

Entangled Art Histories

The United States and the Two Germanies
1960–1990

Valérie Mavridorakis, Alexander Streitberger, Hilde Van Gelder, Erik Verhagen (eds)



Leuven University Press

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The United States and the Two Germanies 1960–1990

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Edited by Valérie Mavridorakis, Alexander Streitberger,
Hilde Van Gelder, and Erik Verhagen

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Must Art Hang?

Critical Ambivalence in Andrea Fraser's Exhibitions at Galerie Christian Nagel

Alexander Streitberger

This paper examines Andrea Fraser's two exhibitions at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne, held ten years apart, in 1990 and 2001.¹ I will argue that the two exhibitions, which mark pivotal moments in Fraser's artistic career, address the historical, political, economic, and institutional conditions of the art world in West Germany—and more specifically in Cologne, as one of the world's leading art scenes from the 1970s to the 1990s—to develop what I would call an aesthetics of critical ambivalence. On the one hand, Fraser adopts strategies of enactment, montage, distanciation, and de-proprietation to explore the inconsistencies of the political and cultural relationships between the USA and Germany. On the other hand, she investigates the ambivalent position of the artist being complicit with the art system while simultaneously being expected to transgress or violate its norms and conditions. It is ultimately in the controversial figure of Martin Kippenberger, the enfant terrible of the German art scene of the 1990s, that these two strands intersect, when Fraser reenacts a drunken diner speech of the German artist in her second solo show at Galerie Christian Nagel, in 2001. For his capacity to stage his contradictory behavior, Kippenberger becomes a catalyst for Fraser's critical ambivalence toward the artist's construction of identity across the fields of the aesthetic, the social, the economic, and the political.

Fishy Beginnings: Conceptualizing Reception

Like many American artists before her since the 1970s, Fraser had her first solo show in Germany, when she exhibited her work at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne from November 15–December 15, 1990. At that time, Cologne was still the cultural and artistic capital of Germany, before being replaced by Berlin over the course of the 1990s. Fraser knew the Cologne art scene through Joseph Kosuth, who had often spent time in the city since his early solo exhibitions at Galerie Paul Maenz, in 1971 and 1973. Around 1988, Fraser met Christian Nagel, in New York. He was planning to open his gallery in Cologne and offered her a solo show. (Simpson, 2006: 42) In the summer of 1990, Fraser traveled to Germany, where she was included in a group show of young American artists at Stuttgart's Galerie Ralph Wernicke. On this occasion, she also met artists linked to Nagel in Cologne, such as Cosima von Bonin, whose work was presented at the inaugural exhibition of Galerie Christian Nagel in the spring of 1990, and Michael Krebber, a close friend and collaborator of Martin Kippenberger who had attained the status of a legend in the local art scene. For her exhibition at Nagel, Fraser transformed the gallery space into an art fair booth. She mimicked the wall covering, the rubber floor, and the furniture used at Art Cologne, which was being held at that precise moment, albeit without the presence of Galerie Nagel. Fraser's conception of the exhibition as a kind of mini-retrospective was not exempt from self-irony given the scarce artistic production of the then-25-year-old artist, who was still at the beginning of her artistic career. (Breitwieser, 2015: 117)

The exhibition consisted of only five works, namely the wall text pieces *Notes on the Margin* and *The New American Painting* (both dated 1990); four poster pieces (1984); the six aluminum "Smileys" and "Frownys" of the 1989 installation *Amuse(um)*; and the video *Museum Highlights* (1989), presented one year before by Colin de Land, during the 1989 Cologne Art Fair. (Fraser, 2006) The exhibition display functioned as a stage set for the sole work produced for the exhibition. Placed on a table, the piece was a black binder replicating the design of presentation books used by galleries at art fairs to present the artist's biography and works. (fig. 1) While the exhibition's invitation card at the beginning of the presentation book appears to confirm this usage, the four following pages point in an unexpected direction. What looks like the artist's biography is in fact a chronology tracing back the political, cultural, economic, and artistic relationships between the United States and Germany since the end of World War II. The unconditional surrender of Germany acts as the first entry, and Fraser's exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel as the last. The remaining sixty-nine pages feature a selection of photographs and texts cut out from multiple sources,



including newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and other print medias. These documents start with an installation view and a review of Fraser's exhibition at Nagel. Moving back in time, they conclude with a 1945 photograph showing Harry S. Truman and James F. Byrnes preparing the Potsdam Conference to set the stage for the United States' postwar policy with respect to Germany. In between, numerous photographs and photocopies analogize various political, artistic, and biographical events to reveal the historical, cultural, and local conditions within which Fraser's show at Nagel ought to be situated.

