

On the Trail of an Amateur



or

How Kasper König Encountered—Not Collected—Art, Although One or the Other Piece Remained with Him...

Ever since parts of Kasper König's art collection have been presented to the public, such as in the spring of 2018 at Galerie Thomas Fischer in Berlin,¹ König has emphasized that he does not actually consider himself a collector, but rather an amateur. This view is easy to understand when one looks back at the history of the term.² Established in the art system with the founding of the academies, it had a consistently positive connotation until the nineteenth century. As Claude-Henri Watelet wrote in his *Dictionnaire des Arts de Peinture, Sculpture et Gravure* of 1792, it was a title "conferred by the academies of painting on those with whom they associate, not in their capacity as artists, but as those connected with art by their taste or knowledge."³ König formulated this quality for us and for himself in a contemporary way as "my ability to recognize whether something in art has substance, [which] is much greater than the ability to make art myself."⁴ Watelet saw the amateur as the recipient most called upon to praise the artist among the artistic recognition bodies of the eighteenth century and at the same time as the institution responsible for shaping the taste of society. What enabled the amateur to do this was a love of art, education, and connoisseurship, which could be acquired through constant engagement with works of art, artists, and art theorists, through the activity of collecting, through self-education in artistic techniques, and, above all, through the development of one's own theory of art. If you take a closer look at König's life, which the following lines are intended to help you do, you can recognize all these qualities, abilities, and activities.

When Rudolf Hans König entered the art system in 1962 as "a kind of trainee" at Galerie Zwirner in Cologne, he was just eighteen years old. He had his "epiphany" the previous October at Zwirner's gallery, then still located in Essen, in an exhibition of works by Cy Twombly, which reminded him of "scribbles in public toilets." This outrageousness, "that you could hang something so valuable on the wall," he found "really amazing. The awareness that if I present something and say it is art, then it is art."⁵ Also in 1962, he met Gerhard Richter, Konrad Lueg, and Sigmar Polke [lots 47, 48]⁶ during a semester tour of the Düsseldorf Academy of Art. In 1963, he bought Richter's papier-mâché figure

of John F. Kennedy, who was still alive at the time, from Richter and Lueg's exhibition *Leben mit Pop – Eine Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus* (Living with Pop – A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism) in October, and he persuaded the Cologne collector Wolfgang Hahn to buy the figure of Alfred Schmela.⁷ This was not König's first purchase,⁸ but it was a significant one. As with many of his later acquisitions, he was supporting an artist at the beginning (or later at a critical time) of his or her career, and he chose not a "classic" collector's item for the living room, but rather a bulky relic of an artistic action that was difficult for the trade to sell, but significant and therefore museum-worthy. In König's personal history, the Kennedy figure took on an additional auratic charge when, after Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, he took it by train from Düsseldorf to his parents' home in Münster and was berated by fellow passengers for being disrespectful. Like the Richter paintings *Hirsch* (Deer, Fondation Louis Vuitton pour la Création, Paris) and *Tote* (Dead, The Museum of Modern Art, New York) from 1963 and *Verwaltungsgebäude* (Administrative Building, The Fisher Collection, SF-MOMA, San Francisco) from 1964,⁹ which he later acquired (he probably first had to borrow the money from his family to purchase them), König also owned the Kennedy figure (Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich)¹⁰ for only a short time and returned it to the cycle of trading and collecting in a situation where he needed money to support himself and later his family. These works are early examples of a probably incalculable number of artworks that König encountered over the next sixty years, that passed through his hands, and that occasionally remained with him, some until this auction at Van Ham. The content of many of these works reflects the art system, in whose dynamic development Kasper König had been involved since the early 1960s as a catalyst and driving force or, as he himself recently put it in better words in a conversation with his successor at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, Yilmaz Dziewior, as an "agent," as an "actor/doer"¹¹—whereby "acting/doing" is to be understood in the complex ambiguity of the terms, which encompass all sociological, and thus also economic aspects, of the system, to which not a few works in König's collection allude in a system-critical manner.

Within a short period of time, König had established himself in the art system and earned the respect of all those involved, as evidenced by the archive he had been compiling since 1960, which he bequeathed to the ZADIK | Central Archive for Ger-

fig. 1
Kasper König with bicycle, 1963

man and International Art Market Studies in 2012. Much of the information presented in the following comes from this rich source,¹² which, like his art collection, which Lorina Speder rightly called his “art archive” in her review of the 2018 Berlin exhibition, bears complex witness to König’s almost encyclopedic tendency to preserve the “signs of the times” of his life, the communications in text, image, and sound documents, as well as in works of art that mark the stages of his eventful life rich in experiences—each with amazing stories behind it that no one could have told better than König himself.¹³

The oldest document in König’s archive is an address book, with entries beginning in July 1960. Most of the addresses in it were collected during his time with Zwirner, for whom he worked for only about nine months, because when he was called up for alternative service in 1963, he soon left for London. In London, he scouted for himself and his German network, recommending the painter Gerhard Richter to the Munich gallerist Heiner Friedrich, who had actually asked him about young English talent. In his first surviving diary from 1964, he noted on April 28: “Bought Yves Klein for £300, earned £50.”¹⁴ He spent intermittent time in Germany, bought Joseph Beuys’s *Schneefall* (Snowfall, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, Basel) from Alfred Schmela with money borrowed from Franz Dahlem, helped set up the graphics department at the *documenta* in 1964, and, back in London, began calling himself “Kasper.”

