

**Annett Reckert, Behind Mirrors,
Iris Wall. Mariella Mosler, Katalog Kunsthalle Göppingen 2004**

In 1934 the psychiatrist Gaetan Gatian de Clérambault shot himself sitting before a mirror. Clérambault, whose greatest passion was seeing, had gradually begun to go blind; the suicide was his response to this affliction. The staging of his last view reflects not only his narcissistic-voyeuristic disposition, but also the ambivalent sensations of fascination and aggression provoked by the mirror.

Two years after the death of his teacher Clérambault, Jacques Lacan published his mirror stage theory concerning the formation of the “I” in early childhood as a psychic entity. According to Lacan, the eye to eye encounter with the mirror image, “the primordial adventure, in which one first sees oneself, reflects on and comprehends oneself differently is a fundamental human experience that structures the imagination.”¹

With the installation “iris wall” in the Kunsthalle Göppingen, Mariella Mosler creates a shredded relative of the mirror from tinsel. The breathtaking work plays on the desire to see one’s reflection and simultaneously dissolves the previously reliable mirror image into threadbare fragments. “Iris wall” therefore addresses our fixation with the mirror image and the relationship between self-recognition and misconception in the process of identity formation.

When there is no breeze to disturb the absolute stillness of the gallery, “iris wall” seems to be a cold, ossified and surreal room within a room. In this sense, it references Minimalism. The work engulfs the pillar construction of the shed roof hall in the Kunsthalle Göppingen. Mariella Mosler plays with the architectonic conception of the Curtainwall, a glass paneled edifice supported by steel beams.² Whoever passes by the cool facade produces a quiet rippling of the fragile walls. A first glance at the installation compels the search for an entry into the mysterious interior. The viewer then enters through one of the two portals and is led along a predetermined path into a bewitched garden. Progressively narrowing, the path determines the pace of the visitor’s stroll. Scattered into a thousand pieces, the once stable mirror image intoxicates the viewer, the intensity of the experience thereby escalating.

The ground plan gradually unfurls, mimicking the path of a winding stream. Without being a labyrinth itself, “iris wall,” references the layout thereof. Paths unfurling from two centers influence the duration of the viewer’s stay within the structure. Confidence in our own perception begins to falter when we attempt to focus on the transient reflections, which are in fact slivers of our own appearance. These fragments shimmer in innumerable nuances of a gray that flashes silver when hit by bright light. The colors brought into the installation by visitors are fractured into the spectrum that is referred to by the

¹ Jacques Lacan, Das Seminar von Jacques Lacan, Vol. I (1953-54). Freuds technische Schriften, Olten 1978, 105.

² Mies van der Rohe’s aim to create a more transparent interior that melded with the exterior led him to design a curtain-like facade of metal and glass that he utilized in his later plans for skyscrapers and brought to perfection in 1958 with the Seagram building.

title of the work. Iris is goddess of the rainbow, a fleeting wonder composed of steadily falling water droplets. In their capacity to reflect light, drops of water are intricately bound to the mirror.

Mariella Mosler's work is characterized by a preoccupation with ornament and the use of materials in bulk. In past years, she has used sand, human hair and sweet fruit gums. Employed as artistic media, these delicate substances require cautious handling. The utilization of tinsel, a deceptive material, is subtly humorous. Tinsel feigns the heavenly and precious while vainly flaunting its own glitter and glory. Although the human desire for adornment has borne the brunt of Modernist criticism, each glittering bauble of "iris wall" celebrates this tendency. Several themes from Mosler's oeuvre resurface in the work, including the homage to the superfluous and the collision between the capacity to work and the limited time available in which to install the piece. Economically impractical, such works make the time in which they are realized into a theme unto its own. They insist on a meaningful connection between extravagance and the final product. Ironically, the commercial art market cannot consume the final product, fragile as it may be. Once more we find beauty heightened by its transitory nature.

"Iris wall" is an enticing illusion related to the hall of mirrors. This tradition challenges visual conventions by distortion and fragmentation, the means of which include the bending of light through the kaleidoscope, anamorphic lenses, panoramas and even the hall of mirrors itself. "Iris wall" evokes glances, be they curious, longing, fearful or hesitant which, in turn, stimulate both the intellect and our emotions. Hence, the mirror finally loses its flatness and coolness, and with it its virtues of timeliness, precision and brilliance. The multi-faceted reflections within the flowing curtain walls create a diffuse depth recalling mysterious waters. Perception becomes uncertain when one's own reflection is dissipated in a space with confounding laws. If the shadowy figures of other visitors are registered within the turns of the meander, confusion and discomfort escalate. Footsteps distant and near create veritable suspense. The strange feeling of privacy in a public space is inhibited by the presence of others. Unexpectedly met with the glance of another through the curtain, our shattered mirror image merges with that of a stranger. Like Alice, we are united with those who dwell in the world through the looking glass.

Whether the experience of the labyrinth-like mirror world is a pleasure or not depends on what Lacan calls the imagination of the dismembered body. This refers to the stage in which the child does not perceive his or her body as a unified whole. "Iris wall" touches on the consequences of suddenly recognizing one's own image in a mirror reflection. This can mean the loss of certainty and the decentralized experience that arises with it. The mysterious tie between oneself and the mirror image is severed, and thereby instigating a rich play on identity and imagination.