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Painting has always been ahead, in terms of societal and philosophical developments,” said Peter Greenaway, delivering this year’s Thyssen lecture. “But only few people can read them. There is a visual illiteracy. We are trained to value language, the spoken and written word, but not the image.” He showed excerpts from his most recent films, *Nightwatching* (2006) and “Episode 7” of *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (2003–07), where a multiscreeen language was used for a new visual experience. Uncannily, his critical stance was echoed in two other events at the time: in the Meiu Miint painting exhibition *The Day is Dark* and at the 20th *Transmediale* (tm20), festival for art and digital culture, where Byung-Chul Han spoke poignantly about hyperculture. All three artists articulated their concern that historical consciousness must be raised.

Miint’s exhibition at the Estonian Embassy opened on the day of the tm20. The two events could not be more
different. One was a show by a young painter from an ex-Soviet Republic, who pursues a traditional painting practice; the other, a festival for web- and media-art fans. Timothy Druckery was among the latter and declared that media art has won the battle with traditional art. "It's 26 years old." The term media art, which initially meant video art, is overused and emptied of its meaning. Panellists called for a new designation such as digital, web and/or Net art. But before that, Druckery asked, "What is media-art practice now, and who controls it?" Answers given included: experience through an apparatus, interrogation of the apparatus itself, electronically distributed field and "digital standards are an apparatus, interrogation of the apparatus itself, electronic controls it?" Answers given included: experience through and perceiving are explored, possibilities that would be unthinkable with celluloid. He paints with a digital brush, in the present tense, to jolt viewers into active critical relations with art, history and life. This Brechtian idea of combining art and life by leading viewers away from a feel-good response and towards a critical disposition is also realized in Mün's oil paintings. Her compositions (of iconic isolation, no shadows, shallow spaces, uncertainty of location) are dark and austere and they generate a critical and disenchanted appeal. I regard them as visual parallels to Han's arguments: One cannot easily step into her tableaux to escape or dream, except by "wearing" one of the old-fashioned dresses (likely costume studies) that occupy half of the show's pictures. The dresses vary in size, as do the canvases. The smaller paintings depict child-size ballet dresses; the larger cocktail dresses in red, grey and black, all against a dark background. Small Dots (2002), a 1950s-style dress, is the most inviting. As the only adult-size garment on view, it is a childlike creature, crouching and with wings spread, looking out with gleaming eyes. Brush

In Nightwatching, Greenaway turns Rembrandt's Nightwatch (1642) into a tableau vivant. Rembrandt is depicted as an uncouth individual, but passionate a painter. "I want to bring into view its public and private life, his idea of painting-as-stage-production," while exposing the production processes. The seven-hour Tulse Luper deals with issues of imprisonment, inasmuch as we may all be prisoners of something; and with uranium as energy or mass destruction, paradise or Armageddon. Greenaway challenges cinema's tyranny (as he phrased it) - text, single frame, acting, camera and director. The result is a visual and sound experience, a hypermedia of immediacy and estrangement. He leaves us in the digital format, where new possibilities of seeing and perceiving are explored, possibilities that would be unthinkable with celluloid. He paints with a digital brush, in the present tense, to jolt viewers into active critical relations with art, history and life.

This Brechtian idea of combining art and life by leading viewers away from a feel-good response and towards a critical disposition is also realized in Mün's oil paintings. Her compositions (of iconic isolation, no shadows, shallow spaces, uncertainty of location) are dark and austere and they generate a critical and disenchanted appeal. I regard them as visual parallels to Han's arguments: One cannot easily step into her tableaux to escape or dream, except by "wearing" one of the old-fashioned dresses (likely costume studies) that occupy half of the show's pictures. The dresses vary in size, as do the canvases. The smaller paintings depict child-size ballet dresses; the larger cocktail dresses in red, grey and black, all against a dark background. Small Dots (2002), a 1950s-style dress, is the most inviting. As the only adult-size garment on view, it is a childlike creature, crouching and with wings spread, looking out with gleaming eyes. Brush
ships lack loyalty and long-term duration. On the Web, which are often noncommittal. Friendship and relations are made through cellphones, forever our screens and material excess (in the West), and cross borders and oceans, and that is our destiny. We live a life of denial filled with meaning. Human derives from humus, meaning earth, while others called it "disaster thinking." Han painted a maritime picture (based on Hegel): "Now one looks into the World Wide Web—an ocean without a horizon— to navigate in darkness and alone. The lights of the others are turned off, except for this inner, intellectual light, which is burning. But thinking alone is loneliness." This new seascape knows neither spirit nor Logos (the Word of God in Christian theology) in an emphatic way. Logos is replaced by a hyperlink, turning dialogue into log-in. Hypercultural windowing does not allow dialogue. "It's about identity formation and growing up," said another spectator of the Episode pictures. Indeed, something like that can be discerned and drawn from those fragmented individuals—boys or girls, young men or women—with little to wear but undergarments, crouching and waiting as in Episode 1—White Socks. Or crawling and searching for firm ground and guidance as in Episode 2—Crawling. Han spoke of the younger generation not having a firm ground to stand on. It is uprooted locally but connected virtually to the world. It surfs the oceans not as adventurers or colonizers, as in Hegel's time, but as friendly tourists in the hyperroom and as consumers. Viewers applauded the show, their fascination was visible, and it seemed to me that they were recognizing traces of their own life and time, though they were unable to translate it clearly into conscious terms. Some said Han’s talk was a harsh critique of the digital age, while others called it “disaster thinking.” Han spoke of death and unfulfilled time as markers of the current hyperculture—a notion clearly reflected in the art discussed. Many young listeners, not much older than the speaker—it’s not about a generational gap here—left the room in defiance, perhaps jolted by a truth unbearable to take? Days later, Han’s small but significant book, Hyperkulturalität, was sold out. He started his lecture with, "We live in a time of death. But I want you to give me a philosophical declaration of love.” His arguments are based in part on Hegel’s notion of love and freedom concerned with the homo liber (free person). What follows are further excerpts of his arguments: We need a new philosophical model that can redeem us and provide hope for the future. Han spoke of Walter Benjamin’s messianic idea and alluded to his angel. I saw this Benjaminian angel, able to fill the time of the present with meaning because it has knowledge of the past and future, in Black Angel as promise (not as doom), waiting with wings spread, ready to fly! Han is working on a philosophical model that differs from modern and postmodern thought. Hyperculture is not multi, trans or inter but hyper.

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1. Han is currently teaching in the Philosophy Department at the University of Basel, Switzerland.
2. In 2005, the Young Euro Classic Music Award (at the Konzerthaus Berlin) went to the Estonian-Uko Kuigel for his composition Jerusheb [sic]. Sincere thanks go to Dr. Nina Ray, Sandrine and Nicolas Roffet and Reet Weidebaum.
3. The Transmediale developed as an alternative to Berlin’s International Film Festival and runs parallel to it, comprising exhibitions, performances, workshops and conferences. This year’s theme was “utterhich.”
4. Druckery named after historians Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh "the heremism of the apocalypse" for including media art from their recent, joint publication.
5. He was invited by the Museum delle Arti a to do a film project on Velasquez’s art.
7. The trailer version of Nightwatching was shown at this year’s Film Festival in Cannes. For an interview with Greenaway, see Hanna Rauterberg, "Freiheit war kein Molen. [Benjamin Was No Painter]," Zeit, December 20th, 2005.
8. He built on Godard’s film Passion (1982) Nightwatching was commissioned by Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum.