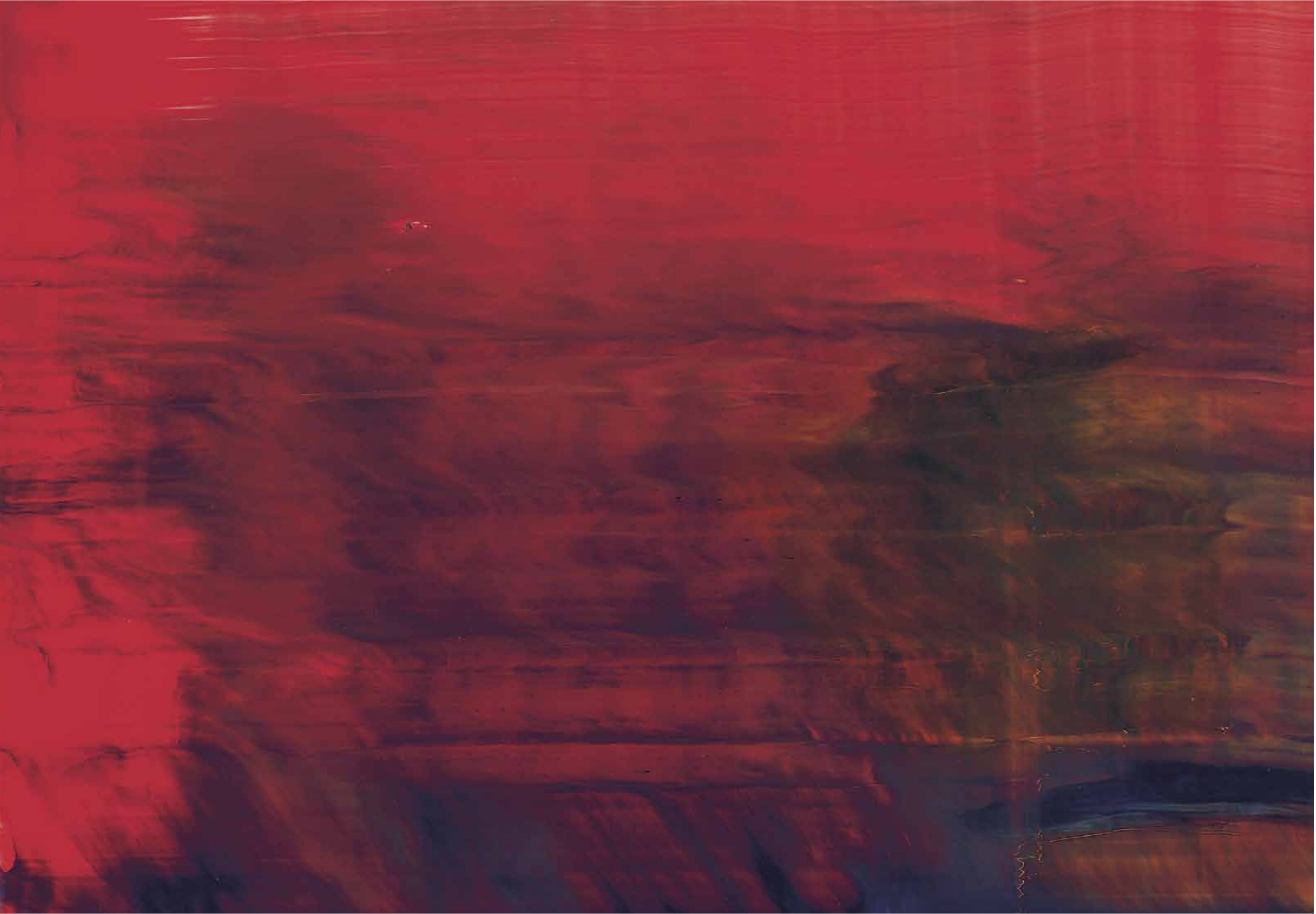
The air was thick with testimonies  
Written in red ink.

I had not witnessed the violence,  
But violence remembered me.

8 The world was rushing by so fast  
That we felt dizzy studying it.

The day was gray and abstract  
Like looking at the sky from a shaking train.

We had brushed against the light,  
We had been brushed by evanescence.





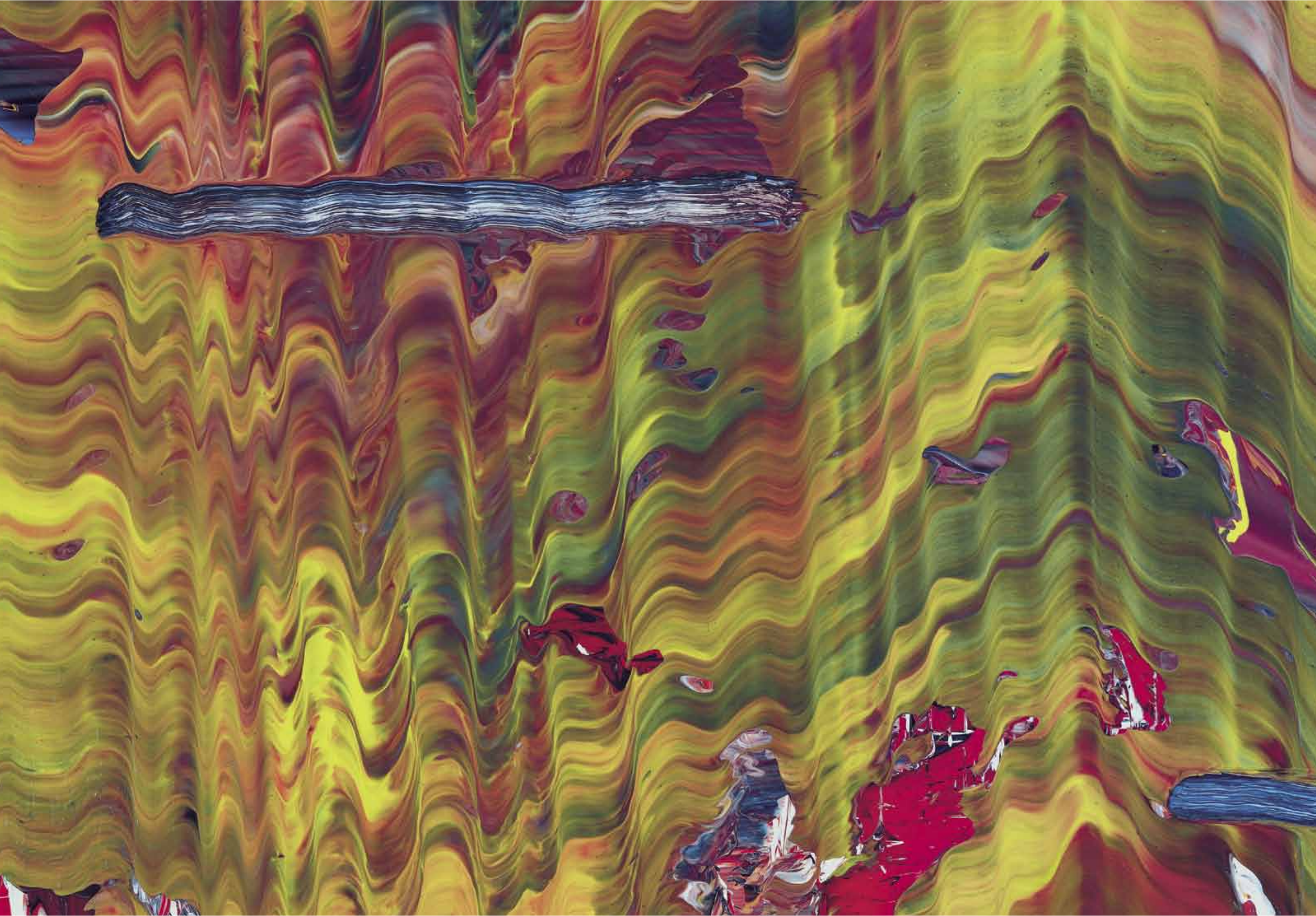
STROKE

of genius? How one wants to be other than *being*, how one wants to be a kind of  
flagellation—a  
genuine hearing—listen—that whisper, that whistling “over there”—are we just in time?,  
[we want to be *just in time*] waiting here—so blank—so open to the brushwork of  
the given—  
that it spill its strokes onto us—build itself upon us—holy garment—(“a life”)—  
Is it all coming nearer? Are we ripening?  
Is this, finally, the hoped-for undrowning of the self—a final “yes”—awash in childhood  
(whizzing past),  
and silence [so intense] and us no wiser for it,  
and the new feeling of *the thing* inside one—  
flooded with duration—sort of silvery...  
Then it was time to go to the opening.  
That was the end of the first day.



And see how the ever-receding last analysis, [*a life*—into which being cannot but  
enter [yes] [*I wanted to paint nothing, how is it*  
*I cannot paint nothing?*—is still the only garden? And us  
eternally foreigners?  
Perhaps *you*  
can look into the vanishing “point”: perhaps the father was the father, for  
instance,  
the mother didn’t really know [here the painter pauses, before revealing something  
else]: she was in a mixed-class, mismatched relationship, she had taken  
another lover by the end of the war, she made him feel special, he was special, she  
fostered his sense of social superiority, but he has few warm memories, they died,  
it was not really possible for me to go back [he says matter of factly] [then returns  
to his dinner]. Stroke of

luck [brushes stacked in drawers, custom-designed, rolling  
shelves] [when your work sells for] [millions of dollars] [you] [can]  
indulge yourself. You can paint to prove that painting is “dead.” You can  
paint as a true believer in painting. [Oh I should] [I really should] [you *said*  
it was there] [truly there] [I only had to take the photograph]  
[and that only one thing exists] [no...not death!] [this!] [holds up his birth  
date] [on a tiny white card] [This, *this*—[picks up a photograph]]:  
a snowy scene, at the edge of a building, behind some trees, leading to...[that was  
the second day]

