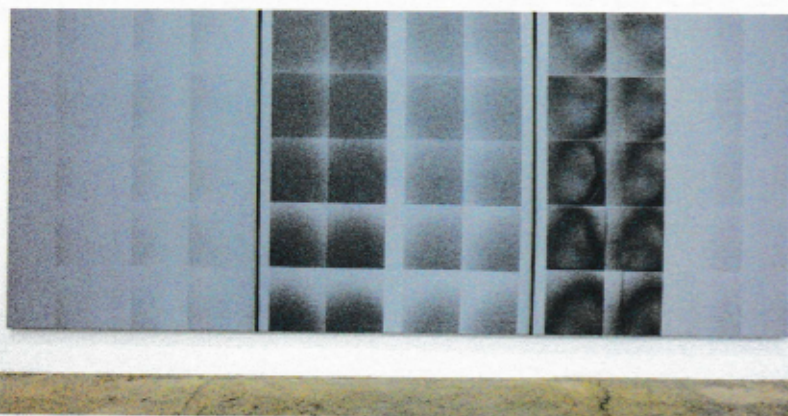


## Tobias Kaspar

SILBERKUPPE

Tobias Kaspar's recent show brought back memories of my puzzlement, years ago, over a pink canvas by Willem de Rooij that appeared to change color depending on where you were standing. In some respects, Kaspar one-upped him with the three pieces on view here, all *Untitled*, 2016. Their hi-tech, silvery, iridescent fabric contains particles of glass that appear to reflect light differently depending on one's viewing position. In the triptych in the gallery's first room, for example, a shifting surface of shiny silver rectangles emerged from the uniform gray you saw



Tobias Kaspar,  
*Untitled*, 2016,  
laser-engraved  
reflective fabric,  
5' 9" x 14' 3 1/2".

as you entered from the street. In the rear gallery, two similarly made works hung on opposite walls, each mirroring the other's negative space in a grid pattern. That was it. My first question was: Is making the monochrome shimmer really of sufficient interest to support an exhibition?

The answer—though I say it reluctantly—is maybe. Kaspar is one of quite a few artists today who seem to be having their cake and eating it, too. On one hand, this work isn't pretending to be more than a gimmick; on the other, and for that very reason, it represents a serious (if not exactly critical) engagement with the mechanisms that underlie the art world elsewhere. There's a magic to the fabric that's so fashion-forward it can't be confused with the sober pursuit of modernist purity; these works really would look great over the proverbial couch. Their visual appeal is overblown and not in any way sublime: This is commerce. Hotline bling.

In lieu of a press release, visitors received an all-caps narrative, printed on heavy card stock, to aid them in viewing the works. (I'll spare you the capitalization, though it's worth noting that it was in a stylish sans-serif font.) It begins: "Geared up in black boots, gold pants and a simple but elegant white sweater, she steps out of the shop." Fashion? Check. Commerce? Check. Ambivalent exit strategies? Check. The woman "examines the sky full with cloud"—a storm is brewing—before going back into the shop to install a window display. Then she goes, in the rain, to an opening in a gallery that happens to be across the street. The end. Gentrification heaven.

This fits with everything I know about Kaspar. He started a jeans line in 2012, and by the time this issue goes to press he will have presented

the culmination of his project *THE STREET*, 2016—a hybrid work including a newspaper, a store, various exhibits, performances, and no small dose of theory—in the set built for Martin Scorsese's 2002 film *Gangs of New York* at Cinecittà Studios in Rome. He likes commerce, artifice, and play. Last year he turned the bookshop/project space Udolpho in Berlin into *Toby's Tristram Shandy Shop*, selling only first editions of Laurence Sterne's eponymous novel. Given the book's own *espièglerie* with medium as material, that's a pretty clever meta-move. Through that project I learned that Sterne was something of an It Boy in eighteenth-century London, just as Kaspar is an art-world insider today, judging by the invitation box the artist designed to commemorate a Valentine's Day party hosted at the private home of (Artists Space director) Stefan Kalmár. This box, which was in the Silberkuppe office, is an homage to FOMO, replete with a poem on a teddy bear's butt.

Where does this leave us? As the Cinecittà project suggests, we live in a world of spectacle; it's not only the art world that's a Potemkin village. And, of course, not everyone fits into Kalmár's apartment, or wants to. So, do you join the parade, buy the jeans if you can't afford the paintings or a first edition of *Tristram Shandy*? That would be going too far, but the works in this show left you no choice but to move around the space to make the "paintings" catch the light—not in the best way, but in all the ways it could.

—Alexander Scrimgeour