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Lotz, Antonia, "Julia Schmidt" *Made in Germany* exh. cat., p. 210-213, 2012.

JULIA SCHMIDT

- 1 *Drying Rack*, 2009
- 2 *Untitled (basement) I*, 2010
- 3 *Untitled (basement) II*, 2010
- 4 *Untitled (Ufficio Postale)*, 2012
- 5 *Untitled (Hair Braiding) II*, 2012
- 6 Exhibition view, Martin Gropius-Bau Berlin, 2012





Central to Julia Schmidt's work is an exploration of the real, economic and personal values of images and objects and the associated expectations, disappointments and hopes. By means of painting as well as various printing techniques and installations, the artist questions the production and reception conditions of painting and the general conditions of the economy of trade, work and the market.

Schmidt's oil paintings, applied in thin layers to MDF, feature reduced colors and reveal just as much as they conceal. They are based on mediatized pictures from magazines, books and the Internet that the artist either took herself or found, with which she continually builds up a personal, complex archive. By repeatedly viewing them, pasting over and re-acting them, Schmidt creates new motifs, although most of them are simply details or cropped sections from the originals. In combination with empty spaces and gaps her pieces often defy identification by the observer. It becomes impossible to perceive an overall context. Thus in the piece *Untitled (stackr)* (2008), based on a photo of an improvised sales kiosk, we see in the upper section a highly accurate depiction of discarded junk, boxes, boards and corrugated sheet metal that, owing to the discontinuation of the objects in the lower section, seem strangely lost and abstract in the image space. Here Schmidt focuses on that which ordinarily remains hidden, goes unnoticed, has been forgotten or is considered worthless, yet at the same time highlights the everyday circulation of goods and products in a place where distribution, storage and disposal converge.

Schmidt embeds her fragmentary images, which hover between figuration and abstraction, precision and imprecision, planarity and physicality, and absence and presence, in installations with floor works, objects and precisely hung pieces. This considerably reinforces her discursive and conceptual painterly exploration of the image, as well as the interplay of shifts in meaning in each piece-fragment, section, detail-depending on arrangement or context. In the exhibition *Control* (2011) for instance, Schmidt added a plywood mosaic to her piece *Still life (bowl, coin, bread)* (2009), on top of and next to which she positioned found old watch straps, batteries, local ad pages, pieces of cardboard and items of clothing. The fragments from Edgar Degas' *A Roman Beggar Womall* (1857), which Schmidt has replicated in black and white on MDF, are complemented by an ambivalent contemporary still life on the floor. The artist consciously employs different painting styles and techniques and refuses to concentrate on a particular theme or series production. Instead she questions the image and its value by continually repeating and re-networking themes and by creating new relationships and contexts-and in so doing keeps the creation of meaning going.

-Antonia Lotz



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*Narrating,
Abstracting,
Representing,
Composing,
Placing,
Structuring,
Pausing,
Hanging.*

NOMAS
FOUNDATION

A PAINTING CYCLE

Curated by Cecilia Canziani and Ilaria Gianni

Nomas Foundation, Viale Somalia, 33 – Rome
8, 22 March | 5, 19 April | 3 May

8 March	Jessica Warboys
22 March	Julia Schmidt
5 April	Christopher Orr
19 April	Agnieszka Brzezanska
3 May	Luca Bertolo

After **'A Performance Cycle'** (2010) and **'A Film Cycle'** (2011), again this spring Nomas Foundation's programme will be marked by a project taking the form of a cycle as a mode of presentation that aims to explore specific languages within art declined in their different nuances and forms.

'A Painting Cycle' reflects on painting, a language that the public typically identifies as art tout court and that is today, increasingly gaining space, attention and momentum.

What does painting mean today? How did it change - if it has - in dialogue with the variety of media that in the past century artists have adopted? Is it still possible to speak about style, technique or use the term 'representation'? With which awareness is painting addressed at the present moment?

These and many more are the themes of 'A Painting Cycle', which aims to confront the public with a dialectic of positions on a specific language rather than with a solution.

Every two weeks from March 8, chapter after chapter, Nomas Foundation becomes a picture gallery hosting conversations, workshops and a thematic library open to the public. Through a selection of works, the five invited artists, offer different positions of the interpretation of painting, addressing specific aspects and key terms that will be discussed in a public conversation with an art critic invited by each artist.

As part of their presentation, the artists have been asked to indicate an art work /monument of the city that has had a particular influence within her or his artistic research, all of them together drawing a virtual map of the cultural heritage inscribed in the city of Rome.

In addition to this, 'A Painting Cycle' is accompanied by a workshop lead by artist Alessandro Sarra, which intertwines with the exhibition programme and constitutes yet another point of view on what painting means today. The workshop Progettare un cielo offers a visionary approach through which to consider the very fabric of painting, and is organized in ten weekly appointments abridging Nomas Foundation, the artist's studio, and some museums of Rome. The material produced during the workshop will be posted regularly on Nomas' website.

Jessica Warboys inaugurates 'A Painting Cycle' on the 8th of March with a selection of works from the series 'Sea Paintings' developed in Stromboli, along with a preview of the film Stone Throat (2011), shot on the island over the fall. Jessica Warboys, will be in conversation with Rita Selvaggio, Managing Director at Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris.

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Matthew Brannon

CASEY KAPLAN

The flat, graphic style of Matthew Brannon's work derives from the visual innovations of Madison Avenue during its midcentury golden age. In this exhibition, that coolly nostalgic look surfaced in silkscreen and letterpress prints, as well as in paintings, sculptures, and cloth uniforms (the last made in collaboration with menswear designer Carlo Brandelli). These works were installed across three galleries, each of which suggested a discrete room-or, more precisely, a theatrical set. For each gallery corresponded to an "act" in a play, written by the artist, the plot of which is elliptically described yet never disclosed in broadsides hanging on the walls.

The texts on these placards are clipped and listlike. In the "Act I" gallery, the first of them read, in part, "A bar of long wall mounted glass shelves lined with endless bottles. A curved banquette with a seahorse motif running in metal relief along the bottom. Pink neon recessed behind it all. High stools with monogrammed back rests. Walls of mirrors. Signs pointing to restrooms, exits and phones ... " That scene was further suggested by the installation of objects, which included *Early Retirement*, 2011, a rack of black, gold, and pink liquor bottles carved from foam, and *As it turns out . . .*, 2011, a Charley Harper-esque silk screen of a pay phone, its receiver off the hook. Across the gallery, a rectangular mint-green sign juts from the wall, its height, proportions, and lettering style suggesting that it might once have 'hung above the entrance to a 1940s restroom-although rather than a demure LADIES or GENTLEMEN, one side of it read SUBLIMINAL and the other MASSAGE. In the following two rooms, there were more props (a cartoony chandelier, an office desk) and more silk screens (black squares with keyholes resembling safes) as well as letterpress prints suggesting forelorn characters confronting tragedy and despair (a forty-year-old professor contemplating an affair with a student, a heroin-addicted commercial airline pilot who commits suicide by crashing his plane).

As sets, these installations have a precedent in Marcel Broodthaers's *Decor: A Conquest*, 1975, a pair of museal "period rooms" furnished with candelabras, guns, chairs, and potted plants that simultaneously suggest cinematic sound stages. At the same time, Brannon's sets refer to the decorative, that category of modernism that flirts dangerously with superfluity and ornament. In the second and third rooms, large, Matisse-like, and perhaps somewhat bad abstractions evoking flowers and vegetation were at once "tasteful" paintings adorning the room and signifiers of wallpaper that we imagine extending beyond the frame to embellish the scene. Throughout the show, both object and text serve as stand-ins, surrogates for the things they describe or represent, which parallels the structure of the commodity form, whose duplicitousness was only intensified in the postwar moment to which Brannon's work refers. The inventory-like texts, gliding from object to object, from surface to surface, evoke the cool detachment of a cinematic pan, or a metonymic slide through language-the movement of desire as it pursues, futilely, an ineffable satisfaction. In this exhibition, the lack that propels desire was embodied by the absent plot of Brannon's play. Appropriately enough, the missing narrative is titled *Gentleman's Relish*, a euphemism for the aftermath of *jouissance*.

ARTFORUM



Matthew Brannon, *Early Retirement*, 2011, metal, wood, hand-carved high density foam, acrylic, enamel, 56' x 111', x 9".

1.



3.



1. Untitled (Junge Frau mit Rosen)

2006, oil on MDF, 27 1/2 x 21 in (70 x 53 cm)

2. Untitled (crotch)

2007, oil on MDF, 42 x 59 in (107 x 150 cm)

3. Untitled (bristles)

2008, oil on MDF, 38 x 55 in (95 x 140 cm)

4. Untitled (shellac)

2007, oil on MDF, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2 in (80 x 80 cm)

.....
 Julia Schmidt earned a BA from the
 School of Art in Glasgow and lives and
 works in Germany. She was awarded the
 Villa Romana Prize from the Deutsche
 Guggenheim in 2008. Her installations
 often have a fragmentary quality;
 she incorporates the labor-intensive
 techniques of Old Master paintings, but
 draws on references from consumer
 culture or popular culture, as in her oil

.....
 painting **Untitled (Crotch)** (2007), a
 close-up of an ornate chair and someone's
 crotch. As in **Untitled (Shellac)** (2007),
 her paintings may have familiar forms and
 motifs but no obvious narrative

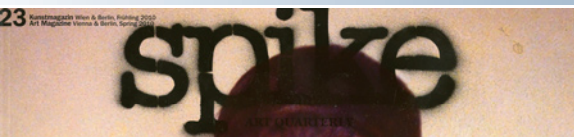


2.



4.

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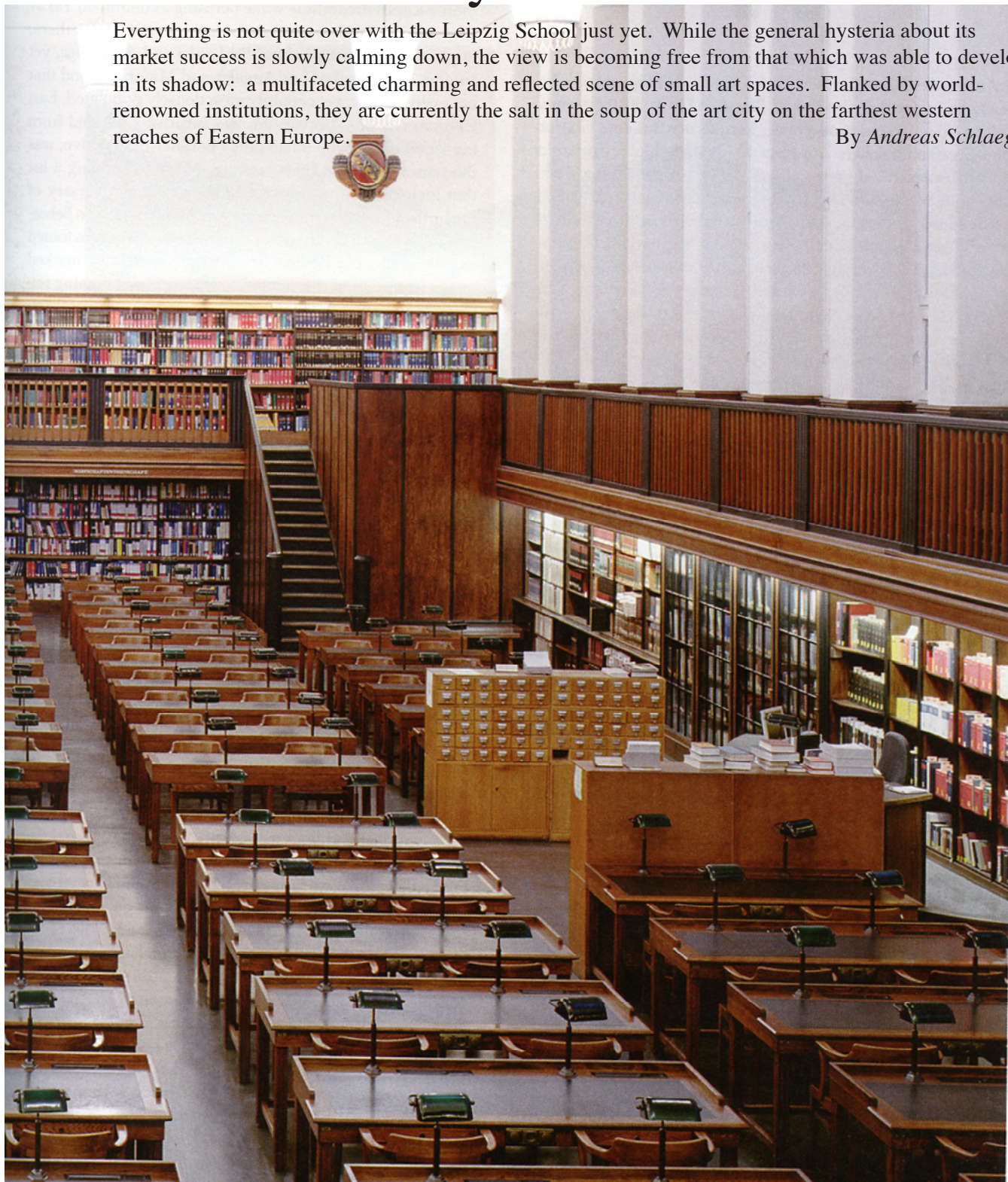


School's out!

