

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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## 1993 COLLECTORS COMMITTEE GIFTS ANNOUNCED

Washington, D.C. -- Two paintings created in 1992 by leading German artists have been acquired for the National Gallery of Art by its Collectors Committee, director Earl A. Powell III announced today. They are Sigmar Polke's Hope is: Wanting to Pull Clouds, a grand statement in scale and subject on a romantic theme, and Gerhard Richter's Abstract Painting 780-1, a work of rich, brilliantly hued paint and dark moody passages for a lush, visual effect.

"We are thrilled to have acquired these inspiring, beautiful paintings by two of the most important artists working in Germany today," said Powell. "While we own prints by both, these are the first paintings in our collection by Polke and Richter. Together with Anselm Keifer's monumental Zim Zum (1990), a gift of our Collectors Committee in 1990, they form the core of our growing presentation of the influential currents of contemporary European art."

Sigmar Polke, one of the most innovative contemporary artists, is recognized as a living master of epic and allegorical subjects. His work moves between comic and disturbing imagery and entirely abstract compositions. Hope is: Wanting to Pull Clouds depicts the figure of a boy, probably inspired by a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century German print. Wishing to reach for the clouds, he is shown pulling on ropes that sweep diagonally from one side of the canvas to the other.

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The composition accentuates the dramatic sixteen-and-a-half-foot width of the canvas, which is nearly ten feet high, and reinforces the sense of a vast aspiration. The painting expresses a romantic wish to control and even change the world, while suggesting that such a goal is achievable. These notions recall German idealist philosophies and beliefs in individual exercises of the will. The cartoonlike, dreamy picture of hope--childlike in its naive aspiration--runs counter to certain aspects of current American art, with its stridently presented social themes and prevailing cynicism.

In Abstract Painting 780-1 (1992), measuring eight-and-a-half feet high by six-and-a-half feet wide, Richter employs a tough, yet lush abstraction. Strokes and splashes of brightly hued paint are combined with deep, dark colors. Areas of thinly applied paint alternate with thick, oily ones. Richter has characterized his work as continuing the achievements of American abstract expressionists in scale and in furthering the overall nature of abstraction, especially its sense of freedom. With each work, he attempts to create a pure visual mood similar to the effects of music.

Both Polke, born in 1941 in Oels, Silesia, and Richter, born in 1932 in Dresden, came to the West from the former East Germany. In the 1960s Polke's work responded to the American styles of pop art, photorealism, and abstraction with a chilly irony. By the early 1970s, he discovered ways of overlaying imagery and mixing mediums, a style that has strongly influenced younger artists. Through combining, contrasting, and merging evocative images he has suggested a phantasmagorical world and multiple states of consciousness for which he is best known.

Hope is: Wanting to Pull Clouds employs a technique typical of the artist's recent work in which images assume an ephemeral appearance on a fragile surface. The process involves stitching together store-bought fabrics then dipping the surface in polyester resin. After drying, paint is poured onto the back of the work and the canvas shifted to create various shapes. Following this preparation, Polke paints the image itself. It took approximately one year to complete Hope is.

Richter's early work also derived from post-war American art, injecting an element of parody. In the late 1960s, he deconstructed abstract art to its bare components. While abstract painting has remained the main focus of his work since the 1970s, he has moved freely between styles and creates misty landscapes that recall German romantic painting. Beneath a tough veneer, his abstract paintings are challenging and extremely beautiful. "Art is the highest form of hope," he once said.

The Collectors Committee of the National Gallery was formed in 1975 to help select and finance commissions to fill the great public spaces of the East Building, which was then under construction. It has continued to acquire major twentieth-century paintings and sculpture for the Gallery and has also established a curatorial discretionary fund for acquiring prints, drawings, and photographs. Gifts this year include five photographs by Robert Frank, a print by Frank Stella, and a drawing by Sean Scully. The National Gallery owns five prints by Polke and ten by Richter.

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