

Hans-Peter Feldmann

(Düsseldorf, 1941)

For fifty years, Hans-Peter Feldmann has based his work on the collection of visual material taken from newspapers, advertisements, postcards or family albums, with which he assembles personal archives in the form of books and installations. What counts for the artist is never the single photograph but the addition to a series, the chance to construct original meanings through the coupling of different images, out of context and without captions or other comments. His intervention does not lie in the creation of original material but in the selection of something that already exists and that requires nothing more than a new means of presentation. It's as if he did nothing more than point a finger, leaving the public with the task of deciphering the meaning. This procedure – which raises questions on the potential of the image, on the lack of the original and its endless reproducibility and on the construction of the value of the work – would not be without its consequences, and was to lead Feldmann to step back from the art world for the whole of the 1980s, as a critique of a system ever more bound up in market mechanisms.

Born in Düsseldorf in 1941, his childhood imagery was shaped by American culture filtered through films, advertising and the illustrated magazines that circulated in West Germany. A hoarder of images ever since he was a boy, even at the very start of his artistic career he had the habit of covering the back of his canvases with cuttings of various origins. His first complete works were little handmade books which he simply called *Bilde* ('image', or *Bilder* in the plural form, and which he used to catalogue photographic reproductions which featured the same subject. From 1968, these collections would define all his following works. Sunsets, unmade beds, pinups, footballers, cars, planes, famous monuments, women's clothing: Feldmann's visual curiosity really is boundless. Purchased for the collection, the work *Ohne Titel (Sonntagbilder)* (1976) is made up of twenty-one posters in black and white installed on the wall. These are romantic photographs, sometimes excessively mawkish in their dream of fairy-tale happiness, with ballerinas, swans, waterfalls and endearing pets, or in which couples of sweethearts appear hand in hand on the beach. The artist defines them as 'Sunday images', referring to that kitsch and stereotypical taste that served as a model for most of his illustrated contents at the time.

At the end of his voluntary withdrawal from the art world, Feldmann took up from where he had left off, although his works from the 1990s onwards have an approach more mindful of political and social issues, from terrorism in Germany to the migratory phenomena. An example is the memorable installation *9/12 Frontpage* (2001), which brings together one hundred and fifty front pages from international newspapers published the day after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York.

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