

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

Michael Krebber

REVUE DE PRESSE | SELECTED PRESS

ARTFORUM

BERN, SWITZERLAND

Michael Krebber

KUNSTHALLE BERN

Just as any exhibition held every two years can be called a biennial, a piece of fabric hung on a wall, with or without paint on it, can plausibly be called a painting. And yet, just as the idea of a biennial carries a lot

of baggage, so does the notion of painting, and the oeuvre of Michael Krebber constantly works at posing uncomfortable questions about it.

This was the second and smaller iteration of this New York-based German artist's survey, "The Living Wedge," which originated at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves in Porto, Portugal, curated by João Ribas and Valérie Knoll. The fifty-six pieces shown here, dating from 1986 through 2016, installed in seven galleries, included early figurative drawings, modified readymades, and neo-expressionistic paintings; Krebber's later work tends toward abstraction. Two groups of works were displayed in particular depth: On view were ten sections from the sixteen-part *Flaggs (Against Nature)*, 2003, and all six sections of *MK/M 2014/15*, 2014. *Flaggs* features found fabrics—two kinds of green gingham; a black cloth with white polka dots; and a dark, flannel-like material printed with an illustration of a horse running under a full moon—while the nonrepresentational *MK/M* paintings exhibit infrequent rolled-on blemishes, sprayed dots, squiggly gestures, and seemingly obscured marks, mostly in green and white, which appear to be furtive gestures or events on the canvas. Each work represents a different tangent of the artist's approach: the readymade or modified readymade in the form of found fabrics on the one hand, and an improvised mark-making on the other.

None of these works could be considered densely painted or highly labored. Indeed, it would be tempting to dismiss many of them as slight, both as effort and idea. But taken together, they suggest that Krebber might be searching for a picture of a painting, rather than just painting; it is in this sense that he earns his reputation as a "Conceptual" painter. Krebber treats the painting as an assisted readymade, in that the marks he makes seem to be obvious quotations of gestures. His squiggles resemble the marks one makes while testing a new pen, his sprays recall graffiti, his rolled-on paint echoes a house painter's. The result offers his viewers a series of questions rather than any kind of certitude. Are they merely accidental marks? Is this a kind of postmodern automatism? Is Krebber just making a mockery of painting? A cheeky personality emerges in his imagery, as evoked for example by his choice of a cartoony snail as the central figure for his 2012–13 Bordeaux, France, retrospective "*Les escargots ridiculisés*" (The Ridiculed Snails), and through such playful improvisations as his use of the poster for his 2003 New York exhibition, "Here It Is: The Painting Machine," as part of the show's installation hardware. Copies of the poster were draped over each canvas to keep it from directly touching the wall against which it leaned, rather than hung.

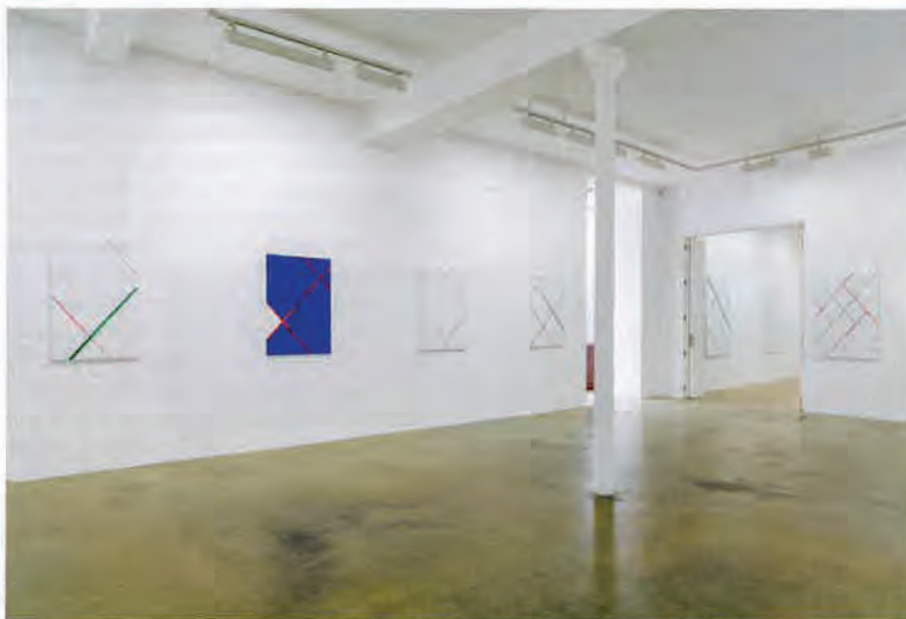
Krebber's works poke at the idea of painting but also embody painting itself. Imagery, or the hint of imagery, and nonrepresentation are treated equally, sometimes contesting or partnering each other equally, as in the gingham pattern and horse imagery of *Flaggs (Against Nature)*, just as his "found" gestural marks offset his altered readymades. All

Michael Krebber, *MK/M 2014/15*, 2014, acrylic and spray paint on canvas. Installation view. Photo: Gunnar Meier.



these elements seemed even more interchangeable when viewed in this unchronological hang. Krebber's work can be difficult to look at but interesting to see. Perhaps the artist should be considered a trickster painter—intent, not on fooling the viewer but on tricking himself into inventing new paintings. Does he succeed or fail? Uncertainty is the pleasure to be found in the game.

—Sherman Sam



Vue de l'exposition « Cartouche paintings » de Michael Krebber.

COURTESY DE L'ARTISTE ET GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL, PARIS

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

CHANTAL CROUSEL

**Michael Krebber
Cartouches paintings**

On aurait pu croire que le débat sur la mort de la peinture, la fin de l'art et même de l'histoire, qui avait fait rage au début des années 2000 en France, avait été classé sans suite. Avec l'Allemand Michael Krebber (né en 1954), les dés de la pratique artistique sont constamment relancés sur le tapis des rituels et des conventions dont il s'amuse. Peintre et créateur d'installations, Krebber appartient au courant conceptuel de l'art. Son œuvre peut alors se comprendre comme une suite d'interprétations, une mise en scène, du concept de peinture. Elle est subtilement provocatrice, toujours dans l'économie de moyens, avec une dimension ludique revendi-

quée – au moins pour son auteur. L'artiste aime être là où on ne l'attend pas, tout comme son travail est multiforme. Pour sa deuxième exposition en dix ans à la galerie Chantal Crousel, sa manière est ainsi très picturale. Ces « Cartouches paintings », une série de quinze tableaux lumineux, composés de lignes diagonales colorées se coupant à angle droit pour former une grille lâche, seraient-ils comme ces petits espaces constitués d'un encadrement affichant des informations sur l'œuvre et son auteur ? Le tableau appréhendé dans sa dimension ornementale ? Puisque, pour l'artiste, tout peut être relié à un autre élément, ces œuvres sont aussi un dialogue avec le Piet Mondrian de New York, ville où il vient justement de s'installer comme son illustre prédécesseur, il y plus de soixante-dix ans. Considéré comme un acteur majeur de la peinture conceptuelle, Michael Krebber reste peu connu en France.

C. D.

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tél. : 01 42 77 38 87, www.crousel.com
Jusqu'au 8 juillet.



ART | EXPO

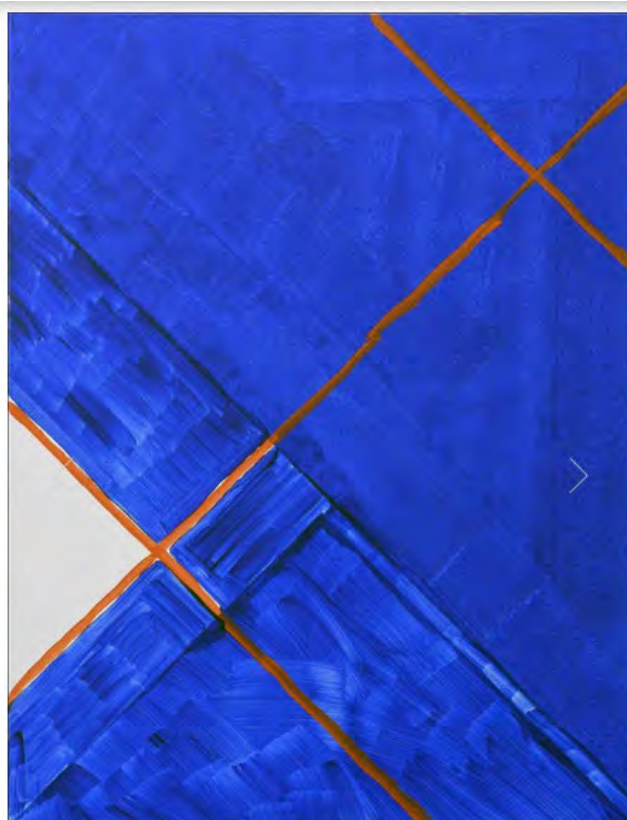
Cartouche Paintings

20 Mai - 08 Juil 2017

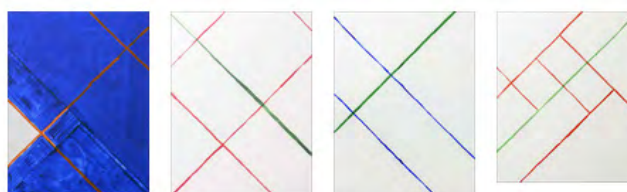
📍 GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL

👤 MICHAEL KREBBER

L'exposition « Cartouche Paintings » à la galerie parisienne Chantal Crousel, présente une nouvelle série de peintures de Michael Krebber : quinze tableaux abstraits où Michael Krebber poursuit à travers la toile blanche, des traits de couleur et de rares aplats son exploration conceptuelle de la peinture.



Michael Krebber, Cartouche Painting N°1, 2017. Peinture acrylique sur toile. 105 x 80 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste et Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, photo Florian Kleinfenn





L'exposition « **Cartouche Paintings** » à la galerie Chantal Crousel, à Paris, dévoile une nouvelle série de tableaux de Michael Krebber.

Quinze nouvelles peintures abstraites de Michael Krebber

L'exposition présente la première série de peintures réalisées par Michael Krebber dans son nouvel atelier de Soho, à New York, où il s'est installé il y a un an. Cet ensemble de quinze peintures abstraites se situe dans sa création même à la jonction entre deux périodes dans la carrière de l'artiste puisque, devant la difficulté à trouver le matériel qui lui convenait aux États-Unis, Michael Krebber a préféré faire venir les châssis et les toiles qui se trouvaient dans son ancien atelier, à Francfort.

Simplement numérotés de un à quinze, ces tableaux réalisés en 2017 à la peinture acrylique sur toile présentent tous les mêmes caractéristiques. Sur le fond blanc de la toile sont tracés, de façon assez irrégulière, comme hésitante et avec des marques visibles d'arrêt et de reprise du geste, des traits de couleur parallèles et perpendiculaires qui se croisent de façon aléatoire. Dans *Cartouche Painting N°12*, deux traits bleus croisent un trait vert ; dans *Cartouche Painting N°2*, ce sont deux traits bleus parallèles qui en croisent un troisième, *Cartouche Painting N°8* est traversé d'un trait vert et de traits rouges, un quadrillage de traits bleus et verts forment *Cartouche Painting N°10* tandis que *Cartouche Painting N°1* se distingue par le remplissage à la peinture bleue d'une partie de sa surface délimitée par des traits rouges.

Avec la série *Cartouche Paintings*, Michael Krebber poursuit son exploration conceptuelle de la peinture

La nouvelle série de Michael Krebber poursuit son exploration conceptuelle de la peinture à travers le geste : les coups de pinceau ici francs et droits, là plus incertains, les aplats ici homogènes, là marqués d'une multitude d'aller-retour sur une toile laissée en partie vide marquent le peu d'espace laissé à l'invention dans un art déjà tant exploré, en même temps que la large place que laisse à l'imagination la toile ouverte.

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CRITIC'S GUIDE - 16 MAY 2017

Critic's Guide: Paris

Ahead of Paris Gallery Weekend, a round-up of the best shows to see in the French capital

BY TOM JEFFREYS



Michael Krebber,
Cartouche paintings,
2017. Courtesy:
Chantal Crousel,
Paris

Michael Krebber

[Chantal Crousel](#)

20 May – 8 July 2017

Ten years on from his first solo show with Chantal Crousel, conceptual painter Michael Krebber is back at the gallery with a selection of new and recent works. Krebber's work operates from the belief that, following such a long history, there is very little new that painting can now do. At the same time, the New York-based artist still works with paint, affirming that the medium has a future even if it is not one of novelty or progress.

Krebber produces works that involve a minimum of traditional brushstrokes. One series of works consisted of differently toned geometrical diamonds painted over shop-bought floral fabric. Another involved covering the canvas with pages from newspapers and magazines. Other works are more recognisable: recent years have seen Krebber working with acrylic, lacquer, charcoal and emulsion to create strikingly engaging compositions out of just two or three gestures; a vertical stripe of peach or a corkscrew of vibrant blue.

Paris Gallery Weekend, '[Choices](#)', runs 20–21 May. For more shows in the city visit [On View](#).

Michael Krebber *The Living Wedge*

Kunsthalle Bern 18 February – 30 April

This exhibition, comprising 55 works created between 1986 and 2016, is a reduced version of one shown at the end of last year at the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto. Even without that major show, Michael Krebber's reputation precedes him, though that reputation is fuzzy. Though he's now in his sixties, his practice remains light-footed and difficult to define. Sometimes he is described as a conceptual painter; curators and galleries hesitate to pin down his visual practice in words. Survey exhibitions are thus welcome opportunities to consider the umpteen facets of the Cologne-born artist's work, and the spaces in the Kunsthalle Bern discreet and compact enough for his unshouty paintings to stand their ground.

Opening the exhibition is *Contempt for One's Own Work as Planning for Career* (2001), a white canvas featuring a head and shoulder outlined in apple-green, one side of the face bathed in a blue shadow, an implicit statement of modesty. The scrubbed lines of the shadow recur elsewhere in other paintings, as do a toolbox of shorthand motifs, such as snails, keyholes and the outline of a rocket – or is it a spanner? This latter occurs in each of the untitled works in the three-part *The average, edible fish says ADIEU* series from 2001, twice like the pins through circular brooches over a deep purple spotted print, once

entering a topsy-turvy environment on a white canvas that may be an office or a toolbox, the faint pen lines left cryptic given the work's hanging well above our heads. Elsewhere Krebber paints on a variety of grounds, such as synthetic blankets and patterned cotton, and there are also a handful of sculptural works. Paint is applied in spare, agile strokes or sprayed, sometimes through patterned templates. En masse, the works show a range of approaches to the construction of paintings: reference, manipulation, recontextualisation, interrelation or sampling, for starters. The same can be said of the installation, which purveys several different approaches: standard white-cube showcasing; chopped-up windsurfing boards laid out as if components of do-it-yourself sculpture; paintings creeping up the wall as if to break out of a single hang into salonlike density; and three smallish canvases propped in one corner testing visitors' observation. By this point, other artists' focus on a single strategy seems laboured and lacking in intellectual curiosity.

Krebber, meanwhile, just keeps innovating, reworking his vocabulary and refusing to settle into a recognisable style. His zigzag scrub from the opening 2001 work pops up again in the recent five-part group *MK/M* (2014/15), with

their blocky green shapes applied in broad perpendicular paint strokes on white canvases; here the zigzag, a grace note to the rectangular shapes, tails off like a sunset reflected on water and thus an abbreviated cliché. These canvases are poorly stretched, their surfaces buckling slightly, and given the intelligence at work elsewhere, this too may be by design. He conjures a return key and space bar, the access keys to virtual spaces, with an L-shaped block and a solid band at the base of one painting; and yet, with the stretching, concurrently underlines the materiality of the painting itself. Krebber knows what a risky business painting is, how little room is left for manoeuvre; after all, he studied under Markus Lüpertz before working for Martin Kippenberger and Georg Baselitz. In answer to the challenge of what painting can mean today, it seems he doesn't acknowledge the question, just keeps mining its referential and communicative potential, sometimes sincerely, sometimes ironically. It's an approach that allows him to make the gloriously cheeky *Miami City Ballet IV* (2010), the aforementioned propped stack. Three primed canvases lean against the wall, unified and coloured by the patterned dust cover he has slipped over all three, a single dab of black acrylic lacquer on top showing that the painter was present. Aoife Rosenmeyer



The Living Wedge, 2017 (installation view). Photo: Gunnar Meier. Courtesy Kunsthalle Bern

C'est sous l'alléchante appellation « The Impossibility of Painting » que s'est déroulée la discussion qui réunissait Michael Krebber et R. H. Quaytman¹ – tous deux lauréats du Wolfgang Hahn Prize² cette année – mais aussi Daniel Birnbaum, Yilmaz Dziewior, nouveau directeur du Museum Ludwig, et la critique Kerstin Stakemeier, le 14 avril dernier à l'occasion de la remise du prix. Au vu de la productivité des deux artistes, le premier réflexe sera de s'interroger sur le bien-fondé d'un tel énoncé. Cependant, il y a ici deux termes à prendre en compte – l'impossibilité et la peinture, donc – qui, rien que considérés séparément, pourraient donner lieu sans mal à de longues analyses digressives, alors associés par une petite conjonction...

Il est amusant de noter qu'au commencement de leurs carrières respectives, chacun avait tendance à lorgner sur le « milieu » artistique de l'autre : au début des années quatre-vingt, New York était, pour Krebber, le point de mire, tandis que, quelques années plus tard, c'est à Cologne, semblait-il à Quaytman, qu'avait lieu le véritable débat sur la peinture. Il faut dire que se revendiquer peintre abstraite intéressée par les questions de perspective au début des années quatre-vingt-dix à New York n'était peut-être pas la position la plus évidente à tenir. Cela avait même, selon l'expression de l'artiste, « quelque chose d'un *I'd prefer not to*³ ».

Peut-être alors cette impossibilité évoquée plus haut renvoie-t-elle, envisagée dans ce contexte historique des débuts de chacun, à l'impossibilité d'une peinture « pure », d'une peinture strictement autocentrée, d'une peinture qui n'aurait parlé que de peinture ? Car s'il est bien un point commun que l'on peut aisément établir dans le travail des deux artistes, c'est celui d'une hyper-contextualisation de leur peinture. Bien sûr, dans un sens différent pour chacun.

En ce qui concerne Krebber, cette contextualisation est peut-être plus à entendre comme une porosité, tant il a pu maintes fois démontrer son intérêt à présenter l'art et le non-art simultanément, mais aussi, via cette présentation régulière de non-art, les entours de l'art. Et si, pour lui, « un châssis fait que la peinture est peinture plus que le fait d'appliquer de la peinture sur des surfaces lisses ou rugueuses⁴ » (a *stretch frame makes painting painting, more than the application of paint to rough or smooth surfaces*), R. H. Quaytman, quant à elle, trouva « dans la peinture un lieu où appliquer des idées provenant d'autres milieux⁵ » car, pour elle, la peinture (en tant que médium, donc, et non en tant que matière colorante) est le véritable médium⁶. En un mouvement inverse de l'inconstance volontaire de Krebber qui réinvente sans cesse son travail pour éluder toute catégorisation stylistique et tenter, par là, d'affirmer le moins de choses possible, Quaytman produit une pensée englobante de son œuvre, une manière de résistance à la dispersion physique de cet œuvre – au travers des expositions, des acquisitions – qui peut aussi être interprétée comme une résistance, plus politique peut-être, à la transsubstantiation d'une œuvre (individuelle, cette fois) en objet d'art. C'est sous la forme de ce qu'elle nomme un « livre » qu'elle a choisi d'unifier sa production depuis 2001, déclinant en autant de « chapitres » ses expositions personnelles. Elle se défend pourtant de tout systématisme, préférant à ce terme celui de « méthode », induisant ainsi plus facilement l'idée d'une lecture ouverte de l'œuvre, alors qu'un système tendrait à la verrouiller. Le fait de lier chaque nouveau chapitre à l'exposition pour laquelle ses éléments ont été produits permet de pointer la question du contexte de la peinture sans pour autant que cette dernière devienne immuable – chaque tableau peut être présenté ultérieurement hors du chapitre dont il est issu – : il s'agit de « reconnaître qu'ils sont des objets que leur emplacement et ce qui est à leur

proximité, modifie⁶ ». (to acknowledge that they are objects that are changed by their location, and by adjacencies).

L'accrochage au Museum Ludwig a été réalisé par les deux artistes – il serait plus juste de dire par Krebber puis modifié par Quaytman, pour des raisons purement pratiques – et offre une parfaite illustration de ce propos ci-avant : Krebber avait réalisé un accrochage que Quaytman a interprété comme contrôlant parfaitement la lecture de l'exposition, qui était en effet une véritable ponctuation régulière des murs de cette salle dont le quatrième est une immense baie vitrée donnant sur la ville. Elle a alors simplement placé à l'horizontale le tableau central⁷ que Krebber avait accroché à la verticale, l'ouvrant ainsi à l'ensemble des peintures qui l'environnaient et permettant, de son point de vue, une vision périphérique de l'exposition. Une vision périphérique que l'on peut bien entendu étendre à la ville de Cologne qui fait donc face au mur principal, des rémanences de Gerhard Richter et Sigmar Polke apparaissant d'évidence dans les œuvres Krebber et Quaytman ici présentées. Si les premiers ont en effet déconstruit les techniques d'impression dans leur peinture, Krebber en reprend le motif (de trame) dans cette nouvelle série de toiles, tandis que Quaytman persiste à utiliser la sérigraphie au cœur de sa peinture, comme un liant entre le gesso et les pigments.

Michael Krebber, R. H. Quaytman 2015 Wolfgang Hahn Prize

par Aude Launay

Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Allemagne,
du 15 avril au 30 août 2015



Vue de l'exposition / Exhibition view; Michael Krebber, R. H. Quaytman, Wolfgang Hahn Prize 2015, Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv / Britta Schlier.

¹ Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'un rapprochement est établi entre les deux artistes, on a déjà vu leurs œuvres se côtoyer dans l'exposition « Gambaroff, Krebber, Quaytman, Rayne », à la Bergen Kunsthall, du 5 novembre au 22 décembre 2010. Krebber a aussi participé à la pièce « To the German Language – Dia » de Quaytman, présentée à Dia Art Foundation le 20 décembre 2011 et à la galerie Buchholz du 7 juillet au 25 août 2012.

² Depuis 1994, le Wolfgang Hahn Prize est doté d'un budget de 100 000€ et remis chaque année à un artiste – le prix 2015 fait donc, avec sa double attribution, figure d'exception – qui jouit d'une reconnaissance internationale mais dont l'œuvre n'est pas encore représentée de manière adéquate dans les collections du musée.

³ Citation extraite de la discussion sus-mentionnée. Toutes les citations ultérieures entre guillemets qui ne renvoient pas à des notes sont extraites de cette même discussion.

⁴ Michael Krebber, entretien avec Isabelle Graw, in *Kaleidoscope* n°17, hiver 2012-13.

⁵ « The medium is painting, not what the painting is made with. It used to be thought that the blank canvas was already a monochrome – now it is the choice itself, whether painting or not, that functions like the medium. » R. H. Quaytman, *Spine*, Sternberg Press, 2011.

⁶ R. H. Quaytman « On painting, architecture, and working in chapters », by Antonio Sergio Bessa, *BOMB Magazine*, 10 décembre 2014.

⁷ Voir en couverture de la revue.

Michael Krebber, R. H. Quaytman 2015 Wolfgang Hahn Prize

by Aude Launay

Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany,
from 15 April to 30 August 2015

It was under the mouth-watering title of "The Impossibility of Painting" that the discussion which brought Michael Krebber and R. H. Quaytman together¹—both winners of the Wolfgang Hahn Prize² this year—along with Daniel Birnbaum, Yilmaz Dziewior, new director of the Museum Ludwig, and the critic Kerstin Stakemeier, was held on 14 April last. Given the productivity of the two artists, one's initial reflex would be to question the validity of such a declaration. But there are two terms to be taken into account here—"impossibility" and "painting", *ergo*—which, merely by being considered separately, might easily give rise to lengthy and digressive analyses, and then be linked together by a little conjunction...

It is amusing to note that at the beginning of their respective careers, each artist had a tendency to eye the other's artistic "circles": in the early 1980s, New York, for Krebber, was the aim, while, a few years later, it was in Cologne, or so it seemed to Quaytman, that the real debate about painting was happening. It has to be said that claiming to be an abstract painter interested in matters of perspective in the early 1990s in New York was perhaps not the most obvious stance to adopt. This, to borrow the artist's own words, even had "something of an *I'd prefer not to*"³ about it. So perhaps the impossibility above-mentioned, seen in this context of each artist's beginnings, refers to the impossibility of a "pure" painting, a strictly self-centered painting, a painting which would have only talked about painting? For if there is indeed a shared point that can easily be established in the work of these two artists, it is that of an extreme contextualization of their painting. In a different sense for each one of them needless to add. As far as Krebber is concerned, this contextualization should possibly be understood more as a porousness, so many times has he managed to demonstrate not only his interest in presenting art and non-art simultaneously, but also the environs of art, by way of this regular presentation of non-art. And if, for him, "a stretcher frame makes painting painting, more than the application of paint to rough or smooth surfaces"⁴, R. H. Quaytman, for her part, found "in painting a place in which to apply ideas coming from other milieus", because, for her, paint (as a medium, therefore, and not "what the painting is made with") is the real medium.⁵ In a reverse movement involving Krebber's deliberate fickleness, as he endlessly re-invents his work in order to sidestep any kind of stylistic pigeonholing, and thereby tries to assert as few things as possible, Quaytman produces an all-encompassing line of thinking about her work, a way of resisting the physical dispersal of this body of work—through exhibitions and acquisitions—which may also be interpreted as a possibly more political resistance to the trans-substantiation of a work (individual, this time) as an art object. It is in the form of what she calls a "book" that she has elected to unify her output since 2001, organizing her solo shows as so many "chapters". Yet she refrains from all manner of systematism, preferring the word "method" to that term, and thus

more readily introducing the idea of an open reading of the oeuvre, whereas a system would tend to lock it in. The fact of linking each new chapter to the exhibition for which its elements have been produced makes it possible to pinpoint the issue of the context of painting, but without this latter becoming immutable—each picture can be shown at a later stage outside the chapter it has come from—: it is a matter of "acknowledging that they are objects that are changed by their location, and by adjacencies".⁶

The hanging at the Museum Ludwig is the work of both artists—it would be fairer to say that it was Krebber's doing, which was then altered by Quaytman, for purely practical reasons—and offers a perfect illustration of this afore-mentioned idea: Krebber produced a hanging which Quaytman interpreted as thoroughly controlling the reading of the show, which was in fact nothing less than a regular punctuation of the walls of that room, whose fourth wall is a huge bay window giving onto the city. So she simply placed horizontally the central picture⁷ which Krebber had hung vertically, thus opening it to all the paintings around it and, from her point of view, making it possible to have a peripheral vision of the exhibition. A peripheral vision that can, of course, be extended to the city of Cologne, which therefore faces the main wall, with ghosts of Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke obviously appearing in the works of Krebber and Quaytman on view here. If the former have actually deconstructed printing techniques in their painting, Krebber takes up the (printing dots) motif in this new series of canvases, while Quaytman makes emphatic use of silkscreening at the heart of her painting, like a bonding agent between gesso and pigments.

¹ This is not the first time that a connection is being made between the two artists. We have already seen their works rubbing shoulders in the exhibition

"Gambroff, Krebber, Quaytman Rayne" at the Bergen Kunsthall, from 5 November to 22 December 2010. Krebber also took part in Quaytman's piece *To the German Language* - Dia, shown at the Dia Art Foundation on 20 December 2011 and at the Buchholz gallery from 7 July to 25 August 2012.

² Initiated in 1994, the Wolfgang Hahn Prize, named after the late Cologne collector, is budgeted with up to 100,000 € and annually awarded to artists who have proven "consistent development of artistic creation over a period spanning decades" and enjoy international recognition among experts, but whose work is not yet adequately represented in the museum. Previous laureates include Kerry James Marshall (2014), Andrea Fraser (2013), Peter Fischli and David Weiss (2010), Christopher Wool (2009), and Peter Doig (2008).

³ Quotation taken from the above-mentioned discussion. All the subsequent quotations in inverted commas which are not referred to in notes are taken from this same discussion.

⁴ "The medium is painting, not what the painting is made with. It used to be thought that the blank canvas was already a monochrome—now it is the choice itself, whether painting or not, that functions like the medium". R. H. Quaytman, *Spine*, Sternberg Press, 2011.

⁵ R. H. Quaytman "On painting, architecture, and working in chapters", by Antonio Sergio Bessa, *BOMB Magazine*, 10 December 2014.

<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2000069/r-h-quaytman>

⁷ On the cover of this issue.

Michael Krebber,
MK/M 2015/05, 2015.
Acrylique sur toile /
Acrylic on canvas, 160 x 120 cm.
Courtesy Michael Krebber,
acquisition du / of the Gesellschaft
für Moderne Kunst
am Museum Ludwig e.V
à l'occasion du / on the occasion of
Wolfgang Hahn Prize 2015.



DARF ICH VORSTELLEN:

MICHAEL KREBBER

**NOBODY'S
FOOL**

Tom Morton über die Finten, Wendungen und Insider-Anspielungen
in einem beinahe drei Jahrzehnte umfassenden Werk

Tom Morton examines the feints and swerves, coded allusions and
insider intimacies in almost three decades of work

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



MICHAEL KREBBER

In den letzten Monaten war im CAPC musée d'art contemporain in Bordeaux eine Ausstellung mit 152 Werken von Michael Krebber zu sehen. Die meisten dieser Arbeiten sind mehr oder weniger klar als Gemälde zu erkennen und zwischen den späten 1980er Jahren und 2012 entstanden. In der Vorbereitungsphase publizierte das Museum auf seiner Website ein Interview mit Krebber, in dem sich der deutsche Künstler mit einem anonymen Gesprächspartner unterhält, möglicherweise mit dem Chefkurator des CAPC, Alexis Vaillant, möglicherweise auch mit sich selbst. Hier erklärt Krebber: „Les escargots ridiculisés' [Die lächerlich gemachten Schnecken] lautet der Titel der Ausstellung. [...] Nach meiner Interpretation des Titels sind alle Schnecken, also alle meine Arbeiten, die in der Ausstellung zu sehen und im Katalog abgebildet sind, tatsächlich bereits lächerlich gemacht. Niemand hält sie zum Narren.“ Unter diesem Frage-Antwort-Spiel mit seinem staubtrockenen Humor, seinen treffenden und erhellenden Aphorismen bringt das Museum noch ein paar Absätze mit Informationen über Krebber, in denen sein Werdegang und seine Arbeitsweise in der international üblichen, ausdruckslosen Diktion zeitgenössischer Kunstinstitutionen aufbereitet sind. Am Ende stehen die Worte: „Es ist dies das erste Mal, dass Michael Krebber [...] einem breiten Publikum vorgestellt wird.“¹ Normalerweise signalisiert ein solcher Satz lediglich, dass die betreffende Person eine bestimmte Stufe ihrer künstlerischen Laufbahn erreicht hat; in diesem Fall aber ging es um etwas viel Komplexeres. Jedem Leser der Museums-Website, der mit Krebbers Werk

In the last few months, an exhibition of 152 works by Michael Krebber, most of them more or less recognizable as paintings and made between the late 1980s and 2012, was staged at CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux. In the run up to the show, the museum published an interview with the German artist on its website, in which he speaks with an anonymous interlocutor, possibly CAPC's Chief Curator Alexis Vaillant, possibly himself. Here, Krebber explained that "Les escargots ridiculisés" [The ridiculized snails], is the title for the entire exhibition. [...] In my interpretation of the title, the snails, i.e. all my works on view in the exhibition and illustrated in the catalogue, are in fact already ridiculized. Nobody makes a fool of them.¹ Beneath this deadpan, often gnostic, fitfully enlightening Q&A, the museum provided a few brief paragraphs of information on the artist, glossing his biography and practice in the flat *lingua franca* of the contemporary art institution, and concluding with the words 'This is the first time that the work of Michael Krebber [...] meets the general public'.² Ordinarily, all a statement like this betokens is that its subject has reached a certain milestone in his or her career, but in this case the stakes were, if not exactly higher, then decidedly more complex. To any readers of CAPC's website familiar with Krebber's work, three questions immediately occurred: has he really agreed, of all things, to a survey show? What will he make of this situation? What will this situation make of him?

To leaf through the literature on Krebber is to see certain phrases repeated over and over: evasion, deflection, deferral and refusal; diffidence, apprehension, ambivalence and

doubt. An (uncredited) digest of critical responses to his work might include the observation that it comprises 'essentially a rhetorical debate about the continuing relevance of painting, or that each of his irregular, small-scale, and contextually hyper-specific shows are as much about 'titles and arrangements, Krebber's approach to space, catalogue and documentation' as they are about the artworks these things frame, or else that his 'mutually affirming, complicating, and even negating chains of reference' are 'virtually impossible to decipher', and 'if you don't get [them] right away, you probably never will'. Given how deeply the artist's practice is embedded in both the history of (especially German) painting, and the much-mythologized Cologne art scene of the 1980s, '90s and beyond, many reviews and catalogue essays advisedly emphasize the biographical: his work as an assistant to Markus Lüpertz (a painter under whom he also studied), Georg Baselitz and Martin Kippenberger, his marriage to Cosima von Bonin, and his friendship with Kai Althoff. More recent accounts

1
Ein Bild gehört Cosima, 2000
Paper, acrylic and linen
73 x 54 cm

2
Les escargots ridiculisés
(The Ridiculized Snails) 2012
Exhibition view, CAPC Bordeaux

3
I can be rented, 2010
Fabric and wood
1.1 x 1.5 x 1.5 m



2

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vertraut ist, kommen sofort drei Fragen in den Sinn: War der Künstler allen Ernstes einverstanden mit einer Ausstellung, die einen *Überblick* über sein Schaffen geben soll? Was macht er aus dieser Situation? Und was macht diese Situation aus ihm?

Blättert man durch die Literatur zu Krebber, stößt man immer wieder auf bestimmte Stichworte: schwer zu fassen, Ablenkungsmanöver, Aufschiebung, Verweigerung, Zurückhaltung, Bekommenheit, Ambivalenz, Zweifel. Ein Reader mit hier anonymisierten Kommentaren zu seiner Arbeit würde die Aussagen enthalten, dass es „im Wesentlichen um eine rhetorische Debatte über die andauernde Relevanz der Malerei“ geht, oder dass es bei jedem seiner kleinen Ausstellungsprojekte mit ihren ungewöhnlichen, extrem kontextspezifischen Formaten eben so sehr um „Titel und Arrangements“ geht, „um Krebbers Umgang mit dem Raum, mit Katalog und Dokumentation“ wie um die Kunstwerke selbst, für die diese Faktoren einen Rahmen schaffen; oder auch, dass seine „sich wechselseitig

für Insider Vertrautem einem breiten Publikum präsentieren, ohne dass das Ganze in der vergleichsweise wenig verfeinerten Umgebung des großen öffentlichen Museums untergeht? Für Krebber war die Ausstellung immer eine Art Ausgangsmaterial. Man könnte sogar sagen, der Antrieb seiner Arbeit sei nicht nur die Malerei, sondern die Gelegenheit, Malerei zu zeigen oder, noch allgemeiner, das „gesellschaftliche Leben“ der Malerei. Wenn ich hier „The P-word“⁵ („P“ wie Painting, Malerei) verwende, wie Krebber das genannt hat, bezeichnet das nicht automatisch, was man gemeinhin unter diesem Begriff versteht. In seiner Ausstellung *Flags* (*Against Nature*), die 2003 in New York bei Greene Naftali zu sehen war, zeigte Krebber eine Folge von Arbeiten, die nicht den geringsten Klecks Pigment aufwiesen: Karierter Stoff und mit im Mondschein galoppierendem Pferd bedruckte Betttücher waren auf hölzerne Keilrahmen gespannt und hingen ordentlich in zwei Gruppen an den Wänden der Galerie. Während die abstrakten Leinwände an ein



3

also flag-up Krebber's teaching activities at the Städelschule, Frankfurt, where he has lectured since 2002, and where his classes, according to his erstwhile colleague Daniel Birnbaum, consist of 'a peculiar mix of screenings, informal meetings, and inscrutable gatherings around carefully selected books, magazines, catalogues etc.'² Mention is often made of his status as an emblematic 'artist's artist', and of his importance to a younger generation of international talent. Finally, it seems almost obligatory for commentators to wheel out the following statement, originally made by Krebber in 1994: 'I do not believe that I can invent something new in art or painting because whatever I would want to invent already exists. As a solution I have chosen therefore not to cease researching. I do not see a great difference between the terms 'composing' and interpreting'.⁴

How, then, to bring this delicate ecosystem of feints and swerves, of coded allusions and insider intimacies, before a broad audience, without the whole thing perishing in the (at least comparatively) un-rarified air of the large-scale public museum? For Krebber, the exhibition has always functioned as a material of sorts. Indeed, it's possible to argue that it is not just painting, but the occasion of showing painting, or even more broadly painting's 'social life', that is the motor of his work. My use here of what the artist has called 'The P-word'⁵ does not, or at least does not necessarily denote what is commonly understood by the term. In his 2003 exhibition *Flags* (*Against Nature*) at Greene Naftali, New York, Krebber presented a series of works untroubled by even the smallest speck of pigment, in which bolts of chequered fabric and fuzzy bedsheets printed with an image of a pale horse prancing across a moonlit plane were stretched on wooden stretchers, and hung on the gallery's wall in two orderly groups. If the abstract canvases recalled a mechanically knocked-off Anni Albers or late-period Piet Mondrian (there's surely some business here about European artists making a transatlantic leap), then the figurative canvases, in which a Caspar David Friedrich-like landscape is graced by the hoary animal energy of Albrecht Dürer, Franz Marc, and Joseph Beuys, nodded towards Teutonic Romanticism, while their use of crops, repetition, and negative imagery winked at Andy Warhol's Slovakian-American Pop. A reference to Georg Baselitz came into

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bestätigenden, verkomplizierenden, ja negierenden Aneinanderreihungen von Bezügen [...] eigentlich nicht zu dechiffrieren sind“, und „wenn man sie nicht gleich versteht, wird man sie wohl nie begreifen“. Krebbers Arbeit ist stark in der Geschichte der (insbesondere deutschen) Malerei und der Mythen-umrankten Kölner Kunstszene der 1980er und 90er Jahre verankert; entsprechend betonen viele Besprechungen und Katalogtexte biographische Aspekte: seine Arbeit als Assistent von Markus Lüpertz (bei dem er auch Malerei studiert hat), Georg Baselitz und Martin Kippenberger, seine Ehe mit Cosima von Bonin, seine Freundschaft mit Kai Althoff. Neuere Beiträge heben auch auf seine Lehrtätigkeit an der Frankfurter Städelschule ab, wo er seit 2002 eine Professur innehat. Sein Unterricht besteht, glaubt man seinem ehemaligen Kollegen Daniel Birnbaum, aus „einer sonderbaren Mischung aus Filmvorführungen, informellen Treffen und unergründlichen Versammlungen um sorgfältig gewählte Bücher, Zeitschriften, Kataloge usw.“² Oft wird gesagt, er sei der Inbegriff eines „artist's artist“, eines Künstlers für Künstler, und habe große Bedeutung für eine jüngere Generation internationaler Talente. Und schließlich kommen die Kommentatoren kaum umhin, immer wieder ein Statement Krebbers von 1994 hervorzuholen: „Ich glaube nicht, dass ich in der Kunst oder der Malerei etwas Neues erfinden kann, denn was immer ich erfinden wollte, gibt es schon. Als Lösung habe ich mich deshalb entschlossen, unaufhörlich zu forschen. Ich sehe keinen großen Unterschied zwischen den Begriffen ‚komponieren‘ und ‚interpretieren‘.“³

Wie soll man nun dieses subtile Ökosystem aus Finten und geschickten Wendungen, aus verschlüsselten Anspielungen und

mechanisch abgekupfertes Muster von Anni Albers oder einen späten Piet Mondrian denken lassen (vermutlich ein Witz über europäische Künstler in Amerika), verweist das figürliche Motiv einer Caspar-David-Friedrich-Landschaft mit mythisch-kraftvollem Tier à la Albrecht Dürer, Franz Marc oder Joseph Beuys auf die deutsche Romantik. Die Verwendung von Ausschnitten, Wiederholungen und Negativbildern wiederum zwinkert in Richtung Andy Warhol und seiner Pop Art. Wenn Krebber eines seiner Pferdebilder auf den Kopf stellt, kommt natürlich Georg Baselitz ins Spiel, was man als Einladung verstehen konnte, sich zu fragen, ob die karierten Bilder, zwischen denen es hing, ebenfalls „kopfüber“ hingen – ein Ding der Unmöglichkeit bei so einem stur regelmäßigen Muster. Gegen diese bewusste und ausgesprochen dandyhafte Überfrachtung (man denke auch an die im Ausstellungstitel enthaltene Anspielung auf Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1884 erschienenen Roman *A rebours*, im Englischen *Against Nature*) von ein paar Stücken industriell gefertigten Stoffs mit einer komprimierten Geschichte westlicher Malerei setzte Krebber den Umstand, dass er bei der Anfertigung dieser Werke nicht einmal in die Nähe einer Spachtel oder eines Pinsels gekommen war. Und man könnte noch drei Geister zitieren, die bei diesem visuellen Festessen – oder Hungermahl – zugegen waren. Erstens den viktorianischen Kunstkritiker John Ruskin, der den angloamerikanischen Maler James Abbott McNeill Whistler wütend fragte, ob er wirklich „zweihundert Guineas“ für die „zwei Tage“ verlangt habe, die es gebraucht habe, um *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1877) zu malen. Zweitens Whistler selbst, der unter seinem prächtigen

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Schnauzer hervorgrinst und antwortet: „Nein, ich verlange sie für die Kenntnisse, die ich mir in einem ganzen Arbeitsleben erworben habe.“⁴⁶ Drittens den Protagonisten von Herman Melvilles 1853 erschienener Kurzgeschichte *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* – einen Schreiber in Manhattan, der, um Korrektur eines kopierten Dokuments gebeten, antwortet: „Ich möchte lieber nicht.“

Wenige Monate später war bei Greene Naftali – ganz gegen die Gepflogenheiten einer kommerziellen Galerie – noch im selben Jahr 2003 eine weitere Einzelausstellung von Krebber zu sehen, diesmal unter dem Titel *Here it is: The Painting Machine*. Erneut präsentierte er gefundene und aufgespannte Stoffe, diesmal als Malgrund für ein paar zaghaft gesetzte Tupfer Acrylfarbe, aufgetragen wie Parfüm auf ein warmes Handgelenk. Die Bilder standen an die Wände der Galerie gelehnt und wurden von darüber drapierten Exemplaren des Ausstellungsplakats teilweise verdeckt. Auf ihnen war das Bild eines ziemlich flamboyanten George-W.-Bush-Doubles samt mit Filzstift gezogenen Wimpern, Nasenring und Vampirzähnen zu sehen – womit sich diese Arbeiten noch stärker als die vorher gezeigten unbemalten Leinwände als abweisend gegenüber solchen Kritikern und Sammlern erwiesen, die mit einer Ausstellung hochbedeutender europäischer Malerei gerechnet haben mochten. Inszeniert wurde hier letztlich eine Wiederholung von Krebbers Weigerung, aus der Gelegenheit, im „Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten“ auszustellen, unmittelbar Kapital zu schlagen. Ein Gestus, der im zweiten Anlauf nur noch komischer und in seiner Kritik umso treffender wurde. Man stellt sich eine Grand Dame der Upper East Side vor, die, ohne der dröhnenden Aristokratin Lady Bracknell aus Oscar Wildes Stück *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) zu nahe treten zu wollen, anmerkt: „Eine Ausstellung in New York zu vermasseln, kann schon mal passieren; bei zweien sieht's dann doch nach Achtlosigkeit aus.“ Das wäre wohl genau die Art Kommentar, die Krebber ernen wollte.

2007 zeigte Krebber Gemälde aus einer einzigen Werkgruppe verteilt auf drei miteinander verbundene Ausstellungen: *London Condom* bei Maureen Paley in London, *Respekt Frischlinge* bei Daniel Buchholz in Köln und *Je suis la chaise* (Ich bin der Stuhl) bei Chantal Crousel in Paris. Ausgangspunkt war eine Vorlesung über Malerei, die der Künstler 2003 an der Kölner Universität gehalten hatte. Krebber engagierte einen Schildermaler, der sein Manuskript in dichter schwarzer Farbe auf 90 Leinwände übertrug, die mit Siebdrucken nach Illustrationen aus französischen Comics im Stil der 1950er-Jahre bedruckt waren – Cowboys, Krankenschwestern, junge Liebespaare. Diese Bilder erinnern nicht nur an Roy Lichtensteins Pulp-Fiction-Gemälde, sondern auch an John Baldessaris *Commissioned Paintings* (1969) und Kippenbergers Serie *Lieber Muler, male mir...* (1981), die beide von einem Plakatemaler nach Anweisungen gemalt wurden. Ein Großteil des Vorlesungstexts versinkt wie ein unterdrücktes Trauma in den Schwärzen der Comichilder, doch hier und da ist ein Wort oder ein Satz zu erkennen.

Wir sehen die Namen zahlreicher Künstler, darunter Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke und Merlin Carpenter (ein weiterer Ehemaliger aus Kippenbergers Atelier) und erfahren, dass in „den 80er Jahren [der deutsche Kunsthistoriker Benjamin H. D.] Buchloh tatsächlich das Verdikt sprach, Malerei sei regressiv, was ich zwar nie schwarz auf weiß gelesen habe, aber ich habe noch meine Notizen darüber, wie sehr mich das damals getroffen hat“. Weitere sichtbare Auszüge sind eher rätselhaft: „es ging um eine auratische Person“, „1968er Gedanken“, „doch das war Teil des Vertrags“, „so etwas wie die Neuerfindung der Malerei, auch wenn mir die Malerei nichts bedeutet“. In der Presseerklärung zu den drei Ausstellungen, die den Western *Red River* von 1948 als rahmendes Motiv verwendet, vergleicht der Künstler John Kelsey Gemälde mit Vieh, das „auf den Markt getrieben werden muss“, und auf einer Ebene könnte man das von Krebber gewählte Verfahren, seine Vorlesung auf Leinwände übertragen zu lassen, als Hineintreiben des Diskurses ins kommerzielle Viehgelege lesen. Andererseits sollte man nicht übersehen, dass die fast gleichzeitige Verteilung seiner Werke auf drei Ausstellungsorte zwei gängige Anforderungen von Galeristen erfüllte und zugleich wieder zunichtemachte: dass ihre Künstler erstens ein erkennbares „Markenzeichen“ hervorbringen und ihnen, zweitens, dennoch etwas glaubhaft Neues und Exklusives zum Verkaufen überlassen. Vielleicht ging es bei

play in Krebber's inversion of one of the equine works, which nestled among its chequered cousins, as though inviting the viewer to ask whether these, too, were hung 'upside down' – an impossibility given the unremitting regularity of their pattern. Against this knowing and (considering the show's titular allusion to JK Huysmans' 1884 novel *À rebours*) decidedly dandyish overburdening of a few swatches of commercially manufactured textiles with a compressed history of Western painting, the artist set the fact that, in making these works, his hand never once strayed close to a palette knife or a brush. We might glimpse three more ghosts in attendance at this visual feast, or famine. One is the Victorian art critic John Ruskin, furiously enquiring of the Anglo-American painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler whether he really 'asked two hundred guineas' for the 'two days' it took him to paint his *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1877). A second is Whistler himself, smiling through his splendid whiskers as he replies: 'No, I ask it for the knowledge I have gained in the work of a lifetime.' A third is the protagonist of Herman Melville's 1853 short story *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* – a Manhattan clerk who when asked to proofread a copied document replies 'I would prefer not to'.

A few months later in 2003, and very much against the usual practice of commercial galleries, Greene Naftali staged another Krebber solo, this time entitled *Here it is:*

4
*Before You Change
Your Mind
(Great Artaud)*
2003
Acrylic and
paper on fabric
1,1 x 1,5 m

5
*The Things
We Are Doing No. 1
(Reiter Sonne)*
2003
Canvas, yarn,
paper on fabric
1,2 x 1 m

6
*This Is A Place
To Stay Forever*
2003
Pencil, lacquer
and paper on fabric
1 x 1,2 m



4

diesem Projekt dann aber doch eher darum, eine Anwendung leichten künstlerischen Transvestitismus zu inszenieren. Was immer es sonst noch gewesen sein mag: Krebbers Anwendung der Methoden „konzeptueller Malerei“ (ein Begriff, der häufig und recht unzutreffend in Zusammenhang mit seinem Werk genannt wird) war jedenfalls eine pragmatische Antwort auf den Druck, drei kurz hintereinander stattfindende Ausstellungen beschicken zu sollen. Inwieweit damit auch eine Kritik an diesen Methoden verbunden ist, oder gar eine verborgene Form der Selbstkritik, bleibt verstörend unklar.

In der selbst verfassten Presseerklärung zu seiner Ausstellung *Miami City Ballet*, die 2010 bei Daniel Buchholz in Berlin zu sehen war, schließt er mit den Worten, „dass es egal ist, was ich mache, ob es nach welchen Kriterien auch immer gut oder schlecht ist, wie auch immer. Die Tatsache, dass ich mich hier Künstler nenne, genügt.“ Neben verschiedenen 2008 entstandenen Arbeiten, die aus gebrauchten, quer in Stücke geteilten Surfbrettern bestehen (die zwar an Donald Judds makellose „Regal-Skulpturen“ erinnern, zugleich aber malerische „Signaturen“ von Surfern tragen, die von den Surfbretthern gesponsort werden, und zudem durch anhaftende Sandkörner und vergilbtes Surferwachs getönt sind) zeigte Krebber zwei Arbeiten, die auf seine Jugend und künstlerische Reifezeit anspielen. *Das politische Bild* (1968/2010), ein Ölgemälde im Stil Jörg Immendorffs mit Atompilz, roter Fahne und

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The Painting Machine. At this show, the artist presented more found stretched fabrics, which this time provided the ground for a few tentative dabs of acrylic, applied like perfume to a warm wrist. Propped up against the gallery wall, and partially obscured by draped copies of the exhibition poster-cum-invite (an image of a rather queeny George W. Bush look-a-like with felt-tipped eyelashes, nose-ring and vampire fangs), these works were if anything even more unfriendly to critics and collectors expecting a show of Important European Painting than the unalloyed bed-sheets that featured in *Flaggs (Against Nature)*. What was being staged here was a repeat of Krebber’s earlier refusal to capitalize, at least in any straightforward manner, on the ‘land of opportunity’, a move that became all the funnier, and all the more critically acute, the second time around. We might imagine some formidable Upper East Side *Grande Dame* remarking, pace the booming aristocrat Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde’s 1895 play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, that ‘to squander one New York show is

a misfortune, to squander two looks like carelessness’. This, it seems, is exactly the kind of response that Krebber set out to court.

2007 saw Krebber show paintings from a single body of work across three linked exhibitions: *London Condom* at Maureen Paley, London, *Respekt Frischlinge* (Respect Fledglings) at Daniel Buchholz, Cologne, and *Je suis la chaise* (I Am the Chair) at Chantal Crousel, Paris. Taking as his departure point a lecture on painting that he originally delivered at the University of Cologne in 2003, the artist employed a sign painter to transcribe his notes on to ninety canvases in dense black pigment, over screen-prints of black and white panels from 1950s-style French comic books featuring cowboys, nurses, and young lovers. Looking at these works, we are reminded not only of Roy Lichtenstein’s pulp fiction canvases, but also of John Baldessari’s *Commissioned Paintings* (1969), and Kippenberger’s series *Lieber Maler, male mir...* (Dear painter, paint for me..., 1981), made by a commercial artist according to his diktats. While much of the lecture’s text

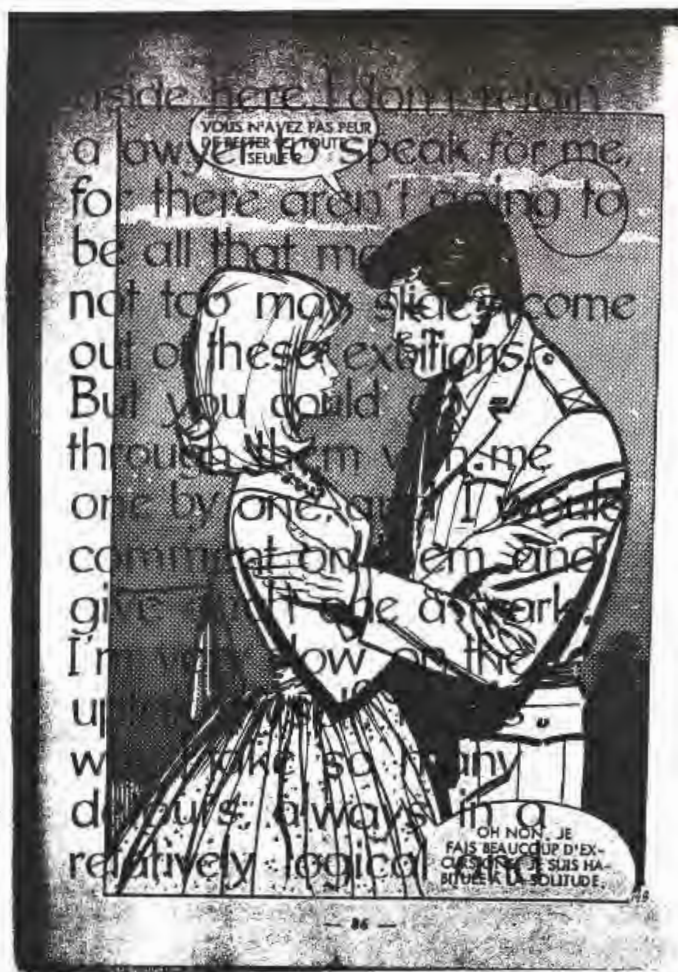


5



6

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7
Untitled (30)
2007
Acrylic and lacquer on canvas
105 x 75 cm

8
Funny Cide 7
2011
Charcoal and lacquer on canvas
105 x 85 cm

sinks, like a repressed trauma, into the overprinted darkness of the cartoon imagery, now and then we can make out a word or phrase. We see the names of numerous artists, among them Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Merlin Carpenter (another alumnus of Kippenberger's studio), and learn that in 'the eighties [German art historian Benjamin H.D.] Buchloh actually pronounced the verdict that painting is regressive, not that I have ever read that in black and white, but I do have my notes on how it struck me at the time'. Other visible extracts are more arcane: 'it was about an auratic person', '1968 thoughts', 'but it was part of the contract', 'something like the reinvention of painting, even though painting means nothing to me'. In the press release for the three shows, which employed the 1948 Western Red River as a framing device, the artist John Kelsey compared paintings to cattle that 'must be driven to market', and on one level we might read Krebber's decision to have his lecture transposed onto canvas as a corralling of the discursive into the commercial, although we should also note how the near-simultaneous tripartite dispersal of these works both met and then immediately thwarted two common gallerists' imperatives: that their artists produce 'signature pieces', and that they provide them with something credibly new and exclusive to sell. Perhaps, though, this project was really about staging an episode of mild artistic transvestitism. Whatever else it was, Krebber's adoption of the methods of 'conceptual painting' (a term that is often and somewhat inaccurately applied to his work) was an undoubtedly pragmatic response to the pressure of delivering three shows in close succession. To what degree it also constituted a critique of these methods, or even an obscure form of self-critique, remains teasingly ambiguous.

In his self-penned press release for his 2010 exhibition *Miami City Ballet* at Daniel Buchholz, Berlin, Krebber signed off with the words: 'it doesn't matter what I do, whether it is good or bad, or that it conforms however to whatever criteria – the fact that I call myself an artist is enough.' In addition to several works from 2008 made from segments of second-hand windsurfing boards sliced across their widths (which, while they recalled Donald Judd's immaculate 'shelf' sculptures, also bore the painter-like printed 'signatures' of the surfers sponsored by the boards' manufacturers, and were further tainted by particles of sand and yellowing smears of surf wax), Krebber presented two pieces that alluded to his youth and artistic maturation. An oil painting in the style of Jörg Immendorff featuring a mushroom cloud, a red flag, and what might be the Berlin Wall, *Das Politische Bild* (The Political Picture, 1968/2010) was

einem Gebilde, das die Berliner Mauer sein könnte, hatte Krebber mit 14 gemalt und anschließend in Stücke gerissen. Für die Ausstellung bei Buchholz wurde es wieder zusammengesetzt. Man konnte es als Zeichen für ein wiedererwachtes politisches Bewusstsein sehen oder zumindest als Einverständnis eines phlegmatischen Erwachsenen mit dem hitzköpfigen Teenager, der er einmal war. Daneben drei Neonchriften von 2010 mit dem Schriftzug *Die Hundejahre sind vorbei* in Transportkisten, ein Verweis auf Kippenbergers Gruppenausstellung *Broken Neons* von 1987, an der Krebber teilgenommen hatte, und auf sein Auftauchen aus dem Schatten seines früheren Chefs. Es ist aufschlussreich, diese Arbeiten vor dem Hintergrund der Ausstellung zu sehen, die 2011 bei Greene Naftali stattfand. Dort zeigte Krebber Gemälde nach Seiten aus drei Blogs, in denen Persönlichkeiten aus der Kunstwelt (unter ihnen er selbst) aus einer Insider-Perspektive heraus anonym – zum Teil waren es seine Studenten an der Städelschule –

kritisiert werden konnten, sowie aus einem wüsten und weitgehend uninformatierten Kommentar: Thread der Website des *Guardian* zu einer negativen Besprechung einer Ausstellung von Krebbers früherem Professorenkollegen Mark Leckey aus der Feder des populistischen Kritikers und selbst ernannten „Außenseiters der Kunstwelt“ Jonathan Jones. Man könnte diese Arbeiten deshalb als einen herablassenden (und nicht ganz ernst gemeinten) Ordnungsruf interpretieren, als feldherrlichen Versuch, die unruhige Jugend im eigenen Lager zu disziplinieren oder den Ansturm der Barbaren abzuwehren – aber ihre Kraft liegt gerade im Bewusstsein davon, dass diese Appelle im eigenen Interesse erfolgen, dass sie zwecklos und letztlich lächerlich sind. Jedes Gemälde steht mit seinen gerade mal 140 x 107 Zentimetern gegen die grenzenlose Ausdehnung des Webs, und gegen die uns eigene Lust an Vaternord und unerkannter digitaler Raserei. Krebbers Behauptung, „dass es egal ist, was ich mache“, erscheint hier durchaus

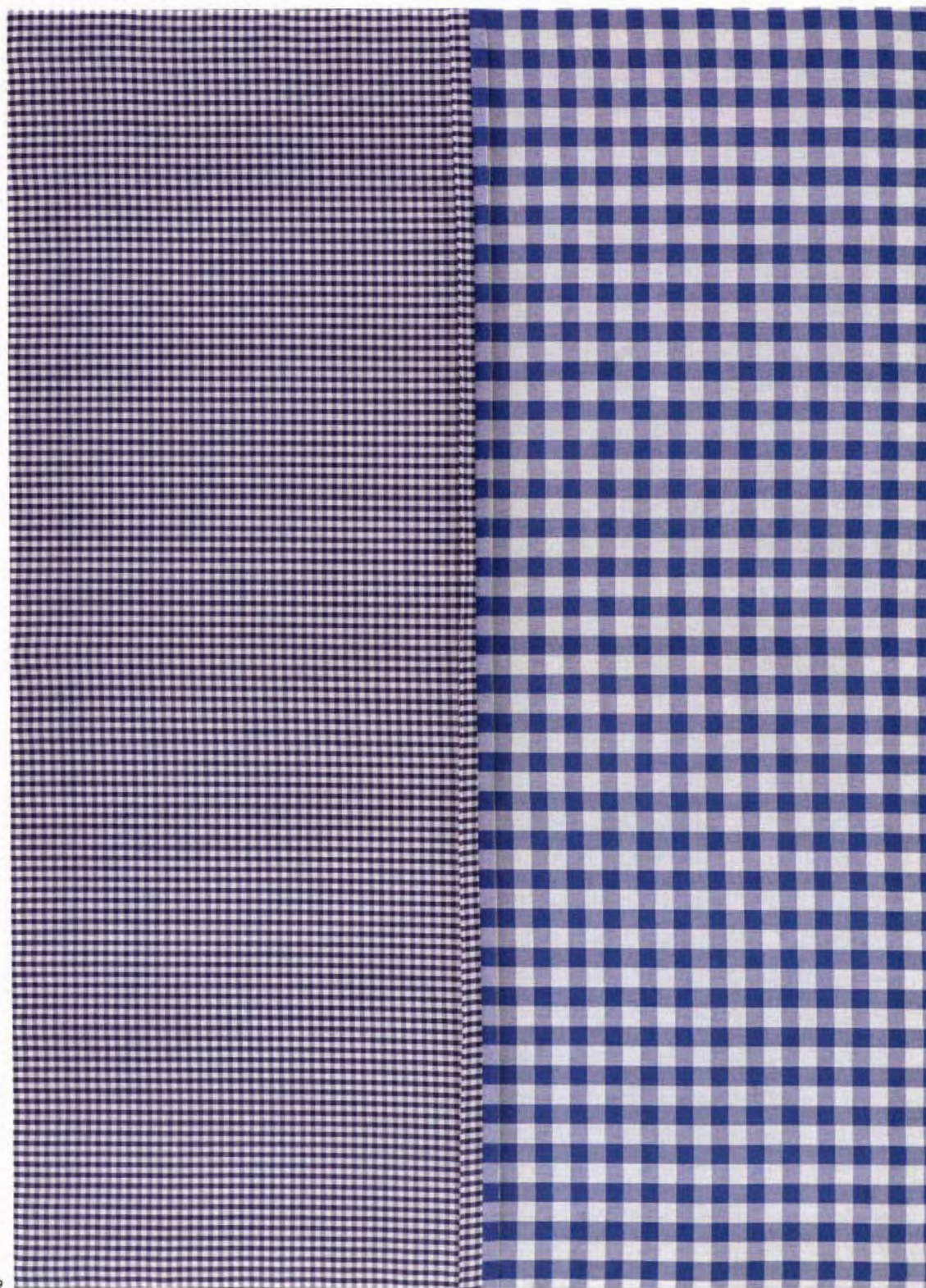
Galerie
Chantal Crousel

MICHAEL KREBBER



8

MICHAEL KREBBER



9

10



9
Untitled
2006
120 x 90 cm

10
Ich habe nie Begleitung.
Ich habe Magenprobleme.
2003
Emulsion on fabric
1,3 x 1,3 m

Die Kraft der Arbeiten liegt im Bewusstsein um das Eigeninteresse und die Vergeblichkeit ihrer Appelle, ja ihrer Tächerlichkeit.

zutreffend. Was allerdings den Nachsatz
anbelangt – „dass ich mich hier Künstler
nenne, genügt“ –, möchte man fragen:
„Wem reicht das?“

Die Schau im CAPC hätte so etwas wie
eine Ausstellung der Ausstellungen sein
können, stattdessen entschied sich Krebber
(mit seinem Kurator Vaillant) für eine
Präsentation seines Werks, die ohne jeglichen
Hinweis auf eine Chronologie auskommt
oder auf die dichten kontextuellen Informa-
tionen, die ihm typischerweise zugrunde
liegen. Das ist nun also, wie er sich „einem
breiten Publikum“ darbietet: als ein Maler,
dessen Gemälde unmittelbar wirken, ohne
besondere Anforderungen zu stellen, Gemälde
von universeller Selbstgenügsamkeit. Man
könnte das als Hinweis auf eine gnadenlose
Raffinesse nehmen, ich würde es eher als
eine weitere Weigerung in einer langen
Reihe von Verweigerungen verstehen. Auf
die Einladung hin, sich einen Überblick über
sein eigenes Werk, sein Schneckenheim

bereits „lächerlich gemachter“ Schnecken
zu verschaffen, hat Krebber es am Ende vor-
gezogen, sich selbst besser nicht ins Auge
zu blicken.

Übersetzt von Michael Müller

Tom Morton ist Autor, Kurator und
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Seine Ausstellung *The World is Almost Six
Thousand Years Old* ist bis zum 7. Mai an
verschiedenen Orten in Lincoln, Großbritannien,
zu sehen.

1 www.cape-bordeaux.fr/en/program/michael-krebber
2 Ebenda

3 Daniel Birnbaum, „Secret Sharer“, in: *Artforum*,
Oktober 2005, S. 221–222

4 Siehe etwa auch Michael Krebber: „Apothekerman“
(Ausstellungskatalog), Kunstverein Braunschweig/
Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, Verlag der
Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln 2000/2001, S. 70

5 Michael Krebber, *Puberty in Painting, Ausserirdische
Zwitterwesen*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König,
Köln 2003, S. 8

6 Zeugenaussage im Gerichtsverfahren Whistler vs.
Ruskin, 1878

MICHAEL KREBBER

Painted by Krebber when he was 14, and then
subsequently torn up. Reassembled for
the Buchholz show, it appeared to signal a
reawakening of political consciousness, or at
any rate a phlegmatic adult's accommodation
of the sanguine teenager he once was. Nearby,
three neon signs, made in 2010, reading
Die Hundejahre sind vorbei (The Dog Years
Are Done) sat in their packing cases, a refer-
ence to Kippenberger's 1987 group show
Broken Neon, in which Krebber participated,
and to his emergence from the shadow of
his former boss. It feels useful to read these
works against the artist's 2011 show
*C-A-N-V-A-S, Uhu-trust, Jerry Magoo, and
guardian.co.uk Paintings* at Greene Naftali.
Here, he presented paintings of pages from
three blogs offering anonymous criticism
of art world figures (including Krebber) from
an insider perspective, written in part by his
former students at the Städelschule, and
of a rowdy and largely ill-informed comment
thread on the Guardian newspaper's website
about a negative review of a show by the
artist's former teaching colleague Mark Leckey,
written by the populist critic and self-pro-
claimed 'art world outsider' Jonathan Jones.
For all that we might interpret these works as
a (mock) patrician call to order, a kingly
attempt to discipline the castle's restless
youth or to shoo the barbarians from the
gates, their power resides in their awareness
of their own self-interest and futility, even
their own ridiculousness. Each painting in this
series measures 140 x 107 cm – set that
against the boundless extension of the web,
and our species' appetite for patricide and
faceless digital rage, Krebber's claim that
'It doesn't matter what I do' seems accurate,
here. As to his addendum that 'the fact that
I call myself an artist is enough', we might ask
'enough for whom?'

The CAPC show could have been an
exhibition of exhibitions, but instead Krebber
(and Vaillant) opted to install his work with-
out a single gesture towards its chronology,
or to the dense contextual information on
which it characteristically relies. This, then,
is how he chooses to 'meet the general public':
as a painter whose paintings are immediate,
in need of no special pleading, somehow
universally sufficient. We might take this as
an indication of a pitiless sophistication, but
I'd rather think of it as another refusal in a
long line of refusals. Invited to survey his own
oeuvre, his *escargatoire* of 'already ridiculized'
snails, Krebber preferred, in the end, not to
recognize himself.

Tom Morton is a writer, curator and contributing
editor of *frieze*, based in London. His exhibi-
tion *The World is Almost Six Thousand Years
Old* is on view in various venues in Lincoln,
UK, until 7 May.

1 www.cape-bordeaux.fr/en/program/michael-krebber
2 Ibid.

