

Save yourself. Saved.” The lights came on. We were all safe, on the other side of the barricade. Irony of fate, it was November 6, the day of the American election and Trump’s victory.

—Veronica Santi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

## ATHENS

### Dana Schutz

THE GEORGE ECONOMOU COLLECTION

Among the paintings on view in Dana Schutz’s exhibition “The Island” is one called *To Have a Head*, 2017. This could have made a good alternate title for the show, as heads—and questions about how it feels to have or be one—are prominent in most of the fifteen paintings and five drawings on display. The painting shows a figure in a posture of despair, hands on head. The protagonists of other works appear anxious, burdened, or uncomfortable—but at the same time they also look funny or absurd. The recent group portrait *The Arbiters*, 2023, shows

some outsize potato heads, while *Face Eater*, 2004, one of Schutz’s best known and most hilarious portraits, is a head in the process of eating itself.

Schutz’s free, straightforward figuration struck a nerve in the early 2000s, and its goofy and cartoonish images of modern life and its easy art-historical references—such as a print of Courbet’s *L’origine du monde* (The Origin of the World), 1866, on the T-shirt worn by the figure in *Daughter*, 2000—inspired a younger generation of painters. The fast and energetic look of Schutz’s paintings was part of their appeal; it always seemed as if the artist, inspired by an idea, just did it, in a quick and confident act of creation.

As a small retrospective, with works ranging from 2000 to 2024, this show offers an opportunity to compare the artist as she is today with her former self and to see how her style has developed. In recent years she has sought dialogue with painters of the past, resulting in some monumental (and relatively traditional) multifigure compositions, among them *Dear Painter*, 2023, which reflects on the act of painting a model. The artist’s engagement with the European tradition of group portraiture, or with biting scenes from the Neue Sachlichkeit (which seem relevant for our own grotesque era) resulted in more complicated compositions, as in *Mountain Group*, 2018. Heavier impasto brushwork marks a difference from the flatter works made earlier.

With this turn to art history, the burden of painting’s past weighs more heavily on Schutz’s shoulders. Her later paintings appear serious and complex but also a bit stiff and heavy-handed. The storytelling tends to take over the painting, as in *The Arbiters*, where five figures gesticulate and argue, leaving the viewers to put the pieces together. Suddenly Schutz is not that unique, but one among many painters trying to cut a piece of the cake.

Observing this conundrum shines a light on how meaning was transmitted in Schutz’s earlier works, those made up until around 2006,

when it came through a more direct and immediate evocation of a feeling. Even when there were hints at narrative, as in *Face Eater* or in *Google*, 2006, where we see the artist bent over a computer screen, a unifying energy sweeps through the painting, giving it a kind of lightness and tying it together. The shifts in paint application are smooth, and the implied story is a relative thing—not the main point of the painting. Looking at these paintings, one gets the feeling that the artist hit it just right. Such a talent is probably not something a painter can really own, at least over time. It has to be earned, or else accepted as a transient gift. It comes and goes—it’s hard to grab—but when it’s there you can always spot it, and then you miss it when it’s gone.

—Jurriaan Benschop

## GRAZ, AUSTRIA

### Mathias Poledna

HALLE FÜR KUNST STEIERMARK

Part of an artist’s job is to fill up spaces. Whether they respond to the character of a given space ingeniously or confrontationally, it dictates the presentation of their works. Mathias Poledna is the rare artist who modifies space with such precision that he makes the room look as though it was designed especially for his art.

In this case, the large main hall of the Halle für Kunst Steiermark was cut in half lengthwise by an imposing freestanding wall that reached almost to the ceiling, with gaps at both ends. When you entered, the room was empty and brightly lit. Facing you was an entry into another room, hidden behind another, smaller wall. On the other side of the large wall was a solitary bench. Before long, the light went out theatrically and the wall became a screen for a 35-mm film projection. Behind the bench was an entrance to a small room where the formidable-looking projector and an even bigger film looper were placed like sculptures to be admired.

Walking around the large wall and through the entrance behind the smaller wall, you found a semicircular room filled with natural light, containing only a bench and an impressive handwoven carpet, *Örtagården* (The Herb Garden), 1929, designed by Swedish textile artist Märta Måås-Fjetterström. Downstairs in the basement hung a set of archival photographs from an Italian car manufacturer, to which Poledna gave the collective title *Untitled (circa 1963–1972)*, 2022. In the center of the room, a vintage Michelin tire tube, still in its original wrapping, presumably from the same period as the photographs, was suspended in midair (*Untitled*, 2022).

Mathias Poledna, *My Favorite Shop*, 2024, 35 mm, color, sound, 10 minutes 10 seconds.



Dana Schutz, *Google*, 2006, oil on canvas, 72 × 72”.

