

Visceral Mirrors: The Paintings of Martina Fischer

*Raphy Sarkissian
New York, 2006*

Overlay an abstract figuration of Yves Tanguy atop a late Arshile Gorky, hybridize, then magnify a partition in order to enter Martina Fischer's Borgesian garden of forking paths, where the simultaneity of the crystalline and the amoebic provides a contest site of cosmic order and chaos. This is a garden of a frozen vortex, a field of quagmires.

Having organized flux in hand with design, stains of color within linear sectors, halations around volumes and across spaces, the paintings of Fischer are suspended between the dichotomy of the historically heterogeneous registers of illusion and abstraction. They caress the two registers simultaneously, blurring their boundaries, unzipping a semiotics of a pictorial representation through formal, historical, and aesthetic allusions, contesting the prison-house of language built upon the diametrical opposition of the unnamable and resemblance.

Despite the non-referential language of Fischer, her techniques remain methodically rooted in a tradition of Western painting that dates back to the late thirteenth century and could be approached through the quintessential illusionistic parameters introduced and mastered by the likes of Giotto and Duccio, cornerstones of the foundation of the Italian Renaissance, that epoch in the history of painting whose syntax would somehow maintain its presence throughout Europe and later the United States till the rise and spread of modernist flatness at the outset of the twentieth century, only to have made a full-fledged return for a while now. When we read the work of Fischer in the context of the works of such contemporary German artists as David Schnell, Franz Ackermann or Christian Hellmich for instance, there would arise one meaning that is prevalent in their works: a discourse between the expressionistic and the linear, between flux and technique within the very architectonic.¹ Only with Fischer the architectonic is no longer constituted through planar lived spaces outside the body, but desires to be imagined as being at once within and remotely outside the physical, as an organic, non-Euclidean space or a chaoid.²

As the project of Fischer remains imbedded in the disciplinary tradition of Western painting yet undoes that structure from within via the interweaving of opticality and hapticity, no matter how sensuously, subtly, academically, no matter how bluntly and distinctly in each of the eight works to be touched upon here, this series unravels both reckoning and process, both design and fluidity of its oil and acrylic intermix. The reckoning here is by no means mathematical or that of Op art. Yet the presence of the psycho-mimetic and the synesthetic in this body of work situates it slackly in a conceptual, formal and tangential tropology that cuts across Op art and Abstract Expressionism.³ The phantom here arises through orderly visual glares that contain coloristic raptures. Fischer's pictorial interplays between gravity and buoyancy parallel those between the objectivity and subjectivity of the work's execution, as within this visual rigor there is the ongoing presence of chromatic facture, often masking itself behind modeling, often exhibiting itself obstinately through an unconditional partnership with an autonomous illusionism. There is a futuristic sensation simulated through masses and weights that both constitute and are contained within undefinable spaces. Through volumetric, tenebristic, spatial, and gestural devices situated within curvilinear and spherical sectors, the paintings of Fischer give rise to an organicist and hypergeometric stratification.

First and foremost, Fischer's paintings are hard to dissociate from academicism, inciting formalistic readings. Yet the coloristic polyphony subverts its beaux-arts techniques, placing the viewer in a tryst with the carnal, whereby vision desires phenomenological passages into the macro and the micro, the outside and the inside of the subject's physicality. Enveloped within the vastness of the outer world, the subject attempts to apprehend the innermost architectonics of the body, where the protoplasm is oozing. Here figments of the imagination are in tandem with the microscopic, the biological, the molecular, and the nanoscale.⁴

Is it perceivable to detach a *paysage historique* from this body of work? The question remains open, if not tautological. In various ways Fischer's handling of line and color comes closer, for instance, to Le Corbusier's *Composition with Moon* (1929) rather than Cézanne's open contours or fragmentation of modeling. In the end, though, based on a given painting of Fischer or upon a specific locality of its surface, such formal and conceptual linkages between Fischer and Cézanne become analogous to the delights and asperities of linkages between Cézanne and Giotto: "For Cézanne, the view of some apples or some pieces of bacon produces a spiritual experience as majestic as was, for Giotto, the tearful contemplation of the Virgin during prayer."⁵ While Cézanne translates Giotto's modeling into fragmented brushstrokes, Fischer retranslates Cézanne's brushstroke into formless stains and spumes that unabashedly heighten Giotto's modeling, rendering it tenebristic. Only now the referent has become stripped bare of specificity.

