

SPRÜTH MAGERS

Thomas Scheibitz

The Hunter in the Snow

Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles

September 14 – October 26, 2018

Over the last two decades, Thomas Scheibitz has developed a distinct visual vocabulary that moves seamlessly between figuration and abstraction. Informed by the systems and codes that structure both the world and our understanding of it, his paintings and sculptures present complexly layered, tectonic spaces in which forms and figures hang in careful balance with one another. Sprüth Magers is pleased to present the German artist's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles since 2001, featuring a selection of recent works that display the breadth of subjects, references, and visual tropes which circulate within the artist's wide-ranging practice.

Scheibitz turns to 16th and 17th-century European art in the exhibition's title, a play on *The Hunters in the Snow*, one of Breughel's best-known genre paintings. Just as Breughel's characters function allegorically as representations of his society at a particular moment, the layered figures that Scheibitz weaves together similarly suggest the visual patterns that construct our daily life. The artist works from a large personal archive of images — including photographs, prints, magazine clippings, and diagrams — from which he selects motifs to develop an iconography all his own. His forms hover at the border of universality and invention: they look familiar, but also strange and new. The notion of "hunting" is a nod to the restless movements of these images as they seek their final state, as well as to the concept of chasing down one's dream in the star-struck city of Los Angeles. In one sense, Scheibitz becomes the hunter amidst the "snow" of our contemporary, image-obsessed world.

In *Vergleich* (2015), which is the German word for "comparison" and "compromise," several cleanly delineated shapes float in and amongst each other through fields of gradated colors. Reminiscent of everyday things, such as flowers, droplets, and gently curling pieces of paper, these ambiguous forms are grounded by two stark black-and-white columns. The curled paper appears again in *Allegorische Figur* (2015), where it functions, perhaps, as the nose of a totemic mask. Both paintings offer a virtual catalogue of painterly gestures, including brushy passages, flat planes of color, methodical spray-painted lines, and quickly rendered striations, all of which are characteristic of Scheibitz's eclectic and steady-handed approach to mark-making.

Though he approaches the blank canvas with a clear concept and design, as the layers build up and a composition begins to emerge, those ideas shift to make room for unexpected moves. *Fama* (2017) might at first seem to be a minimalist rendering of the letter E or an ampersand; looking closely, however, straightforward lines reveal themselves to be palimpsests recording multiple marks and erasures. Here too a black-and-white framework glues the composition together, and it creates what looks like a niche, as if the symbol's curving features were a figurative sculpture. *Fama*, in fact, is the Roman goddess of fame, renown, and rumor — subjects that take on new overtones in the context of Los Angeles.

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Though Scheibitz's work, in its compositional structures and color relationships, is in close dialogue with the entwined histories of representational and abstract painting, the artist regularly looks to literature, film, and other areas of culture for his content and conceptual approach. *Portrait N.W. Peaslee* (2018) is named for the narrator of H.P. Lovecraft's novella *The Shadow Out of Time* (1936), which traces the experiences of a politics professor whose body is possessed by a time-traveling alien species. The yellow polygon that cuts across the character's face splinters the figurative illusion, suggesting a psychological break as well as the breakdown of pictorial space. Likewise, the title of his work *A.I.D.A.* (2018) conjures both Verdi's celebrated opera and the AIDA model in advertising, which strategically turns viewers into consumers. This work is representative of Scheibitz's large-scale, stage-like canvases, in which forms drift within an undefined space that recalls a theater. Stairs lead the viewer into the painting's depths, maybe to immerse or entrap them.

Scheibitz's sculptures translate many of his painterly concerns into three dimensions. The works in this exhibition relate to the automobile, a machine associated with the highways of Los Angeles, but also the tracks of Formula 1 racing. The artist has long been fascinated with the sport, particularly the shapes and engineering that allow for its intense velocities, pressures, and distinctive sounds. Here, Scheibitz presents car-like objects whose planes and materials are carefully crafted, while also displaying idiosyncrasies that reveal an underlying humor found throughout his multilayered work.

Thomas Scheibitz (b. 1968, Radeberg, Germany) lives and works in Berlin. His solo exhibitions include: KINDL – Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst, Berlin (2018), Kunstmuseum Bonn (2018), Sprüth Magers, Berlin (2014), Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle (2013), MMK, Frankfurt am Main (2012), Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, (2011), Museo de Arte de São Paulo (2010), Camden Arts Centre, London (2008), MUDAM, Luxembourg (2008), Sprüth Magers, Berlin (2008), IMMA, Dublin (2007), Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2004), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2001), and Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2001). Recent group exhibitions include those at Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China (2018); Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio (2018); Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga (2016); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2015); and Saint Louis Art Museum (2013). Scheibitz represented Germany at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005.

The Los Angeles gallery is concurrently presenting an exhibition by Frank Stella.

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Public reception: September 13, 6 – 8pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm