

BETWEEN WHITE

RAIMUND GIRKE

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BETWEEN WHITE

Estate Raimund Girke
KEWENIG
Axel Vervoordt Gallery
MER. B&L

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The Wisdom of White



CAT. 1

Untitled (PL. 123)
1973

Unwavering consistency in the artistic programme, inexhaustible wealth in the composition, and eternal flow in the form: three categories that, in my view, make Raimund Girke's oeuvre so unique. His work flows like a mighty river through German post-war art. What sprang from the rock of Art Informel in the mid-1950s swiftly carved out its very own riverbed, where White and Black still crashed against one another like waves on the banks of the River Rhine. Soon, a glitter seeped into the White, that Far Eastern Buddhist shimmer in the early 1960s, before the mighty white river became impeded by the first horizontals, as if trying to staunch the energy like dams. Soon those dams could no longer tame the force of the brushstrokes, the stringent lines become soft again, then the whole pictorial plane resolves into planes, like pure White. Later, a wind springs up, currents, the lines ripple, the Blue even flickers through the White for a few years, then the White flows through years of grey twilight, but it is always the same river, from the source to the mouth to infinity. *Panta rhei*. Painting as a borderline experience. The inexhaustibility that arises from restriction. The freedom that shines out of consistency. The dynamics growing out of concentration.

Recently, I was reading a book about international Minimalism and discovered a brief footnote in which just two names were mentioned: "Raimund Girke, Robert Ryman". Two artists, in alphabetical order. It was intended to illustrate the dimensions capable of opening up in the apparently restricted white space of painting. Above all, however, that footnote showed that Girke had finally become part of the international discourse, that his tenacious, stimulating struggle with the potential of White was slowly being acknowledged as on a par with that of the more famous American colleague. Of course, it is because Raimund Girke's art is so subtle that it took a bit longer for its full impact to unfold. The quality of Girke's art also proves itself above all in retrospect, from today's perspective, when we look back over the sixty years of his creativity. In his meditative focus on the essential and the wisdom of White, Raimund Girke invented an abstract idiom that can be understood and felt worldwide.

Raimund Girke's painting, each one of his canvases, produces an atmosphere that can scarcely be captured in words. It is like an element in its own right, like water itself, which makes sounds, now more subdued, now more resonant, and which converts the weight of the world to a reduced scale. It flows through the eye directly into the whole body, the rhythm of Girke's brushstrokes creates vibrations that transport first the pictorial space and then the viewer into a state of animated rest.

The Suspension of Chromaticity

Painter of White from the Outset

The work of the painter Raimund Girke might appear to be rather uniform at first sight. Upon closer inspection, however, his creative life spanning some five decades breaks down clearly into separate work phases, which can be distinguished from each other but are also linked. The homogeneity of his oeuvre is a result of his continuous and resolute development as an artist, with the colour white at the core of his art practice, along with the concomitant stillness and silence.¹ This reduction to white enabled Girke to exploit the colour's wealth of rhythmic, structural, and surface modulations and the wide range of contrasts in conjunction with other hues. Girke took his white monochrome paintings to the radical extreme of virtual invisibility and dissolution of boundaries, a provocation that he held in common with some of his contemporaries, artists such as Yves Klein or Antonio Calderara – then as now. Klein, who influenced Girke and many others, was a pioneering spirit who encouraged engagement with the monochrome.²

Colour as matter that is tangible and visible.
Colour without meaning something but rather being something.
Colour in which nuances shift, to be experienced as hardly visible and yet still tangible.
Colour as something quiet that remains silent.
— Raimund Girke³

For Girke as a painter, the significance of the colour white was not iconographic or political, nor religious. His pictures do not make anything abstract, do not offer a representation, nor deal with any philosophical issues; rather, such paintings encourage working with the utmost clarity and reserve. These works of art are autonomous, offering the viewer an aesthetic experience, depending on individual perception only. The aim is not to impose rigid constraints, but to open up breadth, freedom, and flexibility.⁴

The painter developed his visual formulations in the artistic atmosphere of the 1950s, shaped by the debate of the prevailing Art Informel movement and attempts to supersede it. From 1951, he studied at the Werkkunstschule (School

of Arts & Crafts) in Hanover and then at the Kunstakademie (State Art Academy) in Düsseldorf as of 1952, where he began his studies in the free painting class of Paul Bindel. Otto Piene and

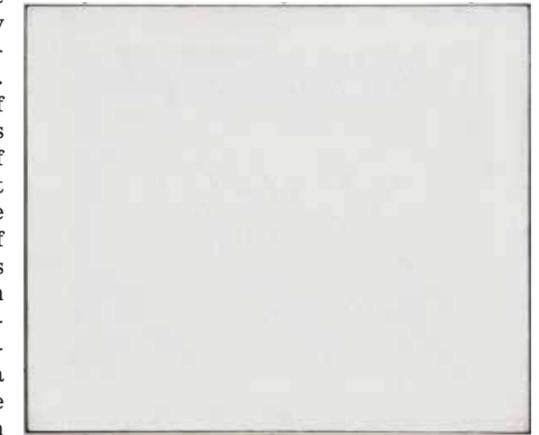


FIG. 1

Heinz Mack were also members of this class and went on to found the artist group Zero a short time later. From 1953, Girke was tutored by Otto Pankok. When Georg Meistermann became a professor at Düsseldorf Art Academy following his participation in Documenta 1 in 1955, Girke and Gotthard Graubner transferred into his class. In 1956, Girke turned away from the traditional compositional style of his forbears. With his tightly composed paintings, he began to develop his autonomous and thoroughly reduced manner of painting, while adhering to the inherent confines of a panel picture. White lends an ineffable quality to the *Structural Paintings* (as of 1959) and the *Horizontal Paintings* (from 1963), rescinding their material status. Girke's art practice treated the picture planes to egalitarian articulation, working and structuring them in dynamic brushstrokes or sweeps of the palette knife. His colour spectrum ranged over nearly five decades from white-on-white, through shades of grey to chiaroscuro contrasts in light and dark. Earthen grounds beneath light surfaces were still evident in the early paintings of the Düsseldorf years but from the end of the 1950s, white prevailed completely. The structures themselves also changed in that year. Whereas earlier paintings were influenced by

FIG. 1 Raimund Girke, *Weiße Strukturen*, 1961.



CAT. 1

Piero Manzoni
Achrome
1958

Raimund Girke
ruhig bewegt
1963



FIG.2

gestural painting with brush and spatula, from the early 1960s fine matrices of colour appeared, applied partly with a spray gun, giving rise to white planes culminating in horizontal arrangements of painted elements. In the 1970s, Girke returned to very painterly visual statements with a gestural air – these represent his most radical monochrome painting phase involving encapsulated colour structures, for example, in various untitled works from 1976. In the late work from the 1980s onwards, his painting embraced a broader colour palette ranging from white through grey to other colour hues, and, as can be seen in *Farbstrom* (Colour Stream) [1992] (PL.212), or *impulsiv* (impulsive) [1993] (PL.226) exhibiting a more expressive use of the brush at this point.

There's no doubt that the arts in the 1950s branched out in very different directions. German painters such as Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Willi Baumeister offered a broad spectrum in those years, looking back to the 1920s on the one hand and representing continuity on the other, while other artists influenced by Art Brut and the École de Paris such as Fritz Winter, Karl Otto Götz, Emil Schumacher, and Fred Thieler celebrated their newly regained political freedoms by practicing informal gestural painting. The more forward-looking abstract style of the Parisian painters Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier, and Serge Poliakoff, who were at pains to dissociate themselves from these tendencies, caught Girke's attention. However, key figures for the second post-war generation continued to be Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich, as benchmarks and providers of stimuli. The Malevich retrospective conceived by Udo Kultermann in Leverkusen in 1962 in collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (FIG.4), along with Kultermann's frequent textual references to him (in relation to e.g., *Weiss auf Weiss*, Bern 1966), underline Girke's post-war impact in art historical terms and influence on other artists. Both Kandinsky and Malevich let the material characteristics and substance of all colours become submerged in the white surface areas of their paintings. As early as 1911, Kandinsky no longer endeavoured to represent landscapes but to capture these spatially and symbolically, as if they were dissolving into a white mist. The white forms denote a higher spiritual sphere, a fourth dimension, in which landscape ultimately disappears, vanishing into thin air.

FIG.2 Girke in his Dusseldorf studio, late 1950s.

There is a silence that is not dead, but fraught with opportunities. This sounds like silence that can suddenly be comprehended. Behold a nothingness that is youthful, or, to be more precise, a nothingness that was there from the beginning, prior to birth. This is perhaps what the Earth sounded like in the white periods of the Ice Ages.

— Wassily Kandinsky (1911)⁵

In contrast, Kazimir Malevich, who was a contemporary of the Russian symbolists, treated the colour white according to more mystical Asian models. For Malevich, white signified the non-representational, and in this sense, was a reaction to the prevailing Materialism in Russia. White Suprematism was emblematic of pure feeling, being a movement that was focused on the spiritual:

White Suprematism no longer acknowledges the concept of material, which is still valid for the average person. Its form are phenomena ordered according to the new relationships of emotion. In white Suprematism, consciousness no longer operates with different materials, but only with emotions.⁶

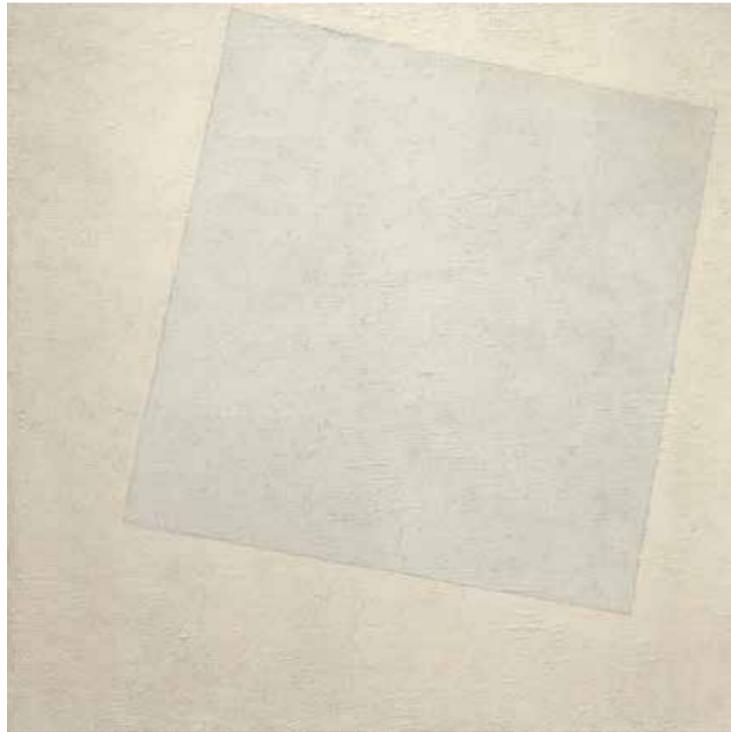


FIG. 3

These insights led Malevich to the conclusion that there is nothing in everything and all is nothing. Art should set off on a path towards achieving the most elevated state, as white non-objective nature, purity, and consciousness. He regarded his painting, *Suprematist Composition: White on White* [1918] as a key to the inauguration of a new classical consciousness (FIG. 3). This concept of a constantly changing relationship of humankind to nature and reality, along with the ideal of a holistic life, was formulated anew three decades later by Piero Manzoni (Movimento Arte Nucleare) and Lucio Fontana in their manifestos.⁷

The new art takes its elements from nature. Existence, nature, and matter come together in a perfect unity. They develop in time and space. Change is an essential property of existence. Movement, the capacity to evolve and to develop, is a basic property of matter. The latter exists solely in movement, not in any other manner. Its development is eternal. Colour and sound, bound together in matter, come together in nature. Matter, colour, and sound in motion, are the phenomena whose simultaneous development makes up the new art.

— Lucio Fontana, 1946⁸



FIG. 4

FIG. 3 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918.
FIG. 4 Kazimir Malevitsch at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Haus Salve Hospes, 1958. This exhibition followed the one in Amsterdam, of which a photo appears on page 406 in this volume.

Reflections in National and International Exhibitions – A Selection

Since the end of the 1950s, the interest in Girke's paintings has been growing, first nationally and then on the international stage. The award by the City of Wolfsburg of a prize of 5,000 Deutschmarks for his painting⁹, *sehr hell mit Akzenten* (very bright with Accents), [1959] (FIG. 5; PL. 33), acquisitions by private and public collections, numerous solo exhibitions, and participation in ground-breaking group shows presenting the so-called "New Tendencies" in Germany, Europe, and the U.S.A. as of 1960, testify to the recognition of the young Girke as a representative of the purported "New Style". Girke realised in the early 1960s that only white could focus absolutely on the pictorial essence of the medium. His use of painted and airbrushed working of structures along with serial ordering systems of similarly shaped white areas aimed to counter what in Girke's eyes amounted to a total overstimulation of the senses with a quiet, tranquil, reduced kind of painting, to encourage the desired concentrated viewing.

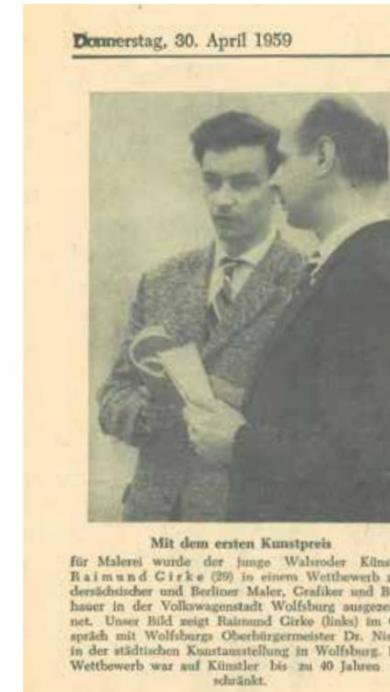


FIG. 5

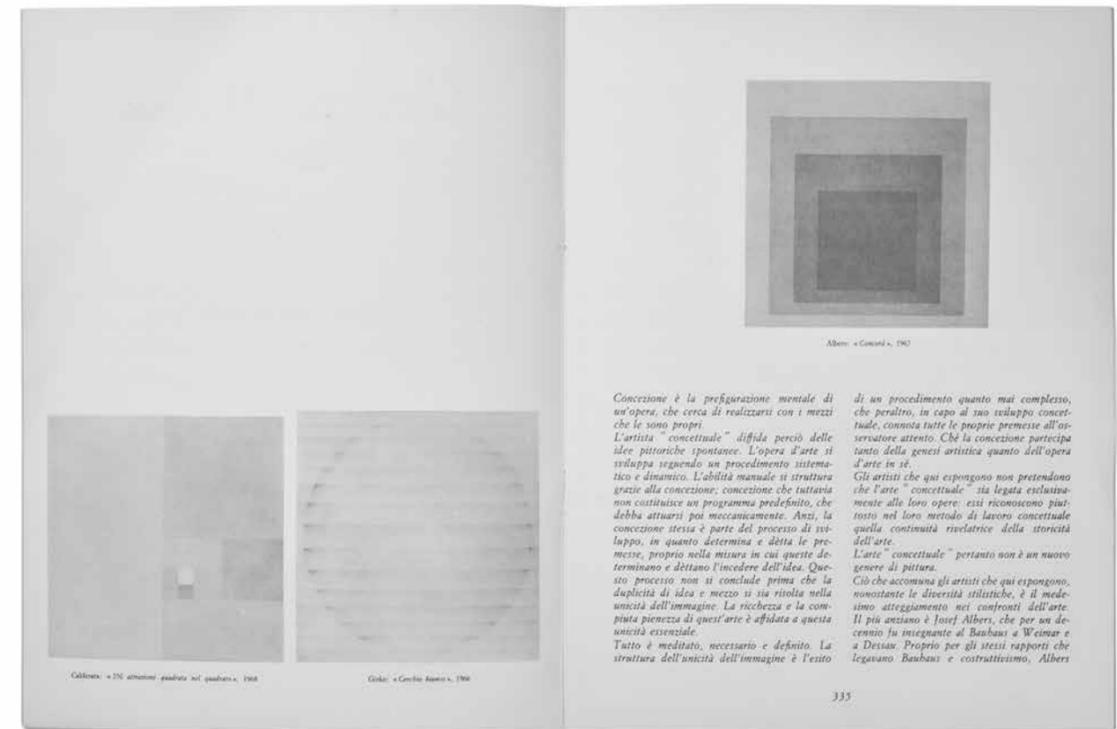


FIG. 6

FIG. 5 Wolfsburger Zeitung article about Girke who won the 1959 Painting Prize.
FIG. 6 *Concettuale*. Albers, Calderara, Jochims, Girke, Fruhrunk, Prantl, Galleria Milano, 1968.

The author and gallery owner Adam Seide¹⁰ exhibited the painter's early work in his private gallery in Hanover in 1958 (until 1962) and followed the young Girke's work from then on continuously. Seide devoted a whole chapter to him (*Katalog über den Maler Raimund Girke* with an accompanying lithograph) in the journal that he published titled, *Egoist*, no. 7/1965, *Jedes Ereignis ist zwangsläufig ein Greuel*, with texts by Dietrich Helms, Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen, and the art critic William E. Simmat (FIG. 7).¹¹ The support of Adam Seide, Georg Meistermann, and Udo Kultermann led to his participation in national and international exhibitions in the years to follow, also due to his belonging to the second post-war generation, and indeed the radical nature of the early white paintings. The large-format work, *Große Schwingungen* (Large Vibrations) [1958] (PL.25), was a first milestone.

In 1959, at Documenta 2, *Kunst nach 1945* (Art after 1945), Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann emphasised abstract art. For the first time, American artists were to play a decisive role. The younger generation of German artists, who were to participate later at Documenta 3 in 1964, was searching at that time to find autonomous paths, advancing well beyond Art Informel. Thus, some of the younger generation of painters opted for new figurative painting, including Horst Antes, the Munich group Spur,¹² and somewhat later Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter; in Düsseldorf, Otto Piene and Heinz Mack founded the artist group Zero in 1957, which Günther Uecker joined in 1961. Girke, who had studied alongside the founders, didn't belong to the inner circle of this group but was represented nonetheless in several national and international exhibitions in which Zero artists also took part. Piene, Mack, and Girke addressed similar themes at the same point in time, such as structure (cf. Heinz Mack, *Dynamische Form*, *Schwarz* (Dynamic Form, Black) [1959/60]), but Girke, unlike the Zero group founders, always remained committed to the traditional panel painting. However, all of them saw white as being the colour closest to pure light, containing all other colours and contrasting most forcefully with the colour black. The artistic approach of the group addressed a specific social vision in particular, in addition to all the experimentation in formal, technical terms and attention to materials, and this had an impact on their contemporaries and international networks.¹³

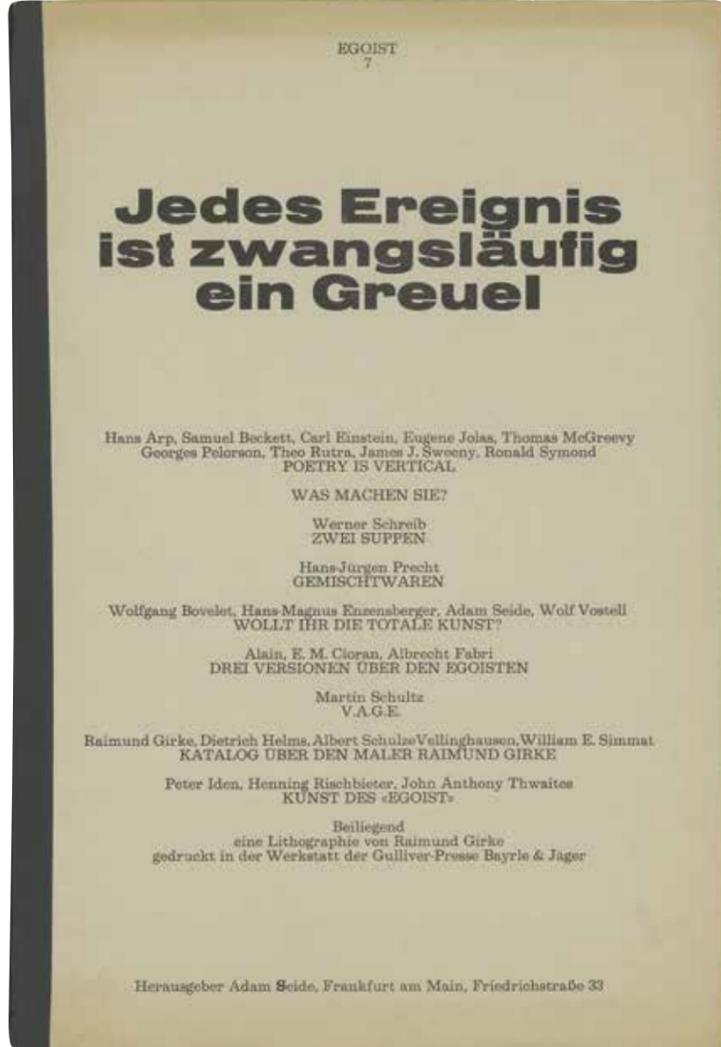


FIG. 7

The journal *Zero* (1958–1961) served as a dynamic communicator of the Zero ideas and disseminated these rapidly across Germany and beyond, to Italy, Holland, Belgium, France, and Switzerland. Similar initiatives had also been set up such as the group Nul, with which there was transnational cooperation.

Udo Kultermann, the new director of Schloss Morsbroich (Morsbroich Castle Municipal Museum in Leverkusen) conceived of a groundbreaking exhibition, *Monochrome Malerei* (Monochrome Painting), as early as 1960, in which more than forty international artists took part – including Enrico Castellani, Lucio

FIG. 7 Seventh volume of *Egoist*, published by Adam Seide, 1965.

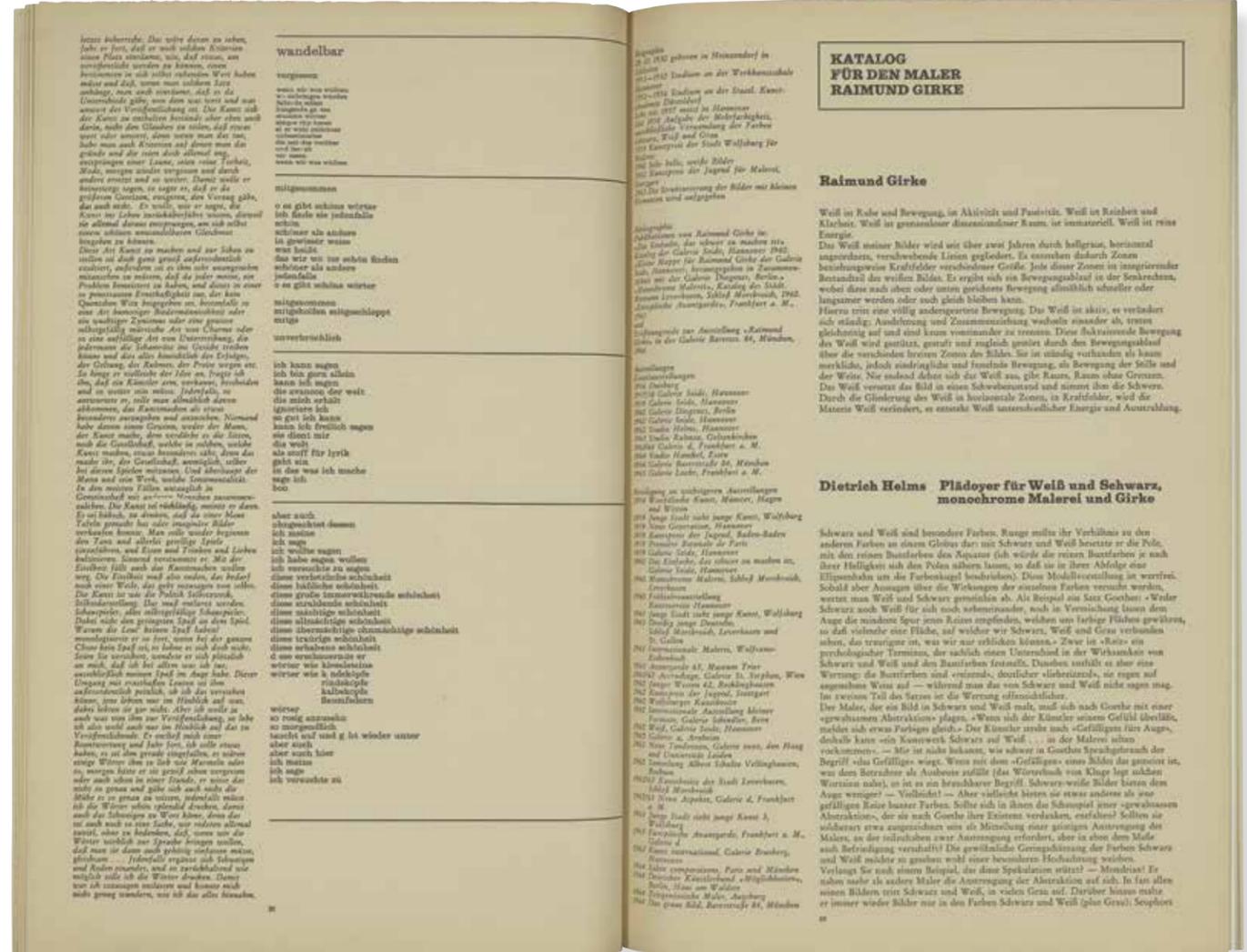


FIG. 8

Fontana, Rupprecht Geiger, Raimund Girke, Oskar Holweck, Yves Klein, Yayoi Kusama, Walter Leblanc, Piero Manzoni, Otto Piene, Günther Uecker (FIG. 9–11). He set himself the task of compiling a spectrum of new tendencies, which in his view were distinct “in principle from equally ill-defined phenomena grouped together under the term Tachism” and “can be regarded as a whole in spite of all national flavours.” The common feature here is the paint. This is “materialised sensitivity, the state of primal matter, the means to liberation of humankind from the bonds to the material world. The paintings are nothing but colour, the red, white, black, yellow and blue are pure

and appear unbroken. Colour is furthermore the means to new spatial effects, which in contrast to optical illusion aspires to render the complete – and thus fulfilled – spatial imagination.”¹⁴ It's thanks to Kultermann that international artists were brought together¹⁵ who were wrestling with similar processes and queries. The unmistakable lack of uniformity in the works collated and his definition of the monochrome were criticised at the time and are still a cause of controversy to this very day.¹⁶ Yet, the exhibition made clear that Girke, despite his tender years, had already become established in the circles of artists from Italy, Japan, U.S.A., France, and the Netherlands.

FIG. 8 “Katalog für den Maler Raimund Girke” (Catalogue about the painter Raimund Girke) in *Egoist* 7.



FIG. 9



FIG. 10

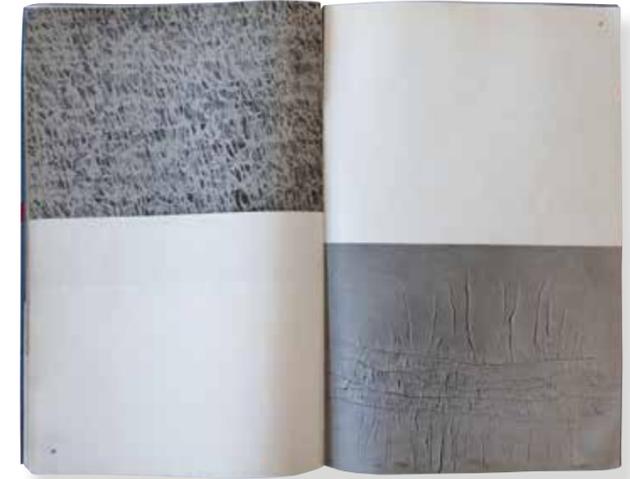


FIG. 11



FIG. 12

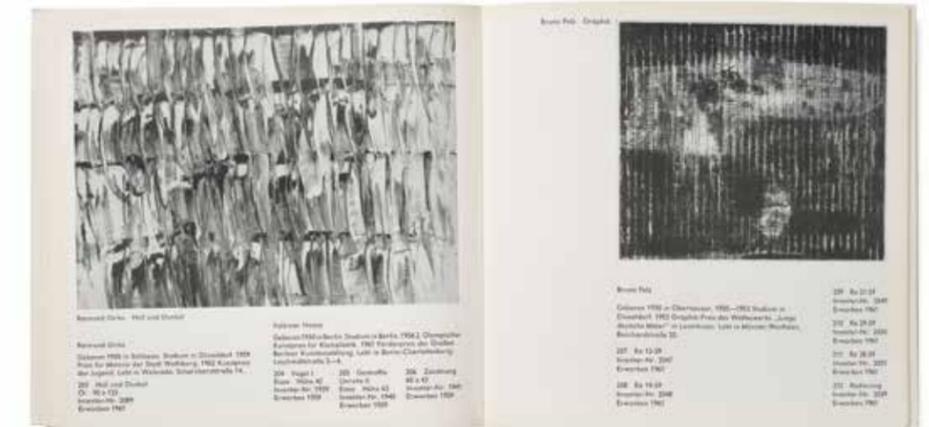


FIG. 13

Kultermann bought Girke's work, *Hell und Dunkel* (Light and Dark) [1959] – this was the first purchase of a Girke painting by a public museum (FIG. 12–13; PL. 28).

The Dutch artists Jan Henderikse, Armando, and Jan Schoonhoven were most impressed by the concept and catalogue of the *Monochromie* exhibition. Schoonhoven stressed in retrospect that this was the initial inspiration for his grid-like reliefs.¹⁷ Henk Peeters, who had visited the exhibition, wrote to Udo Kultermann on June 1, 1960¹⁸ that he was also planning a similar exhibition for Amsterdam; in 1962,

Stedelijk Museum opened *Expositie Nul*, with a comparable selection of artists. Girke was not represented there but in the same year, he participated in *Nieuwe Tendenzen* at Leiden's Academic Art Centre and at the Internationale Galerie Orez in The Hague (both in the Netherlands) (FIG. 14). Many other widely dispersed exhibitions served international dissemination of this theme – such as the “Internationale Avant-Garde 1960” show at the Bern Kellertheater in the Kramgasse, six years before the acclaimed ground-breaking exhibition “Weiss auf Weiss” (White on White) at the Kunsthalle there (FIG. 22, 24–27).¹⁹

FIG. 9 *Monochrome Malerei*, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, 1960.

FIG. 10 *Monochrome Malerei*, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, 1960, with *Brown and Red* by Mark Rothko, 1957, on the cover.
 FIG. 11 Girke's *Strukturen*, 1959, next to Oskar Holweck's work in the catalogue of *Monochrome Malerei*.
 FIG. 12 *Kunstbesitz der Stadt Leverkusen*, Museum Morsbroich, 1962.
 FIG. 13 Girke's *Hell und Dunkel*, 1959, printed next to a work by Bruno Pelz in the catalogue *Kunstbesitz der Stadt Leverkusen*.



FIG. 14

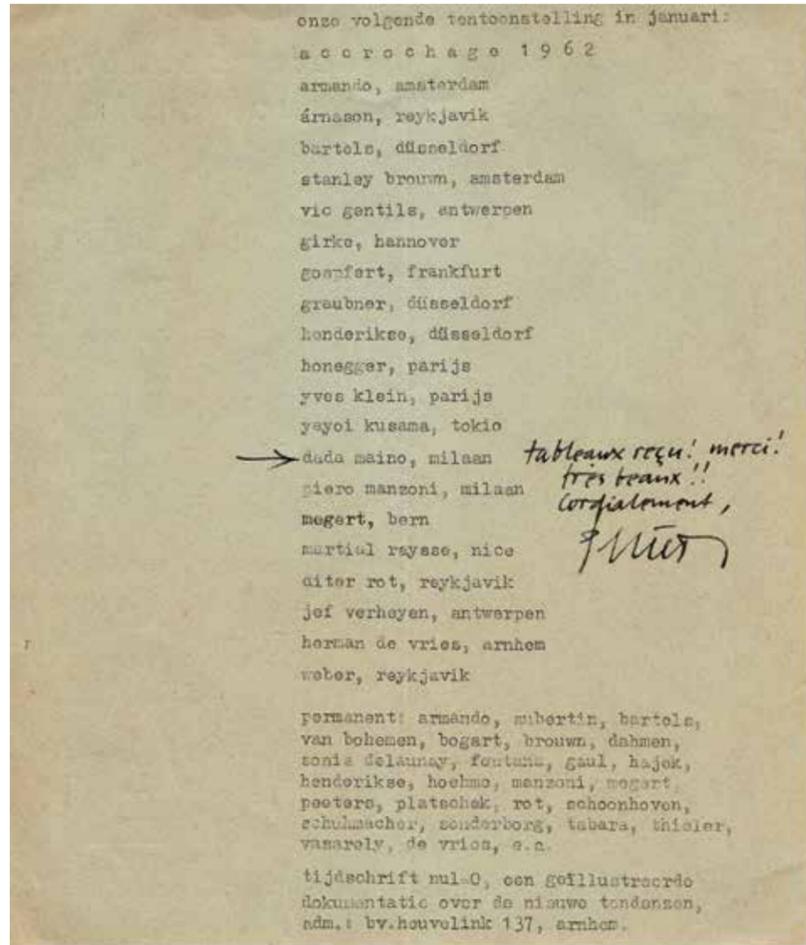


FIG. 15



FIG. 16

Galerie d beehrt sich, Sie zur Ausstellung Europäische Avantgarde in der Schwannenhalle des Römers zu Frankfurt am Main am Dienstag, 9. Juli 1963, um 20 Uhr höflichst einzuladen. Es spricht Dr. Fritz Usinger. Die Ausstellung ist zu sehen bis zum 11. August 1963, montags bis freitags von 11 bis 18 Uhr, samstags und sonntags von 10 bis 13 Uhr.

