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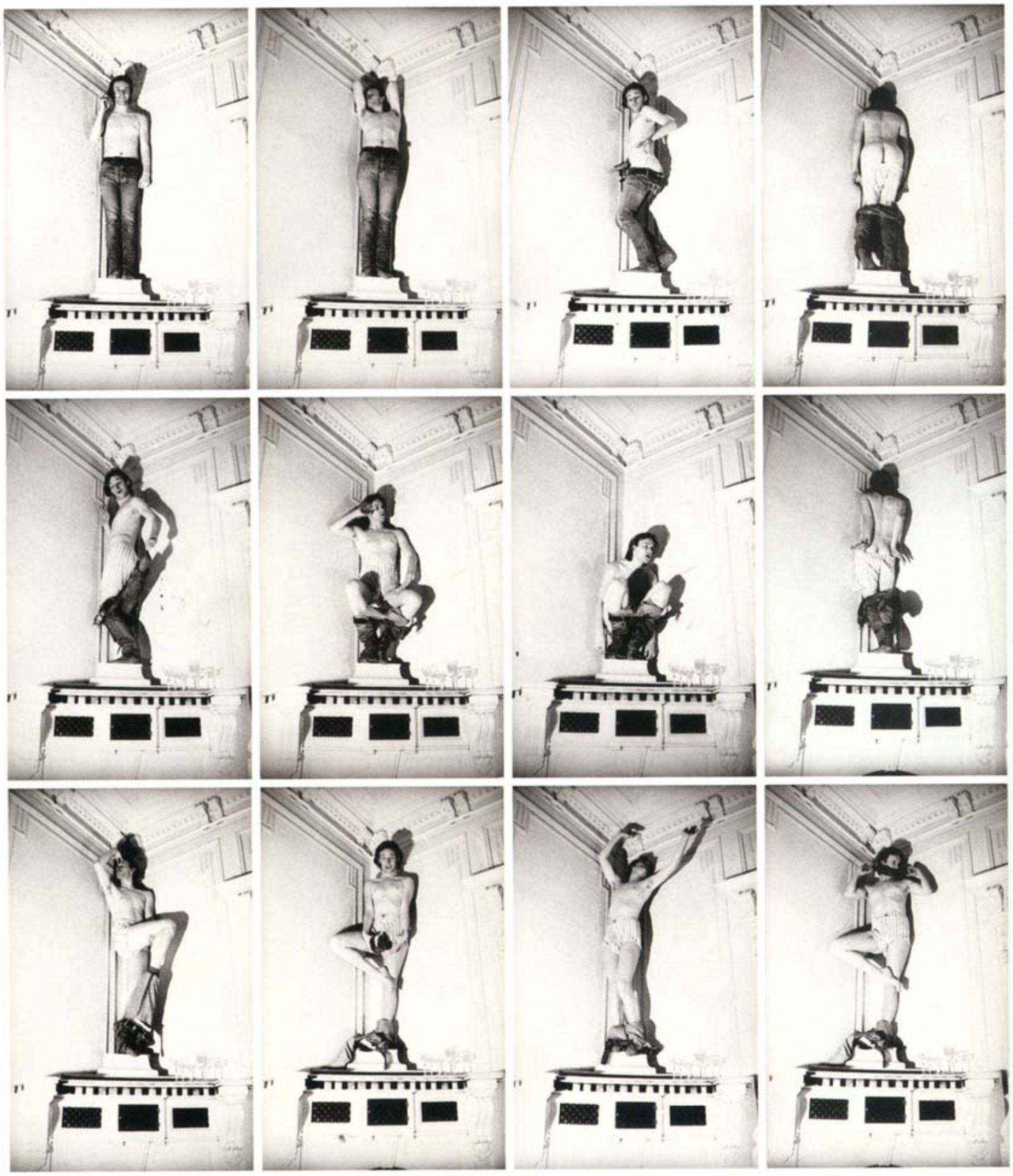
Out of Position

