

## On seeing things in things

Leonor Faber-Jonker

It begins with looking. Not at the smiling faces of racing drivers and stewardesses, the angered eyes of a protester, the polite interest of kings and queens. Nor at the letters spelling captions about medical achievements, disasters, and cruel experiments. No, Tinca Veerman looks beyond all that. What interests her about decades-old news photographs is not their subject matter, but the wear and tear of the paper they are printed on, the grainy textures of blacks and whites (a blanket of snow, a darkened stage?), those inexplicable white dots in the corner.

Like a painter mixing colors, Veerman carefully, deliberately, cuts out these fragments, fusing backdrops with tufts of hair, cutting into the out-of-focus surroundings of *the world record, the beat wedding, the plane crash*. In doing so, she enters into a dialogue with a picture, teasing out new meanings never imagined by the photographer or the readers of the illustrated books she uses as her raw material. Fragments in grayscale and yellowed whites are polished up to become something new entirely, like a diamond from a dull rock. Snippets grow feelers, tentatively reaching for the periphery of the paper. Or are they suckers, holding on for dear life in their new constellation?

Here it begins again, the looking. Our looking. We inadvertently search for anchor points to understand these new images. Our eyes may trip over a barely discernible zipper, the suggestion of a body part. The longer we look, the more we see. Shells, tails, fists, shadows, figures. The face on a coin, *Wilhelmina Peppermint*, a fragile childhood memory. Sadness, joy, elation. We can't help it, it's in our nature. Our brains are geared to see faces in objects and things in things. Hermann Rorschach relied on this phenomenon – pareidolia – for his famous ink blot test. What individuals saw in these amorphous, symmetrical shapes was thought to reveal personality traits and disorders.

Veerman's collages have nothing to do with such assessing and pinpointing – quite the opposite. Her new series is not a diagnostic instrument but a materialization of unconscious processes. By turning the figurative into the abstract, she liberates photographs from the weight of history to bring them into the realm of the personal, the intimate. Try as we may, we will never see the collages in the same way as the artist. Nor should we want to. Pinned to a wall or printed on the pages of this publication, they become a mirror, reflecting back a unique, arbitrary engagement that echoes the serendipitous process of their creation.

With looking it begins, and begins, and begins. Thoughts form in your head and instantly they morph into other thoughts, endlessly morphing, spinning a vast web of meanings around you, a security blanket. In the process, abstract shapes become familiar, a series becomes a narrative. And a composition of fragments a *silky thought*.