

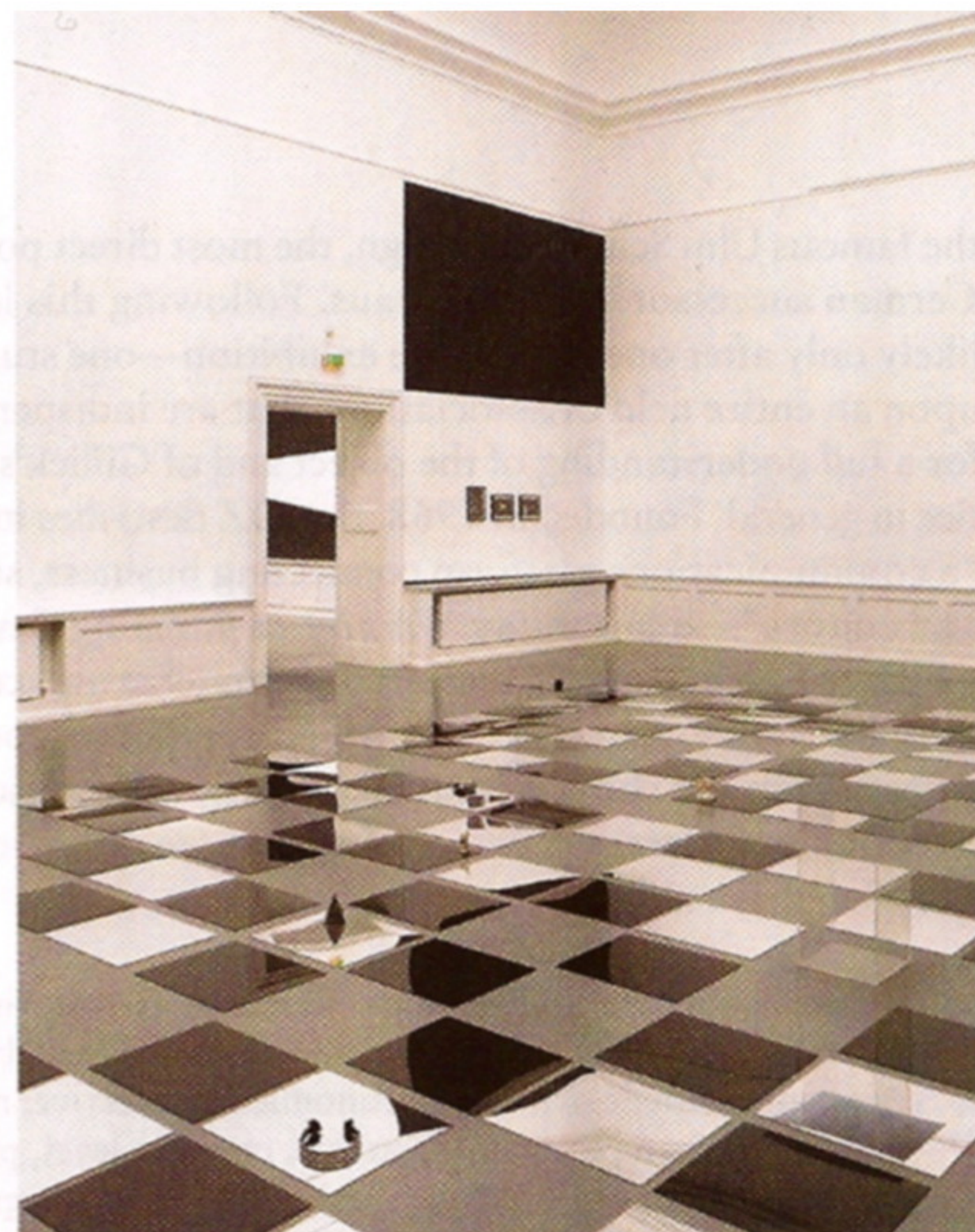
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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



From left: Susanne M. Winterling, *Untitled (Through the Looking Glass II)*, 2010, mixed media. Installation view, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2009. Photo: Stephan Baumann. Susanne M. Winterling, *Poetry and the Looking Glass of the Closet (A. D. and J. G. and the Patterns of Radical Films)*, 2009, photocollage, 11 1/2 x 15 1/2". Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany. Susanne M. Winterling, *Schachhirn (Space-Odyssey 2010)* (Chess Brain [Space Odyssey 2010]), black and reflective Perspex tiles, 16-mm film projections, fabric. Installation view, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany.



Susanne M. Winterling

GESELLSCHAFT FÜR AKTUELLE KUNST,
BREMEN, GERMANY/BADISCHER
KUNSTVEREIN, KARLSRUHE, GERMANY
Jens Asthoff

IN “THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS”—Susanne M. Winterling’s exhibition at the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, Germany—the artist gamely takes up Lewis Carroll’s tale of the same name. The show announces itself by presenting its title on a large-format movie-house marquee (*Untitled [Through the Looking Glass I]*, 2010). Yet this work hangs above the exit, so that viewers do not discover this gigantic lighted board until they are about to leave. Conversely, Winterling stages the actual entrance to the show as a liminal space. She has constructed a wooden copy of the silhouette of the museum’s baroque entry arch, painted it black, and placed it on the floor like a three-dimensional shadow. Thus the viewer is compelled to enter the show by stepping over *Untitled (Through the Looking Glass II)*, 2010, a threshold that marks the entire space as a reality inverted, a fantastic world of mirroring and reflective transformation.

The motif of mirroring is brought to bear not only on physical space but on questions of identity formation, gender, and adolescence—a kind of Wonderland Alice writ large. Winterling often tropes biographical elements from transgressive female artists such as Eileen Gray and Isadora Duncan; here, for example, one work incorporates correspondence between the writers Annemarie Schwarzenbach and Carson McCullers. Yet the most affecting pieces in the show are based not on specific references but on the detritus of multiple and anonymous identities. In the photographic suites *Teen Beat I* and *II*, 2010,

pictures are hung in a line like images on a strip of film, uniting wildly disparate motifs in associative leaps: personal objects such as clothing and jewelry, and film stills and found images that seem loosely related to notions of puberty and femininity. So, too, the fabulous installation *Schachhirn (Space-Odyssey 2010)* (Chess Brain [Space Odyssey 2010]) deploys montage to suggest both the ordering and the dissolution of the self. Winterling has replicated the exact grid structure of the ceiling in alternating black and mirrored Perspex tiles on the floor; in addition, she has placed small objects here and there on the square tiles: a bracelet with rivets, a porcelain figure of three dancing girls, crumpled strips of film, a feather. From punk relic to fanciful trinket, the girlish artifacts drift over the Kubrick-Carrollian mirrored chessboard like archaeological fragments of lives past or forgotten.

Winterling created another walk-in tableau for her recent show at the Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst in Bremen, Germany, elliptically titled “. . . Dreaming is nursed in darkness.” The exhibition—comprising photography, film, sound, text, and light—circled around the titular quotation from Jean Genet: “A man must dream a long time in order to act with grandeur, and dreaming is nursed in darkness.” Indeed, Winterling devoted an entire room to the French existentialist’s line. Titled *Dein Schatten liest Funeral Rites (Lichtraum für Funeral Rites)* (Your Shadow Is Reading Funeral Rites [Room of Light for Funeral Rites]), 2009, this installation was spare yet atmospherically charged: Suffused with green and red light, the space was empty save for the one line of text, mounted on the white wall in white vinyl letters. The chromatic projections rendered the lettering ephemeral, yet their raking light was all that made the typeface legible in the first place—as if incarnating Genet’s legendary distrust of vision and appearance.

In the large, long main room, the visual scheme was stripped down even further into a largely monochromatic, darkened setting. For *Suntrust and Suncatchers*, 2009, Winterling painted a large section of the wall black and then hung black fabric over the gallery’s approximately sixty-five-foot-long wall of windows, thereby both obscuring the room’s view of the Weser River and filling the space

with twilight. The flat surface of the curtain gave way at the bottom third to a gently arched inward curve, immediately recalling the interior of a ship’s hull. Moreover, several circular holes were cut out at or above eye level, like portholes providing glimpses of the opposite shore. But Winterling seems less concerned with the view than with channeling the influx of light: In front of each opening, the artist positioned a freestanding display panel that resembled an easel painted completely black; each propped up a plate of black acrylic glass. These dark reflectors were placed at the focal points of each of the round openings and so were “illuminated” by them. Clearly, the setting was meant to recall a camera obscura—a dark, oneiric chamber in which images arise from immaterial, reflected light.

Winterling’s easels and tableaux also suggest that the photographic image is a way of renewing the gesture, of painting with light—a proposition explicitly enacted in the

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abstract, painterly photographs of the series *Teer und Federn im Rampenlicht* (Tar and Feathers in the Limelight), 2009, and in . . . *Get a Hold of the Darkness* . . . , 2009, a 16-mm film loop of a sparkler burning explosively in the dark. Such inscriptive concerns are echoed in the atmospheric photomontage *Poetry and the Looking Glass of the Closet (A. D. and J. G. and the Patterns of Radical Films)*, 2009, which melds ghostly images of Genet, feminist activist Angela Davis, and a fin de siècle dandy—as if the ghost of Carroll’s decadent, absurdist vision had actually surfaced amid twentieth-century identity politics. With such gestures, Winterling still hopes, it seems, that history can course through her representations, embedding political agency within their inversions and refractions. □

“Through the Looking Glass” is on view at the Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany, through Apr. 5.

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Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.