

BONAKDAR
JANCOU
GALLERY

James, Merlin; "New York Winter painting exhibitions";
Burlington Magazine; February 1999 pgs. 133-134

The thirty-year-old German painter Thomas Scheibitz meanwhile had his first New York exhibition at Bonakdar Jancou Gallery (closed 9th January). His works share something of the cryptic drabness of a Tuymans or a René Daniels, and something of the space of Marcus Lüpertz's 1970s paintings. But they are more complex and articulated than any of these. Some are abstract canvases, divided into bright, angular grids and segments, faintly (and cheekily) reminiscent of French post-War abstractionists such as Magnelli or even late New York neo-formalists like Dennis Ashbaugh. Others show fragments or whole vistas of architecture (Fig.90), odd tree or flower-head shapes, a recurring laboratory-flask form, or an apple. Scheibitz is genuinely a colourist, creating wonderful, unlikely and sonorous chromatic combinations. Also he is interested in pictorial light, which he varies from work to work – now warm and luminous, now a cool daylight, now directional and shadow-casting, now nocturnal, now a sodium glare, and so on. Space is a-logical and contradictory, but relationships are negotiated between elements, not arbitrary or unfelt.

The rhetoric accompanying the work, from gallery sources, telling of the artist's enthusiasm for heavy metal music or interest in urbanism, seems neither here nor there in terms of the paintings themselves. What Scheibitz has done, first and foremost, is simply to find refreshing ways to create illusionistic spaces and describe objects (which he often takes from photographs, but thoroughly assimilates into painterly language). He also goes on to remind us that this dilemma of how to describe the visible world in an age of photography is in fact only one small part of the painter's concern. But he does not do this through any charge in his imagery (which is in fact fairly generic, even in its conscious oddness), nor through reference to subject matter, which the work has little to speak of. It is rather his sense of aesthetic vitality and formal energy that are exciting, and rare in a world where memories of colour-field academicism still give 'form' a bad name. This work seems articulate, simply because it is articulated: if substantive subject matter were really to enter, we might be faced with a very considerable artist indeed. These pictures help highlight, certainly, a weakness of Francis Bacon (who of course does have strong subject matter), which is that he separated out his painting's depictive devices – the slurred photographic illusionism – from its larger formal structures, which as a result became increasingly decorative, as the depictive gestures also became mannered.



90. *House*, by
Thomas Scheibitz.
1998. 150 by 270 cm.
(Bonakdar Jancou
Gallery, New York).