

frieze

SUSANNE M. WINTERLING: "I'll be your mirror but I'll dissolve it"

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Susanne M. Winterling, *AS to Muybridge* (film still C. Bonstein Swiss Rebel) (2007)

'I'll be your mirror, reflect what you are, in case you don't know,' sang German photo model Nico with the Velvet Underground in 1967. 'I'll be your mirror but I'll dissolve' is the title chosen by German artist Susanne M. Winterling (one time member of Hamburg collective Akademie Isotrop) for her first solo show in Vienna – attributing to the mirror and its image an entirely different but profoundly human consequence. In a four-minute 16 mm film loop from 2005, which shares its title with the exhibition, soap bubbles float through the room. Steadily but with

incomprehensible speed, they enter the picture and then confound expectations by exiting the frame again intact. The colours of the rainbow shimmer in their fragile skins, and, reflected in this, four accompanying photographic works vaguely hint at the artist in her studio. A kind of multiple portrait made, like Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1524) (which hangs a few streets away in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum), with the knowledge that no mirror gives an undistorted reproduction of reality.

The 'dissolve' technique in film corresponds to multiple exposure in photography. Both are evoked in 'Untitled' (2007), a series of eight black-and-white prints. They show role models, strong women pushed into grey zones by society on account of their self-determination. One is a film still showing the writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach (1908–1942) on a horse, titled *A Swiss Rebel* (2007) after Carole Bronstein's film of the same name from 2000. There is Effi Briest, once with her back turned and once sleeping, from Reiner Werner Fassbinder's *Fontane Effi Briest* (1974) based on the novel by Theodor Fontane (1895). Fassbinder gave his film the terse subtitle: 'Many have an idea of their potential and their needs, but accept the prevailing system in their heads nonetheless by their deeds, thus consolidating and endorsing it.' The series ends with an MGM logo from which Winterling has erased the roaring lion, leaving the scroll with its motto 'Ars Gratia Artis' framing a dark empty space. With such concise, strategic interventions in the visual canon, Winterling casts these courageous women as subversive heroines who don't accept the prevailing system in their heads and who are not accepted by it.

The show also includes two video projections whose protagonists operate within a theatrical black void. In *Untitled (Play, Winterling)* (2007), a dark-haired woman in dark clothes with white collar and cuffs – the title may at first seem to suggest it is the artist herself, but in fact 'Winterling' is the name of the violinmakers – plays solo violin. Turned away from the viewer and absorbed in her

playing, she draws dissonant notes from the instrument. At first she looks inapproachable, but also trapped in an endless rehearsal, joined by the twittering of birds from off screen, as if this sound were also made by the violin. At this point, the supposed security of distance fails and pain becomes audible.

In *Le sens pratique* (2005), two women face each other in a black void, repeatedly exchanging a typical gentleman's trench coat. Only by wearing an item of clothing not tailored for them do the women's bodies become visible in the all-enveloping blackness. By helping each other into the coat in turn, each affords her counterpart a fleeting corporeality. Out of the repetition of this scene develops an indissoluble regularity, which the two women obey in mutual dependence. In this piece, Winterling's approach becomes especially clear: her works derive their force from subtleness; they remain accessible even though they are also closed; and they render the hide-and-seek game of identity in role playing obsolete by opening it up.