

INTRODUCTORY TEXT TO THE WORK OF GARANCE ARCADIAS

By Thomas Eller, German author and curator. (French translation)

Opening of the solo exhibition Barocker Inframince.
Internationales Künstlerhaus Villa Concordia. 24.09.2022.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With your permission, I would like to share with you an aesthetic and intellectual journey that the artist Garance Arcadias has taken me on.

As you may have guessed, the journey begins with a fragile material, glass. In anticipation of this evening, the artist sent me an e-mail containing a text by Charles Baudelaire from 1869 entitled "Le mauvais vitrier". In this text, the author recounts, in the first person, that he once took a glazier who sold his products in Paris up to the eighth floor in a narrow stairwell and insulted him because of the lack of quality of his glasses. All this only to attack him from above with a flowerpot which, if it didn't actually kill the glazier, did destroy all the glasses he was carrying. "And drunk with my madness, I shouted angrily at him: 'La vie en beau! La vie en beau! We will come back to this later.

As you will notice quite quickly in the exhibition you are about to see, some of the glass panels are site-specific, with the patterns printed on them being a time-shifted reference to the exhibition space. This is appreciable, especially for the exhibiting institution, which can rejoice in having been the subject of a work of art. This is called "in situ" and after this description, one usually gives up, because one has become used to considering this as good in itself and no longer asks questions. The job is done. And at this point, my presentation could already be over, you would breathe a sigh of relief and want to move on to the happier part of the evening.

But you still have to ask yourself what is the nature of the relationship between the image and the motif that is being established here. Before we do this, we need to clarify some terms, because our journey has only just begun.

So let us follow the first indications. Garance has entitled her exhibition "Inframince baroque". Baroque - each of you has an idea of this, and I hope the gentlemen present also. But inframince - those of you who know the term, raise your hands!

After all. OR: That's what I thought. If you want to look up this term in the French encyclopaedia Larousse, you will find it in vain. It is a made-up word.

The best known reference is none other than Marcel Duchamp. According to Marcel Duchamp, "Inframince" refers to phenomena of the order of the infinitesimal, the superfinite and the undecidable - like the heat that remains on a chair when a person stands up.

To put it in another way: When we sit down on a warm chair, we experience an intimacy with a person we have never met. The result is an impossible connection.

To better understand this, Duchamp delivers a note in a notebook: "Infra-thin - separation - better said: partition, because it indicates the interval (in one sense) and the partition (in the other sense) - separation has both masculine and feminine meanings.

And since we are on the subject: if this also makes you think of Duchamp's 'Large Glass', his major work still visible in Pasadena, with its divisions between the upper feminine sphere and the lower masculine sphere, where the bachelors 'grate their own chocolate', you will understand that 'Inframince' is not a technical membrane, but complex sensory events charged with desire.

Let's stay for a moment on the example of the heated chair, because it represents a paradox. We feel something in our body that we can no longer see. If you realise how many times in your life you would have liked to feel the warmth of a person you can see but cannot touch, you will understand why the involuntary warmth of a chair so often has the opposite effect. Unwanted intimacy with a stranger is an intrusion into their private space. Inframince - it touches them in a way they cannot control or sort out, and it disturbs their self. In 1973, the term "inframince" was taken up by the French author and essayist Georges Perec. Even then he called for an 'endotic anthropology'.

What in heaven's name is that? - Endotic is the antonym of exotic. And Perec's appeal was already directed at the time against a preference for sensationalist media that focus on the 'trauma of others' rather than talking about the little everyday things that concern us directly. His thinking therefore focused on 'what happens', however small and insignificant it may seem at first. And not on what is, i.e. on what has already received an ontological determination and thus stabilises the concepts of reality. The whole of post-structuralism, so to speak, was an attempt to

question Cartesian certainties and thus to renew political discourse. Perec too tried to displace the political space, using the 'event' of the infra-thin in social discourse. Perec also tried to displace the political space, using the 'event' of the infra-thin in social discourse.

There is a group of artists in Berlin who propose such an approach as a "method". TIER, The Institute for Endotic Research, sees a much more understandable gesture in activating the "events of small things" to deal with big issues, like climate change. Instead of being alarmist, they propose to "unlearn" the big issues and instead look at the small, seemingly insignificant changes we encounter every day. Aren't there enough clues that we all perceive and that concern us?

In this way, we have already achieved a first, truly important shift in our perception of Garance Arcadias' work. So let us leave behind our greed for the important, the extraordinary in a world hungry for attention. Instead, let us ask ourselves how we react to the "warm chairs" and what this reveals about our relationship to the world.

We have spoken of the infra-thin as an event, a singular feeling that catches us off guard, that does not fit into the plan.

What happens - philosophically speaking - is a difficult thing. We will have to come back to this point. But there is a part of Garance Arcadias' artistic background in this statement.