Before accompanying a painting by Francis Picabia to the gallery Cordier & Ekstrom in New York in 1965 by ship as a courier for Robert Fraser, he made a detour to Berlin, and visited, among others, Hannah Höch, who gave him a drawing as a thank you. In New York, he first worked at Cordier & Ekstrom, where Walter de Maria had a solo exhibition in December 1966 [lot 168], met Richard Bellamy, worked with him to source artists for Jean Leering’s exhibition *KunstLichtKunst* (1966) at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and convinced Dan Flavin to participate. In order to obtain a green card, König had Pontus Hultén, founding director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, employ him as his American representative and organized Claes Oldenburg’s first retrospective, *Skulpturer och teckningar* (1966) for him. In gratitude for his support, Oldenburg gave him his *Ghost Wardrobe (for M[arilyn]. M[onroe])* [lot 42], which he had exhibited at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1967. “It is a discreet tribute to Marilyn Monroe, or to be more precise, to three garments with which she made film and photographic history.”¹⁵

In 1966, following a tip from the young painter Peter Dechar, König discovered the then virtually

unknown On Kawara in his studio on 13th Street in New York, where he had been working since January 4 on his “Date Paintings,” the *Today Series* [lots 30, 32]. They would remain lifelong friends. “There is a kind of family bond between us. [...] What he does as an artist is a completely self-contained view of the world. Sometimes I participate in it more, sometimes less.”¹⁶ When König’s first wife, Ilka, following the birth of Lili in 1971, gave birth to their second daughter, Hiroko, on May 5, 1972, who was given the first name of Kawara’s wife, Hiroko, the “Date Painting” created that day was subtitled *Hiroko König*.¹⁷ In 1968, König gave On Kawara “money for postcards he was to send me from Latin America. This resulted in the series *I Got Up* [lots 31,140] with daily postcards documenting the time On Kawara got up in the morning. This challenged me to write [my famous postcards] myself.”¹⁸

Dan Graham, whom he had also known since 1966, also remained in contact with König throughout his life [lots 23, 24, 117, 118]. Through Graham, he had met some of the artists he introduced to Konrad Fischer (alias Konrad Lueg), who in 1967 had exchanged his career as an artist for that of a gallerist in Düsseldorf, for site-specific exhibitions in his challenging space at Neubrückestraße 12 in Düsseldorf. In 1967, he introduced Fischer to Carl Andre and Hanne Darboven [lot 15], who lived in New York from 1965 to 1968. In 1968, it was Sol LeWitt [lot 161], Richard Artschwager [lots 1–3], Bruce Nauman, and Robert Ryman; in 1969, Robert Smithson [Graham lot 118], Dan Flavin and Lawrence Weiner [lots 232, 233], Barry Flanagan [lot 110, for *prospect 68*] and Mel Bochner. König also placed artists with Zwirner, including H. C. Westermann in 1968 [lots 59, 243].

In 1967, König used the Xerox photocopier at the Leo Castelli Gallery to produce the prototype of the catalog for Andy Warhol’s first European museum exhibition, which König had conceived on behalf of Pontus Hultén for the Moderna Museet (February–March 1968) and which was congenial to Warhol’s concept of art. For the exhibition, he simply had Warhol’s wallpapers and silkscreens reprinted and shipped as rolls at a reasonable price, and ordered 300 new, flat-folded Brillo boxes made of cardboard from the Brillo soap factory at a unit price of 20 cents. The catalog, printed on waste paper and featuring photographs from the *Factory* by Billy Name and Stephen Shore, is still sought after today, despite its large first and later multiple editions and was also the prototype for the artist’s books that König produced with his brother Walther from 1968 in the jointly founded “Verlag Gebrüder König Köln – New York,” including works by Franz Erhard Walther [lot 230], Stanley Brouwn [lots 10, 84], William Copley [lots 12–14], Claus Böhmler, and A. R. Penck [lot 46].

Although his socialization into the art system had largely taken place in New York since 1965, König always maintained intensive contact with the Rhineland, which at the time was one of the leading art regions in Europe, and whose importance increased even further with the founding of the “Kunstmarkt Köln” (today’s Art Cologne) in 1967. In 1969, König and his family moved to Antwerp for six months to “manage” the art and communication center for conceptual art “A 379089,” which was conceived as a collective.¹⁹ In this context, he worked with Konrad Fischer’s circle of artists, friends, and collectors and thus with the European representatives of conceptual and minimal art, such as Marcel Broodthaers [lot 83], Robert Filliou [lots 106, 107], Addi Kōpcke, and other, also German acquaintances, such as Jörg Immendorff [lot 136] and Chris Reinecke. From Antwerp and again from the United States, König occasionally made short visits to Germany. It was probably in 1971 that he met Cy Twombly in Munich through Heiner Friedrich and acquired one of his drawings. He may also have met Palermo for the first time there, or at the latest in 1973 at Heiner Friedrich’s New York gallery. During one of Friedrich’s visits to New York, König bought two drawings by Caspar David Friedrich from a portfolio of twelve sheets. He kept the



fig. 2
Kasper König with a model of the Portikus facade

sketch *Tannenlichtung (Waldstudie)* (Fir Glade [Forest Study]) [lot 19], which he associated at the time with conceptual art and Friedrich’s artistic working process because of the small numbers written on it (with which the artist coded the degree of brightness of the tonal gradations): “This is not made to be shown, but for himself, just as there are certain artists who have taken photographs as models for their own work, but have never presented the photographs themselves. But the photographs were then very important, as a moment of insight, so to speak, for the work that developed from them later.” A statement that can also be applied to König’s collection, which was created in a series of experiences and insights and only reveals its meaning when explained by König himself, as on the occasion of its presentation on February 18, 2018. The filmmaker Corinna Belz accompanied Kasper König with a cameraman through the exhibition and interviewed him about individual works. The film was not completed, but I can quote a few remarks from the transcript of the extensive conversation.²⁰

In New York, together with Richard Bellamy, Kasper König conducted research for Harald Szeeman’s *documenta 5* (1972), to which they were able to suggest many of the artists mentioned here, including Graham and Oldenburg, as well as new acquaintances such as James Lee Byars [lot 85], Barry Flanagan, and John Wesley [lots 55–57, 234–241]. König and his wife helped Oldenburg to furnish his *Mouse Museum*, and Oldenburg appointed König as director of the *Mouse Museum* in Kassel [lot 183]. Dan Graham exhibited his video work *Body-Press* there, and in the same year the König brothers, together with Lisson Publications, London, published the catalog of Graham’s *Selected Works 1965–72*, exhibited at the Lisson Gallery.

Graham was also the intermediary link to König’s next field of activity, encouraging him to publish books modeled on the source texts on modern art that the emigre German bookseller and publisher George Wittenborn had introduced to America. Walther König had also worked for Wittenborn for some time before striking out on his own in Cologne. After Kasper König had presented his project “The Book as the Primary Medium for New Art” at various universities, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Canada, where Dan Graham had taught in 1970 and 1971, hired him in 1973 as an associate professor of art history. Until 1976, König edited the “Nova Scotia Series: Source Material of the Contemporary Arts.”²¹ While in Halifax, König also organized two important exhibitions: *A.R. Penck. Installation. Paintings, Films, Books, Sound Tapes, and Photographic Documentation* at the Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design and, together with Johannes



fig. 3
Kasper König in the Westkunst curator's office
with the "Rote Girlande" by Thomas Schütte,
around 1981

Gachnang, On Kawara's first solo exhibition in a European museum, *On Kawara: 1973 - One Year's Production* for the Kunsthalle Bern. König was also able to introduce Gachnang to Carl Andre (1975) and Donald Judd (1976), and he remained in contact with many of the artists he met in the 1960s throughout his life, collaborating with them time and again on new projects. This was the case with Claes Oldenburg, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Richard Long, and Richard Serra whom he introduced in New York in 1976 to his visitor Klaus Bußmann, who persuaded him to collaborate on a sculpture exhibition planned for Münster in 1977. This exhibition gave rise to the *Skulptur Projekte*, which have been held every ten years since 1977 to coincide with the *documenta*. The German artists Joseph Beuys and Ulrich Rückriem [lots 196, 197] participated in Münster in 1977. In the same year, he arranged a retrospective for Donald Judd in the new Quadrat building of the "Moderne Galerie" in Bottrop. König's son Leo was also born in 1977.

After about twelve years in the United States, Kasper König and his family returned to Germany in January 1978, where his wife had opened an art

bookstore in Munich and he wanted to "take a back seat."²² In the spring, he brokered the sale of the *Mouse Museum* and the *Ray Gun Wing* between Claes Oldenburg and Peter Ludwig. No longer "from the back seat," König proposed to Karl Fred Dahmen a series of lectures (1978) and an exhibition (1979) at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München. The realization of this project led to a renewed collaboration with Gachnang, and König presented Niele Toroni for the first time at Gachnang's suggestion [lots 52, 53, 225, 226]. König's activities triggered a kind of culture war in Munich and the wrath of the conservative newspaper *Bayernkurier*, but at the same time qualified him in the eyes of Cologne's progressive head of cultural affairs, Kurt Hackenberg, as the best candidate for the conception of a major exhibition that would confirm and expand Cologne's new position as an international art metropolis. Together with Laszlo Glozer, the art critic of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and his most committed advocate in Munich, König began conceptual work on the "international exhibition" while still in Munich at the end of 1978, for which Glozer proposed the title *Westkunst* in 1981. While working on *Westkunst*, König met his second wife, Edda Köchl, and in 1981 their son Johann was born—his godfather was Dan Graham.

With an exhibition architecture designed by Oswald Mathias Ungers on an area of 10,000 square meters in the Rheinhallen of the KölnMesse, 800 exhibits by around 275 artists, and some 300,000 visitors, *Westkunst* was one of the first major international exhibitions of the 1980s "in 'documenta' format"²³ and also marked a turning point in the art system in several other respects. The still relatively small art industry of the 1960s, in which pioneering protagonists like Kasper König still knew each other, had now become a highly complex structure. Fluxus, Pop Art, conceptual and minimal art were replaced by the "hunger for images" and a multitude of new art programs—and continued to work at the forefront of this accelerating development.

Thomas Schütte's *Girlande* (Garland) [lot 49], conceived in 1979, hung in König's office during *Westkunst*, for which Schütte had submitted three designs for large sculptures, but which could only be presented as models on tables due to a lack of funds—but the lack turned out to be a gain, as the form of the model had opened up a new and fruitful field of experimentation for the artist for many years. König compared *Girlande* to the endless design of the red corner angle of the Marlboro cigarette pack: "It's magical, how you can completely transform a space with very little means. [...] you can roll it up, you can staple it, you can take it away again. It's something that's always been with me, and I've used it myself sometimes. That was for

my office during *Westkunst*. And that was enough, there was no other art there; it wasn't necessarily like 'Here, this is my art'; it was for everyone and no one."²⁴ Other works by Schütte, with whom König had been in contact since 1979 at the latest, can be found under lot numbers 201 and 202.

