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Tobias Kaspar by Daniel Horn

An almost interview.



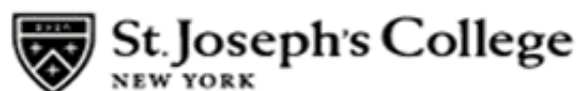
Installation view of *Holiday*
at Midway Contemporary
Art, Minneapolis, 2013.

Tobias Kaspar is an artist and publisher whose work limns the aesthetic sphere of contemporary art's social dynamics, symbolic value creation, and the lifestyle and fashion trends these by turns emulate, oblige, and distort. By juggling memes ranging from modernist Symbolism and Pop to appropriation and

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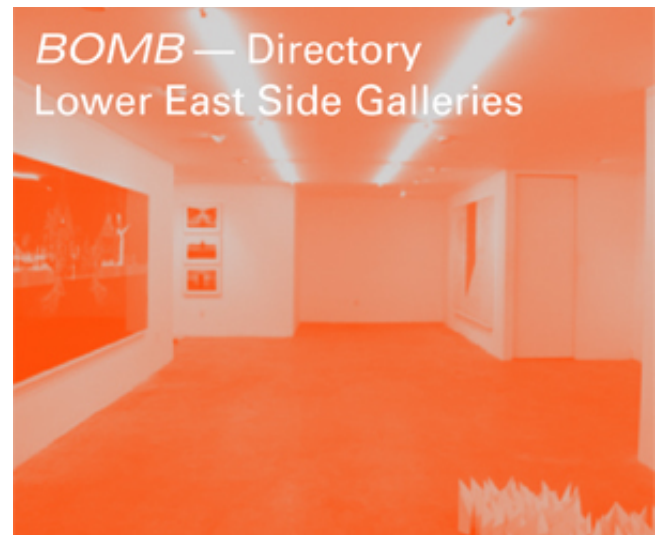


to be, not to seem.



institutional critique, his works reassemble the anemic residues of these personally formative critiques, exposing them to an ever-accelerating commercial image continuum that eagerly incorporates the latest forms of sensual differentiation and estrangement. This interview took place in Rome, where Kaspar was shooting a new film work, which just premiered in his recent solo show at the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland.

Daniel Horn I became familiar with your work when we discussed it in the context of your participation in the group show *The Estate*, that I curated at a gallery in Berlin last summer. Since then, we've had an ongoing conversation during which I got to see new works in



gallery solo shows in Zurich and Paris as well as the presentation last spring of your film *Hydra Life* at your Berlin gallery. You're currently based here in Rome at the truly stately Instituto Svizzero, where we're now sitting in the beautiful winter garden, in order to work on a new film which very much seems to be a sequel or correlate to *Hydra Life*. But before we talk more about this film and the new one in the making, I want to paddle back by reviewing your institutional solo debut in the US at Midway Contemporary Art in Minneapolis last fall. Your work occasionally elicits controversy having to do with an alleged methodical fogging of your critical stance—eligible hoaxer or hard-nosed skeptic? Or, in fact, a slick

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bankrupting of these arguably exhausted roles? Although this dichotomy, if in fact you consider it to be one, is not explicitly addressed in your work, which may render it all the more acute, you seem to be on a warpath, offering winningly smart works while steering a willfully rocky course in view of the foreseeable reception by certain camps, with which you at times ironically share an educational and social background. What's the game?

Tobias Kaspar Before responding I would like you to meet my friend Amalia who is visiting from California and who was in some ways involved in the Minneapolis show that you just mentioned. Have you met before? I'll get us some coffee. Sugar, milk?

Literature : Interview

Roxane Gay by John Freeman



Art : Interview

Tobias Kaspar by Daniel Horn



Amalia Thanks, sugar please.

DH Same, thanks.

A Hi, nice to meet you! You seem familiar!

DH Hi, nice to meet you, too! Well, I used to live in LA for a few years. Do I miss it! So do you want to talk about this show?

