

**THOMAS**

**SCHEIBITZ**

# ABOUT THE ARTIST

Thomas Scheibitz was born in 1968 in Radeberg, a small town in the German state of Saxony, formally part of the German Democratic Republic. Scheibitz's father worked as a stonemason and the artist himself trained as a toolmaker for five years. It was not until the early 1990s that Scheibitz attended the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts to pursue his artistic career.

After three years preparation at evening school in anticipation of his application, Thomas Scheibitz was accepted at the Dresden Academy to study Fine Art. Here, the artist developed a distinctive approach to painting and sculpture and experimented with abstract methods of working.

Scheibitz studied alongside other notable German painters including Eberhard Havekost and Frank Nitsche who, like Scheibitz, both began exploring the relationship between figurative representation and abstraction in their work.

After initial exhibitions in Dresden, Berlin, London and New York, Scheibitz has risen to international acclaim.

He holds a professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and currently lives and works in Berlin. Scheibitz's Berlin studio is the size of two bus depots and allows the artist to keep one side for painting and the other purely for his sculptural work.



# ABOUT THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The German Democratic Republic, or East Germany as it was known in the West, was established in 1949 from an area of Soviet occupied Germany. East Berlin was the capital of the GDR. As West Berlin remained part of the Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany, the city was the subject of conflict.

The GDR's economy was centrally planned, and predominantly state owned. A subsidy system was used to keep the cost for food basics, rent and transport very low. Although it couldn't match the financial system of the FRG, the GDR became one of the largest and most stable economies in the communist world focusing its attention on the electronics, chemicals and plastics industries.

Successful entry to East German universities was very limited. Aged seventeen, state-selected pupils would attend an extended secondary school, six days a week, for four years. Alongside their academic timetable, students participated in ideological and propaganda-fuelled activities and male students served in the military. Between 1950 and 1990, the GDR's population declined by more than two million. As many of the emigrants were young, well-educated people, their defection weakened the state economically. The government tried to stop people leaving by fortifying its western borders and, in 1961, established the Berlin Wall. Hundreds of people were killed by border guards trying to escape.

The East German regime started to falter in May 1989 following the removal of Hungary's border fence which opened a hole in the Iron Curtain. It caused an exodus of thousands of East Germans fleeing to the FRG and Austria via Hungary. The Peaceful Revolution, a series of protests by East Germans, led to the GDR's first free elections and to negotiations between the GDR and FRG. The German reunification process, which united East and West Germany, formally concluded in October 1990.



# ABOUT THE WORK

ONE-Time Pad features over two hundred Scheibitz paintings, sculptures and drawings, all produced in the last five years, and exhibited across BALTIC's Levels 3 and 4.

Scheibitz planned the show in collaboration with BALTIC using maquettes of the exhibition spaces. Level 3 concentrates on large-scale painting and portraiture whereas Level 4 presents more recent sculptures and a series of preparatory drawings.

The exhibition explores Thomas Scheibitz's relationship with the **human figure** and how his layering of simple, geometric shapes represent objects, scenes and people that fluctuate between **figuration** and **abstraction**.

Scheibitz takes inspiration from Renaissance imagery and Medieval engravings as well as contemporary visual culture such as film, literature, music, advertising and architecture.

The exhibition also offers an intriguing insight into the artist's working process giving the chance to view and explore Scheibitz's **archive** of source material on Level 3. This secondary collection of everyday objects, drawings, magazines, newspaper clippings, toys, memos and books provides the artist with inspiration for both his sculptures and paintings.



# ABOUT THE WORK

ONE-Time Pad, the title of an exhibited artwork, as well as the whole show, refers to a method of encryption developed in the 1880s and used to transmit secret messages during the Cold War and World War II.

Coding is an important theme in Schebitz's work. He invites us to unlock his own geometric code, presented through a series of recurring shapes, lines and letters embedded within his colourful compositions.

