

museum rietberg



Mirrors

17.5. —
22.9.19

Mirrors
The Reflected
Self

1 The Reflected Self

Kneeling at a pool to view one's reflection in the water has offered humans an opportunity to explore their own features since time immemorial. When the youth Narcissus caught sight of his reflection in the water for the first time, he immediately fell in love with his own image. However, he soon painfully came to realize that he was unable to embrace his own semblance. "It is I myself!", he cried out in anguish. This drove him to despair and, ultimately, to death. The story of Narcissus, made famous by the Roman poet Ovid, had a deep and lasting impact on European cultural history – including literature, philosophy, art, and psychology. Narcissus became a symbol for transience and blind self-love, the "inventor" of painting, and the embodiment of the introverted poet locked in his own world. To this day, his name stands for people with a bloated self-perception. Ultimately, however, his name also shines bright in a flower which grows each spring in the spot where he sank to the ground and died.

At the unsullied, silvery waters of a spring, a youth fatigued both with the labour of hunting and the heat, lay down. While quenching his thirst he perceives the reflection of his own form in the water, and falls in love with a thing that has no substance, and thinks that to be a body which is but a shadow. He is astonished at himself, and remains unmoved with the same countenance, like a statue formed of Parian marble. In his ignorance, he covets himself; and he that approves, is himself the thing approved. While he pursues, he is pursued, and at the same moment he inflames and burns. How often does he give vain kisses to the deceitful spring! “In thee ’tis I, I now perceive, I burn with love for myself, and both raise the flames and endure them. What I desire is in myself. Oh! would that I could depart from my own body!”

He disturbed the water with his tears; and the form was rendered defaced by the moving of the stream; when he saw it beginning to disappear, he cried aloud, “Whither dost thou fly? Stay, I beseech thee! and do not in thy cruelty abandon thy lover.”

And, while he was grieving, he ripped open his garment from the upper border, and beat his naked breast with his palms, white as marble. His breast, when struck, received a little redness, no otherwise than as apples are wont, which are partly white and partly red... But, as yellow wax melts next to a low fire, or the hoar frost of the morning wastes away in the warmth of the sun, so he, too, faded away, consumed by love. He laid down his wearied head upon the green grass, and death closed his eyes. Instead of his body, now a flower grows, saffron yellow in the midst, enclosed by white petals.

Ovid (43 BC – 17 AD)
Metamorphoses, Book III

1

**The Pool of Narcissus
From the Roman de la Rose
(The Romance of the Rose)**

Authors: Guillaume de
Lorris (ca 1200 – ca 1238) and
Jean de Meun (ca 1240–1305)
France, ca 1340–1350
Parchment

The British Library Collection,
London

2

Narcissus

John Gibson RA (1790–1866)
1838
Marble

Royal Academy of Arts, London

3

**La vanità (La fonte del male)
Vanity (The source of evil)**

Giovanni Segantini (1858–1899)
1897

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich, acquired with means
from Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft,
1996

4

Surrender

Bill Viola (b. 1951)
2001

Video diptych

On loan from the artist

2

On the path to self-awareness

Self-recognition:

I recognize myself in the mirror

Self-awareness:

I recognize my being in the mirror

“So, is the eye a kind of mirror?”

The Greek philosopher Socrates is said to have responded to this question as follows:

The Greek philosopher Socrates is said to have responded to this question as follows: “So you are aware that the face of one looking at an eye appears in the pupil of the person opposite him as in a mirror: we call this the ‘image of the eye’, as it is a reflection of the one looking at it.”

“So, if an eye is going to see itself, it must look at an eye, and at just that place in the eye in which the excellence of the eye resides. And this, I suppose is vision.”

The quotation is from a dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades written by the philosopher Plato in the 4th century BC – a classical text on the awareness of self.

Video: Reflections in the eyes of staff members of the Museum Rietberg

NEWBORNS

Being mirrored in others

Newborns and babies are interested in faces from an early age.

BABIES

The first mirror

A mother’s face or the faces of a newborn’s first attachment figures become its “first mirror”. The two opposites imitate one another and mirror each other’s features and emotions.

A sense of self – one’s own body as a mirror of emotions

Even if babies do not yet recognize themselves, they sense that their body is part of their self.

INFANTS UP TO CA 18 MONTHS

Now, who could this be?

Infants interact with their mirror image as with a significant other; they “smile” at each other, and explore the “strange” being opposite them with interest, or with scepticism and disapproval, as the case may be.

Photo: Dan Cermak, 2018

INFANT, AT CA 18 MONTHS

Self-recognition in the mirror

In the so-called *rouge test*, a red dot is secretly applied to an infant's face. If, when placed in front of a mirror, it tries to remove the dot from its own face, the action indicates that the child recognizes itself in the mirror. Some animals also pass this test.

FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULthood

Self-awareness through the mirror

Self-recognition in the mirror is considered a landmark step in the development of the self. It comes with the ability to perceive one's own being as an object on which to reflect.

FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULthood

Mirror image and social media

One's own reflection in the mirror is private and instantaneous. The photograph of the young woman in the mirror from 1933 looks familiar to, not least if we substitute the erstwhile hand mirror with today's smartphone. A question that remains yet unanswered is how early childhood interaction with selfies impacts on the phase of self-recognition in the mirror— and thus on the process of finding one's identity.

PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

I and the others

Perspective-taking, that is, the ability to perceive a physical situation or an emotional condition from another person's angle, is an important step in the development of moral judgement and empathy. The ability of perspective-taking is considered an important aspect of self-awareness.

IDENTITY SWITCH

I is another

In Arthur Rimbaud's famous phrase – *Je est un autre* – the poet becomes a seer who, in an act of self-liberation, steps beyond himself and becomes another, and so ventures into the unknown realms of imagination.

Hasenspiegel

Markus Raetz's *Hasenspiegel* alludes to the action *How to explain pictures to a dead hare* by the artist Joseph Beuys of 1965: in the mirror, a hare-like figure formed of wire transforms into another, namely into Joseph Beuys in profile complete with his signature felt hat.

5

Freizeit eines arbeitenden Mädchens, Berlin (Leisure time of a working girl, Berlin)

Marianne Breslauer (1909–2001)
1933/34
Silver gelatine print
Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur

6

Hasenspiegel (Hare mirror)

Markus Raetz (b. 1941)
2000
Iron wire, acrylic gesso on wood,
mirror
Private collection

7

Mary with Child and Boy St John

Orazio Samacchini (1532–1577)
attributed, mid-16th c.
Oil on canvas
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien

The intimate gaze exchanged between Mary and Baby Jesus indicates that from infancy on, the facial interplay between mother and child represents a kind of “first mirror”: they imitate one another, mirroring features and emotions.

8

Portrait of the artist's family

Jacques-Augustin-Catherine Pajou (1766–1828)
1802
Oil on wood
Musée du Louvre, Paris,
Département des Peintures

9

Socrates instructs his pupils on self-awareness

Pier Francesco Mola (1612–1666)
ca 1640–1650
Oil on canvas
Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano, Collezione Città di Lugano

According to Plato, Socrates advised his pupils to look in the mirror every day and reflect on outer appearance, beauty, and ugliness but also to explore their own soul and the Divine within – for the purpose developing self-awareness.

Memento mori – the mirror and death

“Remember, thou art mortal!” In Western literature and art, the transience of all earthly beings is described as “vanitas” (nullity, semblance). The mirror stands as a symbol for vanity and transience. Skulls and skeletons are a reminder of the unpredictability of death, while the hourglass and wings signify how fast and incessantly life melts away. The wheel of fortune alludes to the power of fate.

“Remember death” and lead a righteous life, the mirror with the skull tells us; for then death promises a life in paradise, according to Christian belief.

DEATH IN THE MIRROR MAZE The Lady from Shanghai

The final take in Orson Welles’ movie *The Lady from Shanghai* ranks as one of the most famous mirror scenes in film history. In a hall of mirrors, Elsa (Rita Hayworth) and her husband Bannister (Everett Sloane) take to their guns and kill each other in a maze of reflections. They look back on a life of intrigue and extortion, culminating for both in a dramatically staged showdown.

The “non-self” in Buddhism

Buddhism negates the idea of an unchanging and permanent “self” or “I”. It defines the “self” as a fleeting personality consisting of a cluster of ingredients subject to ongoing change, an interplay of bodily organs, perception, feelings, will, and consciousness. From these aggregates of being, consciousness creates the image of a supposed reality. But by perceiving things, including the “self”, as a fixed entity, man wishes to possess and hold on to them. However, possession and attachment only lead to further suffering.

In Buddhism, a speckless mirror which truthfully reflects all occurrences symbolizes clarity and steadfastness and thus stands for the pure “mirror of knowledge” of Buddha Akshobhya, the embodiment of the triumph over cravings and passions.

