

"Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion"

T.S. Eliot. *The Hollow Men* (1925)

One day Peter Rose! travelled to Namibia, where his parents live; he had heard that mirages could often be seen in the desert there that extends all the way to the sea. The atmospheric conditions caused by the extremely cold sea and the boiling hot desert air produce mirages: a phenomenon we have heard described in many tales from times long past. Desperately thirsty travellers perceive an oasis on the desert horizon; this welcome sight fills them with immense joy, and with their last ounce of strength they drag themselves towards it, only to discover with horror that the 'oasis' is merely an illusion. Sobbing with anger and disappointment they fall into a state of madness.

Peter Rosel's interest in this subject has less to do with scientific exploration than with a curiosity about the human tendency to fall victim to imagined perceptions and fantasies.

It is difficult to make a fundamental statement against this characteristic, for where there is no imagination there is no belief, and without belief (in oneself) it is impossible to look ahead or take a step forward.

However this is not what Peter Rosel is referring to. With a wonderful sense of irony he talks about self-reflection - the self-perception of oneself - and the hybris of overestimating one's own capabilities. Here it takes the form of a new and quite ridiculous branch of tourism based on rally racing that looks set to transform the desert into a punishing playground.

Imagine the scene: the artist, his head protected by a straw hat, standing beneath a sunshade and painting at his easel. Suddenly a rally car roars past him. The dust cloud it causes will make him immediately throw a cloth over the painting, double himself over and cover his face with his hands.

The driver and co-driver might actually have preferred to have stopped the car, got out and gone over - complete with fireproof suits and helmets - to take a curious peek over the shoulder of this young man who is behaving in such an anachronistic manner.

Sometimes even the very best driving skills aren't good enough, and the car gets written off, perishing like a bullet-ridden tank in the solitude of the desert. And sometimes they succeed in lifting the car to a dizzying height like a Fata Morgana, as if the goal were actually to fly over the finishing line.

This shimmering expanse of the desert! This light exploding into colourlessness in the unbearable heat!

It is as if all sound has been swallowed up. The silence is deafening. You'd like to hold a conch shell up to your ear to listen to the 'ocean's roar', the sound of a mirage.

But then there is a noise of something crunching through the firm sand. The man crossing the desert on a bicycle is like an apparition; he casts a slim shadow. The mirage has invaded reality. This surreal moment dissociates the apparition from its sound, like in a film where there is a time delay between the image and the sound track.

While the rally cars remain frozen in silent arabesques, you think you can hear the two men talking and laughing. They are on their way to or from work. There is an everyday familiarity about it that makes the immeasurable expanse of the surroundings somehow irrelevant, not least because of the scattered islands of reddish lichen that stretch out like mud flats. Here, too, it is as if the two men were being captured on camera. You hear the sound of them talking and laughing approach, then they pass by the camera as if it weren't there and the sound of their voices recedes and eventually falls away.

First of all Peter Rosel painted in the desert. Then he took photographs and made video recordings, on the basis of which he continued to work on the pictures in his Berlin studio. In the process he retrospectively incorporated what he had seen and experienced into the composition of his paintings.

To me this doesn't seem all that important. What matters in the end is his paintings' coherence, their credibility.

Peter Rose! has painted pictures, of which the viewer must continually reassure him- or herself.

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