

## Interview : Hans-Peter FELDMANN



Mr. Hans-Peter Feldmann in Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid)

Hans-Peter Feldmann insists that he's not an artist. He dislikes such labels, because for him, the so call "Art" is simply part of the everyday life, nothing more nothing less. Born in 1941 in Dusseldorf, Germany, Feldmann started cutting and collecting pictures from books and magazines at the age of five. In the last 65 years, the series of action of collecting, cataloguing and rearranging images has never ceased. It's a habit; it's a need as well.

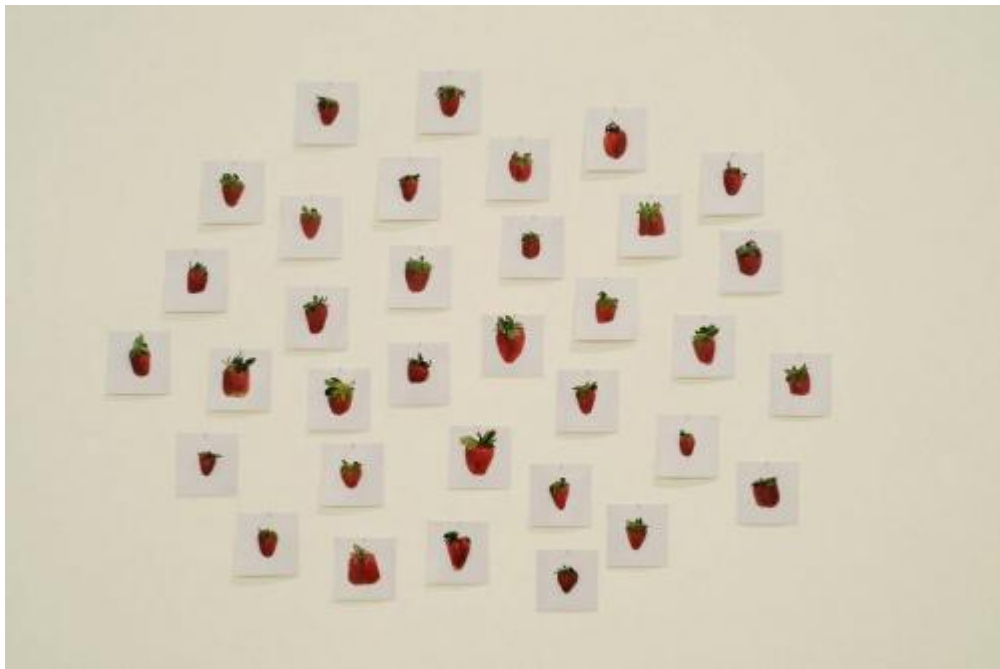
Feldmann received me in his Dusseldorf home located at the southeast of the city. When I arrived, the first thing he showed me was the city view from his balcony. It was noon and the city's modern architecture was gleaming under the sun. Today, Dusseldorf is one of Germany's five global cities and headquarters the country's advertising, fashion and mobile phone industries. The city, however, was seriously damaged during the WWII when it became a target of the strategic bombing, particularly during the five months of RAF bombing campaign against the Ruhr industry in 1943 when over 700 bombers would be used in one single night. Like many others of his generation, Feldmann lived through the nightmare and the transformations.



Hans Peter-Feldmann, 31 paris of knees, 31 individual images, dimension varied. Courtesy of the artist.

"I started cutting pictures from my parents' books at the age of 5. I don't know why I did this... but it was 1946, the war was just over. We had lived our life in the bombings. It was traumatic. There was no toy, so I cut pictures of everything and put them together. I don't know why, but of course, there must be a reason." Today we can imagine hundreds of reasons to explain such an urge to archive images. Consciously or unconsciously, these images opened a world of new reality and new possibilities to the little boy. It became a way of communication and perhaps an attachment to something faithfully ours at a time of chaos.

The 1960s' Dusseldorf witnessed the explosion of German contemporary art. The group Zero (Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günter Uecker), Joseph Beuys, Konrad Klapheck, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Gotthard Graubner and many others moved in from different cities and settled down in the artistic hub of Dusseldorf, close to the art school. However, the young Feldmann decided to sail off the Rhine and became a sailor.



Hans Peter-Feldmann "One Pound Strawberries", 2004. 34 foto's, 4 x 4 inches each. Courtesy of the artist.

