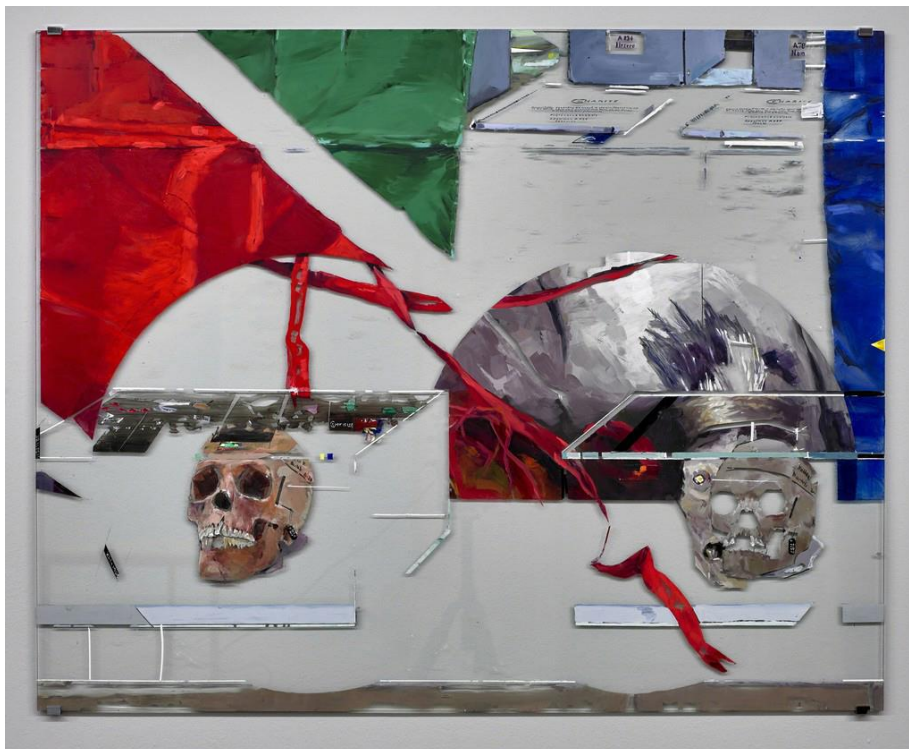


Dierk Schmidt. *Guilt and debts*



DIERK SCHMIDT
Untitled (Human Remains in Berlin), 2014/2015
(Sin título (restos humanos en Berlín))
Óleo y conta sobre cristal
80 x 100 cm
Cortesía del artista y la Galería Kow, Berlín

DATES:	October 9, 2018 – March 10, 2019
PLACE:	Palacio de Velázquez. Retiro Park
ORGANIZATION:	Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
CURATOR:	Lars Bang Larsen
COORDINATION:	Patricia Molins and Leticia Sastre

The **Palacio de Velázquez** in Retiro Park is the venue for the first retrospective in Spain of the artist **Dierk Schmidt** (1965, Unna, Germany), organized by the Reina Sofía Museum, entitled ***Guilt and Debts***, which brings together a wide range of works created from the 1990s to the present day.

The German artist's trajectory has been linked to social, political and institutional criticism from the outset. Schmidt uses aesthetics and visuals to address, for example, **the omissions and violence of colonial narratives**, one of the central themes of his work, along with the need for **the restitution of plundered objects** and the relevant international legislation, **the manipulation of museographic discourses** or **the artificial and spectacular condition of televised politics**.

Schmidt's work is based on the genre of **historical painting** by artists such as **Théodore Géricault**, **Öyvind Fahlström**, **Richard Hamilton** and **Allan Sekula**. In his research projects, Schmidt primarily uses painting to explore the limits of the visible. Even so, it never becomes a self-sufficient artistic instrument, but is complemented by texts and interventions in architecture, so that his works are captured not only through the gaze, but also through reading and physical experience.

His way of working is based on a constant investigation both on the events that take place in the world and on the materiality of painting, using a **wide variety of media (glass, plastic or canvases) and techniques** with which he multiplies the different meanings of his works.

Guilt and Debts

This exhibition, which is the most complete presentation of his work to date, takes its title from the first German translations of **Dostoyevsky's classic**, *Guilt and Atonement* (1866), later translated as *Crime and Punishment*. Schmidt shares the theme of the novel, which deals with power and its abuses and its link to ethical and economic dilemmas, and addresses, like Dostoyevsky, the question of individual atonement in the collective environment of state guilt.

The Palacio de Velázquez is the framework where Guilt and Debts are articulated from two axes of subjective and objective works. The works that derive from personal experience or localized subjectivity are found in the rooms on the left wing of the Palace and the projects based on objective research are grouped in the rooms on the right. In the middle, in the main hall of the building, several research and contestation works establish a relationship between the two extremes.

Schmidt, always attentive to the contexts in which he develops his practice, has made an intervention in the architecture of the Palace, ***Holes in the main hall*** (2018). The artist has made several holes in one of the interior walls, so that if the visitor looks through them, the view he will have of Retiro park will not be very different from that found by the visitors of the first exhibitions held in this place, which was built on the occasion of the National Exhibition of Mining, Metallurgical Arts, Ceramics, Glassware and Mineral Waters in 1883, and which also hosted the General Exhibition of the Philippines, Marianas, Carolinas and Palau in 1887. In this way, the exhibition establishes a historical relationship between the institution dedicated to contemporary art and the institutional frameworks of colonial and industrial modernity.

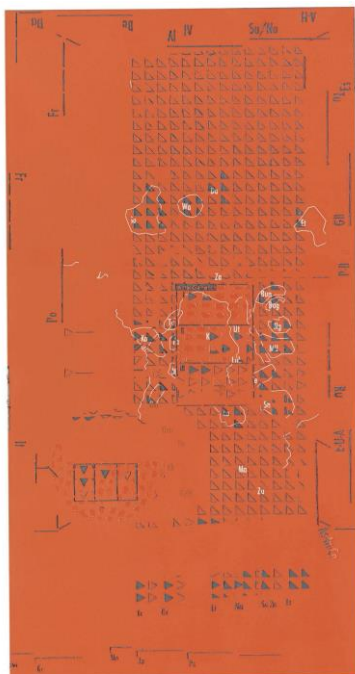
Opposite the main entrance to the Palacio de Velázquez is a new series that Schmidt has created specifically for this exhibition ***Focus on a Showcase Concerning the Archaeologist Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla*** (2018), which shows a display case from the National Archaeological Museum (MAN) and various objects from the collection belonging to the archaeologist, the result of expeditions he made in the 1940s in the Spanish Sahara, and which the State acquired in 1975.

Schmidt represents the showcase of the Sahara in the MAN painted on four glass plates arranged horizontally on the floor, where they open along the length and width of the central axis of the building. The piece thus functions as a mirror of the architecture of the Palacio de Velázquez and reflects the structure of the ceiling.

Colonialism and Restitution

One of his most important research projects is ***The Sharing of the Earth - Panels on the Legal Synopsis of the African Conference in Berlin*** (2005-2007). Composed of two groups of images, the work deals with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, where thirteen European states, plus the USA, agreed to share Africa, giving rise to a new definition and legitimation of colonialism.

The two sets of the project, ***Salzburg Series*** (2005) and ***Kassel Series*** (2007) are made up of large paintings on canvas in vertical format that attempt to translate, in abstract form, the relationship between structure and text. On a background of cartographies that delimit places and territories, text and symbols in silicone have been added.



DIERK SCHMIDT
Tableau 1. Conférence de Berlin 1884/85, 2005
Conferencia de Berlin 1884/85
Acrílico y silicona sobre lienzo
270 x 135 cm

The legal and economic systems, transnational policies and structural violence directed towards the African continent are represented through a system of chromatic diagrams and codes, with symbols that explain the real effects of these abstractions on territories and populations.

With five panels and five engravings of the Berlin Conference, taken from period newspapers, the ***Salzburg Series*** departs from the Conference and analyzes its consequences until reaching the demand presented in 2001 by the Agency for the Reparations of the Herero People (HPRC) for the economic compensation for the "war of extermination" that the German State carried out between 1904 and 1908 against the Nama and Herero peoples of the German Southwest Africa (the current Namibia).

The ***Kassel Series***, presented at Documenta 12 in 2007, consists of fourteen panels and was created from research carried out during Schmidt's stay in Namibia.

This series is easier to decipher as information from catalogues and brochures is integrated into the panels.

In the exhibition you can see two images of politicians taken from the media and painted in figurative style that break the form of representation of both series. One of them, belonging to the Salzburg Series, is an oil painting by Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, speaking to **Alpha Oumar Konaré**, President of the African Union Commission, during the G7+1 summit held in Scotland in 2005. The other, included in the Kassel Series, is a portrait of former German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development **Heidemarie Wiecezrek-Zeul** in which she appears crying in public as she apologises for the German state's responsibility to the Herero and Nama peoples.



