

BEHIND THE POLISHED SURFACE: CONSIDERING THILO WESTERMANN'S REVERSE GLASS WORKS THROUGH THE ART OF CHINESE ANCIENT BRONZE MIRRORS

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Between Surface and Meaning: What do we see in Thilo Westermann's artworks?

On a most overt level, we see the developments and results of an ongoing creative process that has grown gradually and steadily over time. Westermann's critical inquiry into the relations between form, content, medium, and matter, and into how their relationships are transformed through artistic invention and intervention, has brought forth artworks that are not only aesthetically appealing, but also visually complex and conceptually riddling. Springing from consummate technical precision, analytical prowess, and extraordinary manual dexterity, the painstakingly laborious and time-intensive layers of work involved in creating seemingly immaculate artworks remain largely concealed. Before our eyes, something appears perfectly unblemished, pristine, as if created by itself. The magnetism of this polished something—with its glossed-over surface, which we want to touch and run our fingers over, with its dazzling pictures-in-pictures and imagery embodying objects of desire like a glitzy icon sparkling on the cover of a high-end fashion magazine, attracting and repelling our hand's touch like the forces of a polar field: this polished something is inherently magnetic because it lies beyond reach, precisely because it is illusive, allusive, and elusive.

"While considering reverse glass painting, I discovered that the glass pane displays the pictorial image on its back side; at the same time, however, this image withdraws from any direct access. As in a shop window or showcase, my works are exhibited yet also protected."¹

What, then, do we see in Westermann's works, behind the polished surface of the glass pane? There is, of course, no single answer. Yet that does not mean we can or should not ponder the question. On the contrary, the possible answers are infinite. We could compile a very long and interesting list (for instance, in the museum guest book) of the manifold things exhibition visitors see in Westermann's works. And this, in fact, is all my contribution to this catalogue will do: another viewing of his works, from the idiosyncratic perspective of an academic specializing in the art histories of East Asia, as well as the arts and crafts of China.

As even largely uninitiated exhibition visitors will easily recognize, Westermann's art has connections with Chinese art. His works frequently incorporate explicit visual references to particular pictorial motifs, symbolic iconographies, types of objects and material formats specific to the latter. For instance, Westermann's iconic reverse glass paintings include generic depictions of Chinese orchids and peonies, often together with Chinese-styled ceramic vessels; classical Chinese literati motifs and themes such as

scholars' rocks and bamboo; or, more recently, European figurines set before a pictorial background of Chinese vessels, decorating the surface of a vase.

Given these cross-cultural connections, I aim to sketch a horizon for possible interpretations of Westermann's reverse glass art from the historical perspectives of Chinese art. I do not intend to discuss the Chinese pictorial motifs featuring prominently in Westermann's works (one can do so, of course, through an art-historical analysis of their iconographical traditions and iconological symbolism in Chinese culture).² Rather, I borrow from the history of Chinese arts and crafts the traditional genre of bronze mirrors (*tongjing* 銅鏡).³ This will serve as a lens for magnifying and bringing into focus certain material, aesthetic, and conceptual aspects of Westermann's reverse glass works. Considering this special genre, whose art and craft of casting over time brought forth various types of reversible mirrors, will provide a fragmentary perspective on Westermann's works. It will also help to highlight their own efficacious properties as mirrors, and their significance as reflective and projective devices of envisioning, imagining, and fashioning the self.

I purposefully use the term "fragmentary perspective" here because my investigation offers no more (yet also no less) than one spectral viewpoint many others. My choice of the bronze-mirror genre as a lens is arbitrary, as multiple genres specific to the Chinese arts would provide alternative and equally useful perspectives on Westermann's reverse glass art. These lie beyond the scope of the present discussion, which will remain brief. Nevertheless, it may provide what could be termed a dedicated glimpse, one capable of opening up related issues and questions, and thus suited to prospective future inquiry and exploration.⁴ While my choice of perspective is arbitrary, it is not made without reason. In both contexts, Chinese mirrors on the one hand, and Westermann's "mirrors" on the other, two particular aspects seem equally meaningful: firstly, that of the handcrafted image incorporated on the rear side of an object's surface; and secondly, that of the human image projected onto its front side, which transforms, inevitably, when beheld. The interplay and enmeshment of both aspects—front side and back—can be illustrated by juxtaposing two images: Westermann's photomontage "*Bougainvillea*" and "*Vanda coerulea*" at a collector's house, *Maremma 2016* (2017), which includes the photographer's self-reflection;⁵ this is juxtaposed with the image of an earliest example of a Chinese bronze mirror, whose reverse side bears the pictorial design of a human face with wide-open eyes that seem to be looking straight into the viewer's. Both images return and mirror our gaze, albeit in different ways.

