

Beuys, Richter, Palermo, Polke Works on Paper

March 1 – April 14, 2001

While each of these artists has achieved fame for a highly individualistic expression and style, this exhibition recalls a common past and deeply significant friendships, which developed as all four participated in the creation of the new era in German art after World War II.

The association between Beuys, Richter, Polke and Palermo began in the early 1960's at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where Beuys was a professor, the others students. The avant-garde art academy brought together Germany's most exciting young artists, who flourished under Beuys' intensely personal teaching style. This formed an alliance that was strengthened through years of friendship: studio visits, shared interests, companionship, travel, and collaborative artworks. During their time at the Kunstakademie, and in the years that followed, Palermo and Richter, and Polke and Richter collaborated and shared ideas. They presented joint exhibitions in which they juxtaposed specially created works. As Beuys confirmed, his relationship with Palermo was jointly cultivated for nearly 15 years, until Palermo's sudden and premature death in 1977. The intensity of their dialog and shared sense of excitement about art are almost palpable in the photographs of this time.

In the intervening years, the closeness between these powerful personalities has dissipated. While early works clearly demonstrated a common link, as Beuys, Richter, and Polke matured as artists, they have attained a fame and individuality that tends to obscure any shared beginning. Even Palermo, despite his short career and the scarcity of his work, is now considered to be one of Germany's most influential artists.

Perhaps the most durable accomplishment to result from their association was assisting in Germany's return to a place of prominence in contemporary art. In very little time, the country was prepared to nurture the creativity of talents as Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz, Rosemarie Trockel, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Imi Knobel, and Martin Kippenberger, among many others.