A Sure, actually I was supposed to go Minneapolis to help with a photo shoot but couldn't in the end. Tobias and I met shortly before, when he visited LA for a few days. I think one can say that the show consisted of two bodies of works, one being a limited edition of white denim pants labeled "Holiday," a name that came about through an on-location advertising shoot featuring the institution's staff and board members

modeling the jeans at a nearby gas station, that is part of a chain called Holiday.

Images of that shoot, in the form of framed Polaroids, were part of the exhibition as well. The institution's lobby area was transformed into a "Holiday" space containing a white bench, the Polaroids, two gallery monitors transmitting only white, two changing rooms, and a rack of white pairs of jeans whose price tags featured selected images from the shoot I mentioned. If one looked out across the street, the Holiday gas station was visible. The second major work was a series of silkscreen prints—quite simple abstract images of intersecting color squares that Tobias took over from this London fashion and lifestyle magazine called *The Gentlewoman*. There

were more discrete objects, too, that have previously figured in his exhibitions, such as a small manicured box tree and a perforated white plywood cube housing an air humidifier.

DH In conjunction with this literally institutional launch of the “Holiday” jeans collection, I’m interested in these changing booths, set up for museum visitors to try them on to potentially purchase a pair, right? Tobias had pointed out that few people used the booths for their suggested function. What do you think? Was that due to this non-commercial location creating hesitation on the part of museumgoers to interact with these sellable artworks, despite the relative affordability of the jeans whose price

seems adjusted to that of generic covetable art world denim/work-clothes, like APC or Acne? To handle them like they would handle items in a store? So that in a sense the jeans retain, or even reclaim, the kind of auratic exclusivity of objects in an art institution—Don't touch! Was this tension between the nature of the works and their potential buyers or collectors intended? Could one even discuss this interaction between objects and subjects —art and spectators —from the premise of relational aesthetics, even if merely as a gestural comment on institutional branding, accessibility, gift shop art?

A I don't think he specifically planned for this hesitation or tension in that installation. . . . Also, Tobias previously

created a similar edition of raw denim blue jeans, which were exhibited—or, rather, presented—at Andreas Murkudis, a store in Berlin. His friends and colleagues modeled the jeans during the launch event, and I suspect the location, its different institutional environment and the kind of psychology and spatial experience attached to it, was a deciding factor in the differing reception and interaction you're speaking of. Tobias often talks about this event at Murkudis as being some kind of school trip, going into places with a group of people that don't really belong there. As for relational aesthetics, I personally don't consider this figuring in this exhibition. My personal interest in these denim editions crossing over to a

fashion context is the reference to predecessors from the 1960s and '70s, when a number of artists created editions for a wider audience, for example Beuys, that in his case especially corresponded to democratizing art.



Installation view of *Holiday* at Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, 2013.

DH I suppose Karl Lagerfeld's collaboration with H&M may likewise represent a democratizing dynamic? But to come back, I guess the democratic impetus along with the crossover approach, collaborating with designers and fashion stores, at the same

time reflects on—
some may argue,
reiterates and
reinforces—the
heavily trending
collaboration
between the fashion
industry's and art
market's hierarchies.
Raf Simons, just to
give an example, has
previously worked on
a small capsule
collection with the
artist Sterling Ruby;
his latest winter
collection was
designed together
with Ruby, while the
one before featured
motifs from Brian
Calvin, an LA-based
painter, transferred
onto sweatshirts and
dress shirts.

A Democrazy!

Actually, one doesn't
only see that in high
fashion; Ryan Gander
previously
collaborated with G-
Star.

DH To turn even more
to main street, the
Gap had these
collaborations on T-

Shirts a few years ago with art world heavyweights like Barbara Kruger, Chuck Close, and Jeff Koons. Further proof of art's rising value as a global investment asset, such that its rise in actual capital is transferable both symbolically and economically? On the other end of the spectrum, Helmut Lang is currently trying to reinvent himself as a neo-minimalist sculptor in New York. What seems clear are the emergent economic incentives of art's growing popularity with a widening audience that is more interested and aware of contemporary art than ever, and eager to partake in its social sphere, whose membership fees have been diversified accordingly—selling the common man or woman bite-sized tastes of exclusive inclusion. I've also

