

SARA SIZER / UNFOLDINGS

The paintings that have emerged from Sara Sizer's studio in the past few years are enigmatic. It is as if the artist were emulating the trompe-l'œil effects at which the Dutch still life painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so excelled; showing cloth that looks as if it was newly unfolded. Like Zeuxis at the sight of Parrhasios's painting of a curtain, one yearns to shake out the drapes in order to see the reality that must be beneath – so clear and detailed the folds, so three-dimensional. It is only at second glance that you become aware that you're looking at a cloth stretched over a frame. The pictures present folded cloth on flat cloth, evoking the pictorial device of cascading textile folds, the mastery of which, along with the depiction of the nude, was one of the tests of virtuosity in painting.

While alluding to this practice and theory of painting, these works have us doubt whether we are dealing with painting at all, or rather with some photographic technique. It is one of the strengths of this new series of works that each new observation elicits more questions. For example in the work *Lied*, the internal logic by which a painting is modelled with light and shade is not consistent. Where the folds appear raised, the light comes from the left; but at another point, from the right. In *Not*, the light spreads out from the central vertical axis, and yet the horizontal folds are accentuated as if by a beam of light cast at right angles to the main source of light. Thus the pictures emanate their own light, as it were, but are also highly responsive to light sources in the ambient space; depending on the light in the room and the viewer's vantage point, the intensity and colour of the pictures change. Moving about in that space, viewers may witness the most diverse, subtle and surprising modifications happening in these pieces. The closer our scrutiny, the more enigmatic the works become.

Comparatively, the artistic process is somewhat minimal, and consigns to the materials the greater part of the task of establishing form. Sizer has been exploring, since the beginning of the millennium, the possibilities that applying bleach to fabric might open for painting. Now she has opted for red velvet as her raw material, treating it in its unfolded state, with bleach. The paintings are, remarkably, imprints of themselves. They do not represent, nor are they to be read as the trace of contact with an absent object. They are self-generating, as it were, manifesting the image of their previous state. In semantic terms, they draw upon the gestures of concealment and veiling, so recurrent in the history of self-reflective painting from the Late Medieval period on. As un-foldings, however, they also show a diverseness of pictorial complexity which is not expended by our knowledge of the production process. The contemplating eye resists revealing the mystery of these paintings.

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(Transl. from the German: Stephen Reader 2016)