10

The transcendental Buddha Akshobhya

Tibet, Densatil monastery, 14th c.
Gilt copper alloy, gemstone inlays

Museum Rietberg Zürich, on permanent
loan from the Berti Aschmann Collection

11

Alte Frau, sich im Spiegel betrachtend / (Old woman reviewing herself in the mirror)

Engraver: Jeremias Falck (ca 1619–1664 or 1677), Creators: Bernardo Strozzi (1581–1644) and Johann Liss (ca 1595–ca 1630) ca 1655–1660

Copperplate engraving
Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

12

Woman before a mirror, observed by a personification of death ("Mortalia facta peribunt")

Engraver: Monogrammist M, Creator: ascribed to Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), 16th c. Copperplate engraving

Kupferstich-Kabinett – Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

13

Basel Dance of Death: detail of the noble woman

Konrad Witz (circle)
Basel, ca 1440
Oil painting over tempera on stucco

Historisches Museum Basel

14

Death and noble woman

From Matthäus Merian the Elder (1593–1650), Todten-Tantz, Frankfurt am Main 1649

Zentralbibliothek Zürich,
Graphische Sammlung

15

Death mirror

Switzerland
1828
Mirror, spruce wood, coloured, paper, ink

Private collection

16

Memento mori with skull

Switzerland, Canton of Aargau
1750–1800
Mirror, reverse glass painting

Schweizer Nationalmuseum –
Landesmuseum Zurich

17

Schädel (Skull)

Gerhard Richter (b. 1932)
2017
Diasec photograph between Antelio- and Plexiglas®

Private collection

3

Self-portraits – Photographic reflections

Exploring one's own face in the mirror and the artistic transformation of the image into a self-portrait became a rich genre of art in Europe during the age of the Renaissance, in step with the technological development of the mirror. Several centuries later the development of photography opened up new modes for artistically staging the self, either through the use of a self-timer or by capturing one's own facial or bodily image in a mirror. Since modern society is now equipped with ubiquitous cameras, the photographic self-portrait, now better known under the term "selfie", has reached unprecedented proliferation and popularity. The internet offers millions of self-shot images under an equally bewildering array of hashtags. The genre "self-portrait" is explored with the aid of two intriguing facets from the history of photography. For one thing, by a precious piece from the pioneering days of photography – namely an ingenious self-reflection by the French photographer Charles Nègre. For the other, by self-portraits of twenty-two, predominantly female artists and photographers from the 1920s to the present: carefully staged self-reflections alternating between the view of the photographer, the reflection in the mirror, and the eye of the camera. The works offer insight not only into the photographers' studios and artistic practice but also into their everyday lives and their emotions and feelings as captured and framed by the medium.

18

***Self-portrait
(the photographer)***

Marianne Breslauer (1909–2001)
1933
Silver gelatine print
Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur

19

Self-portrait, Berlin 1929

Lotte Jacobi (1896–1990)
1929/60
Silver gelatine print
Raffael Gadebusch

20

Self-portrait with Leica

Ilse Bing (1899–1998)
1931
Silver gelatine print
Thomas Walther Collection

21

Self-portrait in mirror

Alice Boner (1889–1981)
ca 1945
Silver gelatine print
Museum Rietberg Zürich
Alice Boner Bequest

22

Auto-portrait

Sabine Weiss (geb. 1924)
1954
Silver gelatine print
On loan from the artist

23

Auto-portrait

Claude Cahun (1894–1954)
ca 1928
Exhibition print
Jersey Heritage – The Jersey Museum

24

Self-portrait

Florence Henri (1893–1982)
1928
Silver gelatine print
Sprengel Museum Hannover

25

Untitled Film Still #2

Cindy Sherman (b. 1954)
1977
Silver gelatine print
Mark Rosenthal & Lisa Roumell
Collection

26

Bona, Charlottesville

Zanele Muholi (b. 1972)
2015
B/W fine art print
Courtesy of Stevenson,
Cape Town/Johannesburg und
Yancey Richardson, New York

27

***Siphilile Muholi, Quarter
Hampton Inn, Hilton Chelsea***

Zanele Muholi (b. 1972), 2016
B/W fine art print
Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town /
Johannesburg und Yancey Richardson,
New York

28

***Self-Portrait in My Blue
Bathroom, Berlin***

Nan Goldin (b. 1953)
1991/99
Cibachrome
Fotomuseum Winterthur
Gift of Andreas Reinhart

29

***Nan Crying in Bathroom,
Baltimore MD***

Nan Goldin (b. 1953)
1986/1999
Cibachrome
Fotomuseum Winterthur
Gift of Andreas Reinhart

30

***Self-Portrait into the Edge
of a Mirror***

Laurie Anderson (b. 1947)
1975
Four silver gelatine prints
Fotomuseum Winterthur, acquired with
means of “Jedermann Collection” pur-
chasing group

31

Orphée

Tokyo Rumando (b. 1980)
2014
Series of five B/W fine art prints
Courtesy IBASHO Gallery and the artist

32

***Self-portrait in Twenty-Two
Less Two by Michelangelo
Pistoletto***

Evelyn Richter (b. 1930)
2009
Silver gelatine print
Werner Liebknecht / Family Richter,
Dresden/Bautzen

33

***Mirror self-portraits,
sequence untitled***

Tina Bara (b. 1962)
1985
Silver gelatine prints
On loan from the artist

34

***Self deceit #1, #2, #7
Rome, Italy***

Francesca Woodman (1958–1981)
1978/79
Silver gelatine prints
Sammlung Verbund, Vienna

35

***Das Atelier in der Kugel
(Selbstporträt im Atelier, Bau-
haus Dessau) / The studio in
the sphere (Self-portrait in
the studio, Bauhaus Dessau)***

Marianne Brandt (1893–1983)
1928/29
Silver gelatine print
Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin

36

Skulptural (Sculptural)

Hannah Villiger (1951–1997)
1988/89
C-print
Estate of Hannah Villiger

37

Privilege 3/19/2016

Amalia Ulman (b. 1989)
2016
Fuji Photo Print on Aluminium
Dibond under clear composite
Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa

38

The barber shop

Nadia Mounier (b. 1988)
2015
C-print
On loan from the artist

39

The living room image

Nadia Mounier (b. 1988)
2013
C-print
On loan from the artist

40

Untitled

Vivian Maier (1926–2009)
undated
Three C-prints
Estate of Vivian Maier, Courtesy
of Maloof Collection and Howard
Greenberg Gallery, NY

41

***Sonjas Geburtstag
(Sonja's birthday)***

Annelies Štrba (b. 1947)
1977
C-print
On loan from the artist

42

Mom relaxing my hair

LaToya Ruby Frazier (b. 1982)
2004
Silver gelatine print
FRAC Alsace

43

***Selbst im Spiegel
(Self in the mirror)***

Helga Paris (b. 1938)
1971/2000
Silver gelatine print
On loan from the artist

SELF-PORTRAIT OF CHARLES NÈGRE

There is probably no better work from the early days of photography to illustrate the topic of “self-portrait in a mirror” than the impressive and unusual daguerreotype created by the French photo pioneer Charles Nègre (1820–1880). In 1845 Nègre employed the astonishing “sorcerer’s mirror”, a device which consisted of eleven parts and enabled multiple self-reflections. The image was a success thanks to the ingenious way the photographer placed the camera in relation to his face. The picture was created with the aid of a so-called daguerreotype, a polished, silver-coated copper plate which itself operates like a mirror – a mirror in a mirror, so to speak. During the rise of photography, the fascinating new medium was often referred to as a “fixed mirror image” or, as the American poet and inventor Oliver Wendell Holmes called it in 1859, a “mirror with a memory”.

44

***Charles Nègre in the
sorcerer's mirror***

Charles Nègre (1820–1880)
ca 1845
Daguerreotype
Collection R. and P. Herzog, Basel

45

***Miroir sorcière (Sorcerer's
mirror)***

France, 18th c.
Mirror glass, wood
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

4 Sun and Mirror – Amaterasu and the birth of Japan

In myths that tell of the creation of the world and the universe, the two significant celestial bodies, the sun and the moon, often play a leading role. In ancient Egypt, for instance, mirrors were regarded as a symbol of the sun, while in medieval Europe, too, the sun and moon were often imagined as mirrors.

Probably the most famous creation myth involving the sun and a mirror is the legend of the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu, the founding ancestress of the Japanese imperial family. For more than a thousand years, Japan's most sacred shrine in Ise has held a sacred mirror in which the goddess is embodied. The mirror is kept enshrouded and locked away, and is never shown to the public. The secret mirror is one of the three imperial regalia of Japan.

An old Japanese chronicle tells the following story about Amaterasu: Following a dreadful deed committed by her brother Susanoo, the god of the sea and storms, the deeply grieved sun goddess retreats to a cave and closes herself in with the help of a rock. Upon this the universe is plunged into darkness and winter engulfs the world. The other gods try to lure her out through trickery, boisterous performances, and laughter. Ultimately, made inquisitive by all the commotion, the goddess steps out of the cave and into her own light reflected in a mirror suspended from a tree. So, Amaterasu's beauty makes the world shine again.

Inspired by this myth, the fashion designer Kazu Huggler has created a dramatic set and garment that re-envision the moment Amaterasu steps out from the cave.

46

The sun goddess Amaterasu steps out from the cave

Kazu Huggler (b. 1969)
2019

Installation, cloak made of plissé silk organza, trousers of silk Georgette, sun plissé of silk organza with silver cord, figure on the head of silver by Atsushi Suwa, 2019

Noh mask of a beautiful young woman, Manbi
Japan, Edo period, 18th c.
Wood, coloured

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart

5 Mirrors of the world

Obsidian mirrors (a dark, glasslike volcanic rock) produced over seven thousand years ago and found in the Neolithic graves of Catalhöyük in the Anatolian part of Turkey, today rank as the world's oldest, archaeologically documented mirrors. The polished mirrors accompanied the deceased to the grave. In pre-Columbian America mirrors were worked from shiny minerals such as pyrite, anthracite, and hematite, in addition to obsidian.