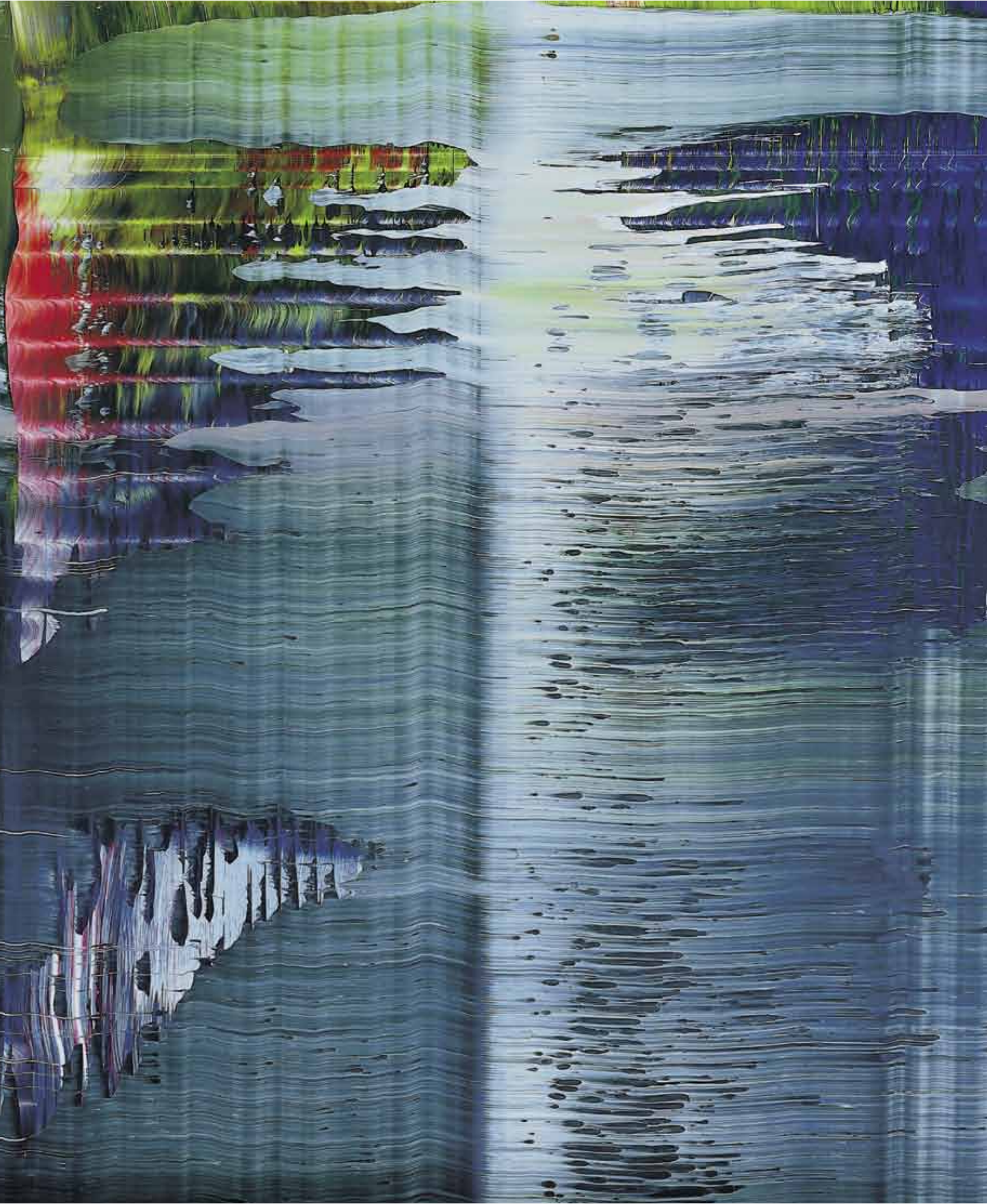




Look now: he carries it to the edge of his studio: he puts the canvas on an easel  
at the end of the room: he slides the photo into the projector:  
the photo appears, projected on the canvas—[can you hear them? the poisonous  
promises filtering down] [Faust: don't you bare your greedy teeth at me  
like that! It sickens me—Great, magnificent spirit that deigned appear to me,  
that knows my heart and soul—feast, feast] [Mephisto: Have you finished?]  
(*song from within*: My mother, the whore,/Who has murdered me—/My father,  
the rogue, /Who has eaten me—/Pick up every bone/Pick up every bone)—  
him beginning to trace with charcoal, a ruler, tracing each detail of  
the photograph, as he always does, [which usually takes about  
a couple of hours] [“I have an eye. I couldn't make  
a drawing of you sitting there right now. I would love to have that  
ability. In the same way I would love to play the piano. But you can do  
anything now, and simply declare it to be art”] [it's terrible] [his father  
a schoolteacher who  
joined  
The Party, it was necessary and expected if he wanted to keep his job,  
who fought in the army was taken prisoner by the Americans,  
and then returned home without prospects, like so many others]  
By then his son regarded him as a hapless interloper.  
I thought, what do you want here.  
He wasn't my father anyway.  
He says he doesn't know who his real father was. He says  
she had taken another lover by the end of the war.  
Someone says he is the greatest living artist.  
Only operating rooms are this immaculate.      [here ends the third]



What I have is not facility.  
What I have is an eye, yes,  
but you have to know *when* to paint the color chart,  
and *what* to call it.  
You have to unmask painting as “dull and nugatory”  
[if you are human, pity my distress]  
you have to demystify the activity of painting and its pretensions  
to creativity,  
you have to love beauty, you have to say “I believe in beauty”





[“and then they were very cheap, now they sell for a fortune!”]  
[“so maybe they were therefore necessary”]  
*with a bunch of keys and a lamp before a small iron gate:*  
“a long unwonted shudder grips,  
mankind’s entire grief grips me.  
She’s here, behind this wall that drips.  
Do you hesitate to go in?  
Do you dread to see her again?”  
*hears the clanking chains and the rustling straw.*  
[you’ll awaken the guards! speak quietly!]  
[Oh sleep the sleep of the end of the fourth of the days]



“I want this to be seen—listen to me—always—as a narrative—  
even if it is a narrative of nothingness—nothing is something—you might say, no?—  
as you might say these are photographs of nothing”  
You can look for instance in Ensslin’s corpse,  
at Baader’s bookshelves, the ones in prison,  
or the phonograph in which Baader was said to have hidden the gun  
with which he killed himself—here: Meins surrendering  
to the police—here: two versions of Baader’s corpse—  
head, face and floor like adjacent clouds, grayish—  
the whole drama [history] floating by over the bodies, yes—  
an aggressive weapon, but also a plan of defense?—  
the moment in which you give yourself away?—  
the stroke of midnight, say—*that* moment—[it  
being all over]—  
and you, you who have the means of keeping it,  
of not turning to dust, right here in front of me, of not letting it  
turn to dust—  
[I can’t make you, of course, he says, I can only copy you]  
[here in my garden, dreaming of becoming complicated]—[the contract between us  
freely drawn up, but  
not “free”]—[as you  
know]—  
[end of the fifth] and yet





all in vain, the things *themselves* turning to dust—  
reducing this world to just this world—  
the copier still here, at this dinner table, waiting for the meal to be over—  
the words “after all” becoming suddenly important—  
“after all, all things are possible in a certain way are they  
not?”—the madness of non-discovery cloaking you gently, brightly—  
long may it prosper, the dream of transparency—  
the “succession of events,” the scene that takes on the “feeling of  
distance.” Or my asking “can anybody in here read this page”—  
Oh private words, certainty, profit, manners.  
I blush with privacy at the pleasures of explanation,  
at this looking-away that we’ve come to call knowledge.  
Even this crumb, here, full of echo, wanting to mean.  
Invented for that purpose—little brilliant phoneme—what is transparency  
to your echoing *now*? The fullness of what is given? The stroking of  
[where the sixth day closes]



fortune? of fancy? of self-invention? All this and morning still before us—  
the snowy scene, the side of the building—its *staying*, a kind of raging, a burning of  
design—  
of intentions—house invented for you to hide in—have you now grown up? moved  
away?—a jewel?—projected with all its weather  
onto the blank canvas?—and nothing left out—nothing left hidden—  
existence: is it in it? is it found hanging in its cell?—  
there was to be a meeting, as one of lovers, but then something was  
arrested—  
just there where the center was beginning to form—  
no, there should not be a center—listen how it echoes—  
you can blot it nicely with some abstraction—  
something applied to the blank—“gaudy and generic”—  
“then he employs homemade wood and plexi squeegees”  
to scam and drag the paint—[every direction the right one!]  
[“I don’t think you are *expressionistic*, are you?”]  
the process involves repeatedly building up and wiping off—  
the effect different depending on the squeegee—on “how pressure  
is applied”—he has become very adept but there is still the element of chance—





perhaps you are being kept here, somewhere in this room—  
you have hidden a gun? you have hidden whatever means  
you might need to get out? is your body here? is your phonograph?  
and your books, do they add up, is the peculiar light upon them,  
that of your single existence, of what a waste it would be to waste it,  
[oh look down now, where are your hands, is it the color chart, is it the tablecloth?],  
someone now removing any trace of the coffee cup  
there on the table where I had just left it,  
transparent guardian of all that is and could be—  
Listen, in your cell, your act is the only sentinel  
then there's all this construction—it is fierce yes, it will acquit no one—  
distant impulses render the whole surface ultra-sensitive,  
all the middle distance, the concerned elaboration—  
the year x saw him joined, the year y saw him married—  
and the past, the past is also yours to keep if you wish,  
with its own last effort to outwit you,  
with its silently projected map of the world.



[and on the seventh]:  
*Where the winter grew white, we went outside.*  
*We went outside to look at things again.*  
*There were little farmhouses, there were too many trees.*  
*But once you have seen a thing, you have to move on.*

*Whose idea was this—how even when we're late now we're perfectly happy.*  
*We just go on happily gathering speed.*  
*Us—like a list of examples that keeps growing faster.*  
*Embracing brutality and importance. Some joy. Some preliminary sketches.*

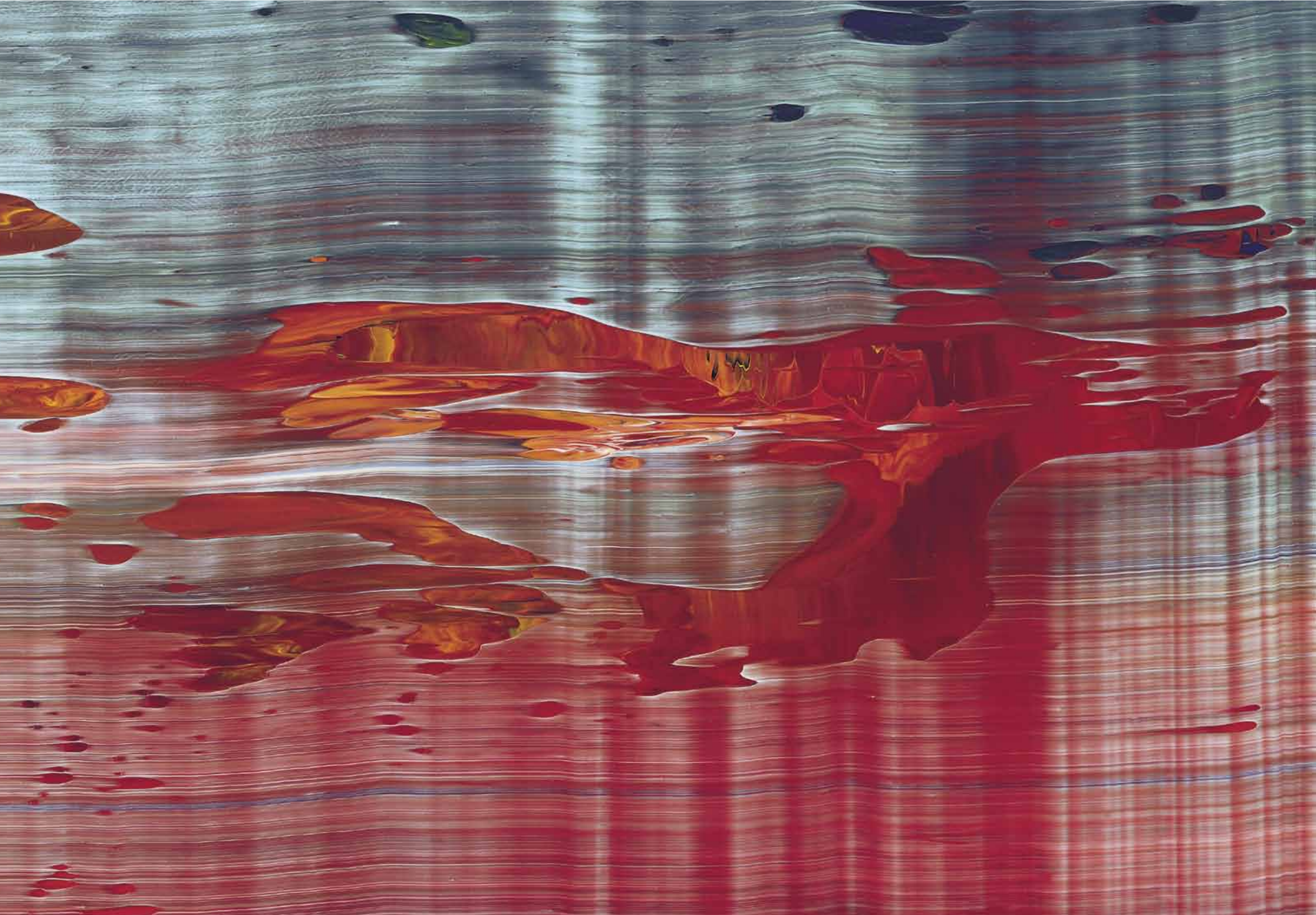
Note: Some language is used—often in altered form—from Michael Kimmel's "The Enigma: An Artist Beyond Isms," which appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* (January 27, 2002). Quotations from Goethe's *Faust* are from the Walter Kaufmann translation.