Yesterday and LindeNOW!

Everything is not quite over with the Leipzig School just yet. While the general hysteria about its market success is slowly calming down, the view is becoming free from that which was able to develop in its shadow: a multifaceted charming and reflected scene of small art spaces. Flanked by world-renowned institutions, they are currently the salt in the soup of the art city on the farthest western reaches of Eastern Europe.

By Andreas Schlaegel



Anyone who, at the start of the year, opened the pages of the *New York Times* in an effort to give him- or herself over to some escapist dreamtime while perusing a column on *The 31 Places to Go in 2010* was going to be in for a surprise. For there, in place 10, distinctly behind Sri Lanka and Antarctica, yet comfortably a head of Los Angeles and Mumbai, stood that not overly exotic, yet certainly most densely populated. East German city of - Leipzig. No less surprising, viewed from my jaded capital city inhabitant's Berliner perspective, was the reasoning behind this ranking. For here, topping a list that included events celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Robert Schumann and the 325th of Johann Sebastian Bach, as well as the names of numerous small clubs touted as looking "just like Berlin - 10 years ago", and clearly marked as the high point of the cultural year, was the upcoming retrospective on the "Father of the New Leipzig School of Painting" «Neo Rauch, scheduled to be shown at the Museum of Visual Arts in April. And, seemingly indivisibly linked, there were, of course, the galleries on site of the erstwhile cotton spinning mill, as though Leipzig were a kind of one-stop factory outlet for the local specialty, the surreal, slightly pallid, figurative painting style of artists such as David Schnell, Matthias Weischer, Tilo Baumgärtel and Tim Eitel, to name just a few of the most successful.

The handy label of the "New Leipzig School of Painting" has long functioned well, opening up a previously unimaginable market for the artists subsumed under it, owing, not least, to gallery owner Judy Lybke's dedicated championship. But even as long as four years ago, on the occasion of the exhibitions at the Austrian Essl Collection and the Munich Hypo-Kunsthalle, colleagues such as Hanno Rauterberg noted in the *Zeit* weekly newspaper that, "the myth is coming apart" By the time the economic crisis was making itself felt on the art market, the hype surrounding the Leipzig painting school was clearly on the wane. The symbolic death knell of the myth appeared to have been sounded when Neo Rauch stepped down from his painting professorship at the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts. But as the label's dominance has been curtailed and the success stories of a handful of artists and their dealers have, to some extent, faded, the vista has opened for positions formerly pushed into the background. And so it has become easier now to report on smaller, not primarily commercially oriented galleries and projects, frequently run by the artists themselves. Similarly, the exhibition practice of the Gallery for Contemporary Art, recent conceptual artistic positions, nearly forgotten characters of the GDR alternative scene, and, against all odds, painting, have become exciting again - the latter because it does not pander to the expectations one has come to associate with the supposititious virtues of the New Leipzig School. such as classic craft, composition, and figuration.

OLD SCHOOL

It is via virtues like these that the connection to the old "Leipzig School" is often invoked, as witnessed most recently in the comprehensive exhibition. *60/40/20 - Art in Leipzig Since 1949*, which finished in January at the Museum of Visual Arts. Across a political timeframe covering 60 years of Leipzig art, 40 as part of the East German Democratic Republic and 20 within the reunited Germany, the four-person team of curators attempted to draw an art historical line from the "old" Leipzig School (and its set of publicly appreciated and nationally endowed loyal-to-the-GDR painters, with names such as Werner Tübke, Bernhard Heisig or Wolfgang Mattheuer) to the "new" one, while defining painting to be the guiding principle of art, as such, and Leipzig art in particular. This fits in with the above-mentioned, and vociferously announced, "first large-scale retrospective" of Neo Rauch with over a hundred rarely seen works from the past 17 years, on loan from various American private collections. And yet the first survey exhibition of the artist's work was already held 13 years ago, and in the same location, at a point in time when Rauch had by no means emerged as the superstar he is today.

The recently deceased Klaus Werner, former dean of the Art Academy and foundation director of the Gallery for Contemporary Art, the first museum newly built in the east of the reunited republic, was co-responsible for that exhibition. An art historian, Werner was considered to be the formative and integrative figure of the Leipzig art scene after the fall of the wall, but he had already been running an exhibition space important to the alternative art scene of the GDR in his days as director of the state-run *Arkade* gallery in East Berlin. Undaunted by reprisals, he stood up for artists who balked at the state-decreed Socialist Realism and instead pursued strategies of an abstract gestural, constructive or performative nature. Werner's support for artists like Horst Bartnig, Carlfriedrich Claus, and Michael Morgner led to his suspension in 1981, which, however, only resulted in giving fresh impetus to the desire for the erection, (at last, following the fall of the wall), of a house for contemporary art in East Germany.

This he succeeded in achieving by 1998 with the conversion of the founders' Era villa of publisher Paul Herfurth into the Gallery for Contemporary Art (or GfZK, in its German abbreviation). The Austrian curator Barbara Steiner, took over as Werner's successor in 2001 and newly established the house, which had become known through its changing exhibitions, as a museum for art after 1945. Exhibition projects like *Cultural Territories*, which explored the local and global roles and long-standing social relevance of contemporary art in post-communist countries, interdisciplinary co-opera-

**Coming to grips with the city's
volatile history is one of
Barbara Steiner's prime concerns**

tions like *Shrinking Cities*. or the annual programme from 2007, which dedicated itself to the ideological entanglements of art and commorative politics, defined the shape of the house, which today, aside from exhibitions, discussions and lectures, is in the happy position of being able to award stipends and two prizes. The new director views the role of her house as that of “corrective vis-a-vis dominant perceptions”, even though some of the outstanding protagonists of the New Leipzig School were able to use her *Carte Blanche* series of exhibitions (2008-early 2010) to find a way in. The house was made available to 11 corporate and private collectors, including the galleries Eigen+Art and Dogenhaus, for holding exhibitions to publicise their private support for the arts, while the costs for so doing had to be borne entirely by the respective exhibitors themselves.

Coming to grips with the city's volatile history is one of Steiner's prime concerns, to which end she has been employing the GfZK's holdings in a forthright manner, because they do comprise numerous works, based on the foundation director's courageous collecting efforts, that were created in the GDR era and are at risk of being cast aside in today's mainstream art. "One should not shrug of the past, just like that. We can create re-evaluations here and point to far more interesting things that exist outside the mainstream and that are well worth contemplating in certain contexts. This is not a plea for parochialism, on the contrary. The deceptive package is contained in the exhortation to move and act on a global scale - which does not really imply the whole world, but only those parts of the world, where new hegemonies have been established, where the political and economic powers have got a toehold. One ought not to allow the clear view of the developments in front of one's own front door to be obstructed, and this goes for the blank spots, too. What is not being shown, and if so, why not?"

NO SCHOOL

By good fortune, Steiner is not alone in her thinking. So it was that, of all places, the young and international “kunstverein” *D21* arranged for a retrospective of Klaus Hahner-Springmühl, a central proponent of the independent GDR art scene, who passed away six years ago. Influenced by an early encounter with A.R. Penck, he had developed an autonomous body of work comprised of actions, painted-over photographs, and drawings, which provoked quite heated controversies in the GDR. Particularly with his uncompromising attitude towards the authorities, he acquired a major significance for the next generation of young artists, including Olaf and Carsten Nicolai.

The merit earned by an effort such as this, acquainting a

younger generation with a forgotten artistic approach, also shows the professionalism of this small “kunstverein”. But *D21* is influential in other ways, as well, because a whole series of art spaces have been called into life within its vicinity, infusing an artistic dynamic into the Leipzig quarter of Lindenau - and transforming it, as the artistic director of *D21*, Michael Arzt, has put it, into “a hell of an experimental try-out place”. Favoured by the high vacancy rate in this shrinking city, the quarter has transformed over the past few years into a lively and charming centre of small and agile artists' galleries. Under the jocular title of *Lindenow* the *Network of Independent Art Spaces in Leipzig*, Lindenau has been organising regular gallery walkabout tours and joint evening openings over the past year-and-a-half. The galleries' amusing names, like *Panipinama*, *Ex-Lalülala*, *Ortloff*, *Praline* (“we only show something when there's something worth seeing”) and *HinZundKunZ - A Space for Encounters*, are primarily an expression of posturing or parading an attitude of commercial non-compliance. Only a few feet apart from one another, these galleries, housed in rundown showrooms, are packed full of surprises. For instance, the people running the *Kuhnturm* (or Cow Tower), altered the innocuous shed behind the house into a tiny but absurdly perfect white cube. The *A&V Project and Audio Gallery* concentrates on art forms that deal with noises, spoken language and sounds, both in recorded and live performances. One local art scene stomping ground is the charming *Kassette*, a place where homemade mix tapes can be swapped, while temporary exhibitions on the subject satisfy the eye. Open three times a week, *Kassette* is financed by the beneficence of landlords, and the sale of cakes and coffee on the premises. While it all sounds a bit quaint, Lindenauers are, in fact, quite capable of self-reflection. Questions regarding the degree to which they are, themselves, contributing to the gentrification of their own city district; or how far they are willing to carry their individual self-exploitation; and what it means to act as a “minimal institution”, are the subject of vigorous and controversial discussions. Their activities go far beyond mere art exhibitions. When the National Democratic (or Neo-Nazi) party moved into a Lindenau office hidden behind high steel fences and barbed wire, the art spaces displayed a sense of social responsibility with a joint activity. They hired a double-decker bus tour, which drove past the Neo-Nazi event hall in a permanent loop, offering a view of the premises, while speakers were delivering lectures on the themes of the visibility and invisibility of Nazi structures in society.

One inspiration for many of the project spaces has been the *b2* located at the opposite end of Lindenau. and founded by, among others, the painters Oliver Kossack and Julia Schmidt. They started in 1998 by taking an, at the time, unheated, ramshackle, but generously proportioned hall situated on the decrepit premises of a former cotton spinning mill, and turning it into an artists'. This type of involvement was prototypical for the city, oriented, as it was, in terms of content rather than commercial interests, and organised by individual networks. The project gallery *b2* was a mag-

Questions regarding the degree to which they are, themselves, contributing to the gentrification of their own city district are the subject of controversial discussions

JULIA SCHMIDT
Casual (reverse print), 2009
Courtesy Casey Kaplan Gallery
© VBK, Wien 2010



unanimous artistic and curatorial field for experimentation. “Naturally we reacted to all sorts of things”, reflects Kossack today. “We were critical companions of the scene, not adversaries, more like trailblazers. The *b2* was a pioneering feat par excellence, here on this cotton mill site”. Since 2006, *bZ* has been operating as a producer's gallery at the same location. The gargantuan grounds, where once 4,000 workers toiled, have been carefully renovated. and the “big names” among the Leipzig galleries have settled in: *Eigen + Art*, *Dogenhaus*, the *Kleindienst Gallery*, widely regarded as a talent magnet, the former artists' gallery *Laden für Nichts* [Shop for Nothing], and also the respectable *Columbus Art Foundation*, which annually awards an art prize named after itself. There is, too, the independent art space and event venue, *Halle 14*, and the Mexican *Galeria Hilario Galguera*. And there are small, precious items, as well, such as the recently opened tiny *Luru Kino* cinema, where, for a mere 250 euros, one can purchase a theatre seat for life and forever retain free entry (and receive a certificate issued by the theatre's co-owner, painting-star Christoph Ruckhäberle.)

