Jörg Heiser

Amouröse Distanz

Amorous Distance

Als Donald Judd in den 1960er Jahren über Kunst schrieb, kannte er kaum ein abfälligeres Wort als „illusionistisch". Die vom ihm 1965 verkündete neue Kunst der spezifischen Objekte – das, worauf man sich dann später einigte, es Minimal Art zu nennen – sollte nicht den visuellen Schein und den Traum eröffnen, sondern eben diese platzen lassen wie Seifenblasen. Stattdessen sollte – „just the facts, Ma'am" – eine unverblümte Präsenz des Objektes selbst regieren, verbunden mit einer Buster-Keaton-haft stoischen Bestandsaufnahme der Konstellation von Kunst und Betrachter im Raum. „Judd hatte Illusionismus-Panik so wie manche Männer Homosexuellen-Panik haben; es trieb ihn dazu, Illusionismus von seiner eigenen Kunst weg zu projizieren…", schreibt Hal Foster[1] – und impliziert mit dem relativ drastischen Vergleich, dass Judd ein In-the-closet-Illusionist war, ein Künstler, der den Zauber des Eintauchens in Effekte des Imaginären für sein eigenes Werk selbst dann noch verleugnete, während er lavendelfarbene Metallic-Lacke einsetzte oder psychedelisch schimmerndes Plexiglas. Also Verdrängung. Kein Wunder, dass Judd jahrelang kein Wort mit Robert Smithson redete, nachdem dieser über Judds Werke um 1966 herum unter anderem Dinge wie dies hier geschrieben hatte: „Das erste Mal, als ich Don Judd's ‚pink-plexiglas box' sah, erinnerte sie mich an einen gigantischen Kristall von einem anderen Planeten."[2]

Gerade für die Malerei sind die ästhetischen Dogmatismen der 1960er Jahre nicht folgenlos geblieben. Der Vorwurf des „Illusionismus" – des irgendwie eskapistischen Eintauchens in eine räumlich vorgegaukelte Jenseits-Welt – wog bei figurativen Bildern besonders schwer. Denn dieser Vorwurf war schnell verbunden mit dem eines allzu willfährigen Bedienens von Kunstmarktbedürfnissen und konservativen Vorstellungen von Darstellbarkeit und – noch schlimmer – Dekoration. Dazu kam die bereits aus den 1950er Jahren rührende Diskursdominanz des abstrakten Expressionismus. Philip Guston konnte ein Lied davon singen. Er war schließlich selbst ein Hauptvertreter des abstrakten Expressionismus gewesen, der allerdings, unzufrieden mit den Limitierungen, sich Ende der 1960er Jahre wieder figürlich-erzählerischeren Formen der Darstellung zuwandte: jene berühmten Comic-haften, keineswegs leichtverdaulich-aparten Bilder über Ku-Klux-Klan-Masken, Schuhe, Zigaretten, zyklopische Maler, Nixon-Tristesse. Was dazu führte, dass 1970 großmäulige Kritiker wie Hilton Kramer (*New York Times*) oder Robert Hughes (*Time Magazine*) sich ermächtigt sahen, ihn im Auftrag der abstrakt-expressionistischen Gemeinde als Verräter der reinen Lehre zu schlachten (wogegen Willem de Kooning zurecht einwandte: „Moment mal, was denken die alle, dass wir ein Baseballteam sind?!"[3].)

For Donald Judd, writing about art in the nineteen-sixties, there were few words more disparaging than "illusionistic". The new art of specific objects that he proclaimed in 1965 – later the consensus was to call it Minimal Art – was not meant to open up visual illusion and dreams but burst them like soap bubbles. A blunt presence of the object itself – "just the facts, Ma'am" – was supposed to reign instead, coupled with a Buster-Keaton-esque, stoic stocktaking of the constellation of art and viewer in space. "Judd had 'illusionist panic' in the way that some men have homosexual panic; it compelled him to project illusionism away from his art…", writes Hal Foster[1] – implying in this relatively drastic comparison that Judd was an in-the-closet illusionist, an artist who denied the magic of immersion into the imaginary for his own work even as he was utilising lavender-coloured metallic paints or psychedelically shimmering Plexiglas. So, a case of repression. It's not surprising that Judd didn't speak to Robert Smithson for years after Smithson, round about 1966, wrote things like the following about Judd's work: "The first time I saw Don Judd's 'pink plexiglas box', it suggested a giant crystal from another planet".[2]

The aesthetic dogmatisms of the sixties were not without their consequences, especially for painting. The accusation of "illusionism" – the somewhat escapist immersion into a falsely three-dimensional beyond-world – was a particularly serious one for figurative painting. For this accusation was quickly associated with that of an all too compliant catering to the requirements of the art market and conservative notions of representability and – even worse – decoration. In addition, there was the dominance of Abstract Expressionist discourse dating back to the fifties. Philip Guston was able to tell a tale or two about this. After all, he himself had been a chief exponent of Abstract Expressionism – then, at the end of the sixties, dissatisfied with the limitations, he returned to figurative-narrative forms of representation: those famous cartoonish, distinctive, anything-but-easy-to-digest paintings of Ku Klux Klan hoods, shoes, cigarettes, cyclopean painters, Nixon-melancholy. This led, in 1970, to critics like Hilton Kramer (*New York Times*) and Robert Hughes (*Time Magazine*) feeling empowered to slaughter Guston, on behalf of the Abstract Expressionist community, as a traitor to pure doctrine (to which Willem de Kooning rightly objected: "What did they think? We're all on a baseball team?!"[3]).

Fast forward to the early eighties and it's hardly surprising that a new generation confronted by the history of the preceding generations said to itself: what are those dogmas to us, we'll paint what we want – and, needless to say, also produced a bunch of half-baked, obsequious works under

Fast forward in die frühen 1980er Jahre, brauchte man sich nicht zu wundern, dass eine junge Generation sich angesichts dieser Geschichte ihrer Vorgänger-Generationen sagte: Was kümmern mich die Dogmen, ich male, was ich will – und prompt auch eine Menge Halbgares und Anbiederndes produzierte unter den schnell aufgepappten Labels „Neo-Expressionismus" oder auch „Neue Wilde". Spätestens ab da war die Tischplatte für das Ping-Pong einer bis heute andauernden Malerei-Diskussion bereitgestellt: auf der einen Seite die Rede von einer sterbenden Kunst (die vielen Enden der Malerei, gefolgt von gesteigerter Abstraktion als Buß- und Trauergebet), auf der anderen Seite das trotzige Sichhinwegsetzen über die Geschichte malerischer Innovationen (ungeniertes Bedienen bei historischen Vorbildern mit allen Fingern in den Farbtöpfen und entweder hoffen, dass es keiner merkt oder behaupten, dass es Absicht ist). Nur einer Handvoll Malern gelang es, sich quer zu dieser Konstellation zu stellen und weder feierlich die Tode der Malerei zu besiegeln noch kindisch so zu tun, als habe man das Aufbringen von Feuchtem auf Flächen gerade erst erfunden. Stattdessen begannen sie, Widersprüche und Hypotheken der Malerei auf produktive Weise selbst zum Material und Treibstoff ihrer Bildfindungen zu machen: ihre schwierige, von Eifersucht und Einverleibung bestimmte Beziehung zur Fotografie; ihre bis dahin oft fehlende (oder wieder vergessene) Reflektion der Bedingungen, unter denen Malerei in Räumen gezeigt, gehängt, gesehen wird; die Notwendigkeit, sich einer falschen Wahl zwischen Virtuosität und Anti-Virtuosität, handwerklichem Ethos und avantgardistischem Pathos zu verweigern. In den 1990er Jahren waren Maler wie Luc Tuymans und Marlene Dumas mit daran beteiligt, diese aus den 1980ern erwachsene Erfahrung als einen gangbaren Weg für die Malerei zu etablieren.

Michael Raedecker hatte vor diesem Hintergrund – könnte man sagen – das Glück, erst als Späteinsteiger in die Malerei zu kommen. Erst mit um die dreißig Jahren, nach bereits abgeschlossenem Modedesign-Studium an der Rietveld-Akademie in Amsterdam, begann er zu malen (und das Studium der Malerei gewissermaßen nachzuholen, erst an der Amsterdamer Rijksakademie 1993–94, dann am Goldsmiths College in London 1996–97). Die Fehler der 1980er Jahre hatten da bereits andere für ihn gemacht; und seine sagenumwobenen drei Monate als Assistent bei Modedesigner Martin Margiela mögen ihm zusätzlich ein paar Impulse injiziert haben, die ihn alert machten für das Schippern zwischen Skylla (vergiftete Hochmut der Avantgarde) und Charybdis (unkontrollierter Fall in den Schlund des Marktes).

Das auf 1993 datierte Bild **fair haven** (S. 53) – eine simple amerikanische Vorstadtszene mit Auto vor Haus – zeigt, wie Raedecker die Widersprüche und Hypotheken der Malerei von Anfang an auf der Rechnung hat, zunächst unter spürbarem Einfluss Luc Tuymans' (ich komme darauf zurück). Das Bild markiert Parameter, die in Raedeckers Arbeit bis heute eine Rolle spielen: vom Einsatz der für Raedecker so charakteristischen Stick-Technik auf mit Acrylfarbe bearbeiteter Leinwand bis zur banal-

the slapped-on label "Neo-expressionism" or "Neue Wilde" (New Wild Ones). It was at this point, at the very latest, that the arena was readied for the ping-pong-like discussion of painting that has continued to this day: on the one hand, the talk of a dying art (the many ends of painting, followed by increased abstraction as prayer of penitence and mourning); on the other hand, the defiant disregard for the history of painterly innovation (shamelessly helping oneself to historical models with all one's fingers in the paint pots and either hoping no one will notice or claiming it's intentional). Only a handful of painters managed to bypass this tedious constellation, neither solemnly sealing the deaths of painting nor childishly acting as if one had only just invented the application of pigment to plane. Instead, they took painting's contradictions and debts and started using these productively by making them the material and fuel of their pictorial solutions: the difficult relationship to photography, characterised by jealousy and assimilation; the hitherto frequent tendency to fail (or forget) to consider the conditions in which painting is shown, hung, and viewed in spaces; the importance of not giving in to a false choice between virtuosity and anti-virtuosity, between the ethos of craft and the pathos of the avant-garde. In the nineties, painters like Luc Tuymans and Marlene Dumas helped to establish this eighties-based experience as a viable avenue for painting.

It could be said that against this backdrop Michael Raedecker was lucky to have been a latecomer to painting. It was only around the age of thirty, after having already completed a degree in fashion design at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, that he started to paint (and make up for lost time, as it were, by studying painting – first at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, from 1993 to 1994, and then at Goldsmiths College in London, from 1996 to 1997). Others had already made the mistakes of the eighties for him; and his legendary three months as assistant for fashion designer Martin Margiela may have given him a few additional ideas in preparation for navigating between a rock (stony arrogance of the avant-garde) and a hard place (uncontrolled fall into the maw of the market).

The painting **fair haven** (p. 53), dated 1993 – a simple, American house-with-car-out-front suburban scene – shows how Raedecker anticipated the contradictions and debts of painting right from the start, initially under the noticeable influence of Luc Tuymans (I will come back to this). *Fair haven* marks out parameters that continue to play a role in Raedecker's work to this day: from his characteristic embroidery technique on acrylic-painted canvas to his repertoire of banal, uncanny motifs. But it is also a square-one from which, over the course of the nineties, in at least one respect – the "illusionary" – he ventured forward to another extreme, namely a cinematic wide-screen effect of painting that may have reached its culmination in a work like **ins and outs** (pp. 28–29) from 2000 (that unreal scene of a house emitting its ghostly glow into the night). In the first, and now, in the

unheimlichen Motivik. Es ist aber auch ein Nullpunkt, von dem aus er sich im Verlauf der 1990er Jahre in zumindest einer Hinsicht – der des „Illusionistischen" – bis ins andere Extrem vorgewagt hat, nämlich einer filmischen Breitwand-Wirkung der Malerei, die vielleicht bei einem Bild wie **ins and outs** (S. 28–29) von 2000 (jene unwirkliche Szene eines gespenstisch in die Nacht hinaus leuchtenden Hauses) ihren Höhepunkt erreicht. In den 2000er und 2010er Jahren, also gegenwärtig, mündet dieser Kontrast in einer gebrochenen Gleichzeitigkeit, bei der Illusionismus und Anti-Illusionismus fortwährend als Montage kollidieren, etwa bei Bildern wie **repeat** (2011, S. 17) und **presentation** (2011–12, S. 9), in denen die Vorstadt-Haus-Motivik wieder auftaucht, aber in gänzlich verwandelter und verschobener Bedeutung. Im Folgenden geht es darum, anhand der genannten Bilder und einigen weiteren diesen Spannungsbogen im Werk Raedeckers nachzuzeichnen und zugleich der Frage auf den Grund zu gehen, wie das immersive, zum Eintauchen einladende Bild sich verhält zum gestückelten, gebrochenen Bild, das seine zusammengesetzte Objekthaftigkeit ausstellt wie Frankensteinsche Wundnähte. Und das ist ein Verhältnis, wie wir sehen werden, das sich für Raedecker nicht nur aus den Traditionssträngen der Malerei (etwa ihrer Genres wie Landschaft, Porträt, Stillleben usw.) speist, sondern mindestens ebenso aus den anderen Künsten – besonders Musik und Film: tranciger Dance-Track und verstörendes Tondokument[4]; Hollywood und Arthouse-Kino. „Art is what art should never be", gab sich Raedecker als Losung damals, Anfang der 1990er Jahre, selber vor; und die Strategien, dieses Paradox zu erreichen – in der Kunst das zu tun, was die Konvention verbietet, und sei es unter Anwendung von Konventionen – lassen sich auch an den anderen Künsten beobachten.

Aber zurück zu **fair haven** von 1993. Das kleine Bild zeigt eine mit wenigen Strichen skizzierte amerikanische Vorstadtszene. Ein Straßenkreuzer (einer der Sorte, wie man sie aus den Krimi-Serien der Zeit kennt, ein Chevy Impala oder ähnliches) steht in der Einfahrt zu einem relativ großzügig dimensionierten Haus, genauer gesagt sehen wir drei Dächer und können nicht sagen, ob es sich um Nachbarhäuser oder Teile des selben Gebäudekomplexes handelt. Die Umrisse sind mit wenigen Strichen – oder besser: Einstichen, da es sich größtenteils um mit Faden gestickte Linien und kleine Flächen handelt – markiert. Darum herum verbleicht die Szene wie in eine gelblich gefärbte Schneeschicht des Vergessens – so wie dies in den letzten Jahrzehnten auch eine zwischen Kleinbürgertum und Geldadel aufgespannte Mittelschicht getan hat. Deren Erosion konnten wir nicht nur in den Statistiken der Wirtschafts- und Sozialforschungsinstitute beobachten, sondern auch in den Qualitäts-TV-Serien der 2000er Jahre: etwa bei den *Sopranos* in New Jersey, wo eine Mafia-Familie überwiegend vergeblich versucht, ein unauffälliges Vorstadtleben zu führen; oder umgekehrt bei *Breaking Bad* in Albuquerque, wo ein langweiliger Chemielehrer aus der finanziellen Not heraus zum halsbrecherisch kühnen Drogenbaron aufsteigt (während er versucht, die Fassade langweiligen Vorstadtlebens aufrecht zu erhalten).

second, decade of this century, this contrast has led to a fractured simultaneity in which illusionism and anti-illusionism are constantly colliding as montage, for example, in paintings such as **repeat** (2011 p. 17) and **presentation** (2011–12. p. 9), works in which suburban-house motifs re-emerge but with a completely altered and shifted meaning. In what follows, I will trace this dramatic arc in Raedecker's *œuvre* with the help of the above-mentioned paintings and several others and, at the same time, will examine the question as to how the immersive image, the image that invites the viewer to plunge in, relates to the patched-together, fractured image that presents its composite objecthood like Frankensteinesque sutures on a wound. And this is a relationship, as we shall see, that for Raedecker is fuelled not only by the strands of painting tradition (for example, its genres of landscape, portrait, still life, etc.) but also, and at least as much so, by other arts – especially music and film: trancey dance-track and unsettling audio recording[4]; Hollywood and art-house cinema. "Art is what art should never be", is the motto Raedecker set for himself back then, at the beginning of the nineties; and the strategies to arrive at this paradox – to do in art what convention forbids, whether by using conventions or otherwise – can also be observed in the other arts.

But back to **fair haven** from 1993. The small painting shows an American suburban scene sketched out with a minimum of lines. A big American car (of the sort familiar from the crime series of the time – a Chevy Impala, or the like) is parked in the driveway of a relatively large-sized house – though what we really see is three roofs; thus we cannot be sure whether these belong to neighbouring houses or are parts of the same complex of buildings. The contours are indicated with a few brief lines – or rather, are embroidered, as the lines and small areas are for the most part embroidered with thread. The scene fades off around the motif as if into a yellowish mist of oblivion – much like the middle class faded in recent decades, having been stretched thin between the poor and the rich. The erosion of the middle class was something we could observe – not just in the statistics provided by the economic and social research institutes, but also in the quality television series of the 2000s: in *The Sopranos*, for example, set in New Jersey, with a mafia family trying, largely in vain, to lead an inconspicuous suburban life; or, conversely, in *Breaking Bad*, in Albuquerque, where a boring chemistry teacher, driven by financial necessity, becomes a recklessly bold drug baron (while trying to maintain the facade of dull suburban life).

So, to state the obvious: the banal family-home facade is almost inevitably a site of potential horror. Which brings us to a painting of a place of very real horror, a painting it's difficult *not* to think of when looking at Raedecker's **fair haven** – namely, Luc Tuymans's notorious *Gas Chamber* (ill. 1) from 1986. Here, too, we have a small-scale painting in which the artist has sketched a banal space, in this case an industrial-looking

Damit sei das Offensichtliche auch zugleich gesagt: Die banale Familienhaus-Fassade ist beinahe zwangsläufig ein Ort potentiellen Grauens. Womit wir bei einem Bild eines Orts ganz realen Grauens anlangen, das es schwer fällt, *nicht* zu assozieren beim Anblick von Raedeckers **fair haven** – nämlich Luc Tuymans' notorisches Bild von 1986, *Gaskammer* (Abb. 1). Auch hier ist in einem kleinformatigen Bild ein banaler, in diesem Fall industriell wirkender Raum mit wenigen Strichen, wenigen kleinen Flächen in dunkler Farbe vor einem Hintergrund fahl-beiger Schattierungen skizziert. Erst der Titel lässt erkennen, um was es sich handeln muss (tatsächlich, das dem Gemälde zugrundeliegende Aquarell fertigte Tuymans vor Ort in Dachau an). Ein Titel wie **fair haven** ist demgegenüber natürlich auf doppelte Weise in falsche Sicherheit wiegend: „hübscher Zufluchtsort", da schwingt „sicherer Hafen" mit. Wie wir aus zahllosen Vorstadtdramen und Horrorfilmen wissen, ist alles andere als das der Fall. Nicht – um das klarzustellen – dass es darum ginge, eine unmittelbare Parallele zwischen den Lagern des Holocaust und den US-Vorstadtsiedlungen zu ziehen („Fair Haven" ist ein gewöhnlicher, mehrfach vorkommender amerikanischer Ortsname, so wie „Neustadt"). Aber es gibt eben eine *mittelbare* Parallele zwischen Tuymans' Bild und Raedeckers: Ein für sich betrachtet bedeutungsloser, austauschbarer Ort wird in verwaschen wirkenden, reduzierten Zügen umrissen; genau durch diese fehlende Detailtreue wird der Ort aufladbar mit Geschichte, Projektion, schwer oder gar nicht Aufzulösendem oder Wegzuerklärendem. Jedoch spekuliert Tuymans' Bild dabei auf einen Schauder des Abgründigen, auch die Frivolität einer künstlerisch-malerischen Grenztestung im Fernduell mit Gerhard Richter (wer wagt es, ein KZ-Sujet zu malen – Richter hatte es trotz Vorlagen in seinem *Atlas* wohlweislich vermieden). Raedecker hingegen wählt den schwierigeren Weg der Alltäglichkeit und Banalität, welche sich erst durch komplizierte semantische Operationen entsprechend unter Spannung setzen lassen.

In dem in diesem Band abgedruckten Interview spricht Raedecker davon, dass das, was man sehe, wenn man ein Gemälde anschaue, nicht exakt dem entspreche, was tatsächlich auf der Leinwand sei – denn jedes Bild (man möchte ergänzen: jedes halbwegs interessante Bild) triggert eine Reihe anderer Bilder und Erfahrungen im eigenen Gedächtnis. Das ist sicher richtig. Ganz wichtig ist aber, dass dies natürlich für den Maler selbst ganz genauso gilt. Denn dem zu erstellenden Bild geht ja eine Motivwahl voraus, bei der Raedecker oft gerade zu für sich betrachtet recht standardisierten Motiven neigt. Das genannte Haus ist in jedem Fall ein vorsichtig modernistisches, typisches Vorstadtanwesen. Amerikanisch, generisch, entleert. Dan Graham etwa begriff mit seiner Serie *Homes for America* den Zusammenhang zwischen dieser Sorte Haus und den seriellen Reduktionen der Minimal Art als eine zwingende Korrelation. Von Tobe Hoopers *Poltergeist* (1982) bis David Lynchs *Blue Velvet* (1986) dominierte das Vorstadthaus besonders die 1980er Jahre als neuralgisches Angstzentrum: Es geht um die Konstruktion der heilen Familie und deren Unterhöhlung und Zerstörung durch Kräfte des jenseitig „Anderen" von außen – die

room, with a few strokes and a few small areas in dark colour against a background of shades of pale beige. Only the title reveals what the painting is about (in fact, the watercolour on which the painting is based was made by Tuymans at Dachau). Compared with this, a title like **fair haven**, of course, lulls us into a false sense of security, and on two levels: it's an "attractive place of refuge" (a "fair haven"), while having overtones of "safe haven" – both far from the truth, as we know from countless suburban dramas and horror films. To be absolutely clear – it's not that there was an intention to draw a direct parallel between the camps of the Holocaust and American suburban developments ("Fair Haven" is an ordinary, frequently occurring town/city name in the United States). But there is, indeed, an *indirect* parallel between Tuymans's painting and Raedecker's: an in itself insignificant, interchangeable place is delineated in washed-out-looking, reduced strokes; precisely because of this lack of fidelity to detail, the place can be charged with history, projection, that which is difficult or impossible to solve or explain away. Tuymans's painting, however, speculates on a horror of unfathomable depths, and on the frivolity of a painterly testing of boundaries, in a long-distance duel with Gerhard Richter (who dares to paint a concentration camp subject? Despite photographs in his *Atlas*, Richter was careful to avoid it). Raedecker, by contrast, chooses the more difficult path of ordinariness and banality, which can only be analogously charged via complicated semantic operations.

In the interview published in this catalogue, Raedecker talks about how what one sees when looking at a painting does not exactly correspond to what is actually on the canvas – for every painting (one would like to add: every halfway interesting painting) triggers a series of other images and experiences in one's own memory. This is certainly true. What is very important, however, is that this also applies, of course, to the painter himself. Because before an image is to be created, a subject has to be chosen, and Raedecker often tends toward motifs that, on their own, are fairly standardised. The aforementioned house is, in each case, a cautiously modernist, typical suburban property. American, generic, emptied. Dan Graham, in his series *Homes for America*, saw the link between this kind of house and the serial reductions of Minimal Art as a compelling correlation. From Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* (1982) to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), the suburban house dominated the eighties, more than any other decade, as a neuralgic centre of fear: the construction of the safe-and-sound family and its undermining and destruction by forces of the outside, otherworldly "other" – forces that are actually the shifted expression of desires and phantasms originating in the ideologically charged family constellation itself. The facade of the house is the poker face behind which trauma and frustration accumulate.

In subsequent years and decades, the motifs of the house and the interior in Raedecker's work are increasingly emptied. And "emptied" does

Abb. / Ill. 1: Luc Tuymans, *Gaskammer / Gas Chamber*, 1986, Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm / 19 3/4 x 27 1/2 inches. The Over Holland Collection, in honor of Caryl Chessman

tatsächlich aber verschobener Ausdruck von Begierden und Phantasmen sind, die in der ideologisch aufgeladenen Familienkonstellation selbst entstehen. Die Fassade des Hauses ist das dazugehörige Pokerface, hinter dem sich Trauma und Frustration anstauen.

Der häusliche Raum ist als Motiv bei Raedecker in den folgenden Jahren und Jahrzehnten zunehmend entleert worden. Und „entleert" heißt hier nicht entwertet, sondern zu einem methodischen Kürzel geworden. Ich komme darauf zurück. Aber zunächst knüpfe ich an die Verbindung von Haus und Kino an. Denn wie bereits erwähnt nähert sich Raedecker im Verlauf der 1990er Jahre langsam, aber sicher einem immersiven, cinematischen Bildmodus an, der bei Gemälden wie **ins and outs** (2000), **reverb** (1998, S. 41) oder **pitch** (2000, S. 30–31) Höhepunkte erreicht.

Was ist in diesem Zusammenhang unter „immersiv" zu verstehen? In seinem kurzen Text „Beim Verlassen des Kinos"[5] umreißt Roland Barthes das Kino als einen dunklen Kubus, in dem das über den Köpfen tanzende Lichtspiel eine Art Larvenstadium im fixiert sitzenden Betracher auslöst, „festklebend" an der Leinwand in einem Zustand narzisstischer Spiegelung, „cinematographischer Hypnose". Beim Verlassen des Kinos erst, hinausgehend ins Stadtleben – oder während der Vorführung, wenn ich es mir erlaube, den Blick zu den Mitzuschauern schweifen zu lassen –, gelingt es mir, dieses Larvenstadium zu brechen. Barthes' Impetus ist jedoch nicht, die Immersion, das Eintauchen in und „Festkleben" an der Traumwelt der Leinwand völlig zu ersetzen durch die „kritische Distanz" eines schweifenden, taxierenden Blicks. Vielmehr empfiehlt Barthes, was er eine „amouröse Distanz" nennt: Es sich zu erlauben, *zweimal* fasziniert zu sein, sowohl vom hypnotisierenden Geschehen auf der Leinwand als auch vom Blick auf die anderen und das Gewühl der Stadt, diesen Kontrast, diese Überlagerung – diese Distanz – zu genießen und dadurch zu Genuss und Erkenntnis zu gelangen. Was damit zugleich auch angedeutet ist: Brechtsche Verfremdungseffekte im Film selbst mögen brauchbare kritische Instrumente sein, entscheidender aber ist für Barthes die Rezeptionshaltung.

not mean devalued in this case – but rather, turned into a methodological shorthand. I'll return to this below. But first I want to go back to the connection of house and cinema: for, as already mentioned, over the course of the nineties, Raedecker was slowly but surely approaching an immersive, cinematic mode of painting that finds its culmination in works like **ins and outs** (2000), **reverb** (1998, p. 41), and **pitch** (2000, pp. 30–31).

