

beyond the looking glass

Alfredo Aceto, Victoria Cantons, Sylvie Fleury, Dorota Gawęda and Eglé Kulbokaitė,
Thomas Julier, Klaudia Schifferle, Xu Yang, Sinae Yoo
curated by Doris Son

19.04. – 25.05.2024

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice ventures through a mirror into a fantastical world where logic and physics seem reversed. In this topsy-turvy reality, the little girl must overcome her skepticism and make her way through a life-sized chessboard to eventually be crowned queen of the realm. A classic of children literature, the novel is famous for its fanciful universe and its notable use of nonsensical humor to discuss profound themes, such as the struggle between free will and determinism.

Echoing Alice in *Wonderland's* sequel, the title of this exhibition is an invitation to contemplate what's hidden behind the surface. Like Carroll's book, it questions perception, identity, and the nature of reality. Yet the exhibition encourages us to look not just through the mirror, but also beyond it. Offering a contemporary perspective on the universal issues addressed in Alice's adventures, the artworks examine our present-day culture and the way technology has reshaped our self-awareness, sometimes blurring the line between reality and the other side of our screens.

Mirrors are a recurring motif throughout the exhibition. Whether actual, depicted, or metaphorical, mirrors evoke not only the reflection of truths but also the subjective nature of (self-)perception. They are more than objects catering to our narcissism, they also represent a threshold between inner and outer realities, and a symbol of the way our identities are constantly being mediated and negotiated, particularly through screens, and, therefore, never fixed.

In Lewis Carroll's books, Alice is both a witness to and the subject of frequent metamorphoses. Like Alice's transformative adventures, artworks in the exhibition exemplify transformation as a state of being, and the fundamental fluidity of identity. This is notably visible in the paintings by Victoria Canton, whose works encrypt gender activism, and by Xu Yang, who explores drag and the performative nature of femininity. Other works in turn play with meaning on a more semiotic level. Take, for instance, Alfredo Aceto's sculpture *Echinoidea*, made out of the cast of automobile parts that the artist recontextualizes and, thus, resignifies, or Klaudia Schifferle's sculptures, which hybridize everyday objects to create surrealist anthropomorphic figures that seem to embody the linguistic phenomenon of blend words, which *Through the Looking-Glass* popularized in English under the name 'portmanteau'. Each in their own way, these artworks remind us that meaning is always layered and that there often is more than meets the eye.

A key theme of *Through the Looking-Glass* is how language determines the way we see the world. Likewise, in the current age, new technological developments, including generative artificial intelligence and extended reality tools, have increasingly impacted our perception and altered our relationship with the notions of authenticity and truth. It is in this sense that the exhibition also includes works that are seeking to disrupt conventional understandings of authorship and originality, such as Dorota Gawęda and Eglé Kulbokaitė's landscape and still life paintings that were composed with an AI and produced digitally.

In Alice's adventures, absurdity is never arbitrary; it simply denotes a reality that obeys to different rules and logic. Likewise, what may seem whimsical or eccentric at first sight is often perfectly serious to the inhabitants of the world on the other side of the mirror. Similarly, in this exhibition, the artworks often conceal their meaning, and thus challenge us to question our own perspective, and to use our imagination.

Simon W. Marin