3 Daniel Birnbaum, „Secret Sharer“, *Artforum*,
Oktober 2005, pp. 221–2.

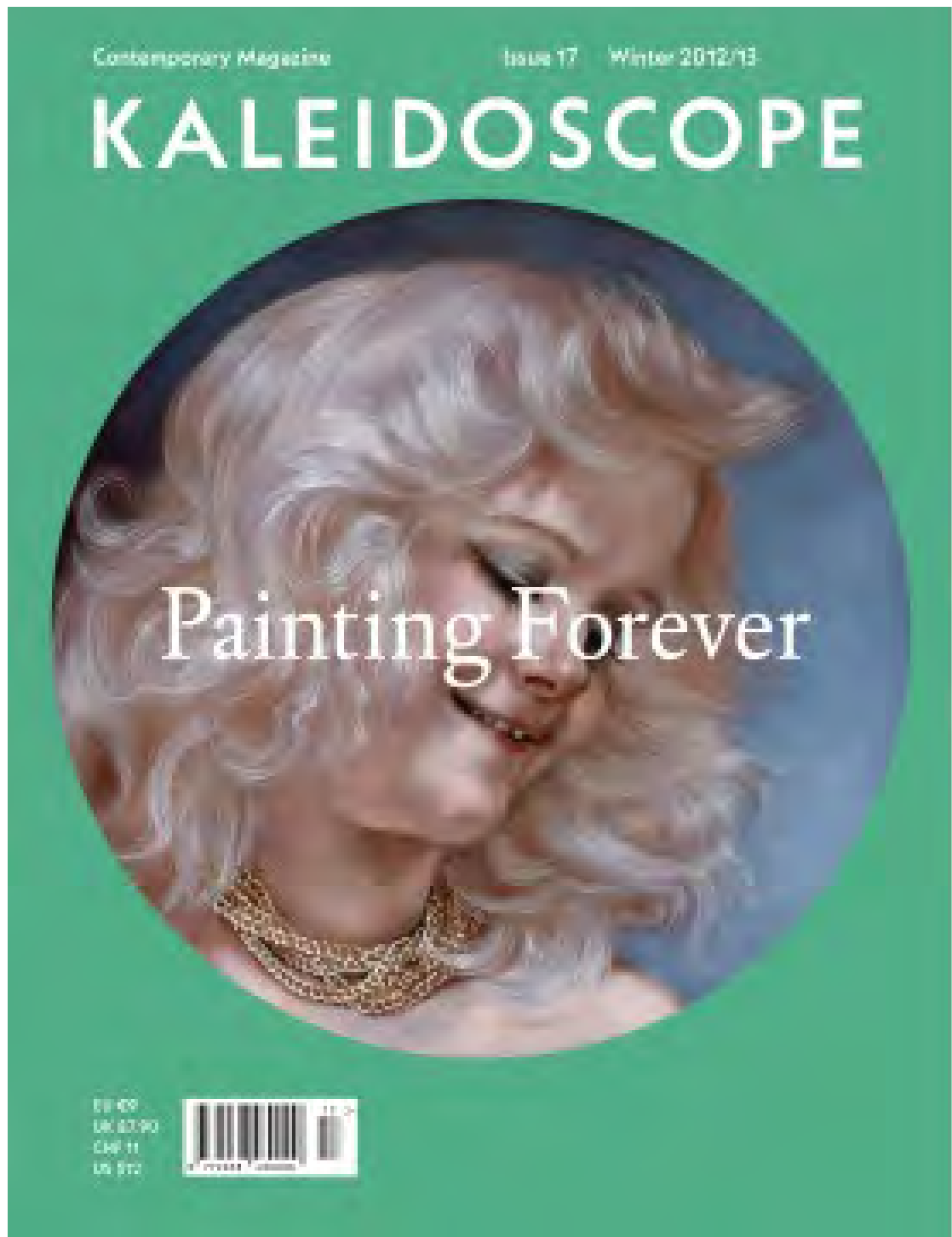
4 See, for example, Michael Krebber: „Apothekerman“
(ex. cat.), Kunstverein Braunschweig / Städtische
Galerie Wolfsburg, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther
König, Cologne, 2000/1, p. 70

5 Michael Krebber, *Puberty in Painting, Ausserirdische
Zwitterwesen* [Allen Hybrid Creatures], Verlag
der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2003, p. 8

6 Testimony in Whistler vs. Ruskin libel trial, 1878

Isabelle Graw. "Painting Forever", *Kaleidoscope*, Issue 17, Winter 2013.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



MAIN THEME

ISABELLE GRAW Our mission today is to talk about painting—an equivocal concept that entrains an entire belief system. In your writings, you've always distanced yourself from Painting with a capital "P", but interestingly enough, you've simultaneously called yourself a painter. Now, painting can be understood to mean all sorts of things—an institution, a medium, a semiotic system, a certain procedure. What's more, painting has been accorded a special status since the 18th century, and despite the much-talked-about dissolution of the boundaries between the arts, it hasn't lost that status. How does your practice position itself vis-à-vis this privileged medium?

MICHAEL KREBBER I'd like to separate the difficulties raised by the concept of "painting" from the question of why an artist would concern himself with it at all. Because the latter, to my mind, usually has little to do with what some essay on art theory says. I started doing painting without having read such essays or pondered such issues. After all, painting as such is a perfectly ordinary activity—here in your kitchen, for example, there are many pieces of furniture your daughter painted. There's a possibility that you still paint after puberty, with ambitions that have changed, and from then on things keep developing again, and I think looking at different approaches to "painting" is interesting.

IG In today's "post-medium condition," no single medium calls the tune, and yet "painting" still evokes an entire system of beliefs: the belief in its truth, its self-activity, its essentialness, its vitality. The moment you paint, you deal with this pretension that painting is special, you have to take a stance vis-à-vis this aspiration one way or another.

MK You're probably referring to the potential misconception of the average member of the educated classes, who would have a certain idea of painting or classical music or literature. Such conceptions may be virtually impossible to dislodge. Of course, that also concerns people like

myself who've been through accidents on this issue and, for one reason or another, stopped doing painting or, then again, didn't stop doing painting.

IG What do you mean by "accidents"?

MK When something doesn't work, when you just can't get something right, no matter how hard you try. You can't get through a thought or turn a corner. I now call that an accident, if indeed it doesn't work.

IG But your oeuvre does not accord special status to painting. In your book *Au erirdische Zwitterwesen = Alien Hybrid Creatures* (Walther König, 2005), for example, the illustrations feature non-painting material such as invitation cards, posters, favorite books, and works by friends, which are presented as essential.

MK Bringing the friends in was not something I did; you did. You once wrote something about Cosima, that said the social environment is important for her art, that it's part and parcel of a work by Cosima von Bonin; that was the first time I read it put like that. At the time, I wasn't particularly interested in the argument.

IG It may be that you weren't particularly interested in the idea of opening art up to its social environment. But your books nonetheless contain numerous tributes to friends, like the inclusion of a picture by Merlin [Carpenter] or a catalogue cover by Josephine [Pryde] ...

MK Yes, but my idea was never to integrate or address this argument. I just put all kinds of things in there, and references of this sort then happened to be part of it as well. To me, it was more important that when something didn't work for me personally, I nonetheless exhibited it. How that came to be I find hard to say. I just have to deal with my material, and then at some point the only option I've got left is to hang things that aren't accomplished, because I don't have anything else. And of course I can then add outside material to balance everything better and to be able to abide it.

IG In 2009, David Joselit published his seminal essay "Painting Beside Itself," and since then the visualization of social networks has grown into a sort of artistic virtue. Does the concept of "network painting" describe what you're doing, because your work, too, is opening up to its social connections?

MK It does, that's spot on, only I didn't intend it and it's not what I'm interested in. It's more like when you never set your clock and it's right every twelve hours and everything fits together very precisely, but still, the moment lasts only a second and then that congruence is gone as quickly as it came.

IG In the early 1980s, you went through the Lüpertz school, where people believed in painting with almost naïve faith. I recall the gallerist Michael Werner, who always referred to painting as if it was a holy affair. This particularly loaded notion of painting has probably informed our thinking.

MK I feel perfectly at home with that. It's just that it didn't work for me, and at some point an artist like Marcel Broodthaers became of interest to me. Now this is perhaps a joke, but he was a poet, and maybe he also didn't get very far with poetry and his books of poems, and then he cast a stack of copies of his last book in cement so that one couldn't read it anymore, and thus offhandedly turned it into a sculpture or an object as well, and he had the brilliant idea of using that to declare himself an artist, a kind of artificial artist within his existence as a poet. What interests me in Broodthaers is this possibility that you can have or make a picture, but you can also easily walk out of the room. The sort of painting you've touched upon is something I cannot bear for long. I can abide such painting only briefly and must have the option of walking away again.

IG In your 2005 show at the Vienna Secession, you also expanded the notion of painting quite literally, by presenting printouts and photo

prints in wood frames. Even the early glass-case work at Galerie Nagel [1990] could be described by the same token as painting in an extended sense. It presents a frame that contains material—books, catalogues, etc.—but here, painting exceeds the tight frame of the picture on canvas.

IK But that's always been my approach. In the catalogue for the exhibition in Braunschweig ["Apothekerman," 2000–01], for example, I was able to show my works of art next to works of non-art. That's what I call them. The show at the Secession then featured exclusively such works of non-art, by themselves and unaccompanied by real works of art, but then it was also accompanied by my book on *Alien Hybrid Creatures*, which included my essay on "Puberty in Painting." The text was my statement, after all, and that helped me get a fairly good grip on the issue. The empty exhibition at Nagel's with the glass cases was a sort of last resort, the emergency exit. That's a description I read somewhere.

Let's take the empty show at Nagel's, which included nothing but display cases with materials. Can you say more on how it was an emergency exit?

IK I'm not going to try and go into details—I'd rather say something about the situation in life I found myself in at the time. The reason I did that had a lot to do with acting, with Jacques Tati movies, and with Broodthaers and Dan Graham as well. But I'd rather not discuss this at greater length, because I've already said a lot about it.

Still, it would be good to know what the emergency consists in and what the emergency exit is?

IK The emergency consists in, say, wanting to tell a joke or make something work on a practical level. You want to say something, but you want to do more than babble, you want to say something that might have an impact. Impact is the right word in this context. And then you're at a loss, and that's the emergency.

On the stage, there is life in time—it has to happen now, or it won't work out. But there's also the possibility that it doesn't happen until five seconds later, you regain your sense of balance, there's a moment of stage comedy or situational humor, but then it does have to happen. These are experiences of strong compulsion, and you have to recognize the emergency right away, you have to look what you have up your sleeve or quickly figure out where your sleeve even is.

IG Do you always come under such pressure, with every exhibition?

MK That's something I'm going to keep to myself. Perhaps it's not even a form of pressure, and "emergency exit" is also not the hallmark by which I recognize quality. It's only that it can happen this way.

IG For the exhibition series "Respekt Frischlinge" ["Respect Rookies"], you printed French comic strips on ninety paintings and then had your lecture on painting painted on it. Instead of spelling out the platitude once more that painting is a language and functions like a language, the shows declare the discourse about painting itself to be painting. How would you describe your relation to the discourse?

MK I'm a practitioner. I'm in the kitchen and have to cook. That's my relation to it.

IG So discourses are your ingredients, your material?

MK A text may be the material as well, and I do know a couple of texts. This work, too, grew out of an emergency situation, because I'd bitten off more than I could chew in terms of committing to exhibition projects. A pretty large number of rooms needed to be filled. That may sound a little sad now, and of course I also like very much that it's a little sad.

IG As though everything in your art was born of necessity, the product of an emergency?

MK As an actor, you've also got to bring

a bit of healthy masochism to the table, or else you don't need to go onstage. I'm not saying that you should enjoy that masochism, but you have to be able to deal with it. The painted lecture notes were a lecture I'd delivered—the transcript was really supposed to become the *Alien Hybrid Creatures* book. But then I didn't think it was good enough for that purpose, so I didn't use it and the book turned into something else altogether. Later on, Gareth James, John Kelsey, and Josef Strau set me to the task of printing as much text I'd written as possible in the Portikus book [*Jcal Krbbr Prodly Prsnts Gart Jas, Jon Klsy, Josef Stra, 2007*], which is to say, to write as much as possible, and so I already had this fairly long text, and then I didn't think it was so bad after all. So it went in there. And then it was used a third time, now in the form of painting, and these painted pages of text, which were scattered across the three exhibitions, were put back into the correct sequence and printed as a book, though one that's hard to read. That gave me an opportunity to demonstrate that I'm capable of making an artist's book. It was fun. The text at that point really isn't the issue anymore—it resurfaced because I didn't have anything else available at the time.

IG But why, in such emergency situations, do you resort to paintings on canvas, which ultimately conveyed the text in the exhibitions?

MK I've spent a lot of time building stretcher frames. I know how you buy stretcher frames and canvas, stretch it on the frames, and it's very easy to do something in rooms with stretcher frames.

IG But your work is precisely about what's beyond this stretcher frame, which is to say, less about painting in a restrictive sense than about realities of life—*Lebenswirklichkeit*, isn't it?

MK Yes, that really is what it's about for me, but the matter is a little more complicated. Because what these pictures are as objects, as well as what can be seen in them, is not

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meant to be the portrayal of a critical relation to painting. I like the idea that they might extend something that I myself, like many other people, do if I, say, changed my standpoint, for example because how someone expressed himself or herself towards me struck me as disagreeable. I could then press a button so that I would still be present and keep on talking, but at the same time would no longer be present. I just like to do this sort of thing; the standpoints at the respective moments are interesting. And moments may occur in the making of a painting, or during everything that can happen subsequently. And all the while one might lose interest, like the artist in Camus's "Jonas, or the Artist at Work," and it might also be profitable. Why not?

IG It is true that painted pictures still fetch the highest prices at auctions. One reason, it seems to me, is that the ties between person and product are especially close-knit in painting. You've brought up the significance of onstage behavior and explained that the picture itself is a form of behavior, a view that clearly illustrates that painting has a particular way of bringing you as a person, your taste and your personal preferences, into play.

MK The term I might use for "person" is perhaps image. When someone whose name is not Polke paints a Polke picture, it's not going to work. The image is missing—however well you do it, it's not going to happen. I'm not interested in keeping, preserving, or upholding painting. A stretcher frame makes painting painting, more than the application of paint to rough or smooth surfaces. To me, that option is now also a bit blocked because of Polke's example, but there will soon be possibilities again, perhaps thanks to the example of Jack Smith. I don't really believe it, but I think there's a right door there.

IG Let's say that we combine your idea of painting as a stretcher frame with the old notion of Maurice Denis who defined painting as paint

on a flat support medium. We still end up with a limited notion of painting. I would rather propose that we understand even Rachel Harrison's painted assemblages as painting in an extended sense.

MK I don't see why we should call sculpture painting.

IG Harrison's objects are painted with an Abstract-Expressionist or impressionist rhetoric, which at least claims their strong association with the vocabulary of painting.

MK To my mind, painting is when someone applies paint to anything. The surface can be smooth or curved, that includes even porcelain painting, but a sculpture that's been painted—now that, I think, is going too far. A sculpture has more to do with kneading or chipping away or assembling and deforming.

IG I think it's self-contradictory that you champion a restrictive notion of painting (painting equals paint on a flat support medium—when you've also done exhibitions in which prints are held in frames or woolen blankets with horse motifs are mounted on stretcher frames. These are clearly ways of expanding painting!

MK It's an engagement with painting, but I'm not sure whether that automatically makes it painting—perhaps in the end it's just art. For example, when I stretch a woolen blanket on an underlying fabric, that has to do, of course, with my having seen something like it before, I've encountered it in life, and I really do like this blanket. The Oedipus thing is more helpful in this context, because the blanket obviously derives from Polke.

IG The product is enriched with personal matters and refers to the person and their preferences. At Greene Naftali in 2003, you also presented a second series of fabric pictures, where the exhibition poster was hung over the fabric pictures leaning against the wall, an arrangement that signaled its being an integral part of the pictures, just like conceptual art had already declared

the incidental—posters, invitation cards—to be essential. But to my mind, these posters, loosely hung over the pictures, also seemed to be making fun of the pathos that is attached to "Painting" with a capital "p"...

MK Yes, I presume they did, but that's just what I've got inside me and it has to do with my character or with the sort of person I am. But it has nothing to do with painting when I do odd things like that, things that are just silly or ridiculous. That's a penchant I just have. Now when I hung a poster over it, that's the same thing I touched on just a moment ago when I talked about stage comedy or situational humor. But comedy is sugar-coating the matter. In reality, these moments are harder than that, they're moments when you have to pull out a weapon to do something. Something's got to happen, and you're compelled to act one way or another.

IG Pulling out a weapon—that's a bellicose way of putting it, as though everything were always at stake, as though life were nothing but struggle.

MK I mean pulling out a weapon more in the sense that even a joke you're making can be regarded as a round fired.

IG But who or what compels you to stage this production? After all, you might also—and many artists do—make your point in a relaxed and laid-back manner?

MK Yes, by now there are many who have a not dissimilar taste. A lot has happened since Kippenberger died. New constellations have formed: people know each other and perhaps they also like each other a little bit, but they might just as well part ways fairly quickly. There's been a development in recent years that I also enjoy—if it's still effective, I hope it will last for a moment longer. Art is seen in a different way than it was in the 1980s. I myself see it differently.

IG What exactly has changed?

MK Perhaps today you can switch more rapidly between applications. It's like with a computer, where you see in the top-left corner of the screen which application you're currently in, and the buttons at the bottom also change accordingly. It seems to me that that has changed the perception.

IG True. In the 1980s, the artistic field was still extremely polarized between poles that regarded each other with mutual enmity. Today, by contrast, the art world is highly differentiated and segmented, with the various segments peacefully coexisting side by side.

MK And major artists were still dominant in the 1980s. America already had women.

IG Germany mostly didn't allow women artists to be considered "great" artists

MK No, Germany didn't.

IG But with American appropriation art, a formation emerged for the first time in which female artists played a central role. Are there comparatively more people today who share your sensibility?

MK My sensibility? I don't know. I had a lot of bad luck in the 1980s: every attempt I made at the time to safely turn a corner just went awry. There were also moments when I sort of liked it like that. But the official history of the 1980s now suits me only in a few points, like the catalogue *Arbeit ist Wahrheit* [Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1984], or some things in Kippenberger.

IG Unlike in the 1980s, numerous young artists now make reference to your work, both at the Städelschule, where you, like myself, teach, and at American art schools. How do you deal with the fact that you've become a sort of role model for a younger generation?

MK It might delight me, and it might scare me. But as far as the Städelschule goes, that's a permanently sinking ship, and everything might change with any movement. Such a

movement might be, for example, when a clique leaves the school. This ongoing generational cycle, which happens incredibly fast, means that you might lose everything again.

IG And why is the Städelschule, and your own position at it, a sinking ship? Because there's no way to preserve what you've attained, because the cards are constantly being reshuffled or because, to put it the way a cultural pessimist might, everything is doomed?

MK All I wanted to do was call your observation in question that people see me as a role model. And I didn't say "a sinking ship," I said "a permanently sinking ship"—that's a big difference.

IG So is it the existence of the role model that's permanently doomed to sink?

MK No, I now want to turn this in a direction I happen to like in this very moment. As regards the existence of the role model—I don't know. But if some people here and there perhaps take a slightly friendlier view of me, I might like that, but it might also get more boring.

IG Don't you find the admiration of your fans suspicious? I'm thinking of a conversation between Merlin Carpenter and John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad of Reena Spaulings. Asked about young painters in New York who follow his work, Merlin said, "Fuck them."

MK I wouldn't say that I have fans. There may be moments of admiration here and there. It could be me who's admiring someone. Merlin takes an attitude that feels a little more aggressive.

IG I wouldn't call it aggressive so much as self-reflective when he doesn't want to pave the way for young painters. Now teaching is something that's an integral part of your practice, as you've made clear with catalogue titles such as *Puberty in Teaching*. There was also a show at Greene Naftali this year with pictures that featured text lifted

from "Canvas," a blog maintained by former students of yours.

MK I can't confirm that.

IG In any case, your act of appropriation caused some displeasure among the people who operate that blog.

MK First of all, these are anonymous blogs. At some point, it was said that they were semi-anonymous because the names were fairly well known. But I cannot confirm any names for you. Michael Sanchez, who wanted to write many press releases for a while and also asked me whether I was interested, only put the assertion in the press release that former students of mine were involved with both blogs. I responded that he would get me in trouble, but I also said: Okay, go ahead. That's the only information I can confirm at this point. So—I didn't give any names.

IG But it's one thing to get excited about these blogs, and another to turn them into art works. How did you come up with the idea?

MK I was making an exhibition and wondering: What am I going to do? The Oedipus-Narcissus text by Dierich [Diederichsen] had just come out, which was important for my exhibition at Real Fine Arts, and so were these blogs. I took a look at what I had to offer at the time, and what I have to offer happens to be what I'm interested in at the moment. The fact that these blogs were so aggressive and toyed with anonymity, struck me as important.

IG But it's also a questionable thing to do, appropriating the work of your students, using it to lend your own work the energy of fresh controversy, and presenting the result under your name.

MK To my mind, when someone blogs, someone else has permission to paint a copy of the blog. There are no rules in that game. Of course it was playing with fire.

IG But might one not feel apprehensive

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that you, an older artist, tap your former students' work for your own art?

MK All those people who wonder about that just need to look at me to see where I'm coming from. Then they'll know what kind of guy I am.

IG What kind of guy are you?

MK I always liked what was going on with Polke, I always liked watching Andy Warhol movies.

IG And Warhol, too, exploited the lives of the Factory's members in his movies.

MK Yes—that's what you're talking about, vampirism, and that's what this is.

IG As a professor who teaches at an art academy, you hold authority by virtue of that function. The question is how to deal with this authority conferred on you by the institution. That's an old point of contention between us.

MK To go back to the blogs: I thought of both the blogs and my show as literature. Only when the disagreement arose—that was no longer literature. When you play with fire, something may get burnt. But I don't see the question of power and dependency you've raised as pertinent in this context at all. Of course, there are many entanglements. The finest model of an academy I ever experienced, I think, is Polke at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg in 1978. What happened at the Hamburg punk bar Marktstube—those were really paradisiacal conditions as far as I'm concerned. Rounds were fired and no class was held. That school in Hamburg was interesting not as a whole; it was very good only in individual rooms and on specific occasions.

IG But there's also something coercive about holding class at a bar. Because what about those who don't drink? Doesn't that effectively exclude them?

MK I wouldn't say that class is held at a bar. After all, no class was held. Exclusion, or procedures of

exclusion—I hope for the best for myself, but it will have happened here and there for sure. Whether and how a teacher participates in the ongoing and perpetually shifting procedures of exclusion that are ultimately always taking place at an academy, whether that sort of thing is right or wrong, that's a sensitive question. As to what I myself think of as right or wrong in that regard, I would say there's no formula for it that could be applied in all instances.

IG You've often said that your students are your friends. By contrast, I've always insisted that the relationship is a hierarchical one for structural reasons, especially since you wouldn't have met them had it not been for your function as a teacher at the university.

MK Generally describing one's students as friends probably won't do. I don't think I've said that my students are my friends. But it's a fact that there are real friendships there.

IG You've used the word "entanglement," and, indeed, you maintain sometimes very close relationships with your students. One might say that unlike during your Cologne years, your social environment is now largely recruited from your students. It's just that given the institutional framework, teacher and student, unlike the artist friends of the 1990s, cannot meet at eye level with each other.