The palette and spatial recession in *Der Vogel Macht* (2003, trans. *The Bird Called Power*) recall El Greco's breathtaking *View of Toledo* (1612) that depicts a cathedral, the Alcázar palace and a theatrically illuminated sky metamorphosed into one ontology of painting that urges the notion of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, that "impended form," that concept of "strangeness" present in images, novels, music, and other representations that attempts to evade "transcendental aesthetics." As Bakhtin reflects on the issue of time and space in Goethe's *Bildungsroman*, "Everything—from an abstract idea to a piece of rock on the bank of a stream—bears the stamp of time, is saturated with time, and assumes its form and meaning in time."⁶ Along its pure dissociation from referential specificities, *Der Vogel Macht* is much more rigidly structured than El Greco's impressionistic spectacularization of nature. Yet within its firm configuration Fischer has imbedded saturated colorations that are ultimately chaotic in the sense of the term one encounters through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari:

Art transforms chaotic variability into *chaoid* variety as in El Greco's black and green-gray conflagration, for example, or Turner's golden conflagration, or de Staël's red conflagration. Art struggles with chaos but it does so in order to render it sensory, even through the most charming character, the most enchanted landscape (Watteau).

7

The paintings of Fischer executed in 2004 persist the motif of light and shadow, modeling, and compositional variations of spatial depictions. As in *Der Vogel Macht*, Fischer's output maintains an ongoing intimacy with pigments, both intact and saturated, ensuring ever-changing dialogues between the two forms. Sharper and softer lines structure the spatial field into distinct regions that are submitted to a given lighting through a simultaneously calculated and accidental syntax of coloration, often submitted to compositional layers.

With a palette analogous to *Der Vogel Macht*, *Engel* (2004, trans. *Angel*) depicts elongated⁸ limb-like entities upon the forefront of the picture plane, shifting the vastness of space into close-ups upon its biomorphic foreground that acts as a screen. The vertical composition here accommodates interlaced strings that are conjoined tangentially at several junctions, as in the upper left corner or farther below on the left-hand side. The image is replete with formal scenarios, whereby oblique filaments are at once given rise and tangled within curvular ones. In *Engel*, spatial suffocation and beauty rival, where the push-pull effect of line is in a duet with the push-pull effect of color. However, even the Gestalt psychologists' figures and grounds reach states of dissolution across this picture. The dichotomy of the opaque and transparent is likewise erased at so many intersections, whereby translucency is a pictorial in-between of the ongoing intercourses of parts. Line is rendered diaphanous at numerous junctions while the diaphanousness of color is innumerable. Such is the reciprocity of the Gestalt of *Engel*.

By way of submitting the 1984 *Rorschach Paintings* of Andy Warhol to a Freudian reading, Rosalind Krauss notes:

But by folding the stain technique into the Rorschach formula, Warhol pulls the plug on these aspirations to sublimation by reminding us that there is no form so "innocent" (or abstract) that it can ever avoid the corruption of a projective interpretation, a "seeing-in" or a "seeing-as." The doubleness of Warhol's *Rorschachs*—half stain painting, half erotic exfoliation—itself operates, then, like a projective test, or like the

figures the Gestalt psychologists were fond of, where depending on whether you focused on the figure (high) or the ground (low), you either saw a vase or two opposing faces in profile.⁹

Through this reading, the pictorial code of *Engel*, no matter how “abstract” or “illusionistic,” no matter how asymmetrical and un-Rorschach, remains inseparable from the subject’s own carnal self that is first and foremost conditioned through visceral parameters that Freud saw as serving “two masters”: the sexual and the self-preservative ego-instincts alike.¹⁰

As Cézanne had written to Émile Bernard, one must “penetrate what is before oneself,” which Yve-Alain Bois interprets, along with its forthright erotic connotation, as Cézanne’s desire “to splice vision and touch together at the very moment when the two sensory fields were in the process of splitting apart: in some way to invent a tactile vision.”¹¹ It is hard to depart from *Engel* before mapping it to one of the many anthropomorphizing landscapes of Cézanne. What may instantaneously compel the viewer to relate Fischer’s *Engel* or *Der Vogel Macht* to Cézanne’s *Lac d’Annecy*, that painting executed during the artist’s sojourn in Talloires in 1896, are the intense blues and greens. Yet it is the spatial configuration of Fischer, with all of its fluidity, transparency and anthropomorphism that recalls Cézanne’s project more urgently—no matter how differently each may “breathe,” to borrow the verb from Bois.