COOL

Like many Leipzig artists, OLIVER KOSSACK (born 1966) works in one of the many spacious studios at the mill. His own eclectic practice leans towards role models like Martin Kippenberger and Georg Herold, and tends to veer, with many a pun and mocking jeer, between conceptual and painterly extremes, with a recognisable, and particularly in Leipzig, refreshing, sense of humour. Brimming with quotations, he presents himself as an always informed, yet disrespectful, commentator and observer of his times, one who doesn't care either for sacrosanct values or for any history set in stone. His re-contextualisation not only reassess the history of culture and art, they also reflect his own aspirations and expectations, including those he holds towards the art industry.

Managing without gallery representation in Leipzig is JULIA SCHMIDT (born 1976), who is considered a “conceptual painter here.” When I do painting, I do so according to templates or pictures that already exist. Anyway, I think there are enough pictures in the world already, so what I do is more like rearranging already extant images into new contexts of significance”. She finds her motifs on EBay or in books, the conceptual approach being a souvenir from her sojourn in Glasgow and her encounters with Turner prizewinner Richard Wright, who, in his own work, challenges the material expenditure involved in painting. The question inherent in Wright's challenge is equally set forth when Schmidt, in a protracted series of painted layers, creates her works, building up unforeseen, iridescent and very nearly unfathomable depths on top of her, for the most part, rather “trashy” motifs. It's a technique that appears almost like an obstacle to the picture's rapid consumption as a product, something that, instead, requires a decelerated process of contemplation.

One of the youngest of the artists who were, after the fall of the wall, already active in the cultural vacuum that ensued, is TILO SCHULZ (born 1972). His career, like that of other artists at the time, did not get its start at the art academy: “I was born in Leipzig and grew up there. At 17, I had to abandon my apprenticeship, because I was being harassed, and then I had to get a job, but I was already setting out to do my own things”. His first exhibition, at 19, was organised at a psychosocial day care centre, although Schulz had, even earlier, made use of the power vacuum during the immediate “post” turning point period, to produce interventionist installations in the public arena, e.g., by installing a series of colour plaques at the Leipzig market place. Since then, the artist has also taken on the mantle of art mediator, working on external projects in the city area and on art projects in his studio, while, simultaneously, organising and curating exhibitions.

Slightly younger, but equally scintillating, is a trio of artists who go by the collective name of *FAMED*, comprised of Sebastian Matthias Kretzschmar (1978), Kilian Schellbach (1971) and Jan Thomaneck (1974). With their politically ambitious, conceptually oriented art they are considered to be groundbreakers for a whole bevy of younger artists, who, under the influence of Academy of Visual Arts professor for visual studies Beatrice von Bismarck, are increasingly exposed to current art theoretical discourses. Their installations and performances, architectural interventions and documentations are the means by which this group of artists subjects the intrinsic significances and (dys-)functionalities of museums, galleries and fairs to scrutiny - which may happen entirely spontaneously or on the basis of painstaking, site-specific analysis; be it at the latest Manifesta or closer to the start of their local career, as in Leipzig, when, in the *Shop for Nothing*, they installed a stage with a drum kit under the title of *Good News For People Who Love Bad News*. Out of the blue, a three-minute drumming performance, and that was it. This frivolous nose-thumbing at the common opening ritual gained a measure of notoriety because the newly erected Museum of Visual Arts was to open the same evening, at the peak of all the fuss surrounding the Leipzig painters.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO AFTER SCHOOL?

But the hot air did not exit as rapidly from the balloon of Leipzig painting as *Famed* had presumed. And even if the occasional local cab driver may wax nostalgic about the openings at the spinning mill in years past, total silence has not and ought not to enter the premises. But as usual, it pays to keep one's eyes peeled and, while searching for the familiar, to remain on the lookout for the new. The *New York Times* is, of course, right in saying that Leipzig is well worth a trip in 2010. This time, it might be a real journey of discovery, or even, one might surmise, the start of a brand new story. *ANDREAS SCHLAEGEL is a writer and a member of the Art Critics Orchestra. He lives in Berlin.* Translated by Tom Appleton

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THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

DECEMBER 22, 2008

JULIA SCHMIDT

Schmidt trained in Leipzig, but her paintings have more in common with the allusive canvases of the Belgian artist Luc Tuymans than with the narrative extravaganzas for which the Leipzig school is best known (think Neo Rauch). Executed in oil on fibreboard, Schmidt's works depict ambiguous found images—a microscopic view of paintbrush bristles, a row of the headless mannequins used for jewelry display, the underpainting of a Botticelli. Her scumbly, pale rendering transforms her subjects into something simultaneously glorious and pedestrian. Accordingly, she's titled this show "Lavoro," Italian for "work," an insistent word that at once underscores the effort spent and romanticizes it. Through Dec. 20. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULIA SCHMIDT

LAVORO

EXHIBITION DATES:

NOVEMBER 13 – DECEMBER 20, 2008

OPENING:

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 6 – 8 PM

GALLERY HOURS:

TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10 – 6 PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present a new series of work by Julia Schmidt. A current recipient of the Villa Romana Fellowship, the artist has spent the last ten months living and working in Florence, Italy. Schmidt, known for bridging stylistic boundaries between Glasgow and Leipzig and gearing away from contemporary German figurative painting, will present for her second New York solo exhibition a body of work that includes her signature method of oil painting on MDF, with an extended range of media including oil on canvas, collage, and paper edition posters.

As implied in the title, “Lavoro,” (the Italian word for “work”) Schmidt situates her production among other forms of labor while emphasizing a dichotomy of relationships with painting by considering the process of painting, “to work,” and the final outcome of painting, “the work”. This element is integral to Schmidt’s exploration of painting as she shapes the positive and negative surfaces of the support through an intensive method of layering, detailing, erasing, and repainting until the final outcome is an abstracted interpretation of the original subject matter.

While considering the new series of oil on MDF paintings in context to the exhibition as a whole, Schmidt culls found images to create a network of ideas and thematic inter-relationships while at the same time referencing and reexamining historical practices. A calculated shifting of imagery such as microphotography of pig bristles used in the manufacture of paint brushes, a peasant farmer dwelling from 1970’s Romania, and a detail of submerged layers from a Botticelli masterpiece switches between the quotidian and the exotic and reflects on the function of intrinsic and market values. Schmidt carefully balances her concerns with aesthetics, media, and an economy of signs through an index of painting and the use of a cool and particular palette that renders a surface that is conceptual both in ideology and style.

Gallery III will include collage, poster sets, and oil on canvas. These works directly correlate to Schmidt’s paintings on MDF, by reiterating the use of found images on an explicitly reflexive level. It further associates the valuation of commodities and image making through methods of machine and handmade production.

Julia Schmidt was born in 1976 in Wolfen, Germany and trained at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig and Glasgow School of Art. Schmidt, with fellows Dani Gal, Asli Sungu, and Clemens von Wedemeyer, were presented for the first time in a group exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany, “Freisteller: Villa Romana Preisträger.” Solo exhibitions include: “Tourism and Painting,” Sachsen LB Art Prize, at the Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig, Germany, which traveled to Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg, Germany (2007/06). Other group exhibitions include: “Wollust,” Columbus Art Foundation, Leipzig, “Rosebud, Eine Suche zwischen Opulenz und Leere” (curated by Tilo Schulz) at the Kunstverein Langenhagen, and “Compilation III,” Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany.

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY.

NEXT GALLERY EXHIBITION: ANYA KIELAR: GALLERY I, YUKO MURATA: GALLERY II, LECIA DOLE-RECIO: GALLERY III
JANUARY 8 – FEBRUARY 14, 2009

HENNING BOHL, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, PAMELA FRASER, LIAM GILLICK, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, CARSTEN HÖLLER, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

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Oliver Koerner Von Gustorf. "A Business Like Any Other: Julia Schmidt 's Discursive Painting," www.db-artmag.com. Issue 48, June 2008, <http://www.db-artmag.de/2008/3/e/1/600.php>

Julia Schmidt

A Business Like Any Other Julia Schmidt's discursive painting

*In the exhibition Freisteller, which introduces this year's Villa Romana fellows at the Deutsche Guggenheim, Julia Schmidt's paintings are also on view. The young Leipzig-based painter is one of the most promising German painters-particularly because her works question how painting is produced, valued, and marketed. **Oliver Koerner von Gustorf** had a conversation with the artist.*

Braided pig's hairs, the facade of a corrugated iron hut, the blurred covering of a baroque Versace chair with a shadow of a man's crotch etched into it: the things and details in Julia Schmidt's paintings appear unfocussed, bleached out, spotty, fragmented-a kind of visual driftwood washed up from the depths of an endless process of production and reproduction that devours images and goods as quickly as it generates them. While young art often serves to adorn the lifestyle of a global art community, Schmidt is interested in the recycling of a culture based on luxury.

"There's this incredible ease with which painting is absorbed by the market. I want to put disturbances, barriers, fissures in my paintings in order to counter this simple ability to consume," she says, blinking into the sun. We are sitting on the roof terrace of her studio at the Villa Romana, looking out over the cypresses onto Florence. Schmidt is currently preparing for the exhibition *Freisteller*, which introduces this year's Villa Romana fellows at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin. After the filmmaker Clemens von Wedemeyer, who took part in the 2007 skulptur projekte munster, Schmidt is probably the best-known fellow. In 2006, the 32-year-old received the Art Prize of the Sachsen LB, awarded in cooperation with the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, where she showed her solo exhibit on Tourism and Painting. Since 2004, the prominent Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York has represented her work. A career as speedy as this might produce a certain attitude in some people, yet Schmidt seems amazingly down-to-earth. Her tone is subdued when she explains that she paints on MDF panels "because it is a neutral ground that doesn't push itself into the foreground," or stresses that an individual work is less important to her than its "constellation within a group of pictures." As though she wanted to put her painting work into a larger perspective-not out of feigned modesty, but from analytic self-reflection.

One could picture her, perhaps, as an economist, a person involved in the economy of image production, with the ways and means in which images are turned into art and how they are consumed. "My work is about production processes," explains Schmidt. "I'm also interested in this in terms of my own things. What happens before, what happens afterwards, also with my own paintings? How are things devoured? It's a kind of chain. It's not a self-evident thing for me to make a painting. It's much more about what a painting is, who it's for, where these things are shown. My work already contains a reference to the art system. But it's abstract, of course." But what does the Third World corrugated iron hut that Schmidt depicts in her 2008 painting *Untitled (Stackr)* have to do with the advertising motif for Versace chairs that she uses for *Untitled (Crotch)* from 2007?

"Stackr" is an abbreviated form of the word "Stacker." An image, torn from a newspaper and hanging on the wall of the studio in Florence that Schmidt has just moved into, serves as a basis for the painting of the same name. It's a black and white photograph of a ghetto in a developing country. Stacked on the roofs of the huts are boxes of fruit sold on the street below-thrown up there

by traders that want to deliver their goods as quickly as possible. Yet while this mixture between shelter, kiosk, and storage could clearly be taken as a metaphor for the endlessly repetitive everyday cycle of goods, the actual painting contains only traces of the original image. Entire parts of the picture have been removed, the hut cut out, the background painted over in white. Branches, stones, tossed boards blur into an abstract still life as the boxes on the roof dissolve into an almost minimalist structure.