By the time he died, of cancer, in 1997 at age forty-four, **MARTIN KIPPENBERGER** had generated what was already recognized to be one of the most significant, and prescient, bodies of work from the postwar era—one whose diversity was matched only by its elusiveness and complicity in its own misprision, since the artist's wide-ranging engagements with radically contrasting approaches to painting, sculpture, photography, and installation all but demanded to be seen through the prism of his own larger-than-life persona and past history as a punk-era impresario. Kippenberger's influence among artists internationally has grown steadily in the years since his death, and yet his first US retrospective took place only last fall, organized by Ann Goldstein at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. We asked art historian and critic **GEORGE BAKER** to take stock of "Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective"—which travels to the Museum of Modern Art in New York next month—and to consider the still-evolving implications of the artist's practice.



This page: Martin Kipp
Hamburg, 1975. Opp
View of Martin Kipp
"Peter: *Die russische*
(Peter: The Russian
1987, Galerie Max
Cologne. All works
Kippenberger © 20
of Martin Kippenberger
Gisela Capitain, Cologne

THERE ARE NIGHTS IN LOS ANGELES when, if your friends are artists, you wind up at Capri—the somewhat forlorn, outdated (very '80s) restaurant that Martin Kippenberger invested in soon after he moved to the city for a brief time in 1989. Inevitably, someone who knew Kippenberger, or someone who knew someone who knew Kippenberger, will tell you that the artist wanted to back the restaurant so that Los Angeles could have decent spaghetti Bolognese. And so, knowing that everyone tells such stories about Kippenberger, you contemplate ordering that. But since this is a story about translation and displacement—like the artist's obsession with the Ford Capri, an American car named after the most touristed of Italian islands; or the Technicolor gondola sculpture that he once installed in Los Angeles in skeletal form atop a BMW—you would be wise to decide against the dish. (Imagine Italian pasta made for a German palate in the City of Angels: Kippenberger usually called his pasta dishes "noodles.") And yet this reluctance might well only lead your dinner companions to recall one more story that gets told about Capri, one that concerns position, the occupation of space: Kippenberger had the restaurant entrance arranged so that if he stood in a particular spot, no one who entered or left could possibly avoid speaking with him. He had to be confronted.

Position is a word that I understand as artist Andrea Fraser uses it, denoting one element within the total set of practices and dispositions that make up the field of art. But it is a term that was put to specific use by Kippenberger as well, surfacing in the title for his important 1987 exhibition of sculptures at the Galerie Max Hetzler in Cologne, "Peter: The Russian Position," referring to the chaotic, salon-style display practices characteristic of museums like the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg. A total system without evident hierarchy, with no order and no rule: As first installed at Hetzler, the "Peter" sculptures had obvious allegorical implications for Kippenberger's larger artistic practice and its particular brand of manic overproduction. For Kippenberger's artistic model seemed to entail the inverse of the fixed position that no one can avoid, with the entrance at Capri serving as something like a self-reflexive reductio ad absurdum; his only position, in fact, was the endless shuttling through every other available position. Despite certain recent claims, I thus think it makes little sense to understand Kippenberger as a Conceptual artist, closeted or not. Surely, though interested in printed matter, museum formats, and curatorial endeavors, he was no serious practitioner of "institutional critique." But neither was he a neo-expressionist painter, a commodity sculptor, some latter-day capitalist realist, outsider artist, conceptual photographer, shameless pasticheur, or shamanistic performer. Rather, Kippenberger occupied all these positions at one time or another, but only *as positions*—which allowed him to invert them, to hybridize them, or to make them confront their repressed conditions. This is the lure and the problem of the work.

