

Now That This Has Been Done It Will Never Have To Be Done Again

He is full of good tips it's true, various escape hatches and models of behaviour for a young artist needing guidance through the thicket. But to look at his actual influence on the 'young scene' (after deciding what this actually constitutes), which seems at first a straightforward and enjoyable task, on closer examination is not – there is too little to work with. Most young artists outside Germany wouldn't in fact know who he was. Even among my contemporaries here in Britain, about whom I have noticed things Kippenbergerish, or with whom I have discussed his work in detail - I can count them up on one hand. The general feeling is of indifference, but where his impact is present, work and attitudes have been affected profoundly, and this is something different.

This polarisation of his impact is in part because his ethos has such a specific measure of value, one that is unique, and one that is difficult to share without seeming imitative. He does not supply an adaptable set of rules. Kippenberger's is a system of self-perpetuation and justification, which does not allow for half measures. He cancels out the possibility of his own failure; the Complaints Office is closed. This means that because it is pointless to discuss individual works in a hierarchical manner, but merely in terms of personal preference, it is easier for a newcomer to decide that they don't like the whole thing and not get involved. This I think is what happened in Britain. As with Warhol, his system is a holistic mode of approach which can easily be misread as seeming much more to do with irony than it actually is. Taken up casually it can be misinterpreted as permission for cynicism. Which is not to say that the work, particularly the paintings, cannot be enjoyed and capitalised on easily from a position of incomplete comprehension. He always insisted that intelligence is in actual fact a barrier to good art; I myself am greatly endeared to misunderstanding.

An all too literal manifestation of his influence would be in an adoption of the posture of macho joke mess-maker, sandwiched between alternate layers of mockery and sincerity. In Germany it seems there is still a place for big paintings with subject matter which is recognisably bad / funny / dodgy coupled to ambiguous intention. The role has been played out to the limits of its self-consciousness, but in Germany there is a discursive climate experienced enough for this to be a viable way.

Kippenberger did not apply ironic distance to either the form or the content of his work. Arbitrarily, and exceptionally so, he looked at what worked for him as a man and made it in turn work for art, transforming his own particularly excessive daily life into a readymade. It's common for artists to use a specific language and set of references and images as shorthand in their work - a

small lexicon of signs and subjects - but this only seems to achieve success when it becomes narrow to the point of extremity. A scaled-down version of Kippenberger's brand of quality control cannot help but seem lacking. The shotgun needs to be sawn-off to do the job properly.

For young artists and students in Germany looking at his work today, he is part of a recognised art history dealing with the liberation of expressionism and production from pomposity, and in the process can be considered and absorbed in a more mellowed way. It is true that many respect him; but this is very different from exerting an influence. We have a different experience of expressionism in Britain, so it's easy for Kippenberger to get grouped with the other exponents of 'Bad German Painting', and be part of a maintenance of an 'idea' of Germany. We have no problem reading Kinder eggs, beer, nudists, prescription drugs etc. as an amalgam of clichés. Kippenberger undermines nationality; German skinhead neo-fascists have adopted the British flag as an emblem; Kippenberger used American culture, a Ford Capri and the Italian 'good life' as signifiers of a banal Germanism. Because this banality is in a foreign vernacular, removed from British culture, it is rational that this translation is much more appealing than contemporary British art dealing with similar themes. I prefer German fried eggs and booze gags to British; I could wear the German flag somewhere in fashion, but never the Union Jack.

What is hard to deal with in Britain is that in the construction of this lingua franca Kippenberger seems to be something which is disarmingly familiar to many things to which he could be considered as offering an antidote. I think in the 1980s he rested in a space between Beuys and Warhol. In the present day he offers an alternative route between the hangover from the anti-intellectualism of Young British Art on the one hand, and on the other, the overtly political or 'socially engaged' art strategy. The truth is he shares tendencies with both and is neither. Because of the culture in the UK, where the reception of art is reduced to the value of column inches, controversy and the cult of personality, here he can be simplified as being in the mould of the greedy egocentric artist, which was promoted in the '90s by a generation looking to Jeff Koons and American's East Coast. The YBA's abridged take on British culture eventually revealed itself to be completely complicit with the hierarchies of the art world while desperately trying to appear to 'keep it real'. Kippenberger polluted the idea of the grand gesture; his production revealed a motivation designed to extinguish reverence rather than compound it. He took responsibility for the contextualisation and dissemination of his ideas into his own hands, and did not wait for the museums to catch up. And many of his gags are actually very funny – while the YBA's generally weren't. Kippenberger was political, but this was not his central thesis; it was just another set of rules to exploit.