Bronze Mirrors in China: Why and How They Exist

As observed by early Western scholarship on Chinese bronze mirrors:

"It must be emphasized that the Chinese bronze mirrors of the great period – from the Late Zhou through the Tang Dynasty (c. 550 B.C.–900 A.D.) – were rarely ever mere looking-glasses, in the sense conveyed

by our use of the word mirror. Of course, some of them were used for vanity's sake, but the primary purposes were for ritual and magic, and the decoration on most mirrors had symbolic meanings referring to these basic uses."⁶

Though the earliest origins of bronze mirrors in China remain a matter of dispute, their wide-scale production and usage are known to have first flourished in the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.).⁷ During this time, material objects cast from bronze, including ancient mirrors, underwent transformation in their function and significance, from initially ceremonial implements used in the ritual cultures of the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties to luxury commodities embodying high social status and aesthetic refinement. With bronze mirrors, this shift also indicated a new form of self-awareness and the heightened attention paid to physical appearance.⁸ Throughout the millennia, following further peaks in domestic production and circulation during the Han (206 B.C. – A.D. 220) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, bronze mirrors evolved considerably as items of global trade; the coastal region of China's southeastern Zhejiang Province developed as their preeminent producer among domestic and international markets.⁹ Satiating the modern-day taste for things antique, bronze mirrors also became known under their alternative designation, "ancient mirrors" (*gujing* 古鏡), to differentiate these from the novel form of glass mirrors.¹⁰

Significantly, the various formats, functions, and meanings of mirrors must, in the Chinese context, be seen as closely intertwined with their symbolic value as "powerful and enduring metaphors," whose round forms were prominently associated with the moon, and "served as vehicles for contemplation on, variously, light, perception and self-perception, perspective, and feeling."¹¹ Further:

"Mirrors had many uses, which were both practical and spiritual. They entrapped reflections that had previously only been seen on the surface of still water. The same as today, this reflective surface was used as a vanity mirror. Early on, craftsman began the production of convex mirrors, which would reduce the size of the reflection so the face was seen in proportion."¹²

We can thus imagine how the moment of reflection and projection experienced by the self while beholding its mirror image, whether consciously or not, evoked associations of the moon, water, and even heaven,¹³ thus blurring the self-perception of one's face through such imaginations or projected imagery. Interestingly, we can assume that this self-observing moment of reflection and projection was extended and complemented when reversing the mirror in one's hand—to gaze at and admire its back side: while the front side of bronze mirrors were highly polished to create a reflective surface, their back side typically featured a decorative pattern, which, particularly in the case of earlier mirrors, was full of symbolism.¹⁴

Thus,

"[f]or the old Chinese, the important consideration was the significance of the pattern on the mirror back, and the deftness or subtlety with which its message was expressed was what made it an effective design."¹⁵

Art history has studied the rich and complex range of incorporated décors, techniques, and materials that have shaped the genre of bronze mirrors in China over time. Worth mentioning besides the above example of a human face is a fine selection of bronze mirrors dating from the Xia (c. 2070– c. 1600 B.C.) through Shang (c. 1600–1046 B.C.) to Northern Song (960–1127) dynasties now housed at Tsinghua University Art Museum (TAM), Beijing. Commonly equipped with a supportive holding device in the form of a lobed knob, through which a cord could be passed, their back sides included geometric and ornamental patterns as well as cosmological imagery; cast inscriptions, often of propitious, superstitious or worshipping nature; color-painted décor; symbolic motifs of auspicious flowers, plants, animals, and mythological creatures; as well as religious themes including Buddhist and Daoist iconographies. Among this selection, let me highlight an example from the Northern Song dynasty, which stands out due to its rectangular shape as well as the addition of an elaborate ink rubbing, laying bare its sophisticated design and casting technique. This piece is also notable for its motif—flowering peonies— which we are particularly familiar with from Westermann’s artworks.

