

SPIKE
ART
MAGAZINE
84

SUMMER
25

SPiKE

DE/AT EUR 20
CHF 28
GBP 18



VULGARITY

TOO MUCH INFORMATION

Portrait
PHILIPP TIMISCHL

How might a buffed-up
muscleman get into a museum
without shamefully putting on a
shirt? Smuggled in the drag of his
own image, according to Philipp
Timischl. Painted, printed, or in
pointillist LED, the Austrian artist's
works emulsify high and low to push
at what good taste regards as extra.

By Maximilian Geymüller

85

Courtesy: the artist and High Art, Paris. Photo: Holly Fogg



I'm just gonna change real quick, Philipp Timischl, 2024, 2024, LED panels, video, media player, 350 x 100 cm

View of “How to tastefully plagiarize myself,” Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers, 2024. From left to right: *A normal pregnant painting*, 2024; *That one monochrome painting that bung in the Jersey Shore house Season 1*, 2024; *Smart Monochrome (Intellectual)*, 2024. All: Tadelakt, acrylic paint, glue, studio dust on canvas, LED Panels, media player, video 1:30 min., 200 x 200 cm



“This is a show about longing for change: dreams of how else life might be, of becoming something else.” That’s how critic Dean Kissick wrapped up his text for one of Philipp Timischl’s recent solo shows at High Art in Paris in 2024. It’s a closing line that brings us right back to the beginning – to the artist’s earlier works.

These early pieces, made around 2013–14, already felt like they were on the verge of becoming something else. Structurally, they seemed unsure of what they were or wanted to be: A flat-screen monitor on the gallery floor had a canvas of the exact same width mounted on top of it, supported from behind by a raw wooden frame. The screens often played deeply personal or private content from the artist – like a montage of video footage from a trip to Corsica with friends – visually echoed by selected stills printed onto the canvas above. This doubling could mean everything or nothing at all (and was probably intended exactly that). The stacked pairing of video sequence and still image quickly nudged viewers toward media critique: a side-by-side comparison of how painting and video/film operate, their strengths and limits – conceptually right in your face. On the other hand, this simultaneity offered little more than redundancy, a dull repetition. The images provided no new meaning, leaving them sitting with the sheer banality of

The boundaries – which Philipp Timischl continues to poke at in his work – are ultimately those of taste.

what was captured. One of the exhibitions from that time bore the title, “Philipp, I have the feeling I’m incredibly good looking, but have nothing to say” (21er Haus, Vienna, 2013) – a title that doubles as a kind of character study of these screen-canvas hybrids: like small-town beauties trying to make it big, dolled up and bursting into the discursive space only to end up looking completely out of place.

Fast forward to summer 2024: In a vast exhibition hall of Le Confort Moderne in Poitiers, France, Timischl presents a perfectly aligned row of ten large-scale paintings (all 2024) stretching across two walls. Each follows the format of a high-modernist staple – the monochrome. In this case, gray ones. They pull out all the stops of gestural abstraction. Color zones shimmer across the works, flickering through

Courtesy: the artist and Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers. Photo: Holly Fogg

almost every imaginable shade of constantly shifting in tone, texture, and intensity to create stunning visual complexity.

Then, in the lower part of each panel, the illusion quietly breaks – though at first, it’s almost imperceptible. The flatscreens have now been replaced with ultra-high-res LED modules that blend seamlessly with the canvases above, continuing the painted abstraction in perfect simulation – until suddenly, the programming switches. Text begins to scroll. The subject matter flips. Each morphs individually, but at one point, they are all synced, creating the rainbow spectrum. It’s quite an upgrade. But it isn’t just the animation that’s been pushed to its technical limits; it’s been done conceptually, too: These monochromes are literally animated. Alive. Through the embedded texts, they introduce themselves, ask viewers questions, even express anxieties. One painting declares:

“I’m not any different. I’m a pregnant painting . . . Swollen with grey tones that refuse to stand out . . . Inside me swirls a rebellion of hues . . . My canvas stretches with untold stories.” Another, *Smart Monochrome (Intellectual)*, lays out its pedigree: “The monochrome as the grid, suited to the avant-garde because its ‘lack of hierarchy or center’ makes it ‘imperviousness to language.’”

Timischl’s works are as silent as they were a decade ago. If anything, they now tend toward the opposite – toward oversharing, toward chatter. And yet – and this remains a constant – they still somehow feel . . . off. Overwrought. Out of place. Add to that a certain childlike quality, for the LED-driven transitions cause their visual appearance to shape-shift and change character – Barbapapas at the museum (those classic French cartoon blobs from the 1970s that could morph into anything).

