

REFLECTION about – about REFLECTION

28 July – 15 September 2018

It is often said that art reflects society. Whether that's true remains an open question, perhaps because no one can define exactly what society is, or indeed art. We can say with certainty, however, that in art there is a long tradition of mirrors and reflective materials. There is also no doubt that artists think a lot about the reciprocal relationships between works of art and viewers. That's what this exhibition is about: thinking about how reflection impacts our thoughts and perceptions. The mirror is an ancient symbol of this process, for it contains the entire problematic of subjectivity – vanity and self-recognition, an awareness of the transience of being, the splitting of the subject into observer and observed, the separation into self and other. Both concepts, thought and the mirror, rest on the play of difference and repetition. Enough then, to leave aside the question of social context for once and focus on individual perception. This group exhibition is about the relationship of the beholder to the work of art, and the expansion of both physical and mental space. These concerns link many of the artists represented by the Tschudi gallery, forming a common thread through the gallery programme. In the exhibition REFLECTION about – about REFLECTION, ten artists unfold a system of references that mirrors the topic of reflection in its many facets. Those for whom all this seems too cerebral have the advantage that the works in the exhibition playfully engage materials, spaces and viewers, coming together as a visually inviting feast of the senses.

Carl Andre

Born 16<sup>th</sup> September 1935 in Quincy, Massachusetts, lives in New York.

Carl Andre's work exemplifies the central themes of many of the artists represented by the Tschudi gallery: perception, space, and materiality. His sculptures have neither a front nor a back and challenge viewers to explore them through movement, to continuously reflect their perspective and (mental) position. In the process, they participate in the definition of both space and the sculpture. Andre describes his sculptures as "places", thus activating both spaces and viewers: "I should make clear the differentiation I have between place and environment. Environment we have continually, so I would say that place is an aspect of environment that is differentiated from environment. The earth itself is a complete environment: all living creatures are contained within this environment. I think a lot that has been called environmental art is actually a kind of décor, and I'm not interested in décor as such. I'm interested in differentiating one area within an environment from all the rest of it and not trying to surround a person with a décor at all. I'm not interested in that kind of thing: I'm much more interested in differentiation than in envelopment."<sup>1</sup>

Poetry plays an important role in Andre's work. The over 70 page work *Stillanovel* (1972) is about the pioneer of photography and film, Eadweard Muybridge, an innovative as well as dazzling figure. Formally, Andre's arrangement of words on the page is often interpreted as an analogy to sculpture. For the artist, however, it is not in the first instance about creating a visually stimulating word structure (he uses nouns exclusively), but to form new relationships between them. By arranging the words spatially he liberates them from syntactical and grammatical rules, and the reader from the usual flow of reading. Thus the words of his poems no longer disappear behind their meanings but manifest independently as forms, as sounds, as names. Andre's works are far from any symbolism. They simulate nothing; they are simply material that the artist puts into the world: "My art springs from my desire to have things in the world which would otherwise never be there. By nature, I am a materialist, an admirer of Lucretius."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Andre in: *Cuts, Place and Environment* (taped interview, New York 1970), Cambridge 2005, p. 185

<sup>2</sup> Carl Andre in: *Cuts, "I have no art ideas; I only have art desires."* (Tuchman, "An interview with Carl Andre", 1970), Cambridge 2005, p. 85

# GALERIE TSCHUDI

Balthasar Burkhard

Born December 24<sup>th</sup> 1944 in Bern, died 16<sup>th</sup> April 2010 in Bern

Photographs capture moments. A glimpse is extracted from the flow of time and preserved. Temporality attaches to the photograph, however. Viewers instinctively seek to participate in the moment depicted; they reconstruct a before and an after, a narrative without a context. In a certain way their imagination re-starts the flow of time frozen in the image.

