

Thomas Eggerer
Selected Collages
 2002 - 2022

September 7th - October 9th

I love these high-gloss, hardcover portraits of American Universities, preferably from the 80s, with high color saturation. Breathtaking treasures are offered within their pages; the manifold sports activities... Pre-game stretching, post-game/pre-shower sweaty locker room gatherings to commiserate or rejoice. Holding hands, where are my socks? Or sunbathing in the sports arena. Full display. Fit, straight, bodies - the fundament of a healthy nation. Most likely he doesn't know how hot he is, lying on a park bench and playing a wooden flute. Or, he sits on top of a stone wall leading to the cafeteria (faded modernism) in shorts, barefoot, completely absorbed by the book he is reading. Am I moved because of his hairy legs or because he is so concentrated? Does he fit in here or anywhere? Does he even care? I also get a kick out of illustrated manuals for fitness group workouts of all kinds ("The Ultimate Spa Body"), self-help guides ("The Backyard Lumberjack") or public transportation systems. An Italian book on the Milano subway published in 1982 is an all time favorite; 70's architecture, subway color codes, handrails! Guys hanging out, Castello Sforzesco, the Pirelli highrise... Books on "Nature" ("America's Outdoor Wonders", "Baxandall's World Guide to Nude Beaches + Recreation") are generally attractive, particularly when they address the myriad wacky ways in which people spend time and money under open skies. Besides, anything that is too obviously interesting doesn't really work. It has to be almost normal, not too sensational. Cut-out photos go in a box where they can rest until I feel more interested in them, which can sometimes take years. Working on a collage is not a quick thing for me and generally it does not work out right away.

-T.E.

Standing: The Collages of Thomas Eggerer

David Joselit

"Standing is always precarious," Thomas Eggerer said to me in his studio, while discussing his collages. Later, I realized that this deceptively simple, though haunting statement holds a key to his aesthetic project--both his collages and his paintings. For indeed, standing--holding oneself up, striking a pose--is not a simple matter, even though many of us do it every day without giving it a thought. But *standing* is only partly an anatomical disposition--one can (and really must) *take a stand* as well, whether actively, as in political protest, or passively, by doing nothing, which is itself a kind of stand-taking. The power of Eggerer's work lies in the relation he establishes between assuming a stance, as a kind of bodily hieroglyph, and taking a stand, by which a figure is charged with social meaning. This relation is "agnostic" in the sense that Eggerer's collages and paintings refuse to moralize any individual stance--as, for instance, progressive or reactionary. But this does not make them apolitical--he offers a figurative lexicon that effectively queers conventional codes of heterosexist militancy on the one hand and reveals the transgressive force of fashion's supposed frivolity on the other. The aesthetic practice, or medium, which epitomizes the convergence of *assuming* a stance and *taking* a stand as a form of embodied abstraction is dance, and indeed Eggerer is a choreographer of images, especially in his collages. This performative dimension of his work puts it in conversation with contemporary artist-choreographers as much as with fellow painters. Figures such as Alexandra Pirici and Maria Hassabi, for instance, pose bodies in spaces (often in museums) in ways that highlight the precarity of taking a stand. Such precarity suffuses what Hassabi calls her "forgotten bodies," that in her 2015 work *PLASTIC* (which was performed at the Museum of Modern Art in 2016), slowly morph from one pose of dereliction or sometimes ecstasy to another like a succession of still images--the kind of succession that is staged in Eggerer's collages.

There is another kind of precarity present in Eggerer's work: the threat that taking a stand might devolve into merely striking a pose. This charged threshold is evoked in *Chain*, a 2021 collage of black and white photographs arranged in a shallow table vitrine in which images of street demonstrations are mixed with Benetton ads featuring models waving flags, a juxtaposition that might seem to undermine the efficacy of protest by demonstrating its commodification. But Eggerer refuses such simplistic binaries, so characteristic of contemporary American political discourse. Instead, by configuring a spectrum of affiliated postures removed from their initial context, he establishes a behavioral rebus where fashion and politics are not to be opposed to one another--where their combination may even lead to new alchemies of eroticism and activism. As in his other collages (as well as his paintings), a quasi-architectural arrangement organizes this array of images: they are laid out in a loose checkerboard configuration, with the rectangles of photographs alternating with empty space. What draws together this uneven lattice of analogous postures and divergent purposes are a series of close-up photographs of a curving chain (presumably a necklace), and incongruously, several disposable coffee cup lids, some black, and some white, echoing the black and white tonality of the photographs. It is typical of Eggerer's collages that the constituent photographs are incorporated into an abstract spatial structure which bends what seems to be a plausible architecture into something uncanny. In the case of *Chain*, the oblong rectangular vitrine, with the photographs of chains suggesting a kind of network of connections, and the circular coffee lids, a series of nodes, I was reminded of the map of the Tube in London, the city where this work was first exhibited. The coffee lids also recall for me the hordes of pedestrians marching down the streets of New York with a phone in one hand and a cup of Starbucks's coffee in the other serving as a kind of double-fisted urban armor. But whether Eggerer had this in mind or not is largely irrelevant. The lids play an important formal role in *Chain*, but they are also evocative objects, whose function is to enable mobile forms of consumption (of coffee) allowing people on the street, whether there to show off or to protest (or both!) the convenience of staying caffeinated while on the run.

