



Membrane Dancer
(Tinkal Glass)
2021, Dr. Wäse

3/10–14/11/2021, Charlott Weise. *Tinted Glass*, Atelier 4.1, Kunsthalle Münster

Tinted Glass evokes altered perception with a before and behind, with an inside and outside. The long, slender works whose dimensions bring to mind full-body mirrors are dispersed around the space. As an arrangement, the ensemble creates a dramatic setting: the figures adopt poses, assume their roles – we are witness to a theatrical performance. In many of the works both the front and the rear are painted, a principle also found in historical panel painting where the reverse sides conceal a second depiction, often as a (quasi moralistic) commentary on the motif on the front. When caught in direct light, both sides of Weise's works are seen in superimposition. This reveals the translucence of the image carrier, thereby lending visual presence to the unconscious which constitutes a kind of subtext in the artist's works.

On the textile carriers, Weise not only uses conventional colouring substances – oils, inks, charcoal, pastels and sanguine crayon – but also materials traditionally considered as female, such as earth pigments and make-up. These play on obsolete connotations concerning the relationship between woman and nature, and the possibilities for designing one's outer appearance, even as far as creating a mask-like persona. Through lengthy painting processes in which the artist doused the cotton fabrics in washes, some of her paintings come to resemble vellum or skin. The works reveal wrinkles and creases, abrasions or accidental hand prints – traces of painterly activity which on their surfaces merge with the drawing and painting. Viewed through a feminist lens, the works in *Tinted Glass* can be read in the context of "embodiment": the body of the artist has inscribed itself into the paintings, has physically shaped the process of painting rather than following a concept constructed in language. This thereby brings the sensual aspect of the paintings to the fore, allowing the textile carrier to act, as it were, as the medium of the unconscious.

The depicted motifs are not tied to a particular narrative; instead, they show scenes that seem to have issued from dreamworlds, playing with reality and fantasy, or whose different moods remind us of film sets. In her abstract and figurative representations the artist creates a tense balance between sketch-like, brutal and highly formulated approaches. Bodies take shape, only to disappear again, or they dissolve into abstract forms. Meanwhile, various kinds of entities resembling ghosts or angels, as well as female protagonists, occupy centre stage and convene to enact a sort of cabaret dissociated from all time and space. Divas from classical cinema such as Marlene Dietrich (*Masquerade*, 12) or Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra (*Cleo*, 8) encounter the holy Madonna (*Love come down*, 11 and *Birth of an Icon*, 6) or the eponymous pop icon, who turns up as a cartoon figure (*Driver's Seat*, 5) to chauffeur the saint through time and space in the guise of a taxi driver (*Birth of an Icon*, 6 and *Breakfast at Mary's*, 4).

In a number of works Weise shows further figures that all feature in the key scenes of the paintings without really being involved in them. In the manner of "commentators" they respond to the events around them, sometimes more, sometimes less. They personify a kind of conscience comparable to the chorus in a Greek drama. In *Masquerade* (12) one figure wearing a crown is lodged between Marlene Dietrich's legs and peering out of the painting with a somewhat sceptical gaze. In *Gerettet mit weiblicher Hilfe* (Saved with female help, 2) another such figure is hovering above the angel which, tightly grasping a mirror, is heading into the depths down below, and seemingly into another world. In *Breakfast at Mary's* (4) a large number of different female figures, in addition to that of the cab driver Madonna, are gathered around the edges of the pictorial surface. In a reference to Egon Schiele's *Zwei sich umarmende Frauen* (Two Women Embracing; 1911), their animated activity opens up and, in a sensual manner, extends the somewhat pathos-laden coitus of the two mysterious phantomlike women. Besides their function as a commenting chorus, they also call to mind the tiny, often obscene figures that populate the margins of medieval painted miniatures whose purpose is to offer cheer and amusement to the readers of factual texts.

Similar to the ghostlike beings in *Phantasma* (1), which seem to be the visual progeny of Art Deco, the cinema icons also undergo a kind of transformation. Weise shows the female figures in various states, whereby the play on femininity and its exaggerated *mise-en-scène* and performance assume a central role. It is not for nothing that at this point Weise

has selected personae such as Marlene Dietrich who was celebrated for projecting different images of femininity into public focus. The paintings evoke associations with scenes in stage plays and cabarets, as well as motifs from chansons or pop songs in which the female protagonists give voice to emotional states and desires.