Galerie d zeigt

Europäische

Aubertin Aue Bartels Breier
Avantgarde

Bury Castellani Dorazio Dries

Monochrome • Abstracte • Kinetik

Fontana Ganzevoort Getulio

Girke Goepfert Graubner

Hiltmann van Hoeydonck

Holweck Kiender Klein Kramer

Leblanc Ludwig Luther Mack

Manzoni Mees Megert Munari

Oehm Peeters Piene Pohl

Rainer Rot Salentin Schmidt

Schoonhoven Soto Spiess

Talman Tas Tinguely Uecker

Vasarely Vercammen
 Verheyen de Vries

FIG. 17



FIG. 18

FIG. 14 *Nieuwe Tendenzen*, Internationale Galerij Orez, The Hague, 1962.
 FIG. 15 *Accrochage 1962*, Galerie A, Arnhem, 1962.
 FIG. 16 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article about *Europäische Avantgarde*, Galerie d, Schwannenhalle des Römers, Frankfurt am Main, 1963.
 FIG. 17 *Europäische Avantgarde*, Galerie d, Schwannenhalle des Römers, Frankfurt am Main, 1963.
 FIG. 18 Inside pages of the catalogue *Avantgarde 61*, Städtisches Museum Trier, 1961.

to the text. Over many years that exchange based on Beckett gave rise to discussions with him about books past and present. Girke was repeatedly moved by reading Adalbert Stifter's *Der Nachsommer*, the consolingly wide landscapes capturing another epoch.²⁶ Writers with whom he was preoccupied were Botho Strauß, Peter Handke, and repeatedly, Samuel Beckett.

Often, he also engaged in writing texts of his own, which show, what is more, that he was also familiar with the experiments of Franz Mon, Eugen Gomringer, Ferdinand Kriwet, and Claus Bremer in bringing together image and script. A volume of his texts written over three decades was published by Kunsthaus in Zug, Switzerland (1995).²⁷ It includes the following lines, visually arranged in a circle and expressive of the effort to embrace in words what the painter's material is and with it, the oldest secret: "Welt der Farbe. Materie und Geist zugleich, beschwörend und von symbolischer Kraft, nicht fassbar, unergründlich: Farbe." (World of colour, / matter / and spirit together, / evocative / and of symbolic force, / not comprehensible, / unfathomable: // colour).²⁸

Our last meeting was on a summer afternoon in 2001 in Girke's studio in Cologne, a large space in a former factory building, accessible across a rear courtyard. The freshness and force of a suite of blue paintings he had just finished were surprising, yes, overwhelming. I thought, and that impression has remained with me to this day, that they were of wistful beauty, that which this painter conjured up to make the world a richer place.

Art Implies a Longing beyond All Limitations

Is this yearning for the poetic impulse evoked at the beginning? The yearning which each person and each society needs because, without such a longing extending beyond the limits of every day, life is reduced to mere existence. The cultural critic Carl J. Burckhardt from Basel once cited the following views from a conversation he had with the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset shortly before the latter's death in 1955: "... most people today take a voluptuous delight in being dissolved in collectives because so much pathetic satisfaction has been promised to the collective." The history of Europe up to the twentieth century has been one of tutelage for individuality – but then, according to Ortega y Gasset, an opposing process of de-individuation began in the mass-movements of the epoch: archaic homesickness for the herd, "man strives towards the shepherd, towards the guard dog".²⁹

The Spanish thinker, who in his day had great charisma and impact (and whose writings Girke knew well), thus aptly described the phase in which we currently find ourselves, worldwide. A period of intense and constantly increasing widespread desolation – for which there are unfortunately all too many examples. For the arts, the immanent task they face of refusing, eschewing, defying that state seems overwhelming and perhaps overpowering, a state of great losses, not just threatening but already suffered. In the course of his life as an artist, Raimund Girke has convincingly committed himself to just this resistance.

FIG. 2 Girke at work in his studio in Cologne, 1992.

FIG. 3 Girke's studio in Cologne in 1992. On the left, several works from the *Schichtungen* series are on display.



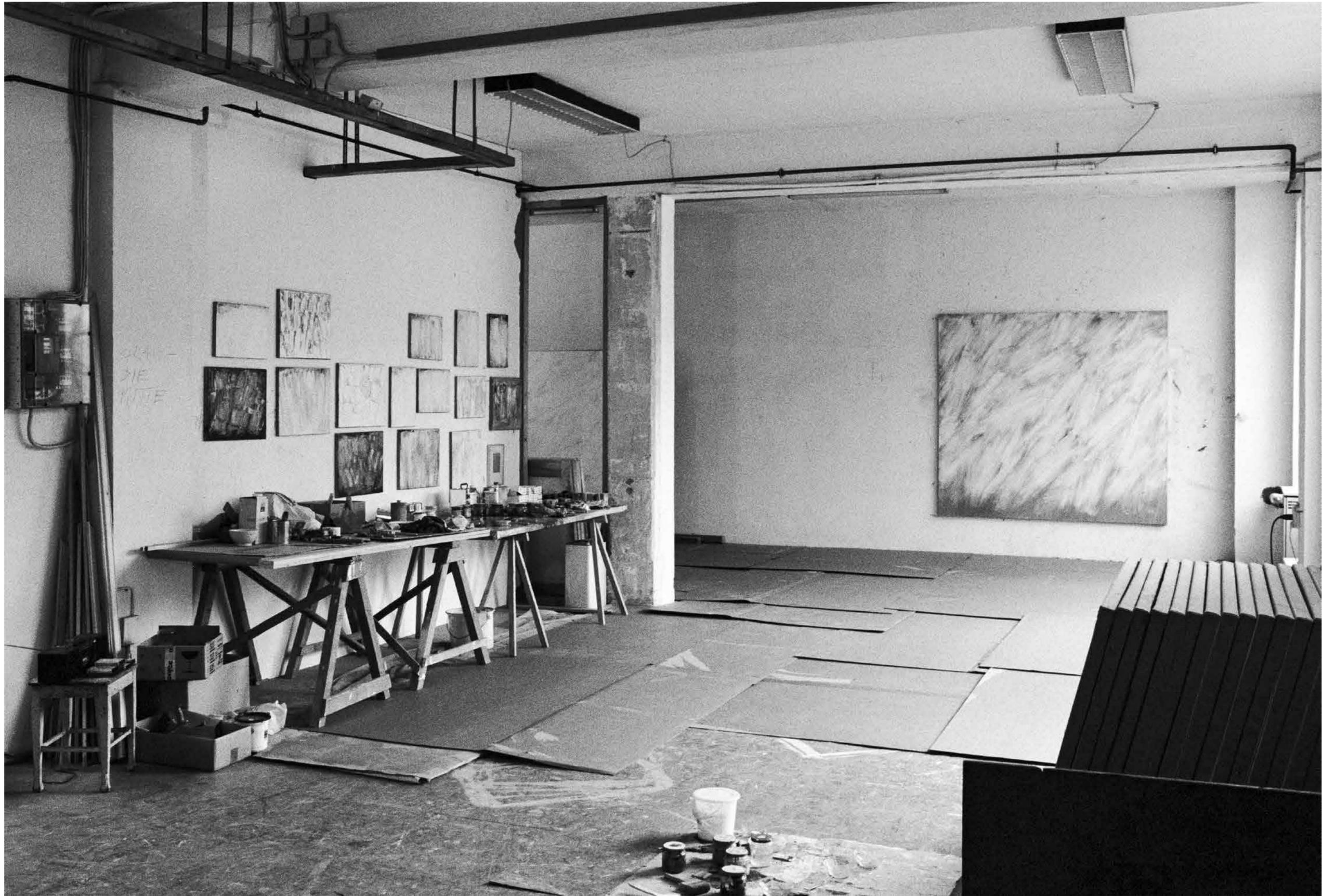


FIG. 3



Exhibition view, *Raimund Girke*,
Museum Kurhaus Kleve, 2012

- 2 LEFT
Malerei
1953
Sammlung Karin Girke
- 3 RIGHT
Bewegung
1953
Sammlung Karin Girke



- 4 nördliche Regionen
1954
Estate Raimund Girke

- 5 Staffelung
1954
Sammlung Kemp, Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf



6 **Blauer Akt**
1955
Estate Raimund Girke

LEFT
7 **lichtes Grün/rhythmisch**
1955-56
Estate Raimund Girke

8 Raupläne
1956
Estate Raimund Girke

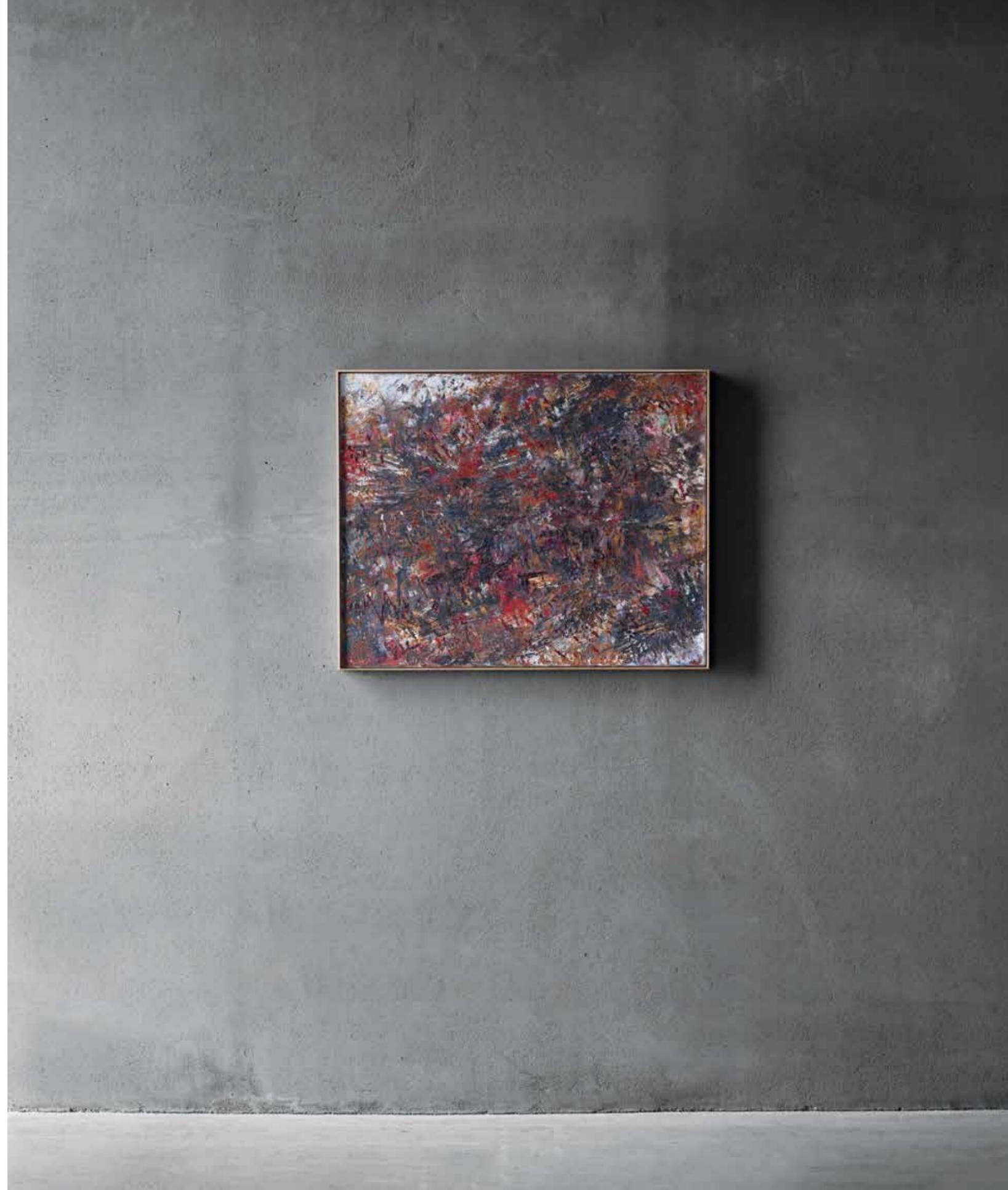




9 Schwere Farben
1956
Kolumba, Cologne



10 Farben der Erde
1956
Estate Raimund Girke

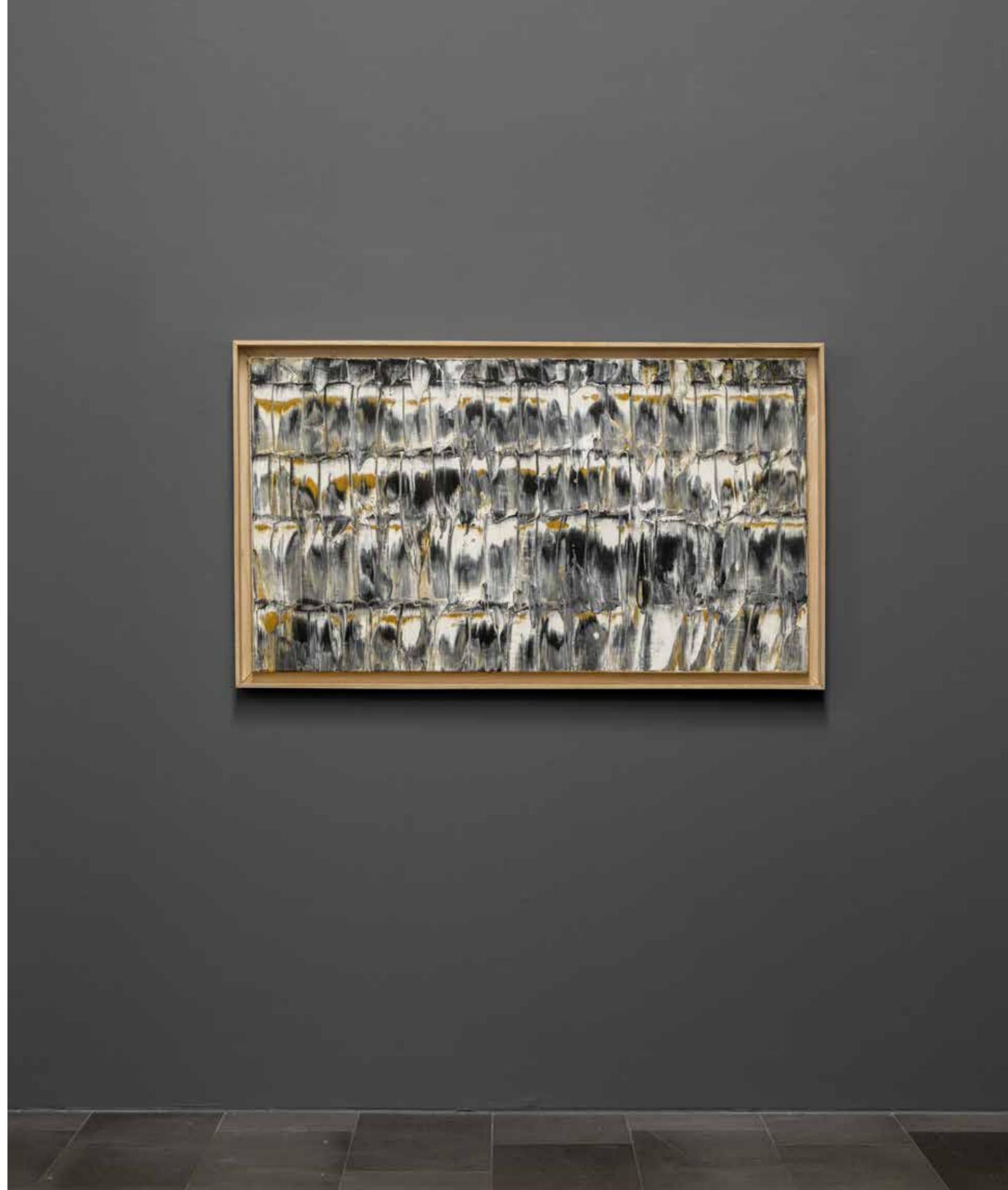




13 Rote Struktur
1956–57
Osthaus Museum Hagen



14 Horizontaler Ablauf
1957
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop





30 Helles Bild
1959
MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg, Sammlung Ströher



Exhibition view, *White and Other Colours*,
Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2011

