

The Rye Breadcrumbs That Inspired Gerhard Richter

Gerhard walks through the empty space of a large warehouse. His shadow, slender and opaque, does not think twice about pursuing him. Suddenly, a female voice jostles his memory: "Remember the cracked paint on the walls of your studio? The garage, moldy from the rain? Your feet felt the cruel cold that a concrete floor produces. Still you painted, as you paint today, but dressed in that black travesty of overalls."

In his mind, Sabine appears in her bland nineties outfit, the triangular light resting on her white collar, the dark blue bow holding her hair in place, her attendant gaze falling diagonally on what appears to be a magazine or a newspaper. The background of the image is maroon and its title, *The Reading*.

Day after day, G. drinks coffee, in the manner of an automaton, converting his habit into a working requirement. In the midst of his reveries, of his dialogues with himself, and the comings and goings of the voices that encourage him to sand, there emerges an idea. It comes from the breadcrumbs that had fallen on the floor that morning and which, due to distraction and carelessness, he has forgotten to sweep up. One was soft cream in color, perhaps with a drop of brown and sienna, its holes slightly darker. Another larger one coexisted with a sesame seed that hung from it, toasted, with a bright and coppery finish, similar to old piping. The light illuminated a third crumb with a pink sheen, pale, like pills administered for a cold. The gray floor, nearly white, with a nearly invisible blue tint, served as a backdrop. G is convinced that the bread and painting have something to do with one another.

He goes in search of a dictionary and in it he finds a definition that interests him. He reads aloud: "Dough is mainly a mixture of flour and water, usually in similar proportions, in which the reproduction of bacteria or yeast found naturally in the environment is brought about." He confuses this mental image, encyclopedic in tone, with the living fungi that inhabit the underside of his paint cans. He is convinced that he has cultivated within them, quite unwittingly, various colors and microbes that form the chromatic and biological basis of his paintings. He relives the intimate euphoria that makes him paint.

His body comes and goes. It scratches here, rubs there. Adds more white and cakes the surface. He preserves the water stain from the beginning. He combats his anxiety by cleaning brushes. After a few hours he removes a tape that had adhered to the canvas. He masks his life and moves away from the scene. His shadow, slender and opaque, will no doubt follow him.