

Headbanging

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Rolls of bubble wrap and unworked pieces clutter the studio space; discarded stuff lies next to finished works, fragments next to raw materials from the DIY store. Amidst the chaos, however, a strict formative grammar rapidly becomes visible. Similar to when the formal syntax of a musical composition comes to the foreground of the listening experience, upon looking around Thomas Scheibitz's studio it is as if lines, sharp angles, interlocking diagonals, triangular shapes and grid frameworks are weaving a thread through the disorder and inscribing a structural principle within it. White-frosted colours and hard-edged forms create an immediate impression of a seemingly absolute artistic vocabulary. Purely formal perspectives combine segments of letters of the alphabet with architectonic elements. Fences, houses and crystalline shapes hover within the austere emptiness of otherwise abstract areas. Sharp edges are varied with frayed painted borders. Aggressive coloration collides with cool understatement. Stylized flowers, trees and landscapes form up in a jagged idyll. Between them are surprisingly soft, almost touching elements of form: the saucer-like eyes of oversized toys seeking our gaze. While these associations are not really tangible, they inscribe themselves in the specific form of creative energy that characterizes Scheibitz's works.

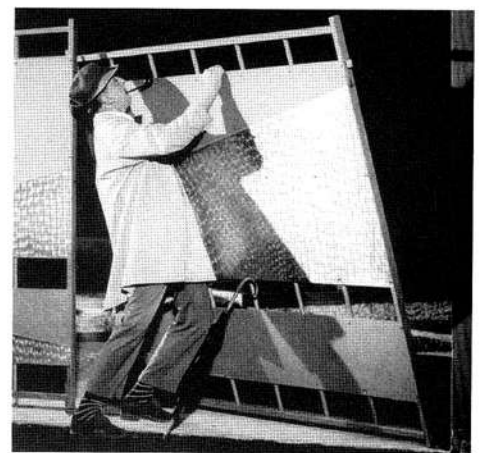
The artistic universe of Thomas Scheibitz unfolds in three studio spaces reserved for sculpture, oil painting and graphic/photographic work respectively. Scheibitz works in a district that has that particular beat unique to Berlin: sleazy but sophisticated. He deadens the noise coming from a workshop on the ground floor by erecting a sound barrier: The Melvins¹ generate in a different way what Brian Eno's² *Music for Airports* does when creating the wallpaper-like sound space of the Muzak ambience: a sonic backdrop that allows the listener to make his own projections. Incidentally, as a musician, Eno is unconventionally open in talking about his frame of reference. He is not afraid that having this knowledge will impede listeners' receptiveness to his music; in fact he prefers to include them in the creative process. This extremely hazardous disclosure of one's own artistic references and objectives leaves an artist open to attack; it is precisely this risk

that Scheibitz takes. His works present his artistic case directly and without mystification – they are precisely indicative, yet always allow enough room for interpretation. The titles of his exhibitions and individual works allude to specific references (*View and Plan of Toledo*, *The man who built the pyramids*), while in the recent sculpture exhibition *ABC - I II III* in Geneva he concluded an accompanying series of drawings with a copy of a work by William Blake from the 19th century. In his photographs Scheibitz shows aspects of his works that are particularly important to him, and at the same time he provides insight into his material and creative working environment. His work is inviting: in terms of his particular way of looking at things, in that it encourages reflection on fundamental questions of artistic means and because it invites every receiver to adopt a particular way of seeing. It is an extremely refreshing approach taken by an artist in superb command of his skills, a freshness that is conveyed to the receptive experience of his works.

Found Worlds: *Credit In The Straight World*³

Mankind has always concerned itself with the scientific and aesthetic examination of forms that exist in the world, continually finding different ways to culturally transform and restructure them. Scheibitz takes this as his starting point to develop a pictorial language aimed at communicating fundamental questions of formal creation: a visual vocabulary which, at the same time, facilitates a kind of shared understanding, whether this be of specific aspects of a work by Hercules Seghers, the influence of Constructivism on the Adidas logo, elements in a design by Jacques Tati's film architect Eugène Roman, particular stylistic considerations in the architecture of Augustin Hernández, formal options in cake decoration, the rules behind the golden section, the design of a display in the coffee section of a department store, the dramatic development of *Takeshi's Castle* or the way in which we view floral decorations. Scheibitz chooses to discuss what in a practical, everyday sense are non-functional, indeed purely stylistic, questions in the traditional language of art. What is composition? What formal transformation has taken place while the contents have remained the same? What constitutes a potentially modern or a possibly contemporary quality? What aspects of design are universal? Does it concern the generation of style or the style of a generation?⁴ What perspectival means are employed in a particular work? Which perspectival approach is appropriate for a sculpture, which for a painting?

Forms, colours and materials make up the filter through which Scheibitz perceives the world. He is interested in the basic cultural



Mon Oncle (Filmstill), 1958,
direction Jacques Tati

ability to grasp the methods of construction, rules and conditions of symbolic systems. Scheibitz conducts an unsentimental appropriation of images, subjecting them to systematic artistic analysis and questioning himself in the process. What interests him are ways of moving from the visual world in one's own head into the possible world in someone else's. As a draughtsman, painter, sculptor and photographer, Scheibitz condenses 'found' worlds that have already been subjected to interpretation and expands their pictorial reality by playing with the forms he filters out from them. Gliding past formal configurations and structural elements of art-historical tradition and everyday aesthetics, the elements he considers to be worth using are absorbed and, according to the perspective of his specific perception, are isolated from their context, reduced and extended in terms of their formal, material and colour impact, and as such are returned to the material using Scheibitz's own vocabulary. The question here is not whether something is 'beautiful' or 'ugly' – these categories do not exist for Scheibitz – but more importantly, whether eidetic inventions are 'important' or 'unimportant' for his artistic method.

Mimesis as Seeing-As: *Licensed To III*⁵

The historical spectrum of the concept of mimesis combines aspects of presentation and expression (*notatio*) with that of creating likeness or imitation (*connatio*). Besides being understood as the simple imitative representation of nature, as mimicry, as *imitatio* of classical models or as emulative imitation vis-à-vis *methexis*,⁶ the concept of mimesis is marked by a music-theoretical interpretation: mimetic processes make visible by sensuous means or vehicles of expression what otherwise escapes superficial apperception.

Scheibitz's thinking about the world is directly converted into artistic creation, and is immediately reproduced in that it becomes a conception of the world according to pictorial aspects. From his personal collection of source images and texts, Scheibitz extracts prototypes and picture themes. His mimetic interpretation and origination lies in this materially defined, productively pictorial way of thinking: he develops elements which allow a vague association with what has gone before and reveal his way of looking at the world. His works create an interface between the purely visual experience of the external and the inner world. Through the gesture of repeating particular elements and reincorporating them into new pictorial contexts, new iconic dimensions and different constructive structures of meaning are generated in the process of comprehension and subjectively enhanced reworking. This transfer of a world into an artificial world

is an instrumental process of cognition: reality is perceived and is manipulated in the process of gaining this knowledge, as the perception of the world is now extended to include the objectives, purposes and situation of the artistic method.

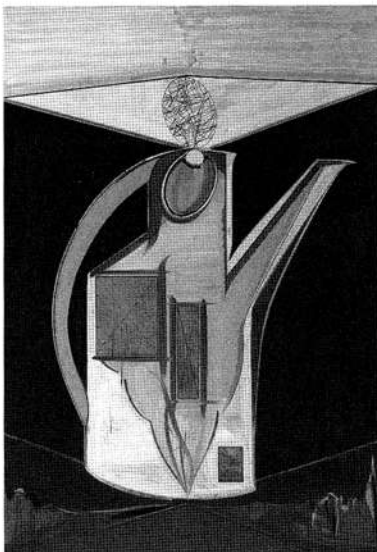
Scheibitz's aim is not to create meaning or make reference to external contexts; rather he analyses the complex structure of the symbols with which meaning and reference are produced. This expansion of comprehension is about clarity, elegance and altering our perception of the world around us in the interaction with it. Beyond conceptual reflection lies a sphere which is not concerned with truth or origin, but instead with autonomous artistic practice. Scheibitz pursues its possibilities in a serious, almost scientific manner, subjecting the 'found' and the ephemeral to his own rules of depiction and filling them with presence. The transformation into composition and a representative motif takes place by way of internalized, intuitive points of reference. These form the central star in the artistic cosmos and set the standard for the usability, originality and consistency of ideas. They also serve as a gauge for the pictorial quality of the artist's own creative output: a formal concept must equally be able to prove its soundness, ascertainable for example by turning it upside down or taking black-and-white photos of the works. This purely visual gesture of reflecting its own historicity characterizes every one of Scheibitz's works.

