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Thomas Scheibitz: *Argos Eyes*

By Barbara A. MacAdam



Thomas Scheibitz. *Luna Park III*. 2024. Oil, vinyl and mixed media on canvas. 57 1/2 x 37 5/8 inches.

Thomas Scheibitz builds with opposites—abstraction and figuration, two and three dimensions, past and present, and everything else—and we, his audience, try to force, conceal, and reveal connections among them. The German artist simultaneously categorizes and disrupts systems as he goes along, fording time and space, while keeping everything lodged imperfectly in memory. He leads us through the landscapes of his installations and paintings, leaving us at once amused and stranded without a playbook.

Argos Eyes
Tanya Bonakdar
Gallery
February 27–April
18, 2025
New York

Using various media, Scheibitz extends his and our reach from painting to drawing to sculpture to video, where he stashes a seemingly infinite collection of observations and speculations. It could almost be a stand-in for his brain—or a memory bank.



Installation view: *Thomas Scheibitz: Argos Eyes*, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 2025. Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles. Photo: Jason Wyche.

Where to begin? Tracking Scheibitz's show through Tanya Bonakdar Gallery's dispersed spaces, we first ascend, almost counterintuitively, a

winding set of stairs to a room filled with modest-size paintings dominated by large eyes emerging from an unspecified gestural backdrop. They seem to track our viewing throughout the room, where, on one wall, a telling centerpiece presides: an all-embracing video projection that could be viewed as a cabinet of curiosities filled with objects as well as fragments of paintings. There's a gesture here, another there, an extract from a Scheibitz canvas along with random sightings, from art to nature, toys, and other things, both banal and otherwise. The images are graphic as well as mental. The artist has described how he uses this exposed archive when he gives talks or seeks inspiration for new works, not knowing where he has put things in the past. It's a fruitful stash. In the center of the room is a large table with samples of models and tools from his actual studio featuring many forms and colors and tidbits of ideas—in all, a studio in a studio, in a studio.



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In this exhibition's allusive mix of paintings we encounter the image of a graphic X that recalls the pop and street artist KAWS, as well as stairs to nowhere floating in space that evoke Dutch conceptualist M.C. Escher, a master of visual impossibilities. Meanwhile, on the shelves of Scheibitz's projected archive and on the surrounding walls, art history nestles in the spaces between images, objects, and ideas. Most fittingly, Cubism plays a dominant role, with Picasso imagery holding court in the central gallery

downstairs, which is filled with large paintings that refer to the big guns of historical painting. With Greek mythology as a starting point, Scheibitz calls into play the figure of Argos and his all-seeing eyes.

Time and space prevail—these are Scheibitz’s prime building tools as he composes from a lively unreality that challenges our perceptions. It's the power of fragments, but also the power of the eye. We can penetrate the unknown and challenge what we think we see, what we know, what we want to see, and what we remember.



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Scheibitz offers us the most intimate and dense of studio views, letting viewers tour the contents of his universe and production, often in one take. The archive includes everything that passes his eyes and consciousness, an entire lexicon rendered, at times, with playfulness. We find an unavoidable association with Giorgio de Chirico, who insisted on seeing the world as “an immense museum of strange things,” and whose metaphysical objects and places leave us stranded in a deserted plaza amid a field of ambiguous symbols—pyramids, statues of marble nudes, and enigmatic figures casting impossible shadows. Here, as in Scheibitz’s work, is a dizzying route from classicism to modernity.

Scheibitz activates his compositions with elements of surprise, leaving us

...entirely new and compositions from elements of surprise, leaving us wondering where to turn. With the eye as his intrusive guide, Scheibitz leads us to consider a frightening metaphor for surveillance or voyeurism, and summons up the memory of Marcel Duchamp's timeless and titillating 1966 assemblage *Étant donnés*. Duchamp's tableau, which can only be viewed through two peepholes, reveals a nude woman positioned on a hill with her legs spread, holding a gas lamp. The material ingredients for this work include everything from nails and bricks and clothespins to hair and glass, and in this respect they lead us back—or ahead—to Scheibitz's theater of the imagination, his feelings, and his unerring sense of composition which holds all the elements in check. For this artist, the studio is a stage upon which to reverse the gaze.

Barbara A. MacAdam is a New York-based freelance arts writer.

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