

ZURICH



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View of “Tobias Kaspar,” 2022. From left: *Mille Fleurs* (Leif Randt); *The Dimitri*; *Paris Fashion Week* (*The Revealing of Metastructures*); *The Balenciaga Revenge* (*Artist Pants*); all works 2022. Photo: Sebastian Schaub.

Tobias Kaspar

GALERIE PETER KILCHMANN | ZAHNRADSTRASSE 21

There’s hardly a less satisfying fusion between art and fashion than the “artist estate x luxury fashion brand” product trend we’ve witnessed so often in recent years (Andy Warhol x Calvin Klein, David Wojnarowicz x JW Anderson, and so on). In such conspicuous deals, audiences are left to adorn themselves with expensively licensed TIFF files on cheap cotton sold at hefty prices. To call out the superficiality of this trend is precisely to highlight its inherent relation to surface: Textile is treated as canvas and painting as pattern, now washable at 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

In his exhibition “Personal Shopper,” Tobias Kaspar seemed to propose a painterly retort to such merchandization: The Swiss artist has spent the pandemic rummaging through various luxury web shops searching for instances of fashion employing the semiotics of art. The results—essentially low-resolution screenshots of e-commerce imagery—have been ink-jet printed on canvases and used as the ground for an array of painted interventions. In *L’Atelier* (*Trunkshows*) (all works 2022), a model sporting a white Peter Do gown in a typical artist-studio setting fades behind a bright-blue cloudlike silk-screen pattern; in *Paint by Number Landscape Sweater*, the painting-like motif of an embroidered jacquard Saint Laurent jacket is extended onto the entire canvas by means of embellishing brushstrokes, stenciling, and more silk screens. The most distinctive works give space to Kaspar’s own art-fashion collaboration with a historic Swiss fabric-printing company, whose deaccessioned haute couture patterns the artist has silk-screened onto some of the canvases, bringing forth, yes, a *painterly* quality, their ornate detailing offering instant relief from their painfully low-res backgrounds. Differently, in *The Dimitri*, a sweater from the artist’s own wardrobe is roughly stenciled in gold on top of a web-shop image of a sweater—the specter of the physical commodity perhaps haunting the digital one. If the added layers of silk screens in *Paint by Number Landscape Sweater* tilt over into pure kitsch—resulting in a pattern nearly as tacky as an H&M T-shirt—at other times, such as in *Silver Brush Stroke*, *Théâtre de la Mode*, fashion image and painted gesture elegantly converge, effectively looking like one of the many hyped print-based art-fashion collabs that we see so often, and that Kaspar may or may not be critiquing.

With this scatter of strategies, it’s hard to gauge just to what extent Kaspar finds himself in on his own joke. How aware is he not only of fashion’s reification of painting, but also of painting’s long reification of fashion—from the lavish sartorial logics of seventeenth-century art to today’s socially networked influencer-painters? What are the effects of this postcritical response to art-inspired consumerism—and how seriously is Kaspar proposing his canvases as luxury products in their own right? The artist’s point about painting’s co-optation by fashion is contingent on the felicity of his examples, but by supplementing fashion-industrial paint techniques with his own gestural interventions, he opens his work up to an altogether different kind of formal evaluation: that of painting! His cautious painterly gestures—filling in an occasional floral stencil, adding expressive marks here and there—*look* strategically derivative but nonetheless *feel* pressingly sincere (or is it the other way around?). Kaspar seems unsure whether his own mark-making offers more than some fashionable splatter to adorn a pair of fictitious Balenciaga jeans, the theme of *The Balenciaga Revenge* (*Artist Pants*); viewers, in turn, are unsure whether to care about Kaspar’s paintings.

This critical cul-de-sac, which Kaspar has succinctly mined for more than a decade, is further obfuscated by an additional work, the ambitious installation *The Cherry Orchard*, which restages Chekhov’s 1903 play about the collapse of the aristocracy in turn-of-the-century Russia. With Kaspar’s postapocalyptic orchard, where Cyrillic fast-food packaging cast in bronze lay scattered among fake cherry petals, the exhibition’s tentative argument about consumer behavior—its relation to decadence, desire, destruction—strayed in too many directions, ultimately diffusing (much in the manner of a merchandise line) Kaspar’s otherwise original inquiry into the fraught relation between canvas and couture.

— Jeppe Ugelvig



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