

CHASING GHOSTS

The apparitional abstractions of Jan-Ole Schiemann are haunting curators and collectors alike.

BY MAXWELL WILLIAMS PORTRAIT BY EVE FOWLER



Schiemann with a work from his current show at Mier Gallery in West Hollywood.

Walking into Mier Gallery in West Hollywood on a sunny day in late December, I couldn't help but notice that Cologne-based painter Jan-Ole Schiemann wearing a shirt that matched his work: lines and shapes flowing in every direction, like a shattered ice sheet in the Arctic Sea.

Schiemann's graphite drawings and ink-acrylic paintings look similarly fractured but once you spend time with them, shapes start to emerge. At first, it's an eye and then maybe a foot or a squiggly head. If you're a fan of early 20th century animation innovator Max Fleischer, you might recognize small elements of his Betty Boop character in Schiemann's work—he is actually mining Fleischer's old animation cells for shapes and fragments.

"I'm coming from gestural abstraction," says Schiemann. "But for now, I like the idea of abstract drawings and lines becoming forms, becoming almost figures, but still oscillating between both."

Where he once pulled readily from Fleischer—his first solo show and the show that inaugurated Mier Gallery was called "MYS/MOS" directly referencing a Fleischer short called *Mysterious Mose* (1930)—Schiemann is now working with the source material judiciously, while developing his own original comical creatures. It's something he's done since he was a child.

"Back in the day when I was into comics, I was always creating my own superhero characters, which I found was the most interesting part," he says. "I always imagine some sort of slapstick situation. Very often, they're tumbling."

This tumbling gives the paintings and drawings a kinetic feel but the biggest treat of seeing Schiemann's work in person is that through a meticulous process, the pieces take on a depth of field that adds another optical layer. Lately, the computer programs renders his work in have become another step in the process.

"I like to think of the works as digital screens almost, because they play with the idea of depth," says Schiemann, who will present a series of new paintings created in Los Angeles at Mier Gallery on March 18. The artist, who is just 34, studied under Andreas Schulze and Albert Oehlen at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, which is where Mier came across his work during the student exhibition. The gallerist was struck by the mastery Schiemann displayed for his "ghost lines"

"You start getting lost in them, and your mind can starts to wander in the paintings," says Mier. "I'm a big fan of Roberto Matta, Secundino Hernández and Carroll Dunham and when I was looking at Jan-Ole and I said, 'He's doing something that is in the 'esque' of some of those artists but really different.' It's a very unique voice in contemporary painting."