

A world in one city

KARIN Apollonia Müller, a traveler, found a destination in L.A.

The daughter of a Rhine River barge captain, the 39-year-old Müller grew up between places; her home was always moving.

As an adult, Müller worked for travel magazines, flying around the world to shoot exotic locales. By her own admission, she stayed on the glossy surface of the places she documented. After a while, it became irrelevant if she was in Thailand or Vietnam — she was photographing the same place. Eventually, she tired of motion.

"I always had this feeling that I'm a floating being," she says, standing on the roof of a downtown building, setting up her tripod to photograph a parking lot. As a photographer, she felt frustrated. In the end, she says, "I felt like a space-less being."

Müller first came to Los Angeles on a German-American grant in 1996. The following summer, she became an artist in residence at Villa Aurora, once the Pacific Palisades home of German-Jewish émigré Lion Feuchtwanger, now a center for German-American cultural exchange.

Her preconceptions about Southern California could have been torn from the pages of the travel magazines she had worked for: sunshine, palm trees and the beach.

"I realized that was not what L.A. is about."

Instead, the rootless Müller found a place without a center. She felt dislocated yet strangely at home.

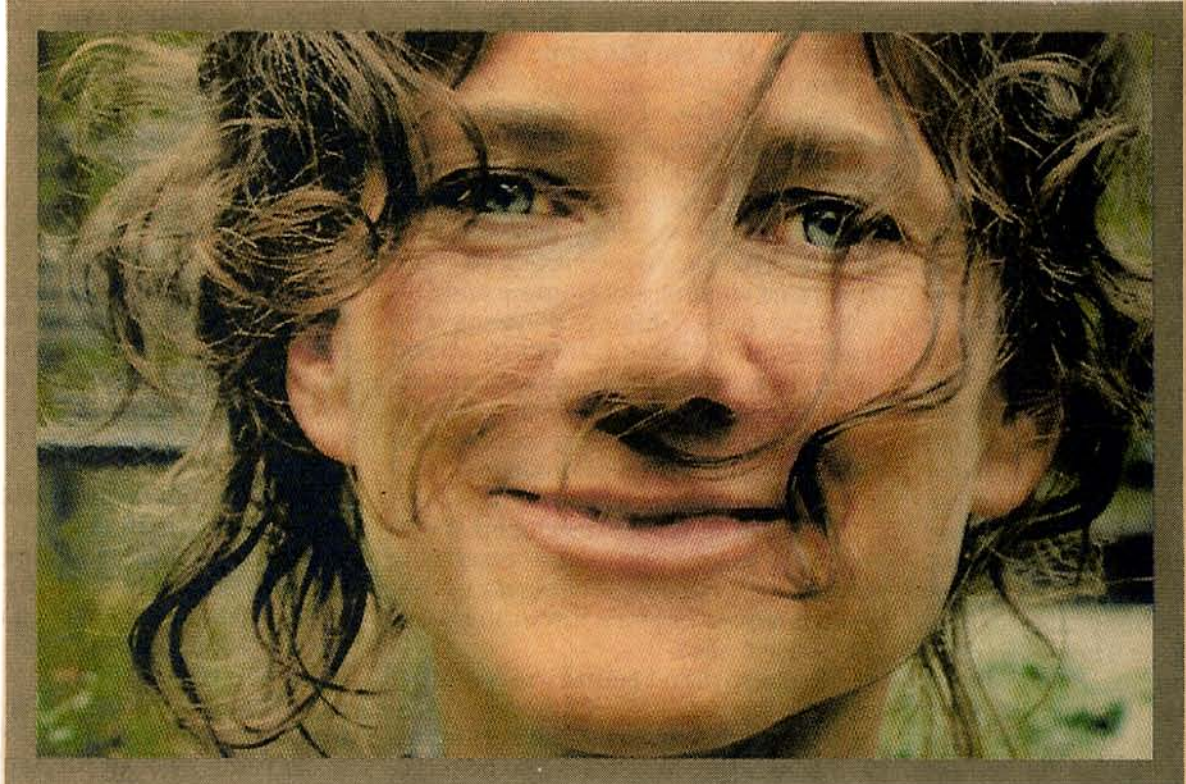
"It makes me happy," she says. "It does give me some hold. In a way, I was desperate, but I found hope, a direction."

She began photographing the city: empty lots, the corners of a well-traveled intersection, the ignored places. She only shoots under gray skies — avoiding the cinematic and characteristic L.A. light, and instead making purposefully flat panoramas, washed out and colorless, to the point of disappearing.

Müller means to illustrate the illusion of permanence. "We always tend to think we possess the world, but we don't. One day, it will fall apart."

Over time, her images have become increasingly specific but, she says, they should not be viewed as a commentary or a journalistic documentary about the city. "You can't document place, and space — it's not real," she says. "I don't want to give an answer. I want to open people's eyes, to open their eyes about L.A."

"A more apposite public portrait of this city would be hard to imagine," wrote *The Times'*



GEORG SCHREIBER



Karyn Lovegrove Gallery

KARIN APOLLONIA MÜLLER

Works like "Landing," she says, are about the L.A. "that for decades people have fled to, the city of fantasy, celebrity and noir."

art critic, Christopher Knight, of her work last year.

Müller, who has lived in virtually every part of the city, from the Pacific Palisades to Los Feliz, has little money and works guerrilla-style. She climbs decrepit staircases, sneaking past security guards or talking her way into private buildings to get to rooftop and balcony vantage points.

She shows at Karyn Lovegrove Gallery in L.A.

and Julie Saul Gallery in New York but keeps one professional foot in Europe. This spring, she has a solo show in Cologne, and she will spend a semester teaching in Italy.

Her preferred space is still a downtown rooftop, pointing her camera toward an empty parking lot.

"Sometimes I feel lonely with my camera," she says. But "L.A. is an example of how I see the world. I want to share this experience."