

**FLORIAN SCHMIDT**

NEW GALERIE

Press

# BLOUIN modernpainters

## NEW YORK

### Florian Schmidt

*Zach Feuer // April 12–June 16*

One group of paintings here (from the “Immunity” series) plausibly recalls the abstract works of Richard Diebenkorn, had the latter purposefully integrated lowly materials like cardboard and vinyl. They’re paired with more sculptural pieces that jut out from the wall, rough and handmade looking—challenging the basic structure of painting in a lively way, despite the increasing banality of such a gesture. In the center of the gallery is *Spot*, 2012, a simple lattice of wood and other materials dabbed with smudges of color that Schmidt intends as a sort of visual interface for the rest of the works, with the viewer standing inside its boundaries.



*Untitled (Immunity) 13, 2012.*



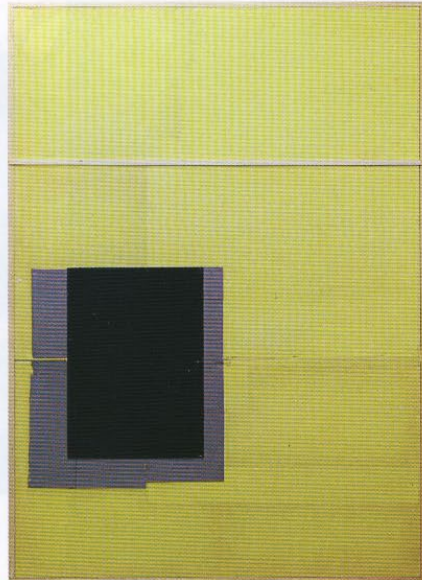
# frieze

## AUSTRIA

grounding in graphic design – like many of the Zurich Concretes, he worked in all areas of design: furniture, architecture, advertising – bookend his career. *Gestoppte Rotation* (Stopped Rotation, 1943) proved prescient of the geometric, abstract photography movement of today, while the funny, poignant *Drei Farben: drei gleiche Volumen, 1/12 grün bewegt* (Three Colours: Three Equal Volumes, 1/12 Shifted Green, 1975/76), featured one of his horizontal bands of colour attempting to make a break for it. Loewensberg's wonderful paintings from the late 1960s and '70s, meanwhile, look like radio frequencies or lighting bolts swathed in colour, conjuring computer approximations of Clyfford Still's (more famous) drippy abstractions from the same period. Bill's revelatory painting of powdery pastel hues blossoming from a spiral, *Betonung einer spirale* (Accentuation of a Spiral, 1947), however, took the award for sheer timelessness.

In the wake of such works, the contemporary inclusions were somewhat disappointing and the choices difficult to interpret – surely there are other Swiss-related artists whose work follows Concrete art more explicitly – but some of the pairings were nevertheless inspired. Best known for her photorealist, figurative murals rendered by Iranian sign painters, Shahbazi showed large geometric works that were both lovely and surprising. If Kilian Rühemann's site-specific installations – playfully dark retorts to geometric abstraction's legacy – fit perfectly, Afif's punk-ish performance documentation was less expected. Still, Concrete art's intentions to unite art and life in all its ably designed forms bore this contribution out. And should the spectator have persisted in the misguided thinking that this Swiss movement remained regional, there was one scene-stealing side project: a series of sketches, drawings and paintings by Fritz Glarner for the famous 1960s-era Rockefeller Dining Room in New York. The artist, who emigrated to the US in 1936, designed the room for Nelson Rockefeller himself, bringing Zurich Concrete – and Glarner's own brand of Mondrian-inflected wit, with its jam of flat, hard-edged geometric forms tricked out in blue, red and yellow – to the most American and yet international of settings.

Quinn Latimer



Florian Schmidt  
Above left:  
*Untitled(Hold)09*  
2011  
Acrylic gel, lacquer, cotton,  
cardboard, wood  
2.2x1.6 m  
Above right:  
*Untitled(Hold)11*  
2011  
Acrylic gel, lacquer, cotton,  
cardboard, wood  
2.2x1.6 m

## Florian Schmidt Galerie Andreas Huber Vienna

*Turn* (all works 2011), the only free-standing object in Florian Schmidt's eponymous exhibition, stands out amongst a selection of wall-based pieces representing four new series entitled 'Community', 'Immunity', 'Presence' and 'Hold'. Made of several pieces of timber forming a fragile, fence-like frame, *Turn* is deliberately positioned in the centre of the show, which stretches across four rooms. A physical barrier as well as a visual focus point, it is made of multiple repeating triangular and semi-circular shapes and almost entirely covered in white paint, only occasionally interrupted by casually placed snippets of dark paper. Whereas the title of the work, as in the 'turn' of a road, can be read as a reference to its repeated rounded shapes, it also seemingly instructs the viewer to look back, suggesting a temporal as well as spatial aspect that recurs within Schmidt's work.

While, at first sight, the works in three of the series follow a more traditional painterly trajectory, in the 'Presence' series, wooden frames protrude from the wall to form sculptural frameworks reminiscent of Sol LeWitt modules. The frames appear as cages for the avial objects inside, made of cut and folded pieces of cheap cardboard. These wall-based works seemingly ache to dissociate themselves from the picture plane and morph into dynamic, three-dimensional sculptures. In a piece like *Untitled(Presence)22*, the irregular, geometric shapes within the frame appear to fit together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, but Schmidt has brutally stapled or nailed them together to stay in place. This technique is a recurring motif that carries through in the rest of the series in the exhibition.

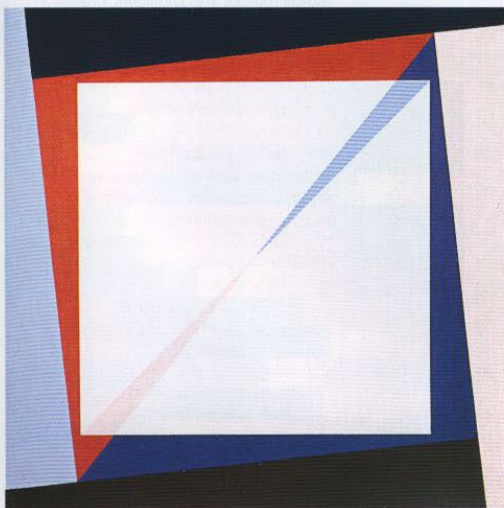
Recalling painterly abstraction, works in the series 'Hold' – such as *Untitled(Hold)09* and *Untitled(Hold)10* – expose dark shadows

like faint brushstrokes through the thin fabric, underneath which Schmidt has applied layers of cardboard. For both pieces, rather than working with conventional canvas, the artist used readymade cotton stretched over a frame. Consisting of two large-scale rectangles each, *Untitled(Hold)09* and *Untitled(Hold)10* are held together by a cheap timber frame and an overall coating of transparent acrylic gel. In *Untitled(Hold)11*, traces of the same gel recall brushstrokes implying a painterly expression, though in fact the colour is achieved through found material. Unlike the bright monochromes of Blinky Palermo's 'Stoffbilder' (Fabric Pictures) of the 1960s and '70s, which also made use of found pieces of fabric, Schmidt's technique of nailing and stapling shapes onto the background alludes to a more intimate play with the works' surface.

Throughout the exhibition, it seems that Schmidt is not referencing painting so much as acting it out, and his materials play a crucial role within this game of painterly displacement. Carefully chosen, it seems that they themselves appear as 'imposters' of fine art materials: the cardboard that morphs into sculptural shapes in 'Presence' is actually carton from removal boxes. His smooth, black painterly surfaces are material used for architectural models, and the bits of dark paper pasted on *Turn* are taken from calendars depicting famous art works, from which any traces of a recognizable image have been carefully omitted. In his essay 'Painting Besides Itself', published in issue 130 of *October* in 2009, David Joselit asks, as one of a number of questions about painting: 'How can the status of painting as matter be made explicit?' Although Schmidt's hybrid works are neither monochromes nor readymades nor Abstract Expressionist explosions of paint's materiality – all examples that Joselit cites – they ask us to reformulate the question of how painting as matter can be conceived within a contemporary artistic practice.

Bettina Brunner

Camille Graeser  
*Gestoppte Rotation*  
(Stopped Rotation)  
1943  
Oil on canvas  
65x65 cm

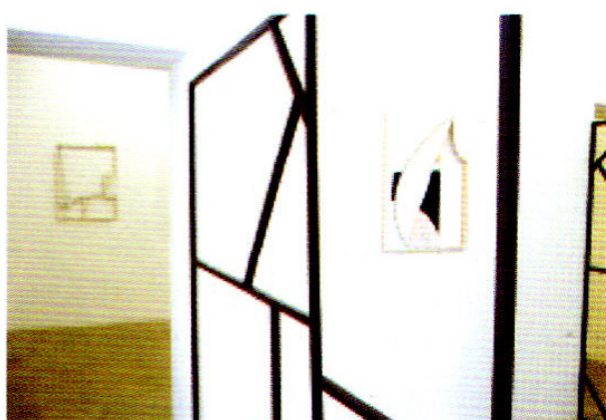




# Flash Art

## FLASH REVIEWS

### FLORIAN SCHMIDT SUZY SHAMMAH - MILANO



FLORIAN SCHMIDT, veduta dell'installazione presso la Galleria Suzy Shammah, Milano 2009. Courtesy Galleria Suzy Shammah, Milano.

Come si sa, è possibile significare un'attitudine "pittorica" anche attraverso l'impiego di materiali che con la pittura hanno poco a che fare, se non per una fortuita incidenza. L'utilizzo celibe delle tele, o delle intelaiature progettate per sostenerle, può esprimere la presenza della pittura senza che essa si manifesti direttamente. Non credo si possa pensare di fare pittura senza pittura, resterebbe un gioco di parole sterile per non dire inutile; è invece possibile evocarla lavorando sui comportamenti che il pittore agisce nel mo-

mento in cui dipinge, rilevandone le tracce che sono direttamente proporzionali alle pennellate depositate sulla tela, capendo come queste si sovrappongono e sedimentano ai piedi dell'artista, sotto il cavalletto. Florian Schmidt riesce mirabilmente ad analizzare l'atto del dipingere a partire da quello che accompagna l'azione stessa. Anche in occasione di questa personale milanese ha composto alcuni collage che sono il risultato di un lungo processo di sedimentazione e al tempo stesso di sottrazione di materiali diversi. Il giovane artista austriaco ha concepito questa mostra esaltando la sua innata capacità di far evolvere in senso del tutto sorprendente la morfologia di elementi strutturali rendendoli "altri" rispetto alla loro origine, fino al punto di farli diventare architetture nell'architettura che è, in ultima analisi, la galleria stessa, ora resa più complessa dall'alternanza dei pieni e dei vuoti creati da Schmidt.

*Marco Tagliafierro*

# FLORIAN SCHMIDT

By Gyonata Bonvicini

Austrian artist Florian Schmidt's works will disappoint viewers looking for visual bombast, but by avoiding heroic painterly gestures, and frequently even forsaking the use of paint, Schmidt has nevertheless become one of the most interesting painters of his generation. With their cultivated fragility, poetic emptiness and unassuming subtlety, it's easy to imagine these works being overlooked in a crowd or overwhelmed. His compositions would seem unresolved or even incomplete were it not for their intuitive elegance.

There's probably a lot to be said for using abstraction, as Schmidt does, in a manner devoid of machismo and in a completely non-power-seeking fashion.

His work is marked by an acute interest in the development of painting using a geometric formal vocabulary. Throughout his practice, he constructs core compositions made of elementary shapes – imperfect circles, squares, and rectangles – which are intersected by and entwined with parallel and crossing lines. Experimenting with alternative ways of painting, Schmidt executes these familiar compositions with de-familiarizing choices of color, material, and surface treatments. Schmidt's works are mostly medium-size panels composed of stretched canvas, wooden structures, daubed with lacquer, silicon, and vinyl or adorned with bits of cardboard and wires. A closer examination of his works reveals, however, that the geometrised and orderly world of these forms is at odds with their arrangements and characterised by fragmentarisation, dissolution, threatened instability, destruction, the loss of control and the supremacy of the forms. The evocation of "structures" and their disembodiment through geometrisation and disciplining, limitations and demarcations (imposed by the space, the physicality of the materials and the angles) as well as deconstruction of geometrisation are in fact central to the artist's works.

The works intuitively allude to *décollagiste* activity but evade the representational and textual reminders of this tradition. Instead, Schmidt creates a self-reflexive aesthetic, quoting his own formal vocabulary from previously made paintings, collages, drawings, and sculptures. The effect becomes evocative of the layers of history found on building facades worn by constant posterage. His paintings assert seductiveness through the unrigorous geometry and a manual proficiency that arrives at painting through alternate means.

For his first solo exhibition in Milan at gallery Suzy Shammah titled "Voice", Florian Schmidt transfers those different paths of narration to a minimalistic concept of forms that re-organise and re-design the space of the gallery, strongly characterized by the sequence of three almost identical rooms. All the works gathered together in the exhibition are connected and the narrative sequence starts from "Carousel", a painted triangular wooden structure sitting on a circular piece of cut canvas, and ends with "Serpentine", a painting composed of four catalog mounted inside a fragile wooden frame.

Although the imagery can be hard to read, the titles given often allude to their point of origin in recognisable forms, such as "One" or "Bridge". The principle of the readymade and recycling also suffuse his practice; off-cuts from previous works often re-appear as motifs for new paintings; hand-knitted lengths are sewn or pulled over stretchers. It is a silent visual conversation between piece and viewer that allows one privileged access to the workings of the artist's interior process, creating depth through a series of interlocking compositions. Though they maintain a remarkable collage like appearance, the canvases are indeed painted works combining traditional and mundane material. Crushed, fragmented, stained or sliced the variety of textures and grains included in each work are often highlighted by a complementary curve, stripe or color tint that punctuates their mute demeanor to imbue the piece with a sense of intimacy, immediacy and mood.

Architectural interventions like the two wooden walls installed in the central room change the original perception of the gallery as a display for art. Looking through the fragile geometrical pattern of these structures, the dark coloured surfaces articulate the space and the works in it in a completely different way; addressing at the same time themes such as architecture, sculpture, transparency and volume. Framed and accented by their own structural elements, these painting-installations unfold and re-structure themselves as the viewer's perspective crosses the space. This transformation of such architectural spaces into a visual compositions, by the near negation of its inherent three dimensionality, is negotiated through the application of color, which merge walls into planes and corners, fixtures into collage elements, and the meeting point of floors and ceilings into the ripped edges, cut and seam design elements central to his two dimensional canvas compositions. Schmidt's presentation of such interrelationships of space and canvas, fragment and whole, present and process, is an exercise in abstraction that appears to have opened the way to new spheres of artistic production, merging format, structure and style.

These works encourage an appreciation of the finished object and a consideration of how it came into being. The environmentalist mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle," enlivened by the element of chance, describes not only this painting, but also Florian Schmidt's humble yet expansive practice as a whole.