

Franziska Reinbothe

*Look Closely*

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~~#~~notforsale

Spitalstr.18, Basel

Appartement

4.OG|4th floor

## Painting as an Object

The work of Franziska Reinbothe (\*1980 in Berlin) focuses on painting and its material conditions. Her pictorial inventions tackle space and are created against the background of art-historical reflection on the medium and its possibilities between fictive representation and factual existence. The artist is less interested in the painted image than in the structural components of the image carrier, canvas and wooden framework, which she subjects to a sculptural transformation.

In the history of painting, the aspect of immersion in the pictorial representation claims a primary value. The painted plane was the place of illusionistic deception, the place of contemplative immersion in a fictive parallel world.

Since the 15th century, Leon Battista Alberti's metaphor of the painting as an open window that directs the viewer's gaze into another reality has been a predominant concept: the *finestra aperta* provides a glimpse into a parallel world through a rectangular section. Charged with a symbolic meaning, the painterly surface refers beyond itself and to an independent reality of representation. Created within a limited field, the illusion of three-dimensionality prevails in this self-contained pictorial world, which is essentially disconnected from the viewer's own material reality. So in order to fully engage with the reality conveyed by the painting, it is necessary that the viewer disengage with his immediate surroundings.

Already in 1890, the Parisian painter Maurice Denis asserted: „Remember that a painting—before being a warhorse, a naked woman or some story or other—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.“ In the course of Minimalism's radically objective conception of art in the early 1960s, painting is completely stripped off its ability to deceive the viewer with visual means that are considered frivolous since they evoke a fictive, therefore, fake composition. Not the arrangement of forms within a painterly image, but the form of the canvas itself becomes relevant. Minimalism categorically rejected any illusionistic tricks and insisted on the pure and true physical presence of painting, thus foregrounding the reality of the painting as a (flat) object. The distinction between the depiction “in” the rectangle and the rectangle itself was no longer valid. Representational and real space coincide, the latter of which being inhabited by both viewer and painting physically. “Three dimensions are real space. [...] Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface.” (Donald Judd, 1964).

Instead of entering a fictive space, the beholder now stops deadpan in front of the plane, recognizing the painting as an object belonging to his direct environment. He is prompted to actively relate to it in space, even move around it. The treatment of the picture surface does no longer follow any representational or illusionistic aim but is committed to the literal shape of the image carrier, thus limited to the purely formal constructive elements of the supporting rectangle. Not the false promise of fiction, but the factual value emphasized.

Franziska Reinbothe's approach is true to this understanding of painting as an object, stimulating the viewer to become aware of his own physical conditions. In her work, Alberti's „open window“ does not assume metaphorical meaning, but attains a literal shape. The wooden parts of a stretcher are joined to form various, often strikingly dysfunctional, constructions: doubled, splayed out, imitating the contour of a room corner, neatly fitted to fit a wall protuberance. The canvas appears sometimes loosely and buoyantly suspended, at other times tightly fixed like a tent tarpaulin or even gathered like a prim curtain. In more recent works, the artist experiments with gauzy, translucent chiffon: the “open window” now enables to catch a glimpse of the rear side of the support and the wall surface,

again dismantling the notion of a representational side.

In a subtle step, this permeability demonstrates the departure from the classical pictorial convention: It dissolves the duality of the painterly panel in its strict separation between painted front and negligible back. In her formal experiments, Franziska Reinbothe investigates the very notion of shape, overcoming the pictorial plane in favor of three-dimensional explorations. She seems to take up Lucio Fontana's endeavor of opening up the painting to space not only by merely penetrating the superficial membrane, but by turning the entire picture construction upside down. Leaving behind the flatness of the conventional painting and imbuing it with a boundless spatial expansion, Reinbothe allows the structural components to become independent entities: „It makes me very happy when the painting or its materials assume a certain autonomy.“

Franziska Reinbothe's sculptural formations or re-formations are based on these formative elements of the pictorial support, which she twists and thwarts and liberates from former rectangular confines in a playful reflection on the means of painting. The origin of this procedure lies in the chance event of the destruction of one of Reinbothe's own dismissed earlier works. Since this decisive incident, destructive actions such as breaking, splitting, sawing, cutting, folding, gathering, creasing, and folding of previously intact constructions of stretcher and canvas have become characteristic working steps. „In painting, I am interested in what usually remains hidden: The back of a painting and its edges. To make them visible, I compress canvases, expose stretcher frames or do without them altogether. I expand, fold, break, cut through and/or sew up my paintings after the painting process is finished. Some of them then protrude far into the room, others have already completely detached themselves from the wall.“

Despite her conceptual consistency, Reinbothe breaks up the strict self-referentiality of minimalism in numerous ways that are imbued with mischievous humor. Although the elements do not explicitly refer to anything else, remaining visible as what they are, the artist allows for a certain mimetic or narrative gesture in her transformations of the wooden slats and colored pieces of fabric: her final forms sometimes contain associative hints, narrative connotations, even suggest spontaneous idea or impression.

For example, the straightness of a lateral wooden slat is broken so it thrusts forward, alluding to a somewhat awkward physical posture (hüftsteif, 2019). Franziska Reinbothe's witty deconstructions also seems to cite the mutability of the altar retable, the traditional genre whose complex religious pictorial program unfolds in space on several panels that stand in distinct relation to one another. The dynamic principle of opening and closing, the transformation of the back into the front and vice versa, the folding, turning over, and turning inside out prove to be actions that enable a variety of manifestations in the religious context. In this sense, Reinbothe's works embody variable states rather than incorporating the leaden static of sculptural works. They intrinsically bear the lightness of moving interventions in space, whose shifting interplay of color and form convey the spontaneity of a sketch and point to an open-ended working process driven by a desire to experiment, whose point of departure is expressed in the question: „What actually happens when...?“

Bettina Haiss, Cologne 2023