A sense of ghostliness emerges again in the figure of the *Membrane Dancer* (7) whose white form all but fully dissolves in movement. On closer inspection, however, the rear side reveals a small face drawn into the figure in sanguine crayon. The metaphor of the membrane – *membraan* in Middle English means parchment – as a thin, delicate skin that performs a division again voices the possibility of changing perspective, of a balancing act between visibility and invisibility, between the physical and the emotional.

Furthermore, Charlott Weise has carried out an intervention on the exhibition space itself. *Divadienst* (10) makes reference to figures and elements in other works, extends and abstracts them. In material terms she once again prompts associations with make-up. Applied with her hands, the paintings on the three left-hand windows put in mind make-up powder and “smokey eyes”, while the windows on the right are reminiscent of a *mise-en-scène* daubed with lipstick on a mirror. The glass paintings alter the lighting within the space. They double up as reflections on the floor or overlap, depending on the way light falls on the suspended works. In this manner, the outer aspect merges into the inner entity, thereby perpetuating the interplay of perception and equivocality.

Franca Zitta

Translation: Matthew Partridge

Biography:

Charlott Weise (born 1991, Görlitz) is a German Amsterdam based painter. She studied the HfbK Dresden, the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and was in residence at De Ateliers, Amsterdam. Recent solo exhibitions include Nevven Gallery, Gothenburg (2021), Kunstfort bij Vijfhuizen, Vijfhuizen (2018) and A Maior, Viseu (PT) (2018). Her works have been included in the following group shows (selection): Arti & Amicitiae, Amsterdam (2019); W139, Amsterdam; Damien and the Love Guru, Brussels (2019); Lower.Green, Norwich (2018); Ginvera Gambino, Cologne (2017). She is the winner of the *Koninklijke Prijs voor Vrije Schilderkunst* (2020).

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Opening hours: Tue–Sun 12–6 pm (free admission)

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Thinking through tinted glass

What appears in the glass changes face under different shades of light. The paintings in *Tinted Glass* by Charlott Weise redesign the theatre of worship. Icons are reconfigured, abstracted away from a fixed sex or identity, while rituals of care and spirit—performed in different hues—chart the female *psyche*. ‘The risk to remain tight in a bud,’ writes Anaïs Nin, ‘was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.’¹ She writes past tense; *it* needed to happen, don’t look back, just a sidelong glance will do, to indicate that you are turning a corner. The professional hazard of playing yourself entails *coming out* on a daily basis, looking into the glass, and meeting your maker. The sybarite² is caught off guard courting danger; her *jouissance* means she will blossom over and over again after every new, fateful administering of *maquillage*. She will be recognized in her dressing room mirror as herself by the character she hopes to play.

Bringing blush to the table, the business of soft giggly spirits, gurgliness, and pansies, is part of the apparatus that constitutes the politics of aesthetics. There was a time when powerful heads of state could simply not afford *not* to perform their leadership in elegant, sanctimonious drag. Julius Caesar—by far the most famous Roman—was a queen before he ruled Rome appearing in drag so as to leave no doubt about his claim to divinity through his lineage to Venus, herself ‘goddess of beauty’ and ancestor of the Roman people. What springs to mind is Beyoncé’s lyric: ‘Diva is the female version of a hustler (2009). Queen B interfaces the Italo-Latin origin³ for the word goddess with the slang term for a low-life criminal.⁴ Perhaps what Caesar and Beyoncé would agree on is that divas get things done, despite being demanding or difficult to work with. This sense of woman cast forward by the diva is overflowing, and always more than bargained for: a deception for truth’s sake, like Weise’s painted *Membrane Dancer*, a glimpse of the essence of femininity before being overruled, something primordially *femme*.

Rouge is the secret *eau de toilette* of every *sanguine goddess*, which becomes available according to the Roman calendar, at *that* time of the month. Divas in Weise’s paintings are in the company of cherubs, or rather their demonic counterparts, which, for want of a better word, I christen *baby-demons*.

The oils splash, and are churned out in finely delineated contours of visage whose blush extends beyond the cheeks onstage. A theatrical aside takes place between wigged actors. Perhaps they discuss the viewer, who is by now perched on a stool, applying eyeliner before her fateful denouement in the dressing-room mirror that stares back at her like the all-seeing, mascara-heavy, smokey eye of *Saurona*—Sauron’s drag persona, the evil, disembodied character from *Lord of the Rings*. The figures being watched, cheeks puffed from betrayal, are in negotiation with their own spectral sexuality as if peeping out from behind a hand of cards,

1 A poem attributed to Anaïs Nin, its source remains uncertain.

2 A sybarite is a sensualist and refers to a resident of the ancient city of Sybaris.

3 While the word ‘diva’ was originated by the Latin *diva*, meaning goddess, it gained its contemporary meaning of an enigmatic female leading lady who is demanding, from the Italian opera stage.

