

## **Behind Frosted Glass**

Reflection and Blurriness / Memory / Rapture

Blurriness as a characteristic property of memory / Mirroring as a characteristic of life's presence /

The undead have no mirror image.

Blurriness, not painted but created through frosted glass overlaid on sharply painted contours.

The frosted glass is a filter, a CODE – like the pane of glass, the transparent mirror in later pictures, which is also a thin veil, a transparent film lying on the painting and dematerialising it.

Pictures emerged that kept withdrawing. F.M.: They are there and they withdraw. In that way they provoke a NOTION of what – if anything – they might be representing. To F.M. there is a certain romanticism in the way processes provoke notions that spirit viewers away from their here and now. They do not stay with themselves; instead they take part in an elementary process, a MOVEMENT of the mind.

Frosted-glass effect: Seen from the side, the colouring fades; the blurriness, the fog increases, allowing only the strongest colours to show through.

Viewers do not necessarily realise that the effect is due to optics rather than painting. A fundamental uncertainty is generated by the fact that the sharpness declines dramatically the closer we get to the picture surface. The shape is more easily discernible from afar. The attempt to glean more precise information by stepping closer to the painting is rewarded with a fuzzy shape beyond recognition. This process shows a kinship with the workings of memory. The closer we get to the object of remembrance, the more elusive it becomes.

Another consequence of the frosted-glass effect: we can no longer determine the depth of the painted ground. The dimensionality of the paint is unclear and changes with distance and angle of vision. Liquid crystal pictures are also behind glass.

From far away, these pictures would have to become crystal clear again.

The pictures behind (frosted) glass were intended as model images; the painting almost just an excuse to spark off certain processes of perception.

But then the reflection split away from communicating the sensual effect of the colouring.

The step was meant to combine reflection (the frozen moment) and the communication of colour as autonomous levels of perception.

The subsequent freezing of a reflection as a method of creating subject matter is already prefigured in the composition and the strongly reflecting presentation of the pictures behind (frosted) glass.

## **Photographed Behind-glass Painting / Self-reflection / Echo Pictures**

So M. reduces painting even more: creates monochrome paintings behind glass and photographs them in an exhibition situation, which also captures the reflected room and the contours of the picture-taker – for instance, his legs from the hips down, or his torso.

That makes two reflections, one a little "deeper" at the depth of the emulsion, the other taking place at the moment of looking at the picture, you might say, a reflection in/behind the glass that moves along with the viewer. The difference in depth is less than a millimetre. The reflection lies on top of the original picture, the monochrome surface, like a thin film.

M. speaks of a perpetual motion machine; the picture keeps creating itself; the author freezes one possible state in the life of monochrome behind-glass paintings.

The picture showing two legs in a room against a warm-coloured ground is also a self-portrait of the artist. The artist is always the first one to view his pictures.

(The artist may even already be the viewer of the picture that has not yet been painted; "it's all in your head"; he looks at the inner picture, the vision, the idea as a picture probe.)

The mirror image in this case looks more like a shadow, an outline.

Reversal of conventional relations.

Reflection or already self-reflection? M. would like to play down the theoretical aspect. He wants the pictures to be

seen more as APPEARANCE.

The term APPEARANCE also has a spiritistic meaning.

Silhouettes, PICTURES OF AIR that come out of the "fog", a shape swimming in "fog", an APPARITION, related to apparatus, the apparatus of photography.

Besides: It's risky for an artist to be too self-reflective. Artists often believe (on the basis of their own convictions but also through outside influence) that they shouldn't do too much thinking before they start painting. You might call it self-censorship, and being afraid of reactions to an excessively conceptual approach. Worrying about not being sufficiently direct and immediate, not using enough intuition, about being too calculating. No artist claims that his works examine a theorem of perceptual theory.

The fine artist's oddly ambivalent relationship to philosophy: alternating between love and hate, sometimes even between anxiety and pleasure. Pictures cannot make a clear statement about the relationship between reality and depiction; they represent this relationship.

F.M.'s pictures are self-reflections. In two ways at once. On one hand, F.M. makes pictures that are self-perpetuating, that reproduce themselves in the act of depicting: they are picture-making machines. Secondly, his pictures contain mirror images of his own body, he himself becomes part of the picture in a quasi automatic kind of autoportrait: the artist's appearance in the picture tends to be random, as if he had casually, unintentionally moved into the reach of the camera. It happens, it appears, "it paints" (Richter).

But we can't be sure whether the barely perceptible, reflected bodies or fragments actually are those of the artist. The UNCERTAINTY regarding the identity of the depicted subject matter is of existential import when it comes to self-portrayal.