From 2007 to 2010 she studied with Professor Noël Dolla at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Nice, Villa Arson. The artist was one of the active members of the influential Supports/Surface art movement which, from 1966 to 1972, was one of the defining keywords in French artistic discourse.

In June 1969, Louis Cane, Dezeuze, Patrick Saytour and Viallat wrote on the occasion of the exhibition "La peinture en question" at the Musée d'art moderne André Malraux - MuMa: "The object of painting is painting itself, and the paintings exhibited refer only to themselves. They do not appeal to an "elsewhere" (the personality of the artist, his biography, the history of art for example). They offer no escape, because the surface, through the ruptures of shapes and colours that occur, forbids the viewer mental projections or dreamlike ramblings. Painting is a fact in itself, and it is on its terrain that we must pose the problems. It is neither a return to the sources, nor the search for an original purity, but the simple exposure of the pictorial elements that constitute the pictorial fact. This explains the neutrality of the works presented, their lack of lyricism and expressive depth.

Thus, what the Linguistic Turn was in philosophy, i.e. the question of how language structures our thought, the artists of Supports/Surface undertook the Visual Turn in painting, by examining abstract visual "rhetorics".

In the politically turbulent 1960s, this was a form of artistic materialism that was enthusiastic about Mao's cultural revolution, which wanted to eliminate all old cultural content. Derrida's deconstruction was the intellectual framework within which they operated.

Roberta Smith wrote for the New York Times: "The group founded after the Paris protests of May 1968 combined Marxist ideas, deconstructivist attitudes and the influences of late Henri Matisse and colour field painting. The artists were pursuing a politically conscious formalism that, by revealing the processes and structures of painting, wanted to mitigate its commercial character without being against painting.

Well, that was certainly true, but what does that mean: "... without being against painting"? - On an artistic level, Jackson Pollock, but also Morris Louis, were models for the artists of Supports/Surface. In contrast to Arte Povera in Italy and Minimalism in the United States, for example, who avoided the problem of painting from the point of view of French artists, they wanted to get to the bottom of their material, and the event-driven nature of the pictorial composition became apparent. Colour, medium, process - basic conditions that could not be ignored. They experimented with everything.

This is what Noël Dolla allowed to be published in 2019 on the occasion of his exhibition at Ceysson & Bénétière in New York: "Noël Dolla completely restructures space through painting. This is metamorphosed, deconstructed, saturated and complexified by creating a landscape of white and translucent geotextile triangles. Like mops, pillowcases, sheets, handkerchiefs, flannels, tarlatan strips and tea towels, geotextiles are an unworthy support. Unstretched canvases of various sizes fill the gallery space from floor to ceiling. These canvases are dotted with holes, like windows through which "we can no longer see the whole landscape and our perception is altered". Behind these geotextile loopholes are works from different series, specially selected for the exhibition. The viewer has to make an effort to orientate himself in this setting of concealment and unveiling. Marcel Duchamp's > Étant Donnée< (his second major work) remains

an important reference for the artist. Perspective is lost when there is only one point of view. Duchamp's construction forces the viewer to see the work as a whole, as a scene. In a note, the artist adds that "it is thanks to this ingenious trick that Marcel Duchamp, at the end of his life, took us back into the history of painting through assiduous craftsmanship, without having really remade a painting".

It is therefore with him that Garance Arcadias studies, and those who know the first works see the proximity. There is a large quantity of dyed fabrics that become exquisite sculptures. Works that I still admire today. She herself jokes that at the time many wanted to put her in the 'women's corner' - dyed fabrics... etc.

Perhaps it is a coincidence, but I would like to draw your attention to it: Garance, the artist's name, refers to "Garance des teinturiers", "Rubis Tinctorum", "Färberkrapp" in German. A cultivated plant whose root has been used for thousands of years to dye our clothes.

Arcadias - you guessed it. Arcadia is the lost Garden of Eden, which became inaccessible after the fall of man, in which only the utopian hope of living in harmony with nature is possible. What a name!

Another infra-thin one ... a relationship that can only be perceived as a crossroads, or an interval. We will talk about Arcadia later. Let me tell you about Arcadias.

She comes to Germany and continues her studies with Gregor Schneider, the darkest installation artist we have in Germany today. Perhaps she will have had an interest in the artist's practice with references to architecture and especially windows. Many of her recent works are based on windows in particular spaces that she removes and through which she takes a new look at their previous location. OK, shortcut: ten metres of books have been written on the theme of the window and the image. Let's listen to what she herself says: "I associate the glass filter with the camera lens and the lens of human subjectivity. Our desires and illusions are based on this filter. It therefore determines how we perceive and interact with the world around us. Images can obscure and impede our approach to the truth. Through the broken glass, (happy) disillusionment penetrates our illusory fullness. It is a light that penetrates the consciousness and stimulates it. It is a hymn to the mysterious passage from being to nothingness.

Woah - but nicely one thing at a time: A glass filter associated with the camera lens. What does this mean? - Earlier in her text, which is also available here and which you should read, she writes that the glass is "the last membrane that separates us from nature". This refers first of all to the garden of Villa Concordia, which is also depicted, but also, as she writes, to "nature" in its totality, which faces our particularity, that is to say, to each of us individually, and from which we are separated. The camera, in her version, the lens, a glass in any case. And this is between the two, and almost always. Another little cascade of associations: first, Plato's cave as a camera obscura - to the last one: the flat glass surfaces that we constantly wipe to establish our relationship to the world. Separation and connection at the same time. The infra-thin. Today, all our desire is concentrated on a few square centimetres of glass surface.

In contrast, the glasses of Arcadia. Broken as they are, they reflect the past light of the old shots, as Roland Barthes described it in his book, *The Clear Room*, in kindly simultaneity with the light that filters through this "membrane" now and only NOW, as we perceive it. The artist speaks in this context of "mise en abyme" and has this translated as "work within the work". If we look at the words more closely, there is a gesture of "mise en place" and "abyme" is simply "the abyss". In other words, the "filter-membrane" of the glass, guardian of the difference between inside and outside, is repeatedly recoded, crushed, printed. On it, multiple levels of information and materiality fold over each other, so that the correlations of the different information, images and traces present push all referentiality into the abyss. What we see, or rather what we perceive, when we are confronted with Garance's glasses (which succeeds well because their formats are on a human scale), is their temporal coloration, dissociated temporal structures and stratified information, folded on top of each other. The fact that the first glasses in this exhibition come from a "light well in the church of St. Paul in Marseille" may have a meaning.

Wrinkles. If you've been paying attention, you'll have noticed that I initially passed over the second major theme of the evening in a rather non-chalant way. No, it's not about ageing and don't look at the wrinkles on my face. It's about the baroque, of course, which you can't imagine without them.

As we know, Bamberg is a medieval town with baroque facades stuck on. The house we are in is one of the many exceptions. But maybe the essence of Baroque is, no, that's not right, maybe the essence of Baroque is just that: to be a façade, a surface that can be folded and unfolded and could thus potentially extend to infinity. At least this is what Gilles Deleuze thinks in his book, *The Fold*: "The Baroque does not refer to an essence, but to an operational function, to a character

trait. It generates an infinite number of folds. It does not invent anything: there are all sorts of folds that come from the East, Greek, Roman, Romanesque, Gothic. Classical folds... . But the Baroque approach turns and turns over its folds, pushes them to infinity, fold upon fold, one upon the other. The Baroque fold is infinitely unfolding. Firstly, the Baroque differentiates its folds in two ways, moving along two infinities, as if the infinite were composed of two levels or tiers: the folds of matter and the folds of the soul. "Here he refers to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's theory of monads. Here again, please excuse my gross simplifications.

One can imagine that Leibniz, almost the German Baroque philosopher, tried to represent the whole of creation in such a way that it became homogeneous and calculable. The monads, as the smallest indivisible units in this system, carry all potentialities within them. Their effects unfold in the perceptible world. There could be an infinite number of other worlds in addition to the world of our experiences, as God is infinite.

Deleuze: "The singularities proper to each monad are extended as far as the singularities of the others and in all directions. Each monad thus expresses the whole world, but in an indistinct and schematic way, because it is finite and the world is infinite. This is why the deepest depths of the monad are so obscure. Since it does not exist outside the monads that carry it, the world is contained within each monad in the form of perceptions or "representatives", elements that are present and infinitely small. As the monad does not exist outside other monads, these are also tiny perceptions without an object, i.e. hallucinatory microperceptions. The world exists only in its representatives, as long as they are contained in each monad. It is a lapping of waves, a rumour, a mist or a mass of dancing dust particles. It is a state of death or catalepsy, of sleep, drowsiness or numbness. It is as if the depths of each monad were made up of an infinite number of tiny folds (diffractions) that wind and unwind ceaselessly in all directions, so that the spontaneity of the monad resembles that of restless sleepers tossing and turning on their mattresses. "

Does this sound familiar? - Let me prephrase. Monads express the whole world, like a wave or a dancing particle, because it is already contained within them. In other words, the phenomenal world, i.e. what we perceive, is nothing but the expression of the potentialities of the monad. For this, we find other words today in particle research. But I am sure that in the future you will walk through the churches of the city differently. When I studied Garance's work, I realised that the abstraction of the Baroque's event-based presentations has enormous contemporary aesthetic potential.

In her photosculptures, Garance Arcadias subtly uses these visual rhetorics on several levels. If one is willing to consider her glasses, even if only for a moment, as fog chambers, one sees on the superimposed planes the traces of different temporal potentialities of phenomenal references. To put it more simply: the non-simultaneities of the spatio-temporal structure in which you find yourself with the works, and which only becomes actualised at the moment you perceive them.

