

MAMCO GENEVE

2022

The Cherry Orchard is Tobias Kaspar's second exhibition at MAMCO, following on from his installation on the theme of "self-management" in 2021. Rented Life—a project in which he outsourced his life—featured at MAMCO's "Apartment," a reconstruction of Minimalist and Conceptual art collector Ghislain Mollet-Viéville's Paris apartment. In 2022, the artist stepped back in time with a project inspired by the tale of a bankrupt family in Russia under Tsar Nicolas II.

Part theatrical performance, part visual installation, The Cherry Orchard is Kaspar's personal, modern interpretation of the famous play of the same name by Anton Chekhov (1860–1904). A voiceover reads selected passages from the play, while the "artifacts" arranged within the exhibition space blur the line between reality and fiction: the flowers are made from plastic, and the fast-food packaging was collected during the pandemic by one of the artist's contacts in Saint Petersburg.

Chekhov's play, which tells the story of a family forced to sell its estate, was written in 1903. It was first performed in 1904 in a production directed by Stanislavski, although Chekhov disapproved of Stanislavski's treatment of the play, which the playwright had conceived more as a comedy. Just a year later, the 1905 revolution broke out in Saint Petersburg, rocking the very foundations of the Russian Empire.

Tobias Kaspar (b. 1984) draws on artistic practices and influences from the "new institutional criticism" of the 1990s, including pieces that combine formalist neutrality with the documentation of reality. In a surprising turnabout, he uses the narratives and discarded trappings of modern consumer society as the decor for a new story. Kaspar's installation spans 100 years of Russian and Western history, from aristocratic decline to globalization and the crisis of late capitalism sparked by the recent pandemic.

Curated by Julien Fronsacq

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As you already know, your cherry orchard is to be sold to pay your debts, and the sale is fixed for August 22.³

The Cherry Orchard

The installation is based on Chekhov's eponymous play from 1903 and retells it in an imaginary scene. The original play, which centers on the country estate and its beautiful cherry orchard of the impoverished landowner Ranevskaya and her grown-up children, paints a socially critical portrait of the Russian aristocracy at the beginning of the 20th century. Society is undergoing changes. To pay off the family's debts, the cherry orchard has to be auctioned off.

Apocalypse

In a quiet reference to Martin Kippenberger's installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's Amerika* (1994), Tobias Kaspar's imaginary scene picks up where Chekhov's original play ends: after a failed building project, the estate and garden are left neglected. Apocalypse. The windows of the unfinished holiday bungalows are left open, a curtain is blowing back and forth. Almost as a counterpoint to the brightly coloured patterns and aesthetically appealing motifs from the online shopping world, an accumulation of scattered scraps of take-away food and their reproduction in bronze can be found on the floor. Despite the Cyrillic lettering, the partially crumpled cardboard boxes and beverage cups are associated with fast food products such as pizza, burgers and the like through globally familiar shapes and logos. The last blossoms of the deforested cherry orchard are scattered between and over the waste products. Like a mantra, a voice⁴ from the installation can be heard reading text elements from the play, which address the sale of the estate and the cherry orchard.

À rebours (Backwards)

The use of theatre, film sets and props is nothing new: in 2016, Tobias Kaspar staged *The Street* - a 24h happening in the film set ruins of Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* at the Cinecittà Film Studios in Rome. In 2018, he took over the set design of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* from an amateur theatre for his survey exhibition *Independence* at the Kunsthalle Bern, and the *Bonnie and Clyde* car shot to pieces, also from an amateur theatre, served as the main piece for his *Why Love Hurts* exhibition in Berlin in 2019.

La Vie d'artiste (The Life of the artist)

Tobias Kaspar's works have been exhibited internationally since 2007. Currently, works from the *Personal Shopper* series are on display at the Astrup Fearnley Museet in Oslo.

Further solo exhibitions (selection): Kim? Contemporary Art Center, Riga (2019); Kunsthalle Bern (2018); Cinecittà Studios, Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Rome (2015); Kunsthalle São Paulo (2014); Kunst Halle St. Gallen (2014); Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2013); Halle für Kunst Lüneburg (2012). Group exhibitions (selection): Kunsthau Glarus (2020); Fondazione MAST, Bologna (2020); Kunsthau Zürich (2018); Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2016); Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2015); CAFAM Biennale, Beijing (2014); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012); Kunsthalle Zürich (2011); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2011); Kunsthau Bregenz (2011). Tobias Kaspar is editor of the publication and magazine series PROVENCE and part of the collectively run label of the same name.

³ Quote from *The Cherry Orchard*, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, 1904

⁴ Thanks to Olamiju Fajemisin