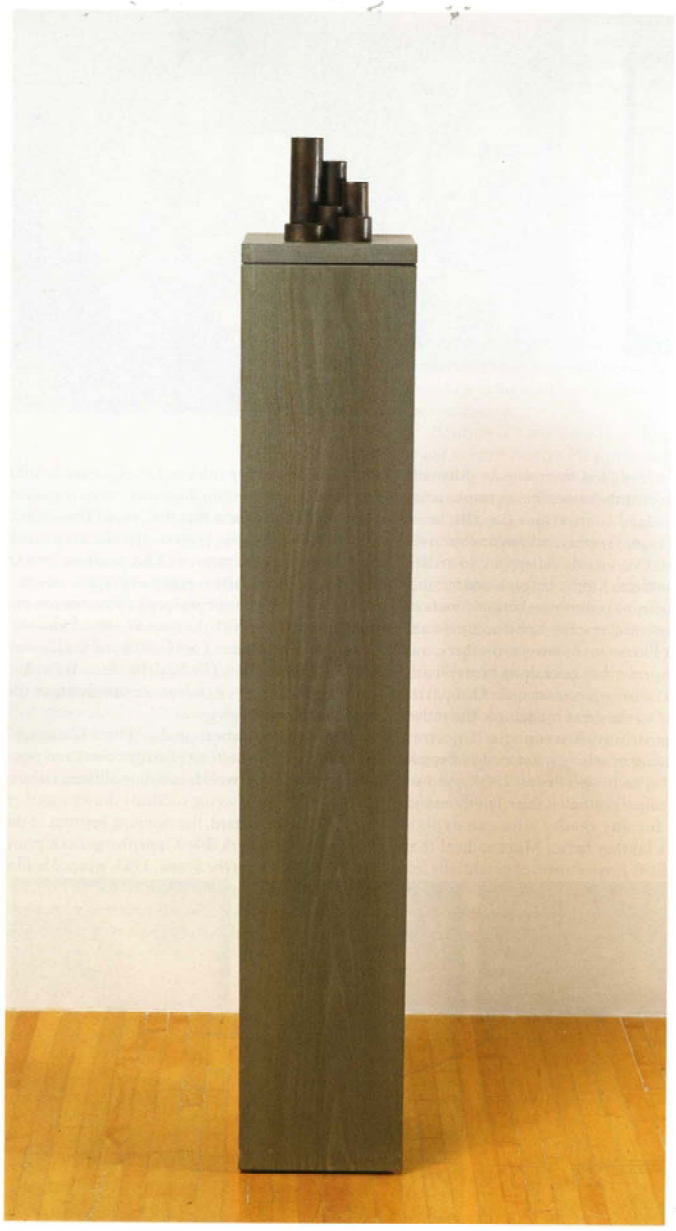
Though interested in printed matter, museum formats, and curatorial endeavors, Kippenberger was no serious practitioner of "institutional critique." But neither was he a neo-expressionist painter, conceptual photographer, or shamanistic performer.

One telltale sign of this activity was Kippenberger's endless interrogation of the artist's "role," which for him could be a function but—since he began his career with ambitions in theater—was also always a matter of performance. For instance, in the photographic work *If You Can't Handle Freedom, Try Seeing How Far You Can Get with Women, Part I*, 1984, Kippenberger would offer—perhaps in ironic, backhanded solidarity with the "women" of his title, if artists like Cindy Sherman are taken to be

This page, above: **Martin Kippenberger at the restaurant Capri, Los Angeles, 1990.** Photo: Siegrid Rothe. Left: **Martin Kippenberger, *Wenn Sie mit der Freiheit nicht klarkommen, versuchen Sie es doch mal mit Frauen, Teil I* (If You Can't Handle Freedom, Try Seeing How Far You Can Get with Women, Part I) (details), 1984,** four of ten color photographs, each 19⅞ x 13". Opposite page, top, from left: **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled, La Residencia), 1995,** mixed media on hotel stationery, 11 1/16 x 8¼". From the series "Hotel Drawings," 1985–97. **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled, Hotel am Stadttor), 1995,** mixed media on hotel stationery, 11 1/16 x 8¼". From the series "Hotel Drawings," 1985–97. **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled, Four Seasons Hotel), 1994,** colored pencil on hotel stationery, 11 x 8¼". From the series "Hotel Drawings," 1985–97. **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled, Hotel Grauer Bär), 1995,** mixed media on hotel stationery, 11 1/16 x 8¼". From the series "Hotel Drawings," 1985–97. Bottom: **Martin Kippenberger, *5 Capris bei Nacht* (5 Capris by Night), 1981,** oil on canvas, five parts, each 27½ x 35½".