The same happens with the Versace motif photographed by the star photographer Steven Meisel in Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion, an image that represents the diametric opposite end of the production chain-luxury furniture elaborately photographed and erotically staged for advertising campaigns. "At the time, I used a great deal of pictorial sources that had to do with the 'fetish of power'," Schmidt explains in a conversation with the critic Clemens Krümmel published in the catalogue to the *Freisteller* exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim. "I tried to create a relationship between high-end advertising and painting. The way that in which Meisel brings out a subtle racism from the fashion show aesthetic - the Mexican gardener between the models dressed in Versace attire who fishes flies out of the swimming pool, the maid from Sri Lanka at the house door - this very directly stressed the relationship of fashion photography to power and hierarchy." Schmidt transforms the spread legs of a male model, the lower body stretched out on the Versace chair into a flat silhouette of color in which all depth and structure have been carefully obliterated in countless layers of paint. In Schmidt's work, the sexual organ, the apparent center of the body, becomes both the center of the image and an empty spot. In a kind of inverted sexism, she extinguishes all traces of corporeality and "castrates" her motif.

"This overpainting is in itself an absurd gesture," she says, "a waste that isn't economical at all. It's unprofitable when I keep painting over certain areas in a painting. In a world where every handshake is translated into cash and, as the saying goes, 'time is money,' I paint over the pictures up to thirty times, which is completely absurd. Yet it's exactly this quality that I'm interested in." The effect she achieves is in a certain sense paradoxical, because the image isn't brought to fore, but becomes more and more lost with each layer of paint applied. Schmidt says that she is trying to "understand" her motif by painting over it: "The painting process merely reflects my thinking. Of course it's also a work about form, but I actually need up to four months to make a painting because I have to think about the motif, about its meaning."

The selection and removal of the motifs from their original context is just as much a part of the working process as the emphasis on certain details or the "emptying" of other areas in the picture. The visual material that Schmidt filters out of magazines, newspapers, books, and Internet search engines takes on a precarious status in her work. Schmidt avoids all pure color, often limiting herself to shades of black and white. Her paintings are full of omissions, pale areas, and "blind spots," as though the viewer's retina had been injured and can only perceive parts of the image while other areas are bathed in contrasts of light and dark. It's precisely these omissions, the "in between" that the viewer has to fill in his or her mind, that makes Schmidt's paintings so unusual.

In one of her recent works titled Still life (bowl, coin, bread), she leaves only a key, a coin on the floor, breadcrumbs, and a part of a wall from Edgar Degas' *A Roman Beggarwoman* (1857) remaining. In another version, *Untitled (The Roman Beggar Woman, After Edgar Degas)* from 2005, she reduces the image to a fragment of the beggar woman's scarf, with the body completely concealed. The "undressing" of the motif questions both the techniques of construction and composition as well as painting's power of seduction. While the viewer's eye can get lost in single, isolated, carefully executed details, it is also repelled by the nearly monochromatic surfaces.

Through omission and overpainting, the painting's materiality, the components it is comprised of become palpable: paint and MDF. At the same time, the empty spaces invite all manner of interpretation. Doesn't the beggar's scarf look like an exclusive design product by Martin Margiela? Is Schmidt deconstructing Degas' voyeuristic, romanticizing view of real poverty? What is the relationship between the motif and the painting's monetary value? And how does painting raise the value of a banal home-building product like MDF?

Even if Schmidt's paintings might appear mysterious at first glance, she's actually concerned with the exact opposite, namely with demystifying painting. She shows her ingredients and addresses the production process, as in *Untitled (bristles)*, where she makes the hairs of an artist's brush the subject of her painting. "I can't come with a hammer and say 'bad capitalism.' But I can ask questions," says Schmidt. Her work proves that painting is a business like any other.

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FREI STELLER

VILLA ROMANA-FREISTRÄGER 2008
26.04. - 22.06.2008

Deutsche Guggenheim 



Julia Schmidt: *Ohne Titel / Untitled (crotch)*, 2007
Private Collection, VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2008.

Freisteller
April 26 until June 22, 2008

Freisteller
Villa Romana Fellows 2008
Dani Gal, Julia Schmidt, Ash Sungu, Clemens von Wedemeyer

For the first time, the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin will introduce the recipients of the Villa Romana Fellowship: from April 26 through June 22, 2008, new paintings, installations and videos by Dani Gal, Julia Schmidt, Ash Sungu and Clemens von Wedemeyer will be displayed at the exhibition hall on Unter den Linden.

The Villa Romana Fellowship, awarded to exceptional young talents since 1905, includes a stipend and a residency program, allowing fellows to live and work for ten months in the artists' house in Florence. This art prize is not just the oldest in Germany, but it also represents Deutsche Bank's longest cultural commitment. The presentation at the Deutsche Guggenheim marks a new milestone in the institution's partnership with the arts, while also continuing the series of exhibitions conceived by Deutsche Bank within its joint venture with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Freisteller was curated by Angelika Stepken, Director of the Villa Romana. The fellows were selected by the Berlin artist Ayse Erkmen and the art historian Beatrice von Bismarck from Leipzig.

The German term "Freisteller," used in photography, printing and computer graphics, describes an image that is cut out from its background and context in order to insert it into a new composition. "Freisteller" is also the title of the current exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim, introducing the Villa Romana Fellows—four young artists with diverse biographies and nationalities working in various media. At first glance, Dani Gal, Julia Schmidt, Ash Sungu and Clemens von Wedemeyer seem to have only two things in common: they live and work in Germany, and they will now spend time together in a new cultural and geographical environment—as residents of the renowned artists' house in the hills of Florence.

Yet, as the exhibition title suggests, the selected artists share a number of common interests and strategies, specifically in the field of photography.

They disconnect motifs and themes from their original context and, through this process of "cutting out," open onto new discursive relations. Dani Gal combines influences from popular culture with historical research; Julia Schmidt works with found images from magazines and the internet, which she isolates and fragmentizes in her paintings; Ash Sungu's videos explore everyday activities to show how our conception of identity, of "right" or "wrong" are socially determined; and Clemens von Wedemeyer's films fuse elements of political documentation with fiction to expose the interplay between concrete social situations and media representation.

The organization of the exhibition space as well departs from the hermetic, protective structure of the "white cube." The window front of the Deutsche Guggenheim is opened up, while partition walls and platforms serve as display units for the artwork. Encountered within this temporary exhibition architecture, the presented positions achieve a dual purpose: they offer insights into the creative practice of each of the recipients, and they address a broad spectrum of questions raised by contemporary art—media and institutional critique, migration, and the ability to articulate critical and political viewpoints.

The exhibition Freisteller documents how an institution like the Villa Romana, rich in tradition and far from the great metropolitan centers, can succeed in becoming a creative think tank of contemporary art and a place for intercultural exchange. Equally notable is the fact that the Villa Romana Fellows are now for the first time presented at the Deutsche Guggenheim. The affiliation between both institutions establishes a public forum that is capable of reflecting authentically the vital, internationally oriented art scene in Germany.

On the occasion of the current exhibition, a catalogue will be published in German/English and German/Italian with texts and artist interviews by Clemens Krümmel, Bert Rebhandl, Angelika Stepken and René Zechlin; book design by atelier september, Karlsruhe; 29 Euro.

Edition No. 43/1–4, issued in conjunction with Freisteller, consists of: No. 43/1 Dani Gal: i.e., 2008; No. 43/2 Julia Schmidt: Untitled (stripper), 2008; No. 43/3 Ash Sungu: Almost, 2008; and Clemens von Wedemeyer: Der überflüssigen Bevölkerung, 2008. All editions can be purchased exclusively at the Deutsche Guggenheim's MuseumsShop; prices on request, (030) 20 20 93-15 /-16.

A variety of special events are scheduled during the exhibition, including artist's talks, lectures and a children's program. Free guided tours daily at 6 p.m. The popular lunch lectures on Wednesday, 1 p.m., and tours focusing on specific topics on Sunday, 11:30 a.m., complete the program.

To celebrate the selection of the Villa Romana as a "Landmark in the Land of Ideas," Angelika Stepken, director of the artists' house and curator of the exhibition, will conduct a guided tour on May 30.

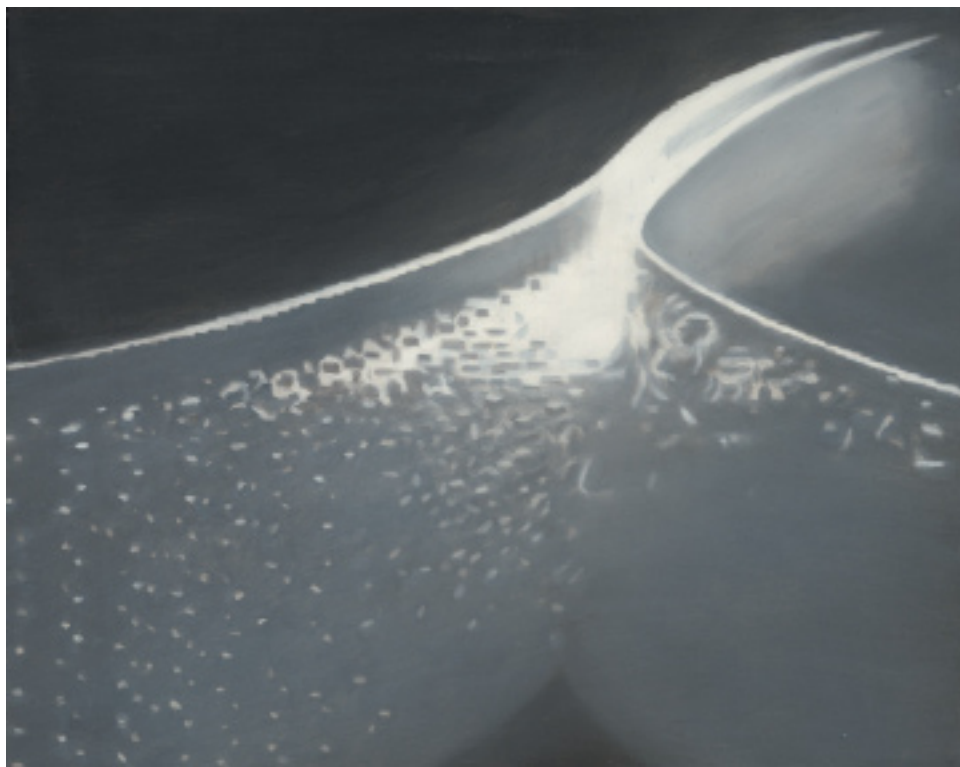
Images of the exhibition are available online at www.photo-files.de/guggenheim in a 300 dpi quality.