What is meant by "immersive" in this context? In his short essay "Leaving the Movie Theater",[5] Roland Barthes outlines the movie theatre as a dark cube in which the play of light dancing above the audience members' heads causes a sort of larval stage in the seated, fixated viewer, "glued" to the screen in a state of narcissistic reflection, "cinematographic hypnosis". Leaving the movie theatre, going out into the street, into the city – or during the showing, if I let my gaze wander to the other people in the audience – I manage to break this larval stage. Barthes's motivation is not, however, to completely replace the immersion, the plunging in and "being glued" to the fantasy world of the screen, with the "critical distance" of a wandering, appraising gaze. On the contrary, Barthes recommends what he calls an "amorous distance": letting oneself be fascinated *twice over*, by the hypnotising goings-on on the screen and by the gaze at the others, and to revel in the bustle of the city, this contrast, this overlapping – this distance – and through this to find pleasure and knowledge. What's also being suggested in this: Brechtian alienation effects in film itself may be useful critical tools, but more crucial for Barthes is the attitude toward reception.

In the white cube in which Michael Raedecker's works are usually shown, the cinematic-narcissistic larval stage is, of course, not possible. On the contrary, the illumination in such locations not only ensures that the artworks are exhibited in bright light but that the bodies of the viewers are as well. (This may, incidentally, be all the more true in the context of contemporary art spaces and private galleries; by contrast, the classic picture gallery allows more dimmed light and greater anonymity, a lingering that facilitates hypnotic states.) So how, then, does Raedecker actually achieve a cinematic effect? In short, by giving centre stage to the issue of light and space itself. This is most striking in **ins and outs** from 2000, a large, horizontal-format work, 3.3 meters wide and just under 2 meters high. Home-theatre format. The work shows a well-kept gardenscape, lit as if by the light of an unseen full moon; on the left, trees with bare trunks and round leafy tops (modelled in woollen thread) line a broad expanse set with concrete slabs that leads to the wide open garage door (or is it an enormous picture window?) of an isolated house. A glaring light (created with close-set, horizontal white and yellow threads) emanates from inside the house – a light in which no outlines of people or objects, etc. can be discerned. It is as if the house were aglow fireplace-like from within. This constellation alone is enough to create a ghostly tension. We take on the role of

Im White Cube, in dem Michael Raedeckers Werke in der Regel gezeigt werden, ist das cinematisch-narzisstische Larvenstadium natürlich nicht möglich. Im Gegenteil sorgt die Ausleuchtung nicht nur dafür, dass die Kunstwerke im hellen Licht ausgestellt sind, sondern auch die Körper der Betrachter. (Das mag übrigens umso mehr im Kontext zeitgenössischer Kunsträume und Privatgalerien der Fall sein; die klassische Gemäldegalerie erlaubt hingegen abgedimmteres Licht und eine größere Anonymität, ein Verweilen, dass hypnotischen Zuständen eher Raum gibt.) Wie also erzielt Raedecker dann überhaupt einen cinematischen Effekt? Kurz gesagt, indem die Frage des Lichts und des Raums selbst ins Zentrum tritt. Am Augenfälligsten bei **ins and outs** von 2000. Es handelt sich um ein großes Querformat, 3,30 Meter breit, knapp 2 Meter hoch. Heimkinoformat. Eine gepflegte Gartenlandschaft wie im Licht eines nicht zu sehenden Vollmonds, zur Linken säumen Bäume mit kahlem Stamm und rund belaubtem Wipfel (mit Wollfäden modelliert) eine breite, mit Betonplatten ausgelegte Fläche, die zum weit geöffneten Garagentor (oder ist es ein riesiges Panoramafenster?) eines einsamen Hauses führt. Aus dem Inneren des Hauses dringt ein gleißendes Licht (erzeugt mit eng und quer geführten weißen und gelben Fäden), in dem jedoch keine Umrisse von Personen oder Objekten etc. zu erkennen sind. Es ist, als glühe das Haus von innen wie ein Kamin. Alleine diese Konstellation erzeugt schon eine gespenstische Anspannung. Wir sind in der Rolle des Peeping Tom, der sich im Schein des Mondlichts von draußen dem hellen elektrisch Lichten im Inneren nähert. Beobachtbarkeit und perverse Kontrolle stehen im Raum. Oder nähern wir uns einem Tatort? Würde unsere voyeuristische Neugier in Angst und Fluchtreflex umschlagen, wenn wir nah genug heran kämen, um zu sehen, was im Hause vor sich geht? Lächerliche Gedanken. Ist natürlich nur das Bild eines Hauses, in dem Licht brennt, sonst nichts. Kein Grund für wilde Spekulationen. Und doch. Die Fährte ist gelegt. Oder, wie Raedecker es in etwa ausdrücken würde: Die Blume hat sich entfaltet und wartet auf die Bienen. Mit wenigen Mitteln (Größe des Bildes, reduzierte Konstellation, leichte ebenso wie krasse Helligkeitskontraste) wird ein filmisches Eintauchen angelegt; es baut auf gemachten Erfahrungen mit realen wie fiktiven Szenarien auf, spitzt diese aber in einer Konstellation zu, die zugleich standardisiert und speziell, banal und dramatisch wirkt.

Bei **reverb** von 1998 (ein wesentlich kleineres Format als **ins and outs**, 61 x 81 cm) befinden wir uns im Innern eines modernistischen Wohntempels. Ein von Decke zu Boden reichender schwerer Vorhang, der zur Seite geschoben ist und den Blick durch ein großes, ebenfalls von Decke zu Boden reichendes Fenster hinaus auf eine hügelige Landschaft freigibt. Die gesamte Konstellation des ansonsten komplett leeren Raums spiegelt sich im blankgeputzten Boden (all das virtuos mit einfachen malerischen und gestickten Mitteln erzeugt). Die Architektur, in ihrer charakteristischen Mischung aus modernistischer Strenge und Großzügigkeit, erinnert an stilbildende Häuser wie Ludwig Mies van der Rohes Villa Tugendhat

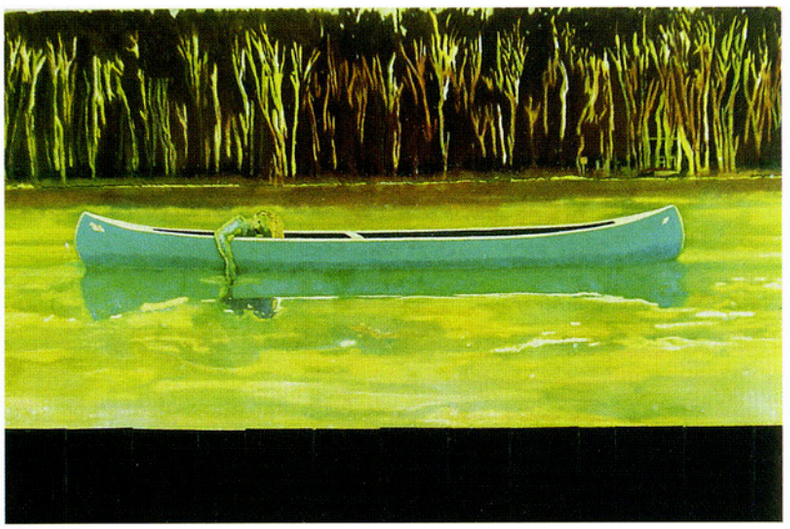

Abb. / Ill. 2: Peter Doig, *Canoe-Lake,* 1997, Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm / 78 3/4 x 118 inches. Yageo Foundation Collection, Taiwan

a Peeping Tom who, in the gleam of the moonlight, draws closer, from outside, to the bright electric light on the inside. Observability and perverse surveillance hang in the air. Or, are we approaching a crime scene? Would our voyeuristic curiosity turn abruptly into fear and flight reflex were we to get close enough to see what's going on in the house? Ridiculous thoughts. It's just a painting of a house with the lights on, nothing else. No reason for wild speculation. And yet. The trail is blazed. Or, as Raedecker would more or less put it: the flower has opened and is waiting for the bees. With a minimum of devices (painting size, reduced constellation, slight and stark contrasts of brightness) a cinematic immersion is suggested; it builds on experiences had with real and fictitious scenarios, but intensifies these to form a constellation that looks both standardised and specialised, banal and dramatic.

In **reverb** from 1998 (at 61 x 81 cm a considerably smaller work than **ins and outs**) we find ourselves inside a modernist residential space. A heavy floor-to-ceiling curtain is pushed to the side, allowing a view through a large, likewise floor-to-ceiling, window, onto a hilly landscape. The entire constellation of the otherwise completely empty space is reflected in the polished floor (all brilliantly executed in paint and embroidery). The architecture, in its characteristic blend of modernist austerity and spaciousness recalls style-defining houses like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Villa Tugendhat in Brno, Czech Republic (1929–30). It is a place of chilly authority, into which a few elements of hominess have been allowed. The painting could be the establishing shot for a thriller by Michael Mann in which gangsters inhabit cool modernist Case Study Houses (*Heat* from 1995, with Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, and Val Kilmer).

A third example. This one with a very different, though still cinematic, pictorial language: **pitch** (2000), another large horizontal-format work. In this painting, frizzy brush-like trees, once more bathed in an unreal nighttime light, edge the boundary of a strangely curved surface. This surface could be interpreted as a road that – in the beam of the headlights of a car in which the viewer is seated – narrows to a vanishing point, as if seen through a sort of hazy tunnel vision; or, the surface could just as easily be

in Brno, Tschechien (1929–30). Es ist ein Ort kühler Macht, an dem man sich ein paar Elemente der Heimeligkeit gegönnt hat. Das Gemälde könnte der Establishing Shot für einen Thriller von Michael Mann sein, in dem Gangster in kühlen modernistischen Case-Study-Häusern wohnen (*Heat* von 1995, mit Al Pacino, Robert de Niro und Val Kilmer).

Noch ein drittes Beispiel, diesmal mit einer ganz anderen, jedoch weiterhin filmischen Bildsprache: **pitch** (2000) ist wieder ein großes Querformat, auf dem Bäume wie wuschelige Pinsel, erneut getaucht in ein unwirklich nächtliches Licht, eine seltsam gekrümmte Fläche begrenzen. Diese Fläche könnte man als eine Straße interpretieren, die sich im Scheinwerferlicht eines Autos, in dem wir sitzen, zu einer Flucht verengt, wie gesehen durch einen benebelten Tunnelblick; man könnte aber genauso gut denken, die Bäume wüchsen auf einem drolligen Spielzeugplaneten, der wie ein Asteroid ungleichmäßig geformt durch das Weltall eiert. Beides zusammen ergibt die Assoziation von Animationsfilmen in Stop-Motion-Technik, wie man sie ursprünglich etwa aus tschechischen Kinderfernsehproduktionen der 1970er Jahre kennt – und wie sie als eloquent eingesetztes Zitat auch wieder in einem Popvideo wie dem zu Björks „Human Behaviour" von 1993 auftaucht, in dem ein Stoffbär Auto fährt und die Erde ein kleiner grüner Ball mit stachelig abstehenden Bäumen ist (gedreht wurde das Video von Michel Gondry, der später ähnlich drollige, traumartige Szenarien in Hollywood-Produktionen einsetzte).

Nun ist es nicht so, dass Raedecker in den 1990er Jahren alleine nach solchen cinematischen Szenen gesucht hätte; das sei kurz umrissen anhand zweier Beispiele etwa zur gleichen Zeit entstandener Arbeiten aus seinem Londoner Umfeld, die auf motivisch ähnliche, allerdings methodisch ganz andere Weise eine cinematische Verdichtung anstrebten. Vordergründig offensichtlicher ist dies der Fall etwa bei David Thorpe, der Ende der 1990er Jahre das Paradigma der Science Fiction in Bildern nächtlicher Szenarien wie *Kings of the Night* (1998) umsetzte; hier leuchten futuristisch wirkende Trabantenstädte hinaus in die bewaldete Nacht. Ein Gefühl von anderweltlicher Unwirklichkeit steht im Raum, verstärkt durch die für Thorpe damals charakteristische Technik der Collage- oder besser Mosaik-Technik (die Bilder sind aus farbigen Papierstückchen montiert). Aus Le-Corbusierschen Betonblocks macht er im Geiste J.G. Ballards dystopische Riesenmaschinen, ohne jedoch unmittelbar auf solche Referenzen abzuzielen. Bei Peter Doigs *Canoe-Lake* (1997, Abb. 2) hingegen gibt es eine konkrete Vorlage – die vorletzte Szene des Horror-Kultfilms *Friday the 13th* (1980), in der die Protagonistin in einem Kanu sitzt, das sich malerisch in einem Waldsee spiegelt, während sie eine Hand ins Wasser taucht und verträumt hineinschaut, so als habe sie das Grauen schon überstanden. Unterlegt von einem romantische-Ballade-Soundtrack kommt ein Polizeiwagen am Ufer an, die scheinbare Rettung – doch dann schlägt der Soundtrack um in scharrend-schleifenden Noise, während eine Zombi-artige Gestalt hinter ihr aus dem Wasser schießt und sie ins Verderben zerrt. Die Szene – im Film ein Alptraum, aus dem die Protagonistin im Krankenhausbett

part of a whimsical tree-filled toy-planet, wobbling through the universe like an irregularly shaped asteroid. Both evoke associations of animated films done in stop motion technique, originally familiar, for example, from nineteen-seventies Czech children's television productions – and turning up again as eloquently deployed quotation in a pop-music video like Björk's "Human Behaviour" video from 1993, in which a toy bear drives a car and the earth is a small green ball with prickly trees sticking out of it (the video was shot by Michel Gondry, who later used similarly droll, dream-like scenarios in Hollywood productions).

It's not as if Raedecker was alone casting about for such cinematic scenes in the nineties; this can be briefly outlined on the basis of two examples of works, roughly contemporaneous, by artists from Raedecker's London circles – works that strove for a cinematic condensation using similar motifs but very different methods. On the surface, this is more obvious in the case of David Thorpe, who, at the end of the nineties, transformed the science fiction paradigm into images of night-time scenarios, as in *Kings of the Night* (1998), for example. In these works, the lights of futuristic-looking satellite housing developments gleam against the tree-filled night. A feeling of otherworldly unreality hangs in the air, reinforced by Thorpe's at the time characteristic use of the collage – or rather, mosaic – technique (the works are assembled from small pieces of coloured paper). He takes Le Corbusierian high-rise blocks and makes giant dystopian machines, in the spirit of J. G. Ballard, without, however, aiming at such references directly. By contrast, Peter Doig's *Canoe-Lake* (1997, ill. 2) has a concrete model – the penultimate scene from the cult horror film *Friday the 13th* (1980), in which the protagonist sits in a canoe in a forest lake, complete with picturesque reflection, while dipping her hand and gazing dreamily into the water, as if all the horror were behind her. A romantic ballad is heard as a police car pulls up to the edge of the lake, her apparent salvation – but then the soundtrack abruptly switches to a scratching, grinding noise as a zombie-like figure shoots out of the water and drags the protagonist to her doom. The scene – in the film a nightmare from which the protagonist awakens to find herself in a hospital bed – is reduced in Doig's painting to the illusory idyll of the solitary figure in a canoe dangling her arm in the water; her green-metallic shimmer, however, gives her the appearance of having been marked by horror and decay. For the rest of the projection, Doig can count on the cinematographic memory of many of his viewers, at least those of a generation born in the sixties.

Which brings us back to Raedecker: unlike Thorpe, Raedecker does not employ futuristic or mystical-fantastic-looking scenarios; and unlike Doig, Raedecker eschews the explicit cinematic reference. Instead, the concentration in Raedecker's works is on what are actually very ordinary suburban homes, interiors, flowers, chandeliers, laundry on a clothes line. The cinematic immersive element in Raedecker's works, in other words, is

erwacht – reduziert Doig für sein Bild auf die täuschende Idylle der Einsamen im Kanu, die ihren Arm ins Wasser schlenkern lässt, wobei sie selbst mit grün-metallischem Schimmer wie affiziert scheint von Grauen und Verfall; für den Rest der Projektion kann Doig auf das cinematographische Gedächtnis vieler seiner Betrachter zählen, jedenfalls denen einer Generation, der in den 1960er Jahren Geborenen.

Womit wir wieder bei Raedecker wären: Im Gegensatz zu Thorpe gibt es bei ihm keine futuristisch oder mystisch-fantastisch wirkenden Szenarien; und im Gegensatz zu Doig meidet er gerade die ausdrückliche filmische Referenz. Stattdessen die Konzentration auf eigentlich ganz alltägliche Vorstadthäuser, Interieurs, Blumen, Kronleuchter, Wäsche auf der Leine. Das Filmisch-Immersive bei Raedecker, mit anderen Worten, ist weniger über die Sujets vermittelt (selbst wenn seine Häuser als Locations in Frage kämen) als über den optischen Apparatus selbst: die filmischen Formen der Kameraeinstellung (Totale, Close-Up etc.) und auch bestimmte Aspekte des Schnitts (Jump-Cut, Mehrfachbild usw.). Letzteres wird besonders deutlich an Werken wie **repeat** (2011).

repeat sagt schon im Titel, was geschieht: Wieder sehen wir Fragmente moderat-modernistischer Giebelhäuser nebst Bäumen; nur dass diese Fragmente nicht auf einem Bild-Kontinuum angesiedelt sind, sondern parzelliert sind in fünf mit Doppelnähten aneinandergenähte, in ausgewaschenem Grün gehaltenen Längsstreifen (die zusammen das Bildformat von 226 x 200 cm ergeben). Die Wiederholung ist in mehrfacher Hinsicht präsent im Bild: im Motiv selbst, seiner entleerten Standardisiertheit im „wirklichen" Leben von Suburbia; in Raedeckers über Jahre immer wieder wiederholter Motivwahl eben dieser Standardhäuser; und, natürlich, in der fünffachen Wiederholung auf der Leinwand. Wohin führen all diese Standardisierungen? Kurz gesagt, hin zur Abstraktion und zur objekthaften Präsenz der Malerei. Wie aber kann bei figurativen Elementen (Haus, Baum etc.) Abstraktion vorliegen? Ganz einfach: Wenn diese figurativen Elemente durch die genannten drei Faktoren der Wiederholung komplett entleert sind, ihrer semantischen Aufladung endgültig beraubt (ich muss an dieser Stelle immer an Georg Herold denken und die Art und Weise, wie er in seinem Werk Dachlatten und Backsteine so lange einsetzte, bis sie endgültig zu standardisierten entleerten Materialien wurden). Wozu aber das Ganze, wozu diese semantische Entleerung? Der aufmerksame skeptische Geist wird an dieser Stelle denken: Obacht, das ist genau der Mechanismus einer Marke, eines *Branding*; je öfter man es wiederholt, je entleerter es eigentlich durch diese Wiederholung werden müsste, umso mehr brennt es sich in das Gedächtnis ein. Doch dieser Mechanismus greift nur, wenn das Wiederholte einen spezifischen besonderen Begehrlichkeitsfaktor in sich trägt (z.B. Status, Attraktivität, Souveränität etc.). Ein banales Giebelhaus jedoch ist so anziehend wie abstoßend; selbst wenn man sich nach Heimeligkeit sehnt, mag man sich noch vor der Vorstadttristesse gruseln. Genau deshalb ist es kein „Markenzeichen" Raedeckers, sondern ein in seiner Gesichtslosigkeit brauchbares Tool, eine figurative Vignette der

conveyed less via the subjects (even if his houses could qualify as filming locations) than via the optical apparatus itself: cinematic types of camera shot (full, close-up, etc.) and specific aspects of editing (jump cut, multi-image, etc.). The latter is particularly evident in works like **repeat** (2011).

repeat – the title itself reveals what's going on. Once again, we see fragments of moderately modernist gabled houses in combination with trees – except that these fragments are not located on an image continuum but have been parcelled into five vertical stripes sewn together with double-stitched seams and coloured a washed-out green (the full work measures 226 x 200 cm). Repetition is present in the painting in several respects: in the motif itself, its emptied standardised state in the "real" life of suburbia; in Raedecker's choosing the standard-house-motif, repeatedly, again and again, over years; and, of course, in the fivefold repetition on the canvas. Where are all these instances of standardisation leading? In a nutshell, toward abstraction and toward the object-like presence of painting. But how can there be abstraction when there are figurative elements (house, tree, etc.)? Very simple: when these figurative elements have been completely emptied via the above-mentioned three factors of repetition, deprived once and for all of their semantic charge (here I'm always reminded of Georg Herold and the way in which he used roof battens and bricks in his work until they finally became standardised emptied materials). But why do all this? Why the semantic emptying? The attentive sceptical mind will think: look out, this is precisely the mechanism of a brand, of a *branding* process; the more often it's repeated, the more emptied it should actually become as a result of this repetition, and, then, the more it is etched on the memory. But this mechanism kicks in only when the thing repeated contains within itself a specific, special covetousness factor (for example, status, attractiveness, supremacy, etc.). A banal gabled house, however, is as attractive as it is repellent; even those craving cosiness might still be creeped out by suburban dreariness. This is precisely why it is not a "trademark" of Raedecker's but rather, in its characterlessness, a handy tool, a figurative vignette of abstraction. And what's abstraction good for? A counterweight to immersion, derived – and herein lies the achievement – from the same sources. The same motif, a similar palette, but then a few interventions of repetition – and before you know it, the proto-cinematic immersion has become a just-as-proto-cinematic anti-illusion machine. A screen of illusion has become a present, fractured object. Like a Michael Snow-like experimental film countershot with a Hollywood suburban-horror-comedy in jump cuts. And this tension develops both in the individual work as well as in the process of a progressing *œuvre*.

Question: isn't the objecthood of the painting always emphasised one way or the other as a result of the embroidery technique, as the disillusioning of a purely visual immersion? Yes and no. Yes, because the physical swelling of the textile out of the picture plane actually violates the notion

Abstraktion. Und was bringt die Abstraktion? Sie bringt einen Gegenpol zur Immersion, geschöpft – und darin liegt die Leistung – aus den gleichen Quellen. Das gleiche Motiv, eine ähnliche Palette, dann aber ein paar Eingriffe der Wiederholung – und schon ist aus der proto-filmischen Immersion eine – ebenso proto-filmische – Anti-Illusions-Maschine geworden. Aus dem Illusionsschirm ein präsentes, gebrochenes Objekt. Wie ein Michael-Snow-artiger Experimental-Film, der mit einer Hollywoodschen Suburban-Horrorcomedy in Jump-Cuts gegengeschnitten ist. Und dieses Spannungsverhältnis entfaltet sich sowohl in einem einzelnen Werk, sowohl innerhalb des einzelnen Bildes als auch im Prozess eines fortschreitenden *Œuvres.*

Zwischenfrage: Ist nicht durch die Garn-Sticktechnik die Objekthaftigkeit des Bildes sowieso stets herausgekehrt, als Entillusionierung einer rein visuellen Immersion? Ja und nein. Ja, weil in der Tat das physische Hervorschwellen des Textils aus der Bildfläche die Vorstellung eines smoothen, geöffneten „Screens" verletzt, der den Aspekt physischer Präsenz gegenüber der visuellen Immersion zurücktreten lässt. Nein, weil das Garn so eingesetzt ist, dass es selbst wiederum optische Effekte erzielt, die im Gegenzug die Illusion räumlicher Tiefe und Gestalt unterstützen (wie etwa im genannten Fall des mittels farbig schimmerndem Garn von innen leuchtenden Hauses bei **ins and outs**); man könnte fast sagen: 3-D-Kino ohne Brille und Maschinen. Besonders deutlich wird dies bei jenen Bildern der letzten Jahre, in denen Raedecker ein detailreich verziertes Interieur-Objekt ins Zentrum des Bildes stellt und wie mit dem Zoomobjektiv herangezogen gefühlt aus der Leinwand treten lässt. **wrong** (2009, S. 62) und **monument** (2011, S. 65) beispielsweise zeigen jeweils eine Hochzeitstorte, mehrstöckig und mit Blümchen und Girlanden verziert, wie immer in Garn gearbeitet; im grau-blau fahlen Acrylfarben-Schimmer erscheint das Objekt wie – siehe die beiden Bildtitel – das Monument einer falsch gelaufenen Beziehung. Oder nehmen wir **detour** (2010, S. 59): Ein Bett ragt uns diagonal entgegen wie im Bildwinkel eines Kameraobjektivs, bedeckt mit einer sorgfältig aufgelegten, reich bestickten, jedoch industriell hergestellt wirkenden Tagesdecke. Auch hier wieder suggeriert der wie immer bei Raedecker wortkarge, aber doppelbödige Titel ein Motel im Nirgendwo, das man auf einer Irrfahrt angesteuert hat – und dessen pseudo-prunkvolles Bett man nun konsterniert anstarrt wie ein Fanal. Bei **blank** (2009, S. 57), das ein ähnliches Motiv, aber seitlich von oben zeigt, entsteht gar der Eindruck – im fahlen, verwaschenen Beigegrau – das Bett sei wie der Stellvertreter einer aufgebahrten Leiche, oder zumindest einer nun abwesenden Person (das Kissen der Kopf, die Decke der restliche Körper).

Es fällt auf, dass Raedecker, dessen Bilder – wie beispielsweise auch die Gerhard Richters oder Thomas Ruffs – sich durchaus anhand der klassischen Malerei-Genres (zumindest vordergründig) kategorisieren lassen, dabei den Akzent aber ganz deutlich auf die Genres Landschaft, Stillleben und Interieur legt. Vielleicht liegt es daran, dass Historienmotive per Definition nicht generisch standardisierbar sind (schließlich zeigen sie ein

of a smooth, open "screen" that makes the aspect of physical presence subsidiary to visual immersion. No, because the thread is used in such a way that it achieves optical effects itself, effects that, conversely, bolster the illusion of spatial depth and form (as, for example, in the above-mentioned work **ins and outs,** where the glow emitting from the house is achieved by means of colourful shimmering threads); one could almost say: 3D cinema without glasses and machinery. This becomes especially evident in works from recent years in which Raedecker focuses on richly detailed ornamented interior objects, allowing the objects to seemingly emerge from the canvas as if pulled in close with a zoom lens. **wrong** (2009, p. 62) and **monument** (2011, p. 65), for example, each depict a wedding cake, multitiered and decorated with small flowers and garlands, worked in thread as always; in the pale greyish-blue shimmer of the acrylic paint, the object looks like – see the titles of both works – a monument to a relationship gone wrong. Or take **detour** (2010, p. 59): a bed projects towards us at a diagonal as if in the angle of view of a camera lens, covered with a carefully laid out, richly embroidered, but seemingly industrially manufactured bedspread. Here, too, another of Raedecker's taciturn, ambiguous titles, this one suggesting a motel in the middle of nowhere, a destination during an aimless wandering – and one now stares with dismay at its pseudo-sumptuous bed as if at a beacon. In **blank** (2009, p. 57), which depicts a similar motif, but shown from the side and above, one even starts to feel – in the pale, washy beige-grey – that the bed is like a surrogate for a laid-out corpse, or at least for a now-absent person (the pillow as head, the cover as the rest of the body).

