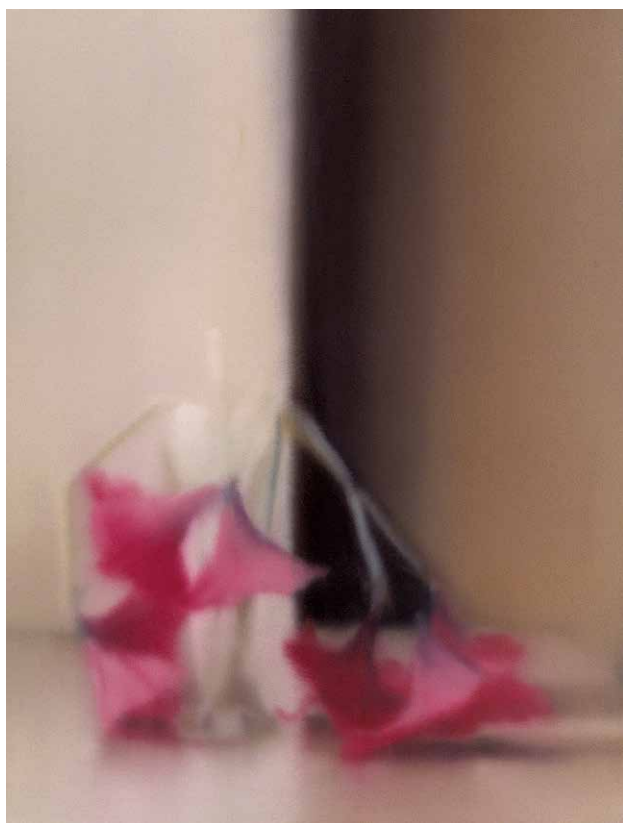




Out of focus

Another vision of art
from 1945 to the present day

Gerhard Richter,
Blumen (815-1), 1994,
oil on canvas, 71 × 51 cm
Nîmes, Carré d'Art, Musée d'Art
Contemporain de Nîmes

30 April – 18 August 2025
Musée de l'Orangerie

The *Water Lilies* have long been viewed and studied as the epitome of abstract, all-over, sensitive painting, prefiguring the immersive installations that followed. Yet the blurring that dominates vast aquatic swathes of Claude Monet's large paintings remains neglected. The exhibition takes Monet's late work as its starting point, using blurring as the key to a new reading of an entire section of modern and contemporary visual art. This blurred aesthetic, imbued with a uniquely political dimension, took root in the ruins of the Second World War. Faced with the erosion of visible certainties and the field of possibilities that lay before them, artists sought new approaches, finding inspiration in disorder, movement, the transitory, the unfinished, the doubt... Taking note of the profound upheavals in

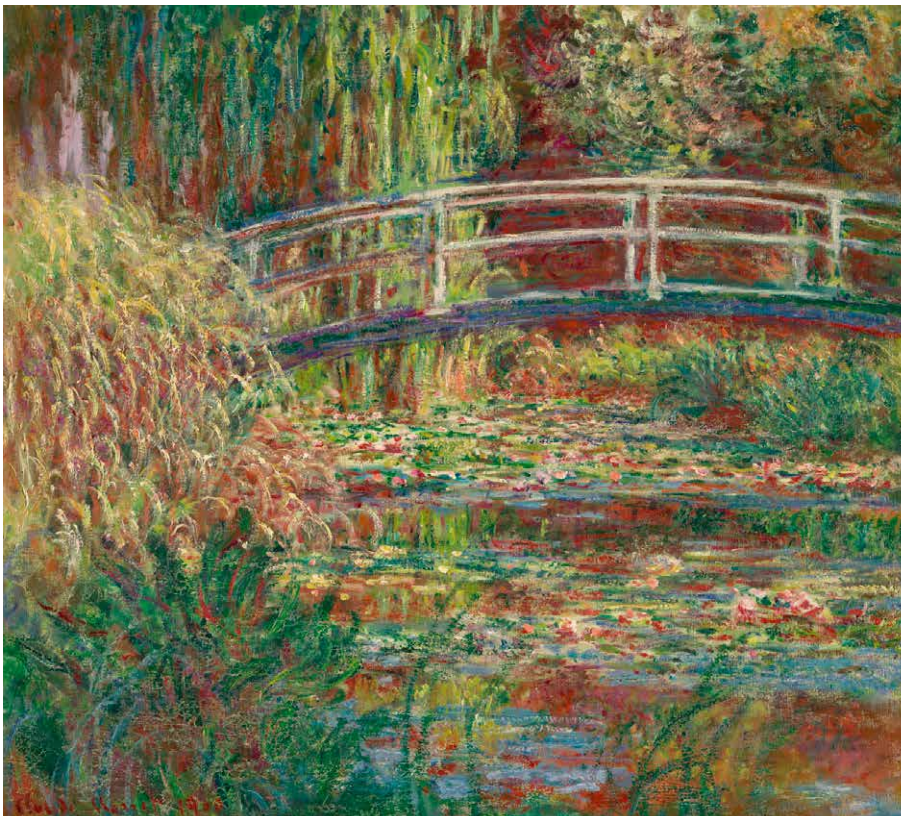
world order, they explored the indeterminate, the indistinct and the allusive, giving greater scope to the viewer's interpretation. Elusive by nature, blurring invites us to take a step back, to refrain from our constant need to focus so we can explore reality in new ways. It became the preferred means of expression for artists in a world where visibility had become blurred and instability reigned, more than ever before.

