

SKARSTEDT

The New York Times

# What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in March

UPPER EAST SIDE

## Martin Kippenberger

Through April 22. Skarstedt, 20 East 79th Street, Manhattan; 212-737-2060, [skarstedt.com](http://skarstedt.com).



Martin Kippenberger's "Nieder mit der Inflation" ("Down With Inflation") from 1984. Estate of Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, Skarstedt, New York

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In the 1980s, a dashing young Martin Kippenberger filled his peers with envy; in the 1990s, bloated and tiresome, he attracted pity. The hard-living German painter died of liver cancer in 1997 at the age of 44. The rangy oeuvre he left behind jostles with his bad-boy legend — as a man who (at least outwardly) dared to fail in public, his canvases unpredictable, often underwhelming, but sometimes unsettlingly fierce.

The eight paintings (1984-96) on view at Skarstedt on the occasion of what would have been the artist's 70th birthday have the ratio just about right. Half are brutal self-portraits, flirting with Picasso's or Schiele's idioms (or the tortured male form in general) in fits of painterly grandstanding and virtual self-abuse. The most idiosyncratic, "Nieder mit der Inflation" ("Down With Inflation"), from 1984, is a bisected composition based on photographs: On the left, Kippenberger pictured himself from the belly down, his pants (as they reportedly often were) around his ankles; on the right, an obscure and protean piece of orange exercise equipment seems mocking. It's the oldest piece here.

The only one to beat the show's fantastic blend of lust and resignation is the latest: "Dinosaurierei" ("Dinosaur Egg"), from 1996, centers a curled, infant longneck in the middle of an oblong shell, its vegetation-hued skin and bulbous eye garnished by hot, petal-like splotches of paint — the image is womblike and gravelike at once; the membrane alive with veins yet split open, perhaps premature and failed, perhaps ready to deliver a miracle. *TRAVIS DIEHL*