



Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective

SEPT 21, 2008—JAN 5, 2009

MOCA GRAND AVENUE and THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT **MOCA**

Martin Kippenberger (b. 1953, Dortmund, Germany; d. 1997, Vienna) was a prolific artist, producing volumes of work during his brief 20-year career. Kippenberger's practice is as distinguished for its incisive challenges to the identity and position of the artist in the culture as it is for its diversity and remarkable volume—including hundreds of paintings, sculptures, works on paper, installations, multiples, photographs, posters, invitation cards, and books. Anything he encountered, experienced, or observed, such as people, ideas, and images, could elicit a work. No subject was sacred, and Kippenberger drew equally from popular culture, art, architecture, music, politics, and history—just as he did his own life and work—as sources, styles, and subjects. Kippenberger was an exceptional appropriator, transforming, challenging, and occupying his subjects with incisive criticism, self-deprecating humor, vulnerability, and pathos. He not only adopted and transformed his subjects, but also the systems of representation and distribution—in effect, occupying the discursive field of art, including printed matter (posters, announcement cards, and books) as primary materials of his practice.

The first major retrospective in the United States of the artist's work, *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective* offers a comprehensive view of Kippenberger's career, assembling over 250 key selections and bodies of work from 1977 to 1997. This exhibition is presented at both of the museum's downtown locations, with the main body of work on view at MOCA Grand Avenue and the large-scale installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika"* (1994), among other works, at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA.

Keenly complex and intertwined, Kippenberger's production embodies both his life and work. Born in Dortmund, in the Ruhr district of West Germany, on February 25, 1953, he was raised in nearby Essen. Kippenberger moved to Hamburg in 1971, beginning his studies at Hochschule für Bildende Künste the following year. Enrolled for 16 terms, he never completed his studies. With hopes of becoming an actor, he moved to Florence in 1976, where he lived for nine months. After three months, he gave up on his acting career and started to paint. He produced *Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze* (*One of You, a German in Florence, 1976–77*), his first in a series of paintings based on newspaper clippings as well as his own snapshots—its grisaille palette and use of photographic sources inspired by the work of Gerhard Richter. Working with identically sized canvases, Kippenberger planned to produce a stack high enough to reach 189 centimeters, his own height.

Following his return to Hamburg in 1977, Kippenberger moved to Berlin in 1978, where, together with Gisela Capitain, he established Kippenbergers Büro in their loft with ambitions of a Warhol Factory-like space. He also managed and programmed S.O. 36, a legendary venue for concerts, film screenings, and performances in the Kreuzberg district of West Berlin. Kippenberger was constantly on the move, living and working in many locations throughout his career, some occupied briefly, some simultaneously, and some, particularly Cologne, on an

ongoing basis; they include Paris, St. Georgen, Stuttgart, Cologne, and Frankfurt, Germany; Edlitz, Vienna, and Burgenland, Austria; Tenerife, Seville, and Madrid, Spain; Syros, Greece; and Los Angeles (1989–90).

Similar to *Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze*, many of the paintings that comprise *Lieber Maler, male mir* (*Dear Painter, Paint for Me, 1981*) are based on photographs. For Kippenberger, the act of selecting a subject was sufficient authorship of a work, and he hired a sign-painter whom he "reinvented" as "Werner Kippenberger" to execute the *Lieber Maler* series according to his instructions. This strategy was prevalent throughout his career, as he regularly relied on close collaboration with assistants in order to realize projects.

Kippenberger often used self-portraiture to critique his identity as an artist (particularly in the context of the greater art-historical narrative of Western Europe) as well as the mutability of his persona. Producing self-portraits in all media throughout his career, Kippenberger utilized the traditional genre as a provocative contemporary statement. He created a series of six life-size sculptures, each cast in a different material—wood, red latex, resin, resin filled with cigarette butts, bronze, and aluminum—and wearing a different set of his own clothes, titled *Martin, ab in die Ecke und schäm dich* (*Martin, into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself, 1989*). In the 1980s, the artist began to produce **drawings on hotel stationery** that he collected during his travels or was given to him, including several self-portraits. For his **untitled paintings from 1988**, Kippenberger drew from an iconic 1970s photograph of Pablo Picasso in his underwear, portraying himself in the guise of the aging master in compositions that also feature his own sculptures in their backgrounds. Similarly, in his **Hand-Painted Pictures (1992)**, he used self-portraiture in a way that does not glamorize his image, rendering himself in bicycle shorts against a sketchy graphic background. For **Jacqueline: The Paintings Pablo Couldn't Paint Anymore (1996)**,

Kippenberger literally cast himself as Picasso, taking up that artist's project by producing a series of portraits of Picasso's grieving widow and muse, Jacqueline, based on photographs of her taken after Picasso's death, some of which are also considered to be self-portraits.

Das Floß der Medusa (The Raft of the Medusa, 1996), Kippenberger's last series of self-portraits, was based on the 1819 painting by Théodore Géricault portraying the aftermath of the wreck of the French ship *Medusa*, during which survivors clung to a raft adrift at sea, resorting to murder and cannibalism in order to survive. For this group of works, which comprises drawings, paintings, and lithographs as well as a rug woven with a diagram of the raft, Kippenberger cast himself as the various figures from Géricault's painting.