Prologue

The aesthetics of blurring existed long before the modern era. Offering imprecision to certain contours and hazy effects in the landscape, it gradually gained prominence in paintings until the atmospheric blurring of William Turner's artworks. Impressionism signalled a turning point at the end of the 19th century. At the same time, the nascent art of photography seized on the aesthetic potential in the very nature of this mechanical process, with blurring used to indicate the photographer's subjectivity. This affirmation of the artist's vision is echoed in the artworks of the Symbolists. Exploring their inner selves, these artists employed blurring to reveal what clarity of vision normally conceals from our consciousness.



1



2

1

Edward Steichen,
Balzac – The Silhouette, 4 a.m.,
1911, heliogravure,
16 × 20.5 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay

2

Claude Monet,
Le Bassin aux nymphéas, harmonie rose, 1900,
oil on canvas, 90 × 100 cm
Paris, Musée d'Orsay

3

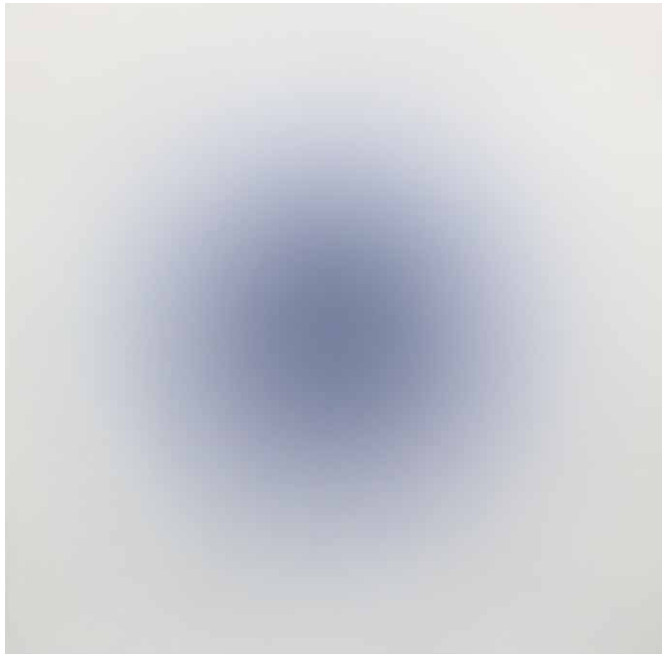
Vincent Dulom,
Hommage à Monet, 2024,
inkjet on canvas,
150 × 150 cm
Artist's collection

4

Hans Hartung,
T1982-H31, 1982,
acrylic on canvas,
185 × 300 cm
Antibes, Hartung-Bergman
Foundation

At the frontier of the visible

Artists use blurring to question our modes of perception, suggesting that we go back to the source of our gaze, encouraging us to break away from an unequivocal reading of reality. They question the limits of perception using the vocabulary of scientific imagery, from the vision of the infra-thin to the immensity of the cosmos (Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and Thomas Ruff). They shake up the traditional reference points of representation, playing with indistinctness rather than the opposition between figuration and abstraction (Mark Rothko, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Hans Hartung). Through optical effects, they test the viewer by mischievously stimulating his or her visual acuity (Wojciech Fangor, Ugo Rondinone, Vincent Dulom). By destabilising the gaze, blurring seeks to make our vision conscious of itself.



