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ERIK SCHMIDT
CUT/UNCUT

OPENING: February 18, 2016, 7pm
DURATION: February 19 – March 26, 2016
Mark Gisbourne, curator, art historian (GB), Berlin is speaking
Erik Schmidt will be present at the opening

This recent series of paintings and accompanying film by Erik Schmidt are born of a rich countercultural experience, following on from a three months residency in Japan in 2015. While the paintings represent commonplace Tokyo urban street scenes and/or observed events, they extend Schmidt themes within his recent investigations of the urban space as seen in his New York Anti-Capitalism *Down Town* series (2012). Moreover, they distil and extend further Schmidt's remarkable development in terms of the regenerative processes he finds within the language of mark making. What is particularly discernible in these paintings is an increased engagement with the gestural aspects of drawing as mark making. The brush marks in this series of untitled Tokyo paintings take on some aspects of visual hatching, a contemporary simile of the reed pen marks of the famed Van Gogh. Not that there is any intended reference as such, but that the famous Dutchman's sources for his reed pen drawing style was similarly derived from sources in Japanese prints and drawings. Though without suggestion Schmidt's interest has less to do with Japanese art, perhaps, than with the psychical notion of gesture within Japanese culture. The studio practice for Schmidt is that he works on framed canvases in a raised horizontal position, and not affixed to the wall or raised on an easel. This gives him the opportunity to literally circumnavigate the canvas, and to approach mark making in a unique and highly personal way. And the gesture or the mark is always an important aspect in painting since it connotes issues of identity, for we recognise artist by the marks they make and it becomes necessarily a visual language of recognition. In this respect at least as seen in post-war artists like Georges Mathieu and Hans Hartung, it was derived in their case from the profound uses of gesture in calligraphy, and again drew upon Nihon cultural practices. Such gestures were defined as and artist's personal 'parafe', his/her flourish as expressed by a denotative signature trait. At the same time Schmidt's paintings in this case while using intense and variable colours, is somewhat different from his earlier uses of a thick paint application and intense colour saturation of a decade ago. Rather his colour has become an extension of the mark, less that of purely optical sensations but accumulative marks of colour in immediate juxtaposition. As a result the white ground of the canvas support has become more evident.

The role of marks and gestures is made clear also in the film the artist made in Tokyo, and called **Cut/Uncut**, which serves as the title for the current exhibition. The film is a sort reverie of Schmidt experiencing modern Tokyo bar life and downside street destitution, and is juxtaposed to his personal performance-based experiences of the ritualistic gestures and behaviour that draw on traditional Japanese culture. The viewer engages simultaneously with the hustle bustle and singular focus of the moving crowd, and the cold architectural anonymity of modern corporate Tokyo, and thereafter in the context of a Geisha House performs his 'Cut-Piece' performance. If the renting and slashing of his Western designed blue suit echoes the famous 'Cut-Piece' performance of Yoko Ono in Kyoto (1964), it does so only to the extent that it

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has a shared sense of materialised action. For whereas in the past the audience were invited to cut and slash the artist's garment, in this instance the destruction is carried out by the artist himself. The ritualistic delivery of the sharp blade is brought into the Tea House type setting by a Geisha and the subsequent shredding of the suit draws upon another ritual gesture and cultural cross reference, namely that of *seppuku* or *hari kiri*. The work is intended to suggest the hybridity and contradictory nature of contemporary Japan, excessively modern and the anachronistically traditional running in parallel. An equally paradoxical aspect is represented by the mass media newsprint images, that the artist has also realised for this exhibition. They form collage overlaid with various calligraphy expressions as marks and puncta, gestures of immediate assertion and inhibition, of momentary assertion and subsidiary denial. In this the collaged marks and lines in the drawings exemplify the 'fold' inflections connotative of the postmodern, the palimpsest of daily life, where simultaneous realities simply run alongside or overlay each other. As a result Schmidt has realised in his new Tokyo series of paintings, gestural collage-drawings, and filmed performance in Japan his own postmodern sense of unique hybridity.

"True beauty is something that attacks, overpowers, robs, and finally destroys" (Yukio Mishima)

Mark Gisbourne

Erik Schmidt, born 1968 in Herford, lives and works in Berlin. Studies of Design at the Fachhochschule Hamburg and the „free class“ UDK/HDK, Berlin. **Exhibitions (selection)**: 2015: Sexhauer Gallery, Berlin (G), 2015: MARTa Herford (G), Herford, Jason McCoy (G), 2014: Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren (E), Galerie Gebauer, Berlin (E), Fábrica de Santo Thyrsó, Santo Tirso, (G), Sammlung Wemhöner, Berlin (G), Matrumo City Museum of Art, Nagao (G), 2013: Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren (E), ART TAIPEI, Taipei (G), Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (G), KUMU Kunstmuseum Tallin, Tallin (G), 2010: Bogged Down, Galerie Krinzinger (S), *WHY PAINTING NOW?*, Krinzinger Projekte (G)