

EXTRACT: SUSAN FINLAY

Sometimes the head of another looms into view and it takes a moment to separate it into its constituent parts. Not in its natural state nor with embellishments of hair, makeup, jewellery, no, nothing sets a restraint on the imagination, a sculpted constellation of eyes, ears, nose, lips, tongue and finally skin (covering its network of vibrating nerves). And yes, the senses beneath respond via the usual litany of moods, doubts, arguments and agreements. But in the end, it is through the eyes alone, when meeting your own, that the first most terrifying visual dialogue is set in motion. The face transforms from its abstract suggestiveness to the singular projection of what? She turned back to seek distraction; examined the ring, huge as it was, and curious. It contained an image of a painting: plainly a Bosch. She once again had recourse to the strong glass she had used to pick out the stitches of the old woman's writing. It was difficult to focus, perhaps because there was no point. There was something close to a centre however, a hub or axis upon which the whole thing revolved and around which both beasts and humans swam. An image of a mandala came into her mind's eye. Through the magnifying glass her sense of scale shifted, her own size vacillated. Like everything else in the painting, this axis was itself miniature, as opposed to merely small. Elsewhere, these same creatures gorged on giant fruits; hatched life-sized, painful eggs; penetrated each other in unusual ways. One had a bunch of violets inserted into their zinc white anus, while another stood with a cherry atop their mars black head. There was also a phthalocyanine blue porcupine, an alizarin crimson horse, and several owls, or parts thereof, depicted in a variety of grey and ochre tones. Aside from the image contained within it, there was nothing notable about the ring. It was cheap and smelt of old skin. It had cracked on its underside and the slight protrusion on one side had cracked and cut her skin on that adjacent finger.