

Rita Siegfried - Geisterspiel / Ghost Game  
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Looking into a room, at the painting, at a painting in the room. Looking out the window, into the garden, a window opens in my head.

These rooms are clearly image. By which I mean I am not sure where I would find such a house other than in a painting. Described in a story perhaps, from another time. One could wish for such a space, a space of retreat, of stability and comfort, away from pressure, from obligations, from turmoil. Or one could feel enclosed by it, secluded from the outside world, removed from others, a domesticated nightmare. The home as a metaphor for interiority has been applied countless times to distinguish between the self and the world. In fact, it was only from the nineteenth century that the interior became a place of privacy, and with it emerged the inward-looking subject. From then on, the dwelling is regarded as an extension of the person living there; measuring real conditions, marking fantasies – of wealth, knowledge, sentimentality. The spectacle of inner life is now on display, only the unwanted aspects of it hidden. The dwelling is something we inhabit, but also something that inhabits us. In this sense, these paintings are haunting. Their frequent emptiness suggest a standstill, a set without a play. Yet, the absent habitant is not the only ghost roaming these rooms. There are spectral aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the childlike spook of dollhouses, and digitally summoned spirits of old masters. These paintings accommodate fantasy and shelter memory, they play with a realm of lost objects, vanishing points that bring forth what is real for the viewer, that are linked to desire. But there is also always something pushing back, that irritates and does not quite support the image of a steady ego-architecture. Actually, I have seen such rooms before, other than in a painting. They jog my memory and I recognize certain motifs, certain styles. As montages, they stand for an understanding of the self as fragmented, made up of varying, though perhaps repeated, viewpoints and patterns. The home no longer stands for the self's castle but is porous, always made from and with and in connection to others.

Looking out the window in the painting is longing. Looking at the painting's window is considering it not solely as a metaphor for something else.

These paintings are not only rooms full of subjectivity, they are also devoid of it. They are materiality in their own right, meticulously painted architectural structures. Sourced from a collection of copies from books, from photographs taken in museums, from zoomed-in details on digital screens, they are coolly constructed, pieced together fragments of other paintings. Cropped and cut they play around with a mix of references and genre, creating a poetics of sampling that is quirky as well as rigorously structured. And this fascination with technical ability is betokened in the numerous portraits and appropriations of old masters. There they hang, tributes kept near. Some even appear more than once. Yet, in contrast to the cynical pastiche, they do not mock their role models and all they stand for. Quite the contrary: These are appropriations that are marked by an unabashed playfulness towards their idols, by a delight in teasing the viewer into immersive effects and hinting at things we have seen before, in taking things apart and then lovingly putting some things back together again, only perhaps differently. The paintings are expressive yet also mechanical, complex interiority and plain interior – they keep these seeming opposites in suspense.

Text: Geraldine Tedder

Rita Siegfried (\*1964) received the Aeschlimann Corti scholarship in 1996 and 'Werkbeiträge' from the city of Bern in 2001. Recent exhibitions include "Cantonale Berne Jura" at Kunsthalle Bern 2019, and "A Room of one's Own" at Milieu, 2019.

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