In passing through Scheibitz's consciousness, a new world emerges that has its own existence, one that can be comprehended in its own right and can stand alone. In this respect, mimetic worlds clearly differ from theories, models, plans and reconstructions. Scheibitz referred to this connection in his work *View and Plan of Toledo* which also impressively illuminates the visual semantics of 'view' and 'plan'. The transformation comprises a transfer of elements from a first world of Others into an eidetically generated world of 'I', the agent. Informing this visual transfer process is the intention of displaying the prior world in the newly created one in such a way that it is perceived as a specific world – view and plan are united. This "Seeing-As" (Wittgenstein) is effectively conveyed by Scheibitz's works.

Sens pratique: *I Wanna Be Your Dog*⁷

The intuitive points of reference, i.e. the particular ability that directs the artistic production process, combine technical and practical skills gained through experience with theoretical and sensory faculties of cognition and evaluation. In terms of practical knowledge, this pro-

vides a direct supply of behavioural patterns which mean that when a situation is perceived, the ways of interpreting and reacting to it are provided at the same time, and the subsequent behavioural steps can therefore be anticipated without having to think. For this unconscious connection of action and knowledge, Pierre Bourdieu coined the term “*sens pratique*”.⁸ Instinctively, as it were, practical and theoretical components are integrated into the production of the iconic world. It is not possible, however, to separate the realm of experience, action and creation into a practical and a theoretical part; the two areas interpenetrate, melting into a process of simultaneous sensory cognition, sense experience, aesthetic and reflexive evaluation and action that constitutes artistic production.



Keramik, 2001, 220 x 150 cm,
oil on canvas

On the face of it, the dos and don'ts of the art business would seem to be irrelevant here, only to become virulent upon stepping back and assessing the work. In fact, these experiences and insights will inevitably contribute towards the generation of the work in the form of aesthetic criteria: it is above all the art world which represents the external world and provides input. However, the extent to which this aspect is integrated into the *sens pratique* depends on the artist's particular conception of the artistic method. Scheibitz finds his influences in equal measure beyond the art world's highly codified, inherent system of signs; mere naval-gazing does not interest him. For him it is not a matter of submitting to handed-down patterns or following market-determining trends, but rather of accepting or maintaining an objective level of critical distance to the work of artistic forerunners and contemporary colleagues. Scheibitz has an acute awareness of the network of connected people, other worlds and their creators that contributes to the production of artistic works; motivated by a mixture of orientation and chance that develops out of the complex network of socialization, current environment and conscious decision, he too stakes his artistic claim within the cultural and social fields. Considered from this perspective, habitus in the sense of Bourdieu emerges from mimetic practice, in the same way as society functions through symbolic constitution and distinction in fields of symbolic capital: mimesis is the objectified activity of a subject who includes the world of Others as a frame of reference for what he does.

Power and Material: *Lady June's Linguistic Leprosy*⁹

Although rational concerns do play a role in Scheibitz's way of working, they are unsuitable for purposive rationalist approaches or as a way of addressing metaphysical questions. His work resists the unequivocal and conceptual differentiation between 'Is' (*Sein*) and

'Ought' (*Sollen*) as well as the sharp subject-object split. In his artworks, the perceptual event lies before any subject-object split and constitutes a relation that is neither a state of the subject nor a quality of the object. Nevertheless, artistic procedures invariably involve a kind of appropriation and are therefore concerned with the balance of power and control: depicting others and oneself, interpreting the world and symbolic worldmaking all have their basis in a form of analysis that is determined by power issues and extends into the social sphere. In Scheibitz's oeuvre, however, control over the concrete work arises from the materiality and form of the artwork itself. It is not the intention of the object which is of interest, but rather the extent to which it obeys "the compulsion of the work itself"¹⁰. Here, the 'command' of the material is to be understood as a gesture that Adorno terms the "mimetic impulse": "Construction is not the corrective of expression, nor does it serve as its guarantor by fulfilling the need for objectivation; rather, construction must conform to the mimetic impulses without planning."¹¹ This is not, however, a matter of obeying some kind of higher force, such as a whispered message from 'higher beings'. Reason, or the spirit, is present in the constructive impulses at the point where it nestles into the pictorial ones rather than being imposed upon them. The works do not directly sensualize the spirit, instead they become spirit through the relationship of their sensual elements to one another. The presence of spirit is not what is crucial – on the contrary: art is closest to its actual purpose when it casts off its spirit as far as possible. On the basis of a logical concentration on the inherent tendencies of the material and the determination of form, Adorno also developed his concept of the sublime as the immanent structure and inner strength of the artwork: the authenticity and sublimity of artworks does not stem from the relevance of their objects but is due to the form of the works themselves.