noticed how fashion writing itself routinely now refers to certain artists or art fair trends in contextualizing the clothes they offer, be it on websites like Mr Porter, where you find artists, curators, even critics being occasionally featured in their editorial stories. Paul Smith's current collection namechecks the Frieze Art Fair, Ed Ruscha, and Robert Irwin as seasonal inspiration. This explicit contextualization of the goods on offer clearly expects the customers' knowledge of these references to be a given—rightly so, I suppose, since it is the same customers that actually buy at art fairs. What do you make of this trend? How or where do you see Tobias's practice, which clearly shows an interest in fashion and this industry's

protocols and forms of communication, being situated? Is it interventional by appropriating these gestures and economic dynamics—meaning, is it a commentary on these aspirations and on co-optation?

A This is fantastic. Fashion designers used to have really good "bad" ideas and now they refer to an art fair as a source of inspiration. From a distance—this is my opinion—art fairs are fantastic, like a market in Cairo with a bunch of people trying to sell more or less anything. What a cruising area. . . . On an entirely different note, when we talk about appropriation art in the context of Tobias's approach, we have to use a more drastic, radical term—I don't know which one. In general, I think Tobias is less concerned with

commercialization in terms of material. That seems to be an '80s or '90s issue. Do we agree to live in a so-called knowledge-based polis as we are constantly told by various "critical" outlets? I think this issue with the intellectual surplus value in art is what interests him, and how to somehow complicate the kind of consumption it creates.

TK (*Returns with coffee for everyone*)
In *Drive*, Ryan Gosling says, "Chevrolet Impala—most popular car in the State of California—no one will be looking at you." Brilliant!

(Kaspar then gives us a tour of the villa all the way up to its rooftop. Points to the big red glowing Martini neon sign that one can see from there, mentions

*something about its
appearance in the
film La Grande
Beleza and the
downfall of the movie
industry as being
brought up in Paul
Schrader's latest film
The Canyons).*

*(Back in the winter
garden, having lost
TK somewhere in the
house)*

A In my view, Tobias's work so far assumes a more general position of ambiguous distance —of non-distance, actually, not aiming for enough distance to have a "critical distance," instead being sucked into it completely, and only then, starting to look from that moment or position. The commercialization or popularization of art in consumer culture across the board that you bring up complicates or deflates former models and methods

of a partisan criticality towards the creative industries. Acting and speaking—or not speaking!—as if operating from outside these other realms—in this case fashion—since they have become so enmeshed, mutually exploitative and exploitable. What's more, I question whether this interest of artists in fashion really is such a recent or particularly contemporary phenomenon. Stéphane Mallarmé, the poet, published a fashion magazine in the late nineteenth century; it was called *La Dernière Mode*. Despite its parodic flavor, it really did circulate as a legitimate publication on fashion, design, lifestyle, travel—the subjects of rising interest to the growing bourgeoisie of its day. So this whole dynamic you mentioned is one

certainly much more pervasive, global, and commercially executed as then. But I think the interest of “high” art in the decorative/applied arts, and fashion in particular, is a crucial feature of modernity and for the self-identification of what it may mean and entail to be a *modern* artist.



Installation view of *The Air on the Way to the Oyster* at Kunsthalle Sao Paulo, 2014.

DH Yes, and when speaking of Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire comes to mind—his embrace or leveling of the frivolity and transience of urban aesthetic experience through the prism of mass culture like fashion. Its significant impact on “high” art,

spurring formal experimentation, and simultaneously, the attempt at immanent critical commentary—self-reflexivity. Tobias and I have talked about this magazine before, in the context of his and his friends' own publishing project, *Provence*, which is totally credible as a hip, glossy lifestyle magazine and may indeed circulate as precisely that among a certain audience. I guess you know it? When leafing through it, the premise and authorship of the magazine actually performs page after page this ambiguity and certain tropes of distancing you just mentioned. There are arbitrary image-text compositions; it's left open what they advertise, so concrete symbolic exchange value is being frustrated or, in turn, put up for grabs, depending on who

“reads” the content on offer and how it is read. There are disjointed snippets of art world gossip—say, a tweet from the Brant brothers at Art Basel Miami Beach—or simply current art market and trending phraseology popping up in between “improvised” fashion editorials that seem to mimic or pay homage to other so-called improvisational styles of fashion photography going back to the ’80s, with post-punk magazines like *i-D*. Jonathan Crary briefly discusses Mallarmé’s *La Dernière Mode*, which he calls “a kaleidoscopic decomposition and displacement of the very objects and social experiences that are evoked so glitteringly.” This may well be as good as any summary of the gambit of *Provence*, “adjusted for inflation”?

