

Splintered Walls - Mapped

Frauke Tomczak's speech at the opening of Myriam Thyès' exhibition at Evangelische Akademie, Mülheim an der Ruhr, DE, 1992

The image has jumped off the wall onto the ground. There it lies – closer to our feet than to our heads; no longer a counterpart, but something thrown down, something subjugated – 'subjectum' as in the original and literal sense of the word – and therein lies the whole paradox of our Western power of disposal over things. We subjugated them by subjecting ourselves, our ideas, to them. Now, at the end of this story, it turns out that what we thought we could dispose of in this way as our own was something else, namely it's own, rising up against this occupation of our disposing gaze and access. This process is thrown back at us by the splintered images from the wall. We stand, doubly stupid, before this image of our own imagination, because now we are forced to look the way we have always looked, namely from top to bottom. But beyond that, this splintering of the wall has splintered so much more.

What the viewer of these three images* cannot know is that they are the end product of a process of dissolution. What was dissolved was grand architecture, that of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. The ledges in the walls, the gargoyles, the bizarre network of Gothic façades were transformed in the preliminary studies (early paintings and sketches) into a permeable, coloured light structure. What we see here is a solidified grid in front of suggested depths. The walls that so firmly enclosed God's spirit have been blown apart into sharply cut surfaces, like aggressive glowing script written in flame: splintered walls – screened to create a staggered view - like bizarre guardians of the dark rooms of unopened knowledge: what enlightenment, what perspective are they blocking? What spirit do these signatures, these hieroglyphs hold?

In Western thought, memory has always been represented in metaphors of space. Because we do not know where what we remember remains until we recall it, we have imagined memory as an enclosed space. When we remember, we stride through this space. This is the ancient concept of memoria, and even Augustine uses numerous spatial metaphors for memory such as a 'temple, vast

and immeasurable,' and 'realms and wide halls' in which the treasures of countless images are brought forth, as it were, from hidden nooks and crannies, stored in 'hidden caves.'

Myriam Thyès' images with their staggered perspectives remind me of the linguistic metaphors of memory: splintered walls - mapped. This leads us closer to the question of what kind of spirit the flaming hieroglyphs might be. For it's not without reason that Augustine's caves of memory evoke the idea of the feminine, and it is not without reason that the spirit, when it descends into memory, becomes ever darker: a spirit of reflection that becomes increasingly obscured by shadows the deeper the spaces of memory become. At their base, silenced and overlaid by layers of repression, rages the seething tumult of the mythical battle of the sexes.

This is recounted in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the *Enuma Elish*, and the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. However, here woman is still the self-creative principle that must be conquered in mighty battles. In the Old Testament's *Genesis*, we learn nothing more of this. Here, only a spirit, the male creator-logos, hovers over the female waters, or more precisely, for that is the original Hebrew meaning of the word: he broods over them as a hen broods over the world egg. What happened? *Genesis* is merely a *casus belli* for the polar reversal that heralds Western history. Its hammer blow is the division of matter and spirit, woman and man, body and logos. Before this division, woman was the embodiment of life, of cyclical rebirth – and man was the embodiment of death. With the rule of the male spirit all values are reversed. Only the spirit creates and then in accord with the desires of his imagination – like the Old Testament God, he creates a world in his image from what is now dead matter. The feminine is now just dead matter.

To quote Christina von Braun: 'Because woman was the symbol of the principle of life, she became the embodiment of "evil", and later of death; because man was the symbol of the principle of death, he became the embodiment of the spirit that gives life to the other, the true principle of life.' For Christina von Braun, this reversal is linked to semiotics, the written word, the symbol, the sign that replaces the material object and opens up a realm to the spirit in which it can establish itself as independent of matter, infinite, omnipotent and immortal, separating itself from death, the body and woman. Precisely because of this separation, the production of this logos is also a production of death.

In this context, the hieroglyphs on these images, which are actually the fragmented wall splinters of this spirit itself, take on meaning. The stone splinters stand like frozen guardians and signatures of a script that figuratively sinks beneath the logos that would make them legible. They stand before the depths of a memory space in which this history of division itself dwells as something repressed: cracks in the stone shell of a spirit that has proclaimed itself the subject of history.

This underground of underlying images is also the one on which all of Myriam Thyès' work is based. You will hear the hammer blow of division in the videos, you will encounter the sterilised return of the female body as a machine, and while the church bells ring incessantly for winner's trophies, the newspaper quotes that can be heard refer to the consequences of, as M. T. writes, the same spirit: 'We have known everything for a long time and yet still we stay with it.'

A spare-parts warehouse on a Sunday

What connects the leg covering of a suit of armour with the archaic stone gate at Stonehenge and that in turn with the futuristic smoothness of the *Arche de la Fraternité*? Now that we see them in all their schematic reduction, the wide-legged male stance is clearly what they have in common: The stride of history is precisely the male one, right up to the human rights of the bourgeois revolution, which in the third banner of the tricolour hold only fraternité, brotherhood. What is missing is not simply woman, it's the whole constricted inner workings that first produced the male armour. The armour

that shackles man and now also humanity as a second nature... Because he has equipped himself and his body in this way, he must continue until he can no longer walk – until it is no longer he who moves the machine, the product of this gait, but the machine that moves him. This has long been commonplace, not only in the bomb ticking away in the computer chip à la 'Terminator II', but in every pub around the corner. The player moves the pinball machine as the pinball machine moves the player, and his hip movement circles reflexively around the machine and in the tension of not letting the ball into that place where his other would rather go.

