

DIRECTIONS

# MARTIN KIPPENBERGER: WORKS ON PAPER

JULY 20 – OCTOBER 22, 1995



*Untitled*, 1990, oil crayon and pastel on hotel stationery, 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.  
(29.5 x 21 cm). Private collection.



Untitled (*Gibt's Mich Wirklich?*) (Do I Really Exist?), 1983, collage on paper, 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 8  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (29.5 x 21 cm). Collection Speck, Cologne.

SINCE THE 1960S, CONTEMPORARY GERMAN art has been at the vanguard of Western culture. With the resurgence of an international art world after World War II, the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) received recognition in Europe and, eventually, America for his environmental and conceptual works that challenged long-standing assumptions about the form and content of art. A major innovator in postwar German art, Beuys influenced several of his country's important artists, notably Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945), Sigmar Polke (b. 1941), and Gerhard Richter (b. 1932). As a part of this burgeoning scene, the artist Martin Kippenberger emerged in gallery exhibitions in the 1980s, attracting favorable European and American reviews for his exhibitions of paintings, drawings, and sculpture. Kippenberger's images, with their references to German society

and history, communicate a range of ideas reflecting the culture of our time. This exhibition, his first solo show in Washington, D.C., presents a selection of his works on paper from the 1980s and 1990s.

Kippenberger was born in 1953 in Dortmund, a part of the Ruhr district in West Germany. As early as age three, he attended a restrictive evangelical school in the Black Forest area, where he began to show artistic promise. After leaving school in 1968, at age fifteen, he tried to find a steady job, without success. He later moved to Hamburg, where in 1972 he enrolled in classes at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste. In 1976 he left art school to paint in Italy, returning to Hamburg the next year to hold his first one-person show. His early work included paintings of simple objects encountered in daily life rendered in tones of black, gray, and white—his unique interpretation of American and British Pop art, then gaining recognition in Germany. In 1978, Kippenberger moved to West Berlin and opened an office to help sell his art and that of his friends.

Kippenberger's own art was influenced by the ideas of several, now major, postwar artists. He particularly emulated the work of Beuys and Polke, who addressed contemporary social themes such as the environment (Beuys) or employed enigmatic, often cynical images of popular culture and art history (Polke). Kippenberger had met Beuys and accepted his holistic concept of creative activity: that the process of making art is linked to all aspects of contemporary life, including politics, consumerism, and the environment. Polke, who was then a professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, liked discussing art with the students who gathered in bars and restaurants. Among them was Kippenberger, who often spoke informally with Polke about matters of art. Polke, who had been a student of Beuys's, was creating images inspired by the subject matter of tabloids, following his belief that art should reflect society. The content of Beuys's and Polke's work was cryptic and difficult for most people, but their ideas impressed Kippenberger. Although Kippenberger would pursue a painting style different from Beuys's, his art is stylistically comparable to Polke's.

Kippenberger's aesthetics derived, in part, from what he knew of the development of Dada in the early twentieth century. The artists who associated with that movement attempted to undermine artistic traditions with deliberate irrationality and cynicism, and they willfully negated current criteria of beauty. Familiar with the writings of Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), one of the Dada movement's founders and chief theorists, Kippenberger was intrigued by



stories about shocking public exhibitions staged by the Dadaists, and by performances at their Cabaret Voltaire that outraged much of the audience. Kippenberger's interest in the movement and its cabaret led to his own involvement in a similar enterprise. In West Berlin, Kippenberger became an amusing and extemporaneous entertainer at the Café Einstein and subsequently helped open the club S.O.36, which became known for its punk-rock concerts.

But Kippenberger's main interest has remained visual art, through which he feels most secure in expressing his personal, critical views. While painting has always appealed to him, the accessibility of paper and drawing materials has given an added impetus to his graphic development, in part because he travels widely. Kippenberger, who has visited many parts of the world since the 1980s, has become known for his drawings on hotel stationery. Representing the artist's peripatetic lifestyle, hotel stationery suits the hurried character of his drawing.

Kippenberger does not try to seduce his audience with the beauty of line and form. Formal aspects such as composition and color are evident in his works, but the energy of the images derives from the compelling immediacy of their execution. Like off-the-cuff remarks, which are often authentic barometers of feelings, Kippenberger's drawings are appropriately abrupt; they serve stylistically to demonstrate a brash disdain for objectionable social attitudes and behaviors—hypocrisy, snobbery, and prejudice among them. Unlike artists who produce careful, detailed studies in a studio, Kippenberger sketches wherever he might be. The spontaneous, crude quality of his works are the equivalent of the conversational "quick comeback," which can immediately, sometimes rudely, convey a point of view.