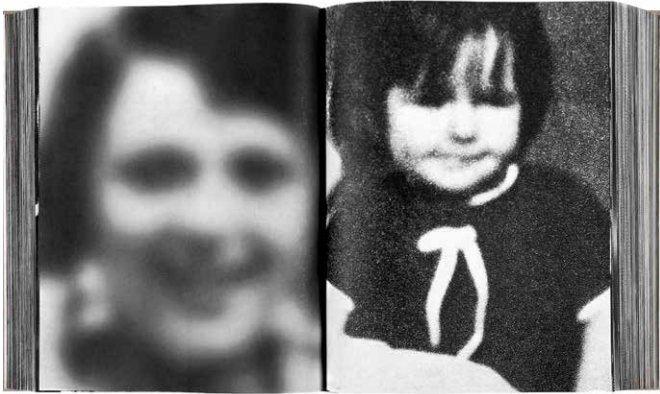
3



4

“I cannot describe anything about reality more clearly than my own relationship with reality. And this has always been associated with haziness, insecurity, inconsistency, fragmentariness and I don’t know what else.”

Gerhard Richter, “Interview with Rolf Shön”, *Gerhard Richter*, Venice Biennale, 1972, p. 74



5

Erosion of certainties

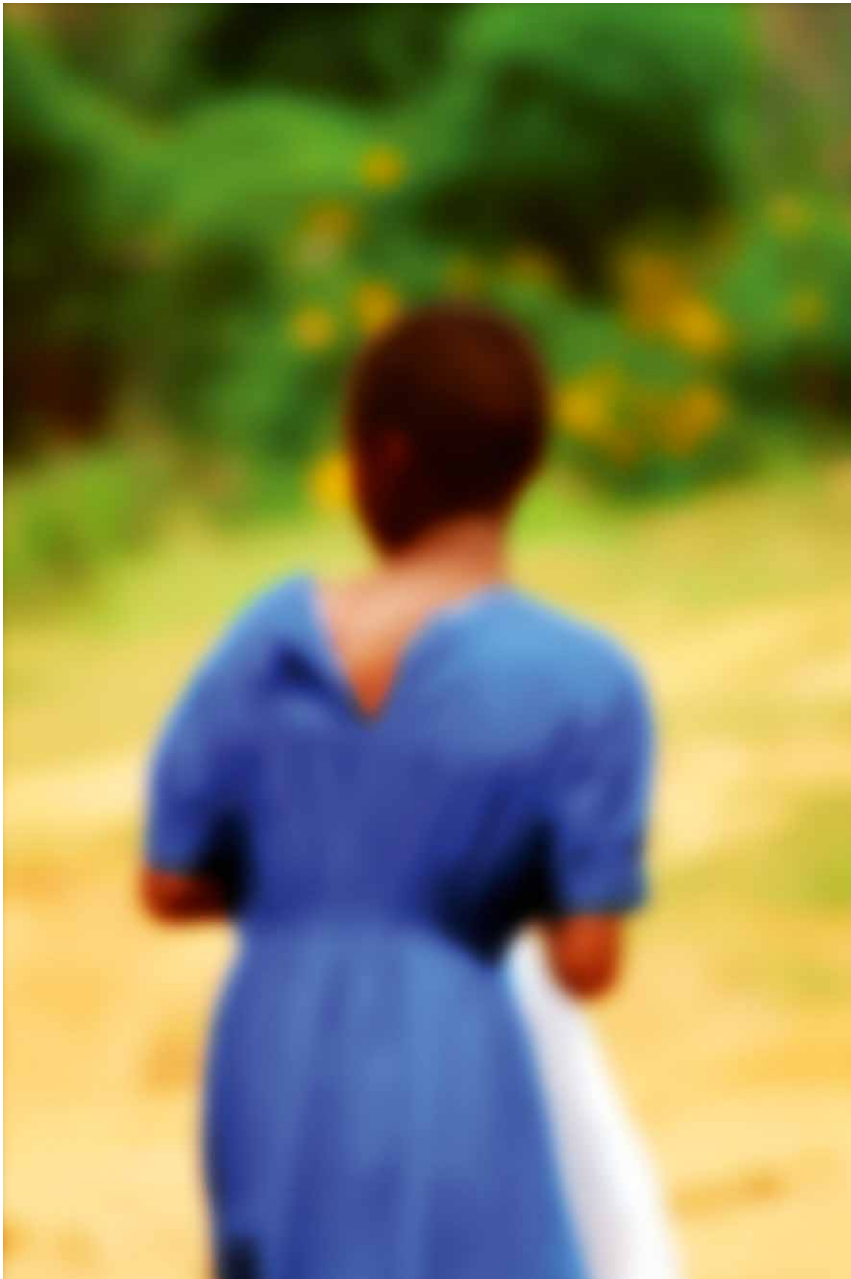
It was in the aftermath of World War II that we truly saw the political dimension of the aesthetics of blurring unfold. Following the discovery of the concentration camps and the impossibility of representing the unrepresentable, blurring came to veil a reality that the eye could not bear. And yet, the viewer must also try and focus, forced to linger on the image and stare reality in the face. Questioning the status and value of the image, these artists offer a vision that is both poetic and disenchanted with the tragedies that have marked the history of the 20th century, right up to the crises of today.