KLAUS KERTESS

PICTURING

A *Chimera* in mythology is a composite of a lion, a goat, and a serpent; in biology, a *chimera* is an organism composed of tissues from at least two genetically distinct parents. We might well regard Gerhard Richter's abstract paintings since 1976 as chimeras—ones constructed simultaneously out of the experience of the painted and the experience of the photographed, part illusion, part relentless physicality—not clearly defined or resolved but constantly metamorphosing. In these abstractions, which he calls "pictures" (*Bilder*), a panoply of referentiality and tonal spatiality, again and again, erupts from and recedes into the materiality of paint. You might spy a fragment of serpent's tail or lion's mane suddenly rising to the surface, only to look again to find your eye bobbing in the blur of rippling tides of layered liquidity propelled by the lateral thrust of Richter's squeegee. Synonyms of chimera include *illusion* and *delusion*. Whether illusion or delusion remains moot in the matter of Richter's painting. What remains certain is the astonishing and challenging variegation of his imagination—and possibly ours—and his ability to give body to and analyze our visual intelligence.

The reciprocity of photography and painting marked Richter's art from the outset of what he has catalogued as his beginning. After being exposed to only Communist social realism and a smattering of early modernism, the epiphanic experience of seeing Jackson Pollock's and Lucio Fontana's paintings at Documenta 2, in 1959, on a visit to the West, catalyzed his flight from East Germany two years later. Settling in Düsseldorf and studying at the Art Academy, he took to painting gestural abstractions and was simultaneously exposed to the more radical acts of the Fluxus artists. In 1962, the year he has marked as his art's beginning—the same year Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg began to employ silkscreened photographs in their painting—Richter employed photographs clipped from newspapers as the basis of his paintings. Initially he decided on this subject for its non-art stylelessness; and he defaced these photo-based subjects with gestural smears calling to Art Informel, or physical cuts calling to Fontana, or thought balloons.

By 1965, these delinquent incompatibilities of making gave way to photo-based images veiled by lightly stroking a dry brush over the still-wet surface, so that the image appeared like a tenuously blurred reflection. The resultant image, as well as the painting's surface, became visually impossible to locate. At once, Richter highlighted the artificiality of creating and the fact that we construct our vision

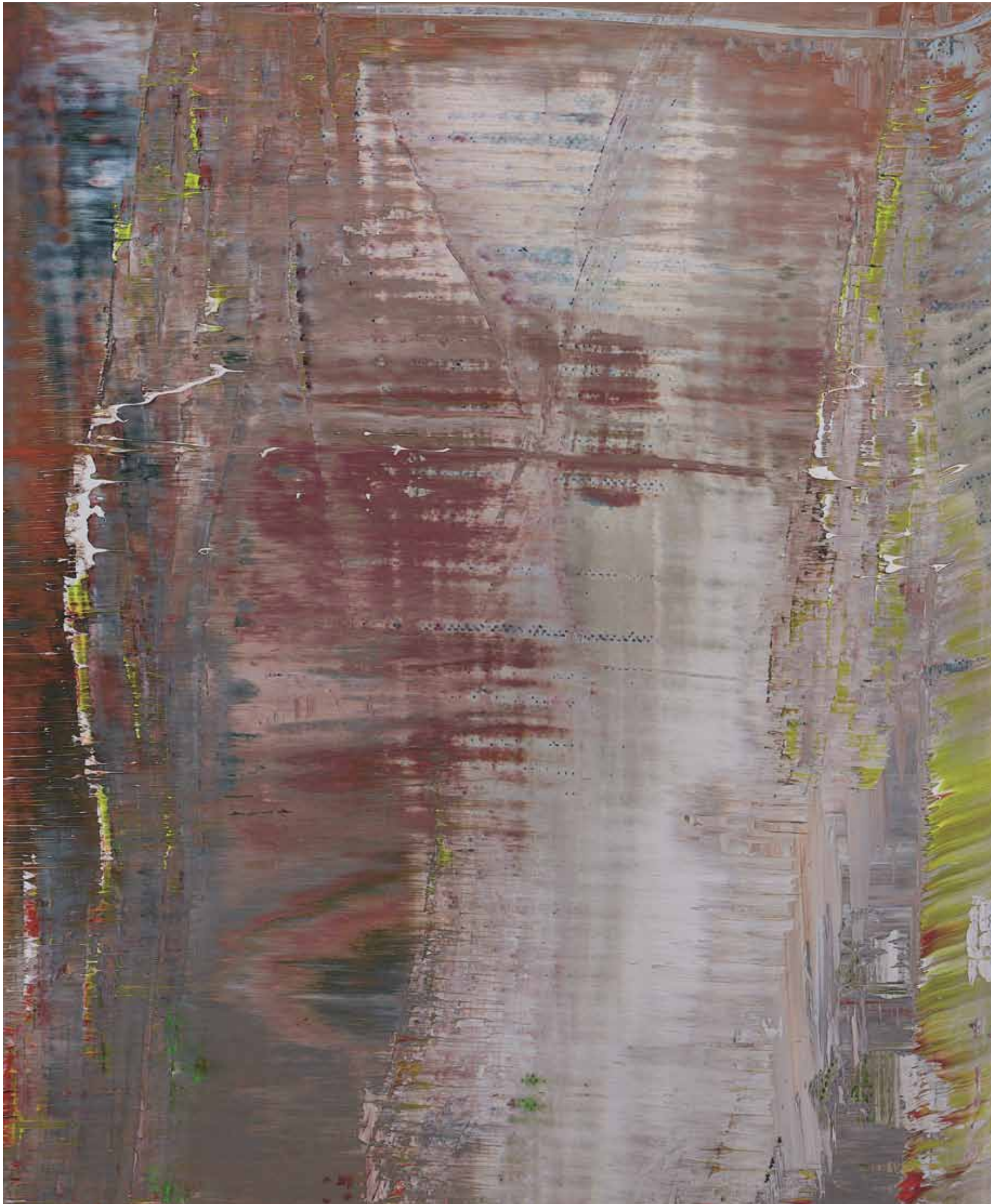
rather than receiving it whole. His engagement with photography also elucidates the endless proliferation, in our culture, of the photographed—whether by still, video, or movie camera. Since the second half of the 20th century, the prevalence of photography, with its concomitant conflation of the real and the staged, has come to mediate much of our knowledge of the world. With rare exception it is *the photographed*, along with evasiveness of surface and configurational incompleteness, which hallmarks Richter's art.

Having already experimented with various modes of abstraction—the found imagery of the Color Charts, the variations on minimalist monochrome work in the Gray Paintings—in 1976 Richter began what would become a major part of his making: the Abstract Pictures. The earliest of these works, sometimes referred to as soft abstractions, buzz with geometric and quasi-geometric fragments adrift in a hazy ether. Sleekly painted in sepias, browns, and dark reds, and vibrating with varying tonalities of suffused light, these works look like they might be renditions of extreme blowups of details of photographs or details of one of Richter's own paintings; and in some cases they are. In the course of the following year, Richter turned to a more physical painterliness, starting each work with splashes of bright color or a simple geometricized configuration, then employing various squeegees to push wet paint around—layer over layer, erasure after erasure—varying the speed, directionality, and pressure on the squeegee, engaging chance, and finally dragging a fine-haired brush over the wet surface, as he had done and continues to do in the photo-based paintings. The results remarkably combine the agitated, gestural physicality of Abstract Expressionism with the atmospheric tonal and spatial shifts found in photography and much pre-modern figuration. Pictures. Abstract painting for the age of television. Picturing.

By 1985, the squeegee movements that simulated broad brushstrokes (accompanied by flurries of paint spatters) more and more gave way to a denser complexity and variegation. A suppressed radiance and an astounding crowd of disparate visual incidents, not unlike those more seamlessly activating an Old Master painting, now dazzlingly pulse through the paint. These abstract pictures stretch into Abstract Expressionist alloverness. They look somewhat akin to viewing, say, Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* or *Last Judgment* through a cracked, Pollockian lens. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, various artists, such as Julian Schnabel and Richter's countryman Georg Baselitz, also employed an Abstract Expressionist-inspired gestural quality in their figuration. And, by 1985, Brice Marden was extending and refining modernist abstraction with a looping, slow-motion grace that looked to Pollock as well as to Chinese and Japanese calligraphy. However, only two other artists engaged in a gestural quality related in its oxymoronic (chimerical) nature to Richter's: Roy Lichtenstein, whose use of reproductions had impacted Richter's initial choice of newspaper photographs as subject, and Andy Warhol.

In 1978, Warhol created two groups of abstract paintings (*Oxidation* aka *Piss* paintings and *Shadows* paintings) that mimed Abstract Expressionist engagement with





KLAUS KERTESS

chance; in his 1988 *Rorschach* series he looked directly to Pollock's late black-and-white paintings and transformed the spontaneity of Rorschach blots and Pollock's partially aleatory gestures into a photo-mechanically derived symmetry. Lichtenstein, starting in the early 1960s, created a mock mechanical, handmade iconic gestural brushstroke that, throughout his career, appears again and again in various guises and combinations, occasionally directly referring to de Kooning.

