



## MYRIAM THYES - PRETTY SMART

By Stephan Trescher, 2023

### SMART PANTHEON

It starts with the anatomical model of a human being - a digital simulation on the screen of a smartphone. It can be rotated and tilted in all directions with the fingers. After just a few such movements the image on the phone fades out and a new handheld smartphone appears on the phone screen. We zoom in. Strangely, this phone is completely black and remains so before another smartphone with a black screen appears on the phone we are looking at. This phone is completely unaffected by the tilting movements and floats in the middle of the image. Then two hands appear there too, holding the smartphone, tapping and wiping the screen. Again, the camera zooms in. The framed smartphone is left behind. And so it continues.

The variations go on, seemingly endlessly. And although the pattern remains essentially predictable, it is hard to tear oneself away from the screen - the pull of spatial depth is too strong as is the curiosity regarding the subtle variations and deviations in the next smartphone that appears.

All the while we hear strange sounds, completely detached from the cinematic imagery: clicking, knocking, clapping, scraping and rubbing. Sounds and noises that can only be produced with our hands and fingers.

It is beautiful to see so many different hands. Youthful, childlike hands and old hands, delicate and sinewy; hands of different skin tones adorned with tattoos and bracelets, hands emerging from cuffs or those with long, perfectly manicured fingernails. And we realise how quickly the sight of hands allows us to imagine a whole person.

At one point, in the middle of the film, the black and white image flips into the negative - a moment that turns out to be a turning point. From here on, the actors, or rather, the images of their hands and phones - reappear with different movements and in a different sequence, and merging into one another until we finally end up back with the anatomical model rotating on the display.

It often appears as though other hands, coming from within, are reaching out to meet the hands tapping on the screen from the outside. They seem to simulate a touch—not merely the solipsistic pawing at a small, cold sheet of glass, but a genuine fingertip-to-fingertip contact. The artist herself prompts us to think of Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, even though the video's title evokes a different Roman edifice—one that is, if you will, more ecumenical in its religious scope, dedicated to all gods at once, and perhaps even to the technological idols we worship today.

## **SMART PANTHEON RGB**

A logical continuation of Smart Pantheon and Smart Tunnel is the work Smart Pantheon RGB. It exists as an interactive video piece and can therefore only be experienced with the necessary technical equipment - specifically, a digital device with a touch screen, such as a tablet or a smartphone. Here the mode of presentation, the subject matter and the medium become inextricably intertwined. When one views a photo of a smartphone being operated by hands on one's own touchscreen, nothing happens at first. It is only when performing the „zoom gesture“—spreading two fingers apart on the screen—that the video begins to play. However, it freezes to a still image the moment the movement stops.

Initially, the action triggers what such a movement typically does on a screen: zooming in on the subject matter, followed by the appearance of the next image behind it. Although, ultimately, nothing different occurs as in the video loop of \*Smart Pantheon\*, the work conveys the impression that we—simultaneously viewers and users, can independently and single-handedly penetrate deeper and deeper layers of image and meaning. Even if it quickly becomes clear that behind each display window only another one awaits us.

Myriam Thyès had already stripped the color from the riotously colourful, oversaturated barrage of smartphone images in her two previous works. Now, in 'Smart Pantheon RGB', the approach remains essentially the same, only this time she has delicately coloured the black and white images in monochrome. On the one hand, this evokes the toning techniques used in early silent films; and on the other, the use of blue, red, and green—each in rather pale shades—directly references the three colours incorporated into the title and used by screens to compose every other color: Red, Green, and Blue. As these tinted sequences alternate with others left in black and white, the result is not only an engaging visual effect that clearly distinguishes the successive layers of images; this shift of colour also creates a further incentive to keep scrolling, to dig deeper with the next spreading motion of the fingers. There is no end in sight.

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