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Eva Rosenstiel: Painting From Where the Eye and Camera Converge¹

*But only those who leave for leaving's sake
are travelers; hearts tugging like balloons,
they never balk at what they call their fate
and, not knowing why, keep muttering >away!< . . .*²

1. A little Buddha statue rests in the bamboo thicket in the little garden behind the house. The rivulet running between the stones, an imagined river, the movement—the intangibility, impermanence—this is all one part of it. A reflection of paradise? Retreat from the world? Indeed! And yet, isn't this also the stuff of real life: family³, the children, the cat? At once this trickle of consciousness seems to constantly accompany as well as act sole inlet—the only reflection one can suppose to know? It is precisely this, this split existence: the challenge, disputability, and involuntary need to do. The contented and desperate, sometimes redeeming search and lust for the image. For its riddle, for that which did not yet exist, for what precluded this thought, this day, this minute—to which one sees oneself at mercy—in making and seeing . . . the image seeming to be both questionable and needed, begging to be explored, discovered and painted, as indeed it needs to be. »For a long time I tried to subordinate the >creative urge< to other activities in my life. Unfortunately, it didn't really work out. >Wanting to paint< always prevailed. According to Markus Lüpertz, »Painting is healthy.«—as if! I still think that I might be happier without the urge . . . at least, long breaks from work are not conducive to my mental well-being, and on one hand, I find this way of painting to be a burden to myself and my family.« And yet this is only the process, the desire and the craving for the interaction with water and ink, with oils, brushes, cotton buds, with photographs and prints, aluminum panels, glass and mirror panes, as well as canvas, prints, pens, turpentine and erasers.

Really it has to do with the joy for everyday images and their many impositions; thus, for Eva Rosenstiel, painting is about the interaction between the artists' materials and the artist in her studio. This and still more: it's about concentration, holding onto an image, a panel. It's about the project of painting along a path with no end. Or rather an ends, of which one knows nothing but the means, where one can only experience the process. Painting—a process for and against images, however ubiquitous today, and yet evermore transient and fleeting, and yet in another

¹ From an expanded edition, in: Rosenstiel, Eva. »Synergien im Magazin der Bilder« »Synergies in a Magazine of Images«, in artforum3 e. V., Freiburg ed. Rosenstiel, Eva. Kunstforum Hochschwarzwald, Neustadt, 27. Jul. - 19. Aug. 2007, pp. 7-11.

² Baudelaire, Charles. »Travelers.« Les Fleurs Du Mal. Trans. Howard, Richard. David R. Godine Publisher, Boston, 1983, pp. 152-153 (first published 1857).

³ Eva Rosenstiel, in: Zerhusen, Michael. ed. »Ist Malen ungesund? Ein Interview mit Eva Rosenstiel.« »Is painting healthy? An interview with Eva Rosenstiel.« Kunstverein Oberer Neckar: Eva Rosenstiel w.w.w., Galerie im Kloster, Horb a. N., 13. Feb-13. Mar. 2005, p.5.

sense, as penetrating as they have ever been in the history of mankind, interwoven with all subtlety of aesthetic, psychological, technical, scientific, cultural, marketing-strategical and other forms of knowledge, which impress upon our consciousness. Images cloud our thoughts and spin a new web around our relationship to reality, interlacing it with a second reality upheld by images, which in turn affects the artist's relation to things, to pictures.

So how to paint what? »Seeing is desire«, says Eva Rosenstiel, »Interacting with colors a furious expedition.« The path she's developed for herself is supported by her research in an unending ›magazine‹ of images that distinguishes our reality. These are photographs, whether shot herself or printed images appropriated from advertisements and newspaper clippings. These are pictures that seem trivial: hotel rooms with twee pillows, two young women in a bed, shipping containers from a bird's eye view, a women in a pile of garbage, the view of a costume jewelry shop, photos of trees, glittering light reflections, the tangle of blades of grass on the wayside. »Moving water surfaces, for instance, that frothe and surge so chaotically that the camera's automatic light meter has to work for several minutes to set them in focus, and yet still fails to do so. Or blurry pictures of weeds on the roadside, or grass, gravel in a creek, or tree trunks. What you see out of the corner of your eye walking through nature, not concentrating on anything particular.«⁴