among them—an autotypology of male-artist clichés: so many portraits of Kippenberger as tourist, criminal, drunk, well-hung exhibitionist, rock star, cowboy, prankster, bohemian, or inept terrorist. But this is also meta–Anselm Kiefer, an anti-"Occupations" series that plays the latter's game of anachronistic pose and persona into the ground, pathos dissipating into bathos. A Kiefer and Sherman mash-up: The equation will not add up; indeed the two positions in this case precisely cancel each other out. In just this way, Kippenberger, especially in his paintings, used the language of citation and appropriation to suspend his own work incoherently, locating it between the most logically incompatible artistic positions staked out by his immediate predecessors. In the painting series *5 Capris by Night*, 1981, for instance, the seriality of Andy Warhol meets the mythic, tenebrous romanticism of Joseph Beuys; the photorealism of Gerhard Richter marries the deliquescence of Dieter Roth. If such layering of discordant positions sounds bad, the resulting group of canvases confirms itself as such—a pathetic love child, flattening the difference between positions at the same time as emphasizing underacknowledged connections (i.e., Richter's blurs and Roth's rot). Yet this awkward subjectivizing of any artist's inevitable reflection on artistic legacies only confirms Kippenberger's understanding of such legacies as positions—author-functions as much as existential states—to be occupied and moved among, like so many lovers, mothers, and fathers. In fact, on other occasions he explicitly Oedipalizes his favorite precursors, the Oedipal triangle being one of the great models for the movement among positions: A seeming self-portrait painting dressed up in colorless Bernard Buffet gets titled *The Mother of Joseph Beuys*, 1984. (And yet what kind of Oedipal position is this? Ten-thousand-franc reward for any reader who can explain Kippenberger's fantasy here.) More radical than such overt Oedipal play—however potentially less incoherent in result—was Kippenberger's frequent pushing of incompatible positions to figure forth something like a map, the seemingly aleatory activity of layering disparate roles and dispositions leading to hybrids with a certain diagnostic, even cognitive, value. It is in this sense that the "Hotel Drawings," 1985–97, for example, pressure the itinerant, serial, and ready-made formats of Conceptualism into an eruption of the infinite energies of graphic kitsch: a precise charting of the unspeakable connections linking the dandy with the *maudit*, the administrative with the subcultural, Sol LeWitt and On Kawara with R. Crumb, Tom of Finland, late Francis Picabia, and Krazy Kat. *Les extrêmes se touchent*, as the French expression goes.

The clash of positions in the "Hotel Drawings" exceeds the mere shuffling of artistic roles and practices; we face social worlds colliding, different dispositions and ways of seeing suddenly drawn together. Consider, in this regard, the mapping gestures of the studiously unremarkable Kippenberger sculpture *New York Seen from the Bronx*, 1985, a pencil holder cast in bronze on a pedestal that raises the object to eye level. The work's title self-reflexively imagines a kind of relational cartography, two geographic



positions locked in a confrontation staged as a kind of visual drama of the gaze. But the urban markers in Kippenberger's title are allegorical: One confronts here the artist playing with the relations of painting to sculpture, translating an empty container for the tools of graphic production into a vaguely corporeal object and an implicitly architectural vessel. The Conceptual artist's unemployed desk and the disaffected (dispossessed) painter's studio become the launching ground for a voided monument and a monumental void. Seemingly, for the artist, the work was also a joke, enacting, in its voyage from Kippenberger's more familiar province of drawing to the realm of sculpture, the trip-up and play of mistranslation and displacement ("Bronx" rhyming here with bronze, so many shades of Kippenberger's spaghetti Bolognese). But the sculpture—to the eyes of this critic (himself born in the Bronx)—nevertheless names a specific disposition on culture. It embodies, or appropriates, a gaze of aspiration, the tragic self-abnegation of petit bourgeois or working-class desire (I assume this is not New York seen from Riverdale). And yet this mapping, this relation, also enacts a literal diminishment—a miniaturization—of the high and the valued. We encounter a gaze from the margins toward the center, from an outside that is also within. (How often does a native have to insist to his Manhattan friends that the Bronx is part of the city?) It is a gaze that makes the center of culture unattainably distant, even while putting it in its place: a Bronx cheer in material form. A relatively overlooked manifesto piece heralding the sculptural turn in Kippenberger's work after 1986—as well as naming, as explicitly as the artist ever would, something like his "method"—*New York Seen from the Bronx* announces two laws of Kippenberger's production, and they are immensely surprising: We face an antimonument to that historical moment when negation would no longer remain a prerogative of aristocratic freedom, having been usurped by the masochism of petit bourgeois shame and embarrassment. (Some have called this the punk-rock ethos of Kippenberger's project. We need a history, and narratives, of this turning point, the new social location of the acts of negation; perhaps it is a story that could replace the old one of the transition from modernism to postmodernism.) And yet such negation or desire shows itself to be utterly, obsessively contingent, *crass* because upwardly mobile—forcing each of Kippenberger's works to become a relational object, "casting" the work of art in an interstitial space between at least two incommensurate and hierarchical positions.

