

Press Release

January 2009

Burgi Kühnemann

Library Exhibition

20/01 – 13/03/09

opening 18/01/09 – 15:00

A new exhibition with work by the German artist Burgi Kühnemann will open at the library of the Van Abbemuseum on Sunday 18 January 2009 at 15:00. Kühnemann uses books as ironic weapons against bourgeois values. She uses books found in second-hand bookshops, selecting them on the basis of the subject matter of their illustrations: pretty girls, brawny men and faithful dogs. Kühnemann estranges these images by adding her own painted commentary, thereby satirizing the *leitmotiv*, the overt subject matter of the image, and mercilessly disclosing its covert values.

Burgi Kühnemann was born in Mayen (Eifel, Germany) in 1935 and now lives and works in Pforzheim (Germany) and Pegognaga (Italy). She trained at the Werkkunstschule in Düsseldorf, specializing in metal sculpture and drawing from model. Kühnemann's artistic work revolves around themes which she analyses, differentiates and redefines. With a sure and lucid touch, she dissects cherished assumptions.

Books

Kühnemann has been making book projects since 1983; examples include *Buch-Akte*, using photos originating from the German *Freikörpernaturist* movement, *Burgis Heine*, inspired by the German author Heinrich Heine, and *Deutsche Gut?* which parodies Nazi kitsch and the characteristic German penchant for middle-class values. Behind the perfect and attractive world, Kühnemann always finds lurking a grubby, imperfect reality. Her books are entertaining, caustic and unsurpassed in their offensive against hidebound convention. Since the death of her parents in 1996, she has also used family mementos and documents as artistic material. Her childhood and everyday family life –in the period from 1930 to 1960– have also been sources of inspiration.



Burgi Kühnemann, *Prost Mahlzeit. Ein Erinnerungs-Album: Deutsche essen und trinken*, 2004. Courtesy Galerie DRUCK & BUCH

Found photography becomes painting

Kühnemann uses existing photographs for her work and transforms them into paintings. She copies the photographic images without significant manipulation. The work *Glück*, for example, consists of nine small canvases depicting the private mini-universe of the German everyman: they include an adorable lapdog such as most families possess (typically, a *schnauzer*), buddies on a football field, two little girls dressed up in their Sunday best on their first day at school, a young woman with her fiancé in *Wehrmacht* uniform, and a young baker showing us a gigantic loaf of bread for which he has won a gleaming prize cup. The nine pictures form a potpourri of geniality, in which Kühnemann lets the images speak for themselves.

German cars and dogs

For *Mein heilix Blechle: deutsche Fahrzeuge in alfabetischer Reihenfolge* –with its proud pairings of men with their cars– Kühnemann uses the glossy picture book of icons from the St. Demetrius Cathedral. These painted motifs are arranged in alphabetic order and interact with their background to fuse into a single picture. Contradictory value systems clash in this work: the holy cow and religion, with a Volkswagen as its natural crowning glory.

Many of Kühnemann's books are populated by dogs, which range from winsome pets to snarling guard dogs. In *Mann & Hund*, she portrays the dog owners. Taking a book of traditional embroidery patterns as her starting point, she places a historic figure or media hero together with his faithful canine companion alongside each splendidly ornamental letter. The man-and-his-dog theme is a traditionally German one which was exploited in the Nazi era to boost the image of Hitler, who liked to be pictured with his trusty Blondi. Man's best friend had a prominent place in Nazi propaganda and was a metaphor of command and obedience.

vanabbemuseum



Burgi Kühnemann, one of the nine little paintings from the series *Glück*

Hitler's image is not a taboo subject for the 73-year old Kühnemann, but a phenomenon that goes along with (her own) German identity. Similarly characteristic are *Ferien, Freizeit und Urlaub, Essen und Trinken, Das Auto* and a notice on a garden gate with the inscription *Vorsicht Hund*. It is a German identity, which Kühnemann probes with her astringent but never cruel wit.

Curators

Diana Franssen, Van Abbemuseum
Susanne Padberg, Galerie DRUCK & BUCH

Partner

This exhibition has been realised in collaboration with Galerie DRUCK & BUCH, Tübingen (Germany).

Van Abbemuseum

Bilderdijklaan 10
Eindhoven

Opening hours Van Abbemuseum

Tuesday–Sunday, 11.00 - 17.00
Thursday, 11.00 - 21.00
(closed on Carnival's Tuesday)

Opening hours Library

Tuesday to Friday, 11.00 - 17.00
(closed on Carnival's Tuesday)

Admission prices Van Abbemuseum

adults: € 8,50
groups of 15 or more, 65+: € 6
students / CJP pass: € 4
Thursday evening from 17.00-21.00: free admission (until 31/10/2009)
Library: free entrance

See www.vanabbemuseum.nl for further information.

To editors:

For further information and images see:
www.vanabbemuseum.nl/press
or contact:
Nicole de Boer, Marketing & Communications
Phone: +31 (0)40 238 1019
Mobile: + 31 (0)6 1299 5794
n.de.boer@vanabbemuseum.nl