

Murray Guy

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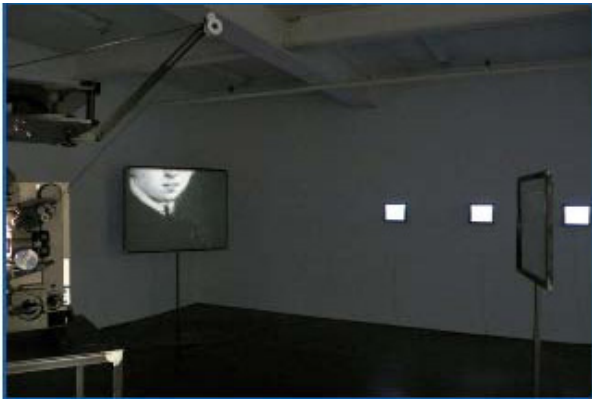
The Washington Post

"Gopnik's Daily Pic: Matthew Buckingham at Murray Guy"

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By Blake Gopnik

November 22, 2010



Matthew Buckingham is one of the most subtle, deep-thinking artists now working.

Washingtonians got a taste of his wildly complex film-based art in the Hirshhorn's "Cinema Effect" project in 2008. A recent piece by Buckingham, titled "Caterina van Hemessen is 20 Years Old" and showing at Murray Guy gallery in New York, is as fascinating (and dizzying) as anything he's done. The work is built around long, lingering close-up takes on an art-historical image: A black-and-white reproduction of a 1548 self portrait of the artist Hemessen as she works away at a picture of herself, said to be the first such painting made. The filmed details are projected in 16mm, but the projector, set beside us in the gallery, doesn't point straight at its screen.

Instead, its light gets there by bouncing off a mirror mounted at 45 degrees halfway across the room - so that the self-portrait seen on screen is actually reversed left-to-right. The walls of the room feature twelve little texts that talk about the painting and its era - all printed in reverse, to be read using little hand mirrors. And our job, as viewers, is to sort out the extreme complexity of looking that's involved, as we take in reversed filmed details of a reproduction of a painting of an artist using a mirror to paint a picture of herself painting. The more you look and read and think, the more you realize that there is to unpack. (For instance, the fact that Buckingham's setup gets us close to what Hemessen would have seen in the mirror as she painted, which she then chose to reverse again to make her finished picture look like it was not made with a mirror. And the fact that Buckingham's lingering shots scan the painting and the person shown in it just as Hemessen's eyes might have done, as they passed from detail to detail across the scene she was painting - including her own body - and then transferred them to canvas one part at a time. And both film and painter use a mirror in their "looking," though our eyes are happy to forget that fact as we ourselves look.) I spent more than an hour with Buckingham's show, and still felt I'd barely scratched the surface of his art.