



View of Tobias Kaspar, “Independence,” 2018.
BERN

Tobias Kaspar

KUNSTHALLE BERN

Helvetiaplatz 1

September 22 - December 2

“Independence” is a loaded exhibition title. It evokes a certain kind of gallerygoer’s cliché fantasy of art and artists, and it immediately raises the question: Independence from what? With its nondisclosure of the participating artist’s name, this show’s title and press materials proclaim a break from art-world convention while posing a paradox: a declaration of independence from a tradition of independence.

The curtain of artistic anonymity is lifted upon entering the gallery space, where one is greeted by rows of uniformed teddy bears (*Harlekin Teddy*, all works 2018) marked with large brand tags that read “TOBIAS KASPAR.” Two photographic prints of textile motifs hang on one wall, the stitched figures of the antibourgeois in *Dandy* (black) and servant in *Porter* (yellow) vaguely recalling nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fashion. The generic imagery of the European middle class acts as a gesture of self-exoticization and perpetuation of the myth of the Industrial Revolution’s rising bourgeois class, in this case exported by a Swiss fabric manufacturer to Japan since the 1960s.

In recent years, Kaspar has become known not only for researching the trade routes of the aesthetic economy but also for establishing his own merchandise—a magazine, a line of jeans, and now, the plush toy. Here, he also deploys architectural typologies that seem to riff off the aesthetics of institutional critique in their revelation of labor conditions in the art industry.

Half-built walls and suspended frames with gallery labels on their backs guide visitors through the space, where one finds champagne flutes from a hotel-room service set directly on the ground, and a film set constructed after the hospital in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. These scenarios—the comforts of a well-heeled jet-setter and Ken Kesey's account of the search for personal freedom within the strictures of a totally controlled environment—are imbued with a yearning for independence, while also emphasizing the material culture upon which they depend.

—Burkhard Meltzer

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