

FORTY YEARS OF PAINTING

ROBERT STORR

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK
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This volume is published on the occasion of the exhibition **Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting**, organized by Robert Storr, Senior Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Tour of the Exhibition:

The Museum of Modern Art, New York February 14–May 21, 2002

The Art Institute of Chicago June 22–September 15, 2002

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art October 11, 2002–January 14, 2003

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. February 20–May 18, 2003

The exhibition is sponsored by Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder.

Generous support is also provided by Mimi and Peter Haas.

An indemnity has been granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

This publication is made possible by the Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund.

Additional support is provided by Leila and Melville Straus and The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

Produced by the Department of Publications, The Museum of Modern Art, New York Edited by Harriet Schoenholz Bee Design and composition by Gina Rossi and Antony Drobinski, Emsworth Design, Inc. Production by Marc Sapir Printed and bound by Dr. Cantz'sche Druckerei, Ostfildern, Germany Printed on 150 gsm PhoenixMotion Xenon

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Published by the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019 (www.moma.org)

Distributed in the United States and Canada by D.A.P. / Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York

Distributed outside the United States and Canada by Thames & Hudson, Ltd., London

Front cover: Gerhard Richter. Detail of *Abstract Picture [Abstraktes Bild]*. 1992. Oil on aluminum panel, 39½ × 39½" (100 × 100 cm). GR 778-4. Private collection

Back cover: Gerhard Richter. Reading [Lesende]. 1994. Oil on linen, 28½ × 40¾" (72.4 × 102.2 cm). GR 804. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Purchased through the gifts of Mimi and Peter Haas and Helen and Charles Schwab, and the Accessions Committee Fund

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Page 96: Gerhard Richter. Detail of *Himalaya* [*Himalaja*]. 1968. Oil on canvas, 6' 6'4" × 63" (200 × 160 cm). GR 181. Collection Gilberto Sandretto