For Scheibitz's works it is not important whether what is created are ostensible or constructed realities with all their implicit ontological questions – on the contrary, his method uses genuinely artistic means to produce an eidetic world without any ideological superstructure. His oeuvre is characterized by a certain immunity towards monopolisation by theories and unequivocal concepts. The distrust of purely conceptual reflection, or even the assumption of Hegelian universal spirituality (*Weltgeistigkeit*) in the realm of aesthetics, and similarly of the instruments and orders of theoretical constructs, reflects a resistance that derives its energy from a fundamentally artistic method and a concentration on its own inherent options. This approach is anything but naive – like Nelson Goodman, Scheibitz does not believe in the innocence of the eye.¹² Rather, the refusal of theoretical and sym-

bolic interpretation refers the artist and the viewer to the unrestricted sensory perception and cognition of the physically 'given'. Scheibitz's sculptures, paintings, drawings and photographs are not meant to be interpreted symbolically; they do not represent anything that exists independent of themselves, nor do they refer directly to things or objects. Instead, they communicate exclusively through the pictorial decisions inherent within them. The works are to be experienced in a sensuously intuitive manner; they enter into a dialogue with the viewer by way of the specific atmosphere¹³ they create, beyond all forms of conceptual categorization.

Suture: *Unchained Melody*¹⁴

In this way, radicality of content becomes a question of form. It is in the nature of non-conceptual communication that it allows the receiver scope for interpretation. Scheibitz gives clear pointers, leaves traces and directs our gaze. His works are captivating in that they do not have to fully decline their pictorial meaning. This is made possible by the fact that, for all their stylistic uniqueness, the chosen elements and formal means adhere to conventional artistic rules. Precisely ordered like the productions of Rick Rubin¹⁵, Scheibitz's arrangements are marked by his inclusion of brilliantly composed, significant blank spaces which give the receiver the freedom to develop his or her own projections. They form the suture where the works are deliberately and programmatically left unfinished in order to be completed in conjunction with the receiver, to become finished pieces in and through the viewer. Here, the artist places himself as a subject on changing levels of autonomy¹⁶ with regard to objects, works and viewers: he is distinct from them, yet not separate. In the work he secures a fundamental openness to interpretation through the inherent heterogeneity and difference between unifying construction and diffuse mimesis, in order to facilitate understanding, resonance and individual productive apprehension on the part of the viewer. Scheibitz's view of things is infectious, virulent in the extreme. And ultimately, art only becomes art on passing through the subject. These works, which in formal terms occupy a space between abstraction and figuration, do not attempt to deny the atmospheric associations of their origins: typographic elements, architectonic details, references to art-historical contexts, traditions of design or formal regularity. Through the visualization and sensory perception of impressions, Scheibitz removes these from the flow of time, and with the presence bestowed upon them they are also given transcendence, although this is due to exclusively artistic considerations: like a good popular song which, in a manner that is in formal terms

extremely precise and at the same time significantly diffuse, indicates its permanent actuality solely through the association of its elements, and which is coded with contemporary wishes and desires.

In their associative function, the formal references seem to reveal the 'true' purpose of the prior image for the first time in precisely this presentation, though without becoming actually tangible. The vague association with the concrete predecessor is based on patterns of interpretation, which only become evident in this combination and in the breakup of the forms. Yet all of this remains cryptic; Scheibitz achieves this, not by combining shocking or antithetical elements in the configuration of his works, but by making more precise, more concrete and more extensive their range of possible interpretations, semantic framework and formal levels. It is as if he were using his trained senses to pick out from a Rick Rubin arrangement or a Phil Spector¹⁷ *Wall of Sound* production one of those parts which due to their openness to interpretation contain the ambiguous unambiguity typical of pop songs, in order to give it concrete form through a modified and narrowed perspective. The offer made to the viewer to carry out concrete codification, and the vacant space reserved for this, are recognized and taken up in a consciously *cool* manner.

Coolness eludes exact theoretical classification. It comprises both a strongly sensuous component and intuitive apprehension. Unlike the highly defined "hot media", "cool media" according to Marshall McLuhan¹⁸ require greater interaction on the part of the receiver in order to be understood. They are not fully differentiated and provide only a partially decoded interpretation: the receiver must fill in the missing information him- or herself. For this reason, "cool media" include the receiver more productively than hot ones. Scheibitz's works utilize this productive ambiguity which lies in the formal structure of the signs. However, the world he develops from this play of the iconic is not totally dominated by the simulacra which Baudrillard introduced into the electronic discourse. Continuing McLuhan's approach, Baudrillard terms the complete extermination of reality from the world of signs *cool*.¹⁹ "Kool Killer" ekes out an existence in the simulated realm of a completely simulated reality. Pure sampling through cuts and breaks would be what Baudrillard would term a *cool* form of writing. What Scheibitz does is not sampling; nor does his way of appropriating resemble that of the Situationists (which involved ranging, misappropriation and spectacle) or a juxtaposition of disparate elements in order to bring about a shift in meaning, for example in the sense of the literary 'constellation' or to create authenticity through the remix ("juxtaposition of dissimilars", T. S.

