

November 4, 2020

Gerhard Richter believes that the purpose of art is “For surviving this world. . . . [Art] has the measure of all the unfathomable, senseless things, the incessant ruthlessness of our world. And art shows us how to see things that are constructive and good, and to be an active part of that.”

Many of you would be familiar with his paintings of candle sticks, one or two candles, lit and burning, in a refined and serene golden beige palette. This image or copies of it is often used to accompany particularly tragic death announcements or obituaries.

He paints photorealistic paintings and abstract paintings that are usually large with thick paint applied with putty knives which are then further spread with squeegee like instruments.

The Art Institute of Chicago has a nice collection of his works in the permanent collection. Please search for them online, really, please do that as copyright issues do not permit me to post them on the internet.

Gerhard was born in Dresden Germany in 1932, the year before Adolph Hitler became chancellor of Germany. His father, a teacher was drafted into the German army and his mother moved to rural areas to try and keep herself and her children safe so the artist grew up very familiar with the realities of the cruel and arbitrary possibilities of life.

He has never shrunk from dealing with that cruelty in his art, not exploiting it or simply representing it, but trying to interpret it and give hope where hope is absent. He has painted the Buchenwald concentration camps and he painted detailed portraits of people involved in the Red Army Faction, a terribly violent group of domestic terrorists that tried to breed chaos in 1970 Germany, West Germany, then, that was also called the Baader-Meinhof Gang after two prominent members of the group.

Do an internet search of Baader-Meinhof and you will learn something.

I tell you all of this that while it appears that any given moment of life may be absent hope or meaning, there are still among us people filled with hope and willing to undertake the arduous and very difficult task of rebuilding and

reaffirming in their own ways a sense of the human possibility for generous and lavish welcome and hospitality.

Do something good for someone today, this week, this month, for yourself and someone else. Look around your home, your yard, your neighborhood and take note of something that you never “saw” before, treasure it.

Get something real, a plant, a flower, food you prepare, cookies or bread or cakes you bake, and give thanks and then share it, you really need to do something real because the artificial harms your soul.

Gerhard Richter said in 1988 interview, “Art is the pure realization of religious feeling, capacity for faith, longing for God. [...] The ability to believe is our outstanding quality, and only art adequately translates it into reality. But when we assuage our need for faith with an ideology we court disaster.”

The embrace of ideology by so many identifying themselves as disciples of Christ is sad, very sad, and the diminishment of the teachings of Christ in their fullness and complexity, the cocksureness that ideology provides does not serve well the Mystery that faith is.

When we lose our capacity to long for the Mystery many call God and replace that longing with certainty we have on our hands a “golden calf” and a “golden calf” is a true fake, kitsch, novelty, a real pornography, a distortion of the good and true and beautiful.

You have the strength to be true and good and beautiful, you really do!