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Time Slice: Eternal transience, transient eternity

'Time Slice' is the name Anne Hoenig has given to a series of portraits of women, comprising a total of 20 paintings. Within the series there is neither a dominant narrative, nor is there dramatic development or a 'correct' sequence. The individual pictures are not scattered fragments that outline a female character when viewed together; instead they are independent, self-sufficient snapshots. Comparable with the flash of a camera that makes its surroundings visible briefly and partially in single excerpts from the darkness, the pictures of Time Slice are also short takes of a person who remains mysterious overall. Hoenig shows her model, often truncated by the edge of the picture, in private situations. The narrative potential, thereby created, paradoxically results from absence. For it is exactly the lack of a clear intention that seduces the viewer into making the glimpse into the world of the pictures' female protagonist an occasion for creating possible stories.

Projected onto a timeline, the fragmentary flash-illumination of a space and the isolation of individual pictures correspond to the working methods of our visual memory. What people can still access from past experiences is predominantly stored in the form of images: pictures that for some hardly identifiable reason made a special impression, unforgettable and burnt into memory, as it were. The scenes in Hoenig's paintings are reminiscent of, or trace, such moments. They are pictorial formulations of an individual concern. The structure of the human power of imagination thereby plays a decidedly important role. Memory, as is well known, leaves a lot out and sometimes even makes additions, embellishing a real situation with various stories and impressions and thereby influencing itself, until finally the corresponding images created in the imagination no longer correspond to reality at all. They are condensed, timeless, and emotionally loaded. The universality of visual memory, on the one hand, simultaneously corresponds to a great indistinctness on the other. The moments found to be important may well appear in memory as though under a magnifying glass, but secondary aspects become peculiarly indistinct. In pictures such as Touch, Water or View, Hoenig abstains almost entirely from using colour, and in this way reproduces this peculiar feeling. If a gesture is prominent, then colour plays a subordinate role. Thus, in memory mode, that means: no role.

However, in most of the paintings of 'Time Slice', colour is central. Based on studies of paintings from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Hoenig uses an extremely laborious, multi-layered painting technique, which due to the many layers of paint often takes several months to create a particular, desired colour. This results in radiant, opulent colours that give the paintings something full-bodied; comparable to a big mouthful of a great red wine. The model's magnificent head of curls becomes even more opulent and the unruly brushwork gives it additional distinction as a memorable sensation; or perhaps the drape of a bedsheet is so prominently set in the scene that it takes up almost the entire picture plane.The handling of the skin is also interesting in this context; in some places it is full and taut, while in others it

