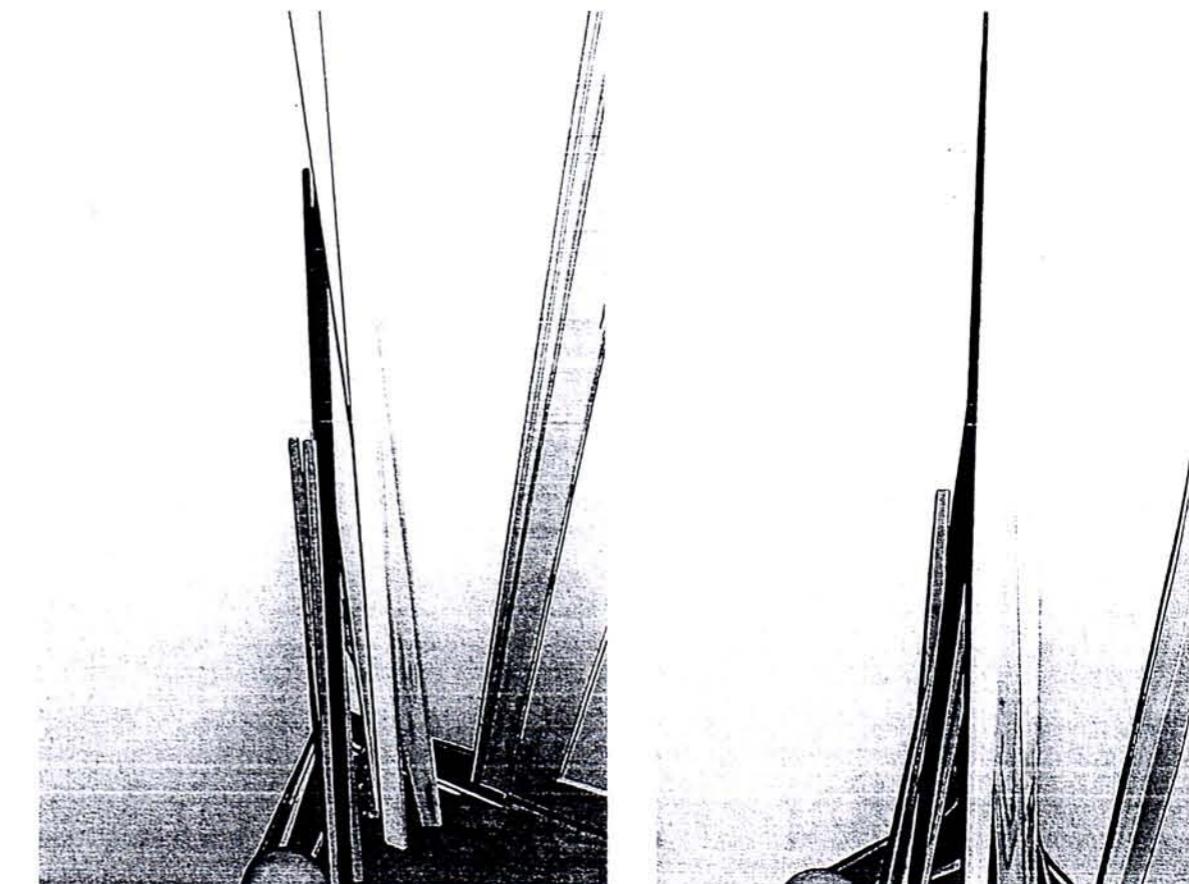


* Thomas Scheibitz, James Hall, 2006, oil on canvas / olio su tela, 280 x 480 cm. Courtesy the artist / Galerie Tammert and / e Tonya Bonksdar Gallery, New York

* Tim Etel Liegendorf, 2005, oil on canvas / olio su tela, 250 x 190 cm. Orlitz Family Collection / Collezione Orlitz Family, Los Angeles. Courtesy Galerie EIGEN + ART, Leipzig/Berlin / Lopis/Berlino
Foto by / Foto di Uwe Walter. Copyright VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany / Germania

Berlin is a city of outsiders. Dubbed "Knapsack Berliners" with affectionate condescension by the indigenous population, these "foreigners" also include thousands of artists. Many of the current developments in the Berlin art scene are essentially due to this inflow of energy from beyond the city limits, and numerous well-known international artists are happy to include "based in Berlin" as an entry in their biography. Not only does the phrase sound trendy, but it also represents an influx of talent that is contributing to a not unsurprising

phenomenon—namely the restoration of Berlin as a cosmopolitan city thanks to the spirit of art! Within this transformation, it's especially young graduates coming from the academies in Dresden and Leipzig who are heating up the scene; though the success of many of these artists has less to do with their place of origin than with the extraordinary artistic quality and the contemporary relevance of their works. They are not the chroniclers of the former German Democratic Republic; their works are quite clearly poetic loci. While artists such as Eberhard Hawekost, Frank Nitsche or



* Eberhard Hawekost, Sonder 1-2 2006, oil on canvas / olio su tela, 150 x 100 cm, each / ciascuna
Courtesy Galerie Gehr / Lehmann, Dresden / Dresda. Photo by / Foto di Werner Hebeleinstaff

Thomas Scheibitz have for years now been setting up pictorial archives in which they collect or create photographs from magazines for, in the case of Hawekost and Scheibitz, their own photographic series as well). The painted representations of these photographs are not only the fruit of much research but also of fantasy and inventive reorganization of original material. There are certainly references to the contemporary here which are expressed in a characteristic style that is more or less realistic, and which bring to light certain facets of current relationships in the world, but here as well, it is in no way a matter of reportage or purely representational processes, but rather of atmospherically dense images whose poetic elements usher into view the chillness or melancholy or outrageously naive cheerfulness of our existence. In a wonderfully light but mysterious manner, one which is to some extent profound and clearly political, Eberhard Hawekost combines formal elements from advertising photography with manifestations of a delight which also has to do with purely abstract chromatic and formal relationships. These images somehow seem to be familiar to us, and yet there emerges from the relationships between them created by Hawekost something which remains open. We experience an italicization that, as in the panning of a camera, links various breaks in mood and then flows into a not entirely harmless prevailing

tone, just like the pulsing, eroding cloud of sound that Hawekost enthusiastically emits throughout the room when, from time to time, he does a turn as a DJ. Thomas Scheibitz had already become an icon of contemporary art at a young age, as much for the diffusion of his pictures into the surrounding space, as for the construction of dialogic relationships between pictures and colored sculptures (e.g. his spatial concept for the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 2005). He thereby posits a central problem of sculptural art in a new and extremely vital manner. While color is extended from painterly, graphical or photographic concepts into three-dimensionality, it takes on new functions and modes of manifestation—in the case of Scheibitz, in a breathtakingly constructive, often seemingly rough, but always very solidly crafted mix of Eastern modernism, utopian dimensionality, and reminiscences of handicraft sessions and do-it-yourself architecture in the sense of a retreat into primal naturalness. With Frank Nitsche, everyday reality is constructively laid out with fire, but is devoid of interiority, and then staged in a marvelously free and stylistically unprecedented manner. The coloration of his pictures is bright, evincing a high degree of freshness, almost transparent. These images are unconscious and wordless, as if they were capturing sounds or



Martin Eder *Im Heist* 2005, oil on canvas / olio su tela, 220 x 150 cm. Collection of / Collezione di Mimi and Eric Budeman, Denver, Colorado. Courtesy Galerie EIGEN + ART, Leipzig/Berlin / Lipsia/Berlino. Photo by / Foto di Ilse Walter. Copyright VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany / Germania.

opening up acoustic manifestations, as if they were a "considerable time," in a different time space which lifts them out of the surrounding flow of time and tosses them into their own temporal continuum. Nietzsche's pictures encapsulate, expand and compress reality in the extent to which it is malleable and unrepresentable. Similarly, this dimension really phenomena which occupy the attention of Gerhard Richter, who stated: "The act of painting, guided by the unconscious, to the extent that it is speechless, requires and shapes a space in which this mute aspect can occur—and which is not to be comprehended as language but rather in activity, and which nonetheless enters into a social relationship and also restores, hauls in, summons up an event." In Berlin, one often hears the reproach that the new German painting is "more conservative." The new Berliner Tim Eitel, for example, who studied in Leipzig, has defined his painterly position in an investigation of the possibilities open to contemporary painting and between the poles represented by Caspar David Friedrich and Piet Mondrian. In his recent works, Martin Eder, a graduate of the Dresden Academy who likewise now resides in Berlin, responds to the slick and artificial posing of so-and-so in film and television. Here it is not a matter of the old