What we perceive (COLOURED SHADOWS, BLURRED MIRROR IMAGE, OUTLINES) is rather an indication of identity, a sign. A metaphorical pointer. The barely perceptible legs (or other barely perceptible things in other pictures) MEAN a certain notion of authorship (or longing for it); longing for the infinite EPHEMERALITY of the author's so-called SELF; longing for EPHEMERALITY PER SE.

To all appearances there (probably) is an author who "happens" to be depicted as a REFLECTION. The author as a reflection. Or: the author? – maybe only a reflex.

A model indication of how the artist crops up in a work.

Another important notion: CROP UP.

Here the author is an extremely ephemeral being; the painterly gesture has been reduced to an activity that takes place secretly, "behind" the picture so to speak, painting behind glass. Even in paintings behind glass no trace remains of the physical, painterly act but in photographed behind-glass painting it has vanished altogether. All physical contact is anathema. The author's activity is restricted to the apparatus-oriented perception of a model of perception.

The author's activity consists of initiating pictorial processes in co-operation with apparatuses, with media. The author has become a director. He determines – even proceeding strategically – what will be reflected in the painted ground.

## Windows / Mirrors / Pictures

Following the photographed reflections of fragments of space and author in monochrome behind-glass paintings, the converse takes place.

The artist turns to the world outside and takes night pictures of cities through the reflecting window panes of interior spaces.

Two decisive changes: subsequent digital colouring with a single hue further undermines the claim that it is a question of painting.

(Compare the monochrome effect of early colour photography in the 1920s or the practice of colouring b/w photographs.)

The author's body is no longer visible, no longer in the eye of the camera, which is achieved by simply changing the angle of the camera.

M. says he colours his pictures afterwards in order to transform and homogenise the supposed objectivity of photography into something like a picture, like a semblance.

The new thing about this is, he says, that (as a viewer) one imagines entering the interior that one sees reflected in the picture of the window. The resulting illusionary space is subsequently heightened through colouring. He calls these pictures vedute.

They have two superimposed – photographed – illusionary spaces.

First, the interior reflected in the respective window; secondly, the deep nocturnal outdoor space shot through the window. But viewers are thrust away, driven out of this outdoor space by the distracting reflection taking place NOW.

Or in more fundamental (and a bit more complicated) terms: Once the viewer realises that what he initially – and with deliberately aroused voyeurist pleasure – perceived as an intimate scene (namely, part of a bedroom with a mussed up bed shot through the window à la peeping Tom) is actually a picture reflected in the window FROM WITHIN, he is drawn out of this deceptive intimacy through the WINDOW / the PANE / the MEMBRANE / the FILTER into the depths of the picture, as it were, to the comparatively tiny, brightly lit opening and into that unknown space behind the window, somewhere over there on the other side of the street where there is also a lamp burning. We imagine this light-space, which has suddenly become so attractive, soaked in the opaque intimacy of the above-mentioned REFLECTED SLEEPING-ROOM, immersed in the milky whiteness of the semi-transparent bedlinen. Our critically longing, floating perception cannot even feel longingly drawn to the appearance of the MIRROR SLEEPING-ROOM nearby because it's already there, as it were. The reflected bedroom embraces the viewer in a paradoxical way, namely completely but completely without illusion, that is, rather more concretely and physically. Reflections are free from illusion.

Thus, the illuminated window in the nocturnal OUTDOORS gradually acquires an oddly real (blurred) intimacy and becomes a strange attractor in the chaotic or certainly highly complex, enigmatically intertwined levels of perception and reflection. It is the outermost window/glass in the array of panes, the bottommost behind-glass picture in the picture.

The nocturnal background with its illuminated windows, seen through the filter of reflections, is the only place where our roving gaze can stop to rest, always exploring and imagining, always drawn to the distance, to absolute uncertainty.

(But the exact opposite could as easily prevail: the corner of the bedroom could be shot through the window from outside, and the highlights in the background would then be the REFLECTIONS of the night-time city.)

### **Displacement / Movement of the Mind**

Moving to the mirrored bedroom or to the virtual space of another picture, where the detail of a light switch and then a nail lead one to the almost shocking perception of a mirrored WALL, entails displacement that is neither illusionary nor intuitive but rather an act of sensorially effective reflection.

Perception leads to the realisation that the picture of the mirrored room does not extend into receding depths but instead moves towards us, spreading out and indeed surrounding us, while nonetheless remaining a purely non-dimensional image – an impression reinforced by the colouring of the photographic ground. A curious feeling results. It is both mental and PHYSICAL at once, a paradoxical spatial SENSATION.

An important prerequisite of these perceptual sensations is the seemingly simple identification of picture glass and window pane. Fragments of reality that appear on and behind a window pane are in effect transformed into BEHIND-GLASS PAINTINGS with APPEARANCES.