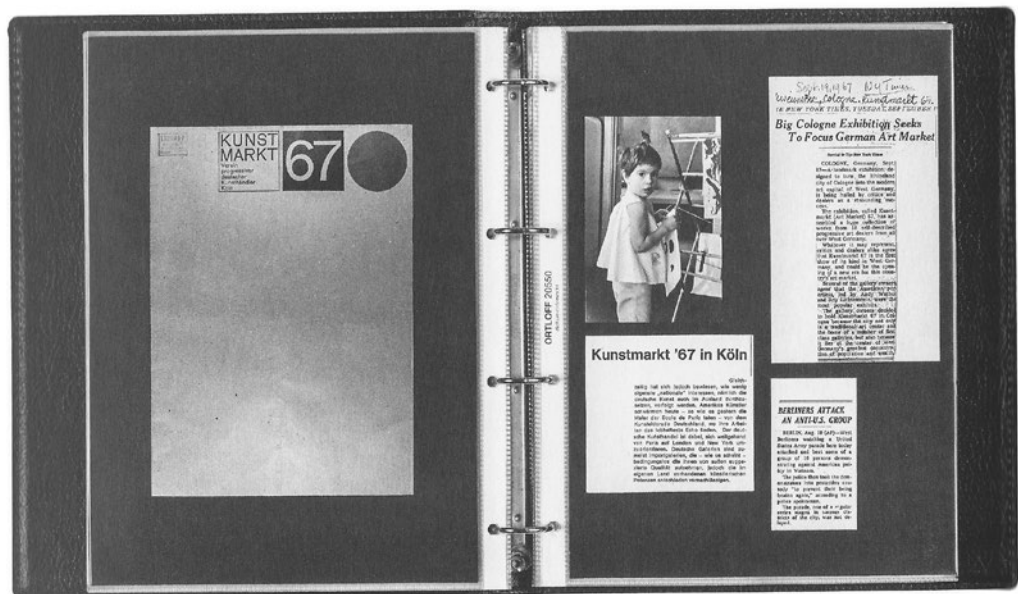
Looking closer at the chronology, we learn that in 1953, when Fraser's mother, Carmen Magrina, was sojourning in Paris, she went skiing in Germany. At that same moment, MoMA was organizing the exhibition *12 amerikanische Maler und Bildhauer* at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. For the

Fig. 1.
Andrea Fraser, Installation
View, Galerie Christian
Nagel, Cologne 1990.
Photo: Andrea Stappert.
Courtesy: Andrea Fraser
and Galerie Nagel Draxler,
Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

year 1954, the chronology describes that her father was stationed in Germany, Calder had an exhibition at Hannover's Kerstner-Gesellschaft, and the Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO.² However, instead of reconstructing one particular story on a micro- or a macro-level (her personal life and artistic career, the reception of American artists in Germany, or US policy in postwar Germany), the presentation book provides a fragmentary multitude of histories, loosely confronting and intertwining episodes of Fraser's biography; the encounters between representatives of the US and West German governments; the role of the Amerika Haus as an instrument to spread American ideas and information to the German people; the chronology of exhibitions organized by MoMA with CIA funding in German museums promoting American art and cultural life; and the growth of the art market in Germany, with a special focus on Cologne's art fair and gallery exhibitions. Indeed, the city served as an artistic center showcasing and marketing the latest American artistic trends. This history is not homogeneous and linear but fragmentary and heterogeneous.

For example, one sheet protector contains the catalog cover of *Neue Realisten & Pop Art*, the first survey exhibition of pop art in Germany, held at Berlin's Akademie der Künste November 20, 1964–January 3, 1965. In the opposite plastic sleeve, an installation view of the exhibition overlaps a Polaroid photograph of a man in a domestic setting reading a newspaper, probably the artist's father. Above, a photograph of US president John F. Kennedy and German chancellor Konrad Adenauer surrounded by a crowd in front of the Cologne cathedral and a short newspaper report of Kennedy's famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech testify to the fervent welcome that the US president received in Germany during his 1963 visit. This collage of various documents confronts what an American citizen could *read* in the newspapers about Kennedy's popularity in Germany with what a West German citizen could *see* of American pop art as it was presented in West German art institutions. The missing element of this story is dissenting voices, such as René Block's critique of the absence of the artists of Kapitalistischer Realismus (Capitalist Realism), the German branch of pop art represented by Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Konrad Lueg.³

Another example reveals that Fraser was well aware of such tensions and their conflictual potential in political and artistic spheres. (fig. 2) Elsewhere in the binder, the cover of the brochure for the first Kunstmarkt Köln, in 1967—which became Art Cologne in 1984—is opposed with three article cutouts and one photograph. An article in *The New York Times* titled "Big Cologne Exhibition Seeks to Focus German Art Market" praises Kunstmarkt Köln as a "landmark exhibition, designed to turn the Rhineland city of Cologne into the modern art capital of West Germany." Further, the article informs about the



number of German art dealers who “present recent art with American pop art as the main attraction,” suggesting that Kunstmarkt Köln 67 was held in Cologne “because the city not only is a traditional art center and the home of a number of first-class galleries, but also because it lies at the center of West Germany’s greatest concentration of population and wealth.” (*The New York Times*, September 19, 1967: 44) On the lower left, Rolf-Gunter Dienst’s critical review of Kunstmarkt Köln 67 abruptly contrasts with this favorable account by criticizing the German art trade’s unconditional worship of American art, which was turning Germany into an Eldorado for American artists while simultaneously disregarding its national interests, namely the promotion of German art abroad. (Dienst, 1968: 65) Finally, the third article refers to pro-American West Berliners who attacked demonstrators against American policies in Vietnam. (*The New York Times*, August 20, 1967: 7) Amid these controversial political and cultural accounts, a photograph depicting a young girl turning her gaze toward the viewer emerges. It is of the four-year-old Andrea painting in her home in Berkeley, California, in 1969. (see Fraser 2004)

In a completely unexpected, more evocative than documentary move, Fraser turns public history into private biography, suggesting that her artistic breakthrough on the European art market ultimately stems from the historic entanglements between American cultural and military policies and the institutional and economic development of the art world in West Germany. Fraser felt distinctly uncomfortable

Fig. 2
Andrea Fraser,
Presentation Book, 1990.
Courtesy: Andrea Fraser
and Galerie Nagel Draxler,
Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

with this situation, as she confirmed later in her contribution to the exhibition catalog *Make Your Own Life: Artists in & out of Cologne*:

The idea was to contextualize my reception in Germany and the peculiar fact that I was having my first gallery show—anywhere—in Germany, and at the tender age of twenty-four. Why Germany? It smelled fishy to me, and if I was the beneficiary of a CIA plot, I wanted to get to the bottom of it. (Simpson, 2006: 43)

Elsewhere, she describes the presentation book as one of her most self-reflexive works. (Fraser, 2006) The inclusion of the 1969 photograph of her as a child among documents of the first Kunstmarkt Köln, in 1967, underlines the fact that this contextualization is equally historical, documentary, subjective, and fictional. Rather than being inserted in an unbroken, coherent history, the decontextualized material is reassembled in fragmentary, heterogeneous collages spanning an associative network of cross-references to be interpreted by the viewer–reader.