MK I resent the term "eye level." Much has changed for me anyway. The former Cologne circle just doesn't exist anymore. There's no single big step from those days into the present—there were many intermediate steps. One intermediate step, for example, would be when I became Fritz Heubach's and Oswald Wiener's visiting student in Düsseldorf: two years during which I started to really like school again. And a little later, the nicest call came from Frankfurt, asking me whether I wouldn't want to come there.

IG But doesn't it make a big difference whether you're a visiting student with Wiener and Heubach or leading a class at the Städelsschule?

MK I know what you're getting at, but I don't want to walk through that door. Plus, Germany permits each teacher to define for himself or herself what being a teacher means.

IG Of course, there are different ways of interpreting and implementing one's teaching position—nothing compels a teacher to become authoritarian and self-satisfied. But shouldn't one nonetheless make responsible use of the institutional power one wields?

MK I would say that I'm using it responsibly. And now I respond with a question: What exactly do you mean by that?

IG Acting responsibly, I believe, would mean not behaving the way male artists have behaved for years at German art academies, which is to say, not confusing one's relationships with one's students with friendship. Maintaining a sort of distance and not entering into close friendships or love affairs with them.

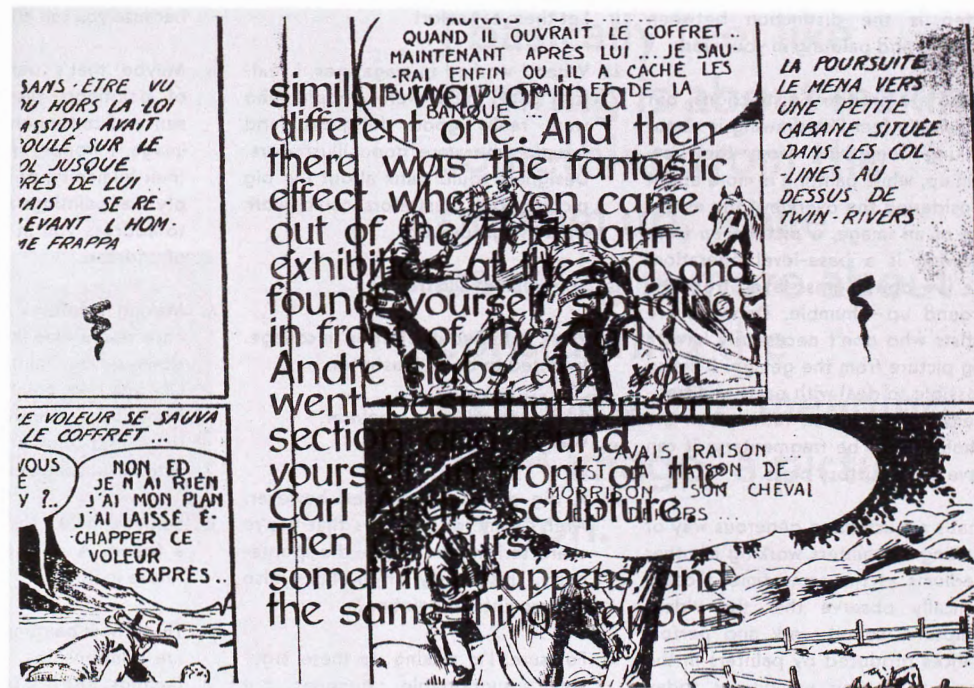
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IG Psychoanalysis is a good model—because psychoanalytic practice likewise inevitably engenders infatuations, in what is called "transference." The analyst is obliged to deal with it in a responsible manner, which is to say, to abstain from sexual relations with the patient, and if such relations do occur, he must refer her to a different therapist.

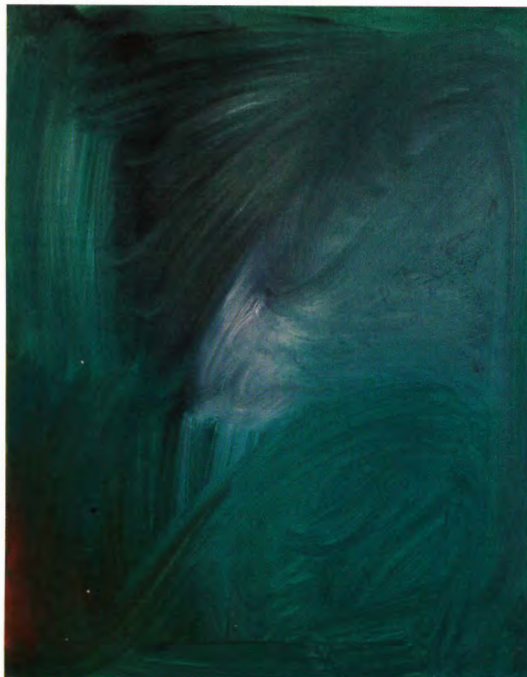
MK Only at the Städelsschule, we don't even know for sure who is the therapist and who is the one seeing the therapist. That's undefined, and needn't be defined either.

All images courtesy of the artist, Chantal Crousel, Paris; Greene Naftali, New York; dependance, Brussels; and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

MAIN THEME



Michael Krebber



in conversation with
Isabelle Graw

The Last



Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Resort

MICHAEL KREBBER'S PERSPECTIVE

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ISABELLE GRAW Our mission today is to talk about painting—an equivocal concept that entrains an entire belief system. In your writings, you've always distanced yourself from Painting with a capital "P", but interestingly enough, you've simultaneously called yourself a painter. Now, painting can be understood to mean all sorts of things—an institution, a medium, a semiotic system, a certain procedure. What's more, painting has been accorded a special status since the 18th century, and despite the much-talked-about dissolution of the boundaries between the arts, it hasn't lost that status. How does your practice position itself vis-à-vis this privileged medium?

MICHAEL KREBBER I'd like to separate the difficulties raised by the concept of "painting" from the question of why an artist would concern himself with it at all. Because the latter, to my mind, usually has little to do with what some essay on art theory says. I started doing painting without having read such essays or pondered such issues. After all, painting as such is a perfectly ordinary activity—here in your kitchen, for example, there are many pieces of furniture your daughter painted. There's a possibility that you still paint after puberty, with ambitions that have changed, and from then on things keep developing again, and I think looking at different approaches to "painting" is interesting.

IG In today's "post-medium condition," no single medium calls the tune, and yet "painting" still evokes an entire system of beliefs: the belief in its truth, its self-activity, its essentialness, its vitality. The moment you paint, you deal with this pretension that painting is special, you have to take a stance vis-à-vis this aspiration one way or another.

MK You're probably referring to the potential misconception of the average member of the educated classes, who would have a certain idea of painting or classical music or literature. Such conceptions may be virtually impossible to dislodge. Of course, that also concerns people like

myself who've been through accidents on this issue and, for one reason or another, stopped doing painting or, then again, didn't stop doing painting.

IG What do you mean by "accidents"?

MK When something doesn't work, when you just can't get something right, no matter how hard you try. You can't get through a thought or turn a corner. I now call that an accident, if indeed it doesn't work.

IG But your oeuvre does not accord special status to painting. In your book *Au erirdische Zwitterwesen = Alien Hybrid Creatures* (Walther König, 2005), for example, the illustrations feature non-painting material such as invitation cards, posters, favorite books, and works by friends, which are presented as essential.

MK Bringing the friends in was not something I did; you did. You once wrote something about Cosima, that said the social environment is important for her art, that it's part and parcel of a work by Cosima von Bonin; that was the first time I read it put like that. At the time, I wasn't particularly interested in the argument.

IG It may be that you weren't particularly interested in the idea of opening art up to its social environment. But your books nonetheless contain numerous tributes to friends, like the inclusion of a picture by Merlin [Carpenter] or a catalogue cover by Josephine [Pryde] ...

MK Yes, but my idea was never to integrate or address this argument. I just put all kinds of things in there, and references of this sort then happened to be part of it as well. To me, it was more important that when something didn't work for me personally, I nonetheless exhibited it. How that came to be I find hard to say. I just have to deal with my material, and then at some point the only option I've got left is to hang things that aren't accomplished, because I don't have anything else. And of course I can then add outside material to balance everything better and to be able to abide it.

IG In 2009, David Joselit published his seminal essay "Painting Beside Itself," and since then the visualization of social networks has grown into a sort of artistic virtue. Does the concept of "network painting" describe what you're doing, because your work, too, is opening up to its social connections?

MK It does, that's spot on, only I didn't intend it and it's not what I'm interested in. It's more like when you never set your clock and it's right every twelve hours and everything fits together very precisely, but still, the moment lasts only a second and then that congruence is gone as quickly as it came.

IG In the early 1980s, you went through the Lüpertz school, where people believed in painting with almost naïve faith. I recall the gallerist Michael Werner, who always referred to painting as if it was a holy affair. This particularly loaded notion of painting has probably informed our thinking.

MK I feel perfectly at home with that. It's just that it didn't work for me, and at some point an artist like Marcel Broodthaers became of interest to me. Now this is perhaps a joke, but he was a poet, and maybe he also didn't get very far with poetry and his books of poems, and then he cast a stack of copies of his last book in cement so that one couldn't read it anymore, and thus offhandedly turned it into a sculpture or an object as well, and he had the brilliant idea of using that to declare himself an artist, a kind of artificial artist within his existence as a poet. What interests me in Broodthaers is this possibility that you can have or make a picture, but you can also easily walk out of the room. The sort of painting you've touched upon is something I cannot bear for long. I can abide such painting only briefly and must have the option of walking away again.

IG In your 2005 show at the Vienna Secession, you also expanded the notion of painting quite literally, by presenting printouts and photo

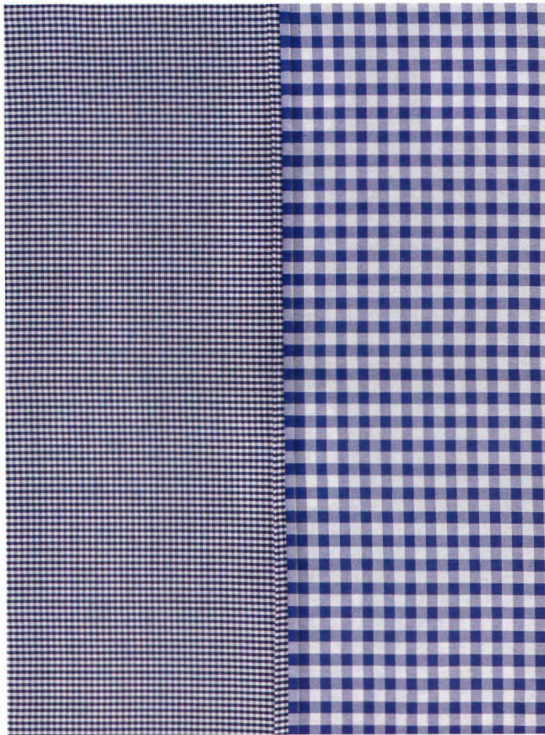
Galerie
Chantal Crousel



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MICHAEL KREBBER'S PERSPECTIVE

MAIN THEME



The emergency consists in, say, wanting to tell a joke or make something work on a practical level.



prints in wood frames. Even the early glass-case work at Galerie Nagel [1990] could be described by the same token as painting in an extended sense. It presents a frame that contains material—books, catalogues, etc.—but here, painting exceeds the tight frame of the picture on canvas.

But that's always been my approach. In the catalogue for the exhibition in Braunschweig ["Apothekerman," 2000–01], for example, I was able to show my works of art next to works of non-art. That's what I call them. The show at the Secession then featured exclusively such works of non-art, by themselves and unaccompanied by real works of art, but then it was also accompanied by my book on *Alien Hybrid Creatures*, which included my essay on "Puberty in Painting." The text was my statement, after all, and that helped me get a fairly good grip on the issue. The empty exhibition at Nagel's with the glass cases was a sort of last resort, the emergency exit. That's a description I read somewhere.

Let's take the empty show at Nagel's, which included nothing but display cases with materials. Can you say more on how it was an emergency exit?

I'm not going to try and go into details—I'd rather say something about the situation in life I found myself in at the time. The reason I did that had a lot to do with acting, with Jacques Tati movies, and with Broodthaers and Dan Graham as well. But I'd rather not discuss this at greater length, because I've already said a lot about it.

Still, it would be good to know what the emergency consists in and what the emergency exit is?

The emergency consists in, say, wanting to tell a joke or make something work on a practical level. You want to say something, but you want to do more than babble, you want to say something that might have an impact. Impact is the right word in this context. And then you're at a loss, and that's the emergency.

On the stage, there is life in time—it has to happen now, or it won't work out. But there's also the possibility that it doesn't happen until five seconds later, you regain your sense of balance, there's a moment of stage comedy or situational humor, but then it does have to happen. These are experiences of strong compulsion, and you have to recognize the emergency right away, you have to look what you have up your sleeve or quickly figure out where your sleeve even is.

IG Do you always come under such pressure, with every exhibition?

MK That's something I'm going to keep to myself. Perhaps it's not even a form of pressure, and "emergency exit" is also not the hallmark by which I recognize quality. It's only that it can happen this way.

IG For the exhibition series "Respekt Frischlinge" ["Respect Rookies"], you printed French comic strips on ninety paintings and then had your lecture on painting painted on it. Instead of spelling out the platitude once more that painting is a language and functions like a language, the shows declare the discourse about painting itself to be painting. How would you describe your relation to the discourse?

MK I'm a practician. I'm in the kitchen and have to cook. That's my relation to it.

IG So discourses are your ingredients, your material?

MK A text may be the material as well, and I do know a couple of texts. This work, too, grew out of an emergency situation, because I'd bitten off more than I could chew in terms of committing to exhibition projects. A pretty large number of rooms needed to be filled. That may sound a little sad now, and of course I also like very much that it's a little sad.

IG As though everything in your art was born of necessity, the product of an emergency?

MK As an actor, you've also got to bring

a bit of healthy masochism to the table, or else you don't need to go onstage. I'm not saying that you should enjoy that masochism, but you have to be able to deal with it. The painted lecture notes were a lecture I'd delivered—the transcript was really supposed to become the *Alien Hybrid Creatures* book. But then I didn't think it was good enough for that purpose, so I didn't use it and the book turned into something else altogether. Later on, Gareth James, John Kelsey, and Josef Strau set me to the task of printing as much text I'd written as possible in the Portikus book [*Local Krebber Prodly Prsnts Gart Jas, Jon Klsy, Josef Stra, 2007*], which is to say, to write as much as possible, and so I already had this fairly long text, and then I didn't think it was so bad after all. So it went in there. And then it was used a third time, now in the form of painting, and these painted pages of text, which were scattered across the three exhibitions, were put back into the correct sequence and printed as a book, though one that's hard to read. That gave me an opportunity to demonstrate that I'm capable of making an artist's book. It was fun. The text at that point really isn't the issue anymore—it resurfaced because I didn't have anything else available at the time.

IG But why, in such emergency situations, do you resort to paintings on canvas, which ultimately conveyed the text in the exhibitions?

MK I've spent a lot of time building stretcher frames. I know how you buy stretcher frames and canvas, stretch it on the frames, and it's very easy to do something in rooms with stretcher frames.

IG But your work is precisely about what's beyond this stretcher frame, which is to say, less about painting in a restrictive sense than about realities of life—*Lebenswirklichkeit*, isn't it?

MK Yes, that really is what it's about for me, but the matter is a little more complicated. Because what these pictures are as objects, as well as what can be seen in them, is not

MAIN THEME

meant to be the portrayal of a critical relation to painting. I like the idea that they might extend something that I myself, like many other people, do if I, say, changed my standpoint, for example because how someone expressed himself or herself towards me struck me as disagreeable. I could then press a button so that I would still be present and keep on talking, but at the same time would no longer be present. I just like to do this sort of thing; the standpoints at the respective moments are interesting. And moments may occur in the making of a painting, or during everything that can happen subsequently. And all the while one might lose interest, like the artist in Camus's "Jonas, or the Artist at Work," and it might also be profitable. Why not?

IG It is true that painted pictures still fetch the highest prices at auctions. One reason, it seems to me, is that the ties between person and product are especially close-knit in painting. You've brought up the significance of onstage behavior and explained that the picture itself is a form of behavior, a view that clearly illustrates that painting has a particular way of bringing you as a person, your taste and your personal preferences, into play.

MK The term I might use for "person" is perhaps image. When someone whose name is not Polke paints a Polke picture, it's not going to work. The image is missing—however well you do it, it's not going to happen. I'm not interested in keeping, preserving, or upholding painting. A stretcher frame makes painting painting, more than the application of paint to rough or smooth surfaces. To me, that option is now also a bit blocked because of Polke's example, but there will soon be possibilities again, perhaps thanks to the example of Jack Smith. I don't really believe it, but I think there's a right door there.

IG Let's say that we combine your idea of painting as a stretcher frame with the old notion of Maurice Denis who defined painting as paint

on a flat support medium. We still end up with a limited notion of painting. I would rather propose that we understand even Rachel Harrison's painted assemblages as painting in an extended sense.

MK I don't see why we should call sculpture painting.

IG Harrison's objects are painted with an Abstract-Expressionist or impressionist rhetoric, which at least claims their strong association with the vocabulary of painting.

MK To my mind, painting is when someone applies paint to anything. The surface can be smooth or curved, that includes even porcelain painting, but a sculpture that's been painted—now that, I think, is going too far. A sculpture has more to do with kneading or chipping away or assembling and deforming.

IG I think it's self-contradictory that you champion a restrictive notion of painting (painting equals paint on a flat support medium—when you've also done exhibitions in which prints are held in frames or woolen blankets with horse motifs are mounted on stretcher frames. These are clearly ways of expanding painting!

MK It's an engagement with painting, but I'm not sure whether that automatically makes it painting—perhaps in the end it's just art. For example, when I stretch a woolen blanket on an underlying fabric, that has to do, of course, with my having seen something like it before, I've encountered it in life, and I really do like this blanket. The Oedipus thing is more helpful in this context, because the blanket obviously derives from Polke.

IG The product is enriched with personal matters and refers to the person and their preferences. At Greene Naftali in 2003, you also presented a second series of fabric pictures, where the exhibition poster was hung over the fabric pictures leaning against the wall, an arrangement that signaled its being an integral part of the pictures, just like conceptual art had already declared

the incidental—posters, invitation cards—to be essential. But to my mind, these posters, loosely hung over the pictures, also seemed to be making fun of the pathos that is attached to "Painting" with a capital "p"...

MK Yes, I presume they did, but that's just what I've got inside me and it has to do with my character or with the sort of person I am. But it has nothing to do with painting when I do odd things like that, things that are just silly or ridiculous. That's a penchant I just have. Now when I hung a poster over it, that's the same thing I touched on just a moment ago when I talked about stage comedy or situational humor. But comedy is sugarcoating the matter. In reality, these moments are harder than that, they're moments when you have to pull out a weapon to do something. Something's got to happen, and you're compelled to act one way or another.

IG Pulling out a weapon—that's a bellicose way of putting it, as though everything were always at stake, as though life were nothing but struggle.

MK I mean pulling out a weapon more in the sense that even a joke you're making can be regarded as a round fired.

IG But who or what compels you to stage this production? After all, you might also—and many artists do—make your point in a relaxed and laid-back manner?

MK Yes, by now there are many who have a not dissimilar taste. A lot has happened since Kippenberger died. New constellations have formed: people know each other and perhaps they also like each other a little bit, but they might just as well part ways fairly quickly. There's been a development in recent years that I also enjoy—if it's still effective, I hope it will last for a moment longer. Art is seen in a different way than it was in the 1980s. I myself see it differently.

IG What exactly has changed?



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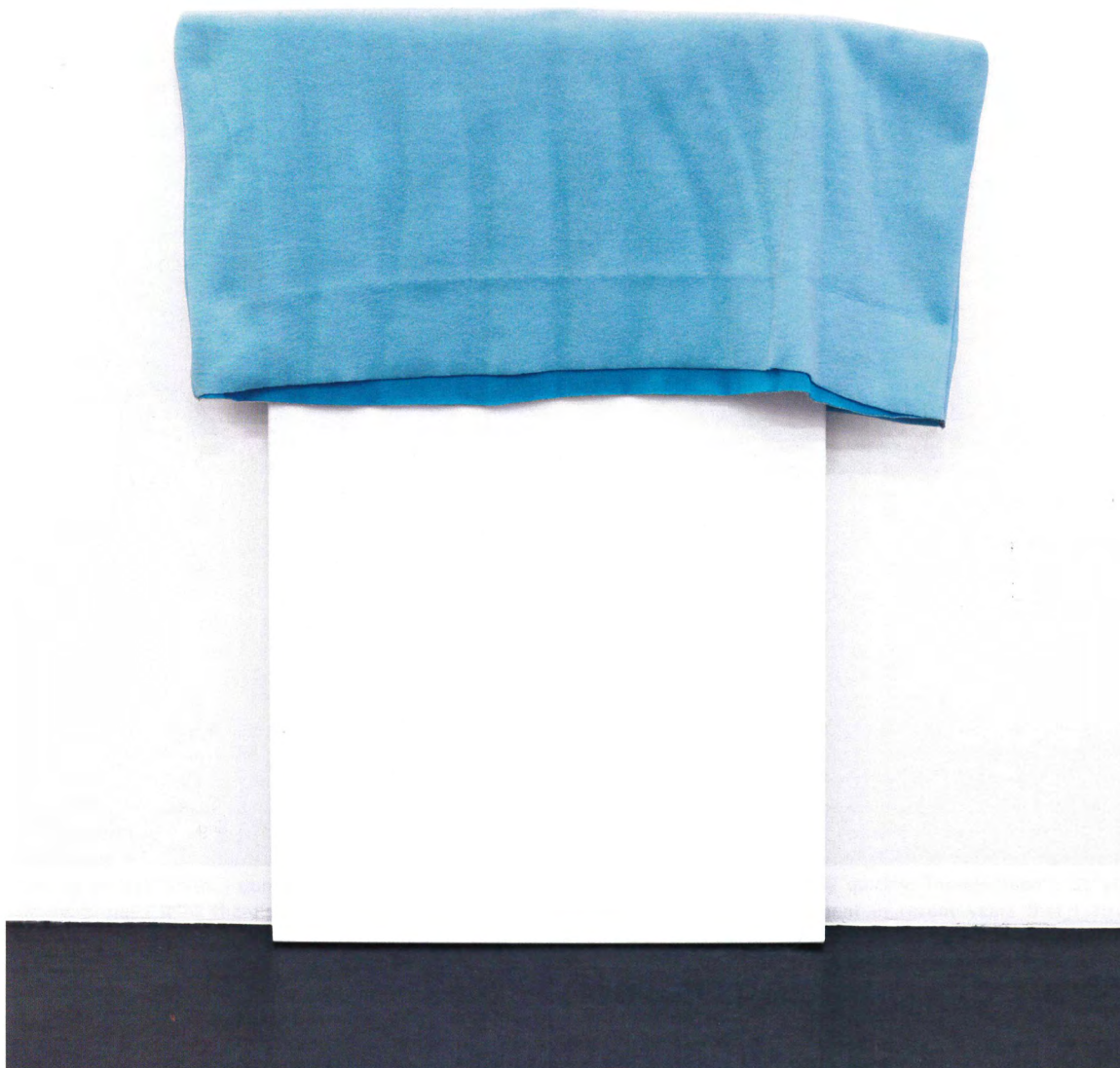
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MICHAEL KREBBER'S PERSPECTIVE

MAIN THEME

**I'm a practician.
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Galerie
Chantal Crousel



- MK Perhaps today you can switch more rapidly between applications. It's like with a computer, where you see in the top-left corner of the screen which application you're currently in, and the buttons at the bottom also change accordingly. It seems to me that that has changed the perception.
- IG True. In the 1980s, the artistic field was still extremely polarized between poles that regarded each other with mutual enmity. Today, by contrast, the art world is highly differentiated and segmented, with the various segments peacefully coexisting side by side.
- MK And major artists were still dominant in the 1980s. America already had women.
- IG Germany mostly didn't allow women artists to be considered "great" artists
- MK No, Germany didn't.
- IG But with American appropriation art, a formation emerged for the first time in which female artists played a central role. Are there comparatively more people today who share your sensibility?
- MK My sensibility? I don't know. I had a lot of bad luck in the 1980s: every attempt I made at the time to safely turn a corner just went awry. There were also moments when I sort of liked it like that. But the official history of the 1980s now suits me only in a few points, like the catalogue *Arbeit ist Wahrheit* [Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1984], or some things in Kippenberger.
- IG Unlike in the 1980s, numerous young artists now make reference to your work, both at the Städelshule, where you, like myself, teach, and at American art schools. How do you deal with the fact that you've become a sort of role model for a younger generation?
- MK It might delight me, and it might scare me. But as far as the Städelshule goes, that's a permanently sinking ship, and everything might change with any movement. Such a movement might be, for example, when a clique leaves the school. This ongoing generational cycle, which happens incredibly fast, means that you might lose everything again.
- IG And why is the Städelshule, and your own position at it, a sinking ship? Because there's no way to preserve what you've attained, because the cards are constantly being reshuffled or because, to put it the way a cultural pessimist might, everything is doomed?
- MK All I wanted to do was call your observation in question that people see me as a role model. And I didn't say "a sinking ship," I said "a permanently sinking ship"—that's a big difference.
- IG So is it the existence of the role model that's permanently doomed to sink?
- MK No, I now want to turn this in a direction I happen to like in this very moment. As regards the existence of the role model—I don't know. But if some people here and there perhaps take a slightly friendlier view of me, I might like that, but it might also get more boring.
- IG Don't you find the admiration of your fans suspicious? I'm thinking of a conversation between Merlin Carpenter and John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad of Reena Spaulings. Asked about young painters in New York who follow his work, Merlin said, "Fuck them."
- MK I wouldn't say that I have fans. There may be moments of admiration here and there. It could be me who's admiring someone. Merlin takes an attitude that feels a little more aggressive.
- IG I wouldn't call it aggressive so much as self-reflective when he doesn't want to pave the way for young painters. Now teaching is something that's an integral part of your practice, as you've made clear with catalogue titles such as *Puberty in Teaching*. There was also a show at Greene Naftali this year with pictures that featured text lifted from "Canvas," a blog maintained by former students of yours.
- MK I can't confirm that.
- IG In any case, your act of appropriation caused some displeasure among the people who operate that blog.
- MK First of all, these are anonymous blogs. At some point, it was said that they were semi-anonymous because the names were fairly well known. But I cannot confirm any names for you. Michael Sanchez, who wanted to write many press releases for a while and also asked me whether I was interested, only put the assertion in the press release that former students of mine were involved with both blogs. I responded that he would get me in trouble, but I also said: Okay, go ahead. That's the only information I can confirm at this point. So—I didn't give any names.
- IG But it's one thing to get excited about these blogs, and another to turn them into art works. How did you come up with the idea?
- MK I was making an exhibition and wondering: What am I going to do? The Oedipus-Narcissus text by Dierich [Diederichsen] had just come out, which was important for my exhibition at Real Fine Arts, and so were these blogs. I took a look at what I had to offer at the time, and what I have to offer happens to be what I'm interested in at the moment. The fact that these blogs were so aggressive and toyed with anonymity, struck me as important.
- IG But it's also a questionable thing to do, appropriating the work of your students, using it to lend your own work the energy of fresh controversy, and presenting the result under your name.
- MK To my mind, when someone blogs, someone else has permission to paint a copy of the blog. There are no rules in that game. Of course it was playing with fire.
- IG But might one not feel apprehensive

MAIN THEME

that you, an older artist, tap your former students' work for your own art?

MK All those people who wonder about that just need to look at me to see where I'm coming from. Then they'll know what kind of guy I am.

IG What kind of guy are you?

MK I always liked what was going on with Polke, I always liked watching Andy Warhol movies.

IG And Warhol, too, exploited the lives of the Factory's members in his movies.

MK Yes—that's what you're talking about, vampirism, and that's what this is.

IG As a professor who teaches at an art academy, you hold authority by virtue of that function. The question is how to deal with this authority conferred on you by the institution. That's an old point of contention between us.

MK To go back to the blogs: I thought of both the blogs and my show as literature. Only when the disagreement arose—that was no longer literature. When you play with fire, something may get burnt. But I don't see the question of power and dependency you've raised as pertinent in this context at all. Of course, there are many entanglements. The finest model of an academy I ever experienced, I think, is Polke at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg in 1978. What happened at the Hamburg punk bar Marktstube—those were really paradisiacal conditions as far as I'm concerned. Rounds were fired and no class was held. That school in Hamburg was interesting not as a whole; it was very good only in individual rooms and on specific occasions.

IG But there's also something coercive about holding class at a bar. Because what about those who don't drink? Doesn't that effectively exclude them?

MK I wouldn't say that class is held at a bar. After all, no class was held. Exclusion, or procedures of

exclusion—I hope for the best for myself, but it will have happened here and there for sure. Whether and how a teacher participates in the ongoing and perpetually shifting procedures of exclusion that are ultimately always taking place at an academy, whether that sort of thing is right or wrong, that's a sensitive question. As to what I myself think of as right or wrong in that regard, I would say there's no formula for it that could be applied in all instances.

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IG You've used the word "entanglement," and, indeed, you maintain sometimes very close relationships with your students. One might say that unlike during your Cologne years, your social environment is now largely recruited from your students. It's just that given the institutional framework, teacher and student, unlike the artist friends of the 1990s, cannot meet at eye level with each other.

MK I resent the term "eye level." Much has changed for me anyway. The former Cologne circle just doesn't exist anymore. There's no single big step from those days into the present—there were many intermediate steps. One intermediate step, for example, would be when I became Fritz Heubach's and Oswald Wiener's visiting student in Düsseldorf: two years during which I started to really like school again. And a little later, the nicest call came from Frankfurt, asking me whether I wouldn't want to come there.

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All images courtesy of the artist, Chantal Crousel, Paris; Greene Naftali, New York; dependance, Brussels; and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne



MICHAEL KREBBER

CAPC ☆☆☆☆

Ridicules escargots La peinture de Michael Krebber, ça peut être tout et n'importe quoi: des planches de surf découpées en de jolis sashimis, du tissu vichy tendu sur châssis, du fusain, de la laque, de l'huile sur toile ou encore du texte tracé au pinceau sur une série de toiles imprimées d'extraits de bandes dessinées. La réflexion de l'artiste sur la peinture se dissout alors dans la peinture elle-même en une longue conférence mue par le principe de l'association d'idées. A quoi peut donc bien ressembler une rétrospective du gaillard si ce n'est à un joyeux bazar? Entremêlant tableaux accrochés à touche-touche et objets posés au sol ou présentés sous vitrine, les quelque cent cinquante-deux œuvres réunies au CAPC ont de quoi déconcerter.

Dressant un panorama de la carrière prolifique du quinquagénaire allemand, l'exposition fait la part belle au hit de l'artiste: les planches à voile ou de surf tranchées en morceaux bien alignés, comme agrandies par l'espace d'exposition qui se glisse dans leurs interstices. Celui qui se présente non comme un peintre mais comme «quelqu'un qui peint», et tente de proposer sans affirmer quoi que ce soit, s'acharne à interroger la pertinence du geste pictural depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans. Pourtant, ses œuvres ont la fraîcheur du travail d'un jeunot frais émoulu d'une école d'art dans le vent. Si la peinture est l'expression subjective de celui qui manie le pinceau, elle est aussi la projection de la subjectivité de celui qui la regarde. Ainsi, nous sommes libres d'appréhender celles que Krebber surnomme «les escargots ridiculisés», ses peintures, comme des peintures, ou pas, en opposant, comme lui, «la production de la peinture à l'institution de la peinture».

→ Jusqu'au 10 février. 7 rue Ferrère, 33000 Bordeaux.

Aude Launay

NIKOLAS GAMBAROFF, MICHAEL KREBBER, R.H. QUAYTMAN, BLAKE RAYNE BERGEN KUNSTHALL - BERGEN, NORWAY

All artists produced new work for this exhibition. That is, Krebber's hands-on "production" consisted of a nonchalant act of subtraction. Despite his continuing resistance to anything resembling a signature, many have suggested his "hesitant brushstroke" — and that of his followers — is a trademark. Here, "hesitant" is turned into "absent," even "subtractive," as Krebber removed the invitation flyers originally attached to some canvases originally shown in 2003.

The exhibition is an attempt to extract questions from an influential essay by art historian David Joselit ("Painting Beside Itself", 2009). Joselit's main idea being that "transitive painting" visualizes networks external and internal to itself through "the transitive passage of action from a painting out to a social network [...] and [...] back onto painting."

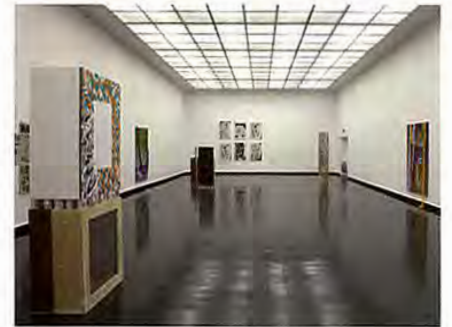
What first meets the viewer is Krebber's *Die Hundejahre sind vorbei (Broken Neon I-III)* (2010): three open wooden transportation boxes, each one containing a broken neon sculpture spelling its title, surrounded by foam material. Institutional, social and didactic

networks are thus present; art transported, stored, packed, unpacked and discussed as the words themselves break asunder. Quaytman's images are realized through a series of displacements, internal/external *mise en abyme*-like stagings with intriguingly pixelated overlapping layers of color, striated vertically and horizontally. Likewise, in a deeper reading, there are gestures of a poetological scansion of sorts in Blake Rayne's paintings as they literally, and serially, scan the surfaces of linen and paint. Then, the formal exercises of Gambaroff: reference-soaked paintings involving shelves, cardboard boxes, coffee mugs and multiple layers of newsprint. Underscoring the notion of exercise is *The New York Times* story at the center of *Seek First to Understand Then to Be Understood* (2010), a potent allegory and iconographic diagram, the training camp drama of two immensely different quarterbacks, the Giants' Eli Manning and the Steelers' Ben Roethlisberger. Gridiron's good versus bad guy. A passage back onto painting's own quarrels with itself, its traditions, reputation and "off-field" relevance.

Quaytman's negatively saturated *mise-en-*

abymes, Gambaroff's overflowing formalism, Rayne's scanned surfaces and Krebber's restless hide-and-seek practice here visualize a muted, fractured, yet outward and energetic prosody of painting. Ever-trying to pull painting out of its immediate surroundings, its non-consequential training camps and to inflict percepto-political damage. As hollows in the tertiary economy of perception.

Peter J. Amdam



Nikolas Gambaroff, Michael Krebber, R.H. Quaytman, and Blake Rayne, installation view at Bergen Kunsthall, 2010. Photo: Thor Brodreskift.

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interview
by
Catherine Chevalier

here are two things that I am particularly interested in in your work: the figure of the dandy, and the way you teach at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. And I was wondering if there is a relation between your interest, as an artist, in the dandy model, and your position as a teacher in an art school? Let's start with this question: when did your interest in the dandy figure begin?

As a young boy, I got to know books like *Against Nature* – A rebours – by Huysmans, and I got to know Monsieur Teste by Valéry and years later, I found a text by Oswald Wiener¹ that was called *Eine Art Einzige*.

If I drop names, I have to mention Fritz Heubach first and then Oswald Wiener. Heubach was the publisher of *Interfunktionen* in the late sixties and early seventies. He is a psychologist and I met him in Cologne when I was maybe 17. He gave me lots of hints about what to read. Actually, he gave me a reading list. This list was very mixed up. It started with Flaubert, went over to Huysmans and Valéry and Russian literature. Through him, I really knew about Huysmans and Valéry. And years and years later, I found this one article of Oswald Wiener on dandyism. I immediately thought this was so important for me and I struck to this article for years...and I had nobody to help me to understand this page or that page, I always started it again. So half a year later, I could understand some more sentences. And it went on like this ten years, fifteen years. I lived with this text. I was carrying it with me and working on it.

I could tell you why dandyism is important for me but then I would say something about what is mentioned in that text. Of course, it is something about dandyism which is not common sense about dandyism – like the caricature of a person looking like what everybody thinks a dandy should look like – but this text has a model of three different persons, a nihilist, a believer and the dandy in between. And this text is not voting for dandyism, it is just mentioning it as one of these three different kinds of maybe philosophies. I don't know about Structuralism, I don't know about Post-Structuralism. It is so stupid to say something like this now. It is so tiring or boring to care about this model of these three different types and to say you can

explain everything with it. If you are into these questions, I think you can easily understand other texts. I will switch to the issue of teaching. I think I am not teaching, I am like an artist teaching in an art school and that can never be a real teacher because there is nothing to teach, nothing that everybody has to learn. And in terms of a «real» teacher, what I have to say is about the things I mentioned before.

— So it is like a heuristic model. The dandy model is a way to understand other authors?

This was my possibility to tidy up a little bit. Other people do it through linguistics for example. With a minimum of structure, you can already switch.

— Was your interest in dandyism linked to the context of Cologne at that time?

No, just a young person starting to read some literature.

— In your text published as a foreword in the catalog of the exhibition at the Portikus², you mention Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp*, and an art-deco store from the Cologne of the 60s/70s, referring to it as «dealers in camp».

The store, that is an anecdote from Cologne. And mentioning Susan Sontag's essay is an anecdote of my life. I said that I had to invent the camp idea myself because I wasn't told by anybody else about it. Although the book was on sale in the shop next door, I didn't know about the shop nor about the book in the shop. But I have only known *Notes on Camp* since 6 or 7 years. In the beginning of the 80's I was told about it for the first time by Jutta Koether and Diedrich Diederichsen but I didn't follow that line unfortunately. I only have heard of it again in the seminars of Wiener and Heubach³.

— So your interest in Dandyism started when you met Heubach and Wiener. Maybe we could go back to the story of *Interfunktionen*. Heubach was in Cologne at that time and the magazine was still existing.

It was 1970 at the bookshop Koenig which exists since '69. It was the first time that a bookshop offered these tables where you could read books without being asked «Do you need help?» which means «Don't touch the book!» I could go there like three times a week and stay there for hours. I couldn't afford to buy books. Two times a year for Christmas and my birthday I could. And there were not so many books being printed

at that time, the table was still quite small. That is where I saw *Interfunktionen* from time to time, the current issue.

— It's hard to imagine how it was at Walter Koenig's at the time. Could you easily meet people there?

It was smaller and *Interfunktionen* was the current book to read. The Andy Warhol Index books were lying on the table, and the first Beuys drawings books were lying on the table – so that was the time!

— When you met Fritz Heubach were you student in an art school?

No, I was still a pupil in school. These are just anecdotes; I started to like art when I was 15. I went to a Rauschenberg exhibit and then, I went home and I made Rauschenberg paintings myself... I had a very good art teacher in school⁴ who could talk about anything without preparing himself. That was the only thing I liked in school – this and music lessons. He always gave me the key for a cabinet with slides and when I wanted to look at, for example Renaissance paintings, I took that file out the cabinet and he put those in the project and talked for an hour about Renaissance paintings. When I wanted to look at Duchamp, I snapped the Duchamp slides, then he would talk for 2 hours about Duchamp. He also had organized these slide-shows and he knew lots of people in Cologne and that's how I slid a little bit into it.

— It is how you met all these artists?

It is actually how I met nearly everybody in Cologne. Then there was the artist, Michael Buthe. He was a very fine man and I went his house everyday after the school. He loved to have visitors, so I was always very welcome. One day, I saw in his hallway there was a drawing by Sigmar Polke. At that time I liked any art. It was the time of the first art fairs, 68–69. I looked at every single piece of art, and considered «is it good or bad» or «do I like it or do I not like it.» And I liked anything but Polke because I thought Polke was silly. Then I saw the drawing by Sigmar Polke in Michael Buthe's hallway and I would say: «Wahou do you like that?» because I didn't like it and he would say «Oh, Yes, that is the gre Sigmar Polke!» So I thought about it, and saw an exhibition... and one day, there was a piece of paper on the door: «We will come tomorrow. Sigmar». Then, I asked «Is the Sigmar Polke coming tomorrow?» He said «Yes» and I stayed the whole next day waiting for Sigmar Polke and finally I met

him. Some time later, I visited him in Düsseldorf. One day, he told me he was coming to Cologne for a party at somebody's called Fritz Heubach, a psychologist but he is ok (laughs). That's how I met Fritz Heubach.

— *What's the place of the theory in your work? In the transcription of the lectures, there are lots of literary and critical references. What is your position toward theory and art criticism?*

I know some dandy theory. If I talk about 20 years ago, I would have had completely different thinking than I have now, and I went through different things... For example, I was really into the school of the gallerist Michael Werner.

— *Both in Baudelaire and in Valéry, there is this idea that one should get rid of theory, or of theoretical or philosophical constructions in order to recover a certain naivety, to escape...*

Baudelaire talks with different voices. You can't get rid of anything if you have lost your virginity already. You cannot go back. But it is not so clear what is theory. What is theory and what is practice. I don't want to see a difference. Both have its practice and so on. I don't see that the one is the opposite of the other. And it can be "cute" from time to time listening to somebody saying: "Theory is important". Because, then, of course, there are different grades. And there are theories for this and theories for that – and maybe a person is somebody who knows a lot of theories and knows how one could read them and of course, this person could be fantastic. But theory, or just to call oneself a theorist, doesn't say anything about its quality. I don't have this opposition between theoretical and practical work.

— *So there is absolutely no hierarchy for you between theory and praxis?*

No. There is no hierarchy. There are hierarchies between theorists and between artists and all of them together. Here is hierarchy... and that's fun! Art and Criticism, or art and theory, that's all the same. It is not a point for me.

— *In your work there is a surface of equivalence: an equality between different kinds of objects, between texts and images, and between...*

Yes, and also doing nothing, and not being a work. Also it is so easy to close it all down but that is my way of thinking. When you

say "your work", I could reply "No, I don't want it, it is not work". Of course, there is a given situation, a context and an art work. In the art world they use the word "work". So then, okay, it is a "work".

— *So when you use the word "work", it's just a way to adapt to the language of the art system and to play the game?*

Yes, I play the game and the game plays me – and I have high respect for the rules and maybe I want something from the game!

— *Can we talk about how you play the communication game that prevails around exhibition making: invitation cards, catalogs, press releases... I'm thinking about the Secession show in Vienna. You made two catalogs, or a book and a catalog. And I was wondering if there was the idea of doubling the catalog, or if it only was about using the format of a catalog to publish yet another book.*

Yes. There were ideas behind it. But I never wanted to do something like that because I was not in the situation where I had enough material to be able to think «Shall I do it this way or that way?» I agreed to do that exhibition – it was fantastic this invitation – but I didn't know what to do at all... and the "drama of the production" – this comes from someone else but it is such a nice term – was that this book? was planned but it was not to be in this exhibition. This book was my work for 2 years! It looked like it would come out a little bit earlier than the Secession exhibition, or a little bit later. If you work on one thing, you don't have anything else to show, because you are already empty. This book was not meant to be the exhibition, just to be a book. There were so many points in it. I wanted to be able to offer one more book to the dandy literature. I asked Oswald Wiener if I were allowed to print his list. This is sort of half stolen – but of course not stolen. It's a bit on the edge. So I had to look for something else. I had no idea at all. I didn't want to put up walls. I thought I would keep it empty and I ordered these frames. I started to fill those frames just like Feldmann does books, with nothing. Then, I thought, "I don't want to have work on offer to anybody... this is not work this is decoration". These were not real games. I was just thinking how I could survive the situation. In the end, I had this beautiful book that was going to look better day by day. Actually the catalog for the Secession was going very well too because I had this idea of doing it a little bit like an archive. You get all the exhibition titles in there. I was happy with that from the beginning on. But the

Secession, this huge building, was a disaster for me til the end. I thought, "at the end, you will have done two nice books and just forget about the exhibition." It was horrible. In the last moments – like a week before – I thought, "Why not do a projection of this beautiful sea anemone?" Then I made this hut. With a hut you can handle a huge room. Like Mario Merz did with his igloos, it's a trick. You can do exhibitions in huge halls, if you make small huts and you can handle every huge space. I did these tricks too and it was not a trick – I just wanted to project this sea anemone in there and not mingle that with my frames on the wall. Also, I could relay the two books and there was no problem anymore about the frames because you could look at them or not look at them. That's how it happened.

— *So it was like a slide-show projection with only one fixed image.*

And it had to be changed every second day because it burnt out so fast. It was absolutely beautiful. I didn't even do this image myself. This was given to me and produced for me by my friend Markus Ziegler or Produzentin as a present; I asked him, Markus Ziegler – or her, Produzentin – if he would like to design the book for me and he had the idea of this hybrid creature which then became the title too. It was the nicest thing that I had in these last days and I had to show it.

— *Could we talk about the organization of the images in the book? I have heard you presented slide shows in schools or other contexts. Could we speak about the way you did the editing?*

Yes, I can tell you in about five sentences. I am somebody with books, for example, or with photos and I have boxes and boxes and shelves and shelves. I collect these things. When I was first asked to show something, I went there with a bag and took out a book. I held it and showed it because I did not have the money to take the photos of it. The next time I was organised a little bit better. I had something like 10 slides and the next time I had a catalog of mine. The fourth time I took photos of the book of mine. This thing grew. This is what I have been doing for a long time; that is actually what it is. That is how it came about that I have a collection like this. As to how this is organised in the book, we forgot to mention that in the credits. That is a real mistake. Markus Ziegler, die Produzentin – she arranged the pairs, the couples.

— *You didn't choose them? You gave him all the images?*

Yes. Actually he said, "give them all to me to have a look" and then, "would you like to come by?" He had them all on the floor arranged in couples. There were genius things in it. I destroyed one couple by accident which I only saw it when it was printed.

