

Thomas Ott (Focus)

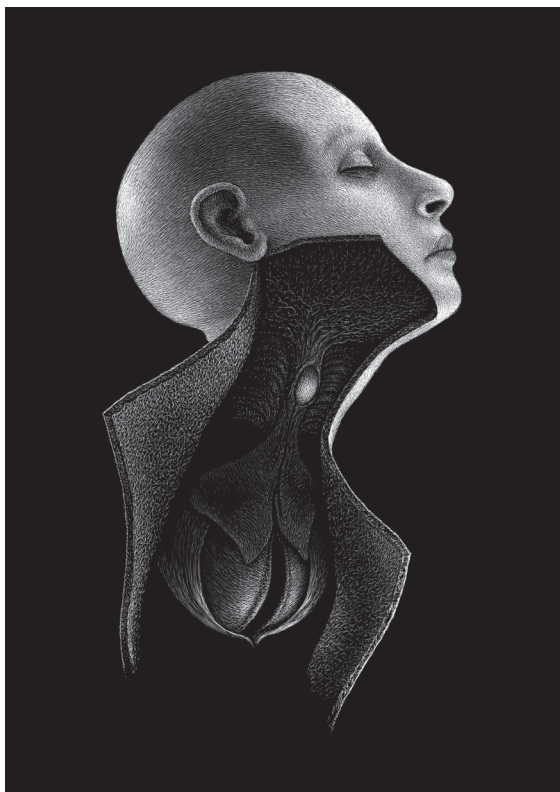
born in 1966, Zurich (Suisse)

Thomas presents a new body of scratchboard drawings. Here, drawing is not an addition but a subtraction: the artist incises the black surface to extract light. The gesture is slow, irreversible, almost surgical.

This series unfolds as an imaginary anatomy. Ott does not observe the body, he opens it. Like a physician from another era, he performs fictional dissections, not to understand reality but to expose its hidden zones. Unknown organs, fragmented structures, opened heads: the body becomes an unstable space, oscillating between knowledge and hallucination.

Nothing here is spectacular. Faces remain calm, almost absent, while bodies are offered up—opened, traversed, disassembled. They do not suffer; they drift. Suspended figures, forms in gestation, uncertain presences: everything seems to exist in an in-between, where categories falter, between life and death, consciousness and the unconscious. Thomas Ott's work is marked by a constant tension between Eros and Thanatos. This series offers a distilled expression of that tension: a sequence of silent images in which anatomy no longer refers to science but to an inner, mental, almost hallucinatory cartography.

Without text, without explicit narrative, Ott constructs a wordless world in which each image functions as a fragment. The viewer finds no explanation, only an experience. For if the artist works in darkness, it is to reveal—with relentless precision—what usually remains unseen.



Thomas Ott, *Vanity*, 2026, carte à gratter, 29 x 41 cm ©Thomas Ott / courtesy Galerie Martel

BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Ott spent his entire childhood in Birmensdorf, near Zurich. At the age of 16, he enrolled in the Kunstgewerbeschule, a school of graphic arts which, upon completing his studies, led him toward a career as a draughtsman.

Thomas approaches drawing in a highly composite way, but very quickly this cinema enthusiast, nourished by comics and noir fiction, made the scratchboard technique his own.

With infinite patience, the artist scratches away the black layer covering the white surface of a board using the tip of a cutter. As with etching, there is almost no room for error in this technique, which requires anticipating the drawing that already exists mentally or in preliminary sketches before the artist takes up his cutter and brings out of darkness an infinity of white hatchings.

For all his fellow draughtsmen, Thomas Ott has become the master of this technique. With incisive and precise drawing, he shapes the sharp contours of his dark, violent and at times offbeat universe. From the early short stories collected in the album *Tales of Error* (Edition Moderne, 1989) and in the anthology *R.I.P.* (L'Association, 2010), to the longer narratives—*Cinema Panopticum* (L'Association, 2005), *The Number* (L'Association, 2008), or his Travel Book unfolding *Route 66* (Louis Vuitton Travel Books, 2018)—one finds his striking framing, filled with that expressionist light that generates unease and dread. While the tone shifts from black humour to biting irony depending on the project, precision and profusion remain constants in the Swiss artist's work.

His latest book, *La Forêt*, a short silent narrative, was published in 2020 by Martin de Halleux.

In 2024, several of his works were shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris as part of the major exhibition *La BD à tous les étages*. Then, in 2025, the CartoonMuseum in Basel devoted an exhibition to him entitled *Thomas Ott From Scratch*, thereby foregrounding his scratched-cardboard technique.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2020 — *La Forêt*, Les Éditions Martin de Halleux
- 2018 — *Travel book Route 66*, Editions Louis Vuitton
- 2014 — *A Hell of a Woman*, de Jim Thompson, Éditions La Baconnière, coll. « Trou Blanc »
- 2013 — *Dark Country*, L'Apocalypse
- 2010 — *R.I.P. - Best of 1985-2004*, L'Association
- 2008 — *73304-23-4153-6-96-8*, L'Association
- 2005 — *Cinema Panopticum*, L'Association
- 2002 — *T.O.T.T.*, Edition Moderne
- 2000 — « Recuerdos de México », dans *L'Association au Mexique*, L'Association, coll. « Eperluette »
- 1999 — *Comix 2000*, L'Association
- 1998 — *La Grande Famiglia* (textes et dessins), avec Gila (photos), L'Association
- 1997 — *Exit*, Delcourt, coll. « Encrages », Reprise de *Tales of Error* et *Greetings from Hellvil*
- 1997 — *Dead End*, Edition Moderne
- 1996 — *La Bête à cinq doigts*, L'Association, coll. « Patte de mouche »
- 1996 — *La Douane*, L'Association, coll. « Patte de mouche »
- 1995-1999 — *Participation à six numéros de Lapin*, L'Association
- 1995 — *Greetings from Hellville*, Edition Moderne
- 1994 — « Les Millionnaires », dans *L'argent roi*, Autrement, coll. « Histoires graphiques »
- 1989 — *Tales of error*, Edition Moderne

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2025 — *From Scratch*, CartoonMuseum de Basel