

# TWOFOLDNESS/THREEFOLDNESS: MARC LÜDERS' *PHOTOPICTUREN*

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Marc Lüders (b.1963) is an artist who paints directly onto photographs. Unlike his fellow countryman Gerhard Richter (b.1932), who smears paint on his “overpainted photographs”, Lüders paints *figuratively* on the photographic print.<sup>1</sup> Whilst painting onto a photograph sits within a mixed-media tradition<sup>2</sup> Lüders’ conjoining of photography with *figurative* painting moves toward creating pictures that become synthesised, unified, wholes. These pictures tend to focus on the lone figure—woman, man, or object (Fig.9.1-9.3)—which raises questions around existential isolation and the position of “self” in the world, and would make an interesting study in its own right. However, in this essay I aim to look at how Lüders’ painting onto photographs activates the viewing experience when looking at these works specifically, and such figuratively overpainted pictures more generally.

By bringing painting and photography together, with their differing material qualities, modes of production and histories, Lüders demonstrates his concern with testing the positions of both mediums in this conjoined relationship. And to reinforce this sense of connectedness, Lüders refers to these works as “*Photopicturen*”; with him coining the term “*Picturen*” from a combination of German, Latin and Italian words which together

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<sup>1</sup> Richter’s “overpainted photographs” initially draw explicit attention to the *physical* differences between paint and photograph; however this connection also implicitly references the differing natures of the mediums; mediation/mechanisation; opacity/“transparency”; abstraction/figuration and so on. See: Gerhard Richter et al., *Gerhard Richter: overpainted photographs* (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Paint, and other “traditional” media worked over the photograph, has been an aspect of practice of numerous artists since the early twentieth century, although it is possibly Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) who produced the first such work in *Pharmacie* (1914) with its dots of coloured paint applied to a photographic reproduction. Duchamp extended over-painting onto a photograph with *Nude Descending A Staircase No. 3* (1916).

attempt to denote “picture”, “painting” and the “act of painting” in one.<sup>3</sup> In coupling this to “photo”, Lüders aims to articulate both a synthesis of these mediums *and* the nature of their production. Having said that, I believe Lüders’ work fits within that of a painting practice: he thinks as a painter when conceiving photographs to take, which can be then painted onto. Whilst there is oscillation of thought and action between painter and photographer in the creation of the work, it is the centrality of painting in this activity that foregrounds these pictures as paintings.<sup>4</sup>



Fig.9.1. Marc Lüders, *Figur 814-12-2*, 2016, oil on cibachrome, 85 x 57 cm. © Marc Lüders

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<sup>3</sup> The English translation of “*Photopicturen*” would seem to be “photopicture” which does not quite capture the essence of the meaning. In an email to the author (16 December, 2017), Lüders explains: “The word ‘Photopicturen’ is a construction of Latin, Italian and German. The word ‘pictura’ is Latin and means picture. And the Italian words ‘la pittura’ (...from [the] Latin ‘pictura’) means: ‘the painting’. And ‘pitturare’ (Italian) means ‘to paint’ (English). And the last two letters in ‘Photopicturen’ [...en] is the German way of building the plural (more than one)”.

<sup>4</sup> Lüders began his artistic practice as a painter.



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Fig.9.2. Marc Lüders, *Figur 873-6-1*, 2017, oil on A1A print, 40 x 23 cm. © Marc Lüders



Fig.9.3. Marc Lüders, *Objekt 465-3-6*, 2005, oil on Cibachrome print, 17.5 x 12.5 cm. © Marc Lüders

Lüders creates a double narrative in these works by bringing a single painted object from one world into another (photographic) one: there is the narrative taking place in the content of the picture, with another taking place between the collision of distinct mediums.<sup>5</sup> Because of this the viewer is required to interpret both the given scene in the picture and, simultaneously, the interplay of painting and photography. This creates conceptual challenges as to what is being seen in the work, and attempting to disentangle these may reveal what is happening in relation to the perception of these pictures. A study of some of Lüders' artworks can shed light on how we look at pictures generally and, more specifically, with regard to how we engage in seeing and perceiving between the surface of pictures and the content of the image held within. Further to this, by bringing painting and photography together in the same picture, Lüders' provides the opportunity for an analysis of the differences between perceiving the painted image and perceiving the photographic image, separately and in combination.

As a means of unravelling some of the complexities of such viewing it is useful to apply Richard Wollheim's (1923-2003) "twofold" theory of perception in relation to viewing pictures.<sup>6</sup> Consequently this essay will take Wollheim's theory and apply this to two types of Lüders' pictures: his *Figur* works (which are more instantly and recognisably figurative in their use of the human figure set within an identifiable environment) and his *Objekt* pictures (seemingly more abstract works which create different challenges to the viewing experience).