John Ahearn's *Boy* [lot 61] was included in the "Heute" (Today) section of *Westkunst*: "This is actually a social sculpture, so to speak, real portraits of people, and some of them are painted in color [...] and this has always been with me. It's amazing that I still have it. Because this little boy always looks at you, no matter where you are, it's, well [...] a real portrait and the man should now be, I don't know, my age or something."²⁵ Other artists represented in *Westkunst* and in König's collection include Felix Droese, Marcel Duchamp, Otto Freundlich [lot 112], Esko Männikö [lots 165–167], Robert Longo [lot 163] Isa Genzken, Öyvind Fahlström [lot 103], and Giulio Paolini [lot 189].

Nam June Paik's installation sketch for his *TV Trichter* [TV Funnel, lot 188] is related to a central exhibit from König's next major exhibition *von hier aus. Zwei Monate neue deutsche Kunst in Düsseldorf* (From Here. Two months of New German art in Düsseldorf, 1984), which featured various large-scale works by 68 artists on 14,000 square meters in Hall 13 of the Messe Düsseldorf, designed by Hermann Czech. The installation, which formed a hanging counterpoint to Per Kirkeby's more than twenty-meter-high brick sculpture like a gigantic 11.6-meter chandelier, consisted of 99 monitors suspended from the ceiling in five upwardly tapering circles with the screens facing downward, drawing in the audience's gaze with flickering image sequences from *Hommage to Stanley Broun* and *V-Matrix*. According to König, the company Samsung, which had donated a total of 124 monitors to Paik for his work, organized its own press conference at the exhibition: "And there was a journalist from the tabloid *BILD*, among others, who was completely uninterested, but he had to participate somehow; he kept looking up and counting them [the monitors], which is very difficult when they are flickering, and noticed that a large percentage was missing. He then posed the question—Paik was sitting there, someone from the company, and I—that he had counted and there weren't even 100. As soon as he had asked that, Paik jumped up and said: 'Wenn so genau, Gott böse' (When so precise, God angry). In other words, he scared him off so much that the question was generally not even noticed, because Paik himself cheated some away, so to speak, for another work [...]. And this mishmash of German and English, 'when too...'—what was it again—'when too perfect, lieber Gott böse.' And that was then somehow adopted as a slogan." König

had met Paik in the Rhineland in the early 1960s. Other artists presented by König in this exhibition were Thomas Bayrle [lots 6–8, 75–79], Bernd and Hilla Becher [lot 9], Joseph Beuys, Bernhard Johannes Blume, Jürgen Bordanowicz, George Brecht, Holger Bunk, Walter Dahn, Katharina Fritsch [lots 21, 113, 114], Ludwig Gosewitz, Hans Haacke, Antonius Höckelmann, Thomas Huber, Axel Kasseböhmer [lot 139], Peter Mell, Reinhard Mucha, Reiner Ruthenbeck, Andreas Schulze [lots 203, 204], Manfred Stumpf, and Norbert Tadeusz [lot 218].

In 1984, the year of the exhibition, König had accepted a professorship for Art and the Public at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art, continuing both the teaching he had begun in Halifax and his work as a freelance curator.²⁶ In 1986, together with Jean-Hubert Martin and Gosse W. Oosterhof, he curated *Initiatief 86* at Saint Pieter's Abbey in Ghent, which ran concurrently with Jan Hoet's *Chambre d'amis*, and in 1987, together with Klaus Bußmann, the second *Skulptur Projekte* for Münster, for which Ludger Gerdes proposed his *Schiff für Münster* (Ship for Münster), the design of which he also created in the form of a watercolor. Gerdes donated the sculpture, which was realized on the Horstmarer Landweg, to the city. The 1987 *Skulptur Projekte* was also König's first collaboration with Thomas Struth [lots 212–214] and Remy Zaugg [lot 246].

In the course of Hilmar Hoffmann's cultural offensive, to which the financial city of Frankfurt am Main devoted eleven percent of its annual budget, Kasper König was appointed professor at the Städelschule in 1988 at the suggestion of Thomas Bayrle and Peter Kulbelka and became its rector the following year. As a kind of "dowry," he had asked for the "Portikus," whose eponymous façade, a relic of the war-destroyed municipal library, he transformed into an exhibition space with an adjoining building of freight containers that attracted worldwide attention. He also initiated the creation of a class for interdisciplinary art and the Institute for New Media with Peter Weibel. For König, Frankfurt was his "Eldorado" and "this Städel period was perhaps the most interesting of all."²⁷ Many artists from König's twelve years in Frankfurt, with over a hundred exhibitions, have left their mark on his collection: Dennis Adams, Kai Althoff, Siah Armajani [lot 64], Michael Bach [lot 73, 74] Monika Baer [lots 4, 68, 69], Stephan Balkenhol [lots 5, 70–72], Thomas Bayrle [lots 6–8, 75–79], Anna and Bernhard Blume, Ernst Caramelle [lots 86, 87], Maria Eichhorn [lots 95–97], Ayşe Erkmen [lots 99, 100], Luciano Fabro [lots 101, 102], Peter Fischli & David Weiss [lots 18, 109], Paul Armand Gette, Andreas Gursky [lots 25, 199], Bernhard Härtter, Georg Herold [lot 122], Thomas Hirschhorn [lots 26, 124, 125], Candida Höfer [lots 28, 126–134], Jim Iserman,



