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# ‘Towards understanding the nature of history and its limitations’<sup>1</sup>: An interview with the American Artist David Schutter

## Keywords

David Schutter  
painting  
collections  
repetition  
tradition  
unrepresentable  
mimesis  
meta-historical mode

## Abstract

*In this conversation American painter David Schutter and the author discuss key aspects of Schutter’s work. Schutter (born 1974), whose work makes reference to major European painting collections, explores in his work the relation to tradition and repetition of artistic conventions. His work, presented at Documenta 14 (2017), often employs strategies of radical limitation of the colour scheme, and restriction of visibility, sometimes blackening out the image plane altogether. This raises questions about the detachment from the referent object, self-reflexivity and the trope of unrepresentable in contemporary painting in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The conversation will further focus on ways Schutter’s work transgresses from a narrow mimetic framework by mitigating in his paintings the difference between original and double and by employing diminished clarity and ambiguity in his work.*

1. In his work American painter David Schutter (born 1974) follows a classical Platonic model. Dealing  
 2. with aspects of distancing and doubling, the titles of his exhibitions, including ‘after paintings’,  
 3. ‘repertory’ and ‘rehearsal’, suggest the idea of staging or mediation, where the images, as shadowy  
 4. simulacra, never come close to the ‘ideal’ form. By unravelling the complex relationships between the  
 5. original, the source, and the artistic rendering, Schutter’s work debunks traditional assumptions of  
 6. immediacy and visibility of images. The need for distance and detachment, reflects, in Rancière’s  
 7. words, a ‘revivification’ of the Platonic model, when he argues:

8.  
 9. The spectator must be removed from the position of observer calmly examining the spectacle  
 10. offered to her. She must be disposed of this illusory mastery, drawn into the magic circle of  
 11. the theatrical action [...] For one, the spectator must be allowed some distance; for the other,  
 12. he must forego any distance. For one, he must refine his gaze, while for the other, he must  
 13. abdicate the very position of viewer.

(2009: 4)

14.  
 15.  
 16. The paradoxical relationship between distance and proximity, visibility and blindness, applies to  
 17. Schutter’s practice, as illustrated in two of his most recent paintings shown at *Documenta 14* (Kassel,  
 18. 2017). Despite the intense study of the Renaissance painter Parentino at the collection at the Galleria  
 19. Doria Pamphilj in Rome, the paintings do not allow an immediate recognition of the source  
 20. (see Figure 1). Instead of following the mimetic model, the paintings ‘act as deposits of the artist’s  
 21. memory of having spent long days just looking at two works’ (Roelstraete 2017).<sup>2</sup> Whether one inter-  
 22. prets these references as ‘homage or annihilation’ of historic collections<sup>3</sup> (Halvorson 2014), Schutter’s  
 23. paintings can be seen as a ‘referent object’ that indicates the historical and institutional context as  
 24. well as artistic intentions. As he explains in relation to his most recent work shown at *Documenta 14*:  
 25. ‘I consider the value of surface information: that it can accrue into a forensic investigation, and give  
 26. over to the more phenomenal aspects of seeing’ (Roelstraete 2017). And yet, despite this apparent  
 27. proximity of his work to the ‘original’ piece, Schutter’s paintings deliberately stretch the idea of  
 28. subject matter and legibility, where the obfuscated paintings allow only limited access to the original  
 29. image source.<sup>4</sup> The work clearly does not intend to produce *copies* made after the originals; the paint-  
 30. ings are, as he argues, ‘a gesture toward understanding the nature of history and its limitations’  
 31. (Schutter 2007).

