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HIJACKED launch at Fluctating Images, Stuttgart

by Jess

Last night was the Stuttgart launch of Hijacked Volume 1, and a presentation of the Hijacked video zine at Fluctuating Images.

Fluctuating Images is an incredible space for less than conventional work. Directors Holger and Cornelia Lund run a non-commercial gallery space focused on video and time-based art, with the current theme of 'Visual Music' running through their shows: which was a perfect fit with the video pieces Mark presented last night – a really eclectic mix of work that was united by a common preoccupation with video as visual texture, and with arcs of images that had a hypnotic, mesmerising effect – just like music.

Holger and Cornelia's approach is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, in promoting work outside the commercial sphere, and in running a non-commercial gallery their time, investment and dedication isn't rewarded in the usual way – they rely on city and state grants to fund their projects. Secondly, they're working with artists and an entire medium that has yet to be embraced by the mainstream of the art world in this part of the world – Stuttgart is an extremely conservative city – driven economically by its two biggest residents, Mercedes Benz and Porsche.

Berlin this ain't. Big business has made Stuttgart one of the wealthiest cities in Europe, but as a result the cost of living is extremely high, and city authorities don't have any inclination towards supporting art on the edges or anything that questions the extremely comfortable status quo (Holger tells us, for example, that despite Stuttgart being one of the most polluted cities in Europe – second to Rome – locally, any discussion about the environment or the impact of the car on this valley alone is pushed under the rug. Cars outnumber bikes and that's the way they'd like to keep it). Despite those big-budget residents, art budgets are small. We found out this week that the Stuttgart photo festival, for example, only receives \$5000 euro in support from the staadt (city) – and even that miniscule contribution is being cut from this year on.

Fluctuating Images is remarkable too because all this is being run from a gallery space that's an island of kultur within Stuttgart's red light district – quite deliberately positioning them outside of the rarefied art world. When Cornelia brings the Hijacked poster out onto the street on a sandwich board, we all joke that we're likely to get some visitors who won't get what they're expecting – Tod Seelie's tattooed, bikini-clad girl is right at home alongside the working girls on the strip – and we do. Once inside, a couple of lost johns are mystified by fifty people attentively watching a slow-motion video of a horse, breathing. I'm sure they left thinking their own perversions paled in comparison to this room full of freaks.

I was really thrilled, and surprised, by just how many people were there when it came time for Mark and I to speak. I was also surprised by how nervous I was (I usually love public speaking, haha, yep, I'm one of those freaks who loves the sound of their own voice pontificating on anything and everything) – but this was such a serious, intense and attentive crowd, unlike any crowd I've seen at an exhibition in Australia. Afterwards, the people who did ask questions were extremely challenging, and took me up on a few things I'd mentioned off-hand and asked me to explain them, to give examples – which confirmed that I'd been nervous with good reason. It was a pretty clever crowd and I should have prepared myself a bit better. If I do end up presenting on Mark's behalf at iPlug in Basel I'll definitely do my homework!

After the screenings, I chatted to Ulrich Eisele from 14-1 Gallery, a photography gallery in the Galerienhaus Stuttgart (an art building housing several galleries in a fancier part of town) and we talked about everything from publishing in Stuttgart (Uli said it's home to the most art book publishers in Germany, including the uber-famous Hatje Cantz) to the continuing effects of reunification between East and West Germany (covering a lot of the reading I've been doing since being spellbound by *Stasiland*, by Anna Funder, in Berlin – more on that later!) and he even gave me some tourist tips – I'm about to spend my last afternoon in Stuttgart at the Weissenhof-Siedlung (literally, Whitecourt Settlement) up in the hills. It's the site of an architectural expo from the 1920s and 1930s which, until recently, was overlooked and neglected by the less-than-impressed residents of Stuttgart. They've only just realised they've got a modernist masterpiece in their midst and are now scrambling to cash in. More on that soon!

After the exhibition cleared out round midnight, Peter Granser (amazing photographer and master culinary tour guide – I'll definitely have more to say about his work in another post) took us to a beautiful restaurant hidden behind heavy, unmarked doors right in the heart of the strip clubs. We all had Swabian ravoli (which translates, un-appetitizingly, to mean “mouth bags”) which tasted much better than it sounds, and of course, local wine. We managed to resist the temptation to keep on going as we all had huge Sundays ahead of us, but I don't think I've had enough of Stuttgart yet!