

# Truth made of Fiction

## *The honest ways of Florian Böhm*

Effectively, Florian Böhm has simply told it like it is. For the purposes of producing a new furniture catalogue for Vitra, he has photographed the reality of the fictional setting in which such furniture photos are always taken. The fact that this is seen as a revelatory idea only indicates how fully we have come to accept the false scenarios that have been created for us all these years out of the selfsame purely fictional elements. Happily, Böhm has also taken care to do so in high quality and with a clever play on narrative. Our hats are off to him. Truly.

text SANDRA HOFMEISTER  
images FLORIAN BÖHM



*Using film stills and  
video sequences,  
Florian Böhm tells  
stories about everyday  
life and the things this  
life is made of...*





I will have to let that sit for a while.

When reality turns into fragments of fiction, a full range of imaginings and memories appear in one's mind. Counting on this effect in his recent project for Vitra, Florian Böhm conceives furniture and people as part of a mise-en-scène. But instead of documenting real everyday life – as Vitra did in 2005 in the company's Select&Arrange catalogue – this German photographer, artist and graphic designer suggested a new way for the Swiss manufacturer to communicate, in switching from reality to fiction. He integrated furniture into single scenes that were video recorded and photographed. Together with a professional film crew, the narrative sequences were produced in six different locations in Rome and Munich. The demanding logistics are not very usual in product photography and this opens-up a new perspective, seducing readers to

immerse themselves in story fragments and familiar situations.

**DAMN°:** Instead of documenting real everyday life, your recent project 'Vitra fiction' points to its artificial character. What is your motivation?

**Florian Böhm:** "Fiction", of course, is a catchy title. But it derives from the awareness that producing a furniture catalogue deals with the staging of objects. We just say, frankly and honestly, what we are doing. We don't cover-up the production process and we don't declare the photographs authentic. As an alternative, we choose the production background as a basis for the project's concept. This idea brought us to the movie format that comes up with pictures in narrative quality, either photographs that can be read as film stills or video sequences.

**DAMN°:** The movie format means that you are telling stories - are these stories about furniture or about people?

**FB:** They cover both aspects and show moments of daily life in different home settings, where people and furniture interact and where relations between the two arise. The principle is a bit similar to Alfred Hitchcock's 'Rear Window', which gives an insight into the lives of different people, and at the same time causes you to recognise parallels in the individual stories that evolve.

**DAMN°:** What's the clue about the stories?

**FB:** Our narrative sequences don't have a clearly defined storyline. They don't come to an end. The video sequences, therefore, were important as a kind of work-around, to come to the specific aura of the image. We



There is enough space on a visitors card for all necessary notes on a party.



