

Drawing the Curtain

MIKA HORIBUCHI // ISSUE 07 SPECIAL EDITION

Selected by the Editors

I. CURTAINS

A Painting Duel: in the 4th century, BCE, at the top of an unnamed Grecian mountain, two of the most famous painters in the village, Zeuxis and Parrhasios, were summoned to a contest. The light was at noon; the sun shone directly above the jury, and not a shadow was seen. Zeuxis is called upon for an unveiling—indeed, behind the curtain (it was important to reveal the work all at once) was his life's masterpiece. “Draw the Curtain!” exclaimed one of the jurors, and dutifully Zeuxis pulled back the deep blue velvet, uncovering the rendering of an exquisite bowl of fruit. The crowd was overjoyed. “You can taste the pomegranates,” said one of the critics, “the pear glistens with such intensity,” chimed another. At this moment, a bird flew down from the sky, straight into the painted bowl of fruit—from which it had hoped to steal a grape—and fell to the ground; a victim of illusion. Now standing around Parrhasios' wall, the anticipation built, until the crowd grew impatient. “Please, Parrhasios, it is time to see what you may have done—honor us by drawing back your curtain.” Parrhasios stood in the face of the jury. “I am very sorry, but I cannot,” said the painter, solemnly. “How can that be,” cried out of the onlookers, “You are a cheat! Did you not come prepared for this, a most important contest?” To this, Parrhasios finally responded, “You see, there is no curtain. This is my painting.” No one said a word.

—Stephanie Cristello

II. QUEEN OF HEARTS

Playing cards were widely introduced to Europe in the mid-late 14th century. Around 100 years after, there was a war in England between the house of Lancaster—represented by the symbol of the red rose—and their rival, the house of York—the white rose—who were both dueling for the throne. Four centuries later, Lewis Carroll writes a story in which a young girl finds herself in the Queendom of Hearts, a land where she encounters playing card soldiers painting the white roses red for fear of their merciless Queen. By that time, playing cards, and the Queen of Hearts herself had become iconic images in the West, instantly recognizable. Although the Queen of Hearts as popularized by Carroll, came to be associated with cruelty, apathy, and a humorous rage. A common phrase today, “painting the roses red” means to attempt to cover up one's mistake, often poorly. On the contrary, Mika Horibuchi has elected to quite literally paint the roses white in her painted interpretations of playing cards. While *2 of Hearts*, and *5 of Hearts*—both oil paintings on linen—are devoid of any imagery of hearts or numerals, they are able to rely on the familiar proportions, composition, and format of traditional numbered playing cards to carry the reference. Surrounded by a backdrop of greenery, the white roses bloom in place of the cards' missing hearts.

—Patrick Lanford Stephenson

III. DUCK-RABBIT

The duck-rabbit illusion was first presented in an 1892 issue of the German magazine, *Fliegende Blätter*. The image was later presented and made famous by psychologist Joseph Jastrow; the image visually grounds the later arguments made by Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*. Used as a primer to many semantics courses, the viewing of the duck-rabbit is dependent on the viewer's past experiences; they may see either a rabbit or duck but never both simultaneously. With the duck-rabbit, Wittgenstein proposes that images are inextricably linked to the social—as thought and language are intertwined—and the act of “seeing” cannot be separated into physiological and psychological experiences.

Horibuchi's work makes use of the duck-rabbit, not because the duck-rabbit needs redoing, but because the duck-rabbit exemplifies (and perhaps explains) the visual illusions she deals with in her body of work. Wittgenstein may propose the tricks, but Horibuchi will build them.

—Gabrielle Welsh



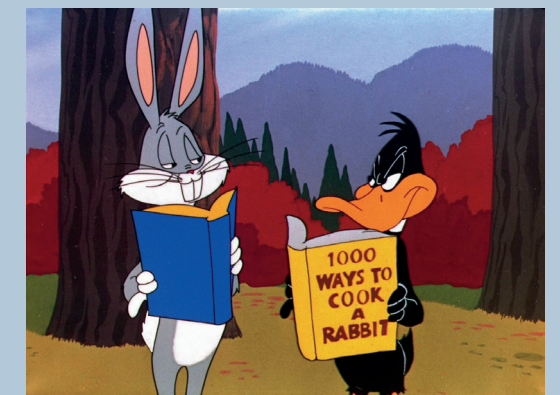
Welche Thiere gleichen ein-
ander am meisten?



Kaninchen und Ente.

LET US REMEMBER TOO THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO TRANSLATE SUCH PICTURES INTO REALISTIC ONES IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THEM ANY MORE THAN WE NEED TRANSLATE PHOTOGRAPHS INTO COLORED PICTURES, ALTHOUGH BLACK-AND-WHITE MEN OR PLANTS IN REALITY WOULD STRIKE US AS UNSPEAKABLY STRANGE AND FRIGHTFUL. SUPPOSE WE WERE TO SAY AT THIS POINT: 'SOMETHING IS A PICTURE ONLY IN A PICTURE-LANGUAGE.'

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN



PAGE 100: Mika Horibuchi, *Curtain Drawn*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery. Photo: Aron Gent. **PAGE 101:** Frans van Mieris I and Adriaen van der Spelt, *Trompe-l'Œil Still Life with a Flower Garland and a Curtain*, 1658. Photo: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY. **PAGES 102–103:** Installation view, *Chicago Works: Mika Horibuchi*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago July 17–December 2, 2018. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago. **PAGE 104:** Mika Horibuchi, *2 of Hearts*, 2015. Oil on linen. 24 x 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery. **PAGE 105:** Mika Horibuchi, *5 of Hearts*, 2015. Oil on linen. 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery. **PAGE 106–107:** Mika Horibuchi, *RD LW*, 2016. Oil on linen. 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery. **PAGE 108:** Mika Horibuchi, *RD MH*, 2017. Oil on linen. 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery. **PAGE 109:** Mika Horibuchi, *RD 1*, 2016. Oil on linen. 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery.

Clockwise from top left: Still from *Alice in Wonderland*, *Painting the Roses Red*, Disney animation, sung by the Queen of Hearts soldiers.; *Kaninchen und Ente (Rabbit and Duck)*, the earliest known version of the duck-rabbit illusion, from the 23 October 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter*. It is captioned: “Welche Thiere gleichen einander am meisten?” (“Which animals are most like each other?”); Bochner, Mel. 1967–1979. *Misunderstandings [A Theory of Photography]*, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Photographs. Place: Art Institute of Chicago, United States, Chicago, IL.; Still from Looney Tune's episode *Rabbit Fire*, 1951. Distributed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.; Juno and her handmaidens seated before the painter Zeuxis, and Parrhasios rushing to unveil his painting before a group of observers. Engraving by J.J. von Sandrart after J. von Sandrart.

Mika Horibuchi: Chicago Works at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago runs through December 2, 2018.









