

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Martin Kippenberger**

*Self Portraits*

March 5 - April 30, 2005

Opening on March 5, Lühring Augustine Gallery is pleased to present works by German artist Martin Kippenberger. This exhibition offers a critical survey of his work in the area of self-portraiture. Creating his art through performance, painting, drawing, lithography, sculpture and installation, Kippenberger's self-portraits may provide the best insight into understanding this multi-faceted and multi-talented artist. The works lent to this exhibition span the history of his self-portraits in all mediums, and demonstrates this representative aspect of his oeuvre. The show includes 12 major paintings, 3 sculptures and several important posters, lithographs and drawings.

Kippenberger's self portraits often portray a brutally unflattering and outrageous depiction of the artist. He is contorted into self-defeated and pathetic poses, bloated-looking, wearing over-sized underwear or outfitted in roles such as sailor, swimmer or businessman. These highly cynical and humorous portrayals disclose the artist's own personal suffering and also call into question assumptions often imparted onto the artist as a glorified icon. They also relate a general sympathy for the ignoble side of the human condition while simultaneously promoting the artist's legendary persona.

The layering in Kippenberger's art work is fascinating and seemingly never-ending. Some pieces aim to show historical context by paying homage to influential artists that are forerunners of his generation. The drunken lantern sculpture from 1992, for example, plays on Kippenberger's well-known fondness for alcohol, his lament for not being included in the 1992 *Documenta* (hence the tear drop) and references Walter De Maria's 1977 *Vertical Earth Kilometer*, recalling the work's gigantic lines. In *Untitled*, 1988 (self portrait with yellow balloons), Kippenberger unabashedly identifies with Pablo Picasso, referencing the famous photo of Picasso in his studio, by wearing a pair of white oversized underwear and displaying his bloated belly. The appearance of balloons throughout this series seems to mirror the shape of his body while adding an infantile and comical side to such a self-denigrating depiction.

Inspired by Andy Warhol, Kippenberger carefully cultivated a public persona, shrouding his oeuvre in an aura of rebelliousness and strategically propagating this persona in public. He was known to wear a suit and tie, basking in the political incorrectness of the artist dressed as the businessman. "*I am rather like a traveling salesman. I deal in ideas. I do much more for people than just paint them pictures.*" He often used this theatrical side as a veneer for his self-portraits, at the same time managing to reveal, to different degrees, Kippenberger, the human being.

These two sides (public and private) became progressively distinct on the canvas towards the end of his career. By 1992, the actor/persona moves further into the background and the successful artist dealing with despair and alcohol becomes more exposed. In 1996, Kippenberger directly addresses the cancer that would kill him the following year in what would be his last cycle of self-portraits, *The Raft of Medusa* series. Practically appropriating Gericault's *The Raft of Medusa* from 1819, Kippenberger portrays himself in the role of the dying sailors with a ravaged and weakened body. While actually depicting his terrible reality, the humor, flamboyance and mythical actor/artist still prevails, even in this final self-portrait.

Martin Kippenberger died at the age of 44 in 1997 leaving a vast amount of work behind him. In a characteristically gross understatement of his achievements, Kippenberger expressed that he would want to be remembered most an artist who generally improved the mood of things. Ironically, because of their raw and drastic quality, Kippenberger's paintings are generally associated with a dark mood, although on a certain level, one cannot help but walk away from his self-portraits and understand Kippenberger as the artist who made people laugh.

This exhibition has been made possible by a group of generous lenders and is accompanied by a catalog published by Lühring Augustine that includes an essay by Robert Storr.

For more information, please contact Vanessa Critchell at 212-206-9100 or visit our web site at [www.luhringaugustine.com](http://www.luhringaugustine.com)