conservative model of a Bohemian dandy who obscures cloying gestures, but rather of the use of kitsch as a model of appropriation. Already in his railcar-blood-death-metal installations, Eder showed his capability to represent the peculiar strengths of an admittedly rather melancholic subculture in an amusing manner. And that is supposed to be neo-conservative? Is it not rather the case that these young painters are rather concerned with an audacious urge for validation which constantly seeks new motifs in order to destabilize agreements? These young artists present us with a distanced attitude with regards to the infantile culture of jokers. We find ourselves confronted with a mode of painting that quite consciously takes a long hard look at the pictorial worlds of advertising, of the aesthetic of television and video, as well as photography, but which is also always conscious of its own historical and media-related substrate, and which furthermore, extends far out into the surrounding space, so that a clear and tangible mixed form arises. It makes no sense to conjur up a "painting beyond the end of painting" when a conventional practice is played off against a conceptual praxis, as if Picasso were entering into a race against Duchamp. And it is not true that conceptual art is always absurd or that any type of belly painting spread

over the body, on the other hand, is the storehouse of sensuality. Avant-garde or retro-garde, being in or out of the stylistic upswing, shifting forwards or backwards along the time-axis—these movements are not pairs of opposites in art, for "vision" is variable and interwoven with the changing types of knowledge and modes of presenting culture. This emigration of creative minds, which the American economist Richard Florida, in his book *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2002), believes he is able to perceive at a point in time when Berlin has actually caught up with London and New York, is definitely not realizable yet when it comes to the art world. In spite of global competition for the most creative persons, many of the recipients of scholarships remain in Berlin after their year of residence, including artists from Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Japan. The liveliness of the academic tradition in Germany is evidenced by the fact that some of the artists of the younger and youngest generations have not only taken on, but also have a say in, the artistic discourse that is being carried out on an international level. Incidentally, Berlin style has also been manipulated in the most individual way by some of the newly arrived artists who, while biding their time until they hit it big, become DJs or open a cellar club or a retro furniture shop. The possibilities in this regard seem endless, and with failed enterprise too. The soundtrack for this Berlin full of upheavals is provided by neither clubs nor radio stations, by neither the theatrical machos of Rammstein nor the numerous Turkish rappers of the Kanak front. Berlin does not need to be shrunk, aggrandized, thrust forward, politicized, deconstructed, "rebalanced" by new musical or linguistic trends; it does not need to be carted off to a museum as a cardboard oracle because it is artistically dangerous. This city simply desires to be listened to and to be molded by this listening process, for example, by Guido Möbius. His "mini-symphonies of the metropolis" achieve their radicality through being so literal. There is much clicking and crackling on his most recent, wonderfully elegiac recording. There is also a lot of violin music. The popular Berlin sound-crafter has now himself taken on the trend of using string arrangements, the popularity of which continues to grow amongst young people. The melodic surfaces, woven by tender fingers out of minimal electronic elements, which Möbius has long strived with, have now, on his new album *Dishock* (2005), been linked to trembling, singing tones from string instruments that are sometimes rhythmically bowed, sometimes extensively plucked. Comical pizzicati that sound like baby chicks afflicted with hiccups are woven into a guitar feedback that is manipulated in a micro-fine manner; contrabass bows elatedly plop upon extremely thick strings, while down below there blazes shimmering and disruptive noise. This is my Berlin—a fluid city with the character of a dream.

Christoph Tannert is an art critic and curator. Since 2000 he is the Director of Künstlerhaus Bethanien Artists in Residence Center in Berlin, where he lives and works. Translation by George Frederick Takis



• Martin Eder *La Mathematique du Slip*, 2006, oil on canvas / olio su tela, 240 x 180 cm. Courtesy the artist / l'artista, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and / e Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig/Berlin / Lipsia Berlino. Photo by / Foto di Uwe Walter. Copyright VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany / Germania.