In cryptography, a 'one-time pad' system is a randomly generated book of numbers used to encrypt a message. The message is decrypted by the receiver using a matching one-time pad and the same starting point. A one-time pad should be used only once, hence the name, and then destroyed. Theoretically, randomly encrypted messages are impossible to decipher without the key. Analysing a succession of messages, for example, is useless because each encryption is unique and bears no relation to the next; this makes a pattern impossible to detect. The one-time pad system is the first, and only, encryption algorithm ever proven to be unbreakable.

Schebitz likens the one-time pad system to his own experiences as a German artist; consistently translating his thoughts, ideas and words into English to be understood.



# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Level 3 includes a collection of the artist's archive material. Scheibitz uses these photos, newspaper clippings, toys, ceramics and found objects as inspiration for the forms and structures in his paintings and sculptures.

This secondary material is usually laid out in Scheibitz's studio in boxes, cabinets and on tabletops.

*I have to be able to transform or translate the source material in some way, in which case it doesn't necessarily have to be kept in the form of an organised archive.<sup>1</sup>*

In one of the cabinets Scheibitz has painted a selection of objects with yellow paint. This is intended to neutralise their original colour, emphasising their shape instead.

- Examine the objects in the vitrines at the far end of Level 3
- What similarities and differences can you see between the objects?
- How does placing these objects in a glass case change their meaning and/or value?
- What objects would you include in your inspirational vitrines?
- Why do you think Scheibitz chose yellow paint? What does it remind you of?
- What colour would you choose if you were to paint these objects and why?



# IN MY OPINION

Many of the objects included in the vitrines are everyday items. Some of the more intriguing things in this archive include a walnut, a Lego skeleton, a plastic monkey, a chopstick rest, a tiny sea urchin, a polystyrene gourd, a plastic starfish and a World Trade Center keyring.

*Ultimately, however, it doesn't matter whether it's a Michaelangelo drawing of an elbow or the label from my bottle of mineral water...these are first of all compared on the same level. They both play the same role in [the] visual experience.*<sup>2</sup>

- Pick an object from one of the vitrines. Walk around the cabinet and look at it from as many different angles as possible.  
Look longer / Look again / Look closer / Look differently
- Write down a list of fifteen words to describe your object.
- Imagine that you are an explorer discovering your object for the first time. Write a short descriptive paragraph to tell the world about your find. Remember, other people have never seen this object before so use as much detail as possible.
- Choose a mystery object from one of the vitrines; one you have never seen before. Use your imagination to decide what this object is, give it a name and a purpose. Write a gallery label or catalogue entry about it. Remember to include detailed descriptions of its history, when and how it was made and who might use it.
- Choose another object. Imagine that it is alive and has a personality of its own. What does it do when no one else is around? How would it interact with the other objects in the cabinet? Write a script for an imaginary conversation you have had with your object.



# IN MY OPINION

The human figure is central to Thomas Scheibitz's work and a theme that has pre-occupied the artist for many years. He builds up layers of recurring and purposely-placed shapes and shading to create the suggestion of figures and faces.

*Finding a contemporary form for this is the most difficult thing, but also the most important. Intuitively, I've always thought I'd arrive at this sort of result. But it took twenty years for me to describe it*<sup>3</sup>

Working from his source material, Scheibitz enlarges and transfers sketches and drawings onto canvas to create the underlying foundation for his paintings. Using gradations of oil paint, pigment markers, vinyl lacquer and spray paint, Scheibitz constructs a 'skin' on the surface of his paintings.

The artist paints without the help of his assistants and often works on more than ten pieces at a time, moving from canvas to canvas.

In their size, Scheibitz's paintings take on human dimensions and are often titled in phonetically pleasing word combinations and as if they are portraits; *Henry Stand*, 2012, *Portrait Tracy Berglund*, 2012, for example.

*Portrait Tracy Berglund*, 2012, is constructed of swathes of grey, brown and green paint layered underneath red isosceles triangles. This collection of shapes and marks suggest a statuesque female figure wearing a grey cloak and a red dress.

- How important is colour in Scheibitz's work? How would his paintings change if they had a different colour palette?
- Compare and contrast a Scheibitz portrait with a more traditional one. Which says more about the subject? Which do you prefer?
- Imagine your own Henry Stand or Tracy Berglund. Spend some time in front of these artworks and create a back story for each person. Think about their looks, personality, day-to-day life, history and preferences.