Raedecker's works can certainly be categorised in terms of classical genres of painting (at least superficially), much the way, for example, Gerhard Richter's or Thomas Ruff's works can. It is striking, however, that Raedecker gives very clear priority to the genres of landscape, still life, and interior. This may be because history motifs by definition cannot be generically standardised (after all, they depict specific historical events); likewise, with portraits, it is harder to find an emptied standardised matrix. It may be precisely for this reason that Raedecker took on for one of his few portraits one of the most frequently reproduced heads of a *historical* figure, Adolf Hitler, who in Raedecker's *œuvre* – twice, in two small paintings that belong together but are always shown separately (**ah,** 2004) – appears in profile looking sheepish and avuncular, abbreviated to the role of a harmless little man, one who is nonetheless the crystallisation of crimes against humanity for which society is responsible. To find the standardised even in the figure of Hitler seems like the most difficult of tasks, but it points in the right direction politically – that evil is not a unique caprice of the cosmos, which in this case descended upon the countless victims of Nazi Germany, but rather is intrinsic in social structures (an everyday insight; no need to quote Hannah Arendt).

geschichtlich spezifiziertes Ereignis) und auch bei Porträts ist es schwieriger, eine entleerte standardisierte Matrize zu finden; vielleicht liegt es genau daran, dass Raedecker für eines seiner wenigen Porträts einen der am häufigsten reproduzierten Köpfe einer *historischen* Figur sich vornahm, Adolf Hitler, der nun bei ihm – zwei mal, auf zwei zusammen gehörenden, aber stets getrennt gezeigten kleinformatigen Bildern (**ah**, 2004) – wie ein betröppeltes Onkelchen im Profil erscheint, verkürzt auf die Rolle eines harmlos tuenden Männleins, das dennoch Kristallisationspunkt gesellschaftlich zu verantwortender Menschheitsverbrechen ist. Selbst noch bei Hitler das Standardisierte zu finden, erscheint wie die schwierigste Aufgabe, weist aber politisch in die richtige Richtung – dass das Böse keine einzigartige Laune des Kosmos ist, die in diesem Fall über die zahllosen Opfer Nazi-Deutschlands hereinbrach, sondern in den gesellschaftlichen Strukturen angelegt war (man muss für diese gewöhnliche Einsicht nicht einmal Hannah Arendt bemühen).

Aber noch einmal, warum bei Raedecker diese Konzentration auf Landschaft, Stillleben, Interieur, also auf das generisch-standardisierbare Bildmotiv? Weil die entleerten Motive eine Spannung zwischen Figuration und Abstraktion erlauben, die der Spannung zwischen persönlich-einzigartiger und gesellschaftlich geteilter Erinnerung entspricht. Es ist diese Spannung, die auch bei Roland Barthes im eingangs erwähnten Text über das Schauen im Kino eine Rolle spielt: zwischen dem Blick auf die Leinwand als Projektionsfläche unserer Ängste und Begierden – und dem Blick auf die Anderen und *deren* Blicke. Es geht darum zu begreifen, dass die hypnotisch-immersive Beziehung zum großen Geschehen auf der Leinwand nicht „bestraft" werden muss mit einer büßerisch-kritischen Distanz, sondern relativiert mit einer Überlagerung dieser beiden Perspektiven – der Immersion und dem Blick auf die Anderen – die Barthes „amouröse Distanz" nennt. Und diese amouröse Distanz erscheint mir der Rezeption der Bilder Michael Raedeckers so angemessen wie der Charakterisierung der Bilder selbst.

[1] Hal Foster, „Dan Flavin and the Catastrophe of Minimalism", in Jeffrey Weiss (Hg.), *Dan Flavin. New Light*, New Haven und Washington D.C., 2006, S. 134

[2] „The first time I saw Don Judd's ‚pink-plexiglas box', it suggested a giant crystal from another planet", Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, Los Angeles und London, 1996, S. 7

[3] Laut Philip Guston, zitiert nach https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/national-gallery-art-videos/id257590780 [Stand: 17 December 2013]

[4] Michael Raedecker ist passionierter Musikhörer und mixt privat unter Freunden und Bekannten verteilte CDs zusammen, auf denen Pop- und Dance-Tracks mit historischen und popkulturellen Tondokumenten ein Kontinuum eingehen – Hörspiel einer Wahrnehmungshaltung, die in gewisser Weise auch wieder der Spannung zwischen Figuration und Abstraktion in Raedeckers Bildern ähnelt.

[5] Roland Barthes, „Beim Verlassen des Kinos", *filmkritik* No. 236, 1976, S. 290–93.

But, again – why this concentration in Raedecker's *œuvre* on landscape, still life, interior, i.e. on the generically standardisable pictorial motif? Because the emptied motifs allow a tension between figuration and abstraction that corresponds to the tension between individually unique and socially shared memory. It is this tension that also plays a role in the above-mentioned text about looking in the movie theatre by Roland Barthes: the tension between the gaze at the screen as projection surface for our fears and desires – and the gaze at the others and *their* gazes. It's a matter of realising that the hypnotically immersive relationship to the important goings-on on the screen doesn't have to be "punished" with a penitential-critical distance, but rather qualified with a superimposition of this immersion with the gaze at the others, a superimposition that Barthes calls "amorous distance". And it seems to me that this amorous distance is as befitting to the reception of Michael Raedecker's paintings as it is to the characterisation of the paintings themselves.

[1] Hal Foster, "Dan Flavin and the Catastrophe of Minimalism", in Jeffrey Weiss, ed., *Dan Flavin: New Light* (New Haven and Washington D.C., 2006), p. 134

[2] Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1996), p. 7.

[3] According to Philip Guston, as quoted in https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/national-gallery-art-videos/id257590780 [accessed 17 December 2013]

[4] Michael Raedecker loves to listen to music and mixes CDs, which he gives to his friends and acquaintances, on which pop and dance tracks exist in a continuum with historical and pop-cultural sound documents and recordings – it is the audio-play of a perceptual attitude that, in a way, is similar to the tension between figuration and abstraction in Raedecker's paintings.

[5] Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater" (1975) in Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 345–49.

PAINTING, POWER and PROPAGANDA

A CONVERSATION
WITH **Alison M. GINGERAS**

ALISON M. GINGERAS I've always been struck by the titles you give to your paintings.
They are very subtle, deliberate and poetic. When is a title *born* during the process of making a painting and how do you want the title to function?

MICHAEL RAEDECKER I never start with a title.
In the early stages, when I am making drawings, I might have ideas that I jot down,
but usually the ideas for titles come later.
It always starts with words or a phrase that sticks in my mind. When I look up the word in the dictionary, it often has more than one meaning — this is something I like a lot.
Since music is such an important part of my life, titles often come from albums or song lyrics.
For example, sensoria, the title of an earlier painting, came from a Cabaret Voltaire song. In the end, I never choose a title that is too clear or direct.
Titles must be ambiguous enough that they do not overdetermine the meaning of the painting.

ALISON It's true that your titles never sound overtly *pop;* whatever the original reference, it is always submerged.
Yet the titles do add another layer of meaning.
Have you titled any of the new works for the show?

MICHAEL The first title came for this still life painting depicting some flowers in a vase. I've called it propaganda, the name of a band from the '80s.
At that time,
pop culture was flirting a lot with fascist aesthetics, whether it was the designs for album sleeves or in the lyrics.
As this title comes from another time and another aesthetic,
it fits well with this still life painting.
I want the painting itself also to seem like it is from another time. I also like the fact that the word propaganda means information of a misleading nature, and this deception starts when the viewer is reading the title. [propaganda; PLATE 9]

Alison The title propaganda also seems to connect with the notion of genre.
The title gently suggests to the viewer to think about the history of this specific genre — the still life.
Throughout the history of painting, still lives employed specific iconography with very coded meanings — whether religious or allegorical.
The Dutch still life tradition in particular proved to be such a dominant genre because it often contained moralizing messages.
I guess one could consider that in the past, painting functioned like modern-day propaganda...

MICHAEL Yes, I have often thought about the relationship between the still life genre and how painters in 17th-century Holland began to develop very narrow specializations within that genre.
For example,
there were painters who only made still lives with certain types of flowers.
This specialization coincided with the boom of the tulip market, when you could buy several paintings for the price of a single bulb!
This was a period of time when painting also became a precious commodity.

ALISON Have such historical reflections always had a direct impact on how you make your own work?

MICHAEL Definitely. We live in very *retro* times.
When I first worked in fashion during the late '80s, there was a revival of the '70s.
The revisitation of the '70s lasted longer than the original decade.
A similar thing happens in painting as well.
I have been interested in looking backwards in time — rummaging around
in history to find things of interest.
The medium of painting has been perceived as being so obsolete and old-fashioned,
that sometimes my desire to look to the past is a direct response to this perception.

ALISON Is there any explicit connection to your being Dutch and your self-awareness of Holland's rich cultural history?

MICHAEL It's difficult to answer this question.
I hesitate to engage in questions about identity.
Despite being born in Holland,
I've lived in London for nearly ten years.
Living abroad,
you start to see things differently.
I think my interest in the past relates more to the era we are living in.
As a painter,
you are very aware of the history of the medium.

ALISON When you make a work such as propaganda, are you working from found imagery?

MICHAEL Yes. In fact, for the first time I am making works based on existing photographs.

ALISON Your older bodies of work — especially the paintings of architectural spaces and interiors — seemed to be based on composite imagery, a mixture of real and imaginary referents.

MICHAEL I have always incorporated found imagery into my work, but in the past I mostly used photographic sources to get the perspective right or to work on specific details of an image.
Found images were always a tool.
This time, all of the works are based on specific, singular images — including the Hitler portrait.
Yet I hope the viewer cannot *see* the photograph.
I find it problematic if it is obvious that the paintings seem like they come from photographs.
I think paintings should look like paintings. [ah; PLATES 4/10]

ALISON You are not interested in deconstructing the photographic source or revealing its hidden meanings, in the way Tuymans does?

MICHAEL I am not interested in that kind of justification in using photographic imagery.
Again, I've been focusing on this *retro* tendency in our culture.
The image of the flowers comes from an issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine from the 1950s.
I think that in translating the image into paint, it should get away from the source.
This distancing process starts with how I prepare the surface of the canvas.
I punch holes in the surface and I apply this fake fur onto a first layer of paint so that the fibres get mixed into the background.

ALISON This distressing technique you just described sounds like a ritual of *authentication* of the canvas.
In addition to its very strong formal effects, this technique seems to add to the timeless quality of your paintings.
Both the images and the overall *look* do not seem to be rooted in a particular moment.

MICHAEL I hope so.
I think that this sense of timelessness is also related to my incorporation of stitching into my paintings.
When I first wanted to leave fashion to become an artist, I felt intimidated.
The weight of painting's history was very daunting.
Using embroidery provided an easy, simple bridge between my fashion background and my work as an artist.

ALISON Speaking of your use of embroidery, I've observed a shift in your work since your exhibition at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in 2003.
In addition to the appearance of portraiture in your work, pictorially things changed too.
The embroidery started to take centre stage; it no longer played a descriptive or background role.
The threads tend to constitute the images themselves; they are now the *punctum* of the overall image.

MICHAEL This happened gradually.
I've been working with embroidery for a while.
As your experience grows, so does your comfort level with the materials.
So now the threads can fulfil other functions in the paintings.
As for the shift in iconography, I had to *learn* the genre of portraiture; it is one of the hardest to learn.
I wanted to really question the nature and definition of different genres in painting's history.

ALISON Is that why you chose such as strong subject — Adolf Hitler — as the portrait for the show?
Was this painting the starting point for the overall conception of the exhibition?

MICHAEL I started out wanting to make a portrait and realized if I made a portrait of a contemporary figure, there might be too much narrative going on.
Quickly I understood that the person that I would depict would have to be isolated.
That subject would need to have its own time frame.

ALISON Your first portrait pictures were based on art historical sources, correct?

MICHAEL Yes. I did a painting after Giorgione and another after Del Sarto, and I think that, in retrospect, I realized that there is a strong temptation to compare them to the originals, in order to locate their differences, which was not what interested me.
So when I made the decision to make another portrait painting, I wanted to make a portrait with a hollow face, and decided to see how far I could go with that idea.

ALISON In a way, the image of Hitler is so charged and loaded with meaning, that it paradoxically becomes an empty image.

MICHAEL When I first had the idea, I immediately dismissed it because it was too loaded.
But the idea stayed with me. I wondered why did Richter or Tuymans never paint Hitler, even if they did make paintings that explicitly addressed the Third Reich?
Being born in Holland, in 1963, I thought that my own subjective position made it possible for me to address the subject matter.
I was interested in testing what was permissible in terms of representation in painting.
When I discussed the idea with friends, this portrait idea sparked many animated conversations.

ALISON Other artists have taken up potentially inflammatory Nazi imagery in a different vein.
But unlike Maurizio Cattelan's cartoonish wax effigy of a kneeling Hitler [HIM—2001] or Piotr Uklanski's image compilation of actors wearing Nazi regalia [NAZIS—1998], you are not really appropriating a mass media image or imbuing the representation of Nazism with irony.
The fact that you have made a painted image of Hitler seems to give this work a more ambiguous,

volatile presence. Does a painted representation somehow humanize the subject more than other more appropriated modes of representation?

MICHAEL When I first began exploring the idea of a Hitler portrait and started to make preparatory sketches, I was pondering these questions. To go for a too obvious documentary approach was not the right way, since I felt there needed to be a level of *classic,* artist interpretation involved. My use of thread could literally help to soften the subject and at the same time make it even more perverse. The first thing I did was an extensive picture research to find a photographic model. I searched for a particular kind of image in which we could look at Hitler, but he could not look back at us. I thought that it was important to stitch one eye away to make his gaze more concentrated and intense.

ALISON When I first heard you were making this Hitler portrait, I immediately thought about Oliver Hirschbiegel's film Der Untergang [THE DOWNFALL] that came out last year. It was particularly criticized in the German press, because Bruno Ganz's portrayal of Hitler was seen as much too humanizing.

MICHAEL I heard about this film well after I started making this portrait, and I only saw it very recently as it was released in London only a short time ago. I am definitely interested in addressing similar issues as the film. Though, I am glad I am not showing my portrait for the first time in Germany. It might still be too provocative for a German audience.

ALISON But showing it in Switzerland is still very charged...

MICHAEL Yes, it is true and it adds another layer, though in the end it is also very banal because we are culturally conditioned to see Hitler's image quite often. You open a magazine or turn on the history channel, and there are documentary images of him everywhere. Of course I am aware that my painting plays with provocation, that was the starting point, though not a facile provocation. In making this work, I tried to deal with the subject in a respectful way; I did not want to make a caricature.

ALISON So how then did the rest of the works you are making for this exhibition evolve around this portrait? I can't help but read the other paintings through the lens of the Hitler diptych. Even the *neutral* imagery such as the still lives takes on a much more perverse and morbid cast. There seems to be a melancholic ambience that runs through the show.

MICHAEL Very true. ah, the title of the Hitler portrait, was made in the early stages of working towards this show and it gave me the opportunity to see to which degree the Hitler double portrait could taint the other paintings. With such a loaded character playing the main part I had to see how the rest could determine the overall atmosphere of this show.

ALISON Could you speak a little about the opposite spectrum of the show — specifically the more decorative pictures of the flower garlands? Do they come out of medieval Belgian tapestries? [prosthetics; PLATE 2]; [paranonia; PLATE 11]

MICHAEL They are based on these 17th-century garland paintings that had very specific religious connotations. In fact, Jesuit artists made many paintings of this type. I was interested in addressing the notion of painting as decoration. Through their composition I was also interested in focusing on the frame, as opposed to the picture plane. That is why I've essentially left the centre of the canvas empty. In a way they indirectly relate to the Hitler portrait because they beg the question: does a painting always have to be beautiful? I also think these paintings evoke the human desire to control nature. The fleeting life cycle of flowers also relates to our fear of mortality. Somebody told me that Hitler couldn't stand having flowers around him in his quarters for the fact that once they are arranged in vases the rotting process starts!

ALISON Your smaller painting of a fireplace also seems to relate to the human desire to tame the wild, to bring the forces of nature into a domestic space. It seems to have a metaphorical relationship to the way the painter poaches an image from the world at large and distills it into his or her own iconography. [consume; PLATE 8]

MICHAEL This image selection process you've described is very important. Painters all deal in icons. Perhaps these are icons of failed utopias — such as the home or nature. Maybe these images relate to a set of values promoted during the time of Hitler's dictatorship...

ALISON It also seems to me that all of these new works are related to the question of power — specifically the cultural power of the painting as a medium and the communicative power of a painter's iconography. Of course, Hitler as an incarnation of the will to power most directly suggests this theme. Even if painting has become an obsolete form of image making, it still radiates an aura of power from its historical past.

MICHAEL I feel that each medium has its raison d'être.
Film tells stories, and its narratives
have a different impact than reading a book.
Since the invention of photography,
painting has certainly lost its preeminence.
Nonetheless, painting still provides a space
to contemplate images.
In the same way, the museum has replaced
the church as a quiet, peaceful place for reflection...
Painting might be an old language,
and not everyone can still *read* it.
But if you make iconographic images, you can
still capture the attention of the viewers and take them
someplace that a photograph
or other visual forms of expression cannot.

ALISON Mass media have become banal in our culture,
because the media themselves are
simultaneously too accessible and readily disposable.
I think the most pre-vocational aspects
of your Hitler portrait are the aura
of permanence and the labour intensiveness of making
a painted portrait.

MICHAEL This is the exact reason why I decided to turn
Hitler's portrait into a double portrait.
I forced myself to paint him twice.
It is a handmade process that is quite long
and involved. I suppose Rauschenberg
first touched upon this doubling in painting with his
works Factum I and Factum II.
It is about replicating gesture and expression twice,
two components of painting which are
usually considered unique, uncontrollable and tied
to a specific moment.
Doubling the embroidery process gives the work
an additionally obsessive element.
And of course, this gesture plays with the fact that
paintings are fetishistic objects.
As objects, paintings have a strong physical presence.
To reproduce all of these qualities twice helps
the work to get away from being about
Hitler *the person* to be more about Hitler *the icon.*
Another important decision
related to this doubling, is that I intend to hang
the two panels separately.
Separating them will give the illusion that the works
are exactly alike.
If they were hung side by side,
the viewer might be tempted to scrutinize the minute
differences in execution.
Also, hanging them apart avoids any confusion with a
cinematic quality.
They are not sequential images.

ALISON In the overall conception of this exhibition,
doubling seems to be
one of the most prominent tropes — such as with
the second still life diptych that
shows nearly the same scene of bottles on
a mirrored floor. Does this
doubling strategy have the same meaning in the Hitler
portrait and that still life diptych? [independent; PLATES 5/6]

MICHAEL With this still life diptych,
I have purposefully incorporated one big difference
between the otherwise identical images.
These two panels will hang apart with
a gap of approximately 80 centimetres between them,
so that the viewer's eye bounces back and forth
between the two paintings in search of the difference.
The difference between the two is very banal.
The curtain on the far right of the first panel
is an opaque curtain that seems to hide something.
In the second panel
the curtain is transparent, revealing that there is
just a bottle hidden behind the fabric.
I wanted this work to address expectations
that we have of painting —
you can expect something from painting,
an illusion for example, but in the end,
maybe we overestimate our expectations.
I wanted to create an image
that was intriguing but not necessarily very *interesting.*
It depicts nothing more than a few bottles
on a mirrored floor, a very old painterly device.
In fact, it is a trick that Vermeer used quite often to
give a sense of perspective and depth.

ALISON It seems like you insert some kind of *trick*
into each of these paintings.
As if you wanted to reveal the *arsenal* of painterly
devices available to painters.

MICHAEL There is a perfect analogy
I can make with the film world.
Quentin Tarantino's most recent film Kill Bill
is full of tricks, references and devices taken from the
whole history of cinema.
If you share Tarantino's knowledge of this history,
watching the film is a totally different experience;
if you don't, the film still has an entertaining storyline.
In the end, genre is just another tool.
Hitler is not a painting about the person himself.
The flower still life is not about those specific flowers.
I am not even really that interested in flowers.

ALISON In a way, your painted images
seem to try to shed their status as individual things
or beings in order to become archetypes.
Perhaps this transformation of subjects into
an archetypal representation distances
you from any ethical qualms about the subjects
you decide to paint?

MICHAEL Most people want to forget that Hitler
was a human being.
To remember this fact is perhaps the most provocative
thing we can do. It is a lot less challenging
for us to demonize Hitler.
And in choosing the source image for these paintings,
I thought he had as much of a menacing expression
as one of apprehension or fear. He also has a spectral
quality; he looks like death incarnate.

ALISON You prefaced this conversation,
not wanting to have the work seen as being political —

especially because of your choice to depict such a historically charged subject as Hitler — yet I do see that there are politicized meanings produced by these works. Maybe not in the usual sense of what one expects from *political art,* but more in the sense that your paintings produce unstable meanings. You don't tell the viewer how to read this image by the way you've made it. To me this is so much more *political* than if you made an image that obviously dictated how it should be read.

MICHAEL It goes back to the question whether a contemporary audience knows how to *read* a painting today. Even if it might not be the case universally speaking, I make my work assuming that he viewer will be able to read it. While I want to push the viewer gently in a certain direction in terms of interpreting the work, I don't feel like my work should be a declarative statement. To be so dogmatic would result in clichés, such as *this should never happen again.* Richter turned to such a historically charged subject matter directly only once, with his October 18, 1977 series, and I believe he was right to tackle such imagery only once. In the end, I am questioning these genres as a vehicle. What is a portrait? What is a still life?

ALISON How do these few *abstract* paintings fit into the puzzle of your practice and into the composition of this specific exhibition? In a way, they seem to function almost like Rorschach ink blots. They slightly disturb any narrative connection between the figurative canvases. [phenomena; PLATE 3]; [hedonia; PLATE 7]; [incognito; PLATE 12]

MICHAEL I think that when you look at any abstract work of art, you always are searching for the figurative. In the more figurative paintings, I primarily use embroidery to make the images, work on traditional linen canvas and am very much in control. With the abstracts there is the intention to use a compositional process that I do not want to control and to let a planned chance play a part. I work on embroidering fabric but am not using threads and push the paint through the back of the grid-like holes of the canvas. I like that my practice has been constructed around two different poles and it can also embrace abstraction as a mode of expression. My work has always had that duality.

ALISON The paintings also seem to be about the physicality of your materials. These abstract paintings seem to refer to an opposite spectrum of avant-garde genres, evident in the work of Fontana or Burri.

MICHAEL Yes, they represent a reversal. The physicality becomes on the one hand appealing — can paint really behave like this? — a cynical approach to *the wonders of painting.* But they also have an abject side to them, as if the paintings were literally rotting away. In the show they can be both dissonant and playing an important supporting role in connection to the figurative paintings. Since there is no obvious direct link between them they start to obstruct the narrative and make the figurative works more ambiguous in their appearance. Like when the flowers start to pervert the Hitler portraits and vice versa, the abstracts use the embroidered pictures at their and its own expense. INTERVIEW CONDUCTED IN MICHAEL RAEDECKER'S STUDIO IN LONDON ON 7 APRIL 2005

Michael Raedecker

Conversations with leading cultural figures

— April 5, 2012 —

Michael Raedecker's studio Photography by Richard Morris Pushinsky

Assisting Martin Margiela in the mid 1980s and graduating with an MA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths during the late 1990s, Michael Raedecker's career as an artist certainly got off to a roaring start when Charles Saatchi bought a sizeable chunk of his final degree show. Since then, Raedecker has spent the last two decades…

Graduating with an MA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths during the late 1990s, **Michael Raedecker**'s career as an artist certainly got off to a roaring start when Charles Saatchi

bought a sizeable chunk of his final degree show. Since then, Raedecker has spent the last two decades perfecting the unique methods for which he has become known. His ability to create haunting and absorbing works that blend both needlework craft and brush stroke so beautifully, culminated in a Turner Prize nomination in the year 2000.

During the mid 1980s, you initially trained as a fashion designer at the distinguished Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. What caused the shift towards your current career as an artist?
For many years, I was sure that I'd end up working in the fashion industry. Whilst I was still just an apprentice, I travelled to Paris to work for various different people – one of the most notable being Martin Margiela. The brand was still in its infancy back then, with a very small number of employees. I realise now, that I was very lucky – the whole experience of working alongside him was very impressive and somewhat life changing. After assisting Margiela with the catwalk shows, I saw how important it was to work as part of a team, and how as a designer it's essential for you to be able to delegate parts of the creative process. I felt that working within the constraints of clothing I could never say everything I wanted to say, and would always have to work alongside other people, when my ideal was to work solo. I still went back to Amsterdam to finish my BA, but in the end, I started to drift away from the idea of a lifetime working as a fashion designer.

"After assisting Margiela, I saw how important it was to work as part of a team, and how as a designer it's essential for you to be able to delegate parts of the creative process"
The concept of combining paint and embroidery thread is unusual. Do people often presume it's as a result of your former training?
People do always tend to automatically assume there's a connection – they make the tenuous link between the thread in my work and my background in fashion, but it's not like that. I think when I started to make the transition from fashion to art I felt like an intruder. It was as though I was sneaking through the back door of the art world. There were so many incredible artists who had existed before me, the only way to understand what it really meant to be an artist, was to spend time down at the library, researching those who had gone before me. The quest for information was pretty labour intensive and lengthy (before the internet existed). Gradually, I became much more focussed, and decided that I wanted to fight the commonly held ideas of fine art, I wanted to kick against it and make something unholy. Combining a folksy, feminine craft with traditional painting was such a huge discovery for me, controversial and rebellious - it was definitely my "eureka" moment.

The first time I saw one of your paintings was in 2002 at the Royal Academy's Galleries Show. I felt inextricably drawn to this eerie glow emanating from a single story bungalow. Although the subject matter of your work has diversified a lot since then, the viewer still feels simultaneously connected and disconnected. Was this your intention?
Although I grew up in the Netherlands during the 1970s, American television still played a huge part in my childhood. The Brady Bunch was one of my particular favourites. I just loved the idea of these neat, suburban homes with their manicured lawns and neat driveways. Sure, I have an appreciation of modernist architecture, but the houses in my

paintings are purely props, they punctuate the otherwise empty landscapes. The houses formed a part of my cinematic ideas of composition – the way the camera moves into the house and pans back out again, encompassing fluid movement, like a film strip. We have all indirectly experienced so much from watching films and television, we don't need a lot of storytelling anymore because we tend to fill in the gaps ourselves and my work acknowledges that. I am the author, not a dictator. The fact that the viewer has the space to walk around, and then decide for themselves how the story ends is all part of the appeal.

