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Artist of the week 106: Thomas Scheibitz

The German artist's arsenal of painted fragments come together in an artificial world where order is forever being built up, toppled and re-imagined

A Moving Plan B by Thomas Scheibitz View larger picture A Moving Plan B by Thomas Scheibitz, currently on show at Sprüth Magers, London. Photograph: Sprüth Magers

Thomas Scheibitz is creating his own universe. Its building blocks are geometric oddities in zingy colours, spread across painting, sculpture, drawing and the exhibition catalogues that he regularly designs himself. Wonky rhomboids, emphatic triangles, circles and zigzags suggest people, animals, landscapes, letters and logos. Yet the illusion only takes you so far: his picture planes are flat, and showy brushstrokes jar with smooth surfaces while fabricated MDF, Plexiglas, wood or steel objects bear similar splashes of paint and often seem strangely hollow, more like props from a kids' TV show than weighty sculptures.

The German artist has been developing a grammar of simple shapes since he first shot to success in the late 1990s, having studied at East Germany's famed Dresden Academy. Yet if this work is instantly recognisable, its sources are not. Scheibitz has described what he does as a "'second nature' nature", derived from other man-made worlds like comics, advertising, magazines and art. Making connections between almost anything – a Roman bath, 16th century painting, a Herzog film, a fashion ad – he distils dizzyingly hybrid ideas and inspirations into visual essentials. Or so it seems at first.

If Scheibitz shows us the act of creating illusions – bird heads grown from circles and triangles, buildings built from squares of colour – then the coherent visual order he suggests with his repeated forms is also something of a masquerade. From his shapes' journeys from artwork to artwork, to the associations he makes between ideas and his archive of images, his work's development is intuitive, and intriguingly opaque to anyone else.

Scheibitz is interested in how the ways we structure the world are always mutating. The 2002 sculpture AB Bank, for instance, looks like a collapsing wendy house built from letters painted in an office palette of greys and blues. Language becomes physical and clunky, while the weird, composite thing itself seems to hover in the uncertainty of "what is it?" The painting 90 Elements, from 2007, similarly riffs on one of the most fundamental systems of classification. It references the standard periodic table, but its neo-cubist jumble of boxes are unmarked.

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Why We Like Him: His brilliantly titled 2008 show, *The Goldilocks Zone*, in Berlin, referenced what scientists have dubbed the perfect conditions for new life – not too hot or cold. Its sculptures looked like dimly recalled brand logos and just unreadable fonts – a breeding ground of signs and symbols.

Better by half: Scheibitz's studio is divided into two, like the left and right sides of the brain. One contains the bare elements of his practice: unpainted sculptures. The other, where paint is applied to sculptures and canvases, is a mess of colour.

Where Can I See Him? His two-venue exhibition *A Moving Plan B* is currently at Sprüth Magers, London where he is showing new work, and at the Drawing Room where he has selected work by other artists who inspire him.