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Visualizing the world – the art of Andrea Flemming

The world in a spoon

As soon as eyes open, you are visualizing and it is almost impossible not to do so. Already a simple glance at the reflection of a spoon creates a complex picture. Initially, as an observer, one faces oneself and, consequently, can also perceive oneself as observer – being embedded into the picture of the surrounding world – dished and from an unfamiliar perspective. Depending on the angle of view of the spoon, the relation between the observer, their image and the rough surrounding varies. Andrea Flemming captures such optical moments photographically, adjusts the upside-down image and presents it in a strongly enlarged flat shape. In doing so, she adds several new layers to the already multilayered interaction between the visually perceivable, the perception, the image, the observer and the cognitive reflection. She involves in a way that even the current actual location, where the observer encounters her work, gets included – wherever it might be displayed. This process possibly resonates something from the magical sphere of picture making. Regardless of the mosaic legislation forbidding the fashioning of images or similar religious commandments, artists have ever created images “of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”. Between the deliberate visualization and the mistrust towards perception, there exists an almost erotic shyness as well as an attraction. Maybe this is one of the key motivating forces that stimulates artists to keep creating. Here Andrea Flemming is surely no exception. But in the face of this enhancement, the way in which the artist from Halle (Saale) achieves her images deserves special attention.

Traces of creating

The way Andrea Flemming creates her work plays a decisive role. Her images reflect the process of creating. They require an intensive, consciously slow viewing that gently reveals all the gradually developed and manually demanding processes of craftsmanship. So it would not be possible to achieve those carefully left traces of milling by any technical means. Yet a technical impression is created. One reason for this comes from the fact that the artist commissions the anodizing of the finished discs. She is therefore confronted with the result of her work, that she is able to anticipate based on her experience, but all its nuances of coloring and of surface texture are not completely predictable. Similarly, an analysis of the weathering and abrasion of those of her works that have been created using mirroring techniques shows that the way towards the creation of forms is a component that deserves attention. No matter whether layers have been added like sediments or have been carefully removed, the result is always coherent, but still comprises and clearly shows traces of its formation. Eventually, the described way of approaching the artworks enables the observer to experience and comprehend the artist's own slow and focusing mode of creation. The potential to better conceive matter, its processes of transformation and relate to one's own experience also allows us to learn something about ourselves. The deliberately manual procedure and the very personalized recognition are clearly corresponding with each other. They are both, an artistic conceptual design and a way of perceiving the artworks.

Location and setting

While we earlier stated that Andrea Flemming's artworks directly address the observing person, we also have to mention the decisive role of the particular space, location and

the setting in this interaction. The artworks do not demand an empty white cube for their presentation by any means – even though such a quiet setting can support their introverted nature, drawing attention more fully towards the objects themselves. The fact that Andrea Flemming abstains from using any form of framing is due to her artworks' claim of being real objects within the real world. Consequently, they also cope well with multifaceted surroundings such as the Gothic Marienkirche in Sangerhausen, or as in a joint exhibition held in a bunker in Kiel. Such complex and interacting structures grown over centuries correspond ever greater with the special sedimentary method of the artworks' creation. Eventually, this interaction with settings from everyday life, that also is crucial for the work of an artist, allows the observer to productively reflect on her very own interaction with surroundings and circumstances.

The sensualism of the surface

Besides all scholarly discussions of surfaces, the surface also is a feature of completion, of the final work, of the finally completed process of creation. Like a protective layer, the mat glimmering or shining surface safeguards against but at the same time advances the gaze which attempts to capture the work. Both, the surface of the aluminum discs as well as the highly reflective shining surface of her glass objects arouse a strong, almost erotic temptation that can not be satisfied by only looking. Wouldn't it be nice to seek to touch – rather with the back of the hand – the material that the artist must have handled? But beware: Such contact not only poses obvious risks, but in fact also includes the possibility of finally having followed a temptation that vanishes – just as in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle – caused by the very attempt to catch it.

Viewing the world as flat disc

From the Bronze Age Nebra sky disc (found near Flemming's home town) to the modern age of flat screens and data-laden DVD silver discs, there has been ample reason to imagine the world as a disc. The flat-screen depictions of daily evening television shows rather suggest the earth as a rotating globe. Yet, a glance at the moon always causes the same difficulties to imagine it as a sphere and to realize its spots as a true landscape and not as a rather abstract shape. Among the many other possibilities of the digital age, Andrea Flemming's aluminum discs also permit to associate a cartographic view of the earth. Similar to such geographic illustrations, the discs draw their attraction from the contrast between the calculable round shaped disc and the individual abstract shapes milled into it. It is just this openness paired with formal concreteness that gives the works a touch of incalculability. That those artifacts seem to hover in front of the wall additionally contributes to this effect. The light and the shadows touching the wall play a decisive role. Confronted with those complex static objects, the observer can get an idea of their dynamic inner processes. Here it becomes an individual question whether they will reach this by their own movement, by intensive viewing, by meditation in front of the complex area or through something that ancient philosophers called “Music of the Spheres” when viewing the movements of celestial objects.

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