32. The return to the past (and references to historic archives, ranging from fifteenth–nineteenth-  
 33. century western European painting collections) and the notion of distance is prevalent in Schutter’s  
 34. work and can be seen as part of a broader tendency in contemporary art in the last decade. Coined  
 35. as ‘meta-historical mode’, artistic practices show a particular interest in reenacting and recon-  
 36. structing the past as ‘another type of storytelling’, avoiding to ‘look at the present’ (Roelstraete

1. The title is taken from a statement David Schutter made in 2007 after his residency in Berlin, working on the cycle ‘After Paintings’ which is linked to the painting collection at the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.
2. Schutter’s work has frequently been interpreted as dealing with aspects of distance and past, showing for example ‘the perceptible archaeology of art objects’ (Halvorson 2014); ‘Rather than a nihilistic endgame or a refutation of history, Schutter crafts memento mori to capture the distance between what was and what is’ (Elms 2007: 59).
3. Schutter makes in his work both reference to specific painting collections as well as the display and arrangements of these collections (see e.g. Constable’s cloud paintings in the Yale Centre for British Art [2008] to the most recent work referencing the Gurlitt Estate and Max Lieberman, shown at the ‘Documenta 14’ [2017]).
4. Schutter’s paintings have been described



Figure 1: David Schutter (2017), DP P 587 PR, DP 588 PR, (Two paintings, oil on linen, 46 x 58.5 cm each), Image Credit: James Prinz.

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1. 2009).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, David Schutter's obfuscated image planes create a sense of detachment, yet never
2. totally eliminate references to the image source. The distance between copy and original is further
3. emphasized in his attempt to eschew the direct confrontation with the latter in order to avoid
4. what he describes as the 'always already there quality' of the museum's display. The work, after a
5. period of intense consultation (a concentrated 'phenomenological' study of the work without any
6. devices or aids), progresses without accessing the original piece, allows him to 'restore [...] mean-
7. ing from the traditional and institutional metaphors already set firmly in place' (Schutter 2007).<sup>6</sup>
8. The aspect of distancing can be also read as his way of dealing with artistic tradition and past in
9. general.
10. Bryson has explored the complexities of artistic practice and its relation to tradition in his discus-
11. sion of French neo-classicist painting. Tradition and the repetition of conventions confront the artist
12. with one of the main struggles in contemporary art. The painter's constant conflict with the presence
13. of the past is a 'negotiation with repetition': 'If a painter fails in his fight against repetition', Bryson
14. adds, 'presence will elude his image, and tradition will expropriate or annex his work' (1984: 28).
15. With its close references to specific painting collections Schutter's work, however, seems to reflect
16. this struggle, this searching for a direct juxtaposition between the 'model', the source material or
17. reference point, and his artistic rendering.
18. Schutter's paintings, then, display, in his own words, 'the liminal traces after a struggle' (2007). In
19. his conceptualization of the *Mystic writing pad* Freud explained how the material leaves a faint, but
20. perceptible trace on the waxen surface below, a trace which can be seen if one were to lift up the
21. sheet of plastic and examine the wax surface. Schutter's work leaves the viewer and the painter in a
22. situation where the plastic sheet has been lifted. The viewer is thus left with the traces of a work that
23. appears uncoupled from direct accessibility. It may seem that Schutter's obfuscated image surfaces
24. wish to eliminate any references to the original. Yet, just like Freud's mystic writing pad, traces reveal
25. a broader understanding of appearance and disappearance.<sup>7</sup>
26. Indeed, in recent years painters have shown a particular interest in diminishing the clarity of the
27. image. There is a fascination with ambiguity, with the dissolution of images (see e.g. Maaik Schoorel,
28. Silke Otto-Knapp, Chris Ofili, Idris Khan and others). Seen as an attempt to disconnect the image
29. from a narrow mimetic framework, these new negations of representation have been justified as an
30. attempt to deviate from heteronormative readings and to widen art historical discourses (see, e.g.,
31. Kaneda [1991 or Enwezor [2008]).
32. As Schutter unpacks this point in our conversation:
- 33.
34. I am not intentionally cultivating obfuscation, nor am I interested in a baffling of the eyes of
35. the beholder. I am interested in deadpan presentation and the events that follow. To me, the
36. presentation of illusory space is a parlour trick that questions belief structures. I consider my

as 'leading to a kind of foggy confusion of the alternatively fully recalled, half remembered, and misremembered details represented' (Molon 2007).

