

## FROM THE PORTRAIT TO THE ICON - A DIFFERENT FACE

It's only a part of the picture that the viewer is offered to look at. The sujet is arranged as a surface extending to the edge of the painting and occupying the area. Instead of creating an artificial pose simulating naturalness, the artist imposes a particular point of view that gives the picture's sujet a new, decisive turning point. The picture's components on the available area are arranged in a way creating a continuum that results in the dissolution of its integrity and turns the components into partial objects. They are single parts pretending to form an integral whole - though representing an ensemble, an arrangement only.

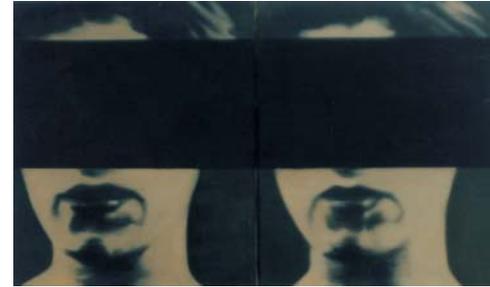
The viewer looks at faces that withhold from being identified by him. Their eyes are closed or hidden by means of a shade cast on them so as to shift the other parts of the face to the centre of attention. It's a common feature in many of Pavlik's pictures that a monochrome surface hides its objects in a way that sujet and surface change their places. In his architectural and landscape paintings the objects are partly even banished to the frame. Subject and theme, object and presentation are thus given a productive drive. The abstract surface invites the viewer to project ideas and interpretations, on the other hand refusing him to discover a final clue. However, in his newer "portraits" nose, lips and chin by means of the shade form new faces which are no longer dominated by the eyes. The viewer comes to realize the face as a projection area and isn't therefore forced but rather seduced to look at it from a different point of view.

This effect is even reinforced in Pavlik's large "rotating" paintings (or on the wall) where some of the faces reassemble to a whole. A net of formal relations draws the viewer's attention to minor elements that are supposed to be the dominating ones; the top and the bottom of the arrangement become obsolete, the faces' interrelations are more important than the single face, which - being looked at in detail - seems to open up abysses: Unless the viewer doesn't only want to make sure of his vis-à-vis, he won't be seeing anything but a picture of himself. - "Don't forget that you are selfcontagious. Don't let your "alter ego" predominate."<sup>1</sup> (H. Michaux) The other's face is a deceptive one: no face opens up without having previously put another below. The facial expression, if only "recognized" is rather quickly interpreted, but being "attentively watched"<sup>2</sup> with all its layers, ruptures and cracks presents itself in a torrent of fugitive gestures and words.

Pavlik's paintings are often patterned on photographs. In that

<sup>1</sup> Quotation from: P. Sloterdijk, Sphären I . Blasen, Kapitel 2: Zwischen Gesichtern. Frankfurt/Main 1998, S. 209.

<sup>2</sup> M. Imdahl, Ikonik. Bilder und ihre Anschauung, in: G. Boehm (Hrsg.), Was ist ein Bild? München 1994, S. 300f.



Judit (Doppelporträt) / Judit (double portrait), 1992, Sammlung / collection Menasse, Vienna



Ohne Titel / Untitled, 2001, Sammlung / collection Weiss, Vienna



Ohne Titel / Untitled, 1994,  
Sammlung / collection Piller, Vienna

way the artistic process further develops from an artificial picture that has only a loose connection to its object. As the artist chooses his pattern by coincidence, the context of the painted issue is completely broken up and reduced to an accidental coincidence. Pavlik's faces are portraits in the state of dissolution only, being loose pictures without any fixed point of reference, they tend to be "signs without denotation."<sup>3</sup> They are a kind of reference and act like icons without referring to the existing but to signs and a series of signs (programs) instead. Benefiting from the characteristics of photography, the artist transposes space to surface and displays the relation of light and shade in order to prevent the viewer from identifying the objects and provide their elements with an individual presence. Pavlik's pictures show individual characteristics without referring to a specific individual. They are portraits without subjects, untitled presentations of individuality.

"The face is politics"<sup>4</sup>, is subject of attribution and deduction/reckoning. To act like that, it has to be separated from the body. This statement is verified by the mask's role in primitive societies, where it stands for a certain social position, for "what makes a face a product of society and its history".<sup>5</sup> Wearing a face also means risking to lose it. The individual is given a face only by surrendering to the rules of society. The portrait highly depends on the portrayed person's importance, i.e. on the role the person plays in society. Only the socially acclaimed face is worth to be portrayed - a fact that is proven whenever talking of the faceless crush.

Pavlik's faces come out of the realm of the infamous people".<sup>6</sup> Unlike the portraits of the movie and music stars that in the limelight freeze to icons, his "icons" suspend the faces' codes. They lift the nocturnal individuals right out of their public non-existence and send them on a journey which is not a self-exploratory one. It is only in the movement of the reference - which conveys the sense from one meaning to another - that the individual manages to escape from the predominating economy, society and technology. With its subjectivity being taken away, the individual can't survive by its superelevation but only by living the life of a nomad. Inertia, vanity and bad metaphysics (i.e. the philosophical small change of the ego) are its bitter enemies. Being looked at in detail, even the individual disintegrates into a variety of individual layers interacting in a way that is rather strange and difficult to understand. The ego is multiple long before reaching the state of delusion. "I feel different than I felt when I had not felt so different."<sup>7</sup>  
(E. Jandl)

<sup>3</sup> Ch.W. Morris, Grundlagen der Zeichentheorie. Ästhetik und Zeichentheorie. Frankfurt/Main, Berlin, Wien 1979, S.103.

<sup>4</sup> G. Deleuze/F.Guattari, Tausend Plateaus. Hamburg 1991, S. 259.

<sup>5</sup> R. Barthes, Die helle Kammer. Bemerkungen zur Photographie. Frankfurt/Main 1989, S. 44.

<sup>6</sup> M. Foucault, Das Leben der infamen Menschen. Berlin 2001.

<sup>7</sup> E. Jandl, Peter und die Kuh. Neuwied/Rhein 1996.

Among all kind of paintings it is the portait that most strongly supports the mystification of presentation and imitation, thereby denying its own visibility, its own presence. Being a descendant of atavistic shrines, of the christian imago and the Renaissance ritratto, it complies with the function of individual remembrance/captivation, absolute presentation and social representation. But photography, the retreat of the religious conscience and the depreciation of the figurative, narrative arts question these three functions. The mass media finally created picture worlds that have even changed the picture's own character. Not only has the digital picture lost its originality and - in the same time - its cult status, the reference to its object has even been replaced by the overall simulation of reality.

The pictures seen on television and video camera screens are simulacra and as common place as striking. Only by outdoing themselves in their consumation of the same sujets, the viewers become individuals in the light of the screens and displays: "Turning the communicating individual somehow into both, an individual and a standardized being - in other words, making it uniform or fictional - communication continues to refer to individuals without integrating those operations that make every individual a unique and independently working/operating system of its own."<sup>8</sup> Like the homo economicus and the homo iuridicus selfdetermined mediaconsuming individual represents the fiction that keeps communication going. From the perspective of the media the individual represents something that mass media technology at a certain moment of time isn't able to tear to pieces and process them.

Similar to the process in which Pavlik transformes space into surface, he does with time and duration in his portraits. His pictures cut off the serial context of the digital sequences. They are "silent pictures", taking stolen time and restoring it to the viewer. The sitting and walking figures in his large-size paintings seem to exist in a kind of time-out, leaving behind the empty noise of the simulation. It is thus only consequent that in video works like *Two Portraits* (1999) or *Good Night Vienna* (2001) Pavlik has passed on to oppose the picture catapulting electronic devices with still images in which the superposition of surface and theme is set in the fields of the electronic media, a process which originally developed from the painting. They become integral parts of a process they aren't designed for: "to show that human imagination is unique, unreplaceable and can't be simulated."<sup>9</sup>

Alexander Schadt

<sup>8</sup> N. Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien*. Opladen 1996, S. 134.

<sup>9</sup> V. Flusser, *Medienkultur*. Frankfurt/Main 1997, S. 81/82ff.



Ohne Titel / Untitled, 2002, Vienna,  
Sammlung des Künstlers / Collection of the artist



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Es gibt nichts Geheimnisvolleres als das Schicksal eines Körpers.

E.M.Cioran