The emergence of Bronze Age cultures in Mesopotamia, Egypt and China from the third millennium on, saw the spread of polished, usually circular mirrors made of metal. They were not only used as grave goods and in the context of rituals, but also for cosmetic purposes and for assessing one's looks.

After first attempts in Roman times, the use of glass in mirror making began to take hold in Europe in the course of the 13th century. Venetian glass mirrors, which were exported across the globe, and French mirrors produced for the royal court of Versailles at the Royal manufactories for mirror glass marked the peak of European mirror production in the 16th to 18th centuries.

47

Mirror plate

Obsidian (glasslike volcanic rock)
from Jalisco, Mexico

Reflecting cube

Pyrite from Navajun, Rioja, Spain

EGYPT

The production and use of round hand mirrors made of polished copper and, later, bronze is documented at the latest from the Old Kingdom which emerged around 2,700 BC. While the mirror surface itself usually remained undecorated, the handles reveal a rich variety of motifs and materials, including depictions of local papyrus plants along with female figures of both worldly and godly nature – made of wood, ivory, ceramics, or metal. They were used for home as well as ritual purposes. In Egypt's polytheistic religion with its supreme sun god Re, the light-reflecting mirror represented the earthly equivalent of the glaring sun disc in the sky, as many relief pictures illustrate.

48

Stately mirror of the court lady Itakayt with consecration inscription

Egypt, Middle Kingdom, 12th dynasty, 19th c. BC
Copper bronze

Antikenmuseum Basel und
Sammlung Ludwig

This piece, which, owing to its inscription, is important in the history of mirrors, shows that mirrors were not only used for cultic purposes some 4,000 years ago, but also in beauty care. The inscription reads: "For gazing at the face, made by Heka for his beloved daughter Itakayt."

49

Mirror with handle in shape of a papyrus plant

Egypt, New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, 13th c. BC
Copper bronze

Antikenmuseum Basel und
Sammlung Ludwig

50

Mirror with handle in shape of a nude girl

Egypt, New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, 15/14th c. BC
Copper bronze

Antikenmuseum Basel und
Sammlung Ludwig

51

Mortuary stela with votive offering in form of mirror (to sun god Ra Harachte)

Egypt
780–525 BC
Limestone

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités égyptiennes

ANCIENT GREECE

The multitude of elaborate handheld and standing mirrors along with depictions of bathing and grooming scenes on ceramic vessels and mirrors are evidence of the popularity of mirrors in ancient Greece. They were above all used for beauty care. Growth in the production of artfully decorated ceramic vessels in the shape of bowls and jugs used for holding wine, oil, or water came with the heyday of Athenian culture from the 5th century BC on. The decorations show women, rarely men, flaunting their beauty and vitality in the mirror. Apart from bronze standing mirrors richly adorned with mythological scenes, we also find folding mirrors featuring beautiful goddesses such as Aphrodite as well as worldly women attending to their hair and makeup.

52

Red-figure hydria

Ganymede painter
Apulia, 4th c. BC
Clay

Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich

53

Squat lekythos

Primato painter
Greece, ca. 330 BC
Clay

Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig

54

Red-figure lekythos with youth holding a mirror

Apulia, 373–350 BC
Clay

Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich

55

**Red-figure bell krater
Tarporey painter**

Apulia, late 5th c. BC
Clay

Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich

56

Standing mirror

Greece, ca 460 BC
Bronze

Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig

57

Bowl

Euaion painter
Greece, ca 450 BC
Clay

Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig

58

Red-figure calyx krater

Sicily, Himera group or surrounds, mid-4th c. BC
Clay

Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich

59

Attic red-figure stamnos

Aegisthos painter
Greece, Attica, ca 470 BC
Clay

Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich

60

Attic red-figure hydria

Chicago painter
Greece, Attica, 475–425 BC
Clay

Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich

61

Mirror cover with woman doing her hair with another holding a mirror and alabastron (perfume jar)

Greece, 4th c. BC
Bronze

The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917

62

Mirror box with two women doing their toilette at a loutation (wash bowl) with a bird sitting on the rim

Greece, 375–350 BC
Copper Alloy

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines

ETRUSCANS

The Etruscans, who populated the western part of central Italy and the regions of Lazio, Tuscany and Umbria from the 9th to the 5th centuries BC, left behind a myriad of bronze handheld mirrors whose filigree and elaborately engraved backs undoubtedly stand as outstanding examples of the art of antiquity. As most of these predominantly small bronze mirrors were discovered in graves, we may assume that they also served cultic purposes. The engravings reveal a connection to the Greek world of gods and heroes with regard to form as well as content, above all in the shape of Turan, the goddess of love and fertility, and counterpart to the Hellenistic Aphrodite, but also in depictions of women adorning themselves in preparation for celebrations such as a wedding.

63

Mirror with three women doing their toilette at a washbowl

Etruria, 4th c. BC
Copper alloy

Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris

64

Mirror with the birth of Turan (Aphrodite)

Etruria, ca 400 BC
Bronze

Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig

65

Mirror with the sea nymph Thetis and King Peleus, the future parents of Achilles

Etruscan, ca 350 BC
Bronze

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, Rogers Fund, 1909

ROME

The Roman art of mirror making was heavily influenced by the design of its Greek and Etruscan forerunners. However, one also notices a refinement in terms of materiality, namely through the increased use of silver, gold, and lead, which lent Roman mirrors a brighter sheen and reflection. What also becomes noticeable is the use of handheld mirrors as status symbols; in Roman high society, they often served as precious gifts to mark special occasions such as weddings. Amongst the most famous Roman mirrors are handheld mirrors decorated with mythological motifs from the treasure excavated in Boscoreale in 1895, most of which is now in the Louvre in Paris. Like Pompeii, Boscoreale was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79.

In the first century AD, the first small-format glass mirrors set in lead or bronze were produced. However, the technique was lost with the downfall of the Roman empire, and glass did not find its way back into mirror making until the 13th century – and then practised for a long time exclusively in Europe.

66

Mirror with handle in the shape of the club of Heracles

Roman Empire, Boscoreale
treasure, early 1st c. AD, Silver

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, Gift of M. Tyszkiewicz 1897

67

Handheld mirror with Leda and the swan

Roman Empire, Boscoreale treasure, end of 1st c. BC to early 1st c. AD
Silver

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, Gift of Baron E. de Rothschild 1895

68

Venus, the goddess of love

Roman Empire, Kaiseraugst silver treasure, AD 300 – 350
Silver

Augusta Raurica Collection, Augst

69

Mirror with handle

Scythian, find-site: Kertch (Ukraine), 5th c. BC
Bronze

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines

CELTS

Handheld mirrors made of copper alloy were found in Celtic tombs on the British Isles dating back to an era between 400 BC and AD 100, featuring elegant and generously crafted decorations. Unlike the mirrors used by their Roman conquerors during the imperial age, the Celts did not rely on figurative and naturalistic motifs, preferring to adorn their mirror backs with abstract, organic ornaments taken from nature.

70

Old Warden Mirror

Celtic, find-site: Old Warden, Bedfordshire, England
ca 50 BC – 50 AD
Bronze

The Higgins Art Gallery and Museum, Bedford

INDIA

In the Buddhist art of Gandhara, which blossomed from the first to the fourth century in an area which today makes up part of Pakistan, we find depictions of women on reliefs holding mirrors in their hands to flaunt their beauty. Female figures hewn from stone seductively looking at their image in the mirror are featured on the richly decorated façades of Hindu temples of the 11th and 12th centuries as the example of the Khajuraho group of temples indicates (see No. 75). In Indian painting, representations of women holding hand mirrors are found on the famous murals in the Ajanta Caves dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries. European glassware including spectacles, drinking glasses, and mirrors reached the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar the Great as early as 1600. Mirrors serving as status symbols on portraits dating from the age of the Mughal Empire were popular motifs in Indian miniature painting from the 17th to 19th centuries. They were customary noble accessories in women’s chambers, as shown in the exhibition’s section on the notion of beauty in Indian painting.

72

Mara’s daughters tempt the Buddha

Gandhara, Pakistan, 2nd – 4th c.
Slate

Museum Rietberg Zürich, purchased with means of the Georgette Boner Bequest

74

Umamaheshvaran, the Great Lord, with the goddess Uma

Orissa, India, 12th c.
Steatite

Museum Rietberg Zürich, Alice Crowley Bequest

73

Yakshi (mythical female figure) with mirror

Gandhara, Pakistan, 2nd / 3rd c.
Slate

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst

75 (Wallpaper image)

Woman with mirror (centre)

Southern façade of the Jain temple of Adinatha (First Lord) India, Madhya Pradesh, Khajuraho, early 11th c.

Photo: Iago Corazza

77

Prince Salim, the later Mughal emperor Jahangir, as a young man

Artist: Bichitr
India, Mughal period, ca 1630
Pigment painting and gold on paper

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, South & South East Asia Collection

78

Mughal lady, gazing at herself in the mirror

India, Mughal period, last quarter of 16th c.
Pigment painting and gold on paper

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst

79

Oval mirror frame

India, time of creation unknown
Polished nephrite jade

Victoria and Albert Museum, London
South & South East Asia Collection
Wells Bequest

76

Mirror embroideries, cloths with appliquéd little mirrors

India, Kutch and Saurashtra, Gujarat, first half of 20th c.
Cotton, silk, little mirrors

Museum Rietberg Zürich, Gift of Eberhard und Barbara Fischer

JAVA, INDONESIA

On these bronze mirrors excavated in eastern Java, the handles and the actual mirrors were usually produced separately. On one of the mirrors on display, the handle consists of the telamon figure of a monkey, probably meant to signify the monkey god Hanuman, while the other represents an abstract geometric sheaf of rice, a symbol of fertility. As early as the 16th century, mirrors from Java reached Buddhist temples in Japan where they were carefully stored and preserved and therefore still exist in their original polished condition today.