5. The 'meta historical mode', also referred to as a 'retrospective' or 'historiographic mode', identifies a particular strand in recent contemporary practices that shows an increased interest in reconstruction and reenactment of archival material (Roelstraete 2009: 1). The practices, dealing with the complex relationships within the archive and memory, purposefully endorse an overlap of timeframes, instances illegibility or a certain 'resistance' to interpretation, resulting in alternative or unorthodox readings. Schutter's investment in archives and exploration of the past is further highlighted through his participation of the 2013 exhibition 'The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art' (November 9 2013– March 9 2014 Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, curated by Dieter Roelstraete). The exhibition

investigates the role of the historical, archival research in contemporary artistic practices (see also Roelstraete 2009).

- 6. Schutter elaborates on the paradoxical point of proximity and distance:

As an example of a basic existential problem, a museum painting's 'always already there quality' forced me to the task of contesting the original work of art, in the hope that I could restore for myself meaning from the traditional and institutional metaphors already set firmly in place.

(2007)

- 7. The 'mnemonic potential' of painting, as Gingeras (2005) argues, shows a particular focus on the materiality of painting. The arguable 'sensuality' of painting is defined, unlike photography, as a way the viewer responds to the materiality of painting and its potential to trigger personal recollections. I wish to suggest, since the relationship between painting and photography is more complex, that

paintings and drawings to be illusory works in the conventional sense. However, as you say, 'not being able to see' is important in this regard.

To some extent we may interpret the obfuscation of the image plane as allowing not only a distancing from any substantive content, but as raising more far-going questions of the *unrepresentable*. Notwithstanding the wide range of instances of the unrepresentable, from instances of the sublime to iconoclasm, I wish to focus here on the relationship between the 'way of making and the economy of affects', concerned with the excess or lack of visibility (Rancière 2007: 112). The scepticism towards the visual regime happens at a time when painting is increasingly exposed to technological progress and phenomena such as the Internet, video, portable devices, CCTV footage or virtual reality. The widening tendency of this hybridization is somewhat countered by the fact that paintings have become more and more 'impenetrable' and show a lack of legibility (Geimer 2012). Schutter's work seems to disentangle the image from the increased media consumption. It encourages viewers to decelerate their perception, while putting a particular focus on the marks and gestures. It stretches the link between trace and its 'organic' referent. Gestures and texture, traditionally seen as a marker of authorship, have been removed from its original context. Instead, distance and detachment could be attributed here to a sort of 'miming' or staging.<sup>8</sup> In his recent work *Spolia* (2016) Schutter employs a series of complex strategies: he reuses, reframes and re-contextualizes a selection of 'syntaxes and jargons' of his art historical references. The notion of the mark related to an author and personal gesture thus becomes almost irrelevant. Yet, despite the detachment of the sign, and the distancing from the original source, the thread is never cut entirely.<sup>9</sup>

Legibility, or the suspension of the overtness of the sign, as a key aspect in artistic practice becomes crucial to understand Schutter's paintings. His work not only examines the relationship between copy and model (as exemplified in the *DP P 587 PR*, *DP 588 PR* [2017] mentioned above) and the idea of resemblance, it also allows a transgression of the narrowing mimetic framework. Mimesis is therefore not understood, as Rancière reminds us and Schutter's work reflects poignantly, as an accurate copy but, rather, as a 'way of making resemblances function within a set of relations between ways of making, modes of speech, forms of visibility and protocols of intelligibility' (Rancière 2007: 73).

The conversation with David Schutter started in person in June 2016, while Schutter was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome and continued over the following months.

**Christian Mieves:** *The titles of some of your past projects suggest the notion of distancing or repetition in your work (e.g. 'repertory', 'rehearsal'; 'repetition'). Does your work suggest, in a linear way, an increasing distancing, detachment, or, is it in fact the opposite, the idea of getting closer?*