Such relations were central to Ann Goldstein's magisterial curation of the Kippenberger retrospective as it appeared at the Museum of Contemporary

Art, Los Angeles, and, indeed, many of her decisions are clarified when considered under the spell of the visual scenario of *New York Seen from the Bronx*. As opposed to *position*, Goldstein prioritized the word *perspective*, borrowing for her exhibition's name the title of Kippenberger's 1986 painting *The Problem Perspective. You are not the problem, it's the problem-maker in your head*—an image of concentric egg shapes surrounded by text, one that had obviously been rotated in every direction during its production, influenced by Picabia's Dada work and his late abstractions both. In fact, in its final orientation, the painting seems to have been simultaneously turned upside down and hung on its side, incompatible positions having become here a formal procedure but also a visual dilemma for the viewer, the very engine of painterly abstraction (enigma). Appropriately, then, in the first room of the retrospective, Goldstein threw a whole series of works by the artist into jumbled proximity—as if to show the inchoate breadth of Kippenberger's production, which she would then proceed to tease apart, room by subsequent room—but what linked almost all these works was that they were literal "perspectives." They were what we could call visual positionings, like the vista of the faux-naïf fantasy thoroughfare depicted in *Venice-MOCA-Dreamway*, 1990, a painting of Cesar Pelli's Pacific Design Center "seen from" the suddenly landlocked bungalows of Venice, with the polarities of the actual locations reversed, the PDC now floating like some alien ship on the sea. (Around this painting, Kippenberger threw a metal chain wrapped in PDC-blue plastic, a Southern California–meets–Yves Klein sausage emphasizing either the work's linkages or its impossibility—it is hard to tell.) Or then there was the machine-for-seeing that is Kippenberger's working-class sports car, the paint- and oatmeal-covered sculptural version of *Capri by Night*, 1982, made in collaboration with Albert Oehlen. Some vistas were blocked, opaque perspectives, like the closed doors and boxes of the other sculptures that share the *by Night* title, or the dysfunctional lamps and disco ball hidden away in the forest of the artist's *Now I Am Going into the Big Birch Wood, My Pills Will Soon Start Doing Me Good*, 1990. A whole wall of untitled watercolors—produced for Kippenberger's first American museum show, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1991—translated into painted images the covers of the artist's publications, with a magnifying glass made to seem as if it were perched atop each. Depicted as though lying directly on the books, the glasses provide little magnification—a collapse of positions—just as they focus attention on random, often blank areas of the artist's printed works.

Opposite page: **Martin Kippenberger, *New York von der Bronx ausgesehen* (New York Seen from the Bronx), 1985,** bronze, 5 ¾ x 5 ½" without pedestal. This page, above, all: **Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled*, 1991,** watercolor on paper, 16 ⅞ x 22 ⅝". Below, intermingled: **Martin Kippenberger, *Jetzt geh ich in den Birkenwald, denn meine Pillen wirken bald* (Now I Am Going into the Big Birch Wood, My Pills Will Soon Start Doing Me Good), 1990,** artificial birch trees (rolls of cardboard, plastic, black-and-white offset prints), metal, wood; **Martin Kippenberger, *Kippenblinky*, 1991,** wood, metal, resin, lightbulb, light fixture, utensils for smoking; **Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled*, 1990,** metal, glass, lightbulb, light fixture; **Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled*, 1989,** metal, glass, lightbulb, light fixture; **Martin Kippenberger, *Disco Bomb*, 1989,** mirrored disco ball with synthetic wig. Photo: Brian Forrest. Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2008.

