

Press release

Oskar Schmidt

*MEDEA*

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Galerie Tobias Naehring, Leipzig

Galerie Tobias Naehring

Spinnereistraße 7

D-04179 Leipzig

+49 (0) 341 227 630 17

info@tobiasnaehring.de

www.tobiasnaehring.de

In the *MEDEA* exhibition, Oskar Schmidt gives a new voice to the forgotten and discarded personnel of GDR art history after reunification.

In his paintings, Oskar Schmidt cautiously approaches a “forgotten canon” and brings it into the present. His artistic practice goes far beyond a traditional yet unconventional painterly gesture: Schmidt deals with what was overlooked in West German collections and in the art historical discourse of the FRG. He preserves a painterly tradition, presents it anew and stimulates discussion about its representation. *MEDEA* forms a chorus of nationally and globally overlooked figures and symbolic figures of the post-reunification period, which emphatically sings against Western ideas and their external attributions.

Schmidt’s inspiration is drawn from motifs and symbols such as Medea, masks, Harlequin or Pierrot - figures that play a central role in the Leipzig School, for example in Werner Tübke and in Christa Wolf’s novel *Medea: Voices*, and are an integral part of the visual language of “East German artists”.

This pleasure in establishing certain “codes” or a “factual symbolism” follows a culture in which the relationship between the private and the public sphere became blurred and the most intimate could become political and formative for artistic forms of expression.

Figures such as Medea and the Harlequin embody archetypal transforming characters whose motivations remain unclear. They linger in a sphere of ambiguity. Schmidt’s Harlequin, for example, sits in a posture reminiscent of the Italian Mannerist Parmigianino, wearing a checkered top typical of his character, his head resting in his hand, melancholically pubescent and waiting - not for a clear reading, but for a response to his self-determined gaze.

The technical precision, particularly visible in the design of the checks, points to Schmidt’s comprehensive training, his craftsmanship, which points to the place from which he speaks as a painter, which he expresses in a special oil-egg tempera mixing process. This painting technique, which artists such as Doris Ziegler, Volker Stelzmann, Ulrich Hachulla and Gudrun Brüne developed and taught based on Otto Dix’s old-masterly glaze painting, follows an elaborate pictorial structure in glazes of egg tempera and oil paints that is rarely found today - the sense of color thus created “gives birth” to Italian Renaissance frescoes in the lap of Otto Dix. During his earlier studies of painting with Gudrun Brüne, Oskar Schmidt, who also trained as a photographer, acquired this knowledge, which was passed down from generation to generation like a traditional recipe.

In addition to the preservation of technique, Schmidt also draws on specific pictorial motifs, such as *Weißer Gefäße (nach Petra Flemming)*, 2024, in which he quotes the painting of the same name by Petra Flemming from 1975, as well as *Still Life with ½ Liter Measure* from 1970 by Ulrich Hachulla, which he transfers to the present day in *Still Life with Liter Measure and Poppy Flower*, 2024. This approach requires intensive research and the procurement of historical objects that have long since ceased to be produced. This careful tracking down of objects forms the second foundation of his painterly archiving practice: the used *Rubens artists’ oil paints or the safety ignition products* from the former GDR are no longer produced and have supposedly become obsolete, but they still have the potential to release color and ignite flames. The devaluation of art created in the GDR - the accusation of nostalgia - are expressions of a “dominance of Western art narratives” (Marlene Militz), whose gaze Oskar Schmidt challenges with his artistic practice, in which he mixes recognized positions and those excluded from the (official) art canon and makes them visible and audible again.

His choir sings loudly.

Can you hear the voices?

*Text: Katharina Klang, Director Kunstverein Bielefeld*