DIERK SCHMIDT
Untitled (Claims-Nefertiti vs Treasure of Troja), 2013
Sin título (Demandas - Nefertiti vs Tesoro de Troya)
Óleo y cinta adhesiva sobre metacrilato
25 x 15,3 cm

The museographic devices are the focus of attention in the ***Broken Windows 2.0*** (2013) and ***Broken Windows 6.3*** (2014-2016) series, where the artist appeals to this omnipresent support in museums to allude to the decontextualization and fetishism of the ethnographic object, to the impoverishment of experience. In addition, these glasses painted by Schmidt retain the condition of frames and framing by means of scratches and perforations, "referring to colonial practices of looting or to initiatives of resistance and restitution"..

Broken Windows 6.3 consists of empty displays that represent the abstract function of the showcase without the objects normally associated with it. *Broken Windows 2.0* paintings are made on acrylic glass on which Schmidt has painted the empty display case, the museum wall with the impact of the World War II bullet or the Neus Museum, with the bust of Nefertiti.

These two Broken Windows series are historical paintings from which, apparently, all historical substance has been removed, and where the empty showcases, with drawings of breaks, holes and text fragments, represent the conditions of historicity.

In the next room two works reflect the destruction of the environment and the theft of images. ***The Image Leaks - On the Image Politics of Resources*** (201-2014) series deals with the 2010 oil spill from BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig and the operation the company set up to control the public image of the subsequent contamination of the Gulf of Mexico.

For *Images Leaks*, Schmidt painted glass leaves with tar and oil-based bitumen, thus creating a painting that is installed above the heads of visitors to the room.

For its part, **Seascape** (2011), also painted with tar, is in keeping with the tradition of the "marinas" and shows the polluted surface of the ocean with magnificent reflection effects and the colours of the rainbow.



Institutional critique, another of Schmidt's focal points, has materialized in actions with the activist collective *Artefakte/// anti-humboldt*, and can be seen in works such as **Ghosts of the Berlin Palace** (2002-2004), in which he denounces the contradiction involved in the reconstruction by the German authorities of an 18th-century imperial palace to become the headquarters of the Humboldt Forum, the universal museum of the world's cultures.

One of the most important cases of the work of the *Artefakte//anti-humboldt* group was the return in 2011 of twenty herero skulls and nama to Namibia. This action is represented in another of Schmidt's works painted on glass: **Untitled (Human Remains in Berlin)** (2014-2015). This is a fusion or superimposition of images from the 2011 restitution ceremony of the herero and nama skulls with the painting by Berlin artist **Hans Looschen**, *Findings of Tubes in the Ancient Perú* (1905).

The rooms on the left wing of the Palace house the earliest and "subjective" works of Schmidt's production. They address issues such as capitalist critique, the precariousness of labour, alienation and the artifice of televised debates.

The works in the **McJob** series (1997-2002) deal with the question of work; specifically, the artist's food work: painting. Painted on transparent plastic sheeting, the four paintings are inspired "literally by the lack of foundation, with blank spaces that open them to the wall behind them: an image of economic emergence that fragments social space, individual bodies and time," in the words of curator **Lars Bang Larsen**. "The instability of the plastic sheets insinuates", continues, "the precariousness and ephemeral character of what is gained, such as, for example, painting train carriages with toxic paint".

Through the exhibition of audiovisual editing processes and optical incongruities in the images, Schmidt questions the spectator's concept of visual subjectivity, encouraging criticism and analysis of what is being seen. In **I Know Something . . . You Don't Know . . . "When opinion becomes an occasion for calculation"** (2001-2006) creates a fictitious version of a real programme of political debate on German television in order to examine the qualities of spectacle and artificiality that characterise that of the world's dominant economies.

The painting on plastic foil *IBM Sticks on Hollerith* (2007) shows a scene of research into what are known as "Hollerith technologies", which the Nazis used to coordinate the

Holocaust. Schmidt expands on this story and brings it into contemporary debates about the payment of compensation by the state and industry to victims of forced labor.



DIRK SCHMIDT
Denk Alles, 1995
Pienso en todo
Óleo sobre lienzo
190 x 290 cm

Finally, the triptych *Think of Everything - Untitled - Running Salt* (1995) brings together opposing elements and makes them coincide: abstraction and concretion, monochrome and figurative, full and empty, mechanical and accidental, dissolution and

formation. According to the curator, "it is like the embodiment of the dialogue between the various forms, forces and arguments that develops in the artist's head and that defines the political-aesthetic engine of his project".

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