And at the center of all this was an installation of Kippenberger's first series of paintings, with its relational, *Tu m'*–like title, another expression perhaps of backhanded solidarity: *One of You, A German in Florence*, 1976–77. Executed during a year when the artist had moved to Italy to seduce the great European center of postwar cinematic production—assured in his belief that he looked like a young Helmut Berger—Kippenberger's paintings emerged from his failure to attract any acting roles, perhaps due to the fact that he had moved to the wrong Italian city altogether. The series immediately established Kippenberger's lifelong reliance on appropriation and photography, as he paints, in irreverent homage to Richter's *48 Portraits*, 1971–72, a grayscale but aleatory collection of found mass-media images and his own tourist snapshots. These are derived from the types of photographs most of us would ignore or throw away—half a head here, a body severed by the camera there—but Kippenberger mines them as an ever-shifting archive of anarchic observation, perspectives on others (in the street, in private, in the media and in postcards, in friendship or in a fight) as much as positions taken up in relation to oneself. We thus see Kippenberger looking down at his feet, or at his hand while holding an Italian cookie or a cigarette butt before his eyes, or at his crotch while taking a shit on a Turkish toilet. In fact, churned out in a (failed) attempt to produce a stack of paintings that would reach Kippenberger's own height, the Florence paintings present the individual subject as nothing more than an endless panoply of positions, a self-portrait in the form of a collection of vistas representing random encounters, forgettable moments, insignificant detritus and fleeting events, a negotiation between the self and the other, between watching and being watched—the war ultimately waged between the vacuous totality of media-vision and the infinity of individual acts of human perception. It is a "one" made of "you": the self as a failed catalogue of its immediate surrounds, a function of the unceasing mobility of potential perspectives and views.

"Art is no longer being produced, but only watched," Kippenberger once opined, continuing, "American women are experts in that. From [Jenny] Holzer on, to [Barbara] Kruger, [Louise] Lawler, [Andrea] Fraser." Backhanded compliments again. And yet this statement—from a conversation with Jutta Koether that took place over a few months in 1990 and 1991—clarifies Goldstein's decision to place Lawler photographs of Kippenberger's work on the front and back covers of her exhibition catalogue: an expanded field of positions and relations, indeed. It is also a statement by Kippenberger that precisely collapses the logic of an analytic of artistic positions with the painterly project of the visual perspective or vista—the artist's most radical (fraught?) endeavor, worked out already in full by the moment of the series "Dear Painter, Paint for Me," 1981. Here Kippenberger took his own dictum seriously, hiring out his production to a movie-poster painter, who was asked to craft billboard-size images often providing views of Kippenberger himself, like the flip side of the artist's Florence paintings. Watching switched over into being watched, an analytic of the author's role became a series of contradictory vistas, with some of the paintings depicting Kippenberger as he could not possibly have seen himself—from behind, for example. "What is your position?" Koether went

on to ask the artist in the exchange cited above. "Do you see yourself among the party of 'new female art' that you once described . . . ?" Kippenberger's response—"Yeah, I'm a woman, too"—has become notorious, but its origin is usually forgotten: Relationality and corrosive solidarity go missing when this comment gets taken out of context as a simple assertion by the artist of a Rrose Sélavy strategy of inversion and reversibility.