Further information at
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julia schmidt

Casey Kaplan Gallery www.caseykaplangallery.com
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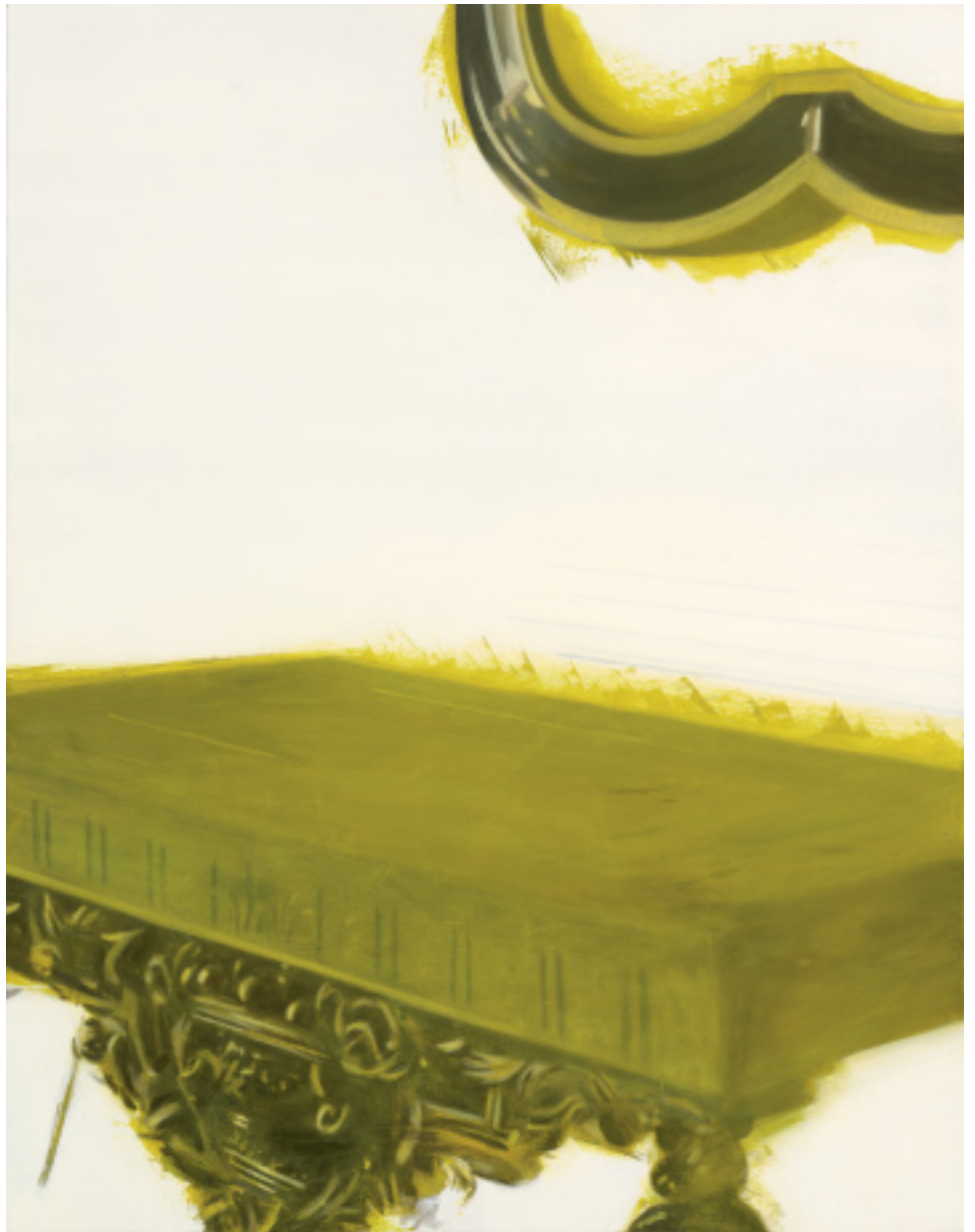


Julia Schmidt Untitled (velcro), 2006, oil on MDF. 31 x 39cm. Courtesy the artist / l'artista.

The seventeen pieces in *New Fabrics*, Julia Schmidt's first NY solo exhibition, refuse to coalesce into a single, brandable style. Scars and lacunae appear in pockmarked, rotting wood; A pair of fighting cocks look like fists of ragged crabgrass; Acorns and maple leaves are painted at once lovingly and also, somehow, with exasperation, as if the Leipzig-based artist has immediately gotten over them. She knows that no visual seduction can hold forever, and her images seem to wryly accept this. It's not any single thing itself that fascinates, rather something looming behind the thing, a kind of congealed history: for example in one image we see what seems to be a bedside table (or

is it a rococo vanity?), and the edge of a gilt-framed mirror with eighteenth-century flourishes painted in acid yellow and marooned in negative space, signs at sea without a context. *New Fabrics* alludes to the history of painting—for example, the Romantic Caspar David Friedrich or the collusion of impressionism and social realism in Degas—along with much else, whilst cleverly avoiding any histrionics. A pile of hulking forms gives shape to a silhouette over which an indecipherable graffiti script hovers, like an exclamation, crouching in the corner of the MDF board (Schmidt doesn't paint on canvas) and engulfed in white space. Schmidt's works

also engage with photography's relationship to painting. In one case, two strips of Velcro peeling apart becomes a hoary crotch, laconically evoking Courbet's *L'Origin du monde*. Schmidt also paints a paled-down section of Degas' *The Roman Beggar Woman*—specifically, the old woman's fringed shawl—creating a brilliant metonymy. This delicate citation simultaneously evokes the "whole" woman in Degas' original and the jowly face of a battle-scarred old fish, Schmidt makes the whole history of painting take place all over again—bur cooler, more detached, suddenly *other*—by wittily playing on the more minute edges of some of its biggest tropes. Ariana Reines

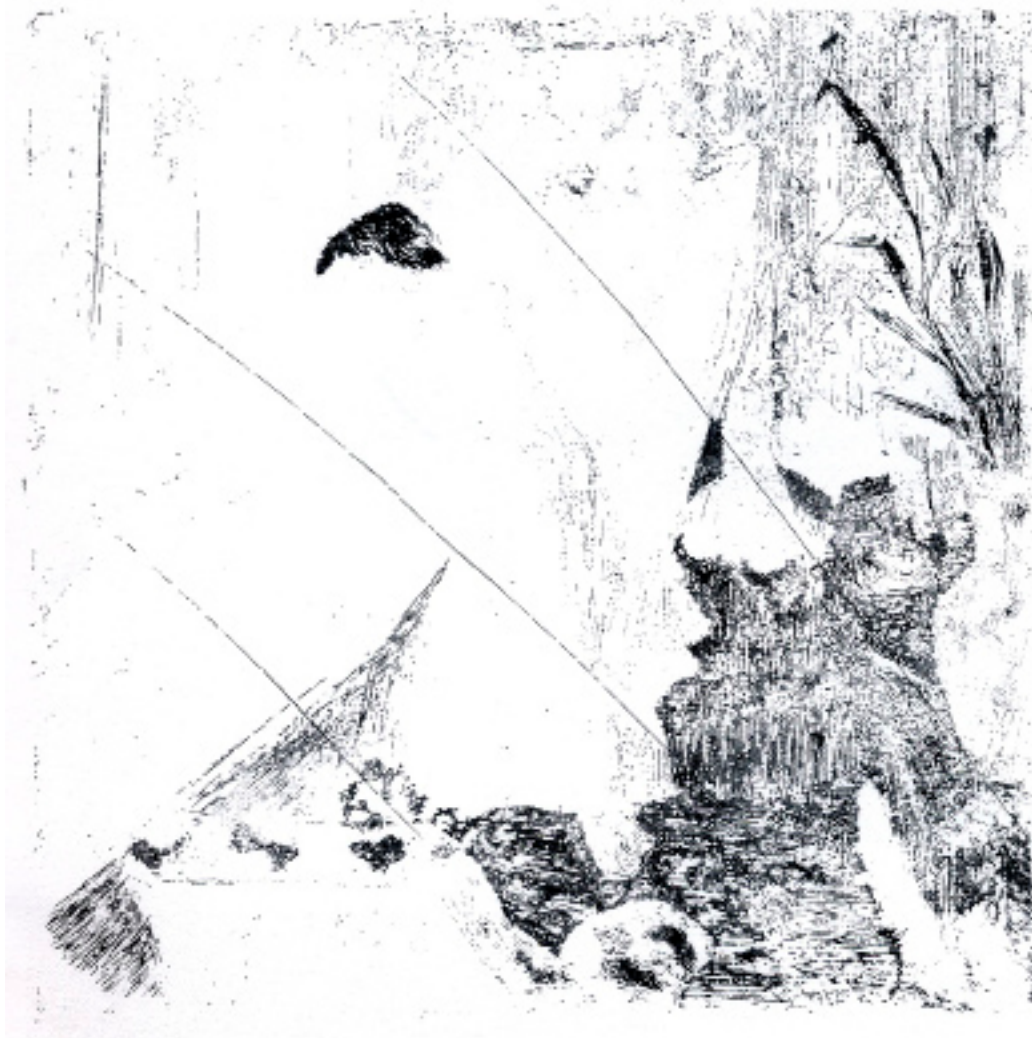


Julia Schmidt Untitled (more green on red), 2006, oil on raw MDF. 147 x 115cm. Courtesy the artist / l'artista.

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Julia Schmidt

Hammilton, Mark. "Provisional Solutions and the Emergence of No-School Painting"
Compilation III: Dusseldorf: Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, p. 116-117.



Impressions from a cancelled plate (Woman getting out of the bath, after Edgar Degas), 2005. Oil auf MDF, 115 x 115 cm, Sammlung Theo Koll, Berlin

In discussing the praxis of Julia Schmidt one cannot avoid her inherent resistance to the seemingly self-assured repetition of serial-based work and the implicit conformity of an explicit trademark style in the context of painting today. She sidesteps both linear methodologies and the easy irony of self-branding while undertaking an array of research and studio-based activity that materializes an obnoxious concern with alternatives and alternates. The refusal to settle on one mode of depiction or mono-thematic derives from a constant questioning of the role(s) and possibilities of painting at this time and shapes a spiky reflexivity to market processes.

Provisional Solutions and the Emergence of No-School Painting

Mark Hamilton

Schmidt battles to disconnect herself from the metaphysical specters of painterly tradition, harnessing handwork and pigment to conceptualization and an engaged consideration of context. She produces and exhibits paintings in terms of specific cycles or groupings - clusters of images, layered and multi-faceted, where selected themes and particular scenes or objects are worked and re-worked. She demonstrates a preference for shifting thematic inter-relations, mining an apparently diverse range of motifs and material; a box of thrown away zippers, the pleats and hems of a troupe of cheerleader's skirts, a detail of an abandoned etching by Edgar Degas, scratches and scrapes on the paintwork of mid-range automobiles or ornaments hovering in the background of hi-end fashion advertising. Developing out of an obsessive sifting and editing of found and archival source images, Schmidt excavates and extracts opportunities to paint. She deploys the materiality of paint with meticulous virtuosity or brazen slovenliness in surfaces rendered from high-gloss or densely layered murk, understanding the brushstroke as both tool of depiction and assigner of value. Paintings switch from opulent detail to vacant or blurred frame - a procedure that disturbs, willfully instilling a tension in the experience of viewing. This serves to disrupt the smooth processes of easy readings, foregrounding the role of the viewer and crucially echoing the rough problematic of (a) paintings potential as discursive device or entropy as mute, exclusive decoration.

In "Untitled (remnants)", 2006, the interior of a box of discarded zippers is rendered in a grayscale palette, a painting frozen formally between abstraction and a provisional photorealism. A staccato ornament is composed from the discards of a particular type of manufacturing, the garment industry, and its processes of cutting and sewing. Schmidt exploits the embedded associations of fashion and branding to question standard notions of value.

In "Untitled (crotch)", 2006/2007, the viewer's gaze is confronted with the murky blue lap and spread thighs of a male figure slouching in a gilded antique chair. The framing of the painting is tightly cropped and reveals only sparse details of the glitzy opulence surrounding the lurid pose of the figure. Here Schmidt acidly inverts stereotypical sexualized depictions and deftly draws attention to a tangle of thorny issues and clichés: from the ever-on-going objectification of the female figure, the current feverish clamor for figurative painting and the male-centric ethos and marketing surrounding the 'Leipzig School'.

Julia Schmidt works from the image-material around her, adapting reflexive conceptual methods and utilizing a range of painterly skills and quotations. She raids the rich and privileged history of fine-art painting while also seeming to delight in locating painting as just one technique among many within a 'Craft' tradition, articulated through recurring depictions of seams, threads, and weaving. She records an index of directions in her work which insistently reverberate concerns with use and ornament, value and artifice.

Schmidt constructs a network of images and a lexicon of painting, reflecting and refracting our strung-out fascination with uptown glam and downtown grit and grunge. From powerdressing and powerbooks to the glittering rituals of transactions, the market stall to the silicon hum of the latest tech processes and all taking place on the relentless micro-machinations of capital's flux and flow.

Beatrice von Bismark, "The Seductive Luxury of Refusal: On the Work of Julia Schmidt,"
Tourism and Painting, Leipzig: Museum der bildenden Künste, 2006, p. 96-98.