MIRROR-EMBROIDERED CLOTHS FROM GUJARAT, INDIA

These kaleidoscopic, mirror-embroidered cloths stem from village households on the Kutch and Saurashtra peninsulas in western India. Garments like these were produced in the first half of the 20th century by young women of the peasant and artisan casts and by shepherdesses but also by women of the landed gentry in their leisure time. Originally, the glittering and colourful cloths were not made for sale but served exclusively as dowries or gifts. The little round mirrors were cut from large, mirrored glass spheres, and sold on markets for further use.

80

Mirror with handle in shape of a telamon monkey

Indonesia
East Java, ca 13th / 14th c.
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Dr Werner Rothpelz Bequest

81

Mirror with handle in shape of a rice garb

Indonesia
East Java, ca 13th / 14th c.
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Dr Werner Rothpelz Bequest

TURKEY AND IRAN

Early Islamic mirrors date back to the Seljuk Empire which ruled over Turkey, Iran, and parts of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan in the 11th and 12th centuries. They are reminiscent of Chinese mirrors from the Han period and are often adorned with bands of writing featuring blessings or felicitations on the reverse; these probably had a tutelary function.

Later, in the Ottoman age of the 16th century, luxury, hand-held mirrors made of steel and adorned with gold inlays became fashionable. Their decoration is based on the arabesque, one of the most popular motifs in Islamic art.

Painted and lacquered objects made of papier mâché are typical of Persian artisanship. In the middle of the 19th century, mirror caskets depicting Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad, either on the inside or the outside, enjoyed great popularity.

82

Mirror with sphinxes and band of writing

Iran
Khorasan, 12th c.
Brass

Museum Rietberg Zürich

83

Bronze mirror

Seljuk, north-western Iran
or Turkey, 12th/13th c.
Bronze

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, Gift of Florence E. und Horace
L. Mayer 1978

84

Handheld mirror

Iran, 14th/15th c.
Steel

Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern

85

Mirror with arabesque design

Turkey, early 16th c.
Iron, inlaid gold, ivory

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, Fletcher Fund 1972

86

Mirror casket “Ali with Hasan, Hussain, Bilal, Abu Talip and Muhammad”

Iran, Isfahan, dated 1871
Papier mâché, lacquer, yellow
metal

Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern

87

Mirror casket with Maryam and Isa (Mary and Jesus)

Iran, Isfahan, dated 1795
Papier mâché, lacquer, yellow
metal

Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern

CHINA

In China, mirrors were often made of a special copper alloy with an increased tin content in order to attain a higher sheen when polishing the mirror surface. On the decorated back of the mirror there is an eyelet at the centre through which a cord was drawn for holding the mirror by hand or for suspending it from a stand. The oldest mirrors dating back to roughly 2,000 BC were simple, barely decorated bronze discs. During the Han period (206 BC – AD 220) mirrors featuring abstract or figurative images on the reverse made up part of the standard funerary equipment in aristocratic tombs. Usually the mirrors lay close to the body, occasionally they were placed on the deceased’s chest. The belief was that mirrors had the capacity of keeping demons and other evil spirits at bay. A treatise from the 3rd century advises travellers to carry a mirror on them when passing through the mountains. In the Han period, tombs were designed as abodes of the dead and formed a kind of miniature universe. The circular mirrors served as representations of the cosmos: below, the earth which was believed to be square; above, the round, heavenly firmament containing the stars. From the 7th century on, mirrors were also produced in the shape of blossoms and squares; they predominantly served as luxury items in the realm of beauty care.

89

TLV mirror

China
Eastern Han dynasty, 1st/2nd c.
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Ginsberg Collection

90

Mirror

China, Eastern Zhou dynasty,
Warring States period,
4th/3rd c. BC
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Ernst Winkler

91

**Qianhua or “Lead Flower”
mirror with inscription**

China, Western Han dynasty,
late 1st c. BC
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Charlotte Holliger-Hasler Bequest

92

Shoushou mirror

China
Eastern Han dynasty, 2nd c.
Bronze

Private Collection

93

**Panlong or “Twisted Dragon”
mirror with inscription**

China, Eastern Han dynasty,
late 1st to 2nd c.
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Charlotte Holliger-Hasler Bequest

94

**Mirror with Queen Mother of
the West and Lord of the East**

China
Eastern Han dynasty, 2nd c.
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Ernst Winkler

95

**Mirror with the animals of the
four directions and the twelve
signs of the zodiac**

China
Sui dynasty, ca 600
Bronze

Museum Rietberg Zürich

96

**Mirror with parrots, strings of
beads, and tortoise**

China
Tang dynasty, first half of 8th c.
Bronze with gilt silver plating

Museum Rietberg Zürich
on loan from Alice and Pierre Uldry
Collection

97

**Sixfold-lobed mirror with
birds and mythical creatures**

China
Tang dynasty, 650–750
Bronze with silver plating

Museum Rietberg Zürich,
on loan from Alice and Pierre Uldry
Collection

98

**Mirror with lions between vine
tendrils**

China
Tang dynasty, 650–800
Bronze with silver plating

Museum Rietberg Zürich
on loan from Alice and Pierre Uldry
Collection

99

**Mirror with anticizing bronze
decorative motifs**

China
Qing dynasty, Qianlong mark and
period, 1736–1796
Cloisonné enamel

Museum Rietberg Zürich
on loan from Alice and Pierre Uldry
Collection

PERU

Mirrors with wooden handles decorated mainly with animal motifs have survived from the ancient Andean civilizations of Peru such as the Moche, Wari, Tiahuanaco, and Chimú (1st to 15th centuries). They were coated with pyrite, obsidian, or anthracite to produce a reflection. Further preserved are small mirror-like objects with handles; they likely served as a kind of snuff plate for ingesting hallucinogenic substances during rituals and religious festivals.

100

Three ancient Peruvian miniature silver mirrors

Peru
northern or central coastal region
ca 11th–16th c.
Silver, hammered

The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan
Cummings

101

Wooden mirror frame with reverse bas relief

Peru, Chimú culture
northern coastal region,
9th–12th c.
Wood, carved

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, Gift of Joyce and Ted Strauss

102

Ancient Peruvian obsidian or anthracite handle-mirror in wooden frame with two feline figures

Peru, Chancay or Chimú culture,
stylistically influenced by the
Wari culture, ca 9th–12th c.
Obsidian, wood, carved

Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen
Ebnöther Collection

MEXICO

Reflecting, artfully decorated discs, so-called *tezcacuitlapilli*, were found in Chichen Itza on the Yucatan Peninsula as well as in Tula, the capital of the Toltec Empire in central Mexico. For the production of these artefacts, the Toltecs, just as the Aztecs after them, used pieces of crystal or volcanic rock such as pyrite, hematite, or obsidian which were worked into round wooden frames like a mosaic. Mirrors probably served as a kind of eye for the members of the elite to catch a glance of the world of the gods beyond; conversely, the gods were able to look into this world.

It appears that mirrors served the purpose of protecting rulers, warriors and priests from evil forces and as divinatory media. Some of these polished, round or rectangle obsidian mirrors from Mexico ended up in the first colonial cabinets of curiosities owned by European dynasties in the 16th century, such as the Austrian Habsburgs or the Tudors in England.

103

Obsidian mirror

Mexico
colonial era, 16th c.
Obsidian, wood

Sammlung Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck
– Weltmuseum Wien

104

Warrior sculpture

Mexico City, Tenochtitlan, find site
at Templo Mayor, ca 14th–16th c.
Stone, sculptured

Museo Nacional de Antropología
Instituto Nacional de Antropología
e Historia, Mexico City

105

Tezcacuitlapilli (back mirror)

Mexico Yucatan, Chichen Itza,
southern chamber, substructure
of Kukulcan pyramid
Early postclassic period,
ca 900–1150
Wood, turquoise, pyrite, slate,
mother-of-pearl

Museo Nacional de Antropología,
Instituto Nacional de Antropología
e Historia, Mexico City

106

Tezacuitlapilli (back mirror)

Mexico, Hidalgo, middle hall of the Templo quemada, early post-classic period, ca 900–1150
Wood, turquoise, pyrite

Museo Nacional de Antropología, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City

107

Mirror disc with reverse relief showing a dancing, small human in a bird costume

Mexico, probably Uaymil late classic period, ca 600–900
Slate

Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Kulturen der Welt, Cologne

NORTH AMERICA

So-called dance mirrors, or mirror boards, were common to the cultures of the Great Plains and Prairie of North America, particularly among the Sioux. They were used in ritual dances where dancers held them in their hands and moved them rhythmically to the beat. The staff-like wooden objects were equipped with mirror glass at the top end. The mirror on display came to the Historical Museum in Bern in 1832.