With the technological advancements of various periods, consummate embellishments further developed through gold and silver inlay, elaborate repoussé design, and the combined incorporation of other precious materials like turquoise, mother-of-pearl or lacquer. Regarding its historical development in China, bronze-mirror production flourished particularly from the Warring States period until the Tang dynasty. Beginning with the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), while certain genres and commodities of art—such as calligraphy and ink painting in form of hanging scrolls, handscrolls, albums, and folding fans—increasingly diversified, and took on emblematic meaning as sophisticated treasures and fashionable rarities, moreover as agents of early-modern popular culture and social prestige, bronze mirrors by contrast underwent an overall decline in production and mobility as an “indigenous” Chinese tradition.¹⁶ They were, in fact “slowly being supplanted by their glass rivals from the other side of the world.”¹⁷ Grounded in the assumption that “[f]oreign things introduced to China in the late Ming entered a market supremely capable of absorbing novelties,”¹⁸ by the early to middle Qing dynasty (1644–1911), China’s glass industry rose to prominence both at the imperial court and among ordinary people. The widespread circulation of specific types of glass objects such as glass mirrors (and also reverse glass paintings) indicates their aesthetic and social status, as much as their transcultural significance and value, as desired exotica and prestigious symbols of early-modern material culture that linked China and the West.¹⁹

Settings and Functions: Glimpses of the Past through Mirror Portraits

Three hanging scrolls dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties, respectively, and now held in the TAM’s painting collection, vividly illustrate some of the settings and functions in which mirrors have been put to use and ascribed significance by producers and recipients of specific historical periods, social groups and cultural circles. The first two examples are figure portraits in the so-called genre of “Paintings of Beautiful Women” (*meirenhua* 美人畫), which flourished from the late-Ming through Qing dynasties

and aimed to depict, in idealized form, both morally virtuous and physically attractive females of often noble or imperial background. The more recent example, by Ren Xun 任薰 (1835–1895) and titled *Portrait of a Lady* (Shinü tu 仕女圖), shows a seated young noblewoman making herself up by her dressing table. While the precious jade items, seen on the dresser and high table in the background, besides adorning her hair, indicate her wealthy status, the wood-root and bamboo furnishings of the tables convey a sophisticated preference for contemporary styles and fashions en vogue at the time. This preference is similarly reflected in the large round mirror positioned centrally on the lady's dresser, which is not made of ancient bronze but of modern glass. Rather than gazing into the mirror, the portrayed sitter gazes directly at the viewer, alluringly and suggestively. We can see the mirror in the function most familiar to us today: as a vanity device.

The older example in this pictorial genre, *Portrait of a Lady Holding a Mirror* (Chi jing shinü tu 持鏡仕女圖), a work by Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1599–1652), likewise depicts a noblewoman with mirror. Different from the previous example, the figurine is portrayed standing outdoors by a boulder, beneath a tree blossoming amid natural surroundings of rocks and shrubs. The lady is holding a flower-shaped bronze mirror, which can be identified by the lobed knob held on the back side as well as by the blue-green patina. The figurine's gaze, however, is not directed at the mirror (nor at the viewer), but into the distance, which remains beyond our view; the lady seems immersed in thought, perhaps reminiscing about things past and bygone. Her melancholic expression, together with the intimacy of the pictorial setting, lyrically and metaphorically evokes the mirror as a symbol of personal longing and remembrance. Indeed, the poetics of this mirror scene are reflected, literally, in the colophon inscribed on the scroll's upper left and reading (in an English translation):

"Three hundred peach trees are cultivated; they are of marvelous and extraordinary color. As has been exclaimed about the palaces of Han, the beautiful ones contend themselves in vain, fighting on their own."²⁰

These lines invariably conjure up literary references to classical Chinese poetry describing the tragic fates, lamentations and hardships of palace ladies since the Han dynasty. They allude to the works of famous Tang dynasty poets such as Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), and Zhang Hu 張祜 (c. 792–c. 853), who tell of the resentment and competitions experienced by court women in imperial China. The artist Chen Hongshou thus creates a portrait in which the mirror acquires function and meaning as a projective device, not only of individual but also of collective memory, and as such providing a glimpse into China's cultural past.²¹