A dull, cloudy day: thin, just barely leaved trees rise up like outlines against the meadow and forest landscape in the background. Their mirror image in the puddle spreading among the patches of snow captures only the naked branches. In shades of violet and blue, the sky seems as covered as the composition itself: in the vertical, *Landscape (half cleaned)* (2006) the work is divided into a darker and a brighter zone, almost as if following the title—on one side a layer of varnish has darkened over the years and mixed with everyday dirt to conceal the original and now is only partially exposed to reveal a lighter winter scene with a more differentiated coloration. For Julia Schmidt, the layer that covers half of the image was not deposited over time, but deliberately painted, and instead of being a disturbing compositional component, it becomes the genuine subject of the image, bringing into view various issues that are central to the artist.

One of these issues is painting's potential to give us something to look at. The veiling mobilized in the purportedly not yet cleaned half of *Landscape (half cleaned)* can be traced as a key feature in the work of the artist, both in terms of media and metaphor. The landscape painting seems covered, the real composition half-concealed, but actually it is a painterly surface that emerges as part of a single process, based on a photograph of a painting in the process of being restored. Julia Schmidt's act of painting takes on the task of the concealing varnish, seeming to conceal although actually making it visible. It represents the veiling of the photographed painting in a way that inseparably interlinks the veil and the veiled. Nothing awaits discovery behind the darkening layer; the veil cannot be lifted. Painting and veiling coincide.

In this sense, Schmidt's painting covers and presents something to see at the same time. In the mode of representation and in terms of motif, the veil appears as a cloak that points to the poten-

tialis of cloaking, without actually fulfilling it. In *Untitled (Scarecrow)* (2004), the jacket hung on the stick gains its presence from the void marked by the missing body that it could have cloaked. It now bears the memory of its former clothing function, only to engender the effect of a scarecrow by relying on this memory. What is lacking develops as an image-filling effect through its cloaking.

In a similar way, Edgar Degas' Roman beggar woman, referred to in Julia Schmidt's work *Untitled (The Roman Beggar Woman, After Degas)* (2005), achieves a disbodied presence. All that is painted is her cloth. Schmidt stages the fringe and implied checked pattern, placing the head scarf, as in the original, on the edge of the picture, but refuses to paint the female body whose shoulders it covers. A shaped object, that has lost the reason for this shape, as seen in *Untitled (Shoulder Pads)* (2006), which points to the cloaking protection of the shoulder, without being able to provide it. Since the shoulders are missing here, the entire rest of the image is yielded to bodilessness.

Not just embodiment disappears from Julia Schmidt's painting, but also color. Just as the painted veil in *Landscape (half cleaned)* robs the motifs of their depth and variety, the painting itself seems to veil what is painted. Behind this, the objects can be seen in shades of the same color, as if painted in grisaille, only varied with touches of brown, ochre, or blue shadows. The technique is complemented by acts of crossing out, painting or smoothing over, allowing bodies and colors to escape the paintings. Verisimilitude disappears behind layers of paint that insinuates itself between reality and artistic imagination, becoming the intervening medium.

Considered in motivic terms-- shawls, cloths, and other objects-- hanging in the visual space of her paintings can also be understood in this way or read in terms of media and material. Julia

Schmidt's veillings address a key issue in the history of Western visual art: that of the velum, the cloth, where the world is captured in the painting as in a net, including both the materiality of the support as well as its mediality, participating in the presence of what it cloaks.

Schmidt's withdrawal of body and color should be understood in this generative sense, bringing what is hidden all the more emphatically before the beholding eye. As if chiseled from the painterly ground, what emerge are bright elevations and discreet shades of color that allow the surface of the compositions to vibrate and come to life. The motif of the cloak picks up a fundamental engagement of painting with its mediality and materiality and the artistic act of animation comes to bear in a three-dimensional uncovering which focuses on accents and details that Jean Jacques Rousseau describes with the unveiling of his Pygmalion: the penetration and removal of the marble mantle allows the sculptor to bring the female body to life. If in Rousseau, the marble mantle fulfils more than just the function of a visual support—here, the stone—is imbued with meaning, “animating it.” In Schmidt's painting, the paint models the objects from out of the surface of what is painted on the MDF panels, lending them a physical presence. By working through the layer that they created, like *Pygmalion*, a vitality develops that is specific to her works.

*

A second essential aspect of Schmidt's praxis: the process of her painting, in which the impression of fleetingness and a protracted expense of effort seem to rub against one another. On the one hand, the paintings give the impression of displaying themselves for just a brief moment, as if their motifs appear only temporarily, soon again to return to invisibility. The reduction of corporeality and color seem to dematerialize the paintings. Here again, the effect of veiling is mobilized and in this case the dissolution of physical substance makes it seem as though the works were only given to the world for an instant. The leaves in *Untitled (Acorns)* (2006) seem barely breathed, the trees in *Landscape (half cleaned)* like thin-as-air sails, and the shawl of the Roman beggar woman is hardly still cloth. They float on a threshold between visibility and invisibility: placed there by painting, and at same time only supported by the painting.

On the verge of dissolution--the verge of disappearance-- the painted objects also find themselves in a contradictory contrast to the time-consuming process of painting that allowed them to emerge. Far from being “exhaled” with quick brushstrokes, they are the result of countless acts of applying and removing layers of paint. Schmidt uses photographs as her starting point, in which she first paints with as many details as possible, then begins to paint over them, retouching them, reducing them, crossing them out, and only in the last step returns just a few details to visibility. The human body lazily slung across the chair fills the foreground of the image as a murky blue surface, explicitly contrasting against the details of the background that it cannot completely cover up. The baroque ornaments of mirror and table find themselves reduced to an echo in greenish yellow, refusing all interior contouring. And the cheerleaders now consist only of the hems of the skirts that once moved in rhythm around their legs.

Schmidt belabors her subjects in a constant play between painting and painting over, revealing and concealing, exposing and hiding. Her repeated recourse to certain motifs corresponds to this as well as her repeated engagement with subjects she has already treated. Some of the subjects varied in this way include cockfights (*Untitled (fighting cocks)* (2005)) classicistic column architecture (*Untitled (empire)* (2005)), the cheerleader skirts (*Untitled (cheerleading)* (2006)) or the veil of Degas' Roman beggar. In returning to these motifs, the shades and contrasts change, the section of the image selected, and the compositional form—but what remains is the chosen detail. In her reference to Degas' beggar, Schmidt thus concentrates solely on the shoulder cloth, but stages it in a different way each time, changing the colors and varying its material presence. In the upright rectangular version, she almost makes the motif disappear, removing the checkered pattern, making the fringe transparent, cutting into the fragment of the image still further, and pushing it from the upper left side of the image. In return, color is restored, a few brown accents that are lacking in the smaller square composition, a color that neither takes up the specific materials nor the compositional characteristics of the original Degas, but is solely indebted to Schmidt's own image character.

The repetitions of each subject leave open the possibility of return lend the individual works

an element of incompleteness that is comparable to intervening stops on the way towards a goal that is not precisely defined. Returning to a motif is not only in the interest of a new pictorial solution, but also follows installative considerations, for Schmidt always understands her individual works in contexts. When installed in the studio, in the gallery, or in the museum, the works take on specific standpoints and statements for the ensemble as a whole. Through the choice of works, conceived for respective surroundings and various contexts, their own meaning is constantly redefined.

To this extent, Schmidt's working process, where the effort seems on first glance to contradict the fleeting impression of the works, underscores this impression. Instead of making a claim to eternity, of being finished once and for all, Schmidt confronts her paintings with questions: when is a work completed? How and why should it be so? How does a work obtain its meanings? What processes of shaping and staging are involved in its shifting and redefinition? The paintings remain open for reformulations without a fixed place in physical reality or a given context of meaning. With this orientation, the image is for Schmidt both the prerequisite for its emergence as well as its subject. Degas' failure to find a satisfying visual solution for a woman stepping out of the bath can thus achieve the same image-worthiness (*Impressions from a Cancelled Plate (Woman Getting out of the Bath, after Edgar Degas)* (2005)), as his more famous paintings *The Star (The Star Dancer (after Edgar Degas) 2004)* and *Roman Beggar Woman*. Degas recorded 22 stages of the work on this composition in 1879 and 1880, until the printing plate was no longer usable due to the many changes that had been made, and he abandoned working on it all together. Going beyond the interventions of the French painter, which repeatedly corrected, crossed out, or emphasized elements of the image, in her treatment, Schmidt leaves only the varied interior structure of hatched fields that once served to depict the bathmat, flowers, wallpaper, or hair. Her work on the image presents the work of the visualizing process itself.

*

All the same, in this work too the human body is missing, and the very same element in Degas brings viewing the image close to voyeurism, which lends his bathing and dressing scenes their attraction. A third central question that Schmidt explores

in her work and that presumes the two previously named: painting's ability to seduce. While Degas in his composition allows the main diagonals to intersect in the crotch of the female nude, thus directing the beholding eye emphatically towards this place on the body as the focal point of the image, Schmidt only alludes to the meeting of two lines, compelling the gaze. She refuses to satisfy the attraction that the compositional structure promises to present, playing with the expectations of the beholder cast to fall for the painting's seductive spell.

With comparable drawing-power, a second work, *Untitled (Velcro)* (2006), directs attention to itself and its center, only to then soberingly expose it: as in the work after Degas, the diagonals run towards a center that remains undefined, light and shadow amplify the element of promise still further. Instead of a fairy-tale-like starry sky--instead of a splendid spatial opening or the reflecting surface of a valuable object-- the beholders are offered nothing but a banal everyday object: a Velcro seal.

Schmidt plays through the potential of art works that is decisive for their meaning and value from many perspectives: their potential to attract, capture attention, fascinate the gaze and produce desire. And with the materiality of her pictures, she takes individual components out of their original context, reinserting them elsewhere and reducing to essentials. Accordingly, she does not link the artistic process to the notion of production, but defies it through techniques that intersect, techniques of directing perception. Jean Baudrillard's defense of seduction resonates here: "They wanted us to believe that everything was production," he writes, an accumulating production, solely committed to reality. He continues stating that seduction--the strength of which lies in its gentleness--is unavoidable: "We seduce with our weakness, never with strong signs or powers. In seduction we enact this weakness, and this is what gives seduction its strength."

The fleeting impression of Schmidt's images gains additional significance from this perspective, and finds its counterpart in her definition of her own role as an authorial figure. Only superficially does she limit and weaken this role by refusing the task of creating the actual motif. Ultimately, she reclaims creative freedom in her specific form of treating the motifs: an approach that works tenderly to the extent that she never

allows her objects to appear in their unencumbered attractiveness. With her painterly treatment, she stunningly grants value to otherwise worthless objects, leftovers, rubbish, remaining stock auctioned on eBay—the Velcro seal, the shoulder pad, or a landscape by a hobby painter. In contrast, valuable objects-- antique furniture intended for auction at Sotheby's, fashion accessories, or high priced designer pieces-- instead appear dirty, stained, and painted-over in her works. In *Untitled (stained)* (2005), the painted stain from a felt-tip pen robs a handbag of its value, in *Untitled (interior)* (2005) it is the removal of the label, and in *Untitled (Sotheby's)* (200?) every rocaille or Baroque curve disappears behind the leveling paint. The painting grants the painted objects their value but can also take it away. The works play with the various valorizations that objects have in various social systems, confronting the economic logic of work on the one hand and the logic of waste in the fashion

industry and art on the other, together setting attractiveness, fetishization, and economic price structures in a mobile, reflexive exchange relation to one another. Wormholes, transformed into glittering surfaces, (*Untitled (woodworm)*, 2006) are no less enthralling than the shimmering reflections of belts and chains, reduced to black and white (*Untitled (rocco)* (2006)). In this interplay where grandeur, glamorous appearances, and signs of power lose their appearance of wholeness, revealing themselves to be precarious, fragile, and dependent on the desire of the beholder, wherein Schmidt's pictures develop their own fragility and seductive power.