This may well be exactly what art ought to be doing: transforming snippets of reality into apparitions, bodies into ghosts, mussed up bedsheets into opaque veils. Naturally not through vague feelings but through perceptive thought, notwithstanding the help of enraptured states of a special order, namely sceptical ecstasy.

In the picture with the light switch and the nail, the above-mentioned mental space, the one that extends from the picture to the viewer and encompasses him, is an extremely constricted virtual corridor, a claustrophobically structured perceptual sluice between PICTURE GLASS=WINDOW PANE and pictured REFLECTION ON THE WALL.

And so our viewing eyes look through the window/picture/glass into an artificially illuminated night and onto an invisible nocturnal street in curious analogy to the glaring white pairs of automobile eyes driving towards us through the nail, through the yellowish grainy fog of the reflected plaster wall.

They are also starting points of perception, from "the other side of the picture", as it were.

These lights are pretty aggressive. They look at you. (F.M.)

### **The Viewer's Reflection while Looking at the Picture**

It takes a long time for viewers engaged in the focused study of a picture with a reflecting surface to notice their own reflection; they simply overlook or see through it. This cerebral achievement is remarkable because once the reflection of one's own figure or face has penetrated perception, it is virtually impossible not to see it anymore.

In F.M.'s pictures this self-perception is an inevitable consequence of works explicitly designed to rule out the possibility of ignoring their reflecting surfaces, that is, they intentionally complicate and confound perception. That, too, could still be a valid objective of art: mutually entangled paths of perception. Viewers immediately take the same stand as F.M., who moves his reflection out of focus. Naturally one wants to be part of a picture but not in such an exaggerated form.

Having hoped to discover an entirely different opposite in a work (which is, of course, instantly colonised and assimilated), we find it physically unpleasant to suffer the shock of being assaulted by the fuzzy appearance not only of some

part of ourselves but our very own self.

Or: In order to expose the act of seeing, art has to make seeing more difficult (possibly because seeing has become too easy, meaning the seeing of pictures in the broadest sense). Or: In daily life, looking is essentially a matter of overlooking. If we didn't overlook most of what we see, we couldn't survive, and if we did, we would go mad.

In this respect art could make us aware of the habitual act of OVERLOOKING things. When, as in F.M.'s case, a model of perception is constructed that results in overlooking pictures of ourselves, the change in consciousness is particularly dramatic.

What happens to the presence of the artist in the picture? Why isn't he there anymore?

F.M.: When I crop up in the picture as a reflection, then this one state is fixed. The space for other subjects has become cluttered.

And: There is basically something melancholy about the absence of people in his pictures. (F.M.) And at the bottom of this melancholy lies the certainty that the project of "painting" pictures is ultimately doomed to failure, that pictures can never come to a conclusion, can never be finished. And to F.M., the presence of the artist in the picture seems to make the picture-making process too conclusive.

This melancholy thus also expresses the certainty that one thing in particular can never be finalised: the oneness of artist and work. It must remain a forever unquenchable longing (or nightmare, as the case may be). The author may at most be present as a fleeting appearance, a fluid, a spectre. Perhaps the essentially melancholy aspect of art (in contrast to political works for instance) lies in this very inability to be in the picture oneself, in the fact that the artist is not at home in his pictures, that art can never be a homeland for him but at most a pleasant foreign territory.

And the melancholy foundations of his model of perception, as I understand F.M., would be cluttered by the presence of the artist's reflected body, no matter how fuzzy and indistinct.

Which is related to a story that F.M. does not want to tell.

Maybe the image of a path is better, a viewing path, from light switch to an insubstantial idea of the wall, to the headlights, to the nail that holds up the idea of the wall, and then possibly to the perception of one's own reflection.

The paths of perception that M. winds through his models may be at a far remove from the narrative paths taken by those wandering through Chinese landscape drawings but they have a similarly remarkable consciousness.

By withdrawing from his pictures, the artist also shifts from the subject matter of the "Night-time Reflection of the Artist's Bed" to "The Artist's Picture Warehouse" or "In the Studio".

What exactly happens in an artist's studio these days and whether it can even be depicted (in comparison to pictures of, say, Brancusi's or Picasso's studios) is an exciting question. The increasing impossibility of depicting the world can no longer be ignored by art. I suspect that the artist's studio has become a mental (partially medial) place of work in which – as in M.'s small-format pictures of picture warehouses – only a few works, exhibited elsewhere or finished long ago, are temporarily stored. There it is: the potential of possible images, which – through the very act of seeing – has indeed turned the viewer into the almost autonomous author of M.'s works.

Translation: Catherine Schelbert