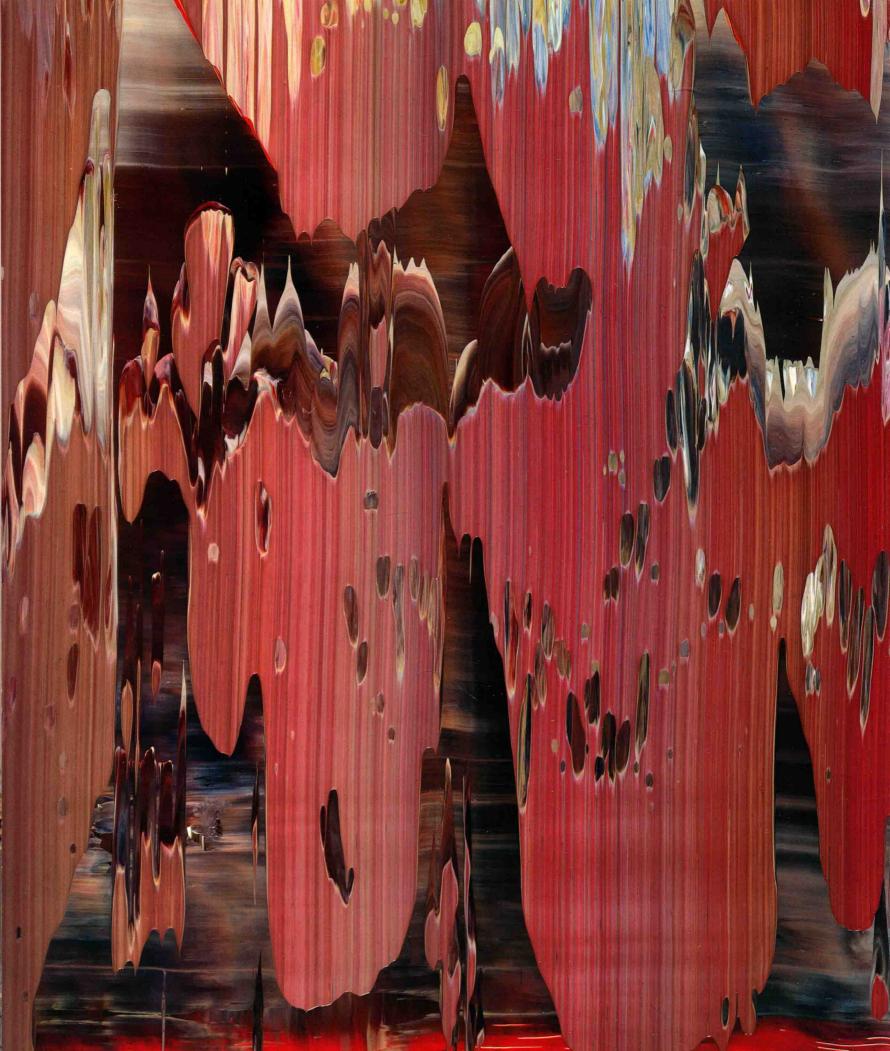
Printed in Germany

Second printing, with revisions, 2002 Third printing, 2003 Fourth printing, 2004 Fifth printing, 2007

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FOREWORD

The Museum of Modern Art is on the verge of a thoroughgoing physical and organizational transformation that will greatly increase its overall size, diversify its sites of operation, and substantially expand and innovate its programming. Nevertheless, its mission remains fundamentally unchanged: to bring the best of the art of our times to the widest possible public. In the case of the present retrospective of paintings by the distinguished German artist Gerhard Richter, the Museum is once again doing what it has traditionally done on behalf of contemporary art and the artists who challenge our ideas and perceptions: namely, provide an opportunity for engagement with the work to a wide public audience. This retrospective makes the case that exploring the development of advanced art beyond our own borders fundamentally alters and enhances our understanding of work that is better known to us. The purpose of such an exhibition, then, is to make this extraordinary body of work as familiar as that which has originated closer to home.

No artist of the postwar era merits this kind of attention more than Gerhard Richter. No other artist has placed more intriguing and rigorous demands upon specialists, interpreters, followers, and average viewers alike—nor upon himself. Richter is the author of pictures so different from one another that at first glance they seem to be by different hands. He has defined a vast pictorial and conceptual territory for himself, and has given it specific dimensions in canvases that vary from Photo-Realist figuration to total abstraction, from snapshot and postcard banality to transcendence, and from serene or pyrotechnic beauty to brooding austerity. Approaching this maze of paintings can be confusing at first, but the more one looks and the more the overt contradictions and subtle continuities of Richter's oeuvre take on substance, the more enlightening the experience becomes. In Richter's work there is pleasure and pain, sly wit and high seriousness, but above all there is a demonstration of the ways in which painting's resources are constantly replenished by the very problems it seems to pose, both for the painter and the viewer. Nobody in our own time has posed them better or solved them more inventively than Richter.

The problems of mounting such a retrospective are daunting at best, and these are surely not the best of times. Under present circumstances, we are all the more thankful for the generosity and faith in The Museum of Modern Art shown by individual collectors and institutions who have made their works available for inclusion in the most comprehensive overview of Richter's career in North America to date, and, almost certainly for years to come. Their commitment to the artist and to the continued free exchange of works of art is exemplary. The lenders to the exhibition are listed in this volume. We are also deeply grateful for the unwavering support provided for this exhibition by its sponsors Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, by Mimi and Peter Haas and Leila and Melville Straus, and for an indemnity granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. This volume has been made possible by the Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund.

On behalf of the Trustees, I would also like to express my appreciation for the extraordinary efforts of the Museum staff at every level to guarantee that this show meets the standards we have always maintained in situations of less upheaval. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the curator of the exhibition, Robert Storr, Senior Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum, who has brought to this project his tremendous intelligence and insight into contemporary art as well as a deep understanding of Richter's work.