The place that I think is rightfully Kippenberger's in the consciousness of my contemporaries is actually filled by Mike Kelly; in the 1990s the art scenes that were written about in Glasgow, London and elsewhere were looking to America's East or West coasts. Kelly works in a theoretical and appropriational mode which is familiar and non-threatening, and his work is generous with an openness to interpretation. It can be assimilated easily into one's own ideas, partly because he helpfully breaks down the specifics of his themes; *Pay For Your Pleasure* inspires pure hopeful joy with its pedagogy. Kelly is also clearly and unequivocally connected to a recognisable idea of underground. Kippenberger, always a few paces ahead of his context, didn't look like an art-scene punk at the beginning of his career in Berlin; there seemed nothing obviously committed, angry, apocalyptic or fantastical about him. He was more like a Mod, with cash, work ethic and a smart suit: the antithesis of punk, which in actual fact is, with the hippie movement, the flip side of the same coin - generally about a middle class desire to appear authentic, and more to do with an art school education than those involved will care to admit.

Incidentally, he has only ever shown in Scotland once, and then it was fittingly a fake (1). I first saw something by Kippenberger in the form of a poster on the wall in a student flat in Karlsruhe - it showed a small wooden building with cigarette lighters all over it - before being fully introduced by the artist Keith Farquhar. I had known Keith vaguely since I was seventeen because we were both in bands on the Glasgow / Edinburgh indie music scene, a scene which in many ways functioned as a microcosm of an art world in which Keith filled a similar role to Kippenberger. He was the singer of the Edinburgh band 'The Male Nurse', who were prone to myth and fable because they were good-looking show-offs who wasted a lot of time on black humour, who drank a lot and capitalised on the prevailing liberalism to bully for private comedy those who were not as quick-witted as them, and who were easily shocked by racism and sexist comments. Being of a similar disposition must have attracted Farquhar to Kippenberger. He is the only person I could find who displays a recognisable influence, but who was not part of the Kippenberger milieu.

Keith has used his own mother as an assistant, making for him a snake draught excluder that looks like it swallowed a woman, and Heart of Midlothian Football Club stuff. In his teaching capacity he has used for his own ends the ideas contained in the posters and poetry of his art therapy students at the Royal Edinburgh Infirmary, ("I need love not Russian roulette!"). His work has a masculinity seeking to define itself on clearly heterosexual terms, and it has an intentionally comedic nature, often relying on detoured titles, self-parody and literalism. His last exhibition featured Zildjan drum kit in the pursuit of 'cymbalism'.

But what about me? Is it just because Kippenberger might be the kind of man I find attractive? I remember what a relief it was when I found out about the inheritance he received in 1976 at the age of 24, which financed the lifestyle, the Berlin Buro, the publications, the collecting. This relief was because of jealousy; and I felt reprieved of something, though I didn't know exactly what. This implies to me a more serious agenda than just being a vague fan, and it's true, I must have been approached to write this for a reason.

For me, Kippenberger illustrates an example of letting work tell you what it's about rather than the other way round, while at the same time being fully committed to everything you release. He showed me that redundancy can be an image, or an object or ideology's most useful quality. I recognise an affinity in my attitude and his in that we have both exploited the artistic licence afforded in the adoption of practices such as curation as a deliberate way to bring friends and under-discussed themes into the public arena. In curation, as well as in individual practice, by belligerently affirming the seriousness of your commitment, and proposing the worth of your ideas and those of your friends, you really can persuade people that things are good, talking up a monologue into a dialogue. What is crucial: he showed that being socially committed does not necessarily mean that you have to feel smug or like a 'good guy', which is always the worry. Kippenberger described the SO 36 club, in which his involvement was legendary and is now a protected historical site, as "... my kitsch program, it's my vanity." (2)

The intention is to try to give a voice to the argot of anti-internationalism, because ultimately it is worth trying to turn the art world into somewhere you would want to be rather than submitting to an existing idea of its limitations.

He shows that letting dissidence have dissonance is as powerful as anything overtly political.

What of the future for Kippenberger's influence? In keeping with the work, there do not appear to be any new beginnings. The renewal of an urgent interest in painting in Poland ignores him in favour of Richter and Tuymans. There is a 'time-wall', like the one paraphrased by Heiner Müller, a blockade that is not strategic or explicable, but just the meeting point of two entities that are not on the same track; Kippenberger's is a critique of capitalism that just does not function in Post-Communist, Pre-EU Eastern Europe.

His worth is still campaigned for through the subjective anecdotes of those he was involved with. This continues to alienate those who never knew him or that time. Artists that did know him in the capacity of students and assistants don't seem to share any tangible camaraderie.

If a successor to Kippenberger had to be identified I would propose Kai Althoff because of the amount at stake there seems to be in his art. He has recently

converted to Catholicism, which can be interpreted as a proposition of one form of escape from the kind of "impossiblism" Kippenberger's closed system espouses.

1 Kippenberger repainted by Beagles and Ramsey for their group show *Museum Magogo*, at the Glasgow Project Space, October 1999.

2 Interview with Jutta Koether, *I had a vision*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1991, p. 135.