Balthasar Burkhard's photos are different. The use of black and white is their only structural device. Motifs, objects and scenes emerge from the darkness, as if the photographer had placed them in front of a neutral backdrop. Burkhard manages to "compose" still lifes without staging them. Our focus is wholly absorbed by the motifs, which seem to appear naturally, without forcing themselves on the viewer. Even a complex sprawl such as the rainforest on the Rio Negro, its complexity doubled by its reflection in the river, appears like a careful composition that directs our gaze. Burkhard's photographs do not capture a moment, referring to a time before and after; this is a photography of the timeless image. It emerges even more clearly in the photographs Normandie (1995) and Japan (Kumano) (2005). Sea surf and waterfalls are symbols of change. Unlike the objects in a still life they cannot be arranged into an ideal image that takes on a symbolic meaning outside time and space. Moving waters will not hold still for that – yet, in Burkhard's photographs, they seem to do so. The sea surf becomes a painting that extends time, not capturing the dynamic movement of the sea, but setting it free. Looking at this image, we are not interested in time, place, or photographic technique. Photography, here, is pure energy; it becomes something akin to action painting. The waterfall in turn becomes a sculpture. Places, histories, contexts, before and after – it all seems irrelevant when looking at these pictures. Completely timeless, these photographs' motifs are encountered in categories such as silence and solitude, movement and monumentality. They replace our investigative and comparative gaze with contemplation.

Andrea Büttner

Born 1972 in Stuttgart, lives and works in London and Berlin

"Our heads are round so our thoughts can change direction"<sup>3</sup> may be a beautiful expression, but it doesn't really tell us much. It doesn't take much for a person to start thinking. Reflection, however, requires an incentive. The circulation of thoughts in one direction or another is insufficient. Reflection needs resistance and rough edges where thoughts (or light) can fracture. A balanced Ying and Yang may lead to enlightenment, but it seems much to exalted for the work of Andrea Büttner. Leaving our thoughts to circulate, we find nothing; at best we might end up inventing something. But that is not what Büttner's work is about. She is not an inventor, she is an explorer. Her works cast light into the farthest corners, forge connections, call attention to contradictions, clear a variety of blocked paths, dredge up unexpected references and correspondences, show us the overlooked, the pedestrian and even the sacred. When Büttner talks about shame and letting go, these are both emotions, sensations or behaviours that happen only in private, even in secret. They do not have an aesthetic form suitable for presentation – but she does it anyway. That can be painful and exposing but also surprisingly touching. Büttner gives us rough edges to rub up against, that drive us to reflection. But thankfully, we don't need to strain to think about meaning all the time. We, too, are allowed to let go sometimes, without sinking into a pit of shame when there is something we don't understand or an idea doesn't work out. Just like in the work Diver (2017). To take a plunge like that is also a way of going deep, helped along by a little courage and gravity. Will we bring something back up from the depths? Either way, we'll feel refreshed. The same goes for engaging with the work of Andrea Büttner.

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<sup>3</sup> This statement is ascribed to Francis Picabia.

# GALERIE TSCHUDI

Alan Charlton

Born 1948 in Sheffield, lives and works in London

Alan Charlton says about himself: "I am an artist who makes a grey painting." He has been doing nothing else since 1969. Building on the measurement unit of 4,5 cm – the depth of the standard stretcher frame he uses – he determines the dimensions of his paintings. Each measurement, from the distance between the paintings to their height, width and depth, builds on multiplications of the 4.5 unit. And all his painted variations on this basic rule are executed in monochrome grey. Charlton doesn't attempt to force meaning on his paintings. His practice follows a pragmatic logic that emerges from his materials. Nature, emotions and subjectivity are completely absent. The artist disappears behind painting, and painting finally behind objects, as which the stretched canvases appear. The application of paint is invisible. Charlton does not create impressionist surfaces, nor is he interested in interpretations of the colour grey as a mixture of complementary colours. It is a grey that does not want to prove anything, either to painting or to the viewer.

Charlton mixes an individual grey for each series of work, applying it very thinly to the canvas. It is important that the colour grey is perceived as unobtrusive at first glance. Each series of paintings, and the individual canvases within a series, thus come alive in their differences to each other, to the wall and the environment. They are objects that slot into a space discreetly and delicately, activating it in the process. The viewers begin to attend to subtle differences, comparing shades of colour, noticing changes in tone as the light shifts, reading the homogenous surfaces in the context of and in contrast to the surrounding architecture. Charlton thus pays close attention to the installation of his work. The grey canvases sharpen the viewers' senses as a neutral source of tranquillity. For those who take the time to engage with these paintings, they reveal a wonderful play of change and identity. After almost 50 (!) years of sticking to his ground rules, the artist has now taken a fundamental step. He has begun to combine his grey canvases with unpainted ones. Unpainted and Painted is the title of these new works, which Charlton is presenting for the first time in the familiar spaces of the Tschudi gallery. No colour can be placed alongside the grey, whose superficial monotony Charlton has repeatedly disproven with each new piece. Introducing colour would have suggested a kind of composition. The key is not colour, but perception. What does it really mean, to see an unpainted surface? Does being unpainted that make it colourless? Some of the work's settings are changing, if not its essence. The viewers are no longer simply activated, the diptych presentation pulls them into an intimate conversation between two interlocutors. The space suddenly becomes charged with fundamental questions concerning the duality between action and inaction, reality and imagination, fact and potential, and finally between being and non being.