The reciprocal ekphrasis of *Lac d’Annecy* and *Engel* rises from a differential structure, whereby the former brings forth spatial depth through its flattened handling of the brush, while the latter submits volumetric depth to a flattened frontality. Beyond composition, the indexicality of Cézanne’s application of paint is singularly affixed to the rehearsal of the stroke, while Fischer’s dichotomy of the announcement and erasure of the pictorial gesture through intermixed colorations in hand with graduated tonal variation abstains the canvas from the luxuriance of mere facture. The self-referential gestures of *Lac d’Annecy* attest to the act of painting, as their deixis wells up the author’s redefinition of perspective. The intensive, archaic discipline of Fischer’s modeling might appear to betray Cézanne’s mode of painting, except it has paradoxically bounded itself within an anarchic coloration that cuts across the artifice of volume, as its double-sided decorum is a simultaneous avowal of Cézanne and Giotto. An interstice of Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* (1947) has now become magnified through Caravaggio’s light, rendering matter ethereal.

Keine Einigung (2004, trans. *No Agreement*) of Fischer derives its name foremost from the dichotomy characteristic of its diptych: as the two panels represent parts of a whole, this binary structure evokes the notion of the “individual” as a split “dividual.” While the painting is structurally split, the lover and the beloved remain inseparable no matter how terminal the cut has been. With interlaced and interwoven branches and limbs marking a duality, *Keine Einigung* is conceptually reminiscent of Picasso’s *Girl Before a Mirror* of 1932 for instance, or perhaps Magritte’s *The Lovers* of 1928, where two lovers are in a room kissing with their heads covered in cloth.

There is another structuralist aspect to *Keine Einigung* that begins with a purely formalistic given: each of the four corners of the pictorial field is bisected by the contours of modeled figures that extend themselves to encounter other figures across the pictorial field. Devoid of any horizontals or verticals, except for the inherent edges of the two canvases, these purely biomorphic, diagonal and oblique tissues have impersonated the Klein Group and the L Schema, only now there is an amorphousness of logic, a central vertical fissure, a simultaneous embracement and deformation of structuralism’s logical square through uncanny recessions and protrusions. In this sense, as Roland Barthes refers to “The Big Toe” of George Bataille, the painting’s meaning “rests on a peculiar, anomalous paradigm, since it is ternary.”¹² Having interlocked the binary opposition of “illusion/abstraction,” *Keine Einigung* calls upon the complex term “both illusion and abstraction,” while it simultaneously encroaches upon the neutral term “neither illusion nor abstraction” as a space for the precariousness of meaning, evoking yet again the concept of Bakhtin’s polyglossia—the plurality of meanings.

Lit brightly from the upper left, *Keine Einigung* presents itself as an abstracted fragment of *The Consequences of War* (1637) of Peter Paul Rubens. Through an uncanny set of associations and substitutions, the baffling yellow figure of Fischer’s left canvas translates as the

tragic figure of Europe, raised her arms towards the heavens in desperation and mourning. The baroque coloration of both panels is coupled with rococo tints across the lower right, within sharp contours and a compressed space. It is the oddity of expressionistic colors suspended loosely within their sharp borderlines that escalates the work's dichotomy, for it is simultaneously engineered and open, self-referential and ambiguous. *Keine Einigung* has no specific agreements with a signified. It is a domain of referents that continue shifting based on the spectator's "point of focus": as a whole it is a highly optical, abstracted *trompe l'oeil*; zeroing in upon its parts infects it thoroughly with the haptic.¹³

