

“Procured, Administrated, Forgotten” is the title of a book about the long-term unemployed in Germany,¹ but the same terms could equally be applied to many of the artworks that eke out an “unloved” existence in museum reserves. Every collection has them: unpopular, art-historically uninteresting, or less well-preserved works, which have been omitted from the canon and so rarely if ever find a place for themselves in the gallery. In the end, the big names have to be constantly shown and space on the walls is limited. “On average, the major Western museums display barely a tenth of their overall holdings.”²

The Groeningemuseum is home to one of the most important collections of early Netherlandish painting. It boasts works by Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, and Rogier van der Weyden, all of which recall the wealth of an earlier age. They are part of Bruges’ self-image as a fifteenth-century artistic metropolis, and draw visitors to the province of West Flanders from all over the world. Bruges is the epitome of a medieval city: untouched by the industrial revolution and two World Wars, and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000, it is a work of art in its own right, which is preserved as a tourist attraction privileging the aesthetic over function. Every square, every house, and every church can be visited, viewed, and consumed. What remains hidden, by contrast, are the contents of the museums’ reserves, which are not on permanent display.

Reserve

The separation of the exhibited collection from the stored collection grew historically out of attempts to reform the museums in the nineteen twenties. It had been customary in the nineteenth century for museums to display their entire collection all at one time, with paintings hung in several rows, one above the

other (“salon-style”). In the twenties, by contrast, the growth of scholarly research into museum collections led to a more systematic presentation and to the idea of mediation. Within the so called “museumreform” after World War I (especially in Germany) several innovations were adopted which were seen internationally as progressive.³ They included technical changes, such as the emulation of a neutral studio environment as an ordering principle (paintings hung in a single row and sculptures displayed in isolation before a monochrome white background); the separation of painting and sculpture collections; the placement of informative texts alongside the artworks rather than relying on comparative viewing; and the rationalization of exhibition spaces by dividing the collection into items for exhibition and those for research: the invention, in other words, of the museum reserve.⁴ The changes in question set the tone for the museum’s further development as an institution during the twentieth century, and were systematically refined.

The museum functions as a large-scale repository and archive for the preservation of cultural heritage. It manages, documents, and disseminates its accumulated knowledge, and subjects the works in its care to taxonomies of its own. Documentation such as inventories, card indexes, picture libraries, printed data, and catalogues help configure the objects for research, making them institutionally usable.⁵ The division of the collection into exhibited and stored works makes it easier for visitors to experience

¹ See E. Schröder, *Vermittelt, Verwaltet, Vergessen: Was Ein-Euro-Jobs mit Menschen machen*, Bonn 2011.

² M. Griesser-Stermescheg, *Tabu Depot: Das Museumsdepot in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2013, p. 103.

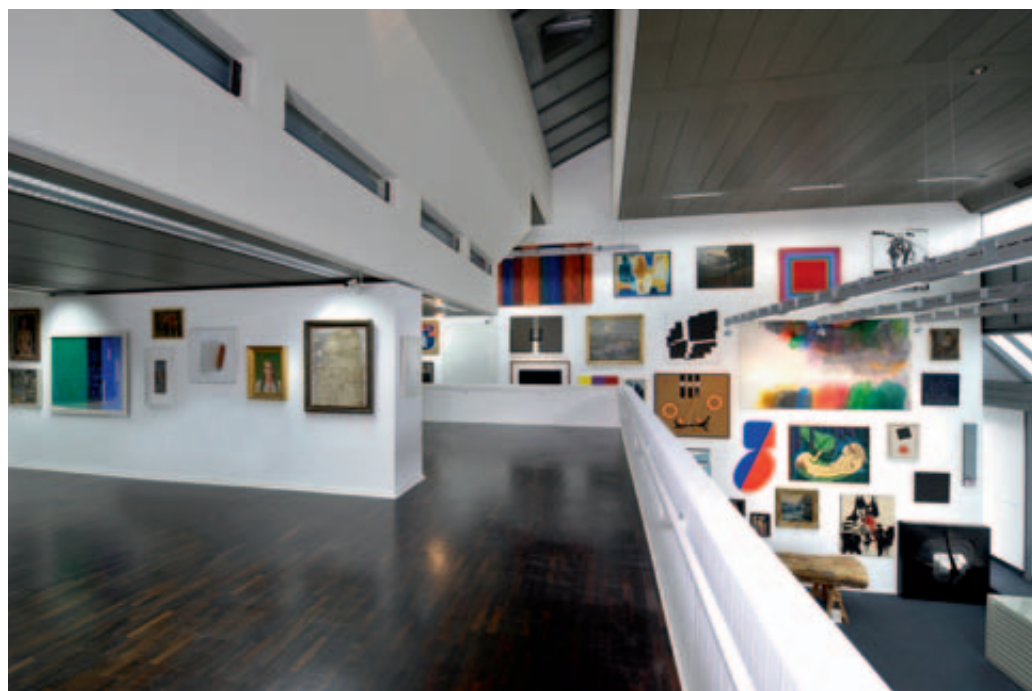
³ See A. Joachimides, *Die Museumsreformbewegung in Deutschland und die Entstehung des modernen Museums 1880–1940*, Dresden 2001, pp. 238ff.

⁴ For the corresponding changes in a number of German museums, see N. Cordier, *Deutsche Landesmuseen: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Betrachtung eines Museumstypus*, Bonn 2003, pp. 109–33.

