

SPIKE
ART
MAGAZINE
84

SUMMER
25

SPiKE

DE/AT EUR 20
CHF 28
GBP 18



VULGARITY

S+T+ARTS at  **ARS ELECTRONICA 2025**
Festival for Art, Technology & Society

PANIC

yes / no

3.—7.
Sept.

POSTCITY
Linz



BERLIN

✓ Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, "Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup," Buzzer Reeves

GRAZ

✓ "Future of Melancholia," Halle für Kunst Steiermark & Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade

MUNICH

✓ Philippe Parreno, "Voices," Haus der Kunst

NEW YORK

✓ "Above Ground: Art from the Martin Wong Graffiti Collection," Museum of the City of New York
✓ "Carnival," Jeffrey Deitch

PARIS

✓ "FEMMES," Perrotin
✓ "David Hockney 25," Fondation Louis Vuitton

VIENNA

✓ Francesca Woodman, "Works from the Verbund Collection," Albertina

125

VIEWS

Byzantine Rats

THOMAS LANIGAN-SCHMIDT
"LEMON SOUR BALLS
IN CHERRY SYRUP"
BUZZER REEVES
1 – 24 MAY 2025



Ornamentally overflowing, highly idiosyncratic in their aesthetic and material choices, and inextricably linked to a life lived, the works of Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt (*1948) are anything but easy to grasp. Consider *Venetian Glass: Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup* from 1984, the oldest piece in the artist’s first Berlin solo exhibition at the age of seventy-seven. The work, which lends the show its title, is reminiscent of a small stained-glass church window and is made from the household materials so characteristic of the artist’s work – plastic foils and tape, adorned with a draped, gold tin-foil bordure, with shrink-wrapped lemon sour balls and cherry syrup like a reliquary of processed foods. As improvised and materially cheap as this feels, the religious references are clearly visible – a camp version of church art.

Just as wine is liturgically turned into Christ’s blood, Lanigan-Schmidt, a former devout Catholic and now converted Orthodox, turns profane, everyday materials into art – and a humble



View of “Lemon Sour Balls in Cherry Syrup”

testament of faith. In an age of intellectual rigor and conceptual cool, his fine balance between lightweight and cheeky, distancing and “the thing itself” – but also between the art and its maker’s biography – lends his works their literal and metaphorical shimmer.

Other works here trigger similar responses and elevate profane materials into makeshift religious pieces. They also conspicuously highlight food or eating. Take a series of wall objects from the early 2000s (one of them reminiscent of an icon) that are all labeled as “placemats.” Other pieces are combined to symbolize a private altar, equipped with two “chalices” from the 90s – these liturgical cups, normally holding Christ’s blood, are here reimagined in wrinkled and shiny metal foils. Another line of work uses disposable aluminum lasagna trays as its base.

The inevitably bodily dimension of eating and food provides his work with

an internal relay that (loosely) connects its thematic strands. It links religion to blue-collar work – in interviews, the artist often highlights his working class background – and, hinting at a rather bodily approach to material, insists on physical pleasure, “sexual appetite”; in Lanigan-Schmidt’s case, an explicitly gay one. The latter dimension is present in some of the works through references to same-sex desire and subculture: a collaged ad for a massage parlor announcing “beautiful nude models”; next to it, a cut-out image of a young man, his gun casually tucked into his jeans; another still from a Hollywood movie with a big, erected candle collaged over the male actor’s crotch.

Though still awaiting broader recognition, the artist was unmistakably present within the queer New York art scene of the second half of the 20th century – next to more famous peers like Charles Ludlam and Jack Smith or curator Henry Geldzahler. He is also one of



Untitled (Rose Color Glasses), ca. 1980s, pipe cleaners, plastic wrap and wire, 4 x 7.5 x 10 cm; *Chalice 26*, ca. 1990s, mixed-media assemblage, 28 x 15 x 13 cm; *Pink Rat*, 2022, mixed-media assemblage, 22 x 7 x 6 cm

the last surviving active participants of the 1969 Stonewall Riots.

Even when the religious and queer elements are clearly present at Buzzer Reeves, the show shifts focus. Along with photographs made by the artist in his Hell’s Kitchen apartment in the 1990s with a camera given to him by his former student, Daragh Reeves (who now runs Buzzer Reeves), two additional works highlight questions of housing, urban living, and gentrification. For *Tenements* (1985–2012), he drew windows, porches, and doors on brown paper bags to turn them into a brownstone street façade – a New York cliché. Another work adds the interior views: wall objects made of discarded tissue boxes, adorned with winding lines and motifs of stylized mid-century



Untitled, 2024–25, Sharpie, ballpoint pen, gel pen on tissue box, various sizes

living rooms. The 90s photographs, presented in the adjacent hallway, seem to offer a counterpoint to these highly idealized and clean representations of urban living, staging a micro-narrative of a tin-foil rat fending off the advances

of a malign toy rat and lizard in the artist’s apartment – where Lanigan-Schmidt had lived since 1975, until his recent move. It is a somewhat dark and messy hole, minimally equipped and packed with books, trash, and whatnots of all sorts.

There is a book I had to think of when seeing this show, Sarah Schulman’s *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (2012), which contextualizes the sweeping gentrification of downtown New York within the devastating AIDS crisis of the 80s and 90s. However idealized, the inner quarters of Western cities have indeed been places for misfits and deviants. Along with the death of countless AIDS victims, the idea of outsider life died, too – replaced by real estate developers. The process, Schulman argues, also led to a “gentrification of the mind” – a streamlining, a taming, an embedding, ultimately a neutralizing of difference, of the other, the radical, the offensive, the once outcast.

In that regard, Lanigan-Schmidt’s show speaks from the point of a broader idea of survival. Here is someone who never gave in to the prevailing bourgeois taste in art and culture, never succumbed to a changing city, never altered his makeshift aesthetic, never renounced his fundamental religious belief, hid his queer identity in a closet, or (until recently) moved out of his apartment. His work is what Schulman would call a “witness to a lost imagination.”

Dominikus Müller



Tenements, 1985/2012, brown paper bags with Sharpie, various sizes