Jim Sumner may have wrapped the film back in 2005 but the Getty Address was a gift from the future. It looked and sounded like a mix of Disney’s Song of the South by Tim Hope and Björk.

Fiction was complemented by fact with the Megagun documentary, which chronicled a South American road trip by Italian street artist Blu. The Illustrative Berlin programme implied Megagun would be shown full-length; the director’s first sentences explained it was half-finished. A false start then, but a fortuitous one, as Lorenzo Fonda went on to flesh out some of the film’s varied anecdotes. Fonda opened with a poxy trailer – also viewable online at megagun.org – that showed Blu quoting Heidegger. My internal alarm bells were unfounded: Blu’s vast murals (3) were spectacular, and translated brilliantly onto celluloid.

Fonda’s aborting facts (eg. 15 people a day are murdered in Guatemala city) combined with Blu’s pertinent Mayan glyphs and gun munals gave the presentation cohesion and unpredictability, like a holiday slide presentation by your favourite teacher.

The film was cinematically strong, too, as Fonda’s traditional reporting skills were balanced by more adventurous sequences. Stop-frame, two-storey murals are an idea so good there’ll probably be a flickr group of them by the end of this article. The arguable highlight, however, was a multi-dimensional comic strip (2), with Blu’s narratives bifurcating and converging on-page.

Narrative, retrospectively, was what unified Illustrative Berlin’s three stand-out films, and indeed all the best work. Once your attention had been won, did the images have any lasting power to entertain, to provoke? Vogue Projekt (1) seemed an unlikely candidate on paper, largely because the paper it was on had been defaced. And, though Wolfgang had taken a German Vogue and coloured it in, page by page, with black marker, while filming himself from above. Rather like watching ink dry, you might think. It was more addictive than Tetris. As each page was segmented by Vokmann’s hand you willed it to obscure certain sections, and were delighted when he rejected your plan. The film’s 43-hour length was perhaps a touch optimistic but my ten-minute stint was golden, albeit rather smudged.

Vogue Projekt showed that narrative could operate on the most basic of levels. Only one of the protagonist’s limbs was on-screen to identify with. This economy (universalism) cemented the film’s conceptual potential. Few of the non-time-based illustrations achieved such engagement, and not simply because they were a single image.

Frédéric Ouellet’s Ars Simia Nature series was a visible exception. Themed around a mysterious sixteenth century wood etching, his monochrome engravings were disturbing and intriguing (2, previous page). Hermaphroditos, Satanism and ape cock all got a lock in – or rather, were locked at through a keyhole. The ingenuity of that framing device (so brilliantly Freudian) showed again how easily illustration can be vaulted from doodle to exhibitable with the right narrative.

Narrative, fittingly, was the subject of what passed for the festival’s critical note: a panel discussion between the publishers, editor and a former interviewee of Varoom magazine. The title was: Can Illustrators Be Authors? The consensus, it seemed, was no, they needed a wordsmith’s leg up. It was a cozy arrangement on stage, free from debate, with agreement passing between the panellists like a pot of warm tea. As long as illustrators, commissioners and curators keep this tucked up in the comfort zone, illustration’s going nowhere fast.

Daniel West is a freelance writer who lives and works in Berlin.