

CLAUDIA & JULIA MULLER

Review

By Martin Pesch and translated by Michael Robinson

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# frieze

## Claudia & Julia Müller

GALERIE MONIKA REITZ, FRANKFURT, GERMANY

For years, the sisters Claudia and Julia Müller have been collecting pictures, articles and advertisements from newspapers, magazines and brochures. In the past, they have used this archive as source material for their drawings, but now, in their exhibition entitled 'Eurobilder' (Euroimages), they have made it an integral component of their work.

Each item of raw material - photograph, graphic or text - is photocopied onto A3 or A4 paper. In this way, the differences between the various resources are narrowed down: everything becomes black and white, loses visual detail and tonal subtlety, and is reduced to a standard format. Above all, this leads to a levelling of content: a photograph of a street fight on the West Bank is treated in the same way as a report on the crowning of Miss Switzerland. Every photocopied page becomes a singular element, a module-like cell, fitted into a system of arranging and homogenising this constant stream of information.

In one corner of the gallery is a pile of folders, each bearing a title identifying the subject matter of the photocopied sheets within: 'bouquets', 'views', 'amusing pictures', 'film reviews' etc. But there are so many of these folders lying around untidily on the floor, and they cover so many subjects, that they resist any imposition of order.

The actual Eurobilder (all works 1998) are framed 95 x 112 cm sheets of paper on which have been drawn ball-point pen versions of the photocopied press material. Individual photocopies are fastened directly to the walls around the pictures, creating a situation where the drawings must assert themselves as separate statements against the anonymous 'voices' of the photocopies that surround them. Once you have looked at the folders you recognise motifs in the drawings, and are constantly on the lookout for links with the photocopies hanging on the wall.

The fact that the drawings are monochrome and executed with everyday ballpoint pen is all part of the levelling process. The motifs do not occur in any comprehensive order in the drawings. Their relationships in terms of size are muddled, they are drawn inside each other, sometimes seeming to emerge from one another. On the other hand formal correspondences can be seen, for example, when a line of skyscrapers is placed next to columns from the stock exchange report. In one case a motif from a photograph by Bill Eggleston is placed prominently in confrontation with the patron saints of a church and a deer standing behind them.

All in all, the drawings make a fleeting, incomplete impression. This arises, in part, from the fact that the motifs used are so fragmented. Drawing with a ball-point pen is laborious, and it takes a long time to fill a large area with its thin lines. This symbolises the effort of working with 'resources', the difficulty of mastering their sheer quantity and developing a point of view about them. You can see at a glance that the drawings look like scribbled sketches, the kind of doodle you make during a long telephone call.

In the video installation 'Überstrapaziert vor farbigem Hintergrund (Don't believe the hype)' (Overtaxed in front of a Coloured Background..., 1997), three television sets stand in the corner of a room; the walls have been painted yellow, red and blue. These colours, the clarity of their arrangement and the regularity with which they are applied are in complete contrast to the 'Eurobilder'. The sisters themselves appear in the videos, performing mundane acts in front of anonymous monochrome backgrounds of green, blue, yellow and orange: jumping backwards into bed, falling asleep in an armchair, not minding being shaken while eating noodles. The featureless nature of the environment depicted in the videos makes the actions look like laboratory experiments, and this atmosphere is reinforced by the fact that the same seven minute film is shown on all three screens, though out of synch. Thus the Müllers, however different the individual works may be, consistently address and resist the way in which the world is being standardised.

Translated by Michael Robinson

**Martin Pesch**