

A moving plan B – chapter ONE

“A moving plan B – chapter ONE” sounds like the precise outline of some kind of extensive array, but also like a flexible alternative option in the face of an uncertain future. So is it about clear instructions or the freedom of choice? With this particular arrangement of words Thomas Scheibitz has managed to incorporate both of the above aspects and a lot more besides. We as outsiders have no way of knowing whether the title inspired the exhibition of the same name, or whether it was developed after the show had been conceived.

The conceptual premise of this exhibition was in any case based upon the observation that sketches and drawings can serve distinctly different purposes – but can just as easily merge into one another. Scheibitz has selected works that are open to a wide range of classifications and interpretations. This also means that the pieces chosen from within the participating artist’s oeuvre can vary greatly in formal terms, and are in fact intended to be extremely diverse in order to reflect the broad scope of their respective artistic output. The spectrum ranges from almost unconsciously drawn squiggles – reminiscent of telephone doodles – to procedural instructions, to fully autonomous pictorial and literary works. Some of the exhibits display a playful, light-hearted spirit of incompleteness, while others confidently assert themselves as works of art in their own right.

Over and above this, the formulation of the exhibition concept and the compilation of works reflect Scheibitz’s interest in time-based phenomena such as the moment of the idea, the process of execution or the relationship between time-dependent and time-independent media. He has essentially compiled a selection of sketches and drawings that show how creative producers translate a line of thought into something visible and enable others to share in their pictorial, lexical or structural recordings and inventions: sketches that exist only as mental or oral concepts are therefore excluded. Acoustic and mathematical sketches have likewise been deliberately omitted, although a sketched musical notation by Manfred Kuttner is included. Of no importance in terms of the selection of works was the protagonists’ choice of recording media: the question of whether they used pencils, coloured crayons, felt pens or fineliners, whether a work was executed on drawing paper or paper napkins, or whether it was produced with the aid of collage, writing or technical devices was completely irrelevant. The choice of creative means is determined by the protagonists’ intentions and the materials available, and is ultimately less interesting than the process that is thereby set in motion.

A further thematic thread is formed by the fact that not only the emerging field of study, but also the wide range of subject areas explored is an extremely important element of Scheibitz’s own work. Thus the participants in the exhibition come from a variety of different backgrounds such as visual art, architecture, graphic novels, film and literature: Dirk Bell, Bogdan Bogdanović, Carlfriedrich Claus, Robert Crumb, Tacita Dean, Thomas Demand, Öyvind Fahlström, Hirschvogel, Hermann Glöckner, Mathew Hale, Lisa Junghanß, Thomas Kiesewetter, Manfred Kuttner, Maria Lassnig, A.R. Penck, Manfred Pernice, Václav Požárek, Eugen Schönebeck, Arno Schmidt, Paul Sharits, Peter Stauss and Reinhard Voigt. On the one hand this illustrates the broad range of influences from which Scheibitz draws. His own works show that in addressing the fundamental questions of what an image is and what it means to use or invent an image, he starts out from an expanded concept of the image that includes pictorial forms and use contexts as diverse as logos, manga, typography, cartography and of course works of art. On the other hand, the approaches examined in this exhibition reveal themselves to be working methods that are not dependent on any particular realm of scientific, knowledge or cultural production, nor are they confined to a specific era. The fact that all the participants were born in the twentieth century serves only to restrict the overwhelming abundance of material and is not intended to suggest any line of argument.

The purposes served by the exhibited works include the documentation of observations and the visualisation of ideas and concepts. These representations can serve as a memory aid or working basis for the person's own use, or as an instructional aid, explanation or proposal that is intended to convey something to other people in an easily comprehensible manner. In this form of 'acting with the image', the focus is on the act of showing the sketch, outline or drawing, and the image is used to convey information, aid persuasion or prove something. Of particular interest in this context are four different dimensions of meaning with respect to representation, as discussed within philosophy and psychology: representation as an imagined concept in the sense of a mental state with cognitive content; as an image that reproduces, is derived from or relates to an earlier mental state; as a structure-preserving representation in the form of images, symbols or signs of all descriptions; and as a proxy.¹ In addition, the exhibited works display a kind of 'acting through the image' whereby the act of production already has relevance and – as a new artefact – the image itself generates reality.