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1. **David Schutter:** I don't think of the titles, particularly of *Rendition* (2013) (in which I remade a suite of four paintings from the Barbizon room of the Art Institute of Chicago) or *Repertory* (2007)
2. (in which I remade a frieze of ten cloud studies by John Constable situated in the Yale Center for
3. British Art) as distancing. Rather, I think that by framing the language of the exhibition titles in the
4. 're-', distance is implied as only the beginning point of a perspective that can grow forward from
5. that problematic position. The very repetition that I embrace is an invitation to advance toward the
6. object, to see difference, to begin a conversation that is sustainable and therefore to offer a closer
7. looking at painting.
- 8.
- 9.
10. **CM:** *I am very interested in the work process. Your painting deals with the idea of repetition and variation,*
11. *while diffusing a clear opposition between copy and original. In particular, this seems to reflect a shift in our*
12. *understanding of representation itself. I am thinking, for example, of your work on Constable's cloud studies.*
13. *While Constable's work still echoes a 'fidelity' of scientific observation of nature as a 'standard of scale', your*
14. *work approaches it from a different perspective. Could you elaborate on this?*
- 15.
16. **DS:** It has been very relevant to me. Constable considered his field studies to be a form of natural
17. science. After all, he went into the field to strengthen his representations of clouds after criticism that
18. his painted clouds were lacking in depth and were not reflective of natural phenomena (perhaps
19. they were too pictorial and classic against trends favouring a vector from naturalism to the sweep-
20. ing abstractions of Turner). He sought to form a more real depiction from field observation, but he
21. also took with him into the field a pedagogical manual for depicting clouds, printed for artists by
22. Alexander Cozens. The manual was full of schematics. Constable used both this manual and his
23. naked observations to build a more believable cloud. This to me is interesting. I am doing something
24. similar in spirit. I am using past painting as the schematic manual and painting itself, as a verb, as a
25. form of field study. The great natural fidelity, for which Constable searched, is something brokered
26. against the pole of the immediately accessible Enlightenment knowledge that he used as material,
27. and on the other end, his continuing wonder of the world. I would say I am centred on that critical
28. point.
- 29.
30. **CM:** *To what extent does your work evoke the idea of mediation where the paintings are described as*
31. *'stand-ins' and 'an act of forgetting', suggesting, again, a sense of distancing? Could you elaborate on the*
32. *aspect of mediation in relation to your work? The idea of re-mediation, circulation, network and so on seems*
33. *very different (and not clearly applicable to your paintings). And yet, the idea of redistribution, relocation*
34. *(where your work frequently makes reference to not only painting collections but also the display and the*
35. *presentation) seems at the same time a poignant aspect of your work (see Figure 2).*
- 36.

- Schutter's work in particular allows a reevaluation of the painterly sign beyond its material quality.
8. Hochdörfer argues that the 'crisis of the subject' coincides with the crisis of contemporary painting (in Ammer et al. 2015: 15). This becomes in particular relevant in Schutter's referencing of painting collections can be understood as 'user-based-content' as introduced by Ammer et al. in the 2015 exhibition 'Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age'. The exhibition further fosters a critical re-evaluation of the notion of gesture as 'privileged marks from the hand' and authorship (Ammer et al. 2015: 10) which I see as one of the key aspects in Schutter's work. For a further discussion of 'Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age' (Nov 2015–April 2016, Museum Brandhorst) (see Ammer et al. 2015).
  9. Yve-Alain Bois argues in *Painting as Model* that painting has already reached the condition of photography and the division of labour is already 'interiorized' in the painter (1993: 231). Painting therefore



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Figure 2: David Schutter (2014), 'What Is Not Clear Is Not French', Installation view; Rhona Hoffman Gallery, April 12 – May 31, 2014, Image: RCH | EKH Art Documentation; courtesy of Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

1. **DS:** The paintings that I make are redistributed via the exhibition encounter. After all, the 'originals'  
2. are entirely already present in their own house of the collection in which they live and function, but  
3. to send them out into the world again estranged they are alive in a different way. To me, the act of  
4. forgetting as a painter is to be able to spend time with the works first hand, make their likeness in  
5. the studio, and let them go, say, into the ether; it is a release. In other words, to render the works  
6. after studying them intimately, is a way of placing them aside. In that adjacency they are maybe  
7. more available to me as 'forgotten'. I can set them aside.