A Yes, Tobias has previously discussed *Provence* in the context of Mallarmé's magazine. But besides all this, there's also his interest in architecture, the body and garments, clothing, the textile—not fashion per se, but its materiality. From walls to textiles to the body—elements we dress ourselves in and which we use to define and build an identity in our respective society and circles.

DH The predicament of style. I've got Crary's text here; let me show it to you, because he further describes *La Dernière Mode* in a way that I think is rather fitting not just to *Provence* but for Tobias's work quite broadly: "The abundance of material objects and experiences that are enumerated are

finally no protection
against an emptiness
and anxiety at the
heart of this
impossible present.
[...] To be out of style
or 'outmoded' is akin
to death." This brings
me to the silkscreen
works you mentioned
earlier, which are
derived from this
suave-looking
magazine *The
Gentlewoman*. What
was the methodology
here?

*(Pascal, a writer and
coordinator at the
Instituto stops by to
announce lunch will
be ready in 10
minutes).*

DH Is Tobias coming
back?

Pascal I just saw him
on the way to the
store, but just the
other day he sent me
the following quotes
and asked me to
forward them to you:

"It's always a sign of
a kind of narrow-

mindedness when a person dresses very individualistically, according to his or her own design and own tailoring." — Adolf Loos

And in another one:

"First it must be bleached, that is to say, its own colour must be taken out of it – and then it must be dyed, that is to say, another colour must be imposed on it." — Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*

DH Telepathy!

A Ha ha. So, to come back to that work, these monochrome squares. They're the layout introducing the different segments of the magazine, which is divided into so-called "chapters": this quality of a magazine-as-novel, by which all the items and people are interwoven into an

inspired story, or an artfully curated exotic trip—traveling first class while “keeping it real.” *The Gentlewoman*, by the way, is the female companion to the magazine *Fantastic Man*. Each issue features a black-and-white portrait of a currently “inspirational” woman: no-brainers like Beyoncé or Vivienne Westwood, but occasionally odder inclusions, such as Angela Lansbury of *Murder, She Wrote* fame. The layout is very understated; and the magazine strives to concoct this superb admixture of style and surface, but also a professed insightfulness into “real” femininity, which is a highly glossed one. Which I, at least, find rather grotesque. To remove all photographic-informational components is also

an intensification of emptying out the content, literally abstracting the content by presenting the bare bones of this super-sleek scenario that is made up of these generically degraded high modernist tropes. On a more intuitive level, I recall Tobias coming back from a first site visit in Midway and talking about the director and his book fetish, the incredible library and its furniture with this Scandinavian minimalist design touch.

DH OK, I understand the strategy but want to ask, What's being proposed in return to this act of multiple degradation? What is replacing or filling the initial act—or is this gesture in and of itself the work full stop? This may be a long shot, but strangely enough I associate it with Mike

Kelley's series *Missing Time Color Exercises* from the late 1990s, where he aligned copies of the vulgar comic magazine *Sex to Sixty* with monochromatically corresponding color rectangles sized according to the magazine's format, creating this harmonious and—when seen from afar—formally pleasing grid composition. While the obscene source material being worked off here is diametrically opposed to Tobias's use of *The Gentlewoman*, the formal logic is similar. But instead of the dialectical high-low clash of "Color Exercises" spoiling instructional formalist ideology, this clash is absent in the Midway show—and so is perhaps any dialectic? Is it a negative potentiation of the "original"

content—a total huckstering of haute-vapidity?