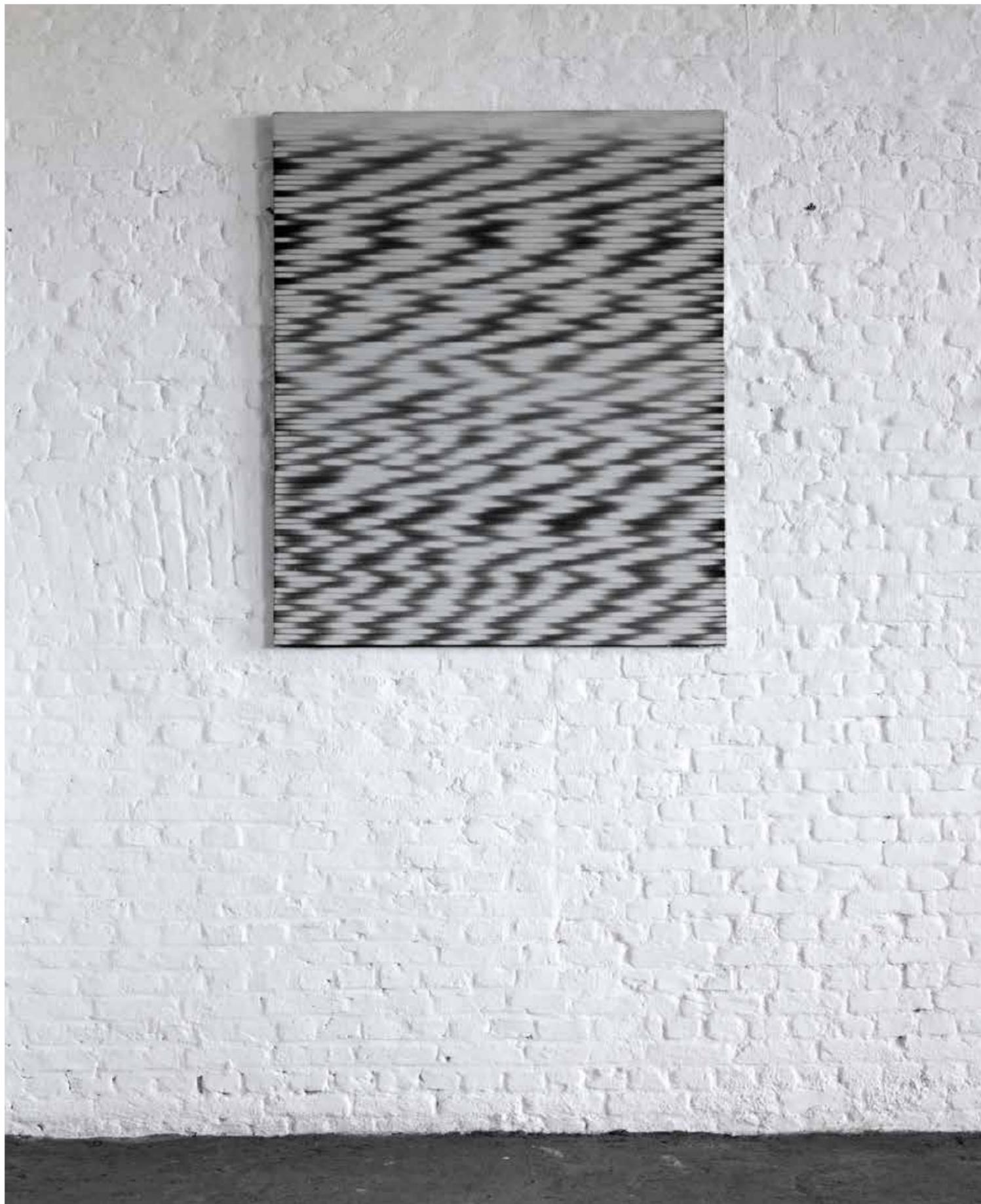
53 Weißfeld
1961
Axel and May Vervoordt Foundation

White refuses to be defined,
seeming to expand and change forever.
It is stillness and movement in one,
boundless, removing the picture
from the level of matter.

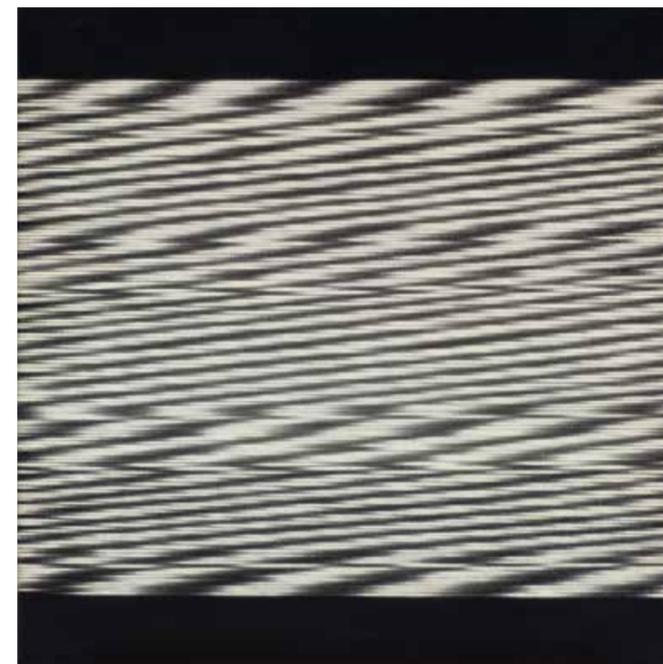
1963



54 Weiße Struktur
1961–1962
Kunstmuseum Bonn



63 **Weiß-Schwarz-Strömung**
1965
Sprengel Museum Hannover, Kunstbesitz der Landeshauptstadt Hannover



LEFT
64 **Kinetisches Weiß**
1964
Private collection



69 **Untitled (WeiBraum)**
1966
Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein



70 **WeiB-Raum**
1966
Museum Ostwall im Dortmunder U, Dortmund

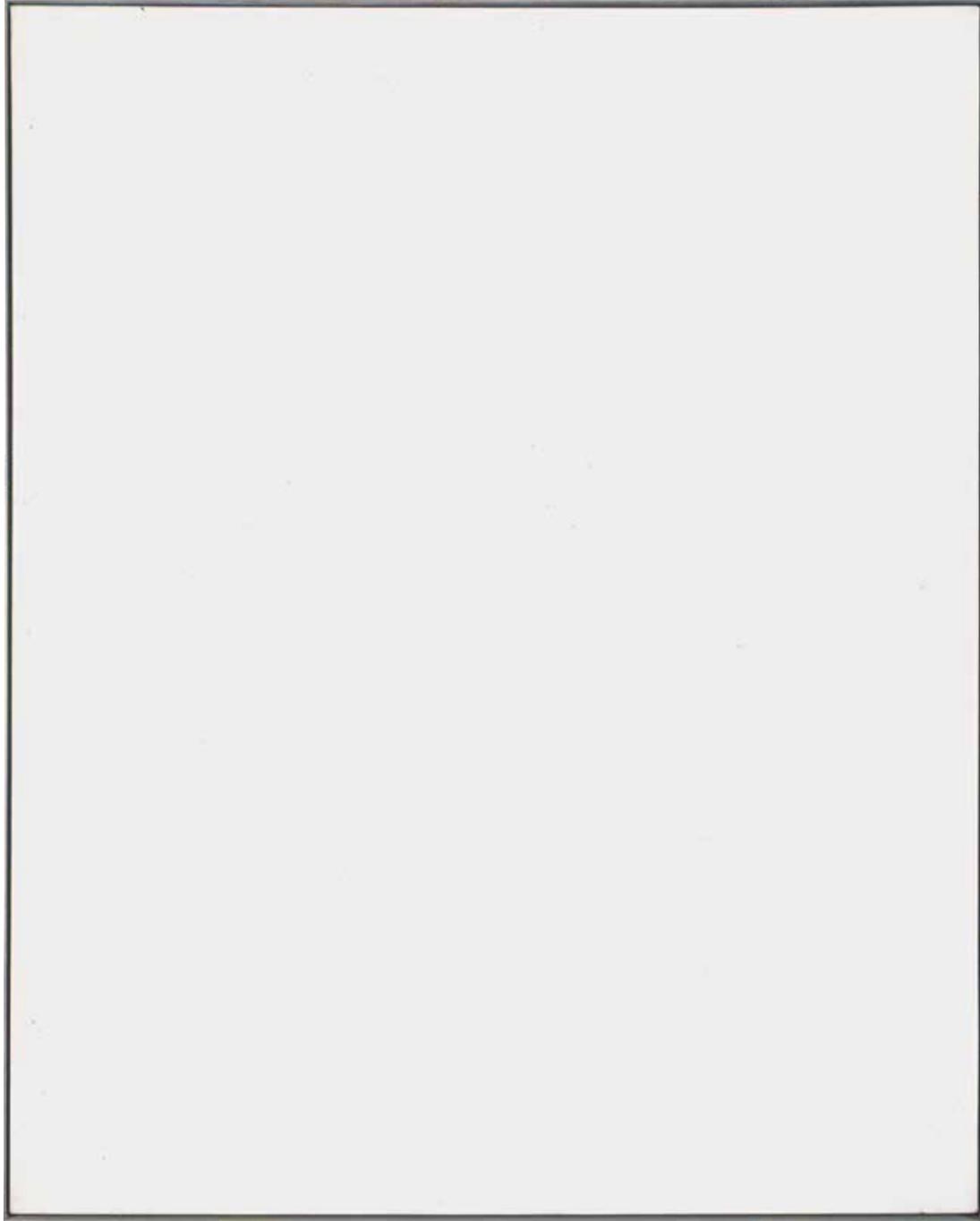
Exhibition view, *White and Other Colours*,
Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2011

- 87 LEFT
Untitled
1969
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg
- 88 RIGHT
Untitled
1969
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg

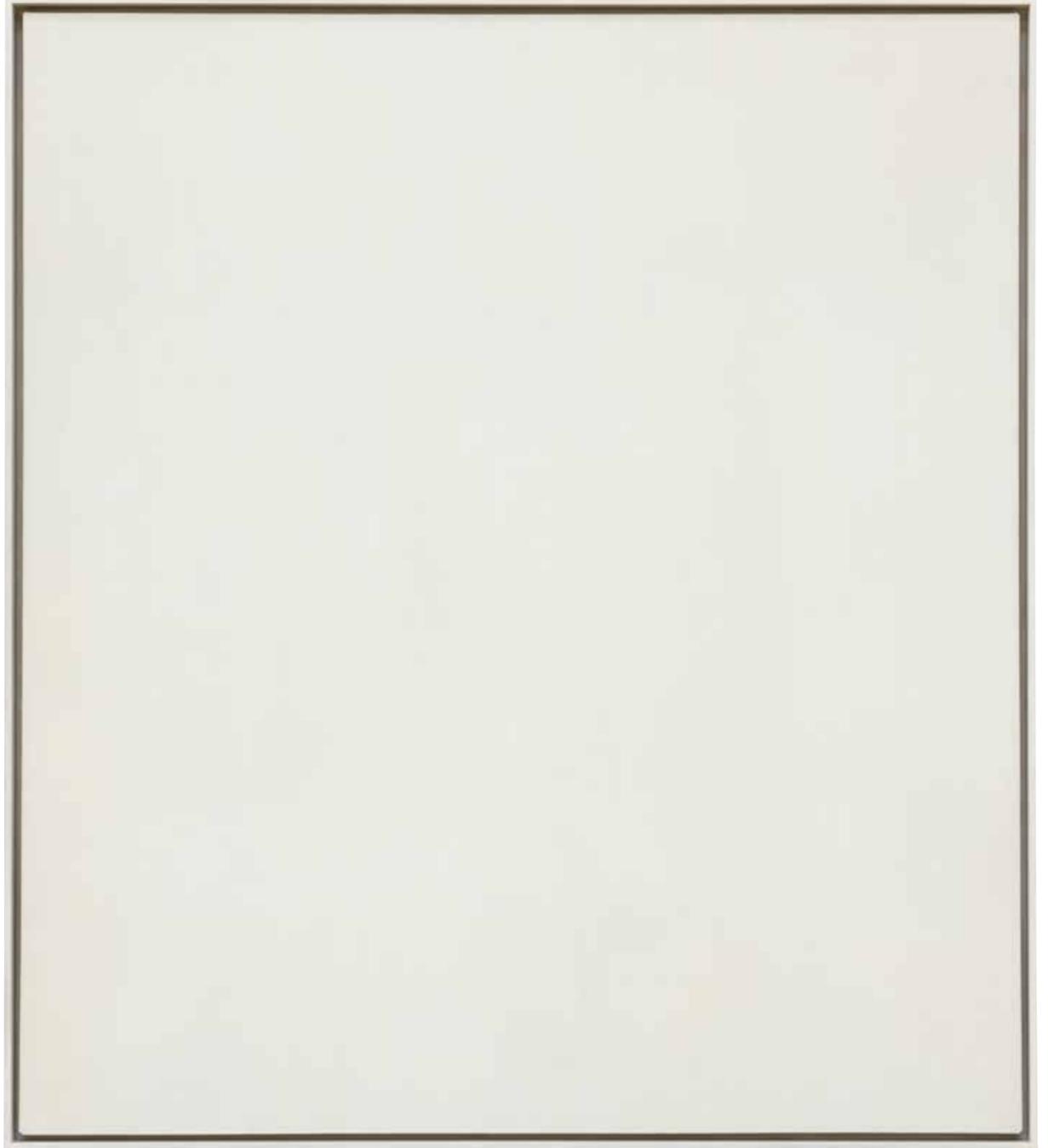


Exhibition view, *Raimund Girke. Was weiss das Weiss*,
Axel Vervoordt Gallery, Wijnegem, 2021

- 89 LEFT
Untitled
1972
Estate Raimund Girke
- 90 CENTRE
PROGRESSION I/70
1970
Private collection
- 91 RIGHT
Untitled
1970



121 Untitled
1973
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk



122 Untitled
1973
Museum Wiesbaden



Stillness, void,
expanse —
places of
rest,
places of
reflection.

1980

Exhibition view, *Raimund Girke*,
Museum Kurhaus Kleve, 2012

LEFT
131 **Untitled**
1976–77
Sammlung Lafrenz, Hamburg

BACK
132 **Dichtes Feld**
1999
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Düsseldorf



155 **Untitled**
1983
Estate Raimund Girke

Exhibition view, *Raimund Girke. Im Rhythmus*,
KEWENIG, Berlin, 2020

Colour,
spanning white and black,
traversing the scale of grey
touching the pure colours,

Colour,
fluctuating between hot to cold,
expressing stillness without excluding movement
unfolding between silence and noise.

Day and night
the greyness of air,
twilights,
rising,
dwindling light.

1987



176 Dez.
1988
Estate Raimund Girke





LEFT
205 Auflösung und Verdichtung
1996
Estate Raimund Girke

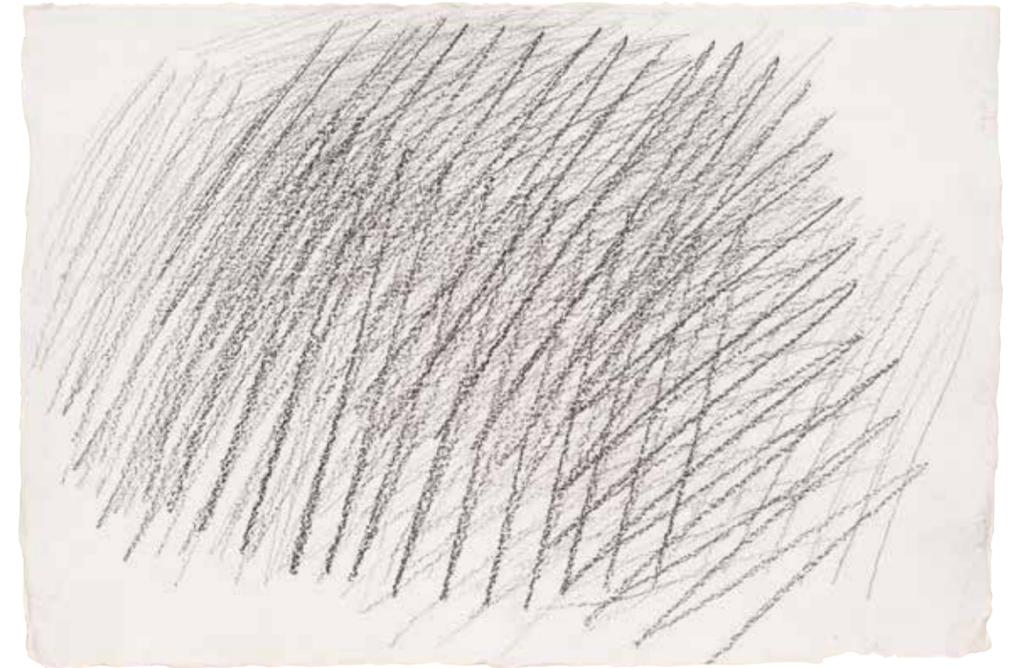
CENTRE
206 Schnelles Weiß
1997
Estate Raimund Girke

RIGHT
207 Vertikales Motiv
1991
Estate Raimund Girke



Why do I paint?
Today,
I can't really do anything else.
In recent years,
I have thought a lot about this,
and said to myself,
if I couldn't paint anymore
then life wouldn't interest
me any longer.