However—mostly—it is not the content of the paintings, the object of the image, whatever the nature of that content may be, that is subject to painterly commentary. Rather, it is the technologically-based easy availability of photography that transforms reality into a two-dimensional phenomenon. In the past years, it has been those pictures in »Paradiesformat«, or »The Golden Mean«⁵, which have been the first point of departure for Rosenstiel's research. Much of what she sees and documents photographically has to do with nature. Eva Rosenstiel intervenes in the photographs with ink and brushes, markers and paint, retouching and over-painting what is to her irrelevant, unloosing individual forms from their frame of context. The meaningless image taken in and of itself unexpectedly unveils a vestigial strength of form: those formative accents, which barely come to light on superficial inspection, and yet still take effect. Abstract forms become visible—an arsenal of visual patterns, i.e. image (re)proofs, which one would hold up to art history in vain. In addition, there are the painting series where a single formal detail may instigate a point of interest, and then, entirely independently of any representational reference point, is further explored and expanded across the entire surface of a print. Not as a mechanical extrapolation, but as polymorphic varia-

⁴ Röschmann, Dietrich. »Pfade der Wahrnehmung durch die Entropie.« »Paths of Perception through Entropy.« Regioartline. 9. Apr. 2006. Freiburg. <http://www.regioartline.org>.

⁵ Title of the 2006 exhibition in the Foth Gallery, Freiburg.

tions: a ›magazine‹ of hundreds of miniatures in a 10 x 15 cm format, a paradise of the possible structures to paint, that might undergo further analysis of form and color.

II. As a painter, Eva Rosenstiel is an archeologist of colors and forms, which she discovers in mechanically and technically produced images such as photographs and inkjet prints. She herself says of how she proceeds: »The results of small format images are enlarged on aluminum with the use of a scanner or inkjet printer. Reproduced along the same lines, it's impossible to definitively determine what was once the photographic basis for an image or one applied with paint. In a further work step endeavoring to make an additional connection between the two media, the entire surface is reworked with symbol-like patterns, identified within the printed images. For me, this process is a kind of ›excavation‹ within the material of the image, as the changes to color in transferring the painting ground always provoke surprising discoveries«⁶. The principal of Eva Rosenstiel's work lies in her reaction in painting and drawing to pre-existing patterns that are ever to be rediscovered, in other words, those that have come about through the process of painting. However, here, it is not about copying what already exists and translating it into the enlarged format of a painting. »That would simply be busy-work!«⁷ Therefore, in a subsequent step, Rosenstiel pursues the contradiction between the material substance of the image and the suggestion of its appearance: »While at first glance the work appears to have more of a digital character, I am exclusively interested in the manual processing of the image's surface.« By reworking the photographs, Eva Rosenstiel blurs the suggestion of illusion, at once breaking the dominance of the camera lens, its ostensible objectivity and indifference toward reality. The relativisation of the photographic images through their reworking thus generates a new and different pictorial experience in the illusion's underlying structure. This journey of discovery through the prints' layers of paint sensitizes the viewer to patterns in color and form, in one further step, rendering autonomous paintings. »Something grabs me! A form. A pattern. Colors grab me. It is a pleasure to paint this, to do that with my paintbrush, ink and cotton buds.«⁸ What is important is working, manual occupation. »It's in my hands!« What is important is the certainty of action, in effect, of a corporeal presence, whose traces are put down in the deconstruction of illusion. And what is important is also the formal control of color harmonies, the intensification, the layering—along with the simultaneous rejection of any pretense toward realism within the painting—

⁶ Letter to the editor, Freiburg May 2007.

⁷ Eva Rosenstiel, in conversation with the editor, 27. May 2007.