108

Mirror for Sioux dance

North America, Plains region, ca 1832
Wood, glass

Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern

109

Studio portrait of the Shoshone Moragootch

North America, ca 1884/85
Exhibition print

Denver Public Library – Western History Collection

MIRRORS IN EUROPE FROM THE 14TH TO 19TH CENTURIES

The oldest surviving mirrors from the Middle Ages are mostly small, polished metal discs or polished hemispheres made of metal and blown glass into which lead was poured to create the required reflection. This also explains the prevalence of convex mirrors in famous works of art between the 14th and 16th century, such as *The Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan van Eyck. From the 13th century onward, the famous glass factories of Murano in Venice, which still exist today, were one of the main centres of mirror production – next to regionally significant manufactories in Lorraine, Flanders, and Holy Roman imperial cities such as Nuremberg and Basel. Up until the Renaissance in the 15th century, one finds metal and glass mirrors side by side. The artfully decorated wall or standing mirrors were a prerogative of the aristocracy and the emerging class of merchants. At the behest of the French king Louis XIV, new manufacturing centres in Paris and the Picardie began producing mirrors in the 17th century, leading to a struggle for monopoly between France and the Republic of Venice; the creation of the magnificent Hall of Mirrors in Versailles at the end of the 17th century set new standards.

Murano and the French Manufacture royale de glaces de miroirs exported their glass mirrors to all corners of the world. The mirror frames made of wood, metal, or ivory and often painted or set with gold changed in step with the developing styles: from baroque to rococo, from classicism to historicizing trends in the 19th century.

110

Two mirror cases with leopard and rosette arms

Limoges, 1250–1300
Champlevé enamel on gilt copper

Musée du Louvre, Paris
Département des Objets d'art

111

Mirror case “A Game of Chess”

Paris or Cologne, ca 1320
Ivory

Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Sculpture Collection

112

Mirror case “Chasseurs devant un chateau” (Hunters before a castle)

France, second quarter 14th c.
Ivory

Musée du Louvre, Paris
Département des Objets d’art

113

The Five Senses

From *Traité de métaphysique et de physique* after Aristotle
Paris, 13th c.

Illustrated manuscript
Bibliothèque de Genève

114

Convex mirror (“Miroir des Conseils”)

Germany (?), after 1500
Wood, linen, glassine, paperboard,
gold leaf, glass, lead alloy

Musée historique de Vevey

115

The old man

From Johann von Schwarzenberg
(1463/65–1528),
Memorial der Tugendt
Germany, 1530–1540
Manuscript with watercolours

Kantonsbibliothek Appenzell
Ausserrhoden, Trogen

116

Tapestry “La Broderie”

From the cycle *La Vie Seigneuriale*
Flanders or northern France
ca 1520
Wool, silk

Musée de Cluny – Musée national du
Moyen Âge, Paris

117

“Monkey with mirror, riding on a crab”, drinking vessel of the Äussere Stand society, Bern

Mint mark of Master Emanuel
Wyss dated 1678
Gilt silver

Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern

The gilt silver drinking vessel in the shape of a monkey mounted on a crab (with a removable head) once used to be part of a tableware belonging to the Äussere Stand society in Bern, a ceremonial association active above all in the 17th and 18th centuries and consisting of young men from the city’s ruling and non-ruling families. The aim of the society was to prepare the young men for the tasks that awaited them later in life, for instance, a seat in government.

The crab is known to walk backwards. The monkey, who is sitting backwards on the crab’s back and looking into a mirror, is slowly pro-

gressing towards the future. He uses the mirror to look back into the past. What does this emblematic image tell us: he who is wise approaches the future prudently and unhurriedly, does not lose sight of the past, and includes what he has learnt in the past in his deliberations for the future.

118

Toilette mirror case

Venice, ca 1550
Ivory, glass, mother-of-pearl

Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien,
Kunstammer

119

Apparition of the New Jerusalem in the mirror

From Guillaume de Deguileville
(1295–1358) *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, France 15th/16th c.
Illustrations: Maître d’Antoine
Rolin, Hainaut, 15th c.

Bibliothèque de Genève

120

Small hand mirror

Germany or Italy, probably 16th c.
Boxwood

Private collection, London

121

Standing mirror

Italy, ca 1510
Carved walnut, bronze mirror
plate

Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Furniture and Woodwork Collection

122

Standing mirror

Venice, ca 1590
Wood, glass, mother-of-pearl

Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Furniture and Woodwork Collection

123

Tondo mirror frame with arms of Praun family, Nuremberg

Siena, ca 1500
Limewood, glass

Private collection, Switzerland

124

Mirror with floral motif

Venice, ca 1725
Wood, glass

Private collection, Switzerland

125

Mirror of compressed leather in style of Sansovino

Venice, end of 16th c.
Leather, glass

Private collection, Switzerland

126

Standing mirror

Flanders, ca 1625
Ebony, tortoiseshell, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

127

Mirror with bizarre details

Antwerp, 16th c.
Wood, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

128

Mirror with Caritas attributes

Antwerp, 17th c.
Wood, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

129

Octagonal mirror

Flanders, 1st half of 17th c.
Wood, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

130

Facet-cut mirror

Netherlands, mid-17th c.
Ebony, glass
Olaf Lemke, Berlin

131

Mirror with phoenix motif

England, ca 1660
Wood, glass
Private collection

132

Baroque mirror in Flemish style

Italy, ca 1700
Wood, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

133

Mirror with Persian floral motif

Venice, end of 17th c.
Wood, glass
Private collection

134

Mirror with Chinoiserie elements

Venice, 1720
Wood, glass
Olaf Lemke, Berlin

135

Gilded wall mirror with original faceted glass

Rome or Turin, mid-18th c.
Wood, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

136

Oblong rococo mirror with mascarons

Venice, ca 1745
Wood, glass
Private collection, Switzerland

A NEW TECHNOLOGY: SILVER MIRRORS

Owing to the use of tin and mercury for coating mirrors and the toxic fumes they produced, mirror makers frequently died at a young age. A new process for silvering discovered by the German chemist Justus Liebig marked the breakthrough for non-toxic glass coating and paved the way for the development of silvered mirrors as from the 1860s. Today, most commercial mirrors are aluminium coated.

137

Silvered glass mirror with round flask, tripod, and glass burner

Germany, 1860-1862
Liebig-Museum Giessen

FIVE MIRRORS

The journey through the artistic and material history of the mirror concludes with a selection of pioneering artworks by Fernand Léger, Roy Lichtenstein, Monir Farmanfarmaian, Anish Kapoor, and Gerhard Richter, all of which place the mirror at the centre of their work be it through the title or the material alone. These works demonstrate the continuous relevance of the mirror as both material and motif in modern and contemporary art.

138

Octagon

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (b. 1922), 2013
Mirror and glass painting on wood and plaster

Courtesy of the artist and The Third Line Dubai

139

Le miroir

Fernand Léger (1881–1955)
1925
Oil on canvas

Kunstmuseum Basel, Gif of Dr. h.c. Raoul La Roche 1963

140

Mirror

Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997)
1972
Oil and magna on canvas

Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel

141

Mirror (Organic Green Black mix to Cobalt Blue)

Anish Kapoor (b. 1954)
2017
Stainless steel, lacquered

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

142

Spiegel (Mirror)

Gerhard Richter (b. 1932)
2008
Mirror glass

Private collection

6

Symbol of wisdom and vanity

As far back as ancient Greece, “wisdom” was considered one of the cardinal virtues. In Christianity, the quality was included in the canon of the “seven virtues” under the Latin terms “Sapientia” (wisdom) and “Prudentia” (prudence). In the art of the Middle Ages and the early modern period, “Wisdom” was often depicted in personified form holding a hand mirror, the message being that it was wise to recognize oneself and consider the path into the future with foresight.

However, the mirror may also allude to one of the “cardinal sins”, namely “Superbia”. Here the idea is that being absorbed with one’s own image in the mirror, considering neither past nor future and living in blissful oblivion instead, are the marks of arrogance, pride, and vanity.

143

Prudence (Prudentia)

Sheet 5 of the series *The Seven Virtues* Engraver: Philips Galle (1537–1612), Creator: Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525/30–1569) ca 1559/60
Copperplate engraving
Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

144

Prudence (Prudentia)

From: Cesare Ripa (ca 1555–1622), *Iconologia. Overo Descrittione Di Diverse Imagini cavate dall'antichità, & di propria inuentione* Rome 1603
Printed book with woodcuts
Private collection

145

Fortune (Fortuna) and Wisdom (Sapientia)

From: Charles de Bouelles (1479–1567), *Liber de sapiente* Paris 1510
Printed book with woodcuts
Zentralbibliothek Zürich – Alte Drucke

146

Prudence (Prudentia)

Agostino dei Musi (called Agostino Veneziano) (ca 1490 – after 1536) 1516, after Raphael (1483–1520)
Copperplate engraving
Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

147

Prudence (Prudentia)

Sheet 4 of the series *The Seven Virtues* Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533) 1530
Copperplate engraving
Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

148

Pride (Superbia)

Sheet 3 of the series *The Seven Deadly Sins* Engraver: Pieter van der Heyden (ca 1530 – ca 1572), Creator: Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525/30–1569), 1558
Copperplate engraving
Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

149

Von eyner edlen frowen wie die vor eym spiegel stuond (About a noble woman as she stood before a mirror)

From: Geoffroy de La Tour Landry (before 1330–1402/06) *Der Ritter vom Turn von den Exempeln der gotsforcht vnd erberkait* Basel 1493
Printed book with woodcuts, ascribed to Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528)
Kantonsbibliothek Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Trogen

