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Flash Art



Thomas Scheibitz
"Final Gold"

Oil and marker on canvas



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THOMAS SCHEIBITZ

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Patricia Ellis

"I ALWAYS THINK OF CALIFORNIA"

FROM A SUMPTUOUS world of designer homes and palm trees, manicured gardens and plate glass, Thomas Scheibitz paints total luxury. His lush abstraction is sleek with frozen perfection (like Marc Quinn's flowers, or a rock from Tiffany's). His is a fragmented recognizability: with dazzling sun-blinded newness, his paintings read like Rodeo Drive seen from a speeding red convertible, his sculptures like a nuevo-architectural shorthand or 3 dimensional Japanese logos.

Scheibitz's painterly abstraction is synonymous with instantaneous brand recognition. Merging commercial imagery with the style of early 20th c. Modernist abstraction, filtered through the retro soft-focus lens of 70s advertising, and rendered with the svelte colors and airy feel of contemporary design, Scheibitz doesn't present the usual celebration of *deja fun-fare*. His is a love affair with the completely soulless: as deliciously market-friendly as Microsoft, electronic pop, and mobile phones (but about as fun as Bill Gates, Enya, and brain tumors). It's an air-tight glamour, the type of affected commodified idealism of Alex Katz, Brett Easton Ellis, or Kraftwerk. On the surface Scheibitz depicts alluringly limpid fashion statements; at the core he is re-inventing History. As far as Art goes, Thomas Scheibitz is very, very serious.

The idea for the paintings/drawings/sculptures falls between model and copy. But I can never use an image directly and exactly. It is always a kind of translation. The copy should be the copy. I hope I can use it in another way — to be concrete but not in a kind of photo-concrete way. It should be very universal and exact, together. Like an invention and also not really; near an invention.

Desire isn't necessarily the product; it's the entire package. Operating like a home-version of Corbis Corporation, Scheibitz has assembled his own image bank: hundreds of

perfect images that he distorts and samples. His source material ranges from magazine cuttings to personal Polaroids and sketches. Scheibitz assembles his paintings like a shopping spree. He's creating a look: smart-casual, sophisticated, utterly cultured. But his mode of production leans less towards Photoshop, it's more reminiscent of 17th c. Dutch still-life painting, or an early concept of Abstraction. Bits of lifestyle are piecemealed together in a complex menagerie of razor-sharp angles and acidic hues. Through his shrapnelized picture planes Scheibitz captures not only the subject matter, but also its spin-doctored media appeal. The pieces come together like Pop-cultural memory bites shared by a billion people.

For art, and the world behind I think, the years between 1900-1930 are one of the most important times. I know a little bit about this history and I can try to understand it as a whole too: for 1550 for example, I would like to know, how cold was a space, a room, and how did it smell? Most important for me speaks Duchamp and Picasso as a fight together. And I like artists like Brancusi and Gropius. You can see the development was step by step, later it comes more side by side (parallel).

This segmented and competitive view of art history is the crux of Scheibitz's practice. A quick glimpse through his portfolio is like racing through centuries of ideas and styles. Heaven is as divine as any Tiepolo, *Rahmenbild* is gauchely colored Albers; *Anlage* is a too-graphic Malevich, a delicate Rothkoish plane backdrops *Funny Game I*, while *Ansicht und Plan von Toledo* is a direct translation of an El Greco. Scheibitz is mastering an almost encyclopedic knowledge of tradition, while encompassing an unnerving understanding of the contemporary world around him. Looking at his work is like experiencing an entire zeitgeist. His paintings exude a believable milieu: not only a space and time, but a climate of everything which has come to influence it. Scheibitz's work

