

## Johannes, Good to talk with you yesterday!

There is not really an exact plan of how the interview text can work but I'll have a think and write again very soon. The gallery in Geneva is called *BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services*. And I'm really pleased that we can make a trade... until soon again jm

Hi Jonathan, thank you for your message. This is very funny because I know the gallery in Geneva quite well. Marc Blondeau and Philippe Davet bought some works of mine and I also showed there two or three times in group shows. We also talked about a solo show but it wasn't realized yet... I'll send you the painting book including the Smiths-paintings to your address in Berlin. I also used the material for an artist book which is more like an object. Please feel free to contact me anytime with your questions. Of course you can also call if you prefer this... In the meantime I'll check which of the paintings are still available... All my best, Johannes

Johannes – all sounds good – I'll think of a good way to start the interview and I look forward to receiving your catalogues etc – so more soon – jm – And this is perhaps a good way to start the interview type text thing – Do you think MK would have approved of my *Lieber Maler, male mir* open ended extension?

Your package arrived this morning with many thanks. I really like *Smiths Painting No. 7* which I think is Terrance Stamp but they are all great so I'd be happy with any of them... and did you have a moment to think about my question? And if you'd prefer to start by asking me something then that is also fine. Until then jm

Hi Jonathan, happy to hear that everything arrived safely at your home. I'll check about the Terence Stamp version, still waiting for the answers from the consigning galleries... Concerning your question: This is hard to tell for me because I can't speak for him. During his lifetime he was generally quite open about artist colleagues making use of his work. I could draw one analogy from my experience with Martin. Before I started working for him I did a series of watercolours which were based on his *Heavy Burschi/Heavy Mädel* series. It was a remake or more a remix of this series which was already meant to be to work like a remix of existing works. During our job interview he asked me about my interest in his work so I told him about my work based on his and

had to show it to him the next day. When he saw the whole portfolio with the series of 51 watercolour images he seemed to like it. At least it was a proof for him that I was seriously into his work because he could see that I invested a lot of time to make the watercolours. In the end he signed some of the watercolours and gave it the title *Heavy Fuzzi* which stands in a line with the other titles and is most likely derived from the word *Schnulzenfuzzi* which he used frequently. Also he did so with works by students or assistants which he just signed and made his own. In the beginning of the 1990s he gave a work of his to Cosima von Bonin who showed it under her name in a gallery show and he then bought it back as a work of Cosima's... So probably he would have asked you for a trade...

I sense a kind of YES/NO/MAYBE situation here – and I completely understand it is very difficult to know how Martin might have reacted to this particular work. I think my original idea of employing a painter to repaint images that were originally made in the same way is an obvious extension to things I have done before. Pushing the works of others a little further down the same path. It has been common place to commission works of art since the 60's and the minimalists could make entire shows from the yellow pages, but these kind of works always had a very hard edge, in the end there was very little of their maker visible. Martin appears to have clearly encouraged the idea of sharing or borrowing or taking the works of others and using their style and working methods as his own and vice versa. I guess almost his entire output can be mapped by the assistants he employed. I often employ a similar tactic and attempt to make works that can be produced via instruction. Each time the resulting work is exactly the same but completely different. But I can't work with assistants in the same way as MK did. I do have people working for me all the time but they are not in my studio. I like to sit quietly doing my things while my outworkers are busy doing my things elsewhere. What was Martin's studio situation like?

Martin had different studio situations. He was working with students or assistants at his studio sometimes but had also people working for him at their places. He enjoyed his last studio in Austria very much and was very productive there. Also he liked being in Syros/Greece and working on Michel Würthle's compound there. He went to town with his crayons and did hotel drawings at a café. In the afternoon we picked him up and went to the beach... Martin moved a lot and so had different places with different people working for him and helping him. Each place had an

other character and seemed to work slightly different. When I started working for him I visited him in Frankfurt first, shortly after he moved to St. Georgen in the Black Forest in the south of Germany.

Martin's studio practice seems to be a roll model for me (and many others) without realizing it. I tend to work on projects with specific people and continue to do this until the energy is all used up. A series of works can last until it is complete and their completeness is often controlled by those involved rather than the ideas involved. I do not move around that much, but clearly ideas change with ones environment and with the people one associates with. I think originally the *Lieber Maler, male mir* was co-signed with Werner, the painter who was hired to make the work, but this connection seems to have been lost over time. I know that you (and other assistants) made works for Martin without a great deal of input. Did this feel odd at the time or was it just part of the energetic creative studio situation – a kind of Warhol Fabrik?