*On Coming From A Broken Home (Pt. 1)*²

In art-historical terms, drawing was not recognised as an artistic genre in its own right until a relatively late stage, and even now the question as to the primacy of the line or of colour continues to provoke heated debate. Throughout many periods of art history, drawing was considered to be the most direct expression of what an artist perceives or imagines, and spontaneity thus became its main criterion. Current art theory generally brackets the sketch and the drawing together:³ a drawing can accordingly be employed as a preparatory work in the form of a study, sketch, design or preliminary drawing in the service of the other artistic genres. As a construction drawing it provides the precise basis for a production process: in the exhibition, this can clearly be seen in the works of Manfred Pemice. In these almost technical drawings, the reflective relationship to the idea is manifested in its rigorous implementation, which nevertheless cannot deny its own artistic merit. Thomas Kiesewetter is represented by classical sculptor's drawings: here the boundary between production process instructions and artistic rendering is more blurred. By contrast, a sketchily executed drawing may provide a first overview or represent a gradual move towards establishing a plan. It can be the attempt to give concrete form to an idea, to embody a concept in a tangible medium or to construct a design. This is not necessarily a matter of accuracy or formal nuance, but rather a way of keeping note of key thoughts or impressions. A sketch can just as easily take the form of a collage, a photographic snapshot, an *objet trouvé* or an object. It is a medium of expression and emotion as well as a memory aid. This presentation clearly shows that sketches can be fascinating artefacts. Drawings can also be considered as the implementation of an idea, as autonomous artworks and as the actual artistic achievement. The medium of drawing involves the accentuation of contour and line: the more succinctly the depiction is reduced to its essence, the more the message becomes condensed into a code. The fragmentary nature of drawing is rooted in this possibility of reducing the form to the mere suggestion of a few lines, whereby the individuality of the artist's style plays an important role: the graphic trace renders the draughtsman's hand visible and thus conveys a sense of intimate proximity to the creator of the work.

*I'm waiting with the ballpoint pen for ideas to strike*⁴

The stimulus of the initial idea can be a long-awaited motivating force. For Maria Lassnig, whose work is included in the current exhibition, drawing as a medium is "closest to the moment" and "closest to the idea".⁵ More than any other artistic genre, it allows the immediate transformation of perception into artistic design. It is precisely this quality that makes drawing the perfect medium for Lassnig's rigorously practised self-observation, her analysis and depiction of physicality and the resulting images of consciousness.

The fact that a drawing can be the very first graphic record of creative inspiration effectively raised its art-historical standing. In the

¹ See Kerstin Behrke, "Repräsentation", in: Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 8, Basel 1992, cols. 790–853.

² Gil Scott-Heron, "On Coming From A Broken Home", from the album *I'm New Here*, London, XL Recordings, 2010.

³ See for example *Der Brockhaus Kunst. Künstler, Epochen, Sachbegriffe*, Leipzig/Mannheim 2001, 2nd revised edition, pp. 1256–8.

⁴ "I'm waiting with the ballpoint pen for ideas to strike, I'm waiting waiting waiting until it's time to return [...] I'm waiting for the dopamines that have been internally promised". Bixa Bargeld, "Ich warte", from the album *Alles Wieder Offen* by the Einstürzende Neubauten, Berlin, Potomak, 2007.