2001



286 Untitled
ca.2000
Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD)

Painterly Diversity through Reduction¹



CAT. 1

Erinnerung an eine Landschaft
1956

For more than five decades Raimund Girke's painting developed continually and consistently. There were no stylistic departures or radical changes of direction. Nonetheless, discrete work phases can be identified, even if their temporal limits cannot always be precisely defined. New developments sometimes made their presence felt in small canvases or works on paper many years before Girke also incorporated them into his large-format paintings. Then again, stylistic echoes of artistic formulations deriving from work phases that had already been concluded can often be identified. Following the early works of his student years, in which Girke wrestled with the precedents set by Art Informel in an attempt to break free of their confines, he started in 1956 to evolve his own distinct formally reduced painting. Like many artists of his generation, he departed from traditional composition to focus on structure. The treatment of the picture surface in a non-hierarchical manner had no more than a certain rhythmic effect, supplanting the conventional harmonic integration of individual components. At the same time, he reduced the rich palette of Art Informel to black-and-white contrasts, adopting a rich spectrum of grey hues with an admixture of earthy pigments. Towards the end of the decade, white prevailed over all other colours, while the gestural, relief-like surface areas became ordered into a kind of matrix of white diaphanous textured planes, which by 1963 finally settled into horizontal zones. Having started to paint at first with a brush, which was later to be replaced by a spatula, Girke also introduced the spray gun, enabling him to disperse paint across the canvas as a fine mist. The pictures did not take on a more painterly character again until the early 1970s when he returned to the practice of gestural "brush writing". These paintings led to his most radical works from a formal point of view, in which structure emerged solely within the monochrome surface. It was not until the 1980s that the spectrum of white and grey hues opened to allow other colour shades to play a renewed part. The brush marks, each speaking for itself, captured the act of painting, which again tended to follow an arrangement of rows, albeit very loosely. In his later pictures, Girke pushed this formal approach even further. Stark

colour contrasts appeared, and the planes of the pictures were textured as a result of his gestural somewhat expressive application of paint. At the same time, Girke's artistic repertoire expanded, so that paintings with almost monochrome, self-contained surfaces were produced in parallel.

If, notwithstanding these developments, Girke's pictures appear homogeneous at first glance, this is due to the way the all-pervading presence of white consolidates his painting into an organic work. For the artist, white was the colour with the greatest clarity, purity, and reticence. Hence white and its opposite, the contrasting darker hues, provided him with the ideal surface for his paintings. In this respect, the function and significance of white in Girke's practice should be put into perspective. The formal quality of his painting is more decisively determined by the structure of the brushwork. The gestural application of the paint creates rhythm, articulating the picture planes and thus playing an important role in creating an atmosphere of colour harmonies and contrasts.

Girke was a painter who located his art practice within the tradition of panel painting. It follows that he did not conform to the prevailing idea of a contemporary artist as a traveler between all styles, genres, and techniques. On the contrary, Girke always persevered with painting on canvas and paper; he did not make a single three-dimensional piece. Even painting the sides of his canvases did not last long; he abandoned this idea after only a few months in 1973 because he found that the pictures treated in this manner then asserted too forcefully their status as objects. For Girke, painting was always something that took place on the surface of the picture, thanks to the paint and a brush.

Girke's painting aspires to diversity in uniformity or richness in reduction. The predominant white is enlivened by hints of colour, while the strokes of the brush modulate the surface to create rhythmic formations. In the '60s and '70s above all, his painting ventured close to the limits of the virtually invisible. For their viewers, Girke's pictures are a provocation. They evade quick perception and casual consumption, as much as they eschew decorative functions. Girke himself described his painting as a deliberate



FIG. 5

commissions for churches and public edifices. Girke was not unfamiliar with Meistermann's pictures. Paintings by Girke from the year before, such as *Staffelung* (Graduation) ^(PL. 5) or *nördliche Regionen* (northern Regions) ^(PL. 4) reveal a compositional articulation of the colour fields akin to that of Meistermann's pieces ^(FIG. 5).

Looking back, it was mainly these last three semesters at the Dusseldorf Art Academy that were formative for Girke's development. His transfer to Meistermann's class marked a conscious decision to seek the release of his painting from the strictures that any reference to a naturalistic motif involves. Despite the freedom that Meistermann accorded his students, he was indeed the only professor that Girke recognised in hindsight as having been an instructive influence. It was precisely during this decisive phase of artistic development, in which Girke began

to establish his independent position, that his discussions with Meistermann and the latter's suggestions proved helpful.

The years at the Dusseldorf Art Academy from 1952 to 1956 brought Girke into contact with up-to-the-minute art of the times. In exhibitions of contemporary French painting and sculpture, the art of the neighbouring country seemed to have successfully remained avant-garde, uninterrupted by the Second World War. Whereas in Germany, the generation of Willi Baumeister, Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff tried to resume work that harked back to the time before the National Socialist painting ban, and thus to create continuity with the cultural situation of the '20s; other artists such as Carl Buchheister in Hanover (whom Girke was to get to know in person at a later date) ^(FIG. 59), Ernst Wilhelm



FIG. 6

FIG. 5 Georg Meistermann, *Treppenhaus im Mädchengymnasium am Stadtpark*, Leverkusen, 1961.

FIG. 6 Exhibition view of the large painting hall on the second floor of Museum Fridericianum, Documenta 2 (1959). Exhibited works by Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Roberto Matta Echaurren, Pierre Soulages, Ben Nicholson, Jean Dubuffet, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Alberto Burri, Hans Hartung, Fritz Winter, and others.



FIG. 23-26

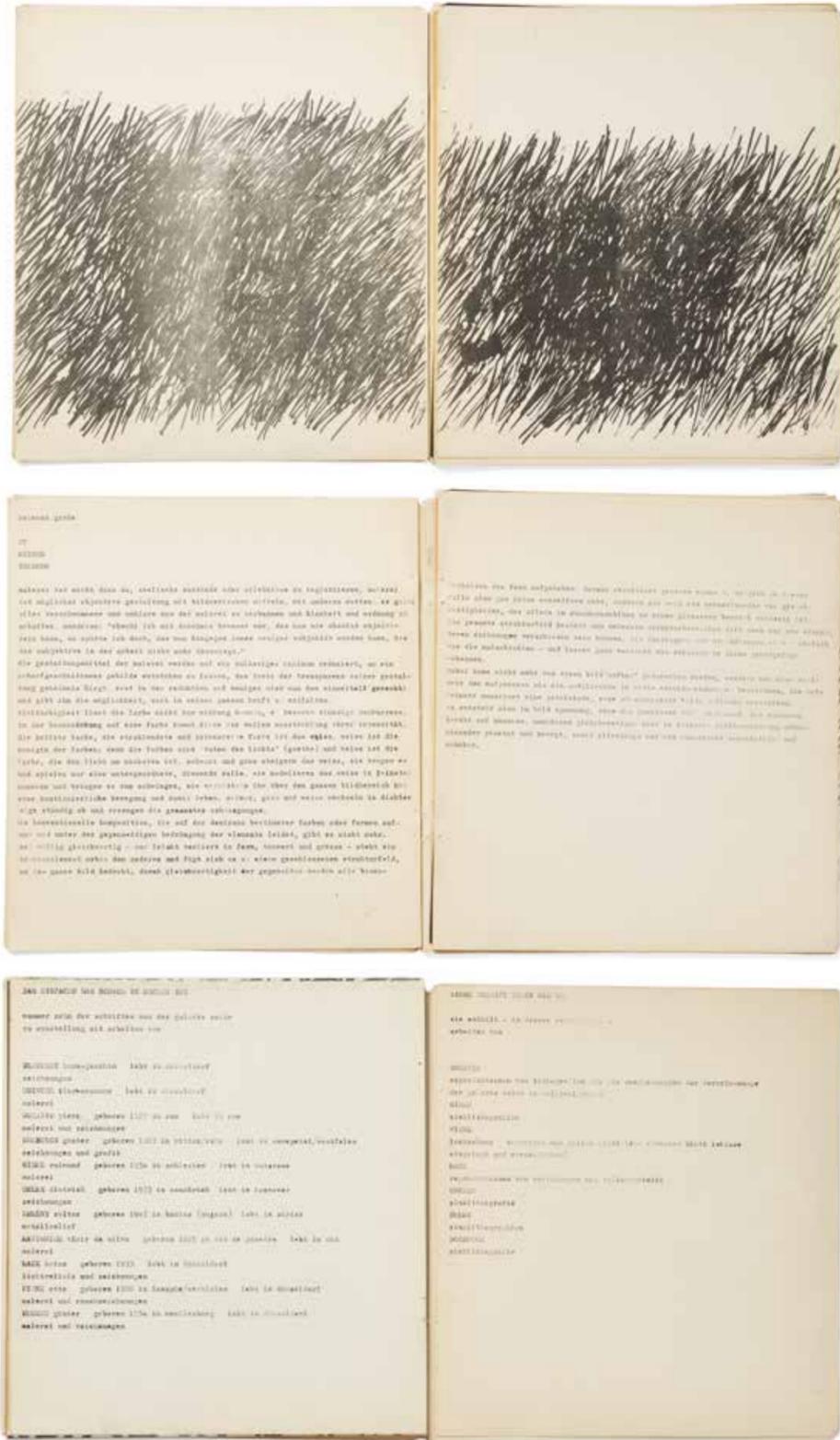


FIG. 23-26 Exhibition catalogue for Das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist at Galerie Adam Seide, Hanover, 1960. Participating artists were Bleckert, Dwinger, Dorazio, Drebusch, Girke, Helms, Kemény, Mavignier, Mack, Piene, and Uecker. Two zincographies by Girke were part of the catalogue. Uecker, Helms, and Drebusch also added a zincography; from Mack and Dorazio there were reproductions; and from Piene a "hole pattern".

while the artist has refrained from mixing in any earthy colours. The rows remain fairly obvious, but tendencies towards dissolution have become apparent that would escalate in works made in later years. Pigments mixed with a synthetic resin binder were Girke's choice of painting medium for this picture, which he first primed with a dark ground. Over this, he created a white layer by pouring the paint from a can directly onto the horizontal canvas along the upper picture margin. The paint was then spread down the canvas using a spatula. He repeated this procedure three more times to cover the four intended divisions of the surface. Girke finished off this coat in the lower right-hand corner. Subsequently, he similarly applied more layers, starting with black. He used the wet-in-wet technique to allow the white and black layers to run into each other, creating translucent effects and many shades of grey hues and giving rise to vibrations rippling across the surface. The major change from the Schichtungen (Stratifications) (PL.19) of 1957 to the Schwingungen (Vibrations) (PL.34) of 1959 points to a phenomenological problem and is fundamental. Layers of paint offer an experience of matter, underscoring the haptic qualities of the painting. In the later picture, Große Schwingungen, Girke used paint more as an optical phenomenon and thus presented painting emphatically as an experience of seeing, communicating a visual epiphany as the conceptual priority of his art.

The overall effect of colour across the plane of the picture is more homogeneous in Große Schwingungen than in the works of the previous year. The stark contrasts of earlier works meld into the richly structured spectrum of grey hues, with lighter zones appearing in places. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist (The Easy Things That Are Hard to Do) at Galerie Adam Seide in Hanover in 1960, Girke described the crucial function of the colour white as follows (FIG. 23-26):

Polychromatism hinders the colour from unfolding its effects, as there is constant competition. Reduction to only one colour intensifies its radiance to the full. The brightest colour, the most radiant and intensive of colours, is white. White is the queen of colours; for colours are the 'deeds of light' (Goethe), and white is the colour that is closest to light. Black and grey enhance white, augmenting it, while playing only a subordinate ancillary role themselves. These dark colours modulate white to elicit the finest of nuances and heighten its vibrancy, relaying

continuous movement across the whole picture field, which thus comes to life. Black, grey and white alternate in close succession, producing the said vibrations.¹⁰

The larger format of this picture affords the spatula generous scope for movement, enabling the paint to be applied with almost expressive gestures that determine the microstructure of the surface. This frequently leads to disruption of the sequence of rows, as elongated tracks made with the spatula cross over the horizontal lines, which can still be discerned underneath in places. Girke also added highlights here and there, emphasising dark areas and bringing a light area in the middle of the right-hand half of the picture into clearer focus. Große Schwingungen marked a further decisive step in the development of his work. In this picture, he succeeded in gaining more artistic freedom than ever before. Girke confronted the rather static character of the arrangement of rows with the dynamics of painterly gestures, which insert themselves into this compositional framework, while at the same time seeming to disrupt it. Black and white, order and interference, but also stillness and motion as in this picture, are formative dichotomies within Girke's painting that were still at work in his final pictures, as he persisted in trying to achieve a balance. Gestörte Ordnung (Disrupted Order) from 1957 (FIG. 21), the two pictures, Die Ruhe kontinuierlicher Bewegung I, II (The Calm of continuous Movement I, II) from 1984 (PL.163), Bewegung und Ruhe I, II (Movement and Rest I, II) (PL.211) from 1992, and ruhig bewegt I, II (serenely animated I, II) done in 1994, are only some examples of paintings for which Girke chose appropriate thematic titles accordingly.

In the 1950s, only a few of Girke's pictures remained untitled. He usually chose straightforward clear designations that occurred to him during the act of painting and following his critical appraisal of the outcome. The titles refer to direct visual experience. Aufhellung (Brightening), aufsteigend (rising) (PL.23), and sich auflösend (dissolving), all completed in 1958, are examples of titles that describe the respective character of the painting. The title of the work offers the viewer a tool to approach it through language, making verbal comprehension of this kind of painting even possible, given that the pictures are entirely free of any representational quality. Girke emphasised the eventful character of his art in these titles, whereby the picture surface served as an action field for painting. In turn,



FIG. 35



FIG. 36



FIG. 37



FIG. 38

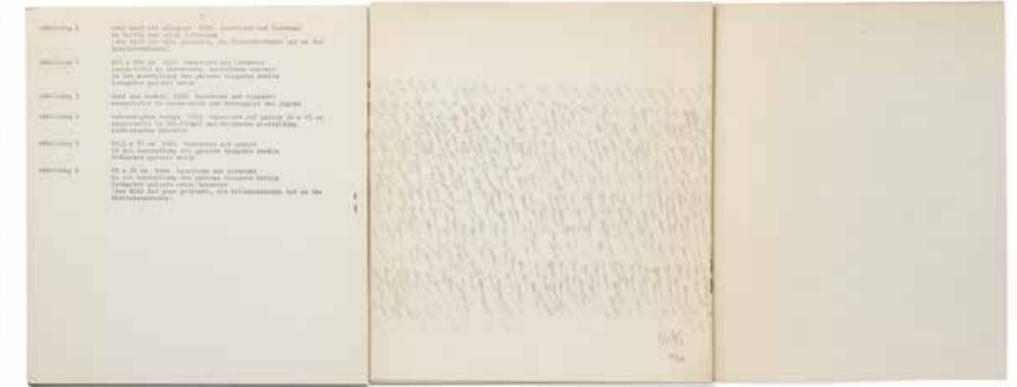


FIG. 39



FIG. 40

FIG. 35 Installation view of Alfred Manessier's exhibition at Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, 1955.

FIG. 36 Installation view of Julius Bissier's exhibition at Galerie Aujourd'hui, Brussels, 1958.

FIG. 37 Exhibition view of *Rétrospective Jean Dubuffet: 1942–1960*, Paris, Musée des Arts décoratifs, 1960–1961.

FIG. 38 First individual catalogue of Girke's work, published for solo exhibition at Galerie Seide, in cooperation with Galerie Diogenes.

FIG. 40 Opening of solo exhibition at Galerie Ernst, 1970. Joachim "Aki" Ernst, Girke's student and gallery owner, is dressed in white.



FIG. 89

FIG. 89 Exhibition view, *30 Jahre Kunst in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Kunstmuseum Bonn, 1979, with the works, *Weißer Struktur*, 1961–62; *Untitled*, 1971; *Untitled*, 1969; *Grey Changing IV*, 1973.

experiences of those former times in his current work. Girke proposed this connection in a show titled, *Malerei 1956/1986* (Painting 1956/1986) (FIG. 93), in which he confronted his new pictures with the early ones. The comprehensive exhibition was shown at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein in 1986 and travelled to Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, and to the Kunstverein Frankfurt am Main. He began to develop his work in line with the strict horizontal arrangement and impasto application of paint typical of the works of the '50s. The starting position had become crucially different by the '80s, meanwhile, leading naturally to quite different painterly results based on the experiences garnered in previous decades. In the early 1990s, Girke worked on a series of mostly small-format works titled, *Schichtungen* (Stratifications), however, in which he applied the paint in an impasto manner again using a spatula (FIG. 92).

Since the early 1980s, Girke had begun to prime his paintings with an earthen coloured (warm) or bluish (cool) undercoat. He then built up colour and structure over this ground of dark hues layer by layer. After selecting a broad paintbrush with relatively hard bristles, he applied the first layers of white paint to the canvas in just a few strokes, but most impulsively and dynamically. Girke then slowly worked towards achieving a self-contained white plane with a structure that progressively settled down, in a process that was often interrupted to take time for reflection. Accents of colour dispersed across the surface guided the picture-making process in the desired direction. During the several weeks often spent on one such painting very different options arose, which the artist could exploit to allow the premeditated concept of the picture to be evolved further and altered in the respective intermediate stage, and for chance factors to be incorporated into the work process.