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Scheibitz presents the majority of *ONE-Time Pad*'s sculptures on Level 4. In various scales, the sculptures are constructed from everyday materials like MDF, resin, Plexiglas, wood, fabric and steel.

These sculptures explore form, space, shape and colour. Like his paintings, Scheibitz's sculptures are inspired by his exploratory drawings and sketches.

From a distance, these forms appear clean and mass-produced but, on closer inspection, these smooth surfaces are actually stained in lacquer and uneven painterly washes that defy the expected flatness of abstraction. While his assistants construct the prototype shape, the artist paints directly onto the artwork, layering materials to create a surface skin.

Scheibitz is inspired by a continually travelling exhibition, *Gods in Colour*, shown in Munich in 2003. The show explored ancient polychromy; the original, brightly painted appearance of ancient sculpture and architecture. A practice particularly associated with the ancient Greeks, evidence of this has substantially, or in some cases totally, faded away due to intense weathering. The emphasis on 'surface' in ancient polychromy is something Scheibitz shares, commenting that the materials used to create a sculpture are not as important as its exterior surface.

Scheibitz's sculptures are exhibited collectively on large, low plinths, and are reminiscent of anthropological displays in natural history museums where collections of artifacts with shared eras, but not necessarily shared meanings, are displayed together.



# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Find the sculpture *Große Figur*, 2009, on Level 4. This cardboard and epoxy resin artwork is hollow with proportions similar to the human body.

**Think** about the similarities and differences between *Große Figur* and the human form.

**Consider** how important the surface is.

**Reconsider** the purpose of the tape.

**Try** debating with other gallery visitors.

**Do** recreate *Große Figur's* pose with your own body

**Imagine** *Große Figur* as a real person; tell their story.

**Find** something about this sculpture that you might have originally overlooked.

**Draw** the negative space around it.

**Make** a critical judgment; what do you think?

**Fold** a piece of A4 paper to create a 3D, *Große Figur*-inspired, sculpture

**Stop** and look again

**Start** to think about how you might change *Große Figur*.

**Be** Thomas Scheibitz; what, or who, is your inspiration?

- Find *Gipsy Rose Lee*, 2007, a white cardboard figure balanced on a pedestal. Titled after the American burlesque dancer, the sculpture simultaneously recalls a rocking horse, a crouching angel, a feasting squirrel and, perhaps more intentionally considering its name, a reclining tassel-sleeved figure.

**Think** about this sculpture as you walk around it, looking from all sides.

**Consider** its title, *Gipsy Rose Lee*.

**Reconsider** the relationship between sculpture and title.

**Try** re-titling the work.

**Do** you like this sculpture?

**Imagine** you are *Gipsy Rose Lee*. How do you feel about Scheibitz's representation?

**Find** something unusual about this artwork. Find something usual.

**Draw** an abstract portrait of someone in the gallery space.

**Make** this portrait into a sculpture.

**Fold** and tear a piece of paper to create a viewfinder.

**Stop** and focus on one part of *Gipsy Rose Lee*.

**Start** a design for a new sculpture using your one focused part as its beginning.

**Be** a critical friend, evaluate your own design and critique a friend's.

# HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

*Monogramm*, 2013, found on Level 4, is a new sculptural work commissioned especially for BALTIC. It is a replica of the letter 'S' from the *BALTIC FLOUR MILLS* signage on the building's river facing facade.

The letter-bearing sides of BALTIC are the only original features left from its former life as a mill, owned by Joseph Rank Ltd. The mill opened in 1950 as a dual-purpose factory producing flour and animal feed. BALTIC, as it exists now, was the silo building of the mill and used to store 22,000 tons of wheat. The mill closed in 1982, opening as BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art at midnight on 13th July 2002.

Scheibitz described the BALTIC font as timeless and, in its lack of serif tails, likened it to digital typography. As the first letter of Scheibitz's surname, *Monogramm* can also be considered a self portrait. The sculpture stands at 1.82m, the same height as Thomas Scheibitz.

When *ONE-Time Pad* closes at BALTIC, *Monogramm* will adorn the outside of Scheibitz's studio in Berlin.