6

In praise of the indistinct

No matter what we do to define its contours, the world itself is blurry and any focus remains ephemeral. Identity, too, is blurred, elusive, constantly changing (Oscar Muñoz, Hervé Guibert, Bertrand Lavier). Between uncertain memories of the past (Eva Nielsen) the refusal of a frozen representation of the present (Mame-Diarra Niang), blurring becomes a quest for identity. The product of technical naivety perhaps, but also a guarantee of spontaneity of the moment captured, the blurring of amateur photography captures life where it is most real, showing what often escapes the eye. The disfiguring effects of this aesthetic sometimes reveal man's animal side (Francis Bacon, Pipilotti Rist).



5

Christian Boltanski
Kaddish: Menschlich, Sachlich, Örtlich, Sterblich, 1998
 Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Munich, éditions Gina Kehayoff

6

Bertrand Lavier, *MERION*, 2024,
 acrylic paint and gel medium
 on wood and dibond,
 115.5 × 97.5 × 2.5 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
 and Mennour, Paris

7

Alfredo Jaar,
Six Seconds, 2000,
 inkjet pigment print,
 238.8 × 162.6 cm
 New York, courtesy of the artist

“The value of an image can be measured by the reach of its imaginary halo, in other words, a stable and finished image stifles the imagination.”
 Gaston Bachelard, *L’Air et les songes*, Paris, Corti, 1963, p. 5-6

Uncertain futures

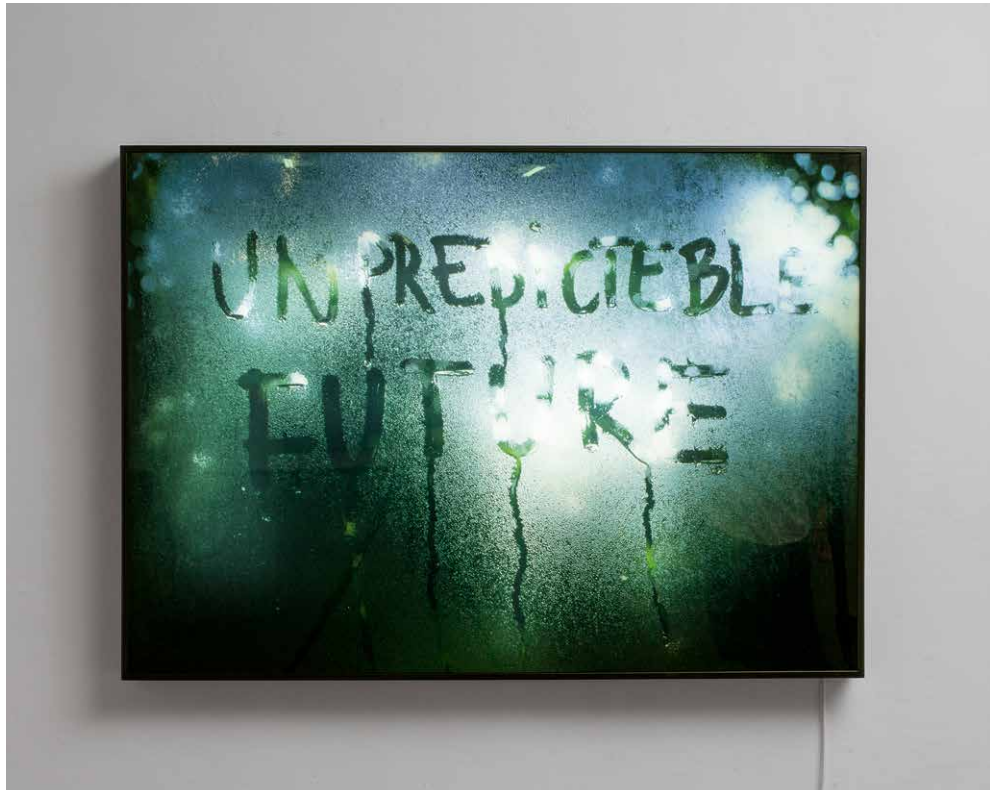
Hiroshi Sugimoto and Y.Z. Kami's relationship with spirituality, approached through sacred places and gestures, offers one possible response to contemporary uncertainties. Captured during the lockdowns of 2020, Nan Goldin's bouquet highlights the beauty and transience of everyday life in turmoil in a world losing its bearings. The question of time, raised by Marteen Baas' deceptive digital clock, or the unpredictable future foretold by Mircea Cantor, is exposed as an object of contemplation and existential interrogation. Paradoxically, blurring is both a symptom of a troubled era and a condition for a re-enchantment, a sign of anxiety and a space for reinventing possibilities.

