

Main Gallery:

Thomas Scheibitz: Final Gold

December 2, 1999 to January 15, 2000

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Like other members of his generation, Thomas Scheibitz, a young German painter from Dresden, is finding new, brainy ways to blur the line between abstraction and representation. His version brings together the ironic obscureness of Sigmar Polke, early modernist sincerity, and a Pop Artlike illustrative methodicalness that is so complex it might be called paint-by-numbers to the nth power.

Mr. Scheibitz's banal, elliptical paintings include suburban houses with flowers and fences, a giant perfume bottle in a mountain landscape, a lone cartoonish figure and an inverted landscape titled "Sky." The colors are softened blends of red, pink, yellow, blue, and green, which often give the images a nostalgic coloring book effect.

But this coloring book seems to have been filled in by a hyperactive child on the verge of reinventing Cubism. The best images seem extravagantly complicated: splintered, patchily painted, repeatedly outlined, as if the intent were to pack legible form with as much abstraction as possible, and never allow the viewer to lose sight of painting as an arcane, self-conscious construct.

The best painting, of a house, is tellingly titled, "Set (NO. 246)." Its two empty swimming pools may be a comment on bourgeoisie excess--not surprisingly for an artist from the former East Germany. But a large flower seems to argue for pure aesthetics, its bloom being a series of directly applied brushstrokes, à la Robert Rauschenberg.

Sometimes interesting new artists seem to come out of Germany the way clowns used to tumble endlessly out of those impossibly tiny cars at the circus. Mr. Scheibitz's impressive show, his second in New York, is another sign that this may be such a time.

Roberta Smith