The spare-parts warehouse on a Sunday is not paradise, but hell; the hell of permanent coitus interruptus, with which an entire cultural history repeatedly postpones the fulfilment of its lust and longing to an unforeseeable end, to the Sunday of history. We can't get anywhere in this endless loop. But something drags behind: our bodies.

Cultural closeness, alien

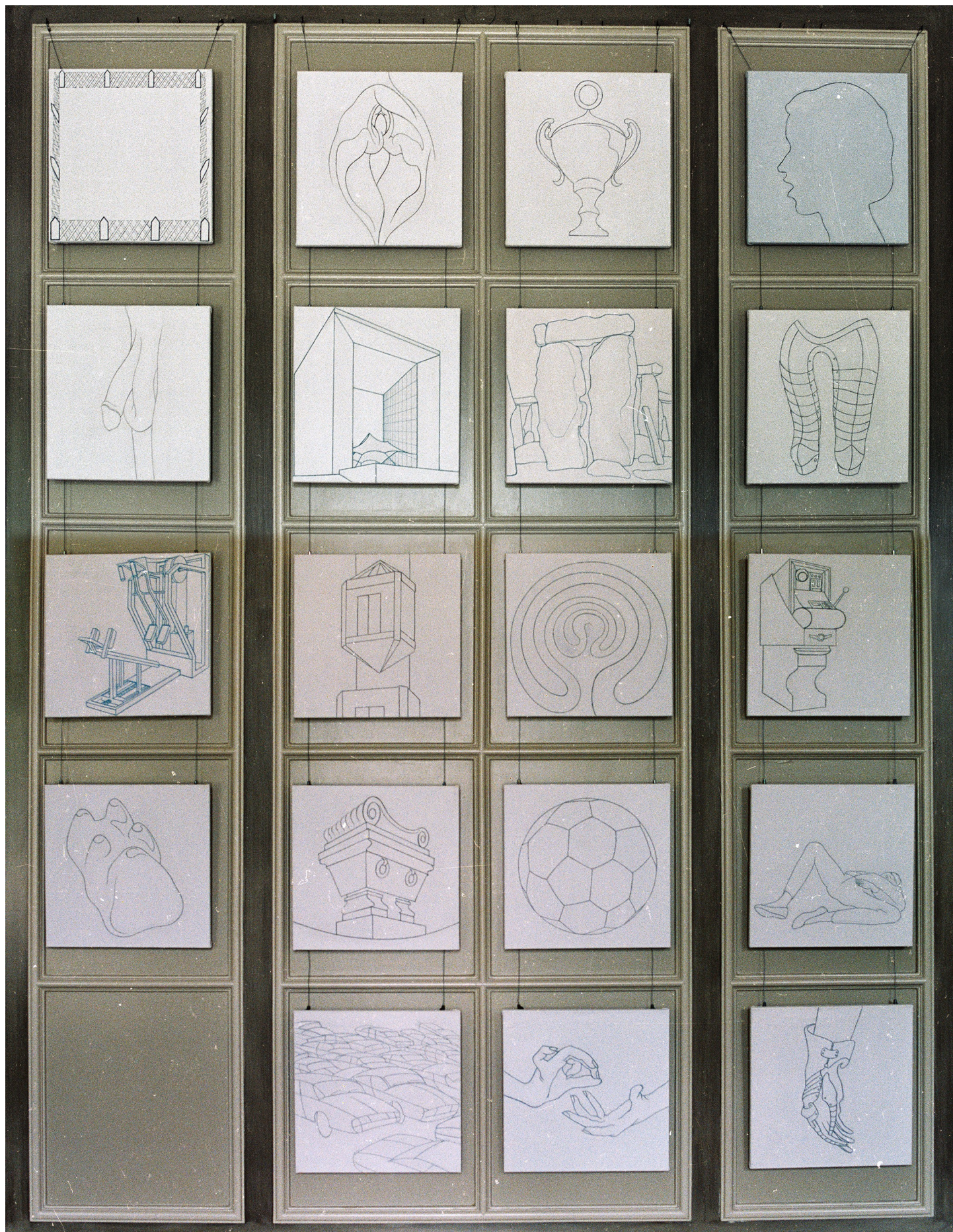
In order to make this endless loop in the spare parts warehouse on Sundays at least visible, if not to stop it, M. T. uses a tried and tested artistic device. She makes the familiar, the everyday, alien and thus reveals its quasi-cultic character. Here we are served the cultic rituals of our everyday life in which we already participate without realising it - Terminator II appears in the cultic kitsch frame of holy pictures - but they still contain, despite all the trinkets, the painful reference to the distorted longing, the gigantic perfection of the Terminator crowns the end of the story of division. In a gesture of salvation history, the machine of the mind that created it promises us redemption.

With all this, the question remains as to which paths are still viable in this vicious circle. Thyes's works clearly belong to a now frowned-upon type of art, namely committed, political art. But they contain no message in the sense of an answer to this question. They analyse and document.

The only thing that remains is the ancient figure of the labyrinth, which appears again and again. If we follow its tangle of lines and arrive at the centre of the labyrinth, we find, instead of the Minotaur, a human being.

Translation from German to English: Matti Rouse + Mithu Sanyal

* <https://thyes.com/en/exhibition/deconstructions-europeennes-wiehrebahnhof-freiburg-1993/>
Journey to the Underworld – Notre Dame Deconstructions (1991-1992). Three images that can be viewed from different angles and can also lie on the floor.



Endless Loop, ink on canvas, 19 parts, 1992