No, not at all, it didn't feel odd because it was more or less daily practise. Martin encouraged his assistants to work in his mind. He was always curious for this kind of input. When I worked for him I wasn't purely the studio assistant but worked more on the organisational side running his office as a secretary. At that time I was collecting material for him related to *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's Amerika*, street lamps, eggs, interesting books, furniture etc... Also I was making photographs for him when I found interesting reference material somewhere which he then used. This was really normal and there were many befriended people collecting stuff for him like hotel stationary or odd shaped pasta. When I visited him at his studio we worked together and then there was sometimes a kind of 'Factory'-feeling if not in NYC but in the Black Forest. There were other students and assistants like Sven O. Ahrens or Thilo Heinzmann around, the Grässlin family and people visiting like the photographer Albrecht Fuchs who did portraits of MK then. Look at this photo so you can imagine it better [www.albrechtfuchs.de/portraits/franz-west-2.html](http://www.albrechtfuchs.de/portraits/franz-west-2.html). The studio was stuffed with works by other artists and good furniture, a wonderful working atmosphere. We used to watch a lot of TV. I had the remote control and Martin told me when to switch... in the afternoon he slept and I was drawing, in the early evening we went out to the restaurant, eating, drinking, talking and some more work after we returned to the studio. We were also allowed to do our own works at his studio, sometimes he used the paintings as backgrounds for his works. Also I wanted to ask you some questions

related to Kippenberger. Did you ever meet him or experience him during his lifetime?

Sadly I never met MK. Douglas Gordon and I often spoke about inviting him to make a project in Glasgow. But we never got round to it and then it was suddenly too late.

To me his artistic output was more or less purely conceptually orientated which in the reception of his work seems to be often overshadowed by his skills as a painter. How do you see that?

I totally agree with you. Even if Martin was understood to be a painter, I think he often only used painting because he could. Painting offered him a tradition or history he could hide his ideas within. From his very early attempt to paint his height in Florence, through the *Lieber Maler, male mir* via the *Preis paintings* into the later paintings *Picasso couldn't paint*. Today it might appear that his output followed a very traditional visual approach, but I think he was a conceptual artist, an artist who shared much more with Weiner and Baldessari etc than it looks – I think he enjoyed what he did and he invented a way of working that fitted into his many different contexts. He did a lot in a short time, but as my father always said – many hands make light work.

And another one. What other works or series by MK would you concern to work about?

I have made a number of things that have taken Kippenberger works as a starting point. But I think his attitude and approach to art and the world that follows it around have been of the greatest influence on me as an artist. This is perhaps why I feel comfortable following his example – *mach dich doch selber nach* etc.

A last one. I know that you are a collector as well. Do you have some of his work?

I am a collector of sorts... and have tried to find things that interest me. I am very interested in Kippenbergers multiples and have managed to acquire a few things in one way or another... *Alkoholfolter*, 1989, a sock book mark he made for Königs in 1991 and *Haus Schloß Case* from 1990 and some poster and invite ephemera but a lot of the multiples are now being treated as smaller works in edition and are becoming very expensive. It is a shame MK didn't get to see how people are now fighting over his works... and there you go. I was thinking it might be nice to finish where we started and follow up with the trade. It would seem that the perfect work to trade would be one of the copied Kippenbergers. And

I guess that leads nicely into a YES/NO answer... My favourite is the dog so let me know if it appeals and I'll stick our correspondence together in the coming week. Until then jm

Hi Jonathan, good to hear from you. Very much like your proposal for the trade. So YES!

This dialogue between Jonathan Monk and Johannes Wohnseifer took place between April and August 2011. Johannes Wohnseifer is an artist based in Cologne.

## Appropriation is something I have used or worked with in my art since starting art school in 1987.

At this time (and still now) I realised that being original was almost impossible, so I tried using what was already available as source material for my own work. By doing this I think I also created something original and certainly something very different to what I was representing. I always think that art is about ideas, and surely the idea of an original and a copy of an original are two very different things.

Jonathan Monk, 2009

I declared a painting ban for myself, I let someone else paint for me.

