

ARTFORUM

“Susanne M. Winterling: Review – Parrotta Contemporary Art”

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Über Gewissheit (Screen Version) (On Certainty [Screen Version]), 2014

Some European countries are now considering proposals to cut cursive handwriting from public-school curricula. A millennia-old cultural technology is fated to vanish; citizens of the future will write using only computer keyboards and screens. Handwriting (at its most fundamental, the marking of a roughened or absorbent ground) and the fine motor skills it requires are being replaced by swiping, dragging, clicking, and tapping—gestures that encounter no physical resistance, and which register on a smooth luminescent surface.

These developments and their repercussions are the subject of Susanne M. Winterling’s most recent work. Her exhibition “Drift” revolved

around the motifs of the hand, skin, and radiant surfaces. Her art examines this question: How does our physical contact with the immaterial, illuminated images on electronic displays all around us alter our relation to reality? One of the videos that was on view here, *Handstift* (Hand Pen), 2014, can be read as an allegory: Seen in close-up, pencils and crayons (symbolizing the age of handwriting) are broken in two over a black mirror, and their splintered halves are then scattered over a blue blanket. The cool sleekness of our screens is echoed in “*Über Gewissheit (Screen Version)*” (On Certainty [Screen Version]), 2014, a series of five digital prints on acrylic glass that show hazy images of a glove. These picture-objects, with their rounded corners, resemble smartphones or tablet computers, but contrary to this suggestion of manual operability, they stay on their metal wall-mounted shelves, untouched, defeating the crisp depth effect of the glove hovering beneath the reflective dark surface.

The title of the installation *Touch Me*, 2014, by contrast, can be taken at its word. Panes of black acrylic glass are set up on two easels. Colorful handgrips of the kind that are bolted onto climbing walls encourage the visitor to take the panes and arrange them on pieces of foam mounted on mirrored surfaces, laid out here and there on the floor; as you can take the panes in hand, you encounter the mirror image of your own face (and the gallery space around you). The surfaces of these pieces reflect ambient light, just as powered-off screens do. The framed work *A Skin Too Thin (Light to Pink, No.1)*, 2012, meanwhile, absorbs ambient light, which slowly causes its color to change: It consists of a sheet of photographic paper that has not been treated with fixer. The projected animation *Diademseeigel Immersion Prototyp* (Diadem Sea Urchin Immersion Prototype), 2014, evokes the world of bioluminescent animals. A pair of white gloves resembling those worn by Mickey Mouse floats through empty space. Propelled solely by a mysterious rotation of the thumbs, the gloves come closer and closer until the viewer can make out individual fibers of the fabric. Then, suddenly, the image of a bioluminescent sea urchin is superimposed on the gloves. The ballet of the animal’s undulating spine resembles human fingers feeling their way in the dark.

Recording and reflection, radiance and refraction: Winterling’s works catalogue the ways light affects bodies and their properties. In view of the effects she showcases, which inevitably involve visual distortion, we have reason to be skeptical of the assumption that light is a particularly persuasive emblem of a higher principle or the

Enlightenment's belief in reason. Reality in all its complexity is literally beyond the grasp of the luminous phenomena on display on the screens that are increasingly our main access to reality. Not without reason do we associate physical contact with sympathetic connection: our devices may have touch screens, but they screen us from the emotions that would come from actually being touched.