

Forced Perspective

by Michaela Schweighofer

As words travel from language to language and fester there, certain objects cross borders and settle on the other side. Once a luxury item, born somewhere in France between 1800-1830, the *psyche**, a dressing room mirror with swinging sides, becomes a popular motif in paintings in the late 19th century. It is still prevalent in Austrian households, where it is casually called 'die Psich', a remnant of (white) nostalgia in an inflated empire and ego.

At the former *salon de coiffure* turned WIELS' project space, the *psyche*'s usual round form has been stretched and elongated, and the mirroring surfaces are blinded by draped/trapped scarves found on flea markets and second-hand shops in Brussels. They inhabit the walls where their real-life counterparts would once have hung. The objects are a portrait of the metropolis and its people, as well as the space they occupy. Their form and their materials, speak of the city and the home, of a life lived - a loophole to another dimension. They could be of a time when women were barred from painting at academies, of when they used the mirror[†] as an empowering tool for self-portraiture, subtly correcting the male gaze by using their own[‡].

The colours hurt, but only a little, and the cellophane is stretched to the limit so that its surface gets a liquid touch, encapsulating its content. The pieces could be reminders of blinded mirrors, over-dimensioned palettes with smears of colour on them, or locket containing Maria Vermeer's self-portraits[‡]. They open up to the inside, while partially blocking our reflection and giving way to a muted background. Our gaze is directed at the interior, away from the concrete object, towards an interiority that might feel familiar. We are looking at something by looking at something else.

* The name is based on the belief that one could see one's soul in the mirror and that it could be trapped there after death.

† What the mirror was then, the camera is now

‡ Shout-out to Jennifer Higgie & Benjamin Binstock

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Title: *Forced Perspective*

Artist: Michaela Schweighofer

Dates: 11.04 – 27.04.2024

Venue: AFFILIATE

Wiels Project Space

Rue du Jardin des Olives/

Olivetenhof 3

1000 Brussels

Photos: Fabrice Schneider

Instagram: @miggigram, @wiels_brussels

HP: <https://www.wiels.org/en/events/michaela-schweighofer-forced-perspective>

<https://www.wiels.org/en/blog/a-new-space-in-the-city-centre>

All works:

Title: *Psyché, Psycho, Psychosis*, 2024

Material: (scarves, paper, wood, lacquer)