Back to Dusseldorf two years later, he continued his search in the obsessed world of images which he regarded and still regards as the most efficient and comfortable communication means. He started to build a unique language and reconstruct the pictorial context through the reassembling of images found from books, magazines, family albums, postcards, etc. Each individual image looks banal by itself. However, it was only when they came in a group of ten, fifty or even a hundred that their meaning starts to reveal. For example, a picture of strawberry or many strawberries looks like a publicity image. However, when we make a portrait of each of the 34 strawberries and group the portraits together, we do not only see the uniqueness of each strawberry but the many different ways of becoming a strawberry. Or, the 30 found pictures of women knees are telling us the concept of beauty has many footnotes, it's just a matter of priority.

Feldmann does not believe in unique specimen, he said at another occasion, because "the uniqueness makes everything all too important, not least in terms of the art market". When a collector bought his ready-made work of a soup plate with two spoons for 7,000 Euros, his reaction was -- he could have had a nice plate and spoons in any department store for less than 5 Euros. The fact is that Feldmann was bored by the art world that he quitted it temporarily in the 1980s and destroyed most of his work, except those important ones that he gave to his friends. Though he is often referred to as the father of concept art, he does not like to take himself or the art world too seriously. He has never signed his work nor given them a title. He's against the authorship system and he hates even more the commoditization of art. It's his rule to not to live on his work. He opened a gift shop with his wife in the 1990s and worked like a businessman seven days a week until his retirement.



Hans-Peter Feldmann, *Shadow Play*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

Feldmann collects almost everything, from pictures, books, handprints to toys, hats, shoes, flowers and all kind of bric-a-brac and daily objects. His contribution in the 2009 Venice Biennale, *Shadow Play* (2002), is an exemplar work of his denial of high cultural references while producing a sensuous effect through everyday objects. For Feldmann, art has to be sensuous for the eye to touch. The explanation comes with another image: "I visited Hong Kong in the 1980s. I remember one day I came across a woman singing aloud in the street. I didn't understand a word of her song, but I knew she was singing her misfortunes and she was very sad. That was how she handled the problem, a physical reaction to it in order to lose it, to overcome it. This is art. This is the functionality of art. Today, I remember my feelings as if I heard the song again, the sensations stay within me." It's the need to express publicly in order to render the emotions concrete or even to exorcise it. When the need becomes an urge, its impact can be overwhelming.



Installation view of *100 Years* portraits series by Hans-Peter Feldmann.

The blur borderline between private and public can be felt in most of Feldmann's works. His *100 Years* (2001) which features 101 individuals aged from 8 months to 100 years old from his family and his acquaintances invites spectators to become an integrant part of work -- to identify every single step in one's own past life and the vaguely visible future projected by the older participants. Another work in the 1970s, *All the Clothes of a Woman*, spectators find themselves in a position to reconstruct the image of the woman whose 71 pieces of clothes were photographed by Feldmann one by one. In a rather embarrassing mood, we became friends with the woman whose face never revealed.

Feldmann insists once again that he's not an artist and his exhibition is not an art exhibition. He is just a person who loves pictures. In his pictures, we "simply have to look at it to hear the music".



Hans-Peter Feldmann, *All the Clothes of a woman*, 1970s. Courtesy of the artist.

### **About Hans-Peter Feldmann**

Hans Peter Feldmann (b. 1941) lives and works in Düsseldorf.  
Winner of THE HUGO BOSS PRIZE 2010. An exhibition of Feldmann's work will be on view at the Guggenheim Museum from May 20 through September 5, 2011.

His recent solo shows includes a major retrospective show which travelled to Konsthall Malmö (Sweden), Museo Centro De Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid) and Kunsthalle Dusseldorf (Germany), all in 2010. "Art Exhibition" which travelled in Simon Lee Gallery (London) in 2009, Arnolfini (Bristol) in 2008 and Sprengel Museum (Hanover) in 2007. In 2006 he showed in the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada. In 2005, he showed "Women in Prison" in Barbara Wien Galerie und Buchhandlung für Kunstbücher (with Klaus Heilmann). He also participated in 2009 Venice Biennale *Making World* curated by Daniel Birnbaum and in 2007 in Sculptur Projects, Muenster.



Installation View of Hans-Peter Feldmann's An Art Exhibition in Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid

**"An Art Exhibition"**  
Hans-Peter Feldmann  
Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid)  
On view until Feb 28, 2011