Michael Raedecker, Volume, showing at Hauser & Wirth, closes today.

Text by Leanne Cloudsdale

Leanne Cloudsdale is a London based writer. She has previously contributed to titles including AnOther, Arena Homme Plus, i-D and Inventory.

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GEM MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Since his nomination for the Turner Prize in 2000, London-based Dutch artist Michael Raedecker has not had a solo museum show in the Netherlands, where he is arguably under-represented in public collections. The Gemeentemuseum is changing all that—it recently bought one of the artist's large-scale paintings, Reflex, 2003, and is putting much of his work from the past five years on display for the first time in the Netherlands. Raedecker is best known for combining embroidery with paint to create images of eerily empty suburban streets and buildings, but this exhibition sees his idiosyncratic technique applied to a variety of subjects, including portraiture. Images of flowers, food and textiles with darkly ambiguous titles, such as Therapy, 2005 (above), bring the feminine and domestic associations of his stitching into play with his subject matter, and show his interest in the Dutch tradition of still-life and vanitas; paintings. Raedecker mines art history and popular culture, sourcing compositions from 17th-century garland paintings, obscure magazines and film stills. His use of thread to imitate pencil lines or globules of paint, questioning conventional divisions between "high" and "low" art, reflects his background; he studied as a fashion designer before shifting his attention to painting. The exhibition was previously shown at London's Camden Arts Centre, and is supplemented at the Gem Museum with several works from private collections.

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ART WORLD

50 PAGES OF NEW WORK

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lust *(2007), Acrylic and thread on canvas, 102 x 146 cm*

MICHAEL RAEDECKER

BEAUTY IN RUINS

Inspired by Churchill and referencing Hiltler, Michael Raedecker's unsettling, textured paintings are steepped in the hisotry of art, war and politics. And with his recent pared-back images of ruins, it seems that current world events are seeping in too

Michael Raedecker is a brave artist. In an art world almost pathologically fearful ofcraft, he has used thread as a primary element of his work, and united it with another frequently beleaguered material, paint. This use of sewing materials is no idle mannerism, for 44-year-old Raedecker studied fashion in his native Amsterdam before moving to London in the 1990s and joining the Goldsmiths MA painting course (Charles Saatchi, presciently,bought much of his degree show). Ever since, he has marshalled his humble media to create enigmatic, haunting and absorbing works, gaining international acclaim and a Turner Prize nomination in the process. Fittingly, for an artist who updates the historical traditions of painting and tapestry, he mines the art of the past, fusing it with images found in old magazines and charity -shop books, to reinvent established genres in art - still-life, interior, landscape, and portraiture.

Raedecker spoke to Art World at his studio in London's Shoreditch in the East End, just as he was completing the works which formed his recent exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, his first in London for five years. Typically for Raedecker, who makes all his works alone, and thus has a far smaller output than most painters, the exhibition featured only a small number of works.

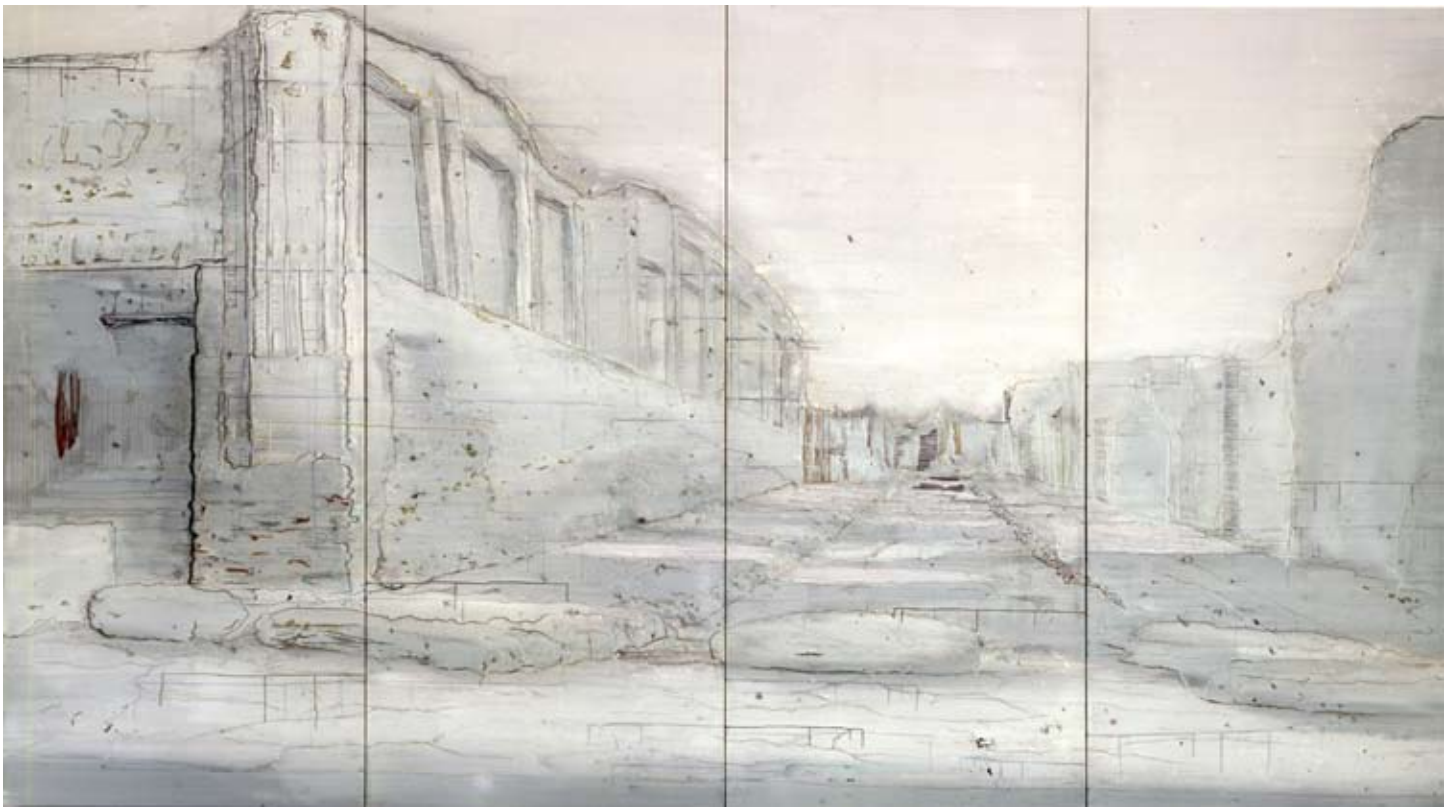
But equally characteristically, the works themselves pack an enormous punch. A striking new development is Raedecker's use of multiple panels in the larger works. He says he has wanted to make more paintings on a grand scale for some time but, in the past, his process had proved inhibiting. "I need to have a painting hanging in the space so that I'm able to walk around to work with the needle," he says. "It would just take too long, and it wouldn't really benefit the paintings. I would dread making them."

In 2006 he finally found the answer, thanks to a post-war American master. "I was in New York seeing the Met's Robert Rauschenberg Combine Paintings show," he explains. "He had a painting there, a larger work made out of panels that were stuck together, and I thought, 'yes, that's an ideal solution for me'."

Adominant motif in several new paintings is a ruin. "When I start a new body ofwork, in a way I try to stick to a theme. I have never been able to do that, and again I failed," he laughs. "So far I have only done three, but it was a good starting point."

Depictions of ruins have a rich history in art. In the 18th and 19th centuries, countless artists embarked on the Grand Tour, visiting atmospheric and picturesque European sites with Italy, and not least Pompeii, at the core of the experience. Their images became part ofthe landscape tradition, encapsulating the search for the mysteries ofthe classical world. Delving into

nameless *(2007), acrylic and thread on canvas, 285 x 240 x 4.5 cm (2 parts: each 285 x 120 x 4.5 cm)*



insignificance *(2007), acrlic and thread on canvas, 230.5 x 410 x 4.5 cm (4 parts: each 230.5 x 102.5 x 4.5 cm)*

history, Raedecker found an ideal subject for his paintings.

"The ruins come from either etchings or paintings, and the ruins depicted are from different eras. What I like about the ruin is the fact that, when I do a painting, it's always about the amount ofinformation you need to put into an image to make it successful, and the need to simplify your source material. It's a lot to do with how much you leave out of the image, and I think with a ruin you have something which was once perfect, but now there is lots ofinformation missing."

A view of Pompeii, called Insignificance (above), most directly engages with the history ofpaintings of ruins, though the source is a rather tame little watercolour by a minor 19th century French painter, Louis-Philippe Boitte. After stretching Boitte's image on a computer, Raedecker consciously blurred or omitted some ofits more identifiable elements. "I did try to disguise it a little bit," he explains. "In the original, at the far end, you could see Mount Vesuvius, as well as a few other elements that were more clearly Roman."

His reinterpretation of the work is a powerful physical monument in its own right. Amaster ofatmosphere, he removes the decayed buildings from their heritage site reality, and re-energises them with a potency which unavoidably recalls the news images that emerge daily from Iraq and Afghanistan. Although Raedecker stresses the ambiguity of the images, he acknowledges that his meditations on recent world affairs might "seep through" into the ruin pictures.

"On a subconscious level, it has almost become a cliche, but after 9/11 you walk into your studio and you think, 'What the fuck am I doing? What's the purpose of all this? What am I trying to do? Alot ofartists feel that way, whatever they are doing. We are living in a time when there is a war going on, but what do you with that, as an artist?"

Another painting in the ruin series, Trip (above right), does deal directly with the wreckage ofwar: not from Iraq, but from France nearly a century ago. Raedecker found a Winston Churchill painting of the ruined cathedral at Arras, which Churchill had based on a work by John Singer Sargent, who was a war artist in World War I. Again, Raedecker's response is compelling. Against a brooding bluish-grey, he delicately describes the opulent detailing ofCorinthian columns, or suggests with intense yellow thread the light hitting the stone. These carefully realised higlights are consciously at odds with the overall ominous feel ofthe work, a testament to a moment ofgreat violence.

Winston Churchill's art is a surprising reference for a contemporary artist. But it's not the first time that he has inspired Raedecker. When he switched to fine art from fashion, Raedecker admits that he felt like "a bit ofan intruder", and started to look deeply into the history ofart, both recent and distant. "You start to look around and think, 'Some great things have been done, even today, by fantastic artists. Who the hell am I to think that I can contribute to that?'." His eclectic search eventually led him to Churchill, whose work he used as a basis for the pieces in his degree show - a deliberately provocative

"Of course I knew Winston Churchill, but I didn't know that he'd been such a keen amateur, and he'd painted for about 50 years. He even wrote an essay on painting, entitled *Painting as a Pastime*. The 80s were very theoretical and it was all about the French philosophers, it all seemed dry. Then reading about Churchill, he sort of said, 'The sun is shining, take your easel out there and just paint. It's lovely; go and paint'. I thought, 'exactly - fuck you! That's what I am going to do'."

In those early paintings, Raedecker formed the vocabulary which he has steadily refined ever since: paint washes in muted colours; scumbled, uneven and broken surfaces; and richly varied incidents created in thread, from pencil-like lines to intensely woven, thick clusters. Raedecker employs the thread following an initial, aggressive distressing of the canvas, giving it his characteristic weathered, aged feel. "Whenever I start a canvas, I puncture holes in it, and I have this fake fur, these loose kind offibres and particles. I paint almost flat and Ijust throw it on the canvas, so when I paint over it, the fur just kind of moves and settles."

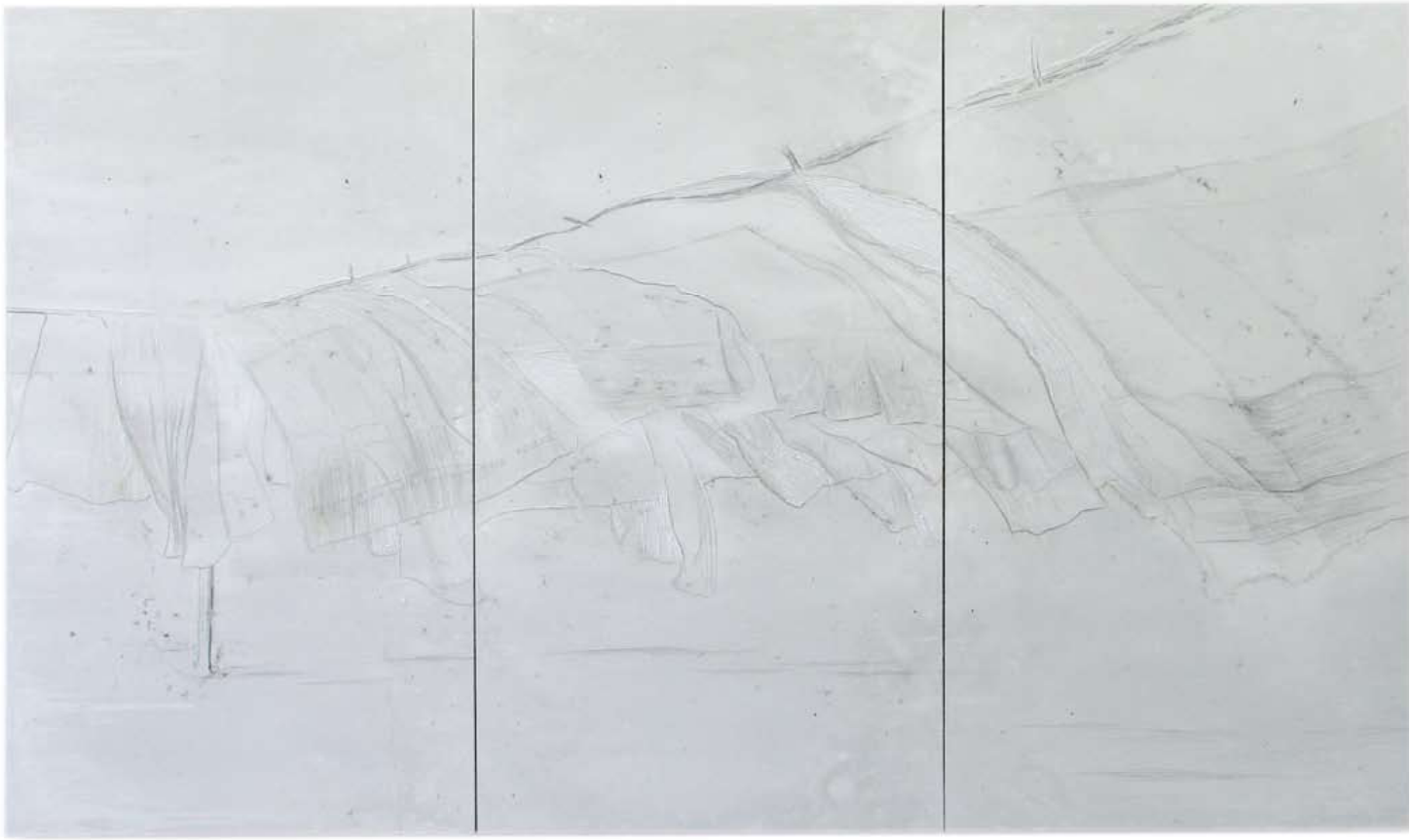
Saatchi bought the works from Raedecker's MA exhibition in 1997. It is a famously dubious honour, as many have had the collector's favour similarly bestowed on them, only to struggle to escape this early pressure. However, for Raedecker, a postgraduate emerging into the real world, the cash Saatchi paid for his paintings was
a lifeline. "He was kind ofimportant to me in the beginning," Raedecker admits, "and with the money, I could rent a studio and continue to work." He admits that Saatchi's interest created a broader consciousness of his work: "Maybe it seems that his place is less work: "Maybe it seems that his place is less important now, but at the time I think it did mean that people would look again, or were curious about who he bought, so it did help to get some exposure."

Raedecker soon attracted attention in his native Holland and his first solo museum exhibition at the Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven helped earn him a place on the Turner Prize shortlist in 2000, alongside Glenn Brown, Tomoko Takahashi and Wolfgang Tillmans. Raedecker says he knew instantly that Tillmans would win, which allowed him quietly to concentrate on making new works for the show at Tate Britain. Raedecker and Brown have had studios in the same building for a number ofyears, first in Bermondsey and
now in the East End. Brown is an important ally for Raedecker and the Dutchman even provided the title Deep Throat for one of Brown's recent paintings.

The naming ofRaedecker's works is one ofthe most crucial aspects in the unsettling world that they present. His titles are frequently jarring, "contradictory to what you see", as he puts it. His flower paintings have particularly evocative names, among them Pornography, Toxic (facing page, inset) and Propaganda. When we meet, Raedecker is considering calling the latest example Syphilis. He frequently plays with the moral and sexual connotations offlowers in art history, citing both the Dutch tradition offlower painting and the work of Georgia O'Keeffe. An erotic quality is clearly present in his flower pieces, but the more you look at them, the more abiding is their atmosphere of death.

"We have something that's growing and we cut it off, we put it in a vase," he says. "In a way, of course, we don't want to think about it, because it's about that

Churchill sort of said, 'The sun is shining, take your easel out there and just paint'. I thought "exactly -that's what I am going to do"



"Gerhard Richter never did anything about [Hitler], and Luc Tuymans has never touched upon him. Am I stupid enough to think that I can?"

when they look beautiful. But quite quickly, in a couple of days, the water starts to stink and they are dying." Raedecker's flowers carefully capture both the initial seduction, and the inevitable rot.

The stench of death pervades what are undoubtedly his most provocative images - two portraits ofHitler made in 2005 from an archive photo. "All ofa sudden I had this idea ofdoing a portrait ofHitler. I said immediately, 'Forget it, you can't do that - it's ridiculous, why would you do that?' But then, you can't let go, you start to play with it and try to explain what is interesting. Maybe it's interesting because you're not supposed to do it."

Again, Raedecker was mindful of historical precedent. "I did feel responsible about how I was going to treat this subject matter," he says, "which is why I dismissed it at the beginning. I thought that Gerhard Richter never did anything about it, and Luc Tuymans has never touched upon him. Am I stupid to think that I can? I thought to be satirical or cynical is too easy. Ofcourse, I started to look around me and see who had done anything with Hitler and I think the most recent example that I could find was Maurizio Cattelan's Praying Hitler - it's a miniature, and it's a bit ofa caricature. I wanted to make it heavy and dark. In the colour of his face, it's like he's dead."

The Hitler portraits are deeply disquieting. Most unsettling is the care with which Raedecker describes the face - the delicate embroidery around the eyes, the gentle, rippled stitching on the brow. He felt that his medium was as apt as any for this bizarre exercise: "Somehow it almost seemed it was more permissible, it would give it slightly more innocence, while at the same time being totally perverse."

Some ofthe more impressive effects Raedecker achieves with thread - such as his trompe l'oeil paint drips or pencil lines - are only detectable close up. His work is slow-burning, but once you are drawn into his world, it captivates you. "One ofthe functions is to show the slowness ofthe medium," he explains. "Painting is a very slow medium today, but then using it with thread slows it down again."

He is cautious not to let his increasing accomplishment get in the way. "I think skill could be your biggest enemy," he says. "Ifyou become better and better at what you are doing, it can just become slick and dead." One way he avoids this is to make his work sparer, more austere: "It's usually better to have less than more."

Tipping Point (above), which depicts a washing line, is compelling evidence ofthis more minimal quality. Reworking an image found in what he describes as a "silly hippie book", Clothes Lines USA, Raedecker imbues the billowing sheets with an elegant ghostliness that belies the image's source. The painting has the feel ofa faded and blemished black and white photograph.

Raedecker is clearly excited at the new possibilities in his work, and passionate about painting itself. He is conscious ofthe frequent declarations ofhis medium's outdatedness, its irrelevance, and the theories behind those arguments, but sees them as a challenge to him and his fellow artists.

"We have all these results, these scientific results. Well, let's start again, let's see what we can do with these conclusions. We have to react to that, we have to move on. And that's what we are doing."

Hauser & Wirth, London, UK

Michael Raedecker

The street in Michael Raedecker's painting *insignificance* (all works 2007) is empty, its paving slabs the same colour as the smudged grey sky. Blind-eyed buildings march sullenly towards the vanishing point, a last act of expiration in a scene in which everything - hope, life, colour - has huffed its last, exhausted breath. This is aburned world whose contents have turned to ashes; you can almost taste them, can almost feel their sour dryness leeching moisture from your tongue.

While the departure point for insignificance was an 18th-century watercolour depicting the volcanic metrocide of Pompeii, there is something transhistorical about Raedecker's abandoned boulevard - it might belong to present day Iraq, or the postapocalyptic America of Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006). Characteristically, the image is hand-embroidered in thread and wool onto washed out, occasionally shadowy painted grounds that are here and there infested with hairy clumps of fibre, or suffer from deep puncture wounds. In this work, however, the artist's familiar needlework seems to possess anew urgency of purpose, as though it is the only thing holding atorn and tattered reality together - aset of sutures made in the hope that some terrible chasm will heal. Raedecker's ruins might be compared to those in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem 'Ozymadias' (1817), but here something 'besides remains'. Behind the facades of those crumbling buildings, abare existence might yet be eked out.

Another painting, nameless, depicts what might be alonely farmhouse, or aholiday home shut for winter. The buildings huddle towards the top of the image, as though straining towards alukewarm sun, while beneath them hangs along, rectangular stretch of grey canvas, here and there dappled with what appear at first glance to be spots of blue and pink paint. Look closer, and it becomes clear that anumber of these drips and splodges have in fact been embroidered on to the picture plane in ameticulous,labour-intensive replication of accidental marks. Much has been written over the past few years about the 'slowness' of painting as a medium, but it is by exchanging oils for threads that Raedecker ties up the eye. Vision snags on these faux splashes of pigment.

Three stililifes of flowers punctuated the show, their titles - voyeur, exhibit and lust - unde scoring their dark kinkiness and pungent whiff of perfumed rot. In Voyeur, gossamer petals bloom like a gorgeous disease, and tendrils of foliage probe pictorial space like sticky, insectoid antennae. Looking at this work, I think of all the damp, breathless acts the average domestic object bears witness to, the microscopic particles of sweat that bead on their proximate surfaces. Raedecker's cut flowers are beautiful corpses slicked with the leavings of human life.

Perhaps the best work in this show, tipping point is athree-panel,landscape-format canvas across which snakes awashing line, its shirts and sheets billowing forward in asinuous wave that recalls the 19th-century compositions of Utagawa Hiroshige. There is, however, no Persil whiteness here, only concrete tones and spidery agglomerations of black fibres. Against this grey backdrop, our dirty laundry seems fated never to be made clean, no matter how often we go through the motions of wash, rinse, repeat. Fluttering in adeath-rattle breeze, these are flags for asick planet, grubby bunting strung up at a suicide's wake.

If Raedecker's paintings speak of flesh and ashes, of memory and its fading, they also speak of the history of his chosen medium. In stripped and denial, the artist represents two horizontally striped beach towels, each of which resembles a sagging, grimy canvas by an obscure hard edge Abstractionist that has been scalpeled from its stretcher and sewn hastily onto a new support. Is this cosmetic or emergency surgery? Is the patient our species' fraying past? Raedecker seems less concerned with heroics (political or painterly) than with modest, and very human acts of preservation. Like death, forgetting is always seeking to unravel us. Best make sure, then, that the stitches are knotted and tied.

Tom Morton

Michael Radecker
lust
2007
Acrylic and thread on canvas
102 x 146 cm

The New York Times

MARCH 17, 2006 E37

Art in Review

Up
Andrea Rosen Gallery
525 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through March 25

Are those curlicues of pigment encrusting the coffee cup and saucer, drifting like wiry hair on the manly torso, highlighting the outlines of two bodies having sex ? No, what seems like pigment are stitchings that seem to grow on the painted images, so that the two mediums are virtually indistinguishable.

Not quite tapestries, not quite paintings, Mr. Raedecker's evocations run to flowers and floral sprays; still life elements; and bodies or parts thereof, like the joky pair of bottoms-up feet that seem to be detached from the female partner in the aforementioned coupling.

He lays down his pigment-thread partnerships on paint-primed grounds enhanced by incidents: tiny snippets of other tactile materials -- hairs, fibers and such -- and random punctures that give each work a look of timeworn survival. And they can remind us of our mortality. One wreath of sere stitched flowers encloses a blank oval space like a dead mirror; the Greek-style torso, titled ''fix,'' hints at the cult of body-building, with the stitches placed to indicate muscle development but also suggesting a crumbling stone rot.

The combination of stitchery and paint, with its inevitable hobbyist connotation of needlework, takes some doing to bring off. But Mr. Raedecker's artfulness does it.

GRACE GLUECK

michael raedecker

Andrea Rosen Gallery
New York

Michael Raedecker's recent works inhabit an emotional terrain that falls somewhere between halcyon tenderness and bittersweet elegy. Veering away from the bleak landscapes and interiors referencing cinematic perspectives for which he first became known, these works focus primarily on images of garlands of flowers, and also include figures, or evidence of habitation. They are embroidered subtly onto understated painterly backgrounds of non-delineated, empty space in the grayed, nearly monochromatic faded colors of memory, so that image and background fuse into one. With implicit reference to classical *vanitas*, Raedecker evokes eternity, or at least the eternal, imbuing the gallery with a reverential atmosphere of silence that invites the viewer to ruminate on the temporal fragility of life. His signature technique, combining needle and thread with brush and pigment, is stunningly harmonious, striking just the right balance between elegant finesse and rawness. With its over-painted holes in the canvases and areas of frayed, matted threads, it skirts the perilous borderlines between fine art and craft. In one ironic work, *cut*, Raedecker impishly reverses his process by posing paint as thread, pushing it through the coarse holes of a mesh base so that it resembles a handwoven carpet. A contemporary still life tableau with a coffee cup breaks the pensive mood, shaking up the viewer's trance-like reverie, as does a striking malachite green image of embroidered feet that is as inexplicable and non-narrative as it is specific. In the whispery, tenderly erotic work entitled *o*, a couple is portrayed *in flagrante delicto*. And in *fix*, with a witty wink to ancient Greek art, Raedecker embroiders an armless nude torso to resemble a chalk study of a "male di Milo" sculpture. Raedecker's material techniques—needle penetration and canvas holes—coalesce metaphorically with his titled, enigmatic flowers and erotic subject matter to become introspective meditations on existence, art and time.

Michael Raedecker *o*, 2005, acrylic and thread on canvas / acrilico e filo su tela, 70 x 88 cm.

The World's Leading Art Magaznie Vol. XXXVIII No.244 October 2005 US $8 International

Flash Art

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, Ah (detail), 2005. Acrylic and thread on canvas, two parts: 70 x 56 cm and 70 x 57 cm. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth Gallery, Zurich.

ZURICH

MICHAEL RAEDECKER

HAUSER & WIRTH GALLERY

'Virulent' is the word that springs repeatedly to mind while walking through Michael Raedecker's latest show. 'Ghostly' runs a close second, and this conflation of the ghost and the virus, the corporeal and the spectral, is everywhere in the work. The embroidered flowers in *Ultimatum* seethe like maggoty bits of venison. Darkness and random glitches of thread encroach from the edges of the canvas, blackening the dark green of a thinly painted space whose ectoplasmic atmosphere is as thin as a watery soup.

The figurative paintings (flowers, portraits, and one, titled *Consume*, of a log fire) are accompanied by a set of icky, delicate, bacterial abstract works, and embroidered semi-abstracts such as *Prosthetics*, in which a central lacuna, equal parts bruise and cloud, floats encircled by a halo of flowers. The painting's surface - as with most of these works - is crossed, sullied and punctuated by bits of fluff, straggling threads, scrapes and knots punched into the canvas, disrupting the spaces the pictures try to maintain, infecting the unreal with the real. The more you look, the more they appear sickly, on the verge of relapsing into their constituent parts.

There are also two near-identical portraits of Hitler: hung on different walls of the same room, you can't really look at them simultaneously. Raedecker wanted to see how much they could 'infect' the rest of the paintings, but what's more interesting, and perhaps surprising, is how the other paintings infect them, integrating them into a subtle, poetic hang that builds around echoes and repetition like a tour through the vestiges of a wilting purgatory, revealing glimpses of an imaginative space with the looping, elegant ineffability of a Mobius strip. Whether Hitler is an inhabitant here, a memory, a photograph glued to the back of a mirror or something else, remains satisfyingly unclear.

Lee Triming

Art in America

MARCH 2004

Michael Raedecker at Andrea Rosen

In Michael Raedecker's new paintings (all 2002-03), he continues to develop his signature process of combining washes, drips and daubs of paint with blobs of yarn and embroidery stitched into the canvas. In these works, the imagery is more disjointed and the atmosphere more surreal than in some of his earlier paintings that took suburban landscapes or interiors as their subject matter. Some canvases were based on art-historical subjects while others were landscapes with a dreamlike, imaginary, almost disjointed quality.

Seeming to reference a Chardin still life, it is happening again (51 by 39 inches) shows a deer carcass hung upside down by one hoof. Metallic thread and sections of ''fur" made from woolly, golden yarn form the awkwardly dangling animal; inexplicably, one of its front hooves is shaped like a duck head with a bright yellow bill. The white backdrop resembles a fringed altar cloth, with small fir trees stitched in the bottom portion. This delicate embroidery contrasts with the aggressive handling of the paint. Thick and muddied in some sections, the white paint seems to have been dragged across the surface, perhaps even scraped off and then reapplied.

In dissociation (for the best future), 29½ by 43⅓ inches, Raedecker offers a twist on the vanitas still life by replacing the usual human skull with a football helmet, dramatically lit by two candles. Like a strand of pearls, tufts of knotted gray yarn encircle the setup, which also includes a pair of pliers, another duck head and what appears to be a pint of beer.

Of the landscapes, breakaway (78¾ by 130 inches) is one of the most intriguing. The entire canvas is a wash of peachy orange color with sewn passages in reds and rusts. The topography is suggested with thick, horizontal patches of paint. A Middle Eastern-style tent surrounded by three palm trees stands near a murky gray pond crafted from long strands of closely stitched thread. Three white armlike forms are trying to pull themselves out of the water and onto the sand. The entire unpopulated landscape has an eerie air about it as if seen through an infrared camera at night.

That's the way it is (72 by 108 inches) retains vestiges of Raedecker's earlier architectural subject matter. A ranch-style house rendered in grisaille appears to be aflame as it peeks through the foggy landscape. Two flower beds in the foreground are delineated with thickly stitched green and brown borders. An erect penis "grows" insouciantly beside a clump of foliage in one of the beds, while a unicorn sits in the other. This slightly surreal suburban scene also includes a birdbath in the middle of the canvas, where two enormous ravens splash about.

Raedecker cleverly incorporates the craft of embroidery into works that are aggressively painterly. In his hands, thread, string and wool are used as expressively as the boldly poured and scumbled paint.

-Melissa Kuntz

Michael Raedecker: breakaway, 2002-03, oil, acrylic and thread on canvas, 78 ¾ by 130 inches; at Andrea Rosen.

ARTFORUM
OCTOBER 2003 INTERNATIONAL

MICHAEL RAEDECKER

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Since he first attracted notice some five years ago, Michael Raedecker has rightfully been admired for his distinctive coupling of homespun materials and the "high" practice of painting. Often he has used thread and yam to "sketch" the contours of the generic modern landscape-say, an empty driveway bordered with well-spaced, overly pruned trees-consistently revealing the formal qualities inherent, if rarely considered, in string (known, of course, to the Renaissance painters who regularly employed it for perspective studies). Layered onto a thick application of paint, Raedecker's strands-thin and shimmery or fat and fuzzy-elegantly describe spare lines in space, though their unshakable "craftiness" hints at one of modernism's most repressed elements: the domestic.

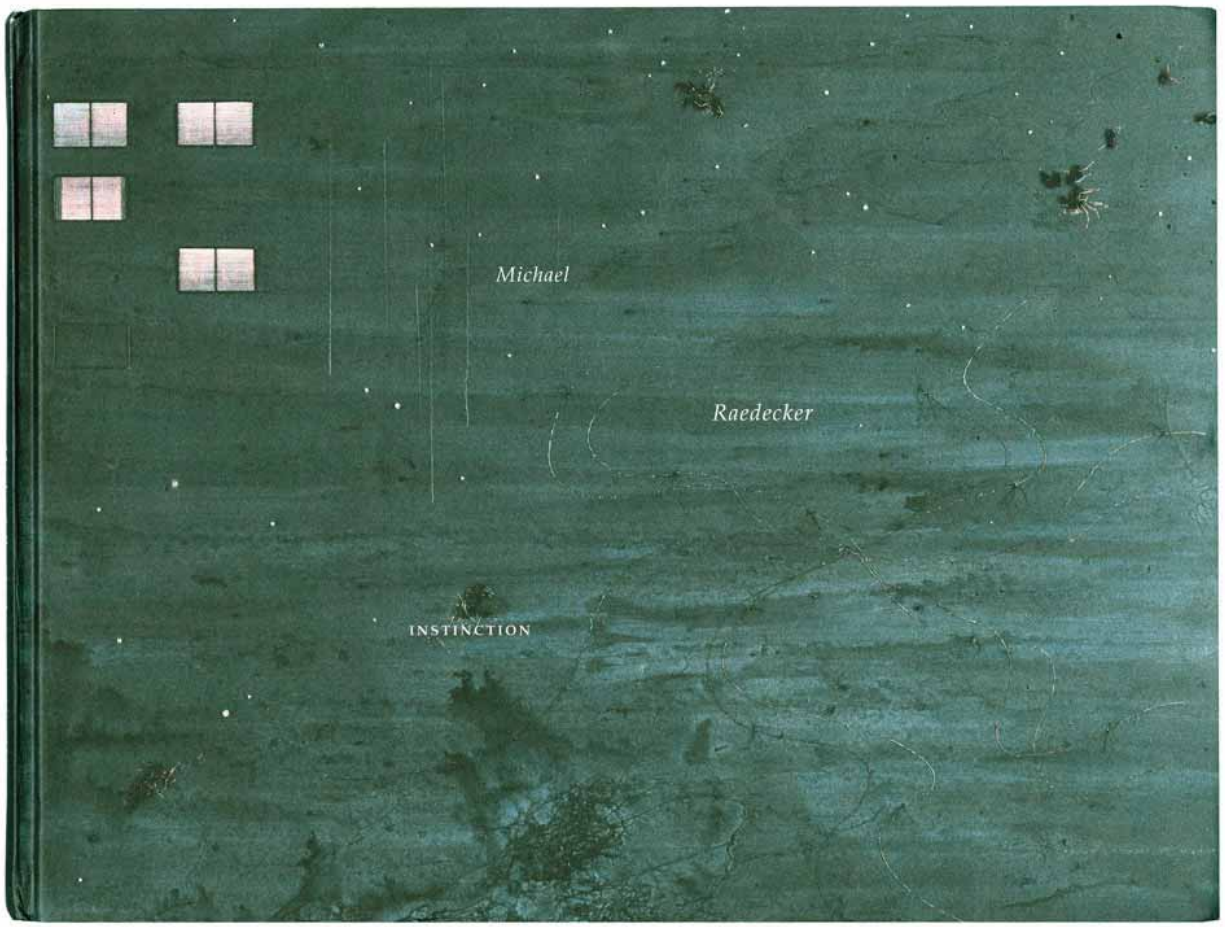
Michael Raedecker, *crab walk,* 2003, acrylic and thread on canvas, 24 1/2 x 37 3/8".

In Raedecker's most recent exhibition, summarily titled "that's the way it is," these dissident strains were far more in evidence. He'd swapped an icy, bloodless palette for one of humid hues (salmon pink, coral orange); his subject matter now included still lifes and portraits, genres rarely compatible with aspirations to distance or indifference. Cotton and wool often left line and plane behind for more "decorative" behaviors-here miming bristly facial hair, there simulating weeds that had burrowed through tarmac. The still lifes could have been memento mori-*crab walk*, 2003, includes an intricately stitched cigarette, the eponymous crustacean, and a grinning double-handled vase-while the portraits were queasily rendered, gunked-up imitations of works by Renaissance masters like del Sarto.

It's hardly novel for an artist to employ textile: as a critical step "within" painting (like Robert Rauschenberg) or as out-and-out resistance to the historically classed and gendered elitism of the medium (like Rosemarie Trockel's knit canvases of the '80s). Still, discussions of Raedecker's work have typically granted the artist an exemption from the considerations of class and gender that would seem implicit in his materials. "I am on the edge of kitsch, but I don't want to make kitschy paintings. I don't want to be that explicit," Raedecker has stated regarding the cultural associations his paintings invite. One wonders if, for an artist like Trockel or Ghada Amer, more than a simple disclaimer would be required to dissociate such materials from readings beginning and ending on the sewing-room floor.

In Raedecker's latest work, the tension he'd set up previously between form and content literally unraveled. The paintings were messier, loopier, louder, and less well behaved. In 1972, Leo Steinberg, himself complicating the form/content dichotomy, coined the term "optical oscillation" to describe what one experienced while standing in front of a good painting, modern or old master. Simply put, a successful canvas stubbornly reminds viewers that it's two-dimensional while at the same time seductively suggesting a kind of third dimension. Raedecker has always engaged in *material* oscillations, asking thread to behave as pigment and calling on traditionally "low" means to produce "high" ends. Now that the artist has, however unwittingly, fallen squarely onto more postmodern concerns of class and gender, his works no longer oscillate smoothly-indeed, they seem to stutter. Yet it is this imperfect oscillation that, with or without the artist's consent, makes their new tension even more compelling.

-Johanna Burton



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Museum fur Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Switzerland, February 15 – April 21, 2003

pages 19 - 26

PAOLO COLOMBO

People often say “writing a film”.
When will they consider “painting a film”?
Michelangelo Antonioni [1]

In memory only, reconsidered passion

The landscapes and interiors of Michael Raedecker’s paintings seem familiar territory: a house surrounded by trees, a spare living room window flanked by curtains opening onto a landscape, a plush wall-to-wall carpet, a building lit from inside and surrounded by darkness. His vision-austere and abstract-is of archetypal houses (they don’t really exist) and of a barren imagined nature. By analogy, and drawing from our own experience, we may think these images closer to movie props than to the actual houses and gardens that we inhabit. In fact, as is the case with *still life,* 2001, these objects and spaces openly declare their fictive nature, but unlike those seen in film, they are not made of light’s ephemeral skin on the silver screen. Instead, in a twist that is characteristic of Raedecker’s expressive disposition, he treads the thin line between the representation of the unreal and the imagined, while undermining his own metaphysical tendencies by giving his canvases a true substance: the texture that he painstakingly creates with threads that penetrate into and extrude

from the canvas, and by the thick pools of congealed paint, that are reminders of the tactile reality and of the labour that make up the artist's pictorial vocabulary.

Raedecker's canvases are placed on the floor of his studio; then they are suspended in mid-air from the ceiling, so that he can push the needle trough the front to the back and again to the front of the canvas. Finally they are placed flat on a table, so that the liquid paint he pours on them can condense in thick three-dimensional areas, either' giving life to an explosion of light, such as in *radiate,* 2000, or creating the effect of the geological layering and of the solidity of stone, as in *thirteen feelings, 2002.*

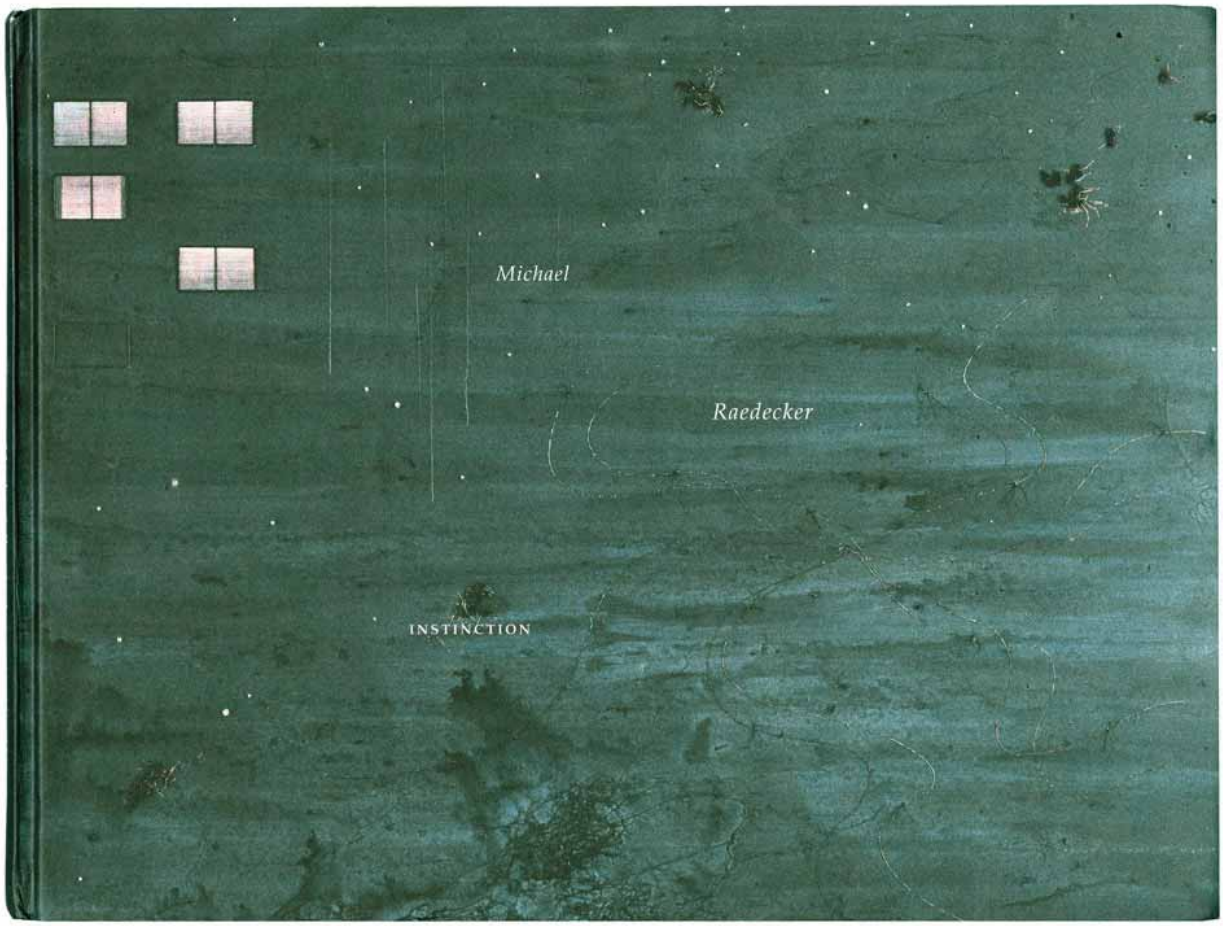
We, the spectators, look at the few objects delineated on the canvas: a close-up of a twig (again, the cinematic metaphor of the movie camera zeroing-in on a detail comes to mind) or a light shining from the window of a house into the sky[22] , rendered with a methodical embroidery of threads that simulate the principle of chiaroscuro-a light line, a dark line-the curtains, the bedspreads, the carpeting, all of which are tautologically represented by yarn. These objects evoke events that have taken place on a stage, of people that have inhabited these landscapes and houses, and yet leave us only with the awareness of their absence.

Like in the films of Antonioni, such as *L'Avventura,* 1960 or *L'Eclisse,* 1962, objects and places acquire an emblematic value, associated with a place of memory-a place therefore that has been first selectively recalled and then abstracted-that suggests past relationships and a drama that has unfolded, leaving a taste of emptiness and a sense of somber foreboding. Like in the work of the Italian filmmaker, whose scenes are also frequently framed by windows, (in Antonioni's vocabulary, glass stands for the invisible barrier that separates us from the others), in Raedecker's paintings the suggestion of our impossibility to communicate is ever present. In this context, memory-that is, the recalling of one's emotional and psychological states, as they were affected by past events-acquires the value of a viable existential solution. Besides texture and light, the third element that characterizes the surface of a painting, i.e. color, is crucial to the iconography of the artist. Similarly to Antonioni's yellow and pink hues of *Deserto Rosso,* 1964, Raedecker's grays, mauves and beiges are not the mere qualifiers of an atmosphere, but they pervade the canvas and become, in fact, personages themselves: active agents of the pathos of the image depicted.

In Raedecker's paintings, a narrative without characters unfolds, marked by a feeling of solitude and of contained turmoil. His canvases work inside of us as mirrors of our past: they are spare and uninhabited portraits of the empty rooms and of the landscapes that we, *ses semblables, ses freres,* have found, made barren and then left behind.

There is no sentiment in Raedecker's paintings, but the mere acknowledgement of a fact: that of the transience of things, of their deaf silence and the endurance that it takes to record it. There is a sense of acceptance of life's indifference and a patient way of recollecting its places and sites. Raedecker wrestles with time, images an d thoughts and in the end gives us the semblance of an emptiness loaded with meaning.

One last thought to his work, and in particular to *hollow hill,* 1999. If it had a voice, it would resonate as in this quatrain: "Sometimes I fear memory
In its concave grottoes and palaces
(Said Saint Augustine) there are so many things.
Hell and Heaven lie there." 3



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PHILIPP KAISER

The near **and** the remote

"Neurotic men," Sigmund Freud writes 1919 in his essay *The Uncanny,* "sometimes relate that they find female genitals unsettling. This uncanny place, however, is the entrance to the former home of the child, the locality in which everyone once, and initially, resided."l The uncanny (in German *unheimlich)* or unhomy contains the term 'home'. To Freud "horny" is meant in the sense of familiar and cosy, as well as also secretive and clandestine. Thus the sole difference between horny and unhomy is the prefix, which Freud calls a "mark of repression". That the known and the familiarly horny can be uncanny and unhomy was already then a noted phenomenon and flares up once again in Michael Raedecker's painting *is this it,* 2001 with its obvious affinity to Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde.* At the same time the explicit context of *is this it-i.e.,* its colour areas-risks decomposing and flip-flopping into a volcanic landscape.

The uncanny is repeatedly manifest in Michael Raedecker's work via the basic tone of his painting that laments a loss, one we may see as nostalgic. If, then, the uncanny is the result of a repression of the familiar, it must also have something to do with memory and childhood. Uninhabited landscapes with solitary houses, avenues and windblown trees inevitably call up in the viewer a feeling of the familiar: modernist architecture, yawning garage doors, abandoned wooden homes, and driveways surface as leitmotifs. This thematic repertoire is fed from the collective memory of film, advertising and illustrated magazines from the 50s and 60s. It was the time of the artist's own socialization,

which he perhaps looks back on with wistfulness. At the same time these stereotypes of popular and commercial picture production (such as the middle-class single home including an uneventful life) enhance a virtuoso play on concepts of time. The brightly lit and mysterious garage entrance in *ins and outs,* 2000 heralds an imminent event with the means of science fiction, while in *zone,* 2000, night banishes day and evokes a narrative dimension. What is notable is that Raedecker first makes up a storyboard in order to arrive at his final images.

The narration-underlined by the installation-like manner in which Michael Raedecker hangs his paintings-and the soberly memorable images of a remote and nostalgic dream time transform the landscapes into a melancholic, eternal delirium. They are venues of the uncanny, both near and far, past-memory and future. They are venues of a story with no beginning or end.

Moreover, the layer of time concepts broaden and link the means of presentation with the present. Not a single line is painted. Michael Raedecker picks out all the lineation on the mostly grayish, brown-tinted. washed-out, monochrome backgrounds with thread; he embroiders the lines onto the canvas with string and wool. Here and there shoots of color grow from the pores of the canvas into grass. The lineation freed from all subjective emotions, however, still refers partly to tree and bush, but wool, needlework and thread likewise try to imitate their subject. The trees do not merely represent trees, but claim to actually be growing out of the picture. The woven threads blend into paint and canvas, and it almost seems as if nature has in fact usurped art. The present is thus the result of a growth process that goes on before our eyes. As though the works wanted to grow old along with artist and viewer, and as though their lush encroachment had taken on a life of its own. Picking out the pictures with thread and needle corresponds to weaving the story, which for the viewer can lead to its outcome. Painting as well as embroidering are acts that compromise the world's relentless flux.The suspicion could arise that this way of seeing his art aims at describing Michael Raedecker's painting as analytical and at seeking its starting point and gratification in a self-referentiality of some kind or other. But like with a coin, our eyes are directed either to the latent reflection of the means or to the ensnarement of the viewer. Illusionism-the means by which spatiality can at all come about-is just as seductive and irresistible as the achievements of the mass media. The light and dark, the centralized perspective and the foreshortened constructions in *ins and outs,* 2000 generate an out-and-out vortex in which the media as such is easily sidelined. Landscapes are therefore not only projection screens for the imagination in a metaphorical sense but, owing to their size seem physically accessible. The proximity of Michael Raedecker's painting to cinema finds expression in the often fantastic viewpoints (which likewise incorporate romantic and Dutch art traditions), the wide-angle shots and blow-ups.

The sensual potential of the pictorial is in no way in competition with the legitimate ballast of painting. On the contrary, it is the affirmative that constantly attracts our attention by permanently courting the viewer. All the means that are available to painting (scorned in the time of modernism) are utilized to allow a specific atmospheric dimension to germinate, which can only really be experienced In direct confrontation with the paintings. Embedded in a leaden grey vacuum, Raedecker's painting achieves a kind of *sensitive* realism. *Sensitive* in the sense of internal and intuitive, which conveys the thematic and pure material fragility of all his works. The flimsiness of these inner worlds up to the repression of the horny-familiar and its tilt into the unhomy-unfamiliar is what accompanies us from picture to picture, as though a permanent reverberation inhabited the exhibition room.

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DIRTY PICTURES

BART VERSCHAFFEL

Viewed from the proper distance every painting becomes flat. When the picture is reproduced, this flatness remains. In the copy the painting obviously loses its materiality and its scale. But in addition, an entire array of viewing possibilities is reduced and simplified, as it were, to a single view: in contrast to studying paintings in "real life," their reproduction remains the same no matter how you look at them. Michael Raedecker's often large-scale paintings also turn into the "beautiful" flat images seen in reproductions when viewed from the right distance. However, his works revolve around what ensues by not looking from the proper distance, that is, by standing too close and hence seeing what happened in the process of making the picture.

In very realistic or illusionistic painting the image stays clear and sharp up to the shortest distance: the image sticks on the canvas; one sees the things portrayed just like one sees real objects in daily life. In many other and practically all modern paintings, the image gradually dissolves as one approaches. The image turns to "matter": roughly structured patches of paint and color that signify nothing more than just paint and color. Just one step backwards allows miraculous recovery of the image from the magma, a witnessing of how order and meaning emerge out of the original chaos, and this bestows on the aesthetic experience a mythical depth ... In the first case the artist is a master artisan or illusionist, who hides behind the realistic effect of his skillfully created images, in the second case he operates as an alchemist constructing form and definition from primal elements. Are image-makers extraordinary people?

It has rightly been said that Michael Raedecker's paintings are "unsettling": we do not readily comprehend what is actually happening in them nor do they offer us an ideal viewing distance from which we might feel that the image coalesces into an accessible whole. The paint, the various kinds of threads, and the other materials sometimes pasted and painted over, work at cross purposes. At the distance where, for example, the paint still yields an immaterial "image" and forms readable figures, the threads already break away from the whole and turn into "wool" and "hairs" that undermine the image. On closer examination, loose hairs and threads stuck into the paint, along with protruding lumps of paint, evoke miniature landscapes, which then again approximate the complete image first seen in the painting, and so on. The embroidery and plaiting that Raedecker uses to imitate painterly effects never blend into the image evenly. The painting is never consistently "image" and the image never dissolves completely into paint. The image actually stays "messy" at all times; Raedecker's technique always generates the appearance of sloppy patchwork. The painter in this case is not a conjuror and not a magician, but a craftsman and a bricoleur. Seen from the right distance or in front of the camera the paint-

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MICHAEL RAEDECKER, DIM, 2001, acrylic and thread on canvas, 28 x 31 1/8".

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, OPERATOR (AFTER GIORGIONE), 2002, acrylic and thread on canvas, 35 7/16 x 29 1/2".

ing obviously does become "image"; yet, from (too) nearby the visual information transmits contradictory messages and the picture proves to be half made of noise. The paintings are like worn-out vinyl LPs, with a scarcely discernible voice or melody amidst the many hisses and scratches, being played to an audience accustomed to a flawless and clean rendition.

Raedecker's strategy can also be read in the details of his images. In MIRAGE (1999) there are two tiny tree trunks to the left. And to the left again of these trunks a shadow line runs straight upwards, alongside the stem; this way, the tree-thread slightly detaches itself from the picture plane, yet simultaneously it treats the painting itself as a plane on which the shadow is cast. However, at the foot of the trunks the shadow of the stems starts sloping to the right, deep into the "landscape" of the image. Hence, the literal reading of the thread on the plane and the reading of the image as a surreal landscape are both evoked and yet mutually opposing. How could one look at such an image and not feel unsettled?

Raedecker's paintings evoke a recognizable basic imagery, taken from the tradition of painting or popular visual culture. His images are never entirely strange or original-they seem familiar, easy to label and to classify. Thus, most of his pictures to date show landscapes and interiors. A number of landscapes clearly allude to the oriental landscape tradition: a few lines and some threads pasted into the pale, primer-like ground suffice to evoke depth in the desiccated paint soil. There are various surrealistic landscapes, deep spaces with no horizon or sky, over which nameless shapes, marked by sharp shadows, are spread out. Since the objects elude identification, the scale of the depiction remains uncertain: Is it microscopic, is it cosmic? Surrealism is often just around the corner: the way in which the shapes are placed in the empty spaces and the confrontation of woolly, almost immateri.al figures and objects with solid and yet' amorphous ones are reminiscent of Magritte in his early work and even more so of Tanguy. Particularly innovative are some landscapes in which the world is folded or rolled up or forms a ring enclosing a vortex or hole. Raedecker's interiors-in fact the interiors of a type of house he also uses for his suburban exteriors-

do not refer to a traditional painting theme or genre, yet they are very recognizable: It is the suburban home of the B-movie or police series, shot at the moment when the telephone starts ringing or the first car pulls up, and the story begins. In addition to these landscapes and domestic scenes, Raedecker also painted a few extremely spatial still lifes and a few portraits. In all these pictures the spectators will easily recognize the genre and be able to name what they see. However, at the same time it is evident that such naming or such references are secondary and do not reveal what is really happening in Raedecker's work.

Raedecker does not paint stories or situations but places. These places are like small boxes or cases. When we discover a lovely box we want to open it even if we know that it is empty; we want to see the bare interior, to smell it and give free rein to our dreams before closing it and turning it upside down in search of a sign or a name. To me that is the way in which Raedecker's paintings work: They seem to be made in order to put something in them, to save something preciously smal1 and intimate, but they feel empty somehow. They are storage locations, the topoi of the classical ars memoriae. This even applies to the still lifes: The depicted objects naturally behave like actors who know they are being watched and address the viewers. But the spatiality of the pictures is more powerful than the single objects in them; the objects-actors do not perform on a stage but in a landscape, and the spectator's gaze passes through them into the depths.

The two portraits recently made by Raedecker radically reverse the spatiality and landscape setting of his earlier works. His mode of working remains the same inasmuch as there is initial recognition: "Ah, Giorgione!" However, instead of portraying sitters of his own, he remodels classical portraits using his own techniques. The choice of a painting by Giorgione as his source image is obvi.ously not motivated by the sentimental desire to make a faithful, "true" picture of a face, but rather by the wish to revise the genre of the portrait. Not even Giorgione himself was primarily interested in rendering a face when he painted his PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN (ca. 1510), now in the National Gallery in Washington. The Renaissance painter turns the head of his model in partial profile so that the "hole" of the left eye becomes central to the face and heightens the piercing impact of the gaze, hence imparting it with-in Deleuze's words-visageite or faceness. Giorgione experiments with the pose of the fist and the eyes as a means to strengthen the artificial nature of the portrait (frontality,juxtaposition, presence ...). It is exactly this "hole" of the eye and gaze that serves as the point of departure and even takes the focal position in Raedecker's OPERATOR (AFTER GIORGIONE) (2002). These portraits are not spatial or poetical like "spaces" or like the small empty boxes, and unlike conventional portraits they do not arouse "human interest" in faces. They are laboratory tests demonstrating the existence of the pure, immoral, meaningless force of the image.

(Translation: Jo Pollet)

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, BLIND SPOT, 2000, acrylic and thread on canvas, 46 x 34".

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Their Second Home

DAVE EGGERS

Hollis and his father broke the upper crust with each step. Below the crust the snow was dry and granular, a feel of both cotton and sand. Hollis and his father were walking home from his grandmother's house, where they had turned her over and washed her.

Hollis's family was now in a new house. Two months ago they had moved from their grandmother's house, where they had lived the nine years of Hollis's life, to this new house, about three miles away. The air was heavy with cold, and breathing it in felt to Hollis like inhaling glass and expelling wool.

Sixteen inches of snow had fallen in two days and nothing had been plowed. The car Hollis's father drove would not make it through this, so they had walked. Their grandmother was alone but for the neighbor girl, Kelly, who was fine but sometimes needed relief. They were walking up a hill in the park, a shortcut that would take them under the highway and to a field that led through the incorporated area and to their house.

"I figured out how to scare your mom," Hollis's father said.

It was the first thing Hollis or his father had said during the walk.

"How do you mean?" Hollis said.

"You know that window next to her desk?"

Hollis did. His mother's office was on the second floor. He nodded.

"Well, she's not used to anything happening right out her window, right?"

Hollis nodded again. His mother's window, over her desk where she did bookkeeping and tax returns, overlooked the backyard, and beyond it, the unincorporated land.

"Well, I've been thinking that a great way to really scare her would be to jump out right there and yell like crazy. She'd scream like a banshee."

Hollis didn't know what a banshee was, but his father had said this before, so he assumed a banshee was either someone who screamed a lot, or screamed loudly and well. Hollis pictured his mother screaming. "I would

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MICHAEL RAEDECKER, MONUMENT, 1998, acrylic and thread on canvas, 55 7/8 x 72".

just get up on the ladder and pop out, and yell Wah!" his father said.

They were walking under the highway now and his father's voice was louder, and his Wah! stayed in the underpass for some time.

As they were passing through the dim corridor Hollis wondered how loudly his mother would scream, and how long afterward she would calm down. He wondered if his mother would find the scaring funny, or if she would be angry.

Hollis wanted to scare his mother.

"I want to scare her," he said.

"You can watch me do it," his father said. They were now in the light again. "Actually, maybe it's not such a great idea. Your mom doesn't like being scared."

Hollis took in a quick breath.

"She does!" Hollis said.

"No, I don't think she does. That one time I did it she was mad for a pretty long while."

Hollis remembered hearing about that afterward. After seeing a suspenseful movie on TV, his father had hidden in the back seat of the car. He knew Hollis's mom would go to the convenience store, which she did every night to get fresh bagels for the next morning, so he snuck out to the car and had hidden in the back seat. He had stayed there, in the back seat, while she started out on the highway and then exited onto the frontage road. He waited until the third stop light, when the road was dark and quiet. Then he jumped up and yelled "Wah!"

They had stayed there, at the intersection, for an hour afterward.

"She'll like it this time," Hollis said.

"No, I don't think so," his father said. "It was a bad idea."

Hollis was furious. He couldn't believe this possibility was being taken from him. The scaring was something that was about to happen, the event looming ahead like a holiday, and now it would not happen. He felt dizzy. He would have to argue with his father to ensure any possibility of it happening, and even then it probably would not happen.

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, INS AND OUT, 2000, acrylic and thread on canvas, 130 x 78".

As they walked, the snow breaking underfoot, Hollis explored other ways he could jump in front of his mother's window. He could do it himself, but the ladder was too heavy for him to lift and raise. He could jump from the tree nearby, but that was too far. He could somehow swing from the rooftop from a rope, perhaps tied to the chimney. He couldn't remember if they had any rope that would be strong enough.

As they came across the field and saw the house in the distance, Hollis pleaded with his father to scare his mother. His father told him to drop it. Hollis begged. His father stopped responding. He was finished with the subject.

When they pushed through the hedge at the perimeter of their yard, they could see Hollis's mother in her second-floor window, her soft oval face painted in ochre. She was reading something under her grandfather's ancient lamp, steam from her tea rising around her face like creeping ivy.

Hollis's father went inside, stomping his feet on the porch, releasing the snow. Hollis went to the garage and found the dead frog he'd been keeping in a jar. He dropped it onto his father's worktable and cut its belly stem to stern.

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, ECHO, 2000, acrylic and thread on canvas, 100 x 78".

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, SYNCHRONICITY, 1998, acrylic and thread on canvas, diptych, 67 x 149 5/8".

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MICHAEL RAEDECKER, RADIATE, 2000, acrylic, wool, and thread on canvas, 70¼ x 50³⁄₁₆"

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TERRY R. MYERS

No Place Like Homeless

No doubt these paintings are unlivable. But there is a lot of there there, in the form of rather weird things or substances that obviously have found a supportive, fecund home. This is a contradiction, but it is more specifically a productive discrepancy that initiates what appears to be an almost natural offsetting of terms rather than a gratuitous gesture of altercation (e.g. a sign of painting as a "struggle"). The overwhelming sense of calm that emerges from this balancing act is the primary reason why the resulting bleakness is so satisfying, filling, and even funny. All of the paint and all of the other materials that have been distributed across or planted in the surface of these canvases look as if they have been able to take root and take up all available space due to some type of fermentation or fertilization process. The implied growth potential of this abundance is poignantly negotiated by a visual barrenness that has been very specifically distributed (rationed?) amongst the necessary components of image: line, shape, and color. The illusion is that these abandoned rural or suburban homes, rooms, and landscapes pictured in these paintings do not have what is necessary for our survival only because all of the "home improvement" stuff—paint, yarn, thread, veneer, wood stain, etc.—has moved in and taken over the place. And why not? After all, this is painting, not a house.

But, of course, painting is often a home, albeit one that is rarely comfortable. There is compelling evidence that Michael Raedecker believes this to a certain degree, especially since he also makes it clear that he has productively invested (like all interesting painters) in the alienating aspects of his chosen activity, most of which have to do with an inability to leave the material as it is. In other words, it has never been easy to keep paint going for very long as paint, to maintain "painting" as 'just painting." In 1962, even Clement Greenberg had to admit something like this, if somewhat begrudgingly: "as the fifties wore on, a good deal in Abstract Expressionist painting began fairly to cry out for a more coherent illusion of three-dimensional space, and to the extent that it did this it cried out for representation, since such coherence can be created only through the tangible representation of three-dimensional objects."[1]) Identifying de Kooning's *Women* paintings of 1952-1955 as a watershed moment, the critic went on to coin the phrase "homeless representation," which he defined as "a plastic and descriptive painterliness that is applied to abstract ends, but which continues to suggest representational ones." With this definition on hand (and keeping Raedecker's paintings in mind), it makes perfect sense that for Greenberg an artist like Richard Diebenkorn "found a home for de Kooning's touch," when he returned to representation via Matisse. For "homeless representation," however, there was a need for some visible (and tangible) tension, a "dialectical" pressure that would transpose the ways and means of abstraction and representation. Enter the early work of Jasper Johns, who, for Greenberg, sang "the swan song of 'homeless representation,'" in his bait-and-switch approach to painting.

Forty years later, this song is still being sung provocatively in painting, even if today it is much more about sampling, or even—particularly in Raedecker's case—the sampler. Like music, painting has been completely rescued by sampling and its hands-on (even craft-like) approach—much of painting's history is now available without the baggage of nostalgia or the antagonism of appropriation. Raedecker gets it, and not only because he used to be a DJ. His paintings remind us that the only home any image has anymore is the one we make for it using things like the movies we will never forget or the songs we will never stop loving. Titling some of his paintings after songs by the likes of, for example, Elvis Presley or Spandau Ballet, Raedecker gives clues that everything in his paintings is directly tapping into the kind of collective memories that never leave us since they are perpetually re-woven into our brains because we want them to be. This is the part of painting that is very much not alienating.

Speaking of weaving, Raedecker's move from fashion to painting has been sufficiently written into his back-story, despite his assurances that his experiences in the former industry are not directly responsible for his use of some of its materials and techniques in the latter. In his early work embroidery was a practical and efficient way in which to make it clear that he considered painting to be most valid as a pastime (his early paintings were

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, KISMET, 1999, acrylic and thread on canvas, 80⅞ x 98 7/16"

a sort of deconstruction of the paintings of Winston Churchill via photomechanical reproduction and thread that was used to "write" their context on their surfaces): "I wanted to use a technique which let me enjoy what I was doing, maybe listening to some music, and let my mind drift away."[2]) Regardless of the explanation behind it (don't forget, after all, that Jasper Johns claims he had a dream in which he made a painting of an American flag), at the very least Raedecker's sewing technique literally grounds what comes across as his complete comfort with exploring and analyzing the relationship between materiality and "look" in his paintings. It could be said that all of the fibers in his work give him and us something to come home to, loose threads that actually anchor our shared experience of what should remain an impermeable painting.

It is just as likely that Raedecker's use of embroidery gives him an effectual way to get started or get something in or on the painting quickly during any moment of its making. It surely also makes it easier for him to rip or unravel something out of the picture if it isn't working.[3]) The flexibility of Raedecker's needlework is what gives many of the images in his paintings the appearance of something that could easily be changed, particularly in works from a few years ago like REVERB (1998). In this painting (made with very little paint) "lines" of white thread dart like streaks of light or scratches across the surface of a schematic image of a living room that seems to have a floor made of water (or is the room slightly flooded?) that "reflects" the ceiling, walls, a window with a view of distant mountains, and—most boldly—an open curtain made with a dense stitching of yellow and brown embroidery thread that is the most physical thing in the work. (It is much more "present" in both material and color than the scattering of loose, frayed threads that hug the perimeter of the room like dust bunnies.) Since 1998, Raedecker's paintings have become much denser, creating a slowness in both image and material that has guaranteed that the work is seen fundamentally as painting instead of drawing or craft.

Of course, craft in the "handicraft" sense of the term (rather than, for example, the "Dutch landscape painting" sense of the term) is a relatively new issue in painting, and I'd imagine that if I were to only have Raedecker's paintings described to me that I might jump to some conclusion about their having a problematic relationship to the well-rehearsed ideological battles of art versus craft in gender or class terms. In his most recent paintings, Raedecker has successfully side-stepped this issue by conceptually opening up his use of fiber, not only by moving beyond a more "conventional" application of stitching and sewing, but also by enabling more of it to act like paint while remaining very much not paint. For example, in a painting like RADIATE (2000), the fibers on the floor of the depicted room are like tiny worms of paint. Other parts of this painting contain paint that has a lot more body than in other works: often the depleted paint in Raedecker's paintings looks like the residue left behind after a flood; in this instance, it has impossibly been able to wet through the window of another empty-yet-very-full room. Maybe a rather liquid avalanche has buried this house? A window in a similar painting, BLOCK (2001) has literally been boarded up with veneer. In its conceptual and physical melding of fiber and paint, Raedecker's work has much in common with the mid-seventies paintings of Joe Zucker. Well-known for his "cottonball" paintings from the late sixties, in which each puff was dipped in a different color of paint and placed on the painting in even rows, Zucker went on to produce a series that he called the Reconstruction paintings which grandly depicted the history of cotton production in the United States in cotton and paint. Rather than simply coating cotton balls with paint, in this series Zucker employed something akin to Greenberg's "descriptive and plastic painterliness": the fibers became part of the paint, fusing art and craft inextricably together. Zucker's statement at the time works nicely for Raedecker: "My selection of subject matter in relation to kinds of surfaces is important. Pictorial content becomes an iconography to discuss the topography of the painting."[4])

I would argue that it has been Raedecker's increasing attention to the topography of his paintings as paintings that has allowed him to open up the iconography of this work in terms of its content as well as its orientation. Exploring a considerable reorientation first in major paintings like KISMET (1999) and UP (1999), and extending it in paintings like JOURNEYS TO GLORY (2001/2002) and EXPOSURE (2001/2002), Raedecker has demonstrated his willingness to move beyond the conventional spatial relationship between an image and the painting it inhabits, to make representation "homeless" in more ways than one. Now he has us flat on our backs looking up into the sky or who knows where, rather than standing upright gazing out of a window or across a field. Disoriented and more than a little dazed, we are definitely not in Kansas any more, and it's very likely that we never were.

1) This quote from Clement Greenberg and all that follow are taken from his essay "After Abstract Expressionism" in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 124-125. First published in *Art International*, October 25,1962.

2) Louisa Buck, "UK artist Q&A: Michael Raedecker," *The Art Newspaper*, no. 104 (June 2000), p. 67.

3) The beginning of Johns's first FLAG painting was a disaster: starting with enamel paint on a bed sheet he made a mess so he switched to encaustic. Rauschenberg then asked if he could paint one of the stripes and used red encaustic where he should have used white, and several of its collage elements needed to be stitched on to hold them in place. In fact, the entire painting is rather desperately stapled to at least one edge of its plywood support because the sheet was barely large enough to cover it. Moreover, the painting is awkwardly dated 1954-55 not because it took that long to complete it but because it was damaged at a party and had to be repaired. My point here in direct relationship to Raedecker's work is that interesting paintings are usually put through hell.

4) Joe Zucker, artist's statement in Richard Marshall, *New Image Painting* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), p.68.

MICHAEL RAEDECKER, UP, 1999, acrylic, oil, and thread on canvas, 67 x 98¼"

tema celeste 94
contemporaryart 2002 November/December

michael raedecker

I have never been to Michael Raedecker's studio, but I can imagine what brightens the walls besides his intricate, serious paintings. Photographs of Modernist architecture in inhospitable places, for example, the 1940s houses of Albert Frey in the parched wilderness of Palm Springs. Reproducrions of flat Dutch landscapes in sharply recessive perspective by seventeenth-century painters such as Jacob van Ruisdael and Meindert Hobbema. NASA photographs, embroidery patterns, and pages from antiquated home decor caralogues. If these influences aren't on his
paint-splartered walls, rhey are all over his paintings, and his ability to synthesize them ioto atmospheric images of disturbingly archetypal locales has made Raedecker one of the most successful of London's painters.

His ascent has been swift. Born in 1963, he worked as a fashion designer (collaborating with Martin Margiela on three collecrions) before studying painting at Amsrerdam's Rijksakademie and London's Goldsmiths' College. In 1999, jusr one year afrer graduating, he won the UK's prestigious John Moores Prize for
painting, and in 2000 he was nominated for the Turner Prize. He found his signature style early: Impastoed, washed, and poured paint in subdued colors, plus embroidered addenda, the legacy of his career as a couturier. More often than not, he alchemizes this mixture into an architectural landscape: a single building, usually
a low-slung Modernist bungalow with a large single picture window, dropped ioto a raw vista dotted with lunar plants and rocks. The viewer's vantage point is often from out of the house's window onto this exterior landscape. The room itself feels long abandoned. In a painting from 1999, rhe viewer is posirioned in a grey living room enlivened only by a cream-colored, tufted rug (reproduced as tufted wool stitched into the canvas). One gazes out, perhaps longingly, at a distant mountain range. *Reformation* (2002), a new canvas from Raedecker's recent show at The
approach in London, shows a similar interior that has starred to decay. The picture window is still there, but the walls are a darker shade of grey. Initially, it seems that the pieces of cheap, woodfinish veneer that Raedecker has sewn onto the canvas with cobweby loops of thread are patching tbe walls of the room, but they don't follow its architectural contours-they are actually parching the painting, trying to hold together its illusory space while fatally torpedoing it.

This is crucial, fot Raedecker is simultaneously a creator of

Michael Raedecker *placebo*, 2002, acrylic, oil, and thread on canvas, 65 x 96 cm. On view at The approach, London

mirages and a destroyer of illusions. A large work, *Someone Said that the World's a Stage* (2002), surveys a painted topography of coral-pink sea and pallid real shore, dotted with stitched replications of bamboo huts, palm trees, rocks, and oddities such as a small, dragon-like figure and an exploding checkerboard-patterned cube. These last are somewhat redundant signs of trouble in a paradise that is neither realistic in its facture-the embroidered aspeers, though they are more physically present than the painted ones, jar she eye with their conscious artifice-or its composition. Floating in the uipper left of the picture, intricate grids of iridescent thread create several overlapping polygons that look like windows in receding perspecrive, as if the trademarks of Raedecker's phantasmal houses had disengaged themselves and
were floating free. It is nothing new for artises to break their iconography into its constituent pares to test the vitality of each, but in Raedecker's schema of puncruring illusion this dismemberment has a consistent purpose.

His paintings have long suggested that there is no perfect paradise to run to, either inside or outside the mind-for these are psychological landscapes, allegories of mental escape from what Sartre termed the hell that is other people, But here even the architecture of the illusion is beginning to collapse, and Raedecker's newly roseate lighting only makes matters worse. In his paintings one always feels stuck-either stuck inside a darkened house, or stuck outside it looking at its bright lights, or stuck hovering over a landscape-and then the painting itself starts to disintegrate before your eyes.

The only person who isn't stuck is Raedecker himself. While he also makes portraits (although not to great effect), one of the most interesting paintings in The approach's show is a small still life.

This work, *placebo* (2002) is set in a reflective, silvery space around which ricochet shimmering afterimages of embroidered versions of another checkered cube, a glass tumbler, an upright, lit cigarette, and a baroque glass paperweight.

This tense, deceptive, self-enclosed world of non-Euclidean possibility suggests Raedecker might also have some *Pittura Metaphysica* reproductions on his studio wall. And while he will undoubtedly continue to map unnatural, melancholy landscapes, I hope he visits this place again,

Martin Herbert

This profile was published on the occasion of the Michael Raedecker exhibition at The
approach, London.

Michael Raedecker *echo*, 2002, acrylic and thread on linen, 254 x 198 cm.

32 DUTCH
march/april 2001

past times

Michael Raedecker's cool-hued paintings of empty houses and snowed-in landscapes tap into feelings of unease rather than shock. Framed like movie stills, his uninhabited living rooms and master bedrooms, or the frozen front yard of a suburban bungalow create an inexplicable sense of the unsavory, as if the viewer had stumbled upon the scene of a crime or crime-to-be. "It's something I experience myself," says the 37-year-old Dutch artist. "You switch on the TV and see funny footage of a house an you immediately think something happened there, but it's just a silly architectural program. Most of the time you think the worst. You think the old people in the house have been slaughtered."

Raedecker started out in fashion, working briefly as Martin Margiela's assistant before switching to art. "Working with Margiela, I realize that the creative process is limited. It's not sitting in the office day in and day out doing drawings. I realized that I wanted to do my own thing but that in fashion you have to work with a lot of people." The only thing that remains of Raedecker's foray into fashion in his use of embroidery and textile elements like mohair, sequins, wool and cotton thread in his painting, though he thinks that is something he would have ended up doing even if he hadn't worked in the clothing business. His work is textured with tufts and knots and squiggles and stitches: cross-stitched duck tracks across a lawn of pooled white paint, tree-tops of coiled wool, the nubby lattice pattern of a bedspread, the knotted yarn of a shag rug, a sewn shadow.

"I started using this technique for a conceptual reason," says Raedecker. "I came across the work of Winston Churchill who made loads of paintings, and he wrote an essay called Painting as Past-time. He just said, 'it's fun to paint - you just go outside and paint what you see.' And I thought, 'Why not? Why hide behind theory? Painting is a past time, like embroidery.' I copied some of Winston Churchill's painting using photographic prints on canvas and I would sit for weeks and weeks embroidering information like the title, which collection the painting was in and the exhibition that it hung in on my painting." After six paintings, Raedecker abandoned Churchill for his own work but he continues to create hybrid canvases of paint and thread. The painstaking needlework that goes into each of his paintings is not just for the novel effect of a rib-stitched tree trunk; it's how Raedecker justifies proliferating images in an image-saturated culture. "With painting you make one gesture and you have the line of the roof. If you work three oro four weeks on one painting, it becomes important." Wanting to do important and worthwhile work in today's scandal-avid art world is as much of a throwback as painting when everyone else is photographing, filming or building installations. *Clara Young*

Michael Raedecker Overnight 1998 166 x 244 cm, acrylic, veneer and thread on linen, The Tate Collection

NEWS EXTRA
Evening Standard
LONDON, TUESDAY, 16 MAY 2000 www.thisislondon.com Incorporating THE EVENING NEWS 35P

Material success

MICHAEL RAEDECKER

★★★

The Approach, E2

Simon Grant

Spinning a yarn: Raedecker's Beam 2000 from wool and cotton

MICHAEL Raedecker has found a painterly language which has turned him into a bit of a star. Thre are now queues of collectors across the globe waiting for him to finish his next canvas.

This is his second solo show at The Approach, one of the most exciting galleries in the East End, and it is even better than the first.

Raedecker made a name for him self with landscapes and interiors which combined paint - lots of muted greens and greys - with wooven wool and cotton. Here, his needle has become the paint-brush, with the surface of the works becoming patchwork of images - wool for plants, cotton for shadows.

The differenct thickness and applications of the threads give the images their tone. A bundle of overpainted threads forms the trees' foliage; thick wool traces the outline of a log cabin. Sometimes it is shagpile thick.

At a distance you can't see all this. Only when you are up close do you recognise the textures and, at the same time, the immense amount of labour which has gone into these works. If this all sounds dangerously close to those hideous wool-and-nail paintings which found their way into homes in the Sixties, then think again. Naff these are not.

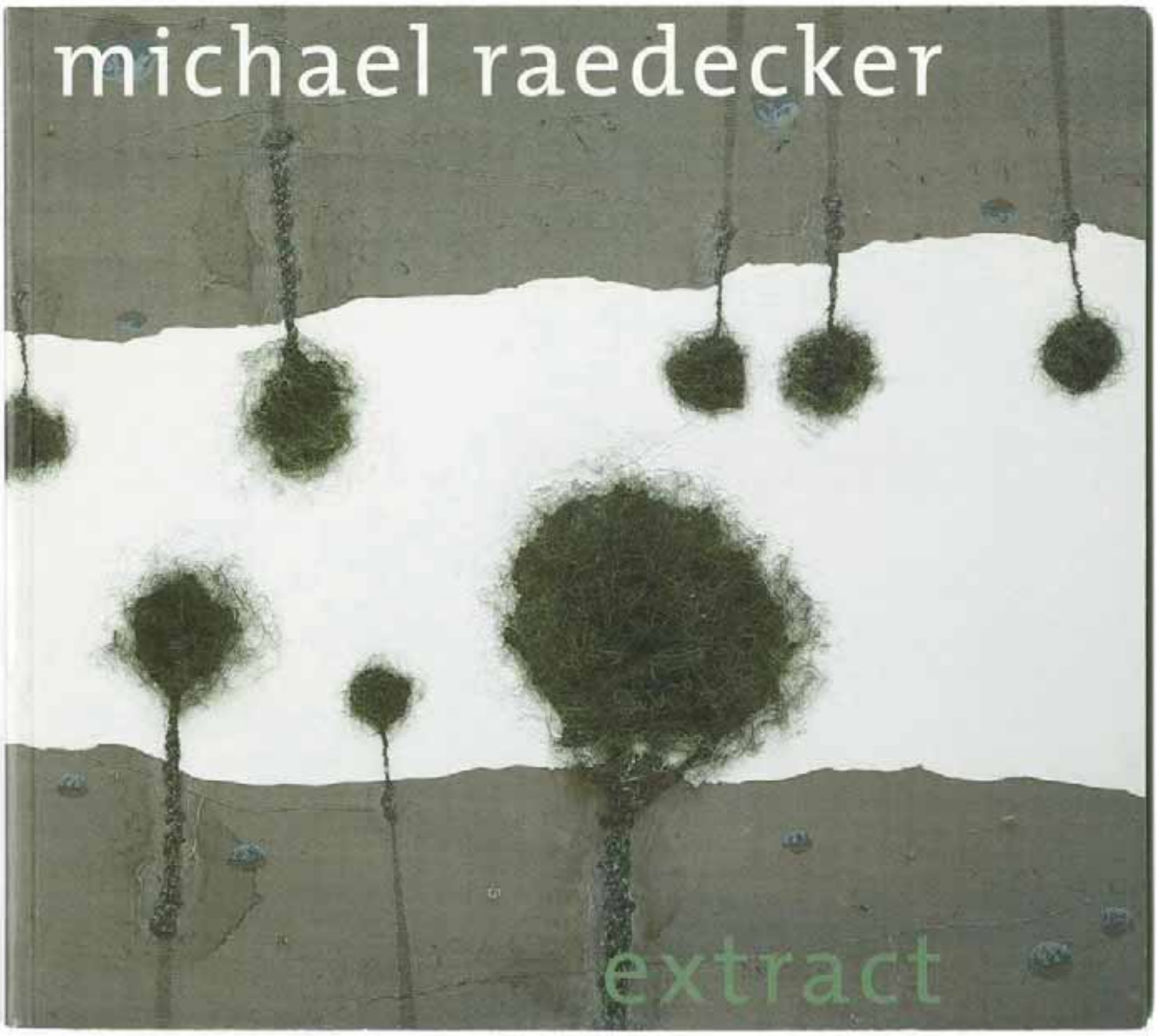
Raedecker, who used to be a fashion designer (he worked with Martin Margiela), gleans his curiously nostalgic imagery from a wide range of sources; from 18th century Dutch landscape paintings to interior-design magazines, from thriller movies to architects' plans.

Rather than being self-consciously referential about their influences, as many contemporary painters are, Raedecker blends them all with great subtlety. His vision is not a Utopian one and his locatoins don't look like fund place. But neither are they depressing. They are suggestive spaces, framed well as compositions without being dercriptive.

There is not enough informatin to start reading a narrative. This is what makes them worth revisiting - there is always something missing. It is up to us to find the missing part of the jigsaw. Fantastic.

The Approach, first floor, 47 Approach Road, E2 (020 8983 3878), Thursday to Sunday, until 18 June. New portraits by Raedecker at One in the Other, 1 Tenter Ground, E1 (0207 241 5282), Friday to Sunday until 11 June.

Ratings:
O adequate
★ good,
★★ very good,
★★★ outstanding,
X poor



Essay published in *extract* on the occasion of the exhibition Michael Raedecker, extract in the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven 13 November 1999 - 9 January 2000

pages 7 - 12

Landscape, Furniture, Painting

by Edwina Ashton

Michael Raedecker's paintings are like finding a hair in the advocaat. They offer up chilled worlds of nostalgic alienation. Re strained, luscious and troubling, from far off they are drab and on the page their coolness seems a bit flat, but in detail they are com pelling. Paint lies on the surface, poured in pools or washed, soaking through wool, sometimes marbled, articulated by embroidery. Exquisite patchy details - mountains, curtains, shadows - direct attention onto particular areas but without explicit purpose. The materials act as ontological focal points that suggest classification: stirred paint for rocks, wool for large plants, cotton for shadows. But they spill into each other and break down to suggest the fragility of those systems by which we attempt to describe the world.

Raedecker's earlier work is imagined in the cool colour and light of 1970'S television. Empty patios or driveways are described in hesitant stitching which breaks off as ifha1f-remembering. In this frame you might be drawn to fill the blankness - with crime scenes or memories of walking home from school, or emptiness. Gradually the paintings have moved from what might have been seen to something more distant and secluded; a wilderness close to an imagined America cast in northern light. His first solo show, like a sequence from an ersatz Western, pictured awesome mountains, a bungalow on the plains, and cacti, arranged as longshot landscapes, an interior, and close-ups. These draw out the surrounding vastness. That old trick of suggesting a narrative that is never satisfied is confounded. Characters are emptied out without implying their departure and all that is left is all that is shown - rooms and scenes and soft furnishings, in which the only character is oneself.

With no action but seeing, Raedecker's paintings allow you to drift through time and space, through the immediate, near and immensely far off. Close up the ground is disturbed by water-stains, fuzz and hair. These are not traces of anything, but conjure up a world in which blots spontaneously generate, like a fantasy of pre-linguistic substance from which everything is formed. The monochrome surface washed with nearly invisible brushmarks does not seem made; it just seems to be there. The colours point to contemporary taste but also to an imaginary past or future: echoey illustrations of glimmery mud flats. Raedecker's buildings concentrate time, but un-specifically. They sample recent design from the lone pioneer to the prefab. The sparse details of these interiors reveal nothing messy or anecdotal. They neither record, nor project, nor symbolize an era safely from the present.

Retrospectively the houses become pathetically pared down. Many are found in the magazine *Vacation and Second Home,* as illustrations rather than photographs, accompanying articles called *Our Dream House.* They trace an image or maybe a utopian longing or contemporary nostalgia. In painting little is real. Raedecker's paintings don't just wrestle with representation but densely tangle it. His images of nature mimic how we read time from things, and objects from shapes and paint. Rocks still look fluid, 1ike cooling lava. Their marbling skirts between stone, decorative paint finishes and torn linoleum. Mounds are trees. Shapes flounder between plants and pattern. Like something felt through a linguistic blanket, you identify but generally.

Raedecker dips into the gap between the knowable and the sensory. Highly tactile qualities belong both to the materials he uses and the objects they picture. These correspondences, the desire to name and to show the real are poked at. Seemingly natural but highly illusionist objects are wrung from the wrong stuff using curious techniques. String patterns mingle concentrations of dankness. Woolly trees are matted with paint like wet socks - a category error on a par with eating toast in the bath. But appropriateness is no guarantee. Curtains, made from what they might be in the world, only serve to underline the illusion.

A fascination of creative embroidery or pasta collage is perverse substitution - chopped eggs for fairy wings in edible woodland scenes. Paint is perverse, but it is more familiar. Thread is less solid than paint. It looks actual but is equally strange.
On another register, Raedecker's paintings dislodge spatial conventions. Often there is no horizon. The same mottled background stands in for land, sky and objects. Narrowing lines and stitches perform a diagram of three-dimensional space, pulling rooms back into views and onto the surface. The tracery delineates objects - and the framework by which we see them. Raedecker repeats illusory space while undermining it. He furtively dissects the positions of the viewer, the canvas and the painting, gliding between co-ordinates and scales. Vertical planes offer apparent openings but return masked abstractions as zipped Soviet jerseys. Raedecker's space is formed by its objects. When he inflects them, the ground tilts and we look obliquely over but never at. The reference point is indeterminate, the stable resting place deferred. Raedecker's *somewhere* might be the slim jetty, but also the painting, the gallery, everywhere and nowhere. Raedecker sees relations over reference. He uses extraordinary gaps to stretch and hold objects apart. Like Cy Twombly's spaces these gaps do not acknowledge the Kantian categories of space and time, but are *I* "the void" of Oriental compositions, merely

accentuated here and there by some calligraphy ... [and Valery's] "huge rooms of the Midi..."

the big pieces of furniture lost in them. The great emptiness enclosed - where time doesn't count: Raedecker plays on an airless association between place and solidity, object and containment. For, as the British philosopher J. L. Austin writes, the world is not made up solely of 'moderately sized dry goods' but equally problematic, amorphous things: piles, rivers, pictures in books or on walls, voices, vapours. Raedecker breaks up space, as within it the possibilities of differentiation are broken down. He suggests and blocks an equation between liquidity and freedom, and conversely between thread, definition and constraint. Slurried paint, inert and almost animate, liquefies and engulfs as it depicts. In *phantom,* a pool, the same colour as the ground, hovers over the painting. Neither a nothing nor a something, it is a blurt of ectoplasm demonstrating the malleability of every image, and a black hole where both meaning and its subject disappear. In a twilight of watered milk and sweating wool the visual condenses opaquely as it is revealed. The erosion of subject, imagery, and space paired with an insistence on lingering detail precipitates a fissure of pleasure that haunts the paintings.

Mimicking light, paint becomes a malevolent material force that reveals and dissolves objects. Dingy creams bind Raedecker's recent paintings into a hermetic world of off-white tennis shoes and leather Clutch bags. Sun-faded planes are infused with the possibility of escape. Seventeenth-century Dutch landscape artists, who had heard about but never visited Italy, bathed an imagined mountainous countryside in golden Italianate light. Michael Raedecker's almost invisible light cements rational but extraordinary worlds, approximate scenes that could be imagined through television or the cinema, though never visited. *kismet's* blank white tongue of paint, masquerading both as source and effect, becomes a blind hole that imitates and inverts natural light. At the Van Abbemuseum Raedecker painted the gallery walls two different grays. These 'made the space feel smaller and filtered light as if it were dimmed, reflected sunlight from the surface of the moon, or the sparse light in my paintings'- *extract,* a subterranean bedroom, lit up like a cinema screen. In this scene yellow cotton rays, seeming more outlandish than other kinds of light, unpick the fictions of cause and effect.

As depiction is loosened and overstated, Raedecker's most recent paintings are charged with untenable sensibility. Deathly colours and materials disintegrate and contaminate *extract.* In *guarantee* perception is undone by conflation; like a milles fleurs ground, the pink haired floor supports a gridded bed and together the two compress Mediaeval, Classical and Modernist perspectives. The moundy bed-head and flanking lamps seem as much prepared for a funeral as a holiday. These bedrooms picture the promise and conditions of love; 'the first thing we love ... is the scene which ... consecrates the object I am going to love'," Both too much and not enough, like their titles they reflect an enduring question of love and death: 'who will leave first?'

Michael Raedecker paints few people. Initially his series of old men, *tronies,* seems as inert as his spaces are subliminally alive. A *tronie* is slang for someone untrustworthy and Dutch for face. Rembrandt made *tronies* - 'face-pictures'; paintings of himself which he did not consider as portraits but as explorations of expression or costume. They attach no significance to identity and upset our concept of portraiture and subject. Raedecker's old men are not of anyone in particular, but illustrate conjecture. They are intelligible as pictures of old men and so question how any portrait can portray its subject. Their faces mask and parody maps of time. Too close, these features get lively. Tufts of wool are combed or sprout from crumpled pore-pricked skin. Embroidered blood-lined eyes dominate, focus and resist attention. The tronies seem unavoidably lonely, hollowed into widening cardigans; any sadness means we have already gone too far. They enact an idiot desire to read intention into matter.

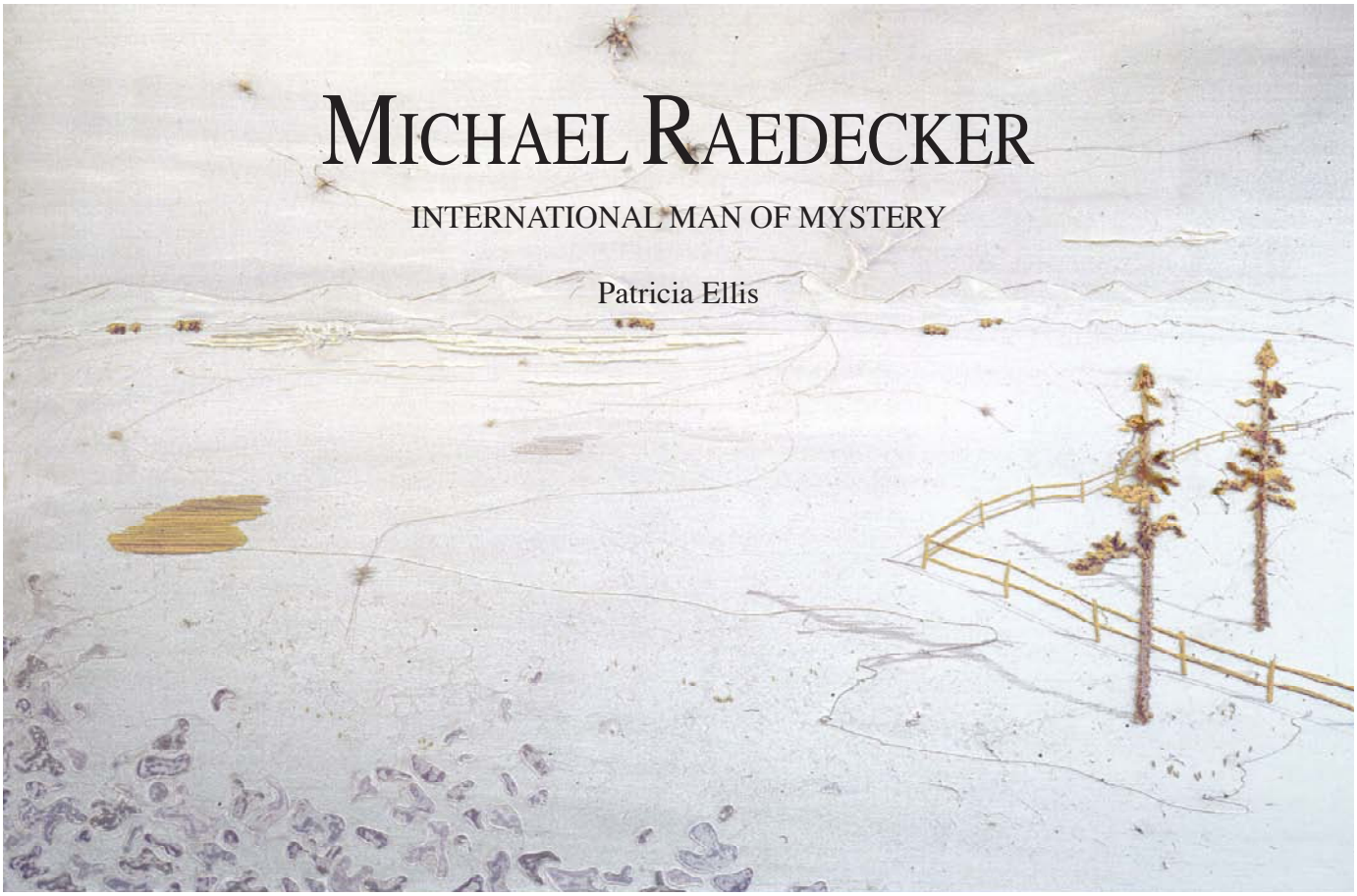
Michael Raedecker's work repeats the past illegibly. The imagery is unknowable and familiar. It belongs to no one and Side-steps personal history. The sewing lays visible, while concealing how it is made and how we see. This action is, for Raedecker, a meditative process: working closely and moving away, both predetermined and subject to change. He sews 'a couple of steps ahead' with an image in mind. Planes of attention slip in embroidery, as the needle passes through the frame. Like drawing, sewn lines stretch between x and y, representing time as space. They cover and never reveal individual origins or routes but specify everything that might have been.
Raedecker's paintings are profoundly philosophical and light. In their beautiful, curious formulation of embroidery and paint, estrangement and vagueness become tangible. Things and the gaps between them are materialized. They have odd and elusive titles, rarely adjectival, often both a noun and a verb. Like the illusory spaces they name, these soften the structures by which we represent our world. Michael Raedecker's paintings are of places that are neither solid nor nameable. They cannot exist simply in space and time. His work shows that reality, too, is neither this nor that, but both and neither. His possible worlds ask us to contemplate how the actual is possible.

Flash Art

MICHAEL RAEDECKER

INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY

Patricia Ellis



Drift, 1999. Acrylic and thread on linen, 166 x 244 cm

MR: Painting is a serious matter.
PE: So you're a really serious guy.
MR: It's funny to realise that myself.

Spinning on the head of a needle, Michael Raedecker weaves a spell of ambience. In the pink-grey dawn of a crispy winter morning, a modern American dream house is frozen in solitude. The luxury of isolation, the status symbol coldness of desirable acquired loneliness. Clinical and undisturbed — disturbing. Anticipation is creeping, the hairs of your neck tingle. Like a distant memory or prophecy, you don't see this painting, you sense it — like tension in the air, an unsettling emotion. It's a comfortable nervous feeling, impending. Like silent sleeping breaths buried in snow.

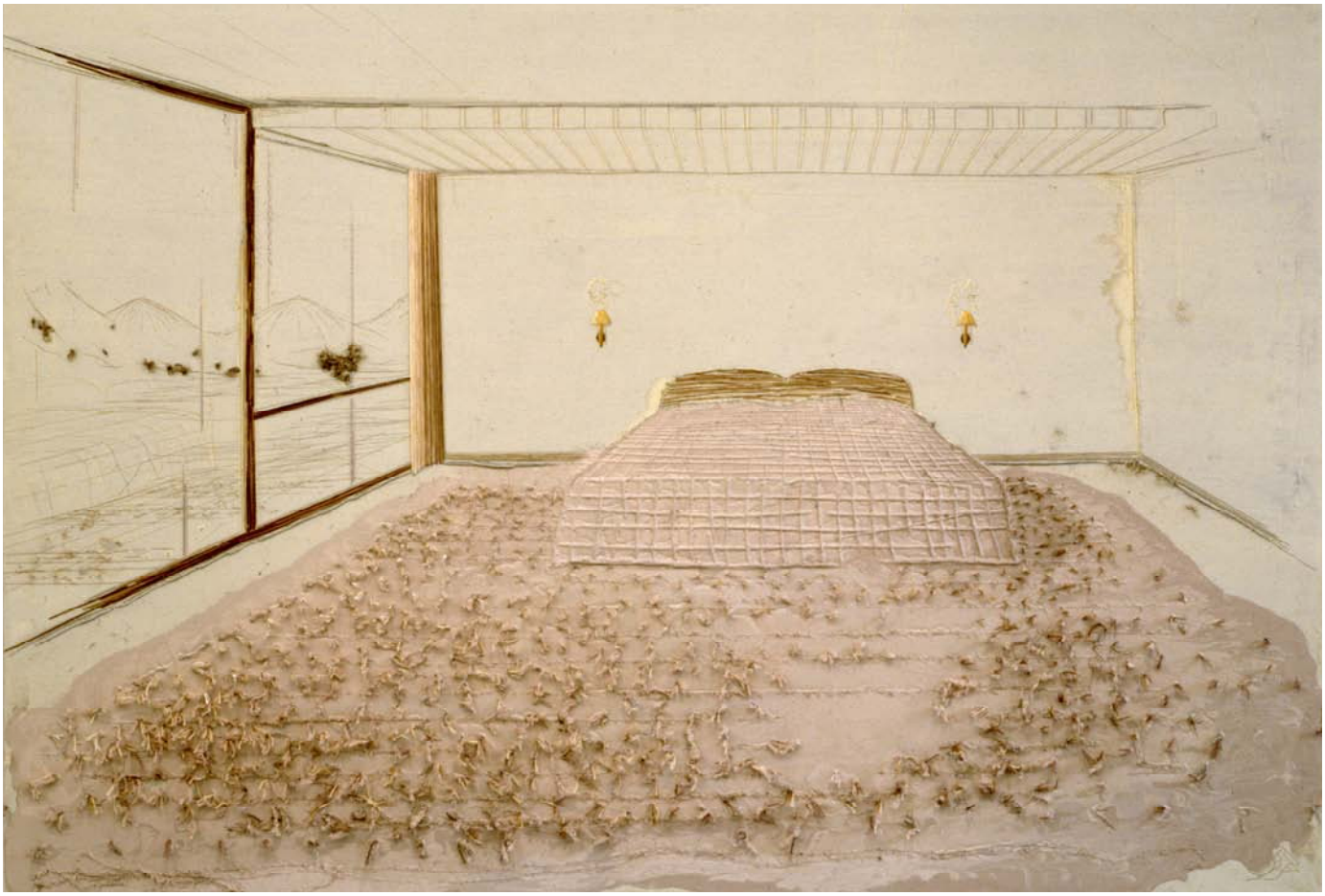
Raedecker is a master of ambience, of dejavú, of Something Not Quite Right. His signature mute-toned paintings dazzle with recognisable, associative glamour, made intimate with homey hand-stitched detailing; Grannycraft warmth with a hard corporate edge. His interiors and landscapes are instantly familiar: anonymous empty hotel rooms, vast spreads of vacant unscathed vista. It's like he's painting a road trip, constantly on the move: fugitive, twitching, unsettled.

"I'm not sure why I do landscapes — maybe because they make us seem so small, or maybe because as a city person I just see them on TV or film. We've always had our thing towards nature and by living in a big city I can neutralise it or block it out; it simply doesn't exist. So the paintings are probably not even landscapes."

Acutely honed and perfectly set, Raedecker compresses his trigger devices. Filmic without narrative, movement, or sound, his lingering suspension is cinematic minirnalism. His subject matter is more common on the big screen than in the big city. Romanticised banality, taken for granted not from experience, but from desensitised media.

Pastoral and seductive, Raedecker's images are sleepy post-card perfect, undermined by an irrational suspicion of silent small-town trauma. You fmd yourself wading in the foreign-ness of familiarity. It's the gnawing knowingness of *Twin Peaks* or *Fargo*, but without the quirks or camp. The premise of nervousness is served up straight-laced; it's a numbing construction.

"It seems maybe obsolete to do landscape. But I hope that with the 'landscapes' I do there is this sense of timelessness. The great outdoors has always been there, long before us, and nothing has changed ever since. And .we have always been puzzled how to relate towards this 'thing' that's as mysterious as life itself. Therefore for me it's still relevant to do painting. Although people are walking away from it because on a theoreticaJ level it seems to be going in circles. It might not be compatible with the times we live in; it can't keep up with TV or the media. But since the media is omnipresent we need a barrier against 'reallity,' and that's probably why there is a new wave of interest in painting. The 2D aspect is easy to get into, you know it's not real. In the end painting is just an optical illusion. So if painting is not real let's move away from reaJity and do big budget film stuff in a low budget



Guarantee, 1999. Acrylic and thread on linen, 152 x 203 cm

individual medium. Like a landscape that mysteriously continues upsidedown."

Hollow Hill: *The dank enrapture ofa cave, a swooping helicopter shot ofa lake, Raedecker edges closer still to the surreal. Swirling and distorted, the landscape becomes frozen in a .rush of confusion. Serenely void, but forensic with detail, the colours loom, damp and mossy. For some unknown reason, the shadows fall the wrong way. A deafeningly pacifying dream that pulls you in. Desiring.*

Hinging on emptiness, Raedecker's ambience is a suggestion of absence. Seduced by perfectly static compositions, your imagination succumbs to a pretence of inertia. The cool calmness of the extremely refined colours, the delicate regularity of labour intensive stitching: The effect is hypnotising. Entropic ghosts of places, without character, context, acoustics, or gravity. Landscapes are constructed like interiors. They're all about design. It's your own reaction to Raedecker's selected isolation which creates the emotional friction. Raedecker has planned and constructed these experiences just for you.

A bright and pricy suite of a remote luxury inn. Generic, swept clean of any history, void of any sign of life, every trace evaporated. Sealed in it's four-star splendour, recycled air flows osmotic through the double weave sheets, the thick woolly carpet, efficiently confined by the double-glazed plate glass. It smells positively... earthy.

"When I start a new painting the first thing I do is to find out how to make it, like a director has to know how to visualise a scenario. then when I'm working, I try to act; I try to be as innocent and intuitive as I was when I did my first painting. Raw and unpolished, it was the atmosphere that was important to come off through the pores of the canvas. And still every time I'm working on one, I am surprised how it comes out. I'm trying to learn something worthwhile in the process and make something that is unintelligible and enigmatic, and therefore says something about... Life... whatever."

Patricia Ellis is an artist and writer based in London and Milan.

Left to right: Hollow Hill, 1999, Acrylic and thread on linen, 152 x 203 cm.; Hindsight, 1999. Acrylic and thread on linen, 198 x 167.5 cm. All Images: Courtesy The Approach, London.

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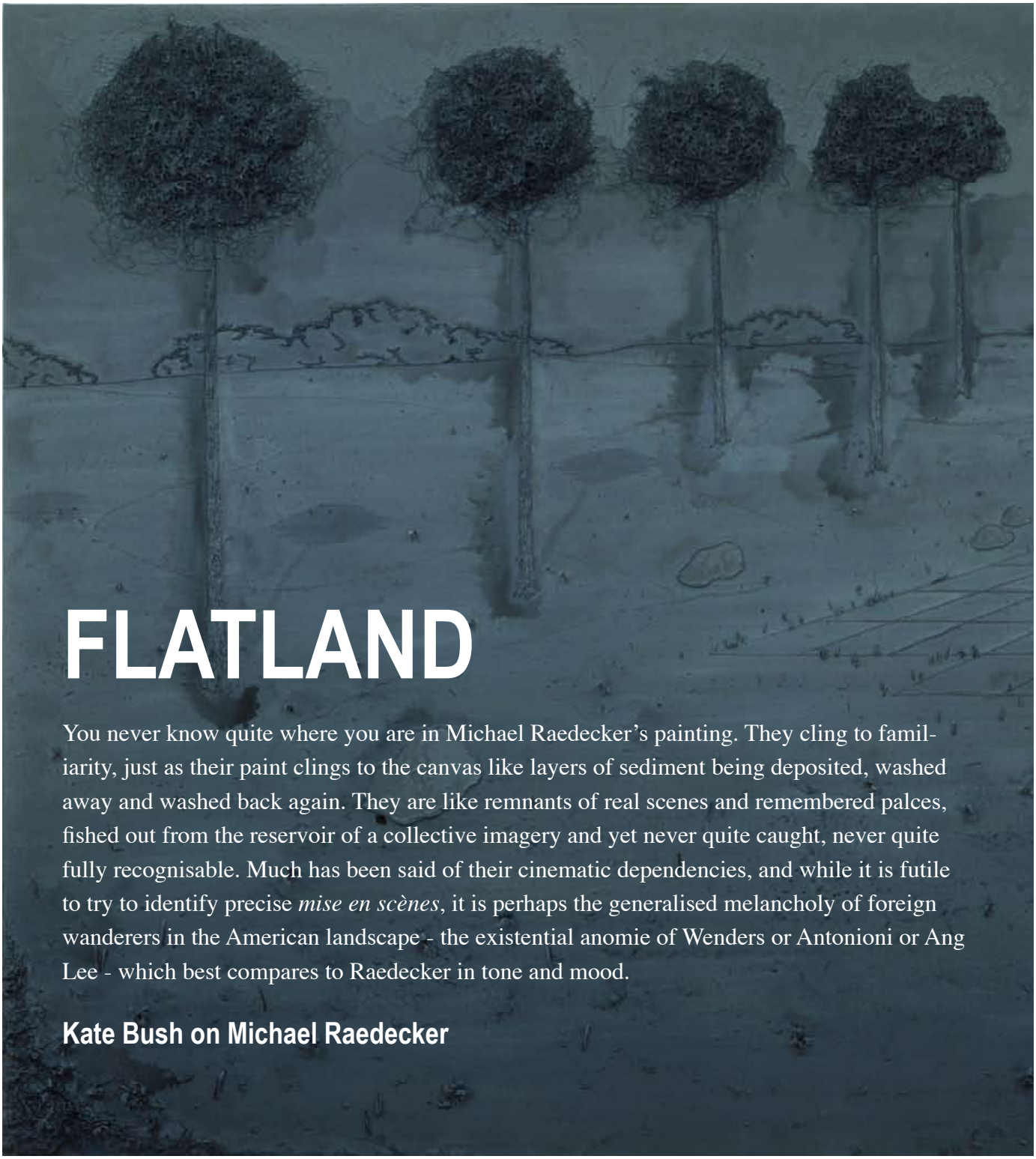

FLATLAND

You never know quite where you are in Michael Raedecker's painting. They cling to familiarity, just as their paint clings to the canvas like layers of sediment being deposited, washed away and washed back again. They are like remnants of real scenes and remembered palces, fished out from the reservoir of a collective imagery and yet never quite caught, never quite fully recognisable. Much has been said of their cinematic dependencies, and while it is futile to try to identify precise *mise en scènes*, it is perhaps the generalised melancholy of foreign wanderers in the American landscape - the existential anomie of Wenders or Antonioni or Ang Lee - which best compares to Raedecker in tone and mood.