Beatrice von Bismarck
Translated by Brian Currid

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THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART
Issue of 2006-11-13
Posted 2006-11-06

JULIA SCHMIDT

This fresh dispatch from the Leipzig painters' league veers from the figurative, Pop-communist propaganda formula, heading toward something more in the vein of Gerhard Richter or his most accomplished heir, Luc Tuymans. Like Tuymans, Schmidt makes paintings that are matte and muted, as if bleached by the sun. She also shares the Richter-Tuymans obsession with the relationship between photography and painting. The difference is that her subjects are bland and self-effacing rather than historically and politically freighted. Bits of fabric, corners of furniture, and the spaces in between objects serve as impetuses for paintings that are vague and dreamlike, but still steeped in the compositional formalism which distinguishes most Leipzig-based painters. Through Nov. 11. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

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Schmidt's Quiet Puzzles, Nitsch's Guts, Havana Rot: Chelsea Art

By Katya Kazakina

Oct. 18 (Bloomberg) -- In Julia Schmidt's oil paintings at Casey Kaplan Gallery in Chelsea, absence takes center stage.

The 30-year-old Leipzig painter zooms in on a man's crotch in a fashion advertisement, transforming it to a shapeless gray mass in the middle of her chipboard surface.

Another work is all luminous white, except for a skirtlike shape at the top painted with curvy, light-brown brushstrokes. What is it? A scarf of a woman in a Degas etching, the artist said, smiling mischievously. In Schmidt's work, the head is gone missing.

Schmidt studied at Leipzig's Academy of Visual Arts and the Glasgow School of Art. Herself-effacing style is closer to that of Luc Tuymans than the representational virtuosity of Leipzig's alpha-male block, led by Neo Rauch.

New York has seen its share of Leipzig art, but it's been largely represented by men, both in galleries and at auction. Christoph Ruckhaberle showed at Zach Feuer in March, Tim Eitel will be at PaceWildenstein in November and Rauch's new paintings will be on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art next May.

At least Rosa Loy, Rauch's wife, showed her dreamlike, and nightmarish, tableaux at David Zwirner this summer.

Schmidt subtly tiptoes between abstraction and representation by erasing most of the narrative and giving the viewer just one or two clues -- a hat, a ladder, a table's edge. Stripped of familiar context and painted in vyashed-out grays, browns and greens, everyday objects become barely recognizable, nearly abstract forms.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULIA SCHMIDT: New Fabrics

EXHIBITION DATES: OCTOBER 14 – NOVEMBER 11, 2006
OPENING: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 6 – 8 PM
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10 – 6 PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce, “New Fabrics,” the first solo exhibition in New York of the Leipzig-based painter, Julia Schmidt. For this show, Julia will present a new series of oil on MDF-board paintings. Schmidt is a key figure of a new generation of German painters whose work resists the bold gestures of her contemporaries, opting instead to focus on details, traces, and omissions.

The works in this exhibition--new fabrics--visit a panoply of subjects. Depicting both representational and abstract imagery, Schmidt portrays her aesthetic totems in muted hues with a cool, detached beauty. Inconsequential objects-- blotches, skirt hems, and debris--are painted with the same painstaking precision as 18th century portraits, baroque tables, and sumptuous leather handbags.

Working with different methods and often reclaiming discarded objects and imagery, Schmidt sidesteps the conformity of a single artistic style. Her paintings often demonstrate an old master-like attention to detail: rich impasto, tonal gradation, and high gloss surfaces. While she uses the classical technique of oil painting, her brushstrokes often appear hacked and staccato, and while her small (even miniature) formats are relatively standardized, her canvas is made from industrial chipboard—a material that lends her paintings an attitude of indifference or self-effacement.

By focusing on flawed, unstudied, and forgotten subjects, Schmidt redirects our attention to blurred backgrounds, peripheral views, and minute details. Schmidt’s appropriation of the overlooked proclaims the significance and wonder of marginal and low-key subjects, addressing her concerns with value and artifice, use and ornament. With all the paintings in the exhibition, Schmidt’s method of visual reduction alongside optical saturation posits what constitutes artistic beauty within the decadence of high art.

Julia Schmidt received her formal training at the Glasgow School of Art and the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig. She was the recipient of the Arbeitsstipendium Stiftung Kunstfonds Bonn e.V. and the Kunstpreis der Sachsen LB in 2006. Recent exhibitions include “Artists from Leipzig,” at Arario Beijing, China in October 2006; “Criss-Cross, Five Positions in Croatian and German Contemporary Art,” at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia in 2005; and the 2nd Biennial of Contemporary Art in Prague. A solo exhibition at Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig opens this December and will travel to Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg.

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY.

NEXT GALLERY EXHIBITION: *NATHAN CARTER* NOVEMBER 16 – DECEMBER 22, 2006

JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, PAMELA FRASER, LIAM GIL-LICK, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, CARSTEN HÖLLER, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

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Along and across

exhibition text/detail *Criss-Cross*, Five positions in Contemporary Croatian and German Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 24.11.-30.12.2005

The boom in the market for the new German painting, particularly in Leipzig, the Academy of Fine Arts of which has become a nursery of talent in the last dozen years, has deprived many young German painters of the chances for natural maturation. Most of their paintings were sell-outs before they left the academy, as if it were enough for them to bear the label *Made in Leipzig*. Not surprisingly, then, some groups of artists, in order to fend off the dictates of the market and resist the deceptive oscillations in taste, decided to found their own associations, to protect their interests and to preserve at least a modicum of independence. Among the best known from Leipzig is Liga, to which Julia Schmidt (*Wolfen*, 1976) also belonged, the youngest artist in *Criss-Cross* and the only woman painter in Liga. Painting, it seems, is still guy-stuff, not only in Germany, but in the minds of many. The painting of Julia Schmidt has little in common with the big gestures and stories of, for example, Neo Rauch, without doubt today's biggest painting star in Germany. What they have in common is a high respect for the medium, as well as for the constant testing and abatement. Painting is a fetish and a brand, however Julia Schmidt always and again sets up a distance from the painting, using inappropriate supports (industrial chipboard - MDF board), doing it down in format and content, spilling the fairly modest contents even outside the set frame of the picture into the space around it... This struggle with painting has nothing of the ferocity that we tend to associate with Germany painting either with the historical avant-gardes (Expressionism, *Der Blaue Reiter*, *Die Brücke*) or with the post-modern variants of the eighties (with *Neue Wilde*, Georg Baselitz or Jörg

Immmendorff...), rather it is adorned by slow contemplation, refinement, even a kind of asceticism.

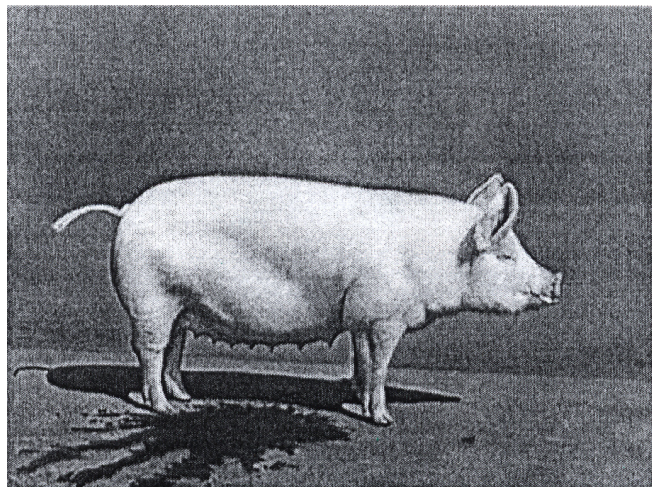
Although the painter uses the classical technique of oil paint, she never takes canvas as the support for her pictures. Formats are regularly small, even miniature, but they are painted long, with vast care and high level of craft skill. Low-key motifs (blotches, straps, bamboos, handbag clasps, details of banknotes or classical columns) are painted in minute detail, almost, we might say, in honour of painting. Still, their fragmentariness leaves an impression of unease that borders on a feeling of absurdity. In the focus of the painting is the emptied centre, whether it is to do with an enlarged and unrecognisable detail from a Caspar David Friedrich painting, an oil splotch on the road or a broken reed...

If paintings have no "grand narrative", does that mean they are also scenes without significance?

In fact, everything can be the subject for a painting, from a reference to the history of painting to the debris created during the painting of a picture. There is no special story to be told today, just as there is no new way of painting a picture. And Julia Schmidt is well aware of all this. But as long as she pulls off turning this static medium into a trap for the eye, a condenser of time and an inducer of tension, the puzzle will not stop, and neither will the need for the unriddling of it.

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CURRENT EXHIBITION



JULIA SCHMIDT, OLIVER KOSSACK, JULIUS POPP, RIGO SCHMIDT

13/07/05 - 24/09/05

UNION is pleased to present new works by emerging German artists, Julia Schmidt, Oliver Kossack, Julius Popp and Rigo Schmidt.

Julia Schmidt's paintings have a fragmentary character where emptiness stands against visual beauty and opulence. Combining art historical references with that of glamour and fashion, her paintings shift between ascetism and extravagance, and her careful focus on traces, details, omissions and shifting thematic inter-relations, which organise her work in terms of cycles, or groupings - clusters, consistently reverberate concerns with value and artifice, use and ornament.

Oliver Kossack's works are pictorial aphorisms. He inhales his surroundings, intuitively juxtaposing disparate elements with stereotypic references to (art and cultural) history. Kossack plays with the multiple associative levels of language, often seeking ostentatiously literal transcriptions in his drawings, paintings and installations. Within this heterogeneous crossover of styles, childlike drawings - seemingly naïve at first glance - operate as nasty reflections of the everyday, while fetishlike, sculptural paintings refer to a realm beyond the blatantly sexual or banally artistic. Kossack forces self-understood utterances to coil back upon themselves. Characteristically, taking the verbal (all too) literally his work functions as a catalyst of experience within the dialectic of self and society, creating a quirky cosmos of thought and image.

Julius Popp approaches scientific problems from an artistic perspective, in turn, achieving technically accomplished sculptures and installations. In collaboration with scientific institutes like the Fraunhofer Institut for Autonomous Intelligent Systems he looks for scientific systems to give expressions to his artistic thoughts. At UNION, Popp will exhibit 'Bitfall', which represents a sculptural information curtain - a waterfall made of information. The installation is created by water formed letters, words, and sentences. The information provided exists only for a certain period of time, constantly being replaced by a continuous flow of new information, representing an idea of reality that passes by.

Rigo Schmidt's works can be described as finely worked paintings in small format. They appear as isolated object studies and show technical perfection. Schmidt is inspired by scientific archives and exhibits, that are displayed in natural history museums, or other already-once exposed objects that create the foundation stone of culture and society. The exposed objects are stagnant and taken away from their original context. Schmidt examines

the constructed scientific conception of the world and of history. Bringing these objects onto canvas and converting them into paintings, Schmidt brings them back to life and poses questions about issues of representation and a media-constructed reality.

Julia Schmidt (b. 1976), Rigo Schmidt (b. 1974), Oliver Kossack (b. 1967) and Julius Popp (b. 1973) live and work in Leipzig, Germany.

Recently, Julius Popp exhibited in the Biennale of Electronic Arts 2004, Perth, Australia. Julia Schmidt is currently exhibiting in the 2nd Prague Biennial of Contemporary Art, Prague and Oliver Kossack recently exhibited in a solo show at B2, Leipzig, 2004. Currently, Rigo Schmidt is participating in a group exhibition at Wohnmaschine, Berlin.

Texts by Tina Schulz and Mark Hamilton.

For more information please contact +44 (0)20 7928 3388 or info@union-gallery.com

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Replete Void or the Other Side of Splendour

BEATRICE VON BISMARCK

Irrefutably, Julia Schmidt's work revolves around painting. Yet she delineates a central void. That is not to say that there is nothing there. Her works boast a profusion of painterly display, wealth and glamour, wastefulness and seduction, time-consuming craftsmanship, old masterly attention to detail, rich impasto, pictorial density, material diversity and an overabundance of references. All these attributes address painting, investigating and constantly referring to the medium from all sides. Schmidt approaches the matter cautiously without ever coming to a standstill by proclaiming what painting is all about. She advocates a mode of painting, which accomplishes itself during the process of searching for its own intrinsic meaning, seeking to define the medium's specifics from its outer bounds.

