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MARTA ZGIERSKA, PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MASK OF REALITY

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Marta Zgierska's exhibition at the Intervalle Gallery questions the surface of the photographic image. Is reality always within reach of the image?

What interests me most in a photographic work, beyond the visual content, are above all the concepts and the network of meaning that it sets in motion. Yes, these images exist to produce meaning, ideas and content. Their appearance is not enough. This type of reading may be considered a drift, an unnecessary complexity or a perversion. I assume it, I defend it.

It would then be all the more stimulating if some photos were to be adorned with the finery of seduction to make people think better.

Marta Zgierska's are of a cold, ethereal beauty. They are nevertheless real, while their smooth surface, so smooth, seems to suggest digital metamorphosis.

So here we are in the world of *trompe-l'oeil*, of this illusion that aims at the perfect repetition of reality. This is a genre well identified and codified in art history, whose meaning has evolved over the years: first mimetic virtuosity, then subtle play with reality. Today, this reality is being challenged in depth, like a kind of revisited Cartesian meditation: the illusion of reality reveals that we would be victims of the exercise of our senses, and we would only live in Plato's cave, busy looking at the shadows all our lives (it could be called *Netflix*, right?).

The *trompe-l'oeil* then constitutes a devilishly effective mechanism, leaving the spectator free to remain on the surface of the image, or to override it to better thwart it.

Today's photography often works to stigmatize illusion through a process of tearing reality apart that could, precisely, pull us out of the cave. A delicate exercise since, if the seduction of this tear were to be too great, we would only change the cave for another one...

This little crack, it's there. On the curve of a buttock so perfect that it becomes academic, announcing, to within a few centimetres, the fold of the skin. Like a shift in eroticism, cracking up. A blow to the famous transparency of photography, open to reality. But here, rather, the photo is covered with a translucent, slightly opaque layer that separates us from the experience of the real body. Experience.

Because beyond the autobiographical foundation (the reconstruction of the body and mind after a car accident) and the questioning of gender, it is this metaphor that is at work in the use of these plastic surgery surfaces by Marta Zgierska. Surfaces that float in the air and dangle like the poor defrockers of reality, having been in contact with it but keeping almost nothing of it.

We can also remember that one of the photos in Marta Zgierska's first series (*Post*, 2013) already worked on this idea of a mask and facial extension, even if it was through a direct intervention on it. The possibility of something else behind the image, a life under the surface.

For a long time, that was all photography was: a surface (of paper), a surface of contact with reality. And then it became this luminous image that has no other materiality than that of the screen scrolled by the pulp of the thumb, destined to slide gently towards its disappearance for the benefit of one image, and another, and another. Surface disappears.

The title *After Beauty*, at a time when there is a lot of talk about *After Photography* (a photography worked by digital dematerialization, exploring its possible futures) could then refer to yesterday's photography, and the surface that is breaking up more and more and would itself be likely to become an object of nostalgia.

There is one more thing that raises questions. A more significant detail than it seems: in the *After Beauty* series, each frame is the exact color of the mask photographed. What could appear as a simple marketing idea intended to reinforce the seduction of the artistic object takes on another meaning: the image flees from itself, from its surface. The frame cannot contain it since it becomes part of the image. Driven by a centrifugal force, it escapes from the surface, explodes, spreads.

The photograph definitely escaped.