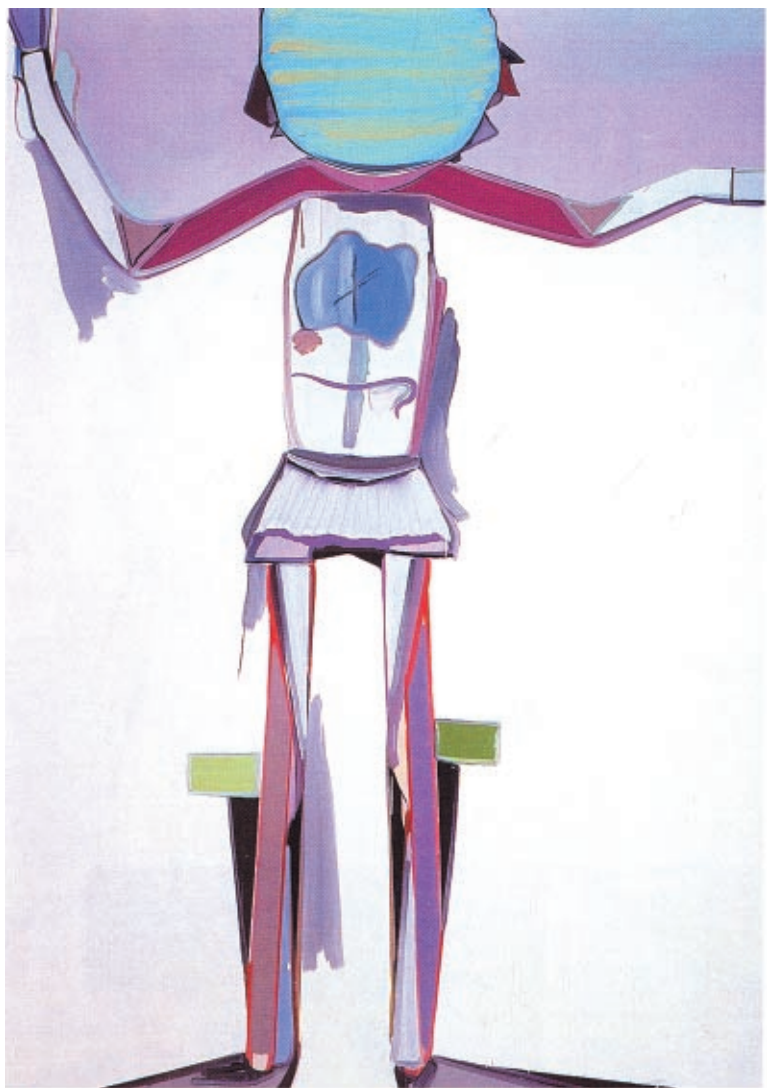
more than parallels an advertised ideal, it anchors that ideal in the very sobering, irrefutable realm of intellect.

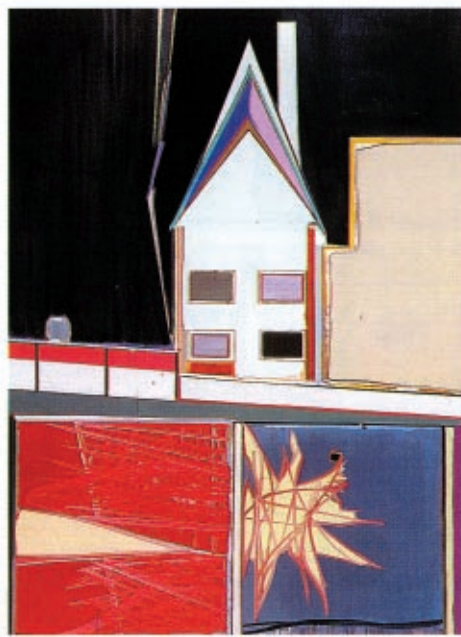
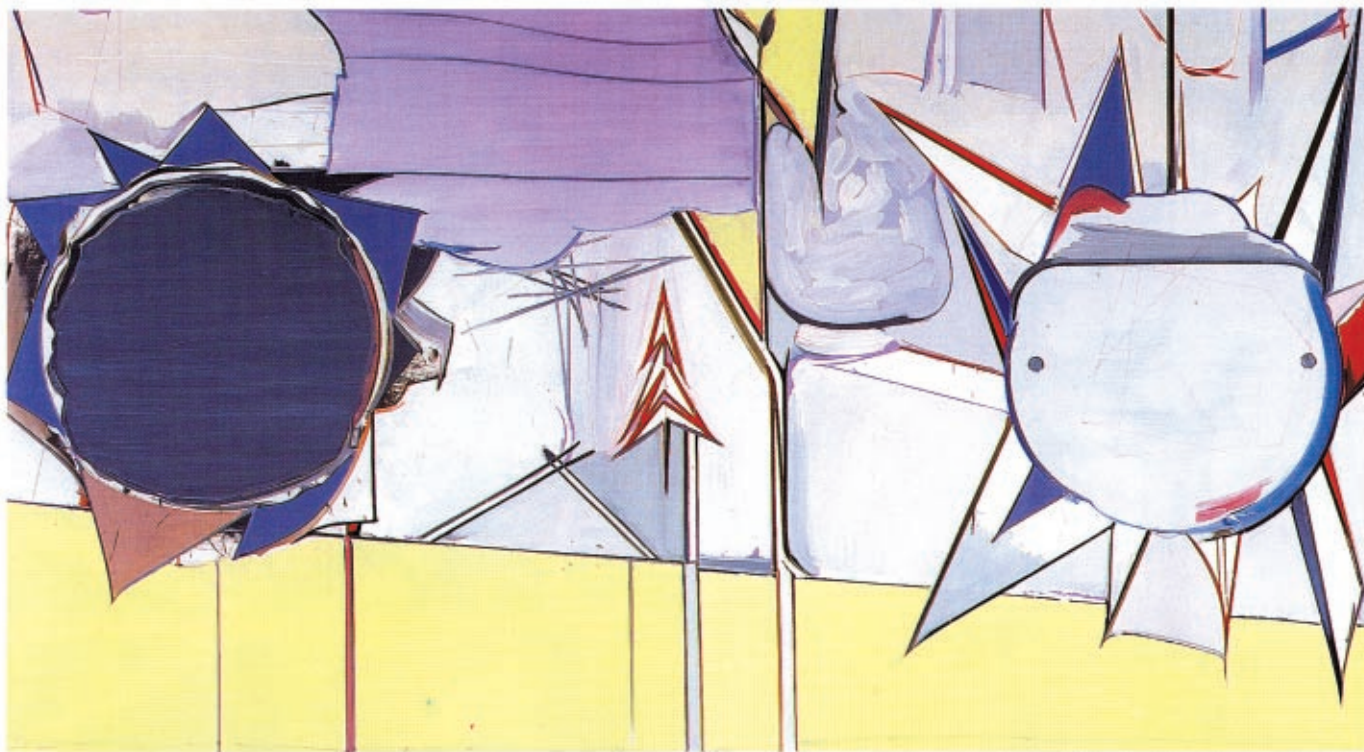
Through his drawings Scheibitz's didactic approach is most evident. Raw and almost vulgar compared to the high finish of his paintings and sculptures, his works on paper are like the scientific notes of an obsessive at work: simple line drawings, geometric doodles, scribbled color schemes; planned out on whatever is most ready at hand: lined note paper, colored pencil, highlighter pen. These are a component-like breakdown of the rich decadence of his painted images: viewing his drawings is like listening to a single channel of a highly produced recording. Each sketch is a single idea in itself: a composition, a color, a texture; isolated elements of an elaborate totality.

