



Thomas Scheibitz/MATRIX 195

I-geometrica B

November 18, 2001 – January 13, 2002

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

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I like working in two dimensions because the translation is immense. Through painting, all of the three-dimensional objects of the world are transformed into two dimensions. This is what makes a painting artificial.

—Thomas Scheibitz¹

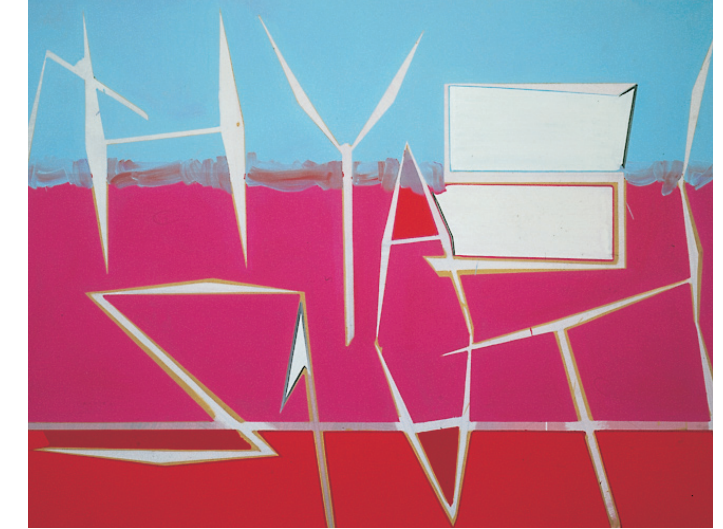
Earlier this year, German painter Thomas Scheibitz was included in an exhibition titled *Painting at the Edge of the World* at the Walker Art Center. As the name suggests, curator Douglas Fogle poses the question, “Where does the edge of the canvas end and the edge of the world begin?”² This notion of disorientation aptly describes the experience of the viewer when looking at Scheibitz’s work. His fractured, complex, and vibrant works express the anxiety and energy of the contemporary era. The brightly colored paintings, drawings, and sculptures are abstracted renderings of familiar objects (flowers, buildings, landscapes) that straddle the traditional divides of abstraction and representation, popular imagery and art history, flatness and depth. The difference between subject and object is blurred. It is not necessarily clear where one thing depicted stops and another thing starts. The viewer cannot know where the edge or the center is because the continuous space seems to exist off the edge of the canvas. The space depicted is singular and yet connected to a larger environment, one full of dualities, conflicts, and contradictions.

It seems as if one cannot mount an exhibition of painting now without questioning the relevance of the medium. In the text I wrote for a Peter Doig exhibition in early 2000, I asked, “What is it about painting that provokes such ambivalence or even animosity?” Despite repeated critical pronouncements of their demise, paintings and painters persist. The Walker’s Fogle notes that the reemergence as well as “apparent freedom and heterogeneity”³ of painting today can be traced to the historical precedents of three artists who “began to question the traditional modernist definitions of painting that were popular in the 1960s”⁴: Hélio Oiticica, Paul Thek, and Marcel Broodthaers. In addition to these artists, Gerhard Richter, a talented and multifaceted artist who moves adroitly between varied painting styles and photography and is as masterful at one as at the next, can be seen as an influence on Scheibitz.

As inspiration for his paintings Scheibitz collects source materials ranging from seventeenth-century art to commercial logos and sports photography. The longer one looks at his paintings—abstractions, landscapes, figures, and architecture—the



D.T. (Nr. 276), 2000 (detail); oil and marker on canvas; 53 x 94 1/2 in. (135 x 240 cm); Palm Collection; photo courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.



Schriftbild, 2000 (detail); oil on canvas; 63 x 100 1/2 in. (160 x 255 cm); courtesy Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden; photo: Jens Ziehe, Berlin.

more the grids and blocks seem to break down into graphic spaces and voids. And yet this is where Scheibitz separates himself from recent forays into abstract painting. These details and vacancies do not allude to a subtext behind the composition, nor do they allow the viewer to reach resolution, but instead leave one with an array of geometric forms, drips, and streaks of colored matter. In fact, some sections are left unfinished, merely sketched in. Scheibitz knows that contemporary life is in constant flux, time is short, and priorities must be made.

Other writers have correctly asserted that the motifs Scheibitz selects are less important than their ability to be “susceptible to what might be called, as if it were a sort of mathematical operation, Scheibitzian analysis.”⁵ The artist himself, however, does not appear to be after any underlying “truth”; he recognizes this concept as a fallacy. Instead, each of his paintings seems to seek a synthesis of conflicting fictions—and the idea of the motif coming from somewhere out there in the world is just one such fiction.⁶ The notion of purity has long since been refuted and abolished.

An essential feature of Scheibitz’s work is his choice of arresting and often discordant colors. He favors those that are decadent, even ugly. Like the subjects of his work, the colors are “something we almost know.”⁷ Scheibitz uses oil paint watered down to an almost unrecognizable form, drippy and thin. Each color is placed on the canvas to convey a duality, simultaneously opaque and translucent, solid and diaphanous. The materiality of Scheibitz’s subjects is not relevant to how the form is painted. Trees and skies are present or substantial or not. “That is why his paintings are at once so spacious and so solid. And it is why their effect can at one moment be that of complexity, while the next moment they feel plain and direct. The paintings are complex when you see how each segment opens up to a completely different space, so that the work no longer seems like a single picture but rather like a dozen all crammed into the same canvas.”⁸ Very much of its moment, Scheibitz’s work nonetheless returns us to something basic in painting: the way color can escape definition, become an autonomous organism whose qualities have already mutated by the time you have begun to codify them.⁹

Language—or more specifically, letters—sometimes appears in Scheibitz’s paintings. He explains, “When I use letters in a painting, they have no meaning and cannot be read. Instead, they are compositional tools like details, flowers, or houses.”¹⁰ In addition to being interested in their form and shape, he is compelled by how computers allow movement and manipulation so that letters become more like images, designs, logos.

Bannister Diamond (2001) is a landscape. We see a house and the sun and a vista. But there are also large planes of color that constitute unidentified things and pose the possibility that the seemingly serene rural setting is experiencing a jolt. Beneath the bright colors—vibrant blues and reds—there is a sense of foreboding. In *Judith & Maria* (2001) two foliate forms stand erect and side-by-side. Their branches or leaves jut from either side of their spines and reach toward the other form, seeming to seek solidarity or comfort. Set against a black and purple background, they, like the solitary figure in *Man* (2001), emerge from an atmosphere of darkness and possible devastation. They remind us that even in our digital age, when hyperconnectivity is commonplace, isolation exists.

The disorientation caused by these paintings is perhaps even greater because, while things seem available and even familiar, the differences between their world and ours are still very real. *Untitled (Nr. 333)* (2001) resembles a face peering out, questioning how and what the viewer sees. The face also easily breaks down into a parody of architectural forms, solids, and voids, suggesting the fragility of human life as well as of architecture. In the lower left of *I-geometrica B* (2001), homogeneous triangles, in shades of orange and white, morph from uncompromising flatness into the illusion of a five-pointed star. In this work, which shares its title with that of his MATRIX exhibition, the artist utilizes his skill in yet another transformation, one that leads the viewer from one dimension into another and then into a third.

A changing notion of reality can be experienced in Scheibitz’s work. What one thinks one knows (and sees) changes depending upon the viewer’s physical or psychological state at a particular moment. The meaning of normalcy, the



permanence of architecture, and our sense of personal security are inalterably transformed by these paintings, which mirror the disorientation of contemporary existence.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

- ¹ Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, interview with Thomas Scheibitz in his studio at the Headlands Center for the Arts, Marin, CA, September 19, 2001.
- ² Douglas Fogle, "The Trouble with Painting," in Douglas Fogle, editor, *Painting at the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2001), p. 15.
- ³ Ibid, p. 19.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 18.
- ⁵ Barry Schwabsky, "Thomas Scheibitz, Painter," in *Ortsbegehung 5* (Berlin: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 1999), n/p.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Zuckerman Jacobson, op. cit.
- ⁸ Schwabsky, op. cit.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Zuckerman Jacobson, op. cit.



Thomas Scheibitz was born in Radeburg, Germany, in 1968. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1996 and a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1998 from Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden. Scheibitz currently lives and works in Berlin.

The works in *I-geometrica B*, Scheibitz's first one-person museum show in the United States, were executed over the course of a residency at Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin County, California.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2001
"BANNISTER DIAMOND," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
"Thomas Scheibitz," Works on Paper, Inc., Los Angeles, CA
"Ansicht und Plan von Toledo," Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland; Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, Germany
2000
"Surrogate," Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden, Germany
1999
"Final Gold," Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, NY
"Low Sweetie," Institute of Contemporary Art, London, U.K.
1998
"Thomas Scheibitz," Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY
"Double," loop—raum für aktuelle kunst, Berlin, Germany
"Trickstar," Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden, Germany

Selected Group Exhibitions

2001
"Painting at the Edge of the World," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
2000
"00," Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY
"Age of Influence: Reflection in the Mirror of American Culture," The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
"Havekost, Nitsche, Scheibitz," White Cube 2, London, U.K.
"Frülingssalon," Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Dresden, Germany
1999
"Ortsbegehung 5," Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, Germany
"Examining Pictures," Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, U.K.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; and Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture, Los Angeles, CA

Judith and Maria, 2001 (detail); oil and marker on canvas; 96 x 62 in. (244 x 157.5 cm); courtesy of the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden.



