

Tobias Kaspar notices the signs of time passing and human life in the stiffness of models, in the collective ornaments, in the empty and forever duplicated gestures, in games and charade, in the medium of advertising, in fashion and in the way of life. Nothing surprising then when in 2011, the artist decided to create, with his accomplice Hannes Loichinger: *The Provence City Guide: Nice*, in which the traveller can benefit from the best advice to have a wonderful day, directly steered to the best hotels, bars and restaurants of the city. Recently, he launched a jeans edition, marketed at the Andreas Murkudis concept store in Berlin. What really counts in this work, as in what can be seen of the exhibition *Life and Lies*, is not the similarities found in a dissected fashion, but the slow apparition of a uniform. It is without doubt in the languor, the slow motion and the tranquil details that individual consciousness is best proclaimed.

The irony displayed by the artists of the end of the 20th century is here reconsidered. It is not, any more, a matter of distancing oneself, denouncing, or placing oneself outside something one is commenting on. If certain critics did underline the contiguity of Kaspar's approach to Philippe Thomas's and his agency Les Readymade appartient à tout le monde® - which adopted a deliberate critical approach of the art institution and the market - the parallel is not so immediate. The end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's saw the onset of an economic thought, where virtual and real intermingled, after the collapse of the communist system, only ideological challenger of capitalism. In 2012, capitalism now rules everything and everyone - thus the artist chooses a position of internal action in the system, without his criticism being clearly expressed as one. Far from thinking like an agent of an entryism still attached to the 20th century, we can imagine Kaspar gliding in a fictionalized reality, as described by the philosopher et psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek (1).

The end of the 20th century was branded by the "transparency ideal" of architectural avant-gardes and the tertiary aesthetic, which came of it. For the curator and critic Guillaume Désanges, it is the shift from the physical transparency (the one of office buildings) to its moral equivalent (the possibility to be seen at any time leads to the adoption of a happiness mask) which goaded the de-realization effect (2). The world Tobias Kaspar depicts here is no more about transparency: it is the escalating contamination of reality by fiction, by publicity and by an ideal of a mercantile happiness, the one described as the "desert of the real" by Morpheus to the hero of *The Matrix* (3). In our 21st century, products only exist through their brand or their western version, marketed for an average consumer: we don't drink coffee but Starbucks, like the coffee plants are only known to us through the greenhouses where they are exhibited in the big European cities. This is what Tobias Kaspar's works were about (*Espresso*, *Capuccino*, *Americano* and the *Sentimental Style* series), the ones we showed at the occasion of the exhibition *Blue is in Fashion this Year* in September 2011.

Soda is Coca-Cola, and even museums become globalized brands (think about the Louvre, the Guggenheim and their branches). The real is an image, a symbol, a sign; it becomes impossible to divide the symbolic and the concrete. "The ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the dematerialization of 'real life' itself, its reversal into a spectral show" analyses Slavoj Žižek.

With this new exhibition, Tobias Kaspar offers us a series of black and white photographs where we see him, dressed as a snowboarder, riding up snowy slopes. The self-portraits he here produces only confirm this contemporary adherence between the real and its commodification. When we see these pictures, though comparable to simple family memories, one cannot but think of these late night shows on Eurosport, and their endless loop of snowboarders grappling with alpine and American glaciers, or even a glossy version of the generic advertising images of Burton and Quicksilver. Tobias Kaspar's work seems to endlessly ask the same question: how can one do something new when every image that can be produced is always attached to its mainstream version, a product of mass culture? Seizing at once images undeniably linked to a planetary culture enables to apprehend the problem in a different way. No, we will not invent any "new" image: art then aims at staging these images, hackneyed by advertising and the mainstream media. Tobias Kaspar uses the power of such products, and the desire marketing creates around them. For whether it be the film *The Devil wears Prada* in the installation *Lumpy Blue Sweater* (2010) or the Guggenheim brand in *Bodies in the Backdrop* (Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, 2012), the process is similar: Kaspar extracts the familiarity we sustain with these cultural products to change the layout of our relationship with these same signs. The works in the exhibition linked with the Parisian catwalk by Belgian stylist Raf Simons in 2009, notably the display where Kaspar places the hairpieces, which the models wore on the nape of their necks, may bestow some material reality to a world of glossy paper. Or is the stake here to isolate an object in the gallery to give it an uncertain, changing, dubious, status, in complete opposition with its magazine version?

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(1) *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London: Verso, 2002; Paris: Flammarion, 2005

(2) "Rien que pour vos yeux", in *Intouchable. L'idéal transparence*, exhibition catalogue, Paris: Xavier Barral / La Villa Arson, 2007

(3) 1999, dir. Lana and Andy Wachowski

Born in 1984, Tobias Kaspar currently lives in Berlin. His work has been subject to personal exhibitions at the Halle für Kunst of Lüneburg (2012, cur. Valérie Knoll and Hannes Loichinger), at the Alex Zachary gallery in New York (2011), and at Hermes und der Pfau in Stuttgart (2009). He recently took part in the following exhibitions: *Made in Berlin*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, *La*

*demeure joyeuse*, Francesca Pia gallery, Zürich (cur. Anne Dressen), *That's the way we do it*, Kunsthhaus Bregenz (cur. Yilmaz Dziewior), *How to work (more for) less*, Kunsthalle Basel (cur. Annette Amberg and Adam Szymczyk), *Test Transmission*, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (cur. Caterina Riva). His exhibition *Bodies in the Backdrop* is still on show until December 22 at the Peter Kilchmann gallery in Zürich. He is also represented by Silberkuppe in Berlin.

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