De-propriation as Performance

In an essay on the theatricality of Fraser's work, Shannon Jackson argues that the performance *Museum Highlights* draws on Brechtian theater techniques of historicization, trans-contextualization, and distanciation to elucidate the position she—or, rather, her alter ego, fictional museum docent Jane Castleton—occupies within the ideological, social, and institutional framework of the art field. (Jackson, 2015: 21–22) In some respects, the exhibition at Nagel employs theatrical principles by functioning as a stage set in which the presentation book plays the role of an actor. As Fraser said in a lecture in 2006, the book should be understood as performance, not in terms of an acting body, but in terms of appropriating positions and functions within a specific institutional context. (Fraser, 2006) Seen in this light, the contrasting juxtaposition of various materials of diverging linguistic, national, political, ideological, and cultural origins may be described as the acting out of conflicting positions with regard to the conditions of artistic production.

However, I feel that Fraser's appropriation technique is inspired less by Brechtian epic theater than by Martha Rosler's quotational and ironic "practice of critical photography and text" (Rosler, 1982/2004: 139) and Mary Kelly's concept of de-propriation. Both artists transfer Brecht's principle of *Verfremdung* (distanciation) from theater to text–image montage. For instance, Rosler explicitly refers to Walter

Benjamin's claim of montage as a political instrument, "for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted." (Benjamin, 1966/1998: 99) Indeed, that is precisely how Fraser's presentation book functions. Furthermore, both artists reject purely quotational appropriation in favor of contextual appropriation aiming to critique the social, gender, and political conditions in art and society. In the catalog text of her notable exhibition *Beyond the Purloined Image*, Mary Kelly opposes purely quotational appropriation with a "strategy of de-propriation." (Kelly, 1983: 68) Referring to Brecht, Kelly defines de-propriation as a heterogeneous, disruptive, open, pleasurable, and political practice that aims to "transform finished works into unfinished works." (Kelly, 1983: 72) The presentation book is such an unfinished, discontinuous work that maintains viewers in a "constant process of reading" (Heath, 1974: 120), inviting them to fill in the gaps and detect the cross-references scattered throughout the pages of the book and extending into the exhibition space.

While the presentation book's appropriation of text and images provides a kind of chronology of American art in West Germany, the exhibition space mimics the format of the art fair booth, thus situating the show within the specific economic context of Art Cologne. The selected works presented in the gallery function as both an independent retrospective and a spatial extension of the presentation book. Once again, used as a tool, de-propriation as a technique of decontextualization and recontextualization reveals the multifarious, shifting significations and values attributed to the artwork according to varying ideological, political, and economic agendas.

Take the English and German wall texts. At first sight, they seem to comment on the other works presented in the exhibition. Next to the television set that plays Fraser's performance *Museum Highlights*, a German text describes the "Americans as globetrotters and conquerors [...]. They push themselves to the forefront in their work, their actions, the act of creation." This might indeed be interpreted as an ironic comment on the video, in which Fraser plays the role of a fictional museum guide. A little further up on the right, another sentence—this time in English—adopts a completely contradictory stance: "This work is shocking, abhorrent, completely undeserving of any recognition whatsoever. Millions of taxpayers are rightfully incensed that their hard-earned dollars were used to honor and support this trash." Next to it, on the adjoining wall, the text printed on a poster of Goya's *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuniga* (1787–1788) acclaims "the brilliant technique and breadth" of this Masterpiece, while another, German wall text further right ponders on Europe's state of defense because of "these young Americans" who are "beyond heritage and psychology, almost beyond good and evil." Confronted with these puzzling

contradictions of complete dispraise and unconditional admiration, gallery visitors are prevented from behaving as expected in a museum. Wall texts usually inform the visitors about the aesthetic qualities or the historical background of the displayed works, therefore confirming the authority of the art-historical discourse and the museum as an institution. Here, by contrast, it is anything but clear to what the texts refer to—Fraser's art or Goya's. Nor is it obvious who is speaking—the artist; the gallery; or, respectively, an English-speaking and a German-speaking critic expressing opposing viewpoints. But once again: viewpoints on what, exactly?

The English texts draw their origin from *Notes on the Margin*, a series of wall texts presented by Fraser at New York's Gracie Mansion Gallery in February 1990 as a reaction to the political attacks aimed at the National Endowment for the Arts at the time. (Breitwieser, 2005: 72) The piece consisted in seven wall texts in which the artist quotes right-wing members of the United States Congress who expressed their disgust with the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano. In contrast, the German wall texts were installed alongside other works by young American artists exhibited in the show *Art Supplies and Utopia*, at Galerie Ralph Wernicke in Stuttgart, in June and July 1990. (Dziewior, 2003: 118–119) The texts are excerpts of an article by art historian Will Grohmann in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*. (Grohmann, 1958) In the article, Grohmann gives an enthusiastic account of *The New American Painting* exhibition organized by MoMA and circulated in Europe in 1958–1959 as a promotional vehicle for American art and culture. (*The New American Painting*, 1959: 10–11)