In addition, she folds and unfolds her image compartments in space, giving them the appearance of a screen. If all the glasses were directly superimposed, they would not communicate. Just as the helix of a DNA strand must be unfolded to be readable. And indeed, the visual information given to us by the lenses is only revealed by the movement of the observer, i.e. by you. It can therefore be said that it is only through you and the act of looking that the works appear, not in their material aspect, but as an event that gives itself to be seen.

I know I am torturing you, but we have to go one last mile together tonight. A moment ago I made you part of the work of art. No, I was trying to make it clear that at the moment of the event you are part of the work, but separate from it. By involving yourself in this event and being folded, you enter that liminal space, the interval, the partition, the infra-thin that has already been discussed. The question now is what this means for you. Because of course, seen from this angle, we are not just "folded" in the contemplation of Garance Arcadias' art, but in our respective lives. We, as a monad so to speak, contain our past, present and also future lives, which have yet to unfold before us. To what extent are we the ones who control this process. In other words, how much freedom do we have in the folds that our life involves?

Again, this is a question that has agitated Deleuze: "Most of the texts in which Leibniz promises us the freedom of man bifurcate towards the simple freedom of God. Certainly, the (infra-thin) incompatibility allows Leibniz to solve the ancient problem of random future events (will there be a sea battle tomorrow?), ... But it does not guarantee the character of these events, which are called voluntary, nor the freedom of the one who wants or does not want the sea battle. [...] But in reality, the soul has its own motives, which are always subjective. We must start from the many little inclinations that bend our soul in all directions. At every moment, under the action of a thousand "little springs": agitation. This is the model of the oscillator, of "agitation", which replaces that of the balance. Activity is voluntary as soon as the soul, instead of being subjected

to the effect of the sum into which all the small demands enter, gives itself this or that impetus, allows itself to be bent entirely in this direction, on this side. [...] The inclination is the bend in the soul, it is the inflection, as it is enclosed in the soul. Hence Leibniz's formulation: the soul is inclined without being forced. The motive is not even an internal determination, but an inclination. It is not an effect of the past, but an expression of the present. It is remarkable how inclusion in Leibniz is largely indexed to the present: I write, I travel... If inclusion in the past and the future extends to infinity, it is because it concerns first of all the living present which presides over their distribution each time. Because my individual notion includes what I am doing at this moment, it also includes infinitely what has brought me there and what will result. "

Again, there is much more to explain. Let us read this as poetry for the moment and listen within ourselves to how this change of perspective sheds a new light on our decision-making. According to Leibniz, our destiny is fulfilled freely in our present inclinations.

We are thus back to the beginning. "There are characters who are purely contemplative, quite unsuited to action, and yet, under a mysterious and unknown impulse, sometimes take action with a rapidity of which they would not have thought themselves capable," writes Baudelaire in "Le Mauvais vitrier ", and I must read you a passage: "Hey, hey!" And I shouted at him to come up. However, I considered, not without some mirth, that, the room being on the sixth floor and the staircase being very narrow, the man must have had some difficulty in making his ascent and in catching the corners of his fragile merchandise in many places.

At last he appeared: I examined all his windows curiously and said to him: "What? Don't you have any coloured glasses? Pink, red and blue glass, magic glass, glass from heaven? Impudent as you are! You dare to walk around in poor neighbourhoods and you don't even have windows that make life look good! And I pushed him briskly towards the stairs, where he stumbled and grunted. I approached the balcony and seized a small flower-pot, and when the man appeared again at the doorway, I dropped my machine of war perpendicularly on the back edge of his hooks; and the shock knocking him over, he finished shattering under his back all his poor ambulatory fortune, which made the shattering noise of a crystal palace dug by lightning. And drunk with my madness, I shouted furiously at him: "La vie en beau! La vie en beau!" These nervous jokes are not without danger and can often be costly. But what does the eternity of damnation matter to one who has found in a second the infinity of enjoyment?

In this spirit ... enjoy the broken glasses of Garance Arcadias and then a glass of wine.

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- Thomas Eller has exhibited in numerous European museums and galleries since 1990. In 1995, he obtained the American green card and moved to New York. He then exhibited in galleries and museums in North and South America as well as in Asia and Europe. In 2004 he returned to Berlin and founded an online art magazine on the internet platform artnet. As director of the German subsidiary, he also organised distribution in China and was the architect of artnet's cooperations with the art fair Art Basel and the Federal Association of German Galleries and Publishers (BVDG). From 2008 to mid-2009, Eller was director of the art department of the Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin. Since 2014, Eller has lived in Beijing and Berlin. He is president of the art magazine RanDian (燃点). In 2017, he founded Gallery Weekend Beijing. -