Although Warhol's and Lichtenstein's subversions of late modernist abstraction are quite unabashedly beautiful, they maintain the cool neutrality and some of the irony endemic to Pop and to Richter's own early paintings. On the other hand, Richter's Abstract Pictures not only exult in viscous painterly liquidity as did Pollock's, but they are filled with an often heated referentiality, as are Pollock's—both intentions at a far remove from Warhol's and Lichtenstein's suave sardonics. Coincidentally, Richter's replacement of the squeegee with a long wooden board to make his very large abstractions calls to Pollock's use of a similar wood tool for *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*. While Pollock employed a length of wood to indent *Blue Poles* with rhythm, Richter uses it to blur, smear, erase, and abrade. Richter's use of boards and squeegees to undermine personal touch certainly relates to Pollock's flung and dripped, rather than brushed, paint. But Richter's courting of pictorial space and illusionistic dimensionality, created as a matter of "planned" chance, betrays vastly different intentions than those of Pollock. Likewise, the abrupt and incomplete shapes Richter often excavates from lower layers of paint, and his disparate repertoire of markmaking—which yields impure and intentionally inconsistent results—are almost diametrically opposed to Pollock's configurational consistency and ruffling, physical frontality.

And so we arrive at the eight small works that have called this book into being, *Abstract Picture* (858-1) through *Abstract Picture* (858-8), all created in 1999. Frequently, Richter has painted numbered groups (series would be too programmatic a word) of pictures of like mind and seemingly wanting to tell a story. But individually and as a group they remain open and incomplete—filled with allusions and illusions but no closure. A story about no story. Unlike Pollock, Richter is not driven by metaphysical or spiritual intentions; he is a skeptic not a shaman. He finds solace in nature but no god. He cares deeply about painting and beauty but lives, like most of us, in a shifting world without clear guidelines or overarching order. His making simultaneously reflects his disbelief in a motivating force or purpose and a deep belief in painting.

Each of the first seven of the eight works is painted on the same-sized horizontal aluminum support. This sleek, hard surface receives the application of paint far more readily than does canvas, thus speeding up and heightening the visual slipperiness endemic to most of Richter's Abstract Pictures. The eighth picture is made on an almost-square, vertical rectangle of conventionally stretched linen; the shape and more porous surface provide a softer, more muted landing for the eye. All eight are painted in one or more variants of red, blue, green and yellow—colors almost automatically redolent of landscape phenomena. The squeegee's

predominantly horizontal thrust pulsing through six of the seven works on aluminum arrives at no conclusive rest at the edges of each support; closure is eschewed. The eighth painting pays more respect to the framing edges of the support and seems to strive for configurational conclusion. But its composure is flayed by the alternating horizontal and vertical peeling away of its skin.

From a distance, all eight pictures quiver like mirages in shimmering light. Gaseous. Diaphanous. Illusionistic. Seen up close, the paintings congeal in the firm, gleaming viscosity of paint's liquidity. Surface physicality subverts illusion. Inconclusion. Over and over again, in his lengthy interviews, Richter has expressed his skepticism of reality's comprehensibility and the possibility of creating stable, clearly defined metaphors. The layering of erasure that is his way of creating gives body to this skepticism. A beautiful body dissolving, re-forming, dissolving, changing.

An arcadian rhythm seems to beat under the surface of 858-1 through 858-5: verdant valleys, a chemical sunset that veers into meteor-inflamed night, followed by dawn's reflection in water, and the mother-of-pearl gleam of daylight blurring a photographic impression of greenery. Something apocalyptic erupts in 858-6: mysteriously irradiated light, violent fissures of the surface made by a knife's ruthless paring down to the aluminum support, toxic pointed flames of yellow and orange fanning out into blazing red—possibly a metaphorical Last Judgment without judgment (Richter means *judge* in German). Some calm returns in 858-7: the previous rush of horizontality is replaced by becalmed, almost regular vertical marking; the red no longer inflamed, maybe the red of the heart filled with as much happiness as is attainable; many different cardiograms zigzagging in delicate horizontal counterpoint to the more forceful verticals, eluding verbal measure and intelligence, reveling in visual intelligence. And then it all comes together in 858-8. Pressure from Richter's tools brings out the nub of the linen surface and creates a sort of slow, pebbled static. The linen is allowed to absorb the colors, colors not strident but almost soothing. The near square of the support and the gathering of marks hovering in the center of the plane aspire to closure, maybe the placid reflection of a face, a resolution after the cataclysmic climax of 858-6 and the conclusion of 858-7.

Or none of the above. The face in 858-8 refuses to congeal into recognizable features; it erodes like a wind-driven cloud. The zigzagging lines in 858-7 may just as easily connote a network of leafless branches as the rhythms of hearts, or may or may not close the loop begun with similar marks in 858's first painting, our beginning. The story is literally and figuratively an illusion. There is no certain narrative, only a striving in the grip of uncertainty. What is certain is that Richter is our fellow traveler in that uncertainty and that he has imbued our journey with palpitating brilliance. In doing so, he has endowed abstract painting with a singular new life and vitality.





DAVE HICKEY

### RICHTER'S HOPE

I can also see my abstracts as metaphors in their own right, pictures that are about a possibility of social coexistence. Looked at in this way, all that I'm trying to do in each picture is to bring together the most disparate and mutually contradictory elements, alive and viable, in the greatest possible freedom. No Paradises.

—Gerhard Richter

At this point in the progress of Gerhard Richter's public career, it seems appropriate to turn down the heat a bit and try, for once, to approach Richter's paintings as quietly and carefully as he approaches making them. There is justification for doing this. Richter himself has always insisted that his practice of painting is grounded in the civilized prerogatives of freedom and doubt, modesty and hope, and our knee-jerk response to his insistence has usually been to assuage his doubts and contravene his modesty, to reassure the artist of his own importance. Either that or we purport to take him at his word while theatricalizing the terms of his practice. We exacerbate "freedom and doubt" into "license and despair"; we transmogrify "modesty and hope" into "bourgeois self-loathing and progressive historical certainty"—thus making of Richter an altogether different kind of artist—a radical connoisseur of bad faith, if you will.

The terms Richter has offered us for his painting practice, however, as he states them and as they stand, have real consequences. Freedom, in Richter's idiom, is as inextricable from doubt as modesty is from hope. The freedom he grants himself to paint any kind of picture he wishes, in any manner he might choose, derives absolutely from his perpetual and oft-articulated doubts about whether he is doing the right thing in his paintings, and whether painting itself is the right thing to do. Freedom is choice, in other words, and to doubt is to face an endless parade of choices, fully aware that one is probably inadequate to the task of choosing. To choose, then, and then to choose again is a manifestation of hope. Certainty, on the other hand, has already *chosen*. It has divided the world and stopped its tumultuous procession. As such it is a form of violence. As an artist, to have a "style" that betrays an agenda is to have chosen. By extension, style is violence.

Richter's position, then, is that painting is a serious activity whose possibilities are decimated when we descend into certainty or seek certainty from artists, who, after all, only look and choose in the present moment. When Richter talks about himself as an artist, he invariably portrays himself as one of his own beholders. He is always looking for something or waiting for something to appear, and, when it appears, he decides, knowing that tomorrow he must decide again. This explains Richter's tendency to discount the relevance of his own skills and intellectual abilities when assessing his importance as an artist, because, in Richter's aesthetic, these attributes come into play well before the fact. Art's value does not derive from the quality of the artist's manifest intentions but from the authority

of contemporary judgment that validates its reception—a process that begins with the artist's choice and ends with the public's. In this sense, Richter is a true pop artist, presuming that his paintings, like Jasper Johns' flags, derive their authority not from the artist who made them, but from the citizens who salute them.

Richter's hope, then, is for his beholders (and for himself as one of his own beholders), for their sensitivity and judgment, for their flexibility and tolerance. So, although we are under no obligation to take any artist on his own terms, it might be interesting, on the occasion of this book about a discrete group of Richter's paintings, to address them in the sense that Richter proposes them—as contingent, tentative products of a painter's daily practice offered up into the fluid, tenebrous realm of perceptual adjudication. The group of paintings in question is comprised of eight, modestly scaled oil paintings that were painted more or less simultaneously during the summer of 1999 and then arranged, after the fact, into a sequence numbered 1 through 8. Each of these pictures is painted in a "television" palette dominated by red, green and blue and executed in Richter's late abstract manner.

As Richter describes this process, each picture is

painted in different layers, separated by intervals of time. The first layer mostly represents the background, which has a photographic, illusionistic look to it, though done without using a photograph. This first, smooth, soft-edged paint surface is like a finished picture; but after a while I decide that I understand it or have seen enough of it, and in the next stage of painting I partly destroy it, partly add to it; and so it goes on at intervals, till there is nothing more to do and the picture is finished. By then it is a Something which I understand in the same way it confronts me, as both incomprehensible and self-sufficient. An attempt to jump over my own shadow....

The pictures in 858, subjected to this process, have been brought to different levels of articulation. Some have been declared "finished" earlier than others and consequently feel "younger" than their fellows. All the pictures share a common language, however, and this staging introduces a network of familial and temporal relations that Richter exploits in his sequential arrangement.

Geological layers of paint have been applied to the surfaces of these pictures with a squeegee in continuous gestures across the support. The gestures are predominantly, although not exclusively, horizontal and vertical, varying in their relative wetness, thickness and cover. Half of the pictures in 858 are scarred by gestural marks that simultaneously add color and wipe other color away. In the "oldest," or most evolved painting in the sequence (Number 6), these marks have highly articulated widths and shapes. They present themselves as figures against the blurred ground of dragged paint. These elements—the palette in its weighted variations, the drag in its different directions with its variable attributes, the scarred marks of various widths and lengths—constitute the language of the





DAVE HICKEY

paintings as utterances. Their variations and repetitions define the pictures individually and articulate their musicality in sequence.

The formal acuity and arrangement of 858 as a musical sequence of abstract paintings, however, is considerably complicated by the aura of representational inference that is created by Richter’s technique of dragging paint. Because of this technique, the paintings always seem to be on the verge of showing us something, and the sources of this haunting inference derive, interestingly enough, from the birthday of modern painting—the historical moment when painting and photography diverged as practices. First, of course, Richter’s dragged gesture across the surface approximates in reverse the blur created in photographs when the camera or the subject moves and the aperture is open. Second, the tiny oval and fractal spaces caused by the irregularity of the squeegee’s traverse literally recreate (and once again in reverse) the scatter of marks that, in Impressionist painting, generate the illusion of liquidity. The combination of these two historically resonant visual effects may be taken as a classic instance of Richter’s effort to keep “the most disparate and mutually contradictory elements, alive and viable, in the greatest possible freedom.”

In doing this, Richter transforms the secret vice of abstract painting into a complicating virtue. As we know, abstract paintings can never not be read as pictures and this vice is without remedy. In the same way that poems are not so much historical utterances as *ahistorical imitations* of historical utterances, paintings are less historical visual occasions than *ahistorical imitations* of historical visual occasions. Thus both poetry and painting, as irrevocably mimetic practices, are always presumed meaningful (which is to say referential) by their very nature. Moreover, in the tradition of western art, the responsibility for divining the meaning of mimetic expressions falls not on their originators but on their receptors, whose primal mandate is to respond by finding meaning. In this tradition, all images are presumed mimetic and burdened with the presumption of visual reference, so, whether or not subjects are put there, they will be found to be there.

Acknowledging this presumption, Richter’s paintings in 858 allude to photography while mimicking the representational devices of Impressionist painting. In the classic pop manner, they portray not Things-in-the-World but Ways-of-Portraying-Things-in-the-World. This creates a situation in which the pictures are invested with an aura of pictoriality without actually *depicting* anything—in which red, green and blue allude to representations of fire, field, water and sky (which they can’t not do) without actually *representing* any of them. Afloat in this aura of reference, painterly traces of the artist-in-action are deftly transformed into fugitive allusions to the world-in-action, and both are effectively occluded. Richter’s gestures reference the artist without expressing anything, reference the

world without depicting anything, and, in doing so, the pictures maintain themselves, as Ellsworth Kelly’s do, at the exact interface of the world and our knowing of it, alluding to both, bound to neither.

Under these conditions, the unstable pictorial ambience of 858 is so pervasive that, even though we hear the music of its formal arrangement, we are never encouraged to listen to it. Almost certainly, Richter’s decision is to rely on the acuity of what we see, whether we are looking at it or not, although if we do look, we immediately recognize the patterns. The paintings in 858 are arranged into a primary set of seven-and-one, a musical subset of four-and-four, and a base sequence of two-two-two-and-two that has musical, dramatic and poetic overtones. The primary organization of the sequence into seven horizontal aluminum paintings and one squarish painting on linen can be read easily enough as seven aluminum “words” followed by a terminal linen “punctuation,” the shift in support alluding to the shifted nature of the terminal sign. The sequence of paintings, as paintings, however, is also readable as a traditional eight-bar musical cadence concluding with a single whole note.

In either case, the traditional musical set of eight with an irrational element in the eighth position insists on some sort of formal closure, and this sense of closure is reinforced by Richter’s positioning of similarly “young,” liquid, and predominately green paintings (858-1 and 858-5) in the one and five positions. This repetition divides the sequence into two four-bar expressions, and, recognizing this four-by-four musical structure, we look for the classic division of Western musical sequences into statement-restatement-release-return, and find a visual version of it. First, Richter has positioned the paintings in iambic groups of two. The “younger,” less articulated paintings occur in the odd-numbered positions as unstressed syllables—the youngest and least stressed pictures occurring at the one and five position, while the unstressed paintings in the three and seven position are slightly more articulated.

The “older,” more densely articulated paintings occur in the even-numbered positions as stressed syllables, occurring in an arc of escalating complexity from 858-2 to 858-4 to 858-6, which occupies the pivotal position. This painting, the most articulate and complex of the sequence, is located at the apogee of the temporal arc. It includes the full language of the series: (1) the squeegee drag, which in this stressed instance moves irregularly and on the diagonal; (2) the full palette of the series, now including yellow, which is otherwise deprioritized; and (3) the scarred marks, which in this instance take on shape and force against the ground of the drag. All of these features, occurring in a painting located in this position, mark 858-6 as the musical release of the temporal expression. In a sonnet, this would be the *volta*, or the “turning.”

If we translate this sequence into the equally appropriate dramatic terminology of introduction-complication-climax-and-resolution, 858-6 functions as the climax of the pictorial narrative. Whether we call it a release, a *volta* or a climax, however, the theatricality of this pivotal picture is exacerbated by its position immediately following the quick diminuendo of 858-5, which is the least stressed yet swiftest image in the series, and immediately preceding 858-7, an unstressed image in which the scarred marks that occur in the initial painting recur in a rhyming configuration, signifying a movement toward closure. Finally, as befits its terminal position, the configuration of 858-8, although highly complex, is much less dramatically non-uniform than the climactic 858-6. This final painting, more inclusive, absorptive and entropic than its predecessors, gathers the full language of all these paintings into a final, softened, dissolve and fade.

This is the structure of 858 as seen in sequence, and if there is any general observation to be derived from it about the nature of Gerhard Richter’s art, it is simply this: Richter abjures division, and, if 858 “works” as seen, he is right to do so. His efficacious appropriation of artistic, poetic, musical and dramatic devices for 858 demonstrates the undivided unity of art as a cultural category of response, as does his polygeneric practice of painting un-styled landscapes, still lifes, portraits and abstractions. Both of these endeavors rest on the assumption that, as beholders of art, we may experience different things—pictures, paintings, poems, sonatas, tragedies—but our experiences of these different things are not different *kinds* of experience. Rather, they are varieties of the *same* experience, intricately connected by analogous attributes and grounded in the tradition of performance and response.

When Richter insists on the profound connection between his art and traditional art, then, he means something quite specific. He is arguing, as he always does, for painting as a *daily practice*, and daily practitioners do one thing, whether they are practicing art, law, medicine, or basketball: they internalize a vast repository of historical precedents out of which they fashion idiosyncratic responses to the novelty of the present. In doing so, they aspire to make new art, new law, new therapies and new moves to the hoop, but only in art is “newness” *required* for the work to achieve a state of visibility, and then required again in response to the perpetual novelty of the next morning. The resources of the past are indispensable to the demands of such a practice, and certainty is the death of it, because only in art is the practitioner his or her own client—the artist’s own primary, critical beholder—and working in this double role, one can never plan or strategize or even think; one can only act and look and hope.





GERHARD RICHTER

TRANSLATIONS

The first impulse towards painting, or towards art in general, stems from the need to communicate, the effort to fix one's own vision, to deal with appearances (which are alien and must be given names and meanings). Without this, all work would be pointless and unjustified, like Art for Art's Sake. —1962

Picturing things, taking a view, is what makes us human; art is making sense and giving shape to that sense. It is like the religious search for God. We are well aware that making sense and picturing are artificial, like illusion; but we can never give them up. For belief (thinking out and interpreting the present and the future) is our most important characteristic. —1962

As soon as artistic activity turns into an 'ism', it ceases to be artistic activity. To be alive is to engage in a daily struggle for form and for survival. (By way of analogy: social concern is a form and a method that is currently seen as appropriate and right. But where it elevates itself into *Socialism*, an order and a dogma, then it loses its best and truest qualities and may turn criminal.) —1962

All that interests me is the gray areas, the passages and tonal sequences, the pictorial spaces, overlaps and interlockings. If I had any way of abandoning the object as the bearer of this structure, I would immediately start painting abstracts. —1964–1965

Arbitrariness has always seemed the central problem in both abstract and representational painting. What reason is there, other than some stupid system or the rules of a game, for placing one thing next to another in any particular format, any particular color, with any particular outline, with any particular likeness—and next to that something else again, no matter what? —1977

At the moment—for quite a time—for about two years, I have been working on a different idea. Different from the Gray Pictures that I was painting before. After those strictly monochromatic or non-chromatic paintings it was rather difficult

just to keep going. Even if such a thing had been possible, I had no desire to produce variations on that theme. So I set out in totally the opposite direction. On small canvases I put random, illogical colors and forms—mostly with long pauses in between, which made sure that these paintings—if you can all them that—became more and more heterogeneous. Ugly sketches is what they are: the total antithesis of the purist Gray Pictures. Colorful, sentimental, associative, anachronistic, random, polysemic, almost like pseudo-psychograms, except that they are not legible, because they are devoid of meaning or logic—if such a thing is possible, which is a fascinating point in itself, if not the most important of all, though I still know too little about it. An exciting business, at all events, as if a new door had opened for me. —1977

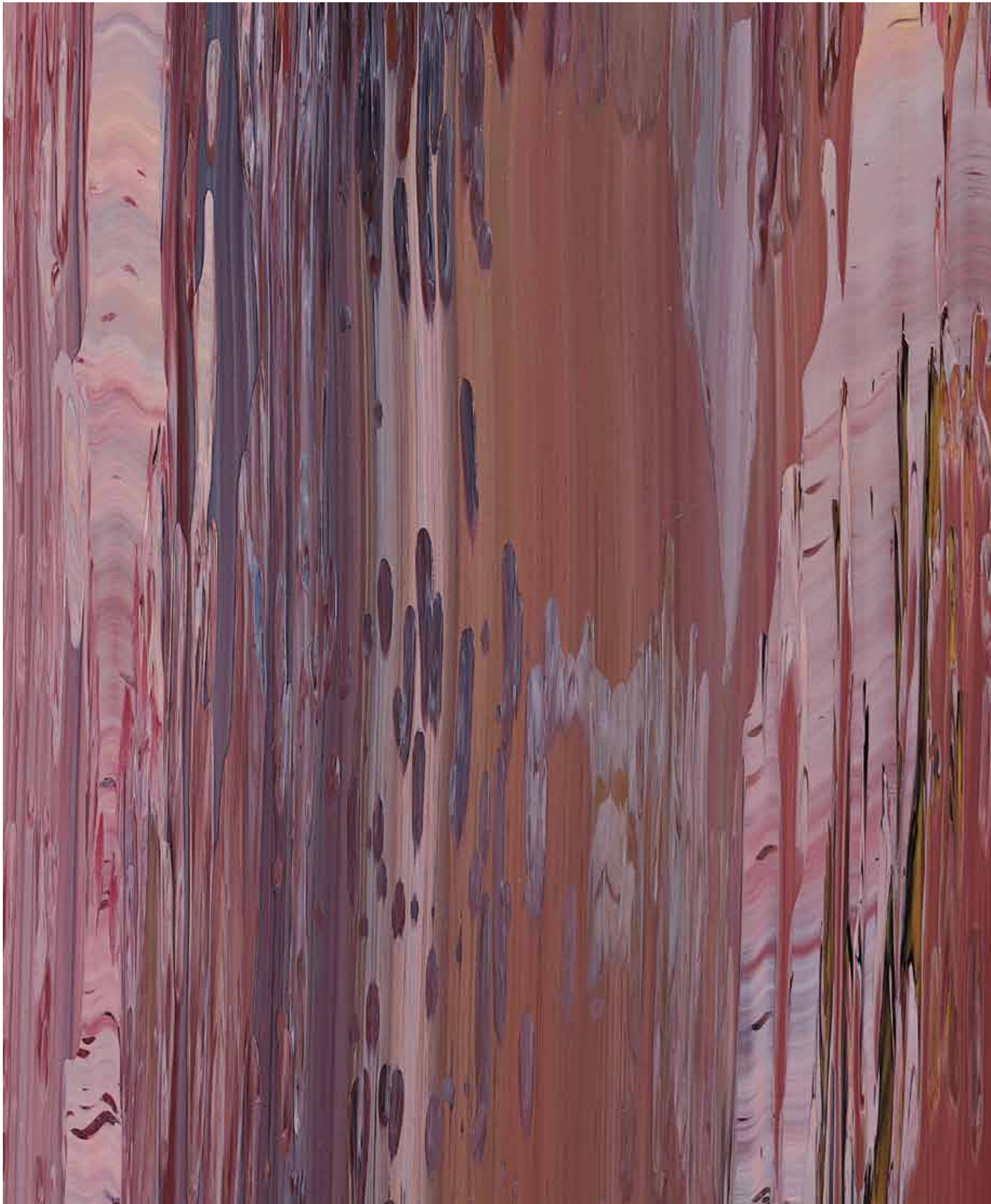
The composition of different forms, colors, structures, proportions, harmonies, etc. comes out as an abstract system analogous to music. It is thus an artificial construct, as logical in its own terms as any natural one, except that it is not objective. This system draws its life from analogies with the appearance of nature, but it would instantly be destroyed if any object were identifiably represented within it. Not because the latter would make it too narrative, but because its explicitness would narrow the expression of content and reduce everything around it to mere staffage. —1981

When we describe a process, or make out an invoice, or photograph a tree, we create models; without them we would know nothing of reality and would be animals. Abstract pictures are fictive models, because they make visible a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can postulate. We denote this reality in negative terms: the unknown, the incomprehensible, the infinite. And for thousands of years we have been depicting it through surrogate images such as heaven and hell, gods and devils.