⁸ Eva Rosenstiel, *ibid.*

through gently probing with colors, which unfold in web-like patterns, sometimes permitting—lens-like—unseen insights into the deeper layers of the printed image. In the disappearance of the ostensible world of things, unleashed by this craving for color and addiction to painting, there is also the question of the relevance of artistic activity—in this moment of ubiquity and dominance of intentional pictorial worlds—in just precisely doubting Why. And yet, thus, painting would seem to be a gesture against personal unconnectability, indispensable as a form of holding on to the self, as the individual objectivization of one's knowledge about the flood of electronic production and the effectual intangibility of the everyday in the normal course of life.⁹

III. Eva Rosenstiel does not seek virtuosity in her application of paint, and is hardly after a significant stylistic identity that one might circumscribe with realistic or abstract. In principal, this was already the case for the series where grass and bamboo thickets formed the central motif of her work. These are paintings often titled with the term ›Feld‹ or ›Field‹, and the date of their making. They suggest periods in a life cycle. Documented photographically, what the artist sees makes up the compositions' point of departure, but only just that—a reference point—as the main subject is always painting's objectivity. In her use of brushstrokes, the motif transforms, departing from illusionist precision and mechanical perception. The paint strokes undermine the eye's orientation, blurring the photographic illusion of a network of different layers of motifs, flattening the pictorial space in the sense of a formal pattern quasi without composition, expanding it across the edge of the painting. Serial instances in the arrangement of line, in which leaves and twigs seem to be represented, will, in the next painting, transform into various layers of strokes with self-iterating curvature in an advancing process of abstraction. Through changes in the spectrum of color, they become more and more detached from their photographic model, thereby becoming a painterly meditation that affirms the entire image surface.¹⁰ The representational provocation to paint increasingly loses its meaning; what is far more important is the process of painting. The image surface and color pattern seem to become an increasingly fixed identity, whereby occasionally depth of field is possible within the illusion.

Thus, Eva Rosenstiel has resolved her relationship to the image by working with the suggestion of space, though liberating herself from the illusionist predicament of the figure-foundation constellation: »In regards to abstraction, essentially it is at the heart of every painterly process. A kind of reduction of paint, spots, dots,

⁹ Vilém Flusser insightfully describes the shift of mentality during the electronic age, reaching up until the present, in: Flusser. Vilém. *Dinge und Undinge. The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design.* ed. Akzente. Hanser, Munich, Vienna. 1993. p. 80.

¹⁰ cf. Eva Rosenstiel, in: Dold, Julia. *V.I.A.S., Hans-Thoma-Museum, Bernau, 16. Mar. - 27. Apr. 2003, Freiburg 2003.*

lines . . . I don't see anything else while working—and I don't later. The image's consumer may then invoke what would-be representation—if that is his wish.«¹¹

IV. Questions concerning the conditions of painting form the basis of Eva Rosenstiel's playful use of forms and colors. Thereby, color becomes matter, to be experienced as an autonomous medium, which the viewer can place himself in relation to. Color is the foundation of the suggestion of pictorial phenomena, upheld by the joy purely in seeing, the richness of human-designed activity and experience, in the production of images in the continual flow of life. The image carrier—whether aluminum, glass, or a mirror pane—is like a sharp edge that cuts through the patterns of color in Rosenstiel's work, which might easily be carried on beyond the frame in her grass paintings. Thus, series of small paintings have emerged, which can be placed alone or together in groups on the wall, thus unfolding a dialogical life of their own.

In her diversely formulated works, Eva Rosenstiel displays the most multi-faceted possibilities of painting. Once again, color is significant, its materiality, at times in the form of a glaze, at others diluted, also applied in short strokes of geometricizing rows, in multi-colored circles, as free organic forms floating across a grey ground of glass, or built up in thick relief. Eva Rosenstiel uses oil paint, which, unlike acrylic in its tough consistency, can fulfill the high demands of the manual intensity of her practice. The little paintings' materiality is underscored in their comparative rigidity in contrast to canvas paintings. The panels float on the wall, held by narrow invisible rails on their reverse. The resulting gap of shadow between the wall supports the denseness of the painting, its idiosyncratic surface and intensity of color. At the same time, Eva Rosenstiel transforms the function of the painting, as a carrier of the concrete matter of paint, as well as its illusionist semblance, into a unique symbiosis of different concepts of space within and beyond the pictorial plane. The painting is at once an object in space, on the wall, and an illusionist space, in its constellation of colors and relief-like surface, with the paint occasionally forming an atmospherically veil-like fond on the printed photographic patterns. Meanwhile on a virtual level, it embeds the real space through the use of a reflective foundation; the applied paint acquiring an iridescent film of light. The viewer discovers himself in the painting, his gaze breaking the reflection. Reflections give the paintings of Eva Rosenstiel a new unique dimension, a dimension that she particularly extends during the Paris strolls occasioned by a Cité des Arts scholarship in the summer of 2009. Aimless research claimed numerous im-