Julian Charrière/Julius von Bismarck

Born 1987 in Morges, Switzerland, lives and works in Berlin /

Born 1983 in Breisach am Rhein, lives and works in Berlin

The work *Objects in mirror might be closer than they appear* (2016) takes its title from the safety warning that is often attached to the side mirrors of cars. There, however, the sentence is not in the subjunctive. The video installation by Julian Charrière and Julius von Bismarck shows film material from the exclusion zone around the reactor that exploded at Chernobyl in 1986. The two artists attached a camera to the antlers of a stag, which shows an extreme close-up of the animal's eye. The eye therefore visibly reflects the surrounding landscape, which has been inaccessible to humans since the catastrophe and has therefore disappeared from view. For the time being, human beings have no influence on the redevelopment of the ecosystem. Animals and plants, however, have already reconquered the area.

The artists make use of an animal to take a peek inside the exclusion zone. But it is not a voyeuristic or inquiring gaze. Rather, they place the film's viewers to experience the perspective of the animal, borrowing his eye. The animal decides what it is we see. But we never see the landscape itself, only its distorted mirror image. Sometimes we think we may have recognized a building, or caught a glimpse of another animal. We experience the exclusion zone as a surreal landscape. The opening and closing of the stag's eyelid and the animal's breath structure the course of the film. In addition, the artists have edited satellite images of the earth from space into the footage. Formally, the round shape of the planet corresponds to the eye of the animal. Both represent an image of nature. But the perspective from space makes it unequivocally clear that the images are man-made, implying a triumph of technology over nature. This also becomes apparent in the reflected glimpses of the exclusion zone, in those moments when the camera is suddenly reflected in the stag's eye.

Julian Charrière's work often critiques man's careless treatment of nature. In compelling images, he illustrates human hubris: our tendency to think in short time spans, focused on maximal profit while ignoring the long-term processes this triggers. The subjunctive of the title suggests that the situation in the exclusion zone may become reality faster than we like to think. Several levels of reflection on the relationship between human beings, culture, nature, exploitation and coexistence overlap in this video installation, showing forcefully that one cannot exist without the other.

Bethan Huws

Born in 1961 in Bangor, Wales, lives and works in Berlin and Paris

An important element in the work of Bethan Huws is her preoccupation with language as a fundamental form of art and communication. From 1998 onwards, this manifested in her "Word Vitrines". They are standard, metal framed information boxes with glass fronts, dark back panels and white plastic adhesive lettering. In these settings, Huws plays with the relationships between signifier and signified. Displacements of meaning and ambiguities are central to the works, as exemplified with reference to René Magritte in the piece *Untitled (Ceci n'est pas un miroir)*, 2006. Word play and puns are also central to the work of Marcel Duchamp. Since the mid 1990s, Bethan Huws has been exploring his work and its impact on conceptual art, developing a comprehensive system of references based on her research. The work *Venus* (2017) is a reproduction of Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914). This work is considered the artist's first readymade, but it was lost before it was ever publicly exhibited. Duchamp bought a new model 20 years later, had Man Ray photograph it and exhibited it in Paris. This version too, was lost. In the 1960s Duchamp chose a further model and produced multiples, which in fact contradicts the principle of the readymade. The work hailed as the first readymade is both a myth and a paradox, pushing the concept of the readymade itself into absurdity. Bethan Huws in turn reproduces all three versions of the *Bottle Rack* and displays them together as a work of art. She thereby reflects the complex history of the object and the concept of the readymade, converging multiple questions about the relationships between original, originality, appropriation, identity, difference and repetition. The work *Reading Duchamp, Réflexion à main, 1948*, (2011) gestures to the fact that Duchamp was not interested only in playing with words and concepts. He understood his practice as "réflexion à main", hand-driven reflection, never intending to reduce art to pure idea or overcome the process of making. Duchamp re-examined the traditional "creative act" by testing it on and in the object. The process of manufacturing is important to Bethan Huws as well (see e.g. the work *Dwynwen*, 2004, in the exhibition). Although she is often described as a contemporary conceptual artist, the material execution of her work is essential – in a sense, Huws' work makes thought manifest. An example of this is *Knowledge and Thought* (2009 – 2016), where the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum" oscillates between certainty and doubt in the rhythmical flashing of the propositions "I know" and "I think".