— *There are a lot of book covers in there...*

That was my collection at that time. Now I don't collect. I don't need anything anymore.

— *That's the end of the archive! (laughs)*
Last question about the book: How did you come up with the idea?

That's because of Renate Goldmann who invited me to do this talk at the Institute of Art History, where she teaches. The text only exists because of this invitation. She had the idea to transcribe my intervention and then she had the idea to print it as a book. Only half of the lecture was recorded, but that is what is printed in this book, and now painted in the exhibition at Chantal Crousel.

— *This was the talk you did?*

Actually this book should have been this printed lecture. But once the talk was taped I didn't like it anymore, because it is not really good. Sometimes I say nice sentences, sometimes very stupid sentences, sometimes I just get lost. Also it is not publishable actually. But I wanted to have that one chance to make a book like this and it had to be perfect. Therefore I only made this foreword and threw this text away. There was someone who helped me to formulate things more clearly. I think this was quite perfect for my possibilities.

But then I made a second book with this long text which was never supposed to be published. I wanted to make it with John, and Gareth and Josef. I wanted to make a 200 page book and I had the possibility to do that. They didn't really respond to a question of mine... I said that I needed to have material within a week, but they didn't react to that. I said, "Everything is fine. The rule is no rule. I will do a 200 page book even without contributions." It had to be 200 pages. The Portikus had asked me to offer as many pages as possible of text. I thought about this text I wanted to throw away and that, translated to English, would have brought me 60 pages already – and I liked it for this book where everything is a little bit like a joke. It is not a very real book. And I thought I could use a text that is not so good but therefore maybe just perfect for a book like this one.

— *How do you teach now: Do you use images, or do you only discuss?*

I don't know. Teaching for me changes all the time. Once, some people invited me to talk somewhere. I was too nervous actually and I just showed a book and started to scream. I am still nervous like that. I don't want to do the same thing every time. I have been a teacher for 6 years in one school constantly and there I am not nervous anymore. The people I met 6 years ago are now about to leave the school. It is exactly one generation of students. It is the first moment that I have to think about how to handle it – because up to now I was always sitting together with the same people. You know each other very well after some time. Even if you don't talk – of course you talk a lot – you know all these things already about the other person. Now it is the first time of thinking professionally because there will be a new generation. So I have to do it again, the thing I did 6 years ago. I have to think about how I will do it now, but it happens for the first time in my life. Up to now, I couldn't say I am like a teacher who does this work professionally because I never knew what was happening next – and now it is the first time there is repetition in the situation. I will of course not do it like I did it before, hopefully. But I don't know. And as I said, I don't want to believe in teaching. I prefer not to give up the idea of a real school which means where somebody can learn something that could help in life. I can only formulate things for myself and not for other people. And I cannot make a theory out of it because everything will always come up in a new combination.

— *Practically, do you work with them from their works?*

We are in a given situation – Frankfurt is a small school – that is rather ideal. Your question was what I am doing. I do not actually work. The situation is that I travel from Frankfurt to Cologne in this fast train, so I just sit in the train for one hour. I have a place to stay in Frankfurt, so I made it very comfortable for myself. It's not like going to Hamburg, sitting on a train for 4 hours, for nothing to happen, which could frustrate me so much.

Within this comfortable situation that I have created for myself, by renting a place around the school and not caring about the hotels, I can just do what I want. Because I've myself to think: "You go to the school, nothing is happening, and that's OK". This is important I think.

I say this because for me it is always about not doing anything in school; just going into

a situation which is already there. There is nothing to do. It is not only what is there to do. Sometimes you say something, and everybody just says: "Boah, what is that? Who wants to listen to something boring like that?" Of course I try to make friends all the time, and to have fun at school. I try to talk in a way that everybody comes back hopefully.

— *What do you think of artists who are interested in the loss of subjectivity, like Clai Fontaine, Reena Spaulings, Bernadette Corporation?*

It is not what I think about these artists but what I think about this idea of not being creative, or not being subjective, or not being individual. Then of course, I can just make it simple. I take the dandy again and somebody who believes in creating. The simplest picture of this – and it is a little bit ugly – is an artist like Giacometti. And it doesn't say anything about quality just about different kinds of thinking; that somebody who believes in this act of creating is normally a person who does the you press and at the end, you have something like that. And somebody who doesn't believe in that can fake it. But it is created in a different way. And this is enough for me. This is how I got to like things like the names you mentioned but also this happened all the time. There was Colin de Land, doing American Fine Art which was fantastic. So often I couldn't understand him, stupid me, although I went into Jacques Tati films. It would have been so easy for me to understand him but I was vulnerable at that time. Of course I still am.

— *These artists can change formats from one exhibition to another and often without any preference. Why are you always working around pictures, even if it is sometimes a very minimal intervention?*

No, these are my limits in the moment. I am doing in the moment is trying to be aware of a world made of a glass where you see all the psychological problematics of a person. Everything is visible. When you mention this, you just see where it comes from, and I only made it this far and not further yet.

The first time I really got fixed to something, was the Michael Werner work his gallerist world – not the gallerist work he was taking himself as an artist. Caring about Derain and having exhibited Baschi then Lüpertz, and caring about Cézanne. That is where I come from. And I tried to be an actor. Once I stopped being an artis

Michael Krebber

at the very beginning of the '80s. I really stopped being an artist and I never wanted to be one again. I applied to an acting school and they didn't take me. Then I paid money to do all these courses and finally I worked for two years in a theater group. I mention this because my wish at that time was to never to see the art world again. I had just left to be someone else but I didn't make it. It was a situation like that – they didn't take me. Also, I got a little bit frustrated with time. It became smaller and smaller. It was a moment in the beginning of the '80s. I was hearing more and more about what was happening in Cologne at that time and I was living in Berlin. Nothing was happening in Berlin. I got jealous and then there was an opportunity to move. So I just jumped back into Cologne and I was immediately sitting at the table with Kippenberger and Oehlen again – whom I had left before and never had wanted to see again! When you say something with pictures, it is like being weak. It is my limit. I would prefer to say this was my limit. Because of course who wants to have limits. Only a dandy could enjoy that.

Behind all this, there is another idea and I didn't give that up. I have still an idea of being the most beautiful drawer and having the nicest ideas and ...actually what my work is – and now I can use this word "work" – I think, it is always about what didn't happen so well. I didn't give up these other ideas, I love making pictures. But the kind of pictures I like are hopefully beyond the question of being subjective or non-subjective. Or maybe, this question is not important at all, it is not the main question.

— *That is why you are so important for a new generation of artists who want to paint?*

This is a nice idea and I cannot vouch for myself. I would enjoy it. But there is always hope and lots of opportunities in daily life to being helpful to others' daily life. Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp* is just one example for something like that.

— *What are you showing at Chantal Crousel?*

That will be something with this text of mine again. I haven't done an exhibition for such a long time. I didn't work on anything for one and half year, or maybe two years, and I was asked by Daniel Buchholz and Christopher Müller¹⁰, by Maureen Paley¹¹, and by Chantal Crousel¹² to do an exhibition. I agreed and asked for dates as late as possible. And then I realized that I had three exhibitions at the same time and, of course, I wouldn't be able to handle that. Of course I can take a brush and put colour

on lots of canvases, I can measure walls, but I just had no idea.

I thought of how I could make it easier for myself. I thought of silk prints. I had nice motives, photocopies of old french comics with cowboys, nurses and lonely heroes. I knew two students who agreed to work for me for a time and they printed these and stretched them. I was still counting and asked for more and more prints and in the end I had 90 stretched canvases; 90 paintings and they were all similar. I thought about how to make three exhibitions with the same material different from each other and finally I had the idea to ask a professional signpainter to write my text page by page all over these 90 prints and I shuffled them and put the same amount in every place and now I will print these paintings in the right text order again in a book and it will be a text book again. And another thing is the photo on the three invites for the three exhibitions. It is always the same film still with Montgomery Clift whittling, taken from *Howard Hawks' Red River*. I found a hint to this in a book by Heubach: *Ein Bild und sein Schatten* (A picture and its shadow.) This is a book about melancholy and depression, too complex to talk about here, but just to say a bit: from the castration of the father to the whittler. And I asked John Kelsey if he would write a press release for these exhibitions – actually for the first one of the three – and he sent me his beautiful text. He wrote the same story that I knew from the book, which he doesn't know as it only exists in German. He had watched the film and knew about something that Manny Farber, the American painter and film critic had written on it. John's text is more than a press release. It was a gift, and it put another turn into the play and you can read that in the book too. A story about a son, whittling, because he is afraid of the revenge of the cruel father whom they have chased away, because he was so cruel.

1. Oswald Wiener was part of the «Wiener Gruppe», group in Literature that was quite radical and considered in the German speaking countries to be as important as Situationism. He was also very close to the Actionnists. Forced to quit Austria he opened the restaurant «Exil» in the 80's in Berlin. He studied there mathematics and emigrated to Dawson City in Canada. He has taught theory of automats at the Kunstakademie of Düsseldorf.

2. This text corresponds to the transcription of a conference «Puberty in Painting» which was given by Michael Krebber within the seminar of Renate Goldmann at the Institute of Art History at the University of Cologne in 2003. It was published as a foreword in the catalog of the exhibition, which was organised by Michael Krebber at the Portikus in 2006-2007. See *Ical Krbbr Prodlly Prsnts Gart Jas, Jon Klsy, Josef Stra, Portikus, Walther Koenig, Köln, 2007*.

3. The shop was called the Tobies and Silex Gallery.

4. Seminar of Friedrich Heubach and Oswald Wiener, «Dandysme I/II», Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Summer semester 2001/ Winter semester 2001/02.

5. Hans Salentin was a sculptor who was a member of the Zero Group.

6. *Ical Krbbr Prodlly Prsnts Gart Jas, Jon Klsy, Josef Stra, Portikus, Walther Koenig, Köln, 2007*.

7. *Außerirdische Zwitterwesen / Alien Hybrid Creatures*, Verlag Walther Koenig, Köln.

8. Catalog: Michael Krebber, *Secession*, Edition Walther Koenig, Köln, 2005.

9. John Kelsey, Gareth James and Joseph Strau.

10. Exhibition Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne (September 21- October 23, 2007)

11. Exhibition Maureen Paley Gallery Londres (November 17- December 21, 2007)

12. Exhibition Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (October 27- December 8, 2007)

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

Secret Sharer

Daniel Birnbaum



Michael Krebber, *Untitled (detail)*, 1989, black-and-white photograph, 9 1/2 x 12".

Michael Krebber's failures have turned out to be his greatest strength. First he failed as an art student, then he failed as an artist. He turned to acting and fell short. Returning again to art, he managed to transform failure, if that's still the correct term, into his own distinctive and undoubtedly attractive *modus operandi*. We are all surrounded by people we don't quite understand. But Krebber, my eccentric colleague since 2002 at Frankfurt's Städelschule, is a special case: a painter who, as he says, is "fundamentally" no painter, and a teacher who, he maintains, has nothing much to teach. And yet shows of his open around the globe where there are things on display that look like paintings to me. And his teaching—a peculiar mix of screenings, informal meetings, and inscrutable gatherings around carefully selected books, magazines, catalogues, etc.—has become legendary enough to attract aspiring young artists from all over the world. It's strange. Has Krebber suddenly turned out a success?

Painter or not, there is no doubt about Krebber's real field of expertise. Hardly anyone knows the recent history of German painting from the inside as he does, having studied with Markus Lüpertz before becoming the assistant of Georg Baselitz (he even moved into the artist's famous castle) and then of Martin Kippenberger, the most demanding of friends. "A double bind," Krebber tells me when I ask about this intense relationship: "Dependency in every way—artistically and financially . . . but it was also a friendship." Krebber is indeed very much a Cologne phenomenon. He still lives in this city on the Rhine with Cosima von Bonin, the artist whom he got to know some twenty years ago. In the 1980s, when Cologne was Europe's undisputed capital of contemporary art, Krebber occupied a key place in the excessive circles around Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen, the leading lights of the moment. In those days, he was rarely acting entirely on his own. A fifteen-year-old photograph pictures Kippenberger's inaugural lecture as a professor at the Städelschule. But the man reading the manuscript before the serious-looking audience turns out to be not the master but his compliant assistant. A ruthless operator, Kippenberger had delegated even this symbolic task to Krebber, who, one can understand, needed some years to recover and gain a sense of artistic independence.

Fritz Heubach, founding editor of the seminal German art magazine *Interfunktionen*, calls Krebber "an inverted Picasso," one who finds little but who is constantly searching. This untiring quest has yielded a surprising variety of strategies and styles. Krebber's art is a zone of contagion, a space for conversation rather than a mode of producing objects. In 1987 he showed a series of floor sculptures consisting of children's clothing sewn together—trios of conservative-looking trousers, a quintet of more-colorful shorts. Although abandoned immediately, this early project—which has been theorized in psychoanalytic terms and compared to the work of Mike Kelley—seems to stress the essential pluralism of his production: There will always be many branching limbs in Krebber's practice, and he likes to walk with others with whom he bonds in incestuous ways.

Before he could return to painting on canvas, several other moves were necessary. A number of exhibitions toyed with that old Conceptual warhorse, the empty gallery, but with an irreverent and even mysterious twist. In 1987, at Christoph Dürr in Munich, Krebber left the gallery's exhibition spaces entirely empty and installed in the adjoining office only a postcard of Laurel and Hardy, a photograph of Georges Simenon by Marcel Broodthaers, and the text of an interview that the Belgian Conceptual artist had imagined between himself and René Magritte. For an exhibition two years later at Galerie Isabella Kacprzak in Stuttgart (the last she would present there before moving to Cologne), Krebber exhibited just an empty vitrine and two framed photocopies of works by Daniel Buren and Allan McCollum. To accompany the show, he made an edition of the vitrine and three photographs that pictured Kacprzak's still-unoccupied new gallery, with only a few black monochrome panels adorning the walls. But, like Broodthaers's conversation with Magritte, the image of the exhibition was a fiction, the work of a photo retoucher who inserted Krebber's unmade paintings in Kacprzak's unoccupied space—making the photographs a somewhat elegiac souvenir from an imaginary future. In yet another twist, for an exhibition the following year at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne, Krebber borrowed back the empty vitrines from their owners and filled them (and the walls) with newspaper clippings, catalogues, and other ephemera. These ranged from a stack of Dan Graham catalogues to a picture of James Lee Byars chatting with a dashing nineteen-year-old Krebber, whose natty appearance seems to anticipate both his later writing on dandyism and the often-repeated claim that he was working on his myth long before his paintings. Part Block Beuys, part Warhol Time Capsule, and part Broodthaers's imaginary museum, the Nagel show would be followed by an even more Oedipal object in the form of the 1991 book *Sonne Busen Hammer* (Sun Breasts Hammer). Advertised by its subtitle as the "Central Organ of the Lord Jim Lodge" (a mysterious arts society in Graz, Austria), the volume represents a kind of killing of the father: Half of the publication is filled with Lüpertz portraits in various states of deletion, and occasionally a hole cut from the page removes entirely the teacher's face.



Michael Krebber delivering Martin Kippenberger's inaugural lecture at the Städelschule, Frankfurt, 1990. Photo: Nicole Neufert.

Since the early '90s, when Krebber made a series of monochromes in oil on canvas, he has systematically turned to painting. But this is not to suggest that he has finally found a technique or subject matter with which he feels authentically at home. "I do not believe I can invent something new in art or painting because whatever I would want to invent already exists," he has explained. Accordingly, he has created paintings that could easily be misunderstood as decorative *Informel* rehashes, and his works are occasionally intentionally quite close to those of other artists like Sigmar Polke. Sometimes there are even explicit quotes from specific paintings by Oehlen and Kippenberger. Often his canvases look barely finished, like the series shown at Maureen Paley in London in 2001 where a few lines and economic patches of color make us see faces, hair, or ordinary objects such as shoes. What look like paintings are often in fact altered readymades, as in the case of some naively exotic-looking cheetah pictures from 2003, which are actually found pieces of fabric put on a stretcher.

In order to understand Krebber one has to get a grip on his intellectual cosmos: Herman Melville and Paul Valéry are always recurring references, as are Broodthaers, whom he got to know in 1977, and his friend Oswald Wiener. And then there are artist friends like Stephen Prina and Christopher Williams in the United States and Kai Althoff at home, as well as a long list of artists, literary figures, and musicians known only to the real connoisseur. This is no doubt an exclusive crowd of carefully selected people, just as the singling out of specific references is very much a part of Krebber's way of working. Quotations and ironic allusions legible only to the insider abound. If you don't get it right away, you probably never will. "Stupidity is not my strong point," is the first remark of Valéry's *Monsieur Teste*, the antihero of Krebber's favorite book.

Already as a student Krebber knew pretty much everything, he tells me, but understood nothing. In a way, his studies were one large frustration, like being forced to write with your left hand when you know—and you try to make clear to everyone else—that you are in fact right-handed. I have a sense that much of Krebber's work is about gaining a kind of lightness. He avoids everything heavy and self-important and prefers subtle, almost invisible, gestures: an understated invitation card or poster rather than a gallery full of works; a display in a window instead of a pompous institutional show. He likes producing for art fairs. When asked about his sources, he refers me to texts he has written about other artists, such as a recent review of a Richard Hawkins show. Krebber writes best when he describes what he likes in other artists' works, which is basically what he does in most of his texts. And most of the time, he may also be writing about himself. The ambiguities and the sly moments of doubling that he praises in others are what he's after in his own work. This is not to suggest that Krebber has a particularly developed sense of self. It's more about seeing something that someone else has seen—and knowing that you both know the other has seen it too.

Daniel Birnbaum is a contributing editor of Artforum.

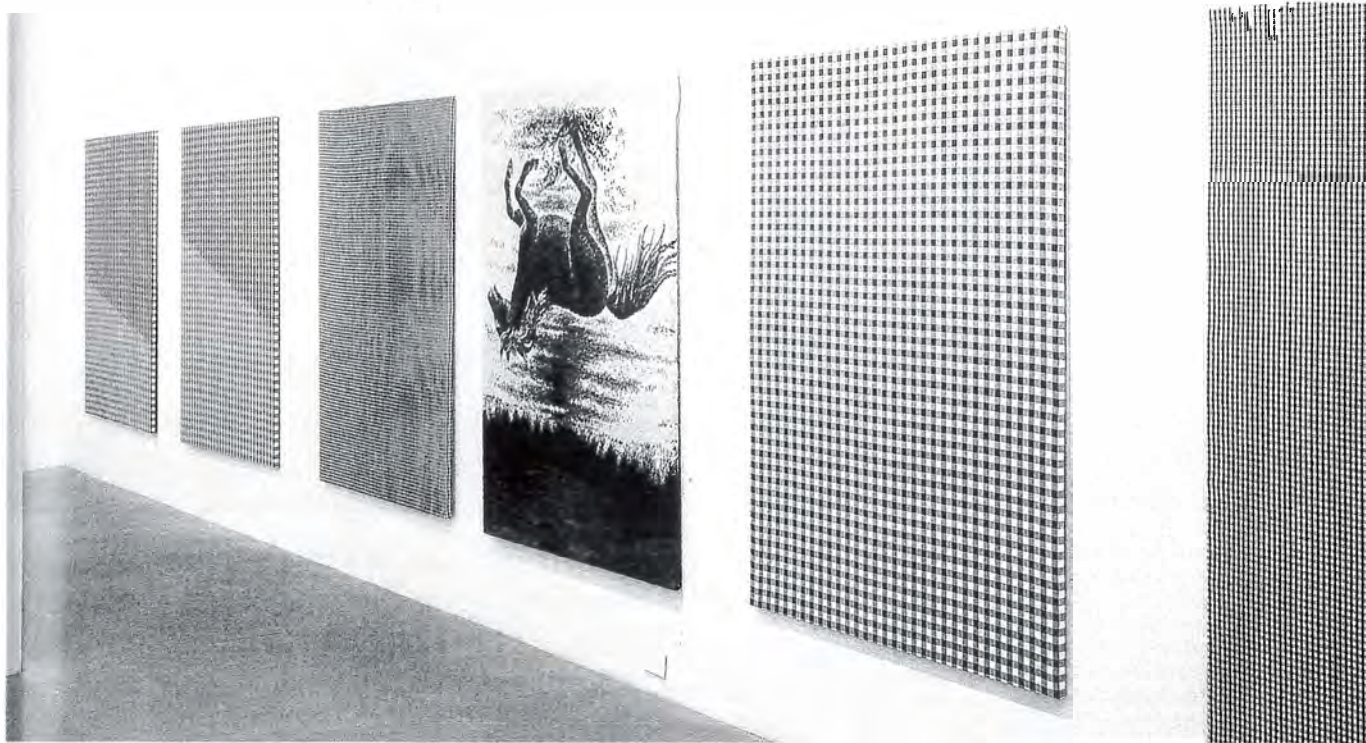
Stop Painting Painting

John Kelsey

"Gaps are my starting point. My impotence is my origin."
—Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*

Some say Michael Krebber doesn't translate to New York, but a painter who "prefers not to" isn't exactly going to meet the demands of a city powered by big dumb painting head on. All the paint in Krebber's last two shows here couldn't fill one small canvas by Dana Schutz or John Currin. With "Flaggs (Against Nature)" and then, only six months later, "Here it is: The Painting Machine" (both at Greene Naftali in 2003), Krebber demonstrated here and here again that the proof is not in the paint job but in the idea that puts it at a fresh distance. Just as Paul Valéry called the poem "a prolonged hesitation between sound and sense," Krebber's practice could be described as an ongoing hesitation between repetition and interruption (or between having an idea and having no idea). It's never been a question of how well or hard he labors on a canvas, a show, or a style; it's all in the ways he uses painting as a strategy for extricating himself from the wrong kind of work—both the bad works that surround him and the bad works he, like anybody, is capable of—or from the demands of work, period. Krebber keeps finding ways of reminding us that it's not only that artists produce paintings, but that *paintings produce artists* (and viewers,





reviewers, dealers, collectors), and this is the productive relation that must sometimes be interrupted if we too are to have a hand in our own making.

Whatever Krebber's intentions, his two New York shows and the mere half year between them were like the unfolding of a well-timed joke: the deadpan setup, the awkward pause, and then the offhand punch line. First he came up very short with a series of repeating, ready-made blankets and bedsheets on stretchers—and not a single drop of paint. And then—as if apologizing for this dry spell and promising to really come through next time for New York—he returned to the scene of the crime with still more bedsheets, this time barely touched with a few restrained dabs of acrylic. Just before the second opening, Krebber seemed to shoot himself in the foot by draping every canvas with the exhibition's poster invites, spoiling any easy view or easy sell of his new "paintings." It was an ambiguous move: at once an expression of shame or self-defense (covering his face) and brazen self-promotion (getting in your face). Also, he didn't hang the show; he leaned his work around the room so you'd almost trip over it as you came in looking for the products of the "painting machine" advertised on the poster.

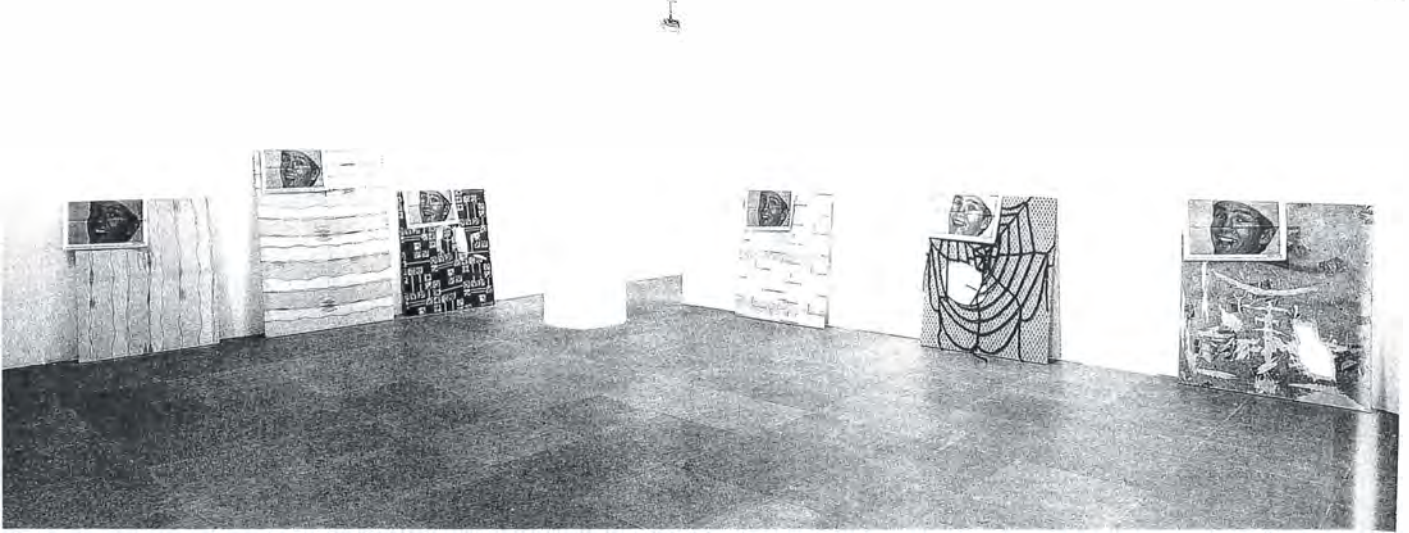
Like other machines, Krebber's repeats and sometimes breaks down. The painting machine doesn't always move forward, sometimes it only turns around on itself like one of Duchamp's hypnotically static

Rotoreliefs. And by announcing and exhibiting the machine as such, rather than just the paintings it produces, Krebber relocated painting from the place where New York likes to find it (on the canvas, on the wall, in the collection) in order to make it wander from place to place (wall to floor, canvas to poster, blanket to bedsheet) and to show how this nonprogressive movement is what makes the possibility of painting return—differently now—without exactly seeming to arrive. Sometimes the machine stops suddenly, like one of Krebber's dandyish brushstrokes that travels across a blank surface for a moment and then abruptly quits. But you can't begin again unless you stop.

Krebber sets impossible standards for himself. He starts against the wall or in a deep hole of aesthetic and historical debt. Known for his vampiric appropriations of other painters (Sigmar Polke's experiments with readymade surfaces, Georg Baselitz's inverted figures, etc.), Krebber makes the condition of being stuck a key operating principle. He is a *user*—primarily of everything that freezes and stops him. Following in the footsteps of so many painter-kings, any Cologne artist is always already made and positioned before even picking up a brush. There is no escape from the influence of a mentor like Markus Lüpertz or an ex-boss like Martin Kippenberger, and Krebber has famously declared his own lack of ideas, since anything good he might think of has already been thought before (his idea is not to have an idea). So he has devised two escape routes: First, don't escape. And if you do, turn yourself in.



Opposite page: Michael Krebber, *Untitled*, 2004, acrylic and collage on canvas, 11 1/4 x 35 1/4". This page: top: View of Michael Krebber, "Flaggs (Against Nature)," Greene Naftali, New York, 2003. Bottom: Michael Krebber, *Untitled*, 1979, oil on canvas, 67 x 67".



Because it's not so much by banging your head against a Polke that you're going to open up some new territory you can call your own, it's by refusing your own style in advance. Krebber has always been careful to work against himself whenever something too recognizably Krebber begins to take over. The consummate fan and disciple, his vampirism is of an entirely different nature than the appropriations and references by which most artists today position themselves and manufacture their own legible signatures. Krebber's approach underlines the fact that artists are readymades too, and that readymades can be unmade.

As Krebber's painting machine stops and starts and displaces itself again, it exhibits its own materials as pure means, endlessly separating them from their normal ends. The canvas, the stretcher bars, the wall, the floor, the title, the exhibition invite, the archival photograph, signature gestures of other painters, the social world that painting serves, etc., are all possible materials—ways into and out of painting. We could say that Krebber is less a painter than a strategist, and that his strategy is to repeat and to stop painting in order to go to work on the wider system that makes painting what it is today, what it was yesterday, and what it might be or stop being tomorrow. We need a strategy if we want art to become possible again, now more than ever.

But to call Krebber a strategist is not to say that he's jockeying for a decisive, final position either for or against the medium of painting, for or against bourgeois conventions. (If he ever had a master plan he would surely discard it immediately.) An antibourgeois bourgeois, as Carter Ratcliff has noted, the dandy is defined precisely by how he empties out his own position. Rather than wasting his time and energy fighting over property or his own proper place, he gladly wastes them undermining himself. The dandy makes himself static and detached, and his endless decentering of his own identity is the means by which he makes the world around him start to lose its grip. In the same sense that the classic proletarian strike suspends exploitative relations of production, the dandy interrupts the relations that position him as a subject: He wages a subjective or human strike. Like other strikes, this one interrupts a rhythm and opens up a gap. In this gap—in the very moment of interruption—

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one's own subjectivity becomes momentarily available again.

If, as he did in New York, Krebber sometimes seems to make painting go on strike, it's by no means a total work stoppage, followed by total change. Krebber never stops stopping, always repeats this. His is a provisional suspension of productive norms with no other goal in mind than itself. It is a way of unlinking painting from the paint job (and, if we bothered to extend the analogy, resistance from official politics). It is an art of suspension and—as with repetition—a means of distancing oneself from any ideology of progress, whether bourgeois or radical. In Krebber's case, the important thing is to disconnect materials from functions, means from ends, in order to reconnect painting to its own potential, but differently now . . . for a moment at least. And this moment will have to be repeated.

It is probably less interesting to interpret the meaning of a readymade checkered bedsheet or one depicting a moonlit, galloping horse than to realize that this throwaway image—in its very meaninglessness—is here being reclaimed as pure means. In other words, such a gesture

doesn't care to fulfill any particular end, to succeed in accomplishing some ultimate significance or work. Filling the space as it does, it exhibits the *place* of painting, and returns this place to its own possibility. When Krebber hangs the readymade horse upside down, we might note that he repeats Baselitz, for example, but the important thing is that this repetition renews the possibility of Baselitz in the present moment, and thus also that of Krebber, stuck as he is. Such an "emptying appropriation" not only captures and claims the stolen gesture or image, it makes it return with a difference. Repetition, as Giorgio Agamben has said regarding both messianic history and cinematic montage, is a strategy of renewing the possibility of what was ("that which is impossible by definition, the past"), of disassociating an identity from its proper place in order to produce a transformation. Sometimes the only way to change is by doing the same thing over and over again.

Looking at a Krebber for the first time—one of those small, washy, "unfinished too soon" canvases—you get the feeling that there is maybe no Krebber behind it. There's not a whole lot to work with. For New Yorkers, Krebber is first of all something overheard, a rumor—

maybe too good to be true. He's a story told by others (Germans, mostly) to each other. The story has no point and no end. It might begin with Krebber eating a beer glass at another painter's opening in order not to say something about it, or with him suddenly instructing his students never to paint again. Krebber is one of those artists they call an "artist's artist," and when you ask around, his story becomes impossible to extricate from those of the close contemporaries who are somehow or other implicated in his myth (Cosima von Bonin, Josephine Pryde, Albert Oehlen, Jutta Koether, Merlin Carpenter, Charline von Heyl, etc.). When pressed, friends and insiders begrudgingly supply half-answers ("it's a Cologne thing"), as if unwilling or unable to flesh him out in a decisive way. There are moments and contexts, certain jokes, things that are said to be "Krebbesque," the precise weight and thickness of a "legendary" opening night in somebody else's memory. Krebber is like a club you can't get into, until you realize the club was built for you and you only, and maybe you are in it now, trying to describe the view to somebody back in Cologne. □

John Kelsey is a frequent contributor to *Artforum*.

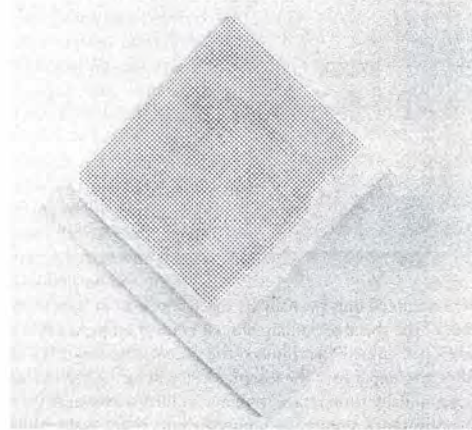
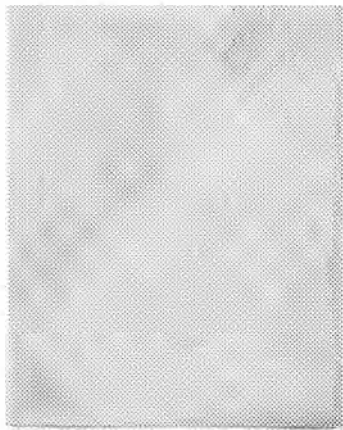
Formal Education

Jessica Morgan

In his characteristically evasive fashion, Michael Krebber used his solo exhibition at Vienna's Secession this past summer to launch two books and present what appeared to be an addendum of just twelve framed works and a single slide projection of a pink sea anemone. The two publications—a catalogue following the Secession's classic template designed by Heimo Zobernig and an artist's book reflecting on the subject of dandyism—seemed to take pride of place. At least that was the impression I gained from a conversation with the artist, a sense that was reinforced on being offered both catalogues before entering the show itself. But then a practice of avoidance and deflection, of postponement, is precisely what one has come to expect from Krebber, an artist who has studiously resisted identification with any apparent aesthetic, style, mode of production, or, for that matter, even the appearance of studiousness itself. That the exhibition should take a backseat to—or at least share the wheel with—the printed material was entirely in keeping with Krebber's approach.

For an artist whose work is so much concerned with diversion and lack of fixity, Krebber currently seems to hold a remarkable position of influence for a generation of younger European and American artists, an imprecise group that stretches from Samara Caughey in Los Angeles to Hayley Tompkins in Glasgow, from Wade Guyton in New York to Kalin Lindena in Cologne, and from Enrico David in London to Katja Strunz in Berlin, among many others. His work, or its affect, has been cited as the guiding force behind recent group exhibitions such as last year's "*Formalismus: Moderne Kunst, heute*" (Formalism: Modern Art, Today) at the Hamburger Kunstverein and "*Deutschland sucht*" (Germany Is Searching) at the Kölischer Kunstverein. Krebber featured prominently in both exhibitions and was hailed as a source of inspiration by their curators and some of the younger artists they chose. The fascination appears to be mutual: In Frankfurt, Krebber's keen interest in the next generation has made him one of the most sought-after teachers at the Städelschule. Indeed, Krebber has possibly

Opposite page, top: View of Michael Krebber, "Here it is: The Painting Machine," Greene Naftali, New York, 2003. Center, from left: Michael Krebber, *Contempt of one's own work as planning for career*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 47 1/4 x 39 3/4". Michael Krebber, *Small Attempt*, 2001, emulsion on canvas, 48 x 39 3/4". Michael Krebber, *A-Ha?*, 2001, oil on canvas, 48 x 39 3/4". This page, left: Michael Krebber, *Or?*, 2002, lacquer on canvas, 78 1/2 x 63". Right: Michael Krebber, *Vampire?*, 2002, lacquer on canvas, 51 1/2 x 45 1/2".



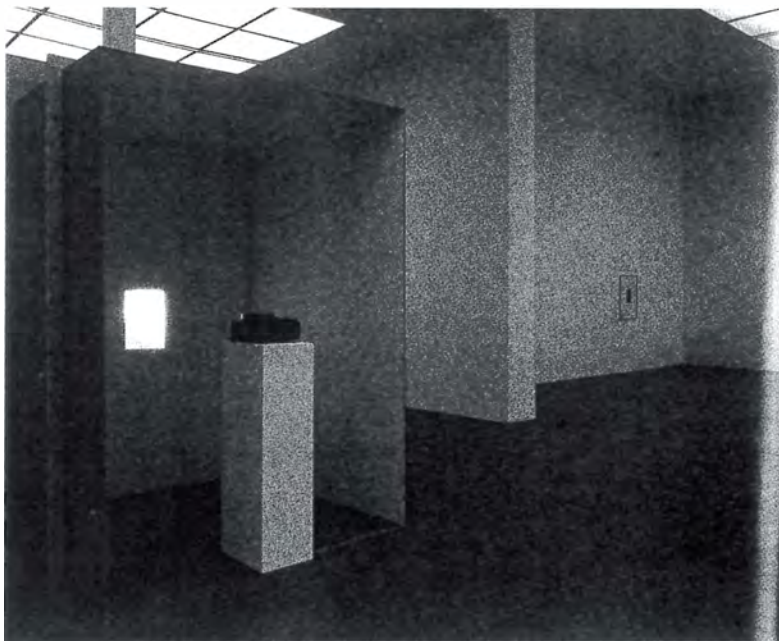
replaced his friend Martin Kippenberger, for whom he once worked as an assistant, as the current reigning reference of choice among a particular group of followers. Which leads one to ask, why Kriebler now? He has, after all, been exhibiting for some two decades, though arguably he only broke free from the Kippenberger association and established an independent presence in the past four or five years. Even now, one suspects that for many he still carries the appealing glow of proximity to the dearly departed antihero.

Like Kippenberger's, Kriebler's work functions as a seductive accumulation of corresponding activities or production (books, paintings, postcards, posters, and titles) that operate on near-equal footing as mutually affirming, complicating, and even negating chains of reference. For Kippenberger these multiple formats were among the many ways to practice his signature method of expressing simultaneously both ambition (to compete on a critical and art-historical standing with the legendary figures of his time and those of the recent past) and failure (in the face of an already-bankrupt notion of the avant-garde and originality). Although failure is also a trope for Kriebler, the multiple elements of his practice perform at a considerably quieter pitch. Rather than wrestling noisily with issues of painting, historical relevancy, image production, and innovation, he carries out acts of subtle reversal, contradiction, repetition, alteration, and contextualization that require careful analysis in order to be deciphered or even discerned. And it is these observational riddles—posed by the various interrelated aspects of his work and its installation—that seem to hold the key to his appeal for the current generation, a generation under the sway of what has loosely been referred to as a return to formalism.

For the Secession exhibition, Kriebler delivered precisely the type of exercise that has made him such an apposite father figure for this younger contingent. The thirteen pieces in the Vienna show comprised just six images, one of which was the slide of the sea anemone, taken from the cover of the artist's book and apparently chosen as an appropriately dandyish hybrid or hermaphroditic creature. The remaining five images, drawn from the Web and Kriebler's archive, included a fashion photograph of a woman smoking, a book titled *Athen* (apparently

a study of ancient Greece that might also serve as a reference to the place where Kriebler and Kippenberger exhibited together), a skyline, a butterfly, and a picture of Saturn. Each image was presented between one and three times, framed, and in various states of reproduction. These versions included a print of the "original" found image downloaded from the Internet scuffed and worn from its life in the studio; a photocopied duplicate; a photographed copy; an inverted image; and so on. The Secession's massive main hall

was occupied only partially by these duplicate images, with more than half of the space remaining almost entirely empty aside from the hut-like open cubicle that housed the slide projection. After crossing the imposing expanse of the Joseph Maria Olbrich-designed hall and moving gradually from image to image, noticing over time the slight shifts in appearance among the multiple prints of the same subject, viewers



Following Kriebler's example, a younger generation of artists has approached formalism as a type of discerning connoisseurship that enables not only feats of perceptual acuity but also their extension into a world of institutional, critical, or architectural surroundings.

were ultimately faced with the choice of retracing their steps across the fairly ominous empty space to confirm what appeared to be the slight differences in presentation, or trusting their questionable memory of images that were now too far away to discern in detail.

Was this some kind of observational test for lazy art audiences: three points for noticing that the images were variously reproduced; three more if you could recall the different modes of reproduction, etc.? Perhaps the repetition of the images, seemingly chosen for their relative facileness, was in fact intended to expose their import (Athens=historic significance), or the opposite (Athens=empty signifier), or both? Or perhaps Kriebler intended to expose the institution itself, to make one aware again of the Secession's commanding architecture and the inevitable necessity for any artist exhibiting there to respond to it.

Such formal, but also potentially critical, qualities are those cited as reasons to hail Kriebler as the precursor and exemplary figure of the new formalism, one that is supposedly dialectically engaged with content or context. As Yilmaz

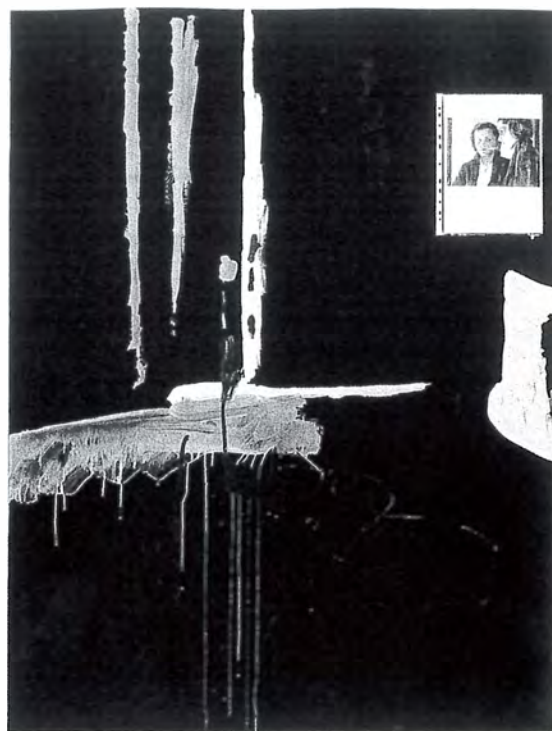


Dziewior, curator of "Formalism: Modern Art, Today," contends, Krebber's work has always questioned how to achieve the "right form," albeit in full consciousness of the likelihood of failure in such attempts." Dziewior then goes on to state that Krebber's work "functions as a reference for a thematically oriented strategy whose visual results do not at first sight betray the fact that they are analyses of context." Following Krebber's example, then, this younger generation of artists approaches formalism as a type of discriminating connoisseurship that enables not only feats of perceptual acuity but also their extension into a work's institutional, critical, or architectural surroundings. This reading of Krebber's work, however, can be rather superficial, more reflective of a general tendency among many artists today to search for meaning in minute gestures of alteration and placement, sly or obscure references to modernist antecedents, and a hope that an awareness of these "subtle" gestures will constitute a critical apperception extending to the work's (and the viewer's) physical surroundings.

Krebber's installations have, of course, always been characterized by a heightened attention to what might be deemed formal issues: Walls intentionally left blank become as significant as those occupied by work; paintings are installed abutting each other at various heights or are carefully draped with the poster for the exhibition in which they hang. But some admirers might miss the fact that such deft attention to structure is only the underpinning of Krebber's broader conceptual approach (this is an artist, after all, who once devised an exhibition improbably pairing an empty gallery space with a postcard of Laurel and Hardy). Perhaps more important still for an understanding of Krebber's work is the artist's deep entrenchment in a particular historical context, that of the Cologne art scene. Krebber has, fairly uniquely, bridged the two most recent incarnations of the city's art world. In addition to the time he served with Kippenberger, Krebber was also an

assistant of Georg Baselitz, a student of Markus Lüpertz, and a fixture on the gallery-dominated Cologne circuit during the time of Max Hetzler and Paul Maenz. Following the decline of this generation of painters and dealers, Krebber continues to hold a central position in the new Cologne nexus consisting primarily of the Christian Nagel and Daniel Buchholz galleries and their respective stables of artists.

Though not evident at the Secession, Krebber's work typically reveals his formidable knowledge of painterly practice, summarizing in a few lean strokes much of the medium's recent German past, doubling and multiplying his voice with those of his predecessors, and toying with the idea of painting's endgame. Indeed, the codes and signs, the references and allusions, and, in particular, the "secondary" material (the posters, invitation cards, and books, which play a significant role in Krebber's exhibitions) are utterly steeped in a high-folkloric Cologne tradition. Yet, viewed from the outside, this quite-specific tradition can border on an elaborately constructed private language or world fortified by an erudite barricade of knowledge, ultimately suggesting an obsessive-



compulsive self-referentiality. For those in the know, this interpretive game acts as a reassuring affirmation of one's world, and as the identification of what is "Krebbesque," an adjective that seems to have materialized as part of the Cologne dialect with the artist's first show at Christian Nagel in 1990.

Although his formalist acolytes may be wrong, at least partially, in citing Krebber as their antecedent, the current critical appraisal of both the "new" formalism and Krebber's work is ultimately even more troubling. In an art world bereft of easily identifiable or radically innovative strands of practice, there is a tendency to exaggerate the significance of superficial similarities. While the artists so often brought together under the rubric of formal or modernist affiliations may be engaged in worthwhile individual pursuits, they often have little in common, and, like Krebber, are more accurately (and perhaps more interestingly) placed in the context of their historical moment and immediate environment—be it Warsaw, Manhattan, or Glasgow. But either way, I would not go looking for salvation in any of these places. After all, Krebber himself has remarked, "I do not believe I can invent something new in art or painting because whatever I would want to invent already exists." Krebber's own practice could perhaps stand as both an example and warning to others. While a consummate knowledge of his immediate cultural context protects him from any accusations of naïveté or misguided notions of originality, the weight of his inheritance leaves room for just the slightest of activities. □

Jessica Morgan is curator of contemporary art at Tate Modern. (See Contributors.)

Opposite page, top: View of "Michael Krebber," *Weiner Secession*, 2005. Bottom, left: Reproduction of book cover from "Michael Krebber," *Weiner Secession*, 2005. Right: Laurel and Hardy postcard from "Michael Krebber," *Galerie Christoph Dürr*, Munich, 1987. This page, top: Michael Krebber, *Untitled*, 2002, collage on canvas, 63 x 47 1/2". Bottom: View of "Michael Krebber," *Galerie Christian Nagel*, Cologne, 1990.

