



1. Andree Volkmann's *Vogue Projekt* was a 43-hour film of the artist defacing an issue of German *Vogue* with a black marker, obscuring various sections and details on the pages as he saw fit.
2. Italian street artist Blu's

multi-directional comic strip narrative was another highlight from the event.
3. This huge wall mural in Buenos Aires was also created by Blu. Illustrative Berlin was held for two weeks in September

at Villa Elisabeth in Berlin. More details at illustrative.de

James 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 remix of Disney's *Song of the South* by Tim Hope and Björk.

Fiction was complemented by fact with the *Megunica* documentary, which chronicled a South American road trip by Italian street artist Blu. The *Illustrative Berlin* programme implied *Megunica* 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 pacy trailer – also viewable online at megunica.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 sobering facts (eg 15 people a day are murdered in Guatemala city) combined with Blu's pertinent Mayan glyphs and gun murals 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 reportage 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-directional comic strip (2), with Blu's narratives bifurcating and converging on-page.

Narrative, retrospectively, was what united *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. Andree Volkmann 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 Volkmann's hand you willed him 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 (universality?) 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 Coché's *Ars Simia Naturae* series was a visible exception. Themed around a mysterious sixteenth century wood etching, his monochrome eroticism was disturbing and intriguing (2, previous page). Hermaphrodites, Satanism and ape cock all got a look in – or rather, were looked 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 in.

Narrative, fittingly, was the subject of what passed for the festival's critical nub: a panel discussion between the publisher, 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 cosy 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

