

# ELKE REINHUBER

## FACE VALUE

① CMC 8/F

Augmented Reality enhanced Giclée  
(OCÉ Crystal Point Print) Print on Tyvek  
2014–2015

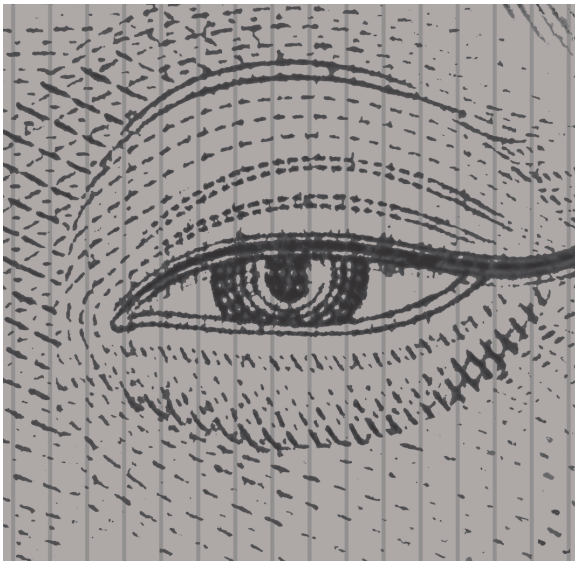
33×33" (84×84cm)

Sebastian Pelz: Text selection and edit (AR  
overlays)

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"Face Value". Famous surrealist Hans Richter knew about the Dreams That Money Can Buy (1947), yet most of the time, they are not for sale but priceless. Still, money can buy many things and some of those are beyond the realms of reality. Concurrently, banknotes are nothing more than colourful inks and holofoils on paper or polymer but have the implicit power attributed to them by mighty institutions and individuals. So the bond between money and dreams is fragile but prevalent since both depend on the powers of imagination.

Concept. The world of finance can be viewed as the domineering force of today, but hardly anyone



appreciates the artistic significance of our currencies or even compares the aesthetic value of the range of banknotes with dead presidents, dictators, poets and reigning sovereigns. In continental Europe, these ruling or otherwise influential heads got replaced with soulless generic monuments on account of the introduction of the common currency Euro.

Unlike to the traditional currencies, the artistic value of credit cards and electronic wallets is basically unexplored. The correlation between the monies and the modes of payment has become a rather abstract one, estranging the consumer from the value of his assets and accelerating the capital turnover speed all for the benefit of maximised profits. Still, the aesthetic appeal of banknotes from various countries with different styles, colour schemes and depicted topics is sovereign. Furthermore, artists enhanced the value of bills by treating them as canvas or interpolating in other ways. Ahead of everyone else was Hans-Peter Feldman, who increased the worth more than a thousand times of American one dollar notes by painting a red clown nose on Washington's face – an unlimited edition, but each one treated individually by the artist's hand. Through more effort went street artist Banksy with his Di-Faced Tenner (2004), a well-elaborated counterfeit of the British ten-pound note, replacing the picture of the ruling Queen with her daughter-in-law, the late Princess Diana. Instead of being handled as illegal tender, the prints signed by Banksy of England circulated apparently and can today score a fortune at international auctions. Further mention is Andy Warhol's witticism to reproduce banknotes as screen-prints on canvas in a number of works – a technique which provides only little detail compared to the traditional gravure printing. Although some early currencies, such as in medieval China, were multiplied by utilising woodcut printing.

Looking at banknotes as objects, the viewer will notice that in most cases the design is based on a small scaled painting and, once engaged in it, the observation of details may result in a never ending obsession. While selecting the faces for my piece on the international financial market, I discovered among the many obvious features the eyes of the personalities as the most captivating detail, and often articulated with a passion for minutiae. The eye has often been labelled in literature and, particular

in surrealist art, as a window to our soul; and, as suggested in the bible, 'The light of the body is the eye' (Matthew 6:22). If we look a person in the eyes, we mean to see the truth. Looking at the hugely enlarged eyes of banknotes, the details turn into abstraction, the reduction of colours, the circles and lines almost resemble the works by Bridget Riley or other Op-Art artists. For this reason, I desired to employ the eyes as my subject for a series of artworks, culminating in the body of work *Face Value*. Hugely enlarged eyes are printed and enhanced with an additional Augmented Reality layer, revealing quotes from experts on finance which connect to the issuing country and the famous person.

How did it start. The work began with my painting *EyeIIR* (2006) ten years ago, showing a detailed eye from Queen Elisabeth II on an Australian five-dollar note. As a relict of British crown colonies, her face still smiles from many international notes – though engraved in different styles and from different portraits, which I tried to examine and compare. Rather than putting the queen's eye of a different age on canvas, I commenced a series of magnified photographs of commonwealth currencies. Fascinated by the beauty of the hugely enlarged eyes, I investigated into the subject and in 2014 the first six images for *Face Value* were completed. The macro photographs were edited, vectorised, about two-hundred times enlarged and printed with a particular Giclée printing technique on Tyvek. In this way, a similarity to the surface feel of the intaglio print of the real banknotes was maintained, although printed on a much more durable material.

Theoretically, a common currency inhabits a wide range of benefits, but among the negative aspects is the lack of national identity as their and nonspecific architecture replaced influential personalities and monuments. What if each country would have kept their individual representations in a common design – mixed up throughout Europe and the whole world, just as it happened with the coins?

In the age of advanced capitalism, everything seems to boil down to a single element, now it is all about money – at least if you look at Scrooge McDuck's eyeballs. Why do we tend to believe that today's money is not worth anything in itself, that capital has to be constantly on the move, as if it were on

the run. Perhaps we have lost trust in the potential of money, because we fear the big bubble might finally burst. Since the bills with historical faces or accomplishments were substituted by tiny chips, on plastic cards or soldered next to other chips, the issuing institutions have lost their significance.

In the past not everything was better, but those currencies used to have a value which extended beyond paper, ink and numbers. Since money has no longer a real value like the precious metals which preceded it, the attributed worth relies not on numbers but on trust, on the faith in the issuing institution. At least, this much is for sure, a wide range of numbered editions did then exist. Each bill was individually enumerated in inflationary quantities. Sadly their artistic value could never be fully appreciated – until now – in collector's repositories, as canvas for artists or as curious necessity when travelling to foreign countries.

With the imminent cash abolition, the connection between labour and value of goods diminishes. Although at the same time, it might bring back the days of barter.

**ELKE REINHUBER** is not your average artist, because she became a specialist on choice, decision making and counterfactual thoughts in media arts. As a decidophobic in her own life, she is dreaming of a life on the Holodeck, where we can simply explore alternative realities. When immersed herself for the first time in the panoramic photographs she had prepared for a 360° environment, she knew that the heydays of flat screens and static photographs on the wall were gone forever – photography was finally not longer constricted by the limitations of the frame. In her work she explores different modes of presentation and strategies of storytelling to emphasise the parallel existence of multiple truths of the here and now. While living and studying in Berlin, Reinhuber came across the federal printing facility where all the German banknotes are manufactured, right down her street. The plant – or rather a concrete fortress – was, and still is, heavily guarded, photography was forbidden around the premises, and sometimes at night the sound of heavy machinery was audible – many factors that spiked her curiosity to investigate into the matters of money.