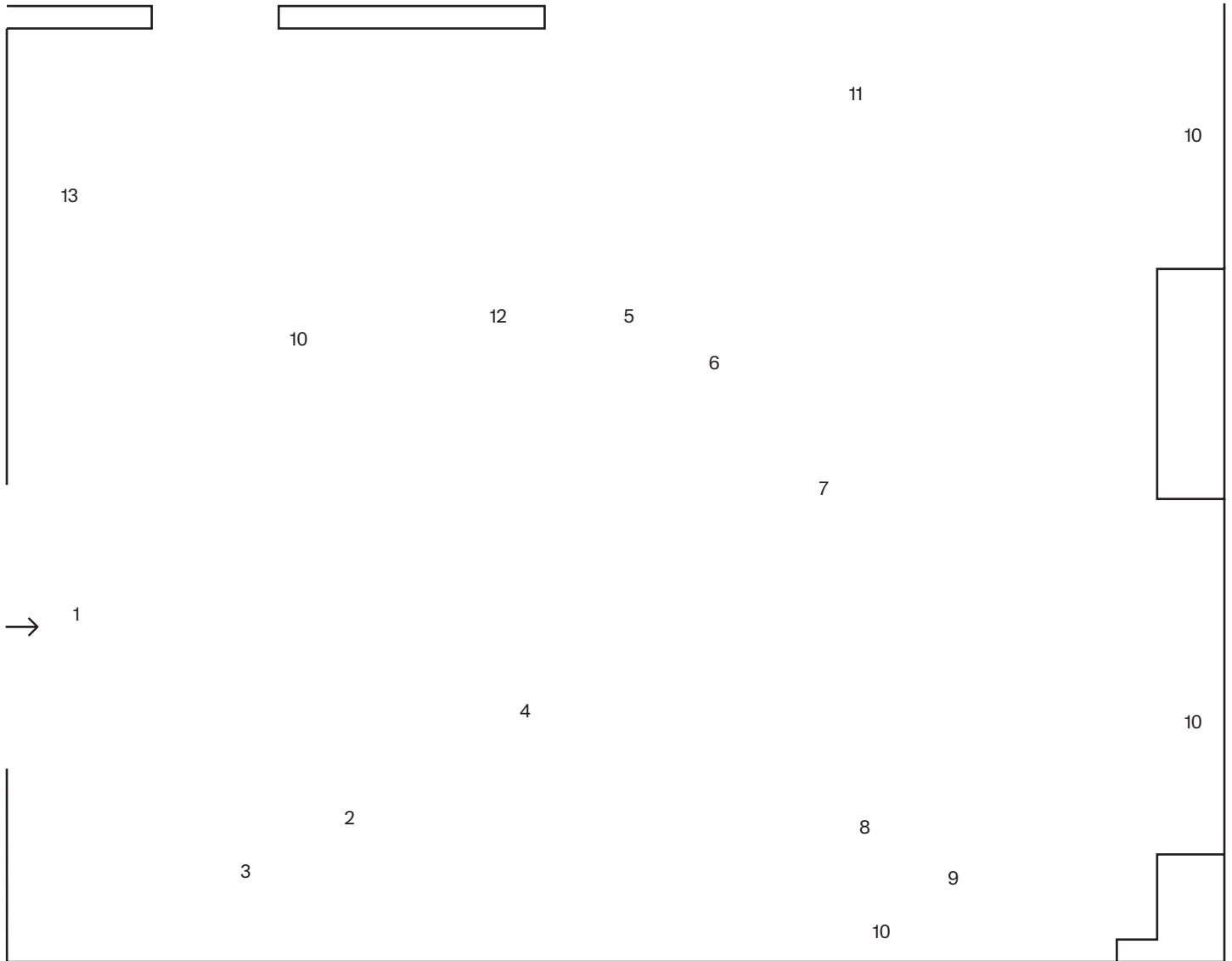
4 ‘Hustler’ is defined as a prostitute, a gambling shark or simply someone who ‘is active and energetic in business, a lively person’. (Merriam-Webster)

ready to perform their reading. And like the figures in the court cards, some queens in the paintings appear doubled in top & tail position with their upside-down selves floating alongside other apparitions. The paintings are translucent, using empty portions of the canvas to draw attention to their obverse. The androgyny between the sexes is reminiscent of opera's golden age, that realm where a star's longevity was still guaranteed by the *divadienst*—the diva worship of fans. In this parallel universe of total opera, Gloria Estefan's well-known contralto, or Britney—contralto-soprano—should, around about now, be approaching their absolute vocal apex—what we might call the *red giant phase* in terms of the life cycle of a star.