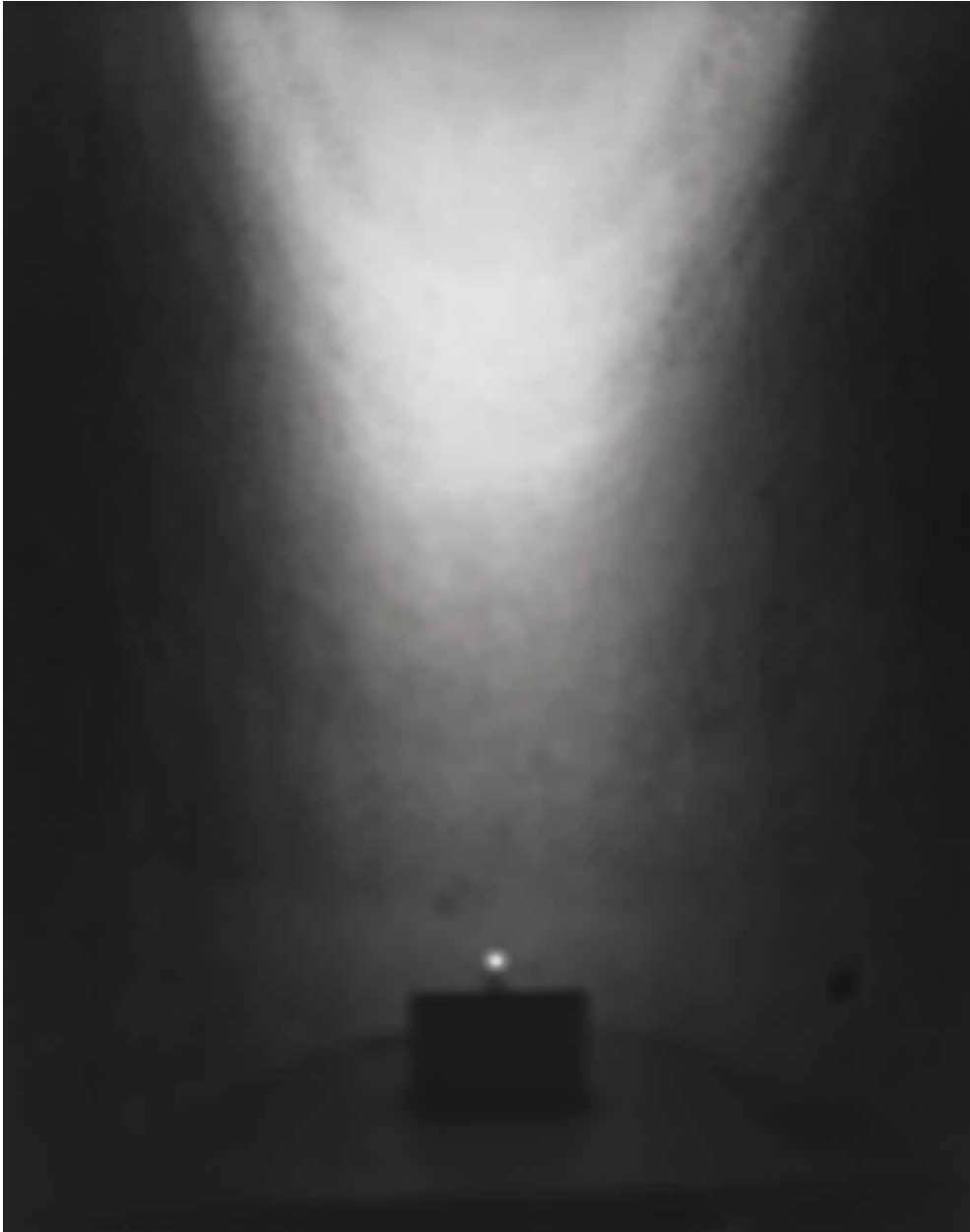
8

Mircea Cantor,
Unpredictable Future, 2015,
lightbox, 70 × 100 × 20 cm
Paris, private collection

9

Hiroshi Sugimoto,
Chapelle Notre-Dame du Haut,
1998, silver gelatin print,
150 × 200 cm
Paris, Centre Pompidou,
musée national d'Art moderne /
Centre de création industrielle





“Behind the ‘blur’ is the intuition of an impossible focus on reality, the impossibility of accounting for the world in all its fluidity, its ephemerality, its inaccuracy – and therefore of bearing witness to it.”
Jean Baudrillard, *Sommes-nous ?*, *photographies de Tendence floue*, Paris, J. Di Sciullo / Naïve, 2006, p. 165

Around the exhibition

Tours

Audioguide (French, English)

Full rate €6/ members €4

Guided tours

(French, English, FSL)

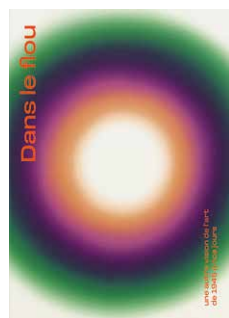
Family workshops

Programme available online

Publication

Exhibition catalogue

Co-published by Musée de l'Orangerie / Atelier EXB



Discover a video and podcast

interview with curators

Claire Bernardi and Émilie Philippot,

articles, the programme of visits

and events around the exhibition:



Programme and bookings

musee-orangerie.fr



#DansLeFlou

Curators:

Claire Bernardi, General Curator,
Director of the Musée de l'Orangerie

Émilie Philippot, Chief Curator,
Deputy Director of Studies
at the Institut National
du Patrimoine, Paris

In collaboration with
Juliette Degennes, Curator,
Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris

In media partnership with:

Libération, *Transfuge*,
Les Inrockuptibles, Radio Nova,
Le Bonbon.

Exhibition organised by
the Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris,
in collaboration with