- Look out for your initials in street signs, advertising, shop names, fashion and titles. Collect different examples as you explore your local area.
- Think about how you document this; you could use notebooks, sketching, record times and dates, use a camera or a video recorder. How might you display this collection for an audience?



# HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

- Some of Scheibitz's sculptures are constructed from everyday, readily available materials. Gather five pieces of cardboard. You could use a mixture of boxes, tubes or scrap pieces. With masking tape, stick the pieces together in as many different combinations as possible.

Record each combination using a method of documentation; photography, film, drawing or written description. Afterwards, reflect on your favourite combination. What do you like about it? Why do you favour it over the others?

Re-create your favourite using your body. Think about how you can document this final 'performance'.

- Choose an artwork from Scheibitz's exhibition and use it as a starting point for a piece of free writing. Write continuously for five minutes.

Don't stop writing even if you run out of things to say. Don't worry about spelling or grammar; you do not need to write in full sentences.

Afterwards, scan through your writing and select five words that you feel relate best to the work you have chosen. Say the words in your head as you consider the work again.

Read and repeat your words out loud in the gallery space. Can you gather an audience? How do other gallery visitors react to you?

- Onomatopoeic words are those that make the sound that they are describing. Examples include splash, splat, bang and crash. Choose one of Scheibitz's paintings and write down a list of five onomatopoeic words that come to mind when you look at it. Discuss your words with a friend.
- Choose an artwork from the Scheibitz exhibition. Note down one aspect of the work which fascinates you; it might be colour, shape or material for example. As you look around the rest of the exhibition spot your chosen characteristic in the other artworks. Make a quick sketch whenever you find it.
- Make a Scheibitz menu. Choose artworks from the exhibition that represent your starter, main course and dessert. You could think about this in terms of artwork sizes, subject matter, favourites or something more imaginative. Remember to provide reasons to support your choices.

# HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

- List the artworks in *ONE-Time Pad* that don't interest you. Find the one that you think is most difficult and spend longer with it. Keep looking until you have a clearer understanding and intimate knowledge of its surfaces, shapes, lines and colours.

Consider why this artwork is in the exhibition. Think about taste and opinion. Who has the final word on this?

- Imagine one artwork needs to be removed from the exhibition and returned to the artist. Debate which artwork should be jettisoned and which should be saved.
- Bring together a collection of objects that remind you of your visit. Your collection might include a *BALTIC Today* guide, other promotional print, a receipt from the shop, a napkin from the café, a metro or bus ticket, a drawing, something you found on the way here, a sweet wrapper or a photograph taken on your mobile phone.

Display your objects in a Scheibitz-like archive. Title your collection and make labels and extended interpretation for your items. Think about how visitors might interact with your collection. Remember to photograph or record it some way.



# FURTHER RESEARCH

TINO SEHGAL/EBERTHARD HAVEKOST/FRANK NITSCHKE  
JOSEPH ALBERS/RICHARD SMITH/FRANK STELLA  
KENNETH NOLAND/WASSILY KANDINSKY/BRUCE NAUMAN  
CLASSICISM/EL GRECO/JAPANESE COMICS/BAUHAUS  
ABY WARBURG/OSKAR SCHLEMMER/BRUNO TAUT  
ZAHA HADID/MARCEL DUCHAMP/MEDIEVAL ENGRAVERS  
RICHARD SERRA/GIORGIO DE CHIRICO/BLINKY PALERMO

# LITERACY KEY WORDS

algorithm

sketchbook

Peaceful  
Revolution

archive

Conceptual Art

Figurative

Renaissance

encryption

motif

curate

Iron Curtain

Polychromy

Abstract

Realism

readymade

typography

vitrine

maquette

geometric

anthropology

cryptography

# NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Contemporary art is incredibly diverse and wide ranging and can be used to support teaching and learning as part of an entire learning experience.