⁵ See P. Müller-Tamm, “Bauen und Zeigen: Aus Geschichte und Gegenwart der Kunsthalle Karlsruhe,” in P. Müller-Tamm and R. Heß (eds.), *Bauen und Zeigen: Aus Geschichte und Gegenwart der Kunsthalle Karlsruhe* (exh. cat. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, June 5–September 21, 2014), Bielefeld 2014, pp. 12–31, esp. p. 19.



ill. 1 Publically accessible frames store in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2010



ill. 2 *alles (Everything)* at the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, March 7–April 26, 2009

⁶ K. Clark, “Ideal Picture Galleries: Paper read at the Annual Conference of the Museum Association, London, 6th July 1945,” in *The Museums Journal*, vol. 45, no. 8 (November 1945), pp. 129–34.

⁷ Griesser-Stermscheg, op. cit., p. 104.

⁸ See, for instance, the speech by Ronald Lauder, President of the Jewish World Congress at the Moses Mendelssohn Zentrum für europäisch-jüdische Studien, Potsdam, January 31, 2014: http://www.topographie.de/fileadmin/topographie/public/Presse/Reden_und_Vortraege/Lauder-engl-140130.pdf; and the interview with former German Minister of Culture Michael Naumann and the lawyer Peter Raue, January 15, 2014: http://www.art-magazin.de/szene/68511/naumann_raue (last accessed July 22, 2014).

⁹ See V. Beyer, “Schaudepots: Zu einer ergänzenden Form der musealen Darstellung,” in K. Dröge, D. Hoffmann (eds.), *Museum revisited: Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf eine Institution im Wandel*, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 153–66; T.G. Natter, M. Fehr, B. Habsburg-Lothringen (eds.), *Das Schaudepot: Zwischen offenem Magazin und Inszenierung*, Bielefeld 2010.

¹⁰ The exhibition *alles. 30 Jahre Wilhelm-Hack-Museum und Wiedereröffnung* (Everything: Thirtieth Anniversary and Reopening of the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum) ran from February 1 to April 26, 2009, at the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum in Ludwigshafen. It drew large numbers of visitors and gained widespread attention for the museum.

¹¹ As recently formulated by Ute und Rudolf Scharpff, who have made their private collection available for display at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart. See A. Sayah, “Bilanz eines Sammlerlebens: Ute und Rudolf Scharpff präsentieren unter dem Titel ‘Cool Place’ im Stuttgarter Kunstmuseum,” in *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, July 26, 2014.

¹² Griesser-Stermscheg, op. cit., p. 105.

¹³ See Nav Haq, “Crushed by Too Much Love: An interview with Ellen Harvey,” p. 23.

the presented selection, as they are able to focus their attention more systematically. It also allows the curators to prepare the information that has to be conveyed in an optimal fashion. Barely two months after the end of World War II, Kenneth Clark (1903–1983), the British art historian and former director of the National Gallery in London, gave an important speech with the title “Ideal Picture Galleries,” in which he praised especially the museum of Bruges for the fact that its exhibited collection consisted solely of a small number of masterpieces.⁶

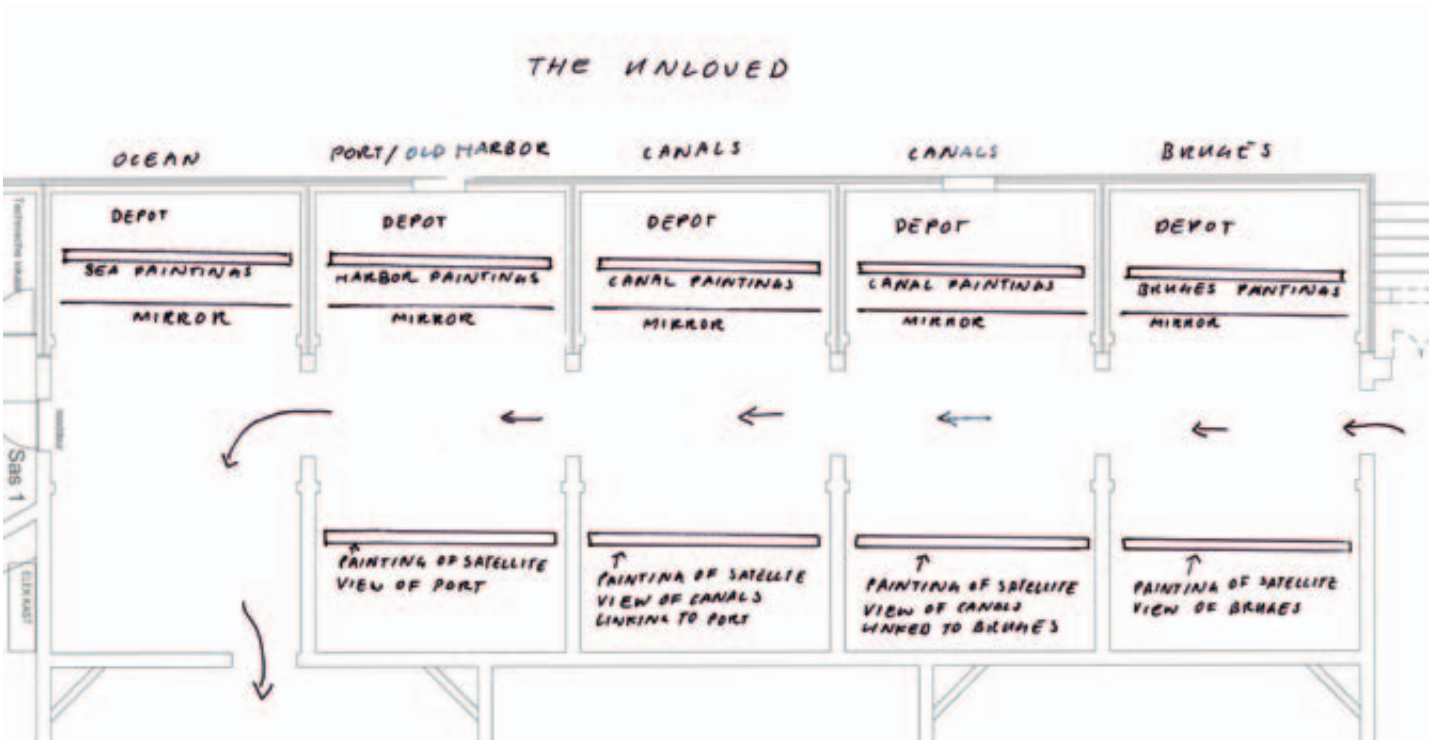
This attitude toward the permanent separation of the different elements of the collection began to change, however, and as the decades passed, the security afforded by storage in the reserve started to attract criticism because of the limits it placed on accessibility. “The hidden nature of the museum reserve is at once its greatest strength and weakness. Out of sight is out of mind. A publicly inaccessible reserve can lead to speculation about ‘mysterious depositories’ and ‘secret stores’.”⁷ The claim has even been made during recent investigations into the provenance of artworks that museum reserves are hiding places for Nazi plunder.⁸