fig. 4
Corinna Belz with Kasper König
in the Galerie Thomas Fischer, 2018

Christian Jankowski [lot 29], Ilya Kabakov, Ellsworth Kelly [lot 146], Stefan Kern, Raoul De Keyser [lots 33–35, 148, 149], Marko Lehanka, Paul McCarthy [lot 41], Boris Mikhailov, Matt Mullican [lots 177, 178], Paul Noble, Nicole van den Plas, Manfred Pernice, Tobias Rehberger [lots 191, 192], Chéri Samba [lot 198], Jörg Sasse [lot 199], Gregor Schneider, Andreas Siekmann, Andreas Slominski [lot 209], Michael Smith, Wolfgang Tillmans [lots 51, 221–233], Gerhard Wittner, and Heimo Zobernig [lots 247–250]. Associated with art history—or rather art histories—are works by Hans Peter Feldmann, [lot 17], whom König motivated to work again after years of artistic abstinence,²⁸ and Friederike Feldmann, who painted one of her “carpets” for König on the wall of his office in the Städelschule—“when I left, I had it cut out of the wall and completed this wall again, so to speak.” “Marko Lehanka, with whom I worked several times, back then in Frankfurt [...] was very involved with computers and indirectly also brought the computer into the academy, so to speak, which was not wanted at all at that time for ideological reasons. [...] He then also made poems that were mutated by computer programs, and he always made things that he wanted to have around him, like a cigarette machine.” And where did König’s drawings by Nikifor [lots 179–181], to whom he dedicated his last exhibition at the Portikus in 2000, come from? “Well, there was Mrs. Gmurzynska, who opened a gallery in Cologne. She had come to Cologne with many of Nikifor’s works, and my brother, the bookseller, vouched for her so that she could get German citizenship. [...] And I gave these small pictures to my mother; and after my mother died, I got them back.”²⁹

During his time in Frankfurt am Main, König also curated exhibitions for other institutions, edited publications, and received several awards, including the 1989 “Passepartout” prize for art education. All of his exhibition and publication projects involved long-time and new artist companions, such as Alighiero e Boetti [lot 80], John Miller [Lota 173, 74], Raymond Pettibon, Julia Scher, and Christopher Wool [lot 60]. In 1991, together with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, he guest-edited volume 38 of the yearbook *Jahresring* for the “Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft im BDI” (Association of Arts and Culture of the German Economy at the Federation of German Industries) under the title *Der öffentliche Blick* (The Public Eye). The former managing director of the Kulturkreis and editor of the *Jahresring* until 2019 was Brigitte Oetker, with whom König also collaborated on other projects. Together with Benjamin Buchloh, he curated the major retrospective *Gerhard Richter. Painting 1962–1993*, which was shown in Paris, Bonn, Madrid, and Stockholm from 1993 to 1994.

Again with Obrist, he organized the exhibitions *Neue Kunst in Hamburg: 1993* (New Art in Hamburg: 1993) for the Kunstverein in Hamburg and *The Broken Mirror: Positions of Painting Today* for the Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna and the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg in 1993 [Michael Bach, lots 66, 67; Maria Lassnig, lot 37; Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, lot 200]. This was followed in 1997 by the third edition of the *Skulptur.Projekte* in Münster, with Klaus Bußmann and Florian Matzner, and in 1998 by *Eight People from Europe* for the Museum of Modern Art in Gunma, Japan [Niele Toroni, lot 53]. In the same year, 1998, he received the “Binding Cultural Award” for his work in Frankfurt am Main. In 1999, he curated *Art Focus 3. International Biennial for Contemporary Art* in Jerusalem.³⁰ And in his last year in Frankfurt, together with Wilfried Dickhoff, he curated the exhibition *In Between* for the Expo Hannover 2000, which included works by twelve contemporary artists.

In 2000, Kasper König received the Audrey Irmas Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, and in the same year he accepted a call from Marie Hüllenkremer, Cologne’s head of cultural affairs, to become director of the Museum Ludwig. He remained there for twelve years, bringing international acclaim to the museum with exhibitions such as the retrospectives of Matthew Barney, Edward Hopper, Rosemarie Trockel, Salvador Dali, and David Hockney. After the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum moved out of the shared building in 2001, he called his inaugural exhibition *Museum of Our Wishes*, with 120 loans, many of which he was actually able to acquire during his tenure. In 2002, König was awarded the Knud W.

Jensen Prize, named after the art collector, founder (1956), and director (until 1993) of the Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk near Copenhagen. For Austria, he curated an exhibition with Bruno Gironcoli for the 2003 Venice Biennale [lot 115]. In 2005, he received an honorary doctorate from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Together with Frank Wagner and Julia Friedrich, König organized the exhibition *The Eighth Square. Gender, Life, and Desire in the Visual Arts since 1960* [Nicole Eisenman, lot 16; SUSI POP, lots 215–217]. For the fourth *Skulptur Projekte* in 2007, König collaborated with Brigitte Franzen and Carina Plath.