8.  
9. **CM:** *Could you say a bit more about the practical terms of the process of 'forgetting' and 'setting aside'?*  
10. *What seems at first a very conscious decision appears to be a very unconscious process.*

11. **DS:** Mediation is a curious term. I am using a painting as a point of focus, say a Hals portrait.<sup>10</sup> I  
12. am not interested in being a medium, as in a séance, but rather I am using the Hals portrait as a  
13. source. After months of becoming familiar with Hals' hand and brush, though I may invoke the traits  
14. of Hals as a painter, I am not interested in speaking through him, like a medium, in an attempt to  
15. embody him as an artist as shaman. I am more interested in the actual surface of his paintings, his  
16. techniques, the appearance of things. I to try to move closer, or as close as I can, toward what is a  
17. Hals. I have no romantic ambitions to recreate a Hals. What I have is a historical moment before  
18. me that gives me a Hals as subject. With it, I can do very little but look at his painting and make a  
19. painting in response, from my historical position. This is a mediation, flawed as it may be, so far as  
20. I can see from your question. What I do is perhaps a mediation to address the past as a present and  
21. uncomfortable entity. I am interested, in this regard, that both the Hals and my painting after it are  
22. living in the same world, further complicating relationships to vision and history. For instance, I may  
23. be setting aside the Hals painting, or forgetting it, in some phenomenological sense, but I am very  
24. much attempting to unearth a discussion on the painting and what it represents. As an example, I  
25. made a group of 5 large Hals portraits that were commissioned to Hals by the investors and chief  
26. shareholders of the Dutch East India Trading Co (see e.g. Figure 3) To raise a conversation around  
27. issues of colonization, the global reach of power, the subjugation of people, and the disproportionate  
28. distribution of wealth at this particular time in history is at the nexus of why I chose those particular  
29. Hals pictures, located in New York and London. So, the repetition that I employ is not just in the  
30. repetition of re-making a painting, but is in the repetition of addressing the representations and  
31. histories in the pictures.

32.  
33. **CM:** *Does your work show (in an almost Brechtian way) a reflection on defamiliarization and the malle-*  
34. *ability of the sign/image? How do you prevent the viewer from becoming too familiar, accustomed to the*  
35. *image, or – conversely – too alienated? Terry Eagleton, for instance, describes Brecht's Alienation Effect as an*  
36.

requires a critical analysis of the link between trace, touch and gesture, and 'its organic referent' (1993: 231). Individual gesture and the notion of authorship in Schutter's work becomes in particular contested and inevitably reworked.

10. Schutter created a body of work 'Glove in Hand' in 2015 (see Figure 3), shown at Aurel Scheibler, Berlin (2 May 2015–27 June 2015). The work is inspired by five portraits of Dutch merchants by seventeenth-century painter Frans Hals.





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Figure 3: David Schutter (2015), 'Glove in Hand', Installation view, Aurel Scheibler, Berlin, Photo: def image.

1. 'effect [that] is one of presence and absence together' (1985: 633). Do you recognize in your painting aspects  
2. of 'cancelling' as a productive strategy?

3. **DS:** I think that your citing here makes sense, I am not so familiar with Eagleton on Brecht, but  
4. I can say that absence and presence is a concomitant set that I find productive, as I think on the  
5. source picture and my work together as a set. Would that productive dialectic of absence/pres-  
6. ence add up to a cancelling? I am not sure. The ontological threads that become frayed in reason-  
7. ing a way of looking at one of my works is, I hope, productive. But I am not trying to actively  
8. cancel anything.

9.  
10. **CM:** To my understanding, your work seems to respond to a current tendency where a sense of diminished  
11. clarity and ambiguity of the image, and interest in the dissolution of the image, can be seen as an attempt  
12. to disconnect the image from the world, what could be called an 'imageless truth', abandoning a sense of  
13. iconicity (see Figure 4). I would be interested to hear about the ways in which you withdraw and delay the  
14. 'consumption' of images in your work, if you think that is the case. Is there a correlation between the delay  
15. in the artistic practice and the perception of the audience?  
16.

