

Wetterling Gallery

Mona Ardeleanu The Bow

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The Ontology of the Fold **About Mona Ardeleanu's painting**

Text by Harriet Zilch

Folds create space while concentrating it at the same time, as a plane surface is made into a spatial construction by means of turning and bending.

A painted fold is always an optical illusion, as it suggests a spatiality that cannot exist on a flat picture carrier.

The ontology of the fold includes the simultaneity of the visible and the invisible. The upper apex, the exterior of the fold is revealed to the viewer. The path it follows is indicative of spatial volume. However, in itself this is concealed and thus harbours a potential secret.

Mona Ardeleanu's painting centres on precisely constructed, fantastic objects, which the artist herself refers to as "bodies". These bodies, which appear both organic and geometric at the same time, float freely in a monochrome picture space. Constructed from painted fabrics, velvet and silk, feathers or even fur, the objects trigger multiple associations and are reminiscent of flower-patterned summer dresses or nostalgic lanterns, Japanese kimonos or bonnets in folk costume. From a distance, the paintings seem almost like works by Old Masters, but the hyperreal illusion is lost as soon as they are regarded close up. For beside sections elaborated in detail, frequently one can also find areas constructed from thick brush strokes or others blurred to reduce their clarity. Here, technical virtuosity is rejected and the impression of "fine painting" is counteracted as a result. Mona Ardeleanu's painting does not pretend to be anything other than what it is – painting.

The clear lines of the shaped folds are as central to the complex construction of the bodies as the geometric, floral and ornamental patterning of the painted fabrics and materials. These are reminiscent of decor stored in the memory, but Mona Ardeleanu uses no direct models. The works increase their value in her eyes when the objects are generated specifically for the painting and not brought to it from outside. She does not use preparatory sketches or three-dimensional models, either. Decisions about composition, colours and the materiality of the initially monochrome bodies are made before and for the canvas. Consequently, they seem familiar to the viewer at first, reminding him of things he has seen in the past. However, at the same time it proves impossible to give the bodies a concrete name, for their composition is exclusively reliant on the pictorial logic of the work. They evade unambiguous identification and

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remain essentially ambivalent. They appear to the viewer as polysemous objects: simultaneously familiar and alien, natural and mysterious, open and hermetic.

This ambivalence and polysemy is also revealed in the fundamental issue of the relationship between space and figure. Due to an astonishing trompe-l'œil effect, the painted objects do not seem flat, by any means, but appear to float like three-dimensional bodies in a neutral space. Painterly effects heighten this impression: for example, Mona Ardeleanu applies varnish to the bodies alone, so making them shine and stand out against the monochrome picture space. Body and surround represent two spheres and are not perceived as a single spatial entity. However, Mona Ardeleanu creates the illusion of three-dimensional objectivity primarily through the complex folds of the bodies. She employs the basic characteristics of the fold with meticulous consideration in her pictorial constructions. As a motif, the fold seems predestined to examine the central issue for Mona Ardeleanu's painting: the relationship between body and space. In this context, irritatingly, the constructed folds are both incorrect and correct. Folds have often developed a life of their own in art history, and the history of both sculpture and painting is rich in autonomous folds, whose existence and appearance cannot have been produced by the movement of a body. In Mona Ardeleanu's paintings, too, the course of the folds is staged, made autonomous; an autonomy that owes little or nothing to reality.

Besides the paintings showing bodies in a neutral space, there are works in which the artist deconstructs these bodies. She takes them apart, unfolds them and lays them across the entire canvas, so that the monochrome picture space disappears. The highly detailed patterns of the painted fabrics are still filled with associations and recall baroque draperies, tropical gardens or a starlit sky at night. At the same time, the folds reveal the full potential of the space, for each fold brings about a change in the surface. The angle of the fold's painted edge seems to cut through the picture space. The folds create and extend the space by means of compression and expansion. Spaces emerge and disappear again, internal and external areas turn against each other, and new interim spaces form as a result. These paintings also irritate the viewer's principles of perception; he is anxious to solve the mysteries of interior or exterior, apex or channel, figure or background.

Mona Ardeleanu's paintings are often arranged in groups of work, the individual pieces being produced parallel to one another. The works exert a reciprocal influence, since one may emerge from another, and painterly as well as compositional questions are examined from different perspectives. However, this painting never focuses on the pictorial motif. The body and its specific materiality, ornamentation, and visual haptics is merely a vehicle for Mona Ardeleanu's ingenious and spectacular painting about painting. The body is a protagonist, analyzing and depicting the possibilities, means and effective qualities of painting in a representative way. And so Mona Ardeleanu's chief concern is not painting a body but painting itself, applied to the example of the body.