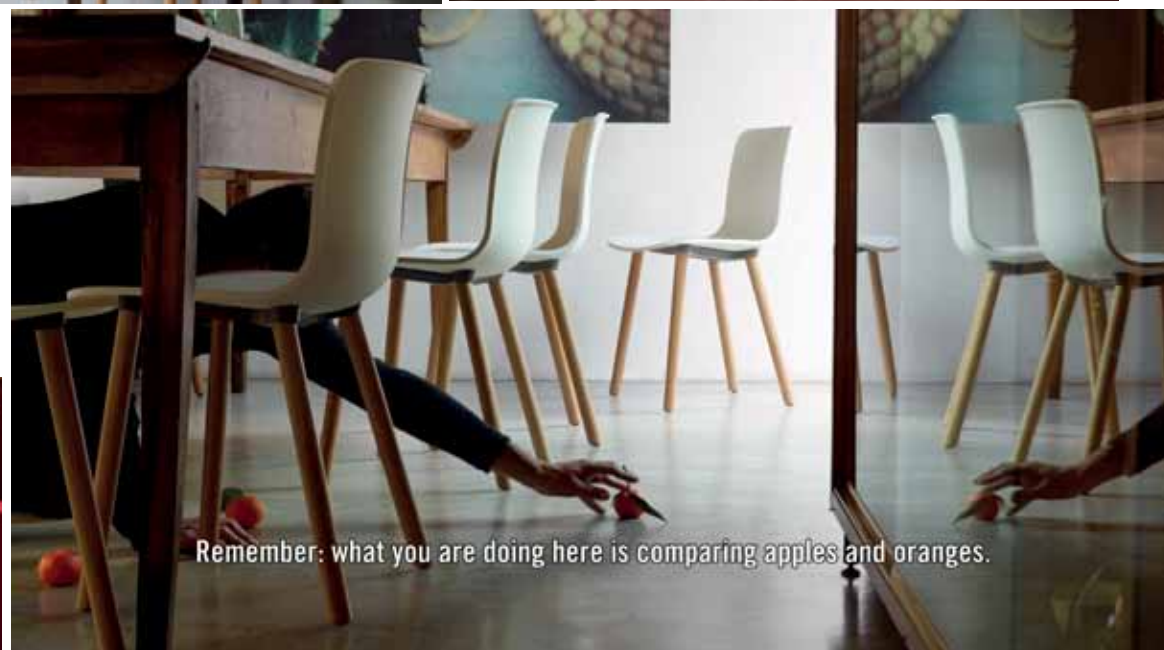




She said she wants it hanging almost above the table level, just a little bit below



Where are you, show yourself!  
- Darling, did you say anything?



Remember: what you are doing here is comparing apples and oranges.



Now you see me, now you don't.



Maybe I need to look at things from a different perspective.



Seeing the little things in a room, good ones, but will be on, but different.



To read was like looking into a mirror and seeing the same thing.



He said, 'I'm Sanskrit. Tat Twam Asi' and I said, 'Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens.'



Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens.



Florian Böhm and Paolo Bonfini  
Photo © Fabian Frinzel

concentrated on single sequences for an entire minute. The films of Chabrol, Sautet and Fassbinder inspire the aesthetics – time is straightened-out instead of the way it presented in action movies nowadays, where the audience is slashed from one scene to the other. If you expand single moments in a movie, the perception of reality changes and one will recognise props and background details, for example. An ordinary situation becomes a kind of performance and gains poetic quality.

DAMN°: Can you tell us a bit about the circumstances of production?

FB: I am neither a stylist nor a studio photographer. But I saw a great potential in the general production conditions that we had to deal with. A lot of furniture had to be moved by trucks in a short time, we had to find locations, set the lights, look after the props, cast the actors... Thus, I cooperated with a professional team from the movie industry. Paolo Bonfini, our set designer and a dear friend of mine, is used to working closely with film directors on every aspect of the movie. It was important to me to be able to count on an experienced team that would be clearly focused on the storytelling.

DAMN°: Who was responsible for the stage directions during the production process?

FB: That was my part. Our stories do not have a clear plot or a point. They all deal with the domestic realm, furniture, people, and with the aim of getting a feeling across to the audience. Our goal therefore was completely different to that of a movie, even if the set was similar. We focused on the effect and quality of the pictures, and did not need to find a resolution to the story. There was no scriptwriter; we just left the insinuated plots completely open.

DAMN°: There are different narrative levels in the final result – the picture level, the subtitles, Eckhart Nickel's text fragments, and finally, the descriptions of the furniture. How did all this come together?

FB: Eckhart's texts are free interpretations, they tell about the context you don't see in the pictures and refer to the possibilities that happen before and after the moment that is recorded. And then there is the furniture as such, which has a lot to say about ideas in design, different stages of the design process, and design history. This is the reason why in the catalogue there is an additional level dedicated to the furniture that forms part of the credits.

DAMN°: Were movie genres like 'thriller' or 'comedy' important to you?

FB: Of course we worked with the dramaturgic method of movies for single scenarios, but we developed them freely. There is the story of a gallery owner who has a party at his house, another of a father and his daughter who do homework together, and one of a child's birthday party. By the way, this birthday party with 30 children was a real one. We had been lucky that we were able to manage the furniture before the event. I just photographed and filmed the real party without a lighting team.

DAMN°: Does that mean that fiction turns reality in this case?

FB: That's true, but it's the only exception. For me, the idea of fiction is relevant for setting-up single sequences – like a movie about real life that does not exist. #

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