Martin Kippenberger, 1981

On the 15th September 2011, to coincide with the *Nuit des Bains*, BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Jonathan Monk in Geneva, at its space at 5 rue de la Muse.

Previously, Monk has taken on artists such as John Baldessari, Jeff Koons, Sol LeWitt, Richard Prince, Ed Ruscha, and Lawrence Weiner, as source material for his own artwork. For this exhibition *Dear Painter, paint for me one last time*, Jonathan Monk follows his attention to the artist Martin Kippenberger and addresses the status of contemporary painting. In 1981, Martin Kippenberger made his first museum show *Lieber Maler, male mir (Dear painter, paint for me)* at Berlin's *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst*. He hired a billboard painter called Werner to execute the paintings. Martin Kippenberger proclaimed that this was Werner's first *indoor* exhibition. Jonathan Monk commissioned reproductions of 10 paintings by a Chinese painter which will be exhibited in our gallery 30 years after the museum debut of Martin Kippenberger. 'By delegating his own painting to others Jonathan Monk demonstrates a multiplication of the duplication that Kippenberger arranged: while the lat-

ter had his paintings copied from photographs that he had taken, Monk's paintings exist as images of a secondary order, preceded by the generation of Kippenberger's paintings. The series *Dear Painter, paint for me one last time* consists of a system circulating within itself, by narrating art as art, therefore speaking of itself, without incorporating the concrete self-expression of the artist. Where Kippenberger retains a reference to his own person in the form of the paintings' subject, in Monk's case it is merely the action which remains as a trace in his work: this conceptual artistic stance is counterposed by an action as a service and reduces the relationship between original and reproduction to absurdity.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Christina Irrgang, 2008

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## A collaborative project initiated by BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services, Geneva and Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe/Berlin with the assistance of Jonathan Monk.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication, edited by Julia Hölz and designed by Daria Holme. The photographs were taken by Annik Wetter. It includes a short informative dialogue between Johannes Wohnseifer and Jonathan Monk. The project was realized with the assistance of The Oil Painting Kingdom and DHL International.

# JONATHAN MONK

Dear painter, paint for me one last time  
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## Difference lies in sameness

by Verner Hanters

Nothing is more obdurate than a cliché, in life and art alike. For although artists like Andy Warhol, Elaine Sturtevant or Martin Kippenberger long ago deconstructed myths about artists in their works, the widely held views relating to the essence of artistic individuals and their output still seem to cling to the 1950s. This is obvious in painting in particular. To give an example: When Neo Rauch celebrated his 50th birthday in 2010, the German edition of *Rolling Stone* devoted a ten-page section of photographs with an interview to the star of the Neue Leipziger Schule [New Leipzig School]. In line with the interests of the pop magazine, the conversation was first and foremost about the relationship of (Rock) music and fine art. The first double-page spread showed Rauch lying in his studio. He seems just to be resting from his work, his clothes – jeans and a tank top – are just as smeared with paint as the surrounding furniture. The caption refers to the manual work and the artistic authenticity: “The paint on his shirt and trousers is genuine.” Further on the questions of whether existential despair is essential for creativity, and whether only an excessive lifestyle can make the art seem properly credible, are discussed. All that is really missing is the topos of genius-inspired originality, and we would already have the rough outlines of the biography of Vincent van Gogh or Jackson Pollock, as seen in the popular mind.



If Jonathan Monk continues to reject authenticity, individual expression and originality in his work, against this background his strategy – in the tradition of appropriation art – seems more than justified. To show up the construction of the categories in question, Monk frequently carries on where his colleagues have left off: In 2002 for instance he completed Ed Ruscha's series of photographs “Every Building On The Sunset Strip” (1966) by photographing and compiling the street intersections not included by Ruscha. While he was initially carrying on mainly from the works of Conceptual artists like Sol LeWitt and On Kawara in doing this, in 2007 Monk turned to painterly pursuits. He produced seven versions of Sigmar Polke's famous picture *Höhere Wesen befehlen: rechte obere Ecke schwarz malen!* [Higher beings ordained: Paint the top right-hand corner black!] (1969). While on Polke's painting the corner indicated is indeed executed in black, Monk lets the instructions for treatment come to nothing, as in his works the said place is executed in a different colour each time – from orange by way of grey to green. Even if Monk is going back to his artistic roots in turning towards painting (he actually started his career with paint and a paintbrush), you will certainly not find him spattered with paint like Neo Rauch, for he delegates the execution to other people. If as he himself says this series is about investigating the motivation to paint, a similar paradox arises by means of this step as on the canvases in his Polke treatments: an artist who exhibits paintings that he has not made himself, but which he wants to use to find out more about the motive for the enduring boom in painting as a medium. The result is pictures that themselves call their own existence into question.