Many museums have responded to these issues by expanding access to their collections in recent years, publishing catalogues, and setting up online databases. Display vaults and publicly accessible storage facilities are increasing in popularity at institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art (ill. 1, p. 9)

in New York, the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, and the Neue Pinakothek in Munich.⁹ In the name of maximizing transparency, the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum in Ludwigshafen (ill. 2, p. 9) emptied out its stores in 2009 and put its entire collection on display under the title *alles*.¹⁰ Even leading private collectors have begun—by way of promotion—to designate their collections as “open reserves” from which selected museums can help themselves to objects.¹¹ This heightened interest in storehouses that are not, in fact, terribly spectacular reflects not only the “largely unordered presentation,” but also “the ‘adventure’ of a glimpse behind the scenes at the museum, the closely packed objects and a view of the collection that is ‘uncensored’ or unmediated by a curatorial concept.”¹²

Site and history

Ellen Harvey’s work usurps all this as her point of departure for *The Unloved*, which grew out of a sense of curiosity and a desire to discover something that is hidden.¹³ The rooms the Groeningemuseum has made available for her project form a parallel parcours to the traditional exhibition circuit. Normally used for temporary exhibitions and the display of special collections, they form a sequence of five display areas, closed off to the rear by partition walls. Behind these are a series of metal racks from which paintings that are not normally displayed are hung from L-shaped hooks (ill. 4, p. 11). Despite attempts to present the exhibition surface itself as a neutral wall, the



ill. 3 Ellen Harvey’s plan for *The Unloved*, 2014

space beyond is made visible by the small amount of light that penetrates through the gaps to the sides of the partitions. Harvey decided to open up these publicly inaccessible storage spaces, while preserving the sense of something that is meant to be concealed. Visitors are turned into researchers, who get to peep intently at the half-seen objects,¹⁴ rather than simply strolling admiringly through the exhibition (ill. 4).

The thread running through the site-specific works in Harvey's eclectic oeuvre is a desire to discover the peculiarities of the site in question: what does this exhibition space, this museum need? What would a viewer like to see here? What do I find interesting?¹⁵ This time she was drawn in this instance to the neglected works from the Groeningemuseum's collection, in combination with an overlooked aspect of the city's history. Because Bruges has not always been just a "work of art": it was once a rich trading metropolis. The city owed its former prosperity to a flood in 1134, which carved out a navigable channel via the mouth of the river Zwin. Bruges now had access to the North Sea, allowing it to participate directly in international trade. At the port, English wool producers rubbed shoulders with winemakers from Gascony and Flemish weavers. The system of canals known as the *Reien*, which still flow through the city center today, allowed the merchandise to be transported to the main square, while also bolstering the city's defenses. Bruges became one of the Hanseatic League's most profitable trading centers or *Kontore*. Merchants from Italy and southern Germany, Castile and Portugal traded there, and bankers, including the Medici from Florence, opened branches. In the fifteenth century, Bruges became the residence of the dukes of Burgundy, who helped trigger a cultural, architectural, and economic golden age. By the end of the medieval period, it was the most prosperous city in all of northern Europe. Ubiquitous wealth attracted a great many artists to Bruges, in search of patrons, and it is their works that are now shown as the Groeningemuseum's greatest treasures.