In 2008, König acquired a special collection piece, and both the circumstances of the acquisition and the work itself have an emblematic character in many respects, saying something about König’s (and of course Polke’s) system-critical attitude toward the art business. At the Art Cologne, Erhard Klein, on behalf of his wife Elke, offered Sigmar Polke’s *Meisterwerk als Ramsch versteigert* (Masterpiece Auctioned Off as Junk) [lot 47], which Polke had given to Elke Klein as a gift. The proceeds were to help her daughter, who had just moved out to study, to finance her first apartment. The piece, according to König, “is characterized by the fact



fig. 5
Kasper König in the Museum Ludwig, 2011

that it is a remnant of a painting that he could not sell; he then cut it out, so to speak, worked on it, and gave it to Mrs. Klein. It’s a picture that glows at night. It has alchemical pigments, and people thought it might be dangerous. Thus: “masterpiece auctioned off as junk.” It’s inscribed on the reverse ‘Junk refined as a masterpiece’, along with a signature for the woman who received it as a gift.” With this explanation, König referred to the connection between the painting and Polke’s contribution to the 42nd Venice Biennale in 1986 in the form of the chemically prepared paintings applied directly to the wall that changed color depending on the temperature and humidity. König would have liked to buy the work himself, but lacked the funds, so he recommended it to a passing collector. “And this collector, greedy, greedy, greedy, immediately ran into Klein’s booth and asked: ‘What percentage discount?’ I was so outraged, especially since I had told the man the story beforehand that it was very personal and actually unrivaled at this booth, that I said: ‘Erhard, I’ll buy the painting; you’ll have the money tomorrow.’ [...] And then I quickly got the money together. [...] So it’s almost like a motto, because art is art, and the art market is of course something that has become so present that it’s very difficult for a young artist to even consider becoming an artist. In the end, it’s also a condition, whether good or bad, you have to deal with it and reflect on it. There is also an institutional critique, but at some point it becomes academic. So in that sense, it’s a personal story that’s not mine; it became mine later, so to speak, because of completely different conditions. First of all, it’s a really personal gift, and then that gift has been, so to speak, beneficially “refined.”³¹

To revamp its annual fundraising event in 2009, the Guggenheim Foundation commissioned the artist Rob Pruitt to create a celebratory concept inspired by the Academy Awards and applied it to the successes and achievements of artists, curators, critics, and gallerists. Kasper König received the Guggenheim Foundation’s “Lifetime Achievement Award” for curating.

Remembering Forward – Australian Aboriginal Painting since 1960 was the title of an exhibition that König conceived together with Falk Wolf and Emily Joyce Evans for the Museum Ludwig (November 2010 – March 2011). With the exhibition *One wish always remains unfulfilled. Kasper König takes stock* in 2012, König concluded his twelve-year directorship of the Museum Ludwig, whose collection he was able to expand by some 2.000 works during his tenure. He was supported in this by the patrons’ circle “Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig.” König moved to Berlin, where his third wife, Barbara Weiss, had been running her gallery



fig. 6
Installation view
Galerie Thomas Fischer, 2017

ipated [lot 162], Lieshout's *Droit Au But* and Francis Alÿs's photograph *Lada Kopeika Project* [lot 62] were added to the collection. During his tour with Corinna Belz, König linked the photograph with the so-called "Petersburg hanging" of part of his collection and the history of Lada production, which is built under license from Fiat in the Lada factories in the city of Tolyatti, named after the Italian communist Palmiro Togliatti. "And that was the story of the artist who, together with his brother, had this fantasy in the 1980s: We're going to drive to Leningrad in a Russian car and see what kind of city it is, so to speak. Anti-capitalist, heroic. And this is a plausible journey, ending in the inner courtyard [of the] Hermitage in front of the tree."³³

In 2015, the merchants of Münster's Salzstraße neighborhood honored Kasper König as co-initiator and long-time artistic director of the *Skulptur Projekte* with the "Golden Putto" cultural award. From 2014 to 2017, together with Britta Peters and Marianne Wagner, he curated the fifth edition of the *Skulptur Projekte* and, in collaboration with Falk Wolf, the exhibition *The Shadow of the Avant-Garde. Rousseau and the Forgotten Masters* at the Museum Folkwang in Essen. In 2016, together with Corinna Belz, he filmed the four-part *arte* series *Kasper König's Address Book*, in which he visited the artists Claes Oldenburg, Nicole Eisenman, Monica Bonvicini, Ayşe Erkmen, Peter Fischli, and Roman Signer in their studios.

As mentioned at the beginning, Galerie Thomas Fischer exhibited works from Kasper König's collection in the spring of 2018, based on an idea by Thomas Fischer and König's long-time assistant, Andreas Prinzing. "So the paintings here by [...] Marcus Weber: I bought three of them with this exhibition in mind. He has a studio in the same building where my friend [Heidi Specker, lots 50, 210, 211] also has a studio; that's how I got to know him just a year ago. He is a fascinating figure, a great hero to a lot of young artists, painters, and to me. He started this series a few years ago, and there are over thirty pictures. This [...] is a street at Kottbusser Tor, where he once documented the right and left side of the street, which for me is actually like street photography, only with different means."³⁴

Together with the photographer and artist Heidi Specker, who has lived in Berlin since 1992 and has been teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig since 2006, König, who in the 1960s and 1970s, according to his own statement, "spent more time in East Berlin than in West Berlin,"³⁵ refreshed his memories and experienced art production in the new federal states. As his fourth wife, Heidi Specker accompanied Kasper König until the end of his life.