This retrospective of art works by one of the seminal painters of the second half of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first is on view at the Museum concurrently with an exhibition devoted to Russian avant-garde books from 1910 to 1934. Together, these shows bracket much of modern art and an important chapter in this Museum's own history; as such, they represent a fitting punctuation for what is both the end of one era and the start of the next.

Glenn D. Lowry Director The Museum of Modern Art

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An exhibition of this magnitude is the work of many hands. It also reflects the combined determination of many people to make that work possible.

First of all, I would like to thank those who have cleared the path for this project to go forward. Foremost among them is Glenn D. Lowry, Director of the Museum, who has strongly supported this exhibition from its inception and has offered indispensable help along the way to maintain its integrity and find solutions to the unexpected problems of such a large undertaking. Like his commitment to the 1995 acquisition of Richter's great cycle of paintings October 18, 1977, his commitment to this retrospective underscores The Museum of Modern Art's overall intent to collect and exhibit contemporary art of the highest order internationally and with the same seriousness with which it has historically pursued classic modern art throughout its history. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Kirk Varnedoe, former Chief Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum, who gave me the best job I ever had and has supported me unstintingly in my efforts to fulfill his faith in my work. His steadfast, straightforward insistence on the highest scholarly and professional standards has been a model for me; and his friendship both in hard times and in good has been a great personal boon. In the Department of Painting and Sculpture I also want to thank my esteemed colleague Kynaston McShine, Acting Chief Curator, and grand master of the Modern, whose knowledge, wise counsel, and professional support have been invaluable; Paulo Herkenhoff, Adjunct Curator, whose enthusiasm for and imaginative response to art is the perfect antidote to the bureaucratic blues; Anne Umland, Associate Curator, whose recent peerless Giacometti exhibition, organized with Carolyn Lanchner, former Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum, inspired many thoughts for the present exhibition; Cora Rosevear, Associate Curator, whose diplomatic skills considerably eased the logjam of loans; and Mattias Herold, Manager, and many others in the department who have borne the various pressures generated by this endeavor with good grace. I would also like to acknowledge the curatorial intervention of my colleague Gary Garrels, Chief Curator of Drawings and Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

The essential contributions of Catharina Manchanda, Curatorial Assistant, have been in every way critical to the research and organization of this retrospective and publication. Her in-depth understanding of the artist and his work, her intellectual gifts, and her forthright character in dealing with lenders, colleagues at this Museum, other institutions, galleries, and all the many people who have contributed to this exhibition have been exemplary. She has my sincere gratitude. Elizabeth Grady, Research Assistant, has devoted herself with admirable skills and astute attention to art-historical accuracy and administrative detail in the preparation of the exhibition and catalogue. My assistant Cary Levine has kept careful watch, in my stead, over the ongoing demands of the department, over all the exigencies and details involved in the preparation of the exhibition, over my difficult schedule, and miraculously has kept his sense of humor while doing so. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of numerous interns, translators, and research assistants: Christina Margenfeld, Lynette Roth, Judith Raum, Carmen Alvarado, Philip Glahn, and Stefan Altevogt. All have my sincere thanks.

Outside my own department, the professional staff at the Museum responsible for seeing to it that exhibition and loan contracts are negotiated, works of art are secured, cared for, and properly installed have performed with customary but extraordinary zeal and the utmost regard for the technical and aesthetic demands of such a retrospective. Moreover, with the present turmoil in the world and the complex preparations for moving the Museum to a temporary site as soon as the exhibition has ended, they have managed to do so admirably under difficult circumstances. First among them, I would like to acknowledge Jennifer Russell, Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Collections Support, New York's doyenne of exhibition practice and diplomacy. I am also greatly in debt to Maria De Marco Beardsley, Coordinator of Exhibitions; Jerome Neuner, Director of Exhibition Design and Production, and Mari Shinagawa-Thanner, Production Manager; Peter Omlor, Manager of Art Preparation and Handling, and the Preparators, with whom I share the challenge and pleasure of actually getting the show onto the walls.

