

Glasses
Huemer / Jelinek.



Brille

Fotos: Josef Pausch

Huemer / Jelinek. concern themselves, in a perceptible-conceptual way, with the view towards the inside. The starting point is their observation of the discrepancy between a profound, reflecting perception and a superficial, non-reflecting perception. Even Walter Benjamin knew about the qualitative difference between the contemplation of an auratic work and diffuse perception. It is the quick glance which artists register as being dominant in the everyday: the glance that follows the zapping through the TV program, the glance that wanders along the richly decorated window displays, or the glance which passes over the over-crowded art exhibitions in museums. In this world which is inundated by stimulations, time and space are to be completely overcome through acceleration in every dimension. In doing so we reach the limits of our ability to see. We need more and more machines. Perception itself has been transformed, as expressed by Paul Virilio, into a "battlefield". In "Aesthetics of Disappearance", Virilio takes up an observation made by Aldous Huxley, that millions of people in the western world wear sun-glasses. Not only on the beach and not only when driving, but also in the twilight and in the weakly lit corridors of public buildings. Virilio draws the conclusion that light — which we actually perceive to be pleasant appears to us to be a weapon in the form of projectors, monitors or other light distribution equipment and consequently appears threatening. So as not to be inundated by pictures, and surprised by the intensive light from projectors, people in the society of civilization protect their retina with dark glasses.

Huemer / Jelinek. developed an object against fast-seeing, against the oversupply of information input. Glasses are a simple tool of human perception. This optical device forms, as it were, a metaphor for seeing in general. At first glance, the glasses appear to be classical sun-glasses with a black frame. Roland Barthes attributes the characteristic of concealment to the object sun-glasses. They are a mask of discretion which conceals feelings and desires. Sun-glasses and their limited field of vision become the filter of privateness and what is public. One adjusts the view so as not to be seen. Eyes irritated by sleep or crying are just as concealed by dark glasses as uncertainty is disguised. Sun-glasses make the wearer look young, cool and sovereign.

But, these light protection glasses have yet another feature. By means of a special vapour technology, reflective glass has been applied to the inside of the glasses. Whoever puts them on looks at himself. He sees himself looking. Wearing these glasses becomes self-reflection at a literal and metaphorical level. Whoever gets hold of these "artificial glasses", recognizes in the first instance that their own eyes are reflected in them. If they put them on, both eyes fuse together to form one eye, on account of the reflection distance which is getting smaller. The observer becomes a Cyclops, a representative of the monsters who are there to assist Hephaestus in his workshop in the bowels of the earth, forging thunderbolts and lightning. The "eye grown together" may remind us that our spatial sight derives from the fusion of the images of both our eyes to form one picture.

The blurred view of one's own eye or pair of eyes from up close, complies with the need for introspection. Apparently it evokes the impression that one could penetrate into one self through the pupils and embark on a journey to the "inner images" which we call memory, in order to get to know our true inside, our core or our psyche. The eye appears to be the door to the soul which invites us on a journey which is called self-reflection. Even Nikolaus Cusanus (1401-1464) believed that our soul was directly associated with our eyes.

The interaction between recipient and its art object represents a significant element to this contribution. In order to make it possible for visitors to the exhibition to use the glasses, a number of the glasses will be presented on a usual stand with a mirror, just as can be found in

every department store. Some 150 of the glasses were manufactured and consequently possess the character of merchandise. Both artists create a shop-like situation where activities like selecting, trying on, fitting and buying are integral parts. The visitor to the exhibition becomes an actor. The glasses belong to the category of 'art of the multiples' which distinguishes itself by the fact that it intends to dodge the mechanisms of the art market by series manufacturing and by the refusal of clearly identifiable authorship. When contemplating the glasses stand one is reminded of the cheap advertisements of the 60, advertising so-called "X-ray glasses" which supposedly made it possible to look through the clothing of the persons being contemplated and to see their naked body. Even Huemer / Jelinek's glasses promise something unusual and attract special attention. Their attractiveness is calculation, as in the world of fast-seeing, only those objects are registered which, so to speak, catch our eye. On account of the attractive, familiar and changed shape, the glasses are a tempting object for the visual nerve.

The eye is not only a receptive passive organ, but a sense which, as it were, appears to devour objects, or as Gert Mattenklott says, "to look is a passion". It is the desire to see that ultimately tempts the art visitor to put on the glasses. He will then discover that they have a second function. The split view reminds us of trick glass which, from one side, appears to be a mirror and which appears to be transparent glass from the other side. It reminds us of the possibility of monitoring and deceiving. Maybe Huemer / Jelinek's glasses are only a cynical deceptive manoeuvre or even a real disappointment for those expecting endoscopic insight. This example ultimately confirms the statement that the view towards the inside is fiction and only gains in reality with pronounced contemplative abilities.

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