Eliot). His chosen method is a *cool*, mimetic one aimed at opening up and expanding.

Cool world-design: *Here Come The Warm Jets*²⁰

Scheibitz's works derive from a far-reaching artistic world-design. The artist professes authorship of an intentional act of artistic creation with all the implications of a personal hand, an individual style. The pursuit of aesthetic movements and details in what is 'found' takes material form in his numerous sketches, drawings and photos: sensory stimuli are apprehended and appropriated through contemplation and recollection in a process of emphatic resonance. The small, A6-format sketchbooks Scheibitz always carries with him do not serve as a kind of diary. On the contrary, most of the sketches are made during train journeys or flights, when he is en route from A to B, in situations when the mind can float freely; in other words, when no decisions have to be made in relation to the external surroundings. The boundaries between longing, desire, dialogue, intervention, annexation and transformation become blurred: in the very perception and assimilation of other formal means of thinking and speaking, the rearrangement takes place which later materializes in a work. There is no room in this sphere for psychologizing or politicizing. It is no coincidence that Scheibitz admires the coolly erotic elegance of the film sets designed by Ken Adam or Lawrence Paull, the sensitive transformation of fear in the production designs of Hein Heckroth²¹ or the aptitude for grotesque exaggeration shared by Takeshi Kitano and William Blake. What all of the above have in common is a superb mastery of cool worldmaking: the *Birth of the Cool* in one world-apprehending, world-creating gesture.

Scheibitz's artworks are *cool* because in the course of appropriation and new interpretation their elements are opened up and expanded. In his work, Scheibitz questions the rules of artistic production, and through his art he examines its potential to see things in a continually new way. He does not believe in the possibility of reinvention, yet his method of transforming and translating comes as close to reinvention as is possible. Aesthetic allusions are inscribed in his referential approach, although more in the sense of a touching upon, indication or refinement, analogous to the storyboard method he uses to design his exhibitions: through the selection of colours and filmic production design, by way of fragmentary dialogues intimated at in titles, a purely sensuous framework of association that can scarcely be grasped in conceptual terms gives rise to a mood of independent coolness. A universe of glittering crystals, dynamic lines, seemingly rapid and light applications of colour, brightly shining stars, gradated

areas and vibrating perspectives assembles itself into a coordinated arrangement of colours, materials, painted forms or surfaces and their specific impact. The set pieces that are integrated into the staging of the artworks with formal rigour ultimately make reality appear to be the filtered substrate of Thomas Scheibitz's consciousness.

- 1 Band from Aberdeen, Washington, USA, founded in the 1980s.
- 2 Musician, producer and artist, born in 1948 in Woodbridge, England.
- 3 Title of a track from the 1980 album *Colossal Youth* by Young Marble Giants. Cover version by Hole from their 1994 album *Live Through This*.
- 4 Cf. Robert Musil, *Stilgeneration oder Generationsstil*, in Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, 2nd edition, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981, vol. 7, 664–667.
- 5 Title of a Beastie Boys' album from 1986.
- 6 Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, tr. A. D. Lindsay, London: Everyman, 1992; Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. Malcolm Heath, London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- 7 Title of a track from the 1969 album *The Stooges* by The Stooges.
- 8 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- 9 Title of an album by Lady June from 1974.
- 10 Theodor W. Adorno, *Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry*, in idem, *Notes to Literature*, tr. Shierry Weber Nicholson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991–2, 2 vols, vol. 2 (note 1), 109–52, esp. 110.
- 11 Idem, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, tr. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- 12 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1968.
- 13 Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995; Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, tr. John Farrell, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, to be published in November 2004.
- 14 Title of a track from the 1965 album *Just Once In My Life* by The Righteous Brothers.
- 15 Musician and producer, born in 1963 in New York.
- 16 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit.
- 17 Music producer, born in 1940 in New York.
- 18 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.
- 19 Jean Baudrillard, *Kool Killer, or The Insurrection of Signs*, in Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, London: Sage Publications, 1993.
- 20 Title of an album by Brian Eno from 1974.
- 21 Frieda Grafe, *Filmfarben*, Berlin: Brinkmann und Bose Verlag, 2002. See also Thomas Scheibitz, *Heckroth*, 2003, photo edition.