The late-Qing painting *Offering Calamus Wine for Good Blessings* (Pu shang yao fu tu 蒲觴邀福圖) by Qian Hui'an 錢慧安 (1833–1911) shows the mythical deity and guardian figure Zhong Kui 鍾馗 gazing into a bronze mirror held in his hand, with his younger sister standing to his right, and her newborn son sitting on his lap. Widely worshipped in Chinese culture as the Demon Queller, Zhong Kui symbolizes a fortune

bringer associated, among other things, with the annual Dragon Boat Festival—as indicated here by the child and goblin presenting wine in a *jue* 爵-type ritual vessel and a plate of freshly picked loquats.²² Set amid a detail-rich scenario referencing a typical Qing dynasty scholar’s studio and garden, and surrounded by various auspicious creatures, animals, and symbolic objects associated with Zhong Kui, the Demon Queller’s mirror-gazing can be interpreted as his act of dispelling harmful spirits—also inasmuch as mirrors in China are traditionally believed to “have the power to ward off evil since the form of any invisible spirit will become visible when reflected in the mirror.”²³ Interestingly, in this painting, Zhong Kui is holding an ancient type of bronze mirror, whose back side bears an inscription in archaic seal script (*zhuan* 篆書), as well as a décor reminiscent of the spiral thunder pattern (*leiwén* 雷紋) prominently found on Shang dynasty ritual vessels. The painter’s choice of iconography reflects the contemporaneous zeitgeist and culture of late Qing China with its taste for things antique, and its pronounced interest in collecting ancient and retro-style bronze objects, such as those seen in this work alongside the mirror and *jue*-type ritual wine vessel: a *gu* 觚-type vessel, a tripod cauldron, and an incense stick holder.

As “mirror portraits,” such vivid illustrations provide useful insights and possible reference points, not least due to their rich and accurate detail. That said, their validity as historical sources is of course limited (like any other form of art history writing). Underlying the respective painter’s or author’s subjective gaze, such examples instead provide valuable cultural and art-historical references inasmuch as they manifest prevailing viewpoints, specific to artists’ periods and places of production; as such, they reflect the differing and changing functions and meanings of objects through history—in this case, mirrors.

Face-to-Face, Back-to-Back: Reflections on Chinese Bronze Mirrors and Westermann’s Reverse Glass Artworks

Considering ancient Chinese bronze mirrors brings us back to the observation that their functional shift, from ritual implement to a physical device serving self-reflection, historically indicated a new form of self-awareness and heightened attention to physical appearance. As such, this genre is characterized by a double-sided view and transitory viewpoint: bronze mirrors may always be looked at from both sides. Their front and back both bear images that playfully complement each other as the beholder envisions his or her self (corporeal and imagined). True enough: “From the earliest periods of China’s history, bronze mirrors have played a significant role in reflecting, both literally and symbolically, the face of the Chinese people.”²⁴ None other than the early bronze mirror showing a human face, which seems to mirror the beholder’s gaze, exemplified this in a primal and prototypical way.

The aesthetic potential and efficacy of the bronze mirror rests on the beholder’s imagination and anticipation, evoked by and playing with the visual illusions and allusions variously conjured up through the specific motifs and texts incorporated into its material. The object itself becomes meaningful, something desired: as a precious commodity; yet also as a projective surface, which embraces and captures a

person's innermost yearnings and laments, memories and hopes. Looking at refined High-Tang bronze mirrors from today's point of view leave us wondering about their owners' hopes and yearnings (or even what their faces might have looked like). Reconstructions such as those attempted by the introduced Ming and Qing period paintings collected at TAM to some extent serve as possible reference points. As noted, their limitations as historical sources notwithstanding, they can still provide useful insights into contemporaneous perspectives.

