

how precious gifts such as the oliphants first made their way to Europe. In the ensuing decades, such objects frequently changed hands and, later on, found institutional settings. Depending on where they ended up, they might have been categorized as curiosities, natural wonders, cultural artifacts, or ethnographic objects—but rarely as works of art. A case in point is that of the nineteenth-century wooden sculptures of the Luba Shakandi people from the Brissoni collection held at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence, displayed in a glass vitrine as part of Baloji's exhibition. In 1922, these were among the works in the "Sculptura negra" (Negro Sculpture) exhibition at the Venice Biennale, but were then demoted again to the rank of ethnographic exhibits upon being returned to the Italian institution.

Belonging to different historical moments, the loosely interconnected "fragments" on view are in dialogue with their immediate (and local) context as much as with each other. The artist chose to mount some of his own sculptural and photographic works on grid-like metallic supports he found in the museum's storage spaces. Reflected in the oculus crowning the domed square space at the heart of the show, the giant black-fiberglass globe surrounded by reproductions of historical maps of Africa in the site-specific installation *Gnosis*, 2022, nods to the one in the Hall of Geographical Maps at the nearby Palazzo Vecchio. Its title echoes that of Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe's 1988 book *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Spanning several centuries, the attempts at mapping out a vast continent amount to an "invention"—in the etymological sense of "finding"—of Africa. The most recent maps on view, labeled *Geological and Mining Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 2005, were a work of Baloji's that illustrated how the slave trade and plunder of the colonial era seamlessly gave way to the current exploitation of his country's natural resources, including copper, in particular.

—Agnieszka Gracza

## VIENNA

### Milena Büsch

FELIX GAUDLITZ

Weekly gossip magazines based their business model on alternative facts decades before the term was coined. Trafficking in fabricated stories and semitruths about royals, celebrities, and sometimes even the family next door, these publications phrase their speculative tales in the conditional and tread the fine line between boosting sales and avoiding lawsuits.

*Freizeit* (Leisure; all works 2022), one of the works in Milena Büsch's exhibition "Auto Freizeit Motor Sport," is a painted appropriation of an array of popular German gossip mags. Twenty-five covers organized in a grid present an aggressive accumulation of orchestrated outrage and feigned compassion emphasized via big yellow headlines and loads of exclamation marks. Many photos repeat several times across magazines, as if to underline urgency. Büsch painted the images directly on the covers themselves in another act of repetition. Her painting is everything but Photorealistic; it is instead a minimum-effort imitation of the magazines' cheap layout that inhibits any deeper interest in their content.

However, the less-than-accurate brushwork and the sheer number of covers, with their attention-seeking images and texts, allow more structural aspects to come to the fore. Gossip weeklies offer an escapist eye on the rich and royal to a predominately female, lower-income readership, and in so doing affirm the ongoing validity of the Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry. But Büsch prefers to let her subject speak for itself and presented a counterpart, *Auto Motor Sport*,



Milena Büsch, *Freizeit*, 2022, oil on magazine pages mounted on cardboard, 57 × 43 1/8".

based on covers of a similarly titled German car magazine. The publication has been around for almost a century, entertaining its mostly male readers with driving reports and news of car launches. The covers feature nothing but cars. Red and blue are the dominant colors. Repetitive headlines announcing vehicle reviews add a serious tone to a journalism that claims to be entirely based on facts.

Büsch previously painted over pages of a catalogue by Albert Oehlen, titling the resulting piece *Doing Other People's Work*, 2020–21. She has covered kitschy napkins and children's carpets with oil reproductions of their motifs, maintaining her own painterly style while redepicting what was already there. Enhancing visual triggers by reproducing what is already a reproduction in itself, she creates work that functions as a kind of filtered copy. In sticking to oil painting's tools for her own intervention in commercial-image production, she intensifies her reflection on the real, the material, and the symbolic.

Two smaller works titled after the respective German-language gossip magazines they depict, *Adel privat* and *Adel aktuell*, visualize Büsch's interest in paintings' dwindling truth claims. They are based on the "spot the difference" photographs in which the attentive viewer is prompted to discover small variations between a pair of images. Büsch remakes these brainteasers, which have been regular features in such German tabloids since the 1970s, in oil on magazine paper, labeling the top photo the "original" and the one with the added details the "forgery" in an allegory of the business model that led to the long-term success of these magazines.

The magazines Büsch deals with are often ridiculed, yet they generate high returns. Büsch literally works her way over them. Disguising the originals with something very similar, she looks at what this might reveal about ubiquitous image production and its pervasive success formulas.

—Vanessa Joan Müller