150

The purgatory with the Seven Deadly Sins

Conrad Dinckmut (active ca 1475–1495) 1483
Coloured woodcut
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Grafische Sammlung

151

Vberhebung der hochfart (The arrogance of pride)

From: Sebastian Brant (1457/1458–1521) *Narren Schyff*, Basel 1497
Printed book with woodcuts
Zentralbibliothek Zürich – Alte Drucke

152

De unda et speculo (Of waves and mirrors)

From: Sebastian Brant (1457/1458–1521), *Publij Virgilij maronis opera cum quinque vulgaris commentariis [...]* Strasbourg 1502
Printed book with woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528)
Private collection

153

Von neuwen Fünden (Of new finds)

From: Sebastian Brant (1457/58–1521), *Welt Spiegel or Narren Schiff*, Basel 1574
Printed book with woodcuts by Tobias Stimmer (1539–1584)
Private collection

154

Künfftig ist der tag/ an dem du dich in einem spiegel nit erkennen kanst (The day will come / when you will not recognize yourself in the mirror)

From: Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), *Von der Artzney bayder Glück [...]* Augsburg 1532
Printed book with woodcuts
Private collection

155

Der Spiegel ein Rathgeber der Schönheit (The mirror as an advisor on beauty)

From: Aegidius Albertinus (1560–1620), *Hirschschleiffer* Cologne 1664
Printed book with woodcuts

Private collection

156

Mirror fool

From: *Centi-Folium stultorum in Quarto, Oder Hundert Ausbündige Narren in Folio.[...]*

Vienna and Nuremberg 1709
Printed book with copperplate engravings by Johann Christoph Weigel (1654–1725) or his circle

Private collection

157

Superbia (Pride)

From: Cesare Ripa (1555–1622), *Des berühmten Italiänischen Ritters, Cæsaris Ripæ, allerley Künsten, und Wissenschaften[...]*

Augsburg, ca 1761
Printed book with illustrations by Gottfried Eichler the Younger (1715–1770) and Jeremias Wachsmuth (1711–1771)

Private collection

158

Se regardant dans la glace, il se trouve joli garçon

From: *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux. Études de mœurs contemporaines*, Paris 1842

Printed book with lithographs by Jean-Jacques Grandville (actually Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard) (1803–1847)

Private collection

159

Sight

Sheet 3 from the series *The Five Senses*
Engraver: Crispijn de Passe the Elder (1564–1637), Creator: Marten de Vos (1532–1603) 1590–1637
Etching and copperplate engraving

Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

160

La Vérité (Truth)

Jules Lefebvre (1834–1912) 1870
Oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

As the large-format painting *La Vérité* (Truth) by Jules Lefebvre indicates, allegorical female figures holding mirrors resurged in European art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in French salon

painting as well as the art movement of Symbolism. Nothing but the “naked truth” is what the lofty work, with which Lefebvre celebrated great success in the Salon show of 1870, wished to show. Shining like a torch, the polished mirror represents the all-pervading luminosity of truth.

161

Allegory of Vanity

Flanders, ca 1550
Oil on wood

Private collection

162

Vanity

Frank Cadogan Cowper RA (1877–1958), 1907
Oil on wood

Royal Academy of Arts, London

163

Mirror on an easel in the shape of a dragon

Gabriel Viardot (1830–1904) ca 1880
Wood, mirror

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

7 The Magic of Mirrors

Mirrors, which have the strange ability to laterally invert objects, which are fragile and faithfully reflect all details, but can also be dark and mysterious, inspired humans not only to view them as harmless reflectors of reality but also to see in them a potent medium. They were believed to have the power to intervene in people's lives, to provide advice and protection, to reveal things hidden, but also marked a potential threat. There is probably no better way to illustrate the magical side to mirrors than a look into the history of film: mirrors feature in countless horror, fantasy, and vampire movies where they foretell the future, reveal the hidden past, make the invisible visible, and vice versa, or spell death.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that mirrors often feature in the art of Surrealism to suggest the abysmal, incomprehensible, or hidden aspects of existence, as the works of Salvador Dalí and the Belgian painter Paul Delvaux convey.

164

La Strega (The witch)

Angelo Caroselli (1585–1652)
first half of 17th c.
Oil on wood

Private collection

In this painting the baroque artist Angelo Caroselli plays with multiple perspectives, reflections, and conventions. The figure of a witch appears to be reaching into the pictorial space of the mirror. In the mirror we recognize an easel and next to it the face of man, probably that of the painter himself, his gaze focused on his model as well as the viewer. However, Caroselli also opens a third, fantastical pictorial space in the vase's reflection at the left bottom margin. Here we recognize not only the artist a second time but also a female figure to his left. Now the skull has taken the place of the "witch" as the embodiment of transience. The allusion to the afterworld also stands for black magic which helps to stir the artist's imagination. The witch's posture mimics and, at the same time, reverses the then current iconography of the penitent, ecstatic Mary Magdalene including her typical attribute, the human skull.

165

Transformación

(Overpainting of a work from the 16th c. attributed to Mathias Gerung)

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989), 1974
Oil on wood

Colero collection

166

Woman in the mirror

Paul Delvaux (1897–1994), 1936
Oil on canvas

Museo nacional Thyssen–Bornemisza
Madrid

167

Mir Kanak consults an astrologer

From: *Dvadasa Bhava*
(Twelve existences)
Artist from Allahabad
India, Mughal period, 1600–1605
Pigment painting and gold on paper

Private collection, Zurich

THE MAGIC MIRROR

This massive bronze “magic mirror”, made especially for the exhibition in a Kyoto mirror workshop, reveals an optical illusion that has us baffled: if you hold the mirror slightly inclined in front of a wall and shine a bright light onto the mirror’s surface, it will reflect a kind of shadow image. Surprisingly, the slightly blurred image shows the decoration on the back of the mirror. Although these kinds of mirror, which have been known in China for more than two thousand years, are referred to as “light-transparent mirrors”, the thick bronze finish prevents any light from passing through. What is the secret behind this “magic” reflection?

Mirrors of this type are made by pouring liquid bronze into a mould, with one side slightly convex and smooth, the other featuring a high relief as decoration (here in the shape of a buddha). After casting, the solidified blank is placed on a base with the decorated, relief-faced side facing downwards. Then the face of the mirror is polished thoroughly with the aid of a planer. Due to the pressure induced by the planer, microscopically more material is removed from the thicker relief areas than from the thin sections, creating a minimal unevenness on the mirror surface invisible the naked eye. But when illuminated with a bright light, the image of the decoration on the reverse is reflected.

168

Contemporary “magic mirror”
with Amitabha

Buddha motif
Kyoto, Japan
Metal alloy, polished
Museum Rietberg Zürich

8

Spiritual reflections – mirrors and mysticism

In many religions, one comes across texts that describe mirrors and their properties. Mirrors are often seen as a metaphor for the human soul: the soul must be kept pure and polished, not a speck of dust should be allowed to settle on it. Only then can the Divine become reflected in it and become manifest.

A Persian manuscript of 1450 recounts a telling episode from the life of Alexander the Great. Alexander wished to know, so the story goes, which painting tradition was superior, the Chinese or the Byzantine tradition. To solve the issue, he asked a Chinese and a Byzantine painter to stage a competition. The Byzantine artist painted an exquisite painting on his wall, while his Chinese counterpart merely polished his wall to an immaculate shine. Alexander, who is seen standing at the centre of the illustration, passed judgement: the Byzantine artist is the better painter, but nobody surpasses the Chinese artist when it comes to polishing. However, it is only through the reflection of the painted picture on the wall, that the painting’s radiance, its true nature as a work of art, comes to the fore. The story alludes to a popular Sufi proverb according to which the soul, by nature, is a blunt mirror that requires polishing for it to be able to cast back God’s reflection.

The polished golden wall referred to in the manuscript is here juxtaposed with the work *Portrait IV* by the contemporary artist Hubertus Hamm. Made of solid gold and weighing 18kg it presents a large mirror exuding an inner radiance.

169

Devotional mirror with Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross

Augsburg, ca 1800
Reverse glass painting, wooden frame

Private collection

170

Devotional mirror with Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan

Probably from the Cistercian convent Rathausen (formerly Diocese of Constance, today Canton of Lucerne)
ca 1700

Reverse glass painting

Kollegiatstift St. Leodegar im Hof Luzern – Luzerner Stiftungsschatz

171 (Wallpaper image)

Detail from the cupola fresco showing Mary and Baby Jesus

Gottfried Bernhard Götz (1708–1774), 1748–1750

Cupola painting in the Birnau pilgrimage church on Lake Constance
Photo: Rainer Wolfsberger

Baby Jesus emits a “ray of grace” which is directed via a heart to a real mirror and thus spreads in the form of divine light to the faithful gathered in church.

172

Nervus opticus

Zacharias Traber (1611–1678)
Vienna ca 1675

Printed book with illustrations

Bibliothek der Universität Basel

173

Ars magna lucis et umbrae, in decem libros digesta

Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680)
Rome 1646

Printed book with illustrations

Zentralbibliothek Zürich – Alte Drucke

174

A Chinese and a Byzantine painter vie in a trial of skill

From: *Khamsa (The Five Treasures)*

Author: Nizami (Gamal ad-Din Abz Muhammad Ilyas ibn Yusuf ibn Zaki ibn Mu'ayyid)
(ca 1141–1209)

Iran, Schiraz, 853 H. / 1449/50
Illustrated manuscript

The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran
1913

175

Portrait IV

Hubertus Hamm (b. 1950)
2016

Mirror, gold, 995/24 carat, alder wood

On loan from the artist

With the kind support of Degussa Goldhandel GmbH

NO MIRROR, NO DUST?

In the two written works projected in the video, the contemporary artist Lu Dadong renders two poems created in China in the 8th century which recount a famous episode in the history of Chan Buddhism (Zen in Japanese). The one text (on the right) was written by the wise monk Shenxiu. It refers to a mirror “that we must strive to polish”. The second text (on the left) contains the famous answer to the first poem conceived by the Chan patriarch Huineng. By refuting everything the first poem has to say, Huineng sums up the true essence of Zen – emptiness – or the sudden experience of enlightenment: “There is no mirror. Where should dust collect?”

SACRED MIRRORS IN KERALA

In the Kerala region of southern India, sacred mirrors – the embodiment of the goddess Bhagavati – are venerated in special shrines as so-called *kannati bimbam* (mirror idols).

One of the most fascinating examples of the use of mirrors in ritual performances refer to the so-called *teyyam* ceremonies, rituals in northern Kerala which involve spirit possession. The performers embody said *teyyam*, essentially local deities, which they represent through elaborate costumes at religious festivals. In a final act on their way to complete possession, the performers look into a mirror, and thus transform from being human to being a deity.

In his steel sculptures, the contemporary artist Balan Nambiar, a native of Kerala, makes reference to the sacred mirrors of his homeland, both in terms of content and form. Just like the mirror idols kept in the temples, Nambiar's sculptures, too, show only slightly reflecting, shimmering surfaces.

176 (Wallpaper image)

Kannati Bimbam (mirror idol)
in the Sri Kodoth Bhagavati
temple

India, Kerala, Kasaragod District

Photo: Harsha Vinay

177

Kannati Bimbam (mirror idol)

India, Kerala, Kannur District,
Jeevan Kunhimangalam, 2018
Pancaloha (alloy of five metals)

Museum Rietberg Zürich

178

Shakti Symbolized

Balan Nambiar (b. 1937)
2004

Stainless steel

Museum Rietberg Zürich

179

Kannati Bimbam

Balan Nambiar (b. 1937)
2004

Stainless steel

Museum Rietberg Zürich

9

Two costumes – shaman and oracle priest

The Siberian shaman's costume on display here is the oldest extant piece in the world and still complete; it was included in the Göttingen university collection in 1788.

Shamanism refers to the basic belief that the world is spirited. Everything in nature – humans, animals, plants, stones, natural phenomena – is animated. Shamans have the ability to mediate between the human world and beings that populate the netherworld and the realm of spirits. In order to communicate with these otherworldly powers, they must enter into trance upon which their spirit leaves their body to receive messages from the beyond.

The reindeer-skin costume is richly adorned with textile and metallic objects. These represent the shaman's helper spirits. Among the metal objects there are several mirrors. Their task is to keep evil spirits and demons at bay.

The colourful robe weighing more than forty kilos, which belongs to the Nechung state oracle of Tibet, is worn by a priest when consulting the oracle. During the session he falls into trance and so becomes the mouthpiece of the respective deity. The Nechung Oracle which today is domiciled in Dharamshala in India counsels the Dalai Lama. The mirror which is worn over the heart is referred to as the “mirror of the pure spirit”. In its quality as an unchanging symbol of wisdom, purity and clarity it reflects everything that goes on. Engraved at the centre of the mirror is the seed syllable *HRI*. It stands for Avalokiteshvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion.

180

Robe of the Nechung state oracle

Tibet, Dharamsala, produced by order of the Nechung monastery in 1985

Brocade, gold, silver, gilt bronze, gemstones

Museum Rietberg Zürich

181

Shaman's costume

Russia, Siberia,
Evenks, 2nd half of 18th c.
Reindeer leather, metal, linen,
animal and vegetable material

Ethnologische Sammlung der
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen,
Baron von Asch

182 (Wallpaper image)

Nechung state oracle with bow and sword

New Year oracle, Dharmansala
25 February 1999

Photo: Manuel Bauer

10 The mirror as weapon and protection

Just as a wall reflects sound as an echo, a mirror reflects light – nothing sticks to it. Since time immemorial and in such diverse cultural areas as Egypt, China, and Mexico, mirrors have been regarded as a suitable medium to ward off evil and hostile forces.

Minkisi figures from the Congo were charged with special powers as a result of the magical substances they carried in and on their bodies. A mirror displayed on the belly served as protection against sickness and evil but also had the power to detect witches and thieves.

Mirrors not only had the power to ward off evil forces, they were, and still are, also used as offensive, optical weapons. According to legend, the great Greek mathematician and engineer Archimedes is said to have destroyed a Roman fleet before Syracuse in 212 BC with the aid of a large parabolic mirror. Thanks to his mirror shield, the Greek hero Perseus succeeded in evading Medusa's deadly gaze and severing her head.

183

Patera with Athena, Perseus, Hermes, and Gorgon sisters

Portugal, Lameira Larga,
Roman, late 1st to early 2nd c.
Chance find 1907
Silver, partially gilt
Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, Lisbon

184

Shield with head of Medusa

Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901),
modelled by Peter Bruckmann
(1851–1926)
1887
Plaster, coloured
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Gift from artist's
bequest (after 1926)

185

Medusa

William Kentridge (b. 1955) 2001
Anamorphosis, lithograph with
reproduction of six different
sheets from *Le Nouveau Larousse
Illustré*, 1906
Metal cylinder, wove paper
Edition for Parkett No. 63, Parkett-
Verlag Zurich

186

Male Nkisi power figure

Historical kingdom of Loango
(today Republic of the Congo
and Cabinda), Vili, before 1904
Purchased on site by Robert
Visser, before 1904
Wood, glass, organic material
Horstmann Collection

187

**Nkisi power figure with
weapons (*mbula*)**

Lower Congo region (today
Democratic Republic of the
Congo, Cabinda, and Republic
of the Congo)
Wood, glass, cotton fabric,
vegetable materials, earth, colour
pigments
GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu
Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden, Sammlung Naturkunde-
museum Stralsund

188

**Nkisi power figure with round
mirror**

DR Congo, Bakongo, 19th c.
Wood, earth, glass mirror, iron
Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Eduard von der Heydt

189

**Nkisi power figure of a hunter
(*nquinde*)**

Vili, historical kingdom of Loango
(today Republic of the Congo and
Cabinda) before 1904
Wood, iron, glass, porcelain, cot-
ton fabric, animal and vegetable
materials, earth, colour pigments
GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu
Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden, Collection Robert Visser
(1860–1937)

190

**Nkisi power figure in shape of
a dog (*kozo*)**

Historical kingdom of Loango
(today Republic of the Congo and
Cabinda), Vili, before 1904
Wood, iron, glass, cotton fabric,
vegetable materials, earth, colour
pigments
GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu
Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden
Collection Robert Visser (1860–1937)

191

**Female Nkisi power figure
(*chimpusse*)**

Historical kingdom of Loango
(today Republic of the Congo and
Cabinda), before 1904
Wood, iron, glass, vegetable
materials, earth, colour pigments
GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu
Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden, Collection Robert Visser
(1860–1937)

11 Beauty, love, and seduction – peeping into women’s chambers

Women with mirrors are a common theme in Indian and Japanese paintings, prints, and photographs as well as in European art of the 16th and 17th centuries. The illustrations all show women in the act of bathing, putting on makeup, adorning themselves, or waiting for their lover, while looking at themselves in the mirror under the eyes of men. Although the European works, at least at first sight, place the women with their mirrors in a moralizing context – they embody the cardinal sin of Vanity – the purpose they were really made for seems obvious. The scenes were arranged by male artists and photographers and destined mainly for the eyes of male viewers which also explains why the women are only lightly dressed, if at all. In some of the pictures we catch a glimpse of the depicted woman’s face in the mirror, which lends the composition a special twist: the woman we seem to be watching discreetly is actually observing us, in other words, she is directly implicating the viewer.

In Roman times, already, the goddess of love, Venus, was shown with a mirror. As works by Titian, Rubens, Velázquez – as well as the painting by the French court painter Simon Vouet on display here – go to show, the motif of Venus with a mirror was an extremely popular theme in the age of Baroque.