A You have to understand Tobias was educated by a certain group of artists and theorists—having studied art in Germany from 2005 to 2011—educated to make art and, or *as*, critique. Obviously one cannot go on like this. And this is painful. It hurts. I think if it was up to him, all would be black—no colors.

The other thing I recall him mentioning is again the institution's director being a discreet, smart, and very passionate book lover, having built an extensive library for Midway with this tasteful design furniture, so despite the outward non-specificity of these works in terms of location and reference, these

personal-institutional details actually show up in the work again. When conceiving this exhibition, Tobias found himself in a provincial situation, somewhere in Switzerland. This provinciality, without direct access to cosmopolitan life and depending on secondary information, also led to the cinema night at Midway Tobias organized. He curated a trilogy of screenings: *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Effi Briest*. I recall him saying that the show's principal artworks—the silkscreen prints—are sort of imaginary works of what a present-day Madame Bovary would do were she a contemporary artist. So provinciality and dilettantism are key here, and they remain very decisive forces and modes of

differentiation in the market and the discourse at large.



Installation view of *Holiday* at Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, 2013.

In opposition to this, the screening and the jeans photo shoot were choreographed evening events that one could only experience *in situ*, while the prints are from a magazine and will presumably find their way back into printed matter. This reminds me that I wanted to describe the process of the realization of the silkscreens for Midway. The previous summer in Nice Tobias got to know a French silk-screener, which led to their collaboration on the prints somewhere in the French

countryside. I think it's these kinds of encounters and happenstance he enjoys to follow and recruit as the work comes along. It's information that's hard to get from the work but, in a way, valuable?

DH What I find interesting is what you said in the beginning, the art school "trauma" narrative. Diedrich Diederichsen compares Kelley's generation's preoccupation with cutting loose and slandering art educational father figures to the succeeding generation, which he argues seeks affiliation with their mentors at any price to satisfy some adolescent narcissistic impulse—seeking approval from these self-chosen parents, or uncles and aunts, big

brothers and sisters,
who are at the same
time also pin-up idols
and crushes!

A I think Tobias never really talks about it and seems to enjoy having artist friends of all generations. He sometimes uses a cynical term “peer-to-peer artists” instead of “artists’ artists” — that’s another hint to his approach toward professionalism. Although he studied at a specific school, he’s not really “labeled” by it, I would say. One could almost say he managed so far to remain unlabeled, for better or worse, never exclusively belonging to certain groups or being owned by them . . . you know what I mean? I think exactly this kind of dialectic or high-low antagonism you brought up by the example of Kelley is what has lost effectiveness for a

differently trained
and art world-
exposed generation. I
can of course only
speak for myself and
my relation to art
world histories,
schools, influences,
favorites. Let's ask
Tobias about this
when he comes back,
but I think he would
agree—simply not
mentioning
something or
someone, that
ignorance is in the
end the hardest slap
in the face. I think it's
more about liberating
oneself and things,
emptying them out so
they're available
again for something
new.

DH I want to come
back to what you
mentioned in the
beginning, Amalia—
this reference to the
1960s and '70s,
because that
humidifier sculpture
in the Midway show
immediately strikes
one as a
reformulation of Hans

Haacke's well-known
Condensation Cube.
This early work of
Haacke is associated
with system art, or
system/network
aesthetics, registering
aggregation states
while rendering these
not only aesthetically
effective, but
simultaneously
contingent on
institutional factors—
visitor numbers, the
amount of heat or
absence thereof
generated by
speculative
somebodies or
anybodies. Tobias's
cube is its cultural
inversion, providing
sought-after yet
invisible hydration
and purification for
the health-conscious,
hyper-sensitive, nut-
dieting-or-allergic,
organic eating,
exercising upper
middle class
museumgoer.
Considering that
Haacke moved on to
exhibit the political
and monetary
networks

underwriting the institution, what's interesting is the changed notion of the network in both of these works—a somewhat contentious subject, as concerns Tobias. I've noticed his work occasionally gets associated with network(ing), at times with quasi-accusatory undertones, as if networking were some kind of personal signature or vice on his part rather than the varyingly implicit or explicit re-performance of our economy's key underpinnings, from which contemporary artists are anything but exempt.

