

Miriam Böhm

Opening: 18 February 2017, 6–9 pm

Exhibition: 21 February – 15 April 2017

In his novel *The Counterfeiters* published in 1925, André Gide was employing a technique known as *mise en abyme*, literally >placed into abyss< by having a character in his novel with the same title. The term originally derives from heraldry, where it describes the conceivably infinite repetition of a miniaturized coat of arms within a coat of arms. It was Gide who, in 1893, first linked this phenomenon to literary and pictorial compositions [...]. In his own works, Gide used the structure of the *mise en abyme* as a means of reflecting on the challenges posed by the fictionalization of modern life. Yet the mirroring of his literary activities in the book also served as a means of contemplating on the creative share of the reader in fiction. With various devices, for example the diversification of narrative and reflective passages, Gide disturbs the unity and illusion of the text again, thus inevitably challenging the reader's perspective on the story.

In painting, Gide sees the *mise en abyme* principle implemented in compositions in which – as in the case of Quentin Metsu's *The Moneylender and His Wife* of 1514 – a mirror reflects the space beyond the depicted scene, thus challenging the depiction's boundaries as well as its perspective. As in literature, a *mise en abyme* in painting presupposes the existence of at least two compositional levels, which are interrelated by means of mirroring or their similarity to one another, and which reflect on the unity of the work in detail. Miriam Böhm's photographs are likewise characterized by this kind of intricate interplay of different levels and elements. With the aid of repetitions, reflections and shifts, she places details within her compositions *en abyme* leading to the emergence of open, multiply ambiguous structures. [...] The composition thus contains numerous doublings that are not, however, exact repetitions, but slightly varied shifts and nuances of individual pictorial elements. [...] In Böhm's photographs, the intermeshing of different pictorial levels in the *mise en abyme* creates breaks that rob the images of their spatiotemporal continuity and logic. [...] The overlapping levels cause breaks along the edges of the forms in such a way that they ultimately defy unequivocal definition with regard to their boundaries and their relationship to the background.

In other works by Böhm, the concern with compositional discontinuities comes even more strongly to the fore. [...] The composition's >trouble spots< are where the rectangles, edges intersect. In and of themselves, the intersections do not pose a problem; the contradictory interplay between them, however, destroys every illusion of pictorial unity and perfection. In more recent works such as *Fade*, elements such as missing connections, gaps and uncertain states are likewise among the composition's chief attributes.



Here pencil lines at the edges of the rectangular surfaces are interrupted and then resumed from a slightly different point, leading to a geometric form dominated by gaps and shifts. As is the case with the *mise en abyme*, this type of disturbance of the compositional unity leads the viewer to start his contemplation of the work over and over again.

Since its beginnings in the nineteenth century, photography has oscillated between two poles. The one is the conviction that, on account of its technical-chemical production, a photographic image is of unshakable validity with regard to the reality depicted. The other is the notion that photographs are just as constructed as drawings or paintings. In the compositional abysses and gaps of Miriam Böhm's photographic works, these two poles merge: on the one hand they leave us in our belief in the truth of the depiction; on the other hand their formal breaks challenge that belief. It is our expectations – with regard to photographic images as well as our own perception – that are thus constantly raised for new renegotiation.

Excerpt from: Nina Schallenberg, *Of Abysses and Gaps*,
in: *Miriam Böhm – wie fast*, ex.cat. 2016

Miriam Böhm (born in 1972 in Frankfurt) most recently has had a solo exhibition at the Wilhelm Hack Museum in Ludwigshafen, Germany, which was accompanied by a catalogue.

Other past solo and group exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Bochum, Germany; Ratio 3, San Francisco, USA; Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, FL; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, MO; Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO; Berkeley Museum, Berkeley, CA; Kumu Art Museum, Tallin, Estonia; Kunstforum NRW, Düsseldorf, Museum für Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt, Germany.

Miriam Böhm was nominated for the 2014 Rudin Prize for Emerging Photographers.

Böhm's works are part of the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen, Germany; Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, CA; des Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL; and Berkley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA.