⁵ Maria Lassnig, in: Julia Friedrich (ed.), *Maria Lassnig. In the Mirror of Possibilities. Watercolours and Drawings from 1947 to the Present*, Ostfildern 2009, p. 7.

early seventeenth century, Federico Zuccaro proclaimed the primacy of drawing by placing the idea (*concetto*) at the very beginning of the creative process. The drawing was considered to be the freshest and most spontaneous expression of the “disegno interno”, the inner idea or mental image that is formed by the creative imagination and divine inspiration. According to Zuccaro, the mental act that is articulated in the drawing (*disegno*) is the necessary external form of the idea. By comparing the idea to the divine act of creation, he placed greater value upon drawing than on its subsequent artistic elaboration. Immanuel Kant also regarded drawing as coming closest to ideas. In his opinion, the “art of drawing” was the basis of all other pictorial arts because it could penetrate much further into the region of ideas and could therefore expand the field of intuition much further than was possible for the other arts.⁶ This echoes a classical view that dates back to antiquity, whereby the completeness of an object is trans-aesthetically equated with its beauty. While colour may be able to enliven the object for sensation, it cannot – as the drawing does – make it worthy of being intuited and beautiful.⁷ This point of view also determines Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s acknowledgement of the transfer of the artist’s spirit into the manual dexterity that is peculiar to drawing, which sets before us in the production of a moment everything contained within the artist’s spirit. The drawing is thus related to the “ideal”.⁸ The emphasis upon the idea as origin is also found in the Romantic notion of the fragment. In contrast to Hegelian dialectics, however, the particular aesthetic and epistemological appeal of the fragment lies in its incompleteness: this involves a process that is open-ended in principle and also underlies the enigmatic and ‘event character’ of the artwork. The concept of the fragmentariness of the artwork is taken up again by Adorno in the twentieth century when he writes about the incommensurability, the aporia and the event character of the artwork, whereby these features are also reflected in his own essayistic style: this logic of the incomplete is retraced by the philosopher Marcus Steinweg in his essay for this artist’s book.

*Grinding Process*⁹

Although Scheibitz’s fascination with the moment of the initial idea places him on the threshold of conceptual art, his own work also reflects a direct engagement with the material. Materialisation increases the number of expressive dimensions, heightens the expressive force and gives visibility to the working process in all the exhibited works. This may begin with the searching, capturing, tentative drawing of lines or the handling of materials in a collage. In sketches and drawings, the particular observation, the specific view of phenomena and the chain of association are ‘outlined’ along with the concept, the thoughts and the struggle to achieve expression. From the sketch to the planning record, from the sensualistic/naturalistic depiction to the reflection of visions, the media-based trace of complex reflective processes is materialised during the process of rendering the idea visible. This visualisation not only represents but also generates reality, if the process of producing a graphic work is conceived as “depictive action”¹⁰. In Dirk Bell’s artistic practice, for example, the sensuousness inherent within the process of drawing is virtually constitutive. The nature of his approach reflects an interest in surrealist methods that seek to transcend reality by way of undirected production processes.

Scheibitz abstracts the broad spectrum of influences that he draws from film, music, literature, architecture, cartoons, advertising, art history and his everyday surroundings by incorporating them into his personal repertoire of forms, thereby combining his view upon them and their symbolic disposition. And vice versa, he perceives the world – as does the recipient who is accustomed to viewing the artist’s works – through the schema of this artistic structuring. Creating paintings and sculptures was the original goal of Scheibitz’s work. Only gradually did his free drawings emancipate themselves in all their limitlessness as regards artistic means, subject matter and forms of expression to become a body of work in their own right. The same applies to photography. Today Scheibitz allows the photographic images he creates out of an interest in structure, the thoughts he records in a diary-like manner, the first ideas that are quickly put down on paper and the details of their development to form an independent and highly fascinating cosmos.

And that’s not all: with this artist’s book Scheibitz has also documented the “moving plan B” with

⁶ See Immanuel Kant, “Critique of the Power of Judgment”, ed. Paul Guyer, New York 2000, p. 207.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁸ See Hegel’s *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, Oxford 1975, p. 838.

⁹ The Mekins, “Grinding Process”, from the album *26 Songs*, Alameda, Ipeca Recordings, 2003. Originally released on the album *Six Songs*, 1986.

¹⁰ See Pierre Sachs, *Idea materialis: Entwurfsdenken und Darstellungshandeln. Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Skizzieren und Modellieren*, Berlin 2002.

respect to the exhibition of the same name. At the outset there was an outline of the exhibition concept, and by including the printed lists of subsequently compiled publications and the envisaged group of artists, Scheibitz reveals his initial idea and the modifications that took place right up to the point when the exhibition reached its final form.

