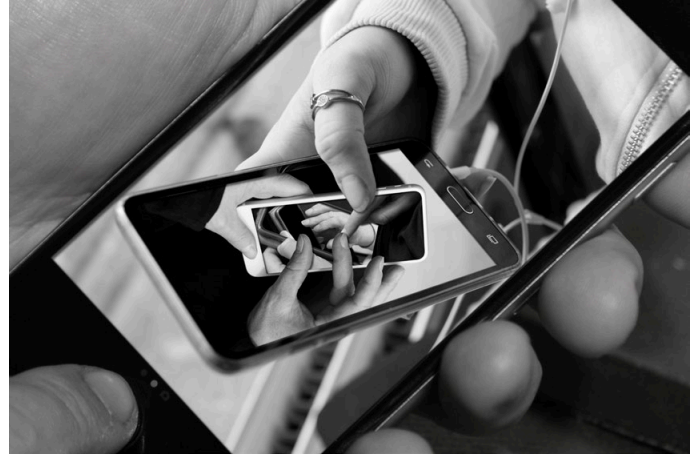


# MYRIAM THYES - PRETTY SMART

By Stephan Trescher, 2023

## SMART TUNNEL



Where should one begin (if one is in a perpetual cycle, a sequence of images that is at least conceivable as infinite)? And how? The best way, of course, is with a sober stock-taking:

Smart Tunnel is a sequence of ten photographs in black and white, or more precisely photomontages. Yet this description refers more to the production process than to the material nature of the finished artwork; after all, the practice of mounting and layering photographs is nowadays typically done digitally—involving neither the elaborate procedures of the darkroom and laboratory nor the manual, collage-like assembly of existing photos using scissors and glue. Consequently, the resulting image possesses a uniformity previously unknown: a single, smooth photographic surface that—in keeping with the state of the art—gains added quality and extra lustre through a seal of acrylic glass, to the back of which the photographic paper is directly bonded. This is by no means a superfluous observation—not only because photographs can look very different, but because this surface aesthetic aligns in a remarkably fitting way with the subject matter of the images themselves: each of the ten photographs depicts a pair of hands—one holding a smartphone, the other touching its screen, which displays an image of \*another\* pair of hands holding and touching a smartphone, on whose screen yet \*another\* handheld phone is visible... and so on, ad infinitum.

The constructive pictorial tilts and skewed perspectives that emerge can sometimes generate a horizontal spinning motion, a kind of visual whirlpool, even more often they form highly improbable yet believably suggestive spatial nests of plunging lines - and we tumble after them, like Alice in her hunt for the white rabbit. This is repeated on every single tableau, with variations depending on whether the user operates their smartphone with one hand or two.

In addition to hands and fingers, one also sees glimpses of clothing and jewellery, allowing one to at least surmise—if not definitively identify—the subjects' age and gender. This variety prevents any sense of monotony and, above all, creates the illusion of a naturalism that the series does not actually possess: what is not immediately apparent is the reduction of the subjects to the screens themselves. The artist has eliminated all controls, leaving only the bare screen which of course does not correspond to the usual view of a smartphone display. This not only focuses the image on the essentials but also draws us, the viewers, inward, creating a sense of being pulled into the infinite depths of an optical tunnel, the kind usually produced only by facing mirrors.

On a thematic level, this also reflects our own user behaviour. We become digital slaves, who stare at our portable mini-computers day in, day out, ostensibly to communicate with others or to learn something about the world, yet ultimately trapped in a labyrinth in which we constantly mirror only ourselves.

And how can we ever stop doing that?