The aspects of the double-sided view and transitory viewpoint specific to the genre of Chinese bronze mirrors—based on their material format, to be held and reversed in the hand—reverberate in Westermann's reverse glass artworks; these aspects may also be considered in terms of the unique properties of these works, as effective mirror devices. While Westermann's mirror devices cannot be held or reversed in the hand like their Chinese precursors, their layered views and transitory viewpoints are based on their specific material conditions and multiple potentials, as objects bearing reverse-side images of culture-specific pictorial motifs and iconic symbols, emerging with the human apparitions of their gazing beholders. Like Chinese bronze mirrors, which allow the beholder to choose between two alternative yet complementary sides, Westermann's reverse glass artworks invite us to choose a side, viewpoint or visual angle:

"[...] the mirroring of the beholder on the glass pane becomes an essential component of viewing the works: beholders may choose whether they wish to focus on their own mirror-images on the surface or on the motif behind the pane."²⁵

As mirrors, Westermann's works self-referentially incorporate multiple, simultaneously effective levels of visual perception, physically and psychologically. Conceived as self-referential framing devices that play with the very nature of reflection, they include its manifold aspects of illusion, allusion, and elusion. Considering how his still lifes have evolved over time, Westermann observes:

"My early still-life pictures [...] were superseded by pictures about still lifes as a genre that address the inherent mechanisms of showing and withdrawing."²⁶

The self-reflective nature of his works transpires on many levels, not least in the pictographic renderings of his motifs, many of which are depicted together with their own reflections mirrored on the pictorial ground.²⁷

Westermann's reverse glass works not only mirror the respective viewers standing before them (as exemplified by the artist capturing his mirror image). They also mirror and visually incorporate their site-specific physical surroundings, settings, and scenes in which they are embedded and experienced in "real space" (which in the case of the photomontages is more or less fictive), thus offering viewers variant perspectives as subjectified objects. Depending on where, why and how a work is presented, these perspectives change, as the example of *Chinese Orchid (Homage to Ma Lin)* shows: on the one hand, in a photomontage, discoverable half-veiled behind the rustic old-fashioned wooden doors of the Himalayas Art

Museum near Shanghai; on the other, in a simple installation shot, installed and coolly animating the stark white-cube walls of the EIGEN + ART Lab in Berlin.

Whence and Whither the Image?

As noted at the outset, and to sum up: I have not attempted to discuss and analyze the Chinese pictorial motifs of Thilo Westermann's reverse glass artworks. Rather, I have adopted an art-historical lens—Chinese bronze mirrors— to illumine Westermann's works as effective "mirrors": based on the physical conditions and transformational potentials of the artwork as form, content, matter and medium; and becoming meaningful as a reflective and projective device of envisioning, imagining and fashioning the self. My discussion of Chinese bronze mirrors, and with a view to drawing conclusions about Westermann's reverse glass artworks, highlights two aspects common to both contexts: first, their unique character as reflective and projective devices of the self, that is, the handcrafted images incorporated on the back side of an object's surface, which is shaped by a specific pictorial motif; and second, their projection of a human image on their front side, which is inevitably transposed in the beholder's gaze.

In Westermann's reverse glass artworks, the interplay of these aspects becomes immediately evident while emerging as complex, blurry, and elusive: whereas Chinese bronze mirrors were not conceived to be reflected on as reflective devices, Westermann's artworks, by contrast, are. Significantly, the beholders of Westermann's reverse glass works are confronted, unexpectedly, with their own mirror-images (and to a certain degree also with those of their spatial surroundings), thus provoking a moment of hesitation. The viewers inevitably register and observe the visual effects of these works through conscious self-reflection, however brief and fleeting. Standing before the artworks, we can neither escape nor withdraw our own image. This interference wishes to be reconciled, at least somehow, with the pictorial image, which in turn wants to be seen beneath the surface of the glass pane.

Such effects are intentional on Westermann's part. Only recently, when I visited him in his studio, I found myself unable to take satisfactory pictures of his reverse glass painting *Chinese Orchid (Homage to Ma Lin)* (2014). No matter how hard I tried, making several awkward attempts from various angles, I could not avoid or evade the reflection of my hand (holding the camera) on the orchid's glass surface. This experience reminded me once more of my initial observation of Westermann's reverse glass art: in its generic form, it creates a polished something, and this polished something is inherently magnetic because it lies beyond reach, precisely because it is illusive, allusive and elusive.

Westermann's artworks are best understood through individual experience, performatively, during on-site viewing. They unfold their full meaning only in the eyes of their beholders, who see themselves embedded within a site-specific situation, at a given moment in time. For want of a better example, let me conclude with the photographic image published on pages 104/105. Also taken during my studio visit, I first

thought that I would never be able to use the shot, since it shows, yet again, the reflection of my body on the surface of the photographed artwork.

Looking back, however, I will use this photograph not only as it recaptures my last encounter with Westermann's reverse glass art in situ, but also as it captures—if not in an aesthetically perfect, then at least in a more elemental manner—what I consider to be an essential quality of Westermann's works. To return to my initial question: What is it that we see in Thilo Westermann's artworks? Among very many possible answers, may this one suffice to conclude my inquiry: facing the original work in the exhibition space, we see ourselves, moreover our contested selves, and the reflections thereof, in their moment of hesitation. As mirror images, they are contested because we are so used to seeing the surfaces of ordinary mirrors—familiar, so-called functional ones. Yet these challenge neither us nor the image we believe to be a true-to-life reflection of ourselves, in the way that Westermann's mirrors do. Which raises the next question: Whence—and whither—our image?

Many thanks to Tsinghua University Art Museum (TAM), Beijing, for generously granting permission to reproduce images of selected pieces from its collection. I am particularly grateful to the TAM curator and my colleague Tan Shengguang 談盛廣 for helping me to obtain the images as well as for advising me on object-related questions. Chinese terms in this text are romanized according to standard pinyin. All translations of the sources quoted in this text are my own.

¹ As Westermann observes in his recent dossier: “Bei der Hinterglasmalerei entdeckte ich, dass die Glas-scheibe das dahinter Abgebildete zeigt, es jedoch zugleich dem direkten Zugriff entzieht. Wie in einem Schaufenster oder einer Vitrine werden meine Stilleben so zwar ausgestellt, zugleich aber auch geschützt.” Thilo Westermann, *Dossier*, April 1, 2021.

² Iconographic and symbolic meanings of pictorial motifs referencing Chinese art traditions in Westermann's artworks are discussed elsewhere; see Zheng Hong, “Chinese Elements in Western Contemporary Art: Thilo Westermann's Work as an Example”, in *Migrations by Thilo Westermann* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2023), pp. 173–200; Peng Lai, „Mirror Flowers: Cross-Cultural Reflections on Diverse Concepts of Time and Space in Thilo Westermann's Work“, in *ibid.*, pp. 206–25.

³ Different from the modern form of glass mirrors that became prevalent from the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) on.

⁴ Possible avenues for further cross-cultural inquiry include, for example, discussing Westermann's works in terms of other art-historical genres, including Chinese painted screens, Chinese painted fans, or Chinese seals and seal-carving art. Such avenues would open up particularly fruitful discussions on Westermann's reverse-glass paintings, unique prints and photomontages.

⁵ The photomontage exists in two versions: while the small-sized paper version referenced here shows the photographer's self-reflection, in the other, large-sized Diasec version, the photographer's self-reflection has been erased from the image (see fig. 34 and 53).

⁶ Schuyler Cammann, “Significant Patterns on Chinese Bronze Mirrors,” in *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 9 (1955), pp. 43–62, esp. 43.

⁷ For a more detailed, Western-language introduction to the historical developments of bronze mirrors in China, see Cammann, “Significant Patterns on Chinese Bronze Mirrors” (see note 6); Susan Costello, “An Investigation of Early Chinese Bronze Mirrors at the Harvard University Art Museums,” paper presented at the 2005 Association of North American Graduate Programs in Conservation (ANAGPIC) Annual Student Conference, accessed October 8, 2021, <https://resources.culturalheritage.org/anagpic-student-papers/anagpic-2005-student-papers/>; Antonia Finnane, “Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors,” in Martin J.

Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds., *A Companion to Chinese Art*, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Art History (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 392–410.

⁸ See Finnane, “Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors” (see note 7), p. 393.

⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 394–95.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 396.

¹¹ As discussed by Finnane in the context of Ming-period China, see *ibid.*, p. 393.