¹¹ Eva Rosenstiel. cf. Endnotes. 3, Horb 2005, p. 6.

ages from the metropolis, the painting of which has been commemorated in sight and in mind throughout history.¹²

The interplay between concrete reality, reflection and illusion falls back on conceptual positions devised in the late 1960s by artists like Michelangelo Pistoletto, or John Baldessari, but especially as the ever-returned to subject of Richard Hamilton's reflection on images. Richard Hamilton photographed himself in front of a mirror so that his hand appears to be both a real and reflected hand, whose index finger is in the midst of smudging oil paint across the glass surface, while the camera lens is invisible. In his self-portraits, Hamilton especially deliberated on the differentiation between various image planes ranging between authenticity and illusion. Through graphical printing, he drew upon the role of the relationship between images, between the manually painted image and that of photographic reproduction, and the multi-layered pictorial reality that illuminates so many psychological dimensions.¹³

In the summer of 2009, due to a Cité des Arts scholarship from the state of Baden-Württemberg, Eva Rosenstiel explored Paris in her own particular way, a city which till today offers a feast for the eyes and food for thought. Photographically exploring the reflective structures of the utopian high-rise district of La Defense, she has placed herself in relationship to the metropolis through painting and mirroring photographic realities and ways of seeing.

Eva Rosenstiel perambulates through the botanical garden, and after painting mirrors with dabs of color in her studio; she then places these in the garden beds to be photographed. Flowers, leaves and reflections are woven together through photography, augmented and augmenting each other through pictorial disorientation. In a combinable disentanglement puzzle of real and reflected plants, painting modifies these different, new experiences that document photographic perspectives, which in turn evolve into unseen often psychologically charged images. The vagrant gaze is disoriented. Illusion and reality blend into each other along the cutting edge of the mirror, deflecting the direct gaze, which presence in the image is both defined and obscured through the splotches of paint.

In this Parisian summer, she follows the trail of the poète maudit—of the poet of the early modern period. With the new challenge of the French language, she encounters Charles Baudelaire's poetry, which she approaches through her »Fleurs du Mal« drawings. Her flower images may be seen from a cool distance; their order privileging irregularity, bordering on the thin line between the documentary, and embracing what pre-exists with acceptance. The mutely glowing silhouettes

¹² cf. Caroline Käding's historical references to John Baldessari and Thomas Demand, in: Käding, Caroline. «Eva Rosenstiel, Flanérie, Retour de Paris», Conrad Schroeder Institut e. V., Centre Culturel Français, Freiburg. 2009

¹³ cf. Herzogenrath, Wulf. »Hamiltons Selbstbildnisse als Malerei-Konzept und Konzept-Malerei.« »Hamiltons Self-Portraits as Painting Concepts and Conceptual Painting.«, in: Richard Hamilton, Subject to an Impression, Kunsthalle Bremen, 19. Jul.-18. Oct. 1998, pp. 106-117.

on mirrors primed with a thin layer of light matt acrylic white are finished in graphite, thus withdrawing from the notion of being colored by emotion. An archive of new motifs develops as a result, their tentativeness suggesting ornamental order and allowing for the discovery of aggressive potential. Meanwhile, the search for form also incorporates the chairs at the Musée des Arts décoratifs. Of interest here are the reflections of often shiny drawings done in graphite and that formulate idiosyncratic and puzzling ornamentation against a paper foundation painted in silver-bronze.