Kippenberger's ironic images sometimes explore racial prejudice. One such work is a collage from 1983 showing a native black man and the text "Gibt's Mich Wirklich?" (Do I really exist?). The work makes a point about discrimination carried to a cruel and senseless extreme. A later work, a drawing of 1989, uses the logo of the Lord Jim Lodge, a small private club Kippenberger formed with his artist friends, the name of which refers to Joseph Conrad's masterful narrative novel (1900). The drawing shows a woman whose dress is shorn down the middle to reveal half of a fleshless skeleton. In front of her she holds a piece of cloth imprinted with the logo of the lodge. The logo combines elements derived from the Communist hammer and sickle; the circle of the moon with rays and two formalized female breasts complete the design.

Kippenberger devised a more lighthearted spoof on society in 1984 in Vienna. With his friends, the artists Albert Oehlen and Werner Büttner, he drafted a mock lecture called "Ansprache dem Hirnlosen" (Speech to the Brainless), made up of meaningless phrases. In it, he derided insensitive people and nonadventurous minds, and he bared his general distrust for the powerful elements of society. Kippenberger aims his indignation at affected, hypocritical attitudes, which he sees as the root of many social problems. His work echoes the sentiments of some German artists of the 1920s and 1930s, such as George Grosz (1893–1959), who broadly satirized the bourgeoisie for their complacency and isolation from the world around them.

A drawing of 1990 is more straightforward than many of his works. Framed by the counterculture phrase "Cool it/Dig it/Do it," lettered with a strong hand, are sketchy but distinct portraits of Kippenberger (on the right) and Oehlen (on the left). The defiance and self-confidence of the two artists are reflected in their facial expressions. Kippenberger frequently depicts himself in the drawn scenarios, in effect indulging in a kind of role playing. The self-portrait *Bei Missfallen Gefühle zurück* (If Dissatisfied, Feelings Back), 1989, expresses emotional distress at losing a girlfriend; the feelings are disparaged, however, through the flippant, satiric title. In another drawing of the same year, he poses with a just-caught shark, the decorative script across the top of the page reading, "Don't force me to kill you." The incongruous pairing of the scene and phrase provides an ironic comment on the relationship between fish and predator, and the nature of the sport, a man-made challenge. The statement poses a humorous ambivalence: Who is speaking, the fish or the fisherman? In an untitled work of 1993, Kippenberger portrays himself with a forester's hat and a tuba, the stereotypical German. Yet this "classic" Bavarian image is turned against itself by the hat that looks too small for the head it sits on, the subject's half-smile, and the fried egg looming in the background.

The series of drawings "Don't Wake Daddy," 1994, concerns the antics of Kippenberger's four-and-one-half-year-old daughter Helena. The works portray activities that might disturb a father trying to fall sleep over the noises of young children. One of his gentler series, it places Kippenberger in the role of a parent. Borrowing from several different art styles, including Synthetic Cubism, Expressionism, and Surrealism, he also taps into early cartoon history with a drawing that could be modeled after the illustrations and cartoons of the late nineteenth-century German caricaturist Wilhelm Busch.

(1832–1908), one of the founders of the modern comic strip. The plump face of a crying infant in an image from the “Don’t Wake Daddy” series could come from Busch’s cautionary and comic children’s tale *Max und Moritz* (1865). Other drawings in the series focus on the clamor of clanging pots and pans, the disrupting sounds of roller skates, and the irritating taps of a toy drummer. The dissonance Kippenberger describes—rendered in crowded, compressed imagery and incongruous spatial relationships—refers to the details of daily life, whether a traffic jam or a loud vacuum cleaner, that irritate our senses. The apparent absurdity of Kippenberger’s imagery and the lack of obvious connections from one work to the next contribute to their chaotic aspect. Deeply cynical, with no pretenses of being a sympathetic social realist, Kippenberger, it seems, does not feel he has to be “nice” in a hostile world.

In a group of recent drawings on hotel stationery, eight refer to self-portraits Kippenberger painted in 1992. The other two involve the artist’s favorite food—pasta: One has a strongman submitting a piece of pasta to the “al dente test” to check whether it is overcooked, while the other, with the words “Grosz-Löcher-Nudeln” (Grosz-Hole-Noodles), alludes to the series “The Painter of the Hole” by Grosz, one of which is *The Painter of the Hole I*, 1948 (Hirshhorn Museum). In Grosz’s composition, an artist sits in front of a canvas that depicts a gaping hole. Kippenberger has borrowed Grosz’s imagery, superimposing a pasta-like form onto the image of an artist’s canvas. A second pasta shape—which Kippenberger has transformed from Grosz’s depiction of an artist’s palette—holds various items: a toothbrush, a painter’s brush and maulstick, and a dinner knife. The assorted implements appear to represent the needs of a painter, or Kippenberger himself.

In several of Kippenberger’s self-portraits, he is a wizened, gnome-like figure. In one, of 1995, he is shown clad in boxer shorts with a hangman’s noose on the left and a life preserver over his right arm, as though referring to the hazards of life—from birth (represented by the egg), to managing one’s existence safely (the life preserver), to the extreme consequences of a misspent life (the hangman’s noose). In another drawing of 1995, he drinks from a can while his raised left hand has been transformed into a capitol of the Greek Ionic column. Another, bearing the words “Nicht Hauen, Ich Bins” (Don’t hit, it’s me), shows Kippenberger ready to defend himself from attack.

Throughout his career Kippenberger has depended on his feet to propel him through life and serve him well during his impromptu dances and humorous acts on



*Don't Wake Daddy (Baby)*, 1994, crayon and felt-tipped marker on hotel stationery, 7 1/2 x 8 1/4 in. (19 x 21 cm). Galerie Borgmann Capitain, Cologne.

stage at the Café Einstein and club S.O.36. Now earning his livelihood through paintings and drawings, he equates his hands to his feet in a metaphorical portrait showing his left hand in a shoe, applying pigment to the surface of a canvas.

The appeal of Kippenberger’s drawings and collages, to most viewers, comes from familiarity with a particular experience that Kippenberger may describe in his drawings. Many of his ideas come from life around him—the remembered conversations and impromptu banter that are the stuff of genuine human emotion and communication. Concentrating on moments when human weakness and incompetence occur at the same time, his art provides humorous insight into his world. With subtle, irreverent, telling images, he ridicules and exposes. Yet his pictures do not immediately communicate their messages. Rather, the artist’s intentions are revealed only after one contemplates the various parts of his visual narratives and reads the sense and suggestions of his imagery.

Frank Gettings  
Curator of Prints and Drawings





Self-Portrait, 1995, crayon and felt-tipped marker on hotel stationery, 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (29.7 x 21 cm), Galerie Borgmann Capitain, Cologne.

## BIOGRAPHY

Born February 25, 1953, in Dortmund, Germany. Attended Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg, 1972–77. Exhibited first one-person exhibition in Hamburg, 1977. Moved to West Berlin, 1978, and to Cologne, 1983. In 1985 had first comprehensive museum exhibition, in Darmstadt, Germany. Daughter Helena was born; moved to Los Angeles, 1989. Returned to Cologne, 1990, and held guest professorship at Städelschule, Frankfurt, 1990–91. Maintains a studio in St. Georgen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1981 Galerie Max Hetzler, Stuttgart.
- 1984 Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne (1985, 1987, 1989 and tour, 1992).  
Galerie Peter Pakesch, Vienna (1987, 1990).
- 1985 Metro Pictures, New York (1987, 1992, 1994).  
Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt (1994).  
Galerie Heinrich Ehrhardt, Frankfurt.  
Galerie Klein, Bonn (1992).
- 1986 Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.
- 1987 Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne (1989, 1990).
- 1988 Kunsthalle Winterthur, Switzerland.
- 1989 Halle Sud, Geneva.
- 1991 Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California.  
David Nolan Gallery, New York.  
Kölischer Kunstverein, Cologne.
- 1993 Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.  
Forum for Contemporary Art, Saint Louis.
- 1994 Galerie Borgmann Capitain, Cologne.  
Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.  
Nolan/Eckman Gallery, New York.

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- Martin Kippenberger. Exhibition catalog. Cologne: Galerie Max Hetzler, 1992.
- Martin Kippenberger. Exhibition catalog. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1991.
- Martin Kippenberger. *Ab. [Abb.] [fig.] The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'America.'* Exhibition catalog. Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1994.
- Martin Kippenberger. *En cas de réclamation les sentiments vous seront remboursés*. Exhibition catalog. Geneva: Halle Sud, 1989.
- Martin Kippenberger. *Heavy Metal*. Exhibition catalog. New York: Pace/MacGill Gallery, 1991.
- Martin Kippenberger. *Mensch geht mir ein Licht auf*. Exhibition catalog. Munich: Kunststrum Daser, 1992.
- Martin Kippenberger. *Miete Strom Gas*. Exhibition catalog. Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum, 1986.
- Martin Kippenberger. *Collages 1989*. Exhibition brochure. New York: David Nolan Gallery, 1989.
- Muthesius, Angelika. *Martin Kippenberger: Ten Years After*. Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1991.
- Schumacher, Rainald. "Martin Kippenberger: Not the Way People Look on Television." *Flash Art* 168 (January–February 1993): 88.
- Wahrheit ist Arbeit: Werner Büttner, Martin Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen*. Exhibition catalog. Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1984.

## LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

The works in the exhibition, dating from 1983 to 1995, are either drawings on hotel stationery or collages and are lent by the following:

- Doris Ammann, Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
- Hans Böhmig, Cologne
- Dr. Michael Borgmann, Hamburg
- The Capital Group Companies, Inc., Los Angeles
- Des. Eizenhöfer and Koch, Cologne
- Galerie Borgmann Capitain, Cologne
- Kunstmuseum, Bonn
- The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Nolan/Eckman Gallery, New York
- Gaby and Wilhelm Schürmann, Herzogenrath, Germany
- Carol O. Selle, New York
- Collection Speck, Cologne



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