seems wrinkled and sinewy due to the extreme lighting. In addition to some areas of skin, the powerful, mannered hands are sometimes particularly reminiscent of Lucian Freud. He went so far in letting the skin dissolve in a painterly tapestry of flecks, that suddenly wounds, scars and cuts appeared, consequently shifting mannered into mistreated. Hoenig similarly uses painterly means for accentuation, but not in regard to the personality traits of her female protagonists, rather to set the portrayed scene into vacillation, a type of suspended state between reality and imagination.The idiosyncratic incompleteness which gives the viewer great scope for interpretation is as much in the individual paintings as in the entire series. Simply the fact that the iconographic programmes are relatively simple and are concentrated completely on the female protagonist makes this surprising. Within the picture she usually remains by herself, whereby it is surprising that the viewer's witnessing of the intimate moments is sufficient for him to construe at least himself as an additional protagonist of the painting. A male role additionally appears now and again. However, he never stands in the focus and is simply implied: as a half-profile in 'Touch' or 'Window', as hands in 'Four Hands' or 'Velvet Gloves', and even reduced to a pair of men's shoes in 'Black Shoes'. 'Velvet Gloves' shows the ambivalence this inspires in the narrative content in a particularly impressive manner. Here, the male hands appear raised in a gesture of conciliatory defence, while at the same time the shadows they cast attempt to touch the woman's left thigh.Almost half of the Time Slice paintings show the woman lightly clad. These paintings evoke memories of Tamara de Lempicka, who portrayed her subjects with a mixture of lasciviousness and melancholy. A significant difference thereby is that Lempicka's paintings were of female nudes, in which a voyeuristic male character is confronted with self-confident female exhibitionism. Interestingly, Hoenig's paintings can never be attributed to the genre of nudes, not even when the feminine charms directly encounter a male counterpart, such as in Velvet Gloves or, even more clearly, in Window. Even in the paintings in which nudity plays a role, it is not display that is important, but posture, gesture, and the narrative potential thereby inspired.Instead of locating Window within the tradition of depictions of the nude from behind, it is more instructive, with reference to a painting such as 'Red Room', to consider the art-historical context of such depictions. It traditionally required a narrative framework; whether as a frivolous scene in which several assistants had to use force to lace up a corset, or as a metaphysical iconographic programme as with Caspar David Friedrich. A further possibility was the nude depiction in which the model's face appeared either in profile, (through an occasional acrobatic turn of the head) or in a mirror. Only in 1808 did Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres allow his 'The Valpinçon Bather' to avert her face completely from the viewer for the first time. In Gerhard Richter's 'Betty' from 1988, clearly following Ingres, this gesture appeared again, but without the erotic charge, since Richter's female protagonist is completely clothed. Interestingly, Betty's posture, along with the triangle of naked skin formed between cheek, neck and throat, is sufficient to give the picture a graceful touch, which while perhaps not erotic is at least sensual. In contrast to this tradition of the averted face, as outlined, in 'Red Room' one cannot speak of sexual enticement. On the contrary, the posture with the back leaning slightly forward and hands clasped below the breasts suggests refusal. A narrative framework is also missing. There is absolutely no hint of a possible reason to explain how and why the woman could have ended up in this situation. In regards to motif, composition and gesture,

there certainly are also art-historical references. However, these are always isolated moments, combined in such a manner that they cannot be attributed to any existing genre. Hoenig condenses the complex and ambivalent depiction of a situation by precisely formulating individual suggestive gestures into pictures, which give the impression of being visual flashbacks to a narrative that cannot be reconstructed. The focus on individual gestures, the intermittent excessive use or omission of paint and the dramatic painting detail, are all strategies which reproduce the mode of the visual powers of recollection. The care taken in the process of pictorial composition, blending out details considered unimportant while simultaneously dramatizing some particular aspects, allows one to suspect that the pictures are far more than excerpts of reality, or the result of many hours of model sittings. In fact, only innumerable sketches and photographs and a further, independently-drafted interior or background make possible the condensation, as is created in the paintings, into an impression of an absolute moment. It is no accident that this strategy, in turn, bears the mark of having been staged. This is also the method by which the picture production machine of the human power of imagination generates memories.Well-formulated pictures that can access the power of memory are only possible in a form of expression that dramatizes; this is known in the theatre business and in the film industry. In the 1980s, Anne Hoenig studied at the American Film Institute. In the 1990s, among other things, she painted historical scenes and paintings as props for Hollywood films. Perhaps this closeness to the film industry explains her sense for gestural dramaturgy and iconography, for the precise modeling of a character through clothing and pose, as well as her unmistakable flair for expression and suggestion. In film, depicting content by using precise transcription into minimal and quickly understandable, visual symbols plays an important role. In the film still, film's 'timeless' correlation, an almost endlessly shorter, more fleeting moment of a feeling that is, simultaneously, the condensed version of a longer narrative, is finally captured.With minimal arrangement, Anne Hoenig stages momentary glimpses of intense, hardly-preservable moments. In a subtle manner, the viewer is integrated into a private world, in which he becomes a witness to possible narratives, of which, however, he himself is the author. This empathetic quality of her paintings is the result of a careful process of pictorial composition, which leaves nothing to chance. This holds true for the painting detail in 'Corset' and the colouration in 'Pillow'; for the lighting in 'Velvet Gloves' and the facial expression in 'Street Lamp'; for the condition of the hairdo in 'Beach' and, finally, also for the angle between two splayed fingers in 'Blue Shift'.