¹² Costello, “An Investigation of Early Chinese Bronze Mirrors” (see note 7), pp. 5–6. As noted by Costello, now conservator of objects and sculpture at Harvard Art Museums, in addition to their practical uses, bronze mirrors “were valued for ritual purposes associated with the power of reflection. Chinese spirits, both good and bad, are supposed to throng the earth and plague the living. Mirrors have the power to ward off evil since the form of any invisible spirit will become visible when reflected in the mirror”; see *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³ See *ibid.*, p. 3. Costello remarks that the round form of bronze mirrors was also considered a symbolic representation of heaven. Further: “The Chinese believed that by using symbols representing the universe, it would be possible to acquire some of the universe’s power to gain both strength and protection from evil. For example, round shapes represented Heaven, the Earth was square and small domes represented stars and constellations.” *ibid.*

¹⁴ See *ibid.*

¹⁵ Cammann, “Significant Patterns on Chinese Bronze Mirrors” (see note 6), p. 43.

¹⁶ See Costello, “An Investigation of Early Chinese Bronze Mirrors” (see note 7), pp. 2–3. For further reading on the social mobility and crucial transformations taking place in material and visual culture of this period in China, see the recommendable book by Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 1991); see also my case study, Shao-Lan Hertel, “Reconstructing Early Modern Architectural Spaces in Late-Ming (1368–1644) and Early-Qing (1644–1912) China: Formats and Functions of Large-Scale Calligraphy,” in Andrew Hopkins, ed., *Lost and Found in Translation: Citation and Early Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; forthcoming).

¹⁷ Finnane, “Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors” (note 7), p. 396.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 397–98.

²⁰ Zhong tao san bai shu, yanse yi yi zhi. Mo xiang Han gong shuo, meiren zheng zi wei. 種桃 三百樹，顏色亦異之。莫向漢宮說，美人爭自為。

²¹ For a further discussion in the generic context of “Paintings of Beautiful Women,” see Shao-Lan Hertel, “Portrait of Wang Yuyan Drawing Orchids,” in Klaas Ruitenbeek, ed., *Faces of China: Portrait Painting of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1912)*, exh. cat. Asian Art Museum, National Museums in Berlin (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2017), pp. 176–77.

²² More precisely, Chinese calamus wine (*changpujiu* 菖蒲酒, as indicated in the painting’s title), like the loquats was traditionally served during the Dragon Boat Festival, which took place on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.

²³ Costello, “An Investigation of Early Chinese Bronze Mirrors” (see note 7), p. 6. On the early Chinese belief of assigning mirrors the property of keeping evil spirits away, see *ibid.*, pp. 3 and 6; see also notes 12 and 13.

²⁴ I am citing June Li, the organizer of the exhibition *Ancient Chinese Bronze Mirrors from the Lloyd Cotsen Collection* at the Virginia Steele Scott Galleries of American Art, The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California (November 12, 2011–May 14, 2012); see <https://www.huntington.org/ancient-chinese-bronze-mirrors>.

²⁵ As stated by Westermann: “Zudem wird die Spiegelung des Betrachters oder der Betrachterin auf der Oberfläche der Glasscheibe essentieller Bestandteil der Bildrezeption: Es bleibt den Betrachtenden überlassen, auf die eigene Spiegelung auf der Oberfläche oder auf das Motiv hinter der Scheibe zu fokussieren”; see Westermann, *Dossier* (see note 1), p. 1.

²⁶ “Meine frühen Stillebenbilder wurden so durch Bilder über das Genre des Stillebens abgelöst, die die inhärenten Mechanismen des Zeigens und Entziehens selbst thematisieren”; see *ibid.* Incidentally, much could be said about the poetics of revealing and appearing, withdrawing and vanishing. These notions have fundamentally shaped philosophical and aesthetic thought in China’s cultural history. I can refer to these ideas only in passing here.

²⁷ The theme of axial symmetry, moreover, highlights Westermann’s “image couples,” as seen in various photomontages: “*Souvenir de Baden-Baden*” at the *Villa Stéphanie, Baden-Baden 2017–20* (2020), “*Bougainvillea*” at the *Villa Stéphanie, Baden-Baden 2017–21* (2021), “*Rose Westerland (3)*” and “*Rose*”

Westerland (3) at a Private Collection, New York 2015 (2015) and *"Bouquet of Roses"* and *"Bouquet of Roses"* at a Private Collection, New York 2015 (2015). The latter two also incorporate framed mirrors as visual elements.

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