Attentive visitors to the exhibition may have deciphered the origin of the German quotations while flipping through the presentation book. Next to the cover of the German catalog of *The New American Painting* and a photograph of a German crowd welcoming the then-American president Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower, two pages celebrate the hegemony of American painting in the Western world. The left page reproduces the first paragraph of Alfred H. Barr's introduction to the German catalog for *The New American Painting*, transferring Karl Jaspers's existentialist claim "to grasp authentic being by action" to the attitude of American Abstract Expressionists. (Barr, 1959: 16) The right page is drawn from the American reprint of the English catalog for the iteration of the exhibition in London's Tate Gallery, to which quotations from a range of international exhibition reviews have been added. (*The New American Painting*, 1959: 2) Clearly, the aim is to provide evidence of American dominance not only in the political and military fields, but also in the artistic realm. In his introduction to this montage of quotations, Porter McCray writes that the reviews prove

that “it was acknowledged that in America a totally ‘new’—a unique and indigenous—kind of painting has appeared, one whose influence can be clearly seen in works of artists in Europe as well as many other parts of the world.” (*The New American Painting*, 1959: 7)

While in the original catalog the series of quotations begins with an extract from Helmi Gasser’s article in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, in the presentation book the page features Will Grohmann’s review as the first entry. We may conclude from this that Fraser changed the order of the reviews to establish a link between the text on the wall and the quote in the catalog. Far from trying to provide an objective, impartial assessment of the complex relationships between the USA and Germany, Fraser opted for a de-propriational, pluri-perspective approach, contrasting, cross-referencing, and reshuffling heterogeneous documents and voices across time and space. In this case, the historical glorification of Abstract Expressionism as a radically unique, independent, and authentic expression of supposedly genuine American values of freedom and innovation was projected into the actual exhibition space, where it collided with recent vilifications of contemporary artists by conservative US politicians, pronounced thirty years later.

The six aluminum disks distributed across the walls ultimately provide a sort of humorous meta-comment on the items presented in the exhibition. The three smiling and three frowning faces were part of Fraser’s installation *Amuse(um)*, produced for the group exhibition *The Desire of the Museum* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where they were installed along with an audiotape player reproducing a series of phrases relating to behavioral codes in public and private contexts. (Dziewior, 2003: 112) At Nagel, the Smileys and Frownys looked down on Fraser’s own pieces, commenting on the antithetic contents of the wall texts in an equally contradictory manner. The presentation book and the exhibition are separate but related forms of critical montage, insofar as they are both based on the principles of fragmentation, de-propriation, and re-appropriation of visual and textual materials of diverging origins. They, further, provide the stage on which the exhibits interact not only with each other, but also with their specific historical, discursive, and institutional contexts, as well as with the viewer–readers, who have to connect all these items themselves. As such, the exhibits are performative in the sense that Fraser gave the term:

What concerns me is the relationship between what is performed or enacted in art, as well as in art discourse, and how those enactments are symbolized, represented, interpreted and understood, or not, by critics and historians as well as artists, but in art discourse above all. What concerns me is what that relationship itself performs. (Fraser, 2011: 155–156)

Performance as Aesthetics of Ambivalence

Yet this relationship is always fragile, shifting, and ambivalent. As has been shown, the documents and works do not fit into a supposedly neutral, objective discourse. Their collage-like, interruptive, and discontinuous arrangement reveals contradictory positions while integrating them in a display that mimics the institutional conventions of the gallery exhibition and the art fair booth. This ambivalence of affirmation and critique entails other contradictions, including the problematic relationship between the subjective position of the artist and the place attributed to them within the official discourses and institutions of art and the conflict between aesthetic pleasure and intellectual critique.⁴ Around 2000, Fraser explicitly broached these questions of the psychical, subjective engagement of the artist. In her 2004 essay “Why Does Fred Sandback’s Work Make Me Cry?” Fraser asked: “What kind of aesthetic experience can be admitted by a hardcore, uncompromising, materialist, sociologically informed ‘institutional critic’ such as myself?” (Fraser, 2005: 37) Three years earlier, in 2001, she had conceived her performance *Official Welcome* as “an attempt to engage one of [the] artist’s most pervasive contradictions: to be loved and admired and supported even while we critique and transgress.” (Breitwieser, 2015: 172)

At the turn of the millennium, this ambivalence was unambiguously what fascinated Fraser about Martin Kippenberger. But when she had her show at Galerie Christian Nagel in 1990, she was not interested in Kippenberger whatsoever. Since her artistic education in New York was fueled by conceptualism and feminist performance art, as well as materialist and post-structuralist theories, she was deeply repelled by Kippenberger’s excessive painting and self-performing lifestyle, around which a true personality cult emerged within Cologne’s art scene. (Simpson, 2006: 16) It cannot have been easy for a young American institutional critic to find her way through the complicated, cliquish Cologne art world, constantly shifting between the global and the very local (the so-called *Kölner Klüngel* [Cologne Clique]), simultaneously generously cosmopolitan and profoundly folkloric. Jutta Koether described this particular mix as a culture of “laissez-faire” based on Catholicism, carnival, and the entertainment industry. (Simpson, 2006: 38) On a gallery walk through Cologne around 1990, one could go to Galerie Werner to see such Neo-expressionist artists as Georg Baselitz and Jörg Immendorff, denounced by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, one of Fraser’s intellectual mentors, as the “ciphers of regression” (Buchloh, 1981), then stop by Galerie Max Hetzler to see works of the group around Kippenberger (for example, works by Albert Oehlen, Georg Herold, or even Kippenberger himself), and end with Galerie Christian

Nagel, which was showing conceptually inspired and politically engaged young artists, such as Cosima von Bonin, Christian Philipp Müller, and, of course, Andrea Fraser.

Yet, the distinction that has been drawn between the Hetzler group around Kippenberger and the theoretically oriented artists promoted by Nagel is rather artificial. In effect, the boundaries were fluid. Kippenberger was friends with Nagel and regularly visited the gallery representing Michael Krebber, his former assistant, with whom he shared the dream of becoming an actor during their Berlin years. (Simpson, 2006: 40) Kippenberger also showed up at the opening of Fraser's exhibition at Nagel and spontaneously bought the video *Museum Highlights* and the six Smileys and Frownys aluminum disks. Some years later, when Fraser met Kippenberger again, the German artist pointed his finger at her and laconically reprimanded her with the words "Kunst muss hängen" (art must hang). (Dziewior, 2003: 210) The reason for this remark was that the aluminum disks were difficult to hang on a wall due to their polished, hard surfaces. Consequently, they systematically fell whenever Kippenberger tried to affix them at Berlin's Paris Bar to display them among other works from his collection.

Kippenberger's utterance eventually became the title of Fraser's second exhibition at Nagel, in 2001. Between the shows of 1990 and 2001, Fraser's view on Kippenberger substantially changed. On the one hand, this is because she realized that Kippenberger was not (or not only) the narcissistic, misogynist, macho artist that he occasionally appeared to be. For example, he was very supportive of young artists, such as Zoe Leonhard, Louise Lawler, and Andrea Fraser herself, who developed a critical stance toward traditional structures of the male-dominated art world. (Diederichsen, 2007: 57) On the other hand, Fraser became increasingly fascinated by the attention Kippenberger paid to context, acting, and performance. In fact, Kippenberger was acutely conscious of the conditions under which art was produced, shown, and circulated. A statement he released in 1991 perfectly encompassed what Fraser did at Galerie Christian Nagel the year before:

"Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful; The whole network is important! [...] When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it. In a gallery that is also the floor, the architecture, the color of the walls." (Simpson, 2006: 12)

As was mentioned above, in around 2000, Fraser became increasingly attentive to the ambivalent position of artists simultaneously courting and disdaining the art system of which they are part. The shift in Fraser's work from questions of art mediation and artistic practice as service provision to the more psychological issue of the love-hate

relationship that artists have with the institutional framework—on which, ultimately, they depend—was correlated to a move to “performance as live art” and an interest in the recent media phenomenon of celebrity cult around artists as sparked by a wholly impassioned market. In this regard, Fraser candidly remarked, “of course, I thought of Martin Kippenberger.” (Fraser, 2006) In fact, Kippenberger possessed a sense of fulfilling the expectations of bourgeois society of an artist as an eccentric, provocative, and transgressive figure, while undermining these expectations in his narcissistic self-performances by propelling them to an extreme degree of grotesque exaggeration. Fraser perceived this attitude “as a profoundly ambivalent acting out of artistic archetypes, right down to drinking himself to death.” (Simpson, 2006: 44) In other words, Kippenberger’s contradictory behavior perfectly matched Fraser’s above-mentioned perception of the ambivalent attitude of the artist—herself included—toward the art institutions and the art market.

If Kippenberger’s volition consisted of exaggerating the bourgeois stereotypes of the artist as a tragic enfant terrible, Fraser exaggerated this exaggeration. At the opening of her 2001 exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel, she performed one of the infamous speeches Kippenberger gave at the occasion of dinners and openings.⁵ (fig. 3) Fraser reenacted the dinner speech Kippenberger gave in 1995 at the Club an der Grenze in Austria, at the opening of the first exhibition of his friend Michel Würthle, the owner of the Paris Bar in Berlin. Instead

Fig. 3.
Andrea Fraser,
Kunst muss hängen,
Performance, Galerie
Christian Nagel, Cologne,
2001. Courtesy: Andrea
Fraser and Galerie Nagel
Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/
Munich.



of rendering homage to the exhibiting artist by praising his artistic work, as is generally expected of an opening speech, the drunken Kippenberger insulted the audience, ridiculed the art of his friend, and told some of his notorious jokes, which were often without real punchline but peppered with misogynist, xenophobic, and homophobic insinuations. Yet, this sort of transgression of the social and institutional conventions was expected of him as the unpredictable, excessive, shocking artist that he devoted years to inventing and self-promoting. Denying expectations while fulfilling others, Kippenberger staged himself as a living contradiction. Retrospectively, Fraser described her ambivalent attitude toward Kippenberger as follows:

My interpretation, as I developed *Kunst muss hängen*, is that, yes, he was the drunken, macho, sexist, racist, homophobic, and possibly anti-Semitic artist that he appears to be in the speech that I found. I think he knew that he was, and I think he hated himself for all that and probably more. But instead of covering it all over, he performed it to an extreme, performing, as I've said elsewhere, the inseparability of that terribly seductive freedom represented by and enjoyed by artists and our enslavement by those very archetypes of freedom, which have often added up to the freedom to destroy ourselves, above all. (Simpson, 2006: 45)

For her performance, Fraser used a video recording of the event to rehearse the German text of the speech as well as Kippenberger's gestures, intonation, and movements. The result can unquestionably be labeled as grotesque: an American feminist and institution-critical artist who does not speak German mimics the behavior of a German artist who seems to fulfill every cliché of the macho, narcissistic, and sometimes racist self-performer. In doing so, Fraser deliberately exposed herself to the risk of ridicule. Considering that Kippenberger was a legend in Cologne, she suspected "most people anticipated that it was going to be a total disaster." (Fraser, 2006) Isabelle Graw described the mood in the audience at the beginning of the performance as "rather embarrassed."⁶ The performance was recorded and then projected onto a wall for the duration of the exhibition, where it completely or partially covered two of the eight oil paintings on display. (fig. 4) If one compares Kippenberger's original speech with Fraser's reconstruction, it quickly becomes clear that it is by no means a word-for-word memorized rendition. Not only are there omissions and cuts, but the various elements of the speech are arranged differently. Additionally, some transcription errors render the already grotesque content even more nonsensical: "gastronomischer Betrieb" (gastronomic establishment) becomes "komischer Betrieb" (comical establishment), "Durchbruchsausstellung"



Fig. 4.