the "la Caixa" Foundation.



The exhibition will take place
at the CaixaForum Madrid, from
September 16th, 2025,
to April 12th, 2026, and at the
CaixaForum Barcelona, from May
19th to September 27th, 2026.

Publication edited by:

Sylvain Amic, President of the
Établissement Public du Musée d'Orsay
et du Musée de l'Orangerie, and
Claire Bernardi, Director of the Musée
de l'Orangerie, Paris.

Design: Visitor services department.

Editorial supervision: Publications
department.

Design: Marie Pellaton.

Layout: Communications department.

Printed by: on recycled paper, France,
Fabrègue.

© Établissement Public du Musée
d'Orsay et du Musée de l'Orangerie –
Valéry-Giscard-d'Estaing, 2025

Photographic credits

Couverture, © Gerhard Richter 2025 (0002);
1: © musée d'Orsay, dist. RMN-Grand Palais /
Patrice Schmidt; **2:** © RMN-Grand Palais (musée
d'Orsay) / Adrien Didierjean; **3:** © avec l'aimable
autorisation de l'artiste et de la Galerie ETC
(Paris) / musée d'Orsay / Allison Bellido
Espichan; **4:** © Fondation Hartung-Bergman;
5: © Bibliothèque du musée de l'Orangerie.
La numérisation des documents conservés
à la bibliothèque du musée de l'Orangerie a été
réalisée par l'atelier photographique du musée
d'Orsay; **6:** © photos Archives Mennour. Courtesy
the artist and Mennour, Paris; **7:** © Courtesy of
the artist, New York; **8:** © Courtesy of the artist
and Dvir Gallery; **9:** © Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Statement of Copyright

© Gerhard Richter 2025 (04032025)
© Hiroshi Sugimoto
© Adagp, Paris, 2025: The estate of Edward
Steichen, Vincent Dulon, Hans Hartung,
Christian Boltanski, Bertrand Lavier, Alfredo Jaar,
Mircea Cantor.