

TOBIAS KASPAR
The Category Is
March 9 - May 4, 2019

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present its fourth solo exhibition with Tobias Kaspar. Kaspar was born in Basel in 1984 and lives and works in Zurich.

With the exhibition *The Category Is* Tobias Kaspar presents two ongoing series that examine consumerism from very different points of view with a distinct ambiguity. Widely divergent in technique, format and motif, the themes and subjects of both series originate outside of the accepted artistic production: documentary photograph and textile design. In combination, they bring to mind the funding of the arts by ruthless painkiller manufacturers as well as the fashionable look of addiction. Everything that plays a role can become a category.

The Japan Collection

Since 2015 Tobias Kaspar has been working closely with a textile manufacturer from St. Gallen that is known for producing fabrics for various haute couture fashion houses. The silver shimmering *Reflector Paintings* were produced there. For *The Japan Collection* Kaspar photographed embroideries from the company's archives. Since the 1960s these were produced almost exclusively for the Japanese market, which was then opening up to western consumer goods. The fabrics *Made in Switzerland* show opulent figurative scenes that quote various epochs and styles and are perhaps more reminiscent of Paris than Switzerland, except maybe for the the flown-in jet set in Gstaad or St. Moritz. In a similar way to Martin Margiela, who enlarged dolls' clothes for his *doll clothes collection* from 1998, Tobias Kaspar upscales the small embroideries to almost life-size figures so that each stitch, thread and disproportion becomes visible. A broken mirror image of reciprocal projections is created that takes into account the gaps between how we see ourselves and how we wish to be seen.

Heroin Paintings

Kaspar's second series on view, the *Heroin Paintings*, is based on photos of the open drug scene in Zurich in the 1990s - one of the biggest in Europe at the time. Further image material comes from the cities of Basel, Bern and St. Gallen. In the early 1990s the police and government were still aggressively intervening in the drug scene until a policy was introduced that was progressive for the time. However, although the practice of giving out sterile needles, medical supervision and providing accommodation for the consumption of drugs ended the extreme marginalization of heroin consumers, policy lagged behind the possible goal of actually decriminalizing consumption and legalizing drugs. Ink-jet prints of the images appropriated from press articles are mounted on primed canvases with wallpaper paste using a large brush with added colour and glitter as decoration and diffusion, and alluding to the heroin chic of the 1990s — one of the moments in which reality was simultaneously reflected in fashion and art while still happening.

The Category Is

Opening up, shifting or overstepping categories is an important part of Tobias Kaspar's approach. Since 2009 he has co-published the magazine PROVENCE, had his own eponymous jeans line since 2012 and in 2018 co-initiated the Longtang in Zurich - a "tank to think through contemporary art". In his practice, institutions and the art system, as well as his own artistic practice, are repeatedly challenged. For example recently with his solo show *Independence* at the Kunsthalle Bern (2018) that was announced without a mention of the artist's name as well as in 2016 with the 24h-blockbuster exhibition *The Street* that took place in the Cinecittà film studios in Rome. Kaspar often works with large groups of works that have titles such as: *Lumpy Blue Sweater* (2010), *Bodies in the Backdrop* (2012), *The Bling Ring* (2013), *Friends, Lovers & Financiers* (2014), *Two Cities - Two Lives* (2015), *The Street* (2016), *Anna Karenina* (2017) and *The Japan Collection* (2019). His works have been exhibited all over the world including Kunsthalle Bern (2018), Kunsthau Zurich (2017), Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2017), Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2015), Solo Shows, São Paulo (2015), CAFAM Biennale, Beijing (2014), Kunsthalle Wien (2014), Kunsthalle St. Gallen (2014), Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2013), Artists Space, New York (2013), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012), Kunsthalle Zürich (2011), Kunsthalle Basel (2011), Museum Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2011), Kunsthau Bregenz (2011) and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (2010).

The title of the exhibition - *The Category Is* - refers to tailor's dummies with various outfits, like the motif on the exhibition's invitation card. It addresses questions of self-image or, better put, self-expression. Borrowed from the formats of *Voguing Nights*, *The Category Is* poses questions such as: what shall I wear today? How should I dress? — This more or less conscious question about the image that one projects or wants to project is what Kaspar has often alluded to in his works: such as with the work *Lumpy Blue Sweater* (2010) recently exhibited at the Kunsthau Zurich in the 2018 exhibition *Fashion Drive*.

The Category Is: Porter, Woman with Greyhound, Lady Smoker, Waiter or Business Man

With reality competition television, drag has also become older. More important than the ironic reference, it seems imperative now to bring home the moral story of becoming oneself, of overriding inner conflict. However, the need to evaluate performance has also constantly broadened and between the "looking good is being good" of social media and platform capitalism and the last places to mark out space for one's own performance, drag stands open to everyone as a mode of self-presentation.

Anke Dyes