A painting from a series Fischer executed in 2005 is *Exosept II*. Tranquil, agile, elongated lavender-blue pebbles have grasped a vivid red dendrite that has proliferated itself. In its composition, austere modeled organic units are schematized within a vertiginous centrifugal rhythm. The yellows, reds, blues, mauves, and greens of *Keine Einigung* have been subdued or departed from the arena of *Exosept II*, leaving behind a cool sterility. In tandem with and to the left of the red figure is a silver companion of it, yet another dendrite entangling and being entangled by the red one. Within this abstract *tableau* the beholder may thematize a series of projections, only to be trapped within a lexical taxonomy: the whimsical, the animate, the in-animate, the cellular, the frozen, the ungraspable, the aesthetic. The rustic wall on the left proffers its tangibility, one that is not purely absent from the solid rocks and pebbles. In doing so, Fischer gives rise to a pictorial materialization of an imaginary exocept (an unconscious pattern of body movements) that is pressing upon the simultaneity of cognition and recognition, suspended between the conscious and unconscious through its psychedelic radiance and cool viscosity. In *Exosept II* Caravaggio has reworked Franstišek Kupka's *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors* of 1912. This painting of Kupka, exhibited publicly first at the Salon d'Automne in 1912 in Paris, is often considered to be the first nonfigurative painting. Despite the absence of Caravaggeque techniques in Kupka's paintings, he was drawn to Baroque and Johann Sebastian Bach, along with the celestial motions of the planets. It is unfeasible to detach Fischer's work from both Baroque visuality and symbolism, particularly that of celestial motions. The illusory plasticity of *Exosept II* longs to extinguish the vacuity of historico-political legitimacy of methods of pictorial representation, suspending the spectator between a keyboard concerto of Bach and *Eon Blue Apocalypse* of Tool...

Magic Mirror of 2005 might as well be designated as a fictive nucleus of a dendrite. A rocklike mass in the center is intensely illuminated from the mid-left, defining its volumetric properties through a palpable palette of blues, greens, pinks and browns. Yet during the subject's cognition of the coloristic and tactile features of this central entity that seems to be suspended in an indefinite spatial setting, there arises an uncanny chimera of two eyes and a mouth. A bright onrush of light comes forth the upper right contour of the head, while an intense red one renders itself metonymic of the neck. Pushing the space into a limitless beyond, ultramarine blues complement the muted surrounding palette of seven countable forms that act as foregrounds around the entirety of the picture plane, as their side-lit masses frame the imaginary mask, that figment of the imagination dear to the Gestalt psychologists. Here is yet one more return of Cézanne's ghost, now fortified within a section of Miró's *Guided by the Phosphorescent Tracks of Snails* of 1940. "The vision of a hermit in despair" is Meyer Schapiro's characterization of Cézanne. In the "somber, passionate" *Rocks at Fontainebleau* of c. 1893,

so saturated by the catastrophic mood, there is a remarkable inner development—a course of feeling moving upward and into depth. The powerful rocks in the lowest part have a strong organic quality—a visceral effect—in their curved and congested forms. We discern a vague human profile in the lower right and physiognomic intimations—a reclining head—in the brighter central rock with scalloped edge.¹⁴

Rocks at Fontainebleau and *Magic Mirror* remain so distant from each other in form, and yet concealing the projected and syncopated semblance upon either in order to submit them to an interpretative silence would be a repression of the unconscious.

Spiegel I (trans. *Mirror I*) was likewise executed in 2005. Under a severe spotlight shed from the left, a voluminous, pebble-like mass transpires as an abstracted mountain viewed from above. It is firmly possessed by a rich vermilion, spherical form emerging from the lower right

foreground, while it is less urgently caressed by a solidified, green and lilac hillside that diagonally reaches the top right corner, meeting a pale dune.

These Caravaggesque volumes that enfold a central body are sculpted through color acting as a messenger of the illusion of light and that of its resultant absence, enabling spatial recessions through the protrusion of physical masses. Central to Fischer's technique, this is yet another illusion of severe illumination and its resultant counterpart, shadow, tangled to the dialectical phenomenon that conditions vision. Yet *Spiegel I* also embraces the possibility of pure obscurity, differentiating shadow as a derivative of light. In this sense, it charts the causal relations of light and shadow, while asserting the autonomy of darkness over the upper-left and lower-right zones. It seems to proclaim: shadow is dependent on light while darkness is not.

Upon *Spiegel I*, Caravaggio's dramatic tenebrism is applied to a gigantic pebble of an optically impenetrable, glaucous surface that carries upon itself a richness in the application of paint, giving way to a sense of tactility that recalls the astonishing coloristic forces of *The Abduction of the Daughters of Leucippus* (c. 1618) of Rubens, in which the coloration of the drapery is seductively echoed upon the voluptuous feminine flesh through emphatic reflections. The passive solidity of the luminous, biomorphic entity within the center of *Spiegel I* remains ambiguous, fissured by a cloudlike translucency produced through a restrained brushwork on the imaged surface. If this jump from pebble to cumulus accelerates the painting's surreal dimension, it returns the spectator to the phenomenon of vision, alluding to the image, that trace left upon the organic mirror, the eye. That trace, in a continuous state of change, is itself as lucid as it is hazy. Jacques Lacan sums up vision by noting: "The point of gaze always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel."¹⁵

The notion of the mirror in this series recalls the one possessed by the viewer. It is that fundamental interior parameter of the subject's visual facility, which Brunelleschi saw as a paradigm of picture-making. In *The Origin of Perspective*, Hubert Damisch submits perspective to an unreserved epistemological scrutiny, cutting across formalism, semiotics and epistemology, and mapping the Albertian Renaissance model to instances from the ornamental motifs of the painters of Pharaonic Egypt through ones in the twentieth century. Notions on the mirror, *trompe l'oeil* and abstraction remain crucial in Damisch's inquiry of linear perspective. For instance, regarding Brunelleschi's experimentation by means of the mirror he claims:

For it was this that made of the painting an object to be handled as well as seen, to be turned round and round, just as 'savages,' it is said, turned the first mirrors presented to them round and round to see what was hidden behind them. Brunelleschi did exactly the same thing: wanting to discover what was hidden behind perspective, he went to see for himself, going so far as to place his eye behind it to capture its operation in the mirror.¹⁶

Its operation in the mirror was simultaneously inclusive and exclusive of figuration and abstraction, rendering the "cloud" as an inevitable condition in the *dispositif* of perspective. And itself a form of abstraction to begin with, a form of a "cloud" materialized through color, *trompe l'oeil* continues to clip itself upon the perspective model, both upon the domains of the architectural and natural, both formally and epistemologically. As the mirror within painting cannot but be constituted as a coloristic entity, regardless of its extent of illusion, the verbal signifier of Fischer renders painting synonymic to "no light no color no mirror no vision no perspective." Jan van Eyck would have recourse to distortion through a convex mirror in his *Arnolfini Portrait*, while Velázquez would present the paradoxical mirror as the *sine qua non* of painting in *Las Meninas*. Manet, Picasso, Magritte, Richter and others would utilize the concept of the mirror or simulate its shattering in order to address the parallels, contingencies, and inconsistencies of seeing, touching, painting, and perceiving. *Spiegel I* counteracts the ephemerality and temporality of the retinal image, as once registered upon consciousness it renders itself as a *nature morte* of the rubbed out reflection.

It is this simultaneous presence and absence of a mirror in Fischer's painting that returns the gaze to the domain of the ocular mirror upon which it marks the aporia of the temporal and permanent, recalling Max Ernst's model of the Wunderblock upon whose top sheet an image

is drawn, only to disappear soon from visibility after having inscribed a permanent trace on the waxen support. Once past a formalistic canon, it would be hard to dissociate so many of Fischer's paintings of 2005 and onward from the mesmerizing hand/eye duplicities of Ernst. His 1922 cover collage *Répétitions* abutted on *Spiegel I* sets off a discursive ground of drawing and painting, of *dessin* and *coloris*, of the reciprocity of tactility and opticality. Looking back through *Spiegel I* onto Ernst's *Répétitions* lures one to look back further to *The Analysis of Beauty* (plates 1 and 2) of William Hogarth, designed, engraved, and published in 1753. "There is a dynamic between vision and imagination that corresponds to the movement—if we may call it that—of the serpentine line," writes Tom Huhn. "We might even hazard that in the case of the human body, serpentine lines describe not only its surfaces but so too its internal contents," concluding: "Vision, for Hogarth, is the exteriorization of the vitality of interior life."¹⁷ Hogarth's linearism is a double-folded trajectory: of mimesis and habit, of imitation and repetition, of eye and mind, what Huhn concludes as a "dance" whose "process mirrors the movement from one faculty to another."¹⁸ So too is the primary structure of painting, no matter to what extent color may uphold, suspend, or erase the original "line" of the brushstroke. Chroma continues drawing itself upon the viewer's retina—in one form or another—as the foundation of visual perception originates through such a fleeting "graphic" one. "Drawing and color are not separate at all; in so far as you paint, you draw,"¹⁹ just as in so far as one sees, one is drawn by the image. Upon the interstices of the surface of *Spiegel I*, lines continue to dance across the abscissas and ordinates of the lattice of the canvas, where the pictorial field demonstrates the simultaneity of the coloristic and the graphic, of hapticity and design. Their hide-and-seek is yet another dance between coloristic illusion and graphic tactility, as they both draw themselves upon the gaze.