Andrea Fraser, *Kunst muss hängen*, Installation View, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

(breakthrough exhibition) becomes “Dummbrustausstellung” (stupid boobs exhibition), “Strohalm” (drinking straw) becomes “Sprudel” (fizzy water). Most importantly, Fraser systematically replaced the name of the exhibited friend with the neutral term “artist” and made other generalizations (the Club an der Grenze simply became “the gallery”). Kippenberger’s attack on a specific exhibition taking place in a particular context metamorphoses into a general parable of the modern artist’s position, between affirmation and transgression, institutional dependence, and artistic freedom.

The paintings are of particular interest because they establish an ironic link between Kippenberger’s art and his public appearances. Whereas the sloppiness of these white-grayish abstract paintings might evoke Kippenberger’s work, the titles and inscriptions explicitly quote the dinner speech, thus posing questions about the relationship between work and life, representation and (self-)performance. Take *Keine eigene Darstellung* [Not (re)presenting oneself], a barely perceptible white cube on a white background. (fig. 5) The title is a quote from the beginning of the speech, where Kippenberger points out that he would not “represent himself” (Fraser, 2013: 41), while what he does in the following is nothing but an unrestrained, provocative self-representation. Another canvas

covered with vehement horizontal white brushstrokes, *Eine abstrakte Darstellung* [An abstract representation], refers to a passage toward the end of the speech in which Kippenberger answers his own question “What is fine art?” with the assertion “It’s abstract art!” simply adding that the latter has been repeated and pushed through to the point of being unbearable. (Fraser, 2013: 48) Relating these two paintings might suggest that it is in the very white cube as exhibition space—where abstract painting has been exhibited *ad nauseam*—that Kippenberger now performs his egocentric attack on the art world’s conventions, which then becomes the subject of Fraser’s ironic comment about Kippenberger’s ambivalent position within the institutional framework of art. Viewed in this light, Fraser’s performance can be described as a meta-performance, a kind of mise en abyme or palimpsest, where one representation layer displays and comments on another.⁷



Fig. 5.
Andrea Fraser, *Keine eigene Darstellung*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 70x70 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

Jetzt kommt ein Künstlerwitz [Now it’s time for an artist’s joke] and *Schildkrötenwitz* [Turtle joke] allude to Kippenberger’s habit of sprinkling weird, often racist and misogynistic jokes into his speeches. (fig. 6) *Jetzt kommt ein Künstlerwitz* refers to the fact that Kippenberger



Fig. 6.

Andrea Fraser, *Jetzt kommt ein Künstlerwitz*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 65x65 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich.

constantly announced jokes—one of which being the *Schildkrötenwitz*—but always deviated and leaped from one subject to another before actually telling two somewhat tasteless and discriminatory jokes. Fraser painted the sentence in white letters on a smudgy grayish background evoking a blackboard after the teacher has negligently wiped away the chalk writing. Thus, the painting humorously highlights the fact that the joke has disappeared (or never was there), while at the same time quoting Kippenberger’s white paintings of the early 1990s, in which the artist asked a nine-year-old boy to write concise descriptions of his earlier works in white color on white canvas, invariably including the remark “very good.” (Kippenberger 2016: 343) (fig. 7 and fig. 8) As Manfred Hermes pointed out, in these works Kippenberger “both addressed and out[did] the paradox that fairly grandiose assertions can be made on the basis of next to nothing.” (Hermes, 2013: 35) Undoubtedly, Fraser was intrigued by Kippenberger’s critical mockery of abstract painting and the mechanisms whereby aesthetic and economic values are attributed to an artwork. This becomes even more explicit in *Ein Wettbewerb* [A competition]. The title evokes Kippenberger’s comparison of the art world with the Olympic Games as a competition based on the principle



of a winner, a second-placed, and a third-placed.⁸ Fraser recycled the motif of the yellow circle surrounded by a white ring from *Schildkröte*, which is reminiscent of the abstracted shape of a turtle. Now, the exclamation “TRY AGAIN!” inscribed in the yellow circle, transforms the abstract turtle into a badge encouraging the reader to be the winner next time. (fig. 9) In 1987 and 1994, Kippenberger produced his *Preisbilder* [Prize pictures], in which a numerical rank is added to the word *Preis*. Playing with the polysemic character of this word meaning both “cost” and “award,” Kippenberger questioned the impact that rankings are having on the market value and the institutional success of paintings. Including a half prize (*1/2 Preis*), a consolation prize (*Trostpreis*), and even a painting without a prize (*preislos*), the *Preisbilder* reveal the arbitrariness of artistic hierarchies and “undermine the rankings they themselves postulate.” (Kippenberger, 2016: 53) (fig. 10)

In addition, the six Smileys and Frownys, purchased by Kippenberger on the occasion of Fraser’s first exhibition at Galerie Nagel, were distributed across the exhibition walls. In a sense, they commented on the exhibition’s thoroughly ambivalent character: the ambivalence of Kippenberger himself, which is both revealed and taken to extremes by Fraser’s performance, but also the ambivalence of the paintings, which, oscillating between formal minimalism and Kippenbergerian gestures, simultaneously ironically reflect and confirm the commodity character of art.⁹

Fig. 7.