The golden age did not last, however. The Zwin silted up again toward the end of the fifteenth century, robbing the metropolis of its access to the ocean and heralding a period of economic paralysis. Like *Sleeping Beauty*, Bruges fell into a slumber that was to last for centuries. In the modern era this has proved its greatest asset: the medieval city center was never redeveloped, and now forms the basis for an important tourist trade, while simultaneously effacing the memory of the port to which the city owed its original wealth. Very few tourists are aware that Bruges was once a port or that it still is today: the new docks that were created in the borough of Zeebrugge (Sea Bruges) in 1907 remain an important economic engine for the inhabitants of the city and for the region.¹⁶ Harvey wants to remind us of these connections, to foreground the unseen and to bring the untold back to mind.



ill. 4 The Groeningemuseum reserve store with works by Marcel Broodthaers, 2003

The Unloved

The Unloved uses the connection between Bruges and the North Sea to narrate an alternative history of the museum and the city. Harvey does this by juxtaposing her monumental oil painting of a satellite photograph from the internet of this area¹⁷ with a selection of historical landscape paintings from the Groeningemuseum's reserve. In five successive rooms she has replaced the partition walls that normally separate the exhibition spaces from the concealed storage behind with 106¼ × 204¾ in. mirrors, in which openings have been cut in the style of a "salon hanging." Through these, the visitor can see into the storage racks, on which the artist presents a thematically ordered selection of paintings. The effect is that of a gallery that keeps visitors at a distance from the old paintings, while simultaneously drawing them in through the works' optical appeal. The boundary between the visitor space and the visual space is permeable: the openings in the glass walls allow the gaze to pass through, connecting the inside with the outside and vice versa.

The display collection usually differs significantly from the reserve in terms of its narration: whereas curated exhibitions are subject to clear narratives, paintings in museum stores are normally hung in an unordered way, according to the dictates of space. By grouping works from the reserve thematically, Harvey gives them a narrative. In a chronologically discontinuous manner, she depicts the route from Bruges via the inner and outer canal system to the docks and finally to the open sea. Visitors are led from one compartment to another, so that they successively experience the city, the inner-city canals, the landscape of small canals and streams, the port, and the North

¹⁴ This reflects the attitude observed on the part of visitors to museum viewing stores, many of who appear to think more actively about the art when it is presented without explanation. See M. Fehr, "Wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Taxonomien: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Schausammlung und Schaudepot," in *Das Schaudepot*, op. cit., pp. 13–30, esp. p. 14.

¹⁵ Harvey discussed this approach in the lecture "Context Is Everything," which she gave at the University of Michigan on October 26, 2006: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=julqarKNAGY> (last accessed July 12, 2014).

¹⁶ See B. Warnier, *Brügge—Die Perle Flanderns*, Sinsheim 2012, p. 6–17; J.A. Van Houtte, *De geschiedenis van Brugge*, Bussum 1982; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruges>

¹⁷ The artist has purchased the Internet image from Google, allowing its use for artistic purposes in the United States.



ill. 5 *The Unloved*, 2014. Installation view



ill. 6 *The Unloved*, 2014. Installation view



ill. 7 Gerhard Richter, *Stadtbild F*, 1968, oil on canvas, 78¾ x 78¾ in. (200 x 200 cm)
Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, inv. 2778

Sea via scenic oil paintings from the reserve by forgotten landscape artists, and via the blown-up aerial image on the opposite wall of the current geographical configuration. The resultant linkage between picturesque cityscapes and the digital, on-line image, and between past and present (visual) dimensions causes the viewer to question his or her own position: what did I expect to see? What am I seeing? With each step, visitors move further away from the familiar urban representation of Bruges toward the untold story of its connection with the sea. (ills. 5–6, p. 12)

The presentation of the historical landscape paintings in museum order behind brightly reflecting and framing panes of mirror lends the works a certain nobility. It suddenly seems unimportant that the reserve paintings lack the quality of van Eyck or van der Weyden's sacred masterpieces and would therefore normally not be displayed. Harvey interrogates the relationship between context and content, and consequently the value system imposed within the museum by the art-historical canon.¹⁸ By confronting this selection of works with her own monumental painting of the satellite photograph and

its ephemeral reflection on the mirrored surface, she inscribes her own work in the group of "unloved paintings." This approach places Harvey in the tradition of artists who have challenged the selection processes applied by the art market and museums, by putting themselves in the role of speaker for neglected objects with no voice of their own.¹⁹ Since the sixties, artists have demanded greater transparency and participation in the museums' construction of meaning, or even its annulment.²⁰ The institutional criticism present in the work of Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, and Marcel Broodthaers, and more recently that of Andrea Fraser and Fred Wilson, comments on the mechanisms of hierarchy and exclusion in the museum, and seeks to undermine the status quo.²¹ In several series of exhibitions that have since achieved high recognition contemporary artists have combined their own work with existing collections in a variety of ways, such as *Artist's Choice* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, or *Ways of Seeing* at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington. New contexts have been created as a result. The *Connections*, a series of exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, for which contemporary artists were invited to display objects specifically selected from the reserve alongside their own works, gained international acclaim: between 1990 and 1994, Martin Puryear, Brice Marden, Louise Lawler, Richard Artschwager, and Mark Tansey all selected works that only managed to escape the storeroom through this embedding in the respective artists' own oeuvres and curatorial concepts.²² Franz Ackermann recently combined examples of nineteenth-century Baden painting, which had not been seen in public for a considerable time, with his own *Mental Maps* at the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe.²³

Harvey's monumental copy of the satellite photograph represents an additional form of artistic commentary. Reserves are classification systems; satellite images are sign systems. In an age of mass digital images, every place on earth seems to have been recorded by Google Earth except for the museum reserve—the secret compartment, the non-place for the public, the museum's backstage. Beginning with a precise representation of Bruges' old town, the painting takes on a more industrial appearance as it approaches the docks, before ending in abstraction. Emulating the online, everyday image in an oil painting highlights the documentary limitations of this technique. Despite the fact that its representative function has been taken over by a whole range of technical innovations, and that the theoretical discourse has announced its death on any number of occasions, painting is still the first art form that the public associates with the museum.²⁴ Nevertheless, it is simply impossible to reproduce every detail of a satellite photograph accurately with a paintbrush. What's more, the deviations from the original give the representation the appearance of a map—the medium *par excellence* of human self-assertion.²⁵ "Maps are not evidence of a given reality: they reveal its constructed

¹⁸ See, in this context, the groundbreaking publication: P. Weibel (ed.), *Kontext Kunst: Kunst der 1990er Jahre* (exh. cat. Neue Galerie, Graz, October 2–November 7, 1993), Cologne 1994.

¹⁹ See Griesser-Stermscheg, op. cit., pp. 137–38.

²⁰ See B. von Bismarck (ed.), *Interarchive: Archivarisches Praktiken und Handlungsräume im zeitgenössischen Kunstfeld / Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, Cologne 2002; S. Osthoff, *Performing the Archive: The Transformation of the Archive in Contemporary Art from Repository of Documents to Art Medium*, New York, Dresden 2009.

²¹ See B. von Bismarck, "Arena Archiv: Prozesse und Räume künstlerischer Selbstarchivierung," in *Interarchive*, op. cit., pp. 113–19, esp. p. 113.

²² See T. Fairbrother, "Dem Speicher auf der Spur: Die 'Connections'—Reihe im Museum of Fine Arts, Boston," in I. Schaffner, M. Winzen (eds.), *Deep Storage: Arsenal der Erinnerung: Sammeln, Speichern, Archivieren in der Kunst* (exh. cat. Haus der Kunst, Munich; Nationalgalerie Berlin; Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle), Munich, New York 1997, pp. 209–12.

²³ See P. Müller-Tamm, "Vorwort," in *Franz Ackermann: Mental Maps—Eikones* (exh. cat. Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, March 14–May 11, 2014), Cologne 2014, p. 17–20, esp. p. 19.

²⁴ See Harvey's statement on the painting medium in her interview with Ana Fiel Honigman, November 16, 2006, in *Saatchi Online*, http://magazine.saatchionline.com/culture/reports-from/los-angeles-reports-from/ellen_harvey_in_conversation_w_1 (last accessed July 27, 2014): "I've been fascinated by the social space that painting occupies. I'm interested in why it's valued so highly when all of the functions that it used to fulfill have migrated to other media—no one would use a painting as documentation of an event anymore, for example. Other media seem to offer a lot of possibilities that painting doesn't and yet for many people painting is still the first thing they think of when they think of art."

²⁵ See S. Folie, "Konjekturen über Kartenobsessionen," in P. Bianchi, S. Folie (eds.), *Atlas Mapping: Künstler als Kartographen* (exh. cat. Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz; Kunsthaus, Bregenz), Dornbirn 2007, pp. 9–19, esp. p. 9.

²⁶ P. Bianchi, “Das (Ent)Falten der Karte,” in *Atlas Mapping*, op. cit., pp. 14–19, esp. p. 14.

²⁷ See G. Deleuze / F. Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota, Minnesota 1987, pp. 13–14: “What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. [...] It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. [...] The map has to do with performance [...]”

²⁸ For the documentary content of Gerhard Richter’s *Stadtbildern*, see the interview with Richter by Rolf Schöne, 1972, in H.-U. Obrist (ed.), *Gerhard Richter: Text*, Frankfurt, Leipzig 1993, p. 66–70, esp. p. 68–69. For the identification of the photograph of the city center that served as model for the painting reproduced here, see F. Jahn (ed.), *Gerhard Richter: Atlas* (exh. cat. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, August 2–October 22, 1989), Munich 1989, pp. 12, 67. See also H. Friedel, U. Wilmes (eds.), *Gerhard Richter: Atlas der Fotos, Collagen und Skizzen* (exh. cat. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, April 8–June 21, 1998), Köln 1998, p. 63, fig. 109.

²⁹ For artists’ interaction with the phenomenon of mapping, see M.A. Brayer, “Atlas der Künstlerkartographien: Landkarten als Maß bildlicher Fiktion in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *Atlas Mapping*, op. cit., pp. 21–38.

³⁰ Interview with Fred Wilson, quoted in C. Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” in *Journal of Performance Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1/1994), p. 148.

³¹ See “Fred Wilson: Museums and Collections,” interview in *Art21*: <http://www.art21.org/texts/fred-wilson/interview-fred-wilson-museums-and-collections> (last accessed July 22, 2014).