Should there not be a celebration of a star's laryngeal descent towards the lower frequencies as she matures? Some remember Eve's fall as the moment when she finally came into her own, her character becoming more tangible and real, as she finally struts her own weight in a true-grit showgirl *dernier cri*. Speaking of lower vocal registers brings me to the ultimate diva—Dietrich, whose Stygian notes made us gaze deeper into ourselves, beyond the realm of living and into the underworld. Dietrich is the most recognizable reference in Weise's pantheon, besides Madonna through her older, biblical namesake. Liz Taylor's Cléopatra bangs are only visceral references, abstracted from pop culture and fan-zines into dream-illustrations of the popular female imagination. Dietrich, embroiled in her *masc'uerade*, watches us through those crescent moonlit eyebrows and lids, whilst Jagger as *lord of the riots*, Prince in *shining armour*, and Bowie in his *thin white duke* period, tread in her shadow. They are like hungry canine inheritors to her throne, redesigning the styles of courtship. It was in *Morocco* (1930) that Dietrich famously delivered her trademark pansexual gusto only to follow Gary Cooper, her beloved foreign legionnaire, into the dunes in a pair of spiked heels. Here in the sand, she joins other lovesick women in pursuit of men in uniforms marching away. This surrealist, balletic dream sequence finale is at odds with the sex-defying 'supreme lover' role she commanded. But somehow the absurdity of spiked heels in sand says something about the human condition, and elevates her beyond its sphere to the heights of stardom. Complexity makes the diva, whose theater always lies before her, with or without a stage. The *divadienst*, that is you and I, secure milady's *rentrée*; however infrequent the occasion, the more devoted the worship, the more splendid will be this Tina Turner-like comeback, under Turner-esque skies, oh dear, it doesn't matter *which* Turner, as long as you turn *her*! She'll be back on that stage before you get the chance to say "Break a leg, darlin'!"

Daniel Vorthys, 2021

Atelier 4.1



- 1 *Phantasma*, 2021
Rötel, Make-up, Tusche, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, make-up, ink, Paverpol on canvas
- 2 *Gerettet mit weiblicher Hilfe*, 2021
Rötel, China Marker, Tusche, Make-up, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, China Marker, ink, make-up, Paverpol on canvas
- 3 *Blossom (Anaïs)*, 2021
Pigmente, Rötel, Pastellkreide, Öl, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / pigments, sanguine, pastels, oil, Paverpol on canvas
- 4 *Breakfast at Mary's*, 2021
Rötel, Tusche, Pastellkreide, Öl, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, ink, pastels, oil, Paverpol on canvas

- 5 *Driver's Seat*, 2021
Rötel, Pastellkreide, Ecoline, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, pastels, Ecoline, Paverpol on canvas
- 6 *Birth of an Icon*, 2021
Rötel, China Marker, Tusche, Öl, Pastellkreide, Make-up, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, China Marker, ink, oil pastel, make-up, Paverpol on canvas
- 7 *Membrane Dancer*, 2021
Rötel, Tusche, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, ink, Paverpol on canvas
- 8 *Cleo*, 2021
Rötel, Make-up, Tusche, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, make-up, ink, Paverpol on canvas

- 9 *Sisterwheel*, 2021
Rötel, Make-up, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, make-up, Paverpol on canvas
- 10 *Divadienst*, 2021
Gouache auf Glas und Wand / gouache on glass and wall
- 11 *Love come down*, 2021
Rötel, Make-up, Ecoline, Pigment, Pastellkreide, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, make-up, Ecoline, pigments, pastels, Paverpol on canvas
- 12 *Masquerade*, 2021
Rötel, Tusche, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / sanguine, ink, Paverpol on canvas
- 13 *Pyrexie*, 2021
Pigment, Pastellkreide, Paverpol auf Baumwolle / pigments, pastels, Paverpol on canvas