



# I'LL BE YOUR MIRROR

When it comes to mixing artistic reputation and nation-branding, Switzerland seems dependable and contemporary, while comfortably art-historical. But that's above ground. The underbelly, as seen in a new London show, is all darkness, dreams and absolute nonsense. We took a tour through a curator's hall of mirrors.

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With Art Basel weeks away, we're thinking in Swiss – as was curator (1) Gianni Jetzer (it's where he's from) – who has put together a new show called *Spiegelgasse* at Hauser & Wirth in London. The title comes from the celebrated street in Zürich's old town that was home to the Cabaret Voltaire, the birthplace of that odd-on-purpose art movement Dada. This narrow "Mirror Alley" was also where James Joyce wrote *Finnegan's Wake* (good nonsense) and where Lenin plotted the Bolshevik Revolution (bad nonsense). *Spiegelgasse* shows Swiss or Swiss-dwelling artists celebrating that rare thing: the Swiss sense of the strange, the surreal, the punk and the rebellious. Anarchy in the CH? You bet! Gianni leads the tour.

"Generally, to put a show together, I want to know as much as possible about the artworks and artists but also develop a gut-feeling. Because artworks have a face value that, if you can read it, really makes a difference. I see each artwork as a personality. Good curating is like making a seating plan for a meal – making sure the guests have something to say to each other but they're not the same. You don't want to speak to your identical twin but you want something in common. It is satisfying to make the connections.

So *Spiegelgasse* has this heritage as a producer of nonsense. It's a strong tradition in Switzerland. People think it's a safe haven and that the people are very rational and controlled. Good organisers; no bullshit. But this was the foil to trigger a lot of fantasy-driven art. Because *Spiegelgasse* means mirror-alley, I've tried to put together a hall of mirrors of different styles and generations here. I was interested to break the mould of ideas about Swissness.

Vivian Suter is an artist from Basel, who went off the art map when she moved to Guatemala (either something to do with her family or for love; if only we could plot the geography of love, huh?). She hung her canvases in the attic of her house there to dry them and so doing discovered a new way of displaying them. It's a totally non-academic way of showing work.

This show, to me, mirrors that. In (2) "Big Vase" by the duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss there is something about the nonchalance of the painting. Look at the size of it! It's a little bit about making fun of bourgeois culture – Fischli/Weiss

were part of a punk generation in Zürich in the late 1970s – and it's all about do-it-yourself, nonsense and humour.

Here are three paintings that I'd like to have talk to each other. This "Unmade Bed" is by Meret Oppenheim who was first the muse of several surrealists, among them Man Ray. A bed is a place where you sleep, dream and imagine; this idea of imagination is quite different to the rational brain. It's about the subconscious, symbolism and image-making.

Jill Mulleady's (3) "Prince S" is a strange one, she's part of this new figuration, a kind of feverish figuration, a twisted form of reality, as depicted in the artist's imagination. There's a figure reflected in a mirror smoking a joint but it's not the real reflection; it's as if the reflected figure is more real to us than the real one. The reflected one is holding our gaze. In the background there are these three figures and it's difficult to know if it's a dance or an orgy. Again, it's not perfect at all; it's imperfect and non-academic; and it's about the feeling that you develop looking at these bodies. A lot of people react strongly to this: they can't take it, it's too much.

This big tent sitting in the middle of the room is (4) "The Salmon-Coloured Boudoir" by Manon, a Swiss performance artist from the 1970s and 1980s who used photography to document her performances. She's an artist that works with her own persona and image; she turned into her own muse. She's the muse, the object and the subject all at once. The piece recreates her studio apartment in an attic in the old town of Zürich, near the *Spiegelgasse*. She lived like this. It contains all her dreams and her visions, and cat food for her pets.

Now comes a depiction of a woman by a male artist. This is (5) Andro Wekua from Georgia, raised in Switzerland since he was 16. He'll have a big show at the Kunsthalle in Zürich

during Art Basel. It's his wife. I really like the ethereal body. It seems to be in flow, immaterial. Maybe it depicts sleep or dreaming. It's very beautiful; a stunning painting.

And this washing machine? This is (6) "One More Carrot Before I Brush My Teeth" by Urs Fischer, an early piece from when he was still working with his hands, sculpting the skeleton himself and tinkering with this washing machine. Making a skeleton out of polystyrene? Come on, it's not easy! This is just a model but I imagine the real machine would vibrate, so it's maybe a sexy thing or maybe it's a massage. But it is also covered in dust so it may be that there is a darker meaning.

This Giacometti is a (7) portrait of a bust, not a real person. To me it looks like a monster. It reminds me of a zombie film, of B-movies or an extra-special sort of anatomy lesson.

I hope the idea of the mirror carries through. It sort of ends here with the third Urs Fischer work, (8) "The Art of Falling Apart". He was fascinated with early digitalisation. When they did the first computer animations in the early 1970s, the artists drew little triangles on everything and animated the triangles. Ed Catmull, who is now the head of Pixar, was one of the lead scientists who realised a very early animated hand. This is a sort of mirror – how the real gets transformed into digital information and vice versa. It's otherworldly too. It's a dream.

"*Spiegelgasse*", curated by Gianni Jetzer, runs until 28 July at Hauser & Wirth, London