## TwoFoldness/ThreeFoldness

Wollheim's theory of "seeing-in" posits that looking at representations, such as paintings, involves a twofold visual experience; between seeing and perceiving the marked surface of the picture, which he terms "configurational", and seeing and perceiving the depicted objects in this physical dimension, which he terms the

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<sup>5</sup> Lüders tends to place single figures only into the works as he feels this enhances the sense of existential isolation in them. This singularity also more forcibly draws attention to the distinctions between the singular mediums of painting and photography. Related to the author in a *Facetime* interview, November 14, 2017, and through an email exchange, January 4, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> See: Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an art: with 388 illustrations, 30 in colour* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

“recognitional”.<sup>7</sup> Wollheim originally conceived this as two simultaneous perceptions, but later revised this as being a single experience with two aspects, which he termed “twofoldness”.<sup>8</sup> According to Wollheim this twofold experience of seeing-in the picture is a phenomenologically unique type of seeing that is irreducible and differentiated from what we might term the “ordinary” seeing of objects in everyday life. A number of theorists have challenged, or expanded upon, Wollheim’s theory by noting there are added layers of complexity to the viewing and perception of pictures.<sup>9</sup> For example, Regina-Nino Kurg argues that seeing-in comprises a “threefold” experience.<sup>10</sup>

Wollheim states that pictures comprise either representations of “*particular objects-or-events*”, for instance where the object represents a *particular* person or “*objects-or-events that are merely of some particular kind*”, for instance where the object represents *a* person. He cites Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’ (1780-1867) *Madame Moitessier* (1851) (Fig.9.4) as an example of depicting a “particular object” and Edouard Manet’s (1832-1883) *La Prune (The Plum, also known as Plum Brandy)* (c.1877) (Fig.9.5) as an example of the depiction of an “object of a particular kind”.<sup>11</sup> For Wollheim, regardless of the status of the object, seeing-in is still a twofold experience between the marked surface and the object represented in the picture.

Kurg extends Wollheim’s concept by drawing on Edmund Husserl’s theory of “image consciousness” which claims seeing-in to be a threefold experience.<sup>12</sup> According to Kurg this is due to the relationship

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Wollheim, “On Pictorial Representation”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Summer, 1998): 221. See, also: Wollheim, *Painting as an art: with 388 illustrations, 30 in colour*, 46-75, and Richard Wollheim, “Seeing-As, Seeing-In, and Pictorial representation”, in *Art and its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 205-226.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See: Kendal Walton, Michael Newall, Edward Winters, Jerrold Levinson, Susan Feagin, et al.

<sup>10</sup> Regina-Nino Kurg, “Seeing-in as Three-Fold Experience”, *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 11, no. 1 (2014), 18-26.

<sup>11</sup> Wollheim, *Painting as an art: with 388 illustrations, 30 in colour*, 67-69.

<sup>12</sup> See: Edmund Husserl and John B. Brough, *Collected works: Volume XI, Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 2005).

of “configuration” (the physical surface dimension of the picture), “representation” (the representing object held in the surface of the picture) and “figuration” (the represented subject of the object).<sup>13</sup>



Fig.9.4. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Madame Moitessier*; 1851, oil on canvas, 147 x 100 cm. Photo and © National Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig.9.5. Edouard Manet, *La Prune*, c.1877, oil on canvas, 74 x 50 cm. Photo and © National Gallery of Art, Washington

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<sup>13</sup> Kurg, “Seeing-in as Three-Fold Experience”, 18-26.

This “threefoldness” would seem to apply to *Madame Moitessier*, given the viewer sees a painting of the represented subject who lived outside the painting’s frame, yet whether there is actual *perception* of the subject of the painting remains debatable. Kendall Walton claims the viewer does not actually perceive the subject of the picture (and here “picture” refers to painting), but that s/he *imagines* perceiving the subject. That “[...] on viewing a picture of a fire engine, for instance, one imagines one’s actual perceiving of the picture to be a perceiving of a fire engine”.<sup>14</sup> As this second stage involves imagination and not perception, Walton’s position would still appear to remain anchored to a twofold experience of perception.