Kimsooja

Born 1957 in Taegu, lives and works in New York, Seoul and Paris

In the *Palacio de Cristal* in Madrid, Kimsooja coated the windows of the former winter garden with a type of foil that dissects light into its spectral colours. She covered the entire floor of the space in mirrors. In principle, the space was completely empty, filled only by the sounds of the artist breathing. Light and space multiplied and began to resonate with the rhythm of breath. The photograph *To Breath – A Mirror Woman* (2006 – 2008) shows the visual beauty of that installation. In the current installation in the hay loft space of the Tschudi gallery, viewers can now experience a different mirror space by the artist. Her work as a whole is characterised by the duality of inside and outside, surface and content, life and death. The artist discovered the metaphor of sewing as a way of connecting the dual principle. This became very important to Kimsooja's work; she says: "If mirroring is a form of sewing the self (questioning and connecting the self), breathing is, as an action similar to sewing, a questioning of life and death. In mirroring, our gaze serves as a sewing thread, bouncing back and forth, penetrating oneself and the other self, reconnecting ourselves to reality and fantasy. A mirror is a fabric that is sewn by our gaze, breathing in and out."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kimsooja in: Kimsooja: Interviews, Cologne/Vaduz 2018, p. 90

For Kimsooja, the mirror is both subject and object; it is only connected to us when we face it. It shows our other only when we engage with it and give it our attention. This is what we experience in the hay loft: we enter into what is basically an empty space. But it isn't emptiness that is reflected in the mirror floor, but the (old and new) architecture, and thus the history of the space and of our own bodies within it. We activate this space through our interest in it, with the presence of our being, our attention and our curiosity. The mirrors turn our usually selective perception into an exceptional state of alert sensual experience. The connection to the space is visually confirmed, since we are doubled in the space and observe ourselves in the act of observation. The categories of subject and object become intertwined, leading to a heightened self-awareness.

Martina Klein

Born 1962 in Trier, lives and works in Düsseldorf

Martina Klein's work can be read within the tradition of analytic painting that developed from the late 1950s onwards. This approach reflected on painting through the means of painting itself. It analysed and deconstructed the different components that constitute a painting – paint, brushes (or palette knives and other tools), surfaces (such as canvas), stretcher frames (or other supports) – while also questioning the relationship between a painting and its traditional place of display, the wall. The point of departure for this exploration was nonrepresentational, monochrome painting. Analytic painting was closely connected to the ideas of Minimalism and its investigation of perception. Both tendencies are fundamental to Klein's approach, but in her work they only resonate remotely. For although her work is based on the same principles, Klein has developed these further and formulates them in her own, distinctive vocabulary. Klein was trained as a realistic, representational painter. She comments that this was a good "school of vision" with regard to colours and spatial relationships. But as a result of this conditioning, she lost interest in the figurative. She dove so deeply into her paintings, she says, that her only preoccupation was the effects of colours on each other and the material structure of the canvas. Today, her work builds on the three cornerstones of material, environment and viewers, bringing a dynamic movement to these relationships. The work *Black and Green* (2018) combines elements of painting, objects, installation, conceptual art and readymade. It triggers a series of questions: what is that tin doing there? Is this an installation? Why is the canvas not completely attached to its support? Shall I look behind the canvas? Is it a relief? Is it a painting? Did the artist apply the black paint by hand? Will the green paint in the tin also end up on the canvas? Frank Stella once said about his painting: "I tried to leave the paint as good as it was in the tin."<sup>5</sup> Marcel Duchamp stated sarcastically that all paintings are assisted readymades, because paint is ready made in the tube. Here, both is true and more. The green paint is ready to use, and surely just as good as in the tin. That doesn't make this work any simpler, quite the opposite. Including layer upon layer of meanings, movements and associations, the work is complex and cannot be grasped with a single look or a single thought. The viewers will shift positions and perspectives, see themselves reflected in the shiny tin, made to think about their idea of art. In the work *\_abtasten eines Raumes\_nur einige Möglichkeiten* (2018) it isn't just ideas and viewers that move around; the work itself shifts over time. Within this site-specific installation, places for seven objects are defined on three different tables. One place always remains free, since every day one object is removed from the table and hung on the wall. The following day it is replaced by another object from the table, which in turn goes on the wall etc. Over the course of the exhibition's 49 days, each object takes each position on the tables once. The exhibition will therefore have a slightly different constellation each day, while the movement of the viewers intersects with the movement within the work. Although the monochrome surfaces are all blue, they will appear differently in changing light and in different positions. Klein's piece enacts a playful exploration of difference and repetition, both in the perception of the viewer as well as in relation to the objects, which – with a slight shift in perspective – can also be seen as paintings.