*The Knowledge*¹¹

A shared feature of sketches, drawings, plans and written works is the fact that they can be used to record and save data or to preserve and impart knowledge. They also lend themselves to the reorganisation and reformulation of experiences and thoughts, in other words they can serve as a means of knowledge in the making: "Writing and drawing must also be regarded as *epistemic procedures*, which in the act of recording participate in the revelation of objects of knowledge"¹². At the present time, therefore, the description of design processes and presentation techniques is increasingly shifting into the focus of image studies. Scheibitz named one of his paintings and one of his first exhibitions *Ansicht und Plan von Toledo* (View and Plan of Toledo): with this title – borrowed from El Greco – he draws attention to the fact that the translation of a perceived world into an artificial one is equivalent to an instrumental process of cognition. In his unique work *View and Plan of Toledo* (1610–14), El Greco adopts a revolutionary approach in addressing the role of the documentary image: the arrangement of the houses and the depicted map are highly abstract and do not correspond to reality, but instead take second place to the compositional quality of the painting. The plan of the city has been included in the composition as a kind of proof, whereby the three-dimensional cityscape is again depicted in two dimensions. Scheibitz continues this line of thought in the current exhibition with the inclusion of Tacita Dean's storyboards, which show how moving images can be reduced to a two-dimensional design: Dean's works on paper are hand-drawn production plans that make it possible for the viewer to comprehend the conceptual development of a filmic idea.

*System*¹³

The surrealist, mythologist, formalist, Gnostic, former partisan, writer, university lecturer and urbanologist Bogdan Bogdanović provides perhaps the most extreme example here of the fact that Scheibitz has the greatest regard for artists who assert an individual concept of the work – independently of stylistic definitions – and whose output offers the widest possible range of exploration. Of particular interest to him, however, are artists who favour a combination of pictoriality and writing. These include writers who regard the visual presentation of their text as essential to their method, and artists who make the pictoriality of language the focus of their creative practice. Examples of this kind of approach can be seen here in Lisa Junghanß's self-dissolving text sequences, in the language-based images and written works of Carlfriedrich Claus or in the linguistic collages of Arno Schmidt, who described himself as a "mosaic artist" and "word mason"¹⁴. According to Walter Benjamin, writing and language represent a particularly complex level of human mimetic behaviour. They form an "archive of nonsensuous similarity"¹⁵ due to the fact that entire layers of history are sedimented within them, above all in language.

*Should I Stay Or Should I Go*¹⁶

A moving plan B – Chapter ONE presents Scheibitz's very personal perspective on the work of fellow artists. On the one hand, this subjective view offers an intimate insight into his own artistic practice, while on the other, the presentation opens up a broad spectrum of associative meanings with respect to sketches and drawings, their use across the disciplines, their importance for pictorial invention,

11 Lewis Harris, "The Knowledge", from the album *Rhythm Nation 1814* by Janet Jackson, New York, A&M Records, 1989.

12 Christoph Hoffmann, "Vorwort", in: Ingrid B. Wittmann (eds.), *Daten sichern. Schreiben und Zeichnen als Verfahren der Aufzeichnung*, Zürich/Berlin 2008, p.7.

13 Terry Lynn, "System", from the album *Kingston Logic 2.0*, Cologne, Phree Music/Groove Attack, 2008.

14 See Arno Schmidt, "Sind wir noch ein Volk der Dichter & Denker?". Source: www.arno-schmidt-stiftung.de/arno2_07.html (Retrieved on 30 July 2010).

15 See Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty" (1933), in: Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931–1934*, Cambridge, MA 2005, p.722.

16 Mick Jones, "Should I Stay Or Should I Go", 7" single from the album *Combat Rock* by The Clash, New York, Epic, 1982.

documentation and organisation, their epistemic potential and their inherent dynamic/processual aspects.

For the curator of this exhibition, at least, the importance of drawings and sketches cannot be overstated: if a fire were to break out in his studio, the first thing Thomas Scheibitz would save would be his sketchbooks. He is currently researching suitable protective case systems.