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Zollikerstrasse 249, 8008 Zürich

Rita Siegfried – Entre Espace
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*I love
the table that awaits me, where everything is arranged for writing
and where I am not writing*

-Francis Ponge¹

In her meticulous panel paintings, Rita Siegfried imbricates fragments of interiors and landscapes in a seamless yet contrived manner. From the confines of her rooms, she fabricates pictures within other pictures and crafts new tableaux out of existing ones. Everything in her paintings is measured to compose real allegories. The beautiful and the sublime are framed behind doors and windows. Peaceful gardens solely exist as lush reflections of impressionist works. Even the effect of rain is re-produced in the form of a miniature trompe l'oeil of Gustave Caillbotte's *L'Yerres, effets de pluie* (1875), which appears through an open door like a postcard propped in front of a dollhouse.

Developed over the past twenty-years, Siegfried's deliberately mannerist approach yields an uncanny pictorial tension that calls to mind the smooth surfaces of Meredith Frampton's still lives and the ominous surrealism of Gertrude Abercrombie. Fueled by her anachronistic glorification of the artifice of painting, her *mise en abyme* of the tableau epitomizes André Chastel's idea of a "double resonance,"² whereby a painting inside of another painting simultaneously points toward nature (form) and the intellect (idea). In Siegfried's *Tafelbilder*, this double resonance is extended through a subtle play between the object and the depiction. The tables and the tableaux that she borrows from different corners of art history come together with the pictures that contain them to form echo chambers.

These multilayered arrangements of furnitures and pictures partake in foregrounding a mediated sense of interiority where labor is concealed. The smooth surfaces of these pictorial fantasies and the spotless interiors they depict hide the maintenance work of maids like Nellie, Virginia Woolf's servant, who in addition to cooking, also "cleaned and dusted, washed dishes, did some laundry, hauled coal, and polished boots."³ Just as "every housekeeper knows that hygiene is an economy,"⁴ Siegfried, through this double concealment, paradoxically reminds the viewer that the intellectual labor of painting depends upon material things.

¹ Francis Ponge, *The Table*, translated by Colombina Zamponi, Wakefield Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991-2002, 31.

² André Chastel, *Le tableau dans le tableau*, Flammarion (Paris), 1978-2012, 29.

³ Eula Biss, *Having and Being Had*, Faber & Faber (London), 2020, 201.

⁴ Lisa Robertson, *Atget's Interiors, Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*, Coach House Books (Toronto), 2003, 171.

In spite of their windows, her paintings function as boxes where she second-handedly “gathers the universe around and in an object.”⁵ Inside these boxes she collects her favorite *morceaux de peintures* and reimagines the daydreams of the poets and painters whose ghostly presence populate her rooms. Filled with carefully arranged books, freshly cut flowers and delicate porcelain cups, her interiors hover between Vilhelm Hammershøi and *Architectural Digest*. These rooms are at once her own, and no one’s—they let us project our desires for quiet retreats in the bourgeois comfort of their vacant armchairs.

Emile Rubino

Rita Siegfried (*1964) lives and works in Bern. Recent exhibitions include 'Camera Magica', Castiglioni Fine Arts, Milano, 2021; 'Geisterspiel / Ghost Game', *suns.works* Zürich, 2020; 'Cantonale Berne Jura', Kunsthalle Bern, 2019; and 'A Room of one's Own', *Milieu*, Bern, 2019.

⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas, Penguin Books (New York), 1964-2013, 105.