³² See F. Wilson, “Die museale Aufbereitung des Spektakels kultureller Produktion,” in C. Kravagna (ed.), *Das Museum als Arena: Institutionstheoretische Text von KünstlerInnen*, Cologne 2001, pp. 119–25, esp. pp. 122ff; C. Kravagna, “Konserven des

character, although they themselves are constructs.”²⁶ Every cartographer therefore has to omit and stylize things, and the impossible artistic task of painting every detail of the satellite view of Bruges leads to similar phenomena in Harvey’s picture. In this way the painting becomes a reference to reality—an illusion, a rhizome—rather than a representation of it.²⁷ The juxtaposition of this “map” with seventeenth-century landscape paintings inevitably raises the question of artistic relevance. It brings together two different cosmographies. Human beings have always wanted to measure the world around them, to represent it, and in so doing to appropriate it. This applies as much to the first cartographers in the seventeenth century, to the artists of the Hudson River School, as to Gerhard Richter’s *Stadtbilder* (ill. 7, p. 13) in the sixties, based on aerial photographs from books.²⁸ The increasing availability of representations of natural space has only intensified interest in the particularities of the region depicted. Painting a Google Earth photograph is the logical continuation of this artistic tradition.²⁹

Connections

The Unloved occupies a special place in Harvey’s substantial oeuvre, since it builds on her existing practice of work in a museums context, but it is also the first project in which she ad-

dresses a museum collection in the role of curator. Fred Wilson stated in 1992 in the context of his *Mining the Museum* show at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, “What they put on view says a lot about a museum, but what they don’t put on view says even more.”³⁰ Harvey was instinctively drawn in a similar way to the Groeningemuseum’s unexhibited works. The African-American Wilson—who described the museum as his “palette,”³¹ on which he mixed socially and institutionally critical elements into meta-narratives—presented, for instance, ornate silver pitchers alongside iron slave shackles, which he discovered in the reserve. The objects were shown in a display case, to which he gave the collective title *Metalwork 1793–1880*. The startling confrontation between metal objects from an aesthetic context and from one of social oppression, revealed the presentation of history in the museum context to be one-sided and Eurocentric, reflecting the mentality of the white exhibition-makers. This was further intensified by the suggested relationship between the mismatched objects: the fact that the production of aesthetic goods is only rendered possible by the exploitation of others, to whom the iron chains refer.³²

Rather than focusing on a historical account, Harvey sets out to explore the relationship between the producers (artists) and consumers of art (exhibition-goers), and between the suppos-



ill. 8 A Whitney for the Whitney at Philip Morris (view from outside), 2003

edly professional world of art and the public at large—in other words, the social relevance of art. She plays with the viewer's expectations, which she fulfills in order to expose them. *The Unloved*—in which she offers visitors to the Groeningemuseum their expected image of Bruges as a picturesque place, as illustrated by the paintings from the reserve—is linked in this regard with an earlier series of works: her 2003 installation *A Whitney for the Whitney at Philip Morris*, which responded to the frustration of disoriented visitors to New York. The Whitney Museum of American Art had a separate exhibition space for solo shows, funded by the Philip Morris (now Altria) company, which was located opposite the entrance to Grand Central Station. The tourists who found their way there were frequently disappointed, because they expected to find the Whitney Museum itself, with its large collection of paintings, rather than a glass box highlighting the work of a single contemporary artist. Harvey picked up

on that expectation and sought to fulfill it by taking the museum's recently published collection catalogue and painting miniature versions of all 394 of the featured masterpieces. She then exhibited the results at the Whitney's contemporary outpost, presenting the entire canon of "American Visionaries" almost as an "appetizer" for a visit to the main museum. The process of copying meant she also inscribed her own work in the museum collection, humorously integrating her painting into the canon. "I can be an American visionary too!" she said slyly of the process in a wall text at the exhibition.³³ *A Whitney for the Whitney* (ill. 8, p. 14) is thus a companion piece to *The Unloved*, in which the artist addresses works from the reserve.

For *The Nudist Museum* (2010) (ills. 9–10) at the Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Harvey copied fifty-four nude images from the painting, sculpture, and drawing departments, dating

Kolonialismus: Die Welt im Museum," in B. Kazeem, C. Martinz-Turek, N. Sternfeld (eds.), *Das Unbehagen im Museum: Postkoloniale Museologien*, Vienna 2008, pp. 131–42, esp. p. 132.

³³ See S. Momin, *A Whitney for the Whitney at Philip Morris*: 282 *American Visionaries and Most Recent Acquisitions repainted by Ellen Harvey* (exh. cat. Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, January 23–April 4, 2003), New York 2003.



ill. 9 *The Nudist Museum* (second presentation at Dodge Gallery, New York), 2012



ill. 10 *The Nudist Museum* (detail), 2012

from the Middle Ages to the present day. The result was a comprehensive and varied collection of representations of nudity. The little canvases were exhibited in gilt frames against a backdrop of pinups from glamour and porn magazines. The copied nudes from historical masterpieces presented a variously idealized image of the human body, while—thanks to the beauty industry and Photoshop—bodies “officially” designated as sexy by the erotic mass media came over as fairly artificial in comparison.³⁴ The fact that this theme was explored in Florida—a US state in which cosmetic surgery and the cult of the body are part of everyday life—heightened its relevance to the location. Harvey played once again with the presumed, clichéd expectations of the visitor, which she achieved—as she does in *The Unloved*—by juxtaposing two contrasting views of the same theme.

