

## Ruben Talberg's volte-face paintings „Arcanum“

An artwork piece from Ruben Talberg's series "Arcanum" suggests an important multi-nodal secret that can only become known to the initiated few. The work hints at presenting the key to solving a mystery, providing an answer to a riddle that is accessible via magic, mysticism and a very personalized meditation practice filtered through classical spiritual traditions. It also intimates a remedy or elixir as cure for an intractable ailment.

Talberg is very interested in medieval alchemy (the "conversio oppositorum," the artist transforming his raw materials into creation, and transforming himself through his creation), and Jewish Kabbalah, i.e. the non-rational existential force which may be the living flame of Judaism. Any Arcanum work shows various compartments or 'rooms' which are almost like separate chambers in a doll house (what Derrida calls spacing). Or like the progressive stages in a video game where one needs to navigate through obstacles in one room in order to pass on to the next room, or to the next level of skill.

There is the sense in these paintings of something tactile, earthy, burned out, scarred, the charred remains of a controlled fire. There are scraps of paper with musical notations, poems written by Talberg, the sideways figure of a sculpted human body, occult esoteric designs and calligraphy, a board game, an overturned newspaper front page from the 1960s, ancient and talismanic symbols, the many circles and cycles of life. An original pictographic language developed by Talberg.

Almost everything in these artworks is turned over, in reverse: backside paintings, volte-face. It is a work of reversibility in the Baudrillardian sense. There is a sense of symbolism, of remote control "spooky action at a distance," of letters and numbering systems from exotic foreign languages. There is an upside-down front page of the *New York Times*: the "newspaper of record." The headline refers to the NASA Ranger spaceflight program, a series of unmanned lunar missions to the moon sent to acquire close-up images of the surface. The spacecraft were usually destroyed, crashing at full speed just moments after transmitting their images back to Earth.

The flag as an arbitrary sign: The American flag e.g. is a powerful national symbol of deepest respect and disrespect, an object at once sacred in its grandeur and profaned in the marketplace. Although there is no wind on the moon, the American flag planted on its surface in 1969 by the first astronauts to walk there appears to have the glorified special effect of fluttering in the wind, a heroic gesture of persistence against the elements of weather which, in this case, are simulated by aluminum wiring or a specially designed ripple -- a tear in the fabric of spacetime.

More than an anecdote: The breakthrough, the veritable eureka took place when in 2010 Talberg was „forced“ to incorporate a bust of Beethoven into a commissioned painting. His radical solution then was as ingenious as it was simple: use the backside of the frame - thus inaugurating a whole new cycle of creation, i.e. the Arcanum series.

Ruben Talberg's volte-face approach appears to be quite unique art-historically, alluding to paradoxes De nihilo such as Cornelis Gijsbrechts tableau of 1675 (National Museum Copenhagen).

Using the reverse surface is a *détournement* with Situationist implications. The upside down. The inside out. The reverse. The "right side and the wrong side" or "betwixt and between" of the early Albert Camus (his first published writing in 1937: "L'envers et l'endroit" in French). Neither here nor there. This is the recurring motif as can be observed in the „Fuck NSA“ tryptych or other pieces.

The "wrong" side of the canvas becoming the "right" side. The material depth of wood, carvings, other miscellaneous textural and textual inscriptions. The big black scratch signature dipped in the pen of ashes (an imprint of tar). Beyond the visual to the tactile. Art of great significance for semiotic graffiti-style resistance against global capitalism and finance.