17. **DS:** Perhaps at this moment we crave an ambiguity from contemporary art because so much of our  
18. consumption of visual imagery is based in the explicit. I do not think that by nature, ambiguity is an  
19. ultimate power, even in this setting. I am more interested in the strength of paradox. Ambiguity is a  
20. valuable trait to suspend or upset circumscribed thought, but as an end, I feel it is over-extended. I  
21. would rather use it as a middle ground toward paradox, which I feel is more rich with redress, revi-  
22. sion, and new beginnings, no matter how cumbersome these things may be. I am not certain about  
23. 'imageless truths'. Or Truth in general. I do not try to degrade the images I work with as sources. I  
24. am trying to make 1:1 renderings in one way or another. I recognize that the paintings I make are  
25. not interchangeable with the sources, like Pierre Menard's Cervantes, but essentially that is the goal  
26. by which I fail. What I live within the studio is the gap that exists, the, not degraded, but, rather the  
27. liminal plane of what remains. I do not want to disconnect images from the world, as you say, but I'd  
28. rather bring paintings to the fore, as vital ways of seeing in the now, a facing of a historical eye that  
29. recognizes our present as a fraught place.  
30.

31. **CM:** I wonder if you can expand on the point about the 'liminal plane' that you mention. In a more literal/  
32. spatial way liminal planes seem less controlled and regimented. I am thinking, very practically, of the edges  
33. of paintings where painters often 'relax' and the unexpected, less controlled brushwork appears.

34. **DS:** Yes. I am glad you asked this. I don't go about making the pictures with an alpha-omega desire  
35. for completion. In other words, I am not a tightrope walker. Many things spill and slip into the  
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Figure 4: David Schutter (2015), MMA H 636a 2, oil on linen, 80.6 x 66 cm, Location: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis, University. Image Credit: James Prinz.

1. pictures on this liminal plane. For as much as I may want to restrict my focus to only the painting at
2. hand (and its connective source) I always have the uninvited guest slip into the room of the work.
3. That takes many forms which I cannot name here. One painter that I can say is a spectre for me with
4. some regularity is Cezanne. I have never worked with a Cezanne as a source material, but he is leak-
5. ing through the seams of whatever barrier I may set for before myself.

6.

7. **CM:** *Does the 'obstacle' of not being able to see opens up new possibilities for your work, in both the making-*

8. *process and for the viewer?*

9.

10. **DS:** There are no obstacles that I intentionally place into play. While I admit that the image or the

11. object of my painting may deny immediate access to see with clarity, I am not intentionally culti-

12. vating obfuscation, nor am I interested in a baffling of the eyes of the beholder. I am interested

13. in deadpan presentation and the events that follow. To me, the presentation of illusory space is a

14. parlor trick that questions belief structures. I consider my paintings and drawings to be illusory

15. works in the conventional sense. However, as you say, 'not being able to see' is important in this

16. regard. Often in the course of making a painting, I feel as if I cannot see clearly a way forward.

17. If an illusory space is made without firm coordinates or clear perspective, then 'not being able to

18. see', as I make the painting, or 'not being able to see' as the viewer on the other end, is a genera-

19. tive problem. It nullifies projections of what the painting could be and forces an engagement

20. with what it is.

21.

22. **CM:** *I am interested in the idea of a 'tradition' of limits of representation which seems so prevalent in your*

23. *work. Beginning e.g. with the baroque and hollowed-out, dark spaces; Romanticism and the sublime and an*

24. *interest in the unrepresentable, artists throughout the ages showed a particular interest in the notion of*

25. *limitation but also in the concept of allegory and the idea of a 'gap'. Can you relate to that?*

26. **DS:** I actually think that your question on this regard is right on. In fact, I would take that question

27. and make it into a statement, if I had the wildness within me to think that I could harness and

28. work with as material what you describe. I am interested in those very things, but with caution

29. and scepticism. It would be foolish for me to say I want to court the gap of the unrepresentable.

30. Could I say instead that I know those phenomena exists and understand that it is a complex full

31. of wonder and terror, but I can never use this thing as a tangible material as a painter. That is the

32. territory of Frenhofer in de Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece* ([1831] 2001). I address what you high-

33. light at a distance and discuss that distance, and my observations from that vantage, in the work

34. I make. These hollowed out spaces you mention, I try to make them full. I can say that, know-

35. ing how paradoxical it sounds – hollowed/full, but still this is in my mind as I work. Space is not

36. empty.

**CM:** *The figure/ground division seems central to the idea of painting and the transgression of the binary opposition appears to question the stability of the visual field. I wonder to what extent this plays a role in your work. Furthermore, the 'instability of the mark' (Elkins 1998) in particular seems relevant to some of your recent body of work, including Spolia (2016) (for example, the idea of pretence of likeness). Could your work be interpreted as exploring different degrees of likeness or proximity?*

**DS:** I very much feel that, as you so eloquently state it, much of my work is about likeness and proximity. One must ask then, a likeness to what source, and then too toward a proximity of what location? If Cezanne had the urge to make paintings as heavy and as present as works in the museum (his desired likeness to old master pictures and toward the proximity of the museum world), I might say that though I work with museum pictures as my sources, I would like to make works that speak of not the heaviness of their actual presence and place, but instead toward the imaginary aspects of their criteria. What makes a picture such as these? What are their traits? How are they made? All of these factors inform how they are seen. The museum can be a palliative zone for painting, so I am not desiring to make pictures that feel as if they are bound for this place.

**CM:** *Are you interested in specific paintings or epochs? How would your work process change if you were to respond to contemporary painting?*

**DS:** I am interested, at least in my practice of working with source material, in the age that brackets easel painting from the fifteenth–nineteenth century in western Europe. It is a huge arena. And it will keep me busy for a lifetime. I think that what we have come to define as painterliness in the West comes from this time. I am interested in taking this apart and trying to understand it, as it informs our now. Of course I am taken by other times, other cultures. There are many moments that stir me that are outside my narrow focus. I am more and more interested in what Hans Belting would define as art before art, or the painting of the icon. Equally I am moved by primitive and medieval works that border his definition, and works outside the canon of the West. But for contemporary painting to be a source, no, I have not the interest to use this as my beginning.

**CM:** *To a certain extent through your work you enable the viewer to see the painting from different angle. You also seem to have a strong interest in viewpoints and positions. The multiplicity of views is often associated with sculpture, not so much so with painting. Why is this important in your work?*

**DS:** I am always thinking about this. The feet of the viewer, and the mobility of these feet. To view a painting is a restless activity, either from boredom, intrigue, or connoisseurship. To change perspectives from any or all of these positions is natural. I make many choices in the paintings to coincide with these changing vectors of spectatorship, even my own. I may scumble a green over a red, a



1. green stroked over in dry paint across a luminescent red, so that when the viewer, or I, move laterally
2. before the picture plane of the painting a swift, but flickering change occurs to reveal a momentary
3. blip or shift that is in time and not in the literal material of the paint. In this way, I try to court a
4. difficult duration, or a phenomenal reading that is active. I strive toward what Nietzsche might have
5. wanted when he said he sought an active readership that did not point out his contradictions, but
6. rather embraced them for their latent pregnancy of meaning across contradiction.

7.  
8. **CM:** *'Living with images' is an important part of your artistic process. I am referring to the fact that you*  
9. *spend extensive periods of time revisiting and observing paintings, in sharp contrast with the rapid recep-*  
10. *tion and distribution of images characteristic of this century. Is the deliberate 'slow' process in the creation or*  
11. *reception of images a reflection on alternative modes of reception of paintings (e.g. in churches)?*

12. **DS:** I do want a slower reception. I can only hope that it is alternative to the way that we process  
13. images now.

14. David Schutter, born 1974, lives and works in Chicago.  
15. Recent solo exhibitions include Magazzino, Rome (2016), Aurel Scheibler, Berlin (2015); Rhona  
16. Hoffman Gallery, Chicago (2014); Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts Chicago (2013);  
17. National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (2009–10); Tony Wight Gallery, Chicago (2008–09);  
18. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (2006). His work has been shown at *Documenta 14*,  
19. Kassel, Germany (2017).  
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35.  
36.

Christian Mieves

1. uncertain fields. His paintings have been shown in exhibitions in Germany, Mexico, Spain and the  
2. United Kingdom. Recent publications include journal articles on Luc Tuymans, Dana Schutz, Peter  
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