In 2019, Kasper König put together the summer exhibition of Galerie König in the former Church of St. Agnes in Berlin as "Johann's Dad" [Annette Kelm, lot 147; Heidi Specker, lot 50]. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition project, *Art is a lie that just won't die*, planned for the fiftieth anniversary of Art Basel in 2020 and developed by Kasper König together with Christina Li and Hamza Walker for the fair, had to be cancelled. In 2021, together with his colleague Annabell Burger, König curated the pop-up show *Hinterm Nischel* (Behind the Head) at the Chemnitz Open Space of the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, which featured a large silkscreen by SUSI POP as its central work. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday (November 21, 2023), König—according to Yilmaz Dziewior, in "close consultation" with the Museum Ludwig—"selected about fifty works, among them important positions, often of conceptual art, which have an illuminating connection to the museum's collection or complement it particularly well" and donated them to the museum, which presented them in the exhibition *1000... miles to the edge*.³⁶ In his conversation with Dziewior, König shared some of his primary motivations for selecting and acquiring a particular work of art: "First and foremost, it was a kind of recognition, rarely economically motivated. That I see something and think it's good. I spent most of my professional life working at the academy in one way or another, and sometimes, when someone graduated, I would say: Okay, I'm going to buy something, regardless of whether it costs five hundred marks or a thousand marks—as a sign of recognition."³⁷

After König told Tatjana Doll that he thought her paintings were too expensive, she turned this admonition into a painting [lot 97] and gave it to him. "Money is very important in the history of art"³⁸—what the famous art historian Michael Baxandall was the first of his profession to dare to write in 1972, Kasper König has experienced firsthand as the increasing economization of the art system and always commented critically on it; however: "Regardless of money, fame, and honor, there are certain criteria for recognizing an important artist like [Gerhard] Richter. For example, you have to ask yourself to what extent there is resistance and complexity, so that it is possible to recognize new layers that may not be so clear at first. How complex is it, can it renew itself? Not only art history is important in dealing with art, but also your own history: What did you see when you were eighteen? What interested you? Years later, when you return to the art that meant something to you, you often find that the aspect that interested you then is no longer relevant. Today it is interesting, if at all, from a completely different perspective. [...]" P.S.: Richter once told me that at some point he was accepted into the circle of recognized artists in Düsseldorf, and a colleague said to him: 'Gerhard, let me give you some good advice. You should also think about painting pictures in a format that fits in the trunk of a BMW or a Mercedes.' I mean, they're colleagues, but they're also competitors, and when someone gives you a tip like that, it's a nice idea, isn't it?"³⁹

since 1992, and from where he continued to work as a freelance curator. He bequeathed a selection of books from his private library to the Art and Museum Library of the City of Cologne and to the Department of Art History of the University of Cologne, as well as his private archive with numerous correspondences to the ZADIK | ZADIK | Central Archive for German and International Art Market Studies.

The next twelve years began for Kasper König with work on *Manifesta 10*, which was to be hosted by the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg on the occasion of its 250th anniversary. When the restriction of human rights through the anti-gay law in June 2013, which König wanted to subversively counter in his program, and the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, which violated international law, led to louder calls for a boycott, Hedwig Fijen, the (founding) director of the "International Foundation Manifesta" and Kasper König decided, also at the request of the participating Russian artists, to bring their work to a conclusion anyway.³² From *Manifesta 10*, in which Erik van Lieshout also partic-