My favorite at the moment are the sculptures. They operate like big environments for paintings, not dummies for a sharp painting. They're always painted with different colors, gloss, acrylic, oil. And to find the right size is not easy. The idea comes early, the size is the moment of realization.

Sleek and perfectly formed, Scheibitz's sculptures take on minimalism where King and Caro left off. His forms allude to a survey of cosmopolitan trend from Asian graphics to Futurist architecture. Bringing to life radical gestures seemingly quoted from his paintings, Scheibitz is building his multi-layered consumerism in the tangible dimension. Existing in space, rather than as a representation of it, Scheibitz's sculptures give the false illusion of pared-down simplicity. Seductive in their purity, unsettling in their presence: his forms are disarmingly charismatic. It's only when they're read in the context of his total practice that their disquieting purpose becomes apparent. Scheibitz is re-creating public memory.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: *St. Johann*, 2000. Oil on canvas, 220 x 150 cm. *Greeting Card*, 2000 (detail). Oil and pigments on canvas, 240 x 132 cm. *Untitled (#275)*, 2000. Oil on canvas, 80 x 50 cm. *Untitled (#315)*, 2001. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm. Courtesy Tanja Bonakdar, New York.





Clockwise from top: Stars, 2001. Oil on canvas, 760 x 280 cm. Haus 1, 2001. Oil on canvas, 230 x 160 cm. Courtesy Kunstmuseum, Winterthur; Kirschbaum, 2001. Oil on canvas, 200 x 280 cm. Courtesy Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden.

LIFE-SIZED

We all share a public memory, which we know and later we understand. I try to translate or work with this experience. It is not so bad, I think, with a border (a history, a medium, a size, a memory, etc.) Finally I can feel more free.

Patricia Ellis is an artist and a writer based in London.

Thomas Scheibitz was born in Radeberg (Germany) in 1968. He lives and works in Berlin.

Selected solo shows: 2001: Kunstmuseum Winterthur; Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig; 2000: Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden; 1999: ICA, London; Bonakdar Jancou, New York; 1998: Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden; Bonakdar Jancou, New York; Aurel Scheibler, Cologne; Klaus-Peter Göbel, Stuttgart; 1997: Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden/Berlin. Selected group shows: 2001: "Guarene 2001," Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Guarene (Italy); "Painting at the Edge of the World," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; 2000: "Age of Influence: Reflection in the Mirror of American Culture," MCA, Chicago; "00: Drawings 2000," Barbara Gladstone, New York; "Eberhard

Havekost, Frank Nitsche, Thomas Scheibitz," White Cube, London; "Collectors' Choice," Exit Art, New York; "Wahre Wunder: Sammler und Sammlungen im Rheinland," Josef Haubrich-Kunsthalle, Cologne; "Examining Pictures," Whitechapel, London/MCA, Chicago/ UCLA Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles; 1999: "In Augenhöle: Eberhard Havekost, Frank Nitsche, Thomas Scheibitz," Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin; "Pictures of Pictures," Norwich Gallery, Norwich School of Art and Design; Arnofini, Bristol; 1998: "ACHSE 3 zu 01," Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Dresden; 1997: "Nebenan und mittendrin," Kunsthalle, Dresden; 1996: "FIN," Kurfürstenpassage, Dresden; "Center Court," Hochschule der Künste, Berlin.