In abstract painting we have found a better way of gaining access to the unvisualizable, the incomprehensible; because abstract painting deploys the utmost visual immediacy—all the resources of art, in fact—in order to depict 'nothing'. Accustomed to pictures in which we recognize something real, we rightly refuse to regard mere color (however multifarious) as the thing visualized. Instead we accept that we are seeing the unvisualizable: that which has never been seen before and is not visible. This is not some abstruse game but a matter of sheer necessity: the unknown simultaneously alarms us and fills us with hope, and so we accept the pictures as a possible way to make the inexplicable more explicable, or at all events more accessible.

Of course, pictures of objects also have this transcendental side to them. Every object, being part of an ultimately incomprehensible world, also embodies that world; when represented in a picture, the object conveys this mystery all the more powerfully, the less of a 'function' the picture has. Hence, for instance, the growing fascination of many beautiful old portraits.





So, in dealing with this inexplicable reality, the lovelier, cleverer, madder, extremer, more visual and more incomprehensible the analogy, the better the picture.

Art is the highest form of hope. —1982

Art has always been basically about agony, desperation and helplessness (I am thinking of Crucifixion narratives, from the Middle Ages to Grünewald; but also of Renaissance portraits, Mondrian and Rembrandt, Donatello and Pollock). We often neglect this side of things by concentrating on the formal, aesthetic side in isolation. Then we no longer see content in form, but form as embracing content, added to it (beauty and artistic skill slapped on)—this is worth examining. The fact is that content does not have a form (like a dress that you can change): it *is* form (which cannot be changed). Agony, desperation and helplessness cannot be represented except aesthetically, because their source is the wounding of beauty (Perfection). —1982

Of course I constantly despair at my own incapacity, at the impossibility of ever accomplishing anything, of painting a valid, true picture or even of knowing what such a thing ought to look like. But then I always have the hope that, if I persevere, it might one day happen. And this hope is nurtured every time something appears, a scattered, partial, initial hint of something which reminds me of what I long for, or which conveys a hint of it—although often enough I have been fooled by a momentary glimpse that then vanishes, leaving behind only the usual thing. —1985

The way I paint, one can't really paint, because the basic prerequisite is lacking: the certainty of what is to be painted, i.e. the Theme. Whether I mention the name of Raphael or of Newman, or lesser lights such as Rothko or Lichtenstein, or anyone else, down to the ultimate provincial artist—all of them have a theme that they pursue, a 'picture' that they are always striving to attain.

When I paint an Abstract Picture (the problem is very much the same in other cases), I neither know in advance what it is meant to look like nor, during the painting process, what I am aiming at and what to do about getting there. Painting is consequently an almost blind, desperate effort, like that of a person abandoned, helpless, in totally incomprehensible surroundings—like that of a person who possesses a given set of tools, materials and abilities and has the urgent desire to build something useful which is not allowed to be a house or a chair or anything else that has a name; who therefore hacks away in the vague hope that by working in a proper, professional way he will ultimately turn out something proper and meaningful.

So I am as blind as Nature, who acts as she can, in accordance with the conditions that hinder or help her. Viewed in this light, anything is possible in my

pictures; any form, added at will, changes the picture but does not make it wrong. Anything goes; so why do I often spend weeks over adding one thing? What am I making that I want? What picture of what? —1985

No ideology. No religion, no belief, no meaning, no imagination, no invention, no creativity, no hope—but painting like Nature, painting as change, becoming, emerging, being-there, thusness; without an aim, and just as right, logical, perfect and incomprehensible (as Mozart, Schönberg, Velázquez, Bach, Raphael, etc.). We can identify the causes of a natural formation, up to a point; the same causes have led to me and, in due course, to my paintings, whose immediate cause is my inner state, my happiness, my pain, in all possible forms and intensities, until that cause no longer exists. —1985

I am a materialist on principle. Mind and spirit, soul, volition, feeling, instinctive surmise, etc., have their material causes (mechanical, chemical, electronic, etc.); and they vanish when their physical base vanishes, just as the work done by a computer vanishes when it is destroyed or switched off.

Art is based on these material preconditions. It is a special mode of our daily intercourse with phenomena, in which we apprehend ourselves and everything around us. Art is therefore the pleasure taken in the production of phenomena that are analogous to those of reality, because they bear a greater or lesser degree of resemblance to them. It follows that art is a way of thinking things out differently, and of apprehending the intrinsic inaccessibility of phenomenal reality; that art is an instrument, a method of getting at that which is closed and inaccessible to us (the banal future, just as much as the intrinsically unknowable); that art has a formative and therapeutic, consolatory and informative, investigative and speculative function; it is thus not only existential pleasure but Utopia. —1986

This plausible theory, that my abstract paintings evolve their motifs as the work proceeds, is a timely one, because there is no central image of the world (world view) any longer: we must work out everything for ourselves, exposed as we are on a kind of refuse heap, with no center and no meaning; we must cope with the advance of a previously undreamt-of freedom. It also conforms to a general principle of Nature; for Nature, too, does not develop an organism in accordance with an idea: Nature lets its forms and modifications come, within the framework of its given facts and with the help of chance. And this theory is no less useless than ludicrous, if I paint bad pictures. —1986

Then there is the relationship with music, in my constant efforts to create a structure in musical terms and a varied instrumentation. —1986





GERHARD RICHTER

Everything you can think of—the feeble-mindedness, the stupid ideas, the gimcrack constructions and speculations, the amazing inventions and the glaring juxtapositions—the things you can’t help seeing a million times over, day in and day out; the impoverishment and the cocksure ineptitude—I paint all that away, out of myself, out of my head, when I first start on a picture. That is my foundation, my ground. I get rid of that in the first few layers, which I destroy, layer by layer, until all the facile feeble-mindedness has gone. I end up with a work of destruction. It goes without saying that I can’t take any short cuts: I can’t start off right away with the work in its final state. —1989

It began in 1976, with small abstract paintings that allowed me to do what I had never let myself do: put something down at random. And then, of course, I realized that it never can be random. It was all a way of opening a door for me. If I don’t know what’s coming—that is, if I have no hard-and-fast image, as I have with a photographic original—then arbitrary choice and chance play an important part.

I don’t have a specific picture in my mind’s eye. I want to end up with a picture that I haven’t planned. This method of arbitrary choice, chance, inspiration and destruction may produce a specific type of picture, but it never produces a predetermined picture. Each picture has to evolve out of a painterly or visual logic: it has to emerge as if inevitably. And by not planning the outcome, I hope to achieve the same coherence and objectivity that a random slice of Nature (or a Readymade) always possesses. Of course, this is also a method of bringing in unconscious processes, as far as possible. I just want to get something more interesting out of it than those things that I can think out for myself. —1990

Early on, at the Academy, I would have loved to paint like the artists I admired at the time: Manet, Cézanne or Velázquez. But I couldn’t. And later on I realized that it’s a good thing I can’t, because that’s beside the point. In the first place, the basis is an intention—that of picturing the world. And painting is always only a means to this end (which is why you can’t ever say that a bad picture is well painted). Nevertheless, painting and the means of painting are of important elementary facts. You can see this in a number of well-intentioned paintings, with lofty aspirations as to content, which remain absolutely inedible. This edible quality has nothing to do with self-indulgence; it’s utterly basic, existential. It has more to do with seeing, I think. The rest is manual; it’s no problem. Anything can be painted. It’s more difficult to see whether what one is doing is any good or not. But that’s the only thing that counts. As Duchamp showed, it has nothing to do with craftsmanship. What counts isn’t being able to do a thing, it’s seeing what it is. Seeing is the decisive act, and ultimately it places the maker and the viewer on the same level. —1990

Accept that I can plan nothing.

Any thoughts on my part about the ‘construction’ of a picture are false, and if the execution works, this is only because I partly destroy it, or because it works in spite of everything—by not detracting and by not looking the way I planned.

I often find this intolerable and even impossible to accept, because, as a thinking, planning human being, it humiliates me to find out that I am so powerless. It casts doubt on my competence and constructive ability. My only consolation is to tell myself that I did actually make the pictures—even though they are a law unto themselves, even though they treat me any way they like and somehow just take shape. Because it’s still up to me to determine the point at which they are finished (picture-making consists of a multitude of Yes/No decisions, with a Yes to end it all). If I look at it that way, the whole thing starts to seem quite natural again—or rather Nature-like, alive—and the same thing applies to the comparison on the social level. —1990

Consciousness is the capacity to know that we and others are and were and will be. It is therefore the capacity to visualize, and therefore the belief that keeps us alive. Without visualizing the future, and our own goals and tasks, we should vegetate and—since we lack the instinct that the animals have—we should perish. Belief (view, opinion, conviction, hope, plan, etc.) is thus our most important quality and capacity. And in the form of faith it can dominate us with such power and conviction that we transform it into destructive superstition. That is why we must always confront belief with skepticism and analysis. —1992

Scraping off. For about a year now, I have been unable to do anything in my painting but scrape off, pile on and then remove again. In this process I don’t actually reveal what was beneath. If I wanted to do that, I would have to think what to reveal (figurative pictures or signs or patterns); that is, pictures that might as well be produced direct. It would also be something of a symbolic trick: bringing to light the lost, buried pictures, or something to that effect. The process of applying, destroying and layering serves only to achieve a more varied technical repertoire in picture-making. —1992

It’s the found object, which you then accept, alter or even destroy—but always control. The process of generating the chance event can be as planned and deliberate as you like. —1993

In principle, everything is a detail. —1993

The image of the artist as a misunderstood figure is abhorrent to me. I much prefer the high times, as in the Renaissance or in Egypt, where art was part of the social order and was needed in the present. —1993

In the abstract paintings, there’s sometimes this trick. I have to be careful not to do it, but I sometimes cover the painting with white and then everything is beautiful and new and fresh, like snow. All the misery is over, the terror. —1996

The most important thing, in life and for humanity, is to decide what is good and what is bad. And it’s the most difficult. I remember a time when it was out of fashion to judge a painting good. But all my real constructive experiences with people were about good or not good. I don’t know if it’s the same in English, but in German if you say it’s a good painting, you already mean it’s beautiful; if you say it’s a bad painting, you imply also that it’s ugly. It almost has moral connotations of good and evil. —1996

When I paint a landscape from a photograph, I can see the end point before I start, although in fact it always turns out slightly different than I imagined. The abstracts are the opposite to work on. That process is more like walking, step by step, without an intention, until you discover where you are going. At the beginning, I feel totally free, and it’s fun, like being a child. The paintings can look good for a day or an hour. Over time, they change. In the end, you become like a chess player. It takes me longer than some people to recognize their quality, their situation—to realize when they are finished. Finally, one day I enter the room and say, “Checkmate.” Then sometimes I need a break, a quiet job, like a landscape. But I always need to paint abstracts again. I need that pleasure. —2002

In one sense, abstract art is absolutely nothing, stupid. In 100 years, maybe people will just think it’s garbage. But somehow we see something in it; we have a sense of quality. There must be something, some higher faculty, some progressive sensibility that we find in abstraction. But it is impossible to describe. —2002









MUSIC

- 1 Abstract Picture 858-1
- 2 Abstract Picture 858-2
- 3 Abstract Picture 858-3
- 4 Abstract Picture 858-4
- 5 Abstract Picture 858-5
- 6 Abstract Picture 858-6
- 7 Abstract Picture 858-7
- 8 Abstract Picture 858-8

Jenny Scheinman: violin  
Eyvind Kang: viola  
Hank Roberts: cello  
Bill Frisell: guitars and electronics  
  
Composed and Arranged by Bill Frisell

Produced by David Breskin  
Engineered by Ron Saint Germain

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Compositions published by Friz-Tone Music / BMI

RICHTER’S TEXTS

All quotations by Gerhard Richter may be found in *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962–1993* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), a selection of his notes, letters, formal writings, and interviews, with the exception of those quotations of more recent vintage, which come, respectively, from a 1996 interview with Robert Storr, “Gerhard Richter: The Day Is Long,” published in *Art in America* (January 2002), and an article by Michael Kimmelman, “The Enigma: An Artist Beyond Isms,” published in *The New York Times Magazine* (January 27, 2002).

