

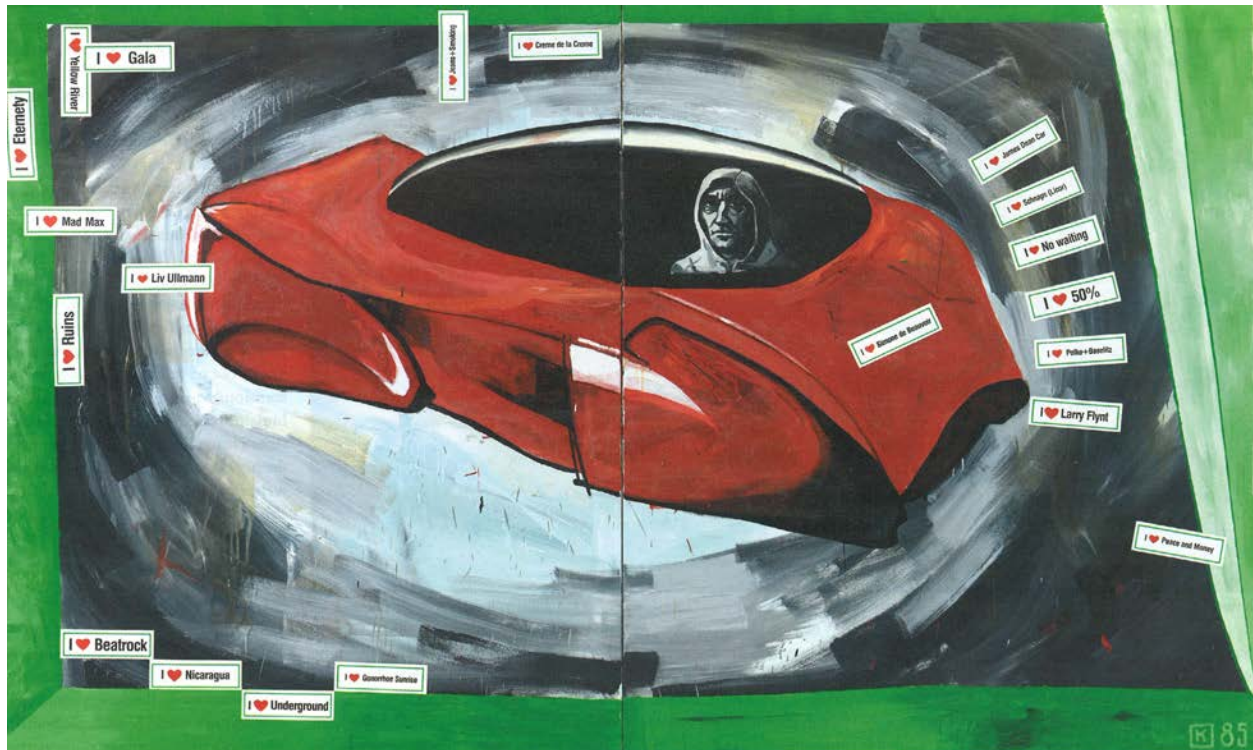
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# BOOKFORUM

## NO PROBLEM: COLOGNE/NEW YORK 1984-1989

BY DIEDRICH DIEDERICHSEN AND BOB NICKAS; FOREWORD BY DAVID ZWIRNER

NEW YORK: DAVID ZWIRNER BOOKS. 276 PAGES. \$65.



Martin Kippenberger, *The Capitalistic Futuristic Painter in his Car*, 1985, oil, acrylic, and stickers on canvas, 99 × 118".

**JUMPING INTO THIS VOLUME**, an expanded exhibition catalogue covering the give-and-take between the Cologne and New York art scenes in the late 1980s, is like touring sister ghost towns. Beneath the curated relics and cultivated dust bunnies loiters a vibrant, unwholesome, and hazardous synergy, crawling with devil-may-care spec-ters. *Have zeitgeist, will travel*, this compact but hefty coffee-table book promises: an exchange program from an overcaffeinated period when "yuppie scum" meant a target instead of a target demographic. *No Problem* showcases artists like Martin Kippenberger, Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelley, Franz West, and Jenny Holzer, who made shrewdly off-balance artworks/japes that could throw you for a loop—or trap you in one. Here, the art world still interferes with dilapidated, cacophonous public arenas, a flea market not yet refashioned into a commodities exchange.

"Those were the days," writes Diedrich Diederichsen in its pages, fondly re-creating the brief tale-of-two-cities period between the rise of Madonna and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Good times, weird times, terrifying times. Cologne was an upstart shaking off backwater status and New York, for all its world-historical centrality, still retained certain endearing avant-parochial tendencies. The hustler-genius Kippenberger, who swilled ideas like free drinks and spit them back out with élan, positioned himself in a 1985 work as *The Capitalistic Futuristic Painter in his Car* (above), pulling into New

York in a vehicle affixed with enough "I ♥" bumper stickers to make his glum face seem like a decal on the rear window of a hearse. (Meeting Sherman and Robert Longo for a meal, he brought along a life-size Big Bird doll as his date.)

Kippenberger and his crowd largely turned stereotypical Teutonic angst on its ear, while the American contingent processed and refined dread with eyedrop- per precision: Holzer and Barbara Kruger's snappy advertisements for unease, California ringer Raymond Pettibon's admonitory etchings ("DON'T FUCK WITH THE APOCALYPSE"), Sherman's super-tactile photographic constructs of humanoid compost heaps, Kelley's gift-wrapped interior decorations (an Orphic underworld by way of Pee-wee Herman). Looming over them all is the shadow of Godzilla, whose 1988 Cologne show, "Jeff Koons: Banality," marked a decisive turning point. (One of the best images in this superbly laid-out book shows a bunch of cloth-coated grandmas ogling Koons's kitschy-koo sculptures: They could easily be part of the installation.)

Juxtaposed in the same gallery space, Kippenberger's surgically incisive pieces make Koons's merchandise look like lawn jockeys fresh from a Pasadena yard sale. Yet Koons, with all the subtlety of Ronald Reagan in a Warhol wig, ultimately won the only contest that matters anymore: the Battle of the Brands. —HOWARD HAMPTON