A special thanks also goes to Ramona Bronkar Bannayan, who, prior to becoming Director of Collections Management and Exhibition Registration, served as Manager in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, and in that capacity smoothed the way for much of the organization of the exhibition. In the Registrar's Department, she has been ably supported by Jennifer Wolfe, Senior Assistant Registrar, and Seth Fogelman, Assistant Registrar. James Coddington, Chief Conservator, Anny Aviram, Conservator, and Michael Duffy, Associate Conservator, have attended to the condition and protection of the artist's works with their usual care.

This volume is the second book on the artist produced by the Museum within the past year and half, and with its companion volume, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, it represents an exceptional effort on behalf of all concerned. I owe an enormous amount to Michael Maegraith, Publisher, for having supported both books to the limit of his resources and with his own critical perspective on the subject at hand. Gina Rossi, Senior Book Designer, and Antony Drobinski, of Emsworth Design, Inc., have worked tirelessly, patiently, and imaginatively to arrive at a design format that shows Richter's work to best advantage. As in the past, Marc Sapir, Director of Production, has supervised the book's production with the hand of a craftsman and the eye of a painter, and it was as one artist talking to another that he and Richter sat down to correct proofs and review layouts. Harriet Schoenholz Bee, Editorial Director, made it possible for me to write this book by reading and editing it section by section with such patience and such attention to sound and sense that the harried author was able to maintain his concentration and keep moving forward. I have been fortunate in my editors before, but never luckier, or more grateful, than in the case of the two Richter books.

There are many others at the Museum I will want to thank in person, but publicly I would like to acknowledge Patty Lipshutz, General Counsel, Stephen Clark, Associate General Counsel, Nancy Adelson, Assistant General Counsel; Mary Lou Strahlendorff, former Director of Communications, Kim Mitchell, Acting Director of Communications; Josiana Bianchi, Public Programs Coordinator; Ed Pusz, Director, Graphic Design, Claire Corey, Production Manager, Graphic Design; Cassandra Heliczer, Associate Editor, Publications, Chris Zichello, Production Manager, Publications; Mikki Carpenter, Director of Imaging Services, Kate Keller, Chief Fine Arts Photographer, Tom Griesel, Fine Arts Photographer, John Wronn, Fine Arts Photographer; Milan Hughston, Chief of Library and Museum Archives, Janis Ekdahl, Senior Librarian, and Jenny Tobias, Associate Librarian. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the strong support this project has received from Michael Margitich, Deputy Director for External Affairs, and Monika Dillon, Director of Development. Without their knowledge and foresight, none of the foregoing would have been possible.

Assistance has come from many quarters outside the Museum as well. In particular, I am indebted to Marian Goodman and the staff at her gallery, which represents the artist in this country, for many crucial contributions to this project. I would also like to thank Anthony d'Offay, who until recently represented the artist in London. Thanks are also extended to David Zwirner and Massimo Martino for their kind assistance with loans. Richter's assistants Frank Wickert and Doris Lohmann have been patient and thorough in answering our constant questions, and Hubert Becker has also been of real help during our visits to the studio. Among many to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for their generous assistance with research are René Block, Manfred Bolz, Hubertus Butin, Dorothée Fischer, and Bernd Lutze.

On the art historical side, I want to acknowledge the work of the many writers who have taken on this artist as their focus. It had been our intention to publish a book of readings that would gather some of these texts together in order to give voice to diverse views and to show the overall breadth and depth of Richter criticism in English as well as other languages. Compilation of this volume was nearly complete when the economic consequences of the events of September 11, 2001, began to be felt, and publication had to be deferred. We hope that this book will eventually see the light, but I would simply like to say, in this context, that I have learned much from the fine essays of my fellow critics and historians, even and perhaps especially those with whom I respectfully disagree, and I wish to recognize their contributions to my own thinking.

