

MINNEAPOLIS

Tobias Kaspar

MIDWAY CONTEMPORARY ART

Tobias Kaspar's recent exhibition, parenthetically titled "(Many who have a notion of their potential and needs, and who nevertheless in their heads accept the ruling system and thereby consolidate and downright confirm it)," could be seen as an exercise meant to gauge how much interest remains in mimicry as an artistic technique. When the communicative potential of artistic reduplication enunciates not the differences that condition such a parrot act but instead, as suggested by the title, strategically mouths the present arrangement of power's effects, what call is sounded in this charade of formalized poses?

Using something of a two-act structure, Kaspar aped two motifs of nowadays cultural production. The first was immediately apparent upon entrance: fashion. Kaspar premiered a line of white denim jeans in a pop-up shop installed near Midway's front doors. Titled after the Minneapolis-to-Wasilla, Alaska, convenience-store franchise Holiday, one of which neighbors the exhibition space, this retail display was complete with a pair of changing rooms, a precious selection of framed Polaroids, sardonically cheery wall-lettering, and sales tags with images from a photo shoot showing both intimates from Kaspar's own international coterie and members of the institution's staff modeling between and before the titular convenience store.

This was in fact Kaspar's second outing in the contempo-artisanal denim market, the first being his 2012 project with Joy Ahoulou, *20122TK1JEANS*, at Berlin's Andreas Murkudis boutique. But this exhibition does mark Kaspar's first attempt to artistically mime painting as a cultural product, which brings us to act two of this mum-faced performance. A modestly sized series of six rectilinear silk-screen-on-lacquered-wood abstractions made up the bulk of this presentation, and one also boasted the show's announcement on its surface. These reduced-palette works were encased in large Perspex frames, embellishing both their scale and their ostentation. Visually, they posed as images derivative of Mondrian or of, say, Josef Albers—yet it is worth mentioning that when the mechanical facture of these works falls short of the industry standard (which it occasionally does), one can readily invoke the hiccups of Wade Guyton's ink-jet paintings as cover-up for the work's registration blemishes. Despite the intimation of such a formidable visual canon, the layouts of Kaspar's panels (with their Duchamp lip-service series title, "Stripped Bare") are simply distilled versions of spreads from the London-based lifestyle magazine *The Gentlewoman*. Yet anyone even slightly familiar with Kaspar's emergent practice, which includes the production of the extensively networked

journal *PROVENCE*, on which most of his car will find little surprise in such an anti-aesthetic de performative mix-up of painting and design, Kaspar zine bare of its information so as to optimize his flat compositional space as a platform for conte or what could potentially be construed as neo-déi the key of bare-assed biopoliticality, is as une imprisonment in an invisible box of his own mak

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DENVER

Heimrad Bäcker

MCA DENVER

Visitors walking into the MCA Denver's Heim might mistake it for a group show. With bla graphs, floor-based sculptures, an austere grov teen issues of the journal *neue texte*, the variou immediately suggest the output of a single artist German-speaking countries, Bäcker (1925–200 plex body of work in two distinct historical World War II as a committed member of the Nazi Party, then after 1968 as a photograph working within the postwar Austrian neo-avant engaging in a long-term reflection on his own p by Patrick Greaney, this is the first exhibition of t at Bäcker's death and marks the first time his the United States.

To understand Bäcker's later output, one n photographs, the earliest of which date to his ye ist documenting Nazism in Germany and a where the artist lived (and where Hitler spent point of mass commitment to Hitler's program *Ceremony*, ca. 1943, in which tightly framed r are seen sitting and listening with rapt attention, on an armband. This conveyance of informatio tle clues continues in the pictures Bäcker mac when he started regularly visiting the site of th concentration camp outside Linz. If Bäcker's w standard recordings of everyday events under



View of "Tobias Kaspar," 2013. From left: *Core Lux*, 2013; *Holiday*, 2013; *Stripped Bare* (Exhibition Announcement), 2013.

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journal *PROVENCE*, on which most of his career has been hedged, will find little surprise in such an anti-aesthetic denudation. Indeed, this performative mix-up of painting and design, Kaspar's stripping a magazine bare of its information so as to optimize historically conditioned flat compositional space as a platform for content-without-qualities, or what could potentially be construed as neo-*détournements* tuned to the key of bare-assed biopoliticality, is as unexpected as a mime's imprisonment in an invisible box of his own making.

There is a coda to the exhibition's two-act structure—a decorative accent: *Core Lux*, 2013, which again reprises an exhibition constant of Kaspar's. This sculptural work consists of functionally ambiguous, dark-tinted acrylic constructions paired with a mound of floral foam bedecked with the waxen foliage of a boxwood plant. This arrangement was a sequel of sorts to a work exhibited last year at Berlin's Silberkuppe, save for the addition to the Midway exhibition—a humidifier housed within a perforated plinth, suggesting a campy yet well-mannered off-branding of Hans Haacke's early growth-network pieces.

Taken as whole, Kaspar's component parts, like episodes in a mime's routine, allow a near cruel but not tormenting enough (read: underwhelming) repackaging of culture exterior to the art institution yet concordant with the consumer-oriented lifestyle economies that predicate its programming. Thus, the pedigreed Dadaist strategies of "mimetic exacerbation" (as Hal Foster terms it) are reduced to a kind of niche-*en-abyme* community of echoing pantomimes. At a time when art as a culture industry so politely caters to consumer discretion, the ostensible freedom of its decision-based purchase power also necessitates refusals, and even a well-behaved utterance of *no* would seem a revelation, in contrast to a mime's conciliatory silence.

—Sam Pulitzer

DENVER

Heimrad Bäcker

MCA DENVER

Visitors walking into the MCA Denver's Heimrad Bäcker exhibition might mistake it for a group show. With black-and-white photographs, floor-based sculptures, an austere group of prints, and fourteen issues of the journal *neue texte*, the various components do not immediately suggest the output of a single artist. Little known outside German-speaking countries, Bäcker (1925–2003) produced this complex body of work in two distinct historical phases: first, during World War II as a committed member of the Hitler Youth and the Nazi Party, then after 1968 as a photographer, writer, and editor working within the postwar Austrian neo-avant-garde and personally engaging in a long-term reflection on his own past actions. Organized by Patrick Greaney, this is the first exhibition of the material left behind at Bäcker's death and marks the first time his work has appeared in the United States.

To understand Bäcker's later output, one needs to begin with his photographs, the earliest of which date to his years as a photojournalist documenting Nazism in Germany and around Linz, Austria, where the artist lived (and where Hitler spent his youth). The high point of mass commitment to Hitler's program can be seen in *Closing Ceremony*, ca. 1943, in which tightly framed rows of uniformed boys are seen sitting and listening with rapt attention, a lone swastika visible on an armband. This conveyance of information through sparse, subtle clues continues in the pictures Bäcker made beginning in 1968, when he started regularly visiting the site of the former Mauthausen concentration camp outside Linz. If Bäcker's war-era images are fairly standard recordings of everyday events under Nazism, the postwar

