

PART

—ing

to a DAY





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Dirk Braeckmann  
Jason Brooks  
Glenn Brown  
Vija Celmins  
Chuck Close  
Marlene Dumas

Richard Estes  
Johannes Kahrs  
Karen Kilimnik  
Martin Kippenberger  
Lucy McKenzie  
Tim Maguire  
Richard Patterson

Elizabeth Peyton  
Richard Prince  
Gerhard Richter  
Rudolf Stingel  
Agus Suwage  
Jeff Wall  
Zhang Xiaogang

# Photography



Photographs, and especially reproductions of them, are ubiquitous: in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, on the internet. We know of most people through photographs rather than actual encounters. The Indonesian artist Agus Suwage never met Marilyn Monroe, but he knows her image just as we do: it is an icon of female beauty, something effectively mythical / **113** /. In repainting it he makes it into something both strange and personal by adding her left hand holding a cigarette. He did the same to twenty-six other photographs of the famous: Frida Kahlo, David Hockney, Mother Teresa, Karl Marx, Chairil Anwar, etc. All twenty-seven paintings have been shown alongside a delivery bicycle loaded with cigarette butts. A local audience would recognize the title to the series, 'I Want to Live Another Thousand Years', as being the final line of a poem by the Indonesian poet Chairil, who died young. It is a curious way of making an image from a distant time and place one's own, but it is typical of a widespread desire to repaint photographs: to make them our own.

Photography seems to exist outside time: it freezes a moment. Painting lacks that indexical element of being made at a specific moment in a specific place. If photography is silent, painting is in comparison 'noisy' with its layering and brushmarks. A photograph of Bob Marley singing freezes that moment but it does not freeze the sound. When Suwage paints the photograph he adds lines of lumps, cloud-like, floating across the surface, emphasizing that this is not a photograph but a painting, a physical object / **112** /. A different type of experience emerges, another mood that, though no substitute for the original music, somehow stands as a potential equivalent.

The vast painting Rudolf Stingel made of a photograph of himself seems initially everyday, but also, because of its scale and the way it echoes Mantegna's famous painting of the dead Christ, it takes on a brooding quality / **111** /. Stingel's paint is dry, unimpassioned and inert, as if to echo the sepulchral feel of the image. Many paintings after photographs seem to play on death as well as timelessness. It is a puzzle: why make such a vast painting (one that he prefers to show in an otherwise empty room)? Paintings of photographs ask us to question both what photography and painting are and what they can do, how they relate. In so doing they ask deeper questions about how we relate to the world.

Perhaps the most famous paintings made after photographs are those fifteen Gerhard Richter first showed in 1989, of arrest and death of idealist young Germans who became terrorists, the Baader-Meinhof group. They are large, richly black and white paintings. To be in the room that these canvases occupy is to enter a realm of silence: people begin to whisper. Mourning may not be a cheerful process but as an act it involves making ourselves whole again after loss.

The beauty of the paintings is some recompense in itself: it helps us make ourselves at one with the world again. It reminds us of the wound but helps us feel at peace.

There is no clearer candidate in our period for the term 'masterpiece' than these fifteen paintings. If it is a masterpiece it is as a group, but it is, like all masterpieces, problematic and inimitable. They seem to offer no opinion of the actions of the Baader-Meinhof Group. Richter has further defused them by taking them from Frankfurt (from where the group had kidnapped a banker, whom they subsequently killed) and selling them to New York's Museum of Modern Art. Nevertheless, they bring to the fore three key themes in painting: our attitudes to death and mourning, our approach to history and our relationship to photography.

Richter painted from photographs because of not only the convenience, to avoid the efforts of drawing or thinking up a composition, but also because the photograph, the snapshot, is indexical, it seems factual, directly connected to reality, to a moment in time. Richter and most of the painters using photographs today do not slavishly copy the photograph but change it quite considerably. Also, it is worth pointing out, they rarely work from great or famous photographs, rather from amateur snaps or news pictures that seem in some way incomplete. Richter said,

*when I was at art school I wanted painting to have a stronger connection to reality, to be more like real life. I wanted to be a photographer because I thought it was closer to real life.... When I started to embrace the ambiguity of the image, and accepted the realization that the image can only come to life through the viewer looking at it, and that it takes on meaning through the process of looking, I began to accept painting for what it was.*

Since they were first shown Richter has tried to restrict reproduction of these paintings, determined that people should go and experience them as paintings — hence their absence here.

Compared to Richter, with his delicate feathering of the brushmarks, what Martin Kippenberger does in his *Dear Painter, Please Paint Me* / **114** / seems in crass bad taste. When Richter had dealt with sexuality (or pornography), his technique was a distancing one; Kippenberger, although likewise copying a photograph, makes involvement out of a voyeurist image: the act of painting here is energetic — like having sex. As to the less than impeccable manner in which he paints, Kippenberger preferred desire to control. If Richter brought high seriousness and conceptual strategies to painting, others such as Kippenberger were subsequently closer to burlesque or overt emotionalism. Kippenberger seems to mock



1. Rudolf Stingel  
 titled (after Sam), 2005–6.  
 on canvas, 335.3 × 457.2 cm  
 (132 × 180 in). Whitney Museum  
 of Art, New York

2. Agus Suwage  
 Bob Marley, from 'The Times  
 They are a Changing', 2007.  
 oil and acrylic on canvas,  
 100 × 145 cm (59 × 57 in)

3. Agus Suwage  
 Marilyn Monroe, from 'I Want  
 to Live Another Thousand  
 Years', 1997. Oil and acrylic  
 on canvas, 150 × 120 cm  
 (59 × 47 1/4 in)