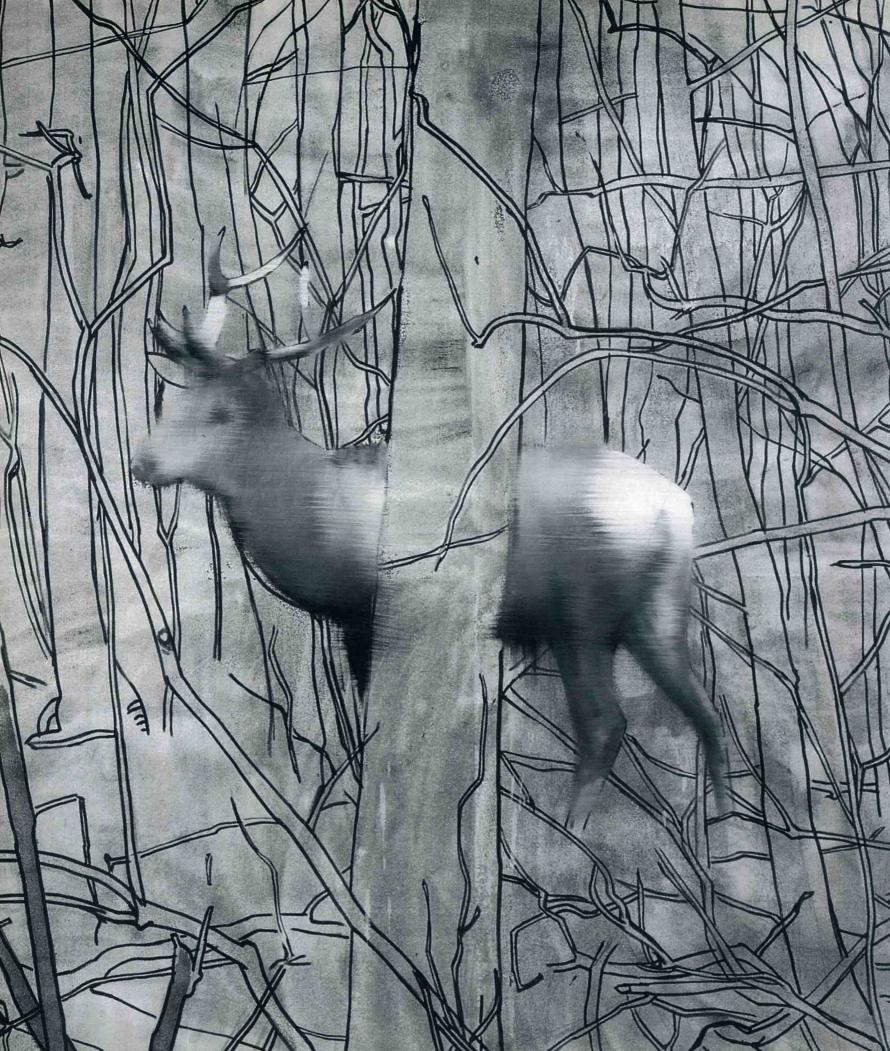
On a personal note, I wish to acknowledge publicly my aunt Gabriele Vawter, who experienced many of the events described or alluded to by the artist in our many conversations and in his art. My understanding of Germany before, during, and after World War II has been deeply enriched by the stories she told to me from my childhood onward; sometimes harsh, sometimes funny, those stories introduced me early on to the idea that oral history contains all the ideological, psychological, moral, and imaginative complexity of the written kind. Combined with the testimony of other German expatriates in whose company I grew up, her vivid descriptions of the ambiguities of that place and those times began my "research" for this book long before I could read.

In closing, I gratefully acknowledge the immense debt owed by the Museum and its public to the lenders to the exhibition, listed in this volume, without whose generosity this show would not have been possible. Also, it bears reiterating the gratitude expressed by our director Glenn Lowry to those whose magnanimity made this show happen: I second his thanks to Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, Mimi and Peter Haas, and Leila and Melville Straus, as well as the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities for the indemnity it has granted the exhibition, and the Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund for its support of this book. And last but not least, I want to offer my special thanks to the artist Gerhard Richter and his wife Sabine Moritz for having welcomed a stranger into their midst with such warmth and for having cooperated so completely in a project that surely complicated life and just as surely carried with it all the worries that attend any close scrutiny of an artist's career. I hope that the results vindicate their trust, but even more than that I hope this endeavor expresses the extraordinary regard in which The Museum of Modern Art holds Gerhard Richter's achievement.

Robert Storr Senior Curator Department of Painting and Sculpture

FORTY YEARS OF PAINTING

ROBERT STORR



INTRODUCTION

"WHEN WE HAVE TO CHANGE AN OPINION ABOUT ANYONE, WE CHARGE HEAVILY TO HIS ACCOUNT THE INCON-VENIENCE HE THEREBY CAUSES US."

—Friedrich Nietzsche¹

The present retrospective of paintings by Gerhard Richter is long overdue. As the first comprehensive exhibition of the work of the seventy-year-old German artist to appear in New York, it follows two previous surveys held over a decade ago in other parts of the country. The first was a synoptic overview consisting of only twenty-two paintings, organized in 1987 by John T. Paoletti for the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, as part of its Matrix series, a program usually focused on emerging artists. That Richter was fifty-five when the show opened indicates the lag in recognition his paintings have met in the United States, although on that occasion the art critic Roberta Smith, in *The New York Times*, hailed the artist as "one of the most important West German painters of the postwar period." ²

Close on the heels of the Hartford show, the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto widened the public's view of Richter in 1988 with an eighty-painting survey of his career that traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, organized by Roald Nasgaard and I. Michael Danoff. In the fifteen years since that exhibition, Richter has become an increasingly visible figure in American galleries, group or thematic shows at museums, and exhibitions devoted to one or another aspect of his work, such as the presentation of Richter's cycle of canvases *October 18*, 1977, at The Museum of Modern Art in 2000, and *Gerhard Richter in Dallas Collections*, which opened the same year, and which, along with a selection of paintings, also included a complete set of the artist's multiples recently acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art.

The fact remains, however, that compared to American contemporaries of comparable achievement—Jasper Johns and Robert Ryman, to name two—Richter is relatively unfamiliar to the general American public, and still insufficiently known or understood by the dedicated audience for modern art. Only two years older than Richter, Johns (who was born in 1930), has had three full-scale retrospectives in New York, not counting exhibitions of his drawings and his prints; still other exhibitions elsewhere in the country have concentrated on particular series of pictures. Ryman (also born in 1930) has had two large New York retrospectives and one moderately sized one. If one were to add to this list somewhat older artists, such as Roy Lichtenstein—whose early Pop images helped spur Richter to make paintings of equal radicality within months of seeing them—or Robert Rauschenberg, who, along with Lichtenstein, had a powerful impact on Richter's friend Sigmar Polke—the discrepancy between the attention given American artists of the post-Abstract Expressionist generation and that paid to leading painters on the opposite side of the Atlantic (not to mention other parts of the world) becomes more glaring.

Things have not been much better—and sometimes have been worse—for European artists who came of age before Richter. Joseph Beuys, Richter's mercurial colleague on the faculty of the Art Academy (Kunstakademie) in Düsseldorf, and among the most influential experimental artists of his period, has had only one American retrospective (at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1979) and one large survey of his drawings (at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art in 1993–94). Lucio Fontana, a vital link between prewar and postwar Italian avant-gardes, who helped open Richter's eyes to modernism, has had only one retrospective in New York (at the Guggenheim in 1977); and Marcel Broodthaers, a cryptic but essential counterforce to Pop art and a seminal figure in Conceptual art, with whom Richter collaborated in the early 1970s, was given a retrospective by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1989, which never made it to New York. Finally, two artists in whom Richter has expressed scant interest but who helped set the stage for him and his contemporaries, Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni, have found even less favor. A Klein retrospective was held at The Jewish Museum in New York in 1967, after which none has been mounted in the United States; and Manzoni has had only two gallery exhibitions and no American retrospective.