Martin Kippenberger, *Untitled (Weiße Bilder/ White Paintings)*, 1991, Varnish on canvas. 11 parts, Installationsansicht in der/ Installation view at Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt, 2003. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Courtesy Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt.

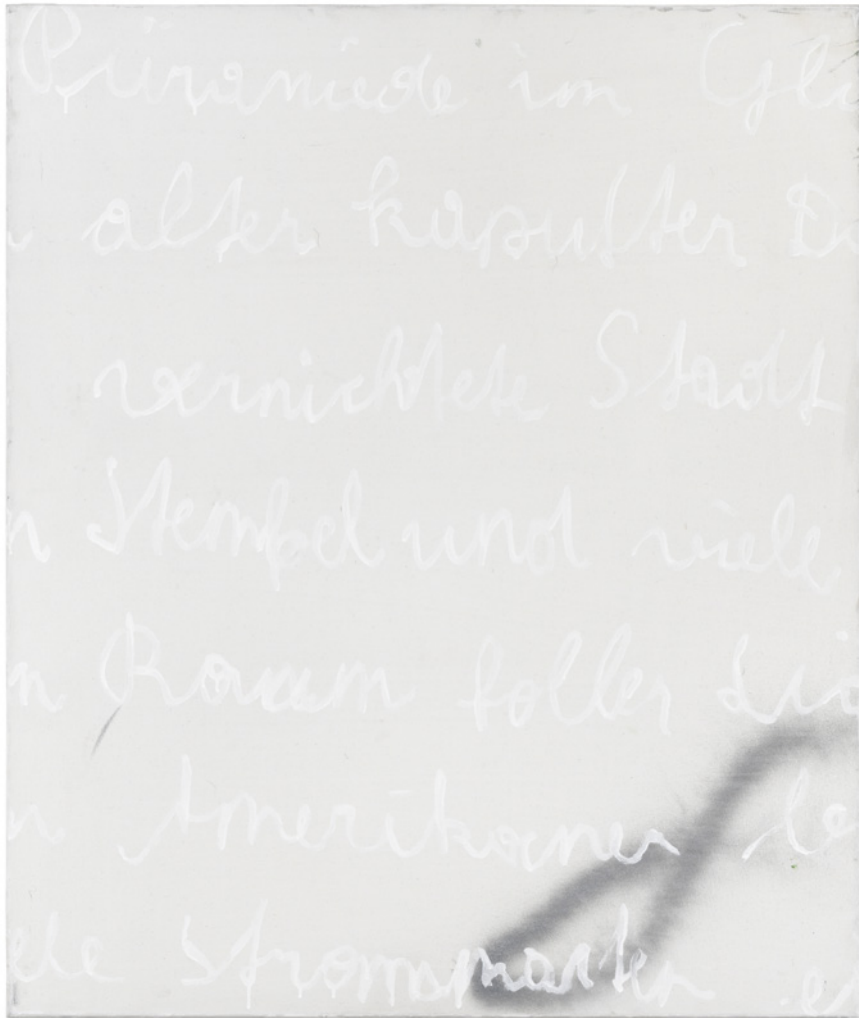


Fig. 8.

Martin Kippenberger, *Ohne Titel/Untitled (Weiße Bilder/White Paintings)*, 1991, Varnish on canvas, Detail of the 11-part installation, 120×100 cm. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Lothar Schnepf, Cologne.



Fig. 9.

Andrea Fraser, *Ein Wettbewerb*, 2001, oil and graphite on canvas, 65x65 cm, Installation component of *Kunst muss hängen*, Galerie Christian Nagel, 2001. Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy: Andrea Fraser and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne/ Munich. See also [Plate 3](#).



Fig. 10.

Martin Kippenberger, *1/2 Preis / 1/2 Price*, 1994. Oil on canvas. 120x100 cm. © Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Wolfgang Günzel, Offenbach, Courtesy Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt. See also [Plate 4](#).

Interjecting and Enacting

As Alexander Alberro rightly observed, Fraser's re-performance of Kippenberger's speech recalls strategies of appropriation art of the late 1970s and early 1980s putting into question "ideologies of authorship, originality, and subjectivity." (Alberro, 2007: 175) Alberro further parenthetically introduced the term introjection to describe Fraser's act of mimicry, thus opening up a psychological dimension of the performance. (Alberro, 2007: 175) Indeed, the deviations from Kippenberger's original speech, the semantic inconsistencies, and the defective pronunciation suggest that Fraser interpreted Kippenberger's performance as an enactment in the psychoanalytical sense.¹⁰ According to Jacques Lacan, hesitations, bungled actions, slips of the tongue, and inaccuracies of the narrative are part of the analytic experience, for they are symptoms of unconscious formations of the subject. (Lacan, 1966/2006: 65, 84, 713) While such irregularities already frequently occurred in Kippenberger's speech, Fraser's reenactment overplayed them and thus revealed their grotesque and ambivalent nature. In psychoanalysis, enactment is defined as the partly unconscious living out of behaviors, conflicts, and fantasies within the boundaries of the analytic frame.¹¹ In Kippenberger's case, the boundaries were defined by the institutional environment within which he acted as an artist. Kippenberger was not intellectualizing or reflecting on his behavior inside a given social and psychological framework, but he was living it out as an affective experience that was, unlike the enactment in a psychoanalytical session, of course, also staged and controlled by himself. If Fraser reenacted Kippenberger's enactment, she ultimately performed a psychological act of introjection by adopting the thoughts, forms of behavior, or personality traits of another person. Yet, she did so as somebody who, within the art scene and discourse, occupied the exact opposite position of the German artist: first as an American artist who did not speak German, then as a woman involved in feminism, and, finally, as an institutional critic who tried to analyze and transform the very attitudes and behaviors that Kippenberger has carried to extremes.

