

DIRT PAINTINGS

I began working with dirt at the same time as I was making chromed objects: scatological, phallic tools that would reflect the users gaze whilst he/she was manipulating them. As I was working I began to observe the traces left by the passage of time in the dirt in my studio. To begin with I would use rubber stamps to make images in the dirt. Then I began to make stencils of Christ's loincloth from renaissance paintings, Dürer, Mantegna etc. at the moment of crucifixion that deliberately expose Christ's genitalia as an affirmation of his kinship with the human condition. The faint traces of the muted non-material, the dirt, echoed the restoration to visibility of a subject that had been repressed and censored for centuries. (cf. Leo Steinberg, *The sexuality of Christ in Renaissance painting and in Modern oblivion*)

The next series using dirt were images of a *curtain* in my grandmothers' cellar in Germany, they were made using silkscreen, varnish, and my own dirt to reveal the image on glass. During my whole childhood I thought that all our family secrets were kept behind this curtain which had come to represent the veil of the unspoken and the unsaid that had haunted our family since the war. In the chapter 'Making Silence talk', (in 'Essai sur la mémoire de la Shoah en Allemagne fédérale (1945-1990)'), Andrea Lauterberg links the 'distinguished silence' with the 'communicative silence' and talks about scraping the nightmares like dust from under the beds.

The series, 'the Romantic skies in my own dirt', (I also call them the *Himmels Körper* or Heavenly Bodies), has evolved from a night-time installation called 'Oh little star of Bethlehem' 1999. I parked the latest model Mercedes 500 in front of a ground floor gallery, Serge Aboukrat in Paris, with a street facing window, whilst images of dramatic sunsets and other cloud formations, strongly reminiscent of German romantic painting, were projected from the interior of the car through the star on the bonnet and onto the back wall of the gallery. The three-pointed star was thereby superimposed onto the romantic sky. A recording of the song 'Oh little star of Bethlehem' by the German psychedelic group CAN played in a loop on the radio whilst a chauffeur polished and caressed the car. The installation lasted one night.

Sometime later I decided to make these images into dust drawings, to pollute the originals, a marriage between the Faustian alchemical cloud and the German romantic cliché, fixing them somewhere between a stain and an image, a metaphor for the silence. They are 'compromised' images, where the positive and the negative are reduced to the same value, where visibility is achieved by the use of a non-material. Distant cousins of Fautrier's *Otages* from the war and Beuys' fat stains. There is a sense of disintegration, a floating between the recognisable and the unrecognisable, a contradiction like a material immateriality. Like other pieces I have made, eg. the Dürer pillows, they are attempts to resuscitate, to open up new spaces, and break out of the German historical impasse, given that all German culture, pre and post 1945, has in some way been polluted by the Nazi era.

The Dust Landscapes/Bastard paintings/Drunken paintings/Phantom paintings/Phoney paintings

This series is an exploration of German romantic landscape painting. These paintings are reworked, crossbred, overlaid and fused with other images and paintings. They are images of paintings hung on walls with their frames and shadows and appear to be suspended behind the glass and give the illusion of existing somewhere, this being a complete fiction.

Technical description for the making of a picture using my own dirt.

The photographic image is worked and reworked on the computer so as to find the point of equilibrium between visible and invisible for when the dirt is finally applied. The reworked image is then transferred to a silkscreen. The image is printed with transparent ultra-violet proof ink onto glass. At this point I am working blind, I know more by touching the test prints with my fingers than by looking at them. Once I have what appears to be a faultless print, I take dust I have gathered and create a cloud of the finest particles and let them slowly settle onto the image. I then blow across the image so as to reveal it.