1998
"sehen sehen—Berlin '98," loop—raum für aktuelle kunst, Berlin, Germany
"ACHSE 3zu01," Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Dresden, Germany
"Neue darstellende Malerei," Hotel, Zürich, Switzerland
National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
1997
"All of a Sudden II," Galerie Aurel Scheibler, Cologne, Germany
"Nebenan und mittendrin," Kunsthalle Dresden, Dresden, Germany

Selected Catalogues and Publications

Thomas Scheibitz: BANNISTER DIAMOND, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2001.
In Augenhöhe: Eberhard Havekost, Frank Nitsche, Thomas Scheibitz, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, Germany, 1999.
Thomas Scheibitz: Low Sweetie, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, U.K., 1999.
"Thomas Scheibitz, Painter," *Ortsbegehung 5*, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, Germany, 1999.

Selected Bibliography

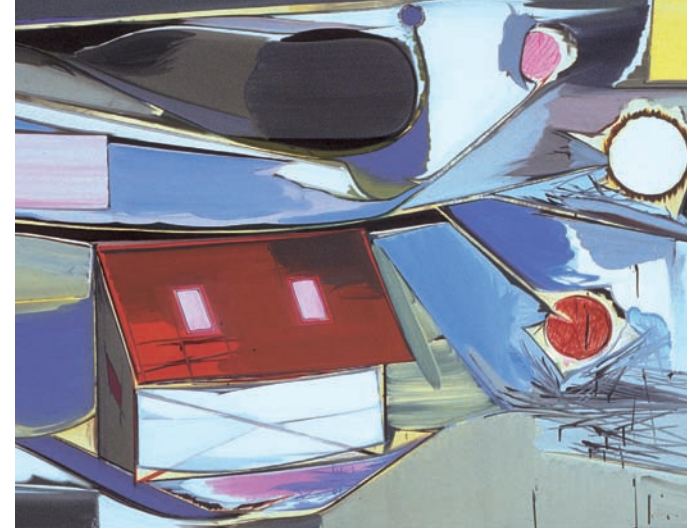
Ellis, Patricia. "Thomas Scheibitz: The Importance of Being Earnest," *Flash Art*, October 10, 2001, pp. 82-83.
Smith, Roberta. "Thomas Scheibitz: Final Gold," *The New York Times*, Friday, January 7, 2000, p. E43.
Vetrock, Marcia. "Painting in the Present Tense," *Art in America*, March 2000, pp. 118-121.
"Scheibitz und Asher in der Galerie Scheibler," *Kölnner Stadtanzeiger*, February 13, 1998.

Work in MATRIX

All works courtesy of the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden, except where noted.

<i>I-geometrica B</i> , 2001 Oil and marker on canvas 108 x 86 in. (274.5 x 218.5 cm)	<i>Cola</i> , 2001 Oil and marker on canvas 40 x 46 in. (101.7 x 117 cm)
<i>Bannister Diamond</i> , 2001 Oil and marker on canvas 57 x 120 in. (144.8 x 304.8 cm)	<i>Flyer</i> , 2001 Oil and marker on canvas 31 x 38 in. (78.8 x 96.5 cm)

Untitled (Nr. 333), 2001 (detail); oil and marker on canvas; 57 x 67 in. (144.8 x 170.2 cm); courtesy of the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden.



Judith & Maria, 2001
Oil and marker on canvas
96 x 62 in. (244 x 157.5 cm)

Man, 2001
Oil and marker on canvas
108 x 60 in. (274.5 x 152.5 cm)

Untitled (Nr. 333), 2001
Oil and marker on canvas
57 x 67 in. (144.8 x 170.2 cm)

Untitled, 2001
Painted wood, concrete, and MDF
43 1/4 x 28 3/4 x 28 3/4 in. (109.9 x 73 x 73 cm)
Collection of James-Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach, New York
Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

Please Note:

Bay Area poets Adam DeGraff and Pamela Lu will respond to Thomas Scheibitz's paintings with selected readings from their work on Sunday, December 2, at 3 p.m.

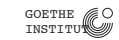
Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will give a curator's walkthrough of the exhibition on Thursday, January 10, at 12:15 p.m.

The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is made possible by the generous endowment gift of Phyllis Wattis.



Additional donors to the MATRIX Program include the UAM MATRIX Council Endowment, Ann M. Hatch, Eric McDougall, and Glenn and April Bucksbaum.

The museum also wishes to thank Goethe-Institut Inter Nationes for its support of the brochure for Thomas Scheibitz/MATRIX 195 *I-geometrica B*.



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COVER: *Commonplace*, 2000 (detail); oil and marker on canvas; 82 2/3 x 102 1/2 in. (210 x 260 cm); Collection Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig.

ABOVE: *Bannister Diamond*, 2001 (detail); oil and marker on canvas; 57 x 120 in. (144.8 x 304.8 cm); courtesy of the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden.

I-geometrica B, 2001 (detail); oil and marker on canvas; 108 x 86 in. (274.5 x 218.5 cm); courtesy of the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden.