

Lisa Beck
The House of Eternity
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A conversation between Lisa Beck and Bruno Botella

LISA : The imagery of the works reference ancient egyptian tomb architecture - carved into the west wall was a false door (a series of nested lintels) that was a threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead and through which a deity or the spirit of the deceased could enter and exit. This door was sometimes known as the door to the west. Offerings could be left there for the spirits of the deceased. The Egyptians believed that the west was where the afterlife was located (the sun goes down there). I was actually using this motif (series of doorways inside one another) before I knew this reference, but once I learned of it, I decided to make use of the reference.

The titles are translations of the names of various deities, preceded by "pr" which means House of (or temple).

BRUNO : as you told me last time the press release for your show could be made like the Carrollian map of England. Cover all the details of the landscape, draw the sides of each grain of sand and notice that the map comes finally to a 1/1 scale. Once the landscape and the map are exactly the same, why should we bother with representation ? That could be the same for a description of your work which assembles euclidian geometry and topological paradoxes. Liminal and hallucinatory.

As you reminded, you use the same mylar as hydroponic weed farmers do. It seems woven and reminds the texture of the canvas used for painting. A flat mirror would be too direct for plants, a grid patterned mirror helps diffusing the light. Then the geometry is here challenged by the softness of polyethylene and its reactions to temperature changes. Thus it looks more like a skin divided in cells with bumps and cavities which in return spreads disorder and refuses a flat reflexion. It is exactly like watching a reflection in the water of a dark river which moves slowly.

Mirrors comes from an old industry and it took a while before they became flat illusions for bathrooms. There is an old story where mirrors are both machineries of destruction and instruments for visions. While you could use them for burning a vessel you could ingest drugs and watch them for divination purposes.

Je dis que pour certains les miroirs furent un hiéroglyphe de la vérité en cela qu'ils découvrent toute chose qui se présente à eux, comme il est de coutume pour la vérité qui ne peut rester cachée. D'autres, au contraire, prennent les miroirs pour des symboles de la fausseté parce qu'ils montrent les choses autrement qu'elles sont.

Raphaël Mirami, 1582

Although people already observed a patent connection of your works to Hard-edge, specular reflexion adds a twist : your paintings are half painted. This dual aspect is close to a duchampian machination, why painting all-over while the mirror finishes the job perfectly? If Hard-edge paintings flushed visual illusionism and embraced their objecthood, they never solved the problem of being commodities - they instead fully assumed the illusionism of their economical value. In your paintings, I feel the canvas requires the help of its own reflection to be assumed as a whole.

Here is the twist : the reflection always moves, it never fully completes the painting and, last but not least, seeking completeness requires to leave a frontal position - to skew/distort visual pleasure (in french "regarder de travers" means "look askance"). Are they paradoxical anamorphosis? While traditional anamorphosis resolves the distortion and reveals the hidden when watched from a peripheral situation, your paintings are a kind of tautological anamorphosis : they reveal the mirage of a painting as whole. The painting is complete and uncomplete, half and full. Let's push the paradox further : the double is not a false projection, it is real as the other and, the other is false as it is - thus there should not have any hierarchy between the painting and its double.

There is a 12th century poem called "le lai d'ombre" (*The lai of shadow* or *The lai of the mirror image*) of Jean Renart. A knight is in love with a woman who resists him and refuses the ring he offers - he then declares that he will finally give the ring to the one he loves the most after the lady : he throws the ring into a well to offer it to the image of the lady reflected in the water. The seduction process

adjusted to an image is also to be understood according medieval theory of image (specifically in the medical tradition, where the image as a reflection process is the core of the perception - thus it could be possible to love an image until offering it a ring).

If the painting is half painted, it is half priced or the reflexion doubles it ?

LISA : I like the workings of the machine as much as the final result, and that is part of the reason I show the backs of these large free standing pieces - they show how a painting is constructed, and not to just focus on the surface. It's like when you know how a magic trick is done, but it still amazes you when it is performed.

I have long been thinking and playing with doubles, reflections, patterns and repetitions. The human brain is wired to search for patterns, often supplying it where there isn't one. And reflections help that process along. In the early 90s I did a series of works which were based on random spots on paper towels that came from cleaning my paint brushes. I repeated and doubled them, creating a sort of Rorshach effect.

And of course, so-called "negative" space is of paramount importance to my work. It's really the only thing I learned in art school.

As you probably know it has been amply demonstrated that all matter contains a much greater amount of "nothing" than "something". This is seen especially clearly on the large scale of deep space in the universe where there is so much more dark matter, which is invisible to us, and yet seems to be the glue that holds together, or the mold that forms what we do see. It is of equal importance to the "real" stuff. This formative aspect of the "negative" is how negative space was explained to me in school, and I've never forgotten it. (I use quotation marks here around the word negative, because it's actually a very positive action that all this so-called nothing has, I think.)

So yes, the reflective part of the pieces completes the painted part, but the completion is variable or unstable; it is unfixed. For me it is more realistic in a sense to make a variable object, since nothing is truly fixed. You need to stand just in a certain place to see it fully. It's fleeting, and that is OK.

I don't identify at all with "Hard Edge" painting. A hard edge seeks to make a hard, definite division between things, which is inaccurate and illusory. But I understand the impulse - it's the best we can do to define something that is indefinable. The hard edges in my work are an illusion anyway, since I painted them without tape, the edges are actually not truly hard or straight. I'm not trying to trick anyone. The paintings are made by a person, a porous and barely contained set of vibrations also lacking in hard edges. The image is approximate. As is the reflection.

As you noted, the double is definitely not a false projection, just as the Door to the West is not a false door (although that term is often used for the spirit portal in Egyptian tombs, it is very misleading and I don't like it). Both are agents of a transition in vision or a transition in being. Both enable a point of contact between what we think we know and what we think we don't. The painting pairs with its own image to make a kind of completion and a suggestion of depth, allowing a shifting view of a static object - a transition from depiction to sensation and back again. In the same way, the Door to the West is the transition point from the "real" world to another state of being. From what we are learning of all the invisible forces that govern reality, not to mention the uncertainty principle or the wave / particle duality, who's to say which of these states is real and which is not?

I think the answer must be: they both are.

BRUNO : The negative space is highly present in your work as an active force of what is not. It is like painting with a phantom limb or amputating the canvas. There we are again : mirrors, amputation, ghosts/doubles. Although the literature on phantom limbs is extremely vast I always found its most poetical illustration in Don Coscarelli's *John Dies at the End*. And yes the movie is full of drugs. There is a "locked door" scene that might be useful for us. The guys are trippin' balls on « soy sauce » (which could be a very strong version of scopolamine given by datura, nightshade and wolfsbane) time and space are properly distorted. Around the end they have to enter a ghost dimension through a ghost door. While none can grab the ethereal knob there is a girl who misses an arm. As she turns her stump to the door and her phantom limb appears just in time for grabbing the phantom knob.