Quotations from *The Daily Practice of Painting* are taken from Richter’s own writings, with the following exceptions: in Dave Hickey’s text, the first citation springs from a 1986 interview with Benjamin H.D. Buchloh; the second from a 1984 interview with Wolfgang Pehnt. The first two quotations from 1990 are found in an interview with Sabine Schütz. Comments dated 1993 are taken from an interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist.

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°Indicates a highly recommended volume with particular relevance to the study of Richter abstraction.  
Note: If a book has been published in more than one language, the ISBN number given above is for the English language edition.



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CONNIE DEANOVICH is the author of two books of poetry, *Watusi Titanic* (1996) and *Zombie Jet* (1999). Her work has been widely anthologized, most prominently in *Under 35: The New Generation of American Poets* (1989), *Walk on the Wild Side: Urban American Poetry Since 1975* (1994), and *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (2000). From 1983 until 1997, she was the editor of the small journal, *B City*. She is the recipient of a Whiting Writer’s Award and a GE Award for Younger Writers.

W.S. DI PIERO is a poet, art critic, and translator of Italian literature. The most recent of his several books of poems are *The Restorers* (1992), *Shadows Burning* (1995), and *Skirts and Slacks* (2001). He is the author of three collections of essays on literature, art, and personal experience: *Memory and Enthusiasm* (1989), *Out of Eden: Essays on Modern Art* (1991), and *Shooting the Works: On Poetry and Pictures* (1996). He has received a Guggenheim fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts grant, an Ingram-Merrill Award, and a Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Award. He teaches at Stanford University.

BILL FRISELL is a guitarist and composer. His discography as a leader, begun in 1982 with *In Line*, now comprises more than twenty albums: *Lookout For Hope* (1988), *Is That You?* (1990), *Have a Little Faith* (1993), *This Land* (1994), *Quartet* (1996), *Nashville* (1997), *Good Dog, Happy Man* (1999), and *Ghost Town* (2000) among them. He has collaborated most famously with Paul Motian, John Zorn, Joey Baron, and Buster Keaton, but has worked in an unusually broad range of contexts with many different artists: Bono, Joe Lovano, Ginger Baker, Caetano Veloso, Elvis Costello, Allen Ginsburg, Gary Larson, Charlie Haden, Brian Eno, Burt Bacharach, Vernon Reid, The Los Angeles Philharmonic, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Jan Garbarek, Wayne Horvitz, Julius Hemphill, Marianne Faithfull, Don Byron, Gus Van Sant, and The Frankfurt Ballet, for instance.

JORIE GRAHAM is the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University, a post first held by John Quincy Adams. Her collections of poetry are *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980), *Erosion* (1983), *The End of Beauty* (1987), *Region of Unlikeness* (1991), *Materialism* (1993), *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000), and *Never* (2002). Her collection, *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974–1994*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1997. Her many honors include a MacArthur fellowship and the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. She was elected a Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets in 1997.

ROBERT HASS is the author of several books of poetry, including *Field Guide* (1973), *Praise* (1979), *Human Wishes* (1989), and *Sun Under Wood* (1996), as well as a book of essays, *20th Century Pleasures* (1984), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has collaborated with Czeslaw Milosz on translations of the Polish poet’s work, and his translations of the classic haiku poets appear in *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson and Issa* (1994). He teaches in the English Department at the University of California at Berkeley. From 1995 until 1997, he served as Poet Laureate of the United States.

DAVE HICKEY is the author of a volume of short fiction, *Prior Convictions* (1989), *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1993), and *Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy* (1997). Formerly a gallery owner and director, a songwriter in Nashville, a newspaperman and an executive editor of *Art in America*, he is currently an independent curator and a professor of Art Criticism and Theory at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. The author of essays on subjects ranging from Siegfried & Roy to Norman Rockwell, Ed Ruscha to Liberace, and Richard Pryor to Richard Serra, he was given the Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Art Criticism in 1994. In 2001, he was awarded a MacArthur fellowship.

BRENDA HILLMAN has published six collections of poetry: *White Dress* (1985), *Fortress* (1989), *Death Tractates* (1992), *Bright Existence* (1993), *Loose Sugar* (1997), and *Cascadia* (2001). Additionally, she has published a number of chapbooks and is a co-editor of *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (2002). Among her awards are fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. She has taught widely, and is currently on the faculty of St. Mary’s College in Moraga, California.

EDWARD HIRSCH has published five books of poems: *For the Sleepwalkers* (1981), *Wild Gratitude* (1986), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, *The Night Parade* (1989), *Earthly Measures* (1994), and *On Love* (1998). His sixth collection, *Lay Back the Darkness*, will appear in 2003. He has also edited *Transforming Vision: Writers on Art* (1994), and published three books of prose, most recently, *The Demon and the Angel: Searching for the Source of Artistic Inspiration* (2002). Among many awards, he has received the Prix de Rome, a Guggenheim fellowship, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, and a MacArthur fellowship. He teaches at the University of Houston.

PAUL HOOVER is the author of nine books of poetry, including *Letter to Einstein Beginning Dear Albert* (1979), *Idea* (1987), *The Novel: A Poem* (1990), *Viridian* (1997), *Totem and Shadow: New & Selected Poems* (1999), and *Rehearsal in Black* (2002). He is the editor of the Norton anthology *Postmodern American Poetry* (1994) and the literary magazine *New American Writing*. He is also the author of a novel, *Saigon, Illinois* (1988). His book of literary essays, *Fables of Representation*, will be published in 2003. He is the poet-in-residence at Columbia College in Chicago.

RICHARD HOWARD is a poet and translator. He teaches literature in the School of Arts (Writing Division) at Columbia University. The author of many volumes of poetry and more than one hundred fifty translations of French texts (Gide, Cocteau, Camus, Breton, Barthes, Baudelaire), he has also published criticism, most notably in *Alone with America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States Since 1950* (1980). In 1970, he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his third book of poems, *Untitled Subjects*, and in 1996 he received a MacArthur fellowship. He is the poetry editor of *The Paris Review*.

EYVIND KANG plays violin, viola, guitar, bass, keyboards and tuba. His composing and playing have been featured on his own recordings: *Sweetness of Sickness* (1997), *Theater of Mineral Nades* (1998), *Story of Iceland* (2000), and *7 Nades* (2001). In addition to being a member of The Bill Frisell Quartet for a number of years in the mid-to-late 1990s, he has played with John Zorn and Wayne Horvitz.

KLAUS KERTESS has been a curator, critic, gallerist and fiction writer. He founded the Bykert Gallery in New York City in 1966 and directed it

until 1975, representing a number of prominent artists, among them Brice Marden and Chuck Close. Published in numerous magazines, he has also contributed essays to museum exhibition catalogues on such artists as John Chamberlain, Terry Winters and Roni Horn. He is the author of the 1992 monograph *Brice Marden* and the 1997 monograph *Joan Mitchell*, as well as *Bomb* (1997), a collection of short stories. Among his many curatorial roles, he was Adjunct Curator of Drawing (1989–95) and Curator of the 1995 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

ANN LAUTERBACH is a poet, essayist, and professor, currently at Bard College. Her volumes of poetry include *Many Times, But Then* (1979), *Before Recollection* (1987), *Clamor* (1991), *And For Example* (1994), *On A Stair* (1997), and a recent collection, *If In Time: Selected Poems 1975–2000* (2001). Trained as a painter, she has also written extensively on art, poetics, and culture, and has frequently collaborated with visual artists, among them Ann Hamilton, Lucio Pozzi, and Ellen Phelan. She is the recipient of Guggenheim, New York State Foundation for the Arts, Ingram-Merrill and MacArthur fellowships.

JAMES MCMANUS has published a great variety of writing: four novels, *Out of the Blue* (1984), *Chin Music* (1985), *Ghost Waves* (1988), and *Going to the Sun* (1996); a book of stories, *Curtains* (1985); a book of prose poems, *Antonio Salazar is Dead* (1979); a volume of poetry, *Great America* (1993); and the forthcoming nonfiction work, *Positively Fifth Street: Murderers, Cheetah’s and the 2000 World Series of Poker* (2003). Among his awards is a Guggenheim fellowship and a Bellagio Residency from the Rockefeller Foundation. His poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *The American Poetry Review* and twice in *The Best American Poetry* anthology. He teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is a world-class poker player.

MICHAEL PALMER is a poet, essayist, translator, editor, and collaborator with composers, painters, performance artists, and choreographers. Since the early 1970s, he has published more than a dozen books of poetry, most recently *At Passages* (1995), *The Lion Bridge: Selected Poetry 1972–1995* (1998), *The Promises of Glass* (2000), and *Codes Appearing: Poems 1979–1988* (2001). His work has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. In addition to awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, he received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America in 2001.

GERHARD RICHTER is an artist. For more than forty years, his work has displayed a broad array of stylistic, formal and conceptual concerns. His *Photo Pictures*, begun in 1962, have taken the form of portraits, landscapes, still lifes, seascapes, townscapes, cloud pictures, history paintings, action “shots” and newspaper “clips.” His *Abstract Pictures*, first begun in 1976, have been executed in scales ranging from tiny to monumental, and have become an increasingly large part of his oeuvre. In the abstract genre, he has also made *Color Charts* (beginning in 1966), *Gray Paintings* (starting in 1970), and *Mirror Paintings* (from 1991 onward). In addition to paintings, he has produced watercolors, drawings, prints, overpainted photographs, the occasional sculpture and an ongoing compendium of photographic source material called *Atlas*. His work has been widely exhibited, and is held in the permanent collections of most of the world’s most prominent museums of modern art. Among many honors, he was awarded the 1995 Wolf Prize in Israel, the 1997 Praemium Imperiale in Japan and Golden Lion in Venice, and the 1999 Wexner Prize in the United States.