Arcade / Arcadia (2011) is another related work, in which mirrors and tourism also feature. Harvey was invited to produce an installation for the opening of the new building designed by David Chipperfield to house the Turner Contemporary in Margate, Kent, UK. The gallery is part of the effort to regenerate the south-coast town, which was once a popular coastal destination for day-trippers, but whose built environment and social structure have grown dilapidated in recent times. Harvey chose to commemorate the artist for whom the museum is named—J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851), who sought inspiration here in the guesthouse of his mistress Sophia Caroline Booth. Harvey installed a wooden shack, inside which she displayed thirty-four rear-illuminated mirrors, on which she engraved views of modern-day Margate as Turner-style Romantic seascapes. On entering the shack, the dimensions of which are three quarters those of Turner’s gallery, visitors encountered a reflective 360-degree panorama of an ambiguous resort—mirrors engraved, in the style of Turner’s with views of the sea and the beach at Margate, inserting the present into the aesthetics of the past. Illuminated letters 70% in. high were leant against the longer wall of the house of mirrors, spelling out the word “ARCADIA.” The font of the letters reference the sign for the Dreamland funfair at Margate, which is currently being refurbished. The reference to the resort’s heyday, which awakes a prospect of what the town could be again, has a personal element too: Harvey knew from old family photographs that her grandparents spent many pleasant summers on the Kent coast. Based on images of contemporary Margate, the installation reflects both the glow of happy memories and the tragic fact that humans often destroy what they most love, turning Arcadia into an amusement arcade.³⁵ (ills. 11–14, pp. 16–17)

Lastly, we should also mention *The Museum of Failure* (2008), which Harvey produced for the Whitney Biennial and which is continued in a sense by her project at the Groeninge. *The Museum of Failure*—like the Bruges project—is comprised of



ill. 11 *Arcade / Arcadia* (Mirror No. 23), 2011–12



ill. 12 *Arcade / Arcadia* (rear), 2011–12

two parts: the *Collection of Impossible Subjects* and the *Invisible Self-Portrait*. The first part consisted of a wall in reflective Plexiglas, in which Harvey hand-engraved a large number of ornate frames. These were once again arranged salon-style, but were empty. Rather than a picture, they displayed an expanse of rear-lit mirror, with no content to convey. The empty picture planes symbolized the unachieved: they were Harvey’s tribute to all the themes she would have liked to incorporate in her work but, for whatever reason, had been unable to do so.

On the second wall of the installation the same selection of frames hung in precisely the same order, but now as carved gilt frames, painted by Harvey in oils. The frames contain trompe l’oeil paintings based on a snapshot taken by Harvey of herself in her studio in an identically hung collection of mirrors. The artist herself, though is unrecognizable, her image obliterated in the central mirror by the camera’s flash. Harvey’s painterly experiment with photography culminates in the simultaneity of her own presence and absence in an anonymized self-portrait.³⁶



ill. 13 *Arcade / Arcadia* (front), 2011–12



ill. 14 *Arcade / Arcadia* (interior), 2011–12



Both parts of the installation refer to the theme of “failure,” in the shape of themes that could not be painted, and the impossibility of self-portraiture. Contrary to conventional interpretation, failure has a positive connotation in Harvey’s oeuvre: she sees it as the element that links all her work, as well as the world of art and reality. “All art is failure,”³⁷ she says, and “being an artist is also being human.”³⁸ There is a gulf between the ideal of the art world (fuelled to a significant degree by a romanticized image held by people outside that world), and its frequently harsh—not to mention banal—reality. Harvey seeks to bridge this by means of ready accessibility and a degree of seduction: an attempt at democratization, which brings art down to earth from its supposed ivory tower. *The Unloved* too takes failure as its theme: the work of unsuccessful “storeroom artists” is set

against the impossibility of reproducing in oil paint every detail of a satellite photograph. While *The Unloved* is thematically linked in this respect with *The Museum of Failure* (ills. 15–16), its formal representation is almost the opposite: in this case, historical paintings are framed by brightly lit mirrored surfaces, whereas in the earlier installation, brightly lit mirrored surfaces were surrounded by engraved frames.

Although Harvey views herself first and foremost as a painter, she also works with mirrors, video, drawing, performance, and installations. Painting to her is a practice, which is not limited to brush and canvas, but which can also exist beyond its own medium. This broader interpretation of painting as something that refers to art as a whole links her work with that

³⁷ Harvey quoted in M. de la Torre, “Failure notice,” in *Bomb*, no. 101 (2007), p. 101. There has been heightened societal interest in recent years—especially in the field of art—in the phenomenon of failure: for a long time the unmentionable flipside of success. See also, *The Beauty of Failure—The Failure of Beauty* (exh. cat. Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, May 28–October 24, 2004), Barcelona 2004; G. Spindler (ed.), *Scheitern* (exh. cat. Landesgalerie, Linz, June 21–August 19, 2007), Vienna 2007.