A brief passage from *The Optical Unconscious* of Rosalind Krauss succinctly encapsulates the cognitive maze innate to the ocular mirror, that means and agent of visuality one confronts in Fischer's *Spiegel I*:

In contrast to this tactile 'visuality' is the space of light, which Lacan calls "dazzling, pulsatile": an atmospheric surround that illuminates the viewer from both back and front, so that from the start there is no question of mastery. And in the context of this space of the luminous, the viewer is not the surveyor—standing at a point just outside the pyramid of vision—but, caught within the onrush of light, he is what blocks the light, what interrupts its flow.²⁰

Spiegel I stamps the onrush of light upon the viewer's gaze. It caresses the subject's visceral mirror at once through a peculiarly abstract syntax that is built upon an autonomous form of figuration, while remaining mutually inclusive of the linear and coloristic, of the optical and haptic.

In a seminal and by now indispensable book *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, Alois Riegl explains the phenomenon of visual perception as an experiential, temporal process whereby the beholder's distance from the object formulates its optical and tactile properties as *perceived*. In a sense, regardless of the textural givens of a physical surface, its appearance changes based on the viewer's distance from it, a change that is dependent upon movement closer to or farther from the surface, for the optical and the tactile belong as much to the retinal domain of the beholder as they do to the object:

What might appear from a distance a patch of light or color of a certain size may from a closer standpoint prove to be a series of alternating illuminated and shaded areas; this immediately signals the presence of convexities—modeling—and thus the third dimension. This effect is naturally amplified the closer the beholder stands to the natural thing, until finally his memories of tactile experience have won the upper hand so unequivocally that he is no longer aware of the illusion caused by his visual organs. If the process is taken to an extreme, however—that is, if the eye is pressed right up against the object—the effect swings back to the opposite pole: no longer able to survey as a whole those aspects that recall tactile experience, the eye apprehends the surface.²¹

From a distance *Spiegel I* is a fragment of *Exosept II*, while *Distance*, executed in 2006, is a continuation of *Spiegel I*, although now the overt tactility of *Der Vogel Macht* or of *Engel* has swept upon this gleaming spheroid that comes forth as an imaginary massive creature whose upper wing is severely cropped. Yet its opticality is heightened as well through luscious *colorito*, the tangible substance of painting. *Distance* has amplified what was in *Spiegel I* seen up close. If Fischer's pictorial motif is twofold, one of spatiality and the other of a central object, a volume, or a mass, there remains a painterly leitmotif that runs across the entire body of work. That leitmotif might be seen as the ongoing imbrication of the optical within the tactile and vice versa. It is the beholder's cognition based on the space between the eye and the surface of Fischer's painting that determines the lived experience. Both the opticality and tactility in this body of work are effects of fluxes of colors even within states of strictest modeling, even as they are situated within given linear boundaries. Yet one more auto-reflexivity of seeing and painting.

Embrace II of 2006 seems to conjoin the distributed versus local compositional motifs of the preceding two groups (*Der Vogel Macht*, *Engel*, *Keine Einigung*, *Exosept* versus *Magic Mirror*, *Spiegel I*, *Distance*). Unlike the others, though, the image here carries rectilinear geometric traits that are both fused and in tension with the spherical vocabulary and looser painterly colorations. Would it be too absurd to link *Embrace II* to an imaginary juxtaposition of the baton of command in Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* and Giorgione's *Tempest*? The Surrealists embraced absurdity at the outset. In fact, overlapping *Embrace II*, Uccello and Giorgione is perhaps not absurd enough to be "surreal," for the three interconnect on so many levels of form, while they disconnect on so many others. *Embrace II* attaches itself to *The Tempest* and *The Battle of San Romano* through its morphology, except now the referent has shifted diametrically, rendering painting as a mirror of a visceral imagination.

