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All rats live high
Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt at
Buzzer Reeves

REVIEW

14. May 2025 • Text by Lara Brörken

To see the beauty in the discarded, requires a poetic visual language. Very few speak them. “Upcycling” would be the unromantic twin. The work of Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt is not done justice to such a concept of conversion. With small mosaics made of packaging material, majestic aluminum rats and glittering lasagna molds, the artist tells a dazzling fairy tale at Buzzer Reeves, raises the overlooked.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Installation view, "Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup", Buzzer Reeves. Photo: Henrik Stromberg.

Massaged through a narrow door, visitors to the Buzzer Reeves exhibition room are directly in Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's "Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup" universe. It's a bit like in the movie about the fairytale town of Narnia, just in a somewhat musty Berlin staircase it goes through a closet into another world, in which majestic rats rule and Elton John briefly took off his rose-colored glasses. It's a bit lighter here, as if the many small colorful islands that create Lanigan-Schmidt's works take a little of the burden off.

Next to the first spotted rat, which rules on a large white cube in the center of the room, two lavishly decorated golden goblets emblazone. Pressed

aluminum webs form the drinking cup. It is decorated with different colored plastic and paper scraps, which are held together by stapler needles, into the spheres of the gemstones. The silvery-blue aluminum rat does not get excited, has even sat hypnotized with its red eyes in front of the fine fake stones of the pomp cups. A plastic sign sets as if it were an alarm clock: Supposedly it is 7:08 a.m. The picture of a cow is also there - like the lover's on the bedside table - and a mobile of moon, fish, octopus and plastic strips dangles over the whole scene.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Installationview, Buzzer Reeves, "Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup".
Photo: Henrik Stromberg.

Lanigan-Schmidt's "placemats", i.e. placemats, adorn the walls around the

cube. Where placemats is an almost too unadorned word to capture their complex, small beauty. Each of these collages is composed of the smallest strips of material. Most of them are glitting, migrating like glittering tiles over the surface. Paths, borders and framing are created, which here and there mark small highlights such as small comic chicks, parrots or a drawn figure in a tartan skirt. His placemats are reminiscent of the splen of glass, for which Lanigan-Schmidt was increasingly enthusiastic during a time in Venice. But instead of enduring to the fragile high-quality material, he remains down-to-earth and true to his plastics, always working with them a touch of autobiographical working-class background.

Turned and pressed forms made of aluminum meet the brutality of the stapler needle, nothing is glued here. Each of the elaborate collages is covered with transparent tape and thus preserved in the best case for eternity. Lanigan-Schmidt has taken his time to combine the tiny pieces into a breathtaking plastic tapestry, a miraculouse mosaic, and this time is transferred into the room with its collages. She's even standing still, it's still 7:08.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, "Untitled (Placemats)", ca. early 2000s, mixed-media collage, 30 × 43 cm // 33 × 43 cm // 41 × 29 cm. Photo: Henrik Stromberg.

Again and again, visitors are pushed into a church context by details, ornaments, chalices and Madonna-like faces in the collages. Elements and faces are reminiscent of images of saints and this is not by chance. Lanigan-Schmidt grew up strictly Catholic, was surrounded by religious images from the outside of the house. He later converted to Orthodox Christianity.

Lanigan-Schmidt can obviously always gain something from the pomp of the church, because to this day new angels are always added. Judging by the format and stylistics of the paper strips on which they are depicted, they are fluttered into a photo box to take a few snapshots of themselves. Actually,

Lanigan-Schmidt has drawn the "Photobooth Angels", which are among the latest works at Buzzer Reeves, on a tissue box cardboard. On each of the six strips, angels of different shapes and colors with round mouths probably sing about how - "ooooh" - heavenly life is.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt: "The Byzantine dialogue between fashion and art", ca. 2004, mixed-media collage, 46 × 36 cm. // "Photobooth Angels", 2024, Sharpie, ballpoint pen, gel pen on tissue box, 21 × 5 cm. Photos: Henrik Stromberg.

Lanigan-Schmidt is 77 years old. He has been in the hospital for over a year. His window to the world is the TV - and tissue boxes. They currently serve him as working material. On the insides of the unfolded boxes, the artist

draws magical scenarios.

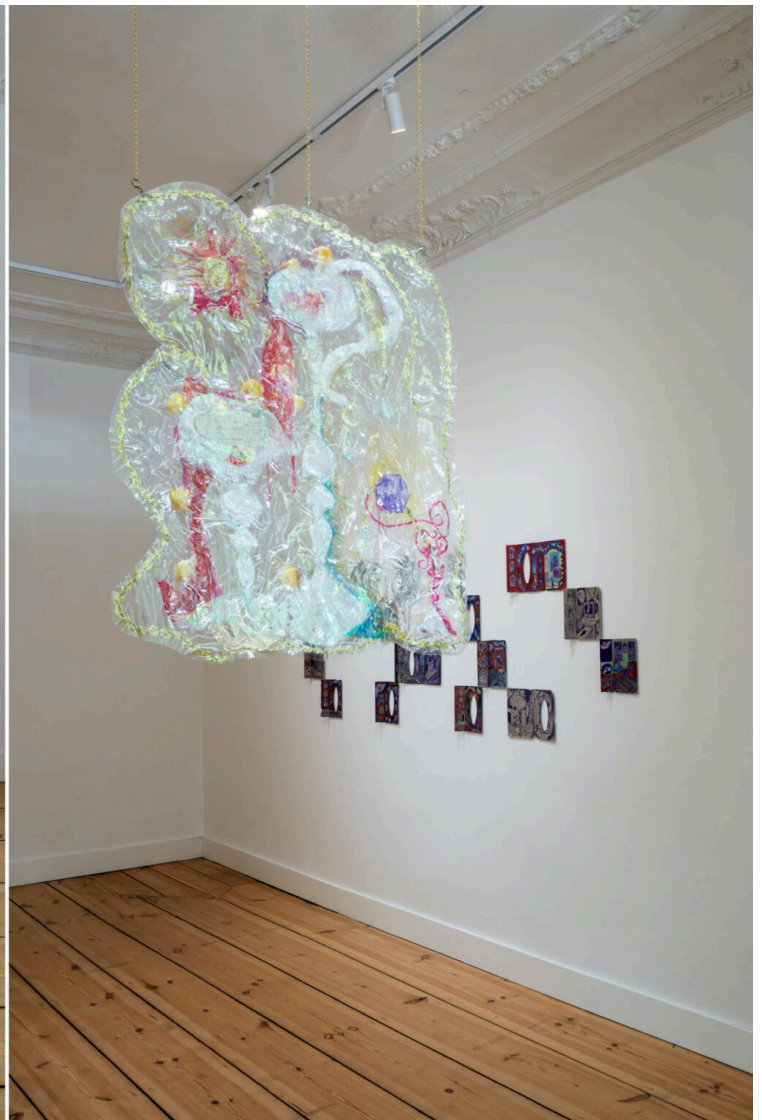
In the adjoining room you can see fairy-like figures with umbrellas. While they are dancing on a pillar, a TV flickers in the corner. People look out of windows in a brick facade typical of New York, the angels sing outside and there a palm tree grows in a checkerboard tiled entrance hall. The series of handkerchief box drawings stretches like tiles over an entire wall. Every omission that once served to remove the cloths now forms a vulvaresc slit, a window through which Lanigan-Schmidt dreams into the world and brings the dream into the world.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Untitled, 2024–2025, Sharpie, ballpoint pen, gel pen on tissue box, various sizes. Photo: Henrik Stromberg.

In the immediate vicinity and in the eye axis of the holy rat in silvery: the next rodent. This time it is a golden specimen that sits on stacked cardboard boxes in a magnificently collated lasagna shell. It marks a truly meteoric rise of the animal: Grandezza instead of gutter - nothing with "from the sewer to the cook's hat". This is the more dazzling story of a rat's ascension as Disney's "Ratatouille". This is the ascension story of a New York rat.

The rat and the collaged plastic spray a pinch of activism in the room, they seem to be symbolic for the underestimated, overlooked and repressed. Each work by Lanigan-Schmidt, who himself was part of the 1969 Stonewall uprising for more rights of the LGBTQI+ community, creates a little more space for marginalized groups, collects all the colors of the rainbow in itself.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Installation views, Buzzer Reeves, "Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup". Photos: Henrik Stromberg.

As glamorous as the rats seem to be staged here, nothing is taken off at Lanigan-Schmidt. The artist always remains aware of his working-class background, works on his environment, his modest nature, his patience. Despite his enthusiasm for the material glass, he reaches for aluminum and plastic waste, which, if it lies around the world, is harmful. However, if plastic is processed into art, it generates a calming longevity. B-Ware becomes 1A-Werk. Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's exhibition "Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup" at Buzzer Reeves is, as the title promises, sweet, sour and fruity - and simply spicy.

WHEN: “Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup” runs until Saturday, the 24th. May. On the last day of the exhibition, a book launch of Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt and Daragh Reeves' book “Rat Attack in Hells Kitchen” will take place from 4 to 6 pm.

WHERE: Buzzer Reeves, Skalitzer Straße 76, 10997 Berlin.

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