

*Reflections on and speculations about the art of Nicolas Freitag.* | “To lead somebody up the garden path” – this familiar quotation could at least have two different meanings. Because apart from the well-known symbolic meaning – man and woman is consciously deceived by someone who pretends to be kindly disposed towards us – the, so to speak, concrete message unvoluntarily comes to one’s mind at the same time: Only thanks to the load-bearing capacity of ice man is able, following the example of Jesus Christ, to walk on water, which is otherwise impassable. Contemptible, all too human behaviour and the holy of holies are here, judging a shiny surface se(e)mantically, conceivably close together. || So shiny surfaces have also been an important aspect in the artistic works of Nicolas Freitag up to now. In the dense meshes of his works whose links are extremely reflected, they go into aesthetic action in various forms: as a plain colour print as well as as multilayered – you might say: ambiguous – painting, as a seductively cryptic sculpture as well as as pun, so intelligent and dull; finally as a colourful photography as well as as section-like, resembling silhouettes, wall work. We will see. || “Only what appears on the surface can be deciphered”, this is what was already known to the cultural critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin. But which message can be deciphered there? “Jetzt ist gut”, 2001 [now is good, 2001] is e.g. written on Nicolas Freitag’s work “Ohne Titel”, 2001 [without title, 2001] in black writing against a perfectly circular orange acrylic background. But what do those three succinct words want to tell us by

their ambivalent multiple meaning? || That “it’s enough now” as we were once much too often inoculated with by our mother? || Or perhaps: an end to art!? Or, on the contrary, that the artist’s work has now actually and finally become a success? As stated above: Contemptible, all too human behaviour and the holy of holies are simply conceivably close to each other when analysing shiny surfaces. || So let us now have a closer look at Nicolas Freitag’s multi-piece work series “Bücher”, 2001 [books, 2001]. || Ostensibly, the covers of books and catalogues are presented here. Links to real or fictitious publications are additionally hanging on the wall, peacefully next to each other, most of them seem to somehow deal with painting. Already the legible titles exceedingly suggest this: “Die Wahrheit nach der Malerei” [the truth after painting] can be seen there, “Gesetze der Farbe” [laws of the colour] and also “Neue Lust auf Malerei” [the new desire for painting]. At the same time ambiguous titles like “Beauty”, “Venus Video” and, even repeatedly, free paraphrase of the Austrian artist Gerwald Rockenschaub, “Augensex” [Eyesex] have secretly entered, so here as well quasi trivial desires and sublime demands furtively merge with each other. The same can be observed on the added reproductions on the aforementioned covers. Picturesque, mostly abstract – alluding to paintings by Gerhard Richter? – structures can be constituted here, just as an extremely lyrical melting of colours. But in addition to that on these book covers e.g. trivial iconographies, commercial signets are swiftly and almost unnoticed turned into artistic

phrases. Moreover, books like “Heimat” [homeland], “Sanatorien” [sanatoriums] or “Zukunft sichern” [safe your future] meddle with the wall-covering ensemble. || The neat surfaces created by Nicolas Freitag reveal themselves as illusionistic and deceptive, but also as significantly telling. They put themselves there as both enlightening and transfiguring foils, which emphasise the questions about the “Realistic” [realism/reality] of aesthetic but also everyday sign productions. Almost symbolic of this permanent problem in the artist’s oeuvre there is the sculpture “Pfützen, 2001” [puddles, 2001]. Four black elements – noble, very shiny varnish covering simple wood, – at first glance remind of the dark, actually rather unappetising pools evoked already by the title. So they remind of nevertheless reflecting expanses of water in which the viewer, producing some meaning, can mirror himself with difficulty but very calmly. The lover of art promptly becomes vain Narcissus who almost autistically drowns himself in a fake poodle which is lying about as a visual trap on the floor of a “Kunstraum” [room of art]. So “Weare all star snow” is enigmatically and somewhat “verrückt” [meaning insane and dislocated in German] – in the true sense of the word! – written in the best of egocentric traditions on Freitag’s painting “Ohne Titel, 2001” [without title, 2001].