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<sup>5</sup> Art News, Vol. 65, Nr. 5, Sept. 1966, pp. 55 - 61

# GALERIE TSCHUDI

Su-Mei Tse

Born 29<sup>th</sup> January 1973 in Luxemburg, lives and works in Berlin and Luxemburg

The great mirrors of nature are placid lakes and calm rivers. In these horizontal surfaces, the surroundings are reflected as far as the sky, implying a correspondence between the earth and the firmament. The symmetrical axis becomes an imaginary horizon. The works Reflection Nr. 1 and Nr. 3 by Su-Mei Tse turn this order on its head. The earth becomes the sky and the sky the earth. At first glance, this is barely noticeable, which goes to show how subjective every order is. A closer look at the photograph reveals that the main part of the image is slightly distorted. The surfaces of the water are gently moving, resulting in a slightly blurred reflection of the surroundings – as if the wind were continuously painting new variations of the shore landscape.

Looking in a mirror, we reflexively search for our own mirror image. The work Faded IV (2014) is in fact a mirror, but it functions completely differently. Its surface is not flawless and therefore it doesn't mirror ideal images. Instead, the viewers discover the complex patina of the object; in examining its surface they find some of the qualities of an abstract painting. It is thus perception they think about, not external appearance. The work thus avoids egocentrism and a connection on the immediate present, both of which we usually seek to confirm in our mirror image. Instead, our thoughts focus on time, duration, transience and aging. Thus the work allows the viewer to access an abstract space of reflection that tells us more about absence than presence. Reflection coincides with contemplation.

This is said to have been the purpose of the "scholar's rocks" appreciated by Chinese monks. These were the inspiration for Su-Mei Tse's series Morning Dew. The rugged stone of Morning Dew Nr. 7 (2017) captures the viewer's gaze within its labyrinthine structure, and we marvel at nature's capacity to create such forms. Juxtaposed to these stones are perfectly polished steel balls, illuminating the contrast between culture and nature.

Not Vital

Born on 15th February 1948, lives and works in Sent and Beijing

In his early work, Not Vital dealt with his need to break out, to find his freedom – freedom from the pressures of his environment and a restrictive society, as well as freedom to develop independently and follow his own rules. He achieved and maintained these freedoms as an artist. They were always contrasted by his close connection to his parents and his home, from which he drew security. These two poles – otherness, remoteness, non-conformity, and freedom on the one hand; the intimate retreat of his parent's home, the closeness of family and the imposing nature of the lower Engadin on the other – have been the dual sources of Not Vital's artistic work from the very beginning. Going out into the world, crossing borders, the experience of constant change, made him aware of the unique qualities of the place he came from. At the same time he learned that routine, repetition, convenience, and pressure to conform to social roles lurk everywhere, if one does not keep moving and seize the moment. The work CHE BELLEZZA ESA NA SANA CHE BELLEZZA HANNA (2018) reflects this issue of forgetting treasured qualities as a result of the repetitive burdens of everyday life. Freely translated, the title means: "You don't know how beautiful you have it", a sentence that we're all somehow familiar with. Not Vital took it from a story his mother used to tell, about a "randulin" (the Romansh term for someone from the Engadin who moved abroad to find work, only coming home during the summer) who used to say it whenever he returned to his village. Half Italian, half Romansh, the sentence mixes up languages as well as ideal and reality. The neon sign, imitating Not Vital's own handwriting as if he had jotted it down as a memo to himself, glows in the darkness as if alerting us to never forget to enjoy moments of beauty.

Text: Lynn Kost