But then again, as the flipped logic of the "Dear Painter, Paint for Me" series shows, inversion and reversal were Kippenberger's favored means of interweaving contradictory positions. In *One of You*, he already included among his gray paintings several images copied directly from the reversible tonal field of the photographic negative. And, early on, inversion became for him a mode of movement between positions, an almost wordlike conjugation of objects and techniques. If in *Capri by Night* Oehlen and Kippenberger paint a readymade, the latter artist would then offer up a readymade as a painting—for example, *Blue Lagoon*, 1982, cut-up sections of a blue Ford Capri hung on the wall—and then, in a further twist, pile readymades onto a painting (the attached Beuys multiples in *Profit Peaks with Economic Values by Joseph Beuys I* and *II*, both 1985). All positions would be explored; none eradicated or outmoded the others—all sense of linear progression and logical necessity abandoned.

Two consequences immediately arose. Kippenberger's reversals continue the impossible positioning of his painterly vistas so that, eventually, one doesn't know from what vantage one is looking at a Kippenberger work, or from where one is supposed to look—the firm ground of positioning ripped from beneath one's feet. The inversions could then lead to a sense of endless equivalence, the collapse of all difference and perspective, the flat denial offered up for example as the (non)position of last resort in the artist's abstract-fascist, postpunk gesture *With the Best Will in the World, I Can't See a Swastika*, 1984. Suprematist abstraction slides indistinguishably into totalitarian aesthetics; the primary colors fuse with a range of black, white, and gray; biomorphic lines swirl obliviously atop a jumbled mass of rigid angular forms; the dual but opposed triumphalisms of neo-expressionism and neo-geo dominate a scene where the failure to see and to remember seems neither exactly parodied nor critiqued.

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Opposite page: **View of "Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective," 2008–2009,** Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2008. From left: Martin Kippenberger, *Blaue Lagune* (Blue Lagoon), 1982; Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen, *Capri bei Nacht* (Capri by Night), 1982; Martin Kippenberger, *Uno di Voi, un Tedesco in Firenze* (One of You, a German in Florence), 1976–77. Photo: Brian Forrest. This page, from top: **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled), 1981,** acrylic on canvas, 78 ⅛ x 118 ⅛". From the series "*Lieber Maler, male mir*" (Dear Painter, Paint for Me), 1981. **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled), 1981,** acrylic on canvas, 118 ⅛ x 78 ¾". From the series "*Lieber Maler, male mir*" (Dear Painter, Paint for Me), 1981. **Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel* (Untitled), 1981,** acrylic on canvas, 78 ⅛ x 118 ⅛". From the series "*Lieber Maler, male mir*" (Dear Painter, Paint for Me), 1981.

This page: **View of "Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective," 2008–2009**, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2008. "Peter" sculptures, 1987. Photo: Brian Forrest. Opposite page: **Martin Kippenberger, *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika,"* 1994**, mixed media, furniture, electricity, carpet, paint, bleachers. Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2008. Photo: Brian Forrest.

But then Kippenberger's negations, his endless reversals and contradictions, could also erupt as a ceaseless search for alternatives, the opposite (inversion) of flat equivalence—a quest instead for an infinite range of difference. Such was the task of the most extraordinary body of work the artist produced, the 1987 "Peter" sculptures, which explore with the intensity of the idiot savant all the major sculptural problems at once: the war between body and commodity as a model for the medium; or the visual versus the tactile, color versus structure; or seriality versus randomness; design object versus language; functional object versus dysfunctional image; support structure versus container; site-specificity versus mobility; pedestal piece versus environmental surround; floor piece versus wall. Surrealism abuts constructivism; assemblage takes on minimalism. Negation and inversion run amok: If a Gerhard Richter painting gets the Florence Knoll treatment and is turned into a coffee table (*Model Interconti*), then a chair by Aldo Rossi must be raised up onto a pedestal and "carved" for good measure (*Not to Be the Second Winner*). And yet what seems like the wild irruption of every possible sculptural option also amounts to a cataloguing of artistic positions. "Peter," as Diedrich Diederichsen points out in his essay for Goldstein's catalogue, translated for Kippenberger as "thingamajig"—the implication being that the sculptures encapsulate a series of studio jokes on the reification of formal strategies into artistic "brands." So we get a little Judd, some Buren, Warhol, and Bruce Conner, some Trockel and Artschwager with a bit of Robert Morris. In this case, however, Kippenberger's cynicism carries the seeds of redemption, that as if by citation and recombination, the flatness of artistic reification could become a process of autonomization, the platform for a manic reinvention of the sculptural medium from the very grounds of the myriad forms of its betrayal.