A Yes: "Performing the system, performing the self"! Who said that? Jack Bankowsky? Alison Gingeras? During the first site visit in Minneapolis, Tobias sent me a text message from a

dinner he was attending. The scene must have been more or less as following: Him sitting next to a young collector/investment banker who was constantly bubbling, next to a, as usual, deadly silent Tobias Kaspar, probably jet-lagged. Or, at least, that is how I imagine the scenario. What he texted me and then later in the night followed up with a longer e-mail was the collector telling him within five minutes how many artist “friends” they have in common—meaning people whose work he purchased—and how well he knows Berlin, and the bar Tobias always hangs out at, and so on. He went on talking about his Saturday afternoon activity of cutting his lawn as a pleasure activity, instead of letting the gardener do it. Then he asked Tobias how

he took care of his lawn. I think that's what interested Tobias—this gap, this miscommunication. Lawn? Having a lawn? In Berlin? With whose resources to finance? Not only this gap, but also sitting in Minnesota talking about Berlin; or being in LA and talking about friends in Rome—constantly wanting to be somewhere else, just not in the here and now. This constant mediation and being able to always seemingly follow and be well informed about someone's practice across entire continents and oceans, completely unaware of a certain loss—but also this privilege—through this kind of perception.

DH Just imagine all the stuff high-end escorts have to listen to . . .

A (*laughter*).

DH This notion of performance is so malleable, depending on who one engages with, and how well. The allure and capriciousness of performing that has redeemed itself as an ultimate survival strategy. And then its counterpart— performance as a key computable factor by which the value of subjects, *homo economicus*, gets evaluated, fixed. Enter Donald Trump: You're fired!

A I know Tobias is totally into performance, this idea of being in between roles. I think he wants to be in between roles, like when you talk to an actor and they respond, "I'm in between roles."

Regarding networks or networking, we are missing a Twitter

account here! The artwork as the avatar of the artist, the subject-objecthood focus shift are interesting discussions, but there is also something incredibly conservative involved which I find outstandingly disgusting.

DH Yeah. Exquisitely disgusting. A great oxymoron from where to approach *Hydra Life*, the film I mentioned earlier—it revolves around this zombified surrogate model, wholly consumed, yet also deeply immersed in a nearly classical painterly, perhaps Romanticist manner, applying an expensive face cream in a mirrored black marble bathroom. There is something Warholian about it, too, the way the film emulates the look and the conventions of glamorous, seductive

staging while at the same time perverting it, stretching and de-accelerating it to such a degree as to become unconsumable and tedious. Sort of hardcore pornography of narcissistic investment and aspiration, which by nature are the imaginings of apathy. Boredom! And, at once a deliberate failure to fetishize the brand or the sign assigned this function in our everyday experience—in this case, Dior—as opposed to Pop. Do you know if this approach and this kind of character are going to figure in a similar way in the new film Tobias is working on?

A I know the figure of the diva was at stake. For the new film it's more her classic suitor/pursuer—the con artist, trickster,

the Dostoyevskian, or Mann's *Hochstapler*. *Hydra Life* took place in an upscale hotel suite, while the new film is set in an exclusive Roman clothing store for men. I'm certainly interested in this notion of de-acceleration you touched on. While I would basically agree with the art-historical evaluation of *Hydra Life* you offer, I think that besides these observations what sustains Tobias's interest in staging these commodity-driven *Kammerspiele* is to wrest a present poetry of this image-as-commodity world.

DH And perhaps what visualizes this poetic quality you speak of is this cropping of banal items into the intricate surface that Tobias frequently devises—a large rectangular crop of a white hi-tech fabric jacket, emphasizing

fetishistic seams,
zippers, and so on—
which evokes an
abstract yet also
sensual glacial
expanse—a shiny
polyester parka, a
pulsating obsidian,
diabolical landscape.
Sublime—or simply
reflective of certain
tropes of “artsy”
advertising?