Kippenberger was also interested in national, regional, and personal identity and its influence on artistic production, and many bodies of work reflect his engagement with German culture and his interest in disturbing and destabilizing "official" histories. In paintings from the mid-1980s, he explored cultural hypocrisies and contradictions by drawing on subjects and styles associated with socialism, communism, and Nazism. *Ich kann beim besten Willen kein Hakenkreuz entdecken* (With the Best Will in the World, I Can't See a Swastika, 1984), a tangle of swastika-like forms, none of which are clearly discrete, was made at a time when the depiction of the swastika was forbidden in Germany; the work confronts the will to repress that which was deeply rooted in a national psyche still coming to terms with its past. His 1990 sculpture *Put Your Freedom in the Corner, Save It for a Rainy Day* (1990) examines the consequences of tearing down the Berlin Wall, in particular the erasure of cultural memory that the removal portends. The notion of cultural exoticism and its role in art history underscores *Die I.N.P.-Bilder* (The Is-Not-Embarrassing Paintings, 1984); for these works, Kippenberger addressed German cultural clichés, stereotypes, and banalities, producing paintings that humorously explore

notions of embarrassment. He was also fascinated by the German obsession with the Ford Capri, an affordable, American-made pseudo-European sports car popular during the 1970s. He featured it in a number of works, including *Blaue Lagune* (Blue Lagoon, 1982), a Capri cut up to constitute individual paintings, and *Capri bei Nacht* (Capri by Night, 1982, with Albert Oehlen), an actual car covered in orange-brown paint mixed with oat flakes.

Sculpture was central to Kippenberger's oeuvre beginning in the mid-1980s. The exhibition features a reunion of many of the key works from his breakthrough 1987 exhibition of sculpture *Peter. Die russische Stellung* (Peter. The Russian Position). The Peter sculptures and related body of drawings demonstrate how objects contain ideas of utopia, dysfunction, and failure. The exhibition also includes several of the "drunken" lanterns and other important sculptures of the late 1980s and 1990s.

On view at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA within a large-scale presentation of the artist's posters is a late sculpture, *Spiderman-Atelier* (1996), modeled on Henri Matisse's studio, with Kippenberger as a superhero surrounded by paintings that refer to On Kawara and drugs. The exhibition concludes with the epic installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika"* (1994), based on Franz Kafka's unfinished novel and composed of dozens of sets of tables and chairs made from found and constructed objects, including Kippenberger's own sculptures as well as those of other artists. The installation, on a green floor modeled on a soccer field, is based on the passage from the novel describing an enormous job recruitment center; the multiple groupings of a table and two chairs represent the job interview and with it the intimate encounter between people, one trying to convince the other of his or her significance and value—all within the context of a competitive game.

RELATED EVENTS

ART TALKS

These informal discussions of current exhibitions feature artists, curators, critics, writers, and other arts professionals. Unless otherwise noted, talks take place in the exhibition galleries, attendance is free with museum admission, and reservations are not required.

INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

SUNDAY, SEPT 21, 3pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE, AHMANSON AUDITORIUM

Diedrich Diederichsen, curator, professor of Theory, Practice, and Transfer of Contemporary Art at the Vienna Art Academy, and author of a forthcoming German monograph on Kippenberger

THURSDAY, OCT 16, 6:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Ann Goldstein, MOCA senior curator and exhibition curator

FREE

THURSDAY, OCT 23, 6:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

Susanne Kippenberger, Berlin-based writer and author of *Kippenberger. Der Künstler und seine Familien*, an acclaimed 2007 biography of Martin Kippenberger, her brother

FREE

Art Talks are made possible by The Times Mirror Foundation Endowment and Good Works Foundation.

FILM

Kippenberger—Der Film

THROUGH JAN 5, 2009

MOCA GRAND AVENUE, JEAN AND LEWIS WOLFF FAMILY LEARNING ANNEX

A film by Jörg Kobel, Germany, 2005, 75 min.

TEENS OF CONTEMPORARY ART (TOCA) EVENT

SUNDAY, OCT 12, 3–5pm

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Act out a surreal satire inspired by Kippenberger's *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika"* (1994). First, set the scene by creating an installation with artist Roman Stollenwerk. Then, work with your friends to bring the scene to life for the camera.

INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

FREE; no reservations required

Teens of Contemporary Art is made possible by UBS.

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MOCA GRAND AVENUE
250 SOUTH GRAND AVENUE

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA
152 NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE

INFO 213/626-6222 moca.org

COURSES

Contemporary Art 101

SATURDAYS: OCT 11, 18, and 25 and NOV 1, 10am–12:30pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE AND THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Inspired by *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective; Louise Bourgeois; Index: Conceptualism in California from the Permanent Collection*; and MOCA's permanent collection, participants will explore the language and movements of art from the 1960s to the present day. This four-session course will include exhibition walkthroughs and slide lectures.

Instructor: **Mary Beth Carosello**, art historian and exhibitions liaison, J. Paul Getty Museum

Advance registration required; no refunds

INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

\$130 MOCA members, \$150 nonmembers

Sculpture and Installation:

Exploring the Third Dimension in Contemporary Art

SATURDAYS: NOV 22, DEC 6 and DEC 13, 10am–1pm

MOCA GRAND AVENUE AND THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

In conjunction with *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective; Louise Bourgeois; and Index: Conceptualism in California from the Permanent Collection*, MOCA offers a three-session course exploring the ideas of sculpture and installation from the latter part of the 20th century. Participants will investigate how the notion of three-dimensional artwork has changed in the past 40 years through exhibition walkthroughs, slide lectures, and discussion.

Instructor: **Gwen Robertson**, art historian and MOCA educator

Advance registration required; no refunds

INFO 213/621-1745 or education@moca.org

\$90 MOCA members, \$120 nonmembers

Education programs at MOCA are supported by The James Irvine Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Endowment for Education Programs; Jean and Lewis Wolff and Family; The Lura Gard Newhouse Charitable Lead Trust; the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission; Wells Fargo; The Green Foundation; and David Hockney.



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