³⁸ Harvey in conversation with the author, July 24, 2014.



ill. 15 *The Museum of Failure* (detail of *Invisible Self-Portrait in My Studio*), 2007–08

ill. 16 *The Museum of Failure* (front), 2007–08



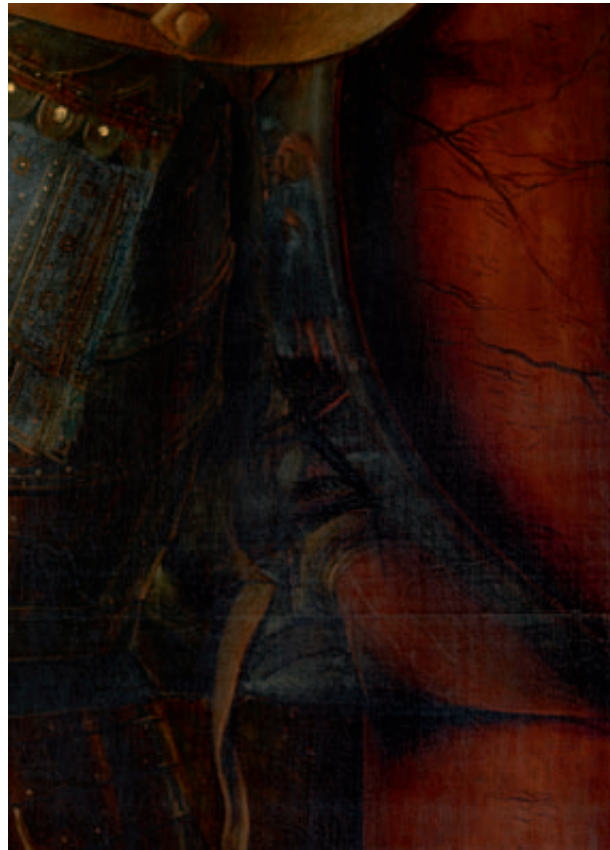
ill. 17 Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2007. Chandelier and site-specific installation by Rudolf Stingel in the *Rudolf Stingel* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, June 28–October 14, 2007



ill. 18 Jan van Eyck, *Madonna with Canon Joris van der Paele*, 1436, oil on panel, 49 x 63 in. (124.5 x 160 cm) inv. 000.GRO161.I

of Rudolf Stingel, who for over thirty years has been attempting to broaden the conception of painting and to explore new boundaries. He too has a strong interest in optically seductive surfaces, and likes to encourage viewers to participate (which here in Harvey's case takes the form of the active gaze through the openings in the storage walls, but in other of her projects has taken the form of even more direct involvement). For instance, Stingel's retrospective at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and Whitney Museum of American Art in 2007 opened with a silver room (ill. 17, p. 20) lined with glittering aluminum sheets, in which the light of a central chandelier was infinitely reflected. Visitors were encouraged to leave traces (written notes, carvings, graffiti, or Post-its) on the modular walls, and to transform the immaculate chamber of mirrors into a site of disruption and entropy. By sharing the artistic responsibility between artists and visitors, Stingel confronted the Romantic notion of the creative artistic genius with the hallmarks of Abstract Expressionism.³⁹

But Harvey's foregrounding of painting combined with reflections does not only form a link to certain contemporary artists: in the Groeningemuseum in particular, we also identify themes that are firmly inscribed in the art of the early Netherlandish painters. The way Harvey's monumental painting of the satellite photograph is reflected on the mirrored surface between the historical representations of Bruges may be read as an indirect signature, just like Jan van Eyck's own reflection in the gleaming armor of Saint George in the *Madonna with Canon Joris van der Paele* (ills. 18–19) in the adjoining room. In this way, Harvey endorses the artistic space she herself has created.⁴⁰



ill. 19 Jan van Eyck, *Madonna with Canon Joris van der Paele* (detail, showing the artist's silhouette in reflection)

Harvey's interest in artistic production and the art business constantly gives rise to new, mutually connected works. She uses traditional techniques and aesthetic means to interrogate current and historical artistic practice and the importance and function of the art world, of which the museum is likewise part. According to Julian Heynen, "The scope of the museum, which is delineated and adapted for the sole purpose of presenting, ordering, and mediating art [...] has created a culture of displaying and observing, which simultaneously constitutes a value system. Only art with the potential to make it into the museum would seem to have any chance in the Western-dominated but increasingly global market of sensibilities and meanings."⁴¹ Harvey casts doubt on this thesis, making *The Unloved* not only an installation rich in allusions, but also one that challenges museum categorizations. She responds to the question of which art finds its way into the museum and which does not, or why certain artists are famous and successful and others are not, by asking a question of her own: what happens if we turn those judgments around? If we suddenly shift the spotlight to the "failures"? *The Unloved* installation exposes the way art is currently evaluated as (at least partially) arbitrary.

³⁹ See G. Carrion-Murayari, "Untitled," in *Rudolf Stingel at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art*, New York, Ostfildern 2008, pp. 111–12.

⁴⁰ See R. Preimesberger, "Selbst-reflexivität, zweifach?," in *Selbstbild: Der Künstler und sein Bildnis* (exh. cat. Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna, November 19–February 20, 2005), Cologne 2005, pp. 16–37; G. Wolf, "Jenseits des Flusses: Affinitäten und Differenzen in den Bildkonzepten Jan van Eycks und Leon Battista Albertis," in C. Kruse and F. Thürlemann (eds.), *Porträt—Landschaft—Interieur: Jan van Eycks Rolin-Madonna im ästhetischen Kontext*, Tübingen 1999, pp. 13–29.

⁴¹ J. Heynen, "Fremd werden, näher kommen," in *Miroslaw Balka: Wir sehen Dich* (exh. cat. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, April 16–August 22, 2010), Nuremberg 2010, pp. 10–21, esp. p. 10.



ill. 1 *New York Nudes (Spring 2012), 2012*



ill. 2 *My Venus Is Better than Your Venus, 2003*