HANK ROBERTS was for many years a member, with Joey Baron and Kermit Driscoll, of The Bill Frisell Band. As a leader, his recordings are *Black Pastels* (1987), *Hank Roberts & Birds of Prey* (1990), *Little Motor People* (1992), *22 Years From Now* (1997), and *I’ll Always Remember* (1997). He has also played and recorded with Tim Berne, Arcado String Trio, the Cologne Radio Orchestra, and as a principal with the cooperative trio Miniature. He has toured extensively in Europe, Japan and North America.

JENNY SCHEINMAN has played with a wide variety of musicians—from Aretha Franklin to Cecil Taylor—and has been recorded in equally diverse settings, accompanying artists such as the Brazilian singer Vinicius Cantuária and the Indian vocalist Shweta Jhaveri. Her own recordings include *Giant Trio* (1996), *The Django Project* (1998), *Live at Yoshi’s* (2000), and *The Rabbi’s Lover* (2002).

DEAN YOUNG is the author of five books of poems: *Design With X* (1988), *Beloved Infidel* (1992), *Strike Anywhere* (1995), which won the Colorado Poetry Prize, *First Course in Turbulence* (1999), and *Skid* (2002). His poems have appeared in several editions of *The Best American Poetry* as well as numerous literary journals. He is the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, as well as Guggenheim and Stegner fellowships. He teaches at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.



THE PAINTINGS

Gerhard Richter painted the 858 suite in the summer of 1999, at his studio in Cologne, Germany. The paintings were first exhibited at The Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld, Germany, from April 9, 2000, through June 18, 2000, as part of the exhibition “Gerhard Richter: Drawings, Watercolors, New Pictures.” The first public American showing of the paintings was at SFMOMA, from September 26, 2002, through April 1, 2003. *Abstract Pictures* 858-1, 858-2, 858-3, 858-4, 858-5, 858-6, 858-7, and 858-8 are in the permanent collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the partial and promised gift of anonymous donors in honor of the artist.

A note regarding Richter numbers: In 1962, Gerhard Richter began a numerical ordering system for his work. Richter uses this system to define his “work order,” with the numbers themselves considered his “work numbers.” These numbers, which organize the artist’s catalogue raisonné of paintings in roughly chronological fashion, have come to be called, more casually, “Richter numbers.” As such, they serve as easy-to-grip handles for the multitude of paintings in the oeuvre, many of which, like the *Abstract Pictures* or the *Gray Paintings*, lack more specific titles. Accompanying reproductions in catalogues or on wall labels in museums, these digits are sometimes prefixed with “GR” (the artist’s initials) and are usually found in parentheses after the title of a work, e.g., *Abstract Picture* (760/1-4) or *Self Portrait* (836-1). The artist has assigned a number to every painting, beginning with *Table* (1) of 1962, and has included his few sculptures in this ordering. Excluded, however, from this numbering system are Richter’s watercolors, drawings, panels of source material in *Atlas*, sculptural and print multiples, and overpainted photographs.

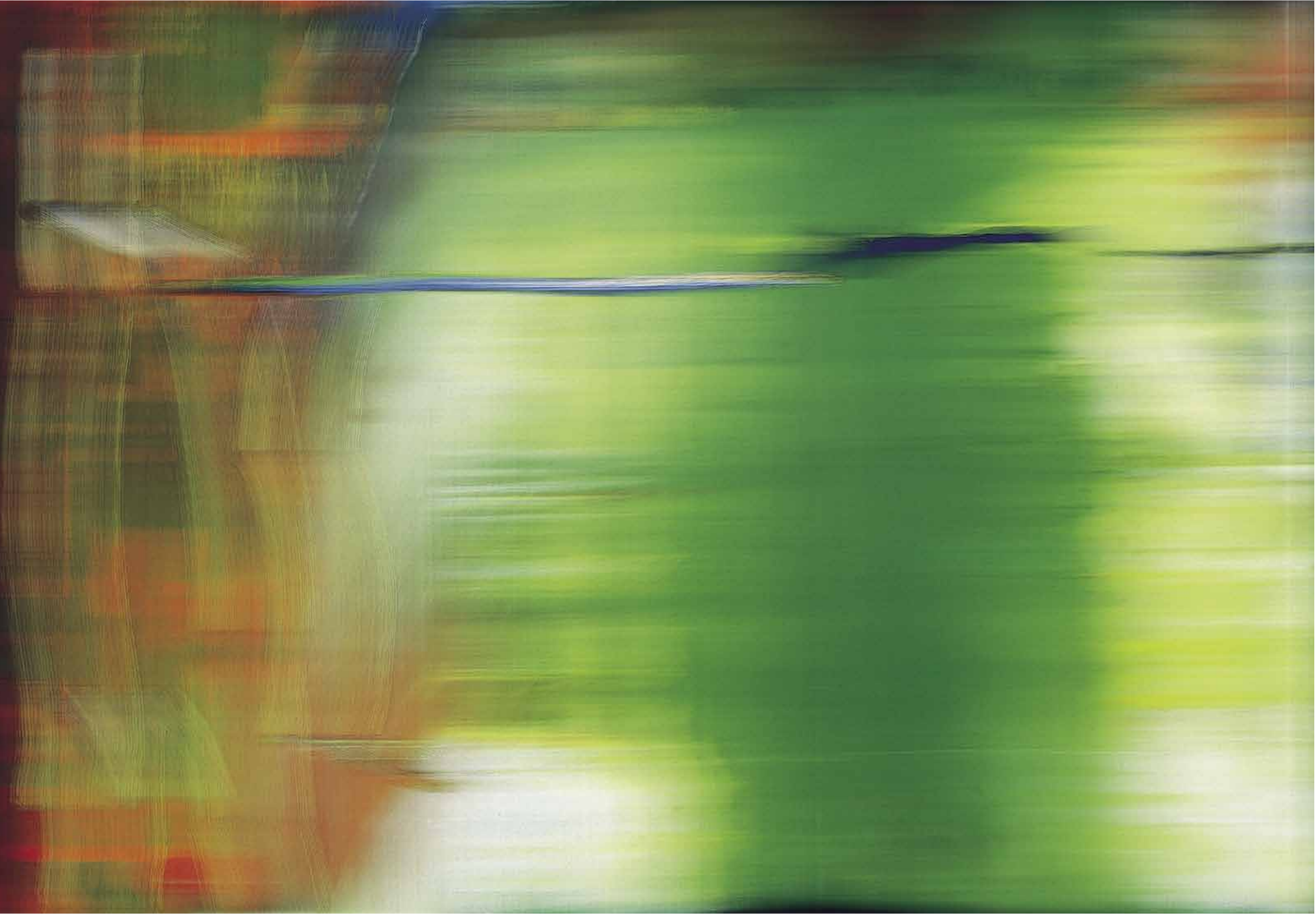
Works with an identical first number, a hyphen, and a second number, such as the paintings in this book, may be thought of as a series or a grouping, however loosely or tightly defined by the artist. Other works sporting consecutive, but unhyphenated, numbers may also be related to each other. Most such paintings, especially of the abstract type, are separated from their siblings or cousins (however near or distant) shortly after birth, and make their way independently in the world, whether in private or public collections. In some cases, however, familial groupings have been kept together, as is the case with 858. Other notably intact abstract suites include the quartet *Ice* (706-1, 706-2, 706-3, 706-4) in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago; the triptych *January* (699), *December* (700), *November* (701) in the collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum; and the *River* series (822, 823, 824), in the collection of the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Deepest thanks to Gerhard Richter, whose gift of freedom and reservoir of trust made this book possible. Without his generosity of spirit, none of the poems, texts, photographs, or music found within these covers would have been produced, for all of these works were commissioned and created specifically for this project.

Many others helped along the way: Marian Goodman, Robin Vousden, Jeannie Freilich-Sondik, Andrew Richards, Elaine Budin, Avi Spira and Linda Pellegrini of the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Sharon Gallagher and Donna Wingate of Distributed Art Publishers; Dick Greene, Elaine McKeon, Madeleine Grynstejn, Jill Sterrett, Kara Kirk, Michelle Barger, and Neal Benezra of The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Doris Lohmann at the Richter Studio in Cologne; Robert Storr and Catharina Manchanda of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tony Meier of Anthony Meier Fine Arts in San Francisco; Lee Townsend and Phyllis Oyama of Songline/Tone Field in Berkeley; Mark Fox, Sue Medicott, Nerissa Vales, Caroline Herter, Massimo Tonolli, Ira Schrank and Ron Saint Germain of the production team; and the following good people: Dean Young, Dave Hickey, Klaus Kertess, W.S. Di Piero, Bill Frisell, Ria German-Carter, Steve Nash, Amy Eliot, Beth Dungan, Joey Baron, Nigel Poor, Jennifer Vorbach, Barbara Ruhman, Don Ruhman, Isabel Breskin, and Thelonious Blue Breskin.

db 22 May 2002 San Francisco





## PRODUCTION

Design: Mark Fox / BlackDog, San Rafael, California

Production + Technical Supervision: Massimo Tonolli / Trifolio S.R.L.,  
Verona, Italy

Production Coordination: Sue Medlicott / The Working Dog Press,  
Whately, Massachusetts

Publication Consulting: Caroline Herter / Herter Studio, San Francisco

Photography: Ira Schrank / Sixth Street Studio, San Francisco

Sound Design: Ron Saint Germain / Wings of a Saint, New York

Concept + Editing: David Breskin / The Art Department, San Francisco

## COLOPHON

Ira Schrank lit the paintings with a stereo pair of polarized tungsten lights and photographed them using a Sinar p2 8 X 10 View Camera, with a Schneider Apo Symar 360 mm lens. He used Kodak Ektachrome 64 T film.

Mark Fox set the display typography in ITC Blair, a contemporary version of a 19th-century American metal typeface. Blair was advertised by the Inland Type Foundry as early as 1900, and its production was continued by the American Type Foundry (ATF) well into the 1950s. The text typography is FF DIN, a 1995 face by Dutch designer Albert-Jan Pool, which is modeled on a German version issued by the H. Berthold AG foundry in 1981. Earlier versions of DIN were released by the Stempel foundry in 1923, and Berthold in 1929.

Sue Medlicott and Massimo Tonolli oversaw production of the book in Italy: color reproductions at Studio 83 (Verona), printing at Stampa Grafica (Verona), and binding at Legatoria Barizza (Loreggia Padova).

The book was printed on GardaMatt Art 200 gsm paper. The eight unbound plates were printed on GardaMatt Art 250 gsm. The end papers are Nettuno Black 215 gsm and the cloth is Cialux Grigio. The slipcase is brushed aluminum.

Printed and bound in Italy in a one-time edition of 3433 copies.

*RICHTER 858* is published on the twin occasions of the first American exhibition of the 858 suite of eight *Abstract Pictures*, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, from September 26, 2002, through April 1, 2003, and the exhibition, “Gerhard Richter: 40 Years of Painting,” organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York (February 14–May 21, 2002), and traveling to The Art Institute of Chicago (June 22–September 15, 2002), The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (October 11, 2002–January 14, 2003), and The Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (February 20–May 18, 2003).

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