fig. 7
Kasper König shows visitors artworks
from his private collection

- 1 *I dreamed I was leaving on a trip but I forgot my money – Works from the Kasper König Collection*, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, February 17 – March 31, 2018. <https://galeriethomasfischer.de/exhibition/i-dreamed-i-was-leaving-on-a-trip-but-i-forgot-my-money/> [last accessed on August 29, 2024]. König himself was the first to exhibit pieces from his collection at the Museum Ludwig: *Gesehen & Geliebt # 5: Es geht um Zeit. Aus Kasper Königs privatem Besitz*, October 12 – November 7, 2010.
- 2 See: Laurence Allard, “L’amateur: une figure de la modernité esthétique,” in: *Communications*, no. 68, 1999, pp. 9–31, available online at: https://www.persee.fr/doc/comm_0588-8018_1999_num_68_1_2028 [last accessed on August 29, 2024].
- 3 *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture et gravure. Par M. Watelet, de l’Académie Française [...]*, 4 vols. (Paris 1792), vol. 1, pp. 56–65, here p. 57 [translated], available online at: https://archive.org/details/bub_gb__btTv25YX70C/page/56/mode/2up [last accessed on August 30, 2024].
- 4 Carmen Strzelecki and Jörg Streichert (eds., with the assistance of Leonie Pfennig and Andreas Prinzing), *Best Kunst. Das Leben von Kasper König in 15 Ausstellungen* (Cologne 2016) [translated].
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 7 [translated].
- 6 The lot numbers appear in the text to indicate at which point in his life König probably first came into contact with the person named. If the lot number is in *italics*, it indicates the specific work referred to.
- 7 Reproductions of the figures are available online at <https://www.meer.com/en/10444-living-with-pop-a-reproduction-of-capitalist-realism> [last accessed on August 30, 2024].
- 8 In his conversation with Yilmaz Dziewior on the occasion of his donation to the Museum Ludwig, König mentions the purchase of Arman’s *Accumulation de Brocs* (1961) from Alfred Schmela, which was sold to Peter Ludwig via Rudolf Zwirner. The latter had also “resold four or five paintings by Gerhard Richter that I had in my mother’s house” on behalf of König. Quoted in: Stephan Diederich (ed.), *1000... miles to the edge. Schenkung/Donation Kasper König*, exh. cat. Museum Ludwig, Cologne, November 11, 2023 – March 17, 2024 (Cologne 2023), p. 106. [von GG übersetzt – bitte mit dem englischen Text im Katalog vergleichen und ggf. austauschen]
- 9 See: Dietmar Elger, *Gerhard Richter* (Cologne 2002), p. 89.
- 10 I would like to thank Dietmar Elger, Head of the Gerhard Richter Archive, Dresden, for the information on the respective locations.
- 11 Diederich 2023 (see note 8), p. 106. [von GG übersetzt – bitte mit dem englischen Text im Katalog vergleichen und ggf. austauschen]
- 12 The information from König’s life up to 1979 that is not individually documented in this text comes from: ZADIK | Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels (ed.), *Kasper König – The Formative Years* [sediment. *Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Kunsthandels*, nos. 23/24] (Nuremberg 2014). For this issue, we were able to fall back on: Walter Grasskamp, *Kasper König [Energien / Synergien*, no. 13, ed. Kunststiftung NRW] (Cologne 2013).
- 13 Further information about Kasper König’s collection will certainly be provided by the forthcoming publication *Kasper König A-Z. Eine Lebenscollage*, edited by Andreas Prinzing, with personal memories and thoughts from art historians, colleagues, friends, and family members, which will shed light on many other and new facets of Kasper König’s life.
- 14 ZADIK G20, VII, 1 [translated].
- 15 Kasper König, quoted in: Christiane Fricke, “In der Regel ist eine Auktion fürchterlich,” in: *Handelsblatt*, July 10, 2024, https://www.handelsblatt.com/arts_und_style/kunstmarkt/kasper-koenig-in-der-regel-ist-eine-auktion-fuerchterlich/100051453.html [last accessed on August 30, 2024] [translated].
- 16 Kasper König, quoted in: Norbert Jocks, “Alles ist ein Nehmen und Geben. Kasper König im Gespräch mit Heinz-Norbert Jocks,” in: *Kunstforum International*, no. 214, March–April 2012, p. 348 [translated].
- 17 See: <https://onkawara.co.uk/styled-17/> [last accessed on August 30, 2024].
- 18 Kasper König, quoted in: Michael Kohler, “Warum Kasper König jetzt in Postkarten und Kalendern macht,” in: *Kölnner Stadt-Anzeiger*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.ksta.de/kultur-medien/kunst-nostalgie-und-koelsch-warum-kasper-koenig-jetzt-in-postkarten-und-kalendern-macht-156128> [last accessed on August 30, 2024] [translated].
- 19 See: <https://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/a379089-een-anti-galerij-achter-het-museum/> [last accessed on August 30, 2024].
- 20 I would like to thank Andreas Prinzing for the opportunity to view the preliminary transcription of the recordings from February 18, 2018; I would especially like to thank him and Annabell Burger for sharing their enormous knowledge with me and supporting me in many ways with the research and editing. My heartfelt thanks also go to Renate Goldmann and the Van Ham team, and above all to Kasper König himself, whom I was able to visit on June 17, 2024 to view his collection on site.
- 21 See: Barbara Büscher, “Kasper König und Benjamin Buchloh als Herausgeber am Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in den 1970er- und 1980er-Jahren,” in: *map. media archive performance*, no. 9 [Book as Archival Space and Artistic Medium], 2018, <https://perfoamap.de/map9/buch-kunst/source-materials-of-the-contemporary-arts> [last accessed on August 31, 2024].
- 22 Strzelecki/Streichert 2016 (see note 4), p. 31 [translated].
- 23 For more detailed information, see: Jürgen Harten: “Der West-Bonus. Kunst und Kunstvermittlung an Rhein und Ruhr,” in: Stephan Berg and Stefan Gronert (eds.), *Der Westen leuchtet / The Luminous West*, exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Bonn, July 10 – October 24, 2010 (Bielefeld 2010), pp. 16–101 (*Westkunst*: pp. 76–78) [translated].
- 24 From the transcription noted above (see note 20) [translated]. Several interesting documents from 1979 onward related to the *Rote Girlande* (Red Garland) can be found at the ZADIK under G020_VIII_576e.
- 25 From the transcription noted above (see note 20) [translated].
- 26 For more on the exhibitions organized by Kasper König, see: Florian Waldvogel, *Aspekte des Kuratorischen am Beispiel der Praxis von Kasper König* (Munich 2016).
- 27 Quoted in: Strzelecki/Streichert 2016 (see note 4), p. 46 [translated].
- 28 See: *ibid.*, pp. 46f.
- 29 All quotes taken from the transcription noted above (see note 20) [translated].
- 30 See: Strzelecki/Streichert 2016 (see note 4), pp. 51–53.
- 31 From the transcription noted above (see note 20) [translated].
- 32 See: Strzelecki/Streichert 2016 (see note 4), pp. 62–65; see also: <https://manifesta.org/editions/manifesta-10-st-petersburg/about> [last accessed on September 1, 2024].
- 33 From the transcription noted above (see note 20) [translated].
- 34 *Ibid.* [translated].
- 35 <https://cafedeutschland.staedelmuseum.de/gespraeche/kasper-koenig> [last accessed on August 31, 2024] [translated].
- 36 Diederich 2023 (see note 8), p. 7. [von GG übersetzt – bitte mit dem englischen Text im Katalog vergleichen und ggf. austauschen]
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 109. [von GG übersetzt – bitte mit dem englischen Text im Katalog vergleichen und ggf. austauschen]
- 38 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy. A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford 1972), p. 1.
- 39 Quoted in: Strzelecki/Streichert 2016 (see note 4), p. 45 [translated].

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