

Sigmar Polke (German, 1941–2010) was one of the most voraciously experimental artists of the twentieth century. This retrospective is the first to encompass the unusually broad range of mediums he worked with during his five-decade career, including painting, photography, film, sculpture, drawings, printmaking, television, performance, and stained glass, as well as his constant, highly innovative blurring of the boundaries between these mediums. Masquerading as many different artists—making cunning figurative paintings at one moment and abstract photographs the next—he always eluded easy categorization.

Beneath Polke's irreverent wit, promiscuous intelligence, and chance operations lay a deep skepticism of all authority—artistic, familial, religious, and governmental. It would be impossible to understand this attitude, and the creativity that grew out of it, without considering Polke's biography and its setting in twentieth-century European history: in 1945, near the end of World War II, his family fled Silesia (in present-day Poland) for what would soon be Soviet-occupied East Germany, and then escaped again, this time to West Germany, in 1953. Polke grew up at a time when many Germans deflected blame for the atrocities of the Nazi period with the alibi "I didn't see anything."

Polke scrutinized the malleability of vision. Highly attuned to the differences between appearance and reality, he was wary of the notion that there might be one universal truth. His relentlessly inventive works, ranging in size from the intimacy of a notebook to monumental paintings, collapse conventional distinctions—between high culture and low, figuration and abstraction, the heroic and the banal—allowing flux, rather than stability, to prevail.



Das Auto.

The exhibition is organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, with Tate Modern, London.

Organized by Kathy Halbreich, Associate Director, The Museum of Modern Art; with Mark Godfrey, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern, London; and Lanka Tattersall, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

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