Kate Bush on Michael Raedecker

Ins and Outs 2000
Acrylic and thread on linen 330 x 198 cm

Raedecker paints places short in human history, and long in natural history - quite unlike Europe's increasingly utilitarian countryside, which grows ever more dense with people and construction. But their precise location - backwoods or badlands, prairie or mountain, desert or swamp - is strangely imprecise, just as their seasons are inexplicit and their temperatures indeterminate. It is a poetic imprecision which connects him historically to a genealogical tree of Dutch landscape painters - from Joachim Patenier to Hercules Seghers to Aelbert Cuyp - artists who never ventured beyond their native flatlands but who filled their canvases with imagined sunlight and impossible geologies, inspired by travellers' stories and other people's paintings of Alpine sublimity. Raedecker's paintings are similarly imagined projections of an unknown elsewhere, though here they are refracted through the prism of cinema, TV, travel brochures and 1960s or 70s lifestyle magazines.

The Dutch landscape tradition has often involved a struggle against flatness: their challenge, to dramatise unremitting horizo ntality within the vertical plane of the painting. In the 17th century, painters anxious to overcome the omnipresent horizon were forced to climb steeples or dunes to gain a purchase On their ground; by the 20th century Piet Mondrian solved the problem by slowly swinging the picture plane through 90 degrees and giving us a bird's-eye view of pier and dune. Raedecker's solutions are even more eccentric. Most of the time he simply ignores the horizon, or else fails to discriminate between sky and land by rendering both in the same sludged paint. When the horizon appears, it is warped. In *Mirage* (1999), for example, the land is pictured as if in the aftermath of some extraordinary seismic spasm. It curves up and back in on itself like a calcified wave, parallel to its own horizon, struggling to find room for itself within the constricted rectangle of the picture. In *Hollow Hill* (1999), what appears initially as a worms-eye view of the sky from inside a crater, could equally be read as a horizon line convulsed almost full circle to fit the format, with a few lone trees still clinging to their original perpendicular. If the horizon is the measure of all things, the known base around which we establish where we are, then Raedecker destabilises this surety and forces us to get lost in the tactile space of his paintings.

Radiate 2000
Acrylic and thread on linen 178 x 127 cm

Unlike typical Dutch landscapists such as Hendrick Goltzius, who described the land in terms of continuous, coherent surface teeming all over with intricate detail, Raedecker's compositions oscillate between points ofabsolute clarity and areas of absolute sparseness. This skittling between isolated object and empty, pallid space accounts for their pervasive melancholia their sense of barely connected loneliness. 'It's possible to give a lot of detail in a painting and still make it look empty', he says. One or two elements are picked out clearly in delicate embroidery, while all around remains inchoate matter: great marbled slurries of paint the consistency of melted icecream, or microscopic surface agitations, bits of fluff and hair, vermicule wriggles of paint, barely adhering to the surface. A rock, a pond, a cabin, or a weird, indelicate succulent: these understated motifs are deposited on the canvas, stranded like meteorites with their strangely matter-of-fact figuration emerging forcefully from the contrast with their formless grounds.

> Nature is as shapeless and haunting as the 'something nasty' which Aunt Ada Doom saw, but could never quite bring herself to describe, in the woodshed on Cold Comfort Farm.

A recurring Raedecker scene - visible in *Ins and Outs* (2000), *Beam* (2000), or *Radiate* (2000) - features an isolated log cabin set in a wood ofleafless trees. You can imagine a thin wind snivelling among the rotting, bald trunks, but otherwise all is cloaked in terrific silence: no birdsong penetrates the muffied, crepuscular gloom. Colour is sucked out of the scene, the palette reduced to a single muddied hue - a putty, olive, lavender, or beige. Light must be there because shadows fall, but we can't see its source; its effects are perversely vapid rather than vivifying. The ground runs liquid with mud or retches water to settle into stagnant ponds. Nature is everywhere, yet everywhere it is leaden with a sense of inertia, less landscape than nature morte. The only things imaginably alive ivy or fungus or bacteria - live off the back of other deaths. If the landscape,

Beam 2000
Acrylic and thread on linen 203 x 172 cm

What leaves the bleakness of Raedecker's uninhabited wastelands and vacant interiors is the same element which makes them sparkle as paintings: the shocking delicacy of his virtuoso needlework, set against the shocking indelicacy of the paint which threatens to soil and engulf it.

as is often said, depicts a human encounter with nature, then Raedecker's meeting is the opposite of sublime. No transcendent thrill, no intimidating, life-enhancing moment, but the reversion of both man and nature to an antediluvian, pre-linguistic materialism. Like the splodge of grey ectoplasm which squeezes out of the rustic hut in his *Phantom* (1999), nature is as shapeless and haunting as the 'something nasty' which Aunt Ada Doom saw, but could never quite bring herself to describe, in the woodshed On Cold Comfort Farm.

Another scene recurs, like a dream, in Raedecker's oeuvre. In paintings such as *Beam* (2000) and *The Practise* (1998), the crisp geometries of his Modernist cabins are turned inside out to describe retro-Modernist rooms with a view of far, still hills. These low-ceilinged interiors, with their insistent, exaggeratedly minimal perspectives, place us within the room and yet force us to view it from a strangely remote vantage point. They create a contradictory sense of distance and nearness, of detachment and claustrophobia. A floor-to-ceiling picture window, so appealing to Modernist American architects seeking osmosis between inside and outside, is usually the central feature. Yet, here, it is doubled within the window of the painting, and doesn't lead into transparency and liberation but a peculiar sense of vitrification, as if the rooms had been vacuum-sealed and soundproofed against emotion and experience. Spare and soft, their hessianed walls, heavy drapes and outsized boucle rugs represent a former time's ideal decor. Now they seem forlorn, decorated only with silence and sadness; settings, perhaps, for human scenes full of misunderstanding and missed intimacy, as naggingly incomplete as a Raymond Carver short story.

What leavens the bleakness of Raedecker's uninhabited wastelands and vacant interiors is, of course, the same element which makes them sparkle as paintings: the shocking delicacy of his virtuoso needlework, set against the shocking indelicacy of the paint which threatens to soil and engulf it. Many artists have sewn as a way of democratising and domesticating the pretensions of painting, but few have contrived the combination of thread and paint, handicraft and high art, to such poetic effect. Like Fontana with his appliquid jewels or Rauschenberg with his precious metal leaf, it is the surprising alloying of two different registers of matter and technique which makes Raedecker's art so distinctive.

THE ART NEWSPAPER

THE ART NEWSPAPER, No. 104, June 2000

Currently showing "Ins and outs" at The Approach Gallery, 1st floor, 47 Approach Road, London E2 9LV, Tel. +44 (0)20 8983 3878, fax +44 (0)20 8983 3878 (until June 18); "Tronies" at One in the Other, 1 Tenter Ground, London El 7NH, Tel. +44 (0)20 7564 8282 (until 11 June)
Represented by The Approach
Background Born 1963, Amsterdam; 1985-90 BA Fashion Design, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam; 1993-94 Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam; 1996-97 MA Fine Art, Goldsmith's College
Track record Solo shows include: 1998: "New paintings", The Approach, London; "Cover", Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam; "Solo", Galerie Nouvelles Images, The Hague; 1999: "Outtakes", Michael Janssen Gallery, Cologne; 1999-2000: "Extract", Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven.
Group shows include: 1997: "In De Sloot...Uit De Sloot", Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; 1998: "Die young, stay pretty", ICA London; "Loose threads", Serpentine Gallery, London; 1999: John Moores 21, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (1st Prize Winner); Istanbul Biennial; "Examining pictures", Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (touring to MoCA, Chicago, Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

You trained as a fashion designer before going to Goldsmith's. What made you switch to making art?
When I was still at college I went to Paris for an apprenticeship with Martin Margiela, which was really great-I think he is a genius. It was really fantastic to work with him, but I found out that what really happens when you are a fashion designer is that you don't have time for the creative process-you do that in the plane, at the factory or when you're in the hotel room. It's not as if you sit there and design all day long. Through the process you just have these ideas and then later you use them. But that's not for me, I just prefer to go to my studio on my own and do my own thing. So did my last show and then worked for two years on making paintings without using any paint-more like doing photos-to find out what painting was and what it meant to me.

What first inspired you to use thread and yarn?
I came across the work of Winston Churchill and his essay "Painting as pastime". I was intrigued, and thought that he was making a very simple and straightforward statement: painting is a pastime; you just sit there and paint. He went outdoors, and sat and painted a landscape, and I thought, "Yes, why not?
Why should you read all these philosophers before you are able to make an artwork? What about the fact that it's really nice to paint?" I wanted to emphasise that, but I decided to reproduce his paintings, not by painting them, but by photographing them and printing them onto the canvas and, on top of that, embroidering all the information that I had about the work — its title, what collection it was in and so on. It took a long time to do because I was using exactly the same colours that were in the paintings, so from a distance you could see there was something going on and had to go up to the surface and read. I wanted to use a technique which let me enjoy what I was doing, maybe listen to some music, and let my mind drift away...

You're now so adept at using the medium of embroidery and textiles that on your canvases thread and paint cross-dress and do the most surprising things. But trompe l'oeil virtuosity is also spliced in with areas that seem deliberately clunky. Is it difficult to keep that fine line between being good enough to get the effects you want and being not so skilful that it becomes a craft exercise?
Yes, but it's also the most interesting bit. When I look back at my first paintings, I was quite naive at the time, but I just had the energy and the ideas to do what I wanted to do. But you're bound to lose that roughness and maybe get too clever, too skilful. So I'm aware of that. To keep on making the images I have to act, I have to play, and so with some bits I really need to be skilful and with other birs I have to try and put it back into balance again and maybe be a bir more clumsy with the material.

There's a lot of humour in your work-the way that you make thread do what one would expect from paint, such as conjuring up light or reflections, or the way that paint is made to hang and dangle off the surface like bits of yarn. Then there are those hokey cabins, garages, and bizarrely marbled rock, not to mention those weird, wormy presences popping up out of the ground in paintings such as "Pulse" or, in this show, "Web".
Sure, I don't want to be too serious. It's good that there are also these weird, almost funny elements in the work, because if it were all really heavy, I would pass a point and it would become pathetic. I always like to play with the elements, and each element has to have its role within the image, otherwise it becomes too funny or too serious. I like to keep things a little bit in the middle, and then the viewer must decide for himself whether he thinks its an uplifting or a sad image, because that's something I don't really want to control. I don't want to be the dictator who makes it too clear. You should be a bit puzzled about what you are seeing or experiencing.

Do you still use images from magazines or brochures as a starting point?
I have much more of a visual library and more experience and so I don't need to look first at other landscapes or houses. Most of the time I just start from sketches and then go to canvas, so they come straight out of my head.

But your colours remain muted, even dingy.
When you use bright colours it becomes just too nice. I think it's quite important that you are careful with the way you use colours, so I don't use a lot of colour, but enough to give an atmosphere.

At the same time as the Approach show, you are also exhibiting portrait heads of old men, which you call tronies, the same term used of Rembrandt self-portraits used by him as explorations of facial expressions and/or costume.
With this series I became intrigued by old men, the last phase of their lives and what it means. But it's not about the individual that's in the painting, it's almost like a mug shot.

Or an icon which people can project their feelings onto?
Yes, an icon or maybe even a cliche because you can't read anything from it because you can't see the status or the function of the person-he may have been a postman or a bank director; perhaps alone, perhaps a widower. He doesn't really have a function any more. You can't put all that in a painting, so the expression is the important bit about it-the way that they look-that will give a reflective quality. I worked in an old people's home in Holland and I observed them, and it's very strange how they live their lives-not a lot of relations see them any more; they're afraid to go out on the street; theit mental abilities are not the same as they used to be. I think that the old people of today have experienced so many changes in society and technology and I don't think that these changes will ever be the same again for future generations. They can't keep up with these things and that's why they maybe hide away.

Influences?
Definitely film. Sometimes you go and see a really good film and you walk out and you think "What am I doing painting?" The impact of film is so immediate; it has a different impact to painting, of course, otherwise, I would have stopped. I especially like the abstract quality of Kubrick's 2001 and the way it tells a story with images and hardly with words.
Future projects?
Grnup shows at ICA Boston this Summer and at Andrea Rosen Gallery 2, New York in the autumn.

Interview by **Louisa Buck**

UK artist Q & A

Michael Raedecker

Time Out
London's living guide
May 24-31 2000 No.1553

Michael Raedecker

The Approach, One in the Other
(East End)

A light shines in the picture window of a bungalow. Shadows are visible but you can't see in; maybe the blind has been drawn against the drab surroundings. A line of melancholy trees flanks a barren patio dotted with dank pools; a tangle of vegetation encroaches on the building as though threatening to engulf it. Michael Raedecker's landscapes (at the Approach) are getting bleaker and more despondent. Most of the drawing is done with strands of wool mired in thick paint that congeals round the tufts and tangles making them look like mould. The air of decay is heightened by blotches in the dull grey ground which seep into visibility like patches ofdamp discolouring decrepit walls.

'Radiate' could be a glimpse of the interior. A picture window dominates a room empty save for a thick pile rug. With dense white impasto blocking out the view, one's attention is focused indoors. The windows are hung, wi.th curtains rendered in fine cotton thteads Sewn into the canvas; unruly strands of wool wriggle across the floor like a seething carpet of maggots and. leap up the walls, as though determined to colonise the entire space. It'san image ofentropy and decline; but an element of humour is introduced by the absurdity of portraying big themes with needle, thread and knitting wool - homely materials associated more with decorative pleasure than blank despair.

Even when the subject is deathly, Raedecker's range of techniques - from subtle stitching to stubbly tangles, and from thick impasto to watery pools enlivens the surface with its variety, skin and wit. The same cannot be said of his portraits (at One in the Other). Men sit in chairs looking terminally depressed. Hair, eyebrows and eyes are rendered in cotton or wool; otherwise faces are blank masks of paint articulated by buried strands of wool. Arecipe has been arrived at; characterisation is uniform - a serious lapse of judgement. Stop!

Sarah Kent

TIMES
The Times, London, 20 September 1999

Images hanging by a thread

VISUAL ART: Richard Cork meets the 1999 John Moores Prizewinner, Michael Raedecker

Two large hooks hang down from the rafters or Michael Raedecker's white-walled London studio. They look disconcerting at first,' and give his room the air of an abattoir. But no carcasses dangle in this luminous space. Indead, Raedecker suspends his paintings from the hooks so that he can work on them with needle and thread. Embroidery, for this highly individual artist, is an integral part of the paintings he makes. And the results are so impressivc that Raedecker has just won the coveted John Moores Prize, a £25,000 award to be handed over on Thursday at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.

As a judge of the 1999 prize, I am delighted with the painting Raedccker submitted. The largest he has yet produced. *Mirage* was the outcome of "a very intense period, when I worked long hours. every single day, for about four weeks. I saw it as a challenge to finish that painting for the John Moores deadline,"

Raedecker's strenuous commitment paid off. *Mirage* had to compete in open competition with well over 2,000 other paintings sent in for the Moores this year, but it stood out at once. Both I and my fellow judges - Germaine Greer, former Moores prizewinners Mark francis and Dan Hays and the new director of Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor - were overwhelmed bv the avalanche of entries. Paintings, far from being dead, seems to enjoy boisterous health at the century' end. But our exhaustion was offset by the excitement of encountering submissions as outstanding as *Mirage*.

Racdecker invites us to roam across the panoramic width of this painting, as if we were travellers an epic journey. But the landscape unfolding in *Mirage* is a desolate locale. No one seems to inhabit this parched coutry, and there are few signs of vegetation. Plants are limited to the base of the two main trees, while their trunks and branches are as stripped as the bare, stricken woods in Paul Nash's paintings of First World War battlefields. Strange, glittering deposits, where Raedecker has applied sequins, counter the bleakness and even make this empty terrain seem beguiling. But the longer we gaze at *Mirage*, the less anything make sense.

Take the thin shadows cast alone the ground by both trees. They are contradicted by two more shadows, running up the trunks and destroying the illusion of perspective. Raedecker appears ro be suggesting that the entire landscape is as flat as a piece of painted stage scenery. He puzzles us even more on the right where the ground curves like a wave and, as thouch shaken by a seismic tremor, turns upside down. The violence of this upheaval is ominous, indicating that the world has suffered a catastrophic convulsion.

Raedecker, for his part, is buoyant and "really surprised" that he won the prize. He may put the money towards buying a house: "I'd like to find something much bigger than my flat in Vauxhali - a warehouse or an old empty pub which I could work on myself."

Although he grew up in his native Netherlands, training initiallv as a fashion designer, Raedeeker has lived in london for the past three years. He came here to take an MA in fine art at Goldsmiths College. "London was at the centre of all the media attention about art." he recalls, "and Goldsmiths made me more self-as-sured - I wasn' fully grown up before then."

His great-grandfather, John Raedecker, was the sculptor responsible for the prominent National Monument in the centre of Amsterdam. It was a prestige commission at the time, and Michael's work, in turn, is beginning to recieve recognition in the Netherlands. He has already won a Royal Painting Prize in Amsterdam, and Queen Beatrix has bought two of his paintings. Other Dutch collectors have acquired his work as well, but none matches the enthusiasm of Charles Saatchi, who now owns "at least 13 of my paimings".

Raedecker is a restless, energetic 36-year-old, tall, slim, and constantly making dramatic hand gestures to back up his remarks, he never once sat down during the afternoon I spent in his studio near Tower Bridge. Open and confident, he has no time for Saatchi's insistence on calling him a Neurotic Realist. What, then, is the springboard for images as bewitching as *Mirage*? "I like 17th-century Dutch landscapes, the ones with moun tains," explains with an ironic smile. "But my own work starts like a dream. I'm fascinated by the fact that landscapes were there long before we came alone. Mirage is about seeing something that's an optical illusion. It's all fake, and I make my art ambiguous so that viewers can complete the paintings in their own minds. But people often tell me that my images derive from Australia or locations they've seen in films."

The thread plays a paradoxical role in his work. It emphasises the anificiality of a painling and, at the same time. "makes certain details stand out. To me, using thread seems such a natural thing to do. After all, there's a very old tradition of artists designing tapestries." But Raedecker is also aware of the risks involved io giving thread such prominence. While hovering dangerously near the borders of craft and folk art. he knows precisely where to stop and how to play off the thickness of embroidery against the thinness of his acrylic paint. Raedecker also stops short of introducing figures into any of his landscapes or interiors. "If I put one of my sad old men into a painting of a room, it would leave the viewer out." he explains, "When a room is empty, the viewer can step into it. But when someone's alreadv there, the painting becomes too close to narrative."

Raedecker wants his work to retain a vital sense of mystery, and he seems completely absorbed by the tantalising images conjured in his work. "I cherish being in my own private space," he admits. I really like going to the studio every day, and feeling that I can do whatever I want."

> Raedecker's Mirage *is included in the John Moores Exhibition 21, at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (0151-207 0001) from Sept 24 to Jan 9*

Richard Cork

reviews

UNFILED

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Michael Raedecker

The Approach Gallery, London

Michael Raedecker's paintings are like finding a hair in the advocaat. They offer up a chilled world of nostalgic alienation dangling somewhere between retro modernism and naffness. They look empty and luscious and a little disgusting. From far off they are drab and on the page their coolness seems a bit flat, but in detail they are compelling.

The show at the Approach consisted of six paintings. Together they seemed like someone's idea of an American film - the locations of an ersatz 70's Western - a bungalow set on the plains, awesome mountain backdrops, picture windows, succulents. These are shown in an array of cinematic views- a longshot, a theatrically framed landscape, an interior, and two close ups. This combination confounds that old trick of suggesting a narrative which is never satisfied. Somehow characters have been emptied out without implying their departure and all that is left, is all that is shown - rooms and scenes and soft furnishings. They offer a short circuit without anecdote, in which the only character is oneself.

The painted spaces are empty rather than expansive. They are articulated by embroidered details - boulders and tree-trunks and shadows. These direct attention onto particular areas, but without explicit purpose. They are occasional, but far too intently made to seem casual. Wool is overstitched and layered in plump mounds. Knotted tangles and loose dangling loops allude to generalised vegetable matter. Stringy, flat, olive camouflage forms stylised backgrounds reminiscent of Paul Klee drawings. A range of mountains is built up in single strands. They are beautifully, but strangely formulated. The skittling between sparseness and detail skirts around modernist sensibilities. Michael Raedecker finds many of his houses in a magazine called Vacation and Second Home which has articles entitled This is our Dream House. They embody a pathetic optimism. His choices form an eloquent sample of design history- a pioneer style balcony in Cue, the low slung bungalow in Monument - shrine to a tawdry prefab modernism - and a classic modern wall-to-ceiling window in Reverb. Lacking the technological or personal mess of our time, they share a fantastical pared-down aesthetic. Gloops of chocolate milkshake, mud grey, and bleached greens compound this suggestion of modernism but go deeper.

The paint is mutely descriptive. It lies on the surface, in pools, as a wash, sometimes soaking through wool, sometimes marbled. At odds with its inertness, the embroidery creates illusionistic detail - sharp areas of colour and overworked texture. It describes objects in a stark, clear light. This clarity almost chokes on its metaphoric enlightenment by way of suggesting a rational world. Short stubby stitches make light-streaks on glass. Cotton is tautly stretched into languorous shadows. The needlework is astoundingly skillful, not for the variety of stitch, but as exquisitely observed drawing. In Cue, shade is knitted onto the undersides of wool fencing and grey threaq shadows are cast in effortlessly arresting tones. Then the assiduous realism is poked at by three gold sequins sewn into the sky.

These embroidery nodes go way beyond any discussions of thread's sex. They act as ontological focal points. Michael Raedecker uses materials as if to generate a classification system or hierarchies of reality; stirred paint for rocks, wool for mountains and curtains and large plants, cotton for shadows. But they spill into each other and break down and

Michael Raedecker: *Pinch*, 1998 (acrylic and thread on linen)

Michael Raedecker: *Cue*, 1998 (acrylic and thread on linen)

anyway suggest a model which is internally meaningless. In contrast to the undifferentiated mass of paint, thread is less solid (a standard unit only so thick) but weirdly actual. The curtains are painstakingly built up from different thickness of wools and cotton (in graded tones of red, brown and green yellow), and the shag-pile rug is bobbled with milky pink-brown knots. It is what they would be made from in the world. But the apparent aptness of using wool or cotton only serves to underline the illusion. Equally one of the fascinations of creative embroidery, flower arranging or pasta collage is perverse substitution - such as using chopped eggs as rally wings in edible woodland scenes, Paint is as perverse but more familiar, Michael Raedecker mingles inappropriate stuff. He uses preposterous techniques (laying wool in patterns and then pulling it from the half dried paint) and decorative flourishes (leaves run through with gold thread like a trouser suit trim). He delights in restrained concentrations of dankness. Woolly trees are matted with paint like wet socks - a category error on a par with eating toast in the bath.

And up close these diffident images have disturbing subliminal stains - water-damage, fuzz and hairs lurking dirtily on the surface, It is as if some of the detritus evacuated by sleek functionalism has returned, Rather than talk about traces of life these allude to a world in which filth occurs randomly in tiny bursts (like spontaneously generating Mediaeval flies). Nature is without solace, The plains are moon like deserts. Plants are strange sci-fi things, fluff balls, bulboid bloods~ckers with fat wool over stitching and spiked stalks topped with horrid little worm heads of paint.

Seventeenth Century Dutch landscape artists, who had heard about, but never visited Italy, bathed the Dutch countryside in a golden Italianate light. Michael Raedecker's paintings approximate to scenes which might have been seen, though never visited. They collude with the possibility of travelling everywhere through TV or films. They seem familiar, but not - something like middle America cast in cool Northern light: somewhere between a TV planet and a National Geographic idea of wilderness.

A few years ago, Michael Raedecker made reproductions of Winston Churchill's paintings, This was working at a remove - making paintings of paintings by someone else, (who laid out his ideas in an essay on painting as a pastime). The paintings at The Approach extend this absenteeism and deferment. Their images are impersonal and familiar They seem doubly distant from their possible source, Instead of belonging to someone else they belong to no one else, Amongst the notes for his paintings Michael Raedecker has a list of words in English, often snatches of songs heard or remembered, When looking for a title he sometimes takes their meanings and matches one to an image. These act in the same way as the later paintings - as a part in translation which is rephrased to assume a seeming life of its own.

Michael Raedecker embroidered almost invisibly over Churchill's paintings with details of their provenance in matching colours. In his current work the sewing is less prescriptive - it needn't correspond to the background but it is in some way predetermined. The action remains the same, For Michael Raedecker, it is a meditative process which involves engagement and distance: working in close detail and then moving away to see it, He works 'a couple qf steps ahead' with an image in his head. There are unpacked patches, Like drawing, sewing involves lines and moving from x to y, but its vagueness is always tangible (knots, matted stuff). It is more difficult to fade out cotton. But Michael Raedecker doesn't need to try.The places he creates are generalities onto which he embroiders the specifics of a possible world.

Edwina ASHTON