A There's this play
with framing and/or
cropping, for sure,
and I think it's
something that goes
beyond images like
the ones you
describe. They're
perhaps more like a
visual treatment, or
maquettes for
scenarios that, like
the films in which
these banal items and
surfaces and textures
reappear, form part of
the décor, costumes,
objects in question,
but then advance to
elements quite
essential to any
narrative structure. I
assume you also
received this cryptic

email at beginning of January announcing: “Con, a play in 5 acts.” Since I was already in Rome I went to “see” it together with Luca Lo Pinto, the editor of *Nero* magazine, who helped Tobias a lot with the organizing of the shoot, which this “play” actually was. That goes to show how the production of Tobias’s work, which is very concerted, is still improvisational—directing a group of people, cinematographer, model, photographer, and a few people “attending” the play inside this store. The model dressing into not yet purchased cloths, not belonging to anyone specific yet—blank sheets.

I haven’t seen any footage yet, but it could be similar in look to something like Catherine Opie’s Liz Taylor series. These

works generate their surplus also through the fact that Opie has taken photographs within Taylor's closet —it's really good, an interesting work. But I think Tobias prefers the blank, the not yet referenced, the potential of this anonymous glamour.

DH How could we conclude? The Midway show had this rather caustic sub-heading, which if I'm not mistaken is a line from the Fassbinder film you mentioned earlier, *Effi Briest*: "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."

A Yeah, the show had no title and was only announced with the artist's and institution's names, the date, and one of

the color-field
patterns that
reappears in the
show, inspired by a
poster for an
Ellsworth Kelly
exhibition at the
Walker Art Center . . .
it seems like he took
some things away
from touring
Minneapolis.

Recently I re-watched
this HBO Series
Angels in America
where Tony Kushner
states more or less,
“It’s something you
learn after your
second theme party.
It’s All Been Done
Before.” It’s pretty
obvious that in our
generation something
like that notion, or
judgment, doesn’t
matter anymore. It’s
about *how* one
stages, choreographs.
Strangely enough,
one can see that
Tobias doesn’t spend
much time on his
objects, the
photographs he
exhibits. For me they
look a certain way,

well done, but over
time, gain their
quality as props,
screens . . .

DH Tobias was talking
before I started
recording about a fan
with a machine gun
behind it, pointing
toward the mirror . . .
am I
misunderstanding the
picture here?

A (*laughter*) Well,
what you just called
caustic, I think, is the
quite sleek nature of
Tobias's work overall,
yet also jarred
through him
somehow not
agreeing to the
"terms and
conditions" of a
certain criticism or
reading. I do think
he's experimenting
with new ways of
criticism as the ones
we are used to—all
these terms, codes,
signs have worn out.
To me, at least, this
worn-out-ness is as
clear in the work as it
is attractive. The critic

Adam Kleinman once wrote that he felt lonely, like after a one-night stand, when returning from the opening of Tobias's first exhibition in New York. That might illustrate the kind of perverse dynamic set into motion, this quite personal reaction by the viewer to Tobias's "individual" yet detached pictures—their jumpy, damaged poetry squeezed out of non-places and never-commensurate commodities, of mundane captions, hearsay, overheard snippets, secondhand opinions and impressions from existing sources, or maybe made up—but also, what's the difference or how can you tell it, and does it actually matter? My question to him would be, Are you dancing on ruins for the sake of dancing? That's more or less Pasolini on Fellini in

La Ricotta: "He dances, he dances," as he says—quite dismissively I would add. If one feels attracted to the style of Tobias's works, one could say he's like a very good dancer. But as said before, for me, that's the surface, and it has cracks which makes it a sort of death-dance for everyone involved, not a kind of solitary, tormented last dance. Let's go for a walk outside in the garden and look for that "I'm going to get cigarettes and be right back guy" . . .

DH Sounds good. Thanks for doing the interview!

Daniel Horn is a writer and artist in Berlin. His texts are published in Texte zur Kunst, Frieze, Springerin, and Artforum.com. He is currently based in Tel Aviv to do research on a book.

*An exhibition of
Tobias Kaspar's work
will run at Kunst Halle
Sankt Gallen until
July 13.*

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