192

Woman brushing her teeth

Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806)
Japan, Edo period, ca 1797
Coloured woodcut
Fondation Baur, Geneva

193

Geisha Tomimoto Toyohina

From the series *Collection of faces of beautiful women*
Chōbunsai Eishi (1756–1829),
Japan, Edo period, 1795/96
Coloured woodcut
Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Julius Mueller

194

The courtesan Nishikido from the house of Chōjiya

From the series *New year cloths as fresh as young leaves*
Chōbunsai Eishi (1756–1829),
Japan, Edo period, 1795/96
Coloured woodcut
Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Julius Mueller

195

Woman with mirror

Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865)
Japan, Edo period, ca 1840
Coloured woodcut
Museo d’Arte Orientale Venezia –
Polo Museale del Veneto

196

Yanagi Bridge

From the series *One hundred famous places and beauties of Edo*
Utagawa Toyokuni III (1786–1865)
Japan, Edo period, 1858
Coloured woodcut
Museum Rietberg Zürich, on permanent loan from Werner Coninx Collection

197

Coiffure of a married woman

From the series *Five modern beauties*
Shimura Tatsumi (1907–1980)
Japan, ca 1953
Woodcut
Museum Rietberg Zürich

198

Woman doing her coiffure with Mount Fuji and Edo Bay in Shinagawa in the background

Keisai Eisen (1790–1848)
Japan, Edo period, 1822–1828
Surimono, coloured woodcut
Museum Rietberg Zürich, on permanent loan from the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich

199

A woman perceives the face of a man in a mirror

Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865)
Japan, Edo period, 1823–1825
Surimono, coloured woodcut

Museum Rietberg Zürich, on permanent loan from the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich

200

A courtesan fixing her hair decoration

Japan, Edo period, 1823–1825
Surimono, coloured woodcut

Museum Rietberg Zürich, on permanent loan from the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich

201

A geisha next to her makeup table

Yanagawa Shigenobu II
(active 1824–1860)
Japan, Edo period, 1835
Surimono, coloured woodcut

Museum Rietberg Zürich, on permanent loan from the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich

202

Woman before the mirror

Unknown photographer
Japan, 1880–1890
Photograph, hand-coloured albumen print

Museo delle Culture, Lugano

203

Women doing their coiffure

Kusakabe Kimbei (1841–1932)
Japan, 1880–1890
Photograph, hand-coloured albumen print

Museo delle Culture, Lugano

204

Women

Unknown photographer
Japan, 1880–1890
Photograph, hand-coloured albumen print

Museo delle Culture, Lugano

205

Young woman putting on makeup

Kusakabe Kimbei (1841–1932)
Japan, 1880–1890
Photograph, hand-coloured albumen print

Museo delle Culture, Lugano

206

Woman before the mirror

Unknown photographer
Japan, 1880–1890
Photograph, hand-coloured albumen print

Museo delle Culture, Lugano

207

Kyōdai (Toilette set with mirror)

Japan, Edo period, 18th c.
Lacquer, bronze

Museo d'Arte Orientale Venezia
Polo museale del Veneto

208

Mirror

Japan, Edo period, 18th c.
Bronze or silver

Museo d'Arte Orientale Venezia
Polo museale del Veneto

209

The experienced lover (Praudha Vasakasajja)

Folio from a Rasamañjari series
India, Rajasthan, Mewar,
1620–1630
Pigment painting with gold on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Horst Metzger Collection

210

In anticipation of her lover (Vilavali Ragini)

Folio from a Ragamala series
India, Rajasthan, Mewar, dated
1628
Pigment painting with gold on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Horst Metzger Collection

211

In anticipation of her lover (Vilavali Ragini)

Folio from a Ragamala series
India, Aurangabad or Raghogarh,
ca 1680
Pigment painting with gold on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Horst Metzger Collection

212

Woman completing her toilette

Folio from a Rukmini series
India, Rajasthan, Kota, 1710–1725
Pigment painting with gold on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Horst Metzger Collection

213

Sita's ordeal of fire

India, Mewar, 1690–1710
Pigment painting with gold on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Barbara und Eberhard Fischer
Collection

214

Young women enjoying themselves while bathing

India, Guler, ca 1800
Pigment painting

Habighorst Collection
Courtesy of Francesca Galloway

215

Krishna and Rada awake to the sound of music

Artist: probably Ranjha
India, Guler, ca 1800
Pigment painting

Habighorst Collection
Courtesy of Francesca Galloway

216

Prakash Chand of Guler with a mirror or Lord of Hindur

India, Pahari region, Guler
ca 1800
Pigment painting on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Eva und Konrad Seitz Collection

217

Fireworks and animal bouts for the Maharana Ari Singh before the Amar Vilas Palace in Udaipur

Signed by Naga, son of Bhagvan
India, Rajasthan, Udaipur, dated
1764
Pigment painting with gold on
paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart

218

Maharana Jagat Singh II with his son on a swing

Signed by Jiva, son of Chand
India, Rajasthan, Udaipur, dated
1735
Pigment painting, gold and mica
on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart

219

Krishna being indulged by ladies

Folio from the “Palam” / “Mitha-
Nana” Bhagavata Purana series
India, Delhi/Agra, ca 1525
Pigment painting on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Horst Metzger Collection

220

The return of the unfaithful lover (Khandita Nayika)

India, Nurpur, ca 1720
Pigment painting

Habighorst Collection
Courtesy of Francesca Galloway

221

In anticipation of her lover (Vilavali Ragini)

India, Hyderabad, 1720–1740
Folio from a Ragamala series
Pigment painting with gold on
paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of Horst Metzger Collection

222

A woman tying her turban

India, Mughal period, 1760–1780
Pigment painting on paper

Museum Rietberg Zürich
Gift of the Ganesha Foundation

223

Odile and Odette

Yinka Shonibare CBE (b. 1962)
2005
HD video, duration: 14:28 minutes

Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery
London and James Cohan Gallery
New York

224

Toilette of Venus

Simon Vouet (1590–1649)
17th c.
Oil on canvas

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Gemäldegalerie

225

David and Bathsheba

Hans von Aachen (1552–1615)
1612–1615
Oil on canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien
Gemäldegalerie

According to the biblical story, King David once watched Bathsheba bathing in his garden. She was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a soldier in David’s army. When her husband was absent, David had Bathsheba brought to his palace where he slept with her. She became pregnant upon which David ordered the death of Uriah in a letter. He went on to marry her and she became David’s eighth wife.

226

Hercules and Omphale

Cornelis Troost (1696–1750), 1727
Oil on canvas

Collection Electrostal

The painting depicts a scene from Greek mythology: Hercules, the hero famed for his strength, once had to serve as a slave in punishment for a misdeed, upon which he was bought by the Lydian queen Omphale who took him as her husband. At the royal court Hercules became increasingly effeminate: he began wearing women's clothes, spun wool, and took on many other female chores while Omphale donned his lion skin and took possession of his club. Depictions of *Hercules and Omphale* became a symbol for male "self-submission"; they were meant to show what happens when wives begin wielding the sceptre in marriage (in this case a club). While the effete Hercules clutches his distaff and lovingly looks up to his wife, she proudly regards herself in the mirror. Cupid, also depicted in the mirror, appears to be whispering something to her. At the painting's bottom edge, a small boy is blowing soap bubbles – a Vanitas symbol signifying the transience of all beauty and life.

227

Venus statuette with mirror

Padua or Venice, ca 1500
Belt: Christoph Kumberger (before 1553–1611), ca 1578
Bronze, gilt silver, beads

Historisches Museum Basel
Amerbach-Kabinett

228

Susanna and the Elders

Copy by Anna Jäger, 1938,
after the painting
by Jacopo Tintoretto 1555/56
Oil on canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien

Since this masterpiece by the Venetian painter Tintoretto (1518–1594), one of the main treasures at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, is never lent out, we present here an exact copy – a mirror image of the original, so to speak. The painting tells the biblical story of Susanna. While bathing in the garden and regarding herself closely in the mirror, she is being watched by two elders. When the two men approach her and demand from her to succumb to their desires, she resists them. The two old men take her to court and accuse her of adultery. However, the Prophet Daniel exposes their wicked plot. Susanna is proven innocent and the two elders are sentenced to death.

12 Through the looking glass into a parallel world

Do other, parallel worlds exist behind a mirror? In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice steps through a mirror into a world of dreams.

Orpheus played by Jean Marais in Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée* of 1949 does the same. But in his case, it is the world of the dead where time stands still. While, in the original myth, Orpheus descends into the underworld to retrieve his beloved wife Eurydice, albeit in vain, Orpheus in the film succeeds in his venture, even if only for a short time. He, too, disobeys the order not to look his lover in the eye: when he accidentally sees her in the car's rearview mirror, she disappears for good.

The Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, who has explored mirrors throughout his oeuvre, created *The Etruscan* in 1976, a work that formally ties in with both Alice and Orpheus. Pistoletto places the Etruscan bronze statue of an *arringatore*, an orator, immediately in front of a mirror so that due to its reflection – by touching the glass and through its stance – the figure appears to be stepping through the mirror. In this work, the past, present, and future become one.

229

Through the looking-glass

Lewis Carroll (1832–1898)
New York 1892
Printed book with illustrations
by John Tenniel

Library of the English Department
University of Zurich

230

L'etrusco

Michelangelo Pistoletto (b. 1933)
1976
Mirror, bronze

Collezione Cittadellarte Fondazione
Pistoletto, Biella

A SWISS NARCISSUS

Our journey through the world of mirrors ends as it started: with Narcissus – to be more precise, with the *Schweizer Narziss*, a major work by the Basel artist and architect Paul Camenisch. It was created towards the end of the Second World War in 1944, after the Battle of Stalingrad and the Allied invasion in Normandy. While the Swiss Narcissus is quietly contemplating himself in the bathroom mirror, lost in a world of his own, around him the world is engulfed in war – as indicated by the images on the bathroom tiles. Camenisch's work still touches us today. It reminds us that we still tend to view the world from our own narrow, personal angle, from our cosy bathroom, while shocking events continue to shake the world outside. Pictures thereof no longer come in form of haunting images on bathroom tiles, now we experience them in real time on the ubiquitous screens around us.

231

Schweizer Narziss
(Swiss Narcissus)

Paul Camenisch (1893–1970)
1944
Oil on canvas

Kunstmuseum Basel, Deposit of the
Friends of the Kunstmuseum Basel

232

Mirror fountain

Li Wei (b. 1981)
2019
Monitor with inbuilt camera and
software, washbasin

Commissioned by the Museum Rietberg
Zürich

