

the glass and the spots

Tony Frey

“The Large Glass (Duchamp) on the other hand is a mystery to me, indescribable, no book I could have written would have brought me any nearer to the subject.”

Johannes Gachnang

To me, Alois Lichtsteiner’s Glass is indescribable. Yet, to pick up on a thought from Ulrich Loock: through all the decades of Lichtsteiner’s career, his fundamental orientation, his basic paradigm, has never changed – could never change. His work has something inevitable about it, developing through movement from painting to painting.

Glass is purest abstraction when you consider how the color is stretched over the canvas like skin. In Glass, the glass is referred to metaphorically, as is the canvas – that which supports the object – and the skin, that which coats or covers it. Since there is nothing to cover, surface becomes content, both in one.

Every object, no matter how transparent or cold, awakens different associations in the observer. The bark of a birch tree, as Loock says, can be a vulva. A glass can certainly be an object of desire, that is obvious – or let us say: clear. Whether you call it “immaculate conception”, or “mother and son”, or “in vitro”, it is a nude – nude f/m, the title says it all. As an object Glass remains – in its crystal clear transparency – a mystery, something indescribable.

Because of the way they are produced, the woodcuts

that are part of Lichtsteiner's new work, the spots on a field of snow, the untitled mountain, are subject to endless transformation, changes which leave their traces on the image.

Lichtsteiner once sent me a torn-off piece of Japanese paper upon which he'd written: "this too is skin, transplanted from a mulberry tree."

If you consider the basic insights into Lichtsteiner's work which Loock described on the occasion of the exhibitions in Bern in 1992 and Lucerne in 2001 – where he talks about "Content of Vessels" and color stretching over the canvas like a "skin" – then I think you can see this new work, in this new technique, as simply another possibility. One or more inversions have taken place: the skin of the mulberry tree now has blots (A. Cozens) (like tattoos) which create the image.

This is never about pictorial representation, it's about painting, about the question, is painting still possible today?

In 2003 Matthias Frehner, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Bern, used the title: Painting is Possible.

In German, the word *haut* means skin. In French you often find *haut* stamped on the top of a package of fragile objects, meaning handle with care, don't drop, and don't hurry.

Skin, surface and depth; there are no holes just sheaths in the plane. When we open them, we simply confirm what is: a large surface of skin with hidden nooks. [...] The manysided polymorphism knows that there is no hole, no inside, no holiness to be respected. It's just skin.

Jean-François Lyotard

All references to the ideas of Ulrich Loock are taken from the book to the exhibition "Alois Lichtsteiner, Birken und ein Berg (Birch trees and a Mountain)", in the Museum of Art Lucerne, 2001.

Tony Frey, nude f/m 2012