Comic characters recur throughout Timischl’s work. One standout: a raccoon avatar inspired by Ronny the Raccoon, a kind of mokey antihero who, in the show at High Art, appears in various roles – cop, chef, pilot – complaining about the grind of daily life via text inserts on Timischl’s canvases.

All these over-the-top gestures, these piles of the trivial, are of course calculated breaches of convention – but it’s not so much about a high-vs-low culture clash, which has already thoroughly been played out by Pop and Appropriation art. Timischl is coming from a broader, more sociological angle. In the background looms the art world itself – its unspoken rules, its gatekeeping, its material and immaterial barriers to entry, its social hierarchies that mirror and intensify those of society at large. What counts as legitimate? What gets you disqualified? Who has access – and why?

His artist’s biography and identity as a gay artist from humble beginnings in the Austrian periphery – first entering the Viennese, then the Parisian art scenes – becomes increasingly prominent. One of his drag alter egos, Phil Up,

Artworks For All Age Groups, 2018, C-Print, framed with custom passepartout, 40 x 30 cm



occasionally surfaces to test the boundaries of what’s deemed acceptable in the art context. Case in point: For his 2019 solo show at Vienna’s Secession, he had himself photographed in flamboyant drag, cigarette in hand, accompanied by a half-naked man while touring the institution.

The boundaries – which Timischl continues to poke at in his work – are ultimately those of taste. In one telling title, *How to tastefully plagiarise myself* (Poitiers, 2024), taste as a tool of distinction, à la Pierre Bourdieu, is not framed as aesthetic judgment, but as a social convention. Which makes its opposite – vulgarity, the antithesis of bourgeois etiquette and its cult of moderation – a key point of reference, albeit flipped in intention. The result? A lot of “too much.” Too personal. Too trivial. Too much info. Too much tech. Those painting-LED hybrids sometimes feel like the musclemen they often depict: puffed-up, showy, overblown. A perfect example: *Hard workers (blue)* (2021), where an abstract painting with gestural marks in Yves Klein blue meets a digital ride through a glowing blue tunnel – more Prater [the Viennese amusement park] than Prado.

This use of the vulgar, along with the tendency for exaggerated masculinity, has its precedents – think camp, or gay visual traditions like Tom of Finland. But we’re also close to something Richard Prince once said in 1985 about the origin

Courtesy: the artist and Layr, Vienna

Heavy weights and heavy heart, 2024, acrylic ink and oil on canvas, 200 x 450 cm



Courtesy: the artist and High Art, Paris. Photo: Holly Fogg



Hard workers (Blue & Blue), 2021, Incredibly Kleinish Blue on linen, LED panels, metal truss, media player, video 4:27 min., 150 x 100 x 50 cm

of his own appropriated images: “I like the presumptuousness and the shame usually associated with these images.” Here, we are looking back at a time of excess – especially visual excess – to which artists responded with their own visual overload. It was a time when images themselves became the protagonists: shameless, vicious, fake, innocent, real. “If I turn on my TV, I get hundreds of ‘personalities’ floating toward me,” said Prince.

When Timischl layers emotions and reflections into his image-objects, stacking and mixing media formats, we can draw a direct line with the Appropriation artists of the 1980s. But there’s another important difference: the artist’s deep personal involvement. Where earlier artists maintained analytical distance, the work of Timischl feels caught up in the social machinery, a shared fate, with no apparent way out. —

PHILIPP TIMISCHL (*1989 in Graz, Austria) is an artist living in Paris. Recent solo shows took place at the Museum of Contemporary, Belgrade (2025); High Art, Paris; Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers (both 2024); Layr, Vienna (2023). Recent group shows include “Unknown Familiars,” Leopold Museum, Vienna; “Between Pixel and Pigment. Hybrid Painting in Postdigital Times,” Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Bielefeld & Museum Marta Herford, Herford (both 2024); “Molinier rose saumon (nous sommes tous des menteurs),” Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA, Bordeaux (2023); “Manifesto of Fragility,” Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art (2022); “Fuck You Be Nice,” Air de Paris, Paris (2020).

MAXIMILIAN GEYMÜLLER is a writer and curator living in Vienna.

Courtesy: the artist and Layr, Vienna. Photo: Kunst-Dokumentation.com

The Collected/Corsica 2013, 2013, polyester glass cast resin, inkjet print, shells on glass, HD video (15 min., looped), flatscreen, 140 x 97 x 5 cm



© Belvedere Museum, Vienna. Photo: Johannes Stoll