Seen in this light, it seems a logical consequence that Monk should next explore Martin Kippenberger. As with Polke's *Höhere Wesen befehlen*, he is interested in a group of works in which painting is taken to zero, namely Kippenberger's series “Lieber Maler male mir” [Dear painter paint for me], created in 1981 for his first major exhibition in Germany. After a period when trends in Conceptual art had long dominated the art market, at this juncture painting enjoyed a new revival. In the book with the telling title *Hunger nach Bildern* [Hunger for pictures] where Max Wolfgang Faust and Gerd de Vries describe current painterly tendencies and their antecedents in 1982, the approach of the up-and-coming painters is described as follows: “The

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relationship between personal experience and painting, subjectivity and picture, that the younger generation is conquering for itself understands the artist as the intersecting point of the widest diversity of influences, and the picture as a snapshot of their expression.”

Because of the great success of expressive-figural painting in West Berlin, Cologne and Hamburg, Kippenberger had actually placed a self-imposed embargo on painting on himself. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from straight away presenting twelve large-format pictures at the premises of the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst. However, the paintings were not in fact executed by Kippenberger himself, but by a professional poster artist who otherwise transferred film posters enlarged for publicity purposes on to canvas. Kippenberger supplied only the source material in the form of Polaroid photographs. And this was also the reason why he chose the exhortation “Lieber Maler male mir” as a title. Thus the exhibition -- following which Kippenberger turned his back on Berlin – was like a multiple attack on the painting competition. He set expressive expression against prosaic commercial art; at the same time he cockily made fun in the press of painters like Rainer Fetting and Salomé from the Selbsthilfegalerie on Moritzplatz: “I have banned myself from painting. I now have painting done. I thus contribute to full employment in the Expressionists’ city of Berlin.”

Ten of the originally twelve pictures in the show have been preserved. These formed the starting point for Monk’s latest series, “Dear painter, paint for me one last time” (2011). Here we are dealing with copies of the paintings Kippenberger had commissioned at the time. However, while Kippenberger fell back on a craftsman who was even prominently referred to – the catalogue names Werner Kippenberger as the artist, an amalgamation of the two men’s family names –, in Monk’s case a painter can no longer be identified. For Monk has had the pictures produced by a company in China that specializes in the reproduction of paintings in the grand style. According to its own information over 500 artists work in the firm. In reports from similar Chinese enterprises there are descriptions of how the painters divide the work up; one after the other they only ever apply one specific colour: assembly-line handmade art. Accordingly Monk does not stop at having the pictures reproduced only once each. Each motif can be reordered from him at will at any time, and the artist will then commission its production. Therefore in the case of each Monk’s copies we are dealing with a one-off, and at the same time its execution is unlimited.



In Monk’s updating of Kippenberger’s pictures three things are thus apparent. Firstly, through the choice of a supplier in China Monk takes account of production which has now become globalised in all fields of life. Even art, which in our country is regarded as a noble, identity-founding commodity, can be produced more cheaply “Made in China” – albeit under highly questionable social conditions. However, these do not appear to trouble the western art market which for its part is trying ever harder to get a foothold in China to participate in the country’s economic strength. Then at a different level, Monk’s series reveals the mechanisms of art-historical reception. For even today Kippenberger certainly provides an appropriate model for scrutinising conceptions regarding the figure of the artist. But at the same time his after-life also makes clear the extent to which every gesture of rejection, however radical it may be, is finally embraced by history. Even an artist like Kippenberger who in his lifetime tended to be cavalier about such things as authorship is posthumously being stylised as an all-powerful artistic genius. Even if he did not prepare the “Lieber Maler male mir” group of pictures with his own hand, they are nonetheless inseparably associated with his person: Their originality has shifted from the production to the conception. But lastly and above all Monk’s Kippenberger variations make it patently clear that if two people do the same thing, the result is not inevitably the same.

Verner Hanters, February 2012  
(translated from German to English by Judith Hayward)  
German and French texts available on request.

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