In 1982, a group of four pictures titled, *Milano* (PL. 150) and numbered I-IV in Latin numerals, were produced for an exhibition at Carlo Grossetti's Milan gallery (FIG. 95). These works are again divided into several horizontal bands by the strokes of the brush. The brush marks descend across the lower third of the picture, coming to a stop somewhere near the edge, where the ochre hue underneath can still be seen. The application of the paint in generous tracks more or less in parallel to each other gives rise to areas of greater density, where the white is fairly compact, whereas in other places the dark ground shows through the superimposed brushwork. Girke, who had started painting exclusively in



FIG. 90



FIG. 91

FIG. 90 *Untitled*, 1976.FIG. 91 *Untitled*, 1976–77.

List of Plates

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| <p>1 <i>Bewegung</i>, ca.1953. Oil on canvas, 80×60 cm. Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>2 <i>Malerei</i>, 1953. Egg tempera on canvas, 73×85 cm. Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>3 Cf. no.1.</p> <p>4 <i>nördliche Regionen</i>, 1954. Oil on canvas, 70.5×120.5 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>5 <i>Staffelung</i>, 1954. Oil on canvas, 65.5×60 cm. Sammlung Kemp in the Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, inv.no.mkp.0.mkp.2011.Kemp263.</p> <p>6 <i>Blauer Akt</i>, 1955. Oil on canvas, 80×60 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>7 <i>lichtes Grün/rhythmisch</i>, 1955–56. Oil on canvas, 30×50 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>8 <i>Raumpläne</i>, 1956. Oil on canvas, 90×100 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>9 <i>Schwere Farben</i>, 1956. Oil on canvas, 80×115 cm. Kolumba, Kunstmuseum des Erzbistums, Cologne, inv.no.2003/87. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2003.</p> <p>10 <i>Farben der Erde</i>, 1956. Oil on canvas, 82×102 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>11 <i>sehr rhythmisch</i>, 1956. Oil on canvas, 65×80 cm. 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Donation Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>19 <i>Schichtungen</i>, 1957. Mixed media on canvas, 100×125 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemälde-sammlungen – Sammlung Moderne Kunst in der Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, inv.no.15235.</p> <p>20 <i>Untitled</i>, 1957. Mixed media on paper, 39×47.5 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, inv.no.17833.</p> <p>21 <i>Untitled</i>, 1958. Gouache on paper, 40×42 cm. Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv.no.C2021-7. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>22 <i>Untitled</i>, 1958. Mixed media on paper, 30×55 cm. Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv.no.C2021-4. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>23 <i>aufsteigend</i>, 1958. Mixed media on canvas, 100×65 cm. Albertinum, Galerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, loan from the Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst in Dresden, inv.no.2012/02. Acquired in 1996.</p> <p>24 <i>Helles Bild</i>, 1958. Mixed media on canvas, 95×125 cm. Neues Museum, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, inv.no.DGe-2014/35. Permanent loan from Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>25 <i>Große Schwingungen</i>, 1958. Mixed media on canvas, 125×180 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich, inv.no.G18344. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2004.</p> | <p>26 <i>Im Grauklang</i>, 1958. Synthetic resin on canvas, 100.5×125 cm. Sammlung Lenz Schönberg, inv.no.GI-03. Acquired in 1970 from Galerie Ernst.</p> <p>27 <i>Mit Oxydrot</i>, 1958. Mixed media on canvas, 100.5×120.5 cm. Sprengel Museum Hannover, Kunstbesitz der Landeshauptstadt Hannover, inv.no.KA53,1961.</p> <p>28 <i>Hell und Dunkel</i>, 1959. Oil on canvas, 90×125 cm. Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, inv.no.3032. The work was acquired in 1961 and shown shortly afterwards in the exhibitions, “30 junge Deutsche” (1961) and “Kunstbesitz der Stadt Leverkusen” (1962).</p> <p>29 <i>Grauhell</i>, 1959. Mixed media on canvas, 100×120 cm. Sammlung Würth, Schwäbisch Hall, inv.no.4640.</p> <p>30 <i>Helles Bild</i>, 1959. Oil on canvas, 90×125 cm. MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg / Sammlung Ströher, inv.no.00123.</p> <p>31 <i>Untitled</i>, 1959. Mixed media on paper, 34×49 cm. Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv.no.C2021-8. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>32 <i>Untitled</i>, 1959. Oil on canvas, 110×130 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>33 <i>sehr hell mit Akzenten</i>, 1959. Synthetic resin on canvas, 100×125 cm. Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, inv.no.586/59. With this work, Girke won the Kunstpreis für Malerei “Junge Stadt sieht junge Kunst“, after which the municipality purchased the work.</p> <p>34 <i>Schwingungen</i>, 1959. Synthetic resin on canvas, 101×126 cm. Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Neue Galerie, Städtische Kunstsammlung, inv.no.AZ1985/4.</p> <p>35 <i>bewegt</i>, 1959. Mixed media on canvas, 100×125 cm. Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>36 <i>auf Schwarz</i>, 1959. 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Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv.no.C2021-5. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>44 <i>Untitled</i>, 1960. Mixed media on paper, 54×38 cm. Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv.no.C2021-10. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke.</p> <p>45 <i>Graue Strukturen</i>, 1960. Tempera on canvas, 75.5×100 cm. Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg, inv.no.18963.</p> <p>46 <i>Untitled</i>, 1960. Mixed media on untreated cotton, 75×110 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, inv.no.2273. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2009.</p> | <p>47 <i>Weiß Dominiert</i>, 1960. Tempera and ink on paper, 46×61 cm. Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg. Permanent loan from the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, inv.no.1339.</p> <p>48 <i>Strukturenfeld</i>, 1960. Mixed media on canvas, 75×110 cm. Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, inv.no.9/403. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2007.</p> <p>49 <i>Untitled (Bild Nr.18)</i>, 1961. Oil on canvas, 25.5×30.5 cm. 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Acquired in 1964.</p> <p>57 <i>Untitled</i>, 1962. Mixed media on paper, 14×26 cm. Sprengel Museum Hannover, loan from the Landesmuseum, Hanover, inv.no.PHz1981.</p> <p>58 <i>Bild Nr.4 Weiß Feld</i>, 1962. Synthetic resin on canvas, 121.5×146 cm. Kunsthalle Bremen, inv.no.1477–2011/21. Acquired through a donation by the Karin and Uwe Hohlweg Foundation from the Roselius Collection of the Museum Weserburg, Bremen, 2011.</p> <p>59 <i>Weißße Struktur</i>, 1963. Tempera on canvas, 70×125 cm. Sprengel Museum Hannover, inv.no.KA15,1966. Acquired in 1966.</p> <p>60 <i>Weißraum</i>, 1963. Synthetic resin on canvas, 100×120 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, inv.no.2274. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2009.</p> <p>61 <i>all is white</i>, 1963. Egg tempera on canvas, 125×100.5 cm. LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, inv.no.1368LM.</p> <p>62 <i>Ruhiges Weißkontinuum</i>, 1963. Oil on canvas, 115×90 cm. Private collection. This work was shown during the two “White on White” exhibitions in 1965.</p> <p>63 <i>Weiß-Schwarz-Strömung</i>, 1965. Synthetic resin on canvas, 60×60 cm. Sprengel Museum Hannover, Kunstbesitz der Landeshauptstadt Hannover, inv.no.KA48,1966.</p> <p>64 <i>Kinetisches Weiß</i>, 1964. Oil on canvas, 121×101 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>65 <i>Fluktuation</i>, 1965. Oil on canvas, 95×70 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>66 <i>Untitled (Überlagerungen)</i>, ca.1965. Oil on canvas, 130×110 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>67 <i>Untitled</i>, 1965. Graphite on paper, 43×61 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>68 <i>Untitled (Bild Nr.11)</i>, 1966. Synthetic resin on canvas, 105×80 cm. Sammlung Lenz Schönberg, inv.no.GI-02.</p> <p>69 <i>Untitled (Weißraum)</i>, 1966. Acrylic paint on canvas, 105×105 cm. Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein, inv.no.450/573</p> | <p>70 <i>Weiß-Raum</i>, 1966. Egg tempera on canvas in wooden box, 105×105 cm. Museum Ostwall im Dortmunder U.</p> <p>71 <i>Durchdringung II</i>, 1966. Egg tempera on canvas, 95×70 cm. Sammlung Daimler, Stuttgart/Berlin, inv.no.63220.</p> <p>72 <i>Weißße Ruhe</i>, 1966. Acrylic paint and egg tempera on canvas, 90.3×90.4 cm. Kunsthalle Mannheim, inv.no.M1800.</p> <p>73 <i>Untitled</i>, 1967. Egg tempera on canvas, 60×60 cm. Kunsthalle Bremen, inv.no.1320–1991/17. Gift from the estate of Wolf and Ursula Hermann, 1990.</p> <p>74 <i>Untitled</i>, 1967. Egg tempera on canvas, 100×70 cm. Museum gegenstandsfreier Kunst, Otterndorf, inv.no.206.</p> <p>75 <i>White Circle</i>, 1967. Acrylic paint on canvas, 90×90 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, inv.no.LK960. Acquired in 1968.</p> <p>76 <i>Untitled</i>, 1967. Egg tempera on canvas, 130×90.5 cm. Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, inv.no.1421/69.</p> <p>77 <i>Zwei Weiß</i>, 1967. Acrylic paint on canvas, 30.5×20.5 cm. Sammlung Heinz und Anette Teufel in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, inv.no.LG-Te-239.</p> <p>78 <i>Untitled</i>, 1967–68. Graphite pencil on paper, 30×41 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>79 <i>Weißes Quadrat</i>, 1968. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 100×100 cm. Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, inv.no.9/404. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2007.</p> <p>80 <i>Diagonalstruktur</i>, 1968. Synthetic resin on canvas, 110×110 cm. Sammlung Würth, Schwäbisch Hall, inv.no.4641.</p> <p>81 <i>In Benennung der Sensibilität</i>, 1968. Tempera on canvas, 40×30 cm. Fondazione Antonio e Carmela Calderara, Milan.</p> <p>82 <i>Untitled</i>, 1968. Egg tempera on canvas, 95×70 cm. Sammlung Kemp, Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, inv.no.mkp.0.mkp.2011.Kemp049.</p> <p>83 <i>Untitled</i>, 1969. Acrylic paint on canvas, 115×90 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn, inv.no.110022.</p> <p>84 <i>One of the White Circles</i>, 1969. Acrylic paint on canvas, 115×115 cm. Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, inv.no.Mpk.0.1971.4. Acquired in 1971.</p> <p>85 <i>Ruhe</i>, 1969. Egg tempera on canvas, 90×70 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, inv.no.2275. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2009.</p> <p>86 <i>Untitled</i>, 1969. Oil on canvas, 156×131 cm. Collection Eugen Gomringer at Museum für Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt.</p> <p>87 <i>Untitled</i>, 1969. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 156×131 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, inv.no.HK-5316. Gift of a Hamburg collector in 1982.</p> <p>88 <i>Untitled</i>, 1969. Acrylic paint on canvas, 180×180 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, acquired at the Galerie de Gestlo, Hamburg, 1975.</p> <p>89 <i>Untitled</i>, 1972. Oil on canvas, 60.5×60.5 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>90 <i>PROGRESSION I/70</i>, 1970. Oil on canvas, 65×65 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>91 <i>Untitled</i>, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 61×61.5 cm.</p> <p>92 <i>Untitled</i>, 1970. Oil on cardboard, 106×83 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>93 <i>weiß weiß IV</i>, 1970. Oil on paper, 65×85 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>94 <i>Progression BR VII</i>, 1970. Oil on canvas, 95×72 cm. The Mayor Gallery, London.</p> <p>95 <i>Progression III</i>, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 115×90 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>96 <i>Untitled</i>, 1958. Mixed media on canvas, 26×80 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>97 <i>Weiß</i>, 1970. Oil on canvas, 54.5×27 cm. Fondazione Antonio e Carmela Calderara, Milan.</p> <p>98 <i>Untitled</i>, 1970. Oil on canvas, 62×62 cm.</p> | <p>99 <i>Von Farbe zu Weiß</i>, 1970. Oil on canvas. 155×90.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich, Sammlung KiCo, inv.no.FH464/2010–32.</p> <p>100 <i>Untitled (Sinkende Helligkeit)</i>, 1971. Gouache and pencil on paper, 106×77 cm.</p> <p>101 <i>Zwölf waagerecht gestufte Progressionen</i>, 1971. Acrylic paint on canvas, 150×120 cm.</p> <p>102 <i>Untitled</i>, 1971. Oil on canvas, 95×70 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>103 <i>Grau zu Weiß</i>, 1971. Oil on canvas, 155×155 cm. Sprengel Museum Hannover, inv.no.KA24,1972.</p> <p>104 <i>Blau</i>, 1971. Acrylic on canvas, 60×60 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>105 <i>Untitled</i>, 1971. Oil on canvas, 125×130 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>106 <i>Untitled</i>, 1971. Acrylic paint and egg tempera on canvas, 150×120.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn, inv.no.110023.</p> <p>107 <i>Untitled</i>, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 110×110.5 cm. Kunstverein Bremerhaven. Acquired in 1972.</p> <p>108 <i>Untitled</i>, 1960. Gouache on paper, 22×40 cm. Kunstverein Bremerhaven. Donation by Ulrike Gollub-Schmel and Dr. Walter Schmel 1999.</p> <p>109 <i>Untitled</i>, 1960. Gouache on paper, 21.3×38.3 cm. Kunstverein Bremerhaven. Acquired with a donation from the Kreissparkasse Wesermünde-Hadeln, 2000.</p> <p>110 <i>Untitled</i>, 1972. Acrylic paint on canvas, 160×135 cm. Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, inv.no.9/405. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2007.</p> <p>111 <i>Untitled</i>, 1972. Gouache and pencil on cardboard, 101.5×73 cm.</p> <p>112 <i>Untitled</i>, 1972. Oil on canvas, 75×75 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>113 Cf. no.89.</p> <p>114 <i>Veränderte Horizonte</i>, 1972. Acrylic paint on canvas. 70×93 cm. Kunsthalle zu Kiel, inv.no.739.</p> <p>115 <i>Grey Changing I</i>, 1973. Mixed media on canvas, 200×162 cm. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk. Donation Peter Augustinus.</p> <p>116 <i>Grey Changing II</i>, 1973. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 200×160 cm. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, inv.no.2945. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2007.</p> <p>117 <i>Grey Changing III</i>, 1973. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 200×160 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich, inv.no.G18345. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2004.</p> <p>118 <i>Grey Changing IV</i>, 1973. Egg tempera on canvas, 200×160 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn, inv.no.110021.</p> <p>119 <i>Grey Changing V</i>, 1973. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 203×160 cm. Neues Museum Nürnberg, inv.no.221. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2002.</p> <p>120 <i>Untitled</i>, 1973. Gouache on handmade paper, 63.5×50 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn, inv.no.110024.</p> <p>121 <i>Untitled</i>, 1973. Oil and tempera on canvas, 200.5×161 cm. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk. Donation from the Friends of the Louisiana Collection.</p> <p>122 <i>Untitled</i>, 1973. Egg tempera, 200×180 cm. Museum Wiesbaden. Acquired in 1985 from Galerie Gianna van Loë, Königstein.</p> <p>123 <i>Untitled</i>, 1973. Oil and tempera on canvas, 200×180.5 cm. Estate Raimund Girke. Formerly part of the Crex Collection, Switzerland.</p> <p>124 <i>Untitled</i>, 1974. Egg tempera on canvas, 200×180 cm. Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, inv.no.450/672.</p> | <p>125 <i>Untitled</i>, 1974. Oil on canvas, 125×128 cm. MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg, Sammlung Ströher, inv.no.00312.</p> <p>126 <i>Untitled</i>, 1977. Watercolour on paper, 28.5×14 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>127 <i>Untitled</i>, 1976. Oil on canvas, 160×130 cm. Private collection.</p> <p>128 <i>Untitled</i>, 1976. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 200×180 cm. Akademie-Galerie, Die Neue Sammlung, Düsseldorf. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2005.</p> <p>129 <i>Untitled</i>, 1976–77. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 250×225 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn, inv.no.110025. One of the three “Documenta-paintings”.</p> <p>130 <i>Untitled</i>, 1976–77. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 250×225 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, inv.no.1860. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2007. One of the three “Documenta-paintings”.</p> <p>131 <i>Untitled</i>, 1976–77. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 250×225 cm. Sammlung Lafrenz, Hamburg. One of the three “Documenta-paintings”.</p> <p>132 <i>Dichtes Feld</i>, 1999. Oil on canvas, 200×220 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, inv.no.1764. Donation Estate Raimund Girke and Galerie Hans Strelow, Düsseldorf, 2005.</p> <p>133 <i>Untitled</i>, 1978. Oil on canvas, 160×130 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>134 <i>Grau/Farbe I</i>, 1978. Tempera on canvas, 200×180 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv.no.B1253.</p> <p>135 <i>Grau/Farbe II</i>, 1978. Tempera on canvas, 200×180 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv.no.B1254.</p> <p>136 <i>Grau/Farbe III</i>, 1978. Tempera on canvas, 200×180 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Verein der Freunde der Nationalgalerie, inv.no.BFNG127/07. Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2007.</p> <p>137 <i>Untitled II</i>, 1978. Graphite on paper, 100×80 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>138 <i>Untitled</i>, 1981–82. Watercolour on paper, 95×74 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>139 <i>Weißße Farbe I–XI</i>, 1978. Egg and oil tempera on handmade paper, 11 pages, each 77×56 cm. Sammlung Lafrenz, Hamburg.</p> <p>140 <i>Untitled</i>, 1979. Oil on canvas, 40×30 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>141 <i>Untitled</i>, 1978. Egg and oil tempera on canvas, 160×130 cm. Museum Kurhaus und Koekkoek-Haus Kleve, inv.no.12-V-II. Permanent loan of the Freundeskreis Museum Kurhaus und Koekkoek-Haus Kleve e.V., Donation Sammlung Karin Girke, 2012.</p> <p>142 <i>Folge II</i>, 1980. Oil on canvas, 180×160 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>143 <i>Graufeld</i>, 1980. Oil on canvas, 180×160 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>144 <i>Untitled</i>, ca.1980. Acrylic on canvas, 180×160 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>145 <i>Weiß/Farbe 80</i>, 1980. Oil on canvas, 180×162 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Verein der Freunde der Nationalgalerie, inv.no.FNG20/82. Acquired in 1982.</p> <p>146 <i>Untitled</i>, 1980. Acrylic on canvas, 180×160 cm. Estate Raimund Girke.</p> <p>147 <i>Untitled</i>, 1980. Oil on canvas, 180.5×160.5 cm. Neues Museum Nürnberg, inv.no.307. Loan from the City of Nürnberg, acquired in 1989.</p> <p>148 <i>Untitled</i>, 1981. Oil on canvas, 100.5×85.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn, inv.no.110026. Permanent loan from KiCo Stiftung.</p> |
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Biography

