

FRANCES SCHOLZ  
THE FACE

“The face, the extreme precariousness of the other.”  
*Emmanuel Levinas, "Paix et Proximité", 1995*

“To respond to the face, to understand its meaning,  
means to be awake for what is precarious in another life,  
or rather, the precariousness of life itself.”  
*Judith Butler, "Precarious Life", 2004.*

In this, her sixth exhibition at the Tony Wuethrich Galerie, Basel, Frances Scholz offers painting as the face of its own disappearance -- and other paradoxes. "the face" draws on three series the German/American artist, professor of painting at University of Arts, Braunschweig has been working on for the last three years. Conceived as three "phases" in a quasi-electrical relationship, a blue room, a red room and a pink room each favor one series. But in each another series intervenes, initiating cross-series communication, and each painting resists its series to ask for the recognition of the unique form. The peculiar lightness of this exhibition, dominated by white, red, blue and pink in the raw, stands for the life of painting beyond its "death" in network and reference. This life is explicitly made possible by an exploration of themes of life in and outside of death. Like the pop horror movies whose soundtracks she mines for her films, Scholz approaches death for creative regeneration, novelty, innovation and living effect.

RED ROOM ("Quatre Bras IV" "Cutting Hay")

Together these two works of the artist's "Waterloo" series insist on their scalar oddity. The wallpaper and mirror of the room Napoleon slept in on the eve of Waterloo are sketched out by thin red lines. Large and stark, the red is the red of the British infantry, of the horror of the art of war, but also catches the trim stitching of a lady's lace. Small, the motif recedes to background a color-field from the Pink Room's series, delicate and precariously alive.

BLUE ROOM ("Grim Glory II" "Night Watch I")

The modernist grid informs the series in blue. In "Night Watch", Scholz flattens out the folded depth of Eileen Gray's *Paravant* screens so that the 3D gridded pattern might be a receding font. Incessantly vertical, and transparently layered, the painting also mimes "Constantine's Dream" of Piero della Francesca, allowing a tent to fall around a central element. But this tent doesn't enclose; it opens so that the central form seems to lift off of the surface, performing a singular motion away from the grid, and out into the viewer's reality.

In "Grim Glory" the projected pattern of the ceiling of Louis Kahn's Yale University Art Gallery reforms according to the laws of physics of falling paint into an emerging fractal frame.

PINK ROOM ("Death Songs for the Living")

The exhibition's darkest themes emerge from its lightest, most sketch-like works. Motifs extracted from fashion photography expose the naked back to the blue color-fields, or shields laid upon them. The pink field emphasizes the precariousness and innocence of this exposure, and gives way to sketchings of "The Lord of The World" (1310) a vanitas motif from Nuremberg's St. Sebald church showing the organs of the saint's opened back swarming with living crabs, snakes and worms. A painting's face is its back. Scholz places us behind this receding articulation -- in that peculiar space between art and the networks that have informed it, where abstraction does not reduce or define but unveils the present unknown and multiplies.