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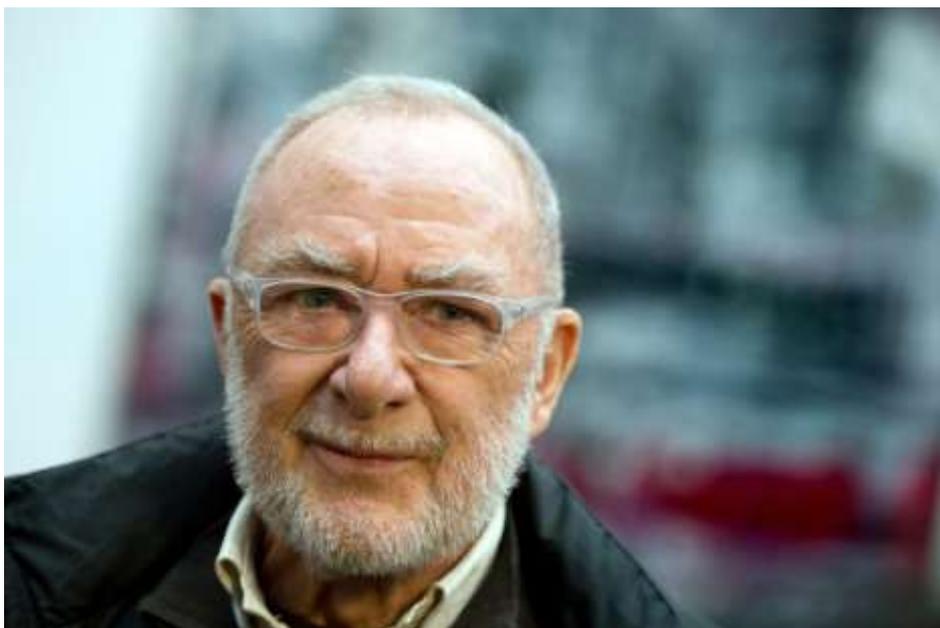
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The Man Who Scavenged Gerhard Richter's Cast-Off Sketches From the Trash Is Found Guilty of Theft

The director of the Gerhard Richter Archive became suspicious because while the works looked genuine, the backstory did not ring true.

Javier Pes, April 25, 2019



Gerhard Richter at the Albertinum museum in Dresden, 2015. Photo by Arno Burgi
AFP/Getty Images.

The saying “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure” takes on new meaning when the trash in question belongs to artist Gerhard Richter.

Richter—who is notoriously particular about what he wants to preserve for posterity, including every scrap of paperwork—was upset to discover that someone had scavenged rejected sketches from the trash outside his villa in Cologne back in July 2016. What seemed like a get-rich-quick scheme then has now landed a 49-year-old man in a German court facing a charge of theft.

A judge in a Cologne district court ruled on Wednesday that the discarded sketches—although they went out with the trash—still belong to Richter. She found the defendant guilty of theft and fined him €3,215 (\$3,500).

Richter was alerted to the scam when the man approached the Gerhard Richter Archive, which is part of the Dresden State Art Collections, to authenticate the drawings, according to *Monopol* magazine. (You have to hand it to the guy, approaching an organization affiliated with the person you stole from in order to get their official stamp of approval takes chutzpah.) The archive serves as the official repository for all the records and ephemera Richter decides to keep.

“[The sketches] were undoubtedly genuine,” the director of the archive, Dietmar Elger, told the court. But he was suspicious because they were unsigned and unframed. He was also skeptical about the defendant’s claim that he had received the pictures from an artist, who had in turn received them as a gift from Richter. Elger was confident the German artist “would never give away his pictures” in such a state.

Richter, whose paintings sell for millions—sometimes tens of millions—of dollars, now wants the confiscated pieces destroyed. “He just wanted his peace,” a police officer told the court. “The whole thing seemed to bother him.”