In photographs the object/subject distinction appears more emphatic and tangible than in paintings, given the object in the photograph is a trace off the real (subject) that sits outside the picture. In a black-and-white photograph of a child for example, the representing object deviates from the real being in many respects; it is composed of black, grey and white tones, it is a particular size, it is static and so on. Nevertheless the represented subject of the picture is a specific person that sits outside of the picture. Therefore, according to Kurg, perceiving the child as subject in the picture involves a third fold of the perceptual experience. It can be understood from this that all photographs involve a threefold perception of viewing, as the representing objects must also always hold the represented subject, as photographs must always be of *something*. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) saw that what appears to be three stages of perception of viewing a photograph happens simultaneously and instantly. He noted that if he were suddenly presented with a photograph of “Pierre”, “the case is functionally the same as when an image appears in my consciousness suddenly and without being willed”.<sup>15</sup>

At most one can suppose, in the first case, a slight lag between the presentation of the photograph and the apprehension of it as an image. We can imagine three successive stages of apprehension: photo, photo of a man standing on steps, photo of Pierre. But it also happens that the three stages occur so closely to one another as to make just one; it happens that the photo does not function as an object but gives itself immediately as an image.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kendall Walton, “Depiction, Perception, and Imagination: Responses to Richard Wollheim”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The imaginary: a phenomenological psychology of the imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

However it has been demonstrated that such “imaging” from photographs is not innate but the “reading” of the photographic image has to be learnt. As David Lewis-Williams notes, the anthropologist Anthony Forge discovered that the Abelam of New Guinea, who would create non-representational paintings, had difficulty “seeing” photographs:

If they were shown a photograph of a person standing rigidly face on, they could appreciate what was shown. But if the photograph showed the person in action or in any other pose than looking directly at the camera, they were at a loss. Sometimes Forge had to draw a thick line around the person in a photograph so that people could retain their ‘seeing’ of him or her. This is not to say that the Abelam are inherently incapable of understanding photographs. Forge managed to teach some Abelam boys to understand the conventions of photographs in a few hours, but up until his tuition, ‘seeing’ photographs was not one of their skills.<sup>17</sup>

Once learnt, however, the perceiving of the subject in the photograph does appear to have immediacy due to the indexical nature of the medium. This cannot be the case for paintings, as a painting is mediated by the artist and does not give immediate and actual connection to the subject itself.<sup>18</sup> Therefore a key difference between photographs and paintings is that whilst photographs *must always* be of the represented subject that sits outside of the photograph, paintings *may (Moitessier)* or *may not (La Prune)* be. Of course, for both paintings and photographs the viewer does not “see” the representing object, but sees shapes, tones and colours that are then *perceived* as the representing object. Ernst H. Gombrich (1909-2001), who believed that in viewing pictures the viewer moves back and forth between seeing the surface and seeing the representation held within, takes a similar position to Walton and the use of imagination in the viewing process.<sup>19</sup> For Gombrich the viewer has to summon memory that has to be projected onto the paint marks on the surface of the picture:

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<sup>17</sup> David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 183.

<sup>18</sup> For Wollheim the artist (painter) has an intention to set a standard of correctness for seeing the representation in the work. The painter aims at this through the mediation of the medium. Wollheim recognises that the mechanical process of photography, which always removes itself from the artist, means the photograph must slightly evade this attempt at absolute intention. Wollheim, *Art and its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*, 207-208.

<sup>19</sup> Wollheim overturned Gombrich’s theory that in looking at pictures the viewer moves back and forth between seeing the surface and seeing the representation held within. Gombrich had propounded this in (what became seen as his incorrect) “duck/rabbit” analogy. See: Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, 46-47.

The image, it might be said, has no firm anchorage left on the canvas...it is only 'conjured up' in our minds. The willing beholder responds to the artist's suggestion because he enjoys the transformation that occurs in front of his eyes.<sup>20</sup>

For Walton, perceiving the subject in a photograph differs to that of imagining perceiving the subject of a painting. With regard to photographs, he notes that we are in direct contact with the objects/subjects in the picture and, because of this, we directly perceive them: "a mechanical connection with something, like that of photography, counts as contact, whereas a humanly mediated one, like that of painting, does not"<sup>21</sup> And Wollheim himself sees there are differences between perceiving objects in a painting and objects in a photograph. He notes that a twin might stand in for its sibling in a painted portrait, but if the twin stood in for its sibling in a photograph it would be a photograph of the twin, not the sibling.

What or whom we correctly see when we look at a photograph is in large part a matter of who or what engaged in the right way with the causal processes realised by the camera, and it is absolutely of a piece with this that the sitter/model distinction, which holds for paintings, does not hold for photographs.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that there are different perceptual experiences when viewing photographic subjects and painted subjects: the former involving direct perceptual access to the subject and the latter, even when of "a particular object", possibly involving imagination or memory. Applying these concepts to Lüders' work may help unravel some of the complexities of his pictures, providing insights into their construction and how they are viewed.

### **“Figur”**

An early work by Lüders, *0-93-31*, (1993) (Fig.9.6) is a small, slightly out of focus colour photograph of a street scene with parked cars and lorries behind which looms a building, onto which a loose smudge of black oil paint (flecked with a little white) has been daubed. The paint, which is

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<sup>20</sup> Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich, *Art and illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation* (London: Phaidon, 2014), 169.

<sup>21</sup> Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism", *Critical Inquiry* 11, (1984): 246-277.

<sup>22</sup> Wollheim, *Art and its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*, 208.

almost a smear, appears unrefined in its rendering yet is instantly recognisable as a human figure. To the right of this, a single dragged brush mark of the same paint is, in the context of the work, “readable” as a street lamp. On closer inspection the paint that constitutes the figure can be seen to consist of at least two marks, the larger of which denotes the body and possibly legs, the smaller being a dab that reads as the head.<sup>23</sup> Lüders makes no attempt at any type of naturalism in the execution of this figure, which becomes a type of semiotic graphic symbol: a simple code for “human”. It demonstrates that even the most reduced paint marks, when shaped to a minimal degree within the context of the photographic image, become figurative and perceived as an object of a particular kind. Meanwhile all the objects in the photograph are particular objects as these exist (or existed) as specific and real entities—car, lorry, building—outside of the image.

The conjoining of the simplest paint mark and photograph immediately brings to the fore the perceptual challenges of viewing such a combination of distinct mediums: that is between the painted objects of a particular kind and the photographed particular objects. The painted element is so simplistically laid down that, even though it is instantly recognisable as human, (albeit not gender specific), it does not sit within the photograph. Consequently the viewer is always conscious of the materiality of the paint lying on the surface of the print and how its un-naturalistic representational qualities are divorced from the naturalism of the photograph. But beyond this, the viewer is also conscious that Lüders has made these marks on the photograph. When the painted object is looked at directly, it appears to hover over the photographic scene, and the viewer becomes engaged in “moving” back and forth between paint and photograph, as Gombrich describes. This instantly becomes an engaged and dynamic viewing experience. It raises the question of whether there can be a twofold visual experience when seeing the painting, and a threefold one when looking at the photograph; whether this is enmeshed within a threefold experience or whether it brings about a further perceptual “fold” of viewing.

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<sup>23</sup> Given the looseness of the brushwork these marks are open to degrees of interpretation and will be viewed differently by different viewers. It would be useful to apply Gestalt principles of perception—“Figure/Ground”; Pragnanz law; “Closure”, and the law of “Common Fate”—to these works. See (for example): Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt psychology* (IT, FR, UK: Mimesis International, 2014).





Fig.9.6. Marc Lüders, *0-93-31*, 1993, oil on C-type print, 13 x 9cm. © Marc Lüders

Because the viewer needs to consciously look from painting to photograph in order to engage with one and, then, the other, a single phenomenological experience of seeing-in the picture is challenged. Given the fracture between painted and photographed elements, physically

standing back from this small picture does not enable seeing a unified whole to any great degree. Consequently a single experience of seeing-in the picture continues to be compromised. Thus, from his earliest *Photopicturen*, Lüders' combination of painting and photography in a single picture forces the viewer to move from the painted surface of the work to the representing objects within, and back again, in a never-ending cycle. From this, s/he is immediately conscious of seeing the painted component as a mediated picture, whilst seeing the photograph involves perceiving more directly the objects in the picture. Internalising this difference creates a self-consciousness of engaging *in* what might be called this "seeing-activity".

*0-93-31* is one of a set of images with figures "simplistically painted" onto street scenes. When seen in relation to its partner artworks, all containing single painted forms in otherwise uninhabited street scenes, the painted mark in this work becomes even more recognisably human. (Fig. 9.7) This demonstrates that any series of two-dimensional visual works will be read and understood in relation to one another, whilst their individuality and difference is simultaneously reinforced.



Fig.9.7. Marc Lüders, *0-93-1*, 1993, oil on C-type print, 9 x 13cm. © Marc Lüders

The painted figure in *0-93-11* (1993) (Fig.9.8) is more naturalistically modelled than that in *0-93-31*, with the lighter tones on the left of it signifying that sunlight falls from the upper left, in keeping with the light falling across the photographic scene. To reinforce this sense of light affecting the painted form, Lüders paints in its shadow to the right, with the highlighted left side of the head echoing the sun-lit upper-edge of the van closest to the picture's edge. In addition to this modulation of light, the

proportion of this figure relative to the photographed vehicles more securely anchors it “into” the scene. And though this is painted monochromatically, in contrast to the colour of the photograph there is, nevertheless, the beginning of a unification between painting and photograph in the viewing experience.



Fig.9.8. Marc Lüdgers, *0-93-11*, 1993, oil on C-type print, 9 x 13cm. © Marc Lüdgers

Lüdgers secures this unification more thoroughly in his later *Figur* works (2004-2018) (Fig.9.9, Fig.9.10). The figures painted onto/“into” these photographic landscapes are now more distinctly recognisable, not only as human, or even male or female, but as particular individuals. The more detailed rendering of the form offers a sense that these people have lives outside of the frame. This is reinforced by their being positioned within, and anchored to, the photograph and its set of particular objects that also exist beyond the picture. The painting of these men and women in their isolated absorption, out of time and place, brings a psychological dimension to the work. And this absorption, this freezing in time is reinforced by, and reinforces the viewer’s sense of, the process of painting as a temporal activity. In order to achieve the dislocation between subject and environment in the first instance, Lüdgers photographs these people out on the street, waiting at bus stops and traffic intersections, crossing busy

roads. They are “captured” unaware,<sup>24</sup> absorbed in their thoughts, present yet absent. When placed into what is, for them, an alien environment their displacement becomes all the more heightened. This “absent presence” has, in fact, a triple aspect: the captured moment in itself where the individual is absorbed; the displacing of this absorption within another context which heightens the sense of dislocation; the deployment of painting in its medium-specific difference to photography through which the individual is realised within the photographic context. The “natures” of painting and photography are thrown into stark contrast through this connection, where the viewer finds “opacity”/“transparency”, “slowness”/“immediacy”, “present”/“past”, “subjectivity”/“objectivity”, “mediated”/“unmediated”, “authorial voice”/“mechanisation”—all of which serve to reinforce the visual similarities, yet ontological differences, between these mediums.

In order to paint his photographed people into the photographic landscape, Lüders projects the digital snapshot of the subject via data projector onto the digital (colour) or analogue (black-and-white) photographic print. He then paints “under” this projection directly onto the photograph. At the point of projection, the photograph of the person merges with the photograph of the environment he or she is placed in; person and environment are both particular objects and hold the represented subject as situated outside the picture, and are conjoined in this respect. For instance, the original photograph of the man in *Figur 843-5-1* (2016) (Plate XV) must have presented a particular object in that he existed outside of the photograph. If Lüders were simply to *Photoshop* the figure into the photographic surrounding at this point, it would retain its nature as represented subject within the represented subjects of the photographic environment. There would be the temporal and spatial shift between the photographed figure being moved from its original environment into a new one; yet there would also be a seamlessness in the digital collaging as the medium merged with itself. Such a digitally-merged image would, in fact, become “analogue” whereas the combination of paint sitting on top of the photograph

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<sup>24</sup> Here, photographic “capture” or “taking” is realised in Lüders’ removing these people from their environment to place elsewhere.



Fig.9.9. Marc Lüders, *Figur 98-36-6*, 2018, oil on silver gelatin print, 93 x 60 cm. © Marc Lüders



Fig.9.10. Marc Lüders, *Figur 98-36-5*, 2018, oil on silver gelatin print, 93 x 60 cm. © Marc Lüders

makes these works distinctly “digital”.<sup>25</sup>

But Lüders is intent on exploring the “differance” when paint is brought to photograph.<sup>26</sup> As he over-paints the form of this man in broad painterly strokes, the figure moves from being a particular object towards being an object of a particular kind. It moves from an image of a specific individual (who exists outside of the photograph) to a depiction of “man”—a universal type—who only exists “within” the picture. It moves from having a representing object/represented subject relation to being representing object only. The broad painterly quality of the depicted man is critical in this transformation, not only in that it reinforces the nature of the medium in its physicality and its attendant artistic activity, but also that this “looseness” moves away from depictive specificity.

Therefore, for a painting to be understood in terms of particular object that has a representing subject, a degree of fidelity to the original is required. It can be seen that this would be the case for Photorealist paintings, but Lüders is not painting a “photographic” portrait. He is representing a subject that stands for a universal type: an object of a particular kind. This resistance to painting in a photorealistic style not only denies a fuller integration of the central subject into the photographic scene, but also positions the figure within the classification of “universal type”.

Lüders’ projection of the image onto the surface of the print brings to mind Johannes Vermeer’s (1632-1675), and others’, possible use of the camera obscura as an aid to creating paintings.<sup>27</sup> The same type of discrete brush marks that falls into delineated zones on the picture surface are evident in both artists’ work, albeit that Lüders’ are far broader and Vermeer’s are more refined and blended. (Fig.9.11) That Vermeer’s representing objects are objects of a particular kind is beyond doubt given these are not specific portraits. With Lüders’ work however, because of the

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<sup>25</sup> “Analogue” meaning continuous and seamless and “digital” meaning discrete and separate.

<sup>26</sup> See Jaques Derrida on “Differance” in *Of Grammatology*: Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, and Judith Butler, *Of grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 49.

See also the translator’s introduction in *Dissemination*, wherein it is noted “differance” means to both differ *and* defer and that this “inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present”: Jacques Derrida and Barbara Johnson, *Dissemination*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), ix.

<sup>27</sup> The debate as whether Vermeer actually used a camera obscura in the creation of his paintings continues. For insights into this and other artists’ use of such a device, as well as other optical aides, see: Wolfgang Lefèvre, *Inside the camera obscura: optics and art under the spell of the projected image* (Berlin: Max-Planck-Institute für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 2007).

figures' photographic qualities, there is a clearer sense of them transforming from represented subject to a representing object of a particular kind. In *Figur 843-5-1* it is the seemingly specific person that appears as though it should exist outside of the picture (but can only exist within it) which gives this work, and all the related works, its peculiar force.



Fig.9.11. Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman Standing at a Virginal*, 1670-1672, oil on canvas, 52 x 45 cm. Photo and © The National Gallery, London

## “Objekt”

Running throughout Lüders' work is the theme of the unidentified “object”, which either flies through or hovers in the air, or sits motionless on the ground of the picture. As with Lüders' other works, these objects are presented as lone bodies and the viewer is offered no clue as to their meaning or why they are in a particular point in space at a particular moment in time. The viewer reads this painted mark as the formation of an object that has a specific if unidentifiable materiality, and which makes these objects of a particular kind. As with the *Figur* pictures, the



photographed environment these bodies sit within are both representing objects and represented subjects because these are photographs of actual places that exist outside of the image. The painted object in the *Objekt* works is solely a representing object that does not hold a subject outside of the picture and, in this respect, they are similar to the earlier *Figur* works, where the painted figure is a representing object only. Unlike the early *Figur* works however, where the figure is read as a kind of token—a semiotic code for “human”—the forms in the *Objekt* works appear more tangible and definable in a real-world sense. That it is impossible to understand what these forms are, despite their tangible presence, adds to the visual and conceptual tension of the works.

Lüders’ sensitive response to the light in the photograph, from which he modulates the painting of light “striking” the objects, reinforces the viewer’s sense of these as physical three-dimensional bodies in real space. The objects are affected by light from above, and appear to reflect or absorb this as either polished metallic surfaces or dense roughened material (such as wood or stone) might; their inherent solidity becoming fixed within the physical space of the photograph through their “casting” a “shadow”. Here, Lüders’ self-referential joke of integrating the object into the surroundings becomes a type of *trompe l’oeil*,<sup>28</sup> that brings yet further challenges to the viewing experience.

Whilst the viewer is aware of the physicality of the painted element of the work—which brings about a forcible perception of the surface of the picture and leads to a heightened twofold experience of this aspect—there is a recurring revelation between this physicality and the suspension of the object as represented “within” the photograph. This continuous disclosure brings about an intimate engagement for the viewer with the picture, extending the sense of difference between the two mediums, whilst at the same time, reinforcing representational similarities. It is through this heightened awareness during the act of viewing that an increased awareness of the temporal nature of the work, coupled with the work’s formal qualities, is made. For the viewer there is an awareness of the construction of the artwork and, as a consequence of this, a sense of the artwork as object. Caroline Levine observes:

[...] in the case of *trompe l’oeil* art, painting proclaims not only that it is a being-for-another, but that it is also a being-in-itself, an object in its own right that differentiates itself from nature. By flaunting the skill of the artist, parading its capacity to imitate the real, the picture, while looking very much like the reality it represents, actually compels us to recognize its status as painting.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Trompe l’oeil*: French, meaning deception, or trick, of the eye.

<sup>29</sup> Caroline Levine, “Seductive Reflexivity: Ruskin’s Dreaded *Trompe l’oeil*”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 4 (1998): 370.