- 1930** Born in Heinzendorf (today: Skrzynka), Lower Silesia, on October 28th. He spent the first fifteen years of his life in the Baroque town Reichenbach im Eulengebirge (today: Dzierżoniów). This northwestern region of Silesia was a Prussian province and was assigned to the Republic of Poland after World War II. Lower Silesia's culture and landscape around Breslau (today: Wrocław) had been a lifelong subject of his deep interest. The lyrics of the Baroque Poets of Silesia, written during the time of the Habsburg Empire, were among his favourite literature. The modernist writers, including James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Gottfried Benn, Arno Schmidt, and others, should also be mentioned in this context, as his favourite sources of reading.
- 1945** Fleeing the approaching Red Army, the Girke family is forced to leave their homeland, and in the years following they find accommodation in Landkreis (district) Osnabrück (western Lower Saxony).
- 1948–1951** Attends school at Artland-Gymnasium, Quakenbrück. His teacher, Kurt Dittmann, an artist himself with an extensive oeuvre well represented in Stadtmuseum Quakenbrück, quickly recognised Girke's talent. Artland is the name of the Gemeinde (collective municipality) in the district of Osnabrück, in the German State (Land) of Lower Saxony.
- 1951–1952** Studies at Werkkunstschule Hannover. This School of Arts and Crafts was the former Kunstgewerbe- und Handwerkerschule Hannover, where Kurt Schwitters studied in the early years of the twentieth century and initiated the group, die abstrakten hannover. These artists, particularly Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, remained significant in Girke's thinking and working.
- 1952–1956** Studies at Staatliche Kunstakademie, Dusseldorf. His professors were Paul Bindel, Otto Pankok, and Georg Meistermann. Günther Uecker and Gotthard Graubner, with whom he would later exhibit several times, were Girke's classmates. Amongst others, fellow students also included Heinz Mack and Otto Piene.
- 1956** Returns to Hanover after completing his studies and becomes involved in the art life. The network of galleries, art associations, and pioneers included gallery owners Adam Seide, August Haseke, Joachim "Aki" Ernst; the Kestner Gesellschaft (with Wieland Schmied as director from 1963 to 1973, who would invite Girke to many exhibitions and wrote several essays on his oeuvre); theatre critic Henning Rischbieter; artist, writer and curator Dietrich Helms, and many more.
- 1958** First solo exhibition at Galerie Seide, Hanover. Artists such as Hajo Bleckert, Piero Dorazio, Dietrich Helms, Almir da Silva Mavignier, and Günther Uecker were also shown by Adam Seide. In the meantime, Girke visits exhibitions by personally influential artists, such as Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, and Serge Poliakoff.
- 1959** Wins the Preis der Stadt Wolfsburg für Malerei (the city of Wolfsburg's Painting Prize).
- Participates in the inaugural Biennale de Paris in the Musée d'Art moderne de Paris, an initiative by André Malraux. In the catalogue, *Biennale de Paris 1959–1967. Une Anthologie* (1977), Girke's work receives a full-page feature regarding the 1959 edition (president: Jacques Jaujard), as do works by Helen Frankenthaler, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely, and Carel Visser, amongst others.
- 1960** Participates in the exhibition, *Monochrome Malerei*, in the Städtisches Museum Leverkusen Schloss Morsbroich, which is the first in a series on the theme of monochrome painting and white-on-white. In the catalogue, written by curator and director Udo Kultermann, Girke's work, *Strukturen* (formerly *Komposition*; now in the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts) ^(PL-39), is juxtaposed with that of Oskar Holweck. Participating artists included: Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Günther Uecker, Yves Klein, Walter Leblanc, Rupprecht Geiger, etc. Kultermann also compiled the catalogue of the 1966 exhibition, *Weiss auf Weiss*, at the Kunsthalle Bern curated by Harald Szeemann, which was the provisional capstone of exhibitions on this subject.
- Publishes first individual catalogue in 1960 on the occasion of his solo exhibitions at Galerie Seide and Galerie Diogenes in Berlin (the gallery of Günter Meisner). Contributions were made by Meisner, Girke himself, and artist-critic Dietrich Helms. A text by Saint-John Perse, who won the Nobel Prize that year, was also included.
- 1961** Participates in three exhibitions associated with the Zero movement: *Zero* at Galerie a, the gallery of Henk Peeters and Felix Valk in Arnhem, the Netherlands; *Internationale Malerei*, at the Deutschordensschloss in Wolframs-Eschenbach (curated by Will Grohmann); and *Avantgarde 61* at the Städtisches Museum in Trier (Klaus Jürgen-Fischer). Later, Girke would take part in several more exhibitions associated with Zero, although he was decisive about not being part of the group.
- The Städtisches Museum Schloss Morsbroich, where the exhibition, *Monochrome Malerei*, took place, is the first institution to acquire a work by Girke: *Hell und Dunkel* (Light and Dark) (1959) ^(PL-28). In the early 1960s, the museum built up a collection that served as an overview of modern and contemporary art, including Wassily Kandinsky, Fernand Léger, Carl Buchheister, Alexander Calder, Lucio Fontana, Barbara Hepworth, Emil Schumacher, Ad Reinhardt, Maria Lassnig, Gerhard Hoehme, Roberto Crippa, Oskar Holweck, Piero Dorazio, Otto Piene, Jef Verheyen, and others.
- 1962** Wins the Kunstpreis der Jugend (Youth Art Prize), Stuttgart. In this period, Girke became further impressed by art of the 1920s and visiting collections in The Hague and Amsterdam and seeing the works of Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich, and through his friendly admiration of Carl Buchheister, who had just moved to Hanover, and was involved with the artists' groups, Cercle et Carrée and die abstrakten hannover.
- 1965** Inaugural participation in an exhibition in the U.S.A.: *White on White*, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts, curated by Frederick P. Walkey. Sixty-five artworks are shown, made by Yayoi Kusama, Lucio Fontana, Walter Leblanc, Günther Uecker, Otto Piene, George Lloyd-Jones, Paolo Scheggi, Antoni Tàpies, Jack Youngerman, and others. The following year, the exhibition is also held at Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.
- 1966–1971** Teaches at the Werkkunstschule Hannover.
- 1971** One of his students was Joachim Ernst, the owner of Galerie Ernst.
- Solo exhibition at galerie h (August Haseke), with catalogue *Raimund Girke (gh3)*.
- 1968** First participation in an exhibition in Italy: *Arte concettuale* in Galleria Milano, curated by Wolf Wezel, who involved Girke in his projects several times. Other participating artists were Josef Albers, Antonio Calderara, Rainer Jochims, Günther Fruhtrunk, and Karl Prantl. Girke maintained a long friendship with Calderara. The following year, a group exhibition is held in Palazzo Pucci, Florence. Italy remains prominent throughout his career for various exhibitions due to Girke's connections and the artist network of which he remained part.
- 1969** Participates in a group exhibition, together with Georg Karl Pfahler and Günther Fruhtrunk, at Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover (curated by Wieland Schmied, as a first part of a series, *Deutsche Avantgarde*). The exhibition travels to Overbeck-Gesellschaft in Lübeck and Kunstverein Mannheim. The poster was designed by fellow artist Almir da Silva Mavignier.
- 1971–1996** Works as Professor für Freie Malerei (Professor of Free Painting) at Hochschule der Künste, Berlin. During a period of twenty-five years, his students included, Hartwig Kompa, Markus Linnenbrink, Katrin von Maltzahn, Ryusho Matsuo, Andrea Alteneeder, Una Möhrke, Bernard Petri, Hermann Pitz, Dirk Rathke, Karin Lambrecht, Joachim Schäfer, Irene Thomet, Eberhard Bosslet, Winfried Virnich, Maja Weyermann, and others. Thomas Kaminsky is also sometimes mentioned in this context, although he was never an official student of Girke.
- 1973** During the exhibition, *Prospect 73*, organised by Evelyn Weiss, Konrad Fischer, Jürgen Harten, and Hans Strelow in Städtische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, Girke exhibits for the first time with Robert Ryman, an artist he greatly respected, although he was also very aware of the differences in approach to painting. A few months later, two concurrent exhibitions took place where this was again the case: *Basically White* in ICA, London, organised by Lucy Milton, which elaborated on the theme of *White on White*, with work by twenty-four artists, including Jean Arp, Antonio Calderara, Enrico Castellani, Lucio Fontana, Oskar Holweck, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Ben Nicholson, Jan Schoonhoven, and Herman de Vries amongst others; and the exhibition, *Geplante Malerei* (Planned Painting) (see next entry).

Biographie

1930
geboren in Reichenbach

1951/52
Studium an der Werk-
Kunstschule Hannover

1952–56
Studium an der Staatl.
Kunstakademie Düsseldorf

1959
Preis der Stadt Wolfsburg
für Malerei

1962
Kunstpreis der Jugend,
Stuttgart

1966–71
Dozent an der Werkkunst-
schule Hannover

1971–96
Professor an der Hochschule
der Künste Berlin

1995
Louis-Cometh-Preis,
Regensburg

lebt in Köln

Visual Essay: A Retrospective



ILL. 1



ILL. 2

Raymund Girke: *Neue Kunstausstellung*
Duisburg-Hamborn 3.10.51

Er weiß es vorher nie

Junger Meistermann-Schüler stellt in der NRZ aus

Er gehört mit seinen 26 Jahren zu den Jungen in der Kunst. Aber er hat schon heute eine klare Vorstellung von dem, was er will und wohin sein Weg führen soll. Der Düsseldorfer Raymund Girke, der zur Zeit eine Auswahl seiner Bilder, starkfarbige abstrakte Kompositionen, in der Duisburger NRZ-Geschäftsstelle zeigt, ist gebürtiger Schlesier, siedelte mit seinen Eltern 1946 in die Osnabrücker Gegend über und entdeckte plötzlich — durch seinen Vater angeregt — seine Freude an der Malerei.

Zunächst studierte Girke einige Semester an der Kunstakademie in Hannover und wechselte später zur Düsseldorfer Akademie über, wo er zuerst Pankok-, später Meistermann-Schüler war.

Meistermann-Impulse spürt man auch heute noch aus den Bildern des jungen Mannes heraus, der jetzt einen Lehrauftrag in Niedersachsen annahm.

Er nimmt seine künstlerische Tätigkeit nicht leicht, der junge Raymund Girke. Er müht sich ständig um die formalen Fragen des Bildaufbaus, die sich für ihn immer aus seinem inneren Verhältnis zu den Dingen der Umwelt ergeben. Über die gegenständliche Malerei kam Girke eines Tages zur Abstraktion, weil er mit dem Vorhergegangenen künstlerisch nichts mehr anzulangen wußte, weil er neue Bildwerte suchte und sie weder in der impressionistischen, noch in der mehr expressiven Malerei zu finden wußte. Heute sind seine Bilder nur noch farbige und formale abstrakte Studien, deren innerem Rhythmus und Wesenszusammenhang der Maler während des Entstehungsprozesses nachspürt. „Ich weiß nie vorher ganz genau, wie das Bild werden soll, das ich schaffen will. Es entwickelt sich aus dem naturgegebenen inneren Zusammenhängen aller Dinge!“ sagt Girke.

Das formale Grundprinzip der Kunst fesselt diesen jungen Mann. Zur Zeit versucht er, „mit ihm“ grafisch fertig zu werden. Linol- und Holzschnitt sind im Entstehen.

In enger Beziehung zu diesen kompositionellen künstlerischen Versuchen steht Raymund Girkes Liebe zur Musik und dem Klang der gut gütigen Worte. So ist verständlich, daß ihm auch der Schauspielberuf gelte.



ILL. 3

am 14. februar 1951 um 20 uhr beginnt in den räumen der galerie selde (elms-helln-11-strasse 6. hste 19 bis selde gorgenhst), der ange-kündigte hochstudienkreis unter leitung von frau erna bouhoulle. wenn sie interessiert sind, dann teilzunehmen. bitten wir sie, sich das flucher-buch „zeichen und gestalt“ mitzubringen.

zur selben zeit beginnt in den räumen eine aus-stellung mit grafik und bleistiftzeichnungen von ra'mond girke (1930*) und arbeiten von brigitte weyer (1934*), die bis ende mürz dauern wird. zu einem besuch sind sie werktags zwischen 16 und 19 uhr stets willkommen.

ILL. 4



ILL. 5



ILL. 6



ILL. 7



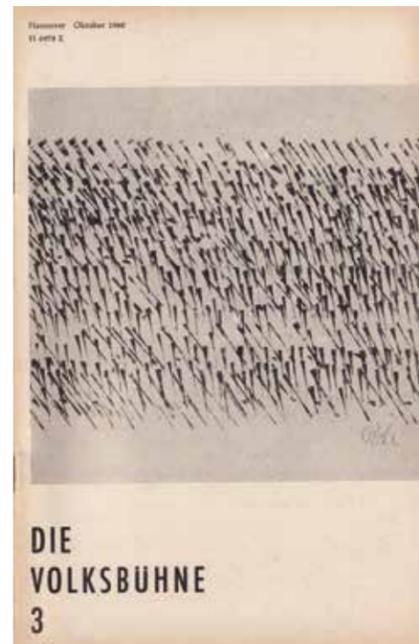
ILL. 9



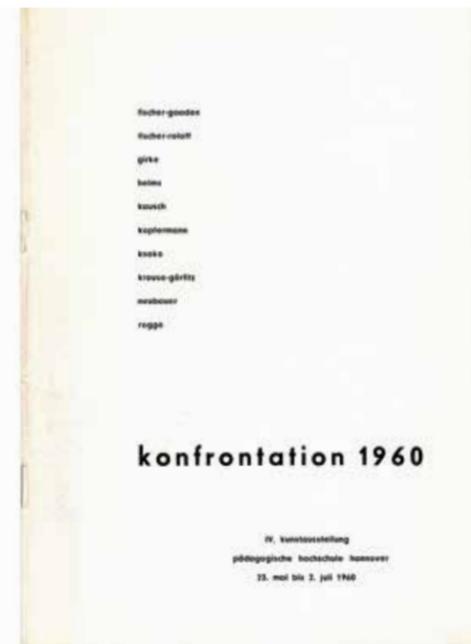
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1948–1961

- ILL. 1 Self-portrait, 1948. Pen drawing, 17 × 18.5 cm, as printed in the catalogue *Grau der Ursprung*, a publication for Galerie Edith Wahlandt's exhibition of Girke's pencil drawings from 2001.
- ILL. 2 Portrait of the student artist, ca. early 1950s.
- ILL. 3 *Neue Ruhr Zeitung* article about Girke's exhibition in the offices of the newspaper's Duisburg department. The title can be translated as "He never knows beforehand".
- ILL. 4 Invitation to the artist's exhibition of graphics and pencil drawings, together with work by Brigitta Weyer, Girke's first wife, at Galerie Adam Seide, Hanover, 1958.
- ILL. 5 *Neue Presse* article about the Painting Prize that Girke won on the occasion of *Junge Stadt sieht junge Kunst* in Wolfsburg's town hall, 1959.
- ILL. 6 Catalogue *Spielarten* published for Girke's exhibition with artist Jens Cords, Galerie Seide, Hanover.
- ILL. 7 Catalogue for *Das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist* at Galerie Adam Seide, Hanover, 1960. Two of Girke's zincographies were part of the catalogue. Uecker, Helms, and Drebusch also added a zincography.
- ILL. 8 *Hannoversche Presse* article about *Das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist* at Galerie Adam Seide, Hanover, 1960. Girke, "with his very lively black and white paintings", is mentioned alongside Piero Dorazio and Günter Drebusch as one of the artists already known to the gallery.
- ILL. 9 First individual catalogue (*Kleine Mappe* or small portfolio) of Girke's work, published for a solo exhibition at Galerie Seide in cooperation with Galerie Diogenes. Text by Dietrich Helms, Günter Meisner, Saint-John Perse, and Girke.