Schmidt guides the observer's gaze from the periphery. Although her works seem to concentrate exclusively on the centre of the picture, compositionally they incorporate the space immediately surrounding it. In *private view* (2003), Schmidt offers the controlled view into a room furnished with bourgeois accessories. Painstakingly rendered details underline the quality of the antiques - a chair, a richly ornamented table, and a painting with a decorative golden frame. Yet none of the objects are fully visible. They all hover in an incomplete state as fragments, sketchy outlines and self-references, as peripheral characters holding vacant a central area for what might be a coincidentally lost drawing of a small bird. The animal's body, rendered as a flat shape, is poised within a still unmarked, white and irregular part of the picture, uncertain as to whether it will slip in front of or behind the faded chair leg next to it. It is surrounded by smears and smudges of light grey paint, applied as if by chance, congealed in passing in an unfinished moment.

Julia Schmidt sets up her personal investigation of painting within the polarity of seemingly inattentive temporality and lavish representation. Between the extremes of asceticism and extravagance, she literally - and quite physically - tackles the medium from two sides at the same time. Schmidt's paintings are governed by notions of the fragmentary, the void and that which has not been uttered, painted or depicted, as well as by blatant visual beauty and haptic opulence. Within this system, Schmidt reveals the conditions of painting: the individual stages of making a painting, the medium's specific materials, the relationships between the act of painting, that what is painted, and the motif itself; the internal and external ties between the painter's and the observer's gaze, and the object of the painting as both a product and a fetish.

Between optic seduction and resistance, Schmidt succeeds in dividing the image from its cult status to reveal the conditions under which it may become a fetish commodity. What remains of Caspar David Friedrich's original, when a reproduction of it bearing all the marks of its prior use as a book cover is repainted - only partly - by a painter today (0.1. [nach Caspar David Friedrich], 2003), or when his figures with their backs turned to the viewer are cut out on glossy grey paper (0.1. [nylon], 2003)? Do the flowerbeds, Versace's garden sculptures and personnel (0.1. [servant], 2003), (0.1. [levelling], 2003), (0.1. [Versace 1/11], 2002) bear traces of the glamour and glitter of the world of fashion? How might the stylised painting of a magnified banknote relate to the latter's nominal value (0.1. [Fond], 2004)? Is it possible to evaluate a painting on the grounds of the waste produced during its making and presentation (0.1. [trash dump], 2003)?

Schmidt's double method of visual reduction and saturation serves to gradually reveal the processes determining aesthetic, social and economic value. Removing from the painting any unnecessary details, traces of the underlying drawing, materiality and colour, discloses their significance for the medium. On the other hand, as these formal aspects alone are an insufficient means of determining artistic value, it seems that Schmidt intends to work her way through splendour by engaging in time-consuming devotion to invaluablely minute detail. As if one could force wastefulness to reveal that which it embraces, as if splendour masks a hidden dimension that supersedes its own intrinsic value.

Notions of reduction and overabundance, abstinence and wastefulness are deployed by Schmidt as a means of revealing and deconstructing the devices of painting in a way recalling Foucault's definition of criticism. Rather than dismissing the object of investigation, Schmidt also seeks to repeatedly modify from scratch the latter's formal appearance and its determinants. This elicits a determined, painterly stance, constructively bringing a certain sceptical view of painting together with a fundamental affirmation of it.

A League of Their Own
In three short years, a group of painters
trained in Leipzig have risen from students
to superstars. By Carina Villingner.

Back in December 2000, five young German artists decided to form a group called Liga ("League") and organize an exhibition of their work in Leipzig's Steibs Hof, an elegant Art Nouveau Building formerly used by fur traders. Sponsored by a local lighting shop called Elektro Wolf, the show of more than 40 paintings by Tilo Baurilgartel, Martin Kobe, Christoph Ruckhaberle, David Schnell and Matthias Weischer received a decidedly muted response. The lone sale was Weischer's Haus I ("House I"), purchased by the Leipzig bank Sachsen LB for OM 7,000 (\$ 3,200).

It was an inauspicious debut for the painters, most of whom had just finished their graduate course work and were attending master classes at the Hochschule fur Graphik und Buchkunst, the respected Leipzig art school. Despite the academy's strong painting tradition, the program had lost much of its cachet with students, who gravitated to "hipper" fields like photography and graphic design. During one of its annual public exhibitions, the painting class had to put up a sign so that visitors and colleagues could find their ways to the studios. The next day, the words "Painting this way" had been written over with "Don't bother going there, it's boring."

As it turned out, some of the most powerful players in the art world couldn't disagree more. After the artists established their own gallery, also called Liga, in Berlin in March 2002, dealers Marianne Boesky, Jay Jopling, Rachel Lehman, David Zwirner and Iwan Wirth all made the pilgrimage to the bare, neon-lit rooms on the residential Tieckstrasse, as did such high-profile collectors as Michael Ovitz, Donald and Mera Rubell and Frieder Burda. The Liga group, which added a half-dozen other graduates from the Leipzig academy, has emerged as a full-blown phenomenon, often referred to as the "New Leipzig School."

Liga has been such a success that by the time the gallery closed this past April, nearly all painters had works in major international collections and gallery and museum shows lined up. "We have huge waiting lists," says the Liga gallery's 28-year-old director Christian Ehrentraut, who continues to work with several of the artists and will open his own space in a converted garage early next year. "There are very few works available, so we can be choosy and try to place them in distinguished, preferably public, collections.

Ehrentraut is organizing a show of young German artists, including three of the Leipzig painters, at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York from September 16 through October 5. He was also invited by Art Basel Miami Beach director Samuel Keller to apply for the fair's Art Positions section, even though the application deadline had already passed. To coincide with the December fair, the Rubell Family Collection in Miami Beach is planning a show that includes selected works by the Liga artists. Several members of the group have upcoming solo exhibitions, and Ruckhaberle is the first to have one in New York. His show opens at the LFL Gallery on June 15.

The meteoric rise of the Liga painters, who range in age from 27 to 35, has been compared to that of the Young British Artists in the last decade, "It's like back in '93, when the whole world was talking about the artists who came from Goldsmiths College in London," says Gerd Harry Lybke, owner of the gallery EIGEN + ART in Berlin and Leipzig and a close follower of Liga's movements, "Now it's the Leipzig academy."

Liga exploded onto the scene at a time when collectors were ready to embrace painting, which for years had been somewhat overshadowed by photography, film and video art. In the recent wave of figurative painting, as practiced by such prominent artists as Peter Doig, Marlene Dumas, Elizabeth Peyton, Lisa Ruyter and Luc Tuymans, these mediums continue to play a central role as a source of images. Many of the Leipzig painters also work from photographs, and there is tremendous interest in this type of painting right now. "Ten years ago, painting was totally unsexy," says Lybke "yet no one ever passed on that information to the Leipzig academy. But they did not want to know anyway."

Interest in the Liga painters has been spurred by the success of another Leipzig artist: Neo Rauch, the 44-year-old-painter whose career took off in the mid-90's, "Neo Rauch really kick-started the comeback

of nonabstract painting in Germany and in Leipzig in particular," says Lybke, who has represented Rauch since 1993. Ehrentraut, who was Lybke's assistant for three years, notes, "People were curious for more because Rauch created such a sensation." (Rauch actually taught some of the Liga artists while assisting his former professor Arno Rink.)

When the original five Liga artists decided to establish their own gallery in Berlin to showcase their work, they invited seven fellow painters from the academy to join them - Peter Busch, Tim Eitel, Tom Fabritius, Oliver Kossack, Jorg Lozek, Bea Meyer and Julia Schmidt. They rented a small space a short distance from the main cluster of galleries in Berlin-Mitte and opened in the spring of 2002 with two consecutive group shows, followed by a series of solo exhibitions for each of the artists. From the beginning, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Collectors couldn't get enough, and museum curators were stepping over each other to line up works for shows.

Early last year, Eitel was included in "deutschemalerei2003" ("German painting 2003"), a survey exhibition of more than 50 young German artists at the Frankfurter Kunstverein. The Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig mounted "Sieben mal Malerei" ("Seven Times Painting"), a show of nearly 60 works by the Liga group that ran from April through June 2003. These exhibitions in particular were heralded as confirmation of the comeback of painting in Germany.

Even though Liga came to prominence as a group, the work of its members is quite diverse, and unsurprisingly, their cohesiveness inevitably waned. "They are all very different artists, as much as they are individual personalities," says Copenhagen dealer Nicolai Wallner, who included Ruckhaberle, Weischer, Eitel, Busch, Schnell and Baumgartel in a March 2003 show. But however diverse and idiosyncratic, their work has common aspects. They paint similar subjects - landscapes, urban views and interiors, often with figures - which are usually distorted into surreal images full of strange fantasies and artificial constructions. And all are highly skilled painters, products of the Leipzig academy's training. The first two years at the school are devoted to a highly structured academic study program, with a particular emphasis on portrait and nude studies. "Visits to the local zoo to draw rhinos are more rule than exception," says Ehrentraut.

Founded in 1764, the Leipzig academy is one of Germany's oldest art schools. Its tradition of figurative painting dates back to 1961, when the first painting course was established. Some of the former East Germany's most important painters, such as Werner Tubke, Wolfgang Mattheuer and Bernhard Heisig, have taught at the academy, and in the 1960s and '70s, their students included Liga teachers Wolfgang Ebersbach, Sighard Gille and Arno Rink. Since the reunification in 1990, Leipzig has attracted students from all over Germany. "It is a complete misconception that this is an East German phenomenon," says Lybke.

When the gallery closed in late April, it had achieved even more for the group than initially expected. "It was always intended to be a two-year project. We want to avoid just going round in circles, and in the past two years we established great contacts with galleries, museums and collectors, which is a great starting point for the future," says Ehrentraut. When he opens his own gallery in February 2005, he plans to represent Baumgartel, Kobe and Ruckhaberle, as well as the painter duo Abetz & Drescher and Hanover installation artist and sculptor Stefan Roigk.

Other Leipzig painters have signed on with galleries in various cities. EIGEN + ART is working with Eitel, Weischer and Schnell. Busch has joined the Leipzig gallery Kleindienst. White Cube in London is talking to Kobe about doing a show. And the list goes on.

The last time a group of young German painters shot to meteoric fame was in the 1980s, when the so-called Junge Wilde, including Rainer Fetting and Salome, enjoyed a moment of celebrity before disappearing almost as quickly. Some worry that a similar fate could befall the Leipzig group.

Though young, these artists are savvy and well-grounded. All of them, with the exception of Eitel, who spends part of his time in Berlin, still live and work in Leipzig. "They are handling it very well and keeping level-headed," Ehrentraut says. "They concentrate on their work and don't let themselves be pressured by too many shows and the need for increased output."

For this talented group, the pressures are sure to intensify with their growing international stature. "Every time need its heroes," quips Lybke. "We are witnessing the rise of a new generation of artists."

“I believe that art is recording, I think it’s reporting” [*]

In discussing the practice of Julia Shmidt one cannot avoid her inherent resistance to the seemingly self-assured repetition of ‘serial work’ and the implicit conformity of an explicit ‘trademark style’ in the context of painting today. Shmidt decides instead on traces, details, omissions and shifting thematic interrelations which organize her work in terms of cycles, or groupings –clusters, and which consistently reverberate concerns ‘Nith value and artifice, use and ornament.

Schmidt deploys the materiality of paint to support these formal, contextual and idea-driven investigations in surfaces rendered from high-gloss or densely layered murk, switching from opulent detail to vacant or blurred frame –a procedure that disturbs, willfully instilling a tension in the experience of viewing. This serves to disrupt the smooth processes of easy readings, foregrounding the role of the viewer, and crucially echoes the rough problematic of (a) paintings potential as discursive device or entropy as mute, exclusive decoration.

Mark Hamilton

[*] Francis Bacon as quoted by Jan Thorn Prikker and Gerhard Richter / “Writings 1962 – 1993/The Daily Practice of Painting” / p. 198/ published by Thames and Hudson / Anthony d’Offay Gallery, 1995