Lüders' work prompts "a particular narrative of spectatorial experience"<sup>30</sup>. The move from perceiving the painted object as being embedded in the photograph to understanding this as being a painting-over-photograph creates a reflexive engagement for the viewer bound up in a set of responses between what constitutes the picture (the photographic and painted) and the self. Whilst the painting does not alter, the conceptual revelation of its changed status heightens the performative nature of looking and perceiving for the viewer. For Levine, "the self-reflexive character of...trompe l'oeil urges us to reflect on the production of representation and trompe l'oeil is, therefore, the *critical art par excellence*".<sup>31</sup>

Wollheim notes that if the viewer perceives three-dimensional/spatial qualities within the picture, then that picture falls within the broad categorisation of "representational". "Figurative" is an aspect of representation in that the depicted objects are recognisable as *types*, such as chair, table, person *etc.* Most abstract works are, therefore, "representational" as they convey a three-dimensional aspect. Hans Hofmann's (1880-1966) abstract paintings are a good example of this.<sup>32</sup> The "Objekte" in Lüders' pictures are both representational (in that they are abstract yet the viewer perceives three-dimensional/spatial qualities) and figurative (in that they appear as recognisable types, even if it is unclear what these types are). As these objects work their way through a variety of photographic settings—landscapes, cities, church interiors, operating theatres—their sense of meaning changes as the context in which the viewer finds them alters. An object that sits solidly against a tree in a forest has a certain "natural" appearance. An object that hovers over an operating table assumes a sinister air of intrusion in a critical space of containment. An object that flies through an urban landscape assumes the shape of an oddly alien form. (Figs.9.12-9.16) This contextualisation demonstrates how apparently neutral forms assume meaning as part of shaping narratives within the given context of two-dimensional visual works.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>32</sup> See: Gary Kemp and Gabriele Mras eds., *Wollheim, Wittgenstein, and Pictorial Representation: Seeing-as and Seeing-in* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).



Fig.9.12. Marc Lüders, *Object 843-4-3*, 2017, oil on silver gelatin print, 75 x 75 cm. © Marc Lüders



Fig.9.13. Marc Lüders, *Objekt 646-10-1*, 2004, oil on silver gelatin print, 110 x 88 cm. © Marc Lüders



Fig.9.14. Marc Lüders, *Objekt 678-5-4*, 2004, oil on silver gelatin print, 58 x 109 cm. © Marc Lüders



Fig.9.15. Marc Lüders, *Objekt 70-33-4*, 2005, oil on silver gelatin print, 40 x 30 cm. © Marc Lüders



Fig.9.16. Marc Lüders, *Objekt 216-1-1*, 1998, oil on silver gelatin print, 60 x 50 cm. © Marc Lüders

There is, however, another aspect to these pictures that differentiates them from Lüders' *Figur* works in that a number of them are concerned with movement. Whilst on occasion the "object" sits firmly anchored to the ground, as in *Objekt 70-33-4* (Fig.9.15), or gives the appearance of hovering motionless, as in *Objekt 216-1-1* (Fig.9.16), there are times when either the object has the appearance of moving or the environment within which it is situated "moves". This movement reveals a key aspect of the idiomatic natures of paint and photography, and our engagement with these mediums through viewing.<sup>33</sup> When the object "moves" it draws attention to itself as a paint mark swiped across the surface of the photograph and, regardless of the degree to which Lüders manipulates this mark (or a series of marks built into this single mark), the act of painting is made emphatic. When the object is created from a single stroke the viewer is aware of the decisive act of the "drag" of the brush across the picture's surface. This type of paint mark is also a nod toward the dragged paint effects of Richter, which reinforces the sense that this type of paint mark sits within a contemporary painting practice. The more Lüders manipulates this mark, which can involve rubbing the paint away around its edges in order to create a smooth outline, the more conscious the viewer becomes of the artist deliberately controlling the constituent elements of paint. In

<sup>33</sup> Gerhard Richter has drawn attention to this through his blurring technique of painting in his "photo paintings". See: Rosemary Hawker, "The Idiom in Photography As the Truth in Painting", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (2002): 541-54, doi:10.1215/00382876-101-3-541.

other words, the artist is engaged in the act of painting. Applying the paint mark in such a way that it is understood as both paint mark and figurative representation of “object” is a key aspect of figurative painting; that is, that sets of single marks mediated by the painter will in turn be interpreted by the viewer.<sup>34</sup> (Fig.9.17)

Meanwhile, the movement of the environment in the photograph draws attention to the photographic act of capturing the scene through the release of the camera’s shutter. Lüders works with the viewer’s knowledge that it is the blurring of the photographic image that presents movement. Either the object of attention blurs as the camera remains motionless and this inert body passes by faster than the time of shutter release, or the camera pans with the object so that it is caught “motionless” whilst the surrounding environment blurs. It is the movement of objects, camera, shutter and photographer that are intertwined in the operations of photography and fundamental to its essence. Lüders skilfully considers and deploys this use of movement in the photograph as a means of reinforcing and extending the “narrativisation” of these works.



Fig.9.17. Edouard Manet, *La Prune* (detail), c.1877. Photo and © National Gallery of Art, Washington

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<sup>34</sup> For an understanding of how painting is “digital”—in the application of single discrete units of paint to a surface, regardless of whether this is then blended into analogue forms—see: Walter Seitter, “Painting has Always been a Digital Affair”, in *Painting pictures: painting and media in the digital age* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2003), 30.

In *Objekt 223-10-2* (2004) (Fig.9.18), for example, the blur of the building in the background of the photograph is *lateral* whilst the foregrounded object is stationary. This indicates that the photographer is tracking the “object” by panning the camera as it moves. The release of the shutter is such that, in combination with the panning, the object is statically “captured” whilst the background blurs. But this is a *horizontal* blurring. Its effect is to suggest, against all logic, that the object is moving *across* the picture plane. The object may be a stone that has been thrown, however, given its size in relation to the buildings this does not seem feasible. The even, level trajectory of the form implies—however irrationally—that this object is self-powered and, due to the intensity of the background blur, is moving at speed.



Fig.9.18. Marc Lüders, *Objekt 223-10-2*, 2004, oil on silver gelatin print, 84 x 100 cm. © Marc Lüders

Given there are no ground-level features in the photograph, the viewer can assume that the object moves high through the air and, given that the eye-line of the viewer is almost level with this object, it indicates that the “photographer” would have had a high-view point. It is doubly ingenious of Lüders to articulate the seemingly simple brush mark (or a set of marks

contained within one) within the photographic context in order to produce rich “narrativisation”; and he cleverly works with viewers’ understandings of the aspects of the natures of both painting and photography in order to bring about a synthesis between the two.

As with all his works, Lüders creates a singular, convincing reality in the picture, while drawing attention to the nature of the differences of painting and photography. The viewer is conscious of the materiality of the paint sitting on the surface of the photographic print whilst reading this as the representing object positioned within the image. Because of the physically tangible quality of the paint on the surface of the print, the viewer can mentally move “around” the picture—from “outside” to “inside”—and is able to undertake this in a deliberately constructed and self-conscious manner. This moving from “within” the photographic image to the surface of the print disrupts the twofold/threefold experience in its singularity and immediacy. Nevertheless the viewer is able (and, at will) to return to seeing-in and the experience of a unified whole this gives. This accords with a number of theorists’ positions in seeing the viewing experience as a more multi-faceted experience than a solely twofold one. For example, Dominic Lopes states:

An adequate theory of depiction should explain the full range of our experience of pictures including those which are twofold, those which require a shift in attention from content to design and back again, and those rare pictures whose contents we experience even when their designed surfaces are not visible.<sup>35</sup>

The “rare pictures” Lopes refers to include those such as *trompe l’oeil* paintings, a categorisation that some of Lüders’ work can be understood to fit within. This movement between seeing-in the picture and seeing the work as an artistic construct fashioned from paint on the surface of the photographic print, creates a dialectical tension between mediums; how they operate, and the modes of seeing involved with these. It is this tension that brings a delight and fascination for the viewer when engaging with Lüders’ works, and it is this aspect of his practice that makes them so engaging. This oscillation between a conscious understanding of the work as being a construction by the artist and seeing-in the picture might appear to be a return to Gombrich’s theory of moving back and forth between seeing the surface of the painting then—and in a different manner—seeing *in* the picture, with both types of seeing being separate acts.

However, there is a difference between looking at either a painting *or* a photograph separately and looking at an artwork that combines painting and photography with their differing natures. The viewer can be engaged in an uninterrupted twofold/threefold experience when looking at a

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<sup>35</sup> Dominic Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).



painting or a photograph separately. It is the fracture between these two mediums *in combination* that incites the oscillation between these two states of viewing: that is, the more unconscious act of seeing-in and the conscious, self-reflexive awareness of viewing. When viewing a picture that is solely a painting *or* a photograph, the viewer is able to maintain a position of seeing-in for prolonged periods, with the length of this time depending on how “experienced” the viewer is at viewing pictures. As Michael Benton states: “For...viewers...the onlooker role is not constant. Their spectatorship will vary in the intensity of its commitment and attention at different times of the viewing process”<sup>36</sup> In contrast the manner in which paint and photograph disrupt each other causes a consequent disruption of the viewing experience. Thus, pictures comprised of single mediums enable greater engagement of seeing-in as part of a continuous viewing process, whilst figurative over-painting onto photographs, such as Lüders’ *Photopictures*, creates a more complex “foldness” in the perceptual experience of viewing.

Carl Robinson, Derby, GB 2017

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Benton, *Studies in the spectator role: literature, painting and pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 34.

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Plate XV. Marc Lüders, Figur 843-5-1, 2016, oil on Kodak Endura Metallic Print, 90 x 60 cm. © Marc Lüders