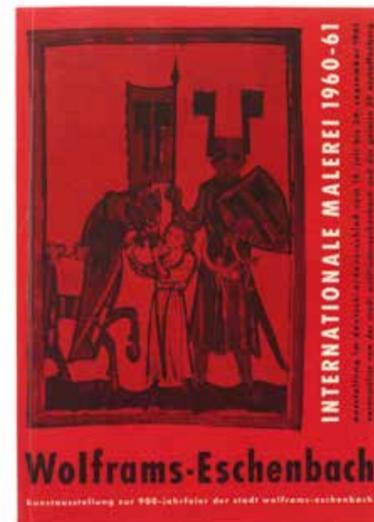
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ILL. 13



ILL. 14

1960–1961

- ILL. 10 The journal *Die Volksbühne* about art institutions in Hanover with text by Dietrich Helms. Girke's stamp drawing is on the cover.
- ILL. 11 Catalogue for *Konfrontation 1960* at the Pädagogische Hochschule Hannover. Participating Hanoverian artists included Heimar Fischer-Gaaden, Heinz Fischer-Roloff, Dietrich Helms, and Sigrid Kopfermann.
- ILL. 12 Poster for *Monochrome Malerei*, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, 1960, curated by Udo Kultermann. Design by Gerhard von Graevenitz. For a list of participating artists, see p.32 in this volume.
- ILL. 13 Catalogue of *Internationale Malerei 1960–61*, Deutschordensschloss, Wolframs-Eschenbach, 1961, curated by Will Grohmann. Organised by the city and Galerie 59, Aschaffenburg (Heiner Ruths), the exhibition took place for Wolfram von

Eschenbach's anniversary. Cover features a portrait from the Codex Manesse (Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift), ca.1300. Participating artists included: Hermann Bartels, Hajo Bleckert, Enrico Castellani, Roberto Crippa, Piero Dorazio, Lucio Fontana, Ruth Francken, Rupprecht Geiger, Hermann Goepfert, Gottfried Honegger, Yayoi Kusama, Maria Lassnig, Walter Leblanc, Piero Manzoni, Georg Karl Pfahler, Lothar Quinte, Arnulf Rainer, Francesco Lo Savio, Jef Verheyen, Jirō Yoshihara, and Herbert Zangs.

ILL. 14 Ibid. Girke's work *Strukturiert* from 1960 is placed next to a *Bild* by the Polish artist Stefan Gierowski.

ILL. 15 Image of a video fragment in which Girke comments on Yayoi Kusama's artwork at *Avantgarde 61*, Städtisches Museum Trier, 1961. Girke discusses the difference between the structure of the wall, mechanically assembled, and that of the painting,

which is set up according to an ordering principle. The work is part of Kusama's *Infinity Nets* series that she began after moving to New York in 1958.

ILL. 16 Announcement for *Avantgarde 61* at the Städtisches Museum Trier, 1961, curated by artist Klaus Jürgen-Fischer and museum director Curt Schweicher.

ILL. 17 Girke at the start of the 1960s.

ILL. 18 Girke on an excursion in the early 1960s, presumably with one of his students.

ILL. 19 Günther Uecker's opening speech for the exhibition *Das Einfache, das schwer zu machen ist*, Galerie Adam Seide, Hanover, 1960. Translated from the German original: *Günther Uecker. Schriften, Gedichte, Projektbeschreibung, Reflexionen*, ed. by Stephan von Wiese (St. Gallen: Erker Verlag, 1979), p.106–107.



ILL. 15



ILL. 16



ILL. 17



ILL. 18

GÜNTHER UECKER »LECTURE ON WHITE«

*Opening speech for the first Girke
exhibition, 1961*

You can say that a painter paints with white paint.

This white can consist of a combustion substance like zinc white, white lead or titanium white.

This powder is bound with resin, spread on the canvas and rhythmically structured.

This way of putting things presupposes a materialistic viewpoint according to which everything is static and can be altered by man.

I try to see it in a different way.

It is hard to deny that white exerts a great fascination, whether you experience it at a great height in a plane, as snow in winter, or as white paint on canvas. Every artist initially has a great respect for white, as you yourself know or have heard from other artists. How often have I heard it said that before you start painting, you should dirty the white sheet because it interferes with subjective sensations and the production of these sensations.

Picasso often accepted white, but inscribed an abstract human form of existence in it, the black as the receptive element, demanding light. Malevich gave this a concrete form in his black square on white. All serious monists (known to us as monks) in different cultures strove for white as the absolute experience of being, where the borders between being and non-being are blurred and a new existence looms. Space as white space, as a space of spiritual being, became evident in the cell of the Christian monks, in Islamic communities where any depiction of human or divine being was officially prohibited. Pre-Gregorian monotonous chanting attempted to articulate white in prayer.

ILL. 19

This meditative singing, which repeats and modulates one melodic line, aims at enabling man to be transported to, and merged with a spiritual realm.

In Buddhism, the experience of emptiness is a phenomenological state achieved not by means of prayers or abstract spaces, but by becoming sensitized to the point of emptiness, until one is transported into the realm of the non-imaginable.

Yves Klein was able to furnish us with the experience of a zone of emptiness in a room of emptiness at the Iris Clert gallery in Paris, and in his Theatre of Emptiness. That demonstration had a great impact on very many artists, who saw white as a new idiom in which to communicate their spiritual experiences. Here man is accepted in his totality. He betakes himself to, and into that idiom, and what takes place between him and the information provided by an artist can enable him to participate, to be included in the creative process.

Here man does not need to bond with a simile for himself in a painting, but can experience a visual phenomenon within himself, without translation.

To return to my work: Here you see a soft staccato, a legible white zone, whose subtlety stirs our most sensitive emotions, which procures for us a new world of tiny nuances, of stillness, far from all the clamour.

*In: Schriften Günther Uecker – Gedichte Projektbeschreibung Reflexionen,
Erker-Verlag, St. Gallen/Switzerland, 1979, pages 106 and 107*



ILL. 26



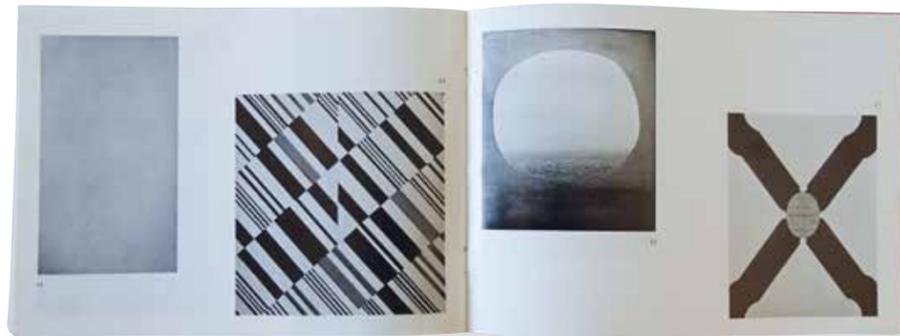
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ILL. 28



ILL. 29



1964-1965

- ILL. 26 Correspondence about the exhibition, *Möglichkeiten* within the framework of the Deutscher Künstlerbund, at Haus am Waldsee, Berlin, Germany. Girke is one of the participating artists who previously also showed work at Galerie d, Frankfurt am Main.
- ILL. 27 Invitation to solo exhibition at Studio Hanckel, 1964. The opening speech was given by the critic and collector Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen.
- ILL. 28 *Cuxhavener Allgemeine* article about a residence by Girke in Fort Kugelbake, Cuxhaven, 1964. The photo on the right shows Girke with his first wife, Brigitta Weyer, and their three children.

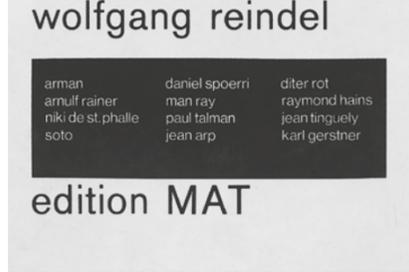
- ILL. 29 Catalogue of *L'art jeune contemporain en Allemagne*, Musée d'art moderne de Paris, 1964, curated by Franz Roh as part of Salon Comparaisons. In the catalogue, Girke's work was displayed alongside those of Günter Fruhtrunk, Rupprecht Geiger, and Klaus Jürgen-Fischer.
- ILL. 30 Poster for *Aktuell 65* at Galerie Aktuell, Bern – the gallery co-founded by Christian Megert a year earlier. It's one of the exhibitions in which Girke was selected under the heading *Zero*.

- ILL. 31 Poster for the duo exhibition of Girke and Wolfgang Reindel at Galerie Loehr, Frankfurt am Main.
- ILL. 32 Opening of *Lucio Fontana – Hermann Goepfert – Jef Verheyen* at Galerie Situationen 60, Berlin, 1965. The exhibition was later held at Galerie Loehr, Frankfurt am Main. Girke, who had a solo exhibition at Dorothea Loehr earlier that year, can be seen at left. Gazing down with glasses is Dietrich Helms. Photo by Jürgen Graaff.

cairoli, gerstner, knifer, mari, mavignier picelj, rot, talman, adrian, lassus castellani, de marco, miranda, von graevenitz, kämmer, lippold, müller, pohl, staudt, tomasello, zehringer, alviani, apollonio, greenham groupe de recherche d'art visuel gegr. 1960, in paris. rossi, le parc, morellet, sobrino, stein, yvaral, durante gruppe N gegr. 1960, in padua. biasi, costa, landi, massironi, chiggo equipo 57 gegr. 1960, in spanien. duarte, duart, ibarola, serrano, cuenca gruppe t gegr. 1960, in milano. boriani, anceschi, colombo, de vecchi, varisco new york, gruppe. rickey, wilke, goodyear, neal, jan z bern, gruppe. weber, lüthi, rätz, distel, vivian, geisbühler, berger ordo-darmstadt. gosewitz, kissel, klomdorff, lukowski, thoms, wegener zero. mack, piene, uecker, klein, manzoni, fontana, peeters, de vries, schoonhoven, armando, göepfert, megert, verheyen dries girke indiana soto, bury, takis, vasarely, tinguely, kramer, goeritz, munari, bill, honegger holweck, vigo, schmidt, maino, luther, aubertin, haacke, salentin, cremer, ganzevoort, graubner, kusama, simeti, lo savio, hoyland, dorazio, spindel, tellesch, cruz-diez, christen, leblanc, bischoffshausen, kiender, ay-o, aue, kristl, ludwig, oehm, rainer, bartels

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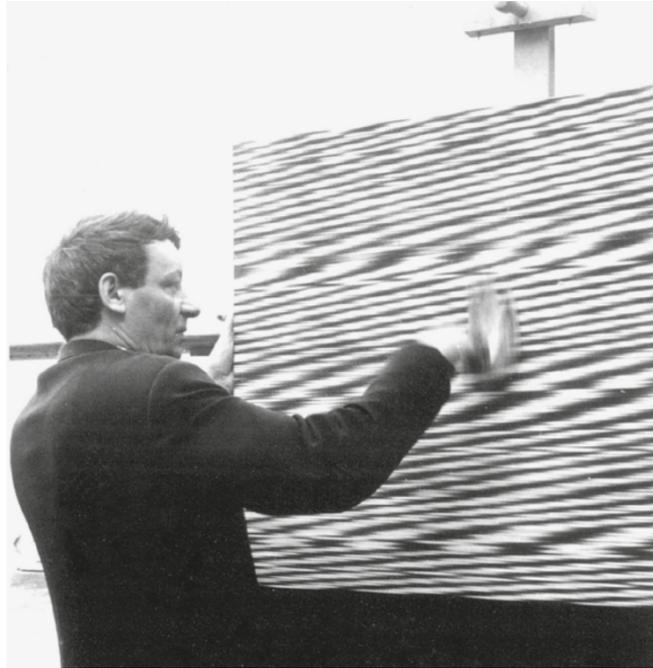
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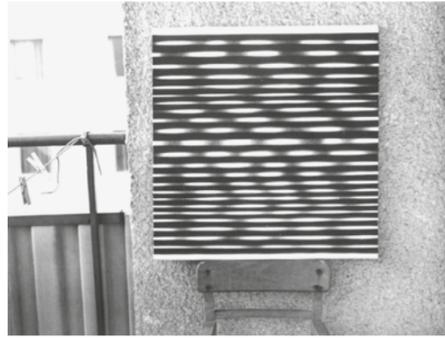
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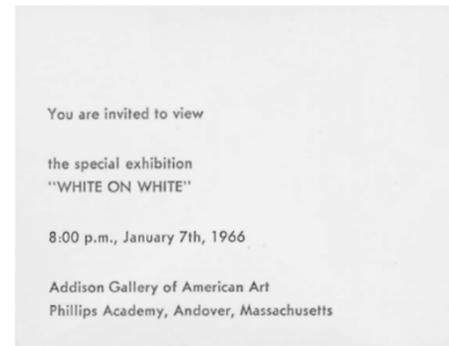
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ILL. 33



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ILL. 35



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ILL. 37

1965–1966

ILL. 33 Artist in his studio, producing a painting from the series *Fluktuationen*.

ILL. 34 Painting from the series *Fluktuationen*, photographed on the balcony of Girke's home in Hanover.

ILL. 35 Invitation to *White on White*, at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.

ILL. 36 Catalogue for Girke's first participation in an American exhibition: *White on White*, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts, curated by Frederick P. Walkey, 1965. The exhibition travelled to the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Sixty-five

artworks included work by Yayoi Kusama, Lucio Fontana, Walter Leblanc, Günther Uecker, Otto Piene, George Lloyd-Jones, Paolo Scheggi, Antoni Tàpies, Jack Youngerman, and others.

ILL. 37 Cover image of the catalogue of the biennial *Herbstausstellung niedersächsischer Künstler*, 1965, organised since 1907 in the Kunstverein Hannover.

ILL. 38 Published for solo exhibition at galerie h, Hanover, 1966. The gallery existed only for a short time, and this is one of seven publications that were issued. The first was about Gotthard Graubner; the second about Siegfried Neuenhausen; the fourth about the exhibition *Polke/Richter*; the fifth about Jiří Kolář; the sixth about Antonio Calderara,

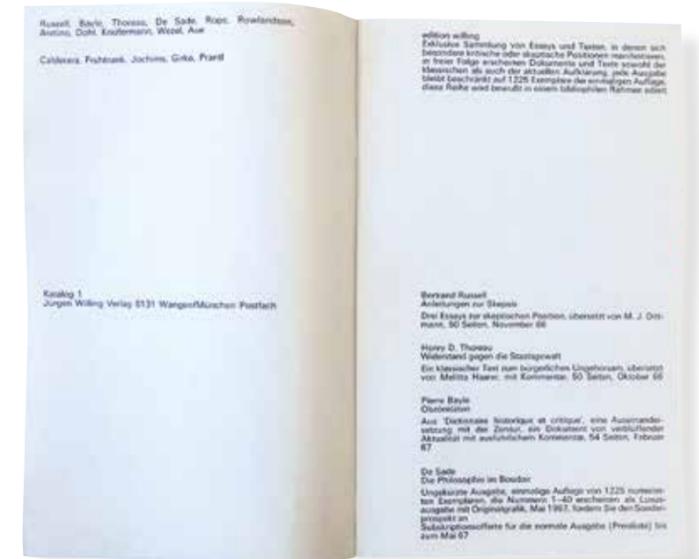
and the last about Konrad Lueg. Girke acquired from Richter the small canvas, *Umgeschlagenes Blatt* (1965, catalogue raisonné 70–4), which is now in the Gerhard Richter Archiv / Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

ILL. 39 *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* article about solo exhibition in galerie h, 1966. The title can be translated as "Spatial movement in white". For the full reproduction of the article, see page 394 in this volume.

ILL. 40 Exhibition view of solo show at galerie h, 1966. Several of his works titled, *Fluktuation*, are on display.



ILL. 38



ILL. 39



ILL. 40