Not necessarily in the following order and not necessarily through the following list, the abstract naturalism of Fischer continues to map itself endlessly to the bodily through non-mutually exclusive formal and conceptual parameters inseparable from Giotto, Uccello, Giorgione, El Greco, Rubens, Watteau, Cézanne, Le Corbusier, Ernst, Richter, and the L Schema. As this work maps itself to a series of names and concepts, it continues to disconnect itself endlessly from the series. It employs the *modus operandi* of illusion in the service of abstraction—and vice versa. By doing so, it reconstructs painting's one ontological truth while erasing another. It reconstructs one amorphousness while deconstructing another, reconstituting projections of the (dis)embodied eye upon the flattened plane through orderly fleas of color. Beyond style, formalism and aesthetics, the opticality of light continues to be shed, permeating the contaminated mirror, wherein the corporeal is grasped as a tangible space. Such is the hermitical painterly project of Martina Fischer.

Notes

¹ For instance, the primary differences of both themes and figural parameters of Fischer and Hellmich notwithstanding, and on a differential ground, both rely upon illusion, dimensionality, modeling (the former highly, the latter barely), perspective (the former spherical, the latter planar), and material facture (the former implicit, the latter explicit). See Mark Gisbourne, "This is the House that Jack Built... The Paintings of Christian Hellmich" in *Arrangement*, catalogue essay (New York: Lehmann Maupin Gallery, 2006). Gisbourne notes: "It would be wrong, however, to cast Hellmich's work as if it existed in a vacuum, for it is part of a much larger concern also expressed by many of his contemporaries, not least several of the well-known and emerging Leipzig painters who also share the same concern with perception and spatial architectonics." In New York, illusionism is present either through the purely figurative (Hilary Harkness) or in contest with flatness (Brian Alfred, perspectival; Eric Freeman, magnified vertical or horizontal modeling). One close parallel to Fischer's style is perhaps that of Ross Bleckner, as both embrace abstraction and illusion simultaneously, despite their individual formalist parameters and contents.

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define a concept as "a chaotic state par excellence; it refers back to a chaos rendered consistent." In *What is Philosophy?* (1991), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 208.

³ On the programmability of Op art versus the emotional excesses linked to Abstract Expressionism and as a route to various sources on these topics, see Pamela Lee, "Bridget Riley's Eye/Body Problem," *October* 98 (Fall 2001), pp. 27-46.

⁴ For a compelling critique of the status of contemporary biological sciences through their representation within the visual arts, see Suzanne Anker and Dorothy Nelkin, *The Molecular Gaze: Art in the Genetic Age* (New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2004).

⁵ In Charles de Tolnay, "Les Écrits de Lajos Fülep sur Cézanne," *Acta Historiae Artium*, vol. 20 (1970), p. 113, cited in Françoise Cachin et al., *Cézanne* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 384.

⁶ Bakhtin's pairing of an abstract idea and a piece of rock compelled me to quote the sentence in both metaphorical and metonymical relations to the paintings of Fischer. M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 42. On this I quote an endnote in Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 320: "For a dialogic model of painting—both as a polyvocal structure in and of itself and as a process of conversation between pictures—I rely on M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*," trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 204-205.

⁸

⁹ Rosalind Krauss, "Carnal Knowledge," in *Andy Warhol: Rorschach Paintings*, catalogue essay (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1996), pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Psychogenic Disturbance in Vision," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psychoanalysis, 1953-1973), Volume XI, p. 216, cited in Krauss, *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹ Yve-Alain Bois, "Cézanne: Words and Deeds," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 84 (Spring 1998), p. 37.

¹² Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 186; and Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 238-249. See also "Value," pp. 186-191, for an astonishing discussion of the Greimasian Square. The Klein Group, L Schema, and Greimasian Square are hammered out in *The Optical Unconscious*, pp. 13-27, 158-161, 186-192, 320.

¹³ See Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, trans. Rolf Winkes (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1985).

¹⁴ Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1952), p. 118, cited in Françoise Cachin et al., *Cézanne* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 381.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1973), trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 96.

¹⁶ Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (1987), trans. John Goodman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 137-138.

¹⁷ Tom Huhn, *Imitation and Society: The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2004), pp. 81-90.

¹⁸ Huhn, p. 84.

¹⁹ Paul Cézanne, reported by Émile Bernard, "Opinions," in *Cézanne in Perspective*, ed. Judith Wechsler (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 42, cited in Bois, p. 42.

²⁰ Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, p. 87.

²¹ Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, trans. Jacqueline E. Jung (New York: Zone Books, 2004), pp. 187-188.