While this process of image production is described in a series of successive steps, the whole process unfolds as a complex web, and the individual steps interlock with each other. The manifold facets, which come together in her images, show that an analysis of pictorial reality is on the horizon. Meanwhile, a reservoir of motifs develops from her photographically documented expeditions.

And so, she >hangs< a series of oval lamps in the Palais de Tokyo by photographing the space through a mirror painted with orange forms. This photograph of golden proportion is yet another point of departure for a painting, where the optical presence of the architectonic structure of the Palais is reduced to blue and green tones, which form a serene foundation against which float three-dimensional, elliptical bodies. Black strips with vertically placed ovals transform the no longer orange, but green lamps into a swarm of satellite-like eyes, which seem to look out at all sides. In this eye-catching game, she has found a companion in Walter Benjamin, who erected Paris as an unrivaled literary monument in his >Arcades Project<. ¹⁴ >In his observations on the passageways, the arcades, streets and boulevards interconnected and inviting *flânerie*, he wrote about the ambiguity of these spaces, at once interior and exterior, ambiguously bounded spaces. The exterior aspect of this ambiguity, according to Benjamin, is determined by »the abundance of mirrors, which fabulously amplify the spaces and make orientation more difficult.«¹⁵

Paris appears reflectively, where the eye directs its gaze, the brush its paint. It is a journey of discovery through the metropolis, whose extension is indebted to the gaze of the *flâneur*, his sweeping consciousness, which, clinging to surfaces, follows the disorienting traces of experience inscribed through history. It is a game in the world of illusion, which tries to accommodate the illusoriness of images, which affords light to the mirror as a painting ground and space to the illusion. »Oil painting, drawing and photography are contingent upon each other and lead the viewer through an >arcade< of percipience. This concept is similar to the notions

¹⁴ cf. Benjamin, Walter. *Das Passagenwerk. The Arcades Project*. Trans. Eiland, Howard. McLaughlin, Kevin. ed. Tiedemann, Rolf. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Belknap Press. London. 1999, *Mirrors*, p. 542.

¹⁵ Nicoletta Torcelli, Eva Rosenstiel, *Rapport, Kunsthhaus L6, Freiburg*, Introductory speech on 22.10.2010, unpublished typed manuscript, p.4.

within Walter Benjamin's philosophy . . . as a metaphor for the ›in-between‹.« For Eva Rosenstiel, »Paris is the city of silver. Paris, city of mirrors. The works that came about here are expression of a psychological spatial experience, a groping and searching movement. A percipience molded by the overabundance of detail, of disruption, of distraction ...«¹⁶. It is a city of *flânerie*, in the fleeting ambivalent sights and sightings, full of relish and without hold, in the anarchic game of the blink of an eye.

In her singular way, through illusion and painterly abstraction, Eva Rosenstiel stays in touch with reality and its relationship to painting as an experiential space, in the patterns of the city, which inspire and fascinate and can only ever be ordered in a limited way, thus oscillating in illusion. As a student under the painter and Karlsruhe Academy professor Peter Dreher, her work ties into a tradition of realism, or rather illusionism, as well as photography, concrete and minimalist art, and color field painting. The paths of her reflections on images are serial and variational in their materiality, relying on the cooperation and coexistence of different positions that are rich in variety, without these necessarily ever—up until now—leading to their symbiotic commonization according to the declination of a standardized canon of color and form. Instead, Eva Rosenstiel fans out areas of conflict that relate to the basic question of the relevancy of painted images. A unique space of aesthetic experience opens up. »For me, the next image always results from the feeling of not being content with what has just been completed. . . . My works are stopping points or pickets rammed in the ground—quasi-markers of existence . . . Works, yes. But not the self. I want to work, work a great deal. I want to see, see a great deal. I want to leave behind traces. But sometimes, I wish I had a cloak of invisibility.«¹⁷

¹⁶ Nicoletta Torcelli, *ibid* 2010, p.4.

¹⁷ Eva Rosenstiel, cf. Endnotes. 3, Horb 2005, pp. 6, 8.