> Kippenberger emerges as the primary avatar today of a long-standing dilemma: What does it mean to occupy—to embody—an artistic position that represents the cancellation of all positions?

If the infinite variety of the "Peter" sculptures seems impossible to circumscribe, with no discernable Kippenberger "thingamajig" in sight—and with most of the production delegated to his longtime assistant Michael Krebber, anyway—the work would yield nonetheless an (il)logical summa, what for me is the capping gesture of Kippenberger's tragically curtailed career: *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika,"* 1994. Now the "Peter" sculptures' wayward combinations give way to a simple collection and arrangement of industrial design objects, chairs and tables. Placed in mismatched pairs to illustrate ad infinitum the bureaucratic nightmare of the communal job interviews of Kafka's narrative, Kippenberger's objects embody a vast field of positions that stretch out before the viewer precisely like an interminable vista. Position and perspective collapse again, and perhaps for the last time (new metaphors such as the "network" will occupy Kippenberger in his final years, especially around what amounts to one of his last series of sculptures, the "METRO-Net" project of 1993–97). Arranging the chairs on a mock playing field, Kippenberger evidently abandoned the chaotic anarchy of the "Russian position" and came to play on other meanings of the word: A "position" is a sporting term as much as it pertains to a job; it might even refer to the stake upon which one wagers in a financial transaction (positions can be "traded"). And as Kippenberger attempts to body forth and circumscribe an entire field of possible positions, he simultaneously renders each position double, making individual pairs of chairs face off in internal opposition and (usually) contradiction. The initial effect is, once again, that of endless equivalence (Kippenberger's closest precedent here is Marcel Broodthaers's museum fiction, with its "Department of Eagles"): No position outweighs any of the others, and each chair is equally empty, with almost none of the positions "occupied." Never has a seething crowd seemed more like a barren, postapocalyptic void. And yet, at the very same time—and through the very same procedures—Kippenberger's *Amerika* finds infinite difference within potential equivalence, an overwhelming typology and collection of the exceptional, the useless but wondrous (systematic but

pathological) microvariations that erupt from within a capitalist mode of production and design. It is as if Kippenberger wished to produce a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* out of the pathetic detritus of twentieth-century design culture, out of bureaucratic procedures, total spectacle, and administered society. Appropriating these modes for his art, Kippenberger emerges as the primary avatar today of a long-standing dilemma: What does it mean to occupy—to embody—an artistic position that represents the cancellation of all positions, their equalization or utter negation? What does it mean to assimilate one's art to the pure negativity of the operations of inversion, self-cancellation, and internal contradiction? What would it mean to make over art practice, in other words, on the very model of capital?

But it is also as if Kippenberger wanted to make a *Gesamtkunstwerk* out of the total field of art itself, as if he could imagine all of its positions as a collective aesthetic work: the corrected version of Social Sculpture. Would knowing and occupying all positions—gambling on them, investing in them, and then moving on—lead to a rootless equivalence, an artist and art practice that cannot possibly be pinned down, immensely uneven and cynical in turn? Or is this instead a desperate line of flight, the only modality of escape from an art system that would circumscribe all positions in advance? Aren't these the same things? Do we witness the leveling of all distinctions? Or the volatile quest for alternatives, a taste for difference for its own sake, and wrested from the very last place one would expect it? What ends do you serve, Martin Kippenberger? Why? How? I am quoting Marcel Broodthaers, writing to Joseph Beuys: "Miserable artists that we are." He was writing in the guise of Jacques Offenbach to Richard Wagner. Kippenberger, typically, perhaps wanted to be both Offenbach and Wagner at the same time. He thus had an answer to Broodthaers's question. It was familiar (he was quoting Picabia). But it was also different: "Miserable mite. Artist! . . . I'm lucky to be Kippenberger. Kippenberger is Kippenberger. Only, not just 'Kippy,' but Martin Kippenberger. Kippenberger. That's different." □

"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective" will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from March 1 through May 11.

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