Contemporary art challenges, exposes and explores cultural and social issues and identities, investigating their meaning through a wide range of practices. BALTIC's programme aims to build pupils' confidence and encourage aspirations, develop their visual language and creative thinking as well as furthering their artistic skills, encouraging students to offer opinions and take risks in response to such visual, cultural and creative stimuli, safe in the knowledge that art has no 'wrong answer'. Contemporary art can be used to generate creative thinking in all subject areas, supporting and offering transferable learning across the curriculum.

**BALTIC offers a variety of workshops, talks, artist sessions and research opportunities for primary, secondary and post-16 students. Many are free!**

*To book a session, arrange a visit or chat about an opportunity, please contact our Schools and Colleges Programmer, Vicky Sturrs on 0191 440 4929 or [vickys@balticmill.com](mailto:vickys@balticmill.com)*

## **SCHEIBITZ GALLERY WORKSHOP**

SUITABLE FOR EYFS, KS1&2 AND SEND, FREE

Through looking, talking, drawing and making activities, your pupils will build confidence and visual language in the gallery space. Explore Thomas Scheibitz's *ONE-Time Pad* in this hands-on, one hour session led by the Learning Team. With lots of short, engaging and practical activities your pupils will respond to the artwork through personal opinions, drawings and other creative ideas. This session includes individual, partner and group tasks and is tailored to the needs of your group.

## **SCHEIBITZ TALK & TOUR**

SUITABLE FOR KS3, 4, POST-16 AND SEND GROUPS, FREE

Led by BALTIC staff, this 30 minute introductory tour to Scheibitz's *ONE-Time Pad* exhibition will look at key works, themes and ideas.

The tour will encourage questioning, opinion-gathering and debate, giving students a more in-depth knowledge of the exhibited contemporary art at BALTIC.

## **ARTIST STUDIO SESSION**

SUITABLE FOR EYFS, KS1,2,3&4, POST-16 AND SEND, £100 HALF DAY, £200 FULL DAY + VAT

Practical art workshops delivered by one of BALTIC's experienced artist facilitators develop your pupils' creative inspiration, influences, skills and techniques. Artist Studio Sessions give your pupils the opportunity to get initial inspiration for projects, develop new artistic practices, work closely with a practicing artist and take creative risks.

Use the exhibitions as a focus, come with a ready-designed project, or leave it to BALTIC to create a bespoke session from your ideas and desired outcomes.

BALTIC's artist team have diverse interests and workshop skills can include sculpture, printing, textiles, installation, photography, drawing, animation and sound work to name only a few!

Artist Studio Session's can take place at BALTIC or at your school and include all materials.

# CROSS CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

- Art, Craft and Design
- English
- History

# USEFUL LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## BALTIC

[www.balticmill.com](http://www.balticmill.com)

## BALTIC Multimedia Database

<http://archive.balticmill.com>

## BALTIC Primary School Resources Bank:

[www.balticmill.com/learning/schools-and-colleges/primary-early-years/resources](http://www.balticmill.com/learning/schools-and-colleges/primary-early-years/resources)

## BALTIC Secondary School Resources Bank:

[www.balticmill.com/learning/schools-and-colleges/secondary-colleges/resources-secondary](http://www.balticmill.com/learning/schools-and-colleges/secondary-colleges/resources-secondary)

## Thomas Scheibitz

[www.thomasscheibitz.de](http://www.thomasscheibitz.de)

Thomas Scheibitz Catalogue: *ONE-Time* Pad. Available to read outside BALTIC Level 3, Level 2 Quay Space and BALTIC Library or to buy at BALTIC shop or through [www.balticmill.com/shop/](http://www.balticmill.com/shop/)

## References

SCHEIBITZ, Thomas. about 90 elements/ TOD IM DSCHUNGEL: Richter Verlag GmbH, Düsseldorf, 2007. p128

ibid, p129.

The Human Dimension Thomas Scheibitz at the MMK. Deutsche Ban Art Works, 2013 [viewed 14 August 2013]. Available from: <http://db-artmag.de/en/72/feature/the-human-dimension-thomas-scheibitz-at-the-mmk/>

# IMAGE CREDITS

## All images:

Thomas Scheibitz:

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Courtesy the artist and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead

Photo: Colin Davison

## Except page 3:

Thomas Scheibitz portrait

Photo: Martin Eder