Unlike Alberro, who compared Fraser's reenactment with Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine's appropriational approaches, I would, rather, argue that *Kunst muss hängen*, as exhibition, is more akin to the above-discussed concept of de-appropriation. If we understand the video not as an autonomous work, but as part of a multi-media installation, it appears as what I termed, concerning the 1990 exhibition, a critical montage based on the techniques of *Verfremdung*, decontextualization, and recontextualization of diverging representational formats and contexts—comprising actions, paintings, words, and aluminum disks. One of the most salient threads of Fraser's practice of critical montage

is the reflection on—and the acting out of—the ambivalences of the artist’s position in the field of art. In the first Cologne exhibition in 1990, Fraser addressed the ambiguities of the conflicting interests on the cultural, political, and economic levels in the relationships between the USA and Germany since World War II. She, further, related these historical conflicts with her own “fishy” position as a young American artist of the institutional critique who was being discovered and promoted in Cologne, one of the most powerful art markets of the era. In *Kunst muss hängen*, Fraser stressed the psychological implications of artistic (self-)performance. Therefore, she linked the question of the artist’s problematic position between freedom and determination to Martin Kippenberger, who, “as self-staging contradiction” (Simpson, 2006: 16) acted out an excessive version of artistic freedom that dialectically revealed itself as the very product of the social and institutional frameworks it endeavored to transgress. From this perspective, Fraser’s aesthetics of critical ambivalence owes a lot to Kippenberger, of whom she said:

The most difficult thing to do as an artist is to perform the inseparability of freedom and determination: to perform that contradiction without forgetting that you can’t escape it through an act of will or reflection or a gesture of transgression. It’s what I’m always trying to do but fear I’m failing. But I do think Kippenberger succeeded. (Fraser, 2003: 103)

Notes

1. I would like to express my warmest thanks to Galerie Christian Nagel Draxler and Galerie Gisela Capitain for giving me access to their archives, databases, and libraries. Special thanks go to Cornelia Zinken-Reinhardt and Maja Funke of Galerie Christian Nagel Draxler and to Lena Ipsen and Lisa Franzen of Galerie Gisela Capitain, for their availability, their kindness, and their skilful support. I also want to thank the collaborators of the library of Museum Ludwig, Cologne, who were of great help in finding documents about Fraser’s exhibitions in Cologne. Finally, I thank Paula Cook for the careful proofreading of the text.
2. Germany was invited to join NATO in 1954 but only entered the organisation on May 5, 1955.
3. During the opening of the exhibition *Neue Realisten & Pop Art*, Block distributed handouts asking: “Please count how many German artists are missing from this exhibition.” (Weier, 2015: 4)
4. This conflict between aesthetic pleasure and critical distanciation has been extensively discussed as part of the feminist discourse of the 1970s and 1980s by such writers as Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock, Stephen Heath, and Victor Burgin (see Streitberger, 2020: 118–119). Fraser, who repeatedly acknowledged the influence of feminist theory and art on her work, was well aware of these discussions. (Alberro, 2005: xix)
5. In 1991, at a dinner following an exhibition by Kippenberger at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Fraser witnessed one of the artist’s infamous, never-ending speeches, which she

subsequently described as “a highly ritualized sadomasochistic enactment in which he alternately charmed and insulted, titillated and abused his supporters, all the while denying them food.” (Simpson, 2006: 44)

6. Graw describes the audience’s reactions in the following terms: “Most of those present looked down to the floor in embarrassment or secretly hoped that it would soon be over. Fraser tried to look like Kippenberger, wearing a suit in the style of the eighties with a white shirt, typical for Kippenberger, but in this clothing she also seemed a little lost. Her attempt to imitate the typical Kippenberger gestures was equally unconvincing. It was unmistakably Fraser who made a great effort to play Kippenberger. But it was precisely the intolerance of this gap that made the action so overbearing. It was only after Fraser had proved her tenacity and convincingly acted out a Kippenberger joke that relief and genuine amusement spread. People began to concede Fraser’s presumptuousness, partly because exaggerated claims of this kind would probably have been entirely in the sense of Kippenberger, who for his part liked to violate sacrosanct values.” (Graw, 2003: 78)
7. I am referring here to W. J. T. Mitchell’s concept of metapicture (Mitchell, 1994).
8. At the commencement of his speech, Kippenberger declares: “*Olympic* competition. *Olympic Games*. The first, the second, the third.

So, what we have here is a competition, of the most intimate kind, at the end of the world.” (Fraser, 2013: 41)

9. Incidentally, these were sold individually, along with a copy of the performance on DVD.
10. In an interview, Fraser emphasizes that she prefers the term enactment rather than performance, due to its psychoanalytical implications. (Breitwieser, 2015: 15)
11. Hirsch defined enactment as “a living out of affective experience, usually by both parties in the analytic dyad, within the strict boundaries of the analytic frame.” (Hirsch, 1994: 172) According to Douglas Frayn, “the action, in the enactment, has unconscious determinants and replaces remembering or reflection on the impulse.” (Frayn, 1996: 194) Finally, Levine and Friedman define enactments as “constructed dramas that are jointly lived out rather than only spoken of.” (Levine and Friedman, 2000: 73) Although there is no joint experience between a therapist and a patient in Kippenberger’s or Fraser’s performances, they correspond to the psychoanalytical definition of enactment as constructed drama enabling the living out of an impulsive, affective experience inside the boundaries of a strictly defined frame (the institution).

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