It is quite common in Eggerer's collages, in which individual component images typically retain their integrity and usually don't physically intersect one another, for there to be a kind of stuttering effect between pictures that seem to represent the same group or action but from different angles, moments, or distances. This introduces a cinematic dimension to his choreography of images in which "shots" that might be seen in succession in a film are made simultaneous to one another within the "stage" of a page. In *Floorgames* of 2018 two related photos, one oriented vertically above another slightly larger horizontal picture creates an ell-formation in the center of a collage. These photographs show the extended legs of football players recumbent on the floor, cutting off the torsos and the faces of most players except for one nearly full figure in the top image. This latter picture, representing a tangle of male legs, is confusing to read at first, but is oriented as it would have been in its source publication. The lower photo, which includes only two sets of players' legs, but from a closer angle, makes it clear that the men are engaged in stretching, tucking one leg under while extending the other. Though this lower horizontal photo is more legible in terms of the posture of those it represents, it is rotated ninety degrees so that the floor appears as a wall and the players seem almost to be standing on their (invisible) heads. The tense tucking of the knee which is pictured in both images is thus doubly echoed in the structure of the collage: first the ell-configuration made by the two photos' disposition mimics a bent leg, but second the ninety-degree rotation between one photo and the other reiterates the spatial allusion to bending. In other words, an anatomical gesture pictured in the photographs radiates out as the compositional principle of the overall collage--an action that is further enhanced by a roughly ell-shaped form cut from a tightly gridded black and white paper backing both photographs. The entire composition sits on a deep oxblood page, very close in hue to the gymnasium floor pictured in the photographs. This collage not only deploys the tension (precarity?) of male limbs, but also encompasses them in a prosthetic device--the artwork itself whose effect is to amplify and transform human anatomy into something non-human, an abstract work of art.

Can we imagine that this prosthetic--the collage--addresses the precarious nature of standing? Can an artwork instruct us in how a personal stance, aggregated with those of an ever-growing population, inspires a material architecture to contain social interaction on the one hand, and to produce an abstract "social anatomy" on the other. I have hardly mentioned an additional force that circulates through Eggerer's collages: desire. The form-fitting uniforms of the football players in *Floorgames*, their tensed limbs and their physical intimacy with one another suggest an entire world of affect and meaning which neither Eggerer's collage, nor my essay can quite contain. It is desire that carries us from one stance to another--and desire exceeds any category. It is never exclusively erotic *or* political; it is always a combination of both.

Thomas Eggerer (b. 1963, Munich DE) has had solo exhibitions at Petzel Gallery (2020), Galerie Buchholz, Berlin (2018); Maureen Paley Gallery (2021) Richard Telles, Los Angeles, CA (2014); Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem (2008); Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig (2003), and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford (2002). His work has also been included in group exhibitions at Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin (2021); Gladstone Gallery, New York (2020); Brandhorst Museum, Munich (2020, 2019); Galerie Buchholz, New York (2018); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2017); Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2016); White Columns, New York (2011); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2009); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2008); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (2008); UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2004); the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2004); Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver (2004); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts (2004), and Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2003). His works are held in the public collections of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum, New York, LACMA, Los Angeles, Sammlung Brandhorst, Munich; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany; and the Boros Collection, Berlin.

Image Checklist:

1. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
2. Thomas Eggerer, "Aerobic Blast", 2022, 25.5 x 19.75 inches
3. Thomas Eggerer, "Team", 2018, 24.25 x 17.75 inches
4. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
5. Thomas Eggerer, "Untitled", 2009, 11.5 x 8.5 inches
6. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
7. Thomas Eggerer, "Untitled", 2013, 24.75 x 20 inches
8. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
9. Thomas Eggerer, "Chain", 2021, various papers and plastic coffee lids, dimensions variable
10. Thomas Eggerer, "Chain", 2021, various papers and plastic coffee lids, dimensions variable (detail)
11. Thomas Eggerer, "Chain", 2021, various papers and plastic coffee lids, dimensions variable (detail)
12. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
13. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
14. Thomas Eggerer, "Peace Bandana", 2022, 25.5 x 19.75 inches
15. Thomas Eggerer, "Untitled", 2011, 23.5 x 17.75 inches

16. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
17. Thomas Eggerer, "Untitled", 2011, 23.5 x 17.75 inches
18. Thomas Eggerer, "Rapa Nui", 2006, 9 x 11.75 inches
19. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
20. Thomas Eggerer, "Downward", 2018, 27.5 x 19.75 inches
21. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
22. Thomas Eggerer, "Floorgames", 2018, 25 x 18.5 inches
23. Thomas Eggerer, "Untitled", 2013, 25 x 19.75 inches
24. Thomas Eggerer, "Tanning", 2022, wallpaper, dimensions variable
25. Thomas Eggerer, "Sphere", 2007, 11.75 x 9 inches
26. Thomas Eggerer, "Untitled", 2017, 24.25 x 17.75 inches
27. Thomas Eggerer, "Selected Collages", 2022 installation view, 15 Orient, New York. Courtesy of the artist and 15 Orient
28. Thomas Eggerer